

Landscape Character Assessment for the Local Plan 2033

South Oxfordshire District Council

November 2017



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South Oxfordshire District Council

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Front cover: Arable farmland to the west of Middle Assendon by William Ewart.

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Abbreviations

| | |
|-------------|--|
| AOD | Above Ordnance Datum |
| AONB | Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty |
| CC | City Council |
| BC | Borough Council |
| DC | District Council |
| km | Kilometres |
| LCA | Landscape Character Area |
| LNR | Local Nature Reserve |
| LT | Landscape Type |
| m | Metres |
| NCA | National Character Area |
| NNR | National Nature Reserve |
| NPPF | National Planning Policy Framework |
| OWLS | Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study |
| SAC | Special Areas of Conservation |
| SODC | South Oxfordshire District Council |
| SSSI | Site of Special Scientific Interest |
| UA | Unitary Authority |

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Executive summary

- E1 This report comprises the Landscape Character Assessment for South Oxfordshire. It is a revision of the previous landscape assessment for South Oxfordshire (1998).

What is Landscape Character?

- E2 Landscape character may be defined as a distinct and recognisable pattern of elements, or characteristics, in the landscape that make one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse¹.

What is Landscape Character Assessment?

- E3 Landscape Character Assessment is the process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features (characteristics) that make landscapes distinctive (see Figure 2.2). This process results in the production of a Landscape Character Assessment².

Why update the previous landscape assessment for South Oxfordshire (1998)?

- E4 The previous landscape assessment for South Oxfordshire (1998) has helped guide development across the district. This update of the 1998 study is written considering the latest and best guidance for conducting a landscape character assessment. The methodology for this study has been derived from aspects of:
- Guidelines for Visual and Landscape Impact Assessment 3 (2013)³;
 - The Countryside Agency Topic Paper 6 (2002): Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity⁴; and
 - Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment⁵.

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

² Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment.

³ Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Third Edition) Abingdon: Routledge

⁴ The Countryside Agency (2002) Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5601625141936128>

⁵ Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscape-character-assessments-identify-and-describe-landscape-types>

Particular elements that have been updated in this 2017 report include:

- Guidance for planning, managing and protecting distinctiveness including forces for change for each landscape character areas (LCAs).
- Boundaries of the landscape types (LTs).
- Photography for each of the 11 LCAs.
- Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to create maps using the latest information from Ordnance Survey and Natural England.

What does this Landscape Character Assessment contain?

E5 This Landscape Character Assessment divides the entire district of South Oxfordshire into LCAs and LTs.

LCAs are the unique individual geographical areas in which landscape types occur. In this Landscape Character Assessment there are eleven LCAs.

LTs are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character. This Landscape Character Assessment contains 24 LTs.

This Landscape Character Assessment is structured around the eleven LCAs in which guidelines for planning, managing and protecting distinctiveness are based.

For whom is this Landscape Character Assessment written?

E6 This Landscape Character Assessment is written to be included as part of the evidence base for the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2033.

The information included in this Landscape Character Assessment is for the use of a variety of stakeholders including planning applicants, developers, development management officers and neighbourhood development plan groups.

How should this Landscape Character Assessment be used?

E7 This Landscape Character Assessment should be used to understand the landscape make up of an area to give context to scheme proposals. The prevailing character of the landscape will help to shape the design and layout of development.

With each landscape area described in this report there is a 'checklist' for managing and mitigating change to help guide the creation of neighbourhood development plans, development proposals and schemes and to provide assistance to decision makers.

1 Introduction

1.1 Appointment and scope of work

1.1.1 Lepus Consulting Ltd has been appointed by South Oxfordshire District Council to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment to support and inform the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2033.

1.1.2 Lepus Consulting is an environmental assessment practice specialising in landscape and ecological impact assessment.

1.1.3 A landscape assessment of South Oxfordshire was conducted by Atlantic Consultants in 1998 and was adopted as supplementary planning guidance following public consultation on 24 July 2003.

1.1.4 The 1998 report was structured in a two stage approach:

- Part one provided the overall background and context to the study, including an explanation of the approach and methodology employed and a brief overview of the district landscape, its formative influences and overall character;
- Part two dealt with the individual character areas, describing in detail their landscape and settlement character together with appropriate guidelines for planning, managing and protecting distinctiveness⁶.

1.1.5 The approach of the 1998 landscape assessment is reflected in this 2017 report (see **Chapter 2** for methodology). The outputs of this study are proportional to the aims of the Local Plan as well as providing a useful reference guide for development in the district.

1.2 Geographic context of South Oxfordshire

1.2.1 The district of South Oxfordshire is located within the county of Oxfordshire in the south east region of England. The district boundary borders the local authorities of Cherwell and Aylesbury Vale to the north, Wycombe to the east, Wokingham, Reading and West Berkshire to the south, Vale of White Horse to the west and Oxford to the north west. Towns in the district include Didcot, Henley, Thame and Wallingford.

⁶ Atlantic Consultants (1998) South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment.

- 1.2.2 South Oxfordshire comprises a high quality rural environment, with historic towns and villages that attract people to live, work and visit. It has a high proportion of unspoilt and attractive countryside, a large area of which is nationally designated for its outstanding beauty, namely the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and North Wessex Downs AONB. The district covers an area of approximately 680 km².

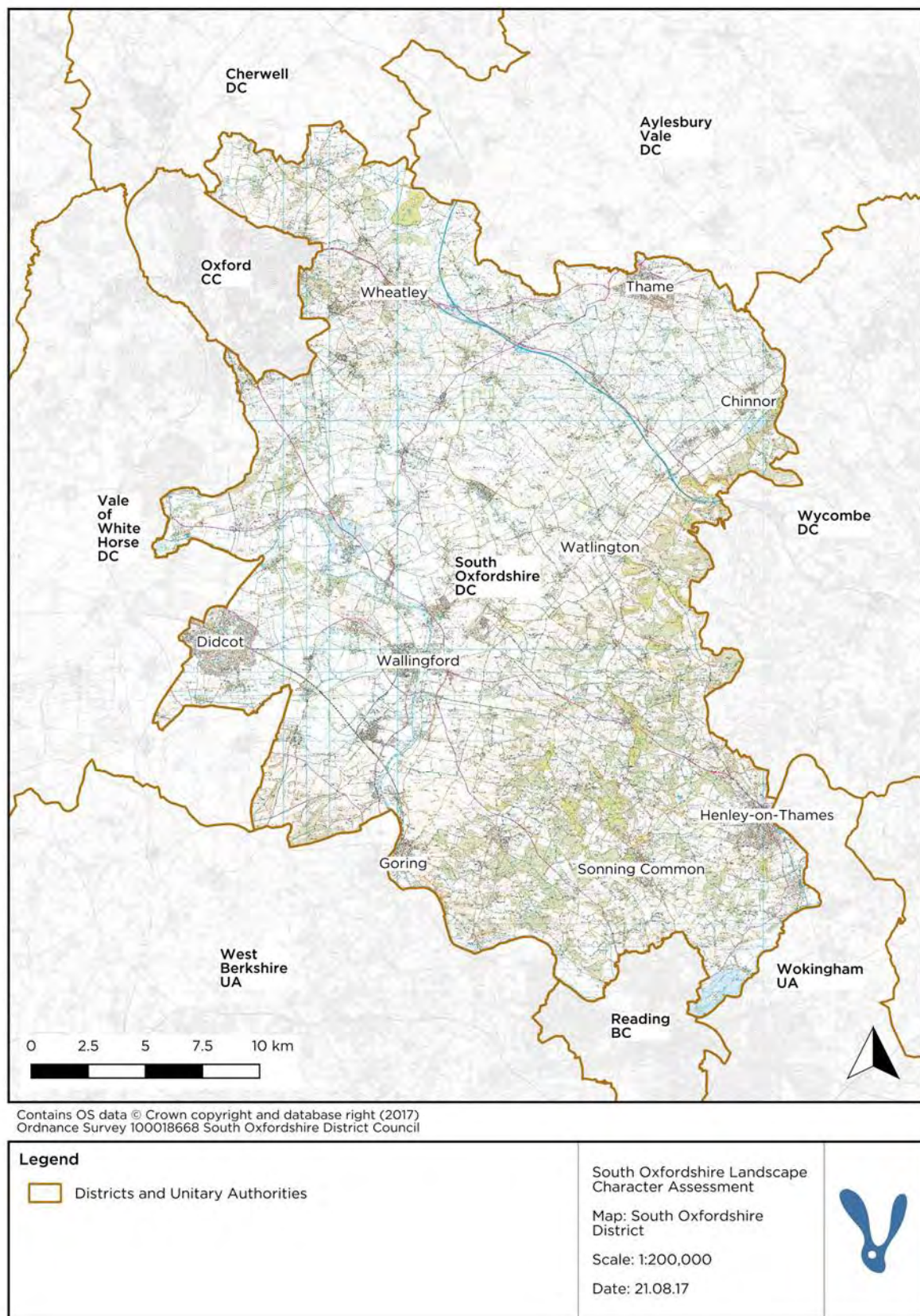


Figure 1.1: South Oxfordshire District

1.3 National landscape context

1.3.1 At a national level, Landscape Character Assessment has been defined by the assessment work of Natural England, which has divided England into areas of similar landscape called National Character Areas (NCAs)⁷.

1.3.2 The boundary of South Oxfordshire District Council contains five National Character Areas (NCAs) as designated by Natural England⁸.

1.3.3 Upper Thames Clay Vales NCA (No. 108) covers a large area in the central to north area and a small area to the far north of the district. A summary of this NCA is as follows:

“The Upper Thames Clay Vales National Character Area (NCA) is a broad belt of open, gently undulating lowland farmland on predominantly Jurassic and Cretaceous clays. Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site falls within the NCA, along with around 5,000 ha of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and smaller areas of the Chilterns AONB and the Cotswolds AONB. Two of its Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) are designated for their lowland meadow vegetation communities, while Little Wittenham SAC has one of the most studied great crested newt populations in the UK. 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”.

1.3.4 Midvale Ridge NCA (No. 109) covers an area to the north of the district. A summary of this NCA is as follows:

“The Midvale Ridge National Character Area (NCA) is a band of low-lying limestone hills stretching east-west from the Vale of Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire to Swindon. 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, cereals being the most important arable crop. 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,

⁷ Natural England (2014) National Character Area profiles: data for local decision making. Accessed on 18/08/17. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making>

⁸ Natural England (2014) National Character Area profiles. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making/national-character-area-profiles>

stagnogleys and lighter sandy brown earths with small patches of sandy soils”.

- 1.3.5 Chilterns NCA (No. 110) covers most of the southern area of the district. A summary of this NCA is as follows:

“The extensively wooded and farmed Chilterns landscape is underlain by chalk bedrock that rises up from the London Basin to form a north-westfacing 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 major sources of public water supply for the Chilterns and the London area are the chalk aquifer and the Thames”.

- 1.3.6 Thames Valley NCA (No. 115) covers a small area to the far south of the district. A summary of this NCA is as follows:

“The Thames Valley is a mainly low-lying, wedge-shaped area, widening from Reading, which includes Slough, Windsor, the Colne Valley and the southwest London fringes. The River Thames provides a unifying feature through a very diverse landscape of urban and suburban settlements, infrastructure networks, fragmented agricultural land, historic parks, commons, woodland, reservoirs and extensive minerals workings”.

- 1.3.7 Berkshire and Marlborough Downs NCA (No. 116) covers a small area to the far west of the district. A summary of this NCA is as follows:

“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. Writers and artists have been inspired by this landscape, including Eric Ravilious and Richard Jefferies, while monuments around Avebury have attracted historians and antiquarians such as John Aubrey. Avebury stone circle is a popular visitor destination and part of a World Heritage Site and there are numerous other Scheduled Monuments and heritage features across this landscape. Heritage features are at risk from damage by cultivation and animal burrowing. 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 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty”.

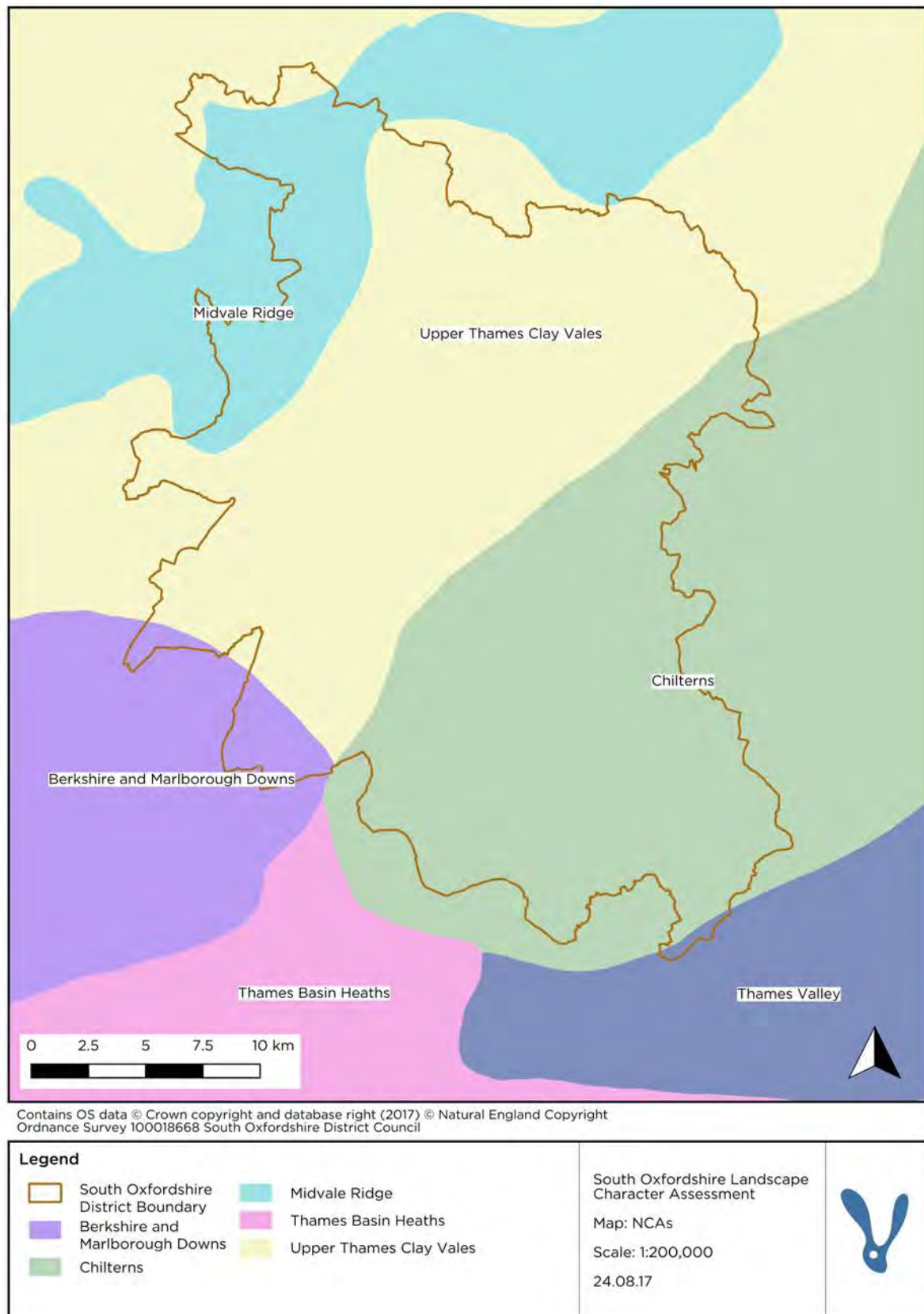


Figure 1.2: National Character Areas in South Oxfordshire

1.4 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Chilterns AONB

1.4.1 A description of the Chilterns AONB is as follows:

“The familiar beech and bluebell woods of the Chilterns sits on London’s doorstep, extending 70 km from the Thames at Goring-on-Thames northeast to Hitchin.

The Chilterns’ rounded hills are part of the chalk ridge which crosses England from Dorset to Yorkshire. The characteristic scarp slope, indented by combes and cut by a number of gaps, looks out north over the panorama of the Vale of Aylesbury. The dip slope, dissected by steep dry valleys, curves gently down into the London Basin. The heavily wooded character of the Chilterns, based on clay-with-flint deposits, gives way in the north to the open downland of Ivinghoe Beacon and Dunstable Downs.

The Chilterns contain an important diversity of habitats ranging from chalk grassland and to the country’s most extensive areas of beech woodland, with the finest stretches protected under EU legislation as Special Areas of Conservation. The landscape contains many prehistoric traces including the great dyke of Grim’s Ditch and the ancient Ridgeway and Icknield Way.

The AONB boundary skirts urban areas such as Luton and High Wycombe and its many picturesque brick-and-flint villages are prized commuter country. However, commercial forestry and agriculture, ranging from small-scale dairying and horticulture to intensive mixed and cereal farming, remains an important part of the economy. Part-time ‘hobby farming’ is increasing.

In addition to the 80,000 people living within the area, half a million people live within two km (two million within 10 km) of the Chilterns, one of South-East England’s major recreation resources. Leisure use is largely informal scenic drives, walking and riding and peak demand puts heavy pressure on viewpoints such as Ivinghoe Beacon. The Ridgeway, a National Trail, runs through the AONB from Ivinghoe Beacon to the River Thames and on into the North Wessex Downs AONB. The Thames Path National Trail also passes through the southern part of the AONB”⁹.

⁹ The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (2017) The Chilterns AONB. Accessed on 18/08/17. Available at: <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/chilterns-aonb.html>

The North Wessex Downs AONB

1.4.2 A description of the North Wessex Downs AONB is as follows:

“The evocative, albeit made-up, name for the AONB was created to give a protective coherence to one of the largest tracts of chalk downland in southern England and perhaps one of the least affected by development. It includes the bright, bare uplands of the Marlborough, Berkshire and North Hampshire Downs and sweeps on its western edge to a crest above the White Horse Vale.

In the east, the AONB’s chalk ridge meets the Thames and the Chilterns AONB along the wooded reaches of Goring Gap. It loops south round the Kennet Valley, with superb views north from the steep scarp edge, to fall gently away to the Test Valley. The AONB’s richly farmed valley landscapes are a pleasing foil to the chalk uplands. They include the Vale of Pewsey’s meadows and the handsome beech avenues and oak-fringed glades of Savernake Forest.

The importance of the surviving downland habitat and ancient woodland is matched in this AONB by its huge archaeological significance. Settled since 3000 BC, the downs are dotted with barrows and other prehistoric features. The Wansdyke earthwork, Roman roads and ancient tracks such as the Ridgeway add to a striking sense of antiquity. In places, distinctive white horses have been cut into the chalk, the most famous being the White Horse of Uffington. The neolithic stone circle at Avebury and surrounding monuments are included in a World Heritage Site.

Agriculture is the major land use in the AONB. Most of the downland sheep runs have been ploughed up for cereals and the valleys are among some of Britain’s most fertile farmland. Bordered by the growing towns of Swindon, Reading, Basingstoke and Andover, the AONB’s scattering of small towns and villages is inevitably becoming expensive commuter country.

Tourism in the AONB has to date been focused on localised sites such as Avebury. However, the AONB is of growing recreational importance both to visitors and to an expanding regional population. A number of initiatives, including the Ridgeway National Trail, and Kennet and Avon Canal Projects have developed to meet this need”¹⁰.

¹⁰ The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (2017) North Wessex Downs AONB. Accessed on 18/08/17. Available at: <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/north-wessex-downs-aonb.html>

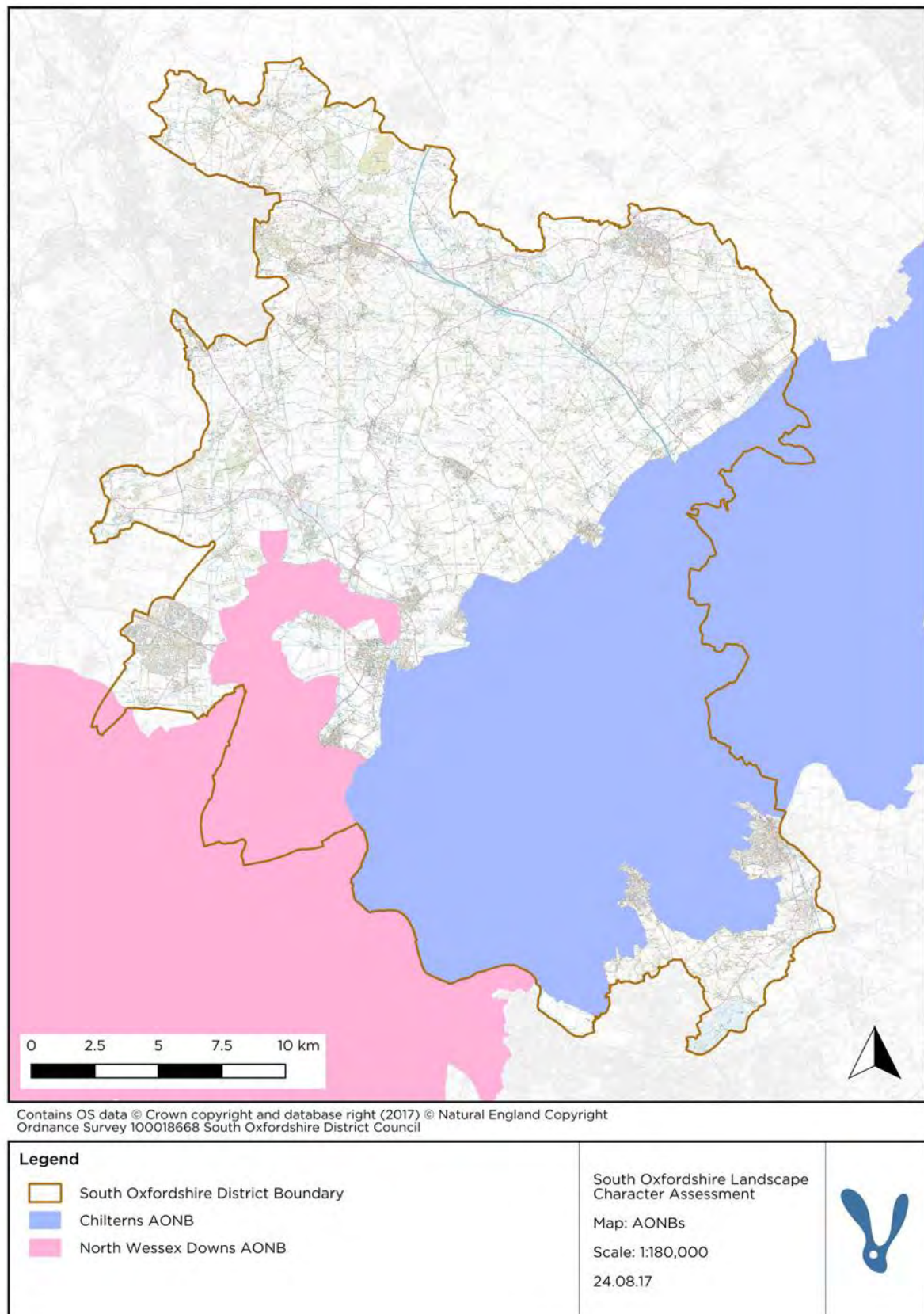


Figure 1.3: Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in South Oxfordshire

1.5 Planning policy context

National Planning Policy

- 1.5.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) acts as guidance for local planning authorities and decision-makers, both in drawing up plans and formulating decisions about planning applications. The environmental role of the NPPF is:
- “...contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy.”*
- 1.5.2 The NPPF identifies Landscape Character Assessment as a tool for protecting valued landscapes outside nationally designated areas without the need for designations. Para 170 states that *‘where appropriate, landscape character assessments should also be prepared, integrated with assessment of historic landscape character, and for areas where there are major expansion options assessments of landscape sensitivity’*.
- 1.5.3 Paragraph 109 states that *‘The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes’*.
- 1.5.4 Paragraphs 156-157 of the NPPF emphasise the importance of landscape and its heritage. Significant adverse impacts should be avoided, though mitigated where avoidance is impossible and compensated for if mitigation is not possible.
- 1.5.5 In 2015, the Department for Communities and Local Government drew the importance of landscape character to the attention of the Planning Inspectorate. The minister drew attention to several recent appeal cases in which harm to landscape character has been an important consideration in the appeal being dismissed. Writing about landscape character and prematurity in planning decisions Brandon Lewis (the minister) stated that, *“I have become aware of several recent appeal cases in which harm to landscape character has been an important consideration in the appeal being dismissed.”*

- 1.5.6 *These cases are a reminder of one of the twelve core principles at paragraph 17 of the National Planning Policy Framework, that plans and decisions should take into account the different roles and character of different areas, and recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, to ensure that development is suitable for the local context”.*

District Planning Policy

- 1.5.7 South Oxfordshire District Council is developing a new Local Plan. The emerging Local Plan sets out a vision for South Oxfordshire up to the year 2033.

- 1.5.8 Regarding the Local Plan, South Oxfordshire District Council states that:

“The local plan identifies a housing target that will be delivered through a strategy consisting of four ‘strategic allocations’ (including a large scheme to support specific regeneration proposals) and policies to support the delivery of the ‘Garden Town’ at Didcot. The local plan also includes some smaller housing site allocations in Nettlebed.

The local plan devolves the identification of non-strategic site allocations – in towns and larger villages (and smaller/other settlements) – to neighbourhood development plans. the plan also allocates locations and sites for employment and Gypsy and Traveller accommodation.

The local plan also contains a range of policies to guide development, protecting and enhancing important assets (such as heritage and the natural environment) and more detailed development management policies to direct the type, scale and design of individual proposals”.

- 1.5.9 Of particular relevance to this study are policies:

- ENV1: Landscape and Countryside;
- ENV2 and ENV3: Biodiversity;
- EN4: Water courses;
- ENV5: Green Infrastructure;
- ENV6: Historic Environment;
- DES1: Delivering high quality development; DES2: Enhancing local character, and;
- The Council's Design Guide that is an adopted supplementary planning document (SPD).

2 Method for Undertaking the Landscape Character Assessment

2.1 Overview

2.1.1 The methodology for this study has been derived from aspects of:

- Guidelines for Visual and Landscape Impact Assessment 3 (2013)¹¹;
- The Countryside Agency Topic Paper 6 (2002): Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity¹²; and
- Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment¹³.

2.1.2 It can be summarized as having four steps:

- Define purpose and scope of the project
- Desk study
- Field study; and
- Classification and description of landscape character types and areas.

2.2 Step 1: Define purpose and scope of the project

2.2.1 SODC provided a project brief which stated that “*Landscape Character Assessment work is required to provide robust evidence to support the submission and examination of the plan. It is envisaged that two stages of landscape character assessment work will be required, principally to review previous work and to provide an important part of the evidence base for the local plan.*”

2.2.2 *The last landscape character assessment undertaken in South Oxfordshire dates from 1998 and was published in 2002. Stages of work require:*

¹¹ Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Third Edition) Abingdon: Routledge

¹² The Countryside Agency (2002) Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5601625141936128>

¹³ Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscape-character-assessments-identify-and-describe-landscape-types>

2.2.3 *A high level assessment of landscape character (This work will need to provide an outline of identifying, describing, classifying and mapping what is distinctive about the district's landscapes. It should start to explain their variety and the difference between the landscapes. This work should include a review of the 1998 landscape study work and any updates); and*

2.2.4 *A detailed assessment (to inform the final report) including:*

- *An explanation of the purpose and scope of the LCA: e.g. the area it will cover, its scale, level of detail and resources available to carry out the work*
- *A desk study, collecting, reviewing and analysing data and documentation and speak to stakeholders involved with the landscape*
- *Field surveys to refine and add to the outputs from the desk study, capturing aesthetic, perceptual and experiential qualities of the landscape*
- *The classification, mapping and description of the landscape's character areas, types and characteristics including geological, other physical and socio-cultural influences."*

2.3 Step 2: Desk study

2.3.1 The desktop study stage consists of an information gathering exercise to prepare a baseline review of natural, cultural and social aspects of South Oxfordshire.

2.3.2 The desktop review draws heavily on the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) and the 1998 LCA, as well as other strategic landscape material been published since 1998.

2.4 Step 3: Field study

- 2.4.1 As stated in Natural England guidance: *“the field study is an essential part of the Landscape Character Assessment process. It presents the opportunity to observe and understand how all the factors identified as part of the desk study interact and are perceived and experienced, to give us landscapes of distinct character. It also enables the identification of other factors that are not evident from the desk study and the chance to record aesthetic and perceptual aspects”*¹⁴.
- 2.4.2 Natural England’s guidance, ‘An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment’¹⁵, explains why landscape character assessment can be used to inform land use planning and specifically local plans. **Figure 2.2** illustrates the various components that together make a landscape. These are under umbrella headings of (i) Natural, (ii) Cultural and Social, and (iii) Perceptual and Aesthetic factors.
- 2.4.3 Recording forms based on **Figure 2.2** are used in the field survey to record details about (i) Natural, (ii) Cultural and Social, and (iii) Perceptual and Aesthetic factors.
- 2.4.4 An example of a field survey sheet for experiential and perceptual factors is presented in **Box 2.1**.
- 2.4.5 **Figure 2.1** provides a summary of the stages and detail for each stage.

2.5 Step 4: Classification and description of landscape types and character areas.

- 2.5.1 The fourth stage of the landscape character assessment guidance from Natural England states that this part of the process deals with the final classification and description of landscape types and character areas, and explains: the difference between landscape types and landscape character areas, and their use; classification at different scales; involvement of people; boundary confirmation; naming landscape character types and areas; how to describe landscape character; mapping landscape character types and / or areas.
- 2.5.2 This particular study has concentrated on updating earlier classification and descriptions of landscape types and character areas.

¹⁴ Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment. Accessed on 11/09/17. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscape-character-assessments-identify-and-describe-landscape-types>

¹⁵ Natural England (2014) An approach to Landscape Character Assessment. Christine Tudor, Natural England.

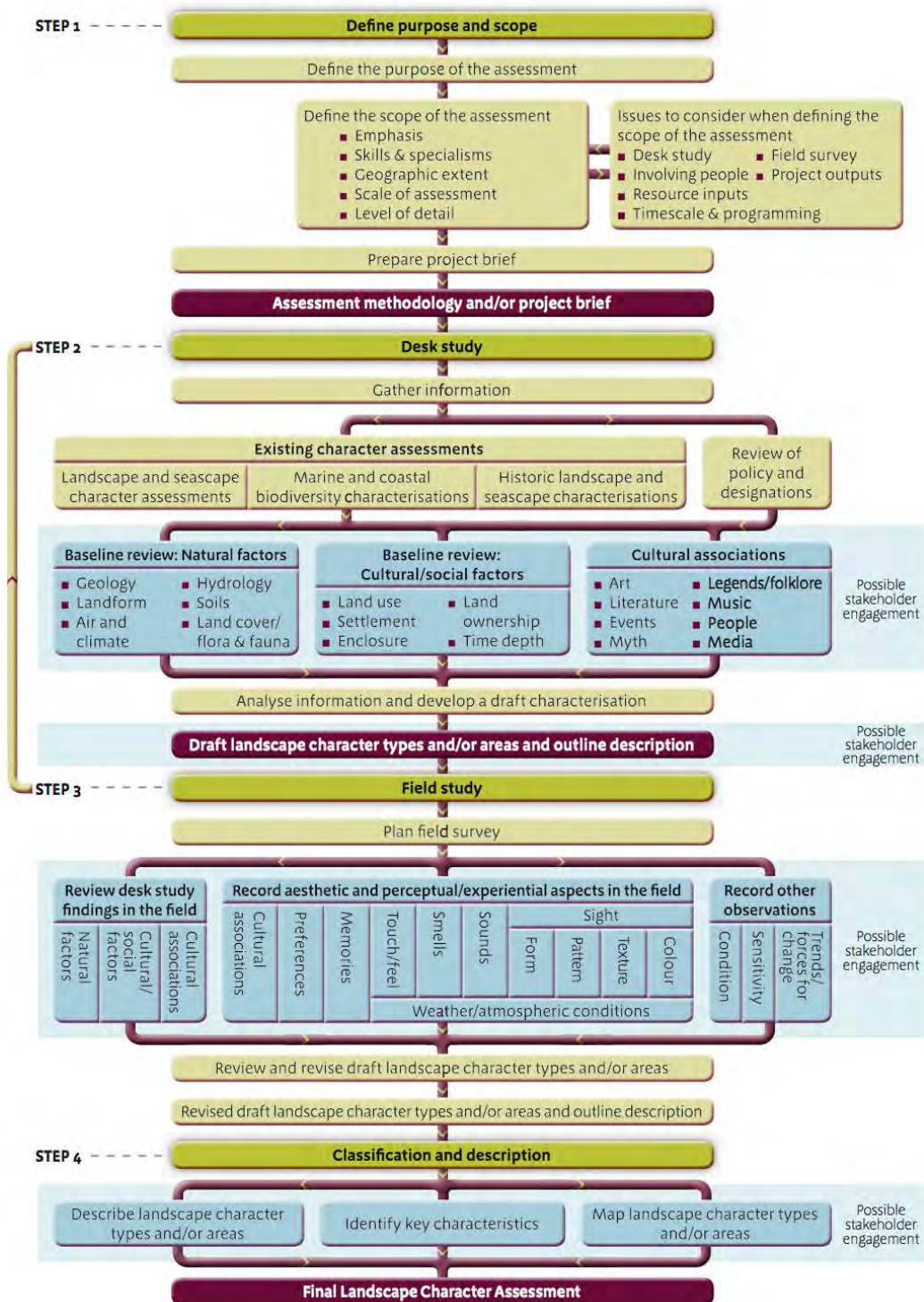


Figure 2.1: Landscape Character Assessment - the process¹⁶

¹⁶ Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment

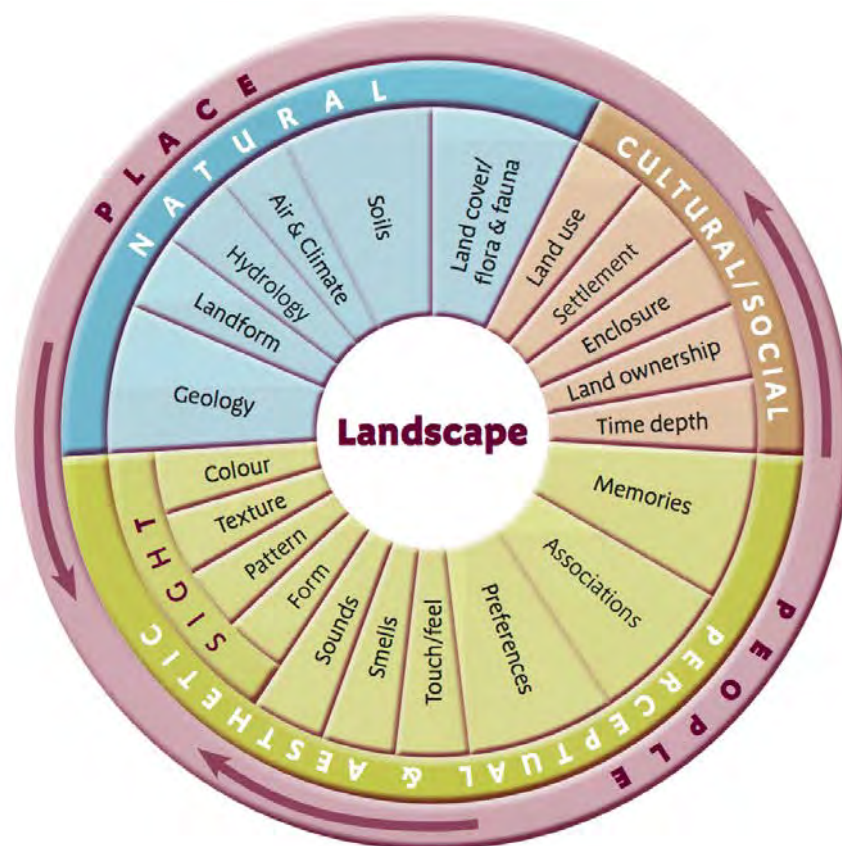


Figure 2.2: What is Landscape?¹⁷

| Box 2.1 Example survey sheet for experiential and perceptual factors | | | | | |
|--|------------|--|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Aesthetic Factors | | | | | |
| Scale | Intimate | | Small | Large | Vast |
| Enclosure | Tight | | Enclosed | Open | Exposed |
| Diversity | Uniform | | Simple | Diverse | Complex |
| Texture | Smooth | | Textured | Rough | Very rough |
| Form | Vertical | | Sloping | Rolling | Horizontal |
| Line | Straight | | Angular | Curved | Sinuous |
| Colour | Monochrome | | Muted | Colourful | Garish |
| Balance | Harmonious | | Balanced | Discordant | Chaotic |
| Movement | Dead | | Still | Calm | Busy |
| Pattern | Random | | Organised | Regular | Formal |
| Perceptual Factors | | | | | |
| Security | Safe | | Unsettling | Disturbing | Threatening |
| Stimuli | Monotonous | | Interesting | Challenging | Inspiring |
| Tranquility | Still | | | | Very busy |
| Movement | Tranquil | | | | Vibrant |
| Naturalness | Natural | | Tamed | Managed | Artificial |
| Noise | Quiet | | Distant | Intermittent | Loud |

¹⁷ Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment

3 South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (1998) Review

- 3.1.1 The following subheadings are taken from the Natural England publication, 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment'¹⁸. They can be considered to review and update the previous LCA for South Oxfordshire (1998).

Date carried out and methodology used

- 3.1.2 South Oxfordshire District Council commissioned Atlantic Consultants to prepare a district-wide landscape assessment, the 'South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment' in 1998.
- 3.1.3 The methodology used to conduct the South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (1998) is informed by landscape assessment guidance published by the Countryside Commission (CCP423).
- 3.1.4 The South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (1998) began with a desk study to identify the physical and human influences that shaped the landscape of the district.
- 3.1.5 Secondly, a field survey was undertaken to record detailed variations in landscape character and key features. The final stage involved analysing the results from the desktop and field studies to determine areas of distinctive character.
- 3.1.6 Each character area includes guidance for landscape management and planning and development issues.

Date and provenance of data

- 3.1.7 The South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment was undertaken in 1998.

The original purpose of the existing LCA

- 3.1.8 The original purpose of the South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (1998) was to:

¹⁸ Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment.

“Increase understanding of the landscape resources of the district, to assist with policy formulation and development control and to assist with the targeting of resources for enhancement and management”¹⁹.

- 3.1.9 The decision to undertake the South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment in 1998 was influenced by the Countryside Commission who actively encouraged local planning authorities to undertake district-wide assessments. It was also encouraged by government advice contained within the revised Planning Policy Guidance 7 (February 1997) to undertake comprehensive landscape assessments as part of the local plan process. The South Oxfordshire Local Plan was adopted in April 1997.

Scale of the assessment and its appropriateness for the proposed use

- 3.1.10 The South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (1998) covers the administrative boundary of South Oxfordshire District Council. This district is located within the county of Oxfordshire.
- 3.1.11 The South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (1998) includes information regarding landscape management, planning and development issues for each landscape character area. This information is appropriate regarding the original purpose of the South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (1998).

Stakeholder engagement with the assessment process

- 3.1.12 The following text is taken from the South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (1998) regarding the public consultation:
- 3.1.13 *“Public consultation was carried out by the Council for a six week period between 21 June and 2 August 2002, at the same time as the consultation on the First Draft Deposit South Oxfordshire Local Plan, which includes a landscape character-based policy framework. The consultation document was widely distributed and copies were sent to parish and town councils, amenity groups, societies and individuals.*
- 3.1.14 *The Council considered its response to the comments made and resolved to make a number of changes to the Assessment which are listed in the erratum. The Assessment was adopted as supplementary planning guidance with these changes on 24 July 2003”.*

Age of the assessment and amount of landscape change since its compilation

¹⁹ Atlantic Consultants (1998) South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment.

- 3.1.15 The South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment was undertaken in 1998 and adopted as supplementary planning guidance following public consultation on 24 July 2003.

The extent of cross boundary join up at the edges of the study area

- 3.1.16 The landscape character areas and types in the South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (1998) do not extend beyond the boundary of the district. There is no cross boundary join up.

Whether the original field survey work is available and can be updated

- 3.1.17 No.

Location (for example, if a coastal location is to be the focus of the assessment then it may be appropriate to also consider Seascape Character and Seascape Character Assessment which may not have been considered earlier)

- 3.1.18 Not applicable. South Oxfordshire is a land locked district.

Will particular aspects of landscape character require more scrutiny or emphasis?

- 3.1.19 The southern region of South Oxfordshire contains areas of the Chilterns AONB and the North Wessex Downs AONB. These areas are designated for their significant landscape value. They will therefore require more scrutiny and emphasis, particularly regarding landscape management and planning and development issues.

- 3.1.20 The northern region of the district contains large areas of the Green Belt that surround the city of Oxford to the north, east and south.

4 The Evolution of the South Oxfordshire Landscape

4.1 Natural factors

Geology and landform

4.1.1 The geological strata of South Oxfordshire is generally located in a diagonal direction from south west to north east. The district contains the following types of bedrock:

- 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 Rocks²⁰.

4.1.2 In the north, the Oxford Heights are a series of low limestone hills that surround Oxford and form part of the 'Mid-vale Ridge', an irregular band of limestone which stretches from Wiltshire to Buckinghamshire across the otherwise low-lying plain of the Thames and Avon clay vales. The hills are composed of Upper Jurassic Corallian limestones and sands, which are widely used as building stone in this area, and which form porous, calcareous soils. 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. These rocks are almost devoid of lime and form thin, sandy soils.

4.1.3 Across the centre of the District, the limestone gives way to the Upper Thames Clay Vale, which forms part of a broad lowland valley that links the Vale of White Horse to the west with the

²⁰ British Geological Survey (2017) Geology of Britain. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>

- 4.1.4 Aylesbury Vale in the east. Much of the vale is underlain by bands of Kimmeridge Clay and Gault Clay, characterised by subdued relief and stiff, heavy soils. The vale is drained by the rivers Thames and Thame, which meet at Dorchester, and are surrounded by extensive, low-lying alluvial flats with naturally impeded drainage. Within this alluvial floodplain, however, deposits of terrace gravels produce lenses of drier, raised ground more suited to settlement and cultivation. Along the southern edge of the vale, a band of Upper Greensand ('or Malmstone') is marked by more pronounced, rolling landform and lighter, calcareous and more fertile soils.
- 4.1.5 Across the south of the district sweeps a broad belt of chalk uplands, part of the more extensive cretaceous chalk belt of southern England. To the 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.
- 4.1.6 The River Thames cuts through the chalk belt at Goring and separates the Chilterns from the North Wessex Downs to the west. These open, rounded chalk 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.
- 4.1.7 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 vale, and brick and flint (with locally grown timber) characterising the Chilterns and Wessex Downs.
- 4.1.8 The southern region of South Oxfordshire contains part of the Chiltern Hills AONB. The escarpment of the Chiltern Hills runs in a diagonal direction from north east to south west through the district. The Chiltern Hills AONB are generally more varied in topography compared to the central and northern regions of South Oxfordshire. Notable features to the north include Shotover Hill at 170m above ordnance datum (AOD) to the east of the city of Oxford.

- 4.1.9 The River Thames and its associated floodplain have created a low lying channel of land that travels south through, then follows, the southern boundary of the district.
- 4.1.10 Wittenham Clumps is the name used to describe Castle Hill (115m AOD) and Round Hill (121m AOD) located in the civil parish of Little Wittenham. The hills are described as ‘clumps’ due to the presence of beech copses that mark the summit of both hills. The Wittenham Clumps are a particularly striking landform in the Thames Valley due to the low-lying nature of the surrounding landscape.
- 4.1.11 The highest area of land in South Oxfordshire is 255m AOD, located to the south of Bald Hill in the Chiltern Hills AONB.
- 4.1.12 A map showing topography data from the Ordnance Survey (OS Terrain 50) is shown in **Figure 4.1**.

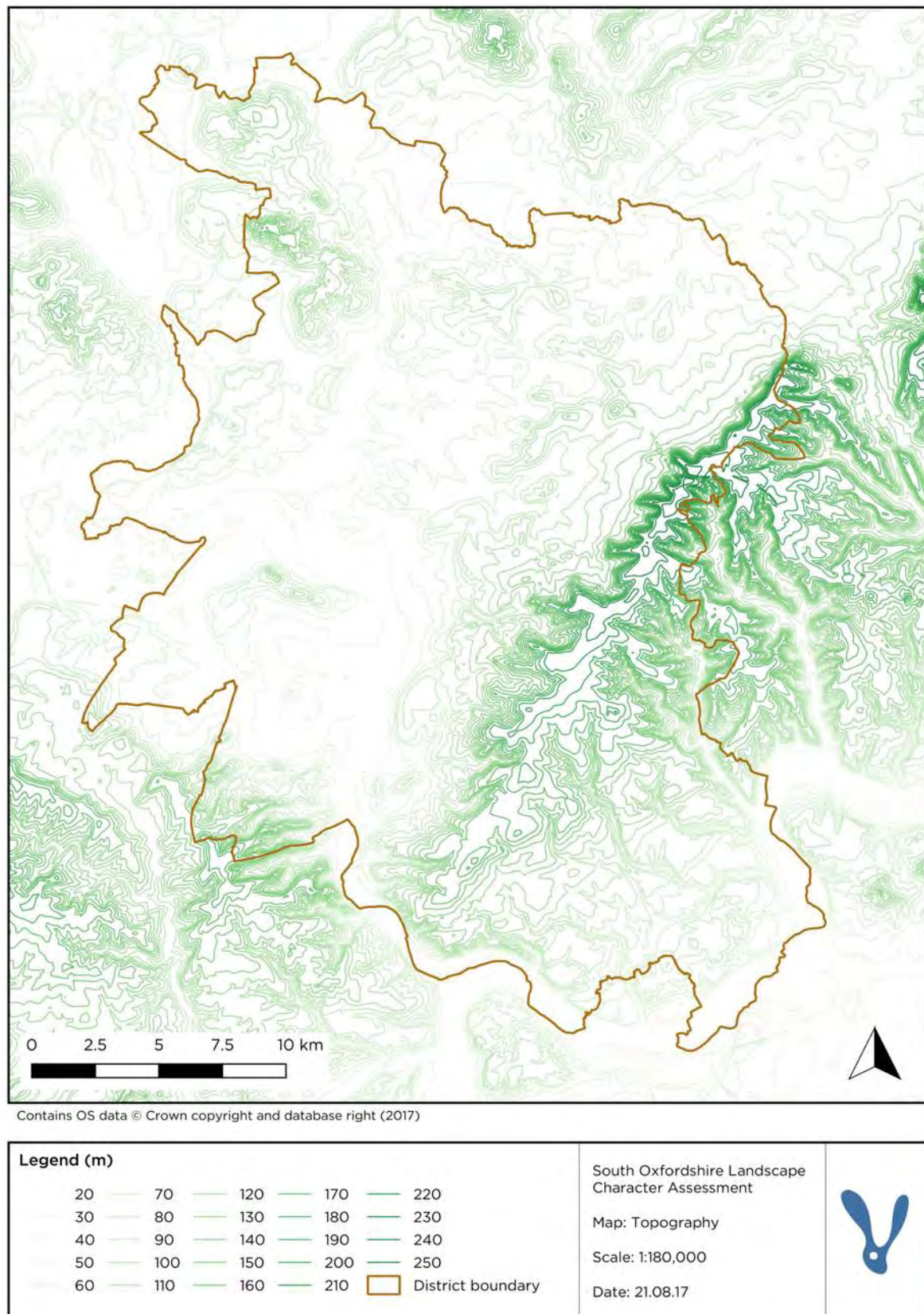


Figure 4.1: Topography of South Oxfordshire

Hydrology

- 4.1.13 The River Thames enters the South Oxfordshire district boundary to the south of Oxford and runs adjacent to the western district boundary until it reaches Abingdon on Thames. Here, the river travels south-eastward into the district and through the town of Wallingford. The river then travels southward and follows the district boundary in an anti-clockwise direction until it reaches Henley-on-Thames where the river heads east towards London (see **Figure 4.2**).
- 4.1.14 Other main rivers in the district include the River Thame, which is a tributary of the River Thames. The River Thame enters the district near the village of Shabington to the north east and travels in a south westerly direction before meeting the River Thames at the village of Dorchester.
- 4.1.15 In terms of flooding, areas of flood zone 2 and 3 are located within the district and are mostly associated with the River Thames and the River Thame²¹.
- 4.1.16 South Oxfordshire is located within the Thames River Basin District and within three Water Framework Directive Management Catchments. Most of the district is located within the Thames and South Chilterns management catchment. An area to the west of the district is located within the Gloucestershire and the Vale catchment and an area to the north is located within the Cherwell and Ray catchment²².

²¹ Environment Agency (2017) What's In Your Backyard? Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://apps.environment-agency.gov.uk/wiyby/default.aspx>

²² Environment Agency (2017) Catchment Data Explorer. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/>

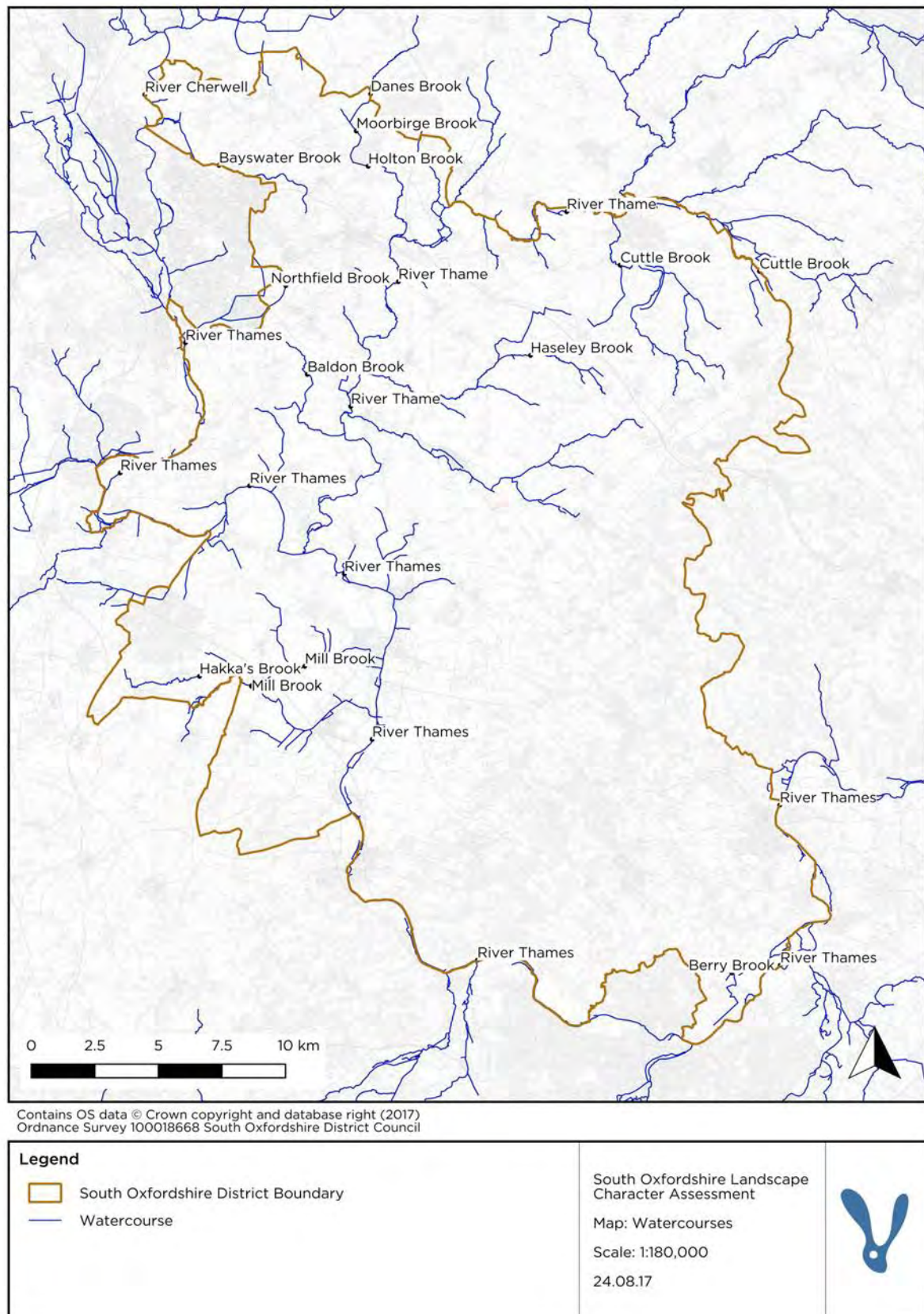


Figure 4.2: Watercourses in South Oxfordshire

Biodiversity/flora and fauna

- 4.1.17 South Oxfordshire encompasses extensive areas of woodland, particularly across the Chilterns AONB to the south of the district. Much of this woodland is deciduous and classified as Ancient Replanted Woodland and Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland²³.
- 4.1.18 Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve (NNR) is located within South Oxfordshire and within the Chilterns AONB boundary. This NNR is located approximately 9 miles to the north east of Wallingford. Main habitats include flower-rich chalk grassland, beech woodland and juniper scrub²⁴.
- 4.1.19 South Oxfordshire contains many Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) with concentrations located to the northern and eastern regions of the district²⁵.
- 4.1.20 South Oxfordshire contains four Special Areas of Conservation (SACs):
- Aston Rowant (SAC) is designated for *Juniperus communis* formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands and *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forests.
 - Chilterns Beechwoods (SAC) is designated for *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forests and semi-natural dry grasslands, scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) and Stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*).
 - Hartslock Wood (SAC) is designated for semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) and *Taxus baccata* woods of the British Isles.
 - Little Wittenham (SAC) is designated for great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*)²⁶.

²³ Natural England (2017) MAGIC. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

²⁴ Natural England (2014) Oxfordshire's National Nature Reserves. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/oxfordshires-national-nature-reserves/oxfordshires-national-nature-reserves#aston-rowant>

²⁵ Natural England (2017) MAGIC. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

²⁶ Natural England (2017) MAGIC. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

- 4.1.21 South Oxfordshire contains four Local Nature Reserves (LNR): Cuttle Brook (LNR), Ewelme Watercress Beds (LNR), Mowbray Fields (LNR) and Watlington Chalk Pit (LNR)²⁷.

²⁷ Natural England (2017) MAGIC. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

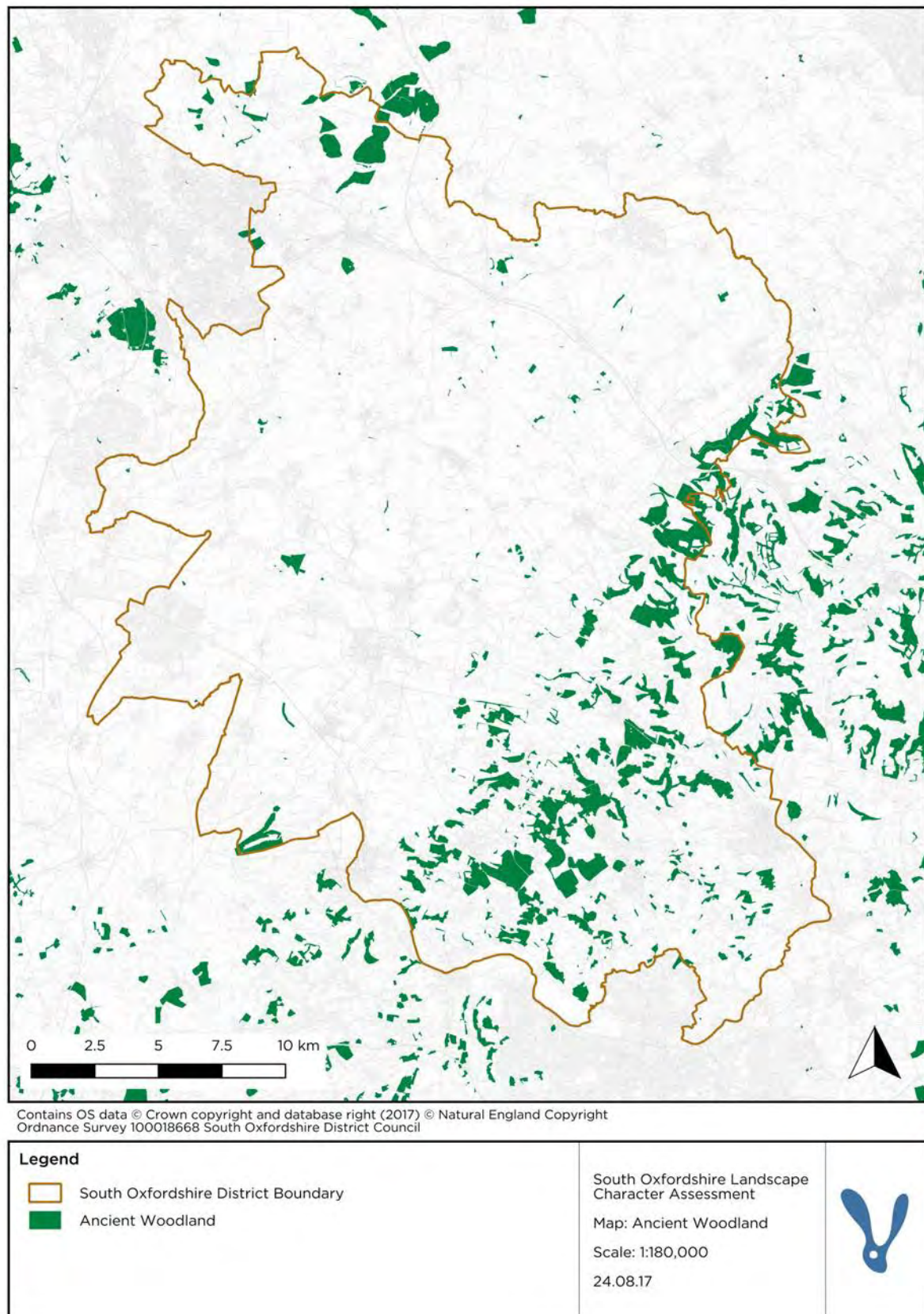


Figure 4.3: Ancient Woodland in South Oxfordshire

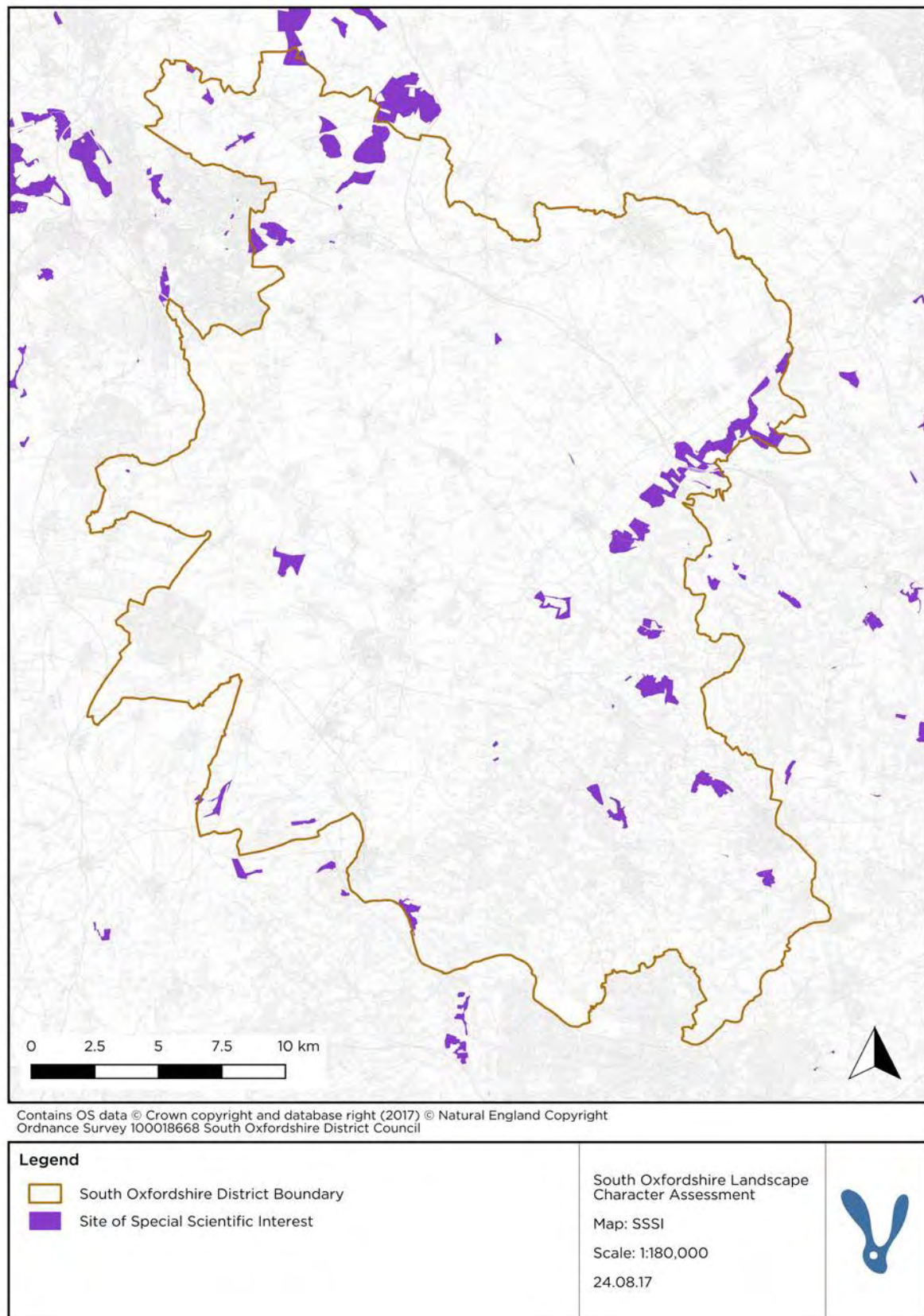


Figure 4.4: Sites of Special Scientific Interest in South Oxfordshire

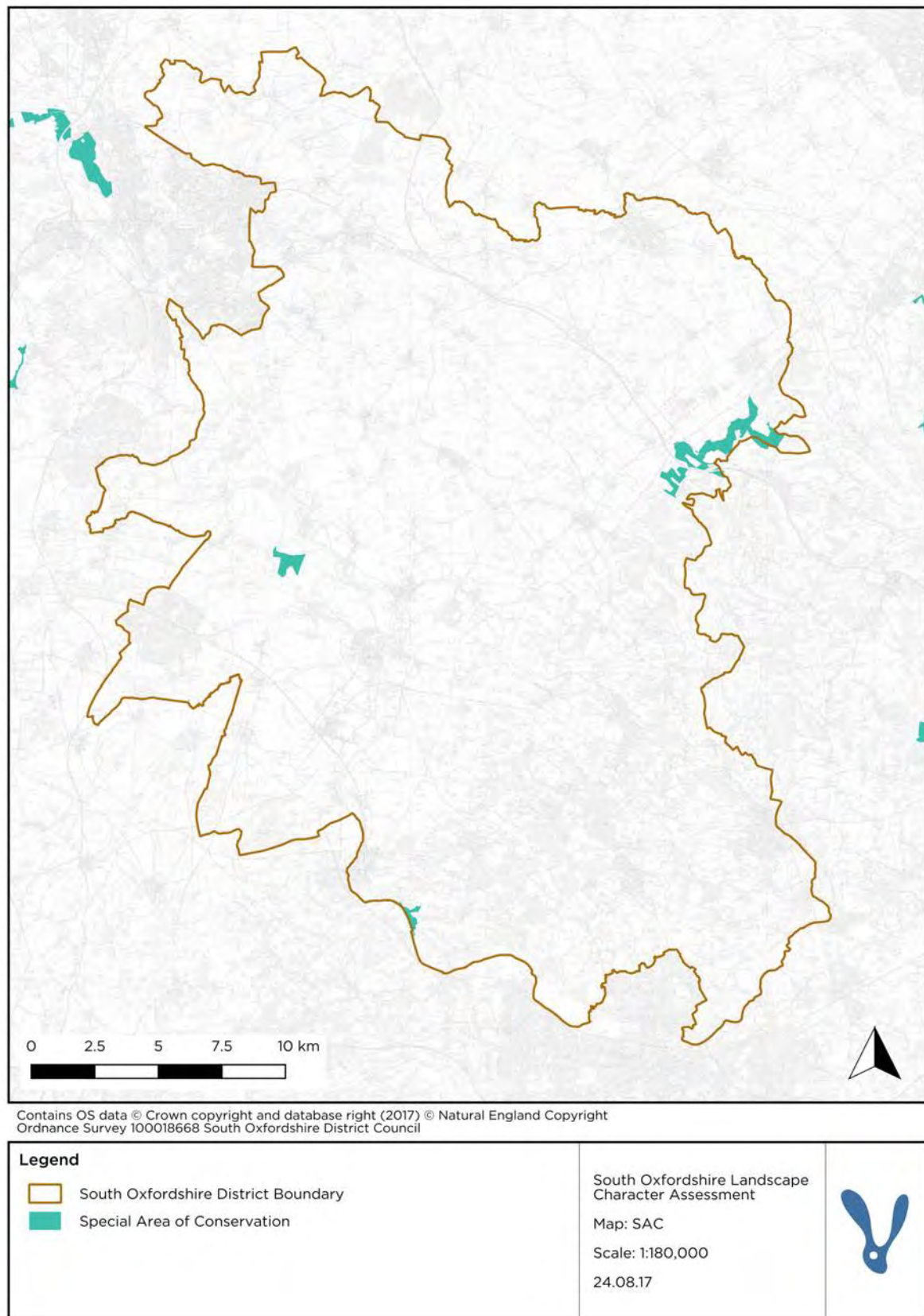


Figure 4.5: Special Areas of Conservation in South Oxfordshire

4.2 Cultural and social factors

Land use and land management/settlement

- 4.2.1 The basic physical structure of the landscape has also had a strong influence on patterns of human occupation and activity within South Oxfordshire. 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.
- 4.2.2 Although evidence of prehistoric settlement is sparse, findings indicate that early settlers had a distinct preference for sites on higher ground less prone to flooding, with more easily worked soils and access to springs or other supplies of water. Favoured sites are found on the Thames-side terraced gravels, the open Chiltern chalklands and the Corallian limestones and sands of the Oxford Heights. By contrast, the heavy, wet soils and woodland cover of the clay lowlands and areas underlain by clay-with-flints were less attractive. Important prehistoric thoroughfares, like the Icknield Way, also followed the outcrops of dry, permeable rocks and formed a focus for early settlement in the district.
- 4.2.3 Prehistoric farmers were responsible for radical changes in the landscape, progressively creating clearings in the dense forests to create extensive open pastures or croplands. Early forest clearance was concentrated on areas of higher land with lighter soils but later extended to the heavier soils of the vale, using iron tools for axes and ploughshares
- 4.2.4 The Romans also brought great changes to South Oxfordshire, creating an integrated pattern of new settlements, planned roads, farming estates and kilns for manufacturing pottery²⁸. The growth in population demanded further woodland clearance, to make way for farmsteads, villages and trackways at the foot of the downs and in the river valleys, and to provide wood as fuel for their potteries, iron-smelting activities, brick industry, and bath houses. A major north-south Roman Road also developed at this time along the route of Grim's Ditch, crossing the Thames at Dorchester, which developed as a frontier post succeeding an earlier Iron Age village.

²⁸ Emery, F (1974) The Oxfordshire Landscape, The making of the English Landscape Series, Hodder and Stoughton, London

- 4.2.5 Many of South Oxfordshire's other villages originated from the Saxon period, particularly those alongside the Thames (e.g. Mapledurham, Goring, Shillingford and the original Nuneham Courtney), those on the Oxford Heights (e.g. Headington, Cuddesdon and Holton) and those along the favoured loamy soils of the Chalk shelf below the Chiltern scarp (e.g. Pyrton, Watlington, Benson and Lewknor)²⁹. This period of settlement established a pattern which is still very much in evidence today.
- 4.2.6 The Saxons were also responsible for establishing extensive hunting preserves and parks, the management of which was later codified by the Normans who introduced forest law. South Oxfordshire district includes part of the Royal Forest of Shotover, with dense woodland cover formerly extending from Islip to Cuddesdon across the Oxford Heights³⁰. Some remnants of this forest survive today.
- 4.2.7 The early middle ages also saw enclosure and clearance of 'wastes' and colonisation of previously unpopulated areas, such as the wooded Chilterns dip slope and marshy valley bottoms (e.g. at Marsh Baldon), during a period of relative prosperity and rapid population growth³¹. 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. Many of the medieval villages outside of the Chilterns subsequently became deserted or shrunk to a single farm or group of houses (e.g. at Clare)³².

²⁹ Emery, F (1974) The Oxfordshire Landscape, The making of the English Landscape Series, Hodder and Stoughton, London.

³⁰ Bond, J and Over, L (1988) Oxfordshire and Berkshire, Ordnance Survey Historical Guides, George Philip & Son, London

³¹ Bond, J and Over, L (1988) Oxfordshire and Berkshire, Ordnance Survey Historical Guides, George Philip & Son, London

³² Emery, F (1974) The Oxfordshire Landscape, The making of the English Landscape Series, Hodder and Stoughton, London

- 4.2.8 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 landscape of much of South Oxfordshire and endowed it with an almost 'blueprinted' pattern of square or rectangular fields surrounded by straight thorn hedges. 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 Vale.
- 4.2.9 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.
- 4.2.10 A feature of the Victorian period, which brought the expansion of many settlements in South Oxfordshire, was the distinction between 'closed' and 'open' villages. Changes in the Poor Law meant that members of a parish became financially responsible for its paupers. As a result, parishes with few landowners actively sought to keep out the immigration of new people who may fall destitute, by building only enough houses for their existing workforce. This placed the burden of housing provision upon the 'open villages' (e.g. Tetworth) which expanded at a considerable rate in a sprawling and haphazard fashion, unlike the compact order of the closed settlements. Another legacy of the Victorian period was the arrival of the railway in 1840, which stimulated the expansion of Didcot and made parts of the district more accessible.

- 4.2.11 Changes to the landscape and settlements of South Oxfordshire 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 and transformed many of the former enclosure landscapes back, as Malcolm Emery puts it, into the *"bare, open vistas of the ancient common fields: see the lifeless prairies at Ipsden in the Chilterns, or Great Milton in the Vale..."*³³.
- 4.2.12 The ecological and visual impoverishment that has resulted seems to be widely regretted, and initiatives (e.g. Countryside Stewardship) and agri-environment policies seek to reverse these trends and, in effect, to replace some of the lost structure of the former enclosure landscapes. However, these changes are slow to materialise and, in the meantime, farming practice is still primarily dictated by market forces and financial subsidies. The growth in extensive pig rearing, which has a significant landscape impact, is an example of this response³⁴.
- 4.2.13 This century has also seen the growth and expansion of towns and villages throughout southern England. The proximity of South Oxfordshire to London and improvements in road and rail communications have placed significant pressures on the district to accommodate new housing. Some settlements, such as Didcot, 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.

³³ Emery, F (1974) *The Oxfordshire Landscape, The making of the English Landscape Series*, Hodder and Stoughton, London

³⁴ Countryside Commission (1992) *The Chilterns Landscape*, CCP 392, Countryside Commission

- 4.2.14 A less obvious effect of the prosperity of this area, however, is the gradual 'suburbanisation' and 'gentrification' of many of the district's villages and a gradual erosion of local distinctiveness. The same effects are evident across the district and are manifested in more 'urban' types of fencing, surfacing, buildings, lighting and highway treatments, which cumulatively detract from the traditional, rural character of the village or hamlet. The design guide for South Oxfordshire aims to improve the standard of design in developments in the district³⁵. Other changes in the landscape have been wrought by the construction of new roads, especially the M40 motorway which carves its way through the Chiltern escarpment, and by mineral extraction, which has transformed the Thames Valley around Dorchester.
- 4.2.15 In planning for future change within South Oxfordshire, the main challenge is to provide a suitable balance between the contrasting claims for housing and business expansion on the one hand and maintenance of the generally unspoilt rural qualities of the landscape on the other.

Public rights of way

- 4.2.16 South Oxfordshire is crossed by an extensive network of public rights of way (PRoW) including the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails.

³⁵ South Oxfordshire District Council (2016) South Oxfordshire Design Guide. Accessed on 24/08/17. Available at: <http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/conservation-and-design/design/design-guide>

5 Landscape character areas and types

- 5.1.1 Natural England's guidance, 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment'³⁶ includes a definition of both landscape character areas and landscape types. These have been reproduced in **Box 5.1**.

Box 5.1: Landscape types and landscape character areas

Landscape types

- are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character;
- are generic in nature – they may occur in different areas in different parts of the country and will share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historic land use and settlement pattern (this does not mean that every area within a particular type will be identical, but rather, that there is a common pattern which can be discerned in maps and in the fields survey records);
- may occur repeatedly in a study area, or occur in just one place;
- can be identified at each level in the hierarchy of assessment;
- can provide a good spatially referenced framework for analysing change (many influences and pressures affect areas with similar character in similar ways); and
- when analysed, can provide a foundation upon which to develop planning and / or landscape management strategies.

Landscape character areas

- are the unique individual geographical areas in which landscape types occur;
- share generic characteristics with other areas of the same type, but have their own particular identity;
- can often be more readily recognised and identified by non-specialists – sense of place is often important to local people and visitors for example;
- may often be more prevalent than landscape character types, because some types will occur in more than one area;
- can be identified at each level in the hierarchy of assessment;
- can provide a good spatially referenced framework from where patterns of local distinctiveness, and factors influencing sense of place, can be drawn; and
- can be used to develop tailored policies and strategies, that reflect the characteristics that make a given landscape different or special.

³⁶ Natural England (2014) An approach to Landscape Character Assessment. Christine Tudor, Natural England.

5.2 Landscape character areas

5.2.1 Eleven LCAs are located in the district of South Oxfordshire:

- Oxford Heights.
- Nuneham Courtenay Ridge.
- The Clay Vale.
- River Thames Corridor.
- Eastern Vale Fringes.
- Central Vale Fringes.
- Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes.
- Chilterns escarpment.
- Chiltern Ridges and Valleys.
- Chilterns Plateau and Valleys.
- Thames Valley and Fringes.

5.3 Landscape types

5.3.1 The following landscape types are located in South Oxfordshire for this LCA:

- Airfields/MOD sites
- Amenity landscape
- Commons and heaths
- Enclosed escarpment
- Flat floodplain pasture
- Flat open farmland
- Flat, semi-enclosed farmland
- Floodplain wetland
- Institutions
- Minerals/landfill sites
- Open dip slope
- Open escarpment
- Open farmed hills and valleys
- Open rolling downs

- Parkland and estate farmland
- Semi-enclosed dip slope
- Semi-enclosed farmed hills and valleys
- Semi-enclosed rolling downs
- Undulating open vale
- Undulating semi-enclosed vale
- Undulating wooded vale
- Urban areas
- Wooded dip slope
- Wooded hills and valleys

5.4 Pattern and scale

5.4.1 Landscape classification can be prepared at a variety of scales depending on the purpose and scope of the project. The scale of the area to be assessed determines the likely level at which the differences between homogeneous and distinctive factors are separated to identify character areas. The process of characterisation divides landscapes into areas of distinct, recognisable, and consistent character, and groups areas of similar character together. The characterisation provides the spatially referenced framework on which landscape character descriptions, and follow on judgements about future policy development, design strategies, or land management etc. may be based.

5.4.2 At a national scale, the UK landscape character framework incorporates 159 areas, each representing large areas of England sometimes crossing several counties. In Oxfordshire, the OWLS presents landscape character types at a scale that reflects the spatial distribution and frequency of particular landscape types such as woodlands, rivers and farmland landscapes.

5.4.3

The aim of this Landscape Character Assessment for South Oxfordshire is to review previous LCAs to determine if they are still fit for purpose. The 1998 Landscape Study identified eleven LCAs stating that, *“these are units of landscape which may embrace a number of different landscape types but which in some way have a coherent and recognisable ‘sense of place’ or local identity. It is important to stress that the boundaries between landscape types or between character areas are rarely distinct. Instead, the boundaries tend to be best approximations of a gradual but discernible change in character. It is also important to stress that landscape character rarely stops at the District boundary and will usually extend beyond into neighbouring districts.”*



Figure 5.1: Landscape Character Areas in South Oxfordshire

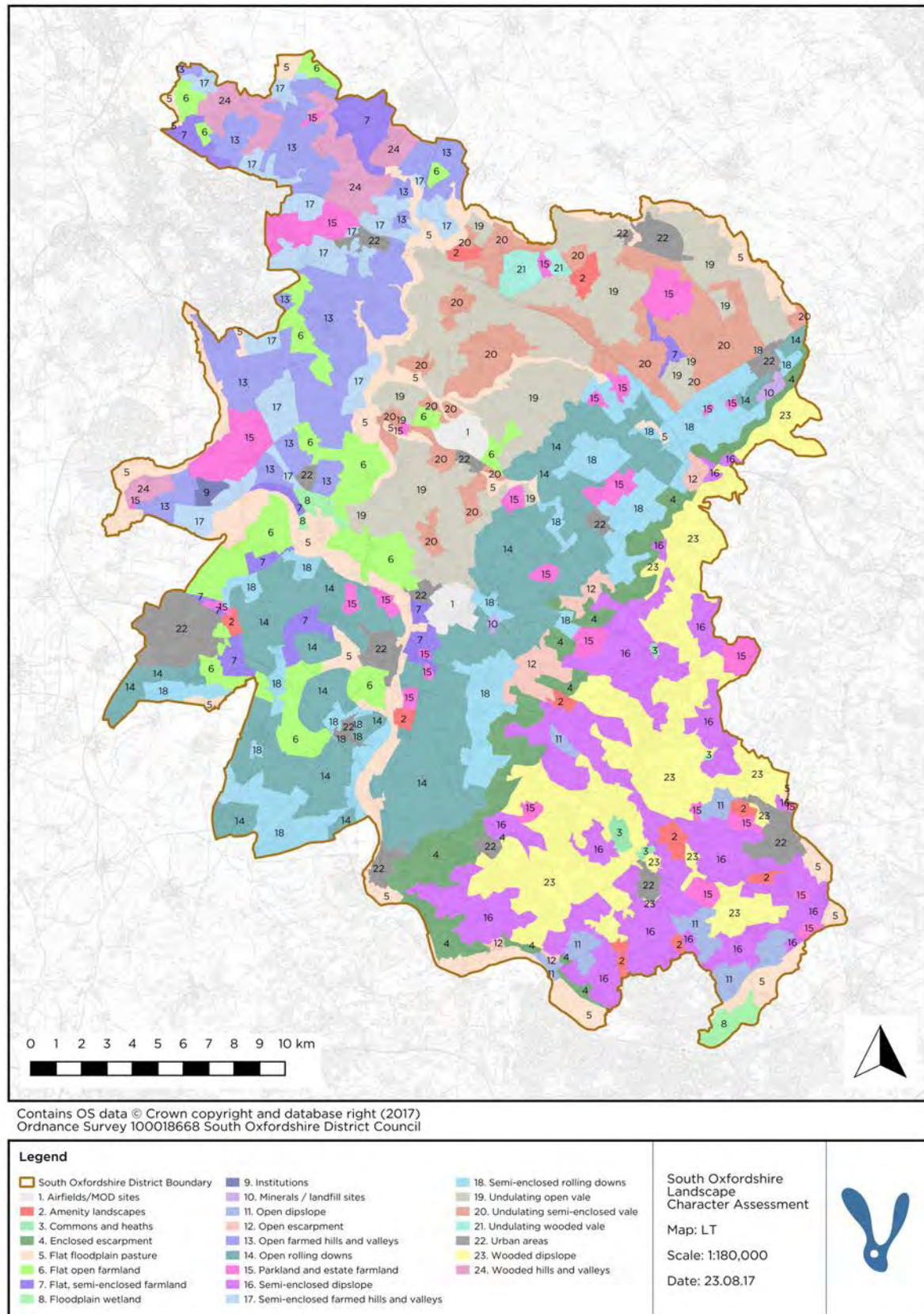
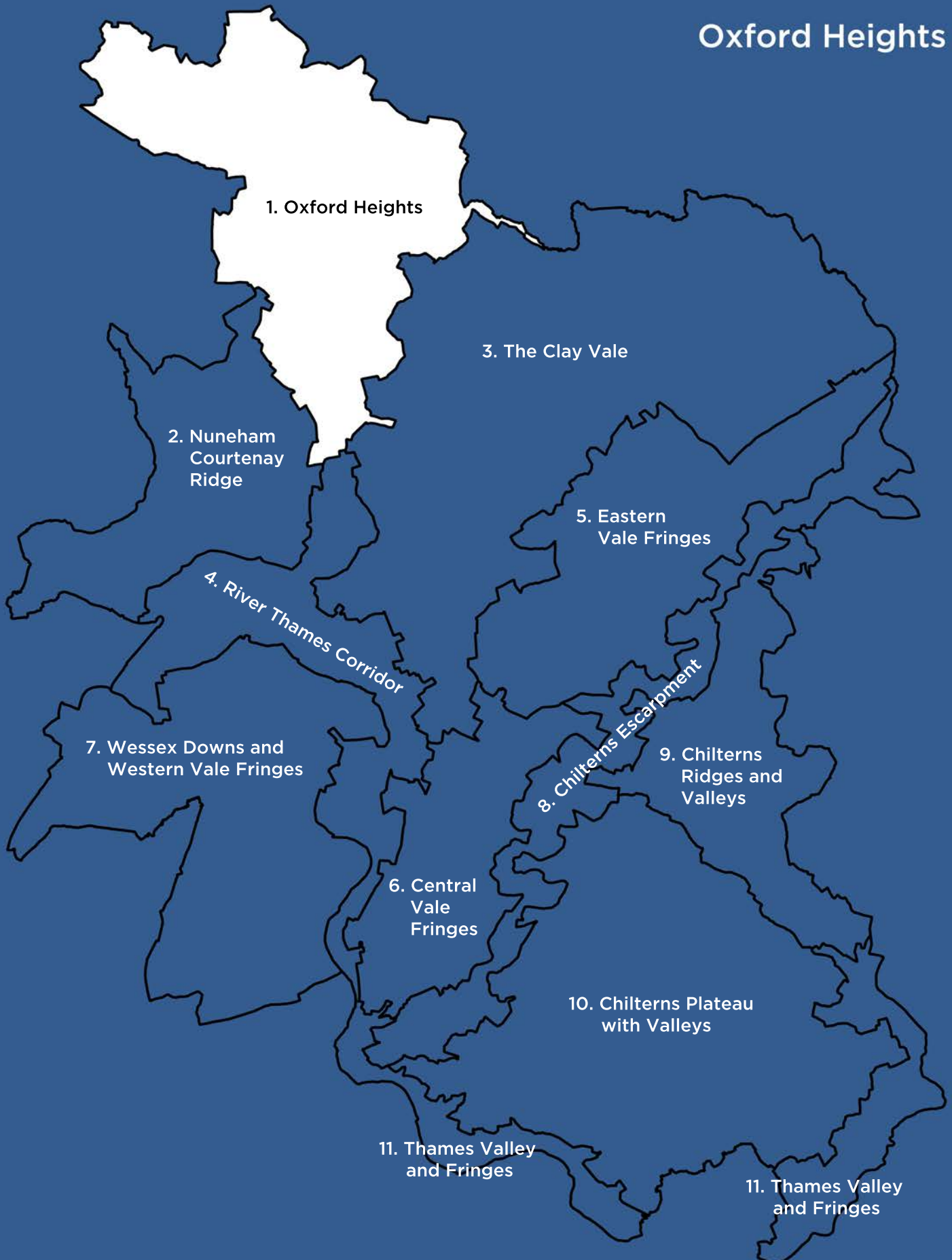
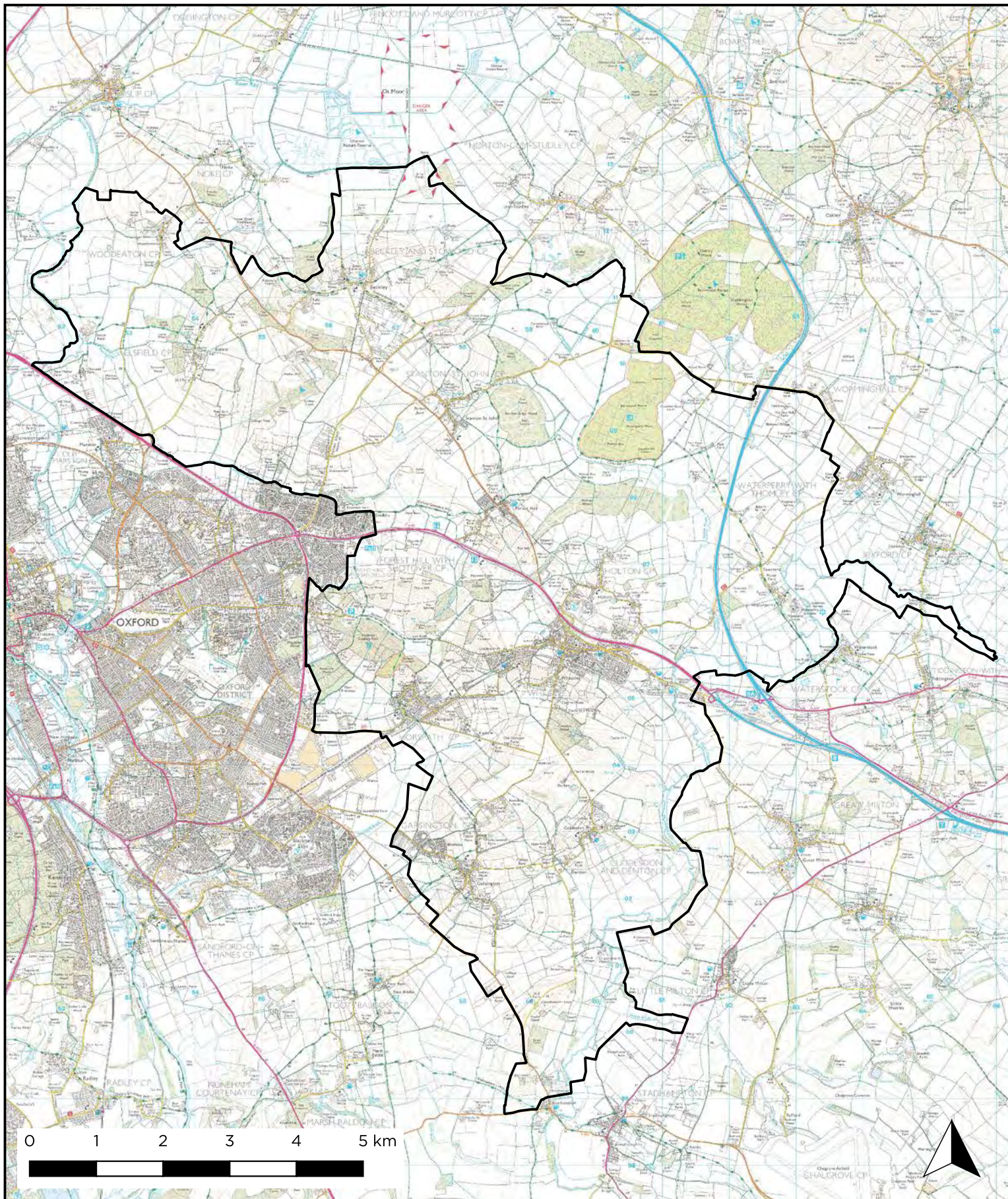


Figure 5.2: Landscape types in South Oxfordshire

Landscape Character Area 1

Oxford Heights





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 Ordnance Survey 100018668 South Oxfordshire District Council

Legend

 1. Oxford Heights

Landscape Character Area 1

South Oxfordshire Landscape
 Character Assessment

1:75,000 scale

31.07.17





Woodeaton



Arable land to the east of Elsfield



Pasture to the south of Otmoor



Scrubland near Beckley



Farmland to the south of Garsington



Long distance view to the Chilterns



View towards Littleworth



Oxford from Shotover Hill

6 Oxford Heights (LCA 1)

6.1 Summary

- 6.1.1 *Oxford Heights* is focused upon the northerly, higher hills of the Mid-Vale Ridge which surround Oxford to the east. It includes the fringing lowlands of Otmoor and the Rivers Ray and Thame.

6.2 Location and boundaries

- 6.2.1 *Oxford Heights* covers an area of land located in the north of South Oxfordshire, surrounding the city of Oxford to the north and east. It is defined by the district boundary to the north and west, *The Clay Vale* (3) to the east, *River Thames Corridor* (4) to the south and *Nuneham Courtenay Ridge* (2) to the west.
- 6.2.2 *Oxford Heights* contains part of NCA 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales and part of NCA 109 Midvale Ridge.

6.3 Key characteristics

- An undulating landscape ranging between c. 60m AOD and c. 140m AOD.
- Interspersed by a network of watercourses including the River Thame.
- Broad alluvial floodplains form large areas of the landscape.
- The land use is predominantly agricultural, comprising a mixture of arable and pasture.
- Significant biodiversity interest including 12 SSSIs and large, isolated areas of Ancient Woodland, particularly in the northern reaches.
- Blocks of woodland, mostly deciduous, are scattered across the landscape.
- Busy transport corridors interrupt the landscape including the A40 road and M40 motorway.
- The area is sparsely settled in the northern and southern reaches. The town of Wheatley defines the central area.

6.4 Natural factors

Geology and landform

- 6.4.1 *Oxford Heights* occupies the northerly part of a belt of low limestone hills that surround Oxford and separates the low-lying clay vales which lie to the north and south. This is an area of complex geology and soils, which contrasts markedly with the adjoining clay vales.
- 6.4.2 The hills are composed of Upper Jurassic Corallian limestones and sands which outcrop in a broad belt from Wheatley north-westwards to Beckley and have historically been the source of superior building stone. Elsewhere 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.
- 6.4.3 In the north, the hills descend sharply into the low-lying Cherwell Valley and Otmoor lowlands which are overlain by extensive deposits of Oxford Clay, while to the east and south the hills descend into the alluvial floodplain of the River Thame and its tributary, Baldon Brook.
- 6.4.4 Over much of the area, the free-draining and easily cultivated soils have historically been suited to growing arable crops while permanent pasture and wet woodland are more common on the heavy clay soils of the floodplains.
- 6.4.5 The topography of *Oxford Heights* ranges between c. -60m AOD and c. 170m AOD. The lowest areas of land are located around the River Cherwell and the River Thame. The highest point in *Oxford Heights* is Shotover Hill (170m AOD), located to the east of the city of Oxford. Other notable high points include land near the village of Beckley (141m AOD), Forest Hill (134 AOD) and land near the village of Garsington (130m AOD).

Hydrology

- 6.4.6 *Oxford Heights* is interspersed with a network of watercourses. These watercourses, along with their associated floodplains, create areas of low lying land that cross through the landscape.
- 6.4.7 The River Thame enters the *Oxford Heights* boundary at the centre of the eastern boundary near the village of Waterperry. The River Thame then follows the eastern boundary and exits *Oxford Heights* at the far south near the village of Chiselhampton.
- 6.4.8 The River Cherwell runs adjacent to part of the *Oxford Heights* boundary to the north west and to the north of the city of Oxford.
- 6.4.9 Other notable watercourses in *Oxford Heights* include Holton Brook, a tributary of the River Thame and Bayswater Brook, a tributary of the River Thames.

Biodiversity/flora and fauna

- 6.4.10 Priority habitats are widespread in this area, including semi-improved grassland, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, lowland meadows, wood-pasture and parkland, deciduous woodland, traditional orchards, lowland calcareous grassland, lowland acid grassland and lowland fens.
- 6.4.11 Small parcels of woodland are scattered across *Oxford Heights*, much of which is deciduous woodland. Larger areas also exist, particularly towards the northern reaches, these include Stanton Great Wood, Holly Wood, Bernwood Forest, Holton Wood and at Shotover Country Park. Much of this woodland is Ancient semi-natural Woodland. There are a number of other ancient woodlands within the landscape type, and several have been designated as county wildlife sites.
- 6.4.12 The woodlands are distinctive landscape features providing structure, visual distinctiveness and height in parts of the landscape that are otherwise low or gently undulating. Hedgerow trees such as ash and oak make a positive contribution to enhancing distinctiveness in arable landscapes that have lost semi-natural vegetation to the enlarging of fields for agricultural production.

6.4.13 Species-poor wet grassland has declined through land drainage and conversion of land to arable. This habitat type is particularly important for wading bird species such as redshank, curlew, snipe and lapwing. Opportunities for maintaining and expanding this resource can be promoted by the targeting of agri-environment schemes.

6.4.14 *Oxford Heights* contains twelve SSSIs (either wholly or partially). Habitats contained within the SSSIs include deciduous woodland, calcareous fen, carr, reedbed, open water and acid and limestone grassland. These mosaics are locally distinctive.

6.5 Cultural and social factors

Land use and land management

6.5.1 Land use is predominantly agricultural. The northern area comprises mostly of pasture and the southern area of mostly arable land.

6.5.2 Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout parts of this character area. Priority should be given to safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource.

6.5.3 Three registered parks and gardens are located within the boundary of *Oxford Heights*: Beckley Park, Garsington Manor and Shotover Country Park.

Public rights of way

6.5.4 The Oxford Greenbelt Way, Oxfordshire Way and Shakespeare's Way cross through this area.

Settlement

6.5.5 This character area is interspersed with a network of small villages. A larger settlement, the town of Wheatley is the main settlement lying in the centre of the area.

- 6.5.6 *Oxford Heights* has been a favoured area for settlement since prehistoric times and villages such as Wheatley, Horspath, Garsington, Cuddesdon, Holton and, particularly, Headington (a 'royal village') were some of the primary settlements in Oxfordshire during the Saxon period. The original settlements took advantage of the higher ground and the water supply provided by springs which enter at the junction of the limestone and clay, or in the case of Beckley, from the freshwater marshes of Otmoor to the north³⁷.
- 6.5.7 Buildings in the villages reflect the underlying geology, with many older houses constructed from the distinctive local Corallian limestone. Red tiles or thatch are common as roofing materials. Buildings were typically clustered around a church and village green but modern expansion of many villages has resulted in a more linear or sprawling form, particularly at Wheatley. The villages are typically connected by a network of small, sunken lanes with low trimmed hedges and hedgerow trees that wind up the slopes towards the hills and ridges.
- 6.5.8 Other distinctive buildings in the landscape include Beckley Lower Park, a moated Tudor brick house on the site of a medieval hunting lodge, and Shotover House with its eighteenth century formal parkland designed by William Kent.
- 6.5.9 Infrastructure includes electricity pylons, telecommunications masts, roads and trains. Pylons are considered to be a visual detractor in all landscapes in which located.
- 6.5.10 Major transport infrastructure interrupts this character area, including the M40 motorway and the A40 road.

6.6 Perceptual and aesthetic factors

- 6.6.1 The undulating topography offers long distance views from many roads across the area. Notable viewpoints in *Oxford Heights* include Shotover Hill. Noise from motor vehicles can be heard from the M40 motorway in the north-eastern region and surrounding the A40 road in the centre of the area. Military aeroplanes and helicopters are occasionally heard across the area. The television masts near Beckley (Oxford transmitting station) are visible from miles around.

³⁷ Emery, F (1974) *The Oxfordshire Landscape. The making of the English Landscape Series*. Hodder and Stoughton. London

6.7 Landscape types

6.7.1 The overall landscape character of the area is defined by its distinctive landform of hills and ridges, which rise prominently above the surrounding vales and river valleys. While this complex relief is a unifying feature of the area, it also creates a landscape of contrasts, from open elevated hilltops and hillsides to enclosed intimate lowlands, with extensive areas of rolling countryside in between. The landscape is also physically and visually fragmented by landform and roads and is consequently difficult to perceive as a coherent unified area.

6.7.2 *Oxford Heights* is comprised of the following landscape types:

Flat floodplain pasture

Key characteristics:

- Flat, low-lying farmland (usually below 50m AOD), typically dominated by permanent pasture with a 'wet', riparian character.
- Prone to flooding with distinctive network of drainage ditches.
- Comparatively strong landscape structure with willow and alder conspicuous along watercourses and roadsides.
- Intimate, semi-enclosed and pastoral character.
- Generally low intervisibility, although views along the river valley may be possible in some more sparsely vegetated areas.
- M40, A40 and other main roads cause localised intrusion in Thame valley but otherwise, comparative inaccessibility creates a tranquil, remote character.

Flat, open farmland

Key characteristics:

- Distinctively flat, low-lying farmland (usually below 50m AOD).
- Typically located beyond immediate riverside pasture on land less prone to flooding and more easily drained and cultivated.
- Large-scale rectilinear field pattern with structured network of drainage ditches.
- Weak landscape structure with few trees, low or gappy hedges, open ditches and fences.
- Rural and remote character.

- Open, denuded character with high visibility.

Flat, semi-enclosed farmland

Key characteristics:

- Similar to the *flat, open farmland* landscape type but with stronger landscape structure and a semi-enclosed character.
- Large-scale woodland blocks (including remnant ancient woodland of Shotover Forest) are a feature of the low-lying area to the east of Stanton St John and create a strong sense of remoteness and strategic containment.
- The lower Cherwell valley is characterised by smaller-scale, irregular field pattern and an enclosed, intimate character.
- The area adjoining the Otmoor lowlands has a larger-scale, more open character but with a strong hedgerow structure.
- Predominantly rural, tranquil, remote or intimate character with only localised intrusion from the A40 near Marston.
- Regular pattern of ditches and rural roads.
- Semi-enclosed character with moderate to low intervisibility.

Parkland and estate farmland

Key characteristics:

- Well-managed parkland character with formal features such as avenues and free-standing mature trees in pasture, clumps and blocks of woodland, exotic tree species, formal structures and boundary features.
- Associated 'estate' landscape at Shotover Hill and Country Park characterised by large blocks of woodland, open grassland and mature trees and including ecologically important ancient woodland (remnants of the Forest of Shotover), scrub and calcareous grass-heath habitats.
- Predominantly rural and unspoilt character but with some localised urban influences on the fringes of Headington, Horspath, Littleworth and Wheatley.
- Generally enclosed character with strong landform, woodland and tree cover, low intervisibility but with some visually prominent hilltop and hillside locations.

Open farmed hills and valleys

Key characteristics:

- Rolling landform of hills and valleys.
- Large-scale farmland, mostly in arable cultivation.
- Typically large fields, with rectilinear pattern of field boundaries (predominantly hedgerows).
- Weak structure of tightly clipped or gappy hedgerows, with few hedgerow trees.
- Open, denuded and exposed character, with prominent skylines and hillsides and high intervisibility.
- Distinctive elevated and expansive character on ridges and higher ground, with dominant sky and long views.
- Predominantly rural character but some localised intrusion of main roads (including M40/A40), overhead power lines and built development.

Semi-enclosed farmed hills and valleys

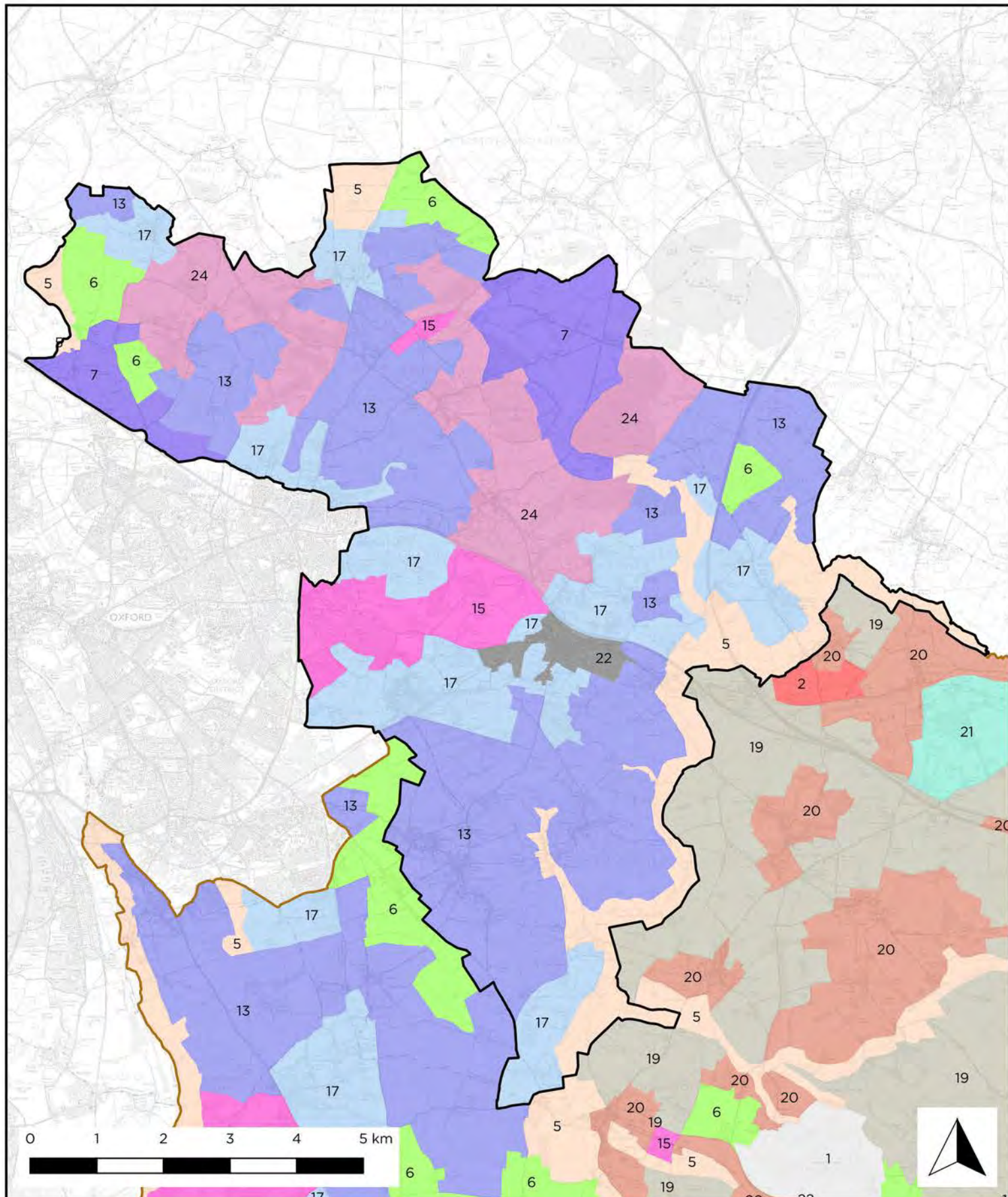
Key characteristics:

- Similar to the *open farmed hills and valleys* landscape type but with a stronger structure of hedgerows and trees which provide clearer definition of field pattern.
- Occurs mostly in association with settlements and steeper hillsides, where a smaller-scale field pattern and the hedgerow structure remains more intact.
- Predominantly intensive arable land use but some pockets of permanent pasture occur, particularly around settlements and on steep hillsides.
- Landscape typically fragmented and intruded upon by roads and built development particularly around Wheatley and Oxford fringes, although it retains a predominantly rural character.
- Landform and landscape structure create enclosure and reduce intervisibility but long views possible from hillsides and higher ground across lower-lying vales (e.g. from Beckley towards Otmoor).

Wooded hills and valleys

Key characteristics:

- Similar to the *semi-enclosed farmed hills and valleys* landscape type but with a particularly strong structure of hedgerows, trees and woodlands (including remnant ancient semi-natural woodland).
- Varied relief, mixed land use and strong woodland and tree cover create an attractive, diverse, patchwork landscape.
- Medium to large-sized fields sometimes with irregular field boundaries, especially on steep valley sides.
- Intervisibility reduced by landform and landscape structure to create a more enclosed and intimate landscape, but long views possible from hillsides and higher ground across lower-lying vales.
- Predominantly rural character with few detracting influences.



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Ordnance Survey 100018668 South Oxfordshire District Council

Legend

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Oxford Heights (LCA 1) | 8. Floodplain wetland | 17. Semi-enclosed farmed hills and valleys |
| South Oxfordshire District Boundary | 9. Institutions | 18. Semi-enclosed rolling downs |
| 1. Airfields/MOD sites | 10. Minerals / landfill sites | 19. Undulating open vale |
| 2. Amenity landscapes | 11. Open dipslope | 20. Undulating semi-enclosed vale |
| 3. Commons and heaths | 12. Open escarpment | 21. Undulating wooded vale |
| 4. Enclosed escarpment | 13. Open farmed hills and valleys | 22. Urban areas |
| 5. Flat floodplain pasture | 14. Open rolling downs | 23. Wooded dipslope |
| 6. Flat open farmland | 15. Parkland and estate farmland | 24. Wooded hills and valleys |
| 7. Flat, semi-enclosed farmland | 16. Semi-enclosed dipslope | |

South Oxfordshire
Landscape
Character Assessment

Map: Oxford Heights
(LCA 1) LT

Scale: 1:75,000

Date: 23.08.17



6.8 Planning, managing and protecting distinctiveness

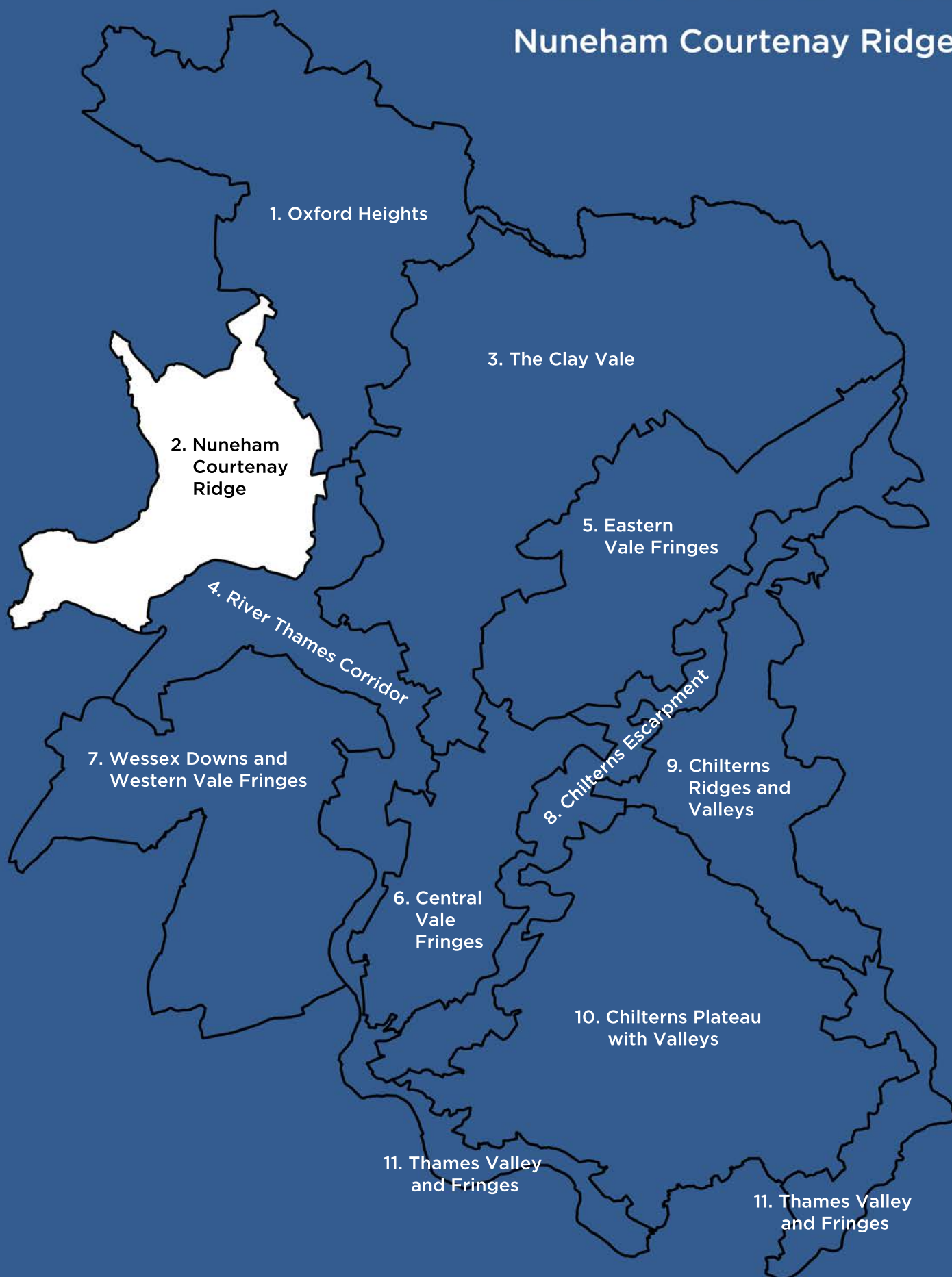
6.8.1 The following table presents recommendations to protect, conserve, enhance and restore the landscape qualities of South Oxfordshire.

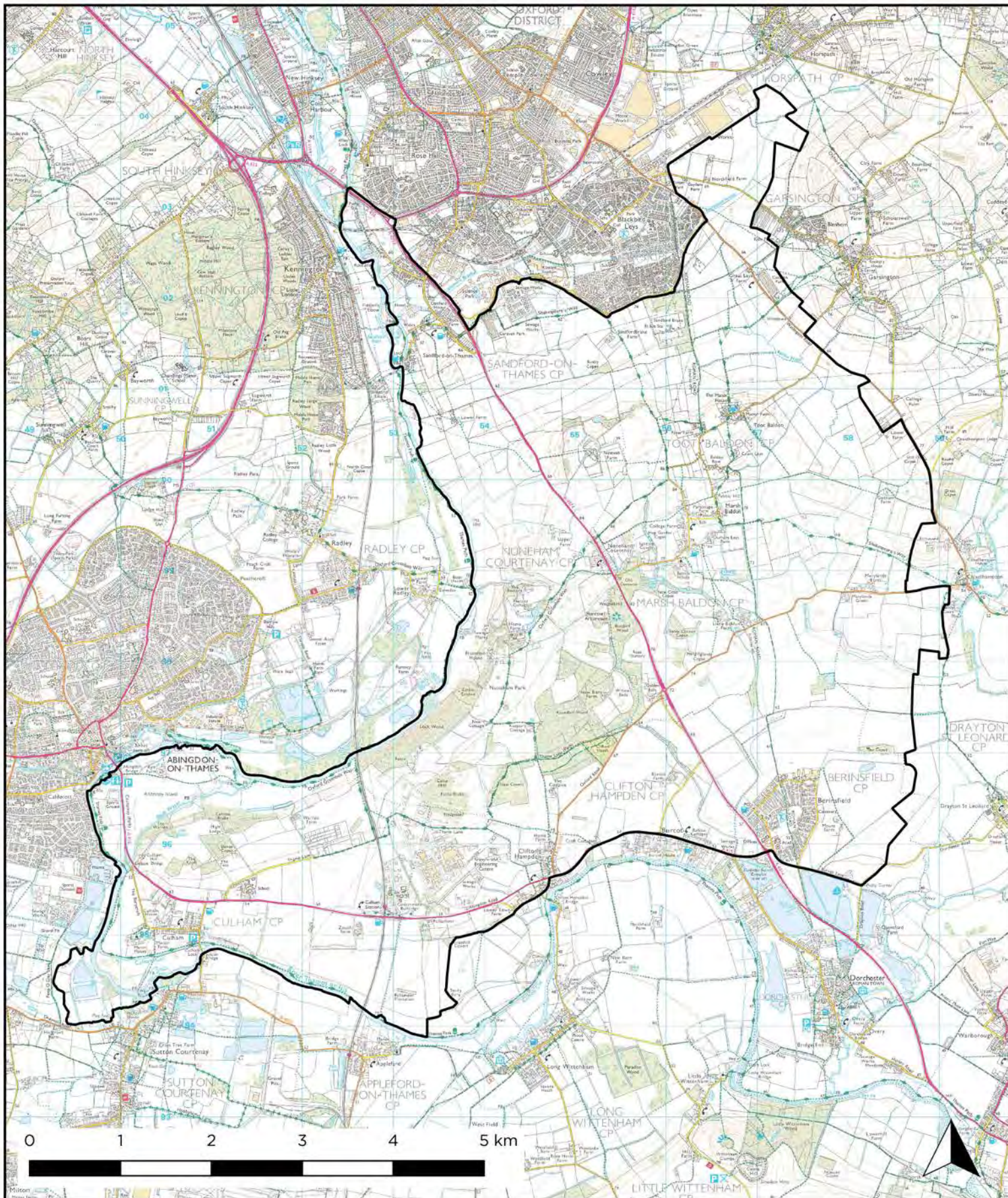
| Forces for change | Guidelines/Mitigation |
|---|--|
| Agricultural intensification, diversification and farm amalgamation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote, where possible, the conservation of the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly on land adjacent to watercourses. Recognise that grazing sheep and cattle can make a contribution to the landscape's identity and distinctiveness. Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type. Promote the conservation of all remaining areas of semi-improved grassland, and encourage conversion of arable land to pasture in the proximity of existing grasslands to maximise their wildlife and landscape value. Strengthen the field pattern by conserving species rich hedgerows and sympathetically maintaining all hedgerows. Where appropriate, replant gappy hedges using species such as hawthorn (<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>) blackthorn (<i>Prunus spinose</i>), wayfaring tree (<i>Viburnum lantana</i>), dogwood (<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>) and spindle (<i>Euonymus europaea</i>). Hedgerow trees are a key feature of this landscape area and felling of mature specimens, especially veteran trees, should be resisted. Planting of new hedgerow trees such as oak (<i>Quercus robur</i>) and ash (<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>), and tree belts, should be encouraged. Prevent scrub encroachment in areas of species-rich grassland. |
| Introduction of tall buildings and structures such as communication masts and electricity pylons. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise impact of tall buildings and structures by locating new communication masts on existing structures or by using existing masts. Bury cables underground and seek opportunities to bury existing overhead cables. |
| Inappropriate built form, development, expansion and infilling of settlements. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses, such as industrial estates, barns, new houses at the fringes of towns and villages with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside. Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements, and promote the use of building materials to maintain vernacular style and a scale of development and that are appropriate to <i>Oxford Heights</i> (see also the South Oxfordshire Design Guide , November 2016). Avoid inappropriate development within the open and exposed hills where it would be intrusive. |
| Decline in | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using |

| | |
|---|---|
| management of existing woodlands and trees. | <p>locally characteristic species such as oak and ash.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ancient semi-natural woodlands should be managed to ensure they are in favorable condition.• Safeguard, maintain and enhance and the characteristic landscape features of existing parklands including mature trees, avenues of trees, lakes, woods and walls.• Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as hazel (<i>Corylus avellana</i>), ash and oak.• Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and alder and, where appropriate, pollarding willows.• |
|---|---|

Landscape Character Area 2


Nuneham Courtenay Ridge





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 Ordnance Survey 100018668 South Oxfordshire District Council

Legend

 2. Nuneham Courtenay Ridge

Landscape Character Area 2

South Oxfordshire Landscape
 Character Assessment

1:55,000 scale

31.07.17





Electricity pylons to the south of Littlemore, Oxford



Arable land to the south of Garsington



Thatched roof and arable land at Baldon Row



Horsiculture near Baldon Row



Arable land and electricity pylons near Marsh Baldon



Arable land and woodland near Little Baldon



View of Wittenham Clumps



The village green at Marsh Baldon

7 Nuneham Courtenay Ridge (LCA 2)

7.1 Summary

- 7.1.1 *Nuneham Courtenay Ridge* comprises the southerly part of the low limestone hills of the mid-vale ridge, which appears as a prominent spur of higher land above the River Thames which bounds it to the west and south.

7.2 Location and boundaries

- 7.2.1 *Nuneham Courtenay Ridge* occupies an area of land located in the north west of South Oxfordshire, to the south of the city of Oxford.
- 7.2.2 The character area occupies the southerly part of a belt of low limestone hills that surround Oxford and divide the low-lying clay vales which lie to the north and south.
- 7.2.3 *Nuneham Courtenay Ridge* is defined by the district boundary to the north, west and part of the southern boundary. *Nuneham Courtenay Ridge* borders *Oxford Heights* (1) to the east and *River Thames Corridor* (4) to the east and south.
- 7.2.4 *Nuneham Courtenay Ridge* contains part of NCA 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales and part of NCA 109 Midvale Ridge.

7.3 Key characteristics

- An undulating landscape ranging between c. 50m AOD and c. 100m AOD.
- The River Thames runs adjacent to the western and southern boundary of this character area.
- Broad alluvial plains exist in the north-eastern region.
- The area is sparsely settled by small villages.
- The land use is predominantly agricultural, comprising mostly of arable land.
- The land rises eastwards from the River Thames creating a dramatic ridge.
- Nuneham Courtenay registered park and garden comprises an

extensive area in the centre of the plateau.

- Significant stands of woodland are located at Nuneham Courtenay Park.
- Small patches of ancient woodland pepper the wider character area.
- The A4074 and A415 roads cross through the area.
- A section of the Cherwell Valley Line (railway) interrupts the south-western corner of the area.
- Electricity pylons are a strong visual detractor in this landscape.

7.4 Natural factors

Geology and landform

- 7.4.1 Within *Nuneham Courtenay Ridge*, the underlying Corallian limestone is capped by Kimmeridge Clay, Portland Beds and Lower Greensand which form a rolling plateau of lower elevation than the northern *Oxford Heights* (1) but which still appears as a prominent spur of higher land above the River Thames which bounds it to the west and south.
- 7.4.2 The free-draining sandy soils of the Lower Greensand are mostly under arable crops while permanent pasture is more common on the heavy clay soils of the floodplains.
- 7.4.3 The landform rises eastwards from the River Thames, creating a dramatic ridge with views over the river towards Abingdon. The northern extent of the ridge is located to the west of the village of Nuneham Courtenay and stretches southwards to Culham Bridge.
- 7.4.4 Further north and to the south and east, the landform grades more gently into the low-lying floodplains of the Rivers Thames, Thame and Baldon Brook.
- 7.4.5 The topography of *Nuneham Courtenay Ridge* ranges between c. 50m AOD and c. 100m AOD. The lowest areas of land are located around the River Thames. The highest area of land in *Nuneham Courtenay Ridge* is at Harcourt Arboretum at 100m AOD. Other notable high points include land at Nineveh Farm (99m AOD) and at Nuneham Park (94m AOD).

Hydrology

- 7.4.6 The River Thames enters the boundary of *Nuneham Courtenay Ridge* at the far northern extent of this landscape character area, to the south west of Rose Hill, a suburb to the south of Oxford.
- 7.4.7 The River Thames then generally follows the western and southern boundary of *Nuneham Courtenay Ridge*, meandering in and out of the boundary until the village of Burcot, where the river diverts south.

Biodiversity/flora and fauna

- 7.4.8 Priority habitats include semi-improved grassland, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, lowland meadows, wood-pasture and parkland, deciduous woodland, traditional orchards and lowland fens.
- 7.4.9 Large areas of deciduous and coniferous woodland are located at Nuneham Courtenay Park. Ancient Woodland exists in small areas including deciduous woodland at Sands Corner Copse, to the south east of the village of Nuneham Courtenay³⁸.
- 7.4.10 Nuneham Courtenay Ridge contains one SSSI (Culham Brake), to the south of Abingdon-on-Thames. This SSSI is a small area of willow carr and contains one of the largest British populations of the summer snowflake *Leucojum aestivum*³⁹.

7.5 Cultural and social factors

Land use (and management)

- 7.5.1 Land use is predominantly agricultural with large areas of arable land and smaller areas of pasture.
- 7.5.2 Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout parts of this area. Priority should be given to safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource.

³⁸ Natural England (2017) MAGIC. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

³⁹ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1001763&SiteName=cul&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCArea=>

- 7.5.3 The landscape of the area was largely influenced in the eighteenth century by the creation of Nuneham Courtenay, a Grade I registered park and garden designed by 'Capability' Brown for Lord Harcourt. The legacy of this picturesque landscape is still evident in the extensive woodlands and formal parkland which dominate the central part of the plateau.

Public rights of way

- 7.5.4 The Oxford Greenbelt Way, Shakespeare's Way and Thames Path cross through this area.

Settlement

- 7.5.5 *Nuneham Courtenay Ridge* is sparsely settled by small villages. The largest settlement within this character area is the village of Berinsfield, located in the south east.
- 7.5.6 Culham Science Centre comprises a large area on the former Royal Navy Air Station Culham (HMS Hornbill) in the south west region of this character area to the west of the village of Clifton Hampden.
- 7.5.7 Settlements in this area have varied origins. For example, the Saxon settlement of Nuneham Courtenay was originally located on high ground overlooking the Thames. It was subsequently demolished and rebuilt as a model estate village in its present location in the mid-eighteenth century, with its original site being used for Lord Harcourt's 'villa with a view'⁴⁰. Other Saxon settlements, such as Culham and Clifton Hampden, were developed just above the Thames floodplain where they took advantage of the higher ground and proximity to well-watered river meadows.
- 7.5.8 Toot Baldon also originated as an old English settlement, perched on the outer edge of a hill where the greensand gives way to the clays below. However, medieval expansion of settlements and colonisation of nearby marshland created a larger estate with a shared field system, which included the associated settlement of Marsh Baldon and two other Baldons, Little Baldon and Baldon St Lawrence, of which only the isolated church of the latter survives⁴¹.

⁴⁰ Emery, F (1974) *The Oxfordshire Landscape. The making of the English Landscape Series*. Hodder and Stoughton. London.

⁴¹ Bond, J and Over, L (1988) *Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Ordnance Survey Historical Guides*. George Philip & Son. London.

7.5.9 The villages typically developed around a central green, of which Marsh Baldon has one of the finest surviving examples. In contrast to the predominance of stone buildings in the Northern *Oxford Heights*, Marsh Baldon also demonstrates the lack of uniformity in building styles and materials within this area. Clustered around the green there is 'a colourful medley of houses in coursed rubble, brick or timber framing, with roofs of thatch or tiles'⁴².

7.5.10 Busy transport corridors include the A4074 road that cuts through the centre of the landscape. Another main road connects the important Thames crossings at Abingdon and Clifton Hampden (A415) but most other roads connecting the villages retain a minor, rural character.

7.5.11 A section of the Cherwell Valley Line (railway) interrupts the south-western corner of the area.

7.6 Perceptual and aesthetic factors

7.6.1 A strong agricultural landscape, mostly comprised of arable land. Electricity pylons are a strong visual detractor in the area, particularly in the northern region (to the south of Oxford). Red kites are often seen in the skies above the area. The Wittenham Clumps are an omnipresent visual landmark across the area. The A4074 and A415 roads and the railway line are visual and aural detractors in the landscape.

7.7 Landscape Types

7.7.1 Landscape character in the Nuneham Courtney Ridge is dominated by the extensively wooded parkland and estate landscapes of Nuneham Courtney, which occupy the core of the area. However, landform is also a unifying element, with the distinctive rolling plateau rising prominently above the surrounding river valleys.

7.7.2 *Nuneham Courtenay Ridge* is comprised of the following landscape types:

Flat floodplain pasture

Key characteristics:

- Flat, low-lying riverside meadows alongside the River Thames, typically dominated by permanent pasture with a distinctively 'wet', riparian character.

⁴² Emery, F (1974) *The Oxfordshire Landscape. The making of the English Landscape Series*. Hodder and Stoughton. London

- Prone to flooding with distinctive network of drainage ditches.
- Comparatively strong landscape structure with willows conspicuous along the riverside.
- Intimate and pastoral character.
- Generally low intervisibility, although views.
- Along the valley may be possible in some more sparsely vegetated areas.
- Comparative inaccessibility creates a tranquil, remote character with only localised intrusion close to main urban areas of Abingdon and Oxford.

Flat, open farmland

Key characteristics:

- Distinctively flat, low-lying farmland (below 65 metres AOD) occupying former marshland alongside the Baldon Brook on land less prone to flooding and more easily drained and cultivated.
- Large-scale rectilinear field pattern with distinctive network of drainage ditches.
- Weak landscape structure with few trees, low or gappy hedges, open ditches and fences.
- Comparative inaccessibility creates a rural and remote character.
- Open, denuded landscape results in high intervisibility.

Parkland and estate farmland

7.7.3

These landscapes comprise the formal C18 designed parkland and associated estate landscape of Nuneham Courtney and a smaller scale area with parkland characteristics associated with Culham House.

Key characteristics:

- Well-managed parkland character with formal features such as avenues and free-standing mature trees in pasture, clumps and blocks of woodland, exotic tree species, formal structures and boundary features.
- Associated 'estate' landscape extending into a few areas beyond listed parkland and characterised by large blocks of woodland, open grassland and mature trees.

- Rural and unspoilt character.
- Generally enclosed character with strong landform, woodland and tree cover, low intervisibility but with some visually prominent hilltop and valleyside locations.

Open farmed hills and valleys

Key characteristics:

- Rolling plateau landform.
- Large-scale farmland, mostly in arable cultivation.
- Large fields, with rectilinear field boundaries, typical of parliamentary enclosures.
- Weak structure of tightly clipped or gappy hedgerows, with few hedgerow trees.
- Open, denuded and exposed character, with prominent skylines and hillsides and high intervisibility;
- Distinctive elevated and expansive character on ridges and higher ground, with dominant sky and long views.
- Predominantly rural character but some localised intrusion of main roads, overhead power lines and built development.

Semi-enclosed farmed hills and valleys

Key characteristics:

- As above, though with a stronger structure of hedgerows and trees which provide clearer definition of field pattern.
- Occurs mostly in association with settlements (e.g. Marsh Baldon), where a smaller-scale field pattern and the hedgerow structure remain more intact.
- Predominantly intensive arable land use but some pockets of permanent pasture occur, particularly around settlements and on steeper hillsides.
- Predominantly rural character.
- Landform and landscape structure create enclosure and reduce intervisibility.

Wooded hills and valleys

Key characteristics:

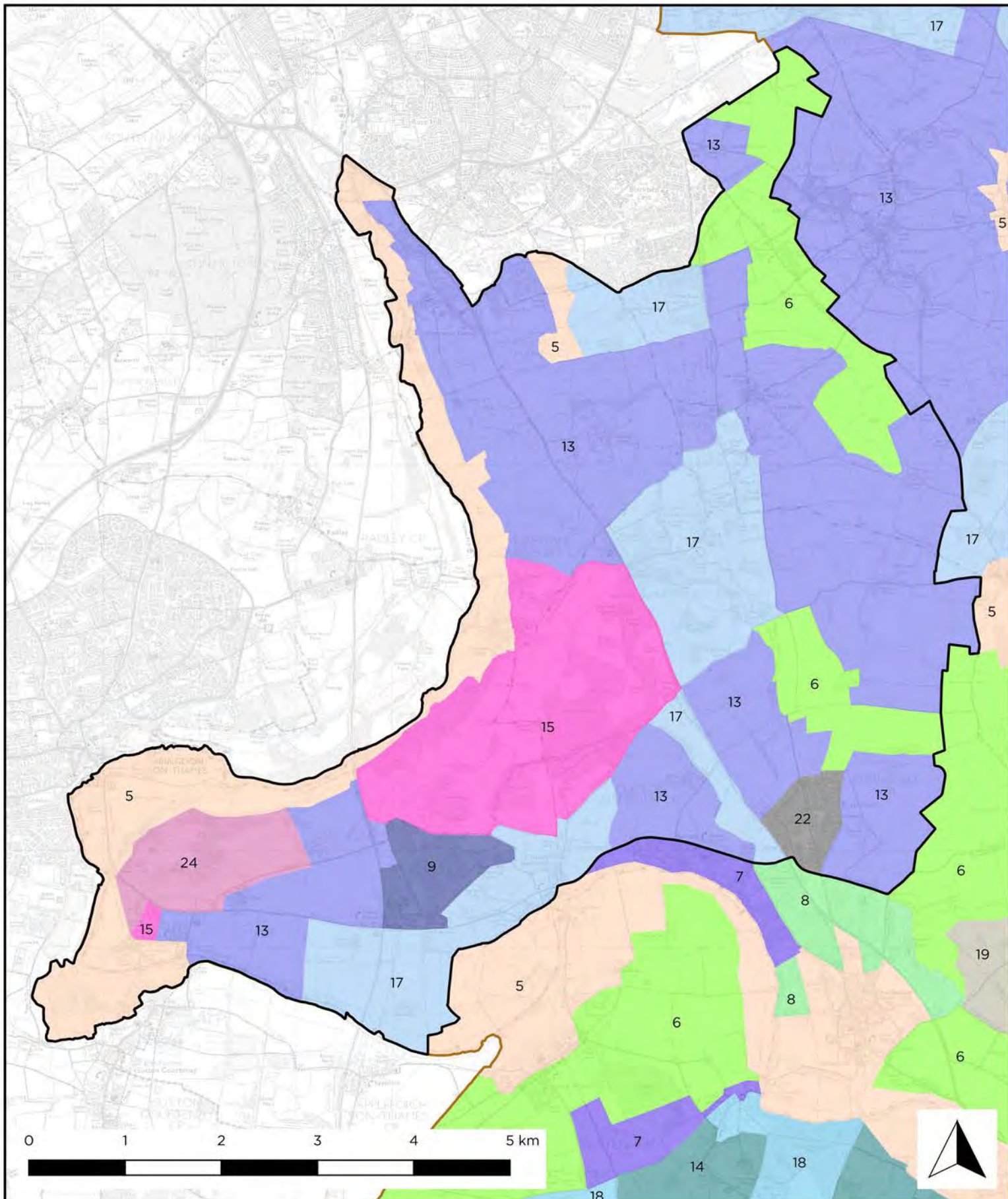
- Similar to *semi-enclosed farmed hills and valleys* landscape type but with a particularly strong structure of hedgerows, trees and woodlands at the western end of the greensand plateau and steep escarpments of the River Thames.
- Strong relief, mixed land use and blocks of woodland create an attractively diverse landscape.
- Intervisibility reduced by landform and landscape structure to create a more enclosed and intimate landscape, but long views possible from hillsides and higher ground across Thames valley.
- Predominantly rural character with few detracting influences.

Institutions

7.7.4 Culham Laboratories is located within this area and comprises a complex of institutional buildings within landscaped grounds.

Key characteristics:

- Landscaped setting with mature trees and semblance of parkland character but lacking its formal features;
- Dispersed complex of buildings, signs and land uses have an urbanising influence on rural context of the site.



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Legend

- Nuneham Courtenay Ridge (LCA 2)
- South Oxfordshire District Boundary
- 1. Airfields/MOD sites
- 2. Amenity landscapes
- 3. Commons and heaths
- 4. Enclosed escarpment
- 5. Flat floodplain pasture
- 6. Flat open farmland
- 7. Flat, semi-enclosed farmland
- 8. Floodplain wetland
- 9. Institutions
- 10. Minerals / landfill sites
- 11. Open dipslope
- 12. Open escarpment
- 13. Open farmed hills and valleys
- 14. Open rolling downs
- 15. Parkland and estate farmland
- 16. Semi-enclosed dipslope
- 17. Semi-enclosed farmed hills and valleys
- 18. Semi-enclosed rolling downs
- 19. Undulating open vale
- 20. Undulating semi-enclosed vale
- 21. Undulating wooded vale
- 22. Urban areas
- 23. Wooded dipslope
- 24. Wooded hills and valleys

South Oxfordshire
Landscape
Character Assessment

Map: Nuneham
Courtenay Ridge (LCA
2) LT

Scale: 1:52,000

Date: 23.08.17



7.8 Planning, managing and protecting distinctiveness

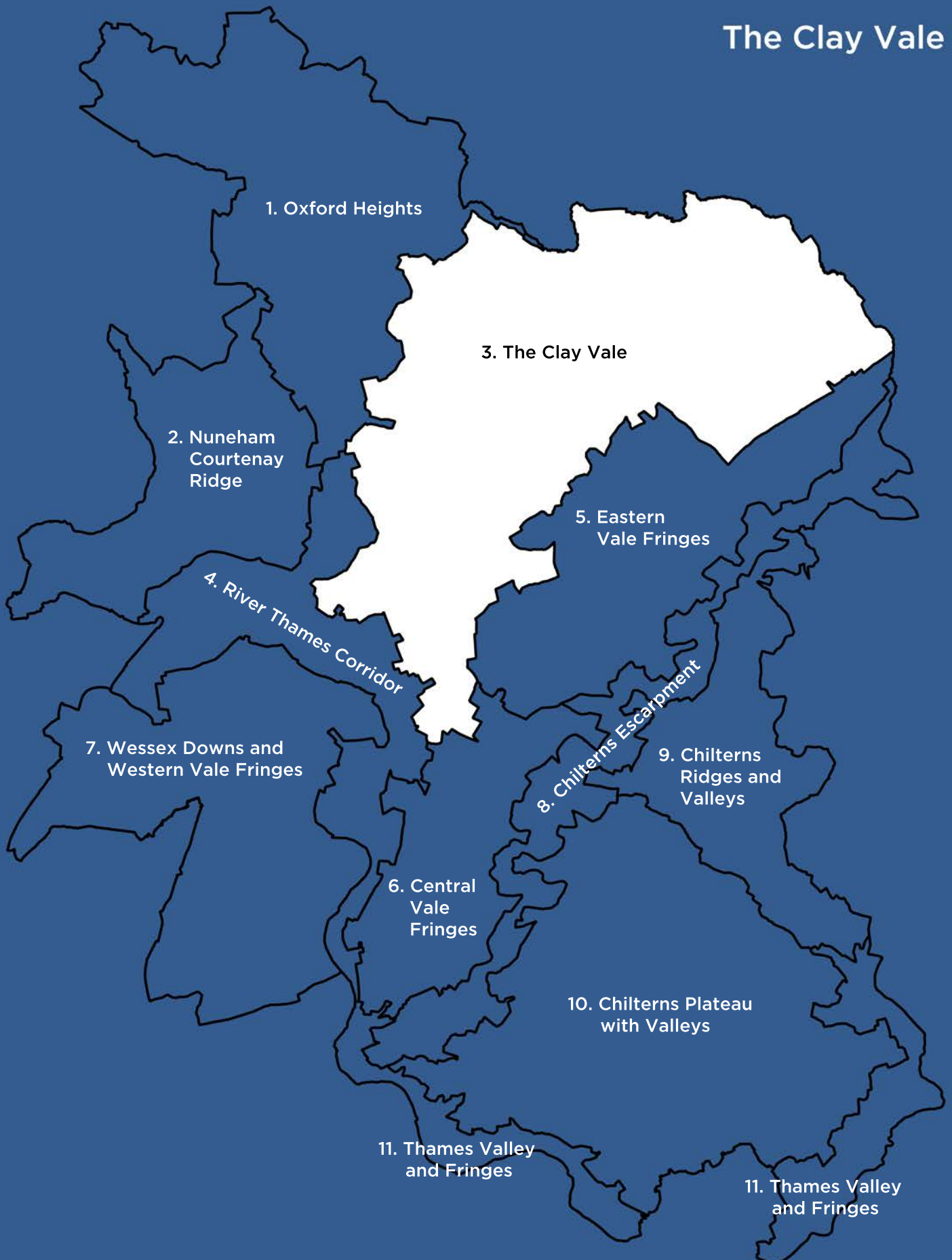
7.8.1 The following table presents recommendations to protect, conserve, enhance and restore the landscape qualities of South Oxfordshire.

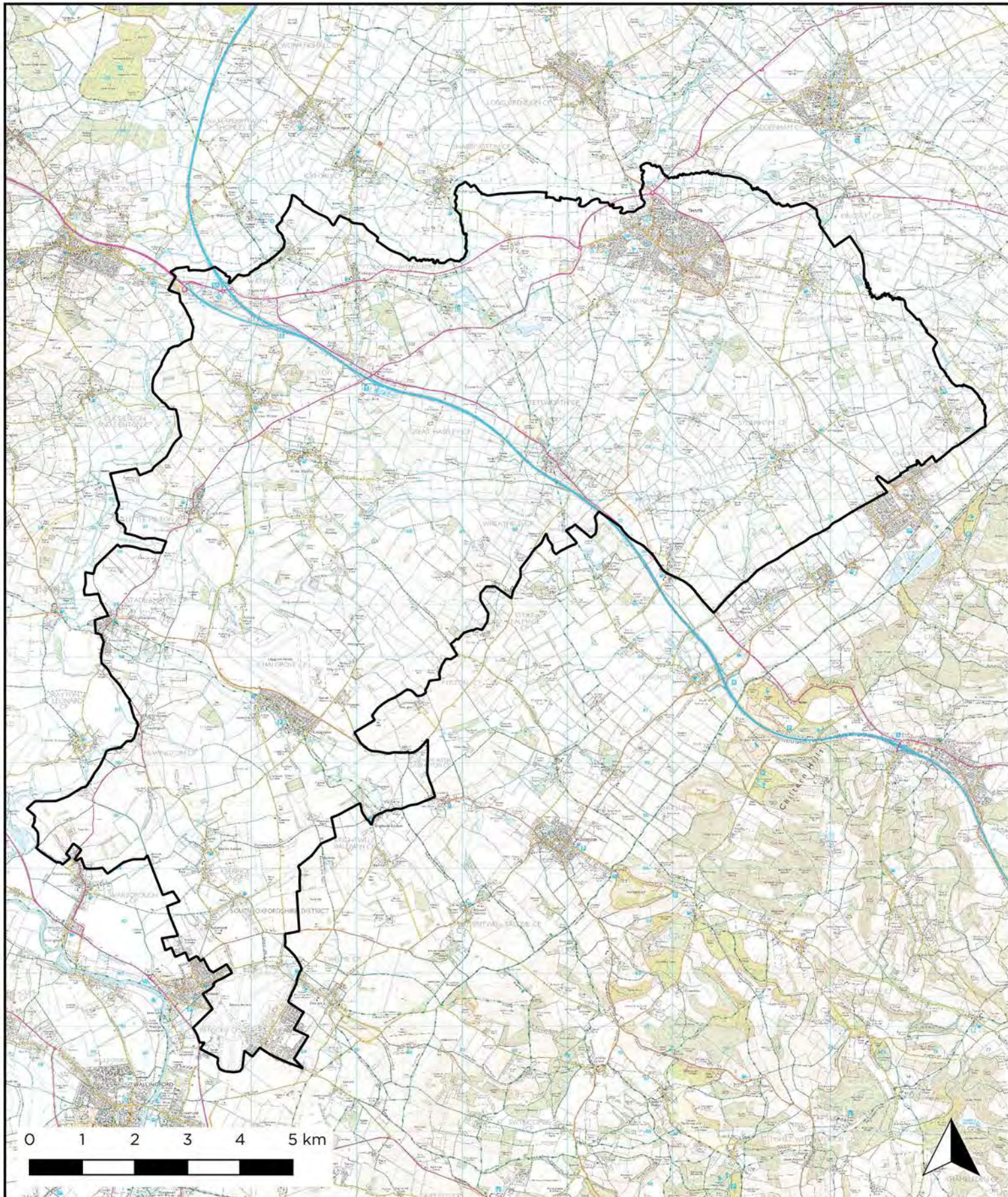
| Forces for change | Guidelines/Mitigation |
|--|---|
| Agricultural intensification, diversification and farm amalgamation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote, where possible, the conservation of the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly on land adjacent to watercourses. Recognise that grazing sheep and cattle can make a contribution to the landscape's identity and distinctiveness. Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type. Felling of mature specimens should be resisted. Planting of new hedgerow trees such as oak and ash, and tree belts, should be encouraged. Strengthen the field pattern by conserving species rich hedgerows and sympathetically maintaining all hedgerows. Where appropriate, replant gappy hedges using species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, wayfaring tree, dogwood and spindle. Promote the conservation of all remaining areas of semi-improved grassland, and encourage conversion of arable land to pasture in the proximity of existing grasslands to maximise their wildlife and landscape value. Prevent scrub encroachment in areas of species-rich grassland. |
| Introduction of tall buildings and structures such as communication masts and electricity pylons | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conserve the agricultural character of <i>Nuneham Courtenay Ridge</i> by managing and restricting, where possible, the development of tall buildings and structures where these would adversely affect views. Minimise impact by locating new communication masts on existing structures or by using existing masts. Bury cables underground and seek opportunities to bury existing overhead cables. |
| Development of gravel extraction sites | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise the visual impact of gravel extraction sites (to the north west of Sutton Courtenay) with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic to the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside. Flooded gravel pits can make a significant contribution to biodiversity, particularly bird species, and the sympathetic restoration and management of these sites through agreement between landowners, mineral operators and the minerals planning authority should be strongly promoted through the use of planning conditions and obligations. |
| Inappropriate or inconsistent management, or neglect of | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safeguard, maintain and enhance and the characteristic landscape features of existing parklands (particularly at Nuneham Park) including mature trees, avenues of trees, lakes, woods and walls. |

| | |
|--|--|
| existing parklands. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote, where possible, the conservation of the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly within parklands. |
| Inappropriate built form, development, expansion and infilling of settlements. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns, villages and farms with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside. Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements, and promote the use of building materials to maintain vernacular style and a scale of development and that are appropriate to <i>Nuneham Courtenay Ridge</i>. (see also the South Oxfordshire Design Guide , November 2016). The siting, scale and materials used for the construction of new barns should be chosen to minimise visual intrusion. Where appropriate, they should be screened with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic to the area. |
| Decline in management of existing woodlands. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows (<i>Salix</i> sp.) and alder (<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>) and, where appropriate, pollarding willows. Establish buffer strips/field margins to potentially benefit small mammals, invertebrates and birds adjacent to willow pollards. Species-rich rivers and ditches should be maintained with diverse banksides and aquatic vegetation through sympathetic management and the use of agri-environment schemes. Conserve and maintain semi-natural and ancient semi-natural woodland. Where appropriate, replace non-native conifer species with native species such as oak and ash. Promote the establishment and management of medium to large-scale deciduous plantations in areas where the landscape structure is particularly weak. Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as oak, ash, hazel, willows and alders. |

Landscape Character Area 3


The Clay Vale





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Legend

 3. The Clay Vale

Landscape Character Area 3
 South Oxfordshire Landscape
 Character Assessment
 1:95,000 scale
 31.07.17





Pasture to the east of Sydenham



Arable land to the north of Postcombe



Grassland and thatched roofs at Little Haseley



Arable land to the north of Great Haseley



Pasture to the north of Great Haseley



Arable land to the west of Little Haseley



Pasture and cattle to the north of Berrick Prior



Arable land to the north east of Roke

8 The Clay Vale (LCA 3)

8.1 Summary

- 8.1.1 *The Clay Vale* embraces the low-lying, gentle landscape which overlies the Gault Clay across the centre of the South Oxfordshire district.

8.2 Location and boundaries

- 8.2.1 *The Clay Vale* occupies a lowland agricultural landscape stretching from the town of Benson to the south west to the town of Thame in the north east.
- 8.2.2 *The Clay Vale* is defined by the district boundary to the north and north east of the area. *The Clay Vale* borders *Oxford Heights* (1) and *River Thames Corridor* (4) to the west, *Central Vale Fringes* (6) to the south and *Eastern Vale Fringes* (5) to the east.
- 8.2.3 *The Clay Vale* is comprised mostly of NCA 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales and a small area of NCA 110 Chilterns in the far south.

8.3 Key characteristics

- The landscape ranges between c. 50m AOD and c. 110m AOD.
- The River Thame is located adjacent to the northern and western character area boundary.
- The area is crossed by a network of small watercourses.
- Ancient woodland exists in small areas.
- The land use is predominantly agricultural, comprising mostly of arable land.
- Arable field margins are widespread in the area.
- The Clay Vale contains Spartum Fen SSSI designated for its calcareous fen and carr vegetation, open water habitats and damp, oak woodland.
- Busy transport corridors cross through this area including the M40 motorway, the A40, A329 and A418 roads.
- Long distance views to the Chilterns AONB in the east.
- Aeroplanes are a common feature in the skies above the area.
- Villages in the area are typically nucleated.

Geology and landform

- 8.3.1 The underlying geology is dominated by heavy blue grey Gault Clay, deposited during a marine incursion in the Lower Cretaceous period. This gives rise to the low ground, subdued topography and heavy soils which are typical of the gently rolling vale landscape.
- 8.3.2 At its western end, the vale grades gently into the flat alluvial floodplain of the River Thames. Along its northern edge, the vale becomes more strongly undulating, partly as a result of more mixed geology around Great Milton and towards the upper Thame valley, where the Gault Clay gives way to exposures of Lower Greensand, Portland Beds and Kimmeridge Clay.
- 8.3.3 The topography of *The Clay Vale* ranges between c. 50m AOD and c. 110m AOD. The lowest areas of land are located around the River Thame. The highest area of land in *The Clay Vale* is located adjacent to Mill Lane (B4009) at Chinnor (116m AOD). Other notable high points include land to the south of Henton (112m AOD), and land adjacent to the M40 motorway to the north west of Postcombe (112m AOD).

Hydrology

- 8.3.4 The River Thame meets the border of *The Clay Vale* to the north of the town of Thame (which is also the South Oxfordshire district boundary). The river then follows the boundary line west and then south, meandering in and out of *The Clay Vale*.
- 8.3.5 *The Clay Vale* is intercepted by a network of smaller watercourses, these include Cuttle Brook and Haseley Brook.
- 8.3.6 *The Clay Vale* contains areas of Flood Zone 2 and 3, associated with the River Thame and smaller watercourses.

8.4 Natural factors

Biodiversity/flora and fauna

- 8.4.1 Priority habitats are widespread in this area, including semi-improved grassland, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, wood-pasture and parkland, deciduous woodland, traditional orchards.
- 8.4.2 *The Clay Vale* contains two local nature reserves, Cuttle Brook (located within the town of Thame) and part of Ewelme Watercress Beds (located in the village of Ewelme).
- 8.4.3 The Clay Vale contains one SSSI, Spartum Fen (located to the east of the village of Great Haseley), to the south of Abingdon-on-Thames. Spartum Fen is designated as a SSSI for its calcareous fen and carr vegetation, open water habitats and damp, oak woodland⁴³.
- 8.4.4 Small blocks of woodland are scattered across the landscape. Ancient Woodland exists in small areas including deciduous and coniferous woodland at Fernhill Wood, to the south east of the village of Tiddington⁴⁴.

8.5 Cultural and social factors

Land use (and management)

- 8.5.1 The vale supports mainly arable farming with some tracts of pasture, particularly in the lowest areas along various watercourses where drainage is impeded. Farming practice is particularly intensive on the better-drained soils of the Lower Greensand and Portland Beds, such as around Great Milton, where field enlargement and hedgerow removal have created a very open landscape probably similar to the bare open vistas of the ancient common fields.
- 8.5.2 Arable field margins are widespread across the area.
- 8.5.3 Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout parts of this character area. Priority should be given to safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource.

⁴³

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1002764&SiteName=Spartum&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=>

⁴⁴ Natural England (2017) MAGIC. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

- 8.5.4 Two registered parks and gardens are located within *The Clay Vale*; Thame Park (Grade II*); and Ascott Park (Grade II).

Public rights of way

- 8.5.5 Oxfordshire Way and Thame Valley Walk cross through this area.

Settlement

- 8.5.6 Settlement pattern within the vale is strongly influenced by physical factors. The heavy clay soils and a risk of flooding have traditionally discouraged settlement on areas underlain by the Gault Clay and there are still quite large areas of the vale which are sparsely settled (e.g. to the north-east of Chalgrove).
- 8.5.7 The area contains the town of Thame (the largest settlement within this character area) and a number of smaller villages which tend to be associated with the sandstones and mudstones of the Portland Beds, Upper Greensand and Kimmeridge Clays. For example, Thame is built on a sandstone island which emerges from the surrounding clay and is almost entirely encircled by the River Thame and its tributaries (the town takes its name from the river, which means 'dark waters'). Other examples of this link with geology are the villages of Great Milton and Great Haseley which sit on the rolling plateau formed by exposures of the Portland Beds and Lower Greensand.
- 8.5.8 Thame was one of the primary Saxon settlements but was deliberately enlarged in the twelfth century by the Bishop of Lincoln and still retains the characteristics of a classic linear medieval new town⁴⁵. This and several other settlements retain a substantial number of old buildings of historical importance and contain designated Conservation Areas. Because of the lack of building stone, most of the older houses are timber framed with thatched roofs and there are occasional examples of walling in cob, a mixture of mud and straw. Brick was also widely used from an early date and 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 brickwork⁴⁶.
- 8.5.9 Busy transport corridors cross through the area including the M40 motorway, the A40, A329 and A418 roads.

⁴⁵ Bond, J and Over, L (1988) Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Ordnance Survey Historical Guides. George Philip & Son. London.

⁴⁶ Bond, J and Over, L (1988) Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Ordnance Survey Historical Guides. George Philip & Son. London.

8.6 Perceptual and aesthetic factors

- 8.6.1 The landscape is of a strong, agricultural nature, particularly comprising of arable land. Field sizes are vast in some areas. The M40 motorway, the A40, A329 and A418 roads are aural and visual detractors in the landscape. The cooling towers and chimney at Didcot Power Station are visible to the south west from areas of higher ground. Thatched roofs are a feature including in the villages of Great Haseley and Little Haseley. Red kites are often seen in the skies above the area. Aeroplanes associated with RAF Benson and Chalgrove Airfield are a common feature in the skies. Sparsely settled villages, stone walls and churches with corallian limestone characterise built form across much of the landscape. Willow trees are a regular feature.

8.7 Landscape Types

- 8.7.1 Although this is a large character area, its landscape character is remarkably unvarying. It is dominated by gently rolling or undulating landform upon which lies a typical pattern of medium to large-scale fields bounded by regular hedgerows, typical of the planned agricultural landscape of the parliamentary enclosures. The main differences lie in the degree of 'intactness' of the hedgerow structure and the degree of openness or enclosure in the landscape, although there are minor variations in land use which have localised effects on landscape character.

- 8.7.2 *The Clay Vale* is comprised of the following landscape types:

Undulating open vale

Key characteristics:

- Low-lying, undulating or gently rolling landform.
- Large-scale farmland, mostly under intensive arable cultivation.
- Typically large fields, with rectilinear pattern of field boundaries.
- Weak structure of tightly clipped or gappy hedgerows, with few hedgerow trees.
- Open, denuded and exposed character, with high intervisibility.
- Distinctive elevated and expansive character on higher ground, with dominant sky and long views.
- Predominantly rural character but some localised intrusion of main roads (including M40/A40), overhead power lines and built development.

Undulating, semi-enclosed vale

Key characteristics:

- Similar to *undulating open vale* landscape type but with a stronger structure of hedgerows and trees which provide clearer definition of field pattern.
- Predominantly intensive arable land use but some pockets of permanent pasture occur, particularly around settlements and in the more strongly undulating areas.
- Predominantly rural character but some localised intrusion of main roads (including M40/A40), overhead power lines and built development.
- Moderate intervisibility.

Undulating wooded vale

Key characteristics:

- Similar to *undulating, semi-enclosed vale* landscape type but with significant woodland blocks which create a stronger sense of enclosure and visual containment.
- Low intervisibility.

Flat, open farmland

Key characteristics:

- Distinctively flat farmland with a low-lying character.
- Rectilinear field pattern with distinctive network of drainage ditches.
- Weak landscape structure with few trees, low or gappy hedges, open ditches and fences.
- Predominantly rural character but some localised intrusion from built development near Chalgrove.
- Open, denuded landscape with high intervisibility.

Flat semi-enclosed farmland

Key characteristics:

- Similar to *flat, open farmland* landscape type but with stronger

landscape structure and a semi-enclosed character (e.g. along Cuttle Brook near Thame Park).

- Rural and semi-enclosed character.
- Moderate to low intervisibility.

Flat floodplain pasture

Key characteristics:

- Flat, low-lying farmland, typically dominated by permanent pasture with a distinctively 'wet', riparian character.
- Prone to flooding with distinctive network of drainage ditches.
- Comparatively strong landscape structure with willows conspicuous along the riverside.
- Small-scale landscapes with intimate, pastoral and tranquil character.
- Generally low intervisibility, although views along the river corridor may be possible in some more sparsely vegetated areas.

Parkland and estate farmland

Key characteristics:

8.7.3 The area contains the listed parkland landscape of Thame Park and a number of smaller parks at Rycote, Ascott, and Brightwell Park.

- Well-managed parkland character with formal features such as avenues and free-standing mature trees in pasture, clumps and blocks of woodland.
- Rural, unspoilt character.
- Generally enclosed character with strong landform, woodland and tree cover.
- Low intervisibility.

Amenity landscape

Key characteristics:

8.7.4 This type is represented by two golf course developments - at the Oxfordshire Golf Course to the west of Thame and at Lower Farm, Waterstock.

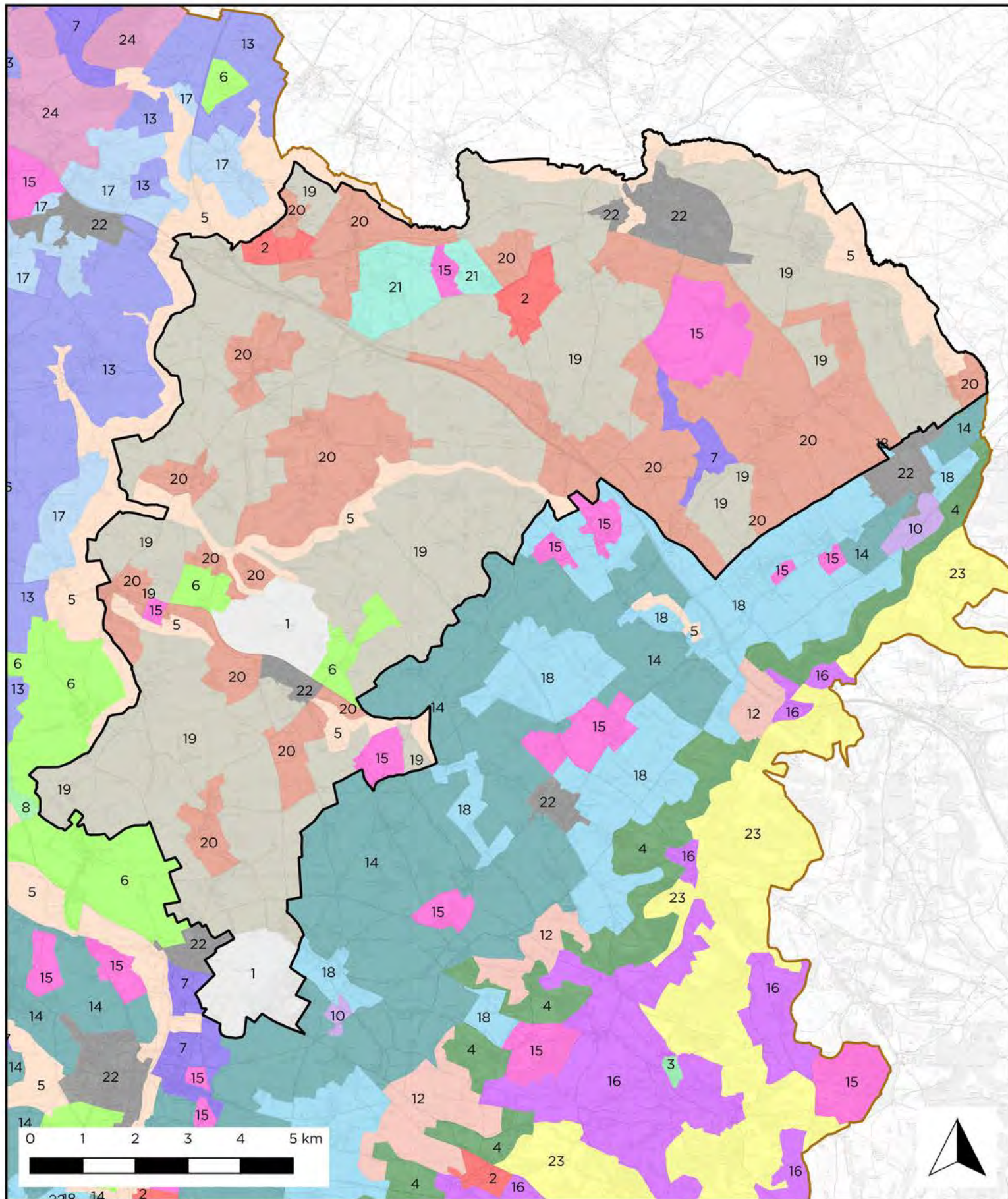
- Incongruous, artificial landform at the Oxfordshire Golf Course, out of context with surrounding gently undulating landform.
- Typical golf course landscapes of greens, fairways and roughs, with associated features such as lakes and bunkers and buildings.
- Intensively managed and suburban character.
- Moderate intervisibility.

Airfields

Key characteristics:

8.7.5 Two large airfields are located within the area, at Chalgrove and Benson, taking advantage of low lying, flat land.

- Flat, low-lying land.
- Large expanse of open ground with very little vegetation to interrupt views and an open, exposed character.
- Typical features of high security fences, large scale sheds or other buildings which are out of character with their rural setting.
- High intervisibility.



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Legend

- The Clay Vale (LCA 3)
- South Oxfordshire District Boundary
- 1. Airfields/MOD sites
- 2. Amenity landscapes
- 3. Commons and heaths
- 4. Enclosed escarpment
- 5. Flat floodplain pasture
- 6. Flat open farmland
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- 8. Floodplain wetland
- 9. Institutions
- 10. Minerals / landfill sites
- 11. Open dipslope
- 12. Open escarpment
- 13. Open farmed hills and valleys
- 14. Open rolling downs
- 15. Parkland and estate farmland
- 16. Semi-enclosed dipslope
- 17. Semi-enclosed farmed hills and valleys
- 18. Semi-enclosed rolling downs
- 19. Undulating open vale
- 20. Undulating semi-enclosed vale
- 21. Undulating wooded vale
- 22. Urban areas
- 23. Wooded dipslope
- 24. Wooded hills and valleys

South Oxfordshire
Landscape
Character Assessment

Map: The Clay Vale
(LCA 3) LT

Scale: 1:95,000

Date: 23.08.17



8.8 Planning, managing and protecting distinctiveness

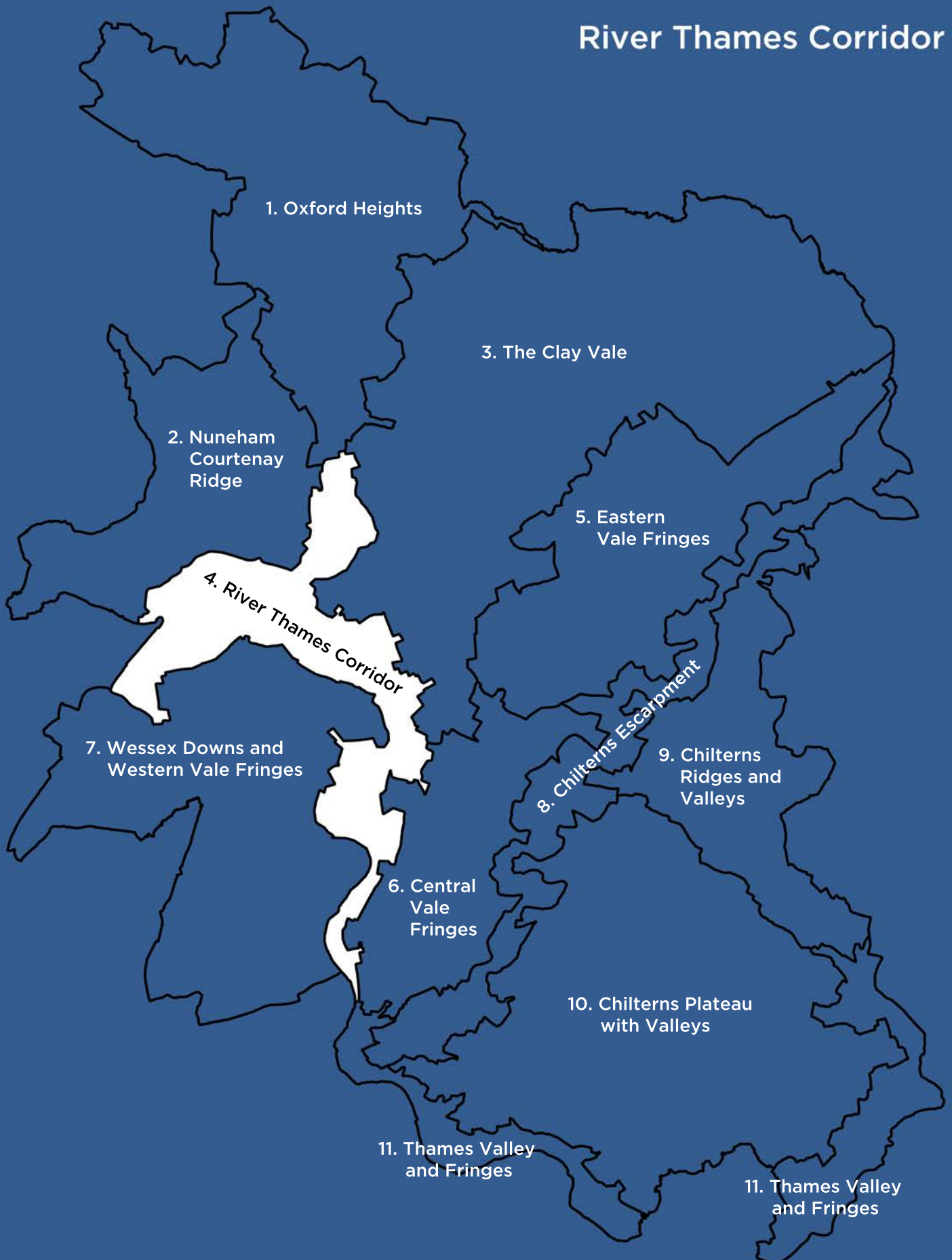
8.8.1 The following table presents recommendations to protect, conserve, enhance and restore the landscape qualities of South Oxfordshire.

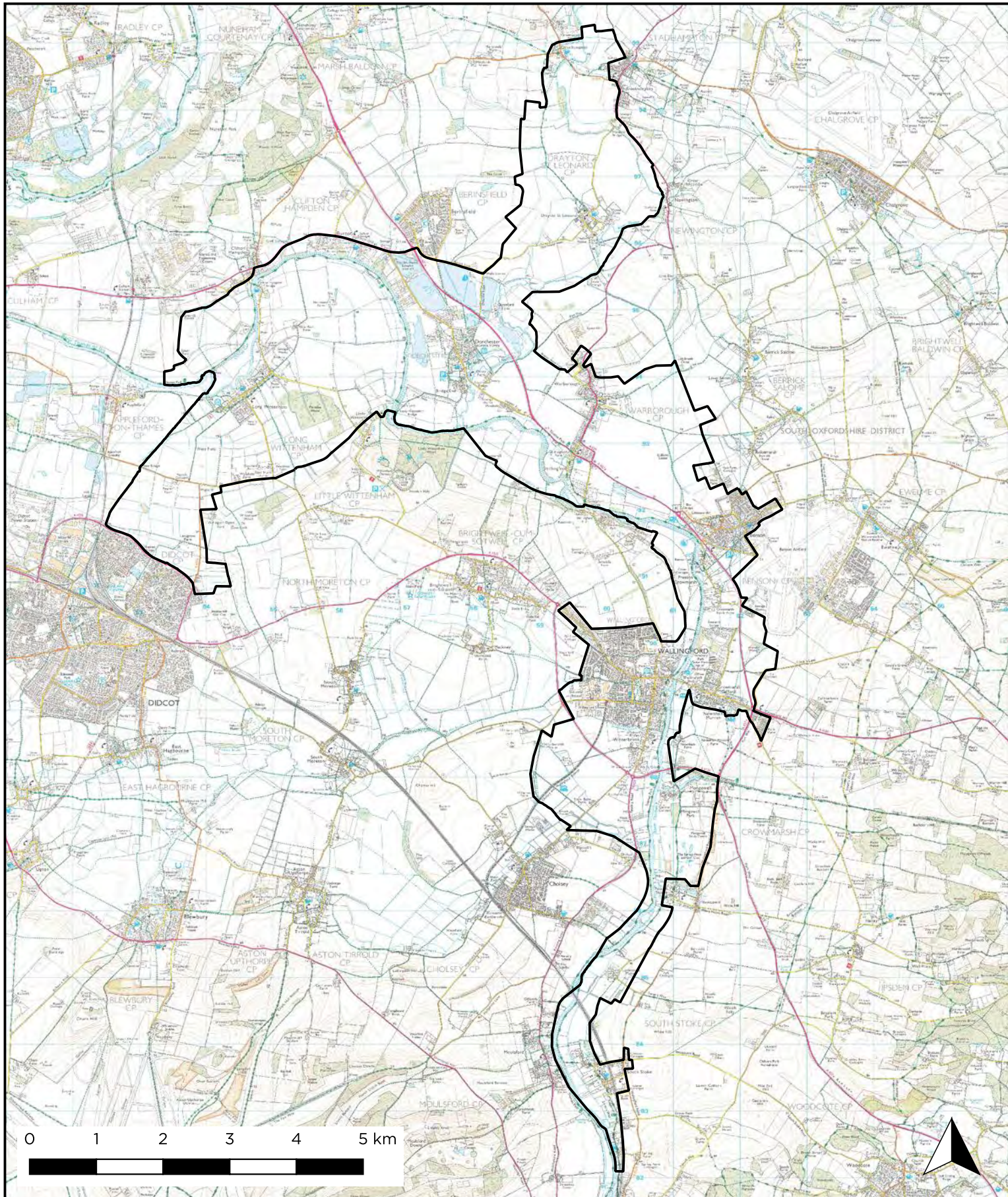
| Forces for change | Guidelines/Mitigation |
|---|---|
| Agricultural intensification, diversification and farm amalgamation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the conservation of the surviving areas of permanent species-poor pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly on land adjacent to watercourses to benefit wading birds and provide distinctive extensive landscape tracts of land. Recognise that grazing sheep and cattle can make a contribution to the landscape's identity and distinctiveness. Strengthen the hedgerow network with hedgerow trees such as oak and ash. Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type. Protect stone walls from deterioration. Prevent scrub encroachment in areas of species-rich grassland. Species-rich rivers and ditches should be maintained with diverse banksides and aquatic vegetation through sympathetic management and the use of agri-environment schemes. |
| Inappropriate or inconsistent management, or neglect of existing parklands. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safeguard, maintain and enhance and the characteristic landscape features of existing parklands (including Thame Park and Ascott Park) that include mature trees, avenues of trees, lakes, woods and walls. |
| Introduction of tall buildings and structures such as communication masts and electricity pylons. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise impact by locating new communication masts on existing structures or by using existing masts. Bury cables underground and seek opportunities to bury existing overhead cables. |
| Development, expansion and infilling of settlements. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns, villages and farms with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside. Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements, and promote the use of building materials to maintain vernacular style and a scale of development and that are appropriate to <i>the Clay Vale</i> (see also the South Oxfordshire Design Guide , November 2016). |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain local distinctiveness by controlling the quality of built development taking into account its scale, setting and use of local building materials. • Protect the sparsely settled character of the landscape and the integrity and vernacular character of the estate villages. |
| Introduction of golf courses. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage planting of biodiverse green infrastructure to surround golf courses. |
| Impact of development at RAF Benson and at Chalgrove airfield. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage planting and design of biodiverse green infrastructure at the airfields. |
| Decline in management of existing woodlands and trees | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and, where appropriate, pollarding willows. • Establish buffer strips/field margins to potentially benefit small mammals, invertebrates and birds adjacent to willow pollards. • Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as crack willow, oak, ash and alders. • Ancient semi-natural woodlands should be managed to ensure they are in favourable condition. • Promote the sustainable management of existing woodland to safeguard its long-term survival. |

Landscape Character Area 4

River Thames Corridor





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Legend

 4. River Thames Corridor

Landscape Character Area 4

South Oxfordshire Landscape
 Character Assessment

1:75,000 scale

31.07.17





The River Thames at Little Stoke



The village green at Warborough



The village of Drayton St Leonard



Arable land and Didcot Power Station



View south from Drayton St Leonard



Little Wittenham road



Arable land to the east of Little Wittenham



The River Thames at Wallingford

9 River Thames Corridor (LCA 4)

9.1 Summary

- 9.1.1 The flat, low- lying alluvial land which forms the corridor of the River Thames between Long Wittenham and Goring and includes the lower reaches of its main tributary, the River Thame.

9.2 Location and boundaries

- 9.2.1 *River Thames Corridor* occupies a stretch of land from the villages of Chiselhampton and Long Wittenham to the town of Goring. This stretch of land comprises an area of low lying floodplain associated with the southern reaches of the River Thames and the far southern reaches of the River Thame.
- 9.2.2 *River Thames Corridor* contains parts of the North Wessex Downs AONB and the Chilterns AONB.
- 9.2.3 Parts of the western boundary of the *River Thames Corridor* are defined by the district boundary. *River Thames Corridor* borders *Oxford Heights* (1) to the north, *The Clay Vale* (3) and *Central Vale Fringes* (6) to the east and *Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes* (7) and *Nuneham Courtenay Ridge* (2) to the west.
- 9.2.4 *River Thames Corridor* is comprised mostly of NCA 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales and small areas of NCA 110 Chilterns in the south east.

9.3 Key characteristics

- Almost flat topography, ranging between c. 50m AOD and c. 70m AOD.
- The River Thames cuts through the landscape.
- This character area is comprised mostly of floodplain associated with the River Thames and the River Thame.
- Settlements are generally located in close proximity to watercourses.
- Predominantly agricultural land use, comprising mostly of arable land.
- Ancient Woodland exists in small areas.
- The cooling towers and chimney at Didcot Power Station are a visual landmark.

- Busy transport corridors cross through this area including the A4074, A329 and the A4130 roads.
- Part of the Great Western main line and part of the Cholsey and Wallingford Railway cross through this area.

9.4 Natural factors

Geology and landform

- 9.4.1 The underlying solid geology is dominated by Gault Clay however this is masked by extensive quaternary deposits. A thin strip of alluvium follows the immediate river corridors, giving rise to heavy soils with naturally impeded drainage. These areas are still liable to flooding and are predominantly under permanent pasture.
- 9.4.2 Beyond this, the floodplain is dominated by extensive spreads of river terrace gravels which are better drained and support lighter more easily worked soils. Much of this has been extensively drained and is now under intensive arable cultivation.
- 9.4.3 *River Thames Corridor* is exceptionally flat, with little perceptible variation in relief. The lowest areas of land located around the River Thame and the River Thames. The topography ranges between c. 50m AOD and c. 70m AOD. The highest area of land in this character area is located at the village of Mongewell at 66m AOD.
- 9.4.4 The floodplain is confined to a comparatively narrow strip where it is bounded by the harder rocks of the lower and upper greensand and chalk but widens considerably around the confluence of the Thames and Thame within the softer Gault Clay of the central vale. The transition between the floodplain and surrounding landscape is comparatively subtle, with no obvious valley form, but the boundaries of the character area do follow a perceptible break in slope between the very flat floodplain floor and rising ground beyond.
- 9.4.5 The escarpment of the Chiltern Hills rises east from the eastern boundary of *River Thames Corridor*.

Hydrology

- 9.4.6 The River Thames enters *River Thames Corridor* adjacent to the village of Long Wittenham and meanders eastwards, reaching the town of Dorchester. The River Thames then travels south, through the town of Wallingford, and continues southwards to the town of Goring.

- 9.4.7 The River Thame enters this character area near the village of Chiselhampton and meanders southwards where it meets the River Thames to the south of Dorchester.
- 9.4.8 This character area also contains a network of smaller watercourses, this includes Bradford's Brook, to the south of the town of Wallingford.
- 9.4.9 A series of small lakes are located near to the settlement of Dorchester.
- 9.4.10 Flood Zone 2 and 3 comprise large areas of *River Thames Corridor*.

Biodiversity/flora and fauna

- 9.4.11 Priority habitats are widespread in this area, including coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, lowland meadows, lowland fens, semi-improved grassland, deciduous woodland, wood-pasture and parkland and lowland calcareous grassland.
- 9.4.12 *River Thames Corridor* is a sparsely wooded landscape. Ancient Woodland exists in small areas, this includes deciduous woodland at Marsh Wood, to the east of the town of Wallingford and a small area of deciduous woodland to the north east of the town of Didcot⁴⁷.
- 9.4.13 Tree lined roads are distinctive features of the area.

9.5 Cultural and social factors

Land use (and management)

- 9.5.1 Land use is predominantly agricultural with large areas of arable land and smaller areas of pasture.
- 9.5.2 Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout different parts of this character area. Priority should be given to safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource.

Public rights of way

- 9.5.3 The Ridgeway, Shakespeare's Way and Thames Path cross through this area.

⁴⁷ Natural England (2017) MAGIC. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

Settlement

- 9.5.4 The Thames-side terrace gravels have been a favoured area for settlement from prehistoric times. Neolithic settlers at Dorchester and other downstream gravel sites along the Thames took advantage of the lighter, more workable soils, an accessible water supply and slight elevation above the most flood-prone areas. This pattern of settlement persisted and was extended through the Roman and Saxon periods, with Dorchester providing a particularly notable persistence of settlement and overlap of cultures. Apart from the physical advantages of these locations, this continuity of settlement was also due to the strategic importance of the River Thames as a territorial boundary and for defence, transport and trade.
- 9.5.5 The string of Thames-side settlements from Dorchester to Goring include the smaller settlements of Shillingford, Warborough, Benson, Preston Crowmarsh, Crowmarsh Gifford, North and South Stoke and Moulsoford. They also include the town of Wallingford which originated by an important ford over the Thames⁴⁸. This strategic position made it a meeting point of ancient routes and contributed to its importance as a town.
- 9.5.6 Many of these settlements retain a substantial number of old buildings of historical importance and contain designated Conservation Areas. Because of the lack of building stone, most of the older houses here are timber framed with thatched roofs and there are occasional examples of walling in cob, a mixture of mud and straw. Brick was also widely used from an early date and 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 (e.g. in Dorchester).
- 9.5.7 Busy transport corridors cross through the area including the A4074, A329 and the A4130 roads. Railway infrastructure including part of the Great Western main line and part of the Cholsey and Wallingford Railway are located in the area.

⁴⁸ Bond, J and Over, L (1988) Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Ordnance Survey Historical Guides. George Philip & Son. London.

9.6 Perceptual and aesthetic factors

- 9.6.1 The River Thames and the River Thame have a strong influence on the location of built form across the area, settlements are located in close proximity to watercourses. The cooling towers and chimney at Didcot Power Station are a visual landmark. The flat nature of the landscape commands long distance views across arable farmland. The A4074, A329 and the A4130 roads and the railway lines are visual and aural detractors in the landscape.

9.7 Landscape types

9.7.1 Landscape character in this area has a strong degree of coherence, with the River Thames providing a strong unifying influence. There are consequently few variations in landscape character.

9.7.2 *River Thames Corridor* is comprised of the following landscape types:

Flat, open farmland

Key characteristics:

- Distinctively flat, low-lying farmland (below 50 metres AOD).
- Large-scale rectilinear field pattern with distinctive network of drainage ditches.
- Weak landscape structure with few trees, low or gappy hedges, open ditches and fences.
- Comparative inaccessibility creates a rural and remote character.
- Open, denuded landscape results in high intervisibility.

Flat semi-enclosed farmland

Key characteristics:

- Similar to *flat, open farmland* landscape type but with stronger landscape structure and a semi-enclosed character around Burcot and to the north of Wittenham Clumps.
- Predominantly rural character but with some intrusion of built form around Burcot.
- Semi-enclosed character with moderate to low intervisibility.

Flat floodplain pasture

Key characteristics:

- Flat, low-lying farmland, typically dominated by permanent pasture with a distinctively 'wet', riparian character.
- Prone to flooding with distinctive network of drainage ditches.
- Comparatively strong landscape structure with willows conspicuous along the riverside.

- Intimate, pastoral and tranquil character with some 'arcadian' qualities along the Thames close to settlements and riverside parklands (e.g. Mongewell).
- Generally low intervisibility, although views along the river corridor may be possible in some more sparsely vegetated areas.
- Important areas of riverside greenspace within or adjoining the main settlements and urban areas (e.g. the riverside at Wallingford).

Floodplain wetland

Key characteristics:

- Complex of freshwater lagoons formed from flooded gravel pits.
- Margins colonised by native plants and animal species to create a semi-natural, riparian character with developing wildlife value.
- Predominantly tranquil, rural character but with some localised intrusion from main roads around Dorchester.
- Semi-enclosed character with moderate to low intervisibility.

Parkland and estate farmland

- 9.7.3 The area contains two main areas with a distinctive parkland character, associated with Wallingford Castle and Mongewell Park.

Key characteristics:

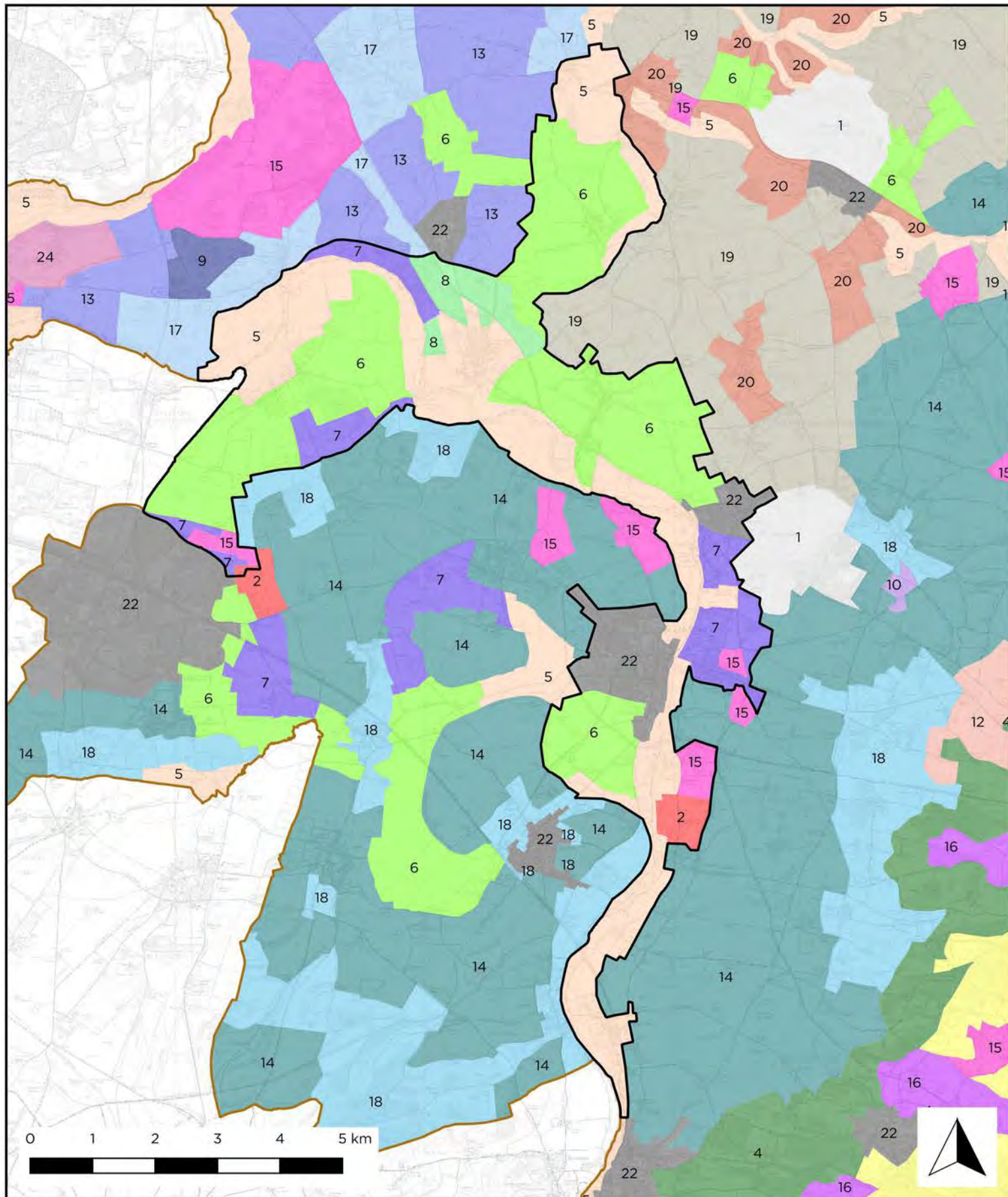
- Well-managed parkland character with formal features such as avenues and free-standing mature trees in pasture, clumps and blocks of woodland.
- Unspoilt character.
- Generally enclosed character with strong landform, woodland and tree cover, low intervisibility.

Amenity landscape

Key characteristics:

- 9.7.4 This type is represented by The Springs Golf Club to the south of Wallingford and part of the Hadden Hill Golf Club to the east of Didcot.

- Typical golf course landscape of greens, fairways and roughs, with associated buildings and features.
- Intensively managed and suburban character.
- Moderate intervisibility.



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Legend

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| River Thames Corridor (LCA 4) | 8. Floodplain wetland | 17. Semi-enclosed farmed hills and valleys |
| South Oxfordshire District Boundary | 9. Institutions | 18. Semi-enclosed rolling downs |
| 1. Airfields/MOD sites | 10. Minerals / landfill sites | 19. Undulating open vale |
| 2. Amenity landscapes | 11. Open dipslope | 20. Undulating semi-enclosed vale |
| 3. Commons and heaths | 12. Open escarpment | 21. Undulating wooded vale |
| 4. Enclosed escarpment | 13. Open farmed hills and valleys | 22. Urban areas |
| 5. Flat floodplain pasture | 14. Open rolling downs | 23. Wooded dipslope |
| 6. Flat open farmland | 15. Parkland and estate farmland | 24. Wooded hills and valleys |
| 7. Flat, semi-enclosed farmland | 16. Semi-enclosed dipslope | |

South Oxfordshire
Landscape
Character Assessment

Map: River Thames
Corridor (LCA 4) LT

Scale: 1:80,000

Date: 23.08.17



9.8 Planning, managing and protecting distinctiveness

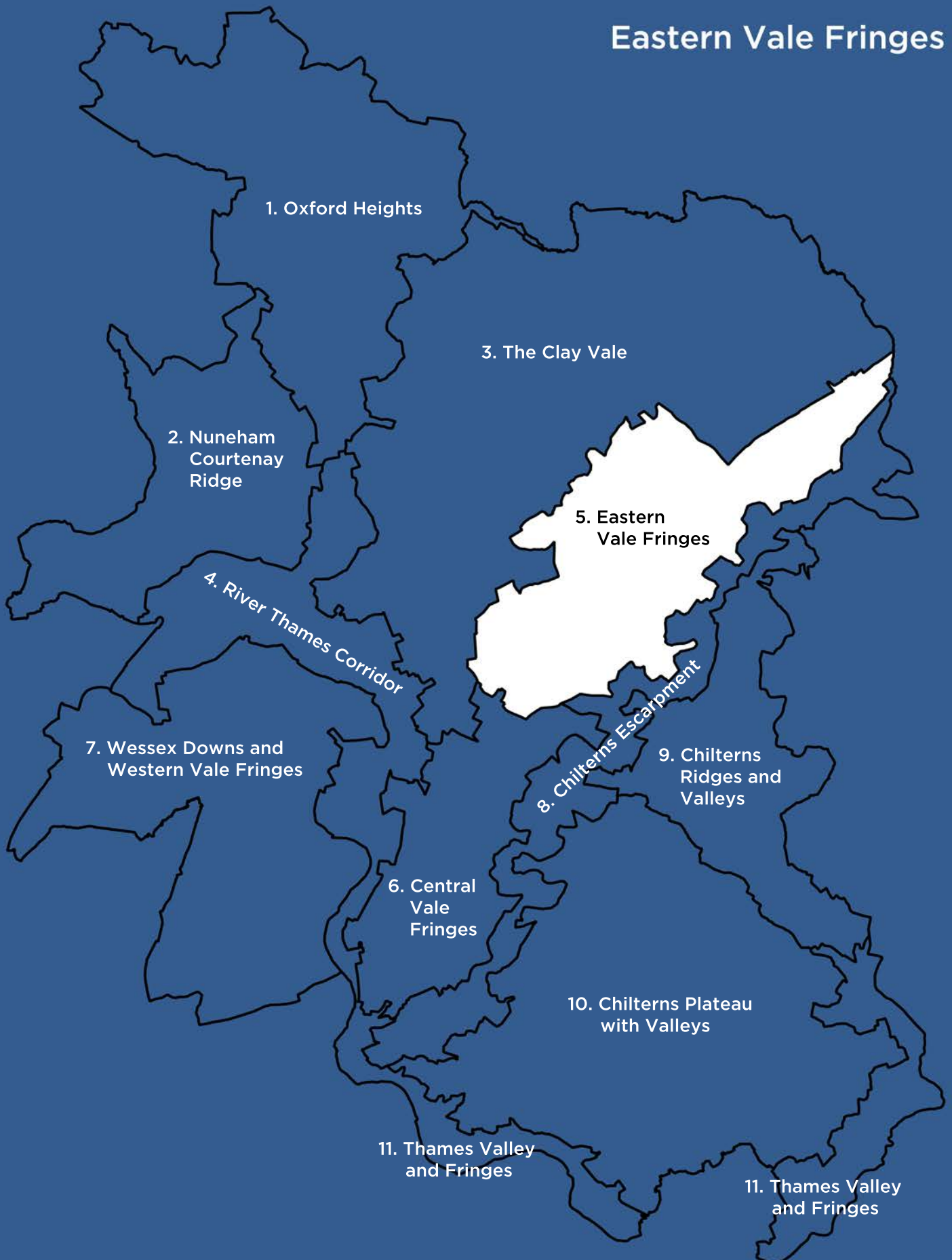
9.8.1 The following table presents recommendations to protect, conserve, enhance and restore the landscape qualities of South Oxfordshire.

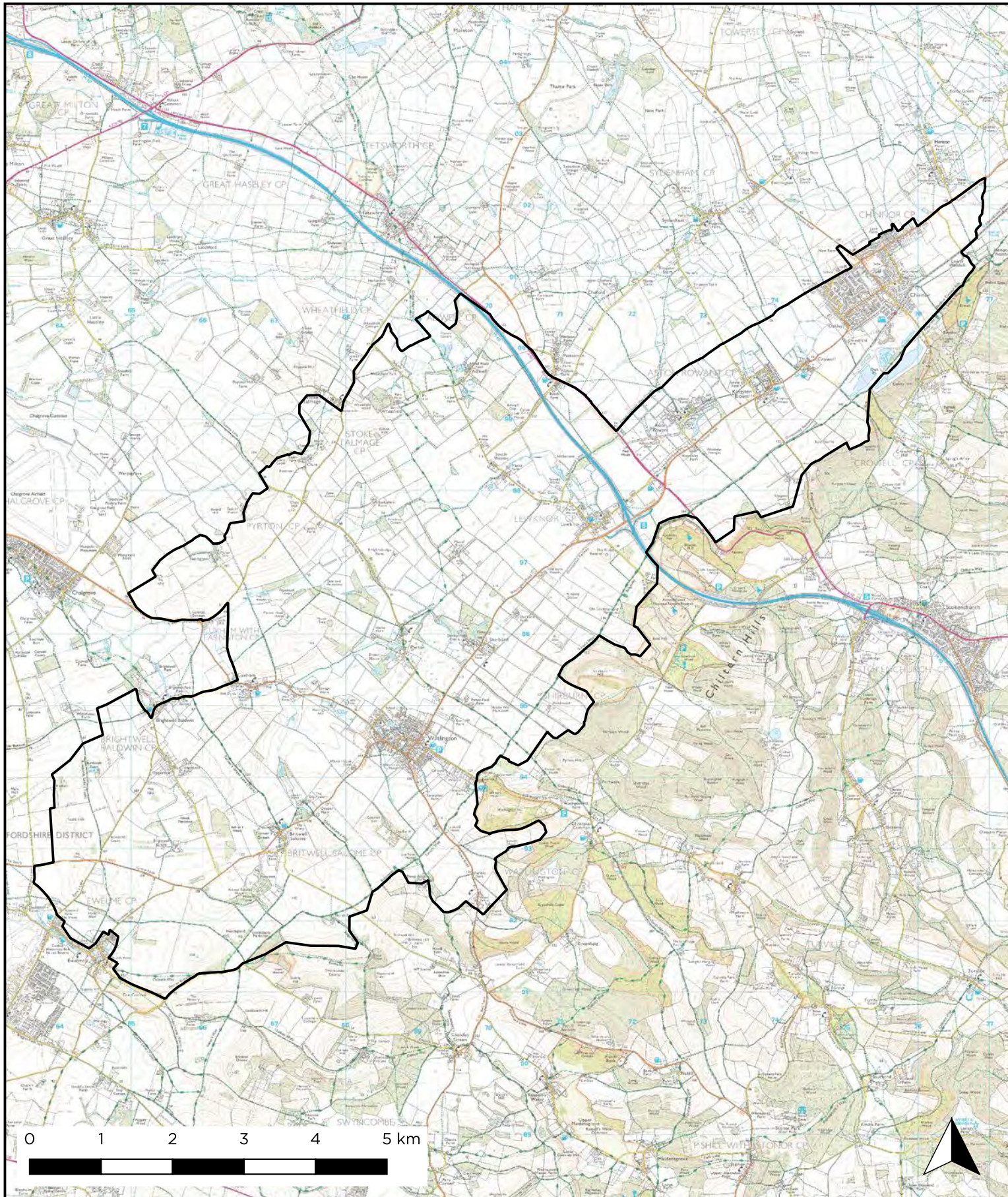
| Forces for change | Guidelines/Mitigation |
|--|--|
| Agricultural intensification, diversification and farm amalgamation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote, where possible, the conservation the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly on land adjacent to watercourses. Recognise that grazing sheep and cattle can make a contribution to the landscape's identity and distinctiveness. Promote the conservation of all remaining areas of semi-improved grassland, and encourage conversion of arable land to pasture in the proximity of existing grasslands to maximize their wildlife and landscape value. Strengthen the field pattern by replanting thinned hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn, and hedgerow trees such as crack willow, oak and ash. Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type. Replant where necessary with shrub species such as blackthorn, field maple (<i>Acer campestre</i>), dogwood and spindle. Felling of mature specimens should be resisted. Planting of new hedgerow trees such as oak and ash, and tree belts, should be encouraged. Protect stone walls from deterioration. Safeguard, maintain and enhance and the characteristic landscape features of existing parklands including mature trees, avenues of trees, lakes, woods and walls. Prevent scrub encroachment in areas of species-rich grassland. |
| Development of gravel extraction sites. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses such as gravel extraction with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic to the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside. Flooded gravel pits can make a significant contribution to biodiversity, particularly bird species, and the sympathetic restoration and management of these sites through agreement between landowners, mineral operators and the minerals planning authority should be strongly promoted through the use of planning conditions and obligations. The flooded gravel pits near Dorchester are still of ornithological interest and any water-based recreation should be zoned both spatially and seasonally to reduce their potential impact on bird populations, particularly overwintering wildfowl. Maintain high standards of restoration at gravel pits to accommodate a |

| | |
|---|---|
| | range of after-uses that integrate successfully with the character of the surrounding landscape. |
| Development, expansion and infilling of settlements. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns, villages and farms with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside. Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements, and promote the use of building materials to maintain vernacular style and a scale of development and that are appropriate to <i>River Thames Corridor</i> (see also the South Oxfordshire Design Guide , November 2016). Protect the sparsely settled character of the landscape and the integrity and vernacular character of the estate villages. The siting, scale and materials used for the construction of new barns should be chosen to minimise visual intrusion. Where appropriate, they should be screened with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic to the area. |
| Decline in management of existing woodland and trees. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and, where appropriate, pollarding willows. Establish buffer strips/field margins to potentially benefit small mammals, invertebrates and birds adjacent to willow pollards. Species-rich rivers and ditches are also very important and the aim should be to establish and maintain diverse banksides and aquatic vegetation through sympathetic management and the use of agri-environment schemes. Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as alders, ash, oak and willows. Ancient semi-natural woodlands should be managed to ensure they are in favorable condition. |

Landscape Character Area 5

Eastern Vale Fringes





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Legend

 5. Eastern Vale Fringes

Landscape Character Area 5

South Oxfordshire Landscape
 Character Assessment

1:70,000 scale

31.07.17





Kingston Hill (to the south of Kingston Blount)



Arable land to the north west of Pyrton



Arable land near Easington looking south



Arable land near Easington looking west



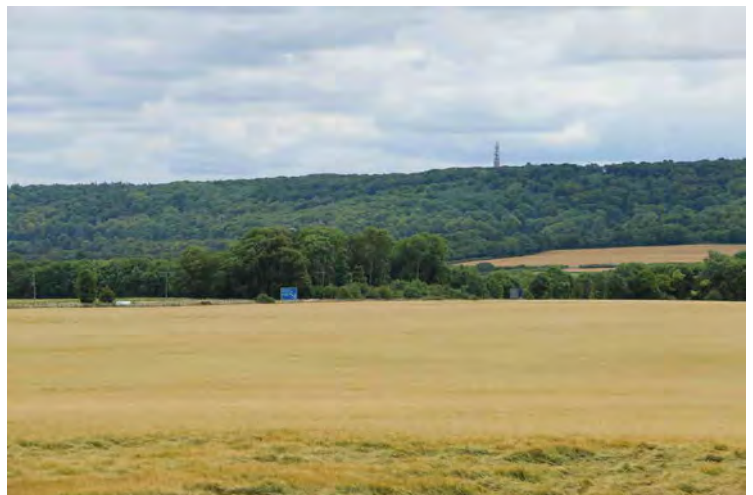
Parkland to the west of Britwell Salome



Looking east from Britwell Salome



View north west from Wheatfield



View of M40 motorway and Chilterns escarpment

10 Eastern Vale Fringes (LCA 5)

10.1 Summary

- 10.1.1 The easterly part of the 'shelf' of Lower Chalk and Upper Greensand which forms a belt of higher rolling ground between the low-lying vale and the steep Chilterns escarpment.

10.2 Location and boundaries

- 10.2.1 *Eastern Vale Fringes* forms the eastern section of a distinctive belt of low, rounded hills, approximately 3 to 4km wide, which follow the base of the towering Chiltern escarpment and form a transition zone between the chalk uplands and the low-lying vale. This character area is located between the village of Chinnor in the north east to the village of Ewelme in the south west.
- 10.2.2 This character area contains a part of the Chilterns AONB.
- 10.2.3 Part of the eastern boundary of *Eastern Vale Fringes* is defined by the district boundary. *Eastern Vale Fringes* borders *The Clay Vale* (3) to the north and west, *Central Vale Fringes* (6) to the south and *Chilterns Escarpment* (8) to the south and east.
- 10.2.4 *Eastern Vale Fringes* contains part of NCA 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales and part of NCA 110 Chilterns.

10.3 Key characteristics

- An undulating landscape ranging between c. 80m AOD and c. 190m AOD.
- The Chiltern Hills rise eastwards from the eastern boundary and are visible across much of the area.
- Small and isolated areas of woodland are a frequent feature across the landscape.
- This character area contains part of Aston Rowant SAC, SSSI and NNR, designated mainly for its flower-rich chalk grassland, beech woodland and juniper scrub.
- Knightsbridge Lane SSSI and part of Swyncombe Downs SSSI are located within this character area.
- Ancient Woodland exists in small areas.

- A network of small watercourses cross through the landscape.
- The land use is predominantly agricultural, comprising mostly of arable land.
- Shirburn Castle registered park and garden comprises a large area in the centre of this landscape.
- Villages in the area are typically nucleated.
- Busy transport corridors cross through the area including the M40 motorway and A40 road.

10.4 Natural factors

Geology and landform

- 10.4.1 The 'shelf' of higher ground is formed by an outcrop of Middle and Lower Chalk, with a small area of malmstone (Upper Greensand), which fringes the Gault Clay of the vale.
- 10.4.2 Permeable, calcareous rocks produce the smoothly rolling landform and light, loamy soils that are characteristic of chalk areas and which contrast with the low-lying, subtle relief and heavy soils of the clay vale.
- 10.4.3 The topography of *Eastern Vale Fringes* ranges between c. 80m AOD and c. 190m AOD. The lowest areas of land are located to the north and west. The highest area of land in *Eastern Vale Fringes* is located on the southern slope of Watlington Hill, to the west of the hamlet of Christmas Common at 190m AOD. Another notable high point within Eastern Vale Fringes includes the summit of Adwell Cop, located to the south east of the village of Adwell at 148m AOD.
- 10.4.4 The south eastern boundary of *Eastern Vale Fringes* is located along the escarpment of the Chiltern Hills.

Hydrology

- 10.4.5 *Eastern Vale Fringes* contains a network of small watercourses.
- 10.4.6 Some areas of Flood Zone 2 and 3 are located within *Eastern Vale Fringes*.

Biodiversity/flora and fauna

- 10.4.7 Priority habitats in this area include wood-pasture and parkland, traditional orchards and deciduous woodland.
- 10.4.8 *Eastern Vale Fringes* contains part of Aston Rowant SAC, SSSI and NNR. Aston Rowant is designated mainly for its flower-rich chalk grassland, beech woodland and juniper scrub⁴⁹.
- 10.4.9 *Eastern Vale Fringes* also contains Knightsbridge Lane SSSI and part of Swyncombe Downs SSSI. Knightsbridge Lane SSSI is designated for its population of the very rare green hound's tongue plant (*Cynoglossum germanicum*)⁵⁰. Swyncombe Downs SSSI is designated for its chalk grassland, scrub and bird communities⁵¹.
- 10.4.10 Linear belts, clumps and blocks of woodland are quite frequent features, providing some structure and enclosure in the landscape. Ancient Woodland exists in small areas, this includes deciduous woodland at Wheatfield Wood, to the east of the village of Stoke Talmage and at Ashley's Wood to the west of the village of Britwell Salome⁵².

10.5 Cultural and social factors

Land use (and management)

- 10.5.1 Land use is predominantly agricultural with large areas of arable land and smaller areas of pasture.
- 10.5.2 Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout parts of this character area. Priority should be given to safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource.
- 10.5.3 *Eastern Vale Fringes* contains one registered park and garden; Shirburn Castle (Grade II), located near the village of Shirburn.

⁴⁹

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1002737&SiteName=&countyCode=34&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=>

⁵⁰

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1001200&SiteName=Bridge&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=>

⁵¹

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1000464&SiteName=Combe%20down&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=>

⁵² Natural England (2017) MAGIC. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

Public rights of way

- 10.5.4 Ridgeway, Oxfordshire Way, Chiltern Way and Swan's Way cross through this area.

Settlement

- 10.5.5 This belt of landscape has provided a favoured area for settlement since prehistoric times. The Icknield Way, a prehistoric thoroughfare, followed the outcrop of dry, permeable rocks between the wet land of the vale and the steep Chilterns escarpment, and the numerous pure springs that emerge along the scarp foot have attracted a long string of villages from Chinnor to Ewelme⁵³.
- 10.5.6 Many of the existing settlements were established by Saxon times (e.g. Pyrton, Watlington and Lewknor) and the basic pattern of settlement has changed very little since then. The Saxon period also accounts for some other patterning in the landscape, with the boundaries of 'strip parishes' (long, linear land holdings which run up into the Chiltern Hills) following the line of early routeways. The whole countryside below the Chilterns is patterned by the intersection of transverse and parallel routes, visible in the existing lattice work of footpaths and bridleways⁵⁴.
- 10.5.7 Many villages were originally nucleated in form, with buildings typically clustered around a church and central open space but during the last two centuries many villages have developed a more linear form (e.g. in Pyrton where the encroachment of the manor and park deflected other buildings along an ancient highway). Some former villages were deserted in medieval times, such as Clare where a single farm now occupies the site of 37 former households⁵⁵.
- 10.5.8 Many of the area's settlements have an attractive core of historic buildings. Earlier buildings were timber-framed with wattle and daub infill, replaced later by brick nogging. Brick and flint are widespread with some examples of the local soft 'clunch' or chalk stone used in association with brick dressings. Roofs are typically red tiles with occasional thatch.

⁵³ Bond, J and Over, L (1988) Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Ordnance Survey Historical Guides. George Philip & Son. London.

⁵⁴ Emery, F (1974) The Oxfordshire Landscape. The making of the English Landscape Series. Hodder and Stoughton. London

⁵⁵ Emery, F (1974) The Oxfordshire Landscape. The making of the English Landscape Series. Hodder and Stoughton. London.

- 10.5.9 This character area contains major transport including the M40 motorway and junction 6 near the village of Lewknor. The A40 road also crosses through this area.

10.6 Perceptual and aesthetic factors

- 10.6.1 Roads and public rights of way on the lower slopes of the Chilterns escarpment offer long distance views to the west. The M40 motorway and A40 road are aural and visual detractors in the landscape. The cooling towers and chimney at Didcot Power Station are visible to the south west from areas of higher ground. Red kites are often seen in the skies above the area. The escarpment of the Chiltern Hills is a prominent feature strongly defining the landscape to the east of the area. The Stokenchurch BT Tower is a visual landmark. Sparsely settled villages, stone walls and churches of corallian limestone characterise much of the landscape.

10.7 Landscape types

10.7.1 Landscape character within this area is fairly consistent, with coherence and unity provided by the underlying chalk or greensand geology which produces the characteristic smooth, rolling landform and grey, flinty soils. Typically this rural landscape is dominated by large, rectangular fields, mostly under arable cultivation, with a good structure of hedgerows and linear tree belts, particularly towards the east. The character of the area is also influenced by the impressive backdrop of the Chiltern escarpment which enhances the quality and sense of enclosure of the landscapes at its foot.

10.7.2 *Eastern Vale Fringes* is comprised of the following landscape types:

Open rolling downs

Key characteristics:

- Distinctively smooth rounded landform of low chalk or greensand hills.
- Dominance of intensive arable cultivation with weak or absent hedgerow structure and large scale field pattern.
- Distinctively 'grey' and flinty soils.
- Denuded and somewhat bleak and sterile character, with few features of landscape or wildlife value.
- Rural character with few detracting influences but large-scale farm buildings tend to be particularly prominent in this very open landscape.
- Open landscape results in high intervisibility and extensive views.

Semi-enclosed rolling downs

Key characteristics:

- Distinctively smooth rounded landform of low chalk or greensand hills.
- Dominance of intensive arable cultivation but some areas of permanent pasture or grassland.
- Large-scale field pattern contained within a comparatively intact structure of hedges, with hedgerow trees and frequent linear belts or stands of planted woodland.

- Distinctively 'grey' and flinty soils.
- Rural character with few detracting influences, although main roads create some localised intrusion.
- Semi-enclosed landscape with moderate intervisibility.

Parkland and estate farmland

Key characteristics:

10.7.3 The main area of parkland and estate farmland is concentrated around Shirburn Castle and Pyrton Manor but there are a number of other smaller examples, around Aston Rowant, Kingston Blount, Britwell Salome House and near Adwell.

- Well-managed parkland character with formal features such as avenues and free-standing mature trees in pasture, or 'estate' landscapes dominated by woodland blocks and clumps of trees.
- Rural and unspoilt character.
- Generally enclosed character with strong landform, woodland and tree cover.
- Low intervisibility.

Flat floodplain pasture

Key characteristics:

10.7.4 A small area of floodplain pasture is associated with a minor streamcourse north of Lewknor.

- Flat, low-lying farmland, typically dominated by permanent pasture with a distinctively 'wet', riparian character.
- Prone to flooding with distinctive network of drainage ditches.
- Comparatively strong landscape structure with willows conspicuous along the riverside.
- Intimate and pastoral character.
- Generally low intervisibility.

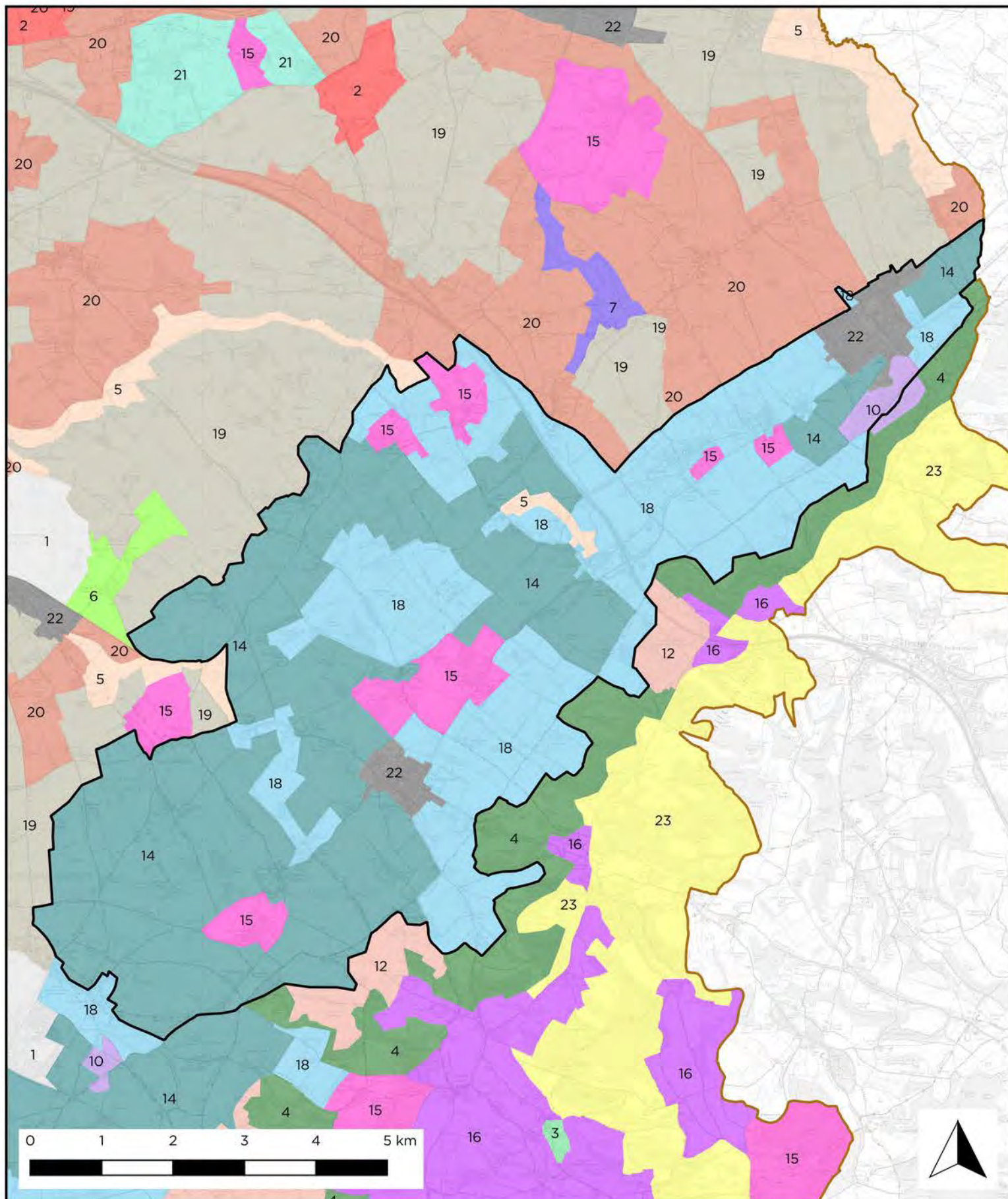
Mineral and landfill sites

Key characteristics:

10.7.5

A chalk quarry exists near Chinnor.

- Disturbed ground under active quarrying or landfilling.
- Removal of characteristic vegetation and land uses and introduction of machinery, structures etc that are incongruous within local landscape.
- Typically 'scruffy' character to site and surrounding area, often evidenced by litter, dust, poor fencing etc.



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Legend

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Eastern Vale Fringes (LCA 5) | 8. Floodplain wetland | 17. Semi-enclosed farmed hills and valleys |
| South Oxfordshire District Boundary | 9. Institutions | 18. Semi-enclosed rolling downs |
| 1. Airfields/MOD sites | 10. Minerals / landfill sites | 19. Undulating open vale |
| 2. Amenity landscapes | 11. Open dipslope | 20. Undulating semi-enclosed vale |
| 3. Commons and heaths | 12. Open escarpment | 21. Undulating wooded vale |
| 4. Enclosed escarpment | 13. Open farmed hills and valleys | 22. Urban areas |
| 5. Flat floodplain pasture | 14. Open rolling downs | 23. Wooded dipslope |
| 6. Flat open farmland | 15. Parkland and estate farmland | 24. Wooded hills and valleys |
| 7. Flat, semi-enclosed farmland | 16. Semi-enclosed dipslope | |

South Oxfordshire
Landscape
Character Assessment

Map: Eastern Vale
Fringes (LCA 5) LT

Scale: 1:70,000

Date: 23.08.17



10.8 Planning, managing and protecting distinctiveness

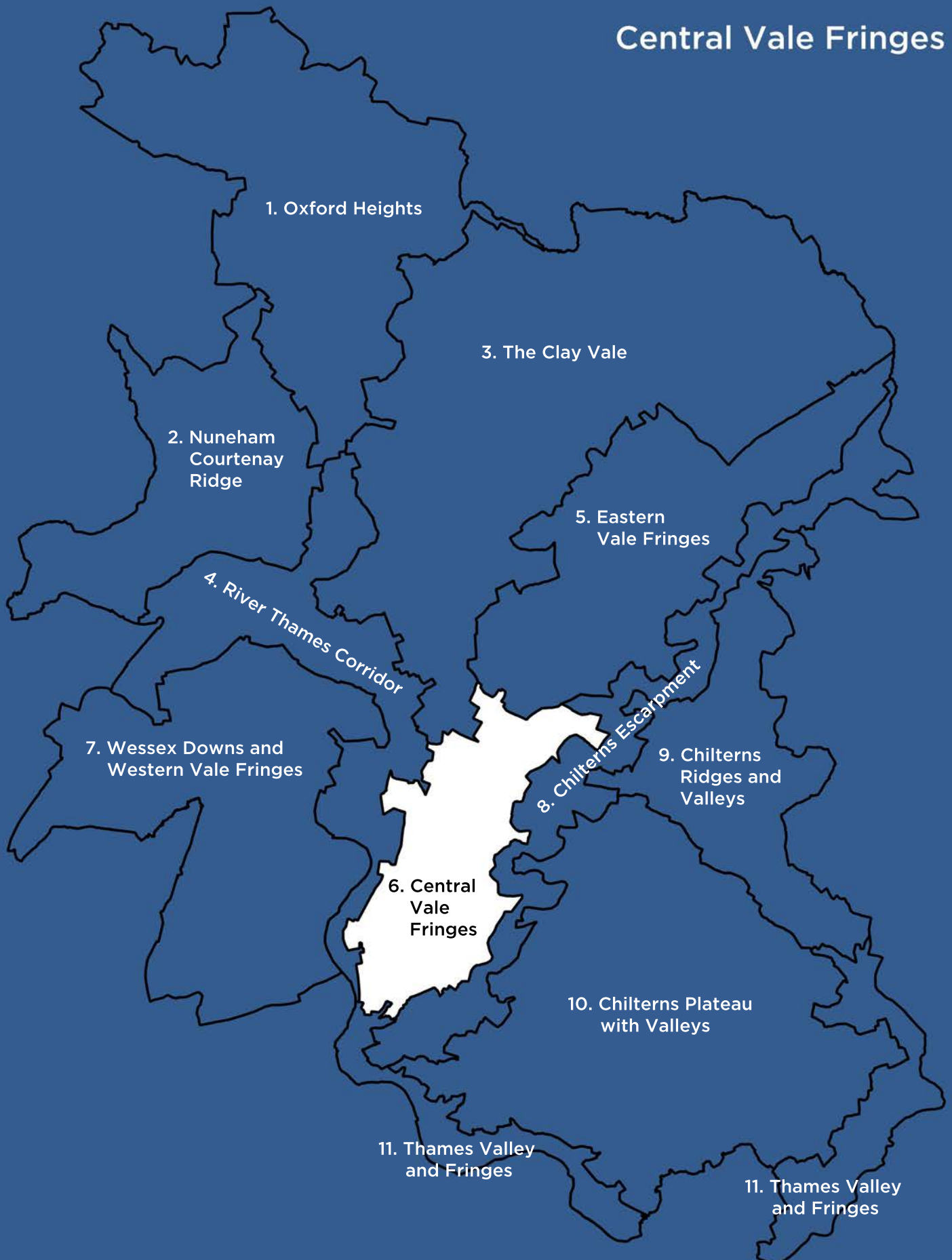
10.8.1 The following table presents recommendations to protect, conserve, enhance and restore the landscape qualities of South Oxfordshire.

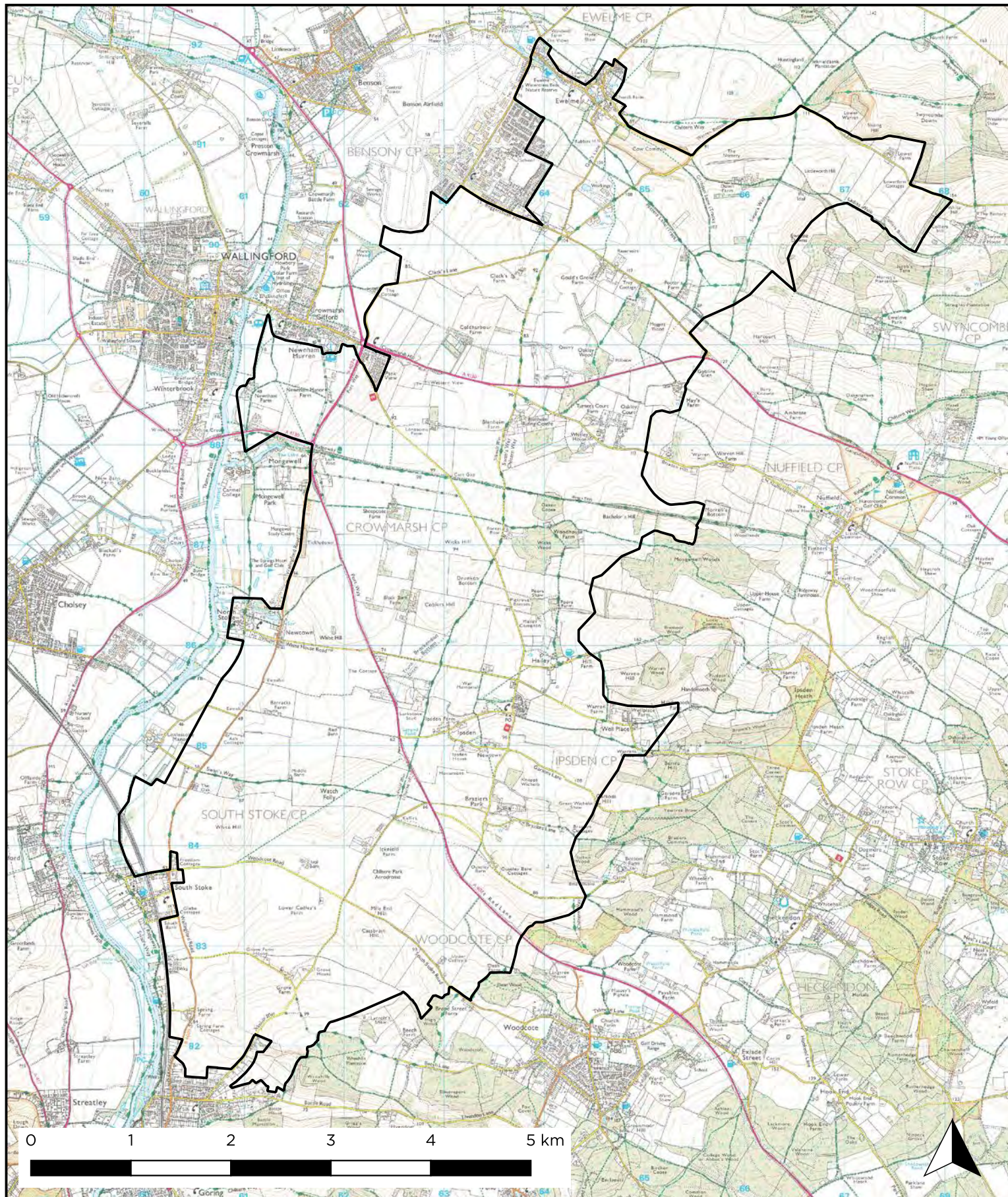
| Forces for change | Guidelines/Mitigation |
|---|---|
| Agricultural intensification, diversification and farm amalgamation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote, where possible, the conservation of the surviving areas of permanent pasture, particularly ridge and furrow, and promote arable reversion to grassland particularly on land adjacent to watercourses. Recognise that grazing sheep and cattle can make a contribution to the landscape's identity and distinctiveness. Strengthen the field pattern by replanting thinned hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn, and hedgerow trees such as crack willow, oak and ash. Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type. Replant where necessary with shrub species such as blackthorn, field maple, dogwood and spindle (see also the South Oxfordshire Design Guide , November 2016; and the Chilterns AONB Building Design Guide 2010). Felling of mature specimens should be resisted. Planting of new hedgerow trees such as oak and ash, and tree belts, should be encouraged. |
| Inappropriate or inconsistent management, or neglect of existing parklands. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safeguard, maintain and enhance the characteristic landscape features of existing parklands including veteran trees, avenues of trees, lakes, woods and walls. Promote the conservation and restoration of the pastoral character of existing parklands and promote the replacement of veteran and mature trees where appropriate. |
| Development, expansion and infilling of settlements. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements, and promote the use of building materials to maintain vernacular style and a scale of development and that are appropriate to <i>Eastern Vale Fringes</i>. Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns, villages and farms with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic to the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside. Protect the sparsely settled character of the landscape and the integrity and vernacular character of the estate villages. |
| Decline in management of existing woodlands and trees. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and, where appropriate, pollarding willows. Establish buffer strips/field margins to potentially benefit small mammals, invertebrates and birds adjacent to willow pollards. Species-rich rivers and ditches are also very important and the aim should be to establish and maintain diverse banksides and aquatic vegetation through sympathetic management and the use of agri- |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <p>environment schemes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as alders, ash oak and willows.• Ancient semi-natural woodlands should be managed to ensure they are in favorable condition. |
|--|---|

Landscape Character Area 6

Central Vale Fringes





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Legend

 6. Central Vale Fringes

Landscape Character Area 6

South Oxfordshire Landscape
Character Assessment

1:50,000 scale

31.07.17





View across the central vale from Nuffield Hill



View south from the Ridgeway at Cart Gap



Bee and Greater Knapweed



View of Didcot Power Station from South Stoke



Sheep grazing at Hailey



Chiltern Park Aerodrome



Arable farmland to the east of South Stoke



View south east from the Ridgeway at Cart Gap

11 Central Vale Fringes (LCA 6)

11.1 Summary

- 11.1.1 The continuation of the Chalk shelf, sandwiched between the Chilterns escarpment and the central clay vale and Thames Valley, focused upon the denuded arable landscapes around Ipsden.

11.2 Location and boundaries

- 11.2.1 *Central Vale Fringes* forms the western section of a distinctive belt of low, rounded hills, approximately 3 to 4 kms wide, which follow the base of the Chiltern escarpment and form a transitional zone between the chalk uplands and the low-lying clay vale and River Thames floodplain. This character area is located between the town of Goring in the south to the village of Ewelme in the north.
- 11.2.2 A large area of *Central Vale Fringes* is located within the Chilterns AONB.
- 11.2.3 Central Vale Fringes borders *The Clay Vale* (3) and *Eastern Vale Fringes* (5) to the north, *Chilterns Escarpment* (8) to the east, *Thames Valley and Fringes* (11) to the south and *River Thames Corridor* (4) to the west.
- 11.2.4 Central Vale Fringes is comprised mostly of NCA 110 Chilterns and small areas of NCA 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales in the north.

11.3 Key characteristics

- An undulating landscape ranging between c. 50m AOD and c. 160m AOD.
- The Chiltern Hills rise eastwards from the eastern boundary, and are visible across much of the area.
- Woodland and tree cover is limited. Ancient Woodland exists in small areas.
- Predominantly agricultural land use, comprising mostly of arable land.
- Sparsely settled.
- Villages in the area are typically nucleated.
- Busy transport corridors cross through the area including the A4130 and A4074 roads.

11.4 Natural factors

Geology and landform

- 11.4.1 The 'shelf' of higher ground is formed by an outcrop of Middle and Lower Chalk which fringes the Gault Clay of the vale.
- 11.4.2 Permeable, calcareous rocks produce the smoothly rolling landform and light, loamy soils that are characteristic of chalk areas and which contrast with the low-lying, subtle relief and heavy soils of the clay vale.
- 11.4.3 The topography of *Central Vale Fringes* ranges from c. 50m AOD to c. 160m AOD. The lowest areas of land are located around the River Thames. The highest area of land in *Central Vale Fringes* is located at Colliers Hill at c. 160m AOD on the western escarpment of the Chiltern Hills. Another notable high point includes Littleworth Hill at 141m AOD.
- 11.4.4 The eastern boundary of *Central Vale Fringes* is located along the escarpment of the Chiltern Hills.

Hydrology

- 11.4.5 There are a limited number of Watercourses within *Central Vale Fringes*.
- 11.4.6 The River Thames is located to the west of the *Central Vale Fringes* boundary. *Central Vale Fringes* contains small areas of Flood Zone 2 and 3 associated with the River Thames.

Biodiversity/flora and fauna

- 11.4.7 Priority habitats include wood-pasture and parkland, deciduous woodland, traditional orchards and lowland calcareous grassland.
- 11.4.8 *Central Vale Fringes* contains part of Ewelme Watercress Beds Local Nature Reserve (LNR).
- 11.4.9 Woodland and tree cover is generally quite sparse due to hedgerow removal, particularly towards the south of this area where intensive agriculture has created a particularly exposed and expansive, open landscape - the so-called 'Ipsden Prairies'. This landscape is likely to be similar to the earlier, bare open vistas of the ancient common fields which would have dominated this area.

- 11.4.10 Ancient woodland exists in small areas, this includes broadleaved and coniferous woodland at Wicks Wood and broadleaved woodland at Oakley Wood⁵⁶.

11.5 Cultural and social factors

Land use (and management)

- 11.5.1 Land use is predominantly agricultural with large areas of arable land and smaller areas of pasture.
- 11.5.2 Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout different parts of this character area. Priority should be given to safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource.

Public rights of way

- 11.5.3 Chiltern Way, Swan's Way, Ridgeway and Icknield Way cross through this area.

Settlement

- 11.5.4 As described in *Eastern Vale Fringes* (5), this belt of higher ground has provided a favoured area for settlement since prehistoric times. The Icknield Way, a prehistoric thoroughfare, followed the outcrop of dry, permeable rocks between the wet land of the vale and the steep Chilterns escarpment and became a focus for early settlement and forest clearance.
- 11.5.5 This part of the chalk belt is, however, more sparsely settled than the Eastern Vale Fringes. It is characterised by a dispersed pattern of farmsteads with a few small nucleated villages, such as Ipsden, Turners Court and Hailey, and straggling rows of houses along some of the many rural roads which criss-cross this area. The southernmost part of the area is particularly empty of settlements, while there is a focus of larger settlements just outside this area within the River Thames corridor (e.g. Crowmarsh Gifford, North Stoke and South Stoke).

⁵⁶ Natural England (2017) MAGIC. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

11.5.6 Earlier buildings within the area were timber- framed with wattle and daub infill, replaced later by brick nogging. Brick and flint are widespread with some examples of the local soft 'clunch' or chalk stone used in association with brick dressings. Roofs are typically red tiles with occasional thatch.

11.5.7 Busy transport corridors cross through the area including the A4130 and A4074 roads.

11.6 Perceptual and aesthetic factors

11.6.1 Rolling topography commands long distance views in all directions. The escarpment of the Chiltern Hills is a prominent feature strongly defining the landscape to the east of the area. Red kites are often seen in the skies above the area. The cooling towers and chimney at Didcot Power Station are a visual landmark. Lines of trees are a distinctive feature in the landscape. The A4130 and A4074 roads are visual and aural detractors in the landscape.

11.7 Landscape types

11.7.1 Like *Eastern Vale Fringes* (5), the landscape within this area has a fairly consistent character, with coherence and unity provided by the underlying chalk or greensand geology which produces the characteristic smooth, rolling landform and grey, flinty soils. However, the character of this area is dominated by the somewhat bleak chalk landscapes around Ipsden, which have historically been quite open but have been further denuded by intensive arable farming.

11.7.2 *Central Vale Fringes* is comprised of the following landscape types:

Open rolling downs

Key characteristics:

- Distinctively smooth rounded landform of low chalk hills.
- Dominance of intensive arable cultivation with weak or absent hedgerow structure and large scale field pattern.
- Distinctively 'grey' and flinty soils.
- Denuded and somewhat bleak and sterile character, with few features of landscape or wildlife value.
- Rural character with few detracting influences but large-scale farm buildings tend to be particularly prominent in this very open landscape.
- Open landscape results in high intervisibility and extensive views.

Semi-enclosed rolling downs

Key characteristics:

- Distinctively smooth rounded landform of low chalk hills.
- Dominance of intensive arable cultivation but some areas of permanent pasture or grassland.
- Large-scale field pattern contained within a comparatively intact structure of hedges, with hedgerow trees and some linear belts or stands of planted woodland.
- Distinctively 'grey' and flinty soils.
- Rural character with few detracting influences, although main roads create some localised intrusion.

- Semi-enclosed landscape with moderate intervisibility.

Parkland and Estate farmland

Key characteristics:

11.7.3 A small area of parkland and estate farmland was noted on the fringes of Crowmarsh Gifford.

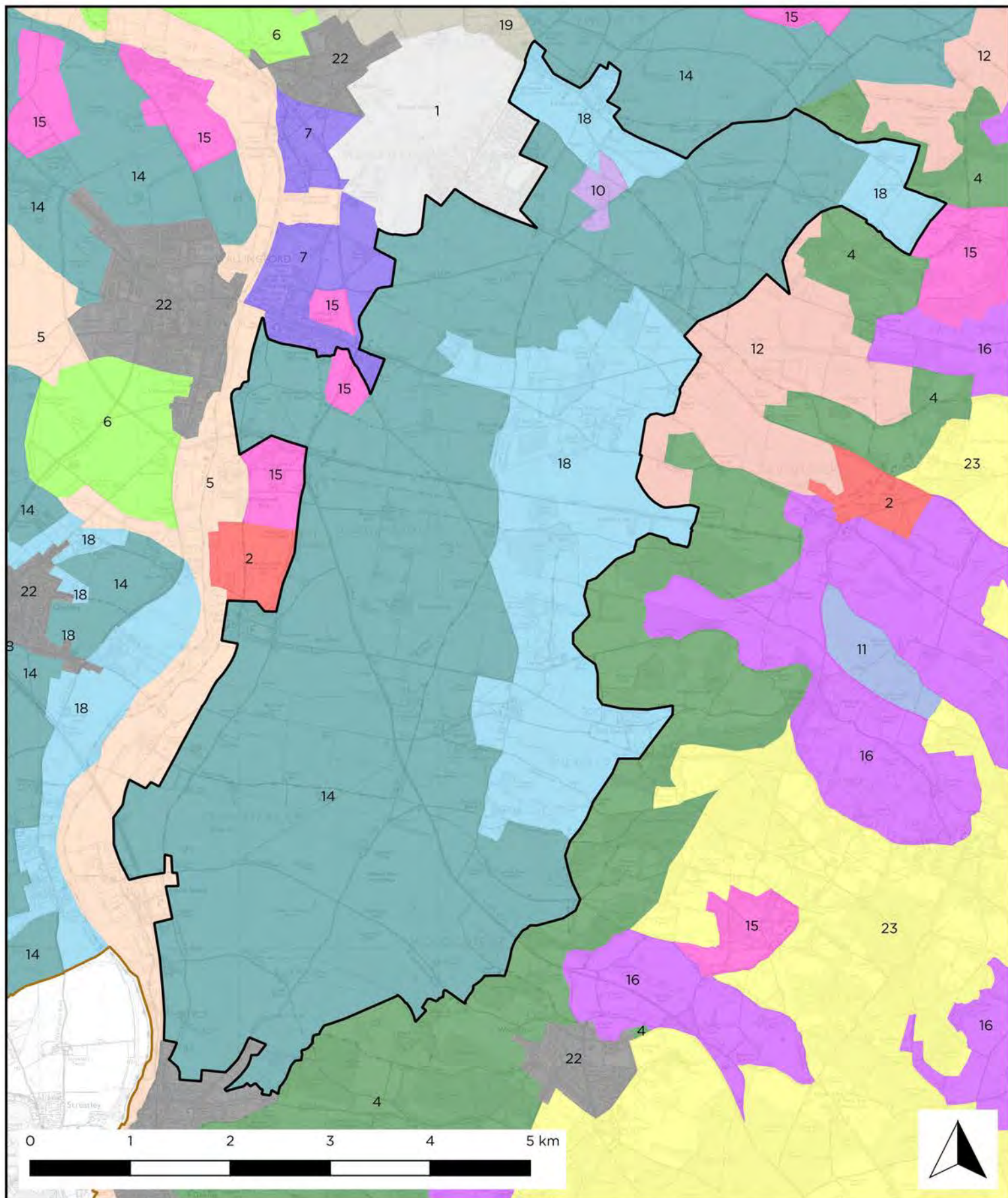
- Well-managed parkland character with formal features such as avenues and free-standing mature trees in pasture, or 'estate' landscapes dominated by woodland blocks and clumps of trees.
- Rural and unspoilt character.
- Generally enclosed character with strong landform, woodland and tree cover.
- Low intervisibility.

Mineral and landfill sites

Key characteristics:

11.7.4 A landfill site exists to the south of Ewelme.

- Unnatural landform and uncharacteristic vegetation cover, giving impression of disturbed ground.
- Introduction of incongruous styles of fencing and highway treatments which lend an urban character to the landscape.



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Legend

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Central Vale Fringes (LCA 6) | 8. Floodplain wetland | 17. Semi-enclosed farmed hills and valleys |
| South Oxfordshire District Boundary | 9. Institutions | 18. Semi-enclosed rolling downs |
| 1. Airfields/MOD sites | 10. Minerals / landfill sites | 19. Undulating open vale |
| 2. Amenity landscapes | 11. Open dipslope | 20. Undulating semi-enclosed vale |
| 3. Commons and heaths | 12. Open escarpment | 21. Undulating wooded vale |
| 4. Enclosed escarpment | 13. Open farmed hills and valleys | 22. Urban areas |
| 5. Flat floodplain pasture | 14. Open rolling downs | 23. Wooded dipslope |
| 6. Flat open farmland | 15. Parkland and estate farmland | 24. Wooded hills and valleys |
| 7. Flat, semi-enclosed farmland | 16. Semi-enclosed dipslope | |

South Oxfordshire
Landscape
Character Assessment

Map: Central Vale
Fringes (LCA 6) LT

Scale: 1:50,000

Date: 23.08.17



11.8 Planning, managing and protecting distinctiveness

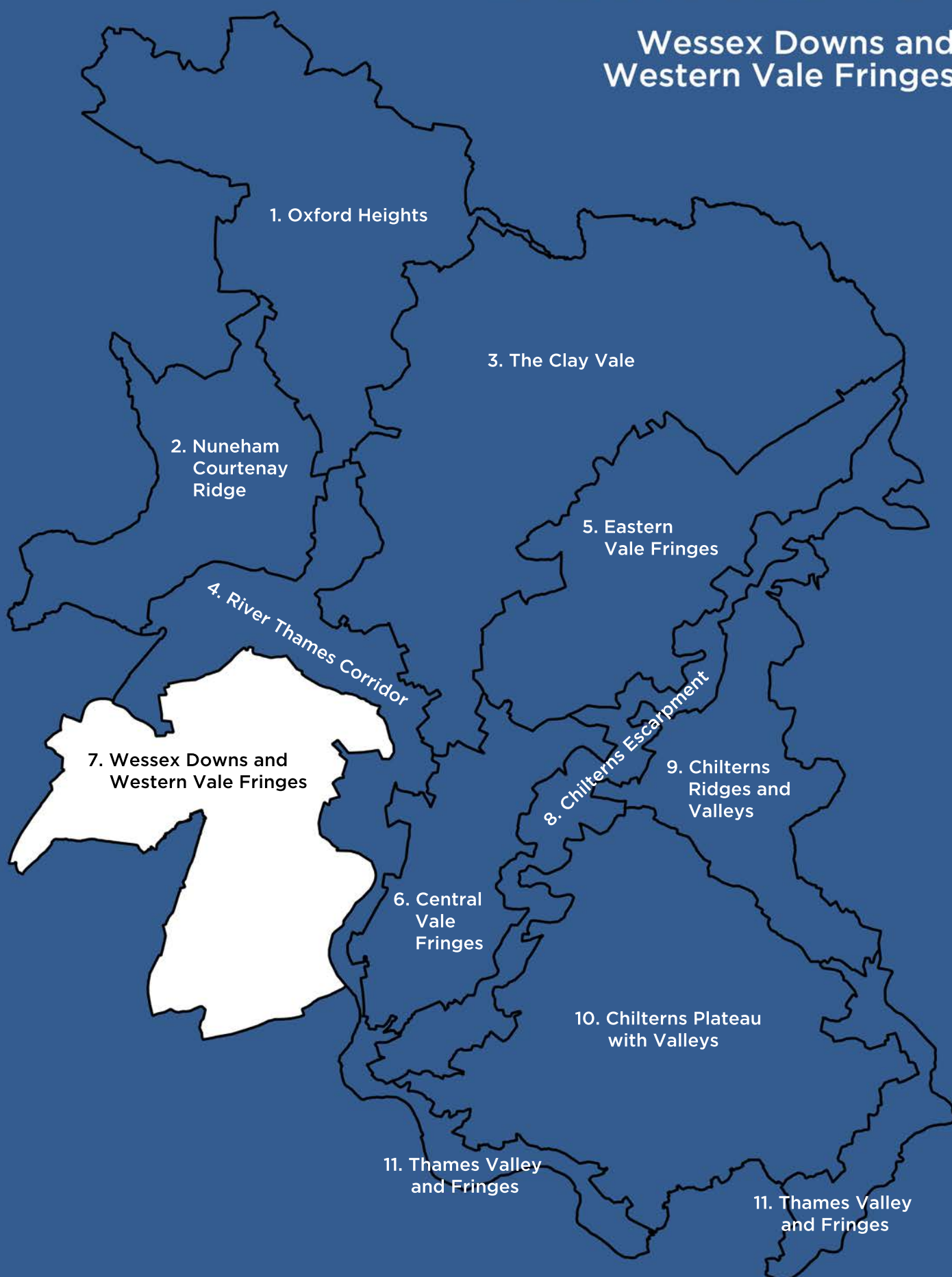
11.8.1 The following table presents recommendations to protect, conserve, enhance and restore the landscape qualities of South Oxfordshire.

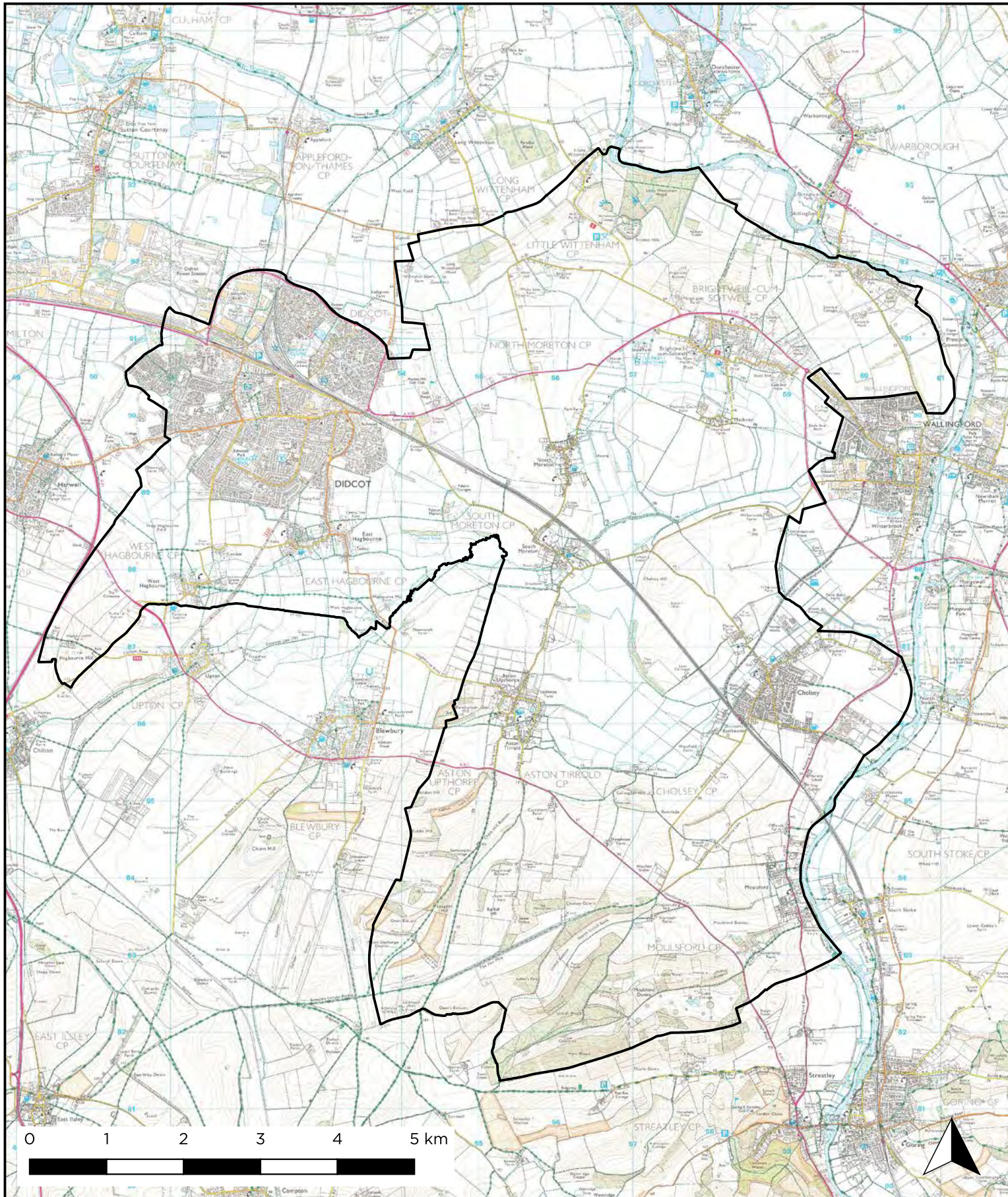
| Forces for change | Guidelines/Mitigation |
|---|---|
| Agricultural intensification, diversification and farm amalgamation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote, where possible, the conservation of surviving areas of permanent pasture. Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering where necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type. Felling of mature specimens should be resisted. Planting of new hedgerow trees such as oak and ash, and tree belts, should be encouraged. Priority should be given to safeguarding and maintaining existing species-rich hedges through coppicing, layering and replanting where necessary with shrub species such as blackthorn, field maple, dogwood and spindle. Protect stone walls from deterioration. Safeguard, maintain and enhance the quality of unimproved chalk and limestone grassland with sustainable grazing techniques. |
| Inappropriate or inconsistent management, or neglect of existing parklands. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safeguard, maintain and enhance and the characteristic landscape features of existing parklands including mature trees, avenues of trees, lakes, woods and walls. |
| Introduction of tall buildings and structures such as communication masts and electricity pylons. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise impact by locating new communication masts on existing structures or by using existing masts. Bury cables underground and seek opportunities to bury existing overhead cables. |
| Inappropriate built form, development, expansion and infilling of settlements. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns and villages with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside. Encourage planting of green infrastructure to surround golf courses. Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements, and promote the use of building materials to maintain vernacular style and a scale of development and that are appropriate to <i>Central Vale Fringes</i>. |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Decline in management of existing woodlands and trees.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Safeguard, maintain and enhance and the characteristic landscape features of existing parklands including mature trees, avenues of trees, lakes, woods and walls.• Ancient semi-natural woodlands should be managed to ensure they are in favorable condition.• Promote the planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as oak and ash.• Promote the sustainable management of existing woodland to safeguard its long-term survival.• Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and, where appropriate, pollarding willows.• Establish buffer strips/field margins to potentially benefit small mammals, invertebrates and birds adjacent to willow pollards. |
|---|---|

Landscape Character Area 7


Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes





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Legend

 7. Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes

Landscape Character Area 7

South Oxfordshire Landscape
 Character Assessment

1:65,000 scale

31.07.17





View of North Wessex Downs from Wittenham Clumps



Arable field margin near North Moreton



Long distance view of the Chiltern Hills



Arable land and Didcot chimney near North Moreton



View of Wittenham Clumps



Arable land at Cholsey Hill



Railway line to the west of Cholsey



Long distance view of Didcot power station

12 Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes (LCA 7)

12.1 Summary

- 12.1.1 A tract of mixed landscape lying between the River Thames and the district boundary at the western end of the clay vale, comprising an area of low-lying land encircled by the chalk hills of the Wessex Downs and the outlying Sinodun Hills.

12.2 Location and boundaries

- 12.2.1 *Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes* is located within the south west region of South Oxfordshire, between Didcot in the west, Wallingford to the east and Goring to the south. This character area forms a transitional area between the chalk uplands to the south and the clay vale to the north.
- 12.2.2 A large area of the North Wessex Downs AONB is located within this character area.
- 12.2.3 *Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes* is defined by the district boundary to the west and south and by River Thames Corridor (4) to the north and east.
- 12.2.4 *Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes* contains part of NCA 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales, part of NCA 116 Berkshire and Marlborough Downs and a small area of NCA 110 Chilterns in the south.

12.3 Key characteristics

- An undulating landscape ranging between c. 50m AOD and c. 180m AOD.
- Wittenham Clumps are a key landscape feature in this area.
- The River Thames is located adjacent to the northern and eastern character area boundary.
- Little Wittenham SAC and SSSI is located in this character area and contains woodland with ponds, as well as grassland and scrub to support the great crested newt population.
- Aston Upthorpe Downs SSSI (species-rich chalk grassland and associated fauna) and Moulsoford Downs SSSI (close grazed,

unimproved chalk grassland, tall ungrazed chalk grassland, a small broad-leaved plantation and scrub with standards) are located in this character area.

- Sparse covering of trees and woodland, except on the steeper valley and hill-sides of the downs and at Wittenham.
- Predominantly agricultural landscape comprising mostly of arable land.
- Villages are sparsely settled with typically nucleated form.
- The cooling towers and chimney of Didcot Power Station are a visual landmark.
- Busy transport corridors including the A4130, A329 and A417 roads cross through the area.
- A section of the Great Western main line (railway) cuts through the centre of the landscape.

12.4 Natural factors

Geology and landform

- 12.4.1 Parts of the area are overlain by clay with flints, the latter conspicuous in the soils and buildings of the area.
- 12.4.2 Around Didcot, a band of calcareous siltstones and sandy limestones of the Upper Greensand (or 'malmstone') forms the transition between the higher land of the downs and the lower-lying vale. These areas share characteristics of the chalk downland, with smoothly rounded landform and well-drained, 'chalky' and sometimes 'flinty' soils. Isolated outcrops of greensand and chalk form prominent rounded hills at Wittenham Clumps and Cholsey Hill, distinctive features within the flat vale landscape.
- 12.4.3 Below the chalk and malmstone hills, the remaining area is underlain by alluvium, forming typically flat, low-lying and 'wet' landscapes. Much of this has been extensively drained and is now also under intensive arable farming, with permanent pasture concentrated mainly within areas prone to flooding next to the River Thames see *River Thames Corridor* (4).
- 12.4.4 The southernmost part of the area occupies part of the north-facing escarpment of the North Wessex Downs, part of the extensive cretaceous chalk belt of southern England. The area is characterised by typical chalk scenery of smoothly rounded open hills dissected by dry, and sometimes wooded, valleys and coombes.

- 12.4.5 The topography of *Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes* ranges from c. 50m AOD to c. 180m AOD. The lowest areas of land are located around the River Thames. The highest area of land in *Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes* is located at Lowbury Hill at 186m AOD within the North Wessex Downs AONB. Other notable high points include Riddle Hill at 140m AOD and Wittenham Clumps at 121m AOD.

Hydrology

- 12.4.6 The River Thames meets the northern boundary of *Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes* at Little Wittenham. The River Thames then meanders in and out of the northern and eastern boundary, before heading south towards Goring.
- 12.4.7 *Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes* contains a network of small watercourses, this includes Hakka's Brook and Mill Brook.
- 12.4.8 *Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes* contains small areas of Flood Zone 2 and 3 associated with the River Thames.

Biodiversity/flora and fauna

- 12.4.9 Priority habitats include lowland calcareous grassland, semi-improved grassland, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, wood-pasture and parkland, deciduous woodland, traditional orchards and lowland meadows.
- 12.4.10 Little Wittenham SAC and SSSI is located within *Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes* (designated for its great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) population)⁵⁷ and consists of woodland with ponds, as well as grassland and scrub⁵⁸. Little Wittenham SAC and SSSI is located on the northern slopes of Wittenham Clumps, to the south of Dorchester.

⁵⁷ <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/protectedsites/sacselection/sac.asp?EUCode=UK0030184>

⁵⁸

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S2000429&SiteName=Ten&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=>

- 12.4.11 Aston Upthorpe Downs SSSI and Moulsoford Downs SSSI are located in the southern area. Aston Upthorpe SSSI is designated for its species-rich chalk grassland and associated fauna⁵⁹. Moulsoford Downs SSSI is designated for its close grazed, unimproved chalk grassland, tall ungrazed chalk grassland, a small broad-leaved plantation and scrub with standards⁶⁰.
- 12.4.12 Mowbray Fields LNR is located to the south of Didcot.
- 12.4.13 This landscape is sparsely wooded, except on the steeper valley and hill-sides of the downs and at Wittenham. There exists areas of Ancient Woodland including deciduous and coniferous woodland at Ham Wood and Unhill Wood in the south and at Little Wittenham Wood in the north⁶¹.

12.5 Cultural and social factors

Land use (and management)

- 12.5.1 Intensive arable farming is the predominant land use with smaller areas of pasture. Arable field margins are widespread across this character area.
- 12.5.2 Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout different parts of this character area. Priority should be given to safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource.
- 12.5.3 Fairmile Hospital registered park and garden (Grade II) is located within *Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes* to the east of the village of Cholsey.

Public rights of way

- 12.5.4 The Thames Path crosses through this area.

Settlement

⁵⁹

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1000924&SiteName=&countyCode=34&responsiblePerson=>

⁶⁰

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1002904&SiteName=moulsoford%20downs&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAAArea=>

⁶¹ Natural England (2017) MAGIC. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

- 12.5.5 Didcot is the largest settlement within the area, its growth from a small village being originally due to its location on the strategic rail network. With the arrival of the Great Western Railway in 1840 it expanded significantly and has continued to grow throughout this century⁶². The industrial estate and power station now link Didcot to Milton and the massive cooling towers are a distinctive and highly visible landmark across large parts of the flat clay vale and from the hills beyond.
- 12.5.6 Evidence of a long history of settlement is provided by various prehistoric earthworks and hillforts (e.g. at Aston Upthorpe) which are scattered along the edge of the downs. 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 (e.g. the Astons and Cholsey). Others are located on isolated pockets of higher ground within the vale, such as Mackney, North and South Moreton and Brightwell-cum-Sotwell.
- 12.5.7 Many of the villages in the area have a typically nucleated form, with many attractive historic buildings. 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. Some of these are associated with large horse-racing establishments which, along with the gallops, are distinctive features of the downs landscape.
- 12.5.8 Busy transport corridors including the A4130, A329 and A417 roads cross through the area. A section of the Great Western main line (railway) intercepts through the centre of the landscape. There also exists a small section of the Cholsey and Wallingford Railway.

12.6 Perceptual and aesthetic factors

- 12.6.1 The cooling towers and chimney of Didcot Power Station are a visual landmark, particularly from areas of higher ground. Wittenham Clumps are a key landscape feature and visual landmark. Large areas of this landscape are open and exposed, particularly at Cholsey Hill. Red kites are often seen in the skies above the area. The A4130, A329 and A417 roads and the railway line are visual and aural detractors in the landscape.

⁶² Emery, F (1974) *The Oxfordshire Landscape. The making of the English Landscape Series*. Hodder and Stoughton. London.

12.7 Landscape types

12.7.1 Landscape character in this area is varied because of its mixed geology and relief, although some coherence and unity is provided by the containment of the lower-lying areas by smoothly rounded hills.

12.7.2 *Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes* is comprised of the following landscape types:

Open rolling downs

Key characteristics:

- Smoothly rounded hills and downland flanks.
- Dominance of intensive arable cultivation with weak or absent hedgerow structure and large scale field pattern.
- Distinctively 'grey' and flinty soils.
- Large-scale, open and denuded landscape.
- Rural character with few detracting influences.
- Open landscape results in high intervisibility and extensive views.

Semi-enclosed rolling downs

Key characteristics:

- Smoothly rounded hills and downland flanks.
- Intimate dry valleys which dissect the chalk downs, typically with mixed woodland clothing the steep valley sides.
- Dominance of arable cultivation but with a comparatively strong landscape structure of hedges, trees and woods, providing visual enclosure and diversity.
- Distinctive clumps of woodland on prominent hilltops, such as Wittenham Clumps.
- Distinctively 'grey' and flinty soils.
- Rural character with few detracting influences.
- Extensive views from hilltops and downs across the vale to the north but intervisibility restricted by woods and hedgerows.

Flat floodplain pasture

Key characteristics:

- Flat, low-lying farmland, typically dominated by permanent pasture with a distinctively 'wet', riparian character.
- Prone to flooding with distinctive network of drainage ditches.
- Comparatively strong landscape structure with willows conspicuous along the riverside.
- Intimate and pastoral character.
- Generally low intervisibility, although views along the valley may be possible in some more sparsely vegetated areas.
- Comparative inaccessibility creates a tranquil, remote character.

Flat, open farmland

Key characteristics:

- Distinctively flat, low-lying farmland (below 50 metres AOD).
- Large-scale rectilinear field pattern with distinctive network of drainage ditches.
- Weak landscape structure with few trees, low or gappy hedges, open ditches and fences.
- Comparative inaccessibility creates a rural and remote character.
- Open, denuded landscape results in high intervisibility.
- Overhead power lines intrude in the very open landscape to the west of Cholsey.

Flat semi-enclosed farmland

Key characteristics:

- As above but with stronger landscape structure and a semi-enclosed character.
- Scattered blocks of woodland between Didcot and South Moreton create some enclosure and diversity.
- Smaller-scale, irregular field pattern near Brightwell-cum-Sotwell create a more enclosed, intimate character.
- Predominantly rural, tranquil, remote or intimate character.
- Regular pattern of ditches and rural roads.

- Semi-enclosed character with moderate to low intervisibility.

Parkland and estate farmland

Key characteristics:

12.7.3 Two areas of parkland and estate farmland are located on the eastern flanks of the isolated ridge of chalk at the Sinodun Hills, associated with the houses of Rush Court and the Sinodun Hills themselves.

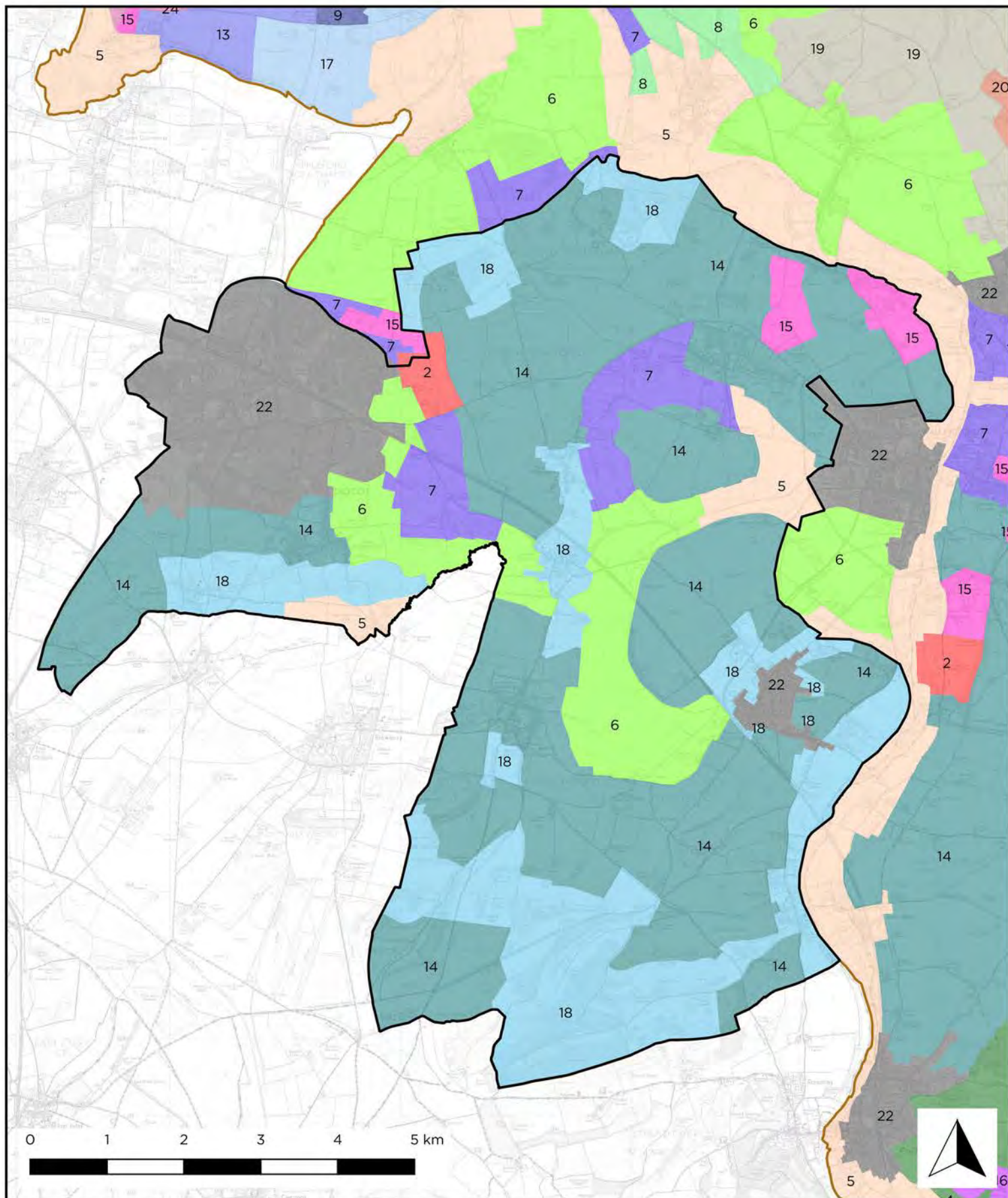
- Well-managed parkland character with formal features such as avenues and free-standing mature trees in pasture, clumps and blocks of woodland.
- Rural and unspoilt character.
- Generally enclosed character with strong landform, woodland and tree cover.
- Low intervisibility.

Amenity landscape

12.7.4 Hadden Hill Golf Club is located to the east of Didcot and is mostly located within this LCA.

Key characteristics:

- Rolling landform characteristic of the chalk and upper greensand geology.
- Typical golf course landscape of greens, fairways and roughs, with associated buildings and features.
- Generally weak landscape structure with immature tree planting, creating an open, exposed character.
- Intensively managed and suburban character.
- Lack of mature tree cover results in high intervisibility.



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Legend

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes (LCA 7) | 7. Flat, semi-enclosed farmland | 16. Semi-enclosed dipslope |
| South Oxfordshire District Boundary | 8. Floodplain wetland | 17. Semi-enclosed farmed hills and valleys |
| 1. Airfields/MOD sites | 9. Institutions | 18. Semi-enclosed rolling downs |
| 2. Amenity landscapes | 10. Minerals / landfill sites | 19. Undulating open vale |
| 3. Commons and heaths | 11. Open dipslope | 20. Undulating semi-enclosed vale |
| 4. Enclosed escarpment | 12. Open escarpment | 21. Undulating wooded vale |
| 5. Flat floodplain pasture | 13. Open farmed hills and valleys | 22. Urban areas |
| 6. Flat open farmland | 14. Open rolling downs | 23. Wooded dipslope |
| | 15. Parkland and estate farmland | 24. Wooded hills and valleys |

South Oxfordshire Landscape Character Assessment

Map: Wessex Downs
and Western Vale
Fringes (LCA 7) LT

Scale: 1:65,000

Date: 23.08.17



12.8 Planning, managing and protecting distinctiveness

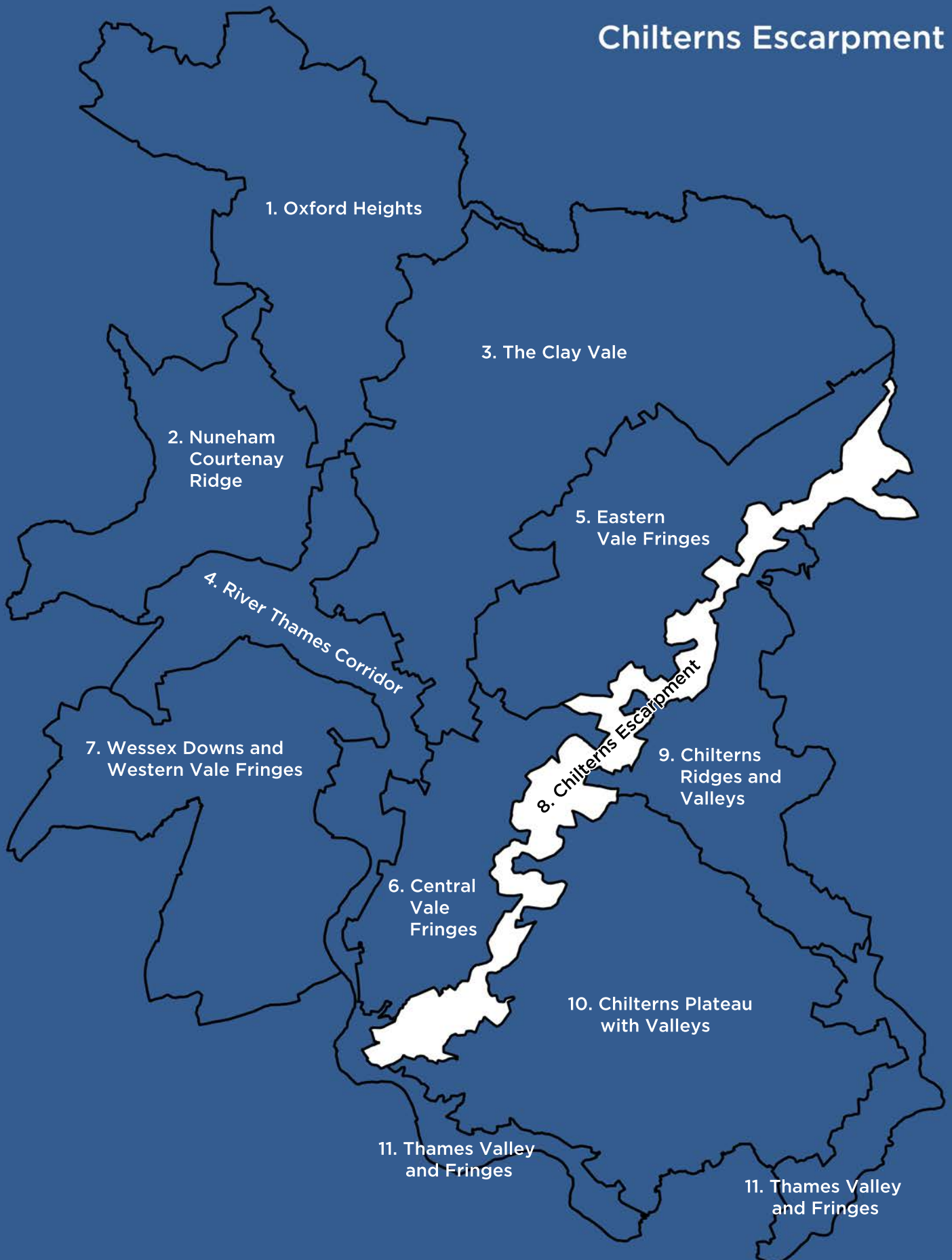
12.8.1 The following table presents recommendations to protect, conserve, enhance and restore the landscape qualities of South Oxfordshire.

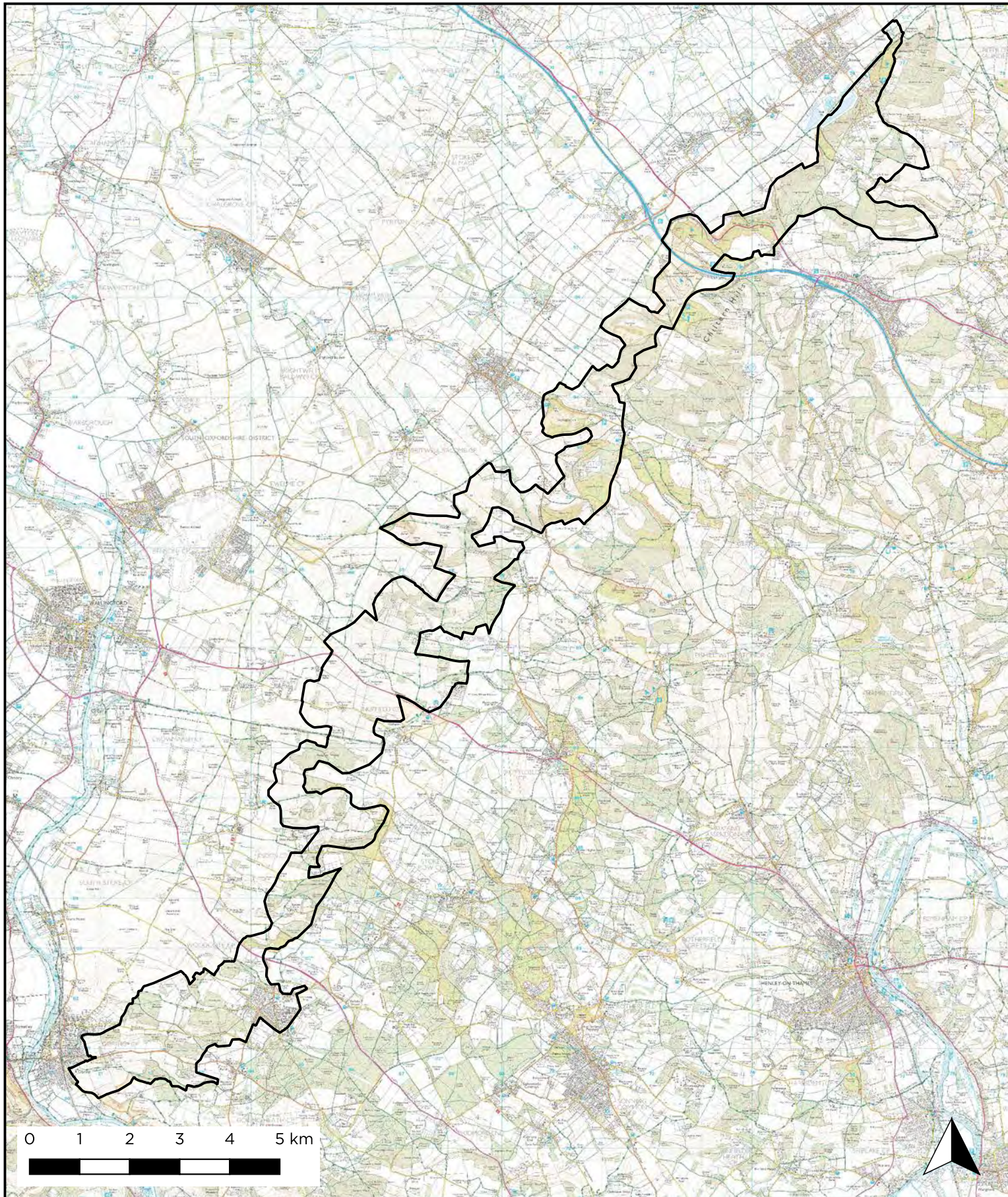
| Forces for change | Guidelines/Mitigation |
|---|---|
| Agricultural intensification, diversification and farm amalgamation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote, where possible, the conservation of the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly on land adjacent to watercourses. Recognise that grazing sheep and cattle can make a contribution to the landscape's identity and distinctiveness. Promote the conservation of all remaining areas of semi-improved grassland, and encourage conversion of arable land to pasture in the proximity of existing grasslands to maximize their wildlife and landscape value. Strengthen the field pattern by conserving species rich hedgerows and sympathetically maintaining all hedgerows. Where appropriate, replant gappy hedges using species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, wayfaring tree, dogwood and spindle. Felling of mature specimens should be resisted. Planting of new hedgerow trees such as oak and ash, and tree belts, should be encouraged. Safeguard, maintain and enhance the quality of unimproved chalk and limestone grassland with sustainable grazing techniques. Identify opportunities for calcareous grassland restoration by linking and extending the existing resource. Prevent scrub encroachment in areas of species-rich grassland. |
| Introduction of tall buildings and structures such as communication masts and electricity pylons. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise impact by locating new communication masts on existing structures or by using existing masts. Bury cables underground and seek opportunities to bury existing overhead cables. Minimise the visual intrusion of structures in the landscape by careful siting and screen planting where appropriate. |
| Inappropriate built form, development, expansion and infilling of settlements. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns, villages and farms with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside. Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements, and promote the use of building materials to maintain vernacular style and a scale of development and that are appropriate to <i>Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes</i>. Avoid inappropriate development within the open and exposed hills where it would be intrusive. Maintain the dispersed and sparsely settled character of the landscape. |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The siting, scale and materials used for the construction of new barns should be chosen to minimise visual intrusion. Where appropriate, they should be screened with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic to the area. |
| Decline in management of existing woodlands and trees. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as alders, ash oak and willows. Ancient semi-natural woodlands should be managed to ensure they are in favourable condition. Safeguard, maintain and enhance and the characteristic landscape features of existing parklands including mature trees, avenues of trees, lakes, woods and walls. Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as oak and ash. Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and, where appropriate, pollarding willows. Establish buffer strips/field margins to potentially benefit small mammals, invertebrates and birds adjacent to willow pollards. Species-rich rivers and ditches are also very important and the aim should be to establish and maintain diverse banksides and aquatic vegetation through sympathetic management and the use of agri-environment schemes. |

Landscape Character Area 8

Chilterns Escarpment





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 Ordnance Survey 100018668 South Oxfordshire District Council

Legend

 8. Chilterns Escarpment

Landscape Character Area 8

South Oxfordshire Landscape
 Character Assessment

1:100,000 scale

31.07.17





View west from Christmas Common



View north from Nuffield Hill



Britwell Hill



Guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*)



View north from Watlington Hill



Swyncombe Downs



Spriggs Alley



M40 motorway at the Stokenchurch Gap

13 Chilterns Escarpment (LCA 8)

13.1 Summary

- 13.1.1 The distinctive north-west facing slopes and top of the Chilterns escarpment.

13.2 Location and boundaries

- 13.2.1 *Chilterns Escarpment* comprises the steep face and top of the Chilterns escarpment, which forms a dramatic backdrop to the low-lying landscape of the vale to the north-west.
- 13.2.2 This character area is located between the village of Chinnor to the north east and the town of Goring to the south west. *Chilterns Escarpment* is located entirely within the Chilterns AONB.
- 13.2.3 *Chilterns Escarpment* is defined by *Eastern Vale Fringes* (5), *Central Vale Fringes* (6) and *Thames Valley and Fringes* (11) to the west, Chilterns Ridges and Valleys (9) and *Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* (10) to the east.
- 13.2.4 *Chilterns Escarpment* is comprised mostly of NCA 110 Chilterns and a small area of NCA 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales is located in the north.

13.3 Key characteristics

- This character area comprises the steep escarpment of the Chiltern Hills and ranges between c. 50m AOD and c. 250m AOD.
- Much of this landscape is blanketed in broad-leaved semi-natural woodland, including extensive areas of Ancient Woodland.
- The M40 motorway at the Stokenchurch Gap is a visual and aural detractor in the landscape.
- This landscape is sparsely settled with small villages and hamlets.
- This character area contains a variety of sites designated for their biodiversity, this includes Aston Rowant SAC, SSSI and NNR (flower-rich chalk grassland, beech woodland and juniper scrub) and Chilterns Beechwoods SAC (beech forests, semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates).
- Agricultural land comprises a mixture of pasture and arable.
- Narrow lanes and tall hedgerows.

13.4 Natural factors

Geology and landform

- 13.4.1 The scarp is formed from Upper Chalk, the youngest of the several layers of chalk laid down in the Cretaceous period which were subsequently tilted downwards towards the south-east leaving an abrupt north-west face.
- 13.4.2 The chalk geology is exposed along the steep scarp face giving rise to thin, calcareous soils on steep slopes which are unsuited to cultivation.
- 13.4.3 The topography of *Chilterns Escarpment* ranges from c. 50m AOD to c. 250m AOD. The lowest areas of land are located at the far south west around the River Thames. The highest area of land in this character area is located at Bald Hill within the Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve at 254m AOD. Other notable high points include Watlington Hill at 242m AOD and Kingston Wood at 242m AOD.
- 13.4.4 Although it has the typically smooth and well defined profile of chalk landform, the escarpment is heavily incised with spurs and valleys, especially towards its western end, which give it a more complex form and character. The steepness of the scarp also varies, with quite gentle slopes towards the western end (in places it hardly reads as an escarpment at all) and becoming increasingly and more dramatic moving eastwards.

Hydrology

- 13.4.5 *Chilterns Escarpment* contains limited numbers of watercourses.

Biodiversity/flora and fauna

- 13.4.6 Priority habitats in *Chilterns Escarpment* include deciduous woodland, traditional orchards, wood-pasture and parkland, semi-improved grassland and lowland calcareous grassland.

- 13.4.7 Much of this part of the Chilterns escarpment is blanketed in broad-leaved semi-natural woodland which has developed in the absence of grazing management. However, this typically forms a distinctive mosaic of dense shady woodland interspersed, especially on the steeper slopes, with small pockets or larger stretches of open chalk grassland, often liberally dotted with scrub. *Chilterns Escarpment* contains extensive areas of Ancient Woodland⁶³.
- 13.4.8 Aston Rowant SAC (also SSSI and NNR) and Chilterns Beechwoods SAC are located within *Chilterns Escarpment*. Aston Rowant SAC is designated mainly for its flower-rich chalk grassland, beech woodland and juniper scrub⁶⁴. Chilterns Beechwoods SAC is primarily designated for its Asperulo-Fagetum beech forests. Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) are also located here⁶⁵.
- 13.4.9 Where it exists, calcareous grassland is a distinctive landscape component, usually at locations that are too steep to plough. As a habitat, the total amount of calcareous grassland left in England represents 0.03% of the total land area⁶⁶. Due to the underlying alkaline Oolitic and Corallian limestone of South Oxfordshire, as well as the chalk, there is a higher than average proportion of calcareous grassland than in other districts. The habitat makes an important contribution to biodiversity hosting several plants and animals that are not found in other habitat types, which is why locations like Aston Rowant have been designated as a Special Area of Conservation.

⁶³ Natural England (2017) MAGIC. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

⁶⁴

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1002737&SiteName=&countyCode=34&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=>

⁶⁵ <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/protectedsites/sacselection/sac.asp?EUCode=UK0012724>

⁶⁶ Natural England (2014) Climate Change Adaptation Manual: Evidence to support nature conservation in a changing climate; Lowland calcareous grassland. Accessed on 11/09/17, available at <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5629923804839936>

- 13.4.10 When viewing calcareous grassland on site, up close to the plants that grow there, it is a colourful and diverse visual experience with pleasant scents of herbs such as marjoram and thyme clearly discernible. The turf feels springy to walk on and it is an experience quite unlike any other landscape feature on offer in this part of the country. From a distance, calcareous grassland can look less distinctive at certain times of the year. Grassland with scrub such as at Watlington Hill is especially colourful in May when the hawthorn blossoms. It also has particular sounds associated with it such as crickets and birds of the open grassland with scrub such as Whinchat. Opportunities for extending and linking priority habitat calcareous grassland are fairly limited as many of the existing sites are small and isolated. The creation of a better connected network of calcareous grassland that is balanced with scrub would be beneficial for a range of priority species including, in particular, invertebrates such as butterflies like the silver spotted skipper and Adonis blue.
- 13.4.11 *Chilterns Escarpment* contains ten SSSIs either wholly or partially. Habitats contained within the SSSIs include beech woodland, beech woodland, mixed scrub, juniper and chalk grassland, unimproved chalk grassland, calcareous grassland, chalk downland, chalk heath and acid grassland. These habitat mosaics are locally distinctive.
- 13.4.12 *Chilterns Escarpment* also contains Watlington Chalk Pit LNR.

13.5 Cultural and social factors

Land use (and management)

- 13.5.1 Besides from where land is covered by woodland, agricultural land (a mixture of arable and pasture) comprises a significant proportion of land in this character area.
- 13.5.2 Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout different parts of this character area. Priority should be given to safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource.

Public rights of way

- 13.5.3 Ridgeway, Swan's Way, Chiltern Way, Oxfordshire Way and Shakespeare's Way cross through this area.

Settlement

- 13.5.4 While settlements are frequent along the band of Middle and Lower Chalk which runs along the scarp foot (see *Eastern Vale Fringes* (5) and *Central Vale Fringes* (6)), the steep scarp face itself is virtually devoid of buildings with only a few isolated farms nestling in hollows along the lower slopes and within the coombes and minor valleys. The main settlement is at Woodcote, where a sizeable village has developed on the much shallower and more gentle gradients of the southern scarp. Other settlement within the character area is located on the level ground at the top of the scarp. This largely comprises individual scattered farms but also some small settlements with a loose linear form, such as Chinnor Hill, Crowell Hill and Christmas Common, and the country mansions of Watlington Park and Swyncombe House, sited on or above the scarp.
- 13.5.5 Traditional building materials are typical of the Chilterns as a whole, with a predominance of red and silver-grey brick and flint. Around Woodcote, brick may account for three quarters of the pre-Victorian buildings and appears in all those built after 1850⁶⁷. Older houses were timber-framed in oak. Plain tiles were the rule on the larger roofs, with thatch on cottages with some slate introduced in Victorian times. Farmsteads are often characterised by large timber framed barns, typically clad with black, horizontal weather boarding with gable walls constructed out of brick and flint.
- 13.5.6 The scarp has a distinctive pattern of roads, with distinctive 'sunken lanes' climbing the scarp face or minor valleys from the vale and other minor roads linking the scattered farmsteads along the plateau top. The M40 motorway is a prominent feature where it carves a route through the chalk scarp at the Stokenchurch Gap.

13.6 Perceptual and aesthetic factors

- 13.6.1 The height of the escarpment offers long distance views to the west and north. Notable viewpoints include Watlington Hill and at Britwell Hill. The M40 motorway at the Stokenchurch Gap is a visual and aural detractor. The cooling towers and chimney at Didcot Power Station are visible from some areas. Red kites are often seen in the skies above the area. Broadleaved woodland is a strong feature in the area that creates a sense of enclosure, particularly in the northern reaches. Narrow lanes with tall hedgerows exist throughout the area.

⁶⁷ Emery, F (1974) *The Oxfordshire Landscape. The making of the English Landscape Series*. Hodder and Stoughton. London.

13.7 Landscape types

13.7.1 The physical form of the scarp face and the 'semi-natural' unspoilt qualities of its vegetation cover provide both unity and coherence to the character of the landscape. However, some localised variations are created by differences in slope, vegetation cover and the degree of enclosure.

13.7.2 *Chilterns Escarpment* is comprised of the following landscape types:

Open escarpment

Key characteristics:

- Well-defined, smooth profile with the main scarp face folded into a series of spurs and valleys.
- Lack of trees creates a 'bald', open character.
- Areas of unimproved chalk grassland of high nature conservation value at Bald Hill, Beacon Hill and Swyncombe Downs, with soft, muted colours.
- Dominance of arable cultivation at Harcourt Hill where gradients are less steep, with stronger, more intense colours.
- Elevated, expansive and invigorating character, with dramatic and extensive views across the vale below.
- Predominantly rural character but with some significant intrusion from M40 motorway.
- Scarp face itself is prominent in views from surrounding area and the lack of vegetation creates high intervisibility along the scarp face.

Enclosed escarpment

Key characteristics:

- scarp face dominated by dense woodland cover or a mosaic of open grassland, scrub and woodland.
- predominantly semi-natural character with a series of broad-leaved woodlands of significant nature conservation value (many designated as SSSI).
- Smooth scarp profile masked by roughly textured vegetation, with sombre, muted colours.
- Enclosed, intimate character within densely wooded areas.

- Semi-enclosed character and some views out across the vale from the scarp within areas with a mosaic of open grassland, scrub and woodland.
- Escarpment prominent in views but woodland cover helps to absorb prominent features and results in low intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed dip slope

- 13.7.3 Three small areas of semi-enclosed dip slope landscape lie adjacent to the scarp top at Christmas Common and either side of the M40 at Bald Hill/Beacon Hill.

Key characteristics:

- Level or gently sloping ground immediately adjacent to the scarp top.
- Generally open character but surrounded by a strong structure of woods, hedgerows or trees.
- Some views possible over the scarp edge at Bald Hill but otherwise views restricted by vegetation to create moderate to low intervisibility.
- Generally rural character but some intrusion from M40 motorway.

Wooded dip slope

- 13.7.4 Two main areas of wooded dip slope landscape lie close to the scarp top within the character area, around Crowell Hill to the north and Woodcote to the south.

Key characteristics:

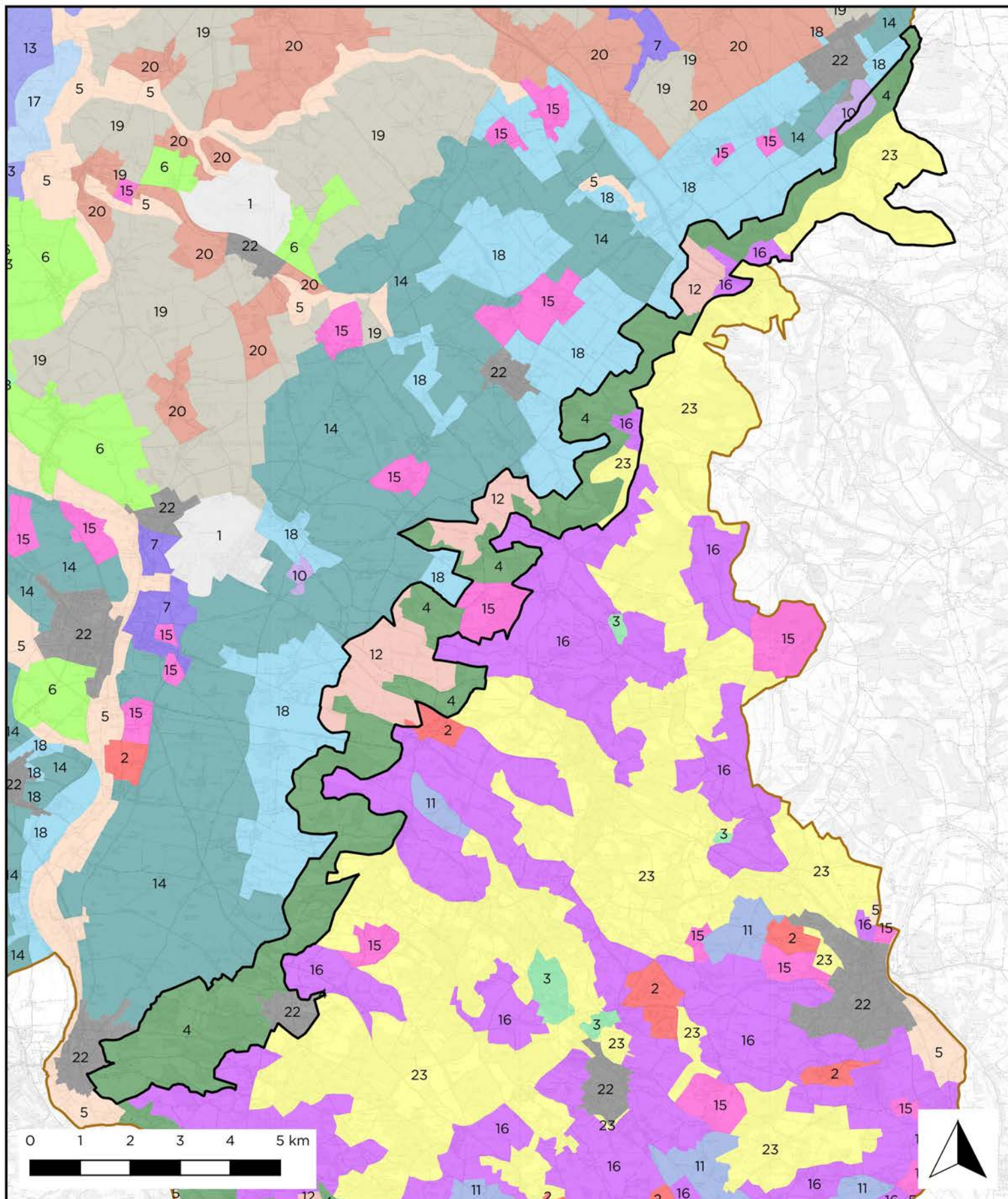
- Flat or gently sloping landform dissected by valleys, particularly in the northern section around Crowell Hill.
- Strong structure of woodland and valley landform creates an attractive, intimate and enclosed character.
- Dominance of semi-natural broad-leaved woodland of high nature conservation value.
- Generally rural character but with some intrusion of built development around Woodcote.
- Low intervisibility.

Parkland and estate farmland

13.7.5 Two areas of wooded parkland and estate landscape occur at Swyncombe House and Watlington Park.

Key characteristics:

- Well-managed parkland character with formal features such as avenues and free-standing mature trees in pasture, blocks of mature woodland and estate walls.
- Rural and unspoilt character.
- Generally enclosed character with strong landform, woodland and tree cover.
- Low intervisibility.



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Legend

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Chilterns Escarpment (LCA 8) | 8. Floodplain wetland | 17. Semi-enclosed farmed hills and valleys |
| South Oxfordshire District Boundary | 9. Institutions | 18. Semi-enclosed rolling downs |
| 1. Airfields/MOD sites | 10. Minerals / landfill sites | 19. Undulating open vale |
| 2. Amenity landscapes | 11. Open dipslope | 20. Undulating semi-enclosed vale |
| 3. Commons and heaths | 12. Open escarpment | 21. Undulating wooded vale |
| 4. Enclosed escarpment | 13. Open farmed hills and valleys | 22. Urban areas |
| 5. Flat floodplain pasture | 14. Open rolling downs | 23. Wooded dipslope |
| 6. Flat open farmland | 15. Parkland and estate farmland | 24. Wooded hills and valleys |
| 7. Flat, semi-enclosed farmland | 16. Semi-enclosed dipslope | |

South Oxfordshire
Landscape
Character Assessment

Map: Chilterns
Escarpment (LCA 8)
LT

Scale: 1:100,000

Date: 23.08.17



13.8 Planning, managing and protecting distinctiveness

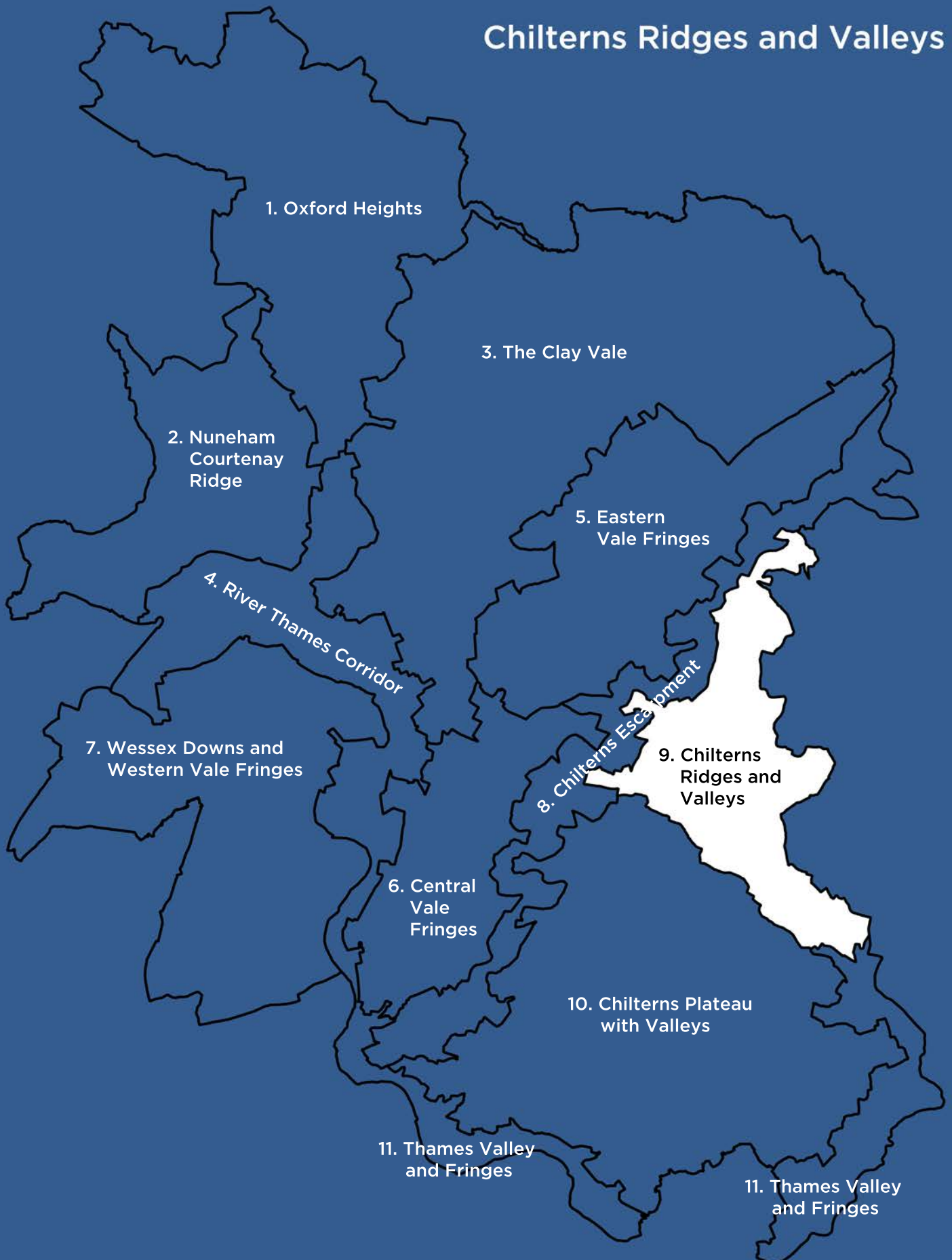
13.8.1 The following table presents recommendations to protect, conserve, enhance and restore the landscape qualities of South Oxfordshire.

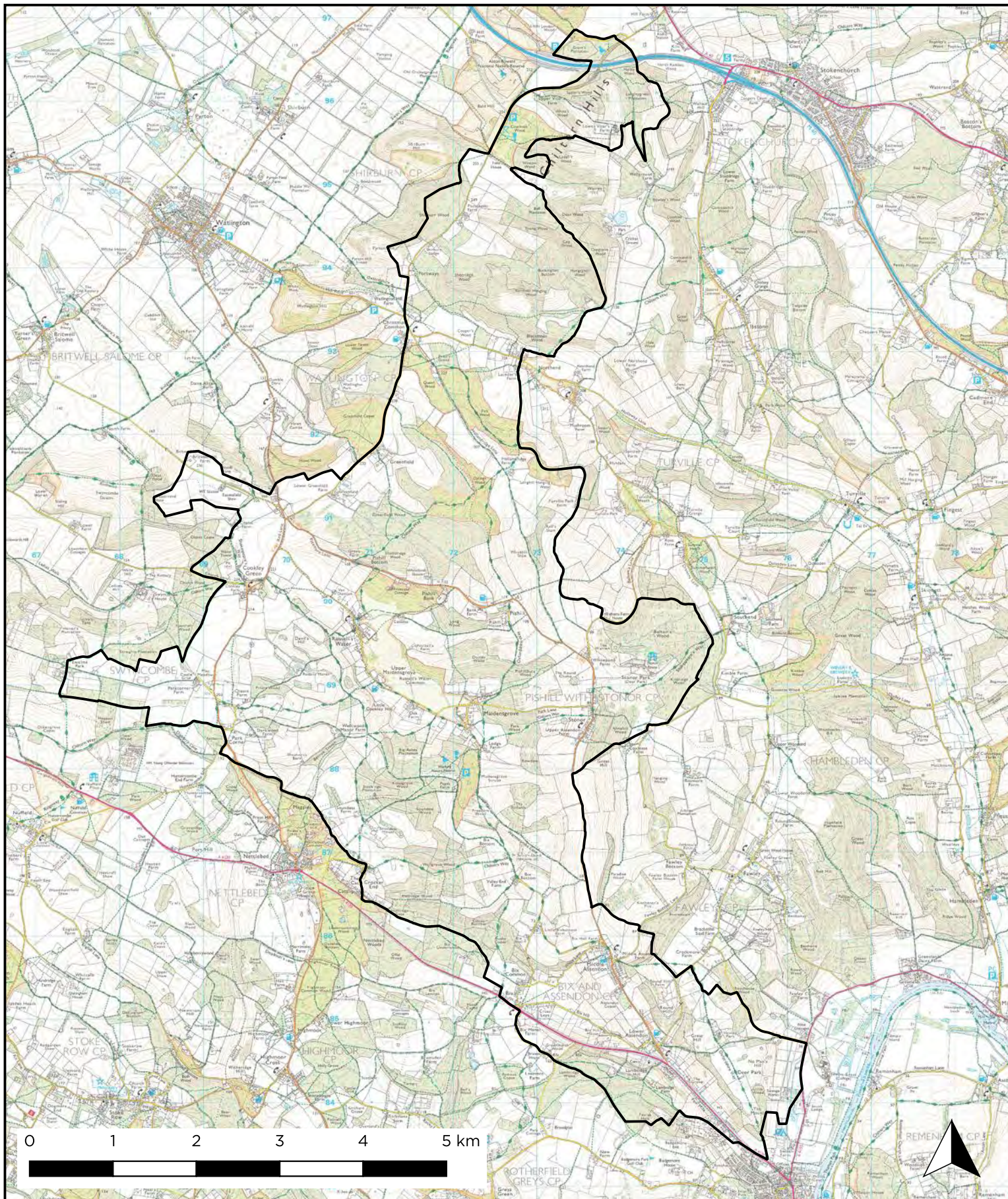
| Forces for change | Guidelines/Mitigation |
|--|---|
| Agricultural intensification, diversification and farm amalgamation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote, where possible, the conservation of the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly on land adjacent to watercourses. Recognise that grazing sheep and cattle can make a contribution to the landscape's identity and distinctiveness. Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type. Felling of mature specimens should be resisted. Planting of new hedgerow trees such as oak and ash, and tree belts, should be encouraged. Strengthen the field pattern by conserving species rich hedgerows and sympathetically maintaining all hedgerows. Priority should be given to safeguarding and where expanding this resource, including replanting gappy hedges using species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, wayfaring tree, dogwood and spindle, particularly in those LCAs where they remain a significant feature. Protect stone walls from deterioration. Safeguard, maintain and enhance the quality of unimproved chalk and limestone grassland with sustainable grazing techniques. Identify opportunities for calcareous grassland restoration by linking and extending the existing resource, particularly along the Chilterns escarpment. |
| Development, expansion and infilling of settlements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns and villages with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside. Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements, and promote the use of building materials to maintain vernacular style and a scale of development and that are appropriate to <i>Chilterns Escarpment</i> (see also the South Oxfordshire Design Guide , November 2016; and the Chilterns AONB Building Design Guide 2010). Local building materials should be used, including flintstone and brick or red and blue brick and clay tiles in the Chilterns. |
| Introduction of tall buildings and structures such as | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise impact by locating new communication masts on existing structures or by using existing masts. Bury cables underground and seek opportunities to bury existing |

| | |
|--|---|
| communication masts and electricity pylons. | overhead cables. |
| Decline in management of existing woodlands and trees. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote the sustainable management of existing woods and plantations, and the establishment of new tree belts and plantations with a significant proportion of deciduous tree and shrub species characteristic of this area.• Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as crack willow, oak and ash.• Promote the sustainable management of existing ancient woodland to safeguard its long-term survival.• Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and, where appropriate, pollarding willows. |

Landscape Character Area 9

Chilterns Ridges and Valleys





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Legend

 9. Chilterns Ridges and Valleys

Landscape Character Area 9

South Oxfordshire Landscape
 Character Assessment

1:60,000 scale

31.07.17





Arable farmland to the west of Middle Assendon



Arable farmland to the west of Middle Assendon



Northend



Pasture to the east of Pishill



Farm buildings at Balham's Lane



Red Kite near Stonor



Stonor Park



Village Hall at Northend

14 Chilterns Ridges and Valleys (LCA 9)

14.1 Summary

- 14.1.1 The heavily incised dip slope of the Chiltern hills to the north-west of Henley-on-Thames, which forms a distinctive landscape of ridges and valleys.

14.2 Location and boundaries

- 14.2.1 *Chilterns Ridges and Valleys* covers an area of land forming part of the Chilterns dip slope, from the Aston Rowant NNR in the north, to the town of Henley-on-Thames to the south. This character area is bound by the top of the Chilterns escarpment to the west.
- 14.2.2 This character area is located entirely within the Chilterns AONB.
- 14.2.3 This character area is defined by the district boundary to the east, *Chilterns Escarpment* (8) to the north west, *Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* (10) to the south west and *Thames Valley and Fringes* (11) to the south.
- 14.2.4 *Chilterns Ridges and Valleys* is located entirely within NCA 110 Chilterns.

14.3 Key characteristics

- An undulating landscape defined by strong valleys ranging between c. 40m AOD and c. 250m AOD
- The M40 motorway at the Stokenchurch Gap is a visual and aural detractor in the landscape.
- This character area is located almost entirely within the Chilterns AONB.
- Steep valley sides typically support woodland, with distinctive valley top 'beech hangers'.
- Narrow lanes and tall hedgerows.
- Extensive areas of Ancient Woodland.
- Agricultural land including arable and pasture is located on the lower valley sides and bottoms.
- This character area contains a variety of SSSIs including parts of

Aston Rowant SAC, SSSI and NNR (flower-rich chalk grassland, beech woodland and juniper scrub).

- Sparsely settled with small villages and hamlets located mainly on the ridges.

14.4 Natural factors

Geology and landform

14.4.1 The area is underlain by Upper Chalk, the youngest of the several layers of chalk laid down in the Cretaceous period. The strata are tilted towards the south-east but the land dips away from the scarp at such a gentle angle that the fall of the ground is almost imperceptible, giving the slope the character of a plateau. In this part of the dip slope, the plateau is heavily dissected by quite steeply incised valleys, leaving only narrow ridges in between which contrasts with the more level and continuous plateau further south.

14.4.2 Deposits of clay-with-flints and pockets of Reading Beds mask the chalk geology on the ridges and typically support woodland and small areas of remnant heath (e.g. at Russell's Water).

14.4.3 The local topography of this area is dominated by the Assendon and Stonor Valleys which merge to form the distinctive straight approach into Henley known as the 'Fair Mile'. Above this, the valleys have a strong and complex profile, with heavily folded sides and narrow meandering spines which create enclosed, intimate landscapes.

14.4.4 The topography of *Chilterns Ridges and Valleys* ranges from c. 40m AOD to c. 250m AOD. The lowest areas of land are located at the far south around the River Thames. The highest area of land in this character area is located to the south of Bald Hill at 255m AOD. Other notable high points include Britwell Hill at 230m AOD.

Hydrology

14.4.5 *Chilterns Ridges and Valleys* contains limited numbers of watercourses.

Biodiversity/flora and fauna

14.4.6 Priority habitats include deciduous woodland, wood-pasture and parkland, traditional orchards, semi-improved grassland and lowland calcareous grassland.

- 14.4.7 The steep valley sides typically support woodland, with distinctive valley top 'beech hangers' framing the valley and emphasising its depth. *This character area* contains extensive areas of Ancient Woodland⁶⁸.
- 14.4.8 Parts of Aston Rowant SAC (also SSSI and NNR) are located within *Chilterns Ridges and Valleys*. Aston Rowant is designated mainly for its flower-rich chalk grassland, beech woodland and juniper scrub⁶⁹.
- 14.4.9 *Chilterns Ridges and Valleys* contains eight SSSIs either wholly or partially. Habitats contained within the SSSIs include beech woodland, mixed scrub, juniper and chalk grassland, chalk downland, chalk scrub, acid grassland and chalk grassland.

14.5 Cultural and social factors

Land use (and management)

- 14.5.1 Pasture and arable land exists on the lower valley sides and bottoms in this character area. A large area of pasture is located at Russell's Water common in the centre of the area.
- 14.5.2 Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout different parts of this character area. Priority should be given to safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource.
- 14.5.3 Stonor Park, a registered park and garden is located in this character area.

Public rights of way

- 14.5.4 The Chiltern Way, Oxfordshire Way and Shakespeare's Way cross through this area.

Settlement

- 14.5.5 The pattern of settlement in the Chilterns is typically one of small hamlets and farms scattered amongst extensive woods and commons. Most of the settlements are located on the ridges (e.g. Middle Assendon) or within the valleys (e.g. Stonor) and have a typically linear form.

⁶⁸ Natural England (2017) MAGIC. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at:
<http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

⁶⁹
<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1002737&SiteName=&countyCode=34&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=>

- 14.5.6 Many settlements date from the early middle ages, which saw enclosure and clearance of 'wastes' and colonisation of previously unpopulated areas, during a period of relative prosperity and rapid population growth. 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'⁷⁰. The process of enclosure through the Tudor and Jacobean period was accompanied by the development of grand mansions and manor houses, including Stonor Park which has a significant impact on local landscape character in the Stonor valley.
- 14.5.7 Traditional building materials are typical of the Chilterns as a whole. Brick-making was an early industry in the area (e.g. at Nettlebed in the fifteenth century) and red brick, together with silver-grey flint, are the predominant materials⁷¹. Older houses were timber-framed in oak and chalk blocks have sometimes been used on Chiltern buildings. Plain tiles were the rule on the larger roofs, with thatch on cottages and with some slate introduced in Victorian times. Farmsteads are often characterised by large timber framed barns, typically clad with black, horizontal weather boarding with gable walls constructed out of brick and flint.
- 14.5.8 A small section of the M40 motorway crosses through the area at the eastern side of the Stokenchurch Gap.

14.6 Perceptual and aesthetic factors

- 14.6.1 Rolling topography, extensive woodland cover and narrow lanes with tall hedgerows create a strong sense of enclosure across the area. Red kites are often seen in the skies above the area. The eastern section of the M40 motorway at the Stokenchurch Gap is a visual and aural detractor in the landscape. Tree lined ridges are a common feature in the area. Long distance views are limited from roads due to the rolling topography.

⁷⁰ Countryside Commission (1992) The Chilterns Landscape. CCP 392. Countryside Commission.

⁷¹ Emery, F (1974) The Oxfordshire Landscape. The making of the English Landscape Series. Hodder and Stoughton. London.

14.7 Landscape types

14.7.1 The complex topography and mosaic of woodland and open farmland paradoxically create both diversity and uniformity in the landscape of the *Chilterns Ridges and Valleys*. This very complexity is a consistent and distinctive feature of the area, and the most obvious differences in landscape character are between the very intimate, enclosed wooded landscapes and those which have a more open structure and character.

14.7.2 *Chilterns Ridges and Valleys* is comprised of the following landscape types:

Semi-enclosed dip slope

14.7.3 This slightly looser mosaic of farmland and woodland is characteristic of the western end of the area, particularly on the ridges and more gentle slopes at the head of the Assendon valley and along the lower slopes of the Stonor valley.

Key characteristics:

- Typically level or more gently sloping ground.
- Comparatively open fields contained within a strong structure of woods, hedgerows or trees to form a loose mosaic.
- Dominance of arable cultivation with pasture more typical of lower slopes or valley bottoms.
- Some views off ridges into valleys but landform and strong structure of woods and hedgerows generally provides visual containment with moderate to low intervisibility.
- Distinctive pattern of winding rural roads, irregular field boundaries and scattered rural settlements, typical of 'ancient countryside'.
- Generally rural and unspoilt character.

Wooded dip slope

14.7.4 This is the dominant landscape type within the area, with extensive blocks of woodland occupying the ridges and valley sides and creating a much more enclosed mosaic of wooded farmland.

Key characteristics:

- Complex landform of ridges and valleys.
- Heavily wooded character, including extensive stands of ancient,

semi-natural broadleaved woodland, mature beechwoods and more recent plantations.

- Strong structure of woodland and incised valley landform creates an intimate and enclosed character.
- Distinctive pattern of valley-side woods with arable or pasture on lower slopes and in valley bottom.
- Distinctive pattern of winding rural roads, irregular field boundaries and scattered rural settlements, typical of 'ancient countryside'.
- Generally rural and unspoilt character.
- Low intervisibility.

Commons and heaths

- 14.7.5 Two small areas of open common or heath occur within the area, at Russell's Water, Maidensgrove and at Bix.

Key characteristics:

- Unfenced character with open access.
- Semi-natural vegetation dominated by acid grassland or heath, typically forming a mosaic of open areas, scrub and woodland with typical species of acid conditions (e.g. birch, gorse, bracken etc.).
- Typically associated with loose linear settlements, with buildings dotted around the margins of the common.
- Rural and unspoilt character.
- Moderate to low intervisibility.

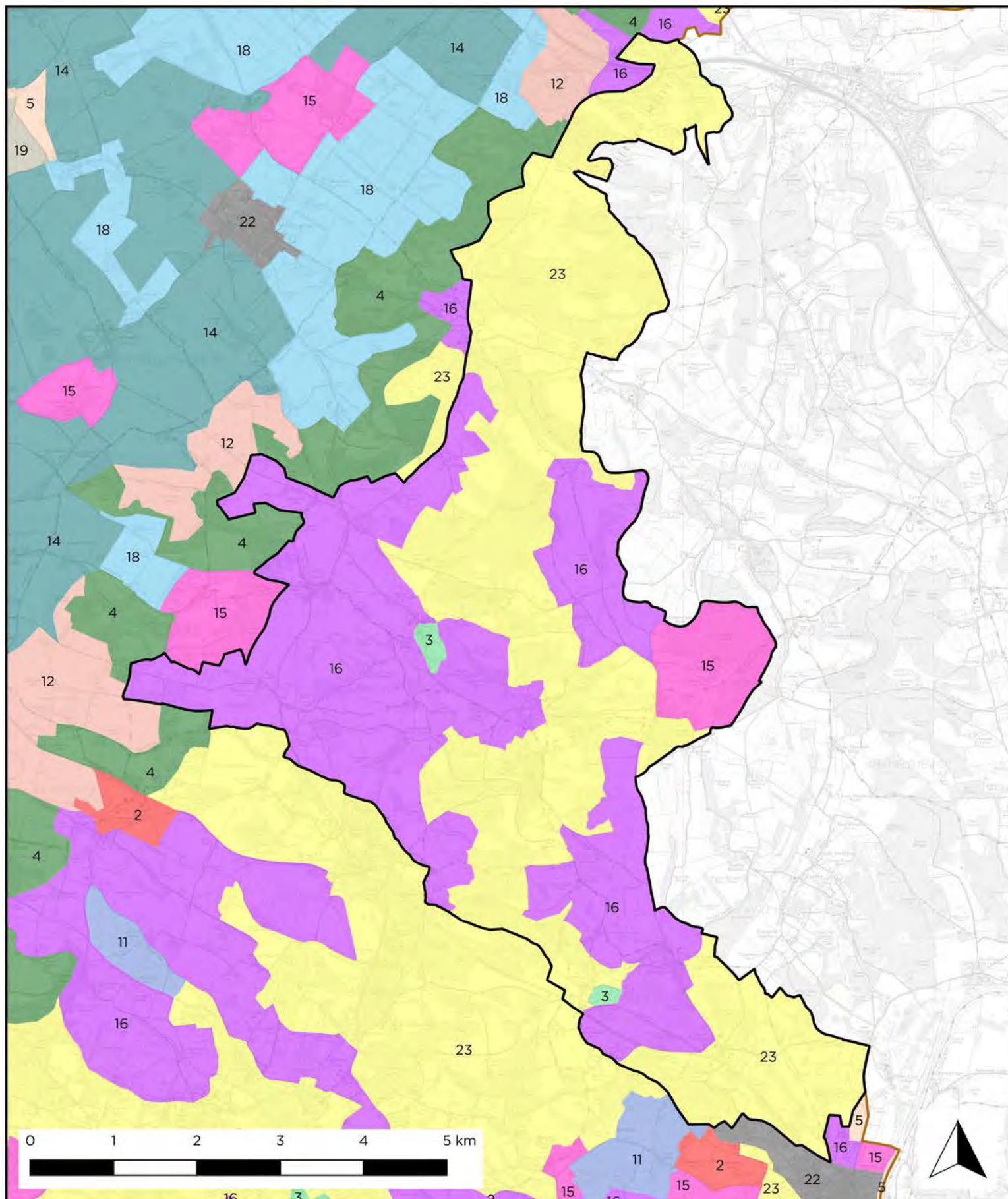
Parkland and Estate farmland

- 14.7.6 The main area of highly distinctive parkland landscape is associated with Stonor Park, set within a valley along the eastern boundary of the area.

Key characteristics:

- Well-managed parkland character with formal features such as avenues and free-standing mature trees in pasture, blocks of mature woodland and estate boundaries.
- Rural and unspoilt character.
- Generally enclosed character with strong landform, woodland and tree cover.

- Low intervisibility.



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Legend

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Chilterns Ridges and Valleys (LCA 9) | 8. Floodplain wetland | 17. Semi-enclosed farmed hills and valleys |
| South Oxfordshire District Boundary | 9. Institutions | 18. Semi-enclosed rolling downs |
| 1. Airfields/MOD sites | 10. Minerals / landfill sites | 19. Undulating open vale |
| 2. Amenity landscapes | 11. Open dipslope | 20. Undulating semi-enclosed vale |
| 3. Commons and heaths | 12. Open escarpment | 21. Undulating wooded vale |
| 4. Enclosed escarpment | 13. Open farmed hills and valleys | 22. Urban areas |
| 5. Flat floodplain pasture | 14. Open rolling downs | 23. Wooded dipslope |
| 6. Flat open farmland | 15. Parkland and estate farmland | 24. Wooded hills and valleys |
| 7. Flat, semi-enclosed farmland | 16. Semi-enclosed dipslope | |

South Oxfordshire
Landscape
Character Assessment

Map: Chilterns Ridges
and Valleys (LCA 9)
LT

Scale: 1:60,000

Date: 23.08.17



14.8 Planning, managing and protecting distinctiveness

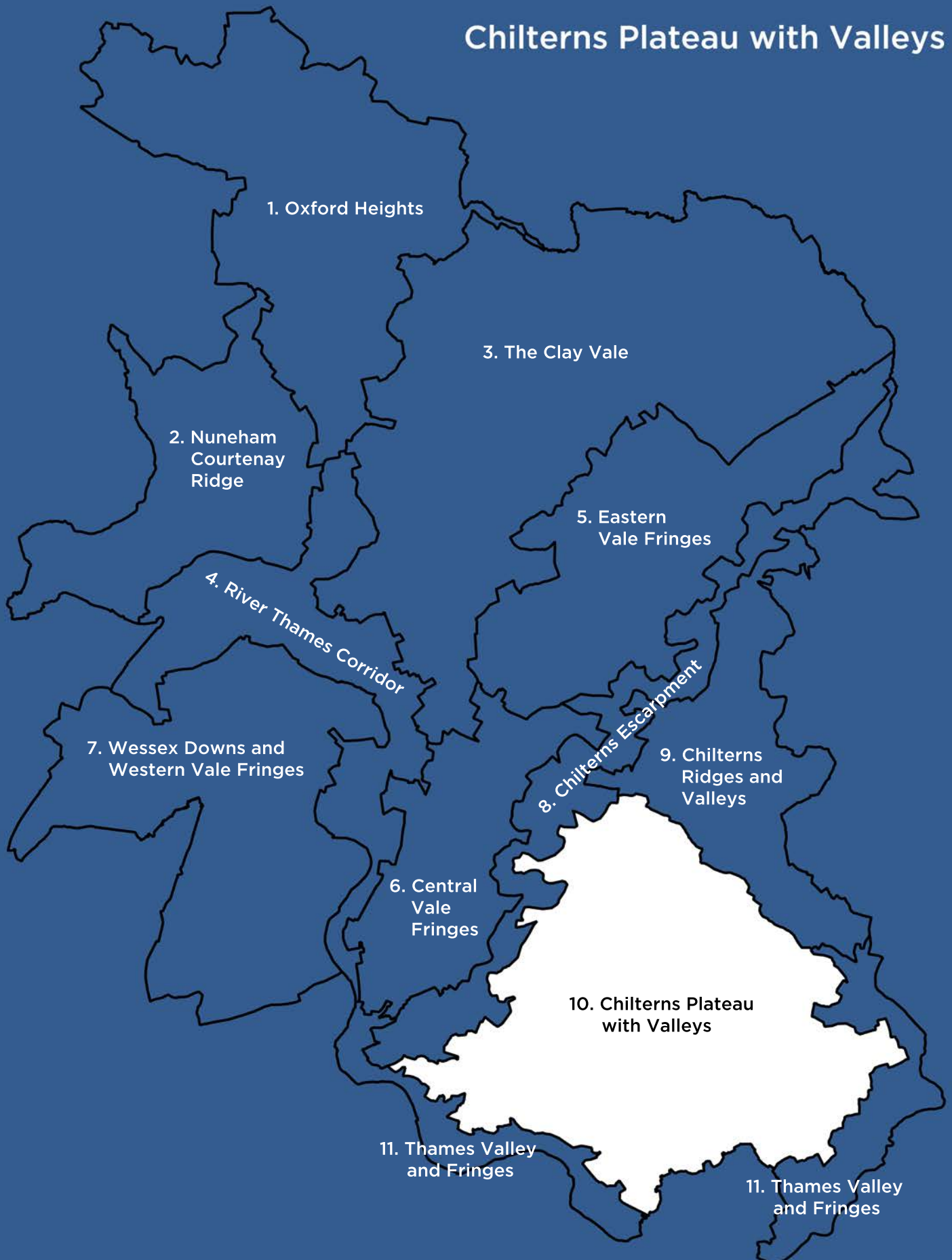
14.8.1 The following table presents recommendations to protect, conserve, enhance and restore the landscape qualities of South Oxfordshire.

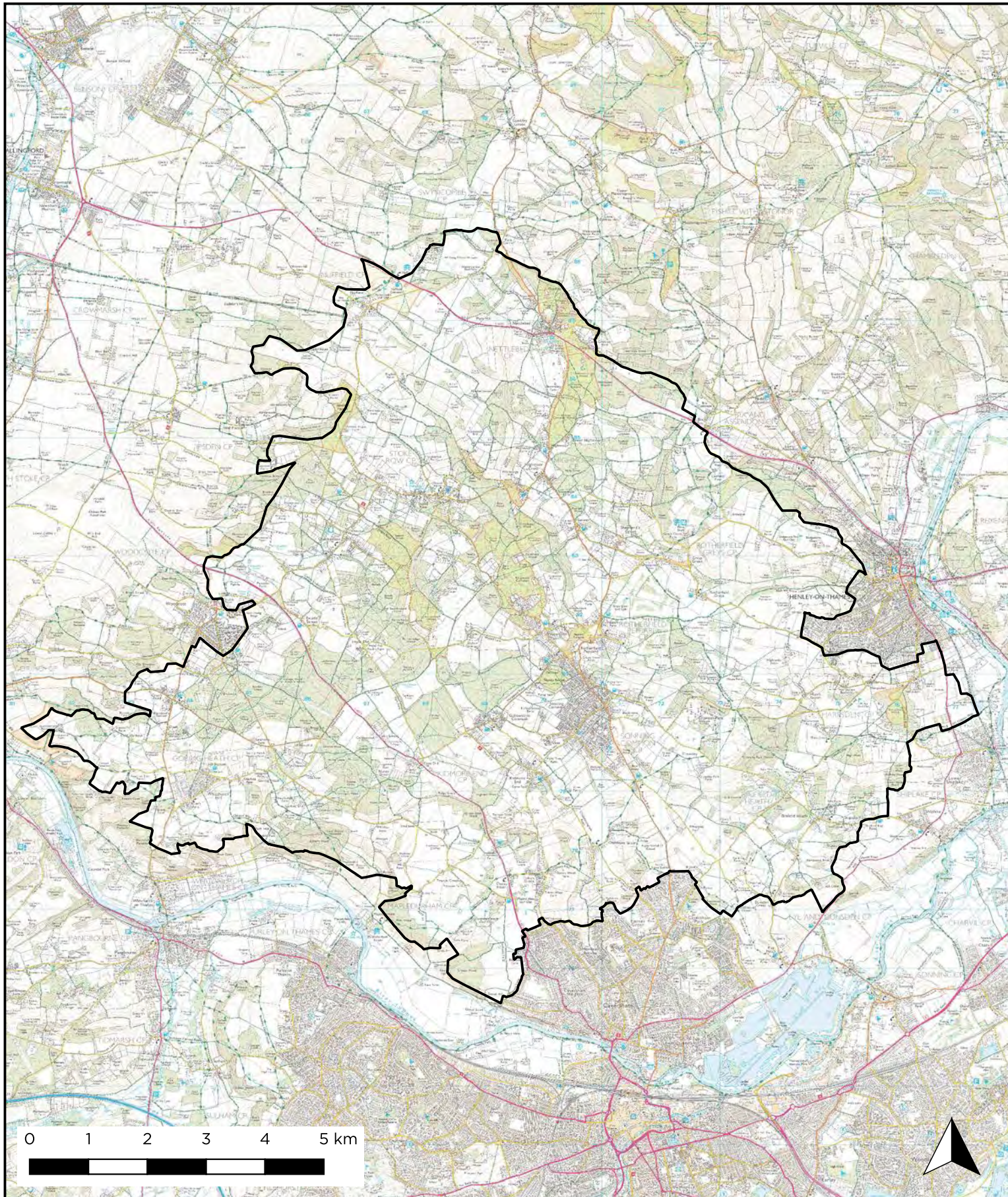
| Forces for change | Guidelines/Mitigation |
|---|--|
| Agricultural intensification, diversification and farm amalgamation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safeguard, maintain and enhance the quality of unimproved chalk and limestone grassland with sustainable grazing techniques. Identify opportunities for calcareous grassland restoration by linking and extending the existing resource, particularly along the Chilterns escarpment. Strengthen the field pattern of hedgerows and hedgerow trees where it is weak, by planting up gaps using appropriate native tree and shrub species. Hedgerow trees are a key feature of this landscape type and felling of mature specimens should be resisted whereas the planting of new hedgerow trees and tree belts should be encouraged. Where appropriate, replant gappy hedges using species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, wayfaring tree, field maple, hazel dogwood and spindle and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash. Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type. Promote, where possible, the conservation of the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland particularly on land adjacent to watercourses. Recognise that grazing sheep and cattle can make a contribution to the landscape's identity and distinctiveness. Protect stone walls from deterioration. Promote the re-establishment of acid grassland and heath on the Chilterns Commons through a combination of selective tree felling, scrub and bracken control, and fencing and grazing. Traditionally, the commons would have been grazed but are now usually dominated by woodland, scrub and bracken. Selective clearance, followed by fencing and the re-introduction of grazing on appropriate sites, should be actively encouraged. There are opportunities for extending this resource within the landscape type to meet the targets outlined in the relevant habitat action plan. |
| Inappropriate or inconsistent management, or neglect of existing parklands. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safeguard, maintain and enhance the characteristic landscape features of existing parklands including veteran trees, avenues of trees, lakes, woods and walls. This includes parkland at Stonor Park. |
| Inappropriate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns |

| | |
|---|--|
| built form, development, expansion and infilling of settlements. | <p>and villages with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen any development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the use of building materials and a scale of development and that is appropriate to this landscape type. This includes brick and flint, red and blue bricks and clay tiles in the Chilterns. |
| Introduction of tall buildings and structures such as communication masts and electricity pylons. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise impact by locating new communication masts on existing structures or by using existing masts. Bury cables underground and seek opportunities to bury existing overhead cables. |
| Inappropriate or inconsistent management, or neglect of existing woodlands. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the sustainable management of existing woodland to safeguard its long-term survival. There is a significant amount of ancient semi-natural woodland within the Chilterns and the priority must be to ensure that all sites are in favourable condition and management. |

Landscape Character Area 10

Chilterns Plateau with Valleys





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Legend

 10. Chilterns Plateau with Valleys

Landscape Character Area 10
 South Oxfordshire Landscape
 Character Assessment
 1:85,000 scale
 31.07.17





View north from Nuffield



View south from Huntercombe End



Arable farmland to the north of Caversham



Pasture to the west of Gallowstree Common



Church of St John the Evangelist at Stoke Row



Arable land at Huntercombe End



Pasture at Huntercombe End



Huntercombe Golf Club at Nuffield Common

15 Chilterns Plateau with Valleys (LCA 10)

15.1 Summary

- 15.1.1 The southern part of the Chilterns dip slope formed by a gently dipping plateau dissected by an irregular pattern of shallow valleys.

15.2 Location and boundaries

- 15.2.1 *Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* forms the part of the Chilterns dip slope, bounded by the top of the escarpment to the west and the Thames Valley to the south and east.
- 15.2.2 This character area contains a large section of the Chilterns AONB.
- 15.2.3 *Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* is defined by the district boundary partially to the south, *Chilterns Ridges and Valleys* (9) to the north east, *Thames Valley and Fringes* (11) to the south east and south west and *Chilterns Escarpment* (8) to the north west.
- 15.2.4 *Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* is located entirely within NCA 110 Chilterns.

15.3 Key characteristics

- An undulating landscape ranging from c. 40m AOD to c. 210m AOD.
- The plateau is dissected by an irregular pattern of shallow, small-scale dry valleys.
- Heavily wooded landscape.
- Extensive areas of Ancient Woodland, some of which are designated as SSSI.
- The A407 and A4130 roads cross through the area.
- Sparsely settled with small villages and hamlets. The village of Sonning Common comprises the largest settlement.
- Agriculture comprises the predominant land use with arable and pasture.
- Narrow lanes and tall hedgerows.

15.4 Natural factors

Geology and landform

- 15.4.1 The area is underlain by Upper Chalk, the youngest of the several layers of chalk laid down in the Cretaceous period. The strata are tilted towards the south-east but the land dips away from the scarp at such a gentle angle that the fall of the ground is almost imperceptible, giving the slope the character of a plateau.
- 15.4.2 Extensive deposits of clay-with-flints, with smaller pockets of Reading Beds, mask the chalk geology on the plateau and typically support extensive areas of woodland and small areas of remnant heath and grass common (e.g. around Rotherfield, Peppard and Nettlebed).
- 15.4.3 In this part of the dip slope, the plateau is comparatively level and expansive and is dissected by an irregular pattern of shallow, small-scale dry valleys which seem to appear unexpectedly in an irregular pattern across the plateau. Their enclosed, intimate and small-scale character tends to contrast with the broader plateau landscape above.
- 15.4.4 The topography of *Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* ranges from c. 40m AOD to c. 210m AOD. The lowest areas of land are located around the River Thames to the east. The highest area of land in this character area is located in the village of Nuffield at 212m AOD. Other notable high points include Windmill Hill, to the north of the village of Nettlebed at 211m AOD.

Hydrology

- 15.4.5 *Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* contains a limited number of watercourses.

Biodiversity/flora and fauna

- 15.4.6 Priority habitats include deciduous woodland, wood-pasture and parkland, traditional orchards, lowland dry acid grassland, semi-improved grassland and lowland calcareous grassland.
- 15.4.7 This is a heavily wooded landscape containing extensive areas of Ancient Woodland⁷².
- 15.4.8 *Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* contains five SSSIs either wholly or partially.

⁷² Natural England (2017) MAGIC. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

- 15.4.9 Habitats contained within the SSSIs are comprised mostly of deciduous woodland.

15.5 Cultural and social factors

Land use (and management)

- 15.5.1 Registered Parks and Gardens within Chilterns Ridges and Valleys includes Greys Court and the western area of Friar Park.

- 15.5.2 Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout different parts of this character area. Priority should be given to safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource.

Public rights of way

- 15.5.3 Chiltern Way crosses through this area.

Settlement

- 15.5.4 The pattern of settlement in the Chilterns is typically one of small hamlets and farms scattered amongst extensive woods and commons. Many of these date from the early middle ages, which saw enclosure and clearance of 'wastes' and colonisation of previously unpopulated areas, during a period of relative prosperity and rapid population growth. 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'.

- 15.5.5 This process often led to the development of a loose, linear form to medieval settlements (e.g. Nettlebed) and many were also associated with a village green or with larger areas of common land (e.g. Rotherfield Greys). The village of Nettlebed is one of the largest within this area and has been an important centre of the brick and tile industry since the fifteenth century and for pottery after the seventeenth century. Production ceased in 1927⁷³ and only a single bottle kiln remains preserved within a modern housing estate. Furniture making was another important industry within this area, using timber from the extensive beechwoods.

⁷³ Bond, J and Over, L (1988) Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Ordnance Survey Historical Guides. George Philip & Son. London.

15.5.6 Traditional building materials are typical of the Chilterns as a whole with a predominance of red brick, together with silver-grey flint. Older houses were timber-framed in oak and chalk blocks have sometimes been used on Chiltern buildings⁷⁴. Plain tiles were the rule on the larger roofs, with thatch on cottages with some slate introduced in Victorian times. Farmsteads are often characterised by large timber framed barns, typically clad with black, horizontal weather boarding with gable walls constructed out of brick and flint⁷⁵.

15.5.7 The A407 and A4130 roads cross through the area.

15.6 Perceptual and aesthetic factors

15.6.1 Large field sizes are widespread across the landscape and are often bounded by woodland. Long distance views are limited from roads across the plateau due to the sloping topography and strong woodland cover. Red kites are often seen in the skies above the area. Narrow lanes with tall hedgerows exist throughout the area.

⁷⁴ Bond, J and Over, L (1988) Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Ordnance Survey Historical Guides. George Philip & Son. London.

⁷⁵ Countryside Commission (1992) The Chilterns Landscape. CCP 392. Countryside Commission.

15.7 Landscape types

15.7.1 Like *Chilterns Ridges and Valleys* (9), this part of the Chilterns dip slope has a surprisingly uniform character, despite its irregular pattern of plateaux and valleys and its mosaic of farmland and woodland. This complexity is a consistent and distinctive feature of the area, and the most obvious differences in landscape character are between the very intimate, enclosed wooded landscapes and those which have a more open structure and character.

15.7.2 *Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* is comprised of the following landscape types:

Open dip slope

Key characteristics:

15.7.3 A few isolated pockets of open farmland with a weak landscape structure occur within the Chilterns dip slope, (e.g. to the north-west and north-east of Caversham, south of Nuffield and to the west of Henley), usually where more gentle gradients have encouraged intensive arable cultivation.

- Gently sloping ground.
- Dominance of intensive arable cultivation with large scale field pattern, weak hedgerow structure and very little woodland cover.
- Distinctively 'grey' and flinty soils.
- Predominantly rural character but with some limited intrusion from power lines (e.g. on both sides of Caversham).
- Large-scale, open landscape with high intervisibility in immediate area but long distance views contained by neighbouring woodland.

Semi-enclosed dip slope

Key characteristics:

15.7.4 This loose mosaic of farmland and woodland is characteristic of the more level ground of the plateau to the south of Nuffield and near Woodcote, and particularly the 'lower' dip slope to the south of Sonning Common.

- Typically level or more gently sloping ground.
- Comparatively open fields contained within a strong structure of

woods, hedgerows or trees to form a loose mosaic.

- Dominance of arable cultivation.
- Strong structure of woods and hedgerows generally provides visual containment and results in moderate to low intervisibility.
- Distinctive pattern of winding rural roads, irregular field boundaries and scattered rural settlements, typical of 'ancient countryside'.
- Generally rural and unspoilt character but with some 'suburbanising' influences within rural settlements and along main roads (e.g. A4074, A4130), and localised intrusion of built development and power lines (e.g. around Sonning Common and Caversham).

Wooded dip slope

Key characteristics:

15.7.5 This is the dominant landscape type within the area, with extensive blocks of woodland occupying much of the dip slope and creating a more enclosed mosaic of wooded farmland.

- Distinctive landform of plateaux dissected by a network of shallow, dry valleys.
- Heavily wooded character, including extensive stands of ancient, semi-natural broadleaved woodland, mature beechwoods and more recent plantations.
- Strong structure of woodland and complex landform creates an intimate and enclosed character with a particular feeling of secrecy in some valleys.
- Distinctive pattern of winding rural roads, irregular field boundaries and scattered rural settlements, typical of 'ancient countryside'.
- Generally rural and unspoilt character with only localised suburbanising influences within villages, along road corridors or around the fringes of the main settlements.
- Low intervisibility.

Commons and heaths

Key characteristics:

15.7.6 Two main areas of open common or heath occur within the area, around Nettlebed and Rotherfield Peppard.

- Unfenced character with open access.
- Semi-natural vegetation dominated by acid grassland or heath, typically forming a mosaic of open areas, scrub and woodland with typical species of acid conditions (e.g. birch, gorse, bracken etc.).
- Typically associated with loose linear settlements, with buildings dotted around the margins of the common.
- Rural and unspoilt character.
- Moderate to low intervisibility.

Parkland and estate farmland

Key characteristics:

15.7.7 There are several areas of distinctive parkland landscape within this part of the Chilterns dip slope, including Greys Court, Checkendon Court and Crowsley Park and several others located around the fringes of Henley.

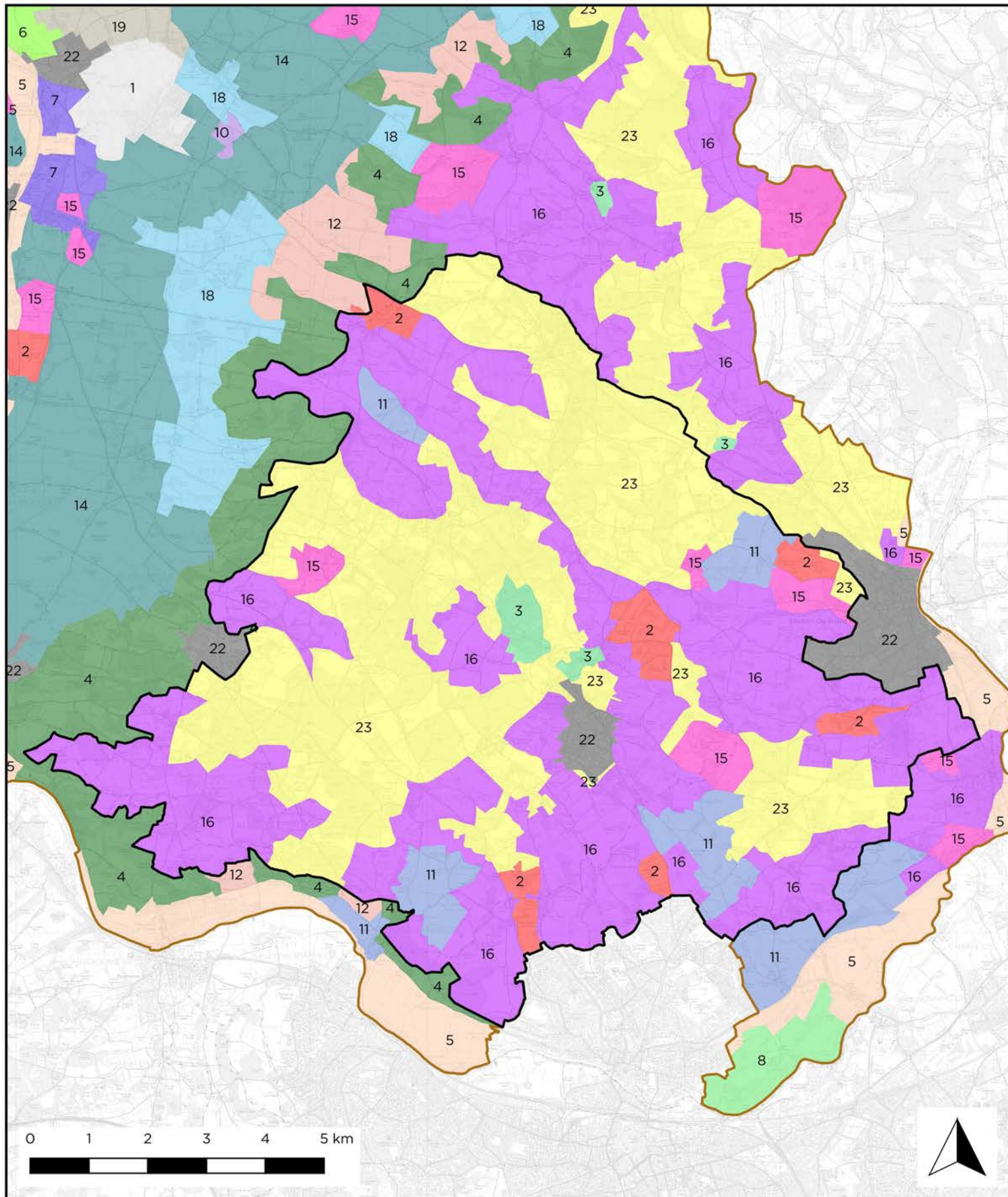
- Distinctive parkland landscape with formal features such as avenues and free-standing mature trees in pasture, blocks of mature woodland and estate boundaries.
- Rural and unspoilt character.
- Generally enclosed character with strong landform, woodland and tree cover.
- Low intervisibility.
- Generally well-managed character but some parks showing signs of decline (e.g. Crowsley Park).

Amenity landscape

Key characteristics:

15.7.8 This type is represented by a number of golf courses scattered within the Chiltern Hills and a sports ground near Caversham.

- Typical golf course landscapes of greens, fairways, roughs and bunkers, with associated buildings and car parking.
- Intensively managed and somewhat sub urban character.
- Use of exotic tree species out of character with locality.
- Rural, often well-wooded setting with moderate to low intervisibility.



Legend

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| Chilterns Plateau with Valleys (LCA 10) | 8. Floodplain wetland | 17. Semi-enclosed farmed hills and valleys |
| South Oxfordshire District Boundary | 9. Institutions | 18. Semi-enclosed rolling downs |
| 1. Airfields/MOD sites | 10. Minerals / landfill sites | 19. Undulating open vale |
| 2. Amenity landscapes | 11. Open dipslope | 20. Undulating semi-enclosed vale |
| 3. Commons and heaths | 12. Open escarpment | 21. Undulating wooded vale |
| 4. Enclosed escarpment | 13. Open farmed hills and valleys | 22. Urban areas |
| 5. Flat floodplain pasture | 14. Open rolling downs | 23. Wooded dipslope |
| 6. Flat open farmland | 15. Parkland and estate farmland | 24. Wooded hills and valleys |
| 7. Flat, semi-enclosed farmland | 16. Semi-enclosed dipslope | |

South Oxfordshire
Landscape
Character Assessment

Map: Chilterns Plateau
with Valleys (LCA 10)
LT

Scale: 1:85,000

Date: 23.08.17



15.8 Planning, managing and protecting distinctiveness

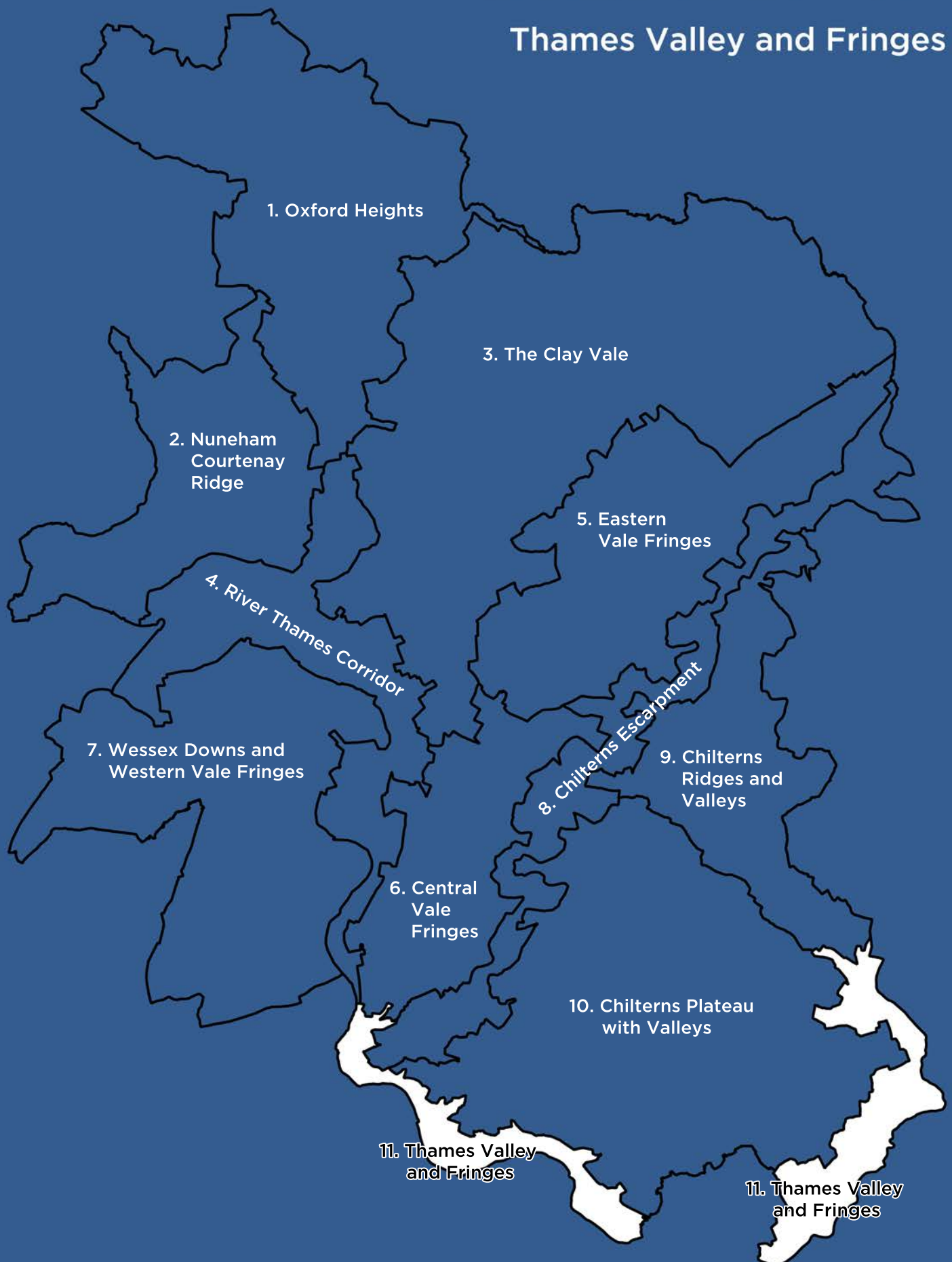
15.8.1 The following table presents recommendations to protect, conserve, enhance and restore the landscape qualities of South Oxfordshire.

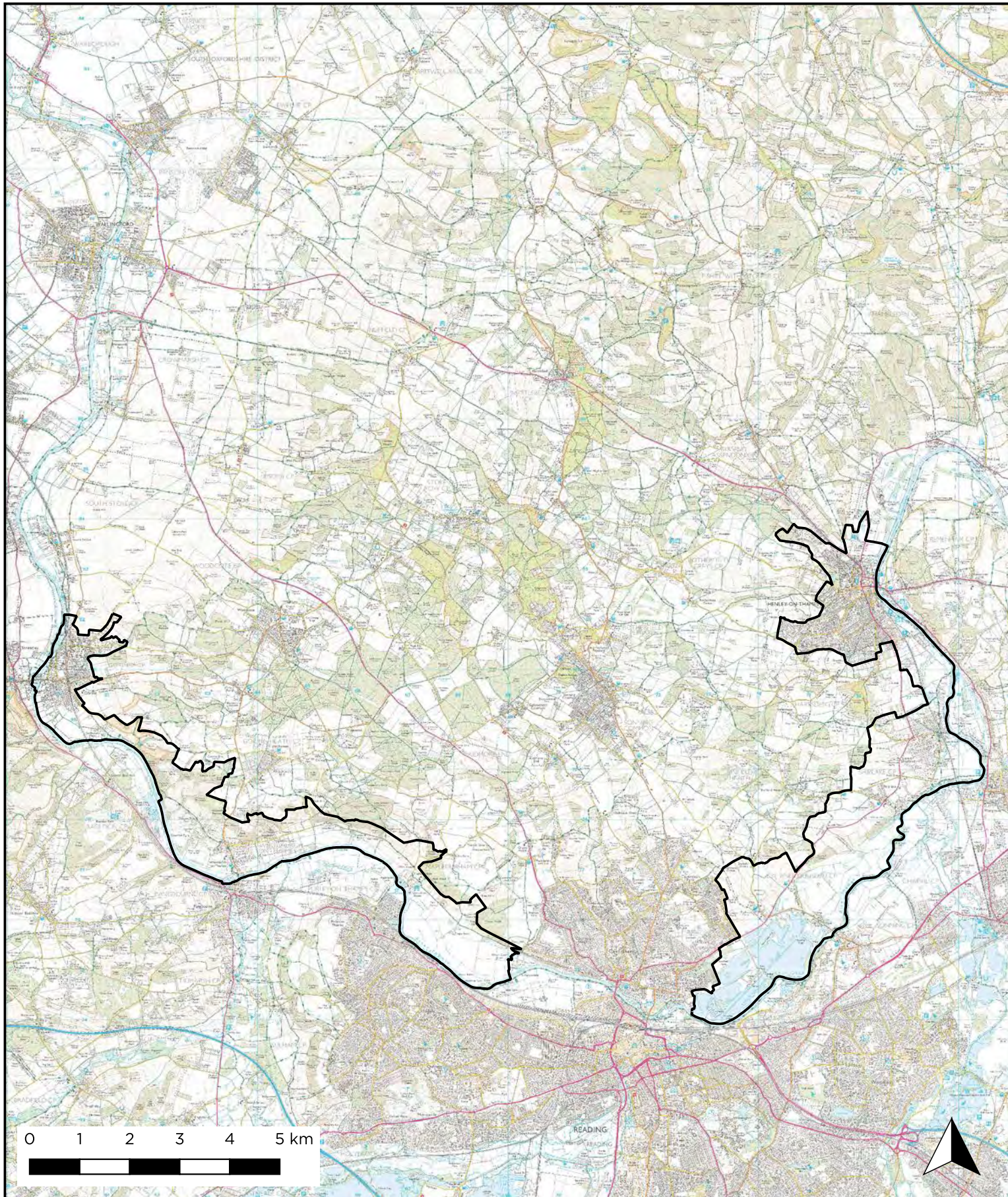
| Forces for change | Guidelines/Mitigation |
|---|--|
| Agricultural intensification, diversification and farm amalgamation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote, where possible, the conservation of the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland particularly on land adjacent to watercourses. Strengthen the field pattern by conserving species rich hedgerows and sympathetically maintaining all hedgerows. Where appropriate, replant gappy hedges using species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, wayfaring tree, dogwood and spindle, and planting of new hedgerow trees such as oak and ash, and tree belts should be encouraged Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type. Protect stone walls from deterioration. Safeguard, maintain and enhance the quality of unimproved chalk and limestone grassland with sustainable grazing techniques. Identify opportunities for calcareous grassland restoration by linking and extending the existing resource, particularly along the Chilterns escarpment. Prevent scrub encroachment in areas of species-rich grassland. Opportunities for expanding this habitat include the establishment and management of field margins/buffer strips adjacent to existing limestone grassland habitat using native wildflower species appropriate to the area. |
| Inappropriate or inconsistent management, or neglect of existing parklands. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safeguard, maintain and enhance and the characteristic landscape features of existing parklands including veteran trees, avenues of trees, lakes, woods and walls. |
| Development, expansion and infilling of settlements. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain the vernacular character of settlements and promote the use of building materials and a scale of development and that is appropriate to this landscape type. Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns and villages with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside. Local building materials should be used, including flintstone and brick or red and blue brick and clay tiles in the Chilterns. Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements, and promote the use of building materials to maintain vernacular style and a scale of development and that are appropriate to <i>Chilterns Plateau with Valleys</i> |

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| | (see also the South Oxfordshire Design Guide , November 2016; and the Chilterns AONB Building Design Guide 2010). |
| Introduction of tall buildings and structures such as communication masts and electricity pylons. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise impact by locating new communication masts on existing structures or by using existing masts. • Bury cables underground and seek opportunities to bury existing overhead cables. |
| Decline in management of existing woodlands and trees. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are a number of ancient semi-natural woodlands distributed throughout the landscape type and the priority must be to ensure that all these sites are in favourable condition and management. • Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as crack willow, oak and ash. |
| Decline of acid grassland and heath due to a reduction or cessation of traditional grazing management. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the re-establishment of acid grassland and heath on the Chilterns Commons through a combination of selective tree felling, scrub and bracken control, and fencing and grazing. • Traditionally, the commons would have been grazed but are now usually dominated by woodland, scrub and bracken. Selective clearance, followed by fencing and the re-introduction of grazing on appropriate sites, should be actively encouraged. There are opportunities for extending this resource within the landscape type to meet the targets outlined in the relevant habitat action plan. |

Landscape Character Area 11

Thames Valley and Fringes





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Legend

 11. Thames Valley and Fringes

Landscape Character Area 11
 South Oxfordshire Landscape
 Character Assessment
 1:100,000 scale
 31.07.17





River Thames at Henley-on-Thames



Pasture at Shiplake



Arable farmland at Shiplake



Henley bridge



Goring Lock



River Thames at Goring



Henley Royal Regatta tents



Copse at Play Hatch

16 Thames Valley and Fringes (LCA 11)

16.1 Summary

- 16.1.1 Focused upon the corridor of the River Thames around the southern fringes of the Chilterns, including the flat valley floor, the steep valley sides below Goring and the more gentle slopes between Caversham and Henley.

16.2 Location and boundaries

- 16.2.1 *Thames Valley and Fringes* comprises the northern extent of the River Thames Corridor between the town of Goring in the west to the town of Henley-on-Thames in the east. This character area is comprised of two distinct regions, divided by the Caversham urban area.
- 16.2.2 The western section of *Thames Valley and Fringes* is almost entirely comprised of the Chilterns AONB. The eastern section contains a small area of the AONB.
- 16.2.3 The eastern section of *Thames Valley and Fringes* is defined by the district boundary to the south east, *Chilterns Ridges and Valleys* (9) to the north and *Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* (10) to the west. The western section is defined by the district boundary to the south west, *River Thames Corridor* (4) and *Central Vale Fringes* (6) to the north and *Chilterns Escarpment* (8) and *Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* (10) to the north east.

16.3 Key characteristics

- Flat valley floor and the steeper valley sides to the west and the more gentle hills and sloping fringes to the east. Topography ranges between c. 40m AOD and c. 140m AOD.
- The River Thames and associated floodplain has a strong influence on the character of this area.
- Hartslock Wood SAC (semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) and *Taxus baccata* woods of the British Isles) and SSSI (species-rich chalk downland, ancient yew wood, semi-natural broadleaved woodland, chalk scrub and riverine fen) is located within this character area.
- Woodlands are feature in this landscape, particularly to the west.

Some of this woodland is Ancient Woodland.

- Away from the urban areas, arable farmland is located adjacent to the River Thames.
- Transport infrastructure including the A4130 and A4155 roads and a section of the Great Western main line (railway) cross through this character area.

16.4 Natural factors

Geology and landform

- 16.4.1 This character area includes the flat valley floor, the steeper valley sides to the west and the more gentle hills and sloping fringes of the lower Chilterns dip slope to the east.
- 16.4.2 At the western end of the area, the River Thames has carved a distinct valley, known as the Goring Gap, through the chalk uplands, dividing the Chiltern Hills from the North Wessex Downs. This marks the transition from the more open floodplain of *River Thames Corridor* (4) and the more constricted downstream sections of the river.
- 16.4.3 The flat floodplain is underlain by alluvium but with frequent deposits of river terrace gravels. The heavier soils generally support extensive cattle grazed pastures but the gravel areas support some arable cultivation and have been quarried to the east of Caversham to create a series of flooded gravel pits.
- 16.4.4 Above the valley floor, the Chiltern Hills rise abruptly as a line of rolling hills, supporting extensive areas of woodland. The line of hills appear as an escarpment, with numerous protruding spurs and narrow valleys that cut back into the adjoining plateau landscape and create quite complex topography. In contrast, beyond Caversham the valley sides are more gentle and grade almost imperceptibly into the Chilterns dip slope. Here, the chalk is masked by coombe deposits and gravels.
- 16.4.5 The topography of *Thames Valley and Fringes* ranges between c. 40m AOD and c. 140m AOD. The lowest areas of land are located around the River Thames. The highest area of land in this character area is located along a contour line at 140m AOD to the west of the village of Whitchurch Hill.

Hydrology

- 16.4.6 The River Thames is located along the western and southern boundary of the western region of *Thames Valley and Fringes* and along the southern and eastern boundary of the eastern region of this character area.
- 16.4.7 The eastern region of *Thames Valley and Fringes* contains a network of smaller watercourses that connect the River Thames with Caversham Lakes.

Biodiversity/flora and fauna

- 16.4.8 Priority habitats include deciduous woodland, wood-pasture and parkland, traditional orchards, lowland calcareous grassland, lowland meadows, semi-improved grassland, lowland fens and coastal and floodplain grazing marsh.
- 16.4.9 *Thames Valley and Fringes* contains extensive areas of woodland on the southern slopes of the Chiltern Hills within the western region of this character area. Ancient Woodland includes deciduous and coniferous woodland at Hartslock Wood⁷⁶.
- 16.4.10 The western region of *Thames Valley and Fringes* contains Hartslock Wood SAC and SSSI.
- 16.4.11 Hartslock Wood is designated as a SAC for its semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) and *Taxus baccata* woods of the British Isles⁷⁷. Hartslock Wood is designated as a SSSI for its species-rich chalk downland, ancient yew wood, semi-natural broadleaved woodland, chalk scrub and riverine fen⁷⁸.

16.5 Cultural and social factors

Land use (and management)

- 16.5.1 Away from the urban areas, arable farmland is located adjacent to the River Thames.

⁷⁶ Natural England (2017) MAGIC. Accessed on 07/09/17. Available at: <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

⁷⁷ <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/protectedsites/sacselection/sac.asp?EUCode=UK0030164>

⁷⁸

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1001933&SiteName=hartslock&countyCode=34&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=>

16.5.2 Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout different parts of this character area. Priority should be given to safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource.

16.5.3 The eastern region of *Thames Valley and Fringes* contains part of Friar Park (Grade II) and part of Fawley Court and Temple Island (Grade II*) registered parks and gardens at Henley-on-Thames.

Public rights of way

16.5.4 The Chiltern Way, Thames Path and Oxfordshire Way cross through this area.

Settlement

16.5.5 This section of the Thames Valley includes a string of riverside towns and settlements, including Goring-on-Thames, Caversham (which now forms the northern outskirts of Reading), Whitchurch (linked to Pangbourne), Lower Shiplake and Henley-on-Thames. Many of these originated as favoured sites on the terrace gravels for prehistoric, Roman and Saxon settlement. However, their strategic position at important river crossings, and as trading or staging posts along the river and main east-west routes, was the key to their later development⁷⁹.

16.5.6 The special qualities of the riverside landscape, set below the wooded Chiltern Hills, were also a key factor in the development of settlements and buildings between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, drawing opulent villas to the towns and riverside and inspiring the creation of a sequence of beautiful parks along these reaches of the Thames. These include Hardwick House, Mapledurham House, Coombe Lodge, Caversham Park and Fawley Court, some of which are associated with fine Tudor brick manor houses. Later development of road and rail communications led to significant expansion of the main towns (including the overwhelming of Caversham by Reading) and the growth of commuter villages.

16.5.7 The principal traditional building materials within this area were timber followed by brick and tile, with Welsh slate introduced after the arrival of the railway in 1857⁸⁰.

⁷⁹ Emery, F (1974) *The Oxfordshire Landscape. The making of the English Landscape Series*. Hodder and Stoughton. London.

⁸⁰ Bond, J and Over, L (1988) *Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Ordnance Survey Historical Guides*. George Philip & Son. London.

- 16.5.8 Transport infrastructure including the A4130 and A4155 roads and a section of the Great Western main line (railway) cross through this character area. A network of minor roads connect settlements.

16.6 Perceptual and aesthetic factors

- 16.6.1 The A4130 and A4155 roads and the railway line are visual and aural detractors in the landscape.

16.7 Landscape types

16.7.1 Landscape character in this area has a strong degree of coherence, with the River Thames providing a strong unifying influence. There are consequently few variations in landscape character.

16.7.2 *Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* is comprised of the following landscape types:

Flat floodplain pasture

Key characteristics:

- Flat, low-lying farmland, typically dominated by permanent pasture with a distinctively 'wet', riparian character (although some areas of arable may be interspersed within the floodplain).
- Prone to flooding with distinctive network of drainage ditches.
- Comparatively strong landscape structure with willows conspicuous along the riverside.
- Intimate, pastoral, tranquil and quite remote character with some 'arcadian' qualities along the Thames close to settlements and riverside parklands.
- Generally low intervisibility, although views along the river corridor may be possible in some more sparsely vegetated areas.

Floodplain wetland

Key characteristics:

- Complex of freshwater lagoons formed from flooded gravel pits.
- Artificial form and character but colonising vegetation helps to create a more semi natural character and developing wildlife value in some areas.
- Comparatively inaccessible, remote character but active gravel workings, recreational use and proximity to roads, railways and built development intrude on rural qualities of the area.
- Semi-enclosed character with moderate to low intervisibility.

Open escarpment

Key characteristics:

- Well defined, smooth profile folded into open, rounded spurs.
- Small-scale open spaces contained by a framework of woodland but with some open views out over the Thames Valley.
- Arable land use typically on the upper, more gentle slopes with pasture typical of the steeper slopes and thinner soils.
- Predominantly rural character.
- Scarp face itself is prominent in views from surrounding area but surrounding woodland reduces intervisibility along the valley side.

Enclosed escarpment

Key characteristics:

- Valley side typically clothed in a mosaic of woodland blocks, particularly on the steepest slopes, and open grassland.
- Predominantly rural, and semi natural character with broadleaved woodland of nature conservation value (e.g. Hartslock Wood).
- Smooth scarp profile masked by roughly textured vegetation, with sombre, muted colours.
- Intimate and enclosed character within densely wooded areas but elsewhere, the valley side has a semi enclosed character with some long views out over the Thames valley from the more open areas.
- Valley side prominent in views but woodland cover helps to absorb prominent features and reduce intervisibility.

Open dip slope

Key characteristics:

- Gently sloping ground at the foot of the Chilterns dip slope next to the valley floor between Caversham and Shiplake.
- Dominance of intensive arable cultivation with large-scale field pattern, weak hedgerow structure and very little woodland cover.
- Distinctively 'grey' and flinty soils.
- Predominantly rural character with limited intrusion from built-up areas.
- Large-scale, open landscape with views out over the Thames Valley and high intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed dip slope

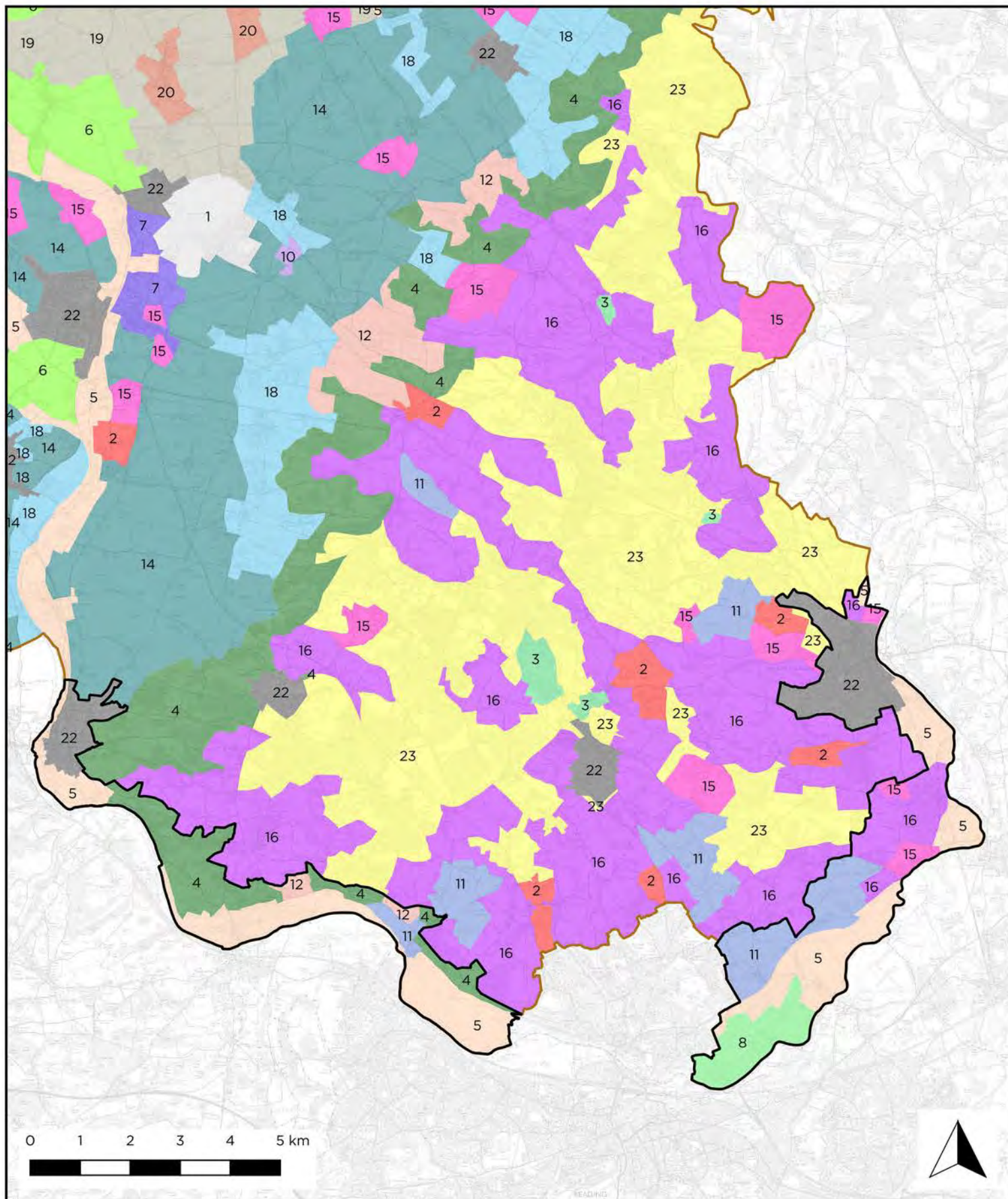
Key characteristics:

- Sloping ground and minor valley at foot of Chilterns dip slope next to the valley floor around Lower Shiplake and a small area to the north of Henley adjacent to the floodplain.
- Mixture of medium-scale fields to west of the A4155 and smaller-scale field pattern around the settlement edges.
- Strong structure of hedgerows, trees and small blocks of woodland, generally provides visual containment and results in moderate intervisibility.
- Predominantly rural character, especially to the west of the A4155, but some localised influence from roads, ribbon development on minor roads and built-up areas immediately around settlement edges.

Parkland and estate farmland

Key characteristics:

- Although much of the landscape of the floodplain and valley sides has been managed as part of large estates and parks, only three areas were identified as having a specific parkland character, namely the parks associated with Hardwick House, Shiplake House and Fawley Court.
- Well-managed parkland character with formal features such as avenues and free standing mature trees in pasture, clumps and blocks of woodland.
- Unspoilt character.
- Generally enclosed character with strong landform, woodland and tree cover.
- Low intervisibility.



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Legend

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Thames Valley and Fringes (LCA 11) | 8. Floodplain wetland | 17. Semi-enclosed farmed hills and valleys |
| South Oxfordshire District Boundary | 9. Institutions | 18. Semi-enclosed rolling downs |
| 1. Airfields/MOD sites | 10. Minerals / landfill sites | 19. Undulating open vale |
| 2. Amenity landscapes | 11. Open dipslope | 20. Undulating semi-enclosed vale |
| 3. Commons and heaths | 12. Open escarpment | 21. Undulating wooded vale |
| 4. Enclosed escarpment | 13. Open farmed hills and valleys | 22. Urban areas |
| 5. Flat floodplain pasture | 14. Open rolling downs | 23. Wooded dipslope |
| 6. Flat open farmland | 15. Parkland and estate farmland | 24. Wooded hills and valleys |
| 7. Flat, semi-enclosed farmland | 16. Semi-enclosed dipslope | |

South Oxfordshire
Landscape
Character Assessment

Map: Thames Valley
and Fringes (LCA 11)
LT

Scale: 1:100,000

Date: 23.08.17



16.8 Planning, managing and protecting distinctiveness

16.8.1 The following table presents recommendations to protect, conserve, enhance and restore the landscape qualities of South Oxfordshire.

| Forces for change | Guidelines/Mitigation/Actions |
|---|---|
| Agricultural intensification, diversification and farm amalgamation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote, where possible, the conservation of the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly on land adjacent to watercourses. Recognise that grazing sheep and cattle can make a contribution to the landscape's identity and distinctiveness. Promote environmentally sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type (see also the South Oxfordshire Design Guide , November 2016). Strengthen the field pattern by conserving species rich hedgerows and sympathetically maintaining all hedgerows. Where appropriate, replant gappy hedges using species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, wayfaring tree, dogwood and spindle. Protect stone walls from deterioration. Safeguard, maintain and enhance the quality of unimproved chalk and limestone grassland with sustainable grazing techniques. Identify opportunities for calcareous grassland restoration by linking and extending the existing resource. Prevent scrub encroachment in areas of species-rich grassland. Opportunities for expanding this habitat include the establishment and management of field margins/buffer strips adjacent to existing limestone grassland habitat using native wildflower species appropriate to the area. |
| Development of gravel extraction sites. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain high standards of restoration at gravel pits to accommodate a range of after-uses that integrate successfully with the character of the surrounding landscape. Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses such as gravel extraction with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic to the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside. |
| Inappropriate or inconsistent management, or neglect of existing parklands. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the conservation and restoration the pastoral character of existing parklands and promote the replacement of veteran and mature trees where appropriate. Safeguard, maintain and enhance and the characteristic landscape features of existing parklands including veteran trees, avenues of trees, lakes, woods and walls. This includes land at Coombe Park and Friar Park (Registered Park and Garden). |

| | |
|---|---|
| Inappropriate built form, development, expansion and infilling of settlements. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns, villages and farms with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside. Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements, and promote the use of building materials to maintain vernacular style and a scale of development and that are appropriate to <i>Thames Valley and Fringes</i> (see also the South Oxfordshire Design Guide , November 2016). |
| Introduction of tall buildings and structures such as communication masts and electricity pylons. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise impact by locating new communication masts on existing structures or by using existing masts. Bury cables underground and seek opportunities to bury existing overhead cables. |
| Decline in management of existing woodlands and trees. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and, where appropriate, pollarding willows. Establish buffer strips/field margins to potentially benefit small mammals, invertebrates and birds adjacent to willow pollards. Species-rich rivers and ditches are also very important and the aim should be to establish and maintain diverse banksides and aquatic vegetation through sympathetic management and the use of agri-environment schemes. There are a number of ancient semi-natural woodlands distributed throughout the landscape type and the priority must be to ensure that all these sites are in favourable condition and management. Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as alders, ash, oak and willows. |



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