

***The site and its immediate surroundings***

- 2.1.11 The site itself has several distinctive characteristics, all of which have influenced the final form and layout of the proposed development.
- 2.1.12 The site primarily consists of arable fields, divided by native hedgerows. The site falls gently from 82m AOD in the north-west to 65m AOD in the south-east. The southern section of the site falls more noticeably down to Gagle Brook. Following the profile of the brook, a 'shoulder of land' prevents views across the site from the valley bottom. The north-western part of the site is particularly open, the absence of vegetation allowing expansive views across the farmland.
- 2.1.13 The setting of Chesterton and its conservation area has been an important consideration in design of the proposals. Much of the conservation area is inward looking and its setting to the north is primarily defined by the woodland north of Chesterton Lodge and along Gagle Brook. To the west of the conservation area, views from the village across the site are more extensive and open. The landscape setting to the village is limited by a combination of topography, built form and vegetation.
- 2.1.14 In the centre of the site, Whitelands Farm is a prominent and positive landmark in the landscape. The farm's setting is important, in particular in views from the south and east where there is a fine vista to the front of the farmhouse. The combination of the view to the farmhouse, a localized valley and the hedgerow patterns make the fields immediately east of the farmhouse more intimate and attractive. The southern edge of the site is also enclosed in character with pleasant views of Gagle Brook.
- 2.1.15 For the most part, hedgerows are of poor quality, containing a limited number of species and often including large sections of dead elm. The combined effect of the hedgerows and the three copses, is to defuse views across the site. The network of hedgerows, trees and copses positively contribute to the landscape character of the site. The most significant copses is Foxey Leys Copse.
- 2.1.16 The majority of the site is used for arable farming and as a consequence its ecological interest is limited. Pingle Brook to the north is a positive landscape feature and of ecological interest and has potential to be a significant asset for the new quarter.

**Figure 2.9 Site context**

- 2.1.17 On the northern edge of the site, beyond the Middleton Stoney Road, is a predominately residential area, much of which is accessed from Shakespeare Drive. Many of the houses along this edge back onto the Middleton Stoney Road.
- 2.1.18 To the north-east of the site lies the town centre, with shops, offices, workshops, restaurants, pubs, hotels, churches and leisure uses, including a youth arts centre. Civic functions, such as the library, court rooms and the police station, are located on the western fringe of the town centre. To the south of the town centre, is the Bicester Village Retail Park (a factory-outlet centre) and a Tesco superstore. This is separated from the town by the Pingle recreation ground.

- 2.1.19 There are a variety of routes between the town centre and the site, including small lanes which are often pedestrian-only. The Piggy Lane route is the most direct link, leading to Church Street and the Market Square at the heart of Bicester.
- 2.1.20 To the west of the site lies Bignell Park, which has extensive mature tree cover within the grounds. This provides a backdrop to the western edge of the site. The Bignell Park Hotel, close to the Gagle Brook, marks the western edge of Chesterton village.

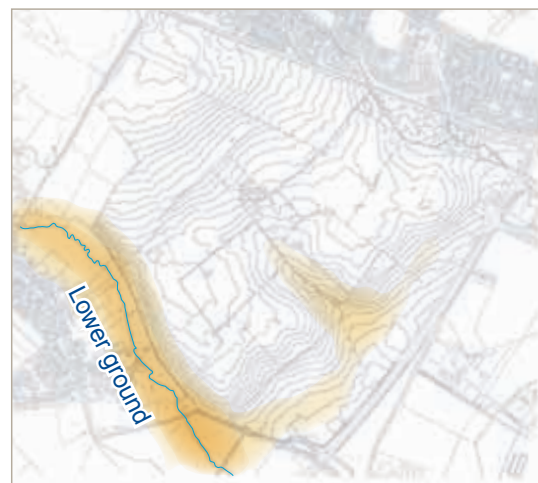
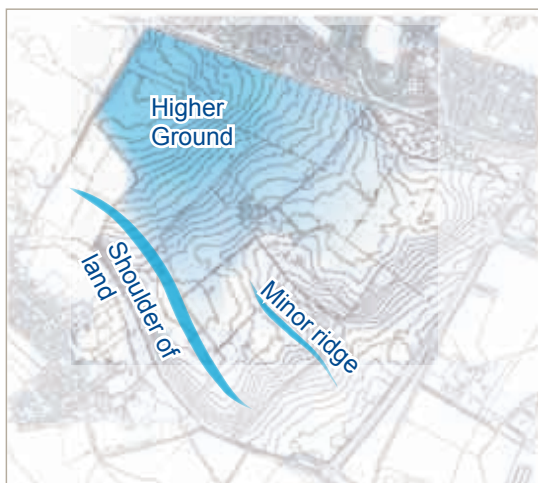


Figure 2.10 **Topography**

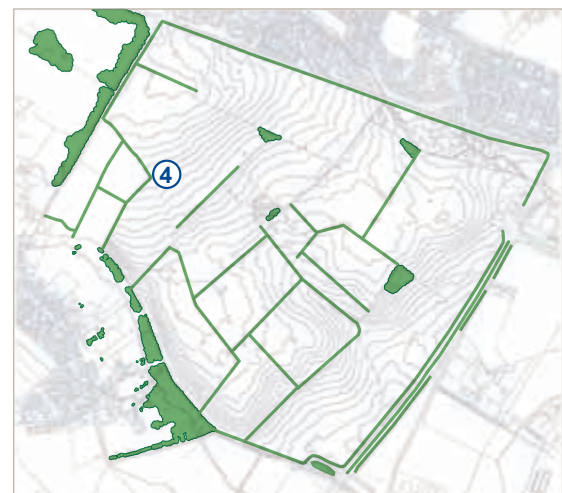




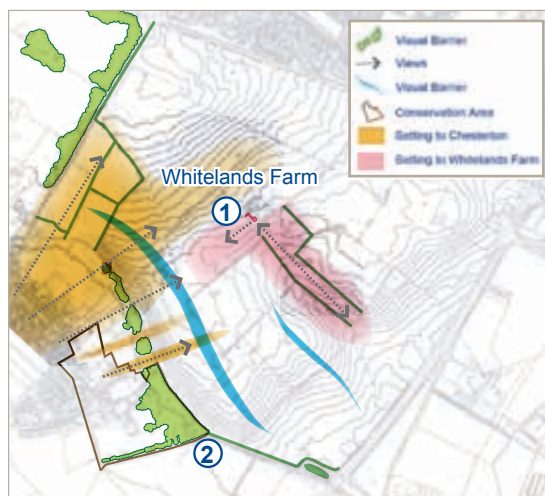
2.1.21 To the south of the site, beyond Gagle Brook, lies Chesterton village. The historic core of the village, including the church and pub, has been designated as a conservation area. The church tower is visible from Whitelands Farm.

2.1.22 The northern edge of Chesterton is characterised by domestic gardens and private lanes running downhill, towards Gagle Brook. Two public rights of way cross the site, connecting the village to Bicester town. The village has an attractive appearance and a sensitive relationship with the countryside.

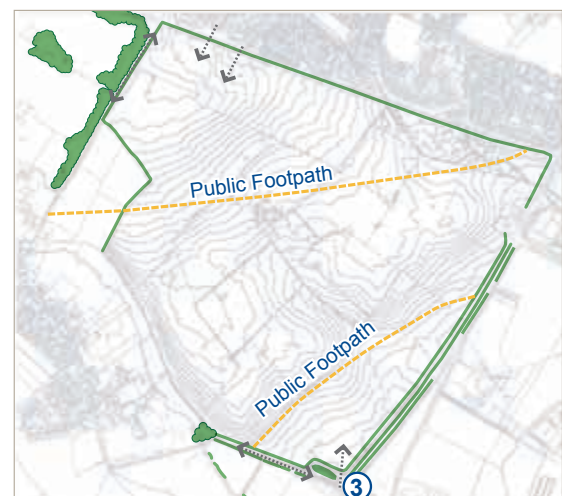
2.1.23 Land to the east of the A41 is agricultural land but is identified (In the local plan?) for employment uses. The A41 (Aylesbury Road) forms the northern edge of this area and is elevated along much of this boundary. The eastern boundary is defined by the extent of the flood plain of the Pingle Brook. The water treatment works and garden centre form the south-eastern and southern boundaries to the site.



**Figure 2.11 Vegetation**

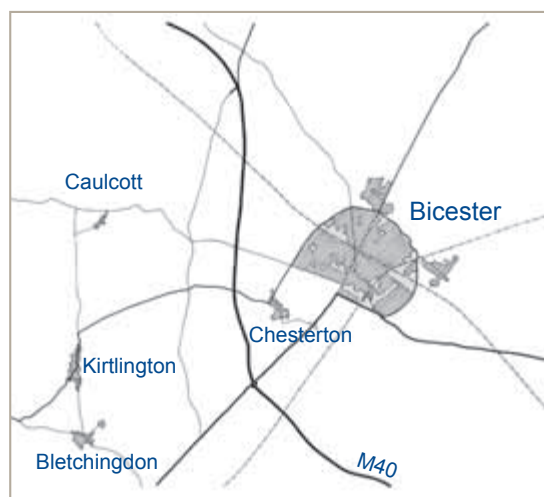


**Figure 2.12 Setting**



**Figure 2.13 Public footpaths**

### **The wider context**



**Figure 2.14 Village location plan, showing the villages looked at during the analysis work**

2.1.24 As well as understanding of the site in its context and learning from Bicester, nearby villages where also analysed. Widely regarded as having positive and attractive qualities, these villages have influenced the master plan to achieve a better edge between town and country. The lessons learned from the villages are described here.

#### *Bletchington*

- A limited range of materials and a restricted palette of colours
- Parkland and recreation spaces form the transitional areas between the development edge and agricultural land and open countryside
- The limited range of building types, which is restricted to two and two and a half storeys, to create a strong sense of unity

#### *Caulcott*

- The use of one to two and a half-storeyed buildings with breaks in sight lines along the main road creates an intimate scale and sense of informality
- The breaks in the sight lines allow for views out to the wider countryside

#### *Chesterton*

- Gaps in the built form open up views out to the wider countryside
- The village green is located around key movement corridor
- The use of predominantly two, two and a half and three storey buildings creates an intimate scale and a sense of informality
- A general uniformity of materials and colours

#### *Kirtlington*

- A sequence of 'village greens' located along a key movement corridor and focused around important junctions
- A curving street pattern with short sightlines and varying widths with mainly two, two and half and three-storey buildings to create an intimate scale and sense of informality
- Again, parkland and recreation spaces for the transitional areas between the development edge and agricultural land

2.1.25 These villages provide a series of important principles showing how an approach to built form, spaces, landscape and transport can produce attractive and successful living environments. They provide clues to the way in which the development at Whitelands Farm can be arranged to create an attractive extension to Bicester.

2.1.26 Whitelands Farm presents an opportunity to create a new edge on the south-west side of the town, one that can make the transition from an urban to a rural environment more successfully than other recent extensions to Bicester.

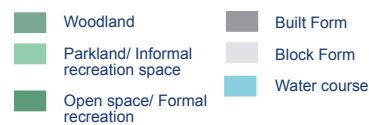
## Bletchington



Open space analysis



OS map extract



Understanding the relationship between the landscape and the village

Bletchington has a very attractive village green. This triangular space has two busy sides and one quiet side. This detail has helped inform the design of public spaces for south west Bicester



A harmonious edge between built form and landscape.



The village green is a combination of buildings, stone walls and trees that define the space.

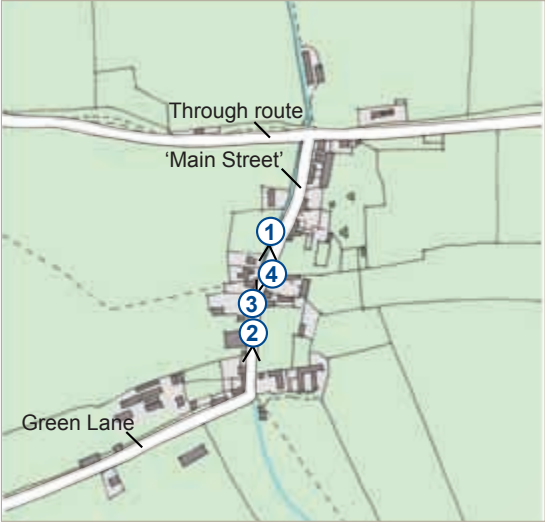


The manor house set in parkland creates a focal point in the distance.

**Figure 2.15 Analysis of the village of Bletchington**

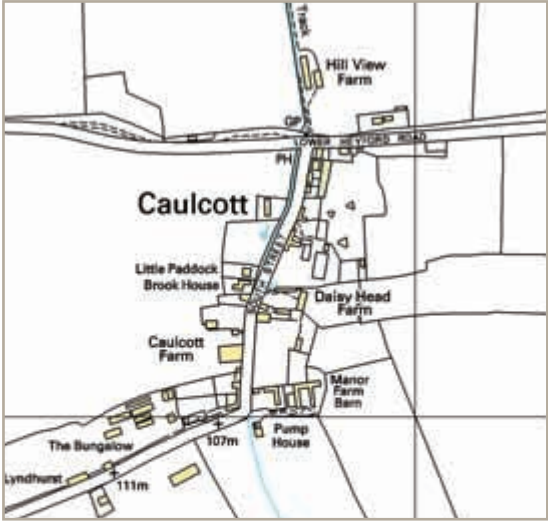


*Caulcott*



Open space analysis

- Woodland
- Parkland/ Informal recreation space
- Open space/ Formal recreation
- Built Form
- Block Form
- Water course



OS map extract



Intimate scale due to short sight lines and building scale.



View of open countryside from the main street.



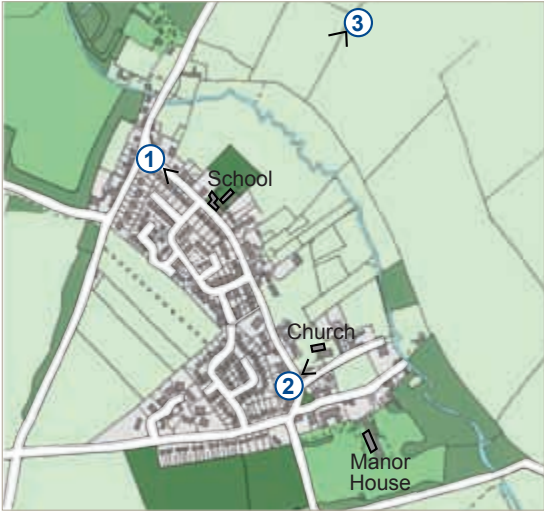
Open water course running alongside the main street.



Balancing pond as part of a sustainable drainage system.

**Figure 2.16 Analysis of the village of Caulcott**

Chesterton



Open space analysis

- |                                     |              |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| Woodland                            | Built Form   |
| Parkland/ Informal recreation space | Block Form   |
| Open space/ Formal recreation       | Water course |



OS map extract



View along Alchester Road. Enclosure is provided by landscape elements rather than built form.



Understanding the relationship between the landscape and the village.



View along private drives toward the site.

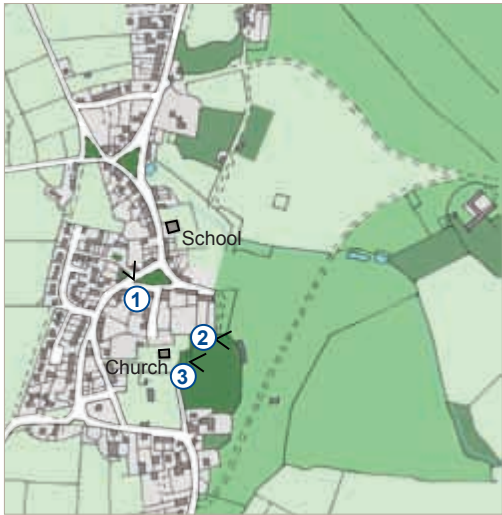


View of the north eastern edge of Chesterton. The primary school clearly visible.

Figure 2.17 Analysis of the village of Chesterton



Kirtlington



Open space analysis

- Woodland
- Parkland/ Informal recreation space
- Open space/ Formal recreation
- Built Form
- Block Form
- Water course



OS map extract



Understanding the relationship between the landscape and the village



Series of green spaces progressively becoming more intimate and private



Rustic play area overlooking parkland. Note appropriate materials and limited colour range



Formal recreation on edge of village

Figure 2.18 Analysis of the village of Kirtlington



## 2.2 Social and Economic situation

- 2.2.0 Local amenities and services in Bicester include nine primary and two secondary schools (all except one with capacity predicted for 2011), five general practice surgeries, seven dentists (only one accepting new NHS patients without restrictions), three opticians and four pharmacies.
- 2.2.1 The Bicester Community Hospital, located on the west of the town, is operated by the East Oxfordshire National Health Service Primary Health Care Trust (PCT). The PCT is currently proposing to modernise and enhance the services available, through the construction of a new hospital and the ability to rent health provision as and when necessary to better meet demand.
- 2.2.2 There are two main retail areas, Bicester town centre and the Bicester Village Outlet Shopping Area to the south of the town centre. The town centre provides local services and amenities

including banks, a post office, supermarket, a variety of independent provisioning shops, some high street chain stores and a number of pubs and restaurants. There are no department stores or any of the larger chain stores in the town centre. The Bicester Village Outlet Shopping Area has 90 retail stores (offering end of lines or previous season stock) and three restaurants.

- 2.2.3 Bicester has two hotels and there are a further four in the surrounding area. There are a range of leisure options for the residents of the Cherwell district, including nature conservation, countryside walks, a museum, a multimedia arts venue and three public leisure centres, however, there is a shortfall in formal outdoor sports provision in Bicester.

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Figure 2.19 Bicester High Street

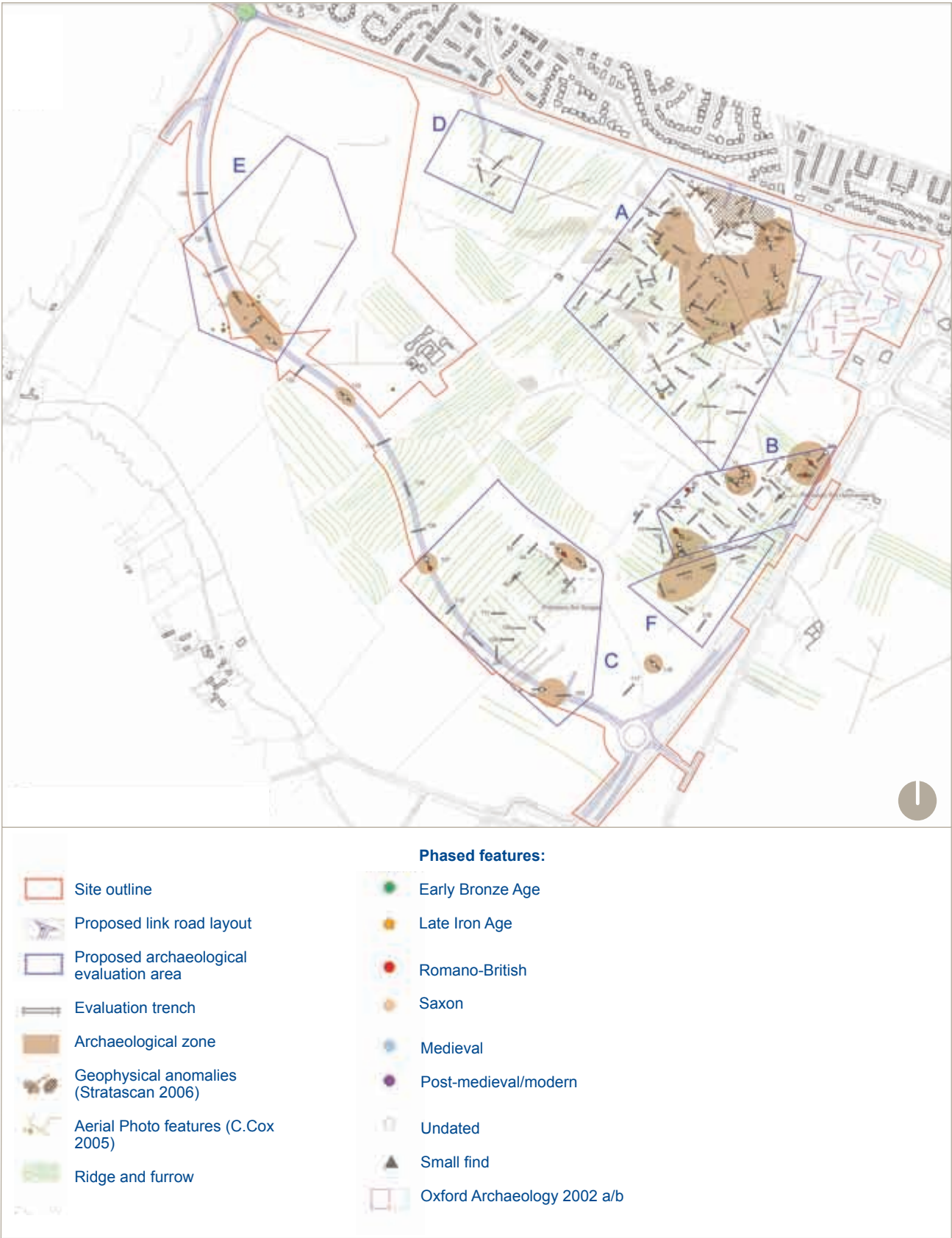


Figure 2.20 Zones of archaeological interest



## 2.3 Cultural heritage

- 2.3.1 A detailed cultural heritage assessment was undertaken for the proposed development. This involved aerial photography analysis, a geophysical survey and targeted evaluation trenching.
- 2.3.2 There are no scheduled ancient monuments (SAMs), listed buildings or conservation areas within the site, but there are examples in close proximity. The largest concentration of listed buildings is in the village of Chesterton, which is a designated conservation area.
- 2.3.3 Certain areas along the eastern side of the site have been the subject of archaeological evaluation. There are eight archaeological sites/findspots listed within the boundary of the proposed development. Investigations in the north-eastern area uncovered evidence of a late Iron Age/Romano-British farmstead settlement of local or county importance. A settlement of similar date and size, which may be an extension of this farmstead, was uncovered immediately to the east during pre-construction investigations at Bicester Village Outlet Shopping Area. The immediate area has a rich archaeological heritage, with the SAM of the Roman Town and Fort of Alchester situated 700m to the south-east of Whitelands Farm.
- 2.3.4 The geophysical survey highlighted evidence of ring ditches, which are the ploughed out below ground remnants of Bronze Age ring barrow monuments. Wessex Archaeology successfully uncovered the remains of both ring ditches, which as a consequence of their excellent state of preservation are considered worthy of preservation in situ. A 50m buffer around these two sites was proposed to ensure no infrastructure works take place that would damage these remains of national importance.
- 2.3.5 Based upon recommendations by Oxford County Council Archaeologist, the associated playing fields for the adjacent primary school are now proposed to overlie these burial monuments, thereby ensuring an extensive area of managed green space.

## 2.4 Policy context

In this section, the national and local policy context is considered.

### ***National policy context & best practice***

- 2.4.1 According to government best practice guidance as contained in 'Design Review', (CABE, London 2002) a well-designed place should:
- Have its own identity
  - Be where public and private spaces are clearly distinguished
  - Have attractive and successful outdoor areas valued by people who use them
  - Be easy to reach and move through
  - Have a clear image and be easy to understand
  - Easily change if required
  - Have variety and choice
  - Be where the users feel safe and are as safe as possible
  - Have an appropriate and high quality services infrastructure
- 2.4.2 The qualities of character, continuity and enclosure, quality of the public realm, ease of movement, legibility, adaptability, diversity, security and services are the basis for all good places. They are reflected in numerous other national guidance documents, including *By Design, Urban design in the planning system : towards better practice* (CABE/DETR, London 1999). These principles are the starting point for the design of the south-west Bicester urban extension and this statement will explain how these qualities have been interpreted and applied within the local context particular to this site.
- 2.4.3 The key principles behind a master plan can be found in *Creating Successful Master plans* (CABE, London 2003) and in the Urban Task Force report, *Towards an Urban Renaissance* (ODPM, London 1999). These are set out below, together with brief examples of how these principles have been adopted in this application.

2.4.4 ***A master plan has an overall vision, captured in a combination of words and diagrams, plans and illustrations.*** How? This statement, with numerous illustrations and drawings, is evidence that this approach has been taken.

2.4.5 ***A master plan establishes the principles of development in three dimensions and sets down the different layers of proposed physical change – buildings, open spaces, streets, public transport and other infrastructure such as utilities, telecoms, drainage.*** How? While there is one overall master plan, it is a result of a layers of complementary data that all have a good ‘fit’ with one another. The series of diagrams in this statement separate the different elements of the master plan to show how these work together.

2.4.6 ***A master plan seeks to show how an area can exploit its distinctive features to give it a character of its own.*** How? Extensive analysis of the site and the wider locality, including the town of Bicester and other settlements, has informed the master plan to ensure it is locally distinctive.

2.4.7 ***A master plan explores, addresses and reconciles different requirements of key stakeholders and interest groups, which may have conflicting yet legitimate concerns.*** How? The engagement process encouraged concerns to be raised and potential design responses to be tested, all in a public forum.

2.4.8 ***A master plan should be visionary; it should raise aspirations and provide a vehicle for consensus building and implementation.*** How? The master planning process involved the extensive consideration of the character of Bicester and nearby villages, learning from the best parts and ensuring that the mistakes of the past are not repeated. Integral to the process have been various community engagement events.

2.4.9 ***A master plan should be flexible, providing the basis for negotiation and dispute resolution, and be the result of a participatory process, providing all the stakeholders with the means of expressing their needs and priorities.*** How? The master plan has been arrived at following consultation and engagement. It has been the vehicle for adjusting thinking and ideas in response to issues raised by both the local community and council officers.

2.4.10 ***A master plan should be fully integrated into the land use planning system, while allowing new uses and market opportunities to exploit the full development potential of a site.*** How? Working with the local authority, Countryside has produced a design & development framework (DDF) that has been endorsed as local planning guidance. This framework enshrines the principle of good design on this site within the local planning system, yet remains flexible enough to allow for the design and layout to evolve as the project moves towards the detailed design phase and implementation.

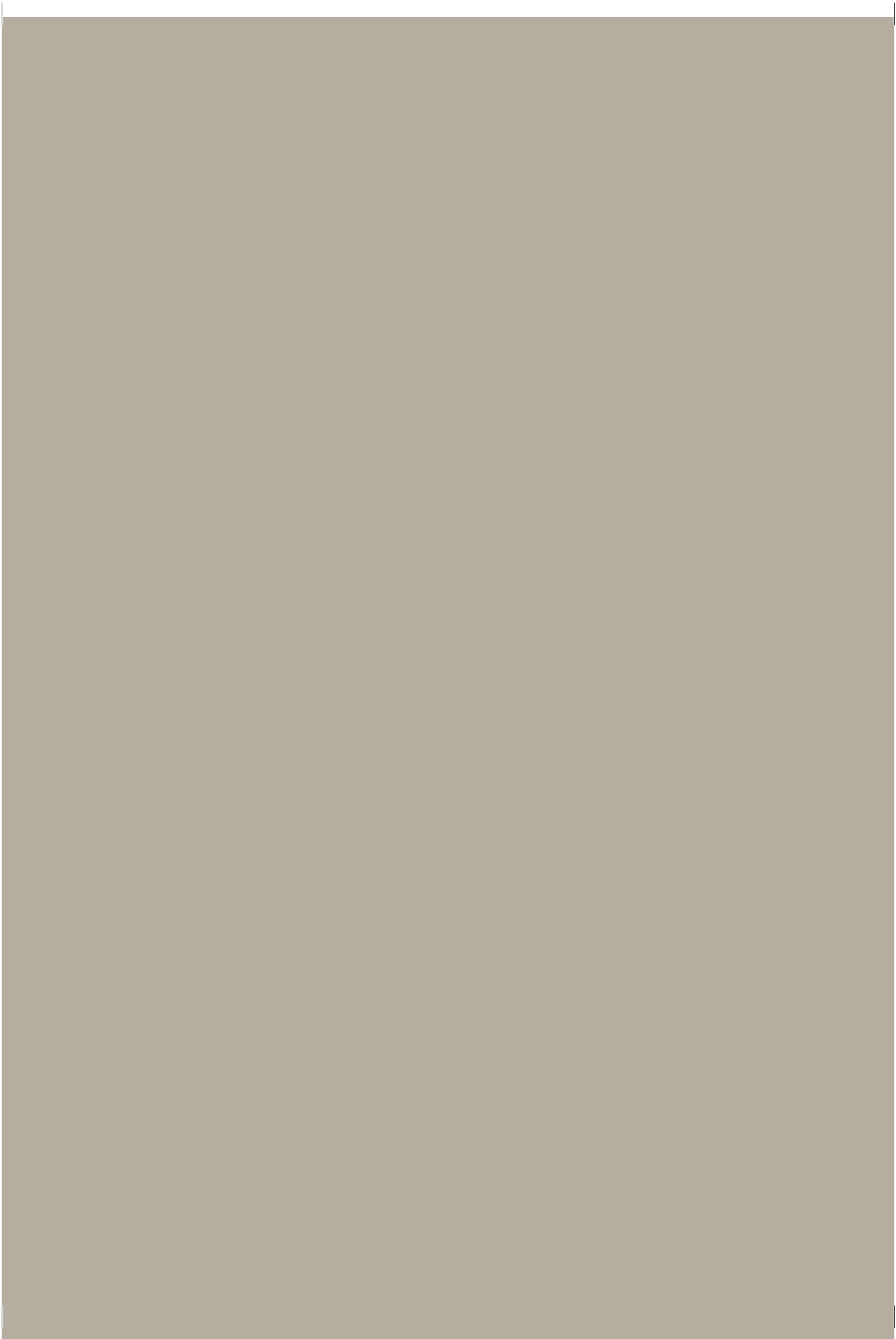
2.4.11 A master plan should be deliverable, it should take into account likely implementation and delivery routes. How? The layout and design of the master plan allows for a phased delivery and minimal disruption to the nearby communities during the construction phase.

2.4.12 In addition to this, the design and access statement has been prepared in accordance with current Government guidance, as set out in the ODPM's second consultation paper, 'Changes to the Planning System', March 2005, as well as more recent publications from the Department for Communities and Local Government, Circular 01/2006 and CABE's document: 'Design and Access Statements: How to write, read and use them'.



***Local policy context***

- 2.4.13 As this statement makes clear, the design of the master plan meets the aims of objectives set out in the Design and Development Framework for land south- west of Bicester, as endorsed by Cherwell District Council in March 2006. The framework is based upon policy H13 and other associated policies found within the unadopted Cherwell local plan. Countryside considers that the proposals submitted for outline planning permission are in accordance with both the framework document and local planning policy.
- 2.4.14 See the planning statement for further details on how the proposal meets national, regional and local planning policy.





### 3 Community engagement

3.1.1 Countryside believes that the engagement process has helped deliver a master plan that is responsive to the needs of the wider community. The master plan was prepared with the involvement and participation of the local community, members and officers of the local authorities and representatives of local interest groups. These various groups were engaged through a series of events organised and facilitated by Kevin Murray Associates:

#### 3.2 29 June 2005 workshop 'Growth of Bicester'

3.2.2 This daytime workshop included a short discussion about the growth of Bicester so far and its consequences, a site visit, a town planning exercise and a design session examining the strengths and weaknesses of transport, housing, community facilities and open space provision in the town. A public meeting followed in the evening at which attendees could view the results from earlier in the day and add their comments and ideas.



Site visit to Whitelands Farm on 29 June 2005

**3.3 18 July 2005 workshop with the Bicester Chamber of Commerce**

3.3.1 Members of the Bicester Chamber of Commerce identified key issues of concern, including business life, traffic, the identity and image of Bicester, its location and strategic importance and growth and expansion.

**3.4 19 July 2005 design workshop 'Growing Bicester'**

3.4.1 At this design workshop, attendees were split into four groups to develop design principles for the movement structure, housing (density, tenure and layout), community and employment uses, open space, leisure, wildlife and water and drainage for the site. Key issues and objectives were outlined before possible design solutions were drawn up. As with the previous event, a public meeting followed in the evening at which attendees could view the results from earlier in the day and add their comments and ideas.

3.4.2 A summary report, produced by Kevin Murray Associates and available from Cherwell District Council, entitled 'Growing Bicester: Planning for a Sustainable Future' gives more details on the community engagement events. It sets out the concerns and the possible design responses that were discussed. The master plan draws on these ideas to ensure the proposal is responsive to the local community.



**Figure 3.1 The options produced by the working groups at community events on 19 July 2005**



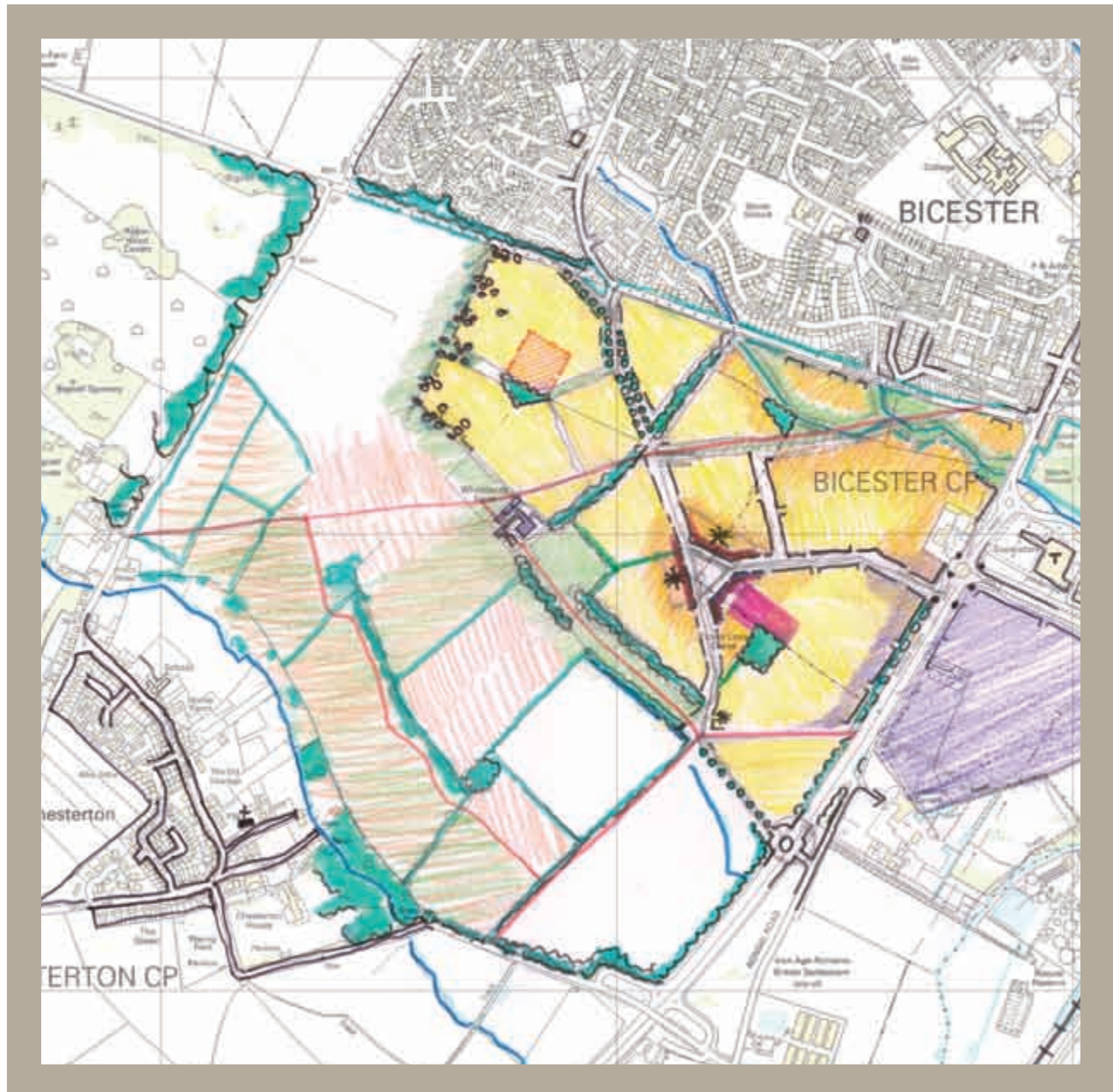


Figure 3.2 Amalgamation of three options presented to final community event on the evening of 19 July 2005

