



Appendix 13.4

EXTRACTS FROM LCA

Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study

- 13.1.1 Published by Oxfordshire County Council, the Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study (2004) describes the character and qualities of landscape character types (LCTs) and local character areas (LCAs) across the county. The study also identifies regional character areas within the county however notes that these are the parts of the National Character Areas which fall within Oxfordshire, no description is provided of these areas in the assessment.
- 13.1.2 The report identifies the Development Site as being located in the Cotswolds Regional Character Area. This character area however is not assessed in detail in this LVIA, as the report notes the RCA is the area of the Cotswolds NCA present within Oxfordshire, no further assessment of the character of this area is provided and as set out above, character studies at the national or regional level are best used to 'set the scene' rather than used to assess the effects on landscape character.

6. Farmland Plateau LCT

- 13.1.3 This landscape type covers the plateau across the elevated northern part of the county. It extends across the areas between Chipping Norton and Banbury and is dissected by the rivers Evenlode, Glyme and Dorn. To the east of the Cherwell Valley the plateau continues northeast of Upper Heyford and Fritwell. The most southern part lies to the northwest of the River Windrush.
- 13.1.4 This landscape type is characterised by a high limestone plateau with a distinctive elevated and exposed character, broad skies and long-distance views. Large scale arable fields dominate the landscape, with some medium-sized plantations partially obscuring the otherwise open views.
- 13.1.5 Its key characteristics are:
- Level or gently rolling open ridges dissected by narrow valleys and broader vales.
 - Large, regular arable fields enclosed by low thorn hedges and limestone walls.
 - Rectilinear plantations and shelterbelts.
 - Sparsely settled landscape with a few nucleated settlements.
 - Long, straight roads running along the ridge summits.
- 13.1.6 The landform of the LCT is a distinctive smoothly rolling plateaux, in places, it reaches heights of around 200 metres.

Land use and vegetation

- 13.1.7 The light and easily cultivated soils have favoured the intensive arable farming that largely dominates the landscape. There are some smaller, semi-improved grass fields used for pony and sheep-grazing. Characteristic features dominating the skyline include the small to medium-sized regular plantations and long, wide shelterbelts bordering roads and field boundaries. They are particularly prominent when associated with large estates, and are mostly mixed and deciduous plantations

with ash, field maple, beech and occasionally oak. Beech plantations are also typical of this landscape type. Small patches of secondary woodland with similar tree and shrub species can also be found.

- 13.1.8 Otherwise, there is very little semi-natural vegetation. There are pockets of calcareous grassland confined to steep railways embankments, disused quarries, airfields, and road verges. Bracken and patches of gorse are also found along road verges and on disused quarries and golf courses.

Cultural pattern

- 13.1.9 This is a characteristic, planned, late Parliamentary enclosure landscape. There is a large-scale geometric field pattern surrounded by low hawthorn hedges and stone walls. Hedgerow trees, which are mainly ash, sycamore, field maple and sometimes oak, are sparsely scattered throughout and do not detract from the openness of the landscape. Another characteristic feature is the straight roads which reinforce the geometric pattern of this planned landscape.
- 13.1.10 The exposed high plateau has not favoured settlement, and it is characterised by sparsely scattered farmsteads and a few nucleated villages. Farmhouses are generally located in the open countryside as a result of parliamentary enclosure.
- 13.1.11 The use of local limestone for building materials gives a very distinctive character to the village settlements. The vernacular character is particularly prominent in villages such as Fritwell and Souldern, and in small hamlets such as Ledwell.

19. Wooded Estate lands LCT

- 13.1.12 The landscape type includes parklands at the eastern end of the Cotswolds, ranging from the area around Blenheim Park, Steeple Barton, Middleton Park and as far as Shelswell Park to the north of Bicester. Further south it includes Eynsham Hall Park and Bladon Heath Wood and it also covers the majority of the wooded and parkland areas in the undulating landscape of the Corallian Ridge.
- 13.1.13 Its key characteristics are:
- Rolling topography with localised steep slopes.
 - Large blocks of ancient woodland and mixed plantations of variable sizes.
 - Large parklands and mansion houses.
 - A regularly-shaped field pattern dominated by arable fields.
 - Small villages with strong vernacular character.
- 13.1.14 The landform is generally rolling, ranging from gently rolling to undulating. Across the Corallian Ridge the landform is strongly undulating and is steeply sloping in places resulting in small valleys.

Land use and vegetation

13.1.15 The landscape has a mix of land uses but is largely dominated by arable farming. On the steeper slopes there is some semi-improved grassland, as well as pockets of calcareous grassland, acid grassland and gorse. This is a well-wooded landscape with large, prominent blocks of ancient semi-natural woodland often located on the steeper slopes. In addition, there is a significant number of smaller, mainly mixed plantations that are scattered throughout much of the area and this adds to the overall sense of enclosure. Dense corridors of willows and poplars, and belts of semi-natural woodland bordering the valley streams are other locally prominent features.

Cultural pattern

13.1.16 The field pattern is generally characterised by a geometric pattern of medium to large-sized fields, with arable cropping in the larger fields. There are a number of species-rich hedges bordering roads and close to woods. Although there are only a few mature oak and ash hedgerow trees, they still contribute to the wooded character of the landscape. They are more obvious in the vicinity of ancient woodland and quite sparse where arable cropping is dominant. Views are generally filtered through trees and framed by woodland blocks. Large parklands with their distinctive country houses, extensive woodland and ornamental lakes at Blenheim, Middleton, Eynsham Hall and Buscot are also very typical of this landscape type and underline its estate character.

13.1.17 The settlement pattern is characterised by small settlements as well as scattered farmhouses in the wider countryside. The vernacular character is strong in most of the villages and this is reinforced by features such as stone walls.

H. Fritwell (CW/57) LCA

13.1.18 This area is characterised by large, regularly-shaped arable fields and medium-sized mixed plantations. There are small fields of semi-improved grassland surrounding villages. There are also a few large blocks of ancient semi-natural woodland, including Stoke Wood and Stoke Little Wood, which add to the wooded character of the area. The field boundaries are dominated by hawthorn and blackthorn hedges with scattered hedgerow trees, although the latter are almost totally absent to the south of Upper Heyford airfield. Hedges are generally low in height, except around Fritwell and Ardley where they are taller and more species-rich.

Forces for change

- Agricultural intensification, particularly the conversion of grassland to arable has resulted in the loss of semi-natural vegetation and fragmentation of the hedgerow network. Hedges along roadsides are generally in a better condition, but many internal hedges bordering arable fields have been removed.
- The open plateau landscapes are very exposed and agricultural buildings and other large structures, such as the industrial units at Enstone Airfield, are particularly prominent. Similarly, the structures associated with Upper Heyford airfield are very visible across the Cherwell valley.

Landscape Strategy

13.1.19 The overarching strategy for this LCA is to conserve the open and remote character of the landscape and maintain the large-scale field pattern.

Guidelines

- Conserve the open, spacious character of the landscape by limiting woodland planting on the more exposed ridge tops. Locate new planting in the dips and folds of the landscape and establish tree belts around airfields, quarries and other large structures to reduce their visual impact using locally characteristic native tree and shrub species such as ash, oak and beech.
- Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn and blackthorn.
- Promote environmentally sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type.
- Maintain the sparsely settled rural character of the landscape by concentrating new development in and around existing settlements. The exposed character of the plateau is particularly sensitive to visually intrusive development, large buildings and communication masts.
- Promote the use of local building materials, such as limestone and ironstone, and a scale of development appropriate to landscape type.

C. Middleton Stoney (CW/59) LCA

13.1.20 The area is dominated by large arable fields and localised improved grassland. Woodland is a strong landscape element, and large woodland blocks are associated with the parklands and estates. It is mainly ancient semi-natural woodland, with species such as ash, oak, hazel, and field maple, as well as mixed plantations. Throughout the landscape, there are belts of young mixed and coniferous plantations next to roadside hedges and they often function as field boundaries. Hedgerow trees such as ash, sycamore and occasionally oak are found in some roadside hedges, but they are sparser to the north where there is more intensive arable cropping. In parts there are dense corridors of willow and ash, belts of semi-natural woodland and poplar plantations bordering watercourses. Hedgerows vary from tall, thick species-rich hedges with shrubs such as wayfaring tree, dogwood, hazel, field maple, spindle and wild privet through to low, gappy internal field hedges. Parklands are a prominent feature throughout and they include Middleton, Bignell and Tusmore Parks in the north and Kirtlington and Bletchington Parks in the south.

Forces for change

- Overall, the hedges are in good condition but intensive agriculture has led to the fragmentation of field boundaries, particularly in areas dominated by arable farming. In such areas the hedges are very intensively maintained, fragmented, and in places removed altogether and replaced by fences.
- The vernacular character is strong in most of the villages and there is generally a low impact from residential development, especially within the wider countryside. However, in some villages new residential development is out of character, even though it is contained within the village envelope. There is also

sprawling development along some of the main roads, particularly the A420 and A338, although this is mitigated to some extent by woodland and mature garden trees.

- In very intensive areas of arable farming some of the new, large-scale barn complexes are visually intrusive.
- Some large-scale business parks using inappropriate building materials are also visually intrusive.

Landscape Strategy

13.1.21 Safeguard and enhance the characteristic landscape of parklands, estates, woodlands, hedgerows and unspoilt villages.

Guidelines

- 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 and mixed plantations in areas where the landscape structure is particularly weak.
- Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn 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.
- Conserve and sympathetically maintain species-rich hedgerows and, where appropriate, replant gappy hedges using species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, wayfaring tree, dogwood and spindle.
- Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses such as quarries, landfill sites, airfields and large-scale development, such as new barns and industrial units, 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 and a scale of development and that is appropriate to this landscape type.