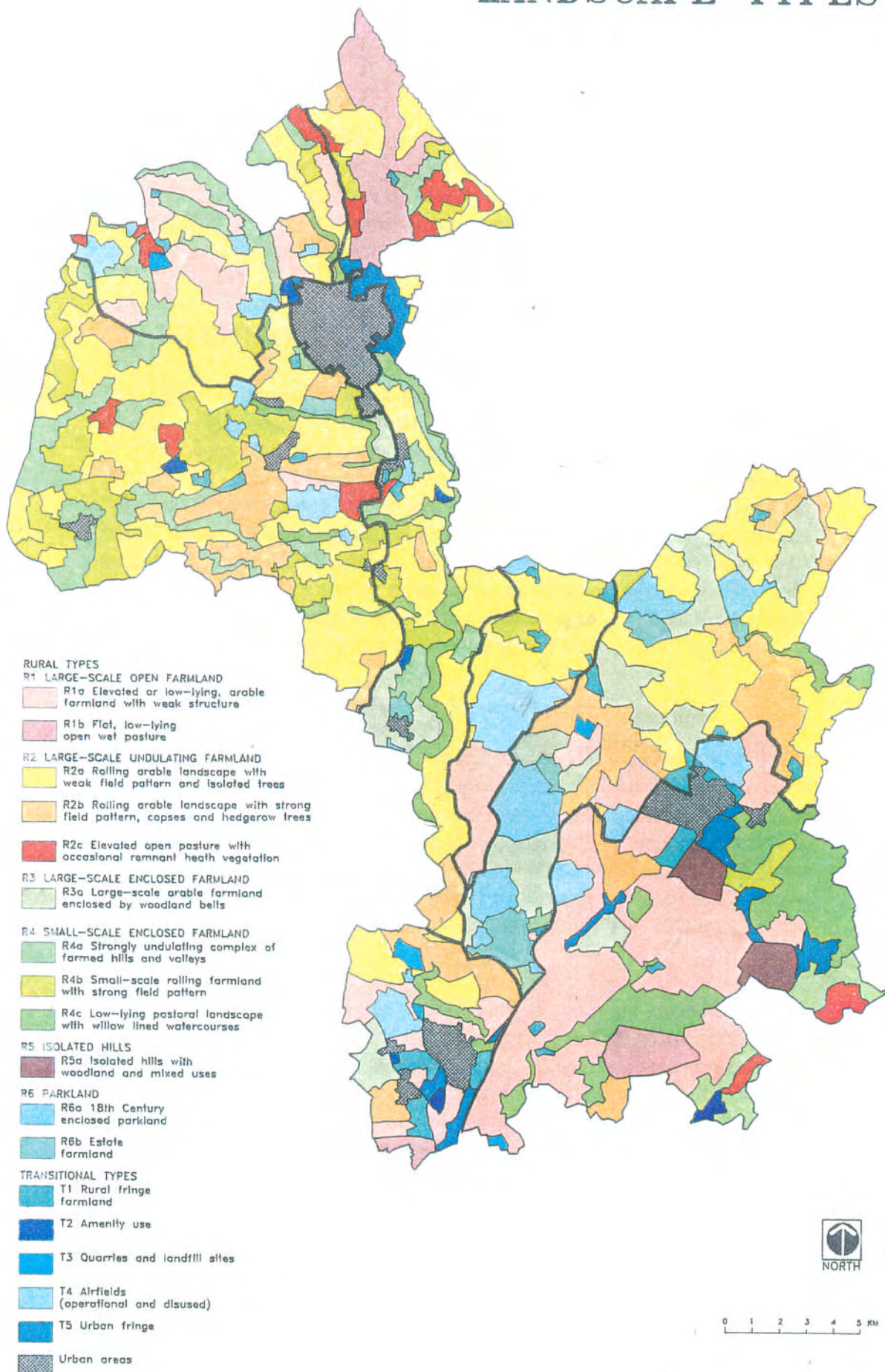


Figure 6

LANDSCAPE TYPES



been mentioned earlier in this report but it is worth noting that a particularly good example is found at Shenington. Here, the steep slopes are terraced to maximise the cultivation area and these strip lynchets are clearly visible.

- 3.55 The attractive village of Wroxton contains many seventeenth and eighteenth century thatched cottages but is best known for Wroxton Abbey. Part of the thirteenth century Augustinian monastic house is incorporated into the present seventeenth century house and the foundations of the early church have been uncovered. The park, designed by Sanderson-Miller, contains the remains of formal gardens and pleasure grounds which included a lake with a great cascade, a dovecote and an archway at the end of an eastward view towards Drayton.

UPPER HEYFORD PLATEAU

- 3.57 The Upper Heyford Plateau lies immediately to the east of the Cherwell Valley, on the highest rise of the White Limestone. A lower area than the Ironstone Hills, it is nonetheless an exposed, level, open plateau, which dips very gently into rolling hills to the south-east. Upper Heyford Airbase comprises about a third of this character area and dominates the landscape.

Landform and landcover

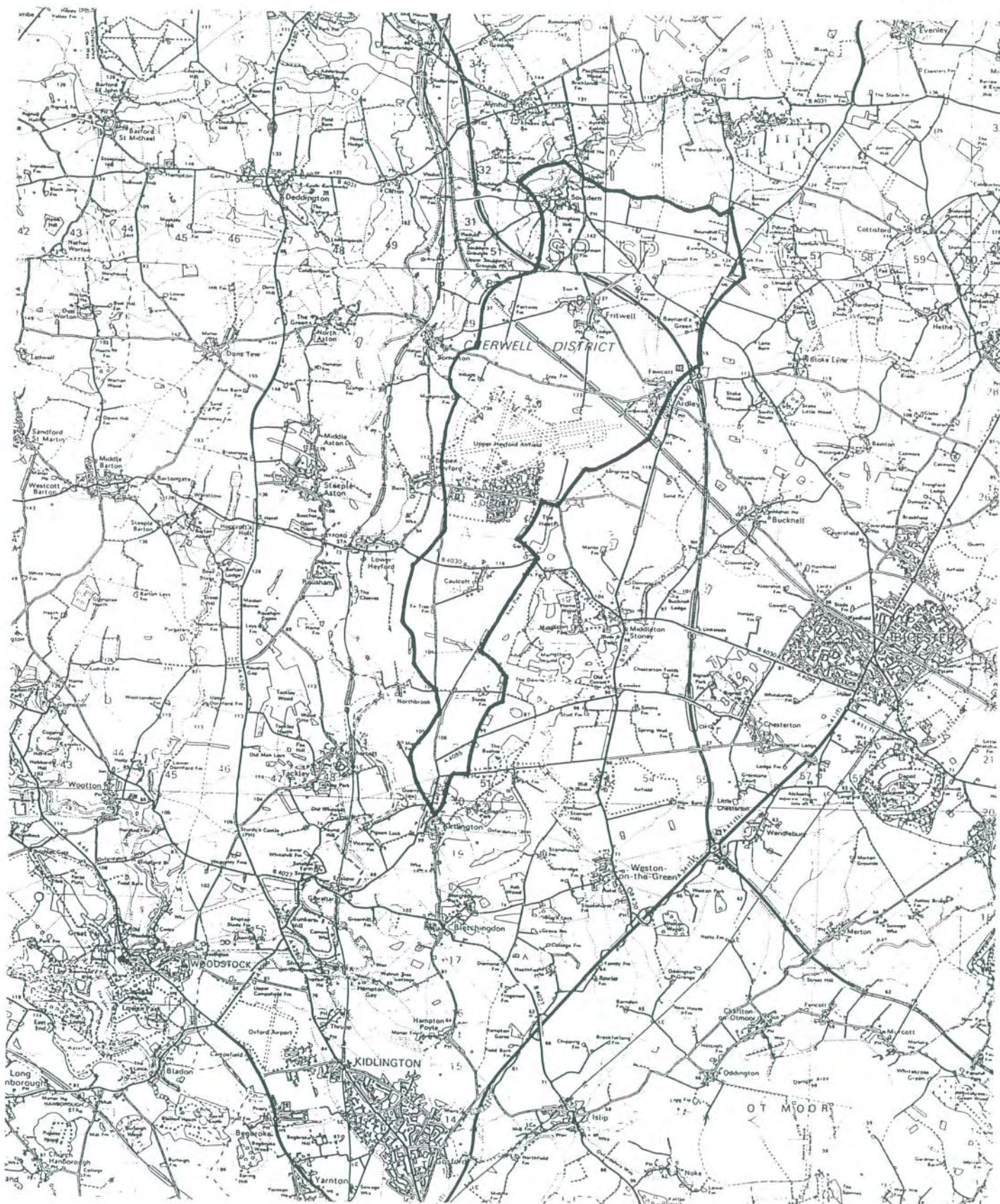
- 3.58 This area lies on a band of White Limestone, a limestone which contains a high proportion of mica interbedded with grey marl. It rises north-westwards in gentle undulations from 120m to 140m. To the west, the land falls sharply away into the valley of the River Cherwell. Minor streams drain west and south into the Thames river system via the Rivers Cherwell and Ray. However, streams sourced around Fritwell and Ardley drain into Padbury Brook which flows eastwards into the Great Ouse.
- 3.59 The level, open aspect was used to great advantage as a military airbase which now dominates the landscape. Immediately around the airfield are a number of grazing fields. However, agricultural land is almost all in intensive arable cultivation, with level or gently rolling, large open fields. Smaller, enclosed grazing fields cluster close to the villages.

Variation in landscape character

- 3.60 The southernmost part of this character area is dominated by **elevated flat arable farmland with weak structure (R1a)**. There are few hedges and virtually no trees. The land is relatively high, and from the well defined western edge there are good views across the Cherwell Valley.
- 3.61 The northern part of the area is similar in character to the south, except that as the land rises, the topography becomes more rolling. The landform gives some interest to the **rolling arable landscape with weak field**

Figure 12

UPPER HEYFORD



SCALE 1:100,000

pattern (R2a), although fields of arable land tend to run into one another with no visual or physical interruption. Within this large-scale landscape are the steeper slopes associated with village settlement, where smaller fields and mixed farming are local features.

- 3.62 The **Airfield (T4)** at Upper Heyford dominates the whole of this character area. On the plateau top are the runways, with associated landing lights and security fences, while barracks, offices, warehouses and hangars sprawl across the landscape to the south. Both buildings and airfield are surrounded by high wire security fences.
- 3.63 The base is now disused and deserted, but features such as the water towers are still very visible across the Cherwell valley. Associated street lighting and security lighting is particularly visible over long distances at night.

Special features

- 3.64 This sparse area of high ground is crossed by two ancient parallel routeways. The line of the Portway is followed by the minor road from Kirtlington which runs along the edge of the Cherwell Valley to Upper Heyford and continues northwards as a footpath towards Souldern. The other more visible feature is variously known as Aves Ditch, Ash Bank and Wattle Bank. It is most obvious as a ditch and bank running across the countryside between Middleton Stoney and Caulcott, and its line can be traced considerably further south, although much of it has been levelled. The bank had a dual function as a Roman boundary dyke and as an embanked road and has formed estate and parish boundaries since Saxon times.
- 3.65 An SSSI falling into this character areas is associated with a more recent linear feature, the railway cutting at Ardley. Here a herb-rich limestone grassland sward has developed on the steep banks of the railway cutting, where the wide range of typical species includes bee orchid *Ophrys apifera*, green-winged orchid *Orchis morio* and blue fleabane *Erigeron acer*. The cutting has particularly large populations of butterfly species which are uncommon in Oxfordshire, supporting a large colony of Small Blue, Brown Argus, Dark Green Fritillary, Green Hairstreak and Duke of Burgundy butterflies, as well as the nationally uncommon Wood White butterfly.

OXFORDSHIRE ESTATE FARMLANDS

- 3.67 South east of the Upper Heyford Plateau, the limestone dips into a series of gentle undulations. This area runs from Bletchingdon on the edge of the Cherwell Valley in the south, around to the north of Bicester and up to the county boundary with Northamptonshire. It is characterised primarily by the extensive remains of eighteenth century parklands and estate farmland

4 EVALUATION AND GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

- 4.1 The preceeding chapters have analysed and described the Cherwell landscape, including its development and present day character. From this assessment it is clear that the district has much to offer, not only as a visual resource, but also as an historical, architectural, cultural and nature conservation asset. The next step is to address issues of landscape value and sensitivity to change, and to identify conservation and enhancement priorities within the district.
- 4.2 We have looked at the pattern of variation in landscape condition and sensitivity to change across the district as a whole, identifying strategic priorities for landscape conservation and enhancement. Following on from this we have made brief recommendations for specific actions or improvements to conserve and enhance the particular landscape elements which contribute to landscape character.
- 4.3 On the whole, the district's landscape has remained remarkably unaffected by the pressures of urbanisation or landuse change and has retained a predominantly rural and unspoilt agricultural character. Certain parts of the district stand out for their individual character and strong sense of place, and for their historical, cultural or ecological associations, such as the Ironstone Hills and Valleys, Otmoor and the Cherwell Valley. These, and the other intact landscapes in the Thames Valley, North Ploughley and Muswell Hill areas, are properly represented within the District Council's designated Areas of High Landscape Value and to a lesser extent within the Cotswolds AONB..
- 4.4 There are other areas which have fared less well and whose landscape character has been adversely affected by urban development or intensive agricultural activity. These areas tend to lie, correctly, outside the district's designated landscapes.
- 4.5 However, these general distinctions conceal a more complex pattern of variation in landscape quality and condition. Inevitably, there are pockets of good quality landscape which lie outside the designated areas as well as pockets of poorer landscape within them. Our approach has been to set designations to one side and, instead, to look critically at the **intrinsic**, rather than the relative, quality of individual landscape types as they occur across the district and to indicate the most appropriate strategy for action. The strategic principles are essentially concerned with ensuring that the most valuable landscape assets within the study area are safeguarded; that resources for landscape enhancement are targeted to the most needy areas;

and that the capacity of different landscapes to accommodate change, including change brought about by development, is properly considered.

- 4.6 Four main strategies for landscape 'intervention' have been defined. Their distribution across the landscape of the study area is shown in Figure 7: Enhancement Strategy. The strategies are:-

- **Conservation**
- **Repair**
- **Restoration**
- **Reconstruction**

- 4.7 These strategies indicate the scope for restoring or creating new landscapes, as well as showing where there is less need for extensive intervention. Clearly, landscape considerations need to be balanced against other socio-economic, transport and environmental considerations within the wider planning framework for the district.

CONSERVATION LANDSCAPES

- 4.8 This strategy applies where landscape character and sense of place is particularly strong or where individual features are particularly notable for their landscape, ecological and/or cultural value. Examples include the intricate, hedged and wooded rural landscapes, valley floor and flood plain wet meadows, eighteenth century parklands, and remnant heathlands.
- 4.9 These landscapes represent the most valuable landscape assets of the district, and they should be given the highest priority for conservation and protection from damaging change. Most forms of development are likely to be highly damaging to these sensitive landscapes. However, this does not necessarily mean that they could or should be fossilised. All of these landscapes require management to conserve their declining features, to reduce intrusive influences and to maintain and enhance long-term landscape and ecological value.
- 4.10 These landscapes should form a guide for restoration and enhancement work elsewhere within the district. Their value could be significantly increased if they were to be extended and linked through improvement of adjacent areas as a priority.
- 4.11 Necessary intervention measures which should be encouraged in respect of these landscapes should include the following:-
- Conservation and good management of hedgerows. Removal of hedges should be strongly resisted and traditional hedge laying practices which are still followed in some areas should be encouraged with grants;

- Continued renewal of hedgerow trees should be encouraged to prevent the decline of the hedgerow tree network, which locally tend to all be of the same age structure;
- Traditional management of willow trees along watercourses and ditches should likewise continue to be strongly supported by landscape conservation grants;
- Detailed study and management plans should be prepared for remaining areas of historic parkland. Most of the parkland trees are of the same, aging structure, and if parkland character is to be conserved extensive planting programmes will need to be undertaken;
- Any improvements to drainage or to traditional agricultural land use should be strongly resisted, especially in low lying wet pasture and flood areas. The most sensitive areas are protected by SSSI status, and the introduction of the ESA should help to conserve other similar sensitive landscapes;
- Development should only be permitted if it is sensitively sited and the scale, size, materials, and character of the scheme are designed to blend in to the area, as is the case with much of the high quality infill housing found in many of the district's villages. Care needs to be taken, however, that the characteristic spatial structure of villages is not too greatly changed.

REPAIR LANDSCAPES

- 4.12 These are areas where the landscape character is still reasonably strong and worthy of conservation, but where some or all of the individual features or overall structure are showing noticeable decline. They typically include most of the unspoilt rural landscapes which do not fall within the conservation category, incorporating large areas of the Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands, the Upper Cherwell Basin, and Otmoor Lowlands.
- 4.13 Landscape intervention should concentrate on repair of the weakening hedgerow and hedgerow tree structure, strengthening or replacement of traditional landscape features and screening or integration of intrusive features. Usually only a minimal degree of intervention would be necessary to bring these areas up to the standard of conservation landscapes. Development in these areas must be sensitively sited, designed and integrated to ensure that the rural, unspoilt character of the landscape is maintained. However, precisely because their existing structure is so strong, these landscapes should be able to absorb limited areas of sensitive development. Specific enhancement measures should take into account the following:-

- Good management of hedgerows. Removal of hedges should be strongly resisted and gapping up carried out where hedges are becoming thin;
- Continued renewal of hedgerow trees should be encouraged to prevent the decline of the hedgerow tree network, which locally tend to all be of the same age structure. Care needs to be taken that trees appropriate to the character area are planted, with oak and ash on heavier soils and beech on limestone outcrops;
- Traditional management of willow trees along watercourses and ditches should be encouraged and supported by landscape conservation grants;
- Continued management of existing copses, coverts and small woods is important.
- Development should be permitted only if the scale, size, materials, and character of the scheme are designed so as to blend in to the area with sensitive siting, for example, as already occurs with most of the high quality infill housing found in many of the district's villages. Care needs to be taken, however, that the characteristic spatial structure of villages is not too greatly changed.
- Care should also be taken with any road improvement schemes that the character of the rural road network does not become urbanised through the use of standard urban kerbs, and that features such as hedgebanks and sunken lanes are not lost.

RESTORATION LANDSCAPES

- 4.14 Restoration landscapes are somewhat further along the scale of decline. Their character and structure are often quite seriously degraded, although they do retain some discernible remnants of their former character. Typically, these areas are those where intensive agricultural practices have resulted in widespread loss of hedgerow and woodland structure, or where the landscape has lost its rural character and become visually degraded, in some instances as a result of intrusive built development, around the urban fringes or along transport corridors.
- 4.15 Potentially, these landscapes have a greater capacity to accommodate positive change because their former character has already been so substantially weakened. Positive intervention should concentrate on strengthening the landscape framework in order to improve landscape quality and create a stronger sense of place. Where intensive agricultural practices have led to locally universal loss of landscape structure, it may be necessary to create a new rural landscape character appropriate to the character area, establishing a stronger sense of place. This does not imply

topographical change where landscapes are otherwise flat and mounding would appear alien in character.

- 4.16 Great care should be taken that new development is well sited and sensitively designed so that it does not simply worsen the existing problems of poorly integrated, intrusive development. The following landscape intervention measures should be encouraged to enhance these landscapes:-
- Replanting of hedgerows and hedgerow trees where these have been removed should be encouraged, together with gapping up and improved maintenance of weakening hedges,
 - There is a good opportunity for extensive woodland planting across the district which as a whole lacks woodland cover. Woodlands should be of a form appropriate to their character area, with smaller woods near the brow of hills in the Ironstone areas, and larger, sweeping woodland belts interspersed with smaller copses in the lowlands. Species used should be indigenous broadleaves;
 - Existing development should be contained within a strong, distinctive landscape framework. There is considerable scope for tightening the landscape structure along road corridors and around the urban fringes;
 - New development should be integrated with a strong landscape framework which should be based on features found within the relevant character area, and should respect long views over open countryside.

RECONSTRUCTION LANDSCAPES

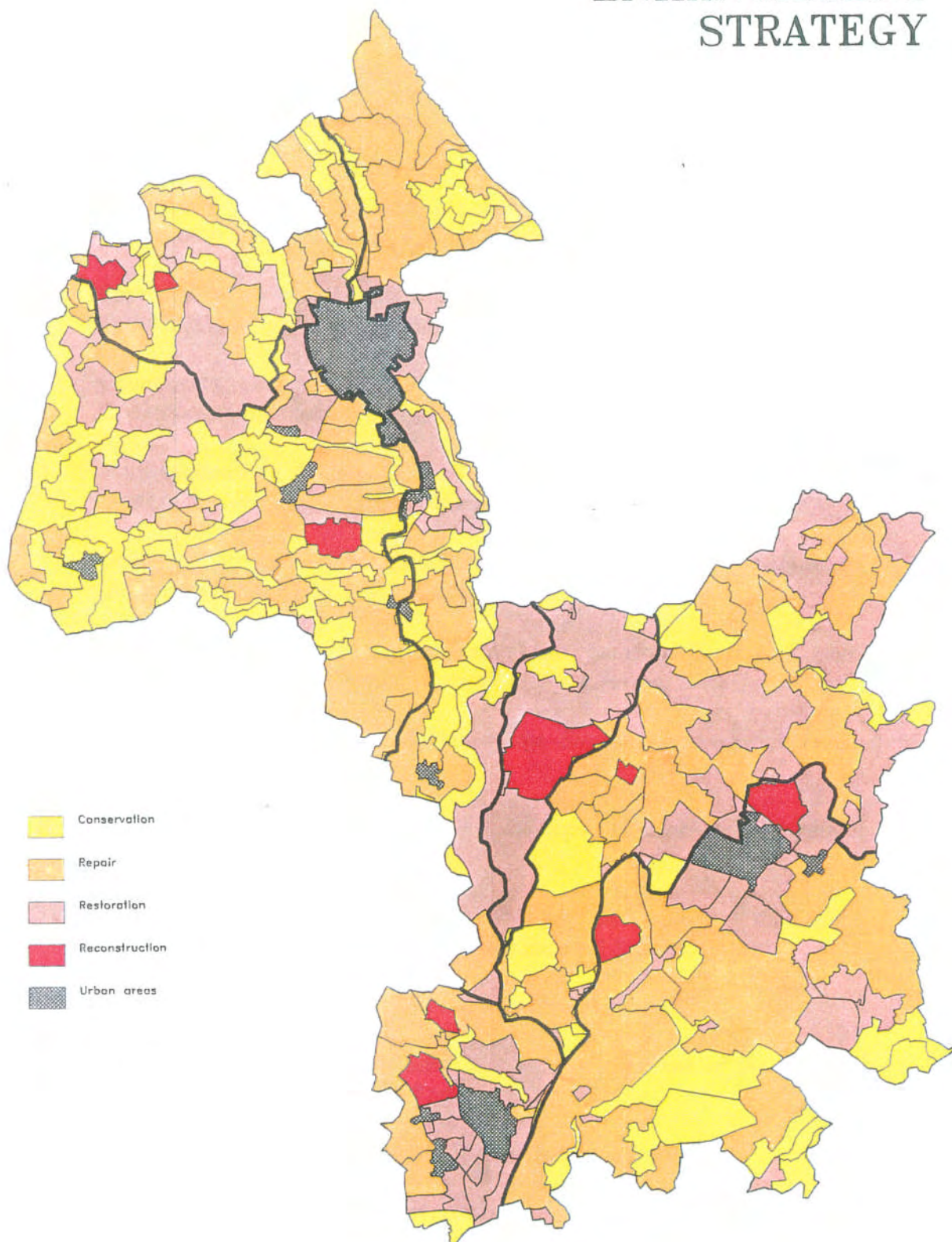
- 4.17 These landscapes are those where the landscape has been so modified by human activity that they no longer bear any resemblance to their former character. They include quarries, and airfields which occur in significant numbers throughout the study area.
- 4.18 These landscapes have a high capacity to accommodate change because they have already lost their intrinsic character. They would gain very positive benefits from the introduction of a new character and strong sense of place. Created new identities need to be distinctive, but also need to respond to the surrounding landscape context. A strong landscape framework can help to achieve successful integration of new development in these areas. The following opportunities should be considered:
- Contain new development within a strong, distinctive landscape framework that is sensitively designed so as to integrate with the surrounding landscape character, paying particular attention to the

distribution of woodlands, scale of field pattern, and local building styles;

- Restructure quarry landscape at Bunkers Hill creating new landscape features and recreational opportunities linked to the Cherwell Valley; seek to restore quarries in remote rural areas to agricultural land, with field patterns, hedges and woodland to blend restored area into surrounding landscape;
- Take advantage of the good opportunity for extensive woodland planting across the district which as a whole lacks woodland cover. Woodlands should be of a form appropriate to the character area, and species should be indigenous broadleaves. Establishment of a green framework of woodland should be a priority, and can occur before development proposals are made.
- Ensure that new development has a strong sense of identity but also knits into surrounding landscape. Seek to divide and structure denuded open landscapes of disused airfields with development contained in strong landscape framework.

Figure 15

ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY



0 1 2 3 4 5 Km