Countryside Design Summary

<div align="center">**COUNTRYSIDE DESIGN SUMMARY**</div>

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The countryside of Cherwell is a product of both natural forces and management of the land by man. We have used the countryside as a place in which to both live and work over many centuries so shaping the character of the landscape into what we see today. Change is often gradual and imperceptible, but over time has a marked impact on our surroundings. Today, change continues to take place as farming practices alter and modern life generates demand for new buildings. This pressure for change is matched by our increased awareness of the need to preserve the unique character of Cherwell's countryside for future generations. This means guiding new development in a way, which respects the past, but does not stifle change.

2. AIMS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE DESIGN SUMMARY

2.1 The purpose of the Countryside Design Summary is to guide development in the rural areas so that the distinctive character of the district's countryside and the settlements and buildings within it are maintained and enhanced.

2.2 By understanding the character of Cherwell District; its countryside, its settlements, its buildings and the way in which they relate to one another, implications for new development can be made which reflects this existing character.

2.3 The district comprises four broad areas each displaying a distinct unity, which makes each one different. The Countryside Design Summary gives a brief description of the form and character of these areas. It concentrates on the essential defining characteristics of each area - what makes them unique and which elements are important. A list of implications for the use and development of land has been drawn from these existing characteristics.

2.4 The guidance is not meant to be prescriptive. The intention is that this document will encourage creative and imaginative approaches to new development, which reflects the existing distinctive character of the villages and countryside of Cherwell District.

3. THE PLANNING CONTEXT

3.1 The Countryside Design Summary has the status of supplementary planning guidance. It is written to compliment national planning guidance and the development plan policy framework by providing more detailed guidance for the rural areas. It should not be read in isolation from these documents.

3.2 The Cherwell Local Plan directs large-scale new development towards Banbury and Bicester. Elsewhere, development is restricted, especially in the open countryside, within the Green Belt and in the smaller villages. In addition, many villages have conservation areas and within or adjacent to them, special attention will be given to the preservation or enhancement of their character and appearance*.*

3.3 Other documents provide more selective and detailed information with regard to design and conservation in the rural areas. For example, there is specific design guidance for barn conversions, planning advice for farmers on the siting and design of farm buildings and published conservation area character appraisals, which provide an insight into character and appearance worthy of preservation and enhancement.

3.4 In addition to the above, this document will provide a broad framework within which local communities will be able to produce their own "Village Design Statements." These would describe the distinct character of a village and its surrounding countryside and the Council will consider the adoption of such statements as supplementary planning guidance.

4. THE FORM AND CHARACTER OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

4.1 The form and character of the countryside of Cherwell District has been defined by studying it at three levels; landscape, settlement pattern and buildings. Cobham Resource Consultants undertook a landscape assessment of the District in 1995 and this provided a basis for further research. Geology, drainage and landform are the basic elements of the countryside, which influence to varying degrees landscape character, land use, village location, village form, village character and building form.

4.2 The District Council recently carried out public consultation on rural planning issues prior to the review of the Cherwell Local Plan. In the document "Helping to Shape the Future - Rural Issues", the public was asked: "Which features define the character of the countryside in Cherwell where you live, work or spend free time? Is it important to you that this character is maintained and if so why?" Responses to these questions show how sensitive people are to diversity and local distinctiveness. The landscape form, hedgerows, views, wildlife, the type of agriculture, traditional building styles, attractive villages, footpaths and peace and quiet are the defining characteristics of the Cherwell countryside which were mentioned most often.

4.3 There are four distinct areas, each one of which exhibits its own characteristics: the Cherwell Valley, Ironstone Downs, Ploughley Limestone Plateau and Clay Vale of Otmoor. Within these areas there is, of course, variation at a more local level, from village to village, street to street and building to building, but overall each area displays an overall character which distinguishes it from the others. The location of the character areas is shown on the plan on page 5, and more detailed plans of each area are located at the beginning of each section. They are introduced briefly below.

4.4 The River Cherwell and its valley forms a distinctive central spine to the district's landscape, through which are routed the Oxford Canal and railway. The north of the district to the west of the Cherwell Valley is characterised by upland plateaux, rolling hills and steep valleys with Marlstone rock beds, known as Ironstone, giving the area its distinctive building material. Ploughley to the east of the Cherwell Valley is a lower and more gently rolling limestone plateau, with significant areas of woodland and 18th century parkland. Further south the plateau gives way to open expanses of low lying flood plains with areas of water meadows in the Clay Vale. The area lies on Oxford clay and its most notable feature is Otmoor, an area of ecological importance, which contains few buildings beyond the existing boundaries of villages.

4.5 The boundaries between the Cherwell Valley and the Ironstone and Limestone areas are defined by a pronounced change in landform and landscape character, whilst the transition from

the Ploughley Limestone Plateau to the Clay Vale of Otmoor is much more subtle. There are also small parts of these large character areas where the landscape character and form does not conform with the remainder of the area. However, such places are too small to create separately defined character areas and are described as features within the larger, more homogenous areas.

5. INFLUENCE OF THE URBAN AREAS

5.1 Whilst it is not the place of this document to explore the complexities of the landscape impact and setting of the three urban areas of Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington, it should be recognised that the urban areas have an impact on the character of the surrounding countryside.

5.2 Over this century, the urban areas have encroached over the adjacent rural areas changing the location and character of the interface between town and country. This interface is important in determining the impact the urban areas have on the character of the countryside.

5.3 The Countryside Design Summary, therefore, needs to be considered by those contemplating proposals for development on, or close to the edge of the urban areas which may have an impact on the character of the rural areas, for example, by visual intrusion, traffic impact, loss of amenity, impact on wildlife. Both the towns of Banbury and Bicester straddle two character areas and therefore considerations will vary depending on the specific edge of town location.

6. 20th CENTURY DEVELOPMENT

6.1 In seeking to preserve local diversity and distinctiveness, this document is making a valued judgement concerning some of the development that has taken place this century. Some villages remain almost entirely as they did 100 years ago, whilst in others 20th century development represents more than half of the villages built form.

6.2 Not all modern development is incongruous with local character, by any means. Many imaginative schemes over recent years have made a positive contribution to the character of a village, for example, redevelopment of Rectory Farm, off Church Street in Bloxham. This document also includes descriptions of existing village and building character, which is partly as a result of development this century.

6.3 However, it should be acknowledged that some 20th century development has taken little or no account of the villages landscape setting, its historic form or local vernacular. Ignoring the past in this way can lead to the standardisation of the rural areas and is a major concern to local people. The Countryside Design Summary aims to learn from the mistakes made in the past.

7. HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

(i)   First, check that your proposal is acceptable in terms of the Local Plan policy framework for the area.

(ii)   Establish the character area in which your proposal is located by using the maps on pages 5, 6, 12, 18 and 24. A list of settlements is provided opposite the maps. Read through the relevant section of this document.

(iii)   Check your proposal against what you have read. Establish whether the development would complement all aspects of the character of this part of the district. To assist in this evaluation a checklist of questions can be found on page 30 of this document.

(iv)   Consider whether there are ways in which your proposal could be improved so that it relates more sympathetically to the character of the rural areas of Cherwell District.

If you require further advice concerning your development proposal, please:

Write to: Head of Development and Property Services
                Cherwell District Council
                Bodicote House
                Bodicote
                Banbury
                Oxon OX15 4AA

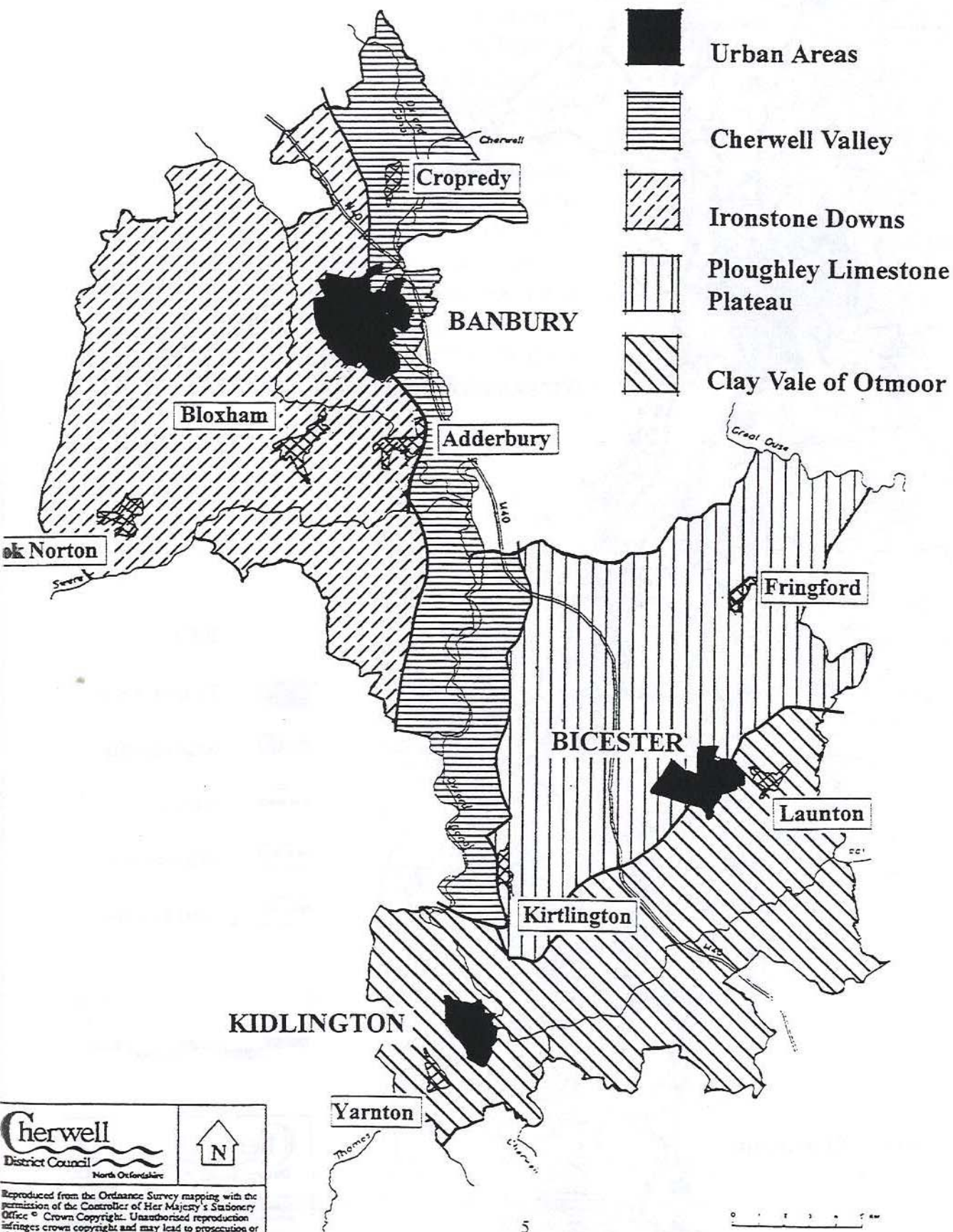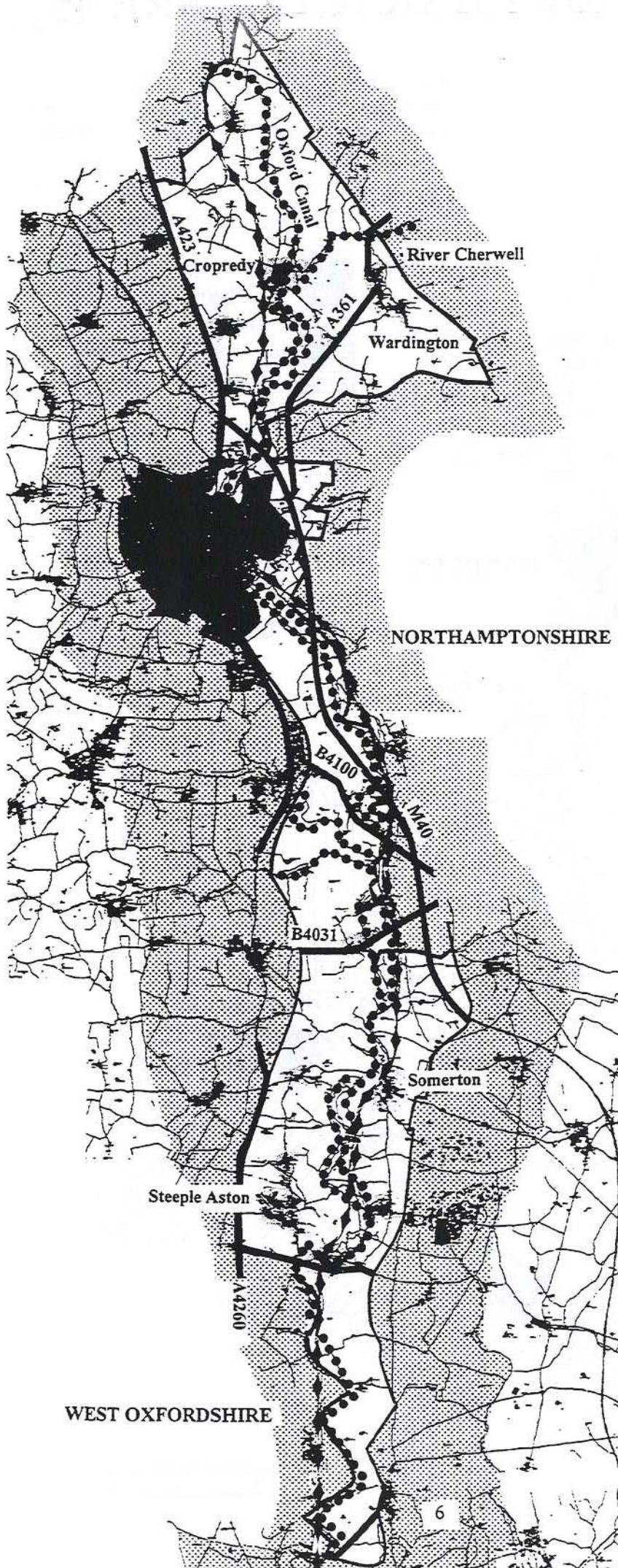   Phone: (01295) 252535

                Fax: (01295) 253153

                Minicom: (01295) 264103.

For further general advice on landscape matters, please contact the Landscape Services Manager on extension 4210

COUNTRYSIDE CHARACTER AREAS

Legend:
- Urban Areas
- Cherwell Valley
- Ironstone Downs
- Ploughley Limestone Plateau
- Clay Vale of Otmoor

Map labels: Cropredy, BANBURY, Bloxham, Adderbury, ok Norton, Fringford, BICESTER, Launton, Kirtlington, KIDLINGTON, Yarnton

CHERWELL VALLEY

Oxford Canal

A423

Cropredy

River Cherwell

A361

Wardington

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

B4100

M40

B4031

Somerton

Steeple Aston

A4260

WEST OXFORDSHIRE

6

KEY

- ■ Urban Areas
- Settlements
- Roads
- •••• Waterways
- Rail Routes

0   5Km

SETTLEMENTS OF THE CHERWELL VALLEY

Claydon
Clifton
Cropredy
Great Bourton
Little Bourton
Lower Heyford
Middle Aston
Nethercote
North Aston
Northbrook
Somerton
Steeple Aston
Upper Heyford
Wardington
Williamscot

THE CHERWELL VALLEY

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The River Cherwell rises at Blackdown Hill in Northamptonshire and flows westwards then southwards to be joined by the major tributary of Highfurlong Brook, at Cropredy. To the north of this point a shallow gently sloping basin creates an open exposed landscape whilst to the south the river flows through a wide rolling valley in the Lower and Middle Lias. The River Cherwell then passes through the urban area of Banbury. To the south of Banbury the river is joined from the west by two major tributaries, the Sor Brook and the River Swere. Thereafter the broad valley becomes more defined and then narrows as it flows through the limestone beds. Finally, the Cherwell reaches the Clay Vale where the landscape flattens out. The River Cherwell forms the boundary of the district between Banbury and Clifton, and between Heyford Bridge and Enslow and as a consequence the other half of the valley lies within an adjoining local authority area.

2. LANDSCAPE

2.1 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

(i)   The Cherwell valley is broad with rolling slopes and a flat floor, which floods seasonally. The valley is open forming a basin in its upper section, dissecting the Ironstone Downs, which rise on either side. To the south of Banbury, the valley narrows and becomes more defined. The river takes a meandering course for much of its length, with small tributary brooks joining at regular intervals. The paths of these watercourses are delineated by groups of Oak, Ash and Alder with the characteristic pollarded willows**.**

(ii)   A loose patchwork of fields remain with strong field patterns concentrated on steeply undulating land and close to villages. These fields are bounded by mixed thorn hedgerows, many of which contain oak trees. Wet pasture on the valley floor gives way to arable farmland on the valley slopes and upland areas.

(iii)   Large woodland belts are not characteristic of the area except on the valley slopes in the vicinity of Steeple Aston.

(iv)   The vista and setting of Rousham Park spanning the Cherwell Valley, remains a largely undeveloped landscape as remodelled in the eighteenth century.(See Rousham Conservation Area Character Appraisal for further details).

(v)   Although not in this character area, the former airbase at Upper Heyford is prominent in many views of the skyline from the valley floor and sides from Rousham to North Aston.

(vi)   The Cherwell valley offers extensive views across its rolling slopes from both sides, with those in the north being more distant and remote.

(vii)   The A4260 (south of Banbury) and the A423 (north of Banbury) run along the ridgeway to the west of the Cherwell Valley. The opening of the M40 as the major north-south road has now relieved traffic there. The Oxford Canal, the Banbury to Oxford railway and the

M40, all have a major influence on the character of the valley floor. Narrow lanes run along the valley sides linking villages. River crossings are limited.

2.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT

(i)   Trees, hedgerows and other features, which are important for their wildlife or landscape value, should be retained. In most cases new planting would assist the integration of new buildings in their landscape setting.

(ii)   All development (including change of use of land) within the vista and setting of Rousham Park will be controlled to ensure that its character and visual integrity is maintained.

(iii)   Further vehicular crossings of the Cherwell and its valley should be restricted.

(iv)   The valley floor of the Cherwell is open and characterised by hedgerows and therefore not a suitable location for areas of woodland. However small stands or copses on the valley slopes or brow may be appropriate.

3. SETTLEMENT PATTERN

3.1 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

(i)   Villages are mainly situated on the valley slopes facing one another with the church usually providing a focal point. Those to the west are prominent features and are largely located on the valley's upper slopes. Those to the east form two types. In its upper section they are secluded because of their location in wooded tributary valleys, whilst to the south villages are located on the valley's lower slopes. The exceptions are Claydon which is located on a knoll in the Cherwell's upper drainage basin, and Cropredy which is located on raised land adjacent to the River.

(ii)   Most of the villages have agricultural origins. In some, working farms remain, e.g. Somerton. Others, such as the Heyfords and Cropredy have been influenced in their development by the Oxford Canal and the railway, with wharfs and stations.

(iii)   Trees and hedges outside villages and in areas of open space within them help to integrate the villages into their valley location.

(iv)   Village form varies, with linear forms such as that exhibited by Williamscot and Clifton, being most common. Other villages are based on road junctions or crossroads (e.g. Claydon), some retaining a strong linear character and others having grown to display a more nucleated form, e.g. Cropredy. Some have central, largely undeveloped space within the street plan (e.g. Steeple Aston) which forms an essential part of the character of the village.

(v)   Village streets are mainly open in character. This is created through a variety of spaces, including informal verges, village greens, orchards, paddocks and gaps in the built up frontage providing views into the surrounding countryside e.g. The Green at North Aston.

A sense of enclosure is produced in some streets through either narrow lanes and terraced buildings or tree cover e.g. Steeple Aston and Williamscot.

3.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT

(i)   New development should reflect the landscape setting of villages, by not encroaching beyond any topographical, visual or environmental limits e.g. beyond the valley slope onto the brow of the hill, or undermining important gaps between neighbouring villages.

(ii)   New development should respect the views to, and setting of, important landmark buildings such as churches.

(iii)   Development should respect the scale and historic form of each particular village.

(iv)   Within linear villages development should emphasise the existing street pattern by limiting backland development.

(v)   Where there is important open space, which forms an integral part of the character of the village, such as at Steeple Aston, this space should remain undeveloped.

(vi)   The creation of new public space, which is an integral part of new development, can help maintain the rural character of a village.

4. BUILDINGS

4.1 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

(i)   Domestic buildings are mainly 2-storey terraced or detached cottages built traditionally of Ironstone from Clifton northwards and of limestone to the south. In some villages, such as Steeple Aston, there is a mixture of these two materials, both between buildings and on the same building.

(ii)   The influence of the canal and the railway is apparent, with the introduction of Welsh slate and engineering bricks. Some villages, especially the larger ones have modern buildings consisting of artificial stone, render and various types of brick.

(iii)   A small percentage of domestic properties have retained their thatched roofs, whilst the majority of the rest have dark toned, plain slates and tiles, including stone slate and Welsh slate. Some 20th century buildings exhibit a variety of roofing materials. Roofs are mostly steeply pitched with red brick chimney stacks on the ridge line.

(iv)   Vernacular cottages tend to have horizontally aligned simple timber casement windows, whilst later houses have larger vertically aligned sash windows.

(v)   Domestic buildings mostly face onto the streets, either positioned close to the kerb or behind stone walls producing a close relationship between buildings and streets. In places these walls are of a substantial height, creating a sense of enclosure. Terraced buildings

are common and produce a strong continuous building line. Front gardens are not common place. Verges tend to be informal or form part of a village green.
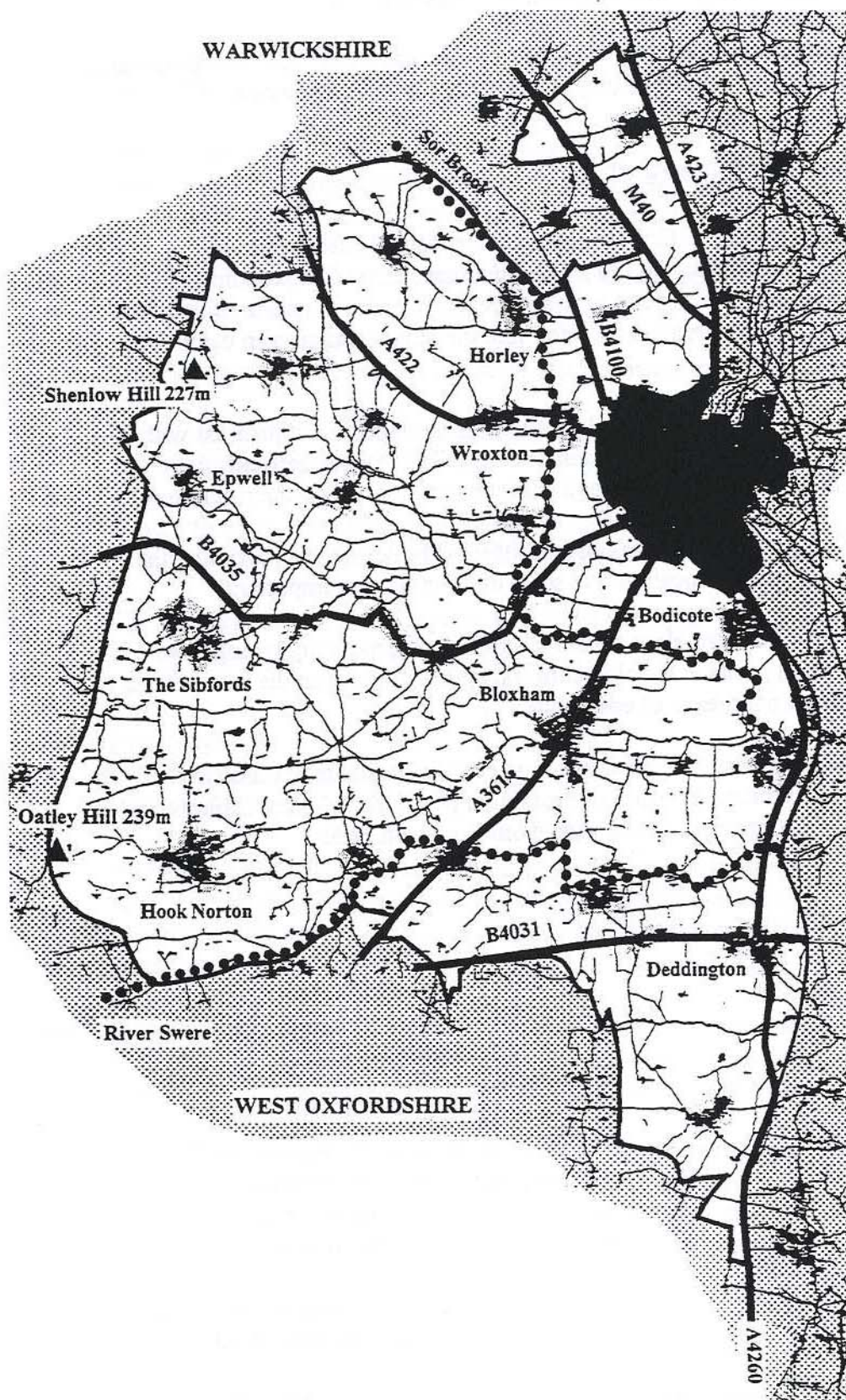
(vi)   Farmsteads in the upper basin are isolated prominent features due to the open landscape and lack of woodland. Further south farm buildings are generally less conspicuous.

4.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT

(i)   Natural stone is appropriate for domestic buildings, with Ironstone used for new development from Clifton northwards. To the south Limestone should be predominant, although in some village localities ironstone may also be appropriate. The use of other materials will require careful consideration to determine the appropriateness in each individual locality.

(ii)   Roofing materials should reflect the traditional tones and materials used in the past with an emphasis on plain slates and tiles. Profiled or interlocking tiles will not normally be acceptable.   Roofs should be steeply pitched and chimneys positioned on the ridge line.

(iii)   New designs should reflect the scale and proportions of local buildings. In particular the relationship of walls to roof and the location and scale of openings are important.

(iv)   Domestic buildings should be located close to and facing streets producing strong street frontages. Large private front gardens should be the exception rather than the rule. Stone walls and hedges are appropriate means of enclosure.

(v)   Farm buildings should be sited with care so as not to appear as dominant features in the landscape, for example, by avoiding exposed or prominent positions. No new isolated buildings should be sited within the protected vista from Rousham Park.

IRONSTONE DOWNS

WARWICKSHIRE

Sor Brook

A422

A423

M40

B4100

Horley

Shenlow Hill 227m

Wroxton

Epwell

B4035

Bodicote

The Sibfords

Bloxham

A361

Oatley Hill 239m

Hook Norton

B4031

Deddington

River Swere

WEST OXFORDSHIRE

A4260

KEY

⬛	Urban Area
🦋	Settlements
≡	Roads
••••	Waterways

0   5Km

Cherwell
District Council
North Oxfordshire

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SETTLEMENTS OF THE IRONSTONE DOWNS

Adderbury
Alkerton
Balscote
Barford St John
Barford St Michael
Bloxham
Bodicote
Broughton
Burdrop
Deddington
Drayton
Duns Tew
Epwell
Hanwell
Hook Norton
Horley
Hornton
Lower Tadmarton
Milcombe
Milton
Mollington
North Newington
Shenington
Shutford
Sibford Ferris
Sibford Gower
South Newington
Swalcliffe
Upper Tadmarton
Wigginton
Wroxton

IRONSTONE DOWNS

1. INTRODUCTION

The character area covers the entire northern half of the district to the west of the Cherwell Valley. It also forms part of a larger region, which is fairly homogenous in terms of its geology and architecture, covering parts of Warwickshire, Northamptonshire and West Oxfordshire. The Ironstone Downs consist of marlstone rock beds overlying middle and lower lias clays, except where outcrops of white limestone and Northampton sands have been exposed by uplift. The southern half of this area is divided into steeply sided, convoluted valleys with narrow valleys floors and rolling, rounded hill lines. The marlstone is less faulted in the northern half, producing an upland plateau-like landscape incised by very steep and often narrow valleys. The majority of this character area drains into the River Cherwell, except for a small area around the Sibfords, which drains west into the River Stour.

2. LANDSCAPE

2.1 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

(i)   The Ironstone Downs is a strongly undulating landscape, which rises to the west forming an upland ridge on the western boundary of the district, over 200m in altitude in part. In places, such as Oatley Hill at 239m, this ridge provides extensive views over much of the western part of this character area.

(ii)   Steeply sided, narrow valleys containing small brooks dissect the area, being more defined in the north where they cut through a gently rolling plateau. To the south, however, rounded hills often extend straight from the valley sides. Quarrying has had a considerable impact on the landscape with some reclaimed fields several metres below the natural level of the land.

(iii)   Mixed farmland is characteristic of this area. Where the land is gently sloping, large-scale intensive arable farmland predominates. Elsewhere on steeper slopes, small scale grazing land exists with strong patterns of mixed thorn hedgerows containing hedgerow trees such as Oak, Ash, Sycamore and occasional Beech. Remnant heath vegetation also exists on some of the higher ground.

(iv)   There are very few extensive areas of woodland. Those that exist are either associated with historic parkland located in the east of the area, or with poor quality soils, especially in association with watercourses and the brow of hills.

(v)   This area contains both exposed large-scale arable landscapes and intimate small-scale valleys under pasture. Views from upland locations often encompass both types.

(vi)   Roads generally cross the higher ground and traverse valleys, but rarely follow them. Occasionally the roads are raised above the level of the landscape where extensive quarrying has taken place in adjacent fields. Roads are sunken where they cross steep valley slopes.

2.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT

(i)   New roads or access ways should cause minimal disturbance to valley floors, e.g., by careful alignment, the formation of cuttings, planting of hedgerows and other treatment sympathetic to the landscape.

(ii)   Trees and hedges should be retained to conserve the small-scale character of much of the landscape. Where new planting is required to help integrate new development into the landscape, this should reflect local landscape structure and character.

(iii)   All forms of development need to be sited with care in order to avoid locations where development would be either, prominent, visually intrusive, out of character or would harm a feature or site, which is important to the character of the area.

3. SETTLEMENTS

3.1 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

(i)   A large number of closely spaced settlements of an agricultural origin have developed as a result of the soil fertility and water supply. The majority of villages are small in scale, with the exception of Adderbury, Bloxham, Bodicote, Deddington and Hook Norton, all of which act as local service centres and are located in the southern half of this area. Villages are positioned in valley locations, either on the valley sides, e.g. South Newington, at the head of a valley, e.g. Wroxton; or near the top of the valley on the brow of the hill, eg. Hempton.

(ii)   Villages are generally only prominent where the valleys are open and wide, e.g. the Barfords in the Swere valley. Elsewhere village location and topography means that many villages are not visible over long distances. Churches located near the highest point of the village provide a landmark in the wider countryside.

(iii)   Villages have developed as distinct nucleated features in the landscape, with little development other than farms in the wider countryside. Over time, development has produced a variety of village forms depending on the location of villages in relation to roads. Where only one road exists the villages are generally linear in form, e.g. Tadmarton, however as many of the villages are located at the junction of roads, compact forms have developed over time, e.g. Balscote. The layouts of roads sometimes enclose areas of undeveloped land, which contributes to the character of the village, e.g. Wigginton. At the head of the valleys, the topography actually limits development and therefore helps to shape the form of the village, e.g. Hornton.

(iv)   Despite a lack of woodland in the wider landscape, trees and hedgerows are often important features in street scenes and in views of villages in their landscape setting.

(v)   Village character varies both within a settlement and from village to village. Terraced properties and high ironstone walls set close to narrow lanes create a sense of enclosure, e.g. parts of Bloxham, whilst small informal verges and small greens create space, e.g. Shenington.

3.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT

(i)   New development should respect the existing setting of each particular village. Landscape constraints are very important in this part of Cherwell District and most proposals, which would have a prominent visual impact on the wider countryside, will not be acceptable.

(ii)   The scale, location and layout of new development should carefully relate to the historic form of each particular village.

(iii)   Open space, which forms an important part of the character of the village, should remain undeveloped.

(iv)   The creation of new public space, which is an integral part of new development, can help maintain the rural character of the villages.

4. BUILDINGS

4.1 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

(i)   There is a strong consistency in the vernacular architecture of this area. Two storey terraced and detached houses built of ironstone is characteristic. Although the ironstone walling shows considerable variation in character, the most frequently used is small roughly squared rubble laid in courses of unequal depth. Duns Tew is the exception, where limestone predominates. Early 19th century brick buildings are largely found in villages close to Banbury, although other villages on railway lines, such as Hook Norton, were influenced by the introduction of new materials. 20th century development displays a large variety of materials.

(ii)   The traditional roofing material of the area is thatch and stone slate. A large number of roofs have subsequently been replaced with plain dark grey slates, tiles and Welsh slate. Red clay or concrete tiles have been used in some modern developments. Roof pitches are generally steep with brick stacks on the ridge line.

(iii)   Window types in ironstone cottages are a mix of stone mullioned, timber casement and timber sash, with horizontal alignment being the traditional pattern.

(iv)   The majority of domestic buildings face the streets with the occasional house positioned at right angles to the road. Houses are either located adjacent to the streets, often with no pavement, or set back a few metres, sometimes enclosed by low ironstone walls. High ironstone walls often enclose large important buildings and open space. This relationship forms well defined streets.

(v)   Farmsteads and farm buildings are dispersed throughout the Ironstone Downs, some close to roads, many at the end of access tracks, away from the main through routes. As a result, these farms either appear set into the hillside or are concealed out of sight.
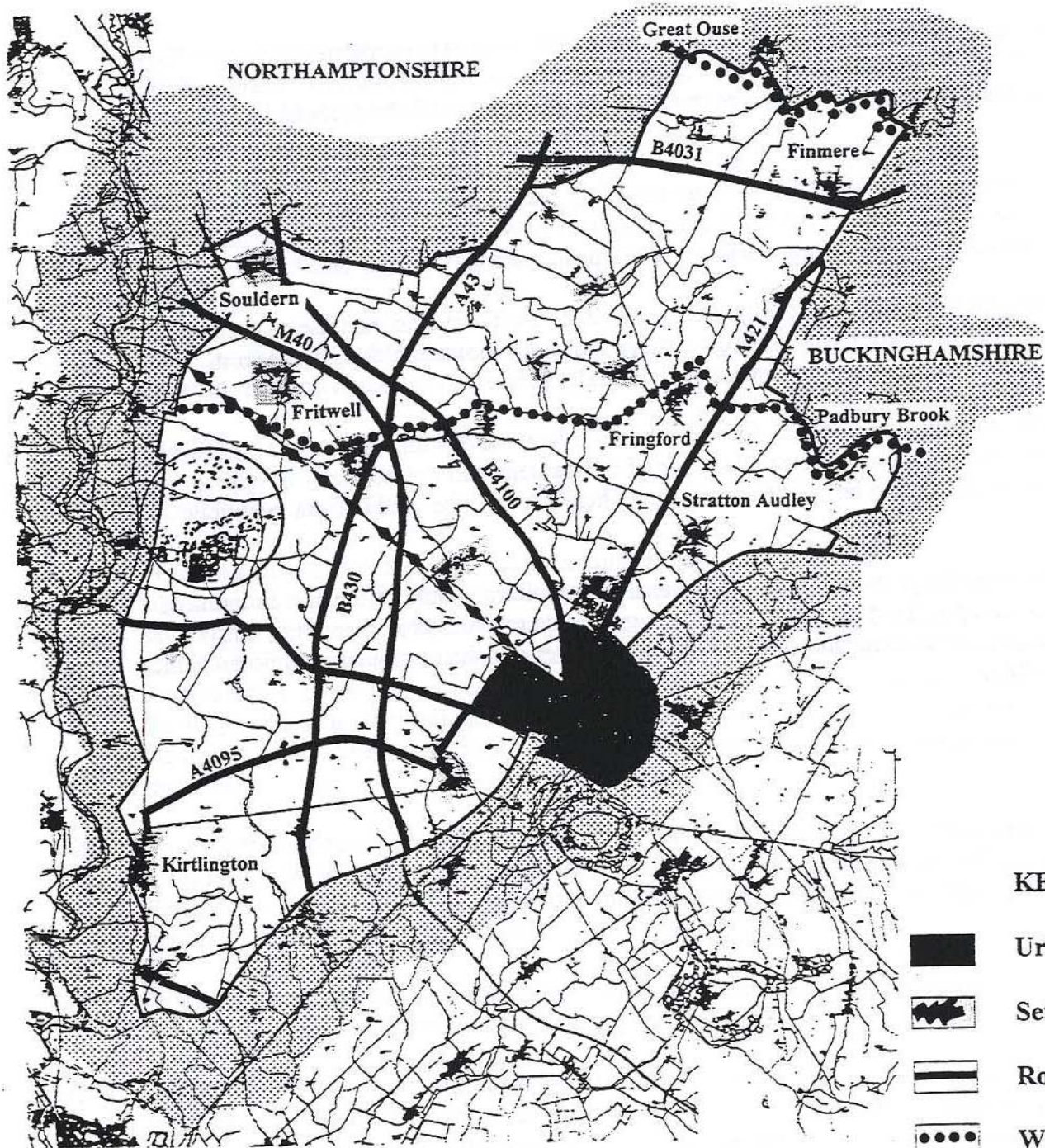
4.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT

(i)   Ironstone is the only appropriate building material for domestic properties in many village locations. The appropriateness of other materials will need to be carefully considered and

will depend on the exact location of the proposal. Limestone will be acceptable in Duns Tew.

(ii)   The dominant roof type should be slates and plain tiles of subdued colours appropriate to their locality and thatch. Profiled or interlocking tiles will not normally be acceptable. Roofs should be steeply pitched and chimneys positioned on the ridge line.

(iii)   Domestic building form and design should be simple, without elaborate use of porches or dormers. The proportions of openings are important in maintaining this simple form. Timber casement or sash windows should normally be used.

(iv)   The mix of terraced and detached houses should reflect the existing character of individual villages. Houses should face streets. Large front gardens will not normally be appropriate. Ironstone walls should be used for enclosure where they will be visible from the public domain.

(v)   New farm buildings should reflect the rural and agricultural nature of the area in terms of scale and design. They should be sited with great care to avoid prominent or sensitive locations and be accompanied by new planting to integrate them as quickly as possible into their setting.

PLOUGHLEY LIMESTONE PLATEAU

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Great Ouse

B4031

Finmere

Souldern

M40

A43

A421

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Fritwell

Padbury Brook

Fringford

B4100

Stratton Audley

B430

A4095

Kirtlington

KEY

Urban Area

Settlements

Roads

Waterways

Rail Routes

Former RAF Base
Upper Heyford

0   5Km

Cherwell
District Council
North Oxfordshire

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SETTLEMENTS OF THE PLOUGHLEY LIMESTONE PLATEAU

Ardley
Bainton
Bletchingdon
Bucknell
Caulcott
Caversfield
Chesterton
Cottisford
Fewcott
Finmere
Fringford
Fritwell
Godington
Hardwick
Hethe
Juniper Hill
Kirtlington
Little Chesterton
Middleton Stoney
Mixbury
Newton Purcell
Souldern
Stoke Lyne
Stratton Audley

PLOUGHLEY LIMESTONE PLATEAU

1. INTRODUCTION

This character area covers the central part of the District to the east of the Cherwell Valley. White limestone in the north gives way to cornbrash further south, both of the great oolitic group. The land is highest in the north and west, where it forms a number of exposed plateaux at 130-140m, to the south the land gradually falls in altitude in a series of gentle undulations until the edge of the clay vale of Otmoor. In the central and northeastern part of this area the shallow valleys drain eastwards into the Anglian drainage basin. Elsewhere streams drain into the rivers of the Thames catchment area.

2. LANDSCAPE

2.1 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

(i)   A number of exposed upland plateaux in the north and west dip gently into rolling undulations and shallow valleys to the Southeast.

(ii)   Extensive remains of 18th century parkland and estate farmland characterise the area. Six parklands survive containing woodland and pasture with fine specimens of single trees such as beech, oak, lime and horse chestnut, enclosed by limestone walls and groups of Corsican and Scots Pine. Adjacent to the parklands, farmland displays estate farm characteristics such as railings and avenues of trees.

(iii)   Woodland cover is comparatively extensive in some parts of this area, either as long plantation belts bordering streams or roads adjacent to arable farmland, or in association with historic parkland.

(iv)   Arable is the primary agricultural land use of the area. Scale varies from a patchwork of fields with well-defined hedgerows and copses, to large-scale fields on the well-drained loams of the open plateaux.

(v)   The former RAF airbase at Upper Heyford is a large and prominent feature situated on an exposed plateau in the west of the character area.

(vi)   Views are often broken by woodlands, e.g. Stoke Wood near Stoke Lyne. However, in places, gentle rises in the arable landscape can afford views for a couple of kilometres.

(vii)   A network of roads criss-cross the entire area, avoiding valleys, and often lined by walls and trees relating to the extensive areas of parkland.

2.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT

(i)   Development should avoid exposed and prominent locations. The protection given by a valley location, existing buildings or woodland, should be used where this does not undermine the character of these existing landscape features.

(ii)   Development in historic parklands or within their setting must maintain or enhance the specific character, which defines this part of the District.

(iii)   Extensive areas of woodland may be appropriate in certain locations, e.g. in association with existing plantations and away from exposed plateau locations.

3. SETTLEMENTS

3.1 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

(i)   Most villages are small and are not prominent in the landscape over large distances due to landform and woodland cover.

(ii)   The majority of settlements have an agricultural origin. They have been established close to a permanent water source, within or adjacent to a small valley avoiding the highest land in the immediate area. The exception to this is Bletchingdon, which is situated on higher ground overlooking the Clay Vale of Otmoor.

(iii)   A new settlement at Upper Heyford to secure the restoration of the airbase should respect the scale and landscape setting of the surrounding villages. The new village should not extend onto the higher ground of the Heyford plateau itself, but sit adjacent to the small brook, which flows south, from the site, using the natural protection afforded by a valley location.

(iv)   A few villages have been planned or display details and a unity of design, which suggests that they are estate villages. For example Kirtlington is built around a series of formal village greens and Mixbury was almost entirely rebuilt in 1874.

(v)   Villages are mainly linear in form, even where they occur at the intersection of roads. Other villages exhibit a semi-dispersed form, although they are still distinct as settlements in the landscape.

(vi)   Village edges are open in places and in others enclosed by woodland and limestone walls associated with the parkland which fringes the settlements. Individual trees are important features within many villages.

(vii)   Village character varies considerably, sometimes within a settlement, as is the case at Fringford, as well as between villages. The villages are mainly open in character as a result of wide streets and open spaces. For example, estate villages have planned formal greens such as at Bletchingdon; other villages have properties set back some distance from the street behind walls such as parts of Fritwell; whilst others have buildings fronting informal verges as is characteristic of parts of Souldern.

3.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT

(i)   New development should reinforce the existing street pattern, which creates the basic village form. In linear villages, development should strengthen the dominant street scene and limit backland development. In villages with a semi-dispersed character, the creation of a more compact form through infilling may not be appropriate.

(ii)   New development proposals should reflect the character found in the immediate locality in terms of the relationship between buildings, open space and roads.

(iii)	In most locations it would be appropriate for small-scale development to be interspersed with public open space and woodland planting to integrate it into the landscape.

4. BUILDINGS

4.1 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

(i)	The predominant building material for domestic properties is coursed thinly bedded limestone rubble. Most villages contain a mixture of terraced and detached properties. However, some display a dominance of terraced properties, such as Kirtlington, and some, such as at Chesterton, consist of mainly detached buildings.

(ii)	Red and occasionally blue bricks are used for quoins and detailing in 19th century estate cottages. There are a number of red brick buildings as well as many modern properties built from a variety of materials.

(iii)	Roofs were traditionally of thatch and stone slate. Many have been replaced by local clay tile and welsh slate and later by concrete tiles. Plain red clay tiles were introduced on many of the 19th century estate cottages in this area. Roofs are fairly steeply pitched with replacement brick chimney stacks on the roofline.

(iv)	A mixture of window types is evident including timber casements and timber sashes. They are mainly of a vertical alignment with wooden lintels.

(v)	Domestic buildings face onto streets and other public space, but their relationship varies markedly. Terraced properties often front streets or greens, but in some villages detached houses are set back some distance behind limestone walls. Enclosure is also by iron railings in some locations, such as in Kirtlington.

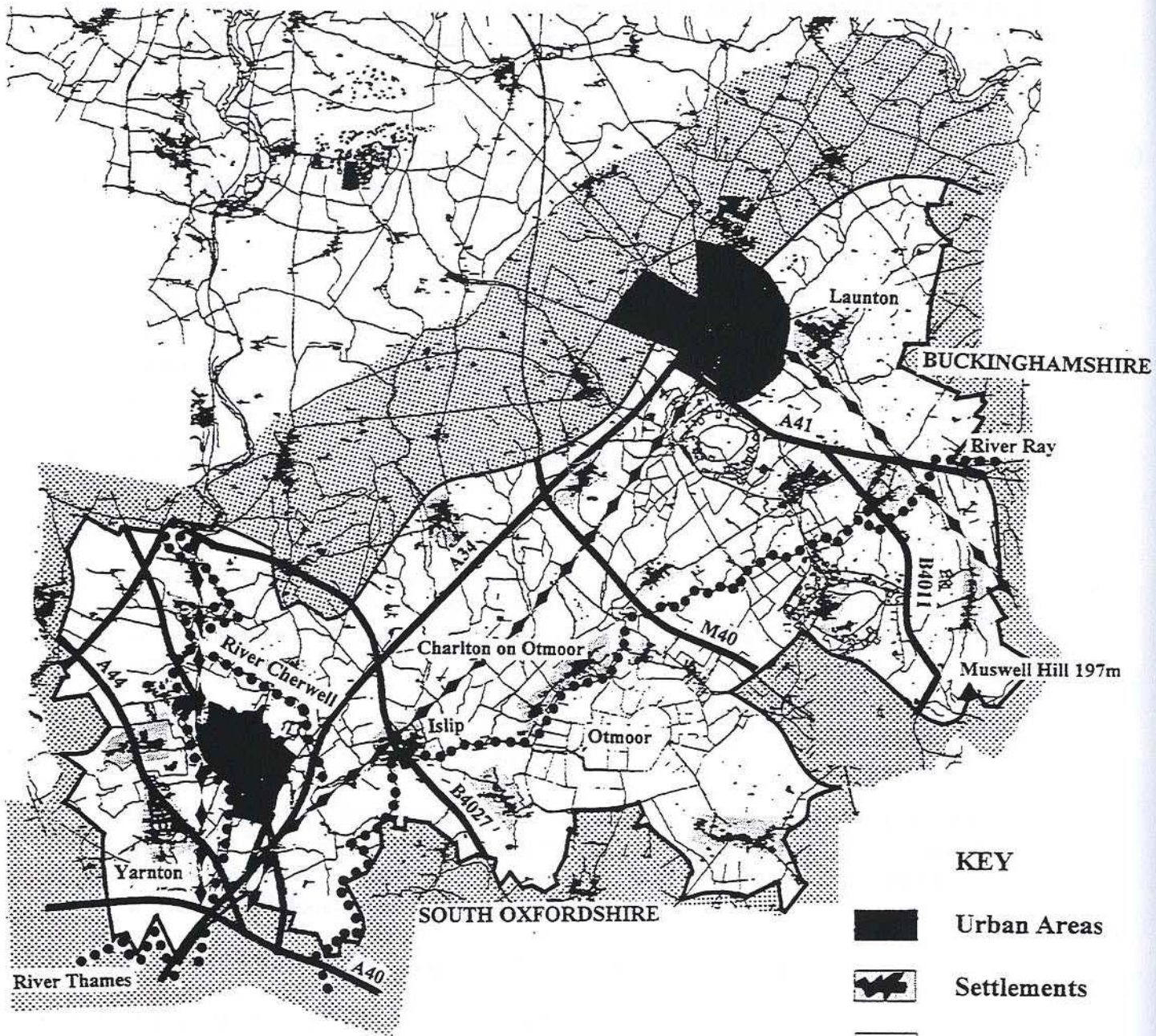(vi)	Farmsteads and other buildings sit adjacent to the road network.

4.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT

(i)	The primary domestic building material should be limestone. Red brick will be acceptable for detailing in some locations. More extensive use of red brick and other materials will depend upon the individual locality and the character of the village.

(ii)	Roofing materials for houses should be stone or welsh slates and plain tiles. Plain red clay tiles will also be appropriate in some village locations. Profiled or interlocking tiles will not normally be acceptable. Steeply pitched roofs should remain predominant with any chimneys located on the ridge line.

(iii)	Openings should be vertically aligned and in proportion to the size of the property, taking the overall scale from historic buildings in the village.

(iv)	Building line and grouping should reflect the individual character of each village. In some villages a formal layout and building form is appropriate, whilst in others an informal approach is desirable. Limestone walls, railings and in some instances hedges will be appropriate means of enclosure.

(v)   New farm buildings should avoid exposed, open or prominent locations, and use the seclusion afforded by a valley location, as well as existing buildings and woodland.

CLAY VALE OF OTMOOR

KEY

███	Urban Areas
🐾	Settlements
≡	Roads
••••	Waterways
◆—◆	Rail Routes

0   5Km

Cherwell
District Council
North Oxfordshire

N

SETTLEMENTS OF THE CLAY VALE OF OTMOOR

Ambrosden
Arncott
Begbroke
Blackthorn
Bunkers Hill
Charlton-on-Otmoor
Enslow
Fencott
Gosford
Hampton Gay
Hampton Poyle
Horton-cum-Studley
Islip
Launton
Merton
Murcott
Noke
Oddington
Piddington
Shipton-on-Cherwell
Thrupp
Wendlebury
Weston-on-the-Green
Yarnton

CLAY VALE OF OTMOOR

1. INTRODUCTION

The Clay Vale of Otmoor covers the southern third of the District. It is a generally flat, low-lying area crossed by the meandering Rivers Ray and Cherwell, which drain into the Thames at Oxford. Oxford clay is exposed across this character area, and in part is overlain by alluvial deposits associated with the river floodplains creating poorly drained soils. Extensive drainage has enabled arable farmland to become predominant although several areas of unimproved wet meadows still exist. This character area contains Otmoor itself, the largest ecologically important area in the District and it remains free from development. In the extreme south of the District the Oxford Heights are formed by outcrops of Corallian Beds.

2. LANDSCAPE

2.1 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

(i)   This is a low-lying Clay Vale, which in the main lies between 60 and 70m AOD and drains southwest into the Thames. The land rises gradually to the north and west into the limestone belt, whilst to the south the land rises sharply to form the Oxford Heights, with Muswell Hill reaching 197m, offering extensive views across the Clay Vale.

(ii)   It is a traditionally pastoral landscape with a regular linear pattern, crossed with water filled drainage ditches and willow-lined watercourses. Extensive drainage of the heavy wet soils has enabled over half of the land to be brought into arable production. Arable fields tend to be larger creating a more open landscape. However, areas of the Clay Vale are still often waterlogged for periods during the winter months.

(iii)   Otmoor is a unique area to the south of the River Ray, which for the most part lies below 60m. It is of great ecological importance with a series of grassland types within a Site of Special Scientific Interest. A wider area, almost 3km across remains free from all development.

(iv)   On the slopes of the Oxford Heights there are small fields of downland pasture with remnant heath in a few places. There are a number of substantial woodlands. At Arncott and Ambrosden, woodland covers the tops of hills and surrounds large-scale military development. In other areas large-scale transport links such as the motorway, trunk roads and the railway create a fringe landscape.

(v)   Overgrown hawthorn hedges and lines of willow trees limit the views across the flat landscape. A small rise in height can provide extensive views over the plain.

(vi)   Roads crossing the landscape are often built up above the level of the surrounding fields.

2.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT

(i)   Buildings or other forms of new development will not normally be acceptable on Otmoor itself.

(ii)   To prevent damage to ecologically important habitats and to maintain its capacity to take floodwater new development will not normally be acceptable within the floodplain.

(iii)   Loss of hedgerows should be avoided, as this will damage landscape character by creating monotonous exposed plains.

3. SETTLEMENT

3.1 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

(i)   Villages are located close to a water supply. However, over a large proportion of the area where the land drains poorly, settlements are situated just above the level of the floodplain, often on outcrops of cornbrash. Settlements in the extreme south and east are located either at the base, or on the sides of hills. The villages have an agricultural origin with the exception of Thrupp and Enslow, which are hamlets based on the Oxford Canal.

(ii)   Those villages, which are raised above the floodplain level, become visually prominent, with the church tower providing a focal point. Trees both within and surrounding the villages anchor the settlements into the landscape.

(iii)   The majority of villages are small in scale and linear in form. This results from their position along one through route and/or a topographical restriction on a dry outcrop of cornbrash, e.g. Merton. Some of the villages are dispersed in form, but still with major linear elements, for example, Blackthorn. A few villages have a compact form, such as Yarnton.

(iv)   In the linear villages space is formed by gaps between the buildings, although in some villages these have been infilled. Where the linear elements of the village are dispersed larger areas of open space are formed.

(v)   There are two basic street types. Firstly there are open, sometimes wide streets where properties rarely abut the pavements but tend to be located back behind stone walls and hedges. This creates an informal, unstructured and sometimes secluded character, e.g. parts of Horton-cum-Studley and Murcott. Secondly other villages have a more urban feel as a result of a tighter structure, with properties fronting streets and with fewer trees. Such villages tend to be the historically larger ones such as Islip and Charlton-on-Otmoor.

3.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT

(i)   New development should not expand villages beyond constraints imposed by landform and ground water characteristics.

(ii)   The views and setting of churches in this area are very important and must not be undermined or interrupted by new development.

(iii)   Trees and hedgerows, which integrate villages into their landscape setting, should be retained. New trees and hedgerows should be planted in association with new development to maintain this character.

(iv)   New development should emphasise the existing street form within linear villages by limiting backland development, whilst maintaining open land which is intrinsic to the character of the village.

(v)   The creation of new public space, which is an integral part of new development, can help maintain the rural character of the villages.

4. BUILDINGS

4.1 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

(i)   Domestic buildings are mainly two storey and detached, with groups of terraced properties in some villages. Houses were traditionally built from limestone in most of the area. Red bricks are sometimes used for detailing and there are examples of red brick buildings with limestone detailing. Where stone was not available historically such as in the Oxford Heights at Horton-cum-Studley, buildings were constructed of timber frame and brick. Ornamental and whitewashed brickwork is also more common across this area. 20th century development displays a large variety of materials.

(ii)   Roofs were traditionally thatched. Most have been replaced with plain dark toned slates and tiles, and in some parts, plain red clay tiles. Roofs are traditionally steeply pitched with chimney stacks on the ridge line.

(iii)   Windows vary, but vertical alignment and simple timber casement forms predominate.

(iv)   Domestic buildings mainly face streets. Detached properties are often a mix of types and are set back at varying depths from the road producing an irregular street frontage. Older buildings tend to be set close to the road. Groups of terraced properties are more common in certain villages such as Islip where they abut streets with the occasional building gable end to the street.

(v)   Farmsteads are generally isolated features at the end of long tracks, with hedgerows ensuring their seclusion.

4.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT

(i)   The primary domestic building material should be Limestone, with red brick acceptable for detailing in many village locations. Red brick buildings and timber framed brick buildings (white washed or not) may be acceptable in certain locations within villages on the southern periphery of the District. Ornate brickwork may be acceptable on rare occasions, for example a landmark or public building.

(ii)   The primary roofing material should be dark toned plain slates and tiles. Only in the south of this area will red clay tiles be acceptable as the primary roofing material. Profiled or interlocking tiles will not normally be acceptable. Roofs should be steeply pitched; both aligned to the road and simple in form, with brick chimney stacks on the ridge line.

(iii)   Openings should be vertically aligned and proportionate to the size of the property, taking the overall scale from historic buildings in the village.

(iv)   Detached or terraced properties are appropriate in most villages. Their relationship with the street and space will be dependent on the character of the village, but buildings must front onto public space and private gardens in front of properties should normally be

enclosed. Limestone walls, hedges and in some localities brick walls are appropriate means of enclosure.

(v)   New farm buildings should be concentrated where a collection of buildings already exist to avoid isolated features in the flat landscape.

CHECK-LIST

Now check your proposal against the series of questions listed below:

- Is your proposal in accordance with adopted local plan policies?

- Does your proposal complement the landscape character of the surrounding area?

- Will it retain existing features, within and along the boundaries of the site?

- Will it respect the setting of existing buildings and features when viewed from distance?

- Is your proposal integrated into its landscape setting?

- Are there less prominent or exposed sites available in the locality?

- Will your proposal retain the existing relationship between the village and its landscape location?

- Will it maintain and enhance the historic form of the village?

- Does it respect the existing street character of that part of the village?

- Does your proposal retain existing trees and hedgerows and provide extra planting if necessary for screening or visual amenity?

- Is the setting of important spaces or gaps in the village enhanced by your proposal?

- Does your proposal use appropriate materials for the locality?

- Will it respect the traditional form, scale and proportions used in buildings of the area?

- Are the means of enclosure appropriate to its village location?

- Do the buildings produce an appropriate street frontage for the particular village?

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