



# Cherwell Residential Design Guide

## Supplementary Planning Document

*Masterplanning and architectural design guidance*

**Adopted on 16 July 2018**

*Cherwell*

DISTRICT COUNCIL  
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Alan Baxter

The Cherwell Residential Design Guide has been prepared by Cherwell District Council in collaboration with Alan Baxter Ltd and ESHA Architects.

Acknowledgements:

Cllr. Colin Clarke, CDC

Clare Mitchell, CDC

Linda Griffiths, CDC

Jon Westerman, CDC

Clare Coats, Alan Baxter Ltd

Isobel Knapp, Alan Baxter Ltd

Boris Bogdanovich, Alan Baxter Ltd

Peterjohn Smyth, ESHA Architects

# Cherwell Residential

## Design Guide

### Supplementary Planning Document

#### *Masterplanning and architectural design guidance*

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## FOREWORD

Cherwell is an attractive district, structured around the historic market towns of Banbury and Bicester and its villages and rural hamlets. The area has a distinct character born out of its geology, landscape and history and its places are well valued by those who live here and those who visit from further afield.

The value of good design is well understood. Well-designed places add environmental, economic, social and cultural value. The Cherwell Residential Design Guide has been produced to ensure that new residential development results in vibrant, sustainable, safe and attractive places that add to the District's legacy. The Guide is not focused on building detail, but intends to support the development of new places that reinforce the character and vitality of a settlement. Central to this is the need for development that provides safe places to live and work, promotes sustainable transport and ways of living with good connections to local facilities.

Over the Local Plan period to 2031, Cherwell will experience unprecedented growth that will bring over 22,000 new homes and many new jobs to the District. The Cherwell Local Plan sets a vision for high quality and locally distinctive design. The ethos of the Design Guide is underpinned by a commitment from the Council to promote exemplary standards of design across the District. Our aim is to create great buildings and desirable places that are valued by future generations and add value to the development process.

Achieving this ambition is only possible through working in partnership with multiple stakeholders. In the production of this document, the Council has sought the views of councillors, planners, developers and the local community and all these parties need to be active stakeholders as new development proposals are shaped. We hope you will welcome the guidance and use it to support a positive legacy of great places and well-loved neighbourhoods.

Cllr. Colin Clarke  
Lead Member for Planning  
Cherwell District Council

# 1 THE IMPORTANCE OF HIGH QUALITY DESIGN



- 1.1 A new era for design in Cherwell
- 1.2 The role of the Design Guide
- 1.3 The design and planning process
- 1.4 Policy background
- 1.5 Abbreviations

## 1.1 A new era for design in Cherwell

**High quality design supports a positive legacy, leaving successful places which are both functional and beautiful, which engender a sense of community, are long lasting and age well.**

The District of Cherwell is known for its distinctive picturesque villages and diverse, historic market town centres. These places have a strong character rooted in the local landscape and have evolved over many centuries.

Looking to the future, the evolution of the District's settlements is set to continue at a rapid pace, with a significant number of new homes planned reflecting Cherwell's attractiveness as a place to live and work. This vision is set out in the Cherwell Local Plan 2011 – 2031 Part 1 (adopted July 2015).

Cherwell District Council is committed to protecting and enhancing the special character of the District. The Cherwell Residential Design Guide has been written to support high quality residential development, primarily on major and strategic development sites, guiding the development of locally distinctive places that reinforce the positive character of the district.

This is an exciting opportunity to create new places which are of a high standard and fit well with the established character of the District. Investment in high quality design today will create a legacy of delightful and successful places for future generations to enjoy. It will support the wider economic prosperity of the District by providing the right mix of high quality homes to attract and retain workers.

The Council has made a commitment to raising the standard of design across the District through Policy ESD15 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan (2011 - 2031) and recognises that there are lessons to be learnt from less successful twentieth century developments.

It is intended that the Guide will:

- Support more efficient and effective decision making in the planning process
- Provide clarity and more certainty to developers on the Council's approach to design
- Promote good quality design and inspire high quality development
- Engage residents of Cherwell in the shaping of their built environment



North West Bicester

## 1.2 The role of the Design Guide

**This Residential Design Guide is an important document that supports the Council’s drive to significantly raise the standard of residential design across the District. It forms part of a wider design quality initiative.**

The Guide provides further explanation and guidance in relation to Policy ESD15 of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011 – 2031 Part 1, explaining what high quality design means in practical terms and why it matters. It is a technical guide, providing clarity and certainty on the design standards that are required. In doing so, it supports a streamlined planning application process and the timely delivery of new homes.

It is designed to be used by everyone involved in shaping places: developers, designers, local residents, Council officers and politicians. By developing a shared understanding of what good design means and why it is important, the Guide empowers local residents and stakeholders to engage in the design process and demand more.

The Guide is designed to promote a holistic approach. Design is not a tick box exercise and we expect a contextual approach to guide the process. Each chapter of the Guide deals with a different part of design. It starts with responding to the site and context, followed by developing the structuring principles of the Masterplan, and then explores individual elements of place including streets, buildings and landscape. The final chapters consider sustainability and innovative approaches, building details and use of materials.

Read together the chapters give an overview of the design process from site selection to detailed design. The chapters of particular relevance to individual stages of the planning process are highlighted in table 1.1.

The Guide has been written to support all residential development. While all guidance is relevant for major and strategic sites, the majority of the principles should be applied to other development types including single dwellings, minor infill and smaller housing sites.

Recent housing developments often do not respond to Cherwell’s vernacular traditions and context, but the majority of housebuilders in the area wish to provide a ‘traditional ‘ product.. Chapter 7 sets out detailed information on the design of buildings that is in keeping with the District’s unique character.

Innovation and the sustainability are a key part of the design agenda and provide the foundation to creating healthy and sustainable places. The Council promotes architectural innovation, which may be particularly appropriate on some of the larger strategic development sites. This approach is likely to vary significantly from the traditional vernacular forms and more detail is set out in Chapter 8.

The Guide sits within a suite of planning documents which will be relevant to guide site planning and design. The Cherwell Local Plan, provides an overarching policy approach for most strategic sites. The guide will sit alongside the masterplans for Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington. The guide will provide the starting point in establishing site specific guidance on Local Plan sites.

Relevant chapters	Site selection / outline planning application	Full application	Reserved matters application
<b>1</b> The importance of high quality design	✓✓	✓✓	✓
<b>2</b> Cherwell’s special character	✓✓	✓✓	✓
<b>3</b> Responding to the site and its context	✓✓	✓✓	✓
<b>4</b> Establishing the structuring principles	✓✓	✓✓	✓
<b>5</b> Streets and spaces	✓	✓✓	✓✓
<b>6</b> Building and plot arrangements	✓	✓✓	✓✓
<b>7</b> Building elevations and details	✓	✓✓	✓✓
<b>8</b> Innovation and sustainability	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓

Table 1.1 Chapter relevance

- ✓✓ highly relevant
- ✓ relevant



### 1.3 The design and planning process

**Good design is a collaborative process. Scheme promoters and their design teams will be expected to work with council officers early in the process through pre-application engagement.**

The Council encourages pre-application engagement before a site is purchased as this provides an opportunity to establish and agree the brief for the site that will help inform development value assumptions.

Early engagement with the Council will help to identify potential issues and uncertainties early on in the design process. This helps to provide more certainty once an application is submitted, steam lining the process.

For major and strategic sites, Planning Performance Agreements (PPA) are strongly recommended, where common goals, design standards, resources and delivery targets can be agreed.

The Council strongly encourages public engagement throughout the design process. Design review is also seen as an important part of the planning process. Further information can be found in **Appendix G**.

The preparation of site specific guidance such as design codes and development briefs. is often required for large sites. It is expected that site specific guidance will follow the principles set out in the Design Guide. Once approved site specific guidance should provide additional detail on design and masterplanning matters that complement this guide. Further information on Design Codes and Development Briefs is provided in **Appendix G**.

Figure 1.1 explains the required process from site selection to reserved matters application and the points at which engagement with the Council should take place as a minimum on strategic and major residential development sites.

A similar process should be followed for minor residential development sites, though it is anticipated that the Stage 1 and 2 process set out in the left hand side would be proportionate to the scale, complexity and sensitivity of the scheme in these cases. For sensitive sites (villages, conservation areas, AONB etc.) a similar process to the diagram above will be expected for all schemes over 5 units. For smaller sites 10 - 100, the process should be agreed with the case officer

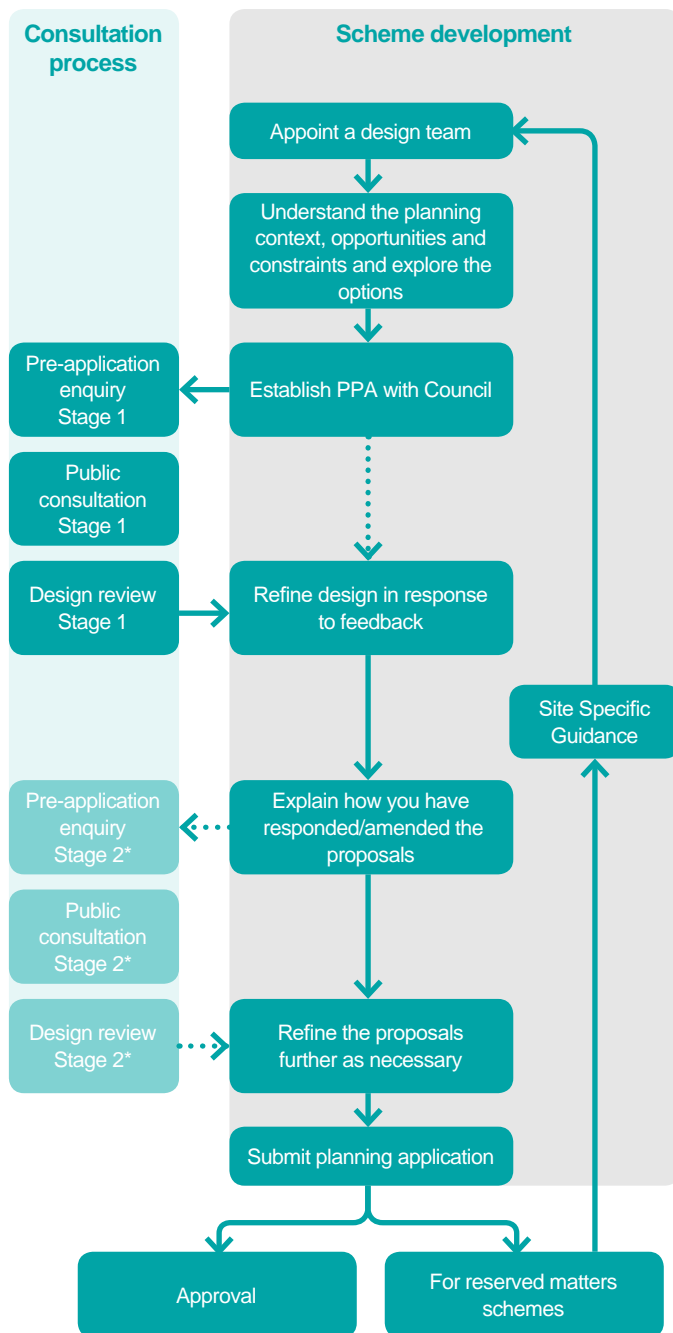


Figure 1.1 Process diagram for outline and full planning applications for major and strategic sites (over 100 units)

\* Second stage pre-application enquiry, public consultation and design review may not be required where an acceptable solution has been established at stage 1

## 1.4 Policy background

**The requirement for high quality design is instilled in Local and National planning policy and supporting guidance.**

Relevant policy and sources of further guidance are highlighted in each chapter of this report. A full reading list is provided in **Appendix A**.

### National policy and guidance

#### National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012

The Government's NPPF is based around a presumption in favour of sustainable development of which good design is a key aspect.

The key message is that development should contribute positively to making places better for people though establishing a sense of place in response to local character and history. It clearly states that permission should be refused for development of poor design quality. The NPPF specifies that Local Plans should develop robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected within their area. Further explanation of the NPPF policies on design is provided in the supporting online publication **Planning Practice Guidance**.

#### National design guidance

National design guidance documents which provide useful background reading and further detail relating to the design process include:

- The Urban Design Compendium, English Partnerships (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2007) and Urban Design Compendium 2, English Partnerships (2007)
- Manual for Streets, DfT/DCLG (2007) and Manual for Streets 2, DfT (2010)
- Car Parking: What Works Where, English Partnerships (2006)
- Building for Life 12, Design for Homes (2012)

### Local policy and guidance

#### Cherwell District Local Plan Part 1 (2011-2031)

The adopted Local Plan states,

*“We will ensure that what we approve for development, whether commercial premises or housing, is of the highest design and building standards.” (Local Plan, Foreword).*

The Design Guide is being prepared in response to Policy ESD 15: The Character of the Built and Historic Environment of the Local Plan. The headline policy states:

*“Successful design is founded upon an understanding and respect for an area’s unique built, natural and cultural context. New development will be expected to complement*



*and enhance the character of its context through sensitive siting, layout and high quality design. All new development will be required to meet high design standards. Where development is in the vicinity of any of the District's distinctive natural or historic assets, delivering high quality design that complements the asset will be essential."* (Local Plan, page 117).

The full wording of Policy ESD15 is provided in **Appendix B**. The Design Guide provides explanation and guidance on the meaning of the Local Plan policies in relation to design and once adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

Further policies relating to design are to be included within Part 2 of the Cherwell District Local Plan.

**Neighbourhood Plans**

Once made Neighbourhood plans are made part of the District's Development Plan and will be used in the determination of planning applications within the area / Parish. They typically provide local policy relating to character, design, mix and location of development.

Adopted Neighbourhood plans

- Bloxham (2016)
- Adderbury (2018)
- Hook Norton (2015)

The following neighbourhood plans are in preparation:

- Deddington
- Merton
- Mid-Cherwell
- Stratton Audley
- Weston on the Green
- Bodicote

**District design and heritage guidance**

Sources of Cherwell planning guidance relating to design which are material considerations when determining planning applications include:

- Conservation Area Appraisals
- Supplementary Planning Documents – site specific and District wide
- Informal planning guidance

A list of current guidance documents is available on Cherwell District Council's website.

**Oxfordshire County Council**

The County provides guidance on movement issues across Oxfordshire. and emphasises the importance of designing layouts which prioritise people before cars.

- Connecting Oxfordshire: Local Transport Plan 2015 - 2031 (2015)
- Residential Road Design Guide (2015)
- Design Standards for Walking (2017)
- Design Standards for Cycling (2017)



## 1.5 Abbreviations

Throughout the document the following abbreviations are used:

Cherwell Residential Design Guide (this document)  
= the Guide

Cherwell District Council = CDC

Oxfordshire County Council = OCC

Manual for Streets = MFS

National Planning Policy Framework = NPPF

## 2 CHERWELL'S SPECIAL CHARACTER



## CHERWELL'S SPECIAL CHARACTER

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- 2.1 The evolution of the District**
- 2.2 The larger settlements**
- 2.3 Countryside Character Areas**

**Cherwell's towns and villages have evolved in response to their landscape, movement and social contexts.**

**This chapter provides a summary of the distinctive characteristics we see today in different parts of the District. It should be used as a starting point for more detailed, site specific analysis which is the first step towards creating a locally distinctive development which sits comfortably alongside its established neighbours.**

**New development in Cherwell should promote:**

- Development informed by an understanding of the historic evolution and character of the District
- The creation of new places which fit well with the pattern and character of local towns and villages
- Development which is locally distinctive and reinforces the different characters of the north and south of the District
- Development which is located appropriately in response to landscape and topography
- Use of appropriate local materials and detailing (see also chapter 7)
- Or a truly innovative approach to architecture and design

**New development should avoid:**

- The creation of 'anywhere places' which do not reflect local character
- Inappropriate settlement patterns, architecture and materials
- An awkward relationship between new and old
- The use of superficial details to add character

**Please refer to the following chapters for supporting information:**

- **Chapter 3:** For details of how site specific analysis should be undertaken
- **Chapter 4-7:** For guidance on how the understanding of local character should inform the masterplan and detailed design decisions
- **Chapter 8:** For guidance on sustainability considerations
- **Appendix C:** List of Conservation Areas within the District

**Further reading:**

- **Countryside Design Summary, 1998, CDC:** A detailed characterisation study of the District's settlements with particular focus on the rural villages
- **Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study:** <http://owls.oxfordshire.gov.uk>. A detailed classification of the District's landscape character
- **Colour Palettes, 1996, Studio REAL:** A detailed guide to traditional materials and colour palettes used in different parts of the District.
- **Conservation Area Appraisals, CDC:** Provides detailed character analysis and guidance for each of the District's conservation areas
- **Landscape Character Sensitivity Assessment, 2017, CDC:** Provides an assessment of landscape sensitivities across the district
- **Category 'A' Villages Village Analysis, 2017, CDC:** Provides an analysis of key issues associated with category A villages

## 2.1 The evolution of the District

# 2

**Local planning policy emphasises the importance of reinforcing Cherwell's local distinctiveness. New development should sit comfortably alongside the established townscape and landscape character of the local area and be unmistakably 'of Cherwell'.**

This chapter is intended to assist with the understanding of local character by summarising the key characteristics of the District's three larger settlements and rural areas. It should be used as a reference when undertaking site specific analysis to inform the design process.

### Growing from the land

In an area of Oxfordshire rich in natural resources, Cherwell has been settled from the earliest times. The District takes its name from the River Cherwell, running north to south through the District.

The distinctive character of the District has evolved slowly over the centuries and owes much to its landscape and underlying geology which have directly influenced the character of the built environment. The majority of building materials were sourced from the landscape; buildings were constructed of locally quarried stone with roofs of locally grown thatch. The resulting townscapes are unique to each local area and have a strongly defined character.

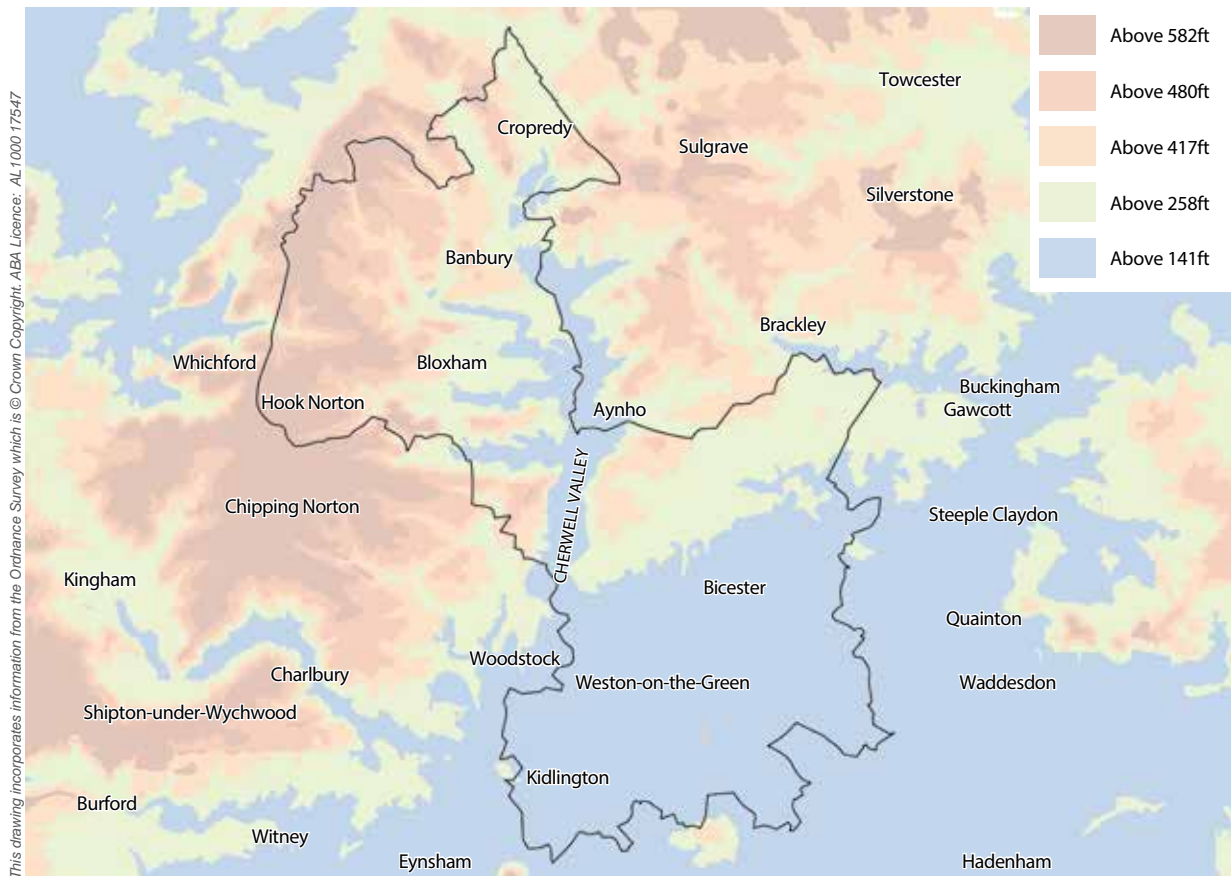


Figure 2.1 Topography map (derived from Ordnance Survey data)



Outside the central valley the District can be broadly divided into two character areas to the north and south:

- To the north and north-west, the District is defined by upland plateau, consisting of rolling hills and steep valleys of ironstone geology. Villages in this area are distinguished by their ochre ironstone walls. Banbury sits at the heart of the ironstone north
- The south-east consists of gently rolling limestone plateaux, with large areas of woodland and historic parkland. The south is mostly low lying, based on clay. Villages across the south make use of the cooler toned limestone as the primary building material. Bicester and Kidlington are larger settlements in the south

**Relationship to Oxford**

While outside the District, the relationship with Oxford is also relevant. Oxford lies directly to the south of the District and provides the economic and cultural heart to the County. Historic routes radiate from the city into the district reflecting the clear relationship that many settlements have with the City. The Council is currently undertaking a Local Plan Partial review to consider the housing requirement from Oxfords unmet need. The relationship between Oxford and new development areas to the south of the District will be important.

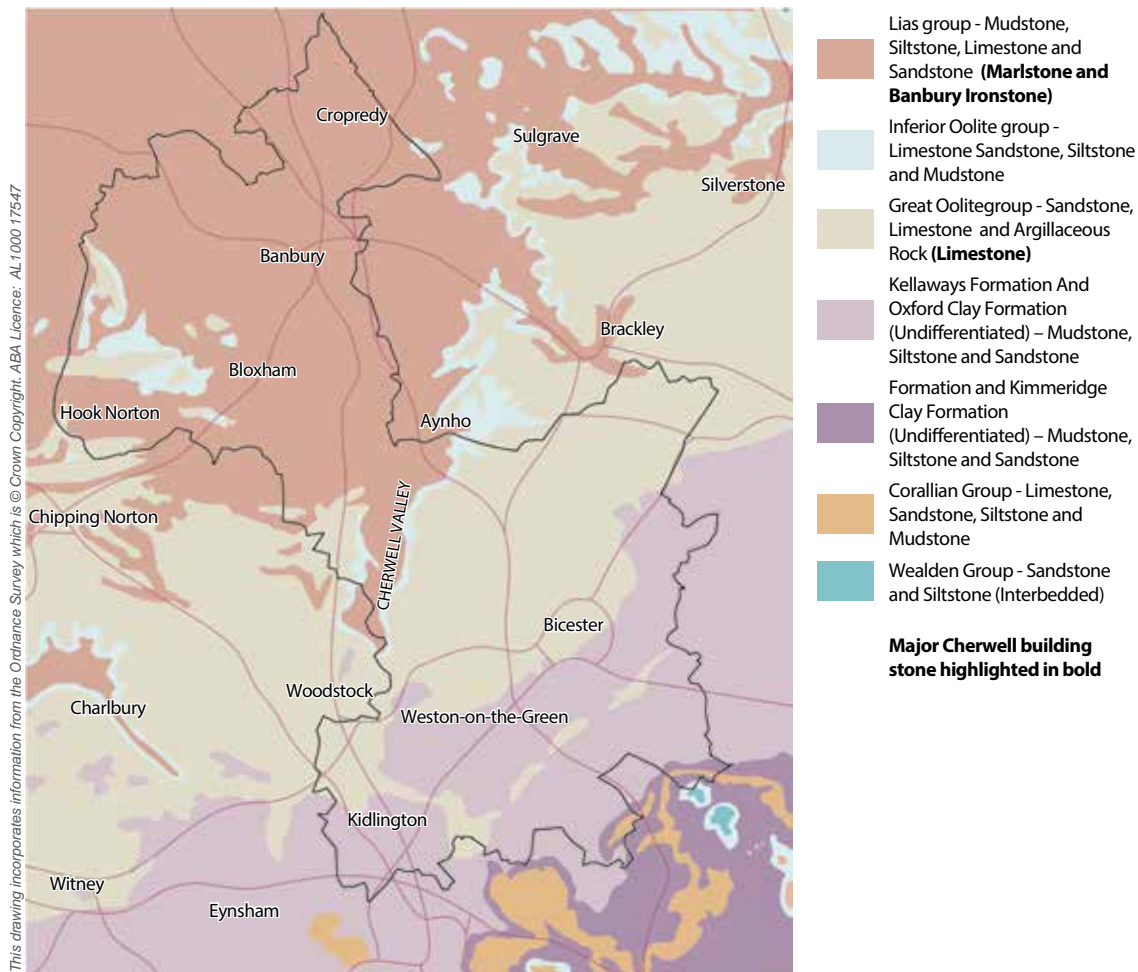


Figure 2.2 Geology map (derived from British Geological Survey mapping)

The railways and Oxford Canal had a significant influence on settlements along their routes. New development in places such as Banbury, took advantage of access to materials such as red brick and Welsh Slate.

Today, Cherwell is an area of growing contrasts. The market towns of Banbury and Bicester which grew as a focus for trade continue to be the primary settlements and have developed an urban character as a result of rapid growth in the twentieth century. The village of Kidlington, the third largest settlement in the District, does not have the status of a market town, but also experienced rapid twentieth century growth as a result of its proximity to Oxford.

The majority of the District, however, retains a rural character. Many of its 72 villages are of a small scale, with distinctive historic cores. They continue to rely on the larger villages and market towns for higher order facilities, retail and employment opportunities.

The high quality of the District's townscapes is reflected in the designation of 60 conservation areas, with over 2,300 listed buildings and dozens of scheduled ancient monuments. The designated historic and natural features of the wider countryside include registered parks and gardens, battlefields and nature reserves.

**Appendix C contains a list of Conservation Areas.** These are important documents and are a material consideration in planning applications.



Ironstone villages of the north - Bloxham (top) and Adderbury (bottom)



Limestone villages of the south- Islip (top) and Fringford (bottom)

**Implications for new development**

Where there is a strong, distinctive local character in the surrounding settlement it is expected that new development will be in keeping. Local character should be reflected in all aspects of design from the masterplan layout to building typologies, materials and detailing. This is particularly important for village development sites or small scale infill within historic urban areas. Often these areas are within Conservation Areas or their settings in which case the detailed guidance provided in Conservation Area Appraisals also applies.

Development at the edge of the larger villages and towns including Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington should reflect the distinctive characteristics of the settlement and the wider Character Area in which the settlement is located. Twentieth century housing estates of a generic character and poor design should not be taken as a precedent.

## 2.2 The larger settlements

2

### Banbury

Banbury is a market town of around 44,000 residents, located within the ironstone north of the District. Its earliest origins date from the Saxon period. As early as the seventh century, a settlement developed at the junction of the two ancient roads of Salt Way and Banbury Lane on the west bank of the River Cherwell.

By the mid-thirteenth century the market and associated industries had begun to prosper, becoming an important centre for the wool trade. Transport links continued to support the town's prosperity with the arrival of the Oxford Canal in 1778 and railways in 1850 and it developed a strong industrial base.

Banbury's central historic core remains relatively intact with a medieval pattern of narrow streets, lanes, market squares and burgage plots. The civic buildings date from the eighteenth and nineteenth century and the town's strong industrial heritage can be seen in its

built fabric. Early buildings are constructed from local Hornton ironstone and other local ironstones, with locally produced red brick with a soft tone used from the mid-eighteenth century onward.

The adjoining suburbs dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, have a grid plan and consist of two or three storey terraced houses. Detached, semi-detached houses and large villas of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century are on a grander scale, with larger plots and mature trees making a valuable contribution to the streetscape.

In comparison to Bicester and Kidlington, Banbury's twentieth century expansion was more gradual and has greater coherence. In outer Banbury, the majority of the built environment was developed during the second half of the twentieth century, particularly 1950s to 1970s to house overspill population from London and the West Midlands. The growth accelerated after

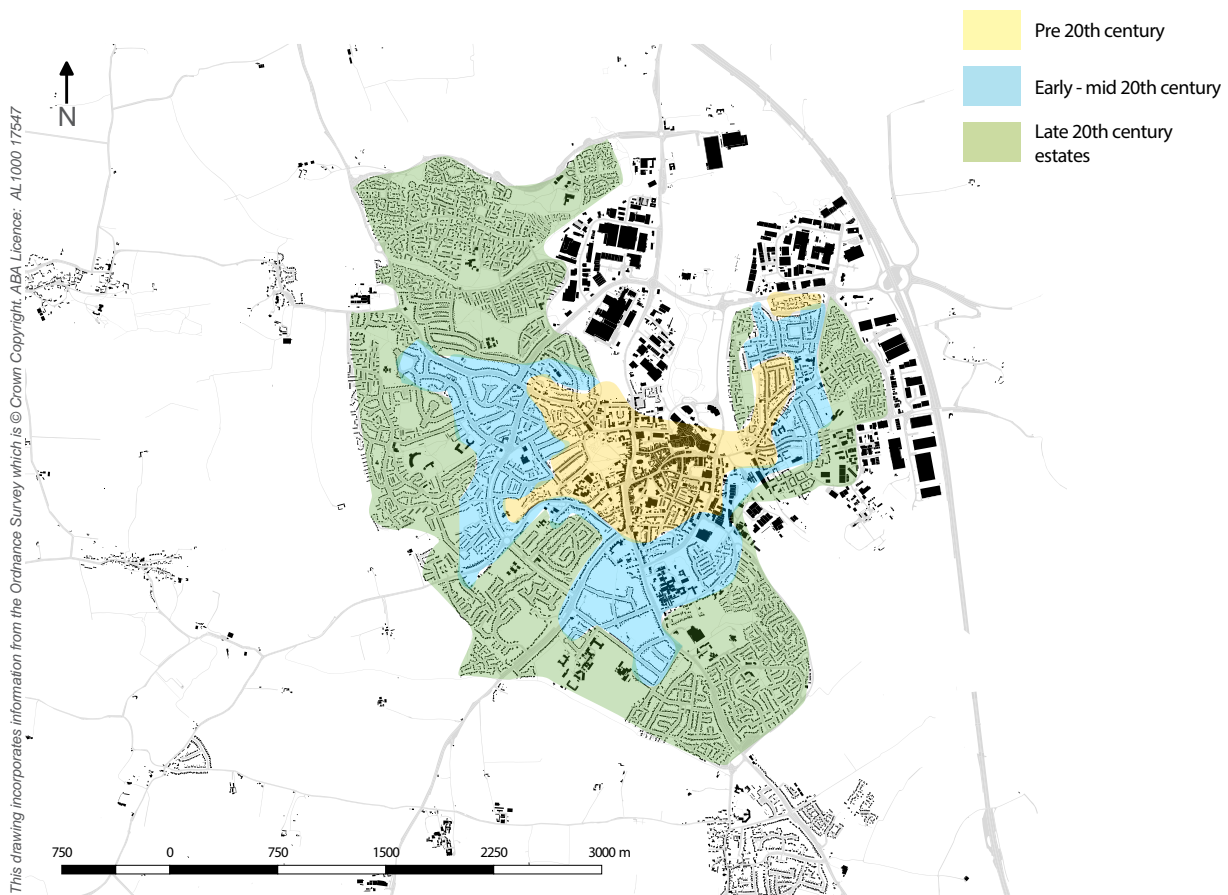


Figure 2.3 Banbury

the 1970s with the completion of the M40 which gave fast and direct access to London and Birmingham.

The Council took a strong lead in the design of the later suburbs, which follow garden suburb principles. In contrast, large estates developed on the periphery of the town offer little in terms of local distinctiveness.

The town remains both walkable and cyclable, with a clear sense of order and relationship between residential areas and the town centre. It is important that new development at the edge of town continues to relate well to the centre and reflects the building traditions of the town's more distinctive residential areas. Key characteristics include:

- A compact medieval core, defined by a clear network of streets and defined frontages. There are a wide range of building styles reflecting the development and redevelopment of the area over the centuries, but harmony is established through the consistent rhythm of the plots, scale and materials
- Victorian and Edwardian suburbs with greater consistency; typically terraced properties, constructed in local brick with a harmony of plots, scale and details
- Many of the mid 20th century suburbs also have a sense of order established along Garden Suburb principles, with tree-lined avenues and stretches of terrace or semi-detached properties set back from the street behind clearly defined thresholds
- Some late 20th century development has a weak urban form and lacks local distinctiveness



Some 20th century developments in Banbury have a weak urban form and lack local distinctiveness



Pre-20th century development in Banbury - Old Parr Road (top), King's Road (middle), South Bar Street (bottom)

**Bicester**

Bicester is a rural market town, located in the south east of the District. Established on a river crossing of the River Bure, an ancient route between Oxford and Buckingham, it sits at the northern edge of the Otmoor lowlands next to a band of limestone and Cornbrash. The river and a railway embankment provide variation to the otherwise flat topography. Graven Hill, located at the south east of town, is the only topographic feature of note.

Bicester's historic core is still the commercial centre and the civic heart of the town. It formed from the coalescence of three settlements: King's End, Market End and Crockwell and was influenced by the route of the River Bure. Aside from redevelopment in the centre, it changed little through the eighteenth to mid-twentieth centuries.

The bulk of the historic core consists of two or three storey vernacular buildings of limestone rubble or red brick with some re-fronted timber framed buildings along the old London Road. Building frontage in the town centre is continuous; strongly defining the public realm. The green spaces within Bicester provide valuable relief from the densely built town centre and mature trees positively contribute to the townscape.

The shape of the town altered in the twentieth century with the establishment of the RAF station and later the Ordnance Depot. Housing estates were developed around the periphery of the historic core. These are well cared for, but poorly connected to the centre and lack local distinctiveness. From a population of 5,512 in 1961, numbers grew to an estimated 32,640 in 2011.

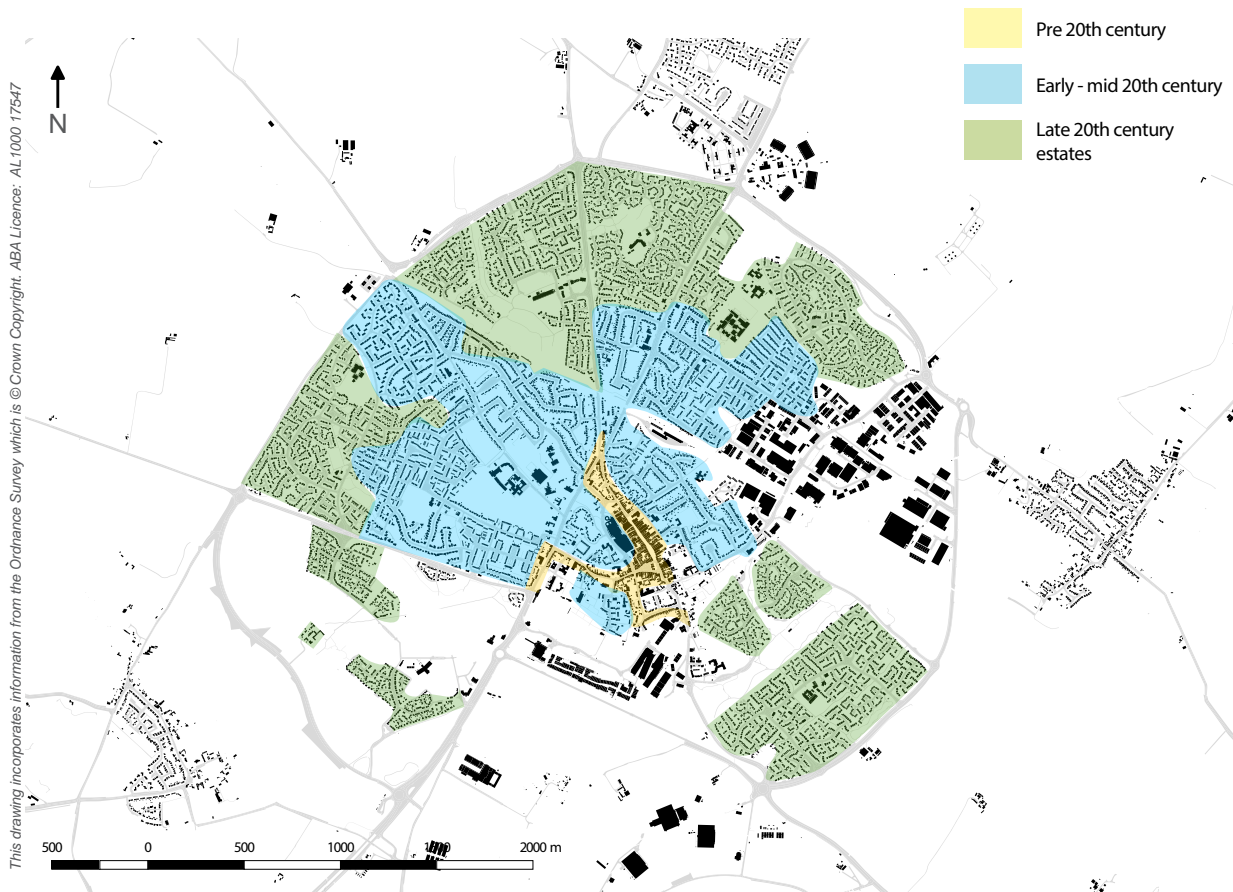


Figure 2.4 Bicester

Key characteristics include:

- A compact medieval core, defined by a clear network of streets and defined frontages. There are a wide range of building styles reflecting the development of the area over the centuries, but harmony is established through the consistent rhythm of the plots, scale and materials
- Small areas of Victorian and Edwardian expansion are typically terraced, constructed in local brick
- Much of the 20th century suburbs date from the post war era. These are frequently based on cul-de-sac structures, limiting their sense of connection with other areas. The layout and design of houses does little to reinforce local distinctiveness. These areas, while well loved by residents, are not appropriate for replication in new development

The perimeter of Bicester is undergoing transformation with significant new development planned in a series of distinctive neighbourhoods. RAF Bicester is becoming an interesting hub combining new technologies with heritage, while Graven Hill is to develop a distinctive character as a result of the council-led self-build programme. To the north-west, Bicester Eco-town is demonstrating new sustainable technologies and new urban forms. To the south-west and south-east housing growth areas are more normative in their design.

**Sustainable exemplars**

The town of Bicester is undergoing significant change and growth. This is reflected in its designation under a number of Government funded initiatives (Garden Town, Eco-town and Healthy New Town) which aim to provide new homes with a focus on innovative design and high levels of sustainability.

The guiding principles of good urbanism contained within this Guide must underpin all these proposals, creating well-connected, distinctive, safe and attractive places which engender civic pride and a sense of community. However, the Guide recognises that within sustainable exemplars, the development of new buildings typologies, architectural styles and materials may be appropriate. Bespoke design solutions will be agreed in consultation with the Council. Chapter 8 provides further details on innovation and sustainability.



Bicester - Priory Road (top), Church Street (middle), Elmbrook, North West Bicester (bottom)

**Kidlington**

Kidlington is an enlarged village, located in the Clay Vale of Otmoor, between the attractive green corridors of the River Cherwell and Oxford Canal. Kidlington emerged as a dispersed group of medieval hamlets focused on and around St Mary's Church and the Town Green in the east and Kidlington Green to the west. The remaining historic streets are built predominantly of Cotswold limestone with some later red brick buildings.

With the arrival of the canal in the eighteenth century and the railway in the nineteenth century, the settlement began to expand westwards. Rapid growth came in the twentieth century in response to Oxford's population pressure. Ribbon development of semi-detached and bungalow properties along Oxford to

Banbury Road and on large plots around the Moors was followed by the development of a 'Garden City' to the south led by the District Council and later on the growth of cul-de-sac based estates which limit east-west connectivity.

Unlike Banbury and Bicester, Kidlington does not have a medieval or Victorian civic centre. The village centre dates mainly from the late-twentieth century and relates poorly in character and scale to the pockets of remaining historic residential streets, some which are now designated as Conservation Areas.

Future development within Kidlington should look to strengthen the character of the village, and create a distinctive heart to the settlement in the village centre.

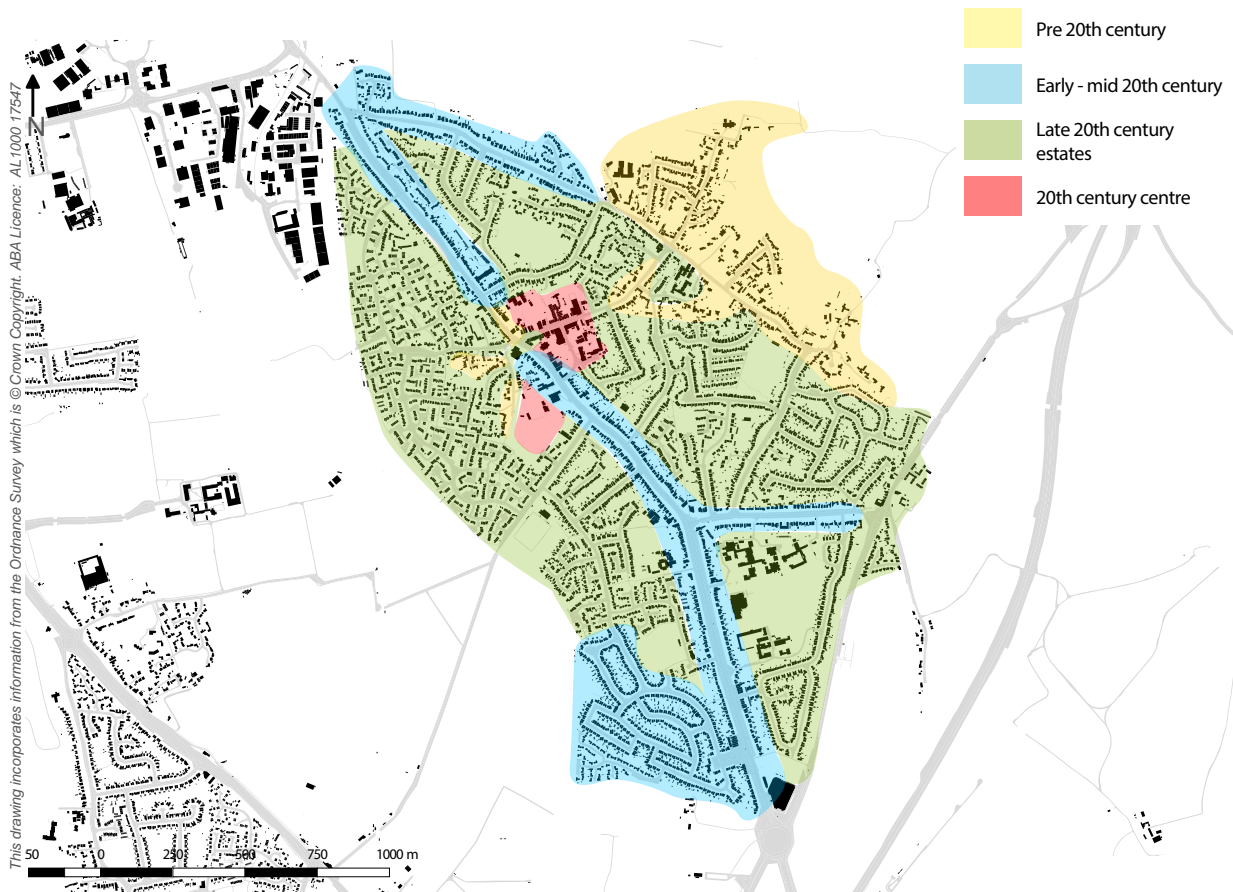


Figure 2.5 Kidlington



Key characteristics include:

- Small pockets of historic development
- 20th century centre which lacks character and consistency
- Many of the suburbs have been guided by Garden Suburb principles, with tree-lined avenue and stretches of terrace or semi-detached properties



Kidlington village centre (top), low rise ribbon development on Oxford Road (bottom)

Franklin Close (top), The Moors (middle), typical Garden City housing (bottom)

## 2.3 Countryside Character Areas

# 2

**The character of the district varies from north to south, with ironstone to the north and limestone to the south. There are more subtle distinctions which are described in the Council's Countryside Design Summary, CDC (1998).**

This classifies the District into four geographic character areas reflecting the influence of landscape and geology (figure 2.6):

- The Cherwell Valley
- The Iron Stone Downs
- The Ploughley Limestone Plateau
- The Clay Vale of Otmoor

A summary of the distinctive characteristics of each area is provided in table 2.1. The Countryside Design Summary notes that variation occurs at the more local level, from village to village, street to street and building to building, but each area displays an overall character which distinguishes it from the others.



Cherwell Valley



Ironstone Downs



Ploughley Limestone Plateau



Clay Vale of Otmoor

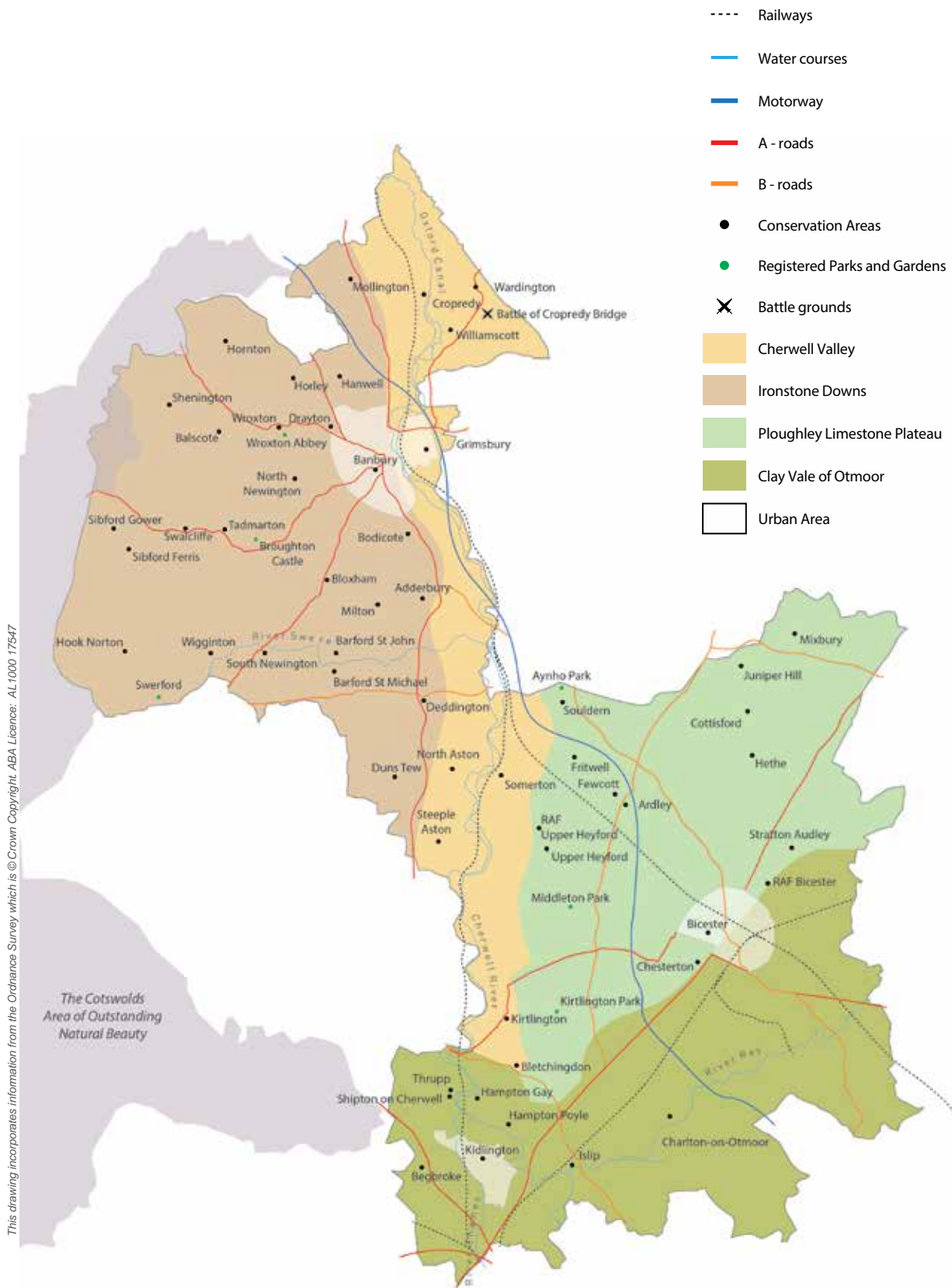






Figure 2.6 Cherwell District countryside character areas and heritage assets

The north and central valley

2

	Cherwell Valley	Ironstone Downs
		
<b>Location</b>	Runs north-south across the District following the River Cherwell.	Northern half of the District to the west of the Cherwell Valley.
<b>Landscape</b>	<p>To the north, a wide rolling valley dissecting the Ironstone Downs with a flat floor which floods seasonally. The valley narrows south of Banbury across limestone beds then flattens out over the Clay Vale.</p> <p>The Oxford Canal, Banbury to Oxford Railway and M40 are significant features of the valley floor.</p>	<p>An upland plateau-like landscape of mixed farmland, incised by very steep and often narrow valleys in the north. The land rises to the west forming an upland ridge with extensive views. The south has steeply sided, convoluted valleys with narrow valley floors and rolling, rounded hill lines.</p> <p>The Ironstone Downs consists of marlstone rock beds overlying middle and lower lias clays.</p>
<b>Settlement patterns</b>	<p>Settlements are mostly located on the valley slopes and have agricultural origins. Some have been influenced by the canal and railway.</p> <p>Linear settlement form is most common reflecting growth along a main movement route. Others are nucleated around road junctions. Village streets are mainly open in character with a variety of open spaces.</p>	<p>Numerous small, closely spaced settlements of agricultural origin, with larger villages located to the south.</p> <p>Villages are positioned in valley locations either on the valley sides, at the head of the valley or on the brow of the hill. Villages are generally only visually prominent where the valleys are open and wide.</p> <p>Villages have linear or nucleated forms or enclose areas of open land.</p>
<b>Buildings</b>	<p>Mainly two storey terraced or detached cottages, facing the streets and close to the kerb or behind stone walls. Steeply pitched roofs.</p> <p>Front gardens are uncommon.</p>	<p>Mainly two storey terraced and detached houses, the majority of which face the street. Roof pitches are steep with brick stacks on the ridge line.</p> <p>Buildings are often located at the back of pavement or set back behind ironstone walls. Trees and hedgerows are important features of the streetscene.</p>
<b>Materials</b>	<p>Ironstone from Clifton northwards, limestone to the south. Some villages have a mixture. Welsh slate and engineering brick also evident.</p> <p>Dark toned plain slate and tile roofs or thatch.</p>	<p>Ironstone walling except at Duns Tew where limestone predominates. Early nineteenth century brick buildings in villages close to Banbury.</p> <p>Thatch and stone slate roofs, often replaced with plain dark grey slates, tiles and Welsh slate.</p>

The south

	Ploughley Limestone Plateau	Clay Vale of Otmoor
		
<b>Location</b>	Central part of the District, east of the Cherwell Valley.	Southern part of the District.
<b>Landscape</b>	<p>A number of exposed upland plateaux in the north and west dip gently into rolling undulations and shallow valleys to the southeast. There are extensive areas of woodland cover.</p> <p>White limestone in the north gives way to cornbrash further south, both of the great oolitic group.</p>	<p>A low lying clay vale which rises gently to the north and west, and sharply to the south to form the Oxford Heights.</p> <p>The land is waterlogged, although extensive drainage has enabled more than half of the land to become arable farmland.</p> <p>Otmoor is an important grassland habitat designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).</p>
<b>Settlement patterns</b>	<p>Most villages are small and linear in form. They are not prominent in the landscape due to landform and woodland cover.</p> <p>A few villages have a formal unity of design which suggests they are planned estate villages e.g. Kirtlington.</p>	<p>Settlements are mostly located just above the level of the floodplain often on outcrops of cornbrash.</p> <p>Villages are small and generally linear in form. Some have an open, unstructured character with properties set back behind stone walls, gardens and hedges. Others have a tighter, urban structure.</p>
<b>Buildings</b>	<p>A mix of mostly two storey terraced and detached properties, with fairly steeply pitched roofs and brick chimney stacks on the roofline.</p> <p>Buildings face onto streets and public spaces, but larger properties may be set back some distance behind limestone walls. Iron railings are also used.</p>	<p>Mostly two storey detached, with groups of terraces in some villages. Steeply pitched roofs with chimneys on the rooflines.</p> <p>Buildings mainly face streets. Detached properties have a variety of forms and often set back at varying depths from the road producing an irregular street frontage.</p>
<b>Materials</b>	<p>Limestone rubble, coursed and thinly bedded. Red brick. Red and occasionally blue bricks are used for quoins and detailing in 19th century estate cottages.</p> <p>Thatch and stone slate roofs, many now replaced by local clay tile and welsh slate.</p>	<p>Limestone in most of the area. Red brick buildings and detailing also found. Ornamental and whitewashed brickwork is more common across this area.</p> <p>Roofs were traditionally thatched, now mostly replaced with plain dark toned slates and tiles and in some areas plain, red clay tiles.</p>

Reference should also be made to the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study. <http://owls.oxfordshire.gov.uk>. This divides the District into 19 landscape types (see figure 2.7) which sit within Natural England's National Character Areas. Landscape and biodiversity guidance is provided for each.

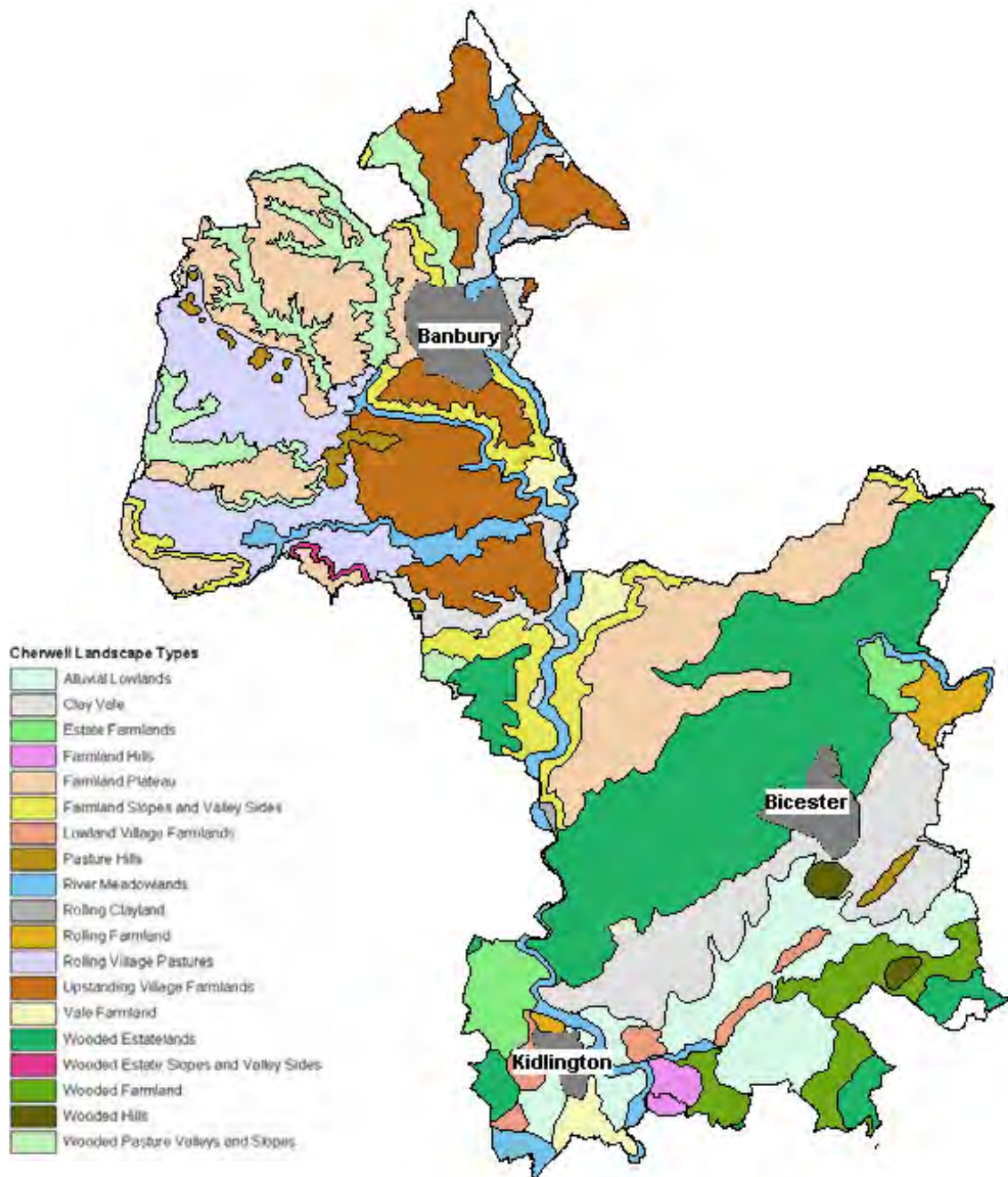


Figure 2.7 Cherwell landscape types (source: OWLS)

# 3 RESPONDING TO THE SITE AND ITS CONTEXT



**3.1 Understanding the site and its context**

**3.2 Opportunities and constraints**



Understanding the characteristics of a site and its wider setting are fundamental to good masterplanning and design solutions.

This chapter explains the process of information gathering, analysis and synthesis leading to a clear understanding of site constraints and opportunities. This should be undertaken in the preparation for outline, full and reserved matters planning applications.

#### New development in Cherwell should promote:

- Meaningful analysis which is appropriate to the stage and nature of the project and positively informs the project brief and design process
- Designs which are responsive to local conditions, which fit naturally with the landscape and settlement pattern and are distinctive to Cherwell
- Engagement with the Council and local stakeholders during the analysis process

#### New development should avoid:

- The creation of 'anywhere places' which do not respond to local context
- Analysis which focuses on detail and fails to consider bigger picture issues
- A lack of engagement with Council Officers in the early stages of the design process
- Responding to the wrong context, for example: taking precedent from poor quality development.
- Failure to synthesise the information gathered that leads to a design that does not respond to the issues identified

#### Please refer to the following chapters for supporting information:

- **Chapter 2:** For a summary of the District's distinctive characteristics and character areas
- **Chapter 4:** For details of how the site analysis should be interpreted in the masterplan and vision
- **Chapter 5-7:** For details of how site analysis should inform the detailed design of streets, plots and buildings
- **Chapter 8:** For guidance on sustainability considerations
- **Appendix A:** List of Conservation Areas within the District

#### Further reading:

- **Urban Design Compendium, 2007, English Partnerships:** Chapter 2 - Appreciating the Context for further detail on human, environmental and economic factors to consider in site analysis and their relationship to site feasibility testing and vision.

### 3.1 Understanding the site and its context

**Analysis of the site and its context is a fundamental part of the design process. The aim is to understand and respond positively to the site's characteristics and the surrounding context to create a distinctive place rooted in the local environment.**

Every site has a different social, economic and physical context and requires a bespoke design response. It is critical that the development context is understood at the very start of the design process to inform the design brief and commercial decisions relating to site selection. Not all sites will be appropriate for development and initial analysis and consultation with the council will be important in determining a site's suitability.

The role of analysis is to:

- Establish where you should and shouldn't build within a site and within a settlement
- Establish important points of connectivity
- Identify site features requiring protection or enhancement
- Identify local townscape and landscape characteristics so that they can be reinforced through the development
- Understand Council, local stakeholder and statutory consultee requirements for the site
- Directly inform the brief for the masterplan and the design solution

Alongside a desk based review of existing documents, the Council will expect to see evidence of site visits and primary analysis of the site and the surrounding area. It is expected that the design team will engage with technical stakeholders including Council Planning Officers to agree the scope of analysis, gather information and discuss the appropriate design response.

It is expected that a robust analysis should be set out within the Design and Access Statement to explain how design decisions have been made.

The extent and breadth of analysis should be appropriate to the size and location of the site (see figure 3.1).

Site analysis should continue throughout the design process with an increasing level of detail as a scheme moves towards implementation.

For example in relation to townscape analysis:  
 Outline application: layout informed by an analysis of characteristic street patterns, block and building typologies and relationship to the street, alongside a general exploration of architectural form, character and detail.

Full or reserved matters application: detailed design informed by a detailed analysis of vernacular architecture, local building and public realm materials and details.

#### Small infill site



#### Large edge of town site

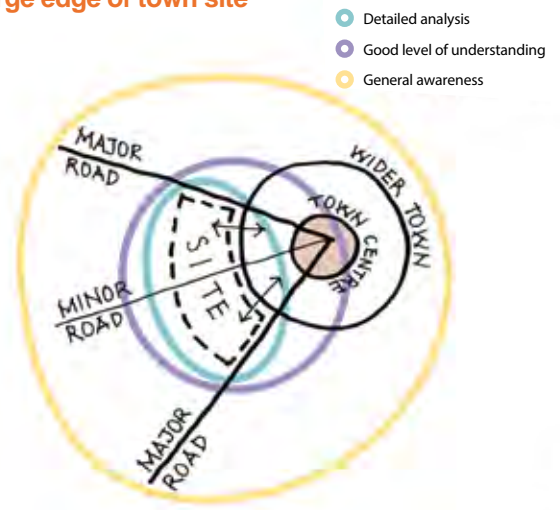


Figure 3.1 Indicative extent of analysis

The table below provides a list of typical topics which should be included in the analysis process, together with likely sources of information. This is not an exhaustive list and should be tailored to the specific site, but can be used as a starting point or aide mémoire. The list of 'Questions to address' provides guidance on how site analysis should be used to inform a synthesis of constraints and opportunities.

Questions in bold are of particular relevance to Full or Reserved Matters Applications.

Planning review and socio-economics	
<b>Details</b>	Planning history of the site Adjacent developments / proposals Relevant planning policy including housing, open space and other land use requirements Neighbourhood plans Demographic characteristics Access to services and facilities
<b>Questions to address:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Is the principle of development acceptable in planning terms / is the site allocated in the Local Plan?</li> <li>2. Is the site located within a neighbourhood plan area?</li> <li>3. What is the most appropriate mix of uses on the site to meet community needs?                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• housing mix?</li> <li>• new facilities and services e.g. education, healthcare, employment, retail?</li> <li>• open space?</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Are there adjacent sites which should be considered in a joined-up way?</li> <li>5. Who should be consulted during the design process and when (e.g. Parish Council, Neighbourhood Forum, adjacent landowners or statutory consultees)?</li> <li>6. How were previous schemes for the site received by the Council and local community?</li> <li>7. Can an appropriate scheme be developed given constraints, commercial and operational viability?</li> </ol>
<b>Sources of background information</b>	CDC Office for National Statistics

Views and sightlines	
<b>Details</b>	Important views into and out of the site Landmarks
<b>Questions to address:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Where are the key views into and out of the site that the scheme should preserve / enhance?</li> <li>9. Are there sensitive visual receptors e.g. adjacent properties or heritage assets and how should the scheme respond to these?</li> </ol>
<b>Sources of background information</b>	Site visits Conservation Area Appraisals

Townscape character	
Details	<p>Settlement evolution and pattern</p> <p>Relevant District Character Area</p> <p>Local street and building characteristics</p> <p>Land use mix</p> <p>Site edge conditions</p> <p>Conservation Areas</p> <p>Heritage assets</p> <p>Archaeology</p>
Questions to address:	<p>10. What District Character Area is the site located within and what are the key characteristics of landscape and townscape?</p> <p>11. Does the site or context contain designated and/or non-designated heritage or townscape assets (e.g. Conservation Area, listed building, locally listed building designations) or is it within the setting of any such assets? How can the significance, special interest, character and appearance of these assets be conserved or enhanced?"</p> <p>12. Where should development be located within the site to respect the natural limits of the settlement and its historic pattern?</p> <p>13. Where is the site located within the overall hierarchy of the settlement e.g. centre, edge, standalone?</p> <p>14. What are the conditions at the edge of the site and how should the scheme respond e.g. housing backing/fronting, open space, woodland, other uses?</p> <p><b>15. How might the scheme reflect locally distinctive relationships between buildings and the public realm e.g. extent of frontage, angle of buildings to the street, boundary treatments?</b></p> <p><b>16. How might the scheme reflect locally distinctive building forms, groupings, heights, rooflines and architectural details, wall and surface materials?</b></p>
Sources of background information	<p>Historic maps</p> <p>CDC Countryside Design Statement</p> <p>Conservation Area Appraisals</p> <p>OCC Historic Environment Record</p> <p>Historic England register of listed buildings</p> <p>CDC for local listings</p> <p>Site visits / surveys</p>

Landscape and topography	
Details	<p>Ecology and Habitat designations</p> <p>Mature trees, Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and hedgerows</p> <p>Treebelts and woodlands</p> <p>Watercourses</p> <p>Topography and geology</p> <p>Public open space provision within the settlement</p>
Questions to address:	<p>17. Does the site or context contain protected or important landscapes, habitats or species? How can these be preserved and enhanced?</p> <p>18. Is there a natural limit to the settlement defined by landscape / topography?</p> <p>19. How should the scheme work with and make the most of topography and existing landscape features e.g. hedgerows, green corridors, high-points, mature trees on and adjacent to the site?</p>
Sources of background information	<p>CDC</p> <p>Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)</p> <p>MAGIC website (<a href="http://www.magic.gov.uk">www.magic.gov.uk</a>)</p> <p>Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) website</p> <p>Natural England</p> <p>British Geological Survey website</p> <p>Ordnance Survey maps</p> <p>Site ecology/ arboricultural surveys</p> <p>Site visits</p>

Movement network	
<b>Details</b>	<p>Planned transport works</p> <p>Potential access points into the site</p> <p>Distance to public facilities, shops, services and employment uses</p> <p>Existing movement routes through the site and in the surrounding settlement: streets hierarchy, footpaths, bridleways, informal and historic routes</p> <p>Future desire lines</p> <p>Public transport routes and stops</p> <p>Car parking requirements</p>
<b>Questions to address:</b>	<p>20. Where can access and connection to the wider network be gained?</p> <p>21. Are there capacity constraints in the local highway network which limit the quantum of development or will require new highways infrastructure?</p> <p>22. How might the scheme layout respond to existing and future desire lines e.g. to local shops, schools, open space?</p> <p>23. Are there existing movement routes (roads, footpath, cycle routes etc) which should be retained?</p> <p>24. How can the scheme connect into the surrounding street and footpath/cycleway network?</p> <p>25. How does the site relate to existing public transport routes? Is there an opportunity to route these through the site?</p> <p>26. What is the appropriate amount and arrangement of car and cycle parking within the scheme?</p>
<b>Sources of background information</b>	<p>CDC</p> <p>Local Transport Plan (OCC)</p> <p>Other OCC guidance e.g. parking standards</p> <p>Ordnance Survey maps</p> <p>Public transport operators websites</p> <p>Site visits</p>

Physical constraints	
<b>Details</b>	<p>Flooding – fluvial and surface</p> <p>Noise</p> <p>Smell</p> <p>Utilities corridors</p> <p>Contamination</p> <p>Archaeology</p> <p>Microclimate</p>
<b>Questions to address:</b>	<p>27. Are there existing buildings on the site?</p> <p>28. Do the site levels present any access and construction issues?</p> <p>29. Does the site have access to utilities; are there utilities constraints e.g. easements?</p> <p>30. Are there ditches, ponds and water courses running through the site?</p> <p>31. Is the site at risk of fluvial or surface water flooding?</p> <p>32. What is the appropriate sustainable drainage response to the topography / geology of the site?</p> <p>33. Does contamination within the site constrain development?</p> <p>34. Does the site suffer from noise pollution which constrains development or requires mitigation?</p> <p>35. Are there any smells / air pollution issues which need to be mitigated?</p> <p>36. Are there any earthworks / archaeological constraints that need to be investigated / surveyed?</p> <p>37. Are there any microclimate issues that need to be considered in relation to wind, overshadowing etc.?</p>
<b>Sources of background information</b>	<p>Environment Agency</p> <p>CDC Strategic Flood Risk Assessment</p> <p>Statutory undertakers</p> <p>Utility providers</p> <p>Site survey</p>

### 3.2 Opportunities and constraints

**Analysis should be sifted and synthesised to draw out the key constraints and opportunities and inform the brief for the masterplan.**

The site analysis process should be broad and layered, fed by multiple sources of information (see figure 3.2). Following information gathering and initial analysis, the issues and details which are important for the scheme are drawn out.

The key findings of the analysis process should be communicated in an opportunities and constraints plan.

This should:

- Overlay key physical constraints and areas unsuitable for built development
- Identify key features of the site and context
- Identify opportunities for reinforcing existing features as part of a green infrastructure strategy
- Identify site access opportunities and connections to the surrounding movement network
- Identify initial design opportunities in response to site conditions including the potential extent of development

The project brief should be refined in light of the opportunities and constraints analysis, which forms a robust foundation for the masterplan.

Figure 3.2 Site analysis process

