Appendix L.A03

Landscape Character

Cotswold Character Area 7

Character Area

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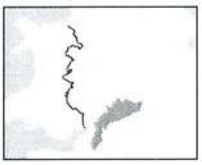


Cotswolds

Key Characteristics

- Defined by its underlying geology: a dramatic scarp rising above adjacent lowlands with steep combes, scarp foot villages and beech woodlands.
- Rolling, open, high wold plateaux moulded by physical and human influences, with arable and large blocks of woodland, divided up by small, narrow valleys.
- Incised landscapes with deep wide valleys.
- Flat, open dip slope landscape with extensive arable farmland.
- Prominent outliers within the lowlands.
- Honey-coloured Cotswold stone in walls, houses and churches.
- Attractive stone villages with a unity of design and materials.

Landscape Character

The Cotswolds form perhaps the best-known of the stone-belt uplands that stretch right across England from Dorset to Lincolnshire. The dominant pattern is of a steep scarp and long, rolling dip slope cut into a series of plateaux by numerous rivers and streams. There is great variety of landform and vegetation and a number of distinct landscapes can be identified. However, in briefly describing these, the fundamental unity must not be underrated. This derives in part from the harmony of the ever-present honey-coloured oolitic limestone in walls, houses, mansions and churches. It dominates the villages which have a distinctive Cotswold style derived from repeating simple elements. There are many other common elements such as beech woods, outstanding landscape parks, valley bottom meadows and a strong sense of a long period of settlement and human activity. The latter derives from the many outstanding features ranging from prehistoric monuments to the dry stone walls of 18th century enclosure.

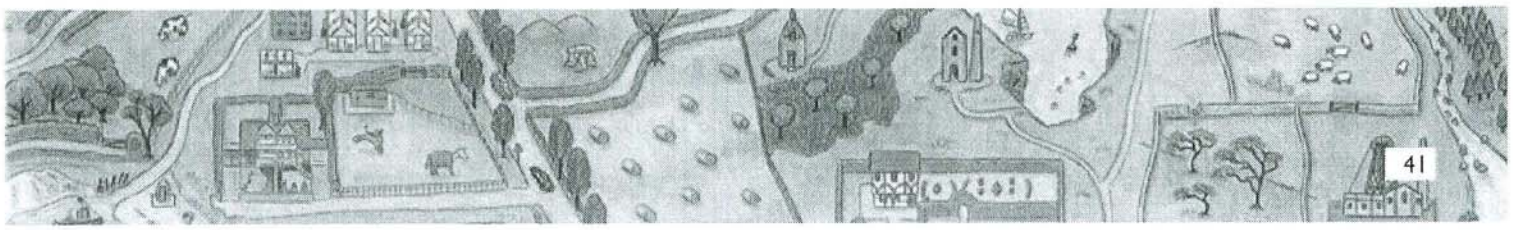
At the western edge of the Cotswolds, the scarp face, fretted by deep combes, dominates the Severn Valley. Dense beechwoods, tree clumps, scrub, semi-natural grassland and prehistoric earthworks, most notably the Iron Age hillforts, contribute to an attractive and imposing skyline. Although hedged fields divide up much of the scarp's pastures, there are surviving commons, including Cleeve Common. Settlements on the scarp are confined to a few sheltered sites, but there are frequent villages where springs emerge at its foot. Around Bath, Stroud and Winchcombe, the landform is characterised by deep, wide valleys, often accentuated by densely-wooded ridge crests. Tree-clad streams wind down the steep slopes where fields are often small with overgrown hedges but, on the ridge tops, the landscape is usually open arable divided up by dry stone walls.

JOHN TYLER/COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY

The use of Cotswold oolitic limestone for buildings is one of the most dominant and characteristic features of the area. It can be seen throughout the built landscape of the Cotswolds especially in the great 'wool' churches.

Beyond the scarp to the north-west, there are outlying hills of which Bredon is the largest and best-known. They have an outward-facing radial form with field boundaries appearing to radiate from a central point. Several are crowned by ridges.

To the east of the scarp and its deeply-incised valleys, the landform becomes gentler and there are the broad rolling plateaux of the high Wolds. The large-scale, generally open landscape, is characterised by blocks of woodland and

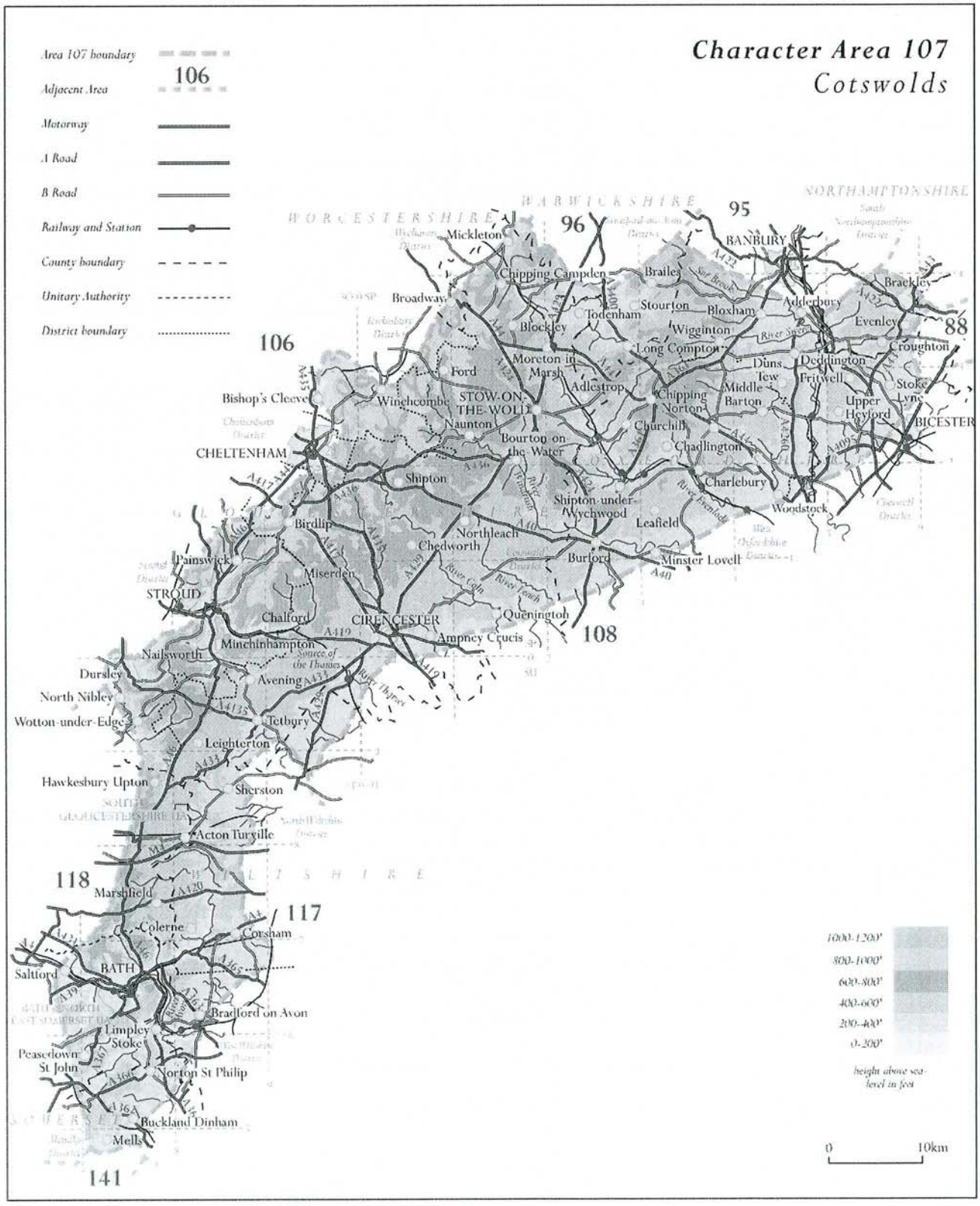


arable, but there are also lush, narrow, enclosed valleys forming a strong contrast, emphasised by the dry stone walls of the plateaux and the hedges of the valleys. Villages are near the spring lines, sometimes lying around a central common or green.

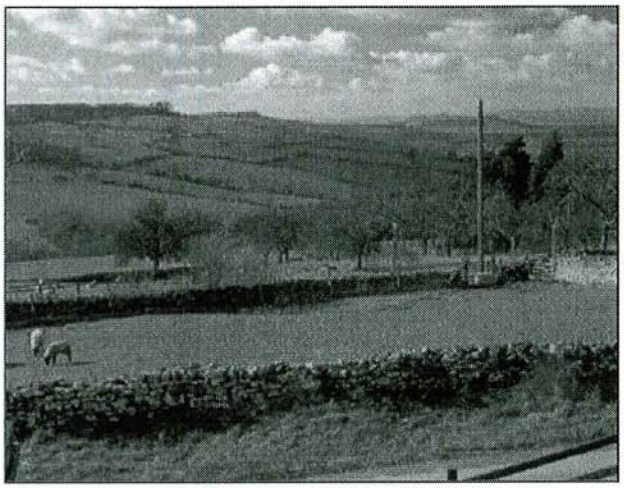
Finally, there is the dip slope which is yet more gentle than the high Wolds. The valleys, like those of the Windrush and Coln, are much broader and sometimes give the impression that they are simply undulations in the plateau. Arable predominates, but marshy valley bottoms with willows, alders and watermeadows still survive.

Physical Influences

The north-west-facing scarp reaches its highest point just north of Cheltenham, becoming less prominent to the north and south. The Jurassic oolitic limestone of the upper scarp



forms the freely-draining high land of the northern and western wolds, as well as the ridge tops between the steep valleys to the south and east. Steeply-incised stream and river valleys cut through the scarp, flowing westwards towards the Severn. To the south and east, the oolite dips beneath wetter clays which form broad valleys around the main rivers and streams which flow eastwards.



JIM HALLETT/COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY

To the north east an undulating wolds landscape with wide views, large fields, dry stone walls, plantation and shelter belts is broken by a lush, enclosed and settled valley.

Jurassic rocks predominate, the strata dipping towards and becoming progessively younger to the south and east. Small areas of Oxford Clay and coarse, crumbly Cornbrash occur at the south-eastern extremity. The Great Oolite underlies most of the plateau area but the massive limestone escarpment to the north and west is formed by the underlying Inferior Oolite which, if anything, is even more sought after as a building stone. Lower down the scarp face, and surrounding the northern and western fringes, the Lias shales, sandstones and siltstones of the Lower Jurassic are exposed. These are soft and easily weathered and have slumped or eroded to form the hummocky ground, stream valleys and bays at the escarpment foot.

Many of the Cotswold soils are derived directly from the parent rock and tend to be alkaline and of low fertility. Thin, well-aerated, brashy soils derived from limestone are common on the steeper slopes, particularly to the west. More fertile, deeper, clayey soils of alluvial origin are present along the valley floors and on lower-lying land to the south and east.

Historical and Cultural Influences

The Cotswolds have some outstanding prehistoric monuments ranging from the Neolithic long barrow of Hetty Pegler's Tump near Uley to the many impressive Iron age hillforts like Bredon Hill and Meon Hill. They are evidence of substantial human activity which almost certainly saw the clearance of areas with light and easily cultivable soils at an early date and it was probably these that formed the basis of the extensive Roman occupation of the area. Villas and lesser settlements were frequent and the road pattern of the Foss Way, Ermin Street, Akeman Street and Ryknild Street is still very apparent.

It is not entirely clear whether the Saxons took over a substantially cleared and settled landscape or whether the clearance of the heavier land took place during the Anglo-Saxon period. However, by the late 11th century, the area was extensively settled and there was little woodland. Common fields were in use soon after, if not before, the preparation of Domesday Book and, at that time and in the ensuing medieval centuries, much of the land was in large estates, both ecclesiastical and lay. There were vast open sheepwalks which formed the basis of medieval prosperity and sheep were moved seasonally from low to high ground.

DAVID MORRIS/COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY

A plateau of large-scale arable farmland with a sparse settlement pattern of isolated farmsteads and hamlets.

After the disasters of the early and mid-14th century, large estates were consolidated and a prosperous cloth trade expanded from its early medieval beginnings with the many fast-flowing streams being used for fulling. Small market towns like Northleach and Chipping Camden expanded and many fine Perpendicular churches and merchants houses were built. The land market that followed the dissolution of the monasteries enabled the consolidation of the large estates, leading ultimately to the fine country houses and historic parks like Dyrham, Badminton and Compton Wynyates. Many of the villages owe their present uniform character to the strong influence of estates which, in many cases, has persisted down to the present day. Throughout the late medieval and post-medieval period, there was piecemeal enclosure of open fields, commons, waste and sheepwalks but many of the sheepwalks remained unenclosed until the late 18th and 19th centuries and the prominent rectilinear patterns characterise much of the higher ground today.

In the early modern period, the cloth industry concentrated in the valleys around Dursley, Stroud, Chalford and Painswick. Although it was originally a cottage industry, by

1800 large mills were built with cottages nearby. However, by the 1830s the industry was in decline and, apart from quarrying, agriculture has been the principal industry of the Cotswolds in the present century. There has been large-scale conversion from grassland to arable, removal of hedges and conversion of broadleaf woodland to conifers. The other major change has been the growth of tourism and the expansion of settlement.

Buildings and Settlement

Settlements throughout the area are united by the use of the Cotswold stone and a relatively small range of architectural styles. The great wool churches were built in Perpendicular style, mostly in the 15th century. They generally have profusely ornamented square towers although spires are sometimes found. It is, however, the high quality of the domestic architecture that is distinctive, typically comprising a steep roof of graded limestone 'slates', parapeted gables with finials, stone mullions, rectangular dripstones, dormer windows in subsidiary gables and four-centred arches over doorways. Ashlar is usually used on the front of buildings at least and the overall impression is one of diversity on a common theme of refinement and simple elegance, blending seamlessly into the surrounding landscape.

The principal towns – Bath, Stroud and Cirencester – lie on the very edges of the area and the fine qualities of the oolite-dominated townscape of Bath in particular is too well known to need description. The smaller towns and villages lie at the scarp foot, in the valley bottoms or on the valley sides with the gentlest gradients. Plans vary between compact and linear with some lying around a wide central green or common. Away from these sheltered town and village sites, usually never far from water, there are generally only small hamlets and isolated farmsteads, so that the higher ground often seems very sparsely populated. The settlements are linked by a complex network of roads. The oldest (the Roman roads) and the most recent (the enclosure roads) sweep across the landscape in almost straight lines but the typical Cotswold road is a winding lane linking villages along the valleys and rising over the high ground.

Land Cover

Much of the high ground of the plateau is arable, broken by occasional woodland blocks and shelterbelts with dry stone walls but also with hedges. In the valleys, at least on the steeper slopes, pasture predominates and along the valley bottoms there are meadows and tree-lined watercourses. On the scarp slopes, scrub, beech woodland, hedges and tree clumps are present and some areas of species-rich grassland survive.

The beech woodlands are of national importance and have a characteristic, if limited, flora. Other woodlands, typically located on the upper slopes of valleys and on the flat plateaux tops, are more varied and contain a wide range of

JOHN TYLER/COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY

The west facing Cotswold scarp supports high calcareous grassland and fine beech woods.

calcicole shrubs and ground flora. The unimproved grassland, too, contains typical calcicole species. The streams and marshes have varied marginal vegetation and unimproved wet meadows with alder and willow carr.

The Changing Countryside

- Agricultural improvement and conversion to arable have brought widespread loss of semi-natural habitats and landscape features in the period since the last war. Much of the unimproved, species-rich limestone grassland has been lost, marshes have been drained and hedges and dry stone walls removed. However, these changes have now more or less abated.
- Loss of unimproved grassland has probably been checked but scrub invasion through declining grazing is affecting what remains.
- There is pressure for expansion of villages and for the creation of new rural settlements, particularly those within easy reach of major towns and cities. Much new building has been infilling and unsympathetic in design and materials. Many farm buildings have been converted to residential use.
- Tourism and through-traffic have brought a requirement for upgraded roads, bypasses and through-routes with associated upgrading and an increased number of signs for minor routes.
- There is pressure for facilities at tourist honeypots, with associated congestion, erosion of footpaths, bridleways and viewing points.
- Dry stone walls are in long-term decline: the limestone walls become friable with age and require regular maintenance which is labour-intensive and expensive.
- Some small woodlands have been converted to conifers. Many existing small woodlands are unmanaged.
- There are continuing pressures for landfill, quarrying and extraction of gravel and minerals.

Shaping the Future

- Much of the scarp would benefit from an improved management of the limestone grassland and a reduction of scrub.
- There are opportunities for the sound managment of hedges, woodlands, copses and – particularly – the distinctive beechwoods.
- The sensitive management of wetland habitats of the valley bottoms including wet grassland, scrub, willows and the streams themselves should be addressed.
- There is much interest in the conservation of dry stone walls and hedge management. Priorities need to be set for the areas that are most important in the landscape.
- The quality of Cotswold villages is often jealously guarded. Local design initiatives offer a basis for turning this into precise guidelines and activity.

SIMON WARNER/COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY

Cotswold streams provide interest in the landscape and are generally of high quality supporting brown trout, dippers and, in a few areas, native crayfish.

Selected References

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Cotswold AONB JAC (1995), *Cotswold AONB Management Strategy*.

Countryside Commission (1990), *The Cotswold Landscape*, Countryside Commission, Cheltenham CCP 294.

Finberg, H P R (1973), *The Gloucestershire Landscape*, Hodder & Stoughton, London.

Hadfield, C and Hadfield, A M (1973), *The Cotswolds : A New Study*.

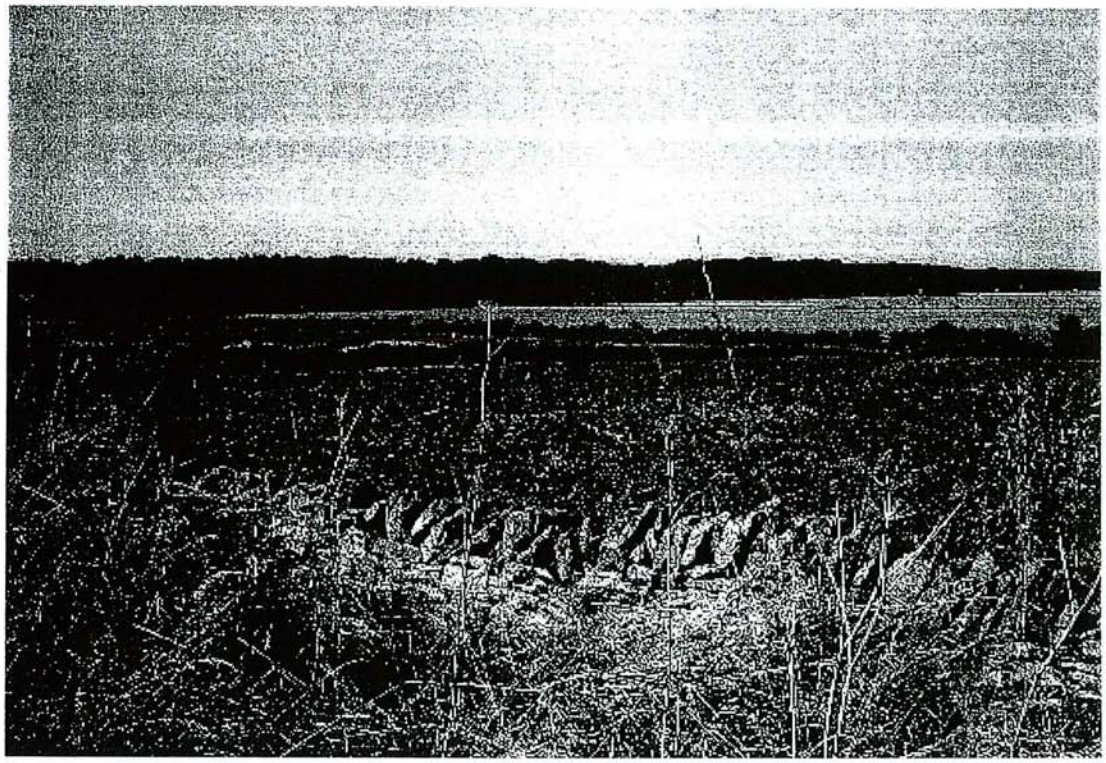
Glossary

calcicole: plant that grows best in calcareous soil

carr: a marshy copse

Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study
Landscape Typles

Landscape Types:
Farmland Plateau



6. FARMLAND PLATEAU

Regional Character Areas

Cotswolds, Northamptonshire Uplands.

Location

This landscape type covers the plateau across the elevated northern part of the county. It extends across the areas between Chipping Norton and Banbury and is dissected by the Rivers Evenlode, Glyme and Dorn. To the east of the Cherwell Valley the plateau continues northeast of Upper Heyford and Fritwell. The most southern part lies to the northwest of the River Windrush.

Overview

This landscape type is characterised by a high limestone plateau with a distinctive elevated and exposed character, broad skies and long-distant views. Large-scale arable fields dominate the landscape, with some medium-sized plantations partially obscuring the otherwise open views.

Key Characteristics

- Level or gently rolling open ridges dissected by narrow valleys and broader vales.
- Large, regular arable fields enclosed by low thorn hedges and limestone walls.
- Rectilinear plantations and shelterbelts.
- Sparsely settled landscape with a few nucleated settlements.
- Long, straight roads running along the ridge summits.

Geology and landform

The rocks are of the Middle and Lower Jurassic periods. The upper strata of the sequence is the hard limestone bed of the Great Oolite, which dominates much of the area and gives rise to the distinctive smoothly rolling plateaux. In places, it reaches heights of around 200 metres. The lower series of Inferior Oolite, along with a band of Marlstone and a shelly ferruginous limestone of the underlying Middle Lias series, occurs mainly across the north of the area. They are referred to as ironstones because of their high iron content. The limestone gives rise to thin, well-drained calcareous soils with a distinctive orange-brown colour where the ironstones prevail.

Land use and vegetation

The light and easily cultivated soils have favoured the intensive arable farming that largely dominates the landscape. There are some smaller, semi-improved grass fields used for pony and sheep-grazing. Characteristic features dominating the skyline include the small to medium-sized regular plantations and long, wide shelterbelts bordering roads and field boundaries. They are particularly prominent when associated with large estates, and are mostly mixed and deciduous plantations with ash, field maple, beech and occasionally oak. Beech plantations are also typical of this landscape type. Small patches of secondary woodland with similar tree and shrub species can also be found.

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

Cultural pattern

This is a characteristic, planned, late Parliamentary enclosure landscape. There is a large-scale geometric field pattern surrounded by low hawthorn hedges and stone walls. Hedgerow trees, which are mainly ash, sycamore, field maple and sometimes oak, are sparsely scattered throughout and do not detract from the openness of the landscape. Occasionally, in places like Glympton where there is a strong estate character, hedges support species such as privet, dogwood, wayfaring tree, hazel and field maple. The hedgerow trees are also much denser in this area. Another characteristic feature is the straight roads which reinforce the geometric pattern of this planned landscape.

The exposed high plateau has not favoured settlement, and it is characterised by sparsely scattered farmsteads and a few nucleated villages. Farmhouses are generally located in the open countryside as a result of parliamentary enclosure.

The use of local limestone for building materials gives a very distinctive character to the village settlements. The pale cream-coloured Oolitic limestone and stone tiles on the roofs feature in most of the buildings. Some houses are built with the warm orange-brown coloured ironstone and local Stonesfield slates. The vernacular character is particularly prominent in villages such as Fritwell and Souldern, and in small hamlets such as Ledwell.

BIODIVERSITY

Overview

This landscape supports a wide range of locally important habitats along with some ancient semi-natural woodland and patches of unimproved limestone grassland.

Key characteristics

• Bioscores/biobands range from low to medium-high but are predominantly in the low to low-medium range.

• Priority habitats include ancient woodland, species-rich hedgerows, calcareous grassland and occasional wetlands such as streams and ponds.

General Description

This is a large landscape type occupying around 9% of the rural county. It supports a relatively wide range of locally important habitats including secondary woodland, plantations, semi-improved grassland and species-poor hawthorn hedges. Parts of the limestone plateaux, either side of the Cherwell Valley from Chipping Norton in the west to the area Upper Heyford in the east, score more highly. This is largely because they still support fragments of priority and important habitats, such as ancient semi-natural woodland, species-rich hedgerows and limestone grassland. These tend to be relatively small and isolated in locations such as Stoke and Worton woods and often associated with marginal areas such as Ardley, Taynton and Rollright Quarries and parts of the Upper Heyford airfield. Similarly, there are isolated pockets of acid grassland and heath to the west of Banbury, with Tadmarton Health Golf Course being the best example. Only Ardley Quarry has any statutory protection, and this is mainly due to its geological interest. A number of others have been designated as county wildlife sites.

LOCAL CHARACTER AREAS

A. Shutford (NU/17, NU/20)

Landscape Character

The area is characterised by prominent, tall thick hedges enclosing medium-sized, regularly-shaped fields. Land uses are mixed, but arable farming dominates the area to the south of Shennington Gliding Club. Ridge and furrow is apparent in the small grass fields around Shutford. Tree cover is limited to a few hedgerow trees. The hedgerow network is generally in good condition, and hedges bordering roads are often support a number of shrub species.

Biodiversity

Bioscores/biobands: 19/L; 31/LM
This area supports a limited range of locally important habitats including deciduous woodland, plantations, scrub, semi-improved grassland and species-poor hedges with trees. There are no recorded priority habitats.

B. Hornton to North Newington (NU/22)

Landscape Character

The area is dominated by large, regularly-shaped arable fields. Long, wide shelterbelts and medium-sized, rectilinear coniferous and mixed plantations are also a distinctive feature. Fields are enclosed by these shelterbelts and low, gappy hawthorn hedges.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 50/LM
There is a range of locally important habitats including plantations, semi-improved grassland and species-poor hedges with trees. Other important habitats recorded include some ponds and patches of gorse scrub.

C. Hanwell (NU/24)

Landscape Character

The area is characterised by medium-sized, regularly-shaped arable fields enclosed by very low, gappy hawthorn hedges. There is some grassland, particularly where the landform is steeper and more undulating. There are a few small mixed plantations and scattered hedgerow trees of young ash and sycamore.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 39/LM
There is a limited range of locally important habitats including mixed plantations, semi-improved grassland and species-poor hedges with trees. There is a small area of calcareous grassland at the Bretch to the west of Banbury.

D. Croft Farm (CW/37)

Landscape Character

The area is characterised by small fields with a range of different land uses including pony paddocks. The hedgerow pattern is generally intact throughout. Hedges bordering roads are generally taller and thicker. They are dominated by species such as hawthorn and field maple and are associated with a dense pattern of mature hedgerow trees including ash, field maple and sycamore. Collectively, these features create a strong structural element in the landscape. By contrast, internal field boundaries tend to be much lower in height with fewer hedgerow trees.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 19/L
This area supports only a limited range of locally important habitats including plantations, semi-improved grassland and species-poor hedges with trees. There are no recorded priority habitats.

E. Wigginton Heath (CW/36)

Landscape Character

The area is characterised by medium-sized fields with a mix of different land uses. Hedges are generally in good condition and dominated by hawthorn. A dense pattern of mature hedgerow trees, mainly ash and sycamore, is the dominant landscape element. There is only one medium-sized plantation and a few groups of trees around farmhouses.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 60/M
There is a range of locally important habitats including a deciduous plantation, semi-improved grassland and species-poor hedges with trees. Parts of Tadmarton golf course still supports significant amounts of acid grassland and some heathland, although it is still a relatively small and isolated site.

F. Chipping Norton (CW/30: CW/31: CW/41)

Landscape Character

The area is characterised by large, regularly-shaped arable fields, and rectilinear mixed and deciduous plantations and shelterbelts. Thinly scattered hedgerow trees of oak and ash are also a unifying feature throughout the area, particularly to the east of Great Rollright. Localised pockets of semi-improved grassland, used mainly for pony-grazing, are found near Heythrop, Gaginwell and to the east of Great Rollright. The field boundaries consist mainly of hawthorn hedges and stone walls, with the latter being particularly prominent to the southeast of Chipping Norton. Some species-rich hedges are found around the estate at Glympton. Hedges are generally low and gappy, and stone walls are often in poor condition and overgrown with hawthorn scrub.

Biodiversity

Bioscores/biobands: 80/M: 76/M: 113/MH.
This area supports locally important habitats such as plantations, deciduous secondary woodland, semi-improved grassland, scrub and species-poor hedges. There are also surviving patches of unimproved grassland near Chipping Norton, limestone grassland at the Rollright Quarry, along the banks of the disused railway at Hook Norton and within the upper section of the River Glyme. There is also some ancient semi-natural woodland at Stoke and Worton woods, species-rich hedgerows and limestone grassland at Ardley and Whiteways quarries, but they are mostly small and isolated sites within this very large landscape type.

G. Swerford Heath (NU/4)

Landscape Character

The landscape is characterised by shelterbelts and rectilinear, mixed plantations bordering roads. There is a scattering of hedgerow trees including oak, ash and beech. Land uses are mixed, with medium-sized fields enclosed by hawthorn and elm hedges. The latter are generally in good condition, but are lower and gappier where they surround improved grassland.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 25/L
This area supports a limited range of locally important habitats including deciduous woodland, plantations, and species-poor hedges with trees. There are no recorded priority habitats.

H. Fritwell (CW/57)

Landscape Character

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

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 112/MH
There is range of locally important habitats including meadows, woodland, plantations, scrub, semi-improved grassland and species-poor hedges with trees. Even though there are a number of priority habitats such as ancient semi-natural woodland, examples being Stoke and Worton woods, species-rich hedgerows and limestone grassland at Ardley and Whiteways quarries, they are mostly small and isolated sites within this relatively large landscape type.

I. Shipton Down (CW/16)

Landscape Character

The area is characterised by large, regularly-shaped arable fields. Hawthorn hedges are low and fragmented and the stone walls are often overgrown with scrub. There are very few hedgerow trees and tree cover is mainly confined to small copses in fields. There are some plantations and shelterbelts associated with restored quarries.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 52/LM
This area supports a range of locally important habitats including plantations, semi-improved grassland, scrub and species-poor hedges as well as some limestone grassland near Taynton.

FORCES FOR CHANGE

- Agricultural intensification, particularly the conversion of grassland to arable has resulted in the loss of semi-natural vegetation and fragmentation of the hedgerow network. Hedges along roadsides are generally in a better condition, but many internal hedges bordering arable fields have been removed. Stone walls are also redundant, in poor condition and overgrown with scrub.
- The open plateau landscapes are very exposed and agricultural buildings and other large structures, such as the industrial units at Enstone Airfield, are particularly prominent. Similarly, the structures associated with Upper Heyford airfield are very visible across the Cherwell valley.
- A number of the ironstone quarries in the north of the county have been restored to low-level agriculture and one, near Alkerton, is currently operating as a landfill site. There is also an active quarry to the south of Hornton and permissions exist for new workings in the area. A number of tree and shrub belts have been planted to screen these operations.
- There is new residential development where the use of building materials has not always been appropriate. However, in many settlements including Fritwell, the scale and use of building materials is in keeping with the local vernacular character. In towns such as Chipping Norton there are small-scale industrial units bordering some of the main routes into the centre.
- Other development such as golf courses can have a suburbanising effect on the landscape.

Landscape Strategy

Conserve the open and remote character of the landscape, and maintain the large-scale field pattern.

Guidelines

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

Biodiversity Strategy

Ensure that all surviving priority habitats are safeguarded, in favourable condition and management, and enhanced to satisfy the actions and targets identified within the relevant habitat and species action plans. Safeguard, maintain and enhance all locally important habitats in a way thatis appropriate to the landscape character of the area. Promote agri-environment schemes which will benefit biodiversity in general and protected species and farmland birds in particular.

Guidelines

• Priority habitats in this landscape type are relatively small and isolated. They include limestone grassland, acid grassland and heath, and species-rich hedgerows.
• Limestone grassland is largely associated with marginal areas such as quarries and airfields. Within the quarries, aim to establish a balance between species-rich limestone grassland and scrub, and prevent scrub encroachment in areas of species-rich grassland. Opportunities for expanding this habitat include the establishment and management of field margins/buffer strips adjacent to existing limestone grassland habitat, using native wildflower species appropriate to the area.
• Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout different parts of the landscape type. Priority should be given to safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource, particularly in those local character areas where they remain a significant feature.
• There is only a limited amount of acid grassland and heath within the landscape type, and this is primarily associated with Tadmarton Heath golf course. The priority is to ensure that it remains in favourable condition and management. Opportunities for extending this habitat type are limited.
• There is some ancient semi-natural woodland at places such as Stoke and Worton woods. The priority must be to ensure that these sites are in favourable condition and management.
• Opportunities for the establishment of other locally important habitats, such as semi-improved grassland and deciduous woodland, should be promoted in order to strengthen wildlife corridors and enhance the local landscape character.
• Promote the use of agri-environment schemes such as conservation headlands, over-wintered stubbles, and winter-sown crops to benefit farmland birds such as

skylarks and yellowhammers.

Key Recommendations

- **Safeguard and enhance the open, sparsely settled character of the landscape whilst maintaining and strengthening its pattern of hedgerows, stone walls, small woodlands and tree belts.**
- **Ensure that all priority habitats are in favourable condition and management.**

Cherwell District Landscape Assessment

CHERWELL DISTRICT LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

FOR

CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL

BY

COBHAM RESOURCE CONSULTANTS
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1.1 INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Cobham Resource Consultants were commissioned in October 1994 to prepare a landscape assessment for the Cherwell District of North Oxfordshire. The study is intended to contribute to an increased understanding of the landscape resources of the District and to be used by the District Council as the basis for the development of a consistent, coordinated approach to planning policy, development control, landscape management/conservation, recreation and tourism. It should also be of interest and use to others involved in land-use planning or land management within the area.

1.2 The high quality of the district's landscape is presently reflected in the large areas which are covered by various types of landscape designation (Figure 1). A small part of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) - a designation of national recognition - lies within the north-west corner of the district and six Areas of High Landscape Value (AHLV) have been identified in the Cherwell Local Plan [1], in accordance with County Structure Plan advice. The Local Plan recognises the special environmental qualities of these areas and seeks to conserve and enhance them through careful control of the scale, nature, siting and design of development. The policies within the Plan also seek to protect the large number of important Historic Parks and Gardens with which the district is blessed, and the inclusion of the Cherwell Valley as part of the Thames Tributaries Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) is a further indication of the commitment to conserve and enhance the district's valued landscapes.

1.3 There is a growing recognition, however, that although these `quality' landscapes are perhaps of the most obvious scenic value, **all** of the district's landscapes are (at least potentially) of value to someone and all have a contribution to make to the attractiveness of the district as a whole. Consequently, the District Council have recognised the need to supplement the traditional reliance upon the conservation of special landscapes by efforts to enhance the beauty of other areas through renewal and recreation. This comprehensive landscape assessment is the means by which the character and distinctive features of the countryside may be highlighted and priorities for landscape conservation and enhancement identified.

1.4 The brief also specifically included the requirement to identify differences in quality and condition within the landscape (so that conservation and enhancement initiatives can be effectively targeted) and special features in the landscape which make a particular contribution to its landscape, historic and amenity value.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

1.5 Landscape assessment, as a tool for identifying and describing the character of our landscapes, is increasingly recognised as an important first step in conserving and enhancing them. Over recent years, there has been a general trend away from quantitative systems of landscape evaluation towards an approach based on understanding the intrinsic character of a locality and its distinctive features. This approach - which has now become part of established practice - allows land-use planning and management to respond to the local landscape `vernacular' [2,3].

1.6 The approach recognises that the character of the landscape relies closely on its physiography, its history and land management in addition to its scenic or visual dimension. Hence, other factors which may influence the ways in which landscape is experienced and valued, such as ecology, history and culture, should be examined although they are not in themselves to be the subject of detailed discussion.

1.7 Advice on principles and methods of landscape assessment was first published by the Countryside Commission in 1987 [2] but since then many assessments have been carried out and the approach has been developed and refined. New guidance, prepared by CRC on behalf of the Countryside Commission, has recently been published which builds on the earlier advice but brings it up-to-date [3]. Our approach to the Cherwell assessment is based closely upon this guidance, as well as upon our extensive practical experience of landscape assessment work. Essentially, the assessment relies upon a mix of subjective and objective judgement, used in a systematic and iterative way.

1.8 The main steps in the assessment process are:

- defining the purpose of the assessment
- preliminary survey
- desk study
- field survey
- analysis
- presentation of results

1.9 The **purpose** of the assessment determines the detailed method to be used and the scale at which the assessment is to be presented. In this case, the assessment is intended to increase understanding of the landscape resources of the district as a whole, to assist with policy formulation and development control, and also to assist with the targeting of resources for enhancement and management. Both of these purposes require the assessment to be pitched at a level of detail which lies somewhere between the broad-brush and the field-by-field assessment.

1.10 Initially, a rapid **preliminary survey** of the district was undertaken to familiarise the study team with its overall character and range of landscape variation. In the course of this initial survey, a range of different **types** of landscape was observed and compiled into a list which formed the basis of a recording system for use during the field survey. Each detailed category of landscape was given a reference code which could be used to provide a 'shorthand' description of landscape character when annotating field survey plans.

1.11 The **desk study** involved the collation of a wide range of existing information from which some of the key formative influences on landscape character could be deduced. A 1:50,000 overlay mapping exercise was undertaken, analysing geology, landform and drainage, landcover, woodland/parkland and sites of ecological and historical importance within the district. Air photographs and various books, plans and reports were also examined in order to build upon our understanding of the landscape resource. Consideration was also given to other studies of landscape character within neighbouring areas, such as those undertaken for the Cotswolds AONB [4] and for Northamptonshire [5]. On the basis of this analysis, a preliminary characterisation of the landscape was made, dividing the district into broad areas of common character, termed **Landscape Character Areas**.

1.12 The purpose of the **field survey** was to confirm or refine the boundaries of the preliminary Landscape Character Areas and to identify and record the range of variation in landscape character within them (ie. into local landscape types). It also allowed the recording of emotional responses to the landscape, of features critical to its character and quality and of its sensitivity to change.

1.13 The field survey involved travelling extensively throughout the study area, recording detailed variations in landscape character and key features onto 1:25,000 base maps using the annotations derived from the preliminary survey. Field survey forms, supported by a photographic record, were completed at representative locations to provide further information on the positive and negative attributes of the landscape and its ability to absorb change.

1.14 **Analysis** of desk and field information, and discussions within the study team and with the District Council, helped to confirm the boundaries of the Landscape Character Areas, to refine the classification of Landscape Types and to determine ideas and priorities for landscape conservation, restoration and enhancement in different parts of the district. The results of the assessment are **presented** in this report, supported by appropriate illustrations.

THE REPORT

1.15 This report summarises our findings and attempts to communicate to policy makers and the public the highly distinctive character and special qualities of the Cherwell landscape. It also identifies the positive opportunities that exist to enhance the landscape for the benefit of local residents and visitors.

1.16 The following chapter describes - in broad brush terms - the factors responsible for shaping the landscape, focusing upon the physical influences of geology, landform, drainage and soils, and the human influences that have affected the district through time. It then concentrates on the district-wide landscape today, describing features of special visual, ecological or historical note, and the way in which certain landscape elements combine to produce areas of distinctively different character with a particular local identity.

1.17 The third chapter concentrates on the description and analysis of eight individual Landscape Character Areas, highlighting their distinctive characteristics and qualities and their special features and attributes. In Chapter 4, the scope for conservation, restoration and enhancement of the district's landscapes is examined and preliminary guidance on priorities for action given.

2.16 Most of the once forested higher ground, particularly the fertile Redland soils around Banbury, was cleared for agriculture in early history. There was already a shortage of woodland in this area as early as the seventh and eighth centuries and the nearest parts of the royal forest of Wychwood around Charlbury supplied timber to the Banbury area. Further south, steady progress of reclaiming 'waste' land, woodland, marsh and heath, accelerated with the population expansion throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The village of 'Hethe', meaning 'uncultured ground', became established as part of this process. Fencott and Murcott were also new settlements set amongst marshy fields reclaimed from Otmoor during this time.

2.17 The Forest of Wychwood lay to the west of the River Cherwell in what is now West Oxfordshire. Another concentration of woodland governed by forest law ran over the Oxford Heights, forming the forests of Shotover and Stowood. At the northernmost limit of Shotover was a great expanse of woodland which in Domesday was measured at over 700 acres, covering most of the Parish of Islip and a broad sweep of land to the south of the River Ray. By 1366, this woodland had shrunk to less than 100 acres and very little of it remains today.

2.18 There are numerous visible remains of medieval features. Castle sites and fishponds are frequent and can often be located by their earthworks, and various monastic remains occur within the district, including Augustinian, Benedictine, Cistercian and Gilbertine houses. Village churches are prominent features, and represent the earliest surviving examples of stonework.

2.19 Economic and social change, led to widespread desertion and contraction of late medieval villages. The south of the district was particularly badly affected, with a third of the total number disappearing and a further third exhibiting shrinkage. Shrinkage was less common in the ironstone area, which depended largely upon the expanding wool trade for its wealth. Here, only about a fifth of the villages contracted in size and very few disappeared altogether.

Parliamentary enclosures

2.20 In response to the growth of the woollen trade, a widespread conversion of arable land to pasture took place, encouraging the process of enclosure. The rate of enclosure varied, depending on locally established agricultural practices and land ownership, with about a third of the district being enclosed by the end of the Tudor and Stuart periods. Such early enclosures can be located by hedgerow dating techniques, as the hedges are typically denser and contain a richer variety of species than the later hawthorn enclosures hedge. Two thirds of Broughton Parish, for example, was enclosed by the 1590s.

2.21 The district contains a high proportion of seventeenth and eighteenth century parkland. This frequently developed from a medieval deer park nucleus. Middleton Stoney had a walled deer park by 1328 which was subsequently incorporated into a vast new park in 1825. Similar fashionable, landscaped parks were created at Kirtlington, Bletchingdon, Chesterton, Tusmore and Shelswell. The characteristically extensive tree planting and long stone wall boundaries are still dominant features in today's landscape.

2.22 Architectural history within the region demonstrates the progressive conversion from timber framed structures to stone, beginning in the early sixteenth century. Vernacular buildings closely reflect the underlying geology. The warm honey coloured ironstone to the north of the district gives way to pale grey and white limestone around Bicester and on the Cornbrash Limestone outcrop across Otmoor. Timber framed brick buildings are found only in areas where stone was not readily available, such as the Oxford Heights which rise up to the south of Otmoor.

2.23 The exploitation of minerals for building materials and other purposes has given rise to landscape features associated with mineral extraction. Hornton Stone has been quarried locally for farm buildings since at least the early mediaeval period, and until recently was exported for higher quality buildings and ornamental work. The best quality stone is that which comes from lower beds, since it is less affected by leaching and oxidisation. It breaks naturally into large stone blocks which can then be finely cut and used for ashlar work, although it is not particularly durable to weathering. Iron staining gives a variety of colours, from rich honey colour to dark orange. Deserted quarries and active limestone quarrying form significant but localised features within today's landscape.

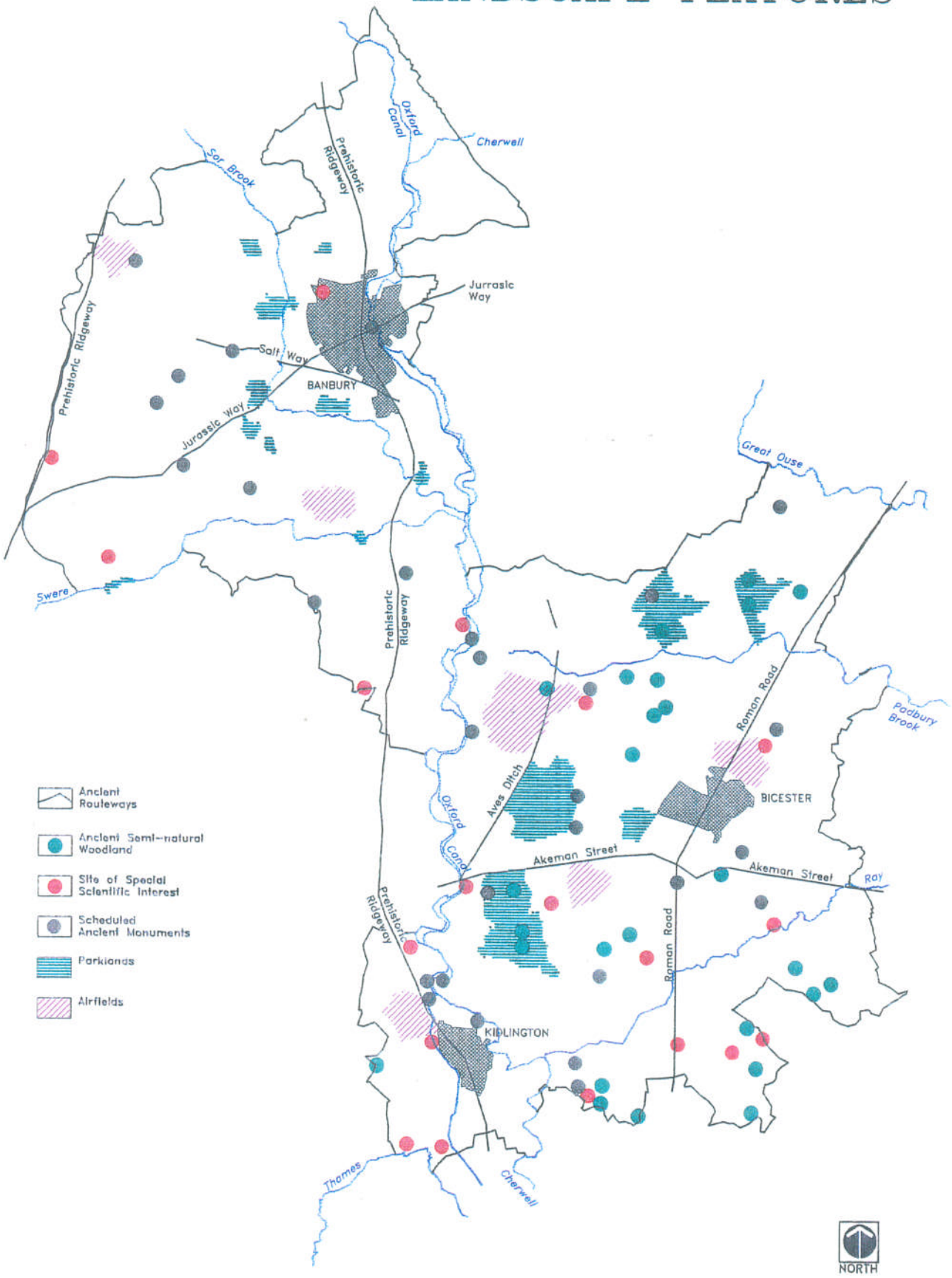
Recent Changes

2.24 Changes in transportation and agricultural development have had the most significant influence upon the landscape during recent history. Major roads - the A40, A34, A44, and A4260 - all converge at Peartree Hill; linking with Cheltenham, Newbury and the South, Buckingham and the north-east, Stratford and Banbury, and the north. The recently opened M40 extension connects Oxford, Bicester and Banbury with Birmingham and London, and has had a considerable influence upon both the rural landscape and upon the urban edges of Banbury and Bicester.

2.25 Airfields are another distinctive transport feature. They occur on expanses of flat land where they break the continuity of the agricultural landscape with security fences, sprawling sheds and hangers. Shennington and Bicester airports are still in working use for gliding but military bases are progressively becoming redundant. The extensive Upper Heyford Air Base, which covers an area almost as large as Bicester, is disused and currently awaiting redevelopment proposals. Other disused airbases, such as Barford, are now used for other non-military purposes.

Figure 4

LANDSCAPE FEATURES



Astons. The district abounds with paired settlements such as 'the Sibfords' (Sibford Gower and Sibford Ferris), 'the Barfords' (Barford St Michael and Barford St John), and the 'Astons' (Steeple, Middle and North Aston).

2.41 In the south, the location of settlements is likewise closely related to the landform, with villages occurring on ground rising even a few metres above the flood plain, as is the case with Islip, Oddington, Charlton on Otmoor and Merton, which are located on the Cornbrash outcrop across the Oxford clay vale. Villages on the limestone have survived wherever there is an adequate permanent water source.

2.42 A particular range of village structure are illustrated within the district, all of which are common with villages across most of the south and Midlands. A village may have expanded or contracted several times throughout its history but usually the historic core has remained as a reasonably constant indicator of its shape. Cherwell district includes a number of good examples of nucleated settlements, where dwellings are grouped around a central village green. However, the linear layout is more common, where houses are strung out along on either side of one main street. The most common layout is a more random pattern where houses cluster together around a double-loop of lanes, forming a village group which lacks a central nucleus.

2.43 Isolated farmsteads are also prominent settlement features. Some of the farmsteads which now appear to be isolated were associated with deserted medieval villages. The best known example of this is Manor Farm at Hampton Gay, where the village earthworks are highly visible but others can be identified, such as Nethercote Grange between Middle and North Aston which is now known simply as Grange Farm. A second generation of isolated farms are associated with the more recent parliamentary enclosures period, where farmsteads were relocated from village centres onto individual enclosed landholdings.

Other Features

2.44 A variety of other features make a positive contribution to the Cherwell landscape. High stone walls enclosing large tracts of seventeenth and eighteenth century parkland, with prominent woodland belts and distinctive parkland trees surround impressive country houses. These mansions themselves are often out of sight, however, several estate villages represent highly visible features in the landscape. Village houses at Bletchingdon, Middleton Stoney and Kirtlington display elements of style and detail typical of estate villages

2.45 Agricultural features include the complex network of hedges which knit the landscape together, especially in the river valleys and more undulating areas of countryside; and the stone barns, walled enclosures and farm buildings which characterise the rural landscape.

LANDSCAPE FEATURES

Flood Meadows - distinctive features of the Cherwell District landscape and, as in this example at Bestmoor SSSI, important wildlife resources.

Ironstone Villages - usually located on the brow of a hill, such as here at Deddington, ironstone villages are found in the hilly western parts of Cherwell District.

Flood Plain Settlements - found in the south of the District, isolated villages such as Charlton-on-Otmoor rise above the open and low-lying flood plain.

Vernacular Architecture- building materials accurately reflect the complex underlying geology of the District landscape, as in the case of these cottages on the western ironstone.

Enclosed Parkland - a typical feature of the centre and south of the District, extensive areas of parkland are often enclosed by stone walls of the local limestone.

Canalside Features - forming a spine running down the centre of the District, The Oxford Canal and its associated features are important landscape elements.

2.46 The Oxford Canal, which follows the Cherwell Valley for most of its length through the district, was opened in1790 and links the centre of Oxford with the Coventry Canal, ninety miles to the north. Enslow and Thrupp are canal villages which were centred on barge trade. Thrupp is now a service centre for holiday boats and the canal is one of the country's most popular recreational waterways. Its wharves, locks, bridges and colourful boating activity, and its attractive flora and fauna, add to the distinctiveness of the Cherwell landscape. Other features of our industrial heritage include the lines of disused rail tracks, which now form valuable wildlife corridors, and the disused ironstone quarry workings which have been colonised by vegetation.

2.47 The Oxford-Birmingham railway also follows the floor of the Cherwell valley for much of its length. Whilst the Bicester-Banbury line traverses the valley on a spectacular stone viaduct to the east of Deddington.

VARIATIONS IN LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

2.48 It is clear that the landscape of Cherwell District exhibits considerable variety, from the urban fringes around Kidlington, where the south part of the district is narrowly divided by green belt before meeting the urban edge of Oxford, to more remote rural areas beyond Bicester and west of Banbury. This variety is potentially endless as different scenes continually unfold and change. In order to make sense of this complex picture, we have identified patterns of landscape elements which combine to produce a locally distinctive character.

2.49 These patterns can be determined at a range of scales. Broad patterns produce a range of **landscape character areas** which define large tracts of landscape with a locally cohesive identity. At this scale it is usually the physical components of the landscape - its geology and form - which have the dominant influence on character, allowing clear distinctions to be drawn, for example, between the rolling landscape and distinctive building stone of the Ironstone Hills and Valleys and the flat, low-lying landscape of Otmoor.

2.50 At the local scale, the picture becomes more complicated by the patterns of land use, vegetation and other landcover elements which have a stronger influence on landscape character. Nevertheless, it is possible to sort these into units of common and distinctive character, termed **landscape types**. These are generic combinations of landform and landcover and, as such, can repeat across the district without being tied to a geographically specific area.

Landscape Character Areas

2.51 The district has been divided into eight broad landscape character areas, namely:

- the Upper Cherwell Basin
- the Cherwell Valley
- the Lower Cherwell Floodplain
- the Ironstone Hills and Valleys
- the Ironstone Incised Plateau
- the Upper Heyford Plateau
- the Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands
- the Otmoor Lowlands

2.52 Figure 5 shows the extent of these areas and the main distinctions between them are indicated below. A more detailed description of the character of each area is given in the following chapter.

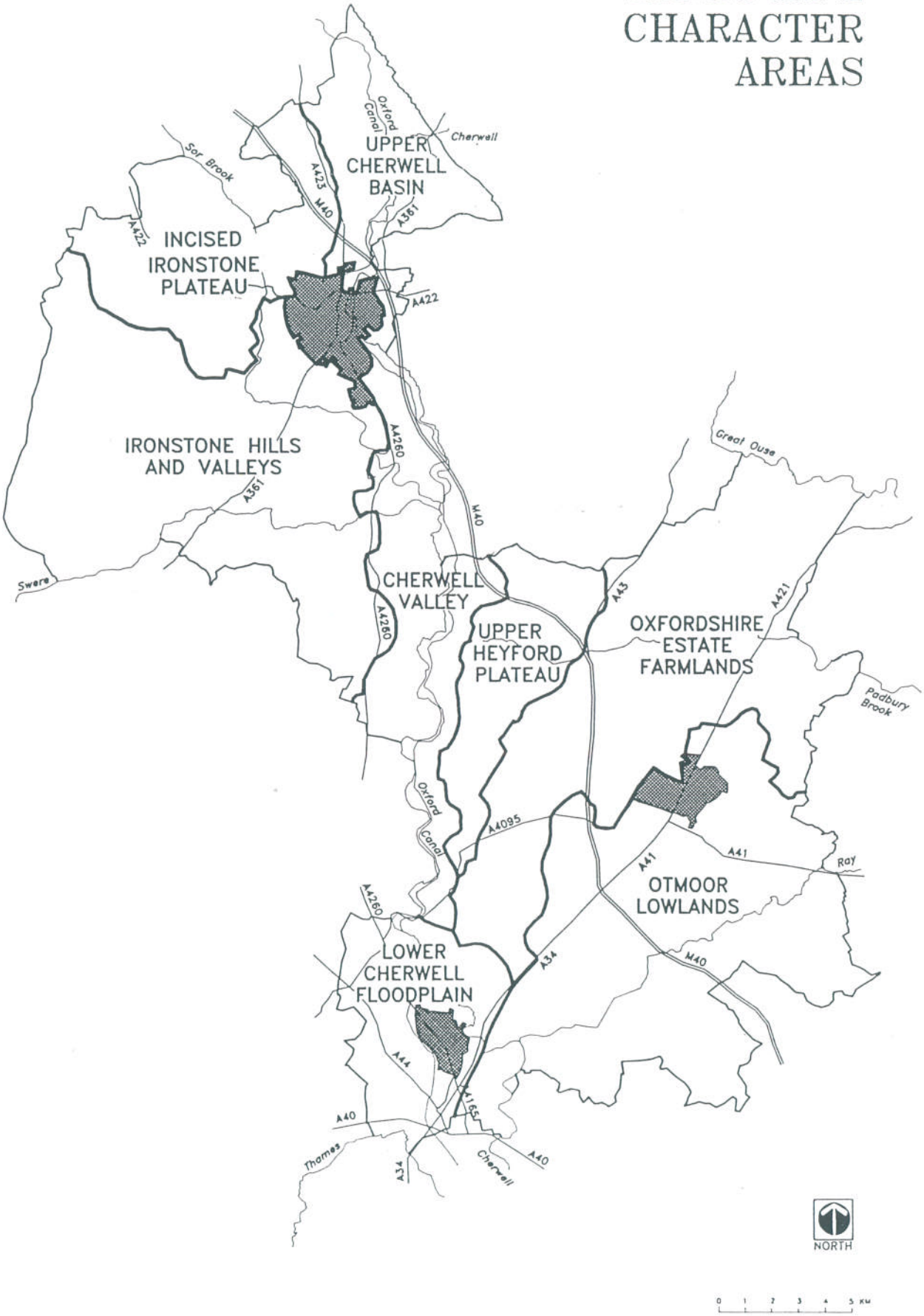
2.53 The River Cherwell forms a continuous landscape 'thread' through the district from north to south and its valley is a recognisable landscape unit. However, its character is not consistent and varies quite markedly according to the scale and shape of the valley form and the patterns of land use within it. It has therefore been divided into three discrete sections, with their own individual identity. The **Upper Cherwell Basin** is a relatively high area of land with very open, gently sloping valley sides. Further south the river runs within the more tightly enclosed **Cherwell Valley**, while at the south of the district the river valley opens out into the **Lower Cherwell Floodplain,** as the Cherwell joins the River Ray and River Thames. The balance of arable and pastoral farmland and the extent of the influence of urban development are also key distinguishing elements between these areas.

2.54 Similarly, the ironstone region in the north-west of the district is distinguished and unified by its common geology and 'upland' character. However, differences in the complexity of landform and associated land use have led to the division of this area into two main areas: the **Ironstone Hills and Valleys** and the **Incised Ironstone Plateau.** The Ironstone Hills and Valleys display a complex topography, being cut and folded into numerous steep-sided valleys which have a pattern of small pastoral fields on the steepest slopes and more open arable farming on rolling higher ground. The Incised Plateau is a more unified area of upland which is sharply divided by the Sor Brook and its tributaries. The area is characterised by open arable farming, with large areas of rough upland pasture.

2.55 The **Upper Heyford Plateau** lies to the east of the Cherwell Valley and forms a distinctive landform unit of elevated ground which dips gently away to the south-east and falls more steeply to the west into the Cherwell Valley. It is situated on the highest part of the oolitic limestone belt and is characterised by extensive areas of rolling arable land with a distinctively denuded character. The disused airbase of Upper Heyford is a dominant element within the landscape of this area.

Figure 5

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS



2.56 The **Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands** are also situated on the limestone belt but, unlike the Upper Heyford Plateau, the area is characterised by a more rolling landform. Most distinctive, however, is the pattern of woodlands and mixed farmland, much of which is associated with estates linked to the extensive areas of remaining eighteenth century parkland. The band of parklands continues northwards into Northamptonshire, and is part of a larger regional pattern.

2.57 At the south of the district is the distinctive, low lying area associated with the River Ray flood plain which forms the large character area of the **Otmoor Lowlands**. This flat, open farmland has a distinctive atmosphere, particularly where the traditional wet meadows and pastures and their important flora and fauna persist. Elsewhere, drainage improvements have led to the conversion of pasture to arable, and the landscape has a denuded, lowland character. A number of isolated low hills dominate the skyline, and the south of the area is contained by the low ridges of the Oxford Heights. Military development has had a considerable influence upon settlement and land use within the area.

Landscape Types

2.58 Although Landscape Character Areas have a definable context and recognisable identity, they inevitably include a fairly diverse range of local landscapes. These have been divided into a series of generic landscape types, reflecting the most distinctive combinations of landform and landcover characteristics and the main determinants of local landscape character across the district. A total of seven main types was identified with further detailed variations identified as sub-types. A summary of their key characteristics is given below and their distribution within the district is illustrated on Figure 6. Appendix 2 contains details and descriptions of these types and sub-types.

2.59 Sometimes the divisions between these types may be distinct, for example between an area of wooded parkland divided from the surrounding arable farmland by a clear boundary. More frequently, there is a more gradual transition between areas of different character, for example where hedgerows change from well managed, dense lines to weaker features that are being replaced by fences, or where the influence of urban development increases to such an extent that rural character is overwhelmed. In these cases, the boundaries between types are only an approximation of a change in character.

2.60 The first main distinction can be made between those landscapes which are essentially **rural** in character and those which have been influenced by urban development and have a somewhat degraded or **transitional** character. The Cherwell landscape is predominantly agricultural and therefore retains a rural character but pockets of transitional landscape occur within this rural fabric (eg. airfields and quarries) or around the fringes of the main settlements and transport corridors.

2.61 Within the rural landscapes, the main factors influencing character are: the nature of the landform (flat, undulating or hilly); land use (arable, mixed or pasture); the scale of the field pattern (large and expansive or small and intimate); and the degree of visual enclosure provided by landform or vegetation (open or enclosed). There are many combinations of these attributes but clear distinctions can be drawn, for example, between the **large-scale, open, flat farmland** of the elevated or lowland plains, with their expansive, denuded character; **large-scale undulating, open farmland**, where rolling topography helps to provide some visual relief; the **large-scale enclosed farmland** where visibility is interrupted by large belts of woodland; and the **small-scale, enclosed farmland** of the hills and valleys and the valley bottoms, with their more intimate and pastoral character. Differences in land use, hedgerow structure and field pattern determine the various sub-types within these categories.

2.62 The **isolated hills** have their own unique character resulting from their distinctive landform, which distinguishes them from other rural types. They typically incorporate woodland on the brow of the hill, and are frequently surrounded by a mixture of military development and mixed farming. Similarly the **parklands** have their own character. Eighteenth century enclosed parklands represent one sub-type. They are characterised by parkland trees and copses with open grazing and are often still surrounded by a complete parkland boundary. Areas of farmland which display estate characteristics, such as metal railings and uniform avenues of trees represent the other sub-type.

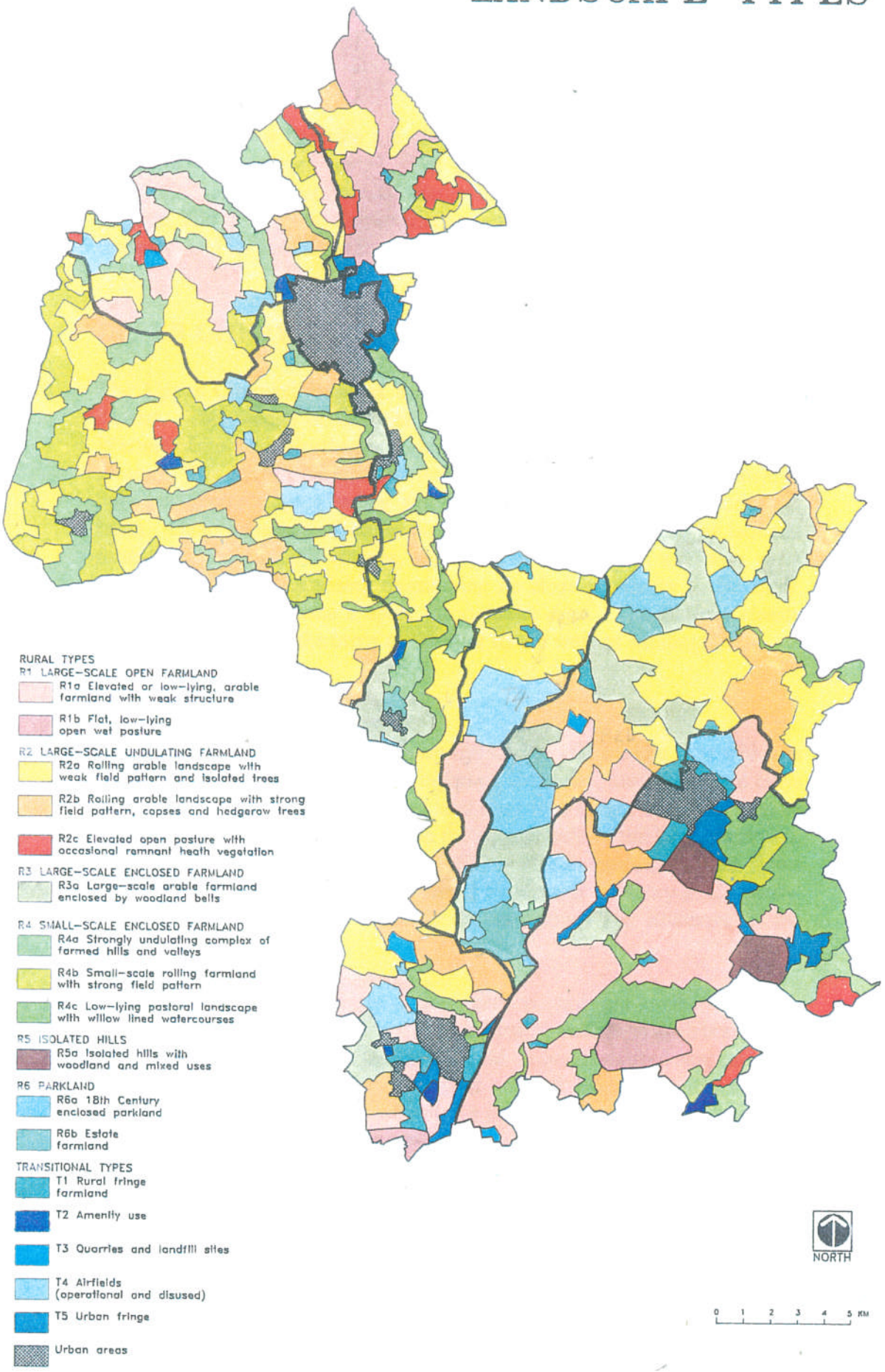
2.63 The main determinants of character within the transitional landscapes are land use and, in particular, the dominance of urban influences. At the most rural end of the spectrum, the **rural fringe farmland** includes those areas of countryside whose essentially agricultural character has been affected by neglect or the intrusion of unsightly elements or activities. At the opposite end of the scale are the **urban fringes landscapes,** where the influence of built development, including industry and ribbon development along road corridors, is so great that the character has become unmistakably urban.

2.64 Between the two extremes, there are a number of transitional landscapes which have very specific land uses which have an overwhelming influence on their character. These are **amenity landscapes**, including golf courses and playing fields, with their highly manicured, distinctive appearance; **quarries and landfill sites**, which can cause major disruption and intrusion upon the rural landscape whilst operational and have a distinctive character even when restored; and **airfields** which have a particular character dominated by expanses of often elevated, flat ground surrounded by security fences and their distinctive buildings and features. Several of the airfields within Cherwell District are military bases and frequently include areas of built development.

2.65 The detailed expression of character provided by these landscape types is useful in two respects: it helps us to understand what makes each Landscape Character Area distinctive; and it also provides pointers to local landscape condition and quality and helps us to identify target areas and priorities for action on the ground. These aspects are explored in more detail in the following chapters.

Figure 6

LANDSCAPE TYPES



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

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

UPPER HEYFORD PLATEAU

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

Landform and landcover

3.58 This area lies on a band of White Limestone, a limestone which contains a high proportion of mica interbedded with grey marl. It rises north-westwards in gentle undulations from 120m to 140m. To the west, the land falls sharply away into the valley of the River Cherwell. Minor streams drain west and south into the Thames river system via the Rivers Cherwell and Ray. However, streams sourced around Fritwell and Ardley drain into Padbury Brook which flows eastwards into the Great Ouse.

3.59 The level, open aspect was used to great advantage as a military airbase which now dominates the landscape. Immediately around the airfield are a number of grazing fields. However, agricultural land is almost all in intensive arable cultivation, with level or gently rolling, large open fields. Smaller, enclosed grazing fields cluster close to the villages.

Variation in landscape character

3.60 The southernmost part of this character area is dominated by **elevated flat arable farmland with weak structure (R1a)**. There are few hedges and virtually no trees. The land is relatively high, and from the well defined western edge there are good views across the Cherwell Valley.

3.61 The northern part of the area is similar in character to the south, except that as the land rises, the topography becomes more rolling. The landform gives some interest to the **rolling arable landscape with weak field**

Figure 12

UPPER HEYFORD

NORTH

SCALE 1:100,000

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

3.62 The **Airfield (T4)** at Upper Heyford dominates the whole of this character area. On the plateau top are the runways, with associated landing lights and security fences, while barracks, offices, warehouses and hangars sprawl across the landscape to the south. Both buildings and airfield are surrounded by high wire security fences.

3.63 The base is now disused and deserted, but features such as the water towers are still very visible across the Cherwell valley. Associated street lighting and security lighting is particularly visible over long distances at night.

Special features

3.64 This sparse area of high ground is crossed by two ancient parallel routeways. The line of the Portway is followed by the minor road from Kirtlington which runs along the edge of the Cherwell Valley to Upper Heyford and continues northwards as a footpath towards Souldern. The other more visible feature is variously known as Aves Ditch, Ash Bank and Wattle Bank. It is most obvious as a ditch and bank running across the countryside between Middleton Stoney and Caulcott, and its line can be traced considerably further south, although much of it has been levelled. The bank had a dual function as a Roman boundary dyke and as an embanked road and has formed estate and parish boundaries since Saxon times.

3.65 An SSSI falling into this character areas is associated with a more recent linear feature, the railway cutting at Ardley. Here a herb-rich limestone grassland sward has developed on the steep banks of the railway cutting, where the wide range of typical species includes bee orchid *Ophrys apifera*, green-winged orchid *Orchis morio* and blue fleabane *Erigeron acer*. The cutting has particularly large populations of butterfly species which are uncommon in Oxfordshire, supporting a large colony of Small Blue, Brown Argus, Dark Green Fritillary, Green Hairstreak and Duke of Burgundy butterflies, as well as the nationally uncommon Wood White butterfly.

OXFORDSHIRE ESTATE FARMLANDS

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

4 EVALUATION AND GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

4.1 The preceeding chapters have analysed and described the Cherwell landscape, including its development and present day character. From this assessment it is clear that the district has much to offer, not only as a visual resource, but also as an historical, architectural, cultural and nature conservation asset. The next step is to address issues of landscape value and sensitivity to change, and to identify conservation and enhancement priorities within the district.

4.2 We have looked at the pattern of variation in landscape condition and sensitivity to change across the district as a whole, identifying strategic priorities for landscape conservation and enhancement. Following on from this we have made brief recommendations for specific actions or improvements to conserve and enhance the particular landscape elements which contribute to landscape character.

4.3 On the whole, the district's landscape has remained remarkably unaffected by the pressures of urbanisation or landuse change and has retained a predominantly rural and unspoilt agricultural character. Certain parts of the district stand out for their individual character and strong sense of place, and for their historical, cultural or ecological associations, such as the Ironstone Hills and Valleys, Otmoor and the Cherwell Valley. These, and the other intact landscapes in the Thames Valley, North Ploughley and Muswell Hill areas, are properly represented within the District Council's designated Areas of High Landscape Value and to a lesser extent within the Cotswolds AONB..

4.4 There are other areas which have fared less well and whose landscape character has been adversely affected by urban development or intensive agricultural activity. These areas tend to lie, correctly, outside the district's designated landscapes.

4.5 However, these general distinctions conceal a more complex pattern of variation in landscape quality and condition. Inevitably, there are pockets of good quality landscape which lie outside the designated areas as well as pockets of poorer landscape within them. Our approach has been to set designations to one side and, instead, to look critically at the **intrinsic**, rather than the relative, quality of individual landscape types as they occur across the district and to indicate the most appropriate strategy for action. The strategic principles are essentially concerned with ensuring that the most valuable landscape assets within the study area are safeguarded; that resources for landscape enhancement are targeted to the most needy areas;

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

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

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

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

CONSERVATION LANDSCAPES

4.8 This strategy applies where landscape character and sense of place is particularly strong or where individual features are particularly notable for their landscape, ecological and/or cultural value. Examples include the intricate, hedged and wooded rural landscapes, valley floor and flood plain wet meadows, eighteenth century parklands, and remnant heathlands.

4.9 These landscapes represent the most valuable landscape assets of the district, and they should be given the highest priority for conservation and protection from damaging change. Most forms of development are likely to be highly damaging to these sensitive landscapes. However, this does not necessarily mean that they could or should be fossilised. All of these landscapes require management to conserve their declining features, to reduce intrusive influences and to maintain and enhance long-term landscape and ecological value.

4.10 These landscapes should form a guide for restoration and enhancement work elsewhere within the district. Their value could be significantly increased if they were to be extended and linked through improvement of adjacent areas as a priority.

4.11 Necessary intervention measures which should be encouraged in respect of these landscapes should include the following:-

- Conservation and good management of hedgerows. Removal of hedges should be strongly resisted and traditional hedge laying practices which are still followed in some areas should be encouraged with grants;

- Continued renewal of hedgerow trees should be encouraged to prevent the decline of the hedgerow tree network, which locally tend to all be of the same age structure;

- Traditional management of willow trees along watercourses and ditches should likewise continue to be strongly supported by landscape conservation grants;

- Detailed study and management plans should be prepared for remaining areas of historic parkland. Most of the parkland trees are of the same, aging structure, and if parkland character is to be conserved extensive planting programmes will need to be undertaken;

- Any improvements to drainage or to traditional agricultural land use should be strongly resisted, especially in low lying wet pasture and flood areas. The most sensitive areas are protected by SSSI status, and the introduction of the ESA should help to conserve other similar sensitive landscapes;

- Development should only be permitted if it is sensitively sited and the scale, size, materials, and character of the scheme are designed to blend in to the area, as is the case with much of the high quality infill housing found in many of the district's villages. Care needs to be taken, however, that the characteristic spatial structure of villages is not too greatly changed.

REPAIR LANDSCAPES

4.12 These are areas where the landscape character is still reasonably strong and worthy of conservation, but where some or all of the individual features or overall structure are showing noticeable decline. They typically include most of the unspoilt rural landscapes which do not fall within the conservation category, incorporating large areas of the Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands, the Upper Cherwell Basin, and Otmoor Lowlands.

4.13 Landscape intervention should concentrate on repair of the weakening hedgerow and hedgerow tree structure, strengthening or replacement of traditional landscape features and screening or integration of intrusive features. Usually only a minimal degree of intervention would be necessary to bring these areas up to the standard of conservation landscapes. Development in these areas must be sensitively sited, designed and integrated to ensure that the rural, unspoilt character of the landscape is maintained. However, precisely because their existing structure is so strong, these landscapes should be able to absorb limited areas of sensitive development. Specific enhancement measures should take into account the following:-

- Good management of hedgerows. Removal of hedges should be strongly resisted and gapping up carried out where hedges are becoming thin;

- Continued renewal of hedgerow trees should be encouraged to prevent the decline of the hedgerow tree network, which locally tend to all be of the same age structure. Care needs to be taken that trees appropriate to the character area are planted, with oak and ash on heavier soils and beech on limestone outcrops;

- Traditional management of willow trees along watercourses and ditches should be encouraged and supported by landscape conservation grants;

- Continued management of existing copses, coverts and small woods is important.

- Development should be permitted only if the scale, size, materials, and character of the scheme are designed so as to blend in to the area with sensitive siting, for example, as already occurs with most of the high quality infill housing found in many of the district's villages. Care needs to be taken, however, that the characteristic spatial structure of villages is not too greatly changed.

- Care should also be taken with any road improvement schemes that the character of the rural road network does not become urbanised through the use of standard urban kerbs, and that features such as hedgebanks and sunken lanes are not lost.

RESTORATION LANDSCAPES

4.14 Restoration landscapes are somewhat further along the scale of decline. Their character and structure are often quite seriously degraded, although they do retain some discernible remnants of their former character. Typically, these areas are those where intensive agricultural practices have resulted in widespread loss of hedgerow and woodland structure, or where the landscape has lost its rural character and become visually degraded, in some instances as a result of intrusive built development, around the urban fringes or along transport corridors.

4.15 Potentially, these landscapes have a greater capacity to accommodate positive change because their former character has already been so substantially weakened. Positive intervention should concentrate on strengthening the landscape framework in order to improve landscape quality and create a stronger sense of place. Where intensive agricultural practices have led to locally universal loss of landscape structure, it may be necessary to create a new rural landscape character appropriate to the character area, establishing a stronger sense of place. This does not imply

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

4.16 Great care should be taken that new development is well sited and sensitively designed so that it does not simply worsen the existing problems of poorly integrated, intrusive development. The following landscape intervention measures should be encouraged to enhance these landscapes:-

- Replanting of hedgerows and hedgerow trees where these have been removed should be encouraged, together with gapping up and improved maintenance of weakening hedges,

- There is a good opportunity for extensive woodland planting across the district which as a whole lacks woodland cover. Woodlands should be of a form appropriate to their character area, with smaller woods near the brow of hills in the Ironstone areas, and larger, sweeping woodland belts interspersed with smaller copses in the lowlands. Species used should be indigenous broadleaves;

- Existing development should be contained within a strong, distinctive landscape framework. There is considerable scope for tightening the landscape structure along road corridors and around the urban fringes;

- New development should be integrated with a strong landscape framework which should be based on features found within the relevant character area, and should respect long views over open countryside.

RECONSTRUCTION LANDSCAPES

4.17 These landscapes are those where the landscape has been so modified by human activity that they no longer bear any resemblance to their former character. They include quarries, and airfields which occur in significant numbers throughout the study area.

4.18 These landscapes have a high capacity to accommodate change because they have already lost their intrinsic character. They would gain very positive benefits from the introduction of a new character and strong sense of place. Created new identities need to be distinctive, but also need to respond to the surrounding landscape context. A strong landscape framework can help to achieve successful integration of new development in these areas. The following opportunities should be considered:

- Contain new development within a strong, distinctive landscape framework that is sensitively designed so as to integrate with the surrounding landscape character, paying particular attention to the

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

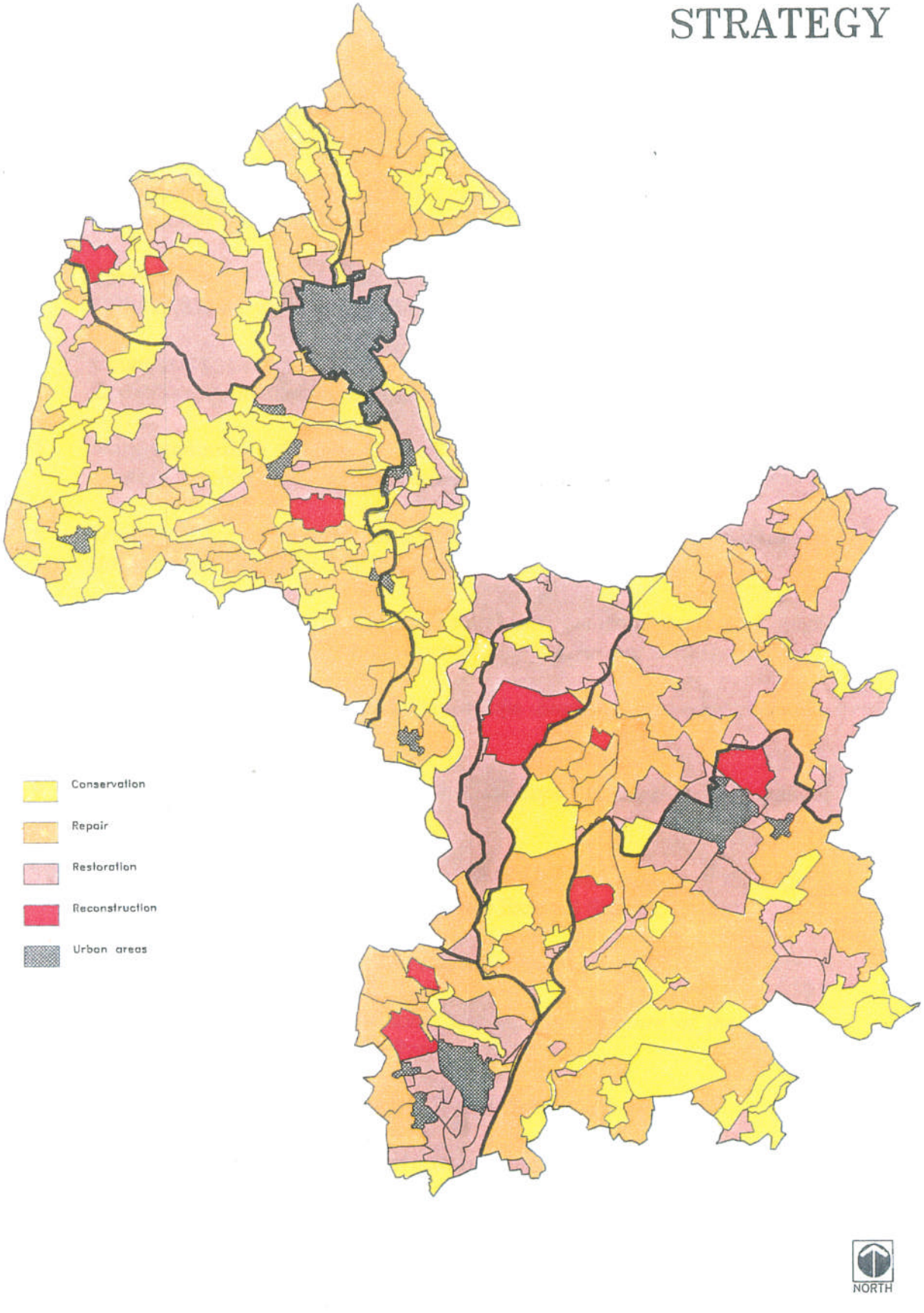
- Restructure quarry landscape at Bunkers Hill creating new landscape features and recreational opportunities linked to the Cherwell Valley; seek to restore quarries in remote rural areas to agricultural land, with field patterns, hedges and woodland to blend restored area into surrounding landscape;

- Take advantage of the good opportunity for extensive woodland planting across the district which as a whole lacks woodland cover. Woodlands should be of a form appropriate to the character area, and species should be indigenous broadleaves. Establishment of a green framework of woodland should be a priority, and can occur before development proposals are made.

- Ensure that new development has a strong sense of identity but also knits into surrounding landscape. Seek to divide and structure denuded open landscapes of disused airfields with development contained in strong landscape framework.

Figure 15

ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY



Conservation Plan, 2005
Volume 2: Figures and Photographs

FORMER RAF UPPER HEYFORD

CONSERVATION PLAN

VOLUME 2: FIGURES AND PHOTOGRAPHS

September 2005

THE TOURISM COMPANY

Oxford Archaeology

ACTA

VOLUME 1: TEXT

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VOLUME 2: FIGURES AND PHOTOGRAPHS (THIS DOCUMENT)

FIGURES

PHOTOGRAPHS

1. One of the Water Towers South of Camp Road from the South
2. The Avionics Maintenance Facility
3. The Nose Docking Sheds
4. An Open Aircraft Shelter
5. Maintenance building 249
6. Character Area 1A: The Runway looking across the NATO runway and the main runway to the Control Tower. The Water Towers South of Camp Road can also be seen
7. Character Area 1B: The Plateau
8. Character Area 1C: The Quick Reaction Alert Area
9. Character Area 1D: South Aircraft Shelters
10. Character Area 1E: Southwest HASs
11. Character Area 2: Runway West Terminal
12. Character Area 3: Runway East Terminal
13. Character Area 4: Southern Conventional Arms Store
14. Character Area 5A: Northern Bomb Store and Special Weapons Area
15. Character Area 5B: Plateau Edge
16. Character Area 5C: North Fringe
17. Character Area 5D: Northwest Fringe
18. Character Area 6: Southeast HASs
19. Character Area 8A: Built-up Edge
20. Character Area 8B: Avionics and HASs
21. The Control Tower

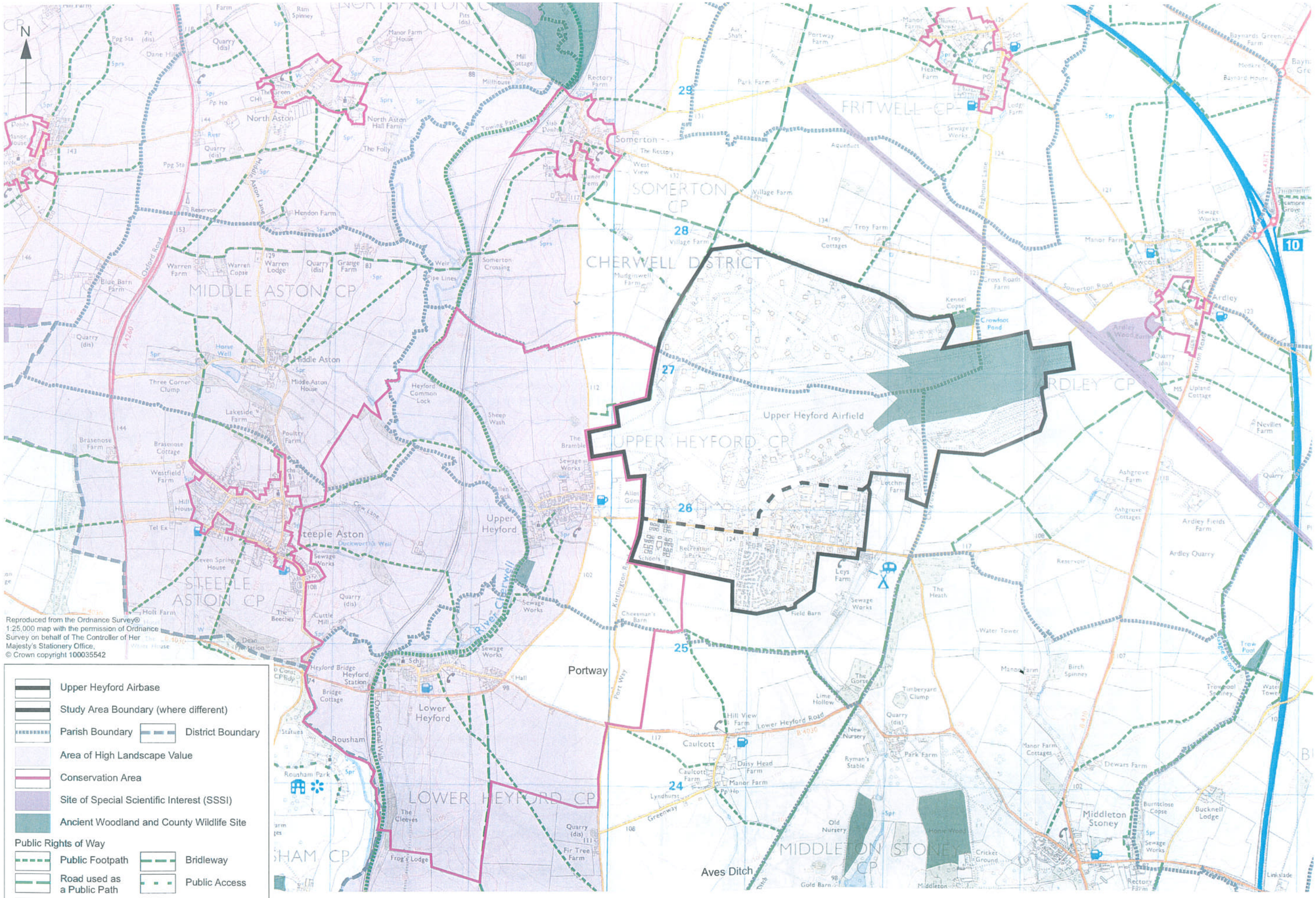


FIGURE 2: The Immediate Setting of the Airbase

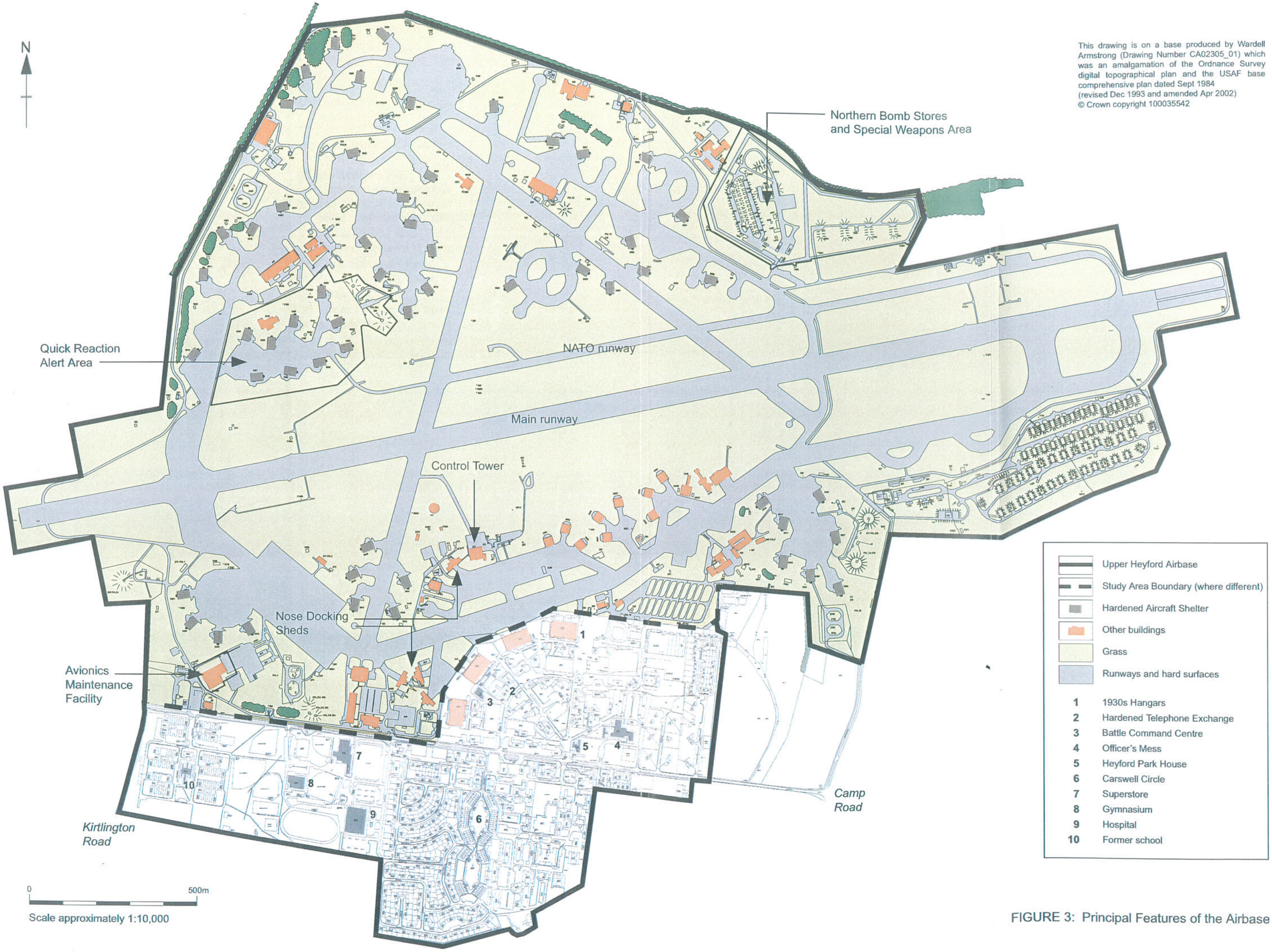
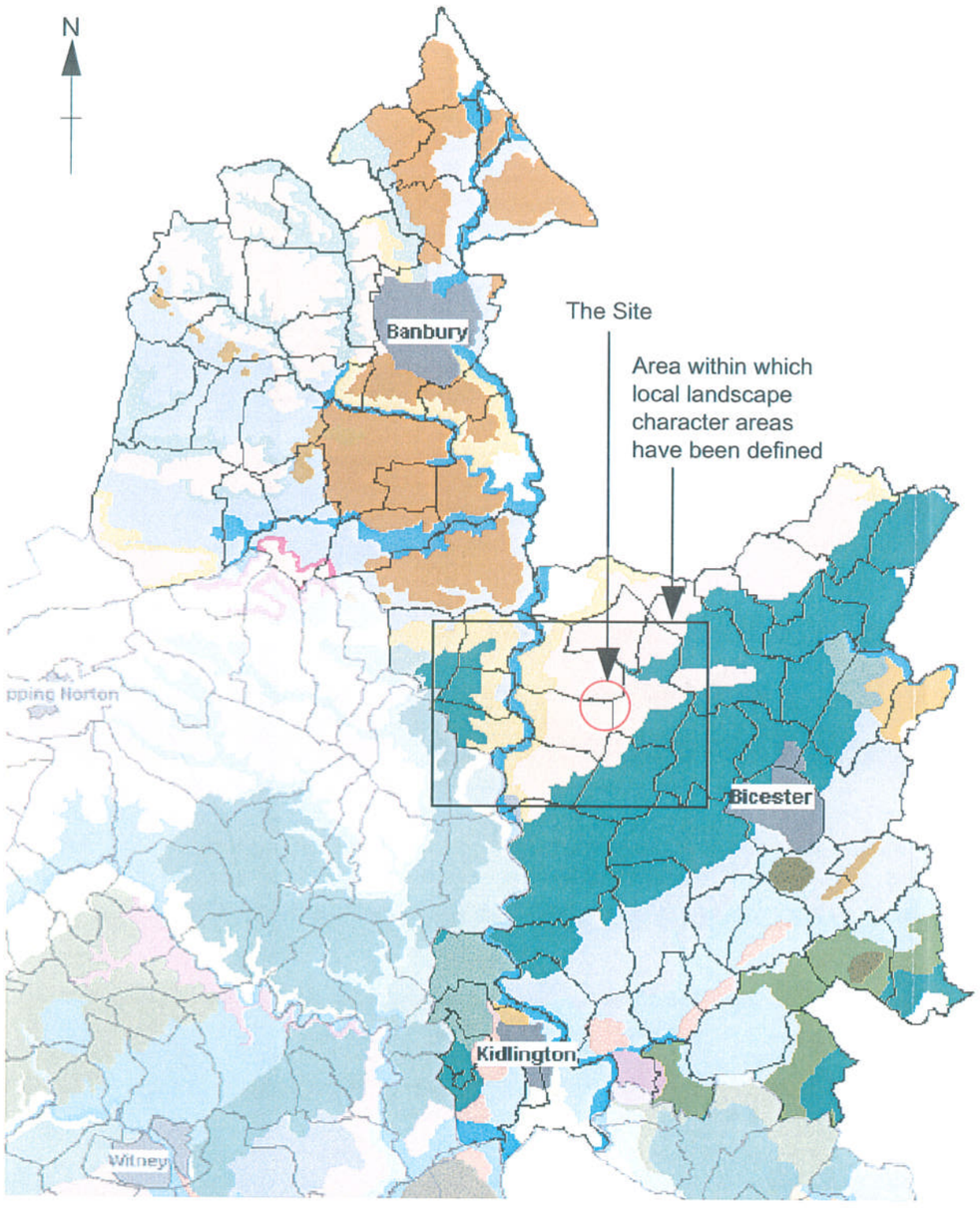
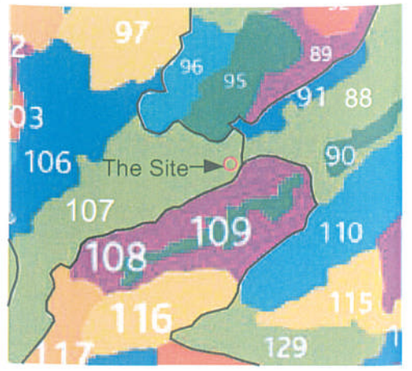


FIGURE 3: Principal Features of the Airbase



Not to scale



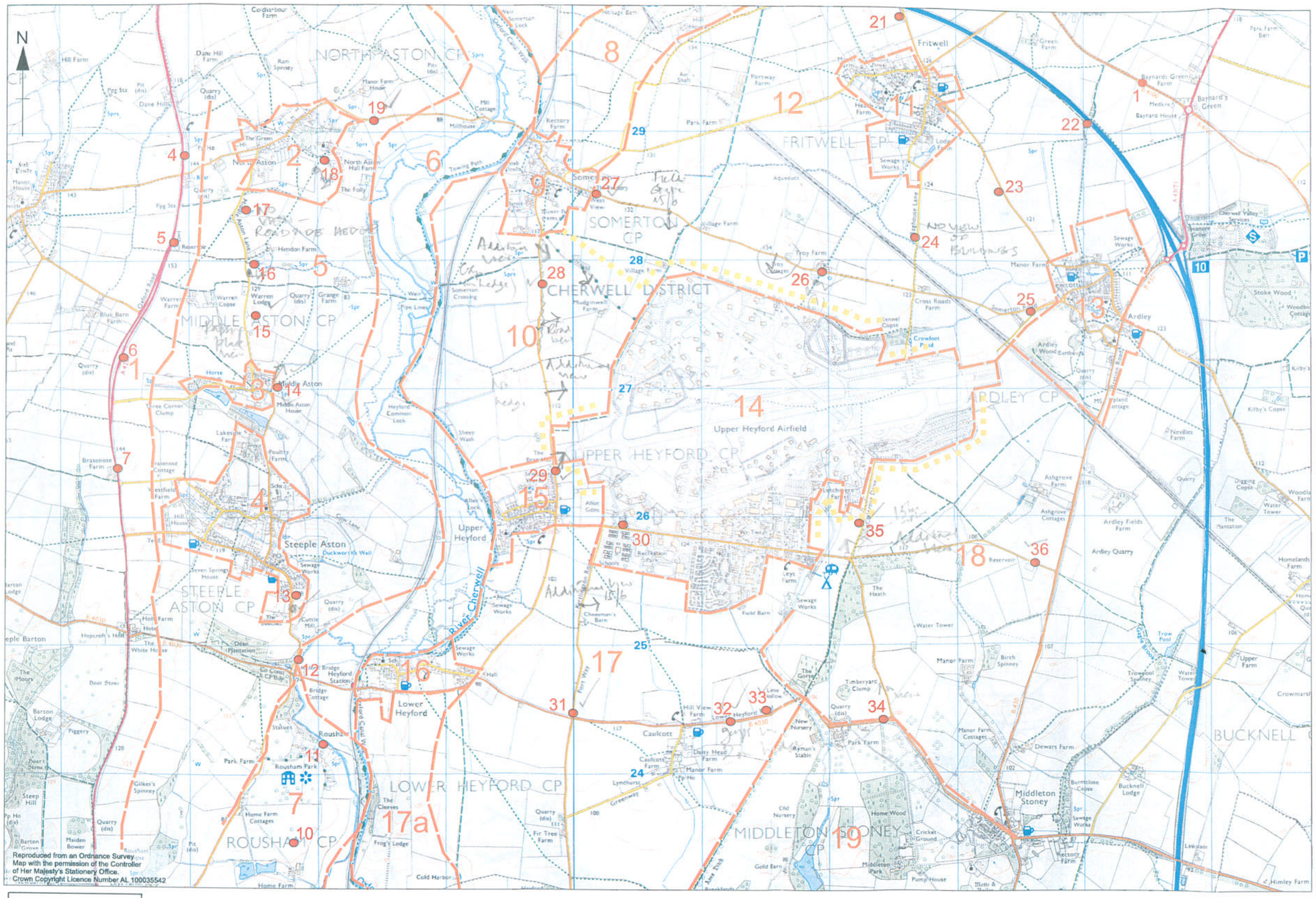
Regional Character Areas

88 Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands
89 and 94 Northamptonshire Vales / Leicestershire Vales
91 Yardley-Whittlewood Ridge
95 Northamptonshire Uplands
96 Dunsmore and Feldon
106 Severn and Avon Vales
107 Cotswolds
108 Upper Thames Clay Vales
109 Midvale Ridge

Cherwell Landscape Types

- Alluvial Lowlands
- Clay Vale
- Estate Farmlands
- Farmland Hills
- Farmland Plateau
- Farmland Slopes and Valley Sides
- Lowland Village Farmlands
- Pasture Hills
- River Meadowlands
- Rolling Clayland
- Rolling Farmland
- Rolling Village Pastures
- Upstanding Village Farmlands
- Vale Farmland
- Wooded Estatelands
- Wooded Estate Slopes and Valley Sides
- Wooded Farmland
- Wooded Hills
- Wooded Pasture Valleys and Slopes

FIGURE 4: Regional Landscape Character Areas and Landscape Types



1 Cherwell Ridge
2 North Aston
3 Middle Aston
4 Steeple Aston
5 Aston Slopes
6 Cherwell Valley Floor
7 Rousham
8 Somerton-Souldern Slopes
9 Somerton
10 Mudginwell Slopes
11 Fritwell
12 Fritwell Plateau
13 Ardley-Fewcott
14 Upper Heyford Airbase
15 Upper Heyford
16 Lower Heyford
17 Caulcott Plateau
17a Caulcott Plateau Edge
18 Middleton Stoney Estatelands
19 Middleton Stoney Park

LDA Viewpoint

Airbase Dominant Visual Element

FIGURE 5: Local Landscape Character Areas

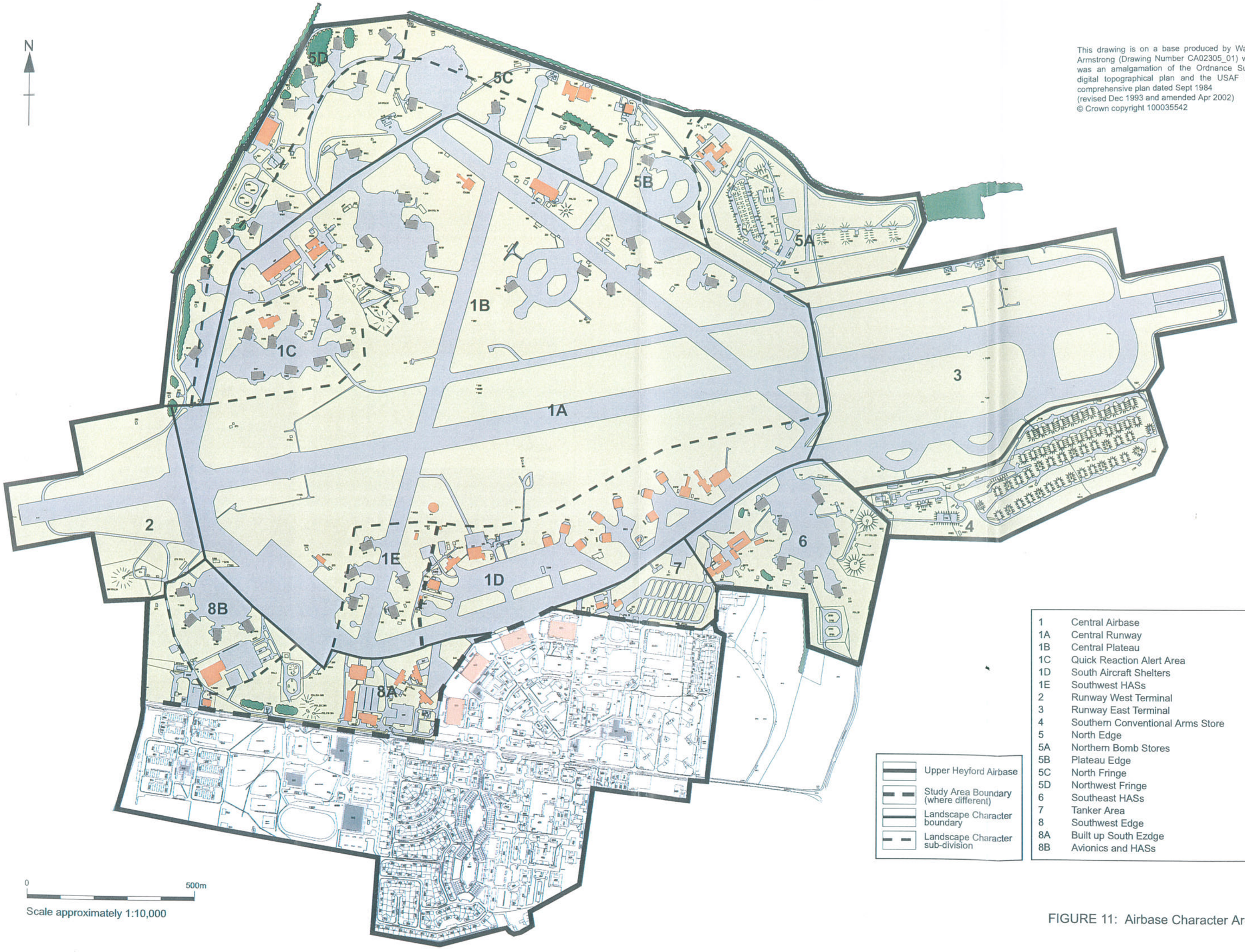


FIGURE 11: Airbase Character Areas

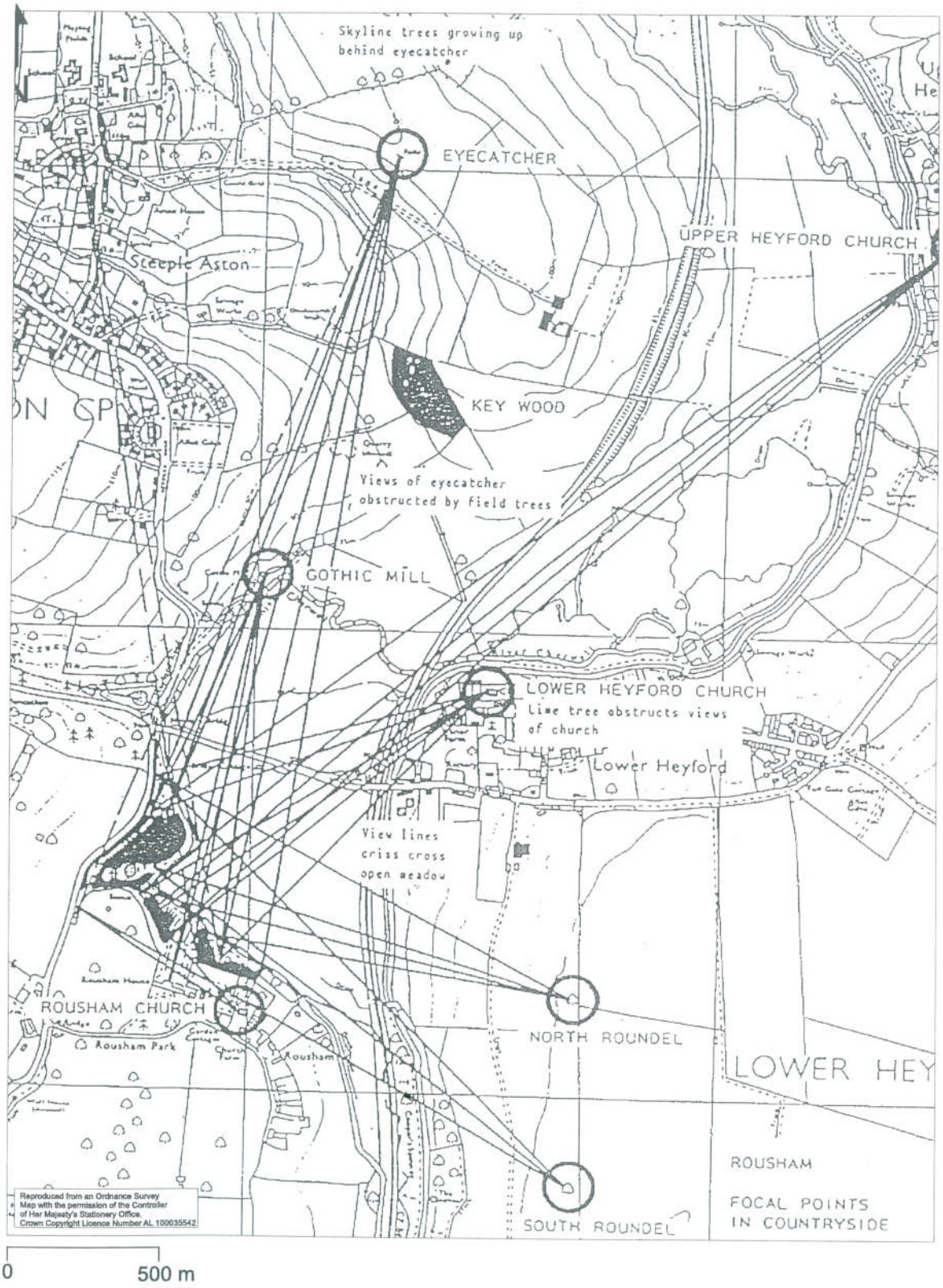
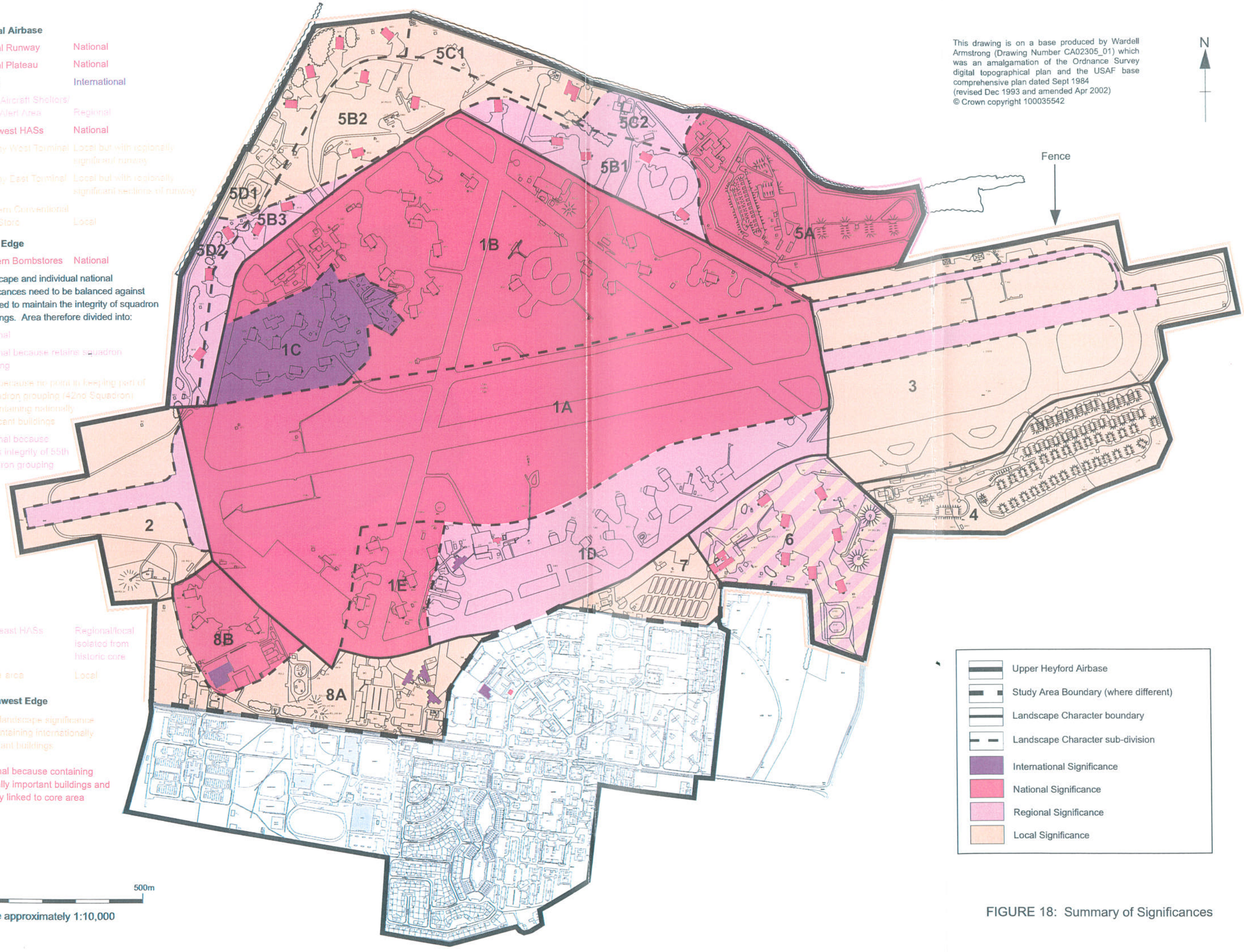


FIGURE 14: Views from Rousham Gardens

1	**Central Airbase**	
1A	Central Runway	National
1B	Central Plateau	National
1C	QRAA	International
1D	South Aircraft Shelters/ Visitor Alert Area	Regional
1E	Southwest HASs	National
2	Runway West Terminal	Local but with regionally significant runway
3	Runway East Terminal	Local but with regionally significant sections of runway
4	Southern Conventional Arms Store	Local
5	**North Edge**	
5A	Northern Bombstores	National
5B/D	Landscape and individual national significances need to be balanced against the need to maintain the integrity of squadron groupings. Area therefore divided into:	
5B1	Regional	
5C2	Regional because retains squadron grouping	
5B2/ 5C1/ 5D1	Local because no point in keeping part of a squadron grouping (42nd Squadron) but containing nationally significant buildings	
5D2/ 5B3	Regional because retains integrity of 55th Squadron grouping	
6	Southeast HASs	Regional/local isolated from historic core
7	Tanker area	Local
8	**Southwest Edge**	
8A	Local landscape significance but containing internationally important buildings	
8B	National because containing centrally important buildings and usually linked to core area	



This drawing is on a base produced by Wardell Armstrong (Drawing Number CA02305_01) which was an amalgamation of the Ordnance Survey digital topographical plan and the USAF base comprehensive plan dated Sept 1984 (revised Dec 1993 and amended Apr 2002)

N

- Upper Heyford Airbase
- Study Area Boundary (where different)
- Landscape Character boundary
- Landscape Character sub-division
- International Significance
- National Significance
- Regional Significance
- Local Significance

0 500m

Scale approximately 1:10,000

FIGURE 18: Summary of Significances

Low overall significance, but with regionally significant runways. Can be absorbed into surrounding rural landscape with runways commemorated

Moderate overall significance but with nationally/internationally important buildings. Soft landscape treatment to absorb into surrounding rural landscape and possible demolition of buildings can be considered, but footprints of buildings and hard surfaces should be commemorated where feasible. For area B see below

Nationally-significant core of historic landscape Priority given to conservation of buildings and landscape. But see below for area C

(A) Potential buffer between residential development and historic landscape

(B) New buildings compatible with the retained historic buildings can be considered here

(C) This area has some nationally-important buildings, but the landscape has no coherence. Landscape treatment that reinforces buffer between historic landscape and residential area, while maintaining the integrity of historic buildings and their setting can be considered here

N

Restored Public Route

Restored Public Route

Upper Heyford Airbase

Study Area Boundary (where different)

Buildings of International Significance

Buildings of National Significance

0 500m

Scale approximately 1:10,000

FIGURE 19: Indicative Proposals