

**APPENDIX 9.6
EXTRACTS FROM RELEVANT LANDSCAPE CHARACTER
ASSESSMENT**

Appendix 9.6: Extracts from relevant Landscape Character Assessments

Introduction

As part of Natural England's responsibilities as set out in the Natural Environment White Paper,¹ Biodiversity 2020² and the European Landscape Convention,³ we are revising profiles for England's 159 National Character Areas (NCAs). These are areas that share similar landscape characteristics, and which follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries, making them a good decision-making framework for the natural environment.

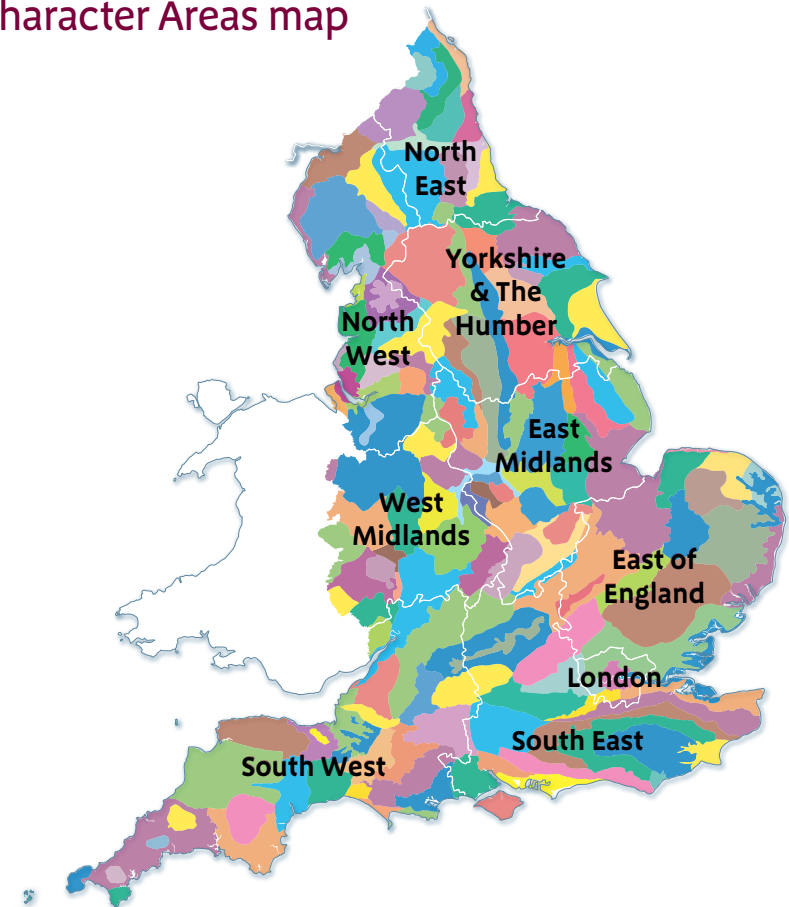
NCA profiles are guidance documents which can help communities to inform their decision-making about the places that they live in and care for. The information they contain will support the planning of conservation initiatives at a landscape scale, inform the delivery of Nature Improvement Areas and encourage broader partnership working through Local Nature Partnerships. The profiles will also help to inform choices about how land is managed and can change.

Each profile includes a description of the natural and cultural features that shape our landscapes, how the landscape has changed over time, the current key drivers for ongoing change, and a broad analysis of each area's characteristics and ecosystem services. Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEOs) are suggested, which draw on this integrated information. The SEOs offer guidance on the critical issues, which could help to achieve sustainable growth and a more secure environmental future.

NCA profiles are working documents which draw on current evidence and knowledge. We will aim to refresh and update them periodically as new information becomes available to us.

We would like to hear how useful the NCA profiles are to you. You can contact the NCA team by emailing ncaprofiles@naturalengland.org.uk.

National Character Areas map



¹ The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature, Defra (2011; URL: www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm80/8082/8082.pdf)

² Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services, Defra (2011; URL: www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13583-biodiversity-strategy-2020-111111.pdf)

³ European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe (2000; URL: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/176.htm>)

Summary

The Cotswolds form the best-known section of the predominantly oolitic Jurassic Limestone belt that stretches from the Dorset coast to Lincolnshire. The dominant pattern of the Cotswold landscape is of a steep scarp crowned by a high, open wold; the beginning of a long and rolling dip slope cut by a series of increasingly wooded valleys. The scarp provides a backdrop to the major settlements of Cheltenham, Gloucester, Stroud and Bath and provides expansive views across the Severn and Avon Vales to the west. Smaller towns and villages nestle at the scarp foot, in the valley bottoms and on the gentler valley sides at springlines. Scattered hamlets and isolated farmsteads are found on the higher ground. The limestone creates a strong sense of place and unity which carries through to the buildings and walls which have been built using local limestone for centuries. The distinctive character of the area is reflected in its designation as the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with sixty five percent of the NCA being covered by this designation.

Nationally important beech woods feature in the landscape and are a notable feature on the scarp edge and in a number of the incised valleys. Mixed oak woodlands are concentrated on the upper slopes of valleys and on the flat high wold tops. Woodlands can contain a wide and notable range of calcicole shrubs and ground flora. Parkland and estates are characteristic of the area. Farming is mixed, with much of the high wold dominated by arable on thin, brashy soils prone to erosion. Pasture is predominant in the valleys, and in particular on steeper slopes and on more clayey soils. Meadows and tree-lined watercourses are found along the valley bottoms.

Important habitats include unimproved limestone grassland along the scarp, for example Rodborough Common Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and wet meadows with alder and willow and springline flushes. Two further SAC are also designated: Cotswold Beechwoods SAC and Bath and Bradford-on-Avon Bats SAC. Steeply-incised stream and river valleys cut through the north-west-facing scarp, flowing westwards towards the Severn. The watercourses of the dip slope provide the headwaters of the Thames and flow eastwards within broad shallow valleys, and these rivers and underlying aquifer are an important supply of high-quality water for populations within and around the area.

The area has a rich history, with nationally and internationally important evidence of prehistoric, Roman, medieval and later settlement in the form of archaeological sites, historic buildings and the wider historic landscape. Roman roads are prominent, including the Fosse Way which extends from north to south through the whole area.

It is a notable visitor destination and has a longstanding reputation as the 'quintessential English landscape'.

[Click map to enlarge; click again to reduce](#)

[Click map to enlarge; click again to reduce](#)

Statements of Environmental Opportunities:

- **SEO 1:** Protect and enhance the highly distinctive farmed landscape, retaining the balance between productive arable, pastoral and wooded elements and the open, expansive views particularly from the scarp, high wold and dip slope.
- **SEO 2:** Safeguard and conserve the historic environment, cultural heritage and geodiversity that illustrate the history, evolution, foundations, land use and settlement of the Cotswolds landscape, and enable access to and interpretation of the relationship between natural processes and human influences.
- **SEO 3:** Protect, maintain and expand the distinctive character of the Cotswolds and the network of semi-natural and arable habitats, including limestone grassland, beech woods and wetlands along streams and rivers, to enhance water quality, strengthen ecological and landscape connectivity, support rare species and allow for adaptation to changes in climate.
- **SEO 4:** Safeguard and manage soil and water resources, allowing naturally functioning hydrological processes to maintain water quality and supply; reduce flooding; and manage land to reduce soil erosion and water pollution and to retain and capture carbon.



Cotswolds field pattern seen at Longborough.

Description

Physical and functional links to other National Character Areas

The Cotswold scarp, rising to 330 m, provides long, expansive views westwards over the Severn and Avon Vales to the Forest of Dean and Wales, to the Malvern and Shropshire hills and the nearby outliers such as Bredon Hill. From the dip slope, long easterly views can still be seen across the Vale of the White Horse to the North Wessex Downs and the Chilterns. Unlike the scarp, the eastern side of the National Character Area (NCA) merges gently with the neighbouring NCAs. The scarp forms the backdrop to the Severn and Avon Vales and in particular the setting for Cheltenham, Gloucester, Stroud and Bath, a World Heritage Site (WHS).

Most of the principal rivers in the NCA are tributaries of the Thames and flow south-eastwards into the Upper Thames Clay Vales, providing strong ecological and functional links. Rivers in the south and west flow into the River Avon and then the Severn Estuary. The area is underlain by a limestone aquifer, and both this and the rivers are a key supply of high-quality water for this and the surrounding areas, including the Cotswold Water Park.

The Cotswolds provide drinking water for populations as far away as Birmingham and London, but also provide outdoor recreation and learning, and many other services. The Cotswolds are also internationally renowned and popular with overseas visitors and as a domestic short-break and day-trip destination. There is an extensive network of public rights of way, particularly

footpaths, including the start of the 184-mile Thames Path National Trail, the majority of the 102-mile Cotswold Way National Trail and parts of the National Cycle Network, which connect beyond the Cotswolds. The A46 and A429 run the length of the Cotswolds along the route of the former Roman road, the Fosse Way. The A41 follows the route of Akeman Street, another former Roman road, from east to west. These Roman roads connected Exeter to Lincoln and St Albans and Cirencester respectively. The M4 and A40 cross the area from east to west linking it to major cities and communities, as do the M40 in the north-east near Banbury and the Oxford to Worcester and London to Bristol, Bath and South Wales railway lines.

The Cotswolds area is famed for its building stone, used extensively within the NCA but also much further afield, for example in Oxford and London.



Limestone grassland at Swellshill.

Key characteristics

- Defined by its underlying geology: a dramatic limestone scarp rising above adjacent lowlands with steep combs, and outliers illustrating the slow erosion of escarpments. The limestone geology has formed the scarp and dip slope of the landscape, which in turn has influenced drainage, soils, vegetation, land use and settlement.
- Open and expansive scarp and high wold dipping gently to the south-east, dissected by river valleys.
- Arable farming dominates the high wold and dip slope while permanent pasture prevails on the steep slopes of the scarp and river valleys with pockets of internationally important limestone grassland.
- Drystone walls define the pattern of fields of the high wold and dip slope. On the deeper soils and river valleys, hedgerows form the main field boundaries.
- Ancient beech hangers line stretches of the upper slopes of the scarp, while oak/ash woodlands are characteristic of the river valleys. Regular blocks of coniferous and mixed plantations are scattered across the open high wold and dip slope.
- Large areas of common land, important for unimproved calcareous grassland, are characteristic of the scarp and high wold around the Stroud valleys and along the crest of the scarp to Cleeve Hill.
- The majority of the principal rivers flow south-eastwards forming the headwaters of the Thames with the exception of rivers in the west which flow into the River Avon and then the Severn Estuary.
- Rich history from Neolithic barrows, iron-age hill forts and Roman roads and villas to deserted medieval villages, grand country houses, cloth mills and Second World War airfields. The field patterns largely reflect both the medieval open field system, with fossilised areas of ridge and furrow, and later planned enclosures.
- Locally quarried limestone brings a harmony to the built environment of scattered villages and drystone walls, giving the area a strong sense of unity for which the Cotswolds are renowned. Bath stone is also famous and has been used for building since Roman times, both locally in the principal buildings and streets of Bath and more widely, for example for Buckingham Palace in London. Parkland, gardens and historic designed landscapes are features particularly of the dip slope and broad lowland, such as Lawrence Johnston's garden at Hidcote, and Heather Muir's garden at Kiftsgate, parkland at Stanway, Chastleton and Blenheim Palace.
- Prominent natural and built features in the landscape include the City of Bath WHS, Brailes Hill, Broadway Tower, Cleeve Hill, the Tyndale monument, Freezing Hill, Kelston Round Hill and Blenheim Palace WHS.

Landscape Types:

Wooded Estatelands



19. WOODED ESTATELANDS

Regional Character Areas

Cotswolds, Northamptonshire Uplands, Midvale Ridge and Upper Thames Vale.

Location

The landscape type includes parklands at the eastern end of the Cotswolds, ranging from the area around Blenheim Park, Steeple Barton, Middleton Park and as far as Shelswell Park to the north of Bicester. Further south it includes Eynsham Hall Park and Bladon Heath Wood and it also covers the majority of the wooded and parkland areas in the undulating landscape of the Corallian Ridge.

Overview

A wooded estate landscape characterised by arable farming and small villages with a strong vernacular character.

Key Characteristics

- Rolling topography with localised steep slopes.
- Large blocks of ancient woodland and mixed plantations of variable sizes.
- Large parklands and mansion houses.
- A regularly-shaped field pattern dominated by arable fields.
- Small villages with strong vernacular character.

Geology and landform

The geology of the landscape type varies according to the locality. Much of the landscape across the Cotswold area is underlain by a mix of Cornbrash and Great Oolite limestone. The geology in the area around Bicester and further south is dominated by Oxford Clay, whilst the landscape across the Corallian Ridge is underlain by Corallian beds, which are a mix of sands and sandy limestones.

The landform is generally rolling, ranging from gently rolling to undulating. Across the Corallian Ridge the landform is strongly undulating, and is steeply sloping in places resulting in small valleys. At the junction of the Corallian beds and the clay vale, springlines emerge and small streams flow through the valleys.

Land use and vegetation

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

Cultural pattern

The field pattern is generally characterised by a geometric pattern of medium to large-sized fields, with arable cropping in the larger fields. A less regular pattern of enclosure is associated with the strongly undulating landform across the Corallian Ridge close to places like Faringdon, Cumnor and Boar's Hill and around Beckley and Shotover Country Park. Fields are generally enclosed by woodland, as well as thorn and elm hedges. There are also a number of species-rich hedges bordering roads and close to woods. Although there are only a few mature oak and ash hedgerow trees, they still contribute to the wooded character of the landscape. They are more obvious in the vicinity of ancient woodland and quite sparse where arable cropping is dominant. Views are generally filtered through trees and framed by woodland blocks. Large parklands with their distinctive country houses, extensive woodland and ornamental lakes at Blenheim, Middleton, Eynsham Hall and Buscot are also very typical of this landscape type and underline its estate character.

The settlement pattern is characterised by small settlements as well as scattered farmhouses in the wider countryside. The vernacular character is strong in most of the villages and this is reinforced by features such as stone walls. The most widely used building materials are limestone, stone and clay tiles. There are also limestone houses with thatched roofs at Fyfield, Tubney, Hatford, Beckley and Stanton St. John. Stone with bricks around the widows is characteristic in villages such as Sunningwell, Cumnor and South Hinksey. Red bricks with clay tiles can be seen at Nuneham Courtenay, timber framed houses with thatched roofs at Horton-cum-Studley and ironstone houses at Duns Tew.

BIODIVERSITY

Overview

This landscape type is associated with parklands and their associated estatelands. It has a wide range of both locally important and priority habitats.

Key Characteristics

- Predominantly medium to very high bioscores.
- Priority and important habitats include ancient semi-natural woodland, species-rich hedgerows with trees, unimproved grassland, fen, reedswamp and species-rich ponds and watercourses.

General Description

This is a very large landscape type occupying around 11.2% of the rural county. It includes a large part of the Midvale Ridge and a significant part of the Cotswolds character area. It is a diverse area and supports a wide range of locally important and priority habitats. Within the Midvale Ridge and on the corallian limestone there are many substantial blocks of ancient semi-natural woodland including Stanton Great, Brasenose and Waterperry Woods to the east of Oxford. To the west of

Oxford, around Frilford, there are significant areas of acid grassland, heath and calcareous fen. There are also areas of limestone grassland within Chilswell Valley to the west of the City and in the Cotswolds near Fawler and Charlbury. The many parklands support a wide range of habitats including mature and veteran trees, species-rich lakes and semi-improved grassland, with Blenheim probably being the best example. In addition, there are smaller areas of neutral and wet grassland and reedswamp. There are also a number of important geological sites including Stratton Audley and Shellingford quarries.

LOCAL CHARACTER AREAS

A. Blenheim Park (CW/29)

Landscape character

The field pattern is dominated by large-scale arable fields and some grass fields around Combe. Woodland cover is prominent throughout the landscape, with large blocks of ancient woodland and mixed plantations. The woods of the Ditchley estate consist mainly of ash, beech and some hazel coppice, whilst the woodland at Blenheim is mainly ash and oak, with a substantial number of conifers. Parklands are very characteristic in this area, including the picturesque landscapes at Blenheim and Ditchley. Mature hedgerow trees are also thinly scattered throughout and they are mainly oak, ash, beech and some sycamore. Fields are enclosed by woodland and thorn hedges. Roadside hedges are often species-rich and gappy, and internal field hedges are fragmented and lost in places.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 128/H

This area supports locally important habitats including plantations, semi-improved grassland and species-poor hedges with trees. It also has a number of ancient semi-natural woodlands including Out Wood which is just under 20 ha in size. Species-rich hedgerows are found throughout the area particularly in association with the ancient woods. Blenheim Park with its veteran trees, lakes and woodlands is particularly important. There are small surviving patches of limestone grassland along the Saltway near Ditchley and in the parish of Fawler. An important geological site is located near Charlbury.

B. North Aston (CW/51)

Landscape character

The area is mainly characterised by large-scale arable fields and some improved grassland. Surviving acid grassland and gorse can be found close to Tackley Wood. Large blocks of ancient woodland, mixed plantations and small woods add variety to an otherwise intensively managed landscape. The composition of the woods is mainly oak and ash but, at places like Tackley Wood, they have been largely replanted with conifers. Thorn hedges are generally low and gappy, but are taller in the vicinity of Tackley Wood. Hedgerow trees, consisting mainly of ash, some sycamore and occasional oak, are sparsely scattered particularly in the area around Tackley Wood. There are also some species-rich hedges in the southern part of the area. The parkland at Steeple Barton, with its mature trees, lakes and pasture, adds to the diversity of the landscape.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 135/H

The area has a number of locally important habitats including plantations, semi-improved grassland, scrub and species-poor hedges with trees. It also has a number of ancient semi-natural woodlands, such as Tackley Wood, some of which have been substantially replanted with conifers. Species-rich hedgerows with trees feature in the southern part of the area, and the parkland at Steeple Barton is important for its

mature trees and lakes. There is some surviving acid grassland and gorse at Tackley Heath, but much of the common is dominated by bracken.

C. Middleton Stoney (CW/59, CW/58, UT/37)

Landscape Character

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

Biodiversity

Bioscores/biobands: 199/VH: 49/LM: 71/M

This combined local character area supports a range of locally important habitats including deciduous woodland, plantations, semi-improved grassland, scrub, species-poor hedges with trees and tree-lined watercourses. It also has a number of important and priority habitats and these are largely associated with the broad limestone plateau to the east of the Cherwell valley. They include ancient semi-natural woodland such as Stoke Bushes and species-rich hedgerows with trees. Kirtlington and Middleton Parks with their associated trees, woodlands and lakes are also very important. There are surviving fragments of limestone grassland, but these are very small and often restricted to old quarries such as Ardley and Stratton Audley. These quarries are also of geological importance. A site noted for its calcareous fen falls partially within the area near Weston on the Green.

D. Hethe (BC/4)

Landscape Character

The area has medium-sized geometrically-shaped fields and a mix of land uses dominated by arable farming. Occasionally, patches of gorse and unimproved grassland can be found, particularly close to woodland. The landscape is characterised by interlocking large blocks of ancient semi-natural woodland, mixed plantations and smaller deciduous and conifer plantations. The composition of the woods is ash, oak and some beech. Extensive areas of parkland are an integral part of the woodland complex at Shelswell Park. Many mature oak and ash hedgerow trees emphasize the strong wooded character of this area. Hedges consist mainly of hawthorn, elm and field maple and are generally in good condition, but become gappier where there is intensive arable farming.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 134/H

The area has several locally important habitats including plantations, semi-improved grassland, species-poor hedgerows with trees and tree-lined watercourses. It also has parkland and its associated habitats of mature trees and lakes at Shelswell, ancient semi-natural woodland including Spilsmere Wood and some wet woodland. There is some surviving limestone grassland and scrub on the old disused railway to the north of the area.

E. Freeland (UT/24)

Landscape Character

The area has medium-sized fields with a mix of land uses including some small pasture fields on the steep valley sides in the eastern part of the area. The landscape has a very strong wooded character, resulting from the large ancient semi-natural woods and mixed plantations of ash, oak and conifers that are largely associated with the parklands at Eynsham Hall and Freeland. The mature oak and ash hedgerow trees reinforce this wooded character, although they are sparser to the south of Cogges Wood where arable farming dominates. The belts of semi-natural woodland associated with the valley sides and floor reinforce the intimacy of this pastoral landscape. Fields are enclosed by thorn hedges and woods, and the grass fields on the valley sides are bordered by watercourse trees and fences. Hedges are generally tall and in good condition, but are more intensively maintained and gappy where they enclose arable land.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 99/MH

Locally important habitats include deciduous woodland, plantations, semi-improved grassland, species-poor hedges with trees and tree-lined watercourses. There are several significant blocks of ancient semi-natural woodland including Cogges and Pinsley Woods. Eynsham Hall Park with its mature trees and lakes is also important. A small area of neutral grassland near Freeland partially overlaps with an adjacent landscape type.

F. Bladon (UT/27)

Landscape Character

The area is characterised by a well-defined, large-scale, geometric pattern of arable fields enclosed by thorn and elm hedges. Large blocks of ancient woodland are locally prominent. Burleigh Wood has been largely replanted with conifers. There are a few hedgerow oak and ash trees, which are largely confined to roadside hedges. Overall, the hedges are low and in good condition, but some of the internal field hedges are gappy and intensively maintained.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 31/LM

Locally important habitats include plantations and species-poor hedges with trees. The only other significant habitat is ancient semi-natural woodland including Burleigh Wood, but this has been largely replanted with conifers.

G. Buscot Park (UT/1)

Landscape Character

The area is characterised by a geometrically-shaped, large-scale field pattern dominated by arable farming with some improved grassland. There are large blocks of ancient woodland which are part of the Buscot estate, and these are locally prominent features. Views are also interrupted by medium-sized, mixed plantations. Fields are enclosed by thorn and elm hedges which are fragmented in places. They are generally taller and thicker next to ditches and along parish boundaries. Mature ash and oak hedgerow trees are generally thinly scattered throughout, but are denser along ditches and parish boundaries. The parkland at Buscot, with its ornamental lakes and mature trees, is a significant landscape element in an otherwise intensively managed landscape.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 72/M

The area includes locally important habitats such as deciduous woodland, plantations, species-poor hedges with trees and tree-lined watercourses. Badbury Forest is a substantial area of ancient semi-natural woodland, and the mature trees and lakes associated with Buscot park are also important.

H. Appleton Lower Common Wood (UT/15)**Landscape Character**

The area has medium and large-sized fields with a mix of land uses, although large arable fields dominate. Small, mainly deciduous plantations are dotted throughout the landscape and small to medium-sized blocks of ancient woodland with ash and some oak also contribute to the woodland cover. Fields are enclosed by woods, hawthorn and elm hedges. The hedges are generally in poor condition and fragmented in many places, particularly where they enclose arable fields. They are often taller where they surround pastureland. Hedgerow trees, mainly ash, dead elm and oak, are sparsely scattered throughout. They are denser where they border ditches, and comprise a mix of crack and shrub willow, dead elm, ash and oak.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 85/M

Locally important habitats include plantations, semi-improved grassland, species-poor hedges with trees and tree-lined watercourses. There are a number of ancient semi-natural woodlands. Appleton Lower Common is an important wet ash-wych elm woodland south of the River Thames.

I. Faringdon (CR/2)**Landscape Character**

The area is dominated by medium to large-sized arable fields. On the steeper slopes there is some semi-improved pasture and some gorse nearer the top. Fields are generally enclosed by hedges, woods and narrow winding lanes. Large blocks of ancient semi-natural woodland and different sized mixed plantations are characteristic. The main tree species in the plantations are elm, beech, oak, Scots pine and larch. Hedges are mainly thorn and elm, with a few oak trees. Most of the hedges are intact and well-maintained, but a few are quite low, particularly where they are associated with areas of arable farming. Parkland features, including mature trees, can be found around Faringdon House and St Mary's Priory.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 65/M

Locally important habitats include deciduous woodland, plantations, semi-improved grassland and species-poor hedges with trees. There is some ancient semi-natural woodland including Coxwell Wood, which is around 50 ha in size, and some parkland habitat near Faringdon. An important geological site lies to the south of Faringdon.

J. Stanford in the Vale (CR/3)**Landscape Character**

The landscape is characterised by a geometrically-shaped pattern of very large, open arable fields, and some improved grassland crossed by a network of straight roads. This is a very varied landscape of scattered, different sized mixed and deciduous plantations. There is also a large block of ancient woodland which has largely been replanted with conifers. A number of small copses, planted in field corners and

around farmhouses, add to the woodland cover. Dense corridors of pollarded willows and linear strips of wet woodland bordering streams are also locally prominent features throughout. Fields are enclosed by hedges of hawthorn, elm and blackthorn. They are fragmented, low and, in many places, have been completely removed resulting a very open landscape. Hedges, with a few scattered trees, are more intact around the Pusey Estate. Distinctive parklands and their mixed plantations are part of the Pusey and Buckland estates. To the north of the village there is an existing limestone quarry and partially restored landfill site.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 167/VH

This area is very varied and supports a wide range of locally important and priority habitats. The former include deciduous woodland, plantations, semi-improved grassland, species-poor hedges with trees and tree-lined watercourses. There are a number of ancient semi-natural woodlands including sites such as Buckland Warren wood which has been largely replanted with conifers. A number of wet woodlands, such as Chinaman Copse and Newhouse Covert, border watercourses near Hatford and Longworth. Calcareous and marshy grassland is associated with Cherbury Camp near Charney Bassett, and there are scattered examples of acid grassland, wet grassland and reedswamp. The parklands at Pusey and Buckland, with their mature trees and lakes, also add to the overall diversity of the area.

K. Tubney (CR/6)

Landscape Character

The area has a geometrically-shaped pattern of medium to large-sized fields with a mixture of arable cropping and semi-improved pasture. There are also large fields dominated by pig farming to the north of Marcham and there are some orchards around Fyfield. Acid grassland interspersed with heather and gorse is a significant feature at Frilford Heath Golf Course. Woodland cover is very prominent in this area and consists of large blocks of ancient woodland, including Tubney Wood, and a number of different sized mixed plantations. Fields are enclosed by thorn and elm hedges with a scattering of elm, oak, sycamore, poplar and willow. These become sparser where arable cropping is dominant. However, a much more prominent feature is the dense corridors of poplars and pollarded willows bordering streams and ditches. Hedges are generally tall and overgrown, but where they enclose arable land they are intensively maintained and in some cases removed altogether and replaced by fences. There are small parklands with semi-improved grassland and mature trees at Besselsleigh School, Sheepstead Park and Kingston Bagpuize House.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 172/VH

This area is notable for its range of locally important and priority habitats. The former include plantations, semi-improved grassland, species-poor hedges with trees and tree-lined watercourses. There are significant areas of acid grassland and some heathland associated with Frilford Heath Golf Course. Examples of calcareous fen can be found near Frilford, Cothill and Marcham. Frilford Heath is also notable for its species-rich ponds and areas of wet woodland. There are also blocks of ancient semi-natural woodland including Tubney Wood and parkland habitat is found at places such as Sheepstead Park and Kingston Bagpuize House.

L. Cumnor Hill (CR/9)

Landscape Character

The area has a mix of land uses including medium-sized, semi-improved grass fields and larger arable fields. There are remnants of calcareous grassland on the steeper slopes adjacent to the Thames floodplain. Woodland dominates the landscape, particularly towards the east where there are very large blocks of ancient woodland including Kennington and Radley woods. The minor valleys and small streams,

bordered by belts of dense scrub and wet woodland, are distinctive features that add diversity to the landscape. The streams are often species-rich, with significant patches of reedswamp vegetation. Fields are enclosed by thorn and elm hedges, but there are also some species-rich hedges with shrubs such dogwood, spindle and wayfaring tree close to the ancient woodland. Hedgerow trees of oak, ash and dead elm are also more prominent in the vicinity of ancient woodland, but are almost absent towards the west, where arable cropping predominates. Hedges are generally taller and in better condition in the eastern part of the area and are very low, fragmented or replaced by fences in the west.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 166/VH

Again, this area supports a wide range of locally important and priority habitats. There is deciduous woodland, plantations, semi-improved grassland, species-poor hedges with trees and tree-lined watercourses. There are several large blocks of ancient semi-natural woodland, including Bagley and Radley Woods, and species-rich hedges with trees. A number of valleys, including Chilswell Valley, have been created by springlines draining the corallian ridge to the west of Oxford. These support a range of priority habitats such as calcareous grassland, fen, species-rich watercourses and wet woodland.

M. Stanton St. John (CR/20, CR/21)

Landscape Character

The landscape is characterised by medium-sized arable fields with smaller fields of semi-improved grassland mainly on the steep hillsides, along with remnants of calcareous grassland. This is a very diverse landscape where fields are enclosed by woods, prominent tall thorn and elm hedges and narrow winding lanes. Large blocks of ancient and semi-natural woodland are strong landscape features, particularly on steeper slopes in the northern part of the area. Hedges are also tall, thick and species-rich in this area. Many mature oak, ash and sycamore hedgerow trees contribute to the enclosed wooded character. Hedges are lower, gappier and with fewer trees in the south where arable farming dominates. Another characteristic feature is the minor valleys and small streams bordered by willows, poplars, belts of semi-natural woodland and neutral grassland. The parkland at Shotover and Shotover House underlines the estate character of this area.

Biodiversity

Bioscores/biobands: 198/VH; 12/L

In this area there is a range of locally important habitats including deciduous woodland, plantations, semi-improved grassland, species-poor hedges with trees and tree-lined watercourses. There are several large blocks of ancient semi-natural woodland, including Stanton Great Wood, and species-rich hedges with trees. Examples of unimproved meadows can be found near Beckley and acid and calcareous grassland is associated with Sidling's Copse, a nature reserve owned and managed by the local wildlife trust.

N. Shotover (CR/17)

Landscape Character

This area lies predominantly outside the Country Park and is dominated by large arable fields with some smaller, semi-improved grassland fields on Shotover Hill. Patches of acid grassland and heathland occur within the Country Park. The landscape is characterised by interlocking blocks of ancient and semi-natural woodland, which are particularly prominent on Shotover Hill. Parts of the area are remnants of the old Royal Forest of Shotover. Many field boundaries of thorn and elm have been removed, resulting in an open landscape. Some survive on Shotover Hill, where they are mixed with gorse and spindle. Hedgerow trees, mainly mature oak

and ash, are mainly associated with the wooded area on Shotover Hill. Poplar shelterbelts sometimes border arable fields.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 79/M

Within this area there are a number of locally important habitats including deciduous woodland, semi-improved grassland and species-poor hedges with trees. Combe Wood is a large block of ancient semi-natural woodland, and survives from the old Royal Forest of Shotover. Most of the important priority habitats can be found within the Country Park, including restored areas of acid grassland and heath.

O. Horton-cum-Studley (CR/23)

Landscape Character

The area is characterised by a mix of land uses, including medium-sized fields with semi-improved and occasionally unimproved acid grassland interspersed with gorse, particularly on some of the steeper slopes. Mature oak hedgerow trees are densely scattered throughout the area. Large blocks of ancient woodland are found on the steep slopes. Fields are enclosed by tall, very gappy hedges, with hawthorn, hazel and elm dominating.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 63/M

Locally important habitats include semi-improved grassland, species-poor hedges with trees and some tree-lined watercourses. Waterperry Wood is a large block of ancient semi-natural woodland and there is some surviving acid grassland associated with part of the golf course near Horton-cum-Studley.

P. Nuneham Courtenay (CR/15)

Landscape Character

The area is dominated by large geometrically-shaped arable fields. Large blocks of ancient woodland and mixed plantations are prominent throughout the area. There are a few hedgerow trees, but they are not a significant landscape feature. Fields are enclosed by woodland and gappy thorn hedges. The parkland surrounding Nuneham Park is dominated by arable farming.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 100/MH

A number of locally important habitats have been recorded in this area, including deciduous woodland, plantations, semi-improved grassland, species-poor hedges with trees and tree-lined watercourses. There are blocks of ancient semi-natural woodland, parkland and some acid grassland associated with the arboretum at Nuneham Courtenay.

FORCES FOR CHANGE

- Overall, the hedges are in good condition but intensive agriculture has led to the fragmentation of field boundaries, particularly in areas dominated by arable farming. In such areas the hedges are very intensively maintained, fragmented, and in places removed altogether and replaced by fences.
- The vernacular character is strong in most of the villages and there is generally a low impact from residential development, especially within the wider countryside. However, in some villages new residential development is out of character, even though it is contained within the village envelope. There is also sprawling development along some of the main roads, particularly the A420 and A338,

although this is mitigated to some extent by woodland and mature garden trees.

- In very intensive areas of arable farming some of the new, large-scale barn complexes are visually intrusive.
- Some large-scale business parks using inappropriate building materials are also visually intrusive.
- There is a localised visual impact from operational quarries and partially restored landfill sites, particularly around places such as Stanford-in-the-Vale.
- The golf course next to the A420 close to Buckland is visually prominent. Frilford Heath golf course, by comparison, blends well with the surrounding countryside by integrating successfully with existing woodlands and heath.
- Overhead pylons are very intrusive in the more open areas where intensive arable farming predominates. This is evident in areas near Nuneham Park, Cumnor and Harcourt hills and to the north of Cuddesdon.
- In the flat, open area near Weston-on-the-Green, the large airfield is visually prominent, in spite of the dense screen planting.

Landscape Strategy

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

Guidelines

- Conserve and maintain semi-natural and ancient semi-natural woodland. Where appropriate, replace non-native conifer species with native species such as oak and ash. Promote the establishment and management of medium to large-scale deciduous and mixed plantations in areas where the landscape structure is particularly weak.
- Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash.
- Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type.
- Conserve and sympathetically maintain species-rich hedgerows and, where appropriate, replant gappy hedges using species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, wayfaring tree, dogwood and spindle.
- Conserve parklands and their associated landscape features such as stone walls, lakes, mature trees and woods.
- Conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly within parklands.
- Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and where appropriate, pollarding willows.
- Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses such as quarries, landfill sites, airfields and large-scale development, such as new barns and industrial units, with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.
- Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements and promote the use of building materials and a scale of development and that is appropriate to this landscape type.

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 that is 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

- Parts of this landscape type support a range of important priority habitats including acid grassland, heath, limestone grassland and fen. The majority of these habitats are associated with sites that have been designated as sites of special scientific interest or county wildlife sites. The priority must be to ensure that all these sites are in favourable condition and management. With S.S.S.I.s this can be achieved, where appropriate, through formal agreement between the landowner and English Nature. For county wildlife sites this can be promoted with advice from organisations such as the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, and the targeting of agri-environment schemes.
- The acid grassland, heath, fen and ponds at Frilford, including part of the golf course, are particularly important within the landscape type and a priority must be to ensure that they are in favourable condition and management.
- Within the valleys to the west of Oxford achieve a balance between species-rich limestone grassland and scrub. Prevent scrub encroachment in areas of species-rich grassland by grazing, as exemplified by the work of Oxford City Council in Chilswell Valley. 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.
- Opportunities for extending the range of these habitats is feasible, particularly acid grassland, on suitable land adjacent to existing similar habitats across the Corallian ridge. Oxford City Council has been successfully restoring acid grassland and heath within Shotover Country Park, and the techniques applied here can be used on soils with a similar fertility and acidity.
- Expansion of these habitats should be promoted through the use of agri-environment schemes and the restoration of mineral workings.
- Ancient semi-natural woodland is an important and characteristic feature throughout the landscape type. A priority is to ensure that it is sustainably maintained so that it remains in favourable condition and management. A substantial amount has been replanted with conifers, and where practicable these should be replaced with native tree and shrub species appropriate to the landscape type.
- 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.
- Parklands, and their associated habitats of woodlands, trees, lakes and grassland, make a significant contribution to the biodiversity resource of the landscape type and a priority must be to ensure that they remain in favourable condition and management.
- Tree-lined watercourses are a feature throughout the landscape type. They should be safeguarded and enhanced by planting species such as ash and willows, pollarding willows where appropriate, and establishing buffer strips/field margins to potentially benefit small mammals, invertebrates and birds.
- Conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly on land adjacent to watercourses.
- Opportunities for the establishment of other locally important habitats, such as semi-improved grassland and medium to large-size deciduous woodlands, 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, overwintered stubbles and winter-sown crops to benefit farmland birds such as skylarks and yellowhammers.
- Parts of the Corallian limestone ridge are notable for their rare arable weeds, and every opportunity should be sought to safeguard and expand this interest through the use of agri-environment schemes and the restoration of mineral workings.

Key Recommendations

- **Safeguard and enhance landscape character of the ancient woodlands, parklands, species-rich hedgerow network and tree-lined watercourses.**
- **Ensure that all priority habitats are in favourable condition and management, and opportunities for expanding this resource should be promoted through agri-environment schemes and the restoration of mineral sites.**

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

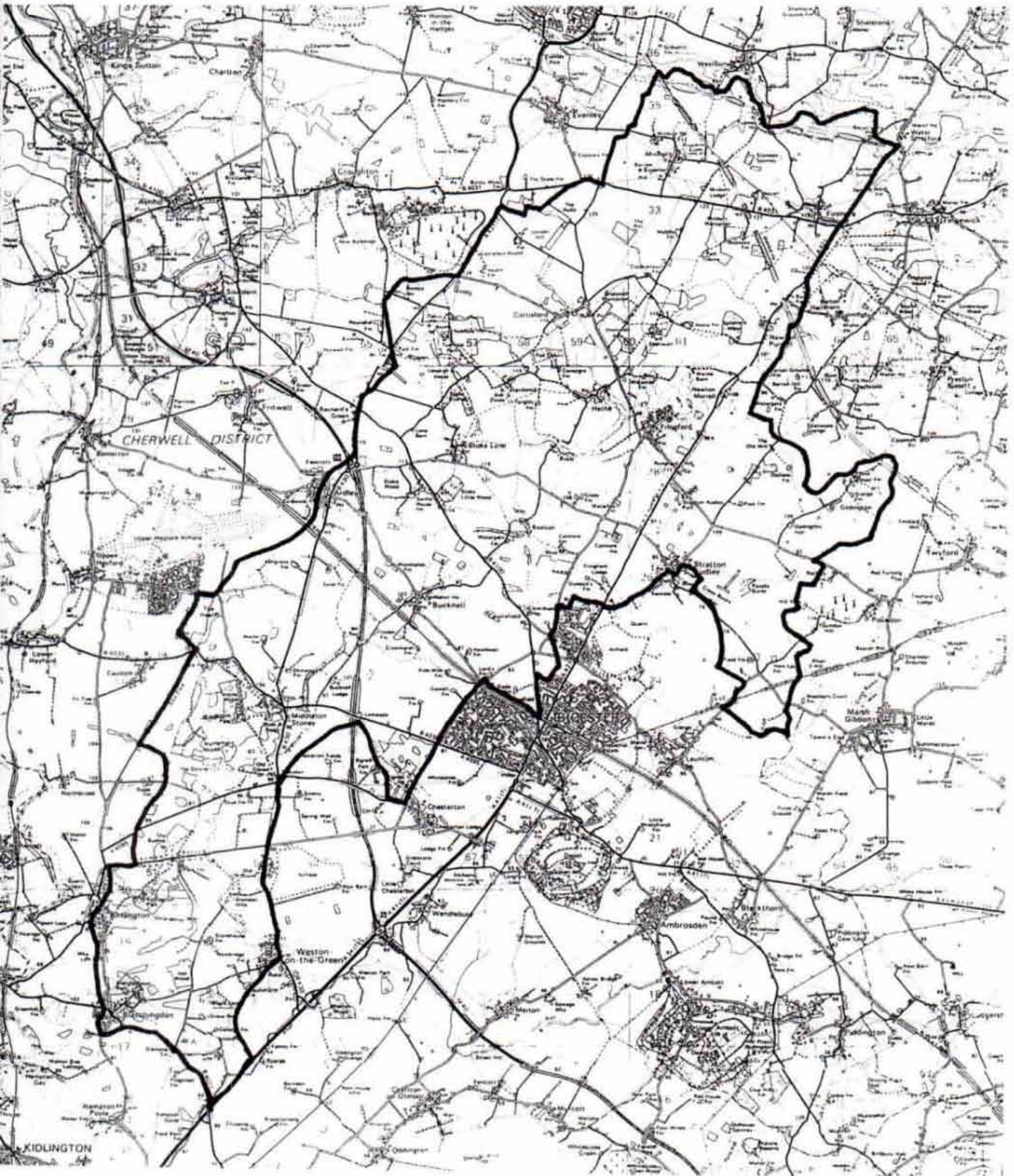
- 3.64 This sparse area of high ground is crossed by two ancient parallel routeways. The line of the Portway is followed by the minor road from Kirtlington which runs along the edge of the Cherwell Valley to Upper Heyford and continues northwards as a footpath towards Souldern. The other more visible 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

Figure 13

OXFORDSHIRE ESTATE FARMLANDS



SCALE 1:100,000

which lies in a band across Oxfordshire and continues into Northamptonshire, which was favoured by the gentry since it was within easy travelling distance from London.

Landform and landcover

- 3.68 This character area is situated upon White Limestone and Cornbrash, a bluish-grey limestone which contains shell debris and has a high clay content. Both bands trend south-west to north-eastwards, rising up to about 120m in the north in a series of gentle undulations.
- 3.69 A major watershed divides the area on an east-west alignment. Streams rising around Stratton Audley and Bucknell drain southwards into the River Ray and hence the Thames river system, while streams to the north of Fringford and Stoke Lyne join Padbury Brook and the Great Ouse river system, flowing eastwards to drain into the Wash.
- 3.70 This area is noticeably the better wooded than the rest of Cherwell District, with considerable plantations which are associated with extensive areas of parkland. Much of the land is in arable cultivation where the wooded character persists, with woodlands which divide and enclose the landscape on a large scale, there are also long views across rolling open fields where there are substantial breaks in tree cover.
- 3.71 Particularly towards the north of the area, woodland cover decreases and the countryside opens out. This is a typical English landscape scene of gently rolling hills clothed with a patchwork of fields punctuated by hedgerow trees and copses. In some areas this is disappearing, resulting in a more open landscape where only lines of trees remain to mark a previous field boundary.

Variations in landscape character

- 3.72 Six distinct areas of **18th Century enclosed farmland (R6a)** survive within this character area, at Bletchingdon, Kirtlington, Middleton, Bignell, Tusmore and Shelswell. Many of them are still surrounded by their original limestone walls, containing a pastoral scene with scattered trees and small woods. The parklands incorporate many fine specimens of single trees, notably beech, oak and horse chestnut. However, in some areas the grazing land has been ploughed up, although often trees have been retained in game coverts.
- 3.73 Associated with these parklands, but not contained within the parkland walls, are areas of **estate farmlands (R6b)** which display estate farm characteristics such as metal railings, post and rail fences, and regular patterns of roadside avenue trees.
- 3.73 **Large scale arable farmland enclosed by woods and copses (R3a)** is found across this character area, where the landscape is structured on a

large scale by woodland belts. The fields tend to be large and open, without any boundary. Plantations are located in long strips along watercourses, roads or other natural boundaries.

- 3.74 To the north of Bicester the landscape opens out into a **rolling arable landscape with strong field pattern copses and trees (R2b)**. The patchwork of arable and pasture is given definition by well maintained hedges. Many of the hedges contain regularly spaced mature hedgerow oaks, some of which are in excellent health although substantial numbers are beginning to die back. Road verges are generous widths, and often have a ditch and hedge on either side.
- 3.75 Views over the rolling countryside are punctuated by numerous small copses and coverts, a well maintained asset in an area where hunting and shooting are still regular features of rural life. However, in places the structure of the landscape is disappearing as intensive arable use has resulted in the removal of field boundaries so that only lines of hedgerow trees remain.

Special features

- 3.76 The most notable features of interest within this character area are the eighteenth century parklands. Several of those remaining, including Middleton Stoney and Kirtlington, have had more than one major phase of landscaping. The first phase of the layout of the eighteenth century park at Middleton was an avenue which ran through the small medieval deer park, which had originally been enclosed early in the thirteenth century. The extension to the layout continued into the nineteenth century, when the old manor house and a number of cottages were destroyed as part of the landscape scheme. The estate villages are found at Bletchingdon and Kirtlington, which likewise have a unity of design and detail, and a planned layout around village greens.
- 3.77 Kirtlington was originally planned to be in the formal style, but was finally landscaped by Capability Brown between 1751 and 1762. The park was considerably extended to cover an area of over 200 ha, including the site of a disused medieval hunting park. The belts of Scots Pine and the loosely grouped coppices around the park were to become hallmarks of Brown's later work. He is also known to have worked at Middleton Stoney and Kirtlington and considerably influenced the park at Bletchingdon [16, 18].

OTMOOR LOWLANDS

- 3.79 At the south east of the district is another large character area, the Otmoor Lowlands. This is essentially a flat, wet, low lying landscape, but it displays considerable variation owing to particular landform features and built development. It stretches northwards to include Bicester's urban fringes, and to the south includes the edge of the Oxford Heights.