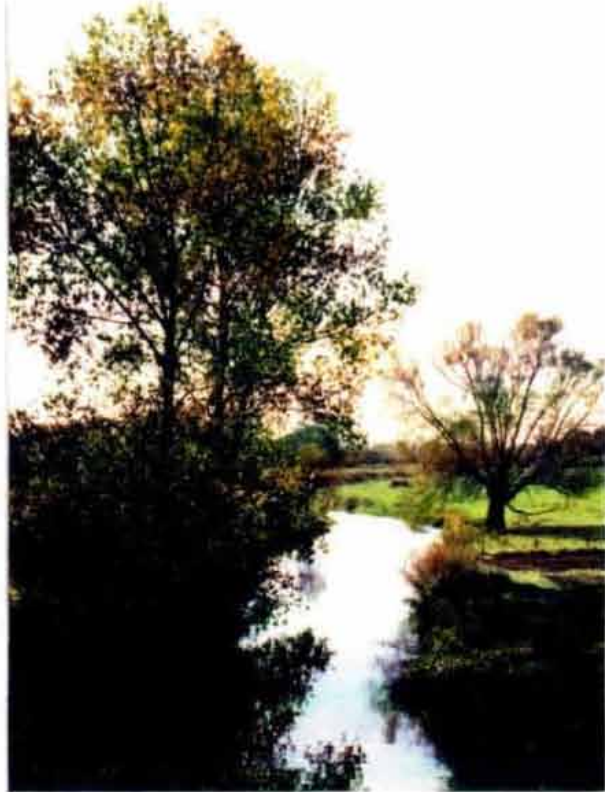


**APPENDIX 10.4**

CHERWELL DISTRICT LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT  
EXTRACT



CHERWELL DISTRICT  
LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

FOR

CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL

BY

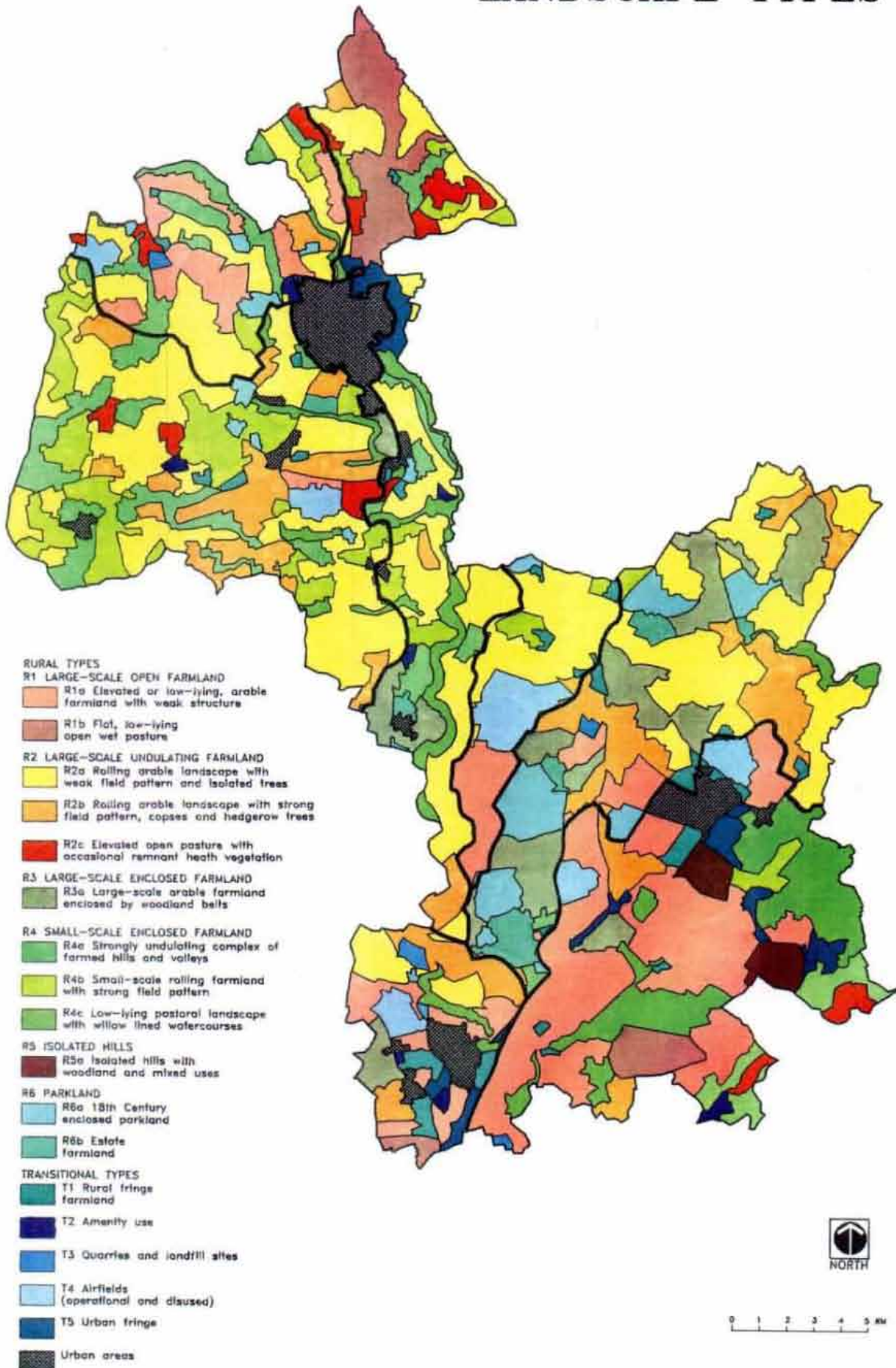
COBHAM RESOURCE CONSULTANTS  
AVALON HOUSE  
MARCHAM ROAD  
ABINGON  
OXON  
OX14 1UG

NOVEMBER 1995

7292

Figure 6

# LANDSCAPE TYPES



- 3.22 James Brindley decided the layout of the Oxford Canal but work was carried on after his death in 1772 by Robert Whitworth and Samuel Simock who were responsible for the stretch between Oxford and Banbury. Advances in engineering techniques led to the simpler single lock gates and counterbalanced wooden drawbridges which are a feature of this stretch of the canal, as are the unique diamond shaped weir locks near Shipton on Cherwell and Aynho where the canal and river are joined.

## **LOWER CHERWELL FLOODPLAIN**

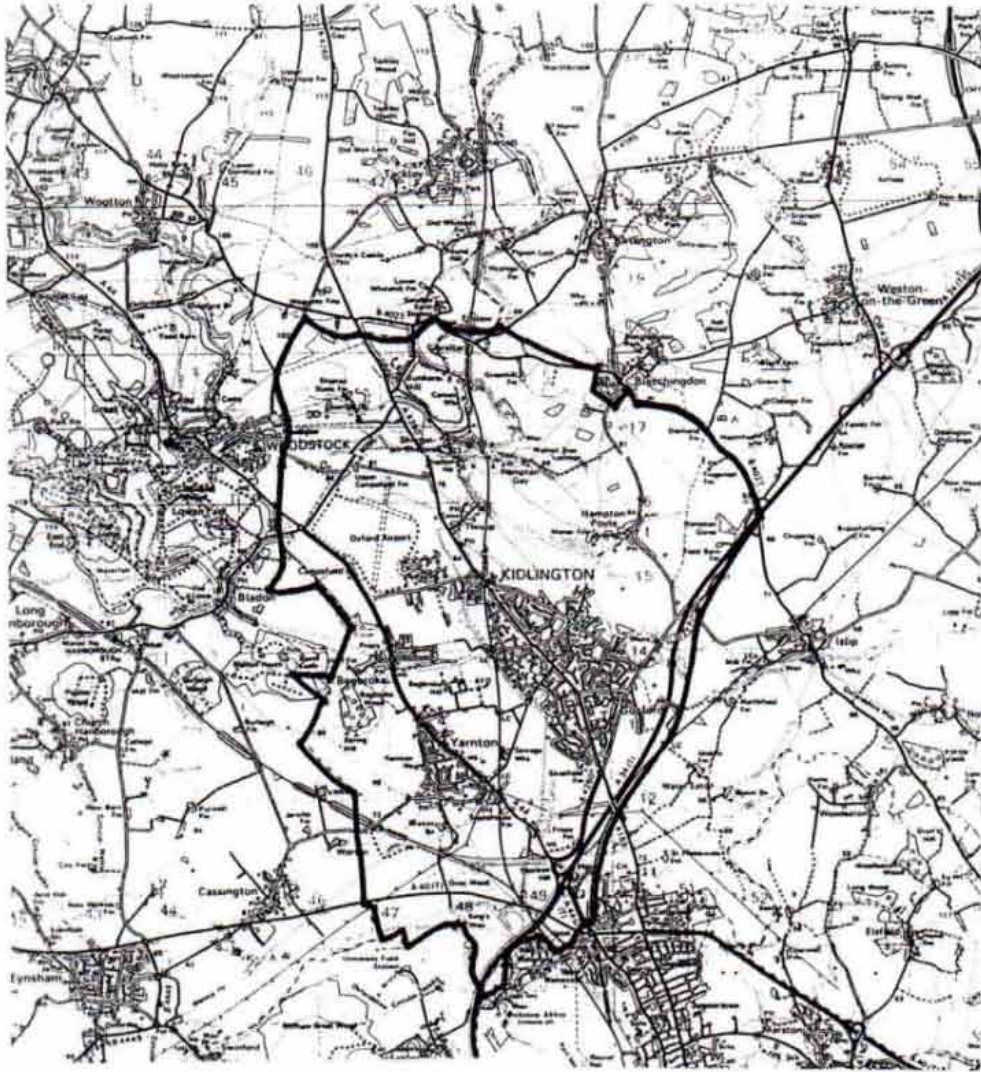
- 3.23 At its southern end, the Cherwell Valley opens out and the river meanders across a broad flood plain before finally joining the River Thames in the centre of Oxford. This area is characterised by fringe landscapes associated with Kidlington, a garden city development, and with the many major road corridors that converge at Peartree Hill, between Oxford and Kidlington.

### **Landform and landcover**

- 3.24 The Lower Cherwell Floodplain is part of the wide floodplain of the River Thames, which at this point forms the district boundary. Oxford Clay underlies the area but the surface geology is composed of terrace gravels and alluvial deposits associated with both rivers. The area is level and low-lying, with heavy clay soils and substantial local gravel deposits. The alignment of the River Cherwell curves south-eastwards, following a fault line which is associated with outcropping Cornbrash limestone, before joining the River Ray near Islip where it turns southwards.
- 3.25 Arable farming has been facilitated by improvements in drainage in this area and the large, flat fields are now mostly under cultivation for cereals. Fields are surrounded by hedgerows and trees, with a high proportion of willow and regenerating elm.
- 3.26 However, the influence of the nearby Oxford urban area is substantial and much of the landscape is dominated by features associated with the urban fringe. Pylons and overhead cables radiate outwards from a large electricity substation at Yarnton, dominating the skyline. The area is crossed by transport links, including the mainline rail link between Birmingham, Oxford and the south coast, and between Oxford and Hereford. Major roads are the most dominant landscape features, with the A40, the A44, the A4260, and the A34 trunk roads converging at Pear Tree Hill. The influence of the road corridors extends over a large area because of the level, exposed nature of the landform.

Figure 9

# LOWER CHERWELL FLOODPLAIN



SCALE 1:100,000

## Variations in landscape character

- 3.27 **Rural fringe (T1)** landscapes are those which are influenced in some way by urban, industrial or commercial elements, but which essentially retain their rural character. Fences are frequently in poor repair, and fields are often in marginal uses such as smallholdings or horse grazing, with ubiquitous striped poles lying around. Around Kidlington much of the farmland is crossed with visually dominant electricity pylons. Owing to the level landform around the town, the visual influence of the urban edge extends over considerable distances and has an urbanising effect on otherwise rural areas.
- 3.28 **Urban fringe (T5)** landscapes are those where the influence of urban areas overwhelms any rural elements, and becomes the dominant characteristic. Around Kidlington, the influence of the major road network and the trunk road corridors have a profound influence on landscape character. Substantial parcels of land are taken up by embankments and roundabouts, and roads tend to be raised on embankment above the floodplain which increases their visual impact. Roadside development also has a substantial influence on the character of the area, with numerous service stations and ribbon development strung out along the road corridors. An electricity substation at Yarnton is a particularly dominant feature.
- 3.29 Beyond the influence of the urban areas are areas of **low lying arable farmland with weak structure (R1a)**. Some of this is separated from urban areas by lines of willows and outgrowing hawthorn hedges, which restrict long views. However, in many places hedges and tree cover is thin and lacks the visual strength to really provide structure and unity to the landscape.

## Special features

- 3.30 Two areas of particularly botanically rich grassland are found on the lower Cherwell Floodplain, Rushy Meadows between Kidlington and Begbroke and Yarnton Mead between the A40(T) and the River Thames. They are both important sites which have survived in an area where meadow and fen communities have suffered decline following urban development. Water Avens *Geum rivale*, which is uncommon in the Thames Basin, is found at Rushy Meadows.
- 3.31 Yarnton Mead is one of the finest remaining examples of neutral grassland in lowland England and is of international importance. The meadows have been cut annually for hay and the aftermath grazed for over a thousand years, and over 170 species have been recorded. A complex ancient system of management which has protected these meadows from being ploughed up in the past continues to operate today. Both Yarnton Mead and Rushy Meadows are SSSIs. A third SSSI of international importance is located at Shipton-on-Cherwell Quarry, which is designated for its geological interest for its Middle Jurassic crocodile fossils.

- 3.32 North-east of Kidlington there is a Roman Villa site, including a well, which is designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM). The site of Hampton Gay Deserted Medieval Village is likewise designated and the earthworks are clearly visible. Buildings of interest include Yarnton Manor, a Grade II\* listed building, originally dating from the early seventeenth century. The present garden at the Manor was recreated in the late 19th century following the lines of a much earlier seventeenth century layout, and part of the 10 hectare park was once an extensive deer park.

## **IRONSTONE HILLS AND VALLEYS**

- 3.33 The Ironstone Hills and Valleys are found in the north west of the district, and is one of the larger character areas, extending from the Cherwell Valley to the Oxfordshire/Warwickshire county boundary. This is an upland area which forms part of the northern extent of the Cotswold Hills - indeed, the Cotswolds AONB extends over part of this character area at Epwell. The main distinguishing features are its extremely complex topography and the style of vernacular buildings which is unique to the Banbury region. The unspoilt ironstone villages and tranquil countryside are remote and isolated, particularly towards the west of the character area.

### **Landform and landcover**

- 3.34 The geology of this area is faulted and fairly complex, which gives rise to a correspondingly complicated topography. Marlstone Rock Bed, an iron-bearing limestone with local sandy deposits, overlies the Middle and Lower Lias clays. This highly coloured Ironstone gives the character area its name. Faulting has uplifted an area of White Limestone and Northampton Sandstone, around Tadmerton and the Sibfords. A second line of faults lies along an east west line from Hook Norton, through Wigginton, South Newington and the Barfords.
- 3.35 Since the area is faulted and uplifted, and also cut through by numerous small streams, the landscape is divided into very steeply sided, convoluted valleys with narrow valley bottoms and rolling, rounded hill lines. Underlying geology has given rise to iron rich clay soils of a characteristic red colour, much of which is classed as grade 2 agricultural land.
- 3.36 Main drainage routes follow the fault lines. To the south, the River Swere flows eastwards along fault lines running into the Cherwell and subsequently draining to the south east, into the River Thames. The River Stour rises in the vicinity of Wigginton Heath. Joined by minor streams from the Sibfords, the Stour flows westwards into the Avon. Thus the hills form part of a major watershed which divides the drainage system of the Severn from that of the Thames. The watershed runs northwards through Epwell Hill and Shenlow Hill to Edge Hill and north-eastwards across the Burton Dassett Hills.