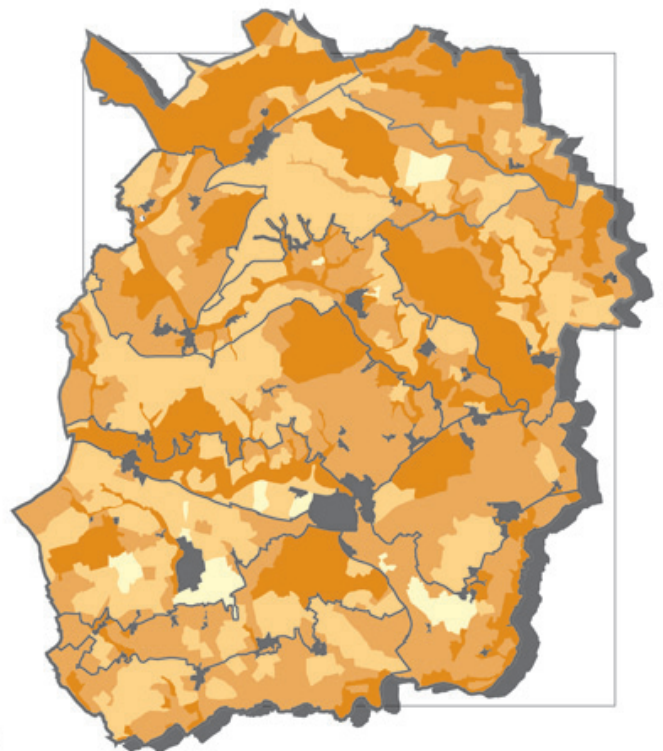
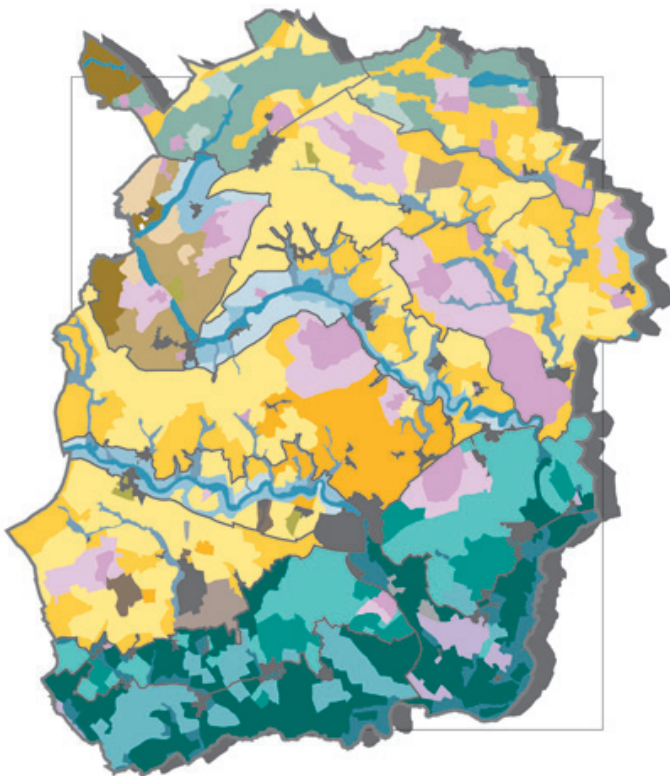
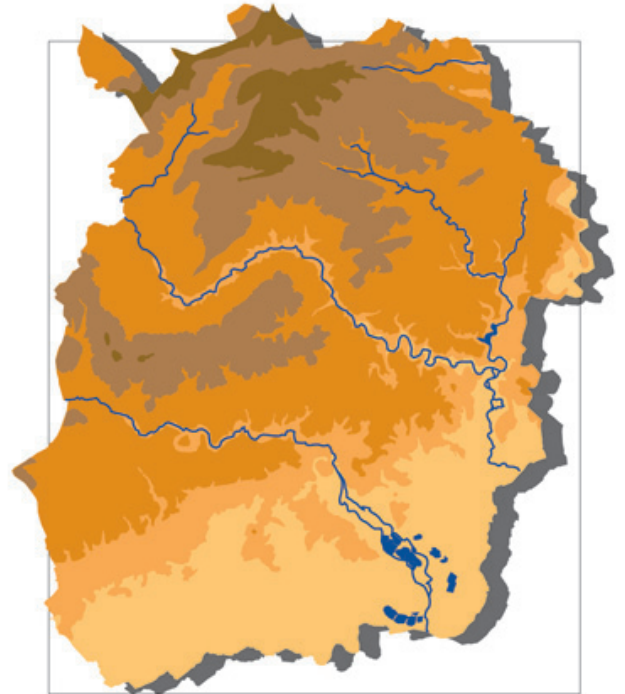
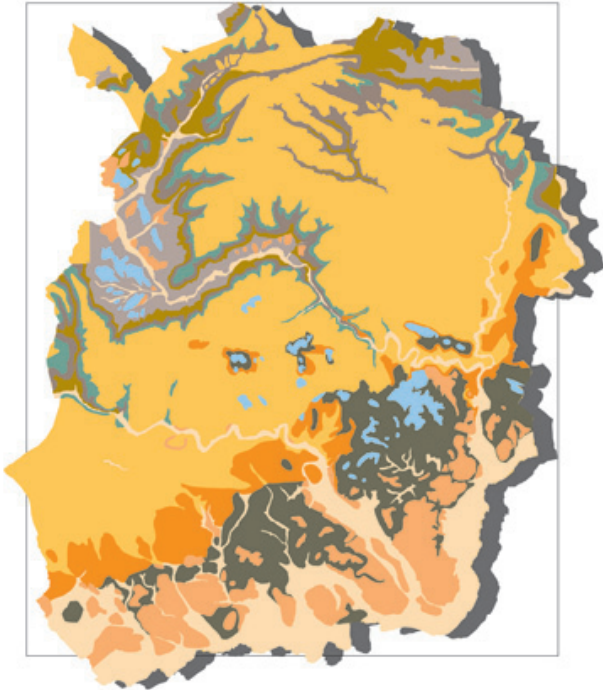


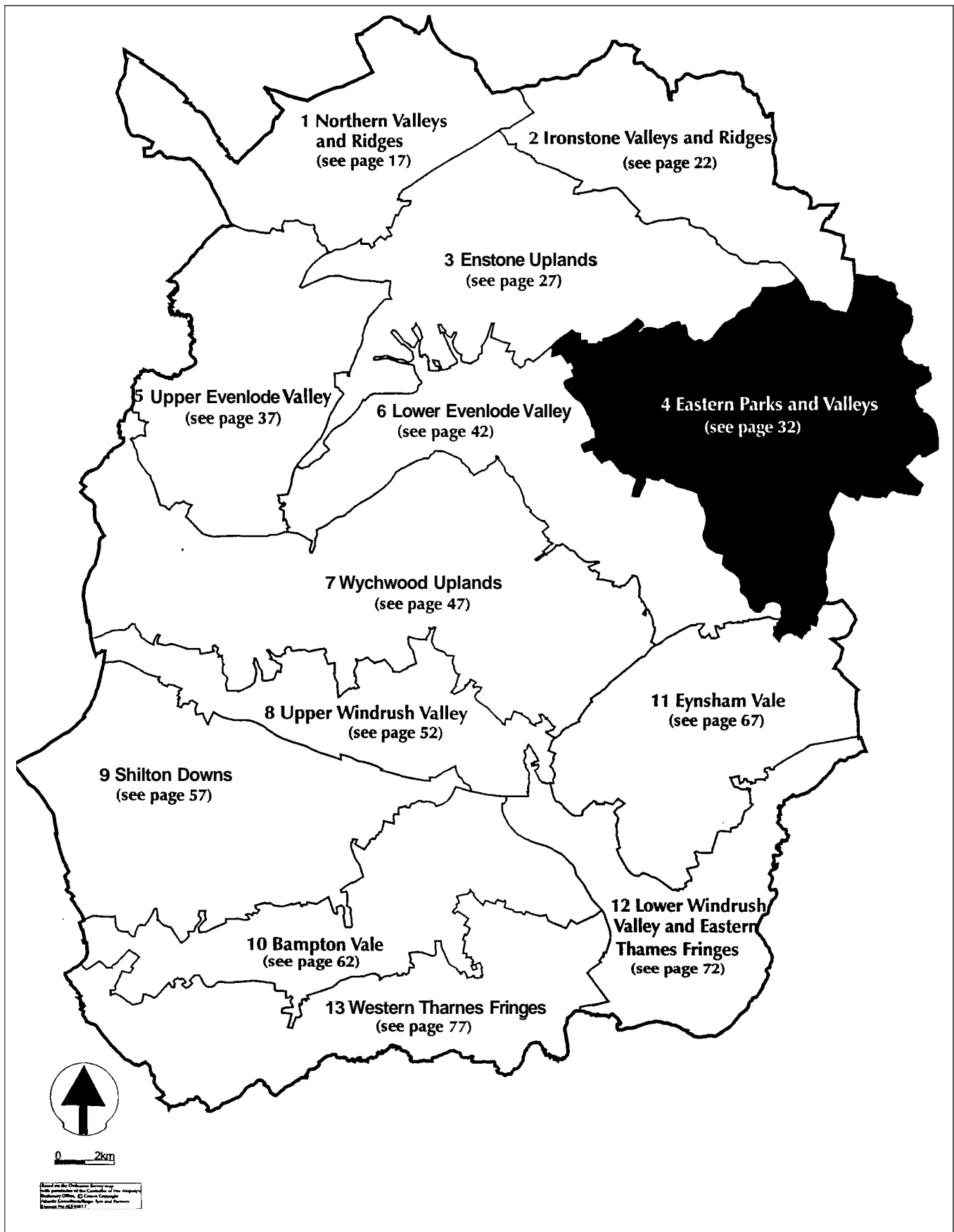
**APPENDIX 10.3**

WEST OXFORDSHIRE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT  
EXTRACT

# West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment



## 4 EASTERN PARKS AND VALLEYS



## 4: EASTERN PARKS AND VALLEYS LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

### OVERVIEW

This is an area of rolling limestone landscape which is heavily dissected by the valleys of the Glyme, Dorn and Cherwell and distinguished by a particular concentration of formal parks, designed landscapes and estate farmland (Blenheim, Ditchley, Glympton, Kiddington, Rousham, etc). The parks have extensive areas of woodland and the landscape generally has a well-managed character typical of large estates.

### GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

This area forms the lower, easternmost part of the Oolitic Limestone plateau. In common with the Enstone Uplands which adjoin it to the west, it forms a smooth, elevated and gently rolling landscape which is sharply dissected by a number of steep-sided river valleys. These include the deep, narrow and winding valley of the River Glyme and its minor tributaries, the Dorn Valley which follows a major fault line, and parts of the much larger Cherwell Valley along its eastern edge.

To the west of the Clyme Valley, geology is dominated by the Great Oolitic Limestone. However, to the east around Tackley it is capped by Cornbrash Limestone and Oxford Clay, while the underlying Lias Clays are exposed within the Cherwell Valley.

### LANDCOVER

Geology is reflected in vegetation character, with intensive arable farming on the limestone and by the presence of woodland and remnant heath on the heavier, less workable soils of the Oxford Clay. Across much of this area, however, the natural patterns of vegetation have been masked by the designed landscapes of formal parks and estates, including the magnificent picturesque landscapes of **Blenheim Palace and Rousham** as well as Ditchley Park and lesser known, smaller parks at Kiddington, Clympton and Tackley. Surrounding these parks, the wider estate landscape is dominated by extensive woodland and tree planting, which give the area its heavily wooded character.

### LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

The parkland and estate landscapes are the dominant feature of this area, creating a large-scale mosaic of woodland and farmland within which are set the mansions and formal elements of the designed parkland landscape. However, a number of different local landscape types have been identified within the area, the key characteristics of which are summarised below.

#### Valley landscapes

##### *Minor valley*

- small-scale tributary valleys which dissect plateaux and valley-sides and connect with major valleys;
- pronounced v-shaped profile with steep sides and absence of flat valley floor;
- watercourse often inconspicuous or absent (eg. dry or winterbourne valleys on limestone);
- shallower profile at upper end with few trees or hedges and a more open character;
- steeper valley profile at lower end of valley, with sides typically occupied by scrub, trees and occasionally woods;
- enclosed, intimate character created by valley form and vegetation cover;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

##### *Valley floor farmland*

- distinctive flat valley floor;
- predominantly permanent pasture but with **pockets of** cultivated land;
- riparian character, with strong pattern of ditches often lined by willow;
- prone to winter flooding;
- landscape structure provided by lines and groups of mature trees, with willow and alder conspicuous;
- **intimate, semi-enclosed and pastoral** character;
- moderate to low intervisibility, with some open views into the valley from above and some filtered longer views along the valley floor.

### ***Semi-enclosed valley-side farmland***

- distinctive sloping, and typically convex, valley-side landform;
- e mixed pattern of land use and strong structure of hedgerows, trees and woodland;
- e more enclosed character with low intervisibility along the valley sides but prominent in views from within and across the valley.

### Limestone wolds landscapes

#### ***Open limestone wolds***

- e large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- e typically large or very large fields, with rectilinear pattern of dry-stone walls (typical of later enclosures and often in poor condition) and weak hedgerows, with frequent gaps and very few trees;
- productive farmland predominantly under intensive arable cultivation;
- e thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- e very open and exposed character;
- e distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky and sweeping views across surrounding areas;
- e high intervisibility.

#### ***Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (large-scale)***

- large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- land use dominated by intensive arable cultivation with only occasional pasture;
- generally large-scale fields with rectilinear boundaries formed by dry-stone walls and low hawthorn hedges with occasional trees, **typical** of later enclosures;
- some visual containment provided by large blocks and belts of woodland creating a semi-enclosed character;
- thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- ash, hazel, field maple etc. conspicuous in hedgerows;
- distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky;
- moderate intervisibility.

### **Parkland landscapes**

#### ***Parkland***

- e formal, designed landscape and grounds surrounding large country houses;
- distinctive formal landscape features, including avenues, free-standing mature trees in pasture, clumps and blocks of woodland, exotic tree species, formal structures and boundary features;
- planting and landscape character generally unrelated to surrounding areas;
- distinctively rural, picturesque and pastoral character;
- e mature woodland and tree cover with typically enclosed character;
- low intervisibility.

#### ***Estate farmland***

- well-managed farmland associated with large country estates, often lying beyond formal parkland boundaries;
- distinctively well-treed character, with extensive mature woodland blocks, belts and copses (often managed for game), lines of mature trees (predominantly oak) within hedgerows, along estate boundaries and roads, estate fencing (railings and post and rail) and other estate features or buildings;
- large-scale pattern of fields, typically bounded by belts of woodland or lines of mature trees;
- land use predominantly arable but with some areas of permanent pasture;
- enclosed, secluded and private character;
- moderate to low intervisibility

## SETTLEMENT PATTERN

The pattern of settlement in this area has not only been influenced by physical landscape factors but also by the historic development of the major parklands and estates which dominate the area.

Although prehistoric and **Roman** settlers occupied and farmed large parts of the limestone uplands, it is the river valleys which were most favoured by Saxon and later settlers for their shelter and ready source of water. Most of the surviving settlements are, therefore, located within the main valley systems of the River Glyme, Dorn and Cherwell, typically clustered in the valley bottoms (eg. Glympton) although some have since grown up the valley sides (eg. Wootton).

The principal settlement of the area is Woodstock, which owes its existence to a hunting lodge for the use of Saxon Kings within the surrounding Wychwood Forest. The old town occupies the sides of the Glyme Valley but New Woodstock was built on the higher ground to the south as a medieval new town to serve the Royal Palace. Other hamlets and farms were established above the river valleys as part of large country estates, such as at Ditchley and Glympton.

## SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

As elsewhere in the Cotswolds, the most dominant landscape influence is the consistent use of **local** Oolitic limestone as a building and walling material, with roofs typically constructed of stone slates from the nearby Stonesfield quarries.

Settlement form is influenced **by** landform, with buildings typically clustered in the valley bottom, often on either side of a ford or bridge as at Glympton, or lining a single road up the valley-side as at Wootton. The 'closed' villages of the major estates (eg. Glympton and Tackley) tend to have a particularly unified and ordered form and character. The form of the latter, however, has been influenced by its proximity to the railway line and development next to the station during this century.

## KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

- mansions and formal parkland features of the eighteenth century designed landscapes of Blenheim Palace, Rousham and Ditchley Park;
- attractive stone buildings within Conservation Areas and in open countryside, including manor houses, churches and farm buildings.

## 4: EASTERN PARKS AND VALLEYS LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

### LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

This character area is outside the Cotswolds AONB but it lies within an Area of High Landscape Value and includes some of the most outstanding designed landscapes in the country and a number of other features of conservation significance which contribute to its overall value, including:

- Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest at Blenheim Palace, Ditchley Park, Rousham and Kiddington;
- Conservation Areas at Woodstock, Wootton and Tackley;
- three Sites of Special Scientific Interest, a **Local** Nature Reserve and extensive remnants of ancient semi-natural woodland;
- a significant concentration of Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the Ditchley area.

The Eastern Parks and Valleys contains large areas of high quality, unspoilt and valued landscape with a rural and attractive character. There are a few detracting influences around settlements and main roads but the localised variations in quality and condition are mainly related to the effects of agricultural land management practice. Different strategies for management and enhancement are shown in Figure 6.

The principal factors that potentially threaten landscape quality in this area are:

- agricultural intensification, particularly the conversion of grassland to arable, the removal of natural vegetation cover and the poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries;
- loss of semi-natural broad-leaved woodland or conversion to commercial coniferous woodland;
- **visual** intrusion of prominent **structures** such as communication masts and large farm buildings;
- 'suburbanisation' of rural settlements and road corridors.

### GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND ESTATE LANDSCAPES

#### Enhancement priorities

- maintain, and where necessary, restore historic parkland landscapes and features, including distinctive elements such as parkland trees, avenues, lakes, rides, woods, copses, boundary walls and structures;
- retain mature boundary and roadside trees and replant as necessary;
- manage and extend existing areas of woodland to maximise their wildlife and landscape value;
- plant new blocks and belts of broadleaved woodland within estate farmland to reinforce typically enclosed, well-wooded character;
- retain areas of permanent pasture and resist further conversion to arable.

#### Development sensitivities

- historic parkland landscapes are of exceptional landscape value and extremely sensitive to development;
- estate farmland is also generally of high scenic quality and sensitive to development, although its mature structure of woodland makes it more visually robust

### GUIDELINES FOR LIMESTONE WOLDS LANDSCAPES

#### Enhancement priorities

- rebuild and maintain drystone walls;
- retain and replant hedgerows and introduce more hedgerow trees, using native species typical of the limestone (eg. ash, field maple etc.);
- plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a mosaic of woodland and farmland;
- where possible, retain areas of existing permanent pasture, encourage conversion of

- arable land to pasture and discourage further field enlargement;
- encourage less intensive farming practices, the introduction of 'natural' vegetation cover in field headlands and margins, improve appearance and wildlife value of 'set-aside' land;
- repair and maintain traditional stone buildings in the landscape.

### Development sensitivities

- elevated, open limestone wold landscapes are very visually exposed and particularly sensitive to development;
- the large-scale semi-enclosed limestone wolds landscapes are also visually sensitive and any development would need to be closely and sensitively integrated with existing buildings or contained within a strong landscape structure;
- open landscapes are particularly sensitive to tall or prominent structures, such as communications masts, and large buildings.

## GUIDELINES FOR VALLEY LANDSCAPES

### Enhancement priorities

- retain and manage areas of floodplain pasture and meadows and encourage conversion of arable fields to grassland;
- reintroduce traditional practices of willow pollarding and ditch management;
- introduce new planting along watercourses and in lines and groups within valley floor, using typical riparian species such as willow and alder;
- where possible, introduce new woodland planting along the valley-sides and within minor valleys to reinforce their enclosed, intimate character.

### Development sensitivities

- unspoilt valley floor farmland and the minor valleys are of particularly high **quality** and sensitive to development;
- open valley-sides are visually sensitive and development would be highly prominent and exposed;

- enclosed valley-sides are also highly visible but may offer limited opportunities to absorb small-scale development within a strong structure of trees and woodland or with other buildings;
- all valley landscape types would be particularly sensitive to the introduction of tall or large-scale structures.

## KEY SETTLEMENTS

See Part 3 for key settlement study for:

### Woodstock



# KEY SETTLEMENT WOODSTOCK

(CHARACTER AREA: 4)

## A: NORTH OF WOODSTOCK

### Landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed valley-side farmland and open limestone wolds farmland;
- Clyme Valley attractive, small scale, semi-enclosed, well vegetated;
- Valley divides Woodstock from Old Woodstock;
- north of Old Woodstock much larger scale open farmland, weak landscape structure, predominantly arable, few trees, weak hedgerow structure;
- distinct boundary between urban area and surrounding farmland;
- few urban influences on surrounding farmland.

### Visual characteristics

- very limited intervisibility across the Clyme Valley, views filtered by mature willows;
- vegetation forms a strong landscape buffer to northern edge of Woodstock; soft edge between urban edge and valley sides;
- urban edge around Old Woodstock much harder, visible across open farmland to the **north** and east;
- views out from urban edge relatively unspoilt
- edge of Blenheim Estate a strong visible edge on approach from the north, glimpsed views into the grounds.

### Key sensitivities and considerations

- Glyme Valley important local feature close to the town centre and sensitive to change;
- Important to maintain landscape **setting** of the Blenheim Estate;
- Any changes to the urban edge of Old Woodstock are likely to be highly visible;
- Urban edge between open farmland and Old Woodstock would benefit from softening;
- special attention should be given to 'greening' approach to Old Woodstock on **A44**.

## B: EAST OF WOODSTOCK

### Landscape characteristics

- open limestone wolds farmland;
- east of Old Woodstock large scale open farmland, weak landscape structure, predominantly arable, few trees, weak hedgerow structure;
- ribbon development, including new houses on Banbury Road, blur the boundary between urban area and open countryside;
- former railway line now a strong landscape feature;
- despite ribbon development rural edge is largely unspoilt;
- farm on the urban edge helps reinforce rural character.

### Visual characteristics

- high intervisibility views across open farmland from Banbury Road;
- urban edge softened by mature vegetation;
- views largely unspoilt by urban influences;
- ribbon development benefits from a backdrop of vegetation along the line of the former railway;
- wall along Banbury Road a good local feature.

### Key sensitivities and considerations

- any changes to the urban edge in this area are likely to be highly visible;
- **resist** any further urban growth along Banbury Road;
- strengthen landscape structure on open farmland;
- maintain and enhance the soft urban edges.

## C: SOUTH OF WOODSTOCK

### Landscape characteristics

- open limestone wolds farmland;
- very flat, medium to large scale farmland; open but with a good hedgerow structure;
- predominantly large rectilinear arable fields plus playing field attached to the school;
- distinct boundary between urban edge and farmland, less distinct around the school;
- farmland largely unspoilt by urban influences;
- area surrounding the school more urbanised including road character, fences, playing fields lighting etc.

### Visual characteristics

- moderate intervisibility, views limited in a very flat landscape;
- distant views intercepted by intervening shelterbelts and small woodland blocks;
- thin vegetation on urban edge makes building silhouette prominent in places - inappropriate roofline reinforces this effect;
- character of A44 approach to Woodstock quite urban - lighting, signage etc;
- wooded character of the Blenheim Estate provides a strong landscape edge;
- views out from edge largely unspoilt although lighting on the A44 and other bits of urban clutter are visible south of Woodstock.



*Silhouette of urban edge of Woodstock viewed from A44*

## Key sensitivities and considerations

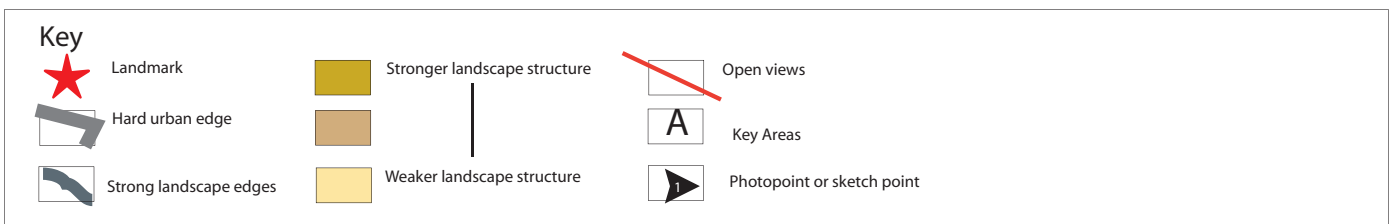
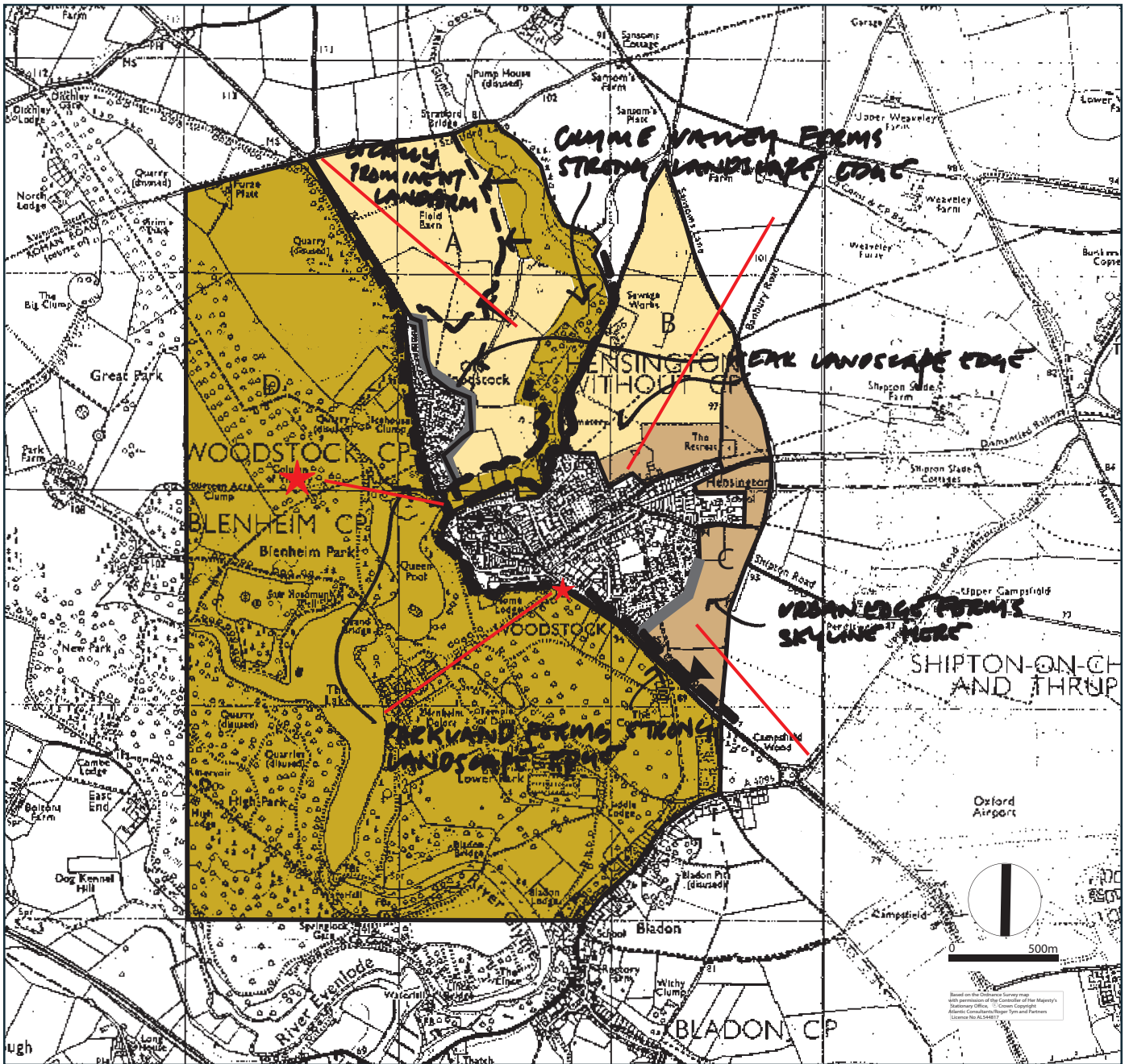
- any changes to the urban edge are likely to be highly visible in places, particularly from the A44;
- need to strengthen landscape edge to the urban area;
- existing woodland blocks and shelterbelts play an important role both as local landscape features and as filters to views;
- need to preserve landscape character of A44 approach into Woodstock and resist any further urbanisation of road corridor;
- need to maintain strong hedgerow structure on open farmland.

## D: WEST OF WOODSTOCK

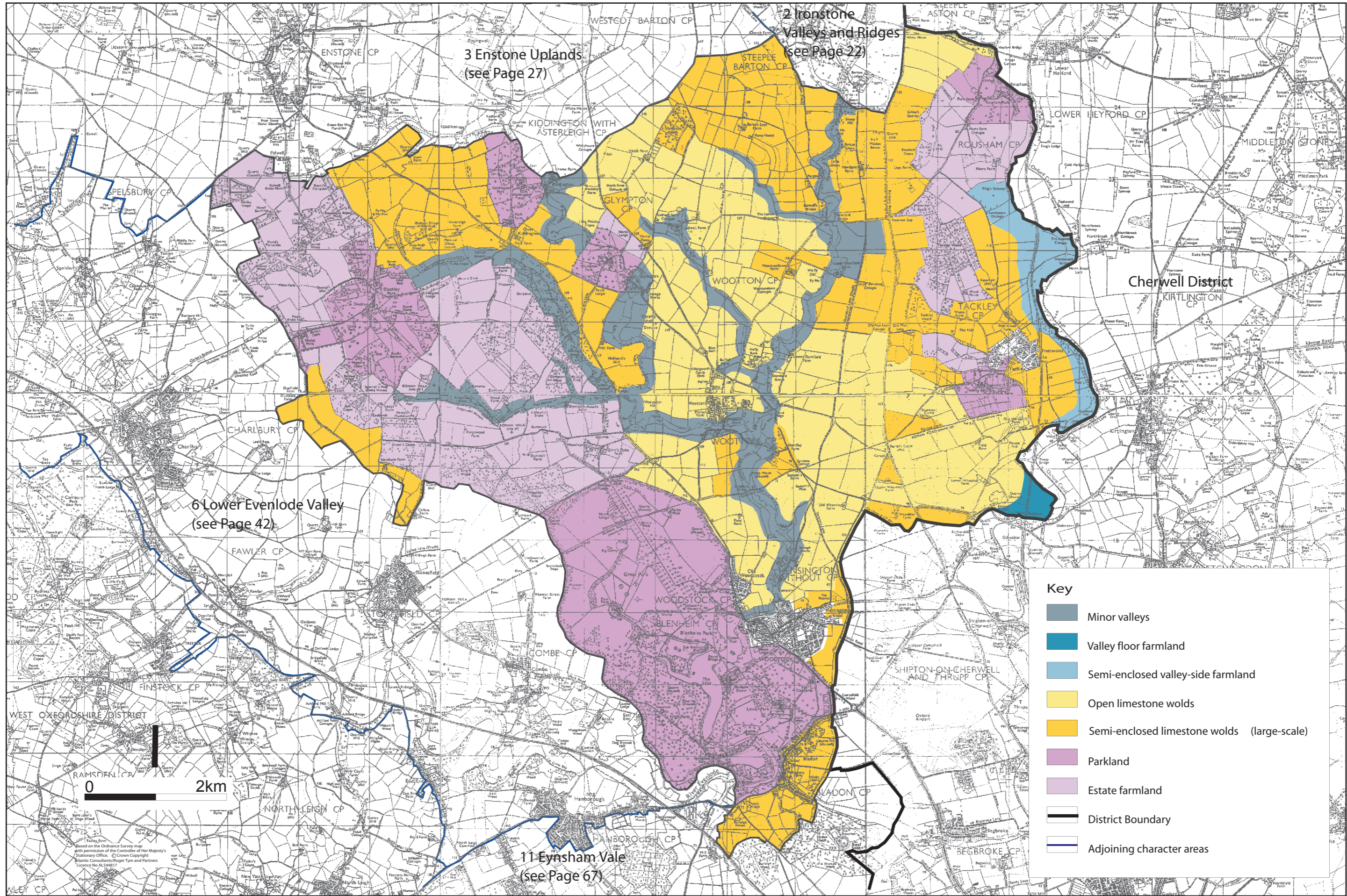
### Landscape characteristics

- formal parkland and designed landscapes
- Blenheim Estate is a Grade 1 historic park;
- at about 1000 ha, it occupies the entire area west of Woodstock;
- its landscape and visual characteristics are well documented and its current designation provides more than adequate protection to western edge of the town.

# Woodstock



## Key Settlements



**Key**

- Minor valleys
- Valley floor farmland
- Semi-enclosed valley-side farmland
- Open limestone wolds
- Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (large-scale)
- Parkland
- Estate farmland
- District Boundary
- Adjoining character areas