

- 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

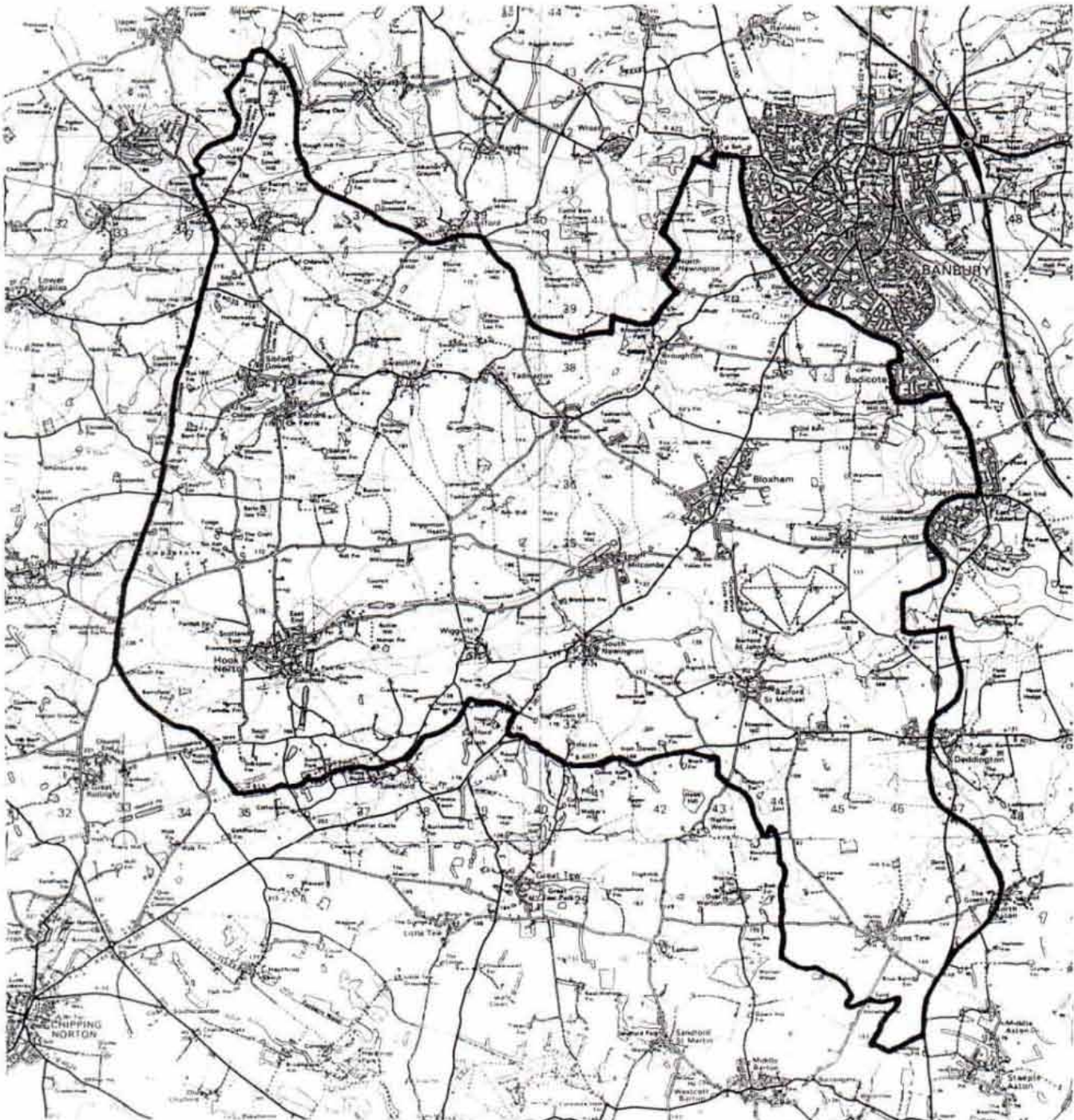
- 3.33 The Ironstone Hills and Valleys are found in the north west of the district, and is one of the larger character areas, extending from the Cherwell Valley to the Oxfordshire/Warwickshire county boundary. This is an upland area which forms part of the northern extent of the Cotswold Hills - indeed, 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.

Figure 10

IRONSTONE HILLS AND VALLEYS



SCALE 1:100,000

- 3.37 Rolling hills with rich soils are considerable agricultural assets and much of this area is in arable cultivation, the main crops being winter cereals with potatoes and sugar beet. In some areas, medium and large arable fields are still surrounded by hedges and the boundaries marked by hedgerow trees. However, much of the higher land and gentler slopes now have a fairly open arable landscape, with local areas where clearance has been so extreme that even post and wire fences have not been retained to demarcate field boundaries.
- 3.38 However, the area is riddled with steep sided valleys and narrow valley floors with a pattern of smaller fields and mixed farming, predominantly permanent pasture. Many hedgerows are unmanaged and growing out, and road verges sometimes include narrow stands of trees, which gives a well-treed impression, although the area lacks larger woodlands. Streams in valley bottoms are locally marked with old willows with some pollarding, and with wet pasture.

Variations in landscape character

- 3.39 Many of the steeper slopes have resisted mechanised arable farming. Here, a pastoral scene of small grazing fields divided by hedgerows prevails on the steepest slopes dominating the scene, the landscape being made up from a **strongly undulating complex of farmed hills and valleys (R4a)**. Wherever the landform levels out slightly, the small fields can be ploughed and crops of winter cereals grown. The resulting landscape is an intricate blend of mixed farming, with small variations in scale and local land use being closely related to topography, a tightly knit **small scale rolling farmland with strong field pattern (R4b)**
- 3.40 Lanes and minor roads run straight along ridges wherever possible, dipping sharply down the valley sides to connect with villages. Hedgerows are mostly dense, well grown barriers, although where arable farming prevails they are closely trimmed. The practice of hedge laying is still continued locally as a means of maintaining a stockproof boundary. Many of the hedges contain mature hedgerow trees, the dominant species being oak and ash, with beech on the limestone outcrops. However, the hedges have an extremely high elm component, and where young trees are regenerating naturally, this is the dominant species.
- 3.41 Wherever the landform opens out sufficiently, intensive use is made of the rich, fertile soils. In these **rolling arable landscapes with weak field pattern (R2a)** fields are large, hedgerows are often weak and gappy, reinforced with fences, and in some places field boundaries have completely disappeared. In one extremely open landscape at Wigginton Heath, new hedges have been planted, bringing some division back into an otherwise 'green desert'. Banks which would have been topped with hedges still remain along roadsides.

- 3.42 In the highest and most exposed areas, where hill tops stand up above the already elevated land, there is **undulating elevated pasture with remnant heath (R2c)** where patches of gorse, bracken and scrubby heath vegetation break up the poor grasslands. These patches contribute considerably to the character of the area, serving as a reminder of its essentially upland heath nature.

Special features

- 3.43 Some of the district's oldest features, the distinctive line of Iron Age hill forts, which top the hills to the west of Banbury, are found in this character area. They include Tadmarton and Ilbury Camps and Madmarston Hill, where the earthworks are still highly visible, although a further three hill fort sites are known. The bivallate hillfort at Tadmarton is the most impressive, although it is now bisected by a road and absorbed into a golf course.
- 3.44 Broughton Castle is also of interest. Built in the early fourteenth century as a fortified manor house, it remains one of the finest and most complete medieval houses in the country. The eighteenth century park by John Davenport includes landscaped grounds with a moat, while the late nineteenth century gardens were laid out by Gertrude Jekyll. The later picturesque parkland at Swerford, which lies partly within Cherwell and partly within West Oxfordshire, was influenced by Loudon.
- 3.45 Sunken lanes are a particular feature of this area, with steep banks rising up on either side of the roads as they dip down the valley sides. Occasionally, these banks are reinforced by drystone walling, many of which are overgrown by hedgerow plants.

INCISED IRONSTONE PLATEAU

- 3.46 The Incised Ironstone Plateau is situated to the north of the Ironstone Hills and Valleys. Both areas have a number of common characteristics, but the plateau landform is substantially different. It is a far less complex, unfaulted, complete unit, divided by streams which create a simple landscape of ridges and valleys which extends around the north-west of Banbury.

Landform and landcover

- 3.47 This area is geologically similar to the Ironstone Hills and Valleys with a layer of Marlstone Rock Bed overlying the Middle and Lower Lias clays. However, the area has a more straightforward topography, consisting of relatively high land forming a level or gently rolling plateau. West of Hornton and at Shenlow Hill the land rises to 200m, with gentle slopes falling eastwards towards Banbury. Tributaries of the Sor Brook have cut down through the plateau creating a series of roughly parallel valleys.