

Landscape Character

Assessment

For South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse

South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council

Final report

Prepared by LUC

September 2024



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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 In January 2023, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils commissioned LUC to prepare a Landscape Character Assessment covering the two districts (together referred to herein as the ‘study area’).

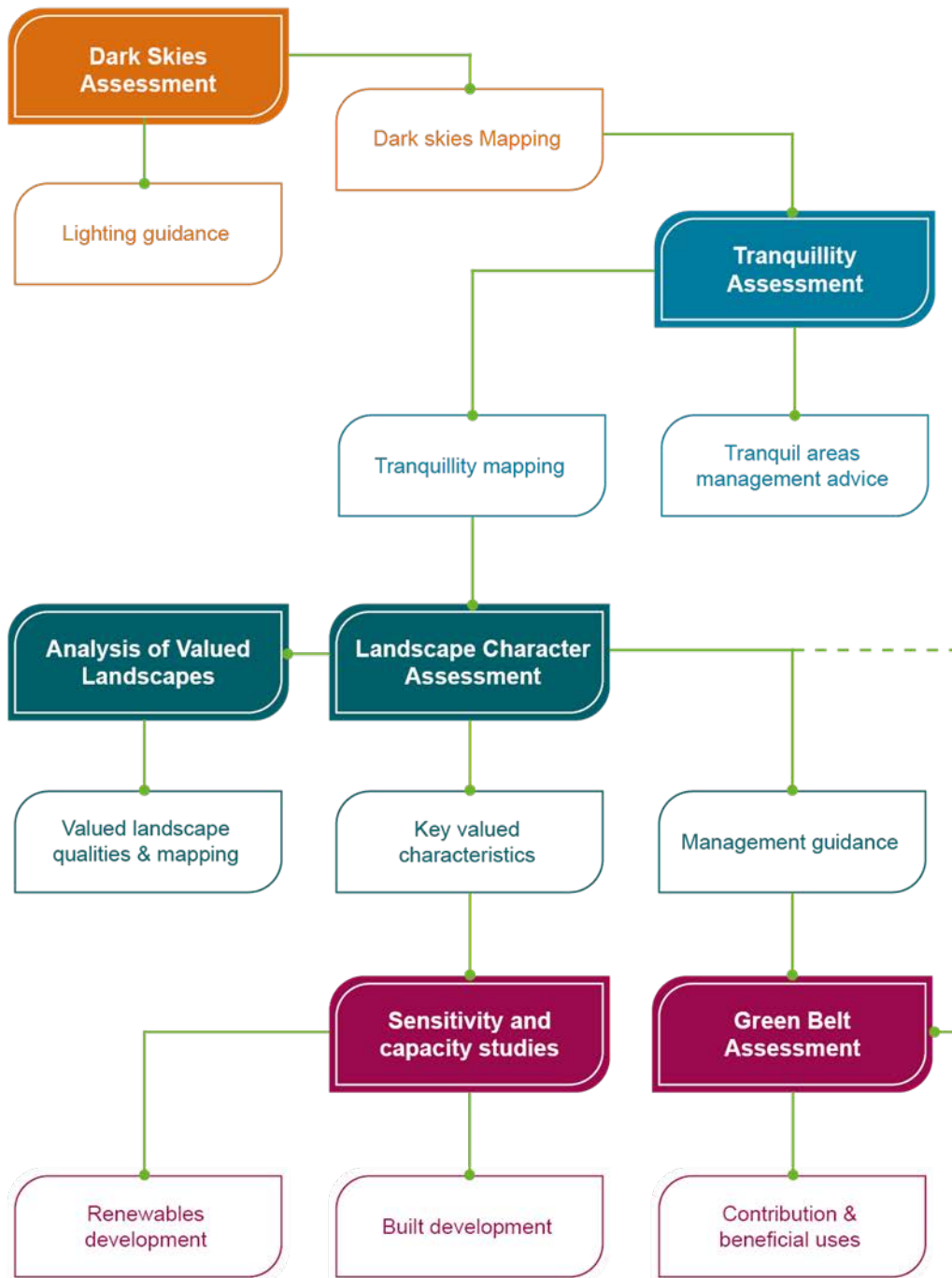
1.2 The Landscape Character Assessment is part of a suite of landscape evidence contributing to the Joint Local Plan that will guide development in the districts to 2041 as shown in Figure 1.1 below.

1.3 The aim of the Landscape Character Assessment is to create a comprehensive and up to date strategic scale landscape evidence. It provides a robust evidence base to underpin the production of the Joint Plan and to assist in the local planning process. It is intended to both inform work on policy development and development management, guiding development that is sympathetic to local character and the qualities/values of the landscape. It can help inform locational policies for strategic development as well as appropriate design and mitigation, providing a framework for more detailed landscape studies and sensitivity assessments as well as baseline evidence for more detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).

1.4 Wider application of the Landscape Character Assessment may include land management, notably implementation of agri-environment schemes, such as the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), and land use change to achieve net zero, including opportunities for woodland creation.

1.5 In summary, the document can be used to consider landscape character when considering any type of change. This includes opportunities for conserving existing character and strengthening and enhancing character, as well as opportunities to create new character.

Figure 1.1: Suite of landscape evidence bases



1.6 This study focuses entirely on rural and urban-fringe landscape and does not encompass consideration of the character of larger urban areas, including market towns and local service centres (such as Abingdon-on-Thames, Botley, Didcot and Thame) and larger rural villages (such as Berinsfield, Steventon, Watlington and Wootton). It is understood that a new settlement hierarchy, defining tiers of settlements, is being proposed by the local authorities, but at time of writing this has yet to be adopted.

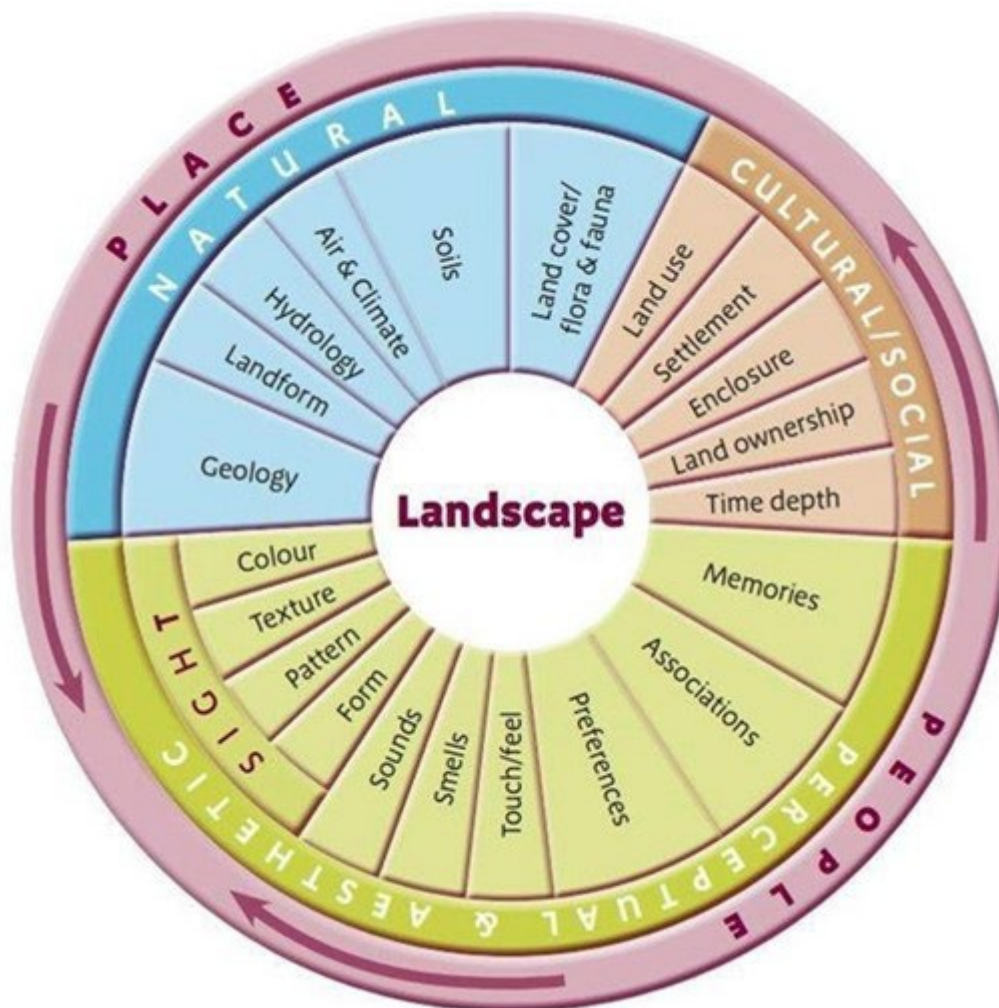
The Role of Landscape Character Assessment

1.7 The process of Landscape Character Assessment is described in 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment' (Natural England, October 2014) [[See reference 1](#)]. Within this document landscape character is defined as "a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse".

1.8 Landscape Character Assessment is the process of identifying and describing such variations in character across a landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of features and attributes (characteristics) that make different landscapes distinctive. The landscape is the result of the interaction between people and place which gives an area a local identity. The 'landscape wheel' below illustrates how the different natural, cultural, and perceptual attributes of a landscape combine to produce character.

1.9 Understanding the character of place and evaluating an area's defining characteristics is a key component in managing growth sustainably and ensuring that the inherent character and qualities of the landscape can continue to be appreciated. Understanding of character can be used to ensure that any change or development does not undermine whatever is valued or characteristic in a particular landscape and help guide positive change that conserves, enhances, restores, or creates local character.

Figure 1.2: The 'Landscape Wheel' (Natural England, 2014)



The European Landscape Convention

1.10 The European Landscape Convention (ELC) came into force in the UK in March 2007. It establishes the need to recognise landscape in law; to develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and planning of landscapes; and to establish procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies. The ELC definition of 'landscape' recognises that all landscapes matter, be they ordinary, degraded, or outstanding: "Landscape means an area,

as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”.

1.11 The ELC puts emphasis on the whole landscape and all its values and is forward looking in its approach, recognising the dynamic and changing character of landscape. Specific measures promoted by the ELC of direct relevance to this study include:

- The identification and assessment of landscape; and
- Improved consideration of landscape in existing and future sectoral and spatial policy and regulation

1.12 This Landscape Character Assessment makes a key contribution to the implementation of the ELC in the study area. It helps to reaffirm the importance of landscape, coordinates existing work and guides future work to protect, manage and plan the landscape.

Using the Assessment

1.13 A glossary of terms is included in **Appendix B** and guidance on how to use the assessment is set out in **Appendix D**.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Approach

2.1 The Landscape Character Assessment follows the method promoted by Natural England through 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment' (2014) which embeds the principles of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) within it. The guidance identifies five key principles for landscape assessment:

- Landscape is everywhere and all landscape and seascape has character;
- Landscape occurs at all scales and the process of Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken at any scale;
- The process of Landscape Character Assessment should involve an understanding of how the landscape is perceived and experienced by people;
- A Landscape Character Assessment can provide a landscape evidence base to inform a range of decisions and applications; and
- A Landscape Character Assessment can provide an integrating spatial framework – a multitude of variables come together to give us our distinctive landscapes.

2.2 The components of landscape character are organised into three main categories, reflecting the 'landscape wheel' illustration in the Natural England guidance:

- Natural;
- Cultural/social; and
- Perceptual.

Assessment Process

2.3 The process for undertaking the study involved several key stages as described below.

Stage 1: Review of existing LCA studies

2.4 An initial review of the existing 2017 landscape character assessments for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse was carried out, as well as the 1998 South Oxfordshire study. This review informed a reclassification of landscape character types (LCT) and landscape character areas (LCA) as set out in Chapter 5.

Stage 2: Pilot study

2.5 A draft methodology and pilot assessment were produced for comment by South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council. This indicated the layout, components, and level of detail to be provided for each LCA profile.

Stage 3: First draft analysis

2.6 Amendments were made to the methodology and classification to reflect comments on the draft methodology and pilot assessment. Following this, draft profiles were produced for each LCA including key characteristics, landscape descriptions, valued qualities and forces for change, and formative thoughts on strategy and guidelines.

2.7 This was primarily a desk-based exercise involving the collation of a wide range of up-to-date mapped information relating to landscape, cultural heritage,

nature conservation and planning. Data used within the report, including data collated in the GIS database is shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: GIS data

Name	Source
Base OS mapping at 1:25k and 1:50k	Ordnance Survey
Linear features, mass movement, artificial ground, superficial deposits, and bedrock geology 1:50K	British Geological Survey
National Character Areas	Natural England
Existing South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Landscape Character Assessments (2017)	South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council
Landscape Character Assessment for the North Wessex Downs AONB (now renamed the North Wessex Downs National Landscape)	LUC
Public Rights of Way, and access land	South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council
River features and flood zones	Environment Agency
Nature conservation designations	Natural England (national datasets) and South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council (local datasets)
Priority Habitats	Natural England, and South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council
Forestry	Forestry Commission

Name	Source
Heritage designations	Historic England (national datasets), and South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council (local datasets)
Oxfordshire Historic Landscape Characterisation	Oxfordshire County Council
Dark skies and tranquillity	LUC assessments for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils
Infrastructure	Ordnance Survey
Local Plan designations and policy areas	South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council
Local Landscape Designations	LUC assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils

Stage 4: Consultation inputs

2.8 A series of consultation activities were undertaken which presented the draft landscape classification and key characteristics, and focussed on gaining insight from stakeholders on:

- What is valued about the landscape and why?
- What are the main issues of change and why?

2.9 The findings from the consultation were used to inform further consideration of the draft landscape classification and LCA profiles. More detail on the consultation process and activities is set out in **Appendix C**.

Stage 5: Fieldwork

2.10 A systematic field survey was undertaken to review and refine the draft classification and descriptions. This involved:

- Verifying and fine-tuning the classification of the landscape types and areas identified including review of boundaries;
- Checking and identifying key characteristics;
- Checking aesthetic/perceptual characteristics;
- Taking photographs to illustrate the report; and
- Providing more detailed guidance in relation to changes observed on the ground.

Stage 6: Full draft report

2.11 The full draft report was produced, reflecting the fieldwork findings, any comments from the Councils on the first drafts and input from the Councils regarding strategy and guidelines for each LCA.

Stage 7: Final report

2.12 The final report took into account feedback from the Councils following issue of the full draft report.

Landscape Character Area Profiles

2.13 The Landscape Character Assessment is presented at an LCA level, with character areas organised within their respective LCT, in **Appendix A**.

2.14 Each LCT section begins with a brief description of the common elements that define it and a list of component LCAs, together with an overview map showing the location(s) of the LCT within the study area and its relationship with other LCTs.

2.15 The individual LCA profiles are structured as follows:

Summary of Location and Landscape Character

2.16 A summary paragraph explaining its location and defining landscape character is followed by a bullet point list of key characteristics. These summarise the combinations of landscape components which help to give an area its distinctive sense of place.

2.17 A context map (1:25,000 OS base) shows the LCA, and a colour-shaded topographical map, which also shows flood zones and watercourses, helps to convey its physical form and context.

Representative Photos

2.18 The list of key characteristics is followed by a series of photos, each accompanied by a brief description. These illustrate landscape components noted in the preceding list. Photos may be included elsewhere in the character area profile to fill gaps between sections.

Description

2.19 Bullet points list characteristics relating to each of the following ten landscape components (where applicable):

- Natural characteristics

- Landform (including geology and soils)
- Hydrology
- Semi-natural land cover
- Cultural/social characteristics
 - Land use
 - Settlement
 - Infrastructure
 - Historic character
- Perceptual characteristics
 - Views
 - Tranquillity (including dark skies)
 - Associations.

2.20 Comments on dark skies and tranquillity have been informed by LUC's Dark Skies Assessment [\[See reference 2\]](#) and Tranquillity Assessment [\[See reference 3\]](#) that also form part of the Councils' landscape evidence base.

Valued qualities

2.21 A bullet point list is provided for valued qualities. Each entry indicates why the quality in question is valued; this is associated with distinctiveness/ scarcity, condition or function. The latter relates to functions associated with landscape character, not to functions which provide benefits not associated with landscape character. So recreational value where landscape/views is a key element is a functional value. Biodiversity value is relevant as it adds to experience of landscape. Functional value of producing food or renewable energy, or storing carbon or water, is not.

2.22 This section is accompanied by two further maps of the LCA and its surroundings, showing landscape, natural heritage and cultural heritage designations. Where applicable, mapping indicates any Local Landscape Designations proposed in LUC's separate Valued Landscapes Assessment [See reference 4].

Forces for change

2.23 'Forces for change' are listed in bullet point format. These include changes that have affected the landscape in recent times, and changes that can be expected to affect it in the foreseeable future, including likely impacts of climate change.

2.24 Each bullet point indicates the causes of change and makes reference to any valued qualities that are affected. These are ordered to reflect the landscape components affected – i.e. natural then cultural/social then perceptual – although it is recognised that multiple components may be relevant in some cases.

Landscape strategy and guidelines

2.25 To provide guidelines to minimise adverse landscape change, or enhance the existing landscape, a strategy for the LCA is set out.

2.26 Recognising the carbon net zero target, the inevitability of climate change and the competing needs for land use, it is expected that landscape change will occur. All landscapes evolve and change over time. Strategy statements reflect this, rather than providing guidelines which just advise on avoidance of development or change. This includes consideration of sensitivities associated with renewable energy developments, with reference to the findings of LUC's separate South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Renewable Energy Study [See reference 5].

2.27 The strategy notes ‘target’ characteristics and valued qualities, with reference to forces for change.

2.28 Guidelines for each LCA are set out as bullet points beneath each element of the landscape strategy. Some guidelines are common to the LCT but others are specific to the LCA. They are a tool to guide development/land uses and environmental improvements in a way that understands and responds to variations in landscape character and which protects and enhances special qualities and local distinctiveness.

Website

2.29 The landscape character assessment will also be made available to view on a website. This offers interactive ways of accessing data and linking between different elements of the landscape character assessment and the wider landscape evidence base.

Chapter 3

Landscape Context

3.1 This chapter refers to the National Character Area context for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, to county-level assessments, to the current district landscape character assessments (that it will replace), to neighbouring authorities' character assessments, and to any other studies that are used to inform our analysis.

Relationship to Published Landscape Studies

3.2 Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken at a variety of scales and levels of detail. This Landscape Character Assessment is part of a hierarchy of landscape character assessment information cascading down from the national to the local level.

National level

National Character Areas

3.3 At a national level, England is divided into 159 distinct National Character Areas (NCAs). Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, history, and cultural and economic activity. There are descriptive profiles available for each NCA setting out information on landscape character, changes in the landscape and an assessment of ecosystem services delivered (Natural England, 2014) [[See reference 6](#)].

3.4 The study area lies within the following NCAs:

- NCA 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales extends east-west across both the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire in two bands, split by the Midvale Ridge NCA. It contains around 5,000 ha of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape (formerly the North Wessex Downs AONB) and smaller areas of the Chilterns National Landscape and the Cotswolds National Landscape (both formerly AONBs). The NCA is summarised as follows:

“... a broad belt of open, gently undulating lowland farmland on predominantly Jurassic and Cretaceous clays ... There are contrasting landscapes, including enclosed pastures of the claylands with wet valleys, mixed farming, hedges, hedge trees and field trees and more settled, open, arable lands. Mature field oaks give a parkland feel in many places... The area is dominated by watercourses, including the Thames and its tributaries, and there are also lakes associated with mineral extraction areas ... Watercourses and lakes provide important areas for wildlife and recreation. There are a number of major transport routes and patches of intensive industrial influence, including Didcot Power Station. There is little woodland cover (around 3 per cent) but hedgerows and mature field and hedgerow trees are a feature, and many watercourses are fringed with willow or poplar...”

- NCA 109 Midvale Ridge stretches east–west from the Vale of Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire to Swindon and covers the northern part of the study area, encircled by the Upper Thames clay vales.

“... a band of low-lying limestone hills ... It is surrounded by the flat lands of the Oxfordshire clay vales, giving extensive views across the surrounding countryside. It is a predominantly agricultural area with a mixed arable/ pastoral farming landscape ... The main towns are Swindon, at the western end, and Oxford, which lies across the centre of the area, but otherwise the settlement pattern is characterised by small nucleated villages along the top of the ridge and along the springline. The soils types are a mix of heavy rendzinas, stagnogleys and lighter sandy brown earths with small patches of sandy soils ... The unusual geology gives rise to habitats that are uncommon in the south of England, such as calcareous flushes and fens, calcareous heath and calcareous grassland ... The NCA

is notably more wooded in character than the surrounding Upper Thames Clay Vales NCA with about 9 per cent woodland coverage ... The continued expansion of Swindon and Oxford will present challenges for preserving the landscape character and biodiversity of the ridge but also opportunities for improving the provision of green infrastructure and access...

- NCA 110 Chilterns extends north-east to south-west and covers the eastern part of the study area. Approximately half the National Character Area (NCA) is designated as part of the Chilterns National Landscape and, a small area south of the River Thames, as part of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

“The extensively wooded and farmed Chilterns landscape is underlain by chalk bedrock that rises up from the London Basin to form a north-west facing escarpment offering long views over the adjacent vales. From the vales, the River Thames breaches the escarpment in the south at the Goring Gap and flows on past riverside towns such as Henley. Small streams flow on chalk down some of the dip slope valleys or from the scarp foot, passing through numerous settlements... The countryside is a patchwork of mixed agriculture with woodland, set within hedged boundaries ... Outside the AONBs there are major settlements that incorporate extensive urban fringe and growth areas, including Luton, Hemel Hempstead and High Wycombe... Opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy the outdoors are wide-ranging, including extensive rights of way; open access commons, woods and downland; Registered Parks and Gardens open to the public ... Arable farming is concentrated on deep, well drained soils found in the valleys, along the scarp foot and beneath the hills in the north. Nucleated settlements, often featuring historic buildings dating back to medieval times, are found in the valleys and along the scarp foot, as are the major routes ...”

- NCA 116 Berkshire and Marlborough Downs extends east to west and covers the south and south-west part of the study area. The natural beauty and special scenic qualities of the area lead to the majority of the area (97 percent) being included in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

“Vast arable fields stretch across the sparsely settled, rolling Chalk hills of the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs National Character Area (NCA).

There are extensive views from the escarpment in particular, punctuated by landmarks including chalk-cut horse figures, beech clumps and ancient monuments ... Historic routeways, including the Ridgeway National Trail, provide public access across this landscape....Heritage features are at risk from damage by cultivation and animal burrowing. Along the escarpment and steep slopes, limited tracts of hanging woodlands and species-rich chalk grassland can be found. In the valleys, woodlands are found on steep slopes, and settlements cluster along the valley bottoms ... Meadow and pasture in the valleys combine with arable farming and small woods to create a mixed agricultural landscape, defined by hedgerow boundaries.

3.5 The NCAs within the study area are illustrated on **Figure 3.1**.

County level

Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study

3.6 At a county level the Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study (OWLS) [**See reference 7**] is the current landscape character assessment for Oxfordshire. This divides the county into twenty-four separate landscape types, made up of individual landscape description units with a similar pattern of geology, topography, land use and settlements. Their names reflect their characteristic land cover. The following LCTs are identified within the study area:

- Alluvial Lowlands;
- Chalk Downland and Slopes;
- Clay Vale;
- Estate Farmlands;
- Farmland Hills;
- Farmland Slopes and Valley Sides;
- Lowland Village Farmlands;

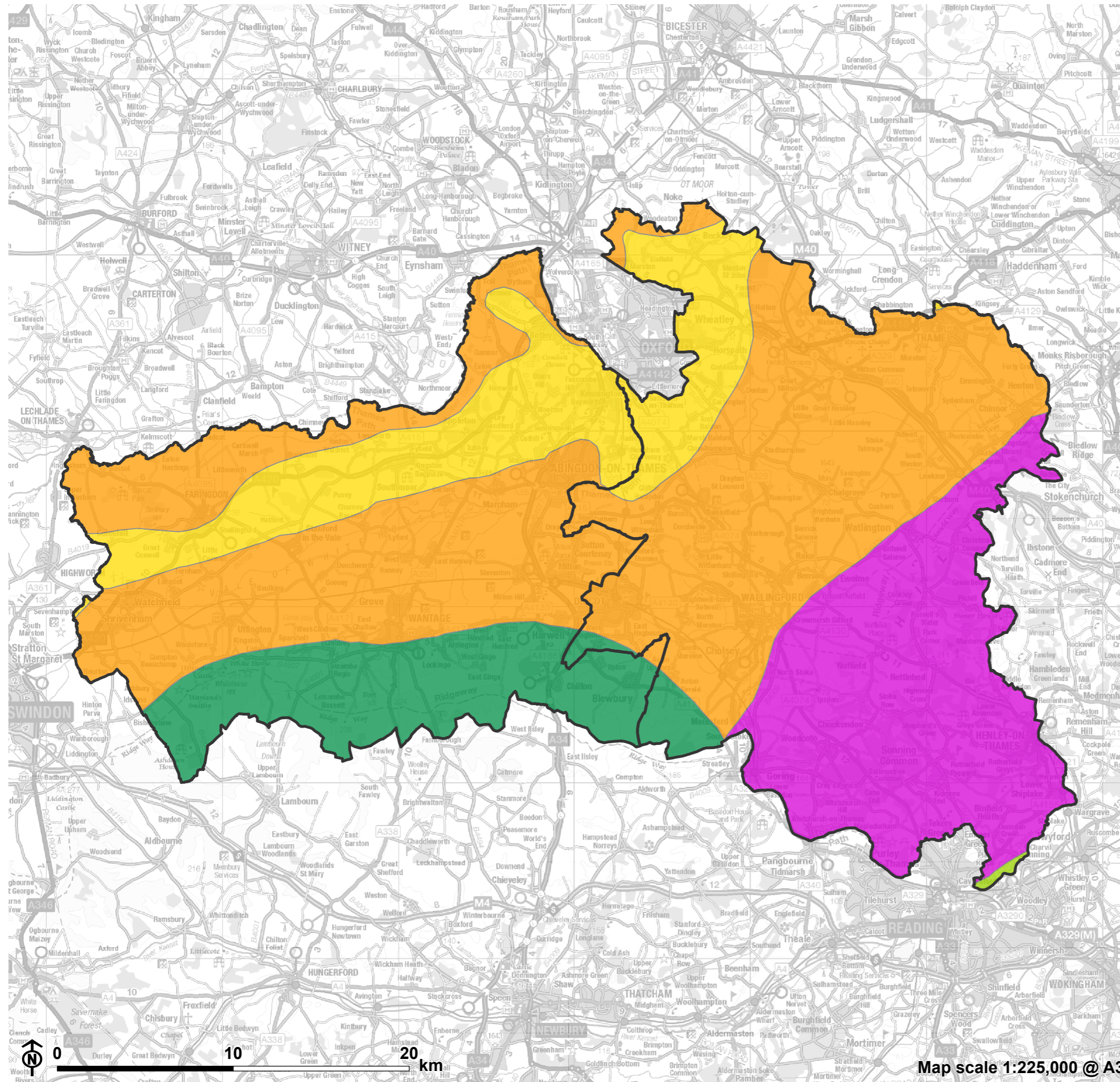
- River Meadowlands;
- Rolling Clayland;
- Rolling Farmland;
- Terrace Farmland;
- Vale Farmland;
- Wooded Downlands;
- Wooded Estatelands;
- Wooded Estate Slopes and Valley Sides;
- Wooded Farmland;
- Wooded Hills;
- Wooded Pasture Valleys and Slopes; and
- Wooded Plateau.

Local level

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse

3.7 The current study for South Oxfordshire is the 'Landscape Character Assessment for the Local Plan 2033' (2017) [See reference 8] and the current study for the Vale of White Horse is the 'Vale of White Horse Landscape Character Assessment' (2017) [See reference 9]. The two studies use differing approaches: the former defines 11 broad LCAs, within which localised variations in LCT (24 in total) are identified; whilst the latter identifies 12 broad LCTs which are split into a larger number of LCAs (84 in total). The 1998 South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment, forerunner of the 2017 study, still retains the status of Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), having been adopted as such in 2003.

Figure 3.1: National Character Areas



- District boundary
- National Character Area**
- 116: Berkshire and Marlborough Downs
- 110: Chilterns
- 109: Midvale Ridge
- 115: Thames Valley
- 108: Upper Thames Clay Vales

3.8 This landscape character assessment replaces the current studies including the SPG and aims to reconcile the different approaches by applying a consistent approach across both districts.

Neighbouring Authorities

3.9 Landscape does not stop at administrative boundaries but continues seamlessly into surrounding local authority areas. This assessment therefore sits alongside Landscape Character Assessments for adjacent authorities.

National Landscapes

3.10 The study area contains sizeable parts of two National Landscapes (formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or AONBs): the Chilterns and the North Wessex Downs. The locations of these are shown on **Figure 4.2**.

The Chilterns National Landscape

3.11 The management plan for the Chilterns National Landscape [**See reference 10**] describes the area as being “*a landscape of remarkable beauty and distinctive character with a unique interaction of geological, ecological and cultural heritage features*” that was “*designated to protect its special qualities which include the steep chalk escarpment with flower-rich downland, woodlands, commons, tranquil valleys, ancient routes, villages with brick and flint houses, chalk streams and a rich historic environment of hillforts and chalk figures*”.

3.12 There is no single Landscape Character Assessment for the Chilterns National Landscape, rather a number of county and district-based LCAs cover

the whole of the designated area. The Chilterns AONB Management Plan identifies four broad types of landscape in the Chilterns:

- Scarp Foothills and Vale Fringes – *“Gently undulating chalk slopes with chalk springs between the base of the scarp and the clay vale to the west. Mainly managed within intensive agriculture with large fields and relatively few hedgerows, this landscape forms a narrow band only a few fields wide, towards the north of the AONB, but widens as it approaches the Thames in the south”.*
- Chalk Scarp – *“The ‘spine’ of the Chilterns is the chalk scarp that runs roughly north-east to south-west along the western side of the AONB. A spectacular ridge rises high above the vale to the west and dominates views over a wide area. Combes and prominent hills, often locations for chalk figures, monuments, burial mounds or hillforts, form a deeply convoluted steep scarp edge which supports a mosaic of chalk grassland, woodland and scrub”.*
- River Valleys – *“The Chilterns contains a series of larger river valleys that cut through the scarp and dipslope. Arterial valleys run north west to south east and, create dramatic ‘wind gaps’ where they cut through the scarp, as at Tring and Wendover. Often asymmetrical in shape these valleys contain the internationally rare, aquifer-fed chalk streams. As natural corridors through the Chiltern Hills, there is a long history of travel from ancient drovers routes, turnpikes and canals to modern day road and rail links. A number of large historic houses presiding over estates and parkland, are scattered throughout the valleys while settlements have grown up associated with the water supply, woodland industry, farming trade and transport links to London”.*
- Plateau and Dipslope – *“A large proportion of the AONB is covered by plateau and dipslope as the land gradually falls away to the east and Greater London. Though less visible and striking than the scarp, this landscape forms a key part of the classic Chilterns landscape. The topography is complex, with areas of plateau dissected by long, narrow, often dry valleys. Extensive woodlands and arable fields interspersed with commons, villages, scattered farmsteads (often dating from medieval times) and designed parklands characterise the plateau. Commons, heaths and greens would once have been far more extensive. Many*

Chilterns commons are wooded or former wood pasture, with areas of heathland, acid grassland, ponds and other open habitats. Grazed fields can still be found on the steeper valley sides and valley bottoms where settlements often formed around water sources or stretched out along the valley roads”.

The North Wessex Downs National Landscape

3.13 The management plan for the North Wessex Downs National Landscape [See reference 11] describes this area as being “a visibly ancient landscape of great beauty, diversity and size. It embraces the high, open arable sweeps of the chalk downs and dramatic scarp slopes with their prehistoric monuments and beech knolls, the moulded dip slopes, sheltered chalk river valleys, intimate and secluded wooded areas and low-lying heaths with a rich mosaic of woodland, pasture, heath and commons.”

3.14 The North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment Report (2002) [See reference 12] identifies 4 Landscape Character Types that are within the study area:

- Open Downlands – “... the remote heart and core of the North Wessex Downs, with the dramatic landscapes created by the underlying chalk rocks being one of the defining features of the AONB. The subtle curves and undulations of the landform are revealed by the uniform clothing of cropped grass or cereals creating a landscape with a simple and elemental quality, accentuated by vast skies. The open, expansive views are punctuated by distinctive beech clumps crowning the downland summits, forming prominent and highly visible landmarks”.
- Downland with woodland – “... encompasses the downlands found in the east and southern part of the AONB, where extensive deposits of Clay-with-Flint overlie the Chalk. This is a landscape defined by contrast; of open rolling downland and enclosed woodland ... The landform is typical of chalk scenery with a strongly rolling topography, rising to gently domed hilltops and dissected by dry valleys. Sinuous woodlands cling to the steep slopes and, with the interconnected hedgerow network, create a strong

framework and sense of enclosure in some areas. Ridge top woods are a particular feature, and form dark wooded horizons providing containment to the views. These enclosed areas are juxtaposed with contrasting more open arable and pastoral summits, and those areas where remnant chalk grassland survives on the steep slopes of the dry valleys and scarps. The Bronze Age and Iron Age hill forts, strategically located on high summits are a notable feature of the landscape type and command panoramic views over the surrounding countryside”.

- *Downs plain and scarp – “... extends along the entire northern edge of the North Wessex Downs. It is defined by geology with the plain formed by the eroded surface of the Lower Chalk, creating a low, level surface extending as a ledge at the foot of the high downs, linked to a distinctive steep escarpment. The scarp slope descends abruptly to the adjacent Vale, except in the north eastern part of the AONB where the slope curves to the south and forms the backdrop to the plain. It is characterised by two of the most emblematic features of the North Wessex Downs: the prehistoric route of the Ridgeway running along the scarp top; and Avebury World Heritage Site with its unique concentration of Neolithic monuments.”*
- *Vales – “... defined topographically, and are distinct areas of lowland, almost always below 130m AOD. The transition to these low lying landscapes is often dramatic, marked by a steep scarp slope...The towering slopes of the adjacent chalk scarps forming a dominant ‘borrowed’ landscape setting that contains and encloses the Vales...Rich loamy and alluvial soils create a productive agricultural landscape, with a mix of both arable and pasture in fields bound by thick, tall hedgerows. Views are constrained and framed by the topography, rising scarp slopes of the downs and low hedgerows, producing a strong sense of enclosure. Woodland cover is sparse, except where linear belts of willow, alder and scrub accentuate the line of the watercourses that thread across the Vales. The streams, remnant waterside pastures and riparian woodlands form a lush ‘wetland’ landscape of considerable ecological value... The concentration of settlement is one of the defining features of the vale landscapes. Settlement includes compact nucleated villages and hamlets, with widespread scattered farmsteads, using characteristic materials of timber frame, brick and flints, sometimes with thatched roofs”.*

Chapter 4

Landscape Character Overview

4.1 This chapter summarises the main physical and cultural influences that have shaped the landscape within the study area. The detailed descriptions of different LCAs (**Appendix A**) highlight the key components that are of most significance to the particular landscape concerned.

4.2 The landscape has evolved through the interaction of the natural environment and human activities, through the combination of physical and cultural influences. Physical influences such as geology and landform, together with the pattern of settlement and land use are key determinants of landscape character.

Natural influences

A.1 The physical components of the landscape have the most tangible and fundamental influences upon its character, being the most permanent and least changeable aspect of its appearance. The underlying geology creates the 'backbone' of the landscape. The actions of weathering, erosion and deposition alter the landform, consequently influencing hydrological patterns and affecting the nature of soil conditions. This influences the nature of the vegetation and fauna that the landscape can support, and affects how humans have used and continue to exploit the landscape for agriculture, settlement and industry.

Geology and landform

4.3 The landforms that have resulted from geological and weathering processes are shown on **Figure 4.1**. The bedrock geological formations generally extend

diagonally across the study area in a south-west to north-east direction and includes the following:

- White Chalk Subgroup.
- Lambeth Group – Clay, Silt, Sand and Gravel.
- Grey Chalk Subgroup.
- Gault Formation and Upper Greensand Formation (undifferentiated) – Mudstone, Sandstone and Limestone.
- West Walton Formation, Ampthill Clay Formation and Kimmeridge Clay Formation (undifferentiated) – Mudstone, Siltstone and Sandstone.
- Corallian Group – Limestone, Sandstone, Siltstone and Mudstone.
- Portland Group – Limestone and Calcareous Sandstone.
- Lower Greensand Group – Sandstone and Mudstone.
- Wealden Group – Sandstone and Siltstone, Interbedded.
- Kellaways Formation and Oxford Clay Formation (undifferentiated) – Mudstone, Siltstone and Sandstone.
- Great Oolite Group – Sandstone, Limestone and Argillaceous Rocks.

4.4 Much of the study area comprises low-lying vales underlain by bands of Kimmeridge Clay and Gault Clay, characterised by flat to gently undulating landform and heavy soils. The vales are drained by the rivers Thames, Thame and Ock and their tributaries, which are surrounded by extensive, low-lying alluvial flats with naturally impeded drainage. Within this alluvial floodplain, however, deposits of terrace gravels produce areas of drier, raised ground more suited to settlement and cultivation. Along the southern edge of the vales, a band of Upper Greensand ('or Malmstone') is marked by more pronounced, rolling landform and lighter, calcareous and more fertile soils.

4.5 In the north the 'Mid-vale Ridge', an irregular band of limestone, rises above the surrounding low-lying clay vales and includes a series of low limestone hills that surround Oxford. The hills are composed of Upper Jurassic Corallian Limestones and Sands, which are widely used as building stone in this area. In

places, these rocks are overlain by Kimmeridge Clay and a capping of Lower Greensand which forms the higher ground at Shotover Hill, Forest Hill and above Garsington.

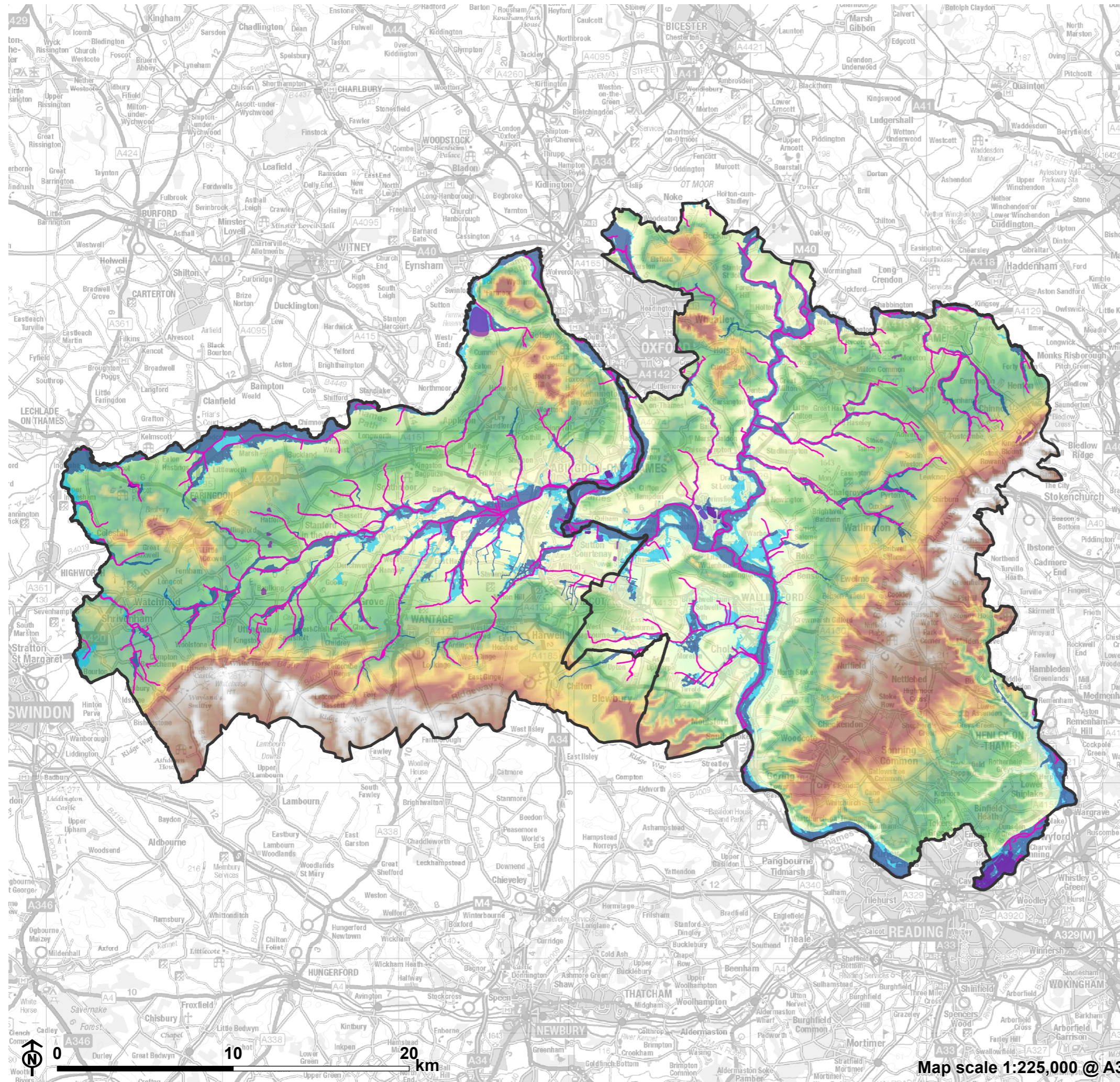
4.6 Across the south of the study area sweeps a broad belt of chalk uplands, part of the more extensive Cretaceous chalk belt of southern England. To the south-east, the Chiltern Hills form a highly distinct land mass with its steep escarpment facing the vale to the north and its dip slope descending gently into the Thames Valley to the south. Where the chalk is exposed along the escarpment and valley sides, the soils are thin and calcareous and support remnant chalk grassland and scrub woodland. On the plateau and dip slope, however, the chalk is overlain by extensive deposits of clay-with-flints, producing more acid soils which support extensive woodlands, medium grade farmland and even remnant heath. To the south-west the North Wessex Downs form an elevated plateau of smoothly rolling or undulating topography, incised by dry valleys or combes, often with scrub woodland on the steeper slopes. Soils are predominantly light, free-draining and thin except where clay-with-flints cap the chalk, creating localised areas of damp, heavier soils. The Sinodun Hills (Wittenham Clumps) form an outlier of the Wessex Downs chalk escarpment rising above the Thames and surrounding vales to the north. The River Thames cuts through the chalk belt at Goring and separates the Chilterns from the North Wessex Downs.

4.7 Traditional building materials closely reflect these broad geological differences, with local Wheatley limestone predominating in the Oxford Heights, brick and tile on the clays of the vales, and brick and flint (with locally grown timber) characterising the Chilterns and Wessex Downs.

Water

4.8 The main rivers within the study area are the River Thames (also referred to as the 'Thames' or 'Isis' north of the confluence with the River Thame) and its tributaries the River Thame and River Ock.

Figure 4.1: Natural - Landform and Hydrology



- District boundary
 - Watercourse
 - Surface water
 - Flood zone 3
 - Flood zone 2
- Elevation (metres)**
- 289.02
 - 200
 - 150
 - 100
 - 50
 - 0

4.9 The River Thames flows from north to south through central parts of the study area and defines its north-western and south-eastern edges. The River Thame flows westwards through the eastern half of the study area (South Oxfordshire District) between the village of Shabbington and the River Thames at Dorchester. The River Ock flows through the western half of the study area (Vale of White Horse District) between the village of Little Coxwell in the west and the River Thames at Abingdon.

4.10 In terms of flooding, areas of Flood Zone 2 and 3 located across the study area are associated with the main rivers and their tributary streams and brooks. Watercourses and flood zones are shown on **Figure 4.1**.

Semi-natural land cover

4.11 The study area supports a wide range of habitats, many of which are of international, national or local importance, and are recognised through designation. This includes six Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), 60 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), 210 Local Wildlife Sites and numerous areas of Ancient Woodland, concentrated particularly in the Chilterns to the south-east and on the ridge hilltops to the north and north-west. Ancient Woodland has been continuously present since at least 1600 and it tends to support nationally important woodland plant and animal species.

4.12 The SACs wholly or partially within the study area are:

- The Chiltern Beechwoods, part of which lies on the chalk escarpment between Chinnor and the M40, designated primarily for being an extensive *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forest that forms an important part of a grassland-scrub-woodland mosaic.
- Aston Rowant to the east, designated for *Juniperus communis* formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands and *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forests.

- Hartslock Wood to the south-east, designated for semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) and *Taxus baccata* woods of the British Isles.
- Little Wittenham to the south of Dorchester, is designated for great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*).
- Hackpen Hill to the south-west, designated for its unimproved chalk grassland and nationally important rare early gentian, as well as autumn gentian, fragrant orchid, frog orchid, horseshoe vetch, common rock-rose and dwarf thistle.
- Cothill Fen to the south-west of Wootton, designated for its nationally rare habitats which include alkaline fens, calcareous grassland, alluvial forests including *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* species, and scrub of varying degrees of wetness.

4.13 The SSSIs within the study area, with particular concentrations in the northern and eastern regions, include:

- Wytham Woods, consisting of a complex of Ancient Woodland, wood pasture, common land and old limestone grassland on a variety of soils.
- The Wytham Ditches and Flushes are also designated, containing species-rich eutrophic aquatic and fen flora.
- Fernham Meadows, to the south of Fernham, designated for its species-rich mosaic of wet fen meadow habitats, woodland and drier grassland.
- Little Wittenham SSSI located to the south of Dorchester, is designated for its great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) population.
- Swyncombe Downs SSSI east of the village of Ewelme is designated for its chalk grassland, scrub and bird communities.
- Culham Brake SSSI, to the south of Abingdon-on-Thames is a small area of willow carr and contains one of the largest British populations of the summer snowflake *Leucojum aestivum*.

4.14 There are two National Nature Reserves (NNR) in the study area:

- Aston Rowant NNR , which is also located within the Chilterns National Landscape boundary, lies approximately nine miles to the north-east of Wallingford. Main habitats within the NNR include flower-rich chalk grassland, beech woodland and juniper scrub.
- Cothill NNR is species-rich lowland calcareous fen, forming part of the Cothill Fen SAC.

4.15 The study area contains six Local Nature Reserves (LNR): Cuttle Brook, Ewelme Watercress Beds, Mowbray Fields, Watlington Chalk Pit, Abbey Fishponds and Tuckhill Meadows.

4.16 There are also numerous Priority Habitats spread across the study area including 'deciduous woodland', 'traditional orchards', 'lowland calcareous grassland', lowland dry acid grassland, lowland fens and lowland meadows.

4.17 Landscape and landscape-related designations are shown on **Figure 4.2** and **Figure 4.3**.

Cultural influences

Historic character and land use

4.18 The study area contains a wealth of archaeological sites, monuments and historic assets that reflect a long history of human settlement and activity. These assets, many of which are statutorily designated, play a large part in defining the character of the landscape and the individuality of particular settlements. Heritage designations are shown on **Figure 4.4**.

4.19 The basic physical structure of the landscape has also had a strong influence on patterns of human occupation and activity within South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse. In particular, slope, elevation and water supply have influenced the selection of sites for settlement, while the workability of soils and

their potential for improvement has influenced patterns of agriculture and land use.

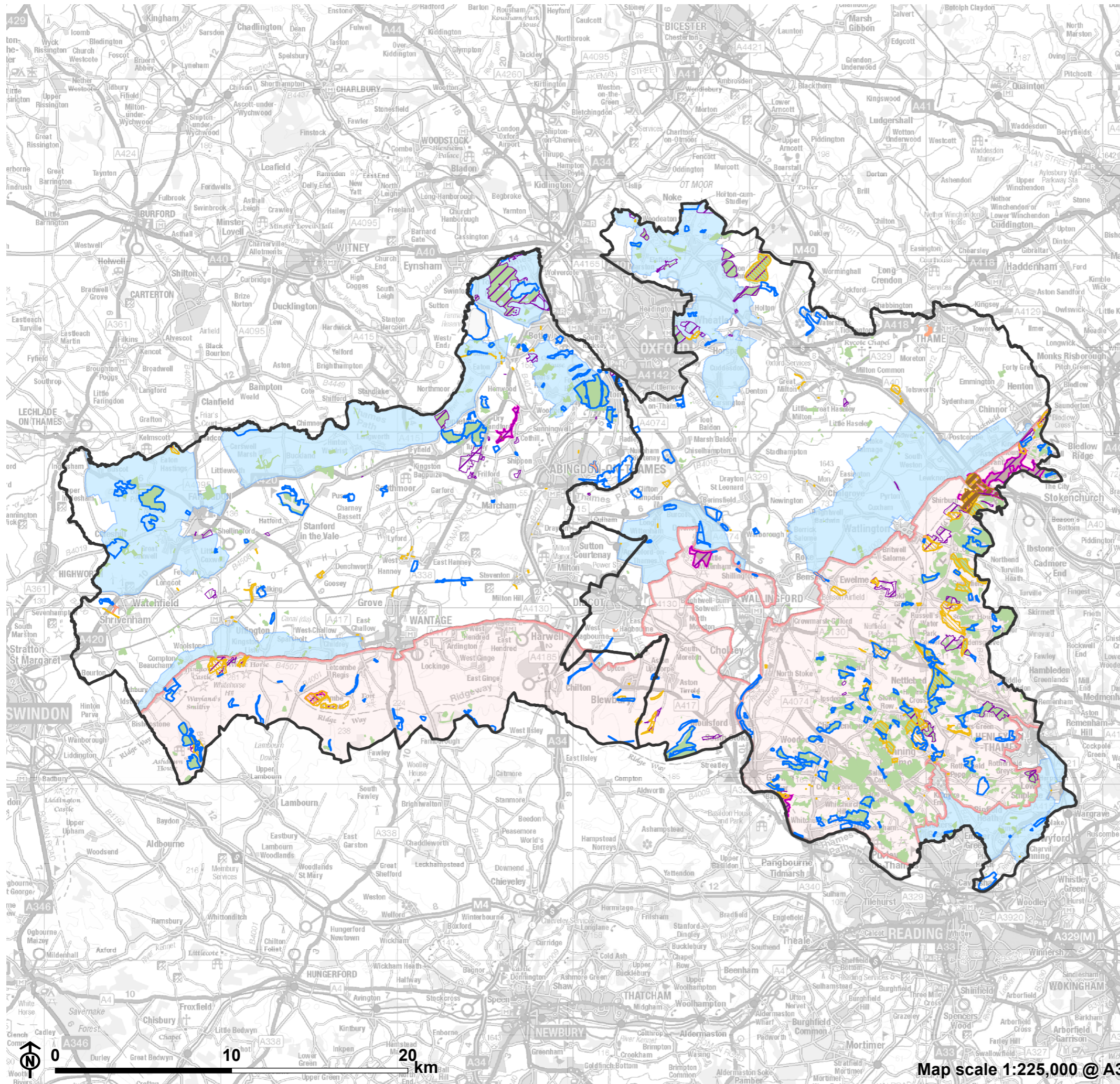
4.20 Prehistoric farmers were responsible for radical changes in the landscape, progressively creating clearings in the dense forests to create extensive open pastures or croplands.

4.21 Many of the settlements within the study area originate from the Saxon period, particularly those alongside the Thames (such as Abingdon-on-Thames, Mapledurham, Goring-on-Thames, Shillingford and the original Nuneham Courtney), those on the Hilltop Ridges (such as Wheatley, Cuddesdon and Faringdon) and those close to the vale edge slopes below the Chiltern and North Wessex Downs scarps (such as Watlington, Benson, Lewknor, Wantage, Childrey, Woolstone). This period of settlement established a pattern which is still very much in evidence today.

4.22 In the Chilterns, clusters of loosely grouped farmsteads were established on the plateau and new small fields were carved out of the extensive common woods, a process known as 'assarting'. Elsewhere, nucleated villages were typically surrounded by a farming system of large open fields divided into a number of strips, individually owned but farmed together.

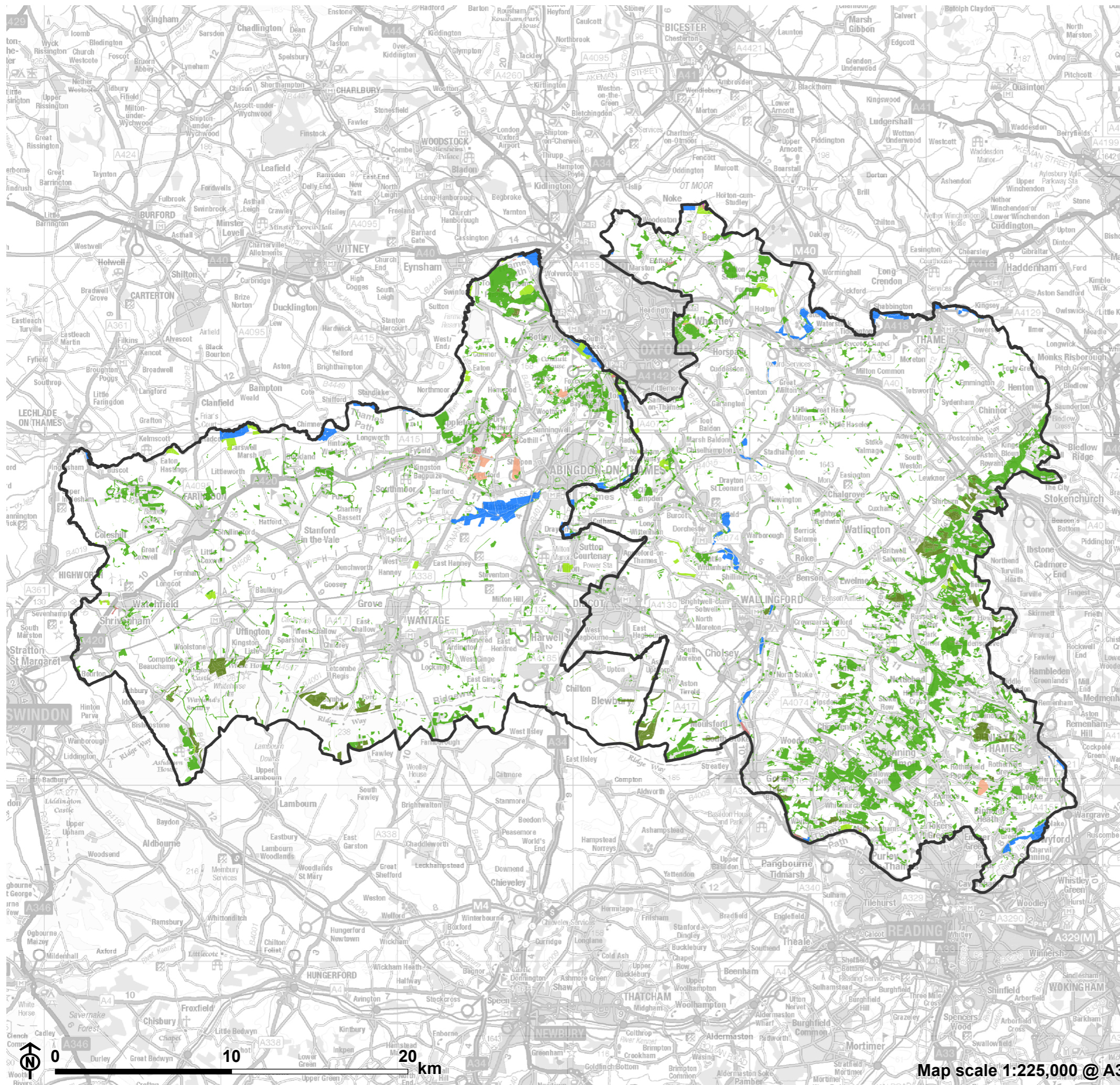
4.23 Open farmland was steadily enclosed by hedges, banks and occasionally ditches during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, these earlier and more irregular enclosures were largely overwhelmed by the major parliamentary enclosures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which transformed the appearance of much of the landscape introducing a pattern of square or rectangular fields defined by straight predominantly hawthorn hedges which remain today. New straight roads were also introduced with wide grass verges, replacing the narrow winding lanes. The Chiltern Hills largely escaped this revolution and still display many typical characteristics of 'ancient countryside' which contrast with the 'planned landscape' of the Vales.

Figure 4.2: Landscape and Landscape-related Designations



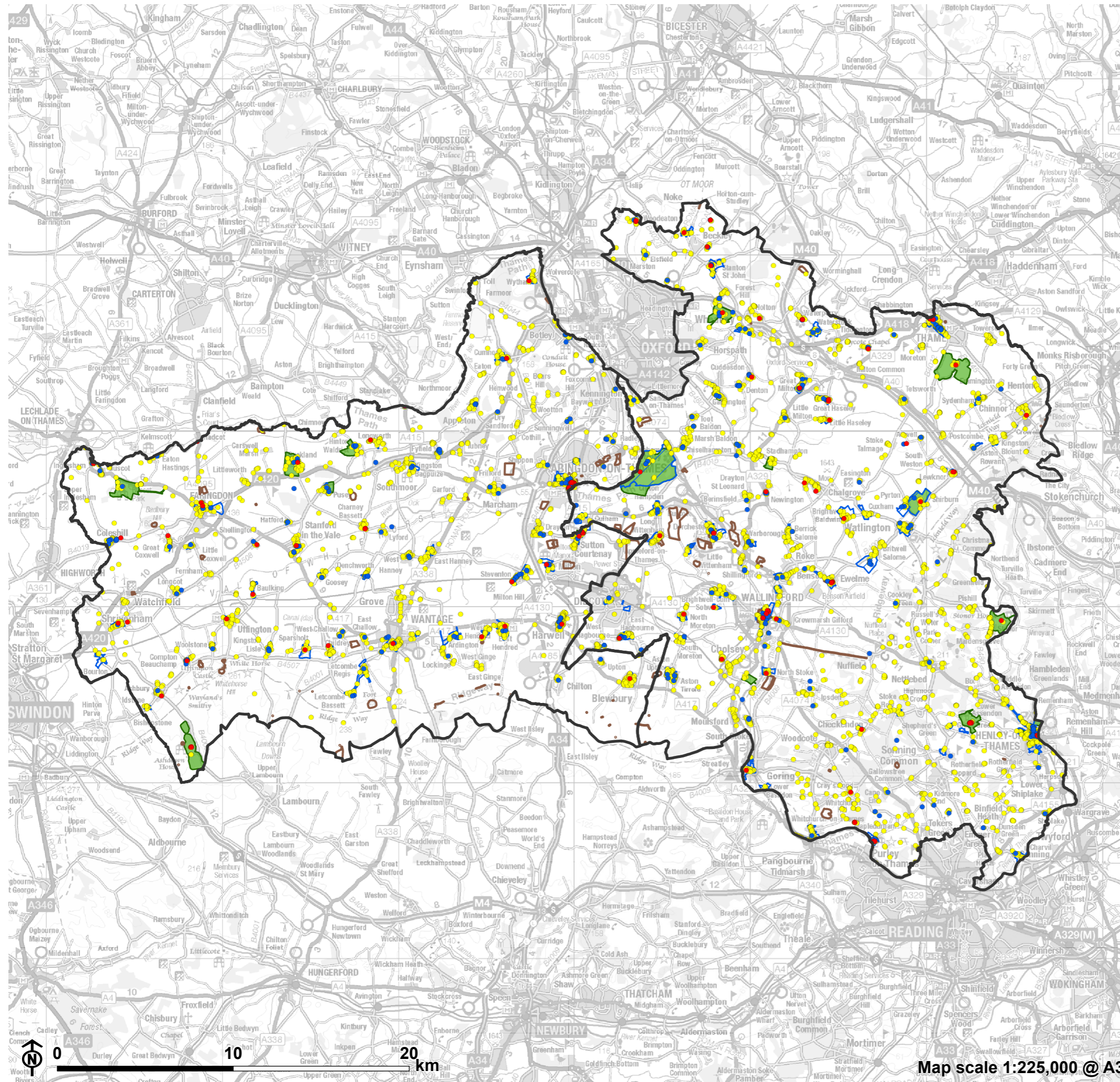
- District boundary
- CRoW access land
- National Landscape
- Special Area of Conservation
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- National Nature Reserve
- Ancient Woodland
- Local Nature Reserve
- Local Wildlife Site
- Local Landscape Designation

Figure 4.3: Priority Habitats



- District boundary
- Priority Habitat**
- Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
- Deciduous woodland
- Lowland calcareous grassland
- Lowland dry acid grassland
- Lowland fens
- Lowland heathland
- Lowland meadows
- Purple moor grass and rush pastures
- Reedbeds
- Traditional orchard

Figure 4.4: Heritage designations



- District boundary
- Scheduled monument
- Conservation area
- Registered parks and gardens
- Listed building**
 - Grade I
 - Grade II*
 - Grade II

4.24 The process of early enclosure through the Tudor and Jacobean period was accompanied by the development of grand mansions and manor houses, particularly in the Chilterns and Thames Valley, such as Mapledurham House, Hardwick House, Rotherfield Greys and Stonor Park. The formal parks which surrounded these houses had a considerable impact on the landscape but not so dramatic as the designed landscapes of the eighteenth century. These include 'Capability' Brown's dramatic transformation of Nuneham Park and a succession of beautiful parks created along the Chiltern reaches of the Thames Valley, including Mongewell House, Caversham Park and Fawley Court as well as the re-design of the parks at Mapledurham and Hardwick House. Other examples of manor houses and associated park and gardens are concentrated along the Corallian Limestone Ridge, including Buscot House, Buckland House and Hinton Manor.

Settlement and infrastructure

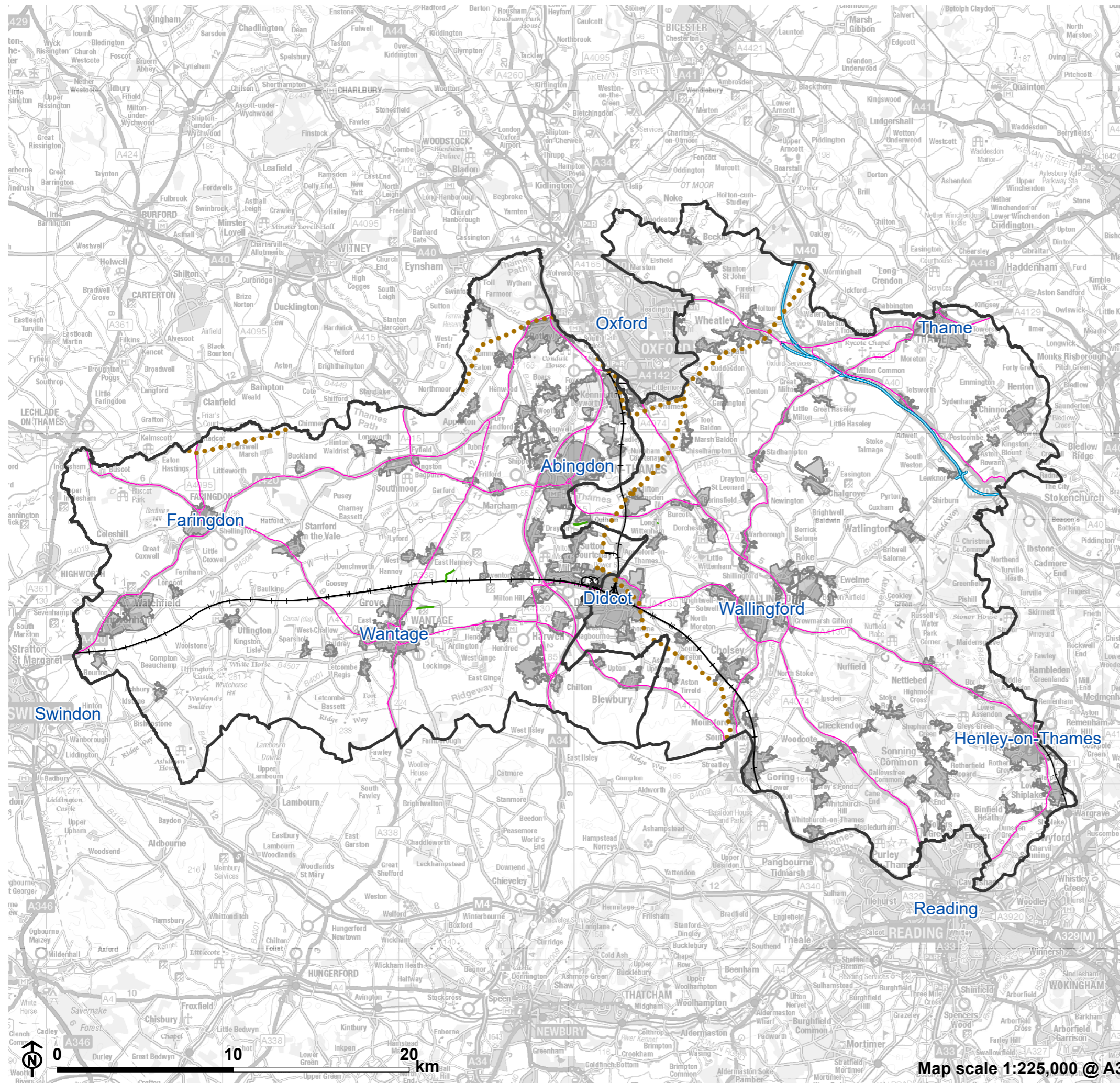
4.25 Changes to the landscape and settlements during the twentieth century have resulted mainly from the pressures of modern farming and the growth in demand for new housing and more efficient communications. The increasing mechanisation of post-war agriculture has obliterated many miles of hedgerows and woodlands creating more open landscapes.

4.26 There are significant pressures on the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse area to accommodate new housing. Improvements in road and rail communications and proximity to London were initially a key factor, but the districts are now home to a wide range of nationally and globally important science and technology businesses. Proximity to the major employment centres of Oxford, Reading and Swindon, combined with the qualities of the districts' countryside, makes it an attractive place to live. Some settlements, such as Didcot and Wantage/Grove, have expanded rapidly with a significant effect upon the local landscape character. Elsewhere, however, much of this pressure has been successfully resisted, particularly in the smaller rural settlements.

4.27 A less obvious effect of the prosperity of this area, however, is the gradual 'suburbanisation' and 'gentrification' of many of the districts' villages and a gradual erosion of local distinctiveness. The same effects are evident across the study area and are manifested in more 'urban' types of fencing, surfacing, buildings, lighting and highway treatments, which cumulatively detract from the traditional, rural character of villages and hamlets. Other changes in the landscape have been brought about by the construction of new roads, including the M40 motorway, and by mineral extraction, particularly along the River Thames.

4.28 The settlements and infrastructure within the study area are shown on **Figure 4.5**.

Figure 4.5: Settlements and infrastructure



- District boundary
- Main settlements
- A Road
- Motorway
- Overhead Lines
- Railway
- Canal

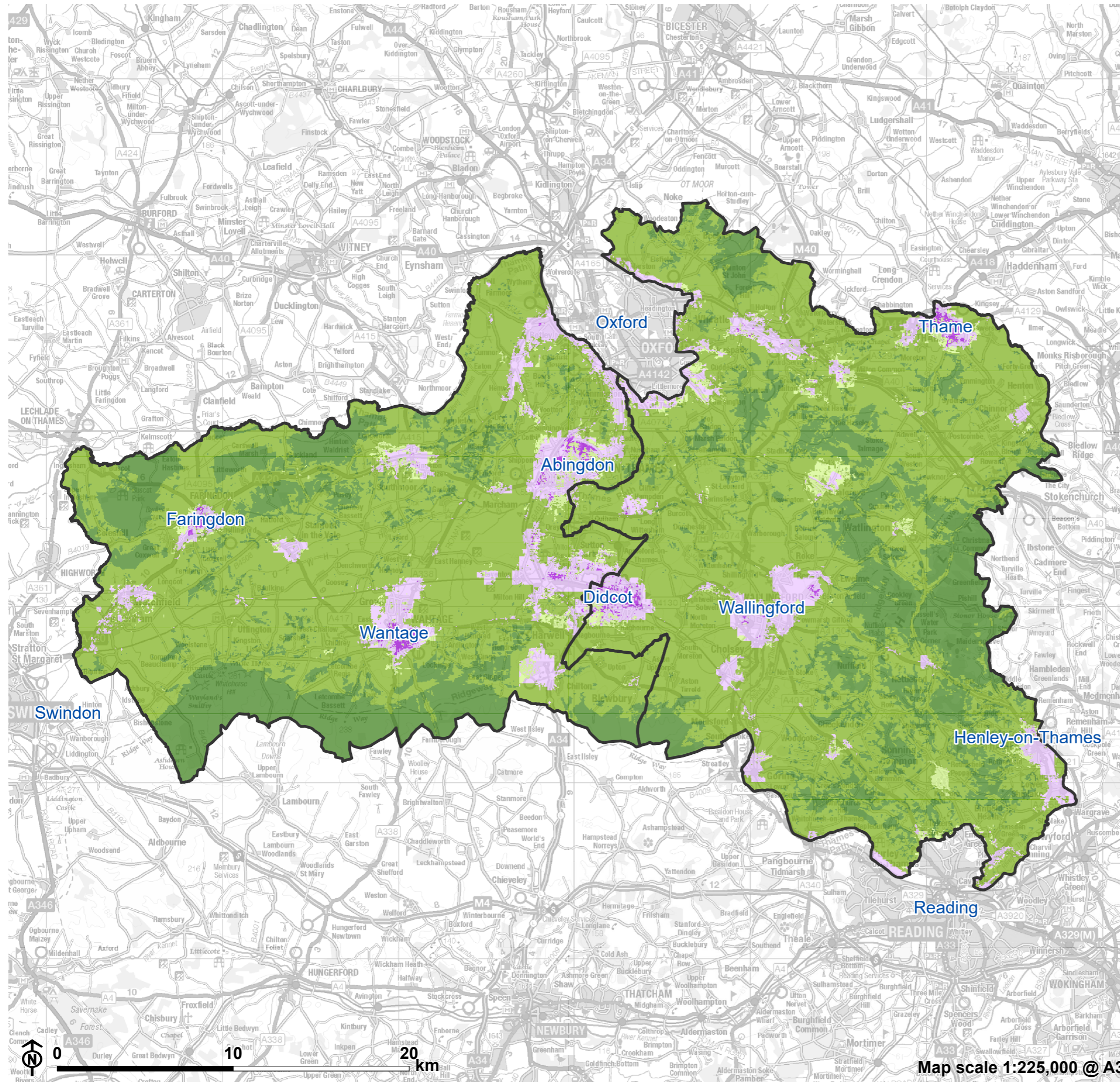
Perceptual characteristics

Tranquillity

4.29 Urban areas (including towns and larger villages, as well as the urban areas of Oxford, Reading/Caversham and Swindon which lie immediately adjacent or close by), along with transport corridors such as the M40 Motorway and A34, influence the character of the surrounding landscape. However, away from the settlements and main roads, many parts of the study area have an overriding rural character and enjoy relatively higher levels of tranquillity. The areas of higher tranquillity are particularly concentrated to the south, in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, to the east within the Chilterns National Landscape and to the north-east on and around the Mid-Vale Ridge. This is illustrated on the map in **Figure 4.6**, taken from LUC's Tranquillity Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.

4.30 The levels of light pollution and dark night skies within the study area vary. Light pollution decreases with distance from the main settlements. There are some areas of dark night skies free from interference from artificial light, notably within the National Landscapes but also in other locations both on higher ground (such as in the hills east and west of Oxford) and in the vales (including parts of the valley of the River Thames). The character and special qualities for both the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs National Landscapes include a sense of remoteness and tranquillity and dark night skies (relative to surrounding areas). Variations in levels of light pollution are illustrated on the map in **Figure 4.7**, taken from LUC and Hoare Lea's Dark Skies/Light Impact report for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.

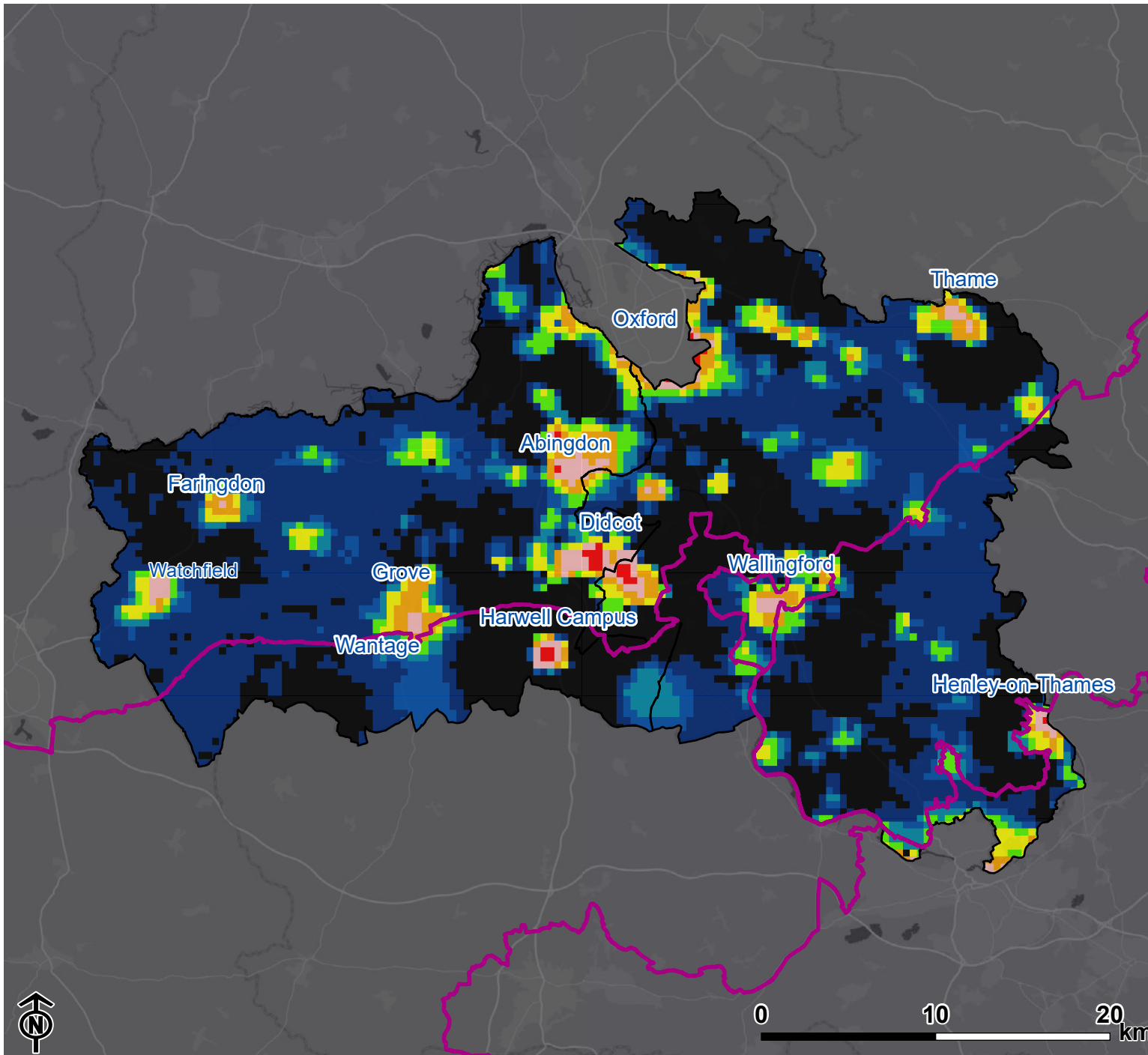
Figure 4.6: Tranquillity



- District boundary
- Zones of relative tranquillity**
- Zone 1: Area of high tranquillity
- Zone 2: Area of some tranquillity
- Zone 3: Area of mixed tranquillity
- Zone 4: Area of low tranquillity
- Zone 5: Area of very low/no tranquillity



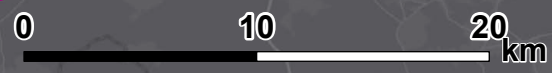
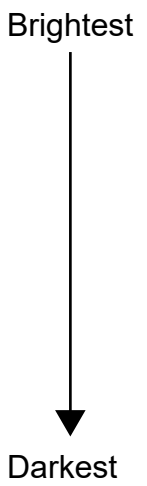
Figure 4.2: Dark Skies and Light Pollution



- South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse
- National Landscape

Night Lights (NanoWatts / cm² / sr)

- >32
- 16 - 32
- 8 - 16
- 4 - 8
- 2 - 4
- 1 - 2
- 0.5 - 1
- 0.25 - 0.5
- < 0.25 (highest 50%)
- < 0.25 (lowest 50%)



Map scale 1:325,000 @ A4

Views

4.31 Open often panoramic views are available from areas of higher ground over the surrounding lower-lying vales and river valleys. Notable views are available from the North Downs Chalk Escarpment and Escarpment Footslopes to the south-west, from the Ridge Hilltops and Ridge Slopes to the north, the Chilterns Chalk Scarp and Footslopes to the south-east, and from the Sinodun Hills (Wittenham Clumps).

4.32 On the lower-lying vales and river valleys the flat, large-scale landscape means that open views are frequent due to the uniform topography and limited intervening vegetation. From other areas, views are more restricted by vegetation and mature trees particularly in the vicinity of watercourses. The surrounding higher ground is often apparent as a backdrop on the horizon of views – the Corallian Limestone Ridge to the north, the North Wessex Downs to the south-west and the Chilterns to the east and south-east.

Figure 4.8: Looking across the vale from Whitehorse Hill



Figure 4.9: Looking north past Shirburn Hill from the Chiltern escarpment



Figure 4.10: Looking west along the Ridgeway towards Uffington Castle



Figure 4.11: Oxford viewed from Boars Hill



Figure 4.12: Holton Wood and Waterperry Wood in the vale east of Forest Hill



Figure 4.13: Wittenham Clumps, viewed over Didcot from Hagbourne Hill



Figure 4.14: North along the Thames from Wittenham Clumps



Associations

4.33 Many parts of the landscape have particular cultural associations relating to art, literature, events, myth, music, people, media, legends and folklore.

These include:

- The 'dreaming spires' of Oxford, as painted from Hinksey Hill by William Turner.
- The prehistoric Uffington White Horse chalk figure is a prominent feature on the scarp. It is used as an emblem by diverse organisations, including the Vale of White Horse District Council and the Berkshire Yeomanry. It also appears in numerous works of literature, including 'The Scouring of the White Horse' (1859) by Thomas Hughes and 'Idylls of the King' (between 1859 and 1885) by Lord Tennyson; and within music, including John Gardner's *Ballad of the White Horse* (1959) and David Bedford's *Song of the White Horse* (1978).
- North Wessex Downs landscapes in Oxfordshire were a favourite subject for noted 20th century artist Paul Nash, and Eric Ravillious also painted downland views in the area.
- The River Thames in South Oxfordshire forms the setting for 'The Wind in the Willows', a children's novel by Kenneth Grahame (1908). Henley-on-Thames has the River and Rowing Museum with special permanent Wind in the Willows exhibition.
- Many villages in Oxfordshire have featured in the *Midsomer Murders* television series, with five towns within the study area being particular favourites for the filming: Henley-on-Thames, Wallingford, Dorchester-on-Thames, Thame and Watlington.

Chapter 5

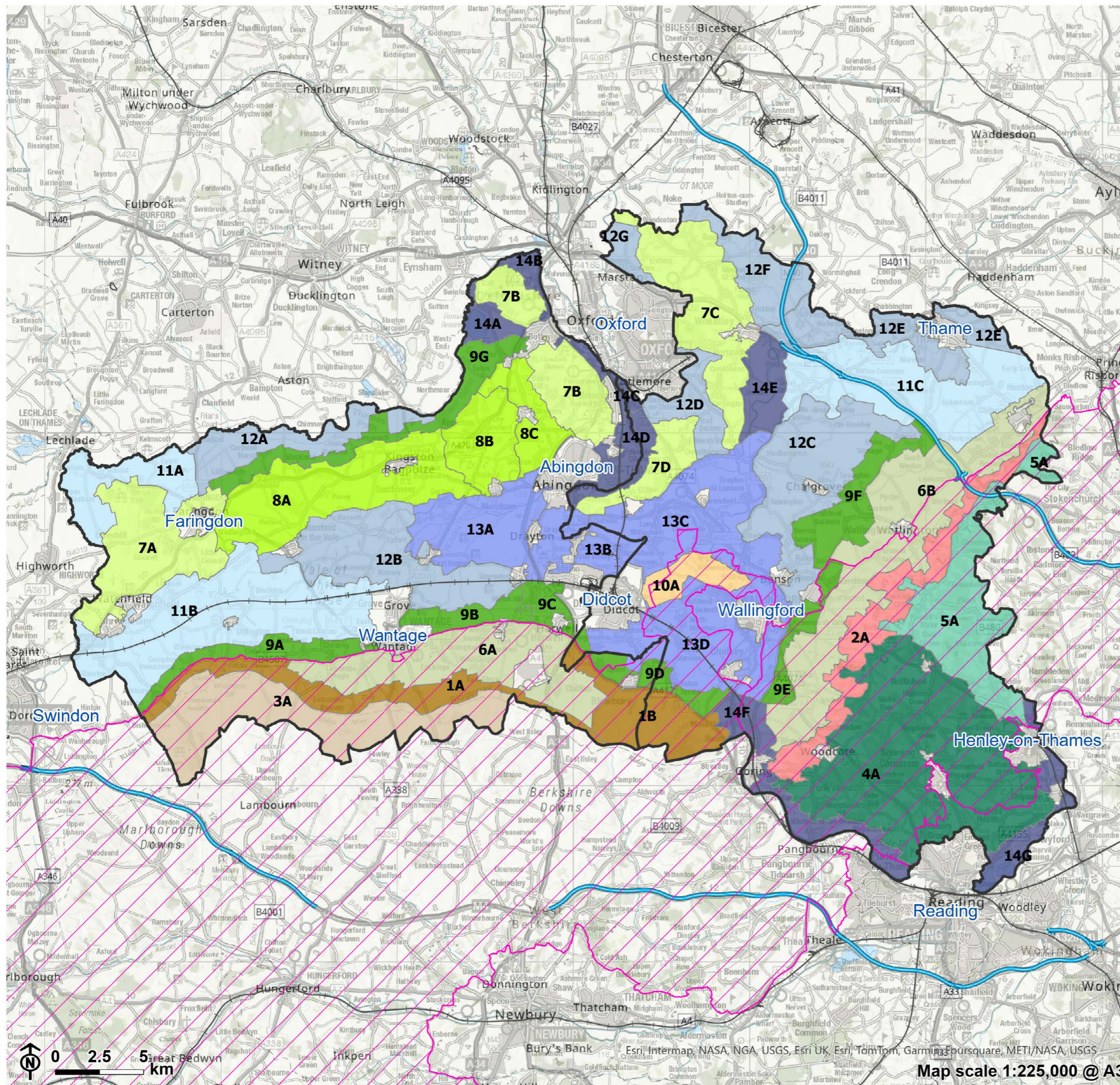
Landscape Classification

5.1 In line with the process of assessment described in 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment', landscapes are divided into Landscape Character Types (LCTs), which are in turn subdivided into Landscape Character Areas (LCAs). LCTs have a broadly consistent, homogeneous character as a result of common combinations of landscape components. LCAs are unique geographic areas with a consistent character and identity.

5.2 The landscape classification identifies 14 LCTs and 44 LCAs. These are shown on **Figure 5.1**.

5.3 It is important to note that boundaries between one LCT or LCA and the next are often transitional: there is rarely a clearcut change in character 'on the ground'. This assessment has been mapped at a scale of 1:25,000 which provides an appropriate level of detail for the landscape character assessment at the strategic unitary authority scale.

Figure 5.1: Landscape Character Type Overview



- District boundary
 - National Landscape
 - Motorway
 - Railway
- Landscape Character Type
- 1: Open Chalk Escarpment and Upper Slopes
 - 2: Wooded Chalk Escarpment
 - 3: Open Chalk Dipslope
 - 4: Wooded Chalk Plateau and Valleys
 - 5: Wooded Chalk Ridges and Valleys
 - 6: Chalk Escarpment Foothills
 - 7: Ridge Hilltops
 - 8: Ridge Slope
 - 9: Vale Edge Slopes
 - 10: Lower Vale Hills
 - 11: Upper Vale
 - 12: Middle Vale
 - 13: Lower Vale
 - 14: River Valley

Landscape Character Types and Areas

5.4 Profiles for the character areas listed below are set out in **Appendix A**.

Landscape Character Type 1: Open Chalk Escarpment and Upper Slopes

- LCA 1A: Wessex Downs Open Chalk Escarpment and Upper Slopes
- LCA 1B: Aston Upthorpe Downs Open Chalk Escarpment and Upper Slopes

Landscape Character Type 2: Wooded Chalk Escarpment

- LCA 2A: Chiltern Wooded Chalk Escarpment

Landscape Character Type 3: Open Chalk Dipslope

- LCA 3A: Wessex Downs Open Chalk Dipslope

Landscape Character Type 4: Wooded Chalk Plateau and Valleys

- LCA 4A: Chiltern Wooded Chalk Plateau and Valleys

Landscape Character Type 5: Wooded Chalk Ridges and Valleys

- LCA 5A: Chiltern Wooded Chalk Ridges and Valleys

Landscape Character Type 6: Chalk Escarpment Footslopes

- LCA 6A: Wessex Downs Chalk Escarpment Footslopes
- LCA 6B: Chiltern Chalk Escarpment Footslopes

Landscape Character Type 7: Ridge Hilltops

- LCA 7A: Faringdon Ridge Hilltops
- LCA 7B: Oxford West Ridge Hilltops
- LCA 7C: Oxford East Ridge Hilltops
- LCA 7D: Oxford South Ridge Hilltops

Landscape Character Type 8: Ridge Slope

- LCA 8A: Faringdon to Frilford Ridge Slope
- LCA 8B: Frilford to Sandford Ridge Slope
- LCA 8C: Cumnor to Abingdon Ridge Slope

Landscape Character Type 9: Vale Edge Slopes

- LCA 9A: Western Vale Edge Slopes
- LCA 9B: Wantage to Milton Hill Vale Edge Slopes
- LCA 9C: Milton Hill to Didcot Vale Edge Slopes.

- LCA 9D: East of Didcot Vale Edge Slopes.
- LCA 9E: Ewelme to South Stoke Vale Edge Slopes.
- LCA 9F: Eastern Vale Edge Slopes.
- LCA 9G: Northern Vale Edge Slopes.

Landscape Character Type 10: Lower Vale Hills

- LCA 10A: Sinodun Lower Vale Hills.

Landscape Character Type 11: Upper Vale

- LCA 11A: Thames Upper Vale
- LCA 11B: Western Upper Vale
- LCA 11C: Eastern Upper Vale

Landscape Character Type 12: Middle Vale

- LCA 12A: Thames Middle Vale
- LCA 12B: Western Middle Vale
- LCA 12C: Eastern Middle Vale
- LCA 12D: Oxford Middle Vale
- LCA 12E: Thame Middle Vale
- LCA 12F: Studley Middle Vale
- LCA 12G: Cherwell Middle Vale

Landscape Character Type 13: Lower Vale

- LCA 13A: Ock Lower Vale

- LCA 13B: Abingdon-Didcot Lower Vale
- LCA 13C: East Thames Lower Vale
- LCA 13D: South Thames Lower Vale

Landscape Character Type 14: River Valley

- LCA14A: Farmoor Reservoir Lower Valley
- LCA14B: Eynsham to Oxford Thames River Valley
- LCA14C: Botley to Kennington Thames River Valley
- LCA14D: Abingdon to Kennington Thames Lower Valley
- LCA14E: River Thame Lower Valley
- LCA14F: Moulsham to Caversham Thames Lower Valley
- LCA14G: Caversham to Henley Thames Lower Valley.

Appendix A

Landscape Character Area Profiles

See separate files for each Landscape Character Type.

Appendix B

Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Table B.1: Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
AOD	Above Ordnance Datum (sea level).
Agricultural Land Classification	The classification of agricultural land in England and Wales.
Analysis	The process of breaking the landscape down, usually in descriptive terms, into its component parts in order to understand how it is made up.
Ancient trees and veteran trees	<p>Individual trees or groups of trees with wood pastures, historic parkland, hedgerows, orchards, park, and other areas. They are often found outside ancient woodlands. irreplaceable habitats with some or all of the following characteristics:</p> <p>Ancient trees</p> <p>An ancient tree is exceptionally valuable. Attributes can include its great age, size, condition, biodiversity value (as a result of significant wood decay and the habitat created from the ageing process), cultural and heritage value.</p> <p>Veteran trees</p> <p>A veteran tree may or may not be very old, but it has decay features, such as branch death and hollowing. These features contribute to its biodiversity, cultural and heritage value.</p>

Appendix A Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
Ancient Woodland	Woodland which the evidence shows has had had continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD and has only been cleared for underwood or timber production. It is an extremely valuable ecological resource, with an exceptionally high diversity of flora and fauna.
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – the term formerly used (until November 2023) for the statutory designation now known as a National Landscape.
Approach	The stepwise process by which a landscape assessment is undertaken.
Arable	Land used for growing crops.
Assessment	An umbrella term used to encompass all of the many different ways of looking at, describing, analysing, and evaluating landscape.
Biodiversity	The measure of the variety of organisms present in different ecosystems.
Built form	The characteristic nature of built development.
Characteristic	An element that contributes to local distinctiveness (e.g. narrow winding lanes, vernacular building style).
Classification	A process of sorting the landscape into different types, each with a distinct, consistent, and recognisable character.
Condition	A judgement on the intactness and condition of the elements of the landscape.
Coppicing	The traditional method of woodland management in which trees are cut

Appendix A Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
	down to near the ground to encourage the production of long, straight shoots, which can subsequently be harvested.
CPRE	Campaign to Protect Rural England, a charity that campaigns to promote, enhance and protect the countryside across England.
Cultural heritage	Cultural heritage includes objects, monuments, individual sites and buildings and groups of buildings and sites that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance. It includes tangible heritage and intangible cultural heritage.
Description	Verbal description of what a landscape looks like. This is usually carried out in a systematic manner, but it may also include personal reactions to the landscape.
Dip slope	A gentle slope following the direction of the underlying geological beds.
Drift	The name for all material of glacial origin found anywhere on land or at sea, including sediment and large rocks.
Element	A component part of the landscape (e.g. hedges, roads, woods).
Enclosure	The placing in private hands of land to which there were previously common rights; the merging of commonly held strip fields to form a block surrounded by hedges.
Escarpment	A steep slope separating areas of land at different elevations (often used synonymously with 'scarp').

Appendix A Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
Feature	A prominent, eye-catching element (e.g. wooded hilltop, church spire).
Floodplain	The area that would naturally be affected by flooding if a river rises above its banks, or if high tides and stormy seas cause flooding in coastal areas.
GIS	Geographic Information System.
GLVIA	Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management. The latest version is the 3 rd edition, published in 2013, but 'Notes and Clarifications' on aspects of the 3 rd edition were published in 2024.
GPS	Global Positioning System.
Grassland	Grassland can be improved (by management practices) semi-improved (modified by management practices and have a range of species less diverse than unimproved grasslands), or unimproved (not treated with fertiliser, herbicide or intensively grazed and consequently species diversity is high). It may be used of grazing, cut (such as for hay or silage), or left unmanaged.
Habitat	The natural home or environment of an animal, plant, or other organism.
HLC	Historic Landscape Characterisation.
Hydrology	The science dealing with the occurrence, circulation, distribution, and properties of the waters of the earth and its atmosphere.
Intact	Not changed or diminished.

Appendix A Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
Intense equestrian activities	Examples include the introduction of: subdivisions to fields, permanent structures, tracks and hard surfacing, horse-walkers, gallops or sand schools/ manèges.
Land cover	Combinations of land use and vegetation that cover the land surface.
Landmark	An object or feature of a landscape or town that is easily seen and recognized from a distance, especially one that enables someone to establish their location.
Landscape	The term refers primarily to the visual appearance of the land, including its shape, form, and colours. However, the landscape is not a purely visual phenomenon; its character relies on a whole range of other dimensions, including geology, topography, soils, ecology, archaeology, landscape history, land use, architecture, and cultural associations.
Landscape character	A distinct pattern or combination of elements that occurs consistently in a particular landscape.
Landscape character area (LCA)	A unique geographic area with a broadly consistent character and identity, which forms part of a landscape character type.
Landscape character type (LCT)	A generic term for landscape with a consistent, homogeneous character. Landscape character types may occur in different parts of the county, but wherever they occur, they will share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation, or human influences.
Landscape condition	Based on judgements about the physical state of the landscape, and

Appendix A Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
	about its intactness, from visual, functional, and ecological perspectives. It reflects the state of repair or intactness of individual features or elements (relating to that feature's primary condition or ultimate desire).
Landscape value	The relative value that is attached to different landscapes. In a policy context the usual basis for recognising certain highly valued landscapes is through the application of a local or national landscape designation. Yet a landscape may be valued by different communities of interest for many different reasons without any formal designation, recognising, for example, perceptual aspects such as scenic beauty, tranquillity or wildness; special cultural associations; the influence and presence of other conservation interests; or the existence of a consensus about importance, either nationally or locally.
Linear settlement	A settlement that is built along a road, in comparison to a nuclear or dispersed settlement.
Listed Building	A building, object or structure that has been judged to be of national importance in terms of architectural or historic interest, as designated under Section 1 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
Local Plan	A development plan prepared by local planning authorities.
LGS	Local Geological Site
Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA)	An assessment of the effect of a proposed development on landscape and/or views, or of the sensitivity of

Appendix A Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
	land to potential development. Typically a less detailed analysis than an LVIA (see below), this may be required by a Planning Authority to help understand effects that are not expected to be significant.
Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)	A detailed assessment, usually carried out in accordance with guidelines published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management (see separate glossary entry for GLVIA). This is likely to be required by a Planning Authority where there is potential for a proposed development to have significant impact on landscape and/or views.
LWS	Local Wildlife Site
National Landscape	A statutory landscape designation formerly (until November 2023) known as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
Natural character	Character as a result of natural or semi-natural features such as woodland, grassland, hedgerows etc.
Natural heritage	Natural features, geological and physiographical formations and habitats that are valued for science, conservation or natural beauty.
NCN	National Cycle Network Route.
NE	Natural England.
NNR	National Nature Reserve.
Nucleated settlement	A settlement that is clustered around a centre, in comparison to a linear or dispersed settlement.
Open Access Land	An area where the public have a right of access on foot as set out in the

Appendix A Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
	Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2005.
OS	Ordnance Survey.
Pastoral	Land used for keeping or grazing sheep or cattle.
Priority Habitats	UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species and habitats were identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation action under the UK BAP. The original lists of UK BAP priority habitats were created between 1995 and 1999 and were subsequently updated in 2007. See http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5155 for further information.
Remnant	A part or quantity left after the greater part has been used, removed, or destroyed.
Riparian habitat	Riverbank habitat.
SAC	Special Area of Conservation (EC Directive 92/43/EEC Habitats Directive).
Scarp slope	A steep slope which cuts across the underlying strata (often used synonymously with 'escarpment').
Scheduled Monument	Nationally important archaeological sites or historic buildings, given protection against unauthorised change, as designated under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.
Semi-natural vegetation	Any type of natural vegetation which has been influenced by human activities, either directly or indirectly.
Sense of place	A person's perception of a location's indigenous characteristics, based on the mix of uses, appearance and

Appendix A Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
	context that makes a place memorable.
Sensitive	The response to change or influence.
Skyline	The outline of landform, land cover or built form seen against the sky.
SPA	Special Protection Area (EC Directive 2009/147/EC on the Conservation of Wild Birds).
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest.
Time depth	The time period expressed in the landscape, or the extent to which the landscape reflects a certain time period (a landscape with greater time depth will comprise older elements than a landscape with lesser time depth).
Topography	Combinations of slope and elevation that produce the shape and form of the land surface.
Valued landscape attributes	Positive features and characteristics that are important to landscape character and that, if lost, would result in adverse change to the landscape.

Appendix C

Consultation Process

C.1 A series of consultation activities were undertaken as described below.

Consultation Hub

C.2 An online ‘Consultation Hub’ was set up to allow members of the public to leave comments on valued landscape qualities (“what is valued and why?”) and on landscape change (“what is changing and why?”). The consultation ran from 17th August to 2nd October 2023.

C.3 A map-based approach allowed participants to ‘pin’ comments to a specific map location, or to make more general comments. **Figure C.1** shows example comments added to the interactive map.

Email consultation

C.4 Emails were sent to key stakeholders, seeking their thoughts/opinions on the draft classification (Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas), on valued landscape characteristics/features and on landscape change issues. Key stakeholders included parish and district councillors, representatives of neighbouring planning authorities and Oxfordshire County Council, the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs National Landscapes, national bodies such as Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency, and various special interest and local community groups.

Interactive workshops

C.5 Three online workshops were held (on the 31st of August and the 11th and 14th of September 2023), with a follow-on council-run internal workshop with other councillors (held on the 21st of September 2023). Invitees included district councillors, representatives of neighbouring planning authorities and Oxfordshire County Council, the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs National Landscapes, national bodies such as Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency, and various special interest and local community groups.

C.6 The online workshops used an ‘interactive whiteboard’ that allowed participants to add comments to maps and charts, and view the comments of others, in a series of exercises. Comments and input were sought around the following exercises:

- Exercise 1: proposed Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas;
- Exercise 2: What do you think is important and what do you value about your local landscape?; and
- Exercise 3: What do you think are potential areas of change or pressure in the landscape?

C.7 **Figure C.2** and **Figure C.3** below show example comments added to the interactive whiteboard at one of the workshops.

Figure C.1: Online consultation Hub

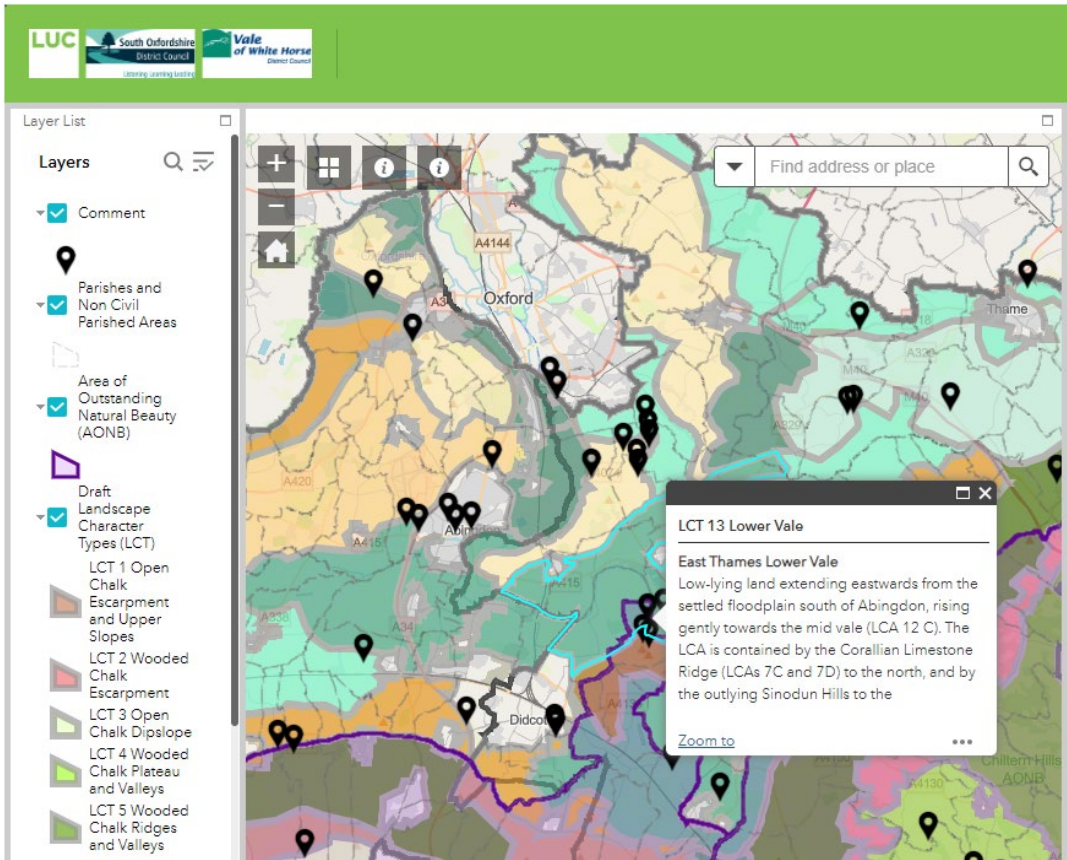


Figure C.2: Interactive whiteboard comments

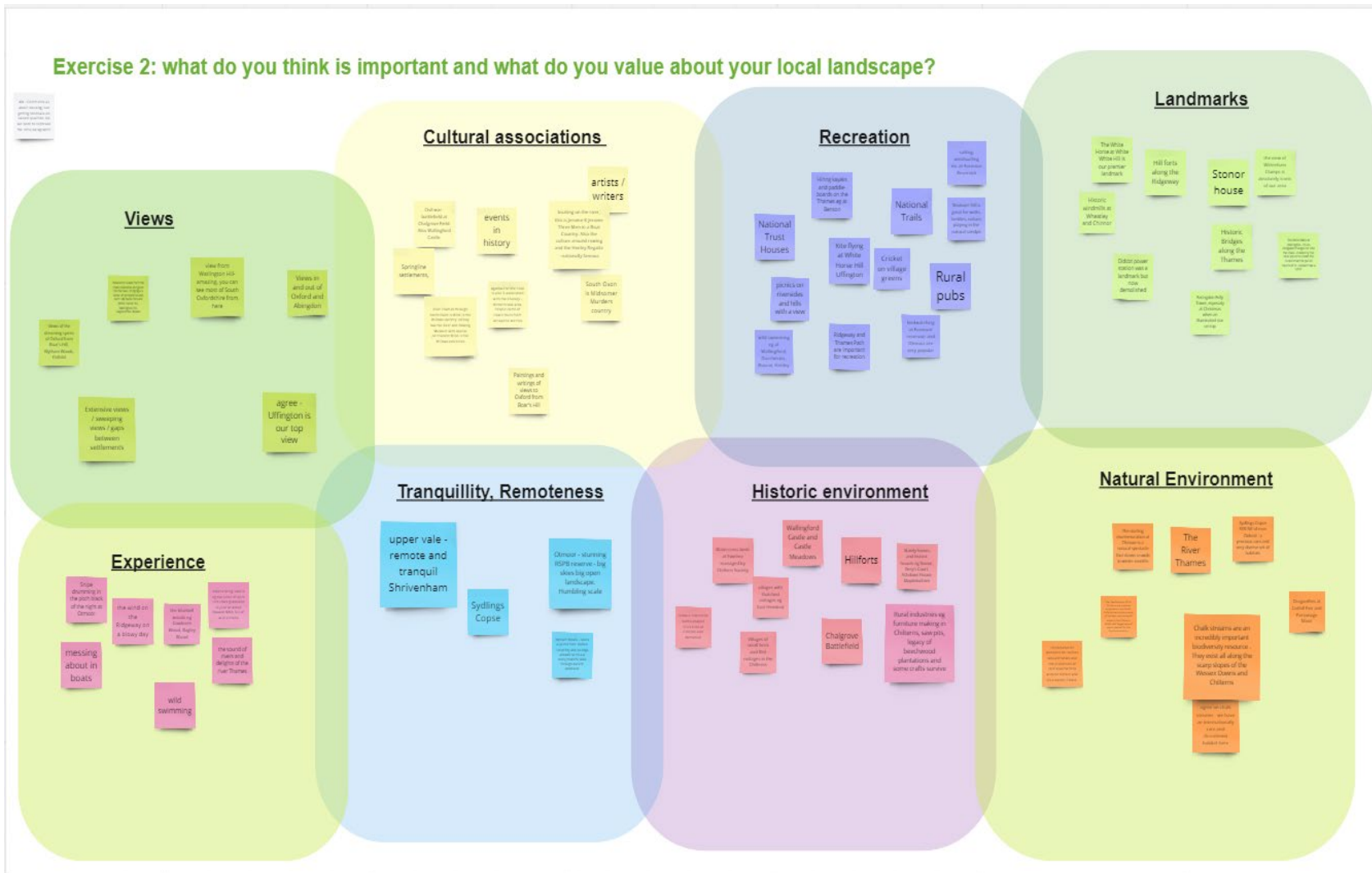
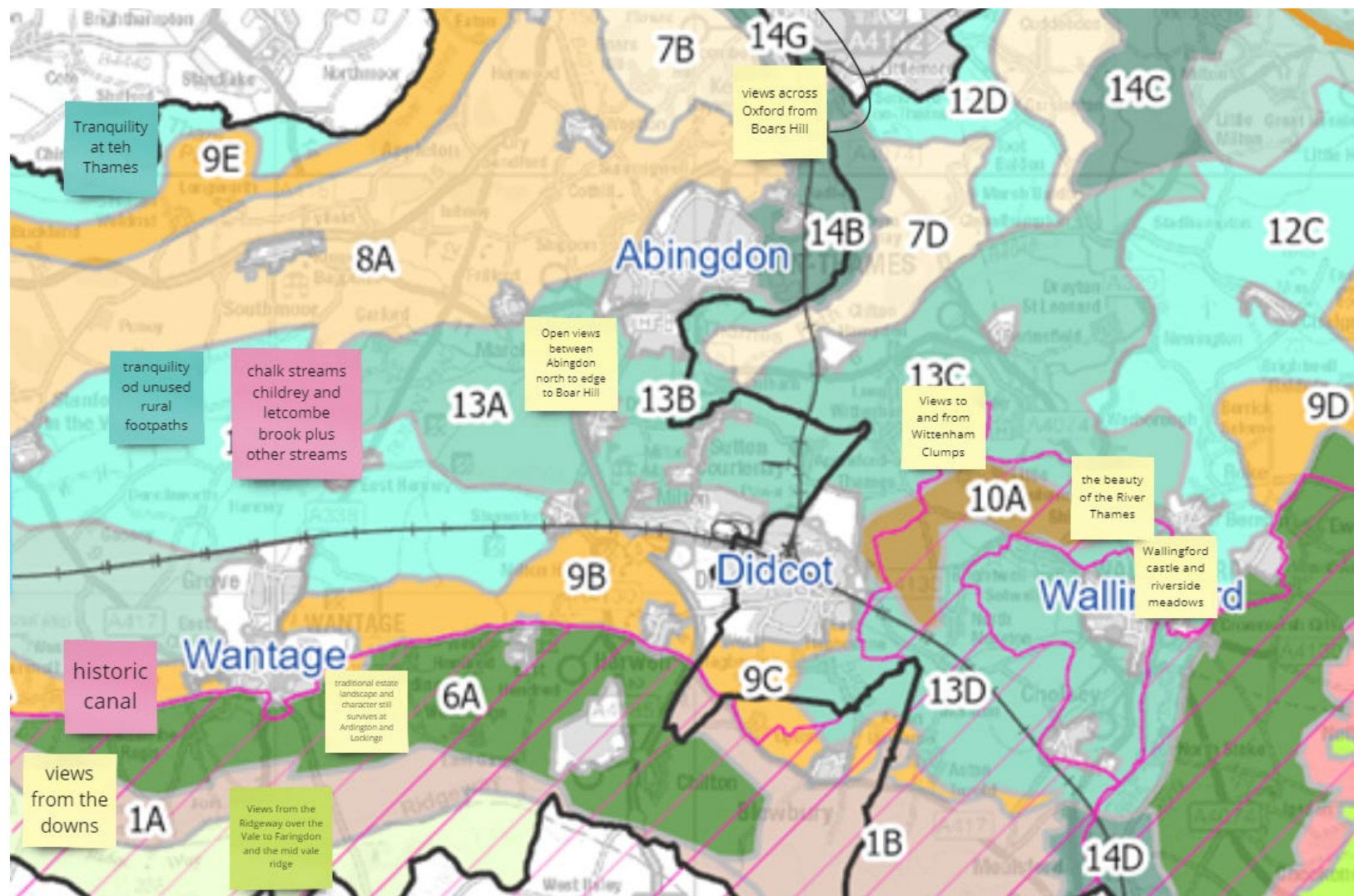


Figure C.3: Interactive whiteboard comments on map



Appendix D

User Guide

This user guide is designed for applicants and developers to follow when considering a development proposal outside of the main towns and villages, and for Development Managers within South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils reviewing applications, to ensure landscape character is considered.

D.1 Applicants should use the Landscape Character Assessment and other related guidance to inform the design process. They should follow the steps set out below before submitting a planning application, to ensure that key characteristics, valued landscape qualities and guidelines are considered at an early stage in the planning and design of the development.

D.2 Development proposals must demonstrate, as part of a planning application, how landscape character has influenced their siting, scale and design. Proposals that are likely to result in significant effects on the landscape and/or views and visual amenity will require a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) to be undertaken. For smaller scale proposals a full LVIA may not be required in these instances a proportionate landscape appraisal (LVA) can be undertaken. The District Council should be consulted with respect to the type of assessment required. In all cases the assessments should follow the methodology set out in the current Guidelines of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA – [\[See reference 13\]](#)).

D.3

Step 1: What type of change is proposed?

Step 2: Which landscape character area (LCA) is the proposal in (refer to **Figure 5.1**)? If the proposal is close to the edge of two or more LCAs all relevant profiles will need to be consulted.

Step 3: Will any of the key characteristics in the LCA be affected by the proposal? If so, which ones and how?

Step 4: Will any of the LCA's valued qualities be affected by the proposal? If so, which ones and how?

Step 5: Will the proposal conflict with the LCA's landscape strategy and guidelines? If so, which ones and how?

Step 6: Can the proposal and mitigation help implement any of the landscape guidelines and contribute to landscape conservation, enhancement or restoration? If so, which ones and how?

Step 7: If the answer is yes to any of steps 3, 4 or 5, can the proposal be altered in any way to avoid or reduce adverse effects on key characteristics, valued qualities or guidelines? If so, how?

Checklist

Referring to the relevant landscape character area profiles, have you considered the following general prompts?

- Does the proposal reinforce and enhance local distinctiveness and local landscape and/or settlement character?
- Does the proposal enhance the sense of place through careful design (including consideration of siting, massing, scale and materials)?
- Do proposals for new buildings respond to the existing topography?
- Does the choice of materials and colours for new buildings and structures reflect the landscape around them, as well as traditional building styles?
- Does the proposal protect and enhance key views, including views to and from valued landscapes, views from public rights of way and open access land etc, and views into, out of, and across settlements?
- Does the proposal retain existing vegetation and enhance with new planting?
- Does the proposal use existing roads and tracks for site access? Do new roads and tracks fit in with the landscape character and complement the pattern of existing road networks?
- Does the proposal improve access to the public rights of way network and/or open access land?
- Does the proposal include aspects of Green Blue Infrastructure, integrated with biodiversity enhancement and high quality public open space where suitable?
- Does the proposal minimise effects on tranquillity, including light pollution/dark skies?
- Have cumulative effects (including in-combination effects) with other existing or planned developments been considered?

References

- 1 Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment
- 2 LUC and Hoare Lea (2024) Dark Skies/Light Impact Methodology Report
- 3 LUC (2024) Tranquillity Assessment – Final Report
- 4 LUC (2024) South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse: Valued Landscapes Assessment
- 5 LUC (2024) South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Renewable Energy Study
- 6 [Natural England National Character Area website](#)
- 7 OWLS: Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study (2004). Available at: <https://owls.oxfordshire.gov.uk/wps/wcm/connect/occ/OWLS/Home/>
- 8 Lepus Consulting (2017) Landscape Character Assessment for the Local Plan 2033, South Oxfordshire District Council
- 9 Hankinson Duckett Associates (2017) Vale of White Horse Landscape Character Assessment
- 10 Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024.
- 11 North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024
- 12 LUC (2002) North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment Technical Report
- 13 The Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition

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