

March 2002

# A Character Assessment of Oxford in its Landscape Setting



Final Report prepared by  
Land Use Consultants



**A CHARACTER ASSESSMENT OF  
OXFORD CITY IN ITS  
LANDSCAPE SETTING**

**Prepared for  
The Countryside Agency  
and Oxford City Council  
by  
Land Use Consultants**

**March 2002**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Land Use Consultants (LUC) prepared this report on behalf of the Countryside Agency and Oxford City Council, with specialist expertise on the historic environment provided by Oxford Archaeology (OA).

The study has been steered by an Advisory Group with the following members:

Councillor John Goddard (Chair)	City Councillor
Professor Brian Goodey	Oxford Brookes University
Christine Tudor	Countryside Agency
Steve Pickles	Oxford City Council
Bob Staig	Oxford City Council
Craig Blackwell	Oxfordshire County Council
Virginia Hinze	English Heritage
Matt Edworthy	English Nature

We are grateful for the guidance and advice provided by the Advisory Group. The views and recommendations in this report are, however, those of Land Use Consultants.

The study has involved consultation and gathering of existing data and information and we appreciate the time and involvement of many individuals and organisations. In particular we have drawn upon information collected as part of a series of public consultation exercises, including information gathering workshops, feedback workshops and a public exhibition at St. Ebbes House. These consultations yielded a great deal of useful information and a level of local detail and understanding that has contributed greatly to the study. The Community Council for Berkshire (CCB) assisted us in organising the workshops. We are very grateful for the involvement of all those who participated in the workshops.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background

The Countryside Agency, in partnership with Oxford City Council commissioned this Character Assessment of the whole of Oxford City and its setting, in recognition of the importance of the city's landscape and townscape and the changes that it faces. The assessment is a systematic study and takes a holistic approach in considering historic, cultural and architectural associations, open places, wildlife and natural habitats and perceptual characteristics that together create the very special sense of place that is Oxford.

The Countryside Agency's primary objective in commissioning the research was to extend the principles of character assessment, already well developed for rural areas, to historic towns and cities. A subsidiary function has been to develop a methodology that can assist in securing the long-term protection and enhancement of historic urban environments.

## Methodology

The method for undertaking the character assessment was adapted from the accepted method promoted by the Countryside Agency as set out in the document "*Interim Landscape Character Assessment Guidance 1999*" and the approach used for a study of *Winchester City and its Setting* in 1998.

## Influences on Landscape Character

The Oxford landscape is dynamic and has evolved and changed over time in response to prevailing social and economic conditions. Historically, changes in agriculture and timber requirements, changes in the socio-economic structure of local communities and industrialisation have all had a significant impact. More recently expansion of residential areas, changing patterns of employment, demand for out of town shopping and business facilities, increased traffic levels and infrastructure development have all been dominant influences on local character. It is the cumulative effect of these past changes that has created the distinctive character of the city today and the landscape of Oxford will continue to evolve in the future.

## Managing Landscape Change

Oxford, with its rich heritage and landscape features, is particularly sensitive. It is increasingly valued as a resource for tourism and recreation, as well as for its intrinsic historic, nature conservation and landscape interest. It is vital that changes are carefully managed to maintain the qualities that make this city special. Change, even within the most sensitive areas, is inevitable. The principal aim for the future must be to manage change so as to take opportunities to enhance as well as conserve. The character based approach can help in accommodating necessary change without sacrificing local character and ensure that future change in and around Oxford leads to the enhancement of the character of the City and its setting.



## **Content of the Report**

The study report begins, in Chapter 1 by setting the context for the study. It explains the basic methodology and emphasises the importance of stakeholder consultation, which figured prominently in the middle part of the work.

**Part 1** of the report provides an understanding of the of the main influences on the contemporary landscape of Oxford, including its broader landscape setting within the County, the topographic, geological and ecological conditions, human influences and issues relating to the management of future change.

**Part 2** explains the underlying approach to landscape characterisation, and the process of identifying landscape types. The study identifies and describes 52 discrete areas in Oxford. Character areas are geographically specific areas of a landscape/townscape type, which have their own individual character or 'sense of place'. Each of these articulates the more important features that need to be conserved and points to further improvements that can be made.

**Part 3** of the report explains how the Character area assessment can be related to landscape and townscape policies in the Oxford Local Plan. As such, the descriptions should provide a useful basis for helping to formulate policies on future development in these areas and should support development control decisions and judgements on design and aesthetic considerations. This section of the report also sets out a method for valuing the Character areas in terms of their landscape and townscape sensitivity using seven criteria covering landscape quality, biodiversity value, historic integrity, the extent of inter-visibility, presence or absence of open space, re-creatability of the landscape and townscape, and overall sensitivity.

The present study is only the first stage in this research process, and more detailed work will be required within the individual character areas, but the methodology and findings of the present work are based on robust assessment and provide the starting point for generating a comprehensive strategy.

# I. INTRODUCTION

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## BACKGROUND

- I.1. The landscape and its relationship to the built environment of Oxford City is of great significance. It has been termed an 'Iconic Landscape', and is recognised worldwide for its distinctive buildings, skyline of domes and 'dreaming spires'; interweaving rivers and meadows set within a rural framework, are contained by wooded ridges. The Oxford landscape consists, however, of more than these 'iconic' features and the evolution of the urban form, cultural associations, relationship of the public and private realms, the density and massing of buildings, the architectural dialogue and vitality all make an important contribution to the character of the city's built up areas. The value of the streetscape is highlighted by Jan Morris in her book on Oxford<sup>1</sup>:

*'Outside the college gates a wider hierarchy exists, and you may see paraded for your analysis all the social grades of an old and prosperous city of the English Midlands. One way to start is to look at the houses, for here almost the whole gamut of English domestic design may be inspected in a morning, providing a key to the kind of people who have inhabited the place.'*

- I.2. In recognition of the importance of the city's landscape and townscape and the pressures that it faces the Countryside Agency, in partnership with Oxford City Council commissioned a Character Assessment of the whole of Oxford City and its Setting. The assessment is a systematic study and takes a holistic approach articulating the palimpsest of historic, cultural and architectural associations, open places, wildlife and natural habitats and perceptual characteristics that together create the very special sense of place of Oxford.

## PURPOSE AND SCOPE

- I.3. The study has three primary objectives:
- To understand which of the open spaces in the city are important in landscape terms, both in their own right and in relation to the built up areas of the city, and why.
  - To determine the areas of the city which are sensitive to change and merit protection as part of the Local Plan Review;
  - To identify opportunities for the city's landscape to be enhanced and key areas for policy development.
- I.4. Other related ancillary objectives of the study are:
- to produce a GIS data base that is complimentary to and linked with the County character data base and to the City Council's GGP system;
  - to produce a separate report to the Countryside Agency, English Heritage and Oxford City Council on further development of the data base as an interactive

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<sup>1</sup> Morris, Jan (1965; second edition 1978) *Oxford*, Oxford University Press.

resource for public use in Oxford, and recommendations for the development of more detailed information on particular aspects of Oxford City's character;

- to generate recommendations for applying the approach to other Cathedral cities and urban areas;
- to make recommendations for the use of the results of the assessment within the Local Plan, corporate strategies and other appropriate guidance, looking at issues such as public open space, access, urban tree strategy, and local protective designations such as areas of high landscape value and wildlife corridors.

1.5. This report presents the main results of the landscape and townscape character assessment and addresses the three main objectives of the study.

## **METHODOLOGY**

1.6. The method for undertaking the landscape assessment has been adapted from the accepted method promoted by the Countryside Agency as set out in the document "*Interim Landscape Character Assessment Guidance 1999*" and the methodology used for the study of *Winchester City and its Setting* carried out by Landscape Design Associates in 1998. There is no specific guidance on the characterisation of urban areas but the principles of the approach used for rural landscapes have been interpreted for this study.

1.7. **Fit within the Hierarchy of Landscape Character Assessment:** The study has been prepared within the framework set by the Agency's Countryside Character Initiative as shown on the Character of England Map. It also fits within the context provided by the Agency's emerging National Landscape Typology. At the same time it is compatible with the emerging results of the parallel Oxfordshire county-wide assessment and should provide a finer grain of detail within the county context.

1.8. **An Integrated Approach:** The assessment seeks to present a fully integrated view of the landscape incorporating all the features and attributes that contribute to the special and distinctive character of Oxford. These include the physical, ecological, visual, historic, built and cultural features that have shaped the present day landscape.

1.9. **Scale of Assessment:** The approach to this study has involved a two-tier assessment.

- **The Landscape Assessment of Oxford in its Setting:** Once the study area for the setting of Oxford had been established a landscape character assessment of the entire area including the city and setting was characterised at a scale of 1:25,000, resulting in the identification of a series of generic landscape types and within them the constituent character areas. This gives a very clear understanding of the character of the surrounding landscape and the landscape that underlies the city.
- **The City-Wide Assessment:** On the completion of the 1:25,000 scale assessment a more detailed assessment of the urban area within the city boundary was undertaken at a scale of 1:10,000. This study identified character types (largely based on predominant land use and age of development) and, within these, local

character areas. This provided a more detailed layer that could be read in conjunction with the underlying landscape assessment.

1.10. **Process:** The process for undertaking the study is illustrated in a process diagram (figure 0.1.1). In summary, this involved six main stages, namely:

- Defining Extent of Landscape Setting
- Desk Study
- Stakeholder Consultation
- Field Survey
- Characterisation
- Making Judgements/Evaluation

### **Defining the Extent of the Landscape Setting**

1.11. The first task was to define the study area for the project. This included the city of Oxford and its *setting*. Definition of the setting involved an analysis of the landscape, visual, topographic and historic settings to the city and involved a combination of desk study and field survey.

1.12. The extent of the visual influence of the city (i.e. the area from which the city can be potentially seen from) was the major defining factor in defining the extent of the study area. This was identified through an analysis of the Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI), based on 11 of the key buildings within the city. Key Terra Firma software was used in conjunction with Digital 3D Panorama topographical tiles at 1:50,000.

#### **Recommendations for Good Practice:**

A computer generated ZVI of key (tallest and most visually important) buildings in the city is a useful tool in defining the visual setting of the city.

Existing character assessment of areas adjacent to the city can be useful in defining the extent of the landscape setting.

### **Desk Study**

1.13. The purpose of the desk study was to collate data and compile a database of layers of information that would be used to form the draft landscape and townscape character areas. This involved producing a data request form to collect and collate the following information:

- Digital 2D OS map tiles (1:25,000 and 1:10,000);
- Digital 3D Panorama topographical tiles at 1:50,000;
- Air photos;
- Geology and soil maps and agricultural land classification;

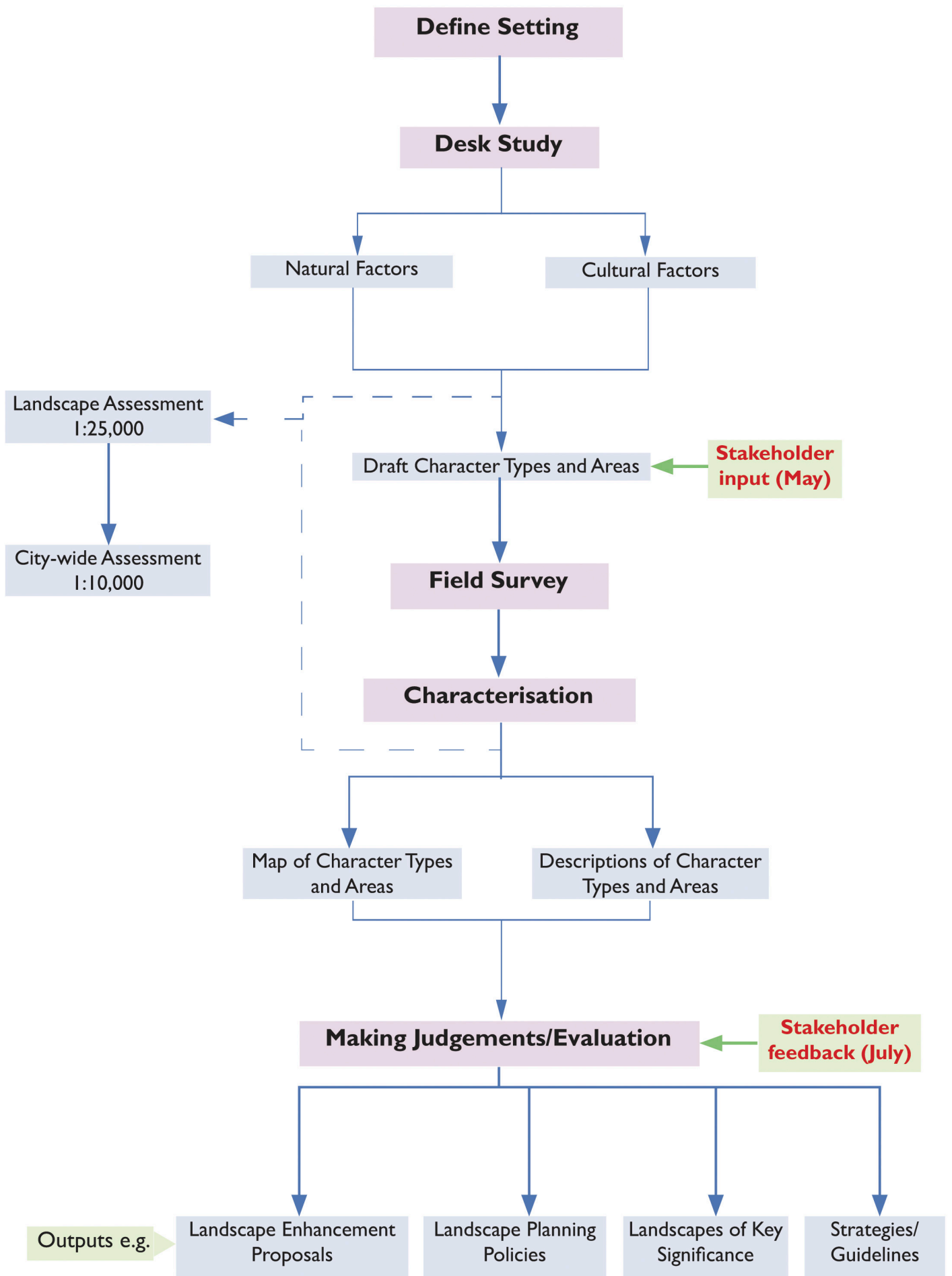


Figure 0.1.1: Process for undertaking the study

## 2. WHAT MAKES THE SETTING TO OXFORD DISTINCTIVE AND WHY

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### INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. The Oxford landscape has evolved over thousands of years as the result of complex interactions between physical, historic, cultural and social factors as described in the previous section. Oxford and its setting is characterised by a diversity of landscapes and these variations and differences are represented in the characterisation of eight distinct **landscape types**. Each of these generic landscape types has a distinct and relatively homogenous character with similar physical and cultural attributes including geology, landform, land cover and historic environment. These landscape types vary from the pastoral floodplains of central Oxford to the prominent wooded ridges of the Midvale Ridge. **Landscape character areas** are geographically specific areas within a landscape type, each with their own individual character or 'sense of place'. The eight landscape types identified within the study area, have each been subdivided into discrete character areas.

### DEFINING LANDSCAPE TYPES

- 2.2. The **Countryside Character Initiative** was the response, from Government, to the need for a new approach to landscape assessment which would look at the whole of England's countryside, rather than just specific designated areas. The aim was to provide a consistent national framework within which more detailed local landscape assessments would fit. The Countryside Agency has mapped the whole country into 159 separate, distinctive character areas. The City of Oxford and its setting is covered by two of these national character areas: 108 The Upper Thames Clay Vales and 109 The Midvale Ridge.
- 2.3. For this study draft landscape types were derived from detailed desk study, taking account of the Countryside Agency's Regional Character Areas (1999) and the Oxford County Framework of Land Description Units, or LDU's (2001). Secondary sources of information included the district assessments undertaken by the four districts adjoining the City of Oxford to ensure that the final assessment was compatible with existing work.
- 2.4. The draft landscape types were then refined through field surveys at a scale of 1:25,000. The table below (2.2.1) indicates how the landscape types fit into the Countryside Character Framework.

**Table 2.2.1. Fit of Landscape Types into the Countryside Character Framework**

<b>Countryside Character Area</b>	<b>Landscape Type (1:25,000)</b>
108: Upper Thames Clay Vales	1. Lowland Clay Vales
	2. Pastoral Floodplains
	3. Settled and Open River Terraces
	4. Wooded Clay Hills
109: Midvale Ridge	5. Settled Plateaux

	6. Enclosing Limestone Hills
	7. High Plains
	8. Clay Vales

2.5. The following table (2.2.2) presents a summary generic description of each landscape type, its distribution and its contribution it makes to Oxford's landscape setting.

**Table 2.2.2. Landscape Type Summary Description**

<b>Landscape Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Contribution to Oxford's Landscape Setting</b>
<b>I08: Upper Thames Clay Vales</b>		
1. Lowland Clay Vales	Smooth, gently undulating low-lying areas of Oxford Clay which form the footslopes and vales between areas of high ground. They are characterised by mixed agricultural fields divided by low, neatly trimmed hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Roads often have wide verges and are bordered by drains. Church towers in the stone/brick built villages and farmsteads are prominent landmarks in these flat, open landscapes.	The smooth, open vales create a dramatic contrast to the areas of high ground, enhancing the topographical setting of Oxford within a ring of hills.
2. Pastoral Floodplains	Flat, wide alluvial floodplains of the rivers which flow between the prominent hills. The tranquil pastoral scene of open meadows with cattle grazing amongst the silhouettes of mature floodplain trees contrasts with the busy urban scenes which often lie adjacent. Boathouses, locks and pubs along the river are landmarks. Historic buildings and ancient groves are features. Allotments and land uses such as playing fields and large scale business/retail parks are often found in the floodplain landscapes.	The flat, open pastoral floodplains are part of the classic image of Oxford - they have long been used for pasture and hay crops. In landscape terms, the simple open green meadows and expanses and open water provide a dramatic contrast, both in colour and form, to the built core of Oxford. Open character allows long views over them.
3. Settled and Open River Terraces	The river terraces (and their proximity to pastures) have been the prime locational factor for settlement in the Thames Valley from prehistoric times. These domed deposits of river terrace gravels overlying clay support the historic core of Oxford as well as much newer built development. The landscape type therefore tends to have a busy, urban character. Buildings are typically of limestone with red brick detailing. Roads are a feature of the landscape today. Those river terraces that remain undeveloped, typically support a rural, agricultural landscape of medium to large	Provides minor undulations in topography and separates the Thames and Cherwell floodplains. The river terraces support built development and form a contrast to the open floodplains.

	'enclosure' fields with arable and pasture. They provide a contrast with both the floodplain and adjacent urban areas.	
4. Wooded Clay Hills	Prominent, but low, rounded hills which stand out from the low lying clay vales and alluvial plains to the north of Oxford. The tranquil agricultural landscape is characterised by a mixture of arable and pasture fields divided by low, neatly clipped hedgerows and wooded ridges, creating a strong field pattern. Fields of oil seed rape stand out as bright patches in the landscape during summer. On top of the hills one has a clear sense of elevation above the surrounding clay vales. Settlement is sparse – stone farmhouses are scattered over the hillsides, and small stone villages are restricted to the footslopes.	Although relatively low, these hills are prominent as they rise out of the flat clay vales north of Oxford. Their wooded ridges and strong field patterns provide an important backdrop to the north of the city where few other landform features are present. Conversely there are views from these hills to the city.
<b>I09: Midvale Ridge</b>		
5. Settled Plateaux	The Settled Plateaux are lower Corallian platforms formed of sand and calcareous sandstone, incised by narrow valleys, with a steep scarp at their western edge. Reefs of Corraline limestone or 'Coral Rag' overlie the sandstone along the eastern boundary, forming the transition to the higher <i>Enclosing Limestone Hills</i> . The Coral Rag, which is quarried from these areas, is typical of the buildings in this landscape type and sandy soils result in vegetation of gorse and pine. The landscape is unique among the upland area for its high density of settlement.	Hills provide a strong topographic setting and wooded skyline is important in views from Oxford. Famous views of Oxford, as drawn by artists e.g. Turner. Conversely there are views from these hills to the city.
6. Enclosing Limestone Hills	Prominent hills with steep scarp slopes and table topped landform, surrounding Oxford. The underlying geology is a mixture of Coral Rag,(Upper Corralian formation), grey mudstones with limestone nodules (Kimmeridge Clay), and sands and limestones of the Portland Formation. They are characterised by fields of mixed farmland divided by hedgerows - the strong field patterns are a feature of this landscape type. The hills typically support large areas of deciduous woodland. Nucleated villages tend to be situated either at the foot or at the top of the scarp slope and are characterised by the use of stone as the main building	These hills provide a strong topographic setting and rural wooded backdrop to Oxford. Conversely there are views from these hills to the city.



	material. Estates are associated with stone walls and designed parkland is common. Church towers within the scarp top villages, for example at Elsfield, are prominent landmarks in the landscape. Communication masts are also prominent on the hills.	
7. High Plains	This landscape type is distinctive in its flat-topped landform and sandy soil, which caps the highest hills as at Boar's Hill and Shotover Hill. The result is isolated areas with red soils and a heathy character, supporting distinctive vegetation such as pines which stand out as distinctive skyline features. These areas tend to be fairly well settled due to the relatively flat landform on top of these hills. Housing, of all ages, is positioned to take advantage of the views. Although these hills are relatively well settled, they retain a peaceful character, remote from the city. Ornamental garden vegetation is the only clue as to the human influence when seen from a distance.	The enclosing effect of these hills is very important to the setting of Oxford. Clumps of Scots Pine growing on sandy soils are particularly important features on the ridgelines. Conversely there are views from these hills to the city.
8. Clay Vales	Smoothly undulating clay vale of large scale arable fields divided by neatly trimmed hedgerows with hedgerow trees. These vales are at a higher altitude than the lowland clay vales. Tree cover is otherwise extremely low. This is a tranquil working rural agricultural landscape with sparsely scattered red brick farmsteads and very little public access. Hedgerow trees stand out as features in this flat, open landscape.	This open agricultural belt emphasises the topography and enclosing effect of the hills beyond the vale.

## DEFINING LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS




- 2.6. **Landscape character areas** are geographically specific areas of a landscape type, which have their own individual character or 'sense of place'. They are particularly useful in planning and management terms allowing appropriate policies or actions to be applied at a local level. Within the City of Oxford and its setting there are some 23 discrete landscape character areas. These are shown on the map in *figure 2.2.1* and are described in table 2.2.3 below.



# Oxford City Landscape Character Assessment

Figure 2.2.1:  
Landscape Character Areas

## Key

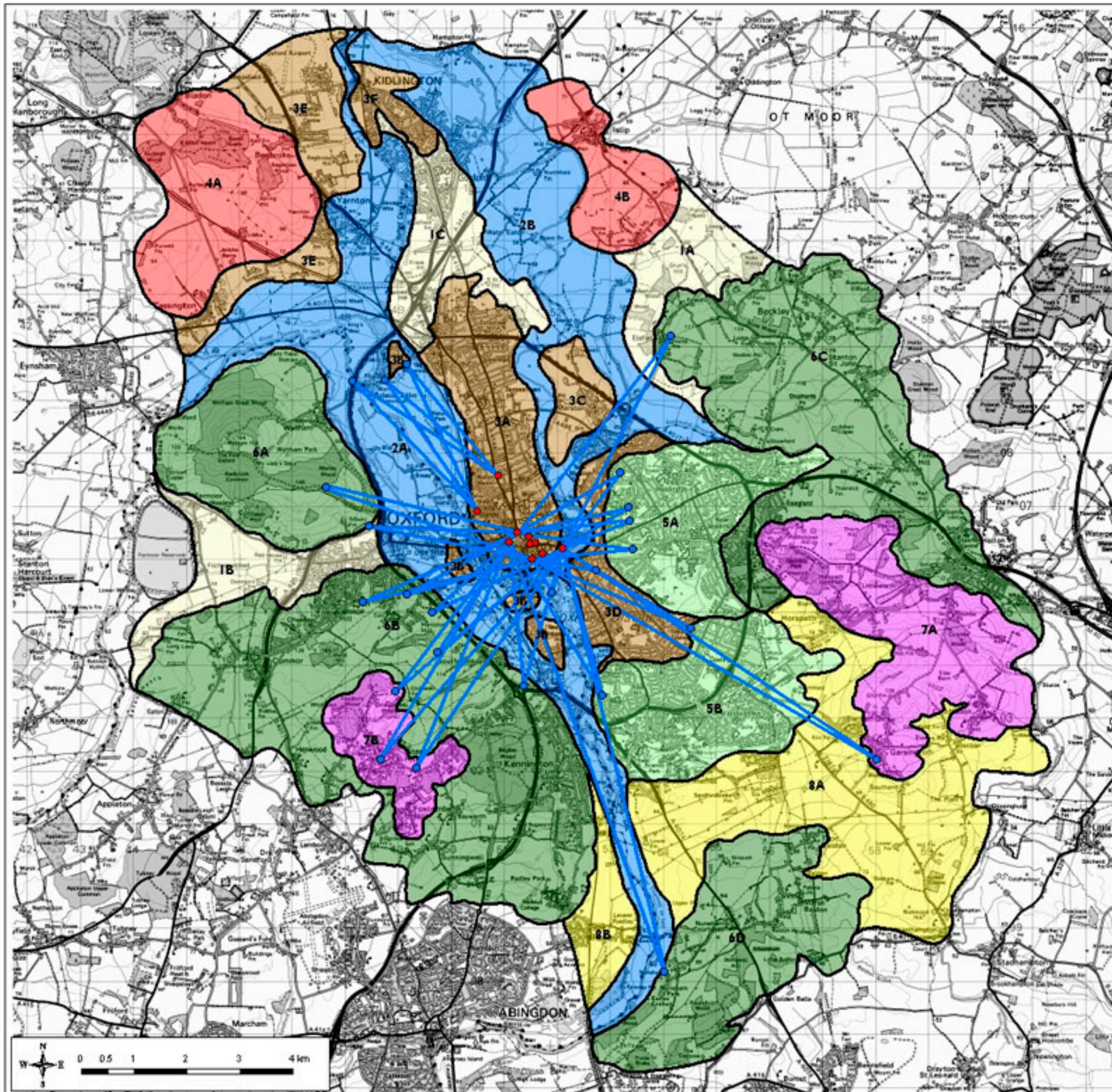
-  Viewpoint
-  View cone
-  Spire location

## Landscape Character Areas

-  1. Lowland Clay Vales
  - IA Elsfield Fringes
  - IB Botley Clay Vale
  - IC Gosford Gap
-  2. Rivers and Pastoral Floodplains
  - 2A Thames (Isis)
  - 2B Cherwell
-  3. Settled and Open River Terraces
  - 3A North Oxford River Terrace
  - 3B River Terrace Outliers
  - 3C Marston River Terrace
  - 3D East Oxford River Terrace
  - 3E Oxford Airport
  - 3F Kidlington River Terrace
-  4. Wooded Clay Hills
  - 4A Cassington - Bladon Ridge
  - 4B Islip Ridge
-  5. Settled Plateaux
  - 5A Headington
  - 5B Cowley / Blackbird Leys
-  6. Endosing Limestone Hills
  - 6A Wytham Hill
  - 6B Hinksey Heights
  - 6C East Oxford Heights
  - 6D Nuneham Courtney Ridge
-  7. High Plains
  - 7A Shotover Plain
  - 7B Boar's Hill
-  8. Clay Vales
  - 8A Sandford Vale
  - 8B Radley Vale

Drawing Number: 205702\_014\_fig2.2.1\_landscape character areas

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**Table 2.2.3. Landscape Character Area – Summary Description**

<b>Landscape Character Area</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b>Opportunities in Relation to the Setting of Oxford</b>
<b>Type 1: Lowland Clay Vales</b>		
IA Elsfield Fringes	Peaceful clay vale of arable fields divided by low hedgerows and crossed by narrow country lanes. Divides the East Oxford Heights and Islip Ridge. Regular ditches drain from surrounding hills into Otmoor to the east and Cherwell Valley to the west. Scattered farms are only settlement.	<p>Manage hedgerows and replant hedgerow trees to conserve them as features.</p> <p>Resist development which would impinge on the rural character of the clay vale.</p> <p>Resist road widening and improvements of rural lanes.</p>
IB Botley Clay Vale	Peaceful agricultural clay vale with a dramatic sweeping landform dividing Wytham Hill and the Hinksey Heights to the west of Oxford. Distinctive red soils and scattered red brick farm buildings are features. Main roads and pylons pass along the vale, between the hills. Views over the vale are a feature of the western approach to Oxford.	<p>Conserve hedgerows which create the characteristic landscape pattern of the vale.</p> <p>Conserve rural character as setting to Oxford.</p> <p>Maintain views across the vale from approach roads into and out of Oxford.</p>
IC Gosford Gap	Low lying clay vale separating north Oxford and Kidlington. Hedgerow trees and shelter belts create a degree of enclosure. This rural area is under pressure from built development, infrastructure and other urban fringe land uses. Scattered farms are constructed from local limestone and are features of the working agricultural landscape. This rural landscape is fragmented by roads - the A34(T), A44(T), A4166, A4260 - and their associated junctions and service facilities. There are also a number of out of town superstores/garden centres and urban fringe activities such as golf courses.	<p>Maintain rural gap and ensure ribbon development does not result in merging Oxford and Kidlington.</p> <p>Maintain rural character as a setting to Oxford.</p> <p>Built development should respond to local materials and rural character - limestone and red brick are the dominant materials of rural buildings.</p> <p>Consider opportunities to enhance this area which forms a major gateway into Oxford.</p>
<b>Type 2: Pastoral Floodplains</b>		
2A Thames (Isis)	The Thames Floodplain is particularly notable for its historic commons and meadowlands, including Port Meadow, Pixey Mead and Wolvercote Green. The Thames National Trail runs along	<p>Maintain historic continuity of land use of the water meadows and commons.</p> <p>Promote traditional</p>

	<p>the length of the river and a number of historic sites such as Godstow Abbey and Binsey are found along its length. Historic wooded groves are also features of the Thames floodplain. The floodplain forms a setting for the historic core of Oxford, most famously at Christchurch Meadow. The industrial/retail estates of the Botley Road are built in the floodplain and obscure views across the floodplain on the western approach into Oxford. There is also encroachment by infrastructure, such as the electricity pylons south of Botley, and the A34.</p>	<p>management of meadowlands (pasture and hay cropping) and trees (pollarding of willows).</p> <p>Maintain open character and views across the floodplain.</p> <p>Maintain opportunities for public access and enjoyment of this pastoral landscape.</p> <p>Conserve and enhance wildlife resource and wetland habitats.</p> <p>Unsuitable landscape for built development.</p> <p>Opportunity to enhance western approach to Oxford.</p>
2B Cherwell	<p>A mixed agricultural landscape of pasture and arable fields divided by hedgerows. Becomes more confined in central Oxford where it forms the setting to the historic core to the west and Marston/Headington to the east. Its course through central Oxford is characterised by open sports grounds, flood meadows (for example the Angel and Greyhound Meadow) and pollarded willows. Part of the development at New Marston encroaches onto the floodplain south of Marston village.</p>	<p>Promote traditional management of meadowlands (pasture and hay cropping) and trees (pollarding of willows).</p> <p>Maintain rural, pastoral character.</p> <p>Maintain public access and enjoyment of this pastoral landscape.</p> <p>Conserve wildlife resource and wetland habitats.</p> <p>Unsuitable landscape for built development.</p>
<b>Type 3: Settled and Open River Terraces</b>		
3A North Oxford River Terrace	<p>Gently domed area of land formed from River terrace deposits between the Thames and Cherwell floodplains. Prime location for settlement since prehistoric times - the medieval walled town of Oxford is located at the southern tip of the terrace, overlooking the point at which the Cherwell and Thames meet. Supports dense urban development from the historic core in the south to the suburb of Cutteslowe in the north.</p>	<p>Built development should be confined to the extent of the river terrace.</p> <p>Maintain existing open spaces as a setting to the floodplains.</p>
3B River Terrace Outliers	<p>Small islands of first level river terrace deposits within the Thames floodplain.</p>	<p>Built development is typical of river terraces, but should not</p>

	Typically support settlement, including Wolvercote, Osney, Grandpont and New Hinksey - all areas vulnerable to flooding.	extend onto the floodplain beyond.
3C Marston River Terrace	Gently domed island of second river terrace deposit on clay in the Cherwell Valley. Supports the historic core of Marston Village and the agricultural fields which form a setting to the village and the floodplain. Crossed by the ring road and B4495.	Built development is typical of river terraces, but should not extend onto the floodplain beyond.  Maintain a rural setting to Marston Village.
3D East Oxford River Terrace	Small second river terrace deposit on a platform of Oxford Clay which gently rises east from the Cherwell floodplain towards Cowley. Supports the large Victorian suburb of East Oxford and contains the narrow alluvial floodplain of Boundary Brook, an important landscape feature and tributary of the Thames.	Conserve and enhance the corridor of Boundary Brook as a wildlife corridor and landscape feature.
3E Oxford Airport	Second and third river terraces overlying solid geology of cornbrash and clay, resulting in an open, flat landscape. Oxford airport and large industrial parks dominate the rural landscape and straight roads cut across the plain. Hedgerows are low, allowing views across the open agricultural landscape. Historic stone buildings such as farms and pubs are present, but new development and urbanising features, such as kerbs and roadside lighting, have eroded the rural character.	Conserve setting of historic features and buildings on approach to Oxford.  Minimise urbanising elements to provide a rural approach to Oxford.  Management of hedgerows and re-planting of hedgerow trees will enhance landscape condition on this northerly approach to Oxford.
3F Kidlington River Terrace	Second river terrace overlying Oxford clay and cornbrash, between the Thames and Cherwell floodplains. Supports the settlement of Kidlington, the largest village in England (population over 17,000). This village has grown from an ancient village with a 13th century church, farm and a vicarage dating from the 16th century.	Maintain the separation between Kidlington village and the North Oxford River Terrace.
<b>Type 4: Wooded Clay Hills</b>		
4A Cassington-Bladon Ridge	Cluster of prominent rounded clay hills to the north-west of Oxford overlooking the Thames Floodplain and Oxford airport. Wooded ridgelines of Bladon Heath and Spring Hill are visible from surroundings and Bladon Heath includes the remains of a round castle. Crossed by a minor road and railway.	Maintain the wooded skylines which provide a wooded setting to the north-west of Oxford.  Limit the number of communication masts on the hill tops. This is particularly

		important on these small scale hills.
4B Islip Ridge	Low, rounded clay hill to the north-east of Oxford, overlooking the Cherwell Valley. A rural, wooded ridge with small limestone villages on the footslopes. Woodeaton Manor is a feature on the hillside. The B4027 traverses the ridge, making use of the dry land between the Cherwell floodplain to the west and low lying Ot Moor to the east.	Maintain the wooded hilltops which provide a wooded setting to the north-east of Oxford.  Limit the number of communication masts on the hill tops. This is particularly important on these small scale hills.
<b>Type 5: Settled Plateaux</b>		
5A Headington	Prominent platform of sand and calcareous sandstone to the east of the Cherwell Valley with a steep scarp slope, probably most famous at Headington Hill. The wooded character of this plateau forms a wooded backdrop to the historic core of Oxford, the sandy soil supporting Scots Pine as landmark features. The southern edge of the plateau is incised by narrow valleys, including the Lye Valley local nature reserve.	Maintain the wooded character.  Scots pine are characteristic of the sandy soils, and could be included in planting schemes.  Avoid high rise development on the highly visible ridgelines.  Maintain views over central Oxford from Headington Hill.
5B Cowley/Blackbird Leys	Prominent platform of sand and calcareous sandstone to the south-east of the East Oxford River Terrace. This plateau is significantly lower than Headington, but forms an obvious scarp along Between Towns Road. The plateau forms a wooded backdrop to East Oxford, the sandy soil supporting Scots Pine as landmark features. The southern edge of the plateau is incised by Northfield Brook. An outcrop of Ampthill Clays from a prominent wooded hill at Rose Hill.	Maintain the wooded character of the plateau, particularly at Rose Hill.  Scots pine are characteristic of the sandy soils and could be included in new planting schemes.  Maintain views over central Oxford from Rose Hill and Cowley.
<b>Type 6: Enclosing Limestone Hills</b>		
6A Wytham Hill	Prominent rounded hill of Coral Rag on the western edge of Oxford, surrounded by the Botley clay vale and Thames floodplain. Mixture of farmland and large areas of ancient deciduous woodland, preserved as a privately owned estate and bequeathed to the University for educational purposes, resulting in a prominent wooded ridge.	Maintain the wooded rural character of the hill as a green backdrop to Oxford.  Limit number of communication masts and other vertical elements which would be very visible on the ridgeline.

	Forms an important backdrop to Oxford and rich ecological resource. All settlement confined to lower slopes.	ridgeline.  Maintain hedgerows which are important elements in views of the hill.
6B Hinksey Heights	Prominent ridge of Coral Rag and Kimmeridge Clay enclosing Oxford to the south-west. Mixed farmland and woodland, including the historic Bagley Wood and lower slopes of Boar's Hill, provides a rural setting to south-west Oxford. Wooded tributaries drain into the Thames floodplain. Villages, located on the lower slopes, have grown extensively in the 20th century. These include Kennington, Botley and Cumnor as well as the village of South Hinksey. Areas of city parkland at Raleigh Park and in the Chilswell Valley reflect the important visual links with the city.	Maintain the wooded rural character of the hill as a green backdrop to Oxford.  Limit number of communication masts and other vertical elements which would be very visible on the ridgeline.  Maintain land in rural, agricultural use. Conversion to other uses such as golf courses can be highly visible in this location, for example from the Thames floodplain.  Maintain views over the Thames floodplain and across Oxford from public footpaths and viewpoints.  Maintain hedgerows which are important elements of the ridge.
6C East Oxford Heights	Prominent ridge of Kimmeridge Clay and Portland limestone enclosing Oxford to the east. Mixed farmland and woodland, including parts of the Forest of Shotover, provides a rural setting to north-east Oxford. Settlement is limited to the lower slopes where it overlooks the adjacent lowlands, for example at Elsfield. The main eastern approach to Oxford (the A40 from London) passes through this rural character area before entering Headington. This area includes Shotover House and Park and forms the lower slopes of Shotover Plain.	Maintain the wooded rural character of the hill as a green backdrop to Oxford.  Limit number of vertical elements which are very visible on the ridgeline.  Maintain views over Oxford from public footpaths and viewpoints.  Conserve hedgerows which are important features of the landscape setting.  Conserve undeveloped rural approach to Oxford along the A40 – gateway to Headington.
6D Nuneham Courtney Ridge	Portland limestone ridge to the south of Oxford, beyond the Sandford Vale. The	Maintain the wooded rural character of the hill as a

	<p>Nuneham Ridge has a prominent scarp to its north, made more visible in the summer by its crop of oil seed rape. The open fields contrast with extensive areas of deciduous woodland. Electricity pylons and a road cross the ridge before descending into the vale. The variety of village landscapes is notable: parkland with new estate village (Nuneham); extended village on green (Marsh Baldon); and compact village (Toot Baldon). The landscape gardens at Nuneham Courtney were designed to incorporate the long-distance views of Oxford across the Thames.</p>	<p>green backdrop to Oxford.</p> <p>Limit number of vertical elements which are very visible on the ridgeline.</p> <p>Maintain views of Oxford from public footpaths and viewpoints.</p> <p>Conserve hedgerows which are important features of the landscape setting.</p>
<b>Type 7: High Plains</b>		
7A Shotover Plain	<p>Shotover Plain is a prominent table-topped hill lying to the east of Oxford. The Shotover Ironsands, which overlie the plateau, result in distinctive red sandy soils supporting heathy vegetation such as gorse and pine, which stand out as distinctive skyline features. The plateau is also valuable agricultural land as a result of its well drained soils and level landform. The windmill at Wheatley indicates its historic popularity for growing corn. The historic approach to Oxford from London ran over the top of the hill until the late 18th century. There are magnificent views over Oxford and surrounds from the edge of the plain.</p>	<p>Maintain tree cover as a backdrop to Oxford.</p> <p>Limit the number of masts which are highly visible on these ridges.</p> <p>Maintain clumps of pines as characteristic skyline features.</p> <p>Conserve vistas over Oxford and the surrounding landscape and provide public viewpoints where possible.</p>
7B Boar's Hill	<p>Steep-sided, table-topped ridge rising above the Hinksey Heights to the west of Oxford. This area was partially developed in the 20th century as a smart country retreat from Oxford and contains many private dwelling, positioned to take advantage of the views across Oxford. The gardens of these properties add a variety of colour and texture to the vegetation of this ridge, making it distinctive. The sandy soils support a large number of Scots pines which are features of this hill. Magnificent views across Oxford and the surrounding lowlands including those painted by Turner. The Jarn Mound was built specifically to allow all-round views.</p>	<p>Maintain extent and variety of tree cover as an interesting backdrop to Oxford.</p> <p>Limit the number of masts which are highly visible on these ridges.</p> <p>Maintain clumps of pines as characteristic skyline features.</p> <p>Conserve public viewpoints and manage vegetation to ensure these do not become obscured.</p>

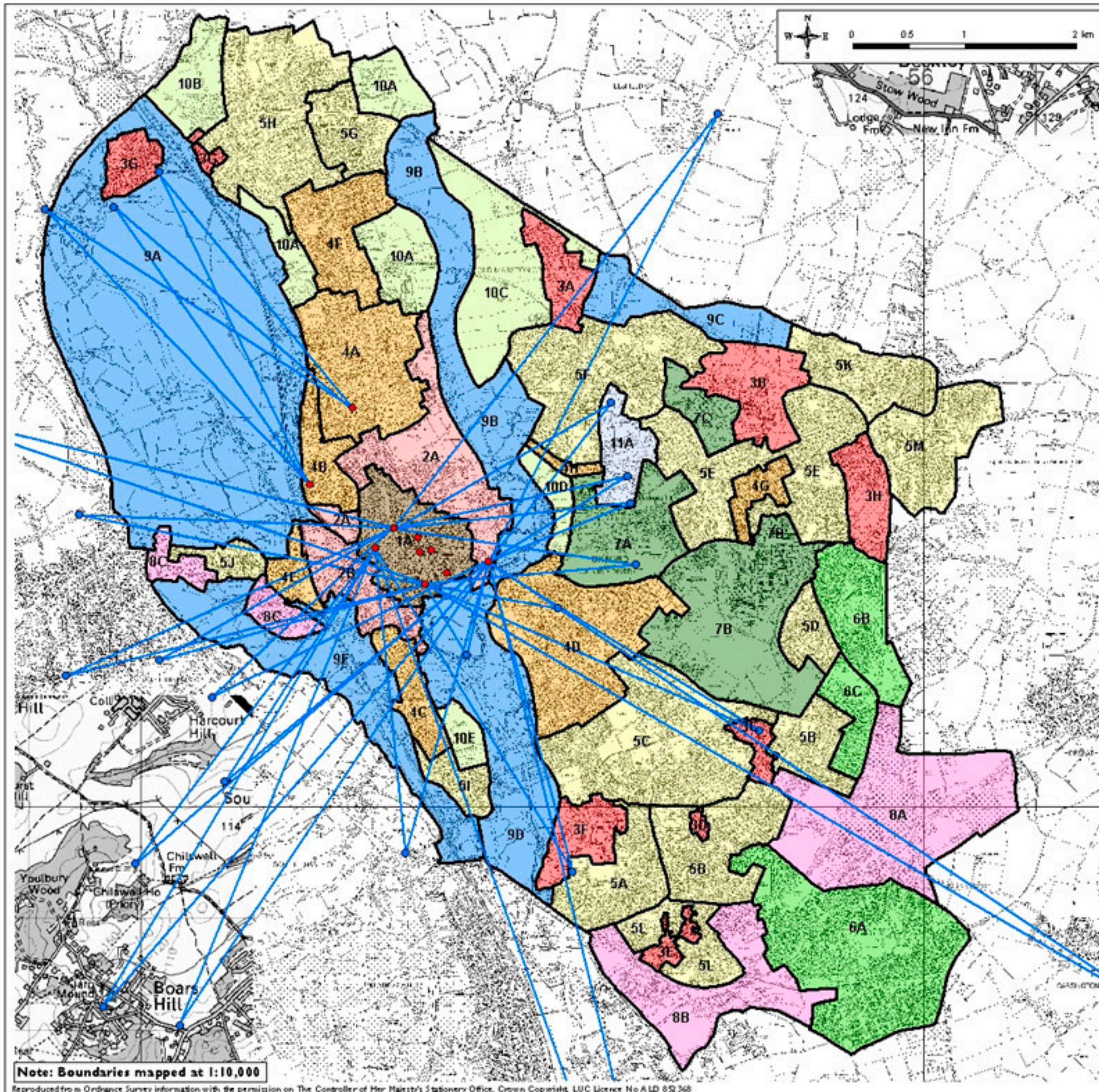


<b>Type 8: Clay Vales</b>		
8A Sandford Vale	Large scale, smooth clay vale to the south of Oxford. Hedgerows create a strong field pattern and hedgerow trees stand out as features in this open landscape. Vertical elements, such as electricity pylons, are highly visible in this open vale landscape. Red brick is characteristic of the vale and red brick farms are scattered throughout. There are extensive views across the vale from surrounding high ground, for example from Garsington, and there is very little opportunity to conceal development in this open landscape.	<p>Conserve hedgerows which are important features of the landscape pattern of the vale.</p> <p>Replace hedgerow trees as they mature to conserve these landscape features.</p>
8B Radley Vale	Flat, open clay vale on the western bank of the Thames, opposite the Sandford Clay Vale. Good condition working agricultural landscape of arable fields divided by low hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees (oak), ditch-side vegetation (willows) or shelter belts (poplar) which create important skyline features. Minor rural lanes are bordered by drainage ditches, rich in wetland vegetation. Farm buildings are typically constructed of red brick and thatch. The settlements of Radley and Lower Radley contain large houses scattered at low density along narrow lanes - these are typically constructed from red brick with thatch, with some rendered and painted. Electricity pylons are prominent elements. This is a sensitive landscape due to its open, exposed character.	<p>Conserve shelter belts (poplar), hedgerow trees (oak) and wetland vegetation (willows) which create a wooded skyline.</p> <p>Maintain the open, rural character as a setting to Oxford.</p> <p>Conserve the low density of housing, which characterises this area, in contrast to the city of Oxford.</p>

- 2.7. This assessment of the city and its setting provides the context for a more detailed study (1:10,000 scale) of the urban fabric, within the city boundary. The results are presented in the following chapter.



**Oxford City Landscape Character Assessment**  
**Figure 2.3.1:**  
**Townscape Character Areas**



- Key**
- Spire location
  - Viewpoints
  - View cone
- Townscape Character Area**
- 1. Historic Core**
    - 1A Historic City Core
  - 2. Historic Fringe**
    - 2A University Fringe
    - 2B Western Fringe
  - 3. Historic Village Cores**
    - 3A Old Marston Core
    - 3B Old Headington Core
    - 3C Temple Cowley
    - 3D Church Cowley Core
    - 3E Littlemore Village
    - 3F Ifley Village
    - 3G Wolvercote
    - 3H Headington Quarry
  - 4. Victorian Suburbs and Villages**
    - 4A North Oxford
    - 4B Jericho
    - 4C Grandpoint
    - 4D East Oxford
    - 4E New Osney
    - 4F Summertown
    - 4G New Headington
    - 4H New Marston Village
  - 5. Inter-war / Post-war Suburbs**
    - 5A Rose Hill
    - 5B Cowley Residential Suburb
    - 5C Florence Park and Cowley Marsh
    - 5D The Slade
    - 5E New Headington
    - 5F New Marston
    - 5G Cutteslowe / Sunnymead
    - 5H North Oxford Fringes
    - 5I New Hinksey
    - 5J Botley Road
    - 5K Barton
    - 5L Littlemore
    - 5M Sandhills and Risinghurst
  - 6. Post 1960s Suburbs**
    - 6A Blackbird Leys
    - 6B Wood Farm
    - 6C Horspath Road Area
  - 7. Open Hills (with institutions)**
    - 7A Headington Hill
    - 7B Southfield Park and Hospitals Complex
    - 7C John Radcliffe Hospital
  - 8. 20th Century Fringe Business, Industry and Retail**
    - 8A Cowley Motor Works
    - 8B Littlemore Business and Science Parks
    - 8C Botley Industrial and Retail Parks
  - 9. Pastoral Floodplains**
    - 9A Thames (Isis) - North
    - 9B Cherwell Valley
    - 9C Bayswater Brook
    - 9D Thames (Isis) - South
    - 9E Hinksey / Bulstake Streams
  - 10. Open River Terraces**
    - 10A North Oxford Open River Terrace
    - 10B Peartree Open River Terrace
    - 10C Marston Open River Terrace
    - 10D St Clements Open River Terrace
    - 10E New Hinksey Open River Terrace
  - 11. Garden Suburbs**
    - 11A Headington Hill

Note: Boundaries mapped at 1:10,000

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## 9 RIVERS AND PASTORAL FLOODPLAINS

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### Generic Description

This landscape/townscape character type is defined by the alluvial floodplains of the main river valleys and tributary valleys through Oxford. This landscape/ townscape type coincides with the *Rivers and Pastoral Floodplains* landscape type at 1:25,000, but has been drawn accurate to 1:10,000 for this assessment.

The tranquil pastoral scene of open meadows with cattle grazing amongst the silhouettes of mature floodplain trees is common to all of the floodplains and these rural scenes form a contrast to the adjacent urban landscapes. Boathouses, locks and pubs are landmarks in these riverside landscapes. They are often the site of allotments, playing fields and large scale business/retail parks because they provide the open space required for such land uses.

The character of these river floodplains varies in different valleys and along different stretches of the same river. For example, the *Thames (Isis)* is a popular recreational landscape with rowing facilities, the Thames towpath and popular pubs whereas the *Cherwell* is a much more rural area with a greater sense of enclosure.

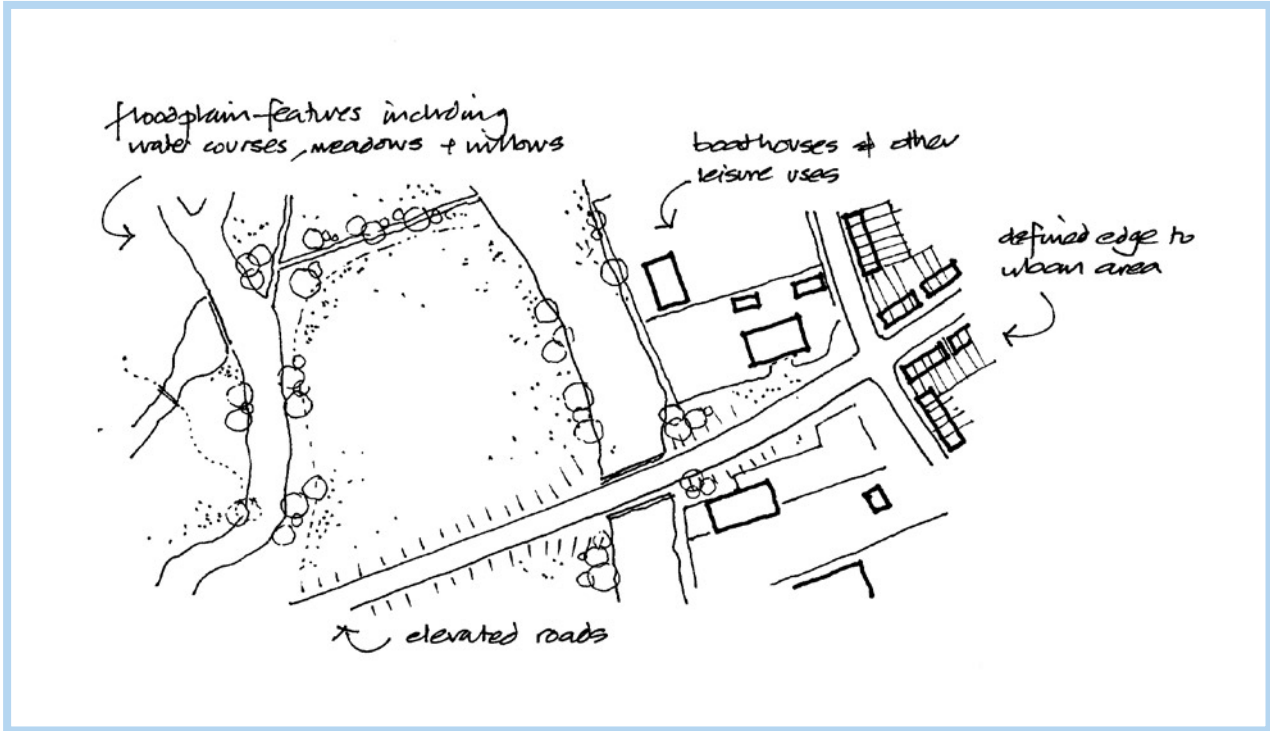
### Key Characteristics

- flat, wide alluvial floodplains of the river that flow between the hills enclosing Oxford;
- tranquil pastoral floodplains with cattle often a feature of the scene;
- boathouses, locks and pubs are features;
- allotments, playing fields and associated buildings are often found in the open floodplain;
- views across the open landscape to adjacent urban areas.

### Character Areas

- 9A Thames (Isis) - north
- 9B Cherwell Valley
- 9C Bayswater Brook
- 9D Thames (Isis) - south
- 9E Hinksey/Bulstake Streams

## 9 PASTORAL FLOODPLAINS



Generic example of spatial characteristics.

## 9A THAMES (ISIS) - NORTH

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### Description

The gently meandering course of the River Thames on the north-west of Oxford, known locally as the River Isis, is bordered by large, historic floodplain commons where cattle and ponies graze in the shade of floodplain trees (*photo 1*). This peaceful floodplain lies to the west of the historic core of Oxford, providing a contrast in scale and character to the busy centre, and is part of the iconography of Oxford celebrated in numerous landscape paintings. The historic meadows, pastures and commons around Port Meadow, Godstow, Binsey and Medley are a strong influence on the character of the area today. Port Meadow is a landscape that has changed little since prehistoric times (*photo 2*). Bronze Age people buried their dead here and during the Iron Age people lived on the meadow during the summer and grazed their livestock on the rich pasture. Coppiced willows, growing alongside watercourses, are features of the floodplain. Some of the historic events that have defined the *Thames (Isis) - North* are the informal 17th century enclosure of fields west of the Thames, the arrival of the Oxford Canal in 1790 and the railway in the 19th century. More recently, the arrival of the northern ring road, gravel workings, industrial workshops, allotment gardens and residential housing have affected the tranquillity of the area.

The area has a very low density of built development and is characterised by scattered farm buildings and historic sites including the ruins of the 12th century Godstow Abbey, the site of St Margarets Well and the rural oasis of Binsey (*photo 3*). Buildings are typically isolated farms and rural stone built pubs at river crossing points. The trout is one of Oxford's most famous pubs, most recently popularised by television through the *Inspector Morse* series by Colin Dexter, valued for its peaceful riverside setting. Local rubble limestone buildings, boundary walls and bridges are features of the rural built environment and boat moorings are common features along the course of the river. Enclosed farmland around Binsey and Godstow is small-moderate sized fields (mixed crop and pasture) bounded by hedgerows (*photo 4*). Historic buildings sheltered by small deciduous groves punctuate the landscape. Small brooks and ditches thread their way through the farmland.

The Oxford Canal, which defines the eastern edge of the floodplain was brought to Oxford in 1790 and its corridor now has a character of its own - colourful barges and industrial land uses border the canal (*photo 5*). The canal has helped to contain urban sprawl, preventing westward expansion into the remainder of the floodplain. Narrow rural lanes (Binsey Lane and Godstow Road) are characterised by lack of kerbing, road markings or street lighting.

The long management history, rare plant and bird populations establish the commons as having exceptionally high ecological value. The continuity of grazing management by the Freeman (and from the 16th century the Commoners of Wolvercote) has created a unique flora on the thin dry gravelly soils to the north. Here, the vegetation is akin to a limestone grassland. The meadows are regularly flooded and support a diverse wetland flora (*photo 6*).

Port Meadow is one of the County's most popular haunts for birders. Annual winter floods bring spectacular flocks of wildfowl and waders. Lapwing and Golden Plover can number over a thousand whilst Teal, Widgeon and Canada Goose are often seen in their hundreds. Port Meadow is a magnet for migrating birds and almost every regularly occurring British species of wader and freshwater wildfowl have been recorded along with many Gulls, Terns, and song birds.

Access to the area is via Binsey Lane from the south, via Walton Well Road or Aristotle Lane (across the Canal) from the east, or Godstow/Wolvercote in the north. The west is bounded by the busy ring road.

## Checklist and Key Characteristics

Underlying landscape type(s)	<i>Pastoral Floodplains</i> - the alluvial floodplain of the River Thames.
Evolution of landscape/townscape	<p>Port Meadow is a landscape that has changed little since prehistoric times. Bronze Age people buried their dead here and during the Iron Age people lived on the meadow during the summer and grazed their livestock on the rich pasture. Medieval commons have survived.</p> <p>Benedictine Nunnery of Godstow founded in 1133 with a medieval bridge approach.</p> <p>Rural Oasis of Binsey originated from St Margaret's Church in the 12th century. Church Farm built 16th century.</p> <p>Commons were gradually enclosed by informal 17th century enclosure of fields.</p> <p>Opening of the Oxford Canal in 1790 and the railway in the 19th century influenced the character of the eastern edge of the area.</p> <p>20th century additions include the northern ring road, gravel workings, industrial workshops, allotment gardens and, most recently, residential housing.</p>
Archaeological and historic interest	<p>Bronze and Iron Age burials and settlements are well preserved and clearly visible from the air or in some cases on the ground as shallow circular ditches and banks.</p> <p>Godstow Abbey ruins.</p> <p>Site of St Margarets Well.</p> <p>Historic meadows, pastures and commons around Port Meadow, Godstow, Binsey and Medley.</p> <p>Historic 'groves' adjacent to settlements.</p> <p>Castle Mills Stream and the Oxford Canal.</p>
Street and block pattern	Scattered, isolated historic stone buildings including farms, pubs and churches.
Public/private realm interface	Clear division between public and private spaces. A large proportion of this character area is in the public realm.
Massing and enclosure	<p>Very low density of built development.</p> <p>Scattered farm buildings and historic sites.</p> <p>Great sense of exposure, particularly to the east of the Thames where there is very little enclosure in the form of built development</p>

## 9A THAMES (ISIS) NORTH

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Photo 1: The River Thames (or Isis) is bordered by large, historic floodplain commons.



Photo 2: Port Meadow has changed little since prehistoric times. There are long distance views to the spires and domes of Oxford.



Photo 3: The rural settlement of Binsey is typical of the floodplain - note the use of thatch.



Photo 4: Enclosed farmland to the west of the river is mixed crop and pasture, divided by hedgerows.



Photo 5: The Oxford Canal (built 1790) corridor has a unique character.



Photo 6: The meadows are regularly flooded and support a diverse wetland flora.

	or field boundaries.
Architecture and built form	<p>Buildings are typically historic churches, farm buildings and rural stone built pubs at river crossing points.</p> <p>Historic stone bridges over rivers.</p> <p>Local rubble limestone buildings and boundary walls.</p>
Streetscape	<p>Narrow rural lanes (Binsey Lane and Godstow Road) are characterised by lack of kerbing, road markings or street lighting.</p> <p>Lanes are no-through roads.</p>
Open space	<p>This area is dominated by its open greenspace including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historic common land untouched by the plough for centuries and rich in history.</li> <li>• Neutral grasslands (Hook Meadow and the Trap Grounds, Wolvercote Meadows) bordering the large pastures of Wolvercote and Port Meadow.</li> <li>• Canal Corridor and Oxford Canal Marsh providing a green corridor running along the edge of the floodplain including the Oxford Canal Walk.</li> <li>• Enclosed private farmland around Binsey and Godstow with hedgerows, small deciduous groves, brooks and ditches.</li> </ul>
Biodiversity	<p>The floodplain meadows of the Upper Thames at Oxford are some of the finest examples of traditionally managed grassland in the country. Port Meadow and Pixey Mead are designated as of international importance (candidate Special Area of Conservation) for their grassland communities and the numbers of water fowl that over-winter. Much of the remaining grassland on the Thames floodplain is designated as of at least local importance (SLINC).</p> <p>Neutral grasslands (Hook Meadow and the Trap Grounds, Wolvercote Meadows) are a series of unimproved and semi-improved neutral grassland with fen, reedbed, ditches and watercourses provide other habitats. Designated as a SSSI and containing a significant proportion of lowland hay meadow, a UK BAP Priority Habitat.</p> <p>The Canal Corridor and Oxford Canal Marsh provides supporting a range of aquatic habitats and animals, including water vole. The marshland was previously cattle grazed wet meadow and sedge dominated fen an important wildlife corridor with some areas designated SLINC.</p> <p>Deciduous groves (Godstow Holt and Medley Manor Wood) include both wet and drier wood types. Species include herb Paris, cowslip hairy brome, giant fescue, field maple and guelder rose. Designated SLINC and containing Wet Woodland, a UK BAP Priority Habitat.</p> <p>Neutral grassland (Godstow Bridge Meadow, Godstow Nunnery Meadow, Lower Wolvercote Meadows, Meadow next to Lower Wolvercote SSSI and Line Ditch) - unimproved and semi-improved neutral grasslands, predominately cattle grazed. Scrub, wet grassland, ditches, sedge-dominated wetland and pollarded trees on the banks of the River Thames provide additional habitats. Designated SLINC.</p>



Land use, culture and vitality	<p>Major land uses are agricultural and recreational.</p> <p>Cultural traditions of the Curator of Port Meadow and Freemen of Oxford who impound all grazing animals once a year.</p> <p>Damp mists of winter make it a melancholy, but evocative part of Oxford while in midsummer it comes alive with people who use the area for boating, swimming, walking and the pic-nics by the riverside.</p>
Access and traffic	<p>Good access to large areas of public open space by foot as a result of the long surviving commons and the Thames National Trail.</p> <p>Dead-end lanes ensure the area is remote to traffic.</p> <p>Thames National Trail and the Oxford Canal Walk are popular walking routes.</p>
Views and visual patterns	<p>Open, unrestricted views across Port Meadow to the spires of central Oxford.</p>
Designations	<p>Port Meadow and Wolvercote Common are a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Scheduled Ancient Monument and together with the nearby Yarnton and Pixey Mead a candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) under the European Habitats Directive. There are also a number of local nature conservation designations.</p> <p>Area is designated as part of the Green Belt.</p> <p>Conservation Areas around Godstow and Binsey.</p> <p>Godstow Abbey and ditches around Port Meadow are SAMs.</p>

## Evaluation of character and quality

This area is highly distinctive as a result of its flat topography, expansive open space, riverside and canalside walks and species rich, traditionally managed, grasslands. Its character is strongly influenced by the history of land management and the richness of wildlife.

The long management history and survival of historic features result in a landscape of exceptional quality illustrating a high survival of floodplain features. The area has a strong visual and cultural unity and a high functional integrity.

## Indicators of landscape value

Landscape Quality	High
Biodiversity	High - international interest (cSAC, SSSIs)
Historic Integrity	High - impressive survival of historic features; SAMs; Conservation Areas
Re-creatability	Low
Intervisibility	High - views across Port Meadow to skyline of spires and domes

## Sensitivity to change

This area is highly sensitive to change as a result of its flat, open character allowing long views and the role it plays in the rural setting of Oxford. It is particularly sensitive as a result of its impressive historic remains, international ecological importance and open character. It also lies within the viewcone of the key viewpoints identified from Wolvercote Common and the A34 and this heightens its sensitivity tall built elements.

Although Port Meadow is a landscape that has changed little since prehistoric times, pressures on other parts of the area are high as a result of the proximity of the city - built development, communication routes and industry have all had their place in the history of the floodplain. The flat nature of the floodplain has allowed westwards expansion of the city, bringing with it industrial estates, housing estates and retail parks, which have influenced its open and rural character.

The flat topography, expansive open spaces, riverside and canalside walks and species rich, traditionally managed, grasslands are crucial to the character of the *Thames (Isis) - North* and threats to this local character could arise as a result of:

- new built development that does not respect the spatial qualities and local vernacular of this distinctive area;
- intensive grassland management for recreation rather than nature conservation;
- abstraction or flood defence work upstream, or drainage associated with building works, resulting in changes in the river flooding regime;
- road works that affect the rural character of the lanes;
- maturing and eventual loss of vegetation, particularly floodplain trees;
- ageing of the built fabric, including the characteristic stone boundary walls and historic buildings;
- expansion of large car parks and industrial uses into the open space provided by the floodplain or new built features that would affect the open expansive character or block views of the historic core from the floodplain.

## Objectives, policy development and enhancement opportunities

The overall strategy should be to conserve the open expansive nature of the floodplain, the rural character, historic depth and ecological habitats as a setting to central Oxford. Key areas to consider for policy development and landscape/townscape enhancement may include:

- conserving the semi-natural habitats and traditional management of the commonland and meadows;

- resisting built development, car parks or industrial land uses which would impinge on the open rural character and tranquillity of the floodplain;
- encouraging management of the water levels of the Thames to ensure floodplain grassland habitats are maintained;
- maintaining access to, and along, the canal corridor - any new development along the canal should make best use of the canal and maintain an open setting to the canal;
- considering opportunities to plant rare floodplain trees such as black poplar;
- maintaining important and famous views of Oxford across the floodplain, such as those from the edge of Wolvercote Common and the A34;
- conserving the balance of tranquillity and recreational use;
- maintaining access roads as no-through roads and conserving the rural character of these lanes through minimising the presence of signage, line painting, street lighting and concrete kerbs.

## 9B CHERWELL VALLEY

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### Description

The alluvial floodplain of the River Cherwell is different, but no less important, than that of the Thames. The course of the Cherwell is of a smaller scale, and less visible, than that of the Thames. It flows a wooded course through a mixed agricultural landscape of small, regular fields divided by hedgerows. Most land alongside the river is privately owned, although public footpaths do access certain stretches of the river. This results in a more peaceful, remote character than the Thames to the west of Oxford (*photos 1 and 2*).

Historic meadows and pastures (New Marston Meadows, Burnt Hill Meadows, Northern Bypass Meadows, Park Farm Meadows, Great Meadow, Long Meadow and Angel and Greyhound Meadow) strongly influence the character of the valley. Angel and Greyhound meadow (*photo 3*) used to grow fodder for two coaching inns, the Angel and Greyhound, both on the High Street. The mixed agricultural landscape today is characterised by small regular fields, a result of enclosure during the 18th century.

The area is notable for its absence of settlement. The most prominent built features are the bridges across the Cherwell (*photo 4*). Magdalen Bridge is a historic crossing point of the Cherwell, the present day bridge resulting from a re-building programme between 1772-1782. Other bridges include the graceful high arched footbridge into University Parks (built 1923) and the modern road bridges carrying northern ring road and Marston Ferry Road and over the Cherwell.

The Cherwell passes to the east of the historic core of Oxford, which is dominated by the University. This has an impact on the character of the floodplain - College grounds and sports fields and the University Botanic Gardens are familiar features of the Cherwell floodplain close to the centre of Oxford. The area has a strong visual and cultural unity - the Cherwell is well known for its flat-bottomed punts (*photo 5*).

The network of floodplain grasslands within the Cherwell valley are of national ecological significance, and are predominantly of a type that is now rare in both Britain and Europe, and a UK BAP Priority Habitat (*photo 6*). The nationally scarce fritillary *Fritillaria meleagris*, occurs in the valley. In addition to the aquatic habitats of the river Cherwell, hedgerows, ditches and the Peasmoor Brook provide further linear wildlife habitats.

### Checklist and Key Characteristics

Underlying landscape type(s)	<i>Pastoral Floodplains</i> - the alluvial floodplain of the River Cherwell.
Evolution of landscape/townscape	Historic Meadows and Pastures (New Marston Meadows, Burnt Hill Meadows, Northern Bypass Meadows, Park Farm Meadows, Great Meadow, Long Meadow and Angel and Greyhound Meadow) strongly influence the character of the valley close to the city centre.  The mixed agricultural landscape of small, regular fields are a result

	<p>of 18th century enclosure.</p> <p>There has been progressively greater access across the Cherwell resulting in increasing number of features along the river.</p> <p>20th century additions include the northern ring road, sports fields and pavilions and increased access bridges across the Cherwell.</p>
Archaeological and historic interest	<p>Historic meadows and pastures. Angel and Greyhound meadow used to grow fodder for two coaching inns, the Angel and Greyhound, both on the High Street.</p> <p>King's Mill is an historic building at a crossing point of the Cherwell.</p>
Street and block pattern	Notable for absence of settlement.
Public/private realm interface	A large proportion of this character area is in the private realm with public access via footpaths.
Massing and enclosure	Hedgerows and vegetation alongside the River Cherwell provide a sense of enclosure within the area.
Architecture and built form	<p>Bridges are the most notable built features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Magdalen Bridge over the Cherwell, historic bridge crossing bridge re-built in its present form 1772-1782.</li> <li>• Graceful high arched footbridge provides access into University Parks across the Cherwell (built 1923)</li> <li>• Modern road bridges carrying northern ring road and Marston Ferry Road and over the Cherwell.</li> </ul> <p>Few buildings - isolated rural stone farm buildings (Park Farm and King's Mill) and sports pavilions of various designs.</p>
Streetscape	Notable for the absence of streets.
Open space	<p>This area is almost entirely open greenspace - most land is privately owned with little access except for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Angel and Greyhound Meadow is leased by the city, from Magdalen College, for the use of the public.</li> <li>• Sunnymead Recreation Ground is a popular riverside area with open public access - includes Sunnymead bathing place.</li> </ul> <p>Magdalen Meadows are unimproved neutral grassland meadows. The sports fields are managed as recreational open spaces with less ecological interest.</p>
Biodiversity	<p>Unimproved neutral grassland, herb rich meadows, species rich hedgerows and wetland habitats.</p> <p>Unimproved and semi-improved neutral meadows, drier grassland and swamp managed as summer pasture and hay meadows. Sites support fritillary, scarce Diptera and damselfly. Breeding lapwing, lesser-spotted woodpecker and kingfisher.</p> <p>Victoria Arms Spinney: a small area of wet woodland with field maple, red currant and song thrush recorded.</p>
Land use, culture and vitality	Peaceful, rural landscape dominated by meadow and pasture with some playing fields and gardens close to the city centre.
Access and traffic	<p>Cycle tracks and footpaths only - no roads.</p> <p>Road bridges over the Cherwell bring some traffic intrusion into the</p>

## 9B CHERWELL

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Photo 1: The Cherwell has a more peaceful & backwater character than the Thames.



Photo 2: Tarmac footpaths access some stretches of the river.



Photo 3: Angel & Greyhound meadow used to grow fodder for two city inns, the Angel and the Greyhound, on the high street.



Photo 4: The most prominent built features are the bridges across the Cherwell.



Photo 5: The Cherwell is well known for its flat-bottomed punts.



Photo 6: Floodplain grasslands are rare and are a UK BAP priority habitat.

	<p>rural landscape.</p> <p>Riverside walks provide public access to the riverside.</p>
Views and visual patterns	Views constrained by layers of hedgerows and mature vegetation alongside the Cherwell.
Designations	<p>Marston Meadows are a designated SSSI and UK BAP priority habitat (lowland hay meadows). Other unimproved meadows are designated of local importance (SLINC).</p> <p>Historic meadows and pastures (New Marston Meadows, Burnt Hill Meadows, Northern Bypass Meadows, Park Farm Meadows) are designated SSSI or SLINC and are UK BAP priority habitat lowland hay meadows.</p> <p>Victoria Arms Spinney, designated SLINC, contains Wet Woodland, a UK BAP Priority Habitat.</p> <p>Angel and Greyhound Meadow, Long Meadow, Great Meadow, Magdalen Gardens and Merton College Sports Ground form part of the city centre Conservation Area.</p> <p>Area is designated as part of the Green Belt.</p>

### Evaluation of character and quality

This character area has an extremely important role in the setting to Oxford. It is one of the major floodplains that defined the historic growth of the city and provided the unique juxtaposition of urban and rural environments at the centre of the city. The area is highly distinctive for its rural character, historic meadows and pastures, wet woodland habitats and remote sense of tranquillity.

The intact rural environment, rich ecological habitats and functional integrity results in a high quality landscape.

### Indicators of landscape value

Landscape Quality	High
Biodiversity	High - national interest in SSSIs
Historic Integrity	High - historic meadows form part of a Conservation Area
Re-creatability	Low
Intervisibility	Moderate - views of historic core skyline between gaps in vegetation
Open Space	High - Large expanse of open greenspace

## **Sensitivity to change**

This area is highly sensitive to change as a result of its intact nature, tranquil character and the role it plays in the rural setting of Oxford. Its sensitivity is further enhanced by its high ecological value. It also lies within the viewcone of the key viewpoints identified at South Park and Elsfeld and this heightens its sensitivity tall built elements.

Since the 18th century enclosures this area has seen very little change, although conversion of floodplain meadows into close mown amenity playing fields has had an impact on the landscape and ecological character of the floodplain. The rural character, historic meadows and pastures, wet woodland habitats and remote sense of tranquillity are crucial to the character of the *Cherwell Valley* and threats to this local character could arise as a result of:

- new built development that does not respect the spatial qualities and local vernacular of this distinctive area;
- intensive grassland management for recreation rather than nature conservation, threatening the survival of traditional herb rich meadows;
- abstraction or flood defence work upstream, or drainage associated with building works, resulting in changes in the river flooding regime;
- increases in traffic resulting in polluting run-off from roads;
- infrastructure improvements that would affect the rural character of the lanes and new crossing points of the river that could intrude into the rural character of the landscape;
- maturing and eventual loss of vegetation, particularly floodplain trees.

## **Objectives, policy development and enhancement opportunities**

The overall strategy should be to conserve the rural character, historic meadows and pastures, wet woodland habitats and remote sense of tranquillity as a setting to central Oxford. Key areas to consider for policy development and landscape/townscape enhancement may include:

- conserving the historic meadows and pastures of the Cherwell floodplain and preserving traditional management techniques;
- resisting built development in the floodplain which would impinge on the open rural character and tranquillity of the floodplain;
- resisting infrastructure improvements which would further fragment the floodplain. Bridges are more suitable than embankments to maintain visual and ecological connections along the floodplain;
- conserving the historic field patterns and managing hedgerow boundaries to conserve these as wildlife habitats;



- maintaining important and famous views of Oxford across the floodplain, such as the views from South Park and Elsfield;
- enhancing access to, and along, the river without threatening the rural, tranquil character of the landscape;
- considering opportunities to plant rare floodplain trees such as black poplar.

Streetscape	Absence of streets. Northern bypass (dual carriageway) and junction with Marsh Lane is only infrastructure.
Open space	This area is almost entirely open greenspace - most land is privately owned.  Pastoral fields south of the brook are small scale unimproved and semi-improved neutral grassland meadows, divided by hedgerows. Important in the setting of Headington Hill. Hedgerow boundaries and trees contribute to the wooded character of the ridge.  Arable farmland is open, large scale fields divided by low, gappy hedgerows. Although not typical of the floodplain landscape, it contributes a rural setting to Oxford.  Public open space in the form of allotment gardens, sports grounds and playground.
Biodiversity	Semi-improved neutral grassland pasture, species rich hedgerows, wetland and aquatic habitats are important features, although there are no designated sites of ecological importance.
Land use, culture and vitality	Arable and pasture farmland with sports fields close to Marston.  Rural area affected by traffic noise associated with the northern bypass.
Access and traffic	Northern bypass is a busy dual carriageway. Junction connects to Marsh Lane.  Public footpath along part of the Brook, but access generally poor and fragmented by dual carriageway.
Views and visual patterns	Views constrained by layers of hedgerows and mature vegetation alongside Bayswater Brook.  Views across the area from Marston junction of the northern bypass.  Views to Barton and Headington on the wooded ridgeline above the valley.
Designations	Area around Marston Junction is designated as part of the Green Belt.

### Evaluation of character and quality

This character area performs an important role in the setting of Headington. It is distinctive as a result of its rural character, its notable lack of development and historic connections to Headington Meads. However, fragmentation of the area by the northern by-pass, the invisible course of the river and the lack of floodplain features means the integrity of the landscape has been lost and landscape quality is perceived as being moderate.

### Indicators of landscape value

Landscape Quality	Moderate
Biodiversity	Low - local interest only

Historic Integrity	Moderate - fields are part of former Headington Meads
Re-creatability	Moderate
Intervisibility	Low - no views of spires and domes of the historic core
Open Space	High - Large expanse of open greenspace as a setting to Headington

### **Sensitivity to change**

Despite the poor condition of landscape features, this area is moderately sensitive to change as a result of its rural character and the role it plays in the rural setting of Headington Village. It also lies under the viewcone of the key viewpoint identified at Elsfield and this heightens its sensitivity to tall elements.

Since parliamentary enclosure the most notable change in the landscape was the introduction of the northern ring road that has fragmented the landscape and the 20th century additions of the football ground, cycle speedway, adventure playground and sports ground. The rural character, notable lack of development and historic connections to Headington Meads are crucial to the character of the *Bayswater Brook* and threats to this local character could arise as a result of:

- new built development that does not respect the spatial qualities and local vernacular of this distinctive area;
- intensive grassland management for recreation or intensive agriculture rather than nature conservation, threatening the survival of traditional herb rich meadows;
- maturing and eventual loss of vegetation, particularly floodplain trees.

### **Objectives, policy development and enhancement opportunities**

The overall strategy should be to conserve the rural character, historic field patterns and undeveloped floodplain as a setting to Headington Village. Key areas to consider for policy development and landscape/townscape enhancement may include:

- conserving the historic integrity of hedgerows south of Bayswater Brook;
- conserving the rural setting of Barton, Headington and Marston;
- enhancing the setting of Bayswater Brook through creation of meadows and pastures and maintaining them through traditional management techniques;
- enhancing the visibility of Bayswater Brook as a landscape feature through planting of floodplain trees along its course;

- maintaining important and famous views of Oxford across the floodplain, such as the view from Elsfield;
- managing existing amenity areas for wildlife, diversifying margins of sports grounds by less frequent mowing and introducing traditional management techniques such as the pollarding of willows and encouraging establishment of unimproved herb rich grassland.

## 9D THAMES (ISIS) - SOUTH

### Description

Flat, wide alluvial floodplain of the southern part of the River Thames as it flows through Oxford, known locally as the River Isis. This part of the Thames floodplain forms a setting for the oldest part of Oxford. Oxford derived its name from a group of ox-herders who forded the river (hence Ox-Ford) near Christchurch meadow and established the first recorded settlement. Christchurch Meadow, with its open character and silhouetted floodplain trees is the archetypal English river scene (*photo 1*) and forms a setting for some of the oldest of the Oxford Colleges, Christchurch and Merton, as well as Oxford's cathedral. The view from the towpath back towards the city centre is a well documented view and encompasses most people's impression of the city of Oxford. Grandpont Causeway, a section of the stone bridges which crossed the river in the eleventh century, is a scheduled ancient monument and defines the western edge of the area. To the north the remains of the medieval city walls (also a scheduled ancient monument) marks the boundary between floodplain and city (*photo 2*).

The southern part of the Thames (Isis) is greatly influenced by the University and its rowing culture with a large number of boathouses scattered along the towpaths which border its banks (*photo 3*). It is a busy stretch of river, particularly during regattas when the banks can be full of spectators. Pubs, such as the Isis Tavern, and the Iffley Lock provide focal points for activity. The river is wide at this point and is a prominent feature in the floodplain. The remainder of the floodplain is a mixture of pastures, paddocks, allotments and playing fields with minor tributaries winding their way through the landscape. Unimproved neutral grasslands are important ecological features of the floodplain and include areas of lowland hay meadows, a UK BAP priority habitat (*photo 4*). Iffley Meadows is notable for its carpets of fritillaries in the spring, the largest population in the region. Donnington Bridge provides the only road crossing of the river and the railway bridge, at Grandpont Nature Park, is a landmark feature (*photo 5*).

### Checklist and Key Characteristics

Underlying landscape type(s)	<i>Pastoral Floodplains</i> - flat, wide alluvial floodplain of the River Thames (Isis) south of Folly Bridge
Evolution of landscape/townscape	Historic Meadows and Pastures (Christchurch Meadow, Merton Field) strongly influence the character of the valley close to the city centre.  20th century additions include the sports fields and pavilions and boat houses.
Archaeological and historic interest	Christchurch meadow is an important historic, ecological and amenity resource and forms a setting to the oldest part of the city.  Grandpont Causeway runs along the edge of Christchurch Meadow and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.  Medieval city walls (also an SAM) border Merton Field

## 9D THAMES (ISIS) SOUTH

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Photo 1: Christchurch meadow is the archetypal English river scene.



Photo 2: The ancient city walls mark the boundary between the floodplain and the city to the north (photo shows Merton College).



Photo 3: The southern part of the Thames is influenced by the University and its rowing culture - boathouses border its banks.



Photo 4: Unimproved neutral grasslands are important ecological features of the floodplain.



Photo 5: The railway bridge crossing the Thames at Grandpoint Nature Park is a landmark.

Street and block pattern	Scattered settlement of schools, pubs and boat houses.
Public/private realm interface	A large proportion of this character area is in the private realm with public access via footpaths.
Massing and enclosure	Open meadows and low density of built development create sense of exposure. Vegetation provides enclosure, particularly in summer.
Architecture and built form	Pubs, locks and boat houses of varying styles and materials. All have views out onto the river. Local rubble stone buildings and boundary walls. Donnington Bridge is a modern road bridge across the floodplain.
Streetscape	Notable for the absence of streets.
Open space	This area is almost entirely open greenspace - much land is privately owned with good access via footpaths. Floodplain Meadows (Iffley Meadows, Long Meadow, St. Hilda's College Meadow) are unimproved neutral meadows and pastures within a network of river channels, willow lined ditches and hedges. Iffley Meadows supports the largest population of fritillary in the region, in addition to adders tongue, great burnet and ragged robin. Aston Eyot and the Kidneys is a mix of improved and semi-improved grassland with scrub and bounded by woodland.
Biodiversity	Unimproved neutral grasslands, with national and local nature conservation designations, including areas of UK BAP priority habitat lowland hay meadows. The traditionally managed lowland hay meadow of St Hilda's College Meadow is a UK BAP habitat and is designated as a SLINC. Iffley Meadows has the largest population of fritillary in the region.
Land use, culture and vitality	Peaceful, rural landscape dominated by meadow and pasture with activity centred around the river and Oxford's rowing culture.
Access and traffic	Donnington Bridge is the only bridge over the floodplain and is therefore a site of traffic congestion. A large number of public footpaths, including the Thames National Trail, allow good access to the river and its setting. Tow paths are well used by cyclists.
Views and visual patterns	Views across open meadows, but constrained by layers of hedgerows and mature vegetation alongside the river. View across Christchurch Meadow towards the city centre is notable
Designations	Floodplain Meadows (Iffley Meadows, Long Meadow, St. Hilda's College Meadow) are designated SSSI and SLINC and contain UK BAP priority habitat, lowland hay meadows. Aston Eyot and the Kidneys is a site of local ecological importance, designated SLINC and BBOWT nature reserve. Grandpont Causeway and city walls SAMs Area is designated as part of the Green Belt. Christchurch Meadow forms part of a Conservation Area

## Evaluation of character and quality

This character area has an extremely important role in the setting to Oxford. It is one of the major floodplains that defined the historic growth of the city and provided the unique juxtaposition of urban and rural environments at the centre of the city. The area is highly distinctive for its rural character, historic meadows, rowing culture and views to the historic core.

The intact survival of historic features, rich ecological habitats and functional integrity results in a landscape of exceptionally high quality.

## Indicators of landscape value

Landscape Quality	High
Biodiversity	High - SSSIs indicate national value
Historic Integrity	High - historic meadows, Grandpont Causeway, city walls, Christchurch Meadow Conservation Area
Re-creatability	Low
Intervisibility	High - views across Christchurch Meadow to historic core
Open Space	High - Large expanse of open greenspace

## Sensitivity to change

This area is highly sensitive to change as a result of its historic integrity, tranquil character, rich biodiversity and the role it plays in the rural setting of Oxford. It also lies within the viewcone of the key viewpoints identified at Nuneham Courtney and across Christchurch Meadow towards the city and this heightens its sensitivity to tall built elements.

Since the 18th century enclosures this area has seen very little change, although conversion of floodplain meadows into close mown amenity playing fields has had an impact on the landscape and ecological character of the floodplain. Threats to local character could arise as a result of:

- new built development that does not respect the spatial qualities and local vernacular of this distinctive area;
- intensive grassland management for recreation rather than nature conservation;
- abstraction or flood defence work upstream, or drainage associated with building works, resulting in changes in the river flooding regime;



- maturing and eventual loss of vegetation, particularly floodplain trees;
- ageing of the built fabric, including the characteristic stone boundary walls and historic buildings;
- new built features that would affect the open expansive character or block views of the historic core from the floodplain.

## **Objectives, policy development and enhancement opportunities**

The overall strategy should be to conserve the area's historic integrity, tranquil character, rich biodiversity and the role it plays in the rural setting of Oxford. Key areas to consider for policy development and landscape/townscape enhancement may include:

- conserving the historic meadows and pastures of the Thames floodplain and preserving traditional management techniques;
- resisting built development in the floodplain which would impinge on the open rural character and tranquillity of the floodplain or that would impinge on views of the historic core;
- resisting infrastructure improvements which would further fragment the floodplain - bridges are more suitable than embankments to maintain visual and ecological connections along the floodplain;
- maintaining access to, and along, the river;
- considering opportunities to plant rare floodplain trees such as black poplar.
- maintaining important and famous views of Oxford across the floodplain, such as that from the Christchurch Meadow to Christchurch Cathedral and the old town walls and the longer distance view identified from Nuneham Courtney.

## 9E HINKSEY AND BULSTAKE STREAMS

### Description

Flat, wide alluvial floodplain of the southern part of the River Thames – comprising the streams and tributaries bordering the south-west side of Oxford. It is separated from main river corridor (9D: *Thames (Isis) South*), which runs through the city, by development along the intervening river terraces. The area has its own distinct character and is thus described separately.

The floodplain contains the meandering watercourses of the Hinksey and Bulstake streams and is crossed by a network of rush-filled ditches (*photo 1*). The presence of these small watercourses is indicated by lines pollarded willow, bands of osiers and low scrub (*photo 2*). They are set within large fields of pasture, and rough grassland with mixed scrub, some of which is grazed by horses. In addition there are a number of open water bodies including Hinksey Lake and smaller pools arising from gravel extraction on the west side of the railway. Transmission lines are a very prominent feature of this area – with both electricity pylons and telecommunications infrastructure (*photo 3*). The lines of consecutive vertical structures are very prominent within this flat open landscape. Other dominant features are the railway line (*photo 4*) bordering Hinksey Lake, to the east and the A34 to the west, with the hum of traffic noise having an impact on the qualities of peacefulness and remoteness of this area. A network of tracks and footpaths with foot bridges provides access into the area, often hidden amongst vegetation (*photo 5*).

The area excludes the historic floodplain villages of North and South Hinksey, which lie beyond the administrative boundary of the city to the west – although these are essentially part of the local character. Elsewhere, built development is largely absent, apart from pavilions associated with sports and recreational use (*photo 6*). The close mown grass and infrastructure associated with these land uses are dominant in some areas, obliterating the underlying floodplain character.

The area is critical in forming part of the landscape setting to the historic core, painted by Turner and celebrated in the poetry of Matthew Arnold.

### Checklist and Key Characteristics

Underlying landscape type(s)	<i>River and Pastoral Floodplain</i> - the alluvial floodplain of the River Thames.
Evolution of landscape/townscape	Historic Meadows and Pastures strongly influence the character of the floodplain.  20th century additions include the railway, electricity pylons and ice rink and activities including gravel extraction.
Archaeological and historic interest	Historic meadows, pastures and commons.  The pollarded trees and ditches are important historic landscape features.
Street and block pattern	Notable for its lack of settlement - sports pavilions and the ice rink are only built features.

## 9E HINKSEY/BULSTAKE STREAMS



Photo 1: The floodplain is crossed by a network of rush filled ditches.



Photo 2: Watercourses are lined by pollarded willow, osiers and low scrub.



Photo 3: Pylons and transmission lines are prominent.



Photo 4: The railway line fragments the area.

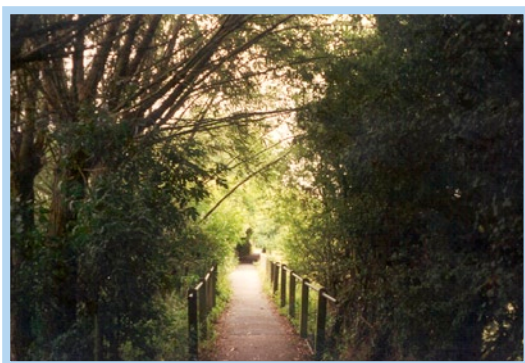


Photo 5: A network of tracks and footpaths with footbridges provide access to floodplain.

Public/private realm interface	A large proportion of this character area is in the private realm with public access via footpaths. Recreation grounds provide public open space.
Massing and enclosure	Low density of built development. Vegetation provides a sense of enclosure, particularly in summer.
Architecture and built form	General absence of built development, apart from pavilions associated with recreational facilities. The wider floodplain includes traditional villages, with vernacular stone buildings and walls (traditional villages of North and South Hinksey are beyond the city boundary). Electricity power lines are prominent.
Streetscape	Notable for the absence of streets.
Open space	Large amount of open space with good access, including rights of way and permitted paths, plus large areas of public open space as a result of the long surviving commons. Grandpont Nature Park - a nature park, created on site of former Oxford Gas works – rough neutral and acidic grassland and scrub managed for wildlife with public access to the Thames. Large number of playing fields and recreation grounds border the area e.g. to the south of New Botley and adjacent to the Ice Rink, plus central cricket ground. Botley Meadow (Osney Mead) - a large area of remnant floodplain meadow, traditionally managed by light grazing horses and a hay cut. Hinksey Pools, Hinksey Stream and Hinksey Lake contain aquatic habitats, which include a narrow pool, where the northern end is used for fishing and southern end undisturbed with reeds and scrub, marginal aquatic vegetation and a larger lake.
Biodiversity	Predominately semi-improved pasture, meadows and scrub. Aquatic habitats, including streams, ditches and standing water are notable and are an extremely valuable wildlife habitat. Spraggelsea Mead and Deans Ham include allotment gardens and local areas of wildlife value. Botley Meadow (Osney Mead) supports great burnet, ragged robin and fritillary and is an important ornithological site, with kingfisher, reed bunting and sedge warbler all recorded. Hinksey Pools, Hinksey Stream and Hinksey Lake contain aquatic habitats, and bittern and water vole have previously been recorded.
Land use, culture and vitality	The area has a timeless quality – historic meadows, pastures and commons.
Access and traffic	Tranquil, rural landscape – impinged on by A34 (noise) and rail line. The area offers public access into the floodplain and beyond. The most notable is the ‘Matthew Arnold’ path – a popular walking route from the city via a footbridge over Hinksey Lake and linking with wider public access including the Chilswell valley walks to Boars Hill. Vitally important in contributing to experience of – rural in close proximity to city – a key characteristic of Oxford.
Views and visual patterns	Views across meadows are constrained by layers of hedgerows and

	mature vegetation alongside the river.
Designations	<p>Botley Meadow (Osney Mead) is designated SLINC with large areas of UK BAP habitat lowland meadow.</p> <p>Hinksey Pools, Hinksey Stream and Hinksey Lake are important areas of ecological interest, designated as SLINC and supporting UK BAP priority species and habitats.</p>

## Evaluation of character and quality

This area has a strength of character by virtue of its good survival of floodplain features. It has an important role in the setting to the city of Oxford, providing the sense of a rural landscape in close proximity to the urban area. It is also critical in the iconography of Oxford – part of a much painted view from Boar’s Hill and North Hinksey forming the rural setting to the historic core, and celebrated in the poetry of Matthew Arnold. Detracting features include the pylons and transmission lines, encroachment of built development, extension of sports facilities and intrusion of traffic noise, which has eroded the peaceful/rural character. Despite this, the area retains a strong visual and cultural unity and a high functional integrity that conveys a perception of exceptionally high landscape quality.

## Indicators of landscape value

Landscape Quality	High
Biodiversity	Moderate - SLINC designations and UK BAP priority habitats
Historic Integrity	Moderate - survival of historic meadows indicate longevity of land use; ditches are important historic features
Re-creatability	Low
Intervisibility	Low - glimpses of some of the tallest buildings of the historic core from floodplain
Open Space	High - Large expanse of open greenspace

## Sensitivity to change

Its distinctiveness, historic interest, high ecological value and open character make this area particularly sensitive to change. It also lies within the viewcone of the key viewpoints identified at Raleigh Park and Boar's Hill to the west and this heightens its sensitivity to built elements.

Since the 18th century enclosures this area has seen progressive changes resulting from expansion of close mown amenity playing fields, introduction of pylons and transmission lines and gravel extraction. Building of the railway line has fragmented the area, but also introduced the colourful railway bridge crossing across the Thames.

Recently the old Oxford Gas works site has been restored to natural habitat and is now a nature park managed for wildlife. Threats to local character could arise as a result of:

- new built development that does not respect the spatial qualities and local vernacular of this distinctive area;
- intensive grassland management for recreation rather than nature conservation;
- abstraction or flood defence work upstream, or drainage associated with building works, resulting in changes in the river flooding regime;
- maturing and eventual loss of vegetation, particularly floodplain trees;
- new built features that would affect the open expansive character of the floodplain.

### **Objectives, policy development and enhancement opportunities**

The overall strategy should be to conserve the area's historic integrity, tranquil character, rich biodiversity and the role it plays in the rural setting of Oxford. Key areas to consider for policy development and landscape/townscape enhancement may include:

- conserving the semi-natural habitats through traditional management of the commonland and meadows;
- conserving and managing important landscape features, including pollards and ditches;
- ensuring any new built development is isolated and of high quality design, in locations that do not obstruct views or adversely affect the rural character of the floodplain;
- seeking to enhance management of recreation land e.g. along margins to reintroduce a 'floodplain' character;
- managing the water levels of the Thames to ensure floodplain grassland habitats are maintained;
- considering opportunities for planting of rare floodplain trees such as black poplar;
- maintaining important and famous views of Oxford across the floodplain, such as those from North Hinksey and Boar's Hill;
- considering long term opportunities for future removal/placing underground of transmission lines – as undertaken on the floodplain (Port Meadow) to the north.