



OXFORD FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER REPORT

Text

on behalf of
Black & Veatch Ltd

April 2009

Land Type 4. Pastoral Floodplains (Appendix Aiv)

Overview: Flat, wide alluvial floodplains of the rivers flowing between the prominent hills have long been used for pasture and hay crops and are part of the classic image of Oxford. 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. In landscape terms, the simple open green meadows expanses and open water allow long views and provide a dramatic contrast, both in colour and form, to the built core of Oxford.

Key characteristics:

- Historic commons and meadowlands
- Tranquil and pastoral landscape
- Areas of ancient wooded groves
- Expanses of open water allowing long views
- Proximity of meadow landscape to cityscape provides dramatic contrast

Local Character Areas within this Landscape Type include:

A. Thames (Isis) North

D. Thames (Isis) South

B. Cherwell Valley

E. Hinksey and Bulstake Streams

Landscape Guidelines

- Maintain the open character and views across the floodplain
- Maintain the rural, pastoral character by resisting development
- Maintain opportunities for public access and enjoyment of this pastoral landscape
- Promote traditional management of meadowlands (pasture and hay cropping) and trees (pollarding of willows)
- Maintain historic continuity of land use of the water meadows and commons
- Conserve and enhance wildlife resource and wetland habitats

Land Type 5. River Meadowlands (Appendix Aiii)

Overview: This landscape type covers the flood plains and valley floors of the rivers Cherwell, Thames, Evenlode, and Windrush. This is a linear riverine landscape with a flat, well-defined alluvial floodplain. It has pastoral character with meadows, wet and semi-improved pasture.

Key characteristics:

- Flat, low-lying topography with seasonally flooded alluvial floodplains.
- Meandering river channels.
- Grazing meadows and small fields of permanent pasture.
- Riparian character with strong pattern of riverside willows and tree lined ditches
- Sparsely settled with a few roads.

Local Character Areas within this Landscape Type include:

- L. Lower Windrush Valley N. Upper Thames
O. Lower Cherwell S. Lower River Thames

Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland particularly on land adjacent to rivers and other watercourses.
- Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn, and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash.
- Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type.
- Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined rivers and other watercourses by planting willows and alders and, where appropriate, pollarding willows.
- Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as willows and alders.
- Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses with the judicious planting of appropriate tree and shrub species characteristic of the landscape type.

Land Type 8. Settled and Open River Terraces (Appendix Aiv)

Overview: The river terraces (and their proximity to pastures) have been the prime locational factor for settlement in the Thames Valley from prehistoric times providing minor undulations in topography and separating the Thames and Cherwell floodplains. These domed deposits of river terrace gravels overlying clay support the historic core of Oxford as well as much newer built development providing contrast to the open floodplains. 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 'enclosed' fields of arable crops and pasture.

Key characteristics:

- Domed landform of river gravel deposits
- Historic core to villages
- Provides platform for development
- Contrast with floodplains

Local Character Areas within this Landscape Type include:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| A. North Oxford River Terrace | C. Marston River Terrace |
| B. River Terrace outliers | D. East Oxford River Terrace |

Landscape Guidelines

- Maintain existing open spaces as a setting floodplains.
- Management of hedgerows and re-planting of hedgerow trees will enhance landscape condition on this northerly approach to Oxford.
- Conserve the setting of historic features and buildings on approach to Oxford by minimising the introduction of urban elements.

Land Type 12. Wooded Estatelands (Appendix Aiii)

Overview: A wooded estate landscape characterised by arable farming and small villages with a strong vernacular character which covers the majority of the wooded and parkland areas in the undulating landscape of the Corallian Ridge and on the southern extremities of the Cotswolds.

Key Characteristics:

- Rolling topography with localised steep slopes.
- Large blocks of ancient woodland and mixed plantations of variable sizes.
- Large parklands and country houses.
- A regularly-shaped field pattern dominated by arable fields.
- Small villages with strong vernacular character.

Local Character Areas within this Landscape Type include:

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| E. Freeland | J. Stanford in the Vale | L. Cumnor Hill |
| F. Bladen | K. Tubney | P. Nuneham Courtenay |
| H. Appleton Lower Common Wood | | |

Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve and maintain semi-natural and ancient semi-natural woodland. Where appropriate, replace non-native conifer species with native species such as oak and ash. Promote the establishment and management of medium to large-scale deciduous and mixed plantations in areas where the landscape structure is particularly weak.
- Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash.
- Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type.
- Conserve and sympathetically maintain species-rich hedgerows and, where appropriate, replant gappy hedges using species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, wayfaring tree, dogwood and spindle.
- Conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly within parklands.
- Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and where appropriate, pollarding willows.
- Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area.
- Promote the use of building materials and a scale of development and that is appropriate to this landscape type.

GLOSSARY

Alluvium sedimentary deposits resulting from the action of rivers, including those laid down in river channels, floodplains, estuaries and lakes.

Ancient woodland land continuously wooded since AD 1600. It is an extremely valuable ecological resource, usually with a high diversity of flora and fauna.

Carr woodland in waterlogged terrain. Characteristic species include alder, willow and willow.

Characterisation The process by which the classification and description of landscape/townscape character is undertaken to identify what makes one area 'different' or 'distinct' from another. This is a recognised approach, endorsed by Government and promoted by the Countryside Agency.

Coral rag, or ragstone The local crumbly limestone quarried from hills surrounding Oxford.

Dipslope The gently sloping backslope of an escarpment landform

Elements individual components which make up the landscape, such as trees and hedges.

Enclosure The density and arrangement of structural elements in the landscape (e.g. landform, trees, hedges, woods, and walls) so that they enclose space and create visual and physical containment.

Escarpment: A distinctive whaleback-shaped hill or landform unit (typically of chalk) which comprises a steep face and gently sloping dipslope.

Features: particularly prominent or eye catching elements, such as tree clumps, church towers, or wooded skylines.

Floodplain The very flat land adjacent to a river or watercourse, generally underlain by alluvium and which would be naturally prone to flooding without specific flood alleviation measures (NB this definition is broader than that used by the Environment Agency to define the Statutory Flood Plain).

Geomorphology the scientific study of the origin of landforms.

Land Cover combination of land use and vegetation that cover the land surface.

Landform Combinations of slope and elevation that produce the shape and form of the land surface.

Landscape primarily the visual appearance of the land including its shape, form and colours. However, landscape is not purely a visual phenomenon. The landscape relies on a range of other dimensions including geology, landform, soils, ecology, archaeology, landscape history, land use, architecture and cultural associations.

Landscape Assessment An umbrella term used to encompass all the many different ways of looking at, describing and analysing landscape.

Landscape Character What makes one landscape different from another. It means the distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occurs consistently in a particular type of landscape. It creates a particular sense of place.

Landscape Character Area A geographic area with a consistent character or coherent identity.

Landscape Sensitivity The degree to which a particular landscape character type or area can accommodate change without unacceptable detrimental effects on character. Sensitivity is not absolute, but is likely to vary according to the type of change being considered.

Landscape Structure Structural components of the landscape, e.g. hedgerows, trees, woods, walls etc.

Landscape/Townscape Character Area Single and unique, discrete geographical areas of a landscape/townscape type.

Landscape/Townscape Type Generic areas sharing common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation, land use and built form.

Landscape Type A generic term for a landscape with a consistent character, resulting from different combinations of landform and landcover.

Landscape Value refers to the value we attach to different landscapes and is the basis for designating or recognising certain highly valued landscapes. A landscape may be valued for many reasons, which might include landscape quality, scenic quality, tranquillity, wilderness value, consensus about its importance either nationally or locally, and other conservation interests and cultural associations.

Landscape Vernacular The combination of elements or components which are locally distinctive to a particular area of landscape.

Local distinctiveness The special character of a place or area which gives it a particular and recognisable identity.

Objective method of assessment in which personal feelings and opinions do not influence characterisation.

Re-creatability A measure of the ability to re-create landscapes or townscapes if they are lost.

Riparian A character which is specifically associated with rivers.

Rolling Landform which is characterised by pronounced topography of soft hills.

Scale The typical size, scale or grain of elements and patterns within the landscape, which have a close bearing on such factors as balance, proportion and enclosure.

Scenic Quality A subjective judgement of the aesthetic appeal of different landscape types, influenced by such factors as balance, proportion, diversity, harmony, unspoilt character, cultural preferences etc.

Sense of Place The essential character and spirit of a landscape or area.

Sensitivity to Change A subjective overall assessment of landscape sensitivity and vulnerability to change, based on a combination of factors including landscape quality and visual sensitivity.

Settlement Pattern The typical pattern of settlement, e.g. scattered evenly across the countryside or concentrated within one area or along a particular line (e.g. valley side).

Subjective method of assessment in which personal views and reactions are used in the characterisation process.

Suburbanisation A process whereby the intrusion of more urban land uses or features gradually erodes the rural character of landscape and settlements to produce a 'suburban' character.

Undulating Landform which is characterised by gentle topography of shallow hills and valleys.

Visual Sensitivity The degree to which the landscape is open or enclosed by landform or vegetation and therefore exposed to views.

Zone of Visual Influence The area from which a structure(s) can be potentially seen from.

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