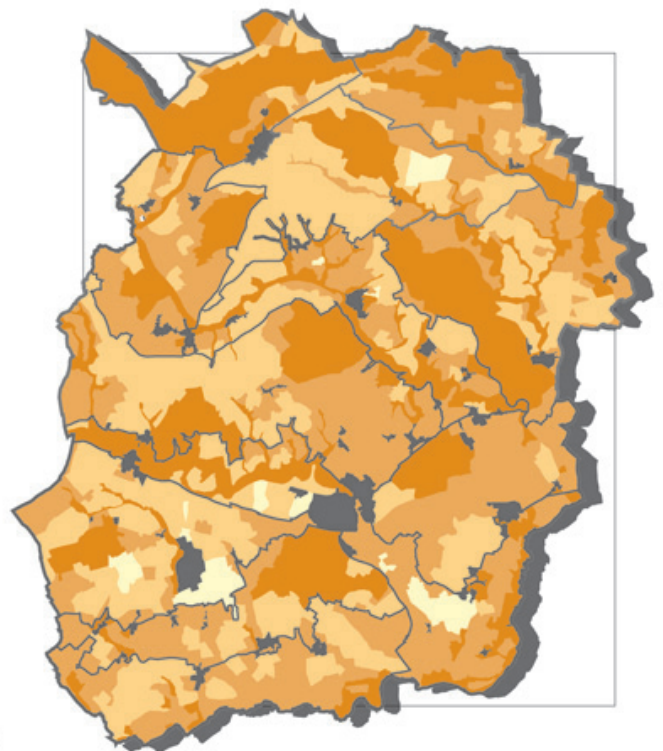
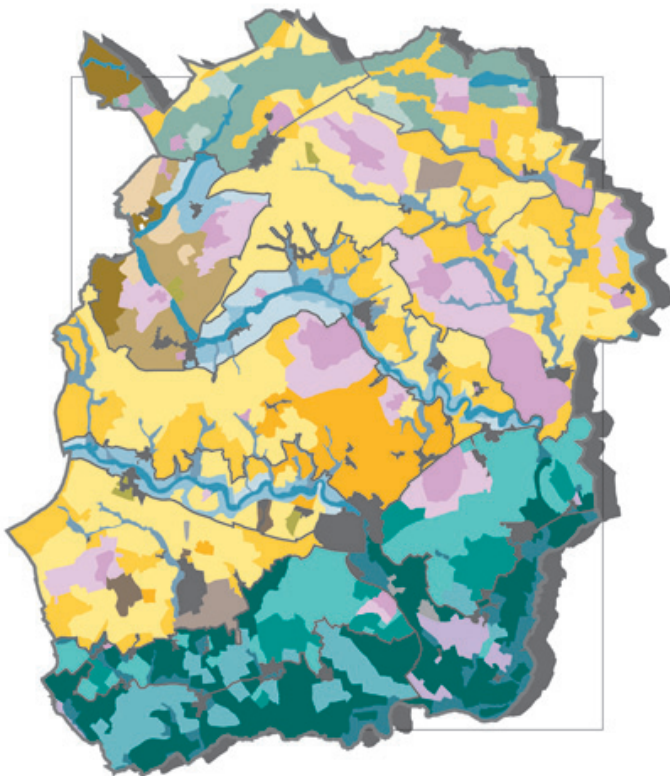
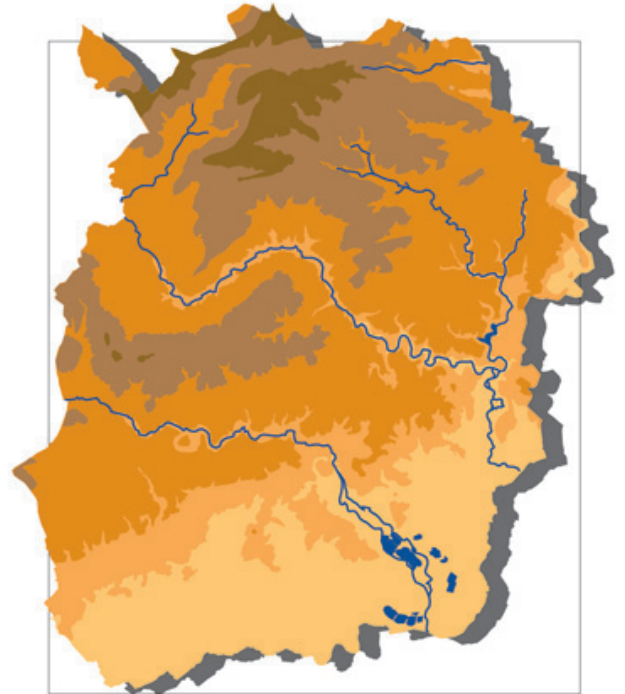
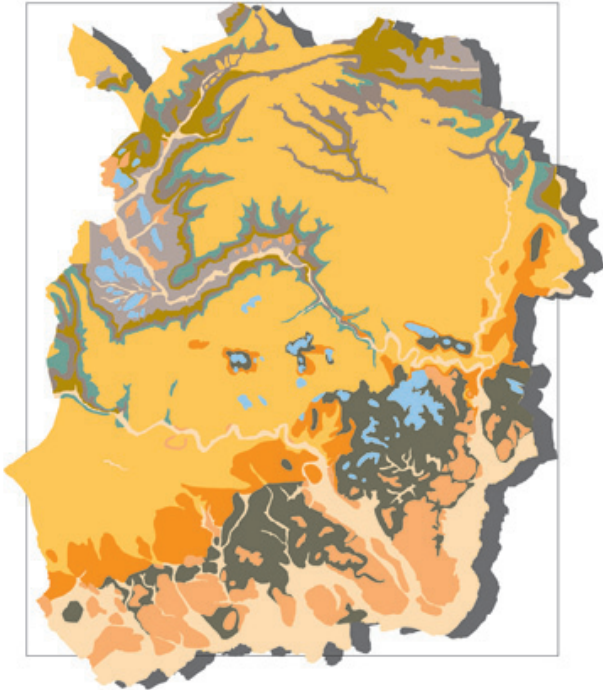
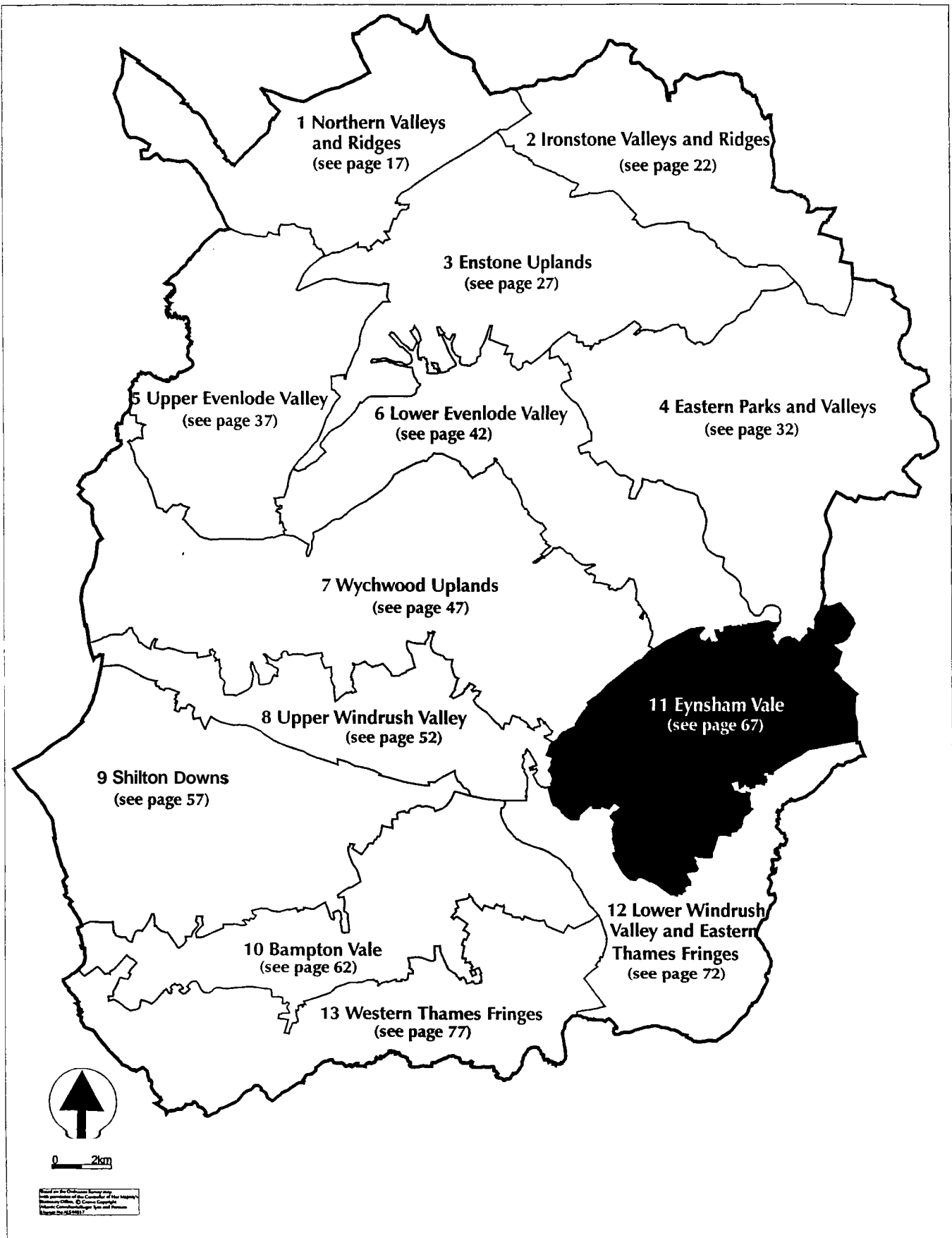


West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment



11 EYNESHAM VALE



11: EYNESHAM VALE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

OVERVIEW

This area has similarities with Area 10 and forms a low-lying area characterised by large-scale, subtly rolling farmland, with a strong landscape structure. However, it is particularly distinguished by extensive areas of woodland and a well-treed character dominated by the formal parkland and well-managed farmland of Eynsham Park and other large estates.

GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

This is an area of low-lying, subdued relief which forms part of the lowland landscape of the Upper Thames Clay Vale and its tributaries (including the lower part of the Evenlode valley). There is some variation in ground levels between about 70 and 90 m AOD but these changes are very subtle and are barely perceptible across much of the area. The underlying geology is dominated by Oxford Clay but overlying this are localised deposits of alluvium, terrace gravels and glacial drift which have an influence on landuse and vegetation.

LANDCOVER

The heavy alluvial soils occur along streamcourses and river valleys and typically support permanent pasture or grassland, with willow-lined ditches and a pastoral, riparian character. Farmland on the Oxford Clay supports a mixture of grassland and arable within large fields bounded by strong hedges and blocks of oak woodland.

Woodland cover, including the ancient woodland of Cogges Wood, is a feature of the parkland and estate landscape surrounding Eynsham Hall and occupies areas underlain by boulder clay. Areas of more open, intensive arable cultivation are confined to the higher, drier and more **productive land overlying localised areas** of river gravels.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

Like the Western Vale Fringes, the typical character of this area is defined by its low-lying and gentle relief and the patchwork of large, regularly shaped fields and comparatively strong structure of hedgerows and trees. However, the heavily wooded estate landscape of Eynsham Park is a dominant feature and a number of more subtle variations in local landscape character have also been identified, as summarised below.

Clay vale landscapes

Floodplain pasture

- typically located immediately adjacent to rivers and minor watercourses on land prone to flooding, particularly in winter;
- distinctively flat, low-lying land (below 70m AOD);
- predominantly under permanent pasture with only occasional cultivated land;
- riparian character, with strong pattern of ditches often lined by willow;
- landscape structure provided by lines and groups of mature trees, with willow and alder conspicuous;
- intimate, semi-enclosed and pastoral character;
- remote and tranquil with limited intrusion by people or buildings;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Open flat vale farmland

- drained and cultivated land (arable or reseeded grassland) within the floodplain;
- distinctively flat and low-lying;
- network of ditches;
- weak landscape structure with few trees, low or gappy hedges open ditches and fences;
- open, denuded character with high intervisibility;
- 'two-dimensional', expansive landscape with dominant sky.

Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland

- drained and cultivated land (arable or reseeded grassland) within the floodplain;
- distinctively flat and low-lying;
- network of ditches;
- stronger landscape structure of willow-lined ditches, hedgerows and occasional woodland blocks;
- semi-enclosed character with moderate to low intervisibility.

Open rolling vale farmland

- low-lying land off floodplain floor (generally above 70m **AOD**) with a discernible raised landform;
- well-drained, productive land underlain by river terrace gravels ;
- large-scale, cultivated fields (arable predominant) with regular field boundaries;
- weak structure of tightly clipped hedges and few hedgerow trees (dry-stone walls absent);
- open, denuded character;
- high intervisibility;
- 'two-dimensional', expansive landscape with dominant sky.

Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland

- low-lying land off floodplain floor (generally above 70m AOD) with a discernible raised landform;
- well-drained, productive land underlain by river terrace gravels ;
- mostly large-scale fields under arable with regular field boundaries but some smaller-scale pattern and pasture (especially around settlements);
- stronger structure of hedgerows, trees and occasional belts or blocks of woodland;
- semi-enclosed character;
- moderate intervisibility.

Floodplain wetlands

- areas of open water occupying former gravel pits within floodplain;
- associated wet grassland and marsh/fen vegetation communities with a semi-natural character;
- distinctively flat, low-lying land (below 70m **AOD**);
- structure and visual enclosure provided by developing scrub and tree cover;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Parkland landscapes

Parkland

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

Estate farmland

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

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

Like most parts of the Upper Thames Clay Vale, the pattern of settlement within this area is intimately related to geology, with most settlements located on the raised terraces of river gravels which overlie the clay and alluvial flats. Their origins are mixed, however, as there has been persistent settlement of these Thames-side gravels since prehistoric times. For example, sites near Eynsham and Cassington show an overlap of cultures from Bronze and Iron Age, through Roman to Saxon settlement.

All took advantage of the proximity to well-watered meadows and the lighter, productive soils of the gravel terraces. Place names suggest definite Saxon origins for some settlements, such as Eynsham which incorporates the Old English word for meadow - 'ham'. Eynsham's siting was also related to a strategic crossing point of the Thames. Other settlements, like Freeland, owe their origins to the re-development of the agrarian landscape and the building of country mansions, notably Eynsham Hall, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

Settlements in this area are predominantly linear in form with buildings strung out along a road (eg. Cassington and Freeland). Eynsham has a squarer form, with its original core having been extended as part of a planned medieval settlement, although this form has been partially obscured by modern development.

Oolitic limestone is the predominant building material in these settlements, reflecting their relative proximity to the Cotswold hills to the north. Roofing material is more mixed, however, and includes Stonesfield slate, thatch, tiles and Welsh slate. While stone is common within the villages, it is rare within the open farmland, where hedges or ditches are the predominant field boundaries.

KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

- intrusive buildings and urban features around fringes of Eynsham.

11: EYNHAM VALE

LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

This character area is not covered by any statutory landscape designations and only a small part lies within the Area of High Landscape Value. However, it includes a number of features of conservation significance which contribute to its overall value, including:

- Conservation Areas at Church Hanborough, Bladon, Cassington and Eynsham;
- a **Park** and Garden of Special Interest at Eynsham Hall;
- a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments on the terrace gravels near Eynsham;
- some large remnants of Ancient **Semi-natural Woodland** scattered across the area.

Overall, the Eynsham Vale has an attractive and largely unspoilt, rural character but with some localised variations in quality and condition which demand different strategies for management and enhancement (see Figure x).

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

- agricultural intensification, particularly drainage and conversion of pasture to arable, the removal of natural vegetation cover and the poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries;
- intrusion from built development, **heavy** traffic on main roads (particularly the A40) and overhead power lines;
- expansion of rural settlements and 'suburbanisation' of the wider countryside.

GUIDELINES FOR CLAY VALE LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- retain and manage areas of floodplain pasture, meadows and riparian vegetation;
- promote traditional practices of willow pollarding and ditch management;
- introduce new planting along watercourses and in lines and groups within valley floor, using typical riparian species such as willow and alder;
- within open clay vale landscapes, restore a stronger structure of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and belts of woodland;
- in semi-enclosed clay vale farmland, retain and extend existing hedgerow network and allow mature hedgerow trees to develop;
- where possible, encourage conversion of arable land to pasture;
- plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a more mixed pattern of woodland and farmland;
- strengthen landscape structure around the main settlements (eg. Eynsham) to soften the urbanising effects of existing or proposed peripheral development;
- maintain rural character of secondary road network and, where possible, avoid urbanising influences of street lighting, kerbs and footpaths, signage etc.

Development sensitivities

- unspoilt floodplain farmland is of particularly high quality and sensitive to development;
- flat, open clay vale landscapes are visually sensitive and development would be highly prominent and exposed unless integrated within strong new landscape frameworks;
- semi-enclosed clay vale landscapes may offer **limited opportunities to absorb small-scale** development within a strong structure of trees and woodland or with other buildings;

- smaller-scale, clay vale landscapes on the immediate fringes of the larger settlements are potentially more tolerant of development, if it conforms to existing field pattern, is sensitively designed and does not significantly alter settlement form.

GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND ESTATE LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- maintain, and where necessary, restore parkland landscape and features at Eynsham Park;
- retain mature hedges, boundary trees and roadside avenues and replant as necessary;
- manage and extend existing areas of broadleaved woodland to maximise their wildlife and landscape value;
- plant new blocks and belts of broadleaved woodland within estate farmland to reinforce enclosed, wooded character;

- retain areas of permanent pasture and resist conversion to arable.

Development sensitivities

- parkland landscapes and their component features are of high landscape value and very sensitive to development;
- estate farmland is also generally of high scenic quality and sensitive to development, although its mature structure of woodland makes it more visually robust.

KEY SETTLEMENTS

See Part 3 for key settlement study for:

Eynsham
Witney

