

Variations in landscape quality and condition

South Oxfordshire remains a predominantly rural District with a high proportion of attractive, unspoilt countryside. The high quality of its landscape is confirmed by the designation of nearly half of the District within the Chilterns and the North Wessex Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (a national designation) and by the inclusion of most of the remainder within the Area of Great Landscape Value (a local designation in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 1997).

Given that most of the District's landscape is intrinsically of high quality there are, nonetheless, some subtle variations in condition within it. The distribution of different enhancement strategies illustrated in Figure 7 (and at a larger scale in the individual character area sections in Part 2) provides an indication of these variations. However, it must be stressed that the differences are subtle and even those landscapes within the 'reconstruct' category are not seriously degraded by the standards of other landscapes which have been assessed within other parts of the country.

Not surprisingly, most of the Chiltern Hills landscape falls within the **conserve** category, reflecting the area's unspoilt, 'ancient' character, its diverse and intact landscape structure, its high aesthetic appeal and its valued habitats and archaeological resources. Other areas of exceptional landscape quality include:

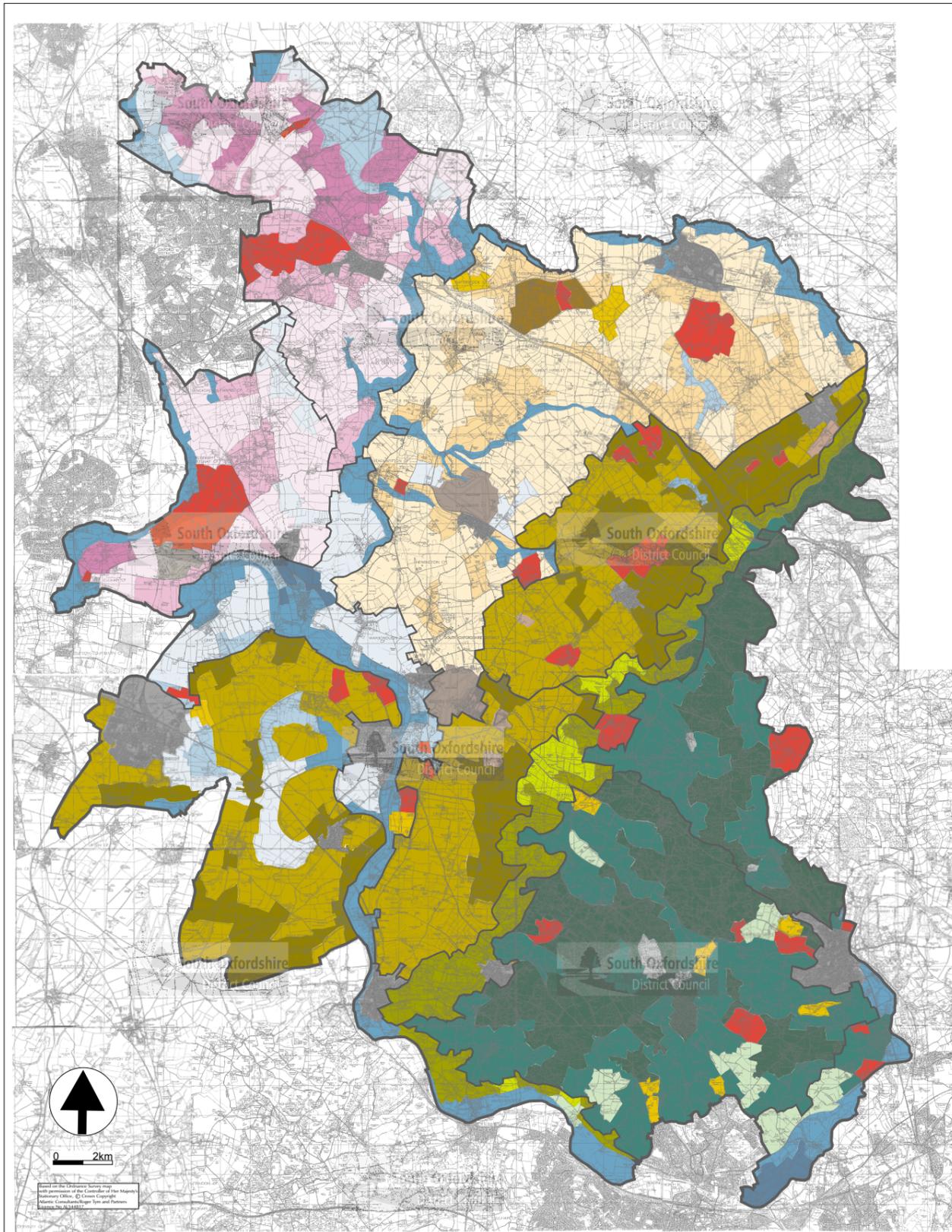
- the more scenically diverse and semi-enclosed parts of the chalk downs and the outlying chalk hills around Wittenham;
- the main areas of formal parkland and estate landscape, such as Nuneham Courtney;
- the unspoilt, pastoral and tranquil floodplain landscapes of the Rivers Thames, Thame and their main tributaries;
- the more heavily wooded and enclosed 'hilly' landscapes associated with outcrops of limestone and upper greensand in the Oxford Heights and northern Clay Vale.

Large parts of the District also fall within the **repair** category and represent rural, attractive landscapes with a reasonably intact structure but which are not quite so special as those listed above. Concentrations of these landscapes occur within the hills and valleys of the southern Oxford Heights, along the upper greensand ridge of the Eastern Vale Fringes and across much of the attractive, undulating farmed landscape of the Clay Vale.

Landscapes within the **restore** category tend to be those which have a particularly denuded character, such as the arable 'prairie' landscapes of the Central Vale Fringes, the open rolling farmland of the central Clay Vale and the very flat, open arable farmland of the river floodplains.

Finally, small pockets of landscape fall within the **reconstruct** category. These occur primarily within the Clay Vale and Vale Fringes and include the two major airfield sites at Chalgrove and Benson and a number of small parcels of land associated with landfill or mineral sites or affected by non-agricultural land uses, such as golf courses.

LANDSCAPE TYPES



▲ For key to Landscape Types, see fold-out flap on reverse ▲

LANDSCAPE TYPES MASTER KEY



LANDSCAPE ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY

