



# WOODCOTE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 2013 - 2035

## Protected Views Assessment

August 2021

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# 1 Introduction

This document is an assessment of important, valued views in and around the village of Woodcote for the purposes of protecting those views in the Neighbourhood Plan.

## 2 Context

### 2.1 The Neighbourhood Area

The Neighbourhood Area is defined as the Parish of Woodcote and the wishes of those who live and work in the Neighbourhood Area provide the essential context to the Woodcote Neighbourhood Plan. This section of the report provides a brief overview of the Neighbourhood Area, its location and surroundings.

#### 2.1.1 Location

The parish is situated in a rural area of open farmland and beech woods. It is one of the larger villages in the district of South Oxfordshire at the south-western end of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), some eight miles to the north west of Reading (see *Figure 2-1*) and four miles from the point where the River Thames flows through the Goring Gap. A Nationally Important Landscape.

Woodcote is located entirely within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) on the escarpment overlooking the Goring Gap.

The AONB and National Park designations were created by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 to protect the finest countryside in England and Wales. In June 2000, the Government confirmed that AONBs and National Parks have the same level of landscape quality.

The Chilterns AONB was designated in 1965 to protect the beauty and special qualities of its landscape and its natural and cultural heritage. Whilst all the Chiltern Hills are within a single National Character Area<sup>1</sup> only a central core deemed to contain the finest landscape and to best exhibit the Chilterns landscape character is within the AONB. The Chiltern Conservation Board notes<sup>2</sup> *'In particular, it was designated to protect its special qualities which include the steep chalk escarpment...'*

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) reinforces the importance attached by Government<sup>3</sup> to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, gives them *'the highest status of protection'*, and requires that the scale and extent of development within designated areas be limited and that serious consideration be given to *'the nature, scale and setting, and whether*



Figure 2-1 Woodcote in South Oxfordshire

<sup>1</sup> Natural England: National Character Area 110; Chilterns

<sup>2</sup> Chilterns Conservation Board: Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014-2019

<sup>3</sup> National Planning Policy Framework: Paragraph 176

development could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined’.

The statutory duty placed on relevant authorities<sup>4</sup>, such as district councils, to ‘have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB’ when ‘exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an AONB’ and the requirements of the NPPF are evident in the emerging South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) Local Plan. This explicitly states that ‘The highest level of protection will be given to the landscape and scenic beauty of the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBS) and that development in an AONB or affecting the setting of an AONB will only be permitted where it conserves, and where possible, enhances the character and natural beauty of the AONB’<sup>5</sup>. The emerging plan also states that ‘development will only be permitted where it protects and, where possible enhances, features that contribute to the nature and quality of South Oxfordshire’s valued landscapes’ identifying, among other features trees, hedgerows, field boundaries and perceptual features such tranquillity. Natural England notes that ‘Contrasting with nearby London, this area offers relative tranquillity. tranquillity is found along parts of the escarpment, but the largest area is found in the remote and sparsely settled dip slope in Oxfordshire’.

## 2.1.2 Neighbourhood Area Boundary

The Neighbourhood Area comprises the parish of Woodcote; thus the boundary of the Neighbourhood Area is the Parish boundary. This is shown by the blue line on the map below *Figure 2-2*

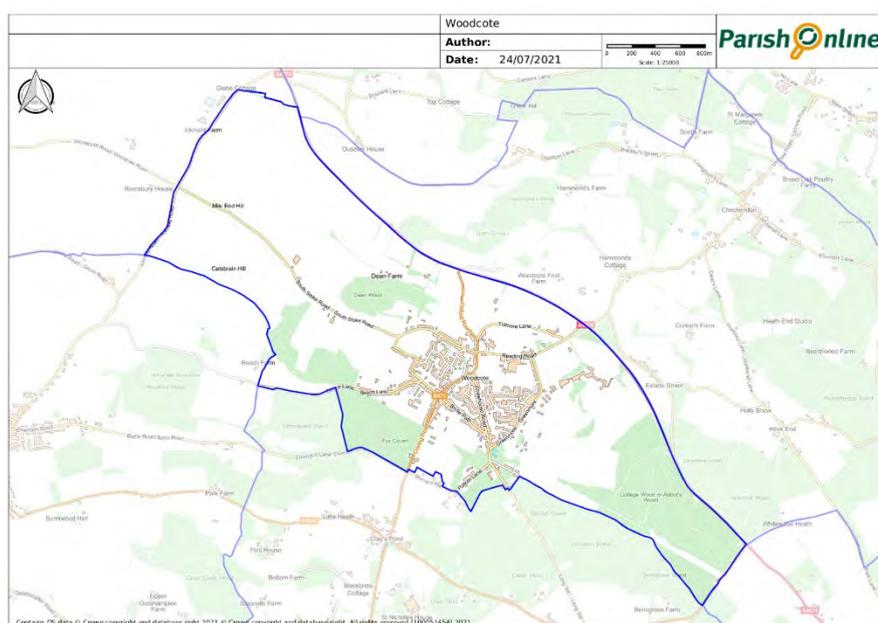


Figure 2-2 Woodcote Parish Boundary

<sup>4</sup> Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

<sup>5</sup> South Oxfordshire Local Plan: Policy ENV1

## 2.2 Landscape

The Parish is located entirely within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty on the escarpment above the Goring Gap. On the other side of the River Thames the eastern edge of North Wessex AONB rises steeply providing long views into Woodcote and the Chilterns AONB.

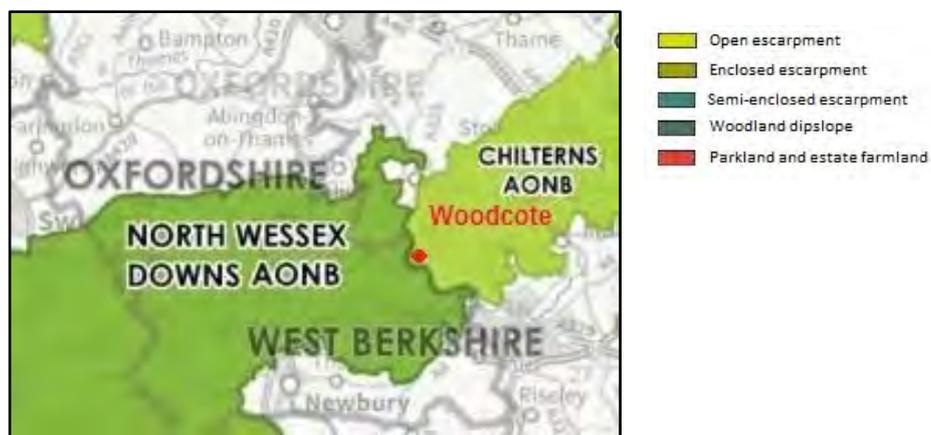


Figure 2-3 Woodcote in the Chilterns AONB

Woodcote is located mainly in Landscape Character Area (LCA) 8 with some outlying parts of the village to the south and east in LCA 10.

The South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (SOLA) for Character Area 8 describes Woodcote as the main settlement within the “Chilterns Escarpment” a feature described by the SOLA as forming:

*“the most visually significant and distinctive landform unit within the whole District. It comprises the steep face and top of the Chilterns escarpment, which forms a dramatic backdrop to the low-lying landscape of the vale to the northwest”.*

The Parish straddles the escarpment and dip slope. The north-west of the Parish is, generally, open farmland which slopes down towards the river Thames. This contrasts with the south-east of the Parish which is dense Chilterns beech woods, planted in the 18th Century to provide materials for the furniture-making industry. Between the different north-western and south-eastern landscapes runs the Chilterns escarpment a steep wooded escarpment as illustrated in Figure 2-4

At its highest point the Neighbourhood Area is 184 metres above sea level; at its lowest some 60 metres (Figure 2-5).

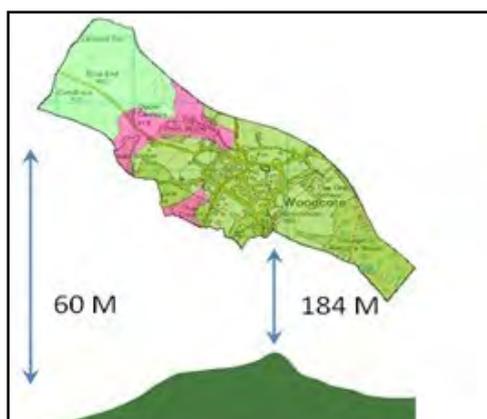


Figure 2-4 Parish Elevation

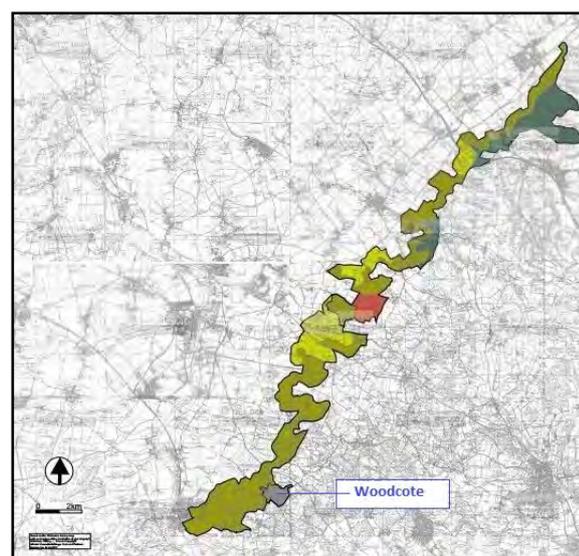


Figure 2-5 The Chilterns Escarpment



## 2.3 Natural Environment

Although there are no sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Areas of Conservation or National Nature Reserves within the Parish there are three Conservation Target Areas. These are important areas for wildlife in the county where targeted conservation action can secure the maximum biodiversity benefits<sup>6</sup>. The three CTAs of particular significance to development in the parish of Woodcote are (shown in yellow in Figure 2-6):

the Chilterns Escarpment South CTA which abuts the south western corner of the built-up area of the village; and  
 the Chilterns Escarpment South Central CTA which abuts the northern edge of the built-up area of the village.  
 the Chilterns dipslope and plateau which occupies the south eastern end of the Parish.

In addition:

the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre<sup>7</sup> has designated four locations in the village area as ‘Local Wildlife Sites’ (also shown in Figure 2-6):

- Elmorepark Woods
- Dean Wood
- Upper Covert
- Langtree House Bank

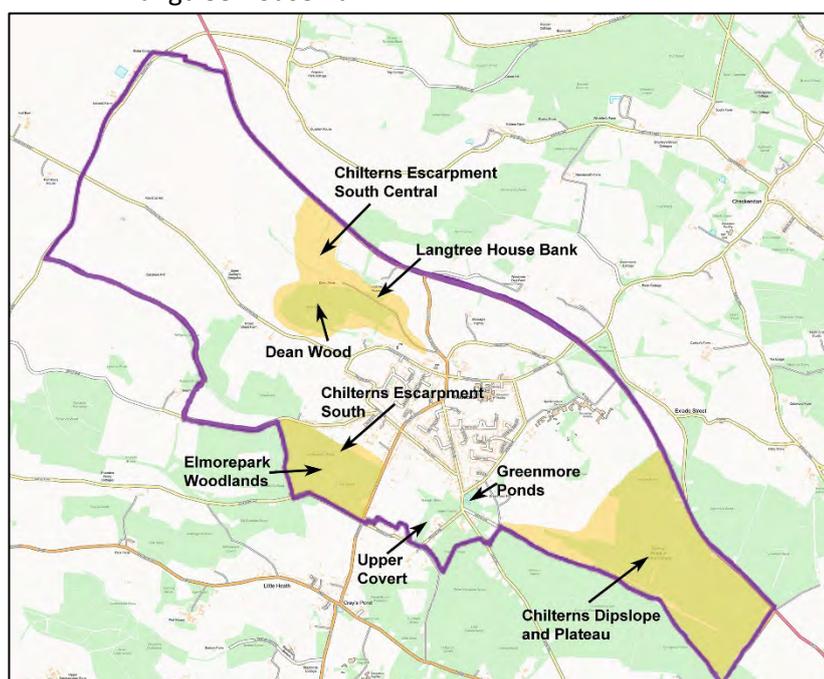


Figure 2-6 Conservation Target Areas and Wildlife Sites

Local Wildlife Sites are a key component in the maintenance of the diversity of wildlife in the UK and although they are non-statutory sites the Neighbourhood Plan should seek to protect them.

The Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study<sup>8</sup> Biomap for South Oxfordshire identifies Woodcote as one of the most important locations for wildlife in the county with the habitat significance of some 60% of the parish being classed as **Very High** with another 25-30% being classed as **High**.

The landscape of the parish is typified by networks of tall dense hedges that support colonies of house sparrows and foraging hedgehogs. Swifts and bats still hunt over the allotments, the surrounding ancient woodland

<sup>6</sup> Wild Oxfordshire [www.wildoxfordshire.org.uk](http://www.wildoxfordshire.org.uk)

<sup>7</sup> The landscape

<sup>8</sup> <http://owls.oxfordshire.gov.uk>

supports red kites, tawny owls and substantial carpets of bluebells, and the arable farmland running towards South Stoke is still home to rapidly declining farmland birds including corn bunting, yellow hammer and skylark.

The Neighbourhood Area has no water courses and contains no Zone 2 or 3 flood risk areas. There are a number of ponds within the Neighbourhood Area that are recognised as providing significant habitats, in particular the Greenmoor ponds (shown in Figure 2-6).

## 2.4 Developed Area

Woodcote is a nucleated settlement with development concentrated, as shown by *Figure 2-2* and *Figure 2-7*, in a single cluster in the centre of the Parish.

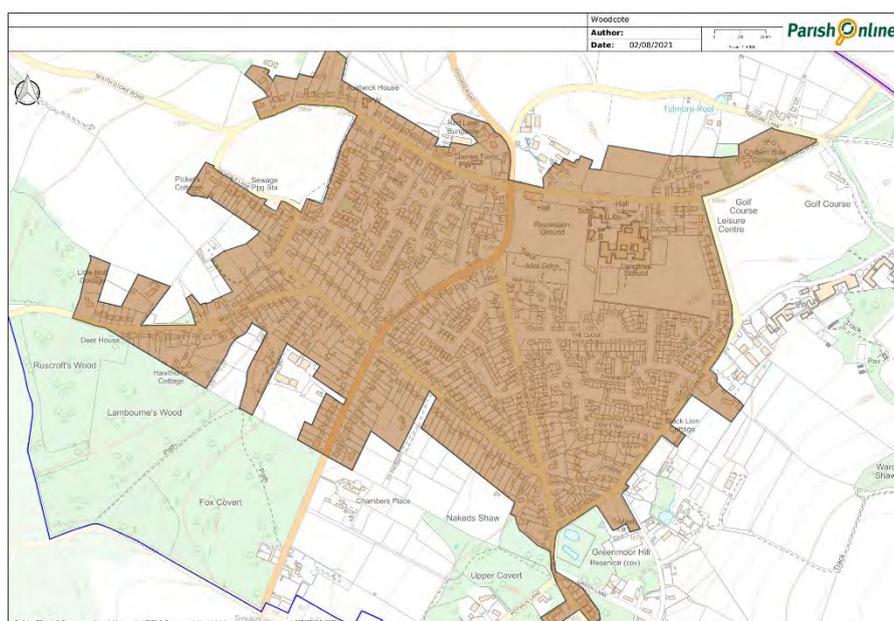


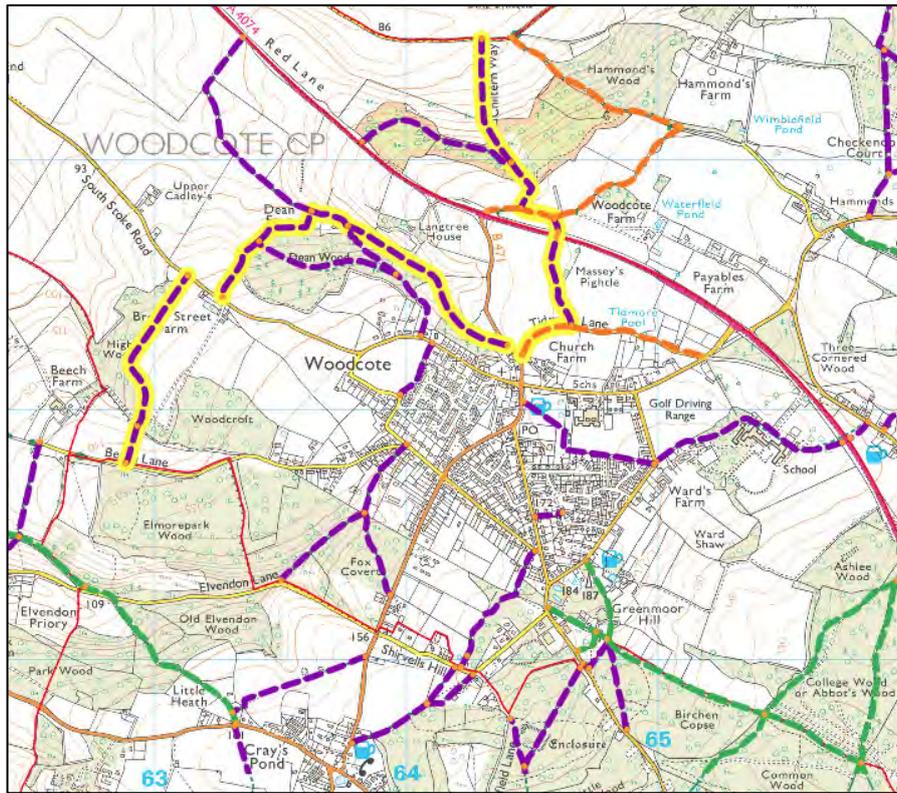
Figure 2-7 Developed Area

## 3 Planning Policies

All of the landscape immediately around Woodcote is protected at a national level by designation as an AONB. At a local level, protection is afforded by SODC local planning policies and supplementary planning guidance. The Chilterns AONB Management Plan sets out further policies to protect the AONB. All of these policies require the landscape of the AONB to be conserved and enhanced. A review of these designations and relevant policies is brought together in Appendix A.

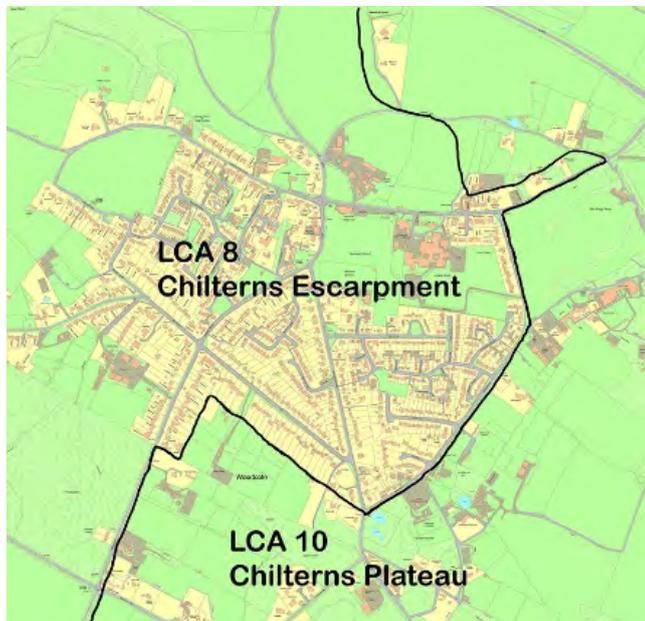
## 4 Public Rights of Way

There is a dense network of public rights of way in and around Woodcote. A nationally important route - the Chiltern Way extension (highlighted in yellow on the map) - passes through the Parish. Public Rights of Way are important in the context of assessment of the views into and out of the village because of issues of visual amenity for walkers and, in the case of bridleways, for horse riders and cyclists. The relatively extensive network of public rights of way shows the value of the landscape surrounding the settlement as a recreational resource.



## 5 Landscape Character Assessment

Woodcote straddles two Landscape Character Areas – LCA 8 (Chilterns Escarpment) and LCA 10 (Chilterns Plateau with Valleys). These LCAs are described in Appendix B.



## 5.1 LCA8 Chilterns Escarpment

*The Chilterns Escarpment* is comprised of the following landscape types:

- Open escarpment
- Enclosed escarpment
- Semi-enclosed dip slope
- Wooded dip slope
- Parkland and estate farmland

These are described in more detail in Appendix B, section B1.5.

## 5.2 LCA10 Chilterns Plateau with Valleys

*The Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* is comprised of the following landscape types:

- Open dip slope
- Semi-enclosed dip slope
- Wooded dip slope
- Commons and heaths
- Parkland and estate farmland
- Amenity landscape

These are described in more detail in Appendix B, section B2.5.

## 5.3 Landscape Character in and around Woodcote

The Parish of Woodcote contains many of the landscape features described above. To the north west the landscape is typical of the open escarpment as described in section 5.1 with sloping ground, open fields and distant views towards the North Wessex Downs AONB.

To the south east the landscape is typical of the open dip slope as described in section 5.2 with gentle slopes and views toward distant woodland.

Adjacent to the built area of the village, to the north and south, the landscape is characterised by small fields and paddocks enclosed by ancient woodland. The areas south of Bridle Path, north of Beech Lane and between Reading Road and Tidmore lane are typical examples. Many of the public rights of way border these fields and paddocks and the landscape provides a tranquil setting for the recreational use of these footpaths and bridleways, which also offer occasional glimpses of the long-distance views out of the village.

The pattern of residential development within the village is characterised by fairly substantial gardens, often with mature trees and hedges. These gardens provide a soft edge to the transition between the built area and the surrounding AONB.

The approaches to the village are rural roads usually bordered by high hedges and/or woodland.

## 6 Important Views

There are a number of views from public vantage points that are particularly distinctive of the rural landscape setting, the village lying within it, and the context of the two AONBs. All the views can be seen from public footpaths, bridleways or public roads. The views have been assessed against the landscape character seen in the view:

- i. Views of the open escarpment to the north west, including views into the North Wessex Downs AONB.
- ii. Views of the open dip slope to the south east.
- iii. Views of the typical paddocks and fields enclosed by hedges and/or woodland.
- iv. Views into the village along the rural roads.

The table below lists the views assessed and Figure 6-1 shows the location of the views.

No	Vantage Point		Open escarpment	Open dip slope	Paddocks /fields	Rural roads
	From footpath/road	Towards				
1	411/9/10	Bridle Path			✓	
2	411/9/10	Upper Covert Woods			✓	
3	411/9/10	Goring Road			✓	
4	411/9/10	Shirvells Hill			✓	
5	Goring Road	Pot Kiln Lane			✓	
6	411/2/10	Fox Covert Woods			✓	
7	411/2/10	Wood Lane			✓	
8	411/8/10	Behoes Lane	✓		✓	
9	411/8/10	South Stoke Road	✓		✓	
10	411/8/10	South Stoke Road	✓		✓	
11	South Stoke Road	Oxford Road	✓			
12	Oxford Road	Reading Road				✓
13	Tidmore Lane (FP 411/27/10)	A4074			✓	
14	411/1/10	Oxford Road			✓	
15	411/1/10	A4074			✓	
16	Tidmore Lane (FP 411/27/10)	A4074			✓	
17	Tidmore Lane (FP 411/27/10)	Reading Road			✓	
18	Tidmore Lane (FP 411/27/10)	Reading Road			✓	
19	Reading Road	Greenmore				✓
20	411/19/30	A4074		✓		
21	411/19/30	College Wood		✓		



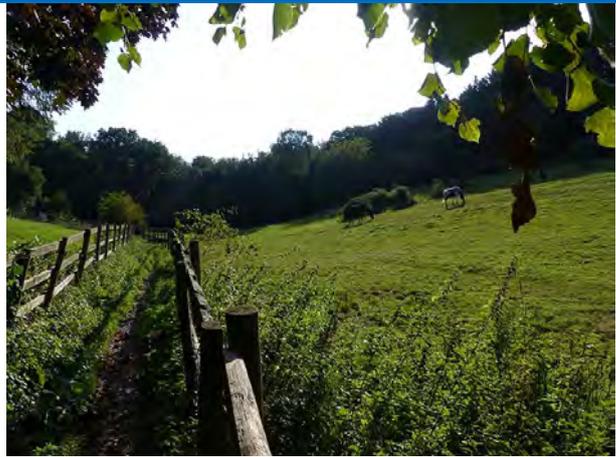
Figure 6-1 Important views

## 6.1 Assessment of views

1	View from footpath 411/9/10	
	Towards Bridle Path	
Typical paddocks enclosed by woodland		
A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. These paddocks lie between the rear of properties in Bridle Path and hedges/woodland to the south. The footpath starts from Bridle Path, skirts the edge of the paddocks and enters the woodland.		
2	View from footpath 411/9/10	
	Towards Upper Covert Woods	
Typical paddocks enclosed by woodland		
A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. These paddocks lie between the rear of properties in Bridle Path and hedges/woodland to the south. The footpath starts from Bridle Path, skirts the edge of the paddocks and enters the woodland.		
3	View from footpath 411/9/10	
	Towards Goring Road	
Typical fields enclosed by woodland		
A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. These fields lie between Upper Covert Woods and Goring Road. The footpath starts from Bridle Path and passes through Upper Covert Woods to Shirvells Hill.		

4	View from footpath 411/9/10	
	Towards Shirvells Hill	
Typical fields enclosed by woodland		
A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. These fields lie between Upper Covert Woods and Goring Road. The footpath starts from Bridle Path and passes through Upper Covert Woods to Shirvells Hill.		

5	View from Goring Road	
	Towards Pot Kiln Lane	
Typical fields enclosed by woodland		
A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. These fields lie between Upper Covert Woods and Goring Road.		

6	View from footpath 411/2/10	
	Towards Fox Covert Woods	
Typical paddocks enclosed by woodland		
A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. These paddocks lie between the Smallholding, Wood Lane and Goats Gambol, Beech Lane. The footpath starts from the end of Wood Lane, passes between the Smallholding and the paddocks and enters Fox Covert Woods.		

7	View from footpath 411/2/10	
	Towards Wood Lane	
Typical paddocks enclosed by woodland		
<p>A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. These paddocks lie between the Smallholding, Wood Lane and Goats Gambol, Beech Lane. The footpath starts from the end of Wood Lane, passes between the Smallholding and the paddocks and enters Fox Covert Woods.</p>		

8	View from footpath 411/8/10	
	Towards Behoes Lane	
Typical field enclosed by hedges, also has distant views across the open escarpment		
<p>A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. This field lies between the rear of properties in Wayside Green, Behoes Lane and South Stoke Road. The footpath runs along the edge of the field from South Stoke Road to Behoes Lane.</p>		

9	View from footpath 411/8/10	
	Towards South Stoke Road	
Typical field enclosed by hedges, also has distant views across the open escarpment		
<p>A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. This field lies between the rear of properties in Wayside Green, Behoes Lane and South Stoke Road. The footpath runs along the edge of the field from South Stoke Road to Behoes Lane.</p>		

10	View from footpath 411/8/10	
	Towards South Stoke Road	
Typical field enclosed by hedges, also has distant views across the open escarpment		
A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. This field lies between the rear of properties in Wayside Green, Behoes Lane and South Stoke Road. The footpath runs along the edge of the field from South Stoke Road to Behoes Lane.		

11	View from South Stoke Road	
	Towards Oxford Road	
Typical views of the open escarpment		
A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village with open views across typical AONB landscape.		

12	View from Oxford Road	
	Towards Reading Road	
Typical view into the village along a rural road		
A typical example of the approaches into the village along a rural road lined with trees and hedges.		

13	View from Tidmore Lane (footpath 411/27/10)	
	Towards the A4074	
Typical field enclosed by hedges/woodland		
A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. This field lies between Tidmore Lane and the A4074. This field is now used as an equestrian training centre.		

14	View from footpath 411/1/10	
	Towards Oxford Road	
Typical field enclosed by hedges/woodland		
A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. This field lies between Tidmore Lane and the A4074. This field is now used as an equestrian training centre.		

15	View from footpath 411/1/10	
	Towards the A4074	
Typical paddocks enclosed by woodland		
A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. This field lies between Tidmore Lane and the A4074.		

16	View from Tidmore Lane (footpath 411/27/10)	
	Towards the A4074	
Typical field enclosed by hedges/woodland		
A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. This field lies between Tidmore Lane and the A4074.		

17	View from Tidmore Lane (footpath 411/27/10)	
	Towards Reading Road	
Typical fields enclosed by hedges/woodland		
A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. These fields lie between Tidmore Lane and Reading Road.		

18	View from Tidmore Lane (footpath 411/27/10)	
	Towards Reading Road	
Typical fields enclosed by hedges/woodland		
typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. These fields lie between Tidmore Lane and Reading Road.		

19	View from Reading Road	
	Towards Greenmore	
Typical view into the village along a rural road		
	A typical example of the approaches into the village along a rural road lined with trees and hedges.	

20	View from footpath 411/19/30	
	Towards the A4074	
Typical view of the open dip slope		
	A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. The views across the fields towards the woodland are typical of the open dip slope.	

21	View from footpath 411/19/30	
	Towards College Wood	
Typical view of the open dip slope		
	A typical example of the landscape on the outskirts of the village. The views across the fields towards the woodland are typical of the open dip slope.	

## Appendix A: Planning Policies

### A1. National Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 174 states that:

*Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*

- a) Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
- b) Recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of the trees and woodland.*

NPPF paragraph 176 further states that:

*Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in the National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.*

NPPF paragraph 177 also states that:

*When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:*

- a) The need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, on the local economy;*
- b) The cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
- c) Any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that can be moderated.*

NPPF paragraph 11 makes it clear that the application of the policies relating to AONBs and other protected areas apply equally to plan making as well as decision making.

### A2. South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) Local Plan 2035 (LP2035)

#### A2.1. Policy ENV1: Landscape and Countryside

1. *The highest level of protection will be given to the landscape and scenic beauty of the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs Areas of Outstanding natural Beauty (AONBs):*
  - i. Development in an AONB or affecting the setting of an AONB will only be permitted where it conserves, and where possible enhances the character and natural beauty of the AONB;*
  - ii. Development in an AONB will only be permitted where it is appropriate to the economic and environmental wellbeing of the area or promotes understanding or enjoyment of the AONB;*
  - iii. Major development in an AONB will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances and where it*

*can be demonstrated to be in the public interest; and*

- iv. Development proposals that could affect the special qualities of an AONB (including the setting of an AONB) either individually or in combination with other developments, should be accompanied by a proportionate Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.*

*AONB Management Plans will be a material consideration in decision making.*

- 2. South Oxfordshire's landscape, countryside and rural areas will be protected against harmful development. Development will only be permitted where it protects and, where possible enhances, features that contribute to the nature and quality of South Oxfordshire's landscape, in particular:*

- i. Trees (including individual trees, groups of trees and woodland), hedgerows and field boundaries;*
- ii. Irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland and aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland;*
- iii. The landscapes, waterscapes, cultural heritage and user enjoyment of the River Thames, its tributaries and flood plains;*
- iv. Other watercourse and water bodies;*
- v. The landscape setting of settlements or the special character and landscape setting of Oxford;*
- vi. Topographical features;*
- vii. Areas or features of cultural and historic value;*
- viii. Important views and visually sensitive skylines; and*
- ix. Aesthetic and perceptual factors such as tranquillity wildness, intactness, rarity and enclosure.*

- 3. Development which supports economic growth in rural areas will be supported provided it conserves and enhances the landscape, countryside and rural areas.*
- 4. The Council will seek the retention of important hedgerows. Where retention is not possible and a proposal seeks the removal of a hedgerow, the Council will require compensatory planting with a mixture of native hedgerow species.*

## **A2.2. Policy ENV2: Biodiversity – Designated Sites, Priority Habitats and Species**

- 1. The highest level of protection will be given to sites of international nature conservation importance (Special Areas of Conservation). Development that is likely to result in a significant effect, either alone or in combination, on such sites will need to satisfy the requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).*
- 2. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are of national importance. Development that is likely to have an adverse effect on a SSSI (either on its own or in combination with other developments) will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances, where it can be demonstrated that the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh any harm to the special interest features and the SSSI's contribution to the local ecological network. In such circumstances, measures should be provided (and secured through planning conditions or legal agreements) that would mitigate or, as a last resort, compensate for the adverse effects resulting from the development.*
- 3. Development likely to result, either directly or indirectly to the loss, deterioration or harm to:*
  - Local Wildlife Sites*
  - Local Nature Reserves*
  - Priority Habitats and Species*
  - Legally Protected Species*
  - Local Geological Sites*
  - Ecological Networks (Conservation Target Areas)*
  - Important or ancient hedges or hedgerows*

- Ancient woodland and veteran trees

Will only be permitted if:

- i. *The need for, and benefits of the development in the proposed location outweigh the adverse effect on the interests;*
  - ii. *It can be demonstrated that it could not reasonably be located on an alternative site that would result in less or no harm to the interests; and*
  - iii. *Measures will be provided (and secured through planning conditions or legal agreements), that would avoid, mitigate or as a last resort compensate for the adverse effects resulting from development.*
4. *Development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) will be refused planning permission, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons justifying the granting of planning permission.*
  5. *Where development has the potential to affect a proposed wildlife site the developer must undertake surveys and assessments to determine whether the site meets the criteria for Local Wildlife Site status.*

### A2.3. Policy ENV3: Biodiversity

1. *Development that will conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity in the district will be supported. All developments should provide a net gain in biodiversity where possible. As a minimum, there should be no net loss of biodiversity. All proposals should be supported by evidence to demonstrate a biodiversity net gain using a recognised biodiversity accounting metric.*
2. *Development proposals that would result in a net loss of biodiversity will only be considered if it can be demonstrated that alternatives which avoid impacts on biodiversity have been fully explored in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy. In the absence of alternative sites or layouts, development proposals must include adequate mitigation measures to achieve a net gain of biodiversity. Where harm cannot be prevented or adequately mitigated, appropriate compensation measures will be sought, as a last resort, through planning conditions or planning obligations (depending on the circumstances of each application) to offset the loss by contributing to appropriate biodiversity projects to achieve an overall net gain for biodiversity.*
3. *Planning permission will only be granted if impacts on biodiversity can be avoided, mitigated or, as a last resort, compensated fully.*

### A2.4. Policy ENV5: Green Infrastructure

1. *Development will be expected to contribute towards the provision of additional Green Infrastructure and protect or enhance existing Green Infrastructure.*
2. *Proposals should:*
  - i. *Protect, conserve or enhance the district's Green Infrastructure;*
  - ii. *Provide an appropriate level of Green Infrastructure with regard to requirements set out in the Green Infrastructure Strategy, AONB Management Plan or the Habitats Regulations Assessment;*
  - iii. *Avoid the loss, fragmentation, severance or other negative impact on the function of the Green Infrastructure;*
  - iv. *Provide appropriate mitigation where there would be an adverse impact on Green Infrastructure; and*
  - v. *Provide an appropriate replacement where it is necessary for development to take place on areas of Green Infrastructure.*
3. *All Green Infrastructure provision should be designed with regard to the quality standards set out within the*

*Green Infrastructure Strategy, or where relevant the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan. Consideration should also be given to inclusive access and contributing to gains in biodiversity, particularly through the use of appropriate planting which takes account of changing weather patterns. Where new Green Infrastructure is provided, applicants should ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure its ongoing management and maintenance.*

## **A2.4. Policy ENV6: Historic Environment**

1. *Proposals for new development that may affect designated and non-designated heritage assets should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of those assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation. Heritage assets include statutorily designated Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings or structures, Conservation Areas, Registered Parks and Gardens, Registered Battlefields, archaeology of national and local interest and non-designated buildings, structures or historic landscapes that contribute to local historic and architectural interest of the district's historic environment, and includes those heritage assets listed by the Oxfordshire Environmental Record.*
2. *Proposals for new development should be sensitively designed and should not cause harm to the historic environment. Proposals that have an impact on heritage assets (designated and non-designated) will be supported particularly when they:
 
  - i. *Conserve or enhance the significance of the heritage asset and settings. The more important the heritage asset, the greater the weight that will be given to its conservation;*
  - ii. *Make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness (through high standards of design, reflecting its significance, including through the use of appropriate materials and construction techniques);*
  - iii. *Make a positive contribution towards public benefits;*
  - iv. *Provide a viable future use for a heritage asset that is consistent with the conservation of its significance; and/or*
  - v. *Protect a heritage asset that is currently at risk.**
3. *Non-designated heritage assets, where identified through local or neighbourhood plan-making, Conservation Area Appraisal or review or through the planning application process, will be recognised as heritage assets in accordance with national guidance and any local criteria. Development proposals that directly or indirectly affect the significance of a non-designated heritage asset will be determined with regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the asset.*
4. *Applicants will be required to describe, in line with best practice and relevant national guidance, the significance of any heritage assets affected including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the asset's importance. In some circumstances further survey, analysis and/or recording will be made a condition of consent.*
5. *Particular encouragement will be given to schemes that will help secure the long term conservation of vacant and under-used buildings and bring them back into appropriate use.*
6. *Alterations to historic buildings, for example to improve energy efficiency, should respect the integrity of the historic environment and the character and significance of the building.*

## **A2.5. Policy ENV8: Conservation Areas**

1. *Proposals for development within or affecting the setting of a Conservation Area must conserve or enhance its special interest, character, setting and appearance. Development will be expected to:
 
  - i. *Contribute to the Conservation Area's special interest and its relationship within its setting. The special characteristics of the Conservation Area (such as existing walls, buildings, trees, hedges, burgage plots, traditional shopfronts and signs, farm groups, medieval townscapes, archaeological features, historic routes, etc) should be preserved;**

- ii. *Take into account important views within, into or out of the Conservation Area and show that these would be retained and unharmed;*
  - iii. *Respect the local character and distinctiveness of the Conservation Area in terms of the development's siting, size, scale, height, alignment, materials and finishes (including colour and texture), proportions, design and form and should have regard to the South Oxfordshire Design Guide and any relevant Conservation Area Character Appraisal;*
  - iv. *Be sympathetic to the original curtilage of buildings and pattern of development that forms part of the historic interest of the Conservation Area;*
  - v. *Be sympathetic to important spaces such as paddocks, greens, gardens and other gaps or spaces between buildings which make a positive contribution to the pattern of development in the Conservation Area;*
  - vi. *Ensure the wider social and environmental effects generated by the development are compatible with the existing character and appearance of the Conservation Area; and/or*
  - vii. *Ensure no loss of, or harm to any building or feature that makes a positive contribution to the special interest, character or appearance of the Conservation Area.*
2. *Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a Conservation Area, consent will only be granted where it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh the harm or loss.*
  3. *Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a Conservation Area, this harm will be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.*
  4. *Wherever possible the sympathetic restoration and re-use of structures which make a positive contribution to the special interest, character or appearance of the Conservation Area will be encouraged to prevent harm through the cumulative loss of features which are an asset to the Conservation Area.*

### A3. Chilterns AONB Management Plan

The Chilterns AONB Management Plan sets out a number of strategic objectives and policies relating to potential development within and adjacent to the AONB.

#### A3.1. Objective NO3:

*Minimise development impacts on the AONB and its setting; where they are unavoidable, ensure they provide net environmental gains.*

There are a number of policies that support this objective:

Policy NP6: Protect and enhance important wildlife habitats.

Policy NP7: Improve ecological condition, resilience and diversity of important wildlife habitats.

Policy NP11: Ensure delivery mechanisms are in place to secure net gains for biodiversity in the AONB and its setting.

#### A3.2. Objective HO1:

*Better protect the Chilterns historic environment, both formally designated and unprotected heritage assets.*

Policies that support this objective are:

Policy H3: Encourage the use of the Chilterns Building Design Guide and the Chilterns Historic Landscape Characterisation Project by developers and planners. Encourage sensitive restoration prioritising local and in-character materials.

Policy H5: Help communities to create robust Neighbourhood Plans which take heritage assets into account.

### A3.3. Objective LO3:

*Safeguard the Chilterns landscape by maintaining and enhancing all landscape features (such as hedges and trees), important wildlife habitats and cultural heritage at all times.*

Policies that support this objective are:

Policy LP8: Ensure there is no net loss of woodland and no loss of irreplaceable ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees within the AONB.

Policy LP13: Protect and sensitively manage historic and cultural features.

### A3.4. Objectives covering development

*Objective DO1 Ensure planning decisions put the conservation and enhancement of the AONB first.*

*Objective DO2: Ensure that where development happens, it leaves the AONB better than it was before – richer in wildlife, quieter, darker at night, designed to have a low impact on the environment, and beautiful to look at and enjoy.*

*Objective DO3: Embrace opportunities to restore natural beauty on sites currently degraded by unsympathetic development, infrastructure or dereliction.*

Policies to support these objectives are:

Policy DP1: Ensure planning decisions take full account of the importance of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB and the great weight given to its protection in the NPPF.

Policy DP2: Reject development in the AONB unless it meets the following criteria:

- a. It is a use appropriate to its location,
- b. It is appropriate to local landscape and character,
- c. It supports local distinctiveness,
- d. It respects heritage and historic landscapes,
- e. It enhances natural beauty,
- f. Ecological and environmental impacts are acceptable,
- g. There are no detrimental impacts on chalk streams,
- h. There is no harm to tranquillity through the generation of noise, motion and light that would spoil quiet enjoyment or disturb wildlife,
- i. There are no negative cumulative effects, including when considered with other plans and proposals.

Policy DP3: Refuse planning permission for major developments in the AONB unless there are exceptional circumstances and where there is a clear demonstration it is in the public interest.

Policy DP4: In the setting of the AONB, take full account of whether proposals harm the AONB. For example, development of land visible in panoramic views across the Chilterns escarpment, or which generates traffic in or travelling across the AONB, or which increases water abstraction from the chalk aquifer, thereby reducing flow in chalk streams.

Policy DP5: Require a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment that meets the standards in the GLVIA latest edition for developments in the AONB or affecting its setting.

Policy DP10: Make sure that all development that is permitted in the AONB or affecting its setting delivers a net gain for the Chilterns by:

- a. On-site improvements for biodiversity, landscape, the rights of way network, AONB visitor facilities, and/or
- b. Financial contributions, secured through s106, CIL, or offsetting schemes, towards wider green infrastructure projects that enhance the AONB by meeting the aims of this AONB Management Plan.

## Appendix B Landscape Character

### B1. LCA 8 Chilterns Escarpment

The following notes are taken from the Chilterns Escarpment section (LCA 8) of the South Oxfordshire Landscape Character Assessment November 2017. The area is described as the distinctive north-west facing slopes and top of the Chilterns escarpment.

#### B1.1. Location and Boundaries

*Chilterns Escarpment* comprises the steep face and top of the Chilterns escarpment which forms a dramatic backdrop to the low-lying landscape of the Vale to the north-east. This character area is located between the village of Chinnor to the north and the town of Goring to the south west. *Chilterns Escarpment* is located entirely within the Chilterns AONB.

#### B1.2. Key Characteristics

- This character area comprises the steep escarpment of the Chiltern Hills and ranges between c. 50m AOD and c. 250m AOD.
- Much of this landscape is blanketed in broad-leaved semi-natural woodlands, including extensive areas of Ancient Woodland.
- This landscape is sparsely settled with small villages and hamlets.
- Agricultural land comprises a mixture of pasture and arable.
- Narrow lanes and tall hedgerows.

#### B1.3. Natural Factors

##### B1.3.1. Geology and Landform

The scarp is formed from Upper Chalk, the youngest of the several layers of chalk laid down in the Cretaceous period which were subsequently tilted downwards towards the south east leaving an abrupt north west face.

The chalk geology is exposed along the steep scarp face giving rise to thin calcareous soils on steep slopes which are unsuitable to cultivation.

Although it has the typically smooth and well defined profile of chalk landform, the escarpment is heavily incised with spurs and valleys, especially towards its western end, which give it a more complex form and character. The steepness of the scarp also varies, with quite gentle slopes towards the western end (in places it hardly reads as an escarpment at all) and becoming increasingly and more dramatic moving eastwards.

##### B1.3.2. Hydrology

*Chilterns Escarpment* contains limited numbers of water courses.

### B1.3.3. Biodiversity/Flora and Fauna

Priority habitats in *Chilterns Escarpment* include deciduous woodland, traditional orchards, wood-pasture and parkland, semi-improved grassland and lowland calcareous grassland.

Much of this part of the *Chilterns escarpment* is blanketed in broad-leaved semi-natural woodland which has developed in the absence of grazing management. However, this typically forms a distinctive mosaic of dense shady woodland interspersed, especially on the steeper slopes, with small pockets or larger stretches of open chalk grassland, often liberally dotted with scrub. *Chilterns Escarpment* contains extensive areas of Ancient Woodland.

Where it exists, calcareous grassland is a distinctive landscape component, usually at locations that are too steep to plough. As a habitat, the total amount of calcareous grassland left in England represents 0.03% of the total land area. Due to the underlying alkaline Oolitic and Corallian limestone of South Oxfordshire, as well as the chalk, there is a higher than average proportion of calcareous grassland than in other districts. The habitat makes an important contribution to biodiversity hosting several plants and animals that are not found in other habitat types, which is why locations like Aston Rowant have been designated as a Special Area of Conservation.

When viewing calcareous grassland on site, up close to the plants that grow there, it is a colourful and diverse visual experience with pleasant scents of herbs such as marjoram and thyme clearly discernible. The turf feels springy to walk on and it is an experience quite unlike any other landscape feature on offer in this part of the country. From a distance, calcareous grassland can look less distinctive at certain times of the year. Grassland with scrub such as at Watlington Hill is especially colourful in May when the hawthorn blossoms. It also has particular sounds associated with it such as crickets and birds of the open grassland with scrub such as Whinchat. Opportunities for extending and linking priority habitat calcareous grassland are fairly limited as many of the existing sites are small and isolated. The creation of a better-connected network of calcareous grassland that is balanced with scrub would be beneficial for a range of priority species including, in particular, invertebrates such as butterflies like the silver spotted skipper and Adonis blue.

## B1.4. Cultural and Social Factors

### B1.4.1. Land Use and Management

Besides from where land is covered by woodland, agricultural land (a mixture of arable and pasture) comprises a significant proportion of land in this character area.

Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout different parts of this character area. Priority should be given to safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource.

### B1.4.2. Settlement

The main settlement is at Woodcote, where a sizeable village has developed on the much shallower and more gentle gradients of the southern scarp. Other settlement within the character area is located on the level ground at the top of the scarp. This largely comprises individual scattered farms but also some small settlements with a loose linear form.

Traditional building materials are typical of the Chilterns as a whole, with a predominance of red and silver-grey brick and flint. Around Woodcote, brick may account for three quarters of the pre-Victorian buildings and appears in all those built after 1850. Older houses were timber-framed in oak. Plain tiles were the rule on the larger roofs, with thatch on cottages with some slate introduced in Victorian times. Farmsteads are often characterised by large timber framed barns, typically clad with black, horizontal weather boarding with gable walls constructed out of brick and flint.

The scarp has a distinctive pattern of roads, with distinctive 'sunken lanes' climbing the scarp face or minor valleys from the vale and other minor roads linking the scattered farmsteads along the plateau top.

### B1.4.3. Perceptual and Aesthetic Factors

The height of the escarpment offers long distance views to the west and north. Notable viewpoints include Watlington Hill and at Britwell Hill. Red kites are often seen in the skies above the area. Broadleaved woodland is a strong feature in the area that creates a sense of enclosure, particularly in the northern reaches. Narrow lanes with tall hedgerows exist throughout the area.

### B1.5. Landscape Types

The physical form of the scarp face and the 'semi- natural' unspoilt qualities of its vegetation cover provide both unity and coherence to the character of the landscape. However, some localised variations are created by differences in slope, vegetation cover and the degree of enclosure.

*Chilterns Escarpment* is comprised of the following landscape types:

#### **Open escarpment**

*Key characteristics:*

- Well-defined, smooth profile with the main scarp face folded into a series of spurs and valleys.
- Lack of trees creates a 'bald', open character.
- Areas of unimproved chalk grassland of high nature conservation value at Bald Hill, Beacon Hill and Swyncombe Downs, with soft, muted colours.
- Dominance of arable cultivation at Harcourt Hill where gradients are less steep, with stronger, more intense colours.
- Elevated, expansive and invigorating character, with dramatic and extensive views across the vale below.
- Predominantly rural character but with some significant intrusion from M40 motorway.
- Scarp face itself is prominent in views from surrounding area and the lack of vegetation creates high intervisibility along the scarp face.

#### **Enclosed escarpment**

*Key characteristics:*

- scarp face dominated by dense woodland cover or a mosaic of open grassland, scrub and woodland.
- predominantly semi-natural character with a series of broad-leaved woodlands of significant nature conservation value (many designated as SSSI).
- Smooth scarp profile masked by roughly textured vegetation, with sombre, muted colours.
- Enclosed, intimate character within densely wooded areas.
- Semi-enclosed character and some views out across the vale from the scarp within areas with a mosaic of open grassland, scrub and woodland.
- Escarpment prominent in views but woodland cover helps to absorb prominent features and results in low intervisibility.

### **Semi-enclosed dip slope**

Three small areas of semi-enclosed dip slope landscape lie adjacent to the scarp top at Christmas Common and either side of the M40 at Bald Hill/Beacon Hill.

*Key characteristics:*

- Level or gently sloping ground immediately adjacent to the scarp top.
- Generally open character but surrounded by a strong structure of woods, hedgerows or trees.
- Some views possible over the scarp edge at Bald Hill but otherwise views restricted by vegetation to create moderate to low intervisibility.
- Generally rural character but some intrusion from M40 motorway.

### **Wooded dip slope**

Two main areas of wooded dip slope landscape lie close to the scarp top within the character area, around Crowell Hill to the north and Woodcote to the south.

*Key characteristics:*

- Flat or gently sloping landform dissected by valleys, particularly in the northern section around Crowell Hill.
- Strong structure of woodland and valley landform creates an attractive, intimate and enclosed character.
- Dominance of semi-natural broad-leaved woodland of high nature conservation value.
- Generally rural character but with some intrusion of built development around Woodcote.
- Low intervisibility.

### **Parkland and estate farmland**

Two areas of wooded parkland and estate landscape occur at Swyncombe House and Watlington Park.

*Key characteristics:*

- Well-managed parkland character with formal features such as avenues and free-standing mature trees in pasture, blocks of mature woodland and estate walls.
- Rural and unspoilt character.
- Generally enclosed character with strong landform, woodland and tree cover.
- Low intervisibility.

## **B1.6. Planning, Managing and Protecting Distinctiveness**

The following table presents recommendations to protect, conserve, enhance and restore the landscape qualities of South Oxfordshire.

Forces for change	Guidelines/Mitigation
Agricultural intensification, diversification and farm amalgamation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote, where possible, the conservation of the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly on land adjacent to watercourses. Recognise that grazing sheep and cattle can make a contribution to the landscape's identity and distinctiveness.</li> <li>• Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type. Felling of mature specimens should be resisted. Planting of new hedgerow trees such as oak and ash, and tree belts, should be encouraged.</li> <li>• Strengthen the field pattern by conserving species rich hedgerows and sympathetically maintaining all hedgerows. Priority should be given to safeguarding and where expanding this resource, including replanting gappy hedges using species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, wayfaring tree, dogwood and spindle, particularly in those LCAs where they remain a significant feature.</li> <li>• Protect stone walls from deterioration.</li> <li>• Safeguard, maintain and enhance the quality of unimproved chalk and limestone grassland with sustainable grazing techniques. Identify opportunities for calcareous grassland restoration by linking and extending the existing resource, particularly along the Chilterns escarpment.</li> </ul>
Development, expansion and infilling of settlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns and villages with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.</li> <li>• Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements, and promote the use of building materials to maintain vernacular style and a scale of development and that are appropriate to Chilterns Escarpment (see also the South Oxfordshire Design Guide , November 2016; and the Chilterns AONB Building Design Guide 2010).</li> <li>• Local building materials should be used, including flintstone and brick or red and blue brick and clay tiles in the Chilterns.</li> </ul>
Introduction of tall buildings and structures such as	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimise impact by locating new communication masts on existing structures or by using existing masts.</li> <li>• Bury cables underground and seek opportunities to bury existing overhead cables</li> </ul>

Forces for change	Guidelines/Mitigation
Decline in management of existing woodlands and trees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the sustainable management of existing woods and plantations, and the establishment of new tree belts and plantations with a significant proportion of deciduous tree and shrub species characteristic of this area.</li> <li>• Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as crack willow, oak and ash.</li> <li>• Promote the sustainable management of existing ancient woodland to safeguard its long-term survival.</li> <li>• Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and, where appropriate, pollarding willows.</li> </ul>

## B2. LCA 10 Chilterns Plateau with Valleys

The following notes are taken from the Chilterns Plateau section (LCA 10) of the South Oxfordshire Landscape Character Assessment November 2017. The area is described as the southern part of the Chilterns dip slope formed by a gently sloping plateau dissected by an irregular pattern of shallow valleys.

### B2.1. Location and Boundaries

*Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* forms the part of the Chilterns dip slope, bounded by the top of the escarpment to the west and the Thames Valley to the south and east. *Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* is located entirely within the Chilterns AONB.

### B2.2. Key Characteristics

- An undulating landscape ranging from c. 40m AOD to c. 210m AOD.
- The plateau is dissected by an irregular pattern of shallow, small-scale dry valleys.
- Heavily wooded landscape.
- Extensive areas of ancient woodland some of which are designated as SSSI.
- The A407 and A4130 roads cross through the area.
- Sparsely settled with small villages and hamlets. The village of Sonning Common comprises the largest settlement.
- Agriculture comprises the predominant land use with arable and pasture.
- Narrow lanes and tall hedgerows.

### B2.3. Natural Factors

#### B2.3.1. Geology and Landform

The area is underlain by Upper Chalk, the youngest of the several layers of chalk laid down in the Cretaceous period. The strata are tilted towards the south-east but the land dips away from the scarp at such a gentle angle that the fall of the ground is almost imperceptible, giving the slope the character of a plateau.

Extensive deposits of clay-with-flints, with smaller pockets of Reading Beds, mask the chalk geology on the plateau and typically support extensive areas of woodland and small areas of remnant heath and grass common (e.g. around Rotherfield, Peppard and Nettlebed).

In this part of the dip slope, the plateau is comparatively level and expansive and is dissected by an irregular pattern of shallow, small-scale dry valleys which seem to appear unexpectedly in an irregular pattern across the plateau. Their enclosed, intimate and small-scale character tends to contrast with the broader plateau landscape above.

The topography of *Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* ranges from c. 40m AOD to c. 210m AOD. The lowest areas of land are located around the River Thames to the east. The highest area of land in this character area is located in the village of Nuffield at 212m AOD. Other notable high points include Windmill Hill, to the north of the village of Nettlebed at 211m AOD.

### B2.3.2. Hydrology

*Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* contains a limited numbers of water courses.

### B2.3.3. Biodiversity/Flora and Fauna

Priority habitats include deciduous woodland, wood-pasture and parkland, traditional orchards, lowland dry acid grassland, semi-improved grassland and lowland calcareous grassland.

This is a heavily wooded landscape containing extensive areas of Ancient Woodland<sup>72</sup>.

*Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* contains five SSSIs either wholly or partially.

Habitats contained within the SSSIs are comprised mostly of deciduous woodland.

## B2.4. Cultural and Social Factors

### B2.4.1. Land Use and Management

Registered Parks and Gardens within Chilterns Ridges and Valleys includes Greys Court and the western area of Friar Park.

Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout different parts of this character area. Priority should be given to safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource.

### B2.4.2. Settlement

The pattern of settlement in the Chilterns is typically one of small hamlets and farms scattered amongst extensive woods and commons. Many of these date from the early middle ages, which saw enclosure and clearance of 'wastes' and colonisation of previously unpopulated areas, during a period of relative prosperity and rapid population growth. Clusters of loosely grouped farmsteads were established on the plateau and new small fields were carved out of the extensive common woods, a process known as 'assarting'.

This process often led to the development of a loose, linear form to medieval settlements (e.g. Nettlebed) and many were also associated with a village green or with larger areas of common land (e.g. Rotherfield Greys). The village of Nettlebed is one of the largest within this area and

has been an important centre of the brick and tile industry since the fifteenth century and for pottery after the seventeenth century. Production ceased in 1927<sup>73</sup> and only a single bottle kiln remains preserved within a modern housing estate. Furniture making was another important industry within this area, using timber from the extensive beechwoods.

Traditional building materials are typical of the Chilterns as a whole with a predominance of red brick, together with silver-grey flint. Older houses were timber-framed in oak and chalk blocks have sometimes been used on Chiltern buildings<sup>74</sup>. Plain tiles were the rule on the larger roofs, with thatch on cottages with some slate introduced in Victorian times. Farmsteads are often characterised by large timber framed barns, typically clad with black, horizontal weather boarding with gable walls constructed out of brick and flint.

### B2.4.3. Perceptual and Aesthetic Factors

Large field sizes are widespread across the landscape and are often bounded by woodland. Long distance views are limited from roads across the plateau due to the sloping topography and strong woodland cover. Red kites are often seen in the skies above the area. Narrow lanes with tall hedgerows exist throughout the area.

## B2.5. Landscape Types

Like *Chilterns Ridges and Valleys* (9), this part of the Chilterns dip slope has a surprisingly uniform character, despite its irregular pattern of plateaux and valleys and its mosaic of farmland and woodland. This complexity is a consistent and distinctive feature of the area, and the most obvious differences in landscape character are between the very intimate, enclosed wooded landscapes and those which have a more open structure and character.

*Chilterns Plateau with Valleys* is comprised of the following landscape types:

### Open dip slope

*Key characteristics:*

A few isolated pockets of open farmland with a weak landscape structure occur within the Chilterns dip slope, (e.g. to the north-west and north-east of Caversham, south of Nuffield and to the west of Henley), usually where more gentle gradients have encouraged intensive arable cultivation.

- Gently sloping ground.
- Dominance of intensive arable cultivation with large scale field pattern, weak hedgerow structure and very little woodland cover.
- Distinctively 'grey' and flinty soils.
- Predominantly rural character but with some limited intrusion from power lines (e.g. on both sides of Caversham).
- Large-scale, open landscape with high intervisibility in immediate area but long-distance views contained by neighbouring woodland.

### Semi-enclosed dip slope

*Key characteristics:*

This loose mosaic of farmland and woodland is characteristic of the more level ground of the plateau to the south of Nuffield and near Woodcote, and particularly the 'lower' dip slope to the south of Sonning Common.

- Typically level or more gently sloping ground.
- Comparatively open fields contained within a strong structure of woods, hedgerows or trees to form a loose mosaic.
- Dominance of arable cultivation.
- Strong structure of woods and hedgerows generally provides visual containment and results in moderate to low intervisibility.
- Distinctive pattern of winding rural roads, irregular field boundaries and scattered rural settlements, typical of 'ancient countryside'.
- Generally rural and unspoilt character but with some 'suburbanising' influences within rural settlements and along main roads (e.g. A4074, A4130), and localised intrusion of built development and power lines (e.g. around Sonning Common and Caversham).

### **Wooded dip slope**

#### *Key characteristics:*

This is the dominant landscape type within the area, with extensive blocks of woodland occupying much of the dip slope and creating a more enclosed mosaic of wooded farmland.

- Distinctive landform of plateaux dissected by a network of shallow, dry valleys.
- Heavily wooded character, including extensive stands of ancient, semi-natural broadleaved woodland, mature beechwoods and more recent plantations.
- Strong structure of woodland and complex landform creates an intimate and enclosed character with a particular feeling of secrecy in some valleys.
- Distinctive pattern of winding rural roads, irregular field boundaries and scattered rural settlements, typical of 'ancient countryside'.
- Generally rural and unspoilt character with only localised suburbanising influences within villages, along road corridors or around the fringes of the main settlements.
- Low intervisibility.

### **Commons and heaths**

#### *Key characteristics:*

Two main areas of open common or heath occur within the area, around Nettlebed and Rotherfield Peppard.

- Unfenced character with open access.
- Semi-natural vegetation dominated by acid grassland or heath, typically forming a mosaic of open areas, scrub and woodland with typical species of acid conditions (e.g. birch, gorse, bracken etc.).
- Typically associated with loose linear settlements, with buildings dotted around the margins of the common.
- Rural and unspoilt character.
- Moderate to low intervisibility.

### **Parkland and estate farmland**

#### *Key characteristics:*

There are several areas of distinctive parkland landscape within this part of the Chilterns dip slope, including Greys Court, Checkendon Court and Crowsley Park and several others located around the fringes of Henley.

- Distinctive parkland landscape with formal features such as avenues and free-standing mature trees in pasture, blocks of mature woodland and estate boundaries.
- Rural and unspoilt character.
- Generally enclosed character with strong landform, woodland and tree cover.
- Low intervisibility.
- Generally well-managed character but some parks showing signs of decline (e.g. Crowsley Park).

### Amenity landscape

*Key characteristics:*

- This type is represented by a number of golf courses scattered within the Chiltern Hills and a sports ground near Caversham.
- Typical golf course landscapes of greens, fairways, roughs and bunkers, with associated buildings and car parking.
- Intensively managed and somewhat sub urban character.
- Use of exotic tree species out of character with locality.
- Rural, often well-wooded setting with moderate to low intervisibility.

### Planning, Managing and Protecting Distinctiveness

The following table presents recommendations to protect, conserve, enhance and restore the landscape qualities of South Oxfordshire.

Forces for change	Guidelines/Mitigation
Agricultural intensification, diversification and farm amalgamation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote, where possible, the conservation of the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland particularly on land adjacent to watercourses.</li> <li>• Strengthen the field pattern by conserving species rich hedgerows and sympathetically maintaining all hedgerows. Where appropriate, replant gappy hedges using species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, wayfaring tree, dogwood and spindle, and planting of new hedgerow trees such as oak and ash, and tree belts should be encouraged</li> <li>• Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type.</li> <li>• Protect stone walls from deterioration.</li> <li>• Safeguard, maintain and enhance the quality of unimproved chalk and limestone grassland with sustainable grazing techniques. Identify opportunities for calcareous grassland restoration by linking and extending the existing resource, particularly along the Chilterns escarpment.</li> <li>• Prevent scrub encroachment in areas of species-rich grassland. Opportunities for expanding this habitat include the establishment and management of field margins/buffer strips adjacent to existing limestone grassland habitat using native wildflower species appropriate to the area.</li> </ul>

Forces for change	Guidelines/Mitigation
Inappropriate or inconsistent management, or neglect of existing parklands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safeguard, maintain and enhance and the characteristic landscape features of existing parklands including veteran trees, avenues of trees, lakes, woods and walls.</li> </ul>
Development, expansion and infilling of settlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain the vernacular character of settlements and promote the use of building materials and a scale of development and that is appropriate to this landscape type.</li> <li>• Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns and villages with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.</li> <li>• Local building materials should be used, including flintstone and brick or red and blue brick and clay tiles in the Chilterns.</li> <li>• Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements, and promote the use of building materials to maintain vernacular style and a scale of development and that are appropriate to Chilterns Plateau with Valleys(see also the South Oxfordshire Design Guide, November 2016; and the Chilterns AONB Building Design Guide 2010).</li> </ul>
Introduction of tall buildings and structures such as	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimise impact by locating new communication masts on existing structures or by using existing masts.</li> <li>• Bury cables underground and seek opportunities to bury existing overhead cables</li> </ul>
Decline in management of existing woodlands and trees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are a number of ancient semi-natural woodlands distributed throughout the landscape type and the priority must be to ensure that all these sites are in favourable condition and management.</li> <li>• Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as crack willow, oak and ash.</li> </ul>
Decline of acid grassland and heath due to a reduction or cessation of traditional grazing management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the re-establishment of acid grassland and heath on the Chilterns Commons through a combination of selective tree felling, scrub and bracken control, and fencing and grazing.</li> <li>• Traditionally, the commons would have been grazed but are now usually dominated by woodland, scrub and bracken. Selective clearance, followed by fencing and the re-introduction of grazing on appropriate sites, should be actively encouraged. There are opportunities for extending this resource within the landscape type to meet the targets outlined in the relevant habitat action plan.</li> </ul>