



Land West of Kidmore End Road, Oxfordshire

Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment
April 2025

Job Name: Land West of Kidmore End Road, Reading
Job number: D3456
Client: Fairfax (Reading) Limited and RGC (SODC) Limited
Report number: FAB-00-XX-PR-0001

[illegible]

Contents

1.0	Introduction	4	7.2	Landscape Design Intent	57
1.1	Introduction	4	8.0	Verified Visual Montages of the Proposed Development	60
1.2	Desktop Research	4	8.1	Introduction and scope	60
1.3	Field Work	4	9.0	Identification of Receptors for Impact Assessment	70
2.0	Consultation	6	9.1	Landscape Receptors	70
3.0	Landscape Planning Context	7	9.2	Visual Receptors	70
3.1	Designations and Policy	7	9.3	Limitations and Assumptions	70
4.0	Landscape Character	14	10.0	Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects	71
4.1	Published Landscape Character	14	10.1	Introduction	71
4.2	Contextual Landscape Appraisal	18	10.2	Landscape and Visual Impact Tables	71
4.3	Future Context	21	11.0	Assessment Against Landscape Policy and Landscape Character	78
4.4	Site and Immediate Context Appraisal	22			
4.5	Internal Visual Survey	24			
5.0	Visual Assessment	28	12.0	Summary and Conclusions	80
5.1	Zone of Theoretical Visibility	28	Appendix 1: LVIA Methodology		81
5.2	Visual Assessment	29			
6.0	Summary of Baseline Assessment	56			
6.1	Landscape and Visual Considerations	56			
6.2	Recommended Embedded Mitigations Strategies	56			
7.0	Parameter Plans and Landscape Design Intent	57			
7.1	Parameter Plan	57			

Project number: D3456
Version: 2
Version date: 30 April 2025
Comment: Final Report

Plans presented in this report are reproduced from Ordnance Survey material by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright 2025. All rights reserved. Reference number 100022432. OS Open Data © Crown copyright and database right 2025 | Aerial Photography © Google Earth.

1.0

Introduction

1.1

Introduction

fabrik Chartered Landscape Architects have been appointed by Fairfax (Reading) Limited and RGC (SODC) Limited to carry out this report, in order to consider the likely physical and visual impacts arising as a result of the Proposed Development on the Land West of Kidmore End Road, Oxfordshire (the Site).

This report sets out landscape policy (together with any related policy on ecological and heritage assets) and any supporting guidance documents / informatives and then goes on to describe the constituent baseline landscape elements (the existing geology, soils, landform, drainage, vegetation cover, land use, settlement, the history of the landscape and the way that landscape is experienced) which together inform landscape character, landscape condition and value. The LVIA then describes the baseline character and amenity of the identified visual receptors (considering the visual envelope, the different groups of people, places affected, the nature of the view and the visual amenity).

The landscape constraints and opportunities are then set out to inform the Proposed Development. Any mitigation measures and assumptions which have informed the assessment of effects are set out after the description of the Proposed Development. The effects of the Proposed Development are then considered against each of the landscape and visual receptors relative to the particular stages of the project. The penultimate section of this report comprises a landscape policy assessment.

The location of the Site is shown at **Figure 1.1**.

The methodology for the LVIA is based on the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' (third edition) by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (Routledge, 2013). A full methodology is set out at Appendix 1.

1.2

Desktop Research

The desktop survey carried out as part of the LVIA included the review of Ordnance Survey maps, interactive maps, aerial photography, published landscape character assessment documents, planning policy and the emerging development proposals. The extent of the baseline and therefore the impact appraisal is broadly defined by the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) as determined by the initial desk study and verified in the field and therefore extends to 1.5km from the Site.

1.3

Field Work

The field work was carried out on 6th March 2025 and recorded the existing landscape elements within the Site; the contextual landscape elements; and identified a series of key visual receptors. The visual assessment element includes a photographic survey of the Site taken from a series of representative key views, chosen to represent a range of locations including both public and private views, distances and directions around the Site.

-  Site boundary
-  District Boundary

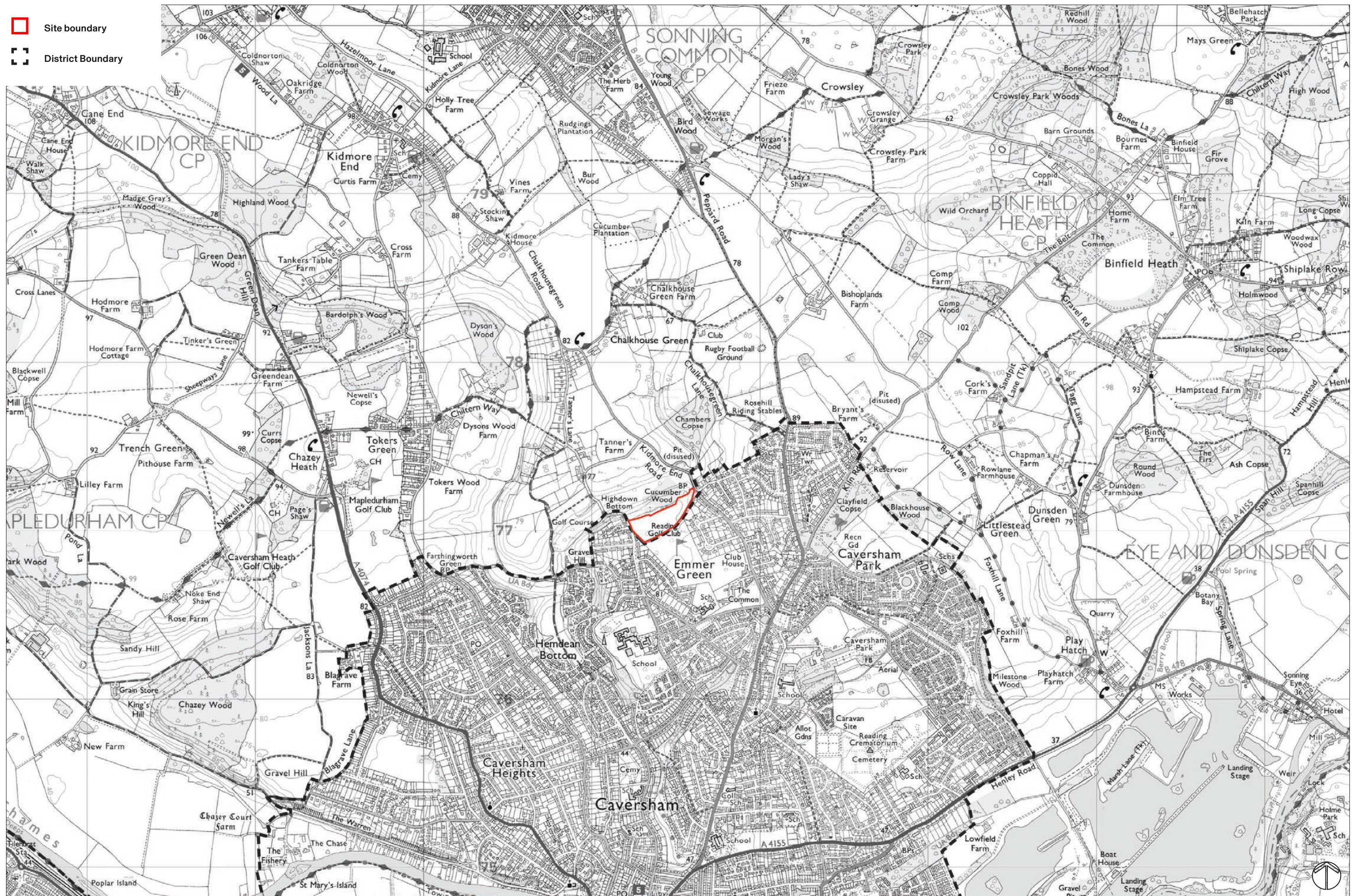


Figure 1.1 – Site location (fabrik, 2025)

2.0

Consultation

Early engagement with South Oxfordshire District Council was carried out via a pre-app meeting in 2022. Written feedback on both the Site and the draft proposals at that time were provided by the Landscape Officer, Hazel Osborne (dated 18th October 2022) the content of which is set out as follows:

"The site comprises part of a former golf course, the remainder of the golf course to the south, within Reading Borough, has planning permission for 223 dwellings. There is an ancient woodland, Cucumber Wood on the northern site boundary, this extends either side to a wider area of woodland subject to TPO, which encloses most of the northern end of the site. There is existing housing development to the west, and further TPO woodland and housing to the east. There are further trees within the site, a number covered by TPO, largely in lines running south-east to north-west.

The site is on generally level and elevated ground, other than the north-eastern part where the ground falls into a dry valley, and there are visual links with the Crawshay Drive area of housing, on the opposite valley side and to the rural landscape. There are also filtered views from housing on the western boundary.

The site lies within local landscape character area 10, Chilterns Plateau with Valleys and character type 16 Semi-enclosed dip slope. This has a strong structure of woods and hedgerows and trees providing visual containment. Recommendations for character area 10 include planting locally characteristic trees and shrubs to screen and integrate development, managing existing woodlands and planting new small scale deciduous woodland blocks.

The site lies within the Kidmore End Neighbourhood Plan (KENP) Locally Valued Landscape Policy (LPLV) area, where development proposals should protect and where practicable enhance the character, quality and appearance of the valued landscape. Where proposals accord with the policy and policy ENV1 of the Local Plan, landscape mitigation measures should reflect the prevailing local vegetation pattern and support the objectives of the KENP.

The site appears generally separated from the rural area to the north, and visually related to the area to the south, which will be developed. The Chilterns AONB lies just under 1km to the north of the site at its closest point; however the visual separation provided by the woodland is likely to prevent the site performing a role in providing setting to the AONB and avoid adverse impacts, provided the design is appropriate; it also separates the site from the rest of the valued landscape area.

The proposals

A Landscape and Visual Technical Note has been submitted,

this includes an initial landscape and visual assessment and sets out a number of constraints and recommendations (1.4) with which I am in broad agreement. However I am concerned about the feasibility of accommodating 100 houses on the site, given these constraints and other development requirements, including:

- The site should provide a transition from the permitted development to the south to the rural edge and should be of low density to allow for this.*
- The height of buildings should be a maximum of 2 storeys to reflect the surrounding development, and to respect the rural edge setting; buildings should not be visible above the existing woodland, and this should be demonstrated in any future proposals.*
- Care should be taken in the north-east corner to avoid buildings appearing prominent on the ridge top, lower buildings heights and additional set back may be required here, as well as woodland planting.*
- Existing TPO trees will need to be located in public spaces, not private gardens, to avoid pressure in the future for their removal.*
- Any SUDS features will need sufficient space to allow for an attractive design, to ensure they are positive not negative features. Standard engineered basins will not be acceptable.*
- Integral open spaces and play areas will be required within the development, which are overlooked for safety; open space should not all be peripheral, see the Joint Design Guide.*
- Landscape buffers are required to the woodland and to existing housing area.*
- Street tree planting is required in line with the NPPF paragraph 131.*
- Light spillage should be avoided on the rural edge.*

I would also be concerned about the proposed vehicular access from Kidmore End Road, this is likely to be intrusive, with effects exacerbated by lighting, and should be avoided.

Conclusion

The site appears largely separated from the rural area to the north, and visually related to the area to the south. Whilst there is potential conflict with the valued landscape policy (LPLV) of the Kidmore End Neighbourhood Plan, the separation of the site from the rest of the valued landscape to the north and change

in context as a result of the adjoining permitted development, will help to mitigate this.

Subject to an appropriate design, the site could potentially accommodate development without significant adverse landscape impacts, however the proposal for 100 houses does not seem to allow for all of the constraints and requirements as set out above.

Should an application be submitted, it should be supported by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), in accordance with GLVIA3, which should be used to inform the design proposals, and with details of proposed planting mitigation, including plant species, size and density. The LVIA should include photomontages or wireframe images from agreed viewpoints, including winter views, and should take into account any cumulative effects and the effects of lighting."

The response has informed the scheme proposals and the content of this LVIA.

3.0

Landscape Planning Context

3.1

Designations and Policy

Designations

The landscape and heritage designations of the Study Area are shown on **Figure 3.1** opposite.

The Site lies within the southern section of a Local Valued Landscape as identified in the Kidmore End Neighbourhood Plan 2011-2035 (September 2022). It contains a number of trees which are subject to a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) and abuts the southern side of Cucumber Wood Ancient Woodland. There are no other landscape designations which cover the Site. The Chilterns National Landscape (CNL, formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - AONB) lies to the north and west of the Site.

A number of Listed Buildings are present within the Study Area both within the townscape and the landscape.

In addition to that shown on **Figure 3.1**, the north-eastern part of the Site lies within a wider ecological 'Conservation Target Area', which due to the strategic scale of this Area is difficult to readily define the boundaries on the finer grain plan opposite.

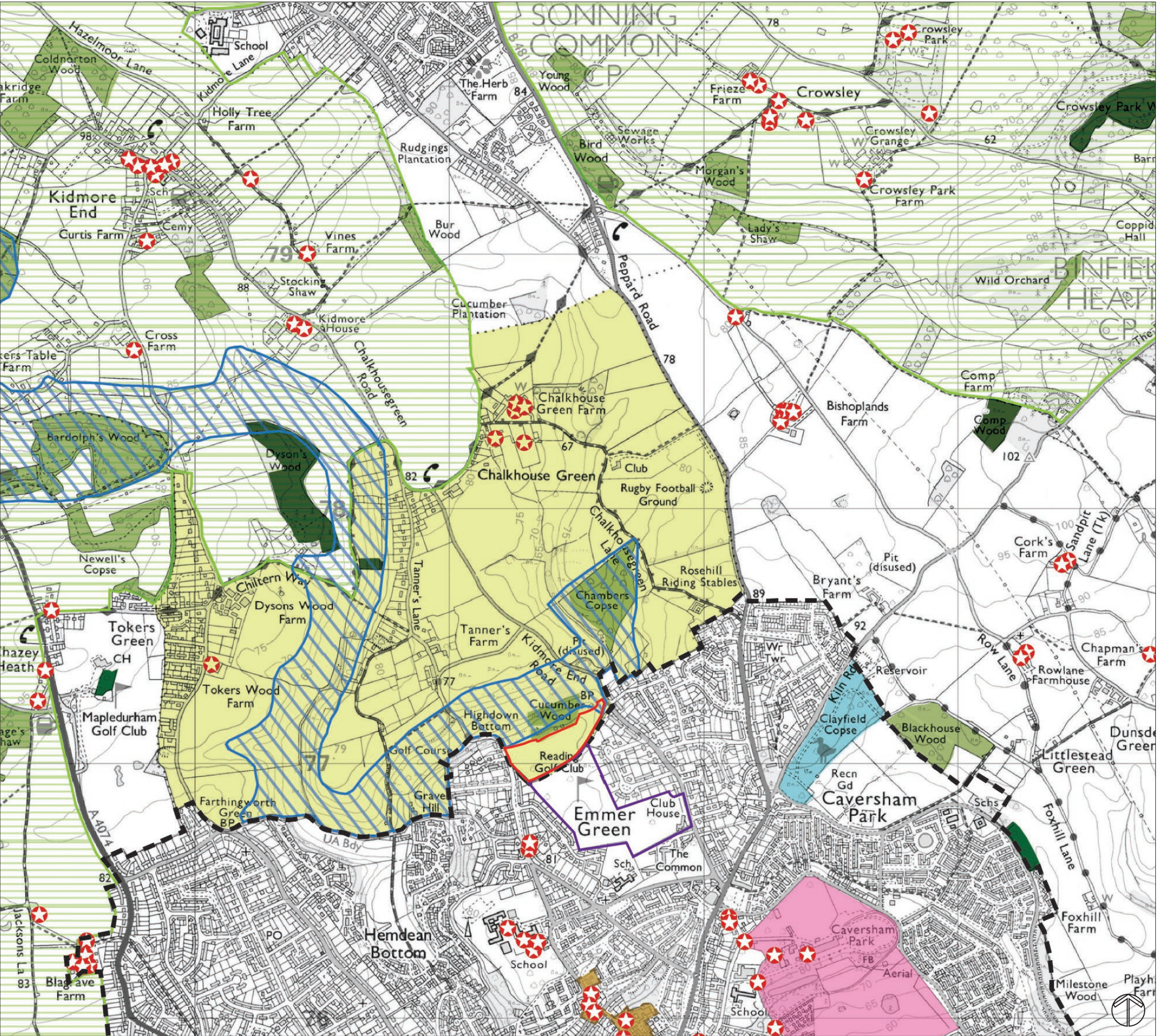
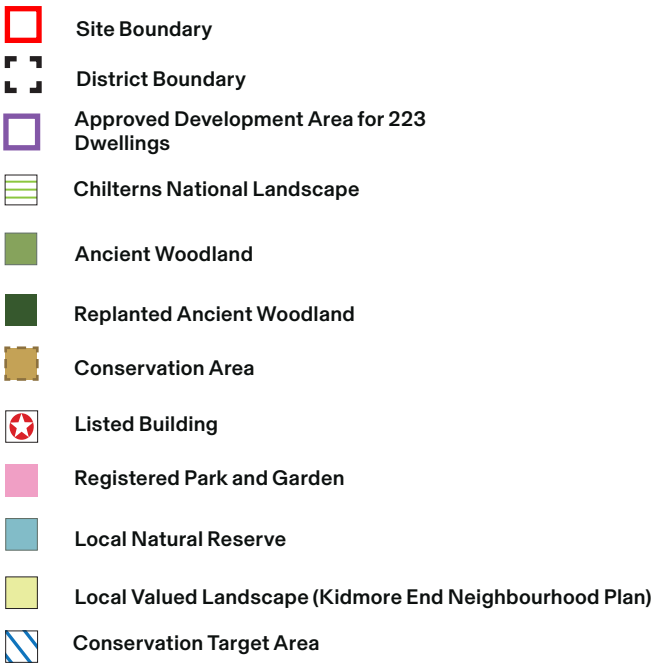
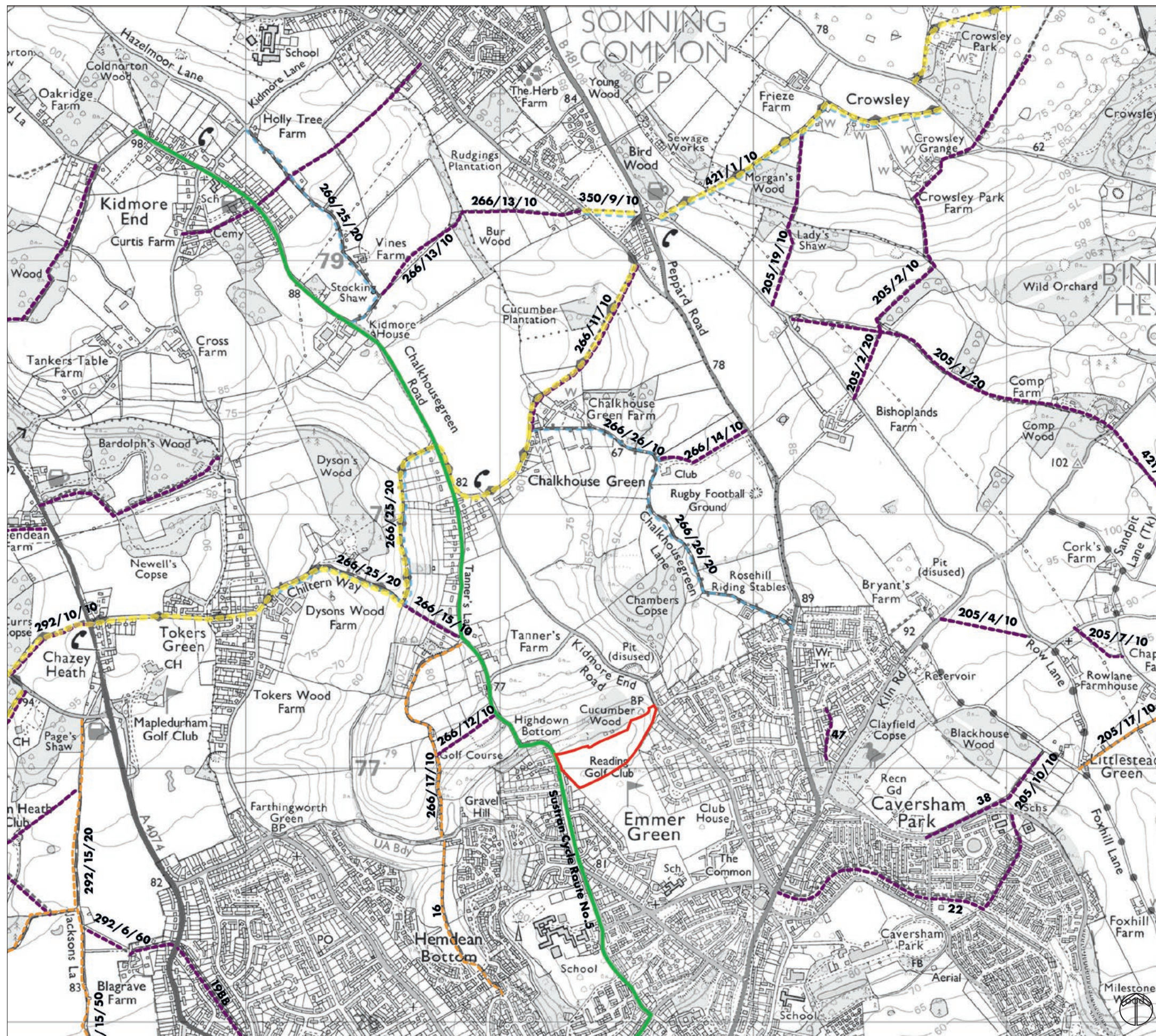


Figure 3.1 – Local designations (fabrik, 2025)



Historic and Cultural Landscape

Caversham Park, to the south eastern corner of the Study Area, beyond the intervening built form, was listed as a Grade II Registered Park and Garden. It is a Victorian stately home with a parkland. It was historically located in Oxfordshire, but became part of Berkshire since the administrative boundary change in 1911.

Surley Row Conservation Area lies to the south of the Study Area, beyond the intervening built form, is one of the oldest built area in Caversham. It comprises a tightly knit lane of domestic scale residential built form and trees are prominent in the area.

There are a series of Listed Buildings scattered throughout the townscape of the Study Area and include Old Grove House (Grade II*) and The Barn (Grade II) at Highdown Hill Road which are the closest to the Site. Chalk House (Grade II* Listed Building) lies at approximately 1.2km to the north of the Site, on the edge of CNL.

Public Rights of Way

A network of Public Rights of Way, including Footpaths and Cycle routes cross the Study Area connecting the townscape with the countryside. Refer to **Figure 3.2** – Plan showing Public Rights of Way. Those in close proximity to the Site include Footpath 47 and 22 to the east of the Site, within the built up area; Footpath 266/12/10, 266/15/10 Sustrans Cycle Path No. 5 and Bridleway 266/17/10 to the west; Restricted Bridleway 266/26/20 to the north-east; and Chiltern Way 266/11/10 to the north.

The Chiltern Way (266/11/10), long distance circular walking route, crosses the Study Area from the west to the north-east and often following the southern edge of the CNL.

Caversham Heath Golf Course lies to the west of the Study Area beyond the built up area of Caversham.

3.1.1 National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The December 2024 NPPF seeks the presumption in favour of sustainable development. The following issues and policies of the NPPF are pertinent to the Proposed Development and this assessment.

Section 2 - achieving sustainable development, para 8, subsection c relating to an environmental objective, states:

“to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change...”

Section 8 - promoting healthy and safe communities, para 103 under the open space and recreation sub-heading states:

“Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities, and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support effects to address climate change...”

Para 105 states:

“Planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.”

Section 12 - achieving well-designed places. Para 131:

“The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities...”

Para 132:

“... Design policies should be developed with local communities so that they reflect local aspirations, and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area’s defining characteristics...”

Para 135:

“Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

a. will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;

b. are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;

c. are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);

d. establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;

e. optimise the potential of the Site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development

(including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and

f. create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.”

Para 136 relates to trees and states:

“Trees make an important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments, and can also help mitigate and adapt to climate change. Planning policies and decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined, that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments (such as parks and community orchards), that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible. Applicants and local planning authorities should work with highways officers and tree officers to ensure that the right trees are planted in the right places, and solutions are found that are compatible with highways standards and the needs of different users.”

Para 137:

“Design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals...”

Para 139:

“Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents which use visual tools such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight should be given to:

a. development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents which use visual tools such as design guides and codes; and/or

b. outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.”

Section 14 - meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change. The elements relevant to landscape matters include para 164 states: “New development should be planned for in ways that:

a. avoid increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from climate change. When new development is brought forward in areas which are vulnerable, care should be taken to ensure that risks can be managed through suitable adaptation measures, including through incorporating green infrastructure and sustainable urban drainage systems;...

Under the sub section on planning and flood risk, Para 172, subsection c goes on to state with regard to 'all plans' that: “c. using opportunities provided by new development and improvements in green and other infrastructure to reduce the causes and impacts of flooding, (making as much use as possible of natural flood management techniques as part of an integrated approach to flood risk management).”

Section 15 - conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Para 187:

“Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and

enhance the natural and local environment by:

a. protecting and enhancing valued landscapes... (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 nest and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.

c. maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it...”

Para 189:

“Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes 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 all 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.”

Section 16 - conserving and enhancing the historic environment, para 202 states:

“Heritage assets range from sites and buildings of local historic value to those of the highest significance, such as World Heritage Sites which are internationally recognised to be of Outstanding Universal Value. These assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations”

Under the subsection on considering potential impacts, para 213:

“Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of:

a. grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks and gardens, should be exceptional;

b. assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and grade II* listed buildings, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional.”

Planning Practice Guidance

The NPPF is supported by the on-line resource Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) There are a number of sections of relevance, as set out below.

Climate change is considered in para 001 (ID 6-001-20140306) states: "... local planning authorities should ensure that protecting the local environment is properly considered alongside the broader issues of protecting the global environment. Planning can also help increase resilience to climate change impact through the location, mix and design of development.

Addressing climate change is one of the core land use planning

principles which the National Planning Policy Framework expects to underpin both plan-making and decision-taking...”

Planning for well-designed places and the sub-section on 'How are well-designed places achieved through the planning system?' are set out at para 001 (ID: 26-001-20191001) which states: "Well-designed places can be achieved by taking a proactive and collaborative approach at all stages of the planning process, from policy and plan formulation through to the determination of planning applications and the post approval stage... To be read alongside this guidance, the National Design Guide sets out the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice.

... significant weight should be given to: a) development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or b) outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.

Good design is set out in the National Design Guide under the following 10 characteristics:

- context
- identity
- built form
- movement
- nature
- public spaces
- uses
- homes and buildings
- resources
- lifespan

The National Design Guide can be used by all those involved in shaping places including in plan-making and decision making."

The setting to a heritage asset is described at para 013 (ID: 18a-013-20190723) as follows: "All heritage assets have a setting, irrespective of the form in which they survive and whether they are designated or not. The setting of a heritage asset and the asset’s curtilage may not have the same extent.

The extent and importance of setting is often expressed by reference to the visual relationship between the asset and the Proposed Development and associated visual/physical considerations. Although views of or from an asset will play an important part in the assessment of impacts on setting, the way in which we experience an asset in its setting is also influenced by other environmental factors such as noise, dust, smell and vibration from other land uses in the vicinity, and by our understanding of the historic relationship between places. For example, buildings that are in close proximity but are not visible from each other may have a historic or aesthetic connection that amplifies the experience of the significance of each.

The contribution that setting makes to the significance of the heritage asset does not depend on there being public rights of way or an ability to otherwise access or experience that setting. The contribution may vary over time.

When assessing any application which may affect the setting of a heritage asset, local planning authorities may need to

consider the implications of cumulative change. They may also need to consider the fact that developments which materially detract from the asset's significance may also damage its economic viability now, or in the future, thereby threatening its ongoing conservation."

Green infrastructure is the topic of para 004 (ID: 8-004-20190721) and states: "Green infrastructure can embrace a range of spaces and assets that provide environmental and wider benefits. It can, for example, include parks, playing fields, other areas of open space, woodland, allotments, private gardens, sustainable drainage features, green roofs and walls, street trees and 'blue infrastructure' such as streams, ponds, canals and other water bodies. References to green infrastructure in this guidance also apply to different types of blue infrastructure where appropriate."

Para 006 (ID: 8-006-20190721) then sets out that green infrastructure can help in:

- "Building a strong, competitive economy: Green infrastructure can drive economic growth and regeneration, helping to create high quality environments which are attractive to businesses and investors.
- Achieving well-designed places: The built environment can be enhanced by features such as green roofs, street trees, proximity to woodland, public gardens and recreational and open spaces. More broadly, green infrastructure exists within a wider landscape context and can reinforce and enhance local landscape character, contributing to a sense of place and natural beaut.
- Promoting healthy and safe communities: Green infrastructure can improve the wellbeing of a neighbourhood with opportunities for recreation, exercise, social interaction, experiencing and caring for nature, community food-growing and gardening, all of which can bring mental and physical health benefits. Outdoor Recreation Value (ORVal) is a useful online tool that can be used to quantify the recreational values provided by greenspace. Green infrastructure can help to reduce health inequalities in areas of socio-economic deprivation and meet the needs of families and an ageing population. It can also help to reduce air pollution and noise.
- Mitigating climate change, flooding and coastal change: Green infrastructure can contribute to carbon storage, cooling and shading, opportunities for species migration to more suitable habitats and the protection of water quality and other natural resources. It can also be an integral part of multifunctional sustainable drainage and natural flood risk management.
- Conserving and enhancing the natural environment: High-quality networks of multifunctional green infrastructure contribute a range of benefits, including ecological connectivity, facilitating biodiversity net gain and nature recovery networks and opportunities for communities to undertake conservation work.'

Guidance on trees and woodland is set out under the natural environment is set out within para 029 (ID 8-20190721) and states: 'Well-placed and well-chosen trees on streets and in urban spaces can provide a range of benefits: encouraging walking and enhanced physical and mental health; contributing to local environmental character and distinctiveness; providing habitats for wildlife; reducing noise and excessive heat; and supporting sustainable drainage. Changing climate, in particular hotter summers and more frequent periods of dry weather, and unknown pests and diseases, will place new pressures on green infrastructure in the long-term, so trees of the right species and age profile are essential'.

Para 036 (ID: 8-036-20190721) considers landscape and sets out that: 'The National Planning Policy Framework is clear that plans should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and that strategic policies should provide for the conservation and enhancement of landscapes. This can include nationally and locally designated landscapes but also the wider countryside. Where landscapes have a particular local value, it is important for policies to identify their special characteristics and be supported by proportionate evidence... The cumulative impacts of development on the landscape need to be considered carefully.'

Open space, sports and recreation facilities are considered under para 001 (ID: 37-001-20140306) which states: 'Open space should be taken into account in planning for new development and considering proposals that may affect existing open space (see National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 96). Open space, which includes all open space of public value, can take many forms, from formal sports pitches to open areas within a development, linear corridors and country parks. It can provide health and recreation benefits to people living and working nearby; have an ecological value and contribute to green infrastructure (see National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 171, as well as being an important part of the landscape and setting of built development, and an important component in the achievement of sustainable development (see National Planning Policy Framework paragraphs 7-9).'

National Design Guide

The National Design Guide (30 January 2021) illustrates how well-designed places that are beautiful, enduring and successful can be achieved in practice. Paragraph 20 sets out the components of good design, including layout, form and scale, appearance, landscape, materials and detailing. The 10 characteristics of a well designed place are described in paragraph 36 as follows:

- 'Context - enhances the surroundings.
- Identity - attractive and distinctive.
- Built form - a coherent pattern of development.
- Movement - accessible and easy to move around.
- Nature - enhanced and optimised.
- Public spaces - safe, social and inclusive.
- Uses - mixed and integrated.
- Homes and buildings - functional, healthy and sustainable.
- Resources - efficient and resilient.
- Lifespan - made to last'.

National Model Design Code

The National Model Design Code forms part of the Planning Practice Guidance expanding on the characteristics of good design set out in the National Design Guide.

3.1.2 Development Plan

The pertinent policies of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011-2035 (Adopted 10 December 2020) relative to landscape and visual matters are set out below.

Policy STRAT1: The Overall Strategy

"1. Proposals for development in South Oxfordshire will be

assessed using national policy and guidance and the whole of the Development Plan and should be consistent with the overall strategy of:

ix) protecting and enhancing the countryside and particularly those areas within the two AONB and Oxford Green Belt by ensuring that outside of the towns and villages any change relates to very specific needs such as those of the agricultural industry or enhancement of the environment;

x) supporting and enhancing our historic environment."

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):

- Development ...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;
- 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.

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 landscapes, in particular:

- i) trees (including individual trees, groups of trees and woodlands), hedgerows and field boundaries;
- ii) irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland and aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland;
- v) the landscape setting of settlements...;
- 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."

Policy ENV2: Biodiversity – Designated Sites, Priority Habitats and Species

"3. Development likely to result, either directly or indirectly to the loss, deterioration or harm to:

- Important or ancient hedges or hedgerows
- Ancient woodland and veteran trees

will only be permitted if:

i) the need for, and the 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 and 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."

Policy ENV5: Green Infrastructure in New Developments

"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, 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 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... Consideration should also be given to inclusive access and contributing to gains in biodiversity, particularly through the use of appropriate planting which takes count 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."

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 also includes those heritage assets listed by the Oxfordshire Historic 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 where 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 wider 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...”

Policy DES1: Delivering High Quality Development

“1. All new development must be of a high quality design that:

‘i) uses land efficiently while respecting the existing landscape character;

iii) incorporates and/or links to a well-defined network of green and blue infrastructure;

iv) is sustainable and resilient to climate change;

vii) takes into account landform, layout, building orientation, massing and landscaping;

xiii) respects the local context working with and complementing the scale, height, density, grain, massing, type, and details of the surrounding area.

2. Where development sites are located adjacent to sites that have a reasonable prospect of coming forward in the future, integration with the neighbouring site should form part of the proposal’s design.

3. Where the Council is aware that adjacent or closely related sites with similar delivery timescales are coming forwards together, a coordinated, integrated and comprehensive masterplan will be required to be prepared across all the sites.”

Policy DES2: Enhancing Local Character

“1. All new development must be designed to reflect the positive features that make up the character of the local area and should both physically and visually enhance and complement the surroundings.

2. All proposals for new development should be informed by a contextual analysis that demonstrates how the design:

i) has been informed by and responds positively to the Site and its surroundings; and

ii) reinforces place-identity by enhancing local character.

3. Where a character assessment has been prepared as part

of a made Neighbourhood Development Plan, a proposal must demonstrate that the positive features identified in the assessment have been incorporated into the design of the development.

4. Where there is no local Character Assessment a comprehensive contextual analysis of the local character should be prepared as part of an application. This should identify the positive features that make up the character of the area. The proposal must demonstrate that these positive features have incorporated into the design of the development.”

Policy DES6: Residential Amenity

“Development proposals should demonstrate that they will not result in significant adverse impacts on the amenity of neighbouring uses, when considering both individual and cumulative impacts, in relation to the following factors:

i) loss of privacy, daylight or sunlight;

ii) dominance or visual intrusion;

iii) noise or vibration;

iv) smell, dust, heat, odour, gases or other emissions;

v) pollution, contamination or the use of / or storage of hazardous substances; and

vi) external lighting.”

Policy DES7: Efficient Use of Resources

“New development is required to make provision for the effective use and protection of natural resources where applicable, including:

i) the efficient use of land, with densities in accordance with Policy STRAT5 Residential Densities. Proposals which seek to deliver higher quality and higher density development which minimises land take will be encouraged...”

Policy DES8: Promoting Sustainable

“1. All new development... should seek to minimise carbon and energy impacts in line with nationally adopted standards. Proposals must demonstrate that they are seeking to limit greenhouse emissions through location, building orientation, design, landscape and planting taking into account any nationally adopted standards...

2. All new development should be designed to improve resilience to the anticipated effects of climate change.

4. The Council will not refuse planning permission for buildings or infrastructure of an outstanding or innovative design which promote high levels of sustainability or help raise the standard of design, as long as they fit with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.

5. A sensitive approach will need to be taken to conserve the special character of designated and non designated heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.”

Policy CF5: Open Space, Sport and Recreation in New Residential Development

“1. New residential development will be required to provide or contribute towards inclusive and accessible open space and play facilities in line with the most up to date standards set out in the Open Space Study...”

The most up to date standards are set out in the SODC

document below.

Sports Facilities, Local Leisure Facilities and Playing Pitch Study: Final report, Part 5: Open Spaces Strategy (January 2017)

Chapter 9, Figure 39 sets out the proposed planning standards for new developments with quantity per 1,000 population as follows:

Parks and Gardens & Amenity Green Space: require “1.4ha per 1000 in the Towns and Larger Villages” with accessibility radius of “710m for Parks and Gardens and 480m for Amenity Green Space”.

Children’s Play and provision for young people: require “0.25 ha per 1,000 of Designated Equipped Playing Space and 0.3ha per 1,000 for teenage/MUGA provision” with accessibility radius of “400m for LEAP, 1000m for NEAP and 1000m for teenage facilities”.

Allotments require “0.4 ha per 1000” with accessibility radius of “1000m”.

3.1.3 SODC Design Guide

The South Oxfordshire Design Guide was adopted in June 2022. The guide highlights the importance of understanding the Site’s features and its setting, identifying opportunities and constraints including the existing networks of natural resources and features, public rights of way, landscape character, visually prominent areas and attractive or sensitive views into, out of and within the Site. The guide also recommends working with and enhancing the natural features and resources of the Site.

3.1.4 SODC Developer Contributions SPD, Supplementary Planning Document (January 2023)

This supplementary planning document adds further detail to the policies set out in the Local Plan providing further guidance on development. Of relevance to the Site are the following:

Chapter 4.33 Open Space and Play Facilities

“DEV5: Open Space and Play Facilities, residential: On-site provision and management of open space and play facilities will be secured through S106.

All new residential development shall provide on-site open space comprising:

1.4ha per 1000 population of amenity greenspace and/or parks and gardens;

0.25ha per 1,000 population of designated Equipped Playing Space; and

0.3ha per 1,000 population of provision for teenage/young people”.

Chapter 4.68 Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure.

“DEV13: Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure: Biodiversity mitigation and enhancements (plus ongoing monitoring) will be secured by condition and, where appropriate, S106. This can include offsite mitigation and enhancement measures for both the direct and indirect impacts of a development scheme”.

All development must deliver a net gain in biodiversity, this must be at least 10% net gain in accordance within the Environment Act 2021.

3.1.5 Kidmore End Neighbourhood Plan 2011-2035 (September 2022)

The Site lies within the southern part of an area designated as a Local Valued Landscape, which is covered by Policy LPLV, which states that: “The Kidmore End Parish Local Valued Landscape is identified in Map 4. Development proposals should protect and where practicable enhance the physical and visual attributes of the character, quality and appearance of this valued landscape.

Where development proposals are in accordance with Local Plan Policy ENV1 and this policy, any landscape mitigation measures should reflect the prevailing local vegetation pattern and where practicable support the landscape, biodiversity and heritage objectives for the parish as set out in this Plan.” Refer to **Figure 3.3**.

Policy LCDPG deals with General Design Principles and states:

“Proposed Development should complement, reinforce and where practicable enhance the local distinctiveness of the relevant settlement. Where appropriate, development proposals should be designed to enhance the landscape setting of these settlements. As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should incorporate the following design considerations:

- Retention of the dark visual ambiance of the settlement via minimal external illumination;
- Regard for good quality locally characteristic building materials and vernacular building styles;
- Being in keeping with the character of neighbouring properties, as appropriate;
- Conservation and enhancement of the settlement’s designated historic heritage assets and their settings, both above and below ground, including listed buildings, scheduled monuments and conservation areas;
- Acknowledgement of the significance of and avoidance of harm or loss to any non-designated historic assets;
- Regard for historic plot boundaries, hedgerows and enclosure walls;
- Regard for existing settlement patterns and character;
- New garages, extensions, outbuildings or garden walls should be subservient in scale and, whether of a traditional or modern design, should draw from the local vernacular building materials;
- Avoiding, where possible, the installation of pre-cast concrete kerbs to new or existing village lanes or roads, in favour of more sympathetic materials or construction design as identified on pages 18 & 19 of Oxfordshire County Council’s Residential Road Guide;
- Boundary treatments to highways and village lanes should comprise the use of native hedgerow, stone, brick or flint boundary walls or iron railings as appropriate to the immediate context of the Site;
- Seeking innovative solutions to parking arrangements that

- do not necessitate large expanses of driveway nor the loss of vegetation along the highway nor parking on village lanes;
- 12. Landscaping schemes which include local indigenous trees and features that already form part of the immediate locality;
- 13. In a form that is complementary to the character of the immediate and surrounding locality, environmentally friendly materials, methods and energy sources should be incorporated, provided that there are no significant adverse effects on the amenity of neighbouring uses."

3.1.6 Evidence Base: Kidmore End Landscape Sensitivity Study - Update Report, 18 August 2020

The Kidmore End Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group commissioned a Landscape Sensitivity Study (the terra firma Consultancy, August 2020), which assessed the sensitivity of the land within the Parish but outside of the Chilterns National Landscape. This southern area of the Parish is referred to as the "Study Area" within the report. **Figure 3.3** illustrates the extent of the Study Area.

The Study does not include a traffic light coloured plan of the parish showing areas of high and low sensitivity, but concludes in the recommendations (p33) that:

- “... the Study Area as a whole is of high landscape and visual sensitivity and not suitable for new development (unless identified through the emerging Neighbourhood Plan or Local Plan to meet local needs)
- ... the Study Area as a whole lies within the setting to the AONB
- Protection of the open landscape gaps between settlements
- Consideration for inclusion within the boundary of the Chilterns AONB at any future review of the AONB”

The Study finds that the whole of the Area has a medium / high visual susceptibility to change (p30). In particular, the following points are pertinent to the Site:

- “Some intervisibility with the AONB to the north, including immediately adjacent to the AONB boundary... Much of the area likely to be screened from wider views by topography and intervening wooded and layers of hedgerows
- The Study Area is generally visible from numerous local PROW connecting across the Study Area, although some areas are more visually contained by woodland, tree belts and topography.
- Short, midrange and some longer views across rolling and flatter farmland to wooded skylines
- Mitigation through retention and planting of tree, hedgerow and woodland cover would respect local character
- Mitigation planting could interrupt views and openness in some areas particularly in and around the dry valleys."

The Study finds that the whole of the Area has a medium / high landscape susceptibility to change. In particular, the following points are pertinent to the Site:

- “Distinct dry valley landform and plateau is a key characteristic feature of landscape character
- Blocks of semi-natural ancient woodland in the south

- BAP Priority Habitat Areas
- Contains a number of recreation facilities: Reading Golf Course in the south... These are largely undeveloped and under... grassland
- Few detractors and largely tranquil
- Generally strong, complex and irregular pattern..."

A 'high wider landscape susceptibility to change' [sic] is defined (p31). The pertinent points for the Site include the:

- “The area forms part of the wider countryside of the plateau and valley landscape character of the dipslope of the Chilterns with extends to the north, east and west and demonstrates many key characteristics of this wider landscape character area (and the AONB) including the distinctive dry valley, hedgerow network, settlement pattern, winding narrow sunken lanes and mosaic of woodland, enclosed pasture and arable fields.
- Urban edge of Reading largely well contained by woodland and tree lines and located on the southern side of the distinctive dry valley within the Study Area, on its southern edge, with limited encroachment onto the valley sides."

The Study assesses the area as being of Medium landscape value due to:

- "Setting of the AONB
- Grade II listed buildings and their setting
- Local wildlife areas
- Chiltern Way regional recreational route
- Conservation Target Area and BAP Priority Habitats."

The overall landscape sensitivity is identified as High. This is defined as:

“The landscape is of higher sensitivity and of higher value and therefore could not accommodate areas of new development without a significant and adverse impact on the landscape character and visual amenity. Only a very small scale development may be possible, such as on any small areas of brownfield land, providing it retains the important landscape features and their landscape setting of the area and has regard to the setting and form of existing settlement and the character and the sensitivity of adjacent landscape character areas."

The summary goes on to state that: “The Study demonstrates that the area is well above ‘ordinary’ countryside and has demonstrable physical attributes which contribute to the conclusion that this should be classified as a ‘valued’ landscape within the meaning of NPPF para 109." Note para ref should be 170a.

“It also plays an important role as a rural setting to the northern edge of Reading, retaining the distinctive character of the urban edge of Emmer Green and the views into open countryside form the urban edge. The area in the south of the Study Area is particularly vulnerable to urbanisation given its proximity to the Reading urban edge where the landscape character could be severely eroded to the detriment of the character of the settlements of Tokers Green and Chalkhouse Green and the Parish."

3.1.7 Kidmore End Local Valued Landscape Assessment (August 2020)

As part of the evidence base to the Kidmore End Neighbourhood Plan, the Parish commissioned The terra firma Consultancy Ltd to prepare the Kidmore End Local Valued Landscape Assessment (11 August 2020). This report therefore focuses on the same 'Study Area' considered in the Landscape Sensitivity Study.

The assessment considers the range of factors that assist with identifying valued landscapes as set out in Box 5.1 of the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA), Third Edition, 2013. The factors are landscape quality, scenic quality, rarity, representativeness, conservation interests, recreation value, perceptual aspects and associations.

The key points pertinent to the Site and it's immediate landscape setting are as follows under each of the above headings:

a. Landscape quality (condition)

Para 7. fourth bullet point: “Key characteristics shared with the wider landscape are the distinctive dry valley, hedgerow network, settlement pattern, winding narrow sunken lanes and mosaic of woodland..."

It goes on to state at para 9: “The Study Area is largely made up of pasture and other grassland with some arable; also a key characteristic of the landscape character."

b. Scenic quality

Para 10, relative to views to the AONB: “Intervisibility is somewhat limited by the undulating landform and layers of woodland and mature field and road hedgerows which are typical of the AONB but there is still a visual continuity with the surrounding open land particularly to the AONB to the north."

c. Rarity

Para 15 in terms of the Study Area's relationship with Reading: "... The town edge is strongly defined by the distinctive dry valley and is well contained by woodland and tree lines, with limited encroachment onto the valley sides. [this quality of unspoilt landscape is rarely found immediately adjoining a major urban area]."

d. Representativeness

Para 17 states that in relation to the CNL: "...It shares many landscape characteristics and special qualities including topography, vegetation cover, historic landscape pattern, perceptual and experiential qualities and some visual links with the designated landscape."

e. Conservation interests

This section sets out the ecological designations. Para 20 states that: “Cucumber Wood and Chambers Copse are 2 Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodlands in the south-east of the Study Area."

f. Recreation value

Para 23 states that: “The Study Area contains a number of recreation facilities: Reading Golf Course in the south... These are largely undeveloped and under pasture or grassland."

g. Perceptual aspects

Para 25 states that the Study Area is: “A strongly rural character

and generally tranquil landscape, with few detractors.."

h. Associations

Para 27 states that: “No cultural associations with writers or artists are known.."

The Valued Landscape Assessment sets out that the Study Area as a whole has an overriding rural character, with good scenic value and no detracting urban fringe uses, and shares many characteristics with the adjacent National Landscape. However, in terms of the Site, it is predominantly physically and visually separated from the CNL by Cucumber Wood (Ancient Woodland) and associated tree belt to the west and has a stronger relationship with the existing and future settlement edge of Reading at Emmer Green.

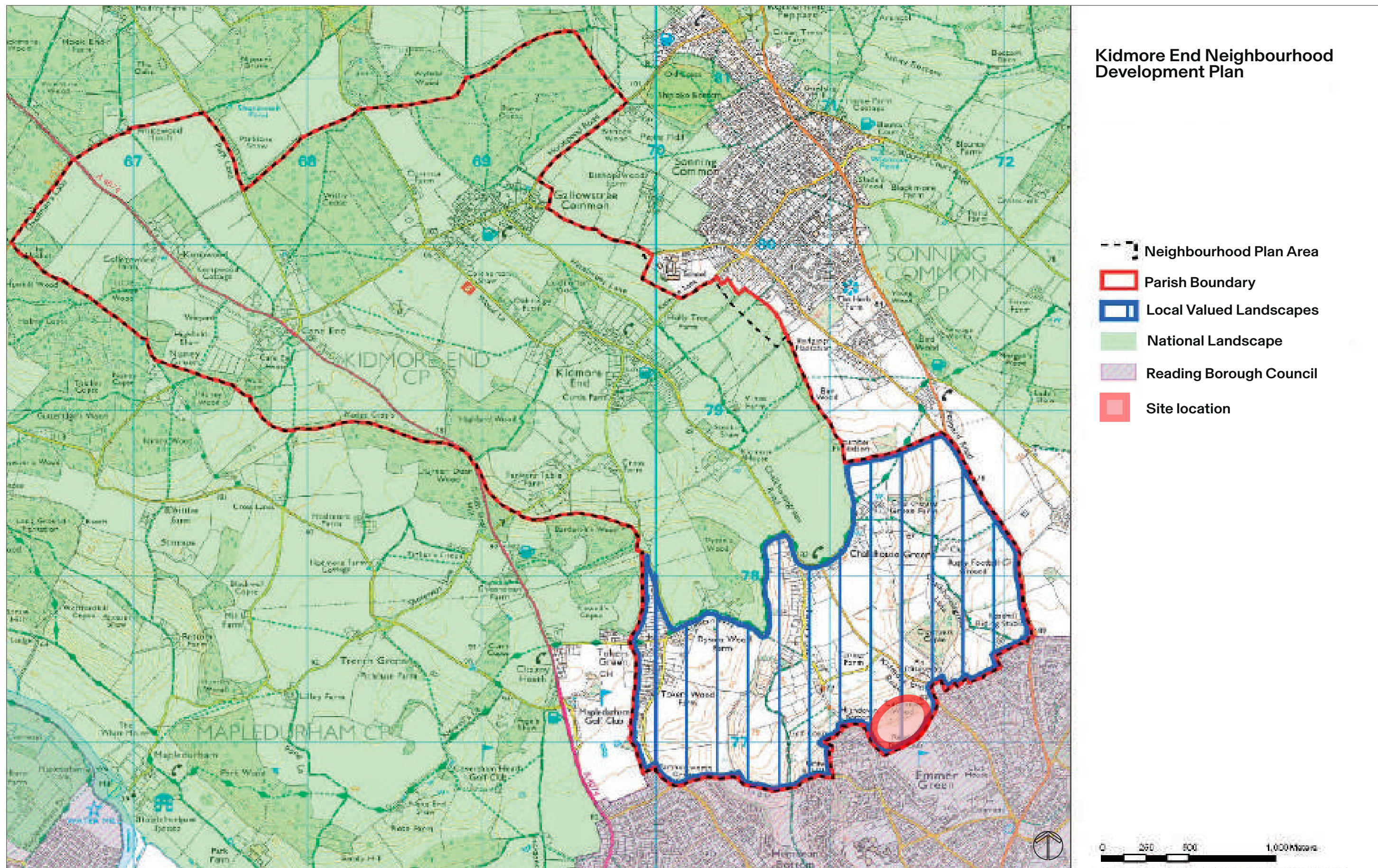


Figure 3.3 - Plan showing neighbourhood plan area and locally valued landscape area (map 4, Kidmore End Neighbourhood Plan, 2022)

4.0

Landscape Character

4.1 Published Landscape Character

The term 'landscape' commonly refers to the view or appearance of the land as perceived by people. Landscape applies to any natural, rural, urban or urban edge areas, in land, water and seascape areas.

Landscape character is the combination of both natural / physical, cultural / social and perceptual / aesthetic influences, which give rise to a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse and which define the 'sense of place'. The landscape is not therefore simply a visual phenomenon.

The following sections set out the landscape character framework of the Study Area from the county to the district scale based upon existing character assessments undertaken by Oxfordshire County Council, South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council.

4.1.1 County Character Assessment

The county level landscape character assessment was prepared and published in 2004 as part of the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) which was jointly sponsored by Oxfordshire County Council, English Nature, the Countryside Agency (now Natural England) and the Northmoor Trust (now The Earth Trust). Refer to **Figures 4.1** and **4.2**.

The Site lies within the Chilterns Oxfordshire Regional Character Area. The OWLS study does not provide a description relative to each LCA, but provides a description of the landscape types which together make up the character area. The Site lies within the Wooded Farmland Landscape Type, which is described as: "This landscape type has a distinctively ancient, rural character typified by a mosaic of woodland, enclosed pasture, arable fields as well as scattered farms and settlements."

- The key characteristics pertinent to the Study Area are described as:
- "Large blocks of ancient woodland and a large number of plantations.
 - A varied field pattern of arable land and pasture enclosed by woodland and hedges.
 - Species rich hedgerows with many hedgerow trees.
 - Dispersed settlement pattern with settlements and scattered farms."

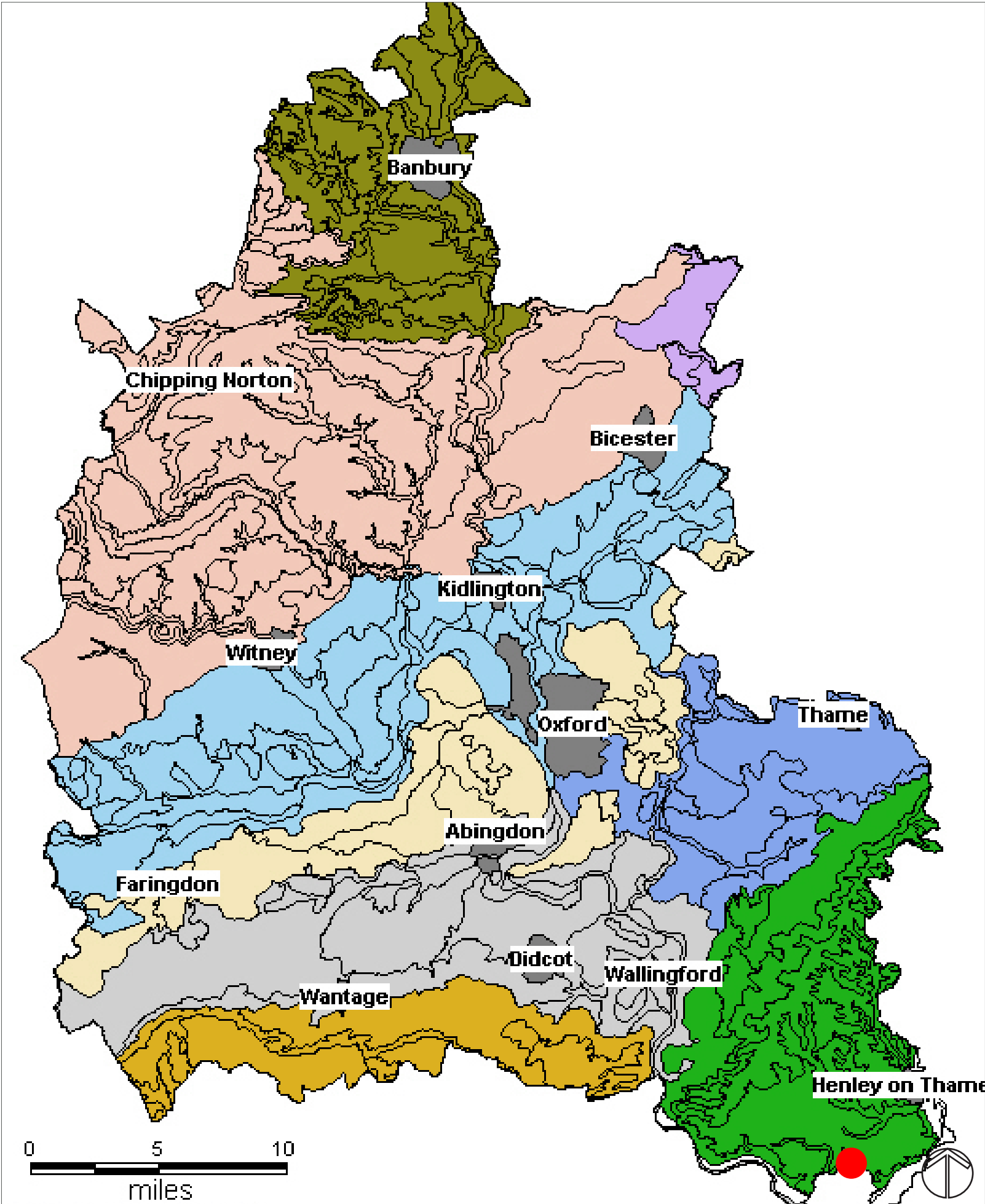
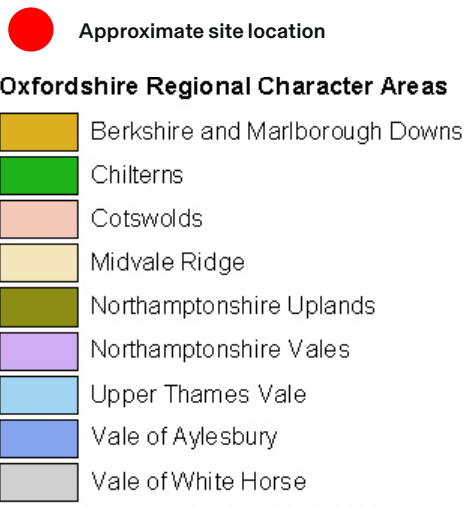


Figure 4.1 – Extract from the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS, 2004) showing Regional Landscape Character Areas

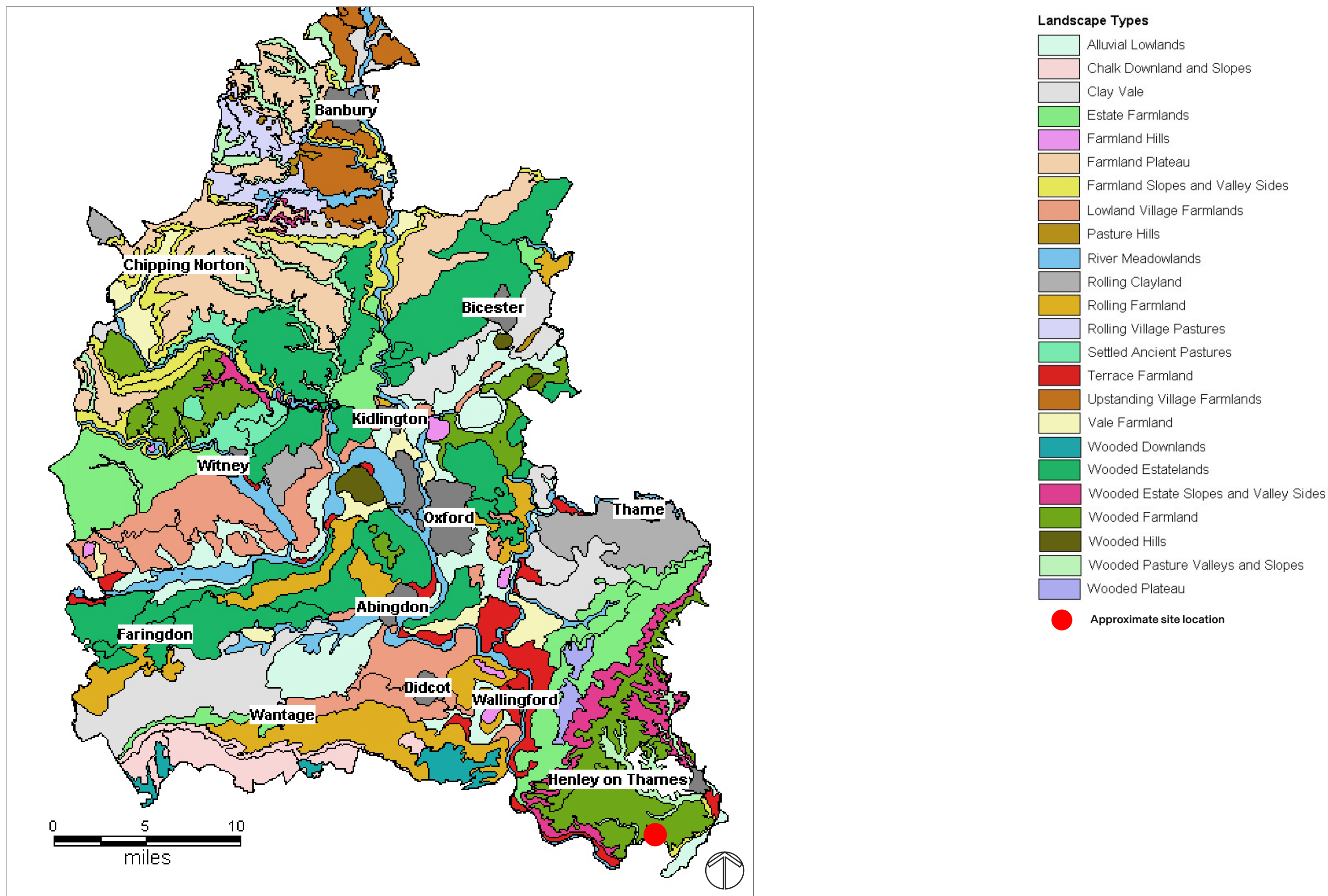


Figure 4.2 – Extract from the Oxfordshire Wildlife Landscape Study (OWLS, 2004) showing Regional Landscape Character Types

4.1.2 District Character Assessment

The Landscape Character Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse was undertaken by LUC in September 2024 to support and inform the upcoming South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan 2041. This assessment splits the dual districts into Landscape Character Types (LCTs), which are then further divided into Landscape Character Areas (LCAs). The Site itself falls within LCT 4: Wooded Chalk Plateau and Valleys and is specifically identified as LCA 4A: Chiltern Wooded Chalk Plateau and Valleys, refer to **Figure 4.3**.

The document summarises LCT 4 as:

"The Wooded Chalk Plateau and Valleys is an elevated landscape dominated by woodland, falling gradually from the Chilterns chalk escarpment down towards the Thames Valley. Small, irregular shallow valleys create an undulating landform"

The key characteristics of LCA 4A, pertinent to the Site and the local area include:

- *"Undulating landscape formed by plateaux dissected by an irregular pattern of shallow small-scale valleys.*
- *Heavily wooded containing extensive areas of Ancient Woodland, with beech common. Irregular pattern of arable and pasture fields defined by a strong structure of species-rich hedgerows, creating an enclosed wooded farmland character.*
- *Remnant commons and heaths have a mosaic of open areas, scrub, acid grassland and woodland.*
- *Typical Chilterns settlement pattern of small villages, hamlets and farms scattered among woods and commons, connected by a distinctive pattern of winding rural roads; larger settlements on the periphery have a more modern character, including Sonning Common, Henley-on-Thames and Woodcote.*
- *Medieval settlements, covered by Conservation Area designations and/or containing clusters of Listed Buildings, provide a sense of time-depth; traditional building materials are typical of the Chilterns, and include red brick, silver-grey flint, oak timber framing, black weather boarding, thatch and plain tiles.*
- *Distinctive estates and parkland landscapes at Checkendon Court and Greys Court with formal avenues, freestanding trees and estate boundaries, create a sense of place and sense of time-depth.*
- *Extensive network of public rights of way, including the promoted Chiltern Way, provides recreational access across the landscape.*
- *A rural landscape, although busy roads and the adjacent urban edges of Caversham and Henley-on-Thames locally reduce tranquillity.*
- *The undulating topography and strong woodland cover combine to generally limit long-distance views across the plateau. Occasional views to the urban edges of Reading and Caversham.*

The Site and immediate contextual landscape within this LCA

comprises of the south of the Chilterns dip slope, to the east of the Wooded Chalk Escarpment (LCA 2A) and north of the Thames valley (LCA 14F and 14G). The majority of the LCA is located within the Chilterns National Landscape.

In relation to maintaining the landscape character the assessment has also provided the following guidelines and strategies under the key objective to protect, conserve, enhance and restore the landscape quality of South Oxfordshire. The recommendations are also set out in a series of themes, as set out below.

"Conserve and enhance the area’s distinctive wooded character.

- *Retain and enhance characteristic woodland cover and explore opportunities to expand and connect this through natural regeneration or small-scale planting to strengthen landscape character and bring benefits for biodiversity; conserve and manage the Ancient Woodland sites.*
- *Encourage the appropriate management of woodland, including to reduce the impacts of pests and diseases and to increase its age structure and structural heterogeneity (including creation of glades). Consider the promotion of natural colonisation adjacent to existing woodland, allowing locally native species to develop resilience to the pressures of climate change through natural processes.*
- *Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/ reinstatement; when establishing new hedges, aim to diversify the range of species and select species and provenances adapted to a wider range of climatic conditions.*
- *Retain and enhance the remnant areas of commons and heaths with their distinctive mosaic of open areas, scrub, acid grassland and woodland; encourage traditional grazing management.*

Increase the quantity and biodiversity of chalk grasslands.

- *Manage chalk grassland to enhance its biodiversity value and appearance; ensure best practice management through suitable grazing regimes and avoiding agrochemical and fertiliser inputs; manage recreational routes to avoid/minimise disturbance; and manage scrub vegetation appropriately to maintain the open character (a certain amount of scrub can be beneficial, especially on sites that are prone to heat stress or drought, due to its shading effect potentially providing refuge for invertebrates).*
- *Consider opportunities to increase the area of chalk grassland through recreation and restoration around existing areas, and ensure that areas that might act as refugia from climate change (such as areas with north facing slopes, complex micro-topography and/or low nitrogen levels) are under optimal management.*

Maintain the historic character of the landscape and its public accessibility.

- *Maintain the valued recreational use of the landscape which allow appreciation of views and landscape character.*

- *Conserve the pattern of sunken narrow lanes enclosed by tall hedgerows, ensuring that their character is not lost through unsympathetic highway works, unnecessary signage, lighting, or removal of hedgerows and trees.*

Maintain the highly rural character of the landscape, which provides separation between individual settlements, helping to retain their individual identities and the distinctive Chilterns settlement pattern.

- *There is very limited scope for development that would not detract from the valued qualities of the Chiltern Wooded Chalk Plateau and Valleys. Avoid the adverse impact of any new development on local character and on the distinctive scattered settlement pattern.*
- *Use careful design, in terms of siting, scale, style and layout to stay in keeping with existing settlement character and to preserve the openness of areas/features which are important to the landscape setting of settlements. Any new development should be small-scale, and should use materials which are in keeping with, or complement, the local vernacular of red brick, flint, timber-framing, weatherboarding and thatch or tile roofs.*
- *Light pollution should be avoided in this landscape and existing light pollution reduced. Consider the impact of lighting, both external and internal, on dark skies and tranquillity (refer to the guidance in the Dark Skies / Light Impact Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse).*

Historic parts of villages should retain a relationship with their rural landscape settings which contribute to their distinctive historic character.

- *Maintain physical and visual connectivity between conservation areas and prominent features in settlement setting."*

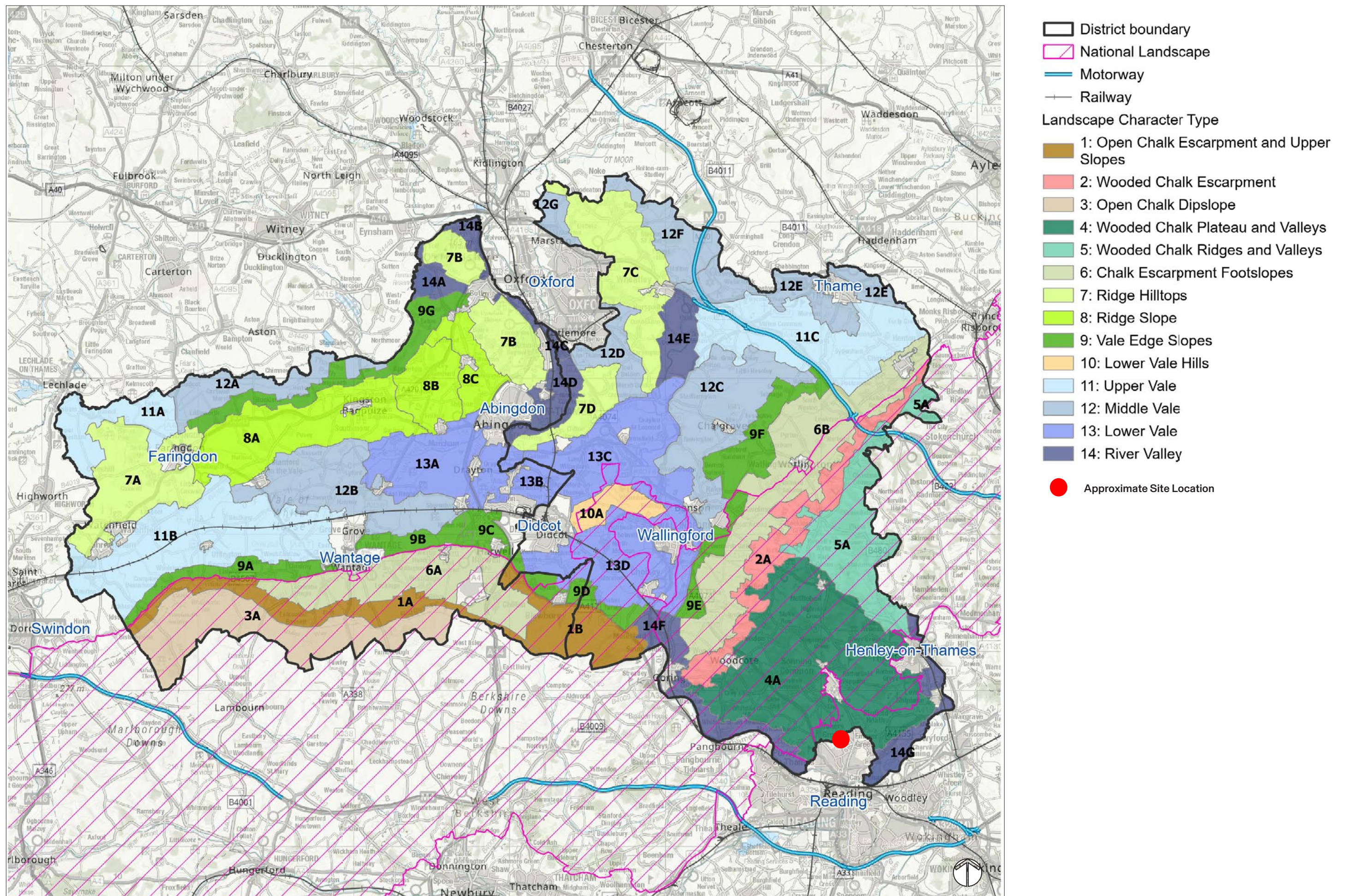


Figure 4.3 - South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse landscape character overview (LUC, September 2024)

4.2 Contextual Landscape Appraisal

4.2.1 Natural Elements

Geology and Soils

The Study Area predominantly lies within the Bedrock geology type, but in various groups, including the Lambeth Group, which comprises clay, silt and sand; and Seaford Chalk Formation and Newhaven Chalk Formation, which comprises of mainly chalk.

The soil to the north of the Study Area is slightly acidic, loamy and clayey, with impeded drainage. Soil to the eastern edge of Emmer Green settlement is a mixture of slowly permeable, seasonally wet and slightly acidic. Soil to the south of the Study Area is freely drained and lime rich. Towards the east sits Bayston Hill Quarry which provides the largest reserve of gritstone in England.

Landform and Drainage

The topography of the Study Area broadly rises south to north with major ridgelines towards the north-west and north-east as illustrated on **Figure 4.5**.

The south of the Study Area is influenced by the valley floor associated with the River Thames which flows eastwards around Caversham at approximately 35m AOD. The valley extends northwards through the centre of Caversham, passing Hemdean Bottom, Highdown Bottom and woodland.

Major ridgelines run through the settlements at Kidmore End (north-west of the Study Area) and Binfield Heath (north-east of the Study Area) at approximately 100m AOD.

The settlement of Emmer Green immediately adjacent to the Site predominantly sits on a relatively flat plateau landscape, with dry valley floors wrapping around the north, west and south, with ridgelines rising beyond.

Vegetation Cover

The mosaic of woodland and farmland is characteristic of the landscape in the north of the Study Area, with blocks of woodland, linear treebelts and hedgerows defining field boundaries. Small, often linear groups of trees are located within the golf courses with individual and clusters of trees associated with local village greens.

To the north of the Study Area towards the Chilterns, the woodland is often ancient semi-natural, including ancient beech woodland that are dominated by ash and oak. The extensive woodland cover provides a strong sense of enclosure, shelter and coherence to the landscape in the north of the Study Area.

In general, the field pattern within the Study Area is characterised by a range of small to large fields which are enclosed by both woodland and hedges. Hedges are often tall and overgrown and more visually prominent in the less wooded areas.

4.2.2 Cultural / Social Elements

Land Use

Figure 4.6 illustrates the Land cover within the Study Area. The Site is not identified as a designated open space. The land cover of the local area is broadly split with that to the north being mixed farmland (including arable, pasture and equestrian uses) and that to the south being settled. The land cover to the north of the Study Area is predominantly pastureland, with arable farming largely restricted to the upper extents of the gently sloping hillsides. Large blocks of woodland intersperse the landscape, connecting to treebelts, copses and hedgerows which mark field boundaries.

Reading and Caversham are settled in the south of the Study Area, with often dense built form and small pockets of green open space. Golf courses are typically located on the northern settlement fringes including Reading and Mapledurham Golf Courses. Both of these are private with no public access.

A4074 and A4155 cross the west and the south of the Study Area. The A roads connect Reading town centre with Wallingford and Henley-on-Thames beyond the Study Area.

The settlements are connected to Reading Town Centre with a series of residential roads, namely Kidmore End Road, Peppard Road, Gravel Hill and Caversham Park Road.

The River Thames sits to the south of the Study Area and forms another movement corridor which is often used by boats, principally for leisure purposes.

Open space within the Study Area is focused around Caversham Park (registered Park and Garden) which is a privately owned Victorian Listed Building set within approximately 38 hectares of ground, situated to the south-east of the Study Area. Caversham Park and Caversham Park House are key heritage and landscape features in the townscape. Reading Cemetery is located to the immediate south of Caversham Park.

Mapledurham Golf Course and Caversham Heath Golf Course are located respectively to the east and west of A4074 within South Oxfordshire along the administrative boundary of the borough. Both Mapledurham and Caversham Heath Golf Course are restricted to member use only.

Clayfield Copse Recreation Ground is a large green space framed by Clayfield Copse and Blackhouse Wood Ancient Woodland, with Clayfield Copse designated as a Local Nature Reserve.

Emmer Green Common is an area of open space to the south of the Site and is surrounded by built form. The common mainly comprises of equipped play features with open field abutting the Grove Road allotments.

Settlement Pattern / Setting / Building Heights / Urban Grain:

Small, linear villages and hamlets are present in the rural landscape to the north of the Study Area. They are rural in character and often located along the ridgelines and connected to the main settled areas by a series of local roads or green lanes.

The settled fringes of Reading have grown organically along the road corridors and extend both along the ridgelines, along the valley sides and into the valley bottoms. The settlement edge is not uniform and has developed around green spaces. It

is predominantly residential in use (interspersed with schools and local amenities). The settlement is suburban in form and character, where rear gardens often back on to adjacent landscape. The water tower to the east of Peppard Road is a built landmark in the local landscape and in views from the north.

Most residential buildings within the Study Area are modest in size and domestic in scale, typically one to two storey with high roof pitches, with occasionally three storey height apartments to the south of the Site; within the Emmer Green area, dwellings are comprised of a mix of traditional brick houses and recently modernised town houses. Caversham Park House (Grade II Listed) is the most notable built form within the Study Area due to its shape and historic characters and it's three storeys in height with basement.

Emmer Green Primary School to the south of the Site comprises of one and two storey terraced buildings with relatively large footprints. Retirement homes at Lyefield Court to the south of the Site predominantly comprises of two and a half storey dwellings with pitched roofs.

The urban structure is broadly determined by the historic street pattern and the topography of the valleys and River Thames. The intensity of the urban development gradually decreases from Reading Railway Station. However, unlike other suburban parts of Reading, the urban grain to the north of Reading does not extend beyond the borough boundary into South Oxfordshire District.

Enclosure

The majority of the land within the Study Area's enclosure type is classified as null, this is true for a large portion of land around the Site and towards the east, west, and south. However, to the north of the Site sits an area of Enclosed Agricultural Land (Typically pre-modern form), this classification encompasses the land stopping at Sonning Common.

Time Depth

Historic maps reveal that the Study Area was predominantly farmlands, with medium to small scale woodlands in the 1890s, including Cucumber Wood to the immediate north of the Site. The key road network, such as Kidmore End Road had already formed, where settlements started to form.

The north of the Study Area has been expanded in a very slow pace, predominantly hamlets and farmsteads. The key settlement to the south is Emmer Green, which started emerging from the 1910s. Trees became a prominent feature in the landscape, which are either defining the boundaries of the fields or scattered across the landscape.

4.2.3 Perceptual / Aesthetic Elements

The Study Area is situated in an undulating network of dry valleys and ridgelines. The skyline is formed by either built form in close proximity to the settlement edges, or by trees.

Caversham Park House is a dominant feature on the skyline within the townscape with its large scale and form and its commanding position on a ridge line, but it is not evident from the Site.

The Study Area comprises of two distinctive characters which are villages and hamlets to the north set within the Chilterns National Landscape. The other being the built up area of

Caversham and Emmer Green to the south, with pockets of open spaces nesting amongst the residential built form.

The area to the north is relatively tranquil in most places and appears to be muted in colour due to the fields and woodlands being dominant in the area. The landscape pattern is predominantly dispersed from the key road network, such as Kidmore End Road, Peppard Road and the A4074. There is a perceived wildness in the landscape further north, with the presence of wildlife and birdsong. Despite the countryside setting, views are relatively enclosed, due to the woodlands and road side vegetation.

The area to the south is much more textured, due to the urban settlement of Caversham and Emmer Green. The various architectural styles create relatively diverse urban sceneries. The area is popular for families and it feels safe, but busy, due to the traffic into Reading town centre.

Golf courses are common in the area, including Caversham Heath, Mapledurham and the Site, all about the settlement edges, forming a man-made landscape pattern that transitions into the countryside.

4.2.4 Summary of Contextual Landscape Character

The land use can be broadly split north and south, with that to the north being mixed farmland, and the south being settled in irregular urban grids.

The landform undulates with a series of dry valleys flowing north to south and east to west; and where the skyline is either formed by built form in the proximity to the settlement edge, or by trees.

Ancient Woodlands, hedgerows and tree field boundaries, sit adjacent to the urban edge. Caversham Park (Registered Park and Gardens) and the number of Listed Buildings sit as distinct elements within the urban area and contribute to the Study Area's sense of place but have limited influence on the Site and its immediate setting itself.

Large scale fields are present to the north of the Study Area within the Chilterns National Landscape, with farmsteads and residential built form along the country lanes. Main roads, schools and other community buildings form the main sources of activity within the settlement edge of the Study Area. More tranquil areas are situated further north and away from these sources, whilst some intermittent noise is noticeable from local traffic on narrow country lanes.



Figure 4.6 – Land Cover (fabrik, 2025)