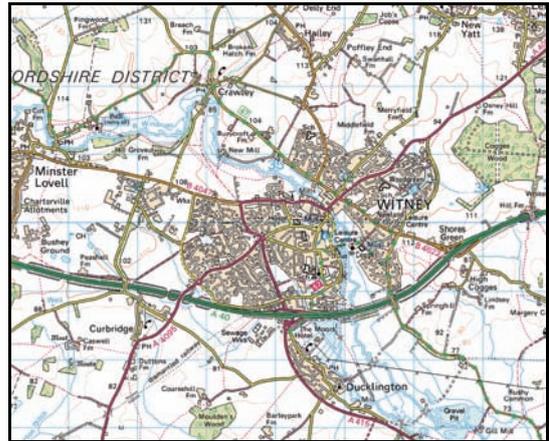


WEST OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

WITNEY LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT 2007

13 November 2007



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

- ES1.** This report has been prepared by Amanda Hopwood Landscape Consultancy (AHLC), on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council. Its aim is to update and expand previous studies of land on the fringes of Witney, in particular the Key Settlement work of the West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (WOLA), in order to establish a sound evidence base for the West Oxfordshire Local Development Framework.
- ES2.** The surroundings of the town are divided into areas, A to H, based largely on those in the WOLA, but divided on a topographical as well as geographical basis.

THE LANDSCAPE SETTING OF WITNEY

- ES3.** Historically, Witney grew up as a valley settlement, based near crossing points over the River Windrush, which flows through the town.
- ES4.** Witney is surrounded on the east, north and west by higher ground. To the north, the ground rises quickly to above 100m, with North Leigh to the north east being above 120m. A ridge along the northern side of the Windrush encloses the town within the landscape and generally marks the extent of its visual envelope to the north, with the exception of development on the higher ground west of the town. The relationship of this ridge with the town is particularly marked, and close to the town centre, in the Cogges Hill area.
- ES5.** A number of small valleys run down from the higher ground to the north to the Windrush, creating a varied sometimes rolling topography.
- ES6.** To the west of the town, a dominant ridge rising to above 100m marks the southern side of the Windrush valley, and the dividing line between the Cotswold uplands and the Thames valley. There are long views from this ridge both to the Wychwood Uplands and across the Thames valley to the Faringdon ridge to the south, and, in places, looking along the Windrush valley towards Witney.
- ES7.** South of Witney, the Windrush flows through a broad, low-lying, gently undulating valley landscape to join the River Thames. An intermediate ridge runs south west of Ducklington, and encloses the town visually, separating it from the wider valley landscape. Occasional higher points, such as at Lew, are prominent in the landscape, with long views to and from the higher ground around Witney.
- ES8.** North of Witney, the landscape is quite well treed, with woods, copses, and many hedgerows and hedgerow trees, a landscape pattern was created by early assarting (clearing) of Wychwood Forest. There are fewer woods in the valley landscape, but there are many hedges and tree lined ditches, giving the impression of a treed landscape. The landscape west of Witney, on the higher ground, is more open, with few woods and poorer hedgerows.

AREA A: NORTH WEST WITNEY: SOUTHERN WINDRUSH VALLEY SIDE

- ES9.** In this assessment, Area A covers the southern (north facing) valley side, and does not include the higher plateau to the south, which is covered under Area H.
- ES10.** The topography of the area is a north facing mainly gently, occasionally steeply, sloping undulating valley side. The area is generally open with long views across the

valley and to the wooded Wychwood uplands to the north. This smooth, open valley side is typical of the Upper Windrush valley generally, which reads as a coherent largely unspoilt piece of landscape between Witney and Burford.

- ES11.** Area A is of high importance and sensitivity because of its prominent valley side landform, which results in high intervisibility to the north, including with the Cotswolds AONB; and the strong continuity of the area with the remainder of the Upper Windrush valley.

AREA B: NORTH WITNEY: VALLEY FLOOR

- ES12.** In this assessment, Area B covers the valley floor, with a small amount of valley side scarp to the south which is separated from Area A by a strong hedgeline. The northern valley side is covered under Area C1.

- ES13.** The topography of the area is flat, with a small amount of north facing scarp in the central southern part of the area. The area is former water meadow, now used as pasture for cattle and, mainly, horse grazing, with the fields often subdivided by fences.

- ES14.** The valley floor is strongly enclosed by the steep valley sides, but with long views along the valley except where blocked by trees. These characteristics are typical of the Upper Windrush valley generally, which reads as a coherent largely unspoilt piece of landscape between Witney and Burford.

- ES15.** Area B is of high importance and sensitivity as a flat valley floor within the flood plain, with its high intervisibility to both north and south and strong continuity with the remainder of the Upper Windrush valley. Its rural character is under threat due to the close proximity of the town.

AREA C1: NORTH WEST WITNEY: NORTHERN WINDRUSH VALLEY SIDE

- ES16.** In this assessment, Area C1 covers the northern (south facing) valley side, which is included under Area B in the WOLA.

- ES17.** The topography of the area is a south facing sometimes steeply sloping valley side, forming a distinctive promontory above the valley.

- ES18.** The area is generally open with long views across the valley to Area A and to the West Witney ridge to the south (Area H), and along the valley to the west. The smooth, open valley side is typical of the Upper Windrush valley generally, which reads as a coherent largely unspoilt piece of landscape between Witney and Burford.

- ES19.** In summary, Area C1 is of high importance and sensitivity because of its prominent valley side landform which results in high intervisibility to the south and west; and the strong continuity of the area with the remainder of the Upper Windrush valley.

AREA C2: NORTH WEST WITNEY: PLATEAU

- ES20.** In this assessment, Area C2 covers the western end of the WOLA Area C.

- ES21.** The topography of the area is a slightly undulating plateau, sloping very gently to the south east. It reads as part of the higher ground of the Wychwood Uplands. Where there are gaps in the hedges there are long views south across the valley to the West Witney ridge, and north west across the Wychwood uplands.

ES22. Area C2 is of moderate to high importance and sensitivity as a gently undulating plateau landscape with high intervisibility to the south and north west and a strong physical continuity with the Wychwood Uplands to the north. The rural gap between Witney and Hailey/Crawley is under pressure from suburbanising influences, and is particularly vulnerable to change given the scattered development along the B4022 between Witney and the modern edge of Hailey village.

AREA C3: NORTH WITNEY: SMALL SCALE VALLEYS

ES23. In this assessment, Area C3 covers the centre of the WOLA Area C.

ES24. The topography of the area consists of rolling small scale valleys, converging in the centre of the area to flow down to the Windrush valley. It reads as part of the higher ground of the Wychwood Uplands, and the land gradually rises to the high point of the New Yatt/North Leigh ridge which contains Witney to the north.

ES25. There is a strong sense of enclosure in the small scale valleys, but there are long views from the open higher ground. To the north, dispersed farmsteads of medieval origin, associated with woodland clearance, lie between the main village of Hailey (Middletown and Poffley End) and Witney. The perceived rural gap between Witney and Hailey is therefore very small, and easily eroded.

ES26. Area C3 is of high importance and sensitivity, because of its topography of rolling small scale valleys; its high intervisibility to the north (filtered) and south west from higher ground; its strong physical continuity with the Wychwood Uplands to the north; and its ancient landscape origins and rarity in a county context. The gap between Witney and Hailey is particularly sensitive given the ill defined gap due to the dispersed settlement pattern.

AREA C4: NORTH WITNEY: PLATEAU

ES27. In this assessment, Area C4 covers part of the western end of the WOLA Area D.

ES28. The topography of the area is quite flat, a small plateau between the small scale valleys of Area C3 and the Madley Brook valley to the south east. It reads as part of the higher ground of the Wychwood Uplands, and the land gradually rises to the high point of the New Yatt/North Leigh ridge which contains Witney to the north.

ES29. The area itself is open, but views are contained to the north west (Area C3) by a slight ridge and to the south and east by housing. There are longer views to and from the north along the A4095, but these are very limited from public footpaths to the north.

ES30. Area C4 is of low-moderate overall sensitivity, as a small plateau area between small valleys, with low intervisibility to the wider countryside. It is, however, important that the rural character of New Yatt Road should be maintained and enhanced.

AREA D1: NORTH EAST WITNEY: MADLEY BROOK VALLEY SIDE

ES31. In this assessment, Area D1 covers the eastern part of the WOLA Area D. Much of the western part of WOLA Area D is now built up, with the North East Witney development (Madley Park).

ES32. The topography of the area is an undulating valley side, the west facing slope of the Madley Brook valley which flows south from North Leigh to join the River Windrush in the Cogges area. This pronounced ridge is part of the higher ground enclosing the

town, which in this area and, especially, Area D2, comes close to the centre of the town.

- ES33.** There are long open views across the new housing area to the countryside to the west and north (AONB), and a strong sense of connection with the wooded Wychwood Uplands. The new housing does not block these views, being set low in the landscape.
- ES34.** Area D1 is of high importance and sensitivity because of its role as part of the ridge encircling the east and north of the town; and its high intervisibility across the countryside to the west and north. By contrast, the new housing area to the west is set relatively low in the landscape with very little impact on the wider landscape. The new road and planting associated with it form a strong boundary between town and countryside.

AREA D2: EAST WITNEY: EASTERN WINDRUSH/MADLEY BROOK VALLEY SIDE

- ES35.** In this assessment, Area D2 includes WOLA Area E, and stretches south across the A40. Areas D1 and D2 are part of the same important ridge enclosing the east of the town.
- ES36.** The topography of the area is an undulating valley side, the eastern side of the Madley Brook and Windrush valleys, forming the end of a very prominent ridge enclosing the eastern side of the town. The ridge comes particularly close to the historic cores of both Witney and Cogges at this point.
- ES37.** The area is generally open, and there are very long views north to the wooded Wychwood Uplands, west along the Upper Windrush valley, and south west to the low lying Lower Windrush valley. There are also fine views of Witney spire, from both north and south of the A40, and in places of Cogges church.
- ES38.** Area D2 is of high importance and sensitivity due to its role as a prominent part of the ridge enclosing the east of the town; its high intervisibility across the countryside to the south west, west and north; and its visual connections with the historic cores of both Witney and Cogges.

AREA E: EAST WITNEY: EAST FACING EASTERN WINDRUSH/MADLEY BROOK VALLEY SIDE

- ES39.** This area was not included specifically in the WOLA, though the eastern corner of WOLA Area D just clips it. It is included here, as Area E, for the sake of completeness as it is part of the ridge enclosing the east of the town.
- ES40.** The topography is an east facing undulating valley side, the eastern side of the prominent ridge enclosing the eastern side of Witney, and separating the Lower Windrush valley from the broader Eynsham (Thames) vale. A small valley runs east under the Shores Green junction.
- ES41.** There is no visual connection with the town from this area. There are instead long views east across the low lying Eynsham vale, with the wooded Wytham Hill, on the far side of the Thames valley, prominent on the skyline. Coming west along the A40, the smooth ridge to the north is a prominent landscape feature.
- ES42.** Area E is of high importance and sensitivity due its role as a prominent part of the ridge enclosing the east of the town; and its high intervisibility across the countryside to the

south east. The area is part of the rural Eynsham vale landscape with no connection with Witney. The introduction of lighting, in particular, to this area would be particularly damaging.

AREA F1: CENTRAL & SOUTH WITNEY: VALLEY FLOOR

- ES43.** In this assessment, Area F1 includes WOLA Area F, and stretches south beyond the A40.
- ES44.** The topography of the area is flat, with a small amount of river terrace in the south east. Area F1 marks the change between the narrow, deeply incised Upper Windrush valley north west of the town, and the broad Lower Windrush valley to the south.
- ES45.** There are long open views along the valley, interrupted at the northern end by new housing development on a former mill/employment site and in the south by the A40 on embankment.
- ES46.** Area F1 is of high importance and sensitivity as a flat valley floor largely within the flood plain with high intervisibility along the valley; and due to its character as a rural landscape running through the heart of the town and its location at a pivotal point between the Upper and Lower Windrush valleys. Its rural character is under threat due to the close proximity of the town.

AREA F2: SOUTH WEST WITNEY: VALLEY FLOOR

- ES47.** Area F2 was not specifically included in the WOLA, as the A40 was taken as the southern boundary of the study. It is included here for completeness, and to cover the area around the A40/A415 junction. It has topographical similarities with Area F1.
- ES48.** The topography of the area is a largely flat valley floor, with slight undulations. Just to the south of the area is a small ridge, very pronounced in the otherwise flat landscape, topped by woods of ancient origin, which contains views south from this part of the valley.
- ES49.** While there is the potential for long views within this area, in practice views are easily blocked by vegetation in the flat landscape. However, there are some long views across the valley from the higher ground to the north, including from within Witney, and from higher ground within the valley.
- ES50.** The area has a strong rural character and connection with the Lower Windrush valley as a whole, rather than with Witney, with the A40 clearly marking the boundary between town and country.
- ES51.** Area F2 is of moderate to high importance and sensitivity as a largely flat valley floor partly within the flood plain, with the potential for high intervisibility easily blocked by vegetation in the flat landscape though with views across the area from higher ground. In the area near the A40/A415 junction the strong contrast between urban (north of A40, east of A415) and rural (west of A415) is vulnerable to erosion.

AREA G: WEST WITNEY: MINOR VALLEYS

- ES52.** Area G extends the WOLA Area G west to include the minor valley north of Curbridge.
- ES53.** The topography of the area consists of two rolling small scale valleys, that to the east containing the Colwell Brook. The valleys flow east/south east into the low lying Lower

Windrush valley, and the area has a strong connection with this lower ground.

- ES54.** There is a contrast between open views from the higher ground in the area, and the strong sense of enclosure elsewhere in the area due to the topography and/or vegetation. The area has a strong connection with the valley landscape to the south, and plays an important part in softening views of the urban edge from the wider valley to the south. It is an important buffer between the west of Witney and the A40, the village of Curbridge, and the wider countryside.
- ES55.** Area G has high importance and sensitivity as an area of small scale valleys with a small scale field pattern and a strong structure of hedgerows/trees, forming a strong landscape edge to Witney.

AREA H: WEST WITNEY RIDGE

- ES56.** In this assessment, Area H extends much further west to include the whole area between Witney and Charterville Allotments (Minster Lovell), and further north to include land north of the B4047 which is part of the same ridge. This latter area was included as part of Area A in the WOLA. A considerable amount of development has taken place in this area since the time of the WOLA assessment.
- ES57.** The topography of the area is a plateau, part of the high ridge between the Upper and Lower Windrush valley. The area south of the B4047 slopes gently towards the south east.
- ES58.** Overall, Area H is of high importance and sensitivity as a high plateau, part of the prominent ridge extending west of Witney and with high intervisibility to both north and south from the highest ground. However, views back from the south are easily blocked by vegetation in the flat landscape, and development below the highest ground would have relatively little visual impact.
- ES59.** The large scale landscape with its generally weak landscape structure can accommodate built development on the lower ground in the south of the area within a new strong landscape structure without a damaging impact on the quality of the landscape, and without significant visual impact.

CONCLUSIONS

- ES60.** Overall, the landscape around Witney is of high sensitivity, a mix of open ridge, open valley side and valley floor.
- ES61.** There is generally high intervisibility between these areas, so development in one would have an impact on the others, as well as direct impact on the area itself.
- ES62.** There is also high intervisibility between the town, particularly higher ground in the west, north and east, and the wider countryside, including the Cotswolds AONB to the north.
- ES63.** These landscape and visual constraints mean that there are few areas which could accommodate large scale development without substantial adverse landscape and/or visual impact.
- ES64.** This study has found, however, that there are a few areas where development could be accommodated without significant landscape and visual impact, where the existing landscape structure is weak, and the existing urban edge could be improved. These are:
- Area C4
 - The lower part of Area H, reserved in the Local Plan for future development.
- ES65.** Other small sites within other areas may be capable of absorbing development, but would need further detailed study on a site by site basis.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report has been prepared by Amanda Hopwood Landscape Consultancy (AHLIC), on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council. The study brief requires the consultant to:

update and expand previous landscape studies of land on the fringes of the existing built-up areas of Witney in order to establish a sound evidence base for the West Oxfordshire Local Development Framework (LDF).

1.2 The previous relevant landscape studies referred to are:

- West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (WOLA), Atlantic Consultants, 1998
- Witney Landscape and Ecological Assessments (WLEA), BHWB, 1999
- West Oxfordshire Local Plan Inquiry (LPI): Witney Landscape and Ecological Assessments: Position Statement June 2004, BHWB Golder, 2004

1.3 Besides covering the whole District, the WOLA also looked in more detail at the surroundings of 'Key Settlements', including Witney. It is the Witney Key Settlement work that this report seeks particularly to update, since that has not been done for the town as a whole since the WOLA, nearly ten years ago.

1.4 The original WLEA was carried out as part of the District Council Local Plan review, and covered landscape and ecological issues relating specifically to three sites on the outskirts of Witney:

- North of Curbridge;
- North of Witney;
- East of Witney.

1.5 The WLEA concluded that housing development on the North of Curbridge site would have less impact on landscape and ecological issues than the other two sites. Having considered all the issues, WODC also subsequently came to the same conclusion that this was the preferred direction for any future growth, and this site was included in the Draft West Oxfordshire Local Plan (DWOLP).

1.6 The 2004 Position Statement updated the landscape and visual issues for these three sites, where these had changed since the original report, largely due to further development having taken place nearby in the interim.

1.7 Following consideration at the LPI, the North Curbridge Development Area is included in the current Local Plan (West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011, adopted June 2006) (WOLP) as Witney Proposal 8, land held in reserve for development in accordance with Phasing Policy H1. It is intended to be an area for comprehensive mixed use development.

1.8 This report, then, seeks mainly to update the work of the WOLA, taking into consideration changes that have taken place since the original assessment. The surroundings of the town are therefore divided into areas based largely on those in the WOLA, but divided on a topographical as well as geographical basis.

1.9 The settlement edge areas are described in Sections 3 to 15. Tables summarising the updating of the WOLA Key Settlement (Witney) work are contained at Appendix A at the end of this report.

- 1.10 Worksheets summarising the characteristics of each settlement edge area are contained at Appendix B at the end of this report. These worksheets also include, for reference, the ecological bioband score for the landscape type within which settlement edge area falls; this work was part of the County Council's Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study, a web-based study carried out in 2004¹.
- 1.11 Plans showing the overall landscape context and the settlement edge areas, and sheets of photographs from selected viewpoints, are contained in Appendix C at the end of this report.

2 THE LANDSCAPE SETTING OF WITNEY

- 2.1 Historically, Witney grew up as a valley settlement, based near crossing points over the River Windrush, which flows through the town. Both Witney and its neighbour Cogges, to the east of the river, were settled on slightly higher ground above 80m AOD, just above the flood plain. Contours are highlighted on the accompanying figures (0720.1 and 2, Appendix C).
- 2.2 Witney is surrounded on the east, north and west by higher ground. To the north, the ground rises quickly to above 100m, with North Leigh to the north east being above 120m. A ridge along the northern side of the Windrush running round from east to north west, from Cogges Hill, Cogges Wood, North Leigh, New Yatt and Hailey to just south east of Crawley, encloses the town within the landscape and generally marks the extent of its visual envelope to the north, with the exception of development on the higher ground west of the town. The relationship of this ridge with the town is particularly marked, and close to the town centre, in the Cogges Hill area.
- 2.3 A number of small, sometimes deeply incised, valleys run down from this higher ground to the north to the Windrush, creating a varied sometimes rolling topography.
- 2.4 The northern edge of the Windrush valley is marked roughly by the line of West End and its continuation, Crawley Road. The rolling topography to the north marks the transition between the valley landscape and the Wychwood Uplands.
- 2.5 To the west of the town, a dominant ridge rising to above 100m marks the southern side of the Windrush valley, and the dividing line between the Cotswold uplands and the Thames valley. There are long views from this ridge both to the Wychwood Uplands and across the Thames valley to the Faringdon ridge to the south, and, in places, looking along the Windrush valley towards Witney.
- 2.6 South of Witney, the Windrush flows through a broad, low-lying, gently undulating valley landscape to join the River Thames at Newbridge. An intermediate ridge, rising in places to above 95m, runs south west of Ducklington, between Curbridge and Cokethorpe, and encloses the town visually, separating it from the wider valley landscape. These higher points are prominent in the landscape, with long views to and from the higher ground around Witney.
- 2.7 To the north of Witney, large woods such as Cogges Wood, the many smaller

¹ [Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study - Home](#)

copses, and the tree and hedge lined fields, roads and tracks build up an impression of a well wooded landscape, and views are often blocked by vegetation. This landscape pattern was created by early assarting (clearing) of Wychwood Forest, and many very good hedgerow trees remain.

- 2.8 South of Witney, there are fewer woods in the valley landscape, though there are remnants of ancient woodland on the Curbridge to Cokethorpe ridge; however, the pattern of tree lined ditches and hedges builds up again to give the impression of a treed landscape, and views are easily blocked by vegetation in this low lying area.
- 2.9 On the ridge west of Witney, the landscape is more open, with few woods and generally poor hedgerows with few hedgerow trees, allowing long views to and from the area. Major blocks of recent planting, in particular associated with the West Witney employment area, are starting to provide some enclosure on parts of the ridge.
- 2.10 Church spires are a particular landmark feature in the West Oxfordshire landscape, and the spire of St Mary's Church on Church Green in Witney draws the eye in many viewpoints around the town and surrounding area. Further afield, the churches at Bampton, in the Thames valley, and Leafield, in the Wychwood Uplands, are also focal points in the landscape. The Folly at Faringdon often stands out on the skyline in distant views south. More recent landmark features include the chimney associated with the former Early's blanket factory on the Burford Road; several communications aerials; and buildings in the West Witney employment areas, south of the Burford Road, in particular the Medisense complex. However, views of both this latter complex, and the West Witney housing area, are starting to be softened by the large blocks of planting mentioned above.
- 2.11 As noted above, Witney was originally a valley settlement. Maps from both the late 18th and 19th centuries show the town's essential pattern relatively unchanged since its medieval expansion, promoted mainly by the Bishopric of Winchester which had been granted the manor in 1044. The centre of the town was, and remains, focussed around Church Green, with development stretching along Corn Street and the High Street. Development in West End was part of Hailey parish, which was also part of the manor, but not the town, of Witney.
- 2.12 The manor of Witney originally held three outlying townships: Curbridge, Crawley and Hailey, and there are therefore historic path links between the town and these areas. While land around Curbridge was cleared of woodland by at least Anglo Saxon times, Crawley and Hailey parishes were essentially wooded at the time of Domesday. The dispersed settlement pattern of Hailey, in particular, with 'Ends' and 'Greens' and old established dispersed farmsteads, is typical of ancient forest landscapes. The woodland and scrub was largely cleared in the 12th and 13th centuries, encouraged by the Bishop of Winchester, and the landscape pattern in the Hailey area today is essentially the result of this activity.
- 2.13 To the east of Witney, the oldest part of Cogges, a separate manor, was also set on a small piece of slightly higher ground within the valley. The Newland area, on higher ground along the Oxford road, was an early 13th century attempt by the lord of Cogges to set up a thriving town similar to Witney, but this failed to expand. The Cogges area also remained essentially unchanged until the 20th century.

- 2.14 It was not until the late 20th century that both Witney and Cogges expanded onto both lower, formerly meadow, land, and higher, generally formerly open field, areas.

3 AREA A: NORTH WEST WITNEY: SOUTHERN WINDRUSH VALLEY SIDE (See Table A, Appendix A; Table 1, Appendix B; Views 1-3, Appendix C)

CONTEXT

- 3.1 In this assessment, Area A covers the southern (north facing) valley side, and does not include the higher plateau to the south, which is covered under Area H.
- 3.2 Area A is bounded to the south by the B4047 with housing south of the road; to the west by Area H (West Witney ridge); to the north by the Windrush valley floor (Area B); and to the east by the built up edge of Witney (Springfield Park area). However, the landscape characteristics described stretch west along the Windrush valley beyond the mapping of this study.
- 3.3 The area is agricultural, with just one small industrial use low in the valley, with access off the B4047, and one dwelling north of the B4047.
- 3.4 The village of Crawley lies in the valley some 1.5km north of the current built up edge of the town, accessed by a minor but busy road used as a rat run by commuters, Dry Lane.
- 3.5 Across the valley from Area A the south facing valley side (Area C1) and plateau stretching north (Area C2) are also agricultural, with scattered farms and dwellings. Further east, the built up edge of north west Witney (Hoyle Close/Schofield Avenue) is visible on the higher ground.

PLANNING STATUS

- 3.6 In the current Local Plan the area is included under Policy NE2, *Policy Area to Prevent Urban Sprawl and to Protect Existing Character*.
- 3.7 The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies north of the Windrush, starting just north west of Crawley approx 1km north west of Area A.
- 3.8 The River Windrush marks the southern boundary of the Wychwood Project area, a project supported by the District Council and designed to increase awareness of and promote the retention and creation of habitats associated with the medieval Royal Forest of Wychwood.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 3.9 The topography of the area is a north facing mainly gently, occasionally steeply, sloping undulating valley side.
- 3.10 Field sizes are quite large, with a regular post parliamentary enclosure field pattern, and the area is generally open with long views across the valley and to the wooded Wychwood uplands to the north. This smooth, open valley side is typical of the Upper Windrush valley generally, which reads as a coherent largely unspoilt piece of landscape between Witney and Burford.

- 3.11 Young belts of native planting are gradually establishing along the B4047 and Dry Lane, with small copses north of the B4047 near the access track to Apley Barn, the small industrial site.
- 3.12 South of the B4047, the West Witney housing area (Deer Park) is generally well screened by a tree and shrub belt, though the upper parts of roofs are occasionally visible, particularly from higher ground outside this area. Large detached houses between West Witney and Tower Hill are set back from the road with well vegetated front gardens. These two areas present a generally soft edge to Area A and the countryside to the north.
- 3.13 Further east, new housing at the top of Tower Hill faces out over the countryside with minimal planting, and is dominant in views from Area A and elsewhere to the north. The young planting north of the B4047 will in time help to soften this housing, but is unlikely to screen it completely.
- 3.14 North of the B4047, detached housing further east and Springfield Park are both well screened by vegetation, and present a generally soft edge to the valley. Springfield Park is built on a fairly flat promontory jutting out into the valley, and both this topography and trees block views from Area A and the Windrush valley generally to the new housing areas on the former Early Mill and blanket factory sites.
- 3.15 Looking across the valley, the northern valley side is similarly smooth and open. The north western edge of Witney, high up the valley side, is visible from the higher part of Area A, presenting a hard edge to the countryside.
- 3.16 A well used bridleway crosses the area between Witney and Crawley. Leaffield spire is visible on the skyline from this path, a clearing in the otherwise wooded skyline.
- 3.17 A hedge, supplemented by the young planting, divides the B4047 from Area A, hiding most traffic from view. The area is, therefore, surprisingly tranquil, especially looking north, despite the proximity of the town.
- 3.18 Overall, then, this area is part of the unspoilt open countryside stretching north and west from the town, with the urban edge largely soft.

SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 3.19 Table A in Appendix A summarises the findings of the WOLA, and updates the assessment. Note that the area covered by Area A is slightly different in the current assessment, in that the WOLA Area A included part of the highest plateau land, included in this assessment under Area H.
- 3.20 The updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:
- The open valley sides are part of a coherent generally unspoilt valley landscape between Witney and Burford;
 - The open valley sides are visually exposed and vulnerable to change;
 - Views from higher ground to the north, including within the AONB, are particularly sensitive.
- 3.21 In summary, Area A has a prominent valley side landform with high intervisibility to the north and a strong continuity with the remainder of the Upper Windrush

valley. The area is of high importance and sensitivity.

4 AREA B: NORTH WITNEY: VALLEY FLOOR (See Table B, Appendix A; Table 2, Appendix B; Views 4-7, Appendix C)

CONTEXT

- 4.1 In this assessment, Area B covers the valley floor, with a small amount of valley side scarp to the south which is separated from Area A by a strong hedgeline. The northern valley side is covered under Area C1.
- 4.2 The area is agricultural, with no buildings on the valley floor apart from a converted mill at New Mill, half way between Witney and Crawley; and a small showmen's caravan site surrounded by conifers near the eastern end, accessed from West End.
- 4.3 The western part of the area is bounded to the south by Area A, the southern valley side, and to the north by Area C1, the northern valley side. The village of Crawley lies in and to the north of the valley to the west; the landscape characteristics of Area B stretch west beyond Crawley along the Upper Windrush valley. In the eastern part of the area, housing covers the valley sides to both north and south. To the north is linear housing along Crawley Road, with 20th century housing estates stretching up the valley side beyond. To the south is Springfield Park, on its promontory, and new housing on the former Early's Mill and blanket factory sites. At the eastern end small housing developments encroach into the valley floor, built on former small industrial (weaving/blanket associated) sites.
- 4.4 The whole area is flood plain or land with a high risk of flooding.

PLANNING STATUS

- 4.5 In the current Local Plan the majority of the area is included under Policy NE2, *Policy Area to Prevent Urban Sprawl and to Protect Existing Character*. The eastern end of the area is included within the Windrush in Witney Project area, Policy WIT 3, which states that *development on land within or where it would be visible from the Windrush in Witney Policy Area...should protect and enhance the intrinsic landscape, character, ecology and cultural value of the valley*.
- 4.6 The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies north of the Windrush, starting just north west of Crawley.
- 4.7 The River Windrush marks the southern boundary of the Wychwood Project area. A small part of Area B lies within the project area.
- 4.8 A corridor across the valley at the eastern end of the area is safeguarded for the possible West End Link Road (WEL).

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 4.9 The topography of the area is flat, with a small amount of north facing scarp in the central southern part of the area.
- 4.10 The area is former water meadow, now used as pasture for cattle and, mainly,

horse grazing, with the fields often subdivided by fences. The field pattern is small-medium scale. Pollard willows are a distinctive feature along the river and many ditches. The valley floor is strongly enclosed by the steep valley sides, but with long views along the valley except where blocked by trees. These characteristics are typical of the Upper Windrush valley generally, which reads as a coherent largely unspoilt piece of landscape between Witney and Burford.

- 4.11 Within the valley, suburbanising influences such as fencing, and farm buildings just outside the area, sometimes screened with inappropriate conifers, are a threat to the area's rural character.
- 4.12 While the western end of the area still has a strong rural character, at the eastern end housing, especially to the north along Crawley Road, looks directly out across the valley, at a higher level and with little screening. The new housing to the south is relatively well screened from the valley floor, due to a combination of the Springfield Park promontory and existing trees south of the river.
- 4.13 There is an important cycle and foot link across the valley at the eastern end of Area B, and a path along most of the southern side from Witney to Crawley, part running through the new housing areas. However, there is little public access to the northern side of the river.
- 4.14 There are many views into and across the valley from the higher ground to the north and south.
- 4.15 The majority of this area is tranquil, marred mainly by the dominance of the Crawley Road housing.
- 4.16 Overall, this area is part of the surprisingly unspoilt river valley running through Witney and stretching west to Burford. Its character is, however, under threat from suburbanising influences and the hard urban edge along part of Crawley Road is dominant in the east of the area.

SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 4.17 Table B in Appendix A summarises the findings of the WOLA, and updates the assessment. Note that the area covered by Area B is slightly different in the current assessment, in that the WOLA Area B included the northern valley side, included in this assessment under Area C1; only those features relating to the valley floor are included in the table.
- 4.18 The updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:
 - The valley floor is part of a coherent generally unspoilt valley landscape between Witney and Burford;
 - The unspoilt valley floor is particularly vulnerable to change and suburbanising influence, given its proximity to the town;
 - The valley floor is also sensitive to built development on the valley sides.
- 4.19 In summary, Area B is a flat valley floor within the flood plain with high intervisibility to both north and south and strong continuity with the remainder of the Upper Windrush valley. Its rural character is under threat due to the close proximity of the town. The area is of high importance and sensitivity.

5 AREA C1: NORTH WEST WITNEY: NORTHERN WINDRUSH VALLEY SIDE (See Table C1, Appendix A; Table 3, Appendix B; Views 8-10, Appendix C)

CONTEXT

- 5.1 In this assessment, Area C1 covers the northern (south facing) valley side, which is included under Area B in the WOLA.
- 5.2 Area C1 is bounded by the Windrush valley floor to the south and west, the flatter plateau C2 to the north, and the western edge of the north of Witney to the east.
- 5.3 The area is agricultural, with scattered farms and houses, mostly modern, with large farm buildings, accessed from the Crawley Road which runs through the area. Agricultural land stretches north from Area C1 through Area C2 and beyond.
- 5.4 The village of Crawley lies some 1.4km west of the north western edge of the town.

PLANNING STATUS

- 5.5 In the current Local Plan the majority of the area is included under Policy NE2, *Policy Area to Prevent Urban Sprawl and to Protect Existing Character*. The remainder of Area C1 is outside the area covered by the Witney inset map on which this policy notation is shown. The eastern end of Area C1 also abuts the Windrush in Witney Project area, Policy WIT 3.
- 5.6 The Cotswolds AONB lies approx 1km north west of Area C1, starting just north west of Crawley.
- 5.7 Area C1 lies within the Wychwood Project area.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 5.8 The topography of the area is a south facing sometimes steeply sloping valley side, forming a distinctive promontory above the valley.
- 5.9 Field sizes are quite large, and field shapes regular, although one of the farms is a long established holding in place well before parliamentary enclosure. The area is a mix of arable and pasture, with a number of fields used for horse grazing. There are some good hedges and trees, especially along Milking Lane, an old established route from Hailey down into the valley, but generally the area is open with long views across the valley to the West Witney ridge to the south (Area H), and along the valley to the west. The smooth, open valley side is typical of the Upper Windrush valley generally, which reads as a coherent largely unspoilt piece of landscape between Witney and Burford.
- 5.10 In the long views south across the valley, the smooth valley side of Area A is an important component of the view. The West Witney ridge forms a strong skyline. The West Witney housing is generally well screened by a tree and shrub belt, presenting a soft edge. Further east, however, the Tower Hill housing is prominent on the skyline, drawing attention to the urban edge. The young planting north of the B4047 will in time help to soften this housing, but it is lower

in the landscape than the housing, and will have limited effectiveness in these higher views from the north. Traffic on the B4047 is also visible in these higher views; the young planting north of the road will in time screen these views.

- 5.11 Further east, some of the large buildings on the employment land are visible on the skyline, but they are set back from the northern edge of the ridge, and are at least partially screened by intervening vegetation.
- 5.12 A number of the prominent farm buildings on the valley side are screened by conifers, inappropriate in the rural landscape, and these and other suburbanising influences are a threat to the area's rural character.
- 5.13 There are few public rights of way across this area, apart from Milking Lane, the bridleway running north-south. While it is relatively enclosed, there are occasional long views west and south west, and also east to the Hoyle Avenue/Schofield Avenue area of north west Witney. This presents a relatively hard urban edge to the countryside, and is on the skyline in the views from Milking Lane.
- 5.14 While the area is relatively quiet, particularly along Milking Lane, with views to unspoilt countryside, the tranquillity is marred by the distant views of development across the valley to the south, and by the views of the edge of north west Witney.
- 5.15 Overall, this area is part of the unspoilt countryside stretching north and west of the town, but the rural gap between Witney and Crawley is under pressure from suburbanising influences.

SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 5.16 Table C1 in Appendix A summarises the finding of the WOLA, and updates the assessment. Note that the area covered by Area C1 is different in the current assessment, much of it being included in the WOLA under Area B, with a small part in Area C. Only features relevant to the valley side are included in the table.
- 5.17 The updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:
- The open valley sides are part of a coherent generally unspoilt valley landscape between Witney and Burford;
 - The open valley sides are visually exposed and vulnerable to change: there are already suburbanising influences in the area;
 - Views from higher ground to the south are particularly sensitive.
- 5.18 In summary, Area C1 has a prominent valley side landform with high intervisibility to south and west and a strong continuity with the remainder of the Upper Windrush valley. The area is of high importance and sensitivity.

6 AREA C2: NORTH WEST WITNEY: PLATEAU (See Table C2, Appendix A; Table 4, Appendix B; Views 11-14, Appendix C)

CONTEXT

- 6.1 In this assessment, Area C2 covers the western end of the WOLA Area C.

- 6.2 Area C2 is bounded to the south by Area C1, the valley side, and the west by a deeply incised valley running north from Crawley. The northern boundary to the area follows Foxburrow Lane, a minor road, but the same landscape characteristics stretch north to Hailey, beyond the area shown on plan. The area is bounded to the east by the B4022, the busy Witney-Charlbury road.
- 6.3 The area is agricultural, with one farm with modern farm buildings. There is a small cluster of 20th century housing near the junction of Foxburrow Lane and the B4022, and scattered long established farms and modern housing, as well as a rugby club, alongside the B4022 further north. The modern edge to Hailey village is some 0.5km north of Foxburrow Lane along the B4022, while the eastern edge of Crawley village abuts the western end of the area.

PLANNING STATUS

- 6.4 In the current Local Plan the eastern end of the area is included under Policy NE2, *Policy Area to Prevent Urban Sprawl and to Protect Existing Character*. The remainder of Area C2 is outside the area covered by the Witney inset map on which this policy notation is shown.
- 6.5 The Cotswolds AONB lies approx 0.4km west of Area C2, starting just north west of Crawley.
- 6.6 Area C2 lies within the Wychwood Project area.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 6.7 The topography of the area is a slightly undulating plateau, sloping very gently to the south east. It reads as part of the higher ground of the Wychwood Uplands.
- 6.8 Field sizes are quite large, and the pattern regular, typical of parliamentary enclosure. The area is a mix of arable and pasture, with some fields used for horse grazing, as well as cattle. There are some good hedges and trees, especially along Milking Lane, an old established route from Hailey down into the valley, which easily block views in the flat landscape. Where there are gaps, however, there are long views south across the valley to the West Witney ridge, and north west across the Wychwood Uplands. There are occasional glimpses of Witney spire from Foxburrow Lane.
- 6.9 In the long views south across the valley, the smooth valley side of Area A is an important component of the view. The West Witney ridge forms a strong skyline. The West Witney housing is fairly well screened by a tree and shrub belt, presenting a soft edge, though roofs are visible. Further east, however, the Tower Hill housing is prominent on the skyline, drawing attention to the urban edge. The young planting north of the B4047 will in time help to soften this housing, but it is lower in the landscape than the housing, and will have limited effectiveness in these higher views from the north. Traffic on the B4047 is also visible in these higher views; the young planting north of the road will in time screen these views.
- 6.10 Further west, some of the large buildings on the employment land are visible on the skyline, but they are set back from the northern edge of the ridge, and are at least partially screened by intervening vegetation.
- 6.11 There are few public rights of way across this area, apart from Milking Lane, the

bridleway running north-south. While it is relatively enclosed, there are occasional long views west and south west, and particularly east to the Hoyle Avenue/Schofield Avenue area of north west Witney. This presents a hard urban edge to the countryside, and is on the skyline in the views from Milking Lane.

- 6.12 While the area is relatively quiet, particularly along Milking Lane, with views to unspoilt countryside, the tranquillity is marred by the distant views of development across the valley to the south, and by the views of the edge of north west Witney. The cluster of development on Foxburrow Lane also introduces a suburban character to the rural landscape, and lighting at the rugby club introduces lights into an otherwise dark landscape.
- 6.13 The B4022, however, is slightly sunken and well screened behind trees/hedges. At the northern edge of Witney, as the B4022 leaves the town, a primary school is the last building to the west of the road, set in a relatively generous landscape setting, and this part of the edge of Witney is soft and well screened from the countryside to the north.
- 6.14 Overall, this area is part of the unspoilt countryside stretching north of the town, but the rural gap between Witney and Hailey/Crawley is under pressure from suburbanising influences.

SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 6.15 Table C2 in Appendix A summarises the findings of the WOLA, and updates the assessment. Note that the area covered by Area C2 is only part of that covered by the WOLA Area C.
- 6.16 The updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:
- Moderate quality landscape edge with some suburbanising influences, vulnerable to change;
 - Important rural approach to Witney from the north, particularly vulnerable to change given the scattered development along the B4022 between Witney and the modern edge of Hailey village;
 - Resist urbanisation between Hailey and Witney, particularly sensitive given the existing scattered development along the B4022.
- 6.17 In summary, Area C2 is a gently undulating plateau landscape with high intervisibility to the south and north west and a strong physical continuity with the Wychwood Uplands to the north. The area is of moderate to high importance and sensitivity.

7 AREA C3: NORTH WITNEY: SMALL SCALE VALLEYS (See Table C3, Appendix A; Table 5, Appendix B; Views 15, 16 and 18, Appendix C)

CONTEXT

- 7.1 In this assessment, Area C3 covers the centre of the WOLA Area C.
- 7.2 Area C3 is bounded to the west by the B4022, and to the east partly by New Yatt road and partly by the A4095 Woodstock road. Housing in the north of Witney marks the southern boundary. The northern boundary follows an arbitrary line

across fields, but the same landscape character extends north to Hailey and New Yatt. New Yatt Road is an old established lane, now heavily used, between Witney and the former heathside settlement of New Yatt, and North Leigh beyond.

- 7.3 The area is agricultural, with a number of dispersed farmsteads of medieval origin, associated with the assarting of woodland to create new farmland. One of these, Middlefield Farm, a complex including a number of converted farm buildings in the south of the area, now forms part of the northern edge of Witney.
- 7.4 A modern school, set in its playing fields, lies in the south eastern corner of the area, adjoining New Yatt road, adjacent to Middlefield Farm.

PLANNING STATUS

- 7.5 In the current Local Plan most of the area is included under Policy NE2, *Policy Area to Prevent Urban Sprawl and to Protect Existing Character*. The remainder of Area C3 is outside the area covered by the Witney inset map on which this policy notation is shown.
- 7.6 The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies approx 1.5km west of Area C3.
- 7.7 Area C3 lies within the Wychwood Project area.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 7.8 The topography of the area consists of rolling small scale valleys, converging in the centre of the area to flow down to the Windrush valley. It reads as part of the higher ground of the Wychwood Uplands, and the land gradually rises to the high point of the New Yatt/North Leigh ridge which contains Witney to the north.
- 7.9 Field sizes vary from small to large, and are generally irregular and sinuous. There are strong hedgerows and hedgerow trees and copses, typical of farmland carved out of woodland, and a number of new copses establishing in field corners. The area is a mix of arable and pasture. There is a strong sense of enclosure in the small scale valleys, but long views from the open higher ground.
- 7.10 There are long views north from the higher ground, filtered by hedgerow trees and copses, to the Poffley End area of Hailey and the New Yatt ridge. There are also long views across the valley to the south west, to the West Witney ridge. Development on the ridge is discernible on the skyline.
- 7.11 The urban edge to the south is hard and generally unscreened by vegetation, but most of the housing is low in the landscape and therefore has limited impact on the wider countryside; this housing is not visible from the other areas which are the subject of this study. The Middlefield Farm complex is prominent on the skyline to the south east, largely retaining its rural character. The new school extends the urban envelope further north along the rural New Yatt Road. Although set in reasonably generous grounds there is almost no planting associated with the school, which is out of character with the treed/hedged landscape.
- 7.12 To the north, dispersed farmsteads lie between the main village of Hailey (Middletown and Poffley End) and Witney. Highcroft Farm, on the B4022, lies

some 0.4km north of the urban edge; Downhill Farm 0.5km north; Swanhall Farm 1.1km north; while the grounds of Merryfield Farm along the New Yatt road adjoin the grounds of the school. The perceived rural gap between Witney and Hailey is therefore very small, and easily eroded.

- 7.13 There are a number of public footpaths/bridleways running north-south between Witney and Hailey, reflecting the ancient connections between the two areas. The character of New Yatt Road is still strongly hedge and tree lined and rural, but this character is in danger of being eroded by pressure of traffic. East of this road, the pattern of small scale fields defined by strong hedges continues to the A4095.
- 7.14 Despite the hard urban edge, this area is generally very tranquil, with little suburbanising influence.
- 7.15 As described, this landscape is typical of ancient forest landscapes elsewhere in the country, but this landscape pattern is relatively rare in Oxfordshire, being one of only three such areas identified in the county-wide landscape assessment, the Oxfordshire Landscape and Wildlife Assessment (OWLS). In this assessment, the landscape type is defined as *Settled Ancient Pastures*, which is a good overall description.
- 7.16 Overall, Area C3 is part of the unspoilt countryside stretching north of the town, with the added importance of its forest origins. It is an important part of the gap between Witney and Hailey.

SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 7.17 Table C3 in Appendix A summarises the findings of the WOLA, and updates the assessment. Note that the area covered by Area C3 is only part of that covered by the WOLA Area C.
- 7.18 The updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:
- High quality landscape edge, high intrinsic landscape quality, vulnerable to change;
 - Important rural approach to Witney from the north, particularly vulnerable to change given the scattered development along the B4022 between Witney and the modern edge of Hailey village;
 - Special attention should be given to maintaining strong landscape edges, including along road approaches;
 - Resist urbanisation between Hailey and Witney, particularly sensitive given ill defined gap due to dispersed settlement pattern.
- 7.18 In summary, Area C3 is an area of rolling small scale valleys with high intervisibility to the north (filtered) and south west from higher ground, and a strong physical continuity with the Wychwood Uplands to the north. With its ancient landscape origins and rarity in a county context, the area is of high importance and sensitivity.

8 AREA C4: NORTH WITNEY: PLATEAU (See Table C4, Appendix A; Table 6, Appendix B; Views 17, 19 and 20, Appendix C)

CONTEXT

- 8.1 In this assessment, Area C4 covers part of the western end of the WOLA Area D.
- 8.2 Area C4 is bounded to the west by New Yatt Road and the east by the A4095. Housing on Early Road in Witney lies to the south, while the new North East Witney housing area (Madley Park) lies to the east, east of the A4095. North of the area, the landscape characteristics of Area C3 extend northwards towards New Yatt. New Yatt lies approx 1.5km to the north, and North Leigh lies approx 2.1km to the north east.
- 8.3 This small area is agricultural, with prominent modern farm buildings.

PLANNING STATUS

- 8.4 In the current Local Plan the area is included under Policy NE2, *Policy Area to Prevent Urban Sprawl and to Protect Existing Character*.
- 8.5 The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies approx 2.8km to the west.
- 8.6 Area C4 lies within the Wychwood Project area.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 8.7 The topography of the area is quite flat, a small plateau between the small scale valleys of Area C3 and the Madley Brook valley to the south east. It reads as part of the higher ground of the Wychwood Uplands, and the land gradually rises to the high point of the New Yatt/North Leigh ridge which contains Witney to the north.
- 8.8 The fields are large and regular, mainly arable, with poor hedges apart from along a narrow field alongside New Yatt road in the north west.
- 8.9 The area itself is open, but views are contained to the north west (Area C3) by a slight ridge and to the south and east by housing. There are longer views to and from the north along the A4095, but these are very limited from public footpaths to the north. Part of the boundary with the New Yatt Road is open, allowing views south east to the housing areas.
- 8.10 The urban edge is hard to both the Early Road and NE Witney areas, though part of the latter will be softened by woodland planting in the longer term.
- 8.11 The urban influence is strong in this area, with open views to the housing and the large modern barn. These views detract from the rural character of New Yatt Road.
- 8.12 Overall, Area C4 reads as an edge of town area rather than strongly rural, despite the open countryside continuing to the north.

SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 8.13 Table C4 in Appendix A summarises the findings of the WOLA, and updates the assessment. Note that the area covered by Area C4 is only a small part of that covered by the WOLA Area D.
- 8.14 The main updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:
- Need to resist any further 'urbanisation' on New Yatt Road and A4095;
 - Need to strengthen landscape structure along the urban edge, in both Early Road and Madley Park areas.
- 8.15 In summary, Area C4 is a small plateau area between small valleys, with low intervisibility to the wider countryside, and low-moderate overall sensitivity, though it is important that the rural character of New Yatt Road should be maintained and enhanced.

9 AREA D1: NORTH EAST WITNEY: MADLEY BROOK VALLEY SIDE (See Table D1, Appendix A; Table 7, Appendix B; Views 21-23, Appendix C)

CONTEXT

- 9.1 In this assessment, Area D1 covers the eastern part of the WOLA Area D. Much of the western part of WOLA Area D is now built up, with the North East Witney development (Madley Park).
- 9.2 Area D1 is bounded to the west by the NE Witney distributor road (Jubilee Way), with the new housing area lying to the west, and the A4095 at the area's northern end. Oxford Hill, one of the two links from Witney to the A40, marks the southern boundary, lined by a few scattered dwellings and farms. Cogges Wood and the top of the prominent ridge have been taken as the eastern boundary.
- 9.3 The area is agricultural, containing no buildings apart from those along Oxford Hill.

PLANNING STATUS

- 9.4 In the current Local Plan the west of the area is included under Policy NE2, *Policy Area to Prevent Urban Sprawl and to Protect Existing Character*. The remainder of Area D1 is outside the area covered by the Witney inset map on which this policy notation is shown.
- 9.5 The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies approx 3.3km to the west.
- 9.6 Area D1 lies within the Wychwood Project area.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 9.7 The topography of the area is an undulating valley side, the west facing slope of the Madley Brook valley which flows south from North Leigh to join the River Windrush in the Cogges area. This pronounced ridge is part of the higher ground enclosing the town, which in this area and, especially, Area D2, comes close to the centre of the town.

- 9.8 The fields are of varied sizes, with irregular boundaries formed by strong hedgelines with many very good trees. Like Area C3, this is a pattern typical of ancient woodland clearance, and Cogges Wood on high ground to the north east is a remnant of this woodland. Fields on the higher ground are more regular, where land has been enclosed from former heathland. The area is a mix of arable and pasture.
- 9.9 Despite the hedges and trees, there are long open views across the new housing area to the countryside to the west and north (AONB), and a strong sense of connection with the wooded Wychwood Uplands. Leaffield spire is visible on the horizon. The new housing does not block these views, being set low in the landscape. Views east and south are prevented by the pronounced ridge.
- 9.10 The new distributor road, set in a generous landscape strip, forms a strong boundary between the town and countryside. While the new housing presents a relatively hard edge at present, this is being softened by maturing planting. The impact is already much less than that at the time of the previous assessment, in 2004. A new small woodland has also been planted in severed field corners to the east of the road.
- 9.11 There is very little urban influence spilling over from the town into this area, apart from the lighting along the new road which introduces light away from the housing area into the countryside.
- 9.12 There are no public rights of way across the area, but Area D1 has a high intrinsic landscape value, forming part of the backdrop to the town in views from the west and north.
- 9.13 Overall, Area D1 reads as the rural countryside beyond the town, with strong visual connections to the countryside to the north and west.

SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 9.14 Table D1 in Appendix A summarises the findings of the WOLA, and updates the assessment. Note that the area covered by Area D1 is only part of that covered by the WOLA Area D. The WOLA assessment was made before the development of NE Witney, most of which is on the flatter land west of Madley Brook, an area with similar characteristics to Area C4.
- 9.15 The updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:
- Need to resist any further 'urbanisation' on A4095;
 - Previously identified need to strengthen landscape structure along urban edge, and between Madley Park and Cogges Wood, has been met by planting associated with the new housing development.
- 9.16 In summary, Area D1 is an undulating valley side, part of the ridge encircling the east and north of the town, with high intervisibility across the countryside to the west and north, with high importance and sensitivity. The new housing area to the west is set relatively low in the landscape, with very little impact on the wider landscape, and the new road and planting associated with it form a strong boundary between town and countryside.

10 AREA D2: EAST WITNEY: EASTERN WINDRUSH/MADLEY BROOK VALLEY SIDE
(See Table D2, Appendix A; Table 8, Appendix B; Views 24, 25 and 29, Appendix C)

CONTEXT

- 10.1 In this assessment, Area D2 includes WOLA Area E, and stretches south across the A40. Areas D1 and D2 are part of the same important ridge enclosing the east of the town.
- 10.2 Area D2 is bounded to the north by Oxford Hill, with Area D1 to the north. The top of the ridge, in the High Cogges area, has been taken as the south eastern boundary. At the south western end the ground drops away to the Lower Windrush valley (Area F1). The housing area of Cogges lies on the lower ground to the west.
- 10.3 The area is agricultural, with a low key woodland cemetery being established in the north, with access from Oxford Hill.
- 10.4 The A40 Witney bypass cuts through the area in deep cutting.

PLANNING STATUS

- 10.5 In the current Local Plan the majority of the area is included under Policy NE2, *Policy Area to Prevent Urban Sprawl and to Protect Existing Character*. The remainder of Area D2 is outside the area covered by the Witney inset map on which this policy notation is shown.
- 10.6 The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies approx 3.7km to the west.
- 10.7 The eastern part of the area lies within the Wychwood Project area. The western (north of A40) side is excluded, for no obvious logical reason since it is part of the same landscape type and ancient parish.
- 10.8 The lower land in the west of the area is safeguarded for the possible Cogges Link Road (CLR), with structural landscape and a small housing area to the west, dependent on the CLR being built.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 10.9 The topography of the area is an undulating valley side, the eastern side of the Madley Brook and Windrush valleys, forming the end of a very prominent ridge enclosing the eastern side of the town. The ridge comes particularly close to the historic cores of both Witney and Cogges at this point.
- 10.10 The field pattern is irregular and small-medium scale, larger south of the A40 where hedgerows have been removed. Like Areas D1 and C3, this is indicative of ancient woodland clearance. Some good hedges and trees remain, and there are small copses, some associated with the A40. New trees have been planted around the cemetery. The area is a mix of arable and pasture.
- 10.11 The area is generally open, and there are very long views north to the wooded Wychwood Uplands, west along the Upper Windrush valley, and south west to the low lying Lower Windrush valley. There are also fine views of Witney spire,

from both north and south of the A40, and of Cogges church from the western part, where an open piece of land has been kept between the housing to allow the sense of connection between Cogges and its former farmland on the hill. There is a network of public footpaths in the area, formerly connecting Cogges with High Cogges but now severed by the A40, from which to enjoy these views.

- 10.12 Area D2 is also an important backdrop to views of the town looking back to the east, from both lower and higher ground.
- 10.13 The existing Cogges housing is set low in the landscape, and with strong planting separating it from this area, so that there is relatively little urban influence.
- 10.14 Overall, Area D2 reads as a prominent ridge enclosing the town, bringing the countryside visually and physically close to the town.

SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 10.15 Table D2 in Appendix A summarises the findings of the WOLA, and updates the assessment. Note that the area covered by Area D2 is part of that covered by the WOLA Area E.
- 10.16 The updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:
- Landform extremely sensitive to change, part of prominent ridge enclosing town;
 - Important landmark on approach to and leaving Witney, and from A40;
 - Need for landscape improvement including strengthening of hedgerows.
- 10.17 In summary, Area D2 is an undulating valley side, a prominent part of the ridge enclosing the east of the town. It has high intervisibility across the countryside to the south west, west and north, and visual connections with the historic cores of both Witney and Cogges. The area has high importance and sensitivity.

11 AREA E: EAST WITNEY: EAST FACING EASTERN WINDRUSH/MADLEY BROOK VALLEY SIDE (See Table E, Appendix A; Table 9, Appendix B; Views 26-28, Appendix C)

CONTEXT

- 11.1 This area was not included specifically in the WOLA, though the eastern corner of WOLA Area D just clips it. It is included here, as Area E, for the sake of completeness as it is part of the ridge enclosing the east of the town.
- 11.2 The area is bounded to the west and north west by the high point of the ridge, with Areas D1 and D2 beyond. Low lying open countryside lies to the east. The A40, with the Shores Green junction which allows one way access to and from Witney, bisects the area. There has been major local disruption to the landform and minor roads to accommodate the junction.
- 11.3 Apart from this major road, the area is agricultural, with one farm north of the A40, and the dispersed settlement of High Cogges to the south

PLANNING STATUS

- 11.4 There is no special notation for this area in the Local Plan, and no visual connection with the Cotswolds AONB.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 11.5 The topography is an east facing undulating valley side, the eastern side of the prominent ridge enclosing the eastern side of Witney, and separating the Lower Windrush valley from the broader Eynsham (Thames) vale. A small valley runs east under the Shores Green junction.
- 11.6 The field pattern is large and regular north of the A40, the result of enclosure of the former heathland, smaller scale and irregular to the south near High Cogges.
- 11.7 The area is open with few hedges/trees in the north, with more hedges/trees in the south. There is reasonably extensive planting on the embankment between the A40 and the Shores Green junction. Cogges Wood is visible on the horizon to the north. The area is a mix of arable and pasture.
- 11.8 There is no visual connection with the town from this area. There are instead long views east across the low lying Eynsham vale, with the wooded Wytham Hill, on the far side of the Thames valley, prominent on the skyline. Coming west along the A40, the smooth ridge to the north is a prominent landscape feature. There are also views towards this area from the higher ground at High Cogges.
- 11.9 Apart from the major road and junction, which are not lit, this is a rural area, with no connection with the town. The area is not tranquil, due to the A40, but there are views across tranquil countryside. The introduction of lighting, in particular, to this area would be particularly damaging.

SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 11.10 There was no specific study of this area in the WOLA, but elements of the Area D assessment apply to this area and are covered in Table E in Appendix A.
- 11.11 The Key Sensitivities and Considerations for this area are:
- Landform extremely sensitive to change, part of prominent ridge enclosing town;
 - Landform important landmark on the south east approach to Witney.
 - Need for landscape improvement including strengthening of hedgerows.
- 11.12 In summary, Area E is an undulating valley side, a prominent part of the ridge enclosing the east of the town. It has high intervisibility across the countryside to the south east, and is part of the rural Eynsham vale landscape with no connection with Witney. The area has high importance and sensitivity.

12 AREA F1: CENTRAL & SOUTH WITNEY: VALLEY FLOOR (See Table F1, Appendix A; Table 10, Appendix B; Views 30-31, Appendix C)

CONTEXT

- 12.1 In this assessment, Area F1 includes WOLA Area F, and stretches south beyond

the A40.

- 12.2 The area is bounded by development in Witney and Cogges to the west, north and east. The flat, broad valley landscape stretches south beyond the A40 which crosses the valley on embankment.
- 12.3 The historic cores of Witney and Cogges lie to west and east in the north of the area, with the Station Lane employment area to the south west, and Cogges housing to the south east.
- 12.4 The area is partly agricultural, with little built development apart from a disused mill, Farm Mill, and a small sewage pumping station. Some of the area is used for informal recreation.

PLANNING STATUS

- 12.5 In the current Local Plan the whole of the area north of the A40 is included within the Windrush in Witney Project area, Policy WIT 3, which states that *development on land within or where it would be visible from the Windrush in Witney Policy Area...should protect and enhance the intrinsic landscape, character, ecology and cultural value of the valley.*
- 12.6 South of the A40, the area is included under Policy NE2, *Policy Area to Prevent Urban Sprawl and to Protect Existing Character.* The whole of the Windrush valley south to the Thames is also included within the Lower Windrush Valley Project area, covering extensive areas of past and present gravel extraction.
- 12.7 A corridor running across the area is safeguarded for the Cogges Link Road (CLR).
- 12.8 The majority of the area is flood plain or land with a high risk of flooding.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 12.9 The topography of the area is flat, with a small amount of river terrace in the south east. Area F1 marks the change between the narrow, deeply incised Upper Windrush valley north west of the town, and the broad Lower Windrush valley to the south.
- 12.10 Part of the south of the area is managed as a country park by Witney Town Council, while Langel Common in the north of the area is an important open space separating Witney and Cogges. It is managed as meadow land, and there are other small pieces of meadow in the area, as well as some arable in the south.
- 12.11 The field pattern is small to medium scale and regular, divided by tree lined ditches, but the sinuous line of the western arm of the river, in particular, provides a contrast to the regular meadow divisions.
- 12.12 Vegetation, in particular willows, lining the two arms of the river and along ditches is an important feature, but there are long open views along the valley, interrupted at the northern end by new housing development on a former mill/employment site and in the south by the A40 on embankment.
- 12.13 In the northern part of the area, the town is fairly well screened by trees and

shrubs between the river and Witan Way, a busy town road. The Windrush Leisure Centre, a large building fairly close to the river, is rather dominant in some views, though recent planting will gradually soften these. Housing to the north and east is not well screened, and is dominant in some views. There are also very attractive views of Cogges church, part of the Scheduled Ancient Monument which covers this long established settlement.

- 12.14 Witney and Cogges are linked by a very heavily used and important foot/cycle path, and the rural character of this area is important for the many users of both this path and the area as a whole.
- 12.15 A public right of way runs south through the area, connecting with the open countryside to the south, part of the long distance Windrush Way.
- 12.16 Further south in Area F1, buildings on the employment site to the west present a hard edge in some views, which detracts from the quiet rural character of the area. The housing to the east in Cogges is partly screened by a strong hedgerow from the main valley floor, but in places, particularly the narrow strip of land east of the hedgerow, the houses present a very hard edge to the valley. There is a view along this strip of land to Cogges church. A play area and balancing ponds in this area bring a suburbanising influence into the valley, and detract from its rural character. Large power lines running south through the area also detract from the tranquil rural character.
- 12.17 The A40 on embankment is fairly well screened visually from the valley, but noise pollution and the uncharacteristic embankment blocking the flow of views detract from the open, quiet character of the valley.
- 12.18 Overall, this area is an important rural landscape running through the heart of the town, connecting the Upper and Lower Windrush valleys, and with good public access. Despite the proximity of the town its character is largely rural and tranquil, but this character is under threat where there are open views to development on either side.

SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 12.19 Table F1 in Appendix A summarises the findings of the WOLA, and updates the assessment.
- 12.20 The updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:
- Floodplain farmland is a valuable landscape resource and is vulnerable to change;
 - Need to safeguard floodplain character;
 - Need to maintain strong landscape edge and improve where necessary;
 - Need to maintain views along valley floor.
- 12.21 In summary, Area F1 is a flat valley floor largely within the flood plain with high intervisibility along the valley, and at a pivotal point between the Upper and Lower Windrush valleys. It is a rural landscape running through the heart of the town, but this rural character is under threat due to the close proximity of the town. The area is of high importance and sensitivity.

13 AREA F2: SOUTH WEST WITNEY: VALLEY FLOOR (See Table F2, Appendix A; Table 11, Appendix B; Views 32-34 and 44, Appendix C)

CONTEXT

- 13.1 Area F2 was not specifically included in the WOLA, as the A40 was taken as the southern boundary of the study. It is included here for completeness, and to cover the area around the A40/A415 junction. It has topographical similarities with Area F1.
- 13.2 Area F2 is bounded to the east by the A40/A415 junction and the Ducklington bypass, and to the north by the A40. To the north west there are small scale valleys, assessed under Area G. The landscape characteristics of Area F2 extend south beyond the boundary of the mapping.
- 13.3 The area is largely agricultural, but with a cluster of development near the A40/A415 junction, including a sewage works, abattoir, petrol station, country shop, and hotel.
- 13.4 The village of Ducklington lies immediately south of the junction, bypassed by the A415.
- 13.5 North of the A40 the area is largely residential (Thorney Leys/Burwell Meadow), with a small business park just west of the A40 junction.

PLANNING STATUS

- 13.6 The whole area, including the development around the junction, is included under Policy NE2, *Policy Area to Prevent Urban Sprawl and to Protect Existing Character*. The Lower Windrush Valley Project area lies immediately to the east.
- 13.7 Part of the area near the junction is flood plain or land with a high risk of flooding.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 13.8 The topography of the area is a largely flat valley floor, with slight undulations. Just to the south of the area is a small ridge, very pronounced in the otherwise flat landscape, topped by woods of ancient origin, which contains views south from this part of the valley.
- 13.9 The area is largely agricultural and arable, with a mainly regular medium to large scale field pattern. There are some strong hedgerows and trees along the small watercourses and ditches, and along the former railway line. A fairly heavily used minor road between Curbridge and Ducklington runs across the area, and there is one public footpath; otherwise the centre of the area is unpopulated and quiet. The minor road is lined with tall hedges, so there are few views across the landscape, and views from the footpath are easily blocked by hedges in this flat landscape.
- 13.10 Although the footprint of development around the sewage works is large, with quite large buildings, there are few views of these from the low lying countryside. The area is separated from the A415 by a field and trees, so there are no views from this direction, and the perception is of a rural landscape to the west of the road. Ducklington lies behind a partly planted mound, with some areas

presenting a hard edge to the A415, but this road in its fairly wide landscape strip forms a strong edge between built development and the open countryside to the west, apart from the area immediately around the A40 junction.

- 13.11 There are several rights of way across the higher ground to the south, but these are generally strongly hedged, with few views out. Where there are views, the large buildings near the A40/A415 junction are clearly visible.
- 13.12 Close to the A40/A415 junction, urban influences are dominant with buildings, lighting and roads. There is effectively little undeveloped gap between Witney and Ducklington.
- 13.13 The A40 is on embankment as it crosses the A415 and then the Windrush valley to the east, so views towards the town are blocked from the A415 area. The A40 and junction embankments are quite heavily planted, so traffic is not dominant in views.
- 13.14 Further west in Area F2, the A40 runs at grade or in slight cutting, so there is the potential of open views to and from the residential areas of Witney. This part of the urban edge is generally well screened from the countryside, and presents a soft edge, though roofs are visible in some views from the south.
- 13.15 While there is the potential for long views from this area, and there are long views across the valley from the higher ground to the north and south, views from within the valley floor are easily blocked by vegetation in the flat landscape.
- 13.16 Overall, this area is part of the open countryside south of the town, with the A40 forming a strong physical boundary. The existing development near the A40/A415 junction is well contained within the landscape, but little gap remains between Witney and Ducklington.

SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 13.17 Area F2 was not specifically assessed in the WOLA, but some characteristics of WOLA Areas B, F and G apply, and are presented and updated in Table F2 in Appendix A.
- 13.18 The updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:
- Unspoilt landscapes particularly vulnerable to change;
 - Need to maintain strong landscape edge and improve where necessary;
 - Need to maintain settings of Witney and Ducklington as separate communities.
- 13.19 In summary, Area F2 is a largely flat valley floor partly within the flood plain, with potential for high intervisibility easily blocked by vegetation in the flat landscape, though with views across the area from higher ground. The area has a strong rural character and connection with the Lower Windrush valley as a whole, any connection with Witney being blocked by the A40. It is of moderate to high importance and sensitivity. In the area near the A40/A415 junction the strong contrast between urban (north of A40, east of A415) and rural (west of A415) is vulnerable to erosion.

14 AREA G: WEST WITNEY: MINOR VALLEYS (See Table G, Appendix A; Table 12, Appendix B; View 35, Appendix C)

CONTEXT

- 14.1 Area G extends the WOLA Area G west to include the minor valley north of Curbridge.
- 14.2 Area G is bounded to the south west by the village of Curbridge, which lies 0.1-0.2 km south of the A40, and approx 0.5km from the current built up area of Witney, and to the south east by the low lying Lower Windrush valley. The built up areas of West Witney and Thorney Leys form the eastern boundary, with Deer Park Road/Thorney Leys Road running along the edge of the housing. The higher ground of the West Witney ridge lies to the west.
- 14.3 The A40 runs through the centre of the area, and the A4095 to Bampton/Faringdon runs north south across the area, crossing over the A40. Downs Road crosses the western corner of the area, also crossing over the A40.
- 14.4 The area is part agricultural, with a small plant nursery and house along the A4095. Balancing ponds and a large structural landscape area lie west of Deer Park road.

PLANNING STATUS

- 14.5 Part of the area north of the A40 (along Deer Park Road and Thorney Leys) is designated as amenity open space/structural landscape in the Local Plan, protected under Policy BE4. This area has a strategic role, forming part of the overall landscape framework for the built-up areas of Witney as confirmed by the Council during finalisation of the Local Plan.
- 14.6 The area south of the A40 is included under Policy NE2, *Policy Area to Prevent Urban Sprawl and to Protect Existing Character*.
- 14.7 Land at the western end of the area is safeguarded for a new junction with the A40.
- 14.8 Land at Coral Springs east of the A4095 is allocated in the Local Plan for *specialist and limited development* under Witney Proposal 10, with the stipulation that any development should be in an *extremely well landscaped setting*, and should *maintain the mainly open character of the land between Curbridge Road and the A40*. The amenity open space/structural landscape designation covers the surrounds of the site, and the small site to the east south of Thorney Leys road.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 14.9 The topography of the area consists of two rolling small scale valleys, that to the east containing the Colwell Brook. The valleys flow east/south east into the low lying Lower Windrush valley, and the area has a strong connection with this lower ground.
- 14.10 Where the land is still used for agriculture, the field sizes are small, and field shapes irregular where the boundaries follow watercourses. The fields are surrounded by tall hedges, and are largely down to grass.

- 14.11 Large willows line Colwell Brook, west of Deer Park road, and are a significant local feature. Between this part of Colwell Brook and Deer Park Road is a large area of open space, mainly rough grass and balancing ponds, which is part of the amenity open space/structural landscape designation. There is a line of poplars along Curbridge Road near the nursery, and these too are a strong local feature.
- 14.12 The Coral Springs site is largely surrounded by strong hedgerows, with a small field between the site and the A40. The small site to the east is rough grass and scrub, surrounded by a security fence but with open views across at the time of writing.
- 14.13 A public footpath crosses the area, formerly linking Witney and Curbridge, but now effectively severed by the A40. North of the A40, a bridleway, formerly a road, runs west across the upper parts of the two valleys, its historic route disrupted as it crosses Downs Road, due to the construction of the A40 and the Downs Road overbridge.
- 14.14 The A40 is a significant physical barrier, but not a visual barrier since it runs into deepening cutting as it runs west through the West Witney ridge.
- 14.15 Where there are gaps in the vegetation, in places east of Deer Park road, and by the site east of Coral Springs, there are long views out across the Lower Windrush valley. Those from the Deer Park road area are from higher ground, and therefore longer; while those from Thorney Leys, on the lower ground, have the outlying ridge in the valley (Moulden's Wood area) on the skyline. There is a contrast between these open views, and the strong sense of enclosure elsewhere in the area due to the topography and/or vegetation.
- 14.16 The village of Curbridge is separated from the A40, and the A4095 overbridge, by small fields, an important gap. The village is set low down in the valley side, with no intervisibility with the town. There is a glimpse of Witney church spire from the A4095 overbridge.
- 14.17 Overall, this small area with its generally strong vegetation and small scale topography forms an important buffer between the west of Witney and the A40, the village of Curbridge, and the wider countryside. It has a strong connection with the valley landscape to the south, and plays an important part in softening views of the urban edge from the wider valley to the south.

SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 14.18 Table G in Appendix A summarises the findings of the WOLA, and updates the assessment. The area covered by this assessment slightly extends WOLA Area G to the west, and south of the A40 to Curbridge.
- 14.19 The updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:
- Need to maintain buffer zone;
 - Valley form distinctive local feature;
 - Need to maintain southern aspect from urban edge;
 - Need to maintain strong landscape edge.
- 14.20 In summary, Area G is an area of small scale valleys with a small scale field

pattern and a strong structure of hedgerows/trees. It has a mix of high intervisibility from some high points, and very low intervisibility elsewhere. The area has high importance and sensitivity as a buffer zone and strong landscape edge to Witney.

15 AREA H: WEST WITNEY RIDGE (See Table H, Appendix A; Table 13, Appendix B; Views 36-43 and 45, Appendix C)

CONTEXT

- 15.1 In this assessment, Area H extends much further west to include the whole area between Witney and Charterville Allotments (Minster Lovell), and further north to include land north of the B4047 which is part of the same ridge. This latter area was included as part of Area A in the WOLA.
- 15.2 This is a large area which extends north from the A40, and across the B4047 to the top of the southern Windrush valley side, land generally above 95m AOD. The ends of the generous Charterville Allotment plots have been taken as the western boundary, with Deer Park Road as the eastern boundary; in practice, the characteristics continue east along the ridge.
- 15.3 The area has been extended from the WOLA assessment to take account of changes which have taken place since that assessment. These are principally:
- Allocation and building on employment land in the north of the area, south of the B4047, and associated structural landscape;
 - Construction of Range Road, between Deer Park Road and Downs Road;
 - Expansion of the golf course west of Downs Road;
 - Inclusion of the North Curbridge Development Area in the Local Plan.
- 15.4 The south, north west, and north (north of the B4047) of the area are in agricultural use, containing two large farm complexes. The Witney Lakes golf course occupies the south western quarter of the area, with the Witney United Football Club (Marriotts Stadium) to the north. The employment land occupies the majority of the north of the area (south of the B4047), between Deer Park road in the east and the Curbridge/Minster Lovell parish boundary in the west.
- 15.5 The deeply incised Upper Windrush valley lies to the north (Areas A, B and C1), with the Wychwood Uplands stretching north from the valley. The small scale valleys of Area G lie to the south east, with the broad low lying Lower Windrush valley stretching away to the south. There are occasional outliers of higher ground within the valley, near Lew, and in the Moulden's Wood area between Curbridge and Ducklington.

PLANNING STATUS

- 15.6 The south west of the area (west of Downs Road), up to the parish boundary, is included under Policy NE2, *Policy Area to Prevent Urban Sprawl and to Protect Existing Character*. The area to the west is outside the mapping of the Witney inset map on which this policy notation is shown.
- 15.7 The southern boundary of the Cotswolds AONB lies approx 0.6km to the north, across the Windrush valley.

- 15.8 As already mentioned, a large swathe of the area is allocated for employment land in the Local Plan, with much of it already built.
- 15.9 The south eastern part of the area is reserved in the Local Plan for a mixed use Development Area (North Curbridge), within a strong proposed landscape setting. This allocation followed, amongst other studies, the work of the Witney Landscape and Ecological Assessments, which concluded that, of the three areas studied, the development of the North Curbridge area would have least landscape and visual impact, provided that it was set within a strong landscape structure.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 15.10 The topography of the area is a plateau, part of the high ridge between the Upper and Lower Windrush valley. The area south of the B4047 slopes gently towards the south east.
- 15.11 The agricultural parts of the area are largely arable, with some pasture. Fields are mostly large and regular, a typical post enclosure landscape. There are few hedgerow trees, except along the Curbridge/Minster Lovell parish boundary, which is a strong feature. The bridleway which runs across the south of the area is enclosed by hedges, but generally the area is open and exposed, with long views north and south from the highest ground, above about 105m AOD. A small wood between the employment land and the North Curbridge allocation is an important landscape feature.
- 15.12 There is a considerable amount of scattered young planting on the golf course, which will in time give some enclosure to this rather exposed area, and reinforce the gap between Witney and Charterville Allotments.
- 15.13 There has been substantial new planting associated with the employment area. Planting east of the area, on the higher ground west of Deer Park road, is starting to be effective in screening views of the highest West Witney housing which was formerly prominent on the skyline, as predicted in the 2004 Position Statement. Unfortunately the employment buildings themselves, as well as newer buildings constructed since the previous assessments, are still extremely prominent in the landscape to the north (including within the AONB), west and south, on the skyline or intermediate skyline in many views. Planting on the scale of that west of Deer Park road, with a high proportion of forest trees, is needed to screen these large buildings.
- 15.14 In the north of Area H, there are long views north across the Windrush valley to the wooded Wychwood Uplands (AONB), with Leafield spire visible on the horizon. This area forms the skyline or intermediate skyline in views from Areas A, B, C1, C2, C3 and D2. It is a highly sensitive area. The land to the south reserved for the North Curbridge Development Area, however, is on lower ground, and development here is highly unlikely to be visible from these areas.
- 15.15 A public footpath runs south from the B4047 down the western side of the area. There are open views east to the employment land, with buildings prominent on the skyline, as well as north and south. This too is a sensitive area, the undeveloped gap between Witney and Minster Lovell. The proposed North Curbridge Development Area, however, is on lower ground to the east, beyond the golf course, and will not affect views from this area.

- 15.16 Looking at views to and from the south, the WLEA and 2004 Position Statement noted (in relation to the North Curbridge proposal) that

the pattern of tree lined ditches and hedges builds up to block views from the low lying areas, though there are long views from the occasional small hills and ridges in the valley,

and that

while there are long views out across the countryside to the south, therefore, many views back to the site from the lower ground are already blocked by vegetation. Where there are views towards the West Witney ridge from higher ground to the south, while the buildings on the employment site are visible and in places dominant in the view, it should be borne in mind that these are higher in the landscape than the proposed housing site, and much larger (both in footprint and height) than the proposed housing.

The housing in West Witney which is most prominent in both near and distant views, and which would be of a comparable scale to the proposed housing (as opposed to the large buildings on the employment sites), is that which is above 105m AOD. The proposed site is below this level, reducing its visual impact. The wide belt of proposed planting along the southern boundary will be effective in screening views of the new housing in both near and distant views.

- 15.17 This assessment has found nothing to change that view.

- 15.18 Overall, this is a large scale open landscape, which at higher levels (above about 105m AOD) has high intervisibility and is extremely sensitive. At the lower levels, however, development could be accommodated, with the provision of a strong landscape structure like that west of Deer Park Road, without a damaging impact on the quality of the landscape, and without significant visual impact.

SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 15.19 Table H in Appendix A summarises the findings of the WOLA, and updates the assessment.

- 15.20 The updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:

- Need to improve landscape quality throughout the area;
- Need to strengthen landscape edge.

- 15.21 In summary, Area H is a high plateau, part of the prominent ridge extending west of Witney, with a generally weak landscape structure and high intervisibility to both north and south from the highest ground. However, views back from the south are easily blocked by vegetation in the flat landscape, and development below the highest ground would have relatively little visual impact. The large scale landscape can accommodate built development on the lower ground within the area within a new strong landscape structure.

16 CONCLUSIONS

- 16.1 Overall, the landscape around Witney is of high sensitivity, a mix of open ridge, open valley side and valley floor.
- 16.2 There is generally high intervisibility between these areas, so development in one would have an impact on the others, as well as direct impact on the area itself.
- 16.3 There is also high intervisibility between the town, particularly higher ground in the west, north and east, and the wider countryside, including the Cotswolds AONB to the north.
- 16.4 These landscape and visual constraints mean that there are few areas which could accommodate large scale development without substantial adverse landscape and/or visual impact.
- 16.5 This study has found, however, that there are a few areas where development could be accommodated without significant landscape and visual impact, where the existing landscape structure is weak, and the existing urban edge could be improved. These are:
- Area C4;
 - The lower part of Area H, reserved in the Local Plan for future development.
- 16.6 Other small sites within other areas may be capable of absorbing development, but would need further detailed study on a site by site basis.