

## 2.1 Introduction

This section commences with a review of the national level of landscape character assessment, and summarises the Character of England and National Landscape Typology which underpins all Landscape Character Assessments across the country. It then summarises the most recent landscape character assessments that have been undertaken within the Cotswold Water Park area.

The review has provided a basis for comparison and cross reference of the range of existing character type and area classifications, their boundaries and names, and the scale of the assessments. For clarification, these have been summarised in *Table 1*.

The intention has been to integrate with these adjacent assessments, and share contiguous boundaries and names where these are appropriate to the Cotswold Water Park. As the foregoing review reveals, however, a range of terminology and boundary delineations has been adopted by the various authorities that extend across the Cotswold Water Park. As a result, it has not always been possible to achieve full correlation between all the assessment findings.

## 2.2 National Level Assessment and Context

### 2.2.1 The Character of England

The former Countryside Commission, in conjunction with English Nature and English Heritage, produced a map of England entitled *'The Character of England: landscape, wildlife and natural features'*. The character of the landscape is depicted at a national scale. Computer based statistical analysis was combined with landscape character assessment to identify 159 character areas based on physical and human influences. In addition to this, a series of countryside character descriptions were developed for each of the character areas.

The following Countryside Character Areas (CCAs) extend across the Cotswold Water Park, and are described in Countryside Character Volumes 7 and 8<sup>2</sup>.

- 107, The Cotswolds;
- 108, Upper Thames Clay Vales; and
- 109, Midvale Ridge

### 2.2.2 National Landscape Typology for England<sup>3</sup>

The former Countryside Agency has prepared a national landscape typology for England, which divides the 159 CCAs into distinct and relatively homogenous tracts of land. The National Landscape

Typology for England study analysed the three strongest determinants of landscape character (physiography, land cover and cultural pattern) through national GIS data sets in a series of complex overlays. The resultant output is a map of 120 generic Landscape Character Types (LCTs) which exist within the framework of the CCAs. Each LCT is allocated a three-letter code, which are representative of descriptions of physiography, land use and cultural pattern.

Based on this initial classification of landscape types, the LCT and CCA maps were combined as part of the national study, to identify geographically distinct Landscape Character Type Areas (LCT Areas). Through this process 587 LCT Areas were identified across the country. Full details of the national typology project, and the methods of assessment used, are contained within two reports<sup>4</sup> prepared by consultants on behalf of the former Countryside Agency. These describe and map the national LCT Areas in detail.

## 2.3 County Assessments within the Cotswold Water Park Study Area

Landscape Character Assessments have been completed by all of the County Councils that extend across the Cotswold Water Park study area. These are briefly described below, together with their completion date, and hierarchy of typology. Table 1A provides a comparative review of the landscape character types and areas that each of these studies identified. For brevity, the schedule of the types and areas listed in the Table are confined to those that occur either within the study area, or lie in close proximity.

### 2.3.1 Gloucestershire

In February 2002 the Countryside Agency, in partnership with Gloucestershire County Council and the Forest of Dean District Council, commissioned Landscape Design Associates (now LDA Design) to undertake a desk based Landscape Character Assessment for Gloucestershire. A principal requirement of the assessment was to use GIS to develop a digital landscape typology for the county, with reference to the former Countryside Agency's Character Map of England, the National Landscape Typology for England, and the Agency's *'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland'*. The national typology was used as a starting point and basis for testing and refining the typology for Gloucestershire. Subsequent to the completion of the draft county typology, the findings of the desk study were used to inform and undertake full LCAs for the Forest of Dean District in 2002, and also the Cotswolds AONB in 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Countryside Character: Volume 7: South-East and London; and Volume 8: South-West; Countryside Agency, 1999

<sup>3</sup> National Countryside Character Decision Support Database, Technical Report, Countryside Agency, 2002

<sup>4</sup> National Countryside Character Decision Support Data Base, Data Report, and Map Report – South-West Volume, Countryside Agency, 2001

In 2004 LDA Design was commissioned to complete the Landscape Character Assessment for Gloucestershire covering those areas that lay outside of the Forest of Dean District and Cotswolds AONB, and which had not therefore been subject to a field based verification and full Landscape Character Assessment process. This included the southern section of the county within the Upper Thames Valley and which also encompasses the northern section of the Cotswold Water Park.

The Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment was completed in January 2006. Three Landscape Types were identified in the Upper Thames section of the study. These comprised the River Basin Lowland, the Cornbrash Lowlands, and the Dip Slope Lowland. A number of Landscape Character Areas were classified within each of these Landscape Types.

The Dip Slope Lowland that extends from Kemble eastwards to the Coln Valley was subdivided into the Kemble Dip Slope and The Ampneys Character Areas. South of the Dip Slope Lowland, the east west aligned Cornbrash Lowlands were subdivided into the Pool Keynes and Ewen Lowlands to the west; the Driffield Lowlands in the central zone; and the Southrop Lowlands on the eastern side of the county. Finally, the broad swathe of River Basin Lowland along the southern perimeter of the county was also divided into three Character Areas. This division was influenced by the very convoluted nature of the county boundary which separates the land into three separate areas. However, the divisions also correlate with three distinctively separate sections of the Cotswold Water Park. These Character Areas were classified as Somerford Keynes to the west, Down Ampney in the central section, and Fairford and Lechlade in the east.

### 2.3.2 Wiltshire<sup>5</sup>

The Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment was undertaken by Land Use Consultants for Wiltshire County Council and completed in 2005. The study identified 16 Landscape Types, four of which are located within the study area. The majority of the Wiltshire section of the study area comprises the Open Clay Vale Landscape Type, and extends across the Thames Valley bottom. Other Landscape Types occupy much smaller areas and comprise a very small section of the Limestone Ridge Landscape Type that extends across Lus Hill; the north-eastern section of the Rolling Clay Lowland Landscape Type to the south of the Thames Clay Vale from the south-west of Cricklade and to the western side of the former Cricklade Airfield; and a very small section of the Limestone Lowland Landscape Type to the south-west of Somerford Lakes.

These Landscape Types are all represented by Landscape Character Areas in the Cotswold Water Park. Within the Open Clay Vale there is no division and the entire area is termed as the Thames Open Clay Vale Character Area. The Limestone Ridge is classified as the Swindon – Lyneham Limestone Ridge Character Area. The Rolling Clay Lowland is classified Minety Rolling Clay Lowland Character Area. Finally, the Limestone Lowland is termed the Malmesbury - Corsham Limestone Lowlands Character Area.

### 2.3.3 Oxfordshire<sup>6</sup>

The Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) three year demonstration project was completed in 2004. Its principal aim has been to explore the relationship between landscape character and biodiversity and to produce a strategic framework for decision making. The landscape assessment was based on the National Typology of Landscape Description Units (LDUs) derived from the national datasets. The Regional Character Areas defined within Oxfordshire were subdivided into LDUs derived from GIS mapping. The field survey and characterisation process then identified Landscape Types and Local Landscape Character Areas.

Seven Landscape Types are located within the land on the western perimeter of Oxfordshire that lies within the Cotswold Water Park study area and the Upper Thames Valley. The most extensive Types comprise Lowland Village Farmland, Vale Farmland, Terrace Farmland and River Meadowlands. This latter type comprises the low lying land along the margins to the River Thames and River Leach.

## 2.4 District and Borough Assessments within the Cotswold Water Park Study Area

Landscape Character Assessments have been undertaken by all of the District and Borough Councils whose administrative area extends across the study area. The Assessments are briefly described below, together with their completion date, and hierarchy of typology. Table 1B provides a comparative review of the landscape character types and areas that each of these studies identified. As with the review of the county studies, and for brevity, the schedule of the types and areas listed in the Table are confined to those that occur either within the Cotswold Water Park study area, or lie in close proximity.

### 2.4.1 Cotswold District Council<sup>7</sup>

In 2000 Cotswold District Council commissioned WHITE Consultants to undertake an assessment of the landscape character of those parts of the District that lie outside of the Cotswolds AONB. The study informed the review of the District-wide Local Plan,

5 Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment, Land Use Consultants for Wiltshire County Council, 2005

6 Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study, Oxfordshire County Council, 2004

7 Assessment of Landscapes outside of the Cotswolds AONB, WHITE consultants for Cotswold District Council, June 2000

and adopted the guidance in the Countryside Agency's Interim Landscape Assessment Guidance, 1999. The study included the area that extends into the northern section of the Cotswold Water Park and was named as the Cirencester/ Upper Thames Valley area. The landscape types that were identified within or in close proximity to the study areas comprised: Cotswold Lower Dipslope; Lower Dipslope Valleys; Dipslope/Thames Valley Transition; and Thames Valley. Geographically specific landscape character areas were classified within these landscape types.

#### 2.4.2 North Wiltshire District<sup>8</sup>

A Landscape Character Assessment was undertaken in 2004 by WHITE Consultants for North Wiltshire District. The study identifies a range of Landscape Types. Those extending across the Cotswold Water Park study area comprise Alluvium River Terrace Farmland; Lowland Clay Farmland; and Lowland Limestone (Forest Marble) Farmland.

Within the CWP, the two separate areas of Alluvium Terrace Farmland are classified as the Thames Valley Floor Landscape Character Area. To the south, the Lowland Clay Farmland is known as the Thames Valley Lowland. Finally, the Lowland Limestone (Forest Marble) Farmland is termed the Shilston Dipslope Lowland.

#### 2.4.3 Swindon Borough<sup>9</sup>

Swindon Borough undertook a Landscape Character Assessment in 2001 to inform the Swindon Borough Local Plan. The findings are summarised in a Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) document that was Adopted in December 2004 and forms part of the Revised Deposit Draft to the Local Plan. The Assessment identified eight Landscape Character Areas across the Borough. Two of these Character Areas extend into the south-eastern section of the Cotswold Water Park, comprising the Thames Vale and the Mid Vale Ridge. Following a description of the Key Characteristics of each of the Character Areas, the SPG also sets out Landscape Guidelines, including Development Considerations.

#### 2.4.4 West Oxfordshire District<sup>10</sup>

West Oxfordshire District Council commissioned Atlantic Consultants in 1997 to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment of the district. The main aims of the Assessment were to increase understanding of the landscape resources of the district, assist with policy formulation and development control, and target resources for

enhancement and management. The study drew from the former Countryside Commission guidance document CCP423, and was completed in 1998.

Located within the Regional Character Area of the Upper Thames Clay Vales, only a very small section of West Oxfordshire District lies within the Cotswold Water Park study area, at the extreme eastern limit. The assessment identified two Landscape Character Areas, comprising the Western Thames Fringes and Bampton Vale Character Areas, and within these broader Character Area a number of local Landscape Types. In the case of the Western Thames Fringes, these comprise floodplain wetlands adjacent to the River Leach, and further east, floodplain pasture, and semi-enclosed flat vale farmland. Only a very limited section of the Bampton Vale extends into the Cotswold Water Park study area, to the north of Little Faringdon. Here, the landscape type is confined to semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland where a low but locally distinctive and partly wooded hillock is evident.

#### 2.4.5 Vale of White Horse District<sup>11</sup>

A Landscape Strategy undertaken by The Vale of White Horse District identified four Landscape Zones in the district. One Landscape Zone and one of its component sub types borders and extends into the south-eastern extremity of the Cotswold Water Park study area, in the vicinity of the hamlet of Buscot Wick and extending to the River Coln. This Zone 1 is described as the Thames Valley and Corallian Ridge (comprising the Golden Ridge and Oxford Heights sub type). Following the adoption of the Landscape Strategy as Supplementary Planning Guidance in 1999, the District Council subsequently published its Local Plan 2011 in July 2006. In this more recent document, the findings of the Landscape Character Assessment are presented in a simplified form and Zone 1 is now classified as The North Vale Corallian Ridge.

### 2.5 Summary and Conclusion

The preceding review of the current Landscape Character Assessments within and on the perimeter of the Cotswold Water Park study area demonstrates that there is a wide range of classifications, terminology and scales of assessment. *Tables 1A* and *1B* bring these findings together and further demonstrate the numerous character type and area terms that have been defined either adjacent to each other, or overlaying at different scales from county down to district and borough studies. Thus, the principle of

8 North Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment, WHITE consultants for Cotswold District Council, June 2004

9 Landscape Character Areas Supplementary Planning Guidance, Swindon Borough Local Plan 2001, Revised Deposit Draft, December 2004

10 West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment, Atlantic Consultants for West Oxfordshire District Council, 1998

11 Vale of White Horse Adopted Local Plan November 1999 – Supplementary Planning Guidance, Landscape Strategy, Vale of White Horse District Council, 2000, and Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 – July 2006.

'nesting' of assessments, with common boundaries retained at each scale of assessment but further sub-divided at the more detailed level, has not always been achieved. Nevertheless, as each of these studies pertains to a specific administrative area, they can function independently and without conflict occurring through any discrepancies or boundary anomalies that may be present.

Despite these differences in terms and detail boundaries, there is nevertheless a broad correlation between the assessments, particularly in the delineation of the Open Clay Vale of the Upper Thames river basin, the Limestone Lowlands that merge into the Cotswolds Dip Slope, and the Rolling Clay Vale / Lowland Clay Farmland to the south of the Thames Valle. The boundary of the Limestone Hills formed by the Corallian Limestone Ridge is also generally compatible between the county and district authorities' assessments.

This Cotswold Water Park Landscape Character Assessment has examined these various classifications and brought them together to seek a common thread that functions across the range of administrative boundaries and authorities that form part of the Water Park. However, the study has also provided an opportunity to determine a Landscape Character Assessment that is Cotswold Water Park focused and recognise the particular characteristics of this distinctive and dynamic landscape. The Landscape Character Types and Areas that have been identified are introduced and described in more detail in Section 4.

Table 1: Review of current Landscape Character Assessments within and contiguous with the Cotswold Water Park

## 1A: County Council and Cotswolds AONB Landscape Character Assessments

County	Gloucestershire County Council LCA, 2006	Wiltshire County Council LCA, 2005	Oxfordshire County Council Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS), 2004
<b>Summary of Assessment Hierarchy</b>	<b>County Landscape Character Types and Areas</b>	<b>County Landscape Character Types and Areas</b>	<b>Regional Character Areas (RCAs)</b> Landscape Description Units Landscape Types and Local Landscaper Character areas
<b>Landscape Character Types and comparison of LCA terminology</b>	<p>Landscape Character Types and Areas within and on the northern boundary of the CWP</p> <p>Landscape Type: River Basin Lowland</p> <p>Landscape Character Areas: Somerset Keynes Down Ampney Fairford and Lechlade</p> <p>Landscape Type: Combrash Lowlands</p> <p>Landscape Character Areas: Pool Keynes and Ewen Lowlands Driffield Lowlands Southrop Lowlands</p> <p>Landscape Type: Dip Slope Lowland</p> <p>Landscape Character Areas: Lower Churn Valley Lower Coln Valley</p>	<p>Landscape Character Types and Areas within and on the southern boundary of the CWP</p> <p>Landscape Types Open Clay Vale</p> <p>Landscape Character Area: Thames Open Clay Vale</p> <p>Landscape Type: Limestone Ridge</p> <p>Landscape Character Area: Swindon-Lyneham Limestone Ridge</p> <p>Landscape Type: Rolling Clay Lowland</p> <p>Landscape Character Area: Minety Rolling Clay Lowland</p> <p>Landscape Type: Limestone Lowland</p> <p>Landscape Character Area: Malmesbury- Corsham Limestone Lowlands</p>	<p>RCAs on the eastern perimeter of CWP</p> <p>Cotswolds Upper Thames Vale</p> <p>Landscape Types on the eastern perimeter of CWP and Local Landscape Character Areas</p> <p>Landscape Type: River Meadowland Landscape Character Area: Thames Open Clay Vale</p> <p>Landscape Type: Vale Farmland Landscape Character Area: Langford Brook</p> <p>Landscape Type: Lowland Village Farmland Landscape Character Area: Langford</p> <p>Landscape Type: Terrace Farmland Landscape Character Area: Buscot to Kelmscott</p> <p>Landscape Type: Estate Farmlands Landscape Character Area: Carterton</p> <p>Landscape Type: Wooded Estatelands Landscape Character Area: Buscot Park</p> <p>Landscape Type: Farmland Hills Landscape Character Area: Little Farringdon Hill</p>

## 1B: District and Borough Council Landscape Character Assessments

Authority	Cotswold District Council	North Wiltshire District Council	Swindon Borough Council	West Oxfordshire District Council	Vale of White Horse District Council
<b>Name, Status and Date of LCA</b>	Assessment of Landscapes outside of the Cotswold AONB, 2000; WHITE consultants for CDC Approved as SPG	North Wiltshire LCA, 2005 WHITE consultants for NWDC	Swindon Borough LCA, Adopted as SPG, Swindon Borough Local Plan, 2001 and Revised Deposit Draft, December 2004	West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment, 1998; Atlantic Consultants for WODC	Landscape Strategy SPG, Vale of White Horse Adopted Local Plan, 1999 and Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011, Revised Deposit Draft, June 2006
<b>Principal Names and Typology</b>	Landscape Character Types: Cotswold Lower Dipslope Landscape Character Areas: Kemble Dipslope; Cirencester North Fringe Dipslope; Ampney to Southrop Dipslope  Landscape Character Types: Lower Dipslope Valleys Landscape Character Areas: Churn Valley Coln Valley  Landscape Character Types: Dipslope / Thames Valley Transition Landscape Character Areas: Ewen Cirencester Southern Fringe Lower Churn Valley Driffield & Meyseley Hampton  Landscape Character Types: Thames Valley Landscape Character Areas: Cotswold Water Park – Western Section; Down Ampney; Fairford Airfield and Cotswold Water Park East; Kempford and Lechlade; Lechlade Water Park;	Landscape Character Type: Lowland Limestone (Forest Marble) Farmland Landscape Character Area: Sherston Dipslope Lowland  Landscape Character Type Alluvium River Terrace Farmland; Landscape Character Areas: Thames Valley Floor  Landscape Character Type: Lowland Clay Farmland; Landscape Character Areas: Thames Valley Lowland	Landscape Character Areas: Thames Vale Mid Vale Ridge	Landscape Character Areas adjacent to the CWP; Each of the LCAs is subdivided into local landscape types as detailed below.  Landscape Character Area: Bampton Vale Landscape Type: Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland  Landscape Character Area: Western Thames Fringes Landscape Types: Floodplain pasture; Floodplain wetlands; Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland;	Landscape Zones: Zone1: The North Vale Corallian Ridge