



CHARACTER AREAS

- 2A** Poole Keynes and Ewen Lowlands
- 2B** Driffield Lowlands
- 2C** Southrop Lowlands

5.2.1 Key Characteristics

- Very gently sloping landform with subtle undulations linked to small scale tributary valleys that cross the area;
- Network of tributary streams draining from the Dip-Slope Limestone Lowland towards the River Thames, their course often marked by scattered lines and groups of trees;
- Predominance of large scale arable fields bounded by a network of hedgerows of varying quality and occasional stone walls;
- Vertical elements such as hedgerow trees gain visual prominence;
- Fertile soils derived from the Cornbrash Formation bedrock;
- Dispersed settlement pattern of mainly linear or nucleated villages, hamlets and farmsteads;
- Occasional mainly geometric woodland copses, comprising broadleaf and coniferous plantations;
- Single principal road bounds or crosses the area together with a limited number of local, and generally straight rural roads; and
- Occasional wide views over productive farmland, limited only by farm copses and woodlands.

5.2.2 Cornbrash Limestone Lowlands within the Cotswold Water Park Study Area

The Cornbrash Lowlands extend along the northern perimeter of the Cotswold Water Park study area, and extend across an area 2-3 km in width. The upper reaches of the River Thames and the broad valley of the River Churn dissects the Cornbrash Lowlands between Cirencester and South Cerney to form a series of separate areas.



5.2.3 Landscape Character

The area is underlain by the Middle Jurassic Cornbrash Formation and forms a transition between the Dip-Slope Limestone Lowland landscapes to the north, and the generally flatter River Basin Clay Vale of the Thames to the south. The area is characterised by a subdued topography, with gentle undulations where the Thames tributaries and their smaller interconnecting tributary valleys extend across the area. The rich and fertile soils derived from the underlying Cornbrash Formation support a land use focused on arable cultivation, together with more limited pastoral areas, principally utilising wetter areas of land bordering watercourses. The area has a predominantly quiet rural character associated with the cultivated arable fields, and a dispersed pattern of small villages, hamlets and farms. Occasional woodlands, mainly geometric in form, and comprising both broadleaved, and mixed coniferous and broadleaf plantations, are present within the area. These provide local enclosure and landmarks within an otherwise undistinguished agricultural landscape. A single major road, comprising the A417, crosses or borders the Cornbrash Limestone Lowlands, together with a network of local roads.

5.2.4 Physical Influences

The Cornbrash Limestone Lowlands form a transition between the gently rising Dip-Slope Limestone Lowland to the north and the extensive generally flatter and lower lying Thames River Basin Clay Vale to the south. The landscape shelves gently from north-west to south-east, dropping an average of 20m over a distance of approximately 2 km (1.2 mile). The general topographical form is therefore subdued, with the area often perceived as being flat or only very gently undulating, with local undulations occurring where small tributary valleys have dissected the area. The course of rivers and local streams are often difficult to trace in the wider landscape except at crossing points or where their course is marked by riverside trees and linear belts of woodland.

The underlying Cornbrash Formation is the youngest rock within the Great Oolite Group, and consists of a coarse, crumbly shelly limestone that outcrops on the perimeter of the youngest Jurassic Formations, comprising the Kellaways Beds and Oxford Clay. The limestone is overlain by brown marl that produces a particularly fertile and friable soil well suited for arable farming. The name of the rock relates specifically to its suitability for arable farming and was coined in the 18th century. Although of very limited value for building, the Cornbrash has been quarried for aggregate, for example at the Shorcote and Dryleaze Farm Quarry west of South Cerney, where it underlies river terrace deposits.

Arable fields predominate and are often located in large or medium sized fields enclosed by a network of generally well-maintained hedgerows and occasional stone walls. Some of the larger fields may have been created by a process of field amalgamation and hedgerow removal. Improved pastures are generally located along the course of the main watercourse, notably the Ampney Brook which flows across the Cornbrash Limestone Lowlands.

The woodland cover within the Cornbrash Limestone Lowlands is very limited, confined to occasional rectilinear woodlands forming shelterbelts and coverts within the wider agricultural landscape. These comprise a mix of coniferous plantations and broadleaved woodlands.

In this managed agricultural landscape, there are few areas of nature conservation interest, although small remnant areas of unimproved mesotrophic and calcareous grasslands survive.

5.2.5 Human Influences

In common with the Dip-Slope Limestone Lowland to the north, it is likely that this landscape has been occupied since the Neolithic period. However, the time layers of occupation and successive patterns of land use and land management have largely been removed or integrated into the field patterns created by the enclosure of the land that occurred in the 18th and 19th centuries. This has had the most significant effect on landscape character, with the resultant strong pattern of medium to large regular fields that extends across

the area. Many of the area's farmhouses and barns date to this period. There is some evidence of previous periods of occupation. The course of the Roman Road, Ermin Way is a significant historic landscape feature which crosses the Cornbrash Lowlands. Other traces of occupation exist, most notably the earthwork at Ranbury Ring to the west of Poulton, and the Anglo Saxon Burial Ground west of Fairford. A section of Salt Way also crosses the eastern part of the Cornbrash Limestone Lowlands.

5.2.6 Buildings and Settlements

Settlement within the Cornbrash Limestone Lowlands is sparse and mainly confined to compact hamlets and occasional dispersed villages, with the small linear villages of Poulton and Driffield, and Pool Keynes located in the west of the area. A pattern of dispersed farmsteads serve the predominantly agricultural land, together with a number of individual buildings. The South Cerney Airfield and military airbase is also located within the landscape type, to the west of Driffield.

The area is crossed by a number of generally straight rural roads that link the rural settlements. East of Cirencester, the A417 is the only major road that passes through the Cornbrash Limestone Lowlands, following an approximately east-west route. Despite the local impact of these roads, the area retains a quiet, rural character focused on agriculture.

5.2.7 Landscape Character Areas

2A Poole Keynes and Ewen Lowlands

The Poole Keynes and Ewen Lowlands comprise a medium to large scale landscape with a very gently undulating landform that can give the impression of being flat. There is a subtle rise in the landform, however, with levels rising from around 90m AOD in the extreme south-east up to 115m AOD in the north-west of the area. There is a general sense of openness and expansiveness with long distance views to the south, and glimpsed views of the Dip Slope Limestone Lowlands to the north. Vertical features also gain visual prominence in the open landscape and the eye is often drawn to a number of high voltage pylons that cross the Poole Keynes and Ewen Lowlands. The underlying Cornbrash Formation has given rise to the stony brown soil that is visible on the periphery of arable fields and in the stone walls that are sometimes found aligning local roads and tracks.



The hydrological features within the area are quite limited and consist of small number of ponds scattered throughout the landscape and ditches aligning field boundaries.

In the eastern section of the Character Area, arable cultivation is the predominant land use with large scale regular fields, whilst in the western section there is a wider variety of land uses including scrubby pasture, semi-improved sheep pasture, tree plantations as well as arable cultivation, all in fields of varying sizes from small to large. This mosaic of contrasting land uses combines to create a colourful textural landscape in the western portion of the Character Area. Low to medium, well managed and regularly trimmed hedgerows form the common field boundary in the agricultural landscape, punctuated by occasional isolated mature hedgerow oak trees. The hedgerow network is becoming gappy in places throughout the area with hedgerows commonly reinforced with post and wire, particularly in the western part. There is also evidence of field amalgamation and some arable fields are unfenced adjacent to farm tracks in the eastern section.



There are scattered and predominantly deciduous woodland copses throughout the area. These copses combine with intermittent mature hedge trees to create a well wooded horizon in many areas. There is also evidence of new tree planting along minor roads and tracks leading to farms.

A network of minor roads provides access across the area. The character of these roads varies considerably. For example, there is a distinctive sunken lane to the south of Kemblewick with low, well maintained and regularly trimmed hedgerows on either side of the road on the elevated banks; in contrast, the road between Ewen and Poole Keynes is at grade and delineated on either side by road side verges and medium height hedgerows. In the eastern part of the Character Area the road network is broadly aligned north-south, east-west with those running north-south tending to be busier whilst those extending east-west are often quieter and more rural in character. There are also a limited number of rights of way giving pedestrian access to the wider landscape. The western section of the Character Area is also crossed by the main line railway, but as it is largely in cutting it does not form a notable feature in the landscape.

The linear and dispersed settlement of Ewen straddles the eastern and western sections of the Character Area. Part of Ewen is designated as a Conservation Area. Old stone properties constructed in the local vernacular in golden/grey limestone predominate together with occasional thatched dwellings in the centre of the village; there is also some modern infill development. Areas of parkland landscape and associated tree avenues on the outskirts of the settlement are a notable local feature.

The settlement of Poole Keynes in the south of the western section of the Character Area also has a traditional character with numerous old stone built properties with stone boundary walls, as well as a few thatched cottages clustered around the village church. Notable features in the village include the stone built square tower of the church, the village cross (a Scheduled Ancient Monument) and Poole Keynes House, which is surrounded by parkland fencing.



Beyond the settlements of Ewen and Poole Keynes, settlement is generally very limited in the wider landscape and generally consists of scattered farms, associated outbuildings and isolated dwellings, usually constructed from stone, and either lying adjacent to local roads or set back on tracks. There are also some newly converted residential barn dwellings at Westend Farm in the western section of the area.

2B Driffield Lowlands

The Driffield Lowlands comprise a very gently undulating and open, expansive landscape. Although extensive areas are perceived as flat, there are occasional localised undulations, for example the small hillock that rises to the north of the Old Downs and The Folly



woodlands on the southern edge of the Character Area. The flat and expansive nature of the landscape allows distant views to the north towards the Dip Slope Limestone Lowlands, and also to the Thames River Basin Lowland to the south, although interrupted in places by localised elevated areas of land, and by intermittent woodland blocks.

The underlying Cornbrash Formation is evident in the landscape through the presence of the stony soils that are commonly found along the margins of agricultural fields and through a number of tumbled-down stone walls found fragmented amongst the hedgerow network. A number of watercourses drain the area and ditches are often found either aligning field boundaries or extending along local roads. The Ampney Brook is the most prominent of these watercourses, flowing broadly north to south through the Driffield Lowlands. The riparian vegetation and scrubby pastures that extend along its course are readily visible in the landscape.



The predominant land uses of the Character Area comprise an extensive network of large to medium scale arable fields with smaller pasture fields commonly aligning watercourses or located adjacent to settlements. The arable fields are generally regular in shape with a variety of crops in cultivation, creating a colourful and textured landscape. Where pasture occurs adjacent to settlement, fields are often used for horse grazing and sub-divided with white tape fencing. Low, well maintained and regularly trimmed hedgerows predominate as the main boundary treatment between fields with medium height hedgerows generally aligning roads. In places, however, hedgerows are quite overgrown, and where they are maintained at a low height, they have often become gappy and reinforced with post and wire. The low height of the hedgerows between fields allows extensive views across the Driffield Lowlands and scattered mature hedgerow trees punctuating the landscape gain visual prominence in the perceived flat landscape.

Several woodland copses are scattered throughout the area so that views towards the horizon line are often dominated by distant woodland. The copses vary in composition and include deciduous, coniferous and mixed species stands of trees. The woodland blocks of The Folly and Old Downs are particularly notable due to their prominent location on a localised hillock rising to 101m AOD in the

south of the area. The Folly comprises a fragment of ancient semi-natural broadleaved woodland. Overgrown field boundaries increase the tree cover and sense of a wooded cover in some areas.

The principal roads within the Character Area comprise the A417 which forms its northern boundary, and the A419(T) which cuts across the western part. The noise generated by the traffic using these roads, and the visual impact of the lighting infrastructure, together have an intrusive effect within an otherwise rural landscape. Elsewhere, a network of minor roads extends across the landscape, several of which terminate at farms in dead-ends.



Notable heritage features in the area include the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Ranbury Ring, which is located to the west of Poulton and surrounded on its western side by a distinctive belt of woodland, and the Ermin Way, a former Roman Road which follows the route of the A419 through the western section of the Character Area. Other features of heritage interest include Conservation Areas that have been designated within the settlements of Harnhill, Driffield and Poulton. Driffield is a small linear settlement comprising a mixture of older and new stone properties that extend outwards from a central village core which includes a village pond and a stone church with a low tower. Poulton is another linear settlement with a number of older stone properties interspersed with occasional clusters of modern stone infill and some new red brick and rendered development on the settlement edge. Amenities in the village include a post office, public house and a general store and there is evidence of market gardening associated with the village with poly-tunnels and glass houses located at the edge of the settlement. The settlement of Harnhill comprises a small cluster of traditional stone-built dwellings with a ditch and a series of old stone walls threading through the village. There is also evidence of ridge and furrow in the fields to the north of this settlement. Overall, however, the influence of settlement is very limited with only distant views to settlement edges visible from the wider landscape and views towards occasional isolated farms and dwellings, largely constructed from stone, punctuating the landscape.

Other notable features in the landscape of the Driffield Lowlands include the South Cerney Army Station and airfield located in the western section of the character area. The group of large

rectangular air hangars are prominent features in the landscape, particularly in the context of their location adjacent to the open expanse of the airfield. The housing within the army station is typical of the architectural style used in military premises.



Recreational opportunities within the area include an 18 hole golf course and driving range to the south of Northmoor Lane adjacent to Butts Farm. Some tree groups have recently been established within the golf course. Butts Farm to the north-east of the golf course is the location of a Rare Breeds Animal Farm. Other recreational opportunities in the area include a number of rights of way that cross the landscape.

2C Southrop Lowlands

The Southrop Lowlands is characterised by a generally flat topography interspersed by occasional minor undulations. A sense of expansiveness prevails due to the prevalence of panoramic distant views towards elevated land on the southern side of the Upper Thames River Basin Clay Vale.



The hydrological features within the area are generally limited to a few minor streams and brooks that follow the flatter land between undulations. The River Coln flows from north to south through the central section of the Character Area, passing through the grounds of Fairford Park. The flow of the river is regulated by a set of weirs in the north of the park and this has created an extensive linear water body known as Broad Water as a central focal feature of the park. Fairford Park comprises the former parkland landscape that was created for a mansion built in the 17th century. The mansion was demolished in the 1950s and Farmoor School now stands on the former site.

Arable cultivation is the dominant land use in the Character Area with fields generally large to medium in size and regular in shape. Low hedgerows of varying condition form the common field boundary to the west of Fairford. Some of these hedgerows are well-maintained, whilst others are gappy in places and there are occasional isolated mature hedgerow trees, some of which are becoming stag-headed. The low well maintained and regularly trimmed hedgerows combine with the regularly shaped fields to visually unify the landscape and this produces a strong overall landscape pattern. To the east of Fairford, low stone walls are the predominant field boundary treatment, interspersed with tracts of overgrown hedgerows. Some of these stone walls are becoming fragmented in places.



There are a number of small, generally geometric shaped copses scattered throughout the Character Area. These vary in composition and include stands of mixed species and copses of coniferous species. The woodland cover in the area includes the southern portion of the ancient semi-natural woodland of The Grove located to the north of Broad Water in Fairford Park. Views towards Lea Wood can be seen readily from the northern section of the area, although this distinctive oval shaped and visually prominent woodland block is within the adjacent landscape character type of Dip Slope Limestone Lowland. The isolated hedgerow trees aligning the hedgerow network also form distinct punctuations as they gain visual prominence in the flat open landscape. Also notable are recently planted avenues of trees along some minor roads in the area.

Heritage features of interest in the Southrop Lowlands includes an Anglo-Saxon Burial Ground located to the north-east of Fairford, the ancient road of the Salt Way, which follows the route of a minor road passing through the east of the Character Area, a Tumulus at Farhill Farm to the east of Fairford Park, and an obelisk situated in the northern part of Fairford Park. There is a disused airfield to the west of Southrop, which is of military historical interest through its links with the network of World War II airfields that were established in the wider area.

The A417 follows the southern boundary of the western section of the Character Area. Elsewhere, there is a network of minor roads that form a grid across the landscape, several of which radiate out from Fairford and connect to settlements in the wider area.

5.2

The Character Types and Areas of the Cotswold Water Park CORNBRAsh LIMESTONE LOWLANDS

Settlement is generally very sparse with the influence of settlement on the character of the area generally limited to distant views towards isolated farms and dwellings and views towards new development on the perimeter of Fairford. Temporary settlement in the area includes the Greenacres Park residential caravan park situated on the south western boundary of the area.



Recreational opportunities in the area include a limited number of rights of way extending through the landscape and a Leisure Centre associated with Farmoor School which now occupies the site of the former mansion at Fairford Park.