



CHARACTER AREAS

- 3A** South Cerney and Ashton Keynes Settled Wetland
- 3B** Down Ampney and Meysey Clay Vale Lowland
- 3C** Fairford and Lechlade Settled Wetlands
- 3D** Swill and Derry Brooks Clay Vale Farmland
- 3E** Castle Eaton and Inglesham Clay Vale Farmland

5.3.1 Key Characteristics

- Low lying, flat to very gently undulating floodplain landscape underlain by extensive deposits of alluvial clay and silt, and sand and gravel that mask the solid geology;
- Isolated hillocks associated with exposures of the Oxford Clay form locally significant features;
- Strong presence of water reflected in rivers, streams, ditches and extensive network of restored sand and gravel extraction sites;
- Lush wet meadows and wide floodplain pastures, with watercourses often lined with riparian vegetation, including frequent lines of pollarded willows;
- Mosaic of wetland and riparian habitats, together with water based recreational uses associated with lakes created through the restoration of gravel extraction sites;
- Combination of pastoral land, often in smaller scale fields and closely associated with watercourses and larger scale fields under arable cultivation;
- Pattern of nucleated and linear settlements dispersed throughout the landscape, including occasional small towns and large villages, hamlets and scattered farmsteads and dwellings, with vernacular buildings constructed in stone and brick;
- Modern waterside developments comprising holiday or second homes with distinctive architectural style and often located in association with restored lake areas;
- Scattered pattern of woodland plantations and copses together with vegetation closely associated with river courses and standing areas of water, which in places results in a sense of enclosure and more intimate landscape; and



- Limited major roads and a wider network of minor roads providing access to the floodplain landscape.

5.3.2 River Basin Clay Vale within the Cotswold Water Park Study Area

The River Basin Clay Vale extends across a broad area encompassing the floodplain and flat, low lying river basin of the Upper Thames. The study area broadly coincides with this landscape type encompassing all of the lowland that defines this broad river basin. The area extends from Pool Keynes in the west to Lechlade and north of Buscot in the east and includes land within the counties of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Oxfordshire.

5.3.3 Landscape Character

The River Basin Clay Vale Character Type comprises a broad low lying area of pastoral land interspersed with an extensive wetland environment of rivers, streams and ditches and numerous areas of open water associated with restored gravel extraction areas. This latter activity has been particularly notable through the progressive land use changes that have resulted from the widespread extraction of sand and gravel throughout the area and the subsequent restoration to extensive lakes. Since its formal designation in 1967, the Cotswold Water Park has developed as a distinctive area supporting a diversity of rich wetland habitats of important ecological

value as well as a range of water based leisure uses. It is now an area of regional and indeed national importance, and through progressive land use and management change has significantly altered the character of this part of the Upper Thames Valley.

The settlement pattern varies from generally sparsely settled areas with intermittent dispersed farms, to large nucleated villages and the small town of Cricklade. These settlements are principally focused either on the River Thames or other principal tributary rivers. To the west, Somerford Keynes, Ashton Keynes and Cricklade are all located adjacent to the River Thames, while South Cerney is located adjacent to the River Churn. Smaller villages, such as Kempford and Castle Eaton are also located adjacent to the Thames. Fairford, on the northern perimeter of the study area and landscape type, is adjacent to the River Coln, and Lechlade to the east has developed adjacent to the River Thames. Beyond the rivers, the presence of water is also a common feature in the wider landscape with ditches and small watercourses commonly aligning field boundaries and running adjacent to local roads.

5.3.4 Physical Influences

The area is underlain by the youngest rock formations of the Jurassic period, comprising the Kellaways Beds and Oxford Clay Formations. These impervious clays are overlain by extensive superficial deposits of alluvium and River Terrace sands and gravels. The pattern and depth of these drift deposits have had a significant effect on local character through their varying influence on agricultural activity and the potential for mineral extraction.

In broad terms this low lying area is characterised by very shallow slopes, and in many areas is perceived as flat particularly where the extensive floodplain borders the river channel. The area varies in height averaging from 90m to 70m AOD with the land sloping very gently towards the River Thames. There are some notable variations to this pattern, however, with intermittent areas of Oxford Clay rising above the general levels of the low lying floodplain to form locally distinctive hillocks. These generally reach accordant summits of around 100 -105 m AOD, and include Ashton Down, to the north of Ashton Keynes; Hailstone Hill, west of Cricklade; and Horcott Hill to the south of Fairford. West of Kempford, the low hillocks of Brazen Church Hill and the adjacent larger hillock to the north, are also notable local features, their prominence strengthened by the woodland cover on the rising slopes.

Although woodland cover is not extensive within the type, intermittent and often geometric form woodlands are present, principally associated with the farmland that extends across the study area. The large, principally deciduous Water Eaton Copse to the south of Castle Eaton is a particularly notable example. In addition, new plantations, semi-mature copses and naturally regenerating vegetation is developing in association with the former sand and gravel workings, and views to the watercourses and lakes are often obscured by this developing vegetation cover. Lines of poplars and pollarded white willows also define the course of rivers and streams in many areas.

5.3.5 Human Influences

There is evidence of continuity of settlement on the gravel areas of the River Basin Clay Vale from the Iron Age through the Saxon and Roman periods and beyond. Place names of the Saxon period indicate that much of the land had been cleared. Development during the Romano-British period included the major communication route of the Ermine Way built on a raised embankment above the floodplain of the Thames.

The long history of water meadows in the River Basin Clay Vale landscape type is shown by the inclusion of grazed meadows at Cricklade in the Domesday Book. Ancient field systems are evident as crop marks on gravel areas. Ridge and furrow is evident for instance at Haydon Meadow SSSI where it has been protected from damage by ploughing. Field patterns vary with the topography and geology, with small scale irregular water meadows and pasture on alluvial areas, and large regular arable fields on free draining gravels.

Prior to the commencement of the extraction of sand and gravel within the Upper Thames Valley in the 1920s, the traditional land use within the River Basin Clay Vale was that of a pastoral landscape of rich water meadows. Pastures are still evident within the farmland that remains between the restored lake areas, but in more recent times there has been a move away from a traditional mix of dairy and livestock towards more intensive grassland and arable production as improvements in land drainage and flood protection have occurred.

The greatest human influence on the character type has been the extensive extraction of sand and gravel from the terraces adjacent to the River Thames within the River Basin Clay Vale. Quarrying continues to form a significant visual and audible feature within the type with many extraction sites still active on the remaining gravel terraces. This has resulted in a paucity of indicators of earlier human activity that were likely to have occurred along the Upper Thames Clay Vale.



The common restoration treatment for the sand and gravel extraction has been the creation of a complex mosaic of lakes, which provide both recreational and wildlife habitats. Many of the lakes are used for a great variety of watersports whilst others form local country parks and provide quiet enjoyment. These lakes are collectively managed as the Cotswold Water Park, which was formally designated in 1967.

The interests of the Water Park are now managed by the Cotswold Water Park Joint Committee, encompassing Gloucestershire and Wiltshire County Councils, and Cotswold and North Wiltshire District Councils. (refer to Section 3.0)

Human reliance on the River Thames has been a strong influence on the communications infrastructure and settlement pattern within the type with the river providing a major highway for the transportation of goods over many centuries until the end of the 19th century. The significance of the River Thames's influence on the landscape is evident through the numerous mills, locks, weirs, wharves and bridges that form locally notable features along the length of the Upper Thames and its principal tributaries, the River Coln and River Churn. The influence of the Thames is also reflected in local nomenclature with many place names ending in 'ford' indicating the establishment of settlements at strategic crossing points over watercourses, e.g. Fairford, Whelford adjacent to the River Coln and Kempford adjacent to the River Thames.

Canals have also been an important means of communication in the study area, although these have been abandoned and fallen into disrepair. At its eastern limit, the route of the Thames and Severn Canal commences at Inglesham at the confluence of the Thames and the River Cole, and proceeds westwards through the study area. A number of sections are evident, notably through Kempford and Eysey, and between Cerney Wick and the south of Cirencester. Remnant sections of the canal including canal bridges and locks add interest and an historical dimension to the local landscape. There is a proposal to restore the canal as part of the Cotswolds Canals Project and once again reinstate the link between the Thames and the Severn. The North Wiltshire Canal is another abandoned route that in the vicinity of the study area links Swindon to Cricklade, and hence the Thames to Severn system. Again, there is an aspiration to restore this canal and integrate it with the Cricklade Country Way Initiative. This latter project proposes a system of alternative non-motorised routes between Swindon and the Cotswold Water Park at Cricklade, by footpaths, cyclist routes, and via the canal, and by train on the restored Swindon and Cricklade Railway.

5.3.6 Biodiversity

The Landscape Character Type supports some many areas of national and international importance for their biodiversity.

Most of the lakes within the western section of the Cotswold Water Park have been designated as a SSSI. The series of lakes that form the SSSI comprise nationally scarce marl waters caused by the lime rich geology. The lakes include a range of the varied plant communities with open water (including those associated with marl waters), reed beds and surrounding grassland habitats. The area supports a wide range notable species including wintering and breeding birds such as pochard and gadwall, as well as water vole, otter, bittern, freshwater white clawed crayfish, and the lesser bearded stonewort *Chara curta* all of which are targets of the Cotswold Water Park BAP.

Within the areas of predominantly intensively farmed pasture and arable there are also areas that support unimproved hay, and nationally significant for their diversity of grassland plants. These include Clattinger Farm SAC, the only lowland farm in Britain known to have received no agricultural chemicals, plus Pike Corner SSSI, Sutton Lane Meadows SSSI, Upper Waterhay Meadow SSSI, Haydon Meadow SSSI, Acres Farm Meadow SSSI and North Meadow SAC, Cricklade SSSI.

Wildlife Sites include Swillbrook Lakes Reserve in the south-western perimeter of the designated Water Park. These former gravel pits are rich in bird and dragonfly diversity, including reed warbler, nightingale, hobby and four-spotted chaser and downy emerald dragonflies.

5.3.7 Buildings and Settlement

The River Basin Clay Vale supports a number of settlements of varying size. Those in the central and northern section of the study area generally retain the character of the Cotswolds local vernacular with historic cores, enhanced by the unifying effect of the predominant use of Oolitic limestone. The larger settlements of Fairford and Lechlade have developed a wider range of architecture with 'town houses' as well as typical village properties present, and new perimeter development that endeavours to link to a Cotswolds vernacular. Both Fairford and Lechlade have fine medieval churches. Other villages such as South Cerney, Ashton Keynes and Somerford Keynes retain a character typical of a Cotswolds village but have the further dimension of now being focused towards the Water Park through their proximity to large bodies of water and associated recreational interests. There are also very small and quiet villages such as Down Ampney, which retains the sense of a rural idyll, and a fitting link with Vaughan Williams who was born and lived there as a young child. A number of new residential holiday developments have established within the heart of the Water Park some of which present contrasting architectural styles.



The area also supports a pattern of both active and disused military airfields as at Fairford, and Down Ampney. The USAF military airbase at Fairford is a dominant feature in the eastern part of the study area although because of the very flat landscape is not immediately evident in wider views. The surrounding security fencing, however, together with the airborne activity serves as a reminder of its presence.

5.3.8 Landscape Character Areas

3A South Cerney and Ashton Keynes Settled Wetlands

This Character Area encompasses much of the western sector of the designated Cotswold Water Park where there has been a long period of sand and gravel extraction. Its character is mainly derived from the combination of an existing settled landscape of small mainly stone built village settlement with a dynamic and evolving wetland landscape.

Large-scale sand and gravel extraction comprises the dominant influence on the landscape character of this area. In addition to extensive areas of post-extraction created lakes, there are a number of areas that are still undergoing active extraction, such as Shorncombe Quarry. The mosaic of lakes comprises part of a complex of water bodies that form the western section of the Cotswold Water Park. Despite the number of lakes, the visual influence of these water bodies within the wider landscape context of the area is often limited as the development of regenerating scrub vegetation and areas of woodland adjacent to many of the lakes restricts views towards the water bodies from neighbouring settlements and local roads. This has resulted in a small to medium scale landscape which feels enclosed, despite the sequence of wetlands and lakes. A network of minor roads align the lakes, broadly running north-south and east-west and the lakes and the road network combine to make a strong overall landscape pattern, with the smooth surfaces of the water bodies contrasting strongly with texture of the surrounding trees and vegetation.



The numerous water bodies within the South Cerney, Ashton Keynes and Somerford Keynes section of the Cotswold Water Park have a very important nature conservation value. A number of the lakes have SSSI designations and Coke's Pit Lake and Swillbrook Lakes are designated as a Local Nature Reserve. Other sites with nature conservation value in the Character Area include Wildmoorway Meadows and Elmlea Meadows in the eastern part, both of which are designated as SSSIs for the invertebrate ecology of their grassland habitats.

Beyond the lakes of the Cotswold Water Park, a traditional land use pattern of small scale regularly enclosed pasture fields continues

within the floodplain adjacent to the River Churn and River Thames with horse and sheep grazing fields separated by low, well maintained and regularly trimmed hedgerows predominating along the valley bottom and occasional medium scale arable fields aligning the shallow slopes and occasional local hillocks that rise above the floodplain, as at Ashton Down to the west of South Cerney. Where agricultural land abuts areas of former gravel extraction, the landscape often appears marginalised and in decline with hedgerows becoming overgrown and/or gappy in places.

The creation of the Cotswold Water Park has facilitated a proliferation of recreational opportunities in the area with many of the lakes supporting yacht clubs, sailing schools, angling clubs and nature reserves, notably the Somerford Lakes Reserve, designated as a SSSI, and Keynes Country Park, to the west and east of Somerford Keynes respectively. It appears that many of the lakes have been constructed specifically for recreational purposes and although some attempts have been made to naturalise these lakes through lakeside planting, many of the water bodies tend to be poorly integrated into the wider landscape. In addition to water-based activities other recreational opportunities in the area include parking sites with picnic facilities, a horse-riding school at Cerney Wick, a wildlife centre on the northern edge of Somerford Keynes and the Thames Path national trail that extends through the southern portion of the area.



Numerous clusters of recently constructed lakeside holiday and second homes and chalets have developed around many of the lakes and these new developments are particularly prominent around the water bodies to the south-east of South Cerney. Although vegetation filters views towards many of these developments, the buildings tend to draw the eye as their architectural style is in contrast with the local vernacular of the surrounding villages; also, the individual developments do not share a consistent character with one another.

The main settlements associated with this Character Area comprise Ashton Keynes, Somerford Keynes and South Cerney.

Ashton Keynes is a compact nuclear village with the central historic core designated as a Conservation Area. Many of the older buildings are constructed in the local vernacular and limestone typical of Cotswold villages, together with more recent development,

particularly on the village perimeter. The juvenile River Thames flows through the village and is celebrated as an integral part of the village form with a series of pedestrian stone bridges linking dwellings. Although surrounded to the west, north and east by restored lakes and a wetland landscape, this is not immediately evident within the village and it presents a sense of a detachment from the nearby water based activities.

Somerford Keynes in the west is a linear settlement and includes a Conservation Area with a distinctive historic core of yellow/grey Cotswold stone-built properties with occasional areas of modern infill scattered throughout the settlement. South Cerney also includes two Conservation Areas with the settlement centred around an historic core interspersed with areas of modern infill. The settlement has developed at the intersection of a crossroads of local roads and a ditch runs east-west through the village in a wide grass verge. There are a few shops and pubs located in the village centre and an industrial area on the southern outskirts of the village including the recent development of the Lakeside Business Park.

Cerney Wick forms a small linear hamlet to the south-east of the western sector of the Cotswold Water Park and includes Churn Pool trout fishery on the outskirts of the settlement. Horse grazing is the common land use at both ends of the settlement with evidence of poached pasture both to the north and to the south. Stone walls thread through the hamlet and give an added sense of unity to the settlement.

In the north of the area, beyond the immediate influence of the lakes, the village of Siddington is located on the valley floor of the River Churn. The settlement comprises a range of new stone built properties, new and old red brick terraces, Siddington Manor, farm buildings, allotments and horse pasture all mixed and clustered together.

Beyond the new lakeside holiday home developments and the villages described above, settlement is very limited within the wider landscape of the Character Area, although scattered 'Mills' and 'Mill Farms' are associated with isolated dwellings and farms in close proximity to the upper reaches of the River Thames, between Somerford Keynes and Ewen.

3B Down Ampney and Meysey Clay Vale Farmland

This is a low lying and predominantly flat landscape, with landform varying between 80 – 85m AOD. Occasional undulations are of local significance, however, such as Poulton Hill to the north of Down Ampney which rises to a height of nearly 120m AOD and Meysey Hampton to the north at 104m AOD.

This scale and pattern within this Character Area portrays a subtle shift in emphasis in comparison with the wider characteristics of the landscape type. Arable agriculture tends to predominate as a land use and field sizes are generally larger in scale. There is evidence of field amalgamation in places with isolated field trees marking



former field boundaries. These vary in condition from gappy and overgrown in places to well-maintained in others. Hedgerows tend to be medium in height adjacent to roads, and low, well maintained and regularly trimmed when forming divisions between fields.

Although there are no extensive areas of woodland cover within the Character Area, the deciduous woodlands of Dukes Brake and Vines Brake are notable features. These are located to the north of Lattton at the transition with the Cornbrash Limestone Lowlands and merge with further woods in this area. Numerous copses are also located in the vicinity of the village of Down Ampney. These include Horseground Covert, Poplar Wood, Gally Leaze Copse, The Grove and Bean Hay Copse and are associated with the planned estate farmland of the village of Down Ampney House. They also lie close to or surround the disused airfield to the south-east of Down Ampney. The airfield formed one of a number of airfields constructed in the south of the Cotswolds during World War II and is associated with the air attack of the Battle of Arnhem. This historical feature provides a visual contrast with the remainder of the Character Area with its long vistas within the flat expansive landscape. Coniferous linear copses prevail around the perimeter of the disused airfield, whilst elsewhere copses tend to be predominantly deciduous and more irregular in shape. In this part of the Character Area, overgrown boundaries and hedgerow trees combine with views to distant copses to create an intermittent wooded feel to the landscape with copses, located within the adjacent Cornbrash Limestone Lowlands, often providing the primary horizon feature. The large scale field pattern combines with the distant expansive views to give landscape that is simple and open.



Hydrological influences on the area include a number of streams and ditches draining the landscape and a water body known as Down Ampney Pits which is a Key Wildlife Site. In addition to the River Thames which flows through the southern part of the Character Area, its tributary the Ampney Brook is also a locally notable watercourse. Their courses are delineated in the landscape by mature trees including pollarded willows and scrubby vegetation aligning the banks.

The North Meadow National Nature Reserve is located at the south-east perimeter of the Character Area, on the north-western side of Cricklade between the confluence of the Thames and Churn. It is nationally renowned for the rare snakeshead fritillaries (*Fritillaria meleagris*) that bloom across the meadow in late April. The 60 hectare site comprises ancient Lammas land where certain Cricklade townspeople have the right to graze their animals in winter, the land reverting to meadow during the summer. With the land held in common it escaped drainage and agricultural improvement and now supports 80% of Britain's wild population of fritillaries.

The dispersed linear settlement of Down Ampney lies adjacent to Ampney Brook. This village includes a Conservation Area and comprises numerous traditional grey/brown stone houses with high pitched roofs scattered throughout the settlement. The historic house of Down Ampney House is located in the south of the settlement and fronts onto a parkland landscape demarcated by a parkland fence. The large modern stone development of Broadleaze is located on the northern outskirts of the village. The village has historical associations with the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams who was born in The Vicarage in 1872. Although he only lived there for a few years up to his father's death, he retained a strong association and love of the Gloucestershire landscape and expressed this in a number of his compositions.



Other settlements in the Character Area comprise Latton, a compact village to the east of the A419 which has recently been expanded to accommodate new housing development, and Meysey Hampton, a nucleated village located in the north of the area. Part of Meysey Hampton is designated as a Conservation Area and set around a village green with a predominance of brown/grey old stone properties and an orchard located in the historic centre. A series of old stone walls thread through the village to impart an additional

sense of unity. The compact linear village of Marston Meysey is located on the eastern perimeter the Character Areas, close to the boundary of Fairford Airfield. The remainder of the landscape area is very sparsely settled, limited to a few isolated farms.

The Eastern Spine Road crosses the Character Area from the Weavers Bridge interchange on the A419, with recent improvements at Sheepen Bridge. This route provides a link to A417 and Fairford, but it retains the character of a local road. There is also a limited road network of minor roads broadly running north-south in the area and these connect the settlements of Down Ampney, Meysey Hampton, and Marston Meysey and to villages in the wider landscape beyond the Character Area.



The Character Area forms part of the central sector of the Cotswold Water Park comprising Latton / Down Ampney / Marston Meysey. In comparison with the western and eastern sectors, this area has experienced much less gravel extraction and the landscape character is therefore more influenced by agricultural intensification than restoration to lakes. As the reserves in the first two sectors become depleted, however, this area will be progressively vulnerable to change through the existing and potential future extraction. The Cotswold Water Park Management Strategy provides the framework to ensure that a long term vision and management plan for this sensitive area is defined which seeks to ensure that the area is appropriately managed and restored. The setting and protection of the settlements in the area, including Latton, Down Ampney and Marston Meysey will be particularly crucial in managing any future landscape change arising from extraction of the underlying mineral reserves.

3C Fairford and Lechlade Settled Wetlands

This area comprises a mixture of contrasting land uses that includes areas of agricultural landscape, the Fairford/Lechlade/Kempsford Section of the designated Cotswold Water Park and Fairford Airfield. The area is predominantly flat and low-lying with the exception of Horcott Hill which rises to a height of 102m AOD and comprises an upstanding outcrop of the Oxford Clay Formation.

The Eastern Section of the Cotswold Water Park has developed as a result a post-extraction remediation treatment which has created a series of water bodies similar in character to the South Cerney and Ashford Keynes Settled Wetlands Character Area, but lake

coverage is not as extensive. The lakes are used for a variety of recreational pursuits including coarse and game fishing, water skiing and sailing. Some lakes also have informal paths around their perimeter with viewing benches. There are very limited views to the lakes from the surrounding road network, however, as they are generally well enclosed by surrounding vegetation. Tree and scrub planting adjacent to most of the lakes has created a naturalistic feel to many of the lakeside edges, and serves to better integrate the water bodies into the wider landscape where these are visible. The smooth surface of the lakes contrasts with the texture of the surrounding vegetation to create a simple landscape pattern throughout the area.

Many of the lakes in the Character Area have been classified as Key Wildlife Sites by Gloucestershire County Council, two of which have been designated as SSSIs. Water bodies of nature conservation interest in the Fairford and Lechlade area include two lakes to the north of Lechlade which form the Edward Richardson and Phyllis Amey GWT Nature Reserve. Other Key Wildlife Sites include a strip of semi-natural grassland aligning the dismantled Bryworth Railway Line in the north of the Character Area, Bushyleaze Copse on the northern boundary to the north of Lechlade, and Whelford Meadows which includes areas of invertebrate rich grassland, and is also designated as a SSSI.

In addition to the series of lakes within the designated Cotswold Water Park, other hydrological features and influences in the area include the River Coln; the River Thames; and an extensive network of ditches, which commonly form field boundaries and align local roads.

A diverse agricultural landscape predominates with varying field sizes and land uses. In the wider landscape a mixture of arable and pastoral land use predominates in medium to large scale fields. Smaller scale fields are evident, however, on the slopes of the local hillocks, and small scale arable fields and scrubby pasture can be found adjacent to the River Thames. Low, well maintained and regularly trimmed hedgerows with isolated hedgerow trees form the common boundary treatment in the agricultural landscape. These hedgerows are becoming gappy in places, however, so that adjacent fields are open to one another. Where hedgerows lie in close proximity to the Thames, they have often become overgrown and in places give a localised sense of enclosure adjacent to the course of the river.

Woodland is not particularly prevalent in the wider landscape although there are a few small copses associated with the localised hillock of Horcott Hill and elsewhere a number of mature trees along local tracks form linear wooded elements in the landscape. There is a predominance of deciduous species in these copses and within hedgerows with the exception of some stands of coniferous trees around Kempford.

The active extraction of sand and gravel continues as a significant land use in this area. The most visually and audibly significant areas of activity occur to the west of Horcott Hill, with unrestored post-extraction works west of the Hill still evident in the area adjacent to the current works. Elsewhere works are evident to the east of Kempford and west of Fairford at Warren's Cross Farm. As this latter area is progressively restored, however, it is proposed that Claydon Pike will be created as a Country Park together with an hotel and lodge development on the neighbouring Bowmoor Lake.



The main settled influences on the area are the village of Fairford and the small market town of Lechlade on Thames. Fairford is located in the north of the area. The settlement includes a Conservation Area and extends outwards from an historic core which hosts a renowned 15th century church with a distinctive square stone tower. There is a compact village centre with an extensive range of shops and stores, eating establishments, pubs and hotels. There is a mixture of architectural styles within the settlement including a few timber framed houses and a new stone built estate at the edge of the village. Old Cotswold stone walls wind through the village forming a common boundary treatment for many residential properties and unifying the ad hoc mixture of historic housing styles in the settlement.



Lechlade on Thames is located at the east of the study area and includes a Conservation Area comprising various eras of housing styles associated with the incremental expansion of the settlement. There is a proliferation of new housing on the outskirts of the village including both stone and brick of varying types as well as some rendered properties. The elegant spire of the church is a particularly

distinctive landmark within the wider landscape. The settlement has a well developed commercial centre including several pubs, a medical centre, estate agents, a bank and a pharmacy as well as a range of shops. The proximity of Lechlade to the River Thames has resulted in a cluster of recreational uses and tourist facilities on the southern periphery of the village including an hotel, the Thames Path National Trail, St. Johns Priory Park caravan park and pleasure craft cruising.



Other settlements in the area include Horcott, a small linear village located at the north-west base of Horcott Hill; Whelford, a small dispersed settlement to the east of Fairford Airfield; and Kempford, a linear village that extends along the northern bank of the River Thames. These settlements generally comprise a mixture of older stone properties and with newer housing clustered at the edges. These smaller settlements have limited facilities with the exception of Kempford which includes a Conservation Area and has a local primary school, a few public houses and a church with a square stone tower that forms a local landmark visible from the wider landscape beyond the village. Beyond the villages and town described above, settlement is generally very sparse in the wider landscape, comprising isolated farm buildings often located on or at base of the localised hillocks and accessed by minor tracks.

Fairford Airfield is a notable feature in the west of the area and creates a strong military presence that has a significant influence on the local landscape character. The airfield has been developed across a flat, large scale landscape with expansive areas of hardstanding and mown grass extending beyond the periphery of the runway. A number of large scale buildings punctuate the horizon;

these include substantial hangars of varying form, including many rectilinear hangars and a large arching domed structure. Intermittent towers also form prominent vertical features across the airfield and there is also a sequence of large turfed geometric bunkers. The boundary of the airfield is demarcated by a large perimeter security fence. Overgrown hedgerows align most of the airfield boundaries limiting views towards the airfield from the surrounding area but there are filtered views through gaps in the vegetation and at the entrance gates.

The A417 extends across the north of the area connecting Fairford and Lechlade with other settlements along the Upper Thames Clay Vale. Elsewhere, access is very limited with a sparse minor road network connecting local villages and skirting around the edge of Fairford Airfield.

3D Swill and Derry Brook Clay Vale Farmland

The Swill and Derry Brook Clay Vale Farmland comprises a low lying area of predominantly permanent pasture farmland to the south of the South Cerney and Ashton Keynes Settled Wetlands. Underlain by the Oxford Clay Formation, morphologically it is part of the Upper Thames River Basin Clay Vale and although there is a very gentle fall to the River Thames, the area appears flat. The area is drained by two watercourses. To the west, the Swill Brook rises to the west of the village of Oaksey beyond the study area and within the Pool Keynes and Ewen Cornbrash Limestone Lowlands, and hence resulting in lime rich water. The course of its lower reaches defines the boundary of the Character Area. Further east, the Derry Brook also rises beyond the study area within the Rolling Clay Lowlands to the south, and follows a generally north-easterly course to meet the Swill Brook at High Bridge and close to the further confluence with the Thames. In addition to the watercourse there are numerous ditches that drain this low lying area together with many small ponds, providing evidence of the high water table.



Unlike the land to the north, the farmland has not been significantly affected by gravel extraction operations. The quiet, pastoral landscape character is derived from the pattern of pasture fields, riparian vegetation with pollarded willows, and a largely intact network of hawthorn hedgerows with intermittent, mainly oak and some ash hedgerow trees. Along the watercourses, and particularly

the Swill Brook, there are also areas of riparian ash and willow / alder carr woodland. This combination of landscape elements is therefore indicative of how many areas to the north would have appeared prior to the extensive exploitation of the sand and gravel reserves and restoration to lakes.

There are no villages in the Character Area and settlement is confined to a dispersed pattern of farms, and clusters of dwellings that form a series of hamlets. There is a particular concentration along Swan Lane that links the Malmesbury and Ashton Roads. The field pattern is characterised by generally small to medium sized fields. Smaller fields, sometimes irregular in form, are particularly evident around the hamlets.

The Clattinger Farm Nature Reserve is located in the north-western section of the Character Area to the north of Swill Brook and has been managed by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust since 1996. Designated as a SSSI and a candidate SAC, it is considered to be the finest remaining example of enclosed lowland grassland in the country and an important remnant of a traditional hay meadow. The previous owners farmed the meadows without fertilisers for many years, and the site is particularly renowned for the snake's head fritillary that flowers in the meadow in late April as well as several species of orchid.

On the northern margin of the Character Area, the Waterhay Car Park is located at one of the Gateways to the Western section of the Cotswold Water Park. Here, visitors can leave their cars behind and gain access to the nearby Cleveland Lakes. It is also a key access point for horse riders as horse boxes can be left in the car park, and riders can use the network of nearby bridlepaths. The Car Park is also located adjacent to the Thames Path National Trail with links either eastwards to Cricklade and North Meadow or west to the head of the Thames.

3E Castle Eaton and Inglesham Clay Vale Farmland

The Castle Eaton and Inglesham Character Area extends across the south-eastern section of the study area from Cricklade in the west to Lechlade and the St John's Bridge crossing of the Thames in the east. The area is generally low lying with an imperceptible fall to the River Thames, which defines the northern limit of many sections of the area. In contrast to the otherwise flat landform the small hillocks of Brazen Church Hill and the broader elongated hill immediately to the north at Dudgrove Farm are locally notable features in the landscape and form reference points in wider views. Their apparent prominence is enhanced by the woodland that extends across part of their slopes.

In addition to the east - west course of the Thames, the area is drained by a series of small tributaries of the main river. These comprise the River Ray in the west, followed by Share Ditch, Bydemill Brook and finally, the River Cole. These are generally small watercourses with their course often only discernible by lines of riparian vegetation including willow and alder.



The land use across the area comprises a mixture of pasture and arable with a predominance of pasture. The generally geometric fields are of a medium to large scale although occasional smaller fields are evident in close proximity the settlements within the area.

Although there is a limited woodland cover across the area, there are nevertheless some substantial areas of woodland which form strong skyline features in the landscape where views are possible across the broad and simple horizons of this flat landscape. The most substantial is Water Eaton Copse, a rectangular area of deciduous woodland to the west of Share Ditch. In the vicinity of this woodland there are further linear belts of woodland including Pope Farm woodland to the west, and further north, the woodlands surrounding North and South Farms. Together these visually link to form a strong north-south line of woodland across the western side of the Character Area.

Settlement within the Character Area is generally small scale and dispersed. The two principal villages are both located adjacent to the River Thames and comprise the compact nuclear Castle Eaton and the larger and linear Kempford. The 13th Century Church of St Mary has a distinctive spire that forms a notable landmark in this flat landscape. Elsewhere, the small settlement of Hannington Wick to the south-east of Kempford comprises a nucleus of several farms that serve the wider area. Finally the small village of Upper Inglesham is located at the extreme east of the Character Area on locally elevated land between the Thames and the River Cole. Beyond these villages there is a very dispersed pattern of isolated farms.

A limited network of roads serves the area confined to simple rural roads connecting the villages. The area surrounding the Water Eaton Copse woodlands is particularly inaccessible to traffic and presents a quiet and isolated character. Similarly, in the eastern section of the Character Area, the land between the River Thames and River Cole and extending west to Kempsford is also very inaccessible with access limited to simple tracks to isolated farms. This quiet and peaceful rural character and its inaccessibility is a particularly notable feature of many parts of this Character Area.

In the extreme west of the Character Area a disused railway line demarks the former Cheltenham to Andover line that was closed in 1961, two years before the more swathing Beeching cuts. Further south the line has been restored as the Swindon and Cricklade Railway, and currently terminates at Hayes Knoll Station just south of the Character Area. The proposal is to reinstate the line as far as Cricklade and integrate this with the Cricklade Country Park Initiative which is working to establish a green recreational and wildlife corridor linking urban Swindon to Cricklade and the Cotswold Water Park. A network of routes will be provided between Cricklade and Swindon - either by train, foot, cycle or by canal boat through the restoration of the West Berkshire Canal that once served the area.