

Vale of White Horse Landscape Character Assessment: LANDSCAPE TYPES



February 2017

Rev A

DRAFT

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Vale of White Horse Landscape Character Assessment 2017 is currently being undertaken by Hankinson Duckett Associates (HDA), on behalf of Vale of White Horse District Council.

The work is being guided by Clare Roberts (Vale of White Horse Senior Planning Policy Officer), and Avril Williams (Vale of White Horse Landscape Officer).

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Example Landscape Character Area description

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Vale of White Horse District Council has commissioned a Landscape Character Assessment of the District to inform its Local Plan 2031 Part 2. The assessment will be carried out in accordance with current best practice landscape character guidance as set out by National England (NE). The assessment methodology 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment', confirmed by NE in 2014, incorporates the assessment processes set out in the 2002 guidance note 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland'.
- 1.2 This preliminary document provides an initial assessment of the landscape context of the Vale of White Horse District, and sets out the Landscape Types which cover the District. When complete, a final Landscape Character Assessment will include an expanded description of the Districts landscape context, photographs from each Type taken during the summer months, and will describe specific Character Areas within each Landscape Type. An example Character Area description is included at Appendix A to this document.
- 1.3 The final report will set out management and policy guidelines relevant to the identified Character Areas, and will be used to inform decision making in accordance with the policies in Local Plan 2031 Part 2.

Background

- 1.4 The District is covered by three of Natural England's broad scale National Character Areas. The national character areas within Vale of White Horse District are the 'Upper Thames Clay Vales' (Character Area 108), 'Midvale Ridge' (Character Area 109), and 'Berkshire and Marlborough Downs' (Character Area 116).
- 1.5 A county-wide scale of assessment is provided by the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS 2004) which divides Oxfordshire into 9 large scale 'character areas' which broadly accord with the National Character Areas covering the county. Each character area consists of a mosaic of 24 smaller 'landscape types'.
- 1.6 Current district-scale landscape characterisation of the Vale relies on the Landscape Strategy incorporated into the Districts 2006 Planning Advisory Notes. The strategy divides the District into four 'zones' and a limited number of sub-zones. These zones cover broad areas and the strategy does not wholly follow current best practice guidance.
- 1.7 The southern portion of the District lies within the North Wessex Downs Area of Natural Beauty (AONB). The 'North Wessex Downs AONB: Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (2002)' categorises the AONB into a number of 'Landscape Types' and more detailed 'Character Areas', these Character Areas include the part of the AONB within the Vale of White Horse District.
- 1.8 Landscape character assessments have also published, utilizing various methodologies and levels of detail, for areas adjoining the Vale. These include the 'South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (1998)', the 'West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (1998)', the 'Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2003)', and the Swindon 'Landscape Character Areas Supplementary Planning Guidance (2004)'.
- 1.9 This current study has regard to all the above studies so as to ensure, wherever possible, a consistent approach to landscape characterisation across the County. Precedence will be

given to following current best practice where inconsistencies arise between the various study findings.

2 METHOD STATEMENT

Introduction

- 2.1 The approach to this study follows best practice as promoted by Natural England's 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment' (2014). The initial assessment has established the Landscape Types across the district. Further detailed work on landscape characterisation is on-going and will describe the individual landscape character areas, future management recommendations and policy considerations.

Stage 1: Desk Study/Review

- 2.2 An initial desk study has reviewed the existing landscape character assessments that cover the District. The national framework provided by the Character of England Map (Joint Character Areas) and the National Landscape Typology (landscape character types) has set the overall context for the study.
- 2.3 The desk study also reviewed the physical and human influences that have shaped the landscape of the district. Physical influences (natural factors) include geology, soils, landform, drainage, and land cover, which, in turn, have a strong influence on patterns of human occupation and activity. The study also reviewed cultural/social factors such as patterns of settlement and land use, enclosure, and considered the current changes in the landscape and the pressures for change acting on the landscapes of the district.

Stage 2: Local Landscape Characterisation

- 2.4 Overlays of baseline information have been produced using GIS mapping for geology, soils, landform, drainage, land cover, environmental designations, land use and historic landscape types/areas. Analysis of this range of data, covering both natural and cultural attributes of the landscape, were utilised in the development of draft Landscape Types prior to field testing and will inform future landscape characterisation.
- 2.5 The draft characterisation stage mapped draft Landscape Types boundaries and established a detailed methodology for the assessment across the District, in advance of the fieldwork. Further assessment of the baseline information will inform the mapping of draft landscape character areas.
- 2.6 The approach taken for landscape characterisation has followed best practice maintaining a distinction between landscape types and character areas, and developing a hierarchical approach as follows:
- **Landscape Types:** generic, often extensive areas of landscape that share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation and human influences, e.g. 'Downs Scarp' or 'Lower Vale Farmland'.
 - **Character Areas:** which are unique, discrete geographical areas of the Landscape Type, e.g. 'Idstone to Chilton Downs Scarp' or 'Appelford Lower Vale Farmland', which exhibit all, or the majority of, the recognisable characteristics of the Type, depending on the location of the Character Area.

Stage 3: Field Survey

- 2.7 Field survey was used to verify draft Landscape Type classifications, and will identify landscape Character Area subdivisions and define precise boundaries. The survey was systematic, using written observations, map annotations, and photographs. Standard survey checklists were used to ensure that landscape features and characteristics were recorded in a consistent and objective way. Photographs were used to record general landscape character, key characteristics and specific attributes.
- 2.8 The field survey, to date, has assessed and recorded the extent and combination of key characteristics and features as well as the perceptual characteristics of each Landscape Type. It has noted a description of local landscape character, a list of landscape elements and characteristics, e.g. settlement form, landmarks and building style and assessed the aesthetic and perceptual factors e.g. pattern, scale, unity, remoteness and tranquillity of the landscape. Continuing field assessment will focus on detailed landscape characterisation and also review the current condition and management of the landscape.

Stage 4: Classification and Description

- 2.9 A final review of the draft Landscape Type boundaries has been undertaken having regard to the desk research findings, field maps and field record sheets and the wider national and county-wide assessments. Summary descriptions of each Landscape Type have been compiled.
- 2.10 Landscape types have been mapped at the scale of 1:25,000 and the boundaries to specific areas defined using the level of detail available at this scale. The boundaries selected for Landscape Types are firm and recognisable features on the ground. The extent, and boundaries to, Character Areas will be defined following a similar process, however, field observation can identify a gradual transition in landscape character. In such cases character area boundaries will represent a 'best fit' to the change in landscape character.

Stage 5: Evaluation and Guidance (to be confirmed)

- 2.11 Following the completion of the landscape characterisation the current status of the elements and features of the landscape will be recorded and forces for change noted as examples of past change and the potential pressures for future change. Information from the desk study, fieldwork and consultation with the relevant Local Authorities will be used to determine the forces for change. This evaluation will identify a number of factors that may have an effect landscape character in future.
- 2.12 An outline landscape strategy will be prepared for each Landscape Type or groups of Character Areas. The strategy will address the landscape area as a whole and identifies broad objectives for each Type/group of character areas. The aim will be to set out broad objectives and principles to manage and direct landscape change in order to protect the highest quality and most sensitive landscapes from adverse change and to encourage positive change in weak or degraded landscapes.
- 2.13 For each Type/group of character areas there will be a set of broad objectives; where individual character areas highlight specific issues of local importance more specific prescriptions may be identified. The guidelines will indicate the actions required, with reference to the overall landscape objective in order to ensure that distinctive character is maintained. To aid ease of reference the guidelines will be divided into prescriptions related to land management and prescriptions specifically related to development.

3 THE VALE OF WHITE HORSE LANDSCAPE

(see Figure 1)

Introduction

- 3.1 The District consists of several distinctive bands of landscape crossing east-west through the District and beyond. As its name suggests, the Vale of White Horse District is centred on a broad valley feature, which rises to the Corallian Limestone Ridge to the north, and the Chalk Downs (which includes the White Horse of Uffington), to the south. To the north and east, the landscape descends to the Thames valley, the edges of which lie just inside the District boundary.

Clay Vales

- 3.2 The broad low lying vale, underlain by clay, runs east-west through the middle of the District from the edge of the Thames at Appleford in the east, to the village of Bourton in the west. The eastern lower portion of the vale consists of large scale, intensively managed open farmland, with a network of ditches draining the landscape towards the River Ock. To the west, beyond Childrey Brook and Woodhill Brook near Grove, the vale becomes slightly more elevated and undulating than the Lower Vale Farmland to the east. The Upper Vale Farmland has a more extensive network of boundary vegetation than the Lower Vale to the east, and there are small blocks of dispersed woodland.
- 3.3 Vale landscapes are not limited to the centre of the District. The northern portion of the District also incorporates the southern edge of the Thames Vale between Appleton and the western edge of the District. At the north-west corner of the District, the vale has increased tree cover, including significant woodland located on high points to the south-east of Buscot.

Chalk Downs

- 3.4 The central vale landscape rises to meet the chalk downland which lies across the southern portion of the District. The elevated downland, with its open farmland and its more wooded areas, the distinctive north facing scarp, and the majority of the footslopes below the scarp are part of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB) designation. The AONB was designated in 1972 and is the third largest in the country. It stretches from Devizes in the west, to Reading in the east, and incorporates a number of downland and other landscapes including the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs, the Hampshire Downs, the West Wiltshire Downs, and Salisbury Plain.
- 3.5 The north facing scarp forms a prominent backdrop in views from the majority of the District, and the rolling, exposed downland affords expansive views across the region from the many public rights of way which criss-cross the Downs. The most notable of these routes is the historic Ridgeway National Trail which transverses east-west across the District along the top of the ridge scarp. The footslopes below the ridge scarp descend to the low lying vale to the north. They contain numerous streams and brooks, which are fed from springs at the foot of the scarp, and flow north towards the River Ock.

Corallian Limestone Ridge

- 3.6 To the north of the central vale there is a broad east-west ridge of Corallian Limestone, often referred to as the 'Mid Vale Ridge'. The northern edge of the ridge is marked by prominent, relatively steep, slopes. To the south, the ridge descends more gently, until it merges with the low lying vale centred on the River Ock. To the east, the ridge incorporates Boars Hill and Cumnor Hill to the west of Oxford.

- 3.7 Despite its subtle southern slopes, the ridge forms a distinctive, often wooded, horizon in views north from the central vale. The wooded backdrop is provided by the small blocks of woodland which pepper the ridge, as well as some extensive tracts of ancient woodland, particularly in the eastern of the District, including Bagley Wood, Tubney Wood and Wytham Great Wood.

The River Ock and Thames

- 3.8 The River Ock and the River Thames form the central landscape features in the vale landscapes within the District. The Ock flows west through the centre of the District until it reaches the Thames at Abingdon. Numerous streams and brooks flow from the foot of the downs, and from the ridge to the north, across the vale and into the Ock. The Thames and its broad floodplain wrap around the eastern and western edges of the District. To the east of Abingdon, and to the north of Buckland, the Thames valley floor extends into the District on river terraces of sand and gravel elevated just above the alluvium of the floodplain.

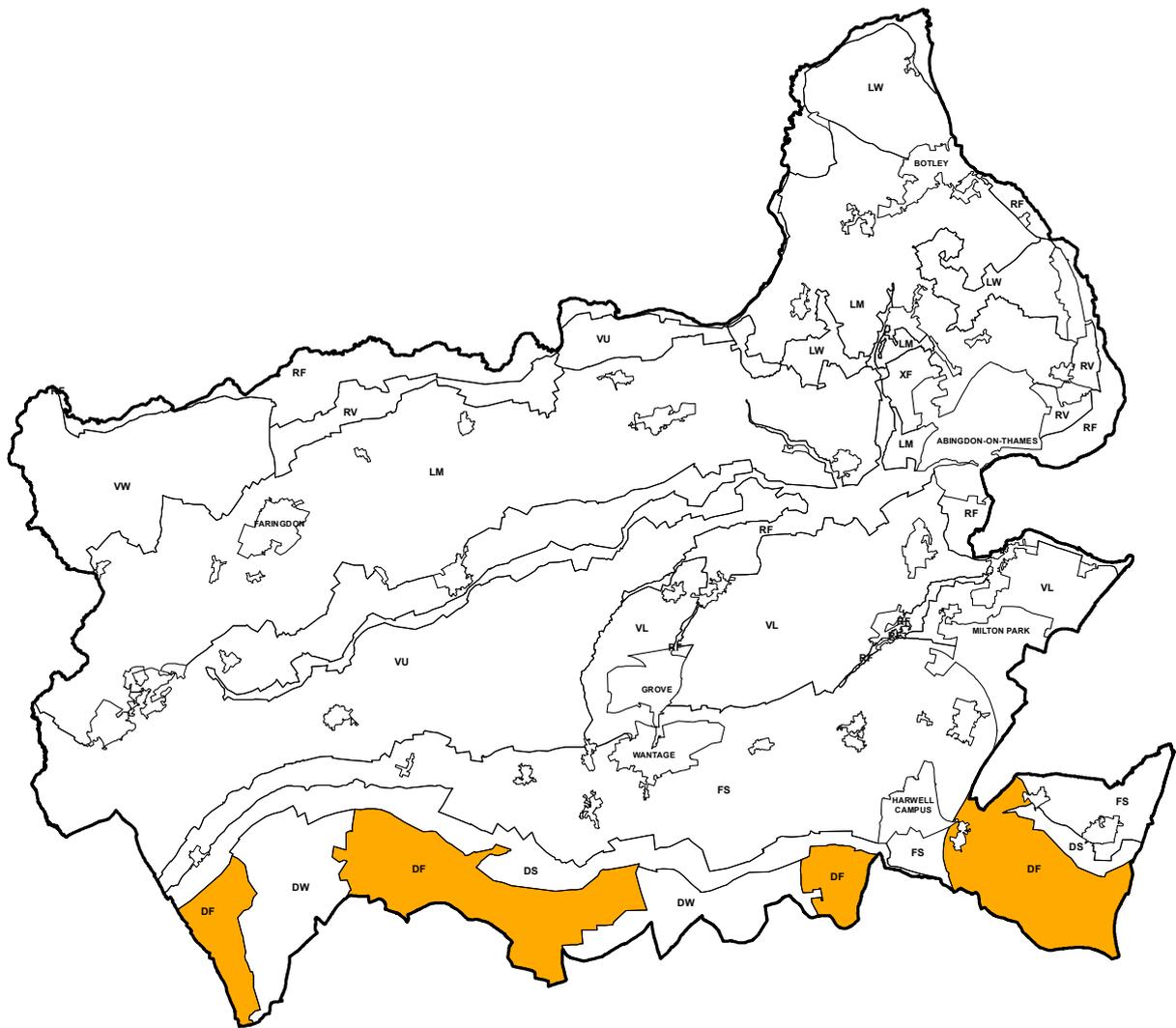
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4 LANDSCAPE CLASSIFICATION

- 4.1 The Landscape Types set out in this initial document reflect the dominant influences on landscape character, often combining, geology, landform and land cover. In all cases the name conveys some sense of the character of the landscape.
- 4.2 A single Landscape Type has broadly similar patterns of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use, settlement and field pattern where it occurs. This does not mean that it will be identical across the extent of the Type, rather that there is a common pattern, which can be discerned.
- 4.3 The Landscape Types will be further sub-divided into Landscape Character Areas and described in more detail in the final landscape assessment document.
- 4.4 The Landscape Types for the District are set out below and illustrated on Figure 2, which has been prepared on a Geographic Information System (GIS), with mapping undertaken at a scale of 1:25,000.
- 4.5 The twelve landscape types which create the unique and distinctive character of the Vale of White Horse District landscape are listed below, (see Figure 2):

DF	Downs Open Farmland
DW	Downs with Woodland
DS	Downs Scarp
FS	Downs Footslopes
LM	Corallian Limestone Ridge with Woodland
LW	Wooded Corallian Limestone Ridge
RF	River Floodplain
RV	River Valley Floor
VL	Lower Vale Farmland
VU	Upper Vale Farmland
VW	Upper Vale with Woodland
XF	Former Airfield

- 4.6 The Landscape Types listed above frequently adjoin or encircle, but do not include significant areas of settlement. Settlements excluded from the Landscape Types include the market towns, local service centres, large and small villages as set out in the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 2. The built up areas of each settlement are mapped on Figure 1, and include permitted but as yet incomplete development. Areas shown do not necessarily constitute settlement boundaries or policy areas.
- 4.7 The location and boundaries, and key characteristics for each Landscape Types are described in section 5 below, along with an index map and photograph of a typical view for each Type.



LANDSCAPE TYPE DF: DOWNS OPEN FARMLAND

The Landscape Types are shown in more detail on Figure 2, with 1:25,000 scale OS base mapping.

LANDSCAPE TYPE DF: DOWNS OPEN FARMLAND

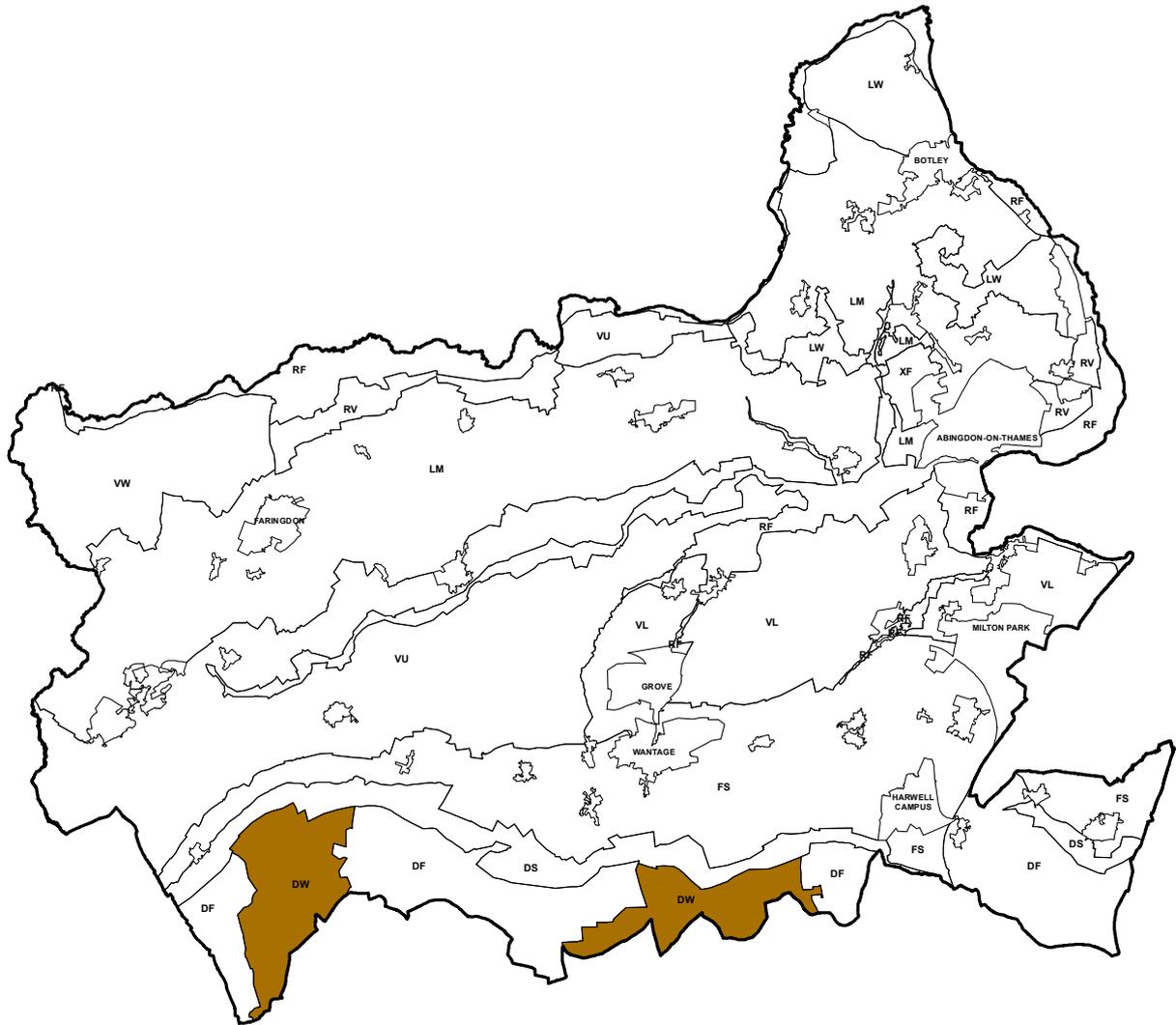
Location and Boundaries

The Downs Open Farmland Landscape Type comprises a number of areas extending across the southern part of the District, they are often interspersed with areas of Downs with Woodland (Type DW), which together form the elevated downland above the Downs Scarp located to the north. Areas of Downs Open Farmland are defined by the changes in topography, scale of landscape and land cover, with boundaries following recognisable features such as roads, woodland edges and field boundaries. The Type is entirely within the North Wessex Downs AONB.



Key Characteristics

- Founded on chalk, the elevated downland of complex rolling topography is located above the steep scarp feature to the north, reaching heights of around 250m AOD.
- Predominantly open exposed arable farmland, of large scale, mainly rectilinear fields, with occasional small blocks of dispersed woodland.
- Hedgerow structure is limited, with field boundaries frequently delineated by post and wire fences and occasional scrub.
- Historic features include hill forts and sections of the well used historic Ridgeway route along the top of the ridge scarp. There are a number of 'named' downs, including Swinley Down to the west and Blewbury Down to the east.
- Rides and gallops associated with horse training are frequent features.
- The Downs Open Farmland is sparsely populated, with settlement limited to isolated farmsteads. Road access is also very limited, with a small number of roads orientated broadly north-south across the Type before descending the scarp to the north.
- A sweeping curved section of the dismantled Didcot, Newbury and Southampton Railway crosses mainly in cutting through the downs to the south of Upton.
- A network of public rights of way provide recreational access across the downs, including parts of the Ridgeway National Trail and a significant number of bridleways.
- There are wide panoramic views, including north from the Ridgeway, across the Vale landscapes to the Corallian Limestone ridge further north, and expansive views across the downs to the south of the wider region beyond the District.
- The Downs Open Farmland provides a rural horizon above the ridge scarp in views from within the District to the north, including from the Corallian Limestone Ridge.
- The open, largely unsettled, downs provide vast dark skies, with a sense of remoteness and tranquillity.



LANDSCAPE TYPE DW: DOWNS WITH WOODLAND

The Landscape Types are shown in more detail on Figure 2, with 1:25,000 scale OS base mapping.

LANDSCAPE TYPE DW: DOWNS WITH WOODLAND

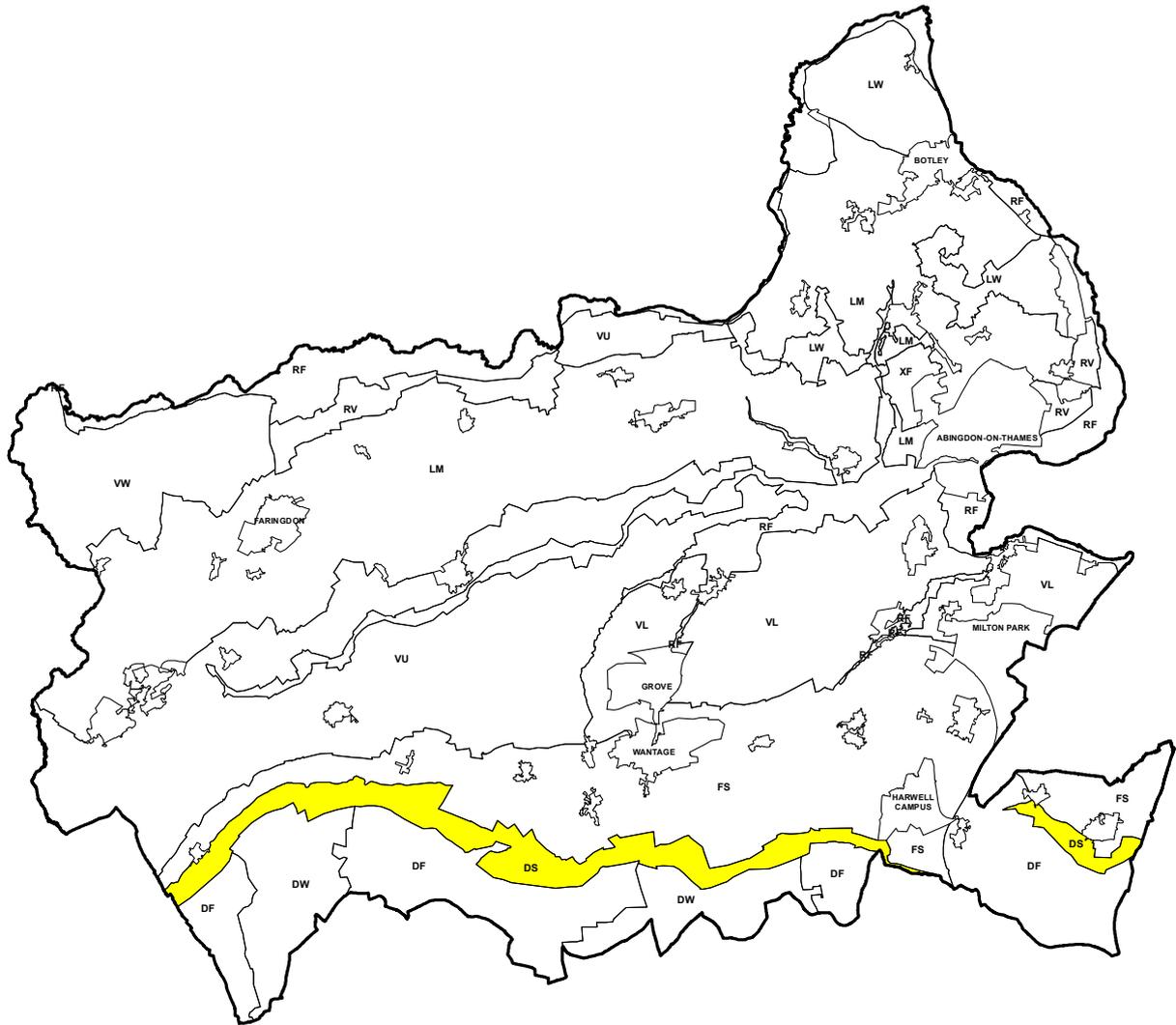
Location and Boundaries

The Downs with Woodland Landscape Type is located within the southern part of the District, consisting of two areas separated by a stretch of the more open Downs Open Farmland (Type DF). The two Types form the elevated downland along the southern portion of the District, and sit above the north-facing Downs Scarp. The Type is defined by topography, the scale and extent of woodland cover and land use. Boundaries follow easily recognisable features including roads, woodland edges and field boundaries. The Type is entirely within the North Wessex Downs AONB.



Key Characteristics

- Rolling downland, with occasional steep slopes, in particular along Kingstone Down. Landform reaches up to 250m in some places above the steep scarp to the north.
- The Type is characterised by a variety of woodland, including ancient deciduous woodland, more recent mixed plantations, copses on hilltops, and occasional woodland 'hangers' along steep slopes. Thick linear shelter belts giving the impression of further woodland cover. Mature tree species frequently include Beech, as well as Oak and Ash.
- In between the woodland blocks and shelter belts there are large arable fields, and occasional smaller scale pastoral fields, and paddocks associated with farmsteads and dwellings.
- Historic features include sections of the historic Ridgeway route along the top of the ridge scarp.
- There is a greater degree of settlement than the Downs Open Farmland (Type DF), with scattered farmsteads and large houses, often secluded within the woodland.
- There are few roads other than those which transverse north-south across the Downs, and descend the Downs Scarp onto the Vale landscapes to the north. Low key lanes and sunken tracks provide access to dwellings and farmsteads.
- A network of public rights of way provide recreational access across the downs. Routes include within the Downs with Woodland Type include parts of the Ridgeway National Trail and the Lambourne Valley Way Long Distant Path.
- There are wide panoramic views north from the Ridgeway, across the Vale landscapes to the Corallian Limestone ridge further north, and expansive views across the downs to the south of the wider region beyond the District. Woodland frames or obscures views in places elsewhere.
- The Downs with Woodland Landscape Type provides a rural, occasionally wooded, horizon above the ridge scarp in views from the north.



LANDSCAPE TYPE DS: DOWNS SCARP

The Landscape Types are shown in more detail on Figure 2, with 1:25,000 scale OS base mapping.

LANDSCAPE TYPE DS: DOWNS SCARP

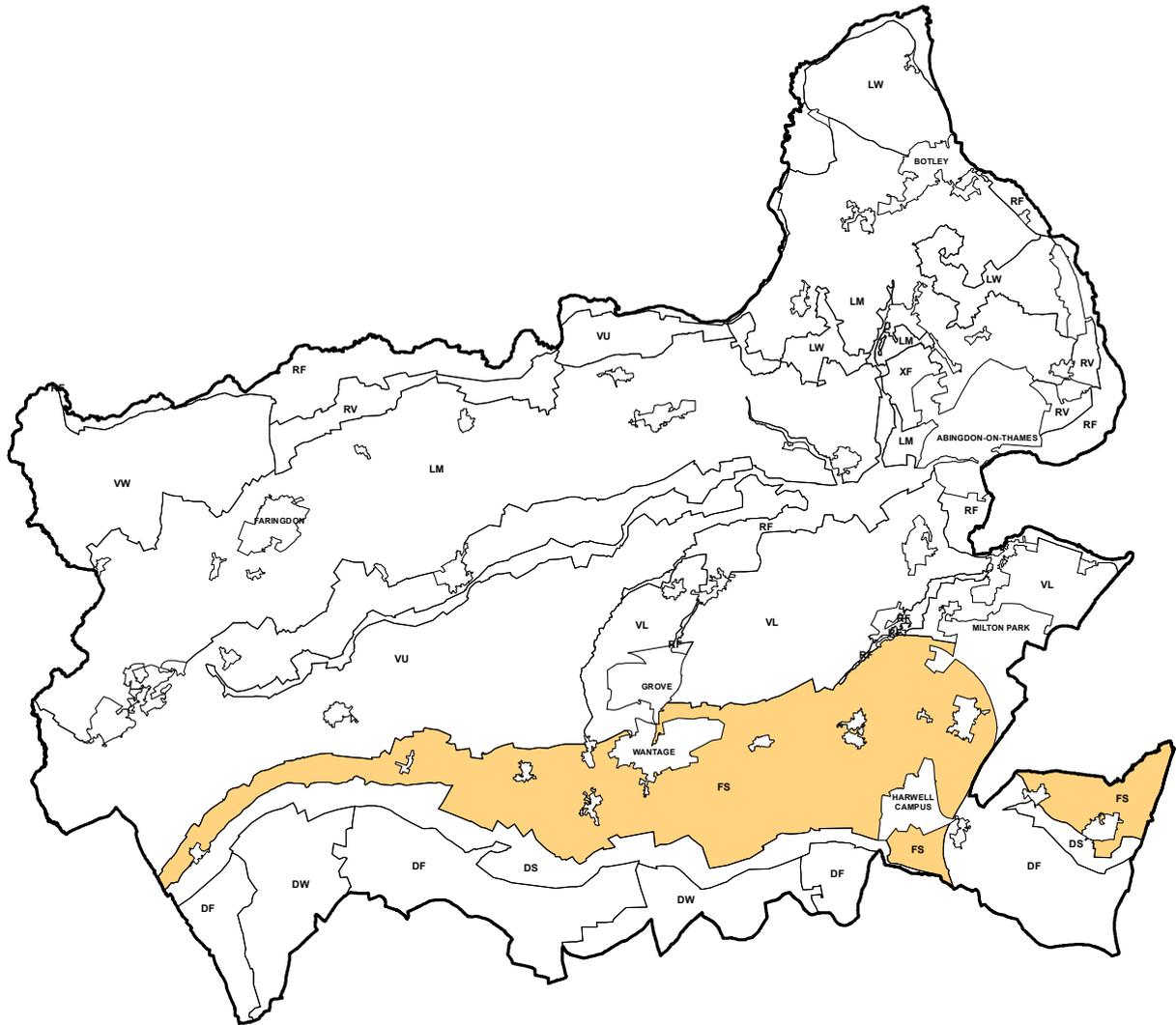
Location and Boundaries

The Downs Scarp runs east-west across the southern portion of the District as a narrow band of steeply sloping land above the Downs Footslopes to the north, and below the elevated Downs to the south. Complex topography which continues outside the District boundary results in a disconnected eastern section of scarp to the south of Blewbury. The extent of the Landscape Type is predominantly defined by its steep, north facing topography, with its boundaries mainly following the edges of fields. The Landscape Type is entirely within the North Wessex Downs AONB.



Key Characteristics

- Steeply rising slopes of the North Wessex Downs forming a prominent north facing escarpment.
- The scarp has complex twisting landform with localised ridges and spurs forming features below such as dry combes and other depressions such as the Devil's Punchbowl south of Childrey.
- Land cover on the scarp predominately consists of pasture.
- Fragments of chalk grassland.
- There are some scattered areas of woodland, including occasional woodland 'hangers', and some natural regeneration.
- Historical features included the Uffington White Horse cut from the slope exposing the underlying chalk.
- Settlement is limited to mainly the occasional farmstead. Roads and footpaths run north-south down the steep topography.
- Historic landscapes associated with human occupation, cultivation of woodland and industrial activity.
- Vantage points at the top of the scarp afford wide panoramic views north from the Ridgeway, across the Vale landscapes to the Corallian Limestone ridge beyond.
- The Scarp provides a rural, distinctive backdrop to views from the north.



LANDSCAPE TYPE FS: DOWNS FOOTSLOPES

The Landscape Types are shown in more detail on Figure 2, with 1:25,000 scale OS base mapping.

LANDSCAPE TYPE FS: DOWNS FOOTSLOPES

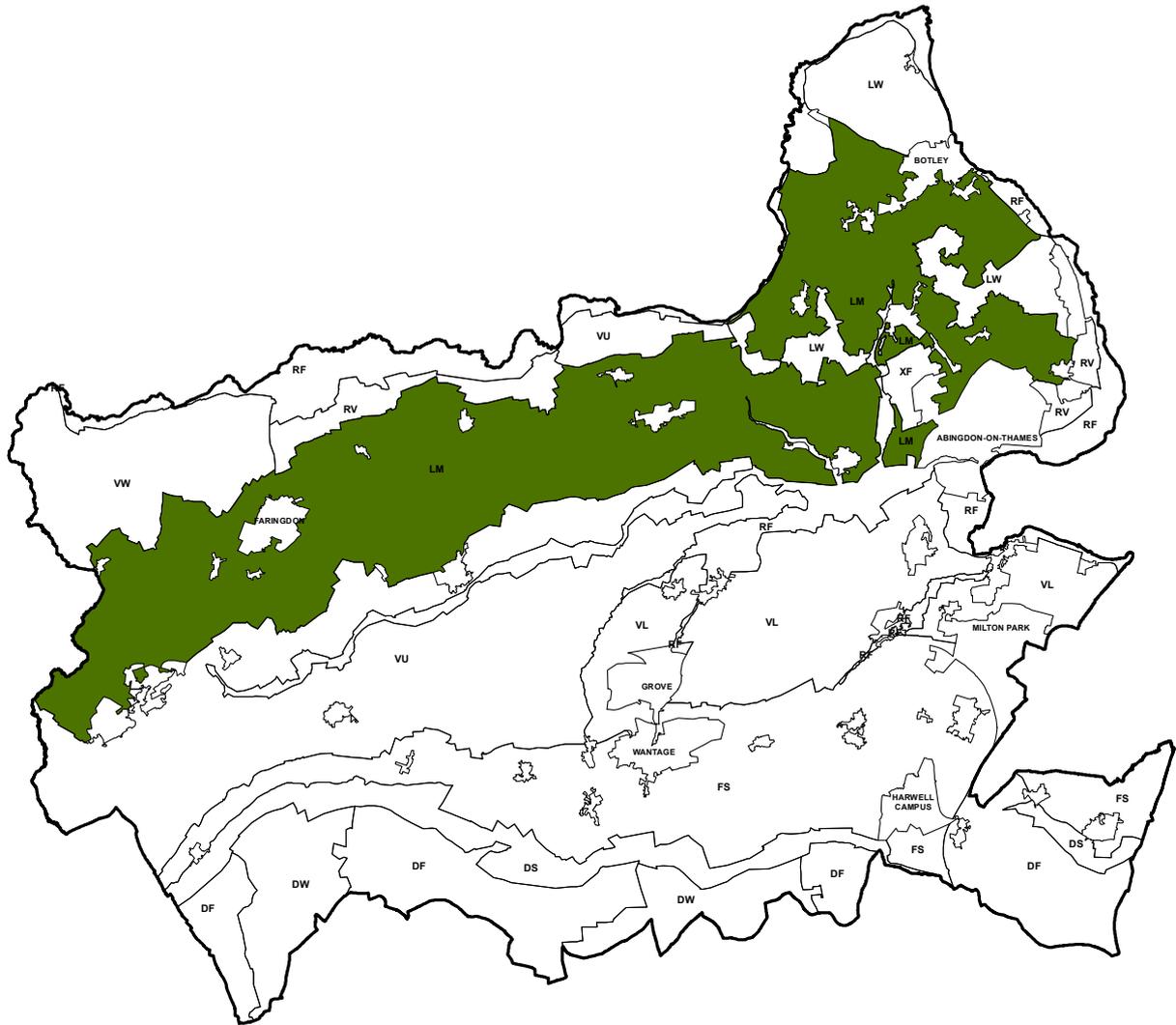
Location and Boundaries

The Downs Footslopes Type is located across the southern half of the District. The Type is defined predominantly by its topography, located between the foot of the Downs Scarp (Type DS) to the south, and the lower Vale landscapes to the north. Boundaries follow easily recognisable features including roads, woodland edges and field boundaries. Significant parts of the footslopes landscape type, to the south and east, are within the North Wessex Downs AONB.



Key Characteristics

- The footslopes are largely underlain with chalk but also forms the transition to the sand and limestone geology to the north.
- The downs footslopes are formed by a shelf of rolling landscape and hills, descending gently north from the foot of the downs scarp.
- The footslopes cover a relatively broad area to the east, which reduces to a narrow ledge below the Downs Scarp to the west.
- The broader eastern portion of the footslopes includes medium to large scale arable farmland surrounding some significant areas of population, including Wantage, Harwell and Blewbury. There are also smaller parcels of land such as paddocks and large gardens associated with settlement edges and farmsteads.
- A number of watercourses flow north from chalk springs towards the River Ock and Thames, and form a focus for rural settlement, including 'spring line' villages in the eastern portion of the footslopes, such as Letcombe Regis, Ardington and East Hendred.
- The narrower western portion of the footslopes is a smaller scale landscape than to the east and includes small to medium arable fields mixed in with estate land and remnant parkland. Estate and parkland is associated with a string of small settlements located at the foot of the north facing downs scarp. Settlements are frequently located near the source of spring fed streams below the scarp, and include the small villages of Ashbury and Kingston Lisle, and hamlets such as Idstone, Compton Beauchamp, Woolstone, and Sparshot.
- Tree cover varies across the footslopes, but includes small scattered woodland blocks, substantial tree belts, and riparian wet woodland. A few fruit orchards remain to the north-east.
- A network of main roads and rural lanes connect areas of settlement and access farmland. Public rights of way provide recreational links up into the Downs to the south.
- There are views across the farmland of the prominent Downs Scarp which forms a backdrop to the south, as well as more distant glimpses of the, often wooded, Corallian Limestone Ridge on the horizon to the north.



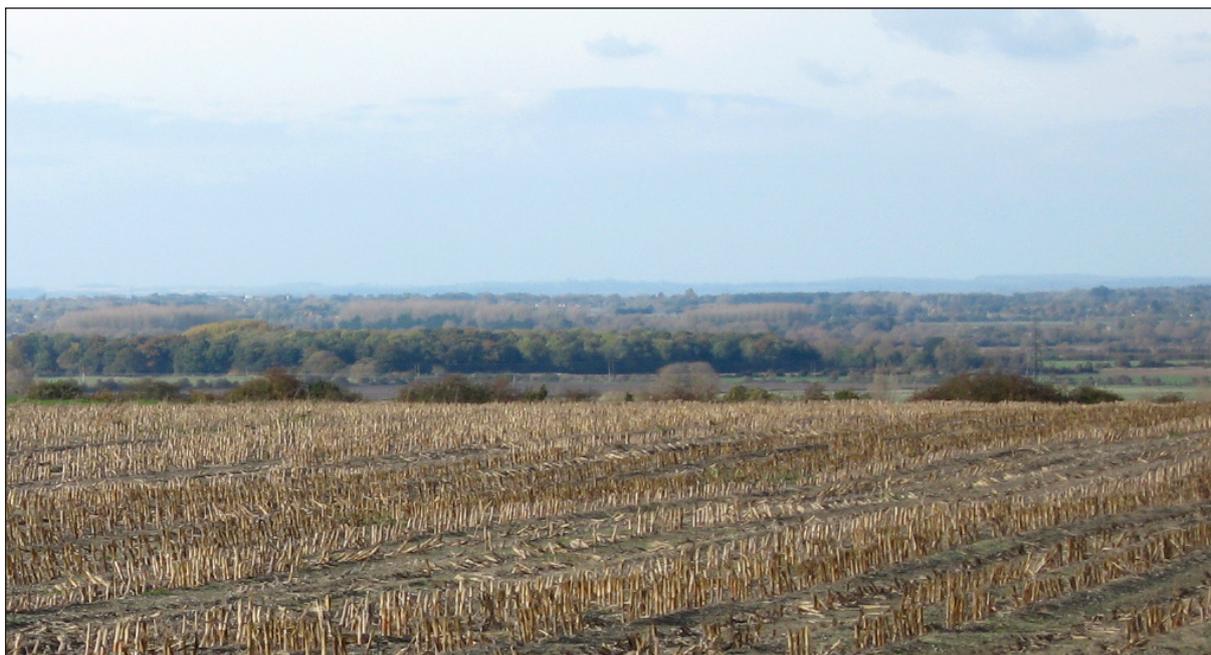
LANDSCAPE TYPE LM: CORALLIAN LIMESTONE RIDGE WITH WOODLAND

The Landscape Types are shown in more detail on Figure 2, with 1:25,000 scale OS base mapping.

LANDSCAPE TYPE LM: CORALLIAN LIMESTONE RIDGE WITH WOODLAND

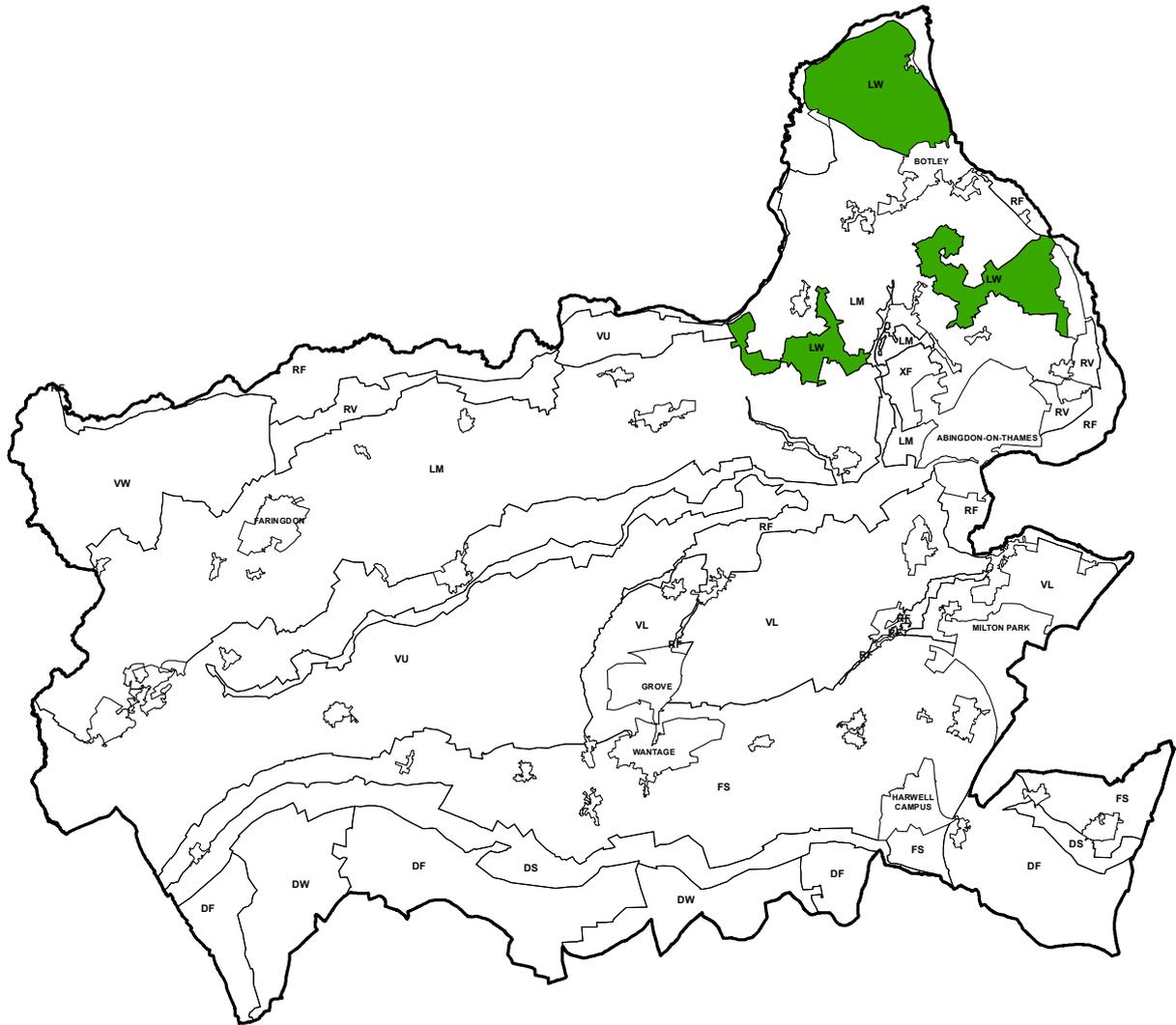
Location and Boundaries

The Corallian Limestone Ridge with Woodland Type stretches east-west through the northern half of the District. The Landscape Type is located between the vale landscape associated with the River Ock to the south, and the vale and valley floor landscapes associated with the River Thames to the north. The Type is defined by its topography, underlying geology, land use and more limited tree cover compared to the Wooded Ridge (Type LW), with boundaries following easily recognisable features including roads, woodland edges and field boundaries. The Landscape Type is approximately 3 miles / 5km from the North Wessex Downs AONB at its closest to the south.



Key Characteristics

- Underlying Corallian Limestone contributes to form a low ridge which protrudes above the clay and alluvial landscapes to the north and south.
- The north facing slopes of the ridge are relatively steep, whilst the south facing slopes are gentler and form a transition to the Upper Vale to the south.
- The Corallian Limestone Ridge features a mixture of relatively large scale arable and pastoral farmland, with areas of estate land, and smaller scale parcels of land including paddocks associated with settlement.
- There are dispersed blocks of significant woodland across the landscape, including areas of ancient woodland.
- The hedgerow network along field boundaries varies, but there is a greater intactness than other Types within the District. Hedges frequently contain mature trees such as Oaks.
- Minor watercourses flow from the ridge towards the Thames and Ock.
- There are areas of rare semi-natural habitats including fens, wet woodland, and calcareous grass heaths, including fens around Frilford and Cothill.
- There are nucleated settlements, of varying size, across the Corallian Limestone Ridge, as well as scattered large country house and farmsteads, often located on high points with views over the Vale landscapes to the north and south.
- The eastern end of the Corallian Limestone Ridge has intervisibility with the city of Oxford, and the Downs are frequently seen on the horizon to the south.



LANDSCAPE TYPE LW: WOODED CORALLIAN LIMESTONE RIDGE

The Landscape Types are shown in more detail on Figure 2, with 1:25,000 scale OS base mapping.

LANDSCAPE TYPE LW: WOODED CORALLIAN LIMESTONE RIDGE

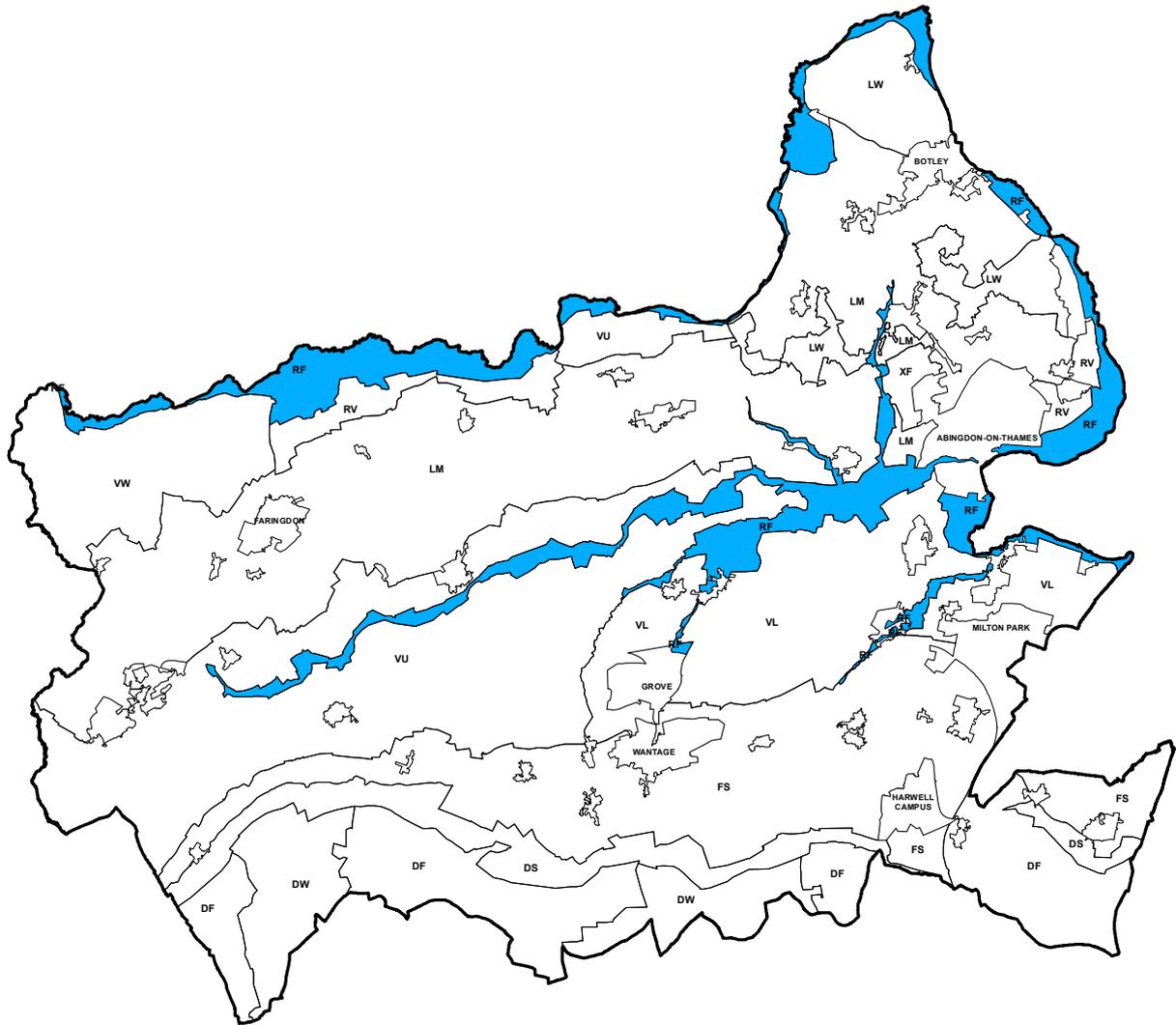
Location and Boundaries

The Wooded Corallian Limestone Ridge Type includes substantial areas of woodland located towards the eastern end of the limestone ridge, between the vale landscape associated with the River Ock to the south, and the vale and valley floor landscape associated with the River Thames to the north. The limestone ridge is wider in its extent and is defined by the extent of woodland cover, its topography, and underlying geology. The boundaries follow easily recognisable features including roads, woodland edges and field boundaries. The Wooded Corallian Limestone Ridge forms a backdrop to the west of Oxford and is relatively distant from the North Wessex Downs AONB to the south.



Key Characteristics

- The Wooded Corallian Limestone Ridge is primarily underlain by corallian limestone which protrudes above the clay and alluvial landscapes to the north and south.
- The Type includes extensive tracts of woodland which are predominantly ancient woodland, such as the Oak dominated Bagley Wood, and Wytham Woods with their mixture of ancient semi-natural woodland, secondary woodland, plantations, and calcareous grassland.
- There are occasional parcels of pastoral and arable fields within the woodland.
- The density of woodland breaks down in places, giving way to groups of low density dwellings set within surrounding tree cover, in particular around Boars Hill.
- The Woodland is prominent in the local landscape, located on high ground including Wytham Hill to the north-west of Oxford, Boars Hill to the south-west of Oxford, and on the north side of the ridge near Appleton.
- The woodland frames views out from high points, with intervisibility with the lower Vale landscapes to the north and south, Oxford to the east, and the Downs on the horizon to the south.



LANDSCAPE TYPE RF: RIVER FLOODPLAIN

The Landscape Types are shown in more detail on Figure 2, with 1:25,000 scale OS base mapping.

LANDSCAPE TYPE RF: RIVER FLOODPLAIN

Location and Boundaries

The River Floodplain consists of low lying river terraces and valley bottoms following the courses of a number of rivers and streams that flow through the District. In particular, the landscape type includes the River Thames as it winds along the northern and north-eastern boundaries of the district, and the River Ock which flows west to east through the centre of the Vale towards the River Thames. Boundaries are generally determined by the edge of the floodplain, as defined by the Environment Agency's Flood Zone 2, which equates to land having between 1 in 100 and 1 in 1000 annual probability of river flooding. However the area has been extended or reduced depending on the extent of characteristic features such as landform, land use and vegetation. The boundaries are generally taken to the nearest recognisable identifiable feature such as field boundaries and roads, but in some limited instances, such as where there are no nearby recognisable features on the ground, the boundaries follow a contour.



Key Characteristics

- Low lying level areas of floodplain situated on alluvial deposits.
- There is the presence of open water in the form of rivers, with channels, streams and brooks.
- Land use is generally pastoral, often with wet meadows, including those used for grazing, with tree species including willow and alder. Woodland is limited within the floodplain.
- In areas along the Thames the river is enlivened by the movement and colour of boats navigating the waterways. Sections of the Thames Path National Trail cross through the District.
- Farmoor is a large reservoir, filled from the adjacent River Thames, which provides further opportunities for waterborne recreation.
- In some instances there are surrounding urban influences, including housing, roads and utilities associated with settlements such as Abingdon and Kennington. Gravel extraction has occurred within the Thames floodplain at the north-eastern edges of the District, resulting in water filled pits.
- Elsewhere, such as along the majority of the River Ock, the route of watercourses are peaceful, semi-enclosed and sparsely settled other than at river crossings.

LANDSCAPE TYPE RV: RIVER VALLEY FLOOR

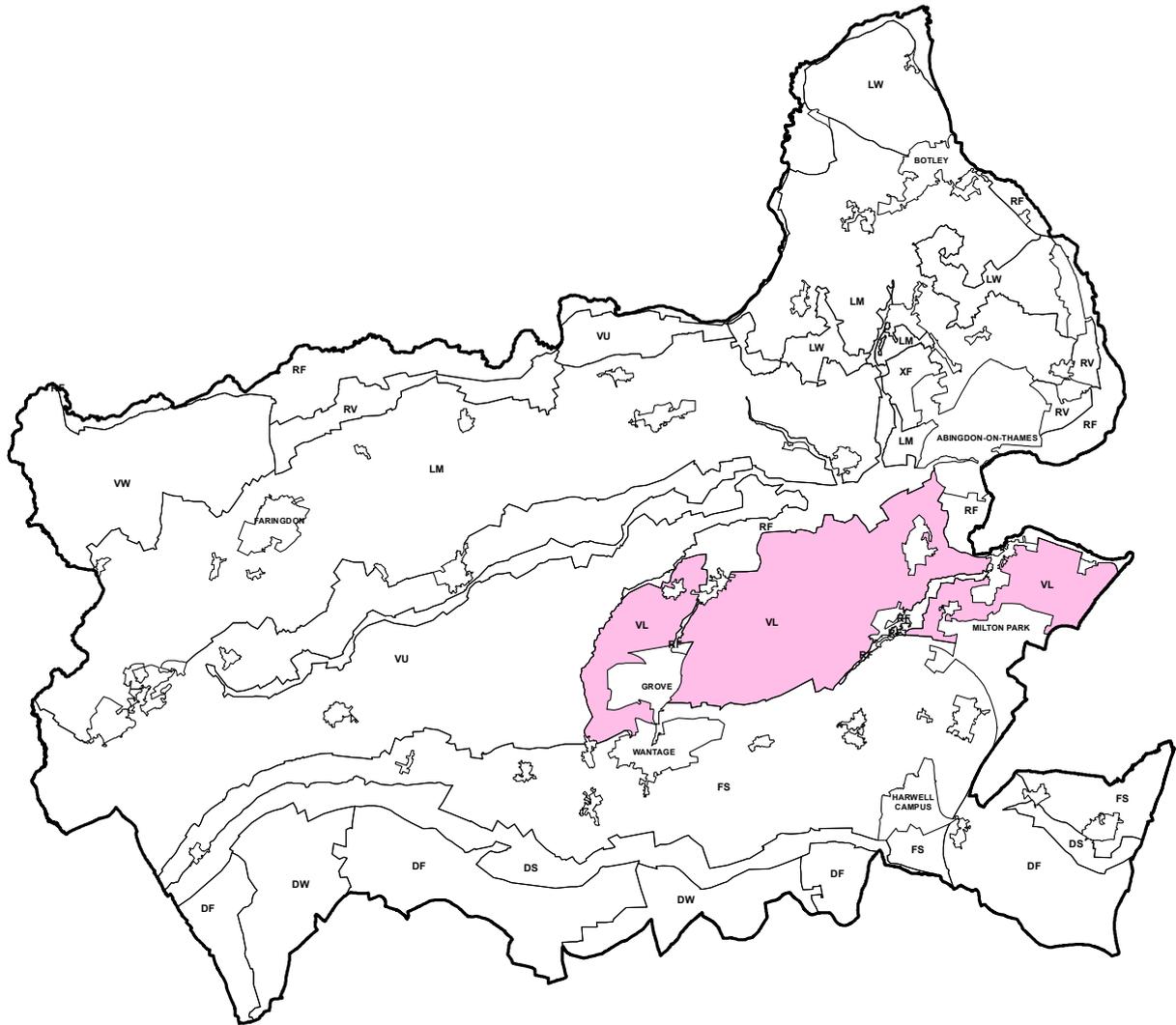
Location and Boundaries

The River Valley Floor Landscape Type comprises two separate areas of river terrace fringing the floodplain along the River Thames. The extent of the Type is based on the underlying sand and gravel terrace, topography and land use. Boundaries follow recognisable features on the ground where possible, including roads, field boundaries and the edge of settlement. The River Valley Floor is distant from the North Wessex Downs AONB.



Key Characteristics

- Level or gently shelving landscape underlain by river terrace sand and gravel, elevated just above the alluvium of the River Thames floodplain, and at the foot of the Corallian Limestone Ridge.
- The valley floors consist of a mixture of large arable fields with limited boundary vegetation, smaller scale more enclosed areas of pasture, and small parcels of land including paddocks and large gardens and parkland associated with dwellings.
- Woodland includes some small blocks or copses incorporated into the geometric field pattern. There are mature trees along boundaries in less intensively farmed areas, and mature field Oaks give a parkland feel in places.
- Streams and ditches cross the area and feed into the River Thames and River Ock.
- Settlement is limited to farmsteads, large houses and occasional small groups of dwellings.
- The eastern area has significant urban influence from adjoining settlement including Abingdon, and a section of the Cherwell Valley Railway passes north-south through the centre of the arable fields.
- The grounds of Wick Hall are located on the eastern portion of the River Valley Floor, just above the River Thames floodplain to the south.
- Within the northern part of the District, near Buckland, the valley floor is rural and peaceful with limited urban influence.
- Open areas allow views across the gravel terrace and adjacent floodplain, and up to the Corallian Limestone Ridge which often forms a wooded, horizon.



LANDSCAPE TYPE VL: LOWER VALE FARMLAND

The Landscape Types are shown in more detail on Figure 2, with 1:25,000 scale OS base mapping.

LANDSCAPE TYPE VL: LOWER VALE FARMLAND

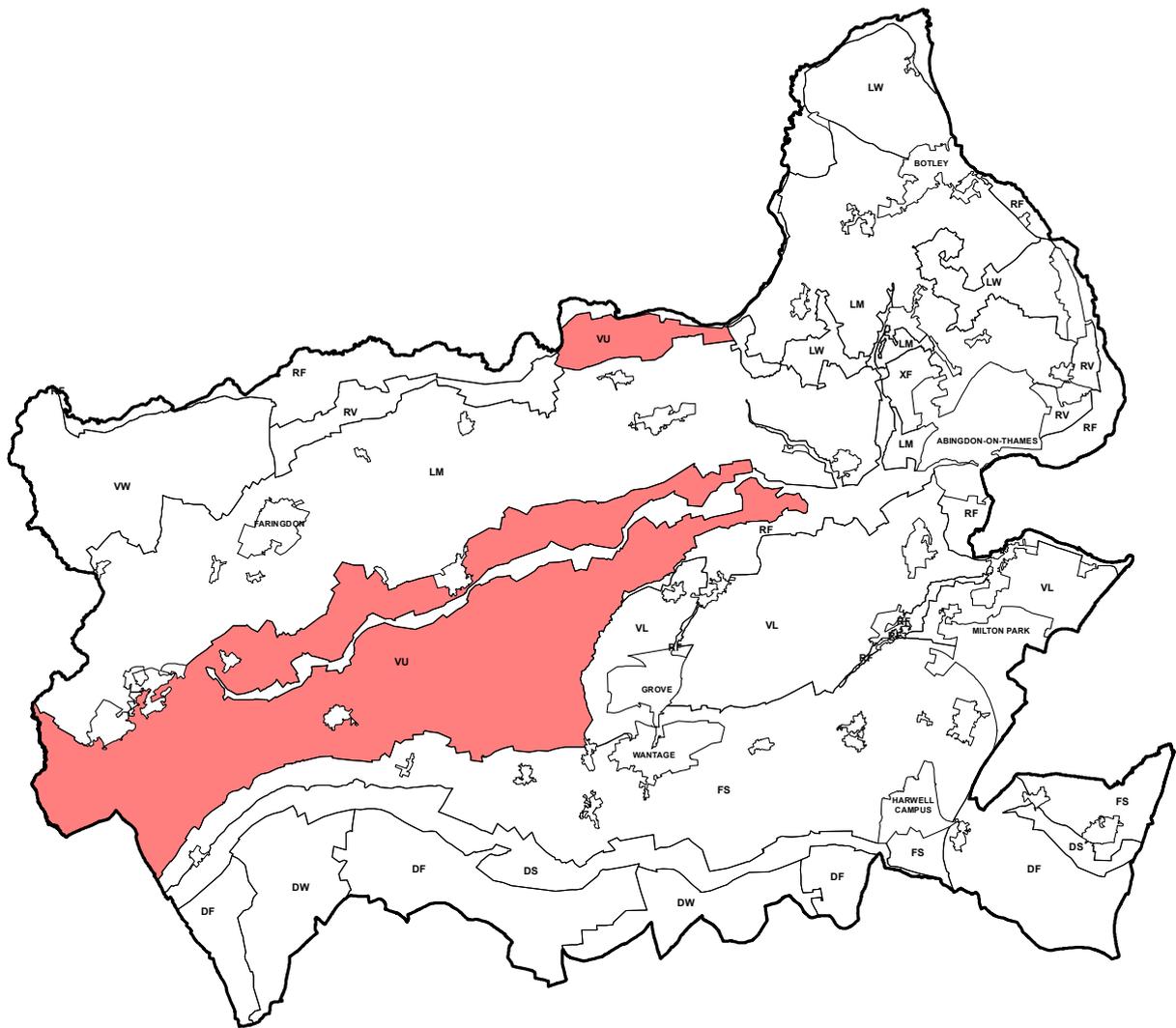
Location and Boundaries

The Lower Vale Farmland Type, together with the Upper Vale Farmland (Type VU) form a band of low lying farmland through the centre of the District between the rising slopes of the Corallian Limestone Ridge to the north and North Wessex Downs to the south. The Lower Vale Farmland is defined by underlying geology, topography, land use and the degree of openness and field pattern scale. Boundaries follow easily recognisable features including roads, woodland edges, watercourses and field boundaries. At its closest, the lower vale is approximately half a mile (0.8km) from the northern edge of the North Wessex Downs AONB.



Key Characteristics

- The Type is predominately underlain by a superficial geology of sand and gravel, and has heavy clay soil.
- The area is low lying and relatively flat, located between the rising ground of the Corallian Limestone Ridge to the north and North Wessex Downs to the south.
- The Lower Vale consists of large scale, intensively managed arable and pastoral farmland, resulting in a relatively open landscape. Hedges, where they exist, are frequently clipped to low heights.
- There are individual mature trees along field boundaries, but woodland is generally limited.
- A network of ditches criss-cross the Lower Vale, draining the farmland towards the River Ock.
- The western extent of the Lower Vale is defined by Childrey Brook and Woodhill Brook, beyond which the landscape rises to Upper Vale Farmland (Type VU) to the west.
- The eastern end of the Lower Vale is disturbed by quarrying and settlement around Didcot, towards the River Thames floodplain. The Lower Vale Farmland wraps around a number of settlements, including Grove, East Hanney and Drayton, but the main body of the Type has very limited settlement other than the occasional farmstead.
- Major transport routes, including the A34 dual carriageway, and the Great Western Main Line and Cherwell Valley railways, cross through the Lower Vale Farmland, but there is a limited internal road network. The disused Wiltshire and Berkshire canal crosses diagonally through the centre of the Lower Vale.
- The relatively open nature of the low lying landscape allows views of the high ground which define the vale to the north and south.



LANDSCAPE TYPE VU: UPPER VALE FARMLAND

The Landscape Types are shown in more detail on Figure 2, with 1:25,000 scale OS base mapping.

LANDSCAPE TYPE VU: UPPER VALE FARMLAND

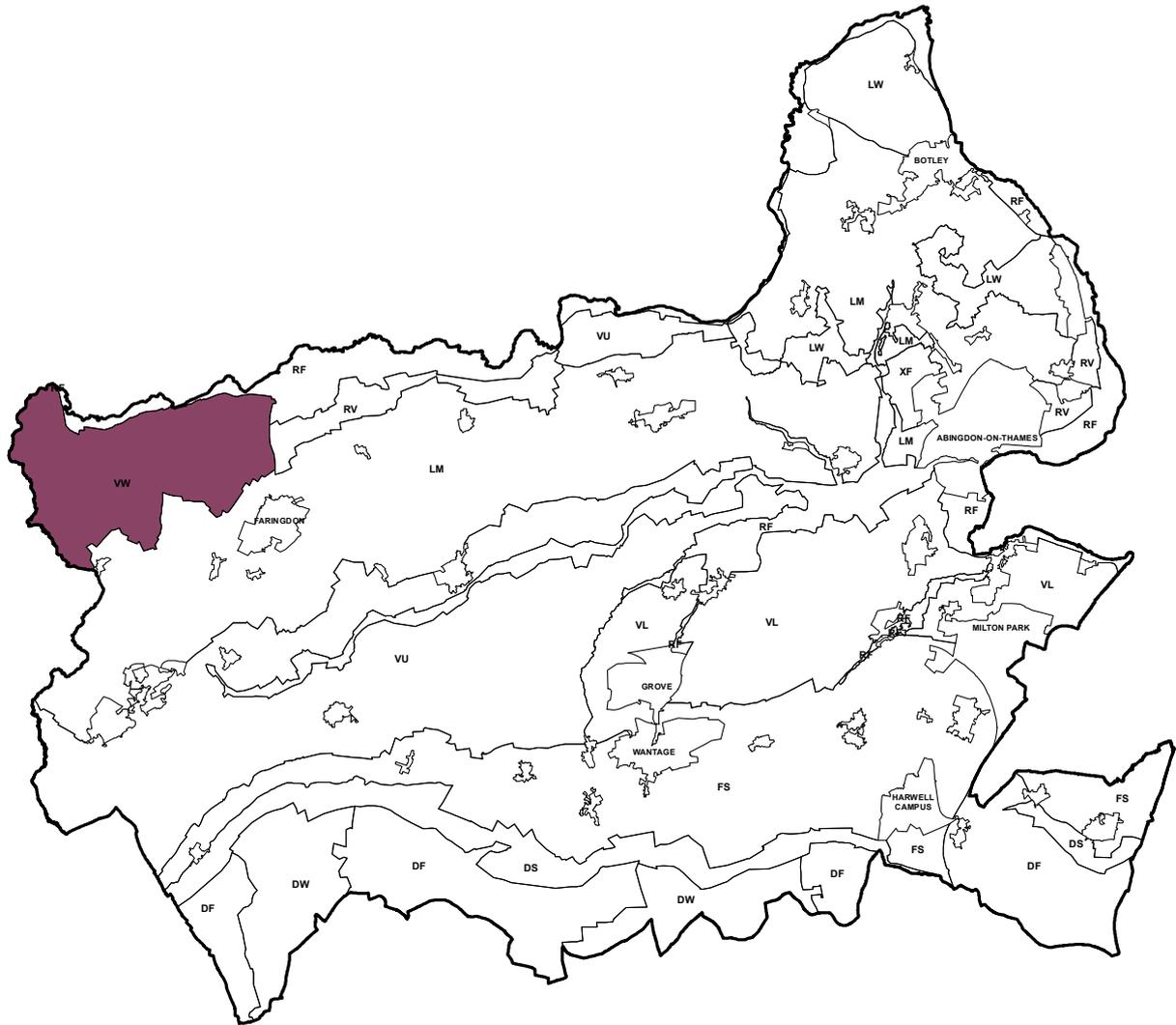
Location and Boundaries

The Upper Vale Farmland Type, together with the Lower Vale Farmland (Type VL) form a band of lower lying farmland through the centre of the District between the rising slopes of the Corallian Limestone Ridge to the north and North Wessex Downs to the south. To the north is an additional area of Upper Vale Farmland located between the Corallian Limestone Ridge and the Thames floodplain. The Upper Vale Farmland is defined by underlying geology, topography, land use and the degree of openness and field pattern scale. Boundaries follow easily recognisable features including roads, woodland edges, watercourses and field boundaries. At its closest, the Type is approximately half a mile (0.8km) from the northern edge of the AONB.



Key Characteristics

- The area is low lying and relatively flat with heavy clay soils, albeit slightly more elevated and gently undulating than the Lower Vale Farmland to the east.
- There is a patchwork of small to medium scale arable fields, interspersed with occasional areas of pasture.
- The intactness of the hedgerow pattern varies, particularly along arable field boundaries, but the Upper Vale Farmland has a more extensive network of boundary vegetation, and more mature field Oaks than the Lower Vale Farmland to the east. There are also small blocks of woodland dispersed through the Upper Vale Farmland.
- Streams and brooks, such as Stutfield Brook and Land Brook, flow north through the Upper Vale towards the River Ock.
- A number of small nucleated settlements and scattered farmsteads are linked by rural lanes across the vale. A network of public rights of way cross the Upper Vale Farmland, including the D'Arcy Dalton Way Long Distance Path.
- The Great Western Main Line railway crosses east-west through the centre of the area, and the route of the disused Wiltshire and Berkshire canal winds its way through the middle of the Type.
- The nearby Corallian Limestone Ridge and North Wessex Downs form backdrops in views to the north and south, aiding the sense of the containment associated with the Upper Vale location.



LANDSCAPE TYPE VW: UPPER VALE WITH WOODLAND

The Landscape Types are shown in more detail on Figure 2, with 1:25,000 scale OS base mapping.

LANDSCAPE TYPE VW: UPPER VALE WITH WOODLAND

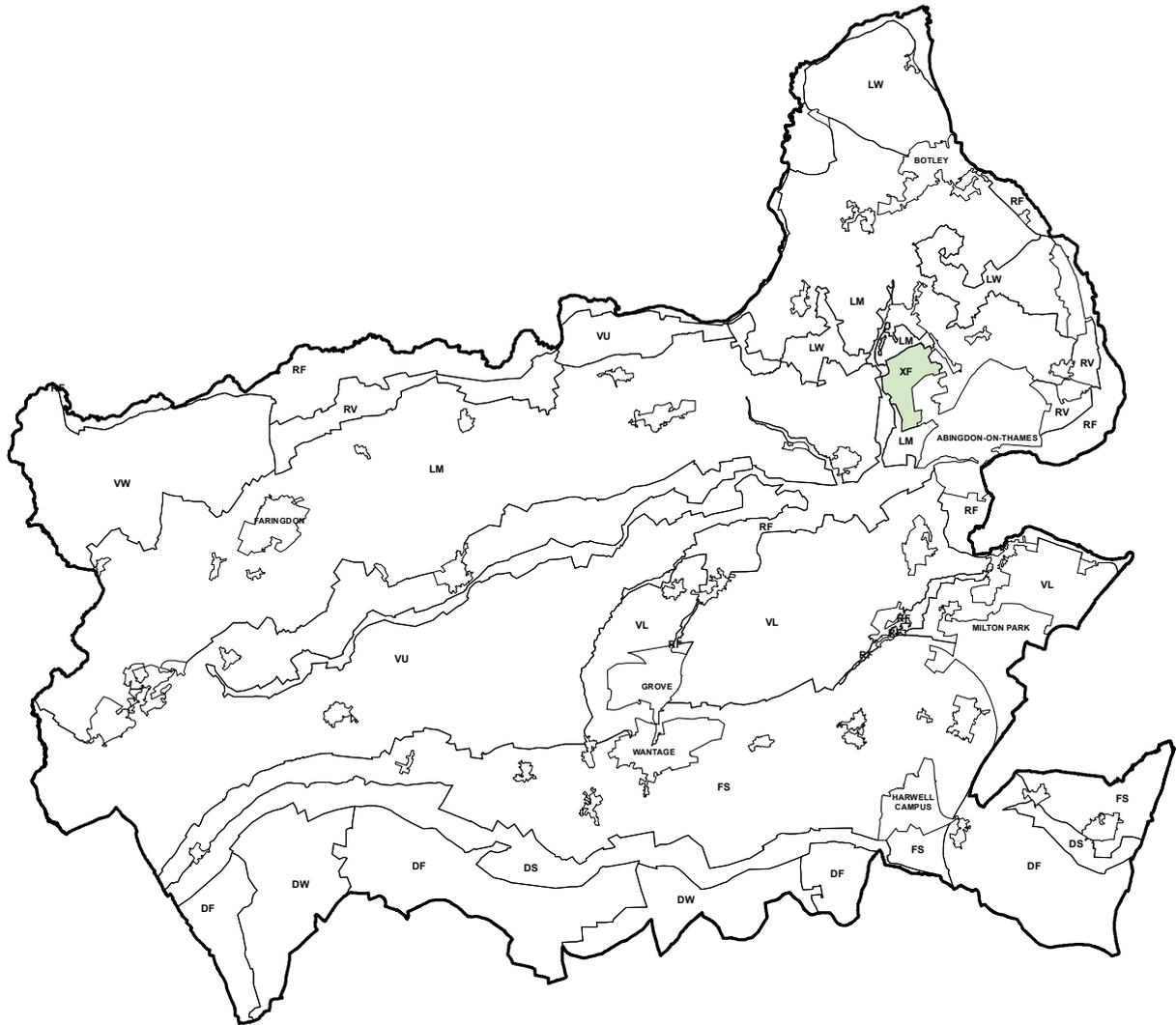
Location and Boundaries

The Upper Vale with Woodland Type is located at the north-west corner of the District, between the Thames floodplain to the north and the Corallian Limestone Ridge to the south. Defined mainly by its geology, topography and land cover, as well as the District boundary and the River Cole to the west. The Landscape Type boundaries follow easily recognisable features including roads, woodland edges and field boundaries. The Upper Vale with Woodland Landscape Type is distant from the North Wessex Downs AONB.



Key Characteristics

- The landscape is generally low lying below the Corallian Limestone Ridge to the south, and above the Thames floodplain to the north, however landform rises to high points in places including around Buscot Park and Badbury Forest.
- The Upper Vale with Woodland includes significant blocks of woodland, along with more open, often large scale, arable farmland.
- The intactness of the hedgerow network varies, with a limited network along some arable field boundaries, intensively clipped hedge in places, and more substantial mature hedgerows elsewhere. Large individual mature trees are a feature along field boundaries and roads.
- There is parkland and manicured grounds and lakes surrounding Buscot House, and evidence of remnant parkland elsewhere.
- Settlement is limited to scattered farmsteads, large houses, and small groups of dwellings, including the Buscot Estate.
- The Upper Vale with Woodland Type contains several main roads, linking to lanes and track which access individual dwellings.
- Vegetation obscures or frames distant views, but the north slopes of the Corallian Limestone Ridge is often prominent in views south and frequently forms a wooded horizon.



LANDSCAPE TYPE XF: FORMER AIRFIELD

The Landscape Types are shown in more detail on Figure 2, with 1:25,000 scale OS base mapping.

LANDSCAPE TYPE XF: FORMER AIRFIELD

Location and Boundaries

The Former Airfield Landscape Type comprises a single area to the north-west of Abingdon, which although a manmade feature is not part of the main area of settlement, and does not readily fall within any of the adjacent Landscape Types. The area is defined by the extent of the airfield and perimeter features, with boundaries following recognisable landscape features on the ground. The Type is relatively distant from the North Wessex Downs AONB.

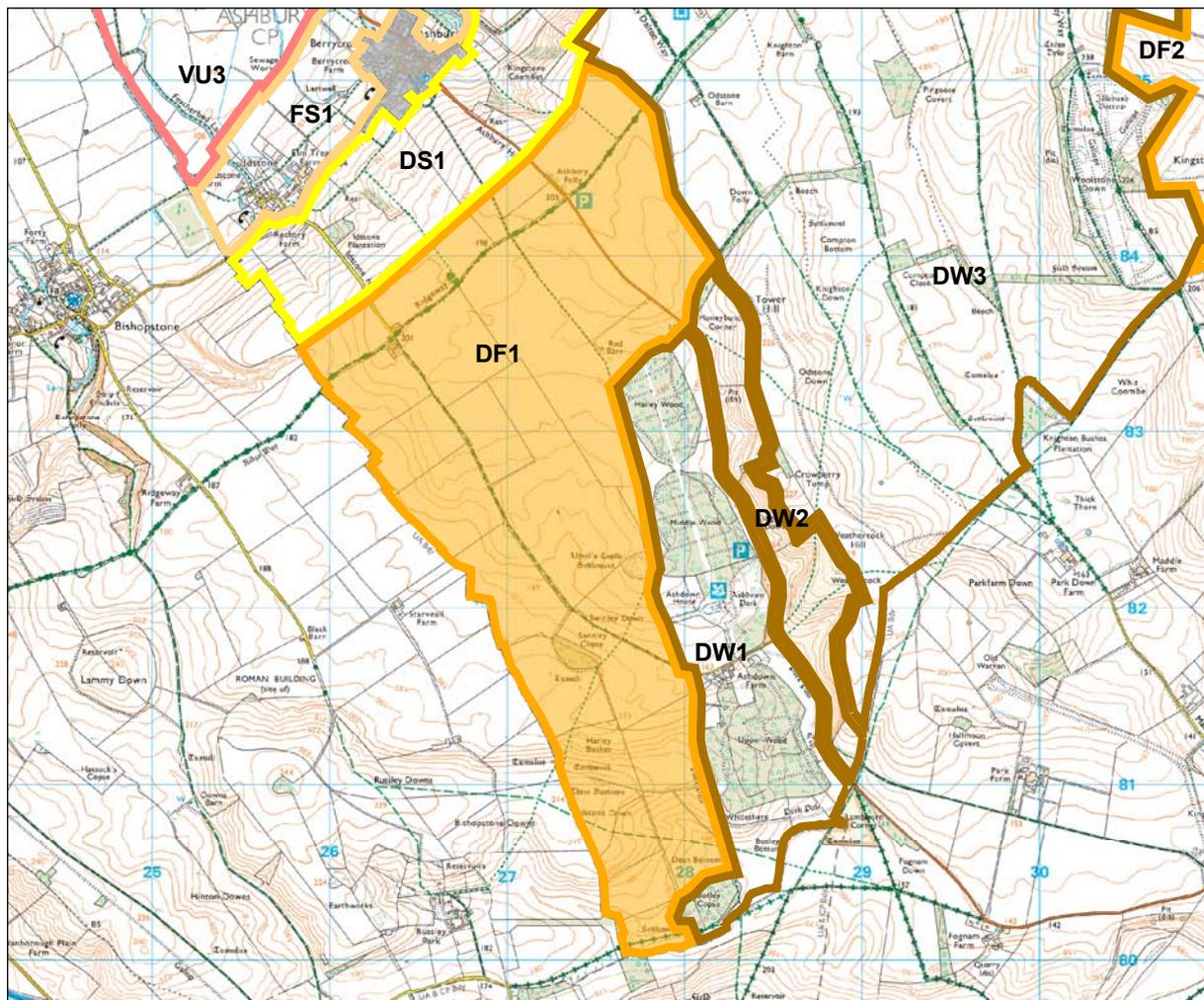


Key Characteristics

- The airfield consists of a flat open area, with significant lengths of runway, hardstandings, hangars and associated buildings.
- The site is a former Royal Air Force base. The airstrip is no longer in regular use by the military, but buildings are currently still used by the Royal Logistic Corps as part of Dalton Barracks.
- The site has the characteristics of a military installation, with security fencing and perimeter warning notices.
- The large scale open aspect across the airfield allows wide ranging views towards the North Wessex Downs on the southern horizon.

Vale of White Horse Landscape Character Assessment

APPENDIX A: Character Area Example



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DF1: SWINLEY DOWNS OPEN FARMLAND

Location and Boundaries

The Swinley Downs Open Farmland Character Area is an area of open chalk downland, adjoining the chalk ridge scarp south of Ashbury. The area is defined by the top of the scarp to the north, and by areas of downland with greater woodland cover, including Ashdown Park, to the east. The open downland character is contiguous with the landscape to the west, however the extent of the Character Area to the west and south is defined by the District boundary. To the west, the area adjoins the 'Downs Plains' and 'High Downs' Character Areas identified within the Swindon Borough Landscape Character Areas Supplementary Planning Guidance. The Character Area is entirely within the Wessex Downs AONB.

Key Characteristics

- Chalk downland, underlain mainly by the Holywell Nodular Chalk Formation.
- Rolling landform, with topography becoming more complex to the south, rising relatively steeply up to approximately 215m AOD at Ildstone Down in the south-west corner of the Character Area. The centre of the Character Area includes a subtle valley feature which descends to approximately 165m. The undulating landform then rises again to the north, up to approximately 200m AOD, where it meets the top of the steep north facing scarp.
- Consists almost entirely of large scale, mainly rectilinear, open arable fields.

- There is a single small block of ancient woodland known as Swinley Copse towards the centre of the Character Area, but elsewhere tree cover is limited to individual trees along field boundaries.
- There is a limited hedgerow network, mainly along tracks, and a number of field boundaries are without any significant vegetation.
- Extensive panoramic long distance views are possible across the character area, including from the Ridgeway looking north across the Thames Vale, and from other public rights of way, including from the top of Ildstone Down, looking across the extensive downland to the west. Views east are restricted to the south of the Character Area by the woodland associated with Ashdown Park.
- The Character Area is unsettled. The only significant structures consist of a small group of agricultural barns at the northern end of the Character Area.
- Formal vehicle access within the Character Area is very limited, consisting mainly of farm tracks. However, the B4000 road runs along the eastern edge of the Character Area, with a small car park located adjacent to the north-east corner of the Character Area, providing access to the Ridgeway.
- The Ridgeway is a National Trail which is an historic route along the top of the ridge scarp to the north. The Ridgeway crosses through the northern part of the Character Area and connects to a comprehensive network of public rights of way providing recreational access to the downland across the Character Area.
- Historic features within the Character Area include an Iron Age hill fort at Alfred's Castle Settlement and barrows at Ildstone Down. Ashdown Park, which abuts the eastern edge of the Character Area, is a registered park and garden.
- This is a rural Character Area, with no nearby urban influences. The large scale landscape is open and exposed. There is limited enclosure, and panoramic views are frequently available from the elevated locations along the numerous public rights of way. There is a keen sense of remoteness across the majority of the Character area.