

Figure D – Biodiversity

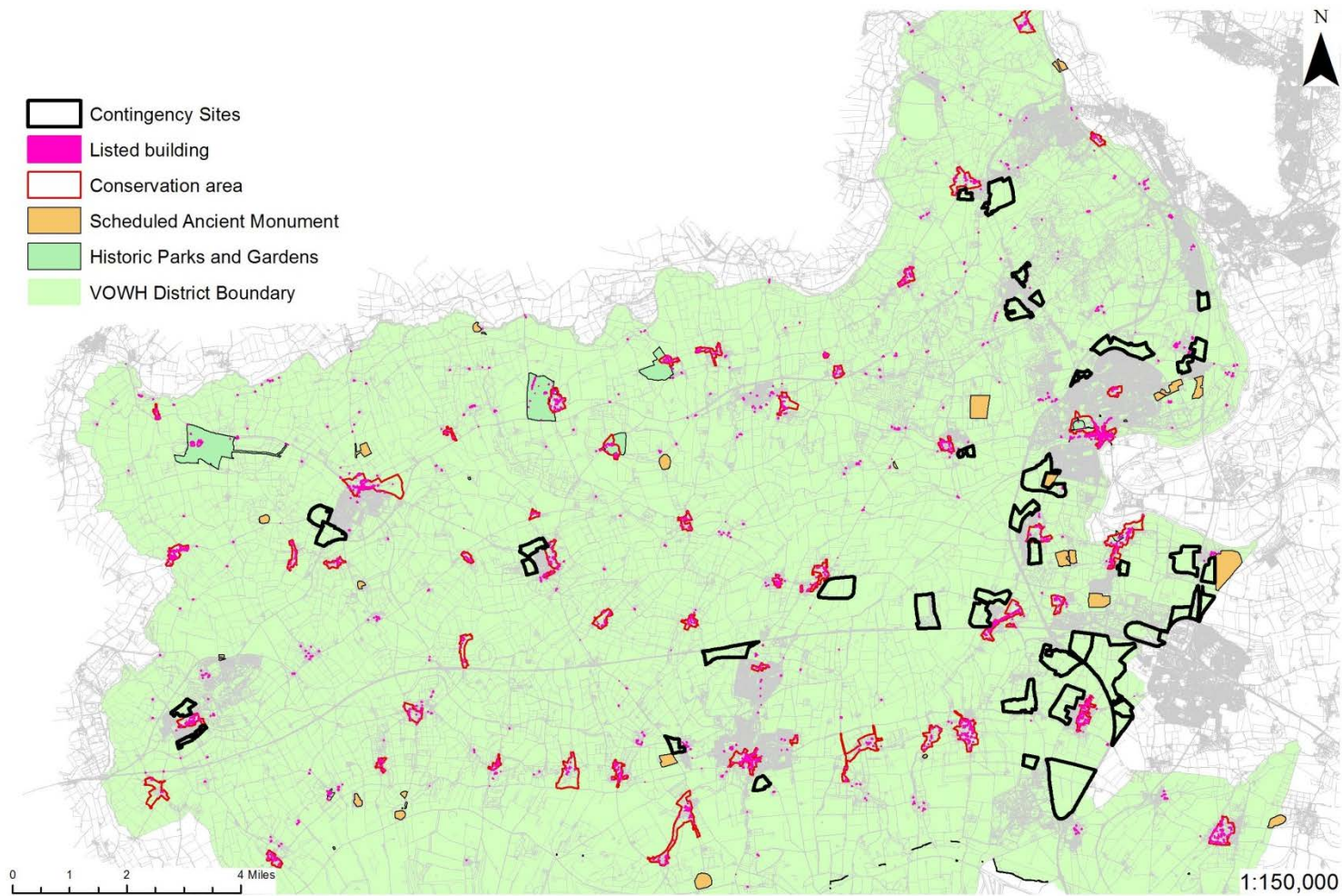


Figure E – Heritage and Landscape

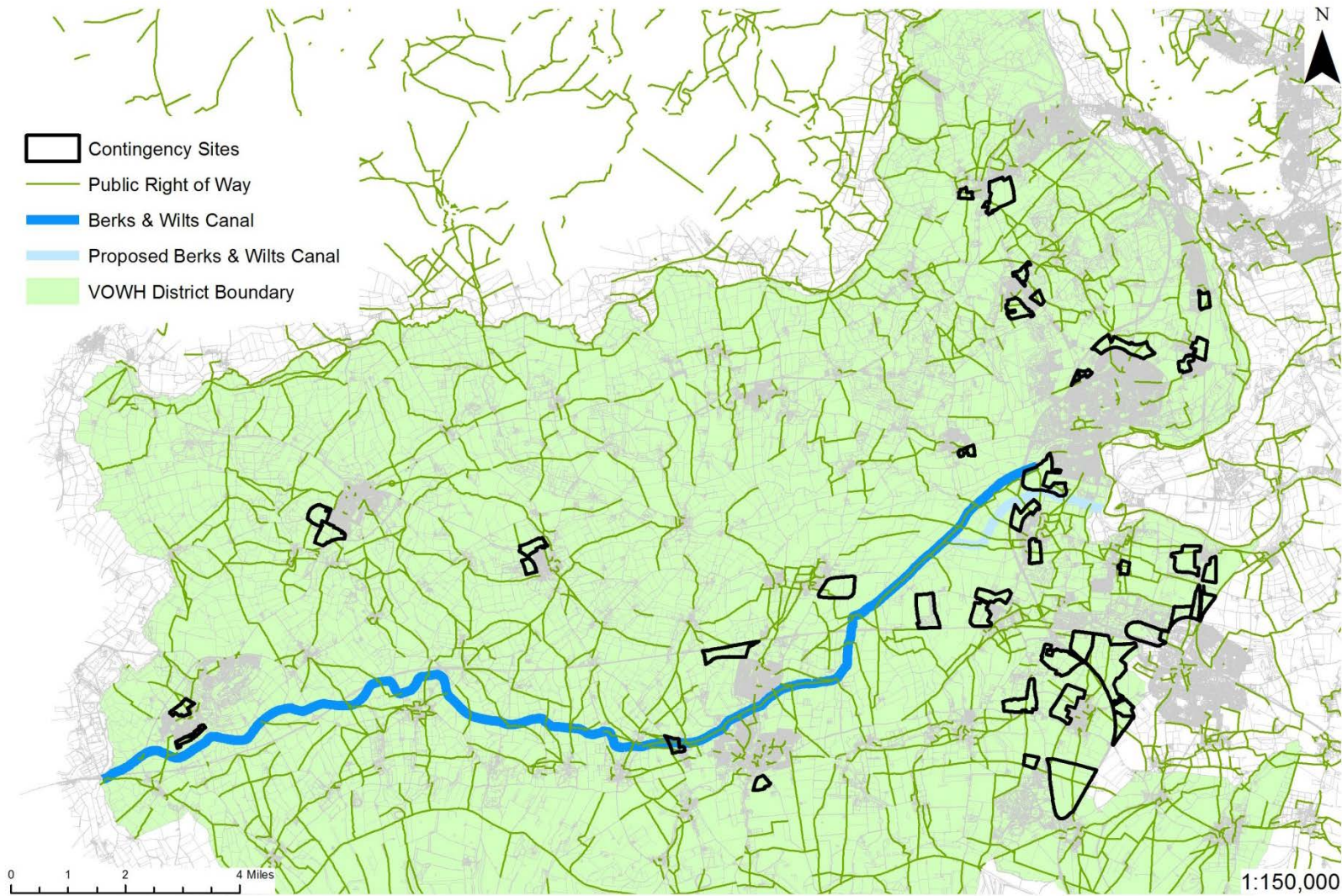


Figure F - Recreation

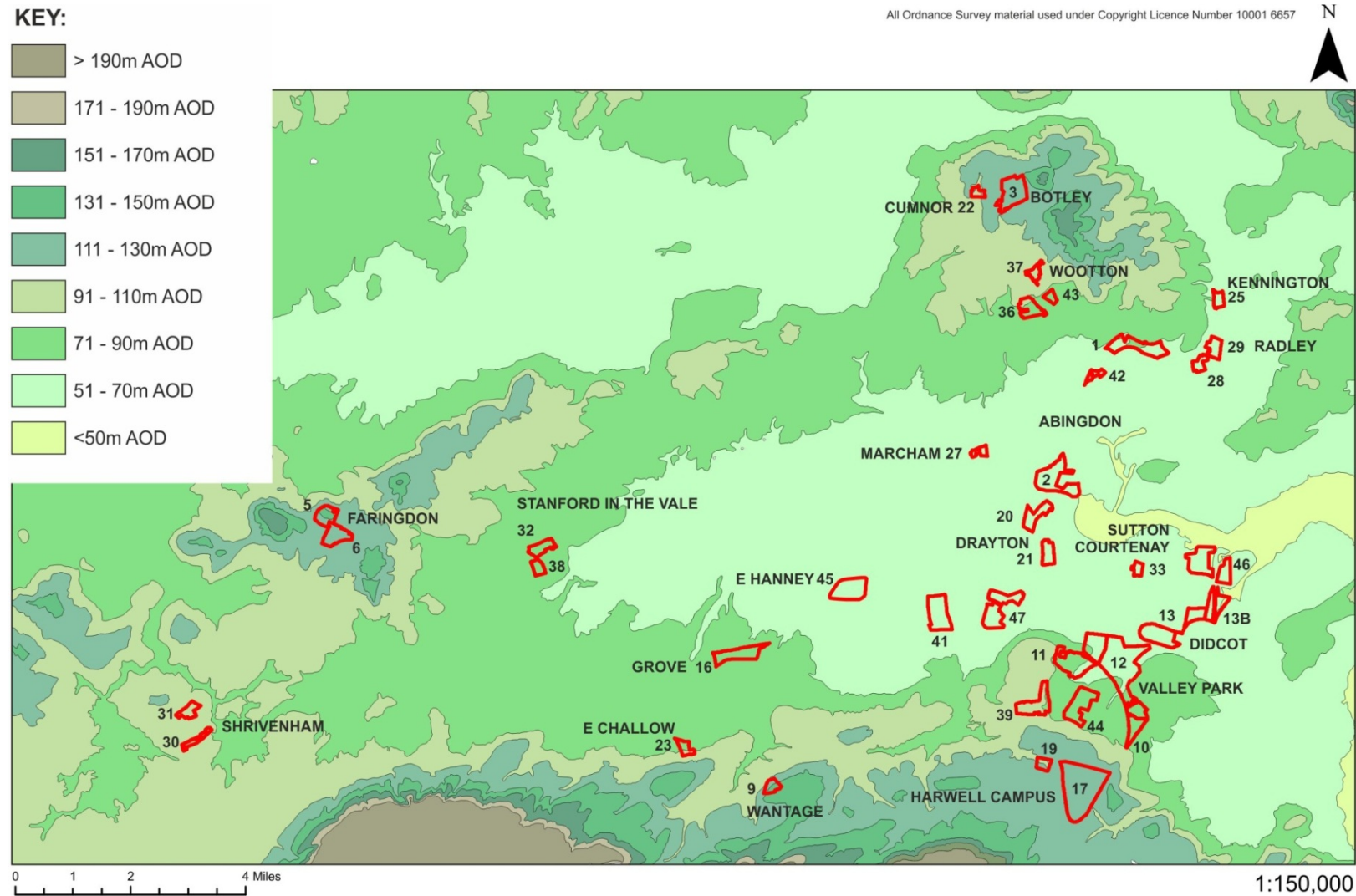


Figure G – Topography

2.2. Previous studies and their relevance

2.2.1 The following documents and data sets have informed the Study:

- GIS data from Vale of White Horse;
- Vale of White Horse Green Infrastructure Audit 2013;
- Vale of White Horse District Council's Planning Advisory Note 2006;
- North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002;
- Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study 2004 (OWLS);
- Vale of White Horse Landscape Assessment – Advice on the Landscape Impact of Further Development at Abingdon, Botley, Faringdon, Grove and Wantage 2008;
- Conservation Area Appraisal for Cumnor;
- National Character Areas NCA108: The Upper Thames Clay Vales (including the Thames Valley and Lowland Vale) 1999; NCA109 The Midvale Ridge 2011 (including the Corallian Ridge); and NCA116 Berkshire and Marlborough Downs (including the North Wessex Downs AONB) 1999.

2.2.2 It is important that this Study reflects the existing adopted landscape character assessments and other studies undertaken in the past for the Vale of White Horse. In the absence of a district-wide landscape character assessment the Study principally draws on the most detailed evidence within the Oxfordshire county-wide landscape character assessment OWLS 2004, supplemented by reference to the broader Vale of White Horse landscape character areas as described in the Local Plan 2011 and Vale of White Horse District Council's Planning Advisory Note 2006; and the much wider but updated Natural England National Character Areas. The key landscape, visual and settlements characteristics and landscape strategies set out in the Record Sheets and Site Reports are therefore mainly taken from OWLS.

2.2.3 The Vale of White Horse Landscape Assessment – Advice on the Landscape Impact of Further Development at Abingdon, Botley, Faringdon, Grove and Wantage 2008 was prepared for the Council to advise at the time on the landscape capacity of a number of settlement edge sites and provides good very detailed advice at site level for five of the sites at Site 2 South Abingdon; Site 5 South-West Farringdon; Site 6 South Farringdon; Site 9 South Wantage; and Site 16 North Grove. This work provided an assessment of the landscape sensitivity and capacity of each site. The current Study revisits these conclusions in the light of further field studies, the methodology adopted for this Study, and a comparison of the relative sensitivity of the thirty eight sites. The results are set out under each Site Report.

2.2.4 For sites within the AONB the key characteristics and landscape strategy set out in the North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002 has been used as the main point of reference supplemented by OWLS.

2.2.5 In the absence of Conservation Area Appraisals, except for Cumnor, further research using the Old Maps website and local information from the local bodies such as the Parishes or local historical groups has helped to identify key features of the landscape setting of Conservation Areas.

2.2.6 Up to date GIS data for the Vale of White Horse has also informed the Study and provided the data shown in Figures A to G.

2.3. **Brief summary of Local Plans 2011 and 2029 policy in relation to the landscape aspects in the Vale of White Horse**

2.3.1 The NPPF sets out a number of key requirements for the open landscape outside of settlements:

1. The environmental role means contributing to protecting and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment (7)
2. Environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously with economic and social gains in order to achieve sustainable development (8)
3. A core principle is the need to take account of the different roles and character of different areas, ... protecting the Green Belts around them (main urban areas) and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside; allocation of land for development should prefer land of lesser environmental value (17)
4. Protecting Green Belt land (79 – 92)
5. Conserving and enhancing the natural and local environment (109 – 125)
6. Conserving and enhancing the landscape setting of the historic environment (128, 129, 131-135).

2.3.2 This Study is undertaken in the light of these principles.

Local Plan 2011 Saved Policies

2.3.3 The main relevant current Local Plan 2011 saved policies include GS3: Development in the Oxford Green Belt; heritage policies HE1: setting of Conservation Areas, HE4: setting of listed buildings, and HE8: historic Parks and Gardens and HE9: setting of archaeological sites; and landscape policies NE6 to NE12. The Wilts and Berks Canal and the proposed new route south of Abingdon runs close to Site 2 South Abingdon, Site 23 land North West of East Challow and in the vicinity of Site 30 South Shrivenham. Site 20 North West Drayton is close to the new proposed canal route south of Abingdon. Therefore policies L14 and L15 are also relevant. Policies HE1, HE4, HE8, HE9, NE6 to NE12, L14 and L15 have been assessed by the Council as fully consistent with NPPF. Policy GS3 is considered to be predominantly consistent and is relevant to this Study, The relevant extracts are set out below for convenience:

POLICY GS3

Development (including the change of use of land and engineering and other operations) will only be permitted if it does not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt and if it preserves its openness and the special character of Oxford and its landscape setting.

Subject to the above criteria new building will only be allowed for the following purposes:

- i) agriculture or forestry;*
- ii) small-scale facilities essential for outdoor sport, recreation, cemeteries and other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt;*
- iii) limited extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings. An extension to or the replacement of a dwelling will not be permitted if it exceeds the following limits:*
 - a) existing dwellings with a floorspace of less than 80 square metres. up to 50% of the original volume of the dwelling (excluding outbuildings);*
 - b) existing dwellings with a floorspace of 81.120 square metres. up to 40% of the original volume of the dwelling (excluding outbuildings);*
 - c) existing dwellings with a floorspace greater than 121 square metres. Up to 30% of the original volume of the dwelling (excluding outbuildings); and*
- iv) limited infilling between existing built development in the villages of Farmoor, Shippon, South Hinksey, Sunningwell, Wootton old village and Wytham, as defined on the proposals map.*

Residential infilling will be limited to schemes of 1 or 2 dwellings unless it is for social housing for the local community in accordance with policy H18.

The visual amenities of the green belt will be protected from development within or conspicuous from the green belt which might be harmful by reason of its siting, scale or design.

POLICY HE1

Proposals for development or other works within or affecting the setting of a conservation area will not be permitted unless they can be shown to preserve or enhance the established character or appearance of the area.

Development will only be permitted:

- i) on areas such as paddocks, greens, gaps between buildings, gardens and other open spaces where it can be shown that these areas do not make a positive contribution to;*
 - a) the conservation area's special interest including its relationship with its landscape setting, or*
 - b) views within, into, or out from the conservation area which would be lost or damaged were the development to be permitted.*

POLICY HE4

Planning permission, for development within the setting of listed buildings will not be granted unless it can be shown that the siting, scale, design, form, finishes (including colour) and materials of the proposal respect the characteristics of the building in its setting, including any visual, functional, historic or architectural relationships it has.

POLICY HE8

Proposals for development within or in the setting of an historic park or garden included in the national register will only be permitted where they conserve and cause no significant harm to the historic character of the site and the features of special interest it possesses.

POLICY HE9

Where there are reasonable grounds for believing that important archaeological remains may be disturbed or otherwise adversely affected by a development proposal the applicant will be required to carry out an archaeological field evaluation of the site and its setting before the planning application is determined.

POLICY NE6

Development in the North Wessex Downs area of outstanding natural beauty will only be permitted if the natural beauty of the landscape will be conserved or enhanced. Development which would be visually prominent, would detract from views from public vantage points or would spoil the appreciation of the landscape quality of the North Wessex Downs area of outstanding natural beauty will not be permitted.

Major industrial or commercial development will not be permitted in the area of outstanding natural beauty unless:

- i) it is proven to be in the national interest and no alternative site can be found; and*
- ii) all steps are taken to reduce the impact of the development on the beauty of the area.*

POLICY NE7

Development which would harm the prevailing character and appearance of the North Vale Corallian Ridge, as shown on the proposals map, will not be permitted unless there is an overriding need for the development and all steps will be taken to minimise the impact on the landscape.

POLICY NE8

The conservation of Oxford's landscape setting will take priority in considering proposals for development in areas within view of the city.

Development will not be permitted if it would:

- i) harm the landscape setting of Oxford; or*
- ii) obscure or detract from an important view of the sky line of collegiate Oxford, particularly within the view cones as defined on the proposals map.*

POLICY NE9

Development in the lowland vale will not be permitted if it would have an adverse effect on the landscape, particularly on the long open views within or across the area.

POLICY NE10

In the urban fringes and important open gaps between settlements, as shown on the proposals map, development or changes of use which would harm their essentially open or rural character will not be permitted.

POLICY NE11

Proposals for development within or affecting areas of damaged or compromised landscape, in particular those areas defined for landscape enhancement on the proposals map, must provide a landscaping scheme which enhances the appearance of the area. Development which would further erode or damage the character of the landscape will not be permitted.

POLICY NE12

Development within the community forest, as shown on the proposals map, must, wherever possible, make a positive contribution towards the creation of a diverse woodland environment appropriate to the landscape character of the area. Proposals which would prejudice the aims and objectives of the great western community forest will not be permitted.

POLICY LI4

Development which would cause demonstrable harm to the essential character of the Wilts and Berks Canal or to its setting, or would be likely to prevent or impair the restoration of the canal, or would result in the loss of any buildings, locks or other structures associated with the original waterway function of the canal will not be permitted.

Development on or close to the route of the canal will be required to facilitate development of its recreational potential and/or protect its nature conservation and heritage value.

Development that would prevent the restoration of the canal on its historic alignment as shown on the proposals map will only be permitted if arrangements for the reinstatement of the canal on a viable alternative route can be secured by the developer.

POLICY LI5

Development which would prevent the implementation of the proposed new route for the canal south of Abingdon as shown on the proposals map will be refused.

Emerging Local Plan 2029

- 2.3.4 The Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2029 Part I Consultation Draft, February 2013, identified a number of new homes to be provided in the area for the period up to 2029. Core policy 3 identified a number of strategic sites in the Plan at Valley Park, Didcot; Harwell Oxford Campus; Faringdon; and Wantage and Grove. The Consultation Document also includes a presumption in favour of sustainable development within the

existing built area of Market Towns, Local Service Centres and Larger Villages. The proposed Core Policy 3 states that development outside of the existing built area of these settlements will be permitted where allocated in the Local Plan 2029 Part 1 or through neighbourhood plans or the Local Plan 2029 Part 2 on the condition that ‘this development must be adjacent, or well related, to the existing built area of the settlement or meet exceptional circumstances set out in other policies of the Local Plan 2029’. Part 2 will go on to contain detailed policies and local sites.

2.3.5 Other relevant proposed policies in the February 2013 LPPI consultation document include:

Core Policy 34: Landscape

The Vale’s distinct landscape character and key features will be protected against inappropriate development and where possible enhanced.

High priority will be given to conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs AONB and planning decisions will have regard to its setting. Proposals that support the economy and social well being of communities located in the AONB, including affordable housing schemes, will be encouraged provided they do not conflict with the aims of conservation and enhancement.

Locally valued landscape and its features will be protected, maintained and where possible, enhanced, in particular:

- i. features such as trees, hedgerows, woodland, field boundaries, watercourses and water bodies*
- ii. the landscape setting of settlements*
- iii. topographical features*
- iv. features of cultural and historic value*
- v. important views and visually sensitive skylines, and*
- vi. tranquillity and the need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise, and motion.*

Where development is acceptable in principle, measures will be sought to integrate it into the landscape character of the area. Proposals will need to demonstrate how they have responded the above aspects of landscape character.

As well as documents produced by the council, development proposals should have regard to the information and advice contained in the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) and the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment and Management Plan.

Core Policy 35: Green Infrastructure

A net gain in green infrastructure, including biodiversity, will be sought either through on site provision or off-site contributions and the targeted use of other funding sources.

Proposals for new development must be accompanied by a statement demonstrating that they have taken into account the relationship of the proposed development to existing green infrastructure and how this will be retained and enhanced. Where appropriate, proposals will be required to contribute to the delivery of new green infrastructure and/or the improvement of existing assets including Conservation Target Areas in accordance with the standards in the forthcoming Oxfordshire Green Infrastructure Strategy.

A net loss of green infrastructure, including biodiversity, through development proposals will be resisted.

- 2.3.6 The Draft Local Plan Part I is currently being reviewed in the light of emerging evidence and consultation responses and the wording of the draft policies may change before publication of the Draft Local Plan Part I pre-submission document.

2.4. Principles of development within the North Wessex Downs AONB

- 2.4.1 It is an over-riding principle that any development within the North Wessex Downs should conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB and in so doing not result in harm to the special qualities of the AONB. Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs which have the highest level of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. Major development should not take place in the AONB, except in exceptional circumstances. NPPF paragraphs 14 (footnote 9), 113, 115 and 116 are most relevant.
- 2.4.2 Two of the potential contingency sites lie within the AONB in the Harwell / Chilton area and five lie within the immediate setting at Wantage, North East Challow, Rowstock, Land west of Harwell and South Valley Park. All seven would constitute major development with a potential cumulative effect at Harwell Oxford Campus.
- 2.4.3 The special qualities of the AONB and key issues are set out in the AONB's Management Plan. The Management Plan is a statutory document (CROW Act 2000) which the AONB is required to update every 5 years. The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2014-19 Consultation Draft was published for consultation in August 2013.

Special Qualities (from the Consultation Draft Management Plan 2014 - 2019: Development Section)

- *The sense of remoteness and tranquillity*
- *An overall undeveloped and rural quality with only limited human intervention*
- *All landscapes within the AONB are sensitive to change*
- *Typically modest villages with distinctive and ancient settlement patterns*
- *A landscape shaped by history and characterised by its quality and number of ancient monuments*
- *Architectural styles that vary throughout the AONB but within specific areas create a sense of place and vernacular local character due to the availability of local building materials and traditional building styles.*
- *The built environment forms an integral part of local character and distinctiveness and adds to the diversity of the AONB landscape as a whole*
- *Its ecology, flora and fauna and space for bio-diversity.*

Key Issues (from the Consultation Draft Management Plan 2014 - 2019: Development Section)

- *The threat of expansion of the main urban areas just beyond the boundary of the North Wessex Downs, including the main centres of Swindon, Wantage, Didcot, Reading, Newbury, Basingstoke, Andover, and Devizes for example creating urban fringe pressures and impact on the setting of the AONB*
- *New housing developments on greenfield sites*
- *Development that results in a material loss of tranquillity and or impact on the dark night skies within the North Wessex Downs or its setting*
- *New road building, new road signage and new street lighting.*

2.5. Principles of development within the Green Belt.

- 2.5.1 The over-riding principle of the Green Belt is to keep the land permanently open. The five purposes (NPPF) are to:
- Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 - Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
 - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
 - Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns;
 - Assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- 2.5.2 The Oxford Green Belt was designated to preserve its openness and the special character of Oxford and its landscape setting. The northern part of the Vale of White Horse is included in the Green Belt and contributes to the character of Oxford and its landscape setting, including both the Thames landscape corridor and parts of the North Vale Corallian Ridge and Lowland Vales landscapes. Key views of Oxford have been identified from this area, but none directly affect the potential contingency sites.
- 2.5.3 Ten of the potential contingency site options are within the existing Oxford Green Belt. A Review of the Green Belt in Vale of White Horse has been commissioned. This will examine in much greater detail the contribution made by land parcels within the Green Belt, including the ten sites and other land on the edge of settlements, to the above purposes.

2.6 Consideration of the role of sites in providing an area of open countryside between settlements

- 2.6.1 The Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 includes policy which seeks to protect open gaps between settlements: GS3 on Green Belts; and NE10 on urban fringes and important open gaps of which three are particularly identified on the Proposals Map. Of these, the Important Open Land between Harwell and Didcot, Didcot and Appleford and around the western and northern edge of Didcot affect this Study. The February 2013 LPPI consultation document proposes that a large part of the Open Land between Harwell and Didcot (covered by policy NE10) should be developed for housing. The principle of policy NE10 remains as a saved policy and as such affects Sites 10: South Valley Park, Site 11: North-West Valley Park, and Site 12 Valley Park in the Didcot – Harwell area; and 13B: North Didcot in the Didcot – Appleford area.
- 2.6.2 The February 2013 LPPI consultation document includes the proposed policy CP9: The Oxford Green Belt and proposes to retain NE10. The policies and proposals in the February 2013 draft LPPI may be subject to change before publication of the LPPI pre-submission draft.

2.7 Objectives

- 2.7.1 The Study forms an important part of the Council's Local Plan evidence base and represents a technical assessment of potential contingency housing sites within the Vale of White Horse. The LCSCS aims to provide a transparent, consistent, objective and robust assessment of landscape capacity of all sites identified as potential contingency sites by the Council, to provide officers with evidence that will identify which sites or areas of sites could best accommodate development or change, without adverse landscape and visual impacts. The landscape capacity of each site has been assessed relative to the other sites included in the study rather than against the most and least sensitive sites nationally. This format gives officers a more meaningful tool for assessing development proposals within the District, and gives a clear indication which sites could best accommodate development, from a landscape perspective and which sites would be most sensitive to change. The attributes identified in the Record Sheets, and summarised within the individual Reports, also provide guidance on which landscape and visual attributes require special protection should some level of development be acceptable.

2.8 Overview of existing landscape character assessment

2.8.1 The thirty eight contingency site options fall within the following local landscape character areas and landscape types as defined in the Vale of White Horse District Council's Planning Advisory Note 2006; North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002 and the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study 2004 (OWLS). These are set out below.

Landscape character area	OWLS (landscape character types)	Contingency site options	Key characteristics / guidance
AONB 5C: Hendred Plain	LCT12 Rolling Farmland	17: East Harwell Oxford Campus 19: North-West Harwell Oxford Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level topography dipping gently north • Largely arable with large regular parliamentary enclosure fields • Shelter belts • Settled landscape of springline villages of mainly clustered form • Quiet rural area • Significant development at Harwell Oxford Campus • Open landscape vulnerable to large scale development • Sensitivity of the edge of the AONB at Wantage and Harwell to new development • Need to conserve the distinctive settlement pattern of nucleated villages along the spring line • Need to conserve the skyline of the higher hills
VWH North Vale Corallian Ridge	LCT12 Rolling Farmland	1A: North Abingdon 22: South Cumnor 42: North West Abingdon 43: East Wootton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prominent rolling landscape • Large geometric arable fields enclosed by weak hedgerows • Thinly distributed hedgerow trees • Locally prominent blocks of ancient woodland • Localised small streams providing some variation to the open intensively managed landscape • Open distant views are common • More filtered views where fields are better enclosed • Abingdon is sited on the junction of the Rivers Thames and Ock • Small to medium sized nucleated villages now expanding into linear settlements outside Abingdon • Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn, and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash. • Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type. • Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and where appropriate, pollarding willows. • Promote the sustainable management of existing ancient semi-natural woodland to safeguard its long-term survival. • Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as oak and ash.
	LCT15 Terrace Farmland	1C: North Abingdon 28: North-West Radley 29: North Radley (small area in SE corner)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad flat or low lying gravel terraces gently rising from the Thames valley floor • Large scale regularly shaped field pattern of predominantly arable land with fragmented network of hedges, becoming medium scaled close to Radley • Localised tree lined ditches • Sparse tree cover and woodland uncommon • Open large scale landscape