

# BLENHEIM PALACE WORLD HERITAGE SITE REVISED MANAGEMENT PLAN 2017

## APPENDIX III : SETTING STUDY

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.01 The primary aim of this document is to provide information which helps to interpret what is meant by 'the setting' of the Blenheim World Heritage Site and to offer guidance on the ways in which it contributes to the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the site. This study has taken close account of Historic England's *Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning:3 The Setting of Heritage Assets* (GPA3) which was published in 2015 and sets out a process by which the character of setting might be explained, as well as providing guidance on how potential impacts of developments on setting can be assessed. The value in understanding the setting of a World Heritage Site (WHS) lies in an appreciation of the way in which it can contribute to the OUV, and this contribution can vary greatly between sites. In some cases the landscape setting of a WHS may be part of the reason for its original location where 'borrowed' views form part of its special character; in other cases the contribution of setting is less clear. In recent years the idea of protecting the setting of all heritage assets has become more widely recognised in the UK. It is now protected through planning policy yet it remains the case that the interpretation of what constitutes 'setting', its extent and character, can vary considerably. This document, therefore, seeks to provide some tools and information to help interpret both the developed and undeveloped setting of the Blenheim WHS in terms of its contribution to OUV.

1.02 Through a more detailed understanding of the setting of Blenheim WHS, and the way in which it contributes to the OUV, it will be possible to better understand the implications of any proposed changes. Thus informed decisions can be made which will help protect the characteristics that are significant to the setting, and potentially highlight where these significances might be enhanced as part of any development project.

1.03 The setting study has been produced by Historic Landscape Management Ltd as part of the process of reviewing and updating the Blenheim Palace and Park WHS

Management Plan which is 10 years old this year (2016). It has been prepared in line with both international and national policy and guidance, including the National Planning Policy Framework, Circular 07/2009 on the Protection of World Heritage Sites, the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention; Historic England (formerly English Heritage) guidance 'The Setting of Heritage Assets', and 'Seeing the History in the View' and most recently GPA3 'The Setting of Heritage Assets'. The document has also benefited from studying the way in which this subject has been considered by other World Heritage Sites in the UK.

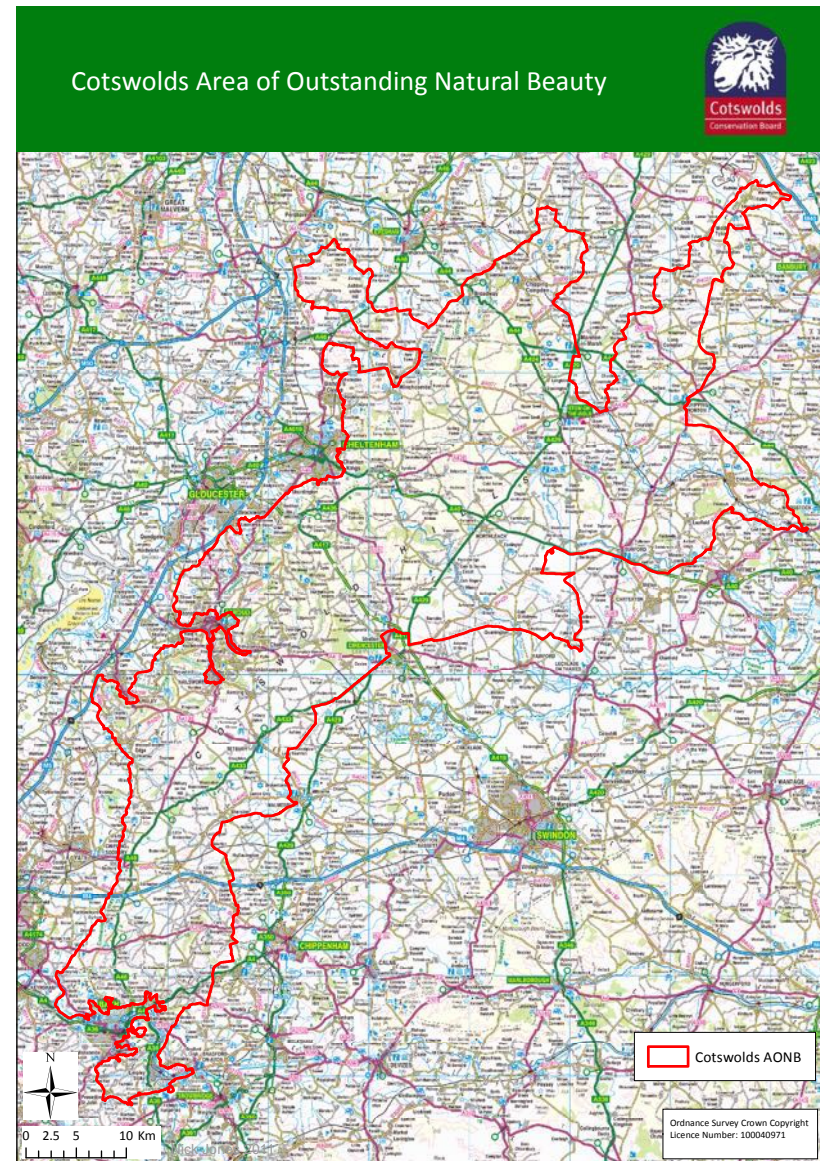
1.04 The document is designed to support decision making on matters that may impact - positively or negatively - on the setting of the Blenheim WHS. It is not intended as a means of preventing appropriate development in the land surrounding Blenheim Park but to help reveal potential impacts and inform decisions on appropriate actions and mitigations. Local planning authorities and those asked to consider planning applications at a parish level, may find its contents helpful in complying with paragraph 129 of the NPPF, which requires them to '*identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset)*'. It may also be helpful to developers in providing an agreed understanding of the setting of the WHS and its significance, so that any new developments can be designed in a way which enhances that significance, and it can also help towards providing some of the background information required of developers by paragraph 128 of the NPPF to '*describe the significance of any heritage asset affected, including any contribution made by their setting*'. Land owners and land managers will also find information of value when considering changes to land use.

1.05 The contents of this document are arranged in the following way: Chapter 2 sets out and examines the relevant guidance and existing policy, explaining the key provisions and intentions of each. It will provide general definitions of the term, specific extracts from the UNESCO Operational Guidelines on setting, the related NPPF policies, and Historic England's guidance on understanding setting of heritage assets. Chapter 3 explains how setting is valued in terms of its scenic qualities, biodiversity, opportunities for leisure uses, and the ways in which it has important benefits for a strong local economy, and explains the characteristics of the setting of the Blenheim

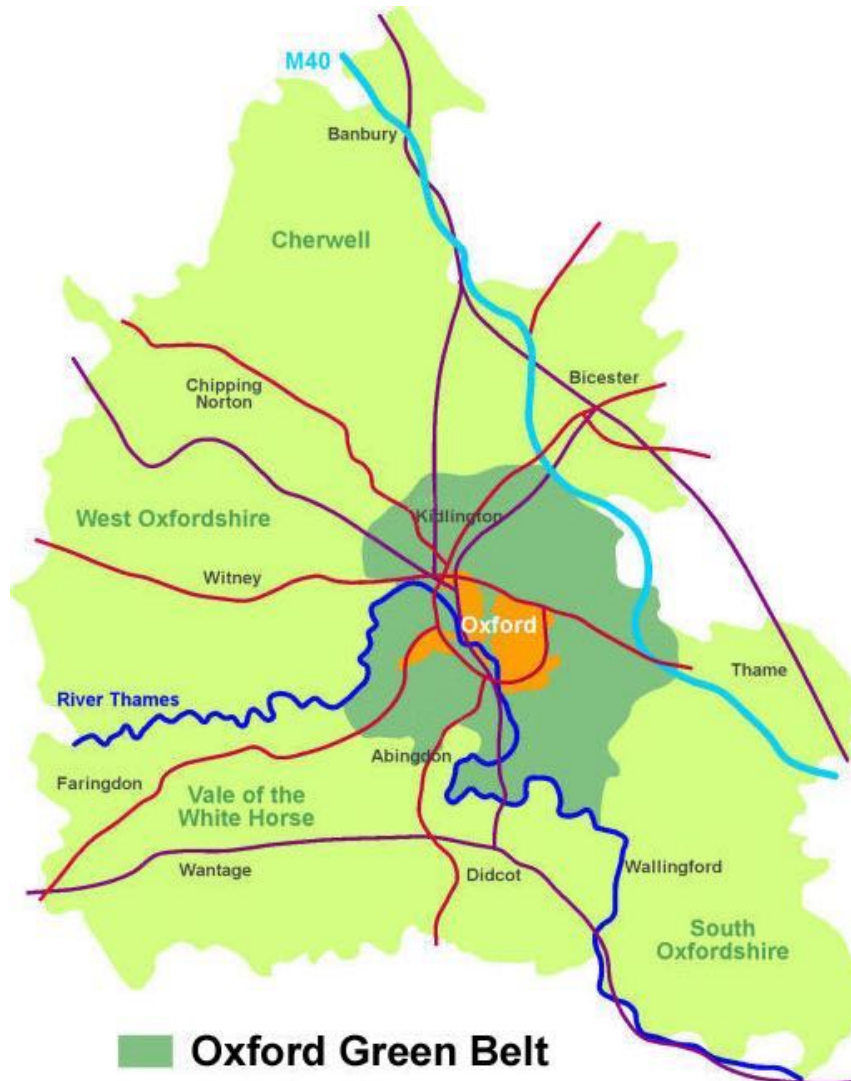
Palace WHS through an examination of NCA landscape character areas; local landscape character assessment; historic landscape character assessment; assessment of the characters of the AONB and conservation areas. It looks at the history of the land and its farming heritage and records the way in which the main settlements have changed over the course of the 20th century. Chapter 4 uses historic archive material to help understand the way in which the setting of the Palace was considered during its original design and layout (particularly in relation to the Lancelot Brown design - which is a key part of the World Heritage Site's OUV); together with the particular landform and visual characteristics of the surrounding landscape recorded during field survey undertaken for this project. Illustrations will include a map of key areas and views. Chapter 5 summarises the values of the WHS setting with a map to help explain the different contributions made by setting to the significance of the WHS; considers its management; and looks at how GPA3 can be used to help guide the assessment of impacts on setting.



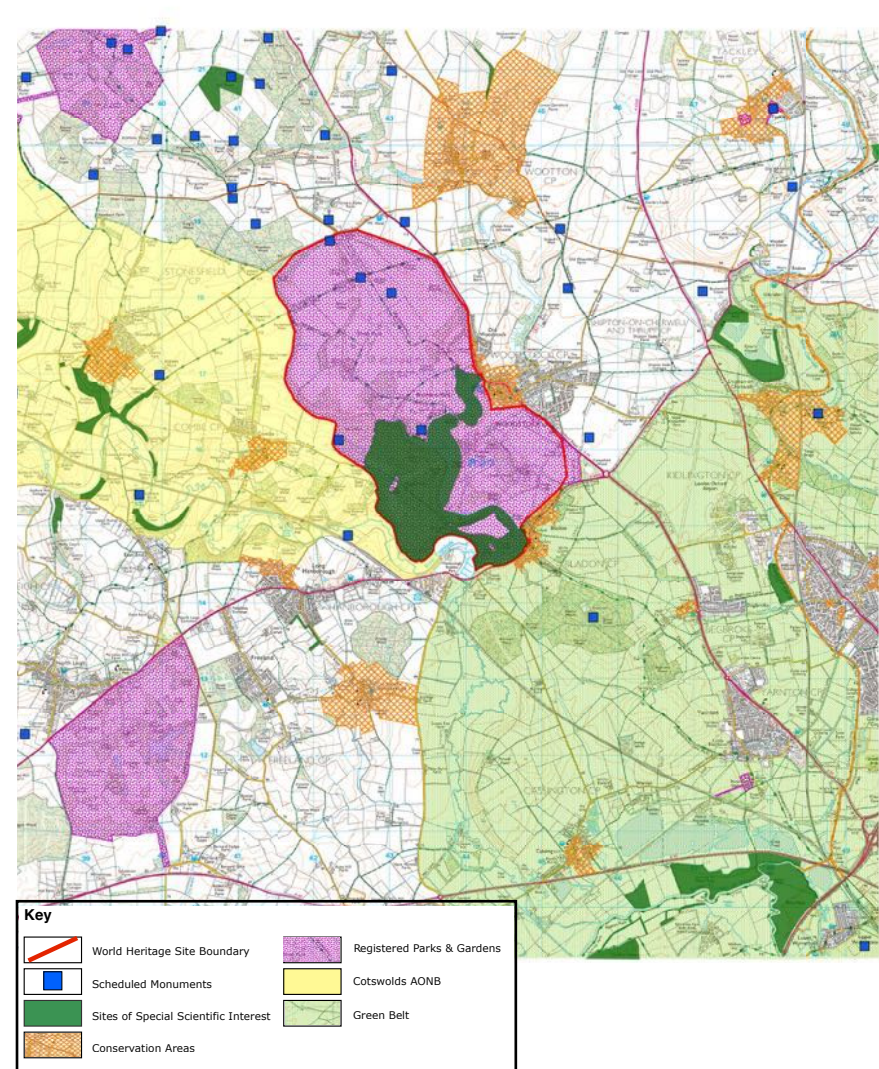
Planning Designations: AONB boundary  
Planning Designations: Green Belt boundary







Planning Designations: Conservation Area boundaries; Scheduled Monuments;  
Registered Parks & Gardens



## 2 DEFINITIONS, GUIDANCE AND POLICY ON SETTING

### DEFINITIONS

#### Dictionary

2.01 The definition of setting provided in the Oxford English Dictionary states that it is *'the manner or position in which something is set, fixed or placed; a person or thing's immediate environment or surroundings; a place or time in, or at which, a story, play, scene etc is represented as happening'*. This provides an appreciation of the fact that setting relates not only to the physical relationship between the subject and its surroundings, but also to less easily defined aspects of setting, specifically those relating to the context of time - something that is particularly relevant at Blenheim. In their publication 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment' English Heritage (now Historic England) stated that setting should be seen as *'the local context of a heritage asset'*, that it *'embraces past and present relationships between the heritage asset and the surrounding landscape'* and that it is *'defined by the extent to which change could affect the place's significance'*.

#### National Planning

2.02 The National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 129) concurs with this idea, and defines the setting of heritage assets as: *'the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive contribution or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral'*. Thus the NPPF concludes that:

- setting is the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced;
- its extent is not fixed and can change as the asset and its surroundings evolve;
- elements of setting can make positive, negative or neutral contributions; and
- setting influences the ability to appreciate the significance of a heritage asset.

#### Historic England

2.03 In 2015, Historic England produced more detailed Good Practice Advice in Planning on the setting of heritage assets (GPA3), which superseded their previous publications. This seeks to further define the ideas of setting and to provide additional explanation of the definition provided by the NPPF. In particular it expands on the fact that setting is *'the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced'* but it *'does not have a fixed boundary and cannot be definitively and permanently described....as a spatially bounded area or as lying within a set distance of a heritage asset'*.

#### UNESCO Operational Guidelines

2.04 The 2015 WHS Operational Guidelines (para 13) is of particular relevance in providing guidance on the definition of setting in relation to World Heritage Sites. It states that: *'the broader setting may relate to the property's topography, natural and built environment, and other elements such as infrastructure, land use patterns, spatial organisation, and visual relationships. It may also include related social and cultural practices, economic processes and other intangible dimensions of heritage such as perceptions and associations. Management of the broader setting is related to its role in supporting the OUV'*.

2.05 In terms of international definitions of setting for World Heritage Sites, the Xi'an Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Structures, Sites and Areas (ICOMOS 2005) provides the following helpful guidance:

- The setting of a heritage site, structure or area is defined as the immediate and extended environment that is part of, or contributes to, its significance and distinctive character.
- The definition of setting requires an understanding of the history, evolution and character of the surrounds of the heritage resources.
- Setting includes interaction with the natural environment, past or present social or spiritual practices, customs, traditional knowledge, use or activities and other forms of intangible cultural heritage aspects.

2.06 In summary, these definitions of the setting of heritage assets, and specifically World Heritage Sites, imply the following characteristics:

- it includes the surroundings of the asset, but this is not fixed, and can change as the asset, values and understanding evolves;
- it is not a designation in its own right but its purpose is to protect OUV and contribute to the asset;
- it is influenced by change which can enhance or cause harm to the asset;
- it can affect the significance of the asset whether or not it was designed to do so;
- it may have a role in revealing the significance of an asset and thus may help protect OUV, integrity, and authenticity;
- it is influenced by visual relationships between the asset and its surroundings, by historical and present day relationships between assets, by aspects of landscape character, and by intangible cultural aspects;
- it may include parts which may enhance the asset, or have a neutral or harmful effect;
- it is not dependent on public access, abundance or shortage of open landscape or the quality of the landscape.

## EXISTING PROTECTION POLICIES

2.07 The reasons for defining and understanding the setting of a World Heritage Site in particular are threefold:

- *Protection* - to ensure that where necessary the setting is helping to protect the OUV, authenticity, integrity and significance of the WHS;
- *Management* - to guide management in a way that is appropriate;
- *Enhancement* - where appropriate to take opportunities to better reveal and appreciate the significance of the WHS.

## International Context

2.08 The UK government ratified the 1972 World Heritage Convention in 1984. Under the terms of the Convention the government is required to promote, interpret and protect World Heritage Sites and their OUV, and to 'transmit them on to future generations'. The procedures for the conservation and protection of WHSs is set out in the Operational Guidelines, which are regularly updated and revised. The key

principles relating to setting include 'the proper protection of the property (para 103) with *'an added layer of protection'* which should include *'the immediate setting of the nominated property, important views and other areas or attributes that are functionally important as a support to the property and its protection'* (para 104).

## National Context

2.09 The 2009 Circular on the Protection of WHSs (this has now been superseded but it still contains useful and relevant information) confirmed that the OUV of a WHS is *'a key material consideration to be taken into account....in determining planning and related applications'* (para 8). It also stated that *'policies for the protection and sustainable use of a particular WHS should apply both to the site itself and, as appropriate, to its setting, including any buffer zone'* (para 10).

2.10 Subsequently, the NPPF published in March 2012 set out a new framework for planning policy in the UK. Statement 12, relating to 'conserving and enhancing the historic environment' states in para 137 that *'local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within .....World Heritage Sites and within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset should be treated favourably'*. Additionally, the NPPF is supported by Planning Practice Guidance notes, one of which (18a) contains policy advice specifically relating to World Heritage Sites. This PPG defines the principles which local planning authorities in the UK should satisfy within the policies of their Local Plans (para 32): protecting the WHS and its setting; striking a balance between conservation, biodiversity, access, the interests of the local community, public benefits of a development, and the sustainable use of the WHS; protecting the WHS from the effect of change which could have a significant effect; enhancing the WHS and its setting; and protecting the WHS from climate change.

## Regional Context

2.11 The following extract is taken from the emerging West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031, which incorporates proposed modifications agreed by Council in October 2016, but which remain subject to Examination in 2017. Policy EW1 relates specifically to Blenheim Palace WHS and includes consideration of the setting:

## Section 9 – Eynsham-Woodstock Sub-Area

9.5.57 In accordance with national policy and Policy EH7 all new development will be expected to conserve or enhance the special character and distinctiveness of West Oxfordshire's historic environment and preserve conserve or enhance the District's heritage assets and their significance and settings. Particular regard will be had to the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site.

## Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site

9.5.58 Following international evaluation, in 1987 the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site was 'designated' by the 11th Session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Helsinki. UNESCO's operational guidelines state that 'World Heritage Sites are places of outstanding universal value to the whole of humanity.

9.5.59 Outstanding universal value means cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries.' Through the designation, UNESCO recognised that Blenheim Palace and its landscaped Park represented a new style of planning and architecture which went on to have a great influence worldwide. The Palace is set in a Park designated by 'Capability' Brown, regarded as a masterpiece of the highest order and widely considered to be a 'naturalistic Versailles'. Together, the Palace and the Park are unique in the world.

9.5.60 World Heritage Sites are designated heritage assets of the highest importance. In line with the NPPF, the OUV of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, its setting, integrity and authenticity, will be protected, conserved and enhanced and its sustainable use promoted<sup>1</sup>.

9.5.61 The Site is a valuable asset of local, national and international significance, providing a wide variety of benefits, including contributing to conservation, biodiversity, access and a sense of community and place. There are also substantial economic benefits to West Oxfordshire and the surrounding region, with, for example, Blenheim attracting over 600,000 tourists each year and bringing investment into local businesses. The Estate itself is one of the largest employers in the area.

9.5.62 A World Heritage Management Plan has been produced for Blenheim Palace which aims to sustain and conserve the OUVs of the Site, recognising the wide variety of possible benefits achievable through positive management. The Plan is a pioneering document, delivering both the requirements of a World Heritage Site Management Plan and those of a Heritage Management Plan in one integrated approach. Given its importance in helping to sustain and enhance the significance of the World Heritage Site, the involvement of key stakeholders and its on-going monitoring and reviewing, the Management Plan is a material planning consideration when assessing development proposals in accordance with relevant policies of the Local Plan.

9.5.63 The Blenheim Palace World Heritage Management Plan:

- sets out a vision for the sustainable future of the historic, scenic, scientific, cultural and social qualities of Blenheim Palace and Park, such that it will protect both World Heritage Site designation and the National Heritage designation;
- provides guidance to the Estate trustees and their advisers on practical management planning, to help plan and prioritise tasks and to inform annual financial and operational plans;
- ensures the careful maintenance and conservation (and enhancement where possible) of the Palace and Park, its associated buildings and grounds, informed by continued historical and scientific research;
- adopts an holistic approach to conservation of the site which balances its many and varied qualities;
- encourages high standards in the restoration of historic features and design of any appropriate new developments, features or landscaped areas which may be proposed in the future.

9.5.64 The vision for Blenheim Estate in the Management Plan is to:

<sup>1</sup> <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/425>



- maintain and manage the Palace and Park to preserve and enhance their character and, where necessary, repair significant buildings or replant parts of the Park in accordance with the objectives of the Management Plan;
- use management practices that are consistent with the above and which are designed to conserve the heritage qualities of the plan area and its OUV through appropriate and sustainable policies and practices;
- protect the existing opportunities for public access including existing public rights of way within the Park and the access arrangements to the Palace and grounds;
- enhance the qualities of visitor facilities and achieve new levels of excellence in visitor management and related experiences as one of the UK's top tourism destinations;
- interpret and present the history of Blenheim Palace and Park to a larger and more diverse audience, and continue to promote high quality education programmes.

9.5.65 UNESCO emphasise the importance of protecting 'the immediate setting' of a World Heritage Site and of 'important views and other areas or attributes that are functionally important as a support to the Property'. The Management Plan considered these issues and concluded that one of the unique qualities of the Site is that it is self-contained.

9.5.66 The Palace and Park are contained within walled grounds. The Blenheim Palace wall extends around the boundary of the World Heritage Site and is some nine miles in length. Views into it and from it are largely obscured by the wall, by trees and by undulating topography of the landscape.

9.5.67 There are, however, a number of places from where there are important views both into and from Blenheim Palace. These are identified in the Management Plan and reproduced at Figure 9.16a below. The setting of the site will be protected through Policy EW1 (see below) and also through other designations: Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Ancient Woodland, Oxford Green Belt and Conservation Areas at Woodstock and Bladon.

#### Policy EW1 – Blenheim World Heritage Site

The exceptional cultural significance (Outstanding Universal Value) of the Blenheim World Heritage Site will be protected, promoted and conserved for current and future generations.

Accordingly, proposals which conserve and enhance the attributes and components that comprise the Outstanding Universal Value of the Site, as identified in the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value Statement and in line with the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site Management Plan, will be supported.

In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, great weight will be given to the conservation of the World Heritage Site and any harm or loss to its significance will require clear and convincing justification. Development proposals that would lead to substantial harm to or loss of those attributes and components of the Site will be unacceptable, unless it can be demonstrated that any such harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefit that outweigh that harm or loss. Such harm will be wholly exceptional. Where development proposals would lead to less than substantial harm to those attributes and components, that harm will be weighed against the public benefits of the proposals.

When assessing the impact of a proposed development on the Outstanding Universal Value, great weight will be given to the conservation and enhancement of the Outstanding Universal Value and to the integrity and authenticity of the World Heritage Site.

Consideration of impact will be made of proposals within, or potentially affecting, the World Heritage Site and its setting, including areas identified as being of special importance for the preservation of long distance views to and/or from the Site (as shown on the Blenheim Palace Management Plan). Particular regard will be given to the design quality of the proposal (including scale, form and massing), its relationship to context (including topography, built form, views, vistas and effect on the skyline) and the implications of the cumulative effect of changes.

By helping to sustain and enhance the significance of the World Heritage Site, the Blenheim Palace Management Plan is a material consideration in assessing development proposals. Proposals relating to the World Heritage Site should seek to support the aims and objectives of the Management Plan.

## PROTECTION TRANSLATED INTO PRACTICE

2.12 The Operational Guidelines state that *'wherever necessary for the proper conservation of the property, an adequate buffer zone should be provided'*. This statement recognises that there are various options available for protecting the setting of World Heritage Sites and in the UK the planning system already has good mechanisms in place to recognise the value of, and protect, setting with or without a buffer zone. These different approaches are reflected in the fact that there is currently a fairly even balance between those World Heritage Sites in the UK that have a buffer zone (14) and those that do not (12). In the case of the 12 without a buffer zone the setting is protected in a variety of ways, appropriate to the nature of each site. This occurs mainly through:

- policies which protect setting using other designations,
- policies to protect significant views,
- reliance on robust management plans,
- reliance on secure land ownership and management,
- and Article 4 directions (although in this last case government guidance to LPAs states that they should only consider making article 4 directions in exceptional circumstances where the exercise of permitted development rights would harm the historic environment).

These approaches can, of course, also be relevant where a buffer zone is in place. The key is in identifying the significance of the site and the part that setting makes to supporting the OUV and its attributes.

2.13 The 2031 WODC Local Plan uses two of these methods, firstly by the use of existing designation protections, and secondly by including in its Policy EW1 the following wording *'by helping to sustain and enhance the significance of the World Heritage Site, the Blenheim Palace Management Plan is a material consideration in assessing development proposals'*. It goes on to provide further advice and clarification by stating that *'particular regard will be given to the design quality of the proposal (including scale, form and massing), its relationship to context (including topography, built form, views, vistas and effect on the skyline) and the implications of the cumulative effect of changes'*.

2.14 There is no standardised or universally accepted methodology for defining setting, although 'Seeing the History in the View' (2011) and GPA3 'The Setting of Heritage Assets' (2015) both provide detailed helpful guidance which is most widely adopted. The following chapter on defining the Blenheim WHS setting has, therefore, been informed by all of the available guidance and policy, together with an examination of existing examples of setting studies.



## The Setting of Heritage Assets

Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 3



### 3 THE VALUE OF SETTING

#### SUMMARY

3.01 The value of setting to Blenheim Palace and its wider communities can be summarised as:

- The importance of the village clusters, farmed countryside and woodlands/ trees in enhancing local distinctiveness and fostering a sense of place;
- the use of local stone in the vernacular buildings which is very distinctive of the area as well as creating a contrast to the high quality architecture of the Palace and its associated buildings;
- The contribution it makes to the distinctive quality of the landscape and environment around Blenheim, making it an attractive place to live, this having significant benefits for the economy;
- The opportunities the setting provides for recreation and leisure which contributes to a healthy lifestyle;
- The opportunities for landscape to contribute to the green infrastructure of the area by supporting a wide range of wildlife habitats which, in addition to the nature conservation benefits, allows people to experience wildlife close to where they live and work

#### HOW SETTING IS VALUED

3.02 Thus, the objective of protection of the setting not only has value in its own right in protecting the OUV of the WHS but also contributes directly to the economy, health and welfare of its surrounding villages and residents, by taking account of the distinctive character of the landscape and the green infrastructure it helps to provide. Additionally, the understanding, management and protection of specific heritage assets within the setting, such as the Conservation Areas and listed buildings, and of the character of the setting, are important in contributing to the quality of life of residents, visitors and those who work locally. This value is reflected in one of the core principles of the National Planning Policy Framework to *'conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations'*.

### LANDSCAPE VALUES

#### National Character Area Descriptions

3.03 The setting of the WHS falls into two National Character Areas as defined by Natural England - the majority within the Cotswolds National Character Area (No 107), with the southern area falling within the Upper Thames Vale National Character Area (No. 108). The dominant National Character Area is that of the Cotswolds, the best known area of the oolite Jurassic limestone belt that runs from the Dorset coast in the south, through England to Lincolnshire. The Cotswolds landscape is characterised, and dominated by, the steep north western facing scarp slope crowned by high, open wolds and the long, rolling dip slope cut by a series of valleys to the south east. Numerous towns and settlements nestle at the foot of the scarp slope or lie within the valleys, especially those broader, shallow valleys of the dip slope. It is a feature of the area that these settlements are linked by a complex network of roads, lanes and rights of way. Parklands and estate landscapes such as that found at Blenheim, are a key characteristic of the Cotswolds and the density of these parks and gardens is a feature of the character area. The key characteristics of the Cotswolds NCA are set out below:

- Defined by its underlying geology: a dramatic limestone scarp rising above adjacent lowlands with steep combs illustrating the slow erosion of the escarpments. Prominent limestone outliers within the lowland landscape.
- Open and expansive scarp and high wold plateaux dipping gently to the south-east which is dissected by a series of small, narrow river valleys.
- The majority of the principal rivers flow south-eastwards forming the headwaters of the Thames.
- The flat, open dip slope landscape is dominated by arable farming while permanent pasture prevails on the steeper ground of the scars and in the river valleys. Some of these permanent pastures contain pockets of internationally important limestone grassland.
- Drystone walls define the pattern of fields on the high ground and dip slopes but give way to hedgerows on the deeper soils and in the river valleys.

- Ancient beech hanging woodlands line stretches of the high ground with oak/ash woodland in the valleys. Regular blocks of coniferous and mixed plantations are scattered across the landscape.
- Large areas of common land are characteristic of the area and were once found more frequently than they are today.
- The landscape has a rich history from Neolithic barrows, Iron Age hill forts and Roman roads to deserted medieval villages, grand country houses, cloth mills and WWII airfields. The field patterns largely reflect both the medieval open field system, with fossilized areas of ridge and furrow, and later planned enclosure landscapes.
- Locally quarried limestone brings a harmony to the built environment of scattered villages and drystone walls. The consistent use of local limestone brings a sense of unity to the landscape, for which the Cotswolds is renowned.
- Parklands, gardens and historic designed landscapes are features particularly of the dip slope and broad lowland with Hidcote, Kiftsgate, Stanway Chastleton and Blenheim Palace all being good examples.
- Prominent natural and built features in the landscape include the City of Bath, Brailes Hill, Broadway Tower, the Tyndale monument and Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site.

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3.04 The southern part of the setting area lies within the Upper Thames Vale NCA (No 108), a broad belt of open, gently undulating lowland farmland on predominantly Jurassic and Cretaceous clays. The southern edge of Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site falls within this NCA, along with around 5,000 ha of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and smaller areas of the Chilterns AONB and the Cotswolds AONB. There are contrasting landscapes, including enclosed pastures of the claylands with wet valleys, mixed farming, hedges, hedge trees and field trees and more settled, open, arable lands. Mature field oaks give a parkland feel in many places. The area encircles the Midvale Ridge NCA and covers an extensive area of low-lying land extending from Wiltshire and Gloucestershire to the west of Swindon through to Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire in the east. It comprises two separate sub-character areas: the Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Vales to the north;

and the Vales of the White Horse and Aylesbury to the south. The area is dominated by watercourses, including the Thames and its tributaries, and there are also lakes associated with mineral extraction areas, such as the Cotswold Water Park.

Watercourses and lakes provide important areas for wildlife and recreation. There are a number of major transport routes and patches of intensive industrial influence, including Didcot Power Station, with little woodland cover (around 3 per cent) but hedgerows and mature field and hedgerow trees are a feature, and many watercourses are fringed with willow or poplar.

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3.05 Low-lying clay-based flood plains encircle the Midvale Ridge. Superficial deposits, including alluvium and gravel terraces, spread over 40 per cent of the area, creating gently undulating topography. The Upper Jurassic and Cretaceous clays and the wet valley bottoms give rise to enclosed pasture, contrasting with the more settled, open, arable lands on the gravel. The key characteristics of the Upper Thames NCA are:

- The large river system of the River Thames drains the Vales, their headwaters flowing off the Cotswolds to the north or emitting from the springline along the Chilterns and Downs escarpments. Where mineral extraction takes place, pits naturally fill with water, and limestone gravels from the Cotswolds give rise to marl formation. There are a high number of nationally important geological sites.
- Woodland cover is low at only about 3 per cent, but hedges, hedgerow trees and field trees are frequent. Watercourses are often marked by lines of willows and, particularly in the Aylesbury Vale and Cotswold Water Park, native black poplar.
- Wet ground conditions and heavy clay soils discourage cultivation in many places, giving rise to livestock farming. Fields are regular and hedged, except near the Cotswolds, where there can be stone walls. The Vale of the White Horse is made distinct by large arable fields, and there are relict orchards on the Greensand.
- In the river corridors, grazed pasture dominates, with limited areas of historic wetland habitats including wet woodland, fen, reedbed and flood meadow. There are two areas of flood meadow designated for their importance at a European level



as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). There are also rich and extensive ditch systems.

- Gravel extraction has left a legacy of geological exposures, numerous waterbodies and, at the Cotswold Water Park, a nationally important complex of marl lakes.
- Wetland habitat attracts regionally important numbers of birds including snipe, redshank, curlew and lapwing and wintering wildfowl such as pochard. Snake's Head fritillary thrives in the internationally important meadows. The area also supports typical farmland wildlife such as brown hare, bats, barn owl, tree sparrow and skylark.
- Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, including its Capability Brown landscape, is the finest of many examples of historic parkland in this NCA. There are many heritage features, including nationally important survivals of ridge and furrow, Roman roads, deserted medieval villages and historic bridges.

### County Landscape Character Assessment

3.06 In 2004 the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) assessment was produced, which mapped the area variously as Estate Farmlands; Wooded Estatelands; Wooded Pasture Valleys and Slopes; Farmland Slopes and Valley Sides; Clay Vale, Alluvial Lowlands; Lowland Village Farmlands; and River Meadowland types. The characteristics of these are:

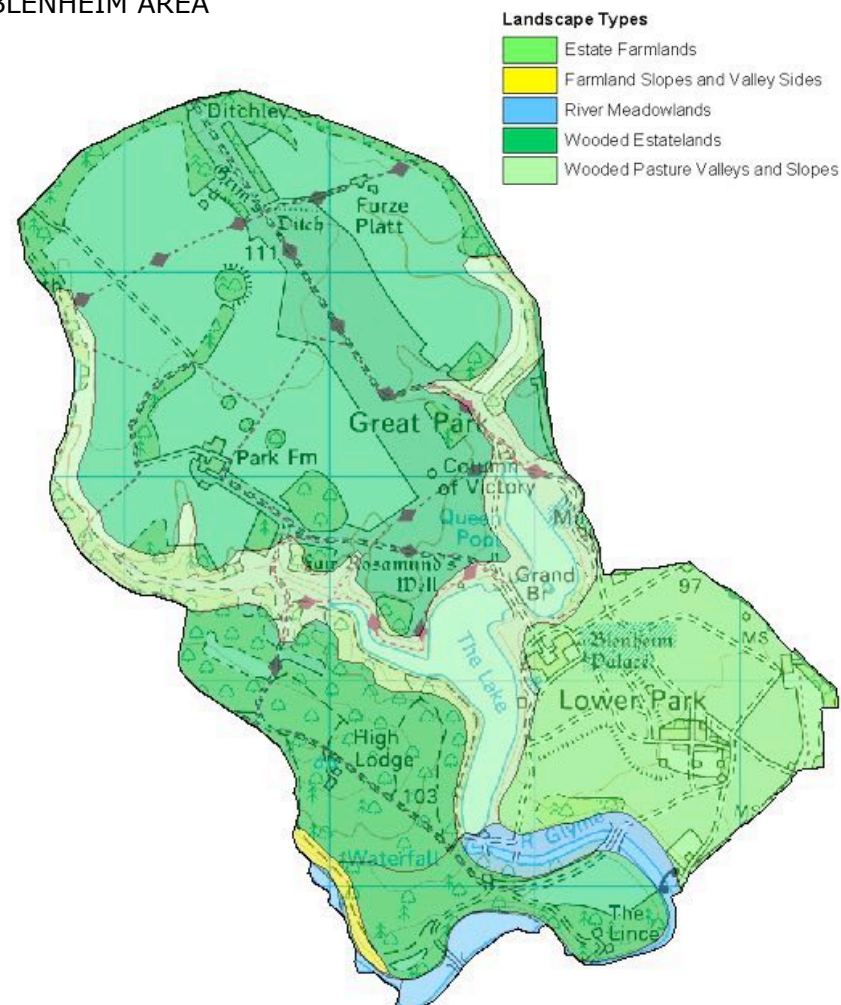
*Estate Farmlands: including core area of park and Woodstock*

- Medium to large, regularly-shaped hedged fields.
- Small, geometric plantations and belts of trees.
- Large country houses set in ornamental parklands.
- Small estate villages and dispersed farmsteads.

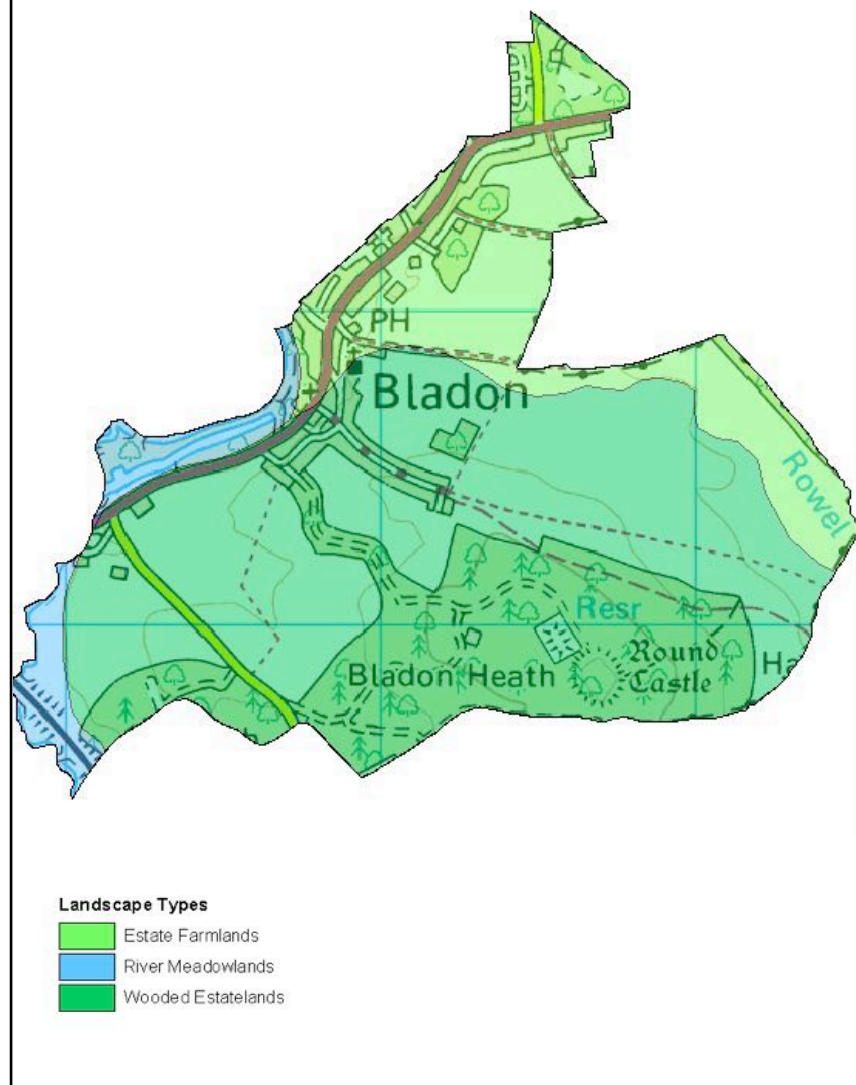
*Wooded Estatelands mainly to west and north*

- Rolling topography with localised steep slopes.
- Large blocks of ancient woodland and mixed plantations of variable sizes.
- Large parklands and mansion houses.
- A regularly shaped field pattern dominated by arable fields.
- Small villages with strong vernacular character.

### BLenheim AREA



## BLADON AREA

*Wooded Pasture Valleys and Slopes*

- Steep sided valleys and slopes.
- Large, interlocking blocks of ancient and plantation woodland.
- Small pasture fields with localised unimproved grassland.
- Tall, thick hedges and densely scattered hedgerow trees.
- Small intact villages and hamlets.

*Farmland Slopes and Valley Sides*

- Prominent slopes and valley sides interrupted by a number of small, narrow v-shaped valleys.
- Large arable fields on the gentler slopes, small pasture fields on the steeper slopes and steep-sided valleys.
- A well defined pattern of tall hedges and hedgerow trees.
- Small woodland copses and belts on steep slopes and along watercourses in the minor valleys.
- Small unspoilt villages with rural character.

*Clay Vale - small areas mainly to the south*

- A flat, low-lying landform.
- Mixed land uses, dominated by pastureland, with small to medium-sized hedged fields.
- Many mature oak, ash and willow hedgerow trees.
- Dense, tree-lined streams and ditches dominated by pollarded willows and poplars.
- Small to medium-sized nucleated villages.

*Alluvial Lowlands - also small pockets to the south*

- Broad alluvial plains.
- Mixed farming pattern with regular fields with both arable cropping and pasture.
- Densely scattered hedgerow trees of ash and willow.
- Dense willow corridors bordering a large number of ditches.
- Sparsely settled.

*River Meadowlands along the river valleys*

- Flat, low-lying topography with seasonally flooded alluvial floodplains.
- Meandering river channels.
- Grazing meadows and small fields of permanent pasture.
- Riparian character with a strong pattern of riverside willows and tree-lined ditches.
- Sparsely settled with a few roads.

# WOODSTOCK AREA



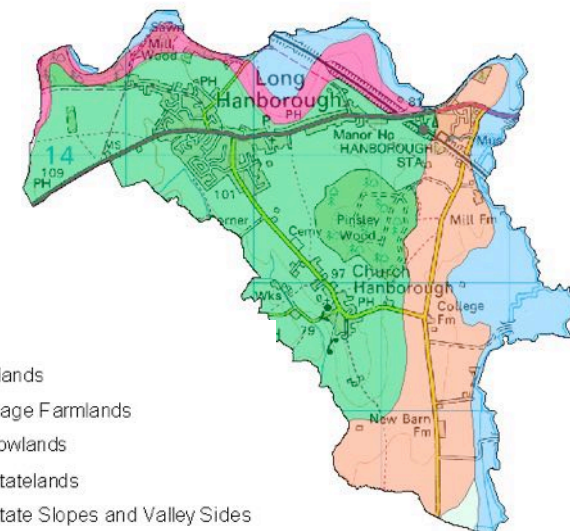
## Wooded Estate Slopes and Valley Sides

- Prominent escarpments and steep valley sides.
- Blocks of ancient woodland and plantations.
- Large areas of unimproved grassland and scrub.
- Parklands and an overall estate character.
- Sparsely settled landscape.

## Lowland Village Farmland

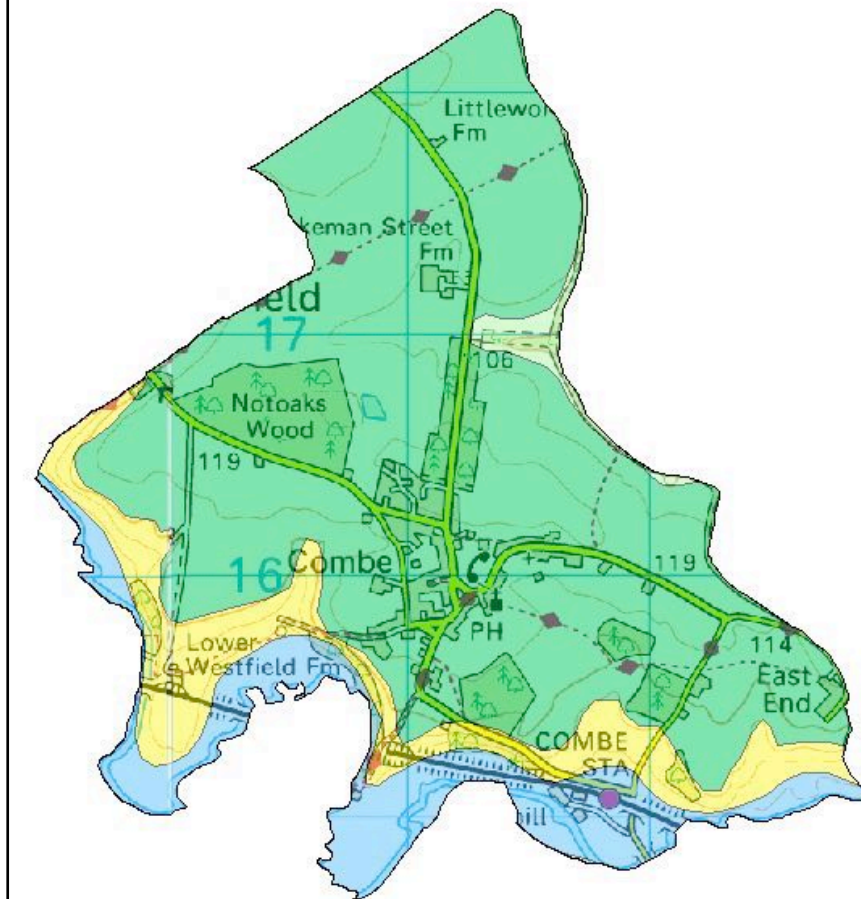
- A varied, gently rolling and almost flat topography.
- Medium to large-sized arable and hedged fields.
- Thinly scattered hedgerow trees, which are mostly ash.
- Ash, willow and poplars fringing ditches and streams.
- Prominent village settlements scattered throughout the area.

# LONG HANBOROUGH AREA

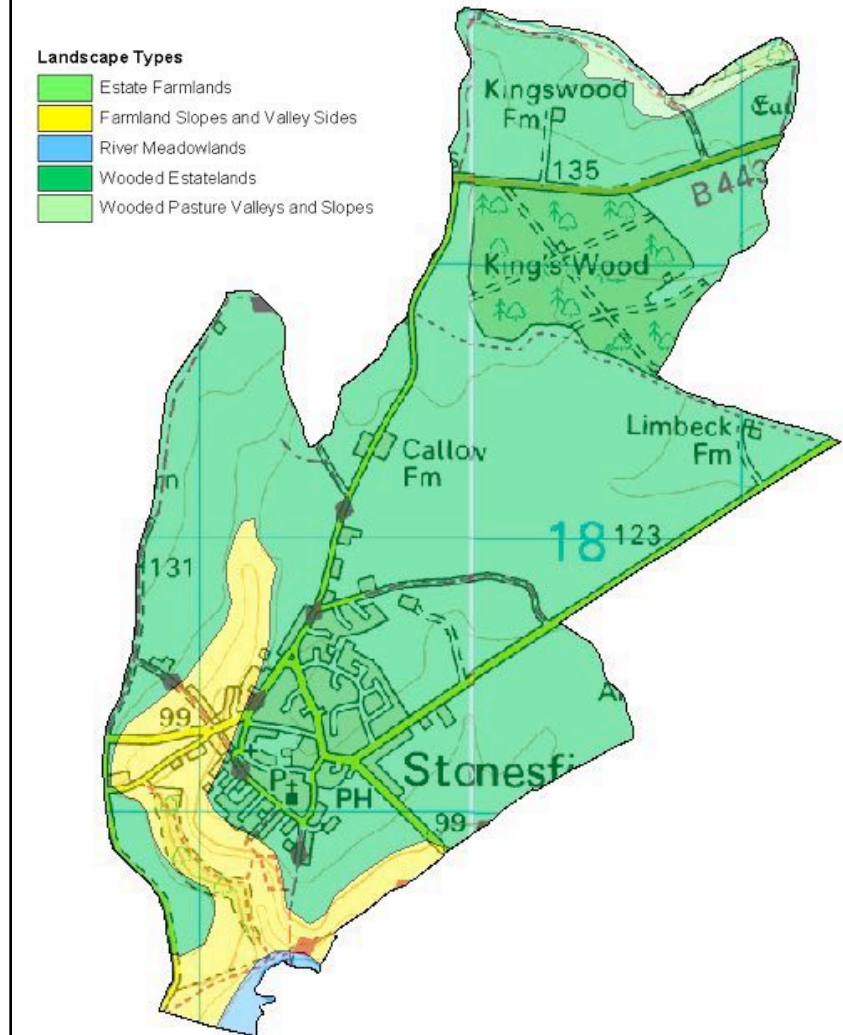




### COMBE AREA



### STONESFIELD AREA





## District Landscape Character Types

3.07 West Oxfordshire District Council prepared a more detailed and comprehensive landscape character assessment of the local authorities area in 1998 which divides the landscape of West Oxfordshire into 13 landscape character areas, each of which share a common identity. Within each character area a number of landscape types have been defined based on the pattern of natural and cultural characteristics. The area around the Blenheim Palace WHS has been assessed as falling largely within the *Eastern Parklands and Valleys* Character Area. The *Parklands and Valleys* landscape character is defined as an area of rolling limestone landscape which is heavily dissected by the valleys of the Glyme, Dorn and Cherwell. The area is distinguished by a particular concentration of formal parks, designed landscapes and estate farmland which are frequently associated with extensive areas of woodland. The landscape of the area has a well-managed character typical of large estates.

3.08 The local landscape character assessment goes on to highlight the smooth, elevated and gently rolling landscape of the *Parklands and Valleys* character area where the underlying geology is reflected in the vegetation cover. Intensive arable farming is supported on the light, loamy soils derived from the limestone, while woodland and pasture occur on the heavier soils of the Oxford Clay or in the wetter valley bottoms. This natural pattern of vegetation cover has been masked by the parks, gardens and estate landscapes, especially at and around Blenheim Palace, Rousham, Ditchley and a number of other smaller parklands. Surrounding these parkland landscapes their wider estates are often dominated by extensive areas of woodland and tree planting which gives the area a locally well wooded character. A dominant landscape influence is the consistent use of local oolitic limestone as a building and walling material. The use of the limestone lends harmony to the landscape and settlements of the character area.

## LAND USE AND SETTLEMENT

### The Historic Landscape

3.09 Neolithic tribes colonised the river terraces downstream from Radley and ancient field systems are visible as cropmarks in the Thames gravels. Virtually no

Palaeolithic or Mesolithic remains exist due to the difficulty of cultivating the heavy clay soils before the advent of crude tools, but to the north of the WHS the area has an abundance of prehistoric monuments relating to the ebb and flow of settlement from the Neolithic onward. The uplands were substantially cleared of woodland in the third millennium BC, covering the major period of constructing long barrows which often provided foci for communities living in the adjacent lowlands and vales. Royal hunting grounds first created in Saxon times are evidenced by embankments, ditches and ancient semi natural woodland and the Anglo Saxons also created pagan burial sites in the south of the area. The area is crossed by several major Roman roads, for example Akeman Street which runs through the WHS. Ridge and furrow dating back to medieval times survives in places across the area. By the late 11th century the area was extensively settled and there was little woodland, with much of the land in the hands of large estates. The predominant field pattern and some isolated farmsteads date from the parliamentary enclosures of the 18th and 19th centuries.

### The Agricultural Landscape Today

3.10 The underlying geology of the area has a significant bearing on the topography and nature of the soils which in turn affects the landscape character and land use pattern seen within the area today. Blenheim Palace lies at the foot of a dip-slope of the Cotswold escarpment, near the point where the hills level out into the flat lands of the Upper Thames valley. The landscape of the park and its surroundings has a relatively muted relief of two low plateaux, divided and given extra interest by the river valleys. The Glyme runs through the landscape to the north-east, enters the park at Woodstock and at the southern boundary of the park it falls into the River Evenlode, one of the main tributaries of the Thames. The solid geology of the area dates from the Jurassic period but forms a complex series of layers, the oldest of which are the Great Oolite series of white limestones of the Middle Jurassic. Lying above this Oolitic group is the Forest Marble, a flaggy oolite with occasional bands of blue-grey and white clay which forms a capping layer over the white limestone. Outcropping elsewhere on the valley sides are the Kemble Beds which comprise the lowest part of the Forest Marble and locally comprise of blue clays. Lying above the Kemble Beds and outcropping around Woodstock is the Lower Cornbrash, a shelly, hard, rubbly limestone. The youngest solid deposits in the area are the Oxford Clays from the Upper Jurassic. Superficial deposits are limited to the Plateau Drift of unbedded yellowish-brown clayey gravel that caps the Oxford Clays. These drift deposits provide

a small perched water table, which accounts for areas of damp ground and, ultimately, the poor soils which is the main reason for the retention of the ancient trees and wood pasture in places. Riverine gravels and alluvium also cover the valley floors as superficial deposits.

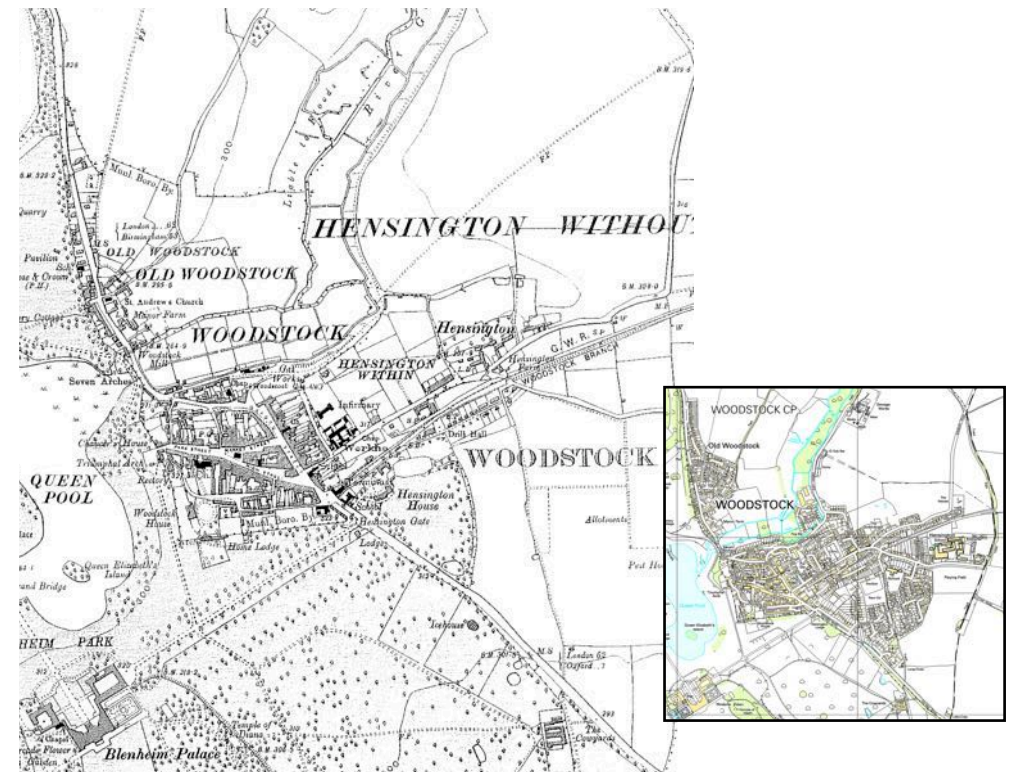
3.11 The WHS lies in central southern England and so has a local climate that reflects this geographical position and the relatively muted topography of the area. Average annual precipitation for the area is around 650 - 700mm per annum with a tendency for wetter winters and drier springs. Prevailing winds are south westerly but frequently the winds are from the east and these are responsible for droughts and extreme temperatures. Winters in the region are generally cool with an average winter temperature last year of c.20°C and warmer summers with an average high in July of c. 22°C.

3.12 Today, farms are more evenly spread between land estate ownership and private ownership than they were historically. The predominate farm types are grazing livestock (mainly sheep, with some cattle) on the poorer soils and arable on the better soils, but the area also supports a range of other farm types including mixed use, specialist poultry, general cropping and horticulture. On land particularly to the west, east and to the north of the WHS it is grass and uncropped land that has the highest land use cover, followed by cereals. Because sheep are by far the most numerous livestock, this gives the landscape a pastoral feel since much of the land use is under grass.

### Settlement Pattern

3.13 Initially building took place beside the rivers and along the key routes from Oxford, and later expanded into the surrounding countryside which provided opportunities for distinctive character and separate identities to develop, thanks to the gentle topography and the number of trees. The present predominant pattern of nucleated settlement developed in the 10th to 12th centuries, replacing an earlier more dispersed pattern of hamlets and farmsteads. Market centres, developed in the 12th and 13th centuries, were planned as new settlements in the 13th century. The

14th century witnessed abandonment and contraction of settlements, including some being replaced by sheep walks. The distinctive style of the Cotswold multi-gabled manor house appeared during extensive rebuilding in late 16th and early 17th centuries, continuing after the adoption of classical styles into the mid 18th century and 19th centuries. During the 20th century, particularly the second half of the century, all of the settlements surrounding the WHS have - as would be expected - grown significantly in size although they still retain their distinctive characters and boundaries. Expansions along the A4095 between Long Hanborough and Bladon, and between Bladon and Woodstock have seen the most growth in the past century.

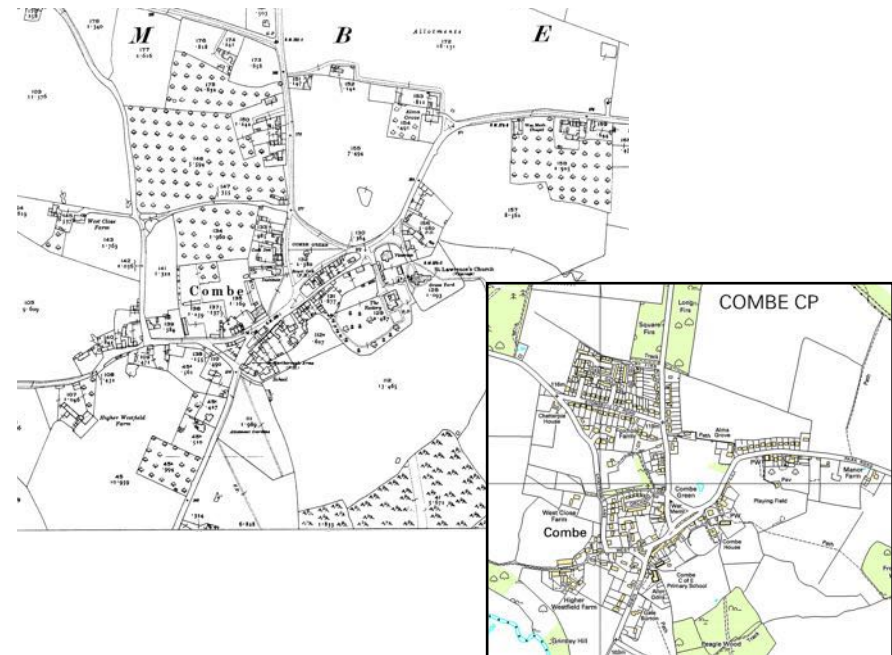


Woodstock as shown on the 1922 Ordnance Survey map and today



Bladon as shown in the 1922 Ordnance Survey map and today

3.14 Today, to the south of the WHS, these spring-line settlements at the foot of the chalk scarps are still characteristic and retain their historic and distinctive styles. Elsewhere, flood risk has dictated settlement patterns so that valley bottoms are uninhabited except at river crossing points. Nucleated settlements are found on rising ground - for example at Combe and Stonesfield - or on raised gravel spreads above the rivers. In the wider landscape, settlement is isolated with farmsteads dating back to parliamentary enclosure and development by country estates. To the north, east and west of the WHS, the Cotswolds are famous for the ever-present honey-coloured oolitic limestone used in walls, houses, mansions and churches. To the south of the WHS, in the Thames Valley area brick and tile from local clays, timber and thatch are traditional building materials, combined with limestone near the Cotswolds boundary, and occasional clunch and wichert near the Chilterns.

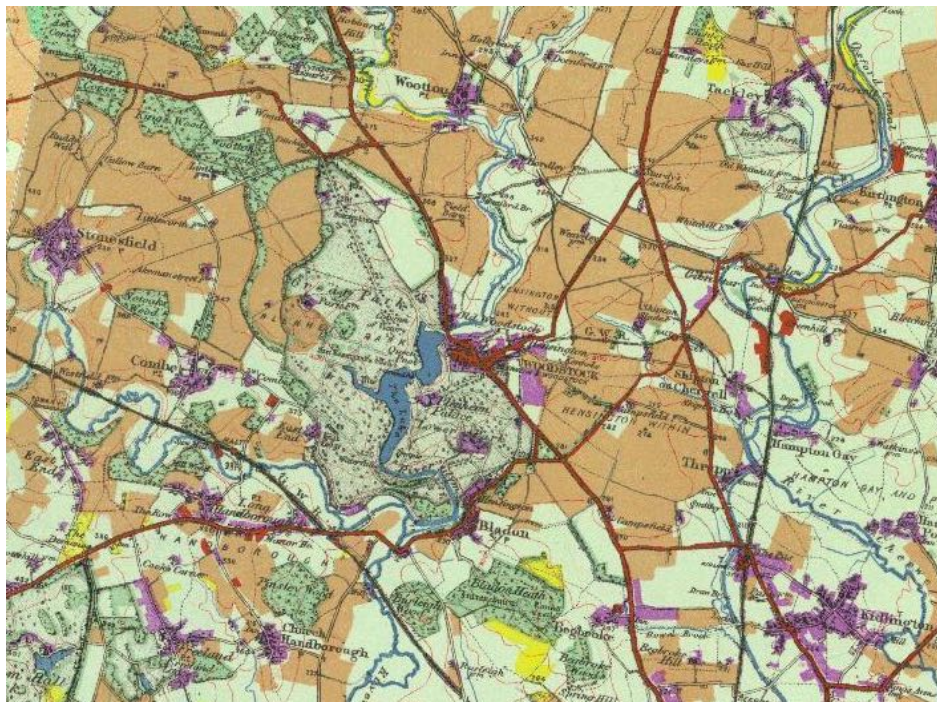


Combe as shown on 1922 Ordnance Survey map and today



## Summary

3.15 The distinct mosaic of stone build villages, rolling farmland, river meadows and blocks of broadleaved woodland is one of the foremost characteristics of the landscape surrounding Blenheim. There is a more intimate feel to the landscape west of the park, around the river valley of the Evenlode, with more pasture present dotted with small woodlands. To the south larger woods predominate and the field size is larger, with a greater mix of use, although still with some pasture. To the west and north the landscape is more expansive with a higher dominance of arable land in larger fields on the flatter land. The 1942 Land use map (extract reproduced below) shows that this general distribution of pasture, arable and woodland was well established by that date (arable is coloured brown; meadow or pasture shown in pale green).



In terms of the WHS itself, the Palace, set in its vast park, was created on such a monumental scale that, unlike many other smaller parks, it did not need to develop visual links with its wider communities in order to 'borrow views', but rather enclosed itself in boundary walls screened with plantations. Thus, the wall is now a significant element of the park, providing separation and division, with the 'inside and outside' clearly defined. This means that the WHS it has retained a largely hidden, but physical connection to Woodstock at its gates, together with glimpsed views of the church spires and woodland looking south towards Oxford, which is still a valued characteristic of the area today as the rural setting of the park forming a positive backdrop to people's lives.

## GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

### Leisure and Amenity

3.16 The vision of West Oxfordshire District Council is to '*meet the needs of West Oxfordshire's communities without significant change to the intrinsic character of the District*' with a '*diverse range of local employment opportunities to foster sustainable economic growth, innovation and enterprise*'. One of the ways to achieve this is through maintaining and enhancing the quality of the environment and enhancing access. The value of the natural environment in producing services for the local economy and society is recognised in the government's vision for the natural environment outlined Andrea Leadsom, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in January 2017.

3.17 Within the setting of Blenheim Palace WHS there are opportunities for a range of leisure uses including walking, rambling and cycling using the network of Public Rights of Way and other routes. In addition the WODC area includes play parks, playing fields, country parks, sailing lakes, golf courses and allotments - in addition to the 2000 acres of parkland surrounding Blenheim Palace - all of which contribute to the Districts open green space. The setting therefore provides opportunities for a diversity of recreational activities and can play an important part in contributing to a



healthy lifestyle. The importance of an attractive environment to encourage healthy lifestyles was recognised in the White Paper: Healthy Lives, Healthy People (2010).

## Biodiversity

3.18 The setting of the WHS is also important for biodiversity. Part of the area falls with the Cotswolds AONB, while the eastern section lies within the Oxford Green Belt. Within the World Heritage Site itself lies one of the largest open water bodies in the district, which is designated as an SSSI, together with the internationally important assemblage of ancient trees found in High Wood. Within the wider setting there are a range of habitats including woodland, rivers, floodplains and pasture which provide habitat opportunities for wildlife and protected species. Blocks of ancient woodland, and links through the area created by the river catchment all represent a benefit to nature conservation and the local population. To the north of the WHS, the area's internationally important lowland meadows require enhanced management alongside improved care of adjacent land, and its wetland habitats require appropriate hydrological regimes to be secured and an ecological network that is resilient to climate change. Wet grassland and wetland habitats also offer opportunities to manage floodwaters and improve water quality. Two of its Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) are designated for their lowland meadow vegetation communities, while Little Wittenham SAC has one of the most studied great crested newt populations in the UK.

3.19 Around the WHS biodiversity is represented by grasslands and habitats associated with the river valleys and floodplains. Some of these river valley meadows are regionally important for wading birds, including small breeding numbers of lapwing, snipe, curlew and redshank, and large wintering numbers of lapwing and golden plover. Nationally important numbers of breeding and wintering wildfowl are associated with water-filled gravel pits and reservoirs. Ponds are commonly found in grazed fields and there is a good cover of woodland, some of which is recognised as ancient. Boundaries in the farmed landscape are important including hedgerows and, north of Oxford, mud-capped stone walls supporting moss flora. In addition the important arable habitats support nationally important assemblages of arable birds.

3.20 To the east, north and west of the WHS, and within the AONB significant areas of small irregular fields signify piecemeal enclosure of earlier open fields with distinctive curved profiles relating to medieval plough strips, generally from the 16th century, but documented from the 13th century. These are concentrated on the scarp while regular enclosure of former open fields, of 18th century or later date, not respecting earlier boundaries, is concentrated in the central and eastern portions of the high wold. Less regular enclosures of this date, with boundaries echoing medieval headlands of open fields, is concentrated in the central and eastern portions of the high wold. These old field systems provide ample opportunity for wildlife to flourish in the margins, hedgerows, drystone walls, field ponds and hedgerow trees.

## Woodlands

3.21 The landscape surrounding the WHS is dotted with mainly small scale woodland blocks (see land use map in 3.15 above), of predominantly broadleaved character with a high proportion of oak, ash and beech. The river valleys are often clothed in woodland where tree-clad slopes follow the course of winding streams and rivers and here there is a higher concentration of species such as black poplar and willow (which is often pollarded). Mature field boundary oaks are also a notable characteristic of the area. Beyond the southern and eastern boundaries of the WHS woodlands tend to be smaller, scattered and mainly located on the higher ground. The landform, geology and soils all influence the location and size of ancient semi-natural woodlands that survives, and there are also some remnants of the ancient royal hunting forests both inside and outside the WHS.

## Waterways

3.22 The River Glyme runs through the WHS and is a tributary of the River Evenlode which rises out of the limestone that underlies the Cotswolds, flowing south-east towards the clay vales of the River Thames. It has a footpath along most of its length. The Evenlode catchment contains 16 river water bodies including the Evenlode itself, the Glyme and the Dorn, and itself forms part of the larger Cotswolds Catchment, and ultimately joining the Thames River Basin District, which covers over 16,200km<sup>2</sup>. This District encompasses all of Greater London and extends from north

Oxfordshire southwards to Surrey and from Gloucester in the west to the Thames Estuary and parts of Kent in the east.

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3.23 The Thames River Basin District Management Plan (prepared in 2009) provides a summary of the character and condition of the Cotswold Catchment describing it as representing one of the most charismatic landscapes in Britain characterised by rolling limestone hills, dry stonewalls and calcareous rivers. Agricultural land use is predominant but some gravel abstraction is undertaken. The resulting gravel pits have led to the creation of the Cotswolds Water Park which includes a bathing water beach and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lake and is a key area for water sports. Surface water quality is generally good. Most rivers have shown improvements over the last few years. However, phosphate concentrations are a concern on the Rivers Evenlode, Glyme and Ampney Brook (two of which are linked to the WHS). Much of the catchment experiences periodic low flows, which in some locations have been exacerbated by abstraction for public water supply. Previous investigations have resulted in reducing abstraction at a number of locations. Flow and ecological monitoring is being undertaken to assess the benefits of reduced abstraction to rivers such as the Churn and Ampney Brook. Signal crayfish are now common in many rivers within the catchment. Further investigations are required to understand how their impacts on invertebrate communities may be affecting the likelihood of achieving good ecological status. Measures to control or eradicate them resulting from current ongoing research, need to be applied. Physical habitat restoration may also be required to achieve good ecological status in parts of the Cotswolds where channels have been heavily degraded, such as on certain reaches of the Evenlode. Nevertheless, an improvement of around 60km of river for fish was expected by 2015. Opportunities will be looked into with landowners and other organisations to restore habitat quality.

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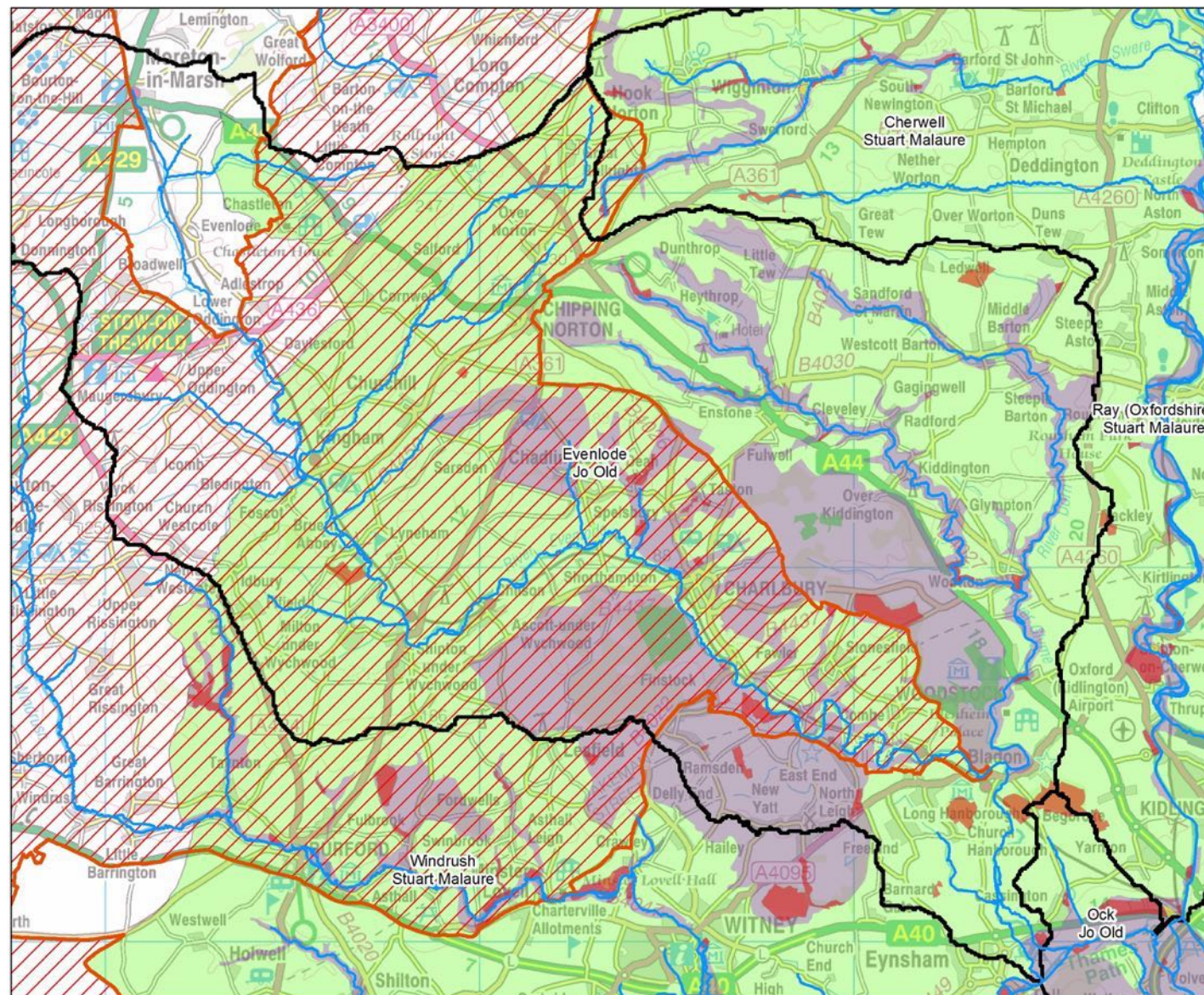
3.24 There are 51 river water bodies and two lakes in the catchment. Four are artificial or heavily modified. 37 per cent of rivers currently achieve good or better ecological status/potential, including the Shill brook and Kencot brook and Serbourne brook. 28 per cent of rivers assessed for biology are at good or high biological status now, with 30 per cent at poor biological status, and 10 per cent of assessed river water bodies at bad status. The 2009 catchment management plan aimed to address the key pressures in the catchment, and those waters in the worst state were be

prioritised. 31 per cent of rivers in the Cotswolds were targeted for improvement of at least one element by 2015. Some of the key actions for this catchment are noted as:

- Contribute to achieving favourable condition on Cotswold Water Park Sites of Special Scientific Interest by implementing invasive species control programme.
  - Investigate impact of sediments on ecological status.
  - Contribute to achieving favourable condition on Cotswold Water Park Site of Special Scientific Interest by planning permission - enforcement/revocation.
  - Apply national guidance framework on disposal of dredging to refine local measures as appropriate (where not disproportionately costly or technically infeasible).
- 

3.25 Within the Evenlode catchment (see map below) lies the remains of the ancient Royal Hunting forest of Wychwood and the WHS, as well as many historic market towns such as Chipping Norton, Moreton-in-Marsh and Woodstock. Habitats include oak-ash woodland, limestone grasslands, lowland meadows and fen, which support a wide range of wildlife. Species present include remnant populations of nationally endangered native crayfish, water voles and rare plant species including fen violet and downy woundwort. The river habitat and fish populations in the Evenlode catchment are degraded through a combination of historical channel modification and pollution (sediment and phosphate) from waste water and rural areas. In many places rivers have been over-deepened, widened and straightened, resulting in uniform channel morphology, a river divorced from its floodplain and extensive in-channel siltation. There are also numerous weirs, (35 on the Glyme), impounding the flow and creating barriers to fish movement. The combined impacts leave the catchment vulnerable to flooding and pollution and contribute to reduced water quality, biodiversity and fisheries interest.





## Evenlode

### Oxfordshire CTAs and Local Wildlife Sites

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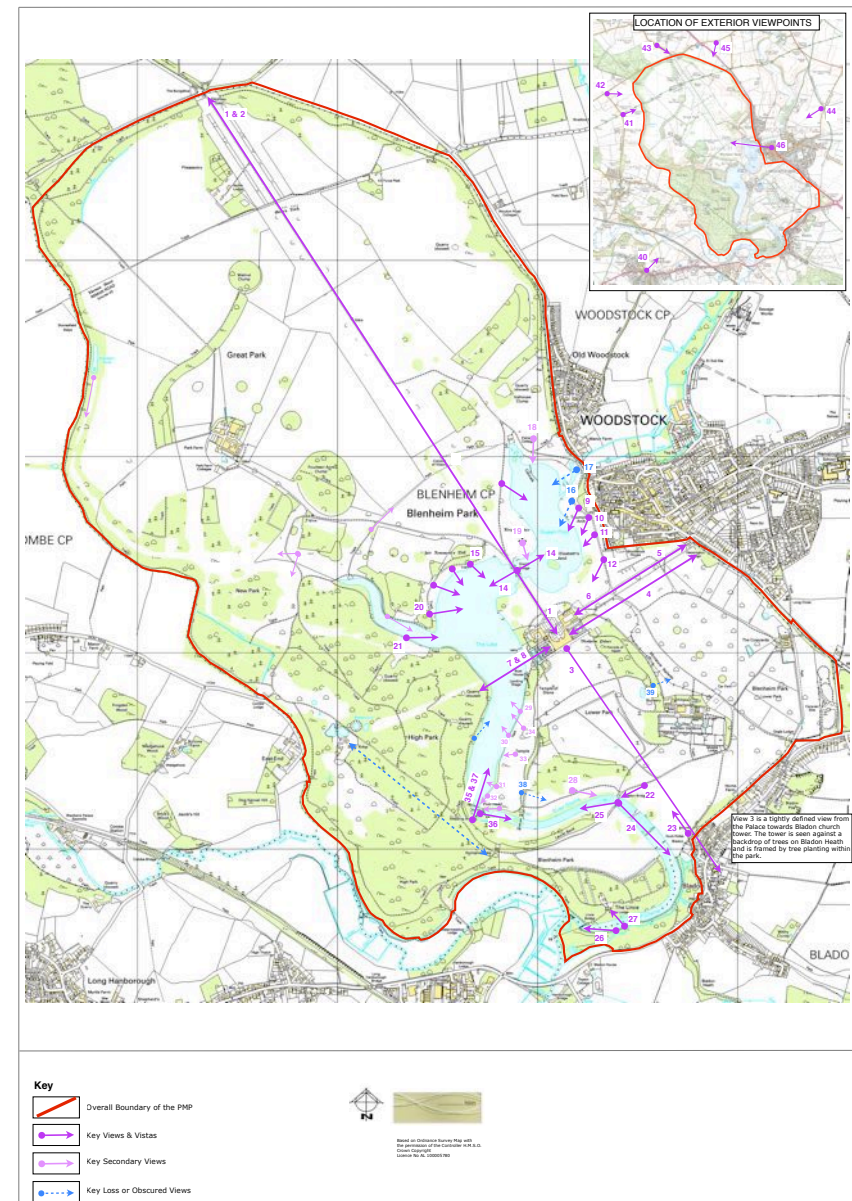
## 4 THE SETTING OF BLENHEIM PALACE WHS DESCRIBED

### INTRODUCTION

4.01 This chapter discusses the historic designed landscape of the WHS and the key visual links looking outwards between the historic buildings and the outer landscape, before describing and illustrating the characteristics of the surrounding landscape as recorded for this study, which considers the views from the outside looking towards the WHS.

4.02 The contribution of setting to the significance of a heritage asset is often expressed by reference to views, a purely visual impression of an asset or place which can be static or dynamic, including a variety of views of, across, or including that asset, and views of the surroundings from or through the asset. These may intersect with, and incorporate the settings of numerous heritage assets. Views which contribute more to understanding the significance of a heritage asset include those where relationships between the asset and other historic assets or places or natural features are particularly relevant; those with historical associations, such as viewing points and the topography of battlefields; those where the composition within the view was a fundamental aspect of the design or function of the heritage asset; and those between heritage assets and natural or topographic features.

4.03 Assets which were intended to be seen from one another for aesthetic, functional, ceremonial or religious reasons include historic parks and gardens with deliberate links to other designed landscapes, and remote 'eye-catching' features or 'borrowed' landmarks beyond the park boundary. Views are also particularly characteristic including those to and from key buildings and other areas of significance. In terms of the Blenheim WHS, the keys views out of the park, to 'borrowed landmarks' are few because of the great extent of the park itself, and its particular topography (see views analysis map opposite, prepared for the 2014 Parkland Management Plan).





## VIEWS OUT OF THE WHS TODAY

4.04 From its creation up to the present day, the park wall has acted as both a physical and visual protective barrier between the inner park and the outer setting. This means there are few views, and those that exist were very carefully contrived. Although historically there are documentary references to more views from inside the park looking out towards surrounding hills and local landmarks (see detailed discussion of historic views below), today's landscape offers a different context and views out of the park are rare. However, the location and situation of Blenheim Palace would clearly have influenced neighbouring landowners who would have been keen to use their proximity to the great Palace by orientating their own houses and landscapes on whatever landmarks within Blenheim Park that might be used as eyecatchers. This appears to have been the case with the landscape created around Ditchley Park, which lies to the north of Blenheim, since one of the main beech avenues radiating from Ditchley is focused on Blenheim Palace (although tree growth and landform are likely to have obscured all but the tips of the Palace). The gates at the northern exit to Blenheim are today known as the Ditchley Gates, but it is not entirely clear when this name was first used. On Spyer's map dated 1764, there is no name given to the gates, although the map is labeled 'Gate to Ditchley' indicating a connection of some kind between the two parks.

4.05 In general, however, the 18th, 19th and 20th century parkland planting together with the woodlands and associated shelterbelts largely enclose Blenheim Park and restrict views into the site. To the west of the park the landform and surrounding vegetation combine to restrict views to the exterior of High Park and the Western Boundary Belt. To the north of the park there are only glimpsed views into the WHS through the Ditchley Gate with the straight section of the B4437 Charlbury Road providing an avenue-like approach, although this is not a significant contrived view.

4.06 To the east of the park the landscape falls away into the valley of the Glyme, from which there is limited visibility. There are views towards the perimeter belts of the park from the A44 but these do not allow views into the park. Further afield there are long distance views from the Banbury Road and associated public rights of way

north east of Woodstock looking towards Blenheim Park but again these are from some distance, very narrowly defined, and focus on the Column of Victory which is an instantly recognisable feature.

4.07 It might be expected that there would be important views from Old and New Woodstock into Blenheim Park, but this is far from the case. There are glimpsed views through the entrance gates and the properties on the boundary south of the church do see into the park<sup>6</sup> but these are only achieved from the immediate vicinity of the gates. Blenheim Park is perhaps best viewed in the wider landscape from the Oxford Road in Woodstock as it descends into the Glyme valley. At this location there is a contrived view of the Column of Victory with the verdant park sward on the northern banks of Queen Pool also just visible. However, the quality of this fleeting view is affected by the street furniture, lighting and overhead cables of the town.

4.08 South of the Palace lies perhaps the most obvious contrived view out of the park, formed as a narrow and carefully defined vista towards Bladon Church, although there is no clear reciprocal view from the ground around the church towards Blenheim Palace. Glimpsed views into the park can be gained from some locations on the public rights of way north of Bladon Heath but even to the north east of Withy Clump the southern boundary shelterbelt of Bladon Park restricts views into the park.

## VIEWS OUT OF THE DESIGNED LANDSCAPE HISTORICALLY

4.09 William Fordyce Mavor, writing in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, provides some of the best descriptions of the views which might have been enjoyed from within the WHS looking outwards as the parkland landscape of Lancelot Brown had not long been completed. His explanations of these views, in the 1789 edition of his guidebook entitled '*New Description of Blenheim, the Seat of His Grace the Duke of Marlborough*' relate almost entirely to views from the park south of the gardens, looking south-east, south and south-west over the countryside in the general direction of Oxford. Of the view from the Palace gardens looking east he says:

*The usual entrance into the gardens is a little to the left of the eastern gate of Blenheim. The East Front first salutes the view: before it spreads a cheerful lawn of an oblong form, extending a considerable way into the park; at first fringed with little clumps of evergreens encircled and interspersed with flowers and deciduous shrubs; then broken by a few scattered trees, which rising on different sides of the boundary effectually conceal it; and afterwards lined by stately trees that throw a finely chequered shade on the verdant sward below, and arranging in irregular pomp preclude stiffness from mingling with beauty. A walk of pebbly gravel of the most beautiful texture and regularity winding to the east between rising plantations and clumps of trees and shrubs in various shapes, at intervals is opened to highly embellished lawn and soon taking an easy bend to the south conducts to a Temple, as yet without a name.....before we reach this Temple, the Triumphal Arch and Woodstock Tower are seen in pleasing perspective.*

**View east from the Palace towards Woodstock/Hensington Gate**



Today this glimpsed view of Woodstock (see photograph above) has been closed by the growth of trees and shrubs in the gardens and along the ha-ha, but the wording of the description suggests that the beauty of the gardens and the parkland setting were not diminished, but rather enhanced, by the sight of the tops of the houses in the town. Thus, the growth of the town over the intervening 230 years has not impacted negatively on the significance of this element of the WHS setting. Because these visual links have been enjoyed for more than 200 years, the area remains very sensitive to potentially negative impacts, particularly from any tall, bulky or very modern structures which would detract from the value of the historic visual connection.

4.10 As Mavor moves further along his walk through the gardens, he passes the entrance into the walled garden and he describes the views south:

*Falling into the Home Walk at this place....we soon enter the Sheep-Walk which is half a mile in length and through its whole extent abounding in rural imagery. Frequently covered with a flock of more than a thousand sheep, all of the most beautiful and valuable, and some of the most curious kinds, this space, though possessing features of characteristic negligence, is not less rich or less animated than the most favourite spots in the garden. The open grove winds away to the right and on this hand we catch a glimpse of the south front of the Palace, which is thrown into various perspective as we advance. In other directions we enjoy a picturesque view of Beckley Hill just peeping over the intervening heights; of Witham's lofty woods rising to the summit of Botley where the trees range in solitary state; and through the long perspective of a rich campaign of which Ensham Tower forms a very conspicuous object when illuminated with a morning sun, the distant White Horse Hills are seen to elevate themselves into a background. Nor are remote pictures alone attractive at this hour: the deep shade that darkens the neighbouring village of Bladon is finely contrasted with the level beams that glance on the water below.*

These very long views south-east, south and south-west from the Sheepwalk in Bladon Park towards distant landmarks have been completely obscured in the intervening 230 years largely by extensive tree growth both inside and outside the park, as well as

development between Oxford and Blenheim which has altered the largely rural character of the area in Mavor's time. Indeed, the landform does, in places, make it difficult to image the extent of the views described by Mavor in this extract, particularly the distant view of the Vale of the White Horse. Nevertheless, any very tall structures or those using materials that catch the light, have potential to impact on the setting of the WHS.

4.11 A little further west along the Sheepwalk path, Mavor describes the changing views of the newly constructed bridge designed by William Chambers and known as New Bridge.

***View south towards Bladon from the Sheepwalk with the Church tower just visible***



This time looking south-west, and then south he says:

*About the middle of this walk, the top of Handborough spire, though more than three miles off appears emerging from the bosom of the deep wood beyond the lake.....near this spot we pause to contemplate the beauties which the changing scene displays. Nothing can be more picturesque than Bladon when gilded with an evening sun: the antique low tower and here and there the end of a building,*

*glow with the crimson of his beams , or the window partially shaded by intervening trees reflects them like living fire. Claude would have caught the tints with rapture; he would have combined the objects into a picture; and on its effects he might have rested the immortality of his fame.*

Any view out of the park towards Long Hanborough have long since been screened by tree growth 'beyond the lake', as well as the boundary plantations which now form a completely protective screen (see image below). With trees here being of some age, the intention by Brown to screen the views appears to have been clear. Views towards Bladon, however, do still exist, although now more filtered than in Mavor's time. The strong axial line all the way from the Ditchely Gate, through the Palace and out of the park into Bladon was designed at the time the Palace and its landscape were laid out and this has been retained ever since. Thus, it represents the most significant view out of the park and the one which would be most significantly affected by tall or inappropriate development in and around the church. Likewise, the 'Claudian' nature of the glimpsed views of elements of some buildings would be potentially impacted if inappropriate development took place within the village which could be seen from within the WHS.

***View south-west towards Long Hanborough from the Sheepwalk***





4.12 Before turning north on his walk though the grounds, Mavor takes a look back towards the east:

*Before we sink into the vale , it will not be unpleasing to take a retrospective view of the landscape we are leaving behind. The lofty spire of Kidlington seems to belong to the park; the distant hills formerly observed are cast into different perspective; and a new and wider range is displayed further than natural vision can distinguish objects until the blue hills of Bucks close with the bounding sky. Among these Ashridge, the seat of the Duke of Bridgwater may be ascertained in a clear day.*

Today there is no view east as far as Kidlington since the parkland boundary plantations, Oxford airport and indeed the 80m contour line all divide the park from the church spire. Mavor also suggests that in 1789 it was possible to see the buildings of the University of Oxford from High Lodge - another view long curtailed by intervening tree growth and centuries of development.

**View east from the Sheepwalk towards Kidlington**



4.13 Returning to the Palace, Mavor looks north-west into the park:

*As we approximate the level of the terrace, the shaft of Churchill's PILLAR appears in front above the surrounding trees; by degrees it opens to its very base.....DITCHELY WOODS form the horizon: these fall into the back-ground of the scene, at a distance sufficient for greatness and without any disjunction of parts.*

This demonstrates that the parkland appeared to be essentially enclosed by woodland with little in the way of external views. That is certainly the case today, even when seen from the roof of the Palace.

**View north from the Palace to the Column of Victory and beyond**





4.14 In his tour through the park Mavor describes how its circumference is 'upwards of twelve miles' around which are the 'most enchanting rides, chiefly shaded towards the boundary with a deep belt of various trees, evergreens and deciduous shrubs'. He says that on the park side of the boundary rides the trees:

*...sometimes range with the former, sometimes breaking into groups with large interstices relieve the tedium of continued uniformity, and open the most brilliant prospects. Indeed the effects of polished taste and the sublime in design are no where more perceptible than in the boundless views that at intervals present themselves; the limits of the park being in general well concealed; and the whole surrounding country, varied with hills and vales, spires, towers extended landscape.*

This last statement suggests that the boundary ride made use of the wider landscape to extend the view of the visitor, but it should perhaps be remembered that Mavor's book was written in 1789 only about 20 years after Brown was busy creating the boundary plantations. When Spyer surveyed the park for Brown in 1764 there was only a belt between the Ditchley Gate on the north-west boundary to just north of Old Woodstock, and it was Brown who made significant extensions to this. Thus in 1789 the trees were young, and these visual connections into the surrounding land would have been only transitory and largely contained by the wall. It may therefore reasonably be assumed that the Duke of Marlborough, in collaboration with Brown, was perhaps most interested in views of his own estate, rather than in creating views towards the seats of others - and the current character of the boundary plantations (shown in the image below) demonstrates this.



## VIEWS INTO THE WHS

4.15 Having considered views out from the WHS, this section considers views into the site; summaries the key elements of the setting of the WHS in terms of physical characteristics; and discusses how the setting is generally experienced. It is illustrated with panoramic photographs from various locations around the WHS, which shows views and general character. The park at Blenheim Palace is a well defined and contained landscape which, following the extensive parkland planting campaigns of the mid 18th and late 19th century, has a limited inter-visibility with its wider setting. However, it stands at the core of an extensive private estate, which has exerted huge influence over the character and appearance of the wider landscape (and neighbouring landowners) and today it can be described through division into six subtly different types. Within each area, the following 'forces for change' are discussed in terms of how, if at all, these might affect the setting of the WHS. They are:

### **Large scale development**, defined as:

- The winning and working of minerals or the use of land for mineral-working deposits;
- Waste development;
- Large-scale renewable energy generation schemes such as solar farms or tall wind turbines;
- The provision of a building or buildings where the floor space to be created by the development is 1,000 square metres or more; or
- Development carried out on a site having an area of 1 hectare or more.

### **Land cover change**, defined as:

- Large scale changes to land cover such as the planting or removal of woodland or conversion from pasture to arable or creation of horse paddocks;
- Introduction of major new crop types (for instance oil seed rape or miscanthus);
- Introduction of new crop management techniques (for instance crop films or fleeces to protect field scale horticultural crops);
- Removal or changes to boundary features such as hedgerows;
- Removal or changes to other locally distinctive landscape features.

### **Incremental development**, defined as:

- Household applications (as defined by the Town and Country Planning (development management procedure) Order 2010)
  - An application for planning permission for development of an existing dwelling house, or development within the curtilage of such a dwelling house for any purpose incidental to the enjoyment of the dwelling house; or
  - An application for any consent, agreement or approval required by or under a planning permission, development order or local development order in relation to such development, but does not include an application for change of use or an application to change the number of dwellings in a building.
- Development of a single dwelling house within an existing settlement boundary;
- Single agricultural sheds or single small scale industrial sheds;
- Single micro wind turbines within the curtilage of a property;
- Household solar PV installations;
- Traffic signs, street furniture and highway improvements or safety measures that lead to a change of character of the area (these changes are governed by a variety of mechanisms and bodies including planning permission, permitted development rights, bye-laws and Highways Acts).
- Small scale developments of between 2 – 9 dwelling houses within an existing settlement boundary, any new dwelling houses

### **Infrastructure development**, defined as:

- New roads, road widening, roadway lighting and increased traffic levels;
- Long term engineering work on rail lines and increased frequency of rail services;
- Increased aircraft movements including take offs and landings;
- Electricity pylons and cables;
- Wind turbines (includes all cluster sizes and turbine heights excluding single micro turbines within the curtilage of a property);
- Solar PV .

## The North-North-West

4.16 North of the WHS the landscape is characterised as estate farmland. This is a well-managed landscape scattered with extensive woodlands, plantations and copses. Lines of oaks along roads and some field boundaries give the landscape to the north of the park a greater sense of enclosure. Within the local environment, perhaps little more than 1km away from the boundary, there is very little perception of the proximity of a World Heritage Site anywhere apart from in the immediate vicinity of the park wall. The experience from public roads and footpaths is of traveling through gently undulating Oxfordshire countryside, heavily used for farming and set in a framework of plantations, woods, and copses which provide a degree of enclosure. Grim's Dyke Farm shelterbelts and the landform into the valley mean there is only a perception of the closeness of a WHS from the A44 by the Duke of Marlborough public house, right next to the boundary of the park.

4.17 In terms of change, the woodlands are very important to the character and, together with the parkland shelterbelts, prevent any views in to or out of the WHS, thus protecting this element of setting. The area has a good rural woodland/farming character which contributes to the traditional nature of the setting of the WHS. Therefore the forces for change that have the potential to most affect the setting of the WHS are alterations to land use which could have a significant impact, particularly through any loss of woodland cover; and major / infra-structure development - particularly those of any height or industrial in character. Generally the activities described as incremental developments could be accommodated depending on the detail and proximity to the boundary of the WHS.

***View from near Woodleys Farm on Ditchley Road looking south towards the northern boundary of the WHS - shows the arable character and importance of woodland***





## The West - Stonesfield and Combe Areas

4.18 To the west the open limestone wolds landscape dominates. Between Gorrel Doors and Stonesfield this is an open, expansive area of large arable fields, but around the village of Combe the landform is more folded and intimate with narrow country lanes and a series of small woodlands and copses. The landscape adjacent to the WHS boundary has a plateau character dissected by narrow country roads, sometimes with fast moving traffic. The villages are screened from views of the WHS by its boundary plantations and thus there is no experience of being in close proximity to an internationally important landscape. The combination of landform, hedges, copses and plantations give a sense of enclosure and at Combe, provides the experience of being within a picturesque village surrounded by farmland. One needs to be a considerable way along Park Road before the boundary belts and the woods of High Park dominate and create a sense of what might be beyond. The isolated properties in the landscape experience the WHS boundary plantations as being indistinguishable from the wider wooded landscape, although in one or two very specific locations the tip of the Column of Victory is also visible over the treetops.

4.19 As with the north-west area, the woodlands are very important to the character and, together with the parkland shelterbelts, prevent any views in to or out of the WHS, thus protecting this element of setting. The small settlements sit within a rural woodland/farming landscape which contributes to the traditional nature of the setting of the WHS. Again, the forces for change that have the potential to most affect the setting of the WHS here are alterations to land use which could have a significant impact, particularly through any loss of woodland cover; and major / infra-structure development - particularly those of any height or industrial in character. Generally the activities described as incremental developments could be accommodated depending on the detail and proximity to the boundary of the WHS.

***View showing the open expansive nature of the view from Stonesfield Road towards the WHS***



***View along Akeman Street towards the WHS  
- with no perception of its existence***



***View from Notoaks Wood, looking north-east  
- showing the general character of this area***





## The South-West - Long Hanborough area

4.20 To the south and south west of the WHS the landscape is one of contrasts, between the highly picturesque valley of the Evenlode with its small copses and meadows south-east of Combe, backed by the ornamental plantings of The Lince and the oaks of High Wood; to the landscape beyond the railway line where the more modern developments of Long Hanborough along the A4095 and the business park are more dominant. There are expansive views over this area from one location on the WHS boundary - the Combe Lodge entrance to the park looking south-west over the valley floor to the distinctive sloping and typically convex valley sides rising up towards Long Hanborough, with long views beyond; but more widely in the other direction from various locations along the northern boundary of Long Hanborough looking north-east towards the oaks of High Wood. There is no intervisibility with the open park, but there is sense of the landscape that lies beyond the woods. The experience of being in this area is also one of contrasts - north of the railway line and east of Combe, for example along Boltons Lane, there is a feeling of an intimate enclosed landscape whereas south of the line and in Long Hanborough the busy road with frequent fast traffic, together with the size of the settlement gives more sense of being in a busy settlement.

4.21 The tranquil character in the Evenlode valley, where the narrow river winds through flat, floodplain meadows and pasture fields which are sub-divided by drainage ditches and fences, is very important to the pastoral character and together with the parkland shelterbelts form the backdrop for views of the boundary of the WHS, thus protecting this element of setting. Thus, changes to land use would have a significant impact, particularly through any loss of the small scale pasture and meadow fields. Otherwise, the forces for change that have the potential to most affect the setting of the WHS are major / infra-structure development particularly along the north side of the A4095 that would impact on the view from Combe Lodge (the view from the Sheepwalk in the park to Hanborough spire mentioned by Mavor in 1789 is now hidden by tree growth). Generally the activities described as incremental developments could be accommodated depending on the detail and proximity to the boundary of the WHS, and their height in the landscape.

***View out from Combe Lodge with Combe village on the right hand edge, and properties at Long Hanborough strung along the A4095, with woodland in the long distance***





*The important pastoral character of the Evenlode valley between the WHS and Long Hanborough - viewed here from the north-east side of the railway track.*



*View from Long Hanborough towards the WHS shows the flatter arable character of the land on the village fringe, with the boundary trees of the WHS forming the distant view.*





***View from the PROW at Long Hanborough looking over the railway cutting towards the WHS***



***View from Lower Road looking towards Mill Farm back towards The Lince and the park - a typical view of the countryside in this upper part of the area***



## The South-South-East - Bladon Area

4.22 The south eastern side of the WHS is bounded by Bladon - a small, linear village strung out along the A4095 road to Witney. South of the village and park the landscape is typical of the semi-enclosed limestone wolds and rises gently up the slopes to the woodlands on Bladon Heath and Burleigh Wood which crown the low lying hills. Bladon is a characterful village, its traditional roof-scape mentioned by Mavor in glowing terms in 1789 as forming part of the charming view from within the park, and its church spire acting as the terminus of the main axial view through the park. Today the experience of being in a small rural village is affected somewhat by the traffic levels on the A4095, although along this road the presence of park lodges gives a physical and experiential link to what lies beyond. Burleigh Wood on the ridge is an important element of the character although the ridge together with the trees prevent any views of the park, and from the park side they stop the view extending any further south. This area is experienced as quiet countryside and is well used by walkers. On the roads and paths nearer the WHS boundary, its ornamental plantations may signal its presence. South east of Bladon there is a more agricultural feel, of fields partly enclosed by small copses and the linear belts along Rowel Brook, which offer limited perception of the proximity of the WHS since the external and boundary woods all blend together in the view.

4.23 In terms of change to land use, any loss of the woodlands on Burleigh Ridge or tall development in this area would be detrimental to setting. Retaining the visual link between the park and the Church spire is also significant, while some screening of the 20th century housing to the south-east of the Church would be beneficial. The forces for change that have the potential to most affect the setting of the WHS are any activities that create height in the landscape since this risks diminishing the importance of the historic roof-scape and the Church tower, as well as major development / infra-structure development. Generally the activities described as incremental developments could be accommodated depending on the detail and proximity to the boundary of the WHS but it is important to retain the discrete definition of Bladon as separate from Long Hanborough to the west and Woodstock to the east.

***View from Burleigh Lodge, looking north towards the WHS with Bladon properties just visible on the lefthand side. The mixed woodlands at The Lince hint at the ornamental nature of the WHS landscape***





*View from Bladon Heath looking over the village on the left hand side, with Withy Clump a key feature, and the woods of the WHS forming the background*



*Although Bladon Church Tower is an eyecatcher from within the WHS, from its churchyard the scene is of the very local village setting, although the ornamental tree planting in the background indicates the existence of the park*



## The East-South-East - Airport and Kidlington area

4.24 This area is characterised by busy roads, more intensive larger-scale farming with low hedges and trees lines, and fewer woodlands. The airport is open and expansive and includes an industrial hub. Roads crossing the area are generally very busy (particularly the A44), with fast moving traffic. All this impacts on the experience of this part of the WHS setting, although the tree lines along Upper Campsfield Road and Shipton Road close any views towards the WHS and remove any perception of its proximity.

***View of the A44 Oxford Road, looking north towards the Bladon roundabout, with the trees of Campsfield Wood a dominant feature. The feeling is of fast moving cars and countryside.***



***The landscape of the airport dominates the east side of the A44 here***



4.25 In terms of change, the shelterbelts and copses that do exist are very valuable in breaking up the open expanses here. The forces for change that have the potential to most affect the setting of the WHS are tall, major industrial or infra-structure development. Generally the activities described as incremental developments could be well accommodated depending on the detail and proximity to the boundary of the WHS.



***View from the PROW near Rowel Brook***



***View from Shipton Road looking south-west, towards the Cowyards and Campsfield Wood, demonstrating the open large-scale agricultural landscape, with few field boundaries or trees.***





## 5 MANAGING SETTING AND ASSESSING IMPACTS

### SUMMARY OF VALUED FEATURES

5.01 Different parts of the setting have the potential to convey different aspects of OUV and the attributes of the WHS, which together are the main source of understanding the various significances of Blenheim and its setting. It is therefore helpful to re-iterate what these are. The elements of Blenheim's OUV are:

- Blenheim is an outstanding example of the work of John Vanbrugh and Nicholas Hawksmoor, two of England's most notable architects;
- Blenheim represents a unique architectural achievement celebrating the triumph of the English armies over the French;
- Blenheim and its associated Park has exerted great influence on the English Romantic movement which was characterised by the eclecticism of its inspiration, its return to national sources and its love of nature;
- The original landscape set out by John Vanbrugh who regulated the course of the River Glyme was later modified by Lancelot "Capability" Brown who created two lakes seen as one of the greatest examples of naturalistic landscape design;
- Blenheim Palace was built by the nation to honour one of its heroes John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough and is also closely associated with Sir Winston Churchill.

The attributes which help explain the OUV are:

- It remains the home of the same aristocratic family, the successive Dukes of Marlborough, for whom it was built;
- It still contains the unique early C18 architecture of the Palace and its associated assemblage of buildings together with an archive of original survey and building documentation;
- It is still set within the early C18 grand Vanbrugh landscape overlaid by Lancelot Brown's masterpiece of English Landscape style design, internationally considered to be the 'English Versailles';
- The surviving special relationship between the important architectural elements and their landscape setting are an exceptional piece of design and, together are greater than the sum of their parts;

- The UK has by far the greatest concentration of veteran trees in northern Europe and within High Park, which sits in the south-west section of Blenheim Park, is one of the finest areas of ancient oak-dominated woodland in the country. It is partially descended from the ancient Wychwood Forest, a C12 deer park and an Anglo-Saxon chase;
- The gardens and pleasure grounds which surround the Palace were partly designed by Lancelot Brown in the mid C18, and partly by the French landscape architect Achille Duchene at the start of the C20;
- The park retains a complete, C18 enclosing stone wall which protects its integrity, but views into and out of the site still provide key linkages between Blenheim and the traditional English countryside and villages surrounding it.

5.02 The elements of Blenheim's OUV (and the attributes which convey it) which the setting most directly relates to are:

- The connection with the River Glyme - the management of this river as it runs through the setting of the WHS directly affects the character, ecological value and water quality of Lancelot Brown's lakes within the WHS;
- The links with the much larger and ancient Wychwood Forest area;
- The value of the boundary wall and plantations which mainly hide the park from outside views, but also form important woodland elements in the wider landscape;
- The key visual linkages between Blenheim and its setting - to Bladon church in the south and from Old Woodstock to the Column of Victory in the east;
- The character of the setting as traditional English countryside, dotted with picturesque villages mainly built using a uniform palate of materials.

5.03 These significances are important individually and together in achieving a strong sense of place, which helps foster a sense of community through pride in the WHS and connecting it with the local area. Landscape character, views and the historic environment, together with recreational opportunities and biodiversity are all important parts of feeling connected and belonging within the local community.

## MANAGING THE SETTING

5.04 The importance of these elements of the setting of Blenheim in reinforcing the OUV and in maintaining and enhancing local distinctiveness and the high quality environment, can perhaps best be understood by considering the implications of not protecting them:

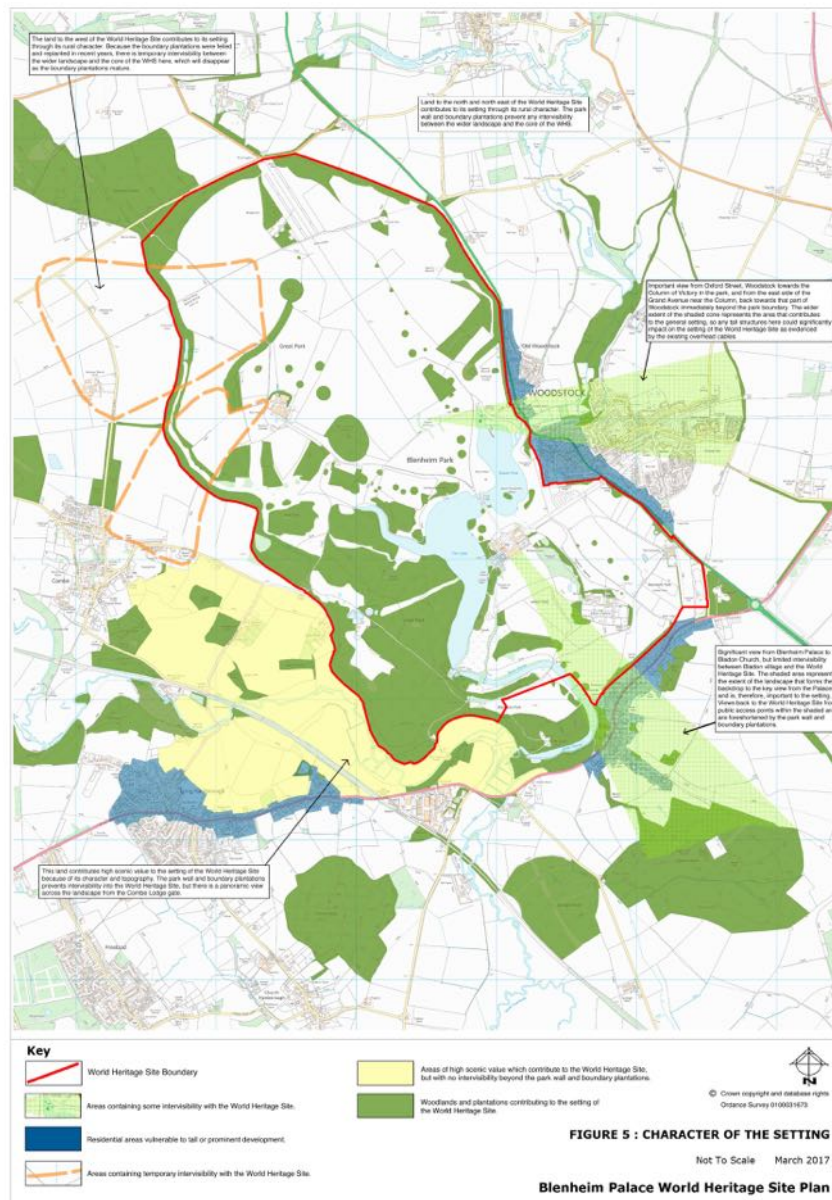
- The conversion of significant areas of agricultural land for other purposes, or the large-scale loss of woodland would detract from the distinctiveness of the setting;
- Tall developments on the skyline, or large-scale development (particularly those of a non-residential nature which tend to be bulkier and non-vernacular, for example industrial development; wind turbines; solar farms etc) could detrimentally influence the character of the adjoining rural areas;
- Increased levels of pollution and silt in the river catchments feed into the WHS and affect the highly significant Lancelot Brown lakes;
- Views from the Palace to the rooftops and church spire of Bladon could be lost, reduced or impacted on;
- The historic physical, and occasionally glimpsed visual, connection with Woodstock could be lost or reduced;
- Development that results in the joining of one village settlement to another could result in the settlements losing their distinctive nature.

5.05 On-going management and care of the setting needs to be informed by this understanding of how the setting contributes to the significance and attributes of the site. In addition, it is clear that management of any WHS requires protection and enhancement of not only the site and its setting as a whole, but also of the individual heritage assets which contribute to OUV. This will include assets and attributes both within the site and within the setting.

5.06 Thus, as the NPPF makes clear, because the extent of setting is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve, it does not have a fixed boundary and cannot be definitively and permanently described for all time as a spatially bounded area or as lying within a set distance of a heritage asset. Because what comprises a heritage asset's setting may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve or as the asset becomes better understood or due to the varying

impacts of different proposals, management of these assets needs to be flexible and their values and relationships regularly reviewed. In addition, the setting of a heritage asset may reflect the character of the wider townscape or landscape in which it is situated, or be quite distinct from it. Extensive heritage assets, such as landscapes and townscapes, can include many heritage assets and their nested and overlapping settings, as well as having a setting of their own. A conservation area, for example, will include the settings of listed buildings and have its own setting, as will the village or urban area in which it is situated (explicitly recognised in green belt designations). All of these will have an influence on how setting is managed.

5.07 One of the key characteristics of the surroundings of Blenheim Park is that much of the setting lies within the wider extent of the Blenheim estate - which is effectively managed by a single owner. It has been owned by the Dukes of Marlborough for 300 years (one of the attributes which contribute to OUV), and has in recent years been recognised as an outstanding property of national heritage value. Thus for almost 300 years management of the wider estate has acted as a means of both supporting the historic core and protecting it. As a traditional landed estate, much of the land is retained in open agricultural and enclosed forestry use - another attribute which contributes to OUV. The grazed pastoral landscapes around the river valleys, along with the fields and woodlands are particularly significant as these reflect the land-use and character of the landscape that would have been appreciated during the 18th century. Contrasts between these features is muted and gentle, representing the historic character of the farmed landscape of middle England. The appropriate management and enhancement of these landscape features is therefore an important objective, and the areas which make a particular contribution to the setting of the WHS are highlighted on the accompanying map (Figure 5 from the WHS Management Plan). In terms of management, therefore, it would be helpful to encourage on-going management of the open elements of the landscape and river meadows through effective agricultural practices and appropriate grazing. The opportunities for other land management practices such as community woodlands, agri-environment schemes and community supported agriculture can also positively contribute to the appropriate care of the setting.



5.08 As the map shows, trees and woodlands are an important component of the character of the WHS and its setting whether individually, in groups or as part of a woodland or the parkland (both the boundary belts and the blocks within the park). There is a need to ensure a healthy on-going mixed age structure within wider landscape of gardens, streets and open spaces, along linear features and in woodlands. The management of the character of the immediate setting needs to recognise the desirability of providing softening and screening of buildings by trees and the contrast they provide to other more open areas. However, maintenance of key views are significant to the OUV, so there has to be a balance when managing the landscape and townscape to ensure these key views are maintained by careful control of new development and where opportunities occur to restore or enhance views. This demonstrates that the appropriate management of vegetation is important to support such an objective. The two main visual links - to Bladon church spire from the Palace; and back from Woodstock to the Column of Victory; are of particular significance and need to be protected in order to ensure that this attribute of OUV is conserved and, where possible, enhanced.

5.09 There are a number of existing or potential means available to ensure that Blenheim WHS and its setting are properly managed including:

- Policies to protect the WHS and its setting contained in the Local Plan and Core Strategy - which have the option of being supported by this document.
- Other policies on specific issues or for specific purposes which support appropriate management
- Management plans for other specific sites within the setting.
- The Blenheim WHS Management Plan.
- The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan
- The Green Infrastructure Strategy
- Other local strategies and guidance which may be a material consideration
- Liaison with landowners and organisations
- Projects to enhance, restore or protect the landscape character



## ASSESSING IMPACTS USING GPA3

5.10 Historic England's Good Practice Guidance Note 3 offers a detailed step-by-step process to help with the assessment of impacts on setting. GPA3 notes that protection of the setting of heritage assets need not prevent change; indeed change may be positive, for instance where the setting has been compromised by poor development. Many places are within the setting of a heritage asset and are subject to some degree of change over time. NPPF policies, together with the guidance on their implementation in the Planning Policy Guidance (PPG), provide the framework for the consideration of change affecting the setting of undesignated and designated heritage assets as part of the decision-taking process (NPPF, Paragraphs 131-135 and 137). Amongst the Government's planning objectives for the historic environment is that conservation decisions should be based on the nature, extent and level of a heritage asset's significance and they should be investigated to a proportionate degree.

### Steps 1 & 2 - Describing the asset and assessing the contribution of setting

5.11 The first two stages of the GPA3 5-step process - describing the heritage asset and explaining its setting, as well as assessing what contribution the setting makes - have been covered in the WHS Management Plan and this document. Thus when a management action, or a proposed development is being considered that may affect the setting of the Blenheim WHS with the potential to impact on its OUV, the remaining 3 stages can be brought into play.

### Step 3 - Assessing the effect of a proposal on the significance of the asset

5.12 Stage 3 of this process is to identify the range of effects a development may have on setting and evaluate the resultant degree of harm or benefit to the significance of the heritage asset. In some circumstances, this evaluation may need to extend to cumulative and complex impacts which may have as great an effect on heritage assets as large-scale development and which may not only be visual. The range of circumstances in which setting may be affected and the range of heritage assets that may be involved precludes a single approach for assessing effects. Different approaches will be required for different circumstances. In general, however,

the assessment should consider the proposed development in terms of its location and siting; form and appearance; additional effects and permanence. A more detailed list of possible attributes is also given in the GPA3 document to aid in the assessment process. Depending on the level of detail considered proportionate to the purpose of the assessment, it would normally be appropriate to make a selection from the list, identifying those particular attributes of the development requiring further consideration as well as what emphasis attaches to each. The key attributes chosen for consideration can be used as a simple check-list, supported by a short explanation, as part of a Design and Access Statement, or may provide the basis for a more complex assessment process that might sometimes draw on quantitative approaches to assist analysis.

5.13 It is also deemed helpful for local planning authorities to consider at an early stage whether development affecting the setting of a heritage asset can be broadly categorised as having the potential to enhance or harm the significance of the asset through the principle of development alone; through the scale, prominence, proximity or placement of development; or through its detailed design. Determining whether the assessment will focus on spatial, landscape and views analysis, on the application of urban design considerations, or on a combination of these approaches will clarify for the applicant the breadth and balance of professional expertise required for its successful delivery.

### Step 4 - Maximising enhancement and minimising harm

5.14 Maximum advantage can be secured if any effects on the significance of a heritage asset arising from development liable to affect its setting are considered from the project's inception. Early assessment of setting may provide a basis for agreeing the scope and form of development, reducing the potential for disagreement and challenge later in the process. Enhancement (See NPPF, Paragraph 137) may be achieved by actions including:

- removing or re-modelling an intrusive building or feature
- replacement of a detrimental feature by a new and more harmonious one
- restoring or revealing a lost historic feature or view

- introducing a wholly new feature that adds to the public appreciation of the asset
- introducing new views (including glimpses or better framed views) that add to the public experience of the asset, or
- improving public access to, or interpretation of, the asset including its setting

***Example of modern build in Woodstock complementing the character of the setting***



5.15 Options for reducing the harm arising from development may include the relocation of a development or its elements, changes to its design, the creation of effective long-term visual or acoustic screening, or management measures secured by planning conditions or legal agreements. For some developments affecting setting, the design of a development may not be capable of sufficient adjustment to avoid or significantly reduce the harm, for example where impacts are caused by fundamental issues such as the proximity, location, scale, prominence or noisiness of a

development. In other cases, good design may reduce or remove the harm, or provide enhancement, and design quality may be the main consideration in determining the balance of harm and benefit.

5.16 Where attributes of a development affecting setting may cause some harm to significance and cannot be adjusted, screening may have a part to play in reducing harm. As screening can only mitigate negative impacts, rather than removing impacts or providing enhancement, it ought never to be regarded as a substitute for well-designed developments within the setting of heritage assets. Screening may have as intrusive an effect on the setting as the development it seeks to mitigate, so where it is necessary, it too merits careful design. This should take account of local landscape character and seasonal and diurnal effects, such as changes to foliage and lighting. The permanence or longevity of screening in relation to the effect on the setting also requires consideration. Ephemeral features, such as hoardings, may be removed or changed during the duration of the development, as may woodland or hedgerows, unless they enjoy statutory protection. Management measures secured by legal agreements may be helpful in securing the long-term effect of screening.

## Step 5 - Making and documenting the decision and monitoring outcomes

5.17 It is good practice to document each stage of the decision-making process in a non-technical way, accessible to non-specialists. This should set out clearly how the setting of each heritage asset affected contributes to its significance and what the anticipated effect of the development, including any mitigation proposals, will be. Despite the wide range of possible variables, normally this analysis should focus on a limited number of key attributes of the asset, its setting and the proposed development, in order to avoid undue complexity. The true effect of a development on setting may be difficult to establish from plans, drawings and visualisations, although the latter are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Once a development affecting setting that was intended to enhance, or was considered unlikely to detract from, the significance of a heritage asset has been implemented, it may be helpful to review the success of the scheme in these terms and to identify any 'lessons learned'. This will be particularly useful where similar developments are anticipated in the future.

## The North-East - between Woodstock and Wootton

4.26 Woodstock is surrounded by a landscape characteristically defined as the open limestone wolds. This is a large-scale, rolling farmland landscape occupying the limestone plateau and dipslope with the land lying mainly between 95m and 110m A.O.D. A predominantly arable landscape, this agricultural land is intensively farmed and has an open, expansive character to the north and east of Woodstock. On the plateau, the field pattern is typically large-scale with a rectilinear pattern of dry stone walls and low, species poor hedgerows with few field boundary trees. It is more intimate and enclosed in the valleys of the Glyme and Dorn, with a sense of picturesque countryside formed by narrow steep-sided valleys of pasture grass, and woods on the break of slope with settlement in the valley bottoms.

4.27 The park is not perceived from this area except as a dense belt of trees, although when in close proximity along the road, the park wall itself does herald something of interest and value beyond it. However, from a distance there is little to suggest the closeness or character of the WHS. In the valleys, the character of the WHS setting is vulnerable to the loss of the pasturelands on the slopes and the woods on the break of slope, and in general any loss of the expanses of farmland would be detrimental. The other forces for change that have the potential to most affect the setting of the WHS here are major / infra-structure development - particularly those of any height or those with an industrial character. Generally the activities described as incremental developments could be accommodated depending on the detail and proximity to the boundary of the WHS.

***View from the land south of Wootton, demonstrating the agricultural character and the importance of the woodlands on the boundary of the park***





## The Immediate East - Woodstock

4.28 Located immediately to the east of Blenheim Palace is the town of Woodstock through which runs the Oxford Road (now the A44). This historic settlement is divided by the narrow, shallow valley of the River Glyme with Old Woodstock occupying the gently rising ground to the north of the river. The new township, reportedly built to house the followers of the royal court in the late 12th century, was located on the southern valley sides and the level plateau above. Woodstock has the strongest link to the WHS by virtue of its historic links, its immediately proximity to the main entrance gate and because of the synergy of building material use. There are also glimpses into the park through the gates at Hensington and Woodstock, and framed views of the Column of Victory from the A44 going in to Old Woodstock. The approach along the Oxford Road (A44) to the Hensington Gate from the south east is an important one, with visitors experiencing a sense of anticipation, created by the park wall and thin shelterbelt giving glimpsed views through trees into a park which is clearly important. Once past the main gates the experience is of being in a busy historic town, while to the east the more modern properties blend into the farmland beyond the town.

4.29 The Woodstock Conservation Area begins at the Hensington Gate and encompasses the older, western, part of the town, developed by the mid-19th century - this sense of arrival is strong and important to the WHS. The eastern part of the town, which is larger than the conservation area, was largely developed after WWII, is not of high quality design, and has subsumed the village of Hensington. In terms of change, unified use of building materials create valuable visual and historic links between the older town and the WHS, adding significantly to the character of its immediate setting. Historically the town has been the busiest settlement on the fringes of the WHS, and that remains the case today. Thus generally the activities described as incremental developments can continue to be accommodated. The other forces for change that have the potential to most affect the setting of the WHS are major infrastructure development - particularly those of any height, of industrial character, or those that disrupt the visual links between town and WHS. Generally land use changes to the north and north-east - particularly loss of the water meadows would be detrimental to setting, and the management of the watercourse also directly affects the WHS itself.

***View of the landscape character to the east of Woodstock, looking from Sansoms Lane along the footpath towards the town***



*Arriving at Woodstock from the Bladon roundabout, with the park wall on the left and hedged fields on the right. Traffic is generally fast moving at this point, but slows as the town is approached.*



*Entry to the Woodstock conservation area begins at the main Hensington Gate entrance into the WHS. This view is looking from the two south along the A44 with traditional buildings in the middle ground and the trees marking the park entrance in the ventral background.*





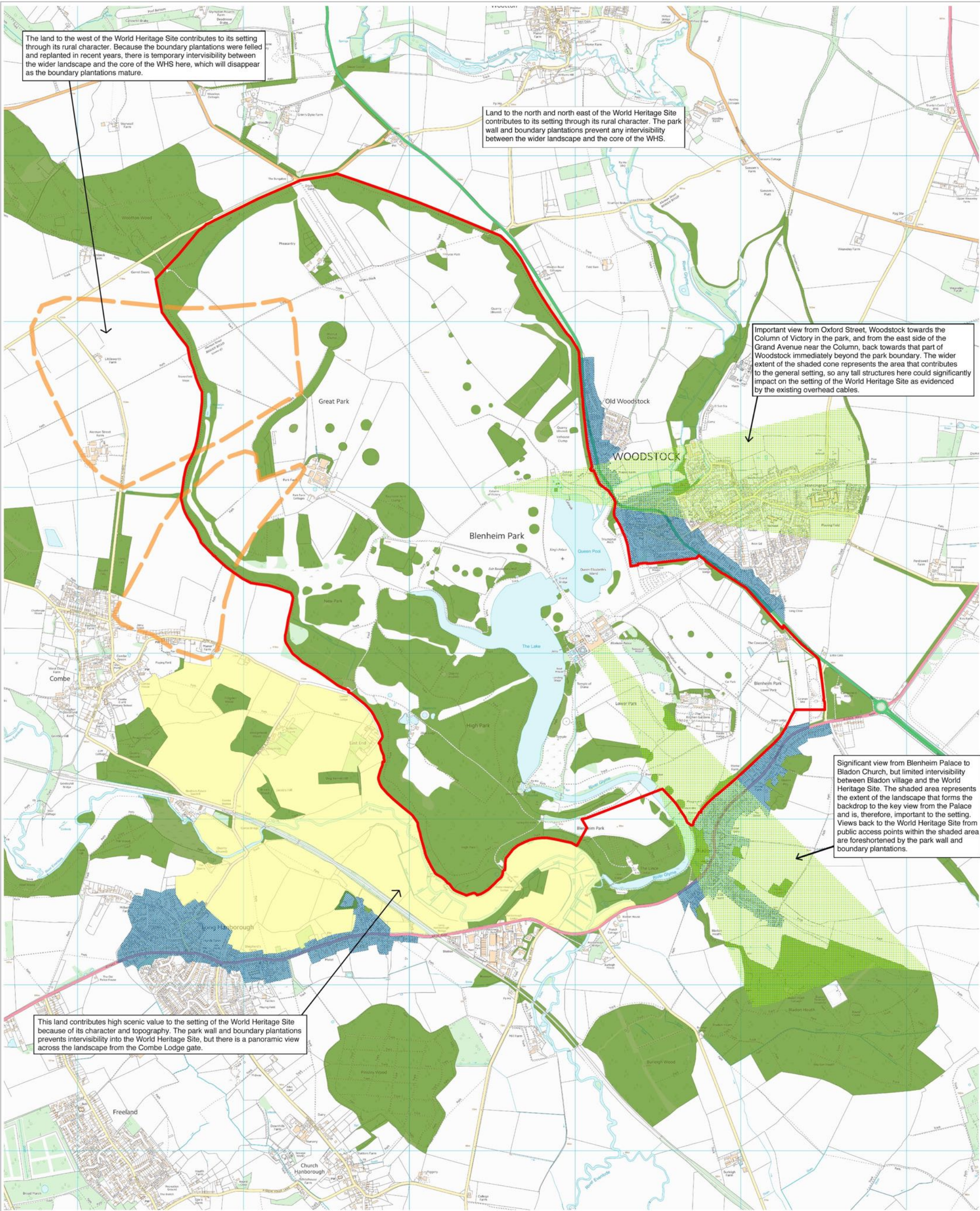
*This image, which accompanies the description of the town in the WODC Local Plan, reflects the character of the centre of the town, near the Woodstock Gate, in particular the unity of the building materials and style of the properties*



*Old Woodstock, showing the carefully framed view of the Column of Victory inside Blenheim park. The view is now somewhat diminished by the parked cars and traffic on the A44, along with the addition of street furniture and signage but it remains very significant.*



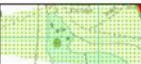




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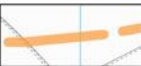
World Heritage Site Boundary



Areas containing some intervisibility with the World Heritage Site.



Residential areas vulnerable to tall or prominent development.



Areas containing temporary intervisibility with the World Heritage Site.



Areas of high scenic value which contribute to the World Heritage Site, but with no intervisibility beyond the park wall and boundary plantations.



Woodlands and plantations contributing to the setting of the World Heritage Site.



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**FIGURE 5 : CHARACTER OF THE SETTING**

Not To Scale March 2017



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