

## Appendix 1: Landscape Character Assessment for the Parish of Curbridge



# Introduction

Landscapes are the settings for our lives.

They have:

- economic value, providing the setting for economic activity
- social and community value, as an important part in people's lives, bringing enjoyment and inspiration
- environmental value, as a home for wildlife and wild flowers.

When well cared-for, landscapes provide some of the essentials of life, such as clean air and water, food, fuel and raw materials. They help to regulate our climate, store flood waters, filter pollution and provide opportunities for us to improve our health and well-being.

If we can understand what makes our local landscapes special, what gives our parish its 'sense of place', then we may be able to understand how it may be sensitive to development and change.

This understanding can then be used to inform local planning policies and individual planning decisions – to help protect local distinctiveness.

By producing this Landscape Character Assessment for the parish, we have tried to capture what makes our landscapes valued by local people. This document describes and champions the special qualities of our local countryside and records the community's views on, and aspirations for, its future.

It is hoped that this Landscape Character Assessment will:

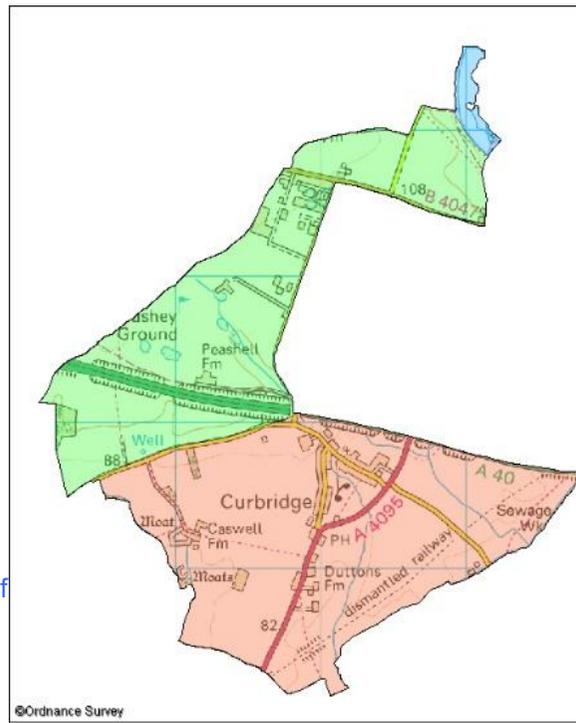
- add value to existing Landscape Character Assessments and local planning policies
- present local views in a consistent and well-informed way for when planning applications (and other proposals which may change the landscape) are considered
- form a vital part of the Curbridge Village Design Statement and complement other community-led planning documents
- raise awareness of local landscapes and how they are valued

The countryside within the parish of Curbridge includes three distinct landscape character areas which have been classified and described in the Oxfordshire Wildlife and

Landscape Study

For each of these areas, descriptions, key sensitivities and future considerations identified by the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study are reproduced.

1. Estate farmlands 
2. Lowland Village farmlands 
3. River meadowlands. 



Extract f

LS) amended for Curbridge Village Design Statement

# Area 1 – Estate Farmlands

## Overview

This is a rolling agricultural landscape characterised by a well-ordered pattern of fields.

## Key Characteristics

- Medium to large, regularly-shaped hedged fields.
- Small, geometric plantations and belts of trees.
- Large country houses.
- dispersed farmsteads.

## Land use and vegetation

The main structural component of the landscape is the large number of small, rectilinear mixed plantations and linear tree belts. These provide some sense of enclosure in the landscape. The plantations are located along field boundaries and roadsides. Small copses are also a feature around farmhouses.

## Cultural pattern

There is a strong, geometric pattern of medium and large-sized fields surrounded by late enclosure hedgerows. The fields are occasionally enclosed by stone walls. This ordered field pattern is the main unifying element throughout and is frequently accentuated by the strong rolling landform.

Hedges are dominated mainly by hawthorn and blackthorn. However, there are a few species-rich hedges with shrubs such as spindle, field maple, hazel, wild privet and dogwood. Although sparsely scattered, they are an obvious feature throughout the landscape and reinforce the visual impact of the field pattern, creating a stronger sense of enclosure. They are often denser along roadsides, ditches, estate and parish boundaries. Mature oak trees are also a feature around farmhouses and along estate field boundaries. Open views across the rolling agricultural landscape are frequently filtered by hedgerow trees.

The settlement pattern is characterised by scattered farmsteads. The network of straight roads reinforces the ordered pattern of fields.

## BIODIVERSITY

### Overview

This is a well-ordered landscape of large arable fields, supporting a wide range of locally important habitats. Priority habitats species-rich hedgerows and calcareous grassland, can also be found.

### Key Characteristics

- Predominantly low-medium to medium-high bioscores/biobands.
- Priority habitats include species-rich hedgerows and some calcareous grassland.

## FORCES FOR CHANGE

- Overall, the hedgerow pattern is in decline with many low or overgrown, gappy hedges. This is particularly evident in the open, intensively managed arable land where much of the hedgerow pattern is either fragmented or lost. The field boundary pattern is also weak along main roads. Where stone walls occur, they are often in poor condition and frequently overgrown with scrub.
- The landscape type has a largely unspoilt rural character. Residential development is moderate in scale. In places there has been some suburbanisation, particularly down Downs Road, where there is ribbon development, development that is out of character as well as expansion of settlements into the open countryside. Similarly, the impact of industrial estates and business parks, with their intrusive large buildings on the urban fringe, is significant in places.
- Intensively managed amenity landscapes, such as the golf course can have a negative impact on landscape character by introducing suburban influences including car parks, lighting and incongruous buildings into the rural environment.
- Large-scale industrial estates, such as those down Downs Road have a strong negative visual impact, particularly in open areas with a weak or fragmented landscape structure.

## Area 1 – Estate Farmlands

### Landscape Strategy

**Conserve the planned farmland character of this landscape type through maintenance and enhancement of field boundaries.**

#### Guidelines

- Conserve and restore the pastoral character and promote the replacement of veteran and mature trees where appropriate.
- Promote the sustainable management of farmland, and the establishment of new tree belts and plantations with a significant proportion of deciduous tree and shrub species characteristic of this area.
- Strengthen the field pattern by planting up new or gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn.
- Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering where necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type.
- Priority should be given to safeguarding and maintaining existing species-rich hedges through coppicing, layering and replanting where necessary with shrub species such as blackthorn, field maple, dogwood and spindle.
- Protect stone walls from deterioration.
- Conserve surviving areas of permanent pasture.
- Protect the sparsely settled character of the landscape and the integrity and vernacular character of the farms.

- Minimise the potential visual impact of intrusive land uses with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.

### Biodiversity Strategy

**Ensure that all surviving priority habitats are safeguarded, in favourable condition and management, and enhanced to satisfy the actions and targets identified within the relevant habitat and species action plans. Safeguard, maintain and enhance all locally important habitats in a way that is appropriate to the landscape character of the area. Promote agri-environment schemes which will benefit biodiversity in general and protected species and farmland birds in particular.**

#### Guidelines

- Priority habitats in this landscape type are relatively small and isolated. They include limestone grassland and species-rich hedgerows.
- Opportunities for significantly expanding this habitat type are limited, but may include the establishment of field margins/buffer strips adjacent to existing sites using native wildflower species appropriate to the area.
- Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout different parts of the landscape type. Priority should be given to

safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource, particularly in those local character areas where they remain a significant feature.

- Parklands, and their associated habitats of woodlands, trees, lakes and grassland, make a significant contribution to the biodiversity resource of the landscape type. A priority must be to ensure that there is a sustainable, long-term programme for safeguarding and perpetuating this resource.
- There are a range of locally important habitats, and the guidelines for conserving and maintaining these are provided under the guidelines for landscape character.
- Promote the use of agri-environment schemes such as conservation headlands, overwintered stubbles and winter-sown crops to benefit farmland birds such as skylarks and yellowhammers.

### Key Recommendations

- **Safeguard and enhance the estate character of this landscape type through the protection, management and enhancement of its parklands, woodlands and hedgerow network.**
- **Ensure that remaining priority and other important habitats are in favourable condition and management.**

## Area 2 – Lowland Village Farmlands

### Overview

A variable, often large-scale farmed landscape closely associated with the village settlement of Curbridge.

### Key characteristics

- 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 Elm Bank ditch
- Prominent village settlement of Curbridge

### Land use and vegetation

This landscape type is dominated by arable farming with some semi-improved, neutral and wet grassland around Curbridge and bordering Elm Bank Ditch. Small pasture fields are particularly characteristic of the undulating landscape. A key landscape feature is the dense corridors of ash, willows and poplar that border Elm Bank Ditch

Woodland is generally not a characteristic feature of this landscape type. There are small tree clumps throughout the area, particularly around Curbridge village, farmhouses and in some fields. They consist mainly of ash, willow and poplar.

### Cultural pattern

The field pattern is largely characterised by regular, medium and large-sized arable fields with some smaller grass fields. Around the villages of Curbridge, the grass fields are less regular in shape. Hedges are dominated by hawthorn, blackthorn and elm, and they are particularly prominent along the roadsides, country lanes and areas where grassland predominates. This pattern of hedged fields is a distinctive feature of the landscape type, although it is not always obvious where it is flat. Hedgerow trees are generally sparse, with ash as the dominant tree species along with willow, poplar and dead elm. Hedgerow trees are denser within roadside hedges and next to ditches where they border pastureland, where they create filtered and framed views.

The settlement pattern is a key feature of this landscape type and it is characterised by the small to medium-sized rural village of Curbridge and dispersed farms bordering roads in the wider countryside. Curbridge is linear in shape. Although there has been some new development, the vernacular character is strong. The church in the village a prominent feature. The vernacular has been a bit overwhelmed by more recent residential development at the end of Well Lane.

### BIODIVERSITY

#### Overview

This is a low-lying, flat to undulating landscape dominated by arable farming and a pattern of hawthorn hedges and scattered trees. It supports a range of locally important habitats, as well as some unimproved neutral grassland.

### Key Characteristics

- Predominantly low to low-medium bioscores, but in a few areas becoming medium-high.
- Important and priority habitats include species-rich hedges with trees, some neutral and wet grassland and species-rich watercourses.

### General Description

This is a fairly large landscape type. Although it is largely dominated by arable farming, it stills supports a range of locally important habitats including semi-improved grassland, species-poor hedges with trees and tree-lined watercourses. There are also species-rich hedgerows and neutral and wet grassland.

### FORCES FOR CHANGE

- Overall, the field pattern is in good condition, particularly roadside hedges which can be very dense, tall and intact, and also where they enclose pastureland. However, in areas of intensively managed arable land, the internal field hedges are often very low, fragmented and in some cases removed altogether, resulting in an open landscape. This weakening of the

## Area 2 – Lowland Village Farmlands

- landscape structure exacerbates the intrusion of built development and roads.
- Although the vernacular character is generally strong in the Curbridge there has been recently a small amount of modern residential development.
- Large-scale agricultural barns can also be visually dominant, particularly when located on roadsides.
- The main road of the A40 and its associated junction and roundabouts, have a major impact, particularly in the area around the North of Curbridge. Landscaping and tree planting will mitigate the impact of continuous traffic.
- Brize Norton airfield and its associated premises are very visible, particularly where the field pattern is weak.

### Landscape Strategy

**Conserve and enhance the vernacular character of the Curbridge village and strengthen the existing pattern of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and tree-lined watercourses.**

### Guidelines

Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn, and hedgerow trees such as willow and ash.

- Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to

maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type.

- Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses/ditches by planting willows and ash and where appropriate, pollarding willows.
- Conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly on the land adjacent to Elm Bank Ditch.
- Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses, such as industrial estates, and the fringes of Curbridge village with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.
- Maintain the vernacular character of Curbridge and promote the use of local building materials and a scale of development and that is appropriate to this landscape type.

### Biodiversity Strategy

**Ensure that all surviving priority habitats are safeguarded, in favourable condition and management, and enhanced to satisfy the actions and targets identified within the relevant habitat and species action plans. Safeguard, maintain and enhance all locally important habitats in a way that is appropriate to the landscape character of the area. Promote agri-environment schemes which will benefit biodiversity in general and protected species and farmland birds in particular.**

### Guidelines

- Priority habitats in this landscape type are relatively small and isolated. They include some species-rich neutral grassland and species-rich hedgerows.
- Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout different parts of the landscape type. Priority should be given to safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource, particularly in those local character areas where they remain a significant feature.
- Tree-lined watercourses/ditches are a feature throughout the landscape type. They should be safeguarded and enhanced by planting species such as ash and willows, pollarding willows where appropriate, and establishing buffer strips/field margins to potentially benefit small mammals, invertebrates and birds.
- Opportunities for the establishment of other locally important habitats, such as semi-improved grassland and small deciduous woodlands, should be promoted in a way to strengthen wildlife corridors and enhance the local landscape character.
  - Promote the use of agri-environment schemes such as conservation headlands, over-wintered stubbles, and winter-sown crops to benefit farmland birds such as skylarks and yellowhammers.

### Key Recommendations

- Safeguard and enhance the landscape character of the hedgerow network, and tree-lined watercourses.
- Ensure that all priority habitats are in favourable condition and management.

## Area 3 – River Meadowland

### Overview

This site is a hay meadow and in its location next to River Windrush it is quite wet. The field has escaped agricultural improvement which means that it hasn't been ploughed and reseeded and fertilizers and herbicides have not been used. This has left the field with an exceptionally rich mix of flowering plants. Meadows such as this are a national priority of nature conservation.

There is a very good display of orchids on site including early marsh orchid, southern marsh orchid and common spotted orchid alongside large sized hybrids between these three types of orchid. Yellow rattle, bugle and small sedges are abundant. There are patches of great burnet and cowslips. Other wildflowers that can be seen include ragged robin, common milkwort and the uncommon marsh arrow grass. An abundance of common knapweed, oxeye daisy and bird's-foot trefoil add to the colourful traditional meadow scene.

### Key characteristics

- Flat, low-lying topography with seasonally flooded alluvial floodplains.
- Meandering river channel.
- 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.

### Land use and vegetation

This landscape type is dominated by flood meadows. Small fields of permanent pasture, consisting mainly of wet and semi-improved grassland and some neutral and marshy grassland, give a sense of visual and ecological unity. This unity is interrupted in places by arable farming. Tree cover is a notable element in this landscape type, with tree-lined corridors dominated by willows, often pollarded, being characteristic throughout the landscape. Crack willow is common. Other tree and shrub species include alder, poplar, ash and hawthorn. Small deciduous plantations, frequently dominated by poplar, and small blocks of wet and semi-natural woodland also add to the tree cover along the river Windrush.

### Cultural pattern

The small pasture fields are enclosed by hawthorn hedges and associated ditches. In places it is the ditches, often bordered by pollarded willows, that form the main field boundaries. Hedges often include scattered ash, willow and oak trees, and this is particularly prominent along parts of the river Windrush. Overall, there is a strong sense of unity resulting from the extensive open views along the river corridor, except in those areas where the views are filtered by tree-lined ditches and scattered riverside and hedgerow trees.

This landscape type has historically been subject to annual flooding and this is reflected in the relative lack of settlements and buildings.

The main buildings are scattered barns and farmhouses. The absence of settlements and roads generates a tranquil and remote character. They all retain a strong vernacular character.

### BIODIVERSITY

#### Overview

This landscape type includes a wide range of habitats which are typically associated with the rivers and watercourses.

#### Key Characteristics

- There is a wide range of bioscores from low to very high
- There is a large number of locally important and priority habitats particularly in neutral, wet and marshy grassland.

### FORCES FOR CHANGE

- Agricultural intensification has led to the drainage and conversion of pasture to arable, as well as to the poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries. As a result, many hedges are gappy and sometimes replaced by fences.

### Landscape strategy

**Conserve and enhance the tranquil, small-scale, intimate pastoral character and visual unity of the river Windrush.**

## Area 3 – River Meadowland

### Guidelines

- Conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland particularly on land adjacent to the river Windrush.
- Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn, and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash.
- Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type.
- Enhance and strengthen the character of the tree-lined river and other watercourses by planting willows and alders and, where appropriate, pollarding willows.
- Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as willows and alders.
- Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of Witney with the judicious planting of appropriate tree and shrub species characteristic of the landscape type. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.

### Biodiversity Strategy

**Ensure that all surviving priority habitats are safeguarded, in favourable condition and management, and enhanced to satisfy the actions and targets identified within the**

**relevant habitat and species action plans. Safeguard, maintain and enhance all locally important habitats in a way that is appropriate to the landscape character of the area.**

### Guidelines

- There is a range of priority habitats bordering the river corridor including neutral, marshy and floodplain grasslands. The prime objective must be to ensure that all these sites are in favourable condition and management through agreement with the landowner and the appropriate targeting of agri-environment schemes.
- Opportunities for the expansion of these habitats are considerable along the main river corridor of the Windrush. Expansion of these very important grassland habitats as part of the agreed actions and targets in the Oxfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Similarly, other priority habitats, can also be maintained and enhanced by the work and advice of the organisations outlined above.
- Species-poor wet grassland is another important habitat which has declined through land drainage and conversion of land to arable. This habitat type is particularly important for wading bird species such as redshank, curlew, snipe and lapwing, and opportunities for maintaining and expanding this resource can again be promoted by the targeting of agri-environment schemes and the work and advice of the various organisations highlighted above.

- Species-rich hedgerows, although scarce, are distributed throughout different parts of the landscape type. Priority should be given to safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource particularly in those local character areas where they remain a significant feature.
- A tree-lined watercourse is a feature throughout the landscape type. They should be safeguarded and enhanced by planting species such as alder and willows, pollarding willows where appropriate, and establishing buffer strips/field margins on adjacent arable land to potentially benefit small mammals, invertebrates and birds.
- Opportunities for the establishment of other locally important habitats, such as semi-improved grassland and small deciduous woodlands, should be promoted in a way to strengthen wildlife corridors and enhance the local landscape character.

### Key Recommendations

- Conserve and enhance the tranquil, small-scale, intimate pastoral character and visual unity of the river corridor through safeguarding existing grassland and the promotion of arable reversion to grassland.
- Ensure that all priority habitats are in favourable condition and management particularly those surviving areas of floodplain, neutral and marshy grassland.
- Promote the expansion of these habitat types through the targeting of agri-environment schemes.