



Stonesfield Parish Landscape Character Assessment

February 2024



APPOINTMENT

WH Landscape Consultancy Ltd (WHLandscape) has been appointed by Stonesfield Parish Council to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment on behalf of the parish.

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Part 1: Introduction



Part 1: Introduction

1.1 Commissioning, purposes and structure of report

This Landscape Character Assessment was commissioned by Stonesfield Parish Council in March 2023. It was undertaken by WHLandscape between May and November 2023, with the bulk of the write-up taking place in the Winter of 2023/24.

This document is intended to inform the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan, which is currently in preparation, and should be read alongside the Stonesfield Village Character Assessment which, at the time of writing, is also in the process of being produced. The Village Character Assessment deals primarily with the built environment of Stonesfield, whereas the Landscape Character Assessment deals with the village's landscape setting.

The Landscape Character Assessment is structured in three parts. Part 1 (Introduction) introduces the concept of landscape character assessment and the methodology employed. Part 2 (Landscape Background) provides a description of Stonesfield and its landscape, and includes a summary of existing larger-scale Landscape Character Assessments that include the parish. Part 3 (Landscape Character Assessment) describes the five Local Landscape Character Areas (LLCAs) that have been identified by this study within the Stonesfield parish, providing a profile of key characteristics for each LLCA, their inherent sensitivities, and recommendations for the future protection and enhancements of their special qualities.

Acknowledgements

WHLandscape would like to acknowledge the support of all the stakeholders who provided information and commented on drafts of this report.

WHLandscape would also particularly like to thank Richard Morris, Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group the Client Group, for his generous help and support throughout this project.

The WHLandscape Team comprised: Robin Lines ALI, Will Harley CMLI and George Harley CMLI.

All photographs were taken by Robin Lines unless where credited.

Previous image: approaching Stonesfield from Highfield Farm (© WH Landscape)

1.2 Introduction to landscape character assessment

Purposes of the Stonesfield Parish Landscape Character Assessment

The Stonesfield Parish Landscape Character Assessment has been prepared to inform the Stonesfield Parish Neighbourhood Plan. It identifies the special qualities of Stonesfield's landscape which contribute to its 'sense of place' and should therefore be protected and enhanced through positive planning and management. Landscapes are dynamic, and affected by changes that may result from both natural processes and human interaction, and as such cannot be preserved 'in aspic'. This study should be used as a tool to guide positive landscape change and decision-making in the parish of Stonesfield, and to help ensure that any changes contribute to its distinctive character rather than undermining it.

Principles of Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape character assessment has been a recognised tool within the UK planning system for many years and has been used to inform the management of change and deliver sustainable development. It provides a framework for people to consider what gives their area its unique sense of place. The process is used to identify and map distinctive Landscape Character Types and/or Areas and can be undertaken at a range of scales from national to local, depending on the purpose for which it is required.

Landscape Character Assessment is the processes of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape and therefore *'seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features (characteristics) which make landscapes distinctive. This process results in the production of a Landscape Character Assessment'*¹.

Landscape as a planning term can be defined as *'an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/ or human factors'*².

Landscape Character Assessment therefore considers the natural, cultural and perceptual qualities of landscape. It provides a framework for people to think about what gives their area its unique 'sense of place'.

¹ *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment* Natural England, 2014, Glossary

² *European Landscape Convention* (Council of Europe, ratified by the UK in 2006, and not affected by Brexit)

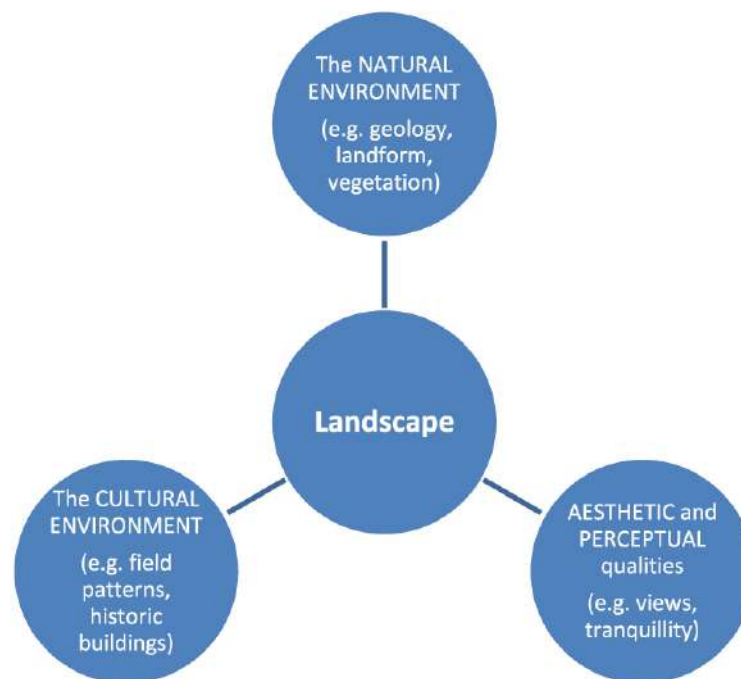


Fig. 1 Natural, cultural and perceptual qualities of landscape

Using the district-wide Cotswold Landscape Character Assessment as a starting point, this study aims to provide a bespoke, finer scale of assessment for the parish of Stonesfield. It therefore defines ‘local’ landscape character areas at a scale of 1:25,000 that broadly ‘nest’ within the landscape classification descriptions defined by the broader study.

Each LLCA is a unique and discrete geographical area of landscape that, whilst it may share generic characteristics with other areas of the same type, has its own individual distinctive characteristics/qualities that give it a particular identity and sense of place. This is covered further in Section 2.5 and in Part 3.

1.3 Methodology and approach

The Stonesfield Landscape Character Assessment was carried out by a Chartered landscape architectural practice with broad experience in landscape character assessment, and good local knowledge of the Cotswolds National Landscape, including the landscape around Stonesfield. The project methodology is in line with the approach set out in the current Best Practice Guidelines for Landscape Character Assessment³ and Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment⁴. It can be divided into four stages, as shown:

Stage 1: Project start-up

Initial meeting to discuss scope of project
Exchange of documents and data



Stage 2: Desk Studies

Review of existing Landscape Character Assessments.
Background reading of relevant documents
Research of other sources e.g. historic maps, designated site citations etc.



Stage 3: Fieldwork

Walking roads and footpaths to confirm LLCA boundaries.
Visiting viewpoints, natural and cultural heritage features
Identifying special qualities and noting forces for change
Photography



Stage 4: Writing-up

Bringing together all the desk study and fieldwork findings into the written draft report
Client team review of draft report
Editing and issue of the final report

³ *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment* Natural England, 2014

⁴ *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition* Landscape Institute and Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013



Part 2: Landscape Background

Part 2: Landscape Background

2.1 Location and Context

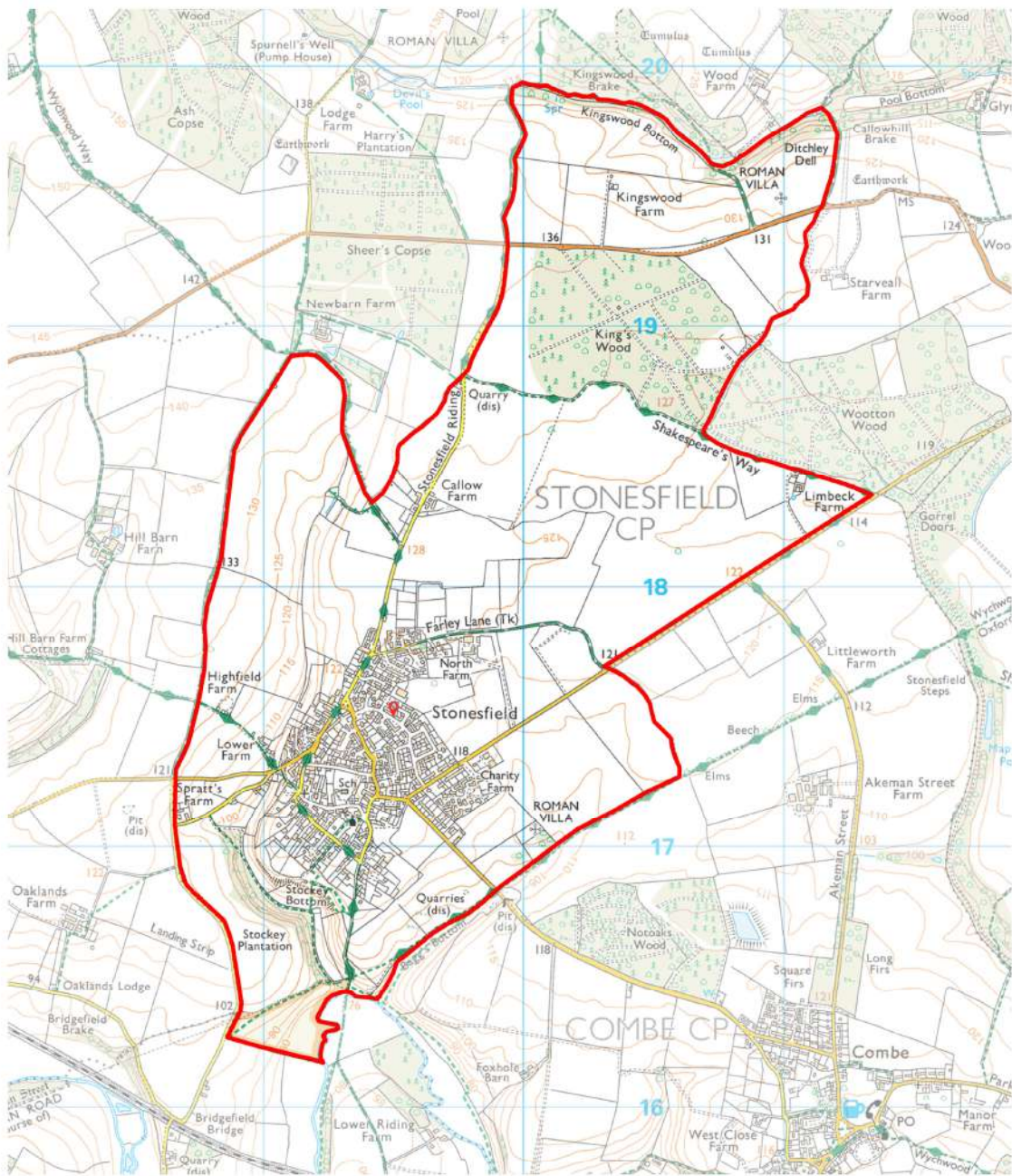
The parish of Stonesfield is located centrally within the West Oxfordshire District, broadly equidistant between the county town Oxford (to the south-east, in Oxford City Council authority) and Chipping Norton (to the north-west). To the south-west is the market town of Witney, where the District Council is based.

Stonesfield's parish boundaries tend to follow minor roads and public rights of way, although in places follows field boundaries and, for a short section to the south of the parish, the River Evenlode.

The north and east of the village has seen late 20th and early 21st Century expansion, but the parish retains its strong rural character as befits its inclusion within the Cotswolds National Landscape boundary.

The parish boundary is shown on Map 1.

Previous image: woodland walk at Stockey Bottom (© WH Landscape)

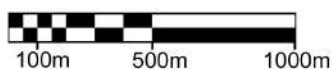


Map 1 - Parish Boundary

 Stonesfield Parish Boundary

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Map 1: Map of Stonesfield Parish

2.2 Stonesfield's Natural Environment

Geology and topography

Stonesfield is located on a small outlying area defined as 'Dip-Slope Lowland' in the Cotswolds Landscape Character Assessment. Dip-Slope Lowland is underlain by the eastern and south-eastern extents of Limestone formations of the Great Oolite Group, and generally displays a gentle fall from the north-west to the south-east, from approximately 160m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) to 100m AOD. This lies over the succession of Middle Jurassic limestones and mudstones of the Great Oolite Group.

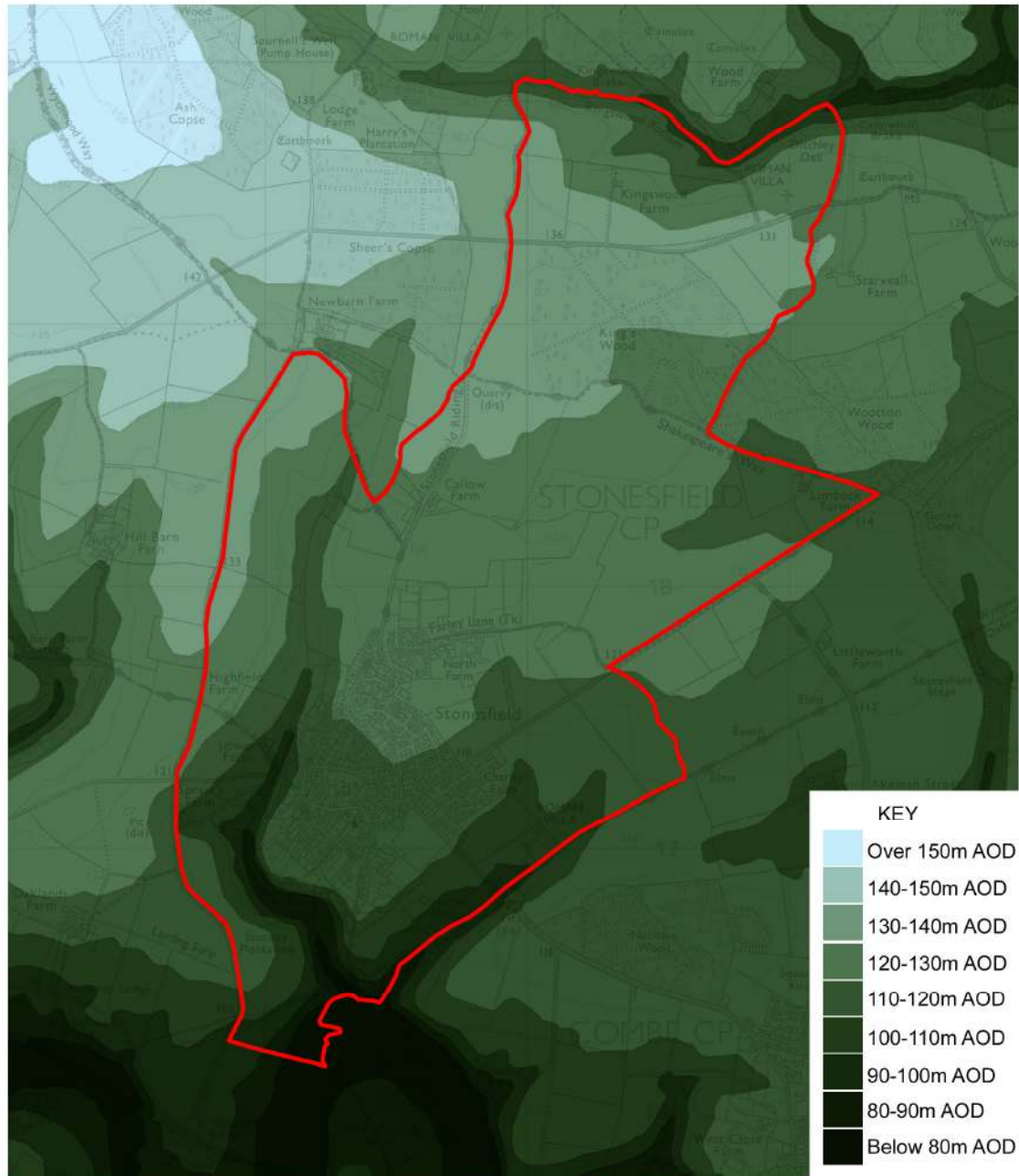
Within the parish of Stonesfield the landscape follows this trend, with a drop of approximately 140m AOD near Newbarn Farm and around the northern end of Stonesfield Riding – to the north-west of the parish – to about 100m AOD to the south-east of the parish, on Combe Road.

The Dip-Slope Lowland is incised in places by shallow valleys, and this is also evident within the parish's landscape where a shallow dry valley (orientated north-south) broadly separates the western part of the parish from the eastern part where it broadens out into a characteristic plateau. The dry valley, known locally as the Ruddywell Valley, gives rise to a highly distinctive western edge to Stonesfield, where the village rises up on the eastern side of the valley. The dry valley 'wraps around' the southern side of the settlement where it forms the more enclosed and more intimate valley of Stockey Bottom.

To the south of the parish the dry valley connects into the Evenlode which meanders through the landscape. Here, the land drops to a height of approximately 80m AOD on the banks of the river where it has cut through the surrounding bedrock.

To the north of the parish a declivity around Kingswood Farm that slopes down into Kingswood Bottom marks the northern part of the parish. This area was once wooded, forming what was once part of a much larger Kings Wood – which itself was once part of the Royal Wychwood hunting forest. It is now rather remote from the rest of the parish, annexed by Kings Wood, and visually enclosed by woodland on all sides.

Map 2 (Landform) shows the general pattern of topography, including the plateau, the dry valley and the Evenlode catchment.

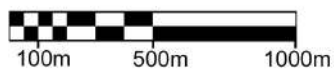


Map 2 - Landform

 Stonesfield Parish Boundary

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Map 2: Landform

Vegetation and habitats

The parish of Stonesfield contains a number of natural and semi-natural areas of vegetation, supporting a rich variety of habitats for wildlife. King's Wood to the north of the parish once extended as far as the northern parish boundary, as far as Kingswood Bottom. The Ancient Woodland Inventory for England shows that it contains both ancient and semi-natural woodland, which includes Priority Habitat Inventory Deciduous Woodland, and Ancient Replanted Woodland, which includes coniferous plantations. Another area of ancient and semi natural woodland can be found at Stockey Bottom/ Stockey Plantation which forms part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (see below). This also includes Priority Habitat Inventory Deciduous Woodland. This woodland includes semi-natural Beech-Wych Elm woodland which has a ground flora which includes several species of plants associated with ancient woodland including Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and Primrose *Primula vulgaris*, as well as Toothwort *Lathraea squamaria*, Spurge Laurel *Daphne laureola*, and Yellow Archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*.

The meadows and woodland edges on southern side of the parish include patches of protected Meadow Clary *Salvia pratensis* – a rare, clump-forming, woody based perennial that is only native to a few sites in southern England.

There are a couple of small remnants of Priority Habitat Inventory Traditional Orchard, either side of Stonesfield Riding, at Callow Farm.

To the south and south-west of Stonesfield, at Stockey Bottom and Bagg's Bottom, there are some areas of Priority Habitat Inventory Lowland Calcareous Grassland. These areas form part of the Stonesfield Common, Bottoms and Banks Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a series of steep sided dry valleys and banks with unimproved limestone grassland and scrub habitats. Grassland such as this was once widespread on the Oolitic limestone of western Oxfordshire, and the importance of this SSSI therefore lies in its survival as one of the largest remnants of this grassland type in the county. Stonesfield Common has a sward that has been dominated by upright Brome *Bromus erectus* and with a herb flora including Field Scabious *Knautia arvensis*, Greater Knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa*, Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum* and Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, although there are significant areas of Tor Grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* present now.

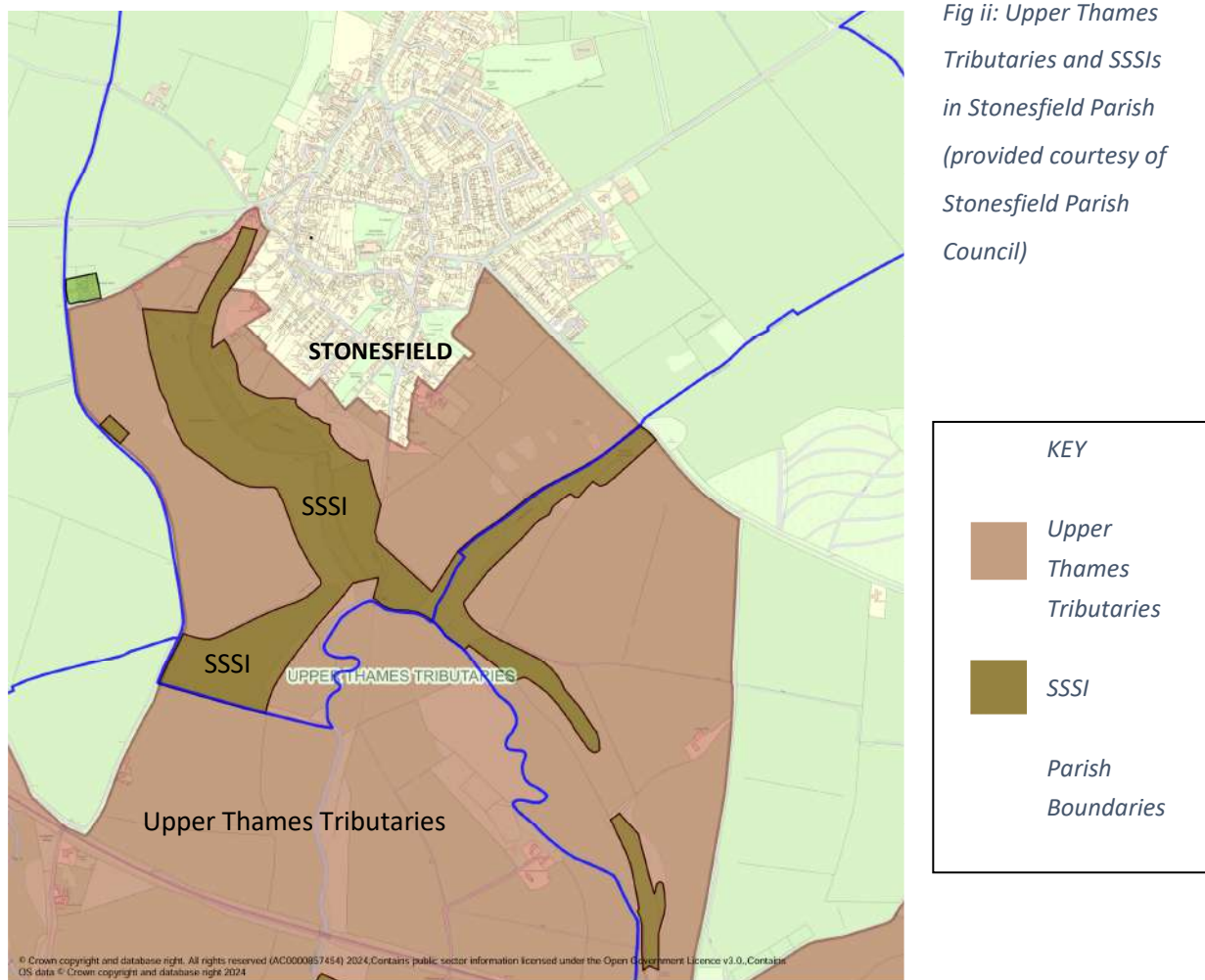
On the steeper slopes of Stonesfield Common a shorter sward is present. This has a flora which includes rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium*, kidney vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, wild mignonette

Reseda lutea, common toadflax *Linaria vulgaris*, bee orchid *Ophrys apifera* and the nationally uncommon bastard toadflax *Thesium humifusum*.

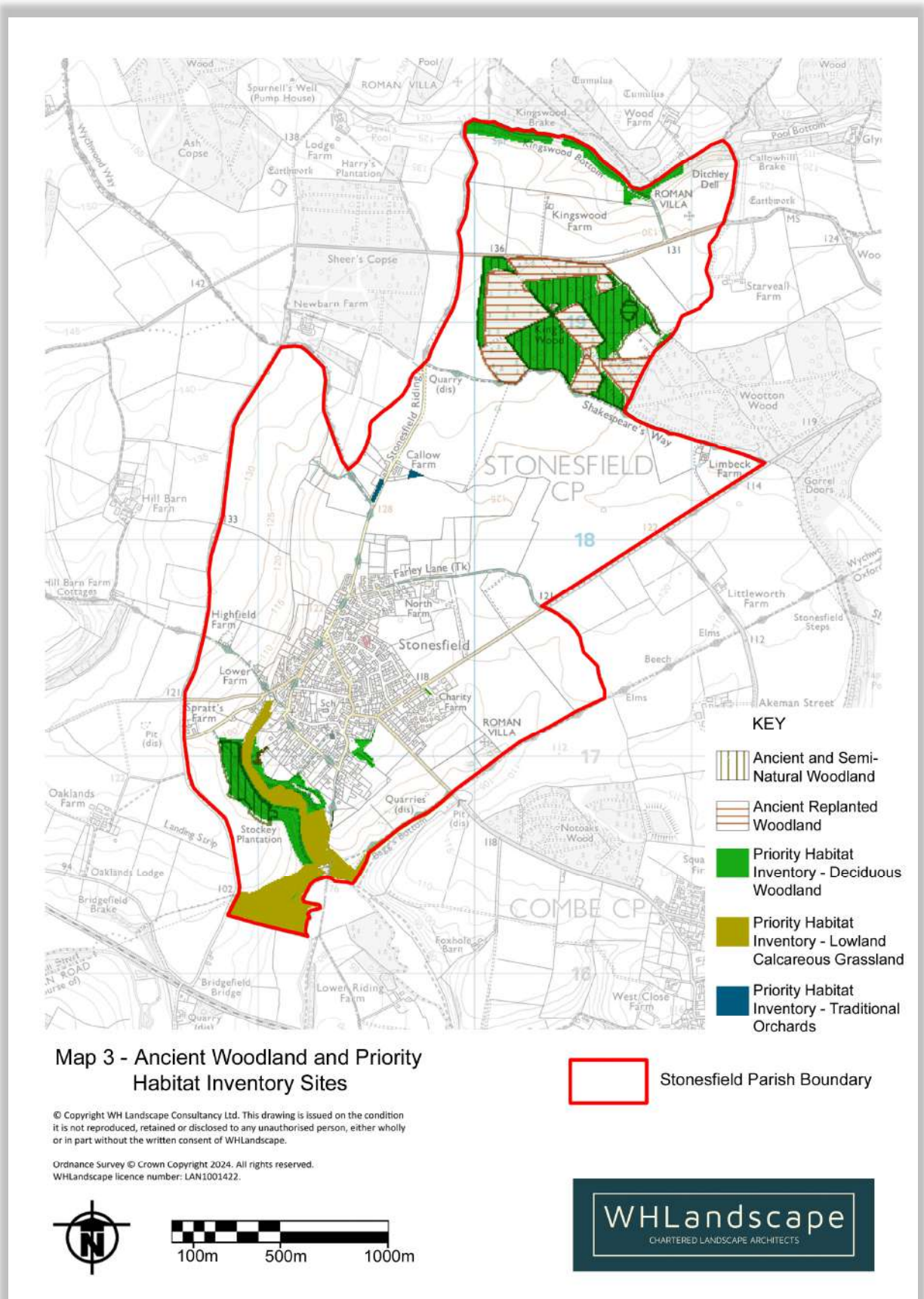
The southern-most part of the parish is identified as an environmentally sensitive area and is included in the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Upper Thames Tributaries) Designation (Amendment) Order 1999. This Order affords protection to the landscape where it seeks to:

- **conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the designated area together with an additional area in the valleys of the Upper Thames and its tributaries;**
- **conserve the flora and fauna and geological and physiographical features of those areas; and**
- **protect buildings and other objects of historic interest in that area.**

The extent of the Upper Thames Tributaries environmentally sensitive areas and the Stonesfield Common, Bottoms and Banks Site SSSI is shown in Figure ii. below (produced courtesy of Stonesfield Parish Council).



Natural environment designations and priority habitats within the parish are shown on Map 3, overleaf.



Map 3: Ancient Woodland and Priority Habitat Inventory Sites in Stonesfield Parish

2.3 Cultural Heritage

It is presumed that the origins of Stonesfield began when a clearing was made in Wychwood Forest and a small settlement was formed. In 1086 only 8 people were enumerated in Stonesfield, but by 1279 the community included 36 tenants and jurors – still much smaller than neighbouring settlements, but an increase in size nonetheless. The population grew slowly over the following centuries, surviving the impact of the plague, and then grew more rapidly during the 18th and 19th Centuries when the population increased from 257 to 374 inhabitants in the three decades from 1771 to 1801. This trend of growth continued in the following sixty years to a peak of 650 in 1861. The population declined between this period and the Second World War, partly the result of many resident emigrating to British Columbia. However, after the war, notably in the period between 1951 and 1971, the village's population grew again, more than doubling as people began to reside in the village whilst commuting to Oxford and other local towns for work. This period saw a significant expansion of Stonesfield's built environment to the north, roughly doubling it in size.

Historic features

Stonesfield is perhaps mostly known for two industries: the production of slate tiles for roofing, and the manufacturing of gloves.

The characteristic Stonesfield slate was created by subjecting excavated fissile limestone to a frosting process to split the rock. This process was in use by the 17th Century, and remained a staple for local labour for three centuries until the last pit was closed in 1911. The blocks of stone, known as "pendles", were brought to the surface and laid out on the fields to expose them to frost. Turf was laid over the pendles to keep them moist until late Autumn or early Winter when crowds of villagers would come out to uncover them and expose them to the frost. The pits formed a lucrative source of income for the landowners, and often were excavated to a significant depth, including one at 66ft. The mines and shafts were supported by timber frames constructed in the village. Today, aside from the many fine roofs that remain as a tribute to the industry across the area, there is little obvious evidence of the mining activity other than surviving spoil heaps, known locally as "chipping banks", which are often marked by clumps of trees in otherwise open fields.

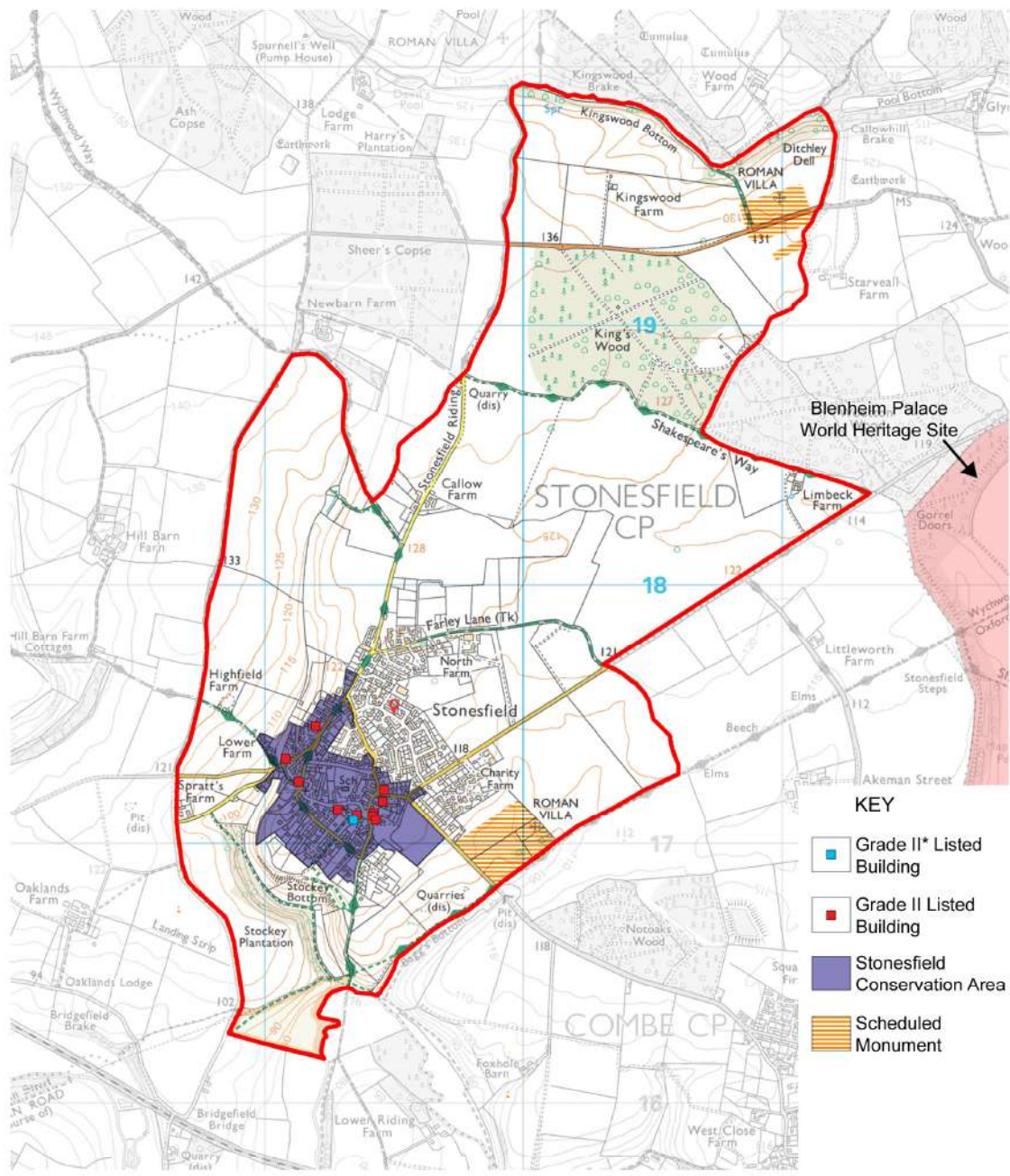
Stonesfield provided many outworkers for gloving firms in Woodstock and elsewhere in the region. This work, which was performed exclusively by women and girls known as 'gloveresses', involved sewing and finishing gloves by piecework, and the industry's workers remained active despite reports of depression in the domestic glove trade following the removal of tariffs on foreign gloves in 1826.

By 1831 almost half the female population were involved in glove making, despite poor pay and long hours. In the late 19th century and early 20th, when machine sewing became increasingly common, Stonesfield still maintained a reputation for the quality of its hand sewing, and in 1954 the Village received its own gloving factory, Pickard's Gloves Ltd, which specialised in the manufacturing of golf gloves. The factory closed in the 1980s due to the competition from cheaper foreign imports, ending this long history of glove making in the village.

The site of a Roman villa was discovered in 1712 to the east of the village. It was found to have four elaborate and well-preserved tessellated pavements, baths, and a hypocaust. However, the landowner, perhaps fearing a loss of productive land, ploughed over the remains soon after its discovery. The site lies just to the north of the Roman Road – Akeman Street – which survives as part of the Oxfordshire Way long-distance footpath, and once linked Watling Street just north of Verulamium (near modern St Albans) with the Fosse Way at Corinium Dobunorum (now Cirencester) – a distance of some 73 miles.

To the east of Kingswood Farm lies the site of a Roman Villa. The site of this designated scheduled monument straddles the B4437 Woodstock to Charlbury road and was thought to be the site of a small corridor house, possibly dating from the 1st Century. The northern part of Stonesfield parish also lies within the compass of Grim's Ditch, an earthwork erected about the time of the Roman invasion, and the World Heritage Site at Blenheim Palace.

The smaller field enclosures on the southern and south-eastern edge of the village survive as remnants of piecemeal enclosure that took place between 1540 and 1797. The larger of these fields, to the south east of Stonesfield Manor, lies within the village Conservation Area, which includes the village's historic core, and also radiates out for a short section of the Ridings.



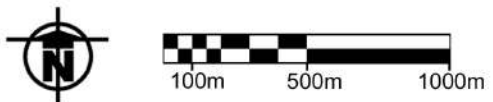
- KEY**
- Grade II* Listed Building
 - Grade II Listed Building
 - Stonesfield Conservation Area
 - Scheduled Monument

Map 4 - Heritage Sites in Stonesfield Parish

Stonesfield Parish Boundary

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Map 4: Heritage Sites in Stonesfield Parish

2.4 Access, perceptual qualities and views

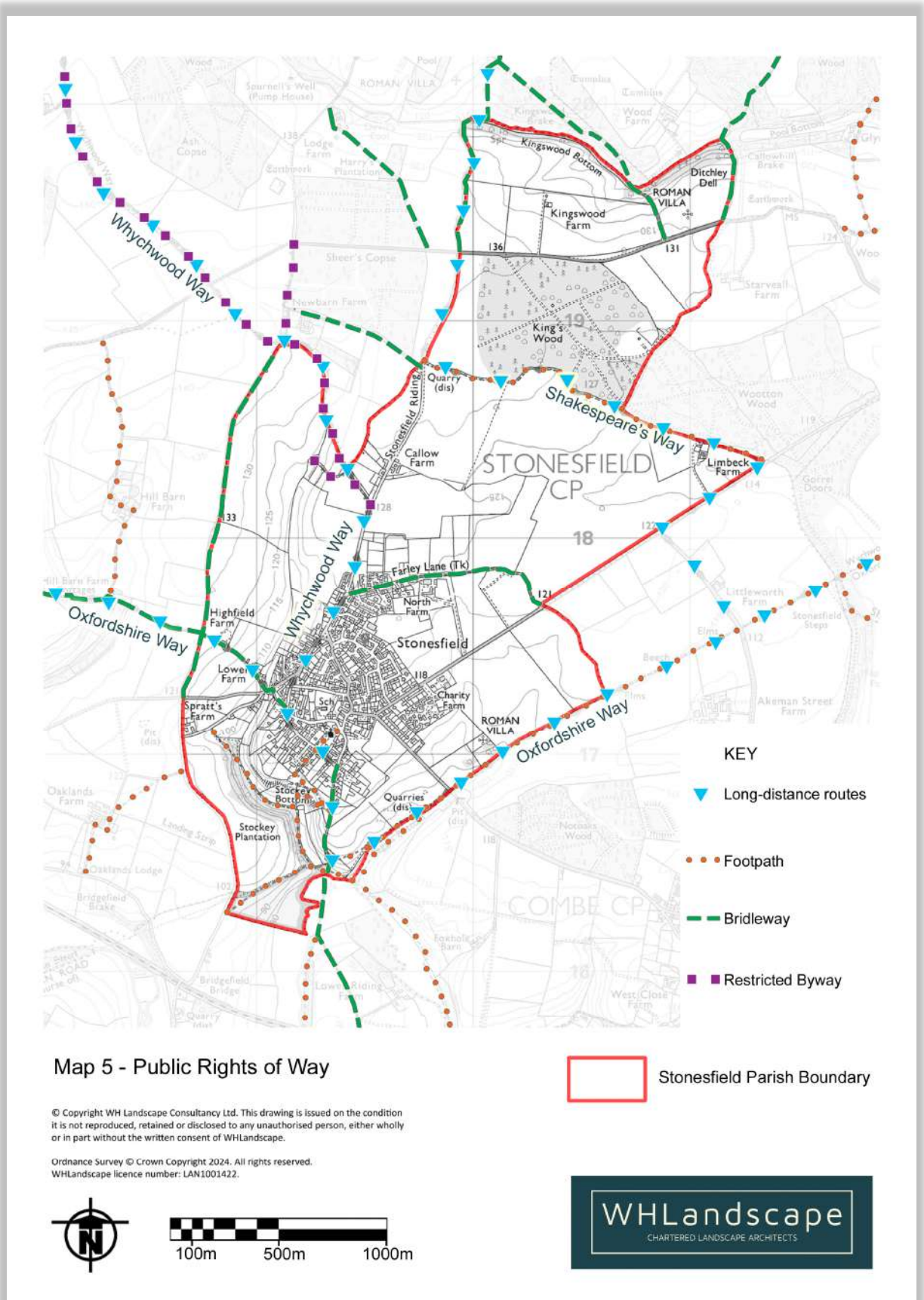
Access and open space

Numerous footpaths and bridleways connect the village to the surrounding countryside and provide opportunities for recreational walks within and beyond the parish. Several of these routes have been in existence for centuries, notably the Oxfordshire Way long distance footpath which uses part of the Akeman Street Roman road, and Brook Lane which connects with an ancient hollow way via a footbridge over the Evenlode (a footbridge was first built at this location in 1896, but a crossing had existed here for centuries before).

The Shakespeare's Way long distance footpath crosses the northern part of the parish. This runs from William Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon to the modern Shakespeare's Globe (near the site of the original Globe Theatre), on the south bank of the river Thames in London, and is intended to shadow a possible route taken by Shakespeare himself when journeying between London, where he acted and wrote his plays, and his home in Stratford.

The Wychwood Way long distance recreational route also crosses through the parish, including through the village itself. This circular walk goes around the heart of the ancient forest of Wychwood, and uses the Roman Road of Akeman Street and therefore it is partly coincident with the Oxfordshire Way.

Stonesfield Common provides access for informal recreation and dog-walking, and is connected to the village by footpath 370/20/10, whilst Footpath 370/19/10 provides access into the wooded areas in Stockey Bottom. Both routes are well connected with the village via other rights of way and minor lanes. Map 5 shows the public rights of way in and around Stonesfield parish.



Map 5: Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) in and around Stonesfield Parish

Recreational Landscape

The landscape within the parish has been enjoyed by villagers over the centuries, for its walks and amenity value. Summertime has led to paddling in the Evenlode, whilst the numerous hillsides provide some ideal slopes for sledging during snowy winters.



▲ *Evenlode bridge, 1936*



▲ *Sledging below the Scout hut in Stockey Bottom*

(images provided courtesy of Stonesfield Parish Council)

Perceptual qualities

One of the most striking qualities of Stonesfield's landscape are the perceptual contrasts within such a small parish area. These include the contrast between the intimate wooded dry valley at Stockey Bottom, the sloping Stonesfield Common with views across the Evenlode's floodplain, the views across the Ruddywell from the ridgeline on the west of the parish, and the views across the open expansive landscape of the arable plateau north of the village.

The western side of the village has extensive areas of deciduous woodland and tree cover to create a soft and verdant setting for the village as it rises gently up the dry valley side. The woodland creates a more seasonally changing setting for the village, is more intimate in scale, and enhances its relative sense of tranquillity. The wooded valley sides provide a naturalistic setting for recreational walks on the immediate edge of the village.

The landscape to the north and eastern sides of the village, in contrast, is large in scale with a broad plateau made up of intensively managed arable land. Further away from the settlement a perception of isolation increases, but not to the extent that the landscape is perceived as being remote. The agrarian character of the landscape remains dominant, and the therefore landscape is perceived as part of the village's rural setting.

The dense woodland to the north of the Parish creates a physical separation between the plateau farmland and the declivity north of the B4437. This area, although fairly open in character, is enclosed by woodland on all sides, leading to visual containment, and is therefore visually divorced from the rest of the parish.

Views

Stonesfield parish Council have carried out their own survey of key public viewing locations where the landscape forms part of the setting for the village (Fig. iii). These include views from public footpaths and bridleways within the parish, as well as from each of the public roads on approach into the village.

The experiential nature of the views will be different depending on the nature of the receptor – for example walkers on a footpath will have a longer exposure to viewpoints and likely a more focused interest in the landscape than occupants of cars who will be moving through the landscape at speed and will experience views more fleetingly. However, it is clear from the locations identified that the landscape setting is fundamental in inward views of the village, and this gives Stonesfield its rural settlement character.



◀ *View west across landscape on approach from the east on Combe Road*



◀ *View east across
landscape
towards
Stonesfield from
Bridleway
208/3/10*



◀ *View west
towards
Stonesfield from
the Oxfordshire
Way long-
Distance footpath
(Footpath
370/1/10)*



◀ *View south
towards
Stonesfield from
Shakespeare's
Way long-
Distance footpath
(Footpath
370/15/10)*

Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan

Viewing points of the village from footpaths, bridleways and roads

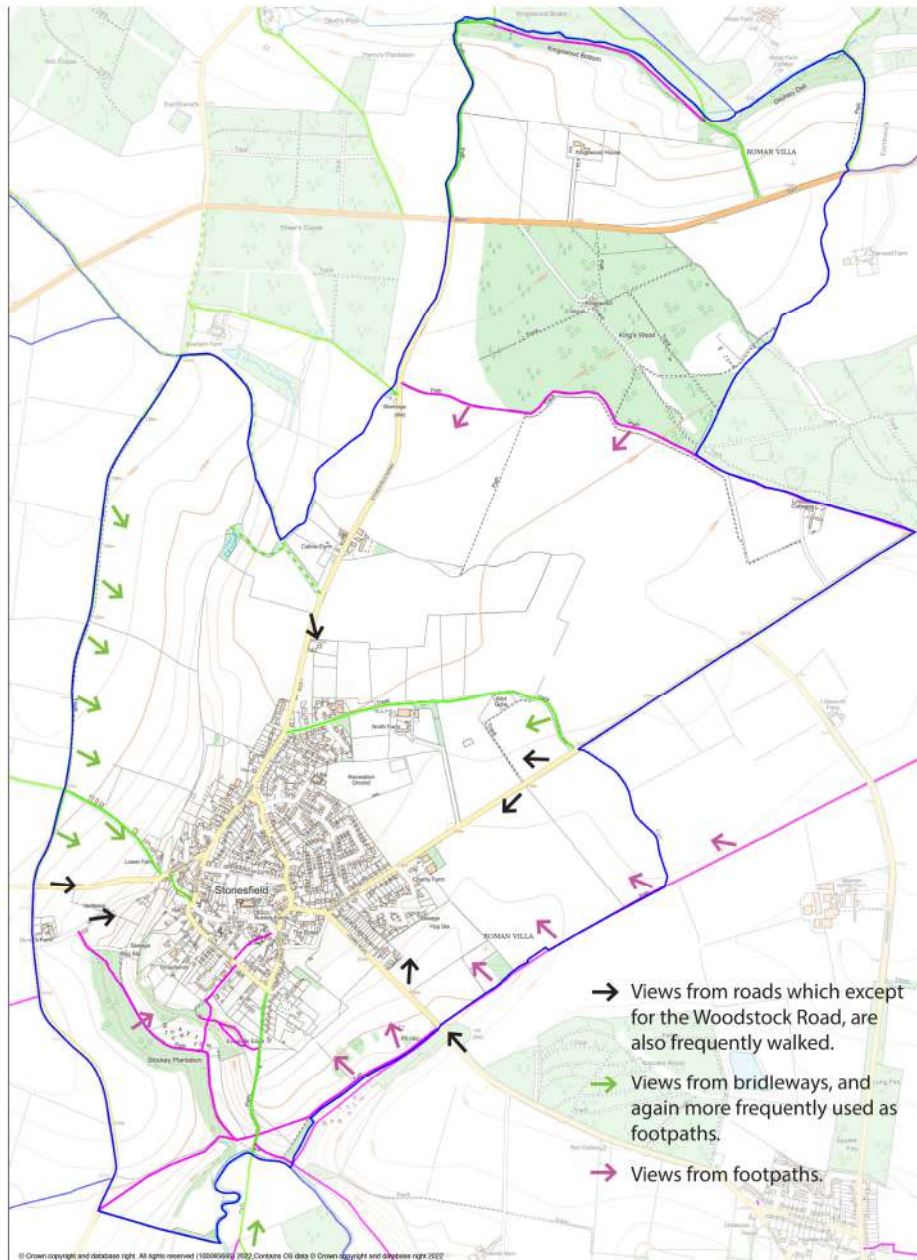


Fig iii: Key views of Stonesfield from footpaths and bridleways (provided courtesy of Stonesfield Parish Council)

2.5 Landscape Character Context

Landscape Character Types and Areas

Landscape Character Assessments identify and map the ‘units’ which make up the landscape. These are known as Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and Landscape Character Areas (LCAs). Landscape Character Assessments can identify LCTs, LCAs or both, as is the case with the Cotswolds Landscape Character Assessment. LCAs can be further divided into Local Landscape Character Areas (LLCAs) as identified in this Assessment for Stonesfield parish.

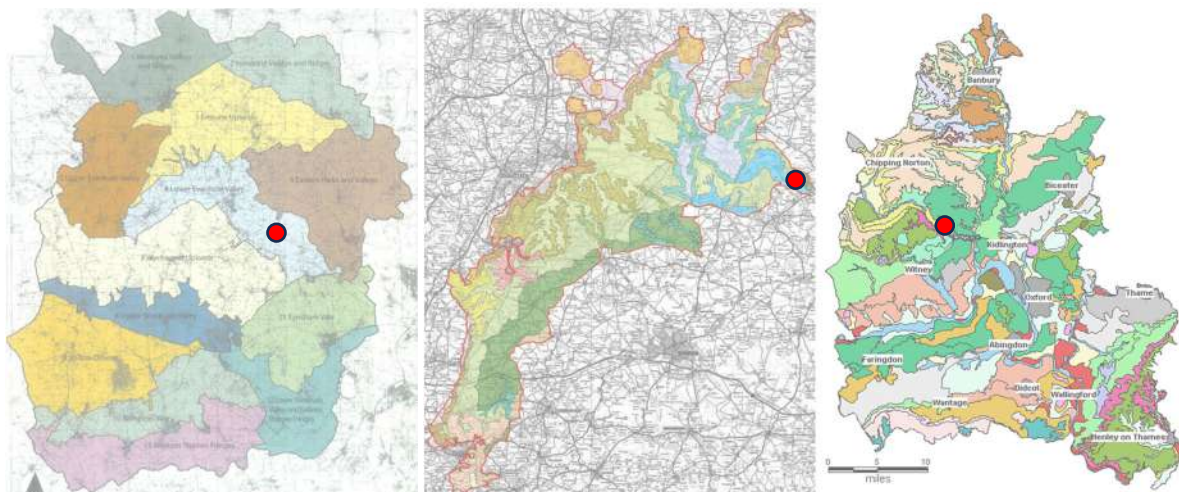
Landscape Character Types (LCTs) are generic types of landscape which can occur in different places. They have similar characteristics wherever they occur, and are called by a descriptive name (e.g. ‘Dip-slope Lowland’).

Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) are geographically-unique areas, each with a distinctive ‘sense of place’ reflecting local distinctiveness. They are called by a place-based name (e.g. ‘Lower Evenlode Valley’).

Scales of Assessment

Landscape Character Assessments can be undertaken at a range of scales and levels of detail (from national to local) depending on the purpose for which they are required. As the geographical area covered gets smaller, then the level of detail of the Assessment increases. This is shown in Table 1, which sets out the Landscape Character Assessment context for Stonesfield parish. Table 1 and the map extracts below show how Stonesfield parish ‘nests’ within existing Landscape Character Assessments (left to right – West Oxfordshire LCA, Cotswolds LCA, The Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study).

● Location of Stonesfield parish.



Level of detail	Extent of assessment	How Stonesfield fits	Where to find more information
Low	National	The 'Character of England' identifies 159 distinctive National Character Areas (NCAs) across England. Stonesfield is within NCA 107: Cotswolds	https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5900626?category=587130
Medium	County	The Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) describes 240 Landscape Description Units, that are made up of 24 separate landscape types (LCTs) within the county. Stonesfield parish straddles LCT 19: Wooded Estatelands (and within this LCA A: Blenheim Park), and LCT 7: Farmland Slopes and Valley Sides (and within this LCA L: Charlbury).	https://owls.oxfordshire.gov.uk/wps/wcm/connect/occ/OWLS/Home/
Medium	District	The West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment 1998 formed part of the Evidence Base for the West Oxfordshire Local plan 2031. Stonesfield Parish falls primarily within the Character Area 6: Lower Evenlode Valley, with the northern part of the parish lying in Character Area 4: Eastern Parks and Valleys.	https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/cpqn2fj0/west-oxfordshire-landscape-assessment-1998.pdf
Medium	National Landscape	The Cotswolds Landscape Character Assessment provides the current most accurate assessment of landscape character for the area. The parish of Stonesfield straddles two landscape character types – LCT 11: Dip-slope Lowlands (and within this LCA 11B Stonesfield Lowlands); and, LCT 16: Broad Floodplain Valley (and within this LCA 16B Lower Evenlode Valley).	https://www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk/our-landscape/landscape-character-assessment/
High	Parish		This document

Table 1: Landscape Character Assessments covering Stonesfield Parish

These assessments identify landscape characteristics at appropriate scales. The key characteristics for studies are listed below. Due to the large-scale of these studies, only some of these may be relevant for Stonesfield parish.

National Character Area profile 107: Cotswolds

Key Characteristics:

- *Defined by its underlying geology: a dramatic limestone scarp rising above adjacent lowlands with steep combs, and outliers illustrating the slow erosion of escarpments. The limestone geology has formed the scarp and dip slope of the landscape, which in turn has influenced drainage, soils, vegetation, land use and settlement.*
- *Open and expansive scarp and high wold dipping gently to the southeast, dissected by river valleys.*
- *Arable farming dominates the high wold and dip slope while permanent pasture prevails on the steep slopes of the scarp and river valleys with pockets of internationally important limestone grassland.*
- *Drystone walls define the pattern of fields of the high wold and dip slope. On the deeper soils and river valleys, hedgerows form the main field boundaries.*
- *Ancient beech hangers line stretches of the upper slopes of the scarp, while oak/ash woodlands are characteristic of the river valleys. Regular blocks of coniferous and mixed plantations are scattered across the open high wold and dip slope.*
- *Large areas of common land, important for unimproved calcareous grassland, are characteristic of the scarp and high wold around the Stroud valleys and along the crest of the scarp to Cleeve Hill.*
- *The majority of the principal rivers flow south-eastwards forming the headwaters of the Thames with the exception of rivers in the west which flow into the River Avon and then the Severn Estuary.*
- *Rich history from Neolithic barrows, iron-age hill forts and Roman roads and villas to deserted medieval villages, grand country houses, cloth mills and Second World War airfields. The field patterns largely reflect both the medieval open field system, with fossilised areas of ridge and furrow, and later planned enclosures.*
- *Locally quarried limestone brings a harmony to the built environment of scattered villages and drystone walls, giving the area a strong sense of unity for which the Cotswolds are renowned. Bath stone is also famous and has been used for building since Roman times, both locally in the principal buildings and streets of Bath and more widely, for example for Buckingham Palace in London. Parkland, gardens and historic designed landscapes are features particularly of the dip slope and broad lowland, such as Lawrence Johnston's garden at Hidcote, and Heather Muir's garden at Kiftsgate, parkland at Stanway, Chastleton and Blenheim Palace.*
- *Prominent natural and built features in the landscape include the City of Bath WHS, Brailes Hill, Broadway Tower, Cleeve Hill, the Tyndale monument, Freezing Hill, Kelston Round Hill and Blenheim Palace WHS.*

Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) LCTs and LCAs

LCT 19: Wooded Estatelands Key Characteristics:

- ***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***

LCA A: Blenheim Park Key Characteristics:

The field pattern is dominated by large-scale arable fields and some grass fields around Combe. Woodland cover is prominent throughout the landscape, with large blocks of ancient woodland and mixed plantations. The woods of the Ditchley estate consist mainly of ash, beech and some hazel coppice, whilst the woodland at Blenheim is mainly ash and oak, with a substantial number of conifers. Parklands are very characteristic in this area, including the picturesque landscapes at Blenheim and Ditchley. Mature hedgerow trees are also thinly scattered throughout and they are mainly oak, ash, beech and some sycamore. Fields are enclosed by woodland and thorn hedges. Roadside hedges are often species-rich and gappy, and internal field hedges are fragmented and lost in places.

LCT 7: Farmland Slopes and Valley Sides Key Characteristics:

- ***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.***

LCA L: Charlbury Key Characteristics:

The area is characterised by medium-sized fields with a mix of land uses including some semi-improved and calcareous grassland on the steepest slopes and valley sides. Fields are enclosed by tall, thick hedges which are gappy in places and often species-rich, particularly where they border roads. Around Charlbury there are more stone walls. A characteristic feature throughout are the blocks of semi-natural woodland and scrub that grow on the sides of these narrow valleys. There are also a few small deciduous and mixed plantations.

Cotswold Landscape Assessment LCTs and LCAs

LCT 11: Dip-slope Lowland Key Characteristics:

- *Broad area of gently sloping, undulating lowland with a predominantly south-easterly fall, changing to a north-easterly fall in the southern perimeter of the area;*
- *lowland landform gently dissected by infrequent small watercourses flowing into the main rivers that cross the area, reinforcing the general grain of the topography;*
- *strong and structured farmland character, more intimate and smaller in scale than the High Wold and High Wold Dip-Slope;*
- *well-managed, productive agricultural landscape of mixed arable and improved pasture, together with more limited areas of permanent pasture, mainly within the valley bottoms;*
- *seasonal variations in colour and texture associated with mixed arable farming;*
- *medium to large scale, regular fields predominate mainly enclosed by hedgerows, with hedgerow trees, together with some stone walls or post and wire fencing;*
- *woodland cover limited to intermittent copses and shelterbelts within agricultural land, but balanced by extensive broadleaved, mixed and coniferous plantations within the large estates and associated farmland areas;*
- *limited areas of ancient woodland and species rich grassland;*
- *settlement pattern of intermittent small nucleated villages, hamlets, and isolated farmsteads, together with occasional larger settlements;*
- *distinctive pattern of large estates and associated planned parkland landscape and woodland occurring throughout the Dip-Slope Lowland; and*
- *evidence of long period of occupation of the area.*

LCT 11 Character Area 11B: Stonesfield Lowlands Key Characteristics:

A small area of Dip-Slope Lowland is located on the extreme eastern part of the AONB, within which are the nucleated villages of Stonesfield and Combe. Although detached from the broader sweep of Dip-Slope Lowland to the west, physiographically it forms the transition to lower land from the adjacent area of High Wold Dip-Slope that extends across a more elevated and rolling landscape north and south of the Evenlode Valley.

Beyond the two villages, land use is entirely under agriculture with a predominance of arable production within large regular fields, with evidence of amalgamation. The broad expansive character is emphasised by the large fields, low hedges, and evidence of hedge loss, as well as the generally limited woodland cover. There is, however, a notable area of ancient woodland at Notoaks Wood between the two villages, and occasional geometric blocks of coniferous and broadleaved woodland plantations, particularly north of Combe. In keeping with the local name, a considerable number of rocks and stones are visible in the soil; this is particularly evident during the winter period after ploughing.

The village of Stonesfield gives its name to the 'Stonesfield Slates' that were quarried in the vicinity of the village for many years. The particular characteristics of the fissile sandy limestone rock that outcrops at the base of the Great Oolite make it particularly suitable for splitting into roof 'slates'. Historically the stone was dug in the Autumn and spread out on the ground for winter frosts to invade the thin films of water within the stone to weaken it so that in spring a blow from a mallet would be enough to split the stone into slates. In the village of Stonesfield quarries were small enterprises and the spreading of the stone in the fields was carried out by almost the entire village. Mining of the stone slates ceased over a century ago, when the source was worked out, but the legacy that this locally occurring horizon has had on the appearance of buildings within the Cotswolds is immeasurable. Many of the older buildings in this character area are roofed in locally mined slates.

Although lying beyond the AONB, the influence of the adjacent estate managed landscape of Blenheim Park is evident. The Park and house was added to UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1987. The Palace and grounds were given to John Churchill, First Duke of Marlborough in recognition of his victory over the French in 1704. It is regarded as a perfect example of an 18th century princely home. The Palace is set within an impressive designed landscape attributable to Lancelot 'Capability' Brown.

The line of the former Roman road, Akeman Street crosses the character area, and although no longer used as a road, it now has a recreational focus and is followed by the Oxfordshire Way.

LCT 16: Broad Floodplain Valley Key Characteristics:

- *Intimate, small scale settled and relatively busy landscape, contrasting with more remote areas of High Wold;*
- *well-defined broad valley profile of open flat floodplain, river terraces and gentle convex slopes;*
- *river floodplain features such as meanders, water meadows, ponds, old river channels and islands;*
- *floodplain and riverside trees including pollarded willows;*
- *wooded bluffs and areas of species rich grassland on areas of steep landform;*
- *river corridor marked by main transport routes through the valley;*
- *valley sides cloaked in improved pasture and arable land form a back drop to the valley floor landscapes;*
- *land use within valley floor and floodplain dominated by pasture although some extensive areas of arable land on areas less prone to flooding;*
- *fields defined by hedgerows and some stone walls although the robust framework is eroded by hedgerow loss and the use of post and wire fences;*
- *river channel habitats including standing water important to a diverse range of flora and fauna;*
- *prolific archaeological remains likely to be hidden by fluvial and human activity;*
- *linear settlements often located at ancient bridging points established in the Saxon or medieval period; and,*

- ***historic character of villages evident in their distinctive layout, building styles and use of Cotswolds limestone.***

LCT 16 Character Area 16B: Lower Evenlode Valley Key Characteristics:

Unlike its upper section, the Lower Evenlode Valley forms a distinct landform unit, and despite varying in width, creates a sense of enclosure and a strong sense of place.

The valley floor has a distinct pastoral, intimate and riparian character with a close visual relationship with its enclosing valley sides along which lie a string of valley side settlements.

The overall valley form is characterised by gently sloping convex sides and a wide flat floodplain through which the river flows in a complex series of meanders. On its northern slopes, the smooth and gentle landform of the valley side is interrupted by a number of minor tributary streams that flow off the West Enstone Uplands landscape character area. To the south the valley has a gentler profile as it rises up onto the Wychwood Forest Character Area. Below Stonesfeld the valley profile is narrower, with wooded slopes bordering the river, the course of which follows a series of tight meanders, and through which the course of the Oxford to Worcester rail line cuts a direct route.

The free draining soils on the gentle valley slopes are predominantly used for arable farming although improved pastures are also evident. Fields are divided by hedgerows, except on the heavier clay soils of the floodplain where post and wire fences predominate. Here, permanent pasture is prevalent although areas of arable farmland tend to mirror the presence of the more free draining river terrace gravels as is the case to the south of Chadlington.

The Evenlode contains a string of settlements located along the valley sides, including the main settlements of Charlbury, Ascott-under-Wychwood and Chadlington. These are interspersed with numerous villages and hamlets and a dispersed pattern of large farms. Together these various forms of settlements form a well-populated area, and yet one which retains a distinct rural character.

The course of the London to Worcester rail line is a major landscape feature and a number of settlements along its route have stations. This was a significant factor in the post war expansion of the villages within the valley.

There are numerous prehistoric sites in and bordering the valley. On the neighbouring uplands, numerous barrows and prehistoric sites such as Knollbury and the Hawk Stone indicate that the valley was an important trade route and area of settlement and indeed modern roads and footpaths linking these sites to the valley may be contemporary with their construction. Perhaps the most significant prehistoric landscape feature in the valley is the small part of the Grims Ditch to the south of Charlbury. This is thought to be the boundary of an Iron Age oppidum, or tribal centre. Longer and more impressive stretches can be found beyond the AONB boundary, particularly in Ditchley Park.

Later sites of historic importance include the North Leigh Roman villa site to the south of Stonesfield and Cornbury Park, located on the eastern fringes of Wychwood Forest, both of which are located on the gentle southern slopes overlooking the river.

Surrounding Assessments

Charlbury Town Council commissioned a Character Assessment for Charlbury Parish in 2018 to provide an evidence base for the development of Charlbury's neighbourhood plan. This provided a hybrid study of both the townscape and its historic core as well as the town's suburban areas and the open countryside beyond this. Although the study doesn't define or describe LCTs or LCAs, it does provide broad descriptions of the countryside, including that to the north west of Stonesfield parish that makes up part of its wider landscape setting.

2.6 Forces for change affecting Stonesfield's landscape

Types of change

There are many different changes affecting the landscape of Stonesfield parish. These changes, known collectively as 'forces for change' can be single, large-scale changes, or smaller incremental changes which can have a strong cumulative impact on the landscape. Some changes are sudden, whilst others may occur gradually. Many of the changes will be exacerbated by climate change. As well as causing visual impacts and their ensuing effect on perceptions of the landscape, changes may also impact on the local economy, and on the health, safety and wellbeing of local people.

Using the Cotswold Landscape Character Assessment, the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines was produced and adopted in June 2016 for the 19 landscape character types identified. This document sets out local forces for change and their implications, and, where appropriate, landscape strategies and guidelines to manage or mitigate these. This information can be used by local planners and decision makers to make informed decisions when assessing the suitability of proposed development or change within the National Landscape.

The parish of Stonesfield is contained within LCT 11: Dip Slope Lowland and LCT16: Broad Floodplain Valley (the characteristics of which are described in 8.0, above). The full list of forces for change, their potential implications, and landscape strategies and guidelines to manage change can be found here:

[lct-11-dipslope-lowland-june-2016.pdf \(cotswolds-nl.org.uk\)](#)

[lct-16-broad-floodplain-valley-june-2016.pdf \(cotswolds-nl.org.uk\)](#)

Image overleaf: Stonesfield from the west (© WH Landscape)

Part 3: Landscape Character Assessment



Part 3: Landscape Character Assessment

3.1 Local Landscape Character Areas (LLCAs) identified within Stonesfield Parish

Five LLCAs have been identified within the parish of Stonesfield. These all lie within Cotswold Landscape Character Assessment LCA 1B: *Stonesfield Lowlands*.

The 'boundaries' LLCAs are shown on Map 6, overleaf, and have been named as follows:

- A: Ruddywell Dry Valley LLCA
- B: Stockey Bottom and Banks, and Stonesfield Common LLCA
- C: Stonesfield Inner Fields and Baggs Bottom LLCA
- D: Callow Farm to Limbeck Farm Plateau Farmland LLLCA
- E: King's Wood to Kingswood Bottom Wooded Farmland LLCA

Illustrative profiles for each LLCA are provided in the following pages. These describe the key characteristics, landscape value, landscape sensitivity and guidance for future management for each LLCA.

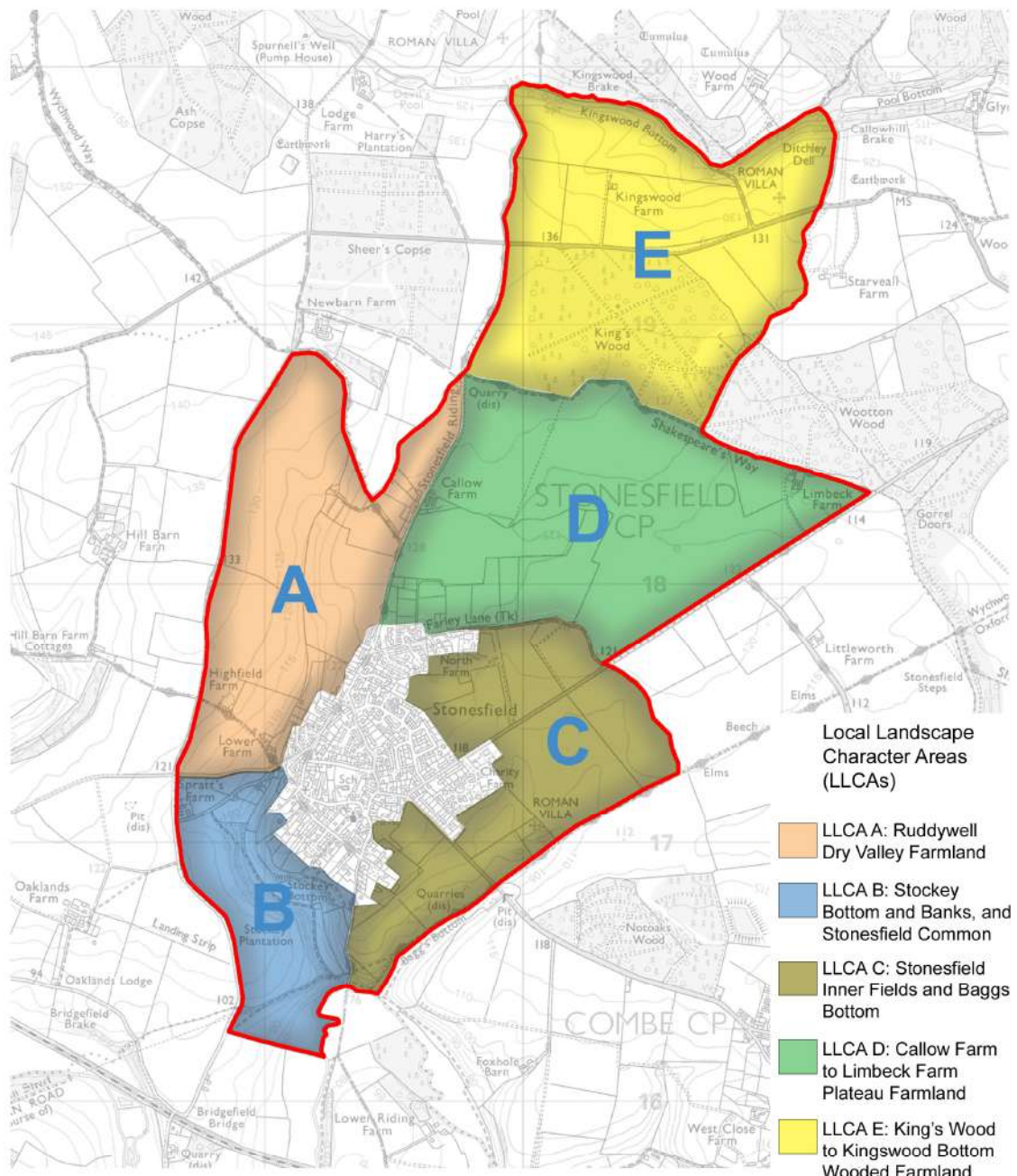
A note on boundaries

Although LLCA boundaries have been shown as a clear line on Map 6, in reality the boundaries of LCAs and LLCAs are often 'transitional', with a gradual change between LLCAs where one merges into the other. Therefore, potential developments or land use changes near LLCA boundaries should be mindful of the special qualities of all LLCAs potentially affected and follow guidance for all the relevant LLCAs.

For legibility, the boundaries for each LLCA use clear features in the landscape, such as roads, watercourses, public rights of way or field boundaries. The boundaries mark the point where a change in character becomes more noticeable.

The 'outer' boundaries have been defined by the parish boundary, but it should be noted that the underlying character may often extend into neighbouring parishes.

It should also be noted that within each LLCA there may be anomalies or localised variations in character, although these are not significant enough to alter the general descriptions of the LLCA or warrant inclusion as their own LLCA. Where notable, the anomalies have been included in the descriptions for each LLCA.



Map 6 - Local Landscape Character Areas

Map 6: Local Landscape Character Areas (LLCAs) in Stonesfield Parish

LLCA A: Ruddywell Dry Valley Farmland

Location

This LLCA is located on the western side of Stonesfield. It comprises a dry valley, formed as a tributary of the Evenlode. The valley is discreet to the north but becomes more dramatic to the south where there are attractive views across the valley where the settlement rises up on the eastern valley side.



A typical view across farmland within LLCA A, looking east from bridleway 208/3/10 towards the western edge of Stonesfield.

Summary

The Ruddywell Dry Valley Farmland LLCA is made up primarily of arable fields with mostly rectilinear boundaries, and has a strong rural character. The field pattern is broken by a belt of mature trees that run north-south through the LLCA and mark the narrow valley floor.

To the south of the LLCA, abutting the settlement edge, are some smaller and narrower field enclosures. These include tracts of hay meadow and grazing paddocks and are more pastoral in character. The narrow hay meadow to the east of Lower Farm on the edge of Stonesfield is included in the Village Conservation Area, and allows pleasant framed views to the north between the farmhouse and the settlement edge from Laughton Hill.

The landform of the steeper valley sides to the south of this LLCA creates a more enclosed and intimate feel, whereas the flatter, less pronounced valley sides to the north have a more open and expansive character that visually connects with the plateau farmland to the east.

Part of the northern and eastern boundary of LLCA A is marked by the Wychwood Way, a circular walk that goes around the heart of the ancient forest of Wychwood. The route passes through the centre of Stonesfield, from the north of the village on Stonesfield Riding and around to the south of St James's Church where it is coincident with the Oxfordshire Way long-distance path. The Oxfordshire Way itself crosses the southern part of the LLCA between Lower Farm and Highfield Farm.

The western boundary of LLCA A is marked by Bridleway 208/3/10 that follows a shallow north-south ridgeline. This affords its users clear views towards the north-eastern edge of Stonesfield across the dry valley. A track that forms part of the Oxfordshire Way descends from Bridleway 208/3/10 into the valley floor just beyond Lower Farm where it meets Loughton Hill (see cover image). This approach into the village provides a particularly attractive view of the village which rises up on the far side of the valley, as does the approach from Stonesfield Road, which forms the southern boundary of LLCA A. Therefore, key views within the parish are found within the Ruddywell Dry Valley Farmland LLCA, and the LLCA is a significant component of the settlement's rural landscape setting.

There are no statutory natural environment designations within LLCA A, and apart from a small strip of Traditional Orchard adjacent to Stonesfield Riding, there are no identified areas of Priority Habitat. Woodland cover is limited to a few small areas on the valley floor which is also marked by a narrow belt of deciduous trees that forms a field boundary to enclosures on either side. Hedgerow cover is variable, with some traditional hedgerows surviving around the smaller enclosures on the valley floor. 1945 aerial imagery shows the former subdivision of the larger field enclosures in the LLCA, and a network of hedgerows. These were mostly grubbed out when the fields were amalgamated in the second half of the 20th Century.

Part of LLCA A lies within the Village Conservation Area, but there are no listed structures or scheduled monuments within this LLCA. Smaller, narrower field enclosures survive to the east of Lower Farm. These pastoral fields lie on the immediate edge of the village and are distinct from the modern field enclosures that dominate the rest of the LLCA. They provide some time depth where they form a historic link with later assarts that were made on the western boundary of the parish; the land formed

part of a local field system called Jenner's Sarts which was created following the clearance of Gerner's Wood which had been recorded in a perambulation of Wychwood Forest in 1298.

Key Characteristics

- Dry river valley topography - discreet to the north but becomes more dramatic to the south.
- Attractive views across the valley where the settlement rises up on the eastern valley side.
- Woodland and tree cover within the LLCA is limited to a few small areas on the valley floor which is also marked by a narrow belt of deciduous trees that forms a field boundary to enclosures on either side.
- Small area of traditional woodland adjacent to Stonesfield Riding near Callow Farm that is included in the Priority Habitat Inventory.
- Other semi-natural habitats include hay meadow and grassland within the narrow pastoral enclosures east of Lower farm, and mature hedges. There are no designated wildlife sites, other areas of priority habitat or ancient woodland within the Ruddywell Dry valley LLCA.
- Land use is predominantly arable production, and the landscape has a strong rural character.
- There are a number of agricultural and former agricultural buildings, including traditional stone-build structures (e.g. at Lower farm) and modern era (e.g. at Highfield Farm). There is a small group of timber clad, low-rise barns and storage buildings to the north of the LLCA on Stonesfield Riding.
- This LLCA is bounded by two roads – Stonesfield Riding on the eastern boundary, and Stonesfield Road on the southern boundary. These enter the village from the north and west, respectively. The Ruddywell Dry Valley therefore forms part of the rural landscape setting when approaching the village, with particularly attractive views on approach from the west.
- There are no designated heritage features within this LLCA. Non-designated heritage features include stone-built farmhouses, and the narrow strip fields and their traditional hedgerows on the valley floor east of Lower Farm. (these provide some time depth where they form a historic link with later assarts that were made on the western boundary of the parish). The two roads are also historic features.
- Wet winters produce occasional winterbournes, and the Ruddywell can flood during wet periods, particularly on land to the east of Lower Farm – the area known as the 'Dene'.
- Two popular rights of way cross or bound the Ruddywell Dry Valley: the Oxfordshire Way long-distance path, which makes up the LLCA's southern boundary, and Wychwood Way long-distance path to the east and north of the LLCA. This short section of the Oxfordshire way provides opportunities for attractive views across the valley towards Stonesfield.

- Bridleway 208/3/10 marks the western boundary of the site and affords its users clear views towards the settlement edge of Stonesfield from a shallow ridgeline.



Valley topography is more evident to south of LLCA



Valley topography is very discreet to north of LLCA



View across valley towards Stonesfield from Oxfordshire Way by Waterloo Barn



View north across narrow hay meadow by Lower Farm known as the 'Dene' which occasionally floods in winter.

Landscape Value

Valued landscape qualities which should be respected:

- Open character of the northern part of the LLCA allows longer-distance views across to the Limbeck to Callow Farms Plateau Farmland (LLCA D).
- Publicly accessible views east towards the village across the southern part of the LLCA (which has a more pronounced valley topography) allow Stonesfield to be appreciated in its landscape setting.
- Views from the Oxfordshire Way and Stonesfield Road towards the western edge of the village are particularly attractive.
- The landscape of the Stonesfield Inner Fields forms the rural landscape setting for the settlement and contributes to the special qualities of the Cotswolds National Landscape.

- Pockets of pastoral land on the western edge of the village at Lower Farm add to the settlement's sense of time depth and survive as remnants of historic field enclosures when the landscape was assarted.
- These pastoral fields are also valued for the pastoral and intimate views north they provide from the edge of the village that contrasts with the predominantly open character of the rest of the LLCA.
- The Oxfordshire Way and Wychwood Way are valued as a popular long-distance paths. These directly link with the village.

Landscape Sensitivity

The table below shows the valued landscape qualities to respect (see Landscape Value section above), together with the threats and issues currently or potentially affecting them. The following Guidance section makes recommendations on how these special qualities can be managed.

Valued quality	Threats and issues
Remaining traditional pastoral fields east of Lower Farm.	<p>This LLCA is highly sensitive to development which would impact on its rural character; the village edge setting; attractive views across the valley towards the settlement, or views north across the remaining pastoral fields east of Lower Farm.</p> <p>Sensitivity to development that would introduce tall vertical elements such as pylons or masts.</p> <p>Further expansion along Stonesfield Riding will disproportionately elongate the village's urban edge by extending it into the countryside.</p> <p>Unsensitive conversion, extension or development of traditional farm buildings can negatively affect Stonesfield's historic landscape setting.</p>
Strong rural character that contributes to the special qualities of the Cotswold National Landscape.	
Landscape setting for Stonesfield in views east from Stonesfield Road, Bridleway 208/3/10 and the Oxfordshire Way long-distance footpath.	
Open views and intervisibility with adjacent Limbeck to Callow Farm Plateau Farmland LLCA, and views across farmland in the Charlbury parish within the broader Evenlode Valley to the west from Bridleway 208/3/10.	

Traditional stone-built farm buildings are considered undesignated heritage assets that historically link with to the landscape's agrarian character.

Guidance

Protect

- Protect this rural and predominantly undeveloped landscape from inappropriate large-scale or visually-prominent development.
- Ensure that the recent village expansion north of Farley Lane or at No's 1-8 The Ridings Close does not extend further north along Stonesfield Riding to ensure the urban edge is not increased, particularly in views from the west on Bridleway 208/3/10.
- Protect the remaining pockets of sensitive pastoral landscape on the village edge from development, particularly to the east of Lower Farm.
- Retain the low density and unobtrusive character of existing residential development at the peripheries of the LLCA.

Manage

- Work with landowners to promote good habitat management (e.g. strengthening 'gappy' hedgerows, widening field margins), and aim to further extend and link habitats.
- Manage and preserve open views across the valley and avoid planting that would compromise the attractive views towards the village in its landscape setting.
- Survey grassland, mature hedges and woodland/ treed areas on edge of village to identify existing areas of priority habitat which are not currently recorded.
- Promote opportunities to enhance biodiversity through protecting existing habitats and creating new ones through the parish's 'blue and green corridor' initiative.
- Manage Public Rights of Way, ensuring access to the LLCA is not reduced, and that footpaths are safe and enjoyable to use.

Plan

- Identify 'key views' within the LLCA, drawing on earlier consultation carried out as part of the neighbourhood plan, and identify strategies to preserve these views.
- Seek opportunities to introduce or restore landscape structure adjacent to prominent modern urban edges on the north-western edge of the village where there has been recent expansion

along Stonesfield Riding (for example by encouraging new woodland and grassland habitats on the north western edge of the village).

- Encourage further tree planting and habitat creation in the valley from the Deene to Ruddywell and beyond to make a better wildlife corridor between the Evenlode valley, Stocky Woods and ultimately Sheer's Copse and Kingswood as part of the parish's 'blue and green corridor' initiative.
- Plan further hedge planting. There has been a programme of hedgerow planting carried out by the Stonesfield Tree Group who have planted a number of trees adjacent to the Ruddy Lane byway (370/9/20) and the ridge bridleway (208/3/10). Plan to monitor this recent planting to ensure successful establishment, replacing diseased or failed stock where necessary.

LLCA B: Stockey Bottom and Banks, and Stonesfield Common

Location

This LLCA is located on the south-western and southern sides of Stonesfield, known locally as Stockey Bottom and Banks, and Stonesfield Common, and includes a more steeply incised and substantially wooded dry valley. The LLCA has a small network of public footpaths that provide direct and easy access from Stonesfield, and is particularly valued by villagers for its informal amenity value and for its importance for nature conservation.



A typical view across grazing paddocks on the south-western edge of Stonesfield within LLCA B, looking south towards the Stockey Plantation.

Summary

This LLCA includes areas that form part of the Stonesfield Common, Bottoms and Banks Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a series of steep sided dry valleys and banks with unimproved limestone grassland and scrub habitats. Grassland such as this was once widespread on the Oolitic limestone of western Oxfordshire, and the importance of this SSSI therefore lies in its survival as one of the largest remnants of this grassland type in the county.

Apart from a triangle of land at Spratt's Farm, between Witney Lane and Stonesfield Road, the LLCA lies within the area covered by the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Upper Thames Tributaries) Designation (Amendment) Order 1999 (see section 5.2).

Within the northern part of the LLCA at Spratt's Farm, as well as the valley floor and rising up on the eastern and north-eastern side of the valley, are a patchwork of pastoral fields, enclosed by mature hedgerows and trees. This is flanked to the west by a woodland on the other valley side. This ancient and semi natural woodland forms part of the designated SSSI, and includes semi-natural Beech-Elm woodland which has a rich ground flora which includes several species of plants associated with ancient woodland including Common Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, Common Primrose *Primula vulgaris*, Toothwort *Lathraea squamaria*, Spurge Laurel *Daphne laureola*, and Yellow Archangel *Lamium galeobdolon*. Footpath numbers 370/19/10 and 370/19/20 allows access into the edge of this woodland and this provides a pleasant woodland walk enjoyed by villagers, and this part of the parish's landscape is enjoyed generally for its informal recreational value. After a campaign run by Sustainable Stonesfield, in 2020 the whole of Stockey Woods was designated 'Village Green' status in perpetuity, allowing residents free access to the whole of the woods for recreational activities.

The southern part of LLCA B includes Stonesfield Common – an area of Priority Habitat Inventory Lowland Calcareous Grassland that spans a broad south-facing slope down towards the Evenlode – and an area of floodplain meadow between the Common and the watercourse. These two areas are bounded to the south by the parish's southern boundary. The upper reaches of Stonesfield Common are crossed by footpath 370/20/10 which affords its users expansive views across the broad floodplain valley to the south beyond the parish.

A short section of the Wychwood Way and Oxfordshire Way long-distance path form the eastern boundary of LLCA B at the point where the landscape transitions into the arable fields of LLCA C.

LLCA B has its own area of arable land on its western side. This large field contrasts with the enclosed, natural and semi-natural landscape of the rest of the LLCA. This arable field's gently rolling topography where it slopes down towards the Evenlode and the dry valley, and the backdrop of Woodland at the Stockey Plantation, distinguishes it from the flatter more expansive arable land in other LLCAs.

Interestingly, a small strip of land on the eastern part of the LLCA, to the south of the allotments on Church Fields, and enclosed by woodland and mature scrub, had also been cultivated for arable crops until relatively recently, despite its small size and difficult access for modern farm machinery. This area has now begun to scrub up, but forms an interesting pocket of enclosed landscape where it is

bounded both to the north and south by public footpaths. There is discreet public artwork to the east of this area, adjacent to footpath 370/5/10.

Despite its proximity on the edge of Stonesfield, this LLCA has little intervisibility with the village due to the prevalence of tree cover and the 'hidden' nature of parts of the valley. The western part of the LLCA (the large arable field) feels particularly remote from the village. Notwithstanding this, this LLCA strongly reinforces the parish's rural character.

Key Characteristics

- Dry valley with occasional winterbourne.
- Visually enclosed within the valley, but the landscape 'opens up' on the south-facing hillside of Stonesfield Common, the floodplain below, and the gently rolling large arable field to the west.
- Large part of the LLCA forms section of the Stonesfield Common, Bottoms and Banks SSSI.
- The LLCA includes a section of the River Evenlode and an area of floodplain meadow. Its bridge, built adjacent to the site of an historic ford, is a local landmark. The rivers banks here are seasonally flooded each Winter.
- LLCA B is heavily wooded within the dry valley, particularly on its western side which includes semi-natural Beech-Wych Elm woodland with a rich ground flora.
- The LLCA includes a substantial part of the Stonesfield Common, Bottoms and Banks Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - a series of steep sided dry valleys and banks with unimproved limestone grassland and scrub habitats. This is one of the largest remnants of this grassland type in the county. Stonesfield Common has a sward that has been dominated by upright Brome *Bromus erectus* and with a herb flora including Field Scabious *Knautia arvensis*, Greater Knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa*, Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum* and Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, although there are significant areas of Tor Grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* present now.
- The meadows and woodland edges include patches of protected Meadow Clary *Salvia pratensis* – a rare, clump-forming, woody based perennial that is only native to a few sites in southern England.
- Land use is predominantly pastoral grassland, with significant areas of natural and semi-natural habitat including woodland and a common. There is a large arable field on the western side of the LLCA.

- There are a few buildings within the northern part of this LLCA, including Spratt's Farm and a few private dwellings on Witney Lane (some of which lie within the Village Conservation Area boundary). There was once a Scout hut in the eastern side of the LLCA on the upper valley side, accessed via footpath 370/7/10 from Church Fields, and there are plans for this to be re-built on broadly the same site.
- This LLCA is bounded by two roads – Stonesfield Road on its northern boundary, and an unnamed minor road that forms its western boundary. Another minor road, Witney Lane, bisects the northern part of LLCA B. The Stockey Bottom and Banks, and Stonesfield Common LLCA therefore forms part of the rural landscape setting on views east from the unnamed minor road and, along with LLCA A, in views when approaching Stonesfield from the west on Stonesfield Road.
- Spratt's Barn is Grade II listed. Non-designated heritage features include the stone-built dwellings on Witney Lane within the Village Conservation Area, as well as the pastoral fields and their traditional hedgerow pattern on the valley floor and eastern side of the valley.
- The Oxfordshire Way/Wychwood Way long-distance path makes up a short section of the LLCA's eastern boundary and provides long-ranging views across the broad floodplain to the south of the parish.



View from the Oxfordshire Way towards Bagg's Bottom (part of SSSI)



View across the Evenlode from the Evenlode Bridge



View from Stonesfield Common across the floodplain Meadow (within the parish) and broader floodplain



Woodland walk through Beech woodland at Stockey Bottom

Landscape Value

Valued landscape qualities which should be respected:

- Significant natural environment designations including a SSSI and Ancient Woodland.
- The site also lies within the area defined by the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Upper Thames Tributaries) Designation (Amendment) Order 1999.
- Valued habitats include ancient semi-natural Beech-Wych Elm woodland, lowland calcareous grassland and floodplain meadow.
- The pastoral land on the western edge of the village add to the settlement's sense of time depth and survive as remnants of historic traditional field enclosures.
- The River Evenlode and the woodland are easily accessible by a network of public footpaths and provide opportunities for informal recreation. The footpaths provide a variety of experiences, from woodland walks, to open elevated views. This LLCA is appreciated for its amenity value by local people, therefore.
- The Oxfordshire Way/Wychwood Way is valued as a popular long-distance path, and directly links with the village.
- The landscape of the LLCA B forms part of the rural landscape setting for the village and contributes to the special qualities of the Cotswolds National Landscape.

Landscape Sensitivity

The table below shows the valued landscape qualities to respect (see Landscape Value section above), together with the threats and issues currently or potentially affecting them. The following Guidance section makes recommendations on how these special qualities can be managed.

Valued quality	Threats and issues
Significant and important habitats supported by natural environment designations including SSSI.	This LLCA is highly sensitive to development which would impact on its rural character and the importance of its natural environment designations; the village edge setting; open views across the landscape from the minor road, or across the broad floodplain beyond the parish.
Strong rural character that contributes to the special qualities of the Cotswold National Landscape.	
Informal recreation/amenity value of the landscape and varied viewing experience offered by footpaths.	Invasive Blackthorn and Tor Grass threaten the integrity of the open grassland requiring constant control from a group of volunteers. Currently the Common is graded 'Favourable Condition' with no adverse conditions.
Pastoral landscape to the north of the LLCA and along the valley floor and eastern side.	
Some open views and intervisibility with the attractive broad floodplain landscape to the south.	The upper section of Footpath 370/19/10 is occasionally subject to a winterbourne in prolonged wet weather.
Some of the traditional stone-built buildings may be considered undesignated heritage assets that reinforce local vernacular and village character.	<p>Inappropriate development within the highly sensitive pastoral fields to the north and south of Witney Lane, which lie outside of the protection of the SSSI and the Village Conservation Area, would severely impact landscape character and the village's historic landscape setting.</p> <p>Unsensitive conversion, extension or development of traditional buildings can negatively affect Stonesfield's historic landscape setting and settlement character.</p>

Guidance

Protect

- Protect this rural and predominantly undeveloped landscape from inappropriate large-scale or visually-prominent development.
- Ensure that domestic properties maintain appropriate boundary treatments to contain the potential impact of domestic paraphernalia around these properties, and to protect landscape/village character and the public realm.
- Protect the sensitive pastoral land on the edge of the village between Stonesfield Road and Witney Lane from development, as this forms part of the 'soft' approach into the village and the transition into its built environment.
- Protect the alignment and character of the historic paths from alteration or damage.

Manage

- Continue to work with appropriate agencies to manage and protect protected habitats of the SSSI.
- Work with landowners to promote good management of other habitats (e.g. strengthening hedgerows if they become 'gappy').
- Continue to work with Natural England and other interested parties to manage the Common, particularly with regard to invasive species. Seek and establish funding/continue support for local volunteer groups.
- Manage Public Rights of Way, ensuring continued access to the LLCA is not reduced, and that footpaths are safe and enjoyable to use.

Plan

- Seek opportunities to introduce interpretation boards for people to understand and appreciate the importance of the SSSIs habitats.

LLCA C: Stonesfield Inner Fields and Baggs Bottom

Location

This LLCA is located on the north and eastern sides of Stonesfield, and includes predominantly flat, fields that make up the settlement's immediate landscape setting.



A typical view across arable fields within the Stonesfield Inner Fields LLCA, looking west from adjacent to the Oxfordshire Way long-distance footpath. Recent development on the southern side of Stonesfield has created a prominent settlement edge.

Summary

This LLCA comprises a patchwork of predominantly arable fields, mostly large and rectilinear in shape, but with some smaller, more pastoral, fields and grazing paddocks immediately abutting the settlement. The larger field enclosures result in a largely open landscape, with some variation where hedgerow and tree cover closer to the village interrupt otherwise expansive views.

Where hedgerows that formerly divided the arable land have mostly been grubbed out, resulting in today's visually open character, the enclosures immediately on the edge of the village – to the east and south-east of Stonesfield Manor/Church Street – have retained much of their hedgerow vegetation, and therefore their historic field patterns have been preserved. These much smaller fields have a more pastoral character that is distinctive and contrasts with the rest of the LLCA, and they

provide valued 'outward' public views from the settlement edge. The field to the east of Stonesfield Manor/south-east of houses on Combe Road lies within the boundary of the Village Conservation Area.

There are several clumps of trees in fields to the south east of the village on former spoil heaps (known locally as "chipping banks") created by waste material produced during the early slate extraction within the village.

The Stonesfield Inner Fields and Baggs Bottom LLCA is bounded on its south-eastern edge by the Oxfordshire Way long-distance path, an important recreational route that in sections uses the line of the former Roman road, Akeman Street. This affords those using the route clear views towards Stonesfield across the open farmland, putting the Stonesfield Inner Fields firmly in the settlement's rural landscape setting. Recent housing development at Charity Farm has created a hard edge to the village in these views, and additional development will further threaten the integrity of its valued rural character.

To the west of Combe Road the Oxfordshire Way continues south-eastwards where it runs along the top of Baggs Bottom, part of the Stonesfield Common, Bottoms and Banks SSSI. Colonising Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) has in recent years compromised the condition of the SSSI. This section of the SSSI lies on the parish boundary and can be accessed via a footpath (number 173/13/10) that connects with the Oxfordshire Way. South west of Combe Lane the land is included with the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Upper Thames Tributaries) Designation (Amendment) Order 1999 (see section 5.2).

Within the Stonesfield Inner Fields and Baggs Bottom LLCA, to the immediate south-east of Charity Farm, lies the site of a Roman Villa. This is a designated scheduled monument.

The central part of the LLCA includes formal sports pitches and tennis courts to the rear of Stonesfield Village Hall. The area between the sports pitches and Farley Lane has seen recent encroachment by modern large houses at Davis Close. To the north of Farley Lane, recent development at Limbeck Way and The Paddocks has extended the village northwards into open farmland.

Key Characteristics

- Underlying bedrock geology of fissile sandy limestone rock that is characterised by outcrops at the base of the Great Oolite that make it particularly suitable for splitting into roof 'slates'.

- Generally flat topography, with a steady slope down from the north-west to the south-east as part of the wider dip slope. To the south-western extent of the LLCA the landscape becomes more undulating before sloping down more abruptly into the dry valley of Baggs Bottom, a dry tributary of the Evenlode, and part of the Stonesfield Common, Bottoms and Banks SSSI.
- There is a year-round spring that arises half-way down Baggs Bottom and flows into the Evenlode.
- Woodland and tree cover within the LLCA is limited to the clumps of trees on the spoil heaps (“chipping banks”) and on the mature boundaries of the pastoral enclosures to the east and south-east of Stonesfield Manor (some of which is included in the Priority Habitat Inventory for Deciduous Woodland). Other semi-natural habitats include trees, grassland within the pastoral enclosures south/south-east of Stonesfield Manor, and mature hedges. There are no designated wildlife sites, other areas of priority habitat or ancient woodland within the Stonesfield Inner Fields and Baggs Bottom LLCA.
- Land use is predominantly arable production with pockets of recreational (to the rear of the library and village hall) and pastoral (to the east and south-east of Stonesfield Manor). The landscape has a strong rural character.
- There are no buildings within this LLCA, although there are some temporary structures associated with a smallholding to the north of Combe Road, resulting in some ‘visual clutter’.
- This LLCA is bisected by two roads – Combe Road that enters the LLCA from the south-east, and Woodstock Road, that enters from north-east. The Stonesfield Inner Fields therefore forms part of the rural landscape setting when approaching Stonesfield from two of the four roads that converge in the village.
- Historic features include the site of a Roman villa discovered in 1712 to the south-east of the village, just north of the Oxfordshire Way (Akeman Street). When discovered it was found to have four elaborate and well-preserved tessellated pavements, baths, and a hypocaust. However, the site was ploughed over and largely destroyed soon after its discovery.
- Two popular rights of way cross the Stonesfield Inner Fields and Baggs Bottom LLCA: the Oxfordshire Way long-distance footpath (which makes up most of the LLCA’s south-eastern boundary, but also defines the south-western extent of the LLCA) and Farley Lane (bridleway 370/8/30) on the northern edge of the settlement. These show on historic maps and both pre-date Woodstock Road and Combe Road. The route of Farley Lane formerly continued as far as Akeman Street, but the eastern section was severed when Woodstock Road was constructed. The parish boundary still runs along the former route however, now marked by a sinuous field boundary that contrasts with the other regular field boundaries around it.



Open views across the flat landscape



Views across the Bagg's Bottom (part of SSSI)



"Chipping banks" south of village



Pastoral fields south-east of Stonesfield Manor

Landscape Value

Valued landscape qualities which should be respected:

- Open character of the landscape allows long-distance wide views across the Dip Slope Lowlands.
- The landscape of the Stonesfield Inner Fields forms the rural landscape setting for the settlement and contributes to the special qualities of the Cotswolds National Landscape.
- Remaining pockets of pastoral land on the southern edge of the village add to the settlement's sense of time depth and survive as remnants of historic field enclosures.
- These pastoral fields are valued for the 'outward' views they provide from the edge of the village.
- Other historic landscape features include the "chipping banks" to the south of the village, which form a visual link within the LLCA with the past production of roofing slate.
- The Oxfordshire Way (Akeman Street) is an old Roman Road and is valued as a popular stretch of this long-distance footpath.

Landscape Sensitivity

The table below shows the valued landscape qualities to respect (see Landscape Value section above), together with the threats and issues currently or potentially affecting them. The following Guidance section makes recommendations on how these special qualities can be managed.

Valued quality	Threats and issues
Remaining traditional pastoral fields east/south east of Stonesfield Manor.	<p>This LLCA is highly sensitive to development which would impact on its rural character; the village edge setting; open views across the landscape towards the settlement, or ‘outward’ views across the remaining pastoral fields south-east of Stonesfield Manor.</p> <p>Sensitivity to development that would introduce tall vertical elements such as pylons or masts.</p> <p>Development within the remaining smaller-scale pastoral fields to the south and south-east of the village will result in the loss of part of Stonesfield’s historic landscape setting.</p>
Strong rural character that contributes to the special qualities of the Cotswold National Landscape.	
Landscape setting for Stonesfield in views from the Oxfordshire Way long-distance footpath.	
Open views and intervisibility with adjacent Limbeck to Callow Farm Plateau Farmland LLCA, and long-distance views to south west beyond the parish boundary.	
Time depth of landscape where visible links to Stonesfield’s extraction of ‘pendle’ for the production of roof slate survives in the spoil heaps that have remained to the south of the village.	

Guidance

Protect

- Protect this visually-rural and predominantly undeveloped landscape from inappropriate large-scale or visually-prominent development.
- Ensure the visual impact of the recent prominent urban edge created at Charity Farm is not increased, particularly in views from the Oxfordshire Way long-distance footpath.

- Protect the remaining pockets of sensitive pastoral landscape on the village edge from development, particularly to the south and south-east of Stonesfield Manor which is enjoyed by locals in 'outward' views from the village.
- Retain the low density and unobtrusive character of existing residential development at the peripheries of the LLCA.
- Protect the alignment and character of the historic paths from alteration or damage (e.g. re-routing, or removal of earth banks).

Manage

- Work with landowners to promote good habitat management (e.g. strengthening 'gappy' hedgerows, widening field margins), and aim to further extend and link habitats.
- Manage and preserve open views across the Dip Slope Lowland and avoid planting that would compromise the open character of the landscape.
- Survey grassland, mature hedges and woodland/ treed areas on edge of village to identify existing areas of priority habitat which are not currently recorded.
- Manage Public Rights of Way, ensuring access to the LLCA is not reduced, and that footpaths are safe and enjoyable to use.

Plan

- Seek opportunity to create (reinstate) public right of way between Woodstock Road opposite Farley Lane and the Oxfordshire Way (once known as Norton Riding) to create a recreational 'circular' route on the eastern side of the village.
- Seek opportunities to introduce or restore landscape structure adjacent to prominent urban edges on the east and north of the village to create softer edges that will further enhance biodiversity and bioabundance and filter views of development (for example by encouraging new woodland and grassland habitats on the edge of the village).
- Encourage further tree planting and habitat creation from Bagg's Bottom to the Roman Villa as part of the parish's 'blue and green corridor' initiative.
- Plan further roadside tree and hedge planting. Monitor this to ensure successful establishment, replacing diseased or failed stock where necessary.

LLCA D: Limbeck to Callow Farm Plateau Farmland

Location

This LLCA is located on the north/north-eastern side of Stonesfield, immediately beyond the Stonesfield Inner Fields LLCA, and includes a broad tract of flat arable farmland.



After harvest: a typical view across an expansive arable field within LLCA D, looking south west across the plateau.

Summary

The Limbeck to Callow Farm Plateau Farmland LLCA lies immediately north of the Stonesfield Inner Fields and Baggs Bottom LLCA where the landscape opens up into a broad plateau that comprises a modern field system of predominantly arable fields, mostly large and regular in shape. These give the landscape a visually open and uniform character, with little variation across the LLCA (see the various views across the landscape below from adjacent roads and public rights of way). Most of the variation within this LLCA derives from the growth of differing crops, and the seasonal timing of these. Both cereal crops and potatoes are grown extensively in this LLCA.

The landform, although dominated by its unremittingly flat topography, slopes very gently from the north east to the south west, as is consistent with the wider Dip-slope Lowland LCT.

LLCA D is bounded to the west by the minor road of Stonesfield Riding – an historic lane that forms a short section of the Wychwood Way long-distance path. The eastern boundary of the LLCA is marked

by Woodstock Road. This minor, very straight, road dates from 1800 when the Woodstock-Charlbury turnpike road was established north of the parish.

The Shakespeare's Way long-distance route marks the northern extent of LLCA D and affords its users open long-ranging views across the flat farmland. This route is flanked by dense woodland at King's Wood and Wootton Wood immediately to the north, and this affects the visual experience of those using the footpath whose natural inclination is to look across the open land.

The southern extent of LLCA D, where it transitions into the Stonesfield Inner Fields, is marked by mature field boundaries on land north of Farley Lane (within LLCA C) and a section of Bridleway 370/8/30 – a continuation of Farley Lane that historically linked to Akeman Street as 'Norton Riding'. This route was severed by the construction of Woodstock Road.

Woodland and tree cover on the edges of LLCA D visually contains views beyond its boundaries, although there is some intervisibility with farmland to the west and east where the arable land use and field pattern continue.

Although there is little hedgerow cover in the majority of the LLCA, to the south east of Callow Farm (partly on the boundary with LLVA C) there are some surviving older hedgerows with some fine hedgerow trees that partially break up views to the south east when approaching Stonesfield from the north on Stonesfield Riding. However, recent housing development off Farley Lane is visible in places on Stonesfield Riding, and adversely affects the rural landscape character of the LLCA south of Callow Farm.

There are no views of Stonesfield's village edge from the LLCA's adjacent section of Woodstock Road. The lack of visible development reinforces rural character on approaching the village from the north east, and adds to the significance of this LLCA as part of a rural 'buffer' between Stonesfield and the World Heritage Site at Blenheim Palace.

The Limbeck to Callow Farm Plateau Farmland LLCA is bounded on its south-eastern edge by the Oxfordshire Way long-distance footpath, an important recreational route that in sections uses the line of the former Roman road, Akeman Street. This affords those using the route clear views towards Stonesfield across the open farmland, putting the Stonesfield Inner Fields firmly in the settlement's rural landscape setting. Recent housing development at Charity Farm has created a hard edge to the

village in these views, and additional development will further threaten the integrity of its valued rural character.

There are very few buildings within LLCA D, with these being limited to buildings associated with Limbeck Farm at the eastern-most point of the LLCA, accessed via a private road, and Callow Farm on the west of the LLCA, immediately adjacent to Stonesfield Riding. These two farms give the LLCA its name.

There are no statutory heritage or historic environment designations within the Limbeck to Callow Farms Plateau Farmland LLCA.

A small triangle of traditional orchard on the eastern edge of Callow Farm is identified as Priority Habitat, but otherwise there are no natural environment designations within the LLCA. The land provides a habitat for typical arable assemblage farmland birds, including Linnet, Chaffinch, Yellowhammer and Skylark.

Key Characteristics

- Unremittingly flat ground, although with a steady gentle slope down from the north-west to the south-east as part of the wider dip slope.
- Visually open and uniform character, with little variation across the LLCA.
- Woodland and tree cover on the edges of LLCA D visually contains views beyond its boundaries, although there is some intervisibility with farmland to the west and east where the arable land use and field pattern continue.
- Land use is almost uniformly arable production of cereal crops and potatoes. The landscape has a strong rural character.
- Little hedgerow cover but there are some surviving older hedgerows with some fine hedgerow trees to the south east of Callow Farm. These partially break up views to the south east when approaching Stonesfield from the north on Stonesfield Riding.
- Recent housing development off Farley Lane is visible in places on Stonesfield Riding, and adversely affects the rural landscape character of the LLCA south of Callow Farm.
- There are no notable water bodies or watercourses in the Limbeck to Callow Farms Plateau Farmland LLCA.
- Very few buildings within LLCA D, with these being limited to buildings associated with Limbeck Farm and Callow Farm (giving the LLCA its name).

- Aside from a small triangle of traditional orchard at Callow Farm, there are no designated wildlife sites, other areas of priority habitat or ancient woodland within the LLCA.
- This LLCA is bounded by two roads – Stonesfield Riding on its western boundary, and Woodstock Road on its east. Stonesfield Riding is much quieter and is used recreationally by walkers, however the exceptionally straight Woodstock Road, which connects with the B4437 and the A44, can be quite busy with fast-moving traffic and consequently is not popular with walkers and other more vulnerable users.
- The length of Woodstock Road has been recently planted with roadside trees by villagers.
- The Limbeck to Callow Farms Plateau Farmland forms part of the wider rural landscape setting when approaching the Stonesfield from the north and north east.
- There are no significant or designated historic features within the LLCA, and the landscape's time depth is not notably apparent.
- This rural landscape serves as a 'buffer' between Stonesfield and the World heritage Site at Blenheim Palace.
- The Shakespeare's Way long-distance Footpath marks the LLCA's northern boundary, and affords long-ranging open views south across the farmland, reinforcing the landscape's visual sensitivity.



Various open views across fields within the flat landscape of LLCA from adjacent roads and public rights of way

Landscape Value

Valued landscape qualities which should be respected:

- Open character of the Limbeck to Callow Farms Plateau Farmland allows long-ranging open views across the landscape.
- The landscape of the Limbeck to Callow Farms Plateau Farmland forms part of the wider rural landscape setting for Stonesfield and contributes to the special qualities of the Cotswolds National Landscape, particularly that of LCT 11: Dip Slope Lowland.
- Hedgerows and trees on the boundary with LLCA C coalesce to create a well-treed backdrop in views from Shakespeare’s Way and Woodstock Road.
- Other mature field boundaries south east of Callow Farm break up views and partially filter visibility of recent development on Farley Lane.
- The Shakespeare’s Way long-distance path has open views across the rural landscape from the north that are valued and sensitive to change.

Landscape Sensitivity

The table below shows the valued landscape qualities to respect (see Landscape Value section above), together with the threats and issues currently or potentially affecting them. The following Guidance section makes recommendations on how these special qualities can be managed.

Valued quality	Threats and issues
Open character that allows long-ranging open views across the rural landscape – notably from the Shakespeare’s Way long-distance path.	This LLCA is highly sensitive to development which would impact on its rural character, the wider village setting, and open views across the landscape.
Strong rural character that contributes to the special qualities of the Cotswold National Landscape – particularly that of the dip-slope lowland.	Sensitivity to development that would introduce tall vertical elements such as pylons or masts.
Wider landscape setting for Stonesfield on approach from the north/north east.	Further development on the northern edge of Stonesfield could potentially be harmful to LLCA D’s rural landscape character.

Mature field boundary vegetation on the southern edge of the LLCA and south east of Callow Farm that break up views towards the modern settlement edge.

Development that would compromise or diminish the function of mature field boundary vegetation to the south of the LLCA which 'softens' the edge of the village.

Guidance

Protect

- Protect this rural and undeveloped landscape from inappropriate large-scale or visually-prominent development.
- Ensure the visual impact of recent housing built adjacent to Farley Lane is not increased by the construction of further visually prominent development.
- Ensure future development is appropriate in scale and external finishes and sensitively sited so as to minimise it's visual impact on the rural character of the LLCA.

Manage

- Work with landowners to promote good habitat management (e.g. strengthening 'gappy' hedgerows, widening field margins), and aim to further extend and link habitats.
- Manage and preserve open views across the LLCA – particularly from the Shakespeare's Way and avoid planting that would otherwise compromise the open character of the landscape.
- Where roadside trees have been recently planted alongside Woodstock Road, inspect regularly and replace diseased or dead stock as required.

Plan

- Seek opportunities to introduce or restore landscape structure south east of Callow Farm and to the north of Farley Lane to maintain a soft edge to the village that will further enhance biodiversity and bioabundance and filter views of existing development.
- Use planning polices to reduce the potential visual impact of future proposed agricultural buildings, through appropriate design, screening and mitigation.
- Identify suitable locations and plan further village tree planting initiatives.

LLCA E: King's Wood to Kingswood Bottom Wooded Farmland

Location

This LLCA is located on the northern-most part of the parish and principally includes King's Wood and farmland to the north and east of this. The LLCA also includes a narrow tract of farmland between King's Wood and Stonesfield Riding to the west. The open farmland north of King's Wood is visually divorced from the rest of the parish.



A typical view across arable land within LLCA E, looking north from Shakespeare's Way long-distance footpath. Significant areas of woodland visually enclose the landscape.

Summary

The King's Wood to Kingswood Bottom Wooded Farmland LLCA includes open arable farmland that is sandwiched between King's Wood on the south of the LLCA and woodland at Kingswood Bottom on the LCA's and parish's northern boundary (as well as Kingswood Brake, which lies just beyond the parish boundary to the north). The LLCA has a pronounced and strong rural character that contributes to wider landscape character and the special qualities of the Cotswold National Landscape.

A dense line of mature trees that flanks Stonesfield Riding west of King's Wood, and continues along a sinuous boundary north of the B4437 to the west of Kingswood Farm (that is flanked by the

Shakespeare's Way), presents a wooded backdrop to the west of the LLCA that is visually enclosing. This sense of enclosure is reinforced by woodland at Sheer's Copse to the west of Stonefield Riding, outside of the parish.

To the east of the LLCA dense mature vegetation on field boundaries either side of the site of a Roman Villa, and to the north of this at Ditchley Dell, combine with the generally wooded context of the surrounding area beyond the parish boundary (*e.g.* woodland at Glympton Wood, Callowhill Brake and Wootton Wood). This creates a distinct sense of enclosure to the east of Kingswood Farm, and provides much of the wooded context that characterises the LLCA.

The LLCA can be broadly split in two halves: the land to the south of the B4437 which contains King's Wood, is more heavily wooded and is topographically linked with the plateau landscape to the south (LLCA D), whereas the land north of the B4437, which is comprised of open arable fields (although visually contained by the surrounding woodland) forms part of a declivity where the landform dips down towards Kingswood bottom.

The northern part of the LLCA was once part of a much larger Kings Wood that extended as far as the northern parish boundary at Kingswood Bottom, and this itself was once part of the Royal Wychwood hunting forest. It is now rather remote from the rest of the parish, annexed by Kings Wood, and visually enclosed by woodland on all sides.

The Ancient Woodland Inventory for England shows that King's Wood contains both ancient and semi-natural woodland, which includes Priority Habitat Inventory Deciduous Woodland, and Ancient Replanted Woodland (which includes coniferous plantations). Although there is no public access into this woodland, Shakespeare's Way runs along its southern boundary from which there are occasional views into the woodland. Parts of the replanted woodland have been cleared for timber, and these areas have mostly been left to be naturally re-colonised.

A Bugslife 'B-line' crosses the northern part of the LLCA, to the north of the B4437. B-lines are 'insect pathways' that run through our countryside and towns where they link existing wildlife areas together. By restoring and creating a series of wildflower-rich habitats they provide a solution to the problem of the loss of flowers and pollinators, benefiting bees, butterflies and a host of other wildlife.

A section of the Shakespeare's way marks the southern and western boundaries of the LLCA. Sections of this (for example to the west of Kingswood Farm, or to the south of King's Wood) have limited visibility across the LLCA or heavily filtered views – particularly during summer months (for example from the wooded section of Stonesfield Riding), although for short sections views across the open areas are possible above flailed hedgerows or through breaks in the vegetation.

To the east of Kingswood Farm lies the site of a Roman Villa. The site of this designated scheduled monument straddles the B4437 Woodstock to Charlbury road, and was thought to be the site of a small corridor house, possibly dating from the 1st Century. This northern part of Stonesfield parish also lies within the compass of Grim's Ditch, an earthwork erected about the time of the Roman invasion. There are no listed buildings or structures within LLCA E.

Aside from Kingswood Farm, which comprises a large modern replacement dwelling and its garage block, and a small built structure in King's Wood, there are no buildings within this LLCA.

Key Characteristics

- Pronounced and strong rural character that contributes to Stonesfield's wider landscape character and the special qualities of the Cotswold National Landscape.
- King's Wood and surrounding tree cover gives the farmland a wooded landscape context.
- Generally flat topography to the south of the LLCA where the landform continues from the plateau landscape to the south (LLCA D)
- Northern part of the LLCA forms part of a declivity where the landform dips down towards Kingswood bottom.
- The northern half of the LLCA, north of the B4437, is visually divorced from the rest of the parish.
- King's Wood contains both ancient and semi-natural woodland, which includes Priority Habitat Inventory Deciduous Woodland, and Ancient Replanted Woodland (which includes coniferous plantations).
- Land use is predominantly arable production to the north of the B4437, and woodland to the south, some of which has been replanted and managed for timber production.
- There are very few buildings within this LLCA. These include Kingswood Farm, which comprises a large modern replacement dwelling and its garage block, as well as Kingswood Cottage in King's Wood.

- This LLCA is bisected by the B4437 Woodstock to Charbury Road, and bounded to the west by Stonesfield Riding. The B3347 is the only road in the parish classified above a minor road.
- Historic features include the site of a Roman villa to the east of Kingswood Farm. This is a designated scheduled monument. There are no listed buildings or structures within LLCA.
- A section of the Shakespeare's Way long-distance path marks the southern and western boundaries of the LLCA. For short sections of this views above flailed hedgerows or through breaks in the vegetation, across open arable farmland set against a wooded backdrop, forms part of the viewing experience.
- The area is valued for its capacity to appreciate dark skies where there is very little light spill or light pollution from buildings.



Open views across flat fields south of B4437



Views across arable farmland enclosed by woodland



Arable land around Kingswood Farm dips down towards Kingswood Bottom



Site of Roman Villa

Landscape Value

Valued landscape qualities which should be respected:

- The landscape of the King’s Wood to Kingswood Bottom Wooded Farmland forms part of the wider rural landscape setting for the settlement and contributes to the special qualities of the Cotswolds National Landscape.
- Unspoiled strongly-rural character of the LLCA.
- The ‘framed’ farmland views that contrast with the more open views to the south of King’s Wood.
- Little development within the LLLCA.
- King’s wood contains Ancient Woodland that survives from the Wychwood Forest.
- Deciduous woodland Priority Habitat.
- Public access and footpath network, including Shakespeare’s Way long-distance path.
- Dark skies with very little light spill or pollution within the LLCA.

Landscape Sensitivity

The table below shows the valued landscape qualities to respect (see Landscape Value section above), together with the threats and issues currently or potentially affecting them. The following Guidance section makes recommendations on how these special qualities can be managed.

Valued quality	Threats and issues
Strong unspoiled rural character that contributes to the special qualities of the Cotswold National Landscape and Stonesfield wider landscape setting.	This LLCA is highly sensitive to development which would impact on its strong rural character, views across farmland from the B4437, and framed views across the landscape from PRoWs..
Heavily treed with adjacent woodland and well-stocked hedgerows giving the LLCA its wooded character.	Further loss of replanted woodland to felling may reduce the density of King’s Wood.
Undeveloped with only one property of note.	

'Framed' views between woodland across open fields, including from the Shakespeare's Way long-distance path.

Quiet landscape, despite presence of B4437.

Dark skies with very little light spill or pollution

Further development could have a cumulative effect with existing development which has already had an adverse impact on landscape character.

The introduction of new light sources has the potential to impact on the integrity of the area's dark skies (for example flood lights and security lights on the outside of buildings).

Guidance

Protect

- Protect the strong rural character of this undeveloped landscape from inappropriate, large-scale or visually-prominent development.
- Protect against the introduction of lighting sources that will impact the appreciation of dark skies.
- Protect the alignment and character of the historic paths from alteration or damage (e.g. re-routing, or removal of earth banks).
- Protect the edges of woodland from clearance.

Manage

- Work with landowners to promote good habitat management (e.g. strengthening 'gappy' hedgerows, widening field margins), and aim to further extend and link habitats.
- There is a Buglife 'B-Line' that crosses the northern part of this LLCA. Opportunities to create and manage wildflower-rich verges and woodland edges should be sought and encouraged I support of this initiative.
- Manage and preserve glimpsed views across the enclosed arable fields and avoid planting that would compromise the open character of the landscape between the woodland.

- Survey grassland, mature hedges and woodland edges to identify existing areas of priority habitat which may not be currently recorded.
- Manage Public Rights of Way, ensuring access in and around the LLCA is not reduced, and that footpaths are safe and enjoyable to use.
- Maintain belt of deciduous trees around coniferous plantations around King's Wood.

Plan

- Seek opportunities to restore the landscape to further enhance biodiversity and bioabundance (for example by encouraging new hedgerow trees and wildflower habitats on field and woodland margins).

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