

12.36 Neighbourhood plans may seek to designate further valued landscapes at a neighbourhood scale, which are not identified at the district scale. Neighbourhood plans are encouraged to use similar criteria to those set out in this assessment to identify valued landscapes at a neighbourhood scale.

## Landscape

### Policy NH6 – Landscape

- 1) South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse's landscapes, countryside and rural areas will be protected from harmful development. Proposals should be accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment or a Landscape and Visual Appraisal which is proportionate to the level of landscape sensitivity and scale of development.
- 2) Development must appropriately respond to its setting by:
  - a) responding to landscape character (as defined in a Joint South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Landscape Character Assessment, National Character Areas and associated profiles and other relevant Landscape Character Assessments in neighbourhood plans);
  - b) being physically sensitive to and visually integrated into the landscape;
  - c) preserving settlement character and setting; and
  - d) maintaining the physical and visual separation between settlements, with consideration given to cumulative impacts with other existing or proposed development.
- 3) Development will only be permitted where it protects and, where possible, enhances the features and functions that contribute to the nature and quality of the landscape, in particular:
  - a) trees (including individual trees, groups of trees and woodlands), hedgerows and field boundaries;
  - b) irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland and aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland;
  - c) the landscapes, waterscapes, cultural heritage and user enjoyment of the River Thames, its tributaries and flood plains;

- d) other watercourses and waterbodies, including globally rare chalk streams;
  - e) topographical features;
  - f) areas or features of cultural and historic value, including historic landscape patterns;
  - g) good quality views and visually sensitive skylines, including the Oxford View Cones<sup>a</sup> and their backdrops / settings; and
  - h) aesthetic and perceptual factors such as tranquility, wildness, intactness, rarity and enclosure.
- 4) Where appropriate, development should consider opportunities to enhance and restore damaged and/or poor-quality landscapes, features and functions.

<sup>a</sup> Oxford City Council (2015) *Assessment of the Oxford View Cones*, available at: [www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20064/conservation/876/oxford\\_views\\_study](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20064/conservation/876/oxford_views_study)

12.37 Landscapes have multifaceted benefits, impacting the environment and society through, among other things, providing views, contributing to biodiversity and providing the opportunity to get out from built up areas into nature through the Public Rights of Way network. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse are mainly rural districts. The quality and character of the countryside, and its relationship with settlements, is a key part of what makes the districts such desirable places to live, work and visit.

12.38 Policy NH6 (Landscape) manages development in a way that protects and enhances what makes our districts special. This includes identifying specific landscape functions and features that should be protected and enhanced, protecting the setting of settlements and separation between settlements, and encouraging enhancement of damaged and/or poor quality landscapes. To assess and determine whether a development responds appropriately to its setting, the councils will use the evidence base on the districts' landscape which includes the Landscape Character Assessment<sup>96</sup>, National Character Areas and associated profiles and other relevant Landscape Character Assessments in neighbourhood plans. We would expect development proposals to be accompanied by discussion of the impacts on landscape through a proportionate Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment or Landscape and Visual Appraisal.

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<sup>96</sup> The Landscape Character Assessment (September 2024) splits the districts into distinct Landscape Character Areas which are shown on our Policies Map.

## Tranquillity

### Policy NH7 – Tranquillity

- 1) Development proposals should conserve and enhance tranquillity, protecting areas which are prized as relatively most tranquil (zone 1 in the Tranquillity Assessment), through demonstrating consideration of impacts on tranquillity<sup>a</sup> as appropriate to the zone. Development proposals within all tranquillity zones should protect and enhance features which are referenced as contributing positively to tranquillity at their location, as well as incorporating features to reduce negative factors; as shown within the Tranquillity Assessment.
- 2) In determining planning applications, the following factors will be considered:
  - a) visual and aural impacts;
  - b) direct and indirect impacts; and
  - c) impacts on users of the Public Right of Way network and other publicly accessible locations.
- 3) Proposals that are likely to negatively impact on tranquillity, with reference to the factors that increase or detract from tranquillity, should demonstrate the ways in which tranquillity has been designed into the development by seeking to (a) avoid and (b) minimise impacts through appropriate mitigation.
- 4) Development in areas with lower levels of relative tranquillity should take opportunities to enhance tranquillity where these exist (for example through high quality design and the provision of green infrastructure).

<sup>a</sup> Making use of the User Guidance within the Tranquillity Assessment

12.39 Tranquillity is related to the feeling of calm and connection to nature experienced in places with lots of natural features and few disturbances from manmade features. For example, places where natural sounds such as birdsong or flowing water are more prominent than background noise from traffic. Tranquillity adds to sense of place and landscape character, as well as having benefits for human health and for nature. For many people, the Covid-19 pandemic emphasised the importance of local access to tranquil places, including within the urban environment.