

The South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment has been produced to support the Council's criteria-based landscape and other environmental policies in the Local Plan and has been adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), to help in the implementation of landscape conservation and enhancement policies, in particular L1, but also L2, L5, D1 and other environmental policies. It is also intended to provide a framework for other environmental initiatives.

The Council expects planning applications to demonstrate how the Landscape Character Assessment has been taken into account in development proposals.

The Council's move away from local landscape designations to a criteria based approach to landscape and other policies, to meet its overall objective with respect to landscape policy, 'to conserve and enhance the character, diversity, natural beauty and amenity of the landscape of South Gloucestershire for its own sake and to improve degraded areas', is in line with national and regional guidelines.

The Council believes that adopting a character-based approach provides a robust and clearly justified set of landscape policies for the entire Council area, rather than just for areas previously protected by local landscape designations. This accords both with best practice and with PPS 7. The Landscape Character Assessment is considered to be an important tool in this approach.

The Landscape Character Assessment provides a statement of the existing character of the landscapes of South Gloucestershire and their distinctive attributes and features, subdividing the Authority area into 8 character types and 21 landscape character areas. It also contains an assessment of the present condition of the landscape, recent and potential future changes including land use/management and built development and the sensitivity of the landscape to future change.

The Landscape Character Assessment has been prepared in accordance with the Countryside Agency's Interim Landscape Character

Assessment Guidance (1999). Towards the concluding stages of the draft report, the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002) became available and was used to inform the draft and final report.

The initial assessment, carried out by Chris Blandford Associates, involved a desk study to review the existing landscape, based on written sources, map based data and previous assessments and was followed by extensive field survey work.

In parallel, community involvement was initiated through a Photographic Survey of the Landscapes of South Gloucestershire, which all the parishes and non-parished areas of South Gloucestershire participated in. The wealth of information gathered from this wide-ranging local involvement was merged with the initial baseline study, firstly by Cooper Partnership and subsequently by South Gloucestershire's Planning and Environment officers, to produce the draft Landscape Character Assessment.

Further community involvement, through workshops and the formal consultation process in 2002, have resulted in significant changes to the draft report, to produce a Landscape Character Assessment which has benefited greatly from local knowledge, improving both the accuracy of the information it contains and adding substantially to the level of detail.

The development of the Landscape Strategy is intended to follow on from the adoption of the Landscape Character Assessment. This will build upon the initial stakeholder workshops held in 2002. The Landscape Strategy will supplement the Landscape Character Assessment and is intended to guide the future evolution of the landscapes of South Gloucestershire, through both development and other initiatives. It will identify the scope and prioritisation for conservation and enhancement of the character of each of the 21 landscape character areas identified in this Landscape Character Assessment. It is anticipated that the Landscape Strategy will also be adopted as SPD in support of the implementation of Local Plan environmental policies, especially L1, L2, L5 and D1.

Both documents will assist South Gloucestershire Council, statutory and non-statutory agencies, landowners and managers in carrying out their development control, planning, management and conservation functions within South Gloucestershire, as well as providing the basis for other environmental initiatives and funding.

This Landscape Character Assessment report is divided into four key sections:

Section One: Introduction provides information on the overall landscape character assessment, policy context, background, development of the Landscape Character Assessment and a brief introduction to the landscapes of South Gloucestershire.

Section Two: Landscape Evolution presents the background information on the landscapes of South Gloucestershire, its historic and recent evolution and potential future changes. Section Two informs the characterisation of South Gloucestershire.

Section Three: Character Overview describes and illustrates the division of the landscape into a hierarchy of discrete areas.

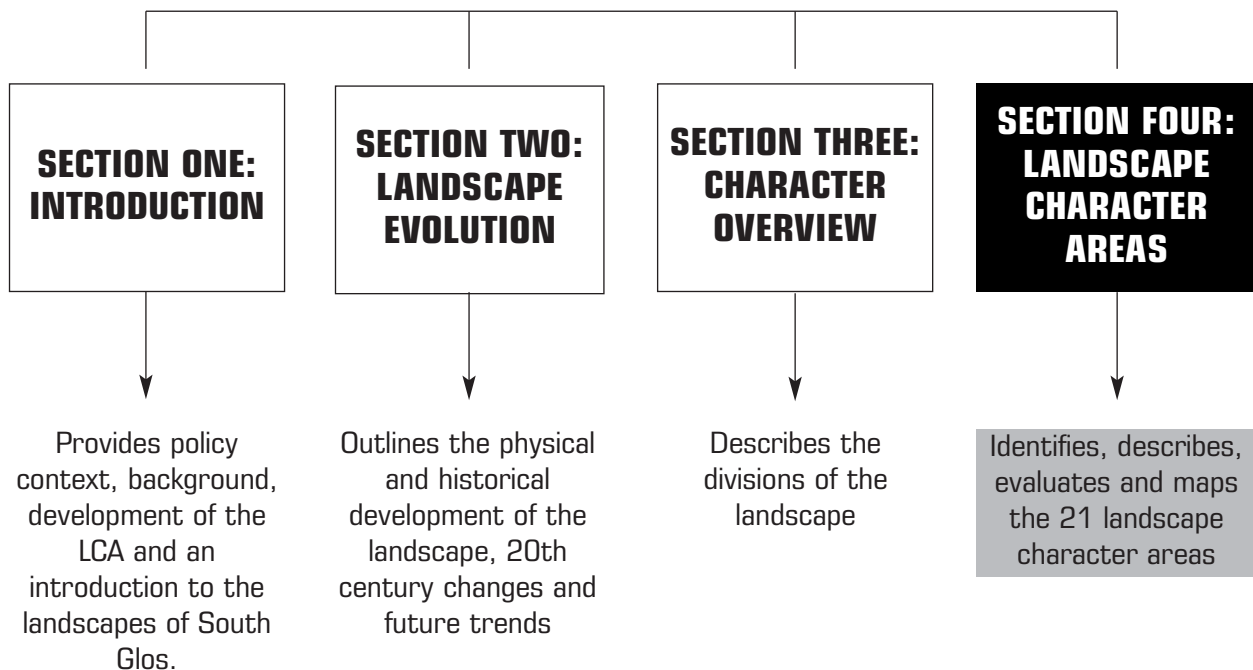
Section Four: Landscape Character Areas provides detailed information on all the 21 landscape character areas within South Gloucestershire.

In addition, Appendices provide information on the Approach and Methodology, Conformity with Statement of Community Involvement, including stakeholder involvement and the Sustainability Appraisal, as well as an example of the site survey form.

The structure of the report is illustrated below.

Some members of the public may primarily be interested in one or more landscape character areas in Section Four, that relate to their local area. To help those people who wish to relate character areas to parishes, a separate map has been produced, which shows parish boundaries in relation to landscape character areas. This is available from the Council.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT OF SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE



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The front cover is a made up of photographs taken by local people within each parish of South Gloucestershire, as part of the Landscapes of South Gloucestershire 2000 photographic survey.



Section One

Introduction

This section introduces the landscape character assessment, provides the policy context, briefly describes the development of the assessment and introduces the landscapes of South Gloucestershire.

1.1 The Landscape Character Assessment

The South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment has been produced primarily to support the Council's policies relating to landscape conservation and enhancement and is intended to provide information to help in the implementation of a range of criteria-based environmental policies within the Local Plan. It will also provide a framework for other environmental initiatives.

The Landscape Character Assessment provides a statement of the character of South Gloucestershire's landscapes, their distinctive attributes and features, together with an assessment of the changes that are taking place in the landscape. It has been prepared in accordance with both the Countryside Agency's Interim Landscape Character Assessment Guidance (1999) and the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage's Landscape Character Assessment, Guidance for England and Scotland (2002) and is also in accordance with Planning Policy Statement (PPS 7).

1.2 Policy Context

South Gloucestershire's Local Plan Adopted January 2006 (subsequently referred to as the Local Plan or SGLP), includes a range of policies concerned with the conservation and enhancement of the landscapes across the Authority area, including L1, L2, L5 and D1. In particular, L1 sets out the Council's policy for the protection and enhancement of all the landscapes within the Plan area:

Policy L1 states that:

In order that the character, distinctiveness, quality and amenity of the landscapes of south Gloucestershire are conserved and enhanced, new development will be permitted only where:

- A. Those attributes of the landscape which make a significant contribution to the character of the landscape are conserved and where possible enhanced; and
- B. Those features in or of the landscape which make a significant contribution to the character or distinctiveness of the locality are retained, protected and managed in a manner which ensures their long-term viability; and
- C. The amenity of the landscape is conserved and where possible enhanced.






The council will seek to negotiate the provision of works to restore, maintain and where possible enhance the landscape in a manner which contributes to the character, quality, distinctiveness and amenity of the locality within which the development is located.

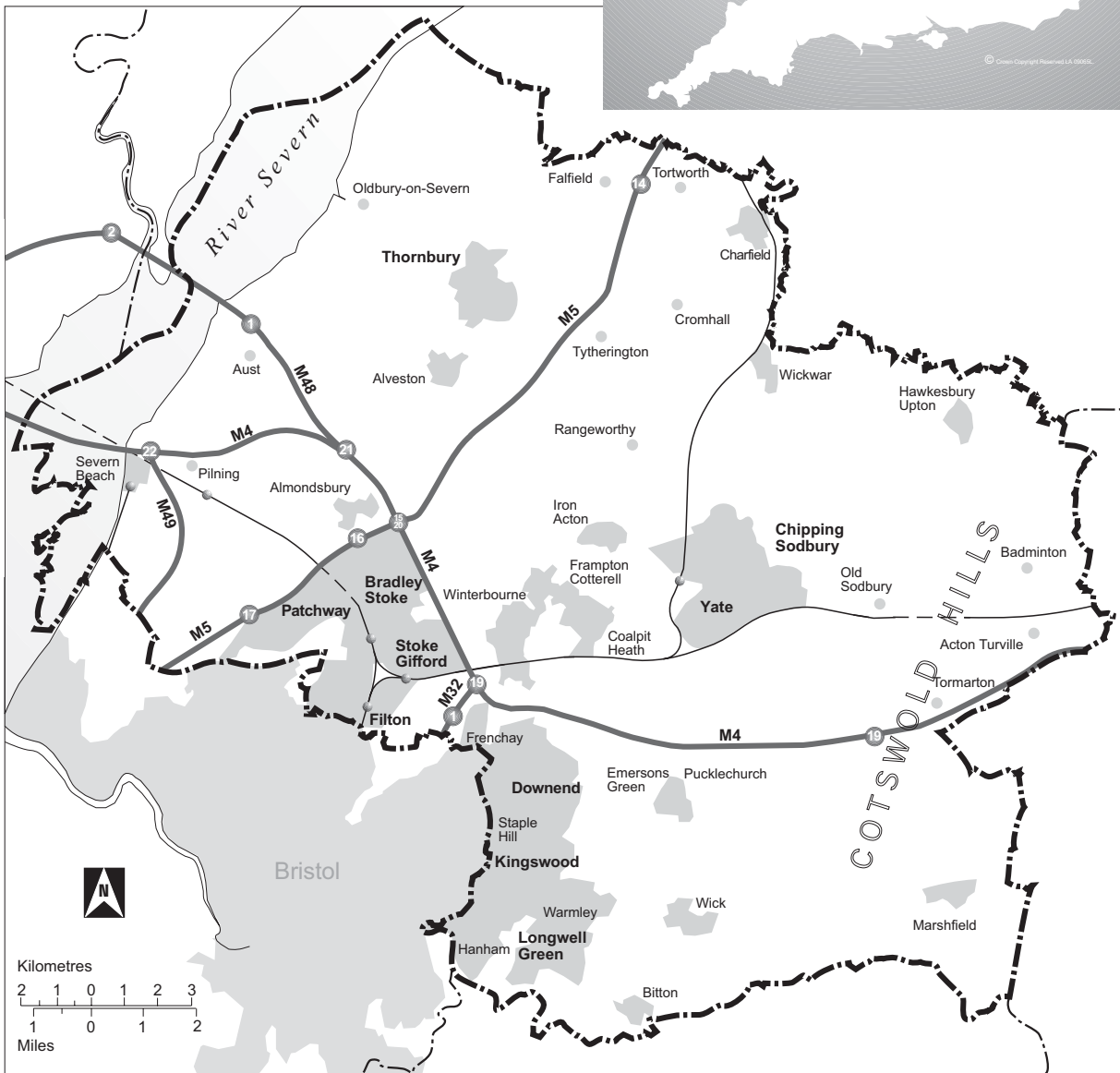
In the context of a degraded landscape, or one where the character has been eroded, the council will expect the development to contribute to the regeneration and restoration of landscape character and distinctiveness as well as visual amenity.

South Gloucestershire's Landscape Character Assessment is specifically referred to in para. 4.17 of policy L1.

It states that the document will provide the broad context for development proposals and will be used when assessing the appropriateness and / or the impact of proposals for development.

Figure 1 - Context

-  South Gloucestershire Boundary
-  Urban Area
-  M4 Motorway
-  Railway Line/Station
-  Adjacent Authority Boundaries



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The Council will therefore expect planning applications, whether outline or detailed, to demonstrate how the Landscape Character Assessment has been taken into account in the development of proposals. Para 4.18 however, states that developers will still need to carry out their own more detailed landscape and visual assessment for a particular site, at an appropriate scale and level of detail.

The policies in the Local Plan will be saved as part of the Local Development Framework for three years from adoption, or until they are superseded by new development plan documents. The Landscape Character Assessment has been adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to support policies within the SGLP, in accordance with the guidance in PPS 12 Local Development Frameworks.

1.3 Background to a character-based approach to Landscape Policy

The Council has endorsed the Countryside Agency's definition of landscape, which acknowledges that as well as the visual appearance of the land, there are whole ranges of other dimensions which affect the way in which it has been formed and continues to be experienced and valued. These include geology, topography, soils, ecology, archaeology, landscape history, land use, architecture and cultural associations (para. 4.11 SGLP).

The Council's overall objective in respect of the landscape, that is to conserve and enhance the character, diversity, natural beauty and amenity of the landscape for its own sake and to improve degraded areas, represents a move away from local landscape designations, to a character-based approach to landscape policy, in line with national and regional guidelines.

i. National and Regional Planning Policy context

National planning policy is contained within Planning Policy Guidance notes (PPGs), or since

2004, in Planning Policy Statements (PPSs).

PPS 7 Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, states that the Government's overall aim is to protect the countryside for the sake of its intrinsic character and beauty, the diversity of its landscapes, heritage and wildlife. Although the Government recognises and accepts that there are areas of landscape, outside nationally designated areas, that are particularly highly valued locally, it still believes that carefully drafted, criteria-based policies, using tools such as landscape character assessments, should provide sufficient protection for these areas, without the need for rigid local designations.

One of the key principles identified in PPS 7 is that all development in rural areas should be in keeping and scale with its location and sensitive to the character of the countryside and local distinctiveness.

This Landscape Character Assessment was prepared in accordance with PPG 7 The Countryside – Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development (England) 1997, which predated PPS 7, in which the Government first endorsed an all-embracing character approach to landscape and called on local authorities to fundamentally reassess the use of local landscape designations.

PPS 1 Delivering Sustainable Development, also endorses protection and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, the quality and character of the countryside. It states that local planning authorities should seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness through clear plan policies and SPDs on design.

Regional planning policy is provided within Regional Planning Guidance notes (RPGs). For the South West, this is RPG 10 (Sept. 2001) which states the importance of the diversity of landscapes in the region to quality of life and, the need to integrate environmental protection with other policy objectives (para. 4.1 - 4.2). Policy EN 1 states that local authority plans should aim to conserve and enhance local landscape character, plan the protection and enhancement of landscapes within new development and take measures to protect the character of the countryside and the environmental features that contribute towards that character. Policy EN 4 applies policies of protecting and enhancing

distinctiveness, character and sense of place to urban and urban fringe locations, and includes specific mention of the contribution that landscape features and areas can make to this.

ii. Structure Plan

The landscape policies in the Joint Replacement Structure Plan are formulated on this character-based approach, requiring Local Plans to identify landscape character areas, using a characterisation approach and to identify landscape features and elements which make a significant contribution to character and distinctiveness of the locality. The relevant policies in the Plan (adopted in 2002) are Policy 3 and 17.

iii. Local Plan

In the light of PPG 7, Chris Blandford Associates were commissioned in 1999, by the Authority, to undertake a study to inform the emerging Local Plan's landscape policies (Landscape Designations Study Technical Report June 1999). The study was based on a comparative review of good practice, since PPG 7 was being interpreted in different ways around the country. This study concluded that adopting a character-based approach, based on the use of landscape assessments, would provide a robust and clearly justified set of landscape policies for the entire Council area, rather than just for the areas that were previously protected by local landscape designations. They advised that this approach accorded with both best practice and PPG 7.

The main reasons for their conclusions were that:

- Landscape policies should be a mechanism for managing change in the countryside as a whole and not simply a mechanism for protecting the areas of highest landscape value through designation.
- Protecting the "best bits" can devalue the landscapes outside the designated areas through concentrating development in them.
- Local designations had been consistently criticised by inspectors nationally on the basis that many are confusing, misleading or inadequately justified.

The report also concluded that understanding local landscape character, through a formal landscape assessment is an essential pre-requisite for the identification of the particular landscape characteristics which need to be protected conserved and enhanced.

The South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment is therefore considered to be an important tool in the implementation of character-based landscape and other environmental policies in the Local Plan.

1.4 Other relevant guidance and policies

As landscape character is, by definition, the result of the interaction of many physical and human factors (para. 1.3), there are many national, regional and local policies, that will either have an influence on landscape character, or be affected by policy objectives to conserve and enhance the landscape character and local distinctiveness in their implementation. The Landscape Character Assessment will therefore inform and support the application of landscape, conservation, countryside and design policies contained within a wide range of planning policies, from national policy and guidance through to Local Plan policies.

The following identifies some of these policies, but by no means represents an exhaustive list:

a) National Policy

PPG 15 Planning and the Historic Environment (England) 1994 states "The physical survivals of our past are to be valued and protected for their own sake, as a central part of our cultural heritage and our sense of national identity. Their presence adds to the quality of our lives, by enhancing the familiar and cherished local scene and appearance of our towns, villages and countryside".

PPG 16 Archaeology and Planning 1990 states that today's archaeological landscape is the product of human activity over thousands of years. Where nationally important archaeological remains, whether scheduled or not, and their settings are affected by proposed

development there should be a presumption in favour of their preservation in-situ.

b) Structure Plans

- Policy 1 - Key Principles of Sustainable Development
- Policy 2 – Locational Strategy
- Policy 3 – Strategic Environmental Principles

Proposals for all development or land use change will be required to conserve and enhance environmental assets which make a significant contribution to character and distinctiveness, as well as those recognised through designation.

- Policy 16 – Green Belt
- Policy 17 – Landscape

Continued conservation and enhancement of character and distinctiveness of the landscape and restoration or regeneration of degraded landscapes. Local plans to identify landscape character areas.

- Policy 21 – Forest of Avon

To assist in achieving the objectives of the Forest of Avon through strategic land use policies. Development conditions or planning obligations may be used to ensure development respects and contributes to woodland setting.

- Policy 22 – The Coast
- Policy 27 – Mineral Extraction

c) Local Plan

- Policy D1 – Achieving Good Quality Design in New Development
- Policy L1 - Landscape Protection and Enhancement
- Policy L2 - Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Policy L3 - Coastal Zone
- Policy L4 - Forest of Avon
- Policy L5 - Open Areas within the Existing Urban Areas and Defined Settlements
- Policy L6 to L9 - Sites of International and National Nature Conservation Interest,

Sites of Regional and Local Nature Conservation Interest & Species Protection

- Policy L10 - Historic Parks and Gardens and Battlefields
- Policy L11 - Archaeology
- Policy L12 - Conservation Areas
- Policy L13 - Listed Buildings
- Policy L16 - Protecting the Best Agricultural Land
- Policy L17 & L18 - The Water Environment
- Policy EP3 - Coastal Defences
- Policy GB1 - Development within the Green Belt
- Policy GB2 – Proposed Expansion of the Green Belt: Land at Abbots Road, Hanham
- Policy LC10 - Quiet Enjoyment of the Countryside

1.5 Development of the Landscape Character Assessment

Chris Blandford Associates were commissioned in 1999 to produce a baseline assessment of the landscape character of South Gloucestershire. This involved both a desktop study and field survey which was carried out in two main stages:

Characterisation: The classification of the landscapes of South Gloucestershire into a hierarchy of landscape character types and areas, with a distinct and recognisable character, set within a national and regional context. As a result of this process, South Gloucestershire was divided into 8 landscape character types and 21 landscape character areas, with a description of the physical features and attributes which make these areas distinct.

Evaluation: Informed judgements were then made to analyse and evaluate each area, looking at their landscape condition, recent changes and potential future trends for change, together with the sensitivity of areas to various

types and levels of future change including land use, management and development changes.

In parallel with the production of baseline Landscape Character Assessment, stakeholder involvement formed a key aspect in the landscape characterisation process. This involved the participation of local people at parish level throughout the South Gloucestershire area, by them summarising in photographic and descriptive form the key characteristics and features of their local landscape. This Photographic Survey of the Landscapes of South Gloucestershire took place in 2000 and was concluded by an exhibition of the results.

Following this stakeholder involvement, information from the extensive photographic survey, which had provided a wealth of additional detail, was merged with the initial baseline survey. This was commenced by Cooper Partnership consultants in 2001 and completed by officers within South Gloucestershire Council, to produce the draft Landscape Character Assessment report, which was issued for public consultation in August 2002.

As a result of the many responses to the consultation process, the draft report has been reviewed and substantial amendments incorporated into the Landscape Character Assessment, to produce a final document with both a greater degree of accuracy and level of detail than the draft, particularly reflected in the 21 landscape character areas.

Further details of the approach and methodology of this Landscape Character Assessment are included in Appendix A.

Details of the stakeholder involvement and public consultation process in the development of the Landscape Character Assessment are included at Appendix B.

1.6 Scope of the Landscape Character Assessment

The Landscape Character Assessment is primarily intended as a study of the rural landscapes of South Gloucestershire. The landscape character of the urban edges and their influence on the character of the adjoining rural areas is also covered. In addition, the principal characteristics and features of the urban areas within South Gloucestershire are also included for completeness, with respect to open spaces, landscape framework and built fabric, although a detailed assessment of the urban areas is not included.

1.7 Landscape Strategy

Further to the adoption of the Landscape Character Assessment, it is proposed to develop a Landscape Strategy for South Gloucestershire, which is intended to guide the future evolution of the landscapes of South Gloucestershire, both through development and other initiatives. It will identify the scope of and prioritisation for the conservation and enhancement of the character of each of the 21 landscape character areas identified in this report, based primarily upon the key characteristics and issues relating to landscape change, as well as identifying restoration projects and application for funding. The development of the strategy will build upon the initial stakeholder workshops held in 2002.

It is intended that the Landscape Strategy will also be adopted as SPD, following public consultation on the draft document and will be used in the implementation of Local Plan policies, particularly policies L1, L2, L5 and D1. Developers will therefore be required to show how the Landscape Strategy has been used to inform their proposals for conservation and enhancement of the character, distinctiveness and diversity of the local landscape.

1.8 Introduction to South Gloucestershire's Landscapes

South Gloucestershire is a large unitary authority covering approximately 49,700 hectares. It is situated along and includes part of, the Severn Estuary to the west and the Cotswolds to the east. To the south it encompasses the urban fringes of Bristol. The context is illustrated on Figure 1.

South Gloucestershire is bordered by Gloucestershire to the north, Wiltshire to the east, Bristol and Bath and North East Somerset to the south. South Gloucestershire also has both physical and visual connections with Monmouthshire to the west via the two Severn Bridge crossings and views across the Severn Estuary.

The South Gloucestershire area has a predominately rural, agricultural landscape greatly influenced by large scale scarp, ridges, vales, levels and estuary landforms / regional features, overlain by a variety of land cover, in places comprising unique natural or historic features. The landscapes of South Gloucestershire have many contrasts ranging from the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Severn Estuary (SSSI), to the urban landscape within the edge of Bristol. Here the landscape is undergoing significant change, with recent large areas of new residential, industrial and commercial development, such as Bradley Stoke, Emerson's Green and Kingswood, as well as the large retail and commercial development at Cribbs Causeway.

There are also a number of towns, such as Yate and Thornbury, and numerous villages and hamlets scattered throughout South Gloucestershire. In addition, the relics of historic settlement and the industrial past texture the landscape of the area. These introduce their own individual characteristics and are particularly sensitive to development pressures.

The economic growth of Bristol and the resultant expansion of its urban fringes exert a considerable influence and pressure for development over South Gloucestershire.

Development pressures are also associated with the main transportation corridors, particularly adjacent to the M4, M5 and their junctions and the intersection of the railway lines.

The M4, M5, M32, M48 and M49 all cross South Gloucestershire, as do rail links to Gloucester, Bristol, Cardiff, Birmingham and London, which provide rapid national and international access. In combination, these make South Gloucestershire an important transport hub.

A number of major long distance recreational routes also cross South Gloucestershire, including the Cotswold Way, the Severn Way and Jubilee Way (the latter two both have links to the Offa's Dyke path across the Severn) and from South Wales, the Monarch's Way. Other important inland recreational routes include the Community Forest Path, the Dramway, Frome Valley and Avon Valley Walkways.



Section Two

Landscape Evolution

Outlines the physical and historical development of the landscape in South Gloucestershire, including 20th century changes and considers potential future trends in landscape change.

2.1 Development of the Landscape

South Gloucestershire has a diverse and varied landscape. The present day landscape is a reflection of natural elements and processes and man's influence, both historically and more recently.

A review of the variations in the physical factors of geology, soils, topography and drainage, how these have influenced landscape character and man's influence upon it, through agricultural practices and settlement pattern in particular, often driven by economic demands.

Present evidence of historic evolution can be subtle, resulting from archaeology, cultural associations and landscape history, but still influence the way the landscape is perceived today. Other influences, such as settlement, infrastructure, communications and mineral exploitation are more obvious and have left more significant evidence within the landscape. 20th century commercial, residential and light industrial development, as well as changes in agricultural practice, have also had a marked effect on the more recent evolution of the landscape and the character of the landscape today.

The importance of the physical and historical features is often reflected in their national, regional or local designations, outlined in the Local Plan or in other written sources (refer to Section 1).

Their designation could reflect their cultural, ecological and/or landscape value.

The physical features and elements in the landscapes across South Gloucestershire are discussed and illustrated below, together with the historical and 20th century landscape influences. The subsequent analysis of the

landscape components form the basis for a definition of landscape character types and landscape character areas (Section 3). This section also discusses broadly some of the known changes and potential changes which may affect the continuing evolution of the landscape and, therefore, its landscape character, in the 21st century.

2.2 Landscape Context

2.2.1 Geology and Soils

Geologically South Gloucestershire is one of the most varied districts in Britain. From the dramatic Cotswold scarp and limestone plateau to the east, through the limestone and sandstone ridges further west containing the Coal Measure vales, to the estuarine alluvium deposits around the Severn, the diversity of geological deposits and the natural processes which have acted upon them, have a major influence on landscape appearance and character. The geology is illustrated in Figure 2.

The Cotswold scarp and plateau forms a significant upland landform in the eastern part of South Gloucestershire. Running from Chipping Campden to Bath and overlooking the lower vales and the Severn, it consists of both Inferior and Great Oolite Limestone. The Great Oolite overlies the Inferior Oolite and includes a number of formations, including Fullers Earth, Fullers Earth Rock and Forest Marble, which combine to form a wide tableland that slopes down to the east and south. The Inferior Oolite emerges to the west of the Great Oolite plateau and forms an indented scarp. The softness of the limestone creates a steep slope, often divided by deep valleys. This forms a natural boundary between the ridges and vales to the west.

On the limestone, many of the soils are derived directly from the parent rock and tend to be alkaline and of low fertility. Thin, well aerated, brashy soils are common. More fertile, deeper clayey soils of alluvial or glacial origin are present on the valley floors, along the scarp and on lower lying land to the south and east.

To the west of the scarp, approximately running through Pucklechurch and Wickwar, a low ridge extends irregularly through the area. This consists of Lias Limestone and Triassic Sandstone to the south, with a mixture of these and Carboniferous Limestone emerging to the north. The ridge slopes down into the shallow basins and vales of the Bristol basin to the west. The lower ground to the west of this ridge consists largely of Coal Measures, known collectively as the Bristol Coalfield.

The Coal Measures are present in a very contorted form, divided by bands of limestone and sandstone, their complex pattern strongly affecting the development of the former coal industry.

On the Coal Measures, soils are more acidic and tend towards slowly permeable, loamy soils.

The western edge of the Bristol basin is formed by another ridge extending irregularly through the area around Almondsbury, roughly parallel with the Severn, composed of a mix of Carboniferous Limestone, Devonian Sandstones, silts and conglomerates. The predominantly soft nature of these rocks gives rise to areas of low relief. The low relief is, however, broken occasionally by undulating ridges, created by outcrops of harder rocks such as Carboniferous Limestone. Carboniferous Limestone also surrounds the northern part of the Bristol Coalfield, extending from Over, north eastwards to Tortworth and then southwards to Chipping Sodbury. It is then concealed by newer rocks, except in small inliers near Codrington and Wick. West of Bristol, Carboniferous Limestone forms high ground which extends southwards towards Portishead.

Interbedded with the Carboniferous Limestone are areas of Devonian Old Red Sandstone and marine shale, which form a grouping of sedimentary rocks. These result in a number of

small inliers north east of Thornbury, that form regular hills and indicate a period of fluctuating shorelines. The limestone-derived soils are shallow and are predominantly Brown Rankers and Argillic Brown Earths. On the sandstone, soils have a tendency towards a higher clay and loam content, with associated poor drainage.

To the west, the undulating landscape falls away to the flat Levels surrounding the Severn Estuary. The Levels consist of estuarine alluvium, although there are some minor outcrops of limestone and sandstone which provide some topographical relief in the form of isolated outliers.

The soils on the Levels, over the permeable alluvium, are loamy gleys, which were formed from periodic waterlogging by a fluctuating water table.

2.2.2 Topography and Drainage

The underlying geology affects the varied topography and drainage patterns of South Gloucestershire. The topography and drainage patterns are illustrated in Figure 3.

The Cotswold plateau forms the highest part of South Gloucestershire, its height approximately 180 to 240 metres above ordnance datum (a.o.d). The plateau falls gently eastwards, forming a dip slope, with occasional stream courses creating shallow valleys and a low undulating landform. West of the plateau, the landform drops suddenly and steeply at the scarp edge and forms an abrupt face of limestone and Lias Clay. These slopes have been eroded in places, along strong vertical joints, forming small valleys. Owing to the solubility of limestone, such tracts are usually waterless, or are subject to seasonal flow over parts of their course. Also, surface water, when reaching the limestone plateau, often plunges underground through "swallets" or "slockers" and runs through subterranean passages and caverns, finally emerging in springs at the foot of the scarp slope.

From the foot of the scarp, the topography changes to a more gently sloping and undulating ridge, which runs approximately north to south from Wickwar to Pucklechurch. The ridge then falls, often quite steeply, to a concave vale to the west with occasional outcrops of higher ground. Surrounded by ridges and bisected by

numerous streams and tributaries, the vale is quite well contained by surrounding topography. To the south, the vale leads into a series of deep, wide valleys leading towards the River Avon. The drainage of these areas is, however, relatively simple. Practically all rivers and their tributaries flow southwards into the River Avon, before entering the Severn Estuary.

To the west, enclosing the vale and shallow valley landscapes, the topography rises again to another ridge running north to south in the vicinity of Almondsbury. This ridge, although broad and shallow, forms a backdrop to the largely flat, uniform Levels on the shores of the Severn. Minor rivers and streams flow roughly westwards from the ridge towards the Levels.

The Levels consist of a generally flat, gently sloping area, punctuated with occasional low hills. Throughout the Levels the complex network of natural and man-made drainage features, including tidal pills, rhines, streams and drainage ditches, unify the area. These generally flow westwards into the estuary. A sea wall or bund separates the agricultural levels from the fluctuating shoreline, created by the high tidal range of the estuary.

2.2.3 Land Use, Farming Pattern and Vegetation

The variations in land use, farming patterns and vegetation cover, are a function of the complex interrelationship of physical factors, including geology, soils, drainage and microclimate, as well as human influences, which have affected historic land use, settlement and farming practices.

The open and exposed Cotswold plateau is dominated by large, regular fields of mainly arable use. The fields are divided by a mix of Cotswold stone walls, many of which are now in a state of disrepair and linear bands of trees. The plateau also contains a patchwork of woodlands, plantations and copses, often of beech. The extensive Badminton Estate has exerted a particular influence over the land use and vegetation pattern of the northern part of the plateau, with historic parkland and woodland covering large areas.

Linear woodland, often of beech, extends along the Cotswold scarp, supplemented by linear

tree belts and copses. These sit amongst the largely pastoral fields on the scarp slope. Incised valleys, which cut into the scarp, often contain mixed broadleaf woodland of oak, ash and sycamore.

A number of historic parklands also occur, often associated with these valley features.

These well wooded valleys extend into the patchwork of arable and pastureland on the shallow ridge and broad valleys and vales, leading west and south from the upland plateau and scarp. Some areas of unenclosed common, used for rough grazing, are also scattered between the enclosed agricultural land and woodland.

Further west, the lower land is characterised by a mix of both arable and improved grassland, divided by trimmed hedges, linear bands of trees or fencing. Woodland is generally limited, although the numerous woodlands comprising Wetmoor Woods are extensive. To the north west of Wickwar, there are also areas of mature, ornamental and native planting with a parkland character.

These low lying areas often have a varied land use, particularly close to the urban areas, with recreational uses such as golf courses and playing fields prevalent.

The mixed farmland, interspersed with a strong recreational land use, such as playing fields, continues to and along the northern boundaries of Bristol. Bristol is intersected by a number of wide valleys that lead towards the River Avon, which are often characterised by linear, tree clad streams.

To the west, the heavily treed ridge, roughly between Thornbury and Almondsbury, consists of undulating mixed farmland and provides a contrast to the flat landscape of the Severn Levels. The mixed regular agricultural fields of the Levels are generally divided by a complex series of drainage ditches, rhines, streams and tidal pills which flow towards the estuary. These are often lined with low, clipped hedgerows, punctuated with individual broadleaf trees, such as willow pollards and alders.

The Levels are separated from the warth salt marshes and intertidal mudflats adjacent to the Severn Estuary, by a sea wall or bund. Their

visibility is dependent on the ebb and flow of the tide.

The geological variations across South Gloucestershire have resulted in widespread exploitation of mineral resources, such as limestone, clays, celestite and coal in rural areas. There is still evidence of numerous former small sites across the area, some of which were excavated for building stone. Many of these small quarries are now covered by vegetation. However, larger quarries, including those at Cromhall, Tytherington and Almondsbury to the north and west and Wickwar, Chipping Sodbury, Wick and Shortwood to the east and south, are still active. Their visibility in the landscape is variable, dependent upon their location and the degree to which woodland cover (often planted in association with the quarrying), or bunding, help to screen the quarry itself and its associated plant.

2.2.4 Buildings, Settlements and Infrastructure

Generally speaking, South Gloucestershire is a rural, agricultural landscape, within which are located small towns, scattered villages, hamlets and farms, connected by a complex network of lanes, roads and long distance recreational routes. With the exception of the larger towns of Thornbury, Yate and Chipping Sodbury, settlement is primarily concentrated in the south west of the area.

This concentration of settlement is largely due to the expansion caused by the economic growth of Bristol. The northern and eastern fringes of the city expanded rapidly in the 20th century, with the coalescence of the largely residential settlements of Patchway, Bradley Stoke, Emerson's Green and Kingswood, which all lie within the boundaries of South Gloucestershire. The coalesced settlements of Frampton Cotterell, Winterbourne and Coalpit Heath remain separated from the urban fringe of Greater Bristol, lying just to the north east.

Expansion of the national road network has seen the development of numerous major roads and motorways, notably the M4, M5, M32, M48 and M49, as well as the A4174 Ring Road around Bristol.

Improved accessibility, brought about by the motorway network, has attracted prolific commercial and industrial development around Bristol and the motorway junctions that serve the city. This accessibility to the area has increased development pressures, not only on the urban fringe, but within South Gloucestershire as a whole. The industrial areas and distribution depots of Avonmouth, the commercial and business park developments at Almondsbury and Aztec West, the commercial/retail development at Cribbs Causeway and the distribution depot at Emerson's Green, are all large scale, dominant, urban built forms in the landscape.

The growth and prosperity of Bristol has also affected many of the outlying settlements, such as Yate, Chipping Sodbury and Thornbury. With connections to the major road and/or rail networks, they have developed as centres in their own right and as commuter settlements for Bristol and Bath. The often rapid and significant levels of urban expansion of these towns in the last century, has increased development pressures on the adjacent smaller towns and villages within their vicinity.

The supply of water and level sites offered by the Severn Estuary and Levels, has provided opportunity for industrial development. The industrial complex at Avonmouth and Severnside in the south, is visually dominant within the open Levels landscape, as is Oldbury Power Station in the north. The M4, M49 and M48 and the two Severn road bridges are also prominent, as are the numerous powerlines that cross the flat Levels' landscape.

Away from these urban influences, however, the landscape of the Levels is one of hamlets, farms and nucleated villages in a rather dispersed pattern. Settlement is more frequent on the slightly higher ground above the Levels and consists of a mix of stone, brick and rendered buildings of a variety of ages and styles. These are linked by an intricate network of lanes, roads and paths, including a number of major recreational routes that cross the Levels, such as the Severn Way and Jubilee Way, which provide connections westwards across the Severn and eastwards inland.

Inland, amidst the undulating landscape between the Levels and the Cotswolds, the

settlement pattern has been influenced by the development of agricultural and textile industries and, to a lesser extent, by coal and iron industries. On the upland ridge areas, scattered farmsteads and hamlets are linked by a complex network of lanes and trackways. In the rural lowland vale areas, villages are more numerous and there are substantial stone farmsteads and old mills along the streams. In the former mining settlements, such as Coalpit Heath, Ram Hill, Parkfield and Shortwood, frequent groups of brick and rendered cottages and houses occur alongside the roads. These are linked by a complex network of minor roads, lanes and footpaths, some now forming recreational routes, including the Frome Valley Walkway, Jubilee Way, Dramway and the Monarch's Way.

Leading towards the Cotswold scarp and plateau, small villages lie at the scarp foot, in the valley bottoms or on the valley sides within the scarp face, on the gentlest gradients. The settlements on the limestone areas are united through their use of Cotswold stone and are generally consistent in architectural style. The use of stone in walls, cottages, houses, stately homes and churches dominates villages, which have a distinctive Cotswold style, creating a harmony within settlements and the surrounding landscape, derived from repeating simple elements.

On the lower scarp slopes there are also large manor houses, often set within parkland landscapes, such as Horton Court, Dodington Park, Dyrham Park and Tracy Park.

On the high ground of the Cotswold plateau and dip slope, the settlement pattern is one of small, nucleated villages and isolated farmsteads, usually of Cotswold Stone. The Badminton Estate, with its core of designed parkland, formal avenues, stately home and worker cottages, contrasts markedly. Roads and lanes, often lined by stone walls, connect settlements. A number of footpaths (now also recreational routes), connect the Cotswold plateau and slopes with the lower ground to the west, such as the Frome Valley Walkway, Jubilee Way and Monarch's Way, which all connect with the Cotswold Way.

2.3 The Historic Landscape

The landscape of South Gloucestershire visible today is the product of continuous change over many centuries, which has transformed it through both natural and human processes. Therefore, historical influences have had a major effect on the present character and development pattern of the landscape. This influence is well researched and documented across South Gloucestershire in the Avon Historic Landscape Characterisation Study, undertaken in 1995-8. The distribution of identified Historic Landscape Characterisation Groups across the area is illustrated in Figure 4.

South Gloucestershire has a long and varied history, with human activity in the area dating from prehistory. There is evidence of neolithic activity within the area, including several long barrows. Through the Iron Age there is also evidence of substantial human activity, with higher ground and ridges being of importance and the lower areas attracting settlement, based on agriculture, quarrying, coal and iron. It was probably the high degree of settlement and general importance of the land that formed the basis of the extensive Roman occupation of the area.

By the late 11th century, the area was extensively settled and there was little woodland cover remaining in many areas. A number of settlements, such as Thornbury, Pucklechurch and Bitton had been established and Bristol had developed. Soon after and possibly before the preparation of the Domesday Book, common fields were in use and in the following centuries, during the medieval period, much of the land was in large estates, both ecclesiastical and lay. There were vast open sheepwalks, which formed the basis of medieval prosperity and sheep were moved seasonally from low to high ground.

During the Middle Ages, open fields surrounded the frequent villages, interspersed with patches of common and remnant woodland. There was, however, extensive open downland on the limestone and a royal forest lay around Kingswood, extending north as far as

Thornbury. Bristol grew rapidly, as a centre for the cloth industry and as a port and was one of the great towns of medieval England. Lesser towns, like Thornbury and Chipping Sodbury also prospered. Following the Black Death and consequent population decline in the 14th century, open fields began to be enclosed. In the late 15th century many large estates were consolidated, mainly due to culling of landowners during the War of the Roses, but also to exchange and enclosure. Much of the open downland remained unenclosed until the 19th century. An important feature of the historic landscape is the degree to which enclosure by agreement had taken place in the latter Middle Ages, well before the period of parliamentary enclosure. A noticeable example of this can be found close to Yate Court.

The dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century enabled the further consolidation of large estates, ultimately leading to fine country houses and historic parks, such as Badminton and Dyrham, being established.

Many of the villages owe their present uniform character to the strong influence of estates which, in many cases, has persisted down to the present day. Throughout the late medieval and post-medieval period, there was piecemeal enclosure of open fields, commons, waste and sheepwalks, but many of the sheepwalks remained unenclosed until the late 18th and 19th centuries and the prominent rectilinear patterns characterise much of the higher ground today.

A coal industry was present in the Middle Ages, but it did not really become significant until the 18th century. It consisted of small pits dispersed across the countryside, often an unlawful use of common land, which fuelled local industries like the brass foundry at Keynsham. The pits continued to be active throughout the 19th century.

In the post-medieval period, Bristol expanded to become Britain's second port. In the 18th and 19th centuries the city prospered and expanded on the basis of its trade, engineering and other industries. The wealth that was generated is evident in the parks and mansions that surround the city.

Many historical landscape features which provide evidence today of the human factors

influencing landscape evolution, are designated as Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs). These are indicated on Figure 5.

2.4 Landscape Change in the 20th Century

Natural factors have continued to evolve the landscapes of South Gloucestershire in the 20th century; however, these are for the most part gradual processes, resulting in small changes over a hundred year period. Dutch Elm Disease is an exception and is the natural factor which has had most influence on landscape character in the last century. However, by far the most significant changes have resulted from human influences. Rapid development and changes in agricultural practices have both exerted a major influence on the character and evolution of the landscape. Although the two world wars introduced some land use changes in the first half of the century, the most significant changes affecting the area generally have occurred since World War II.

2.4.1 Agricultural changes

The two world wars drove the initiative to improve food production, which amongst other consequences, led to the cultivation of some commons and other permanent pasture and the loss of some wildflower meadows and scrub woodlands. The interwar recession in agriculture, combined with the effects of World War I, also saw the start of the break up of large country estates and the loss of farming units. This process continued after the end of World War II. For example, Dyrham Park was bought by the nation as a war memorial and it was only this that saved its break up. It was subsequently handed to the National Trust to ensure its continuance. The wars also resulted in the felling of some woodlands, although not all of these were grubbed up and some have subsequently re-established.

The continued need to improve yields in the post war years led to the introduction of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in 1957, which resulted in major changes in agricultural practices and land use, encouraged by financial incentives for intensification and modernisation.

These agricultural changes have significantly influenced the visual character of the landscape, with respect to the traditional pattern of fields, diversity, openness, texture and colour.

■ **Management of field boundaries** - The resource intensive traditional management of laying hedgerows has largely given way to mechanical hedge trimming (this method of management has been referred to as 'clipped' throughout the report). Whilst this method is quick and cost effective, it results in hedges which initially appear very ragged. Over time it also results in gappy or discontinuous hedgerows that are less diverse and no longer stockproof. Consequently, many boundaries have been supplemented by fencing of various types. In some areas, hedgerows have not been managed for a number of years, resulting in a boundary of very tall shrubby trees, which, whilst providing enclosure for a while, will also eventually become gappy.

Dry stonewall boundaries have also deteriorated through a lack of management, resulting in a loss of continuity or even removal in arable areas. On pastureland, some walls have either been replaced by, or supplemented with, fencing to maintain stockproof boundaries.

■ **Enlargement of fields** - As a result of intensification, many historic field boundaries including hedgerows, ditches and walls, were lost in order to aggregate fields, to accommodate increasing arable production and larger machinery. In some areas, hedgerow trees were retained whilst the hedgerow was removed, leaving solitary trees surrounded by large arable fields. The loss of hedgerows and increase in field size is particularly evident on the Cotswold plateau, but is also seen elsewhere. Countryside management, under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, introduced in 1992, has resulted in the retention and management of a number of hedgerows and, since the introduction of the Hedgerow Regulations in 1997, the rate of loss of hedgerows has reduced.

■ **Loss of diversity** - The change to monocrop culture and the increasing

uniformity of crops in order to intensify yields, which has been possible through technical developments and the increased use of machinery, herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers, has resulted in a dilution of the traditional 'patchwork' landscape.

The introduction of new crops, such as flax and, more particularly, oil seed rape, are increasingly altering the seasonal colour within the landscape over extensive areas. This is especially visible over the Cotswold plateau.

Loss of flower rich meadows has also resulted both from the intensive use of herbicides and, more particularly, the cultivation of previously marginal agricultural land.

During the last decade of the 20th century, 'set aside' field management under the CAP has further reduced the presence of wild flowers and resulted in a less managed appearance to the landscape.

■ **Change in scale of agriculture** - The changes in economic viability of smaller farms in particular, has contributed to the decline of some farm holdings, as well as traditional management practices such as hedge laying, grazing of common land and woodland management. It has led to the merger of farms into larger units, with the development of larger farm buildings, to both house the large scale agricultural machinery and overwinter larger numbers of stock and feed.

These new buildings, which are frequently in prominent locations, are generally of an industrial appearance, both in scale and materials, often sitting less sympathetically in the landscape in comparison with traditional barns.

These farm changes have also resulted in the change of use of some farmhouses and farm buildings for residential, commercial or light industrial purposes, which can affect both their appearance and their relationship with the surrounding landscape, as a result of the associated changes to the buildings and adjacent land.

■ **Changes in agricultural markets** - The change in economic viability of particular

crops, livestock or land use, as a result of foreign competition, and the change to a free market dairy production, after the disbanding of the Milk Marketing Board, has had a significant effect on traditional agricultural land use. For example, the decline, or loss, of many of the orchards which were a characteristic feature associated with settlements or farms. The 20th century saw a number of large and small orchards on the edge of settlements engulfed by, or incorporated into, new developments, or ploughed up. The few that remain are generally in decline, with little or no management. Their present condition contributes little to the settlement character. A large newly planted orchard at Almondsbury is an exception to the more widespread trend in the decline of orchards.

Changing markets have also resulted in a move away from hay meadows, to the practice of taking silage cuts instead. The more frequent cutting of pasture for silage has changed the colour, texture and movement, as well as species diversity, previously found in hay meadows. In addition, the presence of hay ricks or stacks has been replaced by black polythene-wrapped silage, stacked in field corners.

As a result of these changes in agricultural markets and viability, some farmers are diversifying and using part of their land for non-agricultural purposes, for example fishing lakes, paintball games or caravan storage. Whilst fishing lakes are generally small in scale, there has been a slow increase in the number of these developments towards the end of the century.

- **'Horsiculture'** - The rapid increase in the keeping of horses and the change of land use for paddocks in the latter part of the century, particularly adjacent to the urban edge and major settlements, has resulted in a change in the appearance of former pasture fields. The change in use is frequently accompanied by a decline in traditional hedgerow management and their resultant effectiveness for stock

control. This has led to an adaptation of both boundaries and materials to maintain an animal-proof barrier. Often fields are subdivided into smaller units. In many cases, overgrazing and selective grazing results in extensive weed growth or bare ground, influencing the traditional agricultural character of the land.

Additional facilities and infrastructure which may accompany the change in use to paddocks, such as stabling, access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and even floodlighting, further change the character of the rural landscape.

The outbreak of BSE in 1992/93 and Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001, was expected to have both wide ranging and long term effects on agriculture. Whilst during both crises the impacts on both agriculture and the appearance of the landscape were significant, the expectations have not proved to be wholly correct and the effects were largely short term, although in some instances, there have been localised longer term impacts, with farmers ceasing to rely solely on animal husbandry and farm buildings being converted to other uses. The effects on farming practices and the agricultural landscape, as a result of market changes and CAP subsidies, have been far more significant.

Policy changes in the UK and EU institutions, towards agricultural-environment schemes, may prove to have even more significant and long term impacts. Countryside Stewardship Schemes have, since 1992, changed the management practices on some 4000 hectares of land within South Gloucestershire. This trend of increasingly paying farmers to provide environmental benefits through management, restoration and enhancement of the rural landscape, which was introduced at the end of the century, in conjunction with payments for producing food, will be extended early in the 21st century when subsidies for food production cease. This will result in further change in the agricultural landscape in the future.

The decline in the number, extent and management of woodlands during much of the 20th century, as a result of both industrial and agricultural practices, appears to have been

halted and woodland cover is again increasing. The creation of the Forest of Avon in 1991, covers some 57,300 ha. (221 sq miles) around Bristol, of which 26,840 ha. are in South Gloucestershire. The Forest of Avon objective is to increase woodland cover within the Plan area by up to 30% in the next 50 years, dependent on the existing landscape character of particular areas. Substantial areas of new planting have already been carried out in association with development, amenity areas or on agricultural land, through the Woodland Grants Scheme within the Forest area. Most notable to date are Overscourt Farm, Siston and Lower Knole Farm, Almondsbury. The establishment of the Forest will therefore itself result in a significant change and evolution in the landscape character of widespread areas in the future.

2.4.2 Natural factors

Many of the natural factors which shape the landscape are very gradual, perhaps imperceptible over the relatively short timescale of a century. However, some natural factors, especially disease, can have a dramatic impact on the landscape within a short period of time.

- **Dutch Elm Disease (DED)** - Since the outbreak of the disease in the late 1960's, it has resulted in the loss of a very significant number of mature hedgerow trees across South Gloucestershire, which has had a major impact on the landscape character of the rural areas. In some areas, such as the Levels, where much of the vegetation structure was provided by hedgerow trees, the effect of the loss of enclosure provided by the elms and the opening up of views across the landscape, has been dramatic. Generally, there has been little hedgerow tree planting to compensate for the loss of elm trees.

Sucker growth from mature elm stumps which were not removed, continues to produce young elm trees within hedgerows. Where hedgerows are regularly managed, these elm suckers are continually renewed and are unaffected by the disease. However, when left to grow, at a certain age (approx. 8 years) and size,

they again become susceptible to the beetle. This results in a continuous cycle of the growth of taller hedgerows, followed by the appearance of dead and dying trees, which has a further impact upon the character and enclosure within the landscape in areas where hedgerows are not managed, or are managed less frequently. Many of the suckering elms have recently reached this latter stage in their cycle.

- **Phytophthora Disease in Alders** - Phytophthora in alders first became apparent in the early 1990's. It is a root disease, thought to be transmitted by water-borne fungi, which has been particularly severe in the West Country: most river systems in the west have diseased or dead alders. At the moment, the progression of the disease appears to have slowed in the south west.
- **Invasive species** - Japanese Knotweed. Japanese Knotweed is generally regarded as the most invasive plant in Britain. It was introduced into the UK in the 19th century, as an ornamental plant from the Far East. Since then it has spread rapidly, particularly along riverbanks, roadsides, on derelict land, or on unmanaged land awaiting development, displacing native flora and affecting the character of many areas, river corridors in particular, both visually and ecologically.

It spreads by vegetative means (even the smallest fragment of the rhizome, crown or stem can grow into a new plant). Its spread has been exacerbated by riverbank erosion, fly tipping and moving contaminated soil containing pieces of the plant. It is however illegal under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, to spread Japanese Knotweed.

- **Storms** - The storms of 1986 and 1990, which had varying effects across the area, highlighted the problems associated with a general lack of tree management. Although new planting can be seen in some areas, generally there has been little new tree planting to provide succession to the existing mature vegetation framework – either hedgerow trees, woodlands or

copses etc. - which forms such an important feature of the landscape. Therefore, there is frequently nothing to take the place of losses resulting from severe weather conditions, which are likely to become a more frequent occurrence.

2.4.3 Development

In the 20th century, Bristol expanded rapidly, fuelled by economic growth and government policy. Manufacturing industries at Rolls Royce and British Aerospace, associated with Filton Airfield, influenced the development of a large area of north Bristol. The development of the large scale chemical works at Severnside, north of Avonmouth, increased the spread of industrial complexes along the edge of the Levels and Severn Estuary. Major new roads developed, including the M4/M5 motorways, as well as the more recent M48 and M49 motorways through the area and the M32 into Bristol and various stages of the Avon Ring Road around Bristol. These significantly increased accessibility of the area to and from the rest of the country. Economic development and accessibility affected the demand for housing, light industrial areas and commercial development throughout the whole area. Many outlying settlements, such as Yate and Thornbury, developed both as their own employment centres and as dormitories of Bristol.

More recent development trends have seen the growth of the service and retail industries, particularly to the north of Bristol, with large scale office complexes at the MOD Abbey Wood, Axa Sunlife, Aztec West Business Park and Cribbs Causeway retail development. The last two, located adjacent to motorway junctions.

Recent development at Emerald Park, Emerson's Green, adjacent to the Avon Ring Road, has extended the expansion of commercial development to the north east of Bristol.

■ **Residential development** - The extensive expansion of housing development on the edges of Bristol and Yate during the latter half of the 20th century, as well as smaller developments on the edge of other settlements across the area, more often have little relationship in terms of layout,

density, materials and design, to the housing areas which they adjoin. There is therefore an erosion of the character and local distinctiveness of the more traditional settlement. The new edge of the settlement against the rural landscape, which is often a solid fence boundary, is abrupt, with no buffer to soften the effect and integrate the interface between the two landscapes, which in some instances can have a widespread impact.

Even smaller scale extensions, property or boundary changes, where these have paid little respect to existing detailing or materials, have had a localised effect on character.

Barn conversions have been a relatively recent trend, resulting in the change of use of traditional farm buildings to residential properties. The traditional materials, form and setting of these buildings often have a strong relationship with their previous agricultural function, contributing to the local rural character. The changes to the fabric of the building and addition of associated infrastructure, such as access drives, parking, gardens and new boundaries, as a result of the change of use, all have the potential to erode the local, rural landscape character.

■ **Commercial development** - The scale and nature of commercial development in the 20th century, both in terms of building size, materials, colour and design, as well as the associated external infrastructure requirements, especially of roads and car parking, have increased their visual prominence, and at the same time, reduced the potential for integration of these developments within the surrounding landscape.

In the Levels, whilst the flat landscape reduced the need for physical changes to the ground, to accommodate these large-scale buildings, the existing structure of rhines and hedgerows (especially since the loss of elms to DED), was inadequate to provide an appropriate framework to help integrate such large-scale changes. A new landscape structure of appropriate scale is proposed within the development strategy to achieve this.

In other areas, like Emerald Park at Emerson's Green, the introduction of large-scale industrial units into a small-scale landscape resulted in topographic changes and widespread visual intrusion, due to the scale, materials and colour of the building, as well as the range of local and elevated views of the site from the wider landscape.

- **Infrastructure** - The major expansion of the infrastructure network across the area, resulted in the construction of two major railway lines in the early part of the century and five motorways and the Avon Ring Road during the latter part, which have all had a significant effect on the landscapes across the area. Both the railways and roads are largely unsympathetic to the grain of the landscape, cutting through or superimposed upon the topography, with elevated bridges and embankments and, in the case of roads, intersections with adjoining roads, increasing their visual intrusion.

The earlier development of the railways, coupled with the demise of the steam train and, the subsequent lack of management of vegetation growth along embankments and cuttings, has resulted in the establishment of mature vegetation corridors which generally screen the artificial embankments and integrate the line of the railway within the landscape framework of the rural area. The earlier, brick-built viaducts, carrying the railway across the Frome and Bradley Brook Valleys, now form local landmarks in their own right.

The increasing levels of traffic on minor roads have resulted in road widening, erosion of verges, or removal of hedgerows to increase sightlines on some roads. Even generally quiet country roads may have higher levels of traffic during rush hours and the afternoon school-run. This increase in noise from traffic levels can reduce the tranquillity of rural areas.

These changes, together with highway improvement measures, such as kerbs and lighting, introducing standardisation and urban features on some roads in rural areas, result in an erosion of local

character. The accompanying increase in the plethora of road signage further affects rural character.

- **Telecommunications** - Since the early 1990's there has been a significant growth in the number of telecommunication facilities, for mobile phones and other uses, in the form of masts and associated ground equipment. These facilities can have a significant visual impact, as the need to provide them has little correlation with planning designations. Consequently, besides obvious visual impact, facilities can also affect sites of nature conservation and/or archaeological interest. The customer-led demand that is inherent in the telecommunication licensing system, usually results in facilities being concentrated in urban areas and alongside motorways, major roads and railway lines.
- **Light pollution** - The increased level of development has resulted in a much greater requirement for lighting of settlements, commercial sites, recreational areas and the road networks, with little consideration given to the effect these increasing light levels would have. The result has been a significant increase in light pollution of adjacent and the wider rural areas.

Even lighting of road junctions using down lighters can have a significant effect, for example on the A420/A46 junction at Cold Ashton, the A420 at Toghill and the A46/M4 junction 18 at Tormarton, which, due to their elevated locations on or near the Cotswold Scarp, have a widespread as well as local impact. Similarly, the lighting for H.M.P. Ashfield at Pucklechurch has a widespread influence, due to the nature and intensity of the lighting and its elevated position.

2.4.4 Urban fringe

The continuing expansion of the urban areas has resulted in increasing pressures on land and for land use change, both on the urban fringe and on the edge of other settlements.

The change of use from farmland to horse paddocks is already referred to. Small holdings, used for nursery production or market gardens

have, in places, replaced pasture. Other agricultural fields, especially those earmarked for future development, are often not actively managed, resulting in vigorous weed growth taking over former pasture and overgrown and discontinuous hedgerows. All these activities have led to a decline in traditional field boundaries and, sometimes, a change in field patterns and land cover at the settlement edge, affecting landscape character.

Demands for playing fields close to settlement areas can introduce significant change in landscape character, especially where extensive remodelling of existing contours is required to create pitches, as at Emerson's Green and more recently at Rodway Hill.

The continuing growth of the population in the urban areas and settlements, places increasing pressure on existing open spaces, within the built development and on the urban fringe and settlement edges. This can result in the erosion of paths or soil and damage to vegetation through excessive informal use (or abuse), for example at Rodway Common, or damage through the demand for organised events on open spaces, such as the fair at Yate and Westerleigh Commons. This increasing pressure at the urban fringe, also affects the condition of the adjoining rural edge and framework as both farmland and woodlands, with or without public access, are used to supplement public open spaces. The over use of both open spaces and agricultural land on the urban fringes can have a significant effect on the character of the local area.

An additional, though transient, effect of the pressure at the urban edge are the occurrences of burnt out cars and fly-tipping on roadside verges, which are unsightly, prior to their removal. The effects may be longer term, if adjacent vegetation has been damaged by fire or tipping. Whilst this is more prevalent adjacent to the urban edge, it is occasionally apparent further into the countryside area.

2.4.5 Sport and Recreation in the countryside

With the increase in leisure time, more people are actively using the countryside. The extensive public footpath network and particularly the designated recreational routes

and availability of information on access routes, encourage both use and appreciation of the landscape. Popular areas, such as the Cotswolds, can suffer from excessive pressure, requiring a higher degree of management to conserve the landscape character.

The increase in horse riding across the area can result in conflict with walkers and erosion of path surfaces unless carefully managed. The increase in this activity is reflected in the designation of a series of Circular Rides within South Gloucestershire.

Similarly, the use of paths, tracks or green lanes by mountain bikes, trial bikes or 4-wheel drive vehicles, can result in extensive erosion of surfaces, high noise levels, and conflict with other users. Motorised vehicles especially, can disturb an otherwise quiet countryside. This situation may well change in the next few years, when new legislation comes into force to restrict the use of motorised vehicles on certain types of right of way.

The growth of golf courses in the latter part of the last century has resulted in 10 new courses and extensions in South Gloucestershire. These have generally required extensive reshaping of both contours and the landscape framework and therefore have had a significant influence on the character of rural areas. Tracy Park Golf Course is the most prominent, located on the lower slopes of the Cotswold Scarp; the change in landscape character is visible from a wide area.

2.4.6 Mineral extraction

The coal industry continued in South Gloucestershire into the 20th century, with some pits active into the second half of the century. There was a rapid decline following nationalisation and the last pit, at Harry Stoke, closed in 1963. Today, there is little evidence of the coal mining industry remaining. Most of the tips have either been reclaimed or are covered by vegetation, as at Shortwood and in many instances, the associated buildings and plant have largely disappeared. The industrial archaeological relics at Brandy Bottom Colliery, Shortwood are a SAM.

The production of celestite has only recently ceased. It was extracted from areas, mostly to the west and north of Yate, for over 100 years:

the area was formerly the world's leading producer. The shallow strip mining process has left little evidence in the landscape today. Ground levels in some areas north of Yate can be seen to be lower than adjacent areas, where excavations extended up to hedgerows. In some areas, there is also evidence of resultant localised surface water drainage problems.

Although a few of the larger scale hard rock quarries, such as Harnhill, ceased production during the last century or are currently inactive (Cromhall Limestone Quarry), the economic value and demand for hard rock minerals, particularly limestone, continued to grow. As a result, a number of these quarries expanded their operational areas, e.g. Wick, Wickwar, Chipping Sodbury and Tytherington.

Recent changes in government legislation and guidance have enabled greater environmental controls over mineral workings. These are seen as a key factor in securing improvements in both operations, screening and restoration, to minimise the impact of what can be a very visible and highly intensive activity in the landscape, over long periods of time.

Similarly, the extraction of clays at Almondsbury and Shortwood continued and expanded throughout the 20th century. The brickworks associated with the quarry at Shortwood closed and most of the infrastructure has since disappeared. Although earlier parts of the quarry were used for landfill, clay is still extracted and stockpiled, prior to transporting to Cattybrook Brickworks for manufacture.

2.4.7 Landfill / land raising

Whilst there is evidence of some small scale landfill occurring prior to the 20th century, the need for landfill and land raising sites, to accommodate the rapid rise in the volumes of waste produced, expanded significantly during the 20th century: this includes household waste, commercial and industrial waste and inert, construction and demolition materials. The voids of former quarries, such as at Harnhill, have been filled, producing a new landform with contours generally above those of surrounding areas, to accommodate settlement and shrinkage and to allow for drainage of the surface water, away from the filled void.

Shortwood Claypit is also proposed to be used for landfill and land raising, as an integral part of the restoration proposals for the clay extraction. Rarely are landfill sites returned to their original contours, resulting in a new landform and the need to establish a new landscape framework which is in character with the surrounding landscape.

In addition to landfilling, waste materials have also been used to land raise, or to create bunds in many areas of South Gloucestershire. This has, in places, physically changed the shape of the landscape and its relationship to the surrounding areas; this is particularly evident within the Levels, e.g. at Berwick Farm, but is also visible adjacent to roads or development, where bunds form acoustic or visual screens, e.g. along the edge of Woodlands/Bristol Golf Courses, adjacent to the motorways.

Frequently these bunds have steep profiles, with little relationship to the surrounding topography, often changing the degree of openness or enclosure of the area, e.g. along both sides of the M4 corridor and west of the M32 junction. Where the bunds/land raising have been planted, vegetation may, in the long term, help to partially integrate these new features. Where unplanted, these bunds remain an unnatural feature.

2.5 Future Trends

Whilst it is not possible to look too far ahead with any degree of accuracy, there are some trends emerging, from measures introduced, or events apparent, at the end of the 20th century, that will have impacts on landscape character from early in the 21st century.

2.5.1 Development

- **Housing** - Whilst economic growth and the demand for housing increases, development pressures across South Gloucestershire are likely to continue. The levels for housing growth will largely be set by government policy, incorporated within the new Regional Spatial Strategy, due to be adopted in 2006, which will guide land use change to 2026. The development necessary to fulfil the anticipated economic

growth and demand in the South West, is likely to have a significant influence on the landscape character of South Gloucestershire, and especially on those areas adjacent to the present and future rural fringe of settlement edges.

With a rapidly expanding population, pressures on the new urban fringe will increase and new measures will need to be found to meet the sport and recreational needs of the population, including formal and informal open space, whilst appropriately managing adverse change on landscape character and limiting the effect on the wider rural landscape.

The revised PPG 3 on Housing, published in 2000, gave new guidance on housing provision, including encouraging authorities to make better use of land by allowing increased densities. This applies in both urban and rural areas. These government guidelines make it more difficult to achieve sufficient open space within developments, or landscape buffers around the housing, to create appropriate integration. Where higher densities are permitted on the edge of existing settlements, it is also more difficult to achieve adequate integration with the adjoining settlement, due to the massing and frequently increased height of buildings, which can result in a very abrupt and harsh edge against the rural area. The impact of such developments, on the local or wider character, will be influenced by factors such as location, topography, density, massing and building height, as well as retention of any landscape framework and proposals for a new landscape structure. The increased population resulting from higher density schemes will also increase recreational pressure on adjacent existing open space, unless other provision is made.

- **Infrastructure** - There are now pressures to widen some of the existing road network, including some motorways and major roads, to accommodate increasing traffic or to improve sustainable transport, in particular providing bus lanes. Current trends appear to be to widen within the existing highway boundary, which will result

in the loss of vegetation implemented as part of the initial mitigation measures of the original schemes, constructed in the latter half of the 20th century. Current land restrictions are likely to result in little compensatory planting, affecting the character of the local landscape and, in some instances, of the wider landscape.

Future development growth, dependent on the locations identified in the Regional Spatial Strategy, could result in the need for a further expansion of the road network itself.

Network Rail also have proposals for improving the safety of the system, constructed more than 100 years ago. This work, to allow regrading and drainage works to stabilise the banks, will result in the loss of extensive mature/semi-mature vegetation, which has developed on the embankments, largely screening both the unnatural landform and the movement of trains across the elevated landscape. This will have a major impact on the landscape, particularly between Ram Hill and Winterbourne, where the embankments are very high, resulting not only in the loss of major areas of woodland which are currently an integral part of the landscape framework, but also in opening up views of the elevated railway and movement across the rural landscape. It will take many years for any proposed replanting to be effective in screening this feature again.

- **Renewable Energy** - The search for sites for the production of energy from non-fossil fuels, of varying forms, which to date has been limited in South Gloucestershire, will increase during the early part of the 21st century, in order to meet the Government's targets of 10% generation of electricity from renewable resources by 2010 and their desire of 20% by 2020.

Although the UK's greatest wind resource is along the western coastline, recent technological developments mean that wind power is now viable over much of the country. It is therefore likely that energy producers will be looking for sites in South Gloucestershire in the future. However, potential locations on the edge of the

Severn Estuary would have an inherent conflict with migrating birds. Elsewhere in the authority area, potential sites, particularly those capable of accommodating the largest turbines, would be constrained by the extent of residential development. Turbines are very distinctive features in the landscape, particularly when sited in open, rural locations. Their impact on landscape character will be influenced, in addition, by their design, height and numbers, as well as the associated infrastructure, which can include access roads, large areas of hardstanding adjacent to the base of each turbine to allow access for heavy plant and small transformers/sub-stations, to connect the energy produced to the grid.

The potential cultivation of biomass crops will require large areas of land to be converted from more traditional agricultural crops or pasture, to energy crops, to be of an appropriate economic scale that is viable to fuel the plant for production of electricity, heat, or combined heat and power (CHP). This will result in a significant change in landscape character, with crops such as short rotation coppice of willow or poplar, grown on a 2-4 year cycle, or grasses such as *Miscanthus*, (especially in southern England), harvested annually. Both types of crop will grow to a much greater height before harvesting than is typical for pasture or arable land, creating a frequently changing pattern of openness and much greater enclosure than is currently produced on agricultural land. The crops themselves, particularly the grasses, will be alien in form, texture and light (the last two particularly apparent as a result of wind movement through the crop).

In addition, the plant and equipment necessary to generate heat and/or electricity, as well as on-site storage of fuel, will potentially introduce industrial structures, including chimneys, into rural areas where buildings are currently limited or absent, in order to reduce the transport distance between fuel source and plant. However, inevitably this type of fuel production and generation will increase

traffic volumes on local roads and may require highway improvements, to accommodate regular use by heavy vehicles on some rural roads.

- **Telecommunications** - Technological advances in the telecommunications industry are set to continue and grow and it is anticipated this will manifest itself in the landscape with both increases in the number of sites and the enlargement of some existing facilities. Whilst considerable efforts are made by both the telecommunication providers and local planning authorities to minimise visual impact, it is almost inevitable that in the future some sites will require to be located in sensitive locations.

2.5.2 Agricultural changes

Government and EU policy relating to agricultural funding is the major factor affecting the rural landscape. For the present and near future, the emphasis on agri-environment schemes under the CAP, particularly when support for food production is withdrawn, commencing in 2005, will continue to benefit landscape character and ecological diversity across South Gloucestershire. Although the new Single Farm Payment Scheme generally offers opportunities for environmental benefits, some aspects, such as changes in livestock levels, or reduction in the labour force, will affect grazing regimes and management practices, which could have a detrimental effect on landscape character. Future changes in national or European policy, could again have a widespread effect on landscape character.

The conversion of fields back into agricultural use, after set-aside, could result in the loss of the incidental habitats which have established as a result of the non-use and lack of management of these areas.

Diversification of farms will continue with the introduction of non-traditional crops and animal husbandry and the expansion of non-agricultural uses of land, unless the economics of traditional farming improves. Several alpaca farms have recently opened in South Gloucestershire. The affect of these on landscape character can be similar to that of 'horsiculture', including the introduction of additional structures for housing the animals.

To satisfy the increasing demand for horse paddocks and small holdings, pastureland is being divided and sold off, resulting in a change in field pattern which can lead to the enclosure of previously open farmland. Frequently these areas are less actively managed than the former farmland and, without hedgerow planting along new fencelines and tree planting to screen permanent stables and associated equipment and temporary shelters, these areas can affect the integrity of the rural framework and erode the existing rural character.

Farm buildings continue to be converted, either as separate dwellings, or as holiday lets attached to farms. Although these can result in changes to the building facades and use of adjacent land, they may also result in the removal of some large agricultural storage barns which are no longer needed for the reduced level of activity on the farm, which may have a positive impact on the character of the local or wider landscape.

The Forest of Avon, which is a long term initiative (see 2.4.1) will continue to increase the extent of woodland cover within South Gloucestershire over the next 50 years. Many of the areas planted in the earlier years of the scheme will, over this period of time, develop into semi-mature woodland, influencing the openness or enclosure of parts of the landscape and significantly increasing the diversity of the land cover.

2.5.3 Natural factors

- **Plant diseases** - Two plant diseases have recently been identified, in addition to *Phytophthora* in alders (see 2.4.2).

Phytophthora ramorum was first found in South West England in 2003. In America the disease has caused extensive damage to oaks in California. It is not yet known whether English oaks are vulnerable, but other native deciduous trees may be highly susceptible.

Phytophthora kernovii is a new variant of the disease, discovered in 2004. It is thought to host on rhododendrons, as does *P. ramorum*, but this variety has already been found in a number of beech and several oak trees in Cornwall. The origins of this strain are not currently known, but

there are concerns that *P. kernovii* could be more serious for native trees than *P. ramorum*. The full extent of this disease has not yet been established.

Control of these diseases is critical to our native trees. Although neither have as yet been found on any vegetation in South Gloucestershire, if they were to become widespread, potentially the effect could be more devastating on the landscape than Dutch Elm Disease has been over the last 30 years, affecting not only the existing landscape framework, but the potential for future re-establishment of native species.

Defra has implemented a national policy of containment and eradication for *P. ramorum* and a regional programme for control and eradication of *P. kernovii* in Cornwall, as well as widespread monitoring.

- **Climate change** - The potential impacts of climate change, accelerated by global warming, could have a much greater influential effect on landscape character during this century, if the current models of changes in climate pattern occur.

Landscape changes are likely to occur as direct or indirect results of higher temperatures, wetter winters, an increase in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events and sea level rise. Climate is a key factor, in combination with geology, soils, topography, drainage and vegetation, in shaping the physical landscape. The impacts resulting from climate change are therefore likely to be complex, often subtle, but with some more dramatic effects. Current models of the rate and extent of climate change have a high degree of uncertainty and therefore the likely impacts on landscape character are not yet clear. However, it is anticipated that there will be changes to landscape elements such as trees, hedgerows, streams and rivers and broader changes as a result of land use change.

Some low-lying areas like the Levels, may be significantly at risk as a result of rising sea levels, as well as more frequent storm surges and tidal inundation, particularly since the Severn Estuary has the second

highest tidal range in the world. These conditions would affect the warths (salt marshes) and mudflats between the Estuary and sea wall in particular, but may also affect the low-lying farmland behind the sea wall and ultimately, its viability for agricultural use. This could have a major impact on the feeding grounds for overwintering birds, for which the Estuary is designated, nationally and internationally.

Changes as a result of varying water resources may impact on the landscape relatively quickly, whilst habitats and species are likely to be affected over a longer period of time. Agriculture and forestry potentially will be most affected, both in the type of crops/species that can be grown and the viability of particular areas of land, due to changing moisture levels. In the long term, there is likely to be an altitudinal/northward migration of species, which may result in existing native tree species characteristic of our landscapes being unable to regenerate. The storms of 1986 and 1990 illustrated that woodland and hedgerow trees are also vulnerable to extreme weather events. Changes may also result in the fragmentation of habitats, or the loss of protected species in designated areas. Grassland species will be particularly vulnerable to these changes.

Cultural heritage and the historic landscape, which are an essential part of landscape character, are particularly vulnerable. Buildings or structures could be affected by weathering, flooding or subsidence. Potential changes in farming practices could subtly impact upon field patterns and ridge and furrow. More widespread impacts could result from land use change, either in response to agricultural viability, or land use planning policies, in response to climate change.

2.5.4 Mineral extraction

The existing levels of mineral extraction for crushed rock (limestone) are expected to continue for the first quarter of the 21st century. It is anticipated that the existing quarries at Wick, Tytherington, Wickwar and

Chipping Sodbury will continue to be active, with extensions (identified as Preferred Areas in the Minerals & Waste Local Plan for South Gloucestershire, adopted 2002) at Tytherington, Wickwar and Chipping Sodbury and re-opening of the Cromhall Limestone Quarry. It is also possible that new proposals may come forward for a new quarry to replace the Cromhall Quartzite Quarry in the near future. These operations will continue to require tight planning controls to minimise the effects on the landscape character of the immediate locality and wider areas.

Extension of both the Cattybrook and Shortwood Claypits are also anticipated, to allow the Cattybrook Brickworks to continue to be viable. At Shortwood it is proposed to accelerate the rate of extraction, with the resultant need for extensive stockpiling of clay on the site over the first quarter of the century, which will have a significant impact on the landscape of the locality.

2.5.5 Waste management

Government and EU targets over the past few years are resulting in a dramatic reduction in the volume of waste deposited in landfill sites. The sites identified for landfill in the near future are at Churchwood Quarry, Wickwar and Shortwood. Whilst the effect of the landfill will be to ultimately fill and restore these quarries, careful planning controls will be required, both to minimise the environmental impacts during their operational life and to ensure that the final landform, land use and vegetation structure, integrates with and is appropriate to, the landscape character of the surrounding rural area.

As a result of the reduction in the level of waste going to landfill sites, further sites will be required to provide facilities for recovery of waste, which may include waste transfer sites, civic amenity sites, composting sites, energy recovery. The impact on landscape character will be dependent on siting, the nature of proposals and the sensitivity of the surrounding landscape. Again, planning controls will be a major factor in minimising adverse effects on landscape character.

2.6 Summary

The review of the planning policies in Section 1 that affect South Gloucestershire and the landscape context in this Section has provided a starting point in gaining an overview of the South Gloucestershire landscape.

This forms the basis for the next stage of the Landscape Character Assessment, the division of the landscape into a number of discrete areas, to gain a better understanding of the landscape character of South Gloucestershire. The process of undertaking the landscape characterisation is described and illustrated in Section Three: Character Overview.

Both the Landscape Change in the 20th century and Future Trends in this Section, provide the context for a review of how change is, or might, affect landscape character and local distinctiveness, which is addressed under Changing Landscape within each of the Landscape Character Areas in Section Four.



Section Three

Character

Overview

Provides information and definitions on the hierarchy of landscape assessment classification. Describes the division of the landscape into discrete areas of similar characteristics.

3.1 Introduction

The previous section illustrates the major influences on the development of the landscape of South Gloucestershire. This helps to indicate the varied and often complex character which forms the basis of the classification of the landscape.

Partly based on the Overview information in Section Two and on previous character assessments carried out at a national and regional level, the landscape of South Gloucestershire has been divided into a number of discrete areas of similar characteristics. This is illustrated below and each level of character assessment is described in detail over the following pages.

3.2 Regional Landscape Character Areas

The Countryside Agency's Character of England provides maps and descriptions of regional landscape character areas showing the diversity of the landscape at a

national scale. The maps and the descriptions provide the top tier of landscape character assessment.

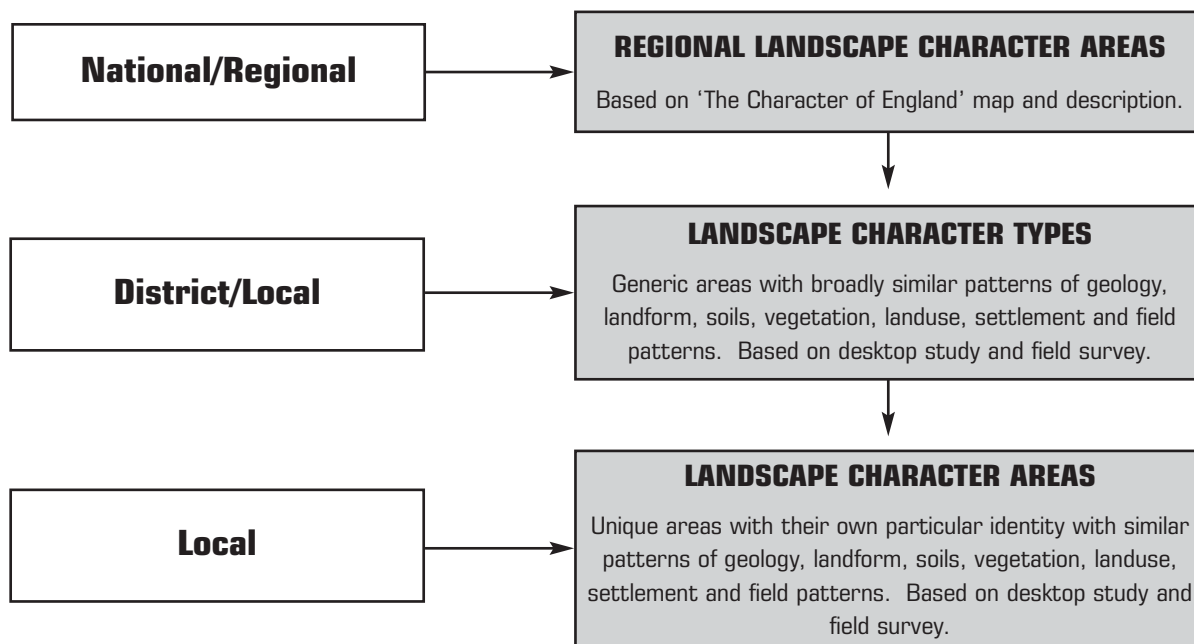
Within South Gloucestershire there are three regional landscape character areas, as identified in the National Map. These include:

- Severn and Avon Vales (No. 106)
- Cotswolds (No. 107)
- Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges (No. 118)

In addition:

- Forest of Dean and Lower Wye (No. 105).

This regional landscape character area is visible from and forms part of the setting to



South Gloucestershire, across the Severn Estuary to the west.

These are illustrated in Figure 6, and their key characteristics are summarised below.

Severn and Avon Vales

- Diverse range of flat and gently undulating landscapes, united by broad river valley character.
- Riverside landscapes with little woodland, often very open.
- Variety of land uses from small pasture fields and commons in west to intensive agriculture in east.
- Distinct and contrasting vales: Evesham, Berkeley, Gloucestershire, Leadon, Avon.
- Frequent ancient market towns and large villages along the rivers.
- Nucleated villages with timber frame and brick buildings.
- Prominent views of hills: such as the Cotswolds, Bredon, Malverns, at edges of regional landscape character area.

Cotswolds

- Dramatic scarp rising above adjacent lowlands with steep coombes, scarp foot villages and beech woodlands.
- Rolling, open, high wold plateau with arable and large blocks of woodland, divided by small, narrow valleys.
- Incised landscapes with deep wide valleys.
- Flat, open dip slope landscape with extensive arable farmland.
- Prominent outliers within the lowlands.
- Honey-coloured Cotswold stone in walls, houses and churches.
- Attractive stone villages with a unity of design and materials.

Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges

- A landscape of very mixed landform, geology and settlement pattern, strongly influenced by Bristol at its centre and by its industrial history.

- Low-lying, shallow valleys which contrast with limestone ridges and scarps.
- Wooded scarps and high, open downland ridges.
- Legacy of coal industry evident in tips, settlement patterns and reclaimed areas.
- Waterside mills and other features of former rural industries are common.
- Frequent parks, mansions and manor houses.

Forest of Dean and Lower Wye

- Well wooded ridges and valleys contained by more open plateau landscape.
- Remote and self-contained.
- Scattered, sprawling settlements intermixed with small scale varied industry set within large broadleaved and coniferous woodlands.
- Numerous industrial artefacts and other historical elements from many periods visible.

The regional landscape character areas provide a very broad classification of landscape character across South Gloucestershire. They also provide the necessary framework for the following more detailed characterisation in the assessment hierarchy.

3.3 Landscape Character Types

From the regional landscape character areas, the landscape of South Gloucestershire has been further divided into landscape character types.

Landscape character types are generic and may occur in different parts of the country, but they are united through broadly similar patterns of geology, landform and drainage patterns as well as soils, vegetation, land use, human influences, settlement and field pattern.

The landscape character types have been identified through a combination of desktop study and field survey. The desktop study included the analysis of previous landscape

assessments, such as the draft Avon Landscape Assessment, which covered the whole of South Gloucestershire and made a preliminary division of the landscape into landscape character zones and sub-zones.

This draft landscape character assessment was correlated with the historic landscape survey boundaries (see Figure 4), where the historic landscape categories and types were mapped and described.

The landscape assessment was carried out in conjunction with the Forest of Avon, within the forest plan area, to provide the basis for the development of a woodland strategy (the Forest of Avon Strategy).

These assessments informed the current landscape character assessment and helped to define the landscape character types.

The eight landscape character types identified in South Gloucestershire include:

- Plateau and Scarp
- Shallow Ridge
- Parkland Vale
- Shallow Vale
- Broad Valleys
- Enclosed Valleys
- Undulating Ridge
- Estuary, Shoreline and Levels

Their location is mapped on Figure 7 and they are described and illustrated in the following pages.

PLATEAU AND SCARP

The landscape character type is characterised by a visually dominant plateau and scarp slope extending along the eastern boundary of South Gloucestershire, its significance recognised through its status as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Generally, the plateau/dip slope is a gently sloping, undulating area of large open pasture and arable fields, often divided by distinctive Cotswold stone walls, many of which are in a state of disrepair. Small areas of woodland punctuate the open landscape and provide a focal point to long distance views and a sense of



OPEN, SLOPING LANDSCAPE OF THE PLATEAU

enclosure. Woodland and tree cover is a more prominent feature of the Badminton Estate, with its designed parkland. The plateau/dipslope is crossed by numerous intersecting open roads, including the A46 and small lanes and tracks, including the Cotswold Way, which provide extensive views over the surrounding landscape and to the lower ground to the west.

This network of roads and paths connect the sparse settlements on the plateau. Consisting of small villages and isolated farms, scattered over the plateau, they are united in their use of Cotswold stone as a major building material. The M4 also passes through this area, although since it is mostly in cutting, its impact is minimal on the surrounding landscape character.



DISTINCTIVE SLOPES OF THE SCARP

The plateau drops dramatically to the west, where the west facing scarp slope offers extensive views over South Gloucestershire, the Severn Estuary, Bristol and north west towards South Wales. The scarp, in contrast to the plateau, generally has a varied, intricate and richly textured landscape. The slopes to the north are typically steep, concave, undulating pasture in irregular patterns of small fields. Deciduous woodland typically clothes the ridgeline and incised steep ‘coombes’, which carry streams issuing from springs or remain dry. Further south, the scarp is more open with less tree or hedgerow structure, instead typically comprising open, rolling grassland with field systems apparent on the steeper ground. Distinctive hanging beech woodland occurs in isolated pockets on steeper slopes and the ridgeline.

In the south eastern corner of South Gloucestershire, the landform typically comprises southerly facing scarp slopes, falling to deeply cut pastoral valleys, gently undulating vales, with arable open farmland on limestone ridges. Woodland encloses some of the valleys.

Amidst the intricate land cover, the scarp is scattered with hamlets typically along its toe, with isolated houses and farms. There are also a number of historic parklands such as Horton Court, Dodington Park, Dyrham Park and Tracy Park, which provide a strong managed landscape with a rich covering of mature woodland, avenues and ornamental trees, creating a high level of enclosure and visual diversity.

SHALLOW RIDGE

To the west of the plateau and scarp, a shallow and undulating ridge runs north to south across the eastern half of South Gloucestershire, from approximately Wickwar, past Pucklechurch, to Bitton.

From this lower area, the rising Cotswold scarp to the east forms a prominent and notable visual feature. To the west, the shallow ridge provides containment to the lower vale landscape and the conurbation of Bristol.

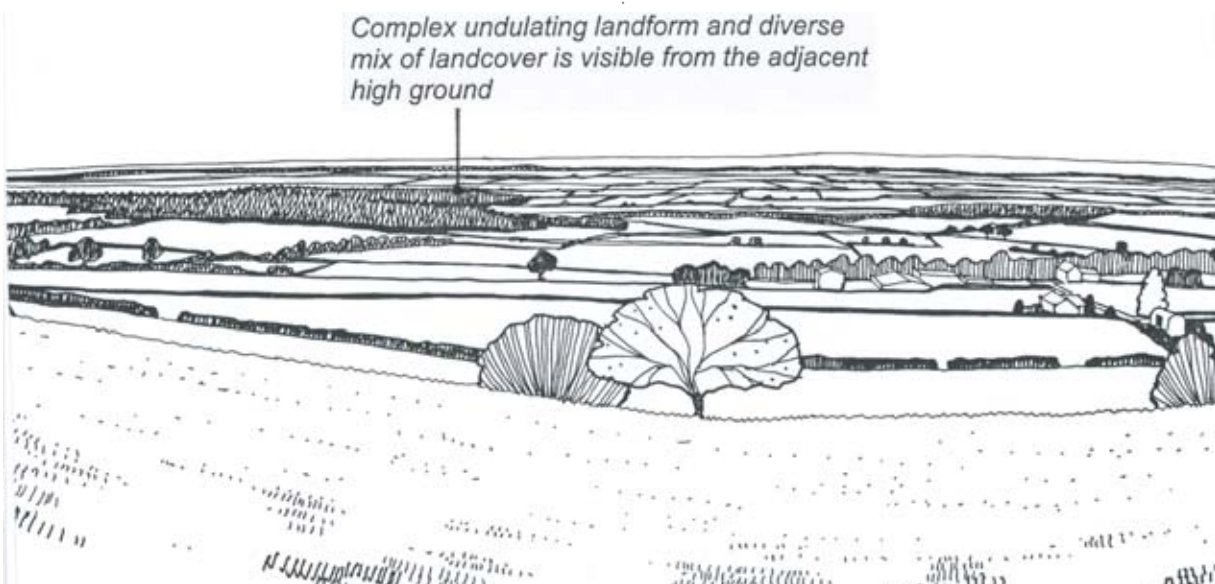
The ridge varies from a simple, undulating landform to a more complex topography, covered with a diverse land use comprising unenclosed common, heathland, woodland, mixed pasture and arable fields. These are divided by a diverse mix of field boundaries including clipped or overgrown hedges, linear bands of trees and fencing.

A number of quarries are associated with the defined ridgeline to the west.

A network of lanes and minor roads cross the area, including a number of major recreational routes such as the Jubilee Way, Monarch’s Way, Frome Valley Walkway and the Circular Rides. The M4 dissects the area, crossing from east to west, allowing open views across the landscape.

There are numerous villages and small towns present, such as Charfield, Wickwar, Pucklechurch and Wick, all with historic cores, which generally appear to blend in with the surrounding diverse landscape structure. The

Complex undulating landform and diverse mix of landcover is visible from the adjacent high ground



VIEWS ACROSS THE SHALLOW RIDGE FROM THE COTSWOLD SCARP

occasional visible church steeple on high ground, such as at Pucklechurch and Abson, forms focal points within the overall undulating landscape. Much of Chipping Sodbury in the west uses local limestone, contrasting with the more recent adjacent visible development at Yate, in the Shallow Vale.



SHALLOW RIDGE

PARKLAND VALE

To the north of South Gloucestershire, the bowl-shaped vale is influenced by heavily wooded parkland, contained to the east and west by surrounding ridges and undulating landform.

The M5 passes north to south through the approximate centre of the vale, from which the

landform gradually rises towards ridges to the east and west. The A38 also runs roughly parallel to the motorway, along which a number of linear settlements have grown.

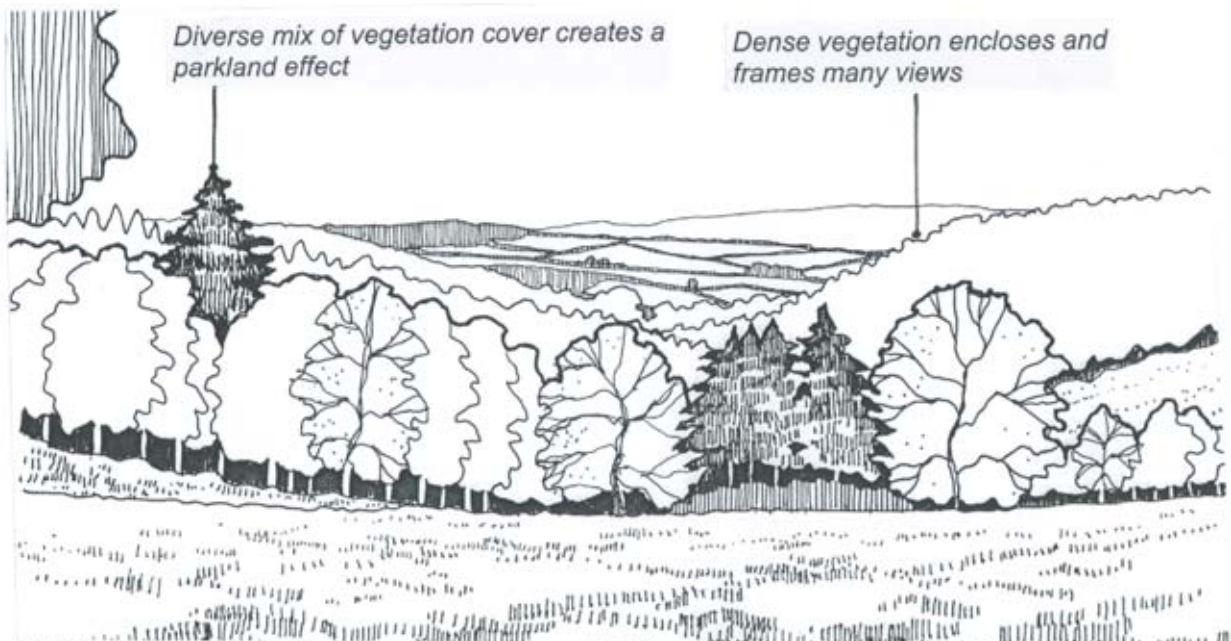
Settlement includes Tortworth, Charfield and Falfield to the north, which are evenly spread over the landscape and are integrated with the surrounding intricate woodland, parkland and hedgerow structure. The selected views of settlement edges, or church steeples add to the visual diversity and intricacy of the landscape.

Extensive views are a feature over the vale. Settlement and roads are largely well integrated within the strong vegetation framework, with views contained by surrounding ridgelines

To the east of the M5, blocks of mixed woodland, such as Priest Wood and in the vicinity of Leyhill and Tortworth Park, enclose the landscape and combine with dense hedgerows and linear bands of trees which surround the irregular mixed pasture and arable fields.

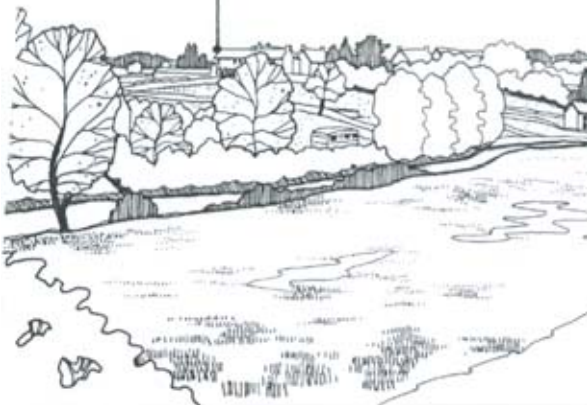
To the west of the M5, numerous linear woodland areas in Eastwood Park, combined with a strong hedgerow structure, enclose and screens many views.

Parkland character is enhanced by the several large houses set within parkland, with mature ornamental, specimen trees, arboretum and former deer park within the Tortworth Estate.



UNDULATING, WOODED PARKLAND VALE

Scattered houses and settlements are visible through the intricate vegetation structure and undulating landform



VARIED LANDSCAPE INFRASTRUCTURE

To the south east, above the vale, lies gently undulating ground with the small scattered settlements of Cromhall, Townwell, Bibstone as well as several small quarries. All are largely well integrated within the strong vegetation structure.

SHALLOW VALE

The shallow vale comprises a gently sloping basin, roughly in the centre of South Gloucestershire, north of Bristol.

It is contained by ridges, formed by curving low rock outcrops on the edge of the basin to the east, north and west, which form the northern limit of the geological formation of the Bristol Coalfield. The landscape within the vale undulates from east to west, as it passes over



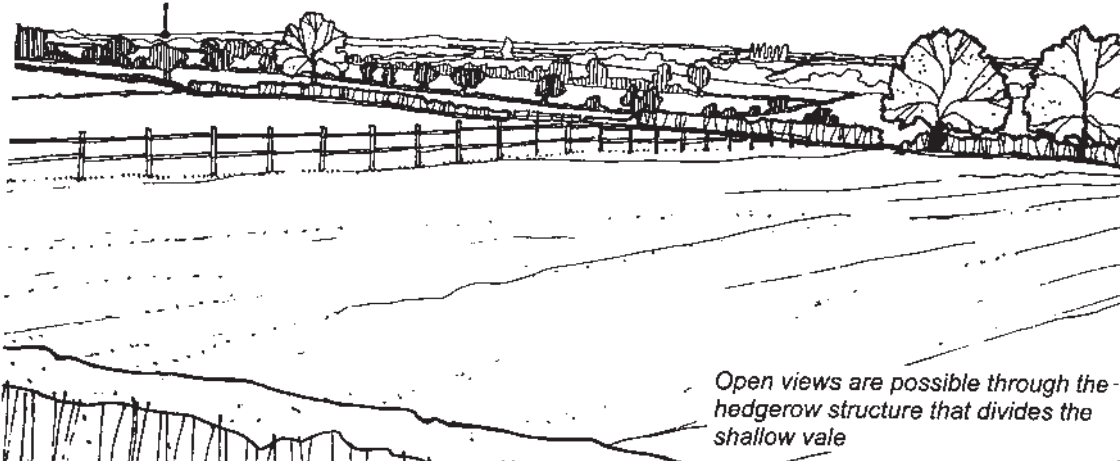
SHALLOW VALE

different rocks outcropping within the basin. The southern boundary is partly defined by settlement.

The shallow vale landscape is dominated by very gently rolling through to flat, topography, with pasture and large regular arable fields contained by a strong landscape framework of clipped hedges, with occasional linear bands of trees, copses and woodlands. To the north east, the vegetation framework becomes very sparse, the land divided by drainage ditches. To the north of the shallow vale lies the wooded parkland vale.

The vale is crossed by numerous minor roads and lanes. These are only occasionally visible however due to the surrounding framework of clipped hedges, trees or hedgebanks within a

Some mature standards create a degree of enclosure



Open views are possible through the hedgerow structure that divides the shallow vale

SLOPING LANDSCAPE LEADING TO RIDGE



OPEN, ROLLING LANDSCAPE

generally flat landscape. In contrast, the M4 and M5 form strong linear elements and define sections of the southern and western boundaries respectively.

Settlement has spread along many of the roads, concentrated particularly within the town of Yate. Yate has an historic scattered core, built of local Pennant stone, surrounded by more recent commercial, residential and industrial development on its fringes which visually encroach into the wider landscape.

Frampton Cotterell, Winterbourne and the urban fringes of Bristol to the south of the shallow vale are also visible within this undulating landscape and influence its character. Other features associated with the proximity of major urban areas, such as powerlines, are also a visible and intrusive element..

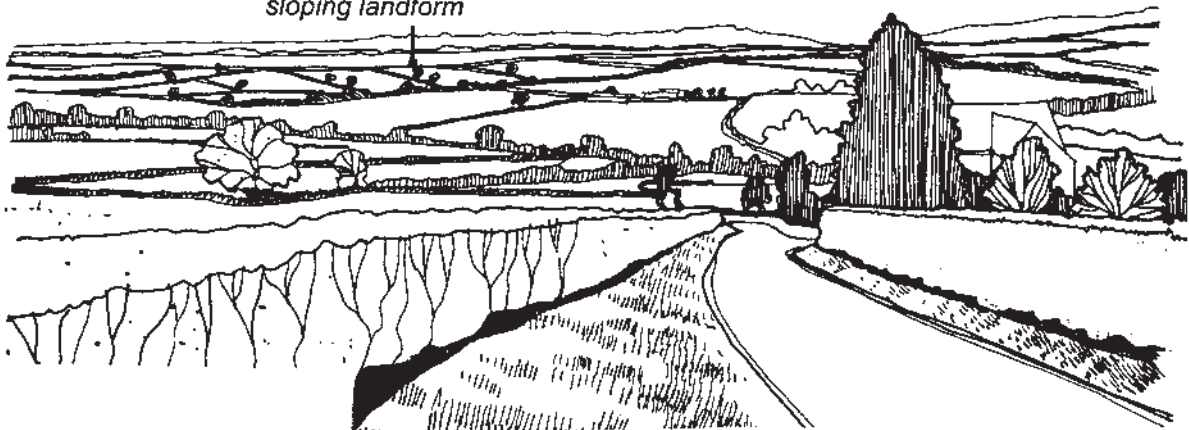
BROAD VALLEYS

To the north east and east of Bristol, a number of shallow, broad valleys occur, united through their similar topography and landform. Sloping down from the higher ground to the north and east the broad valleys lead towards the River Avon to the south.

The area is largely covered by the north and eastern urban areas of Bristol, and is contained to the north west by the M5 and to the north by the M4 motorways. Beyond the urban edges, the broad valleys comprise a rural landscape of smaller scale settlements, including villages, hamlets and scattered farms. The Bristol urban fringe comprises large areas of residential, commercial and industrial development, with retail development centred around Cribbs Causeway and commercial/light industrial development at Aztec West and Emerald Park.

Commercial and industrial developments are all located close to the major roads, motorway and their junctions. Comprising extensive areas of large buildings, warehouse-type structures and associated infrastructure these developments dominate the local landscape and views from the major road network. However, their visual influence is generally more limited in the adjoining rural landscape, largely due to the effect of earth mounding and recent planting along the motorways, as well as limited viewpoints. Emerald Park has a more extensive influence, due to the scale of development within its landscape setting and the surrounding topography, which provides more numerous viewpoints.

Enclosure is provided by the sloping landform



BROAD VALLEY LANDSCAPE



ENCLOSED ROAD ON THE FRINGES OF BRISTOL

There are also large areas of recent residential development at Bradley Stoke, Stoke Gifford, Patchway, Mangotsfield, Emerson's Green and Cadbury Heath. These new, often red brick estates, contrast with the older, denser mixed development around Kingswood and Filton. Scattered throughout the urban areas are diverse areas of open space and vegetation, which help to break up the density of the built form and provide local character. The urban edges of these recent residential developments exert a variable influence on the adjacent rural landscape, dependent on the surrounding landform within the shallow broad valleys, which affects visibility.

The influence of settlement continues to the north east of Bristol, where the horseshoe settlement formed by the coalescence of the villages of Frampton Cotterell, Winterbourne and Coalpit Heath, enclose the Frome Valley.

The rural landscape largely consists of a mix of regular pasture and arable fields, divided by clipped hedges, some stone walls, linear bands of trees and limited woodland. Numerous minor roads and lanes extend from the urban edge into the surrounding settlement and rural landscape.

The major routeways, including the M4, M32 and Avon Ring Road, that follow or cross these northern broad valleys, variably influence both visually and/or audibly, their localities or the wider landscape, dependent on their enclosure by topography and/or vegetation.

Settlement and its edges are also prominent. To the east of Bristol, the valley landscape is

partly covered by the urban area of Kingswood, contained further east by the rising rural ridgeline of the Pucklechurch and Oldland Ridge.

Here, scattered settlement, coal industry relics and common land are distinct features. The valleys are however crossed by numerous roads and lanes, including the A420 and A431. Surrounded by hedges and dense vegetation, they are quite contained. These connect the numerous small towns, villages and hamlets that are evenly scattered throughout the valleys. Set within the intricate field system, sloping topography and enclosed by vegetation, they appear well integrated within the surrounding landscape.

ENCLOSED VALLEYS

On the southern fringes of South Gloucestershire and to the east of Bristol, there are a number of enclosed valleys.

These consist of the steeply sloping landforms of the River Avon Valley and Golden Valley. The River Avon Valley focused upon the meandering river, forms a wide floodplain to the east and a



VARIED AND INTRICATE LAND USE AND LAND COVER

more enclosed steep sided valley to the west. Views are contained by landform and vegetation, but are generally more open within the floodplain.

The Golden Valley with the smaller course of the River Boyd, contains mixed pasture and arable fields divided by a mixture of overgrown and clipped, dense hedges and linear bands of trees.

The River Avon floodplain is edged in places by settlement to the north and beyond the South Gloucestershire boundary to the south. The steeper valley sides are covered by dense



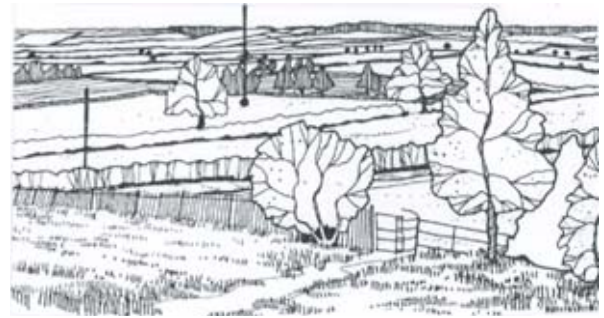
SETTLEMENT EDGE AND URBAN INFLUENCES VISIBLE IN THE ENCLOSED VALLEY LANDSCAPE

woodland vegetation with areas of pasture within the floodplain and more gentle valley sides. The bridge carrying the A4174 is a locally prominent feature as it crosses over the valley landscape. Outside the South Gloucestershire boundary to the south, the large red brick Cadbury's chocolate factory, is also a prominent feature.

Golden Valley contains only a few scattered farms and dwellings, with the village of Bitton, the largest settlement, at its mouth. Its church forms a local feature from within the River Avon Valley.

UNDULATING RIDGE

The undulating ridges forms a distinct band of high ground running north east to south west across the western part of South Gloucestershire. The area forms an extensive, prominent and distinctive landform, rising up quite quickly from the lowland levels to the west and less distinctly from the simple rolling vales to the east.



UNDULATING RIDGE

The ridge is characterised by a diverse mix of sloping pasture and some arable fields, divided by varying hedge patterns resulting from different management styles. There are also some remnants of ridge and furrow field pattern, laid hedges and old orchards, most in poor condition and in decline. The ridge is scattered with areas of prominent deciduous woodland, most typically associated with ridgelines and hill tops. This provides a strongly defined landscape framework and a sense of enclosure, particularly to the south, where the woodland structure creates an effective screen to the urban edge of Bristol.

Several towns and large villages, such as Thornbury, Alveston and Almondsbury occur on the ridgeline, as well as numerous small villages and hamlets. These are connected by an intricate pattern of roads and lanes often surrounded by hedges and woodlands, which add to the sense of enclosure. Many of the towns and villages are located on high points and offer impressive and extensive views to the west. Their churches and large buildings typically form landmarks in the surrounding landscape.



VIEW TOWARDS THE UNDULATING WOODED RIDGE FROM THE LEVELS



CHURCH LANDMARK

The major communication routes of the M4, M5 and A38 all cross the ridge and provide easy access to the surrounding area. Ribbon development has occurred along the A38 and adjoining roads, particularly to the south, producing a slight impression of suburbanisation of the rural landscape, particularly along the main transport corridors.

ESTUARY, SHORELINE AND LEVELS

The estuary, shoreline and Levels extend along the western edge of South Gloucestershire and beyond. The most dominant feature is the estuary with its expansive and panoramic views. Combined with the constantly changing shoreline, the open and exposed character of this area is prominent.

Away from the changing edge of the Severn Estuary of mudflats, exposed rock and salt marsh warth, the Levels generally consist of a mix of arable and pasture farmland protected by a sea wall. These fields are divided by a regular framework of streams and man-made rhines. Hedges and pollarded trees typically

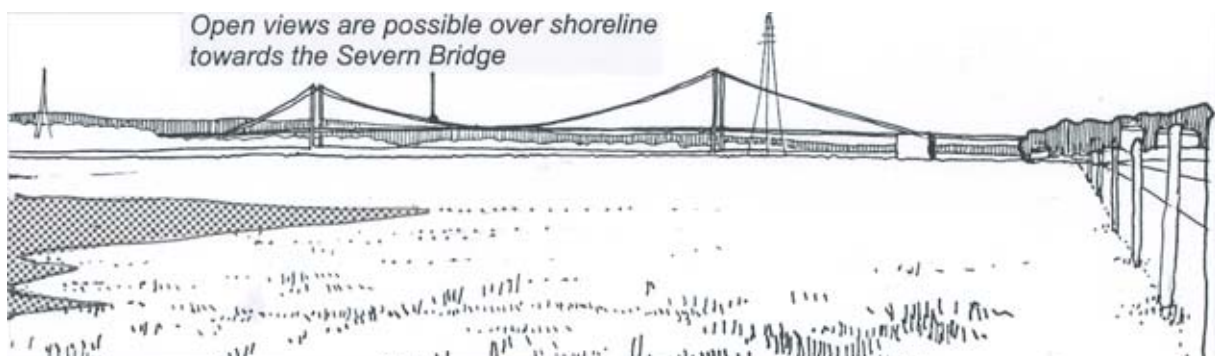


SHORELINE AND LEVELS

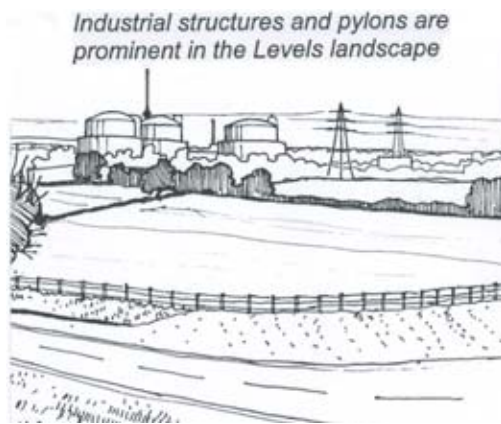
follow the pattern of rhines. The few small woodlands within the area, set within the rectangular field and drainage patterns, are significant despite their size, due to the largely flat and open landscape.

A complex network of minor roads and lanes connect the farms and hamlets scattered over the area with the Severn Way recreational route, following the sea wall along the edge of the estuary. Settlements such as Severn Beach, Redwick and Aust, occur on the edge of the Levels, protected by the sea wall or situated on slightly higher ground. They are a mix of old stone and brick cottages, pre-war brick housing as well as new red brick housing.

Other settlements such as Oldbury-on-Severn, Olveston and Almondsbury are also on slightly higher ground or outliers. These settlements are visible when viewed from the Levels' landscape, with churches and larger buildings forming local landmarks. The higher ground of the ridges to the east and in South Wales, in the Forest of Dean to the west form some distant enclosure and a backdrop to many views.



VIEW OVER THE SEVERN BRIDGE AND ESTUARY



INDUSTRY DOMINATES PARTS OF THE LEVELS

Parts of the Levels are dominated by large scale industrial buildings, structures and infrastructure, due to the open character of the landscape. The Severnside chemical works to the south and industry at Avonmouth, beyond the boundary of South Gloucestershire, are visually prominent. Similarly, Oldbury Power Station to the north is prominent. The

M4, M48, M49 and the main London to South Wales railway line pass through the Levels' landscape, as do numerous powerlines. The two Severn Bridges are prominent from within the Levels' landscape and have become nationally distinct landmarks.

3.4 Landscape Character Areas

The landscape character types have been further divided into 21 landscape character areas. The divisions have been summarised below.

Landscape character areas are unique areas which have their own particular identity. These have been illustrated on Figure 8 which is included and described in detail in Section Four.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

Plateau and Scarp	Badminton Plateau Marshfield Plateau Ashwicke Ridges Cotswold Scarp
Shallow Ridge and Vale	Wickwar Ridge and Vale Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley
Parkland Vale	Falfield Vale
Shallow Vale	Yate Vale Tytherington Plain Earthcott Vale
Broad Valleys	Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge Frome Valley Kingswood Patchway and Filton
Enclosed Valleys	Avon Valley Golden Valley
Undulating Ridge	Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge Severn Ridges
Estuary, Shoreline and Levels	Oldbury Levels Pilning Levels Severn Shoreline and Estuary



Section Four

Landscape

Character Area

Provides the detailed information on each of the landscape character areas that make up South Gloucestershire. Identifies, describes and evaluates each landscape character area.

4.1 Introduction

This section describes in detail the 21 landscape character areas in South Gloucestershire. This is the final stage in the division of the landscape into a hierarchy of areas of similar characteristics. Landscape character areas are distinct from regional landscape character areas and landscape character types. They are unique areas which have their own particular identity. The location of the landscape character areas that cover South Gloucestershire is shown in Figure 8.

Within each unique landscape character area, the physical characteristics of each area are described, outlining their distinctive attributes which contribute to a particular “sense of place”. Each landscape character area is presented as follows:

■ Key Plan

illustrating the location of each landscape character area in the context of South Gloucestershire and relative to other character areas.

■ Sketch Map

providing a “mental map” of each area, illustrating principally the landform and drainage pattern, with other key features such as woodland, settlement, roads etc. indicated where appropriate and where scale of map allows. Photograph viewpoints are also identified.

■ Summary Sentence

which encapsulates the overall character of each individual area.

■ Key Characteristics

comprising a series of bullet points summarising the principal landscape and visual

characteristics of an area. Whilst these bullets largely comprise features or attributes that make a positive contribution to local character or distinctiveness, in some instances they also include features which have had a negative impact, but which none the less, by their presence, have a significant influence on local character.

■ Location

includes descriptions of boundaries and the relationship of the area to surrounding/adjacent landscape character areas.

■ Physical Influences

includes broad information on geology, soils, topography (natural and, where applicable, man-made landforms) and drainage patterns.

■ Land Cover

information on land use, i.e. pasture/arable land, relative field size and shape of fields, type of field boundaries and woodland cover. Also includes any historical or cultural landscape features that may be visible today, i.e. commons, historic landmarks, parks etc. and industrial landscapes such as mineral extraction and landfill areas. Above ground archaeological sites, evident as landforms, are also referred to (these include some SAMs).

■ Settlement and Infrastructure

broad information on towns, villages, houses, farms and industry, including historic development, settlement form and building materials, as well as more recent expansion and infill development is covered. Buildings, including structures designated as SAMs, which form landmarks in the wider landscape are also noted.

The key road and railway networks are described, together with broad references to

the character of the minor road links. Major recreational roads through each area, which include national and local trails for pedestrians, cyclists and/or equestrians are described (the sections of Circular Rides described are specifically for equestrian use), together with general reference to the rest of the public rights of way network. Whilst these routes rarely impact on the character of an area themselves (although they may follow or be bounded by historic features in the landscape), they provide the means of access into and opportunity to experience, the countryside described. The location of powerlines and other structures are also described.

■ Landscape Character

brings together all the above information to give an overall description of landscape character, including distinctive attributes, key views, the prominence of landscape features and the presence of landmarks.

■ The Changing Landscape

following the detailed description of landscape character, each area is evaluated with regard to its present landscape condition, recent changes and future trends with respect to landscape change and sensitivity to change. Future changes include major sites allocated in the Local Plan, preferred sites in the Minerals and Waste Local Plan, major approved schemes, as well as known or potential changes from other land use or management changes.

■ Photographs

illustrating some of the typical and specific landscape features and attributes which contribute to the uniqueness of each landscape character area, as well as in some instances, aspects which detract from local character.

■ Landscape Character Area Boundary Map

illustrated on an Ordnance Survey base map and providing the boundary of each landscape character area, pattern of the landscape framework, such as fields, roads and settlement etc. Adjoining character areas are also indicated.

Broad boundary lines are used to define each character area on the Landscape Character Area Boundary Maps.

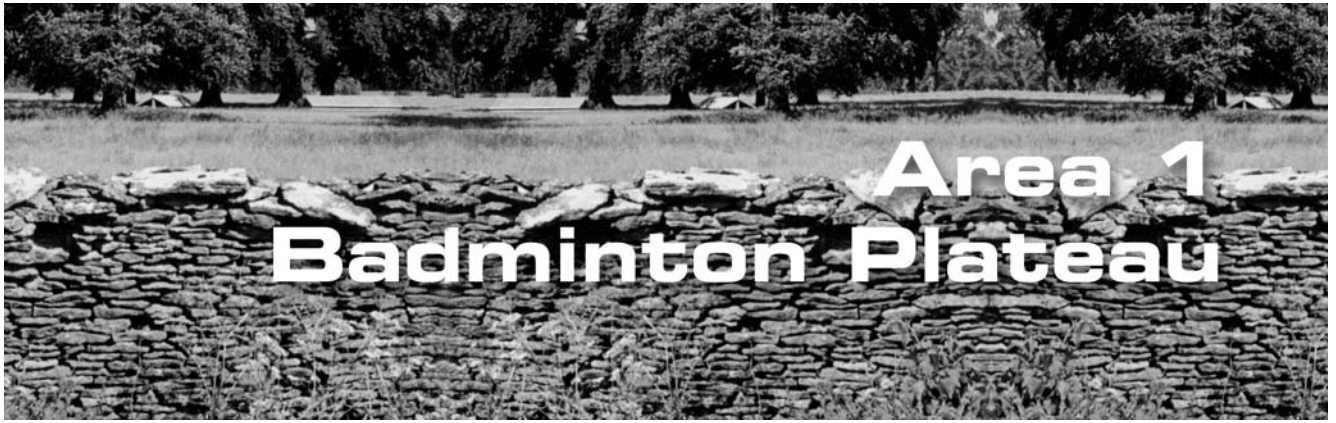
The mapped boundaries follow the most appropriate feature between two areas, whether that is a contour in areas where landform is a key element in defining one or both areas, or a feature, such as a field boundary, river, road, railway, or settlement edge, where these elements are more appropriate.

Although a landscape character area boundary may mark a distinct change between two adjacent areas, more typically the change between one area and another is not abrupt. Instead, boundaries often occupy an area of transition between adjacent landscape character areas, where influences such as land cover, land use or settlement are less consistent.

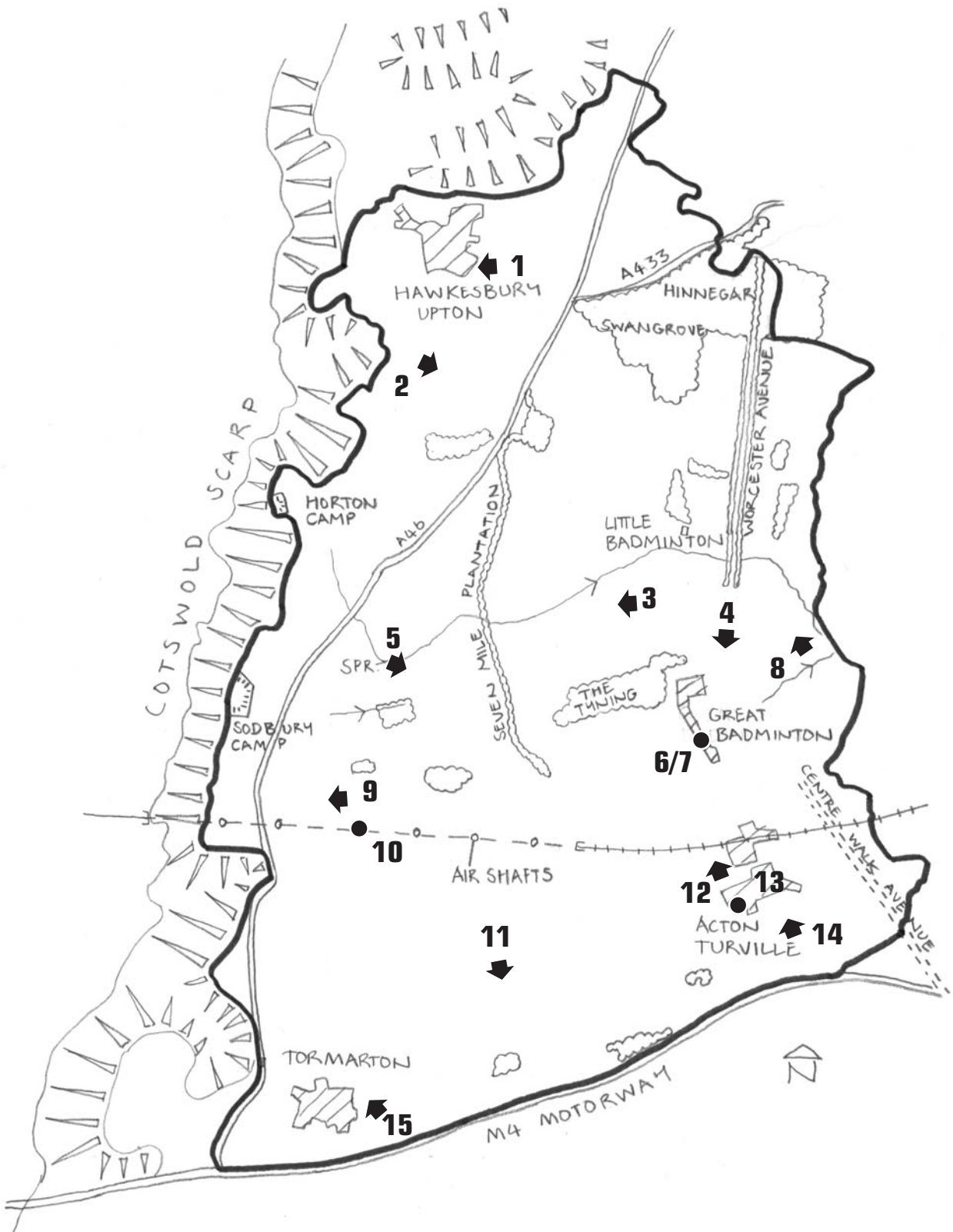
Each landscape character area, however, will still have on the whole a 'sense of place' and distinctive attributes which differ from an adjacent landscape character area.

Due to the transitional nature of many of the landscape character area boundaries and the fact that landscape characteristics or features within one landscape character area may visually influence an adjoining landscape character area, it is important when looking at a particular area or site that an individual landscape character area is not viewed in isolation, but is seen in the context of the wider landscape. This is especially important when an area or site may be located towards the boundary of a landscape character area.

The Glossary of Terms, located at the end of this document, provides further explanation and definition of the various terms used throughout this section of the report.



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Key

➤¹⁵ Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

**Figure 9:
Badminton Plateau - Sketch Map**



The Badminton Plateau landscape character area is a gently sloping, open, agricultural area evenly scattered with Cotswold stone structures and field boundaries.

Key Characteristics

- Gently sloping and undulating, dip slope plateau landscape.
- Large regular shaped fields, mainly arable defined by Cotswold stone walls, (often in a state of disrepair), clipped hedgerows or in places by post and wire fencing.
- Open exposed landscape punctuated by mature trees, copses and woodland of oak, ash, beech and sycamore.
- Expansive views over the plateau are common, with limited focal points. Panoramic views westwards are obtained from the scarp plateau edge.
- Large areas of woodland, formal planned landscape and architecture associated with Badminton Park. The Badminton Estate covers and influences most of this character area.
- Villages, hamlets and isolated farms and buildings are scattered over the plateau and are united through their common use of Cotswold stone as a building material and in other structures, including walls.

- Major roads cross the open landscape, the lack of significant surrounding vegetation making them a strong visible and audible element within the landscape.

Location

The Badminton Plateau landscape character area is located in the north east of South Gloucestershire within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

This landscape character area is defined to the north and east by the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary, although the landscape character of the plateau does extend beyond.

The southern boundary follows the M4, which marks a subtle transition between the Badminton Plateau and the slightly more undulating Marshfield Plateau to the south. To the west, the boundary follows the often sharp change in topography, along the top of the Cotswold Scarp. (See Figures 10 & 12).

Physical Influences

The underlying geology of the area is a varied combination of principally north-south bands of Bathonian Limestone, Great Oolitic Limestones, Fullers Earth, Oolitic Limestone and Forest Marble Limestone. These bands of stone narrow towards the Cotswold Scarp to the west. The soil cover is a simple mix of Brown Rendzinas and typical Calcareous Pelosols.

This geology creates a landform of gentle dip slope and plateau, at approximately 200 metres a.o.d. in the west, sloping to 120 metres a.o.d. in the east.

There are very few watercourses in this area, due to the permeability of the underlying limestone. Short sections of stream rise from springs before flowing eastwards and disappearing into swallow holes (see Figure 10).

Land Cover

The Badminton Plateau area is largely influenced by the Badminton Estate, which covers most of this character area and extends over parts of the Marshfield Plateau and Cotswold Scarp. The estate includes Badminton Park and House at its focus, with the remaining area covered by extensive, mainly arable, tenant farms. The large regular shaped fields are typically defined by Cotswold dry stone walls (in various conditions), low clipped hedgerows, and some post and wire fencing. The location of former stone wall boundaries are often evident as grass mounds within large fields, or remaining walls are sometimes overgrown with vegetation.

Some local variation in the field sizes and boundary type are found within the area. For example, large fields with stone walls to the south and east of Hawkesbury Upton (Photo 2); medium to large fields with stone walls and clipped hedgerows adjacent to Badminton Park; medium fields with stone walling within the area of Tormarton (Photo 15); and fields with clipped hedgerows in the area of Acton Turville (Photo 12).

Badminton Park occupies a significant area of land within the east. The Registered Historic Park is a combination of medieval park and 18th and 19th century designed ornamental landscape, with the settlement of Great Badminton and Badminton House at its focus.

The parkland includes stands and clumps of mature and over-mature beech and oak trees within open grassland, with lakes and ponds the immediate area of Badminton House (Photos 4 & 8). Broad tree avenues project from the house northwards (Worcester Avenue) and south eastwards (Centre Walk Avenue). A prominent modern land use is the mown-grass landing strip to the west of Badminton Park (Photo 3). Badminton Park and its landscape features extend beyond this area, into the wider Badminton Estate to the east and north.

To the north east of the area lies a large and prominent area of mature mixed woodland / beech plantation, fringed by the A433 and segmented by country lanes and the northern extent of Worcester Avenue.

Within the wider plateau area, small copses and woodland blocks of oak, ash, beech and sycamore (Photo 5), punctuate the landscape, with isolated specimen trees along some of the field boundaries.

The plateau also has a scattering of archaeological sites such as long barrows and tumuli, e.g. The Starveall Long Barrow and Round Barrow, north east of Hawkesbury Upton (both SAM's) and the Grickstone, which lies to the west of Great Badminton. There are also two prominent Iron Age hill forts located on the crest of the Cotswold Scarp, Sodbury Camp and Horton Camp (both SAM's), which give visible reminders of ancient land uses in this area.

Settlement and Infrastructure

Settlement on the plateau is scattered and limited to a number of nucleated villages including Hawkesbury Upton with its planned medieval core, Tormarton, Great Badminton, Little Badminton and Acton Turville (Photo 13), all designated Conservation Areas. The Somerset Monument, also within the extended Hawkesbury Conservation Area, is located north west of the village just outside the landscape character area.

The villages are typically a mix of former workers' cottages, farm buildings and 'grand' houses and properties (Photo 4, 7 & 13). A village green and/or church is typically present at the heart of the settlements which, together with the houses, creates a rich mix of building styles and sizes. The settlements have all been part of the Badminton Estate at some point in their history, influencing their use, growth and style.

The character of Great and Little Badminton contrasts noticeably with other villages within the area. Both comprise estate villages (Little Badminton is built on the site of a previous medieval village, with earthwork remains) set around and enclosing a village green, with wider parkland setting. The architectural style of the villages is varied, influenced by both estate and agricultural heritage, but unified through the

use of Cotswold stone and vernacular details. Both villages have examples of stone tiled and thatched roofed cottages. Great Badminton has more prominent architectural structures associated with Badminton House (Photo 4). The stone wall-lined wide roads through the village are another distinctive feature.

Cotswold stone is the common building material used in all settlements, including the scattered and isolated farms and many field boundaries across the area.

The settlements are connected by a network of minor roads and lanes (Photo 1). The B4040 between Chipping Sodbury and Malmesbury, runs east to west and passes through Acton Turville. The M4 defines the southern boundary of this landscape character area and connects to the A46, which runs north east to south west between Bath and Cirencester on the western fringes of this landscape character area.

The South Wales to London railway passes through the centre of this landscape character area from west to east, with the western half in tunnel. The track emerges in cutting and then continues at ground level to the east. Several brick airshafts demarcate the route of the underground section of the line (Photo 10).

Two major recreational routes pass through the area the Cotswold Way and one of a series of Circular Rides. The Cotswold Way passes north-south, west of Hawkesbury Upton along the crest of the Cotswold Scarp. The Circular Ride has several routes in the south west, linking Old Sodbury to Tormarton and to the west of Badminton.

A number of historic green lanes which are visible as unpaved paths, tracks and bridleways, often between stone walls, lie within the western part of the area. These include Marshfield Path (running north west to south east), Bodkin Hazel Lane and the former Bristol to Oxford road north of the M4 and Tynning Lane (Photo 9) (both running east/west).

Only one major powerline crosses the area in the south west, generally in a south easterly direction, passing east of Little Sodbury and Tormarton.

Landscape Character

The northern, western and southern areas, comprising two thirds of the character area, have an open and exposed simple character, arising from its combination of gently sloping and undulating topography and general lack of any significant barriers to the open views, or focal points within this expansive landscape. Views and a similar landscape character continue eastwards into Wiltshire. Views are partly obscured however along some roads, with the growth of self-seeded trees and shrubs.

The western boundary in contrast, provides extensive panoramic views from the Cotswold Scarp, over the lower vale landscapes to the west. Wetmoor Woods and the towns of Chipping Sodbury and Yate, form prominent large scale features in the middle distance.

The agricultural landscape within the dip slope and plateau contrasts significantly with the more planned landscape of Badminton Park to the east, which generally has a greater and richer vegetation cover.

The formal character of the park extends out into the broader landscape of the character area and into Wiltshire to the east and comprises a landscape of hedgerows, mature trees, woodland and avenues. The distinctive vegetation cover of the park also gives definition and scale to the landscape from many view points within the character area.

Occasional blocks of woodland and copses are scattered throughout the area, beyond Badminton Park and help to contain views and provide the main definition of space and scale in the broader landscape.

Some hedges are overgrown and in need of appropriate management. Within the Badminton Estate however, hedgerows are clipped and better managed, with evidence of woodland management and new planting, for example at Caroline Wood.

Low grass mounds within fields indicate the location of former stone wall boundaries, in common with other areas where there has been a significant transition from pasture/mixed agriculture to arable and, where maintenance and management of field boundaries has declined.

Villages, hamlets and isolated houses are fairly evenly scattered throughout the plateau. The special character of the main settlements is recognised through their designation as Conservation Areas.

The architectural diversity within these settlements is united through the common use of Cotswold stone as the principal building material.

Cotswold stone also features in field and settlement boundaries and thus assists the gentle transition between settlement and the wider landscape, creating an integrated and harmonious appearance, particularly within the older settlements.

The historic settlements are often situated within slight depressions in the topography, or include mature trees and vegetation, which assists their integration within the wider landscape.

Acton Turville is however quite prominent within local views from the south (Photo 14). More recent built development, such as at Hawkesbury Upton, is situated on higher ground on the edge of the older village core, where the new rooftops break the skyline and there is little tree cover, making it visually prominent within the wider landscape (Photo 1).

Isolated properties and farms including their associated modern buildings are also prominent in the generally open landscape.

The Somerset Monument, to the north near Hawkesbury Upton, is situated on the crest of the Cotswold Scarp. Although outside the plateau character area, it is a prominent feature and distinctive local landmark, visible not only from the plateau, but also from the scarp and the lower ground to the west.

The earthworks at Sodbury Camp Hill Fort are a prominent local feature seen from the A46. The site forms a large, irregular landform and skyline feature on the western plateau edge.

The settlements, set within the open rolling countryside, are connected by a network of roads. The minor roads are generally lined by mostly low Cotswold dry stone walls (Photo 11), often in a state of disrepair or overgrown with vegetation and some have been removed

completely. There are open views from these roads across the wider landscape with occasional tree belts enclosing some views.

The M4 cuts through the plateau running east to west and defines the southern boundary. Large portions are in cutting, minimising its visual and audible impact, although its traffic volumes impact on the otherwise rural and tranquil character of most of the area. The A46 is largely unenclosed: the traffic on it creating a prominent visual and audible feature through the open landscape. Traffic movement along minor roads is similarly evident.

The overhead powerline which crosses the south western part of the character area is also a highly visible element within the open rolling landscape. Other powerlines are visible within the Marshfield Plateau to the south and beyond the South Gloucestershire boundary, in Wiltshire to the east.

The railway line, largely in cutting or within a tunnel, is not generally a visible element within the landscape. However, the prominent 'castellated' air-shafts provide distinctive features within the rural landscape.

The Changing Landscape

The character of the Badminton Plateau landscape character area is rural, with a significant part being strongly influenced by the designed landscape and distinctive architecture associated with Badminton Park and the agricultural landscape of the wider estate. A key aspect of the built environment of this area is the consistent use of Cotswold stone for buildings and other structures, including boundary walls. Where reconstituted stone has been used, the building form, appearance and weathering qualities integrate less well, resulting in an erosion of the distinctiveness and character of the area.

The framework of walls, hedgerows, woodland and trees within the Badminton Estate are largely well maintained. Measures to conserve the long term framework of trees and woodland within the park have seen relatively recent planting of young trees, laid out in avenues. Recent tree planting has also been undertaken

in the creation of Caroline Wood. This will begin to influence views from the A46 as it matures.

The character of the plateau landscape beyond the Badminton Estate is however influenced in places by limited maintenance of the area's principal landscape features:

- The characteristic landscape generally in a poor state of repair. In some locations the walls have not been maintained or rebuilt, so that only a remnant grass mound remains. Their replacement with hedging or post and wire fencing, or visual loss behind self-seeded vegetation along verges, erodes local distinctiveness and character. An extensive section of wall has however been repaired along the Badminton Estate boundary, following the A433.
- A decline in the management and/or maintenance of existing hedgerow field boundaries, which provide landscape structure, would further erode the character of some parts of the area.
- Similarly, the tree structure is in a variable condition. Some areas retain an ageing structure of mature and over-mature trees. There are, however few juvenile trees to sustain this framework beyond the next few decades. This trend will similarly impact upon woodland with their eventual decline unless brought back under management.
- Self-seeded trees establishing along road verges throughout the area and within field boundaries, as well as other tree planting, whilst contributing to the landscape structure, have the potential to change the open character, vistas and views.

The open and exposed character of this area ensures that it is highly sensitive to change. The change in agricultural land use, from pasture to predominantly arable in the 20th century, together with the loss of walls or hedgerows to increase field sizes, has resulted in a significant change in the colour and texture of the landscape on the plateau. Further changes in agricultural land use or management in the future could have a similarly significant impact, due to the open character of the area.

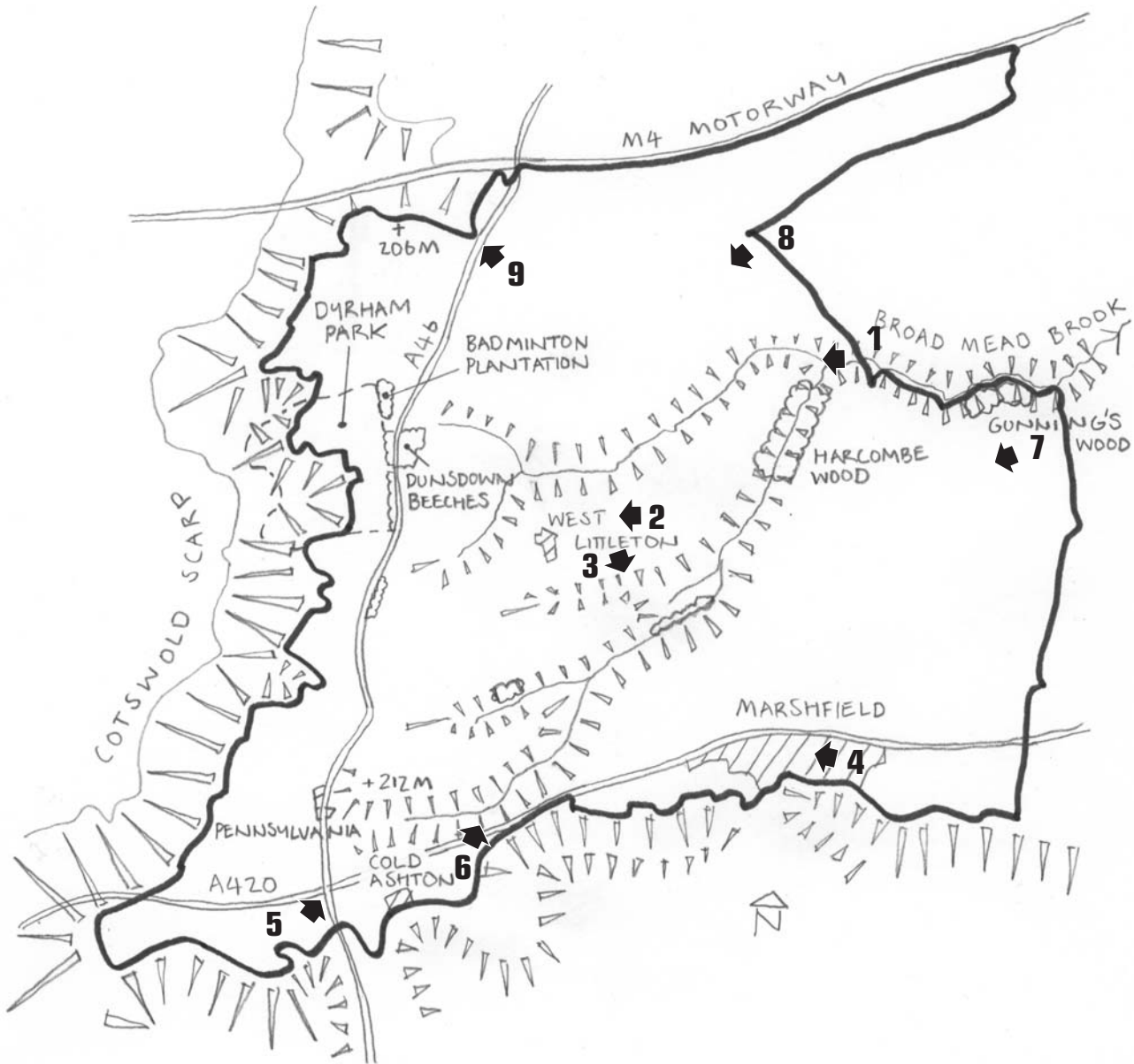
Any vertical built forms would be visible, not just from within the plateau, but from the surrounding wider landscape.

Any development which 'breaks' the skyline, such as housing, large agricultural or other shed type buildings, masts, traffic on roads etc, has the potential to be visually prominent and introduce a discordant element within this open plateau. Similarly, the cumulative effect of a multiplicity of smaller impacts, such as loss of walling, the introduction of fencing and the use of reconstituted stone materials or alien building forms, can have a significant and erosive impact on the distinctiveness of this locality.



Area 2 Marshfield Plateau

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Key

↖₁₅ Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

**Figure 12:
Marshfield Plateau - Sketch Map**



The Marshfield Plateau landscape character area is a gently sloping agricultural plateau dissected by two shallow river valleys.

Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating, upland plateau/dip slope landscape with open character. Covered by mainly large regular shaped arable fields generally defined by Cotswold stone walls, often in a state of disrepair.
- Western and southern boundaries are defined by a significant change in topography, the Cotswold Scarp (west) and Ashwicke Ridges character area (south), offering extensive views beyond the area.
- Minimal areas of woodland, copses and few trees contribute to a simple, exposed landscape of open views.
- Plateau/dip slope landscape dissected by two river valleys, consisting of an enclosed and textured landscape of irregular, medium sized pasture fields and wetland meadows. Divided by hedges, some stone walls, with scattered woodland copses. Valleys contrast strongly with the open plateau.
- Limited settlement, comprising a town, villages, a hamlet and scattered isolated farms and buildings, united with the

landscape through their common use of Cotswold stone as a building material. All are visible features contributing to landscape character.

- Major roads and one pylon line cross the open landscape. The traffic and pylon line are visually intrusive and traffic is audible.

Location

The Marshfield Plateau landscape character area is located in the south east of South Gloucestershire and within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

This landscape character area is defined to the east by the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary, although the landscape character of the plateau extends beyond. The northern boundary follows the M4, which marks a broad and subtle area of transition between the Marshfield Plateau and the slightly less undulating and more heavily vegetated Badminton Plateau to the north.

To the west, the boundary is defined by the fairly abrupt change in topography formed by the Cotswold Scarp. The southern boundary also follows an often distinct change in topography between the plateau and upper valley edges of the Ashwicke Ridges landscape character area, which includes incised valleys which lead towards the River Avon. (See Figures 13 & 15).

Physical Influences

The underlying geology of the area is predominantly Great Oolitic Limestone with Fullers Earth and a small area of Athelstan Oolitic Limestone to the west. The soils are predominantly Brown Rendzinas with a small proportion of typical Calcareous Pelosols.

This geology creates a landform of gently rolling upland plateau/dip slope, its highest point of 220 metres is at Tog Hill in the south west corner. The plateau is incised by two gently sloping valleys, formed by two branches of the Broadmead Brook, fed by a number of springs. The brook gently meanders along the valley

bottom, flowing approximately north eastwards. (See Figure 13).

Along the eastern boundary the Broadmead Brook valley becomes more small scale, with a narrow steep sided valley profile. A number of side valleys are dry and there is only one small man-made pool to the north of West Littleton.

Land Cover

The plateau/dip slope area consists of large, mainly arable, regular shaped fields on the flat to gently sloping upland landscape (Photo 3). There is very little tree cover within the plateau, other than a few isolated copses and mature specimens along the field boundaries and around the edges of settlement. Exceptions on the plateau are small woodlands adjacent to the west and north west boundary. Some woodland is also found within the Broadmead Brook valleys (Photo 6), of which only Harcombe Wood is of any significant size.

Fields over the plateau area are largely divided by Cotswold stone walls. These are often in a state of disrepair and in some cases have been removed, with only remnant grass mounds left to define the former wall position.

There is a particularly strong framework of walls evident within the following areas:

- to the north west of the area, south of Tormarton;
- to the south around Marshfield, where the pronounced change between stone and hedgerow boundaries follows the sharp junction between plateau edge and scarp beyond;
- along the main roads and elsewhere close to settlements and farms.

Intermittent, thick and clipped hedges also form prominent field boundaries, principally to the west, adjacent to the Cotswold Scarp and within the Broadmead Brook valleys.

Land cover within the two valleys consists of a mixture of arable and pasture, with irregular shaped medium sized fields on the valley sides and semi-enclosed meadows on the valley bottom (Photo 1).

Field boundaries within the valleys consist of a mix of stone walls and intermittent, clipped and thick hedges. There is a higher percentage of associated tree cover, formed by small areas of woodland on the valley sides and overgrown hedgerows/trees, which demarcate streams in the lower wetland areas.

Field size is often closely related to landform. Smaller fields have been formed from the enclosure of medieval open fields, generally found within the Broadmead Brook valleys. Over the plateau, much larger fields have been formed, by the enclosure of open common and downland.

Across the character area, where the transition has been made from sheep pasture/mixed agriculture to arable, the field boundaries have often been neglected and, in some cases, have been lost.

There were a number of tumuli and long barrows scattered over the plateau landscape, indicating its past historic importance. A Long Barrow at Lapdown Barn and Round at Littleton Down near West Littleton still exist and are both Scheduled Ancient Monuments. However, most of the others, especially the large group near Marshfield, have been removed.

Dyrham Park, a Registered Historic Park, to the west of this area, partly falls within this and partly within the adjacent Cotswold Scarp character area. The open parkland within this area includes linear woodland and Cotswold stone walling along the park boundary, with avenues, copses and individual tree specimens. Two areas of woodland, Badminton Plantation and Dunsdown Beeches are located adjacent to the boundary of the park.

Settlement and Infrastructure

There are three main settlements within the area. The small town of Marshfield to the south, is situated on the edge of the plateau area with the A420 defining its northern edge. A Conservation Area, it comprises mainly 16th –18th century Cotswold stone buildings with a church towards its eastern end. The main street is characterised by narrow frontages

reflecting the medieval layout of the town (Photo 4). Dry stone boundary walls extend from the town into the adjacent rural landscape.

The small linear villages of West Littleton and Cold Ashton, also Conservation Areas, are the other main settlements. They consist of scattered houses of a variety of styles and ages, with a church and manor of probably Saxon origin. Surrounding field boundaries are dry stone walls. The hamlet of Pennsylvania, to the south west, includes stone buildings and farm agricultural structures, as well as a petrol station. Unlike the above settlements, adjacent field boundaries are hedges.

Elsewhere, the irregular and scattered distribution of farm buildings across the agricultural landscape is closely related to springlines and watercourses.

These settlements are connected by a number of lanes lined with stone walls, which largely radiate from Marshfield (Photo 2). The lanes become more winding within the valleys, where they are largely enclosed by stone walls on banks, although these are frequently masked by hedgerow vegetation. Three main roads also cross the area. The M4 generally forms the northern boundary and this connects to the A46(T) which runs north to south between Bath and Cirencester close to the western boundary. The A420 runs east to west close to the southern boundary of the area and passes along the northern edge of Marshfield.

There are three major recreational routes that pass through the area:

- One of a series of Circular Rides crosses the centre of the area via West Littleton, along the western edge of Marshfield and then south.
- The Cotswold Way passes in a generally north to south direction near the western plateau/scarp boundary. It crosses a section of the north western area, passes outside along the scarp then back into this area, south eastwards through Cold Ashton.
- The Limestone Link passes south east from Cold Ashton towards Bath.

To the north, one major overhead powerline supported by large steel pylons, crosses east

to west through the area south of the M4. A tall telecommunications mast occurs close to the junction of the M4 and A46(T), adjacent to the Cotswold Scarp.

Landscape Character

The Marshfield Plateau area has three principal landform elements which influence its character. These comprise the open plateau/dip slope landscape, the broad shallow and largely open valleys of the upper Broadmead Brook and the smaller scale enclosed lower Broadmead Brook valley to the east of the area.

The broad plateau/dip slope has an open and simple character, created through the combination of gently rolling arable land, which lacks any significant vegetation to screen views across the expansive plateau landscape (Photo 3 & 7). Field boundaries are generally limited to low stone walls, which are frequently overgrown or replaced with fencing. In some locations, walls have become overgrown with hedgerow vegetation and can be easily mistaken for hedgerows. There are also occasional mature trees associated with these features.

The open character of the plateau/dip slope contrasts strongly with the smaller scale landscape associated with the two valleys of the Broadmead Brook and its tributary, which dissect the plateau (Photo 1 & 6). They consist of irregular shaped pasture and arable fields of a generally smaller size than on the plateau, divided by thick, overgrown and clipped hedges and some stone walls. They are interspersed with infrequent small woodland copses. In the east is a more intricate and textured, small scale and enclosed landscape formed by woodland, copses, individual trees and wetland meadows close to the valley bottom.

Part of Dyrham Park lies within the western boundary. The Deer Park includes open parkland with planted avenues, woodland belts, scattered mature ornamental trees, native tree specimens and copses. Woodland belts along the park boundary, following the A46, are visually prominent and contain westerly views from within the character area (Photo 8). Expansive open views are possible from within the park, over the lower vale landscape to the

west, including views of the remainder of the park and its stately home.

Settlement is very limited within the area, comprising a small town, two small villages, a hamlet and a few isolated farms, dwellings and other buildings. They all contain buildings of historic form and architectural style, with little evidence of modern additions.

West Littleton, located towards the centre of the area, partly nestles within the undulating wooded landscape of the valleys, with only the southern part of the settlement being visible over much of the western and central parts of the character area.

The town of Marshfield and village of Cold Ashton are located on high ground along the southern boundary and offer open views of the surrounding landscape, particularly extensive over the lower ground of the Ashwicke Ridges and valleys to the south. Views of their settlement edge are possible over the open exposed plateau, although field boundary walls and intermittent vegetation on the settlement edge integrate these elements to some extent. Views from the adjacent character area to the south, towards these settlements, are either local or long distance, their extent determined by landform and the degree of enclosure along roads.

Views of the hamlet of Pennsylvania are limited to its immediate setting and a few points along roads in the locality. The modern petrol station structure is a utilitarian feature, out of character with the rest of the settlement.

Outside these villages and hamlets, there are only a few isolated farms and buildings, the open plateau landscape being largely unpopulated in comparison with most of South Gloucestershire.

In all cases, due to the general scarcity of settlement within the area, where it is visible, it is generally a significant feature within the landscape.

Settlements are united through their use of Cotswold stone, used both for buildings and structures, including field boundaries.

The two Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the area are not visually distinct features within the landscape.

The exposed plateau/dip slope allows distant internal views from the highest vantage points. Extensive distant views from the area's boundaries are also possible, partly limited in places by a woodland belt at Dyrham Park and by the foreground skyline of the upper scarp edge. These include views westwards over the Cotswold Scarp (hidden below) to the vale beyond, views southwards across the Ashwicke Ridges and Avon Valley, views across to the Badminton Plateau to the north and into similar character areas in Wiltshire to the east.

The tranquillity and rural character evident over much of the character area is, in the south western part, affected by the main roads. The A46(T) and A420 run generally at grade with the surrounding landform, or are occasionally partially enclosed by low Cotswold stone walls, often in a state of disrepair. These 'A' roads typically have higher traffic volumes, which are visible and influence the rural character of the plateau, at least locally. The A420, in particular, is a prominent route running along a ridgeline to the south, with open views in all directions, increasing the visual and audible influence of traffic not only within the Marshfield Plateau landscape character area, but also within the Ashwicke Ridges landscape character area to the south (Photo 5). The traffic is locally prominent where it crosses the often exposed plateau and ridge skyline to the west of Marshfield. The M4 generally forms the northern boundary of this landscape character area. Although mostly in cutting, the high traffic levels are an audible and sometimes visually prominent feature of the landscape along those lengths running at grade.

The open character of the plateau landscape also ensures that the powerline that runs east-west to the south of the M4 (Photo 8 & 9) and the mast near the M4 and A46(T) junction are prominent visual features. A powerline within Wiltshire, beyond this area to the east, is also evident.

The Changing Landscape

The character of the Marshfield Plateau landscape character area is rural, largely unpopulated and distinctive through its simple, upland landscape of gently rolling open arable land and its small scale enclosed valley landscapes, with fields of pasture and arable land, mixed with small woodland copses and wetland meadows.

The rural character of the plateau/dip slope landscape has been eroded in places through the visual intrusion of major roads, traffic, powerlines and masts. The audible intrusion from traffic levels adds to this erosion of rural character.

The deterioration of stone wall field boundaries has reduced the condition and integrity of physical boundaries, which are an important landscape feature within such an exposed and simple area. This is particularly evident along the road network and adjacent to settlement.

The Broadmead Brook valleys, in contrast to the plateau, have very little visual intrusion from modern built development. Their diverse and textured valleys with woodland and meadows are unique within the area.

The open and exposed character of the plateau/dip slope ensures that it is highly sensitive to change. Any vertical built forms would be visible, not just from within the plateau, but from the surrounding wider landscape. Any development which 'breaks' the skyline, such as housing, 'sheds', communication masts or traffic on roads etc, has the potential to be visually prominent and introduce discordant elements within the open plateau, which could erode its distinctive character.

Due to the visual openness of the plateau, the landscape is sensitive to agricultural change through a lack of management maintenance or removal of existing field boundaries or key landscape features.

The transition from pasture and mixed agriculture on the plateau, to arable farmland in the 20th century, introduced changes in the colour and texture of the landscape. Due to the openness of the area, such changes have had, and any future changes will have, a significant

impact on the appearance of the landscape. In addition, the growth of self-seeded trees and the introduction of new planting within the plateau area, whilst contributing to the landscape structure, has the potential to affect existing vistas and key views.

There are only two historic earthworks within the area, due to the removal of other such features. Both are Scheduled Ancient Monuments. There is a need to ensure that present and future land use practices do not jeopardise these remaining features.

The Local Plan identifies a small residential site on the north western edge of Marshfield, within the Conservation Area, adjacent to the A420. Whilst built development will change the degree of openness currently experienced along this approach to the town, policies are included in the Local Plan which seek to ensure that any proposals within a Conservation Area, including its scale, design and choice of materials, preserve or enhance its distinctive character.



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Figure 15: Ashwicke Ridges - Sketch Map

Key
 ↖ 15 Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale



The Ashwicke Ridges landscape character area is a complex area of ridges and valleys covered by a diverse and varied mix of agricultural fields and woodlands.

Key Characteristics

- An area of complex landform, comprising a small plateau area of rounded upland hills, steep sided ridges, incised and broad valleys.
- Distinctive and harmonious landscape framework, with a variety of characteristics associated with different landforms. Extensive views are possible over the area from many points along the upper ridges.
- Open uplands of medium, regular shaped mixed pasture and arable fields, with clipped hedges and occasional Cotswold stone walls.
- Enclosed, incised and wooded St Catherine's Brook valleys, with irregular medium to small unimproved pastoral fields, with clipped and overgrown hedges.
- Broad open Hamswell Valley with irregular shaped fields, clipped/ overgrown hedges & irregular framework of mature trees within hedgerows and along watercourses. The Freezing Hill beech trees form a prominent skyline feature.

- No major settlements are present, buildings are scattered and infrequent, isolated houses and farms are united through the use of Cotswold stone.
- Main roads are limited, but locally visible and audible.

Location

The Ashwicke Ridges landscape character area is located in the south east of South Gloucestershire within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

This landscape character area is defined to the east and south by the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary, although the landscape character of the ridges and valleys extends beyond this boundary into Wiltshire and Bath and North East Somerset.

The northern boundary follows an often distinct topographical change between the adjacent Marshfield Plateau and the upper valley edges of this area. To the west, this boundary first abuts the Cotswold Scarp character area, following the ridgeline of Freezing Hill, before descending to follow an approximate mid slope topographical boundary with the Golden Valley character area. The boundary then descends further to the A431, which forms a boundary with the Avon Valley character area. (See Figures 16 & 18).

Physical Influences

The underlying geology is principally a mix of Fuller's Earth, Great Oolitic Limestone and Midford and Yeovil Sands. The Midford and Yeovil Sands follow the valley bottom. Fuller's Earth on the valley sides and Great Oolitic Limestone dominates the rounded exposed uplands.

The varied mix of soils present is closely linked to the underlying geology, where Brown Earth Loam over Clay follows the valley floors, typical Calcareous Pelosols lie on the valley sides and Brown Rendzinas on the exposed uplands.

This varied, tightly interwoven mix of geology has influenced topography, creating an

undulating and varied landform of small plateau areas with rounded hills, steep sided ridges, incised and broad valleys. Height varies from 70 metres a.o.d. within the valleys to between 180 and 235 metres a.o.d. on top of the hills; Hanging Hill in the west is the highest point, marked by a mast.

The small scale, steeply sided 'V'-shaped St Catherine's Brook valley occupies the eastern half of the area. Numerous tributaries within their own side valleys, often fed by springs, feed the tightly meandering St Catherine's Brook, producing a visually varied valley of descending interlocking spurs (Photo 7).

The South Gloucestershire boundary (southern boundary to this area) follows the St Catherine's Brook east and then south east, before it eventually joins the River Avon at Bath.

North and east, a plateau area rises to Henley Hill in the east near Marshfield. It is separated from the adjacent Marshfield Plateau character area by the steep sided, easterly draining Doncombe Brook valley and the upper tributary valley of St Catherine's Brook.

There are two ponds and two reservoirs within side valleys of the St Catherine's Brook valley. Monkwood Reservoir is a man-made lake located within the western reaches of this valley system (Photo 6). The South Gloucestershire boundary passes through the centre of this feature. To the east of the area is the small Oakford Reservoir and two pools.

High ground of a second Henley Hill to the south of Cold Ashton, separates St Catherine's Brook from the Hamswell Valley to the west. The upper reaches of the Hamswell Valley are broad open bowl contained to the west by Freezing Hill (Photo 5). It is drained to the south by the small and sinuous Lam Brook and its small tributaries, which are fed by springs. This valley continues south eastwards beyond the area, to the River Avon at Bath.

The saddle landform between Freezing Hill along the western boundary and Hanging Hill to the west, forms a prominent break in continuity of the upland landform.

The ridgeline of Hanging Hill runs westwards, with side slopes falling north west into the Golden Valley character area (Photo 1) and

south into the Piple Bottom Valley. It appears as a physical continuation of the Cotswold Scarp, although separated by a saddle, within views from character areas to the west.

The steep sided 'V'-shaped Piple Bottom Valley drains westwards into the River Avon on the boundary of this area. The South Gloucestershire boundary follows the Piple streamcourse, the southern valley slopes lying within Bath and North East Somerset.

Land Cover

The Ashwicke Ridges landscape character area includes a diverse range of land cover, closely related to landform.

The upland undulating hills, located along the northern boundary and within the eastern central area of the landscape character area, form a transitional landscape between the adjacent Marshfield Plateau and incised valleys of this area.

Land cover largely consists of regular shaped, medium sized, arable and pasture fields bounded by clipped hedges, stock proof fencing, some Cotswold stone walls and limited tree cover. In the east, at Henley Hill, is an extensive area of woodland on the hill and valley slopes, rather than the hilltops, comprising linear blocks and a large continuous area of mixed woodland clothing the valley slopes of the Doncombe Brook valley.

To the south and west the valleys comprise steep slopes of convex landform, becoming concave near Freezing Hill to the west.

Within the St Catherine's Brook valley system, the steep landform has produced small to medium sized fields of irregular shape with unimproved pasture, many supporting wildflower meadows. Boundaries vary, including dense overgrown hedgerows or clipped hedgerows (occasionally laid or supplemented with fencing), some with mature trees (Photo 3).

Deciduous and mixed areas of woodland are distributed within these valleys. Distribution includes small areas around major houses, isolated deciduous linear woodland often along

the upper valley edges and an extensive area of mixed woodland clothing the entire valley sides and a hill top of one tributary valley in the east.

Many of these areas of woodland have been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) or as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs).

Woodland, in conjunction with linear hedgerow trees and overgrown hedgerows, produces strong tree cover within this local area, in the south east (Photo 8).

To the west, the upper Hamswell Valley and sides of Freezing Hill and Hanging Hill include a more regular pattern of medium sized arable and pasture fields. They are defined by clipped hedges, which in places are overgrown, including an irregular pattern of mature hedgerow trees (Photo 5). This local area also includes limited small areas of woodland, with one large area to the east of Hanging Hill.

The highly prominent line of beech trees on Freezing Hill is a notable landmark for some great distance, both within and beyond the South Gloucestershire area to the north and west.

Historic relics and cultural associations within the landscape include the Roman road, The Fosse Way, earthworks, tumuli, field systems and battlefields.

The most visible and extensive historic feature is the Fosse Way, forming the whole of the eastern boundary of the character area and which, historically, formed the boundaries of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and in part, Somerset. The Three Shire Stones alongside the Fosse Way, are a configuration of standing stones, which mark these original county boundaries between Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire (now South Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset and Wiltshire). They are probably an 18th century folly, but may be based around a prehistoric burial site.

Other examples include the field terraces in the Piple Bottom Valley south of Hanging Hill (Photo 4), The Royal Camp (SAM) on Freezing Hill, the Battle of Lansdown, a registered battle field (noted on the O/S map south of Freezing Hill, but covering a much wider area) and Iron Age field systems (strip lynchets) to the west of Cold Ashton.

The Rocks Garden adjoining the Fosse Way is a designed historic garden, that includes an avenue of mature trees.

A high stone wall alongside the Fosse Way defines the eastern boundary.

Settlement and Infrastructure

There are no major settlements within this landscape character area. The town of Marshfield and villages of Cold Ashton to the north, Upton Cheyney and Beach to the west (all designated Conservation Areas) are on the periphery of the area or within the adjoining character areas, and are constructed principally of Cotswold stone.

The hamlet of Upton Cheyney to the south partly falls within this area and the adjacent Golden Valley. The settlement is scattered along a number of radiating country lanes, giving a linear character, set on the elevated mid slopes between the lower Golden Valley and rising ridgeline of Hanging Hill. The settlement largely consists of large traditional, Cotswold stone cottages, farm houses and one small group of brick houses.

The small hamlet of Beach comprises a mix of traditional Cotswold houses, cottages and farm buildings, loosely clustered around a junction of narrow country lanes.

The small hamlet of Lower Hamswell consists of isolated and scattered houses and farms. A number of the isolated farmsteads were originally centres of medieval settlement, their building style and layout having been influenced by the formation of the Ashwicke Hall Estate. Other farms and houses are of a variety of different styles, age and size. They are principally constructed from Cotswold stone.

The mid 19th century Ashwicke Hall, replacing an earlier dwelling probably dating from the late 16th century, is located on a prominent ridgeline on the eastern edge of the area. Lodges define the main entrances to the estate with the boundaries partly defined by stone walls. The house and other buildings, that until recently were used as a school, are set within

a designed parkland and garden, also dating from the 19th century.

The A46(T) to the west of Cold Ashton and secondary roads along the top of and to the south of Freezing Hill are the only major roads that cross the area. The A420 defines a very small section of the northern boundary to the west of Marshfield. Similarly, the A431 defines a very small length of the south western boundary. With the exception of the A431, these routes follow upland ridges or descending spurs.

Other routes within the character area are narrow country lanes, which typically radiate out from adjacent villages, largely following open high ground or natural contours of the land. There are few east-west routes due to the limitations created by the north-south ridges and deeply incised valleys. The Fosse Way forms a distinctive north-south route along the eastern boundary.

Linking with the network of rural roads and lanes are three major recreational routes:

- One of a series of Circular Rides enters this area from the adjacent Marshfield Plateau and Cotswold Scarp character areas. It passes just to the west of Marshfield before descending into the St Catherine's Brook valley. It heads westwards climbing to Nimlet Hill, descending into the Hamswell Valley and passing through the saddle to the south of Freezing Hill and on to Upton Cheyney. It then turns eastwards, following the upper slopes of the Piple Bottom Valley.
- The Cotswold Way crosses the area north to south, to the south west of Cold Ashton through the Hamswell Valley, before continuing beyond the character area towards the Avon Valley.
- The Limestone Link passes south east from Cold Ashton into the St Catherine's Brook valley, following the authority boundary eastwards and then south, beyond the character area, also linking through to the Avon Valley.

Landscape Character

The Ashwicke Ridges landscape character area is a varied and complex landscape of plateaux, hilltops, ridges and valleys, with a diverse land cover and very few built elements. These features combine to create a dramatic, distinct and in places, remote character.

There is a strong contrast between the open views obtained from the upper slopes and hilltops and the enclosure within the valleys.

The upland hills to the north have generally a simple, open landscape of arable land use over gentle slopes. Woodland cover is very limited, so where it does feature, it creates texture and focus within the landscape. The woodland belts and large scale forestry within the St Catherine's and Doncombe Brook valleys combine with these valley landforms to produce an enclosed, relatively remote and intimate character. More expansive and dramatic views are obtained over the valleys and ridges.

Open views typically include the following:

- From Marshfield, A420, Cold Ashton and A46 looking southwards. Views of rolling upland agricultural hills, with ground falling steeply from pronounced edges of high ground, into adjacent textured valleys.
- From country lanes just south of Ashwicke Hall looking south towards Oakford in the St Catherine's Brook valley, views include dramatic landform, deep valleys with richly textured, mixed woodlands covering the hillsides.

Further south the landscape descends into a series of ridges and enclosed sinuous valleys of the St Catherine's Brook, with a diverse patchwork of mixed fields and woodland. This creates a quiet, enclosed, richly textured landscape.

The open ridgelines in the area of Freezing Hill (above the upper Hamswell Valley) and Piple Bottom Valley to the west, are large scale landforms. Freezing Hill is particularly striking with its sweeping, primarily grassed, slopes and mature beech trees prominent in silhouette on the horizon (Photo 5).

Throughout this undulating landscape, scattered farms and buildings are set within the

varied landform, united through the use of Cotswold stone within buildings and boundary walls. There are no major settlements within this area, although Marshfield and the small villages of Cold Ashton, Upton Cheyney and Beach are on the boundaries. Marshfield sits along the upper edge of the upper reaches of the St. Catherine's Brook valley and forms a prominent landmark from the open plateau and ridges to the south. Other settlement is largely well integrated as a result of its small scale nature and surrounding framework of stone walls and/or vegetation.

The church towers at Cold Ashton, together with its court (Photo 2), and at Marshfield, form locally visible focal points and distinctive features in the landscape.

The trees planted as part of the parkland and garden at Ashwicke Hall form a significant landscape feature and provide structure within the locality, to the east.

The overall rural character of this area is enhanced by the minimal road network. Where present, roads are typically well integrated within the surrounding landscape, due to the enclosure provided by the surrounding vegetation and undulating landform. In particular, the unclassified country lanes are largely enclosed by hedges which limit views into the surrounding landscape. However, the A420 and A46(T), with associated higher traffic volumes, are prominent locally where they follow the crown of open ridgelines.

The historic field systems and earthworks are locally prominent landform features, often on open steep hillsides, contributing an unusual form and texture to the landscape.

The Changing Landscape

The character of the Ashwicke Ridges landscape character area is distinctly rural and largely tranquil, with a harmonious relationship between landform, vegetation and settlement.

The lack of urban influence, modern development, limited road access and containment of many views, adds to the feeling of remote countryside within the majority of the landscape character area and particularly the

deep valleys. This area is therefore highly sensitive to change, which has the potential to erode the distinctive physical and visual character of the area.

Adjacent to the A420 and A46, where traffic is particularly visually and audibly intrusive, rural landscape characteristics and tranquillity of the area have been diminished and eroded.

The visual attractiveness of the landscape may itself increase the recreational pressures within this area.

'Horsiculture' (although presently very limited within the area) is a recent trend which, in places, has led to the loss or erosion of hedgerows. The cumulative effect of this and the associated infrastructure of stables, access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and even floodlighting which can occur, can result in a marked change in landscape character.

Many of the landscape's constituent parts are vulnerable to less active management, with evidence present of limited hedge laying, poor condition of some stone walls and ageing tree/woodland structure without measures for replacement. In spite of the overall strong character of the area, the cumulative effect of limited management, or even a change in management, has the potential to alter the area's unique and distinctive character. Active management of hedgerows, woodland and stone walls would help to ensure the conservation of these key features for the long term.



Area 4 Cotswold Scarp

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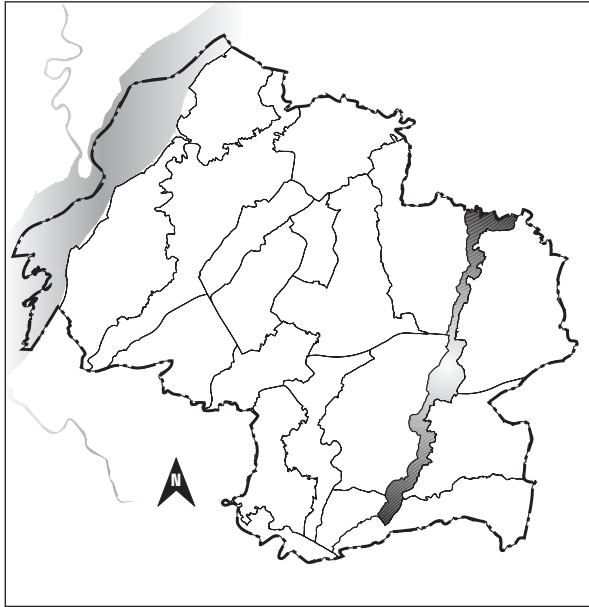
Key

➤¹⁵ Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale



**Figure 18:
Cotswold Scarp - Sketch Map**



The Cotswold Scarp landscape character area is a steeply sloping, dramatic feature, dominated by its distinct topography.

Key Characteristics

- Distinct, extensive and large scale, steeply sloping and folded scarp landform, falling from the Cotswold Plateau westwards to lower vales.
- Offers dramatic and panoramic views over the landscape to the west and is highly prominent as a backcloth to the lower lying landscape.
- Comprises a diverse land cover of largely small, irregular pasture fields, rough grassland, some regular arable fields, parkland, archaeological earthworks and a golf course.
- Trees and hedgerows are important landscape elements. Areas of deciduous woodland or small areas of scrub are generally associated either with valley landforms, or follow the contours along the upper scarp slopes.
- Fields defined by thick clipped hedges, some laid, often intermittent and supplemented with fences, with limited Cotswold stone wall field boundaries.

- Numerous nucleated spring-line villages nestle within the landform along the toe of the scarp and often include churches and large houses.
- Sunken lanes climb the scarp enclosed by high banks, hedgerows or trees.

Location

The Cotswold Scarp landscape character area is a distinct and prominent landform running approximately north-south, defining the western edge of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the eastern part of South Gloucestershire.

The eastern boundary of the character area is typically marked by the sudden change in slope between the steeply rising scarp face and the open upland and flatter plateau/dip slope landscape to the east. The western boundary of the Cotswold Scarp marks the approximate transition in between the lower, gently undulating broad ridge and valleys to the west and the steeply sloping scarp. (See Figures 19 & 21).

This landscape character area extends northwards to the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary, although the landform continues beyond this boundary.

The southern boundary follows the base of Freezing Hill, within a saddle landform dividing a valley to the east, marking the change to the more undulating form of the Ashwicke Ridges and the more gently sloping land to the west, towards the Golden Valley.

Physical Influences

The Cotswold Scarp landscape character area is formed from a mix of geology including Middle Jurassic Limestone overlying Lower Jurassic Sandstone and Lias Clays which slope down from the plateau to the east. The soils are typically Brown Earths and Loam over Clay, forming a distinctive and fertile strip of land.

The large scale and generally steeply sloping landform varies from approximately 200

metres a.o.d. at its highest point to the east, falling westwards to a height of approximately 100 metres a.o.d.

Generally, the scarp gradient/aspect varies only slightly along its length. Sections of consistently uniform concave scarp are interspersed with small scale valley insertions of varying aspect. These have created in places both simple valley forms and a more complicated deeply folded scarp with convex upper slopes, knolls, rounded hills, promontories and descending broad spurs.

The scarp crest defines a watershed within the Authority, as many springs occur along the scarp edge and flow generally westwards, into the Little Avon River, River Frome and River Boyd. A number of the smaller folds and valley insertions into the scarp are dry.

More specifically, to the north between Hawkesbury and Horton, the scarp is typically concave with deeply incised valleys. Springs and streams flow generally westwards from these valleys, feeding the Little River Avon (Photo 2 & 4).

Further south within Dodington Park, the River Frome has formed a prominent valley feature which erodes some way into the scarp. The north west facing valley becomes a shallow 'U'-shaped valley with convex upper slopes creating an undulating profile, characteristically different from the typical scarp (Photo 6).

South of this area, west facing folds have been formed by tributaries of the River Boyd, which flow south westwards through the adjacent Pucklechurch Ridge character area. This has formed a convex scarp with broad rounded spurs extending into the landscape below.

At the southern boundary, a saddle between Freezing Hill and Hanging Hill forms a prominent break in the Cotswold Scarp. Here, Freezing Hill descends steeply in a concave slope.

Land Cover

The steep landform of the Cotswold Scarp landscape character area is typically covered with small, irregular shaped pastoral fields, with rough grassland generally along the steepest

sections. Field hedgerows generally closely follow the contours of the landform and flow down the scarp (perpendicular to the contours), with some large regular shaped arable fields extending beyond the base and crest of the slope. The woodland and hedgerow framework is an important feature along the scarp.

The scarp to the north is typically a mix of large, irregular shaped belts of deciduous woodland which generally follow the upper contours of the slope (Photo 4) and small areas of woodland and scrub, combined with small, irregular shaped pastoral fields. The fields are divided by a mix of thick clipped or laid hedges, some overgrown, sometimes supplemented with timber post and rail fencing.

Towards the centre and the south, woodland cover is typically more limited, with the exception of large areas within Dodington Park (Photo 6) and at Dyrham Wood (Photo 9). Smaller woods and copses are scattered amongst the mix of pasture fields and more open rolling grassland divided by clipped hedges. In a few locations, such as immediately north of the M4, open rough grassland with limited hedgerow or tree cover on bluffs, extends westwards into the lower vale.

A stand of mature beech trees, along the scarp edge at Freezing Hill in the south, is a distinctive feature on the boundary between this and the adjacent character area (Photo 14). On the lower slopes of the scarp are part of the grounds of Tracy Park golf course which extend from the adjacent character area. Land cover comprises more recent infrastructure of fairways, greens and juvenile tree planting.

Some Cotswold stone walls are present along the crest of the scarp, particularly to the south, where they extend eastwards from the scarp and onto the plateau/dip slope of the adjacent character area. However, laid or clipped field boundaries are more common (Photo 5).

Contrasting with the agricultural and woodland landscape pattern along the scarp, are a number of historic parks and grounds to large houses. The location of these houses, associated features and grounds, have taken particular advantage of the often sculptural

landform offered by the scarp and slightly elevated outlook. From north to south these sites include:

- Horton Court, this area includes the site of the original village of Horton, Horton Court house, Cotswold stone estate wall, fishponds and woodland, nestled within a prominent fold within the scarp. The estate grounds extend into the lower vale landscape to the west, into the adjoining character area.
- The manorial complex at Little Sodbury includes fishponds and a large area of earthworks, evident as pillow mounds, created for rabbit warrens.
- Dodington House and parkland (Registered Historic Park) includes the stately house and designed landscape setting, partly attributed to Capability Brown, with open undulating grassland and arable land use, with large sculptural woodland plantations, clumps of woodland, mature specimen trees and lakes, within the setting of the small scale naturalistic River Frome valley (Photo 6).
- Dyrham Park (Registered Historic Park) incorporates a medieval deer park with an 18th century house, with grounds designed by Humphrey Repton and Charles Harcourt Masters amongst others, includes a grand house and mature woodland framework set at the toe of the scarp, in a large scale bowl landform. The parkland extends eastwards beyond the scarp into the adjacent Marshfield Plateau character area. This area includes planted avenues, woodland belts and scattered mature ornamental trees, native tree specimens and tree clumps (Photo 10 & 11).
- The grounds of Tracy Park lie just outside of this character area and abut the south western boundary.

The area also has important historic relics, evident from the presence of numerous long and round barrows of the neolithic and Bronze Ages scattered along the scarp. Notable features include Hawkesbury Knoll medieval field system to the north, visually prominent lynchets and prehistoric burial mound (Photo

1), the Horton Camp (SAM), Sodbury Hill Fort (SAM) south of Little Sodbury and Hinton Hill Fort (SAM) and associated field systems of strip lynchets (Photo 8), just north of Dyrham Park.

Settlement and Infrastructure

The Cotswold Scarp is scattered with numerous nucleated villages, hamlets and farm building groups, united through their use of Cotswold stone as a building material. Many of the villages are spring-line settlements, located along the lower slopes of the scarp, with churches a common feature of most villages.

The villages comprise, from north to south, Hawkesbury, Horton, Little Sodbury, Old Sodbury, Dodington, Hinton and Dyrham, all of which include churches, except Hinton and Horton, where the church is located at Horton Court.

Hawkesbury, Horton and Dyrham are designated Conservation Areas, essential components of which are their Cotswold Scarp setting, often located on the lower slopes extending into adjacent flatter areas, common use of Cotswold stone in construction, historic layout variety in individual building form and size. Church towers are prominent local features within Hawkesbury and Dyrham (Photo 3).

The Somerset Monument is included within the Hawkesbury Conservation Area and is located on top of the scarp, to the north west of Hawkesbury Upton (Photo 2).

The scarp is ascended by a number of roads: the A432, B4465, M4 and A420, as well as several small sunken country lanes enclosed by high banks, hedgerows or trees. They generally take advantage of folds and valley formations within the landform, with the largest concentration of routes (country lanes) to the north.

Some earthwork cuttings are associated with the major routes, the M4 in particular, incorporating large scale re-profiling within an existing valley (Photo 7).

These routes are interconnected with north to south principally minor roads, which intermittently follow sections of the toe or upper scarp/plateau edge.

The interconnection of country lanes is most evident within the north of the area and more intermittent elsewhere.

The A46(T) provides a continuous north-south route, running approximately parallel to the scarp to the east. Whilst located close to the top of the scarp for short sections, typically it is located within the plateau area to the east, beyond this landscape character area.

Three major recreational routes cross the area, linking in part with the minor road network. The Monarch's Way enters this area at Little Sodbury and runs south to north below the scarp, partly following the network of lanes between Horton and Horton Court, Horton and Little Sodbury, as does a section of one of a series of Circular Rides linking to Hawkesbury.

The Monarch's Way then connects to the scarp edge, running northwards. The Cotswold Way follows a significant length of the scarp, over fields and along lanes both along the toe, flank or crest of the scarp, as well as within the plateau, ascending the scarp in several locations. The path passes along the crest of the scarp between Hawkesbury to Horton and between Dodington Park and Dyrham Park to the south. The Circular Ride network crosses and passes along the scarp at several locations, linking with the larger network of public rights of way.

Overhead powerlines set on pylons cross the scarp at two locations, north of Little Sodbury and south of the M4.

Landscape Character

The Cotswold Scarp landscape character area is a prominent physical feature, forming a highly visible and distinctive backdrop in views from the lowland vales and ridges to the west (Photo 9). This feature is regionally prominent, being evident from as far away as South Wales. The top of the scarp provides the highest vantage point within the South Gloucestershire area and thus allows extensive panoramic views

westwards. Its distinct form defines a marked change in character from the plateau/dip slope landscape to the east and the lower undulating ridges and vales to the west.

The scarp's large scale varied form comprises a diverse cover of pasture, rough grassland, hedges and woodland, combined with historic parklands and small nucleated settlements. These elements are superimposed upon the scarp landform, creating a mixture of both bold, simple landscape forms and a more intricate textured landscape.

In places the extensive and prominent tree cover and hedgerow pattern visually link the various land uses. The largely linear form of woodland and hedgerow pattern complements the scarp by following the slope contours. Descending hedgerows often follow the slope gradient visually emphasising the intricacies and folds in the scarp, contributing to a strong and harmonious landscape framework (Photo 9 and 12).

Elsewhere, open grass hillsides, with small isolated tree clumps or scrub reveal the scarp's slope profile and exposed ridgeline.

The single line of mature beech trees along the ridgeline of Freezing Hill on the boundary to the south, superimposed upon the striking scarp landform, produces a distinctive landmark on the skyline visible both locally and from some great distance to the west and east (Photo 14).

The historic designed parklands of Dodington House and Dyrham Park strongly influence the character of parts of the scarp. Both have a mature framework of woodland, copses, linear tree belts, scattered specimen trees and avenues (the latter at Dyrham Park) within open grassland. This planting provides structure and enclosure within pronounced natural landforms, which comprise a shallow valley, stream and lake (head waters of the River Frome) at Dodington House and curving bowl landform at Dyrham Park.

The large stately houses of both estates are prominent within their open parkland setting. Dodington Park also includes some arable land use with fields divided by fencing. Whilst this forms an open landscape not enclosed by hedgerows and therefore typical of parkland, the colour and texture of arable land is subtly

different to traditional pasture normally found within parkland. However, these areas of parkland, their houses and associated buildings, generally have little wider influence beyond their boundaries, due to the surrounding large scale landform and strong tree and woodland framework.

The golf course at Tracy Park, largely in the adjoining area, has introduced a new topography, pattern and texture within an existing agricultural landscape of open fields and hedgerows. Due to the juvenile nature of new tree planting and the open, elevated and undulating nature of the landform, the golf course is visually prominent within views from the scarp and local lower ground to the west (Photo 13).

The degree of enclosure varies considerably along the scarp. Landform, elevation, aspect, woodland and trees define the extent and focus of views both within and beyond the area. View characteristics vary between the heavily enclosed woodland in deeply incised valleys, more open historic parks, to the exposed rough grassland bluffs protruding beyond the scarp, which allow wide panoramic views over considerable distances. In particular, Toghill picnic site, located to the south at the top of the scarp, permits expansive views of the vale landscape below and as far as Wales in the distance.

The pattern and form of the historic settlements and country lanes has been influenced by landform and was closely related to surrounding rural agricultural practices. Settlements, typically set near the toe or nestled within folds of the scarp, are nucleated, small scale and well integrated, given the surrounding mature framework setting of hedgerows, trees and woodland and common use of Cotswold stone in building construction.

Six church towers are visible local features, with five associated with settlements, forming frequent local landmarks along the scarp toe and one associated with Horton Court (Photo 2 and 3).

The Somerset Monument (tower), to the north of Hawkesbury, is a visually prominent and distinctive landmark featuring in many views, not only from the scarp and plateau, but from

the lower vales and valleys to the west.

Horton Court to the north is a large house, prominent on the scarp, framed by woodland and visible from the vale to the west. Similarly, the pillow mound earthworks north of Horton Camp are also clearly visible from within local views below the scarp and along the top of the scarp from the A46, where the road passes close by.

The M4 cutting, through an existing valley in the scarp is a large, more uniform slope than the natural slope profile. The motorway rises up the scarp with the high traffic volumes a visible feature within distant western views and an audible feature locally. The motorway, on approaching the foot of the scarp, is elevated on a substantial embankment and is visually prominent in local views from the scarp and the adjacent character area to the west. The surrounding dense vegetation and undulating landscape along the scarp however limits this impact on more distant views along the scarp itself.

The powerline to the south of the M4 is also visible, the more open landscape of this area accentuating the prominence of the pylons on the scarp slope.

The Changing Landscape

The Cotswold Scarp landscape character area is a highly visible, distinct and visually varied landscape with prominent landscape features. It retains a distinct rural landscape character. The man-made landscape is old, with visual evidence of its past history in its agricultural land cover, parkland and settlement patterns, as well as its archaeological remains. There are only a few examples of visually intrusive modern built development and land use change, such as the M4, pylon towers, telecommunication masts and a golf course. The masts are located on the upper scarp and are therefore visually prominent.

The parkland estates at Dodington House and Dyrham Park influence land use, land management and therefore character, along sections of the scarp. Dodington Park includes some arable land use, enclosed by fences

following the removal of hedgerows. Whilst this open landscape (with mature trees and woodland framework) is a typical characteristic of parkland, the colour and texture of this land use is subtly different to traditional pasture. Further, or wider land use changes could therefore potentially erode the typical parkland character.

The intactness of the key components of the landscape is typically better in the north, although area wide, much of the existing framework of hedgerows and woodland lacks consistent management. Sporadic hedges, some becoming overgrown, or replaced with timber fencing, are evident. The decline of traditional management practices, such as laying hedges, is also a widespread trend. These features are particularly important to the distinctiveness of the area, due to the elevated aspect of the scarp, which is highly visible from the adjacent character areas to the west. Their loss or decline would therefore result in the erosion of the character of the area.

There are few Cotswold stone wall field boundaries within the area, but where these are present they typically occupy an area of landscape transition between the scarp and adjacent plateau/dip slope. Here, they form a strong framework feature, although condition is variable and these features are generally in decline.

In contrast, new stone walls within and adjacent to some settlements are evident, such as at Hawkesbury. These can be an indication of the investment often made in built property and, in Conservation Areas, of the planning requirements applied to conserve local character.

The mature tree structure has a general lack of juvenile trees to sustain succession and hence the woodland framework in the longer term. The landmark trees at Freezing Hill similarly, presently have no juvenile succession planting.

Positive steps to replant trees within parkland are evident at Dyrham Park, with recent avenue planting and woodland areas alongside the A46, on the park's eastern boundary (Photo 11). New tree planting is also evident at Dodington Park. New plantings such as these will, as they mature, contribute to strengthening the landscape framework.

The uniqueness of the small settlements is noted by the Conservation Area status of a number of villages.

Any changes in land use, particularly grazing and arable practices, are likely to change the visual texture of fields and existing scrub pattern.

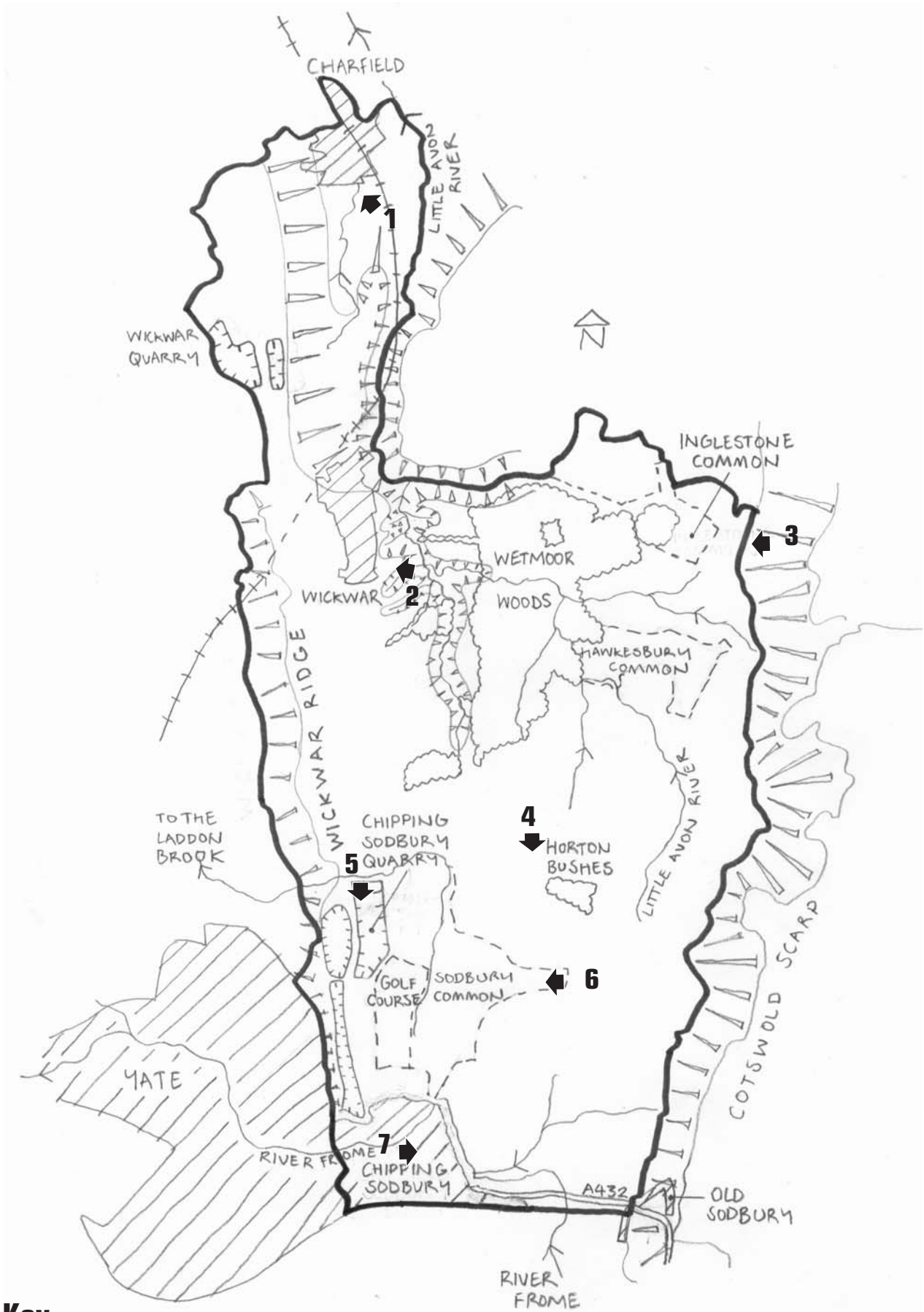
The elevated ground presented by the scarp, makes this character area and its features particularly visible within local and distant views. The variety in landscape framework produces both enclosed and open character, offering numerous vantage points across the area and adjacent landscapes. These characteristics make this character area particularly visually sensitive to change, both viewed from within this and the adjacent character area to the west. Similarly, certain types of change within this character area could have a wide visual impact.

Vantage points and the extent of views are influenced by adjacent vegetation and its degree of management. For example, the panoramic view once obtained from Toghill picnic site is becoming curtailed by the growth of self-seeded trees. Without management, more of this view, and others within the character area, will be obscured in time.

Features which visually disturb the skyline or cause noticeable change to the physical landform or the landscape framework, or are discordant with the landscape or settlement framework/pattern, have the potential to erode the intrinsic characteristics and distinctiveness of the area.



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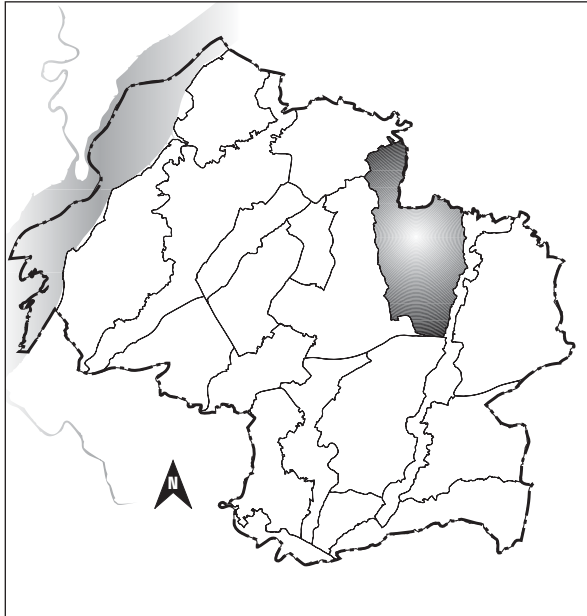


Key

➔₁₅ Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

**Figure 21:
Wickwar Ridge and Vale - Sketch Map**



The Wickwar Ridge and Vale landscape character area is a diverse undulating landscape covered with a mix of farmland, woodland and common.

Key Characteristics

- Large scale undulating landscape with small and medium scale Little Avon River valley. The Cotswold Scarp to the east forms a significant backcloth and provides extensive views over the area.
- A rural, tranquil and in places relatively remote landscape, characterised by varied land cover of irregular, small to medium mixed pasture and arable fields defined by hedgerows (clipped, thick and intermittent) trees & small areas of woodland interspersed with commons.
- The extensive Wetmoor Woods is of significant landscape and ecological importance within this area and the South Gloucestershire area as a whole.
- A number of commons of varying sizes have distinct land use types of rough grassland and scrub.
- Settlement pattern is generally very limited, concentrated in one small town, two villages and scattered elsewhere.

- Views are expansive particularly from commons, more elevated locations, the edges of Churchend and Charfield and elsewhere largely contained by landform, woodland and hedgerows.
- Two quarries, two golf courses, 'B' roads, small settlements, a railway line and powerlines, largely have a local influence on character.

Location

The Wickwar Ridge and Vale landscape character area is located in the north east of the South Gloucestershire area, to the west of the Cotswold Scarp (within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).

The northern most boundary of the landscape character area largely follows the settlement edge of Charfield. The north eastern boundary follows the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary, which partly follows the course of the Little Avon River. Beyond the boundary to the north east, the landscape rises towards Kingswood and Wotton-under-Edge, the latter situated on the Cotswold Scarp. From these elevated positions there are views over this landscape character area and much of South Gloucestershire.

The eastern boundary then follows the approximate toe of the Cotswold Scarp south of Hillesley to Old Sodbury. The southern boundary follows the railway line cutting and southern settlement edge of Chipping Sodbury.

To the west there is a subtle transition in topography and landcover as the land falls westwards towards the adjacent Yate Vale landscape character area. The character boundary in the south west marks the approximate division between Yate and Chipping Sodbury, with Chipping Sodbury located on more elevated ground and with older settlement more typically constructed from limestone, compared with Yate, associated with the lower vale and Pennant sandstone. The boundary then follows the distinct urban edge of Yate and then the approximate toe of the Wickwar Ridge northwards. (See Figures 22 & 24).

Physical Influences

The underlying geology is mostly Jurassic Inferior Oolite Limestone, combined with Alluvium, Carboniferous Limestone and Llandovery Shales.

This creates an undulating landform, comprising the broad low lying Wickwar Ridge to the west, (ranging between approx. 80 metres and 100 metres a.o.d.), a central sloping vale situated below and to the west of the visually dominant Cotswold Scarp and the Little Avon River valley to the north, comprising both narrow and broad valley profiles.

To the north, between Wickwar and Charfield, lies the Little Avon River valley, with land falling from approximately 80 metres along the Wickwar Ridge to 30 metres a.o.d within the valley. The Little Avon River flows northwards along a tightly meandering course. The valley is small scale and steep sided with concave lower slopes and convex upper slopes, becoming more open and broader to the north.

The eastern valley slopes lie beyond the South Gloucestershire boundary.

Around Wetmoor Woods, a series of steep, 'V'-shaped, narrow tributary valleys of the Little Avon cut through the area. Further south, the landform evens out into gently undulating ground and almost flat vale in the area of Sodbury Common. From this area the ground rises gently eastwards to the character area boundary before rising steeply, forming the Cotswold Scarp.

To the south of the area, tributaries of the Ladden Brook flow northwards across Sodbury Common, before turning westwards out of the area. To the south east, tributaries of the River Frome flow generally westwards out of the area.

There is a scattering of small ponds around Charfield and Wickwar.

Land Cover

The Wickwar Ridge and Vale landscape character area includes a diverse mix of land cover. To the north, woodland is a predominant

feature with the very large area of Wetmoor Woods, east of Wickwar, dominating the area and the adjacent Cotswold Scarp (Photo 3).

Wetmoor Woods is an extensive area of ancient woodland (280 hectares) and is of significant nature conservation value, designated an SSSI and Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). It is a unique feature, both within this character area and South Gloucestershire as a whole. There is also a Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS) designated within the woodland area.

The woodland combines with a complex pattern of clearings, comprising unimproved common land and 'trenches' (linear clearings providing route-ways through woodland).

Copses and smaller areas of woodland are also scattered throughout the rest of the character area.

Field size and shape is variable, with predominantly irregular, small to medium sized arable and pastoral use, typically bound by clipped, thick or intermittent hedges and fences (Photo 4).

To the south west of the area the fields tend to be more regular, generally small to medium in size. Hedgerow trees are mature, intermittent or in linear belts.

Intermixed with farmland are large commons of open rough grassland and heathland, at Wetmoor Woods, Inglestone and Hawkesbury to the east and Sodbury Common near the southern boundary (Photo 6). These open areas include patches of scrub, but are largely devoid of tree cover except along their boundaries. Much of the field pattern on the edges of these commons resulted from the process of assarting, where woodland was removed by small scale enclosure and felling. Remaining trees may either predate the field formation or are successor trees.

Sodbury Common includes a golf course amongst the rough grassland. Chipping Sodbury Golf Course (north of Chipping Sodbury and just west of the common) in contrast, includes highly maintained fairways, greens and dense ornamental tree groups.

Colts Green Common, comprising a single field of wildflower meadow, lies to the east of

Chipping Sodbury, sandwiched between the A432 and the railway.

There are a number of limestone quarries in the area, both active and disused. The Chipping Sodbury Quarry, on the area's south western boundary, comprises an extensive site. The disused, linear and flooded Barnhill Quarry lies to the south. The plant site lies to the north at Southfields, with active workings at the Hampstead Farm site to the east of the B4060 (Photo 5). Mature screen planting along the B4060 is present adjacent to the existing working areas.

Wickwar Quarry lies on the north western boundary, to the north west of Wickwar. It comprises a disused quarry area and plant to the west, with active quarrying to the east of the B4509.

Small scale overgrown and wooded quarried outcrops are also located along the Wickwar Ridge at Yate Rocks and Bury Hill.

Settlement and Infrastructure

The main settlements within this landscape character area comprise the small town of Chipping Sodbury and the villages of Wickwar and Charfield. These principally include a mix of limestone, rendered and brick buildings of a variety of ages and styles, with some recent infill housing development.

The medieval planned core of Chipping Sodbury (a Conservation Area) is unique within the South Gloucestershire area and of national importance, due to the settlement pattern and architectural content which survives virtually unaltered since it was laid out in about 1179 AD.

Developed along a broad high street and grid pattern, the houses and buildings are of a common historic architectural style, constructed of local limestone with some rendered buildings (Photo 7). Beyond the historic core, more recent infill housing is constructed from reconstituted stone or brick, with some rendered properties. The town is physically separated from Yate, being located on

higher ground formed by the Wickwar Ridge. There is a noticeable climb from the Yate Vale to Chipping Sodbury on approaching from the west.

The western edge of Wickwar, also designated a Conservation Area, comprises a medieval planned town. Developed along a main trade route from Droitwich to Sodbury and Pucklechurch it is focused along a broad, market street. Limestone boundary walls, mature trees to the north and west and archaeological remains (the medieval Horse Bridge to the west of the town is a Scheduled Ancient Monument) contribute to its historic character. This town was the first in the UK to be lit by electricity and a number of the original distribution poles survive.

Charfield, on the northern boundary of the area also has an historic core.

The settlement initially developed at the hamlet of Churchend to the south west. The present settlement of Charfield then developed towards the railway station, which has a distinctive collection of station buildings.

The eastern edge of the town of Yate defines part of the south western boundary of the landscape character area.

Other small hamlets, farms and houses are scattered throughout the area, tending to be clustered around the network of minor roads and lanes.

The road network is limited within the area and includes 'B' roads and narrow country lanes. The principal roads are orientated generally north to south, including the B4060 between Chipping Sodbury and Wotton-under-Edge and the B4509 between Wickwar and Falfield. Country lanes are orientated north to south near the Cotswold Scarp, connecting with a number of east-west routes, several of which end at isolated farms, with only two continuous routes linking to the wider road network.

The Bristol to Gloucester railway line passes through the area just north of Wickwar, also orientated north to south. It is in a short section of tunnel to the west and north of Wickwar and then largely in cutting (with one short section on embankment) before passing through the centre of Charfield, heading northwards. Six stone airshafts follow the

tunnel alignment at regular intervals in the area of Wickwar.

This transport network is supplemented by several major recreational routes that cross the area in the south east.

- The Jubilee Way passes generally north westwards from Old Sodbury, through agricultural fields, over Sodbury Common and along the boundaries of Chipping Sodbury Quarry.
- Monarch's Way passes around the eastern edge of Chipping Sodbury, running north eastwards over agricultural fields towards Little Sodbury and the Cotswold Scarp, at this point connecting with the Cotswold Way.
- The Frome Valley Walkway passes westwards from the Cotswold Scarp, following the River Frome, first over agricultural fields and then through Chipping Sodbury.
- Two of the series of Circular Rides cross a more extensive area. One travels around Wetmoor Woods, linking Horton and Wickwar and passing beyond both the western and eastern boundaries. The other links the edge of Chipping Sodbury with Hawkesbury and Old Sodbury, crossing both Sodbury and Hawkesbury Common.

There is a particularly intense and intricate network of public footpaths to the east and south east of Wetmoor Woods. Paths, tracks and bridleways also follow rides and clearings within Wetmoor Woods. The remainder of the area has a more dispersed pattern of paths.

Two powerlines cross the area, one passing east to west, south of Wetmoor Woods and one passing north to south, through part of the area west of Wickwar.

Landscape Character

The area is typically a diverse large scale landscape, its undulating landform covered with a mix of arable and pastoral fields, commons, two golf courses and large tracts of woodland, as well as smaller, scattered woodlands.

Topography is slightly variable through the area, with the Wickwar Ridge to the west (visible extending northwards from Wickwar and beyond Charfield and from outside the area to the west as a low ridgeline backdrop); the broad vale (visible from the Cotswold Scarp and open vale areas); and enclosed small 'V'-shaped valleys of the Little Avon River, becoming broader near Charfield (visible from local vantages and upper slopes).

A single extensive area and several isolated blocks of deciduous woodland provides the dominant structure and enclosure to the north east. Combined with a pattern of common land and small pastoral fields with a mix of field boundaries, it is a distinctive and intricate landscape.

Wetmoor Woods is the single, most distinctive component of the area. Its large land coverage, remnant ancient woodland, intermix of common land and visibility in the northern landscape, particularly from the Cotswold Scarp, all contribute to its importance in shaping the distinctive character in this area.

The combination of woodland and strong hedgerow boundaries along fields and lanes creates a sense of enclosure, with a relatively remote and tranquil character.

The common land which abuts Wetmoor Woods is distinctive, with open unimproved grassland, heathland and areas of scrub, edged by dense irregular and overgrown hedgerows, amongst which scattered farmhouses are well integrated.

Further south and north, woodland cover is less dominant. The landscape becomes more open, with views possible over the mixed farmland, divided by clipped, laid or intermittent hedgerows dotted with specimen trees and often supplemented with stock fencing.

The rough grassland and unenclosed commons distributed throughout the east and south of the area are particularly open in character, offering extensive views of the landscape area and the adjacent Cotswold Scarp from the unenclosed roads which cross them.

The character of the two golf courses contrasts with adjacent areas, with the low key informal course on Sodbury Common, with little more than flags to demarcate greens within grazed

common land and the intensely managed Chipping Sodbury Golf Course, with more typical infrastructure of mown greens, fairways and enclosure from ornamental tree structure. The former has very little visual influence upon the landscape and the latter has little influence beyond its boundary.

Set within this mixed landscape and enclosed by a combination of woodland, hedges and gently undulating topography, the smaller settlements, roads and lanes have little direct impact on the surrounding landscape character.

The centre of Chipping Sodbury has a unique, enclosed, historic village character, with distant views eastwards of the Cotswold Scarp obtained along the High Street. The church forms a visible focal point when viewed from the wider landscape. Later phases of development are distinctly different in character, due to the form and pattern of buildings and the use of reconstituted stone, brick or render finishes. The settlement edge of Chipping Sodbury is generally well integrated by the diverse vegetation structure north and east of the town, partly associated with the River Frome corridor, as well as by the adjacent undulating landform. However, white rendered houses along the settlement edge are more prominent in views from the adjacent rural landscape.

Although lying within the adjacent character area, the more recent residential, commercial and business developments on the north east edge of Yate are typically more exposed, with few hedgerows and trees along the settlement edge to integrate it with the adjoining landscape.

More distant views are possible over these settlements from higher ground on the Wickwar Ridge to the east, from where the extensive urban development of Yate is particularly evident. Views from the Ridge are expansive, with Bristol, Pur Down ridge and Wales, forming distant features. The rising slopes and crest of Wickwar Ridge also form an important visual backdrop to the lower lying Yate Vale character area to the west.

Charfield, largely nestled within the Little Avon River valley, is not very prominent from the east, set beneath the rising Wickwar Ridge. Recent development however, along the

southern edge of Charfield, has extended over agricultural fields, the new settlement edge defined by the form of the existing linear and angular hedgerow field pattern. The settlement edge has quite a harsh facade due to the regular edge of development and limited integration provided by the clipped hedgerows with no hedgerow trees along one boundary (Photo 1).

The more elevated parts of Charfield and perched location of Churchend, offer particularly expansive views north westwards to Wotton-under-Edge and the Cotswold Scarp, both beyond the character area. Although the surrounding hedgerow structure and wooded scarp slopes provide a setting and some containment to the Cotswold village, parts of the extensive settlement edge are visually prominent, due to the distinct linear pattern and abrupt built facades in an elevated location, visible on the skyline, above the vale of this character area.

Wickwar is prominent on the upper slopes of the Little Avon River valley, where both building facades and rooflines are clearly visible against the skyline in local views. This is due to the exposed setting, clipped low hedges and very limited tree cover (Photo 2).

The linear quarries at Chipping Sodbury, including the disused Barnhill area are well screened, with only a few glimpsed views possible from the B4060 along their eastern boundaries. The works buildings are also generally well screened by linear tree belts on bunds in views from the east. However, the crusher building is visible in longer views from the south and east, due to its scale and height which rises above the adjacent vegetation. The linear pattern of screen vegetation along the edges of roads is of a bold and regular form, which is visually different to the adjacent, irregular rural field pattern.

From within the area, Wickwar Quarry is visible only within glimpsed views from the adjacent roads which border the site.

The exposed quarry face of the disused section is however evident from beyond the area in the vicinity of Heath End, to the west.

The active quarries have dynamic, visible and noise creating activities associated with their

works. These include frequent blasting operations, lorry movements along the road network and tailings mounds formed on adjacent land. Despite the size of the quarry the effects upon the landscape are largely local.

The increased traffic volumes along the B4060 and B4509 have visible and audible local effect within the area eroding its rural character. Two powerlines cross the area to the south and west of Wetmoor Woods and are generally prominent within local views, but are also evident within more distant views from the Cotswold Scarp.

The Bristol to Gloucester railway line is largely in tunnel, cutting, or enclosed by vegetation and/or topography, with only a short section on embankment. It is generally well integrated now, although has an audible effect upon local character.

The Changing Landscape

The Wickwar Ridge and Vale landscape character area is a diverse and intricate landscape with large distinctive areas of woodland, arable and pasture farmland and common.

The limited and low key extent of settlement and road infrastructure generally reinforces the rural, relatively remote character and perception of tranquillity, found within much of the area.

The balance and interplay between these built features and their landscape setting is critical to maintaining the distinctive character of the area.

This character has already been eroded where large scale land use and built development of a regular pattern or bold linear form has occurred and is visually discordant within the irregular rural framework:

- This is evident along the area's western boundary, where large scale quarrying follows the line of the Wickwar Ridge. Linear tree screens have little relationship with local field patterns. Similarly, the northern settlement edge of Yate (visible beyond this area), has little vegetation or

landform structure to provide physical or visual integration with the adjacent rural area.

- The exposed, regular settlement edge of Wickwar, perched on the skyline above the Little Avon Valley, is stark and intrusive.
- The vertical and linear nature of pylon corridors is prominent within local views and evident within more distant views from the Cotswold Scarp.
- Noise and visual activity, associated with the quarries, principal roads and railway within the area, locally erode the perception of tranquillity within this character area.

The area's landscape features are in varying condition and state of management.

Wetmoor Woods is a highly visible, large, robust landscape feature, interspersed with common land. Both elements are of significant historical and ecological importance. The woodland is owned by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, with the woodland and commons subject to management agreements, formulated with statutory and local agencies. The unique interrelationship of woodland and common land has created complex management issues, which need to find a balance between nature conservation and traditional land use practices. Positive management of this area, which will ensure its conservation, is therefore likely to result in a degree of visible change, of varying scale, but will be appropriate to the site retaining its essential character. Operations are likely to include woodland thinning and scrub clearance.

Although the woodland is visually less sensitive to change, due to its large scale, mature vegetation framework the area is however ecologically very sensitive, with most open areas in and around the wood comprising common land.

The intricate network of footpaths and major recreational routes provides an important recreational resource along the base of the Cotswold Scarp in particular. Pressure from vehicle and pedestrian access has caused localised erosion in places.

The large commons of Inglestone, Hawkesbury

and Sodbury are distinct areas within their locality. Their open character allows extensive views both within these areas, of the adjacent landscape framework and to the Cotswold Scarp. They are therefore sensitive to change both within and beyond these areas. The erosion of roadside verges are particularly evident. These areas are also prone to informal recreational pressures.

Some of the existing hedgerow and tree framework is in poor condition. Many of the hedgerows have been replaced by stock fencing, particularly in the south. Dutch elm disease, evident in some hedgerows, with the cycle of tree growth, elm disease producing die back, followed eventually by regeneration influences the condition, integrity and appearance of the landscape framework in the locality.

The mature tree and woodland structure also has few juvenile trees present to sustain succession and hence this landscape framework in future decades. Cumulative erosion of these rural features would reduce the integrity and intactness of the landscape structure. Active management of hedgerow, tree and woodland framework would help to ensure the conservation of these key features for the long term.

Large extents of the area are overlooked from the Cotswold Scarp and to a lesser extent from Wotton-under-Edge, beyond the character area to the east and north. Coupled with the general open nature of this area, any change may be visible and could introduce a discordant element into the distinctive character of the area. For example, the extension of existing quarries and golf courses, or expansion of built development along existing settlement boundaries, would require sensitive treatment to ensure such changes are integrated within the adjacent landscape. The addition of modern buildings and structures within farmsteads and rural areas, where prominent, would potentially be visually intrusive and therefore influence the character of the area.

The ridgeline and lower slopes of the Wickwar Ridge make an important visual contribution to views from the edge of Yate, slightly elevated open ground within Yate, such as at Tyler's Field and the Yate Vale generally. This landform is

sensitive to change, especially built forms along its slopes or crest, where these have the potential to be visually prominent, break the skyline of the ridge, or physically limit views from the ridgeline over lower areas to the west.

The two limestone quarries within the area both have potential for future expansion beyond their current extent.

- Chipping Sodbury Quarry has an existing permission for quarrying to the north, with the next phase most likely to be within two areas to the east and north of Brinsham Farm. The disused area of Barnhill Quarry is also identified for landfill.
- Wickwar Quarry has a preferred area for quarrying along the eastern side of the B4509 towards Churchend, with potential for landfill and restoration measures within the disused quarry area to the west. In addition, a small area of undisturbed ground to the south of the active quarry is covered by the existing permission.

The Chipping Sodbury extension is likely to continue along the Wickwar Ridge over a number of small fields, with the loss of their hedgerow boundaries and some trees within the two sites, either side of the Wickwar Road. Excavation to the eastern site has the potential to further denude the Brinsham Stream and its vegetation corridor, or remove this feature entirely, if the existing active quarry extends northwards.

Quarrying of the western site could potentially result in the removal of existing farm buildings at Brinsham Farm, the excavation of a small hill of the Wickwar Ridge and possibly the loss of linear woodland along the lower western slopes.

Landfill operations, if undertaken at Barnhill Quarry, are unlikely to be of a scale or volume which would restore the site to its original ground level or landform. As such, landfill operations and their associated visual and audible effects are therefore likely to be largely contained within the site, although they may be evident from the B4060.

The Wickwar Ridge currently forms a natural, largely undeveloped landform and visible backdrop to views from the adjacent character area. The impact of quarrying therefore has the potential to be visually prominent locally and

physically erode the natural skyline of the ridge and existing strong woodland framework.

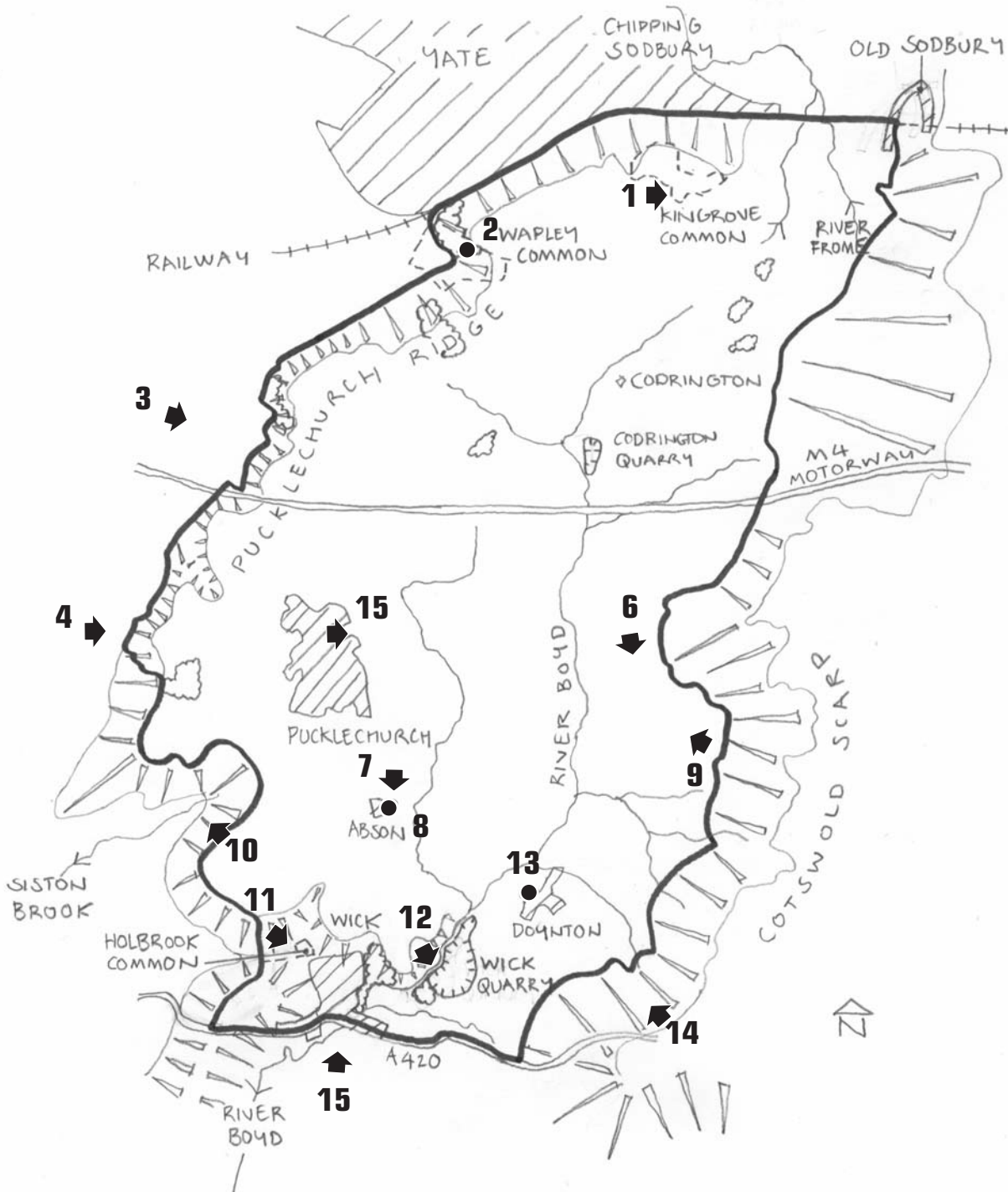
The expansion of Wickwar Quarry, identified in the Minerals & Waste Local Plan, may occur in future. The preferred area is to the north of the current active excavation area, within a single, large field. With the exception of lanes along two sides, the site area is visually contained, located within a linear plateau, with a strong vegetation buffer along its eastern boundary. Unlike the disused flooded quarry to the west, this proposed extension would not visually breach the ridge.

The expansion of the existing active quarry southwards, within the confines of the existing permission, has to date been restricted due to the potential significant visual and audible effect this would have upon the northern edge of Wickwar village.

Policies are included in both the Local Plan and Minerals & Waste Local Plan which seek to ensure that future quarrying, landfill and restoration proposals for these sites take account of the need to protect the landscape character, amenity and distinctiveness of the local and wider landscape.



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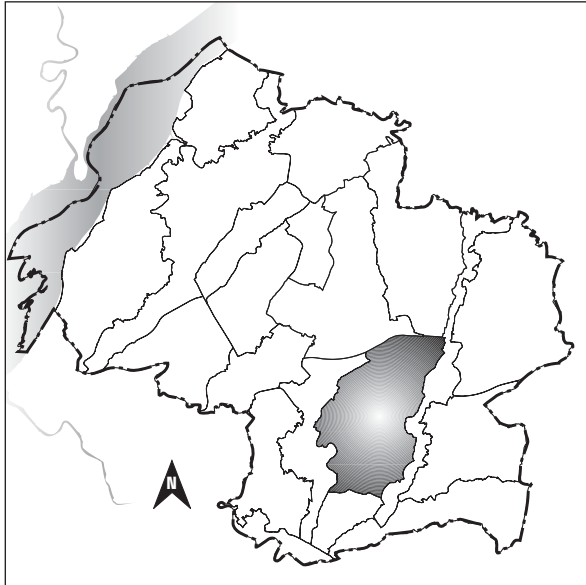


Key

➔₁₅ Photograph viewpoints

**Figure 24:
Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley -
Sketch Map**

Scale: not to scale



The Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley landscape character area is a diverse undulating rural landscape of mainly mixed farmland.

Key Characteristics

- Large scale, generally undulating plateau and vale landscape, with Pucklechurch Ridge forming a scarp/ridge to the north and west and the enclosed River Boyd valley to the south with gently rolling hills.
- The Cotswold Scarp is a prominent backdrop and skyline dominating and enclosing views beyond the area to the east. Internal long distance views are possible over the rolling landscape and across the area from the Cotswold Scarp.
- The Pucklechurch Ridge has a distinctive landform and textured cover, forming a prominent backdrop and skyline to adjacent westerly character areas.
- Land cover of medium sized pasture and arable fields, with some areas of large and small fields associated with plateau and steeper ground respectively. Distinct areas of commons, with infrequent small woodlands or copses in the north and elsewhere, associated with the Pucklechurch Ridge and valley landform.

- Field boundaries are predominantly clipped hedges, with limited hedgerow trees and some post and wire fences.
- Thick, more overgrown hedges and more frequent hedgerow trees lie to the south and south west.
- Settlement is concentrated at Pucklechurch and Wick with infrequent, smaller villages/hamlets dispersed throughout the area.
- Active and disused quarries lie within the area, with claypits and coal industry relics along the toe of the Pucklechurch Ridge (western boundary).
- M4 motorway forms a significant feature cutting across the area. Numerous narrow lanes also cross the area, some with wide grass verges.

Location

The Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley landscape character area is situated in the east of South Gloucestershire, adjacent to the Cotswold Scarp, south of Yate and immediately north of Wick.

The northern boundary of this landscape character area follows the railway, which marks the subtle transition between this area and the more wooded Wickwar Ridge and Vale further north. The eastern boundary follows the base of the Cotswold Scarp. The southern boundary follows the A420, which marks a subtle change between the ridge and vale landscape of this area and the more defined Golden Valley to the south.

The western boundary follows the toe of the Pucklechurch scarp in the north, to Shortwood Hill due west of Pucklechurch. South of the B4465, the scarp peters out changing to a less distinct rolling low hillside with more limited woodland cover. From here southwards, the position of the western boundary approximately follows the skyline, marking a transition between the higher Pucklechurch plateau to the east and the lower area of commons at Holbrook and Siston to the west. (See Figures 25 & 27).

Physical Influences

The geology consists largely of Inferior Oolite Limestone in common with the Cotswold Scarp.

In outline, the landform of the area comprises a scarp to the north and west, which rises to a small plateau and a large scale, undulating eastern vale, with the south and west comprising low, gently rolling hills and the River Boyd valley.

The Pucklechurch Ridge is a pronounced, medium scale landform rising from the Westerleigh Vale eastwards. The ridge has a prominent scarp edge which varies little in height along its length, at approximately 100 metres a.o.d, whilst its toe varies from between 80 metres a.o.d. in the north to 65 metres a.o.d. in the south. The northern scarp is thus more prominent. Throughout its length the landform is folded with occasional, small scale valley incisions fed by springs and tributaries of the Folly Brook, flowing generally north westwards.

The scarp peters out to the south of Shortwood Hill, forming gently rising ground and a curving ridgeline, which defines the Siston Brook valley.

The plateau landscape to the east of the ridge rises barely perceptibly southwards, but is slightly more prominent in the area of Pucklechurch itself, forming a broad dome at around 130 metres a.o.d.

The broad open vale to the east includes tributaries of the River Boyd, which drain southwards past Wick, through the Golden Valley and eventually into the River Avon. East of Wick, the River Boyd follows a more defined, sinuous, small scale and steep sided valley, at around 50 metres a.o.d., rising to around 75 metres a.o.d. on the upper valley slopes.

The Siston Brook valley and its tributaries lie beyond the south western boundary. The open valley slopes within the character area in its upper reaches face south west, producing the broadly curving form of the area's boundary.

The Cotswold Scarp rises beyond the character area to the east forming a prominent large scale ridgeline.

Land Cover

Land cover comprises a roughly equal proportion of arable and pasture land, in medium and some large, regular shaped fields. Field boundaries are predominately clipped hedges or timber post and wire, with only limited tree cover and infrequent woodland copses. However, subtle differences occur within the area.

- A few large regular shaped arable fields defined by low, clipped hedges and fences, are associated with the plateau and very gentle landform and are scattered roughly north east/south west through the centre of the area (Photo 9).
- Surrounding the central vale, along the western boundary and to the south towards Doynton, medium, regular shaped pasture fields dominate, divided by a mix of thick, clipped and intermittent hedges.
- Thick, overgrown hedges with intermittent trees lie mainly along the south and south western boundary.
- Small, irregular shaped fields are quite widespread in the areas around Hinton, Abson, Doynton and Wick and on parts of the Pucklechurch Ridge, within the river valleys, including parts of the Boyd Valley and some slopes rising to the foot of the Cotswold Scarp.
- On the scarp face of the Pucklechurch Ridge are medium, regular shaped fields of rough grassland and scrub, interspersed with copses or small areas of woodland. Clipped and overgrown hedgerows, with some intermittent hedgerow trees, run along the contours and down the slope, emphasising the profile of the scarp.
- Woodland cover is relatively sparse. There are however small woodlands scattered across the northern area and also associated with steeper landform along the Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley the south.

Areas of common land are present in a few locations. To the north, on gentle slopes near the Pucklechurch Ridge, are Kingrove Common, an irregular shaped small area of unimproved grassland and scrub contained by overgrown

hedgerows (Photo 1) and Wapley Common, a small area of open parkland, unimproved grassland and scrub, edged by woodland (Photo 2). Hinton Common west of the village comprises broad, roadside grass verges. Near the southern boundary, Holbrook Common to the north west of Wick, comprises a small area with an ordered, regular pattern of broad, roadside verges and open grass fields between scattered properties.

There are also a number of quarries and areas of mineral workings. These comprise Codrington Quarry, a disused area of workings north of the M4; Wick Quarry near the southern boundary, including an active large quarry and works buildings (Photo 12); Shortwood Claypit and former Brickworks, situated immediately to the west of this character area, but with an earlier tip site now covered by vegetation on the lower slopes of the Pucklechurch Ridge within this area; and the former Parkfield Colliery, comprising a north and south site, located along the toe of the ridge, the north site largely occupying a section of the lower slopes of the ridge within this area, near the M4.

Settlement and Infrastructure

Settlement within the area includes both large nucleated villages and dispersed small hamlets. Farmsteads are sparsely distributed throughout the area randomly, but at roughly equidistant intervals.

Pucklechurch is a large village, located on raised ground just south of the M4, built of limestone, brick and render. It is situated on an historic trade route from Oxford and London to Bristol, routes which have been significant since Saxon times.

The medieval core to the north of the settlement (a Conservation Area), is based around the church and manor at Moat House Farm and is characterised by wide roads, stone houses and boundaries, with the church forming the main focal point.

Its historic development has been principally based on agriculture and the coal mining

industry. More recent housing expansion has occurred and makes up a significant proportion of the village, with a large trading estate centred around a series of WWII balloon sheds and the adjacent prison complex, both on the southern fringes.

The presumed site of the Saxon Manor House where King Edward was martyred in 946 AD, lies on the north eastern edge of the town and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Wick is a large village to the south with both linear and more recent nucleated development pattern. It is situated both within and on the upper slopes of the River Boyd valley and is partly strung out along the A420. It contains a number of limestone buildings, although more recent residential development comprises a mix of materials including brick, render and reconstituted stone. Bury Manor, a large house on an elevated knoll and Wick Quarry and associated buildings are immediately to the east.

Yate and Chipping Sodbury lie adjacent to the northern boundary and comprise an extensive area of residential brick development, contained by the railway cutting.

Small villages and hamlets include Wapley, Codrington, Parkfield, Abson and Doynton (distributed throughout the area) and Dodington, Hinton and Dyrham (spring-line settlements associated with the toe of the Cotswold Scarp, and typically located within the rising ground of the adjacent character area).

Settlement locations are generally related to roads, junctions and, in places, churches. They are built predominantly of limestone, render and newer reconstituted stone. Parkfield Rank, associated with the disused coal mines along the toe of the scarp, is set along the upper edge of the Pucklechurch scarp and includes a terrace of brick and rendered properties.

Dyrham and Doynton are designated Conservation Areas due to their historic layout and building content and are unified through their use of Cotswold stone. Stone walls within Doynton enclose roads through the village (Photo 13).

The distinctive Elizabethan Siston Court lies to the south west of Pucklechurch, adjacent to the character area boundary, set above the

Siston Brook valley. The court is situated within open land containing elements of a designed 18th century landscape park, a locally designated historic park. The court and village (the latter lying within the adjacent area) are also designated a Conservation Area, essentially due to the court (Photo 10).

Copper slag coping stones and quoins (a by-product from the Warmley Brassworks within the Kingswood area) are a feature of the limestone wall of Abson Church and an adjacent barn (Photo 8). Similar coping stones are also evident within short sections of stone walling to a residential property along the A420, west of Wick and in Doynton. The use of this copper slag material is often quite limited within individual buildings, although examples are scattered widely throughout the rural areas of South Gloucestershire, as far as the Severn Ridges and Oldbury Levels.

Relics of the past coal mining industry and brickworks remain immediately adjacent to the foot of the scarp, north of Shortwood. The brickworks and Brandy Bottom Colliery (Parkfield Colliery South Photo 4) lie in the adjacent character area, although are visible from the Ridge. However, Parkfield Colliery North lies within this area adjacent to the motorway. Features comprise a brick chimney (SAM), buildings and earthworks, including an area of spoil which the M4 has cut through.

A disused railway line, a spur off the former Bristol to Bath railway, links the Parkfield Collieries and Shortwood Claypit.

The landscape character area is crossed by numerous roads. The M4 is the main route through the area and runs centrally east to west across the contours crossing the Boyd Valley on embankment and cutting through the Pucklechurch Ridge.

The A420 follows the grain of the landscape along the southern boundary, crossing the contours at grade and runs east to west, whilst the B4465 forms a 'dog leg' in travelling east to west either side of Pucklechurch, but running north-south between Pucklechurch and Westerleigh. Narrow and often tortuous lanes are numerous throughout the area, generally contained by hedges, some with wide asymmetric grass verges.

Only one significant powerline is present, descending from the Cotswold Scarp to pass over the M4 and then run north westwards towards Yate.

There are several major recreational routes present:

- One of a series of Circular Rides comprises a circuit within the north east of the area, taking in Hinton, Codrington and Kingrove Common, before passing into the adjacent area at Old Sodbury.
- The Community Forest Path passes very briefly along the western boundary, north of Shortwood Hill above the Pucklechurch scarp, before descending into the Westerleigh Vale towards Grove Farm (east of Westerleigh).
- The Monarch's Way provides a continuous north-south route through the eastern area, entering from Chipping Sodbury, crossing Kingrove Common before following the River Boyd valley south, through Codrington, Doynton and Wick.

The wider public rights of way network includes extensive linear routes which generally criss-cross the area, with a more intense radiating pattern emanating from Pucklechurch and Doynton. The Bristol - Oxford Road and Back Lane / Redford Lane form an extensive east-west route, connecting the mining areas west of Pucklechurch with Dyrham. Paths east of Doynton climb the adjacent Cotswold Scarp. One path runs along the top of the Pucklechurch Ridge, with several routes descending towards the adjacent Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge area.

Landscape Character

The Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley area forms an open plateau, which is a simple, undulating to rolling area with the prominent Pucklechurch scarp edge to the west. The intricacies of the enclosed Boyd Valley at Wick and steep profile of the Pucklechurch scarp provide contrast, within an otherwise largely exposed, large scale area.

The Cotswold Scarp forms a prominent backcloth and skyline to this area in the east.

Extensive open views of this significant landform are possible from a large extent of the area, greatly influencing its character (Photo 5). This character area is therefore important in providing the setting for the western edge of the Cotswold AONB. The scarp also provides panoramic views over this area.

The Pucklechurch Ridge, with its section of scarp, forms a visually prominent backcloth and containment to views from the Westerleigh Vale and the urban edge of the Kingswood character area and those areas of settlement elevated on rising ground. From these areas, the ridge is a distinctive rising landform and skyline feature. Its textured cover of hedgerows, woodland, rough grassland and scrub with Parkfield Rank and scattered farms, are particularly visible and distinctive. The relics of past industrial activity are closely related to the foot of the scarp, largely within the adjacent area. The two chimneys of the Parkfield Colliery (North and South sites) form local landmarks and are visible against the backdrop of the slope from the adjoining area (Photo 4).

Panoramic views over the adjacent Westerleigh Vale are possible, particularly from Parkfield Rank, Shortwood Hill and footpaths along the scarp edge. Evident within these views are:

- A rural landscape, scattered with industrial relics (now largely absorbed within a framework of naturally regenerating vegetation), road and rail infrastructure, an oil terminal and abattoir building. The landscape is contained to the west by prominent commercial development at Emerald Park, and the residential urban edge of Emerson's Green and Kingswood, with the expanse of Greater Bristol beyond.
- Emerald Park has a concentration of large scale warehouses, the large physical size of these buildings and uniformity of materials, is in stark contrast to the adjacent rural vale landscape and therefore a highly dominant feature within views.
- The extensive nature of settlement edge and urban area of Emerson's Green and Kingswood is very prominent within these views. There is a marked contrast at the boundary between settlement and the adjacent rural vale.

Above the Pucklechurch Ridge, the agricultural landscape comprises largely a patchwork of pasture and arable land of medium to large, regular shaped fields over a rolling, undulating landform. Smaller and more irregular shaped fields are typically associated with small settlements and steeper landform.

Boundaries vary within the area and include laid, clipped, thick or intermittent hedges, infrequently supplemented with fencing. This variety continues along the numerous roads and lanes that cross the area.

Hedgerow trees and woodland are generally intermittent, contributing to an open character (Photo 6 and 9). A few copses are scattered to the north of the M4, (Photo 2 at Wapley) and in small woodlands along the Pucklechurch scarp (Photo 3 & 4).

A dense pattern of hedgerow trees and woodland to the south, around Wick and within the curvilinear Boyd Valley, produces a bold landscape framework (Photo 11), which limits views into and out of this area. This medium scale semi-enclosed landscape is diverse and distinctive in appearance.

Commons at Kingrove (rough grassland, scrub contained by overgrown hedgerows), Wapley (parkland, rough grassland, scrub and woodland backdrop), Hinton (roadside grass verges) and Holbrook (linear roadside verges and regular fields) all provide visually distinct local areas.

The settlement and development pattern varies within the area and, with the exception of Pucklechurch and Wick, is small scale.

The scattered, small scale historic settlements and hamlets within the Boyd Valley and along the toe of the Cotswold Scarp, generally nestle within the landscape, are harmonious and well integrated within the vegetation pattern and often large scale landscape setting.

The churches at Pucklechurch, Wick, Abson and Doynton and Bury Manor at Wick, are focal points within the wider landscape (Photo 7).

More recent settlement expansion at Pucklechurch and Wick is prominent within local views (Photo 15) and from the Cotswold Scarp.

The eastern and southern edges of Pucklechurch, including housing and large modern shed buildings associated with the

trading estate, are very prominent within local views. A large extent of the settlement is also visible in views from the M4 to the north east. The lack of integration results from the slightly elevated location of the town, the limited vegetation framework/hedgerow trees along the settlement edge, or within the adjacent agricultural landscape and the large scale of some developments. From the Cotswold Scarp, the light coloured roofs of the large scale trading estate sheds are visually evident and attract attention, due to scale, colour and textural differences, compared to the adjacent residential settlement pattern and general lack of built development within this rural area as a whole (Photo 9 & 14).

The buildings and quarry edge of the active works at Wick Quarry are visually prominent from the Cotswold Scarp and A420 to the east (Photo 12), due to a lack of screening or vegetation. Frequent blasting operations are also an audible intrusion in the locality.

Part of the village of Wick is well integrated, situated within the wooded valley sides of the Boyd Valley. The dense housing pattern extending along the upper slopes is, however, more prominent within local views, given the very limited tree cover within the settlement area or adjacent to the northern edge.

The settlement edge of Yate is visible to the north of the area, although the undulating topography and vegetation in the surrounding fields and enclosing the railway line, limits its visual impact to intermittent local views.

The M4 and its associated significant traffic levels cuts through the centre of the area and is a highly visible and a prominent source of noise, particularly along the elevated section near Codrington. The open landform and limited vegetation structure emphasise its visual presence. Similarly, the single powerline is also a visible element within the area.

The Changing Landscape

The Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley landscape character area is an open, simple, undulating to rolling area with a defined scarp. The open views of and from the Cotswold Scarp

give a distinctive character to the area and are integral in providing the setting to the Cotswolds AONB.

The landscape framework is largely intact, although there are signs of erosion of its integrity, following the removal of features or deterioration through limited management.

Hedgerows are in places sporadic and intermittent, replaced by stock fencing. Hedgerow removal has been associated with arable land use, particularly in elevated flat areas and as a result of quarrying activities.

The southern pastoral landscape, with its thick hedgerow structure, hedgerow trees and occasional copses, appears to be in good condition. Mature hedgerow trees throughout the area typically have few juvenile replacements present to sustain this framework in future decades, although some recent woodland planting between Pucklechurch and the M4 motorway will, in time, contribute to the landscape framework. Active management of the various elements of the landscape framework, in particular hedgerows, trees and woodlands, including replacement or new planting, would help to ensure the conservation of these key features for the long term.

Whilst 'horsiculture' is not very evident at present in this character area, it is a recent trend in other areas with features such as stables, paddocks and fences. Associated infrastructure can also include exercise areas, jumps, access tracks and even floodlighting. The proliferation of such land use can lead to the loss or erosion of traditional field boundaries and hedges and the introduction of more prominent structures, resulting in a marked change in local character.

The Pucklechurch Ridge visually influences the adjacent Westerleigh Vale and Kingswood character areas lying to the west. It has areas susceptible to landscape change, with the rough grassland and scrub possibly subject to future changes in grazing practices, which would affect the visual texture and openness of the scarp. Mature trees along the skyline and woodland copses on the slopes presently have no juvenile replacements. The loss of tree structure may reveal the dispersed farm

buildings and residential properties, making them more prominent.

The Parkfield Rank facade of properties, along the ridgeline of the scarp, forms an unusual and isolated built skyline feature. This intrudes upon the distinctive scarp face, which otherwise has very few built features evident.

The approved large scale extension of mineral extraction and landfill operations at Shortwood Claypit, whilst largely contained within the adjacent character area immediately to the west, will extend into the lower slopes of the scarp face within this character area. The works will introduce both temporary and long term significant landscape change into the local area throughout its 20 year life, since the elevated location of the Pucklechurch Ridge allows views over parts of the adjoining area.

The initial removal of existing hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees will weaken the existing landscape framework in the local vicinity. However the proposed landform changes within this area, which include excavation and significant screen mounds, are likely to have a greater impact.

The final land raising will result in a landform which is locally convex, rather than the existing concave slopes of the lower scarp. The restoration proposals for the whole site, including the adjacent claypit, will however reintroduce a hedgerow framework over the site, as well as a large area of new woodland. Both will contribute to the overall landscape structure of the area, although the new woodland, in the long term, is likely to screen some of the views of the wider adjacent vale that are currently obtained.

The abattoir and oil terminal buildings near the scarp toe in the adjoining character area, and M4 motorway, are built forms which dilute the rural character, due to their massing, scale or linearity, which contrasts with the rural landscape and landform of the scarp.

The proposed Emerson's Green East development site, covers an extensive area within the adjacent character area to the west and extends between the existing urban edge of Emerson's Green, to and along the toe of the Pucklechurch Ridge. Development of this scale will inevitably result in significant landscape

change and loss of the existing rural character, which will be prominent from the Pucklechurch Ridge. New development and structures within this area are also likely to affect the visibility, prominence and distinctiveness of the Pucklechurch Ridge, in views from the west and the M4. However, policies are included in the Local Plan which seek to ensure that any proposals for the area take account of the need to protect character, amenity and distinctiveness of the locality and wider landscape.

Heavy traffic and overhead powerlines are local detractors to landscape character. The undulating landform and layered effect of the hedgerows generally limits the impact of roads and other structures on the wider landscape. Reduction or erosion of the hedgerow and tree structure would increase the impact of such elements. However, they remain evident within elevated long distance views from the Cotswold Scarp.

Wick Quarry has little woodland structure along its eastern boundary. Both the quarry workings and buildings are prominent from the Cotswolds AONB. New planting has however been undertaken around the recent extension and may, in time, reduce its impact to some degree. Some restructuring of the site buildings will occur over time, as quarrying continues within the confines of the current site boundary.

The central and eastern parts of this landscape character area are sensitive to change, which might erode its distinctive character, due to its open nature and visibility from the Cotswold Scarp.

Sections of the edge of Pucklechurch are also sensitive to change, due to their existing visual prominence and influence upon local landscape character and local, middle and distant views. Future change and particularly expansion of the settlement area into the surrounding plateau, will potentially increase the visual prominence of the town in this open landscape, especially where it results in loss to the already limited vegetation structure, eroding the rural character of this landscape.

The undulating topography and semi-enclosed nature of the western and southern parts of

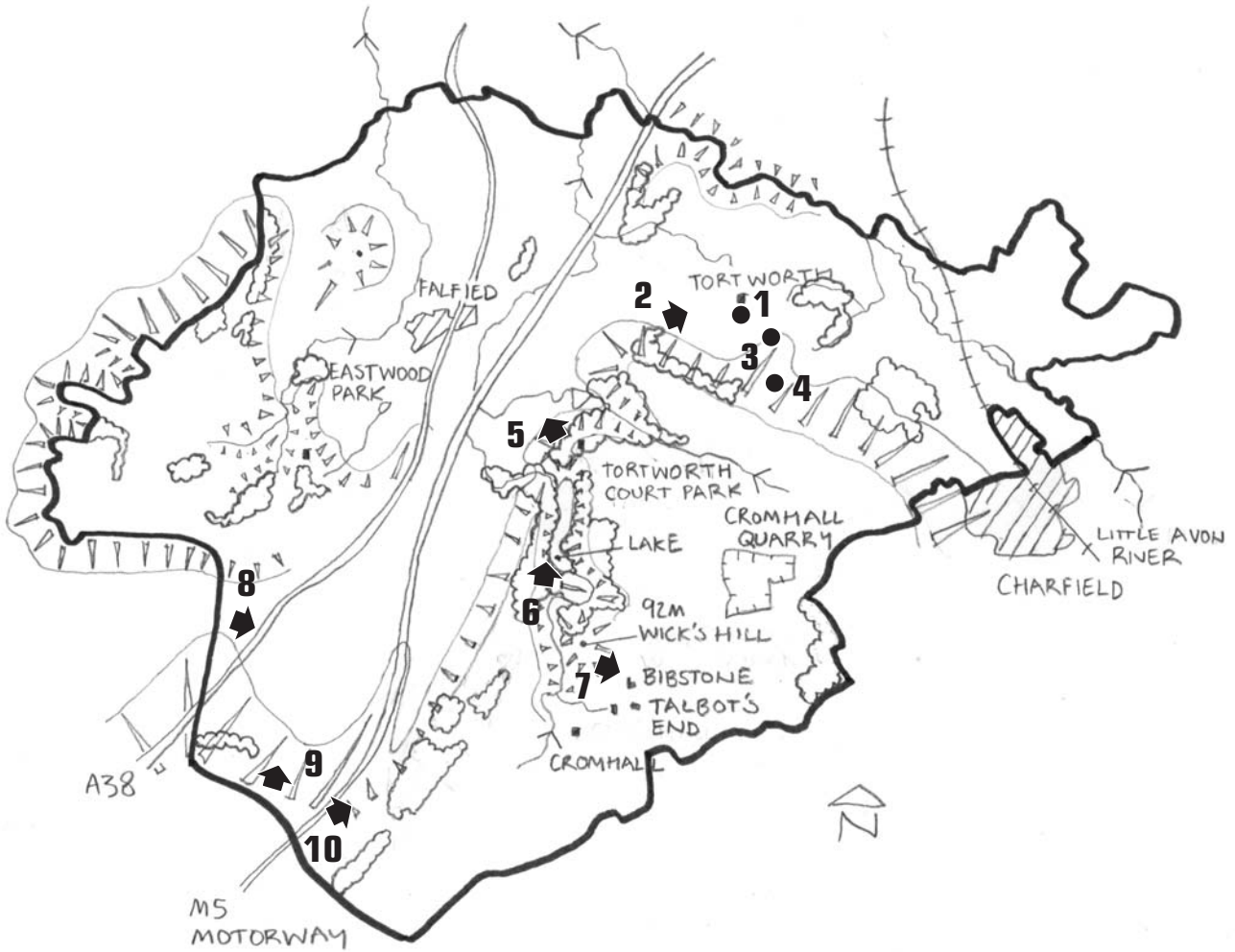
this landscape character area, coupled with a denser vegetation structure, makes it relatively less sensitive to change. However there is, a difference between the sensitivity of the open hill tops and skyline locations, which are prominent within local and long views, compared with that of the more treed and enclosed valleys.

The steeper slopes, for example the valley sides and upper slopes of the Boyd Valley around Wick, are however sensitive to change which might require landform remodelling, which may have a more extensive impact upon landscape form and vegetation framework.


Recent maintenance works to the South Wales to London railway, by Network Rail, has had an effect upon the local landscape character in adjacent character areas to the west. Similar works, if undertaken along the railway cutting which contains the southern edge of Yate, would result in the loss of established vegetation, which together with the railway cutting itself, provides a significant visual screen and spatial separation between the urban edge and rural fringe. The works would have the potential to increase the visual prominence of the urban edge, eroding the present perception of relative remoteness and the largely rural character of the adjoining landscape.



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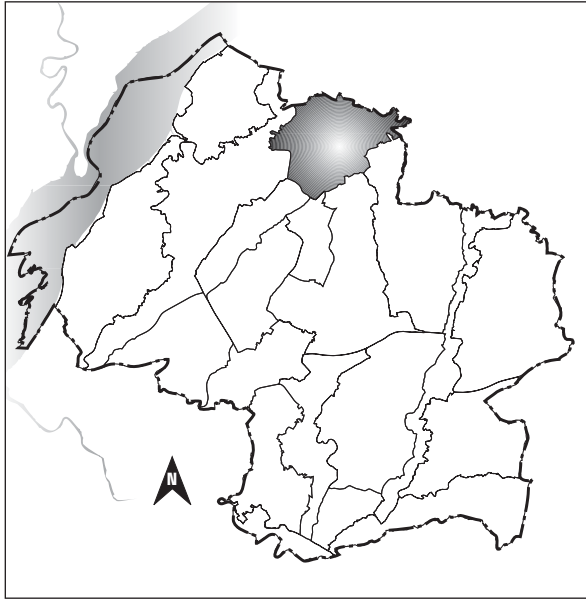


Key

 Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

Figure 27:
Falfield Vale - Sketch Map



The Falfield Vale landscape character area is a shallow bowl comprising agricultural land and parkland, with a prominent mosaic of woodland, copses and mature trees on surrounding higher ground.

Key Characteristics

- Curving bowl shaped vale, enclosed to the east by the slopes of the Severn Ridge and to the west by gently rising ground, with an area of slightly higher undulating land to the east and south of the Severn Ridge.
- Large woodland areas, copses and mature trees associated with scarp slopes, small valleys and parkland estates are dominant.
- Parkland character of mature specimen trees in open grassland within Tortworth Court Park and Eastwood Park estates.
- Rural agricultural landscape with a concentration of medium to large regular arable fields and wider scattered pattern of small to medium sized irregular and regular shaped pasture and arable use, divided by clipped hedges with sporadic hedgerow trees intermixed with strong woodland structure and mature trees.

- Limestone buildings and walls associated with dispersed small settlements, individual properties and park estate architecture.
- M5, A38, B4509 and railway line cut through the landscape, with road traffic locally prominent. Powerlines are locally prominent in the south.
- Two prison complexes, at Leyhill and Eastwood, are largely well integrated, although have local influences.
- One large quarry is located in the east.

Location

The Falfield Vale landscape character area is located in the north of South Gloucestershire, straddling the M5 corridor.

The northern limits of this landscape character area are defined by the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary and generally by the Little Avon River. To the east there is a subtle transition in landform and land cover between the Falfield Vale and Wickwar Ridge. The boundary follows physical features of settlement edge, woodland and roads in a southwards direction from Charfield. The southern boundary marks a transition with the northern end of the Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge and follows the approximate watershed with the Tytherington Plain. The western boundary follows the top of the defined scarp edge, which falls to Rockhampton beyond this area. (See Figures 28 & 30).

Physical Influences

The underlying geology is a mix of Jurassic and Carboniferous Limestone, Wenlock Shales, Devonian Sandstone and Alluvium. This range of intricate and interwoven geological strata creates a gradually changing, bowl and vale landform.

Soils are a similar intricate mix varying from Rankers, Brown Soils, Brown Earth Loam over Clay, Pelo-Stagnogley, typical Argillic Pelosols, typical Stagnogley and Pelo-Alluvial Gley.

The landform consists of a bowl shaped vale open to the north, defined to the east and south east by the Severn Ridge which curves in an extended 's' shape, diagonally through the area (Photo 5). This ridgeline varies in height along its length, generally falling in a north easterly direction from 100m a.o.d. on the southern boundary to 80m a.o.d, before the ridge curves eastwards, merging with the Wickwar Ridge (near Charfield) at 85m a.o.d.

The ridge has a more complex form where a steep side valley cuts south through this area towards Cromhall. This has formed the rounded knoll of Wick's Hill at 92m a.o.d. and meandering small scale valley within Tortworth Court Park. The north eastern curve gives way to the Little Avon River valley to the north at approximately 20m a.o.d.

To the east and south of the Severn Ridge, the land is generally undulating and drains northwards to and through the ridge.

To the west, land gently rises from the bowl shaped vale at approximately 30m a.o.d. to a scarp edge on this area's western boundary at 70m a.o.d. Beyond, the scarp falls steeply towards Rockhampton.

Drainage within the area flows generally northwards as tributaries of the Little Avon River. In the area of Tortworth Court Park, two watercourses flow through small scale meandering and enclosed valleys, cut into the Severn Ridge. These streams have in places been dammed to create ornamental lakes and pools (Photo 6). The Little Avon River follows a tightly meandering course on the northern boundary of the area, flowing north westwards through a shallow, broad valley and then within an enclosed steep sided valley.

A high railway embankment curves diagonally through and segments the Little Avon River valley, to the north west of Charfield.

Land Cover

The Falfield Vale area is characterised by a diverse mix of land cover, largely influenced by the estates of Tortworth Court Park and Eastwood Park.

Field patterns vary throughout the area. Small irregular shaped pasture fields are found to the east, above the Severn Ridge, within the vicinity of Bibstone, Townwell and Cromhall, on rising hills to the west of Falfield and shallow valley north of Falfield and also west of Charfield. East of the A38 fields are also generally small but of a regular shape. Medium to large arable fields of various forms cover a significant part of the area including the estates at Tortworth Court Park and Eastwood Park (the former a Registered Historic Park). Field patterns are particularly irregular north and west of Falfield. Fields are typically defined by dense, low clipped hedges and include sparsely distributed mature hedgerow trees (Photo 2 and 9).

Numerous large mixed and deciduous areas of woodland are prominent within the area, their linear form typically associated with the Severn Ridge (Photo 8). Tree pattern within the estates' parkland varies, including mature, deciduous and evergreen trees in groups or single specimens, within open grassland or hedgerows (Photo 2 & 4). Tortworth Court Park in addition includes an arboretum. Both parks include ornamental lakes and pools, more extensively within Tortworth Court Park, where a small enclosed valley has been dammed (Photo 6).

Historically, Tortworth Court Park replaced an earlier deer park based around the hamlet of Tortworth, the bounds of which can be easily traced within the landscape pattern. The Old Court includes the ancient Tortworth Chestnut tree, a veteran tree and unique landscape feature, which is at least 800 years old (Photo 3).

The Tortworth Estate influences a significant part of the character area through its extensive land ownership (the majority falling within the character area), which includes large areas of farmland and woodland, as well as parkland.

Eastwood Park to the west (under different ownership) is a designed landscape park which partly overlies a huge 16th century deer park. The field pattern in this area reflects the enclosure of the earlier park, with the boundary of the original park still evident in field boundaries and woodland pattern.

There are two Iron Age hill forts (SAMs) within the area: Bloody Acre Camp within Tortworth

Court Park, on the brow of the Severn Ridge and Camp Hill on the area's western boundary, within Eastwood Park. The site of a roman villa (SAM) lies to the south west of Cromhall.

There is one quarry in the area at Cromhall (limestone and quartzite). Only one section of the limestone quarry remains in operation.

Settlement and Infrastructure

Settlement is typically small scale, limited and dispersed throughout the Falfield Vale area, with largely nucleated villages, hamlets, scattered farms and houses. There are also some large houses, estate architecture, buildings and stone walls associated with the Tortworth and Eastwood Estates.

The villages and hamlets of Falfield, Tortworth, Cromhall, Bibstone, Townwell and Talbot's End are located on shallow slopes. Three are associated with churches and all are united through their use of limestone as a construction material. Boundary stone walls are common, particularly around the estates. More recent brick houses are present within the villages, either as single dwellings or grouped infill.

Falfield is a small nucleated village, located within the bowl on the A38. The church is a focal point. The village is generally constructed of limestone with estate-influenced architecture and some more recent brick houses.

Eastwood Park, immediately to the south, includes a group of old buildings concentrated around the large and imposing stately home, which is set on elevated ground above the parkland of the open bowl. The large 'shed' complex of Eastwood Park Prison is located on the northern lower slopes of the estate grounds.

The Tortworth Estate includes a number and diverse range of properties in Tortworth, Cromhall, Charfield, Falfield and Wickwar beyond the area. Tortworth hamlet, located to the north east, is a small estate settlement with a 'designed' regular layout, dominated by a stone

church and surrounded by largely stone terraced estate cottages (Photo 1 & 2).

To the south of the hamlet within Tortworth Court Park, is the large Tortworth Court set within woodland and pleasure gardens, including an ornate gateway and lodge buildings.

The Leyhill Prison complex, within and to the east of the park, consists of a number of large, modern buildings, surrounded by a tall boundary stone wall, playing fields and a small area of housing.

Cromhall, Bibstone, Townwell and Talbot's End are small hamlets located close to each other in the south east, above the Severn Ridge. Properties are largely concentrated around the intersection of country lanes, with some low density and irregular roadside development between hamlet centres (Photo 7).

Scattered throughout the area are several isolated buildings, farms and building groups. These properties have a mix of building styles, although principally constructed of limestone or rendered, with stone property boundaries a common feature. Some farms include large modern shed outbuildings, constructed of timber and corrugated sheet materials.

A high frequency of individual properties is common along both major and minor roads, creating in places small sections of low density ribbon development.

On the boundary, but outside of this area to the east, is the large village of Charfield. It includes a mix of rendered and brick buildings of a variety of ages and styles, around an historic core, with more recent infill housing development.

The A38, B4058 and B4509 are the principal local distributor routes with significant traffic levels. The A38 and M5 with two overbridges (Photo 10) are the main roads which pass north to south, linking the often winding narrow country lanes, which generally run east to west to the adjacent settlements.

A short section of the Bristol to Gloucester railway passes through the north eastern edge of the area on embankment.

Two pylon corridors lie within the south: one enters the area from the west before turning southwards below Cromhall; the other runs close to the south eastern boundary.

There is a low density of public rights of way within the area. They largely cross the higher landform, occasionally descending into the vale bowl. There is a particular concentration of intersecting routes within the shallow valley north of Falfield to the west of and linking settlement around Cromhall. One of the series of Circular Rides is the only major recreational route. It briefly passes through the south of the area, connecting Cromhall with Tytherington to the west and Wickwar to the east, both outside of the area.

Landscape Character

The Falfield Vale landscape has a varied character, largely associated with landform and the historic parkland estates.

The bowl shaped vale is a mix of open pastoral and arable agricultural landscapes of small to medium, regular and irregular shaped fields. A concentration of medium to large, regular arable fields are found within the parkland estates. Fields are typically defined by low maintained hedges and sparse native hedgerow trees.

Large woodland blocks and linear woodlands generally structure and provide enclosure along the upper slopes of the bowl shaped vale (Photo 8 and 9).

The Severn Ridge, rising to the east, is prominent within the area, with large areas of broadleaved native woodland clothing its upper slopes and hill tops. This bold structure covers a large proportion of Tortworth Court Park enclosing features such as the stately Tortworth Court its associated buildings, the lakes, ponds and arboretum, plus the narrow steep sided valleys which cut into the ridge.

Leyhill Prison complex is largely contained by woodland and a high boundary stone wall. Associated with this complex and visible to the south from the adjacent road, are playing fields and a regular grouping of reconstituted stone houses, which are visually different in design, style and materials to the character of the traditional stone buildings in the area.

This development has introduced a slight suburban character to the locality. The lower

slopes of the Severn Ridge include mature tree specimens, often standing within open fields.

To the west, the parkland character within the Eastwood Park estate is distinctive. Designed linear woodland, mature tree stands and specimen trees provide the backdrop and setting for the stately home at Eastwood Park, with an open bowl parkland around the house to the west, including mature tree stands within pasture. Large woodland blocks and linear planting continue westwards along higher slopes beyond the estate boundary. The house is primarily visible within middle distance views from the Severn Ridge to the east.

The village of Falfield, with its cluster of largely traditional stone built properties, the church, Falfield Lodge and some stone walls at a junction with the A38, retains a distinctive character, although the traffic volumes along the A38 detracts from this character. More recent brick housing has formed concentrated pockets of development either side of the A38, which are set back from the road, largely contained by hedgerows and trees.

The linear pattern of brick houses near the Leyhill prison entrance are however, more prominent and detract from the local character and pattern of the village.

The Eastwood Park Prison complex within the park's grounds, is primarily visible within local views from Falfield and its approach road. The architectural style of the complex and associated infrastructure of roads and security fencing are however alien features which erode the character of the locality.

Some irregular shaped areas of woodland are also located along the western boundary and scarp skyline, here merging with woodland on the scarp face below.

Parkland and estate character is again distinctive in the area of Tortworth along the gentle slopes of the Little Avon Valley. The former deer park includes a broad open landscape of pasture, some arable, with mature tree specimens within grassland and limited division by hedgerows. The hamlet of Tortworth, at its centre, visually contributes to the area's distinctiveness. The church tower and estate cottages are visually prominent within local and middle distance views (Photo

2). The Tortworth Chestnut tree is a particularly unique local feature, which provides further visual reference to the area's historic landscape development (Photo 3). Views from this area of the Little Avon Valley are extensive, stretching beyond the character area to include the Cotswold Scarp to the east.

Above the Severn Ridge to the south east, the gently undulating agricultural vale landscape around Cromhall is visually remote from the Falfield bowl. The area generally comprises small to medium, regular and irregular shaped fields, with clipped hedgerows and frequent native hedgerow trees. One large area of mixed woodland is visible on higher slopes to the east (Photo 7). The dispersed and clustered settlement pattern in this area is generally well integrated, within the lower landform of this local area, contained by the backdrop of Wick Hill and within an intact irregular landscape framework. Open views from adjacent high ground over this area are possible, although views within the area are generally more limited, due to the landscape structure and undulating landform.

The northern edge of Charfield remains largely well integrated. Small pockets of housing along the B4062 are set behind a strong structure of hedgerows and trees, with the extensive area of houses adjacent to the railway line, contained to the west by dense vegetation along the railway.

Cromhall Quarry is largely well screened by boundary vegetation. The large scale disused Wickwar Quarry (outside this character area to the east) is partly visible, with a section of exposed quarried rock face wall and buildings visible within middle distance views from the Bagstone Road, south of Townwell.

Individual properties and farms within the area and along the A38 are generally well integrated, given their dispersed distribution and the intactness of hedgerows and tree cover. Modern farm sheds, due to their scale and massing, are however visible elements where the surrounding vegetation structure is more limited, particularly around the parkland estates. This often erodes the rural character and scale of the locality.

The Cotswold Scarp to the east and north, is a strong visual element in long distance views,

generally from higher vantage points within the character area and parts of the Little Avon Valley. The upper slopes of the Little Avon Valley are a more local feature. Both lie outside of this area but influence its character.

The M5 is a prominent built feature within the centre of the area, with two over-bridges and sections of road at grade. The A38 follows slightly higher ground to the west. Both routes have heavy traffic with visible and audible effects within the bowl landform.

The B4509 and network of lanes are typically visually enclosed by tall hedgerows. The heavy traffic carried to and from the motorway junction however introduces noise in an otherwise tranquil area.

Pylon corridors to the south of the area are prominent visual features from the Cromhall area, where they form large built features within a generally low, gently undulating landscape.

The railway line, on embankment, forms a significant built landform within the Little River Avon valley. It however remains generally well integrated and unobtrusive, given the scrub /tree cover along its embankment which connects with the dense riparian vegetation of the Little Avon Valley. The embankment and vegetation within this small scale valley forms strong visual enclosure in places. Further south, the railway is more prominent where it passes through Charfield.

The Changing Landscape

The Falfield Vale landscape character area has a strong historic landscape structure of parkland, agricultural field patterns, dense woodland, mature trees, hedgerows and stone walls near to farm and estate properties, overlying a large scale bowl landform.

The landscape across much of the area is in good condition. Woodland areas of various sizes, stands of trees and specimens are important structural components of this landscape. Within the parkland estates, although management over previous decades has been limited, more recently, long term woodland management has resumed, with both

clear felling and replanting taking place. The landscape outside the estates shows some evidence of new planting, but to a lesser extent. More active management of the landscape framework, including replacement or new woodland planting and supplementing hedgerow tree planting would help to strengthen these key features and ensure their conservation for the long term.

The area's historic parkland around Tortworth hamlet and within Tortworth Court Park and Eastwood Park are particularly sensitive to change.

Their historic pattern and character are the result of a combination of designed parkland and agricultural land use practices, which have influenced hedgerow, tree patterns and settlements that have been in existence or changed little for hundreds of years.

Changes in land use, management or loss of trees could affect the present integrity and structure of the landscape. Similarly, the introduction of built development of a more modern style, form or pattern has the potential to erode the existing character and be intrusive, as is evident already within this area from development at Leyhill Prison and Eastwood Park Prison.

Any future expansion of the prisons within the parkland estates will require careful consideration of building design and measures for integration, to minimise the impact on the distinctive landscape character of the locality.

The higher ground surrounding the shallow bowl of the Falfield Vale allows extensive open views across the agricultural landscape, making parts of this area sensitive to change. Any change within the bowl, both small scale, cumulative change and larger vertical and linear forms, therefore has the potential to be visible and erode character, within the immediate locality and the wider bowl landscape.

As is already evident, strong vertical or horizontal elements are particularly prominent within the bowl, e.g. the M5, A38 (plus associated noise) and overhead powerlines and pylons.

The enclosure offered by woodland and folds within the landform provide areas generally less sensitive to change. The two prisons have been

generally well integrated in the wider view, although they continue to have some local adverse visual influence upon character within the immediate locality, given their scale, form and building materials.

Housing infill has the potential for modifying the traditional, irregular and organic development pattern of most settlements and the spatial segregation found between roadside properties. Brick or reconstituted stone building construction, of an architectural style and pattern which does not reflect local character, is evident in Falfield and Leyhill. This has caused a dilution of local distinctiveness.

Wickwar Quarry buildings and its exposed rock face (beyond this area to the east) are currently partially visible from the vicinity of Bagstone Road, south of Townwell. Although expansion of the quarry may occur in the future, the preferred area for extraction, east of the B4509, is beyond the Wickwar Ridge skyline and is therefore unlikely to have a significant visual effect on views from this area.

Potential landfill and restoration of the disused flooded quarry may occur in the future. This has the potential to introduce visual and audible disturbances during operations, which could be evident from Bibstone, Townwell and Talbots End. Restoration however has the opportunity to integrate landform and land use of the site with adjacent areas, re-establishing a landscape framework and reducing the present impact of the rock face and buildings on this area.

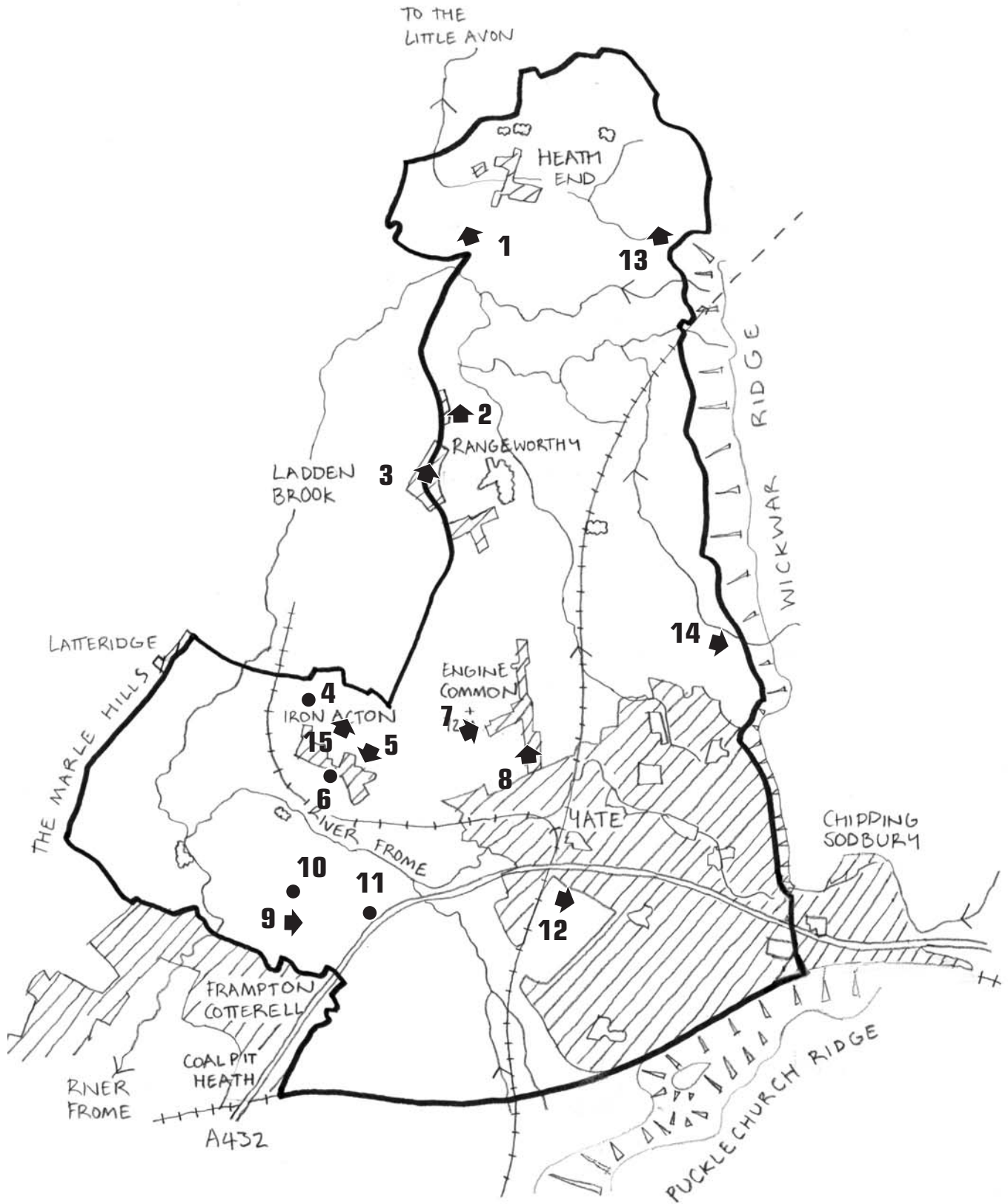
Cromhall Quarry is currently inactive, but has an existing permission for further extraction work. There is still potential for extraction to continue within the existing quarry site, before expansion of the quarry area is considered.

Any future plan to recommence quarrying is therefore likely to introduce some local effects immediately adjacent to the site, but is likely to have limited wider effects upon landscape character.

Policies are included in both the Local Plan and Minerals & Waste Local Plan, which seek to ensure that future quarrying, landfill and restoration proposals for these sites take account of the need to protect the landscape character, amenity and distinctiveness of the local and wider landscape.



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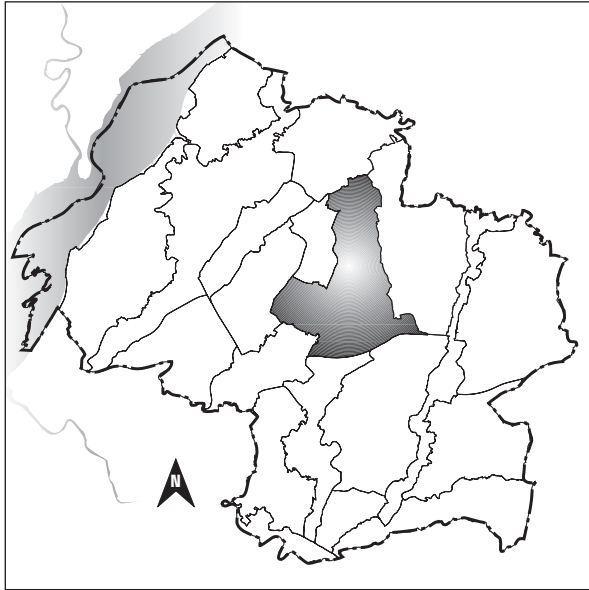


Key

➤₁₅ Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

**Figure 30:
Yate Vale - Sketch Map**



The Yate Vale landscape character area comprises a gently sloping, largely agricultural often well treed area of medium sized fields, with large settlements in the south.

Key Characteristics

- Gently sloping vale of medium sized pasture and arable fields, very irregular shaped to the north, with small to medium regular shaped fields between and around Engine Common and Rangeworthy.
- Fields are contained in places by clipped hedgerows with an even distribution of mature specimen trees, creating a strong parkland character.
- North and west of Yate, tall overgrown hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees, copses and small woodlands, create a more enclosed landscape.
- Occasional small woodlands scattered through parts of the area, often associated with relic coal mining, quarrying and the River Frome.
- Large scale landscape with views largely filtered by vegetation; some distant views possible. Area is overlooked by the adjacent Wickwar Ridge, The Marle Hills and over some distance from the Cotswold Scarp.

- Pennant stone walls feature along some minor roads to the south and B4058, elsewhere associated with older settlement and scattered farms.
- The town of Yate lies in the south, merging with Chipping Sodbury beyond the south eastern boundary. The village of Frampton Cotterell defines part of the southern boundary.
- A number of scattered linear settlements extend northwards from Yate and Iron Acton along the network of roads and lanes, mixed with an intricate landscape of dispersed settlement, historic courts, coal industry relics, commons, woodlands and fields. Much of the northern part of the area has very little settlement, other than scattered farmsteads.
- Numerous minor roads bisect the area in the south, whereas in the north access is very limited.
- Overhead powerlines cross the area and are a visible horizontal and vertical element.

Location

The Yate Vale landscape character area is located in central South Gloucestershire, north east of Bristol and north of the M4 corridor.

The northern boundary defines an area of transition between the Yate Vale and higher ground with a different settlement and field pattern, within the adjacent Falfield Vale area. The eastern boundary follows the approximate toe of the Wickwar Ridge, which in the south is partly defined by the edge of Yate, before marking the approximate landform division between Yate and Chipping Sodbury.

The southern boundary continues to the west beyond the urban edges, following the South Wales to London railway line, which marks a transition from the simple Yate Vale landform to the more undulating and rising landform of the adjacent Westerleigh Vale. The south west boundary follows the eastern and northern settlement edge of Coalpit Heath and Frampton Cotterell. The western boundary follows the

ridgeline of The Marle Hills and B4058. It is a transitional boundary between the subtle variation in landform and vegetation of the Yate Vale and that of the adjacent Earthcott Vale and Tytherington Plain landscapes. (See Figures 31 & 33).

Physical Influences

The Yate Vale landscape character area largely consists of Carboniferous Coal Measures, with Pennant sandstones, mudstones and shales within the vale and some Triassic Keuper marl, clays and sandstones along parts of the eastern and south western boundary. The soils are dominated by a mix of Gleys, Stagnogleys and Brown Earth.

The area largely comprises part of the very shallow and broad Ladden Brook valley, which falls northwards from Yate at 85 metres a.o.d. to 54 metres a.o.d. (average heights). This area is contained to the east by the prominent Wickwar Ridge, which rises beyond the area's boundary, on average 40 metres above the Ladden Valley floor. The southern end of the ridge forms a shallow escarpment at Yate Rocks and Bury Hill, both within the adjacent area, before the gradient slackens to provide the slightly elevated shallow bowl at 100 metres a.o.d. within which Chipping Sodbury is located. Beyond the southern edge of Yate the land rises to form the Pucklechurch Ridge.

West of the Ladden Valley a broad area of slightly elevated ground is followed by the B4058.

To the north, land rises slightly at Heath End to 63 metres a.o.d. A tributary of the Little Avon River forms a small valley, flowing west and then northwards beyond this area.

The south western extent of the area comprises the shallow and broad River Frome valley, which is joined by the Ladden Brook, having passed through the adjacent Tytherington Plain to the north. The Marle Hills on this western boundary partly contain the valley, forming a low ridgeline at 65 metres a.o.d, above the valley floor at 50 metres a.o.d (average heights).

The area's watercourses, comprising the River Frome, Ladden Brook and Little Avon River largely form irregular brooks and stream channels. The River Frome is the most variable in channel form, flowing westwards through Yate, and then southwards through Frampton Cotterell. It variously forms a small natural river, a straightened channel and spillway (flood control measures) within Yate and south of Iron Acton and then follows an irregular, meandering river course north of Frampton Cotterell.

The large scale railway embankment of the South Wales to London line, on the southern boundary, is a significant elevated horizontal man-made landform, superimposed on the gently undulating, natural ground form.

Land Cover

The Yate Vale landscape character area includes arable and pasture land within various field patterns. In the north, to the east of Bagstone, is an area of irregular shaped fields. The field pattern over much of the remaining area is the result of parliamentary enclosure, which comprises distinct, regular shaped fields, small to medium in size, particularly in the area of Engine Common and Rangeworthy. Iron Acton also has a localised area of small to medium sized, rectangular fields. More extensively, south of Iron Acton, fields are generally medium sized and slightly more irregular in shape.

Fields are largely contained by clipped hedges, mixed with some tall overgrown hedges particularly to the north and west of Yate. Mature hedgerow tree specimens (predominantly oak) are common, scattered throughout parts of the area (Photo 2). In contrast, to the east of Heath End in the north of the area, there are fewer hedgerow trees (Photo 13). Copses and small deciduous and mixed woodlands are common to the west and north of Yate, often marking past industrial sites, including relic coal mines and quarrying (Photo 1).

The majority of the railway embankment on the southern boundary is covered by mature trees, with some areas of rough grassland.

Horse paddocks are scattered across the area, largely to the west of Yate, between and adjacent to Iron Acton and Engine Common. Paddocks are secured variously by overgrown hedgerows or stockproof fencing (either reinforcing gaps in hedgerows or replacing hedgerows altogether).

Pennant stone boundary walls are a common feature towards the south of the area, associated with ribbon settlements, at Acton Court, along minor roads and the B4058 (Photo 7 & 15). Hedge banks, including Pennant stone, are locally evident as boundaries to narrow lanes to the north of Frampton Cotterell (Photo 10).

There are limited areas of common and heathland within the area, comprising a narrow strip and pocket of land along the B4058 within Rangeworthy and Westerleigh Common, a large open space, contained on three sides by a mix of residential and industrial estate development west of Yate (Photo 12).

With the exception of commons with settlement edge boundaries, i.e. Westerleigh, the extent of each common is indistinct, with grassland cover and hedgerow containment being largely similar to the adjacent agricultural landscape.

Mineral extraction within the area has left a number of relics. The extraction and burning of limestone has left small quarries and lime kilns along the toe of the Wickwar Ridge, near Yate Rocks/ Bury Hill. The remnants of a dramway, dating from the 1850's, runs west from these sites to the railway line. The extraction of celestite within this area has left only a number of small pits, now forming lakes, although Wickwar Quarry, beyond the north eastern boundary, was at one time the world's largest extraction site for this mineral. Small scale remnants of stone and mineral extraction are also present north of Frampton Cotterell (Pennant sandstone) and between Engine Common and Rangeworthy (former colliery yard and coal pit). There is however, little visible evidence of the once extensive coal mining in the area, other than woodland cover over these sites today.

The urban area of Yate includes a variety of open space, retained amongst the dense settlement

pattern. This largely comprises amenity open space of mown grass and few trees, associated with roadsides and school grounds. Irregular spaces along the River Frome corridor include both sections with overgrown hedgerows, mature trees (some pollarded) and amenity grassland elsewhere. The rural sections of the River Frome to the west of Yate, have occasional small woodland blocks and lengths of linear woodland associated with this watercourse.

On the northern edge of Yate lies Tyler's Field, with its recently planted woodland structure and meadow hillside setting. Also on the settlement edge is a small park and lake associated with the adjacent housing development. A more structured area of mature trees, parkland and lakes is found at Kingsgate Park.

Settlement and Infrastructure

The Yate Vale includes the large settlement of Yate, which has merged with Chipping Sodbury to the east to form a continuous urban area. The town of Yate is however physically separated from Chipping Sodbury, which is located on higher ground within a shallow bowl of the Wickwar Ridge. There is a noticeable increase in elevation from the Yate Vale to Chipping Sodbury on approaching from the west.

Although Yate has a medieval core, it has grown relatively recently to include extensive areas of 20th century housing, often in brick, concentrations of commercial and retail development along major roads and industrial estate development on its western fringe.

The medieval settlement pattern within Yate is particularly evident, clustered around St Mary's Church, Goose Green and Yate Rocks, where the traditional buildings and walls are constructed of Pennant stone. Closer to the Wickwar Ridge, limestone also features within older buildings and walls, reflecting the local changes in geology. A dense network of minor roads emanate from the north and west of Yate. The development of settlement is closely

related to this road network, with dispersed houses of a variety of styles and mix of stone and render, straddling the roads and lanes (Photo 3).

Engine Common is a distinct linear settlement (Photo 8), whilst Rangeworthy (Photo 3) and Heath End are linear settlements with a clustered pattern at road intersections.

Iron Acton village, to the west of Yate, is probably the result of two settlements merging, now forming a linear settlement. Designated a Conservation Area, it was founded through its associations with ore extraction and iron workings. It consists largely of a mix of older building styles, combined with a village green and other small public open spaces. The buildings are mainly Pennant sandstone and light coloured render, with high stone walls defining property boundaries along the High Street (Photo 6).

Acton Court (a SAM), to the north of Iron Acton is included within the Conservation Area and comprises a large Tudor house, walled grounds and decorative gateway (Photo 4). A former deer park lies to the north of Iron Acton, the majority of which is located within the Tytherington Plain area.

Farm building groups are numerous in the area, either distributed at close but random intervals along minor roads around Engine Common, clustered together as seen at Mayshill on the A432 to the north of Coalpit Heath (Photo 11), or distributed more sparsely within the more rural area of the Ladden Brook valley. These buildings are generally small Pennant sandstone farmhouse buildings, of similar design, constructed during the early 19th century.

Yate Court, a medieval manor, lies within the Ladden Valley, north of Yate and is unique in being the only moated habitation within the South Gloucestershire area. It is surrounded by a former deer park, the boundaries of which and some of the internal fields, are still evident in the hedgerow pattern.

The settlement edges of Frampton Cotterell and Coalpit Heath, which lie in the adjoining character area of the Frome Valley, form the south western boundary of this area. The irregular edge of Frampton Cotterell largely comprises linear pattern, traditional Pennant

stone cottages and some brick housing infill, with a more clustered pattern around Frampton End. Frampton End extends slightly northwards from Frampton Cotterell into this character area and comprises scattered Pennant stone cottages, farm buildings and more recent housing infill along a winding country lane, flanked by open countryside. To the west, St Peter's Church also lies within this character area within a tight meander of the River Frome, creating a break within the settlement pattern on the northern edge of Frampton Cotterell.

The eastern edge of Coalpit Heath is defined by a linear, dense façade of 20th century brick housing, with a small clustered pattern at a minor road junction, near traditional farm buildings.

Numerous minor roads and lanes bisect the southern part of the area, however, in the north these are very limited. The B4059, B4060 and A432 are the principal routes and lie in the south, connecting Yate to Coalpit Heath, Frampton Cotterell and Bristol. The A432 and its high traffic has a particular effect upon Nibley, bisecting the village and isolating the two halves. The B4058 runs north-south and defines a major part of the western boundary.

Pennant stone walls border much of the B4058 and are common along the fringes of Frampton Cotterell (Photo 10) and to the west of Yate (Photo 7).

The minor roads and lanes link with the public rights of way network, which includes one of the Circular Rides in South Gloucestershire, the Jubilee Way and the Frome Valley Walkway, which are all major recreational routes.

- The Circular Ride crosses the area east to west, largely along country lanes and one short section of bridleway. The route descends the Wickwar Ridge into the area at Bury Hill, follows country lanes southwards to the east of Engine Common, along the north western fringes of Yate, through Iron Acton and then south along Hover's Lane to Frampton End.
- The Jubilee Way enters the area in the east, from Chipping Sodbury Quarry, descends and briefly follows the toe of the

Wickwar Ridge, before passing north westwards to Rangeworthy.

- The Frome Valley Walkway largely follows the river's course from east to west, through the urban area of Yate, an industrial area on the western edge of Yate, then crossing the rural area to the west before entering Frampton Cotterell.

Three railway lines cross the area. The Bristol-Gloucester line passes centrally south to north, largely at grade, entering into cutting and tunnel through the Wickwar Ridge. The South Wales-London line passes east to west along the southern boundary, initially in cutting in the east and then on high embankment, with two blue brick, single arched bridges along the section between Yate and Coalpit Heath. A mineral line runs from Yate westwards, before turning north at Iron Acton and was formerly the main line to Thornbury.

The area is also crossed by numerous powerlines in a variety of directions, but principally west to east, converging on a sub-station beyond this character area to the north of Latteridge. In addition, one line runs north-south, near the eastern boundary.

Landscape Character

The Yate Vale landscape character area is gently sloping, forming the eastern segment of an overall broad, rolling and curved vale, which extends into the adjacent Tytherington Plain area. The Yate Vale is contained to the east and south by low ridges of the Wickwar Ridge and Pucklechurch Ridge and is distinct from the Tytherington Plain, which has a more simple landform, pattern of land cover and very little settlement.

The Yate Vale is largely an agricultural landscape, with a large concentrated area of settlement in the south at Yate and beyond the area's boundary at Chipping Sodbury and Frampton Cotterell.

The rural character of the area has been influenced greatly by long term human activity associated with settlement, small scale coal mining, quarrying and associated infrastructure. This activity has been set within

a low vale, which is contained by the gently rising landforms of the Wickwar (Photo 14) and Pucklechurch Ridges (to the east), The Marle Hills (to the west) and Severn Ridge (to the north). These slopes contribute visually to the rural setting, enclosure and sense of scale of this area.

The rural areas of the Ladden Brook and River Frome valleys largely comprise an area of subtle landform, semi-enclosed by clipped hedgerows and an even distribution of mature specimen trees, which create a structured landscape with a strong parkland character (Photo 2). Immediately to the north and west of Yate, there is a more enclosed landscape of tall overgrown hedgerows, mature hedgerow trees, copses and small woodlands (Photo1).

Within this framework, the pattern of dispersed farm buildings, linear settlements, low lying road and rail network are well integrated and generally visually low key.

In contrast, an area to the east of Heath End is more open, with few hedgerow trees (Photo 13). This allows views eastwards to Wickwar Quarry (within the adjacent area), where a section of quarry face and associated buildings on the skyline are visible.

Similarly, the area between Yate and Coalpit Heath/Frampton End has few hedgerow trees, which, combined with a shallow open valley, allows some open distant views across to the industrial edge of Yate (Photo 9).

Elsewhere, views are typically filtered by the layers of vegetation, with open views generally only possible from higher ground, such as from the adjacent Wickwar Ridge, The Marle Hills, or from elevated open spaces within Yate, such as at Tyler's Field.

Distant views also extend over this area from the Cotswold Scarp, from where the low lying vale and strong vegetation structure forms part of a much larger panorama, extending to the Severn Ridges.

Land cover and vegetation pattern variations are evident. Within the widespread pattern of medium sized, slightly irregular shaped fields, is a small area of very irregular shaped fields to the east of Bagstone in the north, partly influenced by the Ladden Brook and its tributaries, with an ordered pattern of square

and rectangular fields associated with linear settlement at Engine Common, Bagstone and part of Heath End.

Former coal mining and quarry sites for Pennant stone, lime and coal are now largely colonised and marked by woodland, with former site features no longer visible from the wider landscape. These woodland sites are scattered throughout the vale adjacent to Yate, Frampton Cotterell, Coalpit Heath and along the toe of the Wickwar Ridge.

Former celestite extraction has also left small pools to the north of Yate, now largely colonised and enclosed by vegetation and woodland.

Horse paddocks, scattered across the area, particularly to the west of Yate, between and adjacent to Iron Acton and Engine Common, have in places disrupted the vegetation framework through changes in the management regimes of hedgerows and/or the replacement of hedgerows with timber fences. The consequence has been the creation of a more open landscape character than adjacent fields. This more open landscape increases the visibility of stables, parked vehicles, open storage, jumps and other features associated with the keeping of horses.

The urban edges of Yate are not particularly visible from within the wider vale landscape, due to the layered effect of vegetation and generally low view points. Within southerly views the tower of St. Mary's Church forms a landmark. The urban edge and its extent is however very prominent within local views and from the Wickwar Ridge on this area's eastern boundary. From these locations the density of residential development and large scale industrial units form stark urban edges with little vegetation framework to provide landscape integration.

Westerleigh Common, within the western fringes of Yate, is a large area of rough pasture with some peripheral scrub, largely surrounded and dominated by industrial estates and residential development. The industrial estates cover an extensive area on the western edge of Yate and are evident within distant views from Coalpit Heath.

St. Peter's Church forms a local landmark, visible within rural views to the north and along this edge of Frampton Cotterell.

The settlement edge of Frampton Cotterell and Frampton End are well integrated by the strong hedgerow and tree structure, the riparian vegetation along the River Frome and wooded mound of the former iron workings.

The eastern edge of Coalpit Heath forms a more prominent built edge against the rural landscape beyond. Gently rising ground to the east however limits views of this edge from the wider landscape.

The South Wales to London railway, on high embankment along the southern boundary, physically contains views both into and out from the south western corner of the character area. The tall arched, brick bridges are distinctive local features, also found within the Frome Valley area to the west. Linear woodland conceals a large proportion of the embankment. Elsewhere, the grass covered slopes form a prominent artificial skyline.

Pockets of locally distinct landscape features are evident to the south of the area. Iron Acton and Acton Court comprise a unique juxtaposition of building pattern, architectural style and open spaces. The church in Iron Acton (Photo 5) and Acton Court form locally prominent features.

The River Frome corridor within the urban context of Yate has sections of a remnant rural landscape, with mature bankside trees and less distinct sections of amenity landscape, with regularly planted trees within mown grass. This green corridor forms a significant physical break within the urban framework of Yate. With the exception of the planned layout and mature planting of Kingsgate Park, Yate's other open spaces are largely former fields contained by road and residential development, that now provide amenity spaces with an informal planting structure.

Powerlines and the pylons supporting them are strong vertical and horizontal elements and are prominent within many of the distant views, particularly in the south of the area.

The Changing Landscape

The Yate Vale landscape character area has a gently sloping landform and is predominately agricultural in character, with clipped hedges, some overgrown and a generally strong framework of trees. Broadly speaking, the landscape elements and components are intact and in good condition. In some places, however, the main landscape elements and components are eroded, although this condition does not currently significantly affect the existing rural structure.

The existing hedgerow and tree structure is generally in a good condition. However, the mature trees have few juvenile trees to sustain the future long term framework. A decline or loss of hedgerow trees, overgrown hedgerows or woodland would increase the visual prominence of existing settlement and infrastructure within the area, reducing the present perception of tranquillity and relatively remote character, found particularly to the north of Yate, and around Engine Common and Rangeworthy.

The effectiveness of overgrown hedgerows for stock control will reduce in time if not managed. Bringing these features (which currently create a more enclosed landscape) back under management, will itself initially change the character of the local landscape, resulting in the loss of screening and enclosure, particularly where these features predominate, as to the north of Yate. However, active management of these hedgerows would help to ensure the conservation of these key features for the long term. Dependent on the number of hedgerow trees which are allowed to develop, or are planted, the landscape character could become more or less open as a result of management.

New woodland planting, under the Forest of Avon initiative, has been undertaken recently at Tyler's Field within the northern edge of Yate. The establishment of woodland on this slightly elevated site has the potential, in the long term, to contribute to and enhance existing views from within Yate and potentially screen parts of the urban area from the wider landscape.

Recreational pressure for 'horsiculture' is evident particularly along the edge of settlement. This change in land use is a recent

trend, which in places has led to the loss or erosion of hedgerows. The cumulative effect of this and the associated infrastructure of stables, access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and even floodlighting, can result in a marked change in landscape character.

Pennant stone boundary walls around individual properties in the south are largely in good condition. However, in some locations e.g. along the B4058, the condition of walling is variable, influencing the character of the locality.

The settlement edges of Yate have a visual influence upon the adjacent rural fringe, due to limited integration from existing vegetation structure and a lack of new planting to accompany more recent housing development. The scale of commercial and industrial estate warehouses on the western edge of Yate has a significant impact, whilst the visibility of Yate's northern fringe to views from the Wickwar Ridge make this area sensitive to any future potential change.

The national trend of increasing traffic levels, with the potential for subsequent road widening, threatens some of the more populated ribbon settlements and linking routes. Currently these minor roads typically maintain a small scale presence and follow traditional routes which have evolved over time. There are however, examples of more recent road construction which have resulted in a significant impact in the locality, including the Iron Acton bypass (built in 1967), which cut through the village green to the north and the A432, creating severance through Nibley to the west of Yate. An increase in traffic volumes and/or a perceived need for highway improvement measures, has the potential to introduce standard highway design solutions including kerbs, new signage and materials, which could have a localised but cumulative, effect eroding the existing rural character within settlements and rural corridors.

The sensitivity of the landscape to change varies within the area. Near Yate, sensitivity is typically the result of the interrelationship between landform, the strength of the existing vegetation structure and the extent of views, particularly from elevated vantages.

In the north of the area, to the east of Heath End, few mature trees, low tightly clipped hedges and a rising landform allow open views across the landscape. The Heath End area is highly sensitive to any visible land use change which has the potential to erode the rural landscape character.

Similarly, change along the toe, slopes or skyline of the Wickwar Ridge, has the potential to be intrusive (as seen at Wickwar Quarry to the east), influencing the level of tranquillity and rural views experienced both along the ridge and within the vale below.

To the north and west of Yate, the landscape is potentially less sensitive to change, due to the dense overgrown hedges and mature tree structure, which form a strong and robust vegetation framework. However, change within this area could remain visible from the adjacent rising land and ridgeline of the Wickwar Ridge and any loss of vegetation, as a result, has the potential to further affect landscape character.

The northern edge of Frampton Cotterell, at Frampton End, is well integrated and largely visually contained, given the current limits of the settlement edge, set behind an established and strong pattern of hedgerows, trees and small woodlands. This area is therefore less sensitive to change, although any loss of vegetation has the potential to erode this rural character, or increase the prominence of the existing settlement edge or any subsequent change.

The eastern edge of Coalpit Heath is partially screened from the Yate Vale by a low gentle ridge landform to the east of the settlement, making it less sensitive to change along the immediate settlement edge, although large scale change has the potential to be prominent, given the general openness of the landscape in this area, due to limited tree and woodland cover.

The rural village character of Engine Common and Rangeworthy, comprises a linear settlement pattern, often interspersed with small fields. It is sensitive to incremental infill or the cumulative effect of changes that have the potential to alter this distinctive pattern, through the coalescence of built forms, increased density of development, or loss of

vegetation features and stone walls. Such change could lead to the urbanisation of road corridors and loss of rural village characteristics. Engine Common is also sensitive to coalescence between this settlement area and Yate to the south and south east.

The remaining small linear settlement areas of Iron Acton and Heath End and the clustered settlements of Nibley and Mayhill, also have a distinctive character. These areas would be sensitive to change which could erode the existing architectural form and pattern or disturb the vegetation framework, which provides a setting for and integration of the settlements.

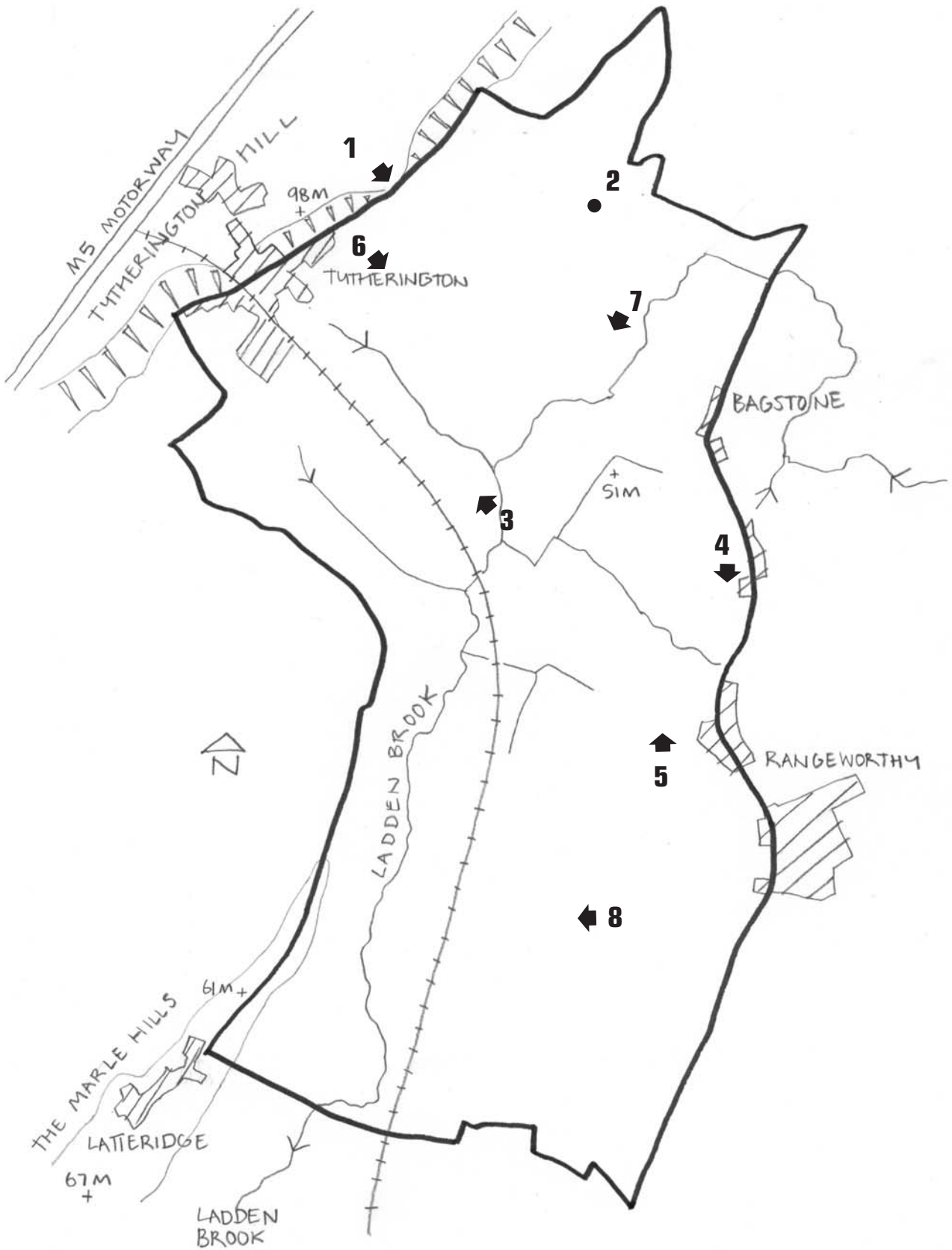
Embankment stabilisation works are proposed by Network Rail across significant areas of the rail network in the interests of safety. Works have recently been undertaken to railway embankments at Beech Hill, on the Bristol to Gloucester line, south of Yate. Such removal of trees from the slopes increases the openness of the area and the visibility of the engineering structures and the trains. As a result, such works have the potential to create significant landscape change. Where agreement can be secured for appropriate replanting, to replace vegetation lost, the visual impact should, over the long term, be reduced.

Expansion of Wickwar Quarry may occur in the future, with the preferred area for extraction identified in the Minerals & Waste Local Plan to the east of the B4509. This is beyond the Wickwar Ridge skyline (in the adjacent character area). There may be some local visual or audible effect evident near the site boundary, but excavation work is unlikely to have a significant visual effect on wider views from within this area.



Area 9 Tytherington Plain

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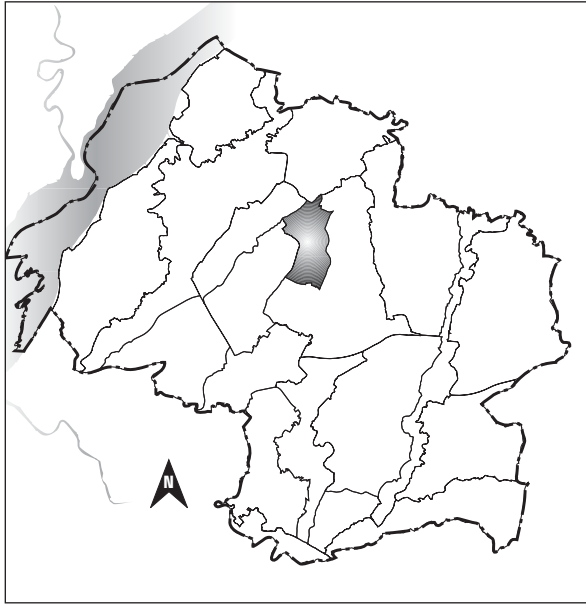


Key

 Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

**Figure 33:
Tytherington Plain - Sketch Map**



The Tytherington Plain landscape character area is a flat open area of agricultural land, rising gently at the boundaries, divided by a regular framework of hedges and ditches, influenced by a number of powerlines.

Key Characteristics

- Simple, flat open plain to the north, with regular pattern of drainage ditches, very gently sloping valley to the south, partly contained by gently rising land to the east, north west and south west. A large area of the plain is seasonally affected by flooding.
- Predominantly arable land with some pasture. Fields are medium sized, defined by a regular pattern of drainage ditches within the northern plain, elsewhere contained by a regular pattern of low clipped hedges, some overgrown, with intermittent mature trees and copses.
- Tree structure is more frequent towards the boundaries of the area and in the south.
- The minerals railway line, bordered by trees and scrub, physically bisects the area north to south and forms a visual barrier within some views.

- Settlement and road infrastructure is very limited. Isolated properties, farms, some linear settlement and the small village of Tytherington line minor roads that skirt the edges of the area.
- A number of powerlines cross and dominate the open landscape, converging on a sub-station within the adjacent area.

Location

The Tytherington Plain landscape character area is located in central South Gloucestershire, north of Bristol and north west of Yate.

The area's boundary follows subtle landform features and, in places, marks a transition in vegetation cover between this open landscape and the more enclosed adjoining character areas.

The eastern boundary follows the B4058 on a low ridge and the north western boundary marks a transition between this area and the adjacent gently rising Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge. Part of the central western boundary marks a transition between this area's limited tree cover and the adjacent area's dense pattern of hedgerow trees.

The south western boundary follows the slightly higher ground of The Marle Hills at Latteridge, which partly contains the southern area. The southern boundary marks an area of transition within the Ladden Brook valley and partly follows the B4059. The north eastern boundary marks a transition in land cover and forms a buffer to small clusters of settlement within the adjacent area. (See Figures 34 & 36).

Physical Influences

The Tytherington Plain landscape character area largely consists of Carboniferous Westphalian rock and Coal Measures with some limestone along the northern boundary. The soils are dominated by a mix of Gleys, Stagnogleys and Brown Earth.

The topography of this area is generally fairly flat, around 50 metres a.o.d. rising slightly at its fringes. It forms a very shallow basin within an overall broad vale landscape which includes the adjacent Earthcott Vale to the west and Yate Vale to the south and east.

Within this context, the minerals railway line, with one section on embankment south east of Tytherington, forms a significant landform feature.

The Ladden Brook is the principal watercourse, which flows southwards through this fairly level landscape. The plain is extensively dissected by drainage ditches which influence the regular field pattern. This regular pattern and straightened sections of the Ladden Brook are the result of deliberate drainage measures to improve marsh and heathland for agricultural purposes. The plain however still floods seasonally after continuous heavy rain, covering a significant area (Photo 1). The land rises in the north west towards the Tytherington Ridge, in the south west, at Latteridge (up to 61 metres a.o.d), and to the east along the B4058 (up to 67 metres a.o.d), defining the very shallow Ladden Brook valley. This valley continues southwards and joins the more dominant River Frome in the adjacent Yate Vale area.

Land Cover

The Tytherington Plain area typically consists of medium sized, regular shaped fields of predominantly arable land with limited pasture. Smaller field patterns are present clustered around scattered properties and farms. These comprise ordered, narrow, rectangular shaped fields to the north. Field boundaries principally comprise clipped hedges, often intermittent, some removed within the central area and occasionally replaced with fencing (Photo 6).

The area's drainage ditches and streams physically contain fields in many locations and are variously lined by hedgerows, or lack field boundaries, particularly within the central plain (Photo 3).

There is little or no tree cover within the plain (Photo 1); what there is, is confined to scattered mature hedgerow trees, isolated

trees remaining from removed hedgerows, occasional copses or clumps of trees and some trees and scrub, along the railway line. Tree cover is more evenly distributed on higher ground towards the area's boundaries and to the south (Photo 8). Remnants of small orchards are present around the edge of Tytherington.

Local variations in land cover occur within the area. Rangeworthy Court, west of Rangeworthy, comprises a parkland of mature tree specimens within grassland (Photo 5); the adjacent remains of medieval fishponds comprise enclosed tree cover with rough grass; and a former deer park which extends into the southern area, associated with Acton Lodge.

Stidcot Plat Common, north east of Tytherington, comprises a small isolated area of neutral unimproved pasture, fringed by trees and clipped hedgerows (Photo 2).

Through the centre of the area, the Ladden Brook and its tributaries are generally open, straight channels, flanked by agricultural fields and post and wire fences (Photo 3).

Settlement and Infrastructure

Settlement is minimal within the low lying plain. Only the hamlet of Stidcot and a few isolated farms to the north and south east lie within the lower ground. Elsewhere, settlement is located on slightly rising ground on the periphery of the area: the village of Tytherington lies partly within this area on higher ground, similarly the linear settlements of Rangeworthy and Bagstone are located on a slight ridge along the B4058, on the eastern boundary of the area.

Rangeworthy is a linear settlement of well spaced houses, consisting of a mix of Pennant sandstone and rendered properties. Stone walls extend along the B4058, sometimes intermittently, between Iron Acton to the south and Bagstone. Stone walls also define the extent of Rangeworthy Court, extending into the agricultural landscape (Photo 5).

Tytherington is located at a confluence of roads on the lower slopes of Tytherington Hill, partly

extending into this area. A Conservation Area covers the central part of the village, which includes key properties and a framework of tall boundary walls, all constructed of Pennant sandstone. The church and public house, located at the heart of the village (and on the area's boundary), are prominent in the locality. More recent brick housing has developed out from the village centre, either concentrated in a small close or located in a regular, but low density, linear pattern along lanes.

Some farms include large modern agricultural buildings, constructed of timber with sheet metal roofing, in contrast to the stone farm houses and original farm complex (Photo 4).

Only one minor road crosses the northern low lying plain at Stidcot. Minor roads and lanes elsewhere are limited to the area's boundaries. These include the B4058 from Iron Acton to Heath End, passing along the upper slopes of the low ridge defining the Ladden Valley; the B4059 to the south from Iron Acton through Latteridge, passing across the Ladden Brook valley; and the angular pattern of lanes around Tytherington, which parallel the rising landform with occasional acute bends.

The Jubilee Way and one of a series of Circular Rides are the major recreational routes that cross the area. The footpath network within the area is otherwise very limited.

The Jubilee Way passes south eastwards from Tytherington to Rangeworthy, over the central plain area and the Circular Ride just enters the area, following lanes through Tytherington.

A minerals railway line, formerly the main line from Thornbury, runs north west to south east through the central plain and Ladden Brook valley, linking the quarries at Tytherington to Yate, via Iron Acton.

A number of powerlines cross the plain, radiating out from the large Iron Acton electricity sub-station located to the west (Photo 7), within the adjacent well treed Earthcott Vale landscape area.

Landscape Character

Tytherington Plain comprises a flat open plain to the north and very gently sloping valley of the Ladden Brook to the south. The area is contained by gently rising slopes to the east, south west, west (although less evident) and the more prominent wooded ridgeline at Tytherington Hill to the north west. The pattern and location of settlement and built features (with the exception of the minerals railway) is limited to higher ground above the floodplain.

The open plain is a large scale and simple landscape, emphasised by the flat landform, the limited framework provided by the open straight ditches, clipped sometimes intermittent hedges and scattered mature trees. The mature specimen trees provide important, though infrequent, vertical visual features.

The minerals railway line, edged with trees and scrub, forms a low key built element, but forms a visually significant linear feature, containing some views across the open plain to east and west.

The clipped and intermittent hedgerows provide little visual containment. However, along the limited network of lanes and roads, where the hedgerows are typically more dense and often overgrown, views are contained.

Tytherington and the wooded ridgeline of the Rudgey and Tytherington Ridge to the west, feature in some distant views from the road network and public footpaths.

Further south, within the more defined Ladden Valley and on rising ground towards the boundaries of the area, the landscape is more contained and structured by an irregular pattern of copses, tree clumps, isolated and frequent hedgerow trees, which provide both open and enclosed views.

Containing only a scattering of isolated properties and farms, settlement does not have a major impact or influence over this area.

The linear settlements on the periphery of the area are generally well integrated by the surrounding hedgerow and tree vegetation. Although occasional views are possible between and through surrounding hedgerows, these built features are not prominent. The extent of

Tytherington village is generally well integrated, set against a wooded ridgeline. The church tower forms a focal point in views from the wider landscape. The village extension eastwards, is however locally more prominent, due to the very limited vegetation structure along this section of the settlement edge, the open landscape context and its different layout. The regular shaped settlement pattern visually extends the village towards the open plain, diluting the original clustered settlement pattern associated with the Tytherington Ridge.

Large farm sheds within the character area are also locally prominent, with limited integration, due to their scale, massing and materials, with buildings often taller than the surrounding vegetation framework, or located within an open landscape setting (Photo 3 & 4).

The hedgerow and tree structure reduces the impact of the minor roads and railway that run with the grain of the landform and either skirt or bisect the area. Although the railway runs through the northern area, where there is less vegetation framework, the infrastructure is low key and it is not particularly evident except within very local views. The passage of trains is however more evident in this open landscape.

The powerlines and pylons that cross the area are prominent horizontal and vertical elements and dominate many local views, due to the openness of the landscape. The Iron Acton sub-station to the west is not visible, contained within a strong structure of mature trees beyond this area. However, the convergence of powerlines and towers towards the sub-station is highly prominent.

The Changing Landscape

The character area is significantly affected by the number of powerlines, which radiate out from the Iron Acton sub-station north of Latteridge across the landscape in all directions. In an otherwise relatively tranquil and undeveloped area with very little settlement, powerlines and towers are prominent features in many views, which erode the rural character of the area.

Modern agricultural buildings are also in places prominent structures in this open landscape,

contrasting with earlier farm and settlement patterns, which due to their scale, stone construction and traditional form are generally well integrated within the landscape. As a result, these modern agricultural buildings can also contribute to a loss of local character.

The removal of hedgerows and resultant open character, particularly within the northern plain, is the result of land drainage and a change in land use to arable. The visual openness makes the area sensitive to change which would be evident from both within the area and higher ground to the east and west.

The tree and hedgerow structure, where evident within or towards the edge of the open plain, forms a particularly important landscape feature. As remnants of a former more divided and enclosed landscape, these trees and hedgerows provide visual texture and diversity within an otherwise open and simple landscape. Deterioration or further loss of these features would increase the extent of open plain and visual sensitivity of the landscape.

The denser pattern of hedgerows and tree cover towards the periphery of the area results in a landscape less sensitive to change. However, the mature tree structure contains few juvenile trees to maintain succession. In the future this could result in a further decline in tree cover, with a landscape change to a more open and sensitive area. Similarly, hedgerow removal or lack of management has the potential to erode this key framework feature.

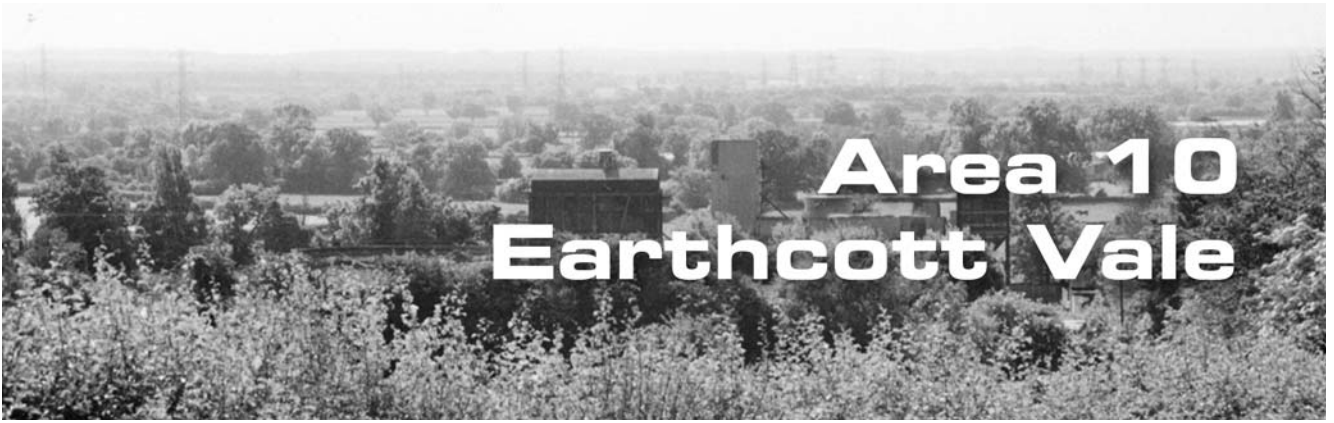
The distinctive linear settlements along the area's boundary are likely to be particularly sensitive to pressures for change, especially from infill development, with the potential resultant loss of the characteristic mosaic and spatial arrangement of buildings, vegetation and open space. The loss of vegetation within and along settlement edges has the potential to reduce their integration within the adjacent, generally open landscape.

The eastern settlement edge of Tytherington is also sensitive to change, being slightly elevated above the central plain and visible within open views from the east.

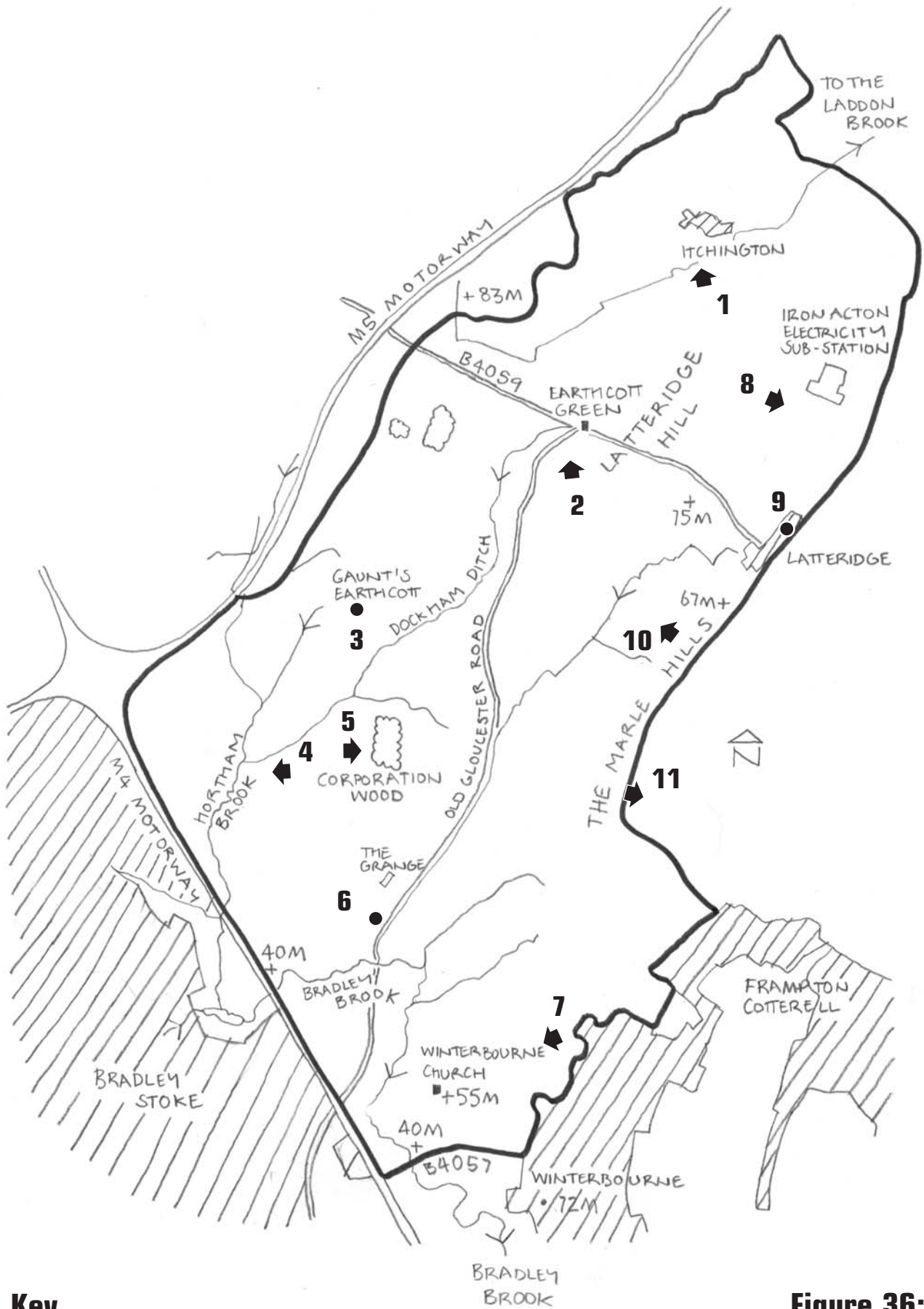
Stone walls along the B4058 are in variable condition, with some sections in need of repair,

influencing the character of this locally important route.

Active management of the landscape structure, including hedgerows, hedgerow trees and the tree structure generally, would help to ensure the conservation of these key features for the long term. Similarly, maintenance of stone walls would prevent further deterioration of these features.



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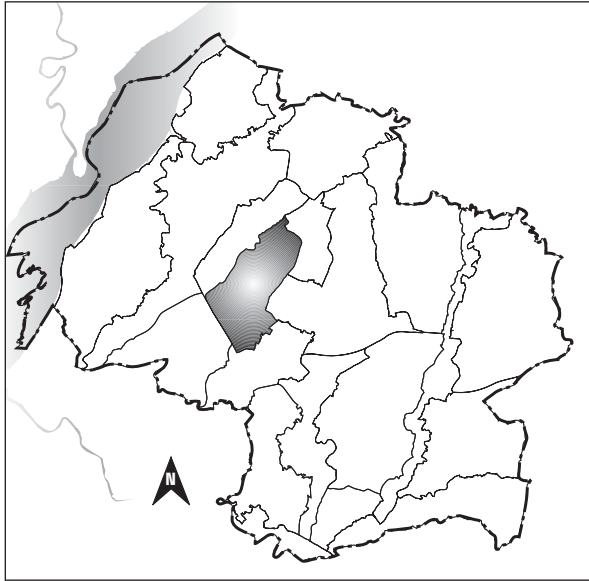


Key

➤₁₅ Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

**Figure 36:
Earthcott Vale - Sketch Map**



The Earthcott Vale landscape character area is a gently undulating agricultural area, divided by a complex network of hedgerows, trees and lanes.

Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating shallow vale with low ridges to the east at Latteridge Hill, The Marle Hills and Winterbourne, with small scale valleys to the south and small plateau area to the south west.
- Land cover of medium to small sized regular or irregular shaped pasture and arable fields, with some enlarged fields to the west.
- Fields are bordered by hedgerows, varying from thick, clipped to overgrown or intermittent in places, with dense riparian vegetation in the south.
- Pennant sandstone walls define some fields and lanes near Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell, with more limited limestone or Pennant sandstone walls associated with properties and settlement elsewhere.
- Woodland is limited with a few areas scattered around the west. Mature hedgerow trees are frequent in the north and west and variable elsewhere.

- Settlement is limited, with traditional scattered farms, houses & hamlets, largely built of limestone in the west and Pennant sandstone in the east, associated with the narrow minor roads/lanes, which cross and intersect the area.
- Winterbourne Church and Court form a local landmark and North Woods Park has a local influence within a small valley, both to the south of the area.
- Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell settlement edges define sections of the area's boundary. Bradley Stoke and the Bristol urban edge beyond the character area have some visual influence over the south western landscape.
- The south west has a concentration of recreational land use comprising a golf course, water sports, rugby ground and horse paddocks. Traffic on the M4 motorway and associated infrastructure has a local effect in this area.
- Land raising operations adjacent to the M4/M5 interchange and along the M4 corridor have formed significant man-made landforms, some with artificial profiles covered by rough grassland or scrub.
- Numerous powerlines and associated pylons cross the area and are visible horizontal and vertical elements. They converge on the Iron Acton sub-station to the north east.

Location

The Earthcott Vale landscape character area is located in central South Gloucestershire, to the north east of Bristol.

The south west boundary is strongly defined by the M4, with the urban edge of Bristol beyond.

The north west boundary marks a transitional area, with a subtle change in landform and vegetation cover between the shallow vale of this area and the gently rising Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge to the west.

The north and north east boundary also marks

a transition between the more sloping ground and frequent tree cover of this area, compared with the more open and flatter Tytherington Plain beyond.

The eastern boundary marks a subtle transition between this sloping vale and the adjacent Yate Vale, following The Marle Hills and then the settlement edges of Frampton Cotterell and Winterbourne to the south east. (See Figures 37 & 39).

Physical Influences

The Earthcott Vale has varied geology, divided and orientated approximately along the line of the B4427, Old Gloucester Road, comprising White and Blue Lias limestone (largely at 60m a.o.d.) overlain by shallow Argillic Brown Earth soils to the west and Keuper marl (largely at 50m a.o.d. but rising to 67m a.o.d. at The Marle Hills) and overlain by clay / loam soils to the east.

Amongst this, there is a more complex pattern of clays around Earthcott Green and Latteridge Hill (at up to 75m a.o.d.), which continue south westwards in linear bands. On the south eastern boundary at Winterbourne, Pennant sandstone partly extends into this area (at up to 65m a.o.d.), whilst on the north western boundary to the north of Itchington, Carboniferous limestone underlies rising ground (continuing beyond this area to 97m a.o.d.).

This geology and resultant drainage pattern produces a gently undulating landform, with relatively higher ground centrally, in the area of Earthcott Green and Latteridge Hill, falling both north eastwards towards the Tytherington Plain and south westwards towards Bradley Stoke, both areas lying at about 50m a.o.d. on the boundary of this area.

The higher ground is dissected by shallow valleys and tributaries of the Dockham Ditch, Hortham Brook and Bradley Brook, which flow south west before joining the south eastwards flowing Bradley Brook beyond this area. In the north of the area, tributaries of the Ladden Brook flow north eastwards.

The valleys become more narrow and enclosed to the south, with tightly meandering natural

channels. To the north, watercourses generally follow regular drainage ditches.

The landform, although subtle, is most evident centrally and to the east, with low south west - north east ridges formed at Latteridge Hill, The Marle Hills and Winterbourne, above lower lying valleys. Towards and beyond the western boundary the landform rises gradually, also in a south west – north east alignment, up to the Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge.

In the south west of the area a small plateau, south of Gaunt's Earthcott lies at 60 metres a.o.d., with land to the south east beyond Bradley Brook, rising towards the Winterbourne ridge.

Land Cover

The area generally consists of pasture and arable land defined within a variety of field patterns. Field boundaries are commonly dense, clipped hedges, with overgrown thick hedges or intermittent laid hedges in places. The following variations are evident.

To the west of the B4427, Old Gloucester Road and north of Gaunt's Earthcott are medium sized regular fields, largely contained by clipped hedgerows, some intermittent, with mature hedgerow trees over the plateau, more infrequent to the west and north. Occasional hedgerow removal has formed some large fields and left isolated trees.

The area east of the B4427, south of Earthcott Green and rising to The Marle Hills, has a pattern of medium to small sized irregular fields, contained by clipped hedgerows and few hedgerow trees (Photo 10).

In the south, adjacent to the well vegetated Bradley Brook and its tributaries, the irregular field pattern is contained by tall and overgrown hedgerows. Similarly, dense, tall vegetation cover of varying structure follows the course of the Hortham Brook to the south west (Photo 4).

The remaining area contains small, more irregular fields. To the north and east, these are defined largely by clipped hedgerows and frequent hedgerow trees, with a more varied

mix of clipped and occasionally overgrown hedgerows with trees, adjacent to Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell.

A number of horse paddocks occur predominately within the south of the area, along lanes adjacent to the scattered settlement pattern and near the edge of Frampton Cotterell and Winterbourne. Timber fences have typically replaced the hedgerow boundaries.

Mature hedgerow trees of predominately oak and ash are frequent and dispersed throughout the north east and west; generally near settlement within the area as a whole, but are more infrequent in the south east. South west of Earthcott Green there are occasional copses and areas of deciduous woodland, Corporation Wood being the largest (Photo 5).

Woodlands Cemetery to the north of Earthcott Green comprises extensive memorial grounds of mown lawns, with recently planted trees and ornamental hedgerows, surrounded by agricultural fields.

Pennant sandstone and limestone walls are a common boundary treatment associated with rural properties and settlements, although generally not typical as field boundaries. Pennant sandstone walls are however common around the edge of Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell and adjacent to country lanes. There are also examples of sunken lanes with hedge banks to the south.

A distinct area of parkland is evident at North Woods, around the Grange in the south, comprising mature tree specimens in grassland (Photo 6).

Formal recreational facilities lie to the south west and include Woodlands Golf Course to the east of the M4/M5 junction, comprising large scale earth mounding along the site's western and southern boundaries and an infrastructure of fairways, greens and tree planting, which retains some sections of the former mature hedgerow pattern; Almondsbury Windsurfing Lake, comprising an ad hoc development of buildings and earthworks around a quarried lake; and a rugby football club, comprising pitches, tall floodlights and buildings.

Land raising operations have also occurred along the south western boundary of this

character area, both adjacent to the M4, with infilling of a field next to the Hortham Brook and, large scale earth mounding and tree planting parallel to the M4, south of Green Acres Farm.

Within the western fringes of Frampton Cotterell a large playing field, adjacent to the B4058, physically separates the settlements of Frampton Cotterell and Winterbourne. It is contained on two sides by housing and on the third by school grounds.

Settlement and Infrastructure

Settlement largely consists of small nucleated hamlets such as Itchington, Earthcott Green, Gaunt's Earthcott and Latteridge, which are generally located at key road junctions and crossroads. The rest of the area is scattered with isolated houses and farms (Photo 1, 2 & 3).

Winterbourne Court, Church and Tythe Barn complex to the south are important historically, as well as being a prominent local landscape feature, situated on the slopes of Bradley Brook valley (Photo 7), separate from the main settlement of Winterbourne. They are built of Pennant sandstone, which locally has a red-brown colour.

The Grange and Grange Court Farm, are set within North Woods Park, on the upper slopes of a small tributary valley of the Bradley Brook. The estate architecture comprises the formal arrangement of large stone buildings of The Grange (a former asylum) to the north and a large house and farm complex at Grange Court Farm, to the south. Both have driveways across open lawns, with gatehouses adjacent to the Old Gloucester Road. The use of stone in the construction of older properties and boundary walls is typical, with the type of stone reflecting the local geological variation. Typically, Blue Lias limestone is used within the south west and Pennant sandstone in the south east and elsewhere.

Stone farm buildings largely form the hamlets of Gaunt's Earthcott, Earthcott Green, and Latteridge. Farm ponds are quite common

around these hamlets, with a roadside pond forming a feature in Latteridge (Photo 9).

Adjacent to the M4 motorway, along the B4427 a small travellers' site, is enclosed by tall timber fences.

To the south east, the settlement edges of Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell form the boundary to this landscape character area. Situated on the slightly higher ground of a broad ridgeline, the settlement edge is mainly formed by traditional houses, cottages and farm buildings, built of Pennant sandstone, clustered at road junctions between the B4058 and country lanes which extend into this area. Short sections of traditional linear development also spread along the B4058, interspersed by long lengths of stone walls and hedgerows. A more recent pattern of predominantly brick houses lines a short section of the B4058 and B4057, near their intersection, in the south.

The road network consists of a number of minor roads and lanes which criss-cross the area and each other at regular intervals. These routes include the B4427, Old Gloucester Road (a former turnpike road between Bristol and Gloucester), which crosses the area south to north, continuing beyond Earthcott Green as a lane; and the B4059 and B4057 which cross the area approximately in an east to west direction. The narrow country lanes, many with sharp bends, are often contained by hedge banks instead of hedgerows, with sections of stone walling nearer settlements.

The M4 defines the area's south western boundary. It passes variously within shallow cutting, low embankment or at grade. The M4/M5 interchange, with its associated multiple flyovers and earthworks, is located to the south west beyond the large scale earth mounding. The interchange and a short section of the M5 define this edge of the character area.

There are numerous overhead powerlines and steel pylons crossing the area in all directions, converging on the large electricity sub-station to the north east. Mobile phone masts are also located along the south western boundary of this area, adjacent to the M4.

One recreational route within the series of Circular Rides in South Gloucestershire crosses

the area in a small circuit, largely along lanes and ancient trackways. The route leaves Winterbourne, travelling along, Green Lane, Church Lane past Winterbourne Court, northwards along minor roads passing the Grange, along Tynings Lane, Lock's Lane, over The Marle Hills and into the adjacent area.

There are also a number of public rights of way which criss-cross the area to the west of Winterbourne and north east of Earthcott Green. Elsewhere, the pattern is more irregular and dispersed, linking scattered farms.

Landscape Character

The Earthcott Vale landscape character area largely comprises a complex, gently undulating, pastoral and arable landscape, with varying field pattern and landscape structure:

The northern area from Latteridge Hill, Earthcott Green to Itchington and the northern boundary, comprises a generally enclosed, small scale landscape of clipped and dense hedgerows, with frequent mature hedgerow trees within a gently rolling landform. Within this framework, the historic pattern of scattered farms, houses and the hamlets of Itchington, Earthcott Green and Latteridge, constructed from local Pennant sandstone, punctuate the area and are well integrated within the strong vegetation framework. Internal views are typically contained, with longer views possible along some road corridors, for example more elevated sections of the B4059 and from Latteridge Hill.

The limited and well integrated nature of settlement here, together with agricultural land use, visual enclosure formed by vegetation and a generally low lying landform, creates areas of tranquil and slightly remote character.

Woodlands Cemetery is located in a remote setting near Earthcott Green and is well integrated by hedgerow boundaries and the largely retained site hedgerows. The serpentine access road, new avenue tree planting, formal yew hedging and mown lawns, have introduced a more ornamental parkland structure, which will become established in

time. The reuse of farm buildings, largely intact hedgerow framework, low key use of the site and visual connection to the wider landscape, combines to ensure that the cemetery will integrate with the surrounding rural character.

The Iron Acton electricity sub-station, located within this rural northern area, is generally well integrated as a result of the surrounding landscape framework, although the convergence of numerous powerlines and pylon towers are visually dominant locally (Photo 8). The powerline network is more evident within open views from higher ground in the adjacent character areas.

The elevated ridgeline of Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge, beyond the north western boundary, forms a backdrop within occasional views from the western side of this character area (Photo 1). The M5, crossing the side slopes of this landform, is evident from within occasional glimpsed views from around Itchington, with some audible influence within this area.

From the northern boundary, the settlement edge of Tytherington, set on rising ground against a wooded ridge in the adjoining area, is well integrated with its church tower forming a distinctive landmark.

The area east of the B4427, south of Earthcott Green and rising to The Marle Hills, has a slightly more open landscape of medium to small sized arable and pasture fields, contained by clipped hedgerows and few hedgerow trees. The Marle Hills allow some distant views eastwards to the Cotswold Scarp (Photo 11) and westwards to the Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge.

The plateau area to the west of the B4427 Old Gloucester Road and north of Gaunt's Earthcott has a semi-enclosed to open character, with medium sized fields, largely clipped hedgerows and frequent hedgerow trees, over a small plateau and a very gentle rolling landform. Hedgerow removal has created some large fields within this part of the character area, which in combination with fewer hedgerow trees to the west and north, has produced a more open character. Isolated, mature former hedgerow trees over the plateau form prominent features. Most of this

area however, largely retains a strong landscape framework.

The few scattered areas of woodland within the west and south west are prominent features (particularly Corporation Wood, Photo 5), within views from the M5 and Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge character area to the north west.

Scattered farms to the north of Gaunt's Earthcott are local features (Photo 3) that are generally well integrated within this low lying area, with its strong vegetation structure.

Within this localised area, the generally low lying landform, good vegetation structure and hedge banks along lanes, restrict and contain views, with the adjacent Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge character area partly visible as a backdrop to the north west and the RAC tower (also outside the area) occasionally visible to the south west.

Within the south of the area, the small scale stream valleys form quite defined landform features compared with the broader rolling landscape elsewhere. Variations in land use and land cover have produced the following distinct areas:

- North Woods Park, with its parkland of mature trees and estate architecture of the Grange and Grange Court Farm, set elevated along a valley side, has a distinctive character and local visual influence along this small valley.
- Bradley Brook, Hortham Brook, Dockham Ditch and associated tributaries are lined by dense vegetation and trees, which visually emphasise their tightly meandering course. An area of overgrown hedgerows adjacent to the Bradley Brook, combine with the streamside vegetation, to produce a strong textured framework to the west and north of Winterbourne Church.
- To the east of the Bradley Brook, towards the edge of Winterbourne, rising ground is covered by open fields with a variety of field boundaries. Overgrown hedges with dead elm trees are occasionally prominent within local views. Clipped hedgerows and mature trees elsewhere, within a gently rolling landscape produce a simple, more open character (Photo 7).

- The open setting and position of Winterbourne Church and Court complex, above the Bradley Brook valley, form a striking local landmark. Pennant sandstone walls line the lanes and some fields, closer to the edge of Winterbourne (some in poor condition or overgrown) and permit some open views westwards.

Dead elm suckers are evident within a number of tall, overgrown hedgerows, generally in the south and near the edges of Frampton Cotterell and Winterbourne. These influence the condition, integrity and appearance of the landscape framework in the locality.

The formal recreation facilities in the south western corner of the area, variously influence local character:

The Almondsbury Windsurfing Lake and Rugby Football Club occupy a former quarry and agricultural fields, with overgrown hedgerow boundaries largely screening these areas and activities. Ad hoc buildings and earthworks adjacent to the regular shaped quarried lake and tall floodlight columns of the Rugby club, however, influence local views and character along Trench Lane.

Woodlands Golf Course and recent extension covers an extensive area and comprises an open to semi-enclosed landscape of mown fairways, new mound landform and linear tree planting (ornamental in places), visually contained to the south, west and north west by very large earth mounds. The existing course is partly visible from roads along its boundary and within middle distance views from higher ground beyond this area to the north west.

Generally, the former agricultural field pattern has been restructured, with the loss or severance of some hedgerows, although isolated remnants of overgrown hedgerows and copses have been retained within parts of the golf course layout. Hortham Brook retains sections of its dense tree and scrub riparian vegetation.

Land raising, in association with the golf course and elsewhere, has had a significant impact on local landscape character:

- Existing earth mounding along the west and southern boundary of the golf course has produced a large scale, steep profiled

landform, forming an artificial skyline and, covered by rough grassland, scrub, and some recent young tree planting, atypical of the surrounding landscape. This feature is highly prominent from the motorway interchange and its approaches. However, it is not particularly evident from within this character area, other than in local views and, it screens the M4/M5 interchange and dense commercial development of Almondsbury Business Park within the adjacent area.

- Further earth mounding, associated with the extension of the golf course, is in progress. The construction operations and bare earth profiles are very visible along the north west boundary of the site.
- A field abutting the Hortham Brook where it passes beneath the M4 has been filled, forming a steep faced, unnatural landform with rough grassland cover.
- Further south at Green Acres Farm, an elongated mound parallel to the motorway forms a medium scale landform, with steep slope profiles, rough grassland and new tree planting. These are evident from the M4 corridor outside the area, but are less evident within the wider area, partially screening the M4 and its traffic. This mound also provides partial screening to a large industrial building beyond the area and M4 to the west.

The settlement edge of Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell is set elevated above the Bradley Brook and its shallow tributary valleys, on the south eastern edge of this area. The northern settlement edge is largely well integrated, where the historic development pattern and materials of older buildings and forms relates and connects well to the adjacent agriculture field pattern of hedgerows (many overgrown) and frequent trees. To the south, the more regular linear pattern of houses along the B4058 and B4057 are more evident within local views, due to the limited boundary vegetation, fewer trees and therefore more open setting.

Middle to long distant views are possible from a number of elevated locations within this southern area:

- From the slightly higher ground above the Bradley Brook valley, south eastwards across the shallow vale, to Winterbourne and beyond. Frequent low undulating ridges, crowned by hedgerows and trees, the prominent middle distant ridgeline on which Winterbourne is located and the far distant Cotswold Scarp, form distinct layers within the landscape.
- The M4 provides a number of middle distant views between earth mounds, into the low valleys of this character area and across the undulating landform to higher ground at Winterbourne. This typically occurs where the M4 passes on embankment above the natural landform, with limited roadside vegetation.

The southern boundaries of this character area are contained by significant concentrations of settlement, with one boundary defined by the M4 corridor. These built elements variously influence landscape character:

Beyond the south west boundary and the M4 corridor, the variety and density of housing along the eastern fringes of Stoke Gifford and Bradley Stoke, together with adjacent commercial/ industrial development (some of which is on the skyline), in places creates an abrupt urban edge, with very limited vegetation or landform to provide integration with the adjacent landscape of this character area.

In open views from near the edge of Winterbourne, the eastern urban edge of Stoke Gifford is prominent and in stark contrast to the adjacent agricultural land use and the wider rural landscape of the Bradley Brook valley.

However, generally the visual impact of this urban edge is limited to the southern part of the character area, due to landform and intervening hedgerow and tree structure. In addition to the edge of Winterbourne, it influences the rural landscape immediately adjacent to the M4 corridor and country lanes as they approach this boundary.

Although the M4 itself is largely concealed either in cutting, by planting or by recent earth mounding at Green Acres Farm, tall light columns, traffic noise and mobile phone masts along this corridor have a wider influence within the south of the area.

There are some small scale, localised influences upon landscape character associated with land use and land use pressures within this area. These cumulatively can have a significant effect on landscape character:

- Horse paddocks, scattered within the south of the area and near Winterbourne, have in places disrupted the vegetation framework through changes in the management regimes of hedgerows and/or the replacement of hedgerows with timber fences. The consequence has been the creation of a more open landscape character than adjacent fields. This more open landscape increases the visibility of stables, parked vehicles, open storage, jumps and other features associated with the keeping of horses.
- The increased traffic volumes along some of the minor roads have, in places, caused the erosion of banks, verges and damage to walls, with traffic having an audible local effect.
- The travellers' site adjacent to the south western boundary is a small discrete area off the B4427. The tall timber screen fence and dense cluster of caravans, contrasts greatly with the adjacent open rural setting. There is little vegetation either within or on the boundaries of the site to provide integration within the immediate locality.

The Changing Landscape

The Earthcott Vale landscape character area is a rural agricultural landscape with limited dispersed settlement. In the south, parts of the area are influenced by recreational land use, the settlement edges of Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell, the M4 corridor and proximity of Bradley Stoke, beyond this area.

The existing landscape framework of hedgerow and tree structure throughout the landscape character area is generally intact and in a good condition. However, the following variations are evident:

- Some of the fields over the plateau to the west of the B4427 Old Gloucester Road

and area north of Gaunt's Earthcott, have been enlarged through hedgerow removal, resulting in some intermittent hedgerows.

- Within the small stream valleys to the south and areas closer to Winterbourne, hedgerows are not actively managed, resulting in the development of tall overgrown hedgerows to fields and dense shrubs and trees along watercourses.
- Within some of these overgrown hedgerows in the south and nearer to Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell, sections of dead elm are apparent particularly in the summer.

The mature hedgerow tree and woodland structure throughout the area has few juvenile trees present to sustain the succession and therefore the framework in the long term. The decline of these features would significantly change the character of the area.

Further removal of hedgerows would also result in a change of landscape character, creating a more open landscape than currently exists.

Whilst overgrown hedgerows provide structure and some degree of enclosure at present, in the longer term without management, the valley character may evolve towards a more open landscape. Hedgerow species will eventually become over mature, allowing more open views beneath the tree canopies. Active management of these hedgerows would help to ensure the conservation of these key features for the long term. Dependent on the number of hedgerow trees which are allowed to develop, or are planted, the landscape character could become more or less open as a result of management.

The present cyclical pattern of growth, decline and regeneration of elm suckers, already influences the degree of openness/enclosure within the landscape. Active management of these hedgerows will similarly help to conserve these features and contribute to the landscape framework for the long term. Where new hedgerow tree planting is also introduced it will, over time, help to replace the vegetation structure lost as a result of Dutch Elm Disease. As with general hedgerow management, the landscape character could become more or less open as a result.

Recent tree planting at Woodlands Cemetery, to the north east of Earthcott Green, will change the character of the local area in the long term, increasing the strength of the landscape framework as the planting matures, in an area where existing trees are limited.

The recreational facilities in the south west have evolved within both a former agricultural landscape and one small former quarry site. These land uses are either contained by the original hedgerow pattern or, as in the case of the golf course, the agricultural pattern of hedgerows, trees and copses has been subsumed and often significantly changed. This has produced an ornamental character within these sites which is different to the wider rural landscape.

Large scale native planting has been proposed as part of the golf course expansion, to integrate the new landforms and land use pattern within wider views. A woodland structure will develop over time.

The hedgerows which presently contain these sites are largely overgrown, helping to screen these areas. However, without active management/ replanting, these hedgerows will decline in the long term, increasing the prominence of these recreational landscapes and their contrast with adjoining rural areas, primarily within local views.

The distinctive North Woods Park relies greatly upon its mature trees for its parkland character. Without replacement planting, the character of this parkland would decline in the long term.

The erosion of the landscape framework within the area as a whole, would raise the visual prominence of a number of built features which are currently well integrated. This would include the Iron Acton sub-station, pylons and powerlines to the north of the area, the settlement edge of Frampton Cotterell and Winterbourne to the south east and the limited scattered settlement pattern elsewhere.

The network of narrow country lanes and roads are under pressure from occasional high traffic levels, due to close proximity of and connection between Bristol, Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell in the south. An increase in traffic volumes and/or a perceived need for highway

improvement measures, has the potential to introduce standard highway design solutions including kerbs, new signage and materials, which could have a localised, but cumulative, effect eroding the existing rural character.

Pennant sandstone wall boundaries near Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell are in variable condition, being prone to damage from increased traffic along narrow lanes and deterioration due to limited maintenance of field boundaries elsewhere.

The sensitivity of the landscape to change varies considerably throughout the Earthcott Vale area, dependent on landform, the strength of the existing vegetation structure and the proximity and visual influence of settlement, the Bristol urban edge and built structures.

- Given the strong vegetation structure and visual enclosure, the north and western areas are generally less sensitive to change. However, they are sensitive to the cumulative effect of change, for example built development, which has the potential to erode the generally tranquil nature within parts of this area.
- The plateau area to the west of the B4427, Old Gloucester Road, north of Gaunt's Earthcott and east to The Marle Hills, is more open, but generally remains slightly remote, due to the relatively limited views obtained from within or over much of this area, and the very limited pattern of settlement, in the form of traditional farms and roads. The area is however sensitive to agricultural land use or management changes which might further erode the landscape framework, or to built development which might affect the pattern and integrity of the historic farm buildings.

The western boundary of this plateau area is visually influenced by the elevated Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge to the west and is therefore, potentially sensitive to changes along the ridge which might affect the rural character of this area.

- The rural landscape in the south forms an important buffer between Winterbourne/Frampton Cotterell and the M4 and the urban edge of Bristol beyond,

due to the elevated aspect and views from settlement edges, motorway and other routes. The partially eroded vegetation framework contributes to the degree of visibility.

These areas are therefore vulnerable to any change, which might affect the rural character of the locality.

There are significant development pressures on land adjacent to settlement edges and principal roads for potential housing infill, business, industrial, amenity use or other forms of land use change, such as horse paddocks or land raising operations.

The following types of development and land use change which have already taken place, illustrate the range of pressures and impacts within this area:

- Land raising has introduced new, unnatural landforms and poorer quality soils which, without adequate maintenance, result in weed encroachment and a visually different grassland to adjacent agricultural land. Some areas planted with trees will, in the long term, result in woodland cover, which will help to reduce the impact of the landform and contribute to the vegetation structure and Forest of Avon objectives in the area.
- A number of mobile phone masts along the motorway corridor have introduced new skyline features, evident from adjacent rural areas and the M4. The proliferation of these masts is a recent development trend, introducing new structures to often rural, elevated and consequently visible locations.
- The formal recreational facilities to the south are largely well integrated, due to the existing vegetation structure, although the associated buildings, entrance/access roads and lighting infrastructure influence local landscape character, particularly along Trench Lane.
- Recreational pressure for 'horsiculture' is evident in the south of the area, particularly adjacent to Winterbourne. This change in land use is a recent trend, which in places has led to the loss or erosion of hedgerows. The cumulative effect of this

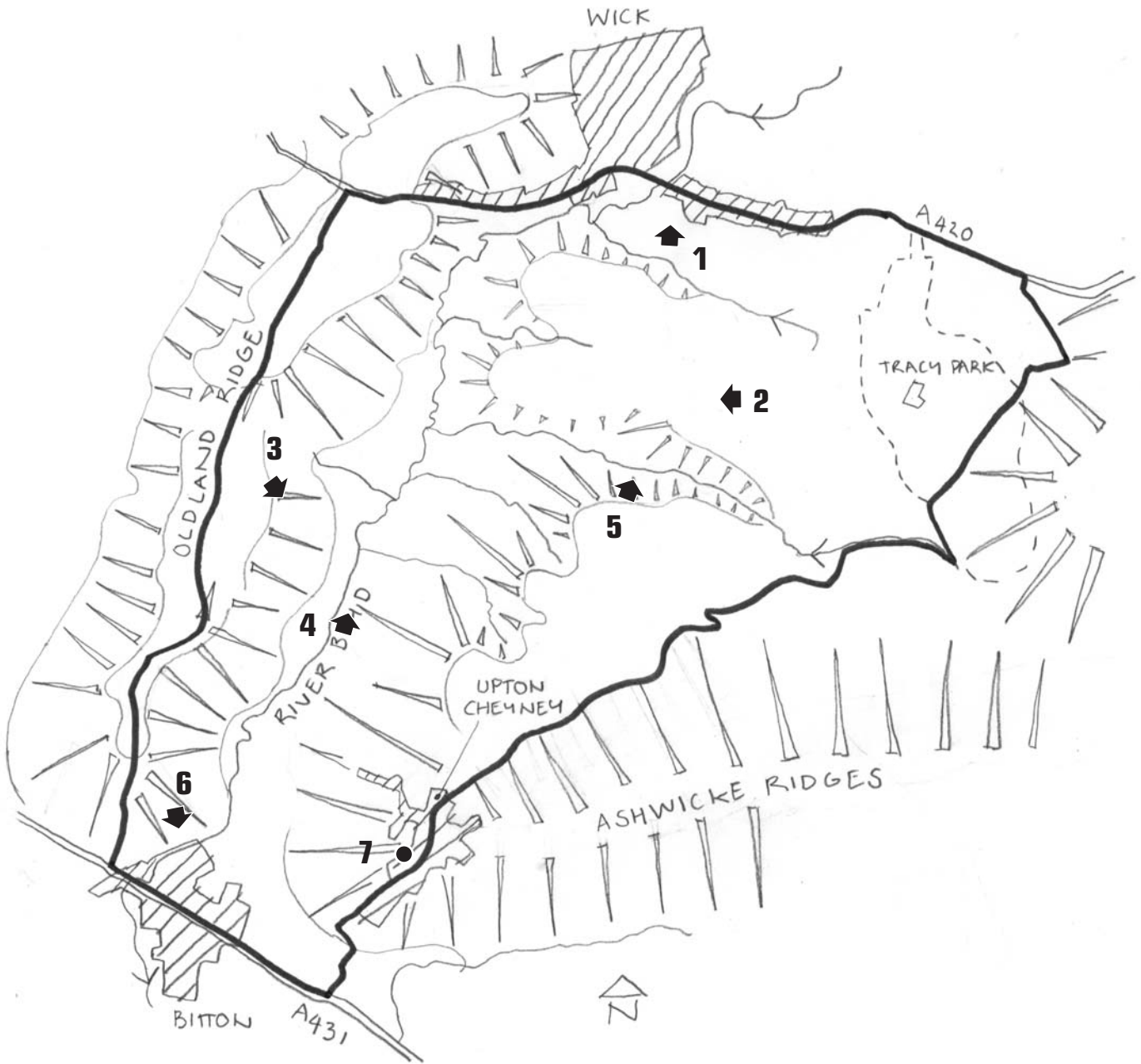
and the associated infrastructure of stables, access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and even floodlighting, can result in a marked change in landscape character.

- The travellers' site on the Old Gloucester Road is an isolated site. However, the tall timber fence boundary forms a locally prominent built feature, which does not relate well to its rural setting.


The effect of these changes on local character to the south west of the area, near the M4 corridor, are already apparent. However, further changes, or the effect of cumulative changes, which could influence the landscape structure of the area and character of the rural landscape could significantly affect the ability of this landscape to function as a physical and visual buffer between settlements, transport corridors and the Bristol urban edge.



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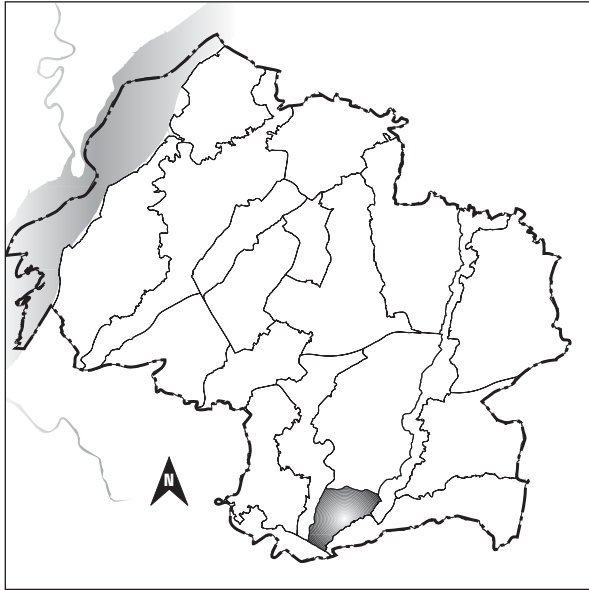


Key

 Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

**Figure 39:
Golden Valley - Sketch Map**



The Golden Valley landscape character area is a steeply sloping broad agricultural valley, containing the meandering River Boyd visually enclosed by the Oldland Ridge and the much higher Ashwicke Ridges.

Key Characteristics

- A narrow enclosed valley to the south, becoming broader to the north, contained by the Ashwicke Ridges to the east and the Oldland Ridge to the west.
- Rising above the tightly meandering River Boyd valley is a diverse mix of medium to small, regular and irregular shaped pasture and arable fields. Larger arable fields occupy upper slopes.
- A dense framework of trees and riparian vegetation lines the River Boyd and its tributaries.
- Fields are divided by a strong framework of largely overgrown hedges, trees and occasional woodland, or copses. Boundaries also include a mix of clipped or laid hedges and some fences.
- Oldland Ridge includes little tree cover, a patchwork of scrub and, one very large arable field within a more typical regular pattern of medium fields.

- A golf course occupies land at Tracy Park, with an extension extending beyond this area and over lower slopes of the Cotswold Scarp.
- Limited settlement, with isolated and scattered houses, farms and hamlets within the area, with adjacent villages and major roads influencing northern and southern boundaries.
- Remnants of coal industry activity, small scale stone quarrying and mills lie within the valley.
- Few country lanes cross the area, some are sunk within steeper slopes.

Location

The Golden Valley landscape character area is located in the south of South Gloucestershire, to the east of Bristol.

The northern boundary follows the A420 and marks the transition between the enclosed upper River Boyd and the broader Golden Valley.

The southern boundary follows the A431, which generally follows the topographical change between the River Boyd valley and the open River Avon floodplain beyond.

The eastern boundary follows an approximate topographical transition between the lower broad slopes of the Golden Valley and the upper steeper slopes of the Ashwicke Ridges. To the south east the boundary follows a lane and glass houses, within an area of transition in slope aspect between the Golden Valley and the Piple Bottom Valley of the Ashwicke Ridges.

The western boundary follows the centre of the Oldland Ridge, the skyline of which is shared with the adjacent Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge area. (See Figures 40 & 42).

Physical Influences

The geology of the Golden Valley landscape character area is diverse, with a linear strip of Coal Measures (sandstone/shales) centrally within the valley, contained largely by Keuper

marls/sandstones to the north. Lias clays and silts, occupy the southern and eastern area, with an irregular band of White and Blue Lias limestone in the area of the central and northern upper valley slopes. This geology is overlain by typical Argillic Pelosols, Brown Earth Loams over Clay to the south, with pockets of Brown Rendzinas to the north west and north east.

This geology and subsequent drainage pattern creates a steeply sloping north east/south west orientated valley landform, enclosed by the ridge of Hanging Hill, within the Ashwicke Ridges to the east (forming the southern most extent of the Cotswold Scarp, within the South Gloucestershire area) and the lower Oldland Ridge to the west. The topography varies from 20 metres a.o.d. at the mouth of the valley near Bitton, to approximately 88 metres a.o.d. along the Oldland Ridge and to approximately 120 metres a.o.d, midway along Hanging Hill on the boundary of the area. Hanging Hill continues to rise in the adjoining character area to 235 metres a.o.d. at its summit.

The River Boyd flows southwards through the centre of the valley along a tightly meandering course. It flows from north of Wick, through the village and then south, flowing through Bitton before joining the River Avon. The valley to the south is narrower, contained to the west by the steep slopes and end of the Oldland Ridge and to the east by the more gentle lower slopes of Hanging Hill Ridge, which curve eastwards into the Piple Bottom Valley.

Adjacent to and to the north of Bitton, the river has formed a small floodplain, occupied by two man-made pools. The lower valley also includes a number of springs, one at Upton Cheyney is known locally as Joseph's Well (Photo 7).

The northern section of the valley is broader, with gentle slopes to the east, where minor tributaries flow from Hanging Hill and join the River Boyd at right angles, south of Wick. This has formed an upper valley landform of broad, descending spurs and undulating form.

Land Cover

Much of the River Boyd and its tributaries are surrounded by a wooded corridor of riparian vegetation from which irregular shaped, small to medium sized pastoral fields spread along the base of the valley and rise up the lower slopes. The eastern slopes also have a mix of more regular, rectilinear fields.

Further north and along the upper slopes there is a mix of larger regular shaped arable fields, with hedgerow removal forming a particularly large irregular shaped field along the Oldland Ridge, south of Highfield Park Farm (Photo 2).

Narrow enclosure fields are noticeable around Upton Cheyney and Bitton.

Field boundaries largely contour the valley sides, except along eastern valley slopes south of Wick, where field boundaries undulate across the broad descending spurs and below Upton Cheyney, where a rectangular hedgerow pattern extends down the slope, appearing to radiate from the village into the valley.

The field boundaries are largely tall and overgrown, with some clipped and laid hedgerows and hedgebanks along lanes.

Fields along the Oldland Ridge are defined by a mix of sporadic, thick and clipped hedges and occasional fences.

There is a strong mature tree cover and occasional small copses within the valley on the eastern slopes and lower north western slopes (Photo 3) and, in some places, associated with former coal mining and small quarry sites (Photo 4). In contrast there is little tree cover along the upper slopes of the Oldland Ridge.

To the north, adjacent to the A420, a small linear woodland plantation has recently been established, following the ridgeline.

Also along the Oldland Ridge, amongst the dominant arable and pasture cover, are some small isolated fields of scrub / rough grassland, associated with the steepest valley slopes. To the north is a large sweeping expanse of arable land following the removal of field boundaries (Photo 2).

To the north eastern corner of the area lies the Tracy Park Golf Course, with a more recent 9-hole extension, which extends beyond this area

and over the lower slopes of the adjoining Cotswold Scarp character area. The golf course is within the grounds of a large stately home, comprising parkland, mature tree specimens within sweeping lawns contained by Cotswold stone walls, a ha-ha and, prominent entrances defined by tall stone piers. The more recent golf course infrastructure extends over former agricultural fields.

Horse stables and paddocks, some enclosed by fences, are a common small scale land use associated with dispersed farms, rural houses and also scattered in more isolated locations adjacent to lanes.

To the north of Coldharbour Farm (south of Wick) are the remains of a burial chamber. To the south west of Bitton within the adjacent Avon Valley, but visible from this area, is a round barrow at Barrow Hill (Scheduled Ancient Monument). The 'Roman Camp', also a SAM, lies to the north of Bitton.

Settlement and Infrastructure

Settlement over much of this area is limited, comprising a village, hamlet, scattered farms and buildings primarily constructed of Lias limestone.

Dry and mortared Lias limestone walls, with random upright stone copings, are a distinctive feature around the edges of settlement and along the lanes which pass through them.

Bitton, to the south of the area, is designated a Conservation Area. . It is a large village of Saxon origins with a planned linear pattern along the A431 and intersecting lanes, extending southwards into the adjacent character area of the Avon Valley (Photo 6). It consists of a mix of buildings, mainly of limestone and render. There are industrial warehouse buildings on the northern edge.

An area of former low key, rural industrial activity, lies at the Old Mill to the north west of the village and comprises a scattering of buildings alongside the River Boyd. To the east of Bitton alongside the A431 and on the boundary of this area is a large nursery, including a very large complex of glass houses.

Wick defines part of the northern boundary and is a large village with both linear and a more recent nucleated development pattern. It is situated both within and on the upper slopes of the River Boyd valley and is partly strung out along the A420 (Photo 1). It contains a number of limestone buildings, although more recent residential development comprises a mix of materials including brick, render and reconstituted stone.

The hamlet of Upton Cheyney, a Conservation Area, partly falls within this area and the adjacent Ashwicke Ridges. The settlement is scattered along a number of radiating country lanes, giving a linear character, set on the elevated mid slopes between the lower Golden Valley and rising ridgeline of Hanging Hill. The settlement generally consists of large traditional limestone cottages, farm houses and one small group of brick houses.

Copper slag coping stones and quoins (a by-product from the Warmley Brassworks within the Kingswood area), feature within a few walls and buildings within the area. Wall coping stones are evident at Upper Cullyhall Farm on the Oldland Ridge and stone walling to a residential property along the A420, west of Wick. Quoins are evident within one house at Upton Cheyney.

The isolated farms and properties are typically scattered along the lower slopes of the valley, with a few along the top of the Oldland Ridge. They are generally older stone buildings, but with a mix of more recent properties.

Former rural industrial activity is evident within the heart of the Golden Valley, with a number of disused corn and paper mills along the River Boyd and a coal mine vent shaft near the disused Golden Valley Coal Works (Photo 4). A few sites of small scale quarrying are also scattered along the valley.

One small sewage works is located within the valley to the north.

The road network largely consists of country lanes, some sunken particularly where climbing steeper ground, others are contained by dense hedgerows (Photo 5).

The northern and southern boundaries are however formed by the A420 and A431 respectively, the A420 at grade descending and

rising as it crosses the Boyd Valley and the A431 at grade, largely following the edge of Avon floodplain to the south.

One recreational route passes through this area and one briefly meets the western boundary:

- The Monarch's Way passes southwards from Wick along the valley close to the River Boyd, ascends the valley sides to Upton Cheyney, before descending to Bitton and the Avon Valley beyond.
- One of a series of Circular Rides briefly follows the western boundary at Upton Cheyney.

The public footpath network comprises a number of routes which largely descend into the valley to the central area of the Old Mill, or link Wick, via Coldharbour Farm, with the Ashwicke Ridges and plateau of Landsdown Hill.

Landscape Character

The Golden Valley landscape character area is an enclosed, visually contained valley, with broader upper slopes, defined to the east by the ridgeline of Hanging Hill within the Ashwicke Ridges and to the west by the Oldland Ridge.

Most of the area is covered by a diverse mix of irregular shaped medium and small pasture fields along the lower slopes and base of the valley, with the smallest fields generally adjacent to settlement. This gradually changes to larger regular shaped arable fields along the upper slopes and fringes, with a more open character. The largest fields are mainly within the northern half of the character area.

The dense tree structure within the valley floor, following the River Boyd, its tributaries and, the overgrown hedgerows defining a large proportion of the field boundaries, produce a strong framework.

Internal views are largely contained along the valley floor by the vegetation structure and upper slopes. Although the lanes are lined by a mix of hedges and hedgebanks, descending routes have some open views across the valley. Views along the valley slopes are largely restricted by vegetation, with vantages

permitted from country lanes where they contour the valley.

The valley form is quite narrow within its southern half. This increases the sense of enclosure and perception of remoteness. The limited dispersed settlement and minimal roads are well integrated both by landform and vegetation structure, providing a sense of tranquillity within the valley landscape. This is reduced along the southern boundary by traffic noise associated with the A431 and in the north by the visual influence of Wick.

Wick, beyond the northern boundary, is visually evident within middle distance views over the northern, broader Boyd Valley. Housing is largely well integrated amongst a framework of copses and linear woodland along the river valley. The abrupt edge of dense modern housing on the upper valley slopes (Photo 1) and Wick Quarry and associated buildings, are however prominent, set above the adjacent vegetation framework. The large, elevated traditional building of Bury Manor, constructed from limestone, is a prominent distinctive landmark on an elevated knoll.

Tracy Park to the east, has a distinctive, historic parkland character, with its prominent features of stone pillared entrances, stone walls, lawns and mature trees, providing the setting to the large stately home. The golf course infrastructure within the park is evident within local views, but is generally well integrated where the strong structure of mature parkland trees are a more visually prominent feature.

The extension to this golf course is however more visually intrusive. It occupies former agricultural fields beyond the park, where the hedgerow framework has now been fragmented. The site also extends over the more open, elevated slopes of Freezing Hill (lying within the adjacent character area). Here, the golf course, with its infrastructure of fairways, ground reshaping and very little planting structure, is very prominent seen against the wider sweeping slopes of Freezing Hill. The land use is also in marked contrast to the wider agricultural hedgerow field pattern, which has a more simple and bold structure, well related to the hillside setting.

The Oldland Ridge separates the Golden Valley from the urban area of Kingswood within the adjacent character area. The straight form of the ridge is overlain by a simple bold pattern of mixed agriculture, defined by a largely regular field pattern. This becomes more irregular within the Golden Valley, where influenced by textured pockets of scrub, linear woodland and a very large open arable field to the north.

Along the ridgeline the clipped, intermittent hedgerows, some of which are overgrown and post and wire fences, provide limited structure over this elevated landform.

From the crown of the Oldland Ridge there are extensive views westwards over the dense urban development of Bristol and eastwards of the large scale landform of the Hanging Hill ridge. The foreground roll of the Oldland Ridge, restricts middle distance views in both directions.

Extensive views from Hanging Hill in the adjacent character area are possible into the Golden Valley and beyond the Oldland Ridge to Bristol.

Bitton, located at the mouth of the Boyd Valley, is primarily visible in local views from adjacent higher ground at Bitton Hill (Photo 6) and Upton Cheyney. Within these views the older residential settlement pattern is distinctive, nestled within the valley and extending southwards beyond the A431 into the adjacent character area, on slightly elevated ground above the Avon Valley floodplain. Large industrial warehouses to the north of the village however, detract from and partly erode the rural settlement character within these views. From within the valley, the settlement area, industrial building edge to the north and glass houses to the east are well integrated by the valley landform and strong vegetation framework. St Mary's Church tower is a prominent distinctive landmark, visible on the edge of the Avon Valley.

The settlement pattern of Upton Cheyney, radiating pattern of lanes and rectilinear fields, reflects the promontory landform setting above the Boyd Valley. The framework of hedgerows and trees integrates the slightly dispersed settlement pattern well. The strong interrelationship of scattered settlement, lanes

and vegetation pattern to landform within this hamlet, has produced a very distinctive and locally visible feature.

The A420 to the north and A431 to the south, are well screened by landform and existing dense vegetation, and have little visual influence upon the character of the area.

Horse stables and paddocks are occasionally visible, where adjacent to the network of lanes associated with the dispersed farms and rural houses. Fields are generally more open in character where fences have replaced some hedgerows. This more open landscape increases the visibility of stables, parked vehicles, open storage, jumps and other features associated with the keeping of horses.

The Changing Landscape

The Golden Valley landscape character area is an enclosed valley landscape with a strong landscape infrastructure. The lack of major development reinforces its rural character and perception of tranquillity.

The landscape across the area is in varying condition. Within the Golden Valley, the hedgerow and tree structure is typically intact. The prominent, overgrown hedgerows which presently provide this area's distinct character and enclosure are the result of little active management. At this level of management, these hedgerows will continue to evolve from the present linear structure, eventually to individual mature trees. The general sensitivity of the landscape is therefore likely to increase in the long term, as the tree canopy becomes more intermittent, with the potential for greater intervisibility within the area.

Active management of these hedgerows would help to ensure the conservation of these key features for the long term. Dependent on the number of hedgerow trees which are allowed to develop, or are planted, the landscape character could become more or less open as a result of management.

New woodland planting to the west of Wick, south of the A420 and following the Oldland Ridge skyline, is presently young and therefore subtle, but will form a significant feature within

local views in the long term and will contribute to the landscape framework of the character area.

Beyond the area to the north, a small proportion of dense modern residential development in Wick, is prominent on the upper slopes of the Boyd Valley, above the adjacent vegetation structure. Future settlement expansion along this edge potentially could encroach towards or onto the skyline, further increasing the visual prominence of the settlement within the locality and eroding the rural landscape character. Similarly, any loss to the woodland framework around Wick Quarry, in the adjoining area, has the potential to raise the visual prominence of the existing plant buildings, affecting local character.

The settlement edges of Upton Cheyney and Bitton are visible elements from within the area and from the Ashwicke Ridges. They are sensitive to change or infill of a type which would visibly alter the existing scale and pattern of settlement, the vegetation framework or landform context which provide setting to these settlements. This change has the potential to erode rural characteristics of both landscape features and distinctive settlements.

The enclosed valley area is sensitive to change which might erode its essential rural characteristics. Change which might affect the physical landscape framework, or, the balance between the agricultural landscape and settlement, could erode the perception of tranquillity within the valley. Despite its enclosure, changes have the potential to be visible from the surrounding elevated ground, therefore influencing not only the local area, but the wider landscape.

A number of farmhouses have been converted to residential properties, especially along the valley bottom. This has brought about a change in the character of buildings and their boundaries by introducing modern, suburban details e.g. fences, conifer hedges and high stone walls/pillars and ornamental gates, within an otherwise distinctly rural location.

The effect of the removal of hedgerows to maximise arable practices is already highly evident along the Oldland Ridge. The upper slopes on both sides of the valley are

particularly visible and therefore sensitive to the disturbance of the field boundary pattern. Further hedgerow removal has the potential to erode the strong vegetation structure found within much of this area, increasing the openness and eroding the perception of tranquillity and, in places, the visually remote character.

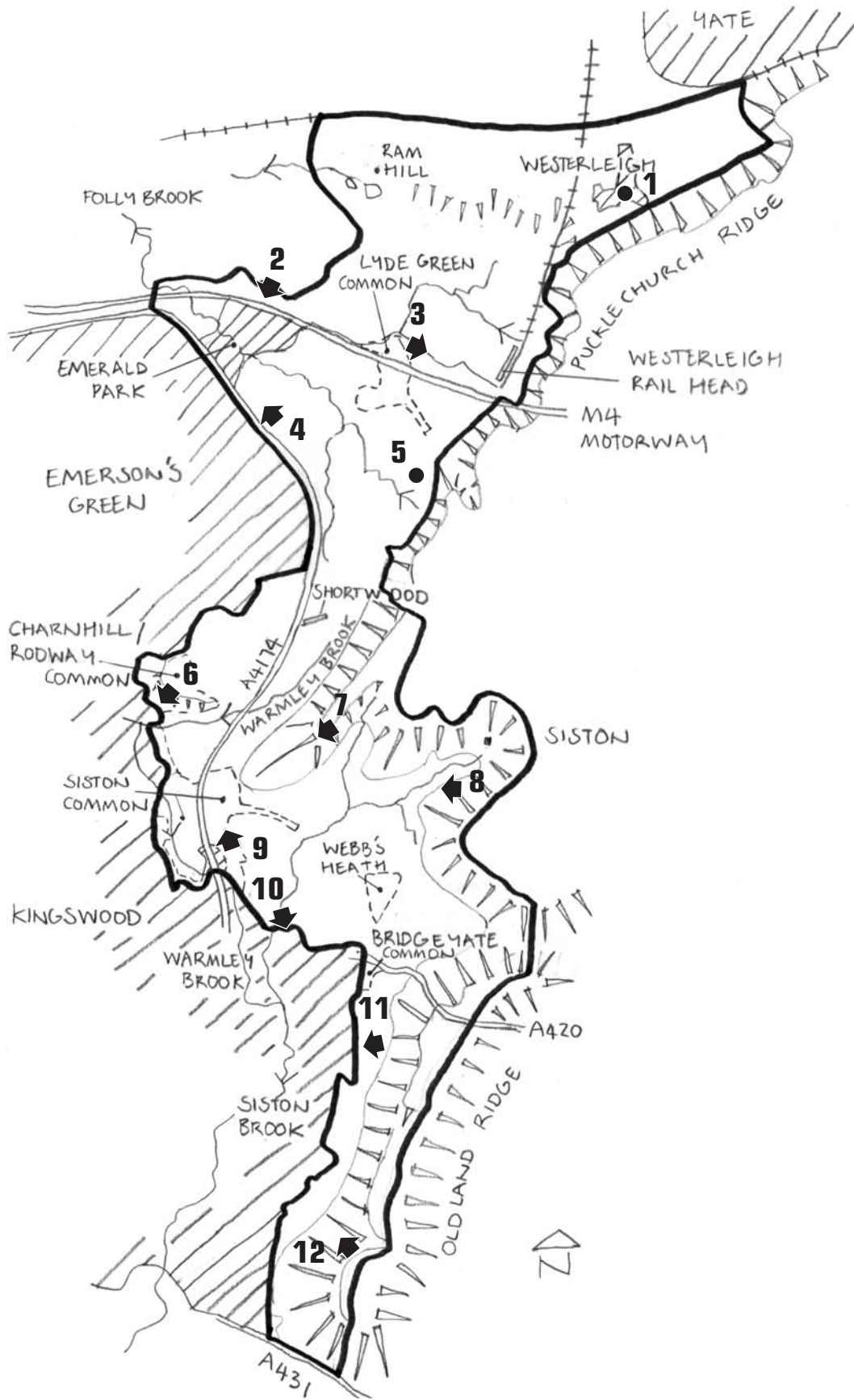
The area is also under considerable recreational pressure due to its close proximity to and access from Bristol. The area has good footpath access along the valley, following the Monarch's Way, with links to the Ashwicke Ridges, with highly worn paths evident at several locations across this area.

Recreational pressure is also increasing from 'horsiculture', with stable blocks, paddocks and a deterioration in field boundaries evident, particularly around Redfield Hill, Ryedown Lane, Cann Lane, Mill Lane, the northern end of Golden Valley Lane and on the slopes to the south of Beach Lane. This change in land use is a recent trend. The cumulative effect of this and the associated infrastructure of access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and even floodlighting, can result in a marked change in landscape character.

The golf course extension at Tracy Park, visible from this area (but lying within the adjacent character area), has introduced land use change that is highly prominent, given the elevated open slopes setting and distinctly different vegetation pattern, which is in marked contrast to the wider agricultural landscape context. This has resulted in an erosion of the rural landscape character in the locality and wider area, due to its visibility.



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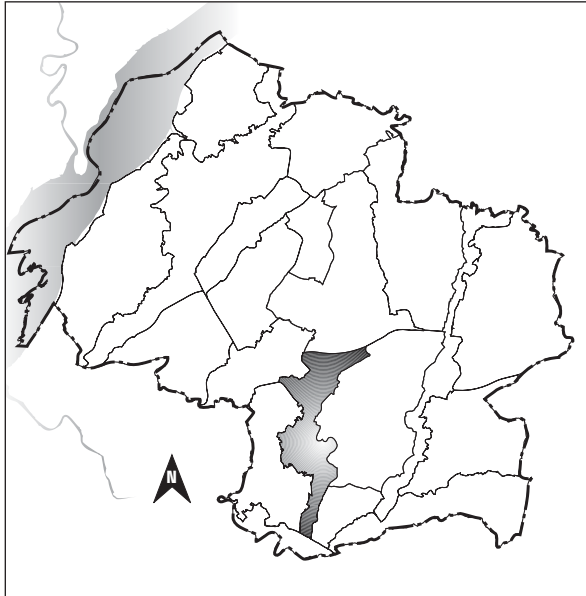


Key

➔₁₅ Photograph viewpoints

**Figure 42:
Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge -
Sketch Map**

Scale: not to scale



The Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge landscape character area comprises a diverse and intricate mix of farmland, settlement, roads, commons and industrial heritage.

Key Characteristics

- A gentle to rolling landscape, contained by the prominent Pucklechurch and Oldland Ridge to the east and influenced by the dominant and continuous urban edge of Bristol to the west.
- Great variety and mix of land uses including pasture, arable, horse paddocks, a golf course, with public open space and playing fields along the urban edge.
- Common land is frequent and diverse.
- Diverse vegetation structure of overgrown and clipped hedges and limited areas of woodland. Variable hedgerow and woodland tree cover often associated with older settlement and commons, with generally more frequent cover to the east.
- Dispersed settlement pattern including a village, hamlets and scattered farms.
- Historic remains of coal industries are evident to the north and east of the area with disused tramways, railways,

chimneys, scattered worker settlements, excavations and spoil mounds. Clay extraction is still active.

- Contained to the west by the residential urban edge, with large scale commercial/ industrial sheds in the north by M4.
- Main roads cross and segment the area. Frequent, winding minor roads and lanes with grass verges / open grassland adjacent to commons, cross the area.

Location

The Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge character area is located along the eastern edge of the Bristol conurbation.

The eastern area is contained by rising landform. The boundary follows the toe of the scarp of the Pucklechurch Ridge from the north to the area of Shortwood Hill, where the scarp peters out into less distinct rolling low hillsides, with more limited woodland cover. From here a transitional boundary approximately follows the skyline, separating the vale from the higher Pucklechurch plateau. From Bridgegate southwards, the boundary follows the Oldland Ridge. The short southern boundary follows the A431 and topographical boundary with the Avon Valley character area.

The western boundary follows the urban edge of Bristol to the M4. North of this, the boundary approximately follows the skyline over low undulating ground and the edge of a golf course.

The northern boundary follows the distinct embankment of the South Wales to London railway line and marks a subtle transition in natural landform and a more distinct change in land cover and settlement pattern with the adjacent area. (See Figures 43 & 45).

Physical Influences

The underlying geology is mixed, with predominately Coal Measures (Upper and Lower series with sandstones, mudstones and shales) centrally, a band of Keuper marl and clays either side of the M4 corridor and along

the lower slopes of the Pucklechurch Ridge, with some small areas of White and Blue Lias (limestone) near Siston and along part of the Oldland Ridge. The soils are a combination of Gleys, Pelo-Stagnogleys and typical Argillic Pelosols.

The area has a varied topography that is given structure and containment by rising ground to the north and more significantly, along the eastern boundary. Broadly, the topographical features within the area comprise the broad bowl of the Folly Brook to the north, the central rolling Siston Brook valley and linear Warmley Brook valley, with the linear Oldland Ridge to the south.

Within the north, a broad shallow bowl at 52 metres. a.o.d. average, is contained to the north by low, gently rolling hills including Ram Hill, rising up to 84 metres a.o.d.; to the east, this area is bounded by the toe of the steep face of the Pucklechurch scarp, comprising a linear ridgeline rising up to 110 metres a.o.d. beyond the character area; and to the south, where land rises gently to the area of Orchard Farm at 80 metres a.o.d. (west of Shortwood). The westerly flowing tributaries of the Folly Brook largely follow an irregular, sinuous course within this bowl with some regular ditches along field boundaries to the east.

Centrally, the Siston Brook valley forms a complex landform. To the east, a broadly curving hillside is formed by gentle slopes and spurs rising to a flat skyline at approximately 100 metres a.o.d. The valley below comprises gently rolling low hills up to 74 metres a.o.d. A descending ridge to the west is a continuation of the Pucklechurch Ridge, forming a skyline and containment to the Siston Valley to the east, separating it from the Warmley Valley to the west.

The south westerly flowing meandering Siston Brook and its tributaries join Warmley Brook south of this character area, before continuing southwards to the River Avon.

The Warmley Brook follows a linear valley to the south of Shortwood, between the Pucklechurch Ridge and Rodway Hill. To the north its course is a natural channel, however to the south, some sections within Felicity Park, adjacent playing fields and across Siston Common, have been modified.

To the south, the linear ridge and gentle slopes of the Oldland Ridge rise to the east, from the generally level valley at approximately 45 metres a.o.d., to the ridge line at 80 to 88 metres a.o.d.

Land Cover

To the north of the area (north of the M4) the gently undulating landform is predominantly pastoral, with scattered pockets of arable land and horse paddocks near to settlement. Field sizes are typically medium (some large) and regular shaped to the north, with generally smaller fields, some of irregular shape, nearer the M4 and generally around the settlement edges. Boundaries are variable. Clipped hedgerows with few hedgerow trees are typical, with intermittent hedgerows or post and wire fences around horse paddocks. Dense linear sections of scrub and trees partially cover the South Wales to London railway embankment and line the old tramways and unpaved tracks in this area. Deciduous and mixed woodland areas cover higher ground at Ram Hill.

Around Ram Hill there are also some small scale, scattered, non-agricultural land uses, with inert material storage/sorting compounds, horse paddocks with associated ad hoc home-made stables and sheds, timber fences and use of old railway wagons.

South of the M4 fields are irregular and small to medium in size. Hedgerows are largely overgrown and contain lines of hedgerow trees. Clipped hedgerows are less common.

To the south east of Emerson's Green, the regular pattern of medium to large fields generally follows the linear form of the Warmley Valley. Boundaries include a mix of clipped and overgrown hedgerows with frequent mature trees.

Within the Siston Valley, the pasture fields are medium to small and irregular shaped with thick, often overgrown hedges, supplemented with mature trees and small copses along upper slopes (Photo 8).

The Oldland Ridge has a regular field pattern of pasture, with medium sized, linear fields

generally following the contours, with smaller fields and horse paddocks associated with the irregular settlement edge (Photo 12). Fields are defined by clipped or overgrown, sometimes intermittent, hedgerows, with timber fences typically around paddocks. Along the ridge, post and wire fences supplement the intermittent hedges.

The degree of tree cover throughout the area is variable and largely relates to the pattern of hedgerow trees, commons, the disused railway track and Dramway. Hedgerow trees are often associated with the edges of older settlement pattern; generally intermittent along lower ground in the west along the urban edge, becoming more dense with thick hedges further east.

The irregular urban edge along the western boundary, from the B4465 southwards, is occasionally interwoven with or edged by commons, school playing fields, public open spaces and horse paddocks.

Land cover in places consists of rough, coarse grassland. These fields are often divided by a combination of hedge, fence and occasional stone wall boundaries.

A number of commons lie within the area:

- Lyde Green Common, severed by the M4, comprises a field and broad road verges of unimproved grassland, partly edged by water-filled ditches and dense hedgerows with intermittent trees.
- Charn Hill and Rodway Common, on the urban edge (Photo 6), comprise rough, unenclosed heathland and a dense scrub/woodland framework, covering elevated ground and slopes of a steep sided valley. They lie on the western boundary and are partly contained by the urban edge.
- Siston Common and Webb's Heath comprise broad open areas of common with a mix of rough, unimproved grassland with thickets of hawthorn and blackthorn scrub, small groups of deciduous trees and informal hedges (Photo 9). Both are crossed by country lanes with scattered farms/houses and are defined variously by the adjacent field boundary pattern, property boundaries, or the urban edge. These two areas are linked by a linear

common of broad roadside verges, following Webb's Heath Road, through Goose Green. Siston Common forms the most extensive common within the character area, but is now bisected by the Avon Ring Road.

- Bridgegate Common comprises two small areas with different patterns of open grassland and scattered trees. The western extent forms a regular space contained by the A420/A4175 road junction, scattered older houses and hedgerows. The eastern extent comprises a small field and irregular verges spread along a country lane, with scattered farms, houses and hedgerow boundaries. This corridor of irregular common land continues eastward for some distance, beyond the character area and provides a link with Holbrook Common at Wick.

Close to the urban edge, much of the landscape has a high amenity/recreational use, with areas of public open space and playing fields. Shortwood Lodge Golf Course is an amenity landscape west of Siston, comprising an irregular pattern of conifers and deciduous tree planting with improved grassland cover (Photo 7).

Historic earthworks are evident to the south of Oldland Common, comprising a circular mound adjacent to the A4175.

Much of the area is influenced by former industrial activity:

- Coal extraction at Ram Hill has left Bitterwell Lake, once a header lake providing water to feed the steam pumps for the local pit, now a recreation feature.
- There are numerous tramways to the north, including one of the earliest railways in Britain, the 19th century Dramway. This connects Coalpit Heath to the north, just beyond this area, with the River Avon to the south and now forms the route of a public footpath passing centrally through the area.
- The original, now disused, Gloucester to Bristol railway passes south along the toe of the Pucklechurch Ridge and west below Rodway Common, to a former important rail junction at Mangotsfield. From here

the Midland Railway had a branch to Bath, which travels southwards and through the built areas of Warmley, North Common and then within the adjacent character area through Oldland Common. The Bristol and Bath Railway Path utilises these corridors.

- Remnants of coal extraction and brick works are very closely associated with the toe of the Pucklechurch scarp.
- Industrial archaeological features are evident within two sites forming the Parkfield Colliery, linked by the Dramway.

Most of the Parkfield North Colliery site and its chimney lies within the adjacent character area, on the lower slopes of the Pucklechurch Ridge. However scrub covered earthworks, to the west of the Dramway adjacent to the M4, are within this area.

Brandy Bottom (Parkfield South) Colliery includes a chimney (Photo 5), pit head buildings and earthworks, all now absorbed within a framework of scrub and trees. The site is a SAM and the most complete example of a 19th century coalmine in the Bristol Coalfield.

- The former Shortwood Brickworks lies near the toe of the Pucklechurch Ridge and partly extends beyond this character area, onto the lower scarp slopes. The brickworks themselves were demolished in the mid 1990's and the site now comprises an active clay extraction area, north of a large partially flooded pit and a stockpiling area adjacent to Shortwood Farm, where clay is stored in mounds prior to transportation to Cattybrook Brickworks within the Severn Ridges character area.

A disused railway forming a spur off the Bristol to Bath Railway Path, runs past the former collieries and Shortwood Claypit.

- Less visible remains of former land use within the landscape are found at Warmley Forest Park (adjacent to A420), previously the site of Warmley Clay Pipe Works, later a landfill site (Photo 10) and at Webb's Heath, where vegetated mounds indicate the remains of coal spoil and a coal mine ventilation shaft remains a local feature.

Settlement and Infrastructure

Settlement forms a prominent, dense edge along much of the western boundary and is elsewhere scattered within a variety of patterns. Most of the older settlement pattern within this area, even where they have an earlier core, expanded along roads, due to the need to house workers of the coalmines, railways and other industries.

The urban edge has in places a complex and irregular pattern of development, which has expanded and pushed the rural edge eastwards. More recent expansion has included large scale phased residential, commercial and industrial development.

The northern part of this urban edge, extending between the A4174 and the M4 comprises a recent employment area at Emerald Park, Emerson's Green, made up of very large distribution sheds, offices, light industry and road infrastructure (Photo 2). A framework of recent planting extends along the site's periphery, including the A4174.

Emerson's Green residential development just to the south, lies in the adjacent Kingswood landscape character area (Photo 4). The recent large scale, dense residential development extends to the A4174, merging with occasional retail and commercial development off the A4174 road junctions. The development edge of residential roofscapes above tall timber screen fencing, together with the A4147 corridor, combine to form a distinct linear urban boundary to the area, with planting along this edge.

Derelict farm houses of Pennant stone, a scrap yard and inert waste compounds are older development and land uses absorbed, or on the northern periphery, of this urban area.

Continuing south, the urban edge recedes westwards and includes a mix of old Pennant stone and more recent brick buildings, intermixed with a number of industrial complexes and school playing fields. This area comprises a complex and interwoven historic pattern of settlement, common land, small scale industry and agriculture.

The historic settlement pattern focuses upon the former village centres of Warmley, North Common and Oldland Common, within which and from which, small scale incremental infill and expansion along roads and lanes has occurred (Photo 11).

Two small areas of housing to the south of Rodway Hill sit largely within a rural framework. Siston Park, adjacent to Siston Common, includes mid 20th century housing and a more recent extension to the north. Recent housing development on Carson's Road, on a former factory site, abuts the new Avon Ring Road, enclosed on this boundary by timber fencing on top of an embankment.

Recent housing infill has also occurred along the A4175 at North Common. Along the toe of the Oldland Ridge, small groups of residential settlement extend into the rural fringe along lanes, perpendicular to the A4175. A complex of glass houses also lies adjacent to this road.

The wider rural landscape contains the village of Westerleigh, hamlets, scattered farms and recent industrial activities.

To the north east of the character area, Westerleigh village is located below the Pucklechurch Ridge and comprises a linear settlement with large Pennant stone houses and farms, brick terraces, and more recent reconstituted stone and rendered infill properties, built on the convergence of three roads, with the church and village green at its centre (Photo 1). The majority of the village is located on gently sloping ground, nestled below the Pucklechurch Ridge, with a more recent housing spur ascending the ridge, along Shorthill Road. The village is surrounded by agricultural fields, with a playing field to the south.

To the west, Ram Hill, a colliery settlement and Henfield, are small dispersed/linear and clustered hamlets respectively, consisting of a mix of, Pennant sandstone with more recent render and brick buildings, focused around a convergence of minor roads and lanes.

The isolated, clustered hamlet of Siston (a Conservation Area) comprises traditional limestone buildings and church, along lanes lined with limestone walls. It has Saxon origins and is located in close proximity to the former

Kingswood Forest. A particularly distinctive feature is the adjacent Siston Court, an Elizabethan manor house, situated above the hamlet within a designed landscape setting, which extends into the adjacent character area.

Settlement groups elsewhere comprise linear development at Shortwood (Pennant sandstone and red brick workers houses), clustered properties along lanes, over common land at Webb's Heath, Goose Green and common edge settlement at Bridgegate and Lyde Green (largely limestone buildings, with more recent brick buildings, some with ad hoc sheds). Scattered farms are common throughout the area, some with large modern agricultural barns.

Low Pennant sandstone walls are common features along roadsides, within the older centres of settlement to the south, and are often accompanied by stone piers of either Pennant sandstone or limestone and Victorian-style copings at property boundaries.

Copper slag coping stones (a by-product from the Warmley Brassworks, within the Kingswood area) are an occasional feature visible along boundary walls, e.g. Upper Cullyhall Farm on the Oldland Ridge. The use of this material is scattered widely within the rural areas of South Gloucestershire.

Recent industrial and non-agricultural activity within the rural framework include an abattoir and processing plant south west of Westerleigh, below the Pucklechurch Ridge. It comprises a large modern building unit adjacent to the rail infrastructure. Tall storage containers at the oil terminal at Westerleigh Rail Head are located to the north of the M4 (Photo 3).

The A4174 Avon Ring Road defines a section of the north western boundary and continues south through rural low lying parts of the area, where it generally follows the line of the former Bristol to Bath railway line. It travels variously at grade in the north, cut into higher ground to the west adjacent to and south of Emerson's Green, where it is associated with a large scale earth sculpture and is contained within cuttings and stone walling to the south. Infrastructure planting has recently taken place along the road.

The M4 cuts across the northern area east to west, in slight cutting to the west, briefly at grade and then on embankment before cutting into the Pucklechurch Ridge.

The west-east South Wales to London railway line on high embankment, forms the northern boundary.

A number of roads cross east to west, connecting with the rural settlements of Westerleigh, Pucklechurch and Wick. The irregular pattern of minor roads and lanes generally follow gentle landform or spurs on steeper terrain.

A number of strategic recreational routes cross the area:

- The Bristol and Bath Railway Path follows the disused railway over low lying ground beneath the Pucklechurch scarp to the east of the urban edge, before following a new section adjacent to the Avon Ring Road, then entering the built up areas of Mangotsfield and Warmley.
- The Dramway is an important former industrial tramway. The original route is largely intact, although parts have been removed by the Avon Ring Road. It is now used as a public footpath. It passes centrally north to south through the area. The path follows the original tramway through the Folly Brook valley from Ram Hill, beneath the M4, west of Lyde Green Common, merging with the Bristol and Bath Railway Path, before following a new route adjacent to the Avon Ring Road, across Siston Common (Photo 9) within the Warmley Valley, close to the western urban edge and then out of the area at Warmley. In places the original limestone track sleepers are still evident.
- One of the circuits within the series of Circular Rides in South Gloucestershire passes through the north east of the area. It commences in Westerleigh and follows a track west and adjacent to the South Wales to London railway embankment, turns south and travels across the Folly Brook valley, beneath the M4 and along Lyde Green Common, before briefly joining the Bristol and Bath Railway Path, and the lane and track ascending the Pucklechurch

Ridge. The route continues through the adjoining character area, turning north to Westerleigh.

- The Community Forest Path, within the Forest of Avon, passes centrally through the area north to south. From south of Ram Hill the path travels across the Folly Brook valley, beneath the M4, ascending the Pucklechurch Ridge to Shortwood Hill. The route descends into the Siston Brook valley, over Siston Hill and to Warmley, before following the Bristol and Bath Railway Path southwards.

There is also an extensive network of public rights of way connecting the urban edge to the wider countryside. All combine to form an intricate network across the area. This is particularly dense in the southern part of the area.

One overhead powerline and associated pylons pass north to south centrally through the area, before bisecting the undulating Siston Brook valley, then turning south, over Bridgegate Common and along the lower slopes of the Oldland Ridge.

Landscape Character

The Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge landscape character area has great variety and distinct landscapes, influenced by the urban conurbation to the west, layers of industrial history and recent built development over an agricultural landscape, contained to the east by prominent rising ground.

The northern bowl of the Folly Brook valley of predominately low, gently sloping pasture, with some arable fields, is contained by the Pucklechurch Ridge to the east and urban edge of Emerald Park /Emerson's Green to the south west and is roughly bisected by the M4. Within this area lies the small dispersed/linear settlement of Ram Hill, clustered pattern of Henfield and scattered farms.

The area of Ram Hill and Henfield comprises a largely strong, irregular rural framework with areas of woodland, mixed overgrown/clipped hedgerows supplemented with wire fences, defining regular shaped fields. The clustered

settlement pattern and non-agricultural activities such as storage compounds, are reasonably well integrated as a result of this framework. Horse paddocks are however locally evident where hedgerows have become replaced with fences. Associated ad hoc home-made stables and sheds and use of old railway wagons are also evident and untypical of a rural landscape. Large modern agricultural sheds are prominent within older farm complexes within this area.

The South Wales to London main railway line cuts across the northern boundary of this area on high embankment. Recent scrub clearance to sections of the embankment, as part of maintenance works, has in places raised the prominence of this landform, with the elevated, artificial horizontal skyline now more evident within some local views. This feature however remains largely well integrated, particularly where the adjacent hedgerow trees, or overgrown hedgerows, provide a strong vegetation structure. This landform also forms a significant visual barrier to views northwards into the adjacent character area.

Westerleigh to the north east, largely nestles within undulating topography contained by the partially wooded Pucklechurch Ridge to the south and east, gently rising ground to the west and the railway embankment to the north. The embankment visually separates Westerleigh from the urban edge of Yate, located less than a kilometre away to the north east, in the adjacent character area. The church forms a distinctive focal point to the village and local landmark, visible against the skyline from the north. The linear settlement pattern radiates along three roads from the central green and church and is influenced by heavy traffic.

The village is largely well integrated by the landform setting and vegetation structure. However, the linear expansion of the village to the east, comprising modern detached houses, has extended on to the lower slopes of the Pucklechurch Ridge and raised the visual prominence of this part of the village within local views.

Recent housing development to the west of the village has also resulted in a new clustered settlement pattern, which although not particularly evident from the road corridor, is

visible within open views from the Pucklechurch Ridge.

To the south west of Westerleigh, below the Pucklechurch Ridge, the abattoir/processing plant, oil terminal (Photo 3) and occasional line of goods wagons along the railway, form a scattered pattern of large structures, visible from the scarp, local landscape and M4. This concentration of features is taller than the adjacent vegetation structure and therefore is prominent within the local landscape.

The Pucklechurch Ridge, beyond the area's eastern boundary, is a prominent backcloth and skyline feature to the Folly Brook valley and in views from the urban edge. It also provides expansive panoramic views over the area, the Bristol conurbation and towards South Wales. The scarp's textured cover of woodland, rough grassland and scrub, coupled with historic industrial relics and scattered farms, is particularly visible and distinctive, influencing this area's character. The two chimneys and wooded spoil mounds along the scarp's toe variously add texture and form local landmarks.

The central bowl of the Folly Brook north of the M4, contains a dense and textured framework of tall hedgerows, some clipped, over a mosaic of pasture, rough grassland and common land, with scattered farms. The M4 is screened to some degree by existing planting along the motorway embankments. It is however visually and audibly prominent in places, providing some views over this area.

To the west, the large warehouse buildings at Emerald Park are visually prominent within the locality and wider landscape (Photo 2). The form, large scale, massing and uniformity of materials of this development, with the loss of virtually all existing landscape features, erodes the characteristic small scale landscape structure and pattern of the surrounding area. The physical form of the landscape has also been changed to accommodate such large platforms, with only the Folly Brook retained. The silver colour of the sheds accentuates their prominence, both against the small scale residential roofscape to the west and against the rural backdrop near Ram Hill, north of the M4.

The housing edge of Emerson's Green abutting the boundary of this area, the acoustic and

screen timber fencing and linear planting, form a regular dense urban edge and a prominent built skyline, often elevated above the A4174. Established planting in places is wide and dense enough to integrate the timber screen fencing, but elsewhere is limited, resulting in a harsh linear built boundary. Derelict farm houses and a scrap yard are locally evident along the A4174 corridor and visually contrast with the more prominent, recent development of housing and road infrastructure.

The claypit workings at Shortwood are locally evident, with the rich red colour of the clay excavation areas and stockpiles contrasting with the surrounding dense green woodland framework. This framework connects to both the adjacent Brandy Bottom Colliery and the wider vegetation pattern on the Pucklechurch Ridge.

To the south, the Siston Brook valley within its upper reaches comprises a gently rolling enclosed pastoral valley, covered by a strong framework of hedgerows, copses and small woodlands, defining small to medium irregular shaped fields. Siston hamlet is well integrated within the valley, with the more elevated Court, on the boundary of this area, evident within distant views from the west. One powerline and occasional middle distance views of the Bristol conurbation, influence the perception of remoteness and tranquillity otherwise obtained within this part of the character area.

The lower rolling hills to the west comprise a similar strong landscape framework, within which lies a distinct cover of dispersed open common/heathland. These areas comprise Siston and Webb's Heath Commons, typically rough open grassland, with small irregular scattered patches of scrub and trees, over hill tops or valley sides.

Bridgegate Common comprises a more balanced regular network of small open fields, partly fringed by housing and hedgerows, or forming an irregular corridor of broad verges, along Chesley Hill and Holbrook Lane. These areas are all associated with scattered stone farms and houses, with some small ad hoc sheds, along lanes. The western area of common is heavily influenced, both visually and audibly, by traffic along the A420 and A4175.

Open elevated views over these three commons are variously influenced, visibly and audibly, by traffic levels the close proximity of the urban edge of Kingswood, the Avon Ring Road, Shortwood Lodge Golf Course, powerline and A420, all of which influence and dilute the otherwise rural character of the area.

To the west, the low lying Warmley Brook valley forms a gentle uniform valley, with a small elevated plateau at Rodway Hill and broader landform to the south, contained by the rolling hills of the Siston Valley to the east. Within this context, the Shortwood Lodge Golf Course occupies the upper slopes and skyline between Siston and Warmley Valley. The fairways and greens are visually evident, contrasting in texture with adjacent pasture fields. Similarly, hedgerow removal and restructuring of the vegetation within the golf course has created a more open landscape, with irregular planting areas, which contrasts with the surrounding field pattern. The valley landscape falls towards and overlooks the urban edge of Kingswood, with a complex mosaic of built development, commons, playing fields, horse paddocks, and roads within a receding agricultural landscape.

The irregular urban edge is prominent within local and elevated middle distant views from the ridge to the east, with limited vegetation structure following this edge. This settlement edge contains and visually influences the rural landscape to the east and south. Conversely, the rural ridgelines to the east of the area are a prominent feature within views from the urban edge and provide a strong sense of place and local distinctiveness.

Warmley and Bridgegate are located within the lower Siston Valley, extending along both its floor and lower eastern slopes. These villages have in effect merged, through piecemeal expansion of older settlement centres extending along roads into the character area, partly containing or segmenting the adjacent rural fringe. Clustered pockets of old and new residential development and old industrial units punctuate the rural area and are locally evident. The tree and vegetation cover associated with Siston Common and adjacent field hedgerows, plus tree cover within the settlement areas, provides generally good integration of these settlement areas.

The Avon Ring Road (A4174) and associated large scale earth sculpture and engineering works, significantly segment part of the area. It follows a largely rural corridor and is variously prominent within local views or well integrated in cutting. The recent planting infrastructure presently has little visual effect.

The church spire at Warmley is a prominent and distinctive landmark, set within a pocket of urban development nestled within the valley (Photo 10).

The remaining agricultural landscape within the Warmley Brook valley comprises pasture with some rough grass, contained by largely overgrown hedges and intermittent trees. Along the urban edge, the elevated rolling, gently sloping commons at Rodway Hill and Charn Hill, edged to the west and south with steep wooded slopes, have both visually enclosed and open aspects, due to the deciduous woodland edge and textured sporadic clumps of thicket and scrub within rough heath land.

Rodway Common has a clearly defined urban edge to the north and south and is visually prominent and distinctive from numerous urban edge and rural vantage points, due to its elevation.

Siston Common has become more fragmented over time and as a result of the Avon Ring Road. A linear strip to the south of the Bristol and Bath Railway Path, abuts an industrial fringe and is enclosed by housing development to the south (Lower Common). The common continues to the south, with open grassland extending along the Warmley Valley, now divided by the Avon Ring Road (Middle Common) and over the slopes and top of Siston Hill (Upper Common) providing open views of the area.

The amenity landscape of playing fields, school grounds and public open space forms a distinct, but low key, open landscape along the urban edge. These spaces provide an open green buffer and transition between the urban edge and the wider rural landscape, although their character, of mown grass and often limited vegetation structure, can contrast markedly with the adjoining rural landscape. Visually their openness, due to the lack of vegetation, increases the prominence of the settlement edge from the wider area.

The Oldland Ridge to the south forms a distinct linear rural landform of rising ground and skyline, greatly influenced by the adjacent prominent urban edge and audible effect of traffic on the A4175, along its lower slopes. The rural framework of clipped and overgrown hedgerows define the medium and small scale fields adjacent to the settlement edge, with some hedgerows replaced by fencing around paddocks along this edge and post and wire fences along the ridge. The rising ground of the ridge forms a prominent rural backdrop, within views from the urban edge and intermittent views from along the A4175 and A420 corridors.

A powerline following the lower slopes is the only prominent built feature within this rural context. The few scattered farms and properties along lanes, which climb towards the ridge, are small scale and generally well integrated by the vegetation structure.

From the open upper slopes and crown of the ridge, there are extensive views of the urban edge and Bristol to the west and of the large scale landform of the Ashwicke Ridges to the east.

The Changing Landscape

The Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge landscape is influenced, both directly and indirectly, by the close proximity of Bristol to the west and the frequent points of access between the urban and rural areas, provided by the extensive road network. The character area however, has pockets of distinctive rural landscape and areas in variable condition and sensitivity to change.

The western fringe of the Folly Brook valley to the north of the area is greatly influenced by the Bristol urban edge. Development, comprising a residential fringe, A4174 corridor and the industrial character of Emerald Park, has a prominent local influence, due to little integration with or transition into the wider agricultural landscape, which as a result, erodes the character of the adjacent rural area.

Recent structure planting implemented at Emerald Park, as part of the approved scheme will, as it matures, provide a degree of

integration of the new development within the surrounding area. However, the scale and massing of the development is such that, even in the long term, planting has only limited potential to integrate the development within the surrounding small scale landscape structure. It is likely that the buildings will remain visually prominent in the local area and from elevated positions on the adjacent Pucklechurch Ridge.

The character of this rural fringe is further eroded by the presence of derelict farm buildings, a scrap yard, horse paddocks and a lack of active management of the agricultural land/framework, awaiting potential urban expansion.

Small scale settlement at Ram Hill and Henfield is largely well integrated within the framework of hedgerow trees and woodland. The area has a generally tranquil character, although the presence of stables and fences associated with the increase in land use change to 'horsiculture', modern large farm buildings and storage compounds, can detract from this, visually eroding the rural character and resulting in removal or fragmentation of hedgerows.

The visually enclosed nature of this area makes it less sensitive to change. However, the existing settlement pattern is sensitive to infill or incremental changes which might further erode the character and distinctiveness of this part of the character area, without appropriate integration measures.

There is little evidence of active management of much of the existing vegetation framework, or new planting to create succession and sustain the landscape structure in the long term. Without this, the strength of the vegetation framework will decline in the future, potentially reducing its ability to integrate either existing, or future changes. Active management of both the hedgerow and woodland framework would help to ensure the conservation of these key features for the long term. Dependent on the number of hedgerow trees which are allowed to develop, or are planted, the landscape character could become more or less open as a result of hedgerow management, which could influence its future sensitivity to change.

The more prominent development to the east, of Westerleigh Rail Head, abattoir and M4 corridor, reduces the perception of tranquillity and erodes the rural characteristics of the area.

Westerleigh is sensitive to further change which might affect the distinctive linear pattern and historic core of this village. The extension of the village along Shorthill Road, in terms of layout, building style and elevation above the vale, is in marked contrast to the original village core and has diluted the distinctive settlement character. Despite some detracting influences the Folly Brook valley landscape however, does have pockets of distinct character and a good vegetation framework, particularly around the area of Lyde Green, Hallen Farm and associated with the industrial heritage in the area below the Pucklechurch Ridge.

Although the enclosure provided by the strong vegetation framework makes this area less sensitive to change, the landscape remains sensitive to change which would affect the character and setting of the commons and heritage features, or result in the loss of vegetation, which would erode the landscape framework. Any change also has the potential to be visible from the Pucklechurch Scarp, potentially affecting the rural setting and character of this landform. The further encroachment of the urban edge, or expansion of Shortwood Claypit, both have the potential to introduce significant landscape change into this area.

The large scale extension of mineral extraction and subsequent landfill operations at Shortwood Claypit is identified within the Minerals & Waste Local Plan. The works, if undertaken, will inevitably introduce both significant temporary and long term landscape change to the area. The current proposal, approved in principle, plans operational activity over a period of some 20 years. Clay extraction and subsequent landfill and land raising are proposed along the toe of the Pucklechurch Ridge and into a section of the lower scarp face in the adjoining area.

The initial removal of existing vegetation to facilitate the works will erode the landscape framework in the vicinity. However, the change in landform, resulting from the proposed

excavation, screen mounding and stockpiling will have a more significant impact on local landscape character, both in the short and longer term. The clay stockpile, to be sited at the south west corner of the site in open ground, will be particularly prominent, increasing existing ground levels by some 15 metres. The final proposed landform, resulting from land raising over the lower scarp, will produce a locally different profile to the adjacent slopes.

These changes will be visible locally and from the adjacent, elevated Pucklechurch Ridge, affecting the distinctiveness of the character of the locality. The final restoration currently proposed will however restore the whole site, including the existing claypit and reintroduce a landscape framework across the area. New planting will incorporate a hedgerow structure similar to that existing before the works and a much more significant area of woodland, which will link with existing areas, contributing to and strengthening the landscape framework of the local area.

Extensions to the urban area are proposed within a number of locations. The Local Plan identifies an extensive area for employment, business and residential development, adjacent to Emerald Park and Emerson's Green. Planning approval has been granted for the westerly extension of Emerald Park and a new Science Park to the east. Both these sites border the A4174 Avon Ring Road and their development will alter the perception of this road, which presently defines the urban edge.

Emerson's Green East development site covers an extensive area, extending to and along the toe of the Pucklechurch Ridge, contained to the north by the M4.

These developments will result in a significant large scale change in landscape character of the area, which is presently largely under agricultural use. Potentially they may also result in the loss of some or all of the existing landscape framework, which will further affect the character of the area. The M4 will replace the A4174 as the new urban edge. Potentially development may also impact upon the setting of the adjacent Pucklechurch Ridge, which forms a backdrop to this character area.

All these development areas are also visible from elevated positions along the Pucklechurch Ridge, as well as the M4. The area presently forms an important rural fringe, providing a landscape setting around this north eastern edge of Bristol, which will inevitably be lost as a result of development.

Policies are included in the Local Plan which seek to ensure that any proposals for this area take account of the need to protect the character, amenity and distinctiveness of the locality and wider landscape. This will include the effect on Listed Buildings within the site, adjacent industrial archaeology, as well as the effect on SNCIs and common land within or bordering the site.

The Siston Brook valley is a relatively tranquil area, with a characteristic mosaic of strong and intact hedgerows, hedgerow trees and low key pattern of traditional buildings. Siston Conservation Area extends over the upper slopes of the ridge and beyond, into the adjacent character area. The collection of traditional and historic buildings of Siston within this elevated location, makes the visual setting particularly sensitive to change.

The distinctive character of the commons and heathland within the lower Siston Valley are also sensitive to change, such as settlement infill along lanes which cross these areas. The condition and general maintenance of common edge properties greatly affects these spaces. Ad hoc development of sheds and variable maintenance of property boundaries has a detracting influence.

Recreational pressure for 'horsiculture' is evident within many parts of the area, especially north of the M4 around Ram Hill and Henfield, along the urban edge of Bristol and adjacent to the Oldland Ridge at the settlement edge. This change in land use is a recent trend, which in places has led to the loss or erosion of hedgerows. The cumulative effect of this and the associated infrastructure of stables, access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and even floodlighting, can result in a marked change in landscape character.

Woodland planting has been undertaken over the last few years, as part of the Forest of Avon, with approximately 70 hectares planted

along the upper valley sides of Siston Valley and within Warmley Forest Park, on the reclaimed claypit. In the longer term, the planting will strengthen the landscape framework of the locality, at the same time changing the degree of enclosure of the area.

Increasing traffic on the adjacent roads has introduced significant visual and noise disturbance to Siston, Webb's Heath and Bridgegate Commons. The new Avon Ring Road has relieved vehicle pressure on the minor roads and lanes adjacent to the commons, which should enhance their potential for recreational use, linking to the new network of footpaths and cycleways associated with the new road.

The Avon Ring Road, following a rural corridor within the Warmley Valley, has introduced significant visual and physical impact upon the local landscape character. The road corridor and associated junctions, overbridges, large scale earth sculpture, signage and lighting, impart a built form which locally erodes the rural character. The extensive infrastructure planting will however introduce a new vegetation framework to help integrate and minimise these effects in the long term. This planting will be significant in reinforcing the future landscape framework, in an area where management of field boundaries is variable or in decline, due in part to the perceived future potential for development opportunities.

Siston Common has been affected by fragmentation, as a result of the construction of the Avon Ring Road. Part of the common has also become more enclosed by recent residential development at Siston Park on one side and the urban edge on the other. This is likely to bring about changes in character, management, rural associations and an increase in recreational and urban edge pressures.

Recent housing at Carson's Road, adjacent to the Avon Ring Road, presents a harsh built edge with little new planting to help integration, facing the gently rising rural landscape to the east. This built edge affects the rural character experienced along this road corridor. The common at Rodway Hill presently has signs of footpath erosion and is sensitive to inappropriate management which would lead to changes in its character.

Sections of the Dramway have been removed by the construction of the Avon Ring Road. New footpath connections have provided a continuous route, albeit along tarmac paths in close proximity to the road corridor and its traffic.

The Avon Ring Road introduces a potential catalyst for future change, with the mix of common land, school playing fields, public open spaces and remnant agricultural land sandwiched between the urban edge and the road, under further pressure for change.

There are approved proposals for a new high density housing development on agricultural fields to the west of the Avon Ring Road at Siston Hill. This is one of the first of the new, higher density housing schemes, as recommended in PPG 3, to be proposed in South Gloucestershire.

The elevated undulating site will require extensive regrading to accommodate houses, roads and car parking which, in conjunction with the dense pattern of development, will inevitably result in the loss of rural character, as well as the loss of many of the existing mature trees and hedgerow framework.

The siting of houses over the elevated landform, will result in a stepped pattern of buildings and rooflines which will be particularly evident within local to middle distance views from Rodway Common, Siston Common to the west, the Bristol and Bath Railway Path and Pucklechurch Ridge to the east. This visibility will emphasise the extent of the site and density of the development.

To achieve the high density, house frontages will be located in close proximity to the site boundary, resulting in a very prominent and abrupt urban/ rural edge. The limited space along these boundaries for new planting will provide little potential to integrate the new development with the surrounding landscape, or soften the visual impact of the building facades, even in the long term.

A small remnant of Siston Common (Lower Common), to the west of the site, is already partially enclosed to the west by industrial units (screened by a linear belt of trees) and to the south and south east by an area of existing semi-detached housing. The common will be more enclosed physically and visually as a result

of the new development at Siston Hill, which will further erode its rural character.

Presently Siston Hill and the adjacent network of common land form a sequence of open spaces along the urban edge of Kingswood. This rural corridor, contained to the east by the Avon Ring Road, is visually most apparent from Rodway Common and is physically connected by the footpath network. Development of the site will sever the visual connection between the open space network, affecting the landscape character of the locality and the amenity of the open spaces and connecting footpaths.

The limited provision of open space within the development, due to the high density, together with the increase in local population, will also increase the recreational pressure on this network of common land. This has the potential to increase footpath erosion, damage existing vegetation and introduce the need for more formal recreation provision, which could all significantly change the rural character of these open spaces.

Open spaces adjacent to the urban edge presently have visual and some physical links with the wider landscape. Their open character and views are visible both from the urban edge and from within these spaces. These spaces are under pressure from current physical recreational activity and the level of potential future change, particularly from settlement encroachment, which may result in visual severance from the wider rural context.

The ridgelines and hills, generally to the east of the area, form distinct landforms with strong rural character. These include the ridges south of Pomphrey Hill and Shortwood Hill; the open rural hillside and skyline between Orchard Farm and Rodway Common to the west and the continuation of the Pucklechurch Ridge to the east then extending south between Siston Hill, Mounds Court Farm, Webb's Heath area and south along the Oldland Ridge. These ridgelines form natural skylines, with very limited development, which are evident within local views and are therefore sensitive to change which might erode their distinctive character.

The hedgerow framework is a strong, generally intact feature of these ridgelines, with the exception of the Oldland Ridge, where some has already been replaced by fencing.

The Shortwood Lodge Golf Course, north of the Siston Valley, has changed the agricultural field pattern, resulting in a more open landscape and erosion of the rural character. The golf course is most evident where it extends over the upper valley slopes and less so where it is contained below the skyline.

One powerline, particularly along the Oldland Ridge, disturbs the otherwise rural framework of these areas.

The Oldland Ridge to the south has areas where landscape character has been eroded, due to the poor condition of some landscape features and particularly due to the visual prominence of the urban edge, which encroaches upon its lower slopes. Further change along this edge, particularly further urban expansion, will increase this effect and the erosion of the distinctive rural character of the area.

Recent maintenance works to the South Wales to London railway embankment by Network Rail, has had an effect upon the local landscape character just north of Westerleigh.

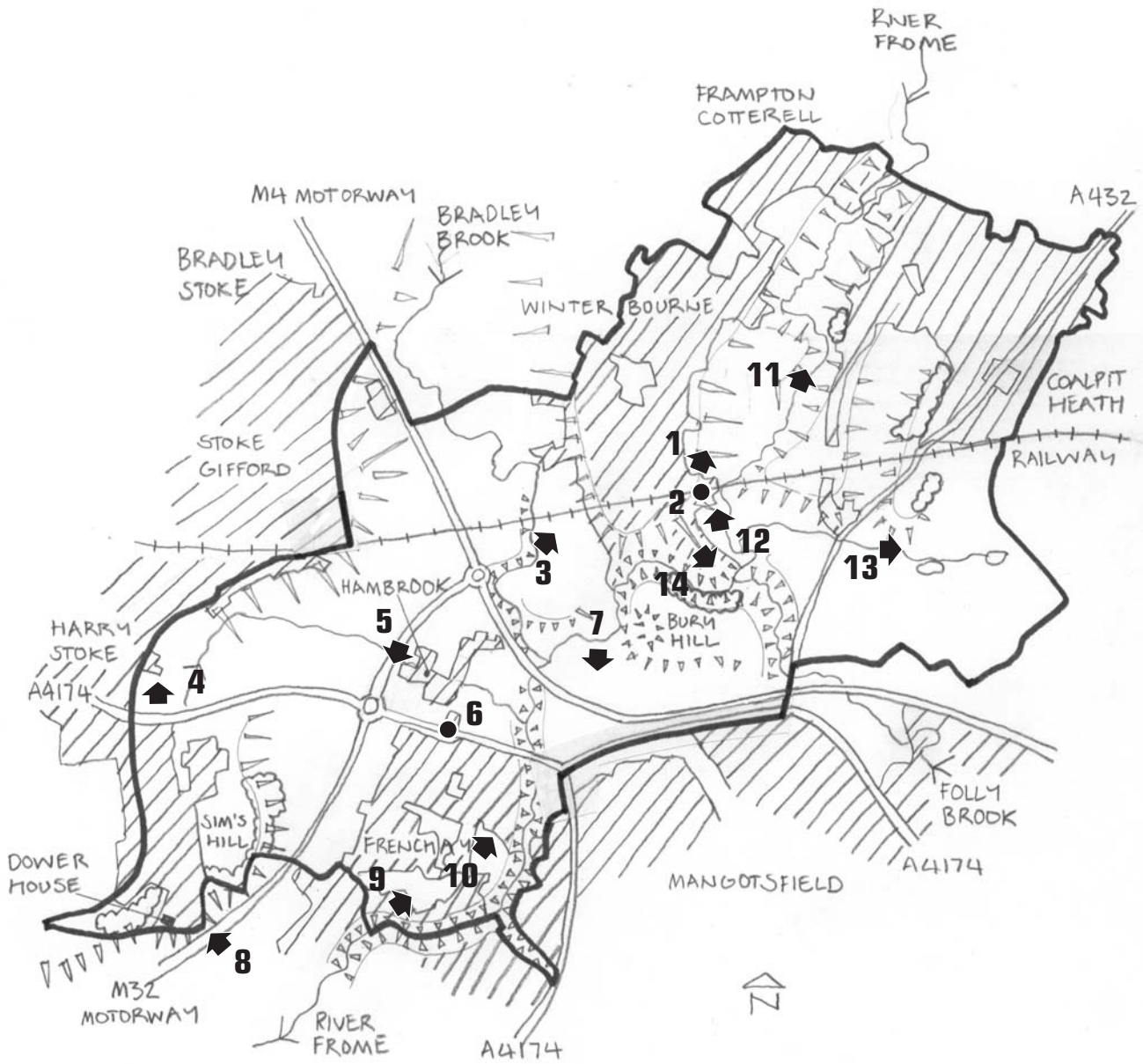
Trees and scrub along the elevated slopes of the embankment previously formed a natural backdrop, making this feature unobtrusive within local views. This vegetation backdrop also combined with the wider hedgerow framework to form a strong landscape structure, particularly evident within more elevated views from the Pucklechurch Ridge.

The removal of some trees and scrub has introduced a more open character and revealed the artificial horizontal skyline of the embankment, making this a more prominent local feature, as well as increasing the perception of the railway itself.

Embankment stabilisation works currently proposed along the South Wales to London railway embankment, within the adjacent Frome Valley character area, may indicate that maintenance works could extend into this area in the future. Further loss of vegetation on the section of embankment at Westerleigh is likely to have a significant effect on local character, increasing the openness of the area and eroding the integrity of the landscape framework.



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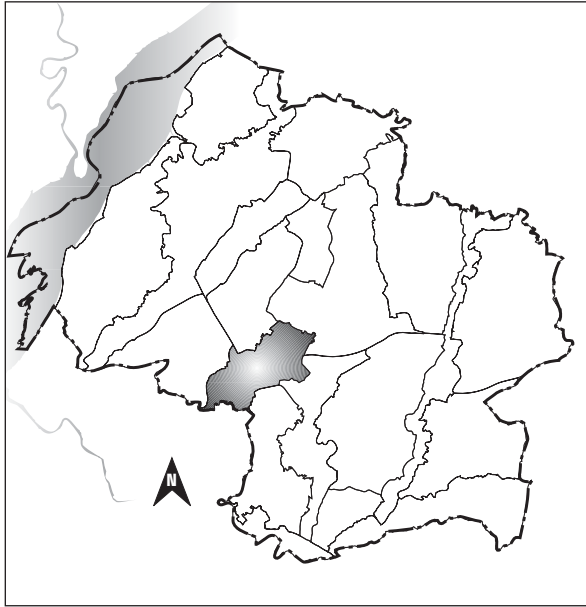


Key

➡₁₅ Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

**Figure 45:
Frome Valley - Sketch Map**



The Frome Valley character area is a diverse, enclosed, intricate combination of agriculture and settlement, divided by major roads.

Key Characteristics

- Undulating landform, with shallow valleys of the River Frome and Bradley Brook / Folly Brook tributaries. The River Frome follows a meandering incised course, through small gorges adjacent to Bury Hill and Frenchay.
- Some areas have a more remote/ tranquil character, with others contained and influenced by settlement boundaries and a dense network of roads.
- Rural areas comprising a mix of medium sized pasture and arable fields, with some limited common land. Small fields are located nearer settlement with a more mixed land use, including some paddocks, plant nurseries, recreation grounds and storage compounds. One golf course lies in the south east.
- Boundaries formed by a variety of hedges and post and wire fencing, with Pennant stone walls near settlement. Tree cover is generally a common feature, but is more variable along settlement boundaries.

- Woodland is associated with Stoke Park, Sims' Hill, Bury Hill, Frome Valley and railway embankments. Scattered smaller areas are associated with the Bradley Brook and former small scale quarry sites.
- Diverse settlement patterns relate to the historic layout and expansion of former village centres. Winterbourne, Frampton Cotterell and Coalpit Heath form a distinct horseshoe shape. Hamlets, farms and residential properties are scattered across the wider rural landscape.
- Distinct historic features include Bury Hill Fort (SAM), Stoke Park (listed parkland) and Whiteshill village green. The Conservation Areas of Hambrook and Frenchay form distinctive settlements with associated landscape settings.
- The landscape is influenced locally by the concentration of road infrastructure, the M32/M4 corridors and railway embankments. A number of railway viaducts form prominent landmarks. Pylon towers and powerlines influence the south west.

Location

The Frome Valley landscape character area is located centrally on the south western boundary of South Gloucestershire, taking in the eastern fringes of Harry Stoke and Stoke Gifford, Frenchay and the settlements of Winterbourne, Frampton Cotterell and Coalpit Heath to the north.

The boundary of the area is defined to the north west, north and north east by the settlement edge of Winterbourne, Frampton Cotterell and Coalpit Heath. The eastern boundary follows the edge of the Kendleshire Golf Course, the A4174 partly defining the northern edge of Bromley Heath, Mangotsfield, Downend and the eastern upper edge of the Frome Valley. The southern boundary follows the South Gloucestershire/Bristol City administrative boundary around Frenchay, across the M32 corridor, taking in part of Stoke Park. The western boundary follows the approximate crown of a broad ridgeline through Stoke Park,

variously including development and the urban edges of Harry Stoke and Stoke Gifford. (See Figures 46 & 48).

Physical Influences

The underlying geology is diverse, varying from a mix of alluvium and sandstone to the west, leading into a mix of Coal Measures and shale to the east. Soils are generally Brown Earth Loam.

The geology, in conjunction with the drainage pattern of the River Frome, Bradley Brook and Folly Brook, has produced largely distinct, simple valley landforms of gentle vale, broad but shallow 'V'-shaped valleys, with some smaller areas of more complex and irregular, steep sided valleys and undulating landform. Topography generally varies between 30 metres in the valleys to 60 - 70 metres a.o.d. on the ridges, reaching 75 metres a.o.d. at Sims' Hill and 80 metres a.o.d. at the southern end of the ridge at Winterbourne.

The landform has been most significantly shaped by the River Frome, which flows southwards through Frampton Cotterell, Winterbourne Down and Frenchay. Its upper reaches form an asymmetric and sometimes irregular, broad but shallow 'V'-shaped valley, the river flowing within a sinuous channel and meandering around a low hill at Cloisters, creating a scarp slope to the east of the river. The valley slopes rise to a small, rounded ridgeline to the east (beyond which lies a parallel dry valley) and to a broader, flatter and higher ridge to the west, occupied by Winterbourne.

Further south, the river is contained within a small narrow gorge and the steep sided slopes of Bury Hill. The river again passes through a small incised valley and gorge through Frenchay, before flowing south west, beyond this character area, through Bristol and into the River Avon. A number of tributaries join the River Frome from different directions, the most notable being the Bradley Brook to the west and the Folly Brook to the east.

The Bradley Brook follows an irregular meandering course southwards from the adjoining character area, before forming a small, incised valley in the area of Whiteshill, before joining the River Frome.

The western area comprises part of a larger vale which runs north-south, contained by broad low lying ridges, occupied by Winterbourne and Mangotsfield to the east and Harry Stoke and Stoke Gifford to the west. The continuation of this ridge along the south western boundary forms a scarp slope within Stoke Park and Sims' Hill, continuing southwards beyond this character area.

Land Cover

The land cover of this character area is a diverse mix of rural uses, contained and variously influenced by settlement areas, urban edge, roads and railway.

To the north, the land within the River Frome valley is contained on three sides by settlement. It consists of rolling pasture of small to medium sized and regular shaped fields, enclosed common at Hicks Common and some horse paddocks near the settlement edge. A small area of woodland covers the steep scarp slope above the River Frome, opposite Cloisters. Fields are divided by a mix of clipped, intermittent and overgrown hedges (Photo 1).

There are frequent mature deciduous trees within hedgerows and along settlement boundaries. Post and wire and timber fencing is also present, particularly on the upper slopes close to the settlement edge. Pennant sandstone walls are common, associated with the settlement edge and roads.

Further south, tree cover and woodland generally increases, associated with the Frome Valley and dry valley to the east; a number of small disused and overgrown quarries along the Frome Valley between Winterbourne and Frenchay; along the Bradley Brook valley; the M4 and M32 verges and embankments; and the high South Wales to London railway embankments.

In this area, the River Frome is contained by a narrow corridor of dense riparian shrub vegetation and occasional trees, with linear woodland associated with the gorges near Bury Hill and Frenchay and elsewhere along steep river banks.

South of Winterbourne, the upper slopes of Bury Hill are heavily wooded, with a mix of mature deciduous trees and Scots pine. This is combined with overgrown hedges and Pennant stone walls, often in a state of disrepair (Photo 3). Bury Hill Fort (a SAM) is located on the broad hill top, above steep slopes of the River Frome and comprises earth ramparts; the western boundary has been damaged by quarrying. On the lower slopes towards the M4, the medium sized, sometimes irregular shaped, pastoral fields and areas of rough grassland include fenced field boundaries, with some stone walls, hedges and fewer trees (Photo 7). To the east lie small fields and a tree lined stream course within a small, tight valley section of the Folly Brook.

Further east again, lies a regular pattern of medium sized fields and the Kendleshire Golf Course, which retains most of the former agricultural hedgerows and tree structure amongst fairways and greens (Photo 13). A recent 9 - hole course extension to the north west comprises ground modelling and open grassland, with native tree and shrub planting. Some existing vegetation has been retained within this new land use.

The dense settlement pattern of Winterbourne, Frampton Cotterell and Coalpit Heath includes a mix of public open spaces, school grounds, playing fields and broad verges/village greens. These punctuate the settlement edge or are integrated within the settlement fabric.

A small section of the Bradley Brook valley lies to the west and below Winterbourne, continuing southwards into the adjacent character area. Regular shaped pasture fields are defined partly by overgrown, intermittent hedgerows, some containing dead elm, with some trees and scrub along the course of the brook and timber fences around some paddocks. Fields become more irregular where they abut the meandering Bradley Brook.

Sections of linear woodland line the incised valley of the Bradley Brook further southwards, in the area of Whiteshill, and also follow the railway and M4 embankments.

A village green at Whiteshill, used as a cricket pitch, is edged by roads and mature trees and is partly contained by stone walls and some scattered buildings and cottages.

Sandwiched between the M4, M32 and A4174 a regular, medium to small sized field pattern is associated with the village of Hambrook, divided by Pennant stone walls, hedgerows, hedgebanks and mature trees, remnant orchards and small fragmented pasture and paddocks. To the east of Bromley Heath lies a narrow strip of rough grassland and paddocks. Former field boundaries have largely disappeared, with containment now provided by roadside tree planting.

Within the M32 corridor, the broad vale is defined by the urban edge of Harry Stoke and Stoke Gifford to the west, the M4 to the north and Frenchay to the east. It is characterised by a mix of medium sized, regular fields of pasture and arable land, with some horse paddocks adjacent to roads and the urban edge. Fields are divided by a mix of clipped or overgrown hedges, some containing hedgerow trees, including some dead elms and fences. Nearer to the urban edges lie Filton Cemetery, plant nurseries, a caravan storage area, recreation area and paddocks. The boundaries of these non - agricultural sites are variously formed by overgrown hedgerows, conifer hedges, or timber fences.

Pennant sandstone walls follow lanes which extend into this area from Hambrook and Frenchay.

To the south west, woodland, scrub and unimproved grassland cover Sims' Hill. Adjacent parkland within Stoke Park, a listed historic park (Photo 8), comprises large areas of woodland on the ridgeline, with open grassland covering steep rolling slopes. The park partly lies within this area, extending south westwards into the Bristol authority area. The built area of Frenchay includes a variety of open spaces, with the wooded Frome Valley connecting to parkland pasture, commons and village greens. These spaces are contained within a framework of groups of mature ornamental trees, both deciduous and coniferous specimens and numerous stone cottages and large houses. (Photo 9 and Photo 10).

Horse paddocks are scattered throughout the character area, and are often associated with the edge of settlements, or in close proximity, accessed by the many roads which cross the

landscape. They are found particularly within the Frome Valley, along the edge of Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell; in the Bradley Brook valley adjacent to Winterbourne and the M4; occasionally within the M32 corridor; between the M4, M32 and A4174; and adjacent to Hambrook.

Settlement and Infrastructure

Winterbourne, Frampton Cotterell and Coalpit Heath form a distinct horseshoe shaped area of settlement, located on raised ground, partly enclosing the River Frome valley in this location.

These historic villages developed from a series of farms located along the pattern of lanes. Hamlets of Pennant stone cottages and large houses, developed in the 18th and 19th century to house workers in the local coal mines, hat making industry and associated with the agricultural economy.

Victorian and later 20th century development introduced brick buildings and infill development, resulting in the coalescence of the three villages.

The small scale, tight pattern of older Pennant stone cottages, with stone wall boundaries, edge the typically winding pattern of small lanes (Photo 14). More recent buildings have extended out from the historic core and typically form linear development along main roads, e.g. at Coalpit Heath and Park Lane. Some more recent infill development has impinged on the horseshoe settlement pattern, extending into the adjoining rural landscape.

The type of stone used throughout the character area for walls, bridges and buildings is predominantly Pennant sandstone, with some imported limestone and Old Red sandstone.

Small scale disused Pennant sandstone quarry sites are scattered extensively within and adjacent to the River Frome valley. Many have existed since Roman times and are now largely vegetated.

A few scattered farms and buildings occur within the Frome Valley, adjacent valley to the

east, the Bradley Brook valley and land north of the M4. Elsewhere, farm buildings are generally associated with hamlets and villages, or have been absorbed within the edge of the urban area.

Four brick railway viaducts are highly prominent, distinctive landmarks crossing the River Frome (Photo 2) and Bradley Brook valleys and roads from east to west. The M4 is crossed by a more recent metal railway bridge.

Hambrook village comprises 18th and 19th century Pennant stone cottages, farmsteads, large houses, church and village green, clustered at a junction of lanes extending in a linear pattern outwards. Stone boundary walls extend along some lanes. The Conservation Area boundary includes the village and its setting, extending largely to the confines of the M32, M4 and River Frome.

Frenchay village, to the south of the area, comprises a diverse pattern of settlement and open space and is also designated a Conservation Area. The phases of historic development were influenced first by the 18th century milling industry, with stone cottages and buildings adjacent to the River Frome. Large houses, stately homes, manors and churches sympathetically relate to open common land and contain smaller green spaces. The sometimes irregular pattern of winding lanes and alley ways descend into the Frome Valley. Buildings are constructed from a range of Pennant stone, limestone, brick and render, with stone boundary walls lining some lanes.

Frenchay Hospital site lies to the west, within the grounds of Frenchay Park. The Conservation Area extends within the park, to include playing fields and open space along the park's southern and eastern boundary, but excludes the main hospital complex, which comprises a dense pattern of buildings, with its chimneys and distinctive water tower.

North of the Conservation Area boundary and hospital, Frenchay also contains 20th century residential development of housing, flats and bungalows. This area extends both north to the A4174 and then eastwards along the A4174 to the River Frome, with Bromley Heath continuing eastwards and into the adjacent area. In combination these settlements define

the urban edge to the agricultural landscape along the M4 corridor (Photo 7). The city of Bristol extends southwards beyond this area.

To the north east of Hambrook, beyond the M4, the settlements near Bury Hill such as Whiteshill, Pye Corner Moorend and Kendleshire, largely consist of older stone and render cottages and houses, clustered at road junctions or form scattered linear development, along the complex network of minor roads and lanes.

To the west, within the M32 corridor, limited settlement is scattered within the agricultural vale, which is defined by the urban edge of Stoke Gifford and Harry Stoke to the west (Photo 4) and Frenchay to the east. Rural settlement consists of scattered, isolated stone built farms/houses, a mix of more recent properties and a nursery complex with glasshouses. Stone boundary walls often surround the houses and line roads and lanes.

The adjacent urban edge to the west forms an irregular edge and in places extends over the skyline, onto the upper slopes within this area.

The variety of development along this boundary includes, from south to north, the stately Dower House in Stoke Park (Photo 8), the large institutional building complex of the University of the West of England (UWE), with adjacent commercial offices, hotel and grounds. A residential fringe defines a significant length of the remaining western boundary, with a small cluster of houses, stone farm buildings and stone walls along a lane at Harry Stoke and a more regular linear pattern of houses, with rear gardens lining this edge of the character area, at Stoke Gifford.

North of the railway line, on high ground, lies a recent development of town houses, a complex of large office buildings and car parks, set within a landscape framework, with the housing edge of Bradley Stoke in the north. Below, on lower ground adjacent to the M4, is a large industrial type building.

To the east of the M32, a relatively narrow green corridor edged by Frenchay, contains an irregular, ad hoc mix of sheds, nursery poly-tunnels, houses, light industrial sheds, caravans and stable blocks.

Numerous roads cross the character area and variously define settlement, or divide the landscape and influence settlement pattern.

The M4 and M32 with associated junctions, slip roads and overbridges largely include road sections at grade or on embankment. Part of the M32/M4 junction and M32 approach is in cutting (Photo 5). The M4 crosses over several country lanes and the River Frome and is itself crossed by the South Wales to London railway. The railway generally crosses the area on high embankments or viaducts and is only in cutting through the ridge on which Winterbourne lies.

The A432, A4174, B4058, B4427 and numerous minor roads and lanes pass through the area largely at grade (Photo 6).

A number of public footpaths cross the area, including the Frome Valley Walkway and Community Forest Path, both major recreational routes, which connect the urban area of Bristol to the wider landscape to the north and west.

The Frome Valley Walkway closely follows the course of the River Frome through this area, from Bristol in the south to the wider landscape to the north. It mainly follows the enclosed valley/gorge through Frenchay, beneath the A4174 and M4, within or along the edge of the narrow gorge between Bury Hill and Winterbourne Down, through the open valley to Frampton Cotterell and then beyond the area, into the wider countryside.

The Community Forest Path passes from east to west, following a tributary valley of the Frome, the River Frome crossing Bury Hill to the south of Winterbourne, through Hambrook and then rising to Stoke Gifford and out of the area.

Three overhead powerlines follow a tight corridor to the west, crossing the Bradley Brook valley, the M4, through part of the M32 corridor and then rising towards Harry Stoke and beyond.

Landscape Character

The Frome Valley landscape character area is a diverse and intricate area. The concentrations of major settlement and smaller settlement pattern are contained within a rural framework of varying scale and character. The area is defined in part to the south by the urban edge of Bristol. A dense network of road and rail infrastructure cross and segment the area.

The combination of some of the key characteristics of the area, the undulating landform, plus the varied and textured vegetation structure, help to integrate some of the settlement edges, urban edge and roads within the wider landscape. Despite the extensive areas of settlement and urban edges, there are areas of the landscape and pockets within settlements which retain, or largely retain, a distinct rural character.

To the north, both the Frome Valley and dry valley to the east, comprise an undulating rural valley landscape which is visually contained by adjacent ridgelines, the 'horseshoe' shaped pattern of Winterbourne, Frampton Cotterell and Coalpit Heath and the railway embankment to the south. The rolling pasture, intermittent thick hedgerow structure, mature trees and occasional areas of woodland provide local visual enclosure, with numerous internal views possible from more elevated locations and from the settlement edges of Winterbourne and parts of Frampton Cotterell.

The more limited presence of hedgerows (largely replaced by timber / wire fences, in some places associated with paddocks) along the upper slopes of the Frome Valley, increases the prominence of the settlement edges of Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell locally within this valley. Similarly, the linear housing pattern along Park Lane and ridgeline to the south of Frampton Cotterell, is visually evident from within the dry valley to the east. A short section of Coalpit Heath edges the eastern side of this valley, but remains well screened by Blackberry Brake woodland. Recent housing development within the north eastern corner of this valley is also largely well integrated behind a strong, intact boundary of overgrown hedgerows and mature trees and has a minimal influence on the wider landscape.

Within these valleys and away from the settlement edges, the visual balance of landform and vegetation creates a strong rural character and a degree of tranquillity which contrasts strongly with the surrounding settlement.

The course of the River Frome, throughout this character area, follows a largely enclosed wooded valley with the perception of a tranquil and relatively remote character, in spite of its close proximity to settlement at Frampton Cotterell, Winterbourne and Frenchay (Photo 11). The river and Frome Valley Walkway provide a continuous corridor linking the centre of Bristol to the south, through this area, to the wider countryside north of Frampton Cotterell.

Within and along the edges of the larger settlement areas of Winterbourne, Frampton Cotterell and Coalpit Heath, as well as at Whiteshill, there are smaller locally distinct landscape pockets, formed through the combination and arrangement of open space and built environment.

- On the northern edge of Frampton Cotterell, St Peter's Church forms a local landmark adjacent to the River Frome within the adjoining character area. It forms a focal point along the road corridor, which has a sequence of roadside greens and breaks within the scattered roadside development of houses and farm buildings.
- At Flaxpits, on the eastern edge of Winterbourne, the large duck pond is partially contained by prominent tall Pennant stone walls, mature roadside trees to the north and a large period house to the east. With views overlooking the Frome Valley, this area has a distinct rural character.
- To the south west of Winterbourne, the village green at Whiteshill forms a distinct and unenclosed area of grassland with mature trees and forms a focal point at the junction of several local minor roads. These roads edge the open space, with traditional stone houses, cottages and some stone walls in the immediate locality both containing and contributing to the distinctive character of the area.

- Within Coalpit Heath, the churchyard of St Saviour's Church, with mature trees, stone wall boundary and adjacent school playing fields, form a distinctive open area along the otherwise enclosed, linear built character of the A432.

The railway viaducts are distinctive, large scale local landmarks, prominent within the Frome and Bradley Brook valleys. The viaduct across the Frome Valley both emphasises and complements the valley form viewed from the north and south, whilst greatly limiting views into and beyond this area (Photo 12).

The railway embankments are also large scale features, physically cutting across the Frome and Bradley Brook valleys and blocking views along them. The strong woodland cover on the slopes reinforces this enclosure and, due to the height of the embankments, contributes significantly to landscape structure, as well as camouflaging the large scale linear skyline of these structures, reducing their prominence within the landscape.

In the south and east of the area, the tree cover and woodland creates an enclosed and secluded landscape. Around Bury Hill Camp) and to the south and westwards towards Hambrook, the combination of diverse landform, woodland and complex mix of small settlements, creates a distinctive, small scale and intimate landscape.

This area has a strong character, the historic hilltop location forming a prominent feature in the locality and offering extensive views south through mature woodland, over fields, woodland and copses towards Bristol. Stone walling and Scots pine are distinctive features over parts of the lower slopes of the hill (Photo 3), although the area also has wire fence boundaries and is generally less enclosed by trees.

The M4 which passes through this area on a low embankment, with associated high traffic levels, influences the immediate surrounding landscape visually and audibly.

The scattered settlements just north of the M4, of Whiteshill, Pye Corner, Moorend and Kendleshire, are small scale clustered or linear settlements, generally well integrated within a strong vegetation framework, maintaining the

rural character of the locality. Whilst Whiteshill is distinctive, centred on the village green, to the south part of the settlement is overshadowed by the M4.

To the east of the A432, the Kendleshire Golf Course has introduced a different landscape structure, compared to the adjacent agricultural landscape. A more open landscape of mown fairways, low mounding, remnant hedgerows and hedgerow trees and young planting is evident within views from the A432 and occasionally elsewhere from the site's boundary.

New boundary walling, as part of a recent development adjacent to the A432, contrasts with the architectural style and materials of the more traditional Pennant stone walling found elsewhere within this character area, influencing the rural character of this locality.

The historic intricate pattern and character of Hambrook village, with walled boundaries, woodland pockets and mature trees remains intact and forms a distinctive island within this area. Smaller, fragmented fields of pasture and paddocks and the encompassing road network however, have some peripheral local influence within this area.

The village of Frenchay has a unique and distinctive village character, largely contained by period residential properties and a mature ornamental tree structure. The character of this area is largely intact with very limited intrusion of modern buildings, resulting in a sympathetic inter-relationship between architecture and the various open spaces, including village greens, commons and parkland, with a sweeping rural valley landform descending to the wooded gorge of the River Frome.

Views within Frenchay are largely internal, with some longer views over Bristol to the south gained from above the Frome Valley.

Within the area as a whole, the older pattern of lanes and minor roads are largely well integrated within hedgerows or Pennant stone walls (nearer older settlements) with 'cock and hen' coping, or where their alignment follows the natural landform and/or relates well to the agricultural field pattern.

This pattern has been overlain and bisected by the contrasting character of the more recent M4, M32 and railway network. Due to the frequency with which these routes cross each other and the undulating landform, this area contains a number of substantial embankments, overbridges and road junctions. Road and rail embankments are typically well vegetated, but physically divide and visually contain/ segment some areas, particularly to the west and north of Hambrook.

Road and rail overbridges have also generally increased the visibility of traffic and range of audible impact upon the landscape. These vantages can also be significant in permitting views across the landscape of this area.

The broad landscape corridors to the west of the area, through which the M4 and M32 pass, are variously influenced by the settlement edges, urban edge developments and land use change, scattered within an agricultural landscape. The asymmetric green corridor followed by the M32 in addition, forms an important gateway to Bristol (Photo 5). The road network frequently segments this part of the character area and often defines discrete areas of landscape, as follows:

■ Bradley Brook, adjacent to Winterbourne:

The western settlement edge of Winterbourne is visible along the Winterbourne ridge, above the Bradley Brook valley. To the south it is well integrated by the strong vegetation framework, comprising the wooded backdrop of Bury Hill and by a foreground rural framework of hedgerows, some small copses and the wooded railway embankment. Garden trees and vegetation within the settlement also soften building facades and rooflines. The linear housing pattern along the B4057 and B4058 is however more prominent, visibly extending over the lower ridgeline slopes, adjacent to open fields and horse paddocks, with little integration.

The textured vegetation structure within this part of the Bradley Brook valley, comprises dense riparian trees and scrub along the meandering stream course and some adjacent overgrown and intermittent hedgerows. Dead elms are evident in some

hedgerows. Timber fences around some horse paddocks locally increase the openness of this area.

This area is physically enclosed to the south and west by the tree lined railway and M4 embankments and influenced by Stoke Gifford urban edge further to the west.

Views extend over the valley from the M4 and adjacent settlement edges. Within these views, the pylon towers are a prominent feature.

■ Eastern setting to Stoke Gifford (west of the M4, north of the railway embankment):

The western boundary is formed by the built edge of Stoke Gifford. Recent development of town houses near Hillside Farm, forms a prominent hard skyline, within middle and long distance views from the west and south.

The roofscape of large commercial buildings are also prominent along the skyline. Although set beyond the ridgeline, the scale of these buildings and lack of planting provides limited integration in local and middle distance views.

The recreational fields, on the slopes below this edge, occupy former agricultural land, with their mown grassland contrasting visually with the adjacent pasture fields.

Further north beyond the B4057, the built edge comprises dense housing and compound area with a low building, caravans and storage containers. These form a prominent built edge along the skyline.

On lower ground next to the M4, a large white industrial building is locally prominent, but largely screened in views from the east by recent mound construction at Green Acres Farm, in the adjacent character area.

The remaining agricultural landscape adjacent to Stoke Gifford retains its rural characteristics, with pasture fields and intact hedgerows over open slopes. The largely traditional building cluster of Mulgrove Farm is prominent, but integrated within the hedgerow framework.

■ Eastern setting to Harry Stoke (west of

the M32, south of the railway and north of the A4174):

This area has a strong rural, agricultural character, given the generally intact hedgerow pattern (some overgrown and including hedgerow trees) with pasture/arable land use. Some dead elm trees are evident within hedgerows closer to the road network.

The settlement edge on the ridgeline at Harry Stoke and Stoke Gifford is visible on the skyline in the middle distance, but is largely integrated by the intervening hedgerows, trees and garden vegetation, within views from lower slopes near the M32. This gives the motorway a generally rural setting to the west, contributing significantly to the strategic green corridor within which the M32 lies, that penetrates into the urban area of Greater Bristol. More recent development on the ridgeline at Harry Stoke is less well integrated as a result of its location and lack of vegetation structure and consequently has a greater influence on the rural character.

The pylons and powerlines which cross the lower slopes of this area are however prominent features in local views.

In local views adjacent to Harry Stoke, the built edge, comprising the University of the West of England (UWE) complex and the roofscapes of commercial and business warehouses, is prominent, with limited vegetation structure to provide integration. Development of student accommodation currently taking place at UWE will increase the visual prominence of buildings along this built edge.

The rotunda building of AXA Sun Life, within the adjacent area to the west, is tall enough to be visible from near the character area boundary and forms a distinctive landmark.

- Eastern setting to Coldharbour Lane development (west of the M32 and south of the A4174):

The agricultural character is less distinct, as a result of the proportionally greater range of other development and land uses, comprising some scattered houses, plant

nursery, a hotel, its grounds and adjacent sports field. The agricultural field pattern of hedgerows, mature hedgerow trees and frequent tree/tall hedgerow boundaries around non-agricultural land uses however, forms a strong vegetation framework which largely integrates these elements.

The rising slopes behind, include Sims' Hill woodland, a distinctive and prominent landscape feature along the ridgeline and upper slopes. A complex of large business units further north, along the edge of the ridgeline and the UWE complex behind, however forms a prominent built skyline feature, in views from the M32.

This contrasts with the landscape to the south, where the Dower House, steep parkland slopes and wooded ridges of Stoke Park, have a distinctive character and form an important landmark, visible from the M32 and extensive areas of Bristol to the south. The parkland character and ridgeline continue south westwards into the Bristol City Council area. The steep slopes and ridgeline on which the Dower House sits, also extends north westwards to the wooded slopes of Sims' Hill.

Housing development within the old Stoke Park Hospital site, behind the Dower House, is largely contained and screened by woodland and the house itself. Housing is however evident where it has encroached upon the skyline, within a gap between woodland and the Dower House.

The recent addition of housing within the park is also visible within local views adjacent to the Dower House and has changed the architectural balance and symmetry of the existing house.

This new development however uses continuity of architectural features, such as the building plinth and recessed position of the new building, to one side and behind the main façade of the Dower House, to aid integration.

- Westerly setting to Frenchay (east of the M32, south of the A4174):

This area comprises a strip of mixed agriculture, nursery grounds, gardens, horse paddocks, and a caravan storage

compound, and contains a variety of scattered buildings. These features are partly integrated by the often limited intermittent hedgerows/hedgerow trees and conifers.

This area provides a buffer to the prominent urban edge of linear housing and Frenchay Hospital (the water tower and chimneys are prominent in many local views). This edge however has very little vegetation structure to provide visual integration.

The M32 is visually and audibly prominent within its locality, particularly where it is on embankment. Elsewhere it is partly screened by maturing roadside tree planting.

In a number of locations across the character area, the change in land use from agriculture has disrupted the vegetation framework, through changes in the management regime of hedgerows and/or the replacement of hedgerows and timber fences. This is particularly evident in relation to horse paddocks, but also occurs in relation to other non-agricultural land uses. The consequences of this have been the creation of a more open landscape character than adjacent fields, which in relation to horse paddocks has increased the visibility of stables, parked vehicles, open storage, jumps and other associated features.

The Changing Landscape

The Frome Valley landscape character area is a diverse and intricate area, greatly influenced by the historic evolution and extensive pattern of settlement, infrastructure and the close proximity of the city of Bristol and the influences of this large population centre. The rural landscape of this area has therefore, in places, been significantly influenced visually and/or physically by settlement edges and the demands and pressures for development, including housing employment and educational facilities.

In addition pressures for other land use change, to non-agricultural uses, are evident within

parts of this character area, with a resultant replacement of traditional agricultural practices and evolution of the rural landscape. Such changes, particularly at the urban edge or settlement edge, in places include the introduction of nurseries with accompanying 'poly' tunnels and buildings, the provision of sports facilities or recreation fields, horse paddocks and, storage compounds accompanied by rough ground and buildings. These pressures for change can also affect the management or integrity of key features which contribute to local distinctiveness of an area.

Boundary hedgerows are often not actively managed as a result of these land use changes. Some hedgerows along a number of rural roads and close to the urban edge within the M32 and M4 corridors contain dead elm trees which are particularly evident in summer. The cyclical pattern of growth, decline and regeneration of elm, influences the condition, integrity, appearance and the degree of openness of the landscape framework in the locality. Their eventual decay or removal will also result in noticeable landscape change.

Some agricultural fields near settlement edges show signs of minimal use, with the resultant development of tall grassland cover and/or scrub, as has developed along Sims' Hill through a lack of grazing.

Stone wall boundaries around Hambrook and south of Winterbourne are also in a variable state of repair, which will decline further without appropriate management. Buildings and structures within the non-agricultural land uses are often in a poor state of repair or unmaintained.

The increased use of small lanes by commuter traffic, in places has caused the erosion of verges, banks, hedges and walls. The effects are often subtle, but lead to an erosion in the condition of features which contribute to local character. An increase in traffic volumes or perceived need for highway improvement measures has the potential to introduce standard highway design solutions including kerbs, new signage and materials. These could have a localised, but cumulative effect, eroding the existing landscape character.

Recreational pressure for 'horsiculture' is evident, particularly within the Frome and

Bradley Brook valleys adjacent to settlements, along the M32 corridor, between the M4, M32 and A4174 and adjacent to Hambrook. This change in land use is a recent trend, which in places has led to the loss or erosion of hedgerows or, in some instances, to the subdivision of fields. The cumulative effect of this and the associated infrastructure of stables, access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and even floodlighting, can result in a marked change in landscape character.

Kendleshire Golf Course, with its recent extension, has resulted in the reshaping of fields and loss of hedgerows and vegetation in the creation of fairways. Although the site is largely contained by boundary vegetation, this new landscape is partly evident from the A432. New planting measures will, in time, provide a new landscape structure and help integrate this land use change with its surroundings.

A section of new boundary wall adjacent to recent development along the A432 is a locally prominent feature and an example of how the lack of reference to the local vernacular, in materials, design, or the rural context of the site, can erode local distinctiveness.

The current pattern of and relationship between settlements or urban areas and their adjoining rural setting, which gives an area its distinctive character, is sensitive to change.

- The Frome Valley, dry valley to the east, Bradley Brook valley, river corridors and Bury Hill are sensitive to further encroachment of settlement edges or change, which might erode their distinctive pattern, rural character or their perception of relative remoteness and tranquillity.
- Scattered settlements such as Winterbourne Down, Whiteshill, Kendleshire, Moorend, Pye Corner and Hambrook are sensitive to incremental infill, or erosion of the vegetation framework and field pattern, which give them their local distinctiveness.
- This applies also to the settlement edges of Winterbourne, Frampton Cotterell and Coalpit Heath, which contain pockets of older buildings and development pattern, which have a distinctive character.

- Village greens, public open spaces, common land and school grounds punctuate these areas of settlement, providing visual and recreational amenity and a physical break within the built environment. Loss of such spaces can have a significant impact on the particular character of such localities.
- The condition of landscape features within the visual setting and open spaces of Hambrook and Frenchay contribute greatly to their character. Such features would therefore be sensitive to change, but are afforded a greater degree of protection as a result of their Conservation Area status.
- Green ridgelines, which remain intact at Stoke Park and Sims' Hill and which are partly intact between Harry Stoke and Bradley Stoke, are sensitive to visual encroachment of the urban edge, particularly from large built forms and infill. These areas are especially visible from road corridors and from elevated hillsides. The effect of such encroachment is already visible in some areas, where their visual prominence affects the rural character of adjacent areas.

The strong vegetation pattern along road and railway embankments and its interconnection with the wider hedgerow pattern and frequent mature trees, greatly assist in the integration of these linear, large scale features. Loss of this vegetation structure through changes in, lack of management, or removal, has the potential to significantly increase the prominence and impact of these features and the trains/vehicles moving along them.

The embankment stabilisation works proposed by Network Rail, between the River Frome and Coalpit Heath in the interests of safety, will result in the removal of trees from significant areas of embankments, increasing the openness of the area and reducing the integrity of the landscape framework. The resultant significant impact on character and visual amenity of both the local and the wider landscape, will in the long term be reduced as a result of the replanting proposed by Network Rail.

A key characteristic of the character area is its varied vegetation structure, which contributes to the integration of the diverse range of

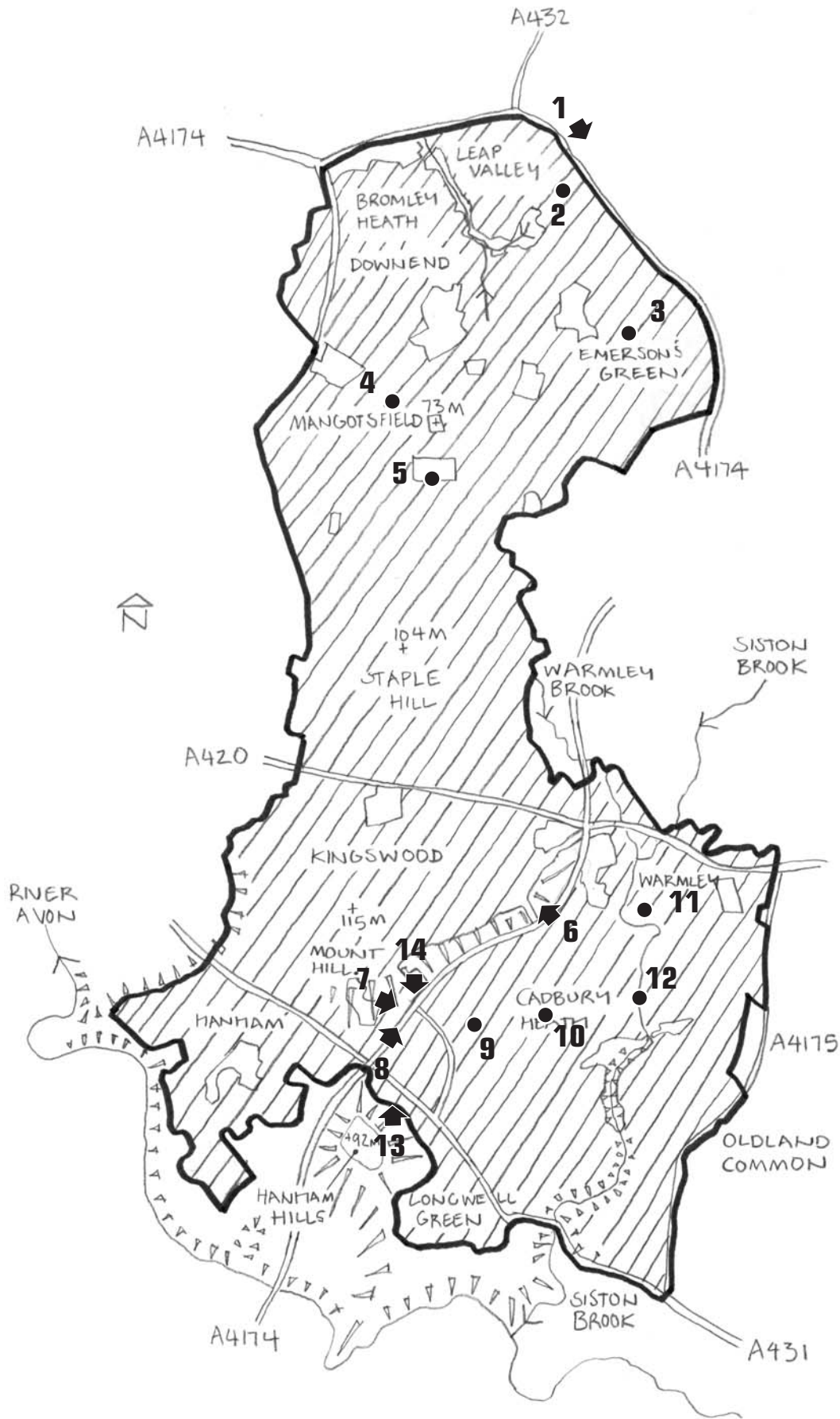
development and land use found within this area, as well as to the distinctive character of open spaces within settlements. As well as changes in management, a lack of replanting or replacement of hedgerows, trees and woodland, will eventually result in a decline in the landscape framework which could, as a result, increase the visibility of the urban and settlement edges and other development within a rural context or erode the distinctive features which contribute to local character. Active management of the hedgerow framework, trees and woodlands, including replacement and new planting, would help to ensure the conservation of these key features for the long term.

Recent tree planting on Sims' Hill will, in the long term, extend the woodland cover on the slopes and contribute to the character and structure of the landscape in the area.

A number of fields along the settlement edge of Harry Stoke, are identified within the Local Plan as land safeguarded for development. Such development on this site, would inevitably result in a loss of rural character and may result in encroachment of the urban edge along the green ridgeline in this area, with potentially local and possibly wider visual impacts evident from the east. However, policies are included in the Local Plan which seek to ensure that any proposals for the site take account of the need to protect the character, amenity and distinctiveness of the locality and wider landscape.



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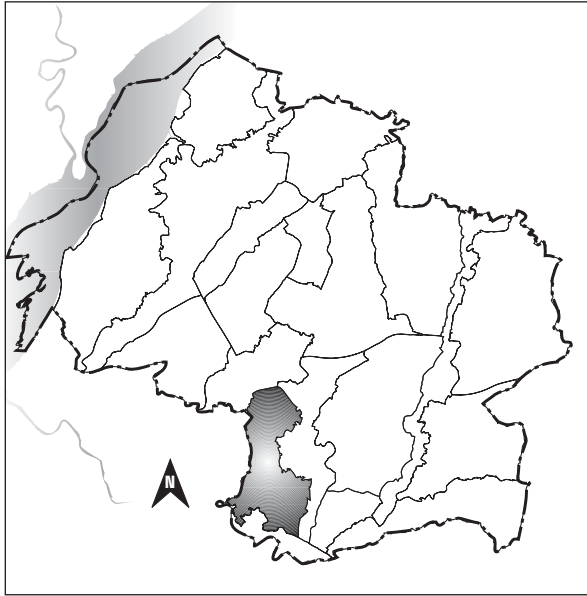


Key

 15 Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

**Figure 48:
Kingswood - Sketch Map**



The Kingswood landscape character area is a heavily built up area of residential, commercial and industrial uses and roads, interspersed with pockets of open space.

Key Characteristics

- Dominated by residential settlement, developed around an historic core of roads and former industrial activity, surrounded by extensive late 19th and 20th century development.
- Extensive recent residential development extends up to the north eastern boundary.
- Former village settlements, with Pennant stone buildings and walls, industrial heritage features, churches and chapels, form distinct features within the urban fabric.
- Large open spaces relate to steeper slopes, valley landforms and drainage systems, generally retaining an agricultural and semi-natural vegetation framework.
- Small areas of formal and informal open spaces break up the urban fabric, provide setting and local identity.

- Frequent urban trees and some remnant orchards are scattered within the urban area.
- Extensive views east and south extend over the area towards adjacent prominent rural hills, ridges and scarp.
- Relics of pre-urbanisation land use pattern and buildings exist, some associated with former coal/brass/pin/shoe industries, an historic estate or remnant agricultural field patterns.

Location

The Kingswood landscape character area is located in the south of South Gloucestershire and forms the eastern urban fringe of the Bristol conurbation.

The northern boundary is defined by the A4174. The western boundary follows the Authority limits with Bristol beyond. The southern boundary marks the limits of the urban area and the rural Avon Valley further south. The eastern boundary follows the well defined edge of the urban area. (See Figures 49 & 51).

Physical Influences

The underlying geology largely consists of Coal Measures, Pennant sandstone and shales, overlain with alluvium. In association with the drainage pattern, this creates a gently sloping and undulating landform between approximately 50 to 115 metres a.o.d., with some steeper slopes.

The landform comprises a ridge of hills running approximately north/south. A few small valley features cut into and are perpendicular to the ridge, forming hilltops on which Kingswood and Staple Hill are located.

A steep slope falls from the southern end of Kingswood at Mount Hill, towards the A4174 and forms a slight scarp running from Warmley, south westwards to Hanham.

Further south, the Hanham Hills rise beyond the urban edge of Longwell Green and the character

area boundary. To the north east lies a broad shallow bowl occupied by Cadbury Heath, contained to the east by the Oldland Ridge beyond the area's boundary.

Siston Brook cuts through this bowl fed by Warmley Brook and one tributary. Siston Brook flows south to the River Avon, within a green corridor contained by dense residential development within this character area. The brook is channelled through Warmley, then follows its natural, tightly meandering course, before following a small steep sided river valley, with a narrow floodplain corridor at Oldland Bottom to the south.

Also flowing into the River Avon is the Stroud Brook, which flows southwards along a small valley feature (forming part of the south western boundary of this area, shared with Bristol). The upper valley includes Magpie Bottom (a village green) and the valley as a whole is hemmed in by residential development. The brook discharges into the River Avon at Conham Wharf.

The Leap Valley to the north forms a very shallow depression, with a small stream course draining north beyond this area to the River Frome. The stream follows a green corridor of varying width, contained by housing.

Land Cover

The majority of this character area is dominated by settlement. There are however, a variety of green spaces and vegetation cover which break up and punctuate the area.

The largest open spaces are associated with steep, natural landform and drainage valleys, which bisect or physically separate the urban area.

Small pockets of open space created by parks, school grounds, linear roadside spaces, some remnant common land and some allotments are scattered within the area.

Churchyards form numerous green spaces within the area, typically comprising grassland around the gravestones and edged by mature trees.

New parks are associated with recent residential development.

Infrastructure planting occurs along the A4174 and the shopping centre at Longwell Green. Private gardens to houses vary in size, have a variety of vegetation, but can have mature trees which contribute to the streetscape. Remnants of orchards are often found adjacent to older cottages and former farmhouses.

The linear corridor below Mount Hill, along the A4174 to the west of Warmley, physically bisects the urban area, comprising steep slopes and rough grassland of former agricultural fields, divided by overgrown hedgerows (Photos 6 & 8).

Siston and Warmley Brook flow within green corridors, often including informal linear parks, riparian vegetation of trees and scrub with rough grassland (Photo 12), or abutting a small golf course above Siston Brook at Cadbury Heath. The Siston Valley at Oldland Bottom to the south, physically separates the urban fabric, comprising a steep sided wooded valley.

The Leap Valley to the north, forms a linear corridor of grassland, with a varied framework of overgrown and intermittent former hedgerows and scattered mature trees, contained by a dense residential fringe.

Within Downend there is a concentration of open spaces and vegetation at Cleeve Hill, comprising mature woodland adjacent to allotments, tennis courts and large residential gardens.

Just to the north, along the A4174 (Bromley Heath Road) lies a broad asymmetric green corridor of mown grass, ornamental trees and shrub beds. Along the northern boundary, adjacent to the A4174 (Avon Ring Road) and contained by the residential edge of Bromley Heath, lies a linear area of open space comprising a cricket ground, rough grassland, scrub and trees.

Page Park and Kingswood Park are formally laid out parks with walled and railing boundaries, ornate gateways (Photo 5), tennis courts, mown lawns, pathways, ornamental planting and mature trees.

The recent village parks within Emerson's Green typically comprise linear and irregular informal open spaces of grassland and tree clumps (Photo 2 & 3).

School playing fields and college grounds largely comprise open mown grassland, with little or no vegetation structure. Sports grounds are also typically simple open spaces, with limited built infrastructure of clubhouses and pavilions and mature trees often associated with older cricket grounds (Photo 4), providing structure or enclosure to these spaces.

Settlement and Infrastructure

Settlement is the predominant land use in this character area. The historic core of road pattern, settlement and former industrial activity is extensively surrounded by late 19th and 20th century residential, industrial and commercial development, creating a dense urban area with relatively few open spaces.

The pre-urbanisation field pattern and road network is evident over much of the area and, in places, largely defines the shape and pattern of settlement and open space seen today.

Older development within the area is typically a mix of grey Pennant sandstone cottages, farmhouses, and individual houses, with gardens and some remnant orchards contained by stone walls. Settlement of this age is either clustered within recognisable former village centres, as seen in Downend, Hanham, Warmley, North Common and Oldland Common, or elsewhere is mixed with the occasional addition of recent brick infill, as at Mangotsfield, Staple Hill and Kingswood. Many of these villages grew in association with the former industrial activities associated with coal mining, the brass/pin works and the shoe industry.

Older stone properties are also scattered throughout the area, absorbed within more recent phases of urban expansion. Some distinctive buildings and structures include churches, chapels, monuments and Sunday Schools (associated with Methodism), small industrial buildings, warehouses and old factories. Stone bridges are associated with the disused Bristol-Bath railway and Dramway, with station platforms and buildings at Mangotsfield North and South and at Willsbridge.

In Hanham, Longwell Green and towards Oldland, the older stone housing is often associated with large gardens and mature trees which abut the road network, or form the southern boundary with the Avon Valley.

Modern residential development is largely of brick (some rendered), detached, semi-detached and flats, varied in density and tends to lack structural tree planting or designed open spaces.

Open space is largely incidental, retained along hedges, watercourses and footpaths, or related to schools, sports centres and community facilities. Some early 20th century housing has mature gardens and street trees which contribute greatly to the streetscape (Photo 10).

Recent large scale residential development lies to the north east at Emerson's Green. Dense, brick estate housing (Photo 3) extends eastwards to the A4174, which in conjunction with the industrial/commercial sheds at Emerald Park within the adjacent area (Photo 1), abruptly defines the urban edge here. Derelict farmhouses on the edge of this development area are partly contained or on the verge of being absorbed.

The new housing areas are occasionally broken by village parks.

The character area is punctuated with retail centres, comprising a number of linear streets or centres located on major roads leading to Bristol City Centre. A large retail centre at Longwell Green forms a concentration of large commercial sheds, within a framework of roads, roundabouts, car parks, grass verges and ornamental planting structure (Photo 8).

The adjacent multiplex development below Mount Hill is cut into the steep hillside and includes a large warehouse type building, car park and peripheral steep earth banks/retaining structures.

Industrial works are concentrated within the centres of Kingswood, Warmley and also along Kingswood's eastern rural fringe. A number of historic sites are absorbed within or on the edge of the urban area.

Warmley House and gardens, together with the Clock Tower (originally a pin mill), form the core

of the internationally important Champion's Brassworks.

The factory is partly constructed with slag block quoins and coping stones, a bi-product of the industrial process (Photo 11).

The use of slag quoins and coping stones is widely distributed within the South Gloucestershire area, generally limited to older individual stone buildings and walls. Distribution is evident within the adjacent character areas of Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley, Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge, as well as Kingswood, Bristol and as far west as the Severn Ridges and Oldbury Levels.

The historic estate of Barr's Court in Oldland, is a partially moated manor site (Scheduled Ancient Monument) and still retains much of its park boundary wall and moat, largely absorbed within residential development (Photo 9). Also within the Siston Valley at Oldland Bottom is Willsbridge Mill.

The Bristol and Bath Railway Path follows a disused railway line west to east through the urban area of Staple Hill, in tunnel and cutting before turning south, entering the adjacent character area, before passing through the urban areas of Warmley, Willsbridge and the Avon Valley beyond.

The southern section of the railway path is partly followed by the Dramway (an historically important tramway associated with the former coal mining industry) and the Community Forest Path. Both these routes leave the railway line south of Oldland Common, entering the rural Siston Valley to Willsbridge Mill and the Avon Valley beyond.

The urban area also includes many short sections of public footpath within pockets of open space. These connect with the widespread, dense local road network.

The area is intensely dissected by numerous lanes, roads and major routes such as the A432, A431, A420, A4174 and A4175, connecting the residential districts.

The A4174 Avon Ring Road follows a broad corridor, generally containing the urban edge to the north and north east and passing through the urban/semi-rural areas in the south.

Landscape Character

The overall character of this area is dense settlement, with distinct areas comprising former village centres and linear hamlets linked by the road network, phased residential development, concentrations of industrial works and commercial areas, interspersed with a mix of various ages and style of development.

Industrial heritage features and distinct buildings contribute to the urban fabric.

A variety of open spaces punctuate the urban area, the character of which are diverse, often providing relief and contrast, contributing to local identity and the setting of built development.

The ridge and hill landform of the character area is generally marked by the dominance and enclosure created by the urban development over much of this area. However, landform and elevated position is very apparent along some road corridors and from open spaces, where views out beyond the character area are obtained.

The steepest landforms have hindered the spread of urban development and are therefore typically the most extensive, open and visible green spaces within the area.

These comprise the largely rural, open steep slopes and ridgeline of Mount Hill above the A4174, a prominent local backcloth; the Siston Valley, a small enclosed and sinuous rural wooded valley, at its southern end largely undisturbed by development; and the prominent landmark of the Hanham Hills, to the south within the Avon Valley character area.

Breaks in the urban fabric on the elevated landform frequently allow long distance views eastwards of the adjacent rural fringe, Pucklechurch and Oldland Ridge and the Cotswold Scarp beyond. Views southwards include the Hanham Hills, which forms a distinct open hill beyond the settlement edge (Photo 14). From the southern settlement edge, some views extend over and beyond the Avon Valley.

The urban area of Kingswood is also prominent within panoramic views from the Pucklechurch and Oldland Ridge to the east.

The urban area contains numerous mature trees which include both remnants of pre-urbanisation agricultural land use and planned tree planting along streets, within parks and gardens. The visual contribution this “urban forest” makes is significant locally and in the wider landscape, particularly from beyond the urban area to the east of this character area.

Planned formal open spaces are limited, comprising typically small, scattered areas contained within the urban fabric. These include ornamental parks at Page Park and Kingswood Park; allotment gardens at several locations; school/college grounds, playing and sports fields; graveyards (some neglected) associated with the many chapels and churches, all of which provide seasonal variations in pattern and texture.

The concentration of woodland at Cleeve Hill (Downend) associated with a break within the urban streetscape, produced by allotments and tennis courts, large gardens, together with street trees, forms a distinct local identity.

Informal open spaces with their former agricultural framework partly intact, include the linear Leap Valley Park and wood fringed field at Charn Hill.

The presence of large private gardens, garden vegetation, street trees, wide verges and planting infrastructure along some roads contribute to a suburban character. In contrast, areas of Victorian housing, typically with small or no gardens, without the presence of public open spaces, form very dense, uniformly built areas.

Village parks, created as part of the Emerson’s Green development, have attempted to incorporate existing landscape features of hedgerows and trees into the structure of the new development. These features, where retained and well managed, provide an immediate framework and mature landscape setting to this development.

The industrial heritage features of villages, linear hamlets and buildings associated with coal mining, pin and shoe making industry, historic remains of Barrs Court Estate and the distribution of architecturally diverse chapels, churches and their churchyards, significantly contribute to local identity.

Warmley Church is a prominent distinctive landmark and focus to the village settlement, nestled within the landform. The adjacent brass works also forms a prominent local feature.

The pattern of stone cottages, unified by stone boundary walls within Downend, has a distinct rural village character within an otherwise urban area.

The eastern and southern urban/rural fringes have varying built characteristics. The open setting provided by the adjacent rural fringe is an important visual characteristic.

The north eastern boundary at Emerson’s Green comprises recent dense housing, commercial and retail development off the A4174 junctions, with derelict farm houses absorbed along or adjacent to this urban edge. The planting associated with the A4174 corridor partly integrates sections of this edge. However, the timber fence boundary to residential areas, located at the top of cuttings or on top of acoustic mounds is, where not screened by vegetation, visually prominent forming an abrupt and hard edge to the development. The commercial development of Emerald Park, within the adjacent character area, is also prominent and visually confines part of this area.

Further south, the degree of integration along the urban edge varies, largely determined by the adjacent land use and vegetation cover which abut this character area’s boundary.

The older residential edge, intermixed with an industrial complex and school grounds, is in places partially contained by woodland at Rodway Hill. Adjacent recreational land uses, remnant common and agricultural land in Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge area, creates in places a transitional boundary between the abrupt development edge of this area and the adjacent, more rural countryside to the east.

The village settlement pattern of Warmley, North Common and Oldland Common, located within this area along the eastern boundary, form a distinct, intricate and varied edge to the rural fringe, variably integrated by the rural vegetation framework, or forming a defined urban edge.

The adjacent landform of the Pucklechurch and Oldland Ridge forms a prominent and distinctive backcloth within many views from this urban edge.

The convoluted urban edge along the southern boundary is largely influenced by the landform of the Siston Valley, the Avon Valley and its floodplain and the Hanham Hills. The various phases of residential development are intermixed with the large retail area at Longwell Green and the more recent redevelopment of Hanham Hall (former hospital) and grounds to residential use, both of which visually influence the urban edge and adjoining rural fringe.

The edge of Willsbridge and older edge of Hanham have a distinctive rural village character. However, in contrast, the more recent residential development around Hanham Hall creates a sharp, defined urban edge without integration. (Photo 2). Longwell Green has both prominent linear urban edges (Photo 13) and better integrated sections, achieved through long rear gardens and associated vegetation. The recent large scale commercial development below Cock Road Ridge, at Mount Hill, is located in an elevated position, compared with the older retail development area. The scale and nature of this development contrasts sharply with the adjacent housing. The development is prominent from a wide area due to its location, scale and light colour, and is visible from the Cotswold Scarp and from the hills to the south of the Avon Valley.

The Hanham Hills are a prominent and distinctive landmark within this area.

The Changing Landscape

The Kingswood landscape character area has a dense urban fabric with a surrounding rural fringe. Distinct areas of local character are influenced by settlement age, pattern and materials used within a number of communities; landmark architecture; historic remnants of early settlement and the industrial past; intermixed with a variety of open spaces.

Recent Government guidance contained in PPG 3: Housing 2000, encourages the re-development of brownfield sites. There is,

therefore, a trend towards developing any areas of previously developed land within the existing urban area, such as former employment sites, chapels and their grounds, or graveyards.

Such change of these spaces could potentially affect local character. Green spaces currently provide valuable visual amenity and physical breaks within the urban fabric, as well as softening the urban form. Loss of such spaces may therefore reduce the openness within the area, increasing the density of the built environment. In addition, it may also introduce a variation in architectural style, form, massing and colour, which could affect the distinctiveness of the locality.

Existing parks provide important open spaces within the urban fabric and influence local character. The landscape amenity of these spaces relies on their continued maintenance and management.

Parks created within new residential development require adequate space and management to be effective, in terms of their visual contribution to local character, their ability to help integrate new development and their recreational provision. Mature trees, often remnant features from the former agricultural land use, pre-urbanisation, contribute greatly to the area's 'Urban Forest' and local streetscape. These features are sensitive to a number of potentially damaging operations and types of change, e.g. work relating to underground and overhead services, site development and site access and especially where insufficient space is allowed for either existing mature trees or semi-mature trees to develop further.

The majority of open spaces are crossed by, or connected to, the urban area by public footpaths. This accessibility provides not only an important recreational and amenity resource for the local community, but also potentially exerts an increasing physical pressure on these spaces and their features.

The recent housing development at Emerson's Green has introduced new urban elements along the edge of Kingswood, within a former agricultural landscape. The retained vegetation framework has only a limited ability to integrate

such extensive built development. The transition between the housing edge and adjacent open space/rural fringe is therefore particularly harsh in places, the visually prominent housing and its boundary fencing eroding the character of the adjacent landscape. A strong vegetation structure is required in such locations to achieve visual integration between the urban edge and the adjacent public open spaces and rural areas.

The large scale commercial/retail development at Longwell Green and below Mount Hill has had a significant effect on the urban character locally. The large scale built forms, together with the associated car parking and road infrastructure, contrasts markedly with the character of adjacent housing areas and the remnant landscape framework.

Typically, the combination of large scale warehouse type buildings, associated car parking and road infrastructure, accommodated on a constrained site area, has left little opportunity for either retention of the original vegetation framework, or for the provision of new structure planting to aid integration of the development in the longer term. Established roadside planting, associated with the principal road network, reduces the impact to some degree from this corridor. However, these developments will remain a prominent element in the urban landscape.

The location of the adjacent multiplex, on a steeply sloping hillside, required extensive ground remodelling to accommodate the large scale building footprint and car park areas and has had a significant effect on the character of the landscape of the locality, eroding the green corridor extending into the urban area. Its elevated position, scale and limited planting, will ensure that the development remains visually prominent in both the local and wider landscape.

Approved proposals for a new swimming pool, adjacent to the multiplex, will occupy sloping ground immediately to the south west and result in the infill of land between the residential edge and the multiplex.

The proposed building will also be set into the hillside, requiring some ground remodelling, with earth redistributed to raise ground levels

and form a new ridgeline adjacent to the residential edge to the west and additional planting along the northern boundary.

This development will result in some local and distant visual change, in addition to the impact of the existing multiplex and, will be evident largely from the urban area, with potentially limited further effects upon the remaining green corridor.

The corridor of remnant agricultural land at Mount Hill adjacent to the multiplex, which separates Kingswood and Oldland, is under potential pressure for change. Hedgerows are not actively managed. The likely long-term decline of these features would weaken their visual contribution to the landscape framework of the area, as well as their ability to provide integration of both existing development and future change. Active management of these hedgerows would help to ensure the conservation of these key features for the long term, although dependent on the number of hedgerow trees which are allowed to develop or are planted, the landscape character could become more or less open as a result of management which would also affect the visual integration of existing or future elements.

The Hanham Hills beyond the southern urban edge in the adjoining character area are a distinct rural landmark, visually prominent within many local views. They are particularly sensitive to change, or a decline of their hedgerow framework.

The southern and eastern urban areas exert a potential pressure for change in the adjacent rural landscape. Such change could have a potentially widespread visual influence, eroding the distinctive rural character of the agricultural landscape and common land which lie just beyond the eastern boundary.

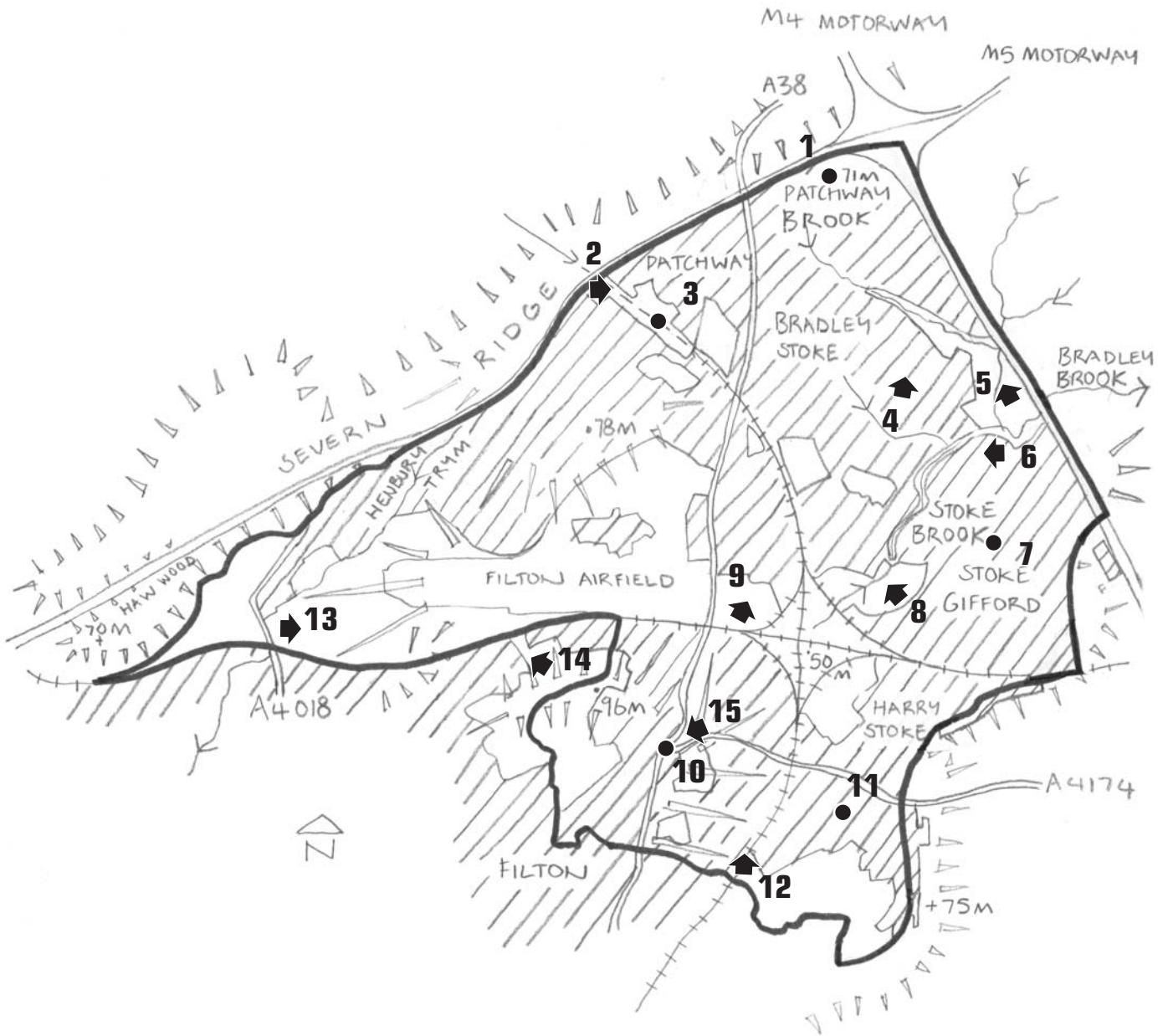
The distinct village patterns seen in many places, such as Warmley, Oldland Common, Willsbridge and Hanham, are sensitive to change such as from infill, which might dilute or erode their individual character.

The proposed large scale extension to Emerson's Green, north east of the A4174 in the adjoining character area, for residential and employment purposes, will result in a significant change to the present character of the rural

fringe. The current urban edge will extend northwards, beyond this character area boundary, with the inevitable loss of the adjoining open rural landscape.



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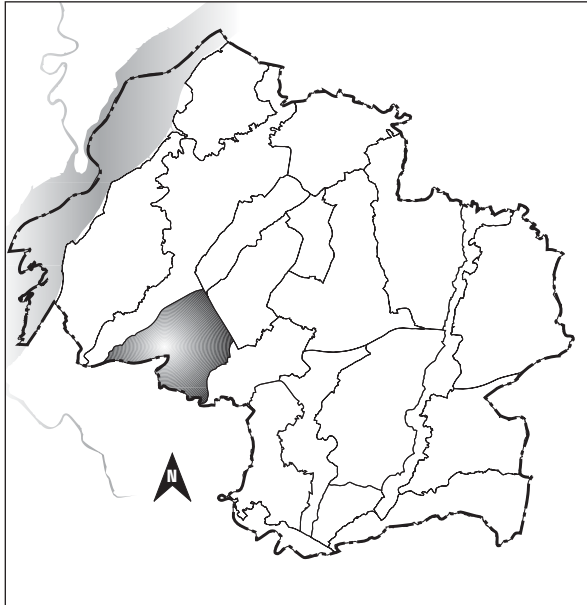


Key

➡₁₅ Photograph viewpoints

**Figure 51:
Patchway and Filton - Sketch Map**

Scale: not to scale



The Patchway and Filton character area is an urban built up area, consisting of a mix of residential, commercial and retail development and major transport corridors, with open space scattered throughout.

Key Characteristics

- Largely built up area, bounded by motorways to the north west and north east, with railway lines and roads dividing the area. Road network and high traffic levels are prominent features.
- Zoning of development within the area comprises commercial, industrial and residential areas of various ages, styles, building materials and densities. Large scale business, industrial and retail development is often highly visible within and beyond the area, with a number of prominent buildings.
- Recent residential development occurs on fringes of older housing core and towards the M4 boundary, comprising uniform estates, with strategic landscape infrastructure.
- Open space is diverse, including areas of Filton Airfield, railway junction, the courses of Patchway Brook and Stoke Brook, part of historic Stoke Park and

remnant agricultural land. Smaller pockets of open space include playing fields, a golf course, allotments and common land.

- Areas of landscape change due to recent and proposed development, particularly at Bradley Stoke and Stoke Gifford, reducing the extent of open space within and adjacent to the urban edge.

Location

The Patchway and Filton landscape character area is located on the south western boundary of the South Gloucestershire area and includes the northern fringes of the Bristol conurbation.

The area is contained to the north east by the M4, to the north west by the M5, beyond which the land rises to the Severn Ridges and in the south west by the foot of the slope below Haw Wood. To the south, the boundary is marked by the limits of the Unitary Authority, the south west boundary following the railway line and eastwards, variously through Filton, crossing agricultural land and dividing Stoke Park. The south eastern boundary approximately follows a ridgeline, shared with the Frome Valley area and partly defined by the urban edge of Harry Stoke and Stoke Gifford. (See Figures 52 & 54).

Physical Influences

The geology is diverse with a ring of White and Blue Lias limestone and clays following the eastern boundary, before curving back to and beyond Filton. This encircles a broad bank of Lias clays. A further area of White and Blue Lias extends from Patchway, north eastwards beyond this area. Keuper marl clays and sandstones form a band, roughly following the western boundary. The soils are a mix of Pelostagnogley and typical Argillic Pelosols. The geology, together with the drainage pattern, has created a landform which is generally gently sloping to undulating.

A number of low ridges and higher ground provide containment to an elongated central

bowl, 55m a.o.d. average, which largely dips gently north eastwards to the Bradley Brook, with a smaller proportion of this area to the west falling south westwards towards the River Avon.

Higher ground comprises Haw Wood ridgeline to the west, rising beyond this area's boundary, to 70m a.o.d. (merging with the Severn Ridges); a broad rounded hill at Filton in the south at 96m a.o.d; a curving ridgeline running between Stoke Park, 85m a.o.d. and Stoke Gifford 70m a.o.d. to the north east ; and gently rising ground to the M5 in the north, up to 85m a.o.d.

There are a number of minor watercourses that run through the area. These include Henbury Trym in the west, which flows south westwards from Cribbs Causeway and Filton Airfield to the River Avon beyond this area. It flows within an open, gently sloping valley, contained to the west by Haw Wood ridge and to the east by more gently sloping ground.

Stoke Brook flows from the central railway intersection north eastwards, joining the Patchway and Hortham Brook near the boundary of this area, continuing as the Bradley Brook beyond. All three brooks meander through shallow, open low valley systems, draining eastwards into the adjacent area.

Within the Patchway Brook valley and adjacent to the M4, the natural landform has been largely reprofiled, following large scale land reclamation/spoil deposition. This, in places, has produced a broad plateau steep sided valley profile and steep slope profile next to the motorway edge.

The area's physical influences and characteristics are generally not that evident where covered by dense urban development, which limits the visibility of the landform beneath.

Land Cover

The majority of the area is dominated by settlement, but contains substantial open spaces.

The character area includes numerous sports fields, public open spaces and school grounds

which service the main residential areas of Patchway, Bradley Stoke, Stoke Gifford and Filton. Sports fields typically comprise open areas of amenity grassland (Photo 9) enclosed by housing, industrial development and intermittent trees/tree belts and hedgerows along boundaries.

Public open spaces within each of the principal residential districts include:

- Bradley Stoke - playing fields; Patchway Brook valley, a linear, often organic space, with riparian trees and grassland contained within housing and road framework; Little Stoke Brook Park, with both mown and rough grassland and scrub/tree fringes (Photo 8 & 6). These two brooks and their open space corridors, converge at a pool near the M4, with an adjacent large plateau landform (a former landfill site) with rough grassland cover and young tree planting on steeper slopes, abutting the M4.
- Patchway - The Tumps, adjacent to the M5 and above the railway tunnel, comprises a linear area of meadow/rough grass, remnant overgrown hedgerows and more recent tree planting along the motorway edge (Photo 3); Patchway Common, of similar land cover to the Tumps, with allotments (Photo 2) near the M5.
- Filton - Filton Recreation Ground comprises open grass playing field, contained by residential development and road network (Photo 15); Northville Playing Fields comprises a grass playing field with a single tree avenue through its centre, also contained by housing; Lockleaze Playing Fields, with open grassland contained to the east by overgrown hedgerows of Abbey Wood MOD/Hewlett Packard (Photo 11) and to the south by housing and school grounds.
- Stoke Gifford - limited, small pockets of open space and school playing fields lie within this area of dense housing.

Elevated land west of the A38, at Westwood, includes Filton Golf Course, comprising greens, fairways and an open tree structure which extends into the Bristol City Authority area.

The open expanse of Filton Airfield includes an

extensive area of open ground, comprising a tarmac runway fringed by a grassland corridor (Photo 14), a small area of woodland to the north eastern end of the runway and adjacent to a large scale hangar complex. The northern boundary largely comprises a dense linear edge of trees.

The railway junction, lying centrally within the area, physically contains a sizeable area of poorly drained rough grassland, scrub, trees and railway sidings. Large scale ground remodelling is occurring within the northern part of this area.

Along the eastern periphery of the area, in Bradley Stoke and adjacent to Hewlett Packard to the south, are former agricultural fields. These now comprise rough grassland and dense hedgerows, overgrown in places, providing a strong landscape framework (Photo 4 and 5).

Part of Stoke Park is located on the south eastern boundary of this area, continuing into the adjacent Frome Valley to the east and into Bristol City Council's area to the south. This area includes ancient woodland, scrub and open grassland on west facing slopes of the Pur Down ridge.

Surrounding the western end of Filton Airfield, within the Henbury Trym valley, is a rural pattern of small sized, regular and irregular shaped pastoral fields, defined by tall overgrown hedgerows and intermittent hedgerow trees, including dead elm trees (Photo 13).

To the east at Bradley Stoke, the area of reclaimed land adjacent to the Bradley Brook and M4 includes open areas of rough grass, scrub and peripheral deciduous woodland with recent woodland planting on some of the steeper slopes.

The area includes a number of significant areas of deciduous woodland, including some ancient woodland (in existence since at least 1600), such as Savage's Wood and Webb's Wood (Bradley Stoke), Long Wood, Hermitage Wood and Barn Wood (Stoke Park) and Splatts Abbey Wood (MOD Filton). These are typically isolated areas within green fringes adjacent to development.

Settlement and Infrastructure

The area is dominated by distinct areas of development types, including the airfield, railways, road network, industrial and commercial areas, together with housing. There have been several phases of development since the First World War.

Adjacent to the M4/M5 interchange and junction off the M5, there is a concentrated corridor of light industry and business park development, at Aztec West and Almondsbury Business Park. Aztec West comprises a large planned business park, including large modern office and warehouse buildings and road infrastructure within a designed, now mature, ornamental landscape framework. The motorway, with no landscape framework, forms its northern boundary. Almondsbury Business Park to the east includes the RAC building and tower (Photo 1).

South of Bristol Parkway Station there is a concentration of large commercial buildings/complexes and retail sheds, some within robust landscaped grounds, as seen at Abbey Wood MOD offices (Photo 11), AXA Sun Life offices, Hewlett Packard and part of the University of the West of England campus (largely lying within the adjacent character area).

To the north west, adjacent to the M5 and industrial sheds of the Patchway Trading Estate on elevated ground, is the large scale retail development of Cribbs Causeway. The concentration of large, distinctive retail structures are surrounded by an infrastructure of roads, car parks, ornamental planting and earthworks, within a relatively recent landscape setting.

Filton Airfield, located to the south of Cribbs Causeway, comprises runway, planes and a complex of light coloured hangars, occupying an extensive area of land fringed by grassland, with a small pocket of woodland. Its westerly expansion in 1946 removed the village of Charlton. The airfield forms a large corridor of open space which is contained by chain link fencing, beyond which lies residential, industrial and retail development and farmland.

The adjacent concentration of industrial works at Rolls Royce and British Aerospace, together with the Royal Mail sorting sheds, fringe the A38, their location and pattern of development historically associated with and related to the airfield.

The majority of the remaining built environment is covered by often dense residential areas, incorporating strategic open spaces. The original hamlets of Filton, Stoke Gifford and Harry Stoke are medieval in origin, with the more recent housing pattern closely related to the economic development of this area and its proximity to Bristol. Patchway served the aircraft works/railways and the northern part of Filton, acting as a commuter belt development, dating from the early 20th century.

The majority of Patchway, Filton and Stoke Gifford consists of a diverse mix of housing areas, with a variety of styles and ages, which include limestone, render, brick and painted houses. The A38 includes some intermixing of residential groups and small scale works, industry and institutional buildings.

Bradley Stoke is a more recent residential development, of largely brick housing, with some local facilities including a retail centre, leisure centre and school. The most recent area of development abuts the M4 (Photo 6). These dense estate developments are based around a network of broad roads, roundabout junctions and strategic open spaces. Contained within and on the edges of these urban areas are old farmhouses. They have either become integrated within adjacent development, following the change in land use (Photo 7), or remain isolated features dominated by adjacent dissimilar development (Photo 12).

Coal mining was previously evident at Harry Stoke Colliery. The last remaining working colliery in the Bristol area, it closed in 1963, with spoil remains evident at the surface into the 1980s. The site is now occupied by a car park at MOD Abbey Wood.

The area is served by a very dense network of roads, the pattern of which in many places determines the edges of residential development and open spaces. The first part of the Avon Ring Road, the A4174, extending

through or along the eastern periphery of the Bristol conurbation, was built in 1962.

Generally the M4 and M5, on the boundaries of this area, delineate the urban edge. Development in Bradley Stoke has extended towards the M4, with the exception of a large break, formed by a plateau of open space adjacent to the Patchway and Bradley Brooks.

The motorways largely contain the urban edge, creating a linear barrier between them and the countryside beyond. The M4/M5 interchange comprises large scale earthworks, elevated slip roads and overbridges, flanked by rough grassland and some scrub. This feature straddles the boundary of this area and two adjacent character areas.

The A38 and A4174 radiate from Filton, north to the M5 and eastwards to the M32 and M4, with the B4057 providing an easterly link to Winterbourne, beyond this area.

Four sections of railway line intersect centrally within the area, forming a large junction with raised embankments, which physically contain rough ground. The railway lines include the South Wales to London line, providing links from Bristol Temple Meads and Bristol Parkway with the rest of the country. One goods line travels westwards to Avonmouth.

There are a few public rights of way which cross both undeveloped open space and public open spaces and elsewhere are absorbed within the built environment.

Around the western end of the airfield, footpaths pass over farmland, their direct route halted and diverted around the airfield and its perimeter fence. The network within Stoke Gifford, north of the railway, is quite intricate, absorbed within the housing and road layout.

Only one major recreational route crosses the area. The Community Forest Path passes roughly south east from Patchway to Stoke Gifford, crossing the M5 in the west, along the green corridor of the Tumps, by the lakes at Aztec West, small lanes of Patchway, the Patchway Brook and Stoke Brook valleys, through the urban areas of Bradley Stoke and Stoke Gifford.

Landscape Character

Overall, the landscape of strategic open spaces and remnant farmland is largely dominated by the urban framework of settlement, roads and high traffic levels.

Settlement abuts most of the M4 and M5 motorways along the area's boundary, and includes extensive areas of residential, business and retail development. This creates an often abrupt contrast between the urban and rural areas beyond. Towards the more open areas to the west, however, the landscape retains a more rural pattern of fields and boundaries extending into the adjacent area.

Green spaces and landscape structure within the area are diverse in form, content and character, variously comprising small linear spaces of remnant common land and allotments; amenity sports fields, a golf course and school grounds; informal public open spaces, which utilise the small river valleys and their drainage areas, often containing semi-natural vegetation and occasional woodland; formal parks; grounds of business, retail and commercial complexes; open grassland around the airfield corridor; and remnant farmland, defined typically by tall overgrown hedgerows. The character of these spaces varies enormously from enclosed, naturalistic rural pockets to stark open playing fields.

Tree belts are a frequent feature along the boundaries between recreational open spaces/industrial and commercial areas, with some poplars forming prominent features. All contribute greatly to punctuating the urban fabric, especially from slightly elevated view points.

Many of these areas which are overlooked by adjacent housing provide distinctive local character and form a physical break within the urban fabric. The following are particularly significant :

- Filton Airfield, its runway fringed by a grassland corridor, small woodland, dispersed light coloured hangars and parked planes forms a distinct open area. This open area is visually prominent from the local road network, elevated ground to the south, Filton Golf Course, adjacent

residential properties and views from around Haw Wood and open countryside to the west.

A visual watershed created by slightly higher landform cuts across the centre of the airfield, north to south, blocking views between the east and west of this open area. To the east, the open area contrasts greatly with the adjacent industrial developments and housing fringe, whilst to the west, the open area merges with open land around Fishpool Hill, creating an increased sense of openness and linkage with open countryside.

- Pastoral landscape is limited within the area, but where present retains some rural characteristics which greatly influence the urban fringe context.

Fields adjacent to the MOD and Hewlett Packard complexes, form part of a wider green pattern of playing fields and wooded ridgeline, which connect with Stoke Park and the Pur Down Ridge towards Bristol. This space, its framework of overgrown hedgerows and wooded backdrop, is of a scale to be distinctive, in spite of the prominent urban edge to the west.

The extensive area of fields at Cribbs Farm, surrounding the western end of Filton Airfield are defined by overgrown hedgerows with hedgerow trees and a limited number of clipped hedgerows, some containing dead elm trees, with open views of the surrounding and enclosing urban development. The open area forms an important buffer between Cribbs Causeway and Brentry (to the south in the Bristol City area), the edges of which are prominent, with traffic visible and audible along the A4018 and M5 and occasionally from air traffic.

The visual connection between the large scale wooded ridgeline at Haw Wood to the west, beyond this area, and the pastoral landscape, openness and green fringes of the airfield and adjacent agricultural land, result in a wide and open corridor with rural characteristics, visible from and in strong contrast to its adjacent urban edge.

- The rising open hillside covered by Filton Golf Course to the south, forms a similar, though smaller scale, break within the urban fabric. It is prominent within long views from the north west and east and visually reduces the coalescence and dominance of built forms. The elevated location of the golf course often gives open views of the airfield and wider urban area.
- Areas of woodland, where present, are prominent features with a significant influence on local character and are often located on the edge of former agricultural land, or are now partly contained by development.

Long Wood and Hermitage Wood are the largest remaining areas of woodland in the area and are visible on the skyline in southerly views from Filton. Splatts Abbey Wood is a small remnant woodland, following part of its removal during the construction of the MOD offices and forms an important physical feature, segregating the MOD and Hewlett Packard sites. A small area of woodland on the hillside at Filton Airfield partly reduces the visual prominence of adjacent buildings.

Savage's Wood, Webb's Wood and Sherbourne's Brake are prominent from within the Patchway Brook and Stoke Brook valleys. Here they combine with the open, small scale valley landscapes to provide visual enclosure and screening of adjacent residential development, often maintaining strong rural characteristics and seclusion within these spaces.

- Bradley Stoke includes strategic open space, comprising small pockets of open space amongst housing and more natural vegetated corridors, with small woodlands, along the Patchway and Stoke Brooks. Near the convergence of the brooks are large scale recent earthworks, which have formed an unnatural steep sided valley to the Bradley Brook and a large open plateau of poor grass cover. Peripheral scrub development and local areas of woodland provide better integration in places (Photo 5). These landscape elements are visible from the M4 and adjacent area of new housing development.

- The large railway junction, although not prominent within the urban fabric, is a visually significant feature within rail journeys to Wales and the South West and forms a large open space and break in the urban fabric. The segmented site contains areas of natural scrub, woodland, rough grassland and disturbed earthworks, mounds, large scale re-grading works and ballast storage.

The zoning of built areas into often distinct types of development, plus the presence of landmark architecture, is evident from roads, open spaces and often within more distant views, both from within and beyond this area. These both influence visual character and contribute to local identity:

- The distinctive large scale development at Cribbs Causeway, its strong ornamental landscape framework and the adjacent motorway (the M5 in places is on embankment) creates a visibly distinct boundary, which can be seen from the motorway and in views from the south. Cribbs Causeway is also partly visible within long distance views from the Pilning Levels to the west, due to the scale of its buildings and its elevated location.
- The extensive concentration of industrial sheds and hangars associated with the airfield, Rolls-Royce and British Aerospace, form a distinct built character. The roofs of these buildings are sometimes visible above the adjacent residential area, and are also prominent within long distance views from as far as the Pucklechurch Ridge to the east.
- Some individual buildings form prominent landmarks: the RAC control tower is visible for some distance from higher ground in the south and also adjacent areas to the north east; in the adjacent character area, the tower at the University of the West of England is visible from Filton to the north west, as well as beyond this area to the east, due to its skyline location; the Abbey Wood MOD offices, rural fields and wooded ridgeline of Stoke Park beyond, are a prominent backdrop from Filton; the rotunda building at AXA Sun Life, is prominent from along the eastern

boundary at Harry Stoke, seen against a foreground of agricultural fields.

Views are typically limited by adjacent dense urban development and the generally low, undulating landform. Some views are however possible from open spaces and the higher ground at Filton. From these vantage points, residential development generally predominates.

The M4 and M5 create physical barriers to this area, with visible and audible effects of high traffic volumes influencing much of the adjacent landscape. These effects are most noticeable at the elevated M4/M5 interchange and M5 junctions to the west. The M4 provides views largely into the adjacent Earthcott Vale and of limited areas of Bradley Stoke. The M5 has views of most of the northern urban fringe, with views to the north largely screened by the steep grass embankments of the Bristol Golf Course in the adjoining area. The road network and key road corridors are a visually prominent feature of the area (Photo 10).

New housing at Bradley Stoke, along the eastern boundary, is partially screened by tall timber fencing, earthmounding and planting in places. Rooflines, the harsh edge created by the timber fence and artificial ground raising operations, are however prominent from sections of the M4 and beyond this character area.

Further south (and forming the eastern boundary) the built edge of Stoke Gifford and Harry Stoke, set along the skyline above the adjacent lower lying character area, has various visual influences over this landscape.

Along the edge of Stoke Gifford the roofscape of large commercial buildings are prominent along the skyline. Although set beyond the ridgeline, the scale of these buildings and lack of planting provides limited planting to provide integration on this open hillside.

Recent development at Hillside Farm, comprising town houses, has formed a stark, new built edge and prominent skyline, with no planting to provide integration on this open hillside.

The residential settlement edge at Harry Stoke is largely well integrated within views from beyond the area to the east, due to mature

garden vegetation and the intervening hedgerows and trees within the adjacent fields.

New student accommodation, under construction at the UWE complex, is located along the skyline just beyond the south eastern boundary. The new buildings are higher than the existing UWE development within this area and form a prominent new skyline feature.

The Changing Landscape

Overall, the Patchway and Filton character area consists of dense and diverse urban development, contained by major road and rail corridors, amongst which are retained strategic areas of open space, remnant woodland and agricultural land.

The landscape framework here, however, is typically in a poor condition. Many boundaries subdividing landholdings and non-agricultural use are overgrown hedgerows, some containing dead elm trees, or hedgerows have been removed and replaced by fencing.

The lack of active management of hedgerows has contributed to their decline, whilst the continued encroachment of the urban edge has eroded the margins of the remaining agricultural landscape, reducing the extent of the buffer between developed areas.

The surrounding urban development of large housing estates, road and rail corridors, large scale retail developments and Filton Airfield are visible throughout much of the western area, due to the lack of vegetation structure to provide integration. The remaining areas of agricultural land are therefore increasingly vulnerable to further change.

Recent development at Bradley Stoke, comprising housing adjacent to the M4 and Bradley Stoke School and within Stoke Gifford at Hillside Farm, has created abrupt urban/rural boundaries. The regular pattern and high density of housing, lack of boundary planting to provide integration, limited provision of formal open space and street trees, tends to create a continuous roofscape and abrupt built edge, visually prominent locally, and in places from the wider countryside beyond this area.

Many pockets of remnant agricultural areas on the fringes of recent urban development and also now enclosed within the expanded urban area, are in a state of flux. With the potential for future change, they are no longer actively managed. Resultant overgrown hedgerows and long, rough grass are signs of a landscape in transition and the erosion of rural/agricultural characteristics. These areas currently provide additional informal recreation areas which are likely to be lost if change occurs. The recent construction of a swimming pool at Bradley Stoke Leisure Centre, adjacent flats and Bradley Stoke Secondary School, are examples of a changing area, where buildings, built structures, hard surfaces and road infrastructure are continuing to replace open space, often encroaching upon existing semi-natural features, such as woodland.

The retention of landscape features within urban development can do much to enhance the character of new settlement, as seen along the courses of the Stoke Brook and Patchway Brook. These features however, require sufficient space within the development and long term management to ensure their longevity.

Woodland cover is rare, typically found near the area's boundaries. Much of this comprises ancient woodland, a nationally limited and declining natural resource, which in addition is visually prominent from adjacent urban areas, contributing to distinctive local character. These woodlands are potentially under threat from enclosure and visual concealment by built development, increased pressure from recreational use and limited active management of their long-term structure. This resource is sensitive to change, particularly isolation from existing green space links, which would potentially affect local distinctiveness.

The lack of active management of landscape and vegetation features will eventually contribute to their decline or loss, with implications upon visual amenity and character of open spaces and urban streetscape. With the exception of new development schemes, where appropriate planting measures are required as part of the approved scheme, there is little evidence of new planting to provide some succession or sustain this structure in the long term.

Active management of the landscape framework would help to ensure the conservation of these key features for the long term. As many of the hedgerows are currently overgrown, bringing them back into management could result in some areas becoming more or less open, dependent on the number of hedgerow trees allowed to develop, or new trees planted.

Recent hedge laying along the boundary of a public open space adjacent to the A4174 in Filton, has however made a positive contribution to both local character and its longevity.

Dead elms are evident within overgrown hedgerows which divide fields to the west of Filton Airfield, within the Henbury Trym valley. The cyclical pattern of growth, decline and regeneration of elm, influences the condition, integrity and appearance of the landscape framework in the locality, affecting local character and the degree of openness. Active management of these hedgerows would similarly help to conserve these features and contribute to the landscape framework for the long term. If new hedgerow tree planting is introduced, it will, over time, help to replace vegetation structure lost as a result of Dutch Elm Disease. As with other hedgerow management, the landscape character could become more or less open as a result.

Open space pockets within the area are also sensitive to change. Due to the extent of urban development, all open spaces provide valuable visual and recreational amenity and create physical breaks within the urban fabric, contributing to the distinctive character of the locality or wider area.

Part of Filton Airfield (Northfield) is designated within the Local Plan as a major mixed use development site, for employment and residential purposes. This will result in a significant change in landscape character to the north eastern corner of the airfield, north of the existing runway. Development will in effect reduce the current extent of openness within this section of the airfield and produce a more defined linear open corridor along the alignment of the main runway.

The site will be evident from the adjacent road network, existing residential properties and

elevated views from Filton Golf Course. The local landscape character consequent on development will be largely determined by aspects such as the retention of existing vegetation, retention of views, design proposals with respect to building height, massing, form, materials, as well as landscape proposals for integration of the development.

The proposed development site between the MOD and Hewlett Packard sites, also identified within the Local Plan, comprises open agricultural fields with a strong vegetation structure. This area forms a visually prominent green fringe and setting to the mature wooded ridge at Stoke Park. The site is sensitive to change, given its rural character and features, elevation and visibility from the urban edge, which makes it unique within this urban context.

The wooded ridgeline at Stoke Park and, to a lesser extent the upper slopes of the Filton Golf Course, are the only remaining landscape skylines within this area not interrupted by built development. These sites are therefore sensitive to change, particularly from the encroachment of built features.

Recent Government guidance contained in PPG 3: Housing 2000 encourages the re-development of brownfield sites. There is, therefore, a trend towards developing any areas of previously developed land within the existing urban area. Change within such spaces could potentially affect local character. Green spaces currently provide valuable visual amenity and physical breaks within the urban fabric, as well as softening the urban form. Loss of such spaces may therefore reduce the openness within the area, increasing the density of the built environment. In addition, it may also introduce a variation in architectural style, form, massing and colour, which could affect the distinctiveness of the locality. However, policies are included in the Local Plan which seek to ensure that any development proposals take account of the need to protect the character, amenity and distinctiveness of the locality and wider landscape.

High traffic levels along the intensive road network are a prominent influence. Road connections east to west are generally poor, with traffic congestion typical, adding to the visual intrusion resulting from the road

network. Continuing development within this area is likely to increase traffic levels on the road network.



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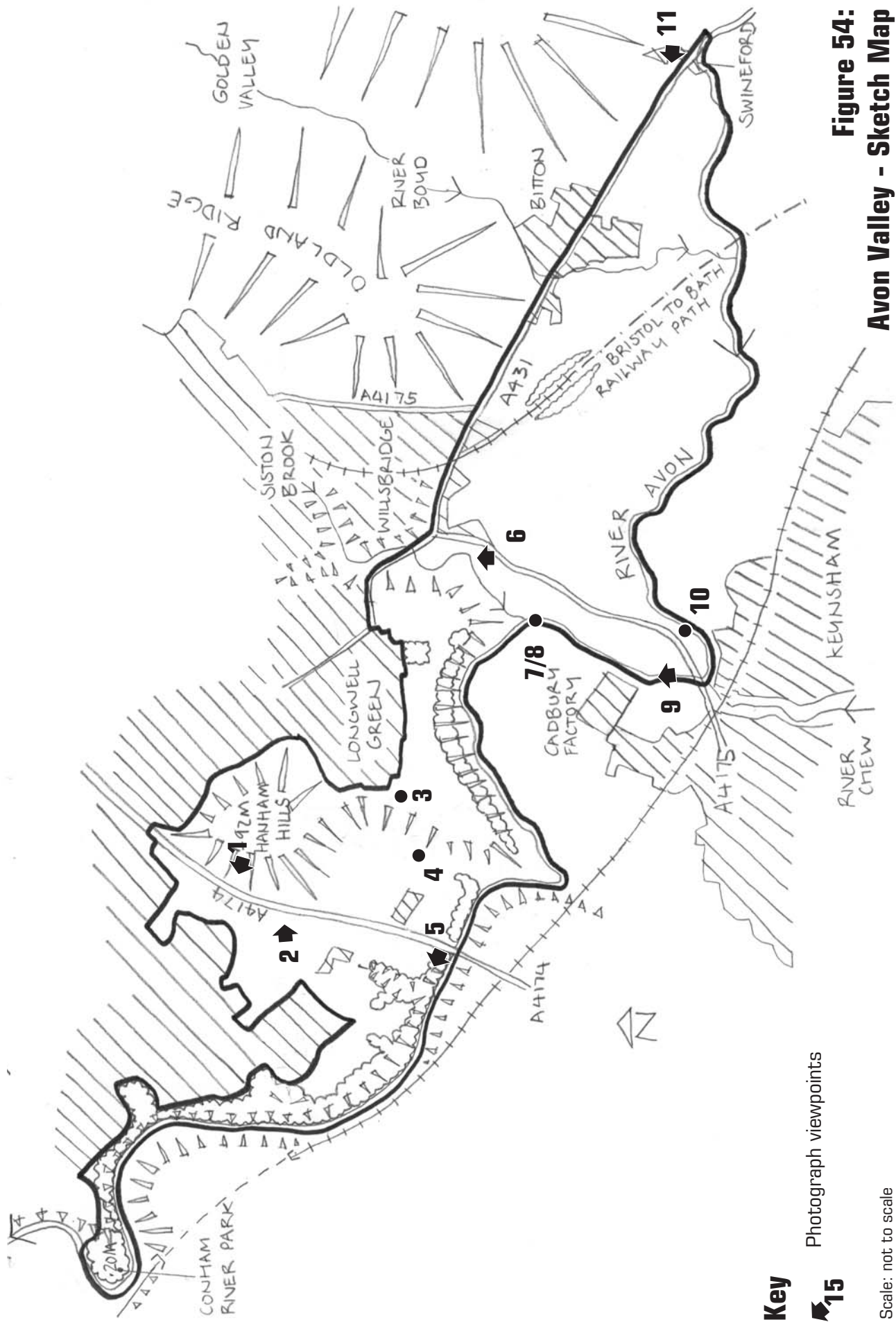


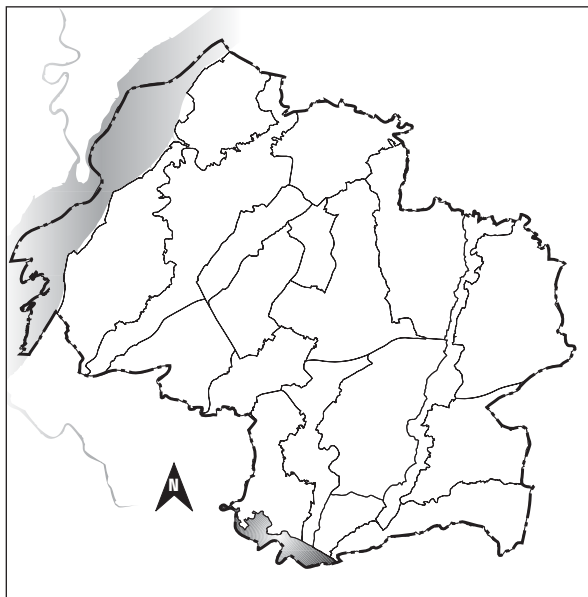
Figure 54:
Avon Valley - Sketch Map

Key

Photograph viewpoints

15

Scale: not to scale



The Avon Valley landscape character area consists of open river floodplain, enclosed steep wooded valley and gentle upper slopes defined by urban edge.

Key Characteristics

- Flat, large scale Avon floodplain to the east, with medium to large regular shaped pasture fields and meadows, some arable. Contained by clipped and overgrown hedges with occasional lines of trees and intermittent specimen trees, some pollarded.
- Enclosed steep sided river valley and linear woodland to the west, with medium sized pasture fields and arable farmland.
- Sinuous and meandering form of the River Avon defines the area's southern boundary.
- Open, upper gentle slopes to the north west, contained to the north by the urban edge of Hanham and Longwell Green.
- Distinct hilltop of the Hanham Hills rises above the urban edge, enabling panoramic views over Bristol and to the Cotswold Scarp.
- The Avon Valley has historic industrial relics, including a disused railway, the Dramway, wharfs and lock gates along the river.

- Main roads cross the area only in two places. One powerline passes along the valley.
- Navigable river, now used mainly for recreation, with major recreational route following river bank.

Location

The Avon Valley landscape character area is located in the south of the South Gloucestershire area, on the boundary with Bath and North East Somerset Authority and to the east of Bristol.

The southern boundary follows the River Avon, which also defines the Authority boundary, although the character of this area continues southwards across the valley towards Keynsham and Saltford. The urban edge of Bristol defines the north western boundary. The A431 marks the north eastern boundary and edge of the floodplain, beyond which rises the Oldland Ridge north west of Bitton and the Ashwicke Ridges at Upton Cheyney. (See Figures 55 & 57).

Physical Influences

The Avon Valley area largely consists of Westphalian sandstone to the west, gradually changing to a mix of alluvium and Lower Jurassic limestone to the east. The soils are principally Brown Earth to the west, with a mix of Pelo-alluvium Gley, typical Argillic Pelosols, Brown Rendzinas, Calcareous Pelosols and Brown Calcareous Earths over the rest of the area.

The topography varies from 10 metres a.o.d. along the River Avon, rising generally to 50-55 metres a.o.d. towards the urban edge of Bristol to the north and, at the highest point, rises to approximately 92 metres a.o.d. on the Hanham Hills above Longwell Green.

In the east of the area the landform is dominated by the broad river valley floodplain. The River Avon occupies a relatively broad channel, which meanders considerably as it flows north westwards towards Bristol.

Within the context of this broad floodplain, the former London to Midland railway (now a footpath and cycleway), is located on a high earth embankment, which physically bisects the flat valley floor.

Lock gates at several points allow navigable access, with weirs controlling river flow. The regular winter flooding of the valley is a feature of this area.

Further west, the valley profile becomes enclosed, with steep sided bluffs rising from the valley floor, with more gentle slopes above. North of the river these slopes continue to rise gently to the rounded hilltop of the Hanham Hills. This creates a prominent convex landform, which extends above the River Avon valley and into the surrounding urban edge to the north.

A number of tributaries flow southwards to the River Avon. These include (from east to west) the River Boyd south of Bitton village and Siston Brook south of Willsbridge. The River Boyd flows along a small slightly irregular shaped channel, fed by regular drainage ditches, across the floodplain. Siston Brook follows a meandering channel within a narrow steep sided valley.

Land Cover

The Avon Valley area is largely rural and has a variety of land cover closely related to the river valley form. The floodplain to the east comprises medium to large, generally regular shaped, pastoral fields with some arable land, contained by clipped and overgrown hedgerows, with some fencing. Tree belts line the river bank and disused railway line, with scattered specimen trees (some pollarded) within fields and hedgerows and wet meadows alongside the river (Photo 11).

Further west, where steep slopes contain the river valley, linear ancient and semi-natural woodland (largely of oak) is dominant, intermixed with areas of rough pasture. These areas are largely designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (Photo 5).

Conham River Park lies within a small meander loop of the River Avon, on the north western boundary of this area. The site comprises woodland cover, with open glades of rough grassland and informal footpaths.

The upper slopes to the north are covered by a mix of medium sized generally regular shaped, pasture and arable fields, with pastoral farmland generally on the higher ground, towards the Hanham Hills (Photo 8). The fields are contained variously by either woodland, clipped hedges or bands of mature deciduous trees. Thick and overgrown hedges are typical along the urban edge, although some boundaries are fencing.

Elements of a more ornamental landscape are evident in the area of Hanham Court, to the south of the Hanham Hills and include a formal avenue of mature trees (Photo 4).

Between the railway and the village of Bitton lies a round barrow (SAM) with scrub cover.

Settlement and Infrastructure

There are no major settlements within the area. Part of Bitton village lies within the area to the east, the rest of the village lying within the Golden Valley. Otherwise, settlement is limited to the hamlet of Swineford to the east, a number of scattered, isolated farms and buildings occurring along the A4175 and A431, on the periphery of, or above the floodplain and dispersed farms and houses along a minor road east of Hanham.

The area is however, bordered by dense settlement. To the north, the urban areas of Willsbridge, Longwell Green and Hanham include both dispersed and clustered groups of older Pennant sandstone and limestone cottages, houses, farms and outbuildings. These are distinct and variously distributed along major roads, extending into the landscape, or absorbed within more recent areas of brick housing or industry.

To the south of the Hanham Hills is the Hanham Abbots Conservation Area. This extends to the River Avon and includes an important historical

building group at Hanham Court and Court Farm (Photo 3), with historical associations with the Ancient Kingswood Forest. Materials include limestone and Pennant sandstone within buildings and walls. Dating back to the 14th and 15th centuries, important features include St George's Church and Tithe Barn at Hanham Court and the 18th century 'Sally on the Barn' at Court Farm: these settlements are perched on the open slopes above the steep sided River Avon valley.

Other small settlements include Riverside Cottages, a scattering of cottages along the river to the west and farm houses, including cottages at Castle Inn Farm and Bickley Farm, with older properties typically enclosed by stone boundary walls.

Bitton, a nucleated village of predominantly limestone buildings and walls to the east, is a designated Conservation Area. Positioned on slightly higher ground on the edge of this area, it overlooks the floodplain of the Avon Valley and extends northwards into the Golden Valley character area.

The former London to Midland railway line (now the Bristol and Bath Railway Path) crosses the floodplain diagonally on embankment, heading towards Bath to the south east. Part of this route is shared with a steam railway.

The remnants of coal mining and small scale stone quarrying have left traces along the valley sides to the west. A large area of tipped material from the Hanham Colliery forms a steep sided mound, well vegetated by woodland. The small quarry sites form frequent features, creating a number of stone outcrops, now enclosed by woodland.

The importance of the River Avon as a communication route is evident at frequent intervals along its course.

Londonderry Wharf, on a meander in the river, opposite and to the north east of the Cadbury factory (Photo 7), was the terminus for coal barges, which collected coal transported along the Dramway from Mangotsfield and Ram Hill (Photo 8) and even from as far as Coalpit Heath to the north.

Numerous lock gates along the Avon and the Port Avon Marina at Keynsham, provide recreational facilities (Photo 10) and access to

the wider river and canal systems of Bristol and Bath. Conham River Park and car park on the north western edge of the character area, enables easy access to the Avon Valley from the urban area for recreational use. Conham Ferry operates seasonally, allowing links across the river.

Two roads cross the area: the A4174 on an elevated bridge, spanning the narrow steep sided river valley to the west; the A4175, following naturally higher ground within a meander loop, before crossing the river. The A431 follows slightly higher ground along the northern edge of the floodplain and character area boundary.

A number of important recreational routes cross the area:

- The Bristol and Bath Railway Path passes from the settlement of Willsbridge into this area and across the floodplain and River Avon along an embanked route, continuing beyond the area to Bath. A short section of this route to the south of Willsbridge is shared with a restored railway track and steam train.
- The Avon Valley Walkway follows the northern river bank from Bristol, joining and heading south along the Railway Path.
- The Dramway follows the eastern edge of the Siston Brook valley, concluding its route at the River Avon and the former Londonderry Wharf.
- The Monarch's Way crosses the floodplain between Bitton and Keynsham Lock on the River Avon, largely following field boundaries and passing beneath the Railway Path.
- The Community Forest Path follows the Dramway, joins the Avon Valley Walkway southwards, crossing the Avon on the A4175, then following the River Chew beyond this area.

A number of footpaths intersect and cross the hillsides above the Avon Valley and floodplain.

One powerline passes through the Siston Brook valley and then westwards along the River Avon valley.

Landscape Character

The Avon Valley area has a largely simple rural character comprising floodplain, enclosed wooded valley to the west and open hillsides to the north west, contained by dense settlement.

The Avon floodplain landscape is a flat, large scale area with, regular shaped pastoral fields, fringed by some arable fields. Fields are defined by clipped or overgrown hedges, periodic lines of tall trees (poplar and willow) defining the river's course and disused railway line, with scattered mature field and hedgerow trees elsewhere. These occasionally confine views, although overall the landscape is open, the flat topography and distinct tree lines creating a simple, well balanced pattern and tranquil character.

The tree lined railway embankment forms a significant physical landform and visual screen within this area, containing east to west views and providing a more enclosed setting to the edge of Bitton. The elevated footpath/cycleway also allows occasional local and distant views over the adjacent floodplain and river.

The winter flooding of the river meadows contributes to seasonal visual changes and connection with natural processes and cycles.

The presence of over mature wetland trees, such as willow and poplar, provide both structure and a sense of age and place in the landscape. Many of the trees are old pollarded willows and poplars, which have not been maintained for many years.

Conham River Park contains a similar tree structure near the river bank, with more even aged, planted lime trees enclosing the park's central area. Glimpsed views southwards include rock outcrops, which define the river valley's southern edge at this point, with housing partially visible along the skyline. Background road noise from the elevated A4174 overbridge interrupts the otherwise very secluded and tranquil character of the area.

Villages such as Bitton on the area's boundary (Photo 11), also contribute to the distinctive character of the locality, with its rich mix of stone buildings and boundary walls on its fringes. The village's church tower is a

prominent feature, visible from many parts of the valley.

The red brick building and tall chimney of Cadbury's chocolate factory is located on the river at Somerdale, just outside this character area. The open character of the floodplain however, ensures this building is visually prominent in the locality and forms a key landmark in many local and wider views from within this area (Photo 9).

The large regular shaped fields beside the factory have intermittent hedges and fenced boundaries, creating a very open appearance, the flat landscape contrasting with the more undulating landform to the north of the river.

The narrow enclosed river valley to the west includes a combination of linear ancient and semi-natural woodland, clipped hedges, and bands of mature deciduous trees, creating a textured but simple enclosed landscape, which emphasises the sinuous form of the River Avon. Long views along the valley are possible from the elevated A4174, less so from the A4175 road bridges. Views are typically more contained from eye level along the valley floor and from slopes, due to the dense woodland cover.

One powerline passes through the enclosed valley area and is prominent locally within the valley confines (Photo 6). The A4174 bridging the valley is a prominent visual structure and the noise from the traffic on it an audible intrusion eroding the perception of remoteness and tranquillity within the valley.

The landscape to the north west, above the steep sided wooded valley, is visually separate from the River Avon and is varied, with some areas appearing relatively tranquil and remote in character, whilst others are heavily influenced by the urban edge along this area's boundary.

Starting in the west and roughly south of the Abbots Road and Court Farm Road, pasture fields are contained by the irregular woodland edge of the River Avon valley.

The scattered traditional stone properties and farms at The Batch, Castle Inn Farm and Bickley Farm are well integrated, due to the small scale scattered nature of development; the limited views in this area, resulting from the south

westwards sloping landform, local woodland containment and, the variety of boundary and garden vegetation; strong structure of stone wall boundaries and the wider strong tree/woodland framework.

The urban area of Hanham, south of Abbots Road has a dense urban edge, which is largely well integrated to the south by boundary trees and hedgerows, but is less so along its eastern edge.

To the east of Hanham, the A4174, which is in cutting, remains visually unobtrusive, except within immediate views.

In the area of Hanham Court, a small hollow in the landform and diverse structure of adjacent hedgerows, forms a textured more enclosed and tranquil landscape, with distinctive historic built landmarks of the court and church. To the north, the linear housing edge of Longwell Green is, in places, well integrated by an adjacent framework of dense overgrown hedgerows, woodland and small scale vegetated back gardens, which provide some transition between the urban edge and rural fringe beyond.

Within the north west area, glimpsed views of the urban edge along adjacent higher ground and trains passing along the valley sides to the south erodes the otherwise tranquil character.

To the north, the Hanham Hills form a prominent rounded landform extending into the urban edge and rising some 30 metres above the adjacent area (Photo 2). This rising ground visually separates the urban edges of Hanham and Longwell Green. The medium sized irregular shaped pasture fields on the hills, bounded by clipped hedges with little tree cover, allow panoramic views. Extensive views are possible over the urban area and to open countryside beyond, including to the east the Oldland Ridge and Pucklechurch Ridge, the Avon Valley towards the Ashwicke Ridges and the Cotswold Scarp; to the west the Severn Ridge and Welsh Hills beyond Bristol; and to the south west, Dundry Hill (Photo 1).

These rural hills are a local landmark and important open space, prominent from the defined urban edge of Hanham and Longwell Green and within southerly views from Kingswood. In conjunction with open fields and public open space to the west, this area forms

an important rural buffer to and the skyline from the urban edge. Although the hills are physically severed from the urban area by the A4174, since this lies in cutting, the open space adjacent to the urban edge and the hills are visually continuous.

From the Hanham Hills, to the north in the adjoining area, the regional retail centre at Longwell Green, comprising large scale light coloured commercial units and adjacent dense residential framework, forms a prominent urban edge. To the west, the recent housing development adjacent to Hanham Hall is also prominent, extending into the adjacent open landscape with no planting structure along its fringe to provide visual integration (Photo 1). To the south east, a section of Longwell Green forms a harsh and prominent urban edge, rising over the lower slopes of the hills.

Individual properties punctuate the line of the A4175, across slightly raised ground within the Avon Valley floodplain and are generally well integrated by surrounding vegetation.

The A431, where it defines the north eastern boundary of this area, has a varied character along this route, influenced by the extent to which settlement or open landscape fringe this corridor. Rural characteristics are, however, strong for much of its length, with scattered Pennant stone houses and cottages (with limestone more common to the east) forming a linear corridor pattern within an often strong vegetation structure, comprising hedgerows, trees and garden vegetation. A different, more concentrated settlement pattern is formed along the southern edge of Willsbridge and within the village of Bitton.

The Changing Landscape

The Avon Valley character area is a distinctive and quite simple rural landscape, with limited visible development except along its fringes, particularly the northern urban edge.

The distinctive and rural character of this area is sensitive to change. The proximity of the urban edge creates pressures for housing, business, transport, amenity and recreational development and use within the area.

Any further significant physical or visual encroachment of the urban edge would erode the character of the rural landscape.

The area is already popular for recreation, as seen from the number of footpaths providing informal recreation and use of the river by pleasure craft. Additional recreational facilities or infrastructure has the potential to erode the distinctive rural character and perception of remoteness.

Much of the existing strong landscape framework of woodland, trees and hedgerows is in a reasonable to good condition. There is a mix, however, of sporadic and intermittent hedges, often replaced or supplemented with fencing in the eastern areas and near the urban edge. This decline in the management of hedges, or their potential future loss, will erode the landscape infrastructure over time.

Pennant stone boundary walls have in places fallen into disrepair and, in some instances, the stone has been removed.

The more wooded areas to the west and north create a strong, intact landscape structure. There is little evidence, however, of the presence of juvenile trees to replace, supplement and sustain succession of the woodland framework in the longer term. Active management of the landscape framework, including hedgerows, woodlands and stone walls, would help to ensure the conservation of these features for the long term. Bringing overgrown hedgerows back into management could result in the landscape character of some areas becoming more or less open, dependent on the number of hedgerow trees which are allowed to develop or are planted.

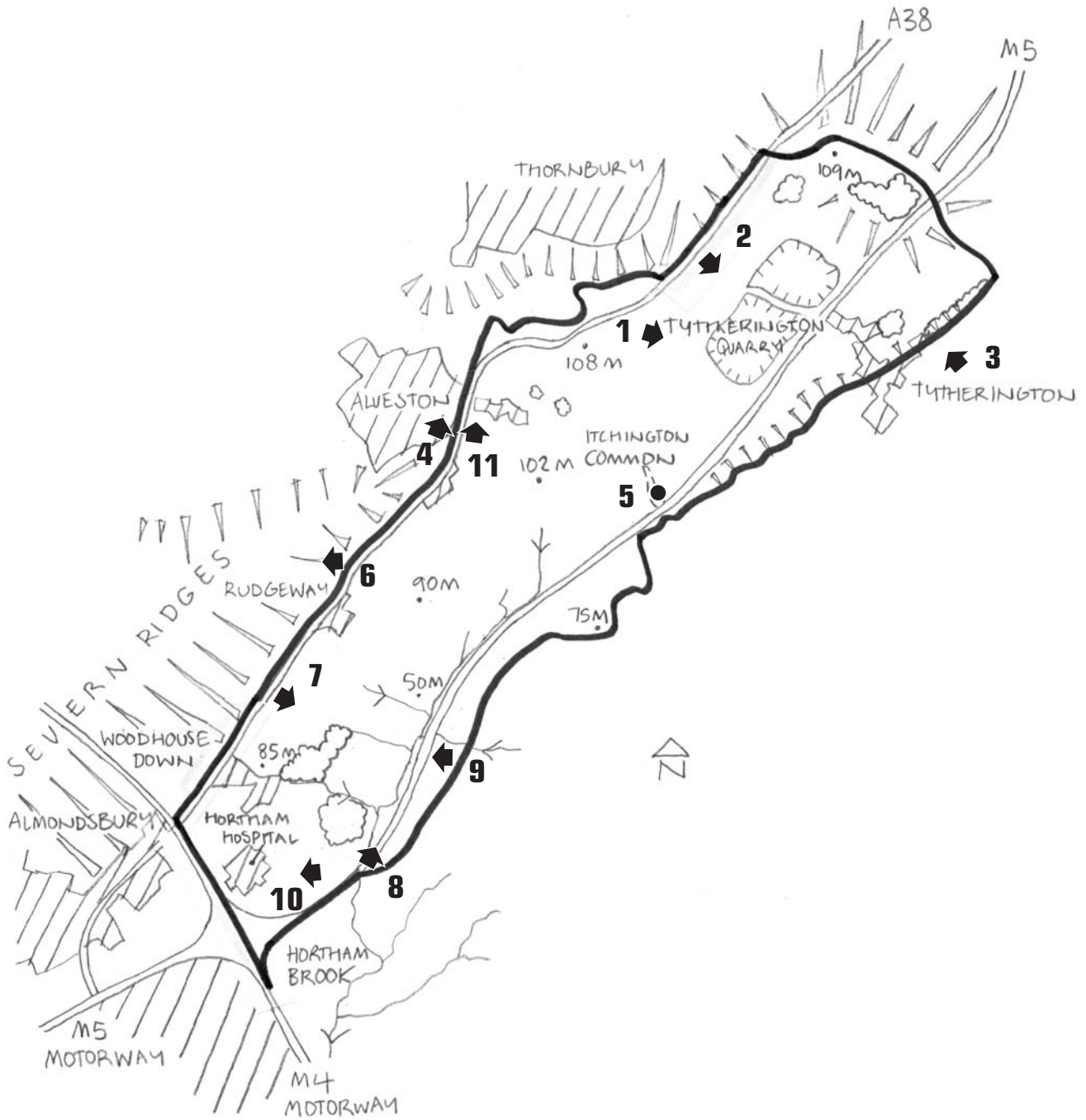
Areas of new woodland have recently been planted in association with and to the south of the recent housing development at Hanham Hall; adjacent to the Bristol and Bath Railway Path south of Willsbridge; and within the floodplain adjacent to the lock and A4175, as part of the Forest of Avon. These will, in the long term, contribute to and strengthen the landscape structure of the area. The woodland park adjacent to Hanham Hall will also as it matures provide some visual integration of the built edge within certain views.

Distinctive settlement occurs along the northern boundary at Hanham, Longwell Green, Willsbridge and Bitton. The often older pattern of settlement, use of local stone and traditional architectural style relate well to their rural fringe. These areas are sensitive to change from infill or coalescence, which might visually change the present distinctive character resulting from the relationship between settlement and adjoining rural setting.

The character of this area is also very much dependent on that of adjacent areas, both within and beyond the South Gloucestershire boundary. Any significant change in these areas potentially could influence the character of the South Gloucestershire Avon Valley.



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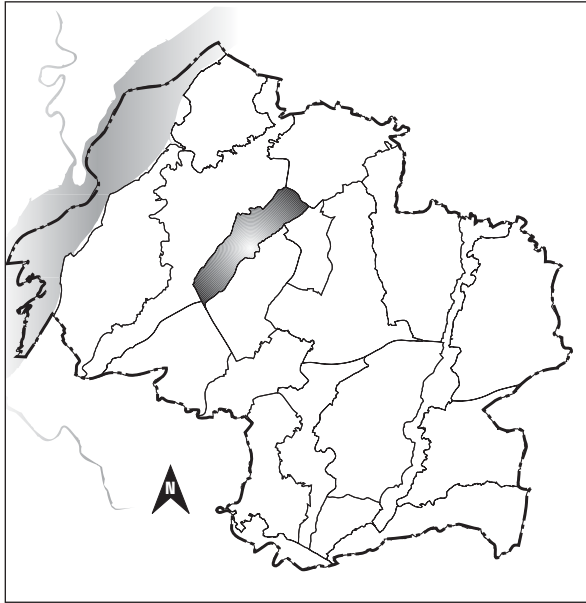


Key

➔₁₅ Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

**Figure 57:
Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge -
Sketch Map**



The Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge character area is a broad open ridge comprising a pastoral landscape, punctuated by woodland and copses and dissected and defined by roads.

Key Characteristics

- A broad linear ridgeline, with ridge/plateau and gentle slopes to the east, seen as a backdrop to the vale and plain beyond.
- Open to semi-enclosed pastoral landscape of regular, medium sized fields with a mix of thick, clipped and intermittent hedges and stock fencing. Limited common land at several sites to the north east.
- Regular dispersed pattern of copses throughout, with large areas of deciduous woodland in the south and north and containing sections of the western boundary along the A38. Limited mature tree specimens are associated with some older farmsteads, occasionally within hedgerows or fields.
- Occasional extensive views from the western boundary include the Severn Estuary. The eastern slopes look towards the Cotswold Scarp.
- Extensive road pattern of M5, M4/M5 interchange and A38 define this area.

B4427 and other minor roads connect and cross the area.

- Settlement is limited, with small villages/hamlets and ribbon settlement along roads. Stone walls line some roads, most notably sections of the A38 and roads adjacent to older farms.
- One large active quarry and a number of powerlines lie to the north, a disused hospital site and one powerline to the south.

Location

The Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge character area extends north eastwards from the M4/M5 interchange (adjacent to the northern edge of the Bristol conurbation) and is located centrally within South Gloucestershire.

The western boundary follows the often distinct landform change between the upper slopes of the Severn Ridges and open plateau/rolling ridgeline of this area.

The eastern boundary marks a transition between the lower eastern slopes of this area and the landform of the Tytherington Plain and Earthcott Vale.

The northern boundary defines the end of the ridge and its approximate skyline, the descending slopes beyond containing the Falfield Vale.

The southern boundary follows the M4 and includes part of the M4 / M5 interchange. (See Figures 58 & 60).

Physical Influences

The Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge area consists of Jurassic limestone, interwoven with a small proportion of alluvium and Carboniferous limestone. Soils are predominantly Pelostagnogleys.

This combination of geological strata creates a broad gentle ridgeline, on a north east-south west axis at approximately 100 metres a.o.d., with a small plateau to the east of Alveston.

Descending, gently rolling, south east facing slopes fall towards and contain the Tytherington Plain and Earthcott Vale at between 50-65 metres a.o.d. Slopes are convex towards the south, with a small bluff forming Tytherington Hill to the north. The boundary of the area is located at the foot of the hill.

The M4/M5 interchange, partly within this area to the south west, forms a large scale focus of road infrastructure and accompanying man-made landform of earthworks, road embankments and overbridges. The M4, to the north west of the interchange, cuts into rising ground of the Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge and Severn Ridge beyond this area.

Surface land drainage is minimal, with a few drainage ditches along field boundaries feeding the Hortham Brook to the south. A number of small ponds are scattered across the area, generally near farms.

Land Cover

The character area is largely a pastoral landscape, with regular shaped, medium sized fields. The fields are divided by a mix of thick, clipped and intermittent hedges, with some areas of fencing around paddocks nearer to the A38 (Photo 7).

There are limited mature hedgerow trees. Mature tree specimens are often associated with old farmsteads and more limited elsewhere. Small regular shaped copses of deciduous woodland occur frequently scattered throughout the area. Large areas of woodland lie to the south in the vicinity of Woodhouse Down (Photo 9), to the north at Milbury Heath, with a cluster of smaller woodlands and copses around Tytherington (Photo 3).

Limited areas of common land lie to the north east of the area, with a concentration of small sites around Tytherington at Baden Hill, (site of a small disused quarry), Tytherington Hill (ancient woodland and open undulating ground) and Hilly Upman (open playing fields).

The larger area of Itchington Common falls within this area. The common is severed by the M5 and comprises rough grassland, with dense boundary vegetation (Photo 5).

Horse paddocks are generally limited in distribution, largely located off the A38 corridor.

Tytherington Quarry occupies an extensive area to the north, comprising a plant area (Photo 1) and three areas of excavation which have been worked sequentially southwards, parallel to the M5. The edge of the site is largely contained by hedgerows and hedgerow trees, supplemented in places with earth mounds, some covered with young woodland.

The Castle Hill Fort to the west of the village of Tytherington and partly quarried, is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Little Abbey Camp, to the west of Grovesend, is severed by the A38 and comprises a fortified enclosure which is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Settlement and Infrastructure

Settlement is limited within the area to small villages or hamlets such as Tytherington, Woodhouse Down and Rudgeway, with small scale ribbon development, in places clustered at road junctions, or scattered farms and houses elsewhere. These are typically constructed from Pennant sandstone, with some limestone to the south west of the area.

Tytherington village, is located at a confluence of roads on the lower slopes of Tytherington Hill, partly extending into the adjacent Tytherington Plain area. A Conservation Area covers the central village which includes key properties, a framework of tall boundary walls, all constructed of Pennant sandstone and, a vegetated area of disused quarry workings. At its heart and on the area's boundary, the church and public house are prominent.

Outside, but adjacent to the boundaries of this character area, there are more significant areas of settlement: the large village of Alveston lies immediately to the west; ribbon settlement extends continuously between Rudgeway and Alveston along both sides of the A38 and is more scattered further south.

The edge of Alveston village abuts the character area to the north west, along the broad A38

corridor. It comprises older cottages of Pennant sandstone, limestone, some render and more recent brick houses (Photo 4). Linear ribbon settlement, extends eastwards from Alveston, into this area, along a minor road.

Woodhouse Down comprises a localised cluster of brick and rendered housing, abutting, but largely lying off the A38 in a regular pattern, laid out along a lane with cul-de-sacs.

Rudgeway comprises a smaller, denser concentration of housing, largely lining the A38.

The linear pattern of Rudgeway and Woodhouse Down frontages, together with frequent houses scattered along the A38, sometimes forms continuous ribbon development which has started to encroach along some of the minor roads to the east and west.

Pennant boundary stone walls, set back from the A38 road edge, are common between Rudgeway and Alveston.

The disused Hortham Hospital is located in the south, adjacent to the M4/M5 junction and consists of a complex of brick buildings (Photo 10).

The former manorial complex at Old Church Farm, off the B4427, is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and includes the disused church of St. Helen's.

Tockington Park Farm, to the south of Rudgeway, is built over a Roman villa and lies within a former deer park. Another former large deer park, south of Alveston, can also be identified through its field boundary pattern.

Major roads pass along the edges of this area, with a number of minor routes dissecting it at regular intervals. The M5 passes near the eastern boundary, largely at grade, with parts of the central and northern section in cutting (Photos 8 & 9). The A38 passes along the western boundary, connecting with the wider pattern of minor roads. The B4427, together with a number of minor roads and country lanes, typically climbs and descends the easterly slopes, running north west - south east, connecting isolated settlements to the A38.

The area is also dissected by numerous public rights of way, including two important recreational routes.

One of a series of Circular Rides comprises a circuit, taking in a larger area of the Severn Ridges to the west, which briefly crosses the area, descending along a lane east of Alveston, following lanes through Tytherington and climbing, via a track and lane, towards Milbury Heath.

The Jubilee Way climbs the ridge north westwards, crossing fields from Itchington in the adjoining area and following a lane towards the A38 and beyond this area, to the south of Thornbury.

A number of overhead powerlines ascend the ridge to the south of Tytherington, running across the area from the major sub-station within the adjacent Earthcott Vale character area. A further powerline passes across the area, to the north of Hortham Hospital.

A number of mobile phone masts are evident adjacent to the M5 and A38 road corridors within the area, with a couple near the A38's bridge over the M4 and adjacent to the M5, at a point to the east of Tockington Park Farm.

One mineral railway line crosses the area in cutting to the west of Tytherington, defining one edge of the active Tytherington Limestone Quarry (Photo 2) and smaller disused quarry workings between the M5 and A38.

Landscape Character

The Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge area is a rural, gently rolling and sloping landscape, its character largely influenced by the ridge/plateau and gentle easterly sloping landform. Land cover of pasture within regular fields defined by clipped or intermittent hedgerows, infrequent hedgerow trees and frequent dispersed copses or areas of woodland, produces a textured, simple, open to semi-enclosed landscape. This rural character remains largely intact, but is influenced variously by roads and small settlement clusters.

The extensive, frequent pattern of roads and sloping landform of this area, provide opportunities to view much of this area and its features. These slopes also allow extensive views westwards, of the vale and plain

landscapes and further, to Winterbourne, Yate and the Cotswold Scarp.

The ridge and plateau area however varies between open and enclosed. Views from within this area are often curtailed by the slight hill and plateau landform, sometimes contained by settlement edge, stone walls along the A38 and wooded slopes of the Severn Ridge to the west, which line parts of the A38 or by the varying pattern and concentration of trees/ copses. The large areas of woodland of Tockington Park Wood, Hortham Wood and Gatten's Brake to the south of the area, overlying gentle slopes of otherwise arable fields, produce a simple and balanced large scale landscape feature. The ridgeline and elevated slopes continue north eastwards, forming a prominent landform within views from the M5 and a backdrop to the lower adjacent vale and plain (Photo 9).

Within this area the combination of built features, setting and vegetation, form areas of distinctive landscape character. The frequent distribution of older stone farm houses, located on the ridge and along minor roads, is a common characteristic of the area, with notable features along Shellards Lane (east of Alveston) and Old Church Road (B4427):

- The complex of farms and out buildings, linked along The Street / Shellards Lane by stone walls, set within an open plateau of fields with mature specimen trees, forms a locally distinct feature (Photo 11).
- The manorial complex of Old Orchard Farm and adjacent tower of St Helen's Church along Old Church Road, forms a prominent landmark, visible from the M5 and adjacent vale character area.

The wooded slopes of Tytherington Hill, and setting of the village and common land at Tytherington are distinctive, with the church forming a prominent landmark. The village is largely well integrated, set above the wooded slopes of Tytherington Hill. However, an eastward extension into the adjacent Tytherington Plain character area is more prominent, due to the more regular shaped concentration of houses and little vegetation within or along its edge to provide integration. These features are visible largely from the adjacent plain area, forming a distinctive backdrop.

Settlement, structures, roads and non-agricultural land use, in places have a strong influence over the adjacent landscape. This is evident for example to the south of the area, where the housing edge of Woodhouse Down, with little vegetation to provide integration, breaches the otherwise rural skyline. Along lower slopes there is a scattering of dissimilar buildings, including glasshouses within a nursery complex, a disused farm with unmanaged fields and a farm with large modern agricultural sheds. These elements detract from the otherwise rural character of the locality.

The tall poplar trees within the adjacent Hortham Hospital site are distinctly different to the wider rural pattern of broadleaved hedgerow trees and woodland. However, the site is largely well integrated, influencing only the immediate area. It comprises low rise linear blocks, set within a strong framework of mature tree cover and substantial areas of peripheral open space (Photo 10).

Tytherington Quarry is largely well integrated, given the containment of views in this locality as a result of the plateau landform, intervening hedgerow structure with occasional trees and mound/planting mitigation measures along the quarry's site boundary. The works' buildings are however prominent industrial structures, visible above the natural ground level, appearing within some local views on the skyline (Photo 1). Lorry movements particularly affect properties at Grovesend.

The A38 is largely a well integrated and visually contained rural corridor. It has a linear framework of stone boundary walls between Rudgeway and Alveston and sections of broad roadside verges. The strong vegetation structure comprises occasional woodland fringe to the west, mixed with mature pine trees, and garden vegetation, which in combination with sections of ribbon development, in places has a suburban influence.

Occasional paddocks and pasture fields, enclosed by post and wire fencing, form more open pockets within the landscape along sections of the eastern edge of this road corridor.

The vegetation structure largely integrates the frequent scattered ribbon settlement. The combination of settlement and increasing traffic

levels however, exerts a slight urban influence upon the adjacent landscape.

There are occasional extensive views from the A38, looking beyond this area to the west, over the steep descending slopes of the Severn Ridge (Photo 6), to the Levels and Severn Estuary beyond.

The town of Thornbury north west of this area's boundary remains concealed from most of this area, set below the Severn Ridges scarp. However, it is prominent within views of the Levels and Estuary from the edge of the scarp on the boundary of this area south of the town.

The M4/M5 interchange close to Bristol, comprising large scale earthworks and elevated interchange structure, in combination with the M5 at grade (Photo 8 & 9), introduce structures and traffic volumes which visually and audibly prominent in the south east corner of this area.

The M5 traffic also influences the adjacent landscape to the north west of Itchington and, has a wider influence to the north west of Tytherington, where it passes on embankment and at grade. The latter location permits extensive views eastwards along Tytherington Hill and over the Tytherington Levels below.

The interchange and large scale earth bunds around Woodlands Golf Course, immediately to the south east beyond this area, largely screen the north eastern commercial development edge of Bristol, although the roofs of some buildings remain evident as a skyline feature, with the RAC tower forming a prominent landmark.

The concentration of a number of powerlines to the east of Alveston are prominent linear features ascending the ridge within an otherwise agricultural framework. Where they cross the edge of the ridge/plateau area, these powerlines and towers are particularly prominent on the skyline.

The mobile phone masts adjacent to the M5 and A38 are generally evident within local views, their prominence locally dependent upon the individual requirements of each installation, which influences the size of the mast and need for associated infrastructure, such as buildings, compounds, access tracks and fencing.

The Changing Landscape

The Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge character area is an agricultural area with significant transport and settlement influences and pressures on its fringes. Much of the existing landscape framework of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and woodland is in good condition and intact, however there is evidence of a loss in hedgerows adjacent to the A38 corridor, with some land use changes from agriculture to horse grazing. This has resulted in a more open character locally.

Throughout the area, there is generally little new planting to provide succession and sustain the landscape structure in the future. In the long term this could result in a decline or loss of features, which may increase the openness of the area. Active management of the landscape structure, including hedgerows and woodlands, would help to ensure the conservation of these features for the long term.

The introduction of ornamental trees and shrubs within a rural landscape has the potential to erode the rural character. The tall poplar trees adjacent to Hortham Hospital detract from the local agricultural framework. Ornamental trees planted in gardens along the A38 corridor are already affecting the rural character of the area, introducing suburban elements. Further similar planting has the potential to increase the erosion of the rural character of this corridor.

The presence of key transport routes around the boundaries of this area, together with the proximity of the urban edge of Bristol to the south, increases the pressures for change within this area.

The road corridors themselves and the existing ribbon development along the A38, already affect the character of the adjacent rural landscape. A further increase in traffic or additional built development could potentially result in a significant change in local character.

Further built development, or tree planting along the western fringe of the A38 also has the potential to conceal the existing, extensive views towards the Severn Estuary, which are a distinctive feature along parts of this route.

The M4/M5 interchange, M5 and, to a lesser extent, the A38 corridor, with associated traffic noise and lighting, have a wide visual and audible influence, eroding the local rural character.

The proliferation of mobile phone masts is a recent development trend, introducing new structures to often rural, elevated and visible locations. This type of development has already occurred along the A38 and M5 corridors. The further intrusion of such development could introduce cumulative erosion of rural characteristics.

Horse paddocks are evident within the area, particularly along the edge of the A38. This change in land use is a recent trend, which in places has led to the loss or erosion of hedgerows. The cumulative effect of this and the associated infrastructure of stables, access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and even floodlighting, can result in a marked change in landscape character.

Land is allocated for residential development at Hortham Hospital within the Local Plan. Proposals for development of the site have the potential to affect some of the numerous trees within the site and along its boundary, which presently contribute significantly to the integration of the site's built development. The combination of a different development layout and loss of trees has the potential to increase the visual prominence of the site within local views, influencing the adjacent rural landscape. However, policies are included in the Local Plan which seek to ensure that any proposals for the site take account of the need to protect the character, amenity and distinctiveness of the locality and wider landscape.

Tytherington Quarry presently comprises a significant area of disused quarry and areas of ongoing excavation. Potential future operations, identified in the Minerals & Waste Local Plan, could include the extension of the quarry to the south west. This would require the removal and realignment of Tytherington Road, with the loss of field boundaries and hedgerow trees, affecting the character of the locality.

The largely rural skyline of the ridge/ plateau is sensitive to change, particularly from the encroachment of built development, due to its visually prominent location.

The easterly facing slopes which comprise much of the area, are similarly sensitive, being visible from the east. Within this area, the introduction of large modern sheds to farmsteads could significantly change the visual prominence of these building groups, which are currently low key rural features, as already seen at Hortham Farm.

A number of distinctive areas of older settlement contribute greatly to local character and are potentially sensitive to change resulting from infill, or built development which would erode their intrinsic character or setting. The buildings at and adjacent to the Grove Farm complex, Old Church Farm and Tytherington village are particularly sensitive to such change.

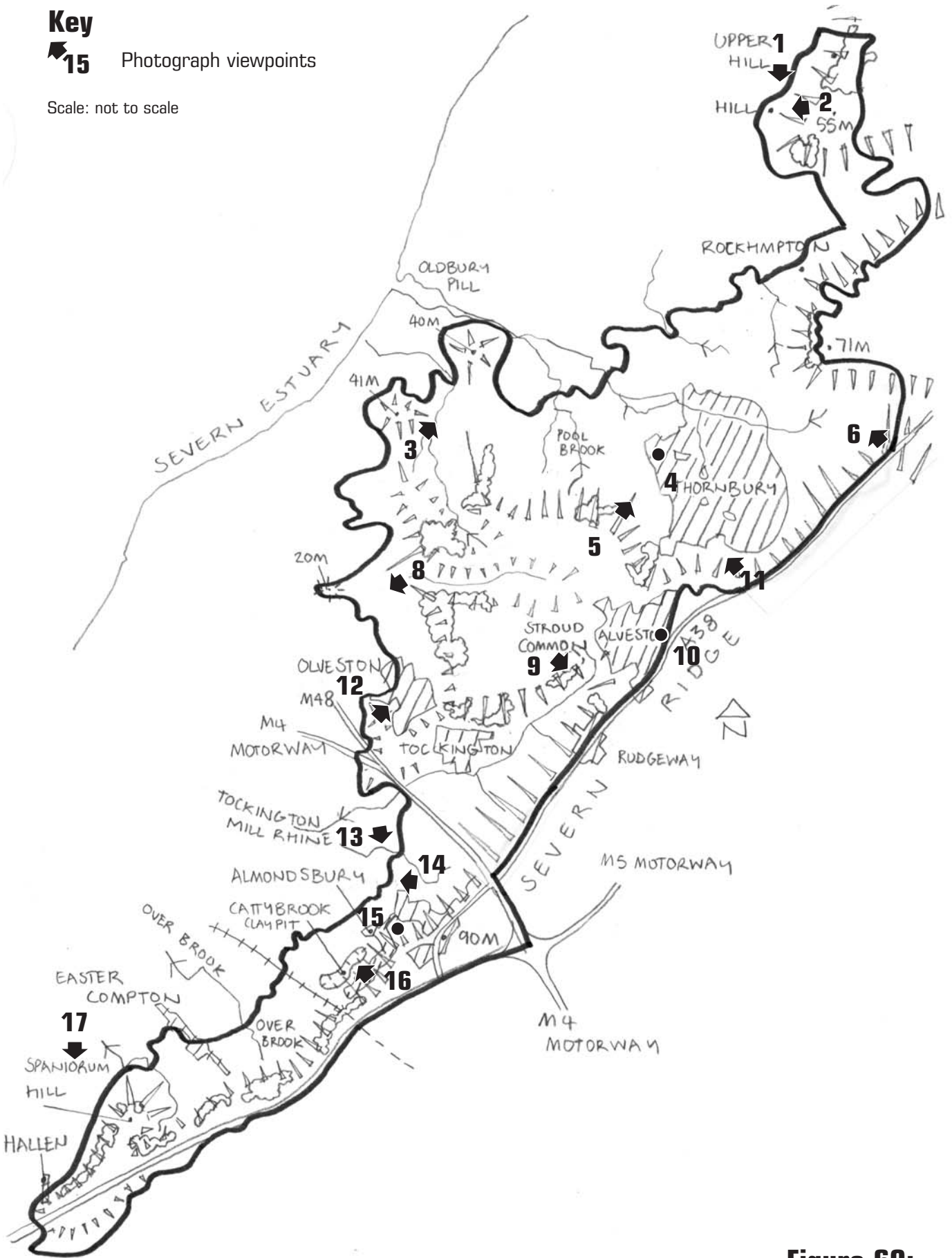


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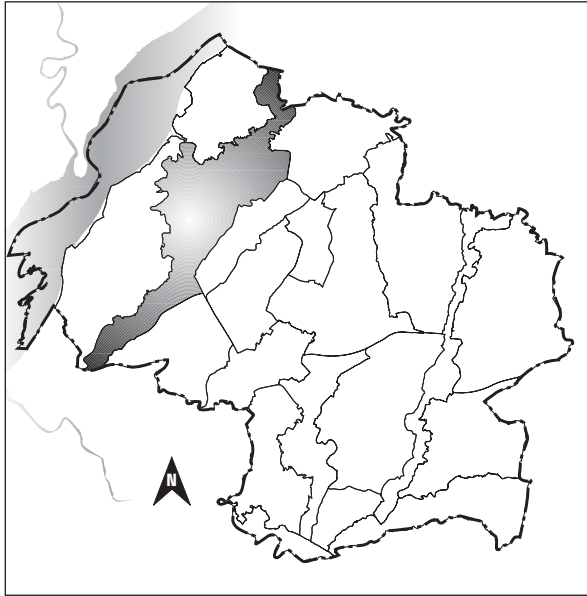
Key

15 Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale



**Figure 60:
Severn Ridges - Sketch Map**



The Severn Ridges landscape character area is an extensive, complex landform of abrupt scarps and gentle ridges, which rises from the lower Levels area.

Key Characteristics

- Distinctive large scale sloping landform rising from the Levels, with sections of steep scarp in the north and south and more gentle slope profiles elsewhere. A large central area of low hills and radiating ridges extends westwards. A narrow linear area of dip slope, lies adjacent to the Bristol urban edge.
- Area is greatly influenced by adjacent Levels and Severn Estuary. All combine to form an area of regionally prominent landform, distinct within and beyond South Gloucestershire.
- Expansive and readily available views extend over the lowland Levels and Severn Estuary to the west.
- Scarp and lower ridges form a prominent backdrop in views from the Levels, South Wales and the Forest of Dean.
- Diverse vegetation cover, with mature wooded scarps, occasionally with ornamental species within historic landscape parks.

- Clipped and overgrown hedgerows and intermittent trees divide small pasture fields, with larger arable fields on more gentle slopes.
- Orchards and limited common land are often associated with older settlements and farms, with a large new orchard at Almondsbury.
- Extensive distribution of settlements and minor roads, with older villages, hamlets and scattered farms of local stone, with stone boundary walls. All largely nestled within the landform and strong landscape structure. Churches form distinctive landmarks.
- To the south, the Bristol urban edge, M4 and M5 are prominent within their local landscape. Sections of the motorways are also prominent within wider views, forming physical and visual barriers.
- Powerlines frequently cross parts of the area, particularly to the north and vary in prominence.
- Industrial/chemical works, distributor sheds, Oldbury Power Station and Severn Bridges, within the adjacent Levels and Estuary, visually influence this character area.

Location

The Severn Ridges landscape character area extends from the northern to south western boundary of South Gloucestershire, running through its western side.

The western boundary follows an often subtle transition in landform, land cover and drainage pattern between the low lying Levels landscape and the rising ground of the ridges. The boundary generally follows the 10 metre contour line, although in some places the topographic change is imperceptible. The eastern boundary generally follows the scarp edge, the A38 and M5. (See Figures 61 & 63).

Physical Influences

The underlying geology varies, with a concentration of Carboniferous limestone centrally, continuing as a narrow band southwards along the ridge. A broad band of Old Red sandstone underlies the curved bowl and northern continuation of the ridgeline, which provides the setting to Thornbury, with the remaining area largely of Keuper marl and Rhaetic clays.

The western boundary approximately follows the geological boundary between the Keuper marl of this area and the Estuarine alluvium of the adjacent Levels. The soils are a mix of Stagnogleyic Pello-argillic Brown Earths, typical Stagnogleys and Brown Rankers.

The landform is varied within the extent of this area, but is dominated by the large scale features of a ridgeline which runs roughly north east – south west, curving westwards around a centrally elevated area, to the west of Thornbury and Alveston. The sloping landform rises from the Levels in the west.

The ridgeline has gentle to steeply sloping scarp slopes, with lower slopes rising from the Levels at approximately 10 metres a.o.d., to the highest point along the ridge at approximately 100 metres a.o.d. south of Thornbury.

The scarp edge is most prominent in the area of Hill and Rockhampton to the north, above Olveston centrally and from Rudgeway south to Hallen. Spaniorum Hill forms a rounded promontory in the south, before the scarp ends abruptly at Hallen.

To the west of Alveston lies a linear plateau, its edges forming low-lying hills and ridges which radiate out into the Levels, often forming small bluffs, for example at Catherine Hill, Olveston. At the western extent of this landform, undulating ground and small outliers rise up to 40 metres a.o.d., above the Levels, for example the two hills either side of Cowhill, (one of which is shown in Photo 3) and Red Hill.

To the south east of the ridge, adjacent to the Bristol urban edge, lies a narrow linear area of south east facing dip slope, which continues beneath the Bristol conurbation.

There are many watercourses that flow from the ridge, generally westwards towards the

Oldbury Levels, Pilning Levels and Severn Estuary. They form a mixture of natural brooks, streams and man-made rhines.

Those flowing to the Oldbury Levels include:

- Regular drainage channels of the Rockhampton Rhine following the angular field pattern.
- Natural, tightly meandering stream course and linear ditches flow from Thornbury, north westwards towards Oldbury Pill, in places within a slightly incised valley.
- Pool Brook flows north westwards to the Oldbury Pill within both natural and straightened channels.

Those flowing to the Pilning Levels include:

- Tockington Mill Rhine and tributaries, which flow south westwards along partly straightened channels, through the Sheepcombe Vale.
- Over Brook, which forms both small sections of straightened and irregular channel, and the linear Bailey's Mead Rhine which forms a linear channel, both flowing north westwards.
- A natural stream course follows the small valley cut into the ridge at Spaniorum Hill and flows northwards.

Man made landforms have been formed, with embankments along the M4 and M5 motorways and earth bunds along the Bristol Golf Course boundary with the M5.

Land Cover

The land cover of the Severn Ridges is varied and largely related to landform. The flatter heart of the area and gently sloping ground is dominated by arable farmland of medium to large, regular shaped fields defined by low clipped hedges, often with fenced boundaries and intermittent trees (Photo 6).

Elsewhere, the undulating and steeply sloping landform over much of the area is used for pasture within small regular shaped fields, with pockets of a more irregular field pattern along steep, folded parts of the landform. Boundaries are typically a mix of clipped hedges, some

overgrown. This boundary treatment also extends along many of the numerous minor roads and lanes that cross the area. Mature hedgerow trees are intermittent, with areas of woodland clothing steep slopes and scarps, mixed occasionally with stands of Scots pine and ornamental deciduous/evergreen trees, particularly along ridgelines or associated with large houses or estates.

Woodland is variable in both size and pattern, with frequent areas, interspersed with pasture, along the scarp to the north at Upper Hill and Rockhampton (Photo 1); scattered linear and irregular areas within the central area (Photo 6) and, linear belts along the scarp edge between Almondsbury and Spaniorum Hill (Photo 13 & 17). In this latter area, the woodland edge is combined with small enclosed pasture with mixed thick hedgerow boundaries.

At Hill Court (a locally registered historic park), to the north of Rockhampton, ridge and furrow field patterns are evident on the sloping hillsides. This is combined with a framework of mature, deciduous and coniferous tree groups, sporadic laid hedgebanks and old orchards. These are remnants of an ornamental and designed landscape, a medieval parkland and cleared and ancient woodland (Photo 2). Other small scale historic landscape parks occur along the ridge south of Almondsbury, comprising Knole Almondsbury, Over Court, Hollywood Tower and Berwick Lodge. (These are all included on the local register of Historic Parks and Gardens).

There are three former large deer parks near Thornbury, which show distinct evidence of later sub-division by hedgerows and more recent land use changes. Thornbury New Park occupied a significant area of land to the north of Thornbury, extending up to Butt Lane and Oldbury Lane. Marlwood Park to the south west now includes Thornbury Golf Course and some fields to the north. Eastwood Deer Park originally extended some distance southwards from Eastwood Park (within the adjacent character area) over the Severn ridgeline and down to the Old Gloucester Road.

Orchards are a common feature, with old, small and scattered remnant orchards associated with settlements and farms. One particularly large new orchard lies to the north of

Almondsbury (Photo 14).

Dead elm trees are present within a number of hedgerows scattered within the area, typically evident as small, ivy clad trees.

Recreational land use is evident within a number of locations.

- Thornbury Golf Course lies to the south west of the town, which also has a large area of allotments and playing fields on its edge.
- North west of Alveston is a large area of recreational and amenity landscape and playing fields along the settlement edges. The area of Old Down, north east of Olveston, includes Old Down Country Park, within the grounds of an old estate. At Down House, just to the south, is a cricket ground near the intersection of several local roads.
- Bristol Golf Course extends along the lower slopes and scarp to the south and south west of Over.
- The southern edges of Almondsbury, adjacent to the M5, include a rugby pitch, cricket ground and sports pitch.
- Almondsbury Hill, within Upper Almondsbury and adjacent to the A38, comprises a linear open space of grassland, overlooking the Levels.

Common land is limited and dispersed, evident within the village of Rockhampton, with village greens, wide grass road verges and small fields; at Stroud Common, south west of Alveston (Photo 9), comprising rough grassland; and adjacent to Olveston Court, comprising orchards.

Large fortified enclosures, similar to hill forts, are found at Elberton and at Stroud Common west of Alveston. A more usual hill fort can be seen at Camp Hill Fort above Rockhampton. Little Abbey Hill Fort (to the south of Thornbury) is partly severed by the A38. All are Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

Knole Hill, south of Almondsbury, also appears a likely spot for a hill fort, although 18th century landscaping has removed possible evidence.

A scheduled round barrow lies to the west of Alveston.

One large disused limestone quarry at Harnhill, to the north of Olveston, has been reclaimed. Cattybrook Claypit, to the west of Almondsbury, is an active quarry and brickworks. A few small disused, sometimes wooded, quarries are located along steeper slopes, with some disused lead mines at Almondsbury Hill.

Settlement and Infrastructure

Settlement makes a major contribution to the character of this area, with its numerous small towns, villages, hamlets and scattered building groups.

Thornbury is the largest settlement within this area and is sited within an open bowl, contained to the south, east and north by higher ground (Photo 11). It is an important planned medieval town, the historic, original linear form laid out along two main streets and their intersection (Photo 4). A stone castle and church are sited to the north of the old town above a small valley. Designated a Conservation Area, important features comprise the diverse building content in limestone, Pennant sandstone and light coloured render, the variety in streetscape enclosure with pavements of various widths. The west and northern aspect are open, with a rural outlook to the Severn Estuary. The old town walls, set within open space, form an important landscape feature.

The town has expanded significantly to the east, with new residential and commercial development along its boundaries.

There are numerous other villages scattered over the lower ridge slopes, set above the lowland Levels landscape to the west. Many of these settlements are designated as Conservation Areas, including Lower Almondsbury, Olveston and Tockington.

- Almondsbury is largely a ribbon settlement, with various clustered and scattered phases of development associated with the road network. The original centre at Lower Almondsbury (a Conservation Area) is a cross-road settlement, centred around a

manor house and church along gentle lower slopes of the ridge, with scattered houses along the wooded scarp of Almondsbury Hill (also within the Conservation Area), which provides a backdrop to the village (Photo 13 & 15). The scarp includes a number of small disused lead mines in this area. A mixture of more recent ribbon/ clustered development follows the A38 and B4055 along the upper slopes of the ridge. The north west and south east linear settlement fringes, relate closely to the ridge topography and face the Severn Estuary, elevated above the Levels.

Rich in variety and style, but united through the common use of stone, including limestone, Pennant sandstone and conglomerate as building materials, it has extensive stone wall boundaries, both in and on the edge of the settlement.

A significant area of the village to the south and associated with the A38, comprises 20th century housing development, typically constructed of brick.

- Olveston and Tockington are positioned on lower slopes just above the Levels. Both historically developed in association with the rural economy of cattle farming and are built from a variety of limestone, Pennant sandstone and conglomerate stone.

Olveston has a linear pattern of settlement, based around two crossroads and a number of minor roads, with a now infilled village green to the south. Frequent tall limestone wall boundaries define the key properties and contain the road margins. The older fabric of the village includes 16th to 18th century properties, the fortified stone manor house (a Scheduled Ancient Monument) and church. A number of orchards lie along the settlement's periphery, with common land also including an orchard, to the west. Late 20th century housing development is clustered to the south east, comprising reconstituted stone buildings.

The neighbouring village of Tockington has developed around a village green and church at the junction of minor roads and lanes, also sharing similar details with

Olveston. In particular, the extensive use of limestone walls to define property boundaries is a notable characteristic of the village. The building style varies, but is typically medieval in origin, stone built, some now finished in render. The village's periphery also includes some remnant orchards and a playing field.

Alveston, to the south of Thornbury, is situated on higher open ground of the Severn Ridge. It comprises linear, older settlement of cottages and houses in a mix of limestone, Pennant sandstone and render, with stone boundary walls, along a network of intersecting roads (Photo 10). More recent brick housing estate infill predominates within a sizeable area of the village.

A section of the eastern boundary of this area abuts part of the A38, between the M4 and Alveston. This road corridor has extensive sections of ribbon development, which variously straddles both sides of the road, containing either the east or western edge of this corridor. There is a particular concentration of houses at Rudgeway, set along the scarp edge within this area, comprising stone houses and more recent brick and render buildings, often with large gardens. Stone boundary walls are common between Rudgeway and Alveston. The B4055 extending south west of Almondsbury, has a more even and regular distribution of houses. Both of these patterns of settlement are sited along the upper edge of the Severn Ridge, facing the Levels and Estuary.

Smaller villages and hamlets are dotted throughout the lower slopes along the edge of the Levels.

- Easter Compton is the largest of these, comprising a linear settlement of Pennant sandstone, brick and render cottages and houses between farms, with more recent brick infill. The village extends beyond the lower slopes into the adjacent Levels.
- Rockhampton, Littleton-upon-Severn and Elberton are all associated with farms and orchards, clustered at intersection of lanes, some with churches (Photo 8). Kington, to the west of Thornbury, has a more scattered pattern of farms and houses along lanes.

The remaining landscape between settlements has a regular scattering of farms.

The church of Oldbury-on-Severn, St. Arilda's, is located on the higher ground of the outlier north east of Cowhill, above the surrounding Levels. (The village of Oldbury-on-Severn lies in the adjacent character area).

Cattybrook Claypit, near Almondsbury, includes large clay extraction and storage areas, as well as a brickworks, with a large building and chimney (Photo 6), set within the gentle slopes above the Levels.

The area is extensively crossed by a complex network of major and minor roads and lanes, connecting the numerous towns, villages, hamlets and farms.

- The Bristol to Gloucester Road (A38) formed the major influence to settlement within the area. It was diverted around Thornbury in the early 19th century. This road and numerous connecting minor roads engendered frequent roadside settlement. Roads generally follow the natural landform, becoming sunken lanes when ascending the steeper scarp. The A38 passes through part of this area at Almondsbury and abuts the central eastern boundary.
- The B4461, B4061 and B4055 connect with the numerous minor lanes that cross the area and intersect with each other, generally well enclosed by hedges and banks.
- The M4 passes across the area south east to north west and connects with the M48 towards the western boundary. The M4 is on embankment for much of its length through the area, before passing into a cutting at the junction with the M48.
- The M5 defines part of the south eastern boundary and largely delineates the urban/rural edge of Bristol, which lies immediately south east of this part of the character area.

For approximately 3 kilometres, the road alignment closely parallels the top of the ridge and scarp landform and, at one point, defines the skyline of a small curved bowl, which recedes into the scarp to the south west of Over Court.

Elsewhere, the motorway is sited along the east facing dip slope of the Severn Ridge, within a deep cutting near Hallen, largely at grade elsewhere, with raised overbridges and embanked slip roads at two junctions.

- The M4/M5 interchange, further north, forms a significant feature with large earthworks, elevated slip roads and overbridges, flanked by rough grassland and some scrub. This structure straddles the boundary of this area and two adjacent character areas.

The Bristol to South Wales Railway line, south of Almondsbury, passes beneath the ridge in a tunnel, emerging within a cutting, then on embankment across the Levels. Numerous public rights of way cross the area and connect with one of a series of Circular Rides, the Jubilee Way and Community Forest Path recreational routes.

- The Circular Ride comprises a large circuit following lanes and tracks, descending towards Oldbury-on-Severn via the eastern edge of Thornbury, before returning to Alveston, over rising and slightly undulating ground.
- The Jubilee Way follows an east-west route, largely undulating as it crosses the westward ridges towards the Estuary, passing the industrial edge and Conservation Area of Thornbury, to Littleton-upon-Severn and then the Levels and Estuary foreshore beyond.
- The Community Forest Path enters the area to the south of the railway, descends the scarp, passing south westwards along the edge of the Levels to Easter Compton, before climbing steeply to Spaniorum Hill, crossing over the M5 and descending towards Bristol.

A number of overhead powerlines also cross the ridges and scarp, generally east to west. Several of these extend around Thornbury, with two connecting to Oldbury Power Station on the Levels.

Landscape Character

The Severn Ridge landscape character area is predominately united through its landform of visually prominent wooded scarps and more complex broad ridges, which extend towards the Severn Estuary, forming a prominent and distinctive rural backcloth to the adjacent Levels.

The scarp provides frequent expansive views, generally over the extensive large scale flat Levels, the Severn Estuary and South Wales/Forest of Dean to the west. Views are most extensive from the upper scarp edge, including places such as Spaniorum Hill, Almondsbury Hill and Tockington Hill. Within this context, changing skies, the changing estuary tidal pattern, the colour and textured variety of this area and the Levels, form a highly distinct feature from these elevated vantages.

Similarly, frequent views of the scarp slopes are obtained from within the adjacent Levels, from the Estuary and from South Wales and the Forest of Dean, from where they provide the backdrop and physical containment to the expansive lowland landscape. The Severn Ridges therefore visually influence, and are influenced by, the adjoining Levels.

The south east facing dip slope to the south west of the area is quite different in character, influenced by the prominent M5 and urban edge of Bristol.

Along the western boundary of this area, much of the landscape shares similar characteristics with the Levels beyond. The combination of very gentle landform and the continuation of hedgerows and a similar field pattern, produces a broad area of transition between the two areas, often without a distinct boundary. This is typical particularly of areas to the north west of Thornbury, near Littleton-upon-Severn and at Easter Compton.

The variety in landform, strong vegetation structure and pattern of frequent settlement, historic courts, parks and roads, produce areas with distinct local character.

The northern scarp at Upper Hill and Rockhampton forms a visually prominent, gently scalloped ridgeline, with simple bold vegetation structure of frequent areas of mature

woodland, interspersed with regular shaped fields of pasture (more irregular at Rockhampton), defined by clipped hedges and intermittent trees.

The very limited pattern of isolated farms are well integrated, producing a tranquil, rural landscape.

Within this area, Hill Court has a rich diverse framework of mature, ornamental, deciduous and coniferous tree groups, sporadic laid hedgebanks and old remnant orchard of a designed landscape and medieval parkland. This mix of elements results in a distinctive local landscape. (The other historic parks within the character area have more subtle influences upon local character, being largely absorbed within woodland along the ridge and scarp).

The broad ridges to the west of Alveston form a rolling upland of pasture and arable land, with a number of distinct small hills and bluffs near to, or defining the edge of, the Levels. The rounded tump to the north of Cowhill, crowned by St. Arilda's Church, is a prominent and distinctive landmark locally, both within this area and the adjacent Pilning Levels (Photo 3).

The open arable landscape to the north west of Thornbury and the plateau west of Alveston, comprises large, regular shaped fields defined by low clipped hedges and intermittent trees. The central parts of the plateau have a perception of remoteness, due to the generally low skyline and few focal points within views.

The plateau also includes a golf course, which is largely visually contained where located within the plateau area, but more evident where fairways, greens and linear tree structure extend over the skyline and along the upper slopes, to the south west of Thornbury. Here, the golf course structure and land cover texture, contrasts with adjacent pasture fields and hedgerows.

A number of hedges have been removed in the Alveston area and replaced by stock fencing. There are extensive views from these open, arable areas to the wooded scarp and west over the rural Levels (Photo 6).

Further south, the ridge and wooded scarp forms a distinct, bold linear landform from Rudgeway to Easter Compton. The slopes and upper edge are covered by a dense regular

pattern of houses, well integrated within the mature, often continuous, tree cover which forms a wooded skyline.

The intermix of mature Scots pine along the skyline, the large orchard at Almondsbury and ornamental trees associated with the historic courts and small landscape parks, create a visually, textured and seasonally diverse backcloth, within views from the Levels. The large orchard at Almondsbury is a prominent feature within views from the M4, from where the regular dense planting structure and springtime blossom are most apparent.

The open, rough grassland scarp of the Bristol Golf Course is distinct and visibly different in texture and colour to the lower, enclosed pasture fields and dense woodland framework above.

The rounded promontory of Spaniorium Hill, further south, forms a prominent landmark, visible from the Levels, with its distinctive wooded crown and pattern of dense overgrown hedges, descending and radiating towards the edge of the Levels.

The scarp south of Spaniorium Hill has a simple structure of continuous woodland, finishing abruptly at Hallen. The scarp forms an angular silhouette above the flat Levels.

Towards the south eastern boundary, the eastern dip slope, bounded by the M5 motorway, forms a narrow rural fringe, varying from north to south in structure. Unlike the rest of the character area, it has a south easterly aspect. It is greatly influenced by the motorway, its traffic and the Bristol urban edge beyond, all of which have some degree of visual influence upon this area and erode its rural character.

Similarly, this area is visible from the motorway, with the elevated southern tip of this character area formed by the wooded ridgeline at Mount Skitham near Hallen, forming an important rural backcloth in views from Bristol and its western fringes.

The following variations occur within this dip slope area from north to south:

- Adjacent to the south of Almondsbury, lies a simple pattern of agricultural land, comprising regular shaped pasture fields,

clipped hedges, some overgrown with dead elm, little tree cover (occasional Scots pine), small copses and an area of woodland abutting the M4. The sloping area is flanked to the north by Almondsbury's residential fringe, which is variously integrated by tall hedgerow boundaries, or more prominent to the west along the skyline. The area also contains a cricket ground, sports pitches, radio masts, powerlines, roads, and elevated junctions. The commercial edge of Bristol at Almondsbury Business Park and M5 traffic, are visually prominent. All of these elements dilute the rural character of the area.

The small open hill/ridgeline just west of the M4/M5 interchange however maintains a strong rural character, is prominent in views from the motorway network and largely conceals a section of Almondsbury's residential fringe.

- Further south west, beyond the railway tunnel, a linear strip of remnant fields, is fringed by woodland along the scarp slopes contained by the M5/urban area. Here the M5 briefly passes along the very edge of the scarp, giving a glimpsed long distant view of the Levels and Severn Estuary below. Conversely, traffic movement and road lighting in this area are visible from the Levels.
- Nearer the M5 motorway, tall steep sided earth mounds have been constructed, covered by rough grass, along the Bristol Golf Course's boundary with the motorway. The abrupt mounding has no vegetation cover to provide integration with the surrounding landscape, with only remnants of the former agricultural landscape structure remaining and former hedgerow trees now surrounded by earth mounds.
- The large commercial development of Cribbs Causeway, to the south of the M5 and in the adjacent character area is prominent from the M5 corridor and visible on the scarp's skyline, within long distance views from the Levels.
- Further west, a prominent wooded ridgeline is fringed by regular shaped

pasture fields with clipped or overgrown hedges (some containing dead elm trees), extending into the adjacent Patchway and Filton area, abutting the Bristol fringe. This backdrop and rural framework is prominent from the Bristol fringe with the elevated landform containing views. The M5 traffic is however, both visible and has audible effects where it forms a skyline feature, passing over this landform.

- Where the M5 is on embankment, traffic and lighting columns are prominent from the south. The deep cutting near Hallen is visible largely within the motorway corridor itself and as a prominent notch in the landform from the south west, beyond this character area.

Small dispersed settlements typically nestle within the landscape, with the intricate pattern of lanes following the landform and contained by clipped or overgrown hedges. The mature woodland along slopes, numerous orchards adjacent to villages and farms, plus intermittent hedgerow trees, form a distinctive landscape patchwork, which helps to integrate settlement and lanes, often forming a semi-enclosed landscape.

Older settlements are typically well integrated within an often large scale setting and strong vegetation framework (Photo 12). Their pattern and common use of local stone (varied within such an extensive area from limestone and Pennant sandstone, to conglomerate, with geological variations in between) influence local character and frequently form distinctive landmarks.

The villages of Olveston and Tockington have a distinct pattern of greens and spaces defined by largely historic stone buildings, walls and the network of lanes. Thornbury's historic centre is similarly influenced by the built form and pattern of roads, creating an individual streetscape (Photo 4).

The churches of Rockhampton, Thornbury, Oldbury-on-Severn, Elberton, Olveston Almondsbury are all located on elevated ground, forming distinctive landmarks and influencing local views (Photo 3, 5 & 8).

More modern settlement expansion, major roads and built development influences the

character of some localities. The extensive expansion of Thornbury is prominent within local views from adjacent elevated ground of the Severn Ridge (Photo 11).

Some sections of the settlement edge are locally prominent, due to limited vegetation structure, the dense linear nature of housing, or the grouping of large scale industrial units/sports hall, the latter visually prominent against the adjacent smaller scale development and rural landscape.

The topographic bowl within which Thornbury sits, limits the prominence of the town in the wider landscape, by the physical containment formed by the Severn Ridge; the open sided bowl merges with the adjoining Levels landscape to the west. Visually, despite the size of the town, the well treed structure throughout the older areas of the settlement greatly contribute to its integration within the landscape framework of the wider Levels and of the slopes of the ridge, which provide a backdrop to the town. The integration of some sections of the settlement edge has been improved through the use of building materials. The muted colour and tonal range of brick, roof tiles and window frames have helped reduce the prominence of built edges.

Alveston largely sits within a plateau landform, with a sense of visual remoteness from the wider ridge area, due to the curtailment of views by landform and the woodlands which edge the plateau. The settlement edge in places however, forms a dense, built linear feature, prominent within local views. This façade however, conceals the greater extent of the village, due to the relatively low viewing points. The western boundary is slightly more prominent, where it descends partly into a small valley, increasing the extent of built settlement visible within this aspect.

Olveston has a large area of recent housing to the south and south east of the village. However, with the exception of visibility from along local lanes, this development is largely screened from the wider landscape, by rising landform and the bowl setting within which the village nestles.

The upper edge of the Severn Ridge has concentrations of ribbon settlement and

scattered houses associated with the A38 and B4055. These routes generally closely follow the edge of this landform (the B4055 descends the ridge further to the south west). Settlement is located along the skyline, in the narrow margin between the road and the top of the steeply falling scarp face, such as between Rudgeway and Alveston, or extends over steep slopes along descending lanes, for example at Almondsbury. The location of settlement typically allows extensive views of the Levels and Estuary. The strong woodland framework along the ridge, including Scots pine and garden vegetation, generally integrates these properties, the A38 and its traffic and largely limits buildings being visible against the skyline. Ornamental garden vegetation and sections of ribbon development along the A38 have however introduced a suburban character, evident along parts of this corridor.

Ribbon development in Easter Compton has extended significantly beyond the older heart of the village, with more recent housing and infill introducing a suburban character along the B4055, in an otherwise rural area.

The visual and audible effects of motorway traffic and elevated overbridges are a significant detractor from the rural character along the M5 corridor, particularly influencing the narrow dip slope landscape corridor to the south east and the lower landscape of the Henbury Trypt (within the adjacent landscape character area to the south east), from where the motorway is visible along the skyline near Haw Wood. The extent of influence is however largely local, with the road's impact contained by the dip slope landform to the north.

The M4/M5 interchange similarly has a significant local effect upon the adjacent landscape and built edge of Almondsbury Business Park, but remains screened from Almondsbury village and the wider Severn Ridges area by the ridge landform at Almondsbury.

The M4 however has wider effects, descending the open rural slopes of the Severn Ridge. Here, the sweeping landform of the Sheepcombe Valley is physically and visually interrupted by the M4 and its traffic (with associated noise) on high embankment. The road embankment has visually severed the

connection between Tockington and the Levels landscape to the south west, which formerly existed along the line of Tockington Mill Rhine.

The junction of the M4 with the M48 to the north west is largely well integrated within cutting, with sympathetic regrading of land between the slip roads.

The chimney at Cattybrook Claypit is a prominent industrial landmark, seen in silhouette within local views (Photo 16). However, the quarry itself and clay storage area are largely well screened.

The concentration of industrial complexes and chemical works within the adjacent Piling Levels and in the Bristol City area at Avonmouth beyond, greatly affect westerly views from the southern section of the ridge and scarp, which is largely rural in character. The large scale buildings, structures and chimneys dwarf the adjacent vegetation and flat landscape.

Further north, the two Severn Bridge crossings form prominent, distinctive landmarks, again within views from the southern and central ridge area.

These built features are not visible from the more northern areas of the Severn Ridge landscape, with only the Second Severn crossing partly evident within limited, elevated, long distance views from northern scarp slopes.

The central and northern section of this character area is however visually influenced by Oldbury Power Station. Located within the Oldbury Levels, the reactor building is a prominent large scale structure, often seen against the expanse of the Severn Estuary and distant ridgeline of the Forest of Dean, or in silhouette against the sky.

Dead elm trees are evident within a number of tall hedgerows throughout the area and are most prominent where defining large fields, with little adjacent supplementary vegetation. They influence the condition, integrity and appearance of the landscape framework in the locality.

There are a number of large overhead electricity lines, supported on steel pylons, which cross the area. Mature tree cover and undulating landform reduce their visual influence to some degree. However, the

vertical large scale pylon towers and linearity of powerlines often remain prominent within the context of an open rolling landform, or where multiple towers are visible against the skyline, particularly near the Levels, or where they cross the scarp.

The South Wales to Bristol Railway line crosses the area south of Almondsbury in cutting. Due to this and its associated vegetation it is well integrated, minimising its visibility within the locality.

The Changing Landscape

The Severn Ridges landscape character area is a semi-enclosed to visibly exposed and diverse landscape. It retains a distinct rural and sometimes remote landscape character, particularly to the west and, with the exception of a small section of landscape to the south east, remains visually unaffected by the proximity of the Bristol urban edge to the south.

Although the overall landscape is in a good to reasonable condition, the consequences of limited management in some areas, for example the replacement of hedgerows with fences around Alveston, has eroded the intactness of its rural characteristics.

In spite of the generally good landscape structure and woodland cover, the elevated landform of ridges, scarp and plateau edges are all sensitive to change, due to the prominence of these areas within open views. Similarly, the lower ridges and hills, generally to the west, are visually evident from the scarp and Levels.

In these locations, the extent of tree cover significantly influences the degree of integration of existing development, the availability of viewpoints and the extent of view.

Views from the ridge in the long term are also dependent on active management of trees and hedgerows. The openness of the view from Almondsbury Hill, for example, will diminish as self-seeded trees on the scarp slopes below, grow both in height and canopy spread, unless management is undertaken. Conversely, the potential loss of over mature trees may result in new views opening up along the ridge.

The vegetation structure generally is not being supplemented by new planting to create succession and sustain it in the long term. Without this, or without active management, the existing strong landscape framework will decline in the future, potentially increasing the prominence of the existing development pattern within the area. This would be evident particularly along the ridge and scarp from Rudgeaway to Easter Compton. Active management of the vegetation framework would help to ensure the conservation of this key feature for the long term. Where overgrown hedgerows are brought back into management, the landscape character could become more or less open as a result, dependent on the number of hedgerow trees which are allowed to develop, or are planted.

Some recent woodland planting has however been undertaken in a number of locations at Thornbury Community Woodland to the north and at Hollywood Towers and Wheat Hill Farm, both near Easter Compton, which will help maintain the landscape structure along these sections of the ridge, in the long term. Woodland at Wheat Hill Farm also extends beyond the lower slopes of the Severn Ridges and into the Levels. Whilst this large area of woodland will contribute to the strengthening of the landscape framework in the long term, it will also change the character of the existing smaller scale woodland pattern found elsewhere within these two character areas.

The widespread loss of mature hedgerow trees through Dutch Elm Disease during the late 20th century, has significantly changed the landscape character of the area, increasing its openness. The cyclical regrowth and die-back of elm suckers, which mark the location of former mature trees in overgrown hedgerows, continues to influence local visual character and the degree of openness. This is less apparent where the main vegetation structure comprises mature trees or woodland, as found along the upper slopes of the ridge. Active management of these hedgerows will similarly help to conserve these features and contribute to the landscape framework for the long term. Where new hedgerow tree planting is also introduced it will, over time, help to replace the vegetation structure lost as a result of Dutch Elm Disease. As with general hedgerow management, the

landscape character could become more or less open as a result.

Orchards are generally in decline, as a feature of the agricultural landscape, with evidence of recent removal of at least one orchard at Upper Morton, north of Thornbury. The remaining orchards often receive limited or no active management, but still remain an integral feature of older farms and small settlements, contributing greatly to local character.

The large new orchard at Almondsbury, has introduced an extensive area of planting in a closely spaced regular pattern. The extent and form of this planting represents a modern economic response to apple production and is distinctly different to the traditional, more open orchard pattern.

The distinctive character of historic small landscape parks which contribute to the textured scarp, are also sensitive to management issues. In the long term, the ornamental landscape framework will be eroded without new planting to replace the ornamental tree structure.

Further built development has the potential to change the character of older settlement pattern unless it is influenced by local character and distinctiveness. Older villages and hamlets often have a sympathetic relationship with their rural setting, due largely to their small clustered form, the close historic interrelationship of these settlements (using traditional materials and building form) and their agricultural hinterland.

Large scale residential expansion has occurred along the edges of Thornbury, Almondsbury, Alveston and Olveston, within the last 30 years.

The expansion of Thornbury to the north, south and east, has pushed the settlement fringe closer to the Levels and further into the bowl landform defined by the Severn Ridge. The visual expanse of the town is evident within elevated views. However, Thornbury generally sits well in the landscape, due to its large scale landscape setting and present constraint of development, to within the low lying bowl landform, set above and separate, from the Levels.

Further expansion of the town would become more prominent were it to extend over elevated

slopes, visually increase the apparent expanse of Thornbury within the bowl landform, or spread out beyond the bowl.

The ridgeline backdrop and skyline also currently provides an intact rural feature and setting to Thornbury. It is therefore sensitive to change which would visually erode this feature.

Upper Almondsbury has seen some residential expansion focused south of the Severn Ridge, adjacent to the A38. The adjacent landscape to the south is sensitive to change, presently providing a rural backdrop and green corridor in views from the M5, M4 and interchange and providing physical separation from the Bristol urban edge.

The interchange and M5, together with its traffic and the adjacent urban edge of Bristol, are visually prominent features within the locality. Although the isolated ridgeline, woodland and fields in the vicinity have a strong rural character, due to their scale, simple form and elevation, this is partially eroded by these built elements. This effect is more evident to the west, where the M5 is on an embankment. In addition, dead elm trees are more apparent in the adjacent overgrown hedgerow structure, which also influences local character and the openness of the landscape.

Alveston, within its plateau setting, is largely visually remote from the wider landscape. The edge of the plateau to the west and its undeveloped skyline are however sensitive to change which might affect its present rural characteristics.

Olveston has expanded to largely fill its natural shallow bowl setting. Further expansion, beyond the containment of the bowl and onto the surrounding rising slopes, is likely to be more visually prominent.

The spread of ornamental planting and Leylandii hedges within gardens along the A38 corridor and within the wider rural landscape has the potential to introduce a suburban character into the rural setting and erode rural characteristics.

The extensive road network provides good access to much of the area, which in conjunction with concentrations of settlement, most notably at Thornbury, Alveston, Almondsbury and the proximity of Bristol, all

introduce pressures for change, particularly through built development and/or recreation.

- Rural character is being eroded, particularly near the fringes of these settlement areas, by changes in land use from agriculture, to recreation, with examples of sports grounds and golf courses common and the potential for 'horsiculture' as seen in other areas. This has resulted in the restructuring of the landscape, with the loss of hedges, the introduction of various features such as timber fences, car parks, tall metal fences and light columns at sports grounds and earth raising at golf courses. These changes affect the visual texture of the land cover and erode the rural character of the landscape.
- The dip slope landscape to the west of the M5, with its wooded ridgeline and rural character, presently provides a prominent and distinctive visual backdrop to the Bristol urban area within views from the M5 corridor. More importantly, this area provides a physical buffer to the Bristol urban edge/M5 corridor, limiting the visual impacts of this development upon the wider Severn Ridges and Levels landscape.
- The effects of road infrastructure, including lighting and signage, often extend beyond the road corridor. Recent highway changes along the M5 have included taller light columns and larger signage gantries, which have widened the visual impact of the road corridor. Highway 'improvements' along rural roads and lanes also have the potential to introduce new urban materials, design features, signage and lighting, within a previously low key rural road network.

The powerlines crossing the ridges are a visually prominent feature above the rural framework. Similarly, the spread of new or taller telecommunication masts in this area has the potential to intrude on the otherwise rural skyline.

Cattybrook Clayworks, to the west of Almondsbury, is expanding south into an area of old workings and northwest into existing agricultural land. This agricultural land forms part of the lower slopes of the Severn Ridge

and is currently evident within views from the adjacent Levels' landscape.

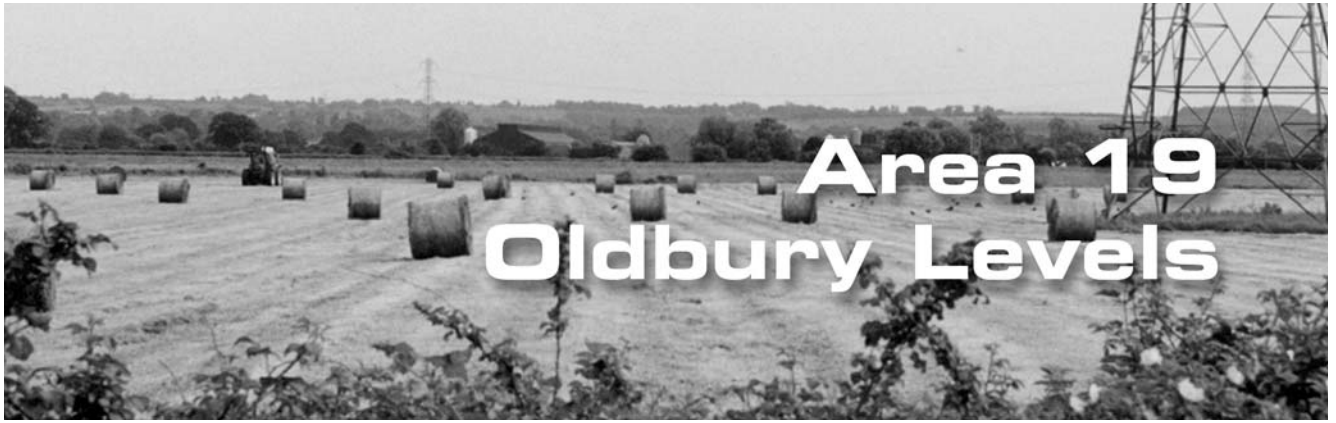
Earth bunding, to be constructed around the works, will contain views of the site activity but will contrast with the existing gentle slopes of the surrounding land. Proposed tree planting will provide some integration with the surrounding wooded Severn Ridge, in the long term.

Due to the visual relationship between the Severn Ridges, the Levels and Severn Estuary, changes within the adjoining areas have the potential to influence the character of this area.

The large scale industrial structures at Avonmouth, Severnside, the distributor warehouse near Severn Beach, Oldbury Power Station, Severn Bridges and extensive motorway network, are significant built features within the adjacent Levels and Severn Estuary. Their large scale, form and colour contrasts with the simple horizontal landform of these areas and dwarfs the vegetation framework. These developments are most apparent from adjacent higher ground and therefore visually influence the Severn Ridges character area.

Further expansion of these industrial areas has the potential to encroach closer to the Severn Ridges, raising the prominence of built development within views and affecting the rural character and setting of the ridge.

Decommissioning of Oldbury Power Station, which is anticipated to commence in the next 3 to 4 years, is likely to result in some ongoing changes to the structures surrounding the main reactor buildings and changes in the use of the site and remaining structures. However, in the very long term (over 100 years), the site is proposed to be returned to open landscape, significantly changing the character of the landscape in views from the central and northern parts of the ridge.



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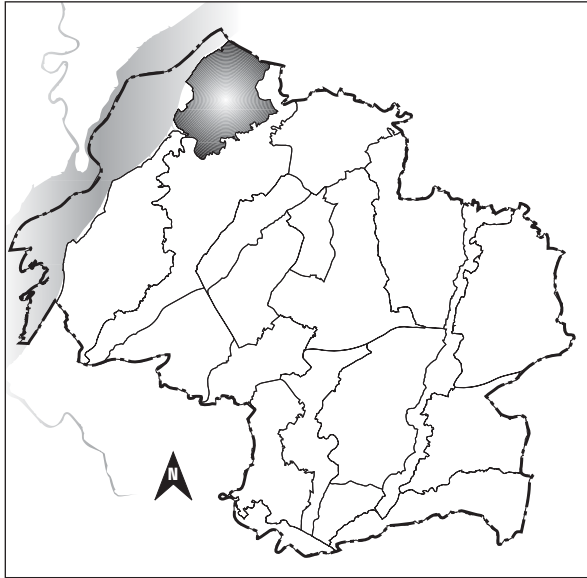


Key

➔₁₅ Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

**Figure 63:
Oldbury Levels - Sketch Map**



The Oldbury Levels landscape character area is a largely flat, open to semi-enclosed agricultural area with rhines, small orchards and very little settlement.

Key Characteristics

- Flat landscape of medium to small sized fields, both regular and irregular in shape. Some ridge and furrow survives and pasture dominates.
- Field pattern is frequently defined by the rhine system and hedges are a mixture of both closely clipped and overgrown.
- Small scattered deciduous woodlands and copses, with often frequent hedgerow trees, occasional pollarded trees, some withy beds and small orchards associated with farms. Some areas have very little tree cover.
- Intricate network of angular, enclosed lanes, often following the historic drainage pattern, connects a limited but regular distribution of settlement, comprising a small village and hamlets, largely built of stone, with some brick. Much of the Levels are largely unpopulated.
- Lanes are occasionally flanked by broad grass verge common land and rhines. Unpaved trackways provide wider connections across the Levels.

- Open to semi-enclosed landscape, with some extensive views of the Severn Ridge and Wye Valley / Forest of Dean ridge. Localised enclosure is formed by mature trees, hedgerows, orchards and copses.
- Oldbury Power Station and radiating powerlines are large scale elements and visually prominent.

Location

The Oldbury Levels landscape character area is located in north west South Gloucestershire.

Its northern limits follow the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary, although the landscape character continues northwards.

The southern and eastern boundaries follow an often subtle transition in landform, land cover and drainage pattern between the Levels and the rising Severn Ridges, largely following the 10m contour, although in some places the topographic change is imperceptible.

The western boundary follows the sea defence wall, which marks a distinct change in land cover between the mainly enclosed fields of the Levels and the open intertidal area of rough grassland, warths and mudflats to the west, where the open expanse of the Estuary is dominant. The boundary continues around and excludes Oldbury Power Station complex, as this element and its siting specifically relates to the Estuary edge. (See Figures 64 & 66).

Physical Influences

The geology of this area is predominantly Alluvial, with Alluvial Gley soils, peats and occasional Alluvial gravel fans, typical of the lowland Levels and adjacent Severn shoreline. This creates a low lying, very flat landscape. With the exception of slightly higher ground west of Hill (19 metres a.o.d.), Henridge Hill (17 metres a.o.d) and Oldbury-on-Severn (14 metres a.o.d.), the topography generally lies at or below 10 metres a.o.d.

A defining physical element of this area is the sea wall to the west and complex pattern of drainage ditches, locally called rhines.

The sea wall comprises a grass covered earth embankment up to 2m high above the adjacent natural ground level. Flood defences have been a feature along the edge of the Estuary for some time, with map evidence indicating the wall has been in existence since at least the mid 18th century. The wall could be much earlier, with one section within the Bristol Authority area dating to the Saxon period.

Some rhines date back to medieval times, with other phases of construction during the Napoleonic era and First World War. These phases in land drainage reclaimed areas of marshland, to improve agricultural production. The pattern of rhines gives some indication of their date of construction, the more regular patterns representing the most recent areas of drainage. The rhine system is controlled by sluices in the sea wall, which discharge into tidal pills and the Estuary beyond.

In places, 'gryps' (comprising a subtle landform feature of a linear shallow bank similar to ridge and furrow) provide drainage to the system of rhines.

Rockhampton Rhine and its irregular and dense matrix of tributaries, covers an extensive area to the east, eventually flowing west to join the broad meandering tidal channel of Oldbury Pill, at Oldbury-on-Severn.

The pattern of rhines to the north is considerably less intense, with a simple, regular pattern of north west flowing channels, discharging into the small Hill Pill.

The drainage pattern across the Levels is evident primarily from higher ground to the east of this area (Photo 3), the pills being visible where they discharge into the Severn. This drainage pattern, defines many of the field boundaries. Few of the rhines are named on the OS maps (1:25,000 Explorer range), yet most have local names, contributing to local identity and colour.

The area is also scattered with many small field ponds.

Land Cover

The Oldbury Levels character area consists largely of pasture, with some areas of arable land. The field pattern is diverse, with distinct

areas associated with rhines and land use.

Ridge and furrow is a common subtle feature evident within many unimproved fields within the Levels (Photo 6). Gryps, created for field drainage, are also evident and form low banks which spread out from the centre of fields. They appear similar to ridge and furrow, but tend to be straighter, shorter and shallower.

Hedgerows follow the variously irregular and regular Rockhampton Rhine drainage pattern, forming medium to small intricate field patterns, lying centrally and to the east towards Rockhampton.

Arable cover is particularly concentrated to the west of Hill and fringing the Estuary to the north of Nupdown.

Fields adjacent to the Severn Estuary typically comprise a mix of regular, rectangular and narrow strip, medium to small fields, often orientated in alignment with the sea wall and Severn Estuary beyond.

To the north of Nupdown Road, fields are typically larger, with a more balanced and regular pattern throughout this area.

Lanes are occasionally flanked by broad grass verges of common land.

Various hedgerow boundaries include a combination of clipped, overgrown and laid hedges, a few are intermittent.

Tree cover is variable in structure and distribution, comprising some areas with strong deciduous hedgerow trees, mature specimens and pollards scattered within hedgerows and fields. There are also scattered regular shaped small woodlands and copses, including withy coppice beds and poplars.

Dead elm trees are evident within some hedgerows, often within drier, more elevated areas of the Levels.

The Rockhampton Rhine area has a particularly frequent pattern of mature hedgerow trees and now isolated tree specimens, following the line of former hedgerows (Photo 8). In contrast, the Levels west of Upper Hill have very few trees (Photo 3).

Near settlement, tree and hedgerow structure becomes more diverse, with orchards commonly associated with farms throughout

the area (Photo 2 & 5) and more ornamental trees such as Leylandii conifers within the area of Oldbury-on-Severn (Photo 10).

Rhines typically include open standing water adjacent to lanes and tracks (Photo 4); some are overgrown with reeds (Photo 1).

Toot Hill Fort, a Scheduled Ancient Monument, lies to the north of Oldbury-on-Severn, on a slight rise above the surrounding Levels.

Settlement and Infrastructure

There is little settlement within the area, with one village, hamlets and scattered farmsteads.

Medieval settlement layout within Hill Parish to the north east is almost unchanged and elsewhere still distinct, where settlement consists of a strung out line of farms on the edge of the Levels (e.g. Upper Hill, Hill and Rockhampton), with other satellite farms within the Levels themselves.

Oldbury on-Severn comprises a linear village dispersed from crossroads and a church, along a number of small lanes, with sandstone and brick cottages and houses.

Rockhampton, along the eastern boundary and at the toe of the Severn Ridges, is a hamlet comprising a dispersed pattern of farms, cottages and houses along lanes, interspersed with grass common land (Photo 8), built of sandstone and render, with a rectory and church creating a focal point.

Beyond this village and hamlet, much of the settlement pattern within the Levels has a distinct, regular and balanced arrangement of farmhouses and buildings, often well spaced and formally set within small fields, grassland and orchards, the frontages facing the adjacent lanes.

Oldbury Naite comprises a sandstone farm, with other houses and groups of buildings often set back from the road on private tracks.

Shepperdine comprises two farms, set facing each other either side of a lane.

A few farms in a mix of sandstone, render and brick are distributed elsewhere at regular

intervals, although large areas of landscape intensely dissected by ditches remain uninhabited.

A boundary wall at Nupdown Farm includes copper slag coping stones, a by-product from the Warmley Brassworks within the Kingswood landscape character area.

A number of modern agricultural sheds are grouped around farms to the south west; for example at Great Leaze Farm, on the lane approach to Oldbury Power Station and at Jobsgreen Farm, adjacent to the power station.

Oldbury Power Station, within the adjacent Severn Shoreline and Estuary area, abuts this agricultural area and comprises large, block reactor buildings, ancillary buildings, a small copse and sea wall embankment boundary around the site (Photo 11).

The character area is crossed by a network of minor unclassified lanes and roads, their sometimes angular pattern strongly influenced and determined by rhines, which often edge these routes. Lengths of lanes are occasionally unenclosed by field boundaries. A number of named, unpaved lanes (typically bridleways), connect with the local road network (Photo 4).

The area is well dissected by public rights of way.

- One of a series of Circular Rides, a recreational route, follows a convoluted course along lanes and bridleways, crossing the Levels to Oldbury-on-Severn via the Rockhampton Rhine, Stoneyard Lane track, passing to the north of Oldbury Naite before reaching Oldbury-on-Severn.
- The pattern of bridleways largely echoes the angular form of the lane network and often follows un-metalled tracks.
- A dense pattern of footpaths radiate from Oldbury-on-Severn, with frequent inter-connections. Elsewhere, they follow often straight, long courses cutting across fields, slightly guided by the pattern of field boundaries or rhines.

Several overhead powerlines supported on large steel pylons cross the area, radiating from Oldbury Power Station, one passing north eastward and two passing eastwards, north and south of Oldbury Naite.

Landscape Character

The Oldbury Levels comprise a rural flat, semi-enclosed to open landscape, with a backdrop of the Severn Ridges to the east. The landscape structure is influenced greatly by the pattern of rhines, which in turn largely defines the vegetation structure and the alignment of lanes. Settlement is very limited, being concentrated on slightly elevated ground, elsewhere scattered at regular intervals, with areas heavily dissected by rhines largely unpopulated.

The Levels have a largely tranquil and remote character, typically due to the lack of landmarks or visual focus within the landscape. This is a result of the combination of very limited built development; visual enclosure by strong vegetation structure; emphasis of the sky within views; and, where more open, views to the distant backdrops of the Severn Ridges or Forest of Dean, emphasising the scale of the Levels area.

The Rockhampton Rhine landscape is largely enclosed and textured by mature trees and pollards. Clipped or overgrown hedges defining the irregular field pattern (Photo 8).

The rest of the area largely comprises regular shaped fields bounded by clipped hedges, slightly less tree cover and occasional orchards, which combined with linear settlement and an angular road layout, contribute to a simple, balanced rectilinear landscape form (Photo 3 & 9). Ridge and furrow within pasture fields are frequent local features.

The area to the north of Nupdown Road has a slightly more open character due to the larger field size.

Large numbers of over wintering birds drawn to the Severn Estuary, are often a seasonal feature of the Levels, both in the fields and overhead.

Settlement forms focal points which punctuate the landscape. The village of Oldbury-on-Severn and hamlet of Rockhampton are linear built areas, largely of traditional cottages and houses which edge or contain the lane network, creating semi-enclosure. They are typically well integrated within the rural fabric, due to the generally low lying topography and adjacent strong vegetation structure.

The church at Rockhampton forms a local landmark. Similarly, the church of St. Arilda's to the south of Oldbury-on-Severn, on an elevated knoll within the Severn Ridges area, is a prominent distinctive landmark, evident for some distance.

Elsewhere, the formal and balanced arrangement of stone built farmsteads, set back from but facing the lanes, set within small open pockets, with adjacent orchards, form distinct local features.

The pattern of angular lanes, often fringed by broad grass verges edged by water filled rhines, is a particular feature, offering more open views of the local area and sometimes to elevated ground and beyond.

Oldbury Power Station is prominent in many views (Photo 11). Its large scale, built form and mass greatly contrast with the otherwise tranquil rural character of the area. The dominance of this building complex within the landscape significantly increases with proximity. Within the vicinity of the power station, the scale of the buildings, seen against the Estuary and sky, dwarf adjacent vegetation and other landscape features. The pale blue and grey striped finish to the reactor buildings however, has some effect in reducing the buildings' massing in certain local views, dependent upon weather and light conditions. The powerlines and their towers converging on the power station are also prominent, often seen in silhouette against the skyline.

Large prefabricated farm sheds are associated with a number of traditional stone built farms. They are generally well integrated, where set behind the older buildings and/or within the strong vegetation structure. Elsewhere they are locally prominent, given the scale and height of these structures and materials used, which contrast in form and texture to the older buildings.

The flat nature of the landform, combined with various layers of low hedges, occasional hedgerow trees and small woodlands, produce an open to semi-enclosed textured landscape. Medium to distant views are possible within this framework, from open lanes and from minor high points at Oldbury-on-Severn and Rockhampton, towards the Severn Ridges to

the east (Photo 7), or towards the Wye Valley ridges and Forest of Dean beyond the Severn Estuary to the west.

These distant views provide a regional context to the area and contribute to its character.

The expanse of the Severn Estuary, although not visible from the majority of views, does reflect light and provides some 'lightness' to the edge of the area.

The sea wall forms a particular barrier to views close to the Estuary.

The Changing Landscape

The Oldbury Levels landscape character area is a rural area, retaining much of its historic pattern, grain of land use and character. The largely pastoral land use has remained unchanged since medieval times. Development is typically small scale or low key (with the exception of Oldbury Power Station and powerlines) and the area appears relatively unaffected by pressures for change experienced elsewhere in South Gloucestershire.

The rural character of the area is reinforced by the Severn Ridge backcloth to the east, the rising slopes similarly containing very little settlement and no prominent development.

The area has a strong landscape infrastructure, providing effective enclosure, protection and drainage to farmland across the Levels.

The rhine drainage pattern, linked to the tidal pills, is essential to the agricultural viability of the area, maintaining the ground water level below that of the adjacent fields.

Hedgerows are generally actively managed however, a limited number of hedges are intermittent, or have been removed or replaced with fencing and dead elm is also present. A decline in hedgerow management has the potential to erode the existing landscape infrastructure. Active management of hedgerows not currently managed would help to ensure the conservation of these key features in the long term. Dependent on the number of hedgerow trees that are allowed to develop, or are planted, the landscape character of areas with currently overgrown

hedgerows could become more or less open as a result of management.

The regular cyclical pollarding of hedgerow trees and coppicing of withy beds is also in decline. The relative scarcity of tree pollards is a good indication of this fact. The eventual loss of overgrown withy beds would result in a loss of a local traditional feature, which presently contributes to the landscape structure and provides a visual focus within some views.

The loss of mature hedgerow trees through Dutch Elm Disease has been particularly widespread across the Levels. As a result, and despite the existing vegetation framework, the character of the area is now significantly more open and windswept than in the middle of the 20th century. There is little evidence that these trees have been replaced: the cyclical regrowth and die-back of elm suckers mark the location of former mature trees, where management of hedgerows is infrequent. Where they occur, dead elms influence the condition, integrity and appearance of the landscape framework in the locality, affecting the degree of openness/enclosure. Active management of these features will similarly help to conserve these hedgerows and contribute to the landscape framework for the long term. Where new hedgerow tree planting is also introduced it will, over time, help to replace the vegetation structure lost as a result of Dutch Elm Disease. As with other hedgerow management, the landscape character could become more or less open as a result.

The vegetation structure generally is not being supplemented by new planting to create succession and sustain it in the long term. Without this, the existing strong framework will decline in the future, resulting in a more open landscape.

Many orchards planted alongside farms have been well maintained and are a characteristic feature of the area. Some however are ageing in structure and, with the decline in local cider production and lack of management/replacement, the potential loss of this feature in the future is likely.

Ridge and furrow and gryps are a subtle feature within many traditional pasture fields and are easily damaged by a change in land use to arable farming.

The introduction of *Leylandii* conifers within Oldbury-on-Severn has produced a suburban garden feature which contrasts markedly with the native, rural vegetation structure. Further planting of these or other ornamental trees within the area would erode the rural character of the locality and potentially could affect the character of the wider area.

The characteristic interrelationship between the older buildings found in isolated hamlets, built farms, settlement and their landscape setting, is sensitive to change which would visually affect this balance, through either vegetation removal, building infill or architecture, which does not reflect the local traditional style or scale. In some settlements, more recent housing development has already started to change this traditional character.

The limited introduction of large prefabricated farm sheds, although not prominent within the wider landscape, does influence local character. A greater frequency of, or the introduction of larger, more prominent structures, has the potential to reduce the present tranquillity of the area.

The area has extensive views from slightly elevated locations, towards the flat Severn Estuary and Forest of Dean hills to the west and towards the Severn Ridges to the east. These distant backdrops provide some sense of enclosure and context within an otherwise rather isolated area. Views therefore significantly contribute to the character of this area. Any change such as the introduction of prominent built development or cumulative small scale built development, which might be seen against these backcloths, could potentially influence this area's character.

Any large scale horizontal or vertical built development would be particularly visible, as is evident with the power station. An increase in the visual prominence of such structures in this flat landscape, would further influence the perception of tranquillity and remoteness, apparent within much of the area and erode its rural pattern, influencing the character of both this and adjacent areas.

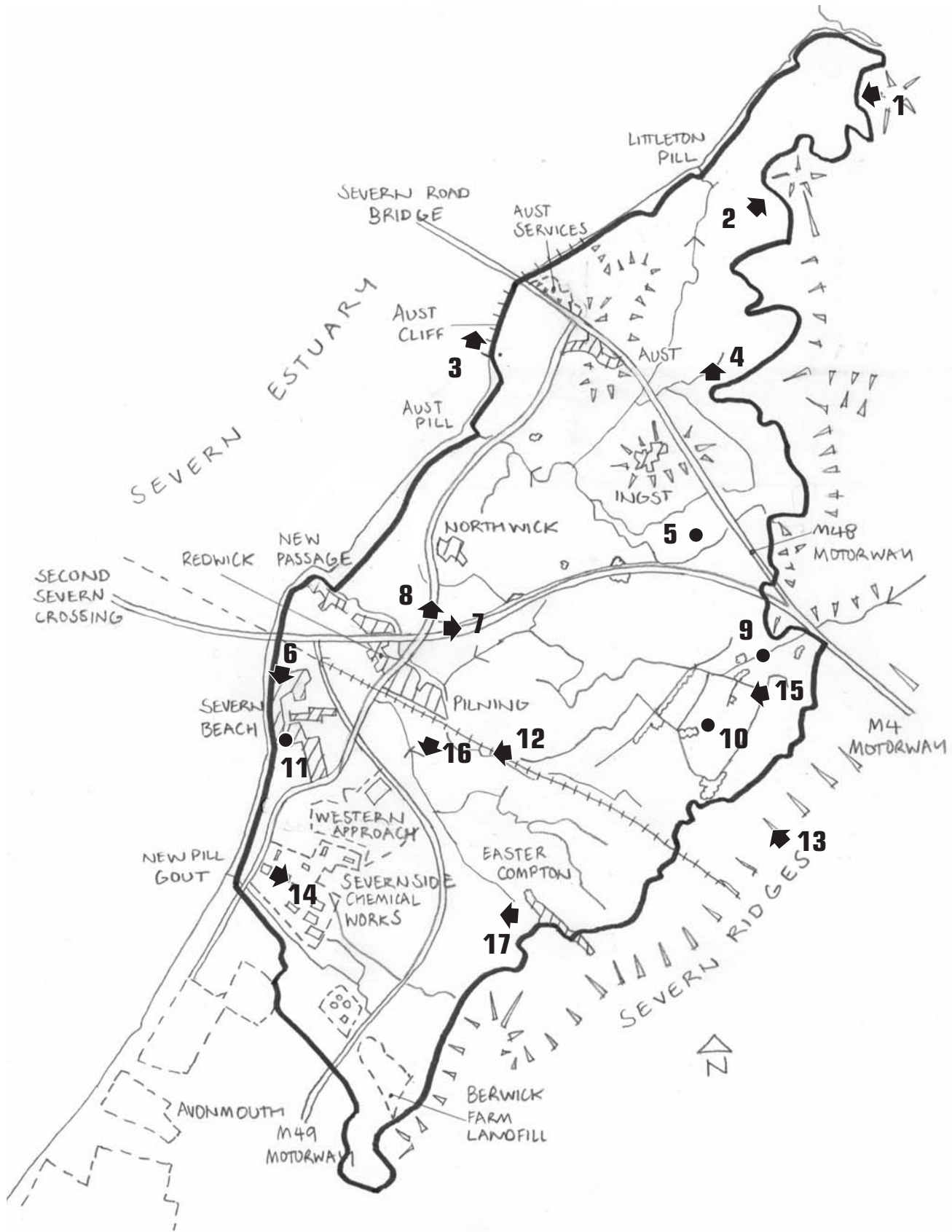
Decommissioning of Oldbury Power Station, which is anticipated to commence in the next 3 to 4 years, is likely to result in some ongoing

changes to the structures surrounding the main reactor buildings and changes in the use of the site and remaining structures. However, in the very long term (over 100 years), the site is proposed to be returned to open landscape, significantly changing the character of the area within local and distant views.

The continual pastoral land use of the Levels since medieval times has resulted in little ground disturbance. As a result few surface finds, more normally associated with ploughed arable land, have been made. Although the archaeological potential of the area is largely unknown, the peat within the Levels may contain evidence of early prehistoric activity, which could be of considerable significance, due to its national rarity.



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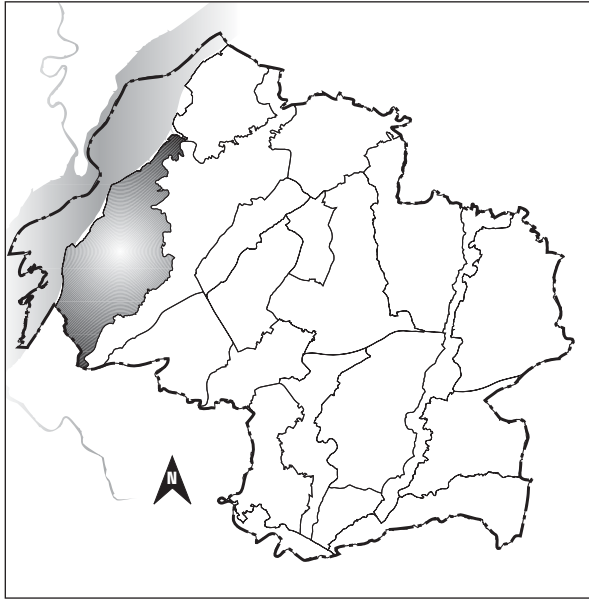


Key

➔₁₅ Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

**Figure 66:
Pilning Levels - Sketch Map**



The Pilning Levels landscape character area is a largely flat, semi-enclosed to open agricultural landscape, divided by rhines, linear transport routes and punctuated by large scale industry.

Key Characteristics

- Flat, simple landscape of medium to small, regular and irregular shaped fields, with a mix of pasture (some with ridge and furrow) and arable fields. Divided by rhines, clipped and some overgrown hedges, with occasional strong tree belts, withy beds, orchards, scattered mature trees and pollards.
- Outliers at Ingst and Aust form prominent low hills.
- Semi-enclosed to open landscape, with occasional long distance views from slightly elevated vantages, west towards South Wales & Forest of Dean and east towards the Severn Ridge.
- Numerous major roads, including the M4, M48, M49 and A403 and a railway line bisect the Levels landscape. Infrastructure, embankments and bridges form prominent features above natural ground level.

- Limited clustered settlements and scattered farms, some on higher ground, with much of the area of the Levels unpopulated.
- Complex of industrial chemical works and distributor sheds are prominent to the south. The two Severn Bridges are prominent to the west beyond the area. Several powerlines and supporting towers crossing the area are also prominent.

Location

The Pilning Levels landscape character area is located on the south western edge of the South Gloucestershire area, to the north west of Bristol.

Its southern limits follow the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary, although the character of this area does continue southwards towards Avonmouth.

The eastern and north eastern boundaries follow an often subtle transition in landform, land cover and drainage pattern, between the flat Levels' landscape and the rising ground of the Severn Ridges, largely following the 10m contour, although in some places the topographic change is imperceptible.

To the west, the boundary follows the sea wall and rock outcrop at Aust. Here there is a clear transition between the fields of the Levels and the warth salt marsh and intertidal areas of mudflats, where the open expanses of the Estuary are dominant. (See Figures 67 & 69).

Physical Influences

The geology of this area is predominantly Alluvial, with Alluvial Gley soils typical of the lowland Levels' landscape. This creates a low lying flat landscape, the topography generally below 10 metres a.o.d. Occasional outcrops of harder rocks, such as sandstone or Carboniferous limestone, create outliers such as at Ingst and Aust, which rise above the flat Levels, forming small isolated hills, between approximately 25 metres and 40 metres a.o.d.

Both outliers are dissected by the M48, with Aust Cliff a prominent feature on the western boundary, facing the Severn Estuary. Aust Cliff is designated an SSSI and RIGS, for its outcropping geological formation and fossil bed.

A major characteristic of this area is the sea wall to the west and pattern of man-made drainage ditches, locally called rhines. Some rhines date back to medieval times, with other phases of construction during the Napoleonic era and First World War. These phases in land drainage reclaimed areas of marshland, to improve agricultural production. The pattern of rhines gives some indication of their date of construction, the more regular patterns representing the most recent areas of drainage. The rhine system is controlled by sluices in the sea wall, which discharge into tidal pills and the Estuary beyond.

In places, 'gryps' (comprising a linear shallow bank landform similar to ridge and furrow), provide drainage to the system of rhines.

Many of the rhines are named on the OS 1:25,000 Explorer series maps, indicating the significance of the drainage features. However, many more have local names, contributing to the identity and colour of the area.

The lowland Levels' landscape is contained to the east by the rising land of the Severn Ridge and to the west is defined by the sea wall, with the Severn shoreline and Estuary beyond.

The sea wall comprises a grass covered earth embankment up to 2m high above the adjacent natural ground level and connects with the Binn Wall at New Passage. Flood defences have been a feature along the edge of the Estuary for some time, with map evidence indicating the sea wall has been in existence since at least the mid 18th century. The wall could be much earlier, with one section within the Bristol Authority area dating to the Saxon period.

Within this very flat landscape, the railway embankment of the South Wales to London line and to a lesser degree, road and overbridge embankments, form significant raised physical features, which segment the Levels and are superimposed over the older drainage and agricultural patterns.

Artificially raised ground at Berwick Farm landfill site lies adjacent to the southern boundary, with earth bunds reaching 20 metres above existing ground level.

Land Cover

The Pilning Levels landscape character area is largely covered by a mix of small to medium, regular and irregular shaped fields of pasture and limited arable use (Photo 1 & 4). Fields are more variable and irregular in shape between Aust and Pilning. The fields are defined by clipped and overgrown hedges, with occasional mature trees or pollarded trees of oak, willow and ash (Photo 5).

Dead elm trees are evident within some hedgerows, often within drier, more elevated areas of the Levels.

Ridge and furrow is a common subtle feature, evident within many unimproved fields within the Levels. Gryps, created for field drainage, are also evident and form low banks which spread out from the centre of fields. They appear similar to ridge and furrow, but tend to be straighter, shorter and shallower.

Small, square or rectangular woodland blocks, with some withy beds of hazel or willow coppice, are frequently scattered centrally, with occasional linear tree belts of alder and poplar (Photo 13 & 15). Occasionally, fences replace the hedgerow structure.

Small areas of common land often fringe the country lanes and farmsteads, in the form of verges.

Small orchards are scattered throughout the area, associated with farms.

The regular, linear vegetation structure is largely defined by the underlying pattern of rhines, which flows towards the Severn Estuary (Photo 13 & 9). Local small scale features include rhine aqueducts, where one watercourse is carried over another by bridge (Photo 10).

Adjacent to New Passage and the sea wall lies a former rifle range, comprising open grassland, firing range and extensive danger area, which extends over part of the sea wall/public footpath and over Northwick Warth, within the

adjacent character area. The boundary of the site is largely indistinct and variously formed by hedgerows of the adjacent agricultural land use and a section of the sea wall.

Berwick Farm landfill site lies to the south of the Severnside Chemical Works, adjacent to the southern boundary. The site comprises large scale landfill operations nearing completion, resulting in earthworks and raised landform, creating a number of broad hills up to 20 metres above existing ground level.

Settlement and Infrastructure

There are no major settlements within this area, although a number of villages and hamlets are present. There are some parts within the central eastern and northern area that are largely unpopulated and crossed by no, or few roads.

Small settlements are either clustered on higher ground, as found at Aust and Ingst, or have typically developed along linear routes as seen at Easter Compton, Pilning, Redwick and New Passage as well as at Severn Beach. Northwick forms an exception, comprising a clustered pattern within the flat Levels.

Farms and farmsteads are scattered at frequent intervals within the Levels, often on the edges of small commons, surrounded by drainage ditches and connected by a network of minor roads and lanes.

The older village of Aust and hamlets of Ingst and Northwick, form clustered settlements of Pennant sandstone farms and cottages, with churches at Aust and Northwick.

The linear village of Easter Compton, comprising Pennant sandstone, brick and rendered houses, extends onto the lower slopes of the Severn Ridges.

The concentration of several settlement centres on the western boundary, have diverse form and content, reflecting a number of development phases.

- Severn Beach and Pilning owe part of their growth to the railways, with Severn Beach a once popular beach resort.
- Pilning has a dense pattern of stone, render and brick houses, clustered at road intersections. Severn Beach has a regular block pattern of largely mid to late 20th century brick housing (Photo 11) and a couple of static caravan parks.
- New Passage and Redwick comprise a linear pattern of Pennant and Old Red Sandstone cottages, large houses and older brick houses.
- To the south east of Pilning, along the B4055, lie two isolated linear groups of brick terraced cottages.
- Aust Motorway Services Area includes a car park, service and petrol station. The former service station building has been converted (now the Motion Picture Media Centre) and forms a large white rectangular building with low roof, which is located near the edge of Aust Cliff facing the Estuary.

The Binn Wall between New Passage and Severn Beach is a concrete/stone sea defence wall (Photo 6), originating in the early 17th century or even earlier. It connects to the more extensive, grass embankment sea wall along the western boundary.

Severnside Chemical Works, to the south of Severn Beach, comprises a scattered and irregular collection of block buildings, chimneys, metal lattice towers, and storage tanks (Photo 14 & 17). Large scale, light coloured warehouse buildings of the expanding Western Approach Distribution Park (Photo 12 & 16), are present to the south east of Severn Beach. Both these developments cover extensive areas, and together extend southwards to the large industrial complex at Avonmouth, beyond this character area.

A small industrial estate is located adjacent to the sea wall at Littleton Pill, in an isolated position to the north west of Littleton-upon-Severn. The site comprises a small cluster of warehouses and adjacent pools (the site of the former Littleton Brickworks).

The M4, M48 and M49 motorways all cross the area, largely on embankments, segmenting the rural landscape (Photo 7) and continuing across the Severn Estuary over the two Severn Bridges (the Severn Road Bridge (Photo 3), and the Second Severn Crossing).

The A403 runs north to south, partly along the edge of the Estuary, connecting the M48 to Avonmouth in the south.

The London-Swansea (South Wales to Bristol) railway crosses the area east to west, on embankment to Pilning Station, before passing into a deep cutting to enter the Severn Tunnel. Some metal storage containers are grouped together at Pilning Station, which is located on high embankment. The area is also crossed by numerous lanes and roads, including the B4055 which connects Easter Compton to Pilning. These are often raised slightly above the Levels' landscape. Many of the minor lanes connecting villages or hamlets inland terminate at the Estuary edge.

There are two major recreational routes which give access across the area. One of a series of Circular Rides makes use of both rural highways and public rights of way, running extensively throughout the area. The Jubilee Way also crosses the area from west to east, from Littleton-upon-Severn, connecting the Severn Way (which runs along the Estuary) to the Cotswold Way in the east of South Gloucestershire. There is also a low density, but extensive, public footpath network connecting settlements, with some areas devoid of coverage.

Overhead powerlines, supported on steel pylons, cross the landscape along several prominent corridors, north to south and east to west. A central part of the character area west to east, between Ingst and Pilning, remains free of pylon lines.

Landscape Character

The Pilning Levels comprise a flat, semi-enclosed to fairly open lowland area, with frequent and characteristic views eastwards to the Severn Ridges and more distant views north westwards, towards the Severn Estuary, South

Wales and Forest of Dean. Longer distance views south west to the Exmoor coastline are visible in clear weather. Slightly elevated vantage points at Aust, Ingst and along the sea wall give views of the Estuary itself and the islands to the south west.

The area is largely a rural, agricultural landscape, with a simple vegetation structure comprising predominately clipped hedges, some overgrown, with frequent scattered mature hedgerow trees. Clipped low hedges allow some middle to long distance views, with mature hedgerow trees variously containing views, or providing semi- enclosure, structure, visual texture and depth to views. The pattern of rhines has significantly influenced the landscape structure, their position and form emphasised by the hedgerows and the varying textured vegetation which follow them. A regular, angular pattern is most evident and typical of the area, with a more subtle, irregular curvilinear pattern to the south and west of Ingst.

Ridge and furrow and gryps are also subtle features within many pastoral fields and are most visually apparent on the sloping ground of the outliers, although they are present more widely within unimproved pasture within the area.

Centrally and towards the eastern boundary, linear woodland and frequent square/rectangular small woodland blocks and withy beds, formally arranged within the regular rhine pattern, are particularly evident. Here, woodland forms a prominent focus within views (limiting wider views), comprising a dense vegetation mass and strong vertical element, contrasting with the flat landform and generally lower vegetation structure elsewhere.

Mature pollarded trees to the north and south, open rhines edging country lanes and forming a 'moated' appearance around some farms, broad grassland verges of common land along some lanes and scattered small orchards near farms, are distinct local features of the Levels' landscape.

The outliers on which Aust and Ingst are located and the adjoining low bluffs and hills which edge the Severn Ridges, including Cowhill, Red Hill, Catherine Hill and Spaniorum Hill, form

distinctive features, within or edging an otherwise flat landscape (Photo 2). Small, largely traditional settlement is located on elevated ground of the outliers. It is well integrated due to the small scale, pattern and form of development, which is nestled within shallow depressions in the landform and contained by a strong vegetation pattern, which connects to the wider landscape.

The church at Aust forms a local landmark, visible above the adjacent vegetation, with large modern agricultural sheds at Ingst locally prominent due to their open setting and their forming a built feature on the skyline.

The Severn Ridges to the east greatly influences this area, providing visual containment, emphasising the rural character context and providing a means of visual orientation from within the remoter parts of this area. The ridges of South Wales and the Forest of Dean to the west have slightly less influence, separated by the wide Estuary, but nevertheless, provide a backdrop and skyline to views from near the western boundary. In the north of the area, beyond Aust, the Severn Ridges and the presence of the sea wall, combine to contain a narrow strip of low lying land, creating a slightly more enclosed area with a visually remote character. Further south, the easterly Severn Ridges and scarp edge form a prominent backdrop, emphasising the flatness and expansiveness of this area.

Open views across this regular patterned landscape are possible from many points, including key views from raised ground, such as the low hills at Aust and Ingst, the surrounding Severn Ridges, motorways, overbridges (Photo 7 & 8), railway (Photo 12), local roads and Severn Bridges across the Estuary. Views from within the area emphasise the large scale nature of the Levels, producing an exposed character in places.

Whilst elevated man-made structures, overbridges and motorways etc. provide the opportunity for key views across the area, these features also physically project above the flat Levels and have an influence upon its character.

Overbridges, comprising medium scale earthworks to approach roads, elevated

bridges and bridge parapets, form prominent local features, given their scale, elevation and landform profile, which are artificial features within the largely flat and undeveloped Levels. Woodland planting along the earth mounds, helps reduce the prominence of the structures, and provides some continuity with the wider rural vegetation pattern.

Motorway embankments are generally lower in elevation, but typically curtail longer views across the Levels. Traffic movement and noise is locally prominent, with wider effects upon the Levels reduced by the often strong intervening structure of hedgerow trees and occasional woodland blocks.

The railway embankment between the Severn Ridges and Pilning forms a high barrier, which physically and visually separates this part of the Levels from the wider area. This visual containment contributes to a rural and relatively remote character within the locality. Passing trains however form an occasional transient, visible and audible feature.

The two Severn Bridges, in the adjoining Severn Shoreline and Estuary area, contribute to regional identity and form striking landmarks within occasional middle distance and local views from the Levels, from where these large sweeping structures are seen against the expanse of open sky, beyond the Levels.

Some 2km north of this area, on the edge of the Levels, Oldbury Power Station forms a large scale, light coloured, rectangular complex of buildings, within views from Aust, Ingst and the Levels to the north. Within these views and at this distance the complex forms a simple, large structure visible against the sky, highly prominent on the edge of the Estuary and Levels and seen in close proximity to the lower hills of the Severn Ridges, or dwarfing the Levels' vegetation. Within this context, the scale of the buildings are very apparent.

The older, largely small scale, traditional settlement of villages, hamlets and farmsteads are generally well integrated within the locally strong vegetation framework. The lack of settlement in some areas, few roads or other infrastructure, plus strong vegetation framework create a particular perception of remoteness and sense of place.

The villages of Severn Beach and New Passage, in contrast, form areas of more recent regular dense housing, with limited integration along their edges (Photo 6). These villages are particularly prominent within views from the Bin Wall /sea wall and longer views from the Estuary warths, in the adjoining character area, from where the settlement edges are exposed and prominent, with little vegetation framework.

The Bin Wall sea defences in this locality form a hard structure and stark boundary between this area and the Severn Shoreline and Estuary.

The grass covered earth bank, which forms more extensive sections of the sea defence, creates a strong linear 'horizon' and skyline within local views from the Levels in the immediate vicinity and a visual barrier to views of the Estuary and shoreline. From a greater distance, the adjacent field vegetation helps mask this linear form.

Large numbers of over wintering birds drawn to the Severn Estuary, are often a seasonal feature of the Levels, both in the fields and overhead.

The expanse of the Severn Estuary, although not visible from the majority of views, does reflect light and provides some 'lightness' to the edge of the area.

The southern area is heavily influenced by the extensive pattern of major road and rail infrastructure, radiating from New Passage and the dispersed large scale industrial structures at Severnside, including towers and chimneys emitting rising smoke clouds and the gas towers of the chemical works (Photo 14). The Avonmouth Works continue this dominant industrial character beyond this character area. These features dominate open views to the south, often dwarfing the existing relatively small scale landscape structure of hedgerows and trees. The large scale structures are also visible from South Wales within distant views. The major roads also introduce visible movement and noise into the area.

The light coloured, large scale distributor sheds adjacent to the M49, which are within Phase I of the Western Approach Distribution Park, are also prominent from as far away as South Wales. Low angled morning and evening

sunlight in particular accentuates the building façades and roofscape. The buildings are generally clearly visible against the darker landscape framework behind and in front, when viewed from the Severn Ridges and are similarly prominent within low level views, where the separate buildings appear to coalesce into a continuous built form. This is further accentuated when seen against the backcloth of the Severn Ridges.

The chimney at Cattybrook Brickworks is evident on the edge of the Severn Ridges, but is of considerably smaller scale in comparison with the chemical works.

Berwick Farm landfill site, with its large scale earthworks and present condition of disturbed ground and bare earth, forms a locally prominent artificial topographic feature within the flat Levels.

This landform differs from the outliers at Aust and Ingst, which form isolated hills with natural slope profiles and irregular outline. The hedgerow field pattern also extends over these features, responding to the shape of the landform, visually connecting these features to the wider agricultural field pattern and landscape. In contrast, the earthworks at Berwick Farm are constrained within a linear, regular shaped site, the angularity of the site emphasised by the hedgerow boundary. The landform is also aligned perpendicular to and separate from the Severn Ridge. The landfill site therefore has little visual similarity with the adjacent field pattern or local topographic features.

The Motion Picture Media Centre complex at Aust Service Station, adjacent to the first Severn Bridge, is visually prominent on higher ground on the skyline above Aust Cliff. It features predominantly in local views and more distant views from South Wales, due to its skyline setting, elevation, scale and colour.

The concentration of storage containers at the elevated Pilning Station visually influences the local area. The railway embankment to the east in places forms an artificial horizontal skyline, physically containing northern or southerly views across the Levels. Passing trains are visually and audibly prominent, often visible above the adjacent vegetation.

The powerlines and pylons that cross the area, are significant vertical and linear elements, contrasting with the flat landscape within the largely undisturbed rural framework to the north and east of Aust. Elsewhere, their visual prominence is dependent upon the viewing location and degree to which foreground and middle distance vegetation (varying from clipped hedges to overgrown hedges and tree belts) limit or focus views.

The former rifle range and danger area at New Passage is a visually low key land use, with some subtle differences to the adjacent agricultural Levels. The grassland site is visually open, with very limited structure, in part provided by drainage ditches, peripheral, intermittent or overgrown sections of the former hedgerow structure and the characteristic features associated with firing ranges, that is a large grass covered earth bund, clustered group of single storey buildings and an access road. The earth bund is a particularly prominent feature within local views from the Levels and Estuary and Severn Shoreline area, being taller than the adjacent sea wall and hedgerow vegetation.

The industrial estate at Littleton Pill has some local visual impact, with the cluster of warehouse buildings evident from the sea wall and within more distant views from the higher ground of the Severn Ridges to the east.

The Changing Landscape

The Pilning Levels landscape character area is a largely rural landscape, retaining much of its historic pattern, agricultural land use, settlement and character. These features are most distinct and intact within the north and central areas, whilst are greatly physically influenced to the south west by a variety of non-agricultural development, including the large scale industrial chemical works, landfill operations, motorways, the railway, powerline infrastructure and Avonmouth beyond this area, which are visually prominent.

The strong rural character of most of the area is reinforced by the rural Severn Ridges backcloth to the east, the rising slopes similarly containing very little settlement and no

prominent development.

There is a strong, largely intact, landscape infrastructure of tree-lined hedges, pollarded trees, linear tree belts, ditches and rhines, providing enclosure across the agricultural landscape of the Levels.

The rhine drainage pattern, linked to the tidal pills, is essential to the agricultural viability of the area, maintaining the ground water level below that of the adjacent fields.

Hedgerows are generally actively managed with some limited hedgerows in variable condition, intermittent in cover or replaced with fencing. Active management of hedgerows not currently managed would help to ensure the conservation of these key features in the long term. Dependent on the number of hedgerow trees that are allowed to develop, or are planted, the landscape character of areas with currently overgrown hedgerows could become more or less open as a result of management.

The loss of mature hedgerow trees through Dutch Elm Disease has been particularly widespread across the Levels. As a result, and despite the existing vegetation framework, the character of the area is now significantly more open and windswept than in the middle of the 20th century. There is little evidence that these trees have been replaced: the cyclical regrowth and die-back of elm suckers mark the location of former mature trees, where management of hedgerows is infrequent. Where they occur, dead elms influence the condition, integrity and appearance of the landscape framework in the locality, affecting the degree of openness/enclosure. Active management of these features will similarly help to conserve these hedgerows and contribute to the landscape framework for the long term. Where new hedgerow tree planting is also introduced it will, over time, help to replace the vegetation structure lost as a result of Dutch Elm Disease. As with other hedgerow management, the landscape character could become more or less open as a result.

Many farm orchards have been well maintained and are a distinctive feature of the area. Some, however, are ageing in structure and with presently no indication of orchard replacement, the potential loss of this feature in the future is likely.

The vegetation structure generally is not being supplemented by new planting to create succession and sustain it in the long term. Without this, the existing strong framework will decline in the future, resulting in a more open landscape.

Recent woodland planting has however been undertaken at Lower Knole Farm, in the east of the area below the Severn Ridge, as part of the Forest of Avon. It occupies an area of almost 60 hectares and will, in time, create a new woodland of a size that will contribute significantly to the landscape framework of the area. Located in a part of the Levels where the existing pattern of woodland comprises small blocks and linear tree belts, the new woodland will significantly change the character and landscape structure within the locality and within more distant views from the Severn Ridge.

However, many of the mature and over-mature oak and ash trees and linear poplar belts, which form an important component of the landscape framework, have few juvenile trees to perpetuate this in the long term. The regular pollarding of hedgerow trees (with concentrations to the north and south of the area) and coppicing of withy beds, is generally in decline, with the potential long term loss of these distinctive features. In addition, a decline in the management of hedgerows, if a widespread trend, has the potential to quickly erode the landscape infrastructure.

Ridge and furrow is a subtle feature within many traditional pasture fields and is easily damaged by a change in land use to arable farming.

Older nucleated small settlement and farmsteads, on higher ground and punctuating the Levels, greatly contribute to the rural agricultural character. Their character, sympathetic setting and integration within the landscape is sensitive to change, which could affect this balance.

The M49 and M4 new links to the Second Severn Crossing have introduced more recent physical and visual change. The associated roadside and off-site planting has yet to become established, but will with time, improve integration within the landscape, although

forming a new vegetation pattern, largely dissimilar to the regular framework within the Levels, which relates to the drainage pattern.

Land raising for sea wall defences, rail and motorway embankments and the Berwick Farm landfill site, have formed significant landforms, which in places both physically and visually influence an otherwise flat landscape.

On completion of landfill operations at Berwick Farm, site restoration will be undertaken, with further earth shaping and planting proposals to form a golf course. The mown greens, fairways and planting structure has the potential to introduce a new ornamental landscape, which, due to the elevated ground, will be visible from the adjacent Levels, contrasting with the wider agricultural landscape.

Land raising for future roads and buildings has the potential, as well as increasing the visual impact, to disturb the rhine system, as is evident from previous development. Other elements, such as road kerbs, concrete drainage structures, road bridges and fencing, all visually influence and erode the rural character.

The semi-enclosed to open nature of the Levels landscape is sensitive to change, particularly to the continued introduction of large scale built elements which, due to their massing and height, are visible over long distances. Such development would further erode the landscape structure and rural character of this area.

An extensive area of the Levels south of the railway line was granted planning permission in 1957. It extends from the railway line south of Severn Beach, eastwards to Easter Compton, merging with Avonmouth to the south within the Bristol Authority area. It includes areas that have already been developed, such as the chemical works at Severnside and the more recent first phase of development of the Western Approach Distribution Park to the north east, as well as substantial areas which are currently undeveloped.

The Local Plan also identifies all the area west of the M49, covered by the existing planning consent and additional land, as a Safeguarded Employment Area.

The Western Approach Distribution Park, which comprises large warehouses and extensive

areas of hard standing, has retained some of the rhine system and associated vegetation within the development. In addition, the site layout, distribution of buildings and roads within a generous landscape setting, have allowed the implementation of a robust planting framework and the creation of wetland habitats. These measures provide some setting and integration of the buildings, however their large scale, mass and height still remain a prominent feature within local and more distant views.

Phase II of the development is proposed, with a significant expansion of the existing site area, including a number of large two storey warehouses, car parks, hard standings and roads, similar in scale to the existing development. Amenity planting (some on low earth mounds) is proposed along sections of the revised site boundary. The extent of each development within the plot, tight against the site boundary, will however often leave limited space available for planting and integration measures.

The growth in warehouse buildings and extent of development is likely to increase the visual prominence of the site within local views from the sea wall to the west, adjacent roads and footpaths and in longer views from the Severn Ridges and South Wales.

Given the anticipation of future change, the management of land and vegetation is often limited within this area.

Future development of this area will result in a further significant change in character, with an inevitable increased prominence of built features spread over an extensive area. This has the potential to affect the rural character of the adjacent Severn Ridge character area and the setting of the Second Severn Crossing, as well as that of the local area.

Where such development is accommodated within the existing landscape framework, physical disturbance to drainage and landscape structure will be lessened. However, large scale development over the consented area will inevitably result in an erosion of the present simple, open structure of the agricultural landscape. Such development will require a new landscape framework, of a scale appropriate to that of the proposed

development, in order to integrate the built forms into the landscape.

Whilst the new framework should be based on existing landscape features and characteristics of the area, it will inevitably result in a landscape character which is essentially different from that of the surrounding area, which is largely based on low, horizontal structure and openness.

The high degree of wind exposure near the Estuary has generally hampered the establishment of shelter belts and planting, which would otherwise provide some integration to existing development. An encroachment of built elements, towards the coastal mudflats, would therefore detract from the simple open character of this adjacent area.

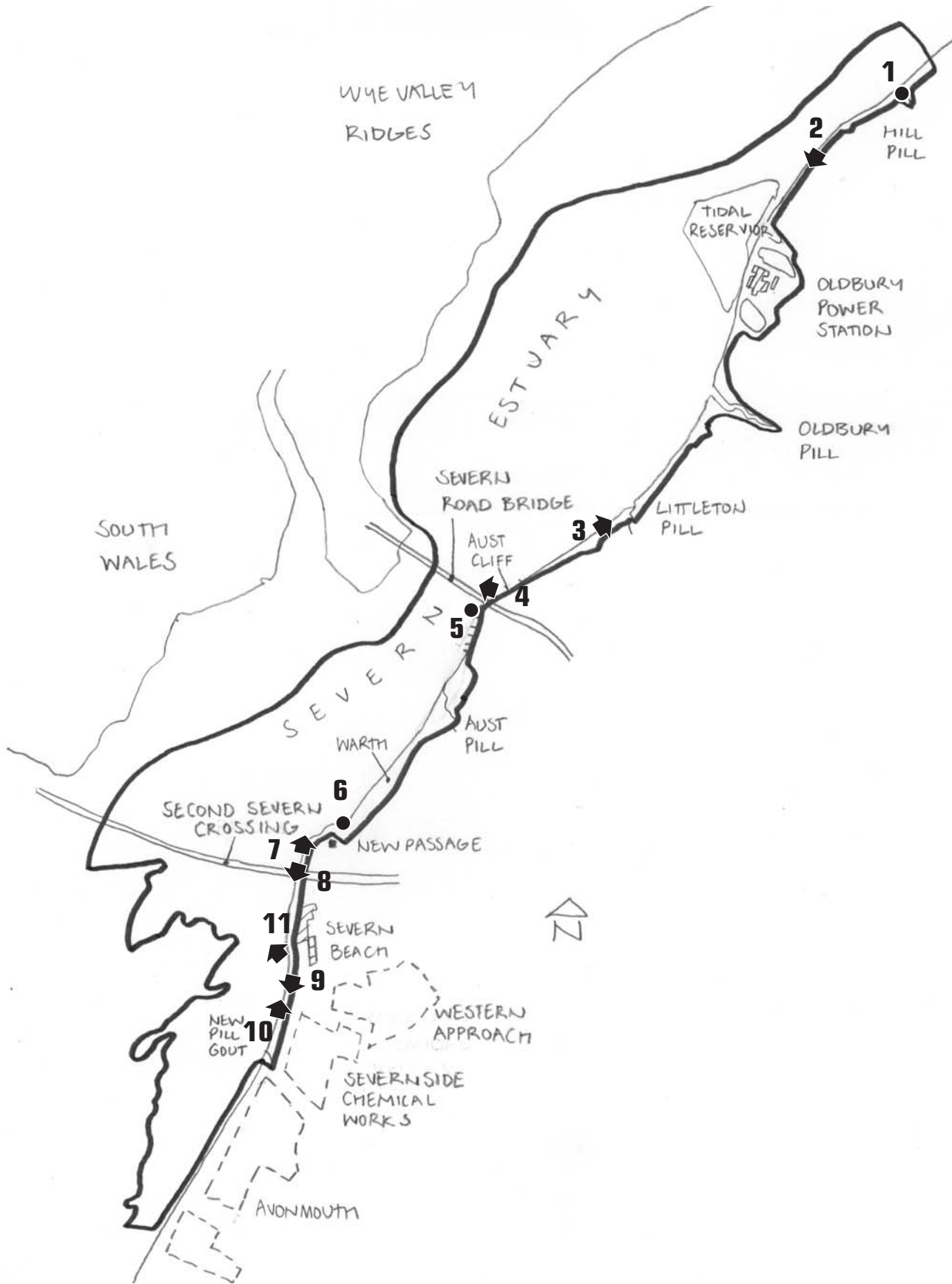
The visual exposure of the area to views from elevated points within and adjacent to it, both in South Gloucestershire, South Wales and Gloucestershire, from bridges and ridges, increases its sensitivity to change. Presently, existing large scale, light coloured, horizontal or vertical development is visible over long distances, affecting the character of these areas. Similarly, any change within the adjacent landscape character areas which is visible from the Levels, has the potential to visually influence and affect the character of this area.

Decommissioning of Oldbury Power Station, which is anticipated to commence in the next 3 to 4 years, is likely to result in some ongoing changes to the structures surrounding the main reactor buildings and changes in the use of the site and remaining structures. However, in the very long term (over 100 years), the site is proposed to be returned to open landscape, significantly changing the character within distant views from the north of this character area.

The continual pastoral land use of the Levels since medieval times has resulted in little ground disturbance. As a result, few surface finds, more normally associated with ploughed arable land, have been made. Although the archaeological potential of the area is largely unknown, the peat within the Levels may contain evidence of early prehistoric activity, which could be of considerable significance, due to its national rarity.



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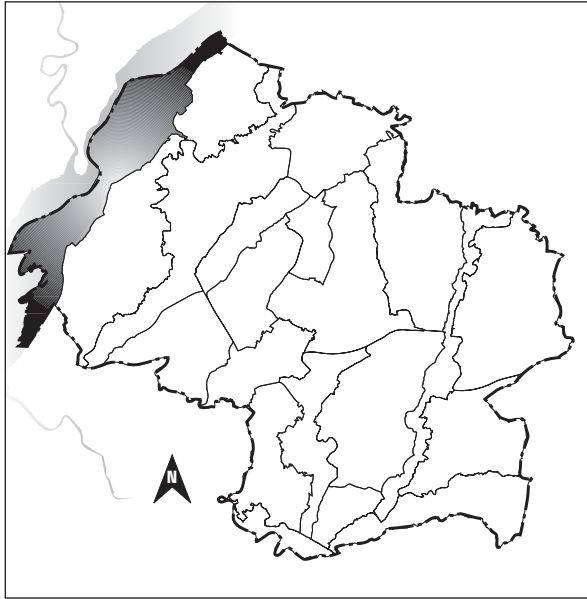


Key

➤¹⁵ Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

**Figure 69:
Severn Shoreline and Estuary -
Sketch Map**



The Severn Shoreline and Estuary landscape character area is a flat open exposed linear landscape of warths, tidal wetlands, mudflats and rock. The large expanse of the Estuary and changing tides, is its most dominant feature.

Key Characteristics

- Open and exposed simple landscape of tidal Severn Estuary, with textured intertidal zone of bed rock, shingle and rivulleted mudflats/ sandflats, edged by a low mud cliff, with warths (salt marshes) beyond, contained to the east by a sea wall.
- Aust Cliff, folded bed rock and fossil bed, forms a prominent landform and geological feature.
- Constantly changing characteristics of shoreline, resulting from the high tidal range of the Severn Estuary (second greatest in the world).
- Warths are grazed in places. A linear woodland along the low outcrop of Aust Cliff is prominent.
- Warths and mudflats are largely untouched by built features. Remnants of putcher ranks are an historical feature.

- Only a few buildings sit on the edge of the warths, with settlement in the adjacent Levels occasionally prominent.
- Tidal pills meander across the warths to the Estuary from sluice gates set within the sea wall.
- Particular lack of formal boat access to the Estuary from the shore, other than via a slipway at Thornbury Sailing Club and at Severn Beach.
- Expansive views include the Estuary and Bristol Channel dotted with islands, South Wales and the Wye Valley/Forest of Dean Ridges to the west and Severn Ridges to the east. Further to the south west the Exmoor coastline is sometimes evident.
- Area of international importance for the large numbers of over wintering birds, a visual feature of the area and adjacent Levels.
- Oldbury Power Station, lying within this area, the two Severn Bridges crossing the Estuary and large scale industry within the southern Levels, are prominent built features.

Location

The Severn Shoreline and Estuary landscape character area is located along the western edge of South Gloucestershire, extending from the chemical works and Avonmouth to the south, to beyond Oldbury Power Station to the north and extending westwards to include a large proportion of the Estuary.

Its northern and southern limits follow the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary, although the character of the shoreline and Estuary continues beyond the limits of the Authority's area. The western limits also follow the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary, which takes the approximate centreline of the Severn's navigable river channel.

The eastern boundary follows the defined sea wall, which runs along the length of the Estuary, marking a prominent change between the unenclosed warths, tidal shoreline and Estuary and the enclosed agricultural fields of the

adjacent Levels. The sea wall merges centrally with Aust Cliff and outlier.

Physical Influences

The geology of this area is predominantly Alluvial, with Alluvial Gley soils, peat and occasional Alluvial gravel fans, typical of the Severn Estuary floodplain and lowland Levels. Geological layers are clearly seen in transect, across the gently sloping intertidal zone, in the low mud cliffs at the edge of this zone which are between 1 to 3 metres high and in the layered sandstone and Carboniferous limestone outcrop at Aust Cliff.

Aust Cliff defines a short section of the eastern boundary and forms a prominent geological exposure and fossil bed. It is designated both an SSSI and RIGS.

The low lying flat landscape has a topography generally below 10 metres a.o.d, with Aust Cliff forming a large and prominent outcrop, almost 2km long, rising in height gradually northwards up to 40 metres a.o.d. (Photo 5).

The sea wall which forms the eastern boundary, comprises a man-made grass covered earth embankment up to 2m high above the adjacent natural ground level and connects with the Binn Wall at Severn Beach. Flood defences have been a feature along the edge of the Estuary for some time, with map evidence indicating the wall has been in existence since at least the mid 18th century. The wall could be much earlier, with one section within the Bristol Authority area dating to the Saxon period.

The sea wall forms a prominent and defining physical feature. It runs along the shoreline, protecting the largely agricultural land of the Levels to the east. It merges with Aust Cliff, turns inland around Oldbury Pill and Oldbury Power Station and defines the eastern extent of the Severn Shoreline and Estuary landscape character area.

The largely linear warths to the west of the sea wall vary in width and are occasionally dissected by tidal pills, which form natural meandering channels, fed by rhines from the adjacent Levels (Photo 1). Water from the rhines is controlled

by sluice gates, set within the sea wall. Oldbury Pill is a particular feature, extending some way inland to Oldbury-on-Severn. The sea wall also extends further inland here as far as Oldbury-on-Severn, in order to skirt the channel.

Land drainage and flood protection have allowed the productive agricultural use of the adjacent Levels' landscape and influence many of the characteristic features of both the Levels and warths evident today.

Land Cover

The largely linear character area has distinct and varied zones of land cover, the visibility of which is dominated by the constantly changing water levels in the Estuary, which has the second highest tidal range in the world (12m at mean spring tide).

The intertidal zone is under constant change as the tidal conditions vary, ranging from the large visual expanse of water several kilometres wide at high tide, to the exposed broad and irregular coastal strip of rivuletted mudflats and sandflats, shingle beach and exposed bed rock at low tide (Photo 3, 4 & 7).

The landward edge of the mudflats is clearly defined by an often pronounced and undercut low mud cliff, marking the height of the mean high water level. Beyond lies flat, open warths (salt marshes), in places grazed, which extend inland to the sea wall (Photo 10). This area is seasonally flooded under extreme high tides. An extensive area of scrub occupies a strip of warth to the south, adjacent to the chemical works.

To the north of Old Passage, the lower cliff section of Aust Cliff is heavily vegetated with trees. Adjacent to Oldbury Power Station is a small area of woodland and vegetation along the eastern boundary of this site. There are no other trees along the shoreline and only very few intermittent trees within the Levels immediately adjacent to the boundary of this area.

The Estuary, intertidal zone and warths provide a nationally and internationally important habitat and feeding ground for migratory and native wildfowl, waterfowl and waders and are

a designated RAMSAR, SSSI, SPA, and pSAC area.

The intertidal zone, through tidal erosion and deposition cycles, has exposed a previously buried landscape, revealing archaeological remains and periods of human activity within deposited layers. This area, together with the warth and adjacent Levels, is a significant area for potential archaeological remains within South Gloucestershire, where peat and waterlogged ground provide good conditions for preserving remains.

At high tide the largest drainage channels (Hill Pill and Oldbury Pill) both form meandering open channels of water with mud banks (Photo 1). Smaller pills at Littleton, Aust and New Passage, snake across the warths and into the adjacent mudflats (Photo 6).

Settlement and Infrastructure

There is no major settlement within this area, although there are two dwellings to the north of Oldbury Power Station adjacent to the sea wall, a cluster of dwellings at Old Passage either side of the sea wall and a small number of deserted farmsteads, near to Severn Beach.

To the south, the settlements of New Passage and Severn Beach within the adjacent Levels are enclosed and protected by the Binn Wall, defining the eastern boundary (Photo 7 & 8). The present Binn Wall was constructed in 1815, with a much earlier sea defence originating from the early 17th century. Here, the sea defences comprise rock armature and a stone/concrete wall which merge with the shingle beach, in place of the more extensive grass embankment sea wall elsewhere.

To the north, the large scale and simple block form of Oldbury Power Station is a significant structure located on the edge of the intertidal zone (Photo 2). The power station complex comprises the large scale, tall, rectangular reactor buildings which are light coloured (vertical blue and grey stripes), surrounded by low adjacent grey buildings fringed to the north and south by regular shaped reservoirs. To the

west, within the Estuary, lies a large tidal reservoir within the mudflat zone, the walls of which are evident at low tide. Numerous overhead powerlines radiate out from the power station across the Levels. Only a few structures extend over the intertidal mudflats. These comprise at Old Passage (and near the first Severn Bridge), an elevated pier giving access to an electricity pylon tower. An adjacent derelict slipway, the former ferry crossing, providing a connection with South Wales before the Severn Bridge was constructed.

Putcher ranks dating from the 18th and 19th century, comprising irregular lines of timber stakes, extend over the mudflats to the north and south of Littleton Pill. Conical shaped putchers were attached to these stakes to catch salmon. This local traditional technique has now largely disappeared along the Severn. The visibility of these stakes and the slipways are determined by the tide.

Boat access to the Estuary from the shore is very limited, with the strong and complex tidal conditions and currents limiting the potential for leisure access. Thornbury Sailing Club, boathouse and boatyard adjacent to Oldbury Pill, includes a cluster of sailing dinghies stored on land, as well as a slipway.

Oldbury Pill forms the largest outlet into the Estuary and provides boat moorings.

A slipway at Severn Beach, near the Bin Wall, also provides boat access, with public access to the shingle beach at New Passage.

A few navigational beacons are features along the shore and within the Estuary to the north of Oldbury Power Station. These comprise two land based, small, metal-latticed towers, water based beacons on masts and a buoy, demarcating the tidal reservoir.

The Severn Bridge and Second Severn Crossing, link Wales and England and form large scale, elevated structures carrying the M4 and M48 across the Estuary (Photo 4, 8 10 & 11).

The Severn Way recreational route runs north to south along the elevated sea wall for most of its length and is joined by the Jubilee Way to the north of Aust and one of a series of Circular Rides to the north of Oldbury Power Station.

Landscape Character

The Severn Shoreline and Estuary landscape character area is a simple, open, expansive area, dominated and influenced by the physical and visual presence of the Severn Estuary, tidal pattern and weather conditions. Its character is variably affected by large scale infrastructure which cross over this area and industrial development within the adjacent area.

Views are dominated by the large scale estuarine landscape of open water and textured, rivuletted mudflats, which continually change with each tide. The influence of the wind, tides and atmospheric weather conditions are a predominant element, which affect the mood and character of the land/ waterscape and texture of the Estuary. South Wales and the Wye Valley/Forest of Dean ridges form a prominent backcloth and coastline to the west, with the widening Estuary and open expanse of the Bristol Channel, dotted with islands, to the south west. The distant headlands of the Exmoor coastline are sometimes evident, further south westwards.

Views from the area of warths are contained to the east by the sea wall. The lack of connection with the Levels in places creates a visually remote character. Views from the elevated sea wall however, extend eastwards, between the vegetation structure of the Levels, occasionally including the distant Severn Ridges, providing a wider context and appreciation of setting.

The very high number of migratory birds are a visually impressive seasonal feature of this area, often extending into the adjacent Levels.

The geological exposure of banded rock at Aust Cliff and heavily folded bed rock exposed at low tide, both form visually dramatic natural features. The prominent linear woodland along the southern low outcrop of the cliff merges with the field hedgerows and trees at Old Passage, to the east of the warth.

The intertidal mudflats are largely untouched by built features. Occasional putcher ranks, which are low key timber structures, have an affinity and interrelationship with their setting. In contrast, the elevated pier with pylon and adjacent slipway, near the Severn Road Bridge at Old Passage, are more prominent built features.

The boat house and slipway of Thornbury Sailing Club form small, low key built elements, the building set behind and largely screened from the Estuary, by the sea wall. The seasonal influx of moored sailing boats and their changing position, influenced by the tides, provides some dynamic and locally colourful changes within Oldbury Pill.

The numerous pills with sluice gates, set within the grassed earth bank of the sea wall, are distinctive features along the warths. North of Oldbury Power Station, the metal towered beacons and two buildings against the sea wall form prominent local features, contrasting with the horizontal landscape.

The two Severn Bridges which span this character area and the Severn Estuary, continue into the Pilning Levels and Wales (Photo 11). They are visually significant, framing distant views and reinforcing the large scale nature and expanse of the Severn Estuary. They are nationally distinctive landmarks, giving this stretch of the Estuary a keen sense of identity.

The perception of remoteness within the area and its rural characteristics are however in places eroded by the visual prominence of built features within the adjacent Levels, or by structures such as pylon lines, passing over the area.

Settlement at Severn Beach is visually prominent adjacent to the foreshore, within long views along the warths, given the close proximity of development and very limited extent of vegetation in this exposed setting (Photo 10). Recent three storey housing towards the south of Severn Beach, in the adjoining character area, is considerably taller than the adjacent sea wall and, as a result, visually impacts on the local warth. Other properties located further inland within the Levels, are either screened behind the sea wall, or better integrated within a framework of hedgerows and trees.

Oldbury Power Station to the north has a distinct large scale, light coloured industrial block structure which is visually prominent within the northern extent of this area beyond Aust, the Levels to the east and is also clearly visible from the Severn Ridges. Both the principal structures and the tidal reservoir and

lagoons are also visible from the Wye Valley/Forest of Dean ridges. The associated infrastructure, of security fence and sea wall/bund, are further man-made elements influencing local character. The pale blue and grey striped finish to the reactor buildings has some effect in reducing the buildings' massing in certain local views, dependent upon weather and light conditions.

The large scale industrial structures of towers and chimneys, emitting smoke clouds and the gas towers of the Severnside Chemical Works are visually prominent, sited within the adjacent Levels to the south (Photo 9). The Avonmouth Works further south, beyond the character area, also contribute to the overriding industrial influence of the southern Levels and adjacent warths and Estuary.

The industrial areas of Severnside and Avonmouth are prominent in views south of the old Severn Bridge, but are screened to the north by Aust Cliff and outlier.

The Western Approach Distribution Park to the north east of Severnside, is at some distance from the shoreline and is not visible from the warth, due to the low angle of view and intervening sea wall. However, this development is evident within the middle distance from the top of the sea wall, between Severn Beach and Severnside, with the large scale warehouse buildings visible above the adjacent vegetation framework.

All these built features are visible from along the Severn Way, in particular from the Severn Road Bridges, from adjacent character areas to the east and from South Wales to the west, interrupting the openness and expansiveness of the Estuary and shoreline.

The grass embankment of the sea wall forms a consistent, horizontal feature, defining the eastern edge of the warths and is significant in visually segregating the Severn Shoreline from the Levels and therefore maintaining the visual remoteness of much of this area. The grass cover integrates the landform with the warths, however the level top of the embankment and constant slope profiles, reinforce the man-made nature of this landform.

The Bin Wall, in contrast, is a more prominent, utilitarian structure where visible from within the warths and Estuary.

The Changing Landscape

The Severn Shoreline and Estuary landscape character area comprises a distinct and sensitive landscape, with significant areas influenced by natural processes and very limited presence of built features and man's activity.

The open and exposed tidal water scape, landscape of intertidal zone and warths, forms part of the wider landscape of the Severn Estuary, South Wales, the Wye Valley/Forest of Dean Ridges, the Levels and Severn Ridges.

As a whole, this larger landscape is visually interrelated. Therefore any change within the Estuary, or within an adjacent area, has the potential to influence character over a much wider area. This sensitivity to change is evident through the visual influence of existing large scale built forms, including Oldbury Power Station, the Severn Bridges, pylon towers, Severnside Chemical Works, Western Approach distributor sheds and Avonmouth further south.

The implications of physical disruption to the tidal pattern within the Estuary has become evident since the construction of the Second Severn Crossing. The bridge abutments and piers have had some effect upon the local pattern of erosion and deposition, with altered silting patterns and beach profiles.

Potential substantial future development within the adjacent Piling Levels, could occur in the areas covered by the 1957 planning permission and the Safeguarded Employment Area (identified in the Local Plan). Development of these areas which adjoin the Severnside Chemical Works and Western Approach Distribution Park, would result in a significant additional visual intrusion to the shoreline and Estuary, further eroding the rural character and perception of remoteness within the area.

The international importance of this area for bird habitat and feeding grounds is clearly indicated by the numerous designations which apply. The area is highly sensitive to physical, visual and audible disturbance, within the adjacent Levels or Estuary which might impact upon the habitat, flight patterns or, indirectly, affect the quality of the feeding grounds.

Present recreational use of the sea wall by walkers has only a limited localised effect upon

bird habitats and distribution of birds. The intensification of recreational activity, or new recreational development, is however likely to introduce additional physical, noise and visual disturbance, although the potential for an increase in water based activities is limited, given the significant tidal range and strong complex currents of the River Severn.

Decommissioning of Oldbury Power Station, which is anticipated to commence in the next 3 to 4 years, is likely to result in some ongoing changes to the structures surrounding the main reactor buildings and changes in the use of the site and remaining structures. However, in the very long term (over 100 years), the site is proposed to be returned to open landscape, significantly changing the character of the shoreline within local and distant views.

The shoreline and Estuary mudflats contain a wealth of archaeological relics, reflecting the long term human activity and association with the River Severn. These relics are largely buried within layers of silt deposits of the warths and the tidal mudflats, but are occasionally uncovered by the scouring effects of the strong tidal currents. Although these finds are often small and subtle, with little visible influence upon landscape character, this archaeological resource remains an important reference to historical activity and is sensitive to the impacts from physical disturbance



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Glossary of Terms

AOD is Above Ordnance Datum and relates to the height of a point measured above mean sea level, shown on Ordnance Survey maps.

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is an area designated by the Secretary of State for the Environment, on the recommendation of the Countryside Commission, under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. It is an area of particularly attractive landscape, which in the Commission's view, should be protected as part of the national heritage.

At grade is the same level as the surrounding area.

Attribute is an inherent characteristic of the locality, including for example, openness or enclosure, key views or vistas, landform and patterns in the landscape such as those defined by historic land uses, roads and lanes, buildings, hedgerows or watercourses.

Coalescence as used within the report, refers to the merging together of built development, either on the fringes of a settlement, resulting in two adjoining settlements uniting into one continuous built form, or by infill development increasing the density of the built environment, resulting in a change to the spatial pattern of a settlement, affecting its landscape character or that of the adjoining settlement.

Conservation Area is an area designated by the Local Planning Authority as being of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which is desirable to preserve or enhance.

Enclosure was the process by which open agricultural land, commons and wastes were restructured into parcels contained by stone wall, hedgerow or fence boundaries. The process consolidated a person's ownership of land parcels into a single land holding, with the transfer of land undertaken with neighbours, through a process of enclosure by private agreement, or where opposition occurred, by Act of Parliament. Enclosure by agreement dates back to at least the medieval period, with enclosure by Acts of Parliament most common between 1750 and 1850.

Field pattern refers to the shape of parcels of land formed by enclosure, traditionally defined by hedgerows or stone walls. Field patterns have been largely characterised within the report as either angular, rectangular, irregular or regular.

Field size refers to the relative size of parcels of land. These have been characterised in terms of small, medium and large size as a guide, relative to the variety of field sizes found within the South Gloucestershire area, which have not been measured.

Historic Park / Garden is a designation recognising a site, which has been listed within the Register of Parks and Gardens as of special historic interest. Sites are registered on the basis of their features and qualities and are considered either of national importance and graded in relation to their significance (register maintained by English Heritage) or of local / regional importance (register maintained by Local Authorities).

Landscape character is what makes one landscape different from another. It means the distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occurs consistently in a particular type of landscape. Distinctive character results from particular combinations of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use, field patterns and human settlement. It creates the particular sense of place of different parts of the landscape.

Landscape character areas are single unique areas and are the discrete geographical areas of a landscape character type. Each has its own individual character and identity.

Landscape character types are distinct and homogeneous areas that are generic in nature. They may occur in different parts of the country, but wherever they occur they will share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation and human influences.

Landscape condition reflects the state of current (or past) management or maintenance of individual features and elements that make up the character in any one place.

Landscape features include those constituent parts of the landscape that either in their own right, or in combination with landscape attributes, give the locality its particular character and distinctiveness, including for example, trees, hedges, ponds, geological or geomorphologic features, rights of way, streams and rhines, ponds and aspects of the built environment including structures such as gate posts, walls, railings as well as the buildings themselves.

Landscape quality is primarily a combination of its strength of character (ie. how clearly the distinctive character is expressed in an area, with the presence of key characteristics and absence of atypical and incongruous features); the state of repair or condition of landscape elements and the integrity and intactness of the landscape.

Landscape sensitivity is the degree to which a landscape can accommodate change without unacceptable detrimental effects on character. Sensitivity is not absolute, but is likely to vary relative to the type and scale of change being considered.

Listed Buildings are buildings of special architectural or historic interest included and described in the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest published by the Department of the Environment.

Local Plan is a detailed set of policies and proposals designed by a Local Planning Authority to guide the future physical development of an area. Its functions are:

to bring local planning issues before the public.

to develop the policies and general proposals of the Structure Plan and to relate them to precise areas of land defined on a Proposals Map;

to provide a detailed basis for co-ordinating and directing development and other use of land - both public and private; and

to provide a detailed basis for determining planning applications;

Medieval Period is a period in English history between the 11th century and the 16th century which saw the establishment of centralised government and the feudal system.

Planning Policy Guidance (PPGs) are a series of publications from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) setting out government policy on various planning issues.

Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) are an evolving series of publications from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) setting out government policy on various planning issues. As these become available they will replace the PPGs.

pSAC is a possible Special Area of Conservation and represents a site awaiting adoption as a candidate SAC (cSAC) or designation as a SAC. A pSAC has the same protection measures afforded a SAC with regard to development control and the determination of planning applications.

Public Rights of Way are routes over which all members of the public have a right of passage, including footpaths, bridleways and carriageways (including cycleways).

Quality of Life Assessment (formerly Environmental Capital) is a tool for maximising environmental, economic and social benefits as part of any land use planning and management decision. It builds upon the process of characterisation by identifying the benefits that each feature or characteristic fulfils and assesses the importance of each function by explaining the reason it matters, to whom and at what scale. This approach emphasises improvement of the quality of life rather than the status quo and values the common place as well as the unusual and rare.

RAMSAR is a designation under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance. The Severn Estuary is designated due to its immense tidal range; its important run of migratory fish between the sea and the sub estuaries, including Salmon, Sea Trout, Sea Lamprey, River Lamprey, Allis Shad, Twaite Shad and Eel; for regularly supporting over 85,000 waterfowl and by providing a staging area for over 1,500 whimbrel.

RIGS is a Regionally Important Geological Site, a non-statutory regional designation applied to geological exposures, in accordance with English Nature criteria standards.

SAC is a Special Area of Conservation, designated under the European Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora ('the Habitats Directive 1992') and implemented in Britain by the Conservation (Natural Habitats & c.) Regulations 1994 ('the Habitat Regulations'). The Severn Estuary is designated due to its estuarine habitat, intertidal mudflats and sandflats, Atlantic salt meadows, subtidal sandbanks, reefs, and four fish species - Allis Shad, Twaite Shad, Sea Lamprey and River Lamprey.

SAM is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, a designation under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeology Areas Act 1979, for the protection of nationally important archaeological sites.

Saxon Period is a period in English history between the 5th and the 11th century, which saw the take over of the former Roman province by invaders from mainland Europe.

SPA is a Special Protection Area under EC Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds ('the Birds Directive'). The Severn Estuary meets the criteria for designation as a SPA due to the internationally important species and populations of over-wintering wildfowl associated with it.

SSSI is a Site of Special Scientific Interest which under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act, English Nature notifies Local Planning Authorities of sites, other than nature reserves, which it has identified as having features of special ecological, geological or physiographic interest of national importance. The Local Planning Authority and English Nature must be consulted with regard to development proposals which would directly or indirectly affect such sites.

Stakeholder is the whole constituency of individuals and groups, including special interest, statutory and non-statutory organisations, who have an interest in a subject or a place.

Structure Plan is a document prepared under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, by a County Council or Joint Unitary Authorities and approved by the Secretary of State for the Environment, containing general policies and proposals for the development and use of land. Its proposals are illustrated diagrammatically on a key plan.

Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Tranquillity has been applied to landscape as meaning an area which has little or no visual or audible influence from built development, traffic, noise or artificial lighting.

Vernacular relates to buildings or structures built in a local style, from local materials.

Warth is an area of salt marsh on the fringe of a tidal estuary. It comprises an area of transition between the bare mud flats and upper marsh, bordered in the case of the Severn Estuary by a sea wall. The warth forms an integral part of the estuarine ecosystem.



Appendices

Appendix A

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The Landscape Character Assessment of South Gloucestershire has been carried out in accordance with the Countryside Agency's Interim Landscape Character Assessment Guidance (1999) and more recent Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, Landscape Character Assessment, Guidance for England and Scotland 2002. This approach was supported by Planning Policy Guidance PPG 7 The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development (England) 1997 and uses appropriate techniques for the level of detail required to fulfil the aims and purposes of the Landscape Character Assessment, as described in Section 1. The approach is also supported by the more recently published Planning Policy Statement, PPS 7 Sustainable Development in Rural Areas 2004, which supersedes PPG 7.

The Landscape Character Assessment followed two main stages, Characterisation and Evaluation, which are described in Section 1.5.

These stages have been further broken down below and illustrated over the page. In addition, on the flow chart, guidance is also given on where in this report further detailed information may be found.

STAGE 1 : CHARACTERISATION

Step One: Defining the Scope

The purpose of the Landscape Character Assessment was defined (as discussed in Section 1). This influenced the scale and level of detail required. The scope of stakeholder involvement was decided.

Step Two: Desktop Study

A variety of data sources, including written and mapped data, were reviewed in Spring 2000. This included the study and analysis of relevant plans, strategies, studies and discussions with the Unitary Authority. A full list of sources reviewed is located in the Bibliography. Through a variety of methods, including map overlay and information sieving, the information was used to gain an understanding of the natural and human factors that have shaped and influenced the landscape.

Step Three: Field Survey

This involved extensive survey work in spring/summer 2000, by a team of landscape architects, to record the physical and visual components and aspects of the landscape. This information was recorded on standard record sheets (see Appendix D). In addition to the physical elements and features visible within the landscape, such as land use, topography and vegetation cover, other characteristics and attributes, such as condition, key views, features and perceived sensitivity were also recorded. Photographs were taken as a working tool and where appropriate, thumbnail sketches prepared to illustrate particular features and character.

In reality, each of the stages of the desktop study, field survey and merging of stakeholder information, informed the other as the study progressed.

Step Four: Characterisation

The desktop study and field survey information were reviewed and collated, to create a hierarchy of areas of similar characteristics in consistent and recognisable groups.

The divisions within South Gloucestershire included:

REGIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS - as shown on the Countryside Agency's Character of England map, which shows broad regional character areas at a national scale. (See Fig 6).

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES - which subdivide the Regional Landscape Character Areas into smaller, generic areas of similar characteristics at a district or local level, largely based on geology, landform and drainage patterns, ascertained from the desktop study and field survey. (See Fig 7).

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS - which further subdivide Landscape Character Types into smaller, unique areas of similar characteristics and attributes at a local level. These were largely based on physical features, land cover, settlement and infrastructure and were ascertained from the desktop study and field survey.

These areas were mapped and concise descriptions of their main physical and human influences noted. This included land cover, landform, drainage, settlement, infrastructure and access, field size, field pattern and boundaries. Their distinctive combination of landscape features and attributes was also recorded.

Stakeholder involvement undertaken by means of a photographic survey of each parish and unparished area of South Gloucestershire (see Appendix B), supplemented this initial characterisation process. This helped to identify important additional features, areas of distinctive character and key characteristics.

STAGE 2 : EVALUATION

Step Five: Evaluation and Landscape Sensitivity

Following the classification of the landscape into discrete areas of similar characteristics, the character areas were evaluated in terms of change. Landscape condition, trends and relative sensitivity to change were considered in this evaluation.

Landscape Condition refers to the existing features within the landscape which are affected by current management or maintenance practices, for example hedgerow field boundaries.

Landscape Trends refers to the potential changes which may happen within the

landscape based on what is currently happening, what has occurred in the past and what may happen in the future, for example agricultural practices.

Landscape Sensitivity is the degree to which a landscape can accommodate change without unacceptable, detrimental effects on character. Sensitivity is not absolute, but is likely to vary relative to the type and scale of change being considered.

The following criteria, from the Countryside Agency's Interim Landscape Character Assessment Guidance (1999), were key considerations used in evaluating conditions, trends and sensitivity:

Landscape Quality

The presence of key characteristics and absence of atypical and incongruous features. It also depends on the state of repair of elements in the landscape and the integrity or intactness of the landscape.

Scenic Quality/Beauty

Reflects the combination and pattern of elements in the landscape, its aesthetic qualities, and its more intangible qualities such as its 'sense of place', the degree to which the landscape has a distinctive and essential character.

Landscape as a Resource

A landscape may be valued because it is rare or because it is particularly representative or typical of a certain landscape type.

Associations

A landscape may be valued because it may have cultural or historical associations with particular people or events in history.

Consensus

There should be a consensus of opinion, expressed by the public, informed professionals, interest groups, artists, writers and other media, on the importance of the landscape.

Wildness Quality

A perception of remoteness and tranquillity. The landscape would appear natural, undeveloped and unspoilt.

Conservation Interests

The presence of features of notable conservation interest such as wildlife, earth science, archaeological or historical areas, in addition to the landscape scenic qualities.

However, the evaluation process for this Landscape Character Assessment specifically excluded value judgements as to the status of the landscape within each character area, or the use of the term 'quality'. Instead, the Landscape Character Assessment has identified and examined the landscape features, attributes and characteristics, how they contribute to form a 'distinctive' landscape, the condition of features and the relative sensitivity of the landscape to change.

Step Six: Stakeholder Involvement

The participation of stakeholders in the process of Landscape Character Assessment added an important dimension to understanding and evaluating the landscape through invaluable local knowledge of landscape features, industrial, cultural and historical associations and landscape evolution.

The Photographic Survey of the Landscapes of South Gloucestershire (see Appendix B) was carried out during spring/early summer 2000, at the same time as the initial characterisation study was underway. The final results of the survey were available during the Evaluation stage.

As well as providing essential information for the Landscape Character Assessment, stakeholders' participation in the process and public exhibitions which resulted, provided a means of raising public awareness of the landscapes within South Gloucestershire, as well as of the Landscape Character Assessment itself.

Step Seven: Merging Process

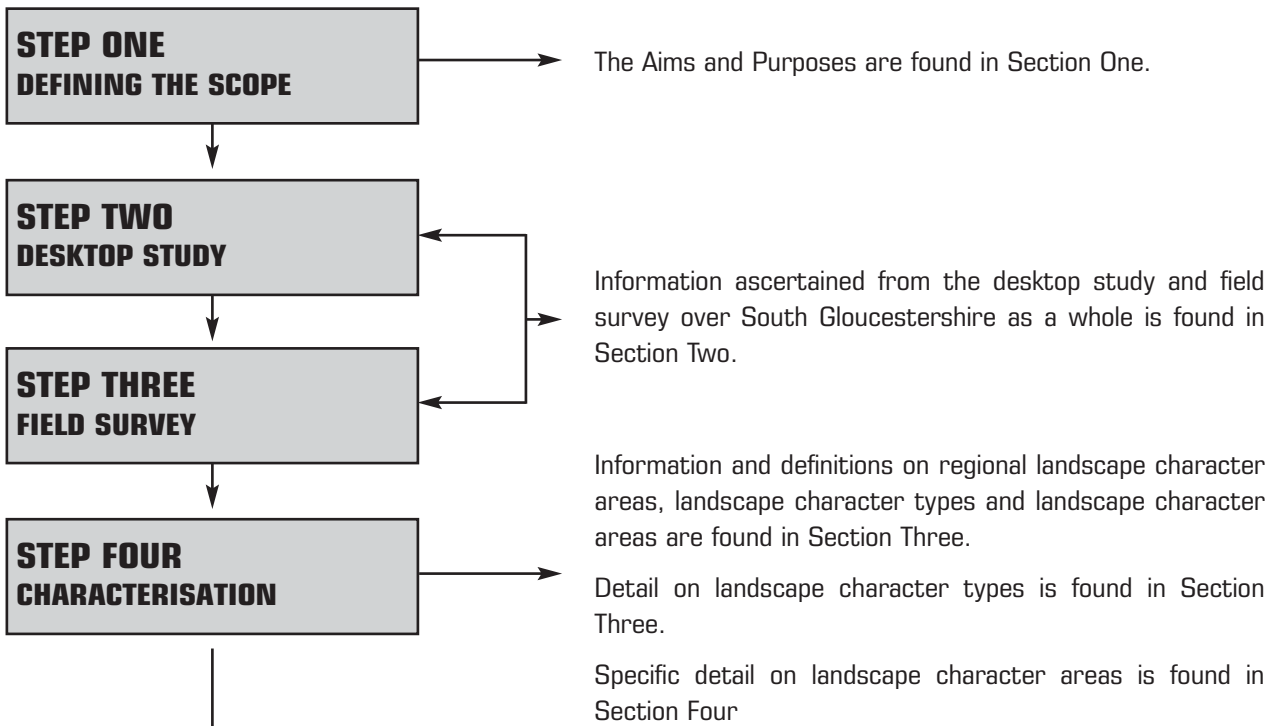
The wealth of photographic images and descriptions, obtained from stakeholder participation, were reviewed and salient information merged with the consultants' baseline Landscape Character Assessment, both with respect to the characterisation and evaluation of the landscapes. The working draft report benefited further from an internal review

process by the Landscape and Built Environment teams within South Gloucestershire's Planning and Environment section, to provide further breadth to the report. All the photographs contained in the draft Landscape Character Assessment, over 200 in number, were selected from over 2000 taken by local people as a result of the Photographic Survey. The photographs are intended to illustrate, as far as possible, typical landscape characteristics or features of each landscape character area.

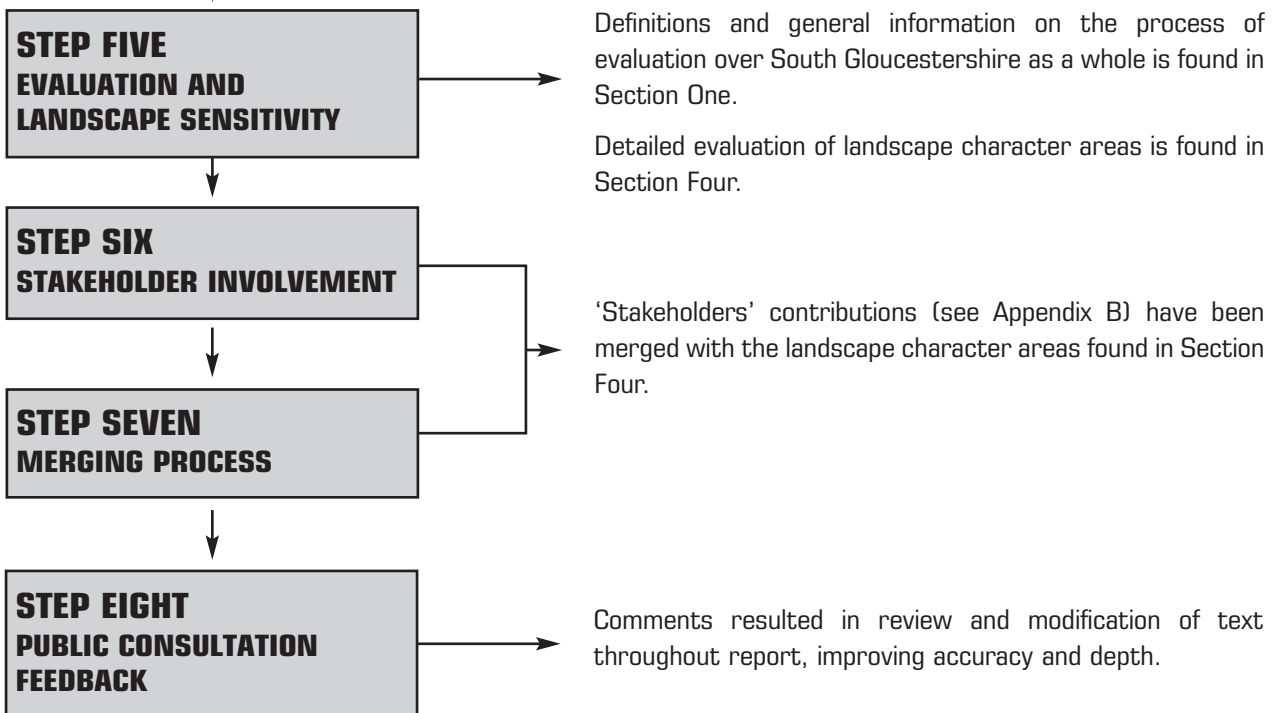
Step Eight: Public Consultation Feedback

Following the public consultation process on the draft Landscape Character Assessment (Appendix B), a further stage has been included in the process of the development of the Landscape Character Assessment. The many comments received on the draft report resulted in an extensive review of the document. Numerous modifications have been incorporated into the text as a result, with the objective of increasing the accuracy of information contained in the Landscape Character Assessment as a result of local knowledge, as well as where appropriate, providing additional depth to the report. As a result of this review, further photographs have been included, either from the Photographic Survey, or in a relatively small number of instances, by photographs taken by officers in the Planning & Environment team, to illustrate specific landscape characteristics or features referred to in the text, but not previously illustrated.

STAGE 1: CHARACTERISATION



STAGE 2: EVALUATION



Appendix B

CONFORMITY WITH STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Work for the Landscape Character Assessment commenced in 1999, prior to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The new Act and Regulations require consultation on Supplementary Planning Documents to be undertaken in line with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). This has not been prepared to date.

The Council still needs to demonstrate that in preparing the SPD, community involvement has been:

- Appropriate - for the level of the document and the needs of the community;
- Front loaded - allowing opportunities for early community input and ownership of the document;
- Continuing - and using appropriate methods;

and also that it:

- Allows for revision on the basis of community input;
- Incorporates feedback from early informal consultation.

The process adopted for the Landscape Character Assessment and described below, meets the minimum requirements of Regulation 17 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations, 2004. It is also within the spirit of Planning Policy Statement 12 Local Development Frameworks 2004 (PPS 12), that are likely to form part of the SCI in due course.

Initial Consultation

Stakeholder involvement initially took place at an early stage in the process, at the same time as the baseline studies for the landscape character assessment were being carried out. The community members of the 44 parishes and 1 non-parished area of South Gloucestershire were invited, via the Environmental Link Groups and agreed, to participate in a Photographic Survey of the Landscapes of South Gloucestershire in 2000. The network of 8 Environmental Link Groups had previously been established to discuss environmental issues within local communities.

Each parish / non-parished area, involving a wide range of the community, took panoramic and detailed photographs to capture distinctive characteristics and particular features of their local landscape during spring / early summer 2000, using cameras and film provided by the Authority. Following the field work stage, parishes, individuals who had carried out the photographic survey and Members, were invited to attend one of four workshops held in June and July 2000: 68 members of the various parishes attended these. Each parish selected a range of photographs from the total of 50 no. taken across their particular area (over 2000 photographs in all), to produce an A1 sized board which best represented the landscape of their area, supported by descriptive captions for each photograph, which provided another layer of information and additional depth.

The compiled photographic boards were used in an extensive exhibition of all the parishes of South Gloucestershire, which was held at a number of locations, during November 2000 to March 2001. The exhibitions explained the purpose of the Photographic Survey and its relationship to the development of the Landscape Character Assessment and the Landscape Strategy which is to follow and provided a means for feedback for any comments from both participants in the photographic survey and the wider public. Feedback was also received through further meetings with the Environmental Link Groups.

Following this stage, the wealth of information from the photographic material and

descriptions, together with feedback from the exhibitions and Link Groups, was merged with the baseline landscape character assessment to produce the draft Landscape Character Assessment report. In addition, all the photographs used in this document to illustrate typical landscape characteristics or features, over 200 in number, were derived from the Photographic Survey.

Public Consultation Process

On 23 August 2002, the draft Landscape Character Assessment report was issued for a 9_ week Consultation Period as part of the regulatory requirement for adoption of the document, at that time as SPG.

Due to the wide range of interest for the document and the topic, generated in part as a result of the Photographic Survey and exhibitions, notice of the public consultation was sent to nearly 600 no. stakeholders, including Parish Councils, statutory bodies, all Members, interested parties and individuals, environmental and amenity groups, landscape architects, architects, planning consultants, developers, land agents and adjacent Local Authorities. The letters explained the consultation process and how to comment, including a proforma for commenting. The recipients were provided with either a hard copy or CD copy of the document.

Draft documents were also circulated internally to principal service users of the Landscape Character Assessment, including to each of the 5 Area Forums, for their comment during the formal consultation period.

The Public Consultation process was advertised in the local press: the Gazette on 16 August and Bristol Evening Post on 23 August 2002. Hard copies of the document and CD access were made available for inspection at all 12 no. local libraries and the mobile library and at the Council's One Stop Shops at Kingswood, Thornbury & Yate.

Due to the size and complexity of the document, it was not possible to make the report

accessible on the Council's website at the time, which is why CD versions were made widely available. However, the proforma for comments was available on the web.

In addition, 5 no. workshop sessions were held in July 2002, immediately prior to the statutory consultation process, to commence the development of the next stage Landscape Strategy, based on the draft Landscape Character Assessment findings. 43 no. community members from parishes, representatives from the photographic survey, Members, as well as individuals who had expressed an interest in the process during the exhibitions, attended the workshops. Many comments were received at those workshops on the draft Landscape Character Assessment itself.

Representations and Responses

55 no. consultation responses were received as a result of the public consultation process. The breakdown of these was as follows:

- 22 no. Members, Parish Councils or photo representatives
- 9 no. Members of the Public
- 2 no. Statutory Consultees
- 9 no. Environmental, Interest or Other Groups
- 2 no. Planners
- 3 no. Developers
- 1 no. Architect
- 6 no. Landscape Architects
- 1 no. Other Local Authority

In addition, 7 no. written responses were received from parishes and landowners following the workshop sessions, prior to the formal consultation process.

In total nearly 700 no. comments were received from the public consultation process and the workshops. All of these have been reviewed and, where appropriate, changes have been recommended for inclusion in the final

document. The Schedule of Representations and Responses to Public Consultation are separately available. This sets out the details of the representations received during the consultation period and as a result of the workshops, together with the officer response and recommendations for modifications. Further comments were received from internal users of the document and these too have been reviewed and changes incorporated in the revised document where appropriate.

The comments have resulted in many changes to the draft Landscape Character Assessment and in some instances, text has been substantially rewritten. In addition, a further 35 no. photographs have been recommended for inclusion in the revised draft report – 6 no. further photographs from the earlier photographic boards and 29 no. new photographs, taken by officers, to show landscape characteristics or features, not previously illustrated.

The purpose of the changes is, primarily, to ensure that the final document adopted as SPD is as accurate as possible, bearing in mind the nature of the report and, that the level of detail it contains supports the implementation of relevant Local Plan policies, especially policy L1, as well as enabling an appropriate Landscape Strategy to be developed for each of the 21 Landscape Character Areas.

Acknowledgements

South Gloucestershire Council would like to thank all members of the public and consultees who have participated in the process, in particular, the following community groups which are shown under the Environmental Link Group to which they belong:

Boyd Valley

Bitton	Doynton
Dyrham and Hinton	Hanham Abbots
Mangotsfield Rural	Oldland
Pucklechurch	Siston
Wick and Abson	

Laddon Vale

Alveston	Charfield
Cromhall	Rangeworthy
Tortworth	Tytherington
Wickwar	

Bristol North Fringe

Bradley Stoke	Filton
Patchway	Stoke Gifford
Winterbourne	

Sevenside

Almondsbury	Aust
Olveston	Pilning & Severn Beach

Cotswold AONB

Acton Turville	Badminton
Cold Ashton	Hawkesbury
Horton	Little Sodbury
Marshfield	Tormarton

Severn Vale

Falfield	Hill
Oldbury-on-Severn	Rockhampton
Thornbury	

Kingswood

Kingswood	
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Upper Frome Enterprise

Dodington	Frampton Cotterell
Iron Acton	Sodbury
Westerleigh	Yate

SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL

Central government guidance in “Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks (consultation draft)” has been followed in deciding how to carry out the sustainability appraisal of the Landscape Character Assessment SPD.

This SPD was produced to support policies in the South Gloucestershire Local Plan. The South Gloucestershire Local Plan was prepared prior to the current draft guidance on sustainability appraisal. However, a sustainability appraisal of the plan was prepared in accordance with best practice at the time (South Gloucestershire Local Plan Consultation Draft Sustainability Appraisal, Sept 2000 and Sustainability Appraisal of the Revised Deposit Draft Plan, June 2002).

Draft government guidance indicates that there may be opportunities for avoiding duplication in sustainability appraisal within the plan-making hierarchy. Specifically, in this situation it is considered that the content of the Landscape Character Assessment is descriptive and does not add new policy over and above that in Policy L1 of the Local Plan, which has already been subject to detailed sustainability appraisal. It is considered that there is, therefore, no need for further appraisal at this stage.

SAMPLE SURVEY FORM

Example of standard survey form used to record site survey information as part of the

landscape characterisation and assessment process.

SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT			
January/February 1999			
Landscape Character Area: /		Viewpoint No: 69	
Location: scarp,			
Date: 17.02.99		Direction of View: North East Weather: overcast	
LANDSCAPE TYPES/ELEMENTS (topography)		Dominant Elements <input type="radio"/>	Additional Elements <input checked="" type="radio"/>
Landcover	Landform	Settlement	Boundaries
Arable	Flat	Isolated Farms/Resid.	Thick Hedges
Pasture	Gently Sloping	Agri. buildings/Barns	Clipped Hedges
Heath	steeply Sloping	Hamlet	Laid Hedges
Common	Undulating	Village	Intermittent Hedge
Rough Grassland	Rolling	Town	Hedge Banks
Scrub	Hilly	Industry	Little Trees Cover
Woodland	Mountain	Urban Fringe	Some Trees Cover
Forest Plantation	Broad Valley	Field Size	Strong Tree Cover
Copse	Narrow Valley	Small	Copse
Water meadow		Medium	Woodland in hollows
Park	Plateau	Large	Post & Wire fence
Amenity Landscape	Floodplain		Fencing
Other	Other		Stone wall
Water Features	Routes/ Transport	Field Pattern	Other Features
Drainage Ditches	Footpath	Regular	Power Lines
Stream	Lane	Irregular	Mineral Workings
River	Minor Road	Rectangular	Roads
Pond/Lake	B Road	Linear	Railways
Severn Estuary	A Road / Trunk Road		Telecom towers
	Motorway		
VISUAL CONTAINMENT. main space definers - woodland blocks, walls, hedge etc.			
BOUNDARY TYPES - clear / distinct / indistinct / transitional			
VERNACULAR DETAILING OF NOTE, in addition to above			
CONDITION OF THE LANDSCAPE			
Good	Run-down	Significantly Destroyed	Requires Restoration
Attractors: tops with field pattern			
Detractors: telecom.			
Likely seasonal variation: small medium large			
MAINLY ACCESSIBILITY BY:			
Footpaths	Motorway	Bridleway	Tracks
Railway	Road	Cycle tracks	
DEGREE OF DEVELOPMENT			
1. very high degree of development	4. some degree of development		
2. high degree of development	5. no development		
3. medium degree of development			
TYPE OF DEVELOPMENT		Sympathetic	Unsympathetic

OPEN VIEWS OF SETTLEMENTS YES noted on plan NO
 NOTE visual envelope of settlement on plan where relevant

AESTHETIC FEATURES)		Dominant Elements	Additional Elements	
Scale	Intimate	Small	Medium	Large
Enclosure	Confined	Enclosed	Open	Exposed
Form	Straight	Angular	Curved	Sinuuous
Diversity	Uniform	Simple	Diverse	Complex
Harmony	Harmonious	Balanced	Discordant	Chaotic
Movement	Deserted	Tranquil	Well used	Heavily Used
Rarity	Ordinary	Unusual	Rare	Unique
Colour	Monochrome	Muted	Colourful	Diverse
Texture	Smooth	Textured	Rough	Very Rough
Stimulus	Boring	Bland	Interesting	Invigorating
Pleasure	Unpleasant	Pleasant	Enjoyable	Beautiful

Key Views: north east
 Photo number: X 1

VALUE/ QUALITY OF LANDSCAPE					
Quality	High	Good	Moderate	Low	Very Low
Scenic Value	High	Good	Moderate	Low	Very Low
Vulnerability of the Landscape (initial judgement)	Very High	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT/STRATEGY GUIDANCE NEEDS

Conserve or Strengthen Enhance Restore Reconstruct Create New Landscape

Landscape Needs

- More Trees & Hedges?
- Grassland Needs?
- Other Notes

replace some trees, maintenance of views.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION/ SKETCHES/ NOTES ETC.:

(Describe the main elements and features of the landscape and the way in which they are organised)

generally undulating arable land well balanced and harmonious view in context with the scarp. attract landscape requiring some work. highly visible properties should be ad monuments could be restored. avoiding obtrusive elements (UPVC etc)