

# **South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment**

## **Supplementary Planning Document - Chapter 5**

### **South Gloucestershire Council**

**Final Draft Report proposed for adoption**

Prepared by LUC

February 2025

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**Note: Each chapter is produced as a separate document for ease of reading and navigation.**

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## Chapter 5

# Landscape Character Classification

**5.1** Classification is concerned with dividing the landscape into areas of distinct, recognisable, and consistent common character and grouping areas of similar character together.

**5.2** Landscape Character Types (LCTs) share broadly similar patterns of geology, topography, vegetation, and human influences in each area in which they occur. Although not identical they share a common pattern of elements.

**5.3** Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) divide each landscape character type into geographically specific character areas. These share generic characteristics with other areas of the same type but have their own particular identity or 'sense of place'.

**5.4** The boundaries of the LCTs and LCAs are unchanged from the 2014 Landscape Character Assessment. It is considered that the boundaries remain 'fit for purpose' as there has not been any substantial changes to land use or landscape character to require boundary alterations. It is important to note that boundaries between one LCT or LCA and the next are transitional and there is rarely a clear-cut change 'on the ground'.

**5.5** The Landscape Character Assessment comprises eight LCTs and 21 LCAs. The classification is set out in **Table 5.1** and shown on **Figure 5.1**. A map showing the relationship of the strategic GI and BGI Corridors (explained in **Chapter 1**) and the LCAs that they fall within follows on **Figure 5.2**.

**5.6** **Chapters 6-13** present each LCA, arranged by their respective LCT.

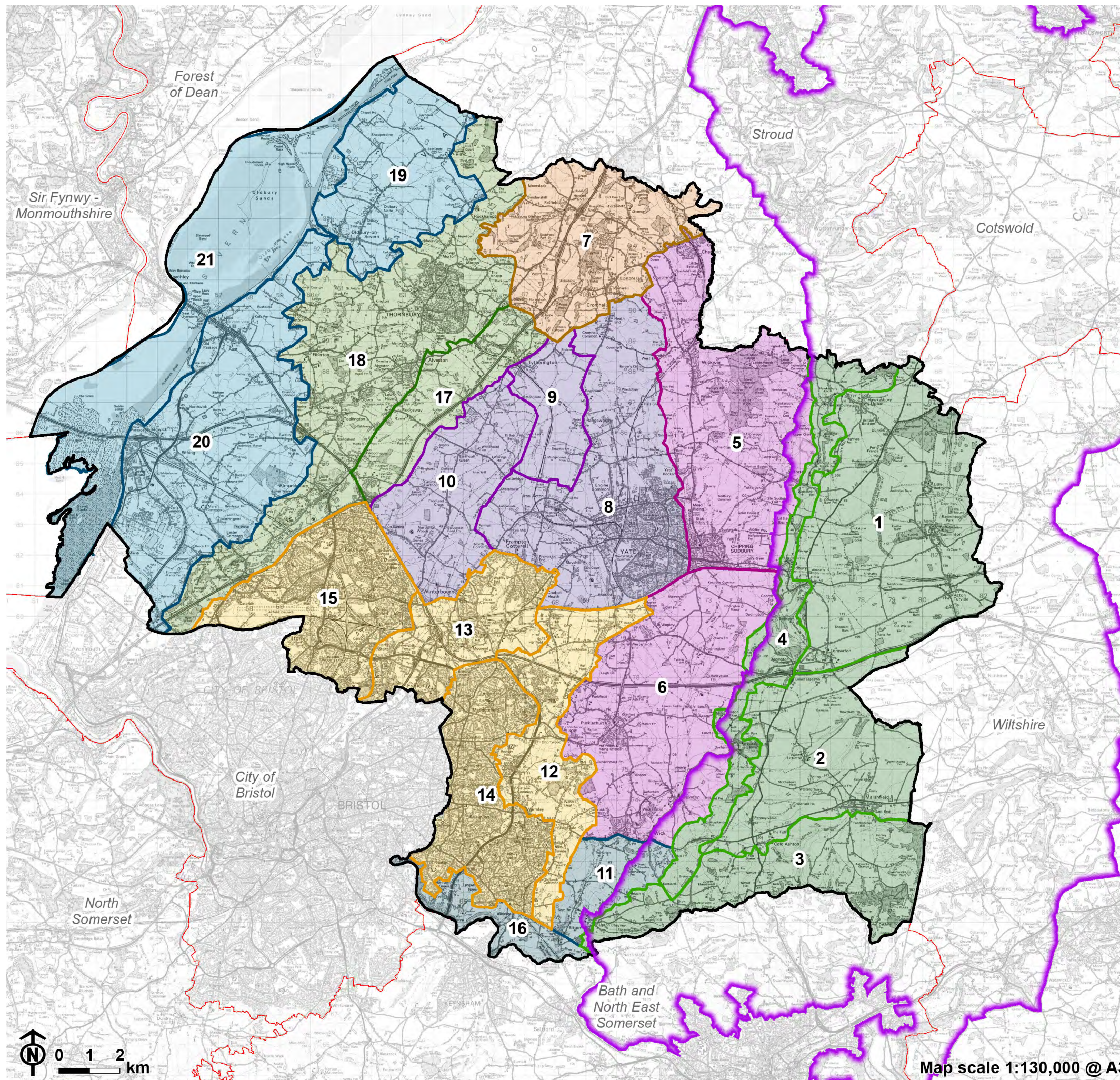


**Table 5.1: Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas**

<b>Plateau and Scarp LCT</b>	<b>LCA name</b>
LCA 1	Badminton Plateau
LCA 2	Marshfield Plateau
LCA 3	Ashwicke Ridges
LCA 4	Cotswold Scarp
<b>Shallow Ridge LCT</b>	<b>LCA name</b>
LCA 5	Wickwar Ridge & Vale
LCA 6	Pucklechurch Ridge & Boyd Valley
<b>Parkland Vale LCT</b>	<b>LCA name</b>
LCA 7	Falfield Vale
<b>Shallow Vale LCT</b>	<b>LCA name</b>
LCA 8	Yate Vale
LCA 9	Tytherington Plain
LCA 10	Earthcott Vale
<b>Enclosed Valleys LCT</b>	<b>LCA name</b>
LCA 11	Golden Valley
LCA 16	Avon Valley
<b>Broad Valleys LCT</b>	<b>LCA name</b>
LCA 12	Westerleigh Vale & Oldland Ridge
LCA 13	Frome Valley
LCA 14	Kingswood
LCA 15	Patchway, Filton and the Stokes

<b>Undulating Ridge LCT</b>	<b>LCA name</b>
LCA 17	Rudgeway Ridge & Tytherington Ridge
LCA 18	Severn Ridges
<b>Estuary, Shoreline and Levels LCT</b>	<b>LCA name</b>
LCA 19	Oldbury Levels
LCA 20	Pilning Levels
LCA 21	Severn Shoreline & Estuary





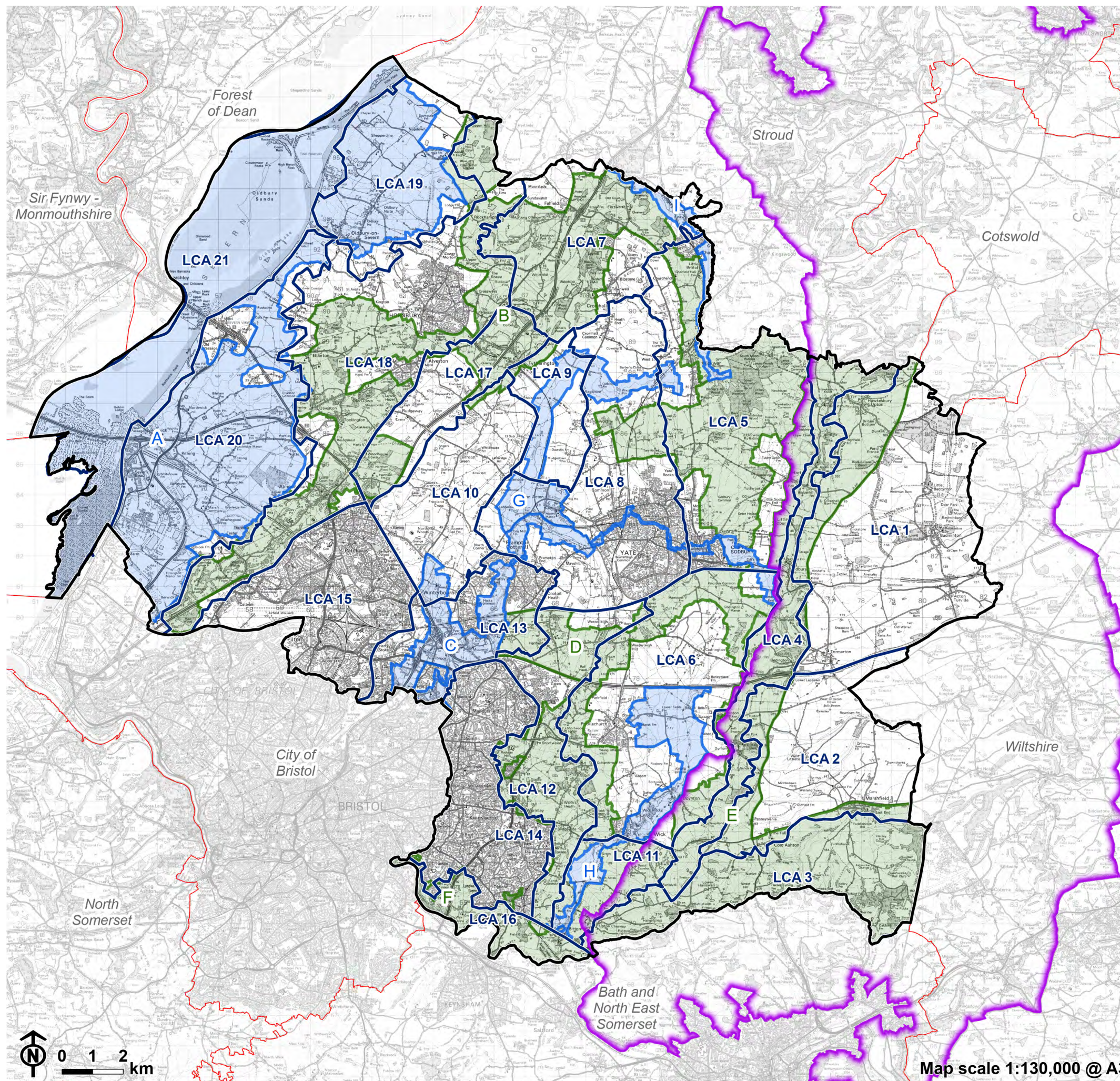
**Figure 5.1: Landscape Character Types and Areas**

- Council boundary
- Neighbouring local authority
- Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB) boundary







**South Gloucestershire LCT/LCA**

- Plateau and Scarp
  - 1. Badminton Plateau
  - 2. Marshfield Plateau
  - 3. Ashwicke Ridges
  - 4. Cotswold Scarp
- Shallow Ridge
  - 5. Wickwar Ridge and Vale
  - 6. Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley
- Parkland Vale
  - 7. Falfield Vale
- Shallow Vale
  - 8. Yate Vale
  - 9. Tytherington Plain
  - 10. Earthcott Vale
- Enclosed Valleys
  - 11. Golden Valley
  - 16. Avon
- Broad Valleys
  - 12. Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge
  - 13. Frome Valley
  - 14. Kingswood
  - 15. Patchway and Filton
- Undulating Ridge
  - 17. Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge
  - 18. Severn Ridges
- Estuary, Shoreline and Levels
  - 19. Oldbury Levels
  - 20. Pilning Levels
  - 21. Severn Shoreline and Estuary





**Figure 5.2: Strategic Green and Blue-Green Infrastructure Corridors and Landscape Character Areas**

-  Council boundary
-  Neighbouring local authority
-  Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB) boundary
-  Landscape Character Area
-  Green Infrastructure Corridor
-  Blue-Green Infrastructure Corridor

- Corridor name**
- A Shepperdine-Oldbury on Severn-Severn Beach (*Severn Estuary and Levels*)
  - B Charfield-Alveston-Hallen (*Western Scarp/ Severn Ridges*)
  - C Winterbourne-Kendleshire-Yate (*River Frome Corridor*)
  - D Wickwar-Westerleigh-Biton (*Westerleigh Vale/Oldland Ridge/East Fringe*)
  - E Hawkesbury-Upton Cheyney-Ashwicke (*Cotswold Scarp and Ashwicke Ridges*)
  - F Hanham Green-Hanham Abbots-Biton (*Avon Valley*)
  - G Wickwar-Iron Acton (*Ladden Valley*)
  - H Hinton-Doynton-Biton (*Boyd Valley*)
  - I Huntingford-Charfield-Wickwar (*Little Avon River Corridor*)



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**South Gloucestershire Council**

**Final Draft Report proposed for adoption**

Prepared by LUC

February 2025

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1	First draft	LUC	LUC	LUC	14.06.2023
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South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment

## **Chapter 6: Plateau and Scarp LCT**

LCA 1: Badminton Plateau

LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau

LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges

LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp





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**Note: Each chapter is produced as a separate document for ease of reading and navigation.**

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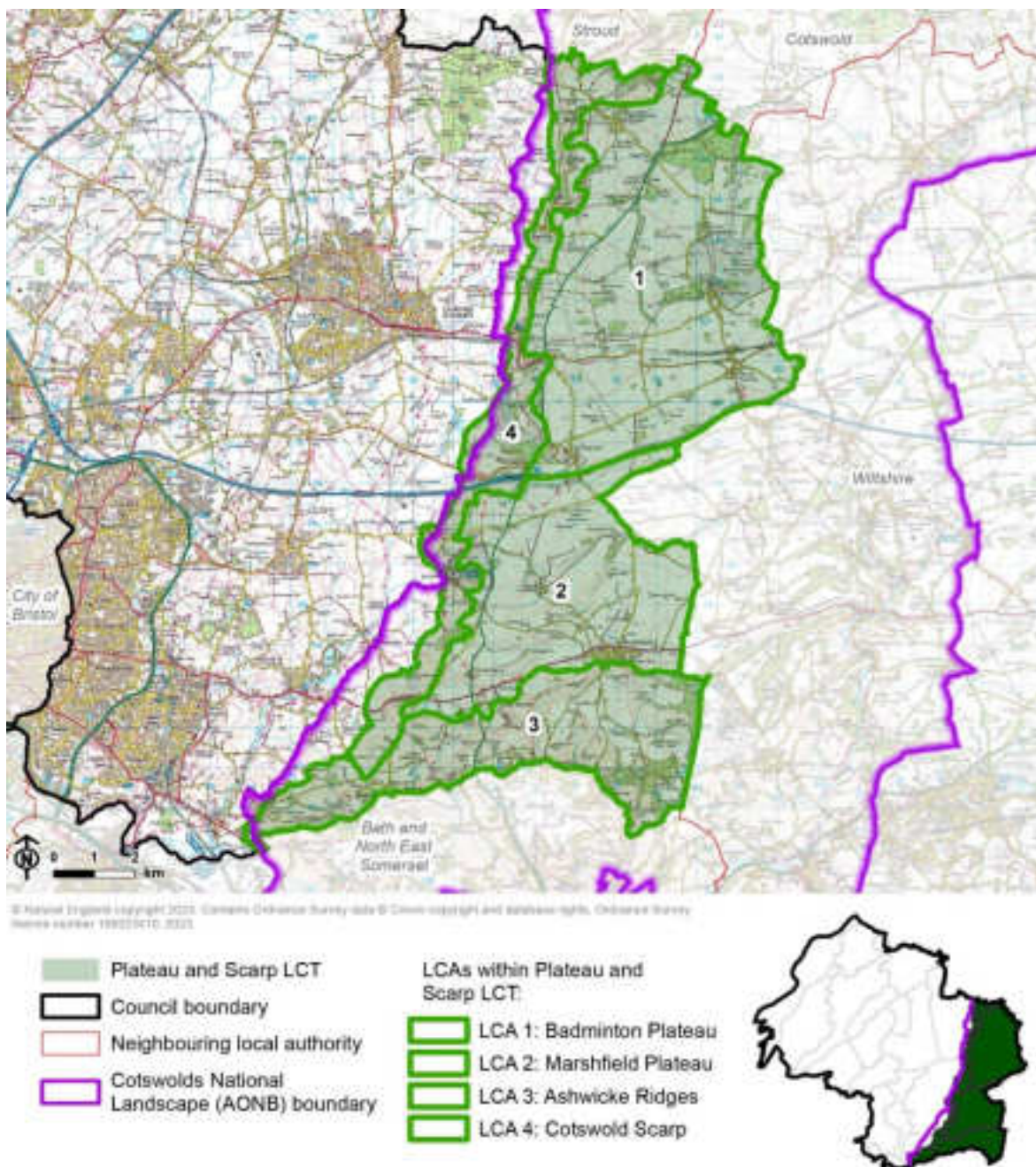
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## Chapter 6

### Plateau and Scarp LCT

Figure 6.1: Location of Plateau and Scarp LCT



# Description

**6.1** The Plateau and Scarp LCT is characterised by a visually dominant plateau and scarp slope extending along the eastern boundary of South Gloucestershire. Its significance is recognised through its status as a National Landscape, located within the south-western part of the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL).

## Key Characteristics

- A gently sloping, undulating area of large open pasture and arable fields, divided by distinctive Cotswold stone walls.
- Small areas of woodland punctuate the open landscape on the plateau and provide a focal point in long-distance views and a sense of enclosure.
- Distinctive hanging beech woodland occurs in isolated pockets on steeper slopes and the ridgeline.
- Numerous intersecting roads cross the landscape, including the A46 and small lanes, tracks, and footpaths, including the Cotswold Way (National Trail).
- Settlement on the plateau consists of small villages and isolated farms, whilst the scarp is scattered with hamlets, isolated houses and farms, united in the use of Cotswold stone as a building material.
- Landscape character is influenced by the presence of numerous historic parklands which have a rich covering of mature woodland, avenues, and ornamental trees, creating a high-level of enclosure and visual diversity.
- The west-facing scarp slope offers extensive views over South Gloucestershire, the Severn Estuary, Bristol, and north-west towards South Wales. In contrast to the plateau, the scarp has a varied, intricate, and richly textured landscape.

## Landscape Character Areas

The Plateau and Scarp LCT is subdivided into four LCAs:

- LCA 1: Badminton Plateau
- LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau
- LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges
- LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp



## LCA 1: Badminton Plateau

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

**Photo 1: Parkland with grassland and mature specimen trees within Badminton Estate.**

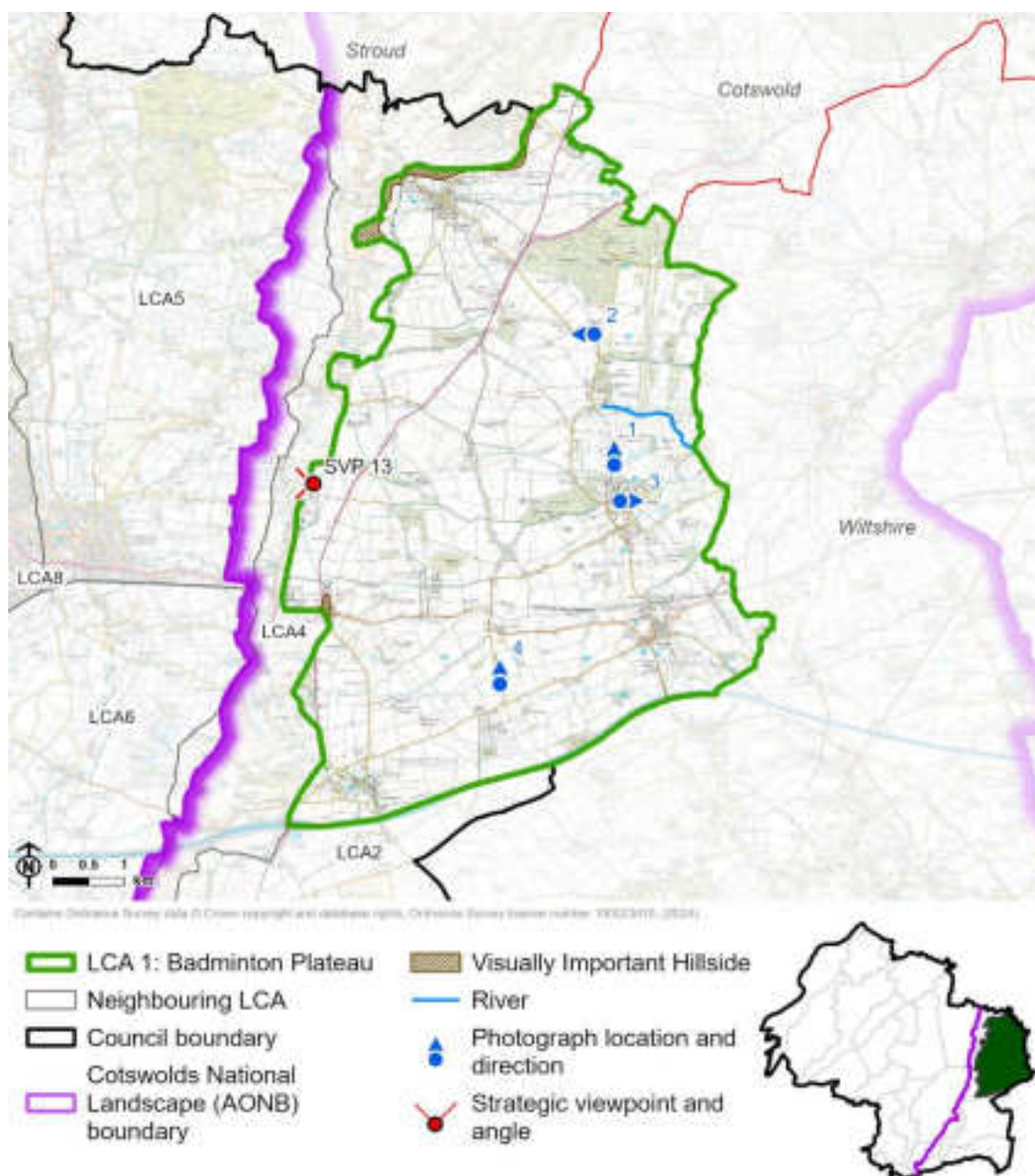


# Location

**6.2** The Badminton Plateau LCA is located in the north-east of South Gloucestershire within the Cotswolds National Landscape. It is defined to the north and east by the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary, although the landscape character of the plateau extends beyond. The southern boundary follows the M4, which marks a subtle transition between the Badminton Plateau and the slightly more undulating Marshfield Plateau (LCA 2) to the south. To the west, the boundary follows the often sharp change in topography, along the top of the Cotswold Scarp.

## LCA 1: Badminton Plateau

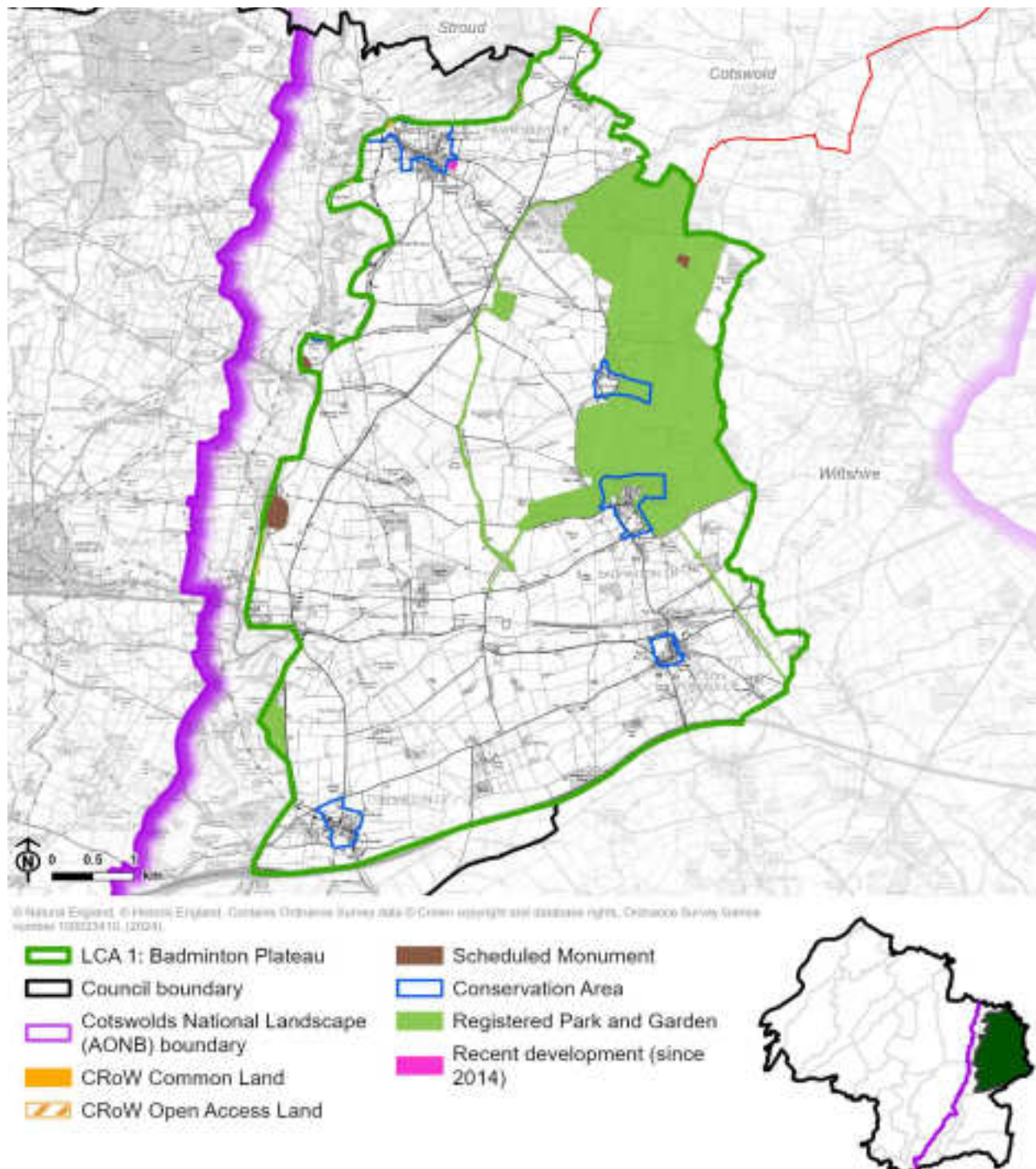
**Figure 6.2: Location and Landscape context of LCA 1: Badminton Plateau**





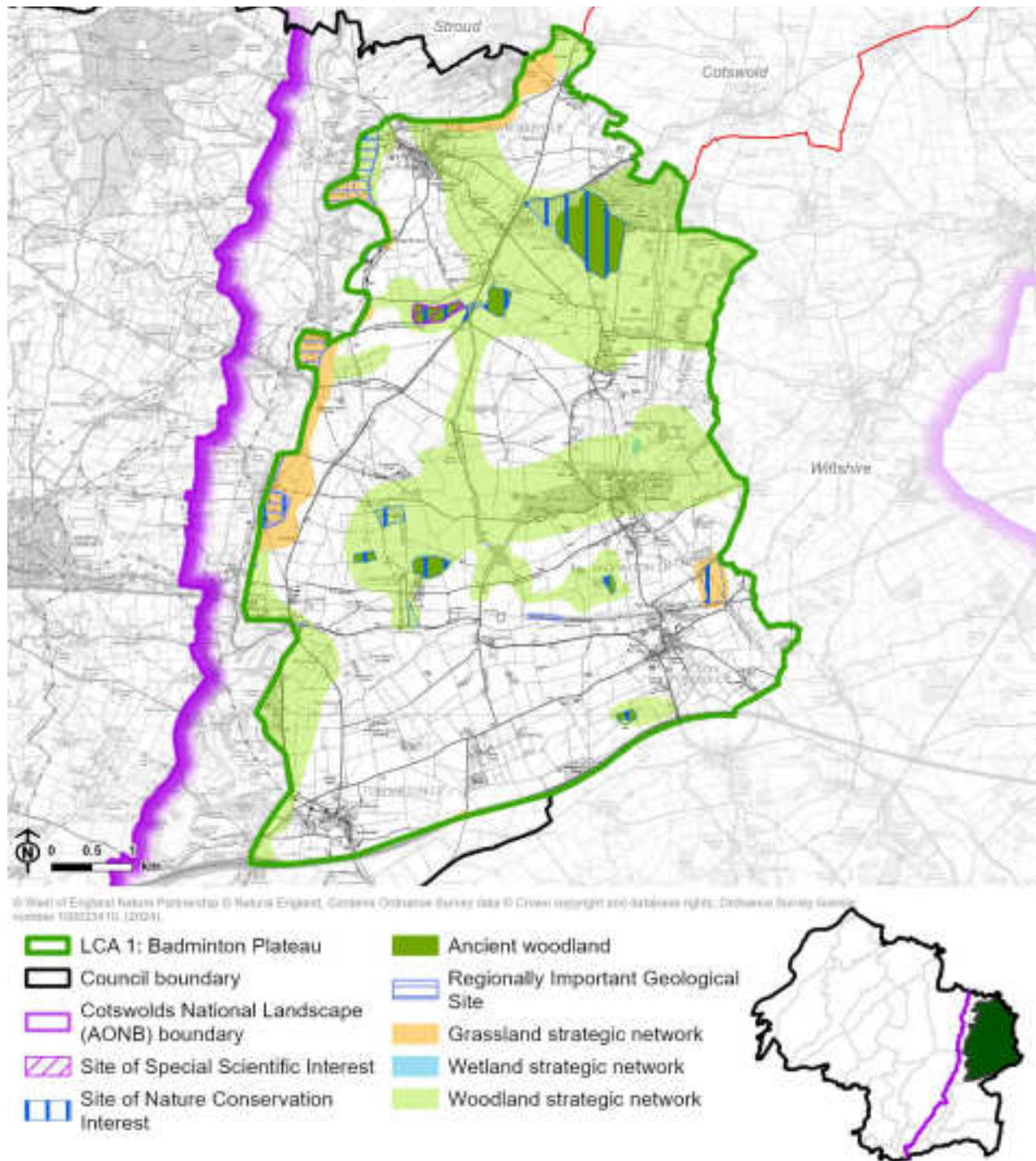
## LCA 1: Badminton Plateau

**Figure 6.3: Settlement and Heritage context of LCA 1: Badminton Plateau**



## LCA 1: Badminton Plateau

**Figure 6.4: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 1:  
Badminton Plateau**



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- Gently sloping and undulating, dip slope and plateau landscape with expansive views over the plateau, and panoramic views westwards from the scarp plateau edge.
- Large, regular shaped fields of mostly arable use, defined by Cotswold stone walls, clipped hedgerows or some post and wire fencing.
- Open, exposed landscape punctuated by mature trees, copses and scattered woodland of oak, ash, beech and sycamore, including ancient woodland.
- Large areas of formal parkland, woodland, and architecture associated with Badminton Park, with the Estate covering and influencing most of the LCA.
- Calcareous grassland present across the Cotswolds, including within the Badminton Plateau, supports a diverse range of flora including areas of species-rich grassland.
- A network of hedgerows and drystone walls provide a notable landscape and ecologically valuable feature which provides connectivity across the area.
- Villages, hamlets and farm buildings are scattered over the plateau and are united through their common use of Cotswold stone as a building material.
- Sense of time depth provided by the presence of prehistoric features and historic green lanes, as well as traditional buildings associated with the Badminton Estate.
- Major roads cross the open landscape, and the lack of substantial surrounding vegetation makes them a strong visible and audible element within the landscape.
- Dark skies and tranquil areas away from roads and settlements.

### Natural Influences

#### Geology. Landform and Hydrology

**6.3** The underlying geology runs in bands north to south which narrows towards the Cotswold Scarp in the west. This comprises a variety of limestone bedrocks (including Bathonian, Great Oolitic, Oolitic and Forest Marble Limestone) and Fullers Earth. The soil cover is a simple mix of Brown Rendzinas and typical Calcareous Pelosols.

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

**6.5** 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.

#### Land Cover

**6.6** The land cover of the Badminton Plateau LCA is largely influenced by the Badminton Estate. The estate covers the LCA and extends over parts of the Marshfield Plateau (LCA 2) and Cotswold Scarp (LCA 4), to the south and west respectively, and extends eastwards outside the district.

**6.7** This Grade I Registered Historic Park combines a medieval park and 18th and 19<sup>th</sup> century designed ornamental landscape, with the settlement of Great Badminton and Badminton House (a Grade I listed building) 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 in the immediate area of Badminton House. Broad tree avenues project from the house northwards (Worcester Avenue) and south-eastwards (Centre Walk Avenue). Hedgerows are clipped and well-managed within the estate, with evidence of woodland



## **LCA 1: Badminton Plateau**

management. The mown-grass landing strip to the west of Badminton Park (1.3km in length) is a modern addition. The formal parkland character also extends out into the broader landscape of the LCA and into Wiltshire to the east.

**6.8** The remaining area of the LCA is covered by extensive, mainly arable, tenant farms. This agricultural landscape contrasts significantly with the planned landscape of Badminton Park to the east (which generally has a greater and richer vegetation cover). The large regular-shaped fields are typically defined by Cotswold drystone walls (in various conditions) and hedgerows, some with lines of mature trees along their length, which are a locally distinctive feature. In places, post and wire fencing has replaced traditional field boundaries. The locations of former stone wall boundaries are often evident as grass mounds within large fields, or remaining walls are sometimes overgrown with vegetation (e.g. where there has been a significant transition from pasture/mixed agriculture to arable and where maintenance and management of field boundaries has declined).

**6.9** Some local variations in field size and boundary type are found within the area. For example, large fields with stone walls to the south and east of Hawkesbury Upton; medium to large fields with stone walls and clipped hedgerows adjacent to Badminton Park; medium fields with stone walling within the area of Tormarton; and fields with clipped hedgerows around Acton Turville.

**6.10** To the north-east of Badminton Park lies a large and prominent area of mature mixed woodland / beech plantation, bordered by the A433 and segmented by country lanes and the northern extent of Worcester Avenue. Within the wider plateau, small copses and woodland blocks of oak, ash, beech and sycamore, punctuate the landscape, with isolated specimen trees along some of the field boundaries.

**Photo 2: An arable field bounded by hedgerow with mature hedgerow trees marking its far boundary, a locally distinctive landscape feature.**



## Biodiversity

**6.11** The Badminton Plateau comprises a mosaic of important habitats for a diverse range of species, including calcareous grassland and ancient woodland.

**6.12** Within the LCA, there are small areas of priority habitat deciduous woodland, of which approximately 100 hectares is ancient in origin. All of the ancient woodlands are also designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) and one, Bodkin Hazel Wood, is designated as both a SNCI and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), recognising the importance of these habitats within the national context for flora and fauna. Key species associated with these include bats and dormice. Good connectivity exists for species such as these between the wooded areas and other habitats via hedgerows and scattered trees.

## **LCA 1: Badminton Plateau**

**6.13** There are five sites within the Badminton Plateau designated as SNCIs for calcareous grassland (including lowland meadow priority habitat south-east of Badminton) that support a diverse range of flora with some areas locally designated as SNCIs. This diverse habitat supports a range of invertebrates and ant hills are a regular feature. These invertebrates in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats.

**6.14** As there are few watercourses within the Badminton Plateau area, species found within these habitats are likely to be sensitive to any changes impacting upon the ponds and pools within the area. These may support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species) which are vulnerable to any loss of habitat including the terrestrial habitat around ponds as well as the ponds themselves.

**6.15** The characteristic and historic drystone walls also provide valuable wildlife corridors, which can be utilised by a diverse range of species from invertebrates to reptiles and amphibians for commuting, foraging and as a refuge.

**6.16** Much of the land use within this area is now arable farmland, which provides habitat for many species of ground nesting farmland birds including birds which have been listed by BirdLife International as being Globally Threatened Red listed species. The stubble left over winter across the farmland provides a precious foraging resource when food sources are scarce for many farmland birds.

**6.17** The Badminton Estate was first quarried for Bath Stone in the 1800s and the quarries closed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These underground quarries provide an ideal habitat for many species of bat including European Protected Species.

**6.18** South Gloucestershire Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor E: Hawkesbury-Upton Cheyney-Ashwicke (*Cotswold Scarp and Ashwicke Ridges*) runs along the western edge of the LCA and is important for its mosaic of strategic woodland and grassland habitats associated with the Cotswold Scarp.

### Cultural Influences

#### Land Use and Time Depth

**6.19** Land use across the Badminton Plateau LCA is largely associated with the Badminton Estate (comprising the Grade I Registered Historic and Grade I listed stately house), and elsewhere through agricultural practices (mainly arable).

**6.20** The plateau 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 Scheduled Monuments) 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 Scheduled Monuments), which are visible reminders of ancient land uses in this area. The site of a Roman villa and earlier settlement is situated on the gently rolling plateaux within Badminton Park; however, this Scheduled Monument is on the Heritage at Risk Register.

#### Settlement and Infrastructure

**6.21** 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. The special character of these main settlements is recognised through their designation as Conservation Areas.

**6.22** The settlements have all been part of the Badminton Estate at some point in their history, influencing their use, growth and style. The villages are typically a mix of former workers' cottages, farm buildings and 'grand' houses and properties. 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.



## **LCA 1: Badminton Plateau**

**6.23** 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 a 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. The wide roads through the village, which are lined with stone walls, are another distinctive feature.

**6.24** The settlements are connected by a network of minor roads and lanes. The B4040 between Chipping Sodbury and Malmesbury runs east to west and passes through Acton Turville. The M4 defines the southern boundary of this LCA and connects to the A46, which runs north-east to south-west between Bath and Cirencester on the western fringes of this LCA.

**6.25** The South Wales to London railway passes through the centre of this LCA 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 designed to look like small castellated towers or turrets in a pastoral landscape demarcate the route of the underground section of the line. Both tunnel portals and the six airshafts are all designated as listed buildings (Grade II) by virtue of their special architectural, design and engineering interest and group value.

**6.26** Two major recreational routes pass through the area, the Cotswold Way National Trail, 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.

**6.27** 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),

## LCA 1: Badminton Plateau

Bodkin Hazel Lane (the former Bristol to Oxford road), and Tynning Lane (both running east to west).

**6.28** A major powerline crosses the area in the south-west, generally in a south-easterly direction, passing east of Little Sodbury and Tormarton.

**Photo 3: Buildings associated with the Badminton Estate, built in locally-distinctive honey coloured stone.**



## Perceptual Influences

### Visual Character

**6.29** The northern, western and southern areas of this LCA, have an open, exposed and simple character. This results from its combination of gently sloping and undulating topography and the open views, or focal points within this expansive landscape. Views and a similar landscape character continue

## **LCA 1: Badminton Plateau**

eastwards into Wiltshire. However, views are partly obscured along some roads, by the growth of self-seeded trees and shrubs. In contrast, the western boundary along the Cotswold Scarp provides extensive panoramic views 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 of these views.

**6.30** The distinctive vegetation cover of Badminton Park gives definition and scale to the landscape from many viewpoints within the LCA. 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.

**6.31** The architectural diversity of the villages within the LCA is united through the common use of Cotswold stone as the principal building material. Cotswold stone also features in field and settlement boundaries and assists the gentle transition between settlement and the wider landscape, creating an integrated and harmonious appearance, particularly within older settlements. Historic settlements are often situated within depressions in the topography, or include mature trees and vegetation, which assists their integration within the wider landscape. However, Acton Turville is quite prominent within local views from the south. 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. Isolated properties and farms, including associated modern buildings are also prominent in the open landscape.

**6.32** The Somerset Monument, to the north near Hawkesbury Upton, is situated on the crest of the Cotswold Scarp. Although located outside the Badminton Plateau LCA (and within LCA 4), 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.

## **LCA 1: Badminton Plateau**

**6.33** The settlements, set within the open rolling countryside, are connected by a network of roads. Minor roads are lined by low Cotswold dry stone walls, 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.

**6.34** 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 (LCT 2) to the south and beyond the South Gloucestershire boundary, in Wiltshire to the east. The railway line is not generally a visible element within the landscape, except for the prominent 'castlelated' airshafts which provide distinctive features within the rural landscape.

**Photo 4: View north-west across large-scale arable fields to smaller pastoral field surrounding an isolated farmstead near Acton Turville.**



### Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**6.35** The Badminton Estate experiences high levels of tranquillity. Traffic on major roads, including the M4 and A46, limits the sense of tranquillity in some parts of the LCA.

**6.36** 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. However its high traffic volumes impact on the otherwise rural and tranquil character of most of the area (including around Acton Turville and Tormarton), and more recent gantries and signs have increased the prominence of the motorway. The A46 is largely unenclosed, with the traffic on it creating a prominent visual and audible feature through the open landscape reducing levels of tranquillity, including from around Old Sodbury. Traffic movement along minor roads is similarly evident.

**6.37** The LCA has a good experience of dark skies with low levels of light pollution, although some localised light pollution occurs around Badminton and the M4/A46 corridors.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**6.38** There are no Visually Important Hillsides (VIH) located within this LCA. However, it is flanked along its western edge by the Cotswold Scarp VIH (located within LCA 2), a visually prominent escarpment on the edge of the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) which defines a marked change in character from the considerably lower-lying undulating ridges and vales to the west, and the broader plateau/dip slope landscape to the east.

**6.39** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

## **LCA 1: Badminton Plateau**

### **Strategic Viewpoints**

**6.40** One Strategic Viewpoint (SVP) is located within this LCA at SVP 13: Little Sodbury Hill Fort. It provides panoramic views west taking in the notable landscape features of the Severn Ridges, the Cotswold Scarp, and the hills of South Wales, and the landmark features of the Tyndale Monument and Severn Bridge in long distance views.

**6.41** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Valued Features

- The open dip slope and plateau landform that provides topographical interest.
- The late 17<sup>th</sup> century Grade I Registered Historic Park and Grade I listed stately house within the Badminton Estate which provide time-depth to the landscape.
- Formal parkland character of Badminton Estate with its distinctive landcover pattern of open grassland with hedgerows, mature trees, woodland, avenues, lakes, and ponds.
- The deciduous woodland, some of ancient origin (including Bodkin Hazel Wood SSSI) which are locally designated as SNCIs.
- Areas of calcareous grassland (some locally designated as SNCIs) that create visual texture and biodiversity value within the arable landscape.
- Woodland, hedgerows, scattered mature trees, and drystone walls which are distinctive landscape features and important for habitat connectivity.
- The long barrows and tumuli, Iron Age hill forts and site of Roman villa and earlier settlement (Scheduled Monuments) and historic green lanes which provide time depth and local distinctiveness.
- The historic nucleated villages at Hawkesbury Upton, Tormarton, Great Badminton, Little Badminton and Acton Turville with their estate character and distinctive vernacular of Cotswold stone which are recognised through designation as Conservation Areas.
- The expansive views across the open landscape, particularly the panoramic views west from the plateau edge.
- The Somerset Monument which is a distinctive landmark feature in the local landscape, perched on a prominent landform at the northern end of the Cotswold Scarp.



## LCA 1: Badminton Plateau

- The network of public footpaths (including the Cotswold Way National Trail and a Circular Ride) that provide recreational opportunities across the landscape.
- The sense of tranquillity within the Badminton Estate and the experience of dark night skies across much of the area.

## The Changing Landscape

**6.42** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Badminton Plateau LCA.

### Climate Change

- Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
- Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges. Ancient woodlands, such as Bodkin Hazel Wood, may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
- Effects of climate change resulting in wetter and warmer winters, and more frequent hot and dry periods, leading to increased risk of flooding in winter and increasing the risk of drought in summer, affecting river flow rates and impacting on riparian habitats and species.

### Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- Wind turbines and other vertical built forms would be visible, not just from within the plateau, but potentially from the surrounding wider landscape.
- An increase in tree planting is required to contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which



## LCA 1: Badminton Plateau

forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may include the establishment of new native woodlands in the 'Main Line Gap' - linking woodlands on the Badminton Estate to those at the Dodington Estate (within LCA 4) as set out in the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy. This may change the open character of the landscape and its expansive views.

### Land use and cover

- The intensification of agricultural land use, from pasture to predominantly arable in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and consequent loss of stone walls or hedgerows to increase field sizes, has resulted in a significant change in the character of the landscape on the plateau and loss of habitats.
- The tree structure is in a variable condition; some areas retain an ageing structure of mature and over-mature trees, with some woodlands needing to be brought back under active management. There is extensive modern tree planting throughout Badminton Park.
- A decline in the management and/or maintenance of existing hedgerow field boundaries, would further erode landscape structure, in some parts of the LCA.
- Although contributing to the landscape structure and habitat value, self-seeded trees establishing along road verges and within field boundaries, as well as other tree planting, have the potential to change the open character, vistas and views.
- The characteristic landscape framework of dry-stone walls is 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, and their habitat value has been lost. Their replacement with hedging or post and wire fencing, or their visual loss behind self-seeded vegetation along verges, erodes local distinctiveness and character.
- The annual Badminton Horse Trials leads to localised changes in land use and pressure on the road network from the influx of vehicles and visitors.

### Development

- The consistent use of Cotswold stone for buildings and boundary walls is a key characteristic of the built environment. Where reconstituted stone is used, the building form, appearance and weathering qualities integrate less well, resulting in an erosion of the distinctiveness and character of the area.
- The development of horse paddocks, particularly around villages, with their associated subdivision of fields by electrified fencing, introduction of stables, exercise facilities, parking, sheds and other features, can lead to the erosion of the character and quality of the landscapes around settlements.
- The pressure for larger farm buildings (including industrial-style 'barns') and agricultural workers' dwellings can result in an adverse visual impact across a wide area of the open landscape.
- The pressure for further barn conversions, may result in the domestication of rural farm building complexes, and result in loss of habitat, particularly for birds and bats.
- Telecommunications masts have been introduced across a wide area over recent years, increasing the frequency of prominent vertical structures on skylines.
- Development which breaks the skyline, such as housing, large agricultural or other shed type buildings, wind turbines, masts, traffic on roads etc, has the potential to be visually prominent and introduce a discordant element within this open plateau.
- The cumulative effect of multiple smaller impacts, such as loss of walling, the introduction of fencing and the use of reconstituted stone, the introduction of insensitively located solar panels or alien building forms, could have a significant and erosive impact on the distinctiveness of the LCA.

# Guidance

**6.43** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the objectives of the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines [\[See reference 1\]](#), as well as the overarching management strategy objectives of the South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment, as set out in Chapter 4.

## Landscape Strategy

## Landscape Management

- Retain the open and rural character of the undulating Cotswold Plateau with its wide panoramic views.
- Retain, manage and enhance the formal historic parkland landscape associated with the Badminton estate to the east, including the wood pasture, mature field trees, woodlands, hedgerows and walled boundaries. Ensure new planting reflects species used in historic designed landscapes within the area.
- Retain, manage and enhance the areas of deciduous woodland, copses and mature trees that contribute to the character of the area.
- Enhance woodland in a controlled manner (i.e. in accordance with the Nature Recovery Network and Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy) so that the LCA retains its open plateau character while contributing to the aims and projects/programmes of the 2021 South Gloucestershire Green Infrastructure Strategy (e.g. doubling tree canopy by 2030).
- Limit new woodland and shelterbelt planting to retain the open character and wide panoramas, having regard to cumulative impact of woodland creation and tree planting. Ensure woodland planting does not take place on archaeological features. Any new planting should reflect the detailed guidance set out in the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines Strategy Area 7: High Wold.

## LCA 1: Badminton Plateau

- Encourage the diversification of agricultural land use from predominantly arable to mixed farming including livestock grazing and regenerative farming methods. This will strengthen landscape character, as well as benefit biodiversity, water catchments and climate change adaption and resilience.
- Establish new native woodlands in the 'Main Line Gap' linking woodlands on the Badminton Estate to those in the Dodington Estate, whilst avoiding Grade 2 agricultural land, responding to requirements of any registered historic park management plans, and conserving other priority habitats, historic monuments and viewpoints.
- Restore, conserve and manage the characteristic and historic pattern of drystone wall and/ or hedgerow framework, as appropriate to the particular character of the local landscape, and provide habitat connectivity through these features.
- Avoid the introduction of uncharacteristic features such as field subdivision by electrified and post and rail fences which are devoid of habitat value, and the degradation of the sward by overgrazing.
- Control change of use to horse keeping where the erosion of landscape character would result.
- Protect the night-time landscape through the retention of dark skies and protect the tranquillity of undisturbed areas.

## Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Enhance biodiversity and habitat connectivity in line with the West of England's Nature Recovery Network, Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy, and Tree and Woodland Strategy (Forest of Avon Plan), as well as South Gloucestershire's Biodiversity Action Plan and Green Infrastructure Strategy (Greener Places).
- Conserve and enhance the existing populations of notable habitats (including priority habitat deciduous woodland and lowland meadow, and other areas of calcareous grassland), ensuring that there is no net loss of biodiversity.

## LCA 1: Badminton Plateau

- Support the planting of new wildflower habitats along B-lines within the north and east of the LCA (identified by Buglife), that will contribute to the national pollinator network.
- Consider changes to the management of highway verges in suitable areas, contributing to the Highway Verges for Nature programme to improve and connect habitat for nature, and climate change adaptation and resilience, whilst ensuring drystone walls do not become obscured and visually lost by vegetation.

## Development Management

- Protect the open, elevated, and gently undulating plateau landscape, including its wide panoramic views (including views from the A46 and M4 motorway) and high degree of intervisibility that make it particularly sensitive to new development that may result in enclosure.
- Ensure that new development is integrated with, and where necessary screened from the wider landscape and avoids the domestication or industrialisation of the rural character of the locality.
- Ensure any new development requires the conservation and planting of trees within the site and as determined by scale and impact, includes off-site tree and woodland planting.
- Any new vertical development should avoid eroding the natural beauty of, or the settings of heritage assets in the wider landscape.
- Where such development is acceptable, telecom's infrastructure, mast, pole or pylon sharing should be considered to avoid the need for addition of new towers or masts to the landscape.
- If wind turbines are to be accommodated within the LCA, these should be carefully located, in order to avoid intervisibility with the CNL and to limit the cumulative impacts of developments within this LCA and adjacent landscapes.
- Any new vertical development should avoid dominating, or visually competing with, other landmark landscape or heritage assets in the character area.

## LCA 1: Badminton Plateau

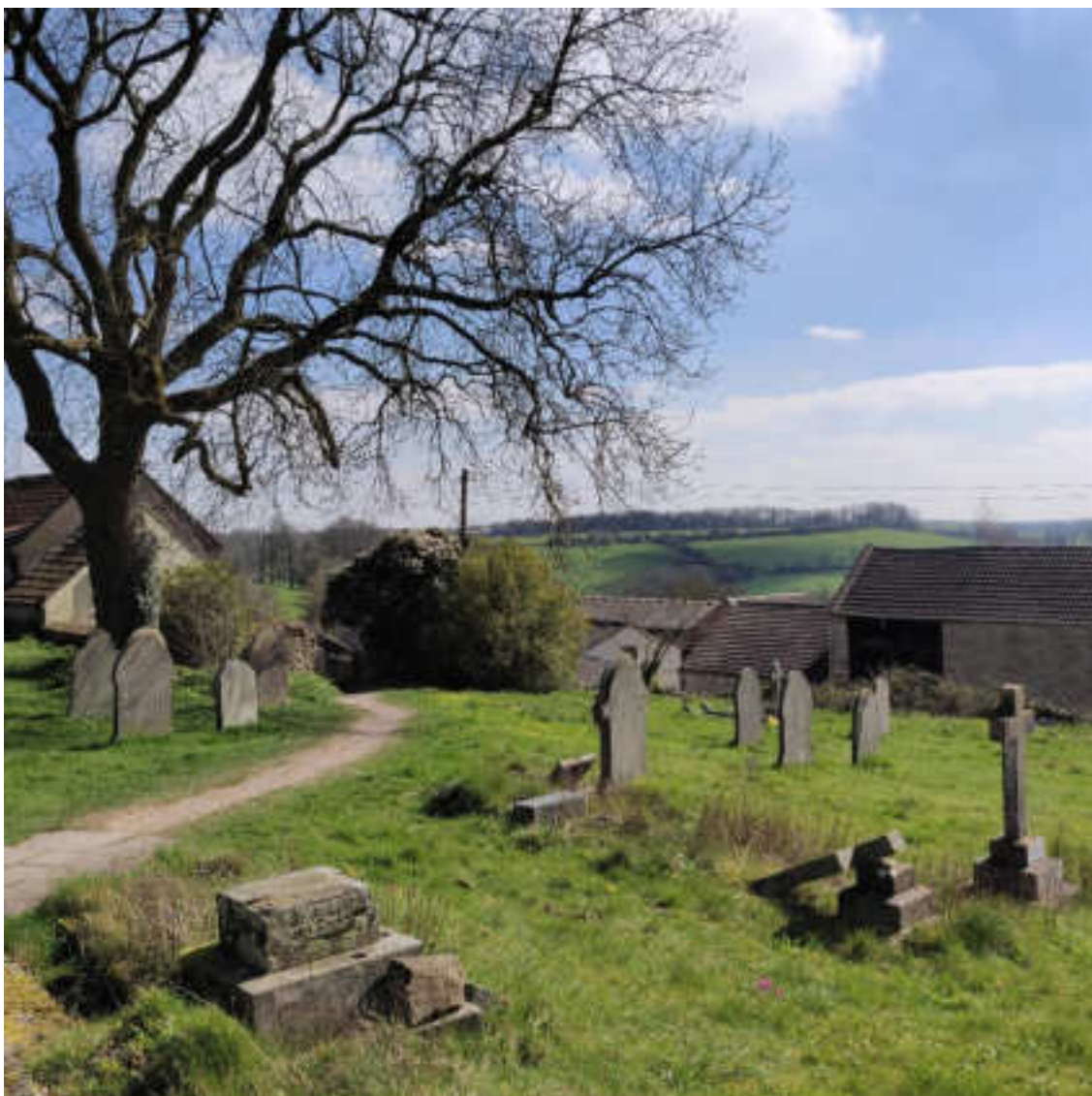
- New development should use locally appropriate materials such as locally sourced Cotswold stone of the appropriate colour and texture that respect and enhances local distinctiveness (including the settlement pattern of small, nucleated villages) and the traditional character of the area.
- Given the openness of the landscape and importance of maintaining the rural character of skylines, careful consideration should be given to the location and design of highway signage and lighting associated with the M4 and A46 roads.
- The cumulative impact with other developments will require particular consideration due to the openness of the landscape.



## LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau

The Marshfield Plateau landscape character area (LCA) is an elevated, gently sloping agricultural plateau, dissected by two shallow river valleys.

**Photo 1: View from Marshfield churchyard towards Henley Hill and the Doncombe Brook valley.**



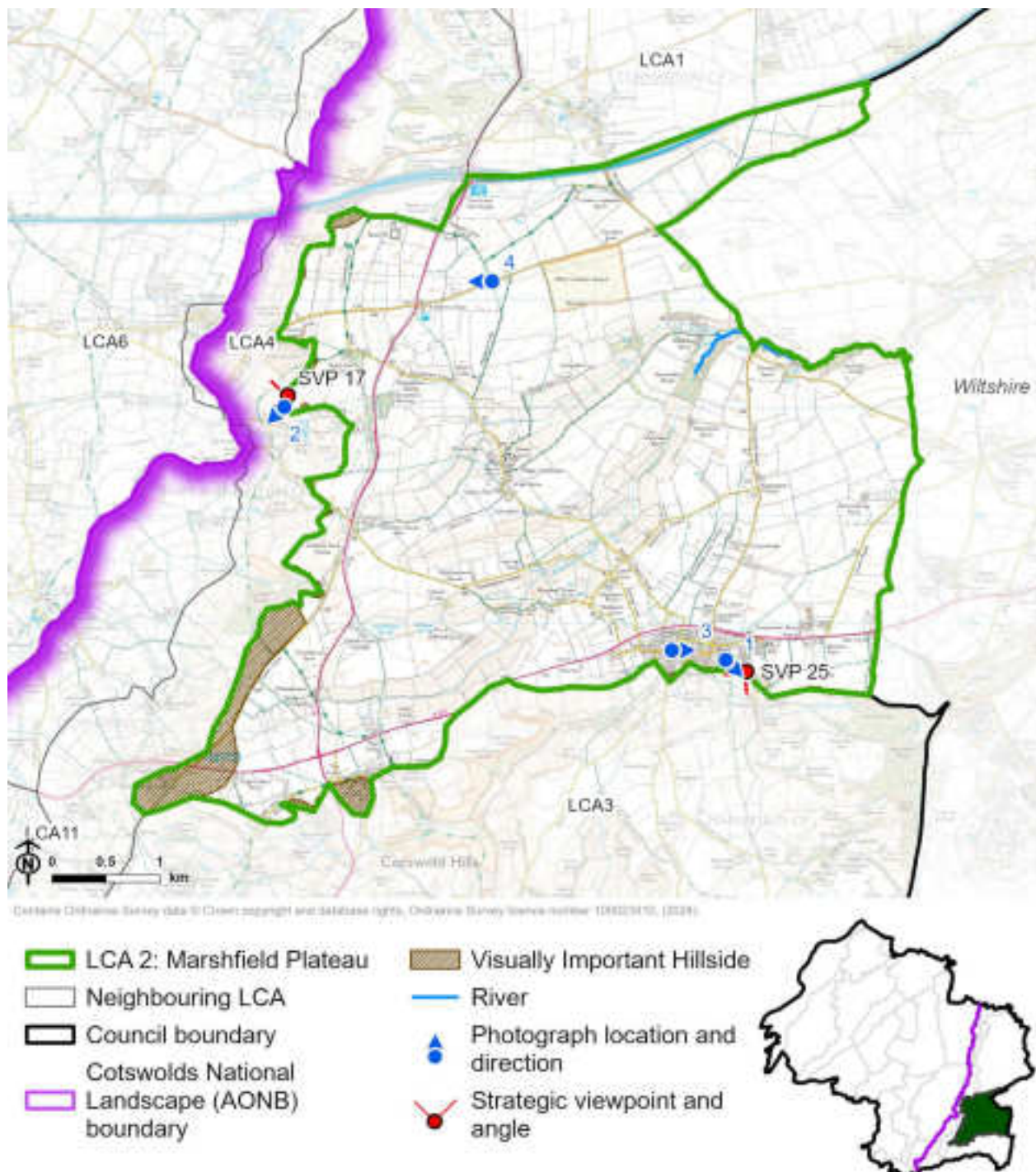
### Location

**6.44** The Marshfield Plateau landscape character area is located in the south-east of South Gloucestershire. The entirety of the LCA is included within the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL).

**6.45** 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 M4 motorway defines the northern boundary, marking a broad and subtle area of transition between the Marshfield Plateau and the slightly flatter and more vegetated Badminton Plateau to the north. To the west, the boundary is defined by an abrupt change in topography formed by the Cotswold Scarp (LCA 4). The southern boundary follows an often-distinct change in topography between the plateau and upper valley edges of the Ashwicke Ridges (LCA 3).

## LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau

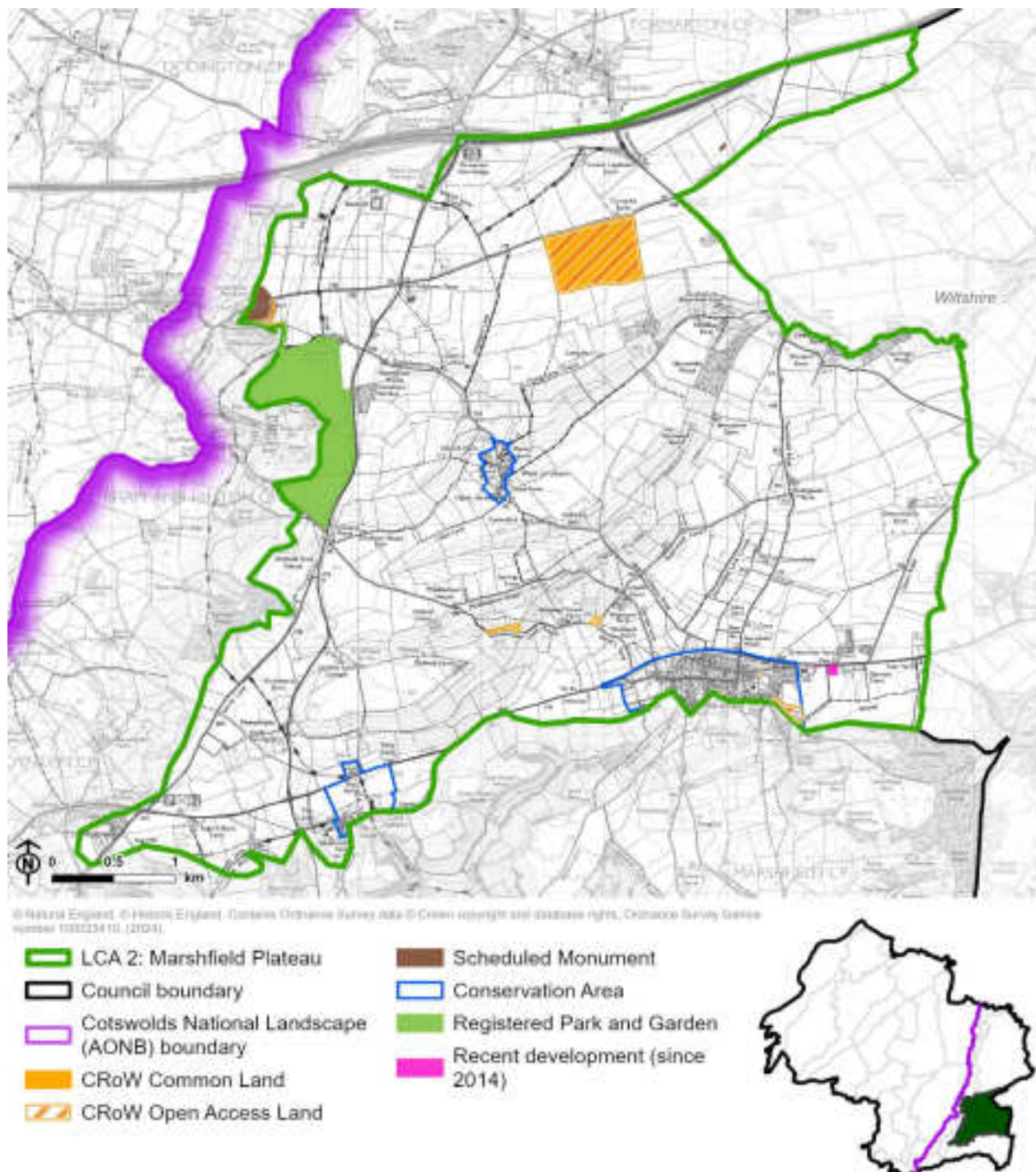
**Figure 6.5: Location and Landscape context of LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau**





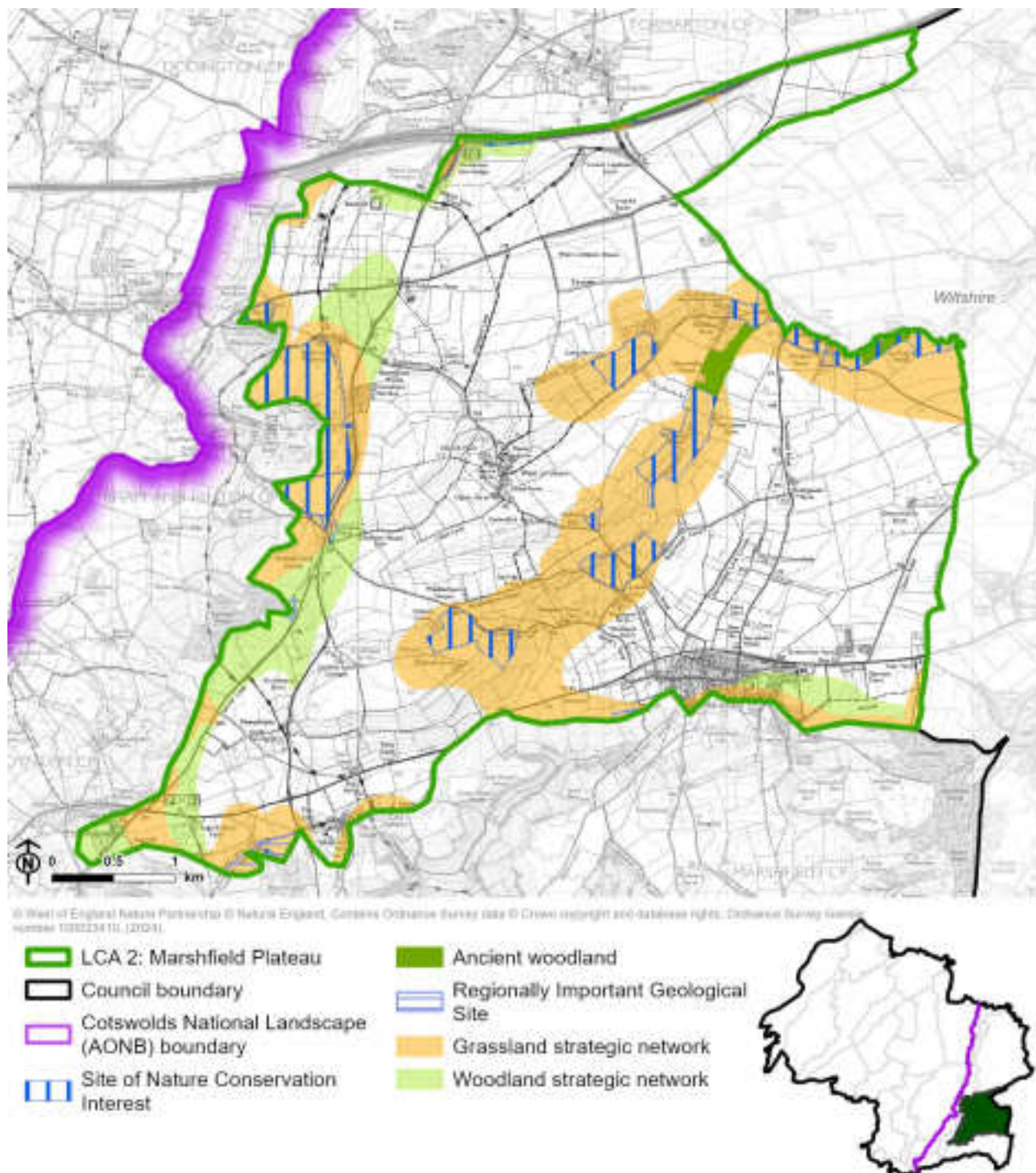
## LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau

**Figure 6.6: Settlement and Heritage context of LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau**



## LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau

**Figure 6.7: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau**



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- A gently undulating upland plateau/dip slope landscape with an open expansive character.
- The boundaries of the plateau are defined by the rising topography of the Cotswold Scarp (LCA 4) to the west and Ashwicke Ridges (LCA 3) to the south, offering extensive views over the LCA.
- Land cover consists of predominantly large, regular-shaped arable fields generally defined by Cotswold stone walls which provide some habitat connectivity.
- The open plateau is dissected by two enclosed river valleys. This is a textured landscape of irregular, medium sized pasture fields and wetland meadows divided by hedges and stone walls, with scattered woodland copses.
- Areas of calcareous grassland support a diverse range of flora including areas of species rich grassland.
- Woodland cover is limited to small, scattered areas of woodland, ancient woodland copses and few hedgerow trees, resulting in a generally simple, exposed landscape of open views.
- A sparse settlement pattern, comprising small villages and scattered isolated farms and buildings. The common use of Cotswold stone as a building material contributes to landscape character.
- A rural landscape with tranquil areas and dark night skies away from major roads. The perceptual and scenic qualities of the landscape are reflected in its inclusion within the Cotswolds National Landscape.



### Natural Influences

#### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**6.46** The underlying geology of the area is predominantly Great Oolitic Limestone with Fullers Earth and a small area of Athelstan Oolitic Limestone in the west. 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, rising to a high point of 220m AOD at Tog Hill in the south-west corner of the LCA, forming part of the Cotswold Scarp Visually Important Hillside (VIH).

**6.47** The plateau is incised by two gently sloping valleys, formed by two branches of the Broadmead Brook which is fed by several springs. The brook gently meanders north-eastwards along the valley bottom, the valley becoming steeper and narrower in the east. A number of the side valleys are dry, and there is a small man-made pool to the north of West Littleton.

#### Land Cover

**6.48** The plateau comprises a pattern of large, rectilinear fields with regular boundaries, mainly under arable cultivation. 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 historic enclosure of open common and downland.

**6.49** Fields on the plateau area are generally divided by Cotswold stone walls in mixed condition. In some places they have been removed, notably where former sheep pasture and mixed agriculture has been converted to arable use, with only remnant grass mounds left to define the former wall position. There is a particularly strong framework of dry stone walls along main roads and around settlements and farms, particularly evident in the north-west near Tormarton and to the south around Marshfield, where the pronounced change between

## **LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau**

stone and hedgerow boundaries follows the sharp junction between plateau edge and scarp beyond. Intermittent, thick and clipped hedges also form prominent field boundaries, principally to the west and adjacent to the Cotswold Scarp.

**6.50** Tree cover on the plateau is sparse, other than a few isolated copses and mature specimens along the field boundaries and around the edges of settlements. Exceptions are the small woodlands adjacent to the west and north-west boundary, associated with Dyrham Park.

**6.51** Within the Broadmead brook valleys, land cover is mixed arable and pasture, with medium sized irregular fields on the valley sides and semi-enclosed meadows on the valley bottom. Field boundaries within the valleys consist of a mix of stone walls and intermittent, clipped and thick hedges. There is a higher proportion of tree cover than on the plateau, comprising small areas of woodland on the valley sides (Harcombe Wood being the largest area) Overgrown hedgerows and trees demarcate streams in the lower wetland areas.

**Photo 2: Large-scale arable fields on the open plateau, with low drystone walls and occasional shelterbelts.**



### Biodiversity

**6.52** The mosaic of habitat in this character area supports a diverse range of species. Nationally important habitats present include grasslands, woodland and parkland containing specimen and veteran trees and some 31 ha. of ancient woodland at Harcombe Wood and Gunnings Wood, which is also designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). Key species associated with these habitats include bats and dormice, both of which are present across South Gloucestershire and are European protected species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP). Some habitat connectivity is provided between the wooded areas and other habitats via the stone walls, hedgerows and scattered trees.

**6.53** There are eleven sites within the Marshfield Plateau designated as SNCIs for their grassland habitats, including calcareous, neutral, and species-rich grasslands which support a range of invertebrates, and ant hills are a regular feature. These invertebrates in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats. Dyrham Park is also designated as an SNCI for the parkland present at the 100 hectare site.

**6.54** The characteristic stone walls are of habitat value for a diverse range of species from invertebrates to reptiles and amphibians for commuting, foraging and as a refuge. Arable fields are important for many species of ground nesting farmland birds including birds which have been listed by BirdLife International as being on the Red List of Globally Threatened species. The stubble left over winter across the farmland provides a precious foraging resource when food sources are scarce for many farmland birds.

**6.55** The few watercourses within the Marshfield Plateau area could host water voles, while ponds and pools within the area may well support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species). Both are vulnerable to any loss of habitat including the terrestrial habitat around the water feature as well as the water bodies themselves.

## LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau

**6.56** South Gloucestershire Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor E: Hawkesbury-Upton Cheyney-Ashwicke (*Cotswold Scarp and Ashwicke Ridges*) falls across into the LCA along its western and southern edges. It is important for its mosaic of strategic woodland and grassland habitats associated with the adjacent Cotswold Scarp.

## Cultural Influences

### Land Use and Time Depth

**6.57** A number of prehistoric tumuli and long barrows are scattered over the plateau landscape, indicating a long history of settlement in the area. A long barrow at Lapdown Barn and a round barrow at Littleton Down near West Littleton are both Scheduled Monuments, although are not visually distinctive. Many others, including a large group near Marshfield, have been removed.

**6.58** Remnant ridge and furrow patterns are evident in some locations such as at West End, as are traces of Iron-Age field systems in the form of strip lynchets in the valleys surrounding Cold Ashton.

**6.59** Part of Dyrham Park (Grade II\* Registered Historic Park) lies within the west of the LCA. The open parkland includes planted avenues, woodland belts, scattered mature and veteran ornamental trees, native tree specimens and small copses. This has traditionally been managed as a deer park. Expansive open views are possible from within the park over the lower-lying vale landscapes to the west, including views from within the park and its stately home.

**6.60** Two linear areas of woodland at Badminton Plantation and Dunsdown Beeches along the park boundary following the A46, are visually prominent in westerly views from within the character area.

### Settlement and Infrastructure

**6.61** The open plateau landscape is largely unpopulated in comparison with most of South Gloucestershire, with only three main settlements.

**6.62** The large village of Marshfield is situated on the edge of the plateau in the south, with the A420 defining its northern edge. The historical significance of Marshfield and its status as the first major staging point on the Bristol to London route is reflected in its designation as 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. Dry stone boundary walls extend from the town into the adjacent rural landscape.

**6.63** The small linear villages of West Littleton and Cold Ashton are the other main settlements. They consist of scattered houses of a variety of styles and ages, with a church and manor house of likely Saxon origin. Both have Conservation Areas and are surrounded by fields with dry stone wall boundaries. The hamlet of Pennsylvania in the south-west includes stone buildings and traditional agricultural buildings, as well as a petrol station which exerts localised urban influence in this otherwise rural landscape. Unlike other settlements in the LCA, adjacent field boundaries are hedges.

**6.64** Elsewhere, the irregular and scattered distribution of farms across the landscape is closely related to spring lines and watercourses, and the farmsteads are often surrounded by trees. Occasional industrial-scale buildings adjacent to the A46, and large-scale farm and commercial sheds alongside the A420 to the east of Marshfield have an urban influence on the surrounding rural landscape.

**6.65** The settlements within this LCA all contain buildings of historic form and architectural style, with little evidence of modern additions. They are united through their use of Cotswold stone for traditional buildings and structures, as well as field boundaries. The local Marshfield stone used for many of the

## **LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau**

buildings is locally distinctive, being greyer than the honey-coloured stone found further east and north in the Cotswolds.

**6.66** Settlements are connected by a number of lanes lined with stone walls, which largely radiate from Marshfield. The lanes become more winding within the valleys, often enclosed by stone walls on banks, although these are frequently masked by hedgerow vegetation. Three major trunk roads also cross the area; the M4 forms the northern boundary of the LCA, connecting to the A46 which runs north to south between Bath and Cirencester. The A420 runs east to west close to the southern boundary of the area and passes along the northern edge of Marshfield.

**6.67** A network of public rights of way cross the landscape, often following field boundaries between farms and small settlements. The Cotswold Way National Trail runs north to south near the western plateau/ scarp boundary. It crosses the north-west of the area, passes outside the LCA along the scarp then back into this area, south-eastwards through Cold Ashton. The Limestone Link promoted route runs south-east from Cold Ashton towards Bath. 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. Areas of Common and open access Land at Littleton Down, Brookhouse Common and West End Town Common provide further recreational access to the landscape.



**Photo 3: The linear medieval layout of Marshfield high street, built in local Cotswold stone.**



## Perceptual Influences

### Visual Character

**6.68** The Marshfield Plateau area has three principal landform elements which influence its visual 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.

**6.69** The broad plateau/dip slope has an open and simple character, created through the combination of gently rolling arable land, which generally lacks any significant vegetation to screen views across the expansive plateau landscape. Field boundaries of low stone walls are frequently overgrown or replaced with

## **LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau**

fencing. In some locations, walls have become overgrown with vegetation and can be easily mistaken for hedgerows. There are also occasional mature trees associated with these features.

**6.70** The open character of the plateau/dip slope contrasts strongly with the smaller scale, more enclosed character of the two valleys of the Broadmead Brook and its tributary, which dissect the plateau. Irregular pastoral and arable fields, generally smaller-scale than on the plateau are divided by thick, overgrown and clipped hedges and some stone walls, interspersed with infrequent small woodland copses. In the east is a more intricate and enclosed landscape formed by woodland, copses, individual trees and wetland meadows close to the valley bottom.

**6.71** The villages of Marshfield and Cold Ashton are located on high ground along the southern boundary and are visually prominent in views from across the open plateau and north from adjacent LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges, although field boundary walls and intermittent vegetation on the settlement edge integrate these elements to some extent. Views of the surrounding landscape are afforded from these settlements, including into the valleys of the Ashwicke Ridges. Marshfield church tower forms a landmark feature in many views. West Littleton nestles within the undulating wooded landscape of the valleys, with only the southern part of the settlement visible from much of the western and central parts of the character area. The hamlet of Pennsylvania is not prominent in wider views, although the petrol station introduces a detractive urban feature within the rural landscape.

**6.72** The exposed plateau/dip slope allows distant views over the landscape from higher ground. Extensive views from the area's boundaries are also possible, limited in places by a woodland belt at Dyrham Park and by the skyline of the upper scarp edge. These include views westwards over the Cotswold Scarp (LCA 4) to the vale beyond, views southwards across the Ashwicke Ridges (LCA 3) and Avon Valley (LCA 16), views north across to the Badminton Plateau (LCA 1) and into Wiltshire to the east.

**6.73** The A46 and A420 run generally at grade with the surrounding landform, occasionally partially enclosed by low Cotswold stone walls, often in a state of

## LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau

disrepair. High traffic volumes on these 'A' roads have localised visible and audible influence on the rural character of the plateau. The junction at Toghill has a significant impact on the landscape, particularly at night, where lighting on the skyline is visible in long distance views from the west.

**6.74** The ridgeline location of the A420 makes it a prominent route, with open views in all directions. A line of pylons running east-west to the south of the M4 and a tall telecommunications mast near the M4 and A46 junction form vertical structures that are visually prominent in the open plateau landscape.

**Photo 4: Large agricultural buildings at Tolldown Farm, with pylons and Hinton Wind Turbine marking the skyline.**



## Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**6.75** A moderately tranquil landscape, particularly in the centre of the LCA. Tranquillity is reduced around major transport corridors including the A46 in the west, A420 in the south, and M4 along the northern edge. Traffic on the A46 and A420 is visually and audibly prominent where it crosses the exposed

## LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau

plateau and ridge skyline to the west of Marshfield. Although mostly in cutting, high volumes of traffic on the M4 are an audible and sometimes visually prominent feature of the landscape.

**6.76** The majority of the LCA experiences dark night skies, with some localised light pollution along transport corridors.

## Visually Important Hillsides

**6.77** There are no Visually Important Hillsides (VIH) located within this LCA. However, it is flanked along its western edge by the Cotswold Scarp VIH (located within LCA 2) and along its southern edge by the Ashwicke Ridges VIH. Key characteristics of each VIH include the following:

- Cotswold Scarp VIH: a visually prominent escarpment on the edge of the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) which defines a marked change in character from the considerably lower-lying undulating ridges and vales to the west, and the broader plateau/dip slope landscape to the east.
- Ashwicke Ridges VIH: a distinctive and complex area of steep sided ridges and valleys, forming some of the most prominent and dramatic hillsides within South Gloucestershire, and an integral landscape feature and characteristic of the CNL.

**6.78** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

## Strategic Viewpoints

**6.79** Four Strategic Viewpoints are located within this LCA. They are:

- SVP 16: Tog Hill: provides a panoramic view west from the edge of the Cotswold scarp that takes in notable landscape features and landmark features across most of South Gloucestershire and extends to the hills of South Wales.

## **LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau**

- SVP 17: Dyrham Park: A designed viewpoint from a Registered Park and Garden and provides a panoramic view west, taking in notable landscape and landmark features across South Gloucestershire, extending to the hills of South Wales, Dundry Hill and the Mendip Hills National Landscape (AONB).
- SVP 25: East End, Marshfield: Enables appreciation of the Cotswold National Landscape and provides a panoramic view that takes in notable landscape features of the Ashwicke Ridges (including the Doncombe Brook Valley and Henley Hill) as well as the landmark feature of the Church of St Mary within Marshfield Conservation Area.
- SVP 26: Cold Ashton: Provides a notable view across the Cotswold National Landscape that takes in the notable landscape features of the Ashwicke Ridges (including St Catherine's Brook Valley and Henley Hill), and the Cold Ashton Conservation Area.

**6.80** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Value Features

- The contrasting landform of gently rolling open arable land on the plateau and small-scale enclosed valleys that provide topographical interest.
- The drystone walls, which are distinctive landscape features and important for habitat connectivity.
- The historic villages with a distinctive form and built character, unified by their use of local stone which provide a strong sense of place.
- Small woodland copses and wetland meadows, valued for their biodiversity and provision of wildlife habitats.
- Open views experienced from the open plateau over surrounding landscapes.
- The rural character, sense of tranquillity and dark night skies experienced across much of the area.

## The Changing Landscape

**6.81** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Marshfield Plateau LCA.

### Climate Change

- Ongoing demand and pressure for renewable energy developments. An area of high potential for wind energy development has been identified in the north of the area adjacent to West Littleton Down.



## LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau

- Change in tree species composition with the increase prevalence of pests and diseases including *Phytophthora* pathogens and ash die-back.
- Extended growing seasons as a result of longer warmer summers. This may alter the composition of arable land and make new crops viable, changing the appearance and structure of the farmed landscape.
- Increased frequency of extreme weather events resulting in more frequent flooding events in winter and drought events in summer, affecting water flow rates in the streams, impacting on riparian habitats and species.

## Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- An increase in tree planting is required to contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may include extension of woodland habitat in the Broadmead Brook valley, as set out in the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy [\[See reference 2\]](#).
- The establishment of self-seeded trees and the introduction of new planting within the plateau area, whilst contributing to the landscape structure, have the potential to affect existing vistas and key views.

## Land use and cover

- 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, any future changes will have a significant impact on the appearance of the landscape.
- The continuing programme of landscape restoration and improvement at Dyrham Park, including woodland management and the restoration

## LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau

of walls and hedges will ensure the character of the historic parkland is maintained.

- Motocross scrambling tracks in the north-west and south-east corners of the area introduce localised visual and noise pollution.
- The ongoing popularity of livestock-keeping including horses and alpaca has resulted in the subdivision of fields using electric and wooden fencing. This and the associated construction of stables and shelters is eroding the character and quality of the landscape on the edge of villages, such as West Littleton.
- The deterioration and loss of stone wall field boundaries has reduced the condition and integrity of an important landscape feature within such an exposed and simple landscape. This is particularly evident along the road network and adjacent to settlement and results in changes to the visual appearance and landscape character of the locality, and also to its habitat value.
- Changing agricultural land management practices in response to climate change and forthcoming changes to agricultural subsidies. This may affect the management of landscape features and wildlife habitats including hedgerows and grassland habitats.

## Development

- Ongoing residential development (18 dwellings) to the east of Marshfield on the A46 will increase the extent of the village beyond its current boundaries once complete.
- The open and exposed character of the plateau/ dip slope 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, large agricultural buildings, wind turbines and communication masts, would be visually prominent and introduce discordant elements within the open plateau, which would erode its distinctive character.
- The rural character of the plateau/dip slope landscape has been eroded in places through the visual intrusion of major roads, traffic,

## LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau

powerlines and masts and more recently the introduction of large industrial scale barns and buildings, for example to the east of Marshfield and adjacent to the A46 north of Cold Ashton. The audible intrusion from traffic levels adds to this erosion of rural character.

## Guidance

**6.82** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the objectives of the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines [See reference 3] as well as the overarching management strategy objectives of the South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment, as set out in Chapter 4.

### Landscape Strategy

### Landscape Management

- Maintain the open and rural character of the Cotswold Plateau, including its wide panoramic views (including views from the major roads) and high degree of intervisibility.
- Conserve, manage and restore dry stone walls which are a key feature of this landscape, using local materials and traditional techniques as appropriate to the local landscape and to enhance habitat value, and encourage the restoration of historic features.
- Conserve and manage heritage assets, ensuring that present and future land use practices do not cause damage to or loss of remaining prehistoric features.
- Protect and enhance the setting, character and features of historic assets including Dyrham Park and Scheduled Monuments. New planting associated with designed landscapes should use species characteristic of the historic landscape and ensure that new woodland does not compromise the structure or setting of archaeological features.

## LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau

- The cumulative impacts of land use change associated with hobby farming and equestrian activity should be carefully managed, avoiding visually prominent locations such as roadsides and valley slopes.
- Preserve and enhance the landscape setting of Marshfield, West Littleton, and Cold Ashton, together with key views towards and from the Conservation Areas; including the panoramic views south from Cold Ashton and Marshfield.
- Maintain the undeveloped character of the Broadmead Brook valleys with its diverse and textured landscape of woodland and meadows which contrast with the open plateau and are unique within the area.

### Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Ensure that farming practices do not negatively impact aquatic and riparian habitats and species. Seek opportunities to enhance these habitats e.g. through South Gloucestershire's Biodiversity Action Plan and Green Infrastructure Strategy (Greener Places).
- Protect and extend the important calcareous grassland and meadow habitats, enhancing connectivity between existing areas and creating new ones where appropriate, in line with the WENP Nature Recovery Network grassland strategic network.
- Enhance the mosaic of woodland and grassland habitats and increase connectivity between different habitat types, for example link Gunnings Wood and grassland to St. Catherine's Valley SSSI through existing areas of lowland meadows, calcareous grassland and deciduous woodland.
- Establish small areas of native woodland including through natural regeneration, to consolidate and extend the diverse wildlife corridor Broadmead Brook, whilst conserving other priority habitats. Ensure woodland does not take place on archaeological features.
- Retain and enhance the landscape's woodlands (including ancient woodland). Ensure new tree planting (including woodland sand shelterbelts) retains the open character and wide panoramic views experienced across the plateau and valleys, having regard to the

cumulative impact of new planting. Any new woodland planting should reflect the detailed guidance set out in the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines Strategy Area 7: High Wold.

- Support the creation of new wildflower habitats along B-lines (identified by Buglife) within the LCA to contribute to the national pollinator network.

### Development Management

- Maintain the open, sparsely settled character by limiting new development to existing settlements. Ensure new built development respects the local built character and does not interrupt the setting of existing villages or views. Ensure that renewable energy developments are appropriately designed and sited, avoiding visible slopes and prominent ridgelines.
- Ensure development of large-scale vertical elements do not adversely affect the skyline and views of the character area, as well as those towards and from neighbouring character areas.
- Wind turbines should be modest in scale and carefully located to limit their visual prominence, particularly in views from the CNL, and to avoid intervisibility between installations.
- Any new development should avoid dominating, or visually competing with, other landmark landscape or heritage assets in the character area including the designed landscapes of Dyrham Park, strip lynchet field systems, and the Broadmead Brook valley.
- Cumulative impacts with other developments will require particular consideration due to the openness of the landscape.
- Ensure any new development requires the conservation and planting of trees within the site, and as determined by scale and impact, includes off-site tree and woodland planting.
- Given the openness of the landscape and importance of maintaining the rural character of skylines, careful consideration should be given to the location and design of highway signage and lighting.

## LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau

- Protect the tranquillity of undisturbed areas, including the retention of dark skies and limit new development that would introduce visual and audible disturbance.



## LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges

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

**Photo 1: View south from Ashwicke Road along a tributary valley of St Catherine's Valley.**



### Location

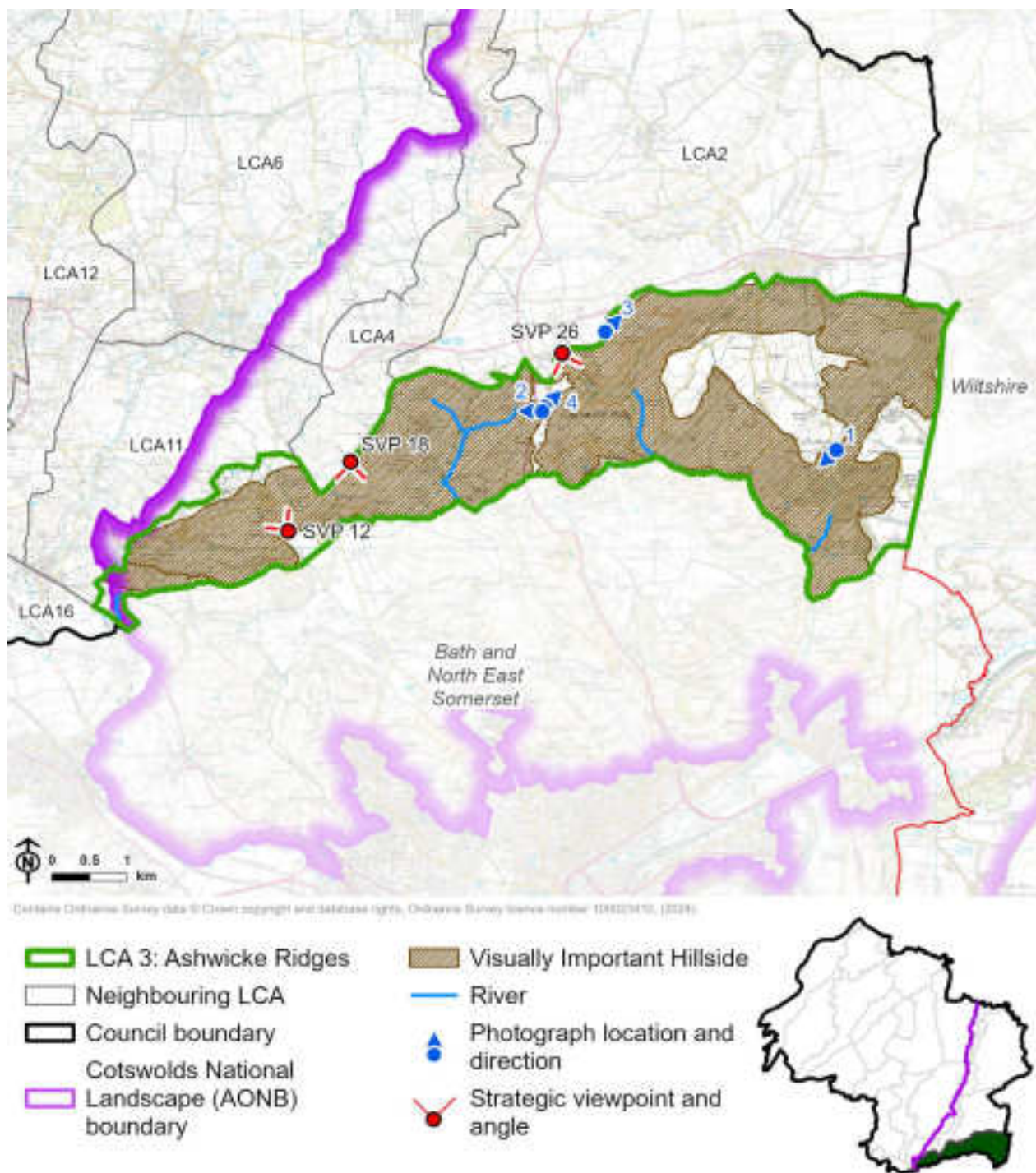
**6.83** The Ashwicke Ridges LCA is located in the south-east of South Gloucestershire. It falls entirely within the Cotswolds National Landscape.

**6.84** This landscape character area is defined along its northern edge northern by an often-distinct topographical change between the adjacent Marshfield Plateau (LCA 2) and the upper valley edges of this area. To the west, the boundary abuts the Cotswold Scarp (LCA 4), following the ridgeline of Freezing Hill, before descending to follow a mid-slope topographical boundary with the Golden Valley (LCA 11). The boundary then descends further to the A431, forming a boundary with the Avon Valley (LCA 16).

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

### LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges

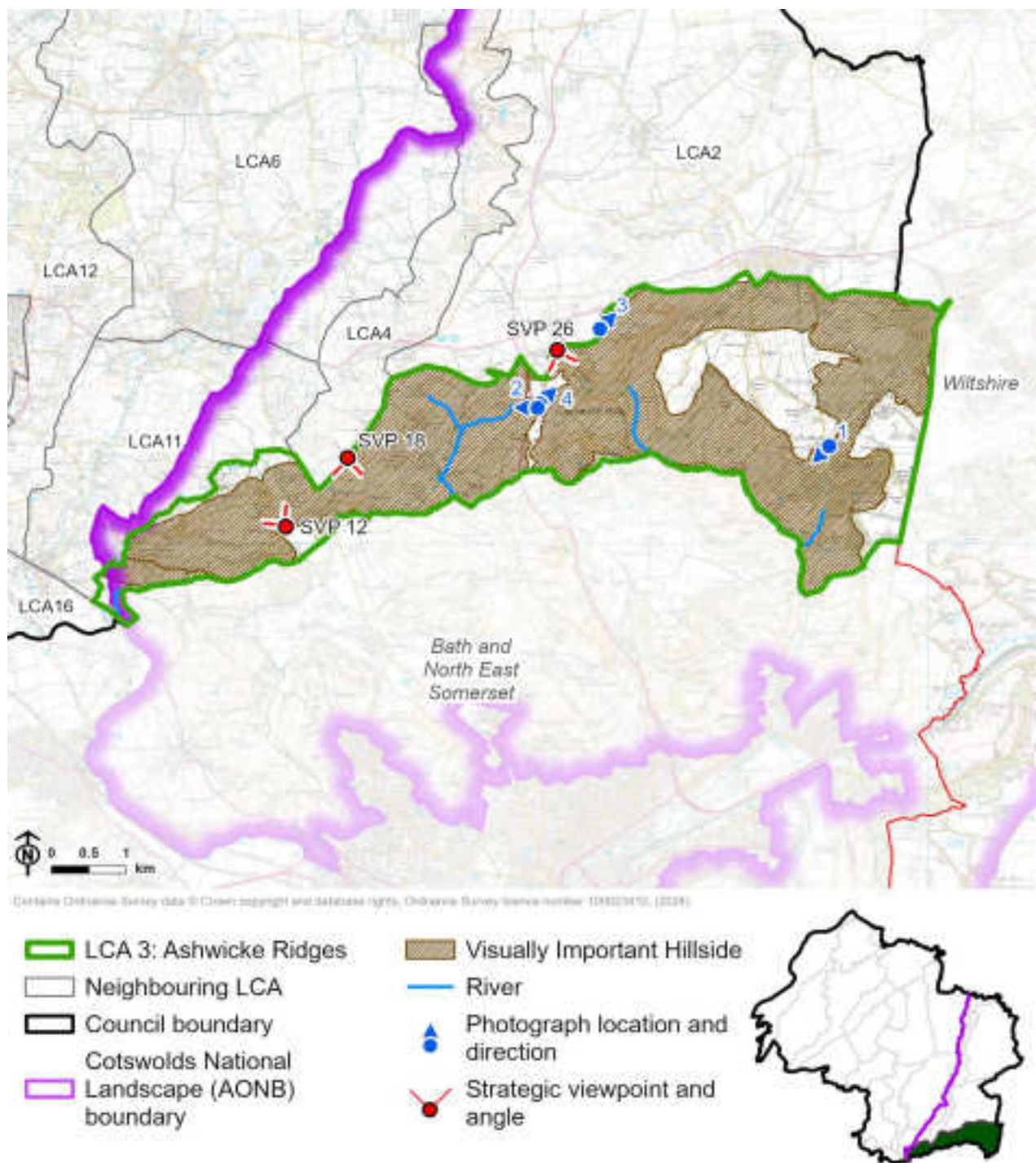
**Figure 6.8: Location and Landscape context of LCA 3:  
Ashwicke Ridges**





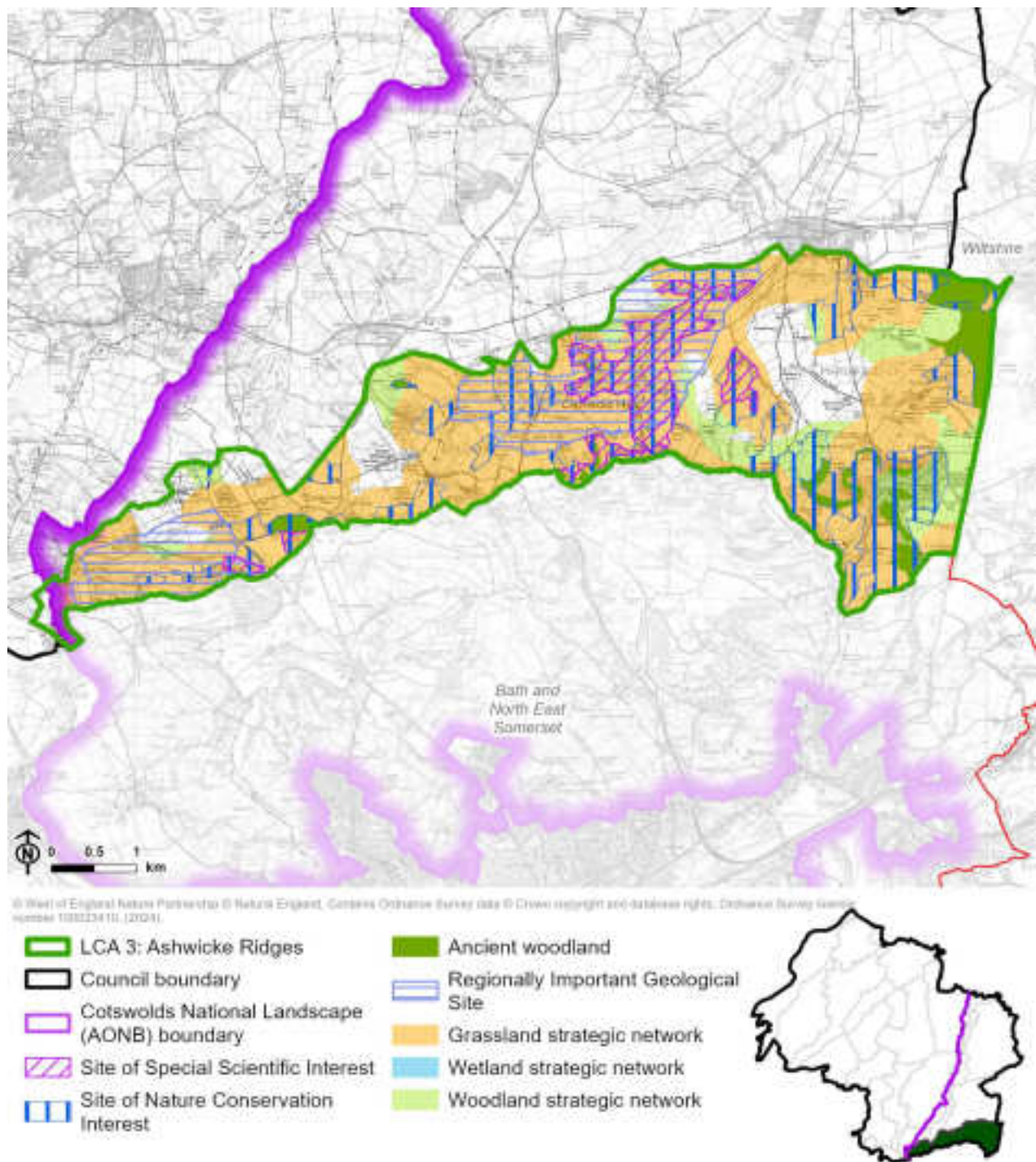
### LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges

**Figure 6.9: Settlement and Heritage context of LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges**



### LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges

**Figure 6.10: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges**



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- A complex landform comprising a small plateau of rounded upland hills, steep sided ridges and both incised and broad valleys. The varied topography result in contrasting landscape characteristics.
- Open upland hills to the north and ridges to the west are characterised by medium, regular shaped fields of mixed pasture and arable, bound with clipped hedges and occasional Cotswold stone walls.
- Enclosed, wooded valleys of St Catherine's Brook and its tributaries are located in the east. The sinuous incised valleys are typified by irregular medium to small unimproved pastoral fields with clipped and overgrown hedges.
- The broad Hamswell Valley in the west, has irregular shaped fields bound by clipped or overgrown hedges with mature hedgerow and riparian trees.
- Significant areas of calcareous and neutral grassland support a diverse and species rich range of flora.
- Small copses, including ancient woodlands connected via hedgerows and dry stone walls, provide habitat for notable species (including European Protected Species).
- Historic assets represent a long history of settlement in the area, the most notable being the Fosse Way Roman Road.
- A scattered settlement pattern of isolated houses and farms united by Cotswold stone.
- Extensive views are possible over the area from the open upper ridges.
- A prominent line of beech trees on Freezing Hill is a notable landmark in views from both within and beyond the character area.



## LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges

- An area around 'The Rocks' forms part of the wider setting to the City of Bath World Heritage site due to its scenic qualities as part of the CNL.

## Natural Influences

### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**6.86** The underlying geology is principally a mix of Fuller's Earth on the valley sides, and Midford and Yeovil Sands in the valley bottom. Great Oolitic Limestone dominates the rounded exposed uplands. The diverse geology results in a variety of soil types with Calcareous Pelosols on the valley sides, Brown Earth Loam over Clay on the valley floors, and Brown Rendzinas on the exposed uplands.

**6.87** The varied and tightly interwoven mix of geology has a strong influence on the topography, creating an undulating landform of small plateau areas with rounded hills, steep sided ridges, and incised and broad valleys. Elevation varies from 70m AOD within the valleys to 235m AOD at Hanging Hill in the west, which is the highest point in the area, marked by a telecommunications mast. This distinctive and complex combination of landform features form the Ashwicke Ridges Visually Important Hillside.

**6.88** The eastern half of the area is occupied by the small-scale 'V'-shaped valley of St Catherine's Brook. Numerous tributaries within side valleys, often fed by springs, feed the tightly meandering St Catherine's Brook, producing a visually varied valley of descending interlocking spurs. To the 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 (LCA 2) by the steep sided, easterly draining Doncombe Brook valley and the upper tributary valley of St Catherine's Brook.

**6.89** High ground of a second Henley Hill to the south of Cold Ashton separates St Catherine's Brook from the Hamswell Valley in the west. The upper reaches

### **LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges**

of the Hamswell Valley comprise a broad bowl-shaped landform contained to the west by Freezing Hill. It drains south via the small sinuous Lam Brook and its tributaries. This valley continues south-eastwards to the River Avon at Bath.

**6.90** The ridgeline of Hanging Hill runs westwards, with slopes falling north-west into the Golden Valley (LCA 11), and south into the Piple Bottom Valley. It appears as a physical continuation of the Cotswold Scarp, although is separated from Freezing Hill by a 'saddle' landform which marks a prominent break in continuity of the upland landform.

**6.91** There are two ponds and two reservoirs within side valleys of St Catherine's Brook valley, including Monkswood Reservoir, a man-made lake located within the western reaches of this valley system. To the east of the area is the smaller Oakford Reservoir, and two natural pools.

**6.92** 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 stream course, the southern valley slopes lying within Bath and North East Somerset.

## **Land Cover**

**6.93** Land cover is closely related to the landform. The field pattern on the rounded hills consists of regular shaped, medium sized arable and pasture fields with varied field boundaries, including clipped hedges, post and wire fencing, and some Cotswold stone walls. Tree cover is limited on higher ground, mainly confined to the valley sides.

**6.94** By contrast, the steep landform of the St Catherine's Brook valley system, results in small to medium sized fields of irregular shape with unimproved pasture, many supporting wildflower meadows. Hedgerow field boundaries vary; some are clipped, others are dense and overgrown, interspersed with occasional mature hedgerow trees. Some hedgerows are laid or supplemented with fencing. Small areas of deciduous and mixed woodland are distributed around historic houses, with linear deciduous woodlands along the upper valley

### LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges

edges, and an extensive area of mixed woodland clothing the valley sides of the Doncombe Brook valley.

**6.95** To the west, the upper Hamswell Valley and sides of Freezing Hill and Hanging Hill comprise a more regular pattern of medium sized arable and pasture fields. They are defined by clipped hedges, which in places are overgrown, with an irregular pattern of mature hedgerow trees. There are occasional 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.

**Photo 2: View west across the undulating ridges and valleys to the west of Cold Ashton, the distinctive line of beech trees on Freezing Hill prominent on the skyline.**



### Biodiversity

**6.96** Semi-natural habitats within this LCA comprise a mosaic of grassland, woodland, mixed farmland, ponds and streams. Together with the hedgerow and drystone wall network, this variety of habitats supports a diverse range of species.

**6.97** Deciduous woodland is distributed across the landscape mainly as small, scattered woodlands and copses with two larger areas in the east, approximately half of the total woodland is of ancient origin (116 hectares) and designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). There are three areas designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) comprising species-rich grassland and woodland. These designations recognise the importance of these habitats in a national context for the range of flora and fauna they support. Key species likely to be associated with these habitats include bats and dormice, both of which are present across South Gloucestershire and are European protected species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP). Hedgerows and scattered trees provide ecological corridors between the areas of woodland. Although less prevalent than in other Cotswold areas, dry stone walls form a valuable habitat that can be utilised by a diverse range of species from invertebrates to reptiles and amphibians for commuting, foraging and as a refuge.

**6.98** There are seventeen sites designated as SNCIs for the calcareous and neutral grassland present, including species-rich grassland. Numerous watercourses and their tributaries cross the landscape and support a diverse range of species, from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and otters. Ponds and pools within the area support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species) which are vulnerable to habitat loss, including terrestrial habitat around ponds as well as the ponds themselves.

**6.99** The arable farmland within this LCA provides an ideal habitat and winter food source for many species of ground nesting farmland birds, including birds which have been listed by BirdLife International as being Globally Threatened Red listed species.

## LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges

**6.100** South Gloucestershire Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor E: Hawkesbury-Upton Cheyney-Ashwicke (*Cotswold Scarp and Ashwicke Ridges*) covers the majority of this LCA, and is important for its mosaic of strategic woodland and grassland habitats associated with the adjacent Cotswold Scarp.

## Cultural Influences

### Land Use and Time Depth

**6.101** The Ashwicke Ridges LCA has a strong sense of time depth, containing historic relics indicating a long history of settlement in the area, including prehistoric earthworks and tumuli, The Fosse Way Roman Road, medieval field systems, and historic battlefield sites.

**6.102** The most visible and extensive historic feature is the Fosse Way Roman Road which forms the eastern boundary of the character area, and historically formed the boundaries of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and in part, Somerset. The Three Shire Stones (Grade II listed) are standing stones along the Fosse Way which mark these original county boundaries. A prehistoric linear earthwork boundary on Freezing Hill (known as Freezing Hill Earthwork, Lansdowne) is designated as a Scheduled Monument, whilst the site of the Battle of Lansdown (noted on OS mapping to the south of Freezing Hill, but covering a much wider area) is a registered battlefield. Relic field systems in the form of Iron Age strip lynchets remain visible in places, for example to the south of Cold Ashton.

**6.103** Ashwicke Hall in the east of the character area is a Grade II Registered Park and Gardens comprising 19<sup>th</sup> Century pleasure grounds and landscaped parkland. To the south of Ashwicke Hall is The Rocks Garden, a designed historic garden that includes a distinctive avenue of mature trees.

### Settlement and Infrastructure

**6.104** The settlement pattern is relatively sparse, comprising nucleated hamlets located mainly around the edge of the LCA, with occasional farms scattered within the valleys.

**6.105** The hamlet of Upton Cheyney falls partially within the south of this area and partly within the adjacent Golden Valley (LCA 11). Set on the elevated mid-slopes between the lower Golden Valley and rising ridgeline of Hanging Hill, the settlement is dispersed along a number of radiating country lanes, giving a linear character. Buildings consist of large cottages and farmhouses in local Cotswold stone, with a small group of red-brick houses. The nearby hamlet of Beach comprises a mix of traditional Cotswold houses, cottages and farm buildings, loosely clustered around a junction of narrow country lanes. Both villages have Conservation Areas.

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

**6.107** The mid-19th century Ashwicke Hall is located on a prominent ridgeline on the eastern edge of the area. Lodges define the main entrances to the estate with the estate boundaries partly defined by stone walls. The house and other buildings, used as a school until 2019, are set within Grade II listed designed parkland and garden, also dating from the 19th century.

**6.108** The A46 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. Elsewhere, narrow country lanes typically radiate out from



### **LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges**

adjacent villages, largely following 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 linear north-south route along the eastern boundary.

**6.109** A network of public rights of way allow access to the landscape, generally running approximately north to south across the LCA, including three major recreational routes. The Cotswold Way National Trail crosses the area north to south through the Hamswell valley, before continuing beyond the character area towards the Avon Valley. The Limestone Link runs south-east from Cold Ashton into the St Catherine's Brook valley, following the authority boundary eastwards also linking through to the Avon Valley beyond the character area. One of a series of Circular Rides enters this area from the adjacent Marshfield Plateau (LCA 2) and Cotswold Scarp (LCA 4) character areas.

**6.110** Significant areas of Open Access land at Hanging Hill, Congrove Wood, and on the ridgelines south of Cold Ashton enable further recreational access to the landscape. There is a small area of Registered Common Land at Ringswell Common, to the south-east of Marshfield.

**Photo 3: View north-east from Hydes Lane, Cold Ashton towards Marshfield located on high ground above the valley.**



## Perceptual Influences

### Visual Character

**6.111** The Ashwicke Ridges landscape character area is a varied and complex landscape of plateaux, hilltops, ridges and valleys, with a diverse land cover and 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.

**6.112** The hills to the north form a simple, open landscape of arable land use over gentle slopes. Woodland cover is generally limited, so where it does feature, it creates texture and focus within the landscape. Further south, the

### **LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges**

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 and richly textured landscape. The woodland within St Catherine's and Doncombe Brook valleys combine with these valley landforms to produce an enclosed, relatively remote and intimate character.

**6.113** The open ridgelines 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 row of mature beech trees which form a prominent landmark in views from the east and west.

**6.114** From Marshfield and Cold Ashton, as well as more open and elevated parts of sections of the A420 and A46 main roads, there are open views southwards of rolling upland agricultural hills, with ground falling steeply from pronounced edges of high ground, into adjacent textured valleys.

**6.115** From the lanes south of Ashwicke Hall, views south (into Bath and North East Somerset) comprise the dramatic landform of deep valleys with richly textured, mixed woodlands covering the hillsides of St Catherine's Brook valley.

**6.116** Scattered farms and buildings set within the undulating landform are united in character through the use of Cotswold stone in buildings and boundary walls. The church towers at Cold Ashton and Marshfield (located within adjacent LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau) occupy a prominent location on the upper edge of St. Catherine's Brook valley and form distinctive landmarks in views north from the open plateau and ridges to the south. Other settlement is generally well-integrated as a result of its small-scale and surrounding framework of stone walls and/or vegetation.

**6.117** Designed parkland and gardens at Ashwicke Hall form a notable landscape feature and provides structure within the locality. 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.

### **LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges**

**6.118** Transport corridors are generally well-integrated within the landscape, due to the enclosure provided by the undulating landform and surrounding vegetation. Minor rural lanes are generally enclosed by hedgerows, which limit views into the surrounding landscape. The A420 and A46, with associated high volumes of traffic are visually prominent where they follow the crown of open ridgelines.

**Photo 4: A designated ‘Quiet Lane’ near Cold Ashton, lined by clipped hedgerows.**



### Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**6.119** The LCA experiences high level of tranquillity, particularly in the east away from larger settlements and major transport routes. There are localised areas of lower tranquillity along the A46 and A420 corridors, where high volumes of traffic impact on the otherwise strongly tranquil and rural character. Dark night skies are experienced throughout, with limited light pollution arising from the absence of major settlement.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**6.120** The Ashwicke Ridges Visually Important Hillside (VIH) is located within this LCA. It comprises a distinctive and complex area of steep sided ridges and valleys, forming some of the most prominent and dramatic hillsides within South Gloucestershire, and an integral landscape feature and characteristic of the CNL.

**6.121** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

### Strategic Viewpoints

**6.122** One Strategic Viewpoint is located within this LCA at SVP 12: Hanging Hill. It provides a natural observation point from which enables appreciation of the Cotswold National Landscape, and provides a panoramic view that takes in notable landscape features and landmark features across most of South Gloucestershire, with distant views extending to the hills of South Wales.

**6.123** Three further Strategic Viewpoints are located along the LCA boundary and afford views into and across the landscape. They are:

- SVP 18: Freezing Hill: Allows appreciation of the Cotswold National Landscape and provides a notable view across the designated landscape; it provides a panoramic view that takes in notable landscape features of the Ashwicke Ridges (including Hanging Hill),

### LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges

the Lower Hamswell valley, Dundry Hill and the Mendip Hills National Landscape (AONB).

- SVP 25: East End, Marshfield: Enables appreciation of the Cotswold National Landscape and provides a panoramic view that takes in notable landscape features of the Ashwicke Ridges (including the Doncombe Brook Valley and Henley Hill) as well as the landmark feature of the Church of St Mary within Marshfield Conservation Area.
- SVP 26: Cold Ashton: Provides a notable view across the Cotswold National Landscape that takes in the notable landscape features of the Ashwicke Ridges (including St Catherine's Brook Valley and Henley Hill), and the Cold Ashton Conservation Area.

**6.124** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.



## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Value Features

- The complex landform of small plateau areas with rounded hills, steep sided ridges, and incised and broad valleys which provide topographical interest and contrast of openness and enclosure in the landscape.
- The strong network of hedgerows and dry stone walls bounding mixed arable and pastoral fields.
- The mosaic of woodland and grassland semi-natural habitats, including ancient woodland and designated sites which provide ecological value.
- Watercourses, spring, pools and ponds providing important habitats and contribute to the visual character of the landscape.
- Small, traditional settlements united in character by their use of Cotswold stone.
- Historic features contributing to the sense of time depth in the landscape, including prehistoric earthworks and tumuli, The Fosse Way Roman Road, medieval field systems, and historic battlefield sites.
- Recreational access to the landscape, provided by the network of footpaths, promoted routes and Open Access land.
- The harmonious relationship between landform, vegetation and settlement, with a strong sense of place which contribute to the special qualities of the CNL.
- The rural character and strong sense of tranquillity with dark night skies resulting from an absence of urban influence and modern development.

## The Changing Landscape

**6.125** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Ashwicke Ridges LCA.

### Climate Change

- Changes in woodland and tree species composition, with an increase in the prevalence of pests and diseases, such as acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species
- Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges. Ancient woodlands may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
- Effects of climate change resulting in wetter and warmer winters, and more frequent hot and dry periods, leading to increased risk of flooding in winter and increasing the risk of drought in summer, affecting river flow rates and impacting on riparian habitats and species.

### Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- Pressure for renewable energy development within the landscape (as set out in South Gloucestershire's Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-2030). This would likely result in adverse effects on landscape character and visual impact.
- Wind turbines and other vertical built forms would be visible, not just from within the plateau, but potentially from the surrounding wider landscape including from the CNL and from areas that contribute to the setting of the City of Bath World Heritage Site.
- An increase in tree planting is required to contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, in accordance with the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy [See reference 4] and proposed woodland strategic network, which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may change the open character of the landscape and its expansive views.
- 'The Retreat' community woodland on Marshfield Lane near Beach is a positive example of woodland planting and management, leased

## LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges

and managed by the Forest of Avon Trust to provide outdoor learning opportunities and enable access to nature.

### Land use and cover

- 'Horsiculture' and sometimes alpaca keeping are more recent trends which, in places, have led to subdivision of fields and/or the loss or erosion of hedgerows. The cumulative effect of this and the associated stables, access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and floodlighting, can result in a marked change in landscape character and disrupt habitat value.
- 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.

### Development

- 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.
- Recreational pressure on the landscape, particularly on promoted routes, and at scenic viewpoints and popular attractions.

## Guidance

**6.126** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the objectives of the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines [See reference 5], as well as the overarching management strategy objectives of the South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment, as set out in Chapter 4.

## Landscape Strategy

### Landscape Management

- Maintain and enhance the highly distinctive, rural and tranquil characteristics of the complex valleys, hills, ridges and skylines, in particular the valleys to the south of Marshfield (e.g. valleys of Doncombe Brook, Catherine's Brook, Lam Brook and Piple Bottom).
- Restore, conserve and manage the dry stone wall network, hedgerow and woodland framework and pattern, particularly on the visually prominent hillsides, and encourage the restoration of other characteristic, historic and traditional landscape features.
- Limit land use change for equestrian activities where this would affect the character of the landscape, including from subdivision by electrified/post and rail fences, overgrazing, introduction of hardstanding, tracks, buildings and floodlighting.
- Conserve the historic landscape features including the strip lynchets field systems south of Cold Ashton, prehistoric earthworks, and other associated features that contribute to the character and interest of the area.
- Encourage small-scale mixed farming and promote the integration of woodlands on farms.
- Preserve and enhance the landscape setting of Upton Cheyney, and Beach Conservation Areas, together with key views towards them and looking out from them.
- Conserve the rural character of the road network, protecting verges, hedges, and stone walls. Avoid widening or creation of new roads, particularly on the prominent mid and upper slopes.



### Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Conserve and enhance the biodiversity value of the diverse mosaic of habitats, including ancient woodland, calcareous and neutral grassland, in line with the WENP Nature Recovery Network grassland and woodland strategic networks.
- Support the creation of new wildflower habitats along B-lines (identified by Buglife) within the LCA to contribute to the national pollinator network.
- Enhance the quality of watercourses and riparian habitats, for example through riparian woodland planting using native species such as willow, creating buffer zones, and through the promotion of low intensity grazing.
- Ensure new woodland planting is appropriately sited, avoiding planting on important grassland habitats. Prioritise new planting where woodland has been lost and encourage natural regeneration, particularly in proximity to ancient woodlands, and extend and link existing woodlands rather than creating new stand-alone woods. Extend and link existing woodlands rather than creating new stand-alone woods, in line with the CNL Landscape Strategy and Guidelines. Any new tree and woodland planting should reflect the detailed guidance set out in the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines Strategy Area 4: Enclosed Limestone Valley.
- Conserve and enhance existing populations of (calcareous and neutral) grassland habitats ensuring there is no net loss of biodiversity. Control scrub and create nesting opportunities for farmland birds and bat habitat.

### Development management

- Ensure that new development is sensitively located, and where necessary screened from the wider landscape to avoid eroding rural character of the character area, part of which contributes to the setting to the Bath World Heritage Site.

### LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges

- Ensure any new development requires the conservation and planting of trees within the site and as determined by scale and impact, includes off-site tree and woodland planting.
- Protect the rural character of the area including the retention of tranquillity and dark skies.
- Maintain the settlement pattern and character of isolated traditional farmsteads and oppose proposals that will be incongruous with the scale of the landscape.
- Promote the use of local building stone and building styles, such as locally sourced Cotswold stone of the appropriate colour and texture.
- Consideration should be given to the location and design of highway signage and lighting on transport corridors, particularly on high ground.
- Protect the open, undeveloped slopes of valleys, key views across and along them (including from the A46).
- Conserve the rural skylines of the Ashwicke Ridges and open upland hills, avoiding vertical elements that could impact on the particular characteristics of the wider landscape character area, including the setting of the Bath World Heritage Site.
- New development should use locally appropriate materials such as locally sourced Cotswold stone of the appropriate colour and texture that respects and enhances local distinctiveness and the traditional character of the area.

## LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp

The Cotswold Scarp landscape character area (LCA) is a dramatic, steeply sloping, landform feature. It's distinct topography and land cover of farmland, woodland and parkland provide a rural backcloth to adjacent lower-lying landscapes.

**Photo 1: Dyrham Park house and parkland, situated on the Cotswold Scarp.**



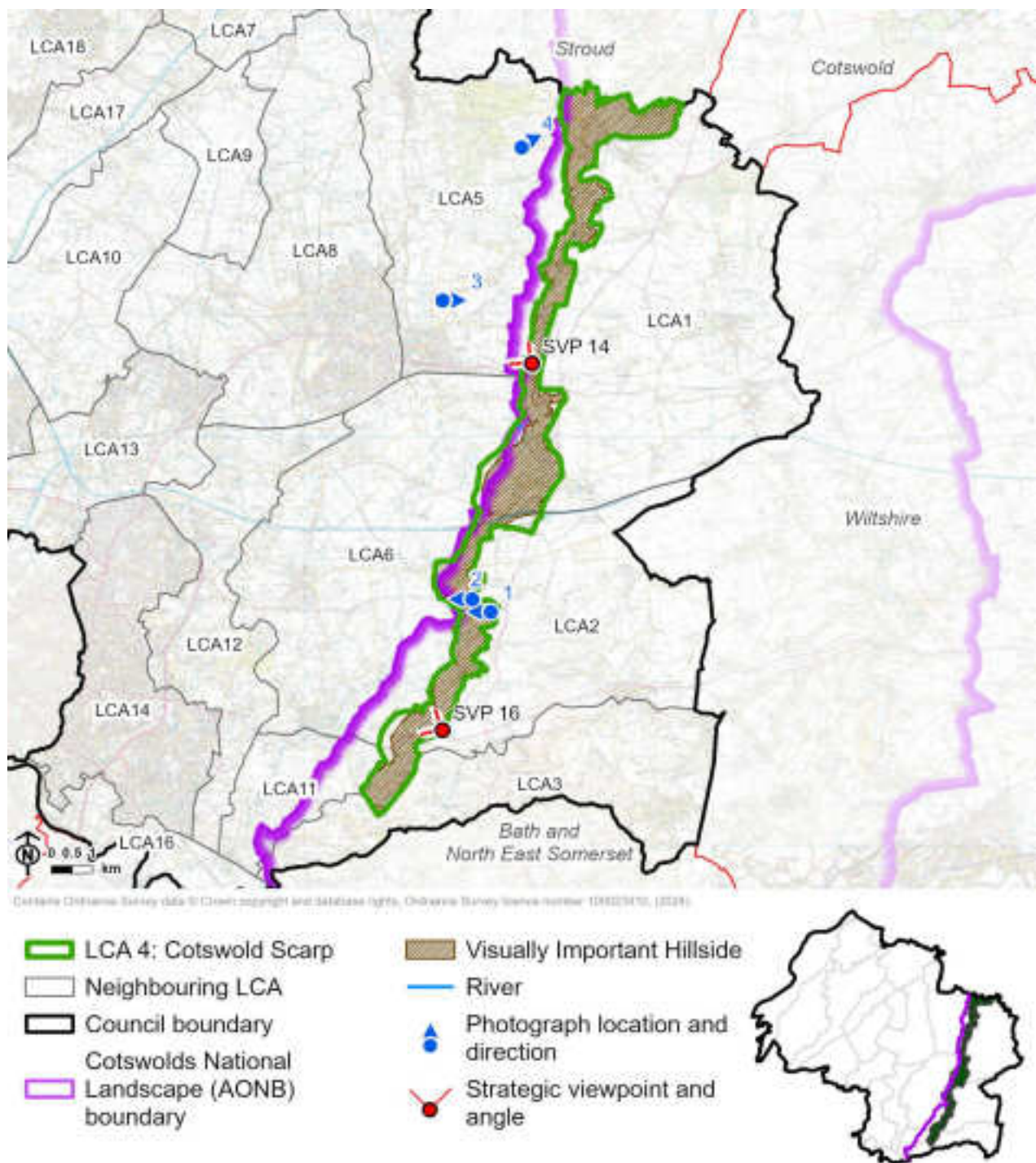
### Location

**6.127** The Cotswold Scarp LCA is located in the east of South Gloucestershire and forms a distinct and prominent landform running approximately north to south . It defines the western edge of the Cotswolds National Landscape , within which the entire LCA is included. The eastern boundary of the character area is 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 marks the transition between the scarp slope and the lower-lying, gently undulating broad ridge and valleys to the west. The South Gloucestershire Authority boundary forms the northern edge of the character area, although the landform continues beyond this boundary. The southern boundary of the LCA follows the base of Freezing Hill, within a saddle landform dividing the valley to the east, marking the change to the more undulating form of the Ashwicke Ridges (LCA 3) and the more gently sloping land to the west, towards the Golden Valley (LCA 11).



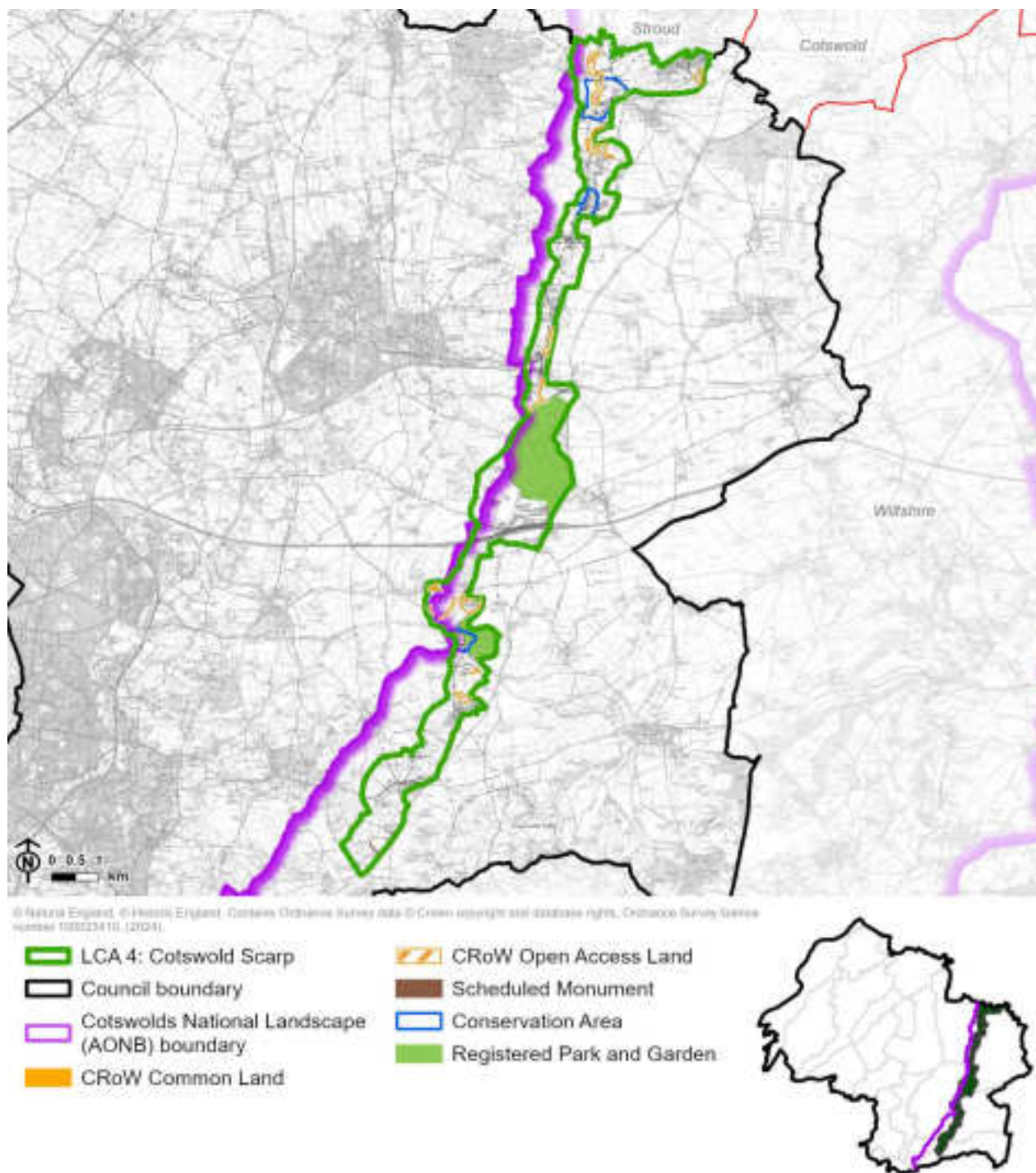
## LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp

**Figure 6.11: Location and Landscape context of LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp**



## LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp

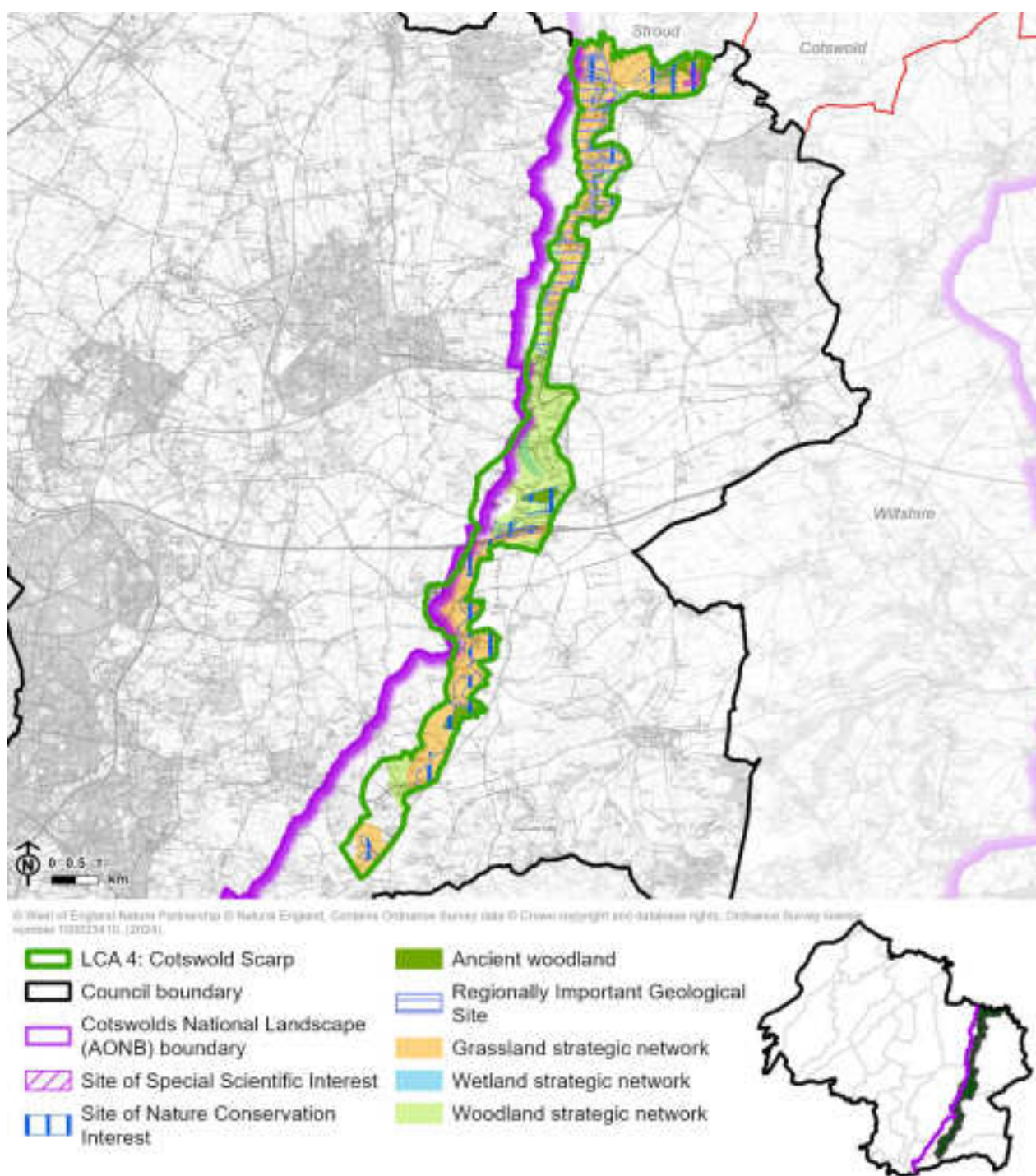
**Figure 6.12: Development and Heritage context of LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp**





## LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp

**Figure 6.13: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp**



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- Large-scale, steeply sloping and folded scarp landform, falling from the Cotswold Plateau westwards to lower vales.
- A largely undisturbed landscape with dramatic and panoramic views to the west, forming a highly prominent rural backcloth to adjacent lower-lying landscapes.
- A diverse land cover of small, irregular pasture fields and some regular arable fields, rough grassland, and a golf course.
- Fields are defined by thick clipped hedges, some laid, often intermittent and supplemented with fences, with limited Cotswold stone wall field boundaries. These provide some connectivity between habitats. Calcareous grassland provides an important habitat, supporting a diverse and species-rich flora.
- Undisturbed grassland provides nesting opportunities in the spring and foraging potential in the winter for farmland birds including Amber and Red listed species such as Skylark.
- Trees and hedgerows are important landscape features. Deciduous woodland (including ancient woodland) and small areas of scrub are generally associated either with valley landforms, or follow the contours along the upper scarp slopes.
- Historic manor houses in open parkland settings are prominently situated on the scarp to take advantage of the views.
- 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.



## LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp

- Enclosed valleys contrast with expansive views from high points on the scarp, including from key viewpoints at Tog Hill, Dyrham Park, Hanging Hill and Freezing Hill. Views from and to the Cotswold escarpment are identified as a special quality of the CNL.

## Natural Influences

### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**6.128** The Cotswold Scarp is formed of mixed underlying 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, generally steeply sloping landform varies from approximately 200m AOD at its highest point in the east, falling westwards to a height of approximately 100m AOD. Generally, the scarp gradient and aspect varies only slightly along its length. Sections of consistently uniform concave scarp are interspersed with small-scale valleys, several of which are dry. These have created both simple valley forms and a more complex deeply folded scarp, with convex upper slopes, knolls, rounded hills, promontories and descending broad spurs. The Cotswold scarp forms Visually Important Hillside 8 (see Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides).

**6.129** The scarp crest defines a watershed within South Gloucestershire with many springs rising along the scarp edge, which flow westwards into the Little Avon River, River Frome and River Boyd, and eventually to the Severn Estuary.

**6.130** The hydrological and geological characteristics of the scarp can be split into three sections: 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. 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

## **LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp**

becomes a shallow 'U'- shaped valley with convex upper slopes creating an undulating profile, characteristically different from the main slope. To the 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 (LCA 6). This has formed a convex scarp with broad rounded spurs extending into the landscape below. At the southern boundary of the LCA, 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**

**6.131** The steeply sloping landform is typically covered with small, irregular shaped pastoral fields, with rough grassland along the steepest sections. Some large, regular shaped arable fields extend beyond the base and crest of the slope.

**6.132** The strong hedgerow framework is an important feature along the scarp. Hedgerows generally follow the contours of the landform and flow down the scarp (perpendicular to the contours). Fields are divided by a mix of thick clipped or laid hedges, some overgrown, sometimes supplemented with post and rail fencing. Field boundaries along the crest of the scarp are generally laid or clipped hedgerows. Some Cotswold stone walls are present, particularly to the south where they extend eastwards from the scarp and onto the plateau/dip slope of the adjacent character area.

**6.133** In the north, woodland cover is typically a mix of large, irregular shaped belts of deciduous woodland which generally follow the upper contours of the slope. Small areas of woodland and scrub are found on the lower slopes.

**6.134** Towards the centre and the south of the LCA, woodland cover is typically more sparse, with the exception of large areas within Dodington Park and at Dyrham Wood. Smaller woodlands and copses are scattered amongst the mix of open rolling grassland and pasture fields... In a few locations, such as immediately north of the M4, open rough grassland with limited hedgerow or tree cover extends westwards into the lower vale.

## **LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp**

**6.135** A stand of mature beech trees along the scarp edge at Freezing Hill in the south (located along the boundary with adjacent character area (LCA 3) forms a highly distinctive landmark which is visible from a wide area within South Gloucestershire and beyond.

**6.136** On the lower slopes of the scarp part of the grounds of Tracy Park golf course extend from the west (LCA 11), comprising landscaped fairways, putting greens and formal tree planting.

**6.137** Along the scarp there are a number of estates with historic houses and associated parkland which impart a distinctive character along the scarp and contrast with the agricultural and wooded landscape pattern.

**Photo 2: View south-west from Dyrham Park along the scarp slope towards Hanging Hill.**



## LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp

### Biodiversity

**6.138** The mosaic of grassland, woodland, arable and pastoral farmland, water courses and framework of hedges and dry stone walls makes the Cotswold Scarp an important habitat for a diverse range of species.

**6.139** Ancient woodland represents approximately half of the total woodland within this character area (approximately 80 hectares). Deciduous woodland exists across the landscape mainly as small scattered woodlands and copses. Approximately half of these ancient woodlands are designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) in recognition of their importance for flora and fauna. Key species likely to be associated with the ancient woodland include bats and dormice both of which are present across the district and are European protected species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP). Other protected species, such as badgers and ground-nesting birds are also likely to be present. Hedgerows and scattered trees provide ecological corridors between the areas of farmed land, woodland and grassland. Veteran trees are an important landscape feature within parkland and an important habitat for lichens and invertebrates.

**6.140** Fifteen sites within the LCA are designated as SNCIs for their calcareous and neutral grassland habitats, including species-rich grassland. Upton Coombe is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designated for its species-rich calcareous grassland. This diverse habitat supports a range of invertebrates and ant hills are a regular feature. Dyrham Park is also designated as an SNCI for the parkland habitat present at the 100 hectare site.

**6.141** Hawkesbury Quarry SSSI is designated for its geological significance as one of the few Inferior Oolite sections in the South Cotswolds, forming a vital link between the northern Cotswolds and the fossil- bearing limestone found further south.

**6.142** The numerous springs and their resultant watercourses support a diverse range of species, from aquatic macro- invertebrates to fish and otters. Ponds and pools within the area support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).



## LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp

**6.143** Although dry stone walls are less prevalent in this area compared with the adjacent Badminton and Marshfield Plateaus (LCAs 1 and 2 respectively), these features are utilised by a diverse range of species from invertebrates to reptiles and amphibians for commuting, foraging and as a refuge.

**6.144** Much of the land use within the area is arable farmland which provides habitat and a food source for many species of ground nesting farmland birds including birds which have been listed by BirdLife International as being on the Red List of globally threatened species.

**6.145** South Gloucestershire Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor E: Hawkesbury-Upton Cheyney-Ashwicke (*Cotswold Scarp and Ashwicke Ridges*) extends along the length of this LCA, important for the mosaic of strategic woodland and grassland habitats located along the scarp slope.

## Cultural Influences

### Land Use and Time Depth

**6.146** Prehistoric settlement and land use on the Cotswold Scarp is indicated by the presence of numerous Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows scattered along the scarp. Other notable features include visually prominent strip lynchet field patterns at Hawkesbury Knoll and Hinton Hill Fort (also a Scheduled Monument). Other Scheduled Monuments include Horton Camp and Sodbury Hillfort.

**6.147** Historic estates with parklands are a notable characteristic of this LCA, exerting localised influence on the character of the scarp. From north to south these include:

- Horton Court (locally listed) is nestled within a prominent fold within the scarp, comprising stone estate walls, fishponds and woodland. It extends into the lower vale to the west, in the adjoining character area.

## LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp

- Little Sodbury Manor includes fishponds and a large area of earthworks, evident as pillow mounds.
- Dodington House and parkland (a Grade II\* Registered Historic Park) includes open undulating grassland and arable fields, with large woodland plantations, mature specimen trees, and lakes.
- Dyrham Park (a Grade II\* Registered Historic Park) incorporates a medieval deer park and 18th century house set within mature woodland, with grounds designed by Humphrey Repton and Charles Harcourt Masters amongst others including planted avenues, woodland belts and clumps and scattered mature ornamental trees and native tree specimens. A formal garden lies to the west of the house. The parkland extends eastwards beyond the scarp into adjacent LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau.

## Settlement and Infrastructure

**6.148** The settlement pattern of the Cotswold Scarp comprises scattered, nucleated villages, hamlets and farms, 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 church towers commonly forming local landmarks. 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 defined and united by their Cotswold Scarp setting, historic layout, and use of Cotswold stone, qualities recognised through their designation as Conservation Areas.

**6.149** 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.

## **LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp**

**6.150** A number of major roads ascend the scarp, including the M4, A420, A432 and B4465. Several small sunken lanes enclosed by high banks, hedgerows or mature trees, generally follow folds and valley formations within the landform, with the largest concentration of lanes in the north of the LCA.

**6.151** The A46 and A420 are ridgeway roads, historically taking the dry and relatively safer high ground. The M4 is mainly in cutting, incorporating large-scale re-profiling within an existing valley.

**6.152** A network of public rights of way traverse the scarp slope, linking adjacent low-lying vale landscapes to the elevated plateau. The Cotswold Way national trail follows a significant length of the LCA along the toe, flank and 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.

**6.153** There are several small areas of open access land across the scarp slope including a larger area at Dyrham. Small linear areas of Registered Common Land are associated with historic settlements as at Hinton Common and Sodbury Commons.

## LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp

**Photo 3: The village of Old Sodbury located along the mid-slope of the scarp. The tower of St Johns Church is a locally-prominent landmark.**



## Perceptual Influences

### Visual Character

**6.154** The Cotswold Scarp landscape character area is a prominent landform feature forming a highly visible and distinctive backcloth in views from the lowland vales and ridges to the west. It is regionally prominent, being visible from as far away as South Wales. The top of the scarp provides the highest vantage point from within South Gloucestershire 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.



## **LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp**

**6.155** The scarp comprises a diverse cover of pasture, rough grassland, hedges and woodland, combined with historic parklands and small nucleated settlements. These elements create a mixture of both bold, simple landscape forms and a more intricate textured landscape.

**6.156** 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. Hedgerows often follow the slope gradient visually emphasising the intricacies and folds in the scarp, contributing to a strong and harmonious landscape framework. Elsewhere, open grass hillsides, with small, isolated tree clumps or scrub reveal the scarp's slope profile and exposed ridgeline.

**6.157** The single line of mature beech trees along the ridgeline of Freezing Hill on the boundary to the south forms a distinctive landmark on the skyline visible both locally and in long-distance views from the west and east.

**6.158** 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 (forming the headwaters of the River Frome) at Dodington House, and a curving 'bowl' landform at Dyrham Park. The large stately houses of both estates are visually prominent within their open parkland setting. 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.

**6.159** The golf course at Tracy Park (largely in adjacent LCA 11) introduces a highly managed pattern and texture within an existing agricultural landscape of open fields and hedgerows. Tree planting around the golf course helps to reduce its visual prominence in views from the scarp and lower ground to the west.

## **LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp**

**6.160** 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. Important viewpoints from the scarp include Dyrham Deer Park, Old Sodbury Church, the Somerset Monument, and Toghill picnic site, together with views from open parts of the Cotswold Way. These viewpoints provide expansive views of the vale landscape below and as far as Wales in the distance.

**6.161** Church towers form distinctive local landmarks, and 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.

**6.162** 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.

**6.163** Overhead powerlines set on pylons cross the scarp at two locations, north of Little Sodbury and south of the M4, the latter being more noticeable due to the more open surrounding landscape which accentuates the prominence of the pylons on the scarp slope. A single 66-metre wind turbine at Hinton is located in a prominent location at the edge of the scarp and forms a distinctive skyline feature in views from surrounding lower-lying landscapes to the south

#### **LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp**

**Photo 4: The Cotswold Scarp seen from Hawkesbury Common, with the Somerset Monument forming a prominent vertical feature on the skyline.**



## LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp

### Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**6.164** A rural landscape with some tranquil areas. The distant sound of traffic can be heard across much of the LCA, although there are some areas of relatively higher tranquillity, particularly within the small valleys and within areas of enclosure within the wooded parklands.

**6.165** The LCA generally experiences dark night skies, with some localised brighter areas around the Tormarton interchange and M4 motorway.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**6.166** The Cotswold Scarp itself is a Visually Important Hillside located within this LCA. It is a visually prominent escarpment on the edge of the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) which defines a marked change in character from the considerably lower-lying undulating ridges and vales to the west, and the broader plateau/dip slope landscape to the east.

**6.167** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

### Strategic Viewpoints

**6.168** One Strategic Viewpoint is located within this LCA at SVP 14: St John's Church (Old Sodbury). It provides a panoramic view that takes in the notable landscape features of the Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley, the Cotswold Scarp, the historic parkland associated with Dodington House and the hills of South Wales, and the landmark features of St John the Baptist Church, the Tyndale Monument and the Severn Bridge.

**6.169** A further three Strategic Viewpoints are located along the eastern boundary and represent views experienced from the scarp. They are:

- SVP 16: Tog Hill: provides a panoramic view west from the edge of the Cotswold scarp that takes in notable landscape features and

## LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp

landmark features across most of South Gloucestershire, extending to the hills of South Wales.

- SVP 17: Dyrham Park: A designed viewpoint from a Registered Park and Garden and provides a panoramic view west, taking in notable landscape and landmark features across South Gloucestershire, extending to the hills of South Wales, Dundry Hill and the Mendip Hills National Landscape (AONB).
- SVP 18 Freezing Hill provides a panoramic view that takes in notable landscape features of the Ashwicke Ridges (including Hanging Hill), the Lower Hamswell valley, Dundry Hill and the Mendip Hills National Landscape (AONB).

**6.170** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.



## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Valued Features

- Visually distinctive scarp landform marking the edge of the Cotswold plateau.
- Small-scale irregular pasture fields enclosed by hedgerows and dry stone walls which provide a strong landscape pattern.
- Important calcareous grassland habitats which support a diverse and species-rich flora.
- Areas of deciduous woodland, including ancient woodland, some of which are also SNCIs are valued landscape feature and ecologically important.
- Estate parklands including at Dodington Hall, Horton Court, and Dyrham Park create a locally distinctive historic landscape.
- Extensive panoramic views within and from the landscape character area, including to landmark features at Hawkesbury and Tyndale Monuments as well as the Severn Bridges in longer views.
- Nucleated spring-line villages nestled along the toe of the scarp, with stone square church towers forming distinctive local landmarks in views towards and along the scarp.
- Recreational value provided by the Cotswold Way National Trail which traverses much of length of the scarp, as well as areas of open access land which enable further recreational access to the landscape.
- The rural character and sense of tranquillity, with dark night skies across much of the area.

# The Changing Landscape

**6.171** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Cotswold Scarp LCA.

## Climate Change

- Potential changes in woodland and tree species composition, with an increase in pests and diseases, such as acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight.
- Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges. Ancient woodlands may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.

## Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- Pressure to locate renewable energy developments within the South Gloucestershire landscape to contribute towards maximising the generation of renewable energy (as set out in South Gloucestershire's Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-2030). This would likely result in adverse effects on landscape character and visual impact.
- An increase in tree planting is required to contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may include the establishment of new native woodlands in the 'Main Line Gap' - linking woodlands on the Badminton Estate to those at the Dodington Estate (within LCA 4), in the 'Lower Woods Gap' linking the Lower Woods complex with woodland on the escarpment and valleys beyond, and in the 'Tormarton Gap' consolidating a woodland corridor between Dyrham Park to Dodington, as set out in the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy. This may change the open character of the landscape and its expansive views.

## LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp

- Landscape restoration and management continues to make a positive contribution at Dyrham Park, including avenue planting and woodland areas alongside the A46, on the park's eastern boundary and restoration of boundary walls. New tree planting and restoration of walls is also evident at Dodington Park. Such restoration work will contribute to strengthening the landscape framework, biodiversity value, and contribution to climate change.

## Land Use and Cover

- The parkland estates at Dodington House and Dyrham Park influence land use and 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 outside Dodington and Dyrham. However, 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. This would also impact on biodiversity value, including loss of connectivity between habitats.
- 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.

## LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp

- Any changes in land use, particularly grazing and arable practices, are likely to change the visual texture of fields and existing scrub pattern with related impacts on habitat value and species. Pressure for horse keeping is also affecting the character of some areas.
- 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 to the east. Here, they form a strong framework feature, although condition is variable. While some of these features are in decline with a resultant impact on the character of the landscape including its biodiversity value, others have been restored.
- The extent of views are often influenced by mature vegetation and its degree of management. For example, the panoramic view once obtained from Tog Hill 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.

## Development

- The consistent use of Cotswold stone for buildings and other structures, including boundary walls is a key characteristic of the built environment. 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 elevated ground of the scarp makes this character area and its features particularly visible within local and distant views, particularly from the lower-lying vale landscapes to the west. 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 across the adjacent character area to the west. Similarly, certain types of change within this character area could have a wide visual impact.

## LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp

- Features which visually disturb the skyline or cause noticeable change to the physical landform or landscape framework (including wind turbines and solar arrays), have the potential to erode the intrinsic characteristics and distinctiveness of the area and its role as a backcloth to many views from the west.

## Guidance

**6.172** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the objectives of the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines [See reference 6] as well as the overarching management strategy objectives of the South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment, as set out in Chapter 4.

### Landscape Strategy

### Landscape Management

- Protect key views to and from the escarpment and maintain its rural character both in local views and as a backcloth to views across adjacent character areas to the west, including views from the A46.
- Avoid development, or new woodland planting, that may restrict or obscure views to the upper scarp slopes and distinctive features such as folly towers and hill forts.
- Ensure new woodlands respond to the scale and form of the existing escarpment woodlands; retain the irregular form of woodland and its relationship to landform and interlocking patterns with hedgerows. Extend and link existing woodlands in preference of creating new stand-alone woodland, where possible. Any new planting should reflect the detailed guidance set out in the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines Strategy Area 2: Escarpment.



## LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp

- Securing succession planting for veteran trees, such as the distinctive line of Beech trees at Freezing Hill.
- Restore, conserve and manage the dry stone wall and/or hedgerow and woodland framework and pattern in a manner that reinforces their landscape pattern and biodiversity value and as appropriate to the local landscape.
- Retain and repair Cotswold stone walls, which are an intrinsic feature of this LCA. For example, the stone walls around Dodington have been repaired recently and make a valuable contribution to local character.
- Avoid the introduction of features and land uses that can harm landscape character and biodiversity, including uncharacteristic planting and field boundaries, the subdivision of fields by electrified and post and rail fences, as well as the degradation of the sward by overgrazing.
- Respect and conserve the historic landscapes, field systems around Dyrham and Hinton, earthworks and other associated features that contribute to the character and interest of the area.
- Support the ongoing active management of parkland at Horton Court, Dyrham Park and Dodington House, including preservation of its historic character, fabric and features. Planting associated with designed landscapes should use species characteristic of the historic landscape. Ensure new planting does not damage archaeological features or their setting.
- Preserve and enhance the landscape setting of Hawkesbury, Horton, and Dyrham Conservation Areas, together with key views towards and from them. Also, protect the remaining rural, open approaches into Hawkesbury Upton village.
- Protect and enhance the notable views towards and from the Somerset Monument at Hawkesbury, and Grade II\* registered parks and gardens of Dyrham Park and Dodington Park.

### Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Ensure the grassland corridor along the scarp remains intact and that woodland creation does not result in the loss of permanent pasture or unimproved grassland, but instead is designed to extend the mosaic of grassland and woodland.
- Ensure new woodland planting uses native species and is appropriately located, in line with The Forest of Avon Plan Tree and Woodland Strategy and Forestry England's 'right tree, right place' guidance.

### Development Management

- Conserve the rural Cotswold skyline, avoiding vertical elements and lighting that could impact on the particular characteristics and natural beauty of the wider landscape character area and also on views across the character areas to the west.
- Ensure that any new development and structures are sensitively located avoid the need for earthworks that disrupt the landform, and where necessary screened from the wider landscape to avoid eroding the rural character of the locality.
- Any new vertical development should avoid dominating, or visually competing with, other landmark landscape features or heritage assets in the character area.
- Protect the rural and tranquil character of the landscape by avoiding intrusive lighting and structures, and by controlling the introduction of new sources of noise. Dark skies should be preserved.
- Protect the nucleated settlement pattern, including the network of sunken lanes that follow the folds and valleys, particularly in the north of the LCA.
- New development including buildings and other structures should use locally appropriate materials such as locally sourced Cotswold stone of the appropriate colour and texture that respect and enhances local distinctiveness and the traditional character of the area.

#### **LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp**

- Ensure that new development does not harm the character, significance or setting of the historic designed parklands and gardens associated with Horton Court, Dyrham Park and Dodington House.
- Ensure that any new renewable energy developments including wind turbines and solar arrays are sensitively designed and sited, avoiding prominent slopes and ridgelines. Utilise natural undulations and new or existing vegetation to provide visual screening.

# References

- 1 Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines (2016). Available at: <https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/our-landscape/landscape-strategy-guidelines/>
- 2 Forest of Avon Trust and West of England Nature Partnership, The Forest of Avon Plan: A Tree and Woodland Strategy for the West of England. Available at: <https://forestofavontrust.org/forest-of-avon-plan/>
- 3 Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025 (2022). Available at: <https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2023-25-CNL-Management-Plan-Adopted.pdf>
- 4 Forest of Avon Trust and West of England Nature Partnership, The Forest of Avon Plan: A Tree and Woodland Strategy for the West of England. Available at: <https://forestofavontrust.org/forest-of-avon-plan/>
- 5 Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines (2016). Available at: <https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/our-landscape/landscape-strategy-guidelines/>
- 6 Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines (2016). Available at: <https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/our-landscape/landscape-strategy-guidelines/>

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# **South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment**

## **Supplementary Planning Document**

### **South Gloucestershire Council**

**Final Draft Report proposed for adoption**

Prepared by LUC

February 2025

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1	First Draft	LUC	LUC	LUC	09.06.2023
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South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment

## **Chapter 7: Shallow Ridge LCT**

LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale

LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley



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**Note: Each chapter is produced as a separate document for ease of reading and navigation.**

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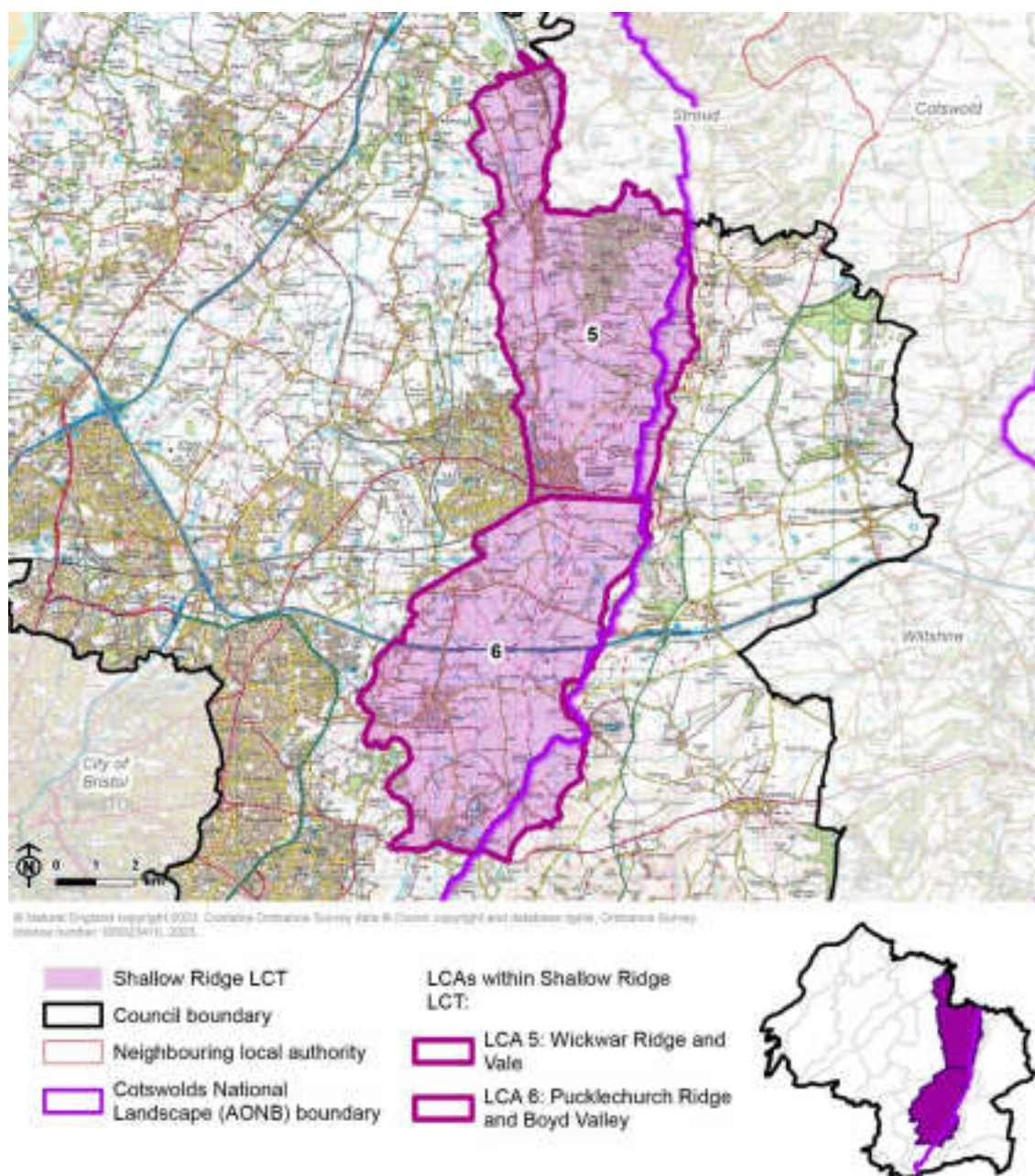
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## Chapter 7

### Shallow Ridge LCT

Figure 7.1: Location of Shallow Ridge LCT



# Description

**7.1** The Shallow Ridge Landscape Character Type (LCT) is located to the west of the plateau and scarp. The LCT is defined by a shallow and undulating ridge that runs north to south across the eastern half of South Gloucestershire, from approximately Wickwar, past Pucklechurch, to Bitton (within the Enclosed Valleys LCT).

## Key Characteristics

- A large-scale undulating valley landscape which sits below and west of the Cotswold scarp.
- A shallow ridge provides containment to the lower vale landscape and the conurbation of Bristol to the west.
- The topography of the ridge varies from a simple, undulating landform to a more complex topography.
- Mixed land cover includes unenclosed common, heathland, woodland (including the extensive Lower Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)), mixed pasture and arable fields.
- Varied field boundaries comprise a mix of clipped or overgrown hedges, linear bands of trees and fencing.
- Quarries are associated with the ridgeline in the west.
- A network of lanes, minor roads and public rights of way cross the landscape, including sections of The Jubilee Way, Monarch's Way, Frome Valley Walkway and the Circular Rides.
- Numerous villages and small towns all with historic cores, are well-integrated with the surrounding rural landscape, such as Charfield, Wickwar, Pucklechurch and Wick.

## Landscape Character Areas

**7.2** The Shallow Ridge LCT is subdivided into two landscape character areas (LCAs):

- LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge & Vale
- LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley

## LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale

The Wickwar Ridge and Vale landscape character area (LCA) is a diverse undulating landscape characterised by a mix of farmland, woodland and common.

**Photo 1: Pastoral fields with varied field boundaries, with the Cotswold Scarp and Somerset Monument in the background of the view.**



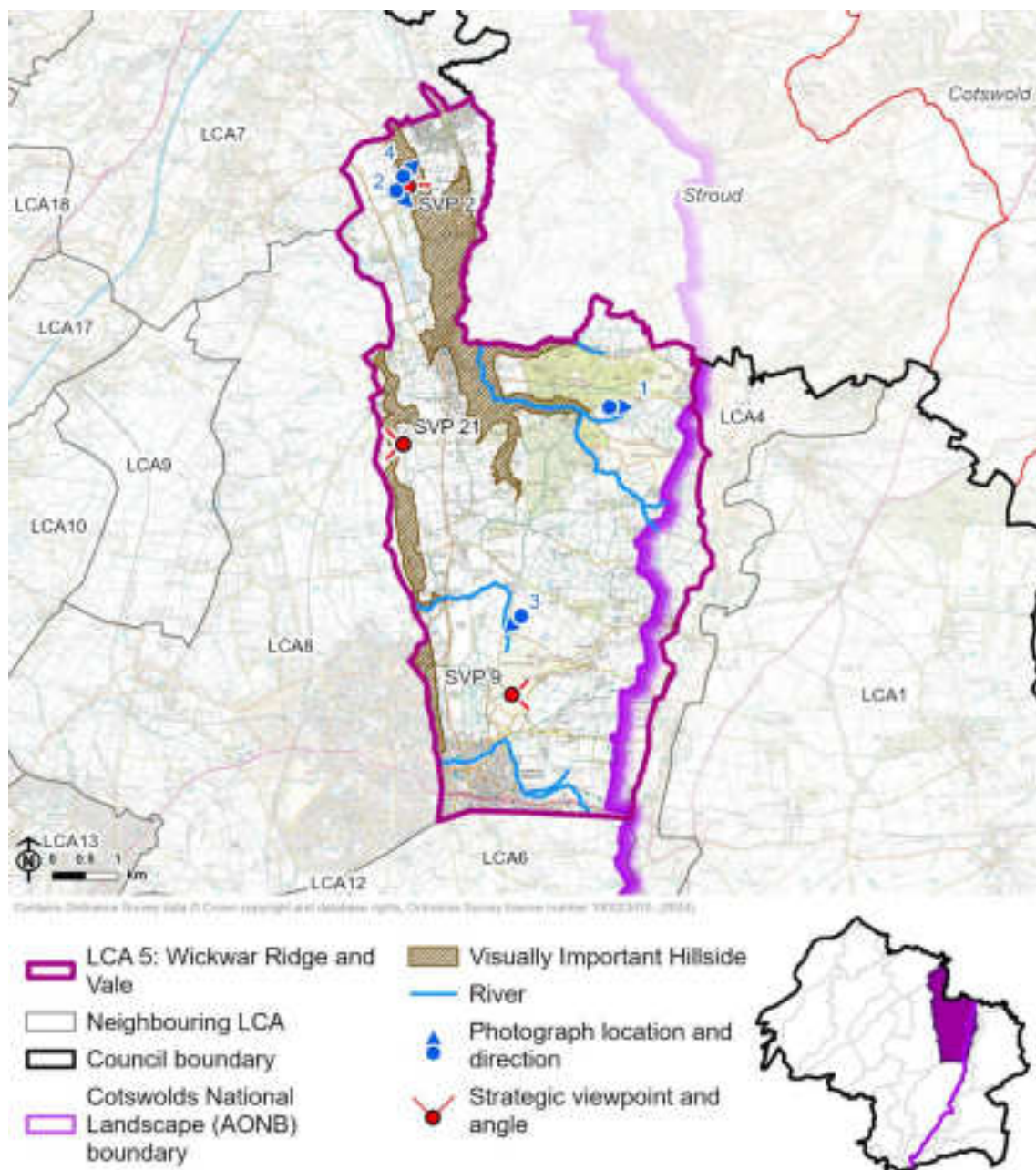
### Location

**7.3** The Wickwar Ridge and Vale LCA is located in the north-east of South Gloucestershire. The northern boundary of the LCA follows the settlement edge of Charfield and the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary. The eastern boundary follows the approximate toe of the Cotswold Scarp. 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, with the boundary approximately following the toe of the Wickwar Ridge and the division between Yate and Chipping Sodbury.



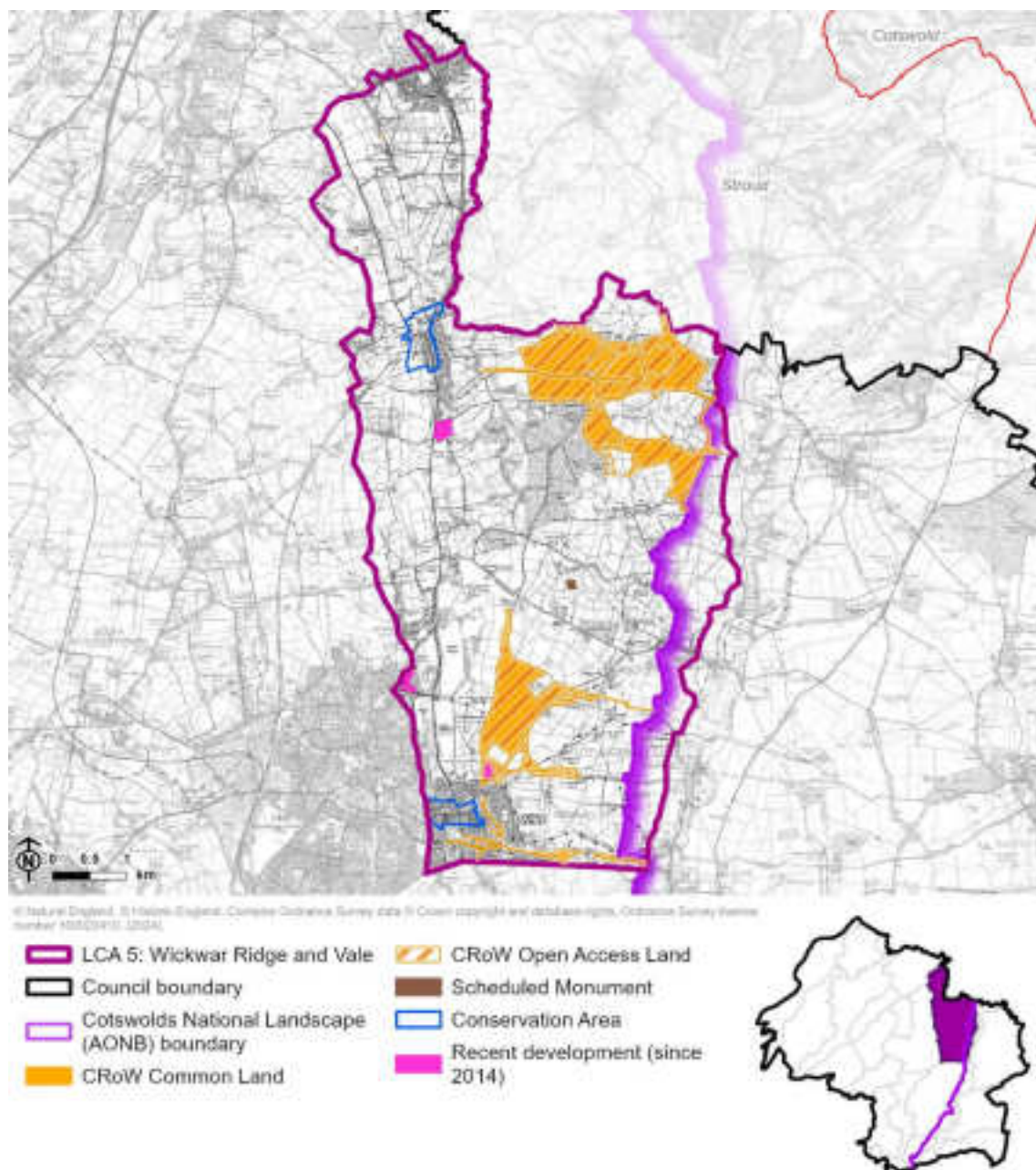
## LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale

Figure 7.2: Location and Landscape Setting of LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale



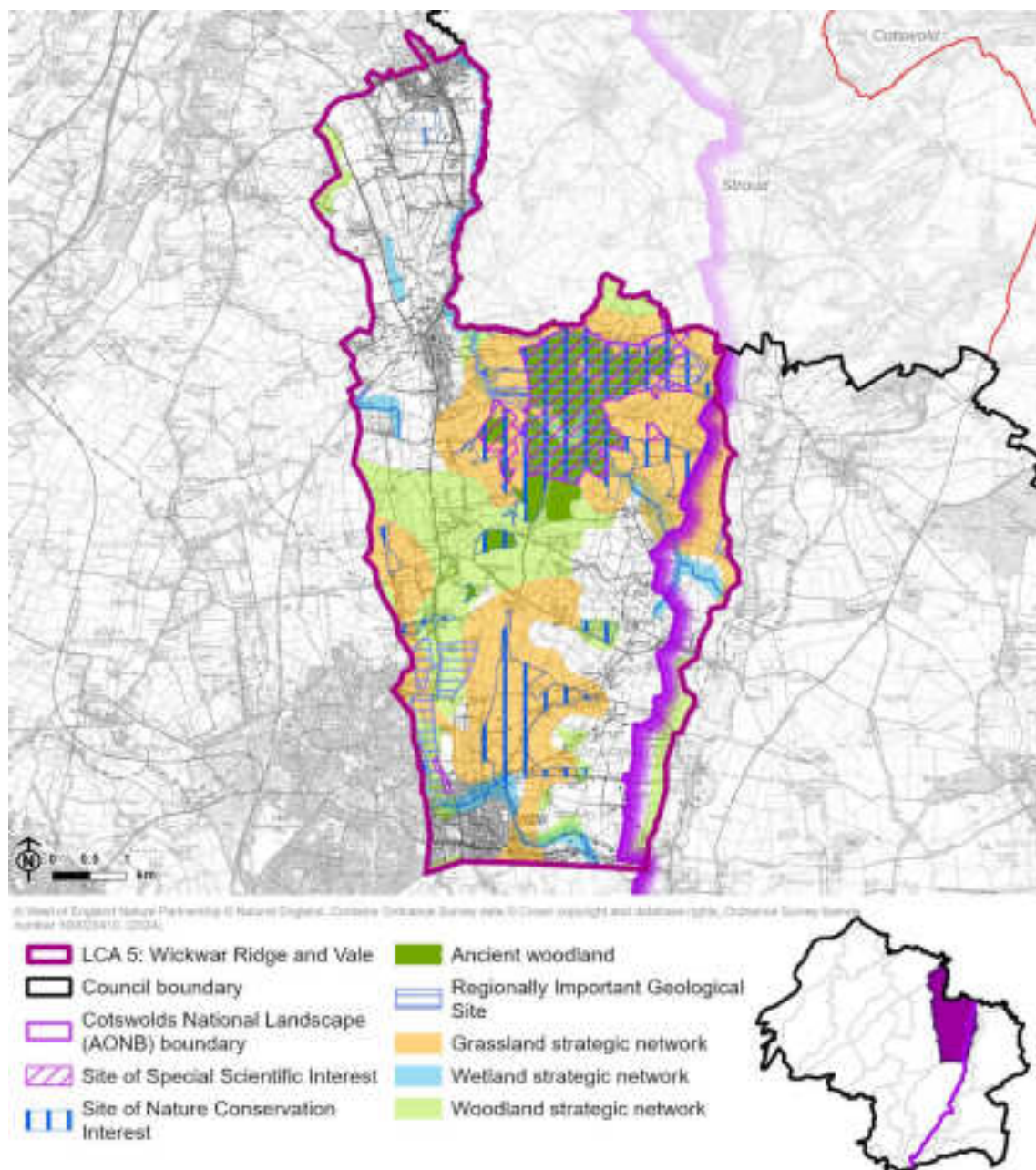
## LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale

**Figure 7.3: Development and Heritage context of LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale**



## LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale

Figure 7.4: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale





## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- A large-scale undulating landscape characterises much of the LCA, with the small to medium-scale Little Avon River valley in the north.
- The LCA is enclosed by the LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp to the east, which forms a significant backcloth and provides extensive views over the area.
- The Wickwar Ridge in the west forms a distinctive landscape feature, particularly in views from LCA 8: Yate Vale and provides expansive westward views across the landscape north of Yate.
- The varied rural landscape is characterised by irregular, small to medium mixed pasture and arable fields defined by hedgerows, with trees and small areas of woodland interspersed with commons.
- Rural tranquillity and dark night skies are strongly experienced, particularly in the north and north-east of the LCA.
- The extensive Lower Woods complex forms one of the largest areas of ancient woodland in the south-west of England and has a close interrelationship with the adjoining common land.
- Commons of varying sizes, characterised by rough grassland and scrub, contribute to the distinctiveness of the landscape.
- An extensive mosaic of calcareous grassland is present across the LCA, supporting a diverse range of flora and species-rich grassland.
- Watercourses and associated tributaries of Little Avon River, River Frome and Ladden Brook form sinuous and wooded small-scale features within the LCA.
- The limited settlement pattern is concentrated in one historic small town (Chipping Sodbury), the historic village of Wickwar and the village of Charfield, and is scattered elsewhere.

## LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale

- Views are expansive, particularly from commons, more elevated locations and the edges of Churchend and Charfield. Elsewhere, views are largely contained by landform, woodland and hedgerows.
- Tranquillity and dark night skies are experienced across much of the LCA, particularly in the north and north-east.
- Two quarries, two golf courses, 'B' roads, small settlements, a railway line and powerlines have a local influence on landscape character.

## Natural Influences

### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**7.4** 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 approximately 80 metres and 100 metres AOD) and a central sloping vale. The visually dominant Cotswold Scarp defines the eastern edge of the LCA, and the Churchend Ridge runs on a north-south alignment in the north.

**7.5** To the north, between Wickwar and Charfield, lies the Little Avon River valley, with land falling from approximately 80 metres AOD along the Wickwar Ridge to 30 metres AOD within the valley. The Little Avon River flows northwards along a tightly meandering course. The valley is small-scale and steep sided, enclosed by the Churchend Ridge to the west 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.

**7.6** Around Lower 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 relatively flat vale in the area of Sodbury



## **LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale**

Common. From this area the ground rises gently eastwards to the LCA boundary before rising steeply, forming the Cotswold Scarp.

**7.7** In the south of the LCA, tributaries of the Ladden Brook flow northwards across Sodbury Common, before turning westwards out of the LCA. To the south-east, tributaries of the River Frome flow generally westwards out of the LCA. There is a scattering of small ponds around Charfield and Wickwar.

### **Land Cover**

**7.8** The Wickwar Ridge and Vale LCA includes a diverse mix of land cover. Woodland is a predominant feature, particularly in the north of the LCA, with the large area of Lower Woods, east of Wickwar. Copses and smaller areas of woodland are also scattered throughout the rest of the LCA.

**7.9** Lower Woods is an extensive area of ancient woodland (280 hectares) comprising 23 woods and coppices separated by ancient grassy 'trenches' and tracks. Its boundaries have remained unchanged for several centuries, and it is a unique feature, both within this LCA and South Gloucestershire as a whole. The woodland includes a complex pattern of clearings, comprising unimproved common land and 'trenches' (linear clearings providing route-ways through woodland).

**7.10** Field pattern is variable, with predominantly irregular, small to medium sized arable and pastoral fields, typically bound by clipped, thick or intermittent hedges and fences. In the south-west of the LCA the fields tend to be more regular and generally small to medium in size. Hedgerow trees are mature, intermittent or in linear belts.

**7.11** Intermixed with the farmland are large commons of open rough grassland, including Inglestone and Hawkesbury in the east and Sodbury Common near the southern boundary. 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,

## **LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale**

where woodland was removed by small-scale enclosure and felling. Remaining trees may either predate the field formation or are successor trees. Colts Green Common, comprising a single field of wildflower meadow, lies to the east of Chipping Sodbury, sandwiched between the A432 and the railway.

**7.12** 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.

**7.13** Some areas of horse keeping near settlement edges has led to subdivision of fields and the proliferation of small buildings, sheds and stables.

**7.14** There are a number of limestone quarries in the area, both active and disused. The Chipping Sodbury Quarry, located along the south-western boundary of the LCA, is an extensive active site. The linear and flooded Barnhill Quarry lies to the south. Part of the quarry is a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), while other areas were redeveloped for retail and housing development. Mature planting along the B4060 screens the existing working areas, including the plant site at Southfields, and active and expanding workings at the Hampstead Farm site. Wickwar Quarry lies on the north-western boundary of the LCA, to the north-west of Wickwar. The disused quarry area and plant to the west has an active landfill scheme which will lead to restoration for agriculture. Active quarrying takes place to the east of the B4509, and there is a consented proposal for an extension of the quarry northwards.

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

**Photo 2: Mixed farmland with partially wooded field boundaries.**



### Biodiversity

**7.16** This LCA includes an important mosaic of grassland, both neutral and calcareous, woodland (including significant areas of ancient woodland), arable and pastoral farmland dissected by watercourses and with scattered ponds. These habitats are generally well-connected by wildlife corridors including hedgerows. They combine to form an important range of habitats for diverse species.

**7.17** The eastern edge of the Wickwar Ridge and Vale LCA runs along the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) which is of national importance for habitats such as calcareous grassland and ancient woodlands. This LCA also includes approximately 280 hectares of ancient woodland, which is mainly located within Lower Woods, although smaller scattered copses are also present. Lower Woods is of significant nature conservation value, designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Site of Nature Conservation

## **LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale**

Interest (SNCI) and a Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve. At 300 hectares, Lower Woods is one of the largest areas of ancient woodland in the south-west, and there is also a Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS) within the woodland area. The interrelated woodland and grazed common land comprise priority habitat deciduous woodland, lowland meadows and good-quality semi-improved grassland.

**7.18** The SNCIs within this LCA, some of which are designated as SSSIs, comprise a mosaic of habitats including grassland, broadleaved woodland (including large areas of the ancient woodland) and flowing open water represented by the Little Avon River and the River Frome. Key species associated with the ancient woodland include bats and dormice, both of which are present across the wider area and are UK priority species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP). Good connectivity exists for species such as these between the wooded areas and other habitats via hedgerows and scattered trees.

**7.19** There are nine sites within the Wickwar Ridge and Valley LCA designated as SNCIs for calcareous and neutral grassland, including species-rich grassland. This diverse habitat supports a range of invertebrates and ant hills are a regular feature. These invertebrates in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats.

**7.20** There are many watercourses and associated tributaries which dissect the landscape through this area. Three watercourses are designated as SNCIs for the flowing water and bankside vegetation; the Little Avon River, the River Frome and a tributary of Ladden Brook. These watercourses support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and water voles. Ponds and pools within the area support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species) which are vulnerable to any loss of habitat including the ponds and surrounding terrestrial habitat.

**7.21** There are extensive areas of arable farmland, an ideal habitat for many species of ground nesting farmland birds including birds listed on the Red List of

## LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale

Threatened Species. Winter stubble provides a valuable winter time foraging resource for many farmland birds.

**7.22** There are disused and working quarries and mines across this area which can provide an ideal habitat for many species of bat including European Protected Species.

**7.23** A number of Strategic Green and Blue-Green Infrastructure Corridors fall within the LCA. Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor D: Wickwar-Westerleigh-Bitton (*Westerleigh Vale/Oldland Ridge/East Fringe*) covers most of the LCA and Corridor B: Charfield-Alveston-Hallen (*Western Scarp/Severn Ridges*) crosses into the north of the LCA. A small area of the Strategic Blue-Green Infrastructure Corridor G: Wickwar-Iron Acton (*Ladden Valley*) crosses into the west of the LCA (along a tributary of Ladden Brook), Corridor I: Huntingford-Charfield-Wickwar (*Little Avon River Corridor*) passes along the north-eastern boundary of the LCA (along the Little Avon River) and Corridor C: Winterbourne-Kendleshire-Yate (*River Frome Corridor*) crosses the south of the LCA (along the River Frome). Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor E: Hawkesbury-Upton Cheyney-Ashwicke (*Cotswold Scarp and Ashwicke Ridges*) runs along the eastern edge of the LCA, forming a continuation of the strategic woodland and grassland habitats associated with the adjacent Cotswold Scarp.

## Cultural Influences

### Land Use and Time Depth

**7.24** Land use across the Wickwar Ridge and Valley LCA is primarily associated with agricultural practices (a mix of pastoral and arable). This is interspersed with woodlands and some quarry operations.

**7.25** Lower Woods comprises a medieval landscape of individual woodlands including traditionally coppiced woodlands surrounded by ancient woodbanks. These are separated by fingers of grazed common land and old grassy



## **LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale**

pathways known as 'trenches' (linear clearings providing route-ways through woodland).

**7.26** Areas of unenclosed commons are scattered throughout the LCA between woodland and enclosed agricultural fields, with the boundaries of some derived from the process of assarting, where woodland was removed by small-scale enclosure and felling. Many of these commons are remnants of a more extensive network of commons fields which were in use from the late 11<sup>th</sup> century.

**7.27** Remnants of the Roman occupation of the area include earthworks associated with the remains of a Roman villa and bathhouse located in Lower Woods and the remains of a further Roman villa near Springfield Farm (both designated as Scheduled Monuments).

**7.28** The Chipping Sodbury and Wickwar Conservation Areas, with their concentration of listed buildings, add further time depth to the landscape. The Chipping Sodbury Conservation Area is unique within South Gloucestershire and of national importance for its well-preserved medieval town plan and the rich variety of its historic buildings. Houses and buildings within the historic core of Chipping Sodbury Conservation Area are constructed of local limestone with some rendered buildings. The church forms a visible focal point when viewed from the wider landscape. Wickwar was the first village in the UK to be lit by electricity and a number of the original distribution poles survive. The Grade II\* listed Wickwar church, 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 Monument) contribute to its historic character. Historic features within the wider landscape setting of the Wickwar Conservation Area also contribute to time depth, including the Grade II\* Frith Farm and Grade II\* Oxwick Farm & Coach House.

**7.29** The landscape of the LCA also form the setting for many historic features located within and along its boundary. This includes views from/to the Grade I listed church of St James' at Churchend, the remains of Yate Court (within the LCA 8: Yate Vale); and the Grade II\* listed St John's at Old Sodbury (within

## **LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale**

LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp), including views across the fields east of St John's Way, and the historic deer park with the Grade II listed Park's Farm at its centre.

### **Settlement and Infrastructure**

**7.30** The main settlements within this LCA comprise the small town of Chipping Sodbury and the villages of Wickwar and Charfield.

**7.31** The settlement pattern of the medieval market town of Chipping Sodbury (designated as a Conservation Area) remains virtually unaltered since it was laid out in about 1179 AD. The village developed along a broad market street and grid pattern, with more recent infill housing extending beyond the historic core. The town is physically separated from Yate, being located on the higher ground of Wickwar Ridge. The eastern edge of the town of Yate defines part of the south-western boundary of the LCA.

**7.32** The western edge of Wickwar, also designated as 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.

**7.33** Charfield, on the northern boundary of the LCA also has an historic core. The settlement initially developed at the hamlet of Churchend to the south-west, later expanding towards the railway station, which has a distinctive collection of station buildings.

**7.34** Other small hamlets, farms and houses are scattered throughout the area, usually clustered around the network of minor roads and lanes.

**7.35** The road network is limited within the area and includes 'B' roads and narrow country lanes. The principal roads are generally orientated north to south, including the B4060 between Chipping Sodbury and Wotton-under-Edge and the B4509 between Wickwar and Falfield. Near the Cotswold Scarp, country lanes are orientated north to south, connecting with a number of east-

## **LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale**

west routes, several of which end at isolated farms, with only two continuous routes linking to the wider road network. The A432 runs east-west along the southern margin of the LCA, linking Old Sodbury and Chipping Sodbury.

**7.36** The Bristol to Gloucester railway line passes through the LCA just north of Wickwar, also orientated north to south. It is in a short section of tunnel to the west and north of Wickwar with six stone airshafts following the tunnel alignment at regular intervals. The railway then runs in cutting (with one short section on embankment) before passing through the centre of Charfield, heading northwards. The London to South Wales railway line defines the southern boundary of the LCA.

**7.37** This transport network is supplemented by several promoted recreational routes that cross the south-east of the LCA. The Jubilee Way, Frome Valley Walkway and Monarch's Way cross the south of the LCA, all broadly passing on a west-east alignment towards the Cotswold Way National Trail (within LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp). Two of the series of Circular Rides cross a more extensive area. One route (which forms part of the Avon Cycleway) travels around Lower Woods, linking Horton and Wickwar and passing beyond both the western and eastern LCA boundaries. The other links the edge of Chipping Sodbury with Hawkesbury and Old Sodbury, crossing both Sodbury and Hawkesbury Common.

**7.38** There is a particularly dense and intricate network of public footpaths to the east and south-east of Lower Woods. Paths, tracks and bridleways also follow rides and clearings within Lower Woods. The remainder of the LCA has a more dispersed pattern of paths.

**7.39** Two powerlines cross the area, one east to west, south of Lower Woods and one north to south, west of Wickwar.

## LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale

**Photo 3: View south-west from Sodbury Common towards Chipping Sodbury.**



## Perceptual Influences

### Visual Character

**7.40** A diverse large-scale landscape, the LCA has an undulating and varied 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.

**7.41** The Wickwar Ridge forms a low ridgeline backdrop in views from the adjacent Yate Vale (LCA 8). Panoramic views of the Yate Vale, the Tytherington Ridge, the Severn Ridges and the hills of South Wales are afforded from the Wickwar Ridge. Relatively open views are afforded looking across the central broad vale within the LCA, which is also visible from the LCA 4: Cotswold

## **LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale**

Scarp. Small 'V'-shaped valleys of the Little Avon River are relatively enclosed in character, becoming broader near Charfield where the valleys are visible from local vantages and upper slopes.

**7.42** In the north-east of the LCA, a single extensive area with several isolated blocks of deciduous woodland and strong hedgerow boundaries provides the dominant structure. This results in a sense of enclosure and a remote, tranquil character. Lower Woods, an extensive ancient woodland intermixed with common land, is the most distinctive component of this part of the LCA and is widely visible from the Cotswold Scarp.

**7.43** To the south and north, woodland cover is less dominant. The landscape becomes more open, with views afforded over the agricultural landscape. Mixed pasture and arable land is divided by clipped, laid or intermittent hedgerows, dotted with specimen trees and often supplemented with post and wire fencing.

**7.44** 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 area and the adjacent Cotswold Scarp from the unenclosed roads which cross them. The floriferous meadows are a particularly distinct characteristic of this LCA.

**7.45** Recreational uses have impacted the visual character of the landscape to varying degrees. The character of the two golf courses contrasts with adjacent areas. The informal course on Sodbury Common has little more than flags to demarcate greens within grazed common land. This contrasts with the intensely managed Chipping Sodbury Golf Course, with a more typical combination of mown greens, fairways and enclosure from ornamental trees. The former has very little visual influence upon the landscape and the latter has little influence beyond its boundary. The extension of horse keeping around Chipping Sodbury and extending towards Wickwar has impacted the rural character of the locality.

**7.46** Set within this mixed landscape and enclosed by a combination of woodland, hedges and gently undulating topography, the smaller settlements,



## **LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale**

roads and lanes have little direct visual impact on the surrounding landscape character.

**7.47** The centre of Chipping Sodbury has a unique, enclosed, historic village character, with distant views eastwards towards the Cotswold Scarp obtained along the High Street. Outside of the historic core, 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.

**7.48** More recent residential, commercial and business developments on the north-east edge of Yate (within the adjacent Yate Vale (LCA 8)) are typically more exposed, with few hedgerows and trees along the settlement edge to integrate it with the adjoining landscape. This extensive urban development around Yate is particularly evident in views from the Wickwar Ridge, with Bristol, Purdown ridge and Wales forming distant features on the skyline. The rising slopes and crest of Wickwar Ridge also form an important visual backdrop to the lower-lying Yate Vale (LCA 8) to the west.

**7.49** Charfield, largely nestled within the Little Avon River valley, is relatively hidden in views from the east, set beneath the rising Churchend Ridge. Relatively recent development on the southern edge of Charfield has extended over agricultural fields, the new settlement edge defined by the form of the existing hedgerow field pattern. The settlement edge in the north-east and south-west is quite harsh due its regular shape and limited integration provided by the clipped hedgerows with few hedgerow trees. However, recent development to the south-east and north-west of the village is better integrated by retained wooded field boundaries. Within the village itself, infill development has occurred although areas of open space contribute to the character of the village and provide amenity and play space.

## **LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale**

**7.50** The more elevated parts of Charfield offer expansive views north-eastwards to Wotton-under-Edge and the Cotswold Scarp (both beyond the LCA). Relatively open views north-east are also afforded more widely from the Churchend Ridge, overlooking the Little Avon Valley with skyline features at Wotton-under-Edge and the Cotswold Scarp (both beyond the LCA) seen beyond. Although the surrounding hedgerow structure and wooded scarp slopes provide some containment, parts of the settlement edge are visually prominent, due to the limited screening and elevated location on the skyline.

**7.51** 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, low clipped hedges and very limited tree cover.

**7.52** The linear quarries at Chipping Sodbury 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 vegetation along the edges of roads is of a bold and regular form, which contrasts with the adjacent, irregular rural field pattern. From within the LCA, 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.

**7.53** Two powerlines cross the area to the south and west of Lower Woods and are generally prominent within local views, but are also evident within more distant views from the Cotswold Scarp. Wind turbines, located to the east and west of the LCA, are evident in outward views from the Wickwar Ridge. An existing wind turbine at Oxwick Farm is evident in views locally.

## **LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale**

**Photo 4: Undulating fields with pockets of woodland, and the Cotswold Scarp in the background.**



### Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**7.54** The combination of woodland and strong hedgerow boundaries along fields and lanes creates a sense of enclosure in the north of the LCA, and the rural landscape has a relatively remote and tranquil character.

**7.55** Whilst the active quarries in the west of the LCA are relatively well-screened, dynamic and noise-creating activities associated with their works influence tranquillity locally. These include frequent blasting operations, lorry movements along the road network (particularly the B4060 and B4509) and tailings mounds formed on adjacent land. Despite the size of the quarry the effects on the landscape are generally localised.

**7.56** Traffic volumes along the A432 have a visible and audible local effect within the area eroding its rural character.

**7.57** 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 by mature vegetation, although has an audible effect upon local character and influences the sense of rural tranquillity within localised parts of the LCA.

**7.58** Much of the LCA has a good experience of dark skies with low levels of light pollution, particularly in the north-east. There is some light pollution associated with settlements in the west of the LCA, notably Chipping Sodbury/Yate along the south-western boundary, as well as Charfield and Wickwar.

**7.59** The scenic and perceptual qualities of the eastern part of the LCA, along the Cotswold Scarp, is reflected in its inclusion within the Cotswolds National Landscape.

### Visually Important Hillside

**7.60** The Churchend Ridge and Wickwar Ridge Visually Important Hillside (VIH) are located within this LCA. The eastern edge of the LCA is also flanked by the Cotswold Scarp VIH (located within LCA 4). Key characteristics of each VIH include the following:

- Churchend Ridge VIH: a linear steep ridge with an exposed setting that is visible from the surrounding area, emphasised by the low-lying landscape to the west. The Churchend Ridge VIH forms part of the rural setting of the Wickwar Conservation Area which sits above the Little Avon River.
- Wickwar Ridge VIH: a linear steep ridge that is relatively narrow in width, which extends into the town of Yate. The Wickwar Ridge forms a distinctive landscape feature in views, emphasised by the lower-lying vale landscape to the west.
- Cotswold Scarp VIH: a long and distinctive stretch of escarpment and series of hillsides, which defines the edge of the CNL and a marked change in landscape character. The Cotswold Scarp VIH is prominent in views from across the majority of South Gloucestershire and influences a number of Conservation Areas and RPGs.

**7.61** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillside**.

### Strategic Viewpoints

**7.62** Three Strategic Viewpoints (SVPs) are located within this LCA. They are:

- SVP 2: Churchend: allows an appreciation of the CNL and provides a broad view of the Little Avon Valley and Cotswold Scarp, as well as the landmark features of St James' Church and Wotton-under-Edge BT Tower.
- SVP 9: Sodbury Common: allows an appreciation of the CNL and provides a panoramic view that takes in the notable landscape features of the shallow ridge landscape and Cotswold Scarp, and the landmark features



## LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale

of the Parish Church of St John, the Somerset Monument and the Tyndale Monument.

- SVP 21: Wickwar Ridge: provides a panoramic view that takes in the notable landscape features of the Yate Vale, the Tytherington Ridge, the Severn Ridges, the hills of South Wales, and the landmark feature of the Purdown BT Tower.

**7.63** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Valued Features

- The varied landform that provides visual interest and a sense of place both within the LCA and in views from surrounding areas. This includes extensive views west over the central vale from the LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp and the backdrop formed by the Wickwar Ridge in views east from the Yate Vale (LCA 8).
- The interconnected and diverse pattern of woodland, irregular small to medium-scale pasture and arable fields, hedgerows, scattered mature trees and open commons that contributes to the mixed visual character and habitat connectivity.
- The extensive Lower Woods complex (designated as SSSI, SNCI and a Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve) that forms part of the wider network of ancient and deciduous woodland (priority habitat) and provides habitat for a range of notable species including European Protected Species.
- The extensive mosaic of calcareous grassland (including areas of species-rich grassland) that supports a diverse range of flora and contributes to biodiversity, with some areas designated as SNCIs.

## LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale

- The flowing water and bankside vegetation of watercourses and associated tributaries that provides habitat for a range of notable species and contributes to biodiversity, with some areas designated as SNCIs.
- The historic town of Chipping Sodbury (designated as a Conservation Area), with its elevated position, unaltered medieval layout and use of local limestone, that contributes to time depth and sense of place.
- The historic village of Wickwar (designated as a Conservation Area), with its limestone boundary walls, mature trees, and archaeological remains that contributes to time depth and sense of place.
- Relatively dispersed settlement pattern outside of villages and limited road infrastructure, that contributes to the sense of rurality.
- Extensive views across the wider LCA and towards the LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp from unenclosed commons in the east and south of the LCA that contribute to the distinctive sense of place and visual character.
- The network of public footpaths (including the Jubilee Way, Monarch's Way, Frome Valley Walkway, two Circular Rides and the Avon Cycleway, in addition to public footpaths within Lower Woods) that provide recreational opportunities across the landscape.
- The sense of tranquillity, particularly within the north and north-east of the LCA, and the experience of dark night skies across much of the area.

## The Changing Landscape

**7.64** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Wickwar Ridge and Vale LCA.

### Climate Change

- Climate change and changing land management practices may lead to potential changes in woodland and tree species composition. Increases in severe gales could result in wind damage to woodland edges. Ancient woodlands, including the Lower Woods, may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
- Climate change and changing land management practices may lead to potential changes in flora and an increase in pests and diseases. Ash die back is currently creating changes in the landscape. Dutch elm disease continues to be, 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 has few juvenile trees present to sustain succession and hence this landscape framework and biodiversity network in future decades. Cumulative erosion of these rural features would reduce the integrity and intactness of the landscape structure.
- Climate change leading to increased temperatures and periods of drought resulting in a change in stream flows, altering the species composition of wetland habitats (ponds, flowing open water and bankside vegetation associated with the Little Avon River, River Frome and Ladden Brook SNCIs).
- Increase in frequency and severity of seasonal flooding as a result of climate change, particularly in the south of the LCA along tributaries of the River Frome. Associated pressures to build flood management engineering works which are not sympathetic to local landscape character and sensitive habitats.

### Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- Large extents of the area are overlooked from the Cotswold Scarp and to a lesser extent from Wotton-under-Edge, beyond the LCA to the east and north. Coupled with the general open nature of this area, any change may

## LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale

be visible and could introduce a discordant element into the distinctive character of the area. Potential pressure for wind turbines and associated electricity infrastructure on the Wickwar Ridge has the potential for significant impact on the character of the wider landscape.

- An increase in tree planting is required to contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network [\[See reference 1\]](#). This may include the establishment of new native woodlands within the 'Lower Woods Gap' between Lower Woods and the LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp as set out in the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy. This may change the open character of the landscape and its expansive views, most notably views towards the Cotswold Scarp.

## Land Use and Cover

- The LCA's landscape features and its habitats are in varying condition and state of management and subject to varying degrees of pressure for change, particularly in the south and central parts of the LCA. In the west of the LCA, new neighbourhoods will result in a northerly extension of the urban influence of Yate and, to a lesser extent, Chipping Sodbury. This will be likely to increase recreational pressures on the Wickwar Ridge area in particular.
- Lower Woods is owned by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and managed as a Nature Reserve, 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. The ongoing management of this Nature Reserve, which will ensure its conservation and habitat value, including operations such as thinning, coppicing and scrub clearance can result in a degree of visible change, of varying scale, but will be appropriate to the woodland retaining its essential character and ecological value.

## LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale

- The intricate network of footpaths and promoted 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 is particularly evident. These areas are also prone to informal recreational pressures.
- The Hawkesbury, Inglestone, Assley and Hareley Commons will be managed under the Higher Tier, Countryside Stewardship [\[See reference 2\]](#) scheme until 2030. Management will focus on the restoration of grassland, ponds, hedges, wood pasture and parkland. This will conserve the traditional open character, on balance with enhancing the biodiversity value of the commons.
- Some of the existing hedgerow and tree framework of the Wickwar Ridge and Vale LCA is in poor condition. Many of the hedgerows have been replaced by stock fencing, particularly in the south.

## Development

- The distinctive character of the area has already been eroded in some locations. Areas of large-scale land use and built development of a regular pattern or bold linear form is visually discordant within the irregular rural framework. This is evident along the LCA's western boundary, where large-scale quarrying follows the line of the Wickwar Ridge. Associated linear tree screens have little relationship with local field patterns.
- The northern settlement edge of Yate (visible beyond this LCA) has little vegetation or landform structure to provide physical or visual integration with the adjacent rural area.
- The exposed, regular settlement edge of Wickwar and the north-east and south-west of Charfield, perched on the skyline above the Little Avon Valley, is stark and intrusive.



## LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale

- The extension of horse keeping across the landscapes around Chipping Sodbury and up to Wickwar results in the subdivision of fields and the proliferation of small buildings, sheds, stables, access points and fencing, while floodlighting can erode tranquillity and disrupt wildlife.
- Relatively recent residential development north of Chipping Sodbury has extended the influence of settlement further north into the countryside, though retained woodland and field boundaries minimise influence. The disused area of Barnhill Quarry was partially infilled at the southern end to facilitate retail and housing development, which is well-integrated by woodland to the west.
- The ridgeline and lower slopes of the Wickwar Ridge make an important visual contribution to views from the edge of Yate, particularly from slightly elevated open ground within Yate, such as at Tyler's Field and from the Yate Vale (LCA 8) 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, or physically limit views from the ridgeline over lower areas to the west.
- Conversely, relatively recent development located within the landscape to the north of Yate is open to view from the adjacent Wickwar Ridge.
- The use of barns for non-agricultural uses and the storage of caravans north and north-east of Chipping Sodbury influences the rural character locally.
- The addition of modern buildings and structures within farmsteads and rural areas, where prominent, would potentially be visually intrusive. This can influence the character of the area and views overlooking the area from higher ground outside the LCA.
- Noise and visual activity, associated with the ongoing and future use of quarries, principal roads and railway within the area, locally erode the perception of tranquillity within this LCA.
- Chipping Sodbury Quarry has recently extended to the north. This has resulted in a localised loss of field pattern, field boundaries and trees.
- Quarrying of the western site could potentially result in the removal of existing farm buildings at Brinsham Farm and the excavation of a small hill

## LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale

at Wickwar Ridge. The final restoration of the quarries to water will significantly alter the character of the ridge.

- Wickwar Quarry has recently expanded further north along the eastern side of the B4509 towards Churchend. Proposals for the progressive restoration of sections of the Wickwar quarry are coming forward.
- The Wickwar Ridge currently forms a natural, largely undeveloped landform and visible backdrop to views from the adjacent LCA 8: Yate Vale. 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.

# Guidance

**7.65** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the objectives of the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines [See reference 3], as well as the overarching management strategy objectives set out in Chapter 4.

## Landscape Strategy

### Landscape Management

- Protect and manage areas that are within the CNL in line with the CNL Management Plan [See reference 4] to conserve the highly valued visual and perceptual qualities of the landscape.
- New hedgerow trees, small, wooded copses, and natural regeneration should be encouraged within the historic field framework and be designed to respect its intrinsic character.
- Establish native woodlands, tree and/or wide hedgerow boundaries in the 'Lower Woods Gap' linking the Lower Woods complex, woodland on the escarpment and valleys beyond it, whilst conserving Grade 2 agricultural land, calcareous grassland and other priority habitats, historic monuments and viewpoints.
- Address potential for flooding issues with the implementation of natural flood management schemes in the south of the LCA, in line with the aims of the River Frome Reconnected project.
- Consider changes to the management of highway verges in suitable areas including the A432 in the south of the LCA, contributing to the Highway Verges for Nature programme to improve and connect habitat for nature, and climate change adaptation and resilience.

- Preserve and enhance the landscape setting of Wickwar and Chipping Sodbury Conservation Areas, together with key views towards them and looking out from them; including the distinctive landscape setting of Grade II\* Wickwar church, Grade II\* Frith Farm and Grade II\* Oxwick Farm & Coach House.
- Preserve and enhance the landscape setting of the Scheduled Monument of Wickwar Small Roman Town, Grade I listed church of St James' at Churchend and the wider setting of other historic features outside of the LCA, including the remains of Yate Court; and views from/towards the Grade II\* listed St John's at Old Sodbury.

### Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Protect the remaining areas of tranquillity in the north and north-east of the LCA (including Wickwar Ridge, Lower Woods SSSI and Wetmoor Complex, and the commons at Inglestone, Hawkesbury and Sodbury) from disturbance that would harm landscape character and biodiversity including through the control of lighting to retain dark skies and avoiding the introduction of sources of noise.
- Create woodland linkages between Lower Woods and the Cotswold Scarp habitat mosaic, on balance with retaining important views towards landscape and historic features, in line with the aims of the Forest of Avon Plan Tree and Woodland Strategy [\[See reference 5\]](#).
- Protect and enhance ancient woodland, by establishing fringing areas for natural regeneration in appropriate sites, for example at Lower Woods.
- Preserve interrelated areas of lowland meadow and good quality semi-improved grassland priority habitat between the commons and Cotswold Scarp habitat mosaic, in line with the aims of the Forest of Avon Plan Tree and Woodland Strategy.
- Encourage the management of commons by grazing to maintain their open character and distinctive species diversity.

## LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale

- Protect and improve the riparian habitat of the River Frome, and Little Avon River (including protection of its water quality) and seek opportunities to naturalise sections currently impacted by engineering structures (except heritage features), together with enhancement of appropriate recreational access.
- Enhance water vole habitat along the River Frome.
- Encourage restoration of buffer strips along watercourses and field ponds to minimise run off to maintain the biodiversity of wetland features, in line with the aims of the River Frome Reconnected project.
- Support the planting of new wildflower habitats along B-lines within the south and east of the LCA (identified by Buglife), that will contribute to the national pollinator network.

## Development Management

- Protect key views towards the Cotswold Scarp, in addition to outward views west from the Cotswold National Landscape across the wider lower-lying landscape context.
- Any significant vertical features on the skylines of the Cotswold Scarp and Wickwar Ridge should be carefully sited to ensure that the inherent sense of scale, rural character and remoteness of this character area are not compromised.
- Retain and enhance publicly accessible open spaces within settlements such as Charfield to improve their amenity, their contribution to the character of the settlement and biodiversity.
- Ensure that future quarrying, landfill, and restoration proposals take account of the need to protect the landscape character, amenity, distinctiveness, and biodiversity of the area. Quarrying should avoid breaching the slopes of the Wickwar Ridge and Churchend Ridge.



## LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley

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

**Photo 1: View across undulating pastoral fields towards the wooded Cotswold Scarp.**

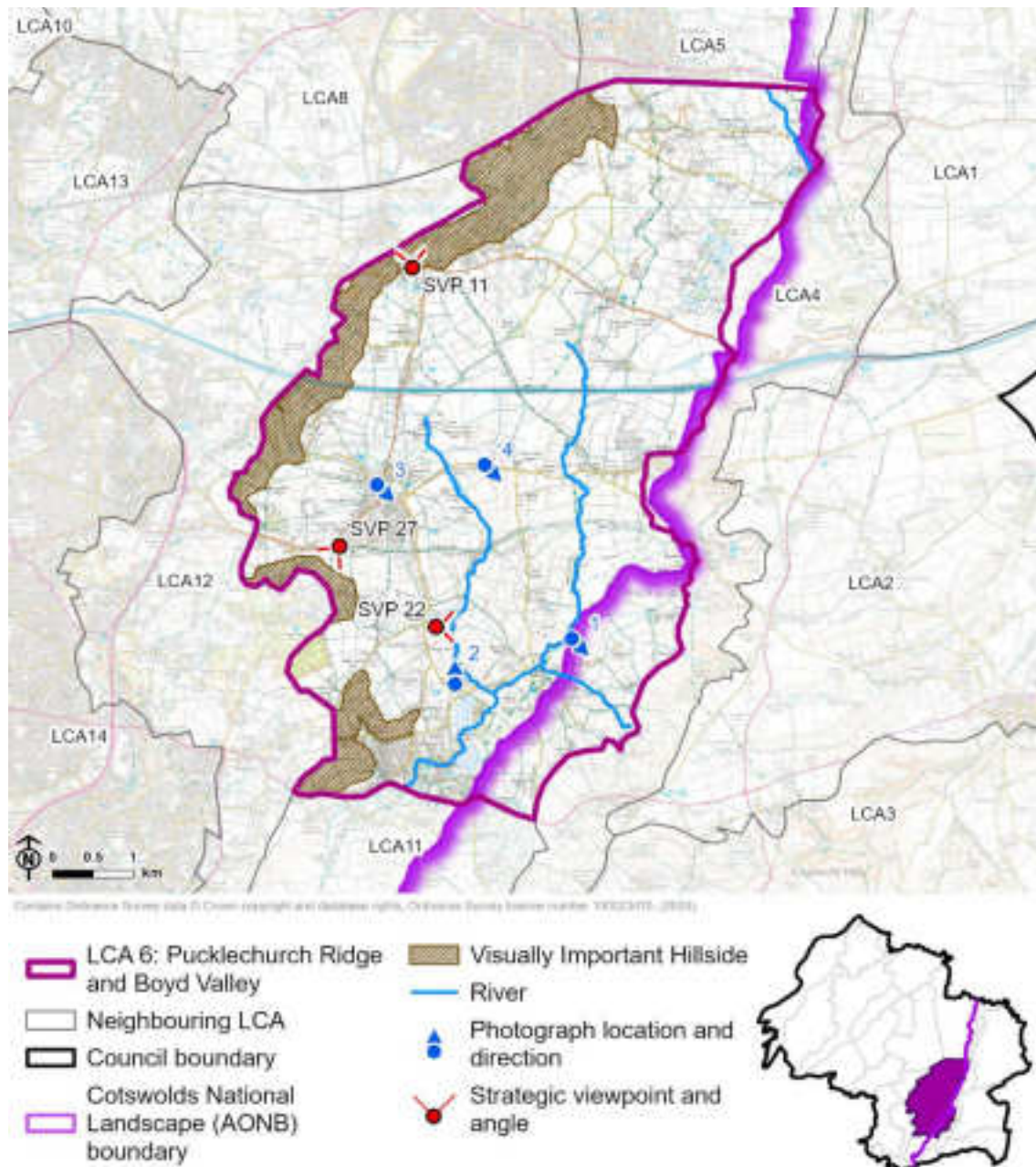


### Location

**7.66** The Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley LCA is located in the east of South Gloucestershire. The northern boundary of this LCA follows the railway and southern settlement edge of Yate and Chipping Sodbury. The eastern boundary follows the base of the LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp. The southern boundary follows the A420. The western boundary follows the toe of the Pucklechurch scarp in the north, and south of the B4465 follows the approximate transition between the higher Pucklechurch plateau to the east and the lower area of commons at Holbrook and Siston to the west (within LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge).

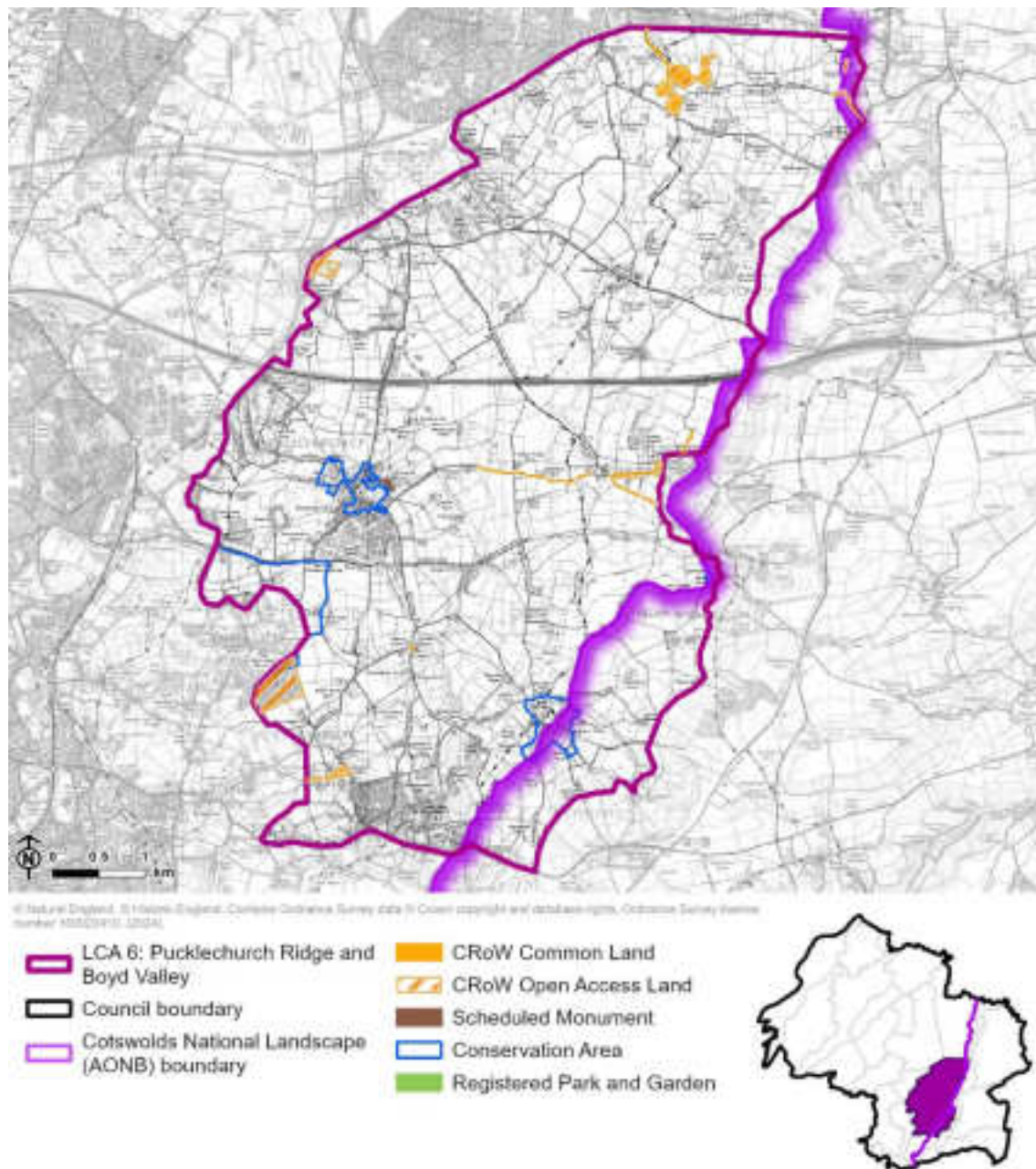
## LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley

Figure 7.5: Location and Landscape Setting of LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley



## LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley

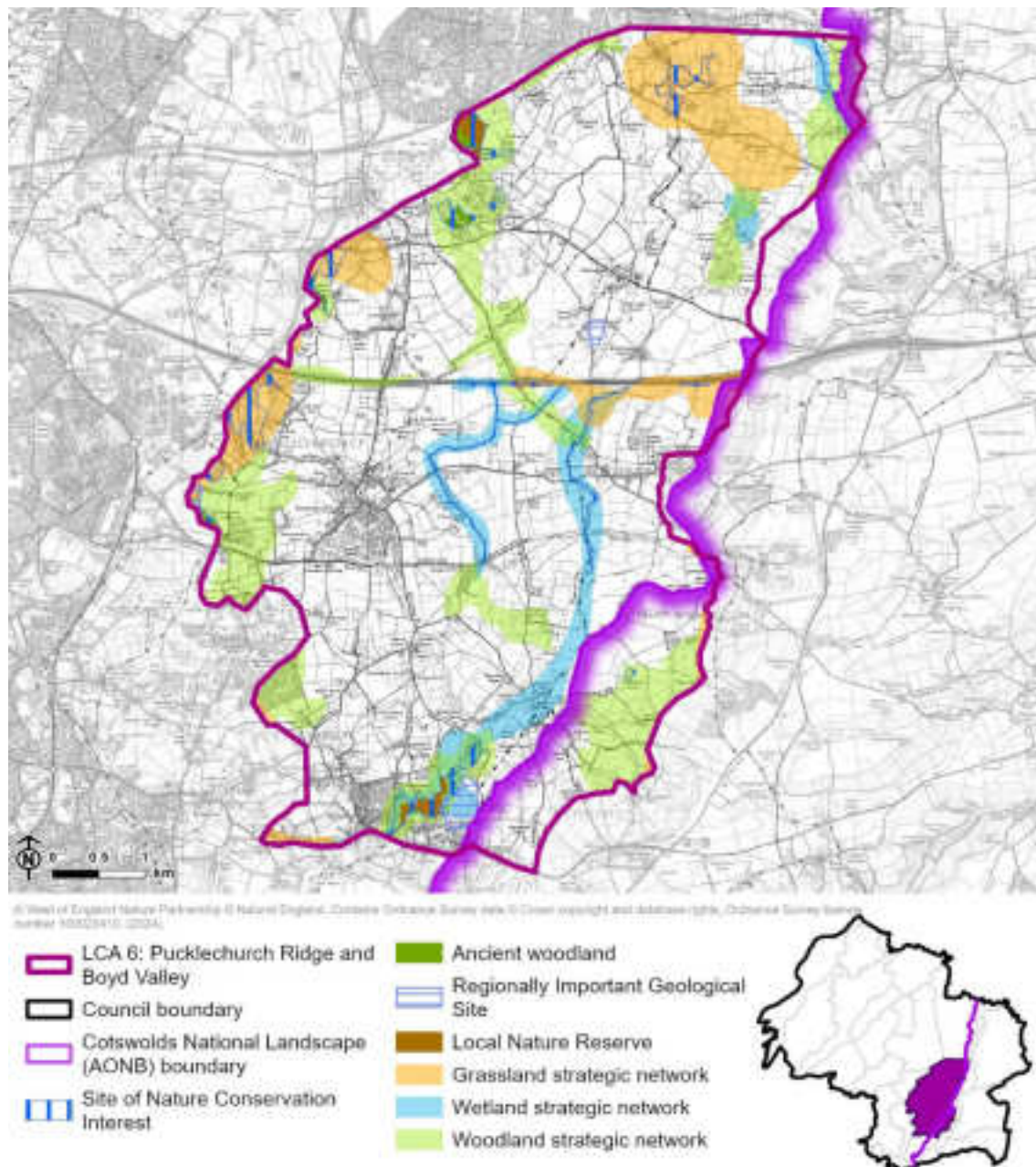
Figure 7.6: Development and Heritage context of LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley





## LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley

Figure 7.7: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley





## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- The large-scale, generally undulating plateau and vale landscape is enclosed by the Pucklechurch Ridge to the north-west and west, and the Cotswold Scarp to the east.
- The gently rolling hills enclosing the River Boyd valley to the south form a contrast to the adjacent ridges.
- The prominent backdrop and skyline formed by the Cotswold Scarp, dominates and encloses views to the east of the LCA. Internal long-distance views are available over the rolling landscape and across the LCA from the LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp.
- The Pucklechurch Ridge with its distinctive landform and textured land cover, forms a prominent backdrop and skyline to adjacent westerly character areas (LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge and LCA 14: Kingswood).
- Land cover consists of medium sized pasture and arable fields, with some larger fields within the plateau, and some smaller fields located on steeper ground.
- Farmland is mixed with distinct areas of commons and infrequent small broadleaved woodlands, some of which is ancient in the north and west of the LCA.
- Areas of calcareous and neutral grassland across the LCA support a diverse range of flora and areas of species-rich grassland.
- Field boundaries comprise predominantly clipped hedges, with limited hedgerow trees and some post and wire fences. Thick, more overgrown hedges and more frequent hedgerow trees are located in the south and south-west.

## LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley

- Watercourses and associated tributaries of Feltham Brook, River Boyd and River Frome form sinuous and wooded small-scale features within the LCA.
- Settlement is concentrated at Pucklechurch and Wick with several small historic villages/hamlets dispersed throughout the LCA.
- Active and disused quarries, with claypits and coal industry relics, are located along the toe of the Pucklechurch Ridge (along the western boundary of the LCA).
- The M4 motorway cuts across the area and influences rural character, with relatively open views across the landscape towards sections of the motorway. Numerous narrow lanes also cross the area, some with wide grass verges.
- Relatively dark night skies are concentrated in the east of the LCA.

## Natural Influences

### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

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

**7.68** 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 south-west comprising low, gently rolling hills and the River Boyd valley. The Cotswold Scarp rises beyond the LCA to the east, forming a prominent large-scale ridgeline.

**7.69** The Pucklechurch Ridge is a pronounced, medium-scale landform rising eastwards from the Westerleigh Vale (LCA 12). The ridge has a prominent scarp edge which varies little in height along its length, at approximately 100-110 metres AOD. However, the northern scarp is more prominent, as the scarp

## **LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley**

toe varies from 80 metres AOD in the south to 65 metres AOD in the north. 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.

**7.70** The plateau landscape to the east of the ridge rises slightly southwards, but is more prominent in the area of Pucklechurch itself, forming a broad dome at around 130 metres AOD. The broad open vale further east includes tributaries of the River Boyd, which drain southwards past Wick, through LCA 11: 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 AOD, rising to around 75 metres AOD on the upper valley slopes.

**7.71** The broadly curving form of the LCA's south-western boundary is partially formed by the upper reaches of the Siston Brook valley. There was an increase in manmade ponds and lakes associated with development at Westerleigh, Dodington and Doynton.

## **Land Cover**

**7.72** 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 fencing, with limited tree cover and infrequent woodland copses. However, subtle differences occur within the LCA.

**7.73** 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. Surrounding the central vale, along the western boundary and to the south towards Doynton, medium, regular shaped pasture fields dominate, divided by a

## **LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley**

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 widespread around Hinton, Abson, Doynton and Wick, as well as on parts of the Pucklechurch Ridge, within the river valleys (including parts of the Boyd Valley) and on some slopes rising to the foot of the Cotswold Scarp.

**7.74** On the scarp face of the Pucklechurch Ridge, medium, regular shaped fields of rough grassland and scrub are 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.

**7.75** Woodland cover is relatively sparse. There are however small woodlands scattered across the northern area and also associated with steeper landforms along the Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley in the south. There was an increase in small woodlands as a result of the Community Forest initiative [\[See reference 6\]](#) which are starting to contribute to the wider landscape.

**7.76** Areas of common land are present in a few locations. In the north, on gentle slopes near the Pucklechurch Ridge is Kingrove Common, a small, irregular shaped area of unimproved grassland and scrub contained by overgrown hedgerows. Wapley Common is also located in the north of the LCA and comprises a small area of open parkland, unimproved grassland and scrub, edged by woodland. The linear Hinton Common to the west of the village comprises broad, roadside grass verges. Near the southern LCA boundary to the north-west of Wick, Holbrook Common comprises a small area with an ordered, regular pattern of broad, roadside verges and open grass fields between scattered properties.

**7.77** The golf course north-east of Codrington includes highly maintained fairways, greens and dense ornamental tree groups. However, the development is fairly well-integrated into the wider landscape due to the retention of hedgerows along the boundaries of the golf course.

## **LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley**

**7.78** There are also a number of quarries and areas of mineral workings. The disused Codrington Quarry is located north of the M4, and the Wick Quarry is located near the southern LCA boundary. The Shortwood Claypit and former Brickworks (now in landfill/progressive restoration) is situated immediately to the west of the LCA (within LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge), but with an earlier tip site now covered by vegetation on the lower slopes of the Pucklechurch Ridge within this LCA. The former Parkfield Colliery, comprising a north and south site, is located along the toe of the ridge. The northern site largely occupies a section of the lower slopes of the ridge within this LCA, near the M4.

**Photo 2: Gently undulating pastoral fields in the south of the LCA, divided by a mix of mature and clipped hedgerows with occasional woodland.**





## **LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley**

### **Biodiversity**

**7.79** This LCA is located adjacent to and partially within the western edge of the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) which contains a range of important habitats including calcareous grassland and ancient woodlands.

**7.80** The LCA comprises a mosaic of grassland, woodland, arable and pastoral farmland with scattered ponds and is dissected by watercourses. Wildlife corridors, such as hedgerows, provide important habitats for a diverse range of species.

**7.81** Key species likely to be associated with the ancient woodland include bats and dormice, both of which are present across the wider area and are UK priority species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP). Hedgerows and scattered trees provide good connectivity between the wooded areas and other habitats for species such as these.

**7.82** There are nine sites within the LCA designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) for their calcareous and neutral grassland, including areas of species-rich grassland. This diverse habitat supports a range of invertebrates and ant hills are a regular feature. The invertebrates also provide a food source for mammals including bats.

**7.83** The Feltham Brook, River Boyd and River Frome are designated as SNCIs for the flowing water and bankside vegetation, which support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and water voles. There are also ponds and pools within the area which support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species). The Golden Valley Local Nature Reserve (LNR) covers part of the Wick Rocks and River Boyd SNCI in the south of the LCA.

**7.84** Small areas of arable farmland provide habitat for a variety of ground nesting farmland birds, including species on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Winter stubble also provides a foraging resource.

## LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley

**7.85** The disused and working quarries across this area provide ideal habitat for many bat species, including European Protected Species.

**7.86** A number of Strategic Green and Blue-Green Infrastructure Corridors fall within the LCA. Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor D: Wickwar-Westerleigh-Bitton (*Westerleigh Vale/Oldland Ridge/East Fringe*) covers the north and western edges of the LCA. Corridor E: Hawkesbury-Upton Cheyney-Ashwicke (*Cotswold Scarp and Ashwicke Ridges*) passes along the eastern boundary of the LCA. Strategic Blue-Green Infrastructure Corridor H: Hinton-Doynton-Bitton (*Boyd Valley*) covers the centre and south of the LCA, while a small area of Corridor C: Winterbourne-Kendleshire-Yate (*River Frome Corridor*) crosses the north-east of the LCA.

## Cultural Influences

### Land Use and Time Depth

**7.87** Land use across the Wickwar Ridge and Valley LCA is associated with agricultural practices (a mix of pastoral and arable), and quarry operations. Areas of unenclosed commons are scattered throughout the LCA, many remnants of a more extensive network of commons which were in use from the late 11<sup>th</sup> century.

**7.88** The Pucklechurch, Siston and Doynton Conservation Areas, with their concentration of listed buildings, historic layout and use of local stone, add further time depth. The Pucklechurch Conservation Area covers the medieval core of the historic settlement, based around the church and manor at Moat House Farm. It is characterised by wide roads, stone houses and boundaries, with the church forming the main focal point. The settlement is situated on an historic trade route from Oxford and London to Bristol, routes which have been significant since Saxon times. Partially evident earthworks associated with an Iron Age enclosed settlement north-east of the Pucklechurch settlement edge contributes to the setting of the Conservation Area. This Scheduled Monument

## **LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley**

also encompasses the presumed site of the Saxon manor house where King Edward was martyred in 946 AD, although the structure no longer remains.

**7.89** The distinctive Elizabethan Siston court lies to the south-west of Pucklechurch, adjacent to the LCA boundary, set above the Siston Brook valley. The building is situated within open land containing elements of a designed 18<sup>th</sup> century landscape park, which is locally designated.

**7.90** Relics of the coal mining industry and brickworks remain immediately adjacent to the foot of the scarp, north of Shortwood. The brickworks and Brandy Bottom Colliery (Scheduled Monument) lie in the adjacent Westerleigh Vale (LCA 12), though they are evident from the Pucklechurch Ridge. The brick chimney of the disused Parkfield Colliery North is located adjacent to the M4.

**7.91** Extensive use of Cotswold stone is distinctive within the small-scale historic settlements and hamlets within the Boyd Valley. 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 St James' Church at Abson and an adjacent barn. 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 (LCA 18) and Oldbury Levels (LCA 19).

**7.92** Parts of the LCA also form the setting for historic features within the Cotswolds National Landscape, including Dyrham Park (Registered Park and Garden), Hinton Hill Fort (Scheduled Monument) and Dodington House (Registered Park and Garden).

### **Settlement and Infrastructure**

**7.93** Settlement within the area comprises large nucleated villages, and dispersed hamlets. Farmsteads are sparsely but evenly distributed throughout the LCA.

**7.94** Pucklechurch is a large village, located on raised ground just south of the M4. The medieval core of the settlement is a Conservation Area, however more recent housing expansion makes up a significant proportion of the village. A large trading estate in the south of the settlement is centred around a series of World War II balloon sheds. A prison complex is also located on high ground on the southern fringes of the settlement.

**7.95** Wick is a large village in the south of the LCA with both a 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 located along the A420. Bury Manor, a large house on an elevated knoll, and Wick Quarry and associated buildings are located immediately to the east.

**7.96** A scattering of small historic villages and hamlets are located within and adjacent to this LCA, including Wapley, Codrington, Parkfield, Abson and Doynton. Dodington, Hinton and Dyrham are spring-line settlements associated with the toe of the Cotswold Scarp, and are partially located on the rising ground of the adjacent character area (LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp). Settlement locations are generally related to roads, junctions and, in places, churches. Parkfield Rank, associated with the disused coal mines along the toe of the scarp, comprises a terrace of properties set along the upper edge of the Pucklechurch scarp.

**7.97** The LCA is crossed by numerous roads. The M4 is the main route through the LCA and runs centrally east to west across 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. The B4465 forms a 'dog leg' running east to west either side of Pucklechurch, but north-south between Pucklechurch and Westerleigh.

## **LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley**

Narrow and often winding lanes are numerous throughout the LCA, generally contained by hedges, some with wide asymmetric grass verges.

**7.98** Only one significant powerline is present, descending from the LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp to pass over the M4 and then runs north-westwards towards Yate.

**7.99** There are several promoted recreational routes across the area. 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 LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp 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 (LCA 12). The Monarch's Way provides a continuous north-south route through the east of the LCA, entering from Chipping Sodbury, crossing Kingrove Common before following the River Boyd valley south, through Codrington, Doynton and Wick.

**7.100** The wider public rights of way network includes extensive linear routes which criss-cross the area, with a denser radiating pattern emanating from Pucklechurch and Doynton. Cycle Route 17 also passes between Pucklechurch and Dyrham.



**Photo 3: Medieval core of the Pucklechurch Conservation Area.**



## Perceptual Influences

### Visual Character

**7.101** The Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley LCA 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.

**7.102** The Cotswold Scarp forms a prominent backcloth and skyline to the east. Extensive open views of this significant landform are possible from a large extent of the LCA, and greatly influence its character. Panoramic views over the LCA are available from the LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp. This LCA is therefore important in providing the setting for the western edge of the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL).

## **LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley**

**7.103** The Pucklechurch Ridge, with its section of scarp, forms a visually prominent backcloth and containment to views from the Westerleigh Vale (LCA 12), the urban edge of Kingswood (LCA 14) and those areas of settlement elevated on rising ground. The two chimneys of the Parkfield Colliery (North and South sites) form local landmarks and are visible against the backdrop of the slope from LCA 12. Panoramic views over the adjacent Westerleigh Vale (LCA 12) are possible, particularly from residential properties located along Parkfield Rank, Shortwood Hill, Westerleigh Hill and footpaths along the scarp edge. These views are focused across the 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. More distant features such as the Severn Ridges (including Baden Hill) and the hills of South Wales are seen beyond the Westerleigh Vale (LCA 12) and Bristol conurbation in these views.

**7.104** The settlement edge and urban area of Emerson's Green/Lyde Green and Kingswood, and large-scale warehouses at Emerald Park are very prominent within views from the western edge of the LCA, though maturing landscape provides some absorption.

**7.105** Above the Pucklechurch Ridge, the mixed agricultural landscape is largely comprised of a patchwork of medium to large, regular shaped fields over a rolling, undulating landform. Hedgerow trees and woodland are generally intermittent, contributing to an open character. A few copses are scattered to the north of the M4, and small woodlands are located along the Pucklechurch scarp, which lead to a semi-enclosed character in these areas.

**7.106** A dense pattern of hedgerow trees and woodland to the south, around Wick and within the curvilinear Boyd Valley, limits views into and out of this part of the LCA. This medium-scale semi-enclosed landscape is diverse and distinctive in appearance. Commons at Kingrove, Wapley, Hinton and Holbrook are visually distinct local areas.

**7.107** The scattered, small-scale historic settlements and hamlets within the Boyd Valley and along the toe of the Cotswold Scarp generally nestle within the

## **LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley**

landscape. They 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. Outward panoramic views of the Feltham Brook valley, the Boyd Valley, the Cotswold Scarp and Doynton Conservation Area are available from St James' Church at Abson.

**7.108** More recent built development at Pucklechurch and Wick, constructed from various materials including brick, render and reconstituted stone, is prominent within local views and from the LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp. The eastern and southern edges of Pucklechurch, which includes housing, a large modern prison and shed buildings associated with the trading estate, are prominent within local views. The lack of integration results from the slightly elevated location of the town, the limited vegetation framework/hedgerow trees along the eastern settlement edge, or within the adjacent agricultural landscape, and the large-scale of some developments. The maturing peripheral landscape scheme around the prison is providing some screening of the prison complex in views from the south. From the LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp, the light-coloured roofs of the large-scale trading estate sheds are visually evident

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

**7.110** The settlement edge of Yate is visible to the north of the LCA, although the undulating topography and vegetation in the surrounding fields limits its visual impact on local views.

**7.111** The buildings and quarry edge of the works at Wick Quarry are visually prominent from the LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp and A420 to the east, due to a lack of screening or vegetation.

**7.112** The M4 and its associated traffic cuts through the centre of the LCA and is highly visible, particularly along the elevated section near Codrington. The

## **LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley**

open landform and limited vegetation emphasise its visual presence. Similarly, the single powerline which crosses the north of the LCA, is also a visible element within the area. Solar farms in the north-east of the LCA are visible locally and in longer views from the Cotswold Scarp. The existing wind turbine near Wapley can be seen in views across the north of the LCA, including from Pucklechurch and the Cotswold Scarp.

**Photo 4: Gently undulating landform with a relatively open character, with distant views to the Cotswold Scarp.**



### Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**7.113** Tranquillity is reduced within some areas of the LCA due to the presence of the M4, which is a source of noise in the centre of the LCA, and the settlements of Pucklechurch and Wick in the south-west. The proximity of the urban edge of Bristol, including the abattoir and oil terminal buildings to the west of the LCA boundary, and the settlement of Yate to the north of the LCA boundary, also disrupt tranquillity.

**7.114** The east of the LCA has a relatively good experience of dark skies with low levels of light pollution. However, light pollution associated with the urban edge of Bristol, Yate, Pucklechurch and Wick influences the experience of dark skies in the west of the LCA.

**7.115** The scenic and perceptual qualities of the south-eastern part of the LCA, along the Cotswold Scarp, is reflected in its inclusion within the Cotswolds National Landscape.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**7.116** The Pucklechurch Ridge Visually Important Hillside (VIH) is located within this LCA, running along the north-western boundary of the LCA. The eastern edge of the LCA is flanked by the Cotswold Scarp (located within LCA 4). A very small part of the Oldland Ridge VIH extends in to the south-west of the LCA. Key characteristics of each VIH include the following:

- Pucklechurch Ridge VIH: a distinctive scarp of folded landform and textured landcover that forms a prominent rising landform and skyline feature in comparison to the lower-lying adjacent areas. The southern part of the Pucklechurch Ridge VIH forms an intrinsic part of the setting to the Siston and Pucklechurch Conservation Areas.



## LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley

- Cotswold Scarp VIH: a long and distinctive stretch of escarpment and series of hillsides, which defines the edge of the CNL and a marked change in landscape character. The Cotswold Scarp VIH is prominent in views from across the majority of South Gloucestershire and influences a number of Conservation Areas and RPGs.
- Oldland Ridge VIH: Part of a larger area comprising the Oldland Ridge and Cotswold Lower Slope, this VIH forms an area of steep ridges and a series of hills separated by the north-south Golden Valley (River Boyd), predominantly falling within LCA 11 and LCA 12. The Oldland Ridge within LCA 6 comprises a rounded ridgetop of rising ground with a distinct rural character, which forms a scenic backdrop to the village of Wick.

**7.117** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

## Strategic Viewpoints

**7.118** Three Strategic Viewpoints (SVP) are located within this LCA. They are:

- SVP 11: Westerleigh Hill: allows some appreciation of the CNL and provides a panoramic view of the vale, the Severn Ridges (including Baden Hill), the hills of South Wales, and the landmark features of St James' Church and St John's Church.
- SVP 22: St James' Church (Abson): allows an appreciation of the CNL and provides a panoramic view of the Feltham Brook valley, the Boyd Valley, the Cotswold Scarp and Doynton Conservation Area, and the landmark features of Doynton House and line of beech trees on Freezing Hill.
- SVP 27: Shortwood Hill (Pucklechurch): provides a panoramic view that takes in the notable landscape features of the shallow ridges, the Pucklechurch Ridge, Overscourt Wood, the Cotswold Scarp, and the landmark features of St Barnabas Church the line of beeches on Freezing Hill.

**7.119** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

# Evaluation

## Key Sensitivities and Valued Features

- Varied landform that provides visual interest and sense of place both within the LCA and from surrounding areas, particularly the prominent backdrop provided by the enclosing ridges of the LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp to the east and the Pucklechurch Ridge to the west.
- The relatively open nature of the landscape, resulting from few scattered woodlands and the patchwork of agricultural fields with open commons, which contribute to the landscape pattern.
- The far-reaching views that are available over this open landscape from the Cotswold Scarp and Pucklechurch Ridge and views towards the Cotswold Scarp contribute to the sense of place.
- The extensive mosaic of calcareous grassland (including areas of species-rich grassland) that supports a diverse range of flora and contributes to biodiversity, with some areas designated as SNCIs.
- The flowing water and bankside vegetation of watercourses and associated tributaries of Feltham Brook, River Boyd and River Frome, that provides habitat for a range of notable species and contributes to biodiversity, with some areas designated as SNCIs.
- Mature hedges in the south and south-west which provide habitat connectivity between wooded areas on the Pucklechurch Ridge and in the Boyd Valley.
- The historic villages at Pucklechurch, Doynton and Siston (including Siston Court), which are designated as Conservation Areas for their historic layout and stone buildings that contribute to time depth and sense of place.
- Relics of the industrial landscape located along the western boundary of the LCA that contribute to time depth.

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- The dispersed settlement pattern outside of Pucklechurch and Wick, which contributes to sense of rurality.
- The network of public footpaths and recreational routes, including the Community Forest Path, Monarch's Way, a Circular Ride and Cycle Route 17, that provide recreational opportunities across the landscape.
- The experience of dark night skies in the east of the LCA.

## The Changing Landscape

**7.120** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley LCA.

### Climate Change

- Climate change leading to increased temperatures and periods of drought resulting in a change in stream flows, altering the species composition of wetland habitats (ponds, flowing open water and bankside vegetation associated with the River Frome, River Boyd and Feltham Brook SNCIs).

### Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- Large parts of the area are overlooked from the Cotswold Scarp. The pressure for locating solar farms and wind turbines within the LCA could result in adverse effects on landscape character and on views overlooking the LCA from the Cotswold Scarp. Conversely potential pressure for wind turbines and associated electricity infrastructure on the Cotswold Scarp would have the potential for significant visual impact on the character of the LCA.
- Pressure for extending existing solar PV development to the south of the M4, which could result in adverse cumulative effects on landscape character and visual amenity.

## LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley

- An increase in tree planting is required to contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may include the establishment of new small native woodlands linking existing ones in a corridor based on the Boyd Valley between Wick and Doynton as set out in the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy. This may change the open character of the landscape and its expansive views, most notably views towards the Cotswold Scarp.

## Land Use and Cover

- The pastoral landscape in the south of the LCA, with its thick hedgerow structure, hedgerow trees and occasional copses, appears to be in good condition. However, mature hedgerow trees throughout the area typically have few juvenile replacements present to sustain this framework in future decades, although recent woodland planting between Pucklechurch and the M4 motorway will contribute to the landscape framework in future.
- 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. There is subdivision of fields with varying boundary treatments resulting from horse keeping affecting a wide area. Hedgerow removal has been associated with arable land use, particularly in elevated flat areas, and as a result of quarrying, landfill and golf course development.
- The scattered ponds and pools are vulnerable to any loss of habitat including the terrestrial habitat around ponds as well as the ponds themselves.
- 'Horsiculture' has increased and is now widespread in this LCA, in particular between Pucklechurch and Abson. The cumulative effect of this and associated infrastructure can result in a marked change in landscape character as well as impact on biodiversity. Other uses such as caravan storage, a traveller site to the west of Pucklechurch and the introduction of

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manmade landforms and ornamental planting associated with golf courses are further eroding the traditional rural character of this LCA.

- The Pucklechurch Ridge provides an important backdrop and skyline feature to the adjacent LCA12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge and LCA 14: Kingswood to the west. Rough grassland and scrub are 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. Loss of mature trees would also harm biodiversity value.
- The Shortwood Claypit which is largely contained within the adjacent Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge (LCA 12) immediately to the west has a stockpile of clay that is currently being drawn on. However, the claypit itself is in progressive restoration with phased infilling of sections of the site. The final land raising is expected to result in a landform which is locally convex, rather than the typical 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 and habitat value 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 available.
- Wick Quarry is relatively prominent from the Cotswolds National Landscape. However, maturing planting along the eastern edge is improving its integration into the wider landscape.
- The central and eastern parts of this LCA are sensitive to change, due to their open nature and visibility from the LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp that are integral in providing the landscape setting to the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL).
- The steeper slopes, for example the valley sides and upper slopes of the Boyd Valley around Wick, are sensitive to change which might require landform remodelling, resulting in impact upon landscape form and vegetation framework.



### Development

- The terraced properties at Parkfield Rank form a distinctive and isolated landmark feature which intrudes upon the scarp face of the Pucklechurch Ridge, which otherwise has very few built features. The introduction of significant vertical structures on the ridge could alter the character and perceived scale of this visually prominent landform.
- The abattoir and oil terminal buildings near the scarp toe in the adjoining Westerleigh Vale (LCA 12) 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.
- Relatively recent development at Emerson's Green East/Lyde Green covers an extensive area within the adjacent Westerleigh Vale (LCA 12) to the west and extends between the existing urban edge of Emerson's Green, to and along the toe of the Pucklechurch Ridge. This has resulted in significant landscape change and loss of rural character, and is prominent in views from the Pucklechurch Ridge. New development and structures within this area have affected the visibility, prominence and distinctiveness of the Pucklechurch Ridge, in views from the west and the M4. However, woodland planting along the eastern edge of the development, once mature, will buffer the impact on the adjoining countryside. Further development is proposed to the east of this recent expansion, and is located directly adjacent to the Pucklechurch Ridge.
- The M4 motorway and overhead powerlines are local detractors to landscape character. However, the undulating landform and layered effect of the hedgerows generally limits the impact of roads and other structures on the wider landscape. However, this infrastructure remains evident within elevated long-distance views from the LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp. Reduction or erosion of the hedgerow and tree structure would increase the impact of such elements.
- The lanes are a key characteristic of the landscape and are under pressure from increased traffic with damage to verges and hedges and pressure for highway improvements. Lack of maintenance of the wider grass verges is leading to the development of scrub.

## **LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley**

- Sections of the edge of Pucklechurch are sensitive to change, due to their visual prominence and influence upon local landscape character and views. Future change and particularly expansion of the settlement 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.
- Maintenance works by Network Rail has resulted in the loss of significant swathes of woodland on both cut and embankment slopes in the north of the LCA. This has increased the visual prominence of the railway and trains and also increased the visibility and extended the urbanising influence of Yate in the wider landscape, and reduced wildlife habitat.

# Guidance

**7.121** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the objectives of the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines [See reference 7], as well as the overarching management strategy objectives set out in Chapter 4.

## Landscape Strategy

### Landscape Management

- Protect and manage areas that are within the CNL in line with the CNL Management Plan [See reference 8] to conserve the highly valued visual and perceptual qualities of the landscape.
- Enhancement of the landscape framework should be considered on balance with the open character of the landscape, retaining key views within, across and outward from the LCA. Encourage and focus larger scale woodland planting on lower-lying land.
- Encourage and support the management, restoration and enhancement of the relic industrial landscape and structures of the coal mining industry associated with Parkfield Colliery.
- Actively manage and strengthen hedgerows, trees and woodlands to ensure the conservation of these key features for the long term as well as conserving and enhancing habitat value and connectivity, in line with the aims of the Common Connections project.
- The loss of hedgerows or introduction of fences should be avoided, particularly for mature hedgerows in the south and south-west of the LCA.

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- Address potential for flooding issues with the implementation of natural flood management schemes along the River Frome in the north of the LCA, in line with the aims of the River Frome Reconnected project, and along the River Boyd in the centre and south of the LCA.
- Preserve and enhance the landscape setting of Pucklechurch, Doynton, and Siston Conservation Areas, together with key views towards them and looking out from them. In particular, consider views towards and from the Grade I listed Siston Court and its locally registered 18th century landscaped park.

### Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Conserve and enhance notable habitats (including priority habitat deciduous woodland, good quality semi-improved grassland and other areas of calcareous grassland), ensuring that there is no net loss of biodiversity.
- Enhance grassland connectivity through linking commons and through improved verge management and promote grassland creation.
- Protect, buffer and improve the riparian habitats of the River Frome and River Boyd, particularly the designated habitats at Wick Rocks and River Boyd SNCIs and Golden Valley LNR. Promote opportunities to enhance recreational access to the rivers. Seek opportunities to naturalise sections of the River Frome currently impacted by engineering structures (except heritage features).
- Encourage restoration of buffer strips along watercourses and field ponds to minimise run off to maintain the biodiversity of wetland features, in line with the aims of the River Frome Reconnected project.
- Support the planting of new wildflower habitats along B-lines within the east of the LCA (identified by Buglife), that will contribute to the national pollinator network.
- Consider opportunities for habitat connectivity of deciduous woodland priority habitat, particularly along the settlement edge of Wick and within

## LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley

Wick Rocks and River Boyd SNCI, in line with the aims of the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy.

- Establish woodlands, linking to others, in corridors linking:
- Forestry England's Overscourt Wood and Warmley Forest Park, and also to Shortwood Landfill Site, whilst ensuring conservation of commons and priority habitats, historic monuments and viewpoints.
- Wapley to Kendleshire Golf Course through the 'Westerleigh Gap', ensuring conservation of priority habitats, historic monuments and viewpoints.
- Wapley to Chipping Sodbury, ensuring conservation of priority habitats, historic monuments and viewpoints.
- Promote the creation of a Garden Forest in Pucklechurch and Wick (including planting shrubs and trees in front and back gardens) to enhance amenity and softening of the urban edge.

## Development Management

- Due to the strong visual interrelationship between the LCA and the Cotswold Scarp, development which would be prominent from or interrupt views to the scarp should be avoided in order to preserve the natural beauty of the CNL and its setting.
- Retain the character of key views from high grade heritage assets within the CNL such as Dyrham Park Registered Park and Garden, Hinton Hill Fort (Scheduled Monument) and Dodington House Registered Park and Garden.
- Any significant vertical features on the skylines of the Cotswold Scarp (LCA 4) and the Pucklechurch Ridge should be carefully sited to ensure that the inherent sense of scale and rural character of this LCA, and key views to and from elevated areas, are not compromised.
- Retain the dispersed settlement pattern outside of Pucklechurch and Wick to ensure the sense of rurality is not compromised.



## LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley

- Soften the southern and eastern settlement edge of Pucklechurch, particularly areas of large-scale development, with additional planting that is in keeping with the local landscape character. Retain key outward views towards the Cotswold Scarp from the settlement edge.
- Soften the settlement edge of Wick, particularly prominent development on upper slopes of the Boyd Valley, with additional planting that is in keeping with the local landscape character.
- Further proposals for horse-keeping should be avoided, given the cumulative impact of existing horsiculture. Other non-agricultural uses should be designed to ensure that the character of the wider landscape is conserved.
- Preserve and enhance woodland planting along the M4 to further reduce the influence of the road on the surrounding landscape.
- Protect the experience of dark night skies in the east of the LCA through the control of lighting.
- The restoration of quarry sites should integrate these sites into the surrounding landscapes and enhance biodiversity value.

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# **South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment**

## **Supplementary Planning Document**

### **South Gloucestershire Council**

**Final Draft Report proposed for adoption**

Prepared by LUC

February 2025

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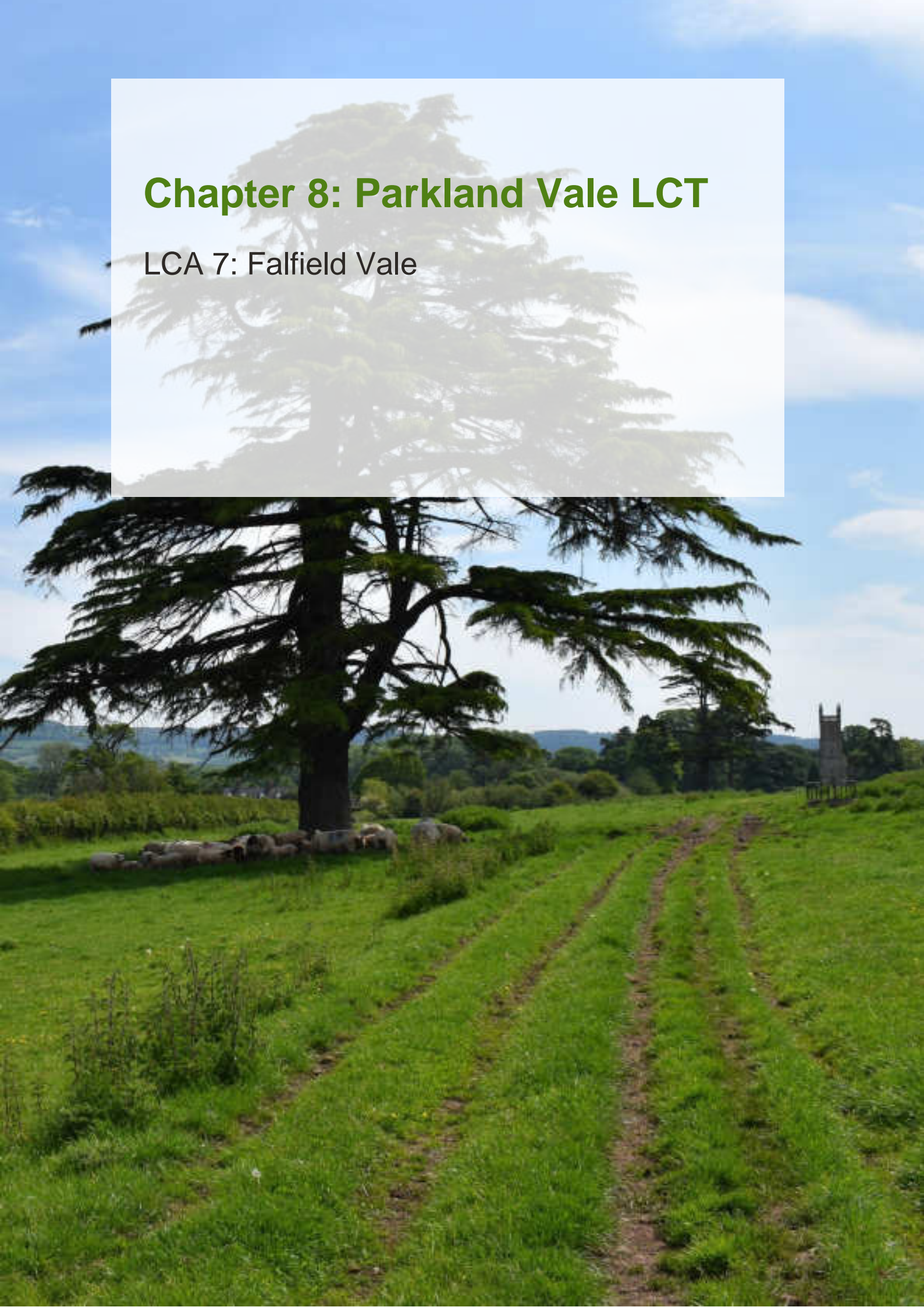
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# Chapter 8: Parkland Vale LCT

LCA 7: Falfield Vale



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**Note: Each chapter is produced as a separate document for ease of reading and navigation.**

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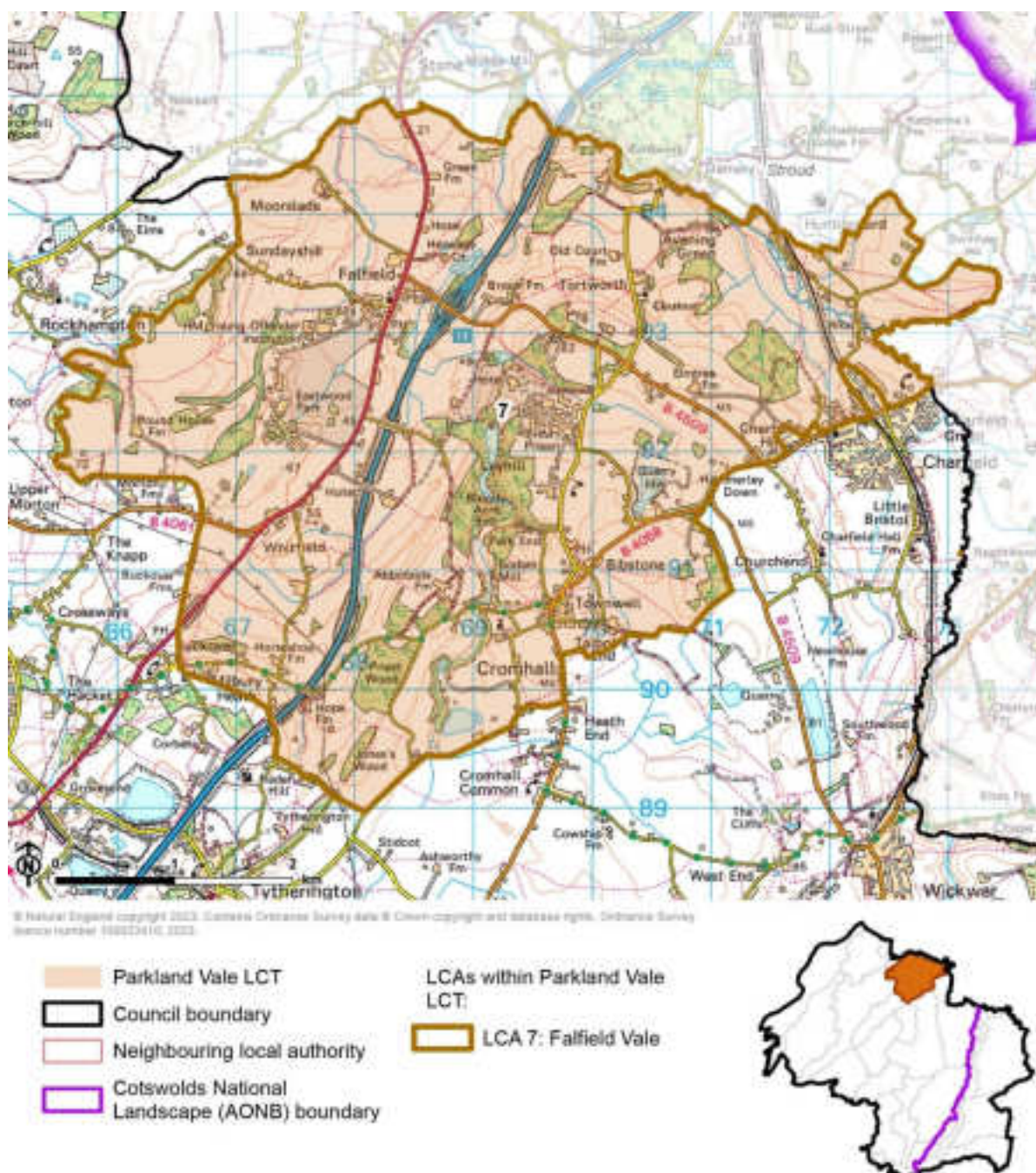
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## Chapter 8

### Parkland Vale LCT

Figure 8.1: Location of Parkland Vale LCT



## Description

**8.1** Located in the north of South Gloucestershire, this bowl-shaped vale is strongly influenced by heavily wooded parkland. It is contained to the east and west by surrounding ridges and undulating landform.

### Key Characteristics

- A bowl-shaped landform which gradually rises towards ridges to the east and west.
- A strong parkland character, enhanced by the presence of several large houses. Mature ornamental, specimen trees in open grassland is characteristics of the Tortworth Court Park and Eastwood Park estates.
- The Little Avon River and its associated riparian vegetation add visual texture and biodiversity value to the landscape and contribute to the South Gloucestershire wetland strategic network.
- Villages are largely well-integrated within the strong vegetation structure of woodland, parkland and hedgerows. Occasional views of settlement edges and church steeples add to the visual diversity and intricacy of the landscape.
- Extensive views over the vale are an important feature of the landscape. Far reaching views are contained by surrounding ridgelines.
- Settlement, roads and small quarries are generally well-integrated within the strong vegetation framework and are generally not visually prominent.
- The M5 motorway runs north-south through the centre of the area. The A38 runs roughly parallel to the motorway, along which a number of linear settlements have developed.

## Parkland Vale LCT

- To the east of the M5, blocks of mixed woodland combined with dense hedgerows and linear bands of trees surround the irregular pattern of mixed pasture and arable fields, providing a sense of enclosure to the landscape.
- To the west of the M5, numerous linear woodlands within Eastwood Park, combined with a strong hedgerow structure, enclose and screen many views.



## Landscape Character Areas

**8.2** The Parkland Vale LCT comprises one LCA:

- LCA 7: Falfield Vale

## LCA 7: Falfield Vale

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

**Photo 1: Pastoral farmland with woodland and mature hedgerow trees near Falfield.**



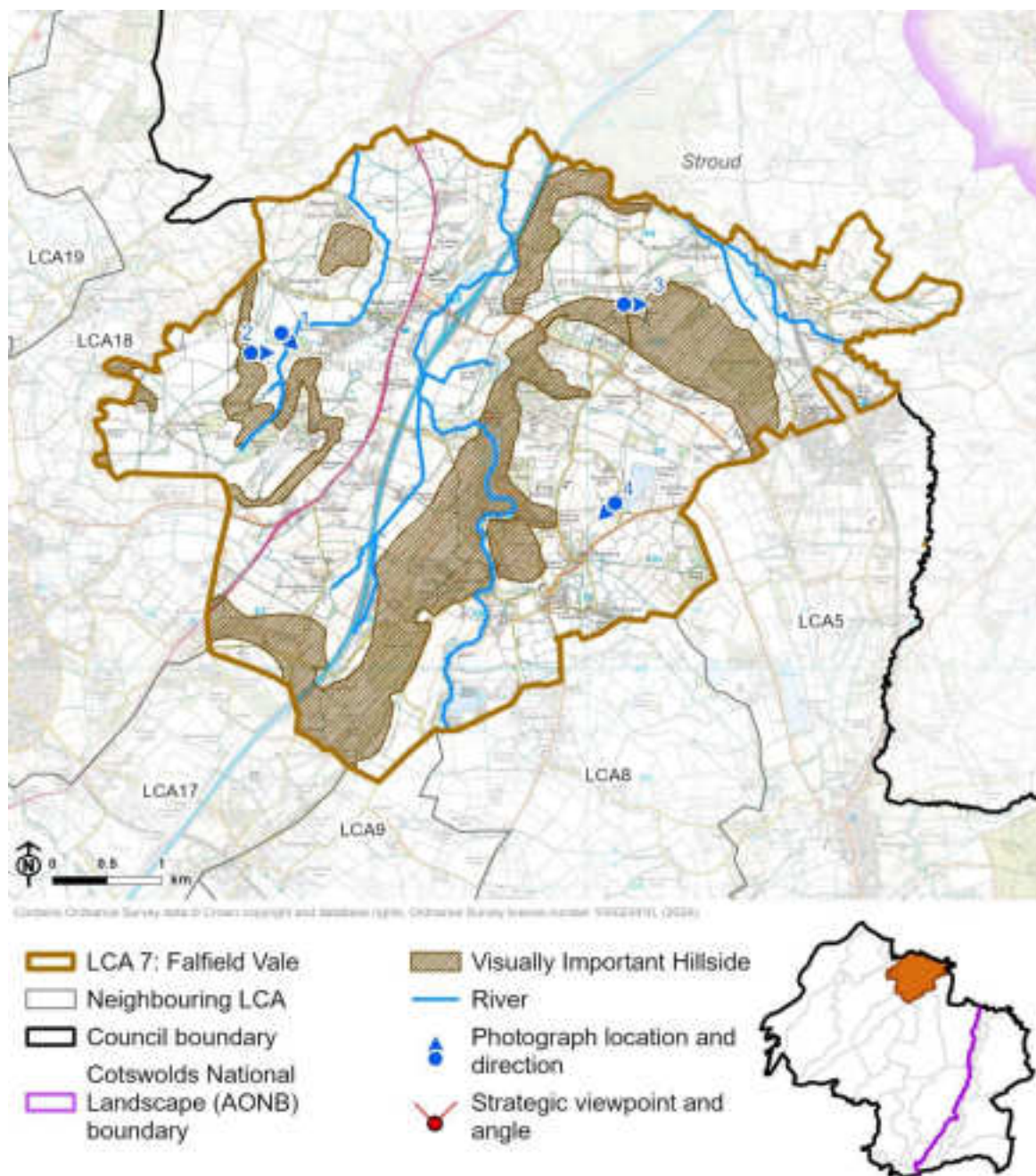
# **Location**

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

**8.4** The northern limits of this landscape character area are defined by the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary and 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 (LCA 17) and follows the approximate watershed with the Tytherington Plain. The western boundary follows the top of a defined scarp edge of the Severn Ridge, which falls westwards to Rockhampton (beyond this area).

## LCA 7: Falfield Vale

Figure 8.2: Location and Landscape context of LCA 7: Falfield Vale





## LCA 7: Falfield Vale

**Figure 8.3: Development and Heritage context of LCA 7: Falfield Vale**

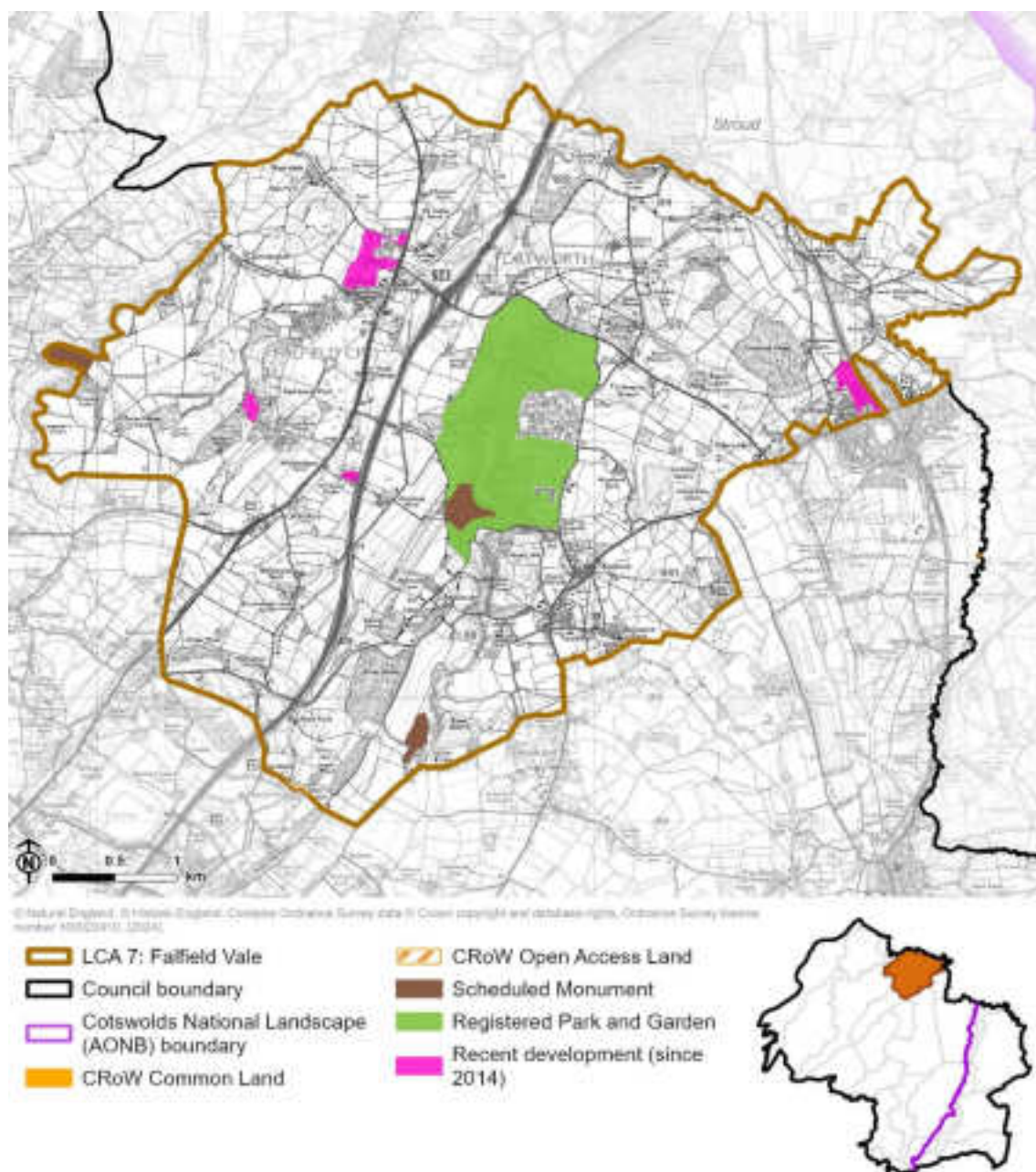
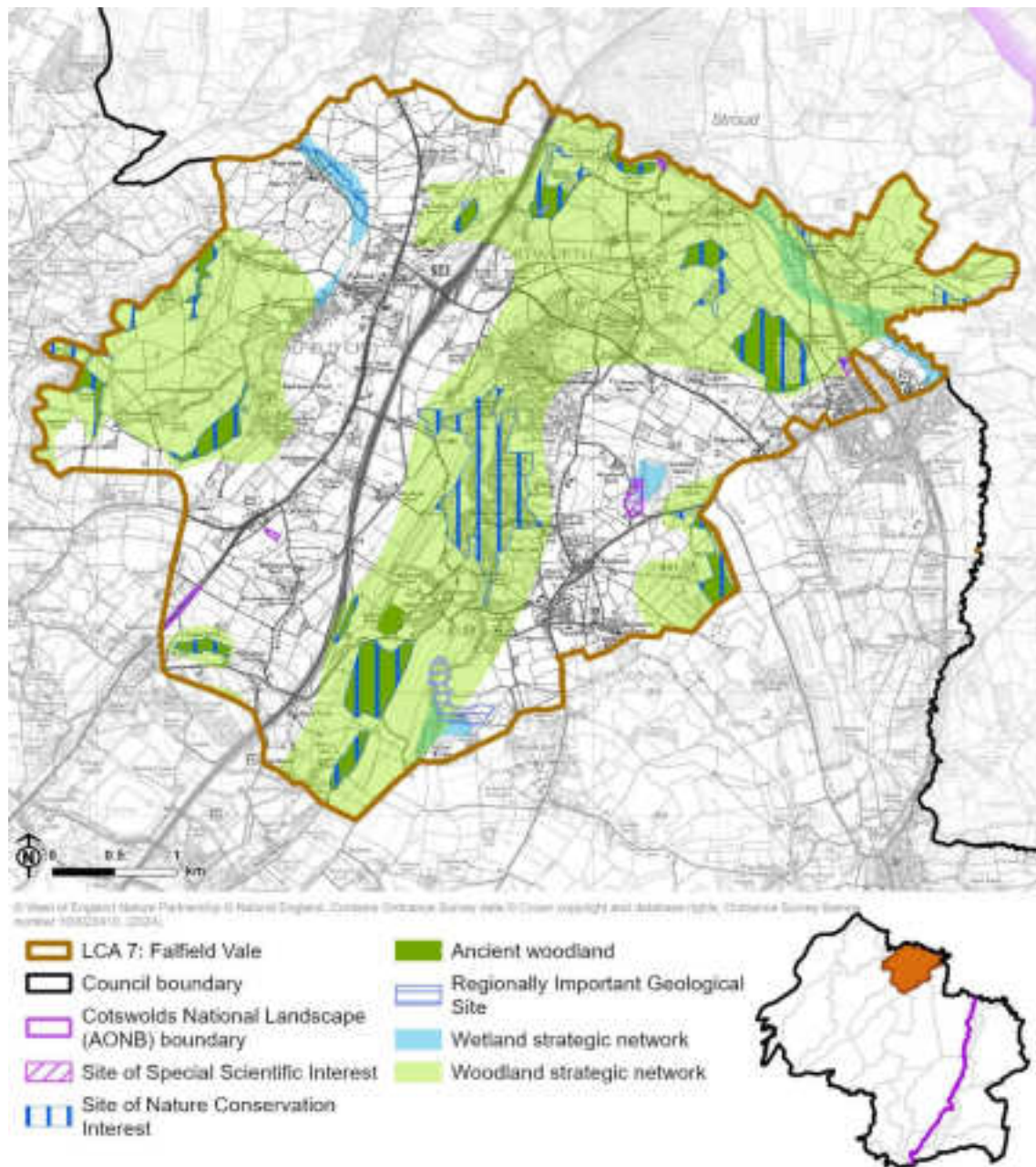




Figure 8.4: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 7: Falfield Vale



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- Bowl shaped vale, enclosed to the east by the curving slopes of the Severn Ridge and to the west by gently rising ground. Slightly higher undulating land is located east and south of the Severn Ridge.
- Strong woodland framework based on historic parkland estates with ancient woodland, small copses and mature parkland trees that are ecologically and visually important elements of the landscape.
- Parkland character arising from woodland planting and mature specimen trees in open grassland is characteristic of Tortworth Court Park and Eastwood Park estates.
- Scattered pattern of small to medium sized irregular and regular shaped fields of pasture and arable use. Some medium to large regular-shaped arable fields are associated with the parkland estates.
- Fields defined by clipped hedges with sporadic hedgerow trees, intermixed with a strong woodland structure and mature trees which provide habitat connectivity.
- Small areas of calcareous and neutral grassland support a diverse range of flora, including areas of species-rich grassland.
- A small-scale dispersed settlement pattern of historic villages interspersed with large manor houses and rural estate buildings, all characterised by limestone buildings and walls , .
- Major transport corridors M5, A38, B4509 and railway line cut through the landscape, with road traffic locally prominent.
- Two prison complexes at Leyhill and Eastwood, are largely well-integrated into the landscape with historic planting, although they have local influences.

- One large quarry is located in the east, and several other older/disused quarries, some of which are Sites of Special Scientific Interest for their geology and/or palaeontology.
- Dark skies are experienced across much of the area, with some tranquil areas away from main roads and settlements.

## Natural Influences

### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**8.5** The underlying geology of the Falfield Vale LCA comprises 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. There are several geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the LCA, including at Cullimore's Quarry, Cromhall Quarry, Slickstones Quarry and Brinkmarsh Quarry, which expose the oldest rocks in South Gloucestershire (dating from the Silurian period, 440-470 million years ago).

**8.6** The landform consists of a bowl-shaped vale, defined to the east and south-east by the Severn Ridge which curves in an extended 's' shape, diagonally through the area. This ridgeline varies in height along its length, generally falling from 100m AOD on the southern boundary to 80m AOD in the north, before curving eastwards, merging with the Wickwar Ridge near Charfield (in LCA 5) at 85m AOD. The ridge has a complex form where a steep-sided valley cuts south through the area towards Cromhall, forming the rounded knoll of Wick's Hill (92m AOD) and the meandering small-scale valley within Tortworth Court Park. The north-eastern curve gives way to the Little Avon River valley in the north of the LCA. To the east and south of the Severn Ridge, the land is generally undulating, draining northwards.

## **LCA 7: Falfield Vale**

**8.7** In the west, land gently rises from 30m AOD in the vale to 70m AOD on a scarp edge on the western boundary. Beyond this, the scarp falls steeply westwards towards Rockhampton.

**8.8** Drainage within the area flows generally northwards as tributaries of the Little Avon River, which follows a tightly meandering course on the northern boundary of the area through a shallow, broad valley, becoming steeper and narrower to the north-west. Near Tortworth Court Park, two small watercourses flow through narrow meandering valleys cut into the Severn Ridge. These streams have been dammed in places to create ornamental lakes and pools within the designed parkland at Tortworth Court.

## **Land Cover**

**8.9** The Falfield Vale is characterised by a diverse mix of land cover, largely influenced by the estates of Tortworth Court Park and Eastwood Park. Agricultural land use within this area comprises a patchwork of arable and pastoral farmland within and around the designed parkland landscapes.

**8.10** Field patterns throughout the area vary. Medium to large-scale arable fields of mixed form cover a significant part of the landscape, including within the estates at Tortworth Court Park and Eastwood Park. Small, irregular shaped pasture fields are characteristic in the east, around Bibstone, Townwell and Cromhall, to the north and west of Falfield, and west of Charfield. Fields are typically defined by dense, low clipped hedges and include sparsely distributed mature hedgerow trees. Several large mixed and deciduous woodlands are prominent within the landscape, typically of linear form associated with the Severn Ridge.

**8.11** The Tortworth and Eastwood Park Estates influence a significant part of the character area through their extensive land ownership which includes large areas of farmland and woodland, as well as parkland. The estate parklands include mature, deciduous and evergreen trees in groups or single specimens set within open grassland, with an arboretum at Tortworth Court Park.

**Photo 2: View east across pastoral fields with mature in-field trees, looking towards the Cotswold Scarp on the skyline.**



### Biodiversity

**8.12** This character area comprises a mosaic of grassland, woodland and arable and pastoral farmland that is dissected by meandering watercourses and punctuated by ponds. Hedgerows, scattered trees, and watercourses provide ecological corridors for wildlife and together these habitats make the Falfield Vale an important habitat for a diverse range of species. The mixed farmland supports many species of ground-nesting farmland birds, including species listed as Globally Threatened on the ICUN Red List. The winter stubble provides a precious foraging resource when food sources are scarce for many farmland birds.

**8.13** The Falfield Vale includes approximately 100 hectares of ancient woodland, mainly in scattered medium size woodlands and copses. Many of these are designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) in



## LCA 7: Falfield Vale

recognition of their nationally important flora and fauna, including at Priest Wood, Tortworth Court, Charfield Quarry, Stumps Wood, and Daniels Wood. Key species likely to be associated with the ancient woodland include bats and dormice both of which are present across South Gloucestershire and are European protected species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP). There are three sites within the Falfield Vale designated as SNCIs for the calcareous and neutral grassland and includes areas of species-rich grassland. This diverse habitat supports a range of invertebrates and ant hills are a regular feature. These invertebrates in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats.

**8.14** Many of the watercourses within this LCA are designated as SNCI, including the stream by Moreslade Lane which is designated for the flowing water and bankside vegetation. These watercourses support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and water voles. The scattered ponds and pools within the area support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

**8.15** The disused and working quarries, including underground quarries, and mines across this area provide an ideal habitat for many species of bat including European Protected Species.

**8.16** South Gloucestershire Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor B (Charfield-Alveston-Hallen (*Western Scarp/Severn Ridges*)) covers a significant proportion of this LCA, associated with the woodland strategic network. Blue-Green Infrastructure Corridor I (Huntingford-Charfield-Wickwar (*Little Avon River Corridor*)) covers a small area in the north-east of the LCA, incorporating the Little Avon River corridor and riparian habitats associated with the wetland strategic network.

### Cultural Influences

#### Land Use and Time Depth

**8.17** The parkland estates of Tortworth Court and Eastwood Park exert a strong influence on the overall landscape character of the area both through historic and present day land use .

**8.18** Tortworth Court Park (a Grade II\* Registered Park and Garden) comprises a historic manor house set within woodland and pleasure gardens, including an ornate gateway and lodge buildings. The park historically replaced an earlier deer park based around the hamlet of Tortworth, the bounds of which can be easily traced within the existing 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.

**8.19** Eastwood Park comprises designed parkland which partly overlies a large 16<sup>th</sup> century deer park, and is locally listed. 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. Both parks include ornamental lakes and pools, more extensively within Tortworth Court Park, where a small enclosed valley has been dammed.

**8.20** Prehistoric settlement and land use is indicated by the presence of two Iron Age hill forts within the area. This includes Bloody Acre Camp on the brow of the Severn Ridge within Tortworth Court Park, and Camp Hill on the western boundary of the LCA, within Eastwood Park. The site of a roman villa lies to the south-west of Cromhall. All are designated as Scheduled Monuments.

**8.21** Historic quarrying in the area is reflected in the presence of several disused quarries at Cromhall (limestone and quartzite) and Slickstones Quarry, as well as several smaller sites within Tortworth Court.

### Settlement and Infrastructure

**8.22** Settlement within the LCA is typically small-scale and dispersed, comprising nucleated villages, hamlets, scattered farms and houses. There are also large houses, estate architecture, buildings and stone walls associated with the Tortworth and Eastwood Estates.

**8.23** The villages and hamlets of Falfield, Tortworth, Cromhall, Bibstone, Townwell and Talbot's End are located on shallow slopes within the vale, and 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.

**8.24** Falfield is a small, nucleated village, located along the A38 within the vale. The church is a focal point. The village is generally constructed of limestone with estate-influenced architecture and some more recent brick houses. Cromhall Bibstone, Townwell and Talbot's End are small hamlets located close to each other in the south-east of the character area. Properties are largely concentrated around the intersection of country lanes, with some low density roadside development between hamlet centres. On the boundary (but largely within adjacent LCA 5 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.

**8.25** Eastwood Park includes a group of old buildings concentrated around a large and imposing stately home, set on elevated ground above the parkland. The large complex of Eastwood Park Prison is located on the northern lower slopes of the estate grounds and is well-screened by mature vegetation.

**8.26** The Tortworth Estate includes a diverse range of properties in Tortworth, Cromhall, Charfield, Falfield . 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 stone terraced estate cottages. The Leyhill Prison complex, within and to the east of the park, consists of a number of large,

## **LCA 7: Falfield Vale**

modern buildings, surrounded by a tall boundary stone wall, playing fields and a small area of housing.

**8.27** Isolated farms and building groups are scattered throughout the area. These comprise a mix of building styles, principally of limestone or rendered, with stone property boundaries a common feature. A high frequency of individual properties is common along both major and minor roads, creating small sections of low-density ribbon development. Some farms include large modern shed outbuildings, constructed of timber and corrugated sheet materials.

**8.28** The M5 and A38 dissect the LCA, passing north to south through the centre of the area. The B4508 and B4509 provide further connections across landscape, with narrow country lanes typically running east to west between the adjacent settlements. A short section of the Bristol to Gloucester railway passes through the north-eastern edge of the area on embankment.

**8.29** There is a relatively low-density of public rights of way within the area. They generally cross higher ground, occasionally descending into the vale with a small concentration of intersecting routes north of Falfield, linking to settlement around Cromhall. One of the series of Circular Rides briefly passes through the south of the area, connecting Cromhall with Tytherington to the west and Wickwar to the east (both outside the LCA). The Avon Cycleway regional cycling route passes through south of the LCA, following rural lanes between Milbury Heath and Cromhall.

**Photo 3: Specimen trees and St Leonards Church, Torthworth.**



## Perceptual Influences

### Visual Character

**8.30** The Falfield Vale landscape character area has a strong historic landscape structure of parkland, field patterns, dense woodland, mature trees, hedgerows and stone walls near farm and estate properties, overlying the large-scale bowl landform.

**8.31** The vale comprises a mix of open agricultural landscapes of small to medium, regular and irregular shaped fields, with larger regular fields found within the parkland estates. Fields are typically defined by low clipped hedges and sparse native hedgerow trees. Large woodland blocks and linear woodlands provide structure and enclosure along the upper slopes of the bowl-shaped vale.



## **LCA 7: Falfield Vale**

**8.32** 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. It covers a large proportion of Tortworth Court Park, enclosing features including the stately home at Tortworth Court and its associated buildings, the lakes, ponds and arboretum, plus the narrow steep sided valleys which cut into the ridge. The lower slopes of the Severn Ridge include mature tree specimens, often standing within open fields.

**8.33** Leyhill Prison complex is largely contained by woodland and a high boundary stone wall. Associated with this complex and visible from the adjacent road, are playing fields and a group 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 Eastwood Park Prison complex within the park's grounds is relatively well-screened from wider views across the landscape, primarily visible from Falfield and its approach road. The architectural style of the complex and associated infrastructure of roads and security fencing are visually detractive in local views.

**8.34** The hamlet of Tortworth, at the centre of Tortworth Estate contributes to the area's visual distinctiveness. The church tower and estate cottages are prominent within local and middle distance views. Views from this area across the Little Avon Valley are extensive, stretching beyond the character area to include the Cotswold Scarp to the east.

**8.35** To the west, the parkland within the Eastwood Park estate comprises designed linear woodland, mature tree stands and specimen trees, which provide the backdrop and setting for the stately home at Eastwood Park (now used for corporate events and weddings), with an open 'bowl' of parkland around the house, including mature tree stands within pasture fields. Large woodland blocks and linear planting continue westwards along higher slopes beyond the estate boundary. The house and parkland is primarily visible within middle distance views from the Severn Ridge.

## **LCA 7: Falfield Vale**

**8.36** The village of Falfield, with its cluster of traditional stone-built properties (including Falfield Lodge), church spire, and stone walls retains a distinctive character. The linear pattern of brick houses near the Leyhill prison entrance are prominent in local views and detract from the character and pattern of the village. Modern brick housing has extended the village north, parallel to the A38.

**8.37** The dispersed and clustered settlement pattern around Cromhall is generally well-integrated within the landform, 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.

**8.38** Cromhall Quarry is well screened by boundary vegetation, however a section of exposed quarried rock face and buildings at Wickwar Quarry (in adjacent LCA 5 to the east) is partly visible within middle distance views from Bagstone Road, south of Townwell.

**8.39** The Cotswold Scarp to the east and north and east is a strong visual element in long distance views, generally from higher vantage points within the character area.

**8.40** The M5 forms 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 landscape. The B4509 and network of lanes are typically visually enclosed by tall hedgerows. The railway line embankment forms a significant built landform within the Little Avon river valley, although it is generally well-integrated by scrub and tree cover which connects with the dense riparian vegetation of the Little Avon Valley. The railway is more prominent further south where it passes through Charfield.

## LCA 7: Falfield Vale

**8.41** Large modern farm sheds form intrusive visual elements, particularly around the parkland estates, eroding the rural character and small-scale of the locality. 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. Pressure for renewable energy developments (particularly wind farms) within this LCA and in adjacent landscapes have the potential to affect landscape character and views experienced from the Falfield Vale LCA.

**Photo 4: Traditional buildings nestled within a strong vegetation framework of dense hedgerows and mature trees at Talbots End.**



### Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**8.42** The sense of tranquillity experienced in this landscape is limited due to the presence of the M5 Motorway and A38, as well as modern development at Leyhill and Eastwood Park Prison sites, and at Charfield. Pockets of tranquillity exist across the landscape within wooded areas and some of the parkland, although the sound of distant traffic from the two major roads can be heard across much of the LCA. Overall, the landscape experiences relatively dark night skies, with localised areas of light pollution associated with the two prison complexes and around Charfield.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**8.43** The Wick's/Butcher's Hill and Baden Hill, and Eastwood Park Spur Visually Important Hillsides (VIH) are located within this LCA. A small part of the Churchend Ridge VIH extends into the north-eastern part of the LCA from adjacent LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale. Key characteristics of each VIH include the following:

- Wick's/Butcher's Hill and Baden Hill VIH: An elevated area, punctuated with three notable hills spanning from Tortworth in the north to Tytherington in the south. Wick's Hill, the largest of the hills is distinguishable from the surrounding landscape due to its elevation and pronounced hillsides, and contributes to the character and setting of Tortworth Court Registered Park and Garden (RPG).
- Eastwood Park Spur VIH: A complex area of ridges, including the outlying Sundays Hill in the north-east. Its presence in views across the landscape is emphasised by the surrounding lower-lying land to the east and west.
- Churchend Ridge (including Charfield Hill) VIH: A north-south linear steep ridge spanning from the south of Wickwar to the north of Charfield and forming the western valley sides to the Little Avon River. Its prominence is emphasised by the considerably lower-lying landscape to the west.

Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

### Strategic Viewpoints

**8.44** There are no Strategic Viewpoints located within or near to this LCA.

**8.45** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**

### Evaluation

#### Key Sensitivities and Valued Features

- The distinctive landform of the large-scale bowl shaped vale contained by gently rising land to the east and Severn Ridge to the west.
- The Geological SSSIs at Brinkmarsh and Slickstones Quarries, valued for their geological interest.
- The extensive network of semi-natural deciduous woodland, including ancient woodland, much of which locally designated as SNCIs.
- Ecologically-valuable grassland and aquatic habitats including species-rich grassland and scattered ponds and pools, supporting a range of species.
- Habitat connectivity provided by woodland, hedgerows, scattered mature trees, and drystone walls.
- The historic nucleated villages at Falfield, Tortworth, Cromhall, Bibstone, Townwell and Talbot's End, united by their estate character and vernacular of Cotswold stone.
- Parkland at Tortworth Court (Grade II\* RPG) and Eastwood Park, with designed woodland, open grassland, specimen trees, streams and ponds, create locally distinctive historic landscapes.
- The Tortworth Chestnut veteran tree, a unique landscape feature which is at least 800 years old and contributes to the sense of time depth.



## LCA 7: Falfield Vale

- Prehistoric assets including two Iron Age hill forts and the site of Roman villa (Scheduled Monuments) which provide a sense of history.
- Uninterrupted views towards the Severn Ridge and Cotswold Scarp which contain the landscape, as well as wide views across the vale from elevated areas.
- The network of public footpaths, as well as a Circular Ride and part of the Avon Cycleway route that provide recreational opportunities across the landscape.
- The experience of dark night skies across most of the area.

## The Changing Landscape

**8.46** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Falfield Vale LCA.

### Climate Change

- Climate change and changing land management practices may lead to potential changes in woodland and tree species composition. Increases in severe gales could result in wind damage to woodland edges. Ancient woodlands may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
- Climate change and changing land management practices may lead to potential changes in flora and an increase in pests and diseases.
- Pressure for locating solar farms and wind turbines within the South Gloucestershire landscape to contribute towards maximising the generation of renewable energy from installations (as set out in South Gloucestershire's Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-2030). This would likely result in adverse effects on landscape character and visual impact.

## Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- The watercourses, scattered ponds and pools are vulnerable to any loss of habitat including the terrestrial habitat around ponds as well as the ponds themselves.
- An increase in tree planting is required to contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may include the establishment of new native woodlands in the 'Tortworth Gap' linking woodlands within Tortworth Park to outlying woodlands (many of which are ASNW), extending northwards to Michael Wood (across the county boundary) and southwards towards Tytherington, across the 'M5 Gap' to link woodlands at Cromhall, and across the M5 to woodlands at Milbury Heath and to the south of Thornbury, as set out in the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy [See reference 1]. This would increase enclosure and extend the wooded character.

## Land Use and Cover

- Changes in land use and management could affect the present integrity, habitat value and structure of the landscape, particularly the grassland and woodland habitats.
- The designed parkland pattern and agricultural land use practices around Tortworth hamlet and within Tortworth Court Park and Eastwood Park which have influenced hedgerow, tree patterns and settlements that have changed little for hundreds of years are particularly sensitive to change.
- Cromhall Limestone Quarry is currently inactive, but has an existing permission for further extraction work. There is potential for extraction to continue within the existing quarry site, before expansion of the quarry area is considered. Any future plan to recommence quarrying would introduce some local effects immediately adjacent to the site, but is likely to have limited wider effects upon landscape character. Policies included in the Policies, Sites and Places Plan [See reference 2] and the Joint Waste Core Strategy [See reference 3] seek to ensure that future

## LCA 7: Falfield Vale

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.

### Development

- Strong vertical or horizontal elements are particularly prominent within the vale, e.g. major transport corridors, overhead powerlines and pylons.
- The higher ground surrounding the shallow bowl of the Falfield Vale allows extensive open views across the agricultural landscape. New development therefore has the potential to influence character and be visually prominent in wider views across the landscape.
- Residential expansion has altered the character and form on the edge of Charfield with further ongoing development on the edge of Charfield and Falfield.
- Residential infill development has the potential to alter the traditional, irregular and organic development pattern of most settlements and the spatial segregation of roadside properties.
- Modern building styles using brick or reconstituted stone such as in Falfield and Leyhill are out of keeping with the local character and vernacular, resulting in dilution of local distinctiveness.

## Guidance

**8.47** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the overarching management strategy objectives of the South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment, as set out in Chapter 4.

### Landscape Strategy

#### Landscape Management

- Maintain the integrity and setting of the distinctive parkland landscapes at Eastwood Park and Tortworth Park.
- Manage the distinctive parkland landscape framework through woodland management (including new woodland and specimen tree planting) and maintaining appropriate grazing levels.
- Limit the introduction of uncharacteristic features such as field subdivision by electrified and post and rail fences which are devoid of habitat value, and the degradation of the sward by overgrazing.
- Seek opportunities to establish native woodland in a broad corridor across the 'Tortworth Gap' linking woodlands in Tortworth Park to outlying woodlands (including ancient woodland areas), extending northwards to Michael Wood across the county boundary and southwards towards Tytherington. Conserve wood pasture and other priority habitats, historic monuments and viewpoints within this.
- Establish native woodland in a broad corridor across the 'M5 Gap' linking woodlands at Cromhall, across the M5 to woodlands at Milbury Heath and potentially to the south of Thornbury.
- Ensure that the tranquillity and dark skies of the rural areas is maintained.

- Protect the setting and views of the two scheduled hillforts within this LCA.

### Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Maintain, manage and enhance the characteristic mosaic of habitats and landscape features, including woodland, parkland hedgerows, riparian corridors and ponds, as well as pastoral and arable fields.
- Restore lost/degraded lengths of hedgerows. Further hedgerow tree planting would help to strengthen and improve the biodiversity value of these key features and ensure their conservation for the long term.
- Quarry restoration (e.g. at Cromhall Quarry) should integrate landform and land use of the site with adjacent areas, re-establishing a strong landscape framework and reinforcing biodiversity value. Loss of habitat in underground areas should be avoided.
- Enhance wildlife habitat links across the character area, seeking opportunities to expand areas of species rich grassland and woodland where appropriate to enhance biodiversity value and contribute to local nature recovery networks.
- Protect ancient woodland with appropriate buffers and enhance woodland connectivity, encouraging natural regeneration of appropriate sites; for example, the woodland areas of Tortworth Copse.
- Work across the LCA boundary, to conserve and enhance complex of ancient and semi-natural woodlands between the A38 and Rockhampton, linking them together through areas of natural regeneration and/or new native planting.
- Protect the riparian habitat and water quality of the Little Avon River and seek opportunities to restore and create new riparian habitats where appropriate.



## Development Management

- Any future expansion of the prisons or other development within the parkland estates or their settings will require careful consideration of building design and measures for integration, to minimise the impact on the distinctive landscape character of the locality.
- Consider tree and vegetation planting around new developments, as well as along the southern margin of Eastwood Park Prison to reduce the visual impact of the built development in the wider landscape.
- Ensure new built development respects the local vernacular. Encourage the use of local stone and traditional building materials to improve integration with existing building styles.
- 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 could have a significant and erosive impact on the distinctiveness of the LCA.
- Ensure that any new vertical elements integrate with the landscape framework and minimise visual impact on the rural and parkland characteristics of the Falfield Vale.

## References

- 1 Forest of Avon Trust and West of England Nature Partnership, The Forest of Avon Plan: A Tree and Woodland Strategy for the West of England. Available at: <https://forestofavontrust.org/forest-of-avon-plan/>
- 2 South Gloucestershire Policies, Sites and Places Plan (November 2017) <https://beta.southglos.gov.uk/policies-sites-and-places-plan-ppsp/>
- 3 West of England Joint Waste Core Strategy (March 2011) <https://beta.southglos.gov.uk/joint-waste-core-strategy/>

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# **South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment**

## **Supplementary Planning Document**

### **South Gloucestershire Council**

**Final Draft Report proposed for adoption**

Prepared by LUC

February 2025

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South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment



## **Chapter 9: Shallow Vale LCT**

LCA 8: Yate Vale

LCA 9: Tytherington Plain

LCA 10: Earthcott Vale



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**Note: Each chapter is produced as a separate document for ease of reading and navigation.**

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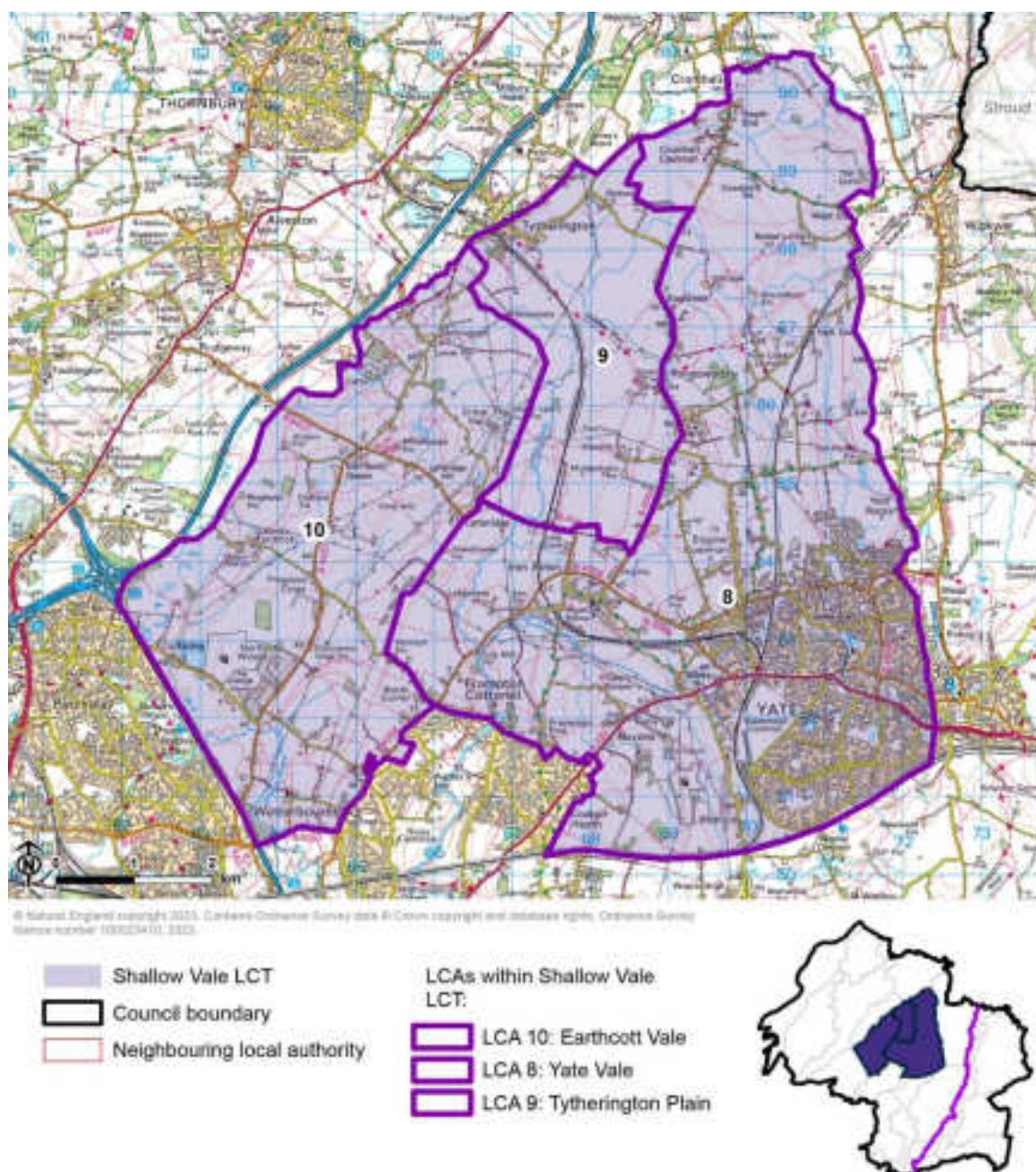
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## Chapter 9

### Shallow Vale LCT

Figure 9.1: Location of Shallow Vale LCT



# Description

**9.1** The Shallow Vale landscape character type (LCT) comprises a gently sloping basin, roughly in the centre of South Gloucestershire, north of Bristol. It is contained by ridges, formed by curving low rocky outcrops on the edge of the basin, beyond the boundary of the LCT to the east, north and west, which form the northern limit of the geological formation of the Bristol Coalfield. The landform within the Shallow Vale LCT undulates from east to west, as it passes over different bedrock formations within the basin. The southern boundary is partly defined by settlement.

## Key Characteristics

- The shallow vale landscape is characterised by very gently rolling through to flat, topography.
- Pasture and large regular arable fields are contained by a strong landscape framework of clipped hedges, with occasional linear bands of trees, copses and woodlands.
- Land in the north-east is divided by drainage ditches, with a sparse vegetation framework.
- Numerous minor roads and lanes are only occasionally visible due to the surrounding clipped hedges, trees or hedgebanks within a generally flat landscape.
- The M4 and M5 form strong linear elements and define sections of the southern and western boundaries respectively.
- Settlement is concentrated within the town of Yate but has spread along many of the roads.
- The landscape is influenced by settlements located outside of the LCT, including Frampton Cotterell, Winterbourne and the urban fringes of Bristol.



## Shallow Vale LCT

- Features associated with the proximity of major urban areas, such as powerlines, are also a visible and intrusive element.

## Landscape Character Areas

**9.2** The Shallow Vale LCT is subdivided into three landscape character areas (LCAs):

- LCA 8: Yate Vale
- LCA 9: Tytherington Plain
- LCA 10: Earthcott Vale

## LCA 8: Yate Vale

The Yate Vale landscape character area (LCA) comprises a gently sloping, largely agricultural and often well-treed area of medium sized fields, with large settlements in the south.

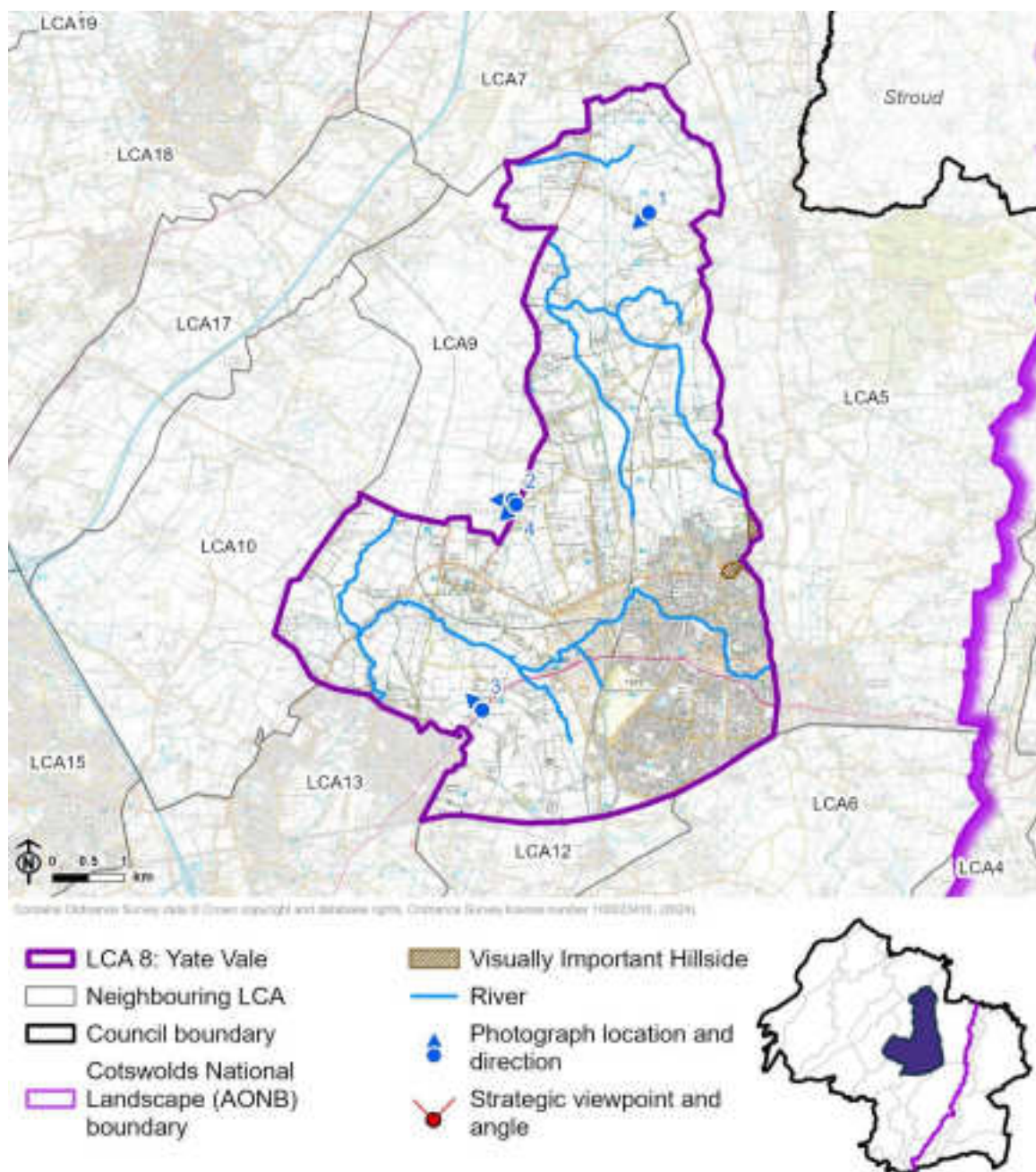
**Photo 1: Gently sloping agricultural fields bounded by hedgerows and woodland.**



### Location

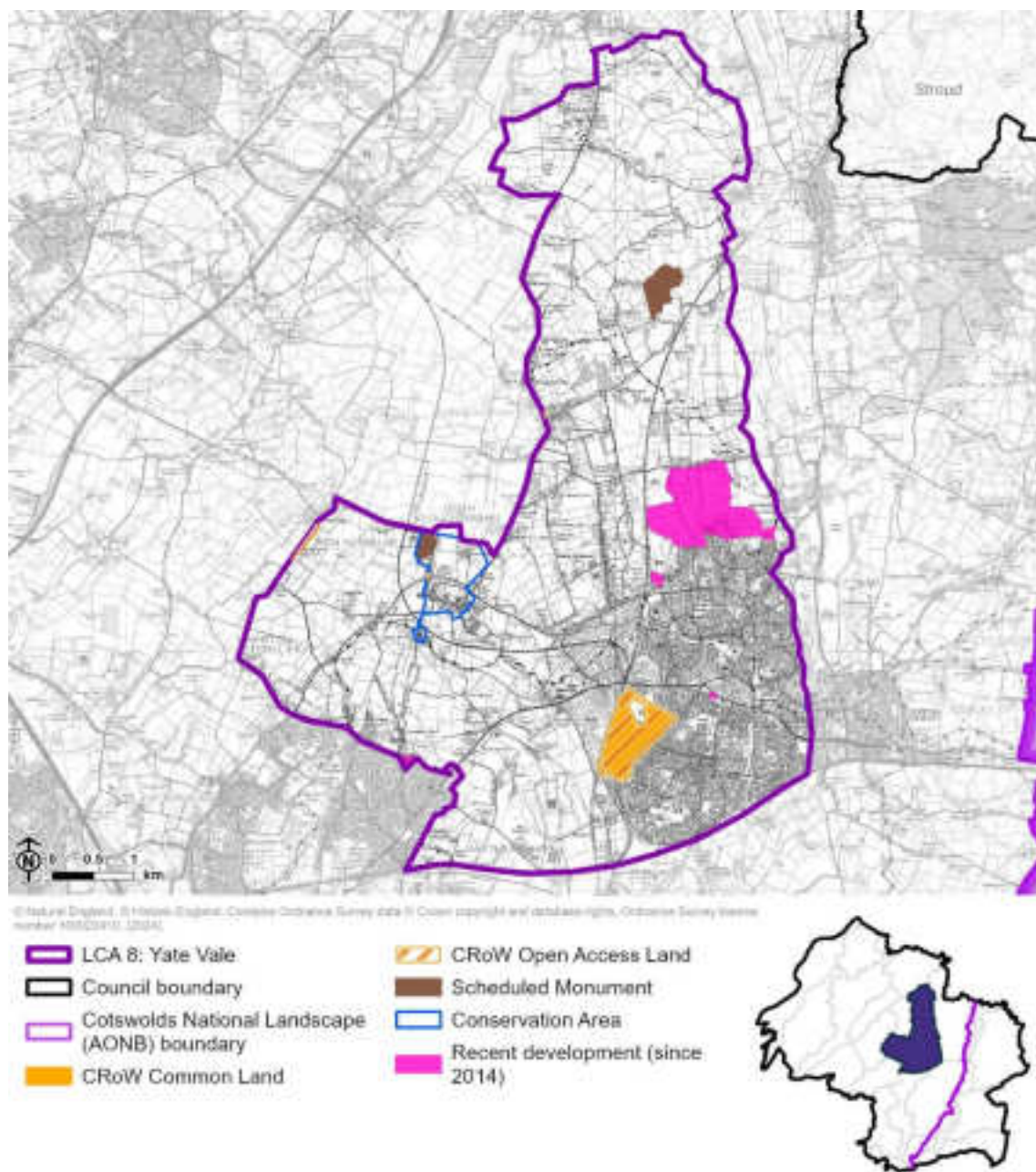
**9.3** The Yate Vale LCA is located in central South Gloucestershire. The northern boundary marks the transition between the vale and higher ground with a different settlement and field pattern within LCA 7: Falfield Vale. The eastern boundary is approximately defined by the toe of the Wickwar Ridge and eastern edge of Yate. The southern boundary follows the railway line and settlement edges of Yate, Coalpit Heath and Frampton Cotterell. The western boundary is defined by the rise in topography to the Marle Hills and B4058.

Figure 9.2: Location and Landscape Setting of LCA 8: Yate Vale



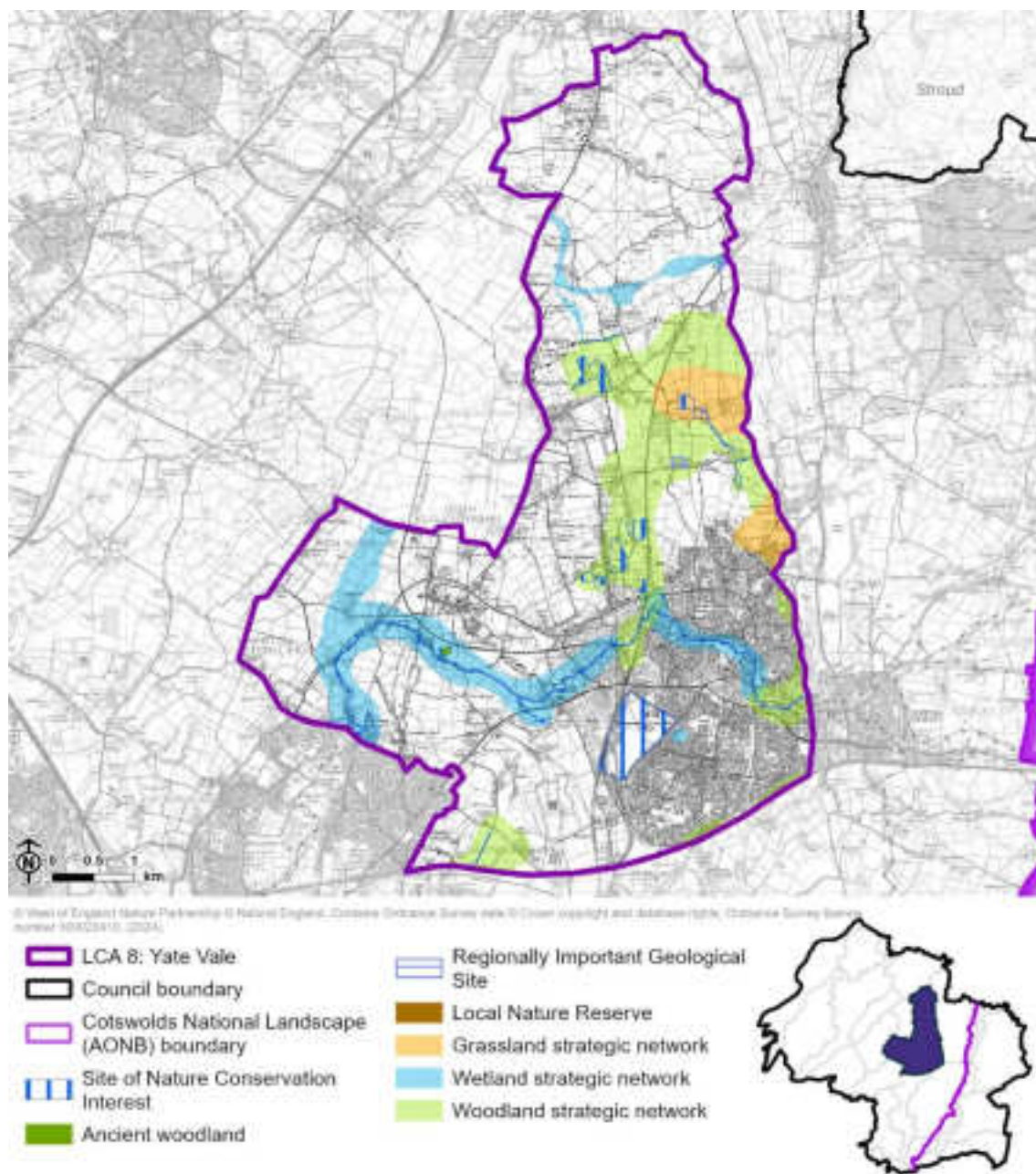


**Figure 9.3: Development and Heritage context of LCA 8: Yate Vale**



## LCA 8: Yate Vale

**Figure 9.4: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 8: Yate Vale**



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- Landform comprises a shallow vale with a simple, gently sloping landform.
- Medium sized pasture and arable fields are relatively irregular shaped to the north, with small to medium regular shaped fields near Engine Common and Rangeworthy.
- Fields are contained by clipped hedgerows with an even distribution of mature specimen trees.
- Areas of neutral grassland support a diverse range of flora including areas of species-rich grassland.
- North and west of Yate, tall overgrown hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees, copses and small woodlands create a more enclosed landscape. Elsewhere occasional small woodlands are scattered through parts of the area, often associated with relic coal mining, quarrying and the River Frome.
- The River Frome forms a wooded corridor with recreational routes following the river valley.
- Views are largely filtered by vegetation within this large-scale landscape, with some distant views possible. This LCA 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.
- Settlement is focused within Yate in the south-east and the historic village of Iron Acton in the west. Frampton Cotterell extends into the south-west of the LCA.
- Scattered linear settlements extend northwards from Yate and Iron Acton along the network of roads and lanes. This is mixed with an

intricate landscape of dispersed settlement, historic courts, coal industry relics, commons, woodlands and fields.

- Numerous minor roads bisect the south of the LCA.
- The north of the LCA has relatively limited settlement, comprising scattered farmsteads and few roads, resulting in areas of tranquillity and an experience of dark skies.
- Overhead powerlines crossing the LCA form a visible horizontal and vertical element.

## Natural Influences

### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**9.4** The Yate Vale LCA largely consists of Carboniferous Coal Measures, with Pennant sandstones, mudstones and shales within the vale. There are some areas of 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.

**9.5** The LCA largely comprises part of the very shallow and broad Ladden Brook valley, which falls northwards from Yate at 85 metres AOD to 54 metres AOD. This LCA is contained to the east by the prominent Wickwar Ridge, which rises beyond the LCA 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 Wickwar Ridge and Vale LCA. The gradient slackens to provide the slightly elevated shallow bowl at 100 metres AOD within which Chipping Sodbury is located. Beyond the southern edge of Yate, the land rises to form the Pucklechurch Ridge.

**9.6** 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



## **LCA 8: Yate Vale**

metres AOD. A tributary of the Little Avon River forms a small valley, flowing west and then northwards beyond this area.

**9.7** The south-western extent of the LCA comprises the shallow and broad River Frome valley, which is joined by the Ladden Brook, having passed through the adjacent LCA 9: Tytherington Plain to the north. The valley floor lies at approximately 50 metres AOD, and is contained by the low ridgeline formed by the Marle Hills at approximately 65 metres AOD.

**9.8** The LCA'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. The river then follows an irregular, meandering course north of Frampton Cotterell.

**9.9** The large-scale railway embankment of the South Wales to London line, on the southern boundary, is a significant man-made landform, superimposed on the gently undulating, natural ground form.

## **Land Cover**

**9.10** The Yate Vale LCA includes arable and pasture fields of varied pattern. The field pattern over much of the area is the result of parliamentary enclosure, which comprises regular shaped fields, small to medium in size, particularly near Engine Common and Rangeworthy. In the north, to the east of Bagstone, is an area of irregular shaped fields. 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.

**9.11** Fields are largely contained by clipped hedges, with some tall overgrown hedges particularly to the north and west of Yate. Mature hedgerow trees (predominantly oak) are common in the LCA, except in north of the LCA, east of



## **LCA 8: Yate Vale**

Heath End. Copses and small deciduous and mixed woodlands are common to the west and north of Yate, often marking former industrial sites, including relic coal mines and quarrying.

**9.12** Horse paddocks are scattered across the LCA, largely to the west of Yate, between and adjacent to Iron Acton and Engine Common. Paddocks are bounded by overgrown hedgerows or fencing (either reinforcing gaps in hedgerows or replacing hedgerows altogether), and also use electric tape to subdivide fields.

**9.13** Pennant stone boundary walls are a common feature in the south of the LCA, associated with ribbon settlements, at Acton Court, and along minor roads and the B4058. Hedge banks, including Pennant stone, are line to narrow lanes to the north of Frampton Cotterell.

**9.14** There are small areas of common and heathland within the LCA, as at Mays Hill, Goose Green in Yate, Nibley and along the B4058 within Rangeworthy. Iron Acton has a village green in the centre of the settlement. Westerleigh Common is a large open space, contained on three sides by a mix of residential and industrial estate development west of Yate. It is largely grassland and used for recreation.

**9.15** A history of mineral extraction has left its mark on the landscape. 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 in the east of the LCA. The remnants of a dramway, dating from the 1850's, runs west from these sites to the railway line. The extraction of celestite has left a number of small pits, now forming lakes. 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 the woodland cover over these sites today. Former celestite extraction has also left small pools to the north of Yate, now largely colonised and enclosed by vegetation and woodland.

## LCA 8: Yate Vale

**9.16** The urban area of Yate retains a variety of open space and parks amongst the dense settlement pattern. The extensive network of amenity space contains relic trees and hedgerows from its former agricultural use. Designed amenity space was created as part of the Radburn style housing layouts of the 1960's expansion of Yate, and largely comprises mown grass and individual trees. The River Frome corridor includes sections of a remnant rural landscape, with mature bankside trees and less distinct sections of amenity landscape, with regularly planted trees within mown grass. The rural sections of the River Frome, to the west of Yate, have occasional small woodland blocks and lengths of linear woodland.

**Photo 2: Regular shaped fields near Rangeworthy, enclosed by hedges with hedgerow trees.**



### Biodiversity

**9.17** The rural areas of the Yate Vale LCA include a mosaic of grassland, woodland, arable and pastoral farmland with a criss-crossing of watercourses and ponds. Interconnected wildlife corridors include hedgerows, which provide an important habitat for a diverse range of species.

**9.18** Woodland habitat comprises scattered woodlands and copses, with just 1 hectare of ancient woodland (representing 4% of the total woodland area in the LCA). Key species likely to be associated with the woodland include bats and dormice, both of which are present across the wider area and are UK priority species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP). Good connectivity exists for species such as these between the wooded areas and other habitats via hedgerows and scattered trees.

**9.19** There are six sites within the Yate Vale designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) for their neutral grassland habitat, including areas of species-rich grassland. This diverse habitat supports a range of invertebrates and ant hills are a regular feature. These invertebrates in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats.

**9.20** This LCA is criss-crossed by a number of watercourses, and many of the SNCIs within this LCA include a watercourse or tributary. The River Frome and Ladden Brook are designated as SNCIs specifically for their flowing water and bankside vegetation. These watercourses support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and water voles. In addition, ponds and pools within the area support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

**9.21** Agricultural areas comprise a patchwork of arable and pastoral farmland. The arable farmland in particular is an ideal habitat for many species of ground nesting farmland birds, including birds that are listed as being Globally Threatened Red listed species. The winter stubble also provides a valuable foraging resource for farmland birds.

## LCA 8: Yate Vale

**9.22** The disused quarries within the northern and western extents of the LCA may include underground quarries and mines that can provide an ideal habitat for many species of bat including European Protected Species.

**9.23** South Gloucestershire Strategic Blue-Green Infrastructure Corridor C: Winterbourne-Kendleshire-Yate (*River Frome Corridor*) runs east-west through the LCA following the River Frome. Part of Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor D: Wickwar-Westerleigh-Biton (*Westerleigh Vale/Oldland Ridge/East Fringe*) extends onto an area of land to the east of Rangeworthy. Strategic Blue-Green Infrastructure Corridor G Wickwar-Iron Acton (*Ladden Valley*) crosses the north of the LCA.

## Cultural Influences

### Land Use and Time Depth

**9.24** The Yate Vale LCA is largely an agricultural landscape with a mix of pastoral and arable land uses, except for the concentrated area of settlement in the south-east.

**9.25** The village of Iron Acton, whose linear plan is typical of the planned settlements of the Middle Ages, is designated as a Conservation Area in recognition of its numerous historic buildings. The village was founded through its associations with ore extraction and iron workings. It consists largely of a mix of historic building styles, combined with a village green and other small public open spaces. The buildings are mainly constructed with Pennant sandstone and light-coloured render, with high stone walls defining property boundaries along the High Street.

**9.26** Early evidence of human habitation of the landscape, include Earthworks associated with the small Roman town of Wickwar (now a Scheduled Monument) comprises an area of approximately 16 hectares and lies 2km to the

## **LCA 8: Yate Vale**

south-west of Wickwar village. The site is situated on a slight crest which drops away at the northern end towards the Ladden Brook.

**9.27** A cluster of Grade II listed buildings at Yate Court, a medieval manor, are located north of Yate. The site is unique in being the only moated habitation within the South Gloucestershire area. It is surrounded by a former deer park, and the associated historic field boundaries are still partially evident in the current field pattern.

**9.28** Acton Court (a Scheduled Monument), located to the north of Iron Acton, is included within the wider Conservation Area. The site comprises a large Tudor house, walled grounds and decorative gateway. A former deer park lies to the north of Iron Acton, the majority of which is located within LCA 9: Tytherington Plain.

## **Settlement and Infrastructure**

**9.29** The Yate Vale LCA includes the large settlement of Yate, which has merged with Chipping Sodbury to the east to form a continuous urban area. The settlements are physically separated by the rising landform of the Wickwar Ridge, with a noticeable increase in elevation when approaching Chipping Sodbury from the west.

**9.30** Although Yate has a medieval core, clustered around St Mary's Church, Goose Green and Yate Rocks, it grew rapidly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to include extensive areas of housing. Concentrations of commercial and retail development are located along major roads with industrial estates located on the western fringe of the settlement.

**9.31** Outside Yate, the settlement pattern of relatively dispersed houses is closely related to the road network. Engine Common is a distinct linear settlement, whilst Rangeworthy and Heath End are linear settlements with a clustered pattern located at road intersections. Iron Acton village, to the west of



## **LCA 8: Yate Vale**

Yate, is probably the result of two settlements merging, now forming a linear settlement.

**9.32** Farm building groups are numerous in the area, dispersed along minor roads or occasionally clustered together as seen at Mayshill.

**9.33** The settlement edges of Frampton Cotterell and Coalpit Heath, which lie in the adjoining LCA 13: Frome Valley, form the south-western boundary of the LCA. Frampton End extends slightly northwards into this LCA 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 LCA 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, clustered around a minor road junction, near traditional farm buildings.

**9.34** Numerous major and minor roads and lanes bisect the southern part of the area. The A432, with its high traffic volumes, extends from Yate to the M4 bisecting the village of Nibley. The B4059, B4060 and A432 connect Yate to Coalpit Heath, Frampton Cotterell and Bristol in the south, while the B4058 runs north–south and defines much of the western LCA boundary. Road access across the north of the LCA is limited.

**9.35** 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 promoted recreational routes.

**9.36** A Circular Ride crosses the LCA east to west, largely along country lanes and one short section of bridleway. The route descends the Wickwar Ridge passing Engine Common, Yate and Iron Acton. The Avon Cycleway also partly follows this route, though crossing the LCA in a second location between Heath End and West End. The Jubilee Way passes through the south and centre of the LCA. The River Frome forms an important ecological and recreational

## LCA 8: Yate Vale

corridor, and the Frome Valley Walkway largely follows the river's course from east to west.

**9.37** Three railway lines cross the area. The Bristol to Gloucester line passes centrally south to north, largely at grade, entering into cutting through the Wickwar Ridge. The London to South Wales line passes east to west along the southern LCA boundary, initially in cutting in the east and then on high embankment, with two blue brick arched bridges along the section between Yate and Coalpit Heath. A mineral line runs from Yate westwards, before turning north at Iron Acton. This was formerly the main line to Thornbury.

**9.38** The LCA is also crossed by numerous powerlines in a variety of directions, but principally west to east. Some powerlines converge on a sub-station beyond this LCA to the north of Latteridge (within the LCA 10: Earthcott Vale). In addition, one line runs north-south, near the eastern LCA boundary. An existing solar farm development is located to the west of Yate. A consented solar farm site is located in the north of the LCA, along the B4058 to the west of Wickwar.

### **Photo 3: Clustered farmsteads located along the road network.**



# Perceptual Influences

## Visual Character

**9.39** The Yate Vale LCA is gently sloping, forming the eastern segment of a wider broad, rolling and curved vale, which extends into the adjacent LCA 9: Tytherington Plain, although distinct from the plain's gentler landform, simpler pattern of land cover and sparse settlement. The low-lying landscape is contained by the gently rising landforms of the Wickwar 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, sense of enclosure and scale of the LCA.

**9.40** Views in the LCA 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 (LCA 4), from where the low-lying vale and strong vegetation structure forms part of a much larger panorama, extending to the LCA 18: Severn Ridges.

**9.41** The rural areas of the Ladden Brook valley, in the east of the LCA, and River Frome valley, in the south-west of the LCA, generally have a subtle landform, semi-enclosed by clipped hedgerows and an even distribution of mature specimen trees which creates a structured landscape pattern.

**9.42** Immediately to the north and west of Yate, the landscape is more enclosed with tall overgrown hedgerows, mature hedgerow trees, copses and small woodlands. In contrast, an area to the east of Heath End is more open, with few hedgerow trees. This allows views eastwards across the LCA to Wickwar Quarry (within the adjacent LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale), 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,

## **LCA 8: Yate Vale**

which, combined with a shallow open valley, allows some open distant views across to the industrial edge of Yate.

**9.43** Horse paddocks, particularly to the west of Yate, have resulted in the decline or loss of hedgerows leading to a more open character. Stables, parked vehicles, open storage, jumps and other features associated with the keeping of horses are relatively visible in this open landscape.

**9.44** The urban edges of Yate are not particularly visible from within the wider vale landscape in the centre and north of the LCA, due to the layered effect of vegetation and generally low-lying nature of views. Within southerly views the tower of St. Mary's Church forms a landmark.

**9.45** The western urban edge of Yate is however very prominent within local views, including from Nibley and Westerleigh Common, and in more distant views from Coalpit Heath and LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge to the east of this LCA. From these locations the density of residential development and large-scale industrial units form stark urban edges, though maturing landscape works provide some integration.

**9.46** Dense settlement influences the south-western boundary of the LCA. The settlement edge of Frampton Cotterell and Frampton End in the west of the LCA 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. St. Peter's Church forms a local landmark, visible within rural views to the north and along the northern edge of Frampton Cotterell.

**9.47** 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.

**9.48** The London to South Wales railway, on high embankment along the southern LCA boundary, physically contains views both into and out from the south-western corner of the LCA. The tall arched, brick bridges are distinctive local features, also found within the LCA 13: Frome Valley to the west.

## LCA 8: Yate Vale

Overhead railway gantries form a significant feature. Linear woodland that formerly covered significant lengths of embankment was previously removed for maintenance works, though some lower-density maturing compensatory planting is softening this artificial skyline.

**9.49** Powerlines and pylons, many converging on the substation to the north of Latteridge (within the LCA 10: Earthcott Vale, form strong vertical and horizontal elements within the landscape that are prominent within many of the distant views, particularly in the south of the LCA.

**Photo 4: Hedgerows contribute to the partially-enclosed character, and provide some screening of residential and electricity infrastructure.**





### Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**9.50** Much of the LCA experienced reduced levels of tranquillity given the presence of settlement at Yate and busy roads in the south including the B4059, B4060 and A432. The Bristol-Gloucester and South Wales-London railway lines influence tranquillity where passing at grade or on embankment. Light pollution associated with Yate, Coalpit Heath and Frampton Cotterell influence the experience of dark skies in the south of the LCA.

**9.51** The north of the LCA is relatively tranquil and has a relatively good experience of dark skies with low levels of light pollution.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**9.52** The LCA is flanked along its eastern edge by the Wickwar Ridge Visually Important Hillside (VIH), which is predominantly located within LCA 5 but passes into this LCA along the eastern settlement edge of Yate. The Wickwar Ridge VIH is a linear steep ridge that is relatively narrow in width. It forms a distinctive landscape feature in views, emphasised by the lower-lying vale landscape to the west.

**9.53** The northern-most extent of the Pucklechurch Ridge VIH is located to the south-east of this LCA (within LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley) and forms a rural backdrop to views from Yate. Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

### Strategic Viewpoints

**9.54** There are no Strategic Viewpoints (SVP) located within this LCA, However SVP 21: Wickwar Ridge (located within LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale)

provides a view across Yate Vale. Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Valued Features

- The network of hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees that create a strong landscape framework and provide habitat connectivity.
- Areas of neutral grassland (including areas of species-rich grassland) that support a diverse range of flora with some areas locally designated as SNCIs.
- The flowing water and bankside vegetation of watercourses and associated tributaries (many of which are designated as SNCI) that provides habitat for a range of notable species and contributes to biodiversity. Most notably, the River Frome and its riparian vegetation provides an important corridor for habitat connectivity and recreation.
- Views of the rural landscape of the north of the LCA from the Wickwar Ridge, Marle Hills and Cotswold Scarp, which contributes to sense of place and scenic value.
- The Iron Acton Conservation Area, with its linear planned village, historic buildings including Acton Court (Scheduled Monument), and rural setting, which adds time depth.
- The cluster of Grade II listed buildings at Yate Court and the associated former deer park with historic field patterns, which add time depth.
- The network of public rights of way and cycle paths, including the Jubilee Way, Frome Valley Walkway, Avon Cycleway and Circular Ride, that provide recreational opportunities across the landscape.
- The rural character and relative tranquillity of the north of the area, which contributes to sense of place.

## The Changing Landscape

**9.55** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Yate Vale LCA.

### Climate Change

- Climate change leading to increased temperatures and periods of drought resulting in a change in stream flows, altering the species composition of wetland habitats (ponds, flowing open water and bankside vegetation associated with SNCIs), particularly the River Frome.
- Climate change resulting in an increase in the frequency and severity of seasonal flooding in lower-lying valleys in the north and west of the LCA. Associated pressures to build flood management works that are unsympathetic to local landscape character and sensitive habitats.

### Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- Pressure to expand existing and consented solar farm development in the south and north of the LCA would likely result in further adverse and cumulative effects on landscape character and visual amenity.
- An increase in tree planting is required to contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may include the establishment of additional woodlands in a corridor fringing the north side of Yate, linking existing woodlands and extending to the woodland complex around and south of Lower Woods as set out in the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy. This may change the character of views towards Wickwar Ridge, although this may also contribute to the softening or screening of quarry operations along the ridge.

### Land Use and Cover

- 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 and from LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge, reducing the present perception of rurality in the north of the LCA.
- The effectiveness of hedgerows for stock control will reduce in time if not managed. Bringing these features back under management, will initially result in the loss of screening and change the enclosed character of the local landscape, particularly where they predominate to the north of Yate.
- Loss or degradation of hedgerows or tree cover would also impact on the habitat value of the landscape and potentially on connectivity between habitats.
- Pools and ponds and surrounding terrestrial habitats are vulnerable to loss or degradation.
- Areas of relatively recent woodland planting, undertaken under the Forest of Avon initiative, at Tyler's Field within Yate, Rangeworthy and Westerleigh Common is softening views of built development and providing habitat connectivity throughout the wider landscape.
- Recreational pressure for 'horsiculture' is evident particularly along the edges of settlements leading to the loss or erosion of hedgerows. The cumulative effect of this and the associated infrastructure can result in a marked change in landscape character as well as impact on biodiversity.
- 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.
- 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.

## LCA 8: Yate Vale

- Similarly, change along the toe, slopes or skyline of the Wickwar Ridge (within LCA 5), has the potential to be visually intrusive (as seen at Wickwar Quarry to the east), influencing rural views experienced both along the ridge and within the vale below.

## Development

- The settlement edges of Yate are poorly integrated and have a visual influence on the adjacent rural fringe, due to limited vegetation including 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, although associated landscape works is maturing to provide some integration with the wider landscape. The visibility of Yate's extending northern fringe in views from the Wickwar Ridge make this area sensitive to change. Another feature of the area is infill and intensification of use of existing sites, such as Brimsham School and Broad Lane Depot.
- Recent expansion of settlement to the north of Yate has extended the influence of development into the countryside. As the landscaping associated with this recent development matures, the green infrastructure network should help not only to provide an appropriate buffer between the urban and rural landscape, but also break up the areas of built form in views from higher ground.
- The national trend of increasing traffic levels, with the potential for subsequent road widening, threatens some of the more populated ribbon settlements and associated 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 will



## LCA 8: Yate Vale

have a localised but cumulative, effect eroding the existing rural character within settlements and rural corridors.

- The solar park development at Says Court has altered the character of this locality; maturing landscaping surrounding the scheme will reinforce the existing landscape pattern and should in time help to absorb this development into the landscape. Some aspects, including ancillary equipment buildings that are located on a gentle ridge are however likely to remain relatively prominent in the landscape.
- The northern edge of Frampton Cotterell, at Frampton End, is well-integrated and largely visually contained 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, and 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 to the east of the settlement, making it less sensitive to change along the immediate settlement edge. However, large-scale change has the potential to be prominent, due to limited tree and woodland cover which results in relatively open character of the landscape.
- 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. Further proposed development at Engine Common, and the recent expansion of the northern edge of Yate, may influence the linear form of the settlement, lead to further encroachment into the rural landscape and contribute to the sense of coalescence between Engine Common, Rangeworthy and Yate.
- The remaining small linear settlement areas of Iron Acton and Heath End and the clustered settlements of Nibley and Mayshill, 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 which cleared tree cover have significantly increased the prominence of the railway within the landscape, however some maturing compensatory planting is softening the appearance of embankments. Electrification of the London to South Wales railway line has added to the visual intrusion of the line from overhead gantries.

## Guidance

**9.56** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the overarching management strategy objectives set out in Chapter 4.

### Landscape Strategy

#### Landscape Management

- Restore, maintain and reinforce the characteristic hedgerows, dry stone walls, historic field patterns and mosaic of habitats of the Yate Vale. Protect and extend hedgerow tree cover.
- Address potential for flooding issues with the implementation of natural flood management schemes in the south of the LCA, in line with the aims of the River Frome Reconnected project.
- Work with the River Frome Reconnected partnership to develop a co-ordinated approach to tree planting in suitable locations along the river corridor and associated green spaces. Work with landowners to support effective riparian tree and hedge management for the benefit of wildlife, public safety and flood management.

## LCA 8: Yate Vale

- Protect and enhance the special character, significance or setting of the parkland, historic field patterns and earthworks associated with Acton Court Scheduled Monument, Yate Court and their deer parks, as well as the landscape pattern of the Engine Common area. Measures should include securing succession planting and landscape management plans.
- Protect the character of the lane network from damage by maintaining roadside stone walls, hedges and trees, and managing road verges to promote grassland interest (e.g., around Acton Court, Engine Common, and Nibley).
- Quarry restoration schemes should incorporate a robust landscape mitigation strategy and structure that ensures their re-integration into the appearance of the wider landscape, and its mosaic of habitats.
- Establish accessible woodlands in a corridor fringing the north side of Yate, linking existing woodlands and extending north to the woodland complex around and to the south of Lower Woods (within LCA 5), whilst ensuring conservation of semi-improved grassland and other priority habitats, historic monuments and viewpoints.
- Establish individual and groups of trees and small woodlands within:
  - parks and greenspaces addressing inequalities in tree canopy cover and with a strong community dimension to their location, size and care.
  - primary and secondary school grounds, with school responsibility for their care
  - adjacent to streets, addressing inequalities in tree canopy cover and with a strong community dimension to their location, size and care.
- Preserve and enhance the landscape setting of Iron Acton Conservation Area, together with key views towards it and looking out from it, and respect its characteristic mosaic of interlinked built and open spaces.
- Protect the landscape setting of the scheduled small Roman Town at Hall End.

## Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Protect and extend the strategic neutral and species-rich grassland network including Sodbury Common and Westerleigh (Yate) Common.
- Conserve and enhance the existing populations of notable habitats (including priority habitat deciduous woodland, good quality semi-improved grassland and lowland meadow), ensuring that there is no net loss of biodiversity.
- Protect and improve the riparian habitat of the River Frome and seek opportunities to naturalise sections currently impacted by engineering structures (except heritage features), together with opportunities for enhance recreational access, particularly through Yate and Chipping Sodbury. Encourage restoration of buffer strips along watercourses and field ponds to minimise run off to maintain the biodiversity of wetland features, in line with the aims of the River Frome Reconnected project.
- Enhance and manage tree and hedge planting in appropriate locations along the River Frome corridor, in line with the aims of the River Frome Reconnected project and Forest of Avon Plan Tree and Woodland Strategy.
- Support the planting of new wildflower habitats along B-lines within the west of the LCA (identified by Buglife), that will contribute to the national pollinator network.

## Development Management

- Encourage and enhance small-scale woodland planting in proximity to prominent industrial and residential development, to minimise the influence of development and settlement edges on the wider rural landscape.
- The landscape strategy for new development should ensure a green character in views from adjacent high ground, including the Wickwar Ridge, Marle Hills and more distant Cotswold Scarp, and visual buffering from the surrounding rural landscape particularly in the north of the LCA.

## LCA 8: Yate Vale

- Protect and enhance the linear settlement pattern and associated historic field pattern of the Engine Common area.
- Encourage the use of building materials that respect and integrate with the local vernacular, in particular Pennant Sandstone with carboniferous limestone closer to the Wickwar Ridge area.
- Avoid disturbance of the remaining areas of tranquillity and dark skies in the north of the LCA. Lighting design needs careful consideration especially on the edge of settlements and in rural areas, both to minimise impact on landscape character and avoid disruption to vulnerable species.
- Cumulative impact of existing solar PV farms has significantly altered the character of the landscape, and further development of this type should be avoided.



## LCA 9: Tytherington Plain

The Tytherington Plain landscape character area (LCA) is a flat open agricultural landscape, rising gently at the boundaries. It is divided by a regular framework of hedges and ditches and its rural character is influenced by a number of powerlines.

**Photo 1: Flat agricultural fields crossed by powerlines with pylons which mark the skyline.**

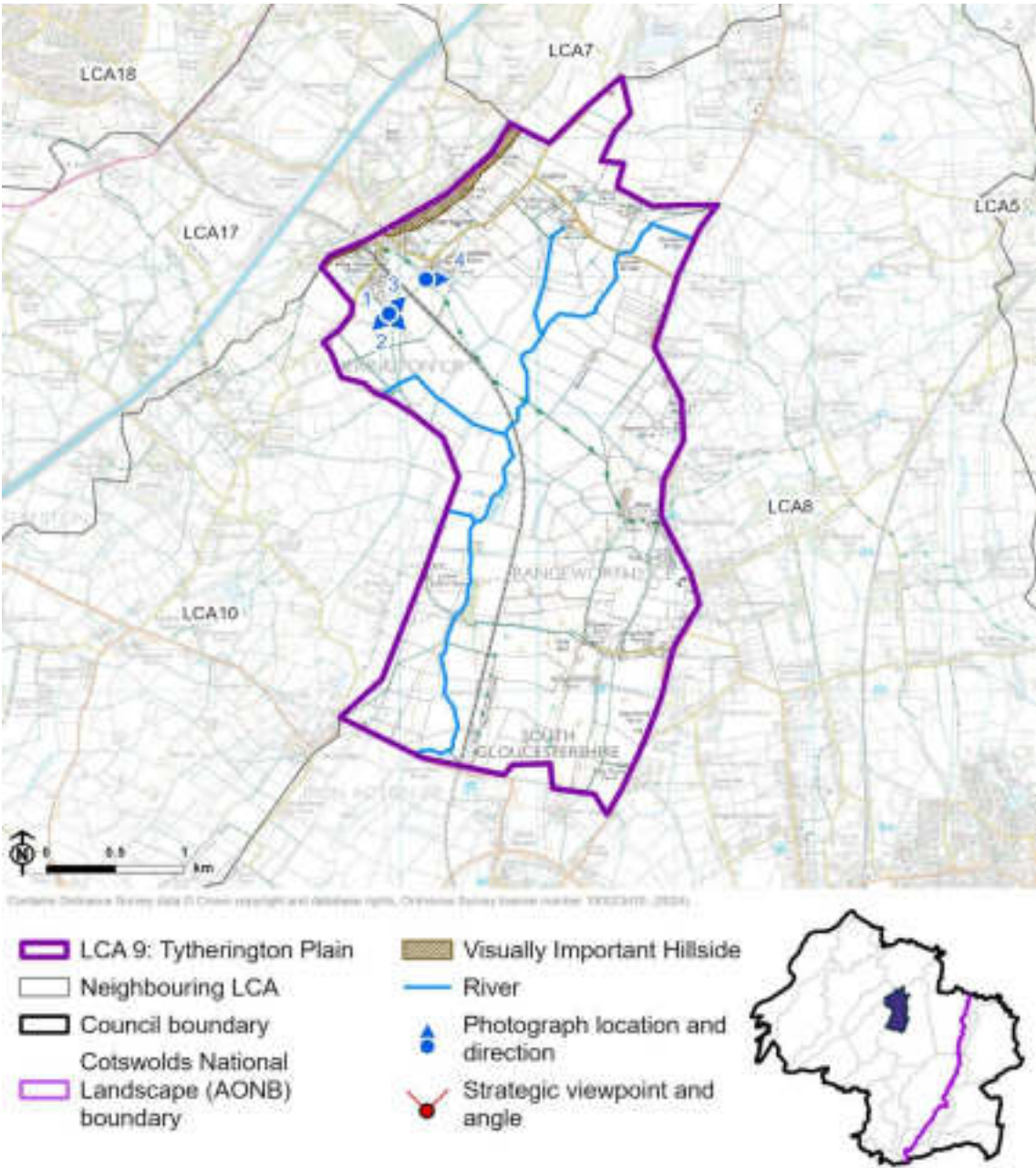


### Location

**9.57** The Tytherington Plain LCA is located in central South Gloucestershire. The eastern boundary follows the B4058 as it runs along a low ridge. The central western boundary marks a transition between this LCA's limited tree cover and the denser pattern of hedgerow trees in the adjacent LCA 10: Earthcott Vale. The south-western boundary follows the slightly higher ground of The Marle Hills at Latteridge, which partly contains the southern area of the LCA. The southern boundary partly follows the B4059.

LCT 9: Tytherington Plain

Figure 9.5: Location and Landscape Setting of LCA 9: Tytherington Plain



## LCT 9: Tytherington Plain

**Figure 9.6: Development and Heritage context of LCA 9: Tytherington Plain**

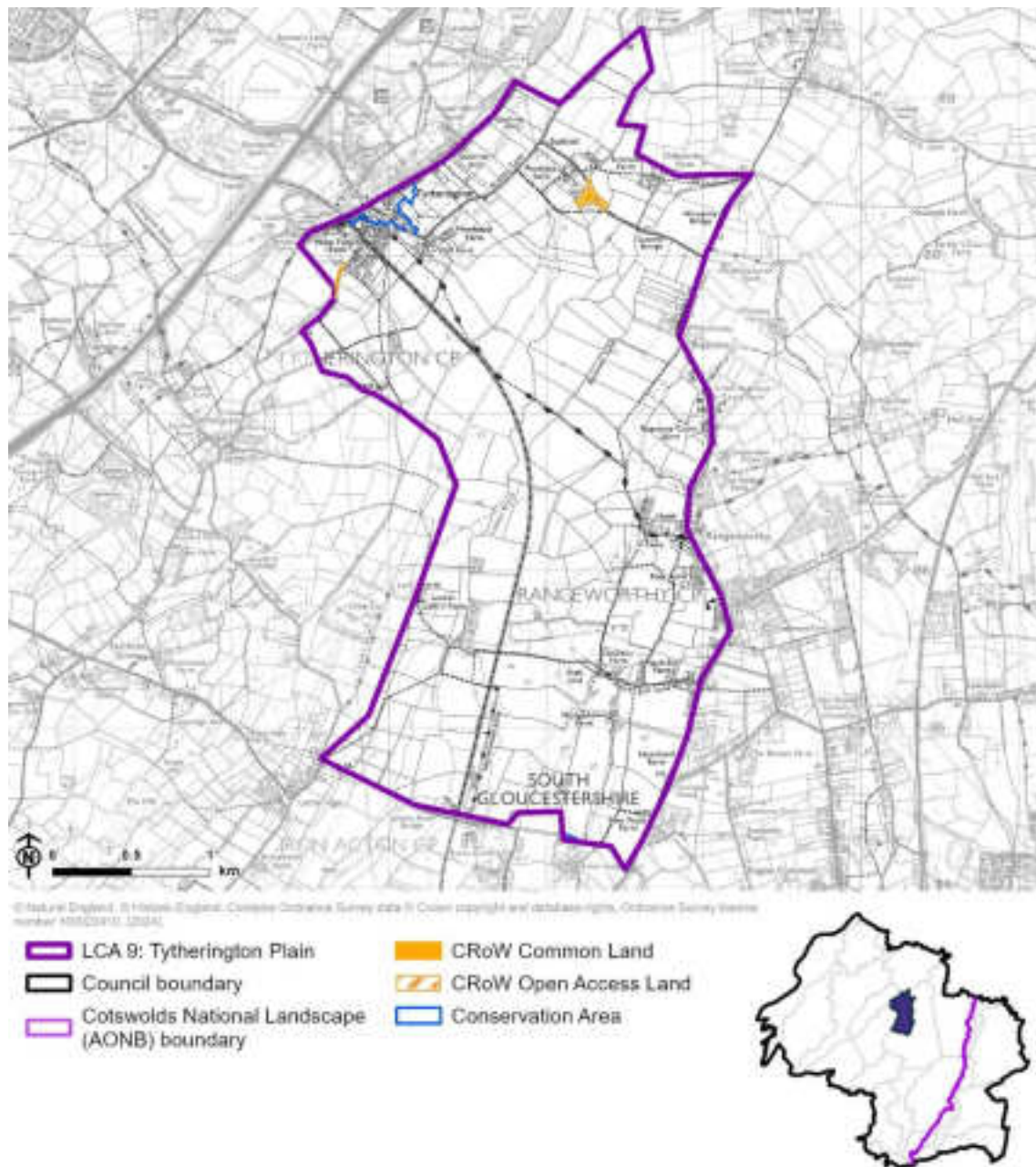
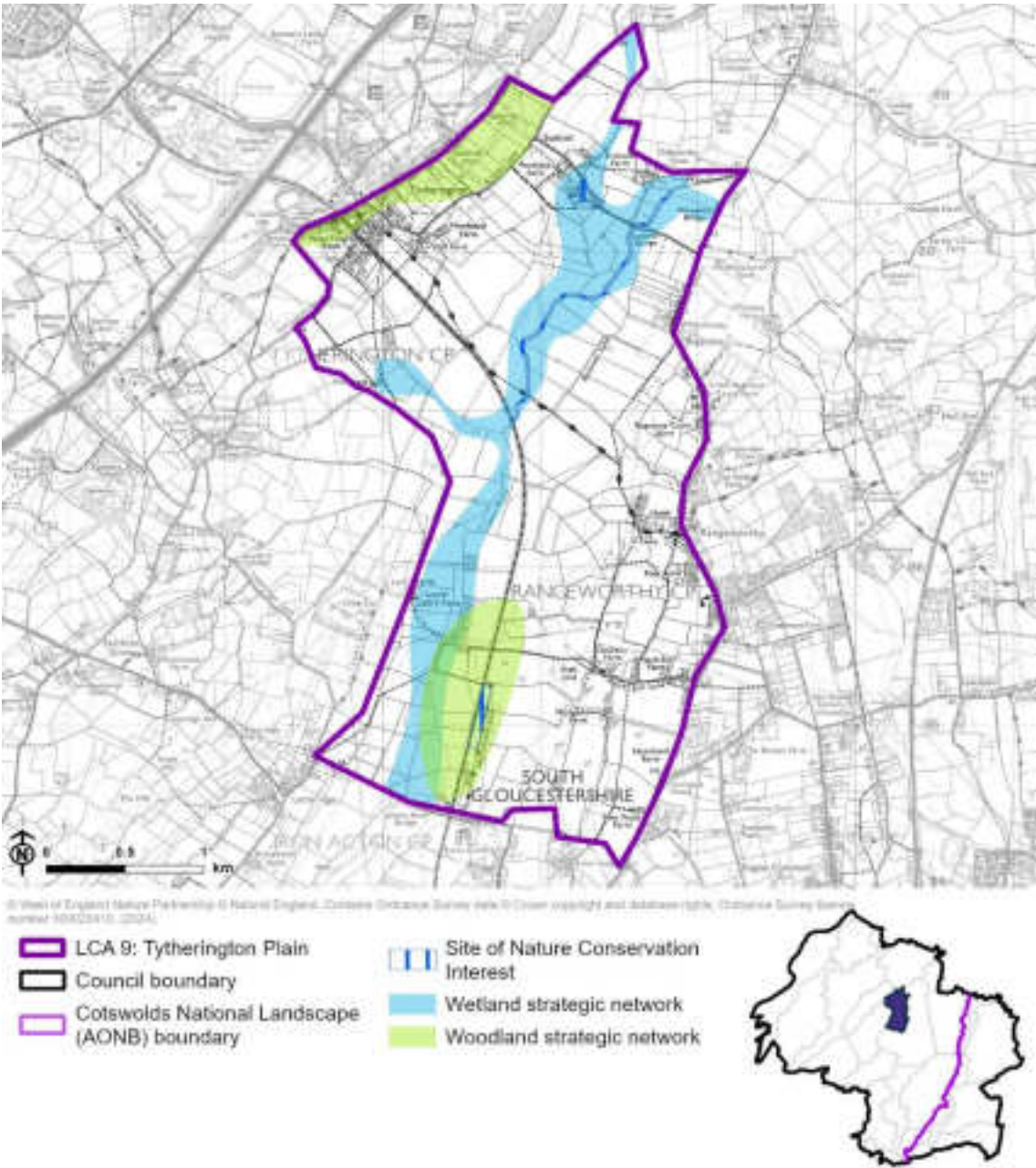




Figure 9.7: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 9: Tytherington Plain



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- The simple, flat open plain in the north transitions to a very gently sloping valley to the south. The LCA is 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.
- The landscape is crossed by watercourses and associated bankside vegetation of the Ladden Brook, its tributaries and a regular pattern of connecting ditches.
- Land use is mostly arable farmland with limited pasture. Fields are medium sized fields with a distinctly regular pattern.
- Within the northern plain, fields are defined by drainage ditches, while elsewhere they are contained by low clipped hedges, some overgrown, with intermittent mature trees and copses.
- Areas of neutral grassland support a diverse range of flora including areas of species-rich grassland.
- Tree cover is limited, except on higher ground along the boundaries of the LCA 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.
- An area with limited settlement and road infrastructure. Isolated properties, farms, some linear settlement and the small village of Tytherington line minor roads along the edges of the area.
- A number of powerlines cross and dominate the open landscape, converging on a sub-station within the adjacent LCA 10: Earthcott Vale to the south-west.
- Relatively dark skies are experienced in the centre and north of the LCA.



### Natural Influences

#### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**9.58** The Tytherington Plain LCA 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.

**9.59** The topography of this area is generally flat, around 50 metres AOD rising slightly at its fringes. The LCA forms a very shallow basin within an overall broad vale landscape which includes the adjacent LCA 10: Earthcott Vale to the west and LCA 8: Yate Vale to the south and east. Within this context, the minerals railway line forms a significant landform feature, with one section on embankment south-east of Tytherington.

**9.60** The Ladden Brook is the principal watercourse, which flows southwards through this relatively 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 historic drainage measures to improve marsh and heathland for agricultural purposes. Seasonal flooding after continuous heavy rain can cover a significant area of the plain. The land rises in the north-west towards the Tytherington Ridge, in the south-west, at Latteridge (up to 61 metres AOD), and to the east along the B4058 (up to 67 metres AOD), defining the shallow Ladden Brook valley. This valley continues southwards and joins the River Frome in the adjacent LCA 8: Yate Vale.

#### Land Cover

**9.61** The Tytherington Plain LCA typically consists of medium sized, regular shaped fields of predominantly arable land with limited pasture. Some smaller field patterns are clustered around scattered properties and farms. These comprise ordered, narrow, rectangular shaped fields in the north. Field

## **LCT 9: Tytherington Plain**

boundaries principally comprise clipped hedges, often intermittent, some removed within the central area and occasionally replaced with fencing. Drainage ditches and streams physically contain fields, particularly in the north of the LCA. 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.

**9.62** Tree cover is limited within the LCA, and is confined to scattered mature hedgerow trees, isolated trees remaining from removed hedgerows, occasional copses or clumps of trees. There are also some trees and scrub along the railway line. Tree cover is more evenly distributed on higher ground towards the LCA's boundaries and in the south. Small remnants of traditional orchards (priority habitat) are present around the edge of Tytherington.

**9.63** Some local variations in land cover occur within the LCA. Rangeworthy Court, west of Rangeworthy, comprises a parkland of mature tree specimens within grassland. The adjacent remains of medieval fishponds are enclosed by trees with rough grassland. A former deer park extends into the south of the LCA, associated with Acton Lodge. Stidcot Plat Common, in the north of the LCA and north-east of Tytherington, comprises a small, isolated area of neutral unimproved pasture, fringed by trees and clipped hedgerows.

**Photo 2: Medium-scale fields with hedgerow boundaries, with more distant woodland along the edges of the LCA.**



### Biodiversity

**9.64** The general lack of woodland within this LCA means that the hedgerows and any hedgerow trees are important landscape features and provide habitats for a range of species. They are likely to form roosting features for bats and dormice both of which are present across the wider area and are UK priority species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP). The hedgerows are a major food source and provide commuting routes across the area.

**9.65** The few Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) within this character area are varied and scattered. Two areas of neutral grassland are designated as SNCIs and support a range of invertebrates which in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats.

## LCT 9: Tytherington Plain

**9.66** The Ladden Brook, designated as an SNCI, is the main watercourse within this area. Its tributaries, in the form of drainage ditches, were created as irrigation for the surrounding arable farmland. These watercourses support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and water voles. In addition, scattered ponds and pools within the area support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

**9.67** Agricultural land use within this area is dominated by arable cultivation with some areas of pastoral farmland. The arable farmland provides a habitat for many species of ground nesting farmland birds including birds which are listed as Globally Threatened Red listed species, while the winter stubble provides a valuable foraging resource.

**9.68** There are small areas of good quality semi-improved grassland priority habitat in the south of the LCA, small areas of traditional orchard priority habitat in the north-west of the LCA, and more extensive areas of coastal and floodplain grazing marsh priority habitat in the west of the LCA.

**9.69** South Gloucestershire Strategic Blue-Green Infrastructure Corridor G: Wickwar-Iron Acton (*Ladden Valley*) follows the course of Ladden Brook through the LCA. A small area of Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor B: Charfield-Alveston-Hallen (*Western Scarp/Severn Ridges*) falls within the north-western extent of the LCA.

## Cultural Influences

### Land Use and Time Depth

**9.70** Land use across the Tytherington Plain LCA is primarily associated with agricultural practices (mainly arable).

**9.71** The Tytherington Conservation Area extends into the north-west of the LCA. The Conservation Area includes key properties and a framework of tall

## **LCT 9: Tytherington Plain**

boundary walls, all constructed of Pennant sandstone. The church and public house, located at the heart of the village (and on the boundary of the LCA), are prominent locally. The open fields of the LCA form the context of key outward views from the Conservation Area towards the Wickwar Ridge.

**9.72** A parkland landscape of mature specimen trees within grassland forms the setting to a cluster of listed buildings at Rangeworthy Court, in the east of the LCA. Historic field patterns associated with the remnants of a former deer park extend from Acton Court (located in the LCA 8: Yate Vale) into the south of the LCA.

### **Settlement and Infrastructure**

**9.73** Settlement within lower-lying extents of the LCA is limited to the hamlet of Stidcot and a few isolated farms within the north and south-east of the LCA. Elsewhere, settlement is located on slightly raised ground on the periphery of the LCA, including the village of Tytherington which lies partly within this LCA. Similarly, the linear settlements of Rangeworthy and Bagstone are located on a slight ridge along the B4058, on the eastern boundary of the LCA.

**9.74** Tytherington (designated as a Conservation Area) is located at a confluence of roads on the lower slopes of Tytherington Hill, partly extending into this LCA. More recent housing has developed out from the village centre beyond the Conservation Area boundary, either concentrated in a small close or a linear pattern along lanes.

**9.75** Only one minor road crosses the northern low-lying plain at Stidcot. Minor roads and lanes elsewhere are limited to the LCA's boundaries. The B4058 passes along upper slopes of the low ridge defining the Ladden Valley, from Iron Acton to Heath End. The B4059 runs to the south from Iron Acton through Latteridge, across the Ladden Brook valley. An angular pattern of lanes around Tytherington runs parallel to the rising landform with occasional acute bends.



## **LCT 9: Tytherington Plain**

**9.76** The Jubilee Way passes south-eastwards from Tytherington to Rangeworthy, over the central plain area. A Circular Ride enters the periphery of the LCA, following lanes through Tytherington. The footpath network within the LCA is otherwise very limited.

**9.77** 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.

**9.78** A number of powerlines cross the plain, radiating out from the large Iron Acton electricity sub-station located to the west, within the adjacent well treed LCA 10: Earthcott Vale.

**Photo 3: Views towards the settlement edge of Tytherington in the north-west of the LCA.**



### Perceptual Influences

#### Visual Character

**9.79** The Tytherington Plain LCA 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 Tytherington Ridge 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.

**9.80** 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. Wide open skies are a key feature.

**9.81** 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. Stone walls form characteristic features extending 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.

**9.82** 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, and hedgerow trees, which occasionally screen and filter outward views.

**9.83** The minerals railway line, edged with trees and scrub, forms a visually significant linear feature in localised views, containing some views across the open plain to east and west. However, the occasional passage of trains is relatively evident in this open landscape.

## **LCT 9: Tytherington Plain**

**9.84** Tytherington and the wooded ridgeline of the LCA 17: Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge to the west, punctuated by Baden Hill to the north-west, feature in some distant views from the road network and public footpaths.

**9.85** Settlement does not have a major influence on this LCA, as it contains only a scattering of isolated properties and farms. The linear settlements on the periphery of the LCA are generally well-integrated by the surrounding hedgerow and tree vegetation.

**9.86** 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 more recent village extension eastwards is locally prominent, due to the limited vegetation along this section of the settlement edge and the open landscape context. The regular layout visually extends the village towards the open plain, diluting the historic clustered settlement pattern associated with the Tytherington Ridge.

**9.87** Large farm sheds within the LCA are also locally prominent, due to their scale, massing and materials, with buildings often taller than the surrounding vegetation framework, or located within an open landscape setting.

**9.88** 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 (within the LCA 10: Earthcott Vale) is not visible, contained within a strong structure of mature trees beyond this LCA. However, the convergence of powerlines and pylons towards the sub-station is highly prominent. Operational wind turbines in the adjacent LCA 10: Earthcott Vale are also evident in views west from the LCA.

## LCT 9: Tytherington Plain

**Photo 4: Open views overlooking flat and simple landform in the north of the LCA, with an influence of electricity infrastructure.**



### Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**9.89** Settlement and busy roads on the boundaries of the LCA influence the sense of tranquillity experienced within the LCA. The occasional passage of trains on the minerals railway line also influences tranquillity.

**9.90** Relatively dark skies are experienced in the centre and north of the LCA. The proximity of Tytherington, the Iron Acton substation and Iron Acton village result in some light pollution along the north-western and southern boundaries of the LCA.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**9.91** There are no Visually Important Hillsides (VIH) located within this LCA. However, it is enclosed along its north-western edge by the Wick's/Butcher's Hill and Baden Hill VIH, (located within adjacent LCA 7: Falfield Vale and LCA 17: Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge). This VIH comprises an elevated area punctuated by three hills, most notably Wick's Hill. The southern section of the VIH forms part of the setting of the Tytherington Conservation Area (located partially within this LCA), and its northern section is an intrinsic part of the character of the Tortworth Court RPG (Grade II\*, located within LCA 7: Falfield Vale).

**9.92** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

### Strategic Viewpoints

**9.93** There are no Strategic Viewpoints (SVP) located within this LCA. Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Valued Features

- Watercourses (including Ladden Brook) and associated vegetation provide wildlife corridors and habitat for a diverse range of species.
- The interconnecting network of drainage ditches that influence the regular field pattern and provide habitat connectivity.
- Pockets of neutral grassland and more extensive areas of floodplain grazing marsh that contribute to the generally open character of the LCA and provide a valued habitat.



## LCT 9: Tytherington Plain

- Smaller areas of priority habitat traditional orchard contribute to the character of the Tytherington settlement edge and provide a valued habitat.
- The Tytherington Conservation Area and key outward views east across the relatively open plain of the LCA towards the Wickwar Ridge.
- The limited settlement and road infrastructure that contributes to the sense of rurality and experience of dark night skies in the centre and north of the LCA.
- The landscape pattern of flat regular-shaped medium-sized fields with relatively open character that contributes to the sense of place.

## The Changing Landscape

**9.94** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Tytherington Plain LCA.

### Climate Change

- Increase in frequency and severity of seasonal flooding, which already affects a large area of the plain, as a result of climate change. Associated pressures to build flood management engineering works which are not sympathetic to local landscape character and sensitive habitats.

### Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- The vertical and linear nature of overhead electricity lines and transmission towers is prominent within local views. Pressure for further electricity infrastructure, associated with additional deployment of renewable energy, may lead to further visual influence on the landscape and may lead to the perception of a 'wirescape' in parts of the LCA.
- An increase in tree planting is required to contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may include the establishment of new native woodlands along the minerals railway line in the south of the LCA and along the south-eastern edge of Tytherington. This may change the open character of the landscape.

### Land Use and Cover

- The removal of hedgerows, particularly within the northern plain, as a result of a change in land use to arable and associated land drainage. The resulting visual openness makes the area sensitive to change which would be evident from both within the area and higher ground to the east and

## LCT 9: Tytherington Plain

west. The habitat value of the remaining hedgerows and ditches is increased due to their relative scarcity.

- The remaining trees and hedgerows within or towards the edge of the open plain, form a particularly important landscape and habitat 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. However, the mature tree structure contains few juvenile trees to maintain succession. Deterioration or further loss of these features would increase the extent of the open plain and visual sensitivity of the landscape and lead to further loss of habitat and connectivity.
- Any loss of or disturbance to the scattered pools and ponds, including to their surrounding terrestrial habitat would result in loss or degradation of this habitat.
- Agriculture diversification in this area includes growing biofuels, which results in a change to the texture and openness of the landscape, while an increase in horse keeping results in some erosion of the rural character

## Development

- Open views are afforded across the LCA towards a number of powerlines that radiate out from the Iron Acton sub-station (within LCA 10: Earthcott Vale). In an otherwise relatively tranquil and undeveloped area with very little settlement or tree cover, powerlines and towers are prominent features in many views, eroding the rural character of the area.
- Modern agricultural buildings are also prominent structures in this open landscape in places. These contrast 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 distinctive linear settlements along the LCA's boundary are likely to be particularly sensitive to pressures for change, especially from infill development. This may result in the potential loss of the characteristic

## LCT 9: Tytherington Plain

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. This is detrimental to the character of this locally important route.
- The roads of this LCA are under pressure from increasing traffic that can erode verges, in addition safety improvements can result in the loss of characteristic landscape features.

## Guidance

**9.95** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the overarching management strategy objectives set out in Chapter 4.

### Landscape Strategy

#### Landscape Management

- Maintain and enhance the tree, woodland and hedgerow structure at settlement edges to help to ensure the continued integration of settlement and buildings within the wider landscape.
- Maintain and restore the remaining traditional stone walls associated with some roads and settlement to prevent further deterioration of these features.

## LCT 9: Tytherington Plain

- Address potential for flooding issues with the implementation of natural flood management schemes, including enhancement of floodplain grazing marsh priority habitats along Ladden Brook (which forms a tributary of the River Frome), in line with the aims of the River Frome Reconnected project.
- Preserve and enhance the landscape setting of Tytherington Conservation Area, together with key views towards and from it.

### Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Protect and enhance the habitat value of Ladden Brook and connecting tributaries, including appropriate buffers and land management for biodiversity enrichment. (e.g., reduce intensity of arable usage).
- Encourage restoration of buffer strips along watercourses and field ponds to minimise run off to maintain the biodiversity of wetland features along drainage ditches and Ladden Brook, in line with the aims of the River Frome Reconnected project.
- Enhance and manage tree and hedge planting in appropriate locations along the Ladden Brook corridor, in line with the aims of the River Frome Reconnected project and Forest of Avon Plan Tree and Woodland Strategy.
- Protect and extend the strategic neutral grassland network including management of verges and changes to arable farming practice.
- Conserve and enhance the existing populations of notable habitats (including priority habitat coastal and floodplain grazing marsh and smaller areas of traditional orchard), ensuring that there is no net loss of biodiversity.

### Development Management

- Any new development outside the settlements should respect the landscape structure and characteristic openness of the locality, incorporate robust landscape proposals and carefully consider the

## LCT 9: Tytherington Plain

colour and texture of finishes to maximise integration with the landscape.

- Ensure that road improvements protect and/or reinstate characteristic landscape features of the locality.
- The impact of any vertical elements in this open landscape should be mitigated through on and/or off site planting to provide a buffer, foil or screening of key views while still maintaining the open character of the landscape.
- Any new development in the vale should be designed and landscaped to ensure that it does not impact on the visual inter-relationship from higher land to the east and west.



## LCA 10: Earthcott Vale

The Earthcott Vale landscape character area (LCA) is a gently undulating agricultural landscape, divided by a complex network of hedgerows, trees and lanes.

**Photo 1: Gently undulating agricultural fields bounded by a mix of clipped hedgerows and woodland.**

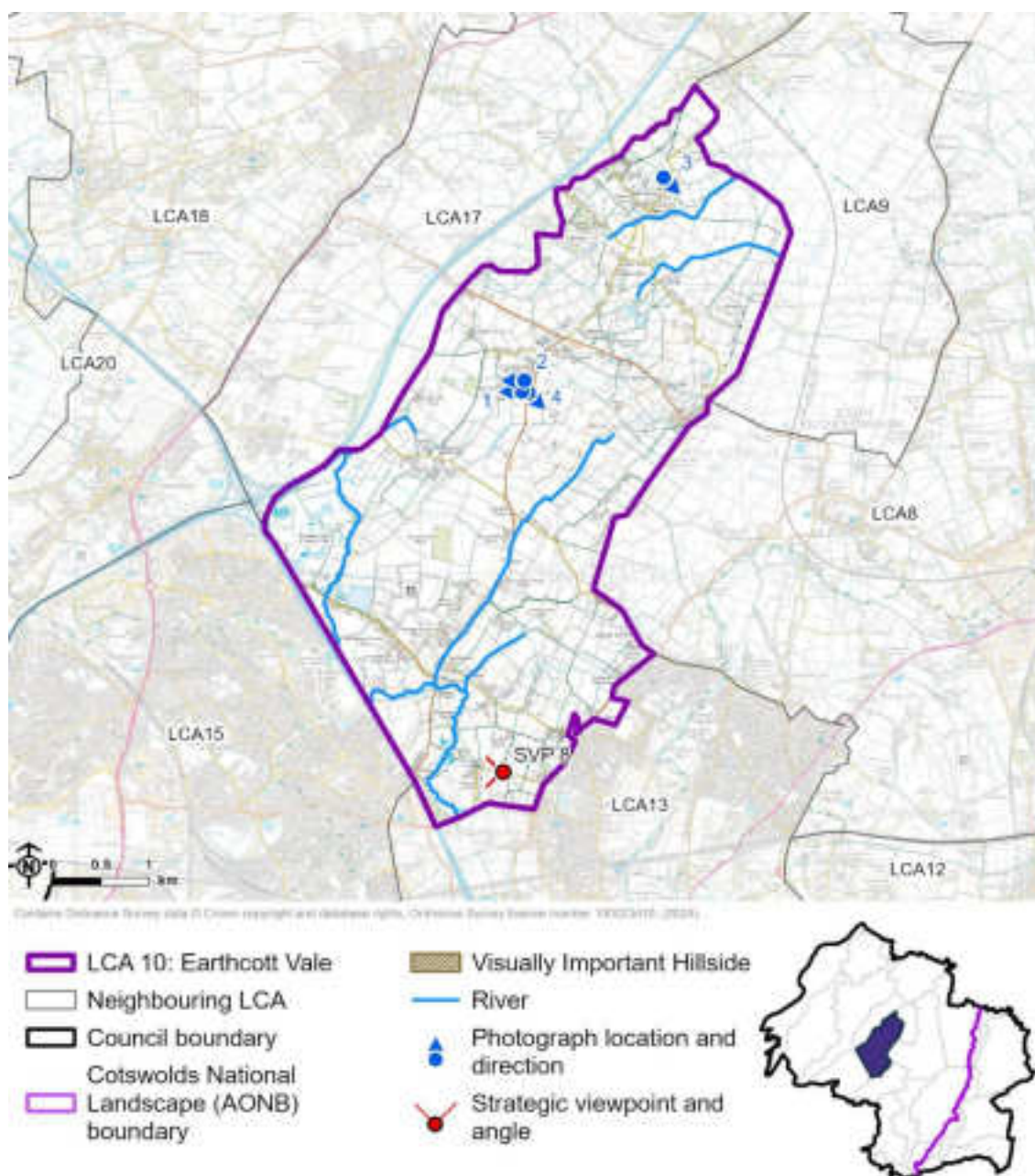


### Location

**9.96** The Earthcott Vale LCA is located in central South Gloucestershire. The south-western boundary is strongly defined by the M4, with the urban edge of Bristol beyond. The north-western boundary marks a subtle change in landform between the shallow vale of this LCA and gently rising landform to the west. The north and north-east boundary also marks a transition between the gently undulating treed landform of this LCA and more open and simpler landform beyond. The eastern boundary follows the Marle Hills and the settlement edges of Frampton Cotterell and Winterbourne to the south-east.

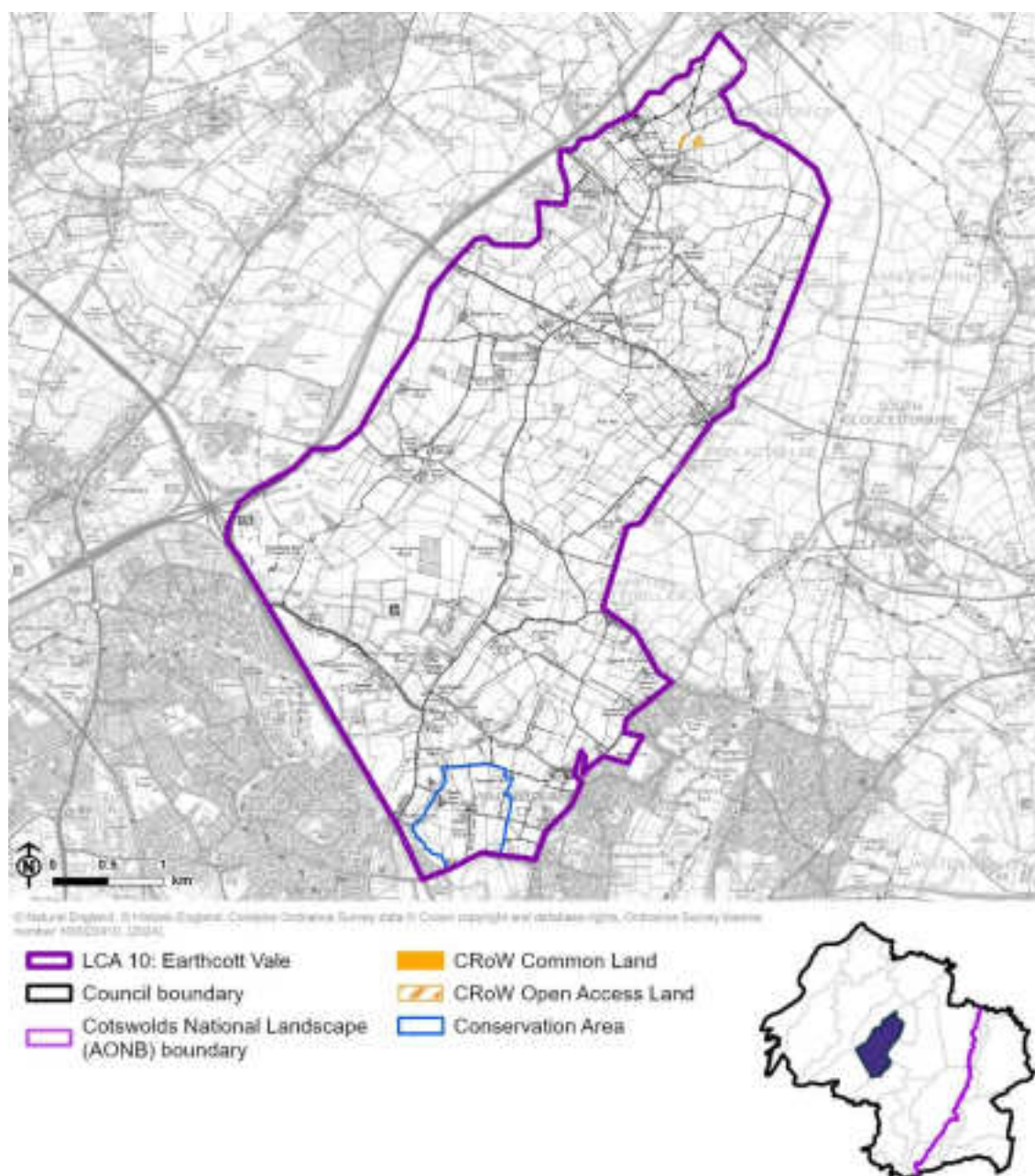
## LCA 10: Earthcott Vale

**Figure 9.8: Location and Landscape Setting of LCA 10: Earthcott Vale**



## LCA 10: Earthcott Vale

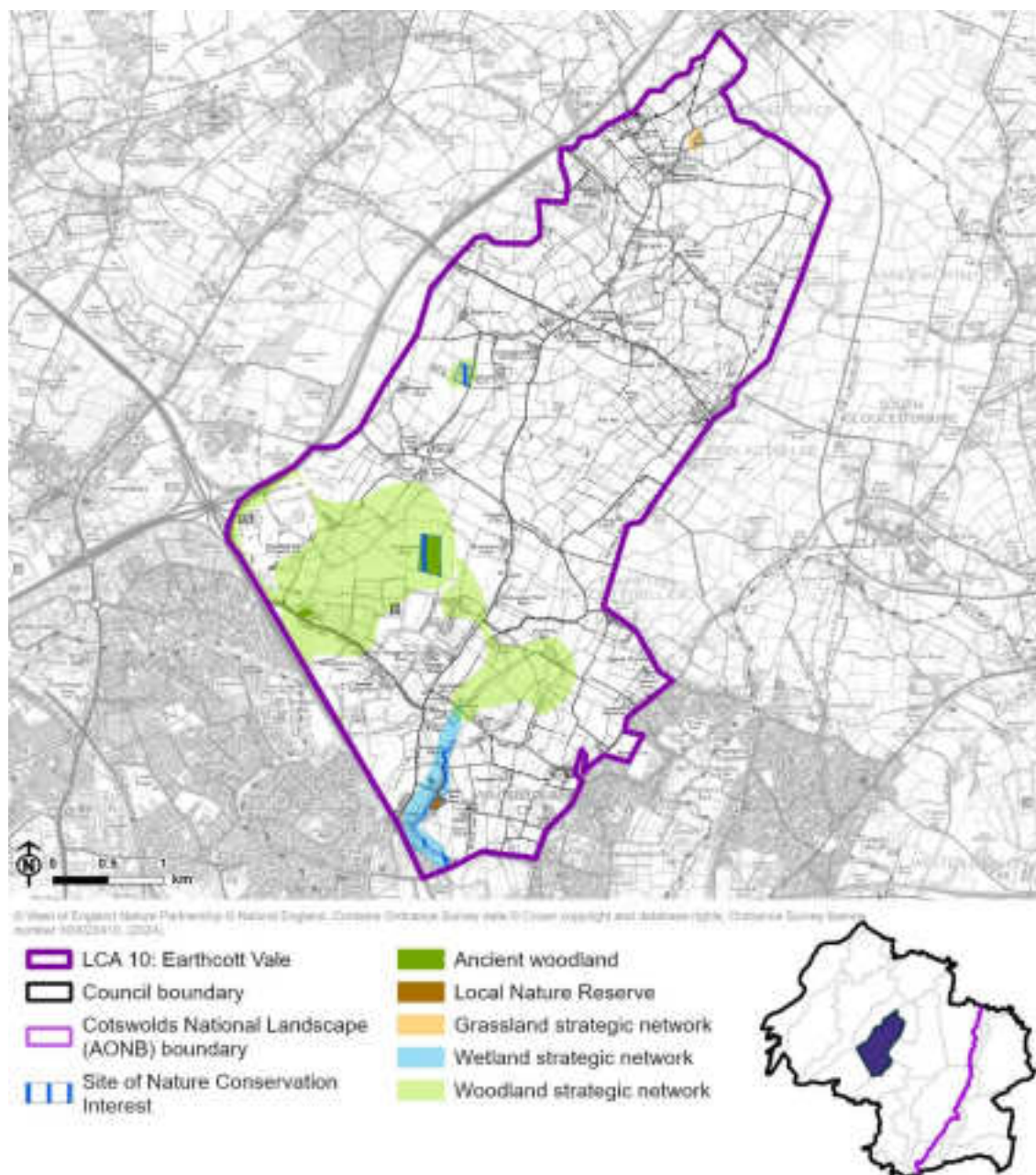
**Figure 9.9: Development and Heritage context of LCA 10: Earthcott Vale**





## LCA 10: Earthcott Vale

**Figure 9.10: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 10:  
Earthcott Vale**



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- Low ridges in the east at Latteridge Hill, The Marle Hills and Winterbourne Hill contain the gently undulating shallow vale and provide elevated vantage points to the wider landscape.
- Small-scale valleys are located to the south and a small plateau area to the south-west.
- The mixed land cover comprises pasture and arable farmland in medium to small sized, regular or irregular shaped fields.
- Varying field boundaries comprise thick, clipped to overgrown or intermittent in places, with dense riparian vegetation in the south. Mature hedgerow and in-field trees are frequent in the north and west.
- Small scattered pockets of broadleaf woodland are located in the south and west of the LCA.
- Numerous watercourses with associated bankside vegetation and riparian trees are located throughout the LCA most notably Bradley Brook in the south.
- Some pennant sandstone walls define fields and lanes in the east of the LCA, associated with the settlement edges of Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell.
- Traditional scattered farms, houses and hamlets are largely built of limestone in the west and Pennant sandstone in the east. Settlement is limited and is associated with the narrow minor roads/lanes which cross and intersect the area.
- The Church Lane, Winterbourne Conservation Area forms a local landmark in the south of the LCA.
- The landscape is influenced by settlement and infrastructure just beyond the LCA's boundaries, including Winterbourne, Frampton Cotterell, Bradley Stoke, the urban edge of Bristol and the M4.



- Significant man-made landforms, some with artificial profiles covered by rough grassland or scrub lie adjacent to the M4/M5 interchange and along the M4 corridor.
- A concentration of recreational land use is located in the south-west, including a golf course, water sports, rugby ground and horse paddocks.
- Electricity generation and infrastructure is visually intrusive, including numerous powerlines and associated pylons, the Iron Acton sub-station in the north-east, and solar farms in the south and north-east and a wind farm in the centre of the LCA.

## Natural Influences

### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**9.97** 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 (generally at 60 metres AOD).

**9.98** Amongst this, there is a more complex pattern of clays around Earthcott Green and Latteridge Hill (at up to 75 metres AOD), which continue south-westwards in linear bands. On the south-eastern boundary at Winterbourne, Pennant sandstone partly extends into this area (at up to 65 metres AOD), whilst on the north-western boundary to the north of Itchington, Carboniferous limestone underlies rising ground (continuing beyond this area to 97 metres AOD).

**9.99** This underlying bedrock is overlain by shallow Argillic Brown Earth soils to the west, Keuper marl (largely at 50 metres AOD but rising to 67 metres AOD at The Marle Hills) and clay / loam soils to the east.

**9.100** This geology, and resultant drainage pattern, produces a gently undulating landform. Earthcott Green and Latteridge Hill are located on

## LCA 10: Earthcott Vale

relatively higher ground (approximately 75 metres AOD) in the centre of the LCA. Land falls north-eastwards towards the Tytherington Plain and south-westwards towards Bradley Stoke, both areas lying at about 50 metres AOD on the boundary of this LCA.

**9.101** 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 Bradley Brook beyond the LCA boundary. In the north of the area, tributaries of the Ladden Brook flow north-eastwards. The valleys become narrower and more enclosed to the south, with tightly meandering natural channels. To the north, watercourses generally follow regular drainage ditches.

**9.102** The landform, although subtle, is more elevated in the centre of the LCA and to the east, with low ridges formed at Latteridge Hill, The Marle Hills and Winterbourne, above lower-lying valleys. Towards and beyond the western boundary the landform rises gradually up to the LCA 17: Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge. An area of Grade 1 and 2 (categorised as best and most versatile) agricultural land lies along the edge of Winterbourne on the higher ground.

**9.103** In the south-west of the LCA a small plateau, south of Gaunt's Earthcott, lies at 60 metres AOD. Land rises to the south-east beyond Bradley Brook, towards the Winterbourne ridge.

## Land Cover

**9.104** A mix of pasture and arable farmland is defined within a variety of field patterns. Field boundaries are commonly dense, clipped hedges, or overgrown, thick hedges with intermittent laid hedges.

**9.105** The area to the west of the B4427 and north of Gaunt's Earthcott has a pattern of medium sized regular fields, largely contained by clipped hedgerows, some with gaps. Mature hedgerow and in-field trees, predominately oak and ash, are scattered across the plateau. Occasional hedgerow removal has

## **LCA 10: Earthcott Vale**

formed some large fields and left isolated trees, though some occasional copses and areas of deciduous woodland remain, Corporation Wood being the largest.

**9.106** The area east of the B4427, south of Earthcott Green and rising to The Marle Hills, has a pattern of medium to small-scale irregular fields, contained by clipped hedgerows with few hedgerow trees.

**9.107** In the south of the LCA, adjacent to the well vegetated Bradley Brook and its tributaries, the irregular field pattern is contained by tall and overgrown hedgerows with trees adjacent to Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell. Similarly, dense, tall vegetation of varying structure follows the course of the Hortham Brook to the south-west. A number of horse paddocks occur predominately within the south of the area, adjacent to the scattered settlements and near the edge of Frampton Cotterell and Winterbourne. Timber fences have typically replaced the hedgerow boundaries.

**9.108** Small irregular fields in the north and east of the LCA are defined largely by clipped hedgerows and frequent hedgerow trees, predominately oak and ash.

**9.109** Woodlands Cemetery to the north of Earthcott Green comprises extensive memorial grounds of mown lawns, with tree cover and ornamental hedgerows, surrounded by agricultural fields.

**9.110** A distinct area of parkland is evident at North Woods Park, around The Grange in the south, comprising mature tree specimens in grassland.

**9.111** Formal recreational facilities are concentrated in the south-west. The Woodlands Golf Course is located to the east of the M4/M5 junction and large-scale earth mounding provides screening along the site's western and southern boundaries. Some of the golf course retains sections of the former mature hedgerow pattern and tree planting surrounds the open fairways and greens. The West Country Water Park is located to the south-east of the golf course and has an ad hoc development of buildings and earthworks around a quarried

## LCA 10: Earthcott Vale

lake. A rugby football club, comprising pitches, tall floodlights and buildings is also located in the south of the LCA along Trench Lane. Within the south-east of the LCA, a large playing field adjacent to the B4058 provides open space between the settlements of Frampton Cotterell and Winterbourne. A solar farm is located near to these recreational facilities.

**9.112** Along the south-western boundary of this LCA large-scale earth mounds and tree planting lie adjacent to the M4, south of Green Acres Farm with infilling of a field next to the Hortham Brook.

### **Photo 2: Undulating pastoral fields with mixed field boundaries.**



## Biodiversity

**9.113** The Earthcott Vale LCA comprises a mosaic of grassland, woodland and farmland with a criss-crossing of watercourses and ponds connected by wildlife

## **LCA 10: Earthcott Vale**

corridors including hedgerows. This makes the Earthcott Vale an important habitat for a diverse range of species.

**9.114** The landscape includes scattered woodland and copses, mainly in the south. A very small proportion is ancient woodland.

**9.115** Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) within the LCA comprise a mosaic of habitats including grassland (both neutral and calcareous), broadleaved woodland (including ancient woodland) and watercourses. Key species likely to be associated with the broadleaved woodland include bats and dormice both of which are present across the Wider area and are UK priority species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP).

**9.116** An area of calcareous and neutral grassland to the north-east of Itchington is designated as a SNCI, providing a diverse habitat that supports a range of invertebrates and includes ant hills as a regular feature. These invertebrates in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats.

**9.117** The Bradley Brook SNCI is designated for its flowing water and bankside vegetation, and along with the other watercourses, supports a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and water voles. In addition, ponds and pools within the area will support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species). The Monks Pool Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is located in the north of the Bradley Brook valley.

**9.118** Much of the land use within this area is arable farmland, providing habitat for many species of ground nesting farmland birds including those on the Red List of Threatened Species, while the winter stubble provides a foraging resource.

**9.119** There is a golf course within the Earthcott Vale, which may have the potential to provide a mosaic of habitats that can be utilised by a diverse range of species.

## LCA 10: Earthcott Vale

**9.120** South Gloucestershire Strategic Blue-Green Infrastructure Corridor C: Winterbourne-Kendleshire-Yate (*River Frome Corridor*) covers a small area in the south of the LCA, associated with the Bradley Brook. A small area of Corridor B: Charfield-Alveston-Hallen (*Western Scarp/Severn Ridges*) borders the north-western LCA boundary.

## Cultural Influences

### Land Use and Time Depth

**9.121** Land use within the LCA is primarily associated with agricultural practices, with formal recreational uses in the south and electricity infrastructure located in the south and north-east of the LCA.

**9.122** Church Lane Winterbourne Conservation Area is separate from the main settlement of Winterbourne and encompasses the Winterbourne Court, Church and Tythe Barn complex in the south-east of the LCA. The buildings are built of Pennant sandstone, which locally has a red-brown colour.

**9.123** Two properties, The Grange and Grange Court Farm are locally listed buildings, 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. A cluster of Grade II listed buildings are located north of the Grange within North Woods Park.

**9.124** The use of stone in the construction of older properties, boundary walls and historic stiles is typical, with the type of stone reflecting local geological variation. Typically, Blue Lias limestone is used within the south-west and Pennant sandstone in the south-east and elsewhere.



### Settlement and Infrastructure

**9.125** Settlement predominantly consists of small, nucleated hamlets which are generally located at key road junctions and crossroads, including Itchington, Earthcott Green, Gaunt's Earthcott and Latteridge.

**9.126** Across the rest of the LCA, settlement comprises scattered farmsteads and isolated dwellings. Stone farm buildings make up the hamlets of Gaunt's Earthcott, Earthcott Green, and Latteridge. Farm ponds are relatively common around these hamlets, with a roadside pond forming a notable feature in Latteridge. Adjacent to the M4 motorway, along the B4427, a small travellers' site is enclosed by tall timber fences.

**9.127** A denser pattern of settlement is located beyond the south-eastern and southern LCA boundaries, with the settlement edges of Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell forming the south-eastern boundary to the LCA. Situated on the slightly higher ground of a broad ridgeline, the settlement edge is mainly formed by traditional houses, cottages and farm buildings. Buildings are clustered at road junctions between the B4058 and country lanes which extend into this area of the LCA. 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.

**9.128** The road network consists of a number of minor roads and lanes which criss-cross the area. The B4427 Old Gloucester Road (a former turnpike road between Bristol and Gloucester) crosses the area south to north, continuing beyond Earthcott Green as a lane. The B4059 and B4057 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.

**9.129** The M4 defines the LCA'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

## **LCA 10: Earthcott Vale**

beyond large-scale earth mounds. The interchange and a short section of the M5 define this edge of the character area.

**9.130** Numerous overhead powerlines and pylons cross 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. The Grange and Hammond Court Farm Solar Farms are located in the south of the LCA with a larger site east of Itchington and a further consent at Perrinpit Road South Gloucestershire's first operational wind farm is located in the centre of the LCA.

**9.131** A recreational route within the series of Circular Rides in South Gloucestershire crosses the LCA in a small circuit, largely along lanes and ancient trackways. 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.

**Photo 3: View towards the nucleated hamlet of Itchington.**



## Perceptual Influences

### Visual Character

**9.132** The Earthcott Vale LCA largely comprises a complex, gently undulating, pastoral and arable landscape, with varying field pattern and landscape structure.

**9.133** The north of the LCA is an enclosed, small-scale landscape of clipped and mature hedgerows 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 landscape. 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 church tower at Tytherington forms a distinctive landmark in views from the north and north-west of the LCA.

## **LCA 10: Earthcott Vale**

**9.134** Woodlands Cemetery is located in the north of the LCA, in a remote setting near Earthcott Green. The cemetery is well screened 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.

**9.135** The elevated ridgeline of the Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge, beyond the north-western LCA boundary, forms a backdrop within occasional views from the west of the LCA. 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. The few scattered areas of woodland within the west and south-west are prominent features (particularly Corporation Wood) within views from the M5 and LCA 17: Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge to the north-west.

**9.136** The plateau area in the west of the LCA, to the west of the B4427 Old Gloucester Road and north of Gaunt's Earthcott, has a semi-enclosed to open character. Frequent hedgerow trees over a small plateau enclose some views. However, hedgerow removal has created some large fields within this part of the LCA, which in combination with fewer hedgerow trees to the west and north and a very gentle landform, has produced a more open character. Isolated, mature former hedgerow trees over the plateau form prominent features.

**9.137** 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. Some distant views eastwards to the Cotswold Scarp (LCA 4) and westwards to the Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge (LCA 17) are available from the Marle Hills.

**9.138** Within the south of the area, the small-scale stream valleys form defined landform features compared with the broader rolling landscape elsewhere. Dense riparian vegetation and trees visually emphasise the tightly meandering watercourses and enclose views. North Woods Park, with its parkland of mature trees and estate architecture of the Grange and Grange Court Farm, is set

## **LCA 10: Earthcott Vale**

elevated along a valley side and has a distinctive character and local visual influence along this small valley. 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 occasionally screen and filter local views. Clipped hedgerows and mature trees elsewhere, within a gently rolling landscape produce a simple, more open character. The open setting and position of Winterbourne Church and Court complex, above the Bradley Brook valley, form a striking local landmark, from which relatively wide views are available looking west across Bradley Brook Valley. 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.

**9.139** The ongoing cycle of dead elm suckering is 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.

**9.140** The formal recreation facilities in the south-west of the LCA variously influence local character. The West Country Water Park and Rugby Football Club occupy a former quarry and agricultural fields, with overgrown hedgerow boundaries largely screening these facilities 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 covers an extensive area and comprises an open to semi-enclosed landscape, visually contained to the south, west and north-west by large earth mounds. The golf course is partly visible from roads along its boundary and within middle distance views from higher ground beyond this area to the north-west.

**9.141** Land raising, in association with the golf course and elsewhere, has had a significant impact on local landscape character. Existing earth mounds along the west and southern boundary of the golf course has produced a large-scale, steep profiled landform, forming an artificial skyline covered by rough grassland, scrub, and developing tree cover, atypical of the surrounding landscape. This feature is highly prominent along the boundaries of this LCA from the motorway interchange and its approaches. However, these slopes screen views of the M4

## **LCA 10: Earthcott Vale**

and its traffic from parts of the south of the LCA. Large gantries and signage, tall light columns, traffic noise and mobile phone masts along this corridor have a wider influence within the south of the LCA.

**9.142** 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 well-integrated by the adjacent agriculture field pattern of hedgerows (many overgrown) and frequent trees. To the south, the more linear pattern of houses along the B4058 and B4057 are more evident within local views, due to the limited boundary vegetation and fewer trees.

**9.143** Longer views are available 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.

**9.144** Views into the LCA are available from the M4, glimpsed between earth mounds into the low valleys of this LCA 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.

**9.145** The southern boundaries of this LCA are contained by significant concentrations of settlement, with one boundary defined by the M4 corridor. In places this forms an abrupt urban edge in outward views from the south of the LCA, including near Winterbourne.

**9.146** The Iron Acton electricity sub-station, located within the rural northern-eastern part of the LCA, 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. Recent development around Iron Acton substation, including solar PV and battery storage schemes are also evident locally. An operational wind farm comprising three 100m tall turbines in the centre of the LCA forms an additional vertical manmade structure



## **LCA 10: Earthcott Vale**

in views. The powerline network is more evident within open views from higher ground in the adjacent character areas. The Grange Solar Farm in the south of the LCA influences local views, though is generally integrated into the retained field pattern with partially wooded boundaries in the south. Views to the north of the solar farm are more open. The Hammond Court Solar Farm also influences local views, though is generally integrated by retained field boundaries.

**9.147** Horse paddocks, scattered within the south of the area and near Winterbourne, have in places disrupted the vegetation framework and created a more open landscape character than adjacent fields. This more open landscape increases the visibility of white tape electric fences subdividing fields, stables, parked vehicles, open storage, jumps and other features associated with the keeping of horses.

**9.148** The travellers' site adjacent to the south-western boundary is a small 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 and fly tipping in the vicinity leads to an erosion of landscape character.

**Photo 4: Gently rolling landform with partially enclosed views, with an influence of electricity infrastructure in the centre of the LCA.**



### Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**9.149** The presence of busy minor roads and particularly the M4, M5 leads to a reduced sense of tranquillity throughout the LCA. There are localised areas of tranquillity in the north of the LCA, away from the M5, given the mature vegetation framework which helps to screen and buffer movement and noise associated with the M5.

**9.150** The urban edge of the Bristol conurbation influences levels of light pollution in the south of the LCA. Areas near and to the north of Earthcott Green have relatively good experience of dark night skies. However, localised areas are influenced by security lighting associated with the substation at Iron Acton.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**9.151** There are no Visually Important Hillsides (VIH) located within this LCA. Part of the north-western boundary of the LCA is formed by Wick's/Butcher's Hill and Baden Hill VIH (located within LCA 7: Falfield Vale and LCA 17: Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge). The VIH forms an elevated area punctuated by three hills, most notably Wick's Hill. The southern section of the VIH forms part of the setting of the Tytherington Conservation Area (located within LCA 9: Tytherington Plain), and its northern section is an intrinsic part of the character of the Tortworth Court RPG (Grade II\*, located within LCA 7: Falfield Vale).

**9.152** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

### Strategic Viewpoints

**9.153** One Strategic Viewpoint (SVP) is located within this LCA at the Church Lane, Winterbourne Conservation Area (SVP 8). It provides a panoramic view west that takes in the landmark feature of St Michael's Church and its setting within the Church Lane Winterbourne Conservation Area, as well as the RAC Tower and the Purdown BT Tower in distant views.

**9.154** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Valued Features

- Distant views towards the Cotswold Scarp and Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge experienced from localised elevated landform within the LCA, which contributes to visual character and sense of place.

- Watercourses (including Bradley Brook) and associated dense riparian vegetation that provide wildlife corridors and habitat for a diverse range of species.
- The steep landform of small-scale stream valleys in the south of the LCA, which have an enclosed character and contribute to a sense of place.
- Small to medium-scale fields, irregular in places, particularly mature hedgerows in the north which provide habitat connectivity.
- Pennant sandstone walls near Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell, which contribute to time depth and sense of place.
- The small-scale landscape of mature hedgerows and historic pattern of scattered farms and small hamlets in the north of the LCA, which contributes to the sense of place and rurality.
- The Church Lane, Winterbourne Conservation Area, including the distinctive features formed by the Winterbourne Church and Court listed buildings, that contributes to time depth and sense of place.
- The network of public rights of way and a Circular Ride that provide recreational opportunities across the landscape.

## The Changing Landscape

**9.155** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Earthcott Vale LCA.

### Climate Change

- Increase in frequency and severity of seasonal flooding as a result of climate change, particularly associated with the Ladden Brook and Bradley Brook in the north and south of the LCA. Associated pressures to build flood management engineering works which are not sympathetic to local landscape character and sensitive habitats.

- Climate change leading to increased temperatures and periods of drought resulting in a change in stream flows, altering the species composition of wetland habitats (ponds, flowing open water and bankside vegetation associated with SNCIs), particularly Bradley Brook and its tributaries in the south of the LCA.

## Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- The vertical and linear nature of pylon corridors is prominent within local views. Pressure for further electricity infrastructure, associated with additional deployment of renewable energy, may lead to further visual influence and may lead to the perception of a 'wirescape' in parts of the LCA.
- An increase in tree planting is required to contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may include the establishment of new native woodlands linking existing ones east of the M5 towards ancient woodland at Corporation Wood, as set out in the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy which may change the character of some open views.

## Land Use and Cover

- 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 with consequent erosion of landscape character and loss of habitat value and connectivity.
- 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.
- The mature hedgerow tree and woodland structure throughout the area has few juvenile trees present to sustain the succession and therefore the

## LCA 10: Earthcott Vale

framework in the long term. The decline of these features would significantly change the character and biodiversity value of the area.

- Further removal of hedgerows would also result in a change of landscape character, creating a more open landscape than currently exists and loss of habitat and connectivity.
- Whilst overgrown hedgerows provide structure and some degree of enclosure at present, in the longer term without management, the valley character may change as hedgerow species can eventually become over mature, allowing more open views beneath the canopies.
- Similarly, the present cyclical pattern of growth, decline and regeneration of elm suckers, already influences the degree of openness/enclosure within the landscape.
- Tree planting at Woodlands Cemetery, to the north-east of Earthcott Green, is changing the character of the local area, increasing the strength of the landscape framework as the planting matures, in an area where tree cover was previously limited.
- Restoration and enhancement works in other locations including at the Monks Pool Local Nature Reserve and the restoration of Winterbourne Court Farm Barn have improved the fabric and settings of these heritage features, thereby contributing to the character, quality and distinctiveness of the surrounding landscape.
- The agricultural pattern of hedgerows, trees and copses was subsumed and changed around the golf course in the south-west of the LCA. This has produced an ornamental character which is different to the wider rural landscape.
- In contrast, large-scale native planting was implemented 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 helping to provide screening and integration with the wider landscape as well as habitat value.
- The hedgerows which presently contain recreational facilities (West Country Water Park and Rugby Football Club) in the south-west of the LCA are largely overgrown, helping to screen these areas. However,



## LCA 10: Earthcott Vale

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 solar farm in the south of the LCA has extended the influence of electricity infrastructure within the LCA. Whilst existing field boundaries have been retained, some hedgerows in the area are degraded, which results in greater visibility of the solar farm from views to the north.
- The distinctive North Woods Park relies greatly upon its mature trees for its parkland character. Without replacement planting, the character of this parkland will decline in the long term.
- Parts of the plateau area to the west of the B4427, Old Gloucester Road, north of Gaunt's Earthcott and east to The Marle Hills, are more open in character. However, this area remains relatively remote, due to the limited views from within or over much of this area, and the sparse settlement pattern, comprising traditional farmsteads and few minor roads. The area is sensitive to agricultural land use or management changes which could further erode the landscape framework, including new built development which could affect the pattern and integrity of historic farm buildings.
- Land raising in the south of the LCA has introduced man-made landforms and poorer quality soils which, without adequate maintenance, result in weed encroachment and visually different grassland to adjacent agricultural land. Some areas of woodland enhancement along the M4 and maturing landscaping around the golf course have softened the impact of the landform and contribute to the vegetation structure and Forest of Avon objectives in the area.

## Development

- In the south, parts of the LCA are influenced by recreational land use, the settlement edges of Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell, the M4 corridor and proximity of Bradley Stoke beyond the LCA boundary.
- Further erosion of the landscape framework across the LCA could raise the visual prominence of a number of existing built features. This would include the Iron Acton sub-station, pylons and powerlines to the north of

## LCA 10: Earthcott Vale

the area, the settlement edge of Frampton Cotterell and Winterbourne to the south-east, the limited scattered settlement pattern elsewhere and the Grange and Hammond Court Farm Solar Farms.

- The network of narrow country lanes and roads are under pressure from traffic levels, due to the 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. Physical damage is occurring to roadside walls, hedges and verges as a result of the traffic volumes using these routes.
- 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 strong vegetation structure and visual enclosure in the north and west of the LCA provides some opportunities for screening of development. However, they are sensitive to the cumulative effect of change, for example built development, which has the potential to erode the vegetation framework and rural character in these parts of the LCA.
- The western boundary of the plateau in the south-west of the LCA 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,

## LCA 10: Earthcott Vale

industrial, amenity use or other forms of land use change, such as horse paddocks or land raising operations.

- 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 relatively recent trend, which in places has led to the loss or erosion of hedgerows. The cumulative effect of this and the associated subdivision of fields by electric tape fencing, pressure on hedges from grazing, construction of stables, access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and floodlighting, can result in a marked change in landscape character. Lighting can also disturb wildlife.
- 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 operational solar park developments at Grange Farm and Hammond Court Farm are not highly visible within the wider landscape but is partially visible through the hedge along Trench Lane. Maturing landscaping at Grange Farm solar park is helping to absorb this development into the landscape. In time, the landscape scheme at Hammond Court Farm solar park will also help to absorb this development into the landscape. The larger solar farm at Itchington is visible in elevated views from the M5 to the west.

## Guidance

**9.156** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the overarching management strategy objectives set out in Chapter 4.

### Landscape Strategy

#### Landscape Management

- Avoid the subdivision of fields or replacement of hedges by fencing or electric tape due to potential for erosion of landscape character and loss of habitat value and connectivity.
- Protect best and most versatile agricultural farmland, especially around Winterbourne Barn in the valley.
- Encourage small woodland and hedgerow tree planting through the Bradley Brook valley and the edge of Winterbourne to filter views of the M4 and urban edge.
- Establish native woodlands in a corridor linking those associated with leisure uses east of M5 Junction 15, towards Corporation Wood, whilst ensuring conservation of priority habitats, historic monuments and views.
- Enhance and manage the wooded landscape framework along the small-scale stream valleys in the south of the LCA to retain the character of these valleys.
- Address potential for flooding issues with the implementation of natural flood management schemes, in line with the aims of the River Frome Reconnected project.
- Protect and enhance the setting of the Marle Hills in the east of the LCA.
- Protect the rural approaches and landscape setting to Latteridge.

- Preserve and enhance the landscape setting of Church Lane, Winterbourne Conservation Area, together with key views to and from key features including Winterbourne Church and Court listed buildings. Maintain the open nature of the fields surrounding the hamlet together with the sharp distinction between its core residential area and the rural context.
- Preserve and enhance the landscape setting of North Woods Park, its Grade II listed buildings, parkland and planting.

### Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Retain the existing habitat resource of diverse mosaic of grasslands and woodlands, with connectivity through wildlife corridors such as hedgerows and watercourses.
- Protect and enhance hedgerows, including hedgerow trees, to help to ensure the conservation of these key landscape and biodiversity features. This is particularly important in the south where the erosion of the landscape structure is extending the urbanising influence of adjacent settlement and the motorway into the vale.
- Protect and improve the riparian habitat of the River Frome, Bradley Brook and Ladden Brook. Also, seek opportunities to naturalise sections currently impacted by engineering structures (except heritage features) along the River Frome, and to enhance recreational access.
- Respect and enhance the commuting corridors of protected species particularly associated with the Bradley Brook, including retention of appropriate buffers and dark corridors.

### Development Management

- Avoid unsympathetic bunding along the M5 motorway; any new earthworks will need to be fully integrated into the surrounding landform and character of the area.
- Encourage and support the repair and retention of Pennant sandstone walls and other traditional stone features such as historic stiles.

## LCA 10: Earthcott Vale

- Any development or structures (including horse keeping) in the north and west of the LCA should incorporate robust landscape proposals in views from elevated ground to the west.
- Recent development around Iron Acton substation has included solar PV and battery storage schemes. Further expansion will need careful consideration due to potential cumulative impacts on the landscape. Any new scheme will need to incorporate robust landscape proposals to screen and reintegrate it into the landscape.
- Retain the settlement pattern of small hamlets and associated rural character in the north of the LCA.
- Consideration should be given to the provision of off-site planting to mitigate the impacts of any highly visible developments in this LCA and the adjacent areas, particularly elevated areas to the north (within LCA 17: Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge) and elevated areas within the east of the LCA.
- Maintain and improve tranquillity and landscape quality by controlling light pollution, screening visually intrusive elements and repairing and maintaining the landscape structure.



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# **South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment**

Supplementary Planning Document

**South Gloucestershire Council**

**Final Draft Report proposed for adoption**

Prepared by LUC

February 2025

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South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment

# Chapter 10: Enclosed Valleys LCT

LCA 11: Golden Valley

LCA 16: Avon Valley



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**Note: Each chapter is produced as a separate document for ease of reading and navigation.**

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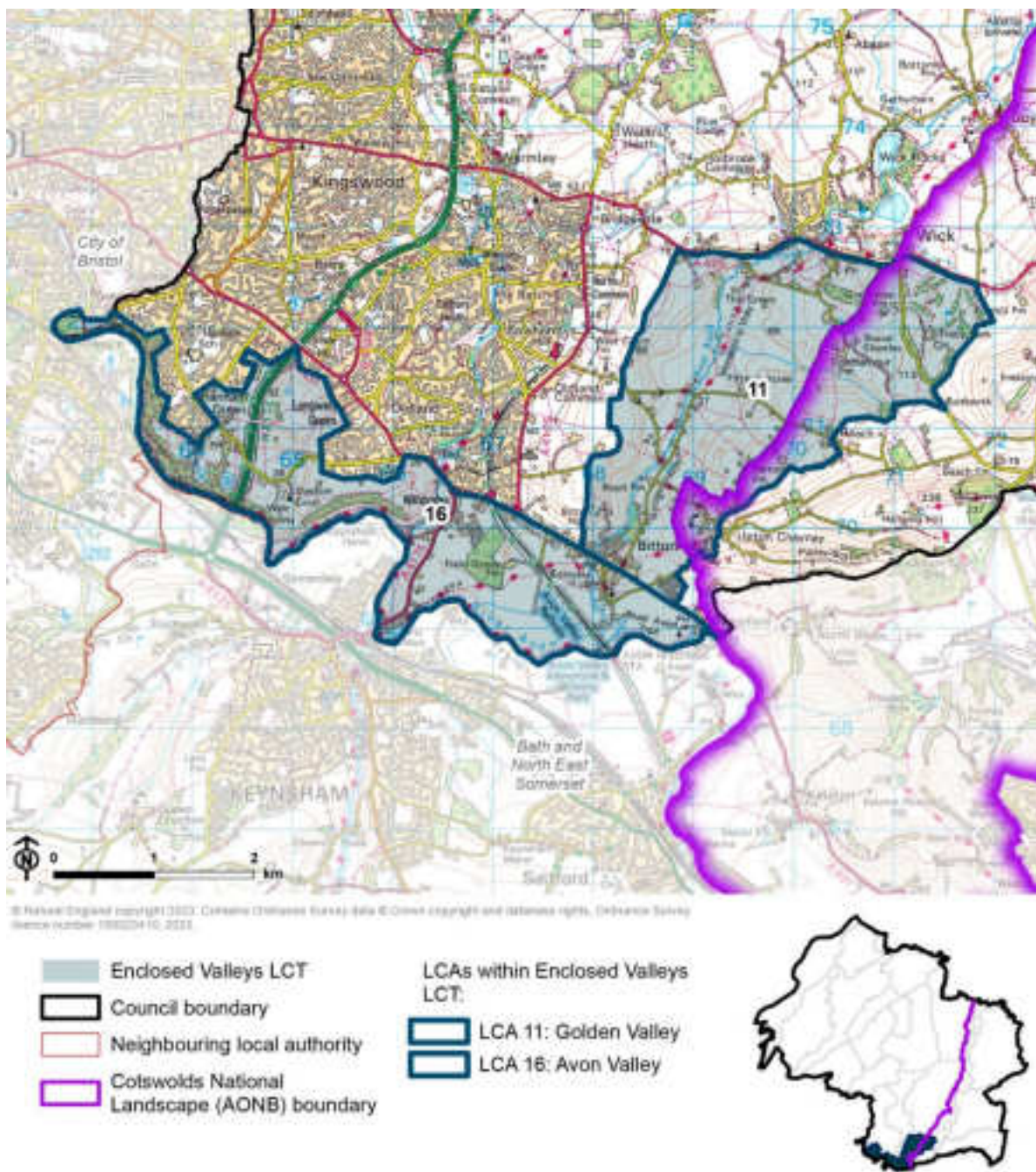
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## Chapter 10

### Enclosed Valleys LCT

Figure 10.1: Location of Enclosed Valleys LCT



# Description

**10.1** The Enclosed Valleys landscape character type (LCT) consists of the steeply sloping landforms of the River Avon Valley and Golden Valley, located on the southern fringes of South Gloucestershire and to the east of Bristol.

## Key Characteristics

- The River Avon Valley forms a wide floodplain to the east of the meandering river and a more enclosed, densely wooded steep sided valley to the west.
- The Golden Valley, which follows the smaller course of the River Boyd, contains mixed pasture and arable fields divided by both overgrown and clipped, dense hedges and linear bands of trees.
- The landscape has an enclosed character in the west, resulting from the steep landform and vegetation, with a more open character in the eastern floodplain.
- Areas of pasture are located 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.
- Landscape character is influenced by settlement to the north and south of the River Avon floodplain, including the large red brick Cadbury's chocolate factory.
- The Golden Valley is relatively rural in character, with only a few scattered farms and dwellings. The village of Bitton, the largest settlement, and its church forms a local feature from within the River Avon Valley.

## Landscape Character Areas

**10.2** The Enclosed Valley LCT is subdivided into two landscape character areas (LCAs):

- LCA 11: Golden Valley
- LCA 16: Avon Valley

## LCA 11: Golden Valley

The Golden Valley landscape character area (LCA) is a steeply sloping broad agricultural valley, containing the meandering River Boyd and visually enclosed by the Oldland Ridge and the higher Ashwicke Ridges.

**Photo 1: View east across the Golden Valley towards Freezing Hill (marked by the distinctive line of Beech trees), and Hanging Hill.**



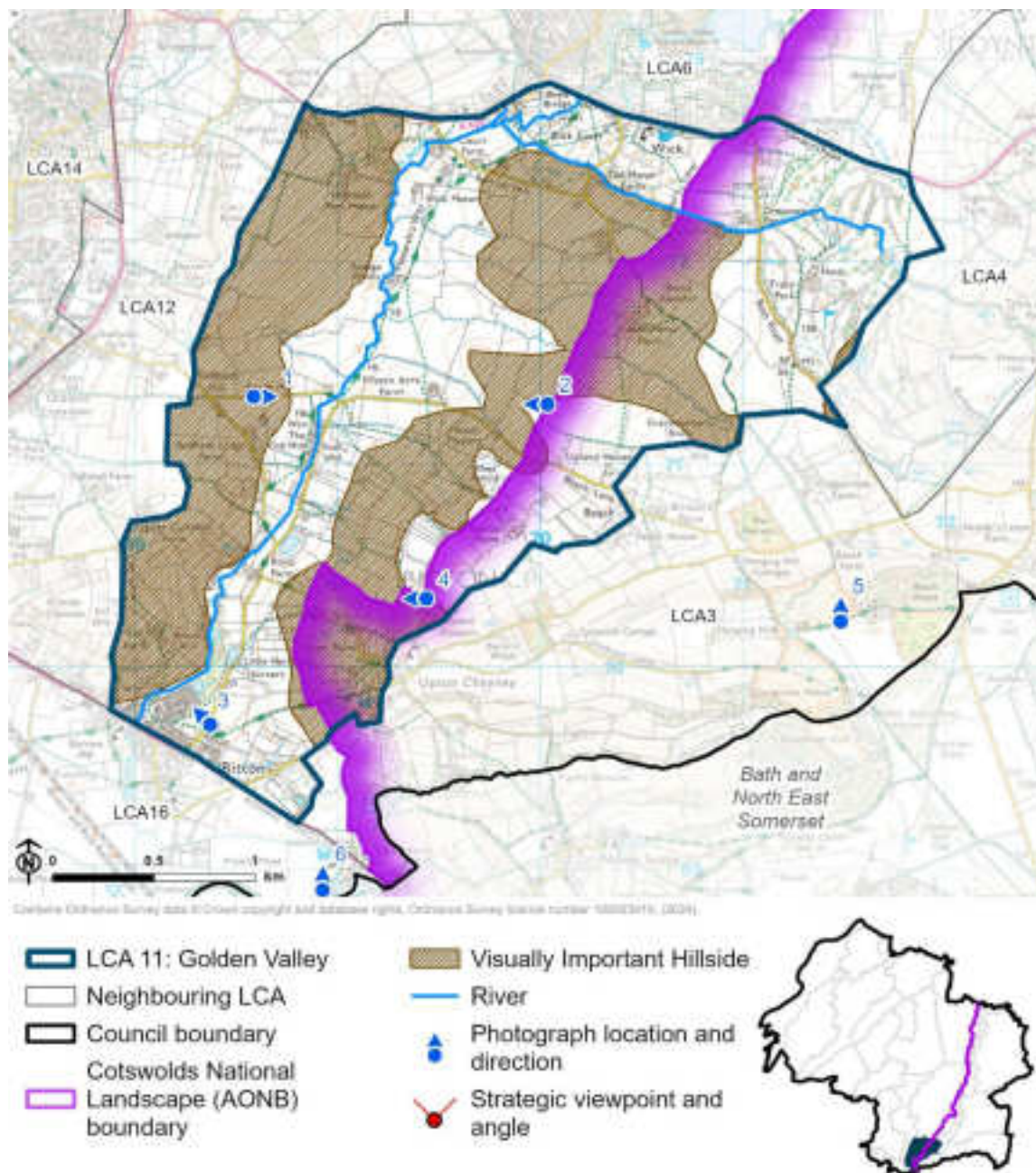
### Location

**10.3** The Golden Valley LCA is located in the south of South Gloucestershire to the east of Bristol, from which it is separated by the Oldland Ridge. The northern boundary of the LCA follows the A420 and marks the transition between the broader Golden Valley and the enclosed valley of the upper River Boyd (LCA 6). The southern boundary follows the A431, which generally follows the topographical change between the River Boyd valley and the open River Avon floodplain beyond (LCA 16). The eastern boundary follows a topographical transition between the lower broad slopes of the Golden Valley and the upper steeper slopes of LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges. To the south-east, the boundary follows a transitional slope between the Golden Valley and the Piple Bottom Valley of the Ashwicke Ridges. The western boundary runs along the centre of the Oldland Ridge, the skyline of which is shared with the adjacent LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge.



## LCA 11: Golden Valley

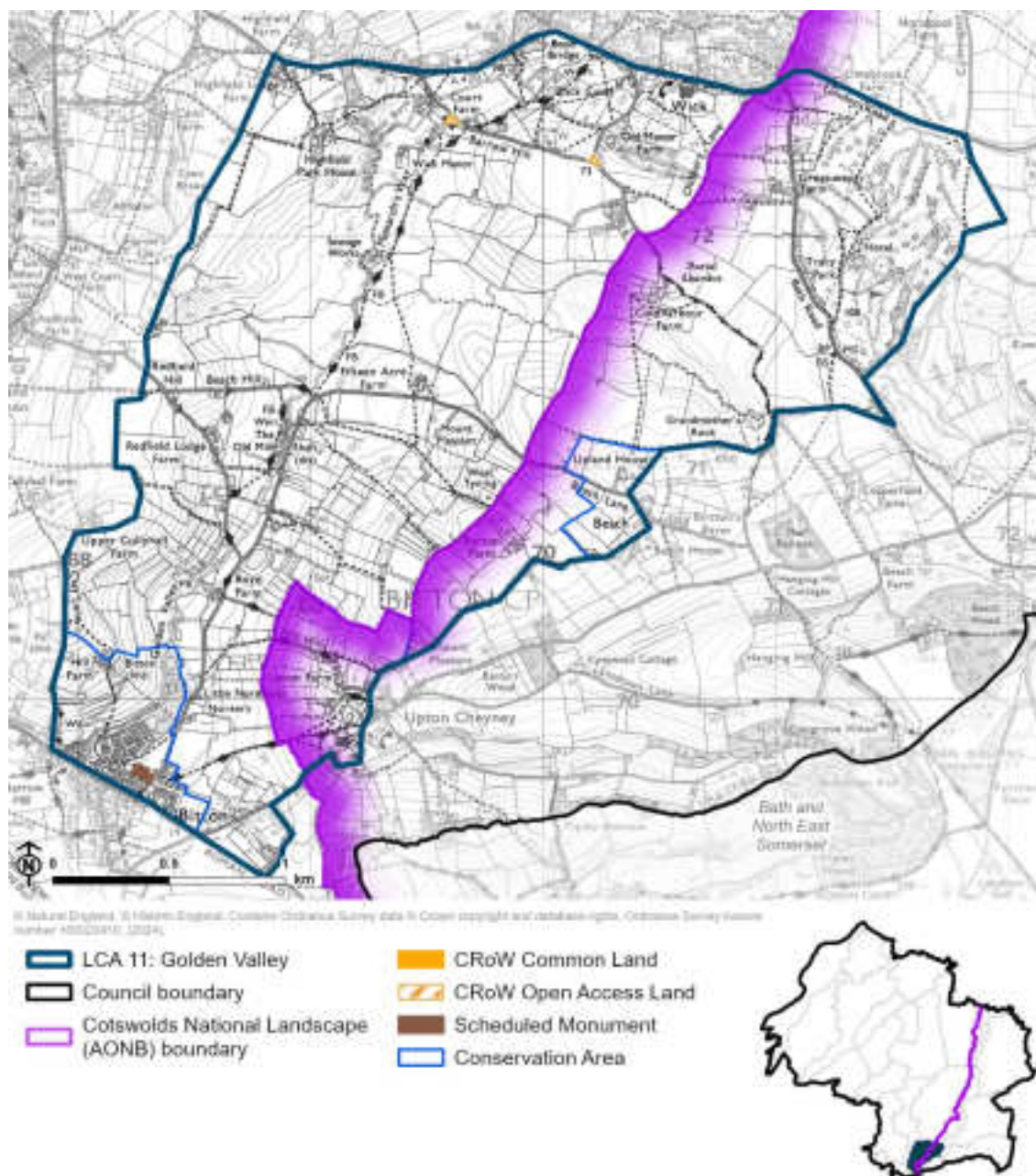
**Figure 10.2: Location and Landscape context of LCA 11: Golden Valley**





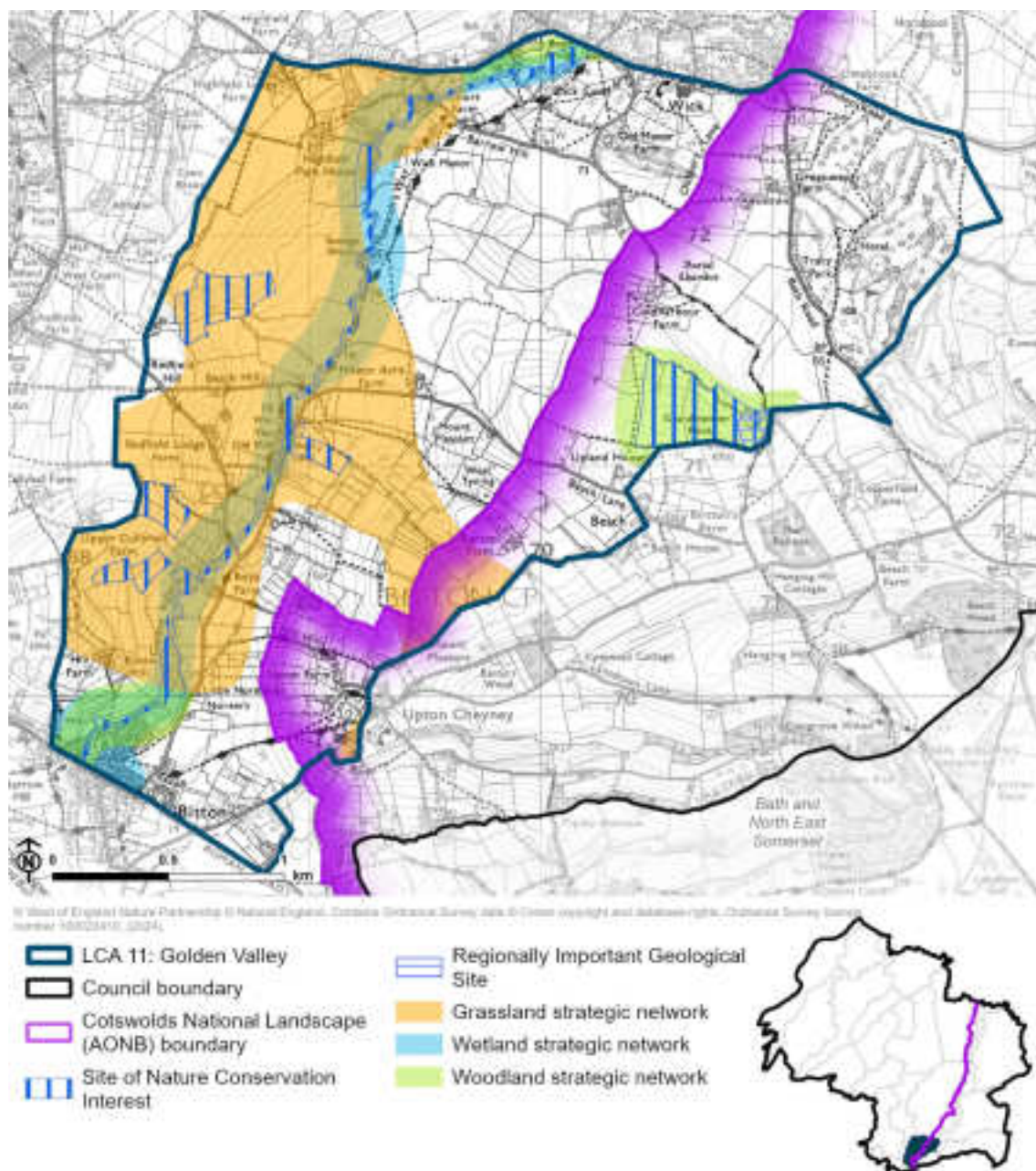
## LCA 11: Golden Valley

**Figure 10.3: Development and Heritage context of LCA 11: Golden Valley**



## LCA 11: Golden Valley

**Figure 10.4: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 11: Golden Valley**



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- A valley landform, narrow and enclosed in the south, becoming broader in the north. It is contained by the Ashwicke Ridges to the east and the Oldland Ridge to the west.
- A mix of small to medium, regular, and irregular shaped pasture and arable fields rise above the tightly meandering River Boyd valley, with larger arable fields on the upper slopes.
- A dense framework of trees and riparian vegetation along the River Boyd and its tributaries provide valuable habitat and connectivity for wildlife.
- Fields are divided by a strong landscape framework of largely overgrown hedges, trees and occasional scattered woodland or copses. Boundaries also include a mix of clipped or laid hedges and some fences.
- Areas of calcareous grassland form attractive landscape and ecologically valuable features with a diverse range of flora including species rich grassland.
- A golf course at Tracy Park Golf Course has localised influence on rural landscape character and extends beyond this LCA over the lower slopes of the Cotswold Scarp.
- Settlement is limited, with isolated and scattered houses, farms, and hamlets. Villages and major roads in adjacent areas influence the northern and southern extents of this LCA.
- Remnants of the coal mining industry, small-scale stone quarrying and mill buildings lie within the valley.
- Few country lanes cross the area, some of which are sunken within steeper slopes.

- A landscape that is under pressure from increased recreational activity including horse-keeping, particularly on the edge of settlements.

## Natural Influences

### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**10.4** The geology of the Golden Valley LCA 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. There is a Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS) known as Grandmother's Rock, located in a disused quarry to the south of Wick in the east of the LCA, designated for its exposures of Maes Knoll limestone conglomerate.

**10.5** This geology and subsequent drainage pattern create a steeply sloping north-east to south-west orientated valley landform. This is enclosed by the ridge of Hanging Hill (part of the LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges to the east, and the Oldland Ridge to the west (LCA 12)). The topography varies from 20 metres AOD at the mouth of the valley near Bitton in the south, to approximately 88 metres AOD along the Oldland Ridge in the west, and approximately 120 metres AOD midway along Hanging Hill, on the eastern boundary of the LCA. The Oldland Ridge Visually Important Hillside (VIH) covers the majority of the LCA, incised by the Boyd Valley.

**10.6** The River Boyd flows southwards through the centre of the valley along a tightly meandering course from north of Wick, through the village and then through Bitton, before joining the River Avon. The valley is narrower in the south, contained to the west by the steep slopes of the Oldland Ridge and to the east by the gentler lower slopes of Hanging Hill Ridge, which curve



## **LCA 11: Golden Valley**

eastwards into the Piple Bottom Valley. The northern section of the valley is broader, with gentle slopes to the east, where minor tributaries flow down from Hanging Hill, joining the River Boyd to the south of Wick. This has formed an upper valley landform of broad, descending spurs with an undulating form.

**10.7** To the north of Bitton, in the valley to the north of Mill Lane, the river has formed a small floodplain, with two man-made pools and large fishing lake (Boyd Valley Lake). The lower valley also includes a number of springs, one at Upton Cheyney known locally as Joseph's Well.

### **Land Cover**

**10.8** A corridor of woodland and riparian vegetation lines much of the River Boyd and its tributaries.

**10.9** Irregular shaped small to medium sized pastoral fields spread along the base of the valley and rise up the lower slopes, with a mix of more regular, rectilinear fields on the eastern slopes. 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. Around Upton Cheyney and Bitton there is a noticeable pattern of long, narrow rectilinear fields. Small, isolated fields of scrub/rough grassland are associated with the steepest valley slopes along the Oldland Ridge.

**10.10** Field boundaries largely follow the contours of the valley sides, except on the eastern valley slopes south of Wick, where field boundaries undulate across the broad descending spurs. South of Upton Cheyney, a rectangular hedgerow pattern extends down the slope, appearing to radiate from the village into the valley. Hedgerow field boundaries are largely tall and overgrown, with some clipped and laid hedgerows and hedge banks along lanes. Along the Oldland Ridge to the west, fields are defined by a mix of sporadic, thick, and clipped hedges and occasional fences.

## **LCA 11: Golden Valley**

**10.11** The eastern and lower north-western slopes of the valley are clothed in mature trees with occasional small copses, sometimes associated with former coal mining and quarry sites. In contrast, there is little tree cover along the upper slopes of the Oldland Ridge. In the north, adjacent to the A420, a small linear woodland plantation follows the ridgeline.

**10.12** Tracy Park Golf Course occupies the north-eastern corner of the LCA and extends eastwards beyond this area onto the lower slopes of the adjoining Cotswold Scarp character area (LCA 4). Located within the grounds of a large stately home, it comprises parkland and mature tree specimens within sweeping lawns contained by Cotswold stone walls, as well as a ha-ha, and prominent gateways defined by tall stone piers.

**10.13** Horse stables and paddocks, along with associated electric and wooden fencing, stables, parking, and access is prevalent across a significant area of the Golden Valley.



**Photo 2: View west showing the large irregular-shaped field south of Highfield Farm.**



## Biodiversity

**10.14** This character area comprises a mosaic of grassland, woodland, and farmland, dissected by watercourses and punctuated by ponds. Hedgerows and scattered trees provide connectivity between these habitats, as well as providing important habitat for a diverse range of species.

**10.15** The eastern part of the Golden Valley forms a continuation of the nationally-important calcareous grassland habitat associated with the Cotswolds National Landscape, including Grandmother's Rock Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI), designated for its grassland and woodland habitats, and geological interest.

## LCA 11: Golden Valley

**10.16** Other SNCI within this character area include a mosaic of habitats designated primarily for their grassland (both neutral and calcareous), including at Redfield Hill, Chimney Field south and The Ruffets. The River Boyd SNCI comprises flowing open water, broadleaved woodland and bankside vegetation. These habitats are of importance for their flora and fauna which support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and water voles. Ponds and pools within the area will also support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

**10.17** The area includes 9 hectares of woodland, comprised of medium sized scattered woodlands and copses of predominantly broadleaved woodland. Key species likely to be associated with the broadleaved woodland include bats and dormice both of which are present across South Gloucestershire and are UK priority species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP).

**10.18** Agricultural land use comprises a patchwork of arable and pastoral farmland. The arable farmland in particular provides ideal habitat for many species of ground nesting farmland birds, including birds which are listed as being Globally Threatened Red listed species. The winter stubble also provides a precious foraging opportunity. Ant hills are also a regular feature. These invertebrates in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats.

**10.19** South Gloucestershire Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor E: Hawkesbury-Upton Cheyney-Ashwicke (*Cotswold Scarp and Ashwicke Ridges*) covers the eastern part of this LCA, important for its mosaic of strategic woodland and grassland habitats associated with the Cotswold Scarp. A small part of Strategic GI Corridor D: Wickwar-Westerleigh-Biton (*Westerleigh Vale/Oldland Ridge/East Fringe*) extends into the western part of the LCA from the adjacent Oldland Ridge, associated with the grassland strategic network. Green-Blue Infrastructure Corridor H: Hinton-Doynton-Biton (*Boyd Valley*) covers the River Boyd corridor running north-south through the LCA, incorporating its associated wetland and riparian habitats.

### Cultural Influences

#### Land Use and Time Depth

**10.20** Early settlement and land use are indicated by the remains of a prehistoric burial chamber to the north of Coldharbour Farm (south of Wick), comprising two standing stones. To the north of Bitton is a medieval enclosure (Scheduled Monument) which survives mainly as a buried feature. Conservation Areas at Bitton, Upton Cheyney and Beach, contain clusters of listed buildings.

**10.21** Historic parklands and designed gardens dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century survive at Wick Court and Tracy Park and are locally listed. These are associated with historic manor houses (both Grade II listed)

#### Settlement and Infrastructure

**10.22** Settlement within the LCA is limited. The villages of Bitton, Upton Cheyney, and Wick, as well as the hamlet of Beach, are located on the edge of the LCA. Scattered farms and isolated dwellings are found elsewhere, primarily constructed of local Lias limestone. Dry and mortared Lias limestone walls with occasional upright stone copings are a distinctive feature around the edges of settlement and along the lanes which pass through them. Copper slag coping stones and quoins (a by-product from the Warmley Brassworks within LCA 14: Kingswood), feature within a few walls and buildings in the area, for example at Upper Cullyhall Farm on the Oldland Ridge and in stone walling to a residential property along the A420, west of Wick, with quoins are evident at one house at Upton Cheyney.

**10.23** Bitton, in the south of the area, is a large village of Saxon origin with a planned linear pattern along the A431 and intersecting lanes, extending southwards into the adjacent LCA 16: Avon Valley. It consists of a mix of buildings, mainly of limestone and render. A new housing development located on the site of the former Bitton Mill is built in red brick and render which is

## LCA 11: Golden Valley

slightly out of keeping with the traditional vernacular. To the east of Bitton alongside the A431 is a large complex of disused glass houses which are locally detractive and impart a degraded character to the landscape. However, they are largely screened from view by mature vegetation.

**Photo 3: New residential development on the former mill site in Bitton, with Bitton Hill Villa (Grade II listed) perched on the hillside above.**



**10.24** The large village of Wick defines part of the northern LCA boundary, mainly falling within adjacent LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and the Boyd Valley. It is situated on the 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.

**10.25** The hamlet of Upton Cheyney, designated as a Conservation Area, falls partly within this area and partly within the adjacent LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges.

## **LCA 11: Golden Valley**

Set on the elevated mid slopes between the lower Golden Valley and rising ridgeline of Hanging Hill, traditional limestone cottages and farmhouses are scattered along a number of radiating country lanes, giving a linear character.

**10.26** Elsewhere, isolated farms and dwellings 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. A large agricultural barn constructed in the centre of the valley in the vicinity of Beech Hill is visually detractive and is out of keeping with the traditional stone building vernacular.

**10.27** 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. A few small-scale quarrying sites (now disused) are also scattered along the valley. The road network largely consists of country lanes, some sunken (particularly on steeper ground), and others are contained by dense hedgerows. The A420 and A431 form the northern and southern boundaries of the LCA respectively, the A420 descending and rising as it crosses the Boyd Valley, and the A431 following the edge of Avon floodplain to the south.

**10.28** A network of public footpaths enables recreational access to the landscape. These frequently descend into the valley to the central area of the Old Mill, also connecting Wick with the Ashwicke Ridges and plateau of Lansdown Hill. The Monarch's Way promoted route passes through the centre of the LCA following the course of the River Boyd, before turning east towards Upton Cheyney and continuing through Bitton. One of a series of Circular Rides briefly follows the western boundary at Upton Cheyney. There are two small areas of Registered Common Land at the top and bottom of Barrow Hill, to the south-west of Wick.

**Photo 4: View west from Wick Lane towards farmsteads at the foot of the Oldland Ridge, and the settlement edge of east Bristol beyond.**



## Perceptual Influences

### Visual Character

**10.29** The Golden Valley LCA is an enclosed, visually contained valley, narrow and secluded in its southern extent, becoming more open on the upper slopes. It is defined to the east by the ridgeline of Hanging Hill, within LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges and the Cotswold Scarp (LCA 4) and to the west by the Oldland Ridge (LCA 12).

**10.30** The pattern of irregular-shaped medium and small pasture fields along the lower slopes and on the valley floor, with the smallest fields generally



## **LCA 11: Golden Valley**

adjacent to settlement results in an enclosed and intimate character within the valley. This gradually changes to larger regular shaped arable fields along the upper slopes and fringes, imparting a more open character. 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 landscape framework. Internal views are therefore largely contained along the valley floor by the vegetation structure and upper slopes of the surrounding ridges.

**10.31** Although the lanes are lined by a mix of hedges and hedge banks, 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 follow the contours of the valley.

**10.32** The cumulative impact of a significant area of equestrian developments (including parking, fencing, stables, jumps, paddocks and other features), both through the central section of the Golden Valley and to the north at Wick Court locally influences the character of these areas. Where fences have replaced hedgerows, the visual influence of these developments spreads over a wider area.

**10.33** Tracy Park has a distinctive, historic parkland character, with its prominent stone pillared entrances, stone walls, lawns, and mature trees, which provide the setting to the large stately home. The golf course infrastructure with its fairways and ground reshaping, is prominent against the open sweeping slopes of Freezing Hill. This land use contrasts with the wider agricultural hedgerow field pattern, which has a more simple and bold structure, well related to the hillside setting. However, a developing framework of planting is gradually integrating it into the surrounding landscape.

**Photo 5: The landscaped golf course at Tracy Park, viewed from Hanging Hill (in adjacent LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp).**



**10.34** The Oldland Ridge separates the Golden Valley from the urban area of LCA 14: Kingswood. The straight form of the ridge is overlain by a simple pattern of mixed agriculture, defined by a largely regular field pattern. Along the ridgeline the intermittent clipped hedgerows, some of which are overgrown or replaced by post and wire fences, provide limited structure over this elevated landform. From the top of the Oldland Ridge there are extensive views westwards over Bristol and eastwards into the Golden Valley and beyond to the large-scale landform of the Hanging Hill ridge.

**10.35** The settlement edge of Wick is evident within middle distance views over the broader northern part of the Boyd Valley, although housing is generally 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 as well as Wick Quarry and its associated buildings are visually prominent in views north, set above the adjacent vegetation framework.

## **LCA 11: Golden Valley**

**10.36** Bitton is mainly visible in local views from elevated ground at Upton Cheyney and from the upper slopes of the Golden Valley. Within these views the historic settlement pattern is distinctive, nestled within the valley and extending southwards beyond the A431 into the adjacent character area (LCA 16: Avon Valley). On slightly elevated ground above the Avon Valley floodplain and from within the Boyd valley, the settlement, including industrial buildings 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 forms a distinctive landmark, visible on the edge of the Avon Valley.

**10.37** Upton Cheyney forms a distinctive feature on the slopes of Hanging Hill, the dispersed settlement pattern well-integrated into the landscape by mature hedgerows and trees. Similarly, the A420 to the north and A431 to the south, are well screened by landform and dense vegetation, and have limited visual influence upon the character of the area.

**Photo 6: Upton Cheyney set on the elevated mid-slope of Hanging Hill, overlooking the Avon Valley Floodplain.**



### Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**10.38** This is a moderately tranquil landscape, experiencing some audible and visual disruption from traffic on the A431 and A421 main roads that frame the valley, as well as from settlements to the north and south. There are some pockets of higher tranquillity on the undeveloped slopes of the Boyd Valley where there is an absence of development. The LCA experiences relatively dark skies, with some localised light pollution around Wick and Bitton.

**10.39** The dispersed and relatively sparse settlement pattern and limited road network are well-integrated both by landform and vegetation structure, providing a sense of tranquillity within the valley landscape. This is reduced in the north and the south by traffic noise associated with the A420 and A431 and to some extent by the visual influence of Wick in the north.

**10.40** The scenic and perceptual qualities of the east and north-eastern part of the character area are reflected in their inclusion within the Cotswolds National Landscape.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**10.41** The Oldland Ridge and Cotswold Lower Slope Visually Important Hillside falls within this LCA. This VIH comprises an area of steep ridges and a series of hills separated by the north-south Golden Valley (River Boyd). The Oldland Ridge forms a visually prominent horseshoe-shaped landform of rising ground with a distinct rural character, forming a green backdrop to the Bitton Conservation Area. The eastern part of the VIH is intrinsic to the setting of the Upton Cheyney Conservation Area, which straddles the steep west-facing valley side of the VIH.

**10.42** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

### Strategic Viewpoints

**10.43** There are no Strategic Viewpoints (SVP) within the LCA, however SVP 12: Hanging Hill, and SVP 20: Bristol and Bath Railway Path offer views into this LCA. SVP 12: Hanging Hill provides a panoramic view that takes in notable landscape features and landmark features across most of South Gloucestershire and extends to the hills of South Wales; and it has historic associations with The Battle of Lansdown (1643). SVP 20: Bristol to Bath Railway Path allows an appreciation of the CNL and provides a panoramic view of the Avon Valley, Ashwicke Ridges, Oldland Ridge, Cotswold hills (including Prospect Stile and Kelston Roundhill), the Bitton and Upper Cheyney Conservation Areas, and the landmark features of St Mary's Church and the former chocolate factory at Keynsham Hams.

**10.44** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Valued Features

- The distinctive valley landform, narrow and enclosed in the south, becoming broader in the north, which contrasts with the adjacent ridges and provides a strong sense of place.
- A strong landscape pattern with a diverse mix of medium to small, regular and irregular shaped pasture and arable fields which provide visual diversity.
- The importance of the network of hedgerows and mature trees providing enclosure and connecting habitats.
- Trees and riparian vegetation along the River Boyd and its tributaries provide valuable landscape features, as well as habitat and connectivity for wildlife.
- The enclosed rural character of the landscape which provides a setting for scattered houses, farms and historic hamlets, often built in local materials including Lias limestone.
- Remnants of former coal extraction, small-scale stone quarrying and mill buildings in the Boyd valley, reflecting historic land uses.
- The network of winding rural lanes, including some sunken lanes.
- Recreational value provided by a network of public rights of way which allow access to the rural landscape, including the Monarch's Way promoted route.
- The rural character and perception of tranquillity resulting from an absence of major modern development.



## The Changing Landscape

**10.45** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Golden Valley LCA.

### Climate Change

- Pressure for renewable energy development within the South Gloucestershire landscape to contribute towards maximising the generation of renewable energy from installations (as set out in South Gloucestershire's Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-2030). This would likely result in adverse effects on landscape character and visual impact.
- 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 and biodiversity value of the character area.

### Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- The effect of the removal of hedgerows to maximise arable practices is already highly evident along the Oldland Ridge. Further hedgerow removal has the potential to erode the strong vegetation structure found within much of this area. This will increase the sense of openness and, in places, the visually remote character, as well as reducing habitat value and connectivity.
- Within the Golden Valley, the hedgerow and tree structure is largely intact, however there are significant areas suffering from a lack of management and/ or removal of hedges.
- The prominent, overgrown hedgerows which presently provide this area's distinct character and enclosure, are the result of little active management. Changes to management may result in change to hedgerow management practices and a loss of this characteristic.

### Land Use and Cover

- Recreational pressure from 'horsiculture', is significant, with stable blocks, paddocks and deterioration of hedgerow field boundaries. The cumulative effect of this and associated access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and floodlighting, has resulted in a marked change to and erosion of the landscape character of this valley and also disturbance to wildlife.
- The area experiences some recreational pressure due to its proximity to Bristol and good footpath access along the valley including the Monarch's Way locally promoted route, with links to the Ashwicke Ridges. Footpath erosion is evident along popular sections of footpaths.

### Development

- A number of farmhouses have been converted to residential properties, especially in 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.
- Residential expansion of Upton Cheyney and Bitton, both of which are visible from within this LCA and from the LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges. New residential development on the edges of these settlements erodes the settlement pattern and rural characteristics of both landscape features and distinctive settlements.
- Future settlement expansion of Wick on the upper slopes of the Boyd Valley may encroach towards or onto the skyline, further increasing the visual prominence of the settlement within the locality and eroding the rural landscape character.

### Guidance

**10.46** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in

conjunction with the objectives of the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines [See reference 1], as well as the overarching management strategy objectives set out in Chapter 4.

# Landscape Strategy

## Landscape Management

- Protect and manage areas that are within the CNL in line with the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan [See reference 2] to conserve the highly valued visual and perceptual qualities of the landscape.
- Protect and enhance views towards and from the CNL, including views to Hanging Hill.
- Preserve and enhance the landscape setting of Bitton, Beach, and Upton Cheyney Conservation Areas, together with key views towards and from them, and the character of their rural approaches. Preserve views of St Marys Church in Bitton as a local landmark.
- Restore and enhance lengths of hedgerow where they have been lost or degraded, using native species and traditional techniques e.g., hedge laying to strengthen the landscape structure and improve biodiversity value. Protect existing mature hedgerow trees.
- Manage Tracy Park to protect and enhance the historic parkland setting, whilst enhancing biodiversity by conservation of wood pasture, mature field trees, woodlands, hedgerows, and walled boundaries, in line with the Forest of Avon Plan [See reference 3].
- Encourage the retention and restoration of natural stone walls and other traditional features such as historic stiles, copper slag coping stones, and quoins.
- Encourage the use of local building materials, such as Lias limestone, in new buildings or structures.

- Avoid the cumulative impact of multiple small-scale changes to the land use of the valley that are out of keeping with its character, particularly equestrian developments (including fencing, stables, jumps, paddocks, and hardstanding areas).

### Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Protect and manage the riparian habitat of the River Boyd valley for biodiversity value. Seek opportunities to enhance ecological connectivity with adjacent habitats.
- Consider new tree planting along the riparian corridor to reduce agricultural runoff and reduce diffuse pollution, as well as improving flood management in the wider catchment. Use native species such as willow.
- Protect and enhance the scattered pools and ponds, creating new wetland and riparian habitat to improve habitat resilience and connectivity.
- Support the creation of new wildflower habitats along B-lines (identified by Buglife) within the LCA to contribute to the national pollinator network.
- Protect and expand the calcareous grassland network, for example along Redfield Hill.

### Development Management

- Any new development in the valley or on its slopes, including on settlement edges and in the wider landscape should incorporate robust landscape proposals to ensure integration with and protection of the rural character of the Golden Valley.
- Promote the creation of a Garden Forest in Wick (including planting shrubs and trees in front and back gardens) to enhance amenity and softening the urban edge.

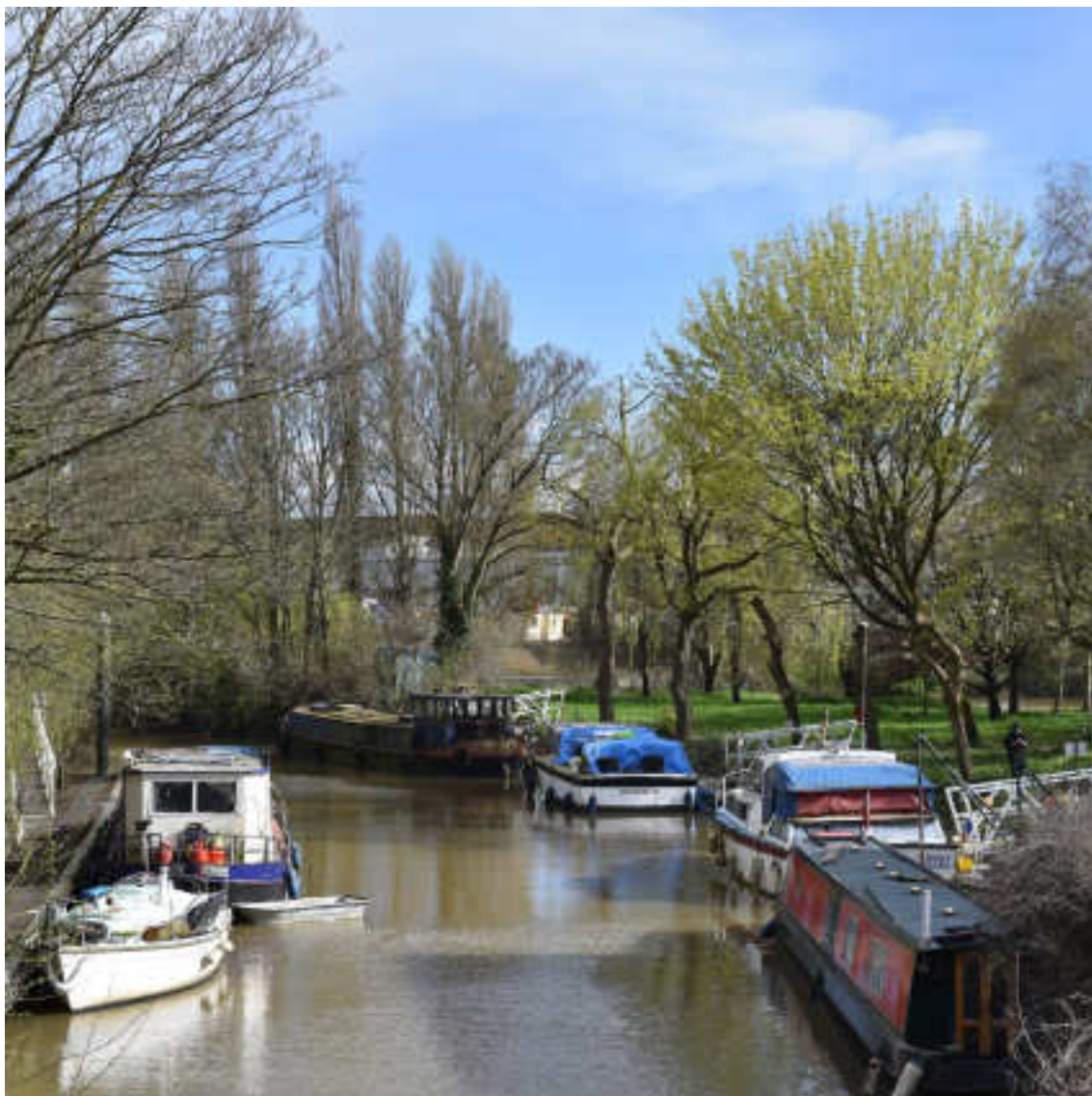
## LCA 11: Golden Valley

- Limit further land use change for horse keeping such as fencing and floodlighting which erode landscape character and biodiversity value.
- Protect the character of the network of rural lanes from inappropriate development and highway improvement schemes. Consider opportunities for extending the network of Quiet Lanes where appropriate, to enhance recreational access to the landscape.
- Resist development that would erode the rural character of the valley, such as intrusive lighting, hedgerow removal, road widening, new signage, and sources of noise disturbance.
- Ensure that new development or land use change (including renewable energy development) does not adversely impact on views from, or the setting to the Cotswolds National Landscape.

## LCA 16: Avon Valley

The Avon Valley landscape character area (LCA) consists of open river floodplain, enclosed steep wooded lower valley slopes and gentle upper slopes defined by the urban edge.

**Photo 1: View south-east along the River Avon near Keynsham Marina.**

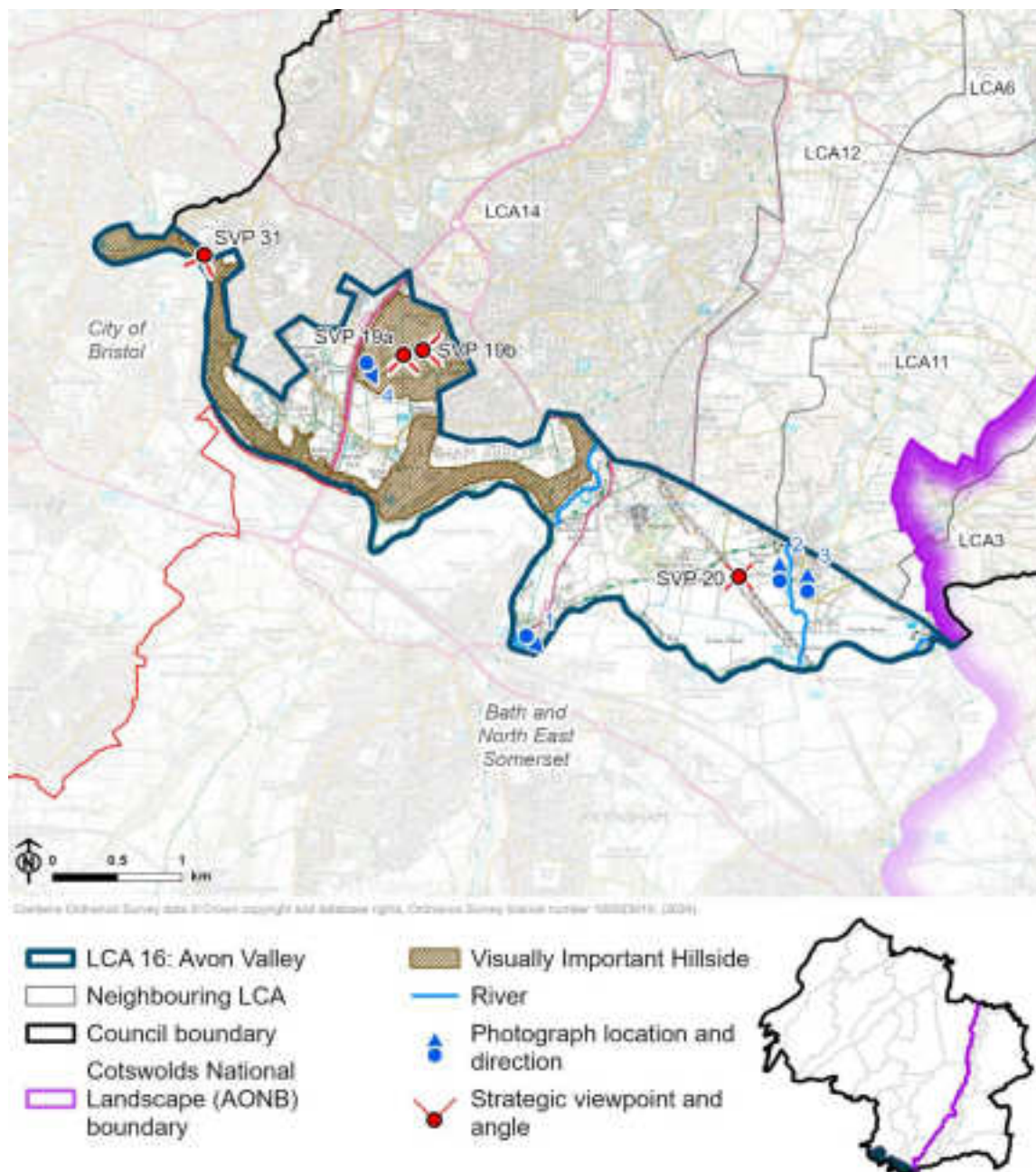




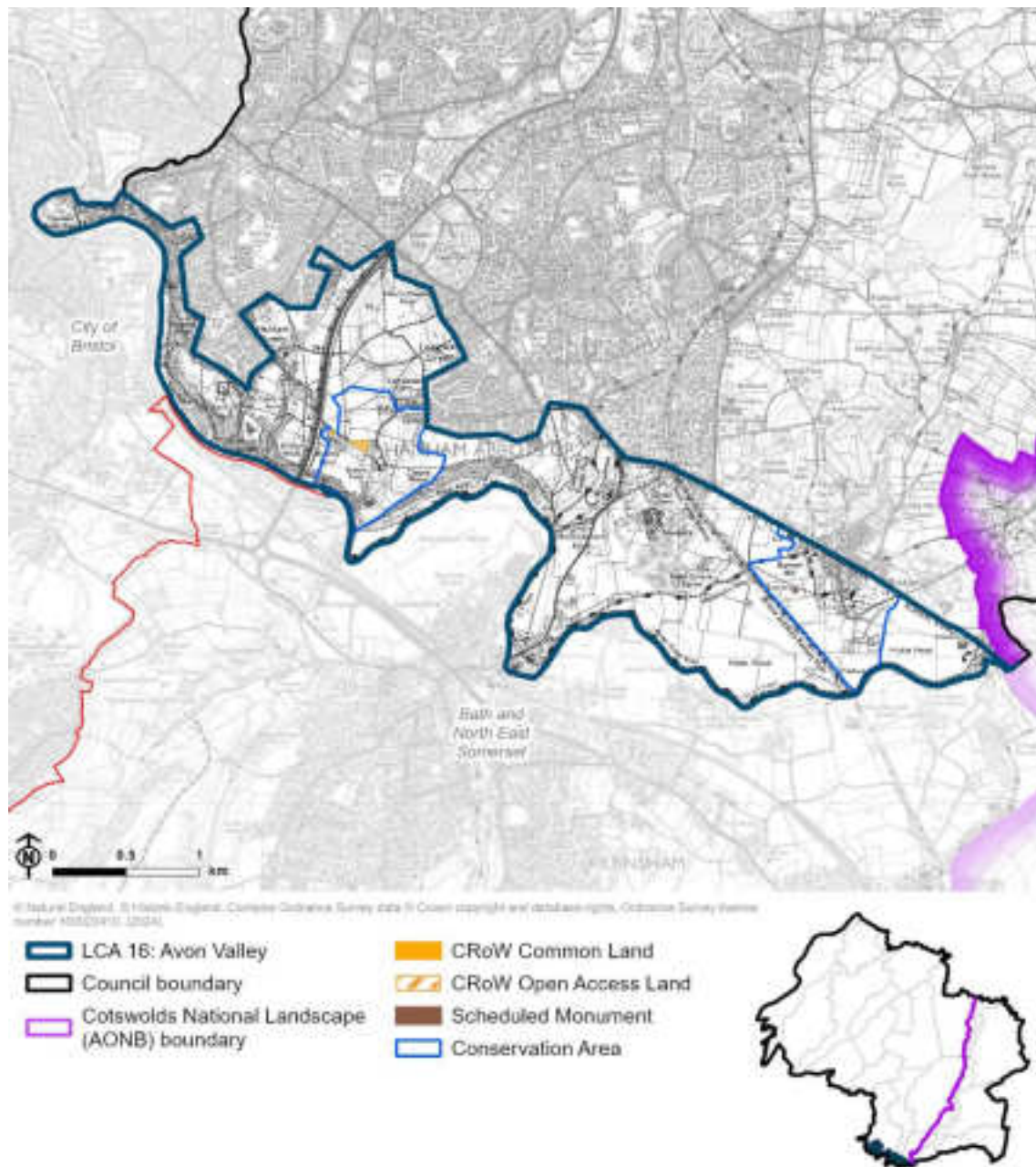
### Location

**10.47** The Avon Valley LCA is located in the south of South Gloucestershire, on the boundary with Bath and North East Somerset 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 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.

**Figure 10.5: Location and Landscape Context of LCA 16: Avon Valley**

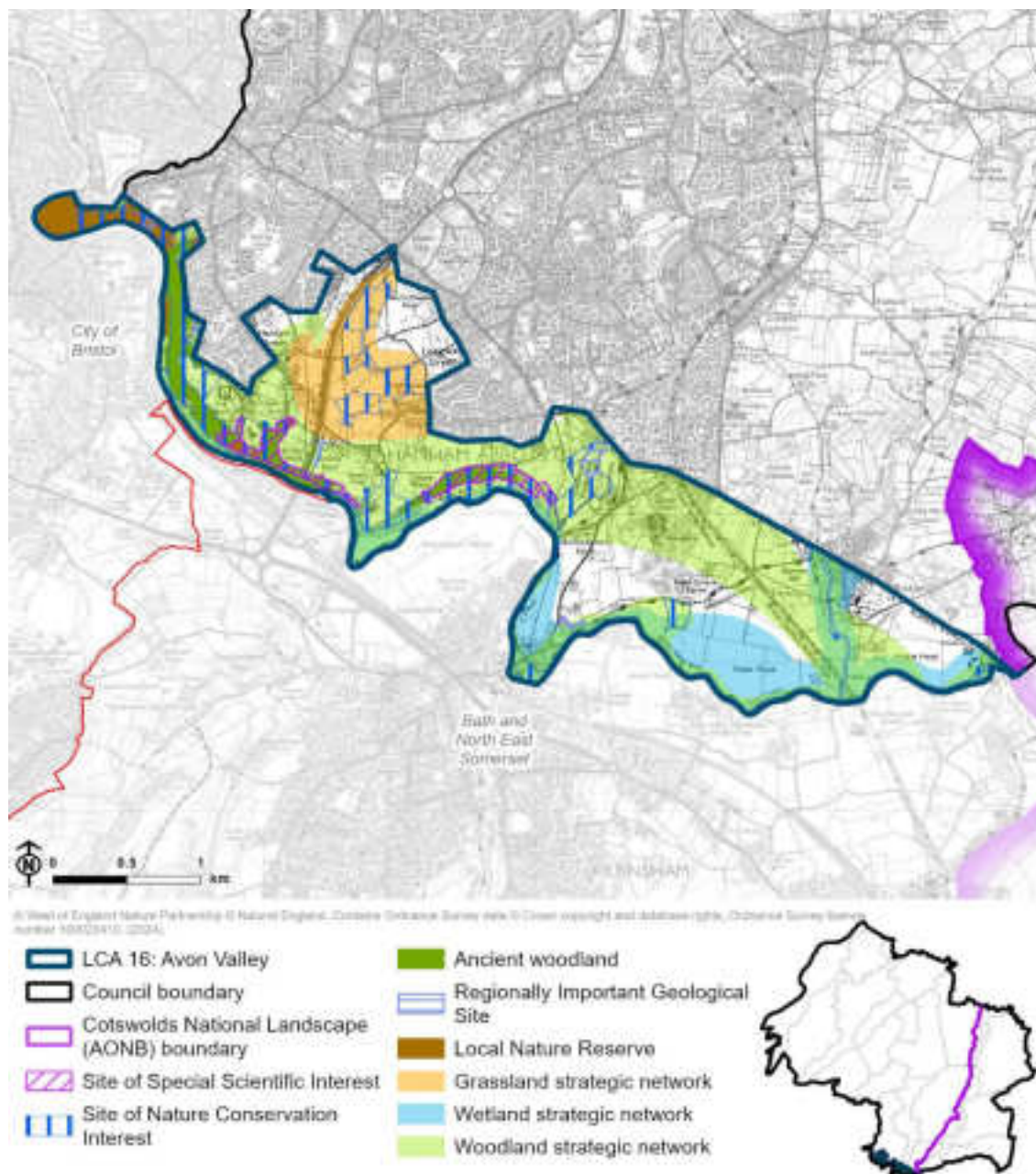


**Figure 10.6: Development and Heritage Context of LCA 16:  
Avon Valley**





**Figure 10.7: Ecology and Biodiversity Context of LCA 16: Avon Valley**



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- The sinuous and meandering form of the River Avon with its associated bankside vegetation runs along the southern boundary of the LCA.
- The broad, open Avon floodplain is located to the east, with medium to large regular shaped fields of pasture and meadows with some arable.
- Fields in the east are bound by clipped and overgrown hedges with occasional lines of trees and intermittent specimen trees, some pollarded.
- Steep-sided, densely wooded slopes enclose the River Avon to the west. The linear broadleaved woodland includes large areas of ancient woodland.
- Gentle upper slopes in the west include medium sized pasture and arable fields, defined by the urban edge to the north.
- The distinct landform of the Hanham Hills rises above the urban edge, enabling panoramic views over Bristol and to the Cotswold Scarp.
- A general lack of development contrasts with notable areas of built development outside the LCA, which bound the open slopes to the north-west.
- The small-scale historic settlement at the Hanham Abbots Conservation Area and Bitton Conservation Area also contrasts with areas of built development outside the LCA.
- Historic industrial relics scattered along the Avon Valley are remnants of past mining, smelting and small-scale quarrying.
- The network of rural lanes and minor roads is only crossed by main roads in two places.
- A navigable river, the Avon is now used mainly for recreation, with promoted recreational routes following the riverbank.

### Natural Influences

#### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**10.48** The Avon Valley LCA 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 Pello-alluvium Gley, typical Argillic Pelosols, Brown Rendzinas, Calcareous Pelosols and Brown Calcareous Earths over the rest of the area.

**10.49** The topography varies from 10 metres AOD along the River Avon, rising generally to 50-55 metres AOD towards the urban edge of Bristol to the north. The highest point within the LCA rises to approximately 92 metres AOD on the Hanham Hills above Longwell Green.

**10.50** In the east of the LCA 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 floor is a feature of this area.

**10.51** Further west, the valley profile becomes enclosed. Steep-sided bluffs rise from the valley floor, with more gentle slopes above. North of the river these slopes continue to rise gently to the rounded and prominent convex landform of the Hanham Hills (Visually Important Hillside (VIH)). This topography extends above the River Avon valley and into the surrounding urban edge to the north. The River Avon Valley VIH also falls within this LCA, the steep valley side sloping southwards to meet the River Avon at the South Gloucestershire authority boundary.



## **LCA 11: Golden Valley**

**10.52** A number of tributaries flow southwards to the River Avon. These include 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. The Siston Brook follows a meandering channel within a narrow steep sided valley.

### **Land Cover**

**10.53** The Avon Valley LCA 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. Fields are contained by clipped and overgrown hedgerows, with some fencing. Tree belts line the riverbank and disused railway line. Scattered specimen trees (some pollarded) are located within fields and hedgerows and wet meadows alongside the river.

**10.54** 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. Conham River Park lies within a small meander loop of the River Avon, on the north-western boundary of the LCA. The site comprises woodland cover, with open glades of rough grassland and informal footpaths.

**10.55** The upper slopes to the north are covered by a mix of medium, generally regular shaped, pastoral, and arable fields. Pastoral farmland is generally located on the higher ground near the Hanham Hills. 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.

**10.56** 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 2: Gently undulating pastoral fields in the east of the LCA, enclosed by the rising landform of the river valley sides.**



### Biodiversity

**10.57** A mosaic of woodland, grassland and farmland connected by the wildlife corridors formed by the meandering River Avon (and its confluence with the River Boyd), plus a network of hedgerows which combine to make the Avon Valley an important habitat for a diverse range of species.

**10.58** The area includes approximately 33 hectares of ancient woodland, including some relatively large areas, representing approximately 60 percent of the total broadleaf wooded cover within this area. Key species likely to be associated with the broadleaved woodland include bats and dormice, both of which are present across the wider area and are UK priority species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP). Cleeve Wood within the Avon Valley woodlands is designated as a Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) for the floral species present, with a mosaic of grassland and woodland habitats

## **LCA 11: Golden Valley**

extending between the SSSI and Willsbridge Valley to the north-east. Bickley Wood is designated as a SSSI for the geological features present. The Avon Valley Woodland is designated as a Local Nature Reserve. There are also extensive areas of priority habitat deciduous woodland along the River Avon in the west of the LCA.

**10.59** There are five sites designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) for their neutral and calcareous grassland as well as marshy grassland at the River Boyd and wetland at the Hanham Hills fields. These include areas of species-rich grassland, which support a range of invertebrates and ant hills are a regular feature. These invertebrates in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats.

**10.60** The watercourses and their tributaries which criss-cross the LCA act as wildlife corridors. The adjacent woodlands provide a wider habitat resource. The entirety of the River Avon within this LCA is situated within an SNCI. The section of the River Boyd which joins the River Frome within the eastern extent of the LCA is also designated as an SNCI. These watercourses will support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and water voles. Ponds and pools within the LCA support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species). There is good connectivity between habitats for species such as these throughout the Avon Valley. Relatively large areas of priority habitat floodplain grazing marsh are located in the east of the LCA.

**10.61** The relatively small area of arable farmland provides some habitat for many species of ground nesting farmland birds including some listed as being Globally Threatened Red listed species, while the winter stubble provides a foraging resource.

**10.62** There is a history of small-scale stone quarrying within the Avon Valley. Underground quarries, mines, and features such as lime kilns provide an ideal habitat for many species of bat including European Protected Species.

## LCA 11: Golden Valley

South Gloucestershire Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor F: Hanham Green-Hanham Abbots-Biton (*Avon Valley*) covers the majority of the LCA. A small area of Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor D: Wickwar-Westerleigh-Biton (*Westerleigh Vale/Oldland Ridge/East Fringe*) passes along the northern boundary of the LCA.

## Cultural Influences

### Land Use and Time Depth

**10.63** Land use across the LCA is associated with agricultural practices (a mix of pastoral and arable).

**10.64** Hanham Abbots Conservation Area is perched on the open slopes above the steep sided River Avon valley, to the south of the Hanham Hills. It extends to the River Avon and includes an important historical building group at Hanham Court and Court Farm, with historical associations with the Ancient Kingswood Forest. 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, which is a prominent local landmark in views from the approach along Court Farm Road. Materials include limestone and Pennant sandstone within buildings and walls.

**10.65** The Bitton Conservation Area is partially located in the east of the LCA. The village is designated for its historic linear form, the setting formed by the surrounding rural countryside and central landmark formed by St Mary's Church.

**10.66** Between the railway and the village of Bitton lies a round barrow (designated as a Scheduled Monument). However, this feature is on the Heritage at Risk register due to adverse effects caused by animal burrowing.

## **LCA 11: Golden Valley**

**10.67** Areas of ancient woodland add time depth in the west of the LCA. Historic industrial relics of mining and small-scale quarrying within the Avon Valley include a disused railway, the Dramway, wharfs and lock gates along the river. The remnants of coal mining and small-scale stone quarrying have left traces along the valley sides to the west. The small quarry sites form frequent features, creating a number of stone outcrops, now enclosed by woodland. The natural stone boundary walls to Conham Hall (demolished 1971) and the ruins of a copper smelting works can be found nestling within the woodland cover.

**10.68** The red brick building of the former Cadbury's factory (located to the south of the LCA) is an evident feature in views south from the LCA, though now partially absorbed by recent redevelopment.

**10.69** The former importance of the River Avon as a communication route is evident at frequent intervals along its course. Londonderry Wharf is located on a meander in the river, opposite and to the north-east of the now disused Cadbury factory. The wharf was the terminus for coal barges, which collected coal transported along the Dramway from Mangotsfield and Ram Hill and even from as far as Coalpit Heath to the north.

## **Settlement and Infrastructure**

**10.70** There are no major settlements within the area. Part of the nucleated Bitton village lies within the east of the LCA, the rest of the village lying within LCA 11: Golden Valley. The village, which is designated as a Conservation Area, is positioned on slightly higher ground on the edge of this area and overlooks the floodplain of the Avon Valley.

**10.71** Otherwise, settlement is limited to the hamlet of Swineford in the east, a number of scattered, isolated farms and buildings along the A4175 and A431, and dispersed farms and houses along a minor road east of Hanham. The LCA 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 cottages, houses, farms, and outbuildings. These are distinct and

## **LCA 11: Golden Valley**

variously distributed along major roads, extending into the landscape, or absorbed within more recent areas of brick housing or industry.

**10.72** Other small settlements include Riverside Cottages, a scattering of cottages along the river to the west and farmhouses, including cottages at Castle Inn Farm and Bickley Farm.

**10.73** 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, at Willsbridge to the west of Bitton village.

**10.74** Numerous lock gates along the Avon and the Port Avon Marina at Keynsham provide recreational facilities 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 LCA enables easy recreational access to the Avon Valley from the surrounding urban area. Conham Ferry operates seasonally, allowing links across the river.

**10.75** A number of promoted recreational routes cross the LCA. This includes the Bristol and Bath Railway Path, Avon Cycleway (following part of NCN Route 4), Monarch's Way, Dramway, Community Forest Path in the centre and east of the LCA. The River Avon Trail follows the northern riverbank from Bristol. A number of footpaths intersect and cross the hillsides above the Avon Valley and floodplain.

**10.76** The A4174 crosses the LCA on an elevated bridge, spanning the narrow steep sided river valley to the west. The A4175 follows 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 LCA boundary.

**10.77** One powerline passes through the Siston Brook valley and then westwards along the River Avon valley.



**Photo 3: Traditional stone buildings within Bitton Conservation Area.**



## Perceptual Influences

### Visual Character

**10.78** The Avon Valley LCA has a relatively simple rural character comprising floodplain, enclosed wooded valley to the west and open hillsides to the north-west, contained by dense settlement.

**10.79** The Avon floodplain in the east of the LCA is a flat, large-scale area with regular shaped pastoral fields, fringed by some arable fields. Occasional overgrown hedges, hedgerow trees and linear woodland occasionally confine views, although overall the landscape is open.

## **LCA 11: Golden Valley**

**10.80** The tree-lined railway embankment forms a significant physical landform and visual screen within the valley floor, 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, including views towards distinctive landform features within the CNL, Ashwicke Ridges and Oldland Ridge, and historic features including the Bitton and Upper Cheyney Conservation Areas.

**10.81** The winter flooding of the river meadows in the east of the LCA 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.

**10.82** Conham River Park contains a similar tree structure near the riverbank, with 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.

**10.83** Villages such as Bitton on the LCA's boundary 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.

**10.84** The red brick building of the now disused Cadbury's chocolate factory is located on the river at Somerdale, just outside this LCA. However, the open character of the floodplain ensures this building is visually prominent in the locality and forms a key landmark in many local and wider views from within this area such as the Cotswold Scarp (LCA 4). 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.

**10.85** 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. This creates a textured but simple enclosed landscape, which

## **LCA 11: Golden Valley**

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.

**10.86** The landscape to the north-west, above the steep sided wooded valley, is visually separate from the River Avon. 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 small-scale scattered traditional stone properties and farms at The Batch, Castle Inn Farm and Bickley Farm are well-integrated. This is due to containment by south-westwards sloping landform, local woodland and the variety of boundary and garden vegetation and strong structure of stone wall boundaries.

**10.87** Hanham, south of Abbots Road has a dense urban edge, which is well-integrated to the south by boundary trees and hedgerows. The eastern settlement edge is more exposed. To the east of Hanham, the A4174 is in cutting and remains visually unobtrusive, except within immediate views.

**10.88** In the area of Hanham Court, a small hollow in the landform and diverse structure of adjacent hedgerows forms a textured, more enclosed landscape. The court and church form distinctive historic built landmarks. To the north, the linear housing edge of Longwell Green is relatively well-integrated by an adjacent framework of dense overgrown hedgerows, woodland, and small-scale vegetated back gardens. This integration provides some transition between the urban edge and rural fringe beyond.

**10.89** 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. 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 available towards the Oldland Ridge, Pucklechurch Ridge, the Avon Valley towards the Ashwicke Ridges and the Cotswold Scarp to the

## **LCA 11: Golden Valley**

east. Views west look towards the Severn Ridge and Welsh Hills beyond Bristol. Dundry Hill is seen in views south-west.

**10.90** The Hanham 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.

**10.91** The retail centre at Longwell Green (located in LCA 14: Kingswood) forms a prominent urban edge to the north of the LCA. Large-scale light-coloured commercial units and adjacent dense residential framework are evident in outward views from the Hanham Hills. 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. To the south-east, a section of Longwell Green forms a harsh and prominent urban edge, rising over the lower slopes of the hills.

**10.92** 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.

**10.93** The A431 defines the north-eastern boundary of the LCA. Views from the route are varied in character, 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. The vegetation structure is strong and comprises hedgerows, trees, and garden vegetation.

**Photo 4: Outward views looking across the wooded river valley from the Hanham Hills.**



### Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**10.94** Adjacent settlement, noise, and movement of traffic on the A4174, A431 and A4 (to the south of the LCA) influence the sense of tranquillity within the LCA. Localised wooded areas in the west of the LCA are relatively tranquil, given containment by landform and woodland, however background road noise from the prominent elevated A4174 overbridge interrupts the secluded character. Within the wooded valley in the west of the LCA, glimpsed views of the urban edge along adjacent higher ground and trains passing along the valley sides to the south erodes the otherwise secluded and rural character.

**10.95** The proximity of the dense urban edge of the Bristol conurbation influences the experienced of dark night skies throughout the area. Areas of woodland in the west filter some of the light pollution from the adjacent settlement edge.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**10.96** The River Avon Valley Visually Important Hillside (VIH) and Hanham Hills VIH are located within this LCA. Key characteristics of each VIH include the following:

- River Avon Valley VIH: a steep wooded northern valley side which contributes to the setting of the River Avon and forms a southerly extension of the Hanham Hills VIH. The VIH contributes to the setting of Hanham Court Conservation Area.
- Hanham Hills VIH: a steep sided singular hill of convex landform that forms a northerly extension to the River Avon Valley VIH. The VIH forms a distinctive landform feature in both views towards the urban edge of Hanham and from within the settlement area itself, as well as providing a green backdrop to Hanham Court Conservation Area.

**10.97** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

### Strategic Viewpoints

**10.98** Three Strategic Viewpoints (SVP) are located within this LCA. They are:

- SVP 19: Hanham Hills: allows an appreciation of the CNL and provides a panoramic view of Avon Valley, Oldland Ridge, Pucklechurch Ridge, Severn Ridges, Dundry Hill, Kelston Hill, the Ashwicke Ridges and the Cotswold Scarp, and the landmark feature of the distinctive line of beech trees on Freezing Hill.
- SVP 20: Bristol to Bath Railway Path: allows an appreciation of the CNL and provides a panoramic view of the Avon Valley, Ashwicke Ridges, Oldland Ridge, Cotswold hills (including Prospect Stile and Kelston Roundhill), the Bitton and Upper Cheyney Conservation Areas, and the landmark features of St Mary's Church and the former chocolate factory at Keynsham Hams.



## **LCA 11: Golden Valley**

- SVP 31: Avon Valley Panorama: provides views across and along the dramatic steep, wooded sides of the Avon Valley and River Avon at Hanham.

**10.99** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Value Features

- Varied landform that provides visual interest and a sense of place both within the LCA and from surrounding areas, including the steep-sided river valley landform and Hanham Hills in the west.
- Areas of deciduous woodland, some of which is ancient, that contribute to habitat connectivity, biodiversity, and landscape pattern.
- The flowing water and bankside vegetation of watercourses and associated tributaries that provides habitat for a range of notable species and contributes to biodiversity, notably the course of the River Avon which is designated as an SNCI.
- The distinctive sinuous form of the River Avon, which contributes to the sense of place and landscape pattern.
- The Hanham Abbots Conservation Area and Bitton Conservation Area which add time depth.
- Industrial relics that provide a historic link to former mining and small-scale quarrying in the area.
- The network of public rights of way and cycle paths, including the Bristol and Bath Railway Path and Avon Cycleway, River Avon Path, Dramway, Community Forest Path, and the River Avon, that provide recreational opportunities across the landscape from the urban edge.

## The Changing Landscape

**10.100** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Avon Valley LCA.

### Climate Change

- Climate change and changing land management practices may lead to potential changes in woodland and tree species composition. Increases in severe gales could result in wind damage to woodland edges. Ancient woodlands in the west of the LCA may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
- Climate change leading to increased temperatures and periods of drought resulting in a change in stream and river flows, altering the species composition of wetland habitats (particularly those associated with the River Avon and River Boyd SNCIs).
- Increase in frequency and severity of seasonal flooding in lower-lying valleys, particularly in the east of the LCA, as a result of climate change. Associated pressures to build flood management engineering works which are not sympathetic to local landscape character and sensitive habitats.

### Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- An increase in tree planting is required to contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may include the establishment of small new woodlands to buffer ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW)/SSSIs and extend the woodland corridor into urban areas north and south of the River Avon, as set out in the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy. This may soften and further integrate the settlement edge.

### Land Use and Cover

- 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.

## LCA 11: Golden Valley

- The area has over recent years seen an increase in woodland management and more recent woodland planting that is now maturing, thereby strengthening the landscape structure, and enhancing the habitat value of the area. A number of these initiatives include local community involvement and 'Friends' groups, such as at Conham River Park and the Avon Valley woodlands.
- The River Avon towpath has been restored, improving recreational access.
- 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 and important wildlife habitat, however given the proximity of urban populations and access, recreational use such as mountain biking has the potential to erode or disturb wildlife habitat including ground flora.

## Development

- 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 has the potential to erode the character of the rural landscape.
- Recent years have seen a significant increase in the number of houseboats/barges on the river and the duration of stays. Some associated domestic related activity has spread onto the banks with garden and storage areas being created. This has the potential to erode rural character and displace habitats of ecological value.
- There has been intensification of recreational activities such as at Bitton football club. Such pressures and additional recreational facilities have the potential to erode the distinctive rural character, perception of remoteness and increase disturbance of wildlife.
- The effects of urbanisation, including telecoms masts and fly tipping within localised areas, have had some influence across the rural valley landscape.

## LCA 11: Golden Valley

- The older pattern of settlement along the northern boundary of the LCA (Hanham, Longwell Green, Willsbridge and Bitton), and use of local stone and traditional architectural style relate well to their rural setting. These areas are sensitive to change from infill or coalescence, which might change their distinctive character.
- Recent development at Hanham Hall has seen the restoration of this landmark building (within LCA 14: Kingswood) and also incorporated a robust landscape scheme that respects its setting, which extends into this LCA.
- The landscape character of this area is dependent on adjacent areas, both within and beyond the South Gloucestershire boundary. Any significant change in adjacent areas potentially could influence the character of the Avon Valley LCA. For example, redevelopment of the former Cadbury factory has influenced the character of views south from the LCA.

## Guidance

**10.101** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the objectives of the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines [See reference 4] as well as the overarching management strategy objectives set out in Chapter 4.

### Landscape Strategy

### Landscape Management

- Enhance and manage existing deciduous and ancient woodlands through appropriate woodland management.
- Establish trees and small woodlands using native species to buffer ancient woodlands and SSSIs, to secure the landscape structure and

habitat value of the valley (i.e. Hencliffe Wood, Conham River Park), in line with the aims of the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy.

- Strengthen woodland buffers around more recent urban areas and other new developments to aid their integration into the landscape.
- Seek opportunities to extend the woodland corridor into urban areas north and south of the River Avon (including linking the woodlands of the Avon Valley to Stockwood Open Space within Bristol), and consolidate the landscape towards Longwell Green, while integrating a diverse land use in the wider landscape and conserving priority habitats, historic monuments and key views.
- Restore, manage, and strengthen the hedgerow network, planting hedgerow trees at irregular spacing where appropriate, on balance with maintaining key views afforded from the open floodplain in the west of the LCA, in line with the aims of the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy [\[See reference 5\]](#).
- Address potential flooding issues with the implementation of natural flood management schemes and enhancement of priority habitat floodplain grazing marsh.
- Encourage and support the management, restoration and enhancement of the relic industrial landscapes and structures associated with the coal mining and copper smelting industries along the Avon Valley.
- Encourage the restoration and management of stone boundary walls and reinforce local distinctiveness through the use of materials such as local Pennant sandstone and limestone that complement the local vernacular.

## Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Protect and extend the mosaic of grassland and woodland habitats, for example between Cleeve Wood SSSI and Willsbridge valley and between Hanham Hills Fields and the Avon Valley as part of the wider strategic grassland network.



- Restore and maintain riparian habitats, taking opportunities to restore the river and enhance biodiversity, in line with the aims of the Bath and North East Somerset WaterSpace project where relevant [\[See reference 6\]](#).
- Conserve and enhance areas of floodplain grazing marsh priority habitat, as part of the wider wetland strategic network.

## Development Management

- Protect the open characteristics and undeveloped nature of the remaining rural skylines, including the Hanham Hills, and views towards and from the Cotswold Scarp.
- Restore and maintain the rural character of the riverbanks and wooded slopes, including managing recreational pressures and access routes in a manner that respects their integrity and character, in line with the aims of the Bath and North East Somerset WaterSpace project.
- Limit sprawl and encroachment into the rural landscape from the dense urban edge to the north of the LCA.
- Reinforce local distinctiveness through the use of materials such as local Pennant sandstone and limestone that are in keeping with the local vernacular.
- Ensure that new development does not harm the character, significance or setting of Hanham Court and the Hanham Abbots Conservation Area, its gardens and rural landscape setting. Retain key views towards and from the Conservation Area.
- Ensure that new development does not harm the character, significance or setting of the Bitton Conservation Area. Retain views towards the church, which forms a key landmark feature in views in the east of the LCA.

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# **South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment**

Supplementary Planning Document

**South Gloucestershire Council**

**Final Draft Report proposed for adoption**

Prepared by LUC

February 2025

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South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment

## **Chapter 11: Broad Valleys LCT**

LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge

LCA 13: Frome Valley

LCA 14: Kingswood

LCA 15: Patchway, Filton and the Stokes





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**Note: Each chapter is produced as a separate document for ease of reading and navigation.**

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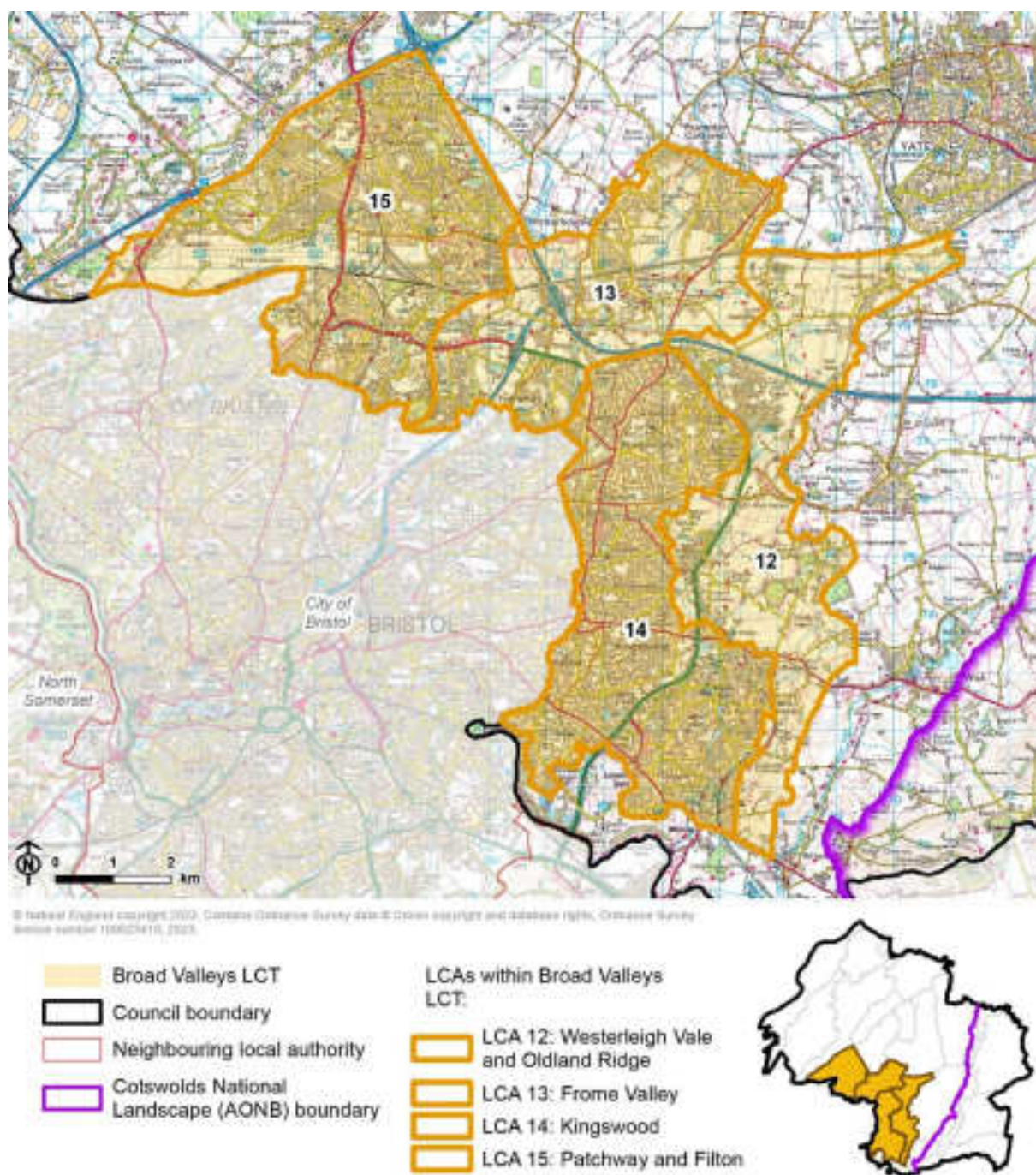
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# Chapter 11

## Broad Valleys LCT

Figure 11.1: Location of Broad Valleys LCT



# Description

**11.1** The Broad Valleys landscape character type (LCT) comprises shallow broad valleys located on the north-eastern and eastern edge of Bristol and bisected by major roads. These landscape character areas differ from others within South Gloucestershire due to the influence of the conurbation edge and the extent of residential, industrial, and commercial development. Urban areas to the north and west have only pockets of open space, but further east there is a mix of urban edge land uses and some farmland.

## Key Characteristics

- An urban fringe landscape north and east of Bristol, comprising large areas of residential, commercial, and industrial development.
- Larger-scale development focused around major roads, motorway, and junctions, which dominates the local landscape and views from roads.
- Relatively recent residential development, predominantly comprising red brick estates, contrasts with the older, denser mixed development around Kingswood and Filton.
- Scattered areas of open space and vegetation help to break up the density of the built form and provide local character within the urban fringe.
- A relatively rural landscape within broad valleys is located beyond the urban edge. Smaller-scale settlements including villages, hamlets and scattered farms are well-integrated within the surrounding landscape.
- The rural landscape consists of a mix of regular pasture and arable fields, divided by clipped hedges, some stone walls, linear bands of trees and limited woodland.

## **Landscape Character Areas**

**11.2** The Broad Valleys LCT is subdivided into four landscape character areas (LCAs):

- LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale & Oldland Ridge
- LCA 13: Frome Valley
- LCA 14: Kingswood
- LCA 15: Patchway, Filton and the Stokes



## LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge

The Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge LCA comprises a diverse mix of farmland, settlement, roads, commons, and industrial heritage.

**Photo 1: View south-west from the Pucklechurch Ridge across rolling fields with woodland, with Bristol visible beyond.**

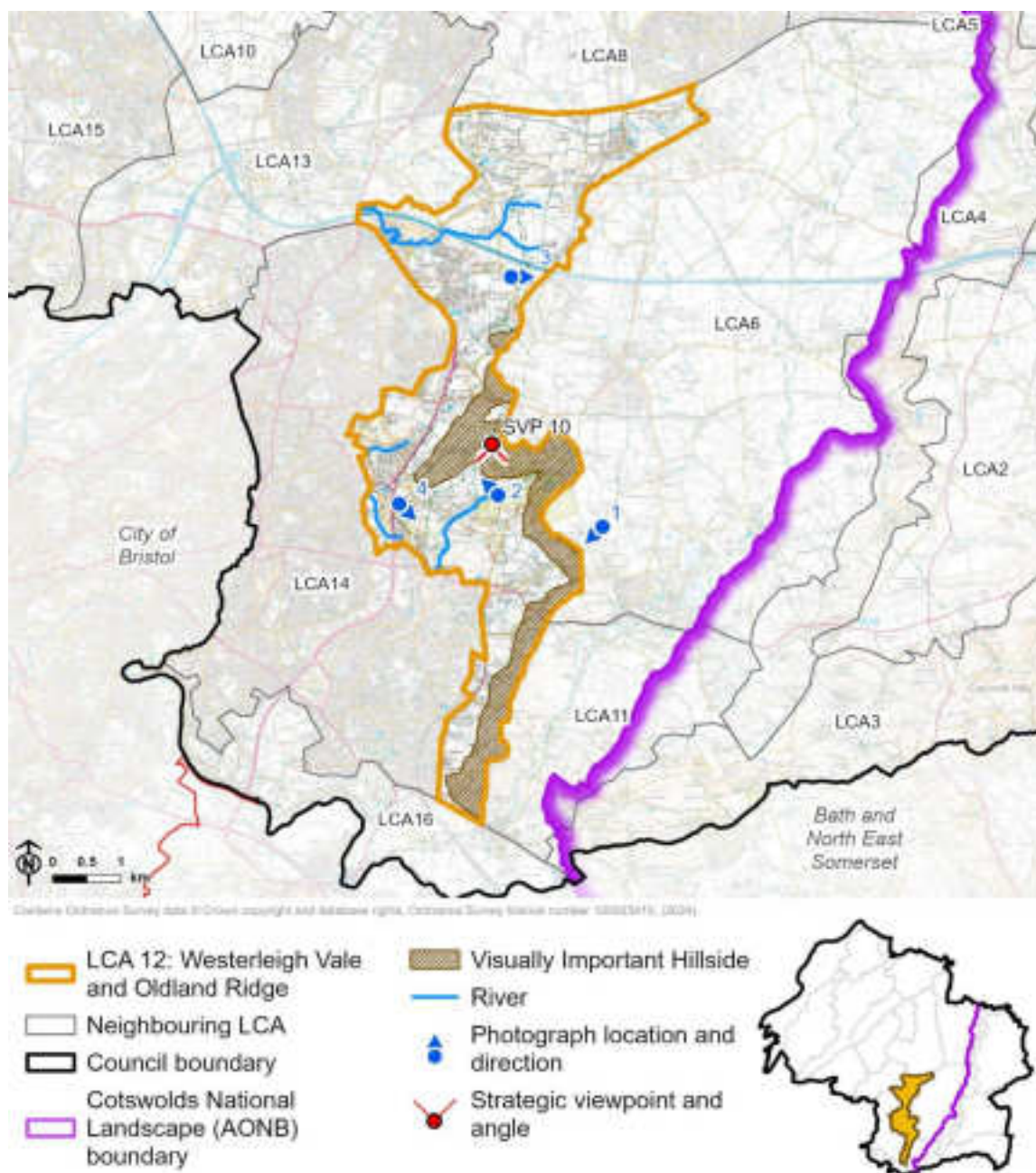


### Location

**11.3** The Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge landscape character area (LCA) is located along the eastern edge of the Bristol conurbation. The north-eastern boundary follows the toe of the Pucklechurch Ridge, which peters out to less distinct rolling low hillsides to the south of Shortwood Hill. The south-eastern boundary follows the Oldland Ridge. The short southern boundary follows the A431 and topographical boundary with LCA 16: Avon Valley. The western boundary follows the urban edge of Bristol to the M4. The northern boundary follows the distinct embankment of the South Wales to London railway line.

## LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge

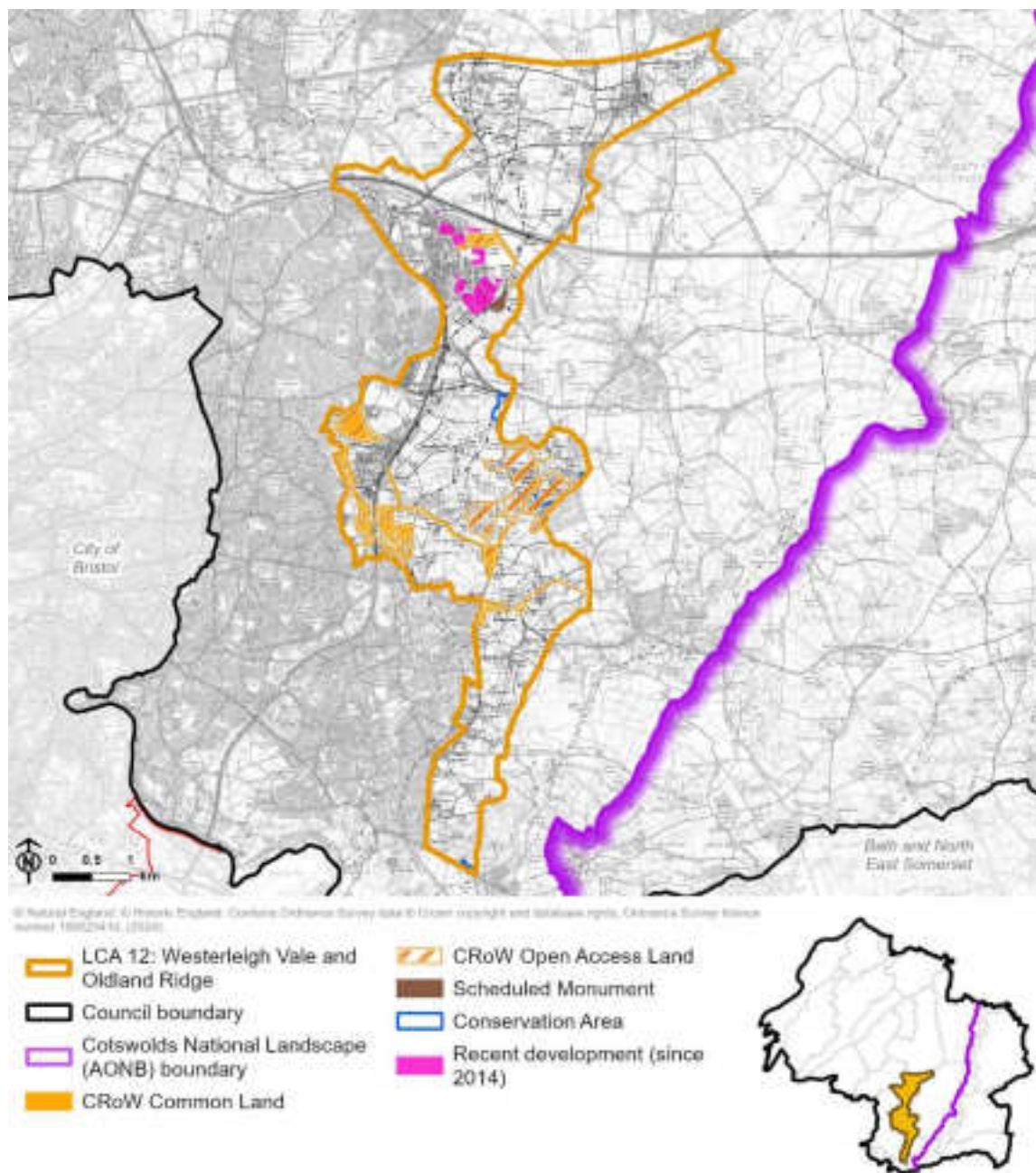
**Figure 11.2: Location and Landscape context of LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge**





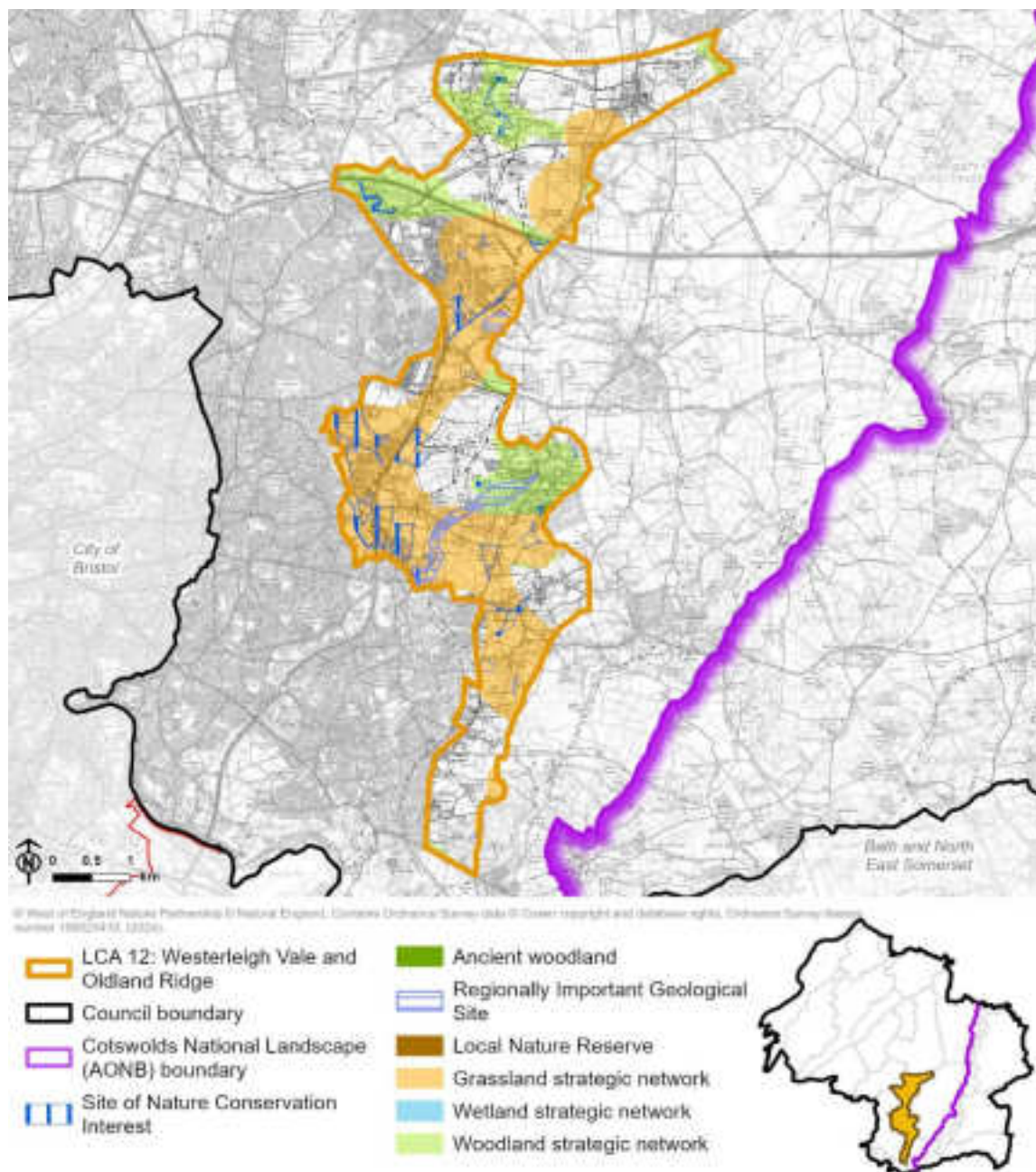
## LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge

**Figure 11.3: Development and Heritage context of LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge**



## LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge

**Figure 11.4: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 12:  
Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge**



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- The gentle to rolling landscape is contained by the prominent Pucklechurch and Oldland Ridge to the east and influenced by the dominant urban edge of Bristol to the west.
- The mix of land uses includes pasture with some arable, horse paddocks, a golf course and common land, with public open space and playing fields along the urban edge.
- Woodland cover is limited. Variable hedgerow and woodland tree cover are often associated with older settlement and commons, with more frequent cover to the east.
- Scattered areas of diverse habitats include neutral, marshy, and acid grassland, broadleaf and ancient woodland, flowing water, and bankside vegetation.
- A dispersed settlement pattern includes a village, hamlets, and scattered farms, contrasting with a significant area of recent development to the east of Emerson's Green.
- Historic remains of coal industries are evident in the north and east, including disused tramways, railways, chimneys, scattered worker settlements, excavations, and spoil mounds.
- The historic hamlet of Siston, designated as a Conservation Area, is a distinctive feature in the east of the LCA.
- The residential urban edge contains the west of the area, with large-scale commercial/ industrial sheds in the north near the M4.
- Main roads cross and segment the area. Frequent, winding minor roads and lanes with grass verges cross the area.



### Natural Influences

#### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**11.4** 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 is located on either side of the M4 corridor and along the lower slopes of the Pucklechurch Ridge. Some small areas of White and Blue Lias (limestone) are located near Siston and along part of the Oldland Ridge. The soils are a combination of Gleys, Pelo- Stagnogleys and typical Argillic Pelosols.

**11.5** 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 LCA 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. The north-east of the LCA is bounded by the Pucklechurch Ridge, comprising a linear ridgeline rising up to 110 metres AOD beyond the LCA. 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 AOD, to the ridge line at 80 to 88 metres AOD.

**11.6** The westerly flowing tributaries of the Folly Brook largely follow an irregular, sinuous course within the northerly bowl with some regular ditches along field boundaries to the east. Centrally, the Siston Brook valley forms a complex landform. The south-westerly flowing meandering Siston Brook and its tributaries join Warmley Brook south of this LCA, 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.

### Land Cover

**11.7** The gently undulating landform in the north of the LCA is predominantly pastoral. Scattered pockets of arable land and horse paddocks are located near to settlement. A driving range and fishing lakes are located to the south of the Westerleigh Road. 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 around the settlement edges. Field boundaries typically comprise clipped hedgerows with few hedgerow trees. Some intermittent hedgerows or post and wire fences are located around horse paddocks. Dense linear sections of scrub and trees line the old tramways and unpaved tracks in this area. Deciduous and mixed woodland areas cover higher ground at Ram Hill.

**11.8** The science park and relatively recent dense residential development is located south of the M4. The open space network around this development comprises retained hedgerows and hedgerow trees. To the south-east of Emerson's Green, the regular pattern of medium to large fields generally follow the linear form of the Warmley Valley. Boundaries include a mix of clipped and overgrown hedgerows with frequent mature trees.

**11.9** Within the Siston Valley, the pasture fields are medium to small and irregular shaped with thick, often overgrown hedges. Mature trees and small copses are located along upper slopes, with maturing areas of Community Forest woodland cover located within this framework. Warmley Forest Park provides links to the cycle network and includes facilities such as a skate park and scout building. The field pattern is disrupted to the west of Siston, where the Shortwood Lodge Golf Club occupies a significant area in the centre of the valley. The planting pattern is largely unrelated to the former field pattern, reflecting the layout of greens and fairways. 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.

**11.10** The Oldland Ridge in the south of the LCA has a relatively regular field pattern of pasture, with medium sized, linear fields generally following the

## **LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge**

contours. Smaller fields and horse paddocks are associated with the irregular settlement edge to the west. 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.

**11.11** A number of commons lie within the area. Lyde Green Common, severed by the M4 in the north of the LCA, 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 in the west of the LCA, comprise rough, unenclosed heathland and a dense scrub/ woodland framework, covering elevated ground and slopes of a steep sided valley. 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. 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. Siston Common forms the most extensive common within the LCA but is now bisected by the Avon Ring Road. Bridgegate Common comprises two small areas with different patterns of open grassland and scattered trees.

**11.12** 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. Numerous tramways cross the north of the LCA, including one of the earliest railways in Britain, the 19th century Dramway. Remnants of coal extraction and brick works are very closely associated with the toe of the Pucklechurch scarp, including the Parkfield Colliery which extends into the adjacent LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley.

## LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge

**Photo 2: Undulating pastoral fields with wooded boundaries north of Webbs Heath.**



### Biodiversity

**11.13** Although immediately adjacent to the urban edge and bisected by major roads, this LCA includes a diverse and ecologically valuable mosaic of grasslands, woodland, and farmland.

**11.14** Ponds and watercourses criss-cross the LCA and are connected by wildlife corridors including hedgerows. Many of the watercourses within this LCA form part of an SNCI, including those at Folly, Warmley and Siston Brooks. These watercourses will support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and water voles. Ponds and pools within the area will support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

## **LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge**

**11.15** There are approximately 3 hectares of ancient woodland comprising two small woodlands, representing less than ten percent of the total wooded cover within this LCA. Several woodland areas are designated as SNCIs. Key species likely to be associated with the broadleaved woodland include bats and dormice, both of which are present across the wider area and are UK priority species. There appears to be good connectivity for species such as these between the wooded areas via hedgerows and scattered trees.

**11.16** There are fifteen sites designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) due to the quality of the grassland (neutral, calcareous, acidic, and marshy) present and includes areas of species-rich grassland and priority habitat good quality semi-improved grassland and lowland dry acid grassland. This diverse habitat supports a range of invertebrates and ant hills are a regular feature. These invertebrates in turn provide a food source for mammals, including bats.

**11.17** The majority of the agricultural land use within this area is pastoral farmland with a small area of arable farmland within the eastern section of the Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge. Arable farmland provides habitat for many species of ground nesting including some that are listed as being Globally Threatened Red listed species. The winter stubble in these areas also provides a foraging resource.

**11.18** There is a history of coal industry in this character area, including mining, tunnels, and underground quarries. Mines and disused railway tunnels provide an ideal habitat for many species of bat including European Protected Species.

**11.19** The golf course presents the opportunity for appropriate planting and management to present a mosaic of habitats of value to a diverse range of species.

**11.20** South Gloucestershire Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor D: Wickwar-Westerleigh-Biton (*Westerleigh Vale/Oldland Ridge/East Fringe*) covers much of the LCA, excluding some areas along the settlement edge, including recent development at Lyde Green.

### Cultural Influences

#### Land Use and Time Depth

**11.21** Land use within the Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge LCA is largely associated with agricultural practices, urban fringe development and amenity use associated with the urban edge.

**11.22** The hamlet of Siston (designated as a Conservation Area) has Saxon origin and is located in close proximity to the former Kingswood Forest, in the east of the LCA. 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 LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley.

**11.23** Relics of past industrial uses of the landscape are scattered throughout the LCA. The 19<sup>th</sup> century Dramway crosses the north of the LCA, passing the Ram Hill Colliery Scheduled Monument. The remnants of Parkfield North Colliery lie within the adjacent character area, on the lower slopes of the Pucklechurch Ridge. However, Brandy Bottom (Parkfield South) Colliery is located within this LCA and includes a chimney, pit head buildings and earthworks, all now absorbed within a framework of scrub and trees. The site is a Scheduled Monument and the most complete example of a 19th century coalmine in the Bristol Coalfield. 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 the A420), previously the site of Warmley Clay Pipe Works, later a landfill site and at Webb's Heath, where vegetated mounds indicate the remains of coal spoil, and a coal mine ventilation shaft remains a local feature. The Webbs Heath Drift Mine is locally listed and is currently being restored by local volunteers.

**11.24** Historic earthworks are evident to the south of Oldland Common, comprising a square enclosure adjacent to the A4175.



### Settlement and Infrastructure

**11.25** The Bristol conurbation forms a prominent, dense edge along much of the western LCA boundary. Settlement within the LCA is scattered, though varied in pattern.

**11.26** The urban edge has a complex and irregular pattern of development, which has expanded and pushed the rural edge eastwards. Expansion has included large-scale residential, commercial, and industrial development in the north-east at Emerson's Green East/Lyde Green. The northern part of this urban edge, extending between the A4174 and the M4 comprises an employment area at Emerald Park made up of very large distribution sheds, offices, light industry and linking road infrastructure. More recent residential development extends further east, with proposed development planned to extend to the base of the Pucklechurch Ridge. Original farmhouses within this area, including Hallen Farm, Lydes Green Farm (Grade II listed) and Newlands Farm (Grade II listed) have been restored. The A4174 and this linear urban edge forms a distinct urban boundary in outward views from the LCA. Further north along the Westerleigh Road a number of recent developments including garden centres and nurseries have introduced large buildings, sheds, glass houses and parking areas and some new housing.

**11.27** The wider rural landscape in the north of the LCA contains the village of Westerleigh, hamlets and scattered farms. Westerleigh 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. 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 relatively dispersed linear settlement of Ram Hill and the clustered hamlet of Henfield are located to the west. These smaller settlements consist of a mix of Pennant sandstone with more recent render and brick buildings, focused around a convergence of minor roads and lanes. Recent industrial and non-agricultural activity in the north of the LCA include an abattoir, processing plant and oil terminal located to the north of the M4.

## **LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge**

**11.28** In the centre and south of the LCA, parts of the urban edge are set back from the western edge of the A4174 corridor. The urban edge crosses the A4174 in the vicinity of Warmley to extend along the A420. Similarly, Emersons Green (within LCA 14) extends north-eastwards across the A4174 into the LCA. 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. This area includes a mix of old Pennant stone and more recent brick buildings, intermixed with a number of industrial complexes and school playing fields. Small-scale incremental infill and expansion along roads and lanes has occurred beyond the village centres, including the redevelopment of a former garden centre site at Oldland Common. 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. Relatively recent housing development to the west of the A4174 is focused on Carson's Road and Ridley Avenue. The isolated, clustered hamlet of Siston is located in the east of the LCA. Designated as a Conservation Area, the hamlet comprises traditional limestone buildings and church, along lanes lined with limestone walls. Scattered farms are common, with some with large modern agricultural barns.

**11.29** The A4174 Avon Ring Road defines a section of the north-western boundary and continues south through rural low-lying parts of the LCA, 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. The associated infrastructure planting is maturing to integrate this road into the wider landscape and to screen adjacent development.

**11.30** The M4 cuts across the north of the LCA east to west, in slight cutting to the west, briefly at grade and then on embankment before cutting into the Pucklechurch Ridge. The South Wales to London railway line, situated on high embankment, forms the northern boundary of the LCA.

**11.31** A number of roads cross east to west, connecting with the rural settlements of Westerleigh, Pucklechurch and Wick. The irregular pattern of

## **LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge**

minor roads and lanes generally follow gentle landform or spurs on steeper terrain.

**11.32** A number of promoted 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 along the boundary of the LCA. The Dramway is an important former industrial tramway, which is now used as a public footpath passing centrally north to south through the LCA. The original route is largely intact, although parts have been removed by the Avon Ring Road. In places the original limestone track sleepers are still evident.

**11.33** One of the circuits within the series of Circular Rides in South Gloucestershire passes through the north-east of the area, through Westerleigh and the Folly Brook valley. The Community Forest Path, within the Forest of Avon, passes centrally through the area north to south. 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.

**11.34** 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.

**Photo 3: Traditional farmhouses (Grade II\* listed) to the east of Lyde Green.**



## Perceptual Influences

### Visual Character

**11.35** The Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge LCA is influenced by the urban conurbation to the west, with its industrial history, more recent development and recreational infrastructure layered over an agricultural landscape. The area is contained to the east by prominent rising ground.

**11.36** The northern bowl of the Folly Brook valley comprises predominately low, gently sloping pasture, with some arable fields. The valley is contained by the Pucklechurch Ridge to the east and urban edge of Emerson's Green East/Lyde Green to the south-west and is roughly bisected by the M4. The dense and textured framework of tall hedgerows, some clipped, over a mosaic of pasture, rough grassland, and common land results in a mix of open and semi-enclosed

## **LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge**

views. The clustered settlement pattern and non-agricultural activities, such as storage compounds and a fishing lake, are reasonably well-integrated as a result of this framework. However, horse paddocks are locally evident where hedgerows have become replaced with fences. Associated ad hoc home-made stables and sheds and the 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 M4 is screened to some degree by existing planting along the motorway embankments but is visually and audibly prominent in places. There are some views over this area from the motorway.

**11.37** The South Wales to London main railway line cuts across the northern boundary of the LCA on high embankment. 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. Some lower density maturing compensatory planting is softening this artificial skyline. Parts of the railway line remain largely well-integrated, particularly where nearby hedgerow trees, or overgrown hedgerows, provide a strong vegetation structure. This landform also forms a significant visual barrier to views northwards into the adjacent LCA 8: Yate Vale.

**11.38** Westerleigh is located to the north-east and is well-integrated by its landform setting and vegetation structure, although landscape character is influenced by heavy traffic. The railway embankment to the north of the village visually separates Westerleigh from the urban edge of Yate, located less than a kilometre away to the north-east, in the adjacent LCA 8: Yate Vale. The church forms a distinctive focal point to the village and local landmark, visible against the skyline from the north. However, the expansion of the village to the east and west is more evident in local views.

**11.39** To the south-west of Westerleigh, below the Pucklechurch Ridge, the abattoir/processing plant, oil terminal and occasional line of goods wagons along the railway form a scattered pattern of large structures, visible from the scarp, local landscape and from the M4. This concentration of features is taller than the adjacent vegetation and therefore is prominent within the local landscape. The large warehouse buildings at Emerald Park are also visually

## **LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge**

prominent within the locality and wider landscape, particularly in views from Downend and other elevated locations. The housing edge of Emerson's Green and associated linear planting abutting the boundary of this LCA form a regular dense urban edge and a prominent built skyline, often elevated above the A4174. The sculpted earth mound located along the A4174 to the east of Emerson's Green and north of Pumphrey Hill provides a distinctive landmark and recreational area, affording wide ranging views of the wider landscape to the east, beyond the ring road.

**11.40** The Pucklechurch Ridge, beyond the LCA'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 LCA. The two chimneys and wooded spoil mounds along the scarp's toe form local landmarks.

**11.41** The claypit stockpiles 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.

**11.42** To the south, the Siston Brook valley within its upper reaches comprises a gently rolling enclosed pastoral valley, with a strong landscape framework which encloses views. Siston hamlet is well-integrated within the valley, with the more elevated Siston 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 LCA. The area to the west and south of Siston now has a more wooded character as the extensive Community Forest Woodland is now established.

**11.43** Open elevated views over Siston, Webb's Heath, and Bridgegate Common 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 rural character of the area.



## **LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge**

**11.44** Warmley (located within LCA 14: Kingswood), straddles the Siston Brook before rising eastwards onto the top of a local ridgeline spur followed by the A420, where it meets Bridgegate at the junction with the A4175.

**11.45** 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 church spire at Warmley is a prominent and distinctive landmark, set within a pocket of urban development nestled within the valley.

**11.46** To the west, the low-lying Warmley Brook valley forms a gentle uniform valley, with a small, elevated plateau and recreational landscape of playing fields 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.

**11.47** The irregular urban edge of Kingswood along the western edge of the LCA comprises a complex mosaic of built development, commons, playing fields, horse paddocks, and roads. This settlement edge contains and visually influences the rural landscape to the east and south, with limited vegetation structure following this edge. 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.

**11.48** Along the urban edge in the centre of the LCA, the elevated rolling, gently sloping commons at Rodway Hill and Charn Hill are edged to the west and south with steep wooded slopes, which have a visually enclosed character. This contrasts with open views available from slightly elevated areas of dry acid grassland within Rodway Common. 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. Open

## **LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge**

views over the area are available from the slopes and top of Siston Hill within Siston Common.

**11.49** The amenity landscape of playing fields, school grounds and public open space forms a distinct open landscape along the urban edge. Visually their openness, due to the lack of vegetation, increases the prominence of the settlement edge from the wider area.

**11.50** The Oldland Ridge in the south of the LCA forms a distinctive backdrop within views from the urban edge and in intermittent views from the A417 and A420 corridors. Although influenced by the adjacent prominent urban edge and audible effect of traffic on the A4175, along its lower slopes, this area provides a rural setting to the urban area. 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.

**11.51** 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 former Warmley Brassworks within LCA 14: Kingswood) are 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 and forms a distinguishing feature within buildings and boundary walls. Historic stiles are occasionally present in areas with a retained historic field pattern.

**Photo 4: View south-east across Siston Common towards the Oldland Ridge.**



## Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**11.52** The proximity of the Bristol conurbation settlement edge, movement, and noise from traffic on the M4, A4174, A431 and A420 and presence of industrial development including the abattoir/processing plant and oil terminal influence the sense of tranquillity across the LCA.

**11.53** The proximity of dense settlement and associated light pollution influences the experience of dark night skies throughout the LCA. Areas of woodland, including Overscourt Wood in the east, filter some of the light pollution from the settlement edge.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**11.54** The Pucklechurch Ridge Visually Important Hillside (VIH) forms part of the boundary and passes into the east of the LCA. The Oldland Ridge and Cotswold Lower Slope Visually Important Hillside is located in the south-east of the LCA. Key characteristics of each VIH include the following:

- Pucklechurch Ridge VIH: a distinctive scarp of folded landform and textured landcover that forms a prominent rising landform and skyline feature in comparison to the lower-lying adjacent areas. The southern part of the Pucklechurch Ridge VIH forms an intrinsic part of the setting to the Siston and Pucklechurch Conservation Areas.
- Oldland Ridge and Cotswold Lower Slope VIH: an area of steep ridges and a series of hills separated by the north-south Golden Valley (River Boyd). The Oldland Ridge forms a visually prominent horseshoe-shaped landform of rising ground with a distinct rural character. The eastern part of the VIH is intrinsic to the setting of the Upton Cheyney Conservation Area, which straddles the steep west-facing valley side of the VIH, and the western part forms a green backdrop to the Bitton Conservation Area.

**11.55** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

### Strategic Viewpoints

**11.56** One Strategic Viewpoint (SVP) is located within this LCA at the Community Forest Path near Siston Court (SVP 10). It provides a panoramic view of the Siston Brook Valley, Lodge Farmhouse, the setting of Siston Court, and the landmark features of St Barnabas Church and Church of the Holy Trinity.

**11.57** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Valued Features

- The topographical variety of the landscape, including the rolling brook valleys in the centre of the LCA and the ridges along the boundary which form the backdrop of views from the urban edge, including the Pucklechurch Ridge in the north and Oldland Ridge in the south.
- Hedgerows and woodland which contribute to biodiversity and habitat connectivity, and contribute to sense of place, particularly within the Siston Valley and Oldland Ridge.
- The flowing water and bankside vegetation of Folly Brook, Siston Brook, Warmley Brook and associated tributaries that provide habitat for a range of notable species and contributes to biodiversity, with some areas designated as SNCIs.
- The mosaic of neutral, calcareous, acidic, and marshy grassland that supports a diverse range of flora and contributes to biodiversity, with some areas designated as SNCIs.
- Areas of commons, with their variable land cover, which contribute to a diverse landscape pattern and sense of place.
- Relatively dispersed settlement pattern which contributes to a sense of rurality, away from the dense urban edge in the west.
- The historic hamlet of Siston (designated as a Conservation Area), including the manor house of Siston Court, that contributes to time depth.
- Industrial archaeological features, including the Brandy Bottom Colliery Scheduled Monument, that contribute to the time depth of the landscape.

## The Changing Landscape

**11.58** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge LCA.

### Climate Change

- Climate change leading to increased temperatures and periods of drought resulting in a change in stream flows, altering the species composition of wetland habitats (ponds, flowing open water and bankside vegetation associated with SNCIs), particularly Folly Brook, Siston Brook and Warmley Brook.
- Climate change resulting in an increase in the frequency and severity of seasonal flooding in lower-lying valleys, particularly along Folly Brook in the north of the LCA. Associated pressures to build flood management works that are unsympathetic to local landscape character and sensitive habitats.

### Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- An increase in tree planting is required to contribute towards South Gloucestershire Council's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may include the establishment of additional woodlands in a corridor between Overscourt Wood and Warmley Forest Park and also to Shortwood Landfill Site, and in a corridor linking Kendleshire Golf Course through the 'Westerleigh Gap', as set out in the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy [\[See reference 1\]](#). This may change the character of views towards the Pucklechurch Ridge, although this may also contribute to the strengthening of the landscape framework.



### Land Use and Cover

- 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, and potentially reducing its biodiversity value.
- The scattered ponds and pools within this area along with their surrounding terrestrial habitat are vulnerable to any loss of habitat.
- The landscape is 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 reduce the biodiversity value and erode the landscape framework. Any change also has the potential to be visible from the Pucklechurch Ridge, potentially affecting the rural setting and character of this landform.
- The further encroachment of the urban edge has the potential to introduce significant landscape change into this area. The areas of ecologically important grassland can be particularly sensitive to changes in management or changes in drainage regime.
- At Shortwood, landfill and progressive restoration is being implemented along the toe of the Pucklechurch Ridge and into a section of the lower scarp face in the adjoining LCA, with the ultimate aim of restoration back into the wider landscape, which should also create new habitat. 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.
- The distinctive character of the commons and heathland within the lower Siston Valley are sensitive to change, such as settlement infill along lanes which cross these areas. The built form, landscape setting, condition and general maintenance of common edge properties greatly affects both the landscape character and habitat value of these spaces. Ad hoc

## LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge

development of sheds and variable maintenance of property boundaries also has a detracting visual 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 relatively recent trend, which in places has led to the loss or erosion of hedgerows. The cumulative effect of this and the associated infrastructure of fencing, stables, access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and floodlighting, can result in a marked change in landscape character and disturbance to wildlife.
- The maturing tree cover of the Community Forest planting along the upper valley sides of Siston Valley and within Warmley Forest Park, on the reclaimed claypit, is providing a more well wooded landscape, increasing the degree of enclosure, whilst also providing recreational opportunities. Improvements to parking at Overscourt Wood has enhanced the amenity of the open access land.
- The hedgerow framework is a strong, generally intact feature of the ridgelines, contributing to landscape character, habitat value and connectivity, with the exception of localised extents of the Oldland Ridge, where some has 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.
- 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, would increase this effect and the erosion of the distinctive rural character of the area and threatens to reduce its habitat value.

### Development

- The centre and west of the Folly Brook valley in the north of the LCA is greatly influenced by the Bristol urban edge. Development, comprising residential fringe, the A4174 corridor, the industrial character of Emerald Park and recent development at Emerson's Green East/Lyde Green, has a prominent local influence. Limited integration with the wider agricultural landscape erodes the character of the adjacent rural area.
- Maturing structure planting implemented at Emerald Park, is providing a degree of integration of the development within the surrounding area. However, the scale and massing of the development is such that, even in the long term, planting has limited potential to integrate the development within the surrounding smaller-scale development to the east. The buildings remain visually prominent in the local area and from elevated positions on the adjacent Pucklechurch Ridge.
- Relatively recent development at Emerson's Green East/Lyde Green covers an extensive area, extending to and along the toe of the Pucklechurch Ridge, contained to the north by the M4. Much of the existing landscape framework has been retained, however further enhancement will improve integration of this extensive area.
- The M4 has replaced the A4174 as the new urban edge. In the wider context, development of the Emerson's Green East/Lyde Green area has altered the wider landscape setting to the M4 and around the north-eastern edge of Bristol and is prominent in views from the Pucklechurch Ridge.
- Small-scale settlement at Ram Hill and Henfield is well-integrated within the framework of hedgerow trees and woodland. The area has a generally tranquil and enclosed 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. This area is also sensitive to infill or incremental changes which might further erode the character and distinctiveness of the rural landscape.

## LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge

- Prominent development located to the north of the M4 along Westerleigh Road, including the abattoir, processing plant, oil terminal, garden centres and nurseries, 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 has 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. These areas are sensitive to incremental changes which might further erode the character and distinctiveness of the rural landscape.
- The Siston Brook valley is a relatively tranquil area, with a characteristic mosaic of strong and intact hedgerows, hedgerow trees and traditional buildings. Siston Conservation Area extends over the upper slopes of the ridge and beyond, into the adjacent LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley. The collection of traditional and historic buildings of Siston within this elevated location makes the visual setting particularly sensitive to change.
- 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, enhancing 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, introduces built form which locally erodes the rural character. Linear planting along the road helps integrate and reduce these effects.

## LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge

- Siston Common was bisected by the Avon Ring Road, with part of the common becoming more enclosed by relatively recent residential development at Siston Park on one side and the urban edge on the other. This has brought changes in character, management, rural associations, and an increase in recreational and urban edge pressures.
- Relatively recent housing at Carson's Road near Siston Hill, adjacent to the Avon Ring Road, presents a harsh built edge. Maturing planting, when in leaf, is helping to integrate this development into the wider landscape. The density and levels of the development have had a particularly urbanising effect, while the increase in population increases pressure on nearby green spaces and footpaths.
- 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 were removed by the construction of the Avon Ring Road, however new footpath connections provide a continuous route, albeit along tarmac paths in close proximity to the road corridor and its traffic.
- The Avon Ring Road introduced a potential catalyst for change, leaving a mix of common land, school playing fields, public open spaces and remnant agricultural land sandwiched between the urban edge and the road. Pressures to extend the built urban edge within this area would change the character of wider views across the surrounding landscape, including for example from Siston and Rodway Commons and high ground to the east.
- 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 and their habitats 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 of hills in the east of the area, form distinct landforms with rural character. These include the ridges south of Pomphrey Hill and Shortwood Hill; the open rural hillside and skyline between Orchard Farm

## LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge

and Rodway Common to the west, and the continuation of the Pucklechurch Ridge to the east, as well as Siston Hill and the Oldland Ridge. These ridgelines form natural skylines, which are prominent within local views, and are therefore sensitive to change which could erode their distinctive character.

- Embankment stabilisation works which cleared railway embankments of tree cover have significantly increased the prominence of the railway within the north of the LCA. Electrification of the London to South Wales railway line has added to the visual intrusion of the line from overhead gantries in the north of the LCA.

## Guidance

**11.59** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the overarching management strategy objectives set out in Chapter 4.

### Landscape Strategy

### Landscape Management

- Design any increase of woodland cover to protect key views and complement new grassland connections in line with the aims of the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy
- Establish new woodlands to link with existing ones, including from the Kendleshire Golf Course (in LCA 13: Frome Valley) through the 'Westerleigh Gap' in the north of the LCA, and between Overscourt Wood, Warmley Forest Park and the Shortwood Landfill site in the centre of the LCA, whilst protecting key views and priority habitats, in line with the aims of the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy **[See reference 2].**



## LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge

- Strengthen the green open character of the hillsides, ridges and skyline that form an important part of the rural setting of the urban area and proposed new development areas.
- Encourage and support the management, restoration, and enhancement of the relic industrial landscape of this area including the structures and tramways associated with the coal mining industry at Parkfield North, Brandy Bottom (Parkfield South) and Ram Hill Collieries, and the locally listed Webbs Heath Drift Mine.
- Seek opportunities to integrate new tree and woodland planting into the restoration of Shortwood Landfill Site.
- Establish groups of trees and small woodlands to further integrate diverse land uses in the wider landscape, with a particular focus on road and rail corridors.

## Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Protect and improve the riparian habitat of the Siston Brook, Folly Brook and Warmley Brook and seek opportunities to naturalise sections currently impacted by engineering structures (except heritage features).
- Enhance, extend, and manage neutral, calcareous, acidic, and marshy grasslands of ecological importance, including the network of common land (including Siston, Bridgegate and Webbs Heath and Rodway Commons).
- Protect and manage the commons, Warmley Forest Park, and Overscourt Wood and Community Forest from recreational pressures likely to damage their habitat value.
- Ensure the conservation and enhancement of the habitats within this LCA and ensure their continued connectivity via hedgerows, broadleaf tree cover and water courses.
- Seek to avoid the introduction of fencing in rural areas due to its landscape impact and lack of biodiversity value, in favour of native hedgerow planting or stone walls that are in keeping with the local architectural vernacular.

## Development Management

- Carefully consider issues such as layout, massing, colour, and texture to ensure high quality views are maintained from surrounding elevated vantage points.
- Avoid development which may diminish or detract from the landform and skyline of the Oldland Ridge and Pucklechurch Ridge.
- Ensure that the character and biodiversity value of the remaining rural landscapes in this LCA is reinforced, and that any new development is sensitively designed and landscaped to achieve this, including careful consideration of details such as lighting to ensure that wildlife is not disturbed.
- Preserve and enhance the landscape setting of Siston Conservation Area, together with key views towards and from it. Ensure that new development does not harm the character, significance or setting of the formal grounds, former parkland, fields, and woodlands associated with Siston Court.
- Encourage and support the repair and retention of natural stone walls and other traditional features such as historic stiles, pennant stone kerbing and copper slag coping stones.

## LCA 13: Frome Valley

The Frome Valley landscape character area (LCA) is a diverse, enclosed valley, characterised by an intricate combination of agriculture and settlement, divided by major roads.

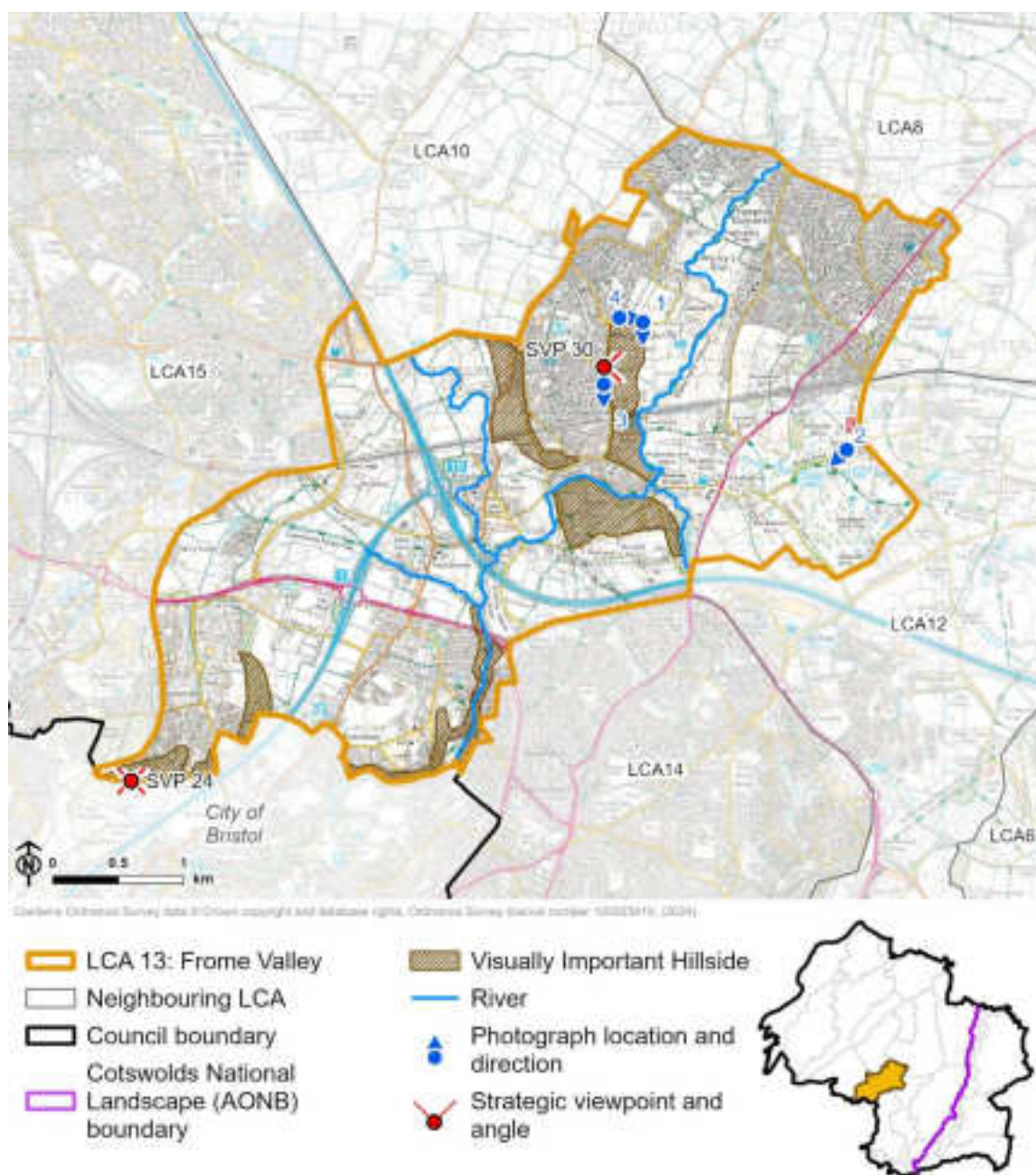
**Photo 1: View south towards the Huckford Viaduct crossing the River Frome to the east of Winterbourne.**



### Location

**11.60** The Frome Valley LCA is located centrally on the south-western boundary of South Gloucestershire. The LCA boundary is defined to the north-west, north, and north-east by the settlement edge of Winterbourne, Frampton Cotterell and Coalpit Heath. The eastern boundary encloses the edge of the Kendleshire Golf Course. The southern boundary follows the South Gloucestershire/Bristol City administrative boundary around Frenchay. The western boundary follows the approximate crown of a broad ridgeline through Stoke Park and the urban edges of Harry Stoke and Stoke Gifford.

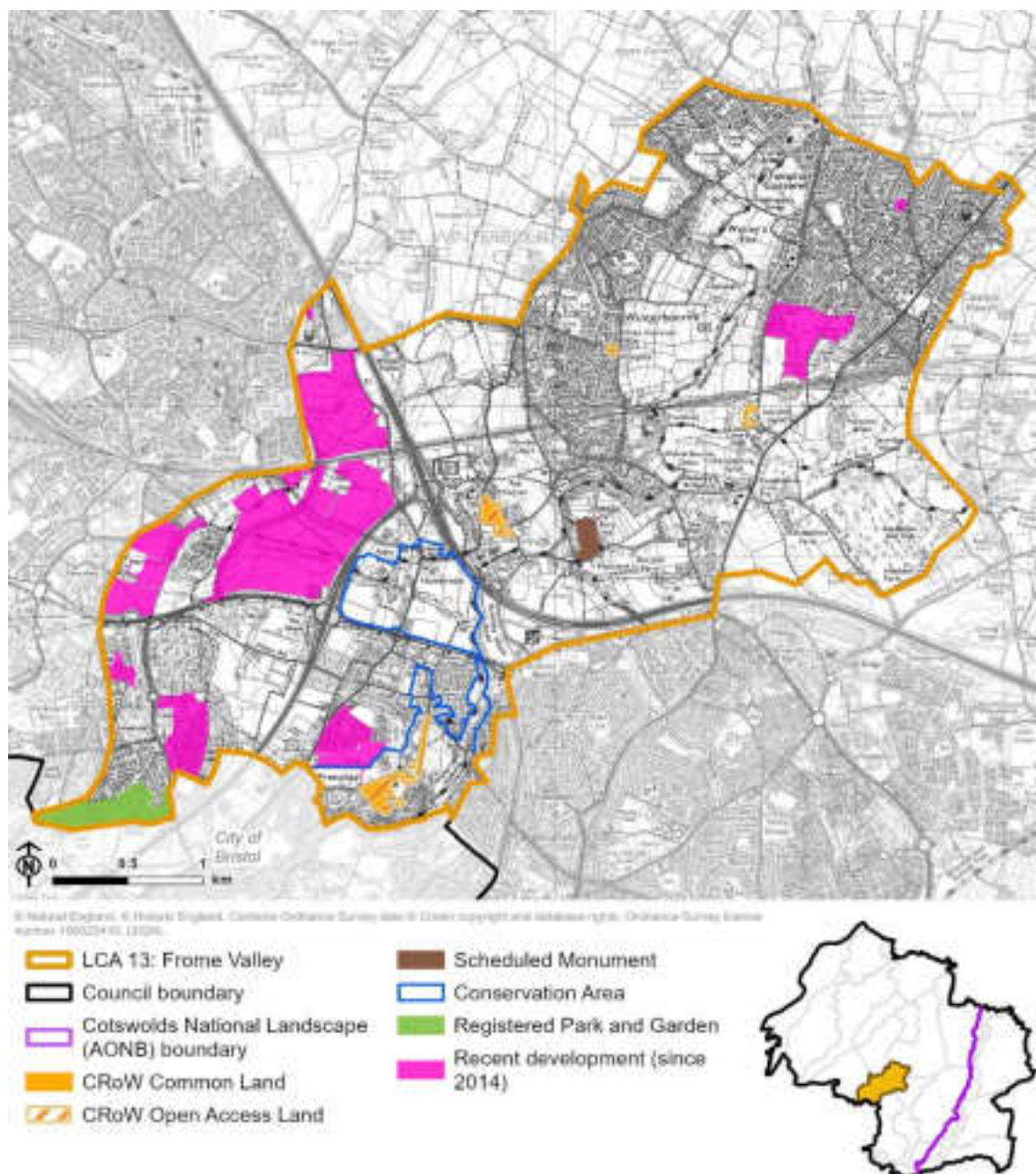
**Figure 11.5: Location and Landscape context of LCA 13: Frome Valley**





## LCA 13: Frome Valley

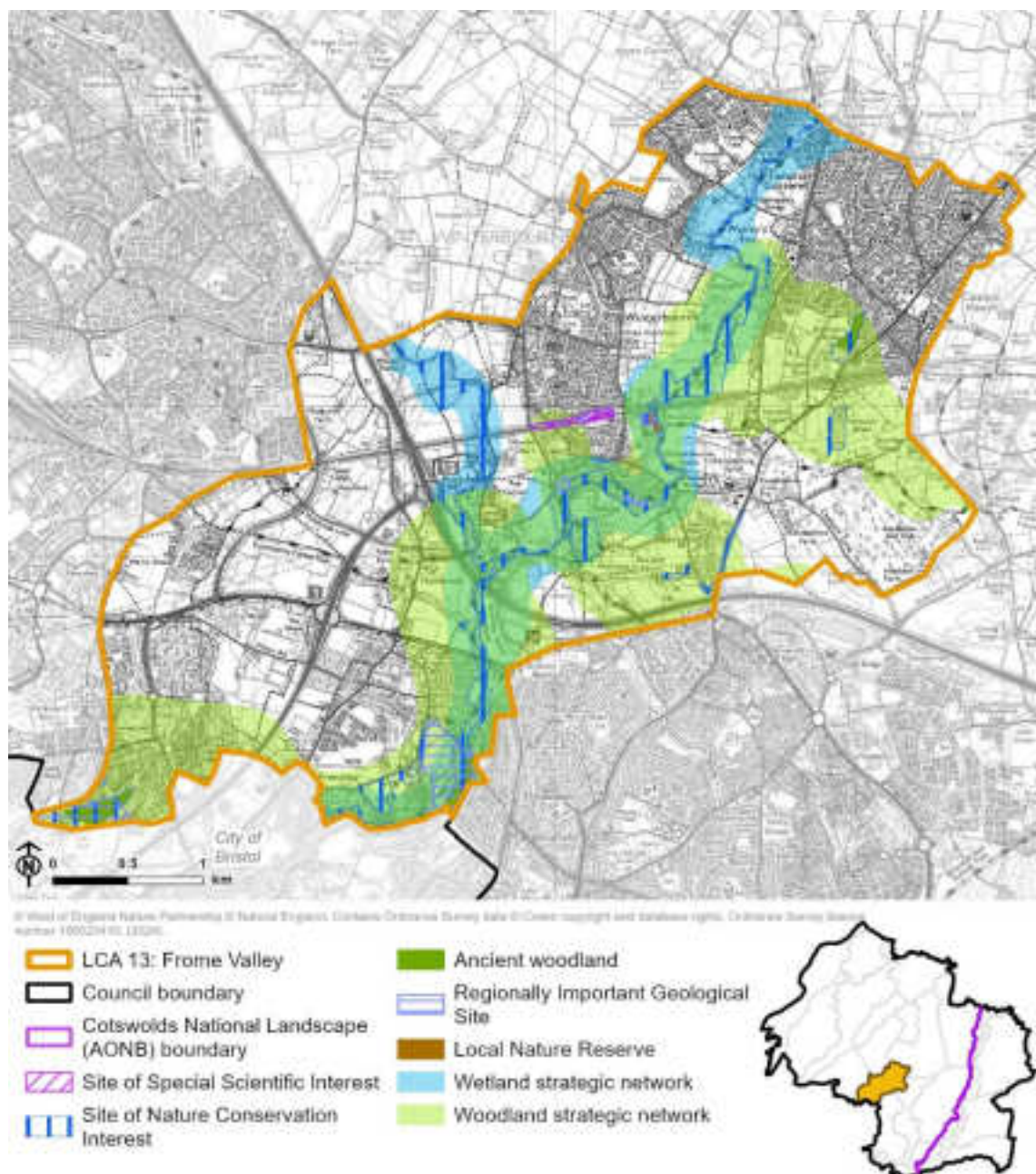
**Figure 11.6: Development and Heritage context of LCA 13: Frome Valley**





## LCA 13: Frome Valley

**Figure 11.7: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 13: Frome Valley**



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- Undulating landform is defined by the 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.
- The landscape is contained and influenced by settlements, the urban edge of Bristol and a dense network of roads and railways.
- The smaller-scale and enclosed character of the River Frome valley contributes to a sense of localised tranquillity and rurality.
- Rural areas comprise a mix of medium sized pasture and arable fields, with some limited common land. Fields are bound by hedges and post and wire fencing, with Pennant stone walls near settlements.
- Land use along the settlement edge is more mixed, and includes paddocks, market gardens, and plant nurseries, which take advantage of the Grade 1 and Grade 2 agricultural land. There are also recreation grounds and a golf course.
- Areas of neutral and acidic grassland supports a diverse range of flora and include areas of ecologically valuable species rich grassland.
- Dense riparian shrub vegetation and linear woodland runs along the River Frome Valley.
- Woodland is associated with Stoke Park, Sims' Hill, Bury Hill, and the Frome Valley, and retained along some settlement edges. Scattered smaller areas are also associated with the Bradley Brook and former small-scale quarry sites.
- The settlement pattern is related to the historic layout and expansion of former village centres. Winterbourne, Frampton Cotterell and Coalpit Heath form a horseshoe shape surrounding a rural landscape.
- Hamlets, farms, and residential properties are scattered across the wider rural landscape.

## LCA 13: Frome Valley

- Distinct historic features include Bury Hill Fort (Scheduled Monument), Stoke Park (Registered Park and Garden), Hambrook and Frenchay Conservation Areas. A number of railway viaducts form prominent landmarks.
- The concentration of road infrastructure, the M32/M4 corridors and railway embankments has a localised influence on the landscape. Pylon towers and powerlines influence the landscape in the south-west.

## Natural Influences

### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**11.61** 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.

**11.62** 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 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 AOD on the ridges, reaching 75 metres AOD at Sims' Hill and 80 metres AOD at the southern end of the ridge at Winterbourne. A railway cutting at Winterbourne includes a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest.

**11.63** 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. An area of Grade 1 and 2

## **LCA 13: Frome Valley**

(categorised as best and most versatile) agricultural land is located along the M32 corridor and the Bradley Brook Valley.

**11.64** Further south, the river is contained within a narrow gorge and the steep sided slopes of Bury Hill. The river again passes through an incised valley and gorge through Frenchay, before flowing south-west, beyond this LCA, 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.

**11.65** The Bradley Brook follows an irregular meandering course southwards from the adjoining LCA 10: Earthcott Vale, before forming a small, incised valley in the area of Whiteshill, before joining the River Frome. The Folly Brook follows a relatively irregular course, passing west from the adjoining LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge before crossing north to join the River Frome near Damsons Bridge.

**11.66** The western area of the LCA 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**

**11.67** The land cover of this LCA is a diverse mix of rural uses, contained and variously influenced by settlement areas, urban edge, roads, and railway.

**11.68** 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 and enclosed common at Hicks Common. A small area of woodland (Rockwell Wood) covers the steep scarp slope above the River Frome, opposite Cloisters. Fields are divided by a mix of clipped, intermittent, and overgrown hedges.

## **LCA 13: Frome Valley**

**11.69** The dense settlement pattern of Winterbourne, Frampton Cotterell and Coalpit Heath in the north of the LCA 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. 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.

**11.70** Further south, tree and woodland cover 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 riverbanks.

**11.71** 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. 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. To the east lie small fields and a tree lined stream course within a small, tight valley section of the Folly Brook.

**11.72** The Kendleshire Golf Course is located in the east of the LCA. The golf course retains some lengths of the former agricultural hedgerows and tree structure amongst extensive ground remodelling and earthworks to form fairways and greens. The north-western extension to the golf course comprises ground modelling and open grassland with native tree and shrub planting.

**11.73** A section of the Bradley Brook valley lies to the west and below Winterbourne. The surrounding fields are predominantly in pastoral use and vary in size. They 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



## **LCA 13: Frome Valley**

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. To the west of Winterbourne Down, along the northeast side of the M4, an area of land raising is gradually being absorbed within woodland cover.

**11.74** In the centre of the LCA, 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. 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.

**11.75** Within the M32 corridor in the south of the LCA, 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, though there is an increasing influence of settlement in this area. 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 plant nurseries, a caravan storage area, and a recreation area. 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.

**11.76** To the south-west, woodland, scrub, and unimproved grassland cover Sims' Hill. Adjacent parkland within Stoke Park, a listed historic park, comprises large areas of woodland on the ridgeline, with open grassland covering steep rolling slopes. The park partly lies within this LCA 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.



## **LCA 13: Frome Valley**

**11.77** Horse paddocks are scattered throughout the LCA, and are often associated with the edge of settlements, or in close proximity, accessed by the many roads which cross the landscape.

**Photo 2: View south-west across horse paddocks near Coalpit Heath, with the landscaped grounds of Kendleshire Golf Course behind.**



## **Biodiversity**

**11.78** Although containing significant built-up areas, the Frome Valley LCA includes a valuable and diverse mosaic of grassland, woodland, and farmland, with a number of watercourses and ponds connected by wildlife corridors, including hedgerows and stone walls, providing important habitat for a diverse range of species.

**11.79** Approximately 9 hectares of ancient woodland is found within three small woodlands and comprises one third of the total wooded cover within this area.

## **LCA 13: Frome Valley**

Several woodland sites are designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). Key species likely to be associated with the broadleaved woodland include bats and dormice, both of which are present across the wider area and are UK priority species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP).

**11.80** There are 5 SNCIs designated for grassland (neutral and acidic) including areas of species-rich grassland which supports a range of invertebrates, and ant hills are a regular feature. These invertebrates provide a food source for mammals including bats.

**11.81** There are a number of watercourses and their tributaries draining the Frome Valley, some of which are designated as SNCI. These watercourses will support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and water voles. Ponds and pools within the area will support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

**11.82** There appears to be good connectivity for species between the wooded areas and other habitats via hedgerows and scattered trees. However, the area is dissected by two motorways and a railway which may form a barrier to the commuting/foraging/habitat availability of these species.

**11.83** Agricultural land use within this area is a patchwork of arable and pastoral farmland, the arable farmland in particular provides habitat for many species of ground nesting farmland birds including some that are listed as Globally Threatened Red species. The winter stubble in these areas also provides a foraging resource.

**11.84** There is a history of quarrying in this area. Underground quarries and mines provide an ideal habitat for many species of bat including European Protected Species.

**11.85** Stone walls are a feature associated with the older settlements within this LCA and many of them are in disrepair. This feature may be utilised by a diverse range of species from invertebrates to reptiles and amphibians for commuting, foraging and as a refuge.

## LCA 13: Frome Valley

**11.86** Suburban land uses such as the golf course in the south-east of the LCA can provide a mosaic of habitats which can be utilised by a diverse range of species. Residential gardens and amenity spaces within the developed areas can also provide valuable ecological habitat.

**11.87** South Gloucestershire Strategic Blue-green Infrastructure Corridor C: Winterbourne-Kendleshire-Yate (*River Frome Corridor*) covers much of the LCA, broadly following the River Frome, Bradley Brook, and Folly Brook. Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor D: Wickwar-Westerleigh-Biton (*Westerleigh Vale/Oldland Ridge/East Fringe*) extends into the south-east of the LCA, associated with woodland and grassland habitat networks.

## Cultural Influences

### Land Use and Time Depth

**11.88** The historic village of Hambrook is located in the south of the LCA. The historic importance of its 18th and 19th century Pennant stone cottages, farmsteads, large houses, church, and village green, clustered at a junction of lanes extending outwards in a linear pattern, is recognised through designation as a Conservation Area. Stone boundary walls extend along some lanes and there is an old packhorse bridge across the Frome to the east of Hambrook.

**11.89** The Frenchay Conservation Area is also located in the south of the LCA. 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. The Conservation Area extends within Frenchay Park, to include playing fields and open space along the park's southern and eastern boundary.

## **LCA 13: Frome Valley**

**11.90** The Bury Hill Fort (Scheduled Monument) is located on the broad hilltop, above steep slopes of the River Frome south of Winterbourne and comprises earth ramparts. Though the western boundary has been damaged by quarrying, the earth ramparts remain a distinct feature locally.

**11.91** Woodland within the Stoke Park Registered Park and Garden extends into the south of the LCA and influences the historic character of the landscape locally.

**11.92** Frampton Cotterell and Coalpit Heath have a range of small-scale coal mining features spanning several centuries.

### **Settlement and Infrastructure**

**11.93** In the north of the LCA, Winterbourne, Frampton Cotterell and Coalpit Heath form a distinct horseshoe shaped area of settlement. These settlements are 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. A small-scale, tight pattern 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. These cottages edge the typically winding pattern of small lanes. Victorian and later 20th century development introduced brick buildings and infill development, resulting in the coalescence of the three villages. There have been two areas of more recent infill development which have impinged on the horseshoe settlement pattern, extending into the adjoining rural landscape. There has also been some infilling on the edge of Winterbourne Down, making the settlement more prominent in wider views.

**11.94** 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.

## **LCA 13: Frome Valley**

**11.95** Pennant sandstone is used throughout the LCA for walls, bridges, and buildings. Imported limestone and Old Red sandstone are also common.

**11.96** In the south-east of the LCA, Hambrook village includes a mix of residential properties clustered at a junction of lanes extending outward in a linear pattern. The M32, M4 and River Frome surround the village. Frenchay village comprises a diverse pattern of settlement and open space. The redevelopment of the Frenchay Hospital site has changed the settlement pattern in this area and introduced some further open space into the otherwise dense settlement pattern. North of the hospital site, Frenchay also contains 20th century residential development of housing, flats, and bungalows. This settlement partially defines the urban edge.

**11.97** In the centre of the LCA, north of 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.

**11.98** In the south-west of the LCA, a number of relatively new and active development sites are located within the M32 corridor, which is extending the urban edge of Stoke Gifford and Harry Stoke into this previously agricultural landscape. 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, the large institutional building complex of the University of the West of England (UWE), relatively recent residential development west of Sims Hill Community Woodland, the Bristol Business Park, hotel, and grounds.

**11.99** A number of public footpaths cross the area, including the Frome Valley Walkway and Community Forest Path, both promoted 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. The Hatters Trails around Frampton Cotterell and Watley's End link a range of buildings and features associated with the 300-year hatting trade that formed an

## **LCA 13: Frome Valley**

important part of the local economy from the late 1500's onwards. The Community Forest Path passes from east to west in the south of the LCA.

**11.100** Four brick railway viaducts are highly prominent, distinctive landmarks crossing the River Frome and Bradley Brook valleys and roads from east to west. The M4 is crossed by a more recent metal railway bridge.

**11.101** Numerous roads cross the LCA 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. 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.

**11.102** 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. An existing solar farm is located between the ring road and M4 in the east of the LCA.



**Photo 3: Views south along Hicks Common Road to houses on the edge of Winterbourne.**



## Perceptual Influences

### Visual Character

**11.103** The Frome Valley LCA 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 LCA 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 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.

**11.104** Despite the extensive areas of settlement and urban edges, there are areas of the landscape and pockets within settlements which largely retain, a

## **LCA 13: Frome Valley**

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. 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 numerous internal views possible from more elevated locations and from the settlement edges of Winterbourne and parts of Frampton Cotterell are a particular characteristic of this locality. 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.

**11.105** On the northern edge of Frampton Cotterell, St Peter's Church forms a local landmark adjacent to the River Frome within the adjoining LCA 8: Yate Vale. It forms a focal point along the road corridor, from which outward views are available looking across roadside greens and breaks within the scattered roadside development.

**11.106** 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.

**11.107** 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.

**11.108** 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.

## **LCA 13: Frome Valley**

**11.109** 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. The railway embankments are also large-scale features, physically cutting across the Frome and Bradley Brook valleys and blocking views along them. The removal of much of the former strong woodland cover on these slopes in the east of the LCA has substantially increased their prominence in and influence on the wider landscape, as have the gantries introduced for the electrification of the London to South Wales railway line.

**11.110** In the centre of the LCA, the tree and woodland cover 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 that helps to reduce the impact of the motorway infrastructure. The historic hilltop location forms a prominent feature in the locality and offers 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, although the area also has wire fence boundaries and is generally less enclosed by trees.

**11.111** To the east of the A432, the extended 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 local views including from the A432 and occasionally elsewhere.

**11.112** The agricultural field pattern in the centre of the LCA has been overlain and bisected by the contrasting character of the M4, M32 and railway network. A number of substantial embankments, overbridges and road junctions 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. Within these views, the pylon towers are a prominent feature in the west of the LCA. The existing solar farm in the east of the LCA is

## **LCA 13: Frome Valley**

relatively well-integrated by the retained landscape framework of hedgerows and woodland along the M4.

**11.113** The influence of settlement and infrastructure is evident across much of the south-west of the LCA. The dense settlement edge encloses the area and rooflines of residential and commercial buildings are prominent. More recent settlement expansion in this area is evident, at times extending onto lower ridgeline slopes with limited integration into the wider rural landscape framework. However, relatively recent residential development south of Filton Cemetery is well-integrated by Sims' Hill Community Woodland to the east. Sims' Hill woodland, which forms part of the Stoke Park Registered Park and Garden located along the southern boundary of the LCA, is a distinctive and prominent landscape feature in views from the LCA and wider Bristol area.

**11.114** Within the LCA 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.

**11.115** In a number of locations across the LCA, 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 which in relation to horse paddocks has increased the visibility of stables, parked vehicles, open storage, jumps and other associated features.

**Photo 4: View east across the Frome Valley near Winterbourne, looking towards Coalpit Heath.**



## Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**11.116** The proximity of the urban edge of the Bristol conurbation, settlement at Winterbourne, Frampton Cotterell and Coalpit Heath, busy roads including the M4, M32, A432 and A4174 influence the sense of tranquillity within the LCA. A degree of tranquillity exists within the enclosed wooded valleys, away from the settlement edge.

**11.117** The proximity of dense settlement and associated light pollution influences the experience of dark night skies throughout the LCA.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**11.118** The Bury Hill and Winterbourne Hill Visually Important Hillside (VIH), River Frome VIH, and Sims' Hill VIH are located within this LCA. Key characteristics of each VIH include the following:

- Bury Hill and Winterbourne Hill VIH: Three steep-sided hills that form an elevated landform above the River Frome, with the Bury Hill Camp scheduled monument located in the south-west. The steep sides and wooded nature of the top of the VIH contribute to the locally-prominent landscape feature formed by the VIH.
- River Frome VIH: The steep, wooded western and eastern valley sides that contribute to the setting of the River Frome. The VIH is associated with views towards and from Frenchay Conservation Area.
- Sims' Hill VIH: a distinctive short, narrow, wooded and steep scarp slope that contributes to the setting of the listed historic stately house, Dower House (Grade II\*), and Stoke Park RPG (Grade II).

**11.119** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

### Strategic Viewpoints

**11.120** Two Strategic Viewpoints (SVPs) are located within this LCA. They are:

- SVP 30: Flax Pits Pond, Hicks Common Road: Located on the eastern edge of Winterbourne and provides a rural view across the Frome Valley, and enables appreciation of its rural character, with clear expression of the characteristic valley landform and the pattern of rectilinear pastoral fields interspersed with hedgerows, hedgerow trees, and small woodlands, with the Cotswold scarp visible on the horizon.
- SVP 24: Stoke Park: Located within Stoke Park Registered Park and Garden. It allows an appreciation of the CNL and provides a panoramic view, though mainly focused to the south, east and west away from LCA 13: Frome Valley and towards the wider Stoke Park Estate, Dundry Hill and the Cotswold Scarp, and the landmark features of Dower House, Purdown



## **LCA 13: Frome Valley**

BT Tower, clock tower at University of the West of England (UWE) Glenside Campus, Stapleton Holy Trinity Church, St Mary's Church and the clocktower of Cossham Hospital in Hillfields. The SVP is a designed viewpoint from a Registered Park and Garden.

**11.121** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Valued Features

- The intimate valleys of the River Frome, Bradley Brook, and Folly Brook, which contribute to sense of place and the experience of rural tranquillity.
- Areas of neutral and acidic grassland in the north of the LCA, which contribute to biodiversity and sense of place.
- Riparian vegetation and woodland along the River Frome, woodland at Stoke Park, Sims' Hill, Bury Hill, and areas of mature hedgerows, which are important landscape features and contribute to habitat connectivity.
- The flowing water and bankside vegetation of the River Frome, Bradley Brook and Folly Brook that provide habitat for a range of notable species and contributes to biodiversity, with some areas designated as SNCIs.
- The use of Pennant sandstone for walls, bridges, and buildings throughout the LCA, which contributes to sense of place.
- Heritage features which contribute to the time depth of the landscape including Bury Hill Fort, Stoke Park Registered Park and Garden, and features associated with the area's history of mining.
- The historic villages of Hambrook and Frenchay, which are designated as Conservation Areas and contribute to time depth.
- The railway viaducts which cross the Frome and Bradley Brook valleys and provide prominent local landmarks.
- The green ridgelines that are free from development such as Stoke Park and Sims' Hill which provide a rural backdrop to adjacent settlements.
- The network of public rights of way and cycle paths, including the Frome Valley Walkway and Community Forest Path, that provide recreational opportunities across the landscape.

## The Changing Landscape

**11.122** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Frome Valley LCA.

### Climate Change

- Climate change leading to increased temperatures and periods of drought resulting in a change in stream flows, altering the species composition of wetland habitats (ponds, flowing open water and bankside vegetation associated with SNCIs), particularly the River Frome, Bradley Brook, and Folly Brook.
- Climate change resulting in an increase in the frequency and severity of seasonal flooding in lower-lying valleys, particularly the River Frome Valley in the north of the LCA. Associated pressures to build flood management works that are unsympathetic to local landscape character and sensitive habitats.

### Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- Pressure to expand existing solar farm development in the south-east of the LCA would likely result in further adverse and cumulative effects on landscape character and visual amenity.
- The vertical and linear nature of pylon corridors is prominent within local views. Pressure for further electricity infrastructure, associated with additional deployment of renewable energy, may lead to further visual influence, and may lead to the perception of a 'wirescape' in parts of the LCA.
- An increase in tree planting is required to contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may include the establishment of new woodlands in a corridor between Coalpit Heath and the M32 as set out in the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland

## LCA 13: Frome Valley

Strategy. This may change the open character of the landscape and its expansive views, most notably views towards the Cotswold Scarp.

### Land Use and Cover

- Boundary hedgerows are often not actively managed as a result of land use changes. This influences the condition, integrity, appearance, and the degree of openness of the landscape framework in the locality.
- Stone wall boundaries around Hambrook and south of Winterbourne are 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, and this area is also under pressure for recreational uses.
- The increased use of small lanes by commuter traffic, in places continues to cause 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 floodlighting, can result in a marked change in landscape character and disturbance to wildlife.
- Loss of vegetation along the ring road to allow for infrastructure improvements has opened up views within the area and increased the prominence of traffic movement. Replacement planting along the ring road is beginning to contribute to the wider landscape structure.
- Embankment stabilisation works which cleared railway embankments of tree cover have significantly increased the prominence of the railway

## LCA 13: Frome Valley

within the east of the LCA. Electrification of the London to South Wales railway line has added to the visual intrusion of the line from overhead gantries in the north of the LCA.

- A key characteristic of the LCA 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.
- Enhancement of woodland at Sims' Hill has extended the woodland cover on the slopes and contributes to the character, habitat value and structure of the landscape in the area as well as helping to absorb relatively new housing.

## Development

- Recent development in the vicinity of Stoke Gifford and Harry Stoke has replaced the agricultural landscape with a new neighbourhood. This has resulted in a relatively exposed settlement edge between Filton Road and the main line railway, however as associated planting matures, this new settlement will become better integrated into the rural framework. Pressures for further development may lead to the loss of the rural setting of the M32 corridor.
- Pressures for non-agricultural land uses along the urban edge include the introduction of nurseries with accompanying polytunnels 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 and habitat value of an area.
- Widening and other signage and improvement works to the motorways and the ring road are gradually squeezing or eliminating the planting that

## LCA 13: Frome Valley

helps to screen these urbanising features from and integrate them into the wider landscape. This increases the visual prominence of the highways themselves, plus the traffic and associated infrastructure.

- 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 character of and possibly the range of habitats available in 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. The edge of the Frenchay Conservation Area has been influenced by recent redevelopment of the hospital site.
- 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.



## Guidance

**11.123** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the overarching management strategy objectives set out in Chapter 4.

### Landscape Strategy

#### Landscape Management

- Protect and enhance the historic and mature landscape pattern in parts of the LCA, particularly near Frenchay, Stoke Park and areas of retained field pattern within the north and centre of the LCA.
- Secure the retention, restoration, and management of hedgerows to reinforce both local character and habitat value and connectivity.
- Establish woodlands, linking to others, in a corridor between Coalpit Heath and the M32, whilst avoiding Grade 1 and Grade 2 agricultural land and ensuring conservation of priority habitats, historic monuments and viewpoints.
- Protect the remains of the open landscape setting of Bury Hill Scheduled Monument.
- Preserve and enhance the landscape setting of Frenchay and Hambrook Conservation Areas, together with key views towards and from them.
- Protect the green open spaces and large gardens of Frenchay and views of its church as a landmark in the local landscape.
- Encourage the conservation and interpretation of the area's heritage of mining features, for example around Frampton Cotterell and Coalpit Heath.
- Maintain the strength of the landscape framework associated with the motorways to ensure maximum buffering and screening to the adjacent

Hambrook Conservation Area, Grade II listed Dower House and Stoke Park Registered Park and Garden.

- Encourage the retention of traditional features and use of materials such as stone walls, stiles, and Pennant stone.
- Protect remaining best and most versatile agricultural farmland, especially along the M32 corridor and the Bradley Brook Valley.
- Establish groups of trees and woodlands to further integrate diverse land uses in the wider landscape, with a particular focus on road and rail corridors.

### Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Protect and improve the riparian habitat of the River Frome and Bradley Brook and seek opportunities to naturalise sections currently impacted by engineering structures (except heritage features), together with opportunities for enhance recreational access.
- Protect ponds and associated terrestrial habitat for Great Crested Newts and support further habitat creation.
- Increase tree cover to meet South Gloucestershire Council's 15% target, selecting locally indigenous species (e.g., the locally distinctive use of pine in the area to the south of Winterbourne).
- Active management and strengthening of the hedgerow framework, trees, and woodlands, including replacement and new planting, to help to ensure the conservation of these key features for the long term as well as diversity and connectivity of habitat.

### Development Management

- Ensure that any new infill development conserves and enhances the particular and varying townscape and landscape patterns; for example, in Hambrook, Pye Corner, Moorend, Winterborne Down, and Whites Hill to preserve their distinctive character and setting at the edge of the Bristol conurbation.

### LCA 13: Frome Valley

- Maintain a green setting to the motorway corridors and seek to minimise the impact of improvement and/or new lighting and signage schemes.
- Protect, re-enforce, and extend trees and woodland along Simms Hill and the east facing slopes north to the M4 to break up the impact of new development in views from the north and east.

## LCA 14: Kingswood

The Kingswood landscape character area (LCA) is a heavily built-up area of residential, commercial, and industrial uses and roads, interspersed with pockets of open space.

**Photo 1: View south-west from Hanham Mount across the urban expanse of south Bristol towards Dundry Hill.**

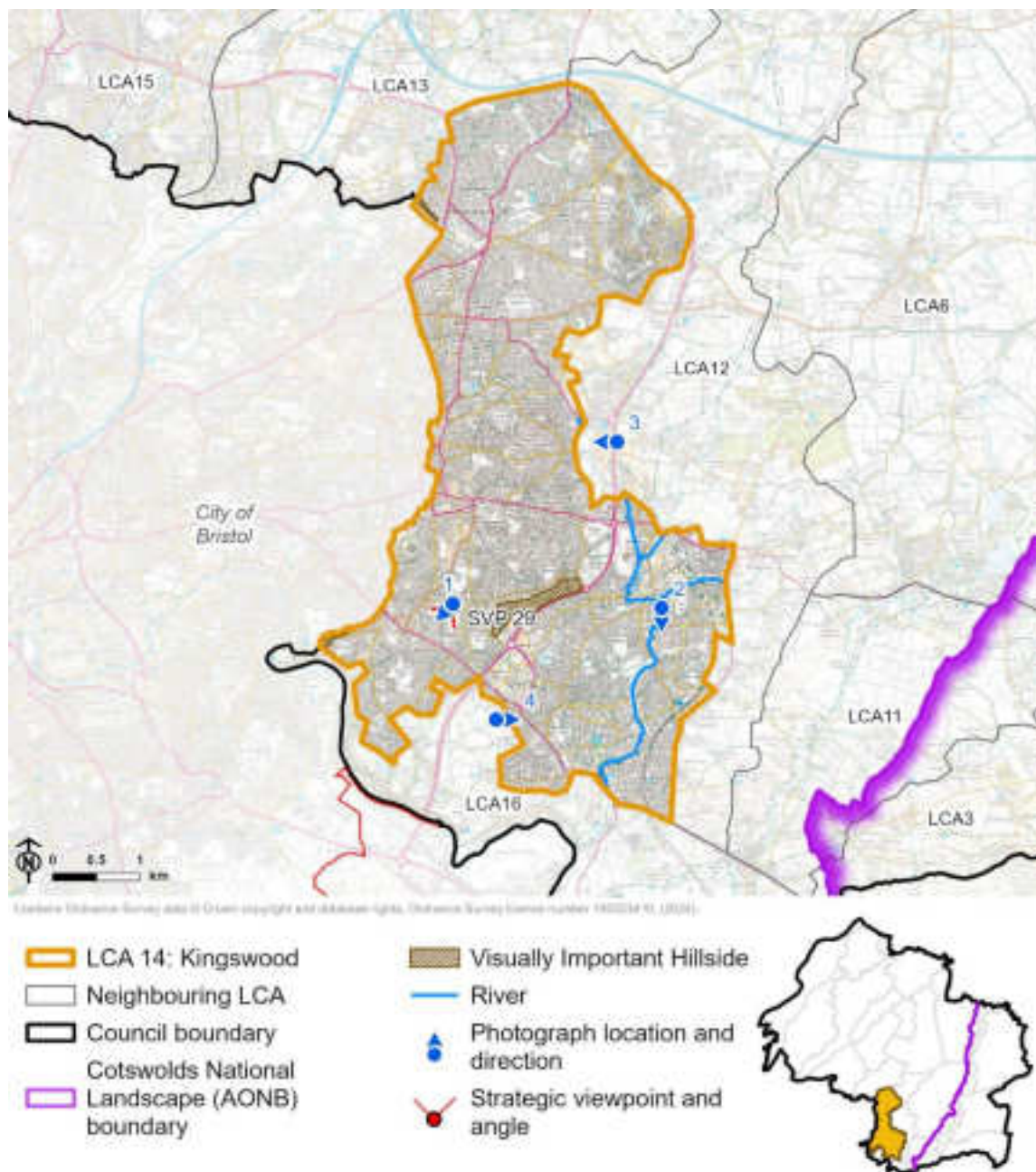


### Location

**11.124** The Kingswood LCA 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 South Gloucestershire/Bristol City administrative boundary. The southern boundary marks the limits of the urban area and the rural LCA 16: Avon Valley further south. The eastern boundary follows the well-defined edge of the urban area.

## LCA 14: Kingswood

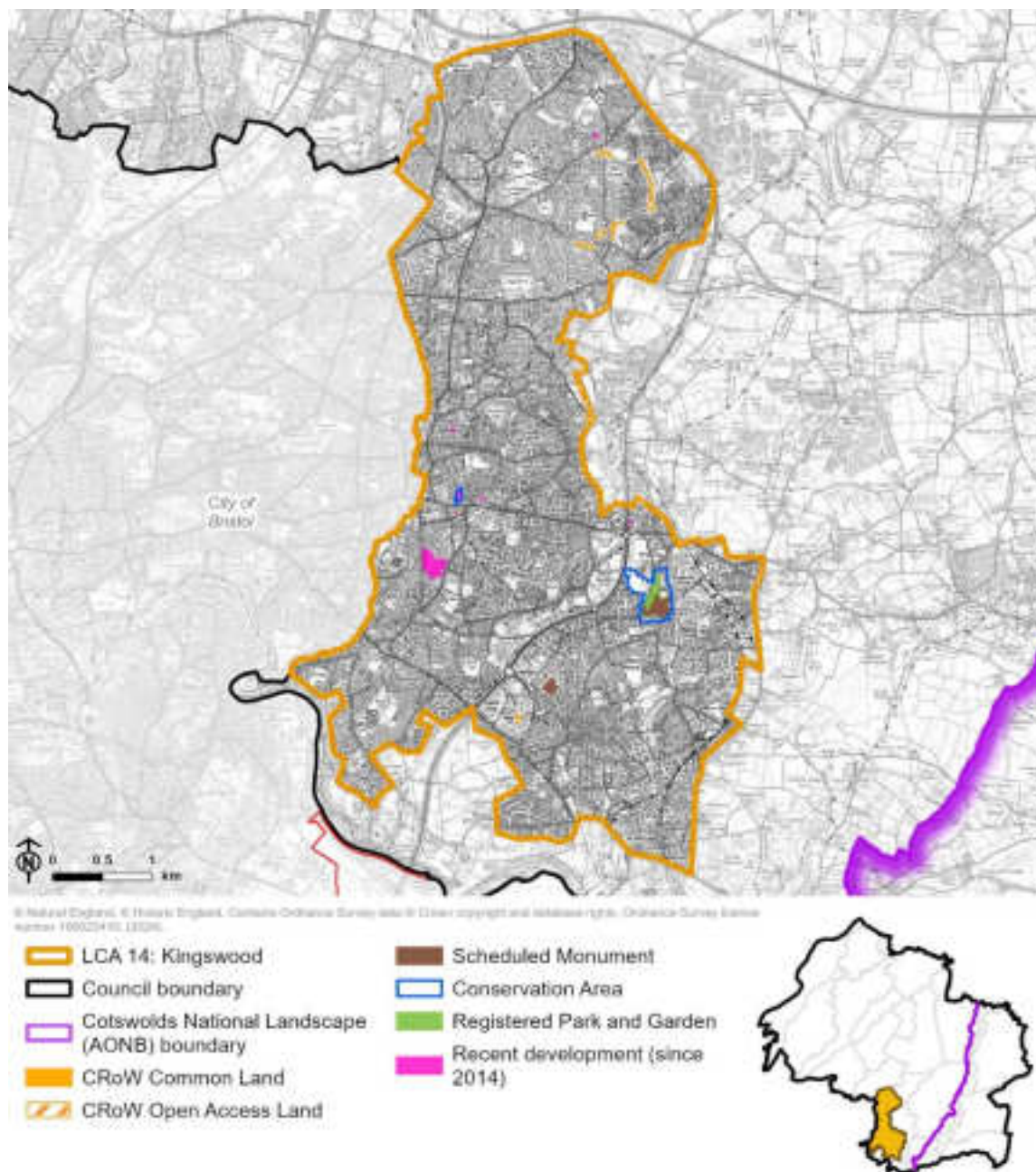
**Figure 11.8: Location and Landscape context of LCA 14: Kingswood**





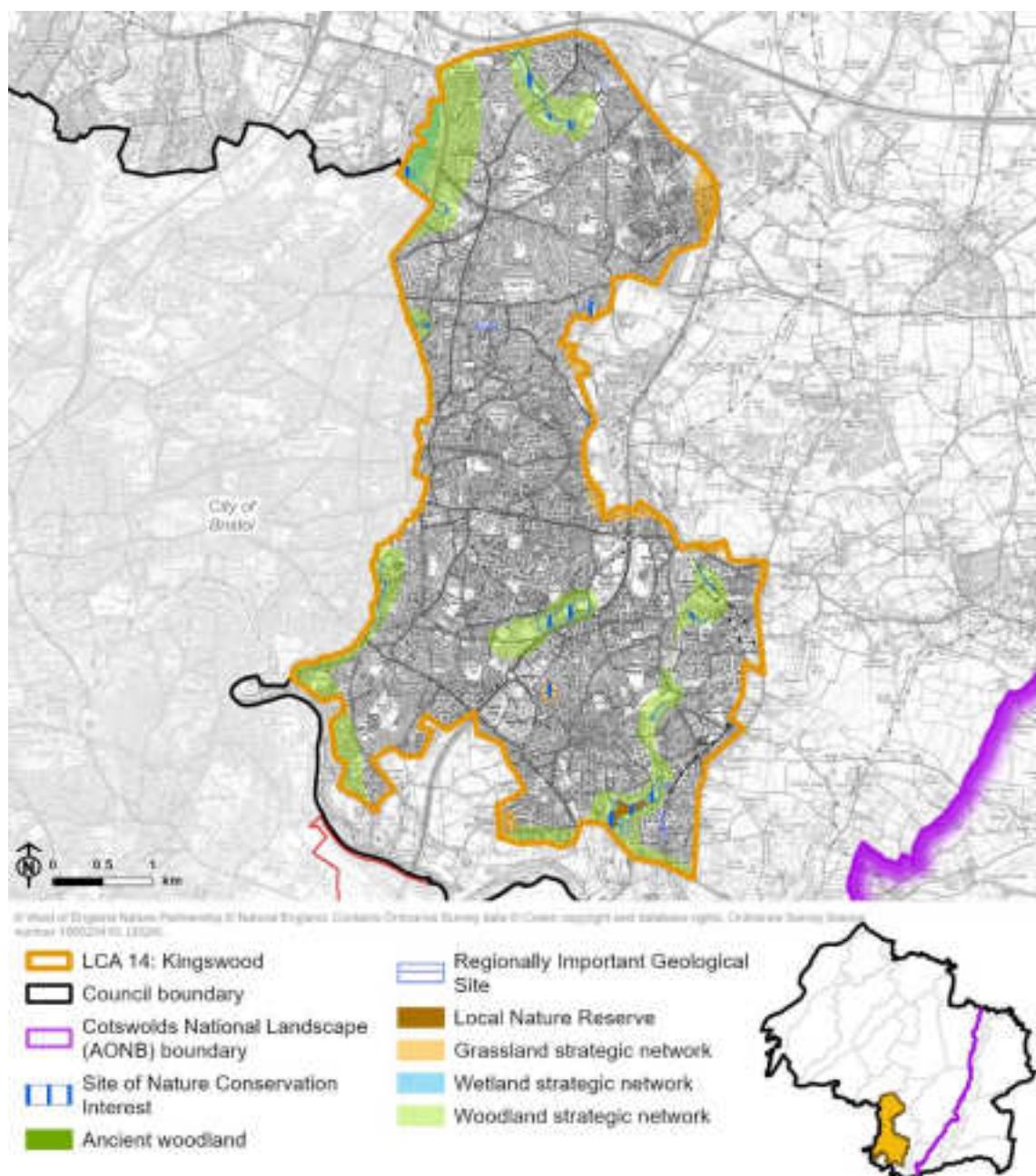
## LCA 14: Kingswood

**Figure 11.9: Development and Heritage context of LCA 14: Kingswood**



## LCA 14: Kingswood

**Figure 11.10: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 14: Kingswood**



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- Residential settlement dominates the area, developed around an historic core of roads and former industrial activity, surrounded by extensive late 19th and 20th century development.
- 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 formal parks and informal open spaces, including gardens, 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 to the 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.

### Natural Influences

#### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**11.125** The underlying geology largely consists of Coal Measures, Pennant sandstone and shales, overlain with alluvium. In association with the drainage

## **LCA 14: Kingswood**

pattern, this creates a gently sloping and undulating landform between approximately 50 to 115 metres AOD, with some steeper slopes.

**11.126** 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.

**11.127** Further south, the Hanham Hills rise beyond the urban edge of Longwell Green and the LCA boundary. To the north-east lies a broad shallow bowl occupied by Cadbury Heath, contained to the east by the Oldland Ridge beyond the LCA's boundary.

**11.128** Siston Brook cuts through the east of the LCA, fed by Warmley Brook and one tributary. Siston Brook flows south to the River Avon, within a green corridor contained by dense residential development. 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.

**11.129** 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.

**11.130** 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

**11.131** The majority of this LCA is dominated by settlement. A variety of green spaces and vegetation cover break up and punctuate the area. The largest open spaces are associated with steep, natural landform and 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.

**11.132** New parks and informal open spaces are associated with recent residential development. Landscape 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.

**11.133** 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.

**11.134** Siston and Warmley Brook flow within green corridors, often including informal linear parks, riparian vegetation of trees and scrub with rough grassland, 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.

**11.135** The Leap Valley in the north of the LCA forms a linear corridor of grassland, with a varied framework of overgrown and intermittent former hedgerows and scattered mature tree cover, contained by a dense residential fringe.

**11.136** 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.



## **LCA 14: Kingswood**

**11.137** 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 sports pitches, rough grassland, scrub, and trees.

**11.138** Page Park and Kingswood Park are formally laid out parks with walled and railing boundaries, ornate gateways, tennis courts, mown lawns, pathways, ornamental planting, and mature trees. Hill House Park is an area of public open space that was formerly a playing field associated with Down End Lower school. The recent village parks within Emerson's Green typically comprise linear and irregular informal open spaces of grassland and tree clumps.

**11.139** Traditional school playing fields and college grounds largely comprise open mown grassland, with little or no vegetation structure, however more recent school redevelopments such as Park School in Kingswood and Courtney Primary have been designed to include a robust landscape framework. 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, providing structure or enclosure to these spaces.



**Photo 2: Green corridors interspersed throughout the dense settlement pattern.**



### Biodiversity

**11.140** Although Kingswood is an urban area, the green spaces and riparian habitats present within this area include a diversity of habitat, as well as a resource to urban wildlife which may include species of conservation concern. These species are likely to be particularly vulnerable to changes impacting upon these habitats.

**11.141** There are only 13 hectares of woodland within this area and these woodlands are very sparse and scattered across the area with generally few linkages between habitats. While the area may still support many species of conservation concern, but the diversity will be much lower than that in the more rural character areas.

**11.142** The 13 Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) within this LCA, comprise a mosaic of habitats including grassland (neutral, acidic, and

## LCA 14: Kingswood

calcareous), small plots of broadleaved woodland likely to be remnants of old orchards and flowing open water represented by the Siston Brook to the south-east of the area and other small tributaries of the River Frome in the north. This designation recognises the importance of these habitats within the national context for flora and fauna and their particular importance within the urban setting of this area. Key species likely to be associated with the wooded and riparian areas include bats which are present across the wider area and are UK priority species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP).

**11.143** Eight of the SNCIs are designated for their neutral, acidic, and calcareous grassland, including areas of species-rich grassland. This diverse habitat supports a range of invertebrates and ant hills are a regular feature. These invertebrates in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats.

**11.144** The water courses in the Leap and Willsbridge valleys are amongst the few watercourses found in this character area. As a result, species (which may include water voles) within these habitats are likely to be sensitive to any changes impacting upon the water body. The scattered ponds and pools within the area will support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

**11.145** Gardens and amenity spaces are likely to present a potential habitat for a range of species in such an urban area, and the provision of tree cover, other planting, and the retention of 'wild corners' takes on additional importance.

**11.146** A small part of South Gloucestershire Strategic South Gloucestershire Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor F: Hanham Green-Hanham Abbots-Biton (*Avon Valley*) extends into the south of the LCA along the Siston Brook.

### Cultural Influences

#### Land Use and Time Depth

**11.147** Land use within the Kingswood LCA is predominantly associated with settlement, including residential and commercial development.

**11.148** The Whitfield Tabernacle Conservation Area is located along the A420 in the centre of the LCA. The Conservation Area comprises a relatively small area of encompassing the Masters Church, Whitfield Tabernacle and Chapel House listed buildings.

**11.149** The Warmley Conservation Area is located in the east of the LCA to the east of the A4174. The Conservation Area encompasses the Grade II\* listed Warmley House, Warmley House Registered Park and Garden, together with the Clock Tower (originally a pin mill), and the internationally important Champion's Brassworks (Scheduled Monument). The factory is partly constructed with slag block quoins and coping stones, which are associated with the industrial process.

**11.150** The historic estate of Barr's Court in the south of the LCA at Oldland is a partially moated manor site (Scheduled Monument) and still retains much of its park boundary wall and moat, largely absorbed within residential development. Also, within the Siston Valley at Oldland Bottom is Willsbridge Mill.

**11.151** Though not formally designated, the area of Hanham Mount is associated with John Wesley, a Baptist minister known for his open-air preaching to the miners of the area in the 1730s. A beacon light marks the site and is seen in views from the wider landscape.

**11.152** The Dramway (an historically important tramway associated with the former coal mining industry) crosses through the south-east of the LCA.

### Settlement and Infrastructure

**11.153** Settlement is the predominant land use in this LCA. 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.

**11.154** 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.

**11.155** 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.

**11.156** 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. Some early 20th century housing has mature gardens and street trees which contribute greatly to the streetscape.

**11.157** Later 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,

## **LCA 14: Kingswood**

retained along hedges, watercourses, and footpaths, or related to schools, sports centres, and community facilities.

**11.158** More recent large-scale residential development lies to the north-east at Emerson's Green. Dense, brick estate housing extends eastwards to the A4174, which in conjunction with the industrial/commercial sheds at Emerald Park within the adjacent area, abruptly defines the urban edge here. Former farmhouses on the edge of this development area have been put to new uses such as public houses.

**11.159** The new housing areas include some strategic open space corridors and are occasionally broken by village parks. The LCA 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.

**11.160** 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, while the more recent leisure centre takes a lower profile. Industrial works are concentrated within the centres of Kingswood, Warmley and also along Kingswood's eastern rural fringe. Some have been redeveloped to residential uses. A number of historic sites are absorbed within or on the edge of the urban area.

**11.161** The use of distinctive 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.

**11.162** The Bristol and Bath Railway Path follows a disused railway line west to east through the urban area of Staple Hill, before passing north to south along the south-eastern edge of the LCA. The southern section of the railway path is partly followed by the Dramway and the Community Forest Path. The urban

## **LCA 14: Kingswood**

area also includes many short sections of public footpath within pockets of open space. These connect with the widespread, dense local road network.

**11.163** 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.

**11.164** 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. Generally contained for much of its length within a maturing framework of trees, the road is being absorbed within the wider landscape.

**Photo 3: View across the A4174 ring road from the adjoining LCA towards the settlement edge of Bristol.**





# Perceptual Influences

## Visual Character

**11.165** The overall character of the LCA 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.

**11.166** Industrial heritage features and distinct buildings provide landmarks and contribute to the distinctive character of the various neighbourhoods within the urban fabric. This includes 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. Warmley Church in the south-east of the LCA 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.

**11.167** 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 'urban forest' of numerous mature trees is significant locally and in the wider landscape, particularly in elevated views from LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge.

**11.168** The ridge and hill landform of the LCA 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 LCA are obtained.

**11.169** The steepest landforms have hindered the spread of urban development and are therefore typically the most extensive, open, and visible green spaces within the LCA. The open steep slopes and ridgeline of Mount Hill above the A4174 are a prominent local backcloth. The Siston Valley is a small enclosed

## **LCA 14: Kingswood**

and sinuous rural wooded valley, at its southern end largely undisturbed by development. The Hanham Hills form a prominent landmark beyond the settlement edge to the south within LCA 16: Avon Valley.

**11.170** 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. From the southern settlement edge, some views extend over and beyond the Avon Valley with views towards Dundry Hill and the Mendip Hills National Landscape (AONB) available from elevated locations such as Mount Hill. From the eastern settlement edge, remnant common and agricultural land in the Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge (LCA 12) creates in places a transitional boundary between the abrupt development edge of this area and the adjacent, more rural countryside to the east. Woodland at Rodway Hill, located in the adjacent Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge (LCA 12), provides partial containment to the eastern settlement edge. The adjacent landform of the Pucklechurch and Oldland Ridge forms a prominent and distinctive backcloth within many views from the urban edge. The urban area of Kingswood is also prominent within panoramic views from the Pucklechurch and Oldland Ridge to the east.

**11.171** Dense housing and commercial development within Emerson's Green and extending further north-east into the adjacent Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge (LCA 12), is prominent and visually confines the north-east of the LCA.

## LCA 14: Kingswood

**Photo 4: Views east across the south of the LCA from the Hanham Hills, looking towards the Oldland Ridge.**



### Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**11.172** The presence of dense settlement and busy roads, including the A4174, A4017, A4175 and A420, influences the sense of tranquillity experienced within the Kingswood LCA.

**11.173** The proximity of dense settlement and associated light pollution influences the experience of dark night skies throughout the LCA.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**11.174** There are no Visually Important Hillsides (VIH) located within this LCA, however the River Avon VIH and Hanham Hills VIH define part of the southern boundary of the LCA. Key characteristics of each VIH include the following:

## LCA 14: Kingswood

- River Avon VIH: a steep wooded northern valley side which contributes to the setting of the River Avon and forms a southerly extension of the Hanham Hills VIH. The VIH contributes to the setting of Hanham Court Conservation Area.
- Hanham Hills VIH: a steep sided singular hill of convex landform that forms a northerly extension to the River Avon Valley VIH. The VIH forms a distinctive landform feature in both views towards the urban edge of Hanham and from within the settlement area itself, as well as providing a green backdrop to Hanham Court Conservation Area.

**11.175** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillside**s.

## Strategic Viewpoints

**11.176** One Strategic Viewpoint (SVP) is located within this LCA at Mount Hill (SVP 29). It provides a panoramic view, focused south and south-west towards the notable landscape features of Dundry Hill and the Mendip Hills National Landscape (AONB).

**11.177** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Valued Features

- The historic character of the former village settlements of Downend, Hanham, Warmley, North Common and Oldland Common, which contribute to time depth.
- The Whitfield Tabernacle Conservation Area and Warmley Conservation Area, Grade II\* listed Warmley House and Warmley House Registered Park and Garden which contribute to time depth.

## LCA 14: Kingswood

- Champion's Brassworks and the moated manor site at Barr's Court, which are designated as Scheduled Monuments and contribute to time depth.
- Large open spaces, including Page Park, Kingswood Park, Hill House Park, and village parks within Emerson's Green, which contribute to habitat connectivity and sense of place.
- Smaller formal and informal open spaces, including the green corridors of Siston and Warmley Brook, Leap Valley, Willsbridge Valley and Cock Road Ridge, which contribute to habitat connectivity and sense of place.
- The 'urban forest' and the role this plays in integrating and softening the settlement edge in views from the wider landscape, including from LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge.
- The network of public rights of way and cycle paths, including the Bristol and Bath Railway Path, Dramway, Community Forest Path, that provide recreational opportunities across the landscape.
- Outward views, afforded from breaks in the urban fabric, to the Pucklechurch and Oldland Ridge, the Cotswold Scarp and across the Avon Valley, which contribute to sense of place and the setting of settlement.

## The Changing Landscape

**11.178** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Kingswood LCA.

### Climate Change

- Climate change leading to increased temperatures and periods of drought resulting in a change in stream flows, altering the species composition of wetland habitats, particularly the tributaries of the River Frome and Siston Brook.

### Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- An increase in tree planting is required to contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may include the planting of individual or groups of trees to address inequalities in canopy cover in parts of the LCA. This may change the character of views within the LCA, however further tree planting will contribute to the softening of settlement in views within the LCA and from the Pucklechurch and Oldland Ridge and the Cotswold Scarp.

### Land Use and Cover

- Recent years have seen the increasing re-development of brownfield sites such as former employment sites, chapels and their grounds, or graveyards, as well as the redevelopment of houses with large gardens to make way for higher density housing. This has affected local character and, in some cases, reduced wildlife habitat. Where green spaces previously provided valuable visual amenity and physical breaks within the urban fabric, as well as softening the urban form, some locations have seen a reduction in openness within the area. This has increased the density of the built environment and introduced a variation in architectural style, form, massing, and colour, that has in some cases affected the distinctiveness of the locality.
- A further change affecting the character area is the paving of front gardens and loss of associated boundary treatments. In other locations hedged boundaries have been replaced by harsh close boarded fences. Cumulatively these small changes often result in a significant erosion of the traditional character and biodiversity of the locality, replacing low stone walls and associated garden planting with the harshness of a fence or a predominance of parked cars. This can also result in the replacement of soil with impermeable paving, leading to increased runoff and potential problems with drainage capacity.
- Kingswood High Street has however seen a significant improvement in the urban fabric of the town centre. The introduction of a one-way system was



## LCA 14: Kingswood

taken as an opportunity to reclaim urban space for the pedestrian, introducing high quality urban street furniture and features designed to reinforce and improve the character and appearance of the street.

- Existing parks provide important open spaces and, in some cases, valuable wildlife habitat within the urban fabric and influence local character. The landscape amenity of these spaces relies on their continued maintenance and management. There has been an increasing trend towards community engagement with the management and maintenance of such open spaces with the formation of 'Friends' groups, a more recent move away from the more traditional play equipment to 'natural play' that utilises natural features such as rocks, logs, and trees, as well as increased tree planting and provision of play and gym facilities to suit a wider age group. Open spaces such as Grimsbury Farm have seen improvements that have resulted in a move away from traditional mown grass to meadow and greater diversity of habitat. Other traditional parks are seeking to ensure restoration of their historic features such as band stands and railings.
- Scattered ponds and pools, including potentially those in gardens are vulnerable to any loss of habitat including the terrestrial habitat around ponds as well as the ponds themselves.
- Open space within new developments often incorporates mature trees, often that are remnant features from the former agricultural land use, pre-urbanisation. These contribute greatly to the area's 'Urban Forest' and local streetscape. These features are however 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 with new development increasing the numbers of users also potentially exerts an increasing physical pressure on these spaces and their features.
- The corridor of remnant agricultural land at Mount Hill, Cock Road Ridge and Grimsbury Farm are important and prominent recreational areas which separates Kingswood and Oldland. These areas have seen further

## LCA 14: Kingswood

infill development and are under potential pressure for further 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.

- 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.

## Development

- Infill remains a significant pressure across this LCA, including on both larger and smaller plots and gardens. Such infill can result in the loss of significant albeit often private areas of green space, increasing the urban character and resulting in the loss of space and landscape features which impart a particular character to the area and/or provide visual relief and wildlife habitat in an otherwise dense urban environment.
- 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 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. As much of the area is elevated, development within the Kingswood LCA has the potential to influence views from the surrounding rural areas such as Redfield Hill, Siston Common, Bridge Yate Common and the Hanham Hills.
- The relatively recent extension to Emerson's Green, north-east of the A4174 in the adjoining LCA, has resulted in a significant change to the present character of the rural fringe. The current urban edge has extended northwards, beyond this LCA boundary, with the inevitable loss of the adjoining open rural landscape.

## LCA 14: Kingswood

- The more 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. While a softening of the transition between the housing edge and adjacent open space/rural fringe has been achieved as the new landscape has matured, maintenance of the landscape will remain integral to ensuring the longevity of the landscape framework.
- The large-scale commercial/retail and leisure developments at Longwell Green and below Mount Hill has had a significant effect on the urban character locally. The elevated and sloping nature of the site means that this development has not effectively integrated with its surroundings, with the result that 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.

## Guidance

**11.179** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the overarching management strategy objectives set out in Chapter 4.

## Landscape Strategy

### Landscape Management

- Protect and extend the Kingswood 'urban forest' character imparted by street trees and maintain, manage, and extend tree cover within the urban environment.
- Where key to the character of the locality, ensure that the critical balance between the existing urban built form and green open space and/ or planting is maintained and enhanced as part of the distinctive local character, including consideration of the role that private open space places in the urban environment.
- Retain the mix of large formal open spaces and smaller formal and informal open spaces, which soften the urban fabric and contribute to sense of place.
- Seek opportunities to address the current shortfall in allotments and public open space within Kingswood and Staple Hill.
- Protect the distinctive, enclosed valley character of the Siston Brook.
- Protect and enhance the significance, setting, landscape character and heritage value of Warmley Conservation Area, including the views to and from the Grade II\* listed Warmley House, Warmley House Registered Park and Garden, and the scheduled monument of William Champion's Brassworks site.
- Protect the landscape setting to the moated manor site at Barr's Court (Scheduled Monument).

### Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Seek to protect and link existing habitat areas, including the green corridors of Siston and Warmley Brook, Leap Valley, Willsbridge Valley and Cock Road Ridge, through adjacent urban areas.
- Protect and improve the riparian habitat of the Warmley and Siston Brooks and Willsbridge valley and seek opportunities to naturalise

## LCA 14: Kingswood

sections currently impacted by engineering structures (except heritage features).

- Protect the woodland and grassland habitats at Cock Road Ridge SNCI, and ensure ongoing public access as an important green space with the urban area.
- Protect the woodland buffer along the Avon Valley.
- Ensure that open space areas within new development are of adequate size to be useable and effective, and that sufficient space is incorporated around retained landscape features and wildlife habitats, to facilitate their effective protection and management into the future.
- Where possible, retain remnants of the former agricultural landscape, including hedgerows and hedgerow trees to ensure the conservation of these features and their continued function as habitat and connectivity in the long term.

### Development Management

- Preserve views towards Warmley church spire, together with those from Cock Road Ridge and A420 corridor towards the Cotswold Scarp and Siston Common, and elevated views from Hanham Mount looking south (associated with the open air preachings of John Wesley).
- Preserve the historic character of former village settlements of Downend, Hanham, Warmley, North Common and Oldland Common
- Carefully control boundary treatments particularly for road facing gardens, to protect the character of place and enhance the biodiversity value and visual quality of the public realm.

## LCA 15: Patchway, Filton & the Stokes

The Patchway, Filton and the Stokes landscape character area (LCA) 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.

**Photo 1: Linear settlement of residential and commercial units along the A38 at Patchway.**



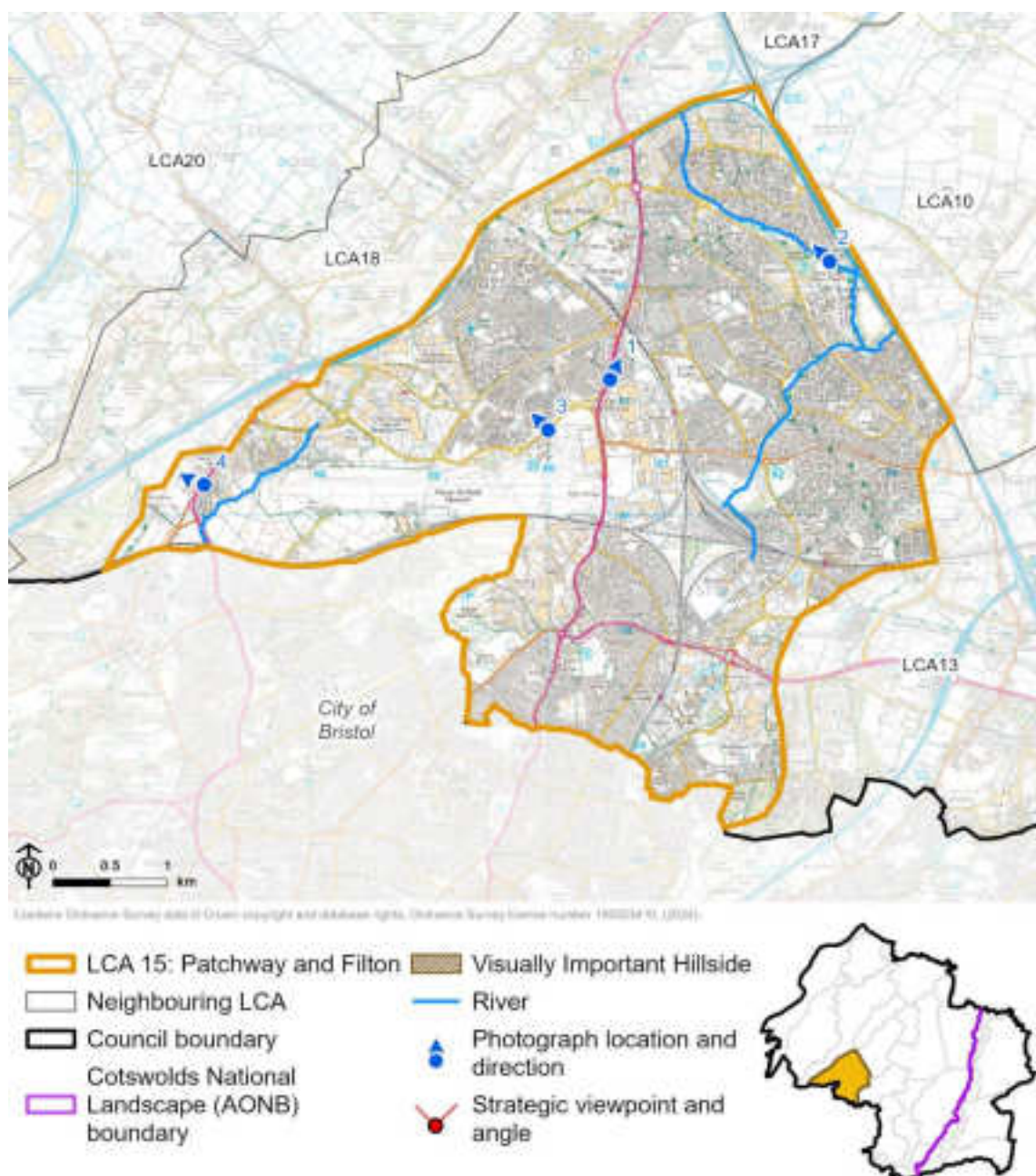


### Location

**11.180** The Patchway, Filton and the Stokes LCA 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 LCA 18: Severn Ridges. The south-western boundary is contained by the foot of the slope below Haw Wood. To the south, the boundary is marked by the limits of the South Gloucestershire/Bristol City administrative boundary.

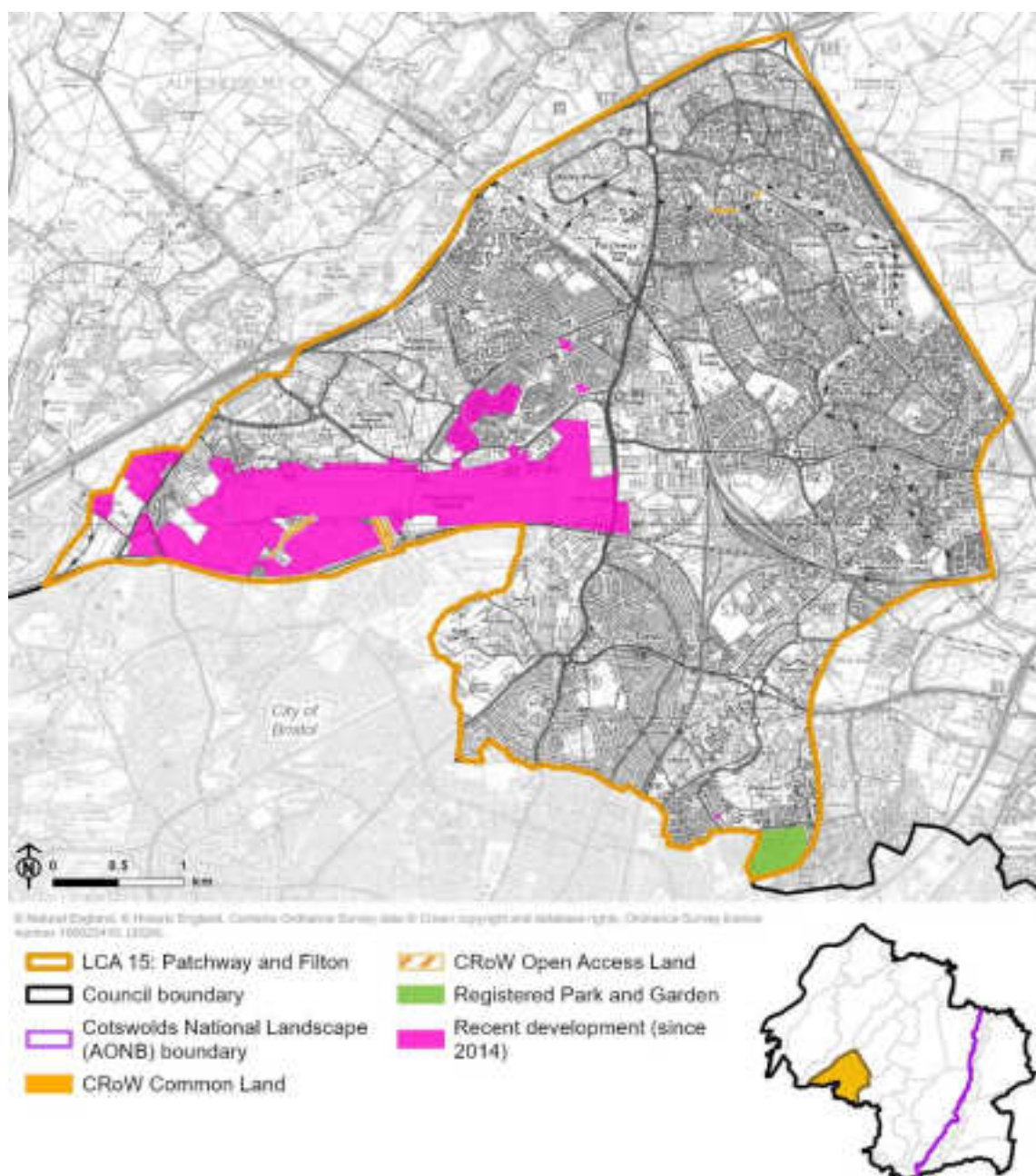
## LCA 15: Patchway, Filton & the Stokes

**Figure 11.11: Location and Landscape context of LCA 15:  
Patchway, Filton and the Stokes**



## LCA 15: Patchway, Filton & the Stokes

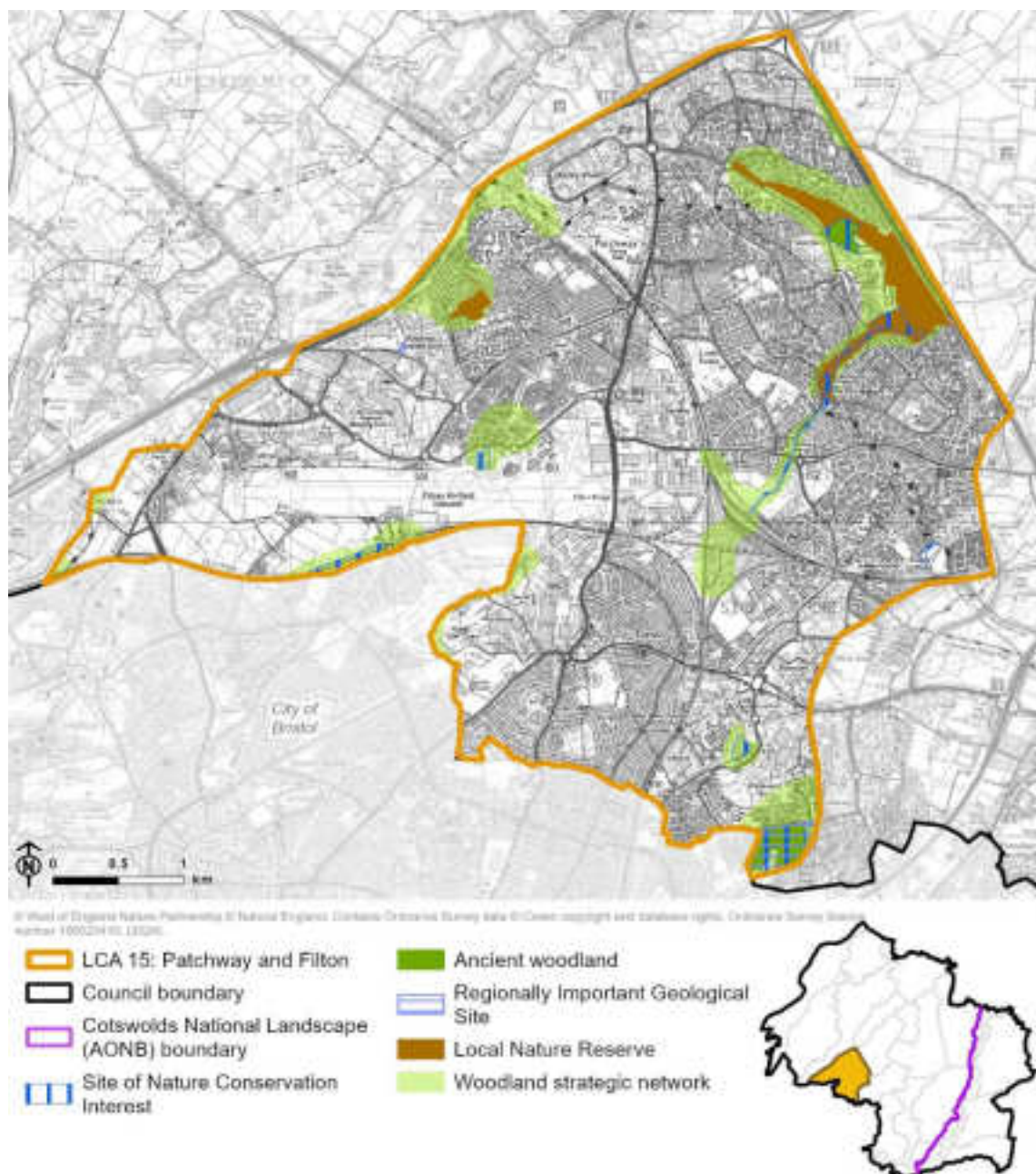
**Figure 11.12: Development and Heritage context of LCA 15:  
Patchway, Filton and the Stokes**





## LCA 15: Patchway, Filton & the Stokes

**Figure 11.13: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 15: Patchway, Filton and the Stokes**



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- Settlement, including Patchway and Filton plus Bradley Stoke, Stoke Gifford, Harry Stoke and Stoke Park, strongly influences the area.
- The largely built-up area is 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.
- Commercial, industrial, and residential areas are of various ages, styles, building materials and densities, some of which is large-scale and highly visible within and beyond the area.
- More recent residential development occurs on fringes of an older housing core, and towards the M4 boundary, comprising uniform estates, with strategic landscape infrastructure.
- A diverse pattern of open space comprises retained areas of Filton Airfield as well as within the railway junction, the courses of Patchway Brook and Stoke Brook, part of historic Stoke Park, remnant agricultural land and smaller pockets of open space.
- Small areas of priority habitat deciduous woodland, some designated as SNCI, are scattered across the LCA, including broadleaf, ancient and damp woodland.
- The wooded corridor of Stoke Brook contrasts with the surrounding built-up urban edge.

## **Natural Influences**

### **Geology, Landform and Hydrology**

**11.181** The geology of this LCA 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 Pelio-stagnogley and typical Argillic Pelosols.

**11.182** The geology, together with the drainage pattern, has created a landform which is generally gently sloping to undulating. Dense urban development within the LCA limits the visibility of the landform beneath.

**11.183** A number of low ridges and higher ground provide containment to an elongated central bowl, of 55 metres AOD on average. Landform 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.

**11.184** Higher ground comprises Haw Wood ridgeline which rises beyond the western LCA boundary to 70 metres AOD (merging with the Severn Ridges). A broad rounded hill at Filton is located in the south at 96 metres AOD. A curving ridgeline runs between Stoke Park (at 85 metres AOD) and Stoke Gifford (at 70 metres AOD) to the north-east. Landform gently rises up to 85 metres AOD towards the M5 in the north-west of the LCA. 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.

**11.185** 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 LCA. It flows within an open, gently sloping valley, contained to the west by Haw Wood ridge



## **LCA 15: Patchway, Filton & the Stokes**

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 north-eastern LCA boundary, continuing as the Bradley Brook beyond. All three brooks meander through shallow, open low valley systems, draining eastwards into the adjacent LCA 10: Earthcott Vale.

### **Land Cover**

**11.186** The majority of the LCA is dominated by settlement interspersed with open spaces, which vary in scale.

**11.187** The LCA includes numerous sports fields, public open spaces, allotments, 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 enclosed by housing, industrial development and intermittent trees/tree belts and hedgerows along boundaries. Parks scattered throughout the LCA predominantly comprise mown and rough grassland with scrub/tree fringes.

**11.188** The Patchway Brook and Stoke Brook valleys are linear, often organic spaces, with riparian trees and grassland contained within housing and road framework. These two brooks and their open space corridors form the Three Brooks Nature Reserve. The watercourses converge at a pool near the M4, with an adjacent large plateau landform (a former landfill site) with rough grassland cover and maturing tree planting on steeper slopes, abutting the M4.

**11.189** 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.

**11.190** Redevelopment of Filton Airfield includes a series public green spaces and urban squares and a new central Brabazon Park, to include a lake, play areas and public square providing a link to the new arena to the south of the site. The Brabazon development, together with the Haw Wood and Fishpool Hill developments will create a strategic network of open space with new planting to

## **LCA 15: Patchway, Filton & the Stokes**

connect to existing areas of woodland; Haw Wood and Filton Wood, which currently border the overall Cribbs-Patchway New Neighbourhood (CPNN) area.

**11.191** The railway junction, lying centrally within the area, physically contains a sizeable area of poorly drained and disturbed rough grassland, scrub, trees, and railway sidings. The north-east quadrant has been redeveloped as a rail depot.

**11.192** 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 Long/Hermitage Wood. These are typically isolated areas within green fringes adjacent to development.

**Photo 2: Three Brooks Nature Reserve is an important green space for residents of Bradley Stoke, comprising woodland and river habitat with waymarked recreational routes.**



### Biodiversity

**11.193** Although the LCA is largely an urban area, it includes a number of substantial green spaces and a diversity of habitat, some of which is designated for its nature conservation value. The green spaces and riparian habitats present within this area are likely to present a precious resource to urban wildlife which may include species of conservation concern. These habitats species are likely to be particularly vulnerable to human pressure and other changes impacting upon the habitats.

**11.194** The area includes approximately 15 hectares designated as ancient woodland which represents half of the total woodland which is located in scattered copses and a larger area within the Three Brooks Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

**11.195** There are a number of Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) designated for their grassland habitat (neutral, marshy, and calcareous), small plots of broadleaved woodland (including ancient woodland) and flowing open water. This designation recognises the importance of these habitats within the national context for flora and fauna and their particular importance within the urban setting of this area. Key species likely to be associated with the wooded and riparian areas include bats which are present across South Gloucestershire and are UK priority species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP). There is generally poor connectivity for wildlife between green spaces across this area which may limit their movements.

**11.196** The four SNCI sites within the Patchway, Filton and the Stokes are designated for their neutral, marshy, and calcareous grassland, including areas of species-rich grassland. This diverse habitat supports a range of invertebrates and ant hills are a regular feature. These invertebrates in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats. The Hortham Brook, Stoke Brook, Patchway Brook and Henbury Trym cross the landscape through this area. A section of the Patchway Brook is situated within an SNCI. These watercourses will support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro- invertebrates to fish and water voles. Ponds and pools within the area will support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

## **LCA 15: Patchway, Filton & the Stokes**

**11.197** Gardens are likely to present a potential habitat for these species in such an urban area, while golf courses such as those at Patchway, Filton and the Stokes have the potential to provide a mosaic of habitats which can be utilised by a diverse range of species.

## **Cultural Influences**

### **Land Use and Time Depth**

**11.198** Land use within the Patchway, Filton and Stokes LCA is predominantly associated with settlement. There are some small areas of remnant agricultural land in the west of the LCA.

**11.199** The disused airfield forms the setting to a cluster of aircraft hangars which are Grade II listed buildings, associated with the Bristol Aeroplane Company which was established at Filton as one of Britain's first aircraft manufacturers in 1910.

**11.200** Stoke Park Registered Park and Garden is located in the south-east of the LCA and extends into the adjacent LCA 13: Frome Valley and Bristol City authority area.

### **Settlement and Infrastructure**

**11.201** The LCA is dominated by distinct areas of development types, including the now closed airfield (which is being redeveloped), railways, road network, industrial and commercial areas, together with housing. There have been several phases of development since the First World War. The majority of Patchway, Filton and Stoke Gifford consist of a diverse mix of housing areas, with a variety of styles and ages, which include limestone, render, brick, and painted houses.

## **LCA 15: Patchway, Filton & the Stokes**

**11.202** Adjacent to the M4/M5 interchange and junction off the M5 in the north of the LCA, 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. Almondsbury Business Park to the east includes the RAC building and tower.

**11.203** In the east of the LCA, 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, AXA Sun Life offices, Hewlett Packard, and part of the University of the West of England campus (largely lying within the adjacent LCA 13: Frome Valley).

**11.204** 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 maturing landscape setting.

**11.205** Filton Airfield, located to the south of Cribbs Causeway, currently comprises a runway, 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 currently forms a large corridor of open space. Redevelopment of the airfield will retain parts of the runway as a linear park, with an associated network of strategic open space interspersed with built development.

**11.206** Larger-scale industrial and commercial buildings line the A83 to the east of the airfield, their location and pattern of development historically associated with and related to the airfield. Notably, the recently restored Pegasus House forms an important landmark building in local views. Elsewhere along the A38, development includes some intermixing of residential groups and small-scale works, industry, and institutional buildings. Relatively recent residential and employment development at Charlton Hayes is located to the west of the road. The associated construction of a new main road has provided the opportunity to transform the existing Highwood Road into a linear park.

## **LCA 15: Patchway, Filton & the Stokes**

**11.207** 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.

**11.208** Bradley Stoke is a relatively 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. 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, or remain isolated features dominated by adjacent dissimilar development.

**11.209** Playing fields on the boundary with Bristol are an important resource. Within the urban areas pressures for intensification of use may be seen, including at schools such as Filton and Harry Stoke where sports provision has urbanised the open areas and within the less dense residential areas where housing development is proposed to infill private gardens.

**11.210** The LCA 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 A4174, is located in the south-east of the LCA. Generally, the M4 and M5, on the boundaries of the LCA, delineate the urban edge. Development in Bradley Stoke extends along 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 to 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 prominence of these features has increased over recent years as widening, lighting and gantries have squeezed the associated planting and introduced new urbanising features. The A38 and



## **LCA 15: Patchway, Filton & the Stokes**

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.

**11.211** The completion of the Willow Brook Centre has created a town centre for the surrounding neighbourhood, replacing the previous open and undeveloped land. The development of the Jubilee Centre site in Savages Wood Road includes a Beacon Play Scheme facility, while the adoption of the Jubilee Green as a Queen Elizabeth II Fields in Trust site and the building of the new town council office, has made the site a focal point for the surrounding area.

**11.212** Four sections of railway line intersect centrally within the area, forming a large junction with raised embankments, which physically contain disturbed rough ground and a recent depot facility. 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.

**11.213** 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 currently 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. The Community Forest Path passes roughly south-east from Patchway to Stoke Gifford. The Patchway Greenway also plays a role in connecting a number of smaller open spaces within the urban area.

**Photo 3: Recent residential development at Charlton Hayes incorporates green infrastructure including trees and grassland, part of a sustainable drainage system (SUDs) scheme.**



## Perceptual Influences

### Visual Character

**11.214** Overall, the landscape of strategic open spaces and remnant farmland is largely dominated by the urban framework of settlement, roads, and high traffic levels. Views are typically limited by adjacent dense urban development and the generally low, undulating landform. Some views are possible from open spaces and the higher ground at Filton, including from Filton Golf Course to the south of the LCA boundary. From these vantage points, residential development generally predominates. Redevelopment of the Filton Airfield and agricultural fields in the west of the LCA will influence the open character of this part of the LCA.

## **LCA 15: Patchway, Filton & the Stokes**

**11.215** Settlement abuts most of the M4 and M5 motorways along the LCA'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. The M4 provides views largely into the adjacent LCA 10: 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 LCA 18: Severn Ridges. The road network and key road corridors are a visually prominent feature of the area, particularly where motorway widening, lighting and gantry infrastructure has been implemented.

**11.216** Larger-scale buildings associated with commercial, industrial and employment uses are prominent throughout the LCA, occasionally forming part of the LCA boundary. This includes retail development at Cribbs Causeway, extensive concentration of industrial sheds and hangars associated with the airfield, Rolls-Royce and British Aerospace, the RAC control tower, the tower at the University of the West of England, the Abbey Wood Ministry of Defence (MOD) offices and the rotunda building at AXA Sun Life.

**11.217** Green spaces and landscape structure within the LCA are diverse in form, content, and character. The character of these spaces varies from enclosed, naturalistic rural pockets to stark open playing fields. There are also areas of derelict land including within the railway junction. Tree belts are a frequent feature along the boundaries between recreational open spaces and industrial or commercial areas, with some poplars forming prominent features. All contribute greatly to punctuating the urban fabric, especially from slightly elevated viewpoints. Many open space areas are overlooked by adjacent housing, providing distinctive local character, and forming a physical break within the urban fabric.

**11.218** 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,

## **LCA 15: Patchway, Filton & the Stokes**

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, including woodland along the southern boundary of recent development at Charlton Hayes. 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.

**11.219** Areas of relatively recent development are evident, including development to the north of the airfield. Though some of the existing perimeter landscape framework has been retained, views remain relatively stark.

**11.220** The extensive area of fields at Cribbs Farm is being redeveloped, which will alter the open character of this area. 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 although this will change as development proceeds.

**11.221** The rising open hillside covered by Filton Golf Course to the south forms a 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.

**11.222** 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 large-scale earthworks 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. These landscape elements are visible from the M4 and adjacent area of new housing development.

## **LCA 15: Patchway, Filton & the Stokes**

**11.223** The large railway junction, although not prominent within the urban fabric, is a visually significant urban fringe landscape seen on rail journeys to Wales and the South-west. Although forming a break in the surrounding urban fabric, the segmented site contains a disturbed landscape with areas of natural scrub, woodland, rough grassland and earthworks, mounds, large-scale re-grading works and ballast storage. A rail depot has been developed in the north-east quadrant.

**11.224** The extensive rolling grassland of Stoke Park Registered Park and Garden in the south-east of the LCA includes peripheral woodland, visually dominant Dower House, and associated features within the parkland. Although largely located within Bristol, the Registered Park and Garden contributes significantly to the character and amenity of the more recent housing development that is structured around it.

**Photo 4: Ongoing residential development dominates the south-western part of the LCA including at Cribbs Farm. The wooded ridgeline of Haw Wood is just visible on the skyline.**



### Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**11.225** The presence of dense settlement, busy roads including the M4, M5, A38 and A4174, and the railway influences the sense of tranquillity experienced within the Kingswood LCA.

**11.226** Dense settlement, and associated light pollution, influences the experience of dark night skies throughout the LCA. Light pollution is particularly high near Aztec West and Almondsbury Business Park, retail development at Cribbs Causeway and industrial development north-east of the airfield.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**11.227** There are no Visually Important Hillsides (VIH) located within this LCA. The Severn Ridges VIH forms part of the north-western boundary of the LCA. This VIH comprises a complex area of ridges punctuated by a series of hills, which marks as distinctive change in landscape character. The VIH is visually prominent when viewed from the west, including within long-distance views from South Wales and the Forest of Dean, and provides a green backdrop and setting to several Conservation Areas.

**11.228** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

### Strategic Viewpoints

**11.229** There are no Strategic Viewpoints (SVP) located within this LCA. Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.



## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Valued Features

- Areas of open space which break up the dense urban pattern, provide recreational opportunities and enhance biodiversity.
- Wooded corridors of Hortham, Patchway and Stoke Brooks within the Three Brooks LNR, which provide habitat opportunities and enhance biodiversity.
- The former airfield and associated hangar buildings that contribute to time depth.
- Distinct boundary feature formed by the M4/M5 to the settlement edge, with a more rural landscape located beyond.
- The Stoke Park Registered Park and Garden, which forms a key feature in views in the south-east of the LCA, contributing to sense of place and time depth.

## The Changing Landscape

**11.230** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Patchway, Filton and the Stokes LCA.

### Climate Change

- Climate change resulting in an increase in the frequency and severity of seasonal flooding in lower-lying valleys, particularly the Henbury Trym in the west and Stoke Brook in the east of the LCA. Associated pressures to build flood management works that are unsympathetic to local landscape character and sensitive habitats.

### Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- An increase in tree planting is required to contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may include the planting of individual and groups of trees, and small woodlands linking the Three Brooks LNR in broad corridors to woodlands and green space north of the M5 and in Filton. This will increase habitat connectivity and further soften the settlement edge.

### Land Use and Cover

- The landscape framework within the LCA 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 remaining areas or 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. Many of these areas are either recently developed, proposed for development or 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.
- The retention of landscape features and habitats within urban development can do much to enhance the character and biodiversity value of new settlement as well as providing connectivity of habitat, as seen along the courses of the Stoke Brook and Patchway Brook. These features require sufficient space within the development and long-term management to ensure their longevity.

## LCA 15: Patchway, Filton & the Stokes

- Woodland cover is relatively rare, typically found near the LCA's boundaries, although some is retained within development. Some retained areas are ancient woodland, a nationally limited natural resource that is of ecological importance. These woodlands can be threatened from enclosure within new urban development resulting from increased pressure from recreational use and limited active management of their long-term structure. This resource is sensitive to change, particularly fragmentation and isolation from existing green space links, which would potentially affect local distinctiveness and their biodiversity values.
- The lack of active management of landscape and vegetation features would eventually contribute to their decline or loss, with implications upon visual amenity, biodiversity 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.
- Where active management has taken place, such as hedge laying along the boundary of a public open space adjacent to the A4174 in Filton, this has made a positive contribution to both local character and its longevity. Improvement of open spaces in terms of both planting and management seen at Patchway has enhanced both the landscape structure and ecological diversity of the sites. A community garden is being developed at Elm Park, Filton.
- Open space pockets within the area are also sensitive to change. Due to the extent of urban development, all open spaces provide valuable visual, biodiversity and recreational amenity and create physical breaks within the urban fabric, contributing to the distinctive character of the locality or wider area.

## Development

- 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.

## LCA 15: Patchway, Filton & the Stokes

- Development to the west of the Filton Airfield will alter the landscape structure and open character of this part of the LCA, which previously provided visual connectivity with Haw Wood to the west of the LCA boundary.
- In densely developed areas, particularly Bradley Stoke and Stoke Gifford, the regular pattern and continuity of housing, lack of boundary planting to provide integration, relatively limited provision of formal open space and street trees, tends to create a continuous roofscape and abrupt built edge. This is visually prominent locally, and in places from the wider countryside beyond this area.
- Relatively recent development at Charlton Hayes has resulted in a significant change in landscape character to the north-eastern corner of the airfield, north of the existing runway. As a high-density development of formal character and with relatively modest open space provision within much of the urban fabric, street trees and robust landscape schemes associated with new development is increasingly important to provide visual relief to the dense built form. Sections of the existing landscape and Filton Wood are incorporated into the development. As a result of the development the character of local views is changing significantly.
- Redevelopment of the Filton airfield will result in significant further change in the character of the locality including in views from the adjacent road network, existing residential properties, and elevated views from Filton Golf Course.
- Relatively recent residential development at Wallscourt Farm occupies land between the MOD and Hewlett Packard sites, and largely retains the strong vegetation structure that was associated with the former agricultural landscape. A small area of unmanaged remnant pastoral land is located to the north-east of this development. Hermitage Wood forms a soft boundary to the east of this development and prevents coalescence between residential and employment development. This area is sensitive to infill development.
- 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

## LCA 15: Patchway, Filton & the Stokes

are therefore sensitive to change, particularly from the encroachment of built features.

- Infill development affects parts of the LCA that historically had larger gardens and open spaces, often impacting on 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. This is further compounded by the widening of roads and the introduction of lighting and gantries that often squeeze or eliminate the planting that previously screened or integrated the transport infrastructure with its surroundings.
- Recently completed and under construction development at UWE will result in further loss of trees and open space within the campus.

## Guidance

**11.231** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the overarching management strategy objectives set out in Chapter 4.

## Landscape Strategy

### Landscape Management

- Protect skylines formed by Stoke Park Registered Park and Garden and Filton Golf course. Frame key views that contribute to the distinctive character of the locality, whether within this LCA or adjacent character areas.
- Establish individual and groups of trees, and small woodlands linking the Three Brooks Nature Reserve in broad corridors to woodlands and green space north of the M5 and in Filton, whilst conserving other priority habitats, historic sites and viewpoints.
- Seek a stronger and more cohesive tree framework both within the existing settlement area and within new development sites in this area to meet South Gloucestershire Council's current target of 15% increase in tree cover.
- Ensure a cohesive approach to the landscape structure of different neighbourhoods and developments within the LCA, for example extending the 'urban forest' character imparted by street trees and other tree cover within the urban fabric of the adjacent landscape character area, and as is emerging at Charlton Hayes.
- Secure the enhancement and management of existing open spaces to improve their natural beauty, recreational function, sustainability and biodiversity value, and their resilience to the pressures of increased use. Recognise the particular importance that residential gardens can contribute to the character and biodiversity value of an area.
- Establish individual and groups of trees and small woodlands within:
  - parks and greenspaces addressing inequalities in tree canopy cover and with a strong community dimension to their location, size and care.
  - primary and secondary school grounds, with school responsibility for their care.
  - adjacent to streets, addressing inequalities in tree canopy cover and with a strong community dimension to their location, size and care.



- private land, with strong involvement of businesses and their staff.

### Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Protect and improve the riparian habitat of the Henbury Trym and Bradley Brook and seek opportunities to naturalise sections currently impacted by engineering structures (except heritage features), together with opportunities for enhance recreational access along Bradley Brook.
- Protect and prioritise connections between deciduous woodland within the LCA and ancient woodland areas in adjacent LCAs, for example between Splatts Abbey Wood SNCI and Stoke Park SNCI/Registered Park and Garden in the south of the LCA, together with Haw Wood SNCI and Blackhorse Wood SNCI in adjacent LCA 18: Severn Ridges.
- Protect, enhance, and manage the Three Brooks LNR for biodiversity and recreational access.
- Manage recreational pressures on habitat areas and semi-natural open space.

### Development Management

- Ensure that retained landscape features within development areas are set within adequate space to ensure effective protection and management.
- Within the areas of dense development, careful planning of any new developments is particularly important to avoid damage to existing retained trees and ensuring the succession of proposed new landscape schemes.
- Where opportunities become available, increase planting to provide an effective buffer between the motorways and adjacent development and landscapes, and contribute towards the creation of wildlife links.
- Carefully control boundary treatments and surfacing including road facing gardens to protect the character of place, biodiversity, and quality of the public realm within both urban and rural environments.

## LCA 15: Patchway, Filton & the Stokes

- Avoid encroachment of dense settlement into the surrounding rural landscape.

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- 1 Forest of Avon Trust and West of England Nature Partnership, The Forest of Avon Plan: A Tree and Woodland Strategy for the West of England (2021). Available at: <https://forestofavontrust.org/forest-of-avon-plan/>
- 2 Forest of Avon Trust and West of England Nature Partnership, The Forest of Avon Plan: A Tree and Woodland Strategy for the West of England (2021). Available at: <https://forestofavontrust.org/forest-of-avon-plan/>

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# South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment

Supplementary Planning Document

**South Gloucestershire Council**

**Final Draft Report proposed for adoption**

Prepared by LUC

February 2025

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South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment



## **Chapter 12: Undulating Ridge LCT**

LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington  
Ridge

LCA 18: Severn Ridges



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**Note: Each chapter is produced as a separate document for ease of reading and navigation.**

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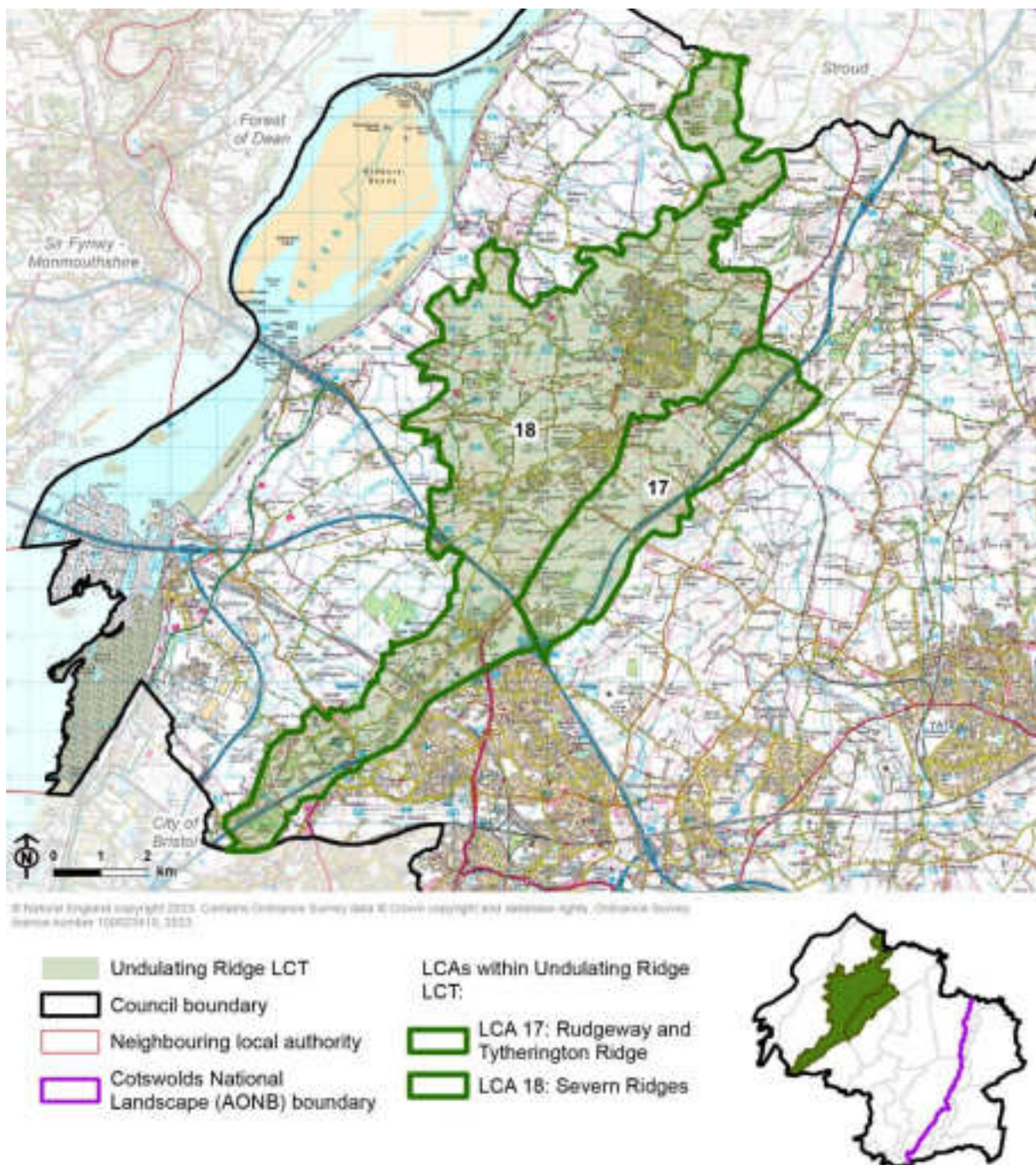
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## Chapter 12

### Undulating Ridge LCT

Figure 12.1: Location of Undulating Ridge LCT



# Description

**12.1** The landscape type comprises a distinct band of high ground running north-east to south-west across the western part of South Gloucestershire. This forms an extensive, prominent and distinctive 'ridge' landform, rising up quite quickly from the lowland levels to the west and less distinctly from the simple rolling vales to the east.

## Key Characteristics

- The ridges are characterised by a diverse mix of sloping pasture and some arable fields, divided by hedges in varying patterns.
- Some remnants of ridge and furrow field pattern, laid hedges and old orchards remain visible, evoking a sense of time depth in the landscape.
- Deciduous woodland is typically associated with ridgelines and hill tops. This provides a strongly defined landscape framework and a sense of enclosure, particularly to the south.
- Towns and large villages are located on high points on the ridgelines, with numerous small villages and hamlets. Church towers typically form landmarks in the surrounding landscape.
- Major transport routes (including the M4, M5 and A38) cross the ridges, connected by an intricate pattern of roads and lanes which are often surrounded by hedges and woodlands.
- Ribbon development along the A38 and adjoining roads creates the impression of sub-urbanisation of the rural landscape, particularly along the main transport corridors.

## Landscape Character Areas

**12.2** The Undulating Ridges LCT is subdivided into two LCAs:

- LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge & Tytherington Ridge
- LCA 18: Severn Ridges



## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

The Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge landscape character area is a broad open ridge comprising a pastoral landscape, punctuated by woodland and copses, and dissected and defined by several roads, including the M5 motorway.

**Photo 1: St Helens Church and linear settlement along Gloucester Road (A38) in Alveston.**

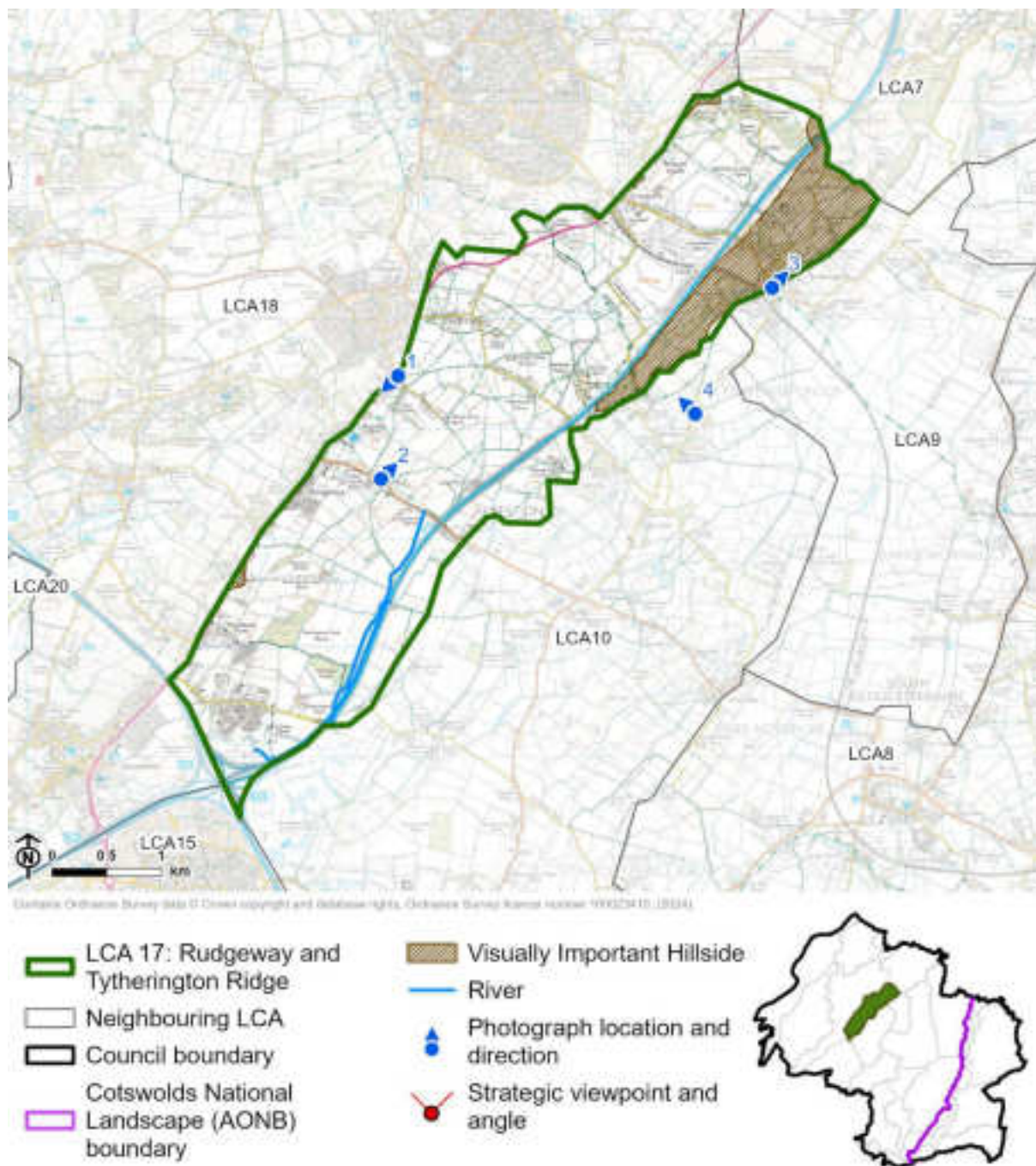


### Location

**12.3** The Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge landscape character area is located centrally within South Gloucestershire, extending north-eastwards from the M4/M5 interchange (adjacent to the northern edge of the Bristol conurbation). The western boundary follows the often-distinct landform change between the upper slopes of the Severn Ridges and the 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 (LCA 9) and Earthcott Vale (LCA 10). The northern boundary defines the end of the ridge and its approximate skyline, the descending slopes beyond containing the Falfield Vale (LCA 7). The southern boundary follows the M4, incorporating part of the M4/M5 interchange.

## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

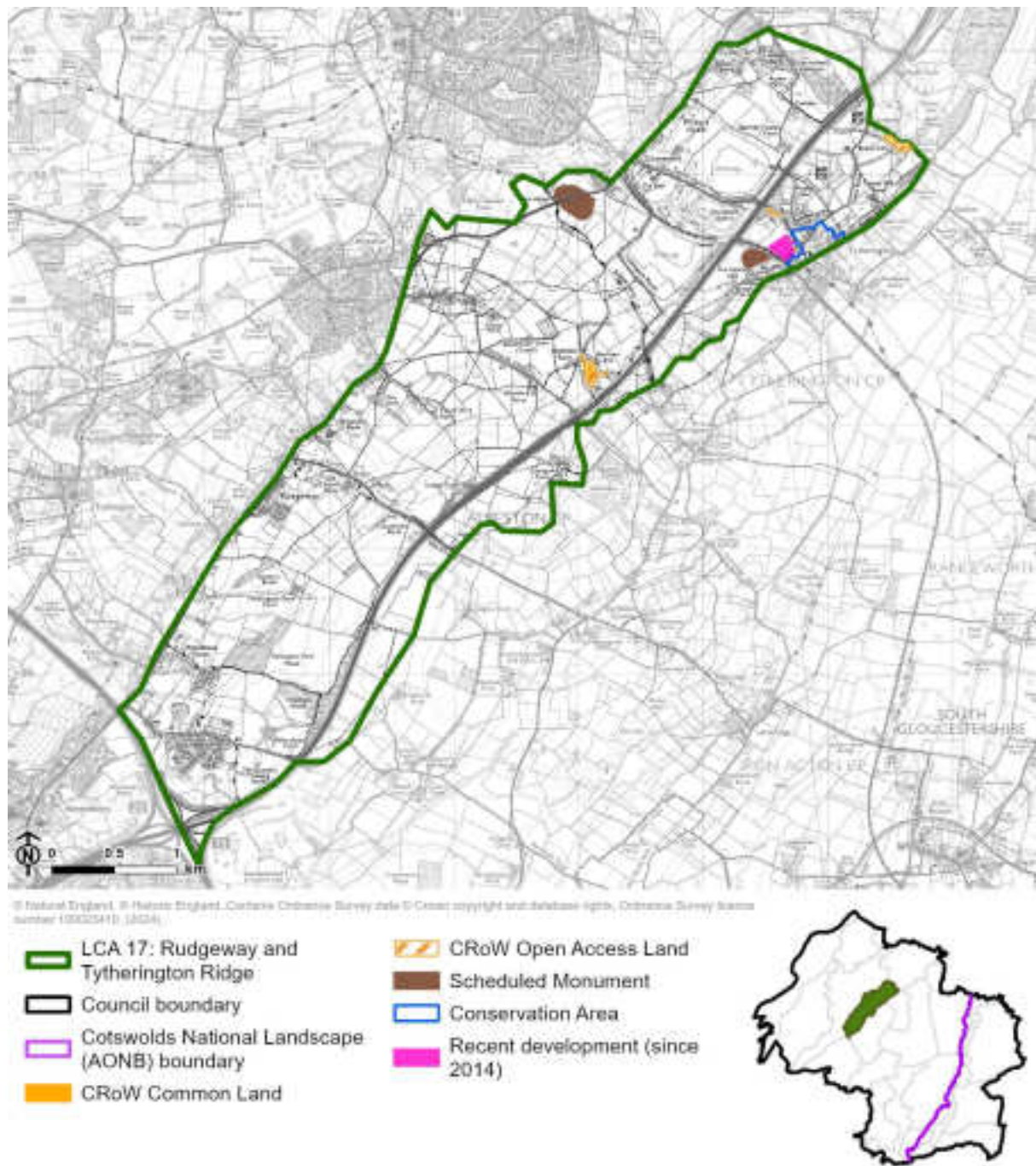
**Figure 12.2: Location and Landscape context of LCA 17:  
Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**





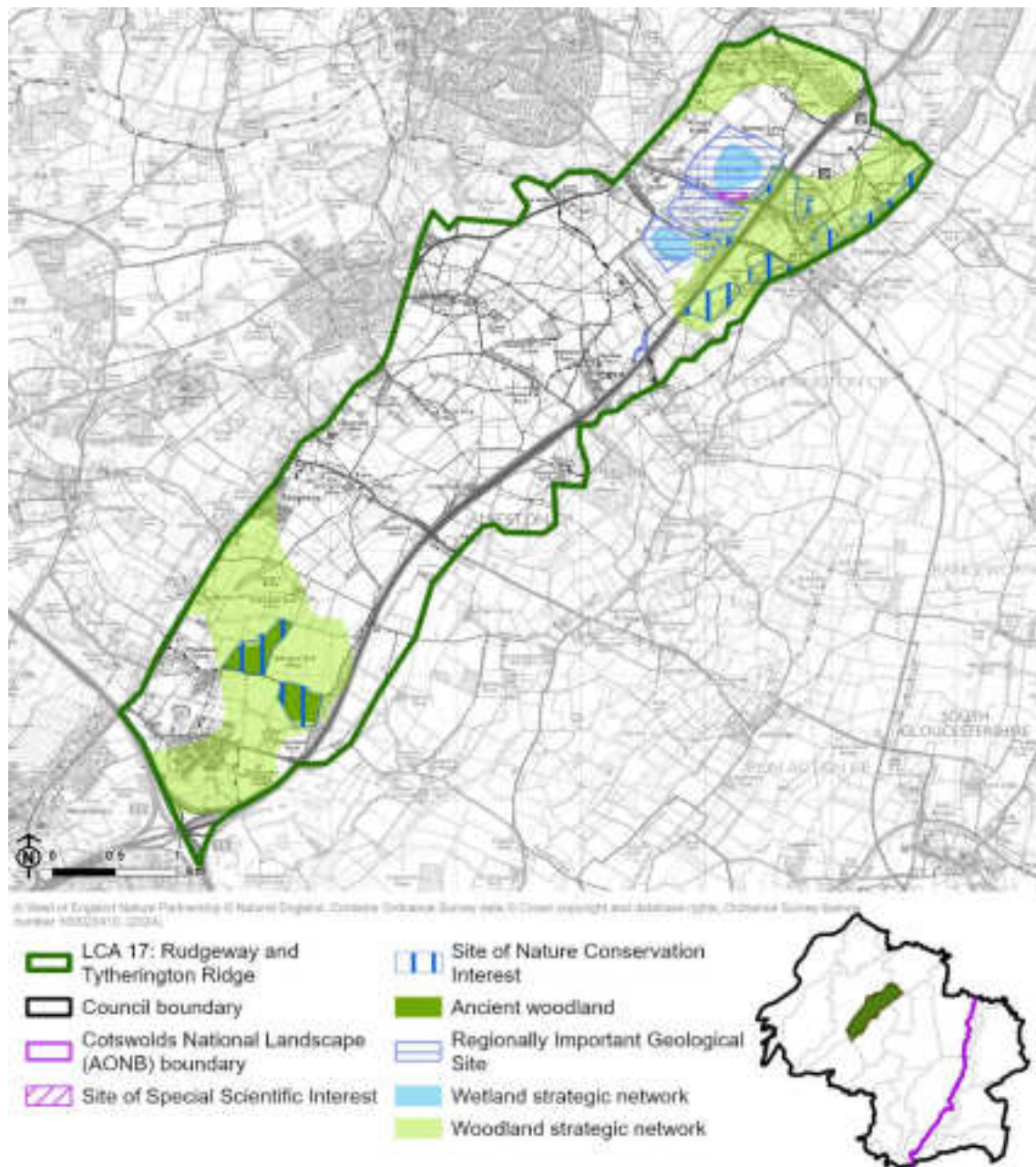
## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

**Figure 12.3: Development and Heritage context of LCA 17:  
Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**



## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

**Figure 12.4: Ecology and Biodiversity Context of LCA 17:  
Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- A broad linear ridgeline plateau which gently slopes to the east, forming a backdrop to the vale and plain beyond.
- Open to semi-enclosed predominantly pastoral landscape of regular, medium sized fields with a mix of thick, clipped and intermittent hedges, and stock fencing.
- There are occasional small pockets of common land in the north and east of the character area.
- Several areas of calcareous grassland are scattered across this character area (including areas of species rich grassland), which add texture to the landscape and provide important habitat for a diverse range of flora.
- A regular, dispersed pattern of woodland copses throughout, with large areas of deciduous woodland in the north and south which provide visual screening to the A38, while also providing valuable habitat for a wide range of species including European Protected Species.
- Occasional mature tree specimens are associated with some older farmsteads, occasionally within hedgerows or fields.
- There are occasional extensive views from the western boundary to the Severn Estuary and beyond. The eastern slopes look towards the Cotswold Scarp.
- The extensive road network defines this area and includes the M5, M4/M5 interchange and A38. The B4427 and other minor roads connect and cross the area.
- Settlement comprises small historic villages and hamlets and ribbon settlement along main roads. Stone walls line some roads, most notably sections of the A38 and roads adjacent to older farms.



- Tytherington Quarry is a large active quarry that includes a geological SSSI.

## Natural Influences

### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**12.4** The underlying geology of the Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge comprises Jurassic limestone, interwoven with a small proportion of alluvium and Carboniferous limestone. Soils are predominantly Pelic-stagnogleys. There is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at Tytherington Quarry, designated for its geological importance.

**12.5** This combination of geological strata creates a broad ridgeline on a north-east to south-west axis lying at approximately 100 metres AOD, with a small plateau to the east of Alveston. The gently rolling south-east facing slopes fall towards the Tytherington Plain (LCA 9) and Earthcott Vale (LCA 10) at 50-65 metres AOD. Slopes are convex towards the south, with a small bluff forming Tytherington Hill to the north. The boundary of the LCA is located at the foot of the hill. Earthworks, road embankments, gantries and overbridges associated with the M4, M5, and Almondsbury Interchange introduce man-made landforms to the landscape.

**12.6** The drainage pattern comprises a limited number of 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

**12.7** The character area is a predominantly pastoral landscape, with regular shaped, medium sized fields. The fields are divided by a mix of thick, clipped and intermittent hedges, with some stock fencing around horse paddocks near

## **LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**

the A38. Small copses of deciduous woodland occur frequently, scattered throughout the area. Larger areas of woodland lie to the south near Woodhouse Down and in the north at Milbury Heath, with a cluster of smaller woodlands and copses around Tytherington. Mature specimen trees are generally associated with old farmsteads and are limited elsewhere.

**12.8** Small pockets of Registered Common Land are clustered around Tytherington at Baden Hill, Tytherington Hill, and Hilly Upman. The larger area of Itchington Common comprises rough grassland with dense boundary vegetation.

**12.9** Tytherington Quarry occupies an extensive area of the northern part of the LCA, comprising 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, and a developing woodland structure. The northern section of the quarry is SSSI-designated for its geological value and interest.

**Photo 2: Pastoral fields near Rudgeway enclosed by dense hedgerows with mature trees.**



## **LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**

### **Biodiversity**

**12.10** The LCA comprises a mosaic of grassland, woodland and farmland, providing important habitat for a diverse range of species. Hedgerows, the Hortham Brook and its tributaries form ecological corridors which provide connectivity across the landscape.

**12.11** Broadleaf woodland occurs in small blocks dispersed across the LCA, often associated with farms, with two larger areas at Tockington Park Wood and Hortham Wood (both ancient woodland sites) as well as at Milbury Heath plantation in the north of the LCA. Several areas of broadleaf woodland at Tytherington and Hortham are designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI). Key species likely to be associated with the broadleaved woodland include bats and dormice both of which are present across the district and are European protected species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP).

**12.12** There are seven sites within the LCA designated as SNCIs for their calcareous grassland habitat, including species-rich grassland. This diverse habitat supports a range of invertebrates and ant hills are a regular feature. These invertebrates in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats. Hedgerows and scattered trees provide connectivity for species such as these between the wooded areas and other habitats.

**12.13** Although aquatic habits are uncommon in this LCA, the drainage ditches, tributary streams, ponds and pools support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

**12.14** Underground quarries, mines and tunnels associated with the quarrying activity in the area provide an ideal habitat for many species of bat including European Protected Species.

**12.15** The majority of the agricultural land use within this area is pastoral farmland with small areas of arable cultivation. Arable farmland provides ground

## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

nesting, and the winter stubble provides foraging opportunities for farmland birds including some listed as being Globally Threatened Red list species.

**12.16** South Gloucestershire Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor B (Charfield-Alveston-Hallen (*Western Scarp/Severn Ridges*)) covers the northern and southern ends of this LCA, associated with the woodland strategic network on the ridges.

## Cultural Influences

### Land Use and Time Depth

**12.17** Early settlement and land use is indicated by the presence of two prehistoric hillforts at 'The Castle' to the west of Tytherington, and at Little Abbey Camp west of Grovesend, comprising a fortified enclosure segmented by the A38. Both are Scheduled Monuments. The former manorial complex at Old Church Farm, off the B4427, is a Scheduled Monument and locally listed building, and includes the old church of St. Helen's (Grade II listed). 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.

**12.18** Part of Tytherington Conservation Area falls within the east of the LCA, covering the core of the village with a cluster of listed buildings including St James' Church (Grade II\* listed), with a framework of tall Pennant stone boundary walls.

### Settlement and Infrastructure

**12.19** Settlement comprises the village of Tytherington, the hamlets of Woodhouse Down and Rudgeway, and small-scale ribbon development along the A38. Elsewhere are scattered farms and isolated houses, typically constructed from Pennant sandstone, with some limestone evident in the south-

## **LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**

west of the area. The former Hortham hospital site (adjacent to the M4/M5 junction) has been redeveloped for housing, incorporating a structure of mature trees that formerly were part of the hospital grounds.

**12.20** Tytherington village is located at a confluence of roads on the lower slopes of Tytherington Hill, partly extending into the adjacent Tytherington Plain (LCA 9) containing historic buildings built in pennant stone. The church spire and public house form locally prominent features. Acoustic fencing separates the western part of the village from the M5 motorway.

**12.21** Along and adjacent to the boundaries of this character area, ribbon settlement extends continuously between Rudgeway and Alveston (in adjacent LCA 18) along both sides of the A38 and is more scattered further south. Woodhouse Down comprises a localised cluster of brick and rendered housing, in a regular pattern, laid out along a lane with cul-de-sacs. Rudgeway comprises a smaller, denser concentration of housing, along the A38. The linear pattern of Rudgeway and Woodhouse Down frontages, together with frequent houses scattered along the A38 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.

**12.22** Major roads run along the edges of this area, dissected by a number of minor routes at regular intervals. The M5 passes near the eastern boundary, with parts of the central and northern section in cutting. The A38 passes along the western boundary, whilst the B4427, together with a number of minor roads and country lanes climb and descend the easterly slopes, connecting isolated settlements to the A38.

**12.23** The area is served by numerous public rights of way, including the Jubilee Way locally promoted route, which climbs the ridge north-westwards, crossing the north of the area between Itchington and the southern edge of Thornbury. One of a series of circular rides comprises a circuit taking in a larger area of the Severn Ridges to the west, briefly crossing into the LCA, following lanes through Tytherington and climbing towards Milbury Heath.

## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

**12.24** 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 (LCA 10). A further powerline crosses the skyline south of Woodhouse Down. Several mobile phone masts are present adjacent to the M5 and A38 road corridors, and when viewed in combination with overhead gantries and signage associated with the motorway can appear cluttered on the skyline. A mineral railway line crosses the area in cutting to the west of Tytherington, defining one edge of the Tytherington Limestone Quarry and smaller disused quarries between the M5 and A38. There are two small solar farms at Tower Hill Farm and Oakham farm near Tytherington in the north-east of the LCA, located on a concealed slope and only evident in local views.

**Photo 3: St James' Church and traditional stone-built cottages in Tytherington Conservation Area.**





### Perceptual Influences

#### Visual Character

**12.25** The visual character of the Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge LCA is largely influenced by the ridgeline 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. The rural character remains largely intact but is strongly influenced by major roads, quarrying activity, and frequent small settlement clusters.

**12.26** The pattern of minor roads and rural lanes that cross the sloping landform of this area provides opportunities to view much of this area and its features. These slopes allow extensive views eastwards across the adjacent vale and plain landscapes, and further to Winterbourne, Yate and the Cotswold Scarp.

**12.27** However, the ridge and plateau landscape varies between open and enclosed. Views from within this area are often curtailed by the slight hill and plateau landform. Sometimes views are contained by settlement edge, stone walls along the A38 and the 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.

**12.28** The combination of built features, setting, and vegetation form areas of distinctive landscape character. The frequent distribution of older stone farmhouses, located on the ridge and along minor roads, is a common characteristic of the area, notably along Shellards Lane (east of Alveston) and Old Church Road (B4427): The complex of farms and outbuildings, linked along

## **LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**

by stone walls, set within an open plateau of fields with mature specimen trees, forms a locally distinct feature. The manorial complex of Old Church 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 (LCA 12).

**12.29** The wooded slopes of Tytherington Hill and setting of the village and common land at Tytherington are visually distinctive, with the church forming a locally 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 (LCA 9) is more prominent, due to the regular shaped concentration of houses and limited vegetation within or along its edge to provide integration.

**12.30** Settlement, structures, roads and non-agricultural land use have a strong influence over the adjacent landscape in places, for example in the south of the LCA, where the settlement edge at Woodhouse Down breaches the otherwise undeveloped skyline with little vegetation to provide integration. Similarly, the sports playing field adjacent to the site of the former Hortham Hospital introduces an urbanising element to the rural landscape and is incongruous with the surrounding rural land uses. Along lower slopes there is a scattering of mismatching buildings, including glasshouses within a nursery complex, a group of large modern agricultural sheds, and a disused farm with unmanaged fields. These elements detract from the otherwise intact rural character of the locality. The group of three wind turbines in adjacent vale landscape LCA 10 are prominent in views to the east.

**12.31** Tytherington Quarry is generally well-integrated by mature vegetation and hedgerows with occasional trees and mound/planting mitigation measures along the quarry's site boundary. The works' buildings form prominent industrial structures, visible above the natural ground level, appearing within some local views on the skyline.

**12.32** The A38 is largely a well-integrated and visually contained rural corridor. A linear framework of stone boundary walls between Rudgeway and Alveston, and sections of broad roadside verges soften the edges and aid its integration into the landscape. The road is fringed by woodland to the west, mixed with

## **LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**

mature pine trees, however garden vegetation in combination with sections of ribbon development, has a suburban influence in places. Occasional paddocks and pasture fields, enclosed by post and wire fencing, form 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. There are occasional extensive views to the west from the A38, looking over the steep descending slopes of the Severn Ridge towards the levels and Severn Estuary beyond.

**12.33** The M4/M5 interchange close to Bristol comprising large-scale earthworks and an elevated interchange structure, in combination with the M5 at grade introduce structures and traffic volumes which are visually and audibly prominent in the south-east corner of this area. The M5 has a wider influence north-west of Tytherington, where it passes on embankment, permitting extensive views eastwards along Tytherington Hill and over the Tytherington plain below. The interchange and large-scale earth bunds around Woodlands Golf Course, immediately to the south-east (within Bristol City Authority area) largely screen commercial development on the edge of Bristol, although the roofs of some buildings remain evident as a skyline feature, with the RAC tower forming a prominent landmark.

**12.34** A number of powerlines to the east of Alveston form prominent linear features ascending the ridge. Where they cross the edge of the ridge/plateau area, these powerlines and towers are particularly prominent on the skyline. Mobile phone masts adjacent to the M5 and A38 are generally evident within local views, their prominence is locally dependent upon mast size and requirement for associated infrastructure, such as buildings, compounds, access tracks and fencing.

## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

**Photo 4: View north from Itchington towards the ridge, with traffic on the M5 motorway intermittently visible through gaps in vegetation.**



### Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**12.35** The extensive road network of the M4, M5, M4/M5 interchange and A38 are defining features and introduce noise and visual disruption to the area. The sound of traffic can be heard across much of the LCA, resulting in limited sense of tranquillity. When the quarry is active, movement and noise from quarry traffic impacts on the sense of tranquillity within the locality. Light pollution from adjacent urban areas Bristol and Thornbury, as well as lighting associated with the A38 and M5/Almondsbury interchange has a relatively wide-spread impact across the LCA, with few areas of dark skies.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**12.36** The southern extent of Wick's/Butcher's Hill and Baden Hill Visually Important Hillside (VIH) is located within this LCA. It comprises an elevated area of three hillsides stretching between Tortworth in the north and Tytherington in the south. Baden Hill is the southernmost hillside and forms part of the setting to the Tytherington Conservation Area.

**12.37** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

### Strategic Viewpoints

**12.38** There are no Strategic Viewpoints within this LCA.

**12.39** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Value Features

- Remaining areas of pastoral land use, enclosed by hedgerows which provide structure to the landscape and habitat connectivity .
- Ecologically valuable woodland and calcareous grassland habitats, including designated areas.
- Assets of historic significance, including prehistoric hillforts and the manorial complex at Old Church Farm.
- Traditional rural settlements with distinctive vernacular using local building styles and materials, for example in Tytherington.
- Wide views available from more open parts of the ridge, including west towards the Severn Ridges and Estuary.
- Recreational value in the form of Common Land and public rights of way network including part of the Jubilee Way , and a Circular Ride.

## The Changing Landscape

**12.40** The Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge character area is a predominantly 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.

**12.41** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge LCA.



### Climate Change

- Pressure for renewable energy development including wind and solar to contribute towards maximising the generation of renewable energy from installations (as set out in South Gloucestershire's Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-2030), already evident in the presence of solar arrays at Tower Hill Farm and Oakham Farm near Tytherington.

### Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- An increase in tree planting is required to reverse potential decline of existing woodland coverage and increased openness of the landscape. This will contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may include the establishment of new native woodlands in the 'A38 Gap' as part of a loose accessible woodland framework around the fringes of Thornbury (within LCA 18) as set out in the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy. This may change the open character of the landscape and its expansive views.
- Pools and ponds and their associated aquatic species, including Great Crested Newt, are vulnerable to any loss of habitat including the terrestrial habitat around ponds as well as the ponds themselves.

### Land Use and Cover

- Tytherington Quarry presently comprises a significant area of disused quarry and areas that at the time of writing are dormant. 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.

## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

- The sports pitch facility to the east of housing development on the site of the former Hortham Hospital is poorly integrated, lacking a landscaped setting it erodes the rural character of the local landscape.
- The increasing prevalence of horse paddocks is evident within the area, particularly along the edge of the A38, which in places has led to the loss or erosion of hedgerows with a resultant reduction in connectivity of habitats. The cumulative effect of this and associated stables, access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and floodlighting, can result in a marked change in landscape character and disturbance to wildlife.
- The tall poplar trees adjacent to Hortham Hospital are in contrast with the local agricultural framework and the character of the pre-existing tree cover within the former hospital site. The replacement of hedging with close boarded fencing, paving and to a lesser extent ornamental planting in gardens along the A38 corridor are significantly eroding the rural character of the area.

## Development

- The presence of major transport routes around the boundaries of this area, together with the proximity of the urban edge of Bristol to the south, increase the pressure for development within this area. road corridors and existing ribbon development along the A38 already affect the character of the adjacent rural landscape. Further increase in traffic or additional built development could result in a significant change to the local character.
- The introduction of urban features within the rural landscape has the potential to erode the rural character.
- Older settlements and buildings contribute significantly to local character and are potentially sensitive to change resulting from new 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.
- The introduction of large modern farm sheds on the east-facing slopes could significantly change the visual prominence of these building groups

## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

(as already seen at Hortham Farm) which are currently low-profile rural features.

- Large vertical elements such as wind turbines could have wide visibility and erode the rural characteristics of the locality- as already evidenced by the Tytherington Plain wind turbines.
- The undisturbed rural skylines of the ridge/ plateau are sensitive to change, particularly from the encroachment of built and vertical forms of development, due to its visually prominent location. The undeveloped areas of the easterly facing slopes are similarly sensitive, being visible from the adjoining vale and the Wickwar Ridge to the east.
- Further built development, fencing or tree planting along the western fringe of the A38 may conceal the extensive views towards the Severn Estuary, which are a distinctive and characteristic feature along parts of this route.
- Mobile phone masts in elevated and visible locations introduce detractive vertical elements to the skyline and has the cumulative effect of eroding rural characteristics.
- 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.
- A large residential development site on the north-western edge of Tytherington, as well as a site on the south-eastern edge of Thornbury (in adjacent LCA 18) will impact on views west from the LCA and contribute to the sense of coalescence between settlements.

## Guidance

**12.42** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the overarching management strategy objectives of the South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment, as set out in Chapter 4.

## Landscape Strategy

### Landscape Management

- Actively manage the landscape vegetation structure, including hedgerows, hedgerow trees, copses and woodlands, to maintain landscape character and biodiversity value of the locality for the long term.
- The loss of boundary features, including hedgerows and stone walls that contribute local landscape character and habitat connectivity should be resisted. New field boundaries should reinforce the particular and distinctive character and appearance of the locality, and fencing should be avoided.
- Preserve and enhance the landscape setting of Tytherington Conservation Area, together with key views towards and from it.
- Establish new native woodlands in the 'A38 Gap' as part of a loose accessible woodland framework around the fringes of Thornbury), whilst conserving Grade 2 agricultural land, priority habitats, historic monuments and viewpoints.
- Increase tree cover on eastern facing slopes and along the principal road corridors to reinforce landscape structure and mitigate impact on views from higher ground to the east. Establish trees and small woodlands to consolidate the on and off-carriageway planting adjacent to the M5.
- Preserve the rural character of undisturbed rural ridges and skylines, and open views across the estuary, including careful consideration of new large-scale vertical structures.

### Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Ensure the mosaic of calcareous grasslands are appropriately managed in order to maintain their biodiversity value and contribution to nature recovery networks.

## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

- Plan for the sympathetic restoration of Tytherington Quarry as different phases are worked out, seeking opportunities to create new habitat and enhance ecological corridors between existing habitats.
- Protect deciduous woodlands at Tockington Park Wood and Hortham Wood with appropriate buffers and seek opportunities for expansion and connections to the west.

### Development Management

- Ensure that any new development respects the locally distinctive character of the traditional rural settlements (such as Tytherington) as well as within groupings of farm buildings. New developments should include landscape schemes that reinforce this objective.
- Ensure that recreational development including equestrian land uses are located and designed to protect, conserve, and strengthen the local pattern of hedgerows and tree cover and includes adequate landscape proposals to protect the particular rural character of the locality. Avoid the use of floodlights that can also disturb wildlife.
- Careful consideration must be given for the design and siting of new renewable energy developments, particularly wind turbines which would introduce prominent vertical structures on the skyline.

## LCA 18: Severn Ridges

The Severn Ridges landscape character area is an extensive, complex landform of abrupt scarps and gentle ridges which rises from the lower Levels area running north to south through the length of South Gloucestershire.

**Photo 1: View south towards the Severn Ridge with Almondsbury nestled on the wooded slopes of the ridge.**



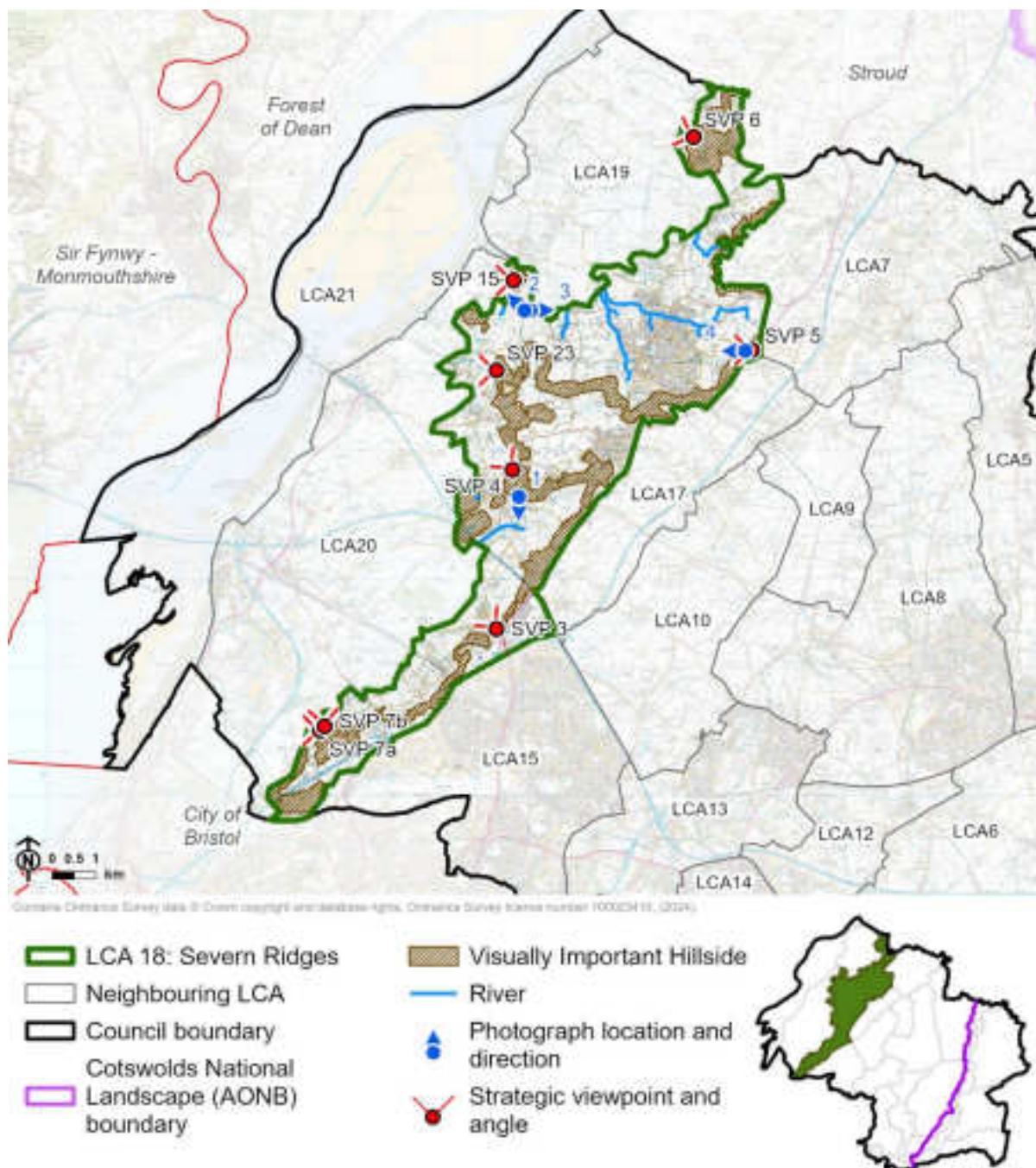


### Location

**12.43** The Severn Ridges landscape character area extends through the west of the district from the northern to south-western boundary of South Gloucestershire . The western boundary follows an often-subtle transition in landform, land cover and drainage pattern between the adjacent low-lying Levels landscape (LCT 8) 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, defined by the A38 and the M5.

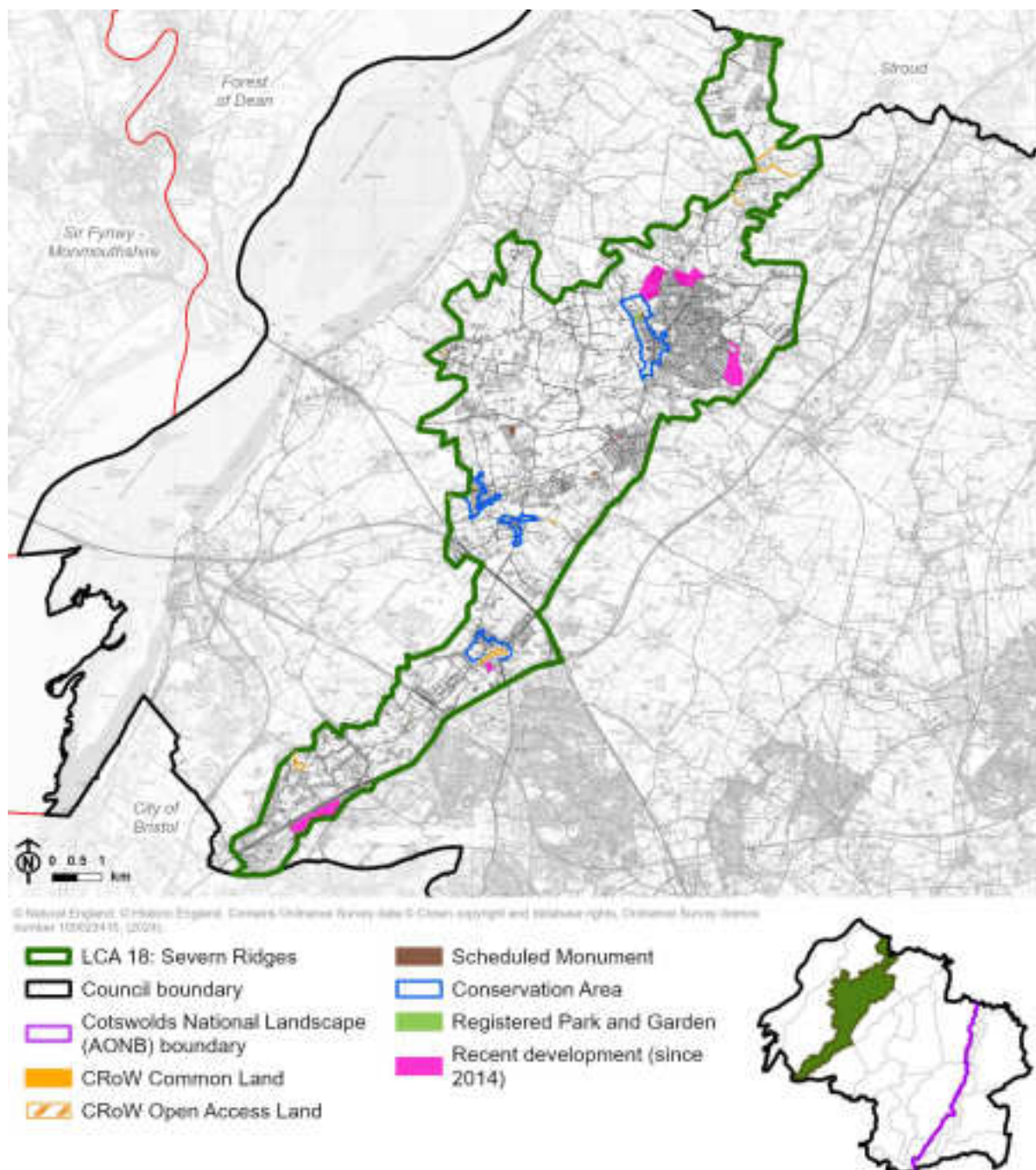
## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

**Figure 12.5: Location and Landscape context of LCA 18: Severn Ridges**



## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

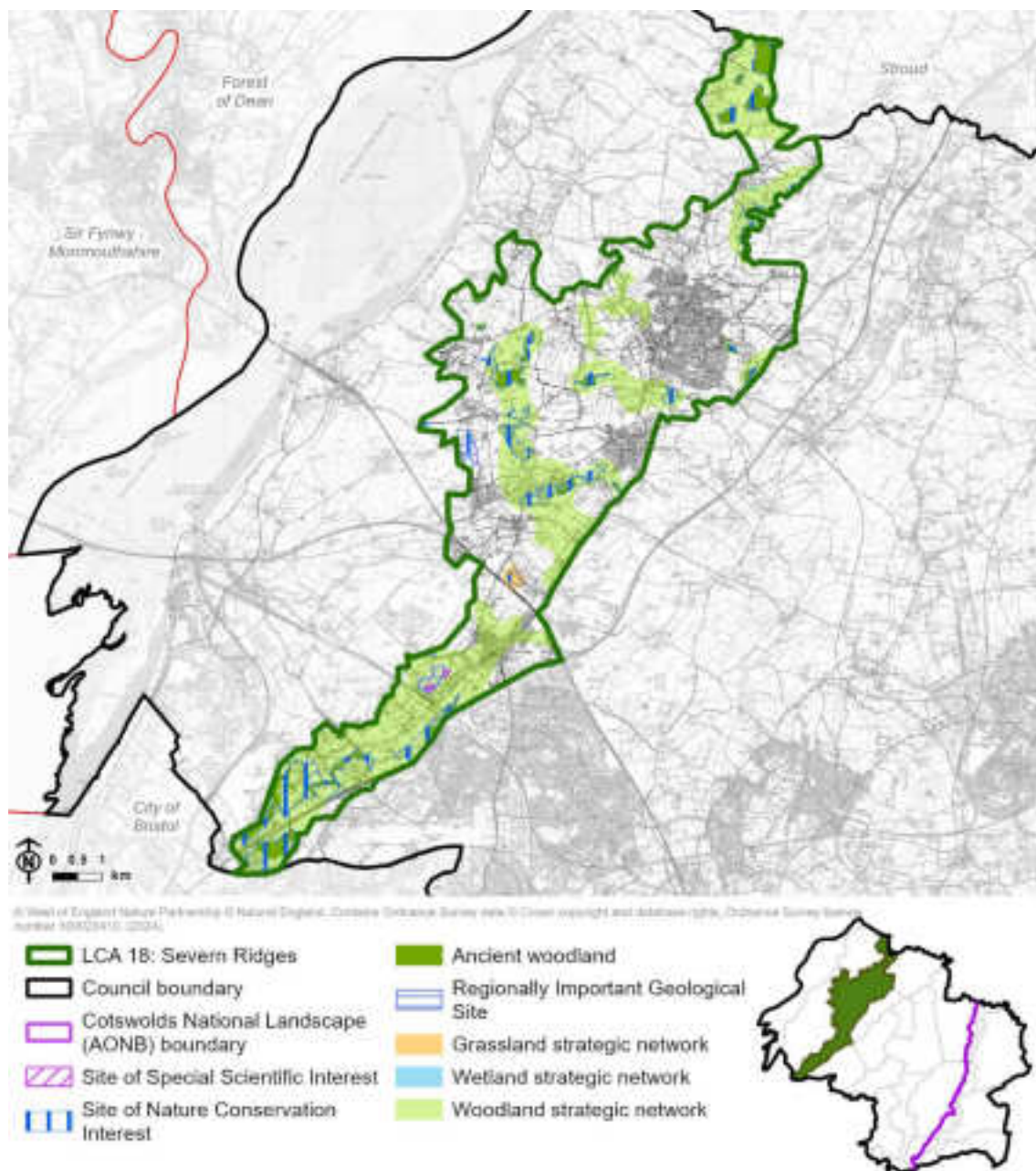
**Figure 12.6: Development and Heritage context of LCA 18: Severn Ridges**





## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

**Figure 12.7: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 18: Severn Ridges**



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- A distinctive large-scale landform rising from the Levels, with sections of steep scarp in the north and south and more gentle slopes elsewhere, and a narrow linear area of dip slope adjacent to the urban edge of Bristol.
- The ridgelines combine with the adjacent Levels and Severn Estuary to form a regionally distinct landform .
- Mature woodlands, including ancient woodlands, clothe the scarps, with occasional ornamental species within historic landscape parks.
- Scattered areas of calcareous, neutral, and marshy grassland across the Severn Ridges support a diverse range of flora including areas of species rich grassland.
- Numerous watercourses flow from the elevated ridge, draining to the adjacent levels. Areas of bankside vegetation at Groves Gully and Roundhouse and Fishponds Woods enhance habitat connectivity across the landscape.
- A pastoral landscape of regular small-sized fields which become more irregular on steeper slopes, with larger regular arable fields on more gentle slopes.
- Clipped and overgrown hedgerows with intermittent trees provide prominent landscape features and wildlife connectivity including between areas of woodland.
- Orchards and small areas of common land are often associated with older settlements and farms, with a large commercial orchard at Almondsbury.
- Numerous settlements linked by minor roads, are nestled within the landform, and contained by a strong landscape structure.

## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

- Older villages, hamlets and scattered farms are built of local stone, with stone boundary walls. Churches form distinctive landmarks.
- Long history of settlement in the area, indicated by the presence of prehistoric settlement sites and hillforts.
- Small historic parklands locally influence the landscape character with designed parkland, mature woodland, and specimen trees.
- Expansive views, available from the length of the ridges, extend over the lowland Levels and Severn Estuary to the west.
- The Severn Bridges feature in views from the Severn Ridges and provide national landmarks within the wider estuary landscape.
- The scarp and lower ridges form a prominent backdrop in views from the Levels, South Wales, and the Forest of Dean.

## Natural Influences

### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**12.44** The underlying geology is varied, with a central area of Carboniferous limestone, 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. The remaining area is largely of Keuper marl and Rhaetic clays. The western boundary of the LCA approximately follows the geological boundary between the Keuper marl of this area and the estuarine alluvium of the adjacent Levels. Soils are a mix of Stagnogleyic Pello-argillic Brown Earths, typical Stagnogleys, and Brown Rankers.

**12.45** The landform is dominated by the large-scale ridgeline which runs roughly north-east to south-west, curving westwards around a centrally elevated area to the west of Thornbury and Alveston. The landform is sloping, rising eastwards from the Levels in the west. The ridgeline has gentle to steeply



## **LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**

sloping scarp slopes, with lower slopes rising from the Levels at approximately 10 metres AOD to the highest point along the ridge at approximately 100 metres AOD, south of Thornbury.

**12.46** The scarp edge is most prominent in the north around Hill and Rockhampton, above Olveston, and from Rudgeway 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 AOD above the Levels, for example at Cowhill and Red Hill. To the south-east of the ridge, adjacent to the urban edge of Bristol, a narrow linear area of south-east facing dip slope continues beneath the Bristol conurbation. Embankments along the M4 and M5 motorways, and earth bunds along the Bristol Golf Course boundary form manmade landforms, introducing a localised suburban character to parts of the LCA.

**12.47** Several watercourses 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 (ditches).

**12.48** Those flowing to the Oldbury Levels include regular drainage channels of Rockhampton Rhine which follow the angular field pattern. Pool Brook flows north-westwards to the Oldbury Pill within both natural and straightened channels.

**12.49** Those flowing to the Pilning Levels are generally more varied, comprising Tockington Mill Rhine and its tributaries which flow south-westwards along partly straightened channels through the Sheepcombe Vale. Over Brook comprises small sections of straightened and irregular channels, whilst Bailey's Mead Rhine forms a linear channel flowing north-westwards.

## **LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**

**12.50** Natural watercourses include a small stream cut into the ridge at Spaniorum Hill, and a tightly meandering stream course flowing north-westwards towards Oldbury Pill from Thornbury.

### **Land Cover**

**12.51** The land cover of the Severn Ridges is varied and is largely related to landform. Flatter and gently sloping ground on the lower slopes is dominated by arable farmland of medium to large, regular shaped fields, defined by low clipped hedges, fencing and intermittent trees. Elsewhere, the undulating and steeply sloping landform is used for pasture in small regular-shaped fields, with a more irregular field pattern along steeper, folded parts of the landform. Field boundaries generally comprise clipped or overgrown hedgerows, this boundary pattern extending along many of the numerous minor roads and lanes that cross the area. Mature hedgerow trees are intermittent.

**12.52** Woodland is variable in both size and pattern, frequently interspersed with pasture along the scarp to the north at Upper Hill and Rockhampton, scattered linear and irregular areas within the central area, and linear belts along the scarp edge between Almondsbury and Spaniorum Hill where the woodland edge is combined with thick hedgerow boundaries. The steep slopes and scarps are clothed in mainly deciduous woodland, mixed occasionally with stands of Scots pine and ornamental deciduous/evergreen trees, particularly along ridgelines or associated with large houses or estates.

**12.53** To the north of Rockhampton at Hill Court (a locally registered historic park) 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 hedge banks and old orchards. These are remnants of an ornamental and designed landscape, a medieval parkland and cleared and ancient woodland. Other small-scale historic landscape parks occur along the ridge south of Almondsbury at Knole Park, Over Court, Hollywood Tower, and Berwick Lodge (all included on the local register of Historic Parks and Gardens).

## **LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**

**12.54** Orchards are a common feature across the LCA, with old, small, and scattered remnant orchards associated with settlements and farms. There is a large commercial orchard to the north of Almondsbury.

**12.55** Recreational land use is widespread across the LCA. Thornbury Golf Course occupies land to the south-west of the town and forms part of a wider recreational and amenity landscape with a large area of allotments and playing fields on the settlement edges. To the north-east of Olveston, Old Down Country Park is set within the grounds of an old estate. Opposite The Down House to the south is a football pitch, cricket field, bowling green and the Queen Alexandra Memorial Pavilion. Bristol Golf Course covers an extensively remodelled historic parkland along the lower slopes and scarp to the south and south-west of Over. The southern edges of Almondsbury on both sides of the A38 and adjacent to the M5, include sports pitches some with lighting, parking, pavilions, and some tennis courts, fencing and ground modelling.

**12.56** Small areas of common land are dispersed across the LCA and include village greens, wide grass road verges, small fields, and rough grassland. A larger area on Almondsbury Hill comprises a linear open space of grassland overlooking the adjacent Levels.

**12.57** A few small disused quarries are located along steeper slopes, with some disused lead mines at Almondsbury Hill. Cattybrook Brickpit, to the west of Almondsbury, is an active quarry and brickworks. The disused section of the site is now designated as a SSSI for its geological interest. A large disused limestone quarry at Harnhill, to the north of Olveston, has been reclaimed as a landfill site.

**Photo 2: Characteristic small-scale rectilinear fields bound by hedgerows with mature trees. The church-tower of Thornbury is visible above the trees, with the wooded skyline of the Severn Ridge forming a backcloth behind.**



## Biodiversity

**12.58** The Severn Ridges provide an extensive mosaic of grassland, woodland and farmland that is crossed by a number of watercourses and ponds. Hedgerows provide ecological corridors and habitat for a diverse range of species.

**12.59** There are approximately 176 hectares of ancient woodland which represents roughly half of the total woodland within this character area. There are 28 SNCIs within this character area, comprising a mosaic of habitats including grassland and broadleaved woodland (including several large areas of ancient woodland), in recognition of their importance within the national context

## **LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**

for flora and fauna. Key species likely to be associated with the broadleaved woodland include bats and dormice both of which are present across the district and are European protected species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP). There appears to be good connectivity for species such as these between these habitats via hedgerows and scattered trees, however, the motorways may present a barrier to their movements.

**12.60** Eleven of the SNCI sites are designated for the calcareous, neutral, and marshy grassland, including species-rich grassland. This diverse habitat supports a range of invertebrates that provide a food source for mammals including bats. Ant hills are also a regular feature.

**12.61** There are many watercourses crossing the landscape that support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro- invertebrates to fish and otters. Ponds and pools within the area also support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

**12.62** Agricultural land use within this area is a patchwork of arable and pastoral farmland, the arable farmland providing habitat for many species of ground nesting and winter foraging by farmland birds including birds which have been listed as Globally Threatened Red listed species.

**12.63** Underground quarries and mines associated with the disused and working quarries across the LCA provide habitat for many species of bat, including European Protected Species. The two golf courses may present a mosaic of habitats which can be utilised by a diverse range of species if appropriately managed.

**12.64** South Gloucestershire Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor B: (Charfield-Alveston-Hallen (*Western Scarp/Severn Ridges*)) covers a significant proportion of the LCA, associated with the woodland strategic network on the along the Severn Ridge.

### Cultural Influences

#### Land Use and Time Depth

**12.65** Early settlement and land use is indicated by the presence of large, fortified enclosures (similar to hill forts) of prehistoric origin at Elberton and Stroud Common, west of Alveston. Hill Forts are also present at Camp Hill Fort above Rockhampton and Little Abbey Hill Fort (to the south of Thornbury), which is partly severed by the A38. A round barrow lies to the west of Alveston, on Alveston Down. All are Scheduled Monuments.

**12.66** The historic core of Thornbury is designated as a Conservation Area for its significance as a planned medieval settlement. Important features include the vernacular building style in limestone, Pennant sandstone and light-coloured render and the variety in streetscape enclosure with pavements of varying widths.

**12.67** There are three former 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 adjacent LCA 7) over the Severn ridgeline and down to the Old Gloucester Road.

#### Settlement and Infrastructure

**12.68** This is a relatively settled LCA, comprising a small town, villages, hamlets, and scattered building groups.

**12.69** Thornbury is the largest settlement within the area and is sited within an open 'bowl' landform, contained to the south, east and north by higher ground. It



## **LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**

is a planned medieval town, the historic linear form laid out along two main streets and their intersection. A stone castle and church are located to the north of the old town above a small valley. The west and northern aspect are open, with a rural outlook to the Severn Estuary. The old town walls, set within open space, form a locally important landscape feature, as do structures associated with the former railway line. The town has expanded significantly, with several large-scale residential and commercial developments around its boundaries, notably to the north and east.

**12.70** Alveston is situated on higher open ground of the Severn Ridge, to the south of Thornbury. It is an older, linear settlement of cottages and houses in a mix of limestone, Pennant sandstone and render, with stone boundary walls along a network of intersecting roads. More recent brick infill housing dominates a sizeable area of the village.

**12.71** There are numerous other villages scattered over the lower ridge slopes, set above the lowland Levels landscape to the west. The historic core of many of these settlements are designated as Conservation Areas, including Lower Almondsbury, Olveston and Tockington.

**12.72** Almondsbury is a ribbon settlement, with various clustered and scattered phases of development associated with the road network. The north-west and south-east linear settlement fringes relate closely to the ridge topography and face the Severn Estuary, elevated above the Levels. The original centre of Lower Almondsbury (a Conservation Area) is a crossroad settlement, centred around a manor house and church along the gentle lower slopes of the ridge, with scattered houses along the wooded scarp of Almondsbury Hill which provides a backdrop to the village. A mixture of more recent ribbon/ clustered development follows the A38 and B4055 along the upper slopes of the ridge. 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.

## **LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**

**12.73** 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 their older buildings are built from a variety of limestone, Pennant sandstone and conglomerate stone.

**12.74** Olveston is a linear settlement, based around two crossroads and a number of minor roads, with an 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 Monument) and church. A number of orchards lie along the settlement's periphery. Twentieth century housing development is clustered to the south-east, comprising reconstituted stone buildings.

**12.75** The neighbouring village of Tockington has developed around a village green and church at the junction of minor roads and lanes, sharing similar characteristics with Olveston. The extensive use of limestone walls to define property boundaries is a notable characteristic. 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.

**12.76** 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. Stone boundary walls are common between Rudgeway and Alveston. The B4055 extending south-west of Almondsbury, has a more 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.

**12.77** A number of smaller villages and hamlets are dotted throughout the lower slopes along the edge of the Levels. To the south, 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. To the north Rockhampton, Littleton-upon-Severn and Elberton are all associated with farms

## **LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**

and orchards, clustered at intersection of lanes, some with churches. Kingston, to the west of Thornbury, has a more scattered pattern of farms and houses along lanes.

**12.78** The remaining landscape between settlements has a regular scattering of farms. St. Arilda's Church of Oldbury on Severn is located within the LCA on an outlier of the Severn Ridge, forming a prominent landmark above the surrounding lower lying land. (The village of Oldbury-on-Severn lies in adjacent character area LCA 19).

**12.79** Cattybrook Claypit near Almondsbury includes large clay extraction and storage areas, as well as a brickworks. The large industrial building and chimney are locally prominent in views, set within the gentle slopes above the Levels.

**12.80** The area is crossed by a complex network of major and minor roads and lanes, connecting the numerous settlements. 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. Diverted around Thornbury in the early 19th century, Gloucester Road (now the A38) and connecting minor roads were historically a major influence on the settlement pattern within the area, engendering frequent roadside settlements.

**12.81** 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.

**12.82** 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

## **LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**

point, defines the skyline of a small, curved 'bowl', which recedes into the scarp to the south-west of Over Court. The M4/M5 interchange near Almondsbury 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.

**12.83** The South Wales to Bristol Railway line crosses the area south of Almondsbury. As the line is in cutting and surrounded by mature vegetation, it is well-integrated, minimising its visibility within the locality.

**12.84** A small solar farm located on the plateau to the south-west of Almondsbury (adjacent to the M5) is largely concealed from views.

**12.85** A dense network of public rights of way cross the area, including parts of the Jubilee Way and Forest of Avon Community Forest Path promoted routes. A Circular Ride route 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 runs east to west, undulating as it crosses the westward ridges towards the Estuary, passing Thornbury, to Littleton-upon-Severn and then the Estuary, Shoreline and Levels foreshore (LCA 20) beyond. The Community Forest Path 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 section of the Avon Cycleway regional route and part of National Cycle Network Route 41 passes through the west of the LCA, following quiet rural lanes at the foot of the scarp slope. Pockets of CROW Open Access Land on Almondsbury Hill and Spaniorum hill enable further recreational access to the landscape.

**Photo 3: St Arilda's Church (Grade II\* listed) perched on a small mound above the surrounding low-lying farmland.**



## Perceptual Influences

### Visual Character

**12.86** The Severn Ridges LCA is unified 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 landscape (LCAs 19 and 20).

**12.87** The Severn Ridges visually influence, and are influenced by, the adjoining Levels landscape (LCAs 19 and 20). The scarp provides frequent expansive views west over the adjacent flat, low-lying Levels, towards the Severn Estuary and across to South Wales and the Forest of Dean. Views are

## **LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**

most extensive from the upper scarp edge, including places such as Spaniorum Hill, Almondsbury Hill and Tockington Hill. Within this context, changing skies, the tidal pattern of the estuary, the colour and textured variety of this area and the Levels, form dynamic and highly distinct features in views from these elevated vantages. Similarly, the scarp slopes feature prominently in views from adjacent lowland landscapes and from South Wales and the Forest of Dean, providing the backdrop and physical containment to the Levels and Estuary.

**12.88** The western part of the LCA shares similar characteristics with the adjacent Levels (LCAs 19 and 20). Here, the very gently sloping landform and small-to-medium-scale hedgerow-bound field pattern results in a broad area of transition between the two areas, often without a distinct boundary. This is most notable to the north-west of Thornbury, near Littleton-upon-Severn and to the south-west at Easter Compton. The variety in landform, strong vegetation structure and pattern of frequent settlement, historic courts, parks, and roads produce areas of distinct local character.

**12.89** The northern scarp at Upper Hill and Rockhampton forms a visually prominent, gently scalloped ridgeline, with a simple vegetation structure. Frequent areas of mature woodland are interspersed with regular-shaped pasture fields (more irregular at Rockhampton), defined by clipped hedges and intermittent trees. 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 hedge banks 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).

**12.90** 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 (LCA 19).



## **LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**

**12.91** Further south, the ridge and wooded scarp forms a long landform extending from Rudgeway to Easter Compton. The slopes and upper edge are covered by a dense regular pattern of houses, well-integrated within the mature tree cover which forms a wooded skyline. The mix of mature Scots pines, the large orchard at Almondsbury, and ornamental trees associated with the historic courts and small landscaped parks create a visually textured and seasonally diverse landscape in views within the LCA and from the Levels. The commercial 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.

**12.92** The rounded promontory of Spaniorum Hill further south forms a prominent landmark visible from the Levels, with its distinctive wooded crown and pattern of dense overgrown hedges radiating towards the edge of the Levels. The scarp south of Spaniorum Hill has a simple structure of continuous woodland, finishing abruptly at Hallen, and forms an angular silhouette above the flat Levels.

**12.93** The south-east facing dip slope in the south-west of the LCA is distinctly different in character, strongly influenced by the M5 and urban edge of Bristol. Haw Wood forms an important feature in the landscape, although the character of this area is mainly 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. The wooded ridgeline at Mount Skitham near Hallen forms an important rural backcloth in views from Bristol and its western fringes, including in important views from Blaise Castle historic parkland (within the City of Bristol). The large commercial development of Cribbs Causeway, to the south of the M5 (within LCA 15) is prominent from the M5 corridor and visible on the scarp's skyline.

**12.94** To the south of Almondsbury, the landscape is a simple pattern of regular shaped pasture fields, clipped hedges, small copses, and occasional Scots Pine trees. 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.

## **LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**

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.

**12.95** More widely across this character area, small, dispersed settlements nestle within the landscape, linked by an intricate pattern of lanes following the landform, 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 'patchwork' landscape, which helps to integrate settlement, often resulting in a semi-enclosed character. Older settlements are typically well-integrated within a strong vegetation framework. Their layout and common use of local stone (including limestone, Pennant sandstone and conglomerate, with geological variations in between) influence local character. The villages of Olveston and Tockington have a distinct pattern of village greens and spaces defined by largely historic stone buildings, walls, and network of rural lanes.

**12.96** The churches of Rockhampton, Thornbury, Oldbury-on-Severn, Elberton, Olveston and Almondsbury are all located on elevated ground, forming prominent landmarks in local views.

**12.97** The extensive expansion of Thornbury is prominent within local views from elevated ground of the Severn Ridge. Despite the size of the town, the vegetation 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.

**12.98** Along the upper edge of the Severn Ridge, concentrations of ribbon settlement and scattered houses are associated with the A38 and B4055. These routes generally closely follow the edge of this landform. 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. Vegetation including Scots pine and garden vegetation generally integrates these properties, the A38 and its traffic and largely limits buildings being visible against the skyline. Ribbon development in Easter Compton has

## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

extended significantly beyond the older core of the village, with more recent housing and infill introducing a suburban character along the B4055 in an otherwise rural area.

**12.99** The concentration of industrial complexes and chemical works within the adjacent Pilning 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 Bridges 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.

**12.100** The reactor buildings of the existing Oldbury Power Station, located on the shoreline of the Oldbury Levels (LCA 21) forms a prominent large-scale structure in long views west, often seen against the expanse of the Severn Estuary and distant ridgeline of the Forest of Dean, or in silhouette against the sky. The chimney at Cattybrook Claypit forms a local landmark, seen in silhouette within local views. However, the quarry itself is generally well screened.

**12.101** The visual impact of the M5 has increased over time due to carriageway widening, loss of vegetation, and construction of overhead gantries which are prominent in views from the surrounding landscape, particularly where the motorway is on embankment.

**12.102** The visual and audible effects of the motorway traffic and infrastructure are a significant detractor from the rural character along the M5 corridor, particularly in the south-east from where the motorway is visible along the skyline near Haw Wood. 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.

## **LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge**

**12.103** The M4 has wider effects, descending the open rural slopes of the Severn Ridge. Here, the sweeping landform of the Sheepcombe Valley is visually interrupted by the M4 on high embankment, which 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.

**12.104** A number of overhead electricity lines on steel pylons cross the ridges and scarp, generally east to west. Several of these extend around Thornbury, with two connecting to the decommissioned Oldbury Power Station on the Levels. Mature tree cover and undulating landform reduce their visual influence to some degree, however, the large-scale vertical pylon towers and linearity of powerlines form prominent vertical structures within the context of the open rolling landform, exaggerated where multiple towers are visible against the skyline.

**Photo 4: View west from Buckover illustrating the setting of Thornbury with scattered farmsteads across the rural landscape and views towards the estuary beyond.**



### Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**12.105** The sense of tranquillity across much of the eastern part of the ridge is limited due to the presence of major transport routes and settlements. In the north-west where the land transitions to the Levels around Rockhampton, Kington, and Hill there is a stronger sense of tranquillity resulting from the sparser settlement pattern and absence of major roads or modern development. Similarly, pockets of dark skies exist in the north-west, with localised areas of light pollution around Thornbury and throughout much of the southern part of the LCA, as well as along the M5 corridor and on the edge of Bristol.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**12.106** Three Visually Important Hillsides are located within this LCA. The Severn Ridge itself is a Visually Important Hillside (VIH), extending along the full length of this LCA. This includes the outlier hills of Catherine Hill, Eastcombe Hill, and two unnamed hills to the north and south of Cowhill.

**12.107** Part of the Eastwood Park Spur VIH falls within the north of the LCA, its western extent straddling the edge of the LCA and forming a physical boundary between Rockhampton to the west and the M5 to the east.

**12.108** Upper Hill VIH defines the northern extent of this LCA and comprises a series of steep scarp slopes which descend from a plateau at the top of the hill.

**12.109** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

### Strategic Viewpoints

**12.110** Seven Strategic Viewpoints are located within this LCA. They are:

- SVP 3: Almondsbury Scenic Viewpoint: Provides a panoramic view that takes in the notable landscape features of the levels, Severn Estuary and hills of South Wales, the historic settlement of Almondsbury, and the landmark features of The Church of St Mary, the Severn Bridge and the Prince of Wales Bridge.
- SVP 4: Old Down: Provides a panoramic view that takes in the notable landscape features of the Levels, the wooded slopes of the Severn Ridges, the Severn Estuary and the hills of the Wye Valley and South Wales, and the landmark features of St John's Church, the Severn Bridge and the Prince of Wales Bridge
- SVP 5: Whitewall Lane (Buckover): Provides a panoramic view that demonstrates the relationship between Thornbury within its 'bowl' landform setting, takes in the notable landscape features of the levels, the hills of the Severn Ridges and Eastwood Park Spur, the Severn Estuary and the hills of the Wye Valley and South Wales, and the landmark features of St Mary's Church, Oldbury Power Station and the Severn Bridge.
- SVP 6: St Michael's Church (Hill Court): Provides a panoramic view that takes in the notable landscape features of the levels, the Severn Estuary and the hills of the Wye Valley and South Wales, and the landmark features of Oldbury Power Station, the Severn Bridge and the Prince of Wales Bridge; and is a designed viewpoint from the locally registered historic park of Hill Court.
- SVP 7: Spaniorum Hill: Provides a panoramic view that takes in the notable landscape features of the levels, Severn Estuary and hills of South Wales, the historic settlement of Almondsbury, and the landmark features of The Church of St Mary, the Severn Bridge and the Prince of Wales Bridge.
- SVP 15: Saint Arilda's Church (Oldbury-on-Severn): Provides a panoramic view that takes in the notable landscape features of the levels, Severn Estuary and hills of the Wye Valley and South Wales, and the landmark



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features of the Severn Bridge, the Prince of Wales Bridge, Oldbury Power Station and Berkley Power Station.

- SVP 23: Woodwell Meadow: Provides a panoramic view across the lower-lying levels towards the Severn Estuary and beyond to the wooded hills of the Wye Valley and South Wales, taking in the landmark features of the Severn Bridge and Prince of Wales Bridge.

**12.111** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Value Features

- Distinctive scarp slope which is prominent in views from surrounding landscapes and forms a rural backdrop to the adjacent Levels landscape.
- Ecologically important woodland and grassland habitats, including nationally designated sites.
- Well-wooded character with visually prominent mature wooded scarps including areas of ancient woodland, hedgerow trees and occasional ornamental species within historic parks.
- Historic assets including prehistoric enclosures and hill forts which reflect the long history of human settlement and land use in the area.
- The rural character, particularly in the west and in transition to the Levels, enhanced by the presence of small settlements and farms with a local vernacular of stone and render.
- Extensive open views west afforded from many parts of the ridge.
- Recreational access provided a network of public rights of way, including locally promoted routes and small areas of Open Access land.

## The Changing Landscape

**12.112** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Severn Ridges LCA.

### Climate Change

- Change in woodland species composition and increased prevalence of pest and disease as a result of warmer average temperatures which could impact this well-wooded landscape.
- Changes to flow rates of watercourses and resulting impacts on riparian and aquatic habitats and species. Aquatic species including Great Crested newts are vulnerable to any loss of habitat including the terrestrial habitat around ponds as well as the ponds themselves.
- Pressure for locating renewable energy developments within the South Gloucestershire landscape to contribute towards maximising the generation of renewable energy from installations (as set out in South Gloucestershire's Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-2030). The elevated ridgeline would be particularly sensitive to the introduction of wind turbines which would form prominent vertical structures on the skyline.

### Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- The widespread loss of mature hedgerow trees through Dutch Elm Disease during the late 20th century, 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.
- An increased recognition of the landscape and biodiversity importance of orchards is helping to arrest their decline, and they still remain an integral

## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

feature of older farms and small settlements, contributing greatly to local character.

- An increase in tree planting is required to contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may include the establishment of new native woodlands, broad hedgerows, or parkland trees, in order to enhance connectivity with existing woodlands (including ancient woodland) and other semi-natural habitats in adjacent character areas, as set out in the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy. This may change the character of the expansive views afforded from the Severn Ridge.

## Land Use and Cover

- Limited management, expansion of recreational uses, pressure of use from nearby urban populations and sometimes farm diversification, have eroded the intactness of its rural characteristics in some areas.
- The openness of the views from some locations (e.g., Almondsbury Hill) will diminish if self-seeded trees on the scarp slopes below grow both in height and extent if not appropriately managed. Conversely, loss of over-mature trees may result in new views opening up along the ridge.
- Areas of calcareous and neutral grassland are declining. Encroachment of scrub or trees onto ecologically important grassland would also result in a loss and pressure from recreational use can also result in the loss of or otherwise harm this habitat.
- 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 that are planted or allowed to develop.
- The distinctive character of historic small landscape parks which contribute to the textured scarp, are sensitive to management issues. In the long term, the ornamental landscape framework will be eroded without new planting to replace the ornamental tree structure.

## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

- Rural character is being eroded, particularly near the fringes of these settlement areas, by changes in land use from agriculture to recreation, with sports grounds and golf courses and 'horsiculture' as well as recreational land uses such as an outdoor activity centre and paintballing site at Spaniorum Hill.
- Farm diversification has introduced large buildings into the rural landscape in the north of the area, as well as restructuring the landscape, with the loss of hedges, introduction of features such as timber fences, car parks, tall metal fences and light columns at sports grounds, and earth raising at golf courses such as at Bristol Golf Course near Almondsbury.
- Equestrian land use has resulted in the subdivision of fields with fencing, the introduction of stables, storage, structures and lighting as well as the potential for over grazing and consequent 'poaching' of the ground. These changes affect the visual texture of the land cover and erode the rural character of the landscape, as well as potentially disturbing wildlife.
- The effects of road infrastructure, including lighting and signage, often extend beyond the road corridor. Increased traffic on rural lanes is eroding landscape features, while highway improvements along rural roads and lanes also have the potential to introduce new urban materials, design features, signage and lighting within a previously rural road network.

## Development

- Expansion of Thornbury to the north, east and west, 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.
- Extensive ongoing residential development on the edge of Thornbury (and smaller residential developments on the settlement edge of Alveston) has significantly altered the settlement form, encroaching into surrounding countryside and increasing the extent of the urban character.
- 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

## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

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.

- A large mixed use development site adjacent to Cribbs Causeway (including extensive ongoing residential development) partially falls within this LCA, imparting a strong urban character.
- Further expansion of Olveston beyond the containment of its natural shallow bowl setting and onto the surrounding rising slopes, is likely to be more visually prominent.
- The spread of fencing or walling and some ornamental planting and Leylandii hedges within gardens along the A38 and within the wider rural landscape has eroded the rural characteristics of some sections of this corridor.
- Further expansion of industrial developments in adjacent character areas and along the Severn Estuary 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. 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.
- Changes to significant built infrastructure in adjacent character areas, including the existing Oldbury Power Station in LCA 21. Demolition is currently in progress and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority currently anticipates final site clearance in 2080. Current adopted South Gloucestershire planning policy states that nuclear new build on the adjacent 150-hectare nationally-designated nuclear new build site should reuse land and infrastructure associated with the existing power station site where possible, resulting in a change to views west from the Severn Ridge.
- The extensive road network introduces pressures for change, particularly through built development and/or recreation. The rural character of some lanes and minor roads is also subject to erosion both through the pressure of traffic on verges and hedges and also from highway improvement schemes.



## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

- The spread of new or tall structures such as telecommunication masts or the introduction of wind turbines in this area or other nearby character areas has the potential to intrude on the rural skyline.
- An extension of the zoological garden (Bristol Zoo Project) is currently in progress but remains contained within historic parkland and woodland at Hollywood Tower, extending down the slopes from the Severn Ridge. The existing landscape features are retained and the extension is well-integrated into the landscape.

## Guidance

**12.113** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the overarching management strategy objectives of the South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment, as set out in Chapter 4.

### Landscape Strategy

### Landscape Management

- Actively manage vegetation including hedgerows, hedgerow trees, and woodland, to maintain landscape character and to frame and maintain characteristic views across the adjacent Levels landscape and the estuary.
- Encourage succession planting to ensure long term protection of the wooded character of the ridgeline as a rural backcloth.
- Establish small native woodlands and/or natural regeneration corridors to link ridge top ancient woodland areas north of Thornbury and to reinforce the woodland and parkland landscape structure to its east, to consolidate the woodland corridor centred on the M5 (south of Junction 15), and to extend the woodland framework across the higher land to

## LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

Littleton on Severn, whilst conserving other priority habitats, historic monuments and views.

- Maintain and enhance traditional orchards, parkland trees and woodland within the various historic parks, to maintain the landscape character and to meet the South Gloucestershire 15% target for increased tree cover.
- Conserve the rural character of the visually prominent Severn Ridges and associated hills, and the Thornbury 'bowl' landform.
- Conserve and enhance the landscape setting of Thornbury, Almondsbury, Olveston, and Tockington Conservation Areas, together with key views towards and from them.
- Conserve views to Grade I listed churches and Thornbury Castle, which form landmarks in the local landscape.
- Preserve the rural tranquillity of the landscape, particularly to the north and west of the character area.

### Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Conserve and appropriately manage the important grassland habitats, both as habitat and in contributing towards the maintenance of characteristic and panoramic views. Seek opportunities to expand the strategic grassland network.
- Encourage new tree planting to maintain and/ or reinstate the parkland character of the historic parks scattered across the character area.
- Establish individual and small groups of trees in/ adjacent to streets, greenspaces and school grounds addressing inequalities in tree canopy cover and with a strong community dimension to their location, size and care.
- Expand and reconnect woodlands to improve ecological connectivity along the ridges, including ancient woodlands at Haw Wood, Blackhorse Wood and Spaniorum Hill.

- Protect and restore remaining areas of traditional orchard and seek opportunities to create new ones to strengthen landscape character and enhance biodiversity value. Prioritise those not covered by grant schemes, working to maintain locally distinctive varieties.

### Development Management

- Consider the impact of development in the Levels (in particular, the scale, massing, and appearance of continuing new development at Severnside), on views from, and the setting and character of the Severn Ridges;
- New development should seek to respect the characteristic steeply sloping landform of the area and avoid unsympathetic cut and fill.
- Protect the 'open closes' on the west of the historic core of Thornbury, and open spaces of Tockington.
- Encourage the use of local materials and building styles in new developments to reinforce the particular and varying landscape and settlement characters found across this character area.
- Any new vertical development should avoid dominating, or visually competing with, landmark heritage assets or undisturbed rural landscapes or skylines in the character area.
- Ensure that new development respects and integrates with the historic pattern of the host landscape or the settlement pattern of small, dispersed hamlets, villages, towns and scattered building groups.
- Encourage the use of limestone, pennant sandstone, conglomerate to render building materials to compliment the local vernacular and reinforce local distinctiveness.
- Ensure new renewable energy developments are sensitively designed and sited to reduce their impact on views within and to the Severn Ridge, avoiding prominent slopes and open skylines.

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# **South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment**

Supplementary Planning Document

**South Gloucestershire Council**

**Final Draft Report proposed for adoption**

Prepared by LUC

February 2025

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South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment



# **Chapter 13: Estuary, Shoreline and Levels LCT**

LCA 19: Oldbury Levels

LCA 20: Pilning Levels

LCA 21: Severn Shoreline and Estuary



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**Note: Each chapter is produced as a separate document for ease of reading and navigation.**

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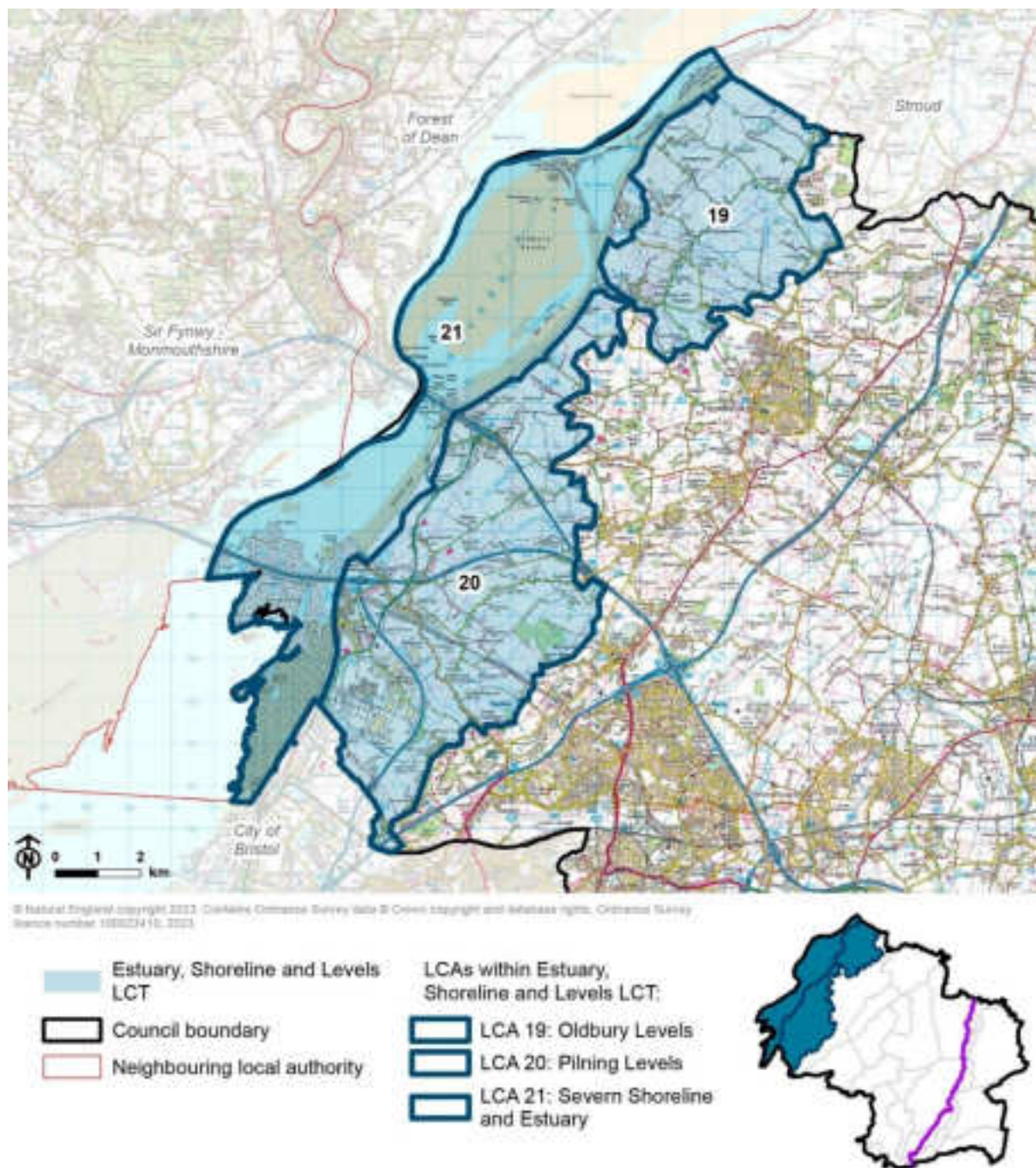
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## Chapter 13

### Estuary, Shoreline & Levels LCT

Figure 13.1: Location of Estuary, Shoreline & Levels LCT



# Description

**13.1** The Estuary, Shoreline and Levels LCT extends 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.

**13.2** The Severn Estuary and intertidal zone is of national and European ecological importance, and is covered by multiple nature conservation designations which reflect its significance. Further information is provided separately in relevant South Gloucestershire Council policy documents.

## Key Characteristics

- The tidal edge of the Severn Estuary is characterised by mudflats, exposed rock and salt marsh warth.
- The Levels consist of mixed of arable and pastoral farmland, divided by a regular framework of streams and man-made rhines. Hedges and pollarded trees typically follow the pattern of rhines.
- Woodlands are typically small but visually prominent in the largely flat and open landscape.
- Settlements consists of scattered farms and hamlets located on the edge of the Levels or situated on slightly higher ground. These settlements are visible when viewed across the landscape, with churches forming local landmarks.
- Large-scale industrial units in the south of the area are visually prominent in the open landscape. The existing 60m-high Oldbury Power Station reactors and other associated buildings form a prominent landmark in the north.
- Several major transport corridors including the M4, M48, M49 and the main London to South Wales railway line pass through the landscape,

## Estuary, Shoreline & Levels LCT

supported by a complex network of minor rural lanes which connect the scattered farms and hamlets.

- The two Severn Bridges are prominent in views and are nationally distinctive landmarks.

## Landscape Character Areas

**13.3** The Estuary, Shoreline and Levels LCT is subdivided into three LCAs:

- LCA 19: Oldbury Levels
- LCA 20: Pilning Levels
- LCA 21: Severn Shoreline and Estuary



## LCA 19: Oldbury Levels

The Oldbury Levels landscape character area (LCA) is a largely flat, open to semi-enclosed farmland divided by rhines (ditches), with small orchards and relatively sparse scattered settlement. It is strongly influenced by the adjacent Severn Estuary.

**Photo 1: A small pastoral field enclosed by rhines, typical of the Levels landscape.**

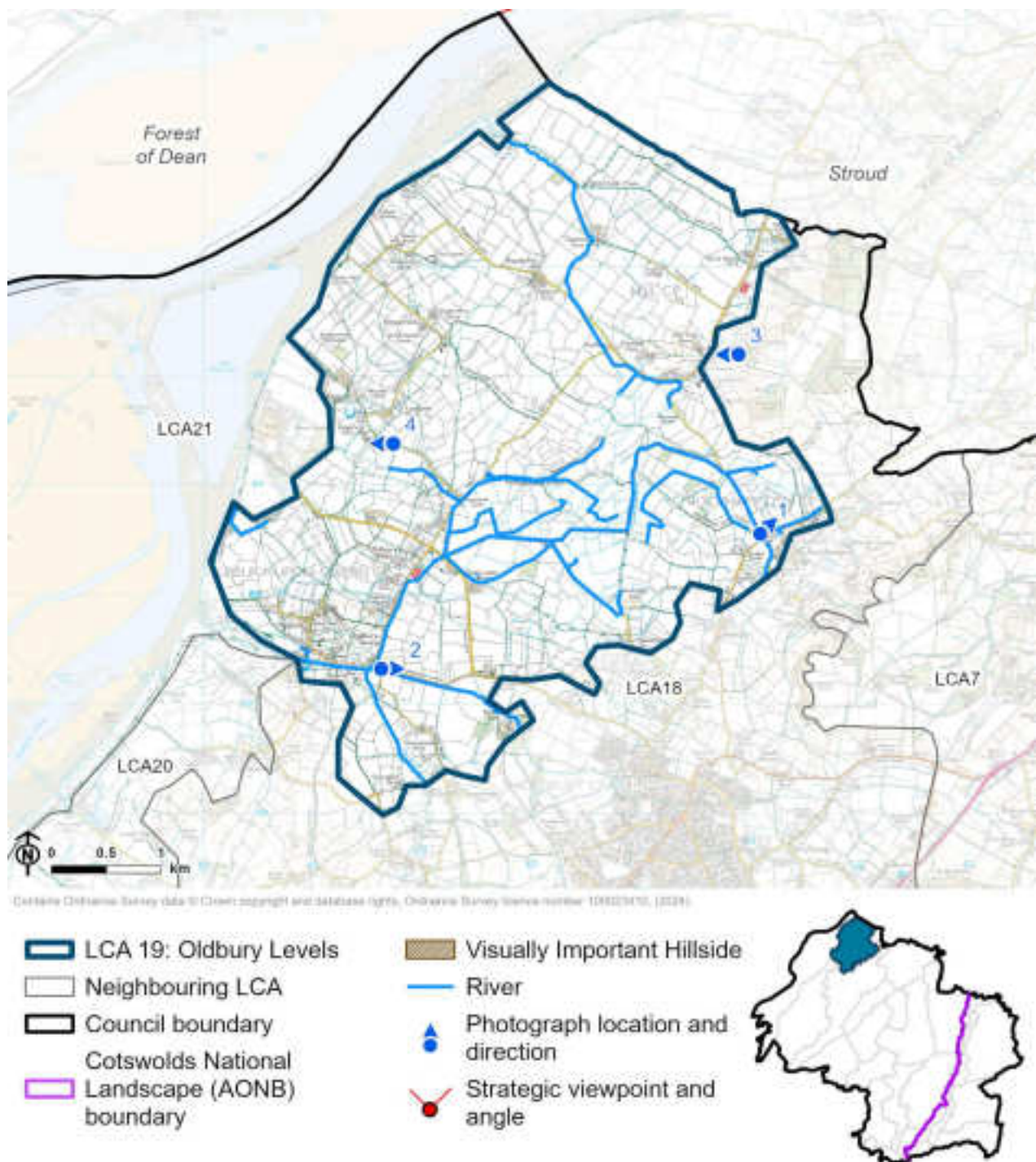


### Location

**13.4** The Oldbury Levels landscape character area is located in the north-west of 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 to the east. The boundary largely follows the 10-metre contour, although in some places the topographic change is imperceptible. The western boundary follows the sea wall, which marks a distinct change in land cover between the enclosed fields of the Levels and the open intertidal area of rough grassland, warths (salt marsh) and mudflats to the west, where the open expanse of the Estuary is dominant. The boundary excludes Oldbury Power Station complex, as this is more strongly associated with the Estuary edge.

## LCA 19: Oldbury Levels

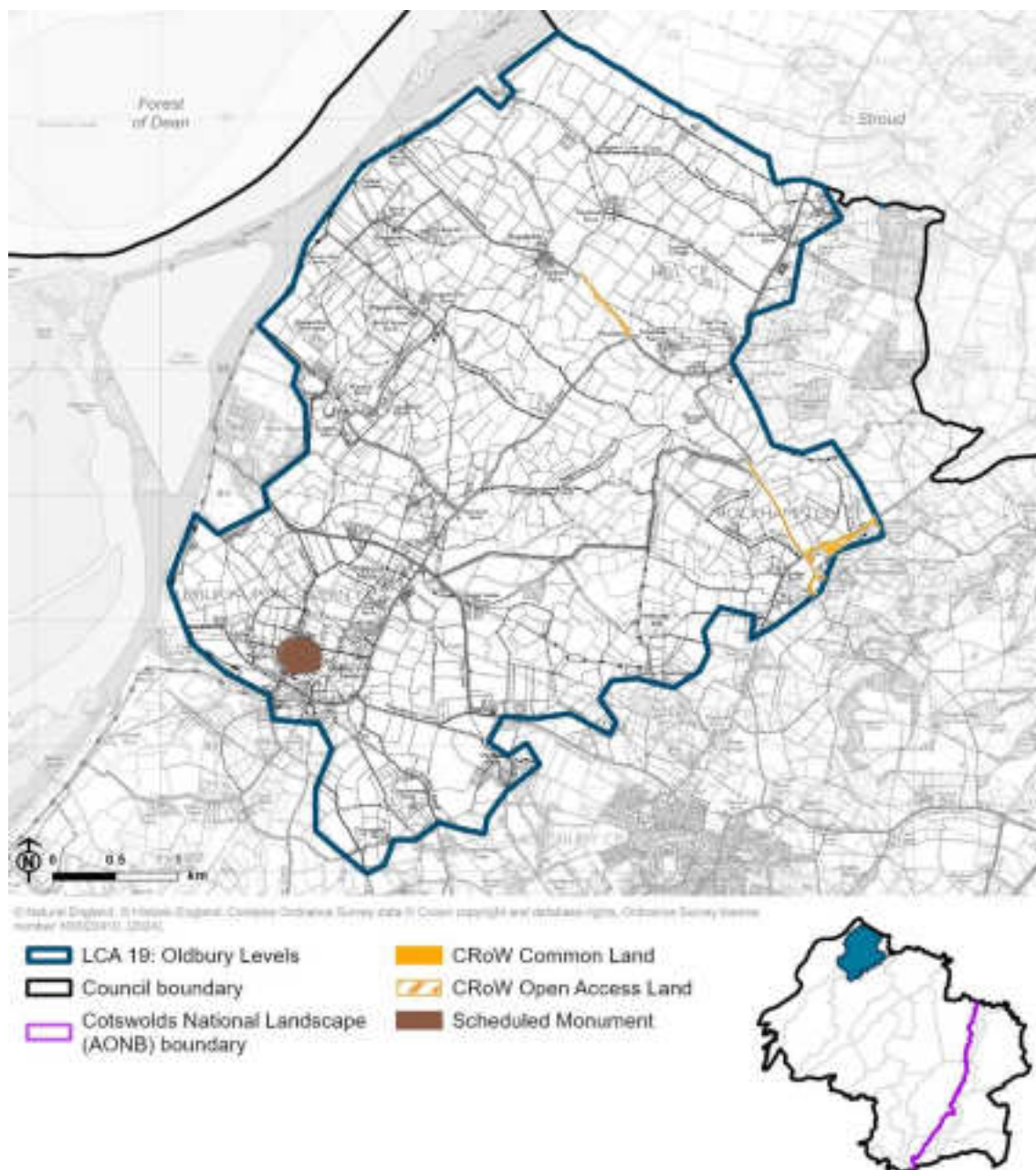
**Figure 13.2: Location and Landscape context of LCA 19: Oldbury Levels**





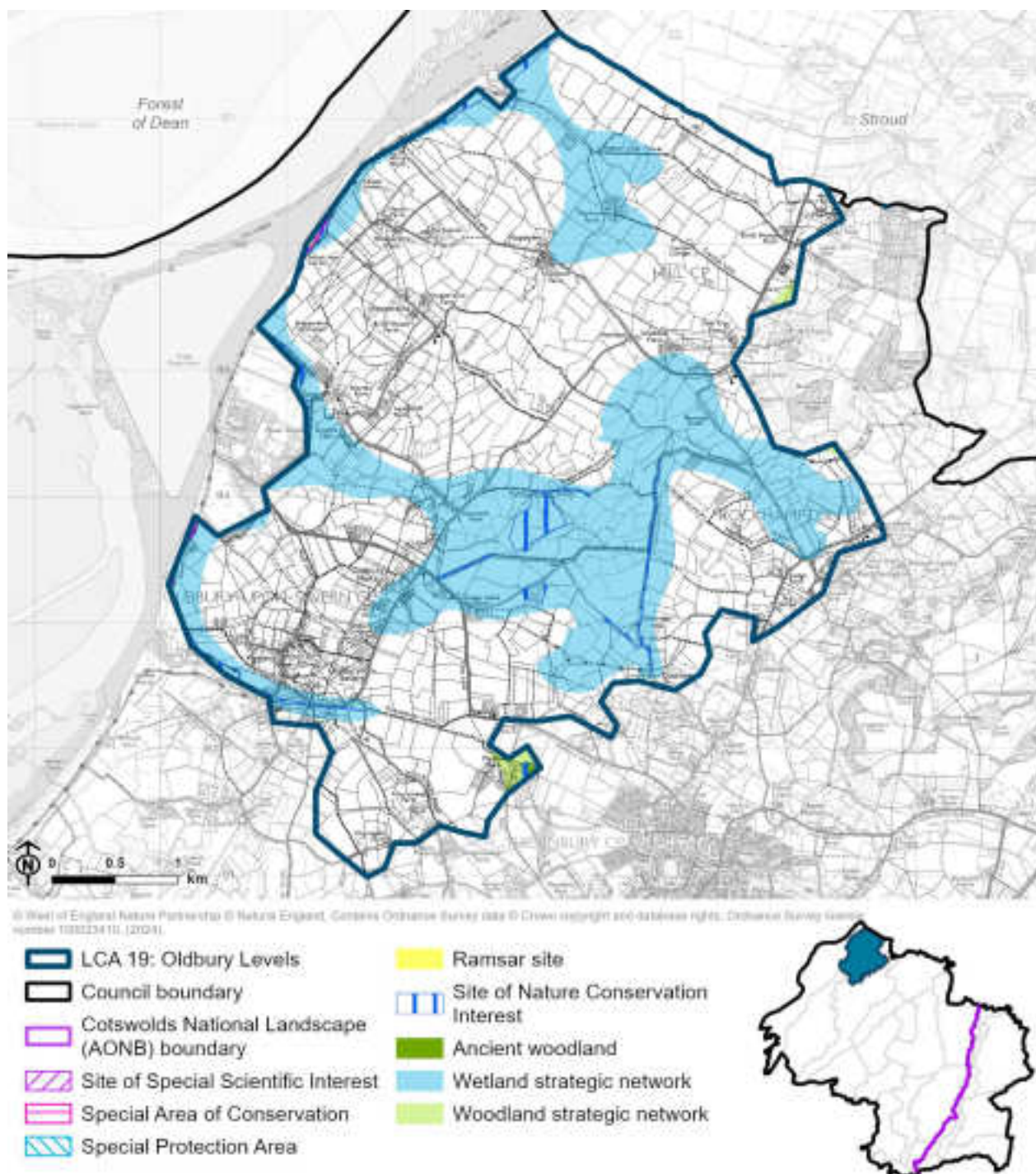
## LCA 19: Oldbury Levels

**Figure 13.3: Development and Heritage context of LCA 19: Oldbury Levels**



## LCA 19: Oldbury Levels

**Figure 13.4: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 19: Oldbury Levels**



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- Flat landscape of small to medium sized pastoral fields, both regular and irregular in shape occasionally punctuated by isolated knolls.
- Field pattern is frequently defined by a network of rhines, often supplemented by hedges, which are a mixture of both closely clipped and overgrown.
- A historic landscape dating as far back as the Roman period, underlain by alluvial deposits of high archaeological potential, containing deposits of prehistoric origin. Some medieval ridge and furrow survives.
- Small scattered deciduous woodlands and copses, with frequent hedgerow trees, occasional pollarded trees, some withy beds, and small orchards associated with farms. Some areas have very little tree cover.
- Neutral and marshy grassland across this character area provides visual texture and support a diverse range of flora, while pastoral farmland provides overwintering habitat for birds associated with the adjacent international designated Severn Estuary.
- A limited but regular distribution of often historic settlements, largely built of stone, with some brick. Much of the Levels are sparsely populated.
- An intricate network of angular, enclosed lanes, often following the historic drainage pattern. Lanes are occasionally flanked by broad grass verges, common land and rhines.
- Unpaved trackways provide wider connections and recreational value throughout the Levels.
- Open to semi-enclosed landscape, with a strong visual influence of the estuary and extensive views west to the Wye Valley / Forest of Dean , and east to the Severn Ridge. The area provides a rural setting in views of the Severn Bridge.
- Localised enclosure is formed by mature trees, hedgerows, orchards and copses.



## LCA 19: Oldbury Levels

- Oldbury Power Station and its radiating powerlines form large-scale, visually prominent elements on the open skyline and feature in views from the ridges, thereby influencing the visual character of the area.
- A rural landscape with a remote and tranquil character, with dark night skies.

## Natural Influences

### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**13.5** 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 results in a very flat, low-lying landscape. With the exception of slightly higher ground to the west of Hill (19 metres AOD), Henridge Hill (17 metres AOD) and Oldbury-on-Severn (14 metres AOD), the topography generally lies at or below 10 metres AOD.

**13.6** 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 above the adjacent natural ground level. Flood defences have been a feature along the edge of the estuary since at least the mid-18th century. Some of the rhines date 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' (a subtle linear shallow bank landform similar to ridge and furrow) provide drainage to the rhine network.

**13.7** The dense pattern of tributaries covers an extensive area in the east of the LCA at Rockhampton Rhine, flowing west to join the broad meandering tidal channel of Oldbury Pill at Oldbury-on-Severn. In the north, a simple, regular

## **LCA 19: Oldbury Levels**

pattern of north-west flowing channels discharge into the small Hill Pill. The drainage pattern across the Levels is evident primarily from higher ground to the east of this area, the pills being visible where they discharge into the Severn. Few of the rhines are named on OS maps (1:25,000 Explorer range), yet most have local names, contributing to local identity, distinctiveness, and sense of place.

### **Land Cover**

**13.8** Land cover is predominantly pastoral with occasional areas of arable land, particularly to north of Oldbury of Severn and fringing the Estuary to the north of Nupdown. The field pattern is diverse, with distinct areas defined by rhines. Hedgerows include a combination of clipped, overgrown and laid hedges which follow the Rockhampton Rhine drainage pattern, forming an intricate pattern of small to medium-scale fields. Rhines typically include open standing water, and there are several small in-field ponds scattered across the LCA. 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. The underlying soil layers have been laid down over time and are of significant archaeological potential, although much of the area is unsurveyed.

**13.9** Fields adjacent to the Severn Estuary typically comprise a mix of small to medium-scale regular fields with some narrow strip fields, often orientated in alignment with the sea wall and the estuary. To the north of Nupdown Road, fields are typically larger, with a more balanced and regular pattern.

**13.10** Tree cover is variable in structure and distribution, comprising small, scattered woodlands and copses, including withy coppice beds and poplars, as well as deciduous hedgerow trees, mature specimens, and pollards scattered within hedgerows and fields. The area around Rockhampton Rhines has a frequent pattern of mature hedgerow trees and isolated specimen trees, following the line of former hedgerows. In contrast, the Levels west of Upper Hill have very few trees. Near settlements, the tree and hedgerow structure becomes more diverse, with orchards commonly associated with farms

## LCA 19: Oldbury Levels

throughout the area. There are some non-native trees such as Leylandii conifers near Oldbury-on-Severn.

### **Photo 2: A typical rhine along Pickedmoor Lane near Oldbury on Severn.**



## Biodiversity

**13.11** This pastoral landscape with its mosaic of grassland, watercourses and rhines, ponds, and scattered tree cover, connected by wildlife corridors including hedgerows make the Oldbury Levels an important habitat for a diverse range of species. The pastoral land presents an important roosting and foraging opportunity for the over-wintering birds associated with the internationally and nationally designated Severn Estuary and its associated species.

**13.12** Tree cover is relatively sparse, with just 32 hectares of woodland, much of which is made up of orchards, and just over one hectare designated as ancient woodland. Parkmill Covert and Kingswood broadleaved woodlands are

## LCA 19: Oldbury Levels

designated as SNCIs. Key species likely to be associated with the broadleaved woodland include bats and dormice both of which are present across the district and are European protected species and priority species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP).

**13.13** The mosaic of neutral and marshy grassland, rhines and estuarine habitats comprise a number of SNCI designations, reflecting the national significance of these habitats for flora and fauna. This diverse habitat supports a range of invertebrates which in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats. The strong hedgerow network and associated rhines provide ecological corridors between adjacent areas and enhance habitat connectivity.

**13.14** Large numbers of over-wintering birds drawn to the Severn Estuary are a seasonal feature of the Levels, both in the fields and overhead.

**13.15** Numerous watercourses (including rhines) criss-cross the landscape, supporting a diverse range of species from aquatic macro- invertebrates to fish, water vole and otters. Ponds and pools within the area support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

**13.16** South Gloucestershire Strategic Blue-Green Infrastructure Corridor A: (Shepperdine-Oldbury on Severn-Severn Beach (*Severn Estuary and Levels*)) covers the majority of this LCA, encompassing the wetland strategic network and habitats associated with the Severn Estuary. A small area of Green Infrastructure Corridor B (Charfield-Alveston-Hallen (*Western Scarp/Severn Ridges*)) fringes the north-eastern boundary of the LCA, incorporating the woodland strategic network along the adjacent Severn Ridge.

## Cultural Influences

### Land Use and Time Depth

**13.17** Early settlement and land use is indicated by the presence of Oldbury Camp Iron Age Hillfort (also known as Toot Hill Fort), a Scheduled Monument,

## **LCA 19: Oldbury Levels**

located to the north of Oldbury-on-Severn on a slight rise above the surrounding Levels. Many of the historic farmhouses in the area are nationally listed.

**13.18** The Levels have a history of land reclamation dating back to Roman and medieval periods. The continual pastoral land use of the Levels has resulted in little ground disturbance and as a result, remnant ridge and furrow patterns within pasture fields are frequent, contributing to the sense of time-depth in the landscape. Although the archaeological value and content 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.

## **Settlement and Infrastructure**

**13.19** Settlement within the area is relatively sparse, comprising the village of Oldbury-on-Severn, with occasional hamlets and scattered farmsteads dotted along the lanes across the landscape.

**13.20** Oldbury-on-Severn comprises a linear village focussed on a crossroads, with settlement strung out along a number of small lanes. Buildings are generally built in sandstone and brick. The hamlet of Rockhampton, located in the east of the LCA at the toe of the Severn Ridge comprises a dispersed pattern of sandstone and render farms, cottages and houses along lanes, interspersed with linear areas of grass common land. A rectory and church create a focal point for the settlement. Shepperdine comprises a dispersed rural hamlet lying close to the sea wall and north-east of the existing nuclear power station (located within LCA 21). Elsewhere, 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. In the north-east of the LCA (within Hill Parish) the medieval settlement layout remains relatively unchanged, consisting of a linear pattern of farms on the edge of the Levels, and isolated farmsteads within the Levels themselves. Large areas, 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 LCA 14: Kingswood).

## **LCA 19: Oldbury Levels**

**13.21** A number of modern agricultural sheds are grouped around farms in the south-west of the LCA, notably near Oldbury Power Station.

**13.22** The character area is crossed by a network of minor unclassified lanes and roads, their sometimes-angular pattern strongly influenced and determined by the rhines, which often edge these routes. Lengths of lanes are occasionally unenclosed by field boundaries and flanked by broad grass verges of common land (for example near Rockhampton). A number of named, unpaved lanes (often defined as bridleways), connect with the local road network.

**13.23** The area is well connected by public rights of way including the Severn Way long distance footpath, which runs along the sea wall at the western edge of the character area affording intermittent views across the Oldbury levels. A dense pattern of footpaths radiate from Oldbury-on-Severn, with frequent inter-connections. Elsewhere, they follow straight, long courses cutting across fields, often guided by the pattern of field boundaries or rhines. The pattern of bridleways largely echoes the angular form of the lane network and often follows un-metalled tracks. One of a series of Circular Rides 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. National Cycle Network route 41 runs northwards through the LCA, following the rural lanes.



**Photo 3: The dispersed pattern of traditional farmsteads among pastoral farmland near Hill, with views to Oldbury Power Station and the South Wales hills beyond.**



## Perceptual Influences

### Visual Character

**13.24** The Oldbury Levels comprise a flat and semi-enclosed to open lowland landscape, with the Severn Ridges forming a backdrop to the east. The landscape structure is influenced greatly by the pattern of rhines, particularly in unpopulated areas, which in turn largely defines the vegetation structure and the alignment of lanes.

## **LCA 19: Oldbury Levels**

**13.25** Visual enclosure is provided by the strong vegetation structure. Where the landscape is more open, there are views to the distant backdrops of the Severn Ridges to the east and wooded skyline of the Forest of Dean to the west, emphasising the scale of the Levels area. The visual inter-relationship of the Severn Ridge and the Levels is important, with views to listed buildings, Scheduled Monuments and historic landscapes on the ridge contributing to the character of the Levels.

**13.26** Mature trees and pollards provide enclosure and texture to the Rockhampton Rhine landscape, with clipped or overgrown hedges defining the irregular field pattern. The rest of the LCA largely comprises regular shaped fields bounded by clipped hedges, with limited tree cover and occasional orchards, which results in a relatively open character, particularly in areas of larger field size, such as the area to the north of Nupdown Road. The pattern of angular lanes, often fringed by broad grass verges edged by water filled rhines, is a distinctive feature of the LCA.

**13.27** Settlement punctuates the landscape, largely of traditional farmsteads, cottages and houses which edge or contain the lane network. 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. They are typically well-integrated within the rural fabric, due to the low-lying topography and 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, perched on an elevated knoll (within the Severn Ridges LCA) is a prominent and distinctive landmark, visible from some distance.

**13.28** The existing Oldbury Power Station is prominent in many views from this LCA, its large-scale industrial built form (particularly the pale blue and grey striped reactor buildings) strongly contrast with the otherwise rural character of the area. The dominance of this structure within the landscape significantly increases with proximity, and 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 powerlines and their towers converging at the power station are also prominent, often seen in silhouette against the skyline.

## **LCA 19: Oldbury Levels**

**13.29** Large modern farm sheds are locally prominent in places, owing to the scale and height of the structures and materials used, which contrast in form and texture to the older buildings, although where set behind older buildings and/or within the strong vegetation structure they are generally better integrated. The flat landform, combined with low hedges, limited hedgerow trees and small woodlands produce an open to semi-enclosed textured landscape. Medium to distant views are possible from open lanes and from occasional high points at Oldbury-on-Severn and Rockhampton, towards the Severn Ridges to the east, 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 'brightness' to the edge of the area. The sea wall along the western boundary forms a barrier to views close to the estuary from the landward side, but itself offers views into the landscape from the Severn Way footpath which runs along its top.

**13.30** Several overhead powerlines on lattice pylons cross the area, radiating from Oldbury Power Station north and south of Oldbury Naite. The pylons form prominent vertical structures on the open skylines of this flat low-lying landscape.

## LCA 19: Oldbury Levels

**Photo 4: View west across pastoral fields near Sheppardine, the rural character of the landscape contrasting with pylon lines and the towers of Oldbury Power Station.**



### Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**13.31** The Oldbury Levels LCA is a strongly rural landscape with a sense of time-depth and some sense of remoteness, owing to the limited presence of modern development. This is a highly tranquil landscape owing to the sparse settlement pattern, and absence of modern development (including major settlement or transport corridors). The area experiences dark night skies throughout, especially in the north. There is some localised light pollution around Oldbury Power Station.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**13.32** There are no Visually Important Hillsides located within this LCA. However, Upper Hill VIH lies adjacent to its north-eastern edge (located within

## LCA 19: Oldbury Levels

LCA 18). Its elevation and steep sided slopes contrast with the low-lying levels landscape and form a prominent backdrop in views east from the levels.

**13.33** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillside**s.

## Strategic Viewpoints

**13.34** There are no Strategic Viewpoints located within this LCA, however SVP 6: St Michael's Church (Hill Court) (located within adjacent LCA 18: Severn Ridges) provides views over the Oldbury Levels from an elevated vantage point, taking in the Severn Estuary and the hills of the Wye Valley and South Wales, and the landmark features of Oldbury Power Station, the Severn Bridge and the Prince of Wales Bridge.

**13.35** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Value Features

- Traditional pastoral land use in small to medium-scale fields reinforce the local landscape pattern.
- Locally distinctive drainage ditches and rhines, supported by a network of hedgerow that contribute to the sense of place.
- Semi-natural habitats including grassland, watercourses, and traditional orchards, some designated as SNCI sites provide visual texture and ecological value.
- Historic features including Oldbury Camp Iron Age Hill Fort and visible ridge and furrow in fields contribute to the sense of time depth in the landscape.
- Quiet rural lanes, often edged by rhines or hedgerows.

## LCA 19: Oldbury Levels

- Low density settlement of traditional buildings with a medieval layout.
- Open and expansive views, west to south Wales/Forest of Dean and east to the Severn Ridge, that contribute to the sense of place and scenic value.
- The network of rights of way including the Severn Way long distance footpath enable recreational access to the landscape, including the Severn Way long distance footpath which runs along the elevated sea wall, offering open and expansive views across the estuary as well as views across the levels.
- Strong perceptual qualities of rural tranquillity, with dark night skies.

## The Changing Landscape

**13.36** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Oldbury Levels LCA.

**13.37** The Oldbury Levels landscape character area is a rural area, retaining much of its historic layout, land use and character, with field patterns and pastoral land use remaining unchanged since medieval times. Development is typically small-scale or low key (with the exception of the existing Oldbury Power Station and powerlines) and the area appears relatively unaffected by pressures for change experienced in many other parts of South Gloucestershire.

## Climate Change

- The area is subject to pressure for renewable energy provision, including wind and solar developments. Wind energy developments within this LCA and in surrounding character areas would be highly visible due to flat, low-lying landform and would introduce modern built development to the rural character of the Oldbury Levels.



## LCA 19: Oldbury Levels

- Increased temperatures as a result of climate change, as well as increased frequency and severity of flood events in winter and drought events in summer may affect the water levels of the rhines.
- Changes in sea level as a result of climate change may result in increased frequency of storms and flood events.

## Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- Well-maintained farm orchards are a characteristic feature of the area. Some are ageing in structure, however interest in community orchards and planting of new orchards bodes well for these characteristic features and their biodiversity value.
- The vegetation structure is not being supplemented by new planting resulting in a potential decline of the existing strong framework and a more open landscape as well as a reduction in diversity of habitat.
- Great Crested Newts and other aquatic species are vulnerable to any loss of habitat including the terrestrial habitat around ponds as well as the ponds themselves.

## Land Use and Cover

- 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, and also makes a significant contribution to the diversity of habitat and biodiversity value of the levels.
- The existing Oldbury Power Station is surrounded by an associated landscape of elevated lagoons, tree cover, an orchard and hay meadows. The tree cover is effective in acting as a foil in views across the Levels landscape and helping to integrate the power station with its surroundings. These landscape features also provide biodiversity value, as well as amenity value through access via permissive pathways .
- Hedgerows are generally actively managed; however, a limited number of hedges have been removed or replaced with fencing. A decline in

## LCA 19: Oldbury Levels

hedgerow management has the potential to erode the existing landscape infrastructure as well as biodiversity value and wildlife connectivity.

- 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 in decline, indicated by the relative scarcity of tree pollards. The eventual loss of overgrown withy beds would result in a loss of a local traditional feature, which presently contributes to the landscape structure.
- The loss of mature hedgerow trees through Dutch Elm Disease was historically widespread across the Levels. As a result, 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.

## Development

- Development has the potential to result in significant impact on potential archaeological resources. the ridge and furrow and 'gryps' which are important historic features found within many of the traditional pasture fields would be easily damaged by a change in land use to arable farming or other uses such as solar farms.
- Horse keeping around Oldbury-upon-Severn has affected the character of the village, and the introduction of floodlighting may also disturb wildlife.
- Several clusters of large farm sheds (including poultry sheds) affect the character and quality of the local landscape. A greater frequency of buildings or the introduction of larger, more prominent structures would impact on the remote character of the area.
- The introduction of large-scale built development or cumulative small-scale developments would impact on views into the area from surrounding higher ground, including the Severn Ridge, as is evident with the existing 60m-high reactor buildings at Oldbury Power Station.

## LCA 19: Oldbury Levels

- An increase of modern, visually prominent structures in this flat landscape would degrade the perception of relative remoteness and would erode its traditional, rural pattern and character.
- The decommissioning of the existing Oldbury Power Station includes demolition of redundant structures, and the introduction of some new temporary buildings. This is resulting in changes to the massing and structures surrounding the main reactor buildings and changes in the use of the site and remaining structures. The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority envisages final site clearance in the 2080's, however it may be that new uses are proposed for the brownfield land released by the decommissioning programme.
- A 150 hectare area to the north of the existing power station, extending to Sheppardine Road is designated in National Policy Statement EN-6 for the development of a new nuclear power station. This site straddles the Oldbury Levels (LCA 19) and the Severn Shoreline and Coast (LCA 21). The scale and massing of development proposed will depend on the technology proposed for deployment at Oldbury. Cooling technology is a particular issue as natural draft cooling towers can be up to 200m tall and would be highly intrusive in the flat Levels landscape. Adopted South Gloucestershire planning policy seeks integration of the existing power station or any new structures, and promotes the reuse or redevelopment of existing infrastructure in order to minimise impacts on the wider landscape.

## Guidance

**13.38** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the overarching management strategy objectives of the South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment, as set out in Chapter 4.

### Landscape Strategy

#### Landscape Management

- Manage the historic small-scale field pattern, including through willow pollarding and management of withy beds and tree belts, to ensure long term conservation of these key features for their cultural and biodiversity value.
- Maintain and restore the extensive drainage network of rhines, gryps, pill, and sea wall, together with sensitive management of ridge and furrow to retain the historic landscape character of the levels.
- Establish small native woodlands or broad hedgerows (where floodplain grazing marsh dictates) linking the network of woodlands (including ancient woodland areas) on the slopes at Rockhampton across lower land to those on land east of Hill, whilst conserving other priority habitats, historic monuments and views.
- Ensure that new development and present and future land use practices respect and conserve the historic landscape of the levels including its field systems and remaining areas of ridge and furrow and have special regard to the archaeological potential of the area.
- Conserve the Medieval settlement pattern of the Hill Parish area, and the character of the linear settlement of Oldbury on Severn, ensuring that the balance of development and green space that contributes to the character of the settlements is maintained.

## LCA 19: Oldbury Levels

- Protect and enhance the character and quality of the rural setting to and views of the Grade I listed Severn Road Bridge, and Grade II\* listed St Arilda's Church (in adjacent LCA 20: Pilning Levels).
- Protect the strong rural, tranquil qualities of the landscape, including the sparse settlement pattern and dark night skies. Resist development that would dilute these highly valued qualities.

## Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Conserve and extend overwintering habitat for species associated with the international and national designations on the Severn Estuary including high tide roosts.
- Seek opportunities to restore, enhance and create new traditional orchards to enhance landscape character and biodiversity value. Prioritise those not covered by grant schemes, working to maintain locally distinctive varieties.
- Conserve willow pollards, re-pollarding these as necessary to ensure long-term contribution to landscape character, and as a farm timber resource. Establish small, irregular groups of native large willow adjacent to watercourses, where permitted by statutory conservation designations.
- Conserve the few small 'withy beds' scattered through the area, undertaking small scale expansion where appropriate.
- Maintain and enhance existing hedgerows and increase associated tree cover, including tree belts which are a distinctive feature of the LCA.
- Support the creation of new wildflower habitats along B-lines (identified by Buglife) within the LCA to contribute to the national pollinator network, for example along grass verges.
- Seek opportunities for wetland creation and rhine habitat enhancement, including measures to control pollution from agricultural run-off.

## Development Management

- Any redevelopment proposal for the Oldbury power station should be planned and designed to minimise impact on the character and amenity of views from the surrounding landscapes, including careful consideration of the bulk and height of the built form, the appearance and integration of any supporting infrastructure, and provision of a robust landscape framework.
- Ensure renewable energy developments are sensitively designed and sited to minimise their impact on visual and landscape character, also considering cumulative effects that will be widely visible across the flat low-lying landscape. Use existing vegetation to screen new developments where appropriate.
- New development should ensure provision of a robust landscape framework that is commensurate with the scale of the development proposed.



## LCA 20: Pilning Levels

The Pilning Levels landscape character area (LCA) is a landscape of contrast, with largely flat, semi-enclosed farmland divided by rhines (drainage ditches) and linear transport routes across the central and northern area, and extensive areas of industry and warehousing in the south.

**Photo 1: View across hedgerow-bound pastoral fields near Littleton upon Severn.**

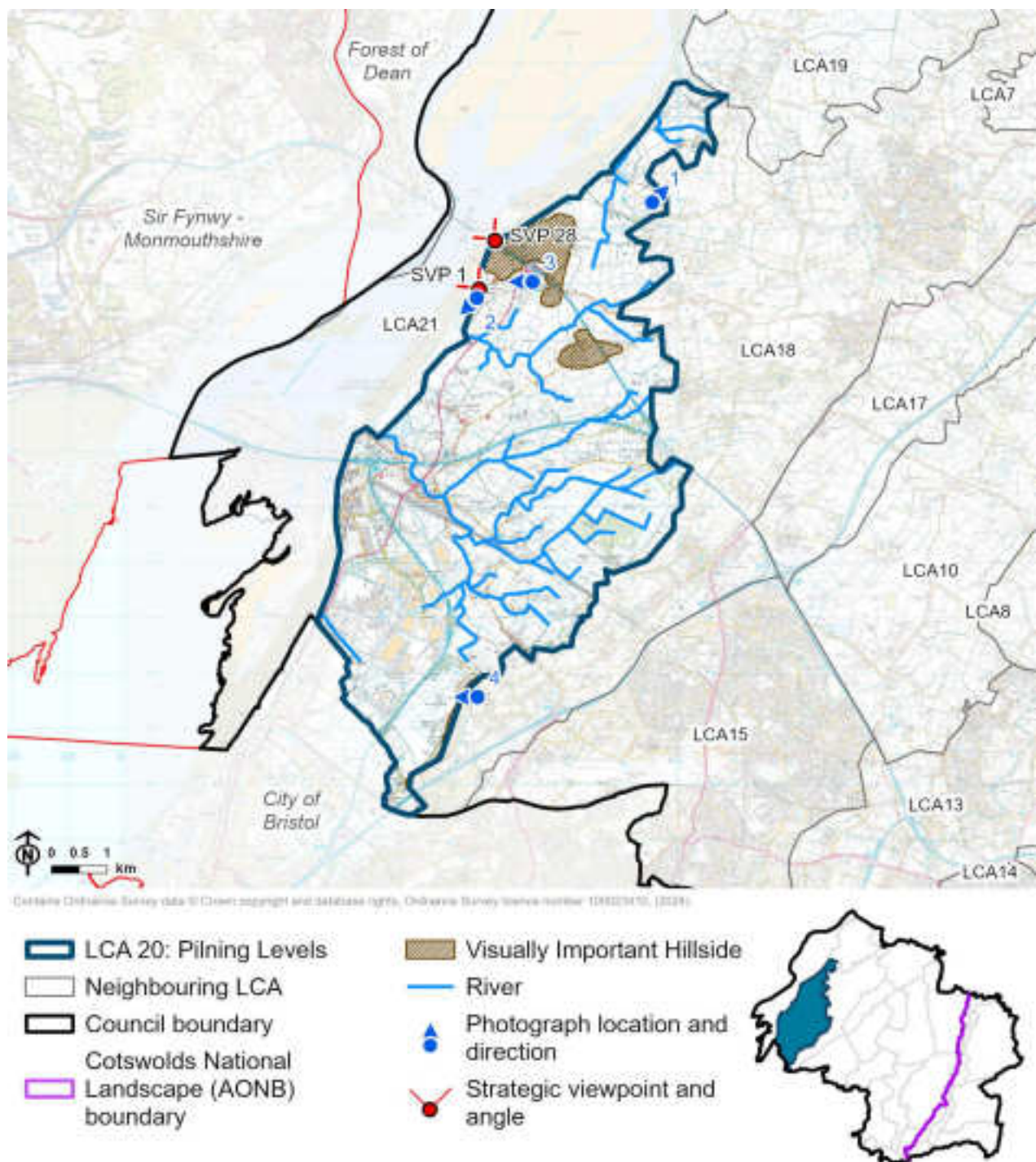


### Location

**13.39** The Pilning Levels LCA is located on the south-western edge of South Gloucestershire, to the north-west of Bristol. Its southern boundary follows the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary, although the character of this area continues south towards Avonmouth (within the Bristol City area). 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. The boundary largely follows 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 expanse of the Estuary are dominant.

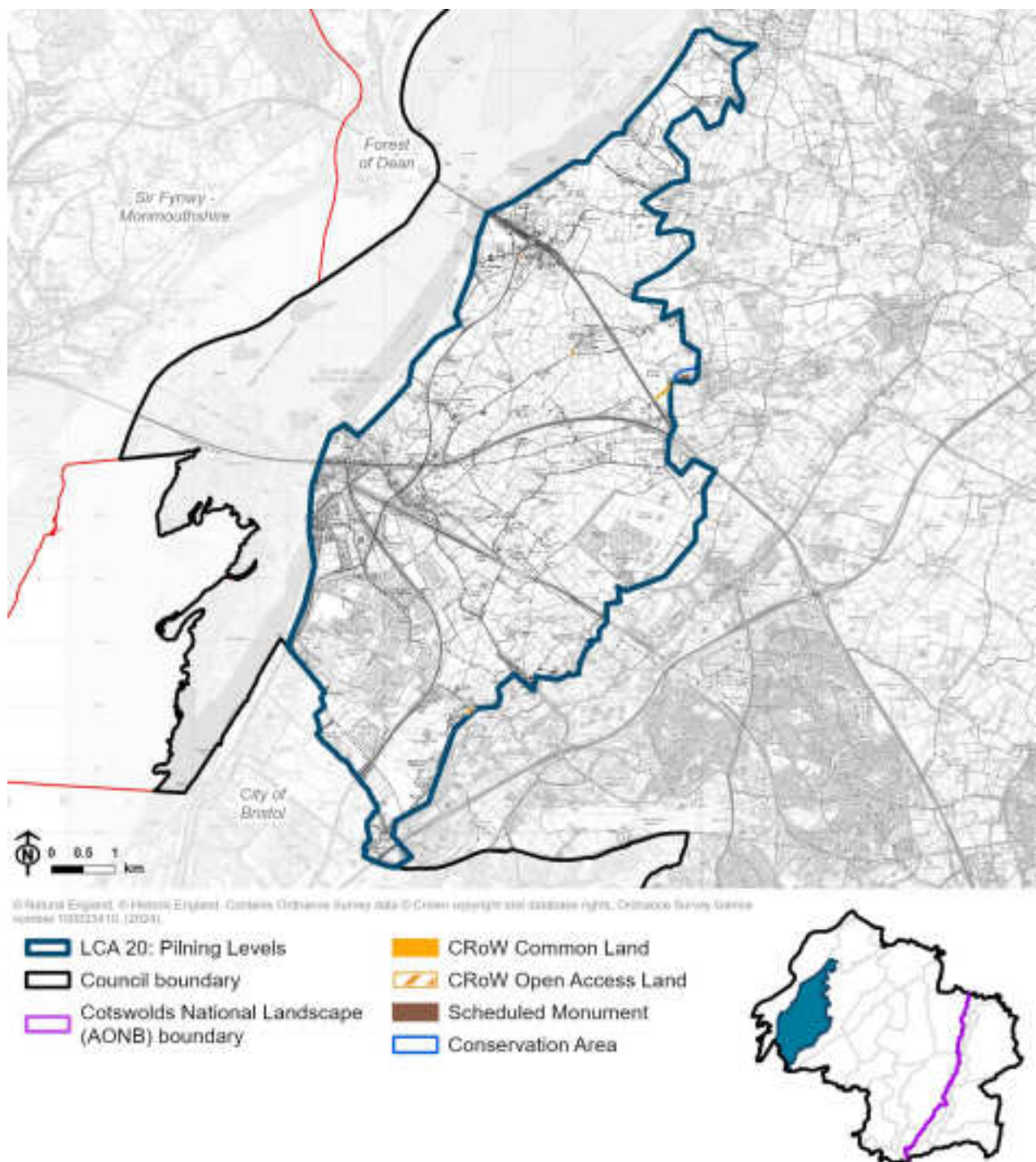
## LCA 20: Pilning Levels

**Figure 13.5: Location and Landscape context of LCA 20: Pilning Levels**



## LCA 20: Pilning Levels

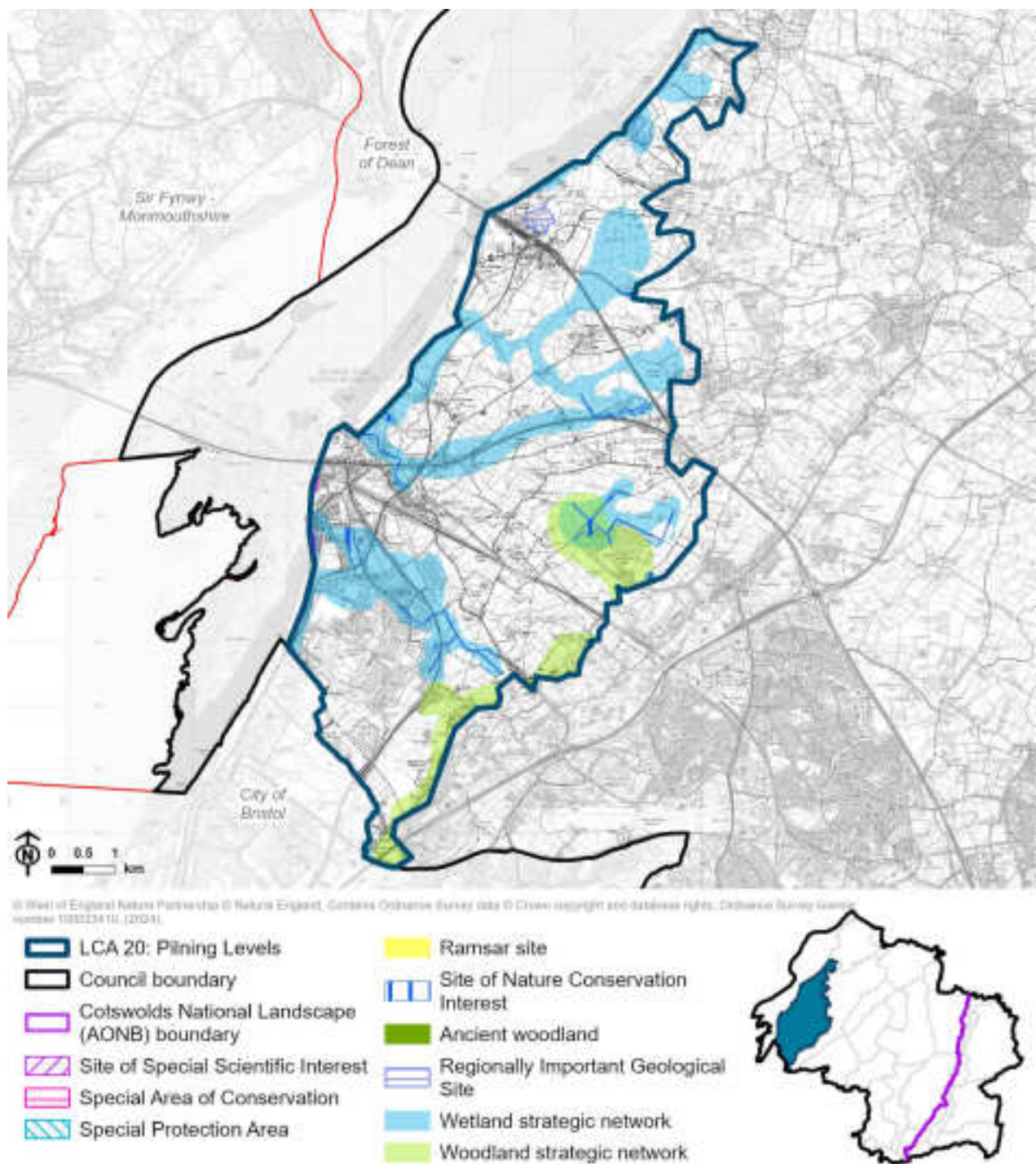
**Figure 13.6: Development and Heritage context of LCA 20: Pilning Levels**





## LCA 20: Pilning Levels

**Figure 13.7: Ecology and Biodiversity Context of LCA 20: Pilning Levels**



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- The rural part of the character area comprises a flat, simple landscape with outliers at Ingst and Aust which form prominent low hills.
- A varied field pattern with small to medium sized regular and irregular fields, with a mix of pasture (some with ridge and furrow) and arable land use.
- The farmland is criss-crossed by rhines, clipped and some overgrown hedges, with occasional strong tree belts, withy beds, orchards, scattered mature trees and pollards.
- Strong visual influence of the estuary, and areas of the levels that provide overwintering habitat for birds associated with the international and national designations on the Severn Estuary.
- Neutral, calcareous and marshy grassland across the levels provide visual texture and support a diverse range of flora.
- 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. Scattered woodland provides visual enclosure in some areas.
- Numerous major roads, including the M4, M48, M49 and A403, as well as a railway line bisect the landscape. Embankments and bridges form prominent features, partially integrated by vegetation.
- Limited clustered settlements and scattered farms, mainly on higher ground, with much of the area of the rural landscape being relatively unpopulated.
- An expanding complex of industrial and distribution warehouses, as well as power generation infrastructure are prominent to the south and continue into the adjacent Bristol City Council area.



- The two Severn Bridges are prominent to the west beyond the area. Several powerlines and supporting towers crossing the area are also prominent.

## Natural Influences

### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**13.40** The geology of this area is predominantly alluvial, including alluvial gley soils typical of the lowland Level landscape. This creates a flat, low-lying landscape, the topography generally below 10 metres AOD. Occasional outcrops of harder rock such as sandstone and Carboniferous limestone create outliers, such as at Ingst and Aust, which rise above the flat Levels forming small, isolated hills, at 25 metres to 40 metres AOD. Aust Cliff is a prominent feature on the western boundary facing the Severn Estuary and is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS) for its exposed strata and rich fossil bed.

**13.41** The LCA is contained to the east by 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 above the 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 considerable time, with map evidence indicating the sea wall has been in existence since at least the mid-18th century.

**13.42** A defining characteristic of this area is the pattern of man-made drainage ditches, locally called rhines. Some rhines date 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, with the more regular patterns representing the most recent areas of drainage. The rhine system is controlled by sluices in the sea wall, which

## LCA 20: Pilning Levels

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. Several of the rhines are named on OS maps, indicating their significance, however many others have local names, contributing to the identity and distinctiveness of the area.

**13.43** 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 in the south-east of the LCA comprises earth bunds reaching 20 metres above existing ground level, although these are well-integrated by mature vegetation.

## Land Cover

**13.44** Much of the Pilning Levels LCA is covered by a mix of small to medium, regular and irregular shaped pastoral fields, with occasional arable use. Fields are more variable and irregular in shape between Aust and Pilning. Boundaries are defined by clipped and overgrown hedges, with occasional mature trees or pollarded oak, willow and ash. In places, hedgerows are replaced by fencing. Ridge and furrow is a common but subtle feature evident within many unimproved fields within the Levels. Gryps created for field drainage are also evident, forming low banks which radiate from the centre of fields. Beneath the visible landscape the underlying soil layers are gradually laid down over time and are of significant archaeological potential, although much of the area is unsurveyed.

**13.45** The vegetation structure is largely defined by the underlying linear pattern of rhines which flow towards the Severn Estuary. Small rectilinear woodland blocks with withy beds of hazel or willow coppice are common across the central part of the LCA, with occasional linear tree belts of alder and poplar. Linear tree and shrub planting also encloses significant lengths of the motorways, with tree blocks around junctions, embankments and overbridges.

## LCA 20: Pilning Levels

At the Western Approach Distribution Park, a framework of rhines, ponds, and amenity planting have replaced the former agricultural landscape structure.

**13.46** Small areas of common land fringe the rural lanes and farmsteads, often in the form of grass verges. Small orchards are scattered throughout the rural area, typically associated with farms.

**13.47** Berwick Farm landfill site (now inactive) lies in the south-east of the LCA. Following completion of landfill operations, a raised landform has created a number of broad hills up to 20 metres above the existing ground level.

**13.48** An area in the south of the character area is covered by an extant 1957 planning permission for a range of industrial related uses. The 1957 consent area relates to South Gloucestershire Council **Core Strategy Policy 35 – Severnside**, with the area it relates to shown on Figure 13A within the Core Strategy document [\[See reference 1\]](#). This is an area of ongoing development and redevelopment for a range of warehousing, industrial and energy generation uses.

**Photo 2: Salt marsh habitat on the estuary edge near Old Passage, with views to the Prince of Wales Bridge and South Wales hills.**



### Biodiversity

**13.49** The mosaic of grassland and pastoral farmland with woodland, watercourses and scattered ponds, connected by wildlife corridors including rhines and hedgerows make the Pilning Levels an important habitat for a diverse range of species. The incorporation of woodland, rhine and other habitat areas and corridors in the early phases of the development at Western Approach Distribution Park ensures continuity of habitat through this area.

**13.50** The Pilning Levels include 100 hectares of woodland scattered across the area, mainly represented by small copses including orchards, with a larger area of woodland located within the eastern extent of the area. Key species likely to be associated with the broadleaved woodland include bats and dormice both of

## LCA 20: Pilning Levels

which are present across the district and are UK priority species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP).

**13.51** The numerous watercourses (including rhines) that cross the landscape support a diverse range of species, from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and water voles. Ponds and pools within the area support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species). Several of the rhines (including Impool, Middle and Upper Compton, The Pill and Olveston Mill rhines) are designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Importance in recognition of the significance of these habitats for flora and fauna, and for the connectivity provided by the network of hedgerows and rhines. The diverse mosaic of grassland habitats (including neutral, calcareous and marshy grasslands), some of which are designated as SNCIs. The grasslands support a range of invertebrates which in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats.

**13.52** The majority of agricultural land use within this area is pastoral farmland with small areas in arable use. The former provides roosting and foraging opportunity for the overwintering birds associated with the Severn Estuary, including those associated with its international and national designations. The arable farmland provides ground nesting and winter stubble provides foraging opportunity for ground nesting farmland birds, including those listed as Globally Threatened Red listed species. Large numbers of over-wintering birds drawn to the Severn Estuary are a seasonal feature of the Levels, both in the fields and overhead.

**13.53** South Gloucestershire Strategic Green-Blue Infrastructure Corridor A: (Shepperdine-Oldbury on Severn-Severn Beach (*Severn Estuary and Levels*)) covers the majority of this LCA, encompassing the wetland strategic network and habitats associated with the Severn Estuary.

### Cultural Influences

#### Land Use and Time Depth

**13.54** The continual pastoral land use of the Levels since medieval times has resulted in limited ground disturbance and as such, the archaeological value and content of the area is largely unknown, however the peat within the Levels may contain evidence of early prehistoric activity, which could be of considerable significance, due to its national rarity.

**13.55** The rhine drainage pattern, linked to the tidal pills, is essential to the agricultural viability and biodiversity of the area, maintaining the ground water level below that of the adjacent fields and providing aquatic habitat.

#### Settlement and Infrastructure

**13.56** Settlement comprises a dispersed pattern of small villages and hamlets, with some parts across the central, eastern and northern area relatively unpopulated, with few roads. Settlements are typically developed along linear routes as at Easter Compton, Pilning, Redwick, New Passage, and Severn Beach. Aust and Ingst are compact nucleated settlements located on higher ground, whilst Northwick is located on the Levels. Isolated farmsteads are scattered at frequent intervals within the Levels, often on the edges of small commons, surrounded by rhines and connected by a network of minor roads and lanes.

**13.57** The settlements on the western boundary have diverse form and character, reflecting a number of development phases. The older settlements of Aust, Ingst and Northwick comprise clusters 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. Severn Beach and Pilning owe part of their growth to the railways, with Severn Beach (once a popular beach resort)



## LCA 20: Pilning Levels

comprising a regular pattern of mid to late 20th century brick housing and 'park home' static caravan sites. Pilning has a dense pattern of stone, render and brick houses, clustered at road intersections. New Passage and Redwick comprise a linear pattern of Pennant and Old Red Sandstone cottages, large houses and older brick houses. Two isolated linear groups of cottages lie to the south-east of Pilning along the B4055.

### **Photo 3: Aust Village, the tower of St John's Church forming a local landmark.**



**13.58** To the south-east of Severn Beach, large-scale, light-coloured warehouse buildings at the expanding Western Approach Distribution Park cover extensive areas, extending southwards to the large industrial complex at Avonmouth (within the City of Bristol Authority area). A small former industrial estate (now redeveloped as Whale Wharf Business Park) is located adjacent to the sea wall at Littleton Pill, in an isolated location to the north-west of Littleton-upon-Severn. The site comprises a compact cluster of office buildings and small pools (the site of the former Littleton Brickworks).

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**13.59** Built structures along the estuary edge include Aust Motorway Services comprising a hotel, car park, and petrol station. The old service station building forms a large white rectangular building with low roof, overlooking the estuary on the edge of Aust Cliff. Further south, the Binn Wall concrete and stone sea wall between New Passage and Severn Beach dates from the early 17th century, possibly earlier. It connects to the grass embankment sea wall further up the shoreline.

**13.60** The M4, M48 and M49 motorways all cross the area, largely on embankments, segmenting the rural landscape and continuing across the Severn Estuary over the two Severn Bridges (the Severn Road Bridge, and the Prince of Wales Bridge). The A403 runs north to south, partly along the edge of the Estuary, connecting the M48 to Avonmouth in the south. Elsewhere, a network of lanes and minor roads cross the landscape, including the B4055 which connects Easter Compton to Pilning. Many of the minor lanes connecting inland villages or hamlets terminate at the estuary edge. 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.

**13.61** An extensive network of public rights of way enable recreational access to the landscape, often following field boundaries between settlements, although some areas (particularly in the south) are devoid of coverage. The King Charles III England Coast Path National Trail runs south from Old Passage along the estuary edge, continuing southwards beyond the South Gloucestershire authority boundary. The Jubilee Way long distance footpath crosses the area from west to east from Littleton-upon-Severn, linking the Severn Way (which runs along the estuary edge) to the Cotswold Way in the east of South Gloucestershire. One of a series of Circular Rides makes use of both rural highways and public rights of way, running extensively throughout the area. National Cycle Network Routes 4 (London to Fishguard) and 41 (Bristol to Rugby) follow cycle paths and rural lanes through the LCA. The Wave surf centre is located to the north-east of Easter Compton but is well-integrated by surrounding vegetation.

# Perceptual Influences

## Visual Character

**13.62** The Pilning Levels comprise a flat, semi-enclosed to fairly open lowland area, with frequent views eastwards to the Severn Ridges and more distant views north-westwards, towards the Severn Estuary, South Wales and the wooded skyline of The Forest of Dean. Longer distance views south-west to the Exmoor coastline are possible from higher ground in clear weather. Slightly elevated vantage points at Aust, Ingst and along the sea wall enable views of the estuary itself and the islands to the south-west. The rural backcloth of the Severn Ridges to the east providing visual containment and reinforces the strong rural character, its rising slopes containing very limited built development. 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 in views to the west. North of Aust, the Severn Ridge and 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.

**13.63** The area is a largely rural, agricultural landscape, with a simple vegetation structure comprising predominately clipped hedges, some overgrown, with frequent scattered mature hedgerow trees. The low hedges allow some middle to long distance views, with mature hedgerow trees providing some enclosure, structure, visual texture and depth to views. The regular, angular pattern of rhines (more irregular and curvilinear to the south and west of Ingst) has significantly influenced the landscape structure, their position and form emphasised by the hedgerows and the varying textured vegetation which follow them. Ridge and furrow field patterns and 'gryps' form subtle features within many of the pastoral fields and are most visually apparent on the sloping ground of the outlier hills, although they are present widely within the unimproved pastoral land.

## **LCA 20: Pilning Levels**

**13.64** Centrally and towards the eastern boundary, linear woodland and frequent rectilinear 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 notable vertical element, contrasting with the flat landform and generally lower vegetation structure elsewhere.

**13.65** Locally distinctive features of the Levels' landscape include mature pollarded trees, open rhines and broad grass verges of common land along rural lanes and scattered small orchards near farms.

**13.66** The older, small-scale, settlement pattern of traditional villages, hamlets and farmsteads is generally well-integrated within mature vegetation. In the north, the absence of modern settlement and infrastructure, limited road access, and strong vegetation framework creates a perception of remoteness with a strong sense of place. In contrast, the villages of Severn Beach and New Passage comprise areas of more recent regular dense settlement, often with limited integration along their edges. These villages are particularly prominent within views from rights of way along the sea wall and in longer views from the Estuary warths in the adjoining character area (LCA 21). 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 extensive sections of the sea defence creates a strong linear 'horizon' 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 provides visual screening of the embankment. The Severn Way National Trail runs along the sea wall for significant lengths and affords panoramic views east and west across the adjacent landscape and estuary, including to the Severn Bridges.

**13.67** The outliers on which Aust and Ingst are located and the adjoining low bluffs and hills (within adjacent LCA 18: Severn Ridges), including Cowhill, Red Hill, Catherine Hill and Spaniorum Hill, form distinctive landform features in views across the flat 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.

## **LCA 20: Pilning Levels**

**13.68** Open views across the landscape are possible from elevated ground, such as the low hills at Aust and Ingst, the surrounding Severn Ridges, motorways, overbridges, local roads and Severn Bridges across the Estuary. There are extensive views across this LCA from the elevated Severn Ridge.

**13.69** Motorway overbridges and embankments (including the railway embankment) form prominent local features, given their scale, elevation and landform profile, introducing artificial features within the flat and largely undeveloped Levels. Maturing woodland planting helps to reduce the prominence of the motorway and its structures and provides some continuity with the wider rural vegetation pattern. Although traffic movement and noise is locally prominent, wider effects upon the Levels is reduced by outlying raised land and the intervening vegetation.

**13.70** The two Severn Bridges (in adjoining LCA 21: Severn Shoreline and Estuary) contribute to regional identity and form prominent and distinctive landmarks within occasional middle-distance and local views from the Levels, from where these large structures are seen against the expanse of open sky. Some 2 kilometres north of this area, on the edge of the Levels, Oldbury Power Station forms a large-scale structure, highly prominent on the edge of the Estuary and Levels and seen in close proximity to the lower hills of the Severn Ridges within views north from Aust, Ingst and the Levels.

**13.71** The expanse of the Severn Estuary, although not visible from the majority of inland views, does reflect light and provides some 'lightness' to the edge of the area.

**13.72** The southern part of the area is heavily influenced by the extensive pattern of major road and rail infrastructure radiating from New Passage, and the evolving industrial and warehouse structures at Severnside which continues south beyond this character area to Avonmouth, including the Seabank Power station with its tall chimneys and steam clouds. Wind turbines have become increasingly prevalent in this landscape. The various industrial features dominate open views to the south and west, often dwarfing the existing relatively small-scale landscape structure of hedgerows and trees. Larger

## **LCA 20: Pilning Levels**

structures are also visible from South Wales in distant views. The major road corridors introduce visible movement and noise into the area.

**13.73** The light coloured, large-scale distribution sheds adjacent to the M49 at Western Approach Distribution Park are prominent and clearly visible against the darker landscape framework when viewed from the Severn Ridges and are similarly prominent within low-level views, the separate buildings appearing to coalesce into a continuous built form. This development incorporates ponds, rhines, footpaths and bridleways, as well as woodland and avenue planting included as key features during the early phases of development. The chimney at Cattybrook Brickworks (within adjacent LCA 18) is evident in views east to the edge of the Severn Ridges but is of considerably smaller scale in comparison with the industrial development on the levels.

**13.74** Powerlines and pylons crossing the area form significant vertical and linear elements, contrasting with the flat landscape and 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.

**13.75** Overhead powerlines on steel pylons cross the landscape along several prominent corridors, north to south and east to west, while the National Grid sealing end compound is tucked in below the east side of the hill at Aust.



**Photo 4: View west from Spaniorum Hill across industrial infrastructure and warehouses at Severnside Works and Western Distribution Park.**



### Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**13.76** The LCA experiences high levels of light pollution in the south, associated with the extensive industrial and commercial development south of New Passage at Severnside Works and Western Distribution Park across the south of the LCA. There are some areas of darker skies in the north of the LCA, away from settlement and transport corridors.

**13.77** Levels of tranquillity are generally low across the LCA, particularly in the south as a result of the extensive industrial development and presence of several major transport corridors. Occasional small pockets of higher tranquillity exist across the more rural Levels and in the north of the LCA near Cowhill.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**13.78** The Severn Ridge VIH (located within LCA 18) flanks the eastern edge of the Pilning Levels LCA, its distinct form and elevation defining a marked change in character from the low-lying levels and estuary and providing a visually prominent landscape feature in views from the west. Two small outlier hills of the Severn Hills VIH lie within this LCA at Ingst, and Aust Hill.

**13.79** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

### Strategic Viewpoints

**13.80** Two Strategic Viewpoints are located within this LCA. They are:

- SVP 1: Old Passage: Provides a panoramic view taking in the notable landscape features of the Severn Estuary and hills of the Wye Valley and South Wales, and the landmark features of the Severn Bridge and Prince of Wales Bridge.
- SVP 28: Severn View Viewpoint: Provides a panoramic view and takes in the notable landscape features of the Severn Estuary and the hills of the

## LCA 20: Pilning Levels

Wye Valley and South Wales, and the landmark features of the Severn Bridge, Prince of Wales Bridge and Oldbury Power Station

**13.81** Strategic viewpoints located along the Severn Ridge (LCA 18) also offer views into and across the landscape, including from SVP 4: Old Down, SVP 7: Spaniorum Hill, SVP 15: St Arilda's Church (Oldbury-on-Severn) and SVP 23: Woodwell Meadows.

**13.82** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Value Features

- Small to medium-scale mixed agricultural fields contained by a strong hedgerow framework that reinforces the local landscape pattern.
- Rhines, hedgerows, withy beds, orchards, scattered mature trees and pollards add texture to the landscape and contribute to the sense of place.
- Semi-natural habitats including neutral, calcareous and marshy grassland across the levels which provide visual texture and support a diverse range of flora.
- The strong visual influence of the estuary in views to the west.
- The rural character in the north of the LCA, retaining much of its historic landscape pattern, agricultural land use, settlement and character.
- Extensive network of public rights of way including the Jubilee Way promoted route enable recreational access to the landscape.

## The Changing Landscape

**13.83** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Pilning Levels LCA.

### Climate Change

- This area is subject to pressures related to power generation including existing gas and nuclear power stations as well as existing and potential renewable energy development (including wind turbines and solar arrays). Renewable energy development is evident in the landscape with a solar farm near Severn Beach, as well as several individual wind turbines at Western Approach Distribution Park.
- Changes in sea level as a result of climate change may result in increased frequency of storms and flood events.

### Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- The past loss of mature hedgerow trees through Dutch Elm Disease was 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.
- The traditional practice of regular pollarding of hedgerow trees (with concentrations to the north and south of the area) and coppicing of withy beds, is in decline, with the potential long-term loss of these distinctive features.
- Well-maintained farm orchards form distinctive and ecologically important features of the area. However, some are ageing in structure with potential for further loss of this feature.
- New woodland planting as part of the Forest of Avon, at Lower Knole Farm below the Severn Ridge, occupies an area of almost 60 hectares. As it

## LCA 20: Pilning Levels

matures, the woodland will contribute significantly to the landscape framework and habitat diversity, which otherwise comprises small blocks and linear tree planting.

- The Avonmouth Severnside Enterprise Area (ASEA) Ecology Mitigation and Flood Defence Project along the estuary edge near Old Passage will create 80 hectares of wetland habitat as part of the development. This will provide wetland habitat for a range of species, as part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network [\[See reference 2\]](#).

## Land Use and Cover

- The introduction of fencing, stable and other structures and uses associated with horse keeping around some settlements is eroding the strong vegetation framework of tree-lined hedges, pollarded trees, linear tree belts, ditches and rhines.
- The Western Distribution Park development has retained some of the rhine system and associated vegetation, as well as incorporating new tree planting and wetland habitat creation, which provides ecological value and connectivity, and supports visual integration of the buildings in more distant views.
- Remnant ridge and furrow field patterns, an important and distinctive historic feature of this landscape, would be easily damaged by a change in land use from pasture to arable farming.
- The small-scale nucleated pattern of settlements and farmsteads which are well-integrated within the landscape are sensitive to change including from new commercial and residential development, as well as land use changes.
- Land raising for sea wall defences, rail and motorway embankments and the Berwick Farm landfill site, have formed significant 'artificial' landforms which physically and visually influence the otherwise flat landscape.
- Land raising for future roads and buildings has the potential to disturb the rhine system, as is evident from previous development.

## LCA 20: Pilning Levels

- Some lengths of hedgerow are degraded, unmanaged or replaced with fencing. A decline in the management of hedgerows has the potential to quickly erode the landscape infrastructure.

## Development

- The decommissioning of the existing Oldbury Power Station (located in the adjacent Oldbury Levels character area) is likely to result in visual changes to the reactor buildings and surrounding structures. Potential redevelopment of a new nuclear power station on the site is likely to increase the prominence of built form in open views northwards into the adjacent Oldbury Levels character area (LCA 19).
- The semi-enclosed to open character of the Levels landscape is sensitive to the continued introduction of large-scale built elements which, due to their massing and height, are visible over long distances. Such development is replacing the traditional landscape structure and rural character across the southern part of this character area.
- Development to the east of M49, within the Severnside Enterprise Area, intrudes into views across the landscape, including those from Easter Compton, and sits in stark contrast to the remnant historic tract of land at Hallen Marsh, which provides visual relief and habitat value. A recently approved industrial and logistics development (known as Axis Works) will further contribute to the industrial character of the landscape.
- Given the anticipation of future change, the management of remaining open land and vegetation is often limited within this area, giving a neglected feel to areas of land to the south and west of the A403 and M49.

## Guidance

**13.84** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the overarching management strategy objectives as set out in Chapter 4 of the South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment.



## Landscape Strategy

### Landscape Management

- Ensure that new development and present and future land use practices respect and conserve remaining historic landscapes, field systems and areas of ridge and furrow.
- Protect and enhance the character and quality of the setting, and views of Aust Cliff, the Grade 1 listed Severn Road Bridge and Grade II\* listed St Arilda's Church, together with the churches of Easter Compton and Oldbury.
- Manage the historic field pattern, including through willow pollarding, management of withy beds and tree belts, to ensure long term conservation of these key features for their cultural and biodiversity value.
- Conserve willow pollards, re-pollarding these as necessary to ensure long-term contribution to landscape character and as a farm timber resource. Establish small, irregular groups of native large willow adjacent to watercourses, where permitted by statutory conservation designations.
- Maintain and restore the extensive drainage network of rhines, gryps, pill, and sea wall, and their associated landscape features to retain the historic landscape character of the levels.
- Secure a robust and integrated landscape and ecological framework that is adequate to absorb large-scale new buildings and creates a new high-quality landscape for the Severnside development area.
- Preserve the tranquillity and relatively undeveloped character of the rural landscape north of the M4.

## Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Conserve and extend overwintering habitat for species associated with the international and national designations on the Severn Estuary including the creation of further high tide roosts.
- Seek opportunities to restore and recreate traditional orchards to enhance landscape character and biodiversity value. Prioritise those not covered by grant schemes, working to maintain locally distinctive varieties.
- Conserve and enhance tree belts, hedgerows and other traditional landscape features, such as withy beds which are a distinctive feature of the LCA.
- Conserve the few small 'withy beds' scattered through the area, undertaking small scale expansion of these where appropriate.
- Seek opportunities for wetland creation (including scrapes) and rhine habitat enhancement including measures to control pollution.
- Protect the aquatic and associated terrestrial habitat of Great Crested Newts, and water voles, avoiding fragmentation of existing areas.

## Development Management

- Ensure that any new development respects the distinctive character of the levels associated outcrops of higher ground in its central and northern part of the character area.
- New development materials and the colour of finishes to be selected to ensure maximum integration with the character and appearance of the landscape, waterscape, and skies, including in views from high ground, from the levels, and from and across the estuary.
- Limit the spread of industrial development beyond the 1957 extant permission area boundary which separates industrial land use from the remaining rural landscape of the Pilning Levels.

## LCA 20: Pilning Levels

- Ensure renewable energy developments are sensitively designed and sited to minimise their impact on visual and landscape character, also considering cumulative effects that will be widely visible across the flat low-lying landscape. Use existing vegetation to screen new developments where appropriate.

## LCA 21: Severn Shoreline and Estuary

The Severn Shoreline and Estuary landscape character area (LCA) is a flat, open and exposed linear landscape of warths, tidal wetlands, mudflats and rock. The large expanse of the estuary and changing tides, is its most dominant feature.

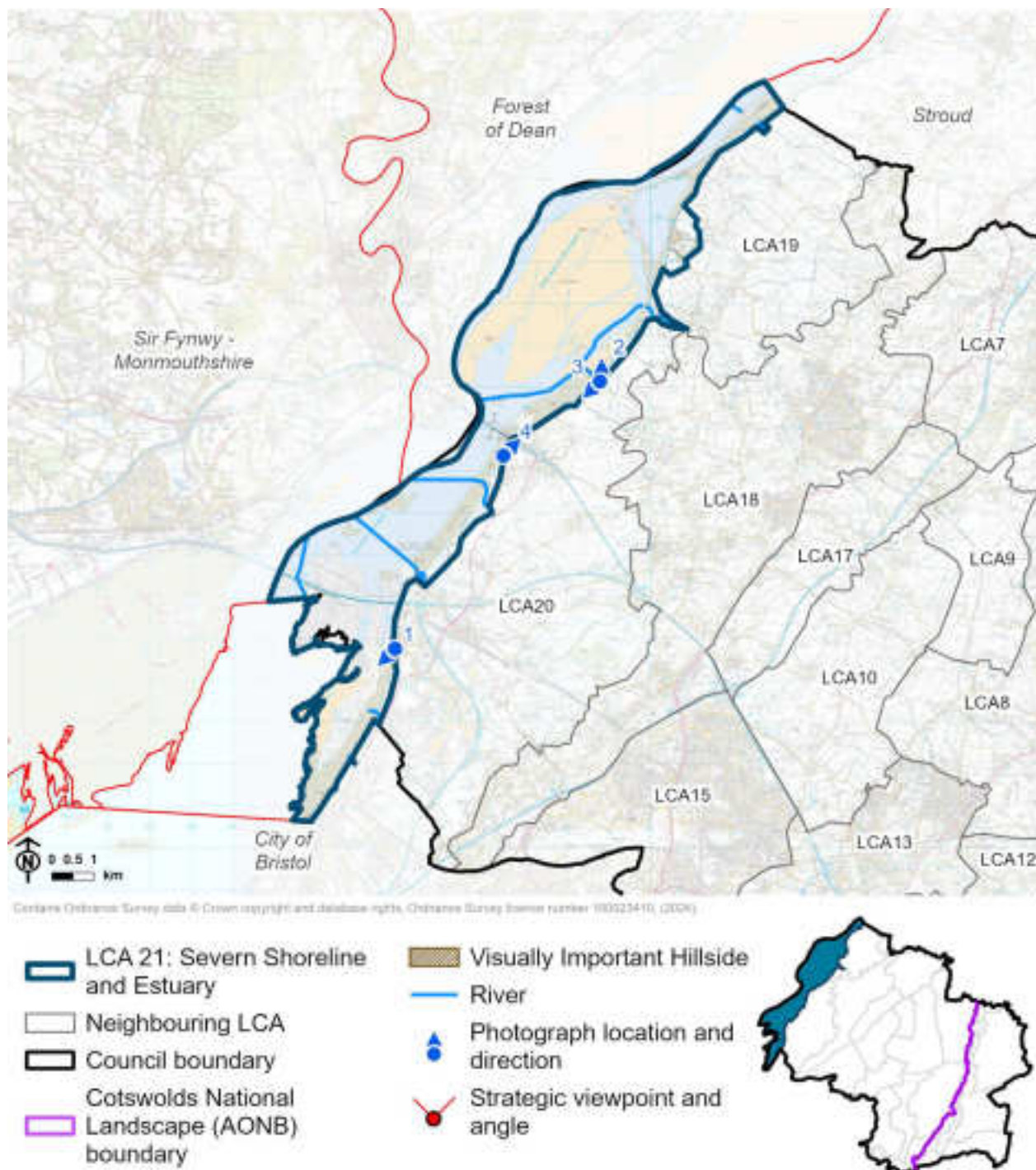
**Photo 1: View north-west across the estuary from Severn Beach, the Prince of Wales Bridge a prominent landmark feature spanning the water.**



### Location

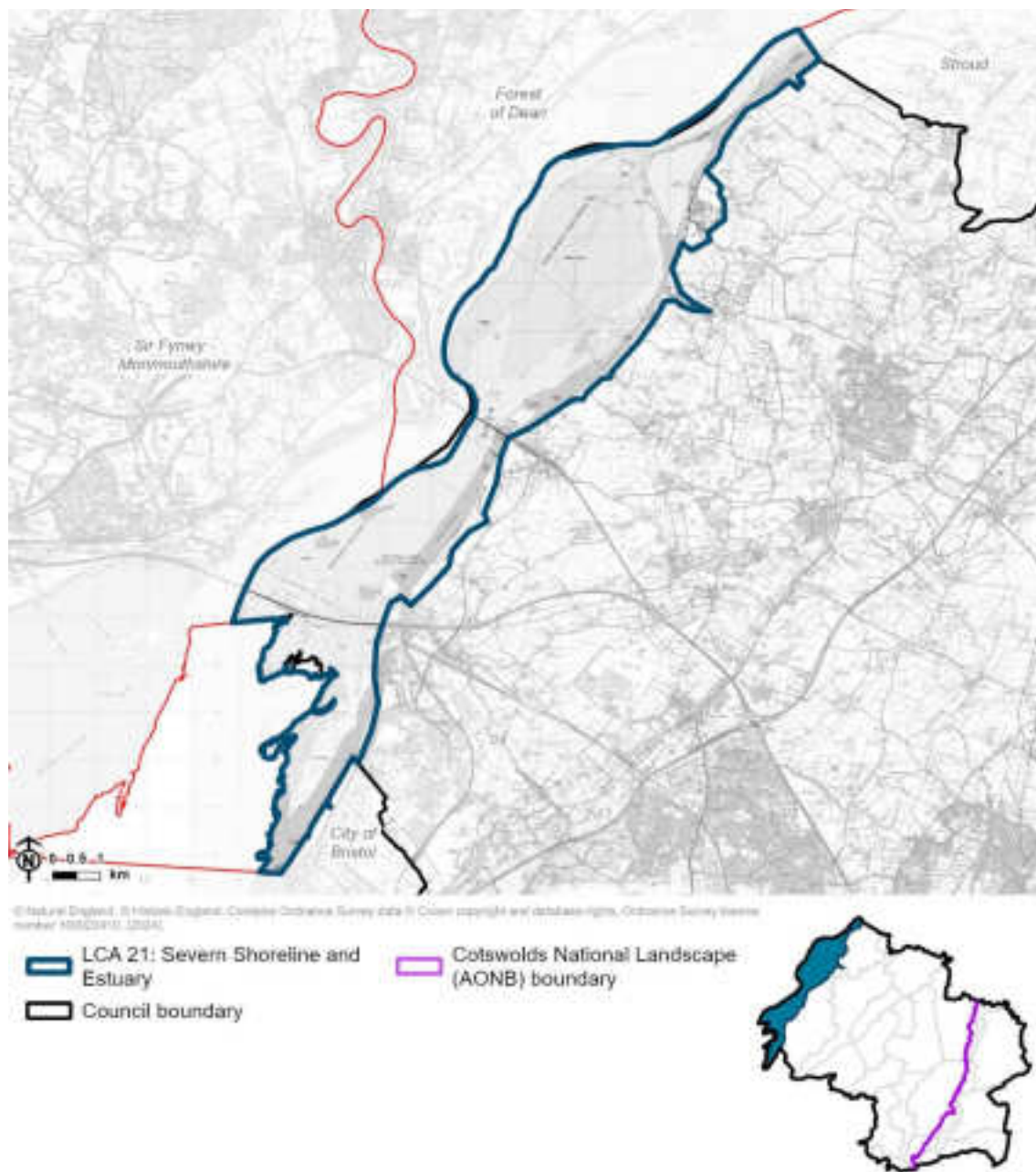
**13.85** The Severn Shoreline and Estuary landscape character area is located along the western edge of South Gloucestershire. It extends from Avonmouth in the south, north to Oldbury Power Station and beyond. It extends west to include a large proportion of the Estuary. Its northern and southern limits follow the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary, although the character of the shoreline and Estuary continues beyond the boundary. 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 the change between the unenclosed warths, tidal shoreline and estuary and the enclosed agricultural fields or industrial areas on the adjacent Levels. The sea wall merges centrally with Aust Cliff and outlier.

**Figure 13.8: Location and Landscape context of LCA 21: Severn Shoreline and Estuary**



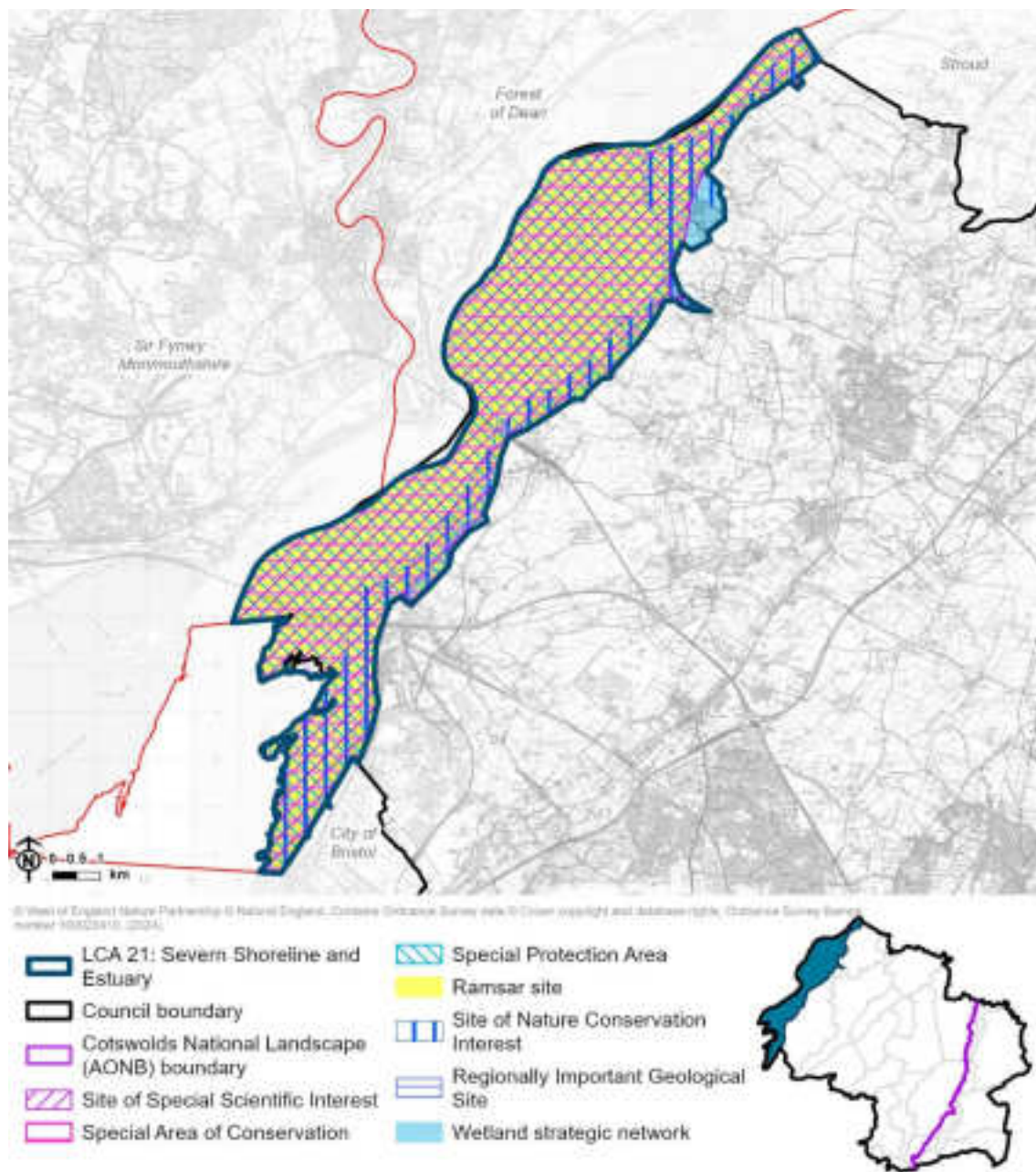


**Figure 13.9: Development and Heritage context of LCA 21:  
Severn Shoreline and Estuary**



## LCA 21: Severn Shoreline and Estuary

**Figure 13.10: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 21: Severn Shoreline and Estuary**



## Landscape Description

### Key Characteristics

- Open and exposed landscape of the tidal estuary, with a textured intertidal zone of bed rock, shingle and rivulleted mudflats/ sandflats, edged by a low mud cliff, with salt marshes (warths) beyond, contained to the east by a sea wall.
- The folded bed rock and fossil bed at Aust Cliff forms a prominent landform and important geological feature that is designated as a SSSI.
- Constantly changing characteristics of the shoreline, result from the high tidal range of the Severn Estuary (second greatest in the world).
- Tidal pills meander across the warths to the estuary from sluice gates set within the sea wall.
- The Severn Estuary and shoreline is internationally designated for a range of habitats and species, including significant numbers of over-wintering wildfowl that also roost and forage in the adjacent Oldbury and Pilning Levels character areas.
- Warths are grazed in places. A linear woodland along the low outcrop of Aust Cliff is prominent.
- The intertidal zone is of high archaeological potential, representing a journey back in time from the present day through medieval and Roman to Prehistoric times.
- Remnants of putcher ranks (wooden frames designed to hold conical fishing nets) associated with historic salmon fishing industry are an important feature on the estuary edge.
- Oldbury Power Station and designated nuclear new build site to the north has a significant influence across a wide area of this LCA.
- The warths and mudflats are largely undeveloped except, for a small number of buildings on the edge of the warths.

## LCA 21: Severn Shoreline and Estuary

- Land-based industrial influences from adjacent LCAs in the south contrast with tranquil, rural land and seascapes in the north.
- Limited formal boat access to the estuary from the shore, other than via a slipway at Thornbury Sailing Club and at Severn Beach.
- Expansive views over the estuary, Bristol Channel and its islands to South Wales and the Wye Valley/Forest of Dean Ridges to the west, and to the Severn Ridges to the east. The Exmoor coastline is occasionally evident in views to the south-west.

## Natural Influences

### Geology, Landform and Hydrology

**13.86** 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 can be clearly seen in transect across the gently sloping intertidal zone in the layered sandstone and Carboniferous limestone outcrop at Aust Cliff. Designated as both a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS), Aust Cliff defines a short section of the eastern boundary and forms a prominent geological exposure and fossil bed. The flat, low-lying landscape lies generally below 10 metres AOD, with Aust Cliff forming a large and prominent outcrop at almost 2 kilometres long, rising gradually northwards to 40 metres AOD.

**13.87** The sea wall defines much of the eastern LCA boundary. It comprises a man-made grass covered earth embankment up to two metres above the adjacent natural ground level and connects with the Binn Wall sea defence at Severn Beach. Flood defences have been a feature along the estuary edge for considerable time, with evidence of land reclamation since Roman times. Map evidence indicates that the wall has been in existence since at least the mid-18th century. The sea wall forms a prominent and defining physical feature along the shoreline, protecting the agricultural land of the Levels to the east as

## LCA 21: Severn Shoreline and Estuary

well as the developed areas to the south. Historic land drainage and flood protection enabled the productive agricultural use of the adjacent Levels' landscape and influence many of the characteristic features of both the Levels and warths today.

**13.88** The 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. Water from the rhines is controlled by sluice gates set within the sea wall. Oldbury Pill is a notable feature, extending some way inland to Oldbury-on-Severn village.

### Land Cover

**13.89** This 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 (12 metres at mean spring tide). The intertidal zone constantly changes with the tide, ranging from an expanse of water several kilometres wide at high tide, to a broad and irregular coastal strip of rivulleted mudflats and sandflats, shingle beach and exposed bed rock at low tide. Tree cover is generally sparse along the shoreline, although the lower section of Aust Cliff is heavily vegetated with trees. The existing Oldbury Power Station and associated former lagoons are elevated above the surrounding landscape – this is particularly evident at Lagoons 1 and 2 to the north. The site is bounded by tree belts along with a mosaic of woodland, traditional orchard and meadow habitats to the east.

**13.90** The landward edge of the mudflats is clearly defined by a pronounced and undercut low mud cliff, marking the height of the mean high-water level. Beyond this are flat, open warths (salt marshes), grazed in places, which extend inland to the sea wall. This area is seasonally flooded under extreme high tides. An extensive area of scrub occupies a strip of warth in the south. At high tide the largest drainage channels (Hill Pill and Oldbury Pill) form meandering open channels of water with mud banks. There are smaller pills at Littleton, Aust and New Passage.



**Photo 2: Coastal floodplain grazing at Whale Wharf, with views north towards Oldbury Power Station.**



### Biodiversity

**13.91** The estuary provides a range of habitats including mudflats, sand banks, rocky platforms and salt marsh, supporting a diverse range of species. These habitats are particularly important for the significant numbers of over wintering waterfowl that they support. The estuary is also important for the populations of invertebrates and migratory fish.

**13.92** The estuary's overall ecological importance depends on its size, and on the inter-relationships between the intertidal and marine habitats and its fauna. The ecological importance of the Severn Shoreline and Estuary is internationally, nationally and locally recognised through its designations as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar Site, Important Bird Area (IBA), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). Although the silt lagoons at



## LCA 21: Severn Shoreline and Estuary

Oldbury Power Station are SNCI-designated, Lagoons 1 and 2 to the north of the existing power station have dried out, with one scrubbing over and the other in agricultural use and as such they no longer provide the significant wetland habitat for which they were designated. However, at the time of writing Magnox (the nuclear decommissioning authority) has proposed to undertake works to retain water at Lagoon 3, south of the existing power station, with the objective of recreating the wetland habitat.

**13.93** The ongoing Avonmouth Severnside Enterprise Area (ASEA) ecology mitigation and flood defence scheme extending from Lamplighters Marsh in the south to Aust Cliff in the north has created 80 hectares of new wetland habitat, with two new wetlands at Hallen Marsh and Northwick.

**13.94** South Gloucestershire Strategic Blue-Green Infrastructure Corridor A: (Shepperdine-Oldbury on Severn-Severn Beach (*Severn Estuary and Levels*)) covers the majority of this LCA, encompassing the wetland strategic network and habitats associated with the Severn Estuary.

## Cultural Influences

### Land Use and Time Depth

**13.95** Through tidal erosion and deposition cycles, the intertidal zone has revealed archaeological remains and periods of human activity within deposited layers. Much of this buried landscape remains undisturbed and unexplored. This area, together with the warth and adjacent Levels, is therefore of high archaeological potential, the peat soils and waterlogged ground providing good conditions for preserving remains.

**13.96** The current Binn Wall sea defence was constructed in 1815, with a much earlier sea defence originating from the early 17th century. Putter ranks (irregular lines of timber stakes planted into the mudflats to catch salmon) dating from the 18th and 19th century are still evident to the north and south of

## LCA 21: Severn Shoreline and Estuary

Littleton Pill. This traditional local fishing technique has now largely disappeared along the Severn. The visibility of these stakes and the slipways are determined by the tide.

### Settlement and Infrastructure

**13.97** The LCA is very sparsely settled, with a small number of dwellings to the north of the existing Oldbury Power Station close to the sea wall, a cluster of dwellings at Old Passage, and a small number of deserted farmsteads near Severn Beach. To the south, the settlements of New Passage and Severn Beach (within the adjacent LCA 20 Pilning Levels) are enclosed and protected by the Binn Wall. 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.

**13.98** To the north, the existing Oldbury Power Station forms a significant structure located on the edge of the intertidal zone. This power station complex comprises the two distinctive 60m high circular blue and white striped reactor buildings that are surrounded by a complex of lower buildings that are subject to a programme of demolition as decommissioning progresses. The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority anticipates final site clearance of the existing power station complex in the 2080's, although there may be potential for elements of its associated infrastructure and/or brownfield land to become available for reuse in association with development on the designated nuclear new build to the north. Such reuse could have the benefit of reducing the footprint and impact of nuclear new build. To the north and south are large former settlement lagoons that are no longer in use, two are scrubbing over and the northerly most is under agricultural use. Overhead powerlines radiate out from the power station across the Levels. To the south, the small-scale sealing-end compound is tucked in below the hill east of the cliffs at Aust, limiting its visual prominence in views along the sea wall.

**13.99** Other structures extending into the intertidal mudflats include an elevated pier giving access to an electricity pylon tower near Old Passage, and a derelict slipway (the former ferry crossing) which provided a connection with South

## **LCA 21: Severn Shoreline and Estuary**

Wales before the Severn Bridge was constructed. A few navigational beacons are located along the shore and within the Estuary to the north of Oldbury Power Station. These include two small land-based metal-latticed towers, estuary way-markers on masts, and a buoy demarcating the tidal reservoir. The Severn Bridge and Second Severn Crossing link Wales and England and form large, elevated structures carrying the M4 and M48 across the Estuary.

**13.100** Access to the estuary from the shore is 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 Binn Wall, also provides boat access, with public access to the shingle beach at New Passage, as well as a promontory on the sea wall which provides a vantage point for viewing the estuary and the two Severn bridges.

**13.101** The King Charles III England Coast Path National Trail runs southwards along the estuary edge from Old Passage, continuing beyond the South Gloucestershire authority boundary. The Severn Way recreational route runs north to south along the elevated sea wall for most of its length. This 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.

**Photo 3: View across the intertidal zone towards the Severn Bridge and the Estuary, with Chepstow visible on the horizon.**



## Perceptual Influences

### Visual Character

**13.102** The Severn Shoreline and Estuary landscape character area is a simple, open and expansive area, strongly influenced by the physical and visual presence of the Severn Estuary, its tidal pattern, and weather conditions. Its open and exposed character is variably affected by industrial development within adjacent areas, which contrasts with the large tranquil rural landscape.

**13.103** Views are dominated by the large-scale estuarine landscape of open water and textured, rivuletted mudflats, which continually change with the tide. The influence of the wind, tides and atmospheric weather conditions are a

## **LCA 21: Severn Shoreline and Estuary**

dominant element, affecting the character of the land/waterscape and texture of the estuary. South Wales, the Wye Valley and the Forest of Dean ridges form a prominent backcloth and coastline in views 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 in clear conditions, in long views to the south-west.

**13.104** Views east from the warths are contained by the sea wall. The lack of visual connection with the adjacent Levels creates a sense of remoteness and isolation in places. In contrast, views from the elevated sea wall are panoramic across and along the estuary, also extending eastwards between the vegetation structure of the Levels, occasionally including distant views to the Severn Ridges. There are several vantage points along the sea wall, including a promontory at New Passage, elevated sections of the grass embankment along which the Severn Way footpath runs, and the pier at Old Passage, illustrated by Strategic Viewpoint (SVP) 1: Old Passage (see Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints for further detail).

**13.105** The geological exposure of banded and heavily folded bed rock at Aust Cliff forms a visually dramatic feature. 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.

**13.106** The intertidal mudflats are largely untouched by built features. Occasional putcher ranks (small timber structures) along the shoreline have an affinity with their setting and reflect the long history of human activity along the estuary edge. In contrast, the elevated pier, pylon and adjacent slipway at Old Passage form more prominent built features. Tidal pills with sluice gates set within the grassed earth bank of the sea wall are distinctive features along the warths.

**13.107** The boat house and slipway of Thornbury Sailing Club form small built elements on the shoreline, largely screened from the estuary by the sea wall. The seasonal influx of moored sailing boats and their changing position,

## **LCA 21: Severn Shoreline and Estuary**

influenced by the tides, provides dynamic and locally distinctive feature within Oldbury Pill.

**13.108** The two Severn Bridges which span the Severn Estuary form visually significant features, framing distant views and reinforcing the large scale of the Severn Estuary. They are nationally distinctive landmarks, giving this stretch of the Estuary a strong sense of identity. The original suspension bridge is a Grade I listed structure.

**13.109** The perception of remoteness within the area and its rural characteristics, although extensive, are affected in places by the visual prominence of industrial buildings within the adjacent Levels, or by structures such as pylon lines passing over the area.

**13.110** 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. 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.

**13.111** The existing Oldbury Power Station in 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, from the Levels to the east and also from the Severn Ridges. Both the principal structures and the tidal reservoir and lagoons are also visible from the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean ridges on the western side of the estuary. The associated infrastructure including security fencing and sea wall/bund are further man-made elements which influence local character. The pale blue and grey striped finish to the 60m-high reactor buildings has some effect in reducing the buildings' massing in certain local views, dependent upon weather and light conditions.



## **LCA 21: Severn Shoreline and Estuary**

**13.112** To the south of the M49, large-scale industrial structures and Seabank power station (including towers and chimneys) are visually prominent, sited within the adjacent Pilning Levels (LCA 20) to the south. The Western Approach Distribution Park to the north-east of Severnside is evident in middle-distance views from the top of the sea wall between Severn Beach and Severnside, with the large-scale warehouse buildings visible above the adjacent vegetation framework.

**13.113** Further south, infrastructure associated with the Avonmouth Works (beyond the South Gloucestershire boundary) also contributes to the overriding industrial influence of the Levels and adjacent warths and estuary. To the north, these become progressively screened by intervening topography, including Aust Cliff and outlier hills.

**13.114** All of these built features are visible from the Severn Way footpath, 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.

**13.115** The predominantly earth built and grassed 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 Binn Wall, in contrast, is a more prominent, utilitarian structure where visible from within the warths and estuary. More recently, the Avonmouth Severnside Enterprise Area (ASEA) ecological mitigation flood defence scheme has had a significant impact on this LCA. The project extends from Lamplighters Marsh in the south to Aust Cliff in the north and comprises a combination of flood embankments, precast concrete walling (in some sections with glass panels to maintain views of the Estuary) and sheet pile walls.

**Photo 4: The exposed strata and intertidal vegetation at Aust Cliff SSSI.**



## Tranquillity and Dark Skies

**13.116** A strong rural character and high levels of tranquillity are experienced in the north of the LCA, which is reduced in the south by industrial development on the shoreline and adjacent land around Severn Beach, Severnside Works, and Seabank Power Station, as well as traffic on the Severn Bridges.

**13.117** Parts of the estuary and shoreline experience dark skies, particularly in the north. Light pollution is strongly associated with development, on both Severn Bridges and around Oldbury Power Station.

### Visually Important Hillsides

**13.118** There are no Visually Important Hillsides (VIH) located within this LCA. However, the Severn Ridges VIH (located within LCA 18) to the east has some visual influence, its distinct form and elevation defining a marked change in character from the low-lying levels and estuary and providing a visually prominent landscape feature in views from the west.

**13.119** Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

### Strategic Viewpoints

**13.120** There are no Strategic Viewpoints (SVP) located within this LCA, however several viewpoints in adjacent character areas offer views into and across the landscape, including SVP 1: Old Passage, SVP 6: St Michael's Church (Hill Court), SVP 23: Woodwell Meadows, and SVP 28: Severn View Viewpoint. The estuary is also visible from SVPs located along the Severn Ridge (LCA 18) and in long-distance views west from SVPs located along the Cotswold Scarp (LCA 4).

**13.121** Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Value Features

- Simple, open and exposed landscape of tidal waters, rivulleted mudflats and low cliffs which provide a textured landscape pattern.
- Extensive estuarine habitats of national and international importance for the range of bird species they support, with numerous designations.
- Constantly changing characteristics of the shoreline, resulting from the high tidal range of the Severn Estuary
- Aust Cliff, important for its geological exposed strata and rich fossil bed.
- Strong sense of place with mudflats, grazed warths, tidal pill, the sea wall, Severn Bridges, and important historical features including remnants of putcher ranks.
- Strong sense of relative remoteness, tranquillity and dark night skies arising from the absence of modern development, especially in the northern part of the landscape.
- Expansive views across the estuary to South Wales and the Wye Valley/Forest of Dean Ridges beyond.

## The Changing Landscape

**13.122** The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Estuary, shorelines and levels LCA.

**13.123** Apart from the potential for development on the 150-hectare designated nuclear new build site north of the existing power station at Oldbury, the potential for change in this character area is likely to be limited to pipelines or

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proposals associated with water transport or recreation given the tidal nature and internationally-significant ecological value of much of this LCA.,. However, changes in the adjacent landward landscape character areas may impact on the estuary and shoreline character area. Given the flat topography of this and adjacent landscape areas, there is limited potential to absorb vertical built forms without altering the fundamental character of the more remote and undisturbed areas of the shoreline and estuary.

### Climate Change

- The impact of climate change on sea levels, including increased storm frequency and sea level rise.
- The potential of the Severn Estuary to deliver renewable energy, which could be in various forms, and include both the generation of electricity and the supply of heat. Such proposals would be technically assessed together with measures to minimise and mitigate any potential to change to the landscape character and biodiversity of this character area.

### Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- The Severn Estuary is important for migratory fish which are highly sensitive to changes to water quality and water levels within the estuary.
- Physical, visual and audible disturbance within the adjacent Levels or Estuary may impact upon the habitat, flight patterns or, indirectly, affect the quality of feeding grounds provided by the intertidal zones and estuary waters.
- The Avonmouth Severnside Enterprise Area (ASEA) Ecology Mitigation and Flood Defence Project [See reference 3] along the estuary edge near Old Passage has created around 80 hectares of wetland habitat as part of the development. This will provide habitat for a range of species, contributing to the wetland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network [See reference 4].

### Land Use and Cover

- The bridge abutments and piers associated with the construction of the Second Severn Bridge had some effect upon the local pattern of erosion and deposition, altering silting patterns and beach profiles.
- The visual influence of wind turbines in South Gloucestershire, Bristol, and South Wales extends widely across this character area, however their impact diminishes beyond the Severn Bridges.
- The visual influence of the Oldbury Power Station is significant in the northern part of this LCA.

### Development

- Ongoing changes to the structures and land use associated with the decommissioning of Oldbury Power Station.
- Following the cessation of power generation in 2012, the decommissioning of the existing Oldbury Power Station is ongoing, with a programme of demolitions and construction of temporary facilities ongoing, and final site clearance anticipated in 2080. This will result in changes to the scale massing and extent of buildings at the existing station. There may be potential for some brownfield land and infrastructure to be reused or redeveloped in association with nuclear new build and related development on the adjacent 150 hectare nationally designated site.
- A 150 hectare site is proposed in national policy for the development of a new nuclear power station on the site of the existing lagoons, extending into the Oldbury Levels (LCA 19). Depending on the scale and nature of development and landscape mitigation works proposed, there is potential for significant effects on the character of the wider estuarine landscape, and on the adjacent Levels (LCA 19). Any need for water access including a marine offloading facility, while potentially reducing land-based impacts, could result in significant temporary or permanent change to the foreshore, sea wall and Severn Way in this locality.
- Effects on landscape character and views across the estuary and the adjacent Oldbury Levels landscape can be expected to arise as a result of



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new nuclear and related development. The extent and significance of these effects will be dependent on the type and scale of nuclear and related development, the extent to which existing brownfield land and/or infrastructure on the existing power station site can be reused, repurposed or redeveloped and the effectiveness of landscape and biodiversity buffering to the adjacent areas, including to the adjacent and nearby biodiversity and heritage designations.

- There may also be the potential for offsite effects arising from flood protection measures and any transport, logistics, emergency control and other facilities that may be required.
- Development within the Safeguarded Employment Area (identified in the Local Plan) within the adjacent Pilning Levels (LCA 20) and promoted through the Local Enterprise Partnership has resulted in a significant increase in the extent of industrial infrastructure and commercial warehouses in this area.

## Guidance

**13.124** These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the overarching objectives of the South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment, as set out in Chapter 4.

### Landscape Strategy

### Landscape Management

- Ensure that development and land use practices respect and conserve the archaeological features and historic features that reflect the long-term human activity and association with the River Severn and have special regard to the archaeological potential of the area.

- Have regard to the historic flood defences (sea wall embankment) and features associated with the protection and farming of the levels. Ensure that flood alleviation schemes preserve the grazing marshes, pills, and the distinctive character of the adjoining agricultural land.
- Protect the tranquillity of the landscape and estuary particularly in the north of the character area, and from its overlooking western side.

### Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Identify opportunities to enhance the features of the Severn Estuary European Marine Site, and recently completed wetland restoration and creation projects, for example at Northwick and Hallen Marsh.
- Seek to enhance habitat for the significant waterfowl populations and avoid impact on and/or disturbance to their habitat.
- Prioritise salt marsh expansion and creation as part of the response to future climate change and sea level rises to manage any shoreline retreat, coupled with opportunities for salt marsh grazing and wetland habitat restoration and creation.
- Seek opportunities to create managed retreat to alleviate flood and climate change adaptation and mitigation, including the potential to enlarge areas of salt marsh grazing linked to new wetland habitats created through the A Forgotten Landscape heritage project [\[See reference 5\]](#) and future 'String of Pearls' project [\[See reference 6\]](#).
- Retain and manage Silt Lagoon 3 at Oldbury Power Station as a high tide roost for wetland birds. Explore opportunities to restore lagoon three to increase the provision of intertidal habitat for wetland birds, and to contribute to the wider West of England Nature Partnership (WENP) Strategy and South Gloucestershire Council's 'Linking the Levels' project, which builds on the legacy of the 'Forgotten Landscape Project' and vision for the 'String of Pearls' wetlands programme, aiming to increase wetland connectivity along the Severn Estuary.
- Protect, buffer, and seek opportunities to extend the reedbed habitat at Littleton Brick Pits Avon Wildlife Trust reserve (a local wildlife site and SNCI).

### Development Management

- Development proposals within the landscape and in adjacent areas should be planned and designed to minimise their visual prominence in rural and open views along the Severn Shoreline, the England Coast Path National Trail and Severn Way, and the estuary, and within the setting of the Grade 1 listed Severn Bridge.
- Proposals for development on or associated with the designated nuclear new build site at Oldbury should be designed to minimise impact on the character of the shoreline and estuary landscape and waterscape and to the England Coast Path National Trail and Severn Way. This should include consideration of advance landscape works and other mitigation measures, and the use of temporary facilities and measures that would be removed once the construction phase is concluded.
- Minimise the height and bulk of the new nuclear build, and carefully consider the colour palette as seen within the estuarine and adjacent levels landscapes, including in combination with the existing station. Any proposals for a new nuclear development should incorporate a landscape and ecological framework appropriate for the scale of the development and which provides visual screening. In order to ensure continuity of estuarine habitat, biodiversity mitigation and net gain must be delivered, seeking to ensure reprovision of suitable habitat for protected species within the local area.
- Ensure renewable energy developments are sensitively designed and sited to minimise their impact on visual and landscape character, also considering cumulative effects that will be widely visible across the flat low-lying landscape. Use existing vegetation to screen new developments where appropriate.

# References

- 1 South Gloucestershire Council Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-2027 (adopted December 2013) Available at: <https://www.southglos.gov.uk/documents/cleanversionforinterimpublishion2.pdf>
- 2 West of England Nature Partnership, Nature Recovery Network. Available at: <https://wenp.org.uk/nature-recovery-network/>
- 3 The Avonmouth Severnside Enterprise Area (ASEA) Ecology Mitigation and Flood Defence Project. Available at: <https://www.asea-flood-ecology.co.uk/>
- 4 West of England Nature Partnership, Nature Recovery Network. Available at: <https://wenp.org.uk/nature-recovery-network/>
- 5 A Forgotten Landscape heritage conservation project. Available at: <https://www.aforgottenlandscape.org.uk/>
- 6 West of England Nature Recovery Network prospectus 2021. Available at: [https://www.wenp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NRN-Prospectus\\_March-2021\\_for-website-1.pdf](https://www.wenp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NRN-Prospectus_March-2021_for-website-1.pdf)

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