

Stroud District Landscape Assessment



Supplementary Planning Guidance
November 2000



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Directorate of Development and Leisure

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FOREWORD



FOREWORD

The aim of undertaking a landscape assessment is to provide an objective overview of the visual character of the landscape, its variety and distinctiveness. It identifies key features and characteristics which give places their individual and unique identity, as well as factors which threaten an adverse change to landscapes central to the landscape assessment process and its future use.

The information contained in this document is to be used as supplementary planning guidance to the Stroud District Local Plan. In other Districts in the UK this guidance has proved to be extremely valuable in integrating landscape issues and giving them due consideration within the planning system.

This document provides information on the landscapes of Stroud in such a way that it is interesting and informative for all parties: local residents, farmers, developers and planners. Only when we understand the essence of what we have as a landscape resource are we effective at making 'sustainable' decisions about its future.

PREFACE

PREFACE

This document presents valuable information on the Stroud District landscape which, it is hoped, will raise the awareness and understanding of the District's varied and unique landscapes.

It has been based on a detailed landscape assessment carried out by Landscape Design Associates in 1996 and on other earlier landscape studies undertaken by different parties.

The landscape assessment was guided by the Countryside Commission's guidelines on landscape assessment CCP423 and fits within the context of the now completed 'Character Map of England' undertaken by the Countryside Commission.

The methodology has embraced background material and mapped information including geology, topography, hydrology, ecology, land cover and historical development and compiled this information to define areas of distinct character and local identity. It has considered and fits within relevant planning policy including Planning Policy Guidance 7 (PPG7), The Hedgerows Regulations as well as Structure and Local Plan policies.

STROUD LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

SECTION A

THE SHAPING OF STROUD DISTRICT LANDSCAPE



Supplementary Planning Guidance

November 2000

THE SHAPING OF STROUD DISTRICT LANDSCAPE

C O N T E N T S

INTRODUCTION

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

- Geology
- Topography
- Hydrology and Ecology

HUMAN INFLUENCES

NATURAL HISTORY

- Land Use
- Agriculture



THE SHAPING OF STROUD DISTRICT LANDSCAPE

INTRODUCTION

Stroud District embraces a diversity of landscape character from the open and exposed plateaux landscapes of the Cotswolds and the sheltered valleys in the scarp face, to the flat expansive landscapes of the Severn Estuary. About half of the District is included in the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) a nationally important high quality landscape. The lowland landscapes of the Severn Vale, to the west of the escarpment, are more subtle and diverse and are less well known, but are important at a local level and when viewed from the upland areas.




The dramatic contrasts of the Stroud District landscape are due to many complex interactions, over a long period of time. A unique combination of geology and physical geography, and a rich history of human occupation, all contribute to Stroud District's unmistakable character and identity.

The physical and human factors provide the background to understanding the existing landscape resource, its variety, and its value.



STROUD LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT
SECTION A
THE SHAPING OF STROUD
DISTRICT LANDSCAPE

Key

-  District Boundary
-  Major Towns
-  Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

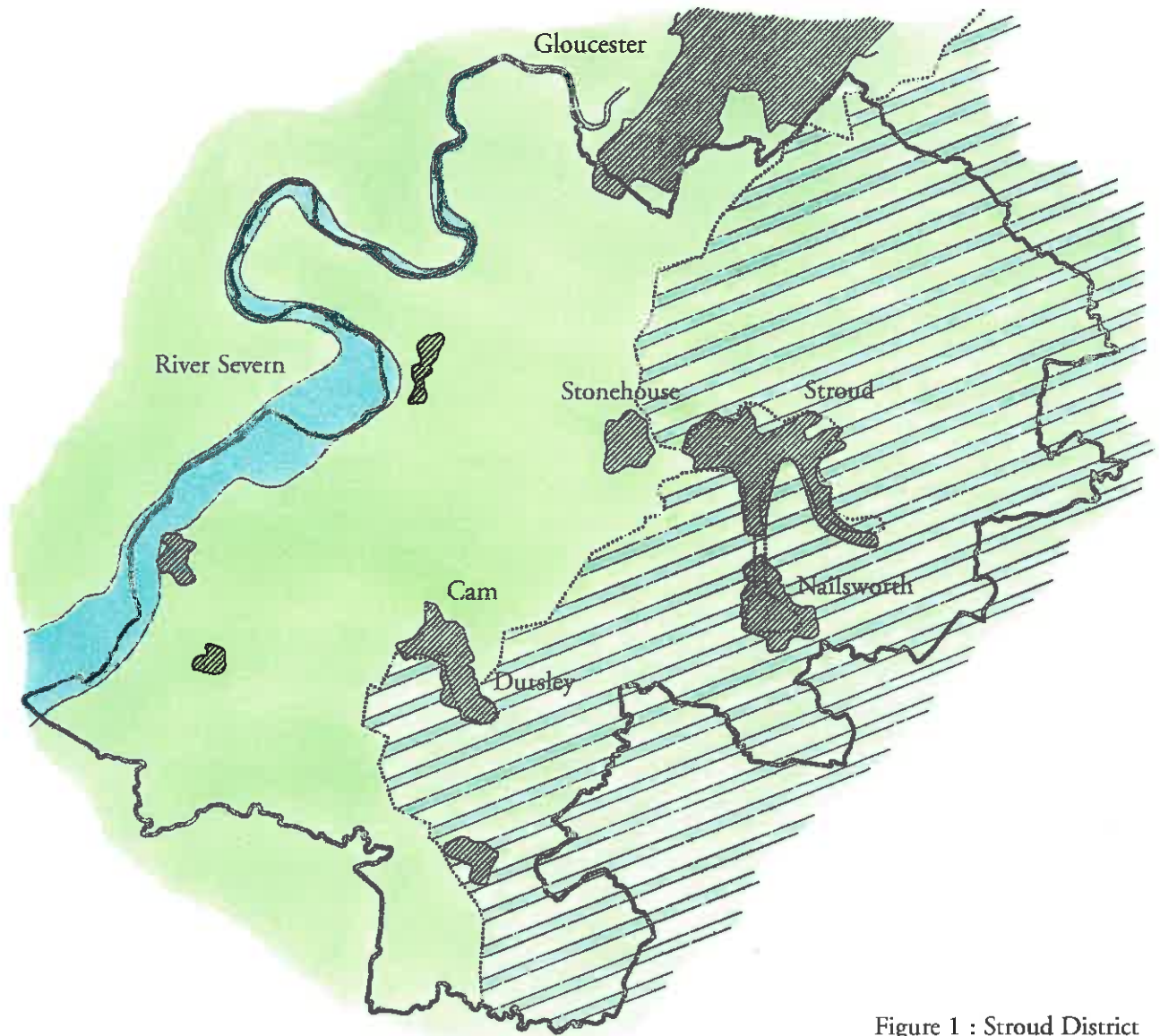


Figure 1 : Stroud District

THE SHAPING OF STROUD DISTRICT LANDSCAPE



PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

■ *Geology*

The geology of Stroud District is **dominated by rocks of the Jurassic era**. The relative porosity and hardness of these rocks have had a significant effect on the character of the landscape influencing land form, the formation of particular soil types and related vegetation cover and building materials.

The influence of geology is marked in the upland area of the **Cotswolds which owes its existence to Oolitic Limestone**. This rock is yellowish to greyish, hard and porous. The strata of the limestone rock dip gently to the south-east resulting in a raised plateau landscape and dramatic scarp face. The limestone is used extensively for walls and roofs - a typical characteristic of the Cotswolds AONB.

Underlying the limestones are beds of softer sandstone and siltstones with some clay. These rocks and sediments are exposed on the Cotswolds scarp face and valley sides and it is this interface of the limestone with the underlying clay which marks the transition to the lowland landscapes of the Severn Vale. **The clay predominates through the lowland landscapes**, stretching from Gloucester southwards in a broad belt flanking the Cotswolds escarpment and again influences the local building stone which in this area is predominantly brick.





STROUD LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT
SECTION A
THE SHAPING OF STROUD
DISTRICT LANDSCAPE

Key

Recent

-  River Alluvium
-  Estuarine Alluvium


Jurassic

-  Oolites : Limestones with some Clay
-  Corteswold Sands and Clay
-  Silts and Marlstone Rock Bed
-  Mainly Clay with Severn River Gravels including White and Blue Lias (Limestone)

Triassic

-  Marls

Carboniferous

-  Carboniferous Complex: Mainly Limestones, Shale and Sandstones



Devonian

-  Old Red Sandstones

Silurian

-  Mainly Sandstones and Shales

Cambrian

-  Mainly Shales and Siltstones
-  Significant low-lying ridges

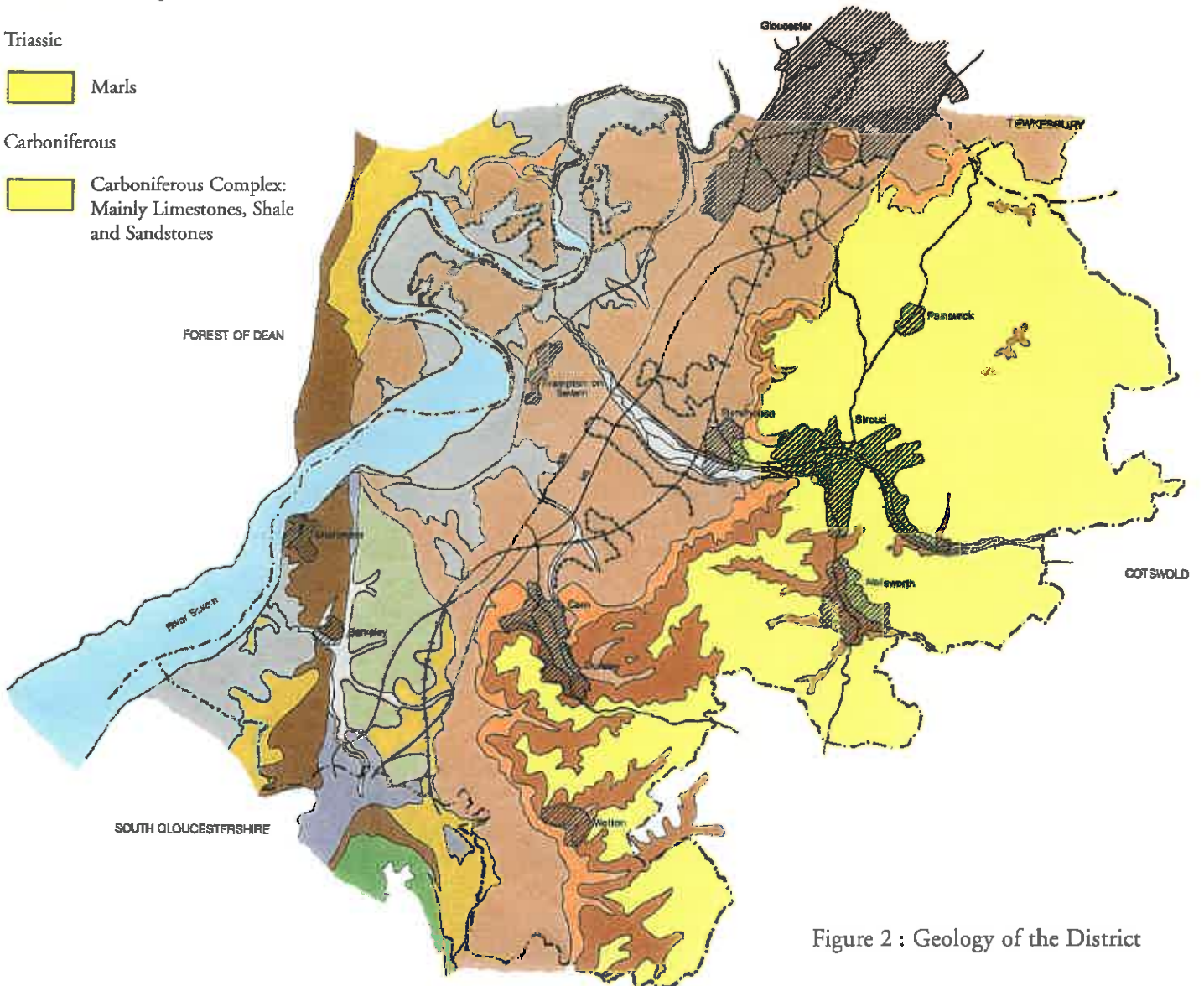


Figure 2 : Geology of the District

THE SHAPING OF STROUD DISTRICT LANDSCAPE

Outcrops of Triassic marls form low ridges in the south-western part of the District, with Devonian Old Red Sandstones evident as a broad low ridge stretching south from Sharpness to Berkeley, and beyond to the District boundary. Much-eroded older shales, siltstones and sandstones of the Silurian and Cambrian eras also occur in the southwest of the District, giving rise to an irregular low-lying terrain.

The most recent deposits of marine and river alluvium occur close to the River Severn and the lower reaches of the rivers Frome and Little Avon.

Topography

The District exhibits a wide range of topographical character, but divides clearly into the Cotswolds upland area, and the broad, low lying, gently undulating landscape of the Severn Vale.

The highest part of the Cotswolds plateau occurs in the north-east at just over 280m AOD, while the main body of the upland plateau occurs between 150 - 200m AOD. The upland plateau is characterised by a gently undulating to rolling terrain, dissected by deeply incised, and narrow valleys.

The defining escarpment of the Cotswolds runs more-or-less north-east to south-west, but is much indented and modified by short valleys and coombes.







There are two significant breaches in this dramatic escarpment; one at Stonehouse formed by the River Frome, and one at Dursley and Cam formed by the River Ewelme, a tributary of the River Cam. These valleys tend to be broader than those formed by the smaller streams.

The foot of the escarpment coincides approximately with the 100m contour, with gentle gradients defining the lower footslopes. Much of the Severn Vale lowland lies below 50m AOD, with the exception of a few distinctive rounded hillocks and ridges. Small rounded hills are evident near Elmore and Longney, and on the Arlingham peninsular.



THE SHAPING OF STROUD DISTRICT LANDSCAPE

Key

-  250m + AOD
-  200m - 250m AOD
-  150m - 200m AOD
-  100m - 150m AOD
-  50m - 100m AOD
-  0 - 50m AOD

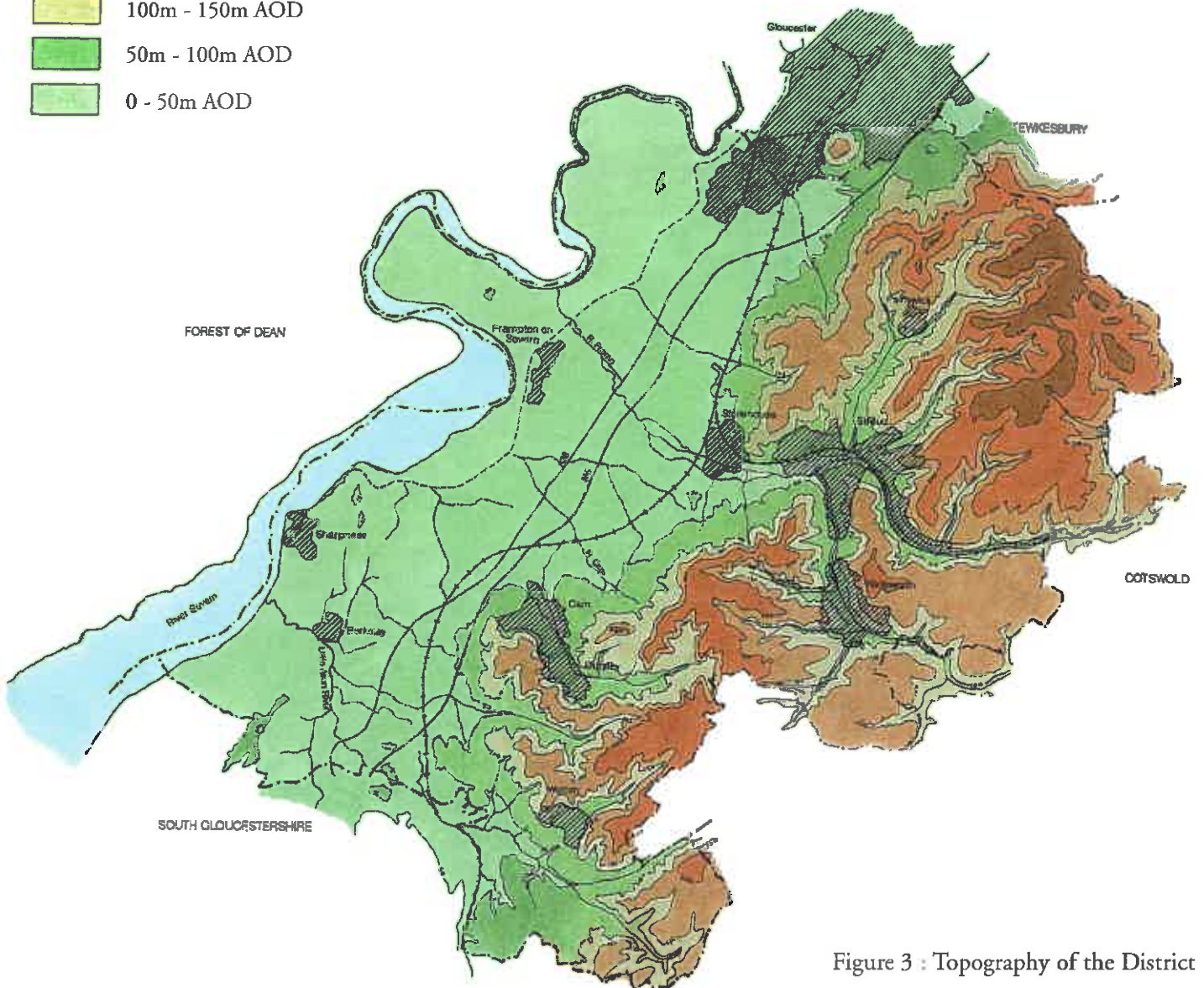


Figure 3 : Topography of the District

THE SHAPING OF STROUD DISTRICT LANDSCAPE

The ridge of Old Red Sandstone near Berkeley rises to about 40m AOD, while the distinctive whale-back of Triassic marls at Whitcliff Deer Park has its highest point at around 57m AOD. In contrast, **extensive, flat, low-lying marshy land and wet pastures flank the River Severn** and form a distinctive estuarine landscape.

Hydrology and Ecology

The main rivers of the District all form tributaries to the River Severn, draining the higher land of the Cotswolds. The River Frome, River Cam and the Little Avon River all flow in a generally westerly or north-westerly direction.

The upper valley sections within the Cotswolds are characteristically steep-sided and deeply incised. In these sections the streams run rapidly and flows are adequate for powering mills; this has been an important factor in the historical and commercial development of the area. The headwaters have a complex, branching pattern with lesser, short tributaries at right angles.

The limestone uplands are generally devoid of surface water; the streams emerging at seeps and springs along the base of the limestone to feed the headwaters.

Many of the lesser streams of the District are short and steep, arising in small valleys and coombes in the escarpment itself, and issuing onto the Severn Vale before joining one of the three main rivers. The River Frome has an **unspoilt** character in its upper reaches, with an engineered channel in much of its mid-course from Chalford to Stonehouse where it is flanked by the Thames and Severn and the Stroudwater Canals, now the subject of restoration.

The rural character of the **Frome Valley** is regained downstream of Stonehouse. Here the River Frome is large enough to have a defined valley floor and floodplain. It flows through a shallow alluvial valley with gentle convex slopes, and within the context of the wider Severn



THE SHAPING OF STROUD DISTRICT LANDSCAPE

Plain, the river valley topography and its associated alder and willows give it a distinctive character. The stretch from Chalford through Stroud, to the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal, is designated an Industrial Heritage Conservation Area.

The **River Cam** is tree-lined with diverse bankside vegetation in its upper reaches. It crosses the River Severn flood plain and joins the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal which is contained between banks above the level of the surrounding pastures. These low-lying alluvial lands are drained by ditches or "rhines" which are pumped into the River Severn, and protected by sea banks, giving a fen-like character.

The **Little Avon River** is similarly tree-lined in its upper reaches; the small-scale, gorge-like valley near Michaelwood with its sinuous, incised character is worthy of special note. Its lower section is a complex, low-lying basin of dendritic water courses, issuing through a restricted gap between locally higher ground at Berkeley. An historic sea mill is sited here. This river joins the Severn estuary via Berkeley Pill, a narrow tidal inlet.

Of all the water courses however it is the **River Severn** which forms the largest body of water within and adjacent to the Stroud District. Here the River meets the sea forming an estuary of broad tidal water. It significantly affects the character and land uses immediately adjacent to it but also influences views from the escarpment edge and other elevated viewpoints. On hazy days the shining silver ribbon of water can be picked out in the distance, giving context and orientation to the viewer.

The landscape context of the Severn is lowland grazing marshes. The banks of the estuary comprise mud flats and marshes and the open simplicity of the landscape, coupled with the expanse of water is memorable and distinctive.



THE SHAPING OF STROUD DISTRICT LANDSCAPE

HUMAN INFLUENCES

Stroud District, like most of England, contains a **richly historic landscape** occupied since the Neolithic period and exploited for its raw materials and fertile soils. Of course, much of the historic land use and settlement pattern has itself been determined or at least influenced by topography, soils, geology and climatic variations, so that the remains or patterns of human activity often reflect the influence of these natural factors.

The Cotswold Hills were first occupied in the **Mesolithic period**. Small clearings were made in the woodlands and hamlets formed during the Prehistoric period in the sheltered valleys of the scarp, close to water supplies. Visible features from this Prehistoric period include long barrows and hill forts, and although not proven it is likely that the pattern of sinuous lanes connecting the valleys to higher land could also date from this period.

It is not until the **Roman period** that there is evidence of occupation on the footslopes of the escarpment which includes roman villas such as at Frocester. A larger area of the Severn Plain is likely to have been exploited for agriculture to supply the neighbouring market towns of Gloucester and Cirencester during this period.

In the **Saxon period** more villages established on the Severn Plain leaving place names terminating in ham, ton and ley. Domesday records sheep grazing and crop growing on the plain indicating more extensive agriculture.

The **Medieval period** leaves the greatest mark on the Stroud District landscape today in the form of the settlement pattern and the very important development of the fulling and wool trade starting in the 14th Century and clustering at the foot of the escarpment. Villages prospered and churches were built which can still be seen today.

Over **the following centuries** increasing population, communication routes and changing agriculture have further influenced the historic pattern of the landscape. The location and form of the built environment has evolved within the landscape to become an integral part of the landscape character of the District. There has, and will continue to be, a large impact on the landscape from national farming trends and the search for efficiencies in agricultural production. Similarly, changing trends in planning policy and the location of future new development will influence the patterns of settlement.

THE SHAPING OF STROUD DISTRICT LANDSCAPE

NATURAL HISTORY

Land Use

The wide variation in the character of bedrock and topography has given rise to diverse soil types and vegetation.

The drier, alkaline soils of the Cotswolds, derived from the limestones, have traditionally been used for sheep grazing. Much **limestone grassland**, formerly extensive, has been lost due to increases in arable farming and intensification, leaving species-rich remnants on the steeper escarpment, valley slopes and the commons. These areas are of national importance and many are designated SSSIs or Nature Conservation Sites, supporting a wide variety of grasses, herbs and invertebrates.

The steepest slopes of the Secluded Valleys and Escarpment have supported **woodland** continuously for hundreds of years. Much is designated as Ancient Woodland and extensive areas are protected as NNRs, SSSIs or Nature Conservation Sites. Beech dominates the shallower, drier soils, with Oak, Ash and Beech on the deeper soils. Where the canopy is more open, a diverse shrub and herb layer occurs.

In places, extensive conversion to mixed plantations (eg - Westridge Wood, North Nibley), including conifers and non native hardwoods has greatly reduced the conservation value of these ancient woodlands with subsequent loss of species diversity. Colonisation by Sycamore is also causing a deterioration in quality and diversity. Along the Severn Vale the loss of hedgerow Elm trees to Dutch Elm disease since the 1970's has resulted in a loss of sense of enclosure and an opening up of that landscape.



THE SHAPING OF STROUD DISTRICT LANDSCAPE

Woodland, clearly, is an important land cover and habitat type within the District. All measures are required to ensure the protection and positive management of the remaining ancient woodlands and their diverse, dependent wildlife, and to retain landscape character.

Other important habitats within the District include the extensive **wetlands of the Severn Estuary** landscape, which below the Mean High Water mark, are designated as a RAMSAR site, Special Protection Area and proposed Special Area for Conservation. These estuarine tidal flats and pastures are internationally important for over-wintering wildfowl and provide a variety of habitats for other birds, mammals and invertebrates.

Throughout the lowland landscapes small farm ponds occur. These are particularly numerous in the south and southwest part of the District, and are likely to be of special importance for amphibian populations.

The **river landscapes** have been mentioned under the previous heading, but it should be noted that the rivers and streams throughout the District are generally of high or good quality, supporting a wide variety of plant and invertebrate life including protected species such as Otter and Water Vole, and there are species-rich wetland meadows within the District.

Hedgerows continue to be lost from much of the lowland landscape due to field enlargement for the purpose of streamlining agricultural operations. Continued attrition of this habitat type will seriously weaken the wildlife value of the remaining isolated hedgerows and farm woodlands. Loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, and increases in field sizes can also significantly alter the landscape character, both locally, and as seen from more distant viewpoints.

Agriculture

Agriculture and agricultural land use clearly has a very significant impact on the landscape. As part of the assessment, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food were asked to prepare an agricultural issues report. The following section of this report summarises the key issues arising.

THE SHAPING OF STROUD DISTRICT LANDSCAPE

The Stroud district has very little excellent and poor quality agricultural land, but a **higher than average amount of good to moderate land** (ie. grade 3 - 67.1%, contrasting with 43.6% nationally). Approximately two thirds of the agricultural land is owner-occupied, the remainder being rented. 23.5% of the land is cropped, with 61% laid to grass and 5% rough grazing. Grassland has declined over the last ten years with cropped areas increasing. Over the last ten years farm types have changed with dairy, pig and poultry, cropping and mixed farm units declining while cattle and sheep, horticulture and part-time farming have been increasing.

Within cropped areas, over the last ten years, cereal acreage has decreased whilst other crops, particularly oilseed rape, linseed, field beans and peas have increased markedly. The current patterns of cropping obviously contribute to the current landscape. Whilst there is a **domination of grassland**, arable use is found in all landscape character types. As is seen nationwide, the search for efficiencies in agricultural production over the last few decades has had a significant impact on landscape character. CAP reform, and **Government schemes** designed to encourage farmers to adopt agricultural practices which help **to protect and enhance the environment** are beginning to have an impact with increasing take up of Set Aside, Cotswold Hills ESA and Countryside Stewardship Management Agreements. Within the overall Cotswold Hills ESA scheme, which extends beyond the Stroud District boundary, 500 agreements have been made covering 60% of the eligible area. Under the Countryside Stewardship scheme, Severn Vale farmland has been selected as a priority for encouraging wading birds, wild flowers, species rich pastures and meadows and pollarded Willows. Traditional orchards, ridge and furrow fields and designed parklands are also targets.

Farm diversification arising from changes in the agricultural economy and planning policy will be an increasingly important issue in respect of the landscape. A range of enterprises are already active within Stroud and more will undoubtedly follow.



STROUD LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

SECTION B

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES



Supplementary Planning Guidance

November 2000

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES

C O N T E N T S

INTRODUCTION

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE DESCRIPTIONS

COTSWOLD UPLAND LANDSCAPES

- Wold Tops
- Rolling Valleys
- Secluded Valleys
- Escarpment

SEVERN VALE LOWLAND LANDSCAPES

- Rolling Agricultural Plain
- Undulating Lowlands
- Severn Vale Hillocks
- Severn Vale Grazing Marshes
- Sandstone Ridge
- Triassic Ridge
- Wooded Cambrian Ridge
- Kingswood Vale



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES

INTRODUCTION

The methodology applied to the assessment of the landscape character of the District was based on the widely recognised Countryside Commission approach, as set out in CCP423, "Landscape Assessment - A Countryside Commission Approach". This has subsequently been adapted and refined by Landscape Design Associates during, and as a result of several Regional, County and District-wide assessments.

Broadly, the methodology follows three steps; firstly, collection and review of data as a desk study, giving a general preliminary indication of landscape character areas or types; secondly, a period of field study recording both objective data and subjective responses to the landscape itself and testing the draft character areas; and thirdly, an analysis and description of the collected information in the form of the report, with recommendations such as landscape guidelines or planning policy guidance, as required.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE DESCRIPTIONS

Mapping of Landscape Character Types is shown on the fold-out drawings at the end of this document.

In response to the existing detailed assessment work of the Cotswolds AONB landscape presented in the ADAS report, this study has followed the model of landscape character types used in that study. The identification of character types in an area of clearly differentiated topographical character such as the Cotswolds works particularly well. However, the more subtly differentiated topography and land use of the lowland landscape within the District, presents a more complex prospect, and the definition of character types cannot be applied so rigidly.

In view of this subtlety of the lowland areas, the boundaries between some character types are in reality gradual transitions rather than sharply defined changes. These are indicated as "transitions" on the Landscape Character drawings.

Certain areas embrace a diversity of characteristics, and to avoid undue complexity these have been described as groups such as landscape character type 5, Rolling Agricultural Plain, which is subdivided into three variations (see below).

Twelve Landscape Character Types have been identified throughout the District, and these are described below.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES

COTSWOLD UPLAND LANDSCAPES

The Cotswold Upland Landscapes can be divided into four character types :

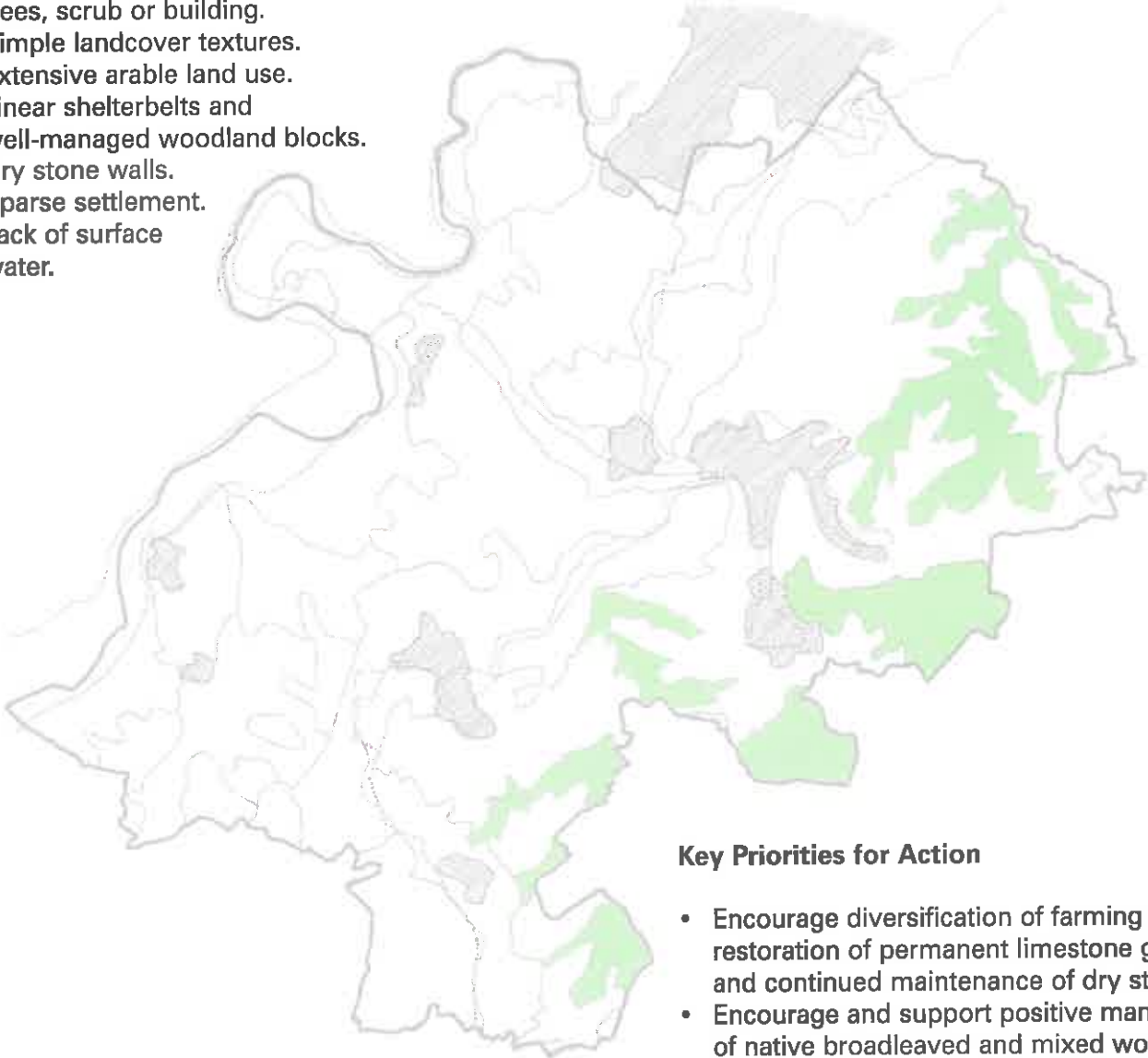
- Wold Tops
- Rolling Valleys
- Secluded Valleys
- Escarpment

The majority of these character types fall within the Cotswolds AONB and closely follow the assessment carried out in 1994 by ADAS. The detailed guidelines given in the ADAS report are of particular relevance to understanding the landscape in terms of land management, proposals for new planting and new building, and the protection of archaeological sites throughout the Cotswold Upland Landscapes and should be read in conjunction with this document. It is available for inspection at Stroud District Council offices at Ebley, Mill, Stroud.

WOLD TOPS

Key Characteristics

- Simple expansive character with long views giving the impression of a plateau.
- Broad undulating elevated topography.
- Large scale strong visual pattern of fields and woodland.
- Lack of enclosure from hedgerow trees, scrub or building.
- Simple landcover textures.
- Extensive arable land use.
- Linear shelterbelts and well-managed woodland blocks.
- Dry stone walls.
- Sparse settlement.
- Lack of surface water.



Key Priorities for Action

- Encourage diversification of farming to include restoration of permanent limestone grassland and continued maintenance of dry stone walls.
- Encourage and support positive management of native broadleaved and mixed woodlands and discourage extensive planting of conifers.
- Maintain the open character of this upland landscape and avoid siting any development on prominent ridgelines or horizons.
- See also detailed landscape management guidelines in ADAS report, 1994.

WOLD TOPS



Landform and Context

The Wold Tops Landscape forms an elevated undulating dissected plateau. The physical landform owes its characteristics to the thickly bedded, more or less horizontal strata of oolitic limestones. Surface water is not evident in this landscape.

Generally topography is flat to gently undulating with gentle convex slopes which steepen dramatically and form a distinct edge dissected by the incised Secluded Valleys landscape type. The upland landscape is attenuated in many places to form long gently undulating ridgelines, with the divided and sub-divided valleys cutting into the upland plain and marked by distinct valley heads.

The area north of the River Frome Valley, i.e. east of Stroud and north of Chalford, is the most dissected part of the Wold Tops landscape. South of the River Frome Valley and south of the Nailsworth and Cam Valleys, the Wold Tops stretch south-east in an extensive plateau-like landscape which forms the dip slope of the Cotswolds.

WOLD TOPS

Land Use and Landscape Pattern

This area is characterised by the large scale, open arable fields broken locally by tree clumps, shelterbelts and plantations of both broad-leaved and mixed woodland. Field patterns are large scale with boundaries of both dry stone walling, hedges and in places post and wire fencing. There are still significant patches of common land within this landscape type, as found in the Stroud area which contribute to the simple, expansive character of the landscape and the general lack of visual enclosure.

Formerly this landscape was extensively used for sheep grazing, but nowadays this has been largely replaced by cereal crops and improved grassland although Beech is the typical tree on these limestone uplands, although this has been superseded in many areas by conversion to conifer and mixed plantations. In some areas parkland influences the otherwise more open landscape, as in the vicinity of the Miserden and Edgeworth Estates.

The characteristic relationship of the Secluded Valley landscape with the edge of the Wold Tops is most distinctive. At the marked break of slope, particularly at the valley heads the change from large scale open arable fields to a smaller scale of enclosure, often associated with small woodlands, copses and sometimes scrubland on the steeper slopes, can be readily identified.

Roads commonly follow the ridgelines and are often lined with dry stone walls. The linear patterns of regular rectangular enclosures is evidence of this more recently enclosed landscape, and it contrasts markedly to the valley and lowland landscapes within the District.

Settlement and Vernacular Character

The settlement is generally sparse throughout this landscape type. It predominantly consists of scattered farmsteads, manor houses and farming hamlets which are sited to take advantage of local variations in the landform thus gaining shelter in the exposed landscape. Many of the settlements are in fact on the edge of this landscape type and partly within the shelter of the Secluded Valleys landscape type. The village settlement of Bisley is a clustered settlement occupying a strategic position on the edge of the upland on communication routes between the plateau and the valleys. The largest settlement occurring within this landscape character type is the small market town of Minchinhampton occupying the ridge between the main Stroud valley and the Nailsworth valley.

The extensive use of limestone as a building and roofing material throughout this area gives it a very strong and distinct local character. Houses often with stone mullioned windows, and the cottages with steeply sloping roofs and dormer windows reinforce this particular character. Gardens are often enclosed with stone walls, again

WOLD TOPS

reinforcing local character. Where the traditional materials have not been employed for building construction, these buildings tend to be very noticeable and have a visually detracting effect. Larger buildings as at the old airfield at Aston Down are very prominent in this open gently undulating landscape, as are large agricultural sheds. In places lines of electricity pylons form an intrusive element.

Small disused quarries now often support clumps of trees and blend with the generally broken pattern of woodland through the landscape type. However, in some places these small quarries have become sites for fly-tipping and informal dumping of waste materials creating eye sores and decreasing environmental quality.

Roman roads are a feature of this landscape and barrows are scattered throughout the area.

Sensitivity to Change

This expansive upland landscape with long distance open views has a sense of remoteness from built up areas. It is unified, being fairly simple in the pattern of land use types, and has a well managed character. When travelling along the minor roads with their old dry stone walls, unspoilt grassland verges and variety of wild flowers, this can be an inspirational landscape. In areas where arable farming predominates and the fields are of large size, there is a sense of a prairie type landscape. Long distance views can be satisfying, broken with clumps of trees and shelterbelts, and where well-managed mixed woodland and the parkland estate landscape are evident, the variety of characters is visually satisfying.



WOLD TOPS

Sensitivity to Change

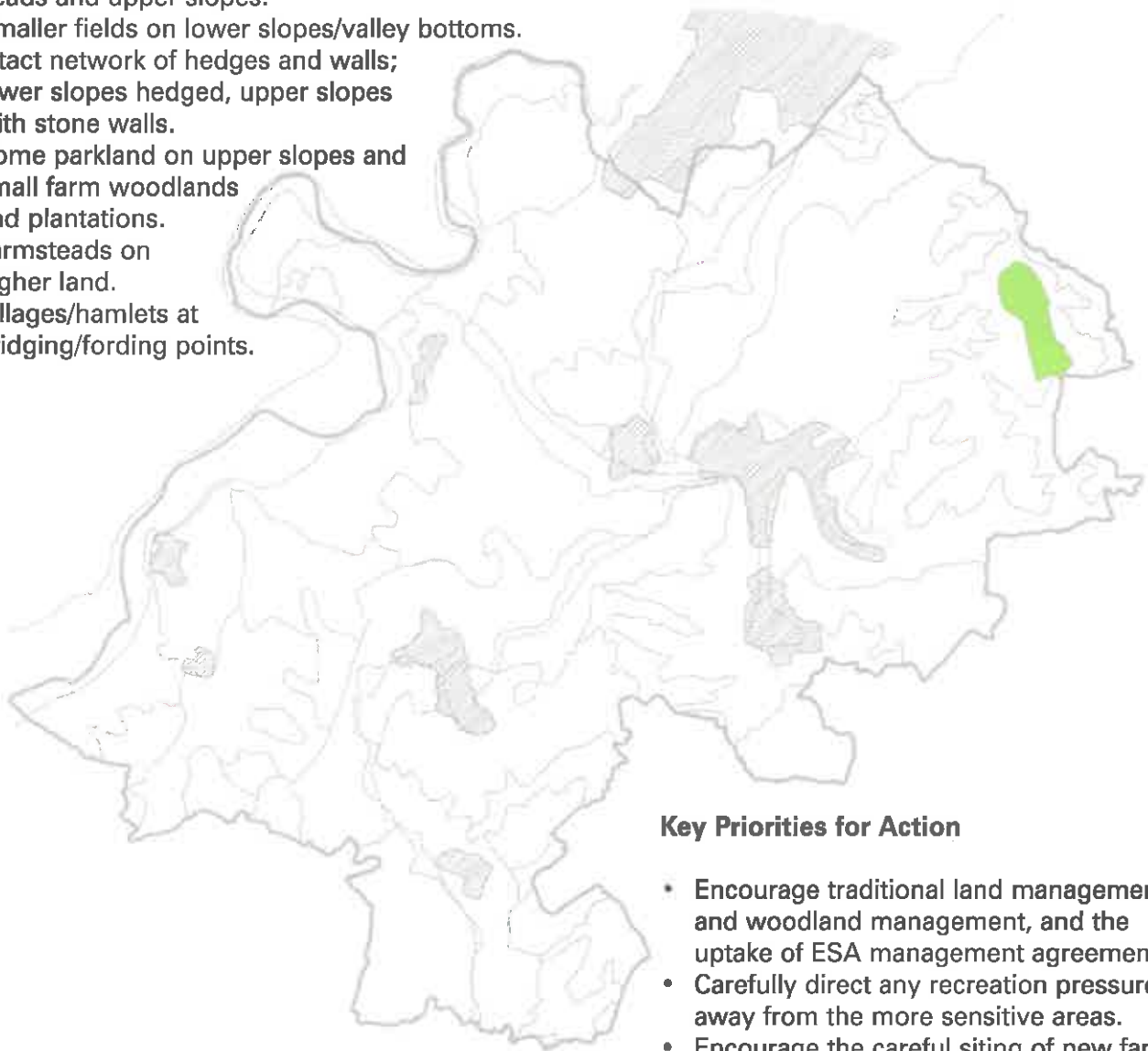
In an area where extensive arable farming predominates the greatest factor of change is agricultural policy leading to related changes in land use. Historically, this landscape has already undergone a significant change from limestone grassland to the present day arable landscape with the ensuing loss of habitats. Further loss of the remnant semi-natural habitats should be resisted, and those features which lend distinctiveness to the character area such as the old dry stone walls should be repaired and restored. The open visual character is sensitive to differing types of tree planting, and it is desirable to maintain and continue the management of native broadleaved woodlands.

Similarly, new large scale structures and buildings such as masts, wind turbines and agricultural sheds, or large scale development of new housing estates on the edge of existing villages could have a significant visual impact, and very careful siting and planning controls are required to prevent negative impact.

ROLLING VALLEYS

Key Characteristics

- Associated with rolling topography of Cotswold dip slope.
- Convex valley side profile;
no upper valley-side rim or distinct break of slope.
- Valley heads open without scrub and woodland.
- Mid-valleys more wooded on steeper slopes.
- Permanent grassland and wetland vegetation on valley bottom.
- Large scale regularly shaped fields at valley heads and upper slopes.
- Smaller fields on lower slopes/valley bottoms.
- Intact network of hedges and walls; lower slopes hedged, upper slopes with stone walls.
- Some parkland on upper slopes and small farm woodlands and plantations.
- Farmsteads on higher land.
- Villages/hamlets at bridging/fording points.



Key Priorities for Action

- Encourage traditional land management and woodland management, and the uptake of ESA management agreements.
- Carefully direct any recreation pressures away from the more sensitive areas.
- Encourage the careful siting of new farm buildings to prevent damage to the historic character of hamlets and farmsteads.
- See also detailed landscape management guidelines in ADAS report, 1994.

ROLLING VALLEYS



Landform and Context

There are two areas within the District which can be identified as the Rolling Valleys landscape character type. The largest area occurs in the north-east stretching from Whiteway to Sudgrove. The second area occurs in parts of the Avening Valley complex coming within the south-east edge of the Stroud District boundary.

The Rolling Valley landscape is characterised by convex sides with no obvious break of slope from the undulating landscape of the Wold Tops. The valley heads are often indistinct, but the valleys proper are characterised by steep lower slopes often with interlocking rounded spurs.

ROLLING VALLEYS

Where this landscape type occurs within the District, these valleys support small streams which form part of the complex drainage pattern joining the River Frome. The valley heads are typically without the woodland and scrub which demarcates the Secluded Valleys landscape type. Thus, the transition from the Wold Tops landscape is often indistinct, and arable land use may occur on these shallow upper slopes. Further down the valley profile, woodland and scrub occupy the steeper slopes, and permanent grassland forms species-rich pastures, particularly on the valley bottom.

Land Use and Landscape Pattern

The shallower upper slopes typically support a patchwork of grasslands and arable land, along with areas of parkland and field-sized woodlands, the latter of which is closely related to the contours. Where the valley bottoms broaden, species-rich pastures, meadows and some more intensively farmed fields are characteristic. The streams are often tree lined and hedges and hedgerow trees are common on the lower slopes. In contrast dry stone walls and infrequent trees are typical of the upper slopes and shallow valley heads. Here, the influence of adjoining parkland has a softening affect, particularly near the Miserden Estate and Hazle Manor.

Coniferous plantations form a significant constituent of the woodland cover, and these valleys generally have an enclosed character.

Access by road is restricted, although these valleys are traversed by many bridleways and footpaths.

Settlement and Vernacular Character

A scattering of farmsteads and old hamlets associated with manor houses take advantage of the shallower slopes and broader sections of valley floor within this sheltered landscape type. Overall however, the Rolling Valleys comprise a predominantly agricultural landscape with sparse settlements of a traditional Cotswold character, the buildings being of stone with stone roofs.

ROLLING VALLEYS

Human Response

The Rolling Valleys form secluded sheltered landscapes within the more open exposed Wold Tops. They have an air of seclusion and where the traditional wet pastures exist, there is a richness in the diversity of landscape.

Sensitivity to Change

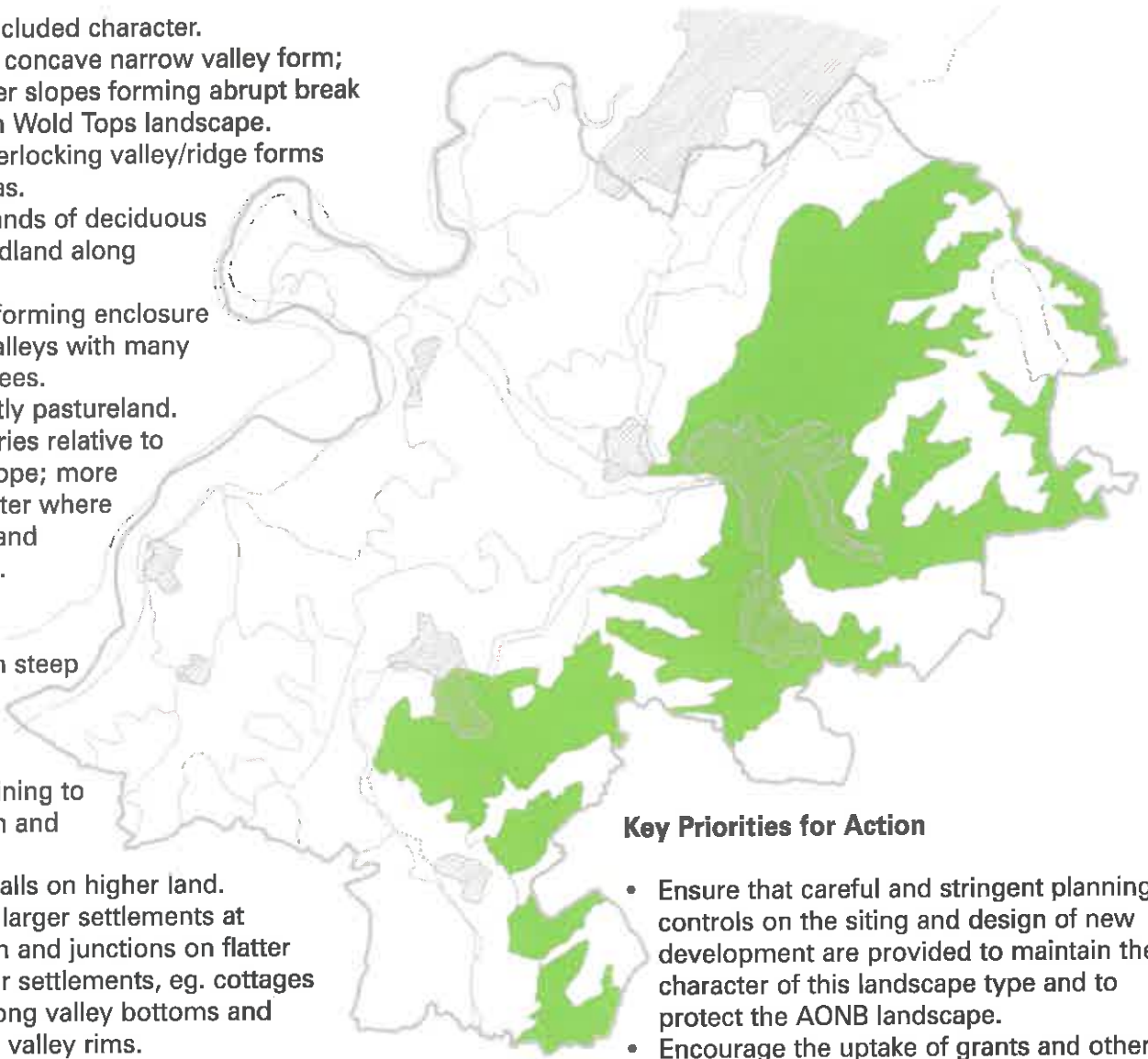
The Rolling Valleys landscape is to some extent protected by its topographic character but the diversity of habitats including unimproved grasslands and wetland, and traditional small scale woodland, could be seriously jeopardised by any drastic change of land management. These valleys are therefore sensitive to any large scale change of use or development, and given the importance of the matrix of habitats supported within them, are deserving of protection.



SECLUDED VALLEYS

Key Characteristics

- Enclosed, secluded character.
- Steep sides, concave narrow valley form; steeper upper slopes forming abrupt break of slope with Wold Tops landscape.
- Complex interlocking valley/ridge forms in some areas.
- Extensive bands of deciduous ancient woodland along valley rims.
- Tall hedges forming enclosure within the valleys with many hedgerow trees.
- Predominantly pastureland.
- Field size varies relative to degree of slope; more open character where valleys join and broaden out.
- Scrub and unimproved grassland on steep and broken slopes.
- Fast flowing streams draining to River Severn and tributaries.
- Dry stone walls on higher land.
- Settlement: larger settlements at valley mouth and junctions on flatter land; smaller settlements, eg. cottages and mills along valley bottoms and along upper valley rims.



Key Priorities for Action

- Ensure that careful and stringent planning controls on the siting and design of new development are provided to maintain the character of this landscape type and to protect the AONB landscape.
- Encourage the uptake of grants and other support schemes to maintain traditional land management in the rural valleys.
- Encourage the continued protection of important wildlife habitats.
- Conserve and restore important cultural features such as old mill buildings and protect old quarry sites which form distinctive local features where they have revegetated and become important local sites of nature conservation.
- Protect remnant pastures and small woodlands both on the valleys sides and valley floor within the more urban pressured areas.
- See also detailed landscape management guidelines in ADAS report, 1994.

SECLUDED VALLEYS



Landform and Context

This landscape type occurs extensively throughout the District. It is bounded to the north-west by the Escarpment landscape type and forms an intricate matrix of interlocking fingers with the Wold Tops landscape type to the east and south.

The Secluded Valleys are deeply incised into the Cotswolds plateau and vary in places from narrow, steep-sided valleys, of almost V-shaped profile, to the more eroded open complex of the Painswick and Slad Valley area. Typically these steep sided valleys have a concave profile with upper slopes forming an abrupt break with the Wold Tops landscape beyond. Formed by a dendritic river system, there are many small tributary side valleys divided by spurs of higher land.

The valleys of the southern part of the District are less complex and shorter with the streams issuing directly on to the Severn Vale through broad breaks in the escarpment as at Alderley and Dursley. The valleys created by the River Frome catchment are far more complex, although still characterised by the typical landform described above.

The area north of Stroud covered by the Painswick and Slad Valleys has a distinct character of its own. These parallel valleys have created a broader basin which is evident when viewed from the surrounding higher land; the ridges between having been vigorously eroded to more rounded profiles. Sometimes upstanding knolls and spurs marked by prominent trees are left between the wider, shallower slopes which occur at the valley junctions.

SECLUDED VALLEYS

These valleys support small fast flowing streams which arise from springlines and wet flushes on the steep slopes below the oolitic limestone.

Land Use and Landscape Pattern

These valleys are distinctive for their extensive woodland, particularly on the steep upper slopes and around the valley rims. Here indigenous broadleaved woodland creates hangars. Much of this is identified as Ancient Woodland with important ground flora, and significant areas are designated as Nature Conservation Sites or SSSIs.

On the gentler slopes more extensive broadleaved and mixed woodlands support commercial forestry. Beech, ash and oak all occur, and the dry valley heads are also distinctive where the break of slope from the Wolds landscape is often marked with hazel, holly, ash and sycamore. These valley heads are also characterised by areas of unimproved pasture and scrubland. The steep open slopes, where unimproved limestone grassland persists, support another important constituent of the mix of habitats which occur in these valleys.

On the lower and gentler slopes the land cover is a patchwork of improved and semi-improved pastures and meadows, with occasional arable fields, while the small tributary valleys contain linear woodlands and streamside trees and scrub.

The valley bottoms are typically unimproved or semi-improved pasture, often with rich streamside flora, and lines of willow and alder. The enclosure pattern is irregular and formed by tall hedges particularly on the lower land and valley side where frequent hedgerow trees also occur. On the higher land of the ridge and valley complexes, dry stone walls are typical.

The broad rolling spurs of land between the valley complexes support common land which is important to the visual character of these valley slopes, formally providing important common grazing, and nowadays providing a valued recreational resource.

The valleys are well served by communications, with many lanes twisting along the valley bottoms and valley sides. These ancient lanes are often sunken between high banks and climb the steeper slopes in a series of tight hairpin bends, as at Elcombe near Stroud. In such locations the overhanging woodland vegetation forms characteristic tunnels.

SECLUDED VALLEYS

Settlement and Vernacular Character

The Secluded Valleys support a variety of settlement patterns and include some of the most densely populated areas within the District. The distribution of settlements reflects the topography and drainage, and in the rural areas settlement tends to be concentrated towards the valley rims or to exploit the gentler valley slopes.

Often the springline is a location for medieval manor houses and associated villages, while small mills and cottages are located in the bottoms of the smaller valleys. These smaller settlements are both clustered and linear, and are generally secluded and very attractive.

Larger settlements occur at strategic locations as on the high land at Painswick, and throughout the Stroud and Nailsworth valleys where they have grown up around industry centred on the fast flowing streams. Although the textile industry based on the former production of wool has declined, many engineering and fabrication industries persist.

The industrial heritage of these urban and rural valleys is significant, with fine mill buildings both in stone and brick in evidence along the valley bottoms flanking the rivers and the Stroud canals. Modern industry utilises both traditional and contemporary buildings, although the latter are often unsightly and out of character within the setting of pastures and woodland.

More recent development has significantly spread up the valley slopes in many locations, and is visually prominent over considerable distances. This has occurred at Cashes Green, Paganhill and Whiteshill, at Uplands and along the Bisley Road by Stroud. Further development at locations such as Eastcombe and Bussage by the Toadsmoor Valley has spread up the valley sides and on to the Wold Tops, bearing little relationship to traditional settlement patterns.



SECLUDED VALLEYS

Traditional buildings throughout this character type are of Cotswold stone with stone roofs, but many brick buildings and terraced housing also occur. More modern construction using concrete block, rendered and painted white, stands out conspicuously on the open hillsides.

Human Response

This complex landscape type evokes many different responses; from the quietitude of the remote and secluded rural valleys with their ancient woodland and patchwork of irregular fields and sunken lanes, to the busy urban valley bottoms with their cultural heritage of industrial mill buildings. Apart from where the settlements have spread randomly up hillsides, the urban areas are fairly well contained and generally have the character of overgrown and scattered village settlements rather than towns, except where the obvious town centres of Nailsworth and Stroud are evident. The valleys therefore tend to have a rural character with contained views and a clearly defined visual envelope. The variety of vegetation cover and complexity of the landscape pattern makes this landscape type aesthetically pleasing. The greater variety of habitats adds significantly to one's quiet enjoyment and enriches human experience of these valleys.

Sensitivity to Change

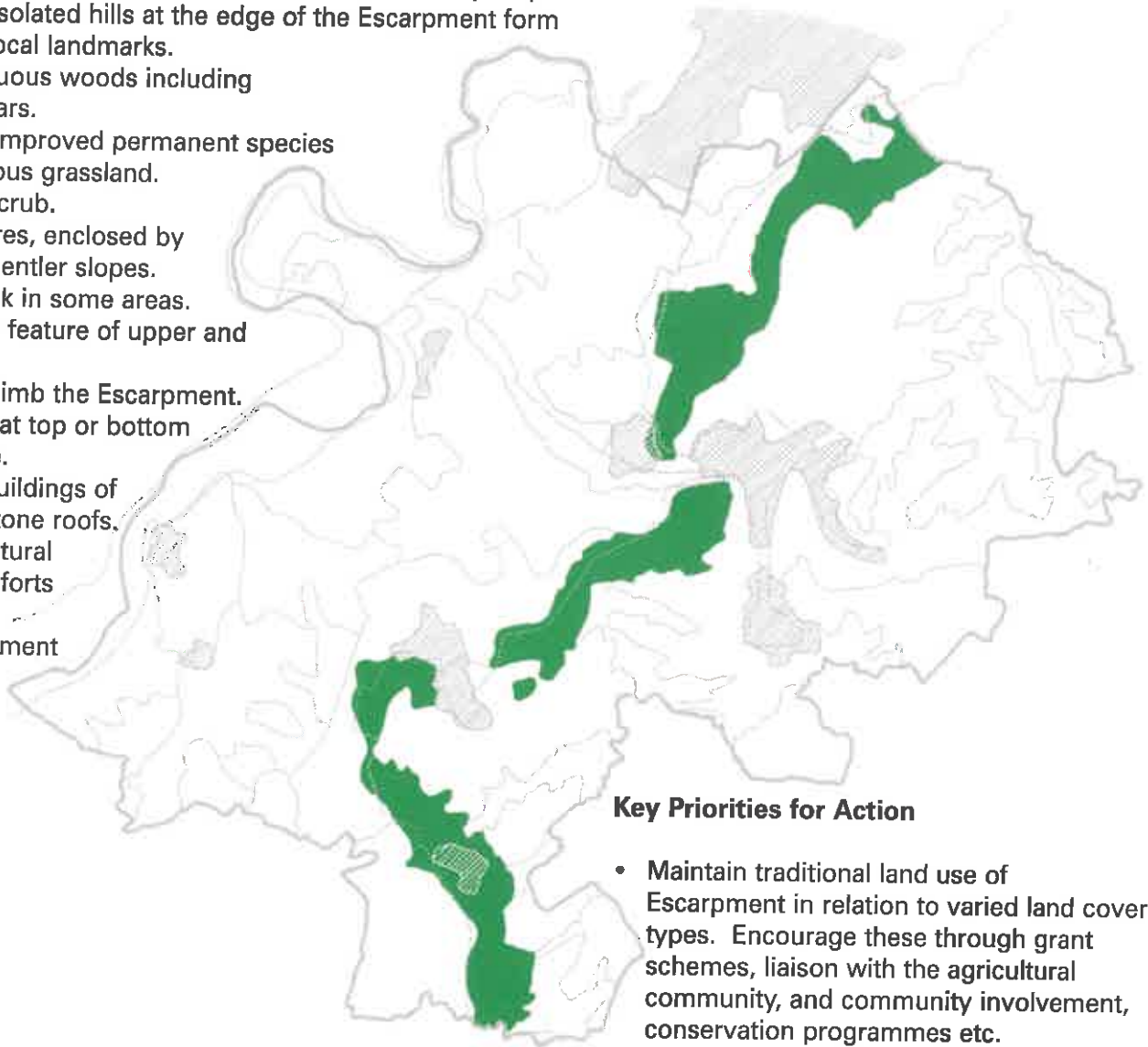
The main pressures for change in this character type are from built development, including improvements to communication routes. Potentially much can be done to integrate new development through sensitive planning and design and response to traditional building types. The main threat arises from visually intrusive development of unsympathetic design and materials.

The complex matrix of various rural land uses is important in determining the overall character of this landscape type, and the area is therefore sensitive to changes in rural land use and woodland management. Positive management of woodlands, permanent pasture, unimproved grassland, wetlands and hedgerows and hedgerow trees is therefore essential and to be encouraged. Of minor but not insignificant visual impact is the increase in horse paddocks and the associated buildings and fencing.

ESCARPMENT

Key Characteristics

- Large scale, semi-natural exposed and elevated scarp slope.
- Outliers or isolated hills at the edge of the Escarpment form distinctive local landmarks.
- Large deciduous woods including beech hangars.
- Areas of unimproved permanent species rich calcareous grassland.
- Patches of scrub.
- Small pastures, enclosed by hedges on gentler slopes.
- Exposed rock in some areas.
- Parkland is a feature of upper and mid-slopes.
- Few roads climb the Escarpment.
- Settlements at top or bottom of scarp face.
- Traditional buildings of stone with stone roofs.
- Historical cultural sites, i.e. hill forts and barrows along escarpment ridge.



Key Priorities for Action

- Maintain traditional land use of Escarpment in relation to varied land cover types. Encourage these through grant schemes, liaison with the agricultural community, and community involvement, conservation programmes etc.
- Protect, conserve, and interpret historic sites along the Escarpment.
- Exercise development control to limit impact of new development including change of land use. Particular regard to the texture and mosaic of land use patterns, settlement pattern, and tree cover is essential for successful integration of any development permitted in these areas. The scale of proposed development, and the use of building materials should be subject to landscape impact assessments.
- See also detail landscape management guidelines in ADAS report, 1994.

ESCARPMENT



Landform and Context

The scarp slope of the Cotswolds forms a major landscape feature running through the District from near Brockworth, southwards to the District's boundary with South Gloucestershire, near Hillesley. It forms an abrupt face of Jurassic limestone and Lias clay rising in a concave profile from the plain below, the slope steepening towards the top edge. In some areas outcrops of exposed rock occur.

The scarp face is outward looking, elevated and exposed. The slopes are typically steep, irregular and indented by stream gullies and coombes. In places there are broader breaches in the escarpment where streams draining the Cotswold hills issue onto the Severn Plain. Where this occurs, as at Stonehouse where the River Frome flows out from the Stroud valleys, and at Dursley where the headwaters of the River Cam drain the hillslopes, the escarpment recedes in more gentle slopes. At Dursley, and further north by Gloucester, portions of the Escarpment have been separated from the main face, creating outliers, or isolated hills formed by the downward cutting action of the streams. These steep sided, flat-topped hills, capped with horizontal layers of Oolite, create dramatic profiles and are locally distinctive landmarks, often topped with small woods.

ESCARPMENT

Generally the Escarpment exists as a narrow landscape type, rarely more than 1km wide. The top edge of the scarp is gently domed, rolling over as open hilltop from the Wolds. The lower slopes fall more gently to the undulating plain below, often broken with slumped slopes or with an intermediate ledge formed by the lower strata. A secondary, lower, less well defined escarpment occurs on the section between North Nibley and Wotton-under-Edge.

There is some differentiation between the northern sections of the Escarpment from Upton St Leonards to Dursley and the section stretching south from Stinchcombe near Dursley to Hillesley. The latter section is characterised by the interlocking fingers of the Secluded Valleys landscape type, which cut through the Escarpment face, forming broad connections with the lower-lying arable vale landscapes to the west. Elsewhere the deeply etched Secluded Valleys cut in behind the Escarpment with the heads of the valleys cutting back forming an attenuated ridgeline behind the scarp face. These sections of extreme gradients are particularly distinguished by the extent of ancient and secondary woodland cover.

Land Use and Landscape Pattern

The land cover on the Escarpment consists predominantly of unimproved grassland with areas of scrub and extensive areas of broadleaved woodland, including beech hangars. The unimproved grassland occurs mainly on the upper steep slope where there is no woodland. Patches of scrub and bracken also occur on these steeper slopes and is often used for rough grazing.

The pattern of land use varies according to the elevation and slope. The scarp top, where it rolls over onto the more undulating Wold landscape, is typically either unenclosed or has large enclosures of rough grazing or common land. In places the escarpment woodlands extend over the upper lip to the flatter land above, effectively concealing the escarpment when viewed from the Wold landscape. Where the woodlands are extensive on the scarp face, they are very important in determining visual landscape character, and where managed, form an important economic resource. Many of these woods are designated as Ancient Woodland and some form part of SSSIs along with other habitats such as Limestone Grassland.

On the middle slopes of the scarp face there is a mixture of small to medium, irregular pasture fields, strongly defined by the pattern of hedges and scattered hedgerow trees. The field pattern is smaller on the lower, gentler slopes, widening to medium scale fields at the flatter scarp foot. Locally, larger enclosures occur where the land is steeper. Hedgerow trees are a feature of the mid to lower slopes with occasional

ESCARPMENT

isolated oak or ash trees standing in fields of pasture or marking the line of small streams and spring lines.

At the foot of the Escarpment slope orchards form an element of the traditional rural landscape, with many old pear and apple orchards in the northern section around Upton St Leonards to Vinegar Hill near Standish, and in the southern section between North Nibley and Alderley.

Parkland is another important land use of the Escarpment slopes, contributing to the rich and varied character of this landscape, as at Prinknash, Stancombe and Alderley.

Settlement Pattern and Vernacular

The steep topography of the Escarpment is generally unsuitable for large scale settlement, although the small town of Wotton-under-Edge occupies a broad shelf within the southern part of this landscape, and other small settlements such as North Nibley and King's Stanley have grown up on the gentler lower slopes.

Smaller settlements nestle at the foot of the steeper slopes or are set back just above the Escarpment top. These are mainly farmsteads, small farming hamlets or groups of dwellings which have developed in association with local quarrying or cider brewing industries. Larger manor houses and occasional villages are located on the upper slopes at the springline, with the house and parkland taking advantage of the long views.

Few roads climb the face of the Escarpment, but generally run along both the top and the bottom, linking the settlements in these locations. Where the larger valleys interrupt the scarp, larger settlements have grown up, but these are generally found within the adjoining landscape types of the Secluded Valleys and the Rolling Agricultural Plain.



ESCARPMENT

Generally, the buildings of the Escarpment are built of stone with stone or tile roofs in traditional vernacular style.

This landscape type is rich in cultural remains: strip lynchets near Wotton-under-Edge, ancient earthworks and hill forts as at Haresfield Hill, Uley Bury and Brackenburg Ditches near North Nibley. Hill forts are necessarily situated on ridgelines and prominent escarpments to utilise the strategic location, and hence very fine views over the surrounding landscape can be enjoyed from these locations. In the section from Selsley to Uley there are several long barrows. More recent cultural landmarks are the monument on the Escarpment above North Nibley, and the gliding club above Leonard Stanley.

The many small abandoned quarry workings are a small scale but significant local feature of this landscape, as at Selsley Common.

Human Response

This is visually the most dramatic landscape type within the District, affording superb panoramic views over the Severn Vale, other parts of the Escarpment and the valleys. The elevation of the ridgeline gives a sense of exposure to the elements, and a powerful sense of the geology and scale of this landscape. The complexity of the land use along the Escarpment creates visually satisfying and balanced views, and the great variety of habitats and land use types enriches perceptions of this area. There is also a sense of the strategic importance historically of this ridgeline, with the many traces of former human settlement and fortification. The views over the low lying landscapes reveals a patchwork of ancient field patterns dotted with small farming settlements and villages, with the Severn Estuary shining silver in the distance. The views beyond extend to the hills of Herefordshire and Wales.

There are many footpaths along and crossing the Escarpment which is highly valued as part of the AONB landscape. From some sections of the Escarpment the views are not so attractive, extending over sprawling urban developments on the Vale floor below. Recent industrial development west of Stonehouse, which consists of large industrial sheds, can be seen from considerable distances and gives an indication of the potential visual impact of large scale development on the low land below.

ESCARPMENT

Sensitivity to Change

The main sensitivities of this landscape type relate directly to the land use, its visual character being dependent upon the continuation of traditional land management regimes, including rough grazing, and woodland management. Cessation or reduction of rough grazing will allow increasing encroachment of bracken and scrubbing-over, resulting in more extensive woodland cover. However, recreation pressures are increasing; from walking, cycling, horse riding, and hang gliding. At beauty spots and popular viewpoints, pressures are particularly intense and there is a need for car parking and other facilities. Further carefully sited and well designed parking areas, such as that at Coaley Peak are desirable.

Ecologically the Escarpment is a very important landscape and its continued richness and importance depends upon the maintenance of a mosaic of varied habitats which can be achieved through careful monitoring and the continuing use of traditional land management techniques.

Because of its physical characteristic as a vantage point over much of the District, the Escarpment is of major significance in its relationship to the lower lying areas to the west and north-west. There are particular sensitivities therefore relating to changes of land use and the development in the areas below.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES

SEVERN VALE LOWLAND LANDSCAPES

The Severn Vale Lowland landscapes can be divided into eight character types :

- Rolling Agricultural Plain
- Undulating Lowlands
- Severn Vale Hillocks
- Severn Vale Grazing Marshes
- Sandstone Ridge
- Triassic Ridge
- Wooded Cambrian Ridge
- Kingswood Vale

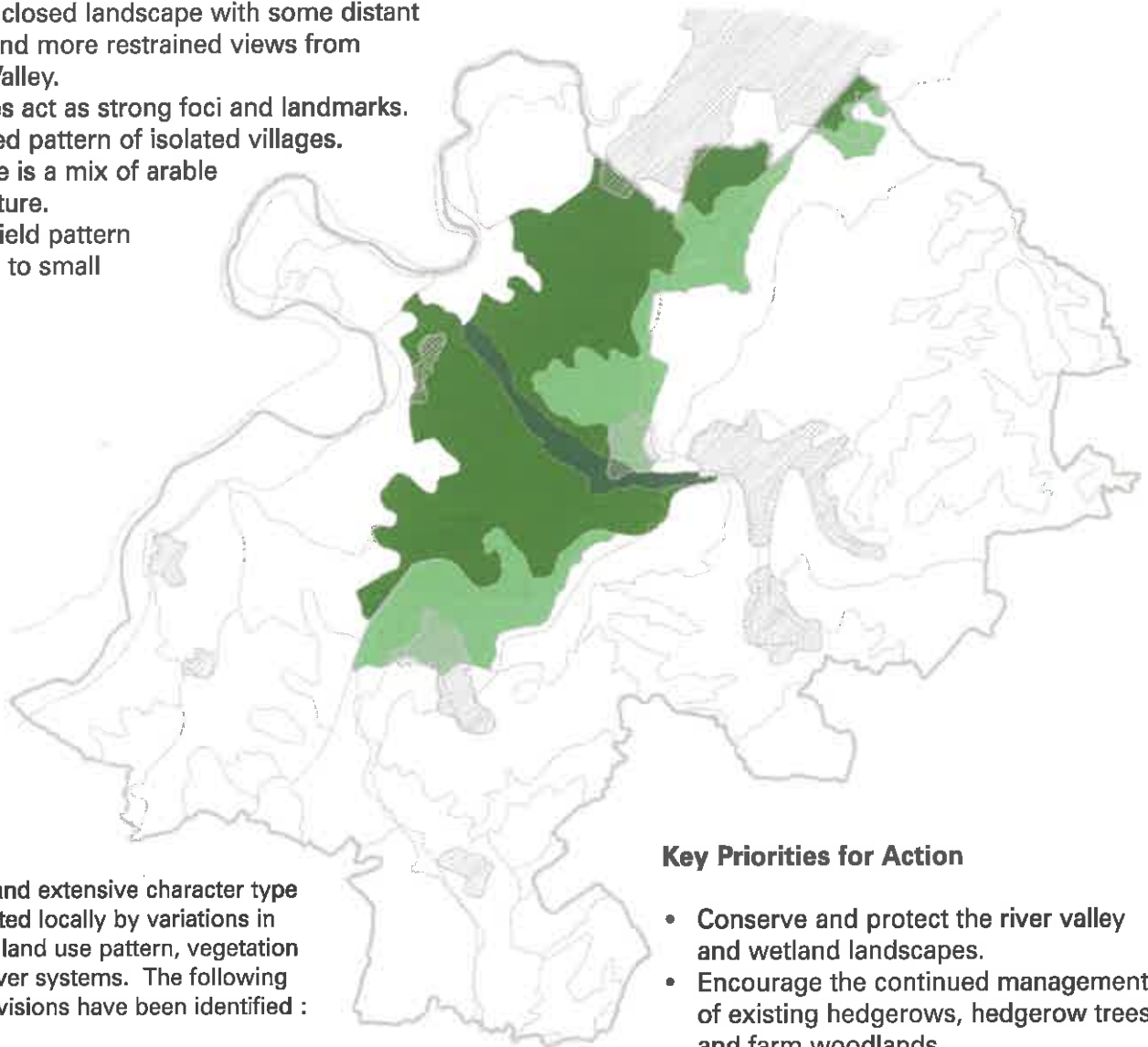
The above character types stretch across the lower lying landscapes of the Stroud District, and illustrate the variety of character that exists within this area.

In the descriptions that follow, some of the character types have been subdivided to define subtle variations which it is important to distinguish between. Where this occurs the key characteristics set out the landscape elements which unite any subdivisions as a single family, while the main text explains and describes in detail the variation between the character subdivisions.

ROLLING AGRICULTURAL PLAIN

Key Characteristics

- Varied landscape of open flat plain to more undulating landform towards limestone escarpment.
- Established, old, rich rural lowland, with some woodlands and mature hedgerow trees and occasional orchards.
- Land is dissected by River Cam and Frome to the east.
- Traversed from north to south by M5, railway, Gloucester-Sharpness canal and the A38.
- Semi-enclosed landscape with some distant views, and more restrained views from Frome Valley.
- Churches act as strong foci and landmarks.
- Dispersed pattern of isolated villages.
- Land use is a mix of arable and pasture.
- Strong field pattern medium to small in scale.



This varied and extensive character type is differentiated locally by variations in topography, land use pattern, vegetation cover and river systems. The following three sub-divisions have been identified :

-  Lowland Plain
-  Escarpment Footslopes
-  Frome River Valley

Key Priorities for Action

- Conserve and protect the river valley and wetland landscapes.
- Encourage the continued management of existing hedgerows, hedgerow trees, and farm woodlands.
- Review the schedule of conservation areas to protect small settlements.
- Control sporadic development along the major routes and at the edges of small settlements.

ROLLING AGRICULTURAL PLAIN



Landform and Context

The Rolling Agricultural Plain forms one of the most extensive landscape types within the Stroud District. Stretching from just south of Gloucester it extends to Woodfield and Cam in the south, and is flanked by the Cotswold Escarpment landscape type to the east and to the west by the Severn Vale Grazing Marshes landscape type.

Subtle variations in topography throughout the area help distinguish sub-divisions in landscape character. The relatively flat, and in places gently undulating topography, that covers the majority of this landscape, defines the expansive *Lowland Plain*. This area is composed mainly of gravel terraces and head deposits. Further to the east more obviously undulating and westward sloping topography defines the *Escarpment Footslopes*, a transitional fringe to the base of the Cotswold Escarpment landscape type. This fringe landscape varies in width from narrow sections at Haresfield and Frocester to more extensive areas at Bookthorpe, Nupend and Lower Cam. To the north of the Frome river the slopes are gentle and fairly low, while to the south they become more pronounced.

ROLLING AGRICULTURAL PLAIN

Within these landscapes the influence of hydrology and river systems gives rise to the third division in character. This is the *River Frome Valley*, defined by gentle and subtle convex slopes, to form a shallow alluvial valley, that traverses the landscape from east to west. The Cam River also crosses this landscape in an east-west direction, draining the escarpment to the River Severn, but its valley is not clearly defined from the surrounding landscape context, and it has therefore not been identified as a separate division.

Throughout the area the subtle low lying nature of the landform unifies these landscapes. Enclosure varies throughout, dependent on topography and pattern of field enclosure, however views to the steep Cotswold Escarpment that rises dramatically to the east, gives definition to this landscape, as well as contributing orientation and sense of place.

Land Use and Landscape Pattern

This landscape supports a variety of land uses and contains a range of differing enclosure patterns. On the *Escarpment Footslopes* pasture is the predominant land use gradually becoming more arable dominated on the *Lowland Plain*. The pasture fields form a rich textured small scale pattern that is best appreciated from the Escarpment, where views look down onto the footslopes and across the Severn Plain. Within the pastoral landscape the small hedges coupled with the undulating topography proved a strong sense of enclosure. This enclosure is retained within the *Frome Valley* because of the gentle valley sides which contain views and the more sheltered wooded condition of the valley floor. On the *Lowland Plain* however, enclosure is less, and the arable field pattern more regular and larger scale. Hedgerows are mainly elm, closely clipped to form a low but strong rectilinear pattern and regular rhythm to the landscape. Mature oak trees on the plain, both within hedgerows and free standing are characteristic, and further reinforce this pattern. Views, however, are predominantly open and uniform, with small orchards providing local visual interest. Elm hedgerows can also be found on the *Escarpment Footslopes* mainly around small streams and on the lower slopes. On higher slopes however, where drainage is better, hazel and hawthorn become the dominant hedgerow species, with ash and oak trees becoming more prevalent.

ROLLING AGRICULTURAL PLAIN

Significant blocks of woodland are not common, and more often woodland occurs as small farm woods, remnant parkland trees in pasture, or as small old pear and apple orchards. These types of woodland are more common on the footslopes, around Harescome and Brookthorpe, with views of surrounding and overlapping lines of vegetation further adding to the sense of enclosure. In the *Frome River Valley* species are associated with the damper conditions. Alder and pollarded willows are common, as are varied and valuable wetland habitats along water channels, with permanent unimproved wet pasture and meadows on the valley floor.

Settlement and Vernacular Character

This landscape has a distinctive type of settlement composed mainly of small villages and hamlets of medieval origin, dispersed over the landscape to form a relatively regular pattern. The majority of these settlements possess churches whose towers are visible across the relatively flat terrain, immediately describing the regular pattern. Examples include Frocester, Standish, Coaley, Slimbridge, and Churchend. Settlements vary in size from just a few properties and associated farm complexes, to larger settlements such as King's Stanley and Leonard Stanley that have been under increasing development pressures from the expansion of Stroud.

Other significant buildings include occasional mills along the river courses such as Coaley Mill and Fromebridge Mill that form local features of interest, while at Frampton the old manorial town layout remains, with an impressive rectangular village green. More recent RAF bases are highly visible, and, due to their built form, detract from the quality of the area.



ROLLING AGRICULTURAL PLAIN

There is a strong vernacular character to this landscape, the local building material being weathered stone and brick and giving rise to a mature and historic feel to buildings and settlement alike. The buildings themselves vary from brick town houses to small cottages and farm buildings, often with low brick and stone front walls to gardens, and slate roofs. Other more modern buildings also occur in this landscape associated with existing settlement and farm complexes. In places modern development has occurred as new housing estates have been tacked onto existing settlement bearing no relationship to the traditional layout of buildings, scale or materials. These new developments while noticeable in passing, are also highly visible from the Cotswold Escarpment.

Transport routes are also a significant element in this landscape, although they tend to concentrate within the *Lowland Plain*. They include the M5, A38, A419 and Gloucester to Bristol railway. All of these except the A419 run in a north-south direction dissecting the lowland landscape, and fragmenting its characteristic pattern. Elsewhere the pattern of roads and lanes runs generally from east to west connecting the Cotswold Escarpment to the *Lowland Plain* villages and the Severn Estuary, reflecting the importance of an earlier economy, and former trade routes. These lanes are sinuous, and small scale, often single track and enclosed by high hedgerows.

Human Response

The strong pattern of settlement, churches, lanes and field enclosure are characteristic features of this landscape. Together they provide a recognisable network that is valuable for cultural reasons as well as for local identity and sense of place, and give an impression of a landscape long worked and inhabited. The quality of this landscape is however varied with some areas degraded by roads and associated developments or inappropriate housing, that undermines the rural qualities of the villages. Despite this however, there remain significant areas that are either unspoilt, or only slightly degraded and which are still worthy of protection to ensure the conservation and the retention of characteristic elements.

ROLLING AGRICULTURAL PLAIN

Sensitivity to Change

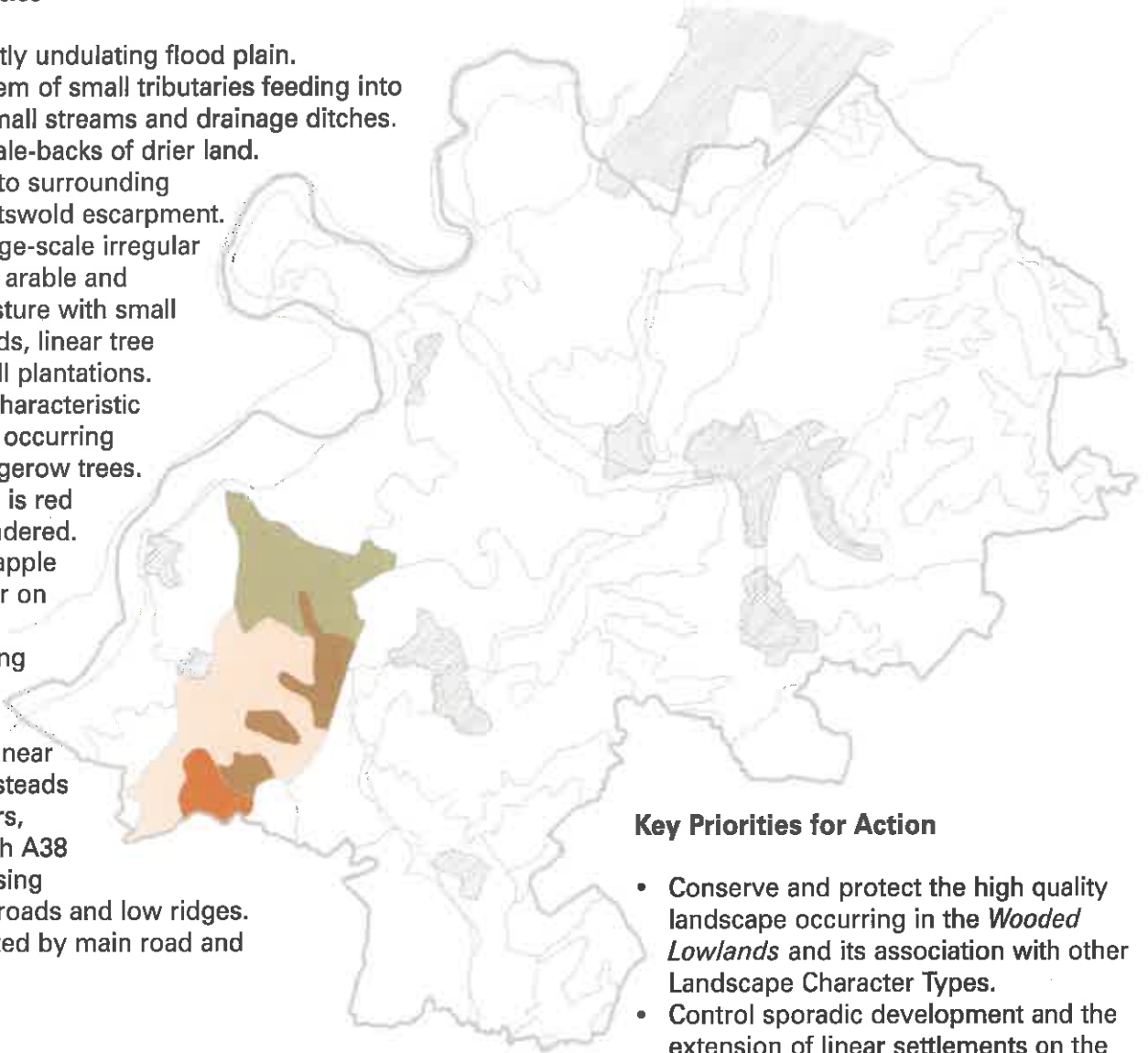
The flat and relatively open nature of the Rolling Agricultural Plain, and the visibility of this landscape from the AONB make it particularly susceptible to inappropriate development. This landscape is under particular pressure from the expansion of existing settlement at Stroud, Stonehouse and Gloucester. New development from these settlements has already degraded some areas of the landscape. Major roads that dissect the *Lowland Plain* also pose a threat of associated developments which could undermine existing landscape quality. The decommissioning of the RAF bases presents opportunities for landscape gain. Linear development if allowed to occur in the landscape would undermine the traditional and strong pattern of nucleated settlement.

The distinctive patterns of field enclosure and their geographical distribution are sensitive to changes in agricultural land use management. Changes in land use which would reduce the amount of pasture land would therefore be detrimental to the character of the landscape, as would the loss of hedgerow trees and small woodland. This is particularly important along the Escarpment footslopes fringe where the quality of landscape impacts upon the designated area of the AONB. Similarly it is important to retain the pastoral river valley qualities of the *River Frome*, as there are few landscapes of this nature within the Stroud District.

UNDULATING LOWLANDS

Key Characteristics

- Low-lying gently undulating flood plain.
- Dendritic system of small tributaries feeding into Little Avon: small streams and drainage ditches.
- Elongated whale-backs of drier land.
- Distant views to surrounding ridges and Cotswold escarpment.
- Medium to large-scale irregular shaped fields: arable and short-term pasture with small farm woodlands, linear tree belts and small plantations.
- Ash and oak characteristic of higher land occurring mainly as hedgerow trees.
- Building stone is red brick often rendered.
- Old pear and apple orchards occur on ridges and more undulating topography to north.
- Settlements: linear hamlets, farmsteads and old manors, associated with A38 and river crossing points, minor roads and low ridges.
- Ridges dissected by main road and rail routes.



This extensive character type is differentiated locally by variations in topography, land use pattern and vegetation characteristics. The following four sub-divisions have been identified:

-  Little Avon Basin
-  Little Avon Mid-Valley
-  Wooded Lowlands
-  Lowland Ridges

Key Priorities for Action

- Conserve and protect the high quality landscape occurring in the *Wooded Lowlands* and its association with other Landscape Character Types.
- Control sporadic development and the extension of linear settlements on the B4066 and A38.
- Encourage the management of existing hedgerow trees and farm woodlands and the planting of new native broadleaved woodlands.
- Conserve wet pastures and related wetland habitats. Encourage development of wetland buffer zones to protect these habitats.
- Conserve important woodland habitats.
- Protect important historic landscape related to Berkeley Castle and Whitcliff Deer Park.
- Review schedule of listed buildings particularly in respect of old farm houses and out buildings.

UNDULATING LOWLANDS



Landform and Context

The Undulating Lowlands occur in the south-west of the District and are bounded by higher land defined along the line of the M5 motorway to the east, and by prominent ridges to the west; the Sandstone Ridge, and the Triassic Ridge landscape types.

The main extent of this landscape type lies within the catchment of the Little Avon River, with the more northerly section drained by minor streams to the Gloucester and Sharpness canal.

The landscape is typically flat to undulating, with a varied geological structure. Alluvial deposits and river terraces of the River Severn overlie sandstones, shales and siltstones of the Cambrian and Silurian eras. The *Lowland Ridges* landscape type is formed by low whalebacks of Triassic Marls while the Jurassic clays and River Severn gravels to the north of the area influence the landscape identified as the *Wooded Lowlands* landscape type.

UNDULATING LOWLANDS

The flat to undulating topography unifies this landscape type which has a semi-enclosed to open character depending upon the degree of enclosure afforded locally by the low ridges and vegetation. From the ridges there are clear views to the more distinct topographical features within the District; the Cotswold Escarpment to the east and the sandstone ridges to the west. The Wooded Cambrian Ridge Landscape type, to the south-east, forms a distinctive feature extending beyond the study area.

Land Use and Landscape Pattern

It is the variation of land use and distribution of woodland cover, combined with the subtle topographic variations outlined above, that distinguish the subdivisions of this landscape.

The *Little Avon Basin* has a generally open character and is typified by a large scale rectilinear field pattern of mainly pastoral land use with some small areas of arable. Elm in the hedgerows is a characteristic feature which, if spared the ravages of Dutch Elm disease, would again form an important feature of this lowland landscape. Mature oak trees occur in the hedgerows with some free standing in the fields, while alder and willow line the river and stream channels.

In contrast, the field pattern of the *Wooded Lowlands* is less regular and of a smaller scale suggesting an earlier period of enclosure than in the *Little Avon Basin*. Woodland occurs more frequently in the *Wooded Lowlands* with significant numbers of mature free standing oak trees in some fields lending a parkland character to the landscape. Ancient woodland occurs at Red Wood, and there are mixed plantations with small farm woodlands and treebelts throughout the area giving a semi-enclosed character and more secluded feel.

The *Little Avon Mid Valley* is distinct in its more rolling topography and clearly defined river valley constrained on either side by distinct valley slopes creating a narrow floodplain. Through this section the river is clearly lined with alders and willows, some of which are pollarded. Here the field pattern is large scale but more irregular, and hedgerow trees, mainly oak and ash are also frequent. Arable land use occurs on this higher land with permanent pastures on the valley floor. The drier soils occurring on the *Lowland Ridges* give rise to a more

UNDULATING LOWLANDS

open landscape with few hedgerow trees and a notable absence of elm; ash is more dominant here. The less fertile soil found on the ridges is reflected in a predominance of pasture rather than arable land. Old pear and apple orchards also occur on these ridges and on the more undulating topography in the north of the area and are important features visually despite their deteriorating condition.

Settlement and Vernacular Character

This landscape type is fairly sparsely settled with the largest settlements occurring at Stone on the higher land of the *Little Avon Mid-Valley*, and at Newport on the ridge of land associated with the *Lowland Ridges*. Other settlements occur as hamlets and farmsteads scattered through the area on higher ground away from the wet valley floors.

Red brick is a common building material through the *Undulating Lowlands* with some rendered and some half timbered buildings. Welsh slate rather than Cotswold stone is used as roofing materials. Many of the farm houses and cottages are attractive, and older style rounded-roof corrugated iron barns are features.

The area includes some high quality landscape, particularly in the *Wooded Lowlands*. There is a strong sense of the historical pattern of this landscape: old farm settlements and moated sites and orchards forming nuclei in the wooded, small scale pastures. Old farm ponds remain and the area is unaffected by intrusive development or any recent wholesale agricultural change.

The communications pattern through this type is dominated by the A38 and the main line railway, both of which cut through the various ridges of higher land. Other roads consist of small winding lanes which form part of the intricate enclosure pattern particularly in the north of the character area, generally avoiding the lower lying wetland. The *Little Avon Basin* includes part of an historic landscape near



UNDULATING LOWLANDS

Berkeley where the river flows through the gap between the two sandstone ridges. Here a tidal mill and old farm houses are important local features. This low saddle of land is the site of the estate village of Ham and forms a link between Whitcliff Deer Park and Berkeley Castle.

Human Response

The over-riding impression throughout this character type is of a landscape long farmed and settled having a complex and diffuse pattern. Views are varied according to the vegetation cover but glimpses of the Cotswolds escarpment maintain orientation. Generally there are few landmarks. The aesthetic quality of the landscape varies from large scale open and arable farmland to the intimate and semi-enclosed landscape of the *Wooded Lowlands* and the more clearly defined landform of the ridges of the *Little Avon Mid-Valley* and *Lowland Ridges*.

The occurrence of many mature oak trees and developing young elms, together with the scattering of old red brick farm buildings, ponds and wet roadside ditches gives a strong feeling of local identity particularly to the *Wooded Lowlands*. The *Little Avon Mid Valley* is particularly attractive along the river course with secluded mill buildings and the tree lined-river. Despite the major communication route traversing this area there are still large areas which are secluded, rural and unspoilt.

Sensitivity to Change

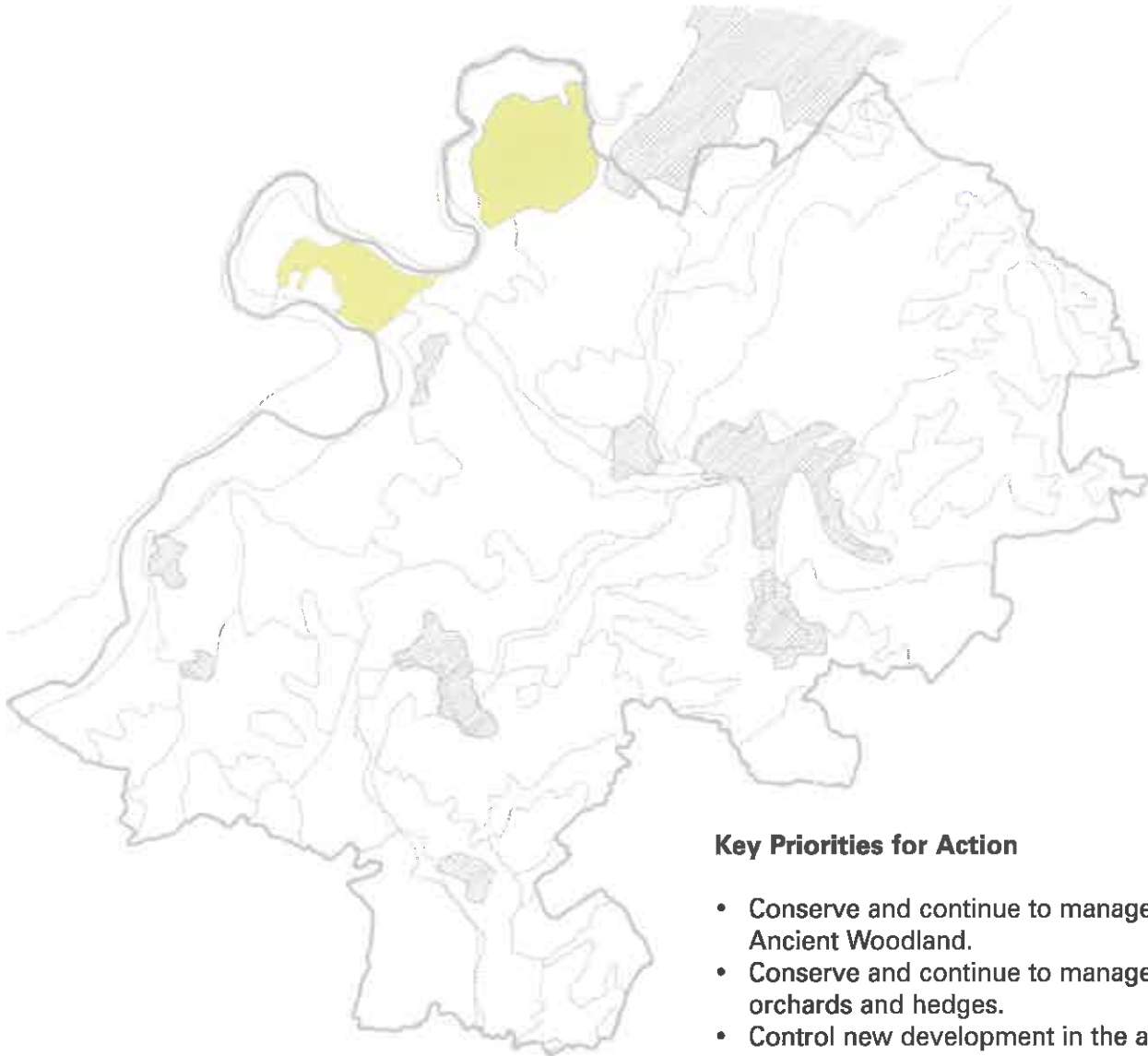
Given the predominantly rural character of the area it is particularly sensitive to large scale development. There is a strong need for any development to respect the local identity of the particular landscape and the local landscape character variations.

Generally the area owes much of its character to its low lying wet pastures and the occurrence of many hedgerow trees, small farm woodlands and shelterbelts. Changes of land use which would reduce the amount of pastureland would therefore be detrimental to the character of the area, as would the loss of hedgerow trees and woodlands and more dramatic drainage of the farmland. Further growth of the linear settlements arising on the B4066 or the lane from Halmore to Purton should be resisted as this would lead to a degradation and weakening of the existing landscape character.

SEVERN VALE HILLOCKS

Key Characteristics

- Knolls of higher land composed of clay, head and gravel terraces.
- Undulating landform rising to approximately 62m AOD.
- Well wooded with significant blocks of ancient woodland, and hedgerow trees.
- Ancient small sinuous lanes traverse landscape.
- Settlement flanks roads as linear strips.
- Field pattern varies considerably from small linear strips to medium scale rectangular fields.
- Well drained pasture and arable land use.
- Higher land forms a strong visual barrier between River Severn and the Severn Plain.



Key Priorities for Action

- Conserve and continue to manage the Ancient Woodland.
- Conserve and continue to manage orchards and hedges.
- Control new development in the area through strict planning controls and design briefs.
- Control the species and location of new woodland through grant and stewardship schemes.

SEVERN VALE HILLOCKS



Landform and Context

The Severn Vale Hillocks are low hills and knolls in the far north west of Stroud District. They lie in close proximity to the River Severn which meanders around them, visually separating the river from the Severn Plain. Two distinctive areas have been identified, one at Overton, and the other stretching from the village of Elmore to Longney, taking in Monks' Hill, and Hockley Hill. The geology of the area is composed of a mixture of clay, head and gravel terraces which gives rise to the small hills. These hills are generally asymmetrical, steep on one side with more gentle and attenuated slopes on the other. Rounded in character, they collectively give rise to an overall undulating topography, which distinguishes them from the surrounding landscape types.

Water is not a prominent element in this landscape with only small streams and drainage channels occurring mainly in lower lying areas at the base of slopes. However, a concentration of drainage ditches occurs at the base of Monks' Hill, and here water is more evident. Elsewhere, associated with small hamlets and farm complexes, there are a scattering of inconspicuous ponds, and at Wick Court an old medieval moat. The Gloucester to Sharpness Canal runs to the south east of Hickley Hill forming a boundary between this landscape type and the Rolling Agricultural Plain landscape type.

SEVERN VALE HILLOCKS

Land Use and Landscape Pattern

The pattern of woodland and field enclosures found in this landscape gives it a strong character and robustness. Much of the woodland forms significant blocks on the slopes of the low hills and is composed of a mix of broadleaved and coniferous species. A high concentration of the woods are Ancient Woodland such as Hockley Wood, Fisherwood, and Smiths Wood, their mature character expressing a thread of this landscape's history. Other woodland is more recent and consists of regular plantations. Small pocket orchards, which are common features throughout the Severn Vale, occur in concentration around the hamlets, as at Longney, Downend, Farleys End and Elmore, and poplar plantations occur at the base of hill slopes where the drainage is less good, their height giving a new scale to the low hills and other surrounding woodland.

The strong field pattern consists of generally well managed and closely clipped elm hedgerows, with a large number of mature hedgerow trees, predominantly of oak and ash. These hedgerows enclose a mix of arable, and improved pasture in a variety of field shapes and sizes. They range from larger fields on the gentle slopes, to smaller irregular fields adjacent to settlement and on steeper slopes. Some of these smaller fields are elongated in shape, and may be remnants of an early, possibly medieval, pattern of land tenure.

The small sinuous pattern of lanes is another indication of history in this landscape. In the northern area, the road pattern encircles the hills forming a very distinctive pattern separating the undulating landform from the flatter, wetter landscape of the Severn Grazing Marshes to the north. Other smaller tracks lead off the more used routes, to a dispersed pattern of farm houses.

Settlement Pattern and Vernacular

Settlement consists of a mixture of linear hamlets and a more dispersed and evenly spread pattern of relatively large farm complexes. Most of the buildings are made from brick and there is little modern development or infill, giving rise to an overall traditional vernacular character. Churches occur at Longney and to the south west of Farleys End. Although not especially visible in this landscape they act as important landmarks and provide a strong sense of place.

SEVERN VALE HILLOCKS

Human Response

The landscape has a clear visual unity and identity, easily distinguishable from the surrounding less elevated landform. Views of the River Severn and beyond, link it to other similar topography within the District of The Forest of Dean. It is a visually varied yet balanced landscape with a well defined network of woodland and field boundaries. There is a strong impression of a settled rural community, coupled with continuity and tradition. The good network of footpaths and tracks in the area, particularly to Overton, makes this landscape easily accessible.

Sensitivity to Change

The existing pattern of land use and the balance of woodland, arable and pasture is a strong aspect of this landscape. It could easily be eroded if new woodland does not respond to the topography and existing pattern of vegetation. More poplar plantations and/or the loss of existing woods and orchard from lack of management would have an adverse impact.

It is the strong pattern of woodland and hedgerows in this landscape which makes it relatively robust to changes, allowing new development to be absorbed to some degree. However, the linear pattern of settlement is particularly sensitive to new development which does not relate to the existing pattern, scale and the use of traditional materials. The increasing pressures from the expansion of Gloucester to the east are also likely to impact on this area, particularly on the small sinuous lanes whose unspoilt rural character and characteristic associated linear settlement patterns could be lost or altered as a result of highway improvements.



SEVERN VALE GRAZING MARSHES

Key Characteristics

- Occurs intermittently along the edge of Severn Estuary.
- Open flat landscape with extensive views across a large scale rectilinear field pattern.
- Strong influence of water manifested in numerous drainage ditches, streams, and important wetland habitats.
- Vegetation reflects wet soils; pollarded willows are a feature.
- Fewer trees than Rolling Agricultural Plain.
- Mixture of arable and wet alluvial pastures depending on water management.
- Few settlements - generally isolated farmhouses with exception of Upper Framilode.
- Flood embankments restrict views of estuary.
- Tracks and roads are linear and pylons common.
- Ditches and banks are common as field boundaries.
- Distinctive colour and texture of wet pastures.



Key Priorities for Action

- Encourage the use of water management plans to reduce the risk of water pollution and encourage traditional land use management.
- Control public access to the area, leaving some areas inaccessible, and retaining the remote unpeopled character.
- Restrict new development in the area, and the siting of visually intrusive elements such as masts and increased numbers of pylons.
- Restrict new woodland planting to lines of willow and alder and encourage the continued management of pollarded willows, through stewardship and woodland grant schemes.

SEVERN VALE GRAZING MARSHES



Landform and Context

The Severside grazing marshes are found on low lying land adjacent to the River Severn Estuary, forming an almost continuous edge to the river, broken only by higher land at Sharpness, and Barrow Hill. The area is intervisible with the higher land beyond the River Severn to the Forest of Dean, giving it a strong association and sense of borrowed character.

This landscape type includes the mudflats and water margins of the Severn Estuary, extending out as far as the Stroud Borough boundary. Inland this landscape extends an average of 1 to 2 km in from the estuary flood defence banks, and is boarded on its western side by the low lying land of the Rolling Agricultural Plain.

There is little topographic variation, the majority of land lying below the 10m contour. The flat, simple nature of this landscape is fundamental to its character and sense of place. It is composed of river alluvium, resulting from centuries of regular flooding, and is drained by a series of ditches that form a strong rectilinear network. Winding minor tributary streams such as Berkeley Pill link the straight man-made drainage ditches before draining into the River Severn.

SEVERN VALE GRAZING MARSHES

Water is a strong element giving rise to extensive expanses of marshes and wetlands, particularly around Slimbridge, which has been developed as an important nature reserve for birds. Field ponds also scatter the landscape particularly to the south of Berkeley power station.

Land Use and Landscape Pattern

The grazing marshes which cover this landscape are used for cattle and sheep as summer pastures due to waterlogging of the fields in the winter months. The pasture fields tend to appear large, due to the visually unobtrusive ditches that divide them, although occasionally they are lined with pollarded willows, alder, or dilapidated post and wire fencing which give a greater sense of enclosure. The regular layout of fields in the Slimbridge area dates back to the Sixteenth century where the landscape known as The Rhine or New Grounds was drained. Similar patterns of drainage around Arlingham may also date to this period. Further inland, closer to the Rolling Agricultural Plain, elm hedgerows become more frequent, reinforcing the medium scale, rectilinear pattern, and creating thin lines of overlapping vegetation. In other places, such as south of Berkeley power station, and north of Farleys End, this regular rectilinear pattern varies slightly as the field enclosures become smaller and more sinuous. The overall character of the area is however the same.

The varied drainage and unimproved nature of pastures gives rise to a distinctive and attractive variety of colour in this landscape, ranging from pale barley and buff colours to olive greens with patches of rushes and reeds providing textural contrasts. The importance of these pastures for habitats is reflected in the large number of designated conservation areas and SSSIs that cover the area.

Woodland is not a notable element in this landscape, occurring as a dispersed pattern of small copses, with a more concentrated area of woodland around Slimbridge. The lack of woodland further accentuates the exposed and horizontal emphasis of this landscape.

Settlement and Vernacular Character

This is a sparsely populated area for reasons of flood risk, and generally has only a scattering of isolated farm buildings, with the exception of the hamlet of Upper Framilode. Framilode is located on the edge of the Severn Estuary and its buildings are generally of brick, similar in character to houses found in the Severn Vale Hillocks landscape types. Roads through the area are also limited and generally consist of single track unenclosed routes, which follow the line of field boundaries and often end in dead ends or at farm buildings.

SEVERN VALE GRAZING MARSHES

There are a number of built structures in this landscape, other than settlements, that provide visual interest and focal points. Most notable is the Gloucester to Sharpness Canal which passes through sections of this landscape at Upper Framilode and Slimbridge. At road crossing points there are characteristic white swing bridges and an associated small canal office, while passing long boats and barges provide colour, movement and interest. Similarly small wooden bridges which cross drainage ditches, providing access to fields, are characteristic, as are views to church towers of villages inland.

In contrast to these man-made features the larger scale Berkeley power station and associated industrial buildings are found in the southern area of this landscape, and although large in scale, the expansive nature of this landscape absorbs them to some degree. Similarly electricity pylons are common to this landscape originating from the power station, and traversing along the Severn Estuary.

Human Response

A remote and peaceful landscape with an open aspect and strong associations with the estuary and water. The damp character is reflected in the landscape pattern of ditches, vegetation and the distinctive muted colours of wet pastures, reed and willow stems. The undisturbed and unimproved nature of the pastures are an important and valuable characteristic.

The density of footpaths that cover this area varies, leaving some areas inaccessible, conserving the landscape's more remote and wilderness characteristics. This landscape contains stretches of the Severn Estuary long distance footpath.



SEVERN VALE GRAZING MARSHES

Sensitivity to Change

The pastures and wetlands of this landscape are sensitive to current practices of land drainage and water management, and insensitive management could easily result in the loss of species rich grasslands and habitats for breeding birds. Issues such as changes in sea level, and the Severn Barrage will also have significant implications for this landscape.

The flat and open nature of the marshes makes them sensitive to change due to their inability to absorb visually intrusive development, and screen planting here would be inappropriate.

Those features which lend distinctiveness to the character area such as small bridges and pollarded willows should be retained. Inappropriate development or lack of management should be avoided.

This landscape is also sensitive to increased accessibility which would undermine its tranquil and remote qualities.

SANDSTONE RIDGE

Key Characteristics

- An undulating ridge of Old Red Sandstone and Limestone.
- Semi enclosed landscape with intermittent views to the River Severn estuary.
- Land use is mixed pasture and arable.
- Well wooded with hedgerow trees and blocks of woodland.
- Hedgerows enclose medium scale fields but their pattern is confused by topography.
- Settlement associated with the Sharpness Docks composed of Victorian terraces and more recent housing.
- Some traditional farmhouses built of Old Sandstone occur along narrow lanes.
- Strong industrial influences of docks and associated Gloucester to Sharpness canal and railway line.
- Pylons are visually prominent.



Key Priorities for Action

- Conserve local vernacular buildings, and the variation between settlements through planning controls and design briefs.
- Conserve and continue to manage woodland and hedgerows.
- Protect important wetland habitats.

SANDSTONE RIDGE



Landform and Context

The Sandstone Ridge forms one of a number of ridgelines and areas of more elevated topography within the Severn Vale which create distinctive areas of landscape. Located adjacent to the Severn estuary in the south western side of Stroud District it forms a ridge which is approximately 5km long, running in a north-south direction. It is composed of Old Red Sandstone and Limestone and is the tail end of a larger ridgeline which continues on the other side of the estuary, having been dissected by the River Severn. One side of the ridge overlooks the Severn Estuary, while the other looks inland to the Cotswold Escarpment.

The topography of the ridge is varied with its most steep slopes to the north. The western slopes are dissected by a series of small streams that drain the ridge to the River Severn, and give rise to more undulating topography of rolling ridges and valleys. The eastern side of the ridge has fewer streams, the geology acting as a reservoir, and thus a number of wells and a spring at Hollywell are features of its hydrology. Also there are a number of small incidental ponds that tend to concentrate along the roads and around properties throughout the area. Gloucester to Sharpness canal runs along the northern and western edges of the ridge, concealed from surrounding landscape, for much of its route, by topography. The underlying sandstone geology expresses itself in the rich red colour of the soil, and occasionally in local vernacular.

SANDSTONE RIDGE

This is a varied landscape not just because of its topography, but also due to the variety of views across the Severn Estuary to the landscape opposite, and the exposed red cliffs of the sandstone ridge. Views to the estuary are sometimes obscured due to variable relief, giving rise to intermittent views and series of changing horizons and local interest.

Land Use and Landscape Pattern

Agricultural land is predominantly pastoral, with some areas of arable, particularly to the north. Hedgerows are common dividing the fields into medium and small scale enclosures. The pattern of fields although strong, due to the hedgerows, is visually confused by the undulating topography, so that fields appear irregular and boundaries sinuous. Many of the hedgerows are elm, and those that have not been closely trimmed support groups of young elm trees. Along the small lanes that traverse the undulating hills, hedgerows are overgrown, contain a high concentration of holly and overhang to create tunnels of green and dappled light in summer.

Woodland is mainly concentrated on the eastern side of the ridge and is generally mixed broadleaved and coniferous. In other places small farm woods, and alder trees along small streams collectively provide a well wooded feel to the landscape. There are a few small pocket orchards on the lower slopes at the northern edge of the ridge, around Purton, which add local interest.

Settlement and Vernacular Character

The varied settlement types and patterns are an important and characteristic feature of this landscape. Traditional vernacular buildings using the local red sandstone rock, are not however predominant, with only an occasional rural farm building reflecting this architecture. More evident is the architecture relating to the development of the Sharpness Docks, which are located on the edge of the ridge, and extend into the estuary. These dock buildings and cranes are mainly concealed by topography except from Newtown, and from more distant views on the Cotswold Escarpment. The industrial architecture and scale of the docks contrast with the surrounding rural landscape, but express a strong link to the Victorian terraces that make up much of the vernacular architecture in the surrounding villages, at Newtown, Brookend and Wanswell. These terraces, built to house the dock workers, form regular linear streets along older country lanes. Other structures relating to the dock include a railway line which cuts inland, and the Gloucester and Sharpness canal which has associated small white swing bridges, barges and colourful long boats. A series of electricity pylons cross this landscape and in places are visually intrusive, sitting uncomfortably within the undulating topography.

SANDSTONE RIDGE

The village of Purton which is located at the northern end of the ridge is an attractive small village associated with the canal and contains a greater concentration of older buildings and farms. At the opposite end of the ridge sits the historically important town of Berkeley, overlooking the Little Avon River. This town possesses an impressive castle which was built to guard the Severn approaches and is the oldest inhabited castle in Britain. The town is made up of many small brick buildings and narrow streets, and more recent housing estates on its outskirts.

Human Response

The distinctive ridge topography, influence of the Sharpness docks and the older historic associations of Berkeley make this landscape rather unusual and distinctive from other areas within the Stroud District, having a strong sense of place and local identity. Predominantly rural in character with the exception of the area around the docks, this landscape is generally unspoiled, although pylons and inappropriate housing development detract from its quality in places.

Sensitivity to Change

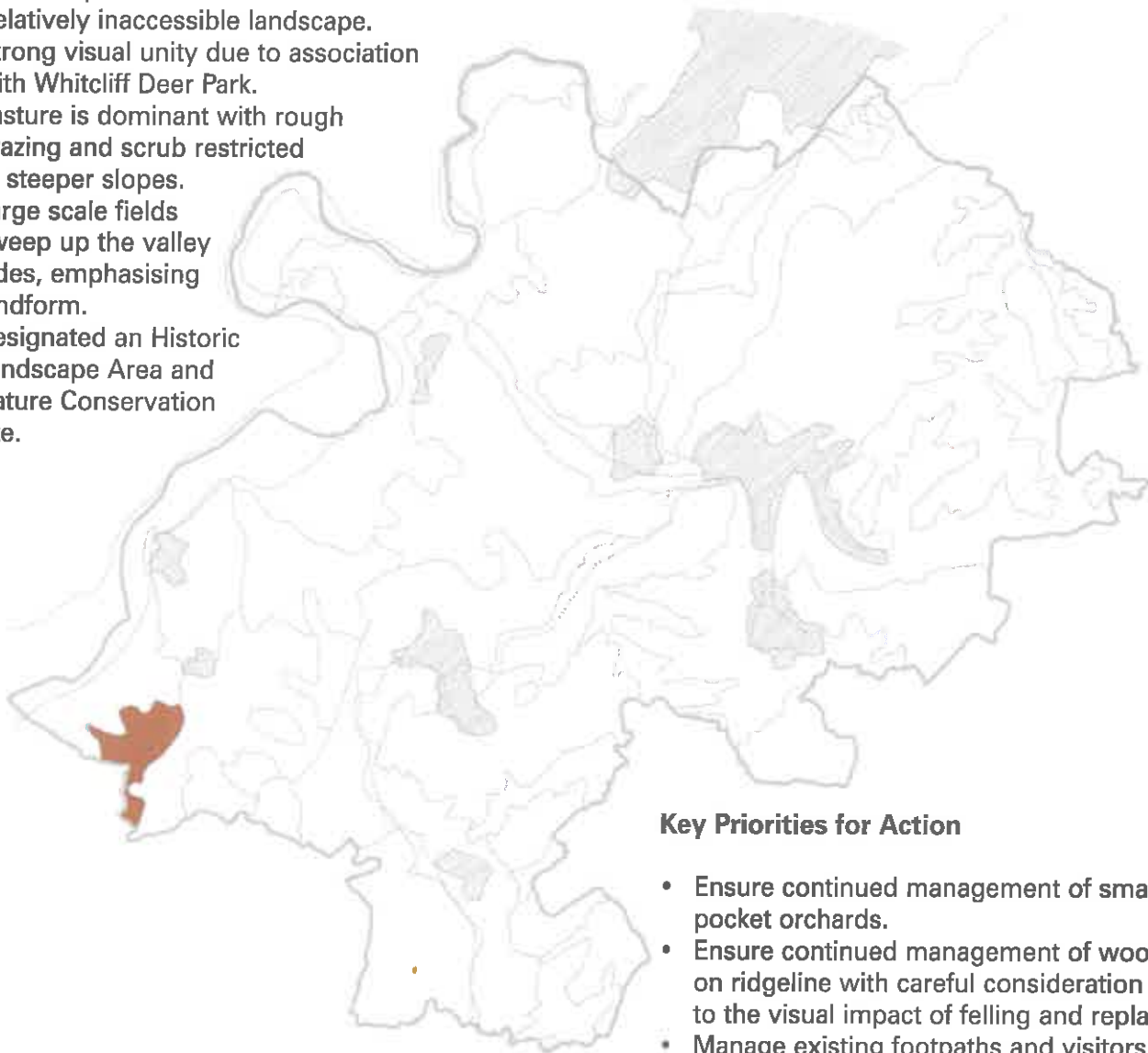
This is a sensitive landscape, visible across a wide area from within Stroud District and from the other side of the Severn estuary, and new development therefore needs to be considered carefully. Development pressures are likely to be high around settlements, with possible encroachment into open countryside and extending linear development along roads, resulting in the connecting of individual settlements. The main threat arises from unsympathetic design and new development should respond to the local vernacular, scale and grain, helping to retain the difference between the Sharpness settlements and the more rural villages such as Purton. Road widening and improvements have already been carried out around Berkeley. Further improvements should carefully consider the rural character of this landscape. The well wooded nature of this landscape is an important characteristic brought about by the large number of hedges and hedgerow trees. The landscape is therefore sensitive to continued woodland and hedgerow management retaining a balance of clipped hedges and areas of hedgerow trees.



TRIASSIC RIDGE

Key Characteristics

- Distinctive ridge rising to approximately 50-55 m AOD
- The upper slopes become progressively steeper forming a concave profile.
- Mixed woodland blocks occur along the ridge silhouetted against the sky.
- Groups of pine and mature oak give a strong sense of parkland.
- Relatively inaccessible landscape.
- Strong visual unity due to association with Whitcliff Deer Park.
- Pasture is dominant with rough grazing and scrub restricted to steeper slopes.
- Large scale fields sweep up the valley sides, emphasising landform.
- Designated an Historic Landscape Area and Nature Conservation site.



Key Priorities for Action

- Ensure continued management of small pocket orchards.
- Ensure continued management of woodland on ridgeline with careful consideration given to the visual impact of felling and replanting.
- Manage existing footpaths and visitors.
- Ensure restoration of field boundaries where possible, and the prevention of further removal.
- Restrict new modern and visually intrusive development, particularly in relation to tourism, through stringent planning controls.

TRIASSIC RIDGE



Landform and Context

Located within the lower lying, flatter landscapes of the Severn Vale, this ridge is marked by its relatively uniform steep slopes, that abruptly rise out of the surrounding gentle topography to a height of 55m AOD. The ridge is located in the far south western corner of the Stroud District and continues beyond its boundary into South Gloucestershire.

The edges and slopes of the ridge in places extend out as spurs of higher land as at Clapton and Willis Elm Farm. Between spurs the slopes of the ridge form a crescent of higher land surrounding an area of Severn Vale Grazing Marshes which abut the ridge to the west. The upper slopes become progressively steeper forming a convex profile before levelling off to form a narrow, gently undulating plateau.

The ridge is composed of Keuper Marl, clay and some areas of limestone. Small streams drain the land forming subtle indents along the ridge slopes, and ponds are a common feature throughout, both on the ridge plateau and also at the base of its slopes and around farm complexes.

TRIASSIC RIDGE

Land Use and Landscape Pattern

Whitcliff deer park, closely associated with Berkeley castle to the north, and designated an historic landscape, comprises the majority of this landscape, its parkland qualities being strongly reflected in visual character and land use. As a parkland landscape, pasture is the dominant land use, with only limited arable on the lower, more shallow slopes. Areas of rough grazing and scrub are restricted to steeper slopes. Fields are large in scale, enclosed by hedgerows that sweep up the ridge slopes, emphasising landform. In some places there has been a significant loss of hedgerows which has contributed to a new larger scale pattern.

Woodland is a very distinctive element of this landscape. Mixed woodland occurs in significant blocks, located mostly on the plateau of the ridge and therefore seen in silhouette against the sky. On the slopes mature oak and groups of pine are characteristically found within pasture fields, thus emphasising the parkland character. Small pocket orchards occur in places on the western slopes of the ridge, adjacent to Willis Elm and Bluegates Farm.

The simplicity of this historic landscape, its uniform land use and blocks of woodland, purvey a visually balanced character and unity.

Settlement and Vernacular Character

Settlement is not a significant feature of this landscape. A small cluster of buildings form the little hamlet of Bevington on the upper slopes of the ridge, enclosed by landform and vegetation. Elsewhere there is a dispersed pattern of farm house built of brick and local stone, which are nestled into the base of the slopes along the road which encircles the ridge.

Other than the road that leads to the hamlet of Bevington there is no vehicular access on to the ridge. However public footpaths cross both the length and width of the ridge making it more accessible to the walker.

Human Response

The parkland qualities of this landscape and its distinctive topography give it a powerful sense of place. Its historic land management gives rise to a balanced and interesting landscape, that is peaceful and unspoilt by modern development.

TRIASSIC RIDGE

Sensitivity to Change

The historic pattern of this landscape is sensitive to changes in land use management. Its designation as an historic landscape should help to prevent inappropriate conversion of pasture to arable, however there is already evidence of significant removal of hedgerows from this landscape and this poses a future threat to the field scale and pattern. Similarly, grazing regimes need careful control to prevent areas of undergrazing and the subsequent invasion of scrub.

Increased public access and tourism pressure could present a future threat to the tranquillity of this landscape, and visitor management needs careful consideration.



WOODED CAMBRIAN RIDGE

Key Characteristics

- Prominent rounded ridgeline (extending beyond District boundary).
- Extensive mixed woodland: plantation and ancient woodland.
- Dissected by Little Avon River forming deeply incised sinuous valley.
- Landform and woodland form local landmark.
- Bisected by M5 motorway.



Key Priorities for Action

- Ensure conservation and continued positive management of the Ancient Woodland.
- Ensure conservation and positive management of the river valley.

WOODED CAMBRIAN RIDGE



Landform and Context

This character type occupies only a small area within the District although it extends considerably in a southerly direction. Geologically the area is complex composed of Cambrian, Silurian, Devonian and Carboniferous shales, sandstones and limestones. The portion of this ridge coming within the District is clearly defined by the Little Avon River which has cut a narrow gorge-like valley through from east to west, and is coincident with the District boundary. The area consists of a larger southern hill and a smaller northern hill whose physical separation has been exaggerated by the construction of the M5 motorway which travels between the two hills. The saddle of land between the hills accommodates the Michaelwood service area.

Although the hills rise to only just over 50m, their prominence is emphasised by the extensive mixed woodland cover which creates a dark backdrop when seen from the surrounding lower lying regions. Also the obvious extension of the ridge southwards beyond the District boundary adds weight to its physical presence. The woodland and the mast associated with Michaelwood service area form a local landmark.

Land Use and Landscape Pattern

The land use is predominately woodland and is comprised of several ancient woodlands. The character of the woods however, is significantly affected by the high proportion of recent conifer planting. Peripheral areas include pastureland, the motorway service station and along the southern edge, the steep banks down to the Little Avon River.

A twisting lane follows the deeply incised river valley through the area and another lane skirts the woodland on the eastern edge.

WOODED CAMBRIAN RIDGE

Settlement and Vernacular Character

This small area is virtually unsettled except for a scattering of houses along the lane at Damery, where there is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument: the Old Castle earthworks. There are also sites of disused quarries along the steep sides of the river valley.

Human Response

Despite its limited extent this landscape type has a strong character and sense of identity. The sinuous incised river valley with its steep banks, woodland and winding lane are particularly attractive and unique in the District. This contrasts markedly with the intrusion of the M5 motorway which bisects the two hills. From this elevated area there are good views from the lane by Damery to the Cotswold escarpment over the north of Kingswood Vale.

Sensitivity to Change

The area owes its intrinsic character to the woodland cover, and any change to this would result in a loss of local character. The Ancient Woodland has already been severed by the M5 motorway and any further extension of the service area is likely to be detrimental to this area. Much of the old timber has been removed and replaced with recent plantation which has reduced the visual character and nature conservation value. Selective felling allowing the development of older broadleaved species would be desirable.

The Little Avon River Valley through this section with its steeply wooded banks is of particularly high conservation value and the site of the old castle demonstrates the historic strategic importance of this small river gap.

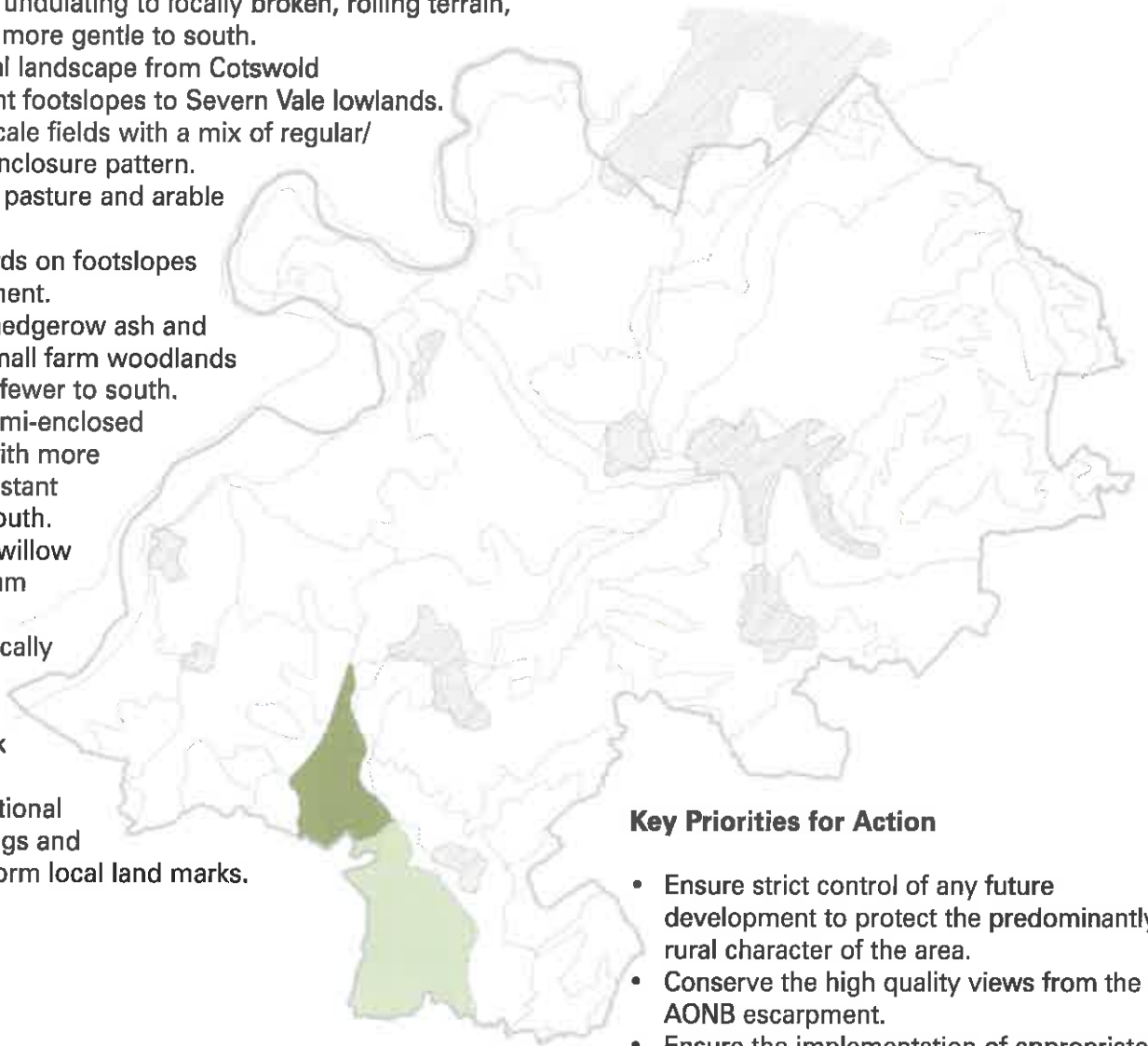
Any large scale development in this area would be detrimental to its character.



KINGSWOOD VALE



Key Characteristics

- Irregularly undulating to locally broken, rolling terrain, becoming more gentle to south.
- Transitional landscape from Cotswold Escarpment footslopes to Severn Vale lowlands.
- Medium scale fields with a mix of regular/irregular enclosure pattern.
- Mixture of pasture and arable land use.
- Old orchards on footslopes of escarpment.
- Frequent hedgerow ash and oak and small farm woodlands becoming fewer to south.
- Visually semi-enclosed to open, with more outward distant views to south.
- Alder and willow along stream courses.
- Streams locally incised.
- Buildings of red brick and stone.
- Large traditional mill buildings and hop kilns form local land marks.



Kingswood Vale forms an extensive area of more or less rolling arable and mixed farmland lying west of the Cotswold escarpment and extending southwards from Stinchcombe to the District boundary with Avon.

This landscape type is differentiated by broad but discernible variations in character:

-  Kingswood Vale - north
-  Kingswood Vale - south

Key Priorities for Action

- Ensure strict control of any future development to protect the predominantly rural character of the area.
- Conserve the high quality views from the AONB escarpment.
- Ensure the implementation of appropriate landscape schemes for any development to maximise integration with the landscape pattern and minimise visibility from the AONB.
- Discourage removal of hedgerows and intensification of arable production which would result in a loss of character.
- Encourage the replanting of new orchards and the management of old orchards where appropriate.
- Encourage the uptake of farm woodland grant schemes and the maintenance of existing pollarded hedgerow trees.
- Protect the small streams and related wetland habitats throughout the area.
- Encourage sympathetic redevelopment of vernacular buildings such as mills and farm buildings to retain local character.

KINGSWOOD VALE



Landform and Context

Kingswood Vale forms a transition from the footslopes of the Cotswold Escarpment to the lowland landscapes of Severn Vale. The larger southern portion lies between the escarpment and a low lying ridge to the west beyond the district boundary, which is part of the Wooded Cambrian Ridge landscape type. It is typically undulating with locally incised streams forming tributaries to the Little Avon River. The southern part of Kingswood Vale has some larger areas of flatter, more gently undulating land, while to the north the streams are more incised and the landform becomes more rolling and broken.

Geologically the area is formed of Jurassic clays underlain with Blue and White Lias which outcrops along the Little Avon Valley where it creates a more hummocky topography, particularly in the north.

KINGSWOOD VALE

Land Use and Landscape Pattern

The area is characterised by the medium to large scale fields of both arable and pastureland. To the south the fields assume a rectilinear and large scale pattern while the pattern in the northern part of the Vale is more irregular. There is a fairly marked break between the arable and short-term ley fields of this area and the permanent pasture of the adjoining Cotswold escarpment footslopes. On the better drained slopes bordering the escarpment and on higher land, particularly in the northern part of the Vale, old orchards occur. The old pear trees form a notable constituent of the landscape pattern.

The field boundaries are demarcated by hedgerows and in the northern part ash and oak are common hedgerow trees. To the south the landscape is more open with fewer hedgerow trees. Here willow becomes an important component of the landscape occurring as both hedgerow trees and along the stream courses. In this southern section old oak and ash pollards occur in the hedgerows. Due to the more rolling topography and denser tree cover the northern part has a more semi-enclosed character, whereas the south has a more distinctly open character with distant views to the south. The Cotswold escarpment forms an important visual backdrop to this area with its high scenic quality and views to local landmarks such as Nibley Knoll. Stinchcombe and Nibley churches, Alderley church and the settlements of the escarpment including Wotton-under-Edge all form distinctive landmarks when viewed from this landscape area.

Woodlands mainly occur in *Kingswood Vale - north* as small farm woods and shelterbelts and over-mature hedgerows creating linear features in the landscape. Here free standing mature oaks occur in pastures and arable fields creating a rich, parkland-like character in places. Well developed scrub occurs along the streams creating a landscape of varied textures.

Settlement and Vernacular Character

The area is principally rural with mixed farming. The settlement pattern consists of scattered farmsteads and hamlets with only one sizeable settlement occurring in the area; the small market town of Kingswood in the southern part of the Vale. The road network is fairly sparse with winding lanes radiating from Kingswood to connect it to Wotton-under-Edge, Charfield and Wickwar. There are very few lanes in the northern part of this landscape type. The area is fairly well served by footpaths and bridleways, particularly in the southern part of the Vale.

KINGSWOOD VALE

The buildings of the area reflect the transitional nature of this landscape with some buildings in Cotswold stone and many others in brick. Large mill buildings are associated with the course of the Little Avon River and are still used for commercial purposes giving the area a sense of prosperity. These buildings are distinctive in the landscape, often being four or five storeys tall and of red brick construction. Other local landmarks are provided by farm silos.

Human Response

The over-riding impression of this landscape is of a well worked, productive lowland farmland. The open aspect of the southern part of the Vale has a wide spacious feel similar to the landscape of the Little Avon River Basin with impressive long distance views of the Cotswold escarpment to north and south.

Locally there is intimate detail and interest in the winding lanes which access the farms, and the old orchards. The irregular topography of the northern part of the Vale has a special character and quality. This is particularly evident near Michaelwood Lodge Farm where the ancient woodland and standard oak trees occur as hedgerow specimens and create a more sheltered character.

Generally this character type has an air of an old established and domesticated landscape.

Sensitivity to Change

Kingswood Vale is important as a setting for the town of Wotton-under-Edge and the wider AONB landscape. Given its generally open character, particularly to the south where there is the greatest density of settlement, this landscape is sensitive to further large scale development. When viewed from the escarpment the existing larger scale buildings, such as the school to the north of Kingswood, are



KINGSWOOD VALE

prominently visible and give an indication of the likely impact of any other new building and development of this scale. While the variety of field shape and the settlement pattern gives a patchwork quality to this landscape, its ability to absorb further development is restricted.

Pressures exist from the expansion of existing urban communities in Wotton-under-Edge, Kingswood itself and Charfield Green just outside of the District.

The main sensitivities of this landscape lie with changing agricultural policies which may affect the area of land cultivated for arable crops. Changes in the extent of woodland cover would also affect the character of this landscape, although this would not be detrimental if it were increased. The old orchards give an indication of the decline in this particular crop and the ensuing loss of this element from the landscape.

STROUD LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

SECTION C

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STROUD LANDSCAPE



Supplementary Planning Guidance

November 2000

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STROUD LANDSCAPE

C O N T E N T S

The importance of the Stroud Landscape	CI
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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STROUD LANDSCAPE





















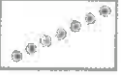

The human race is characterised by its thirst for new ideas, for change and development. However, to an increasing extent people also value the continuity and consistency to be found in their landscape, connecting them to nature and their roots. The conservation of the landscape is an ongoing and often unspectacular activity. It can be achieved as part of people's day-to-day work, with additional inputs of financial resources, specialist professional advice and voluntary community work.

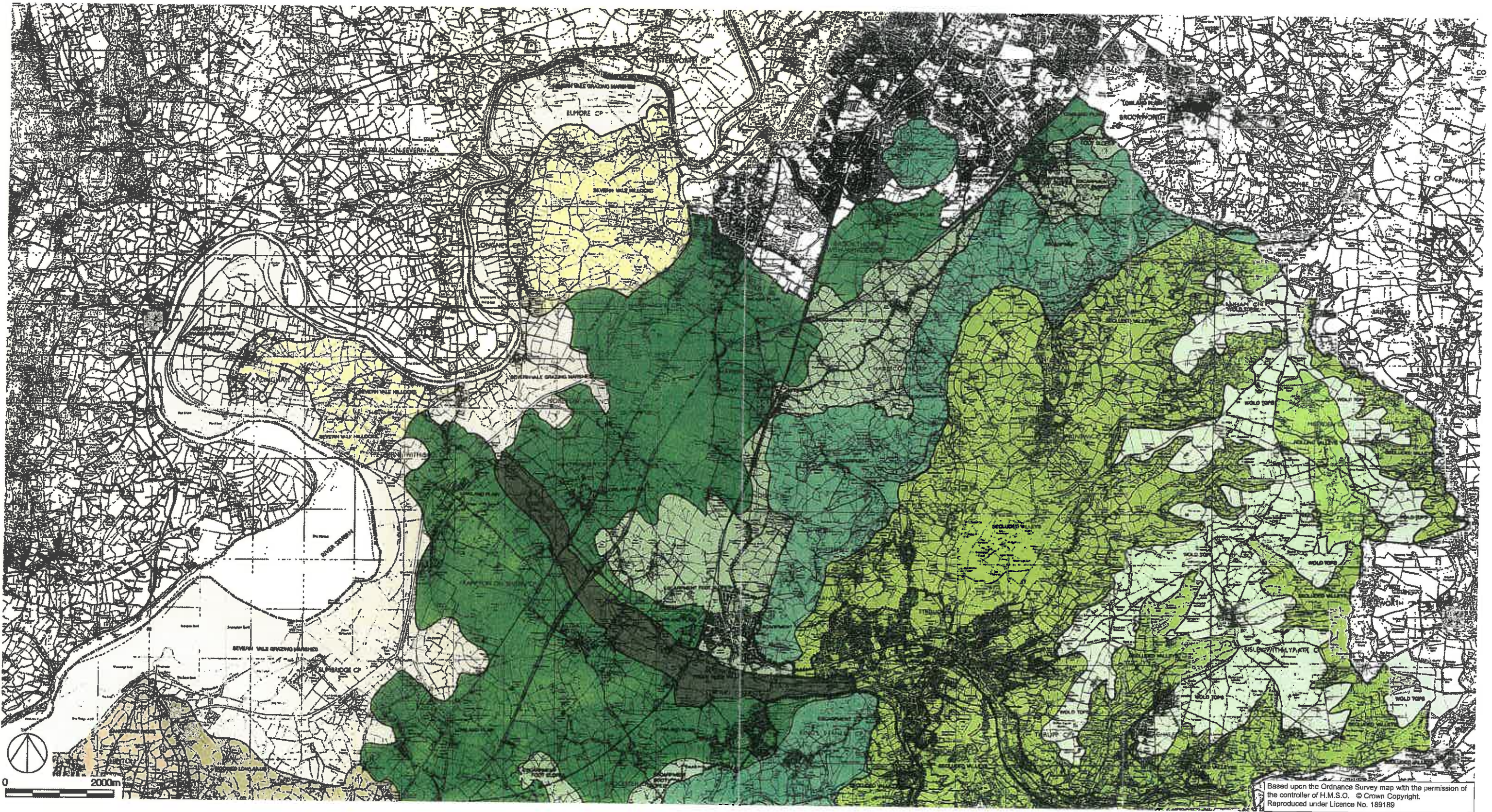
The successful management of the Stroud Landscape will therefore necessitate the continued help and co-operation of a number of players: farmers in the way they manage their land, engineers in their willingness to ensure that features such as traffic calming or road widening are sensitively integrated into the landscape; planning authorities in controlling unwanted development and encouraging innovative and sustainable solutions for new housing. It will also involve local communities and others who care about the Stroud District Landscape in taking responsibility for the conservation of their local landscapes in their day to day actions and resisting harmful developments.

This document sets out the variety of landscape character within the Stroud District, in order to highlight the subtle but important contrasts which make each area special. It is intended that this information will serve as a baseline to ensure that future developments in the Stroud District take place within a framework of respecting, protecting and enhancing the unique character of each area.

Landscape Character Maps

Key

	Wold Tops		Lowland Ridges
	Rolling Valleys		Severn Vale Hillocks
	Secluded Valleys		Severn Vale Grazing Marshes
	Escarpment		Sandstone Ridge
5	Rolling Agricultural Plain		Triassic Ridge
	Escarpment foot slopes		Wooded Cambrian Ridge
	Lowland Plain	12	Kingswood Vale
	Frome River Valley		Kingswood Vale – North
6	Undulating Lowlands		Kingswood Vale – South
	Little Avon Basin		District Boundary
	Little Avon Mid-Valley		AONB Boundary
	Wooded Lowlands		



Landscape Character (North Sheet)



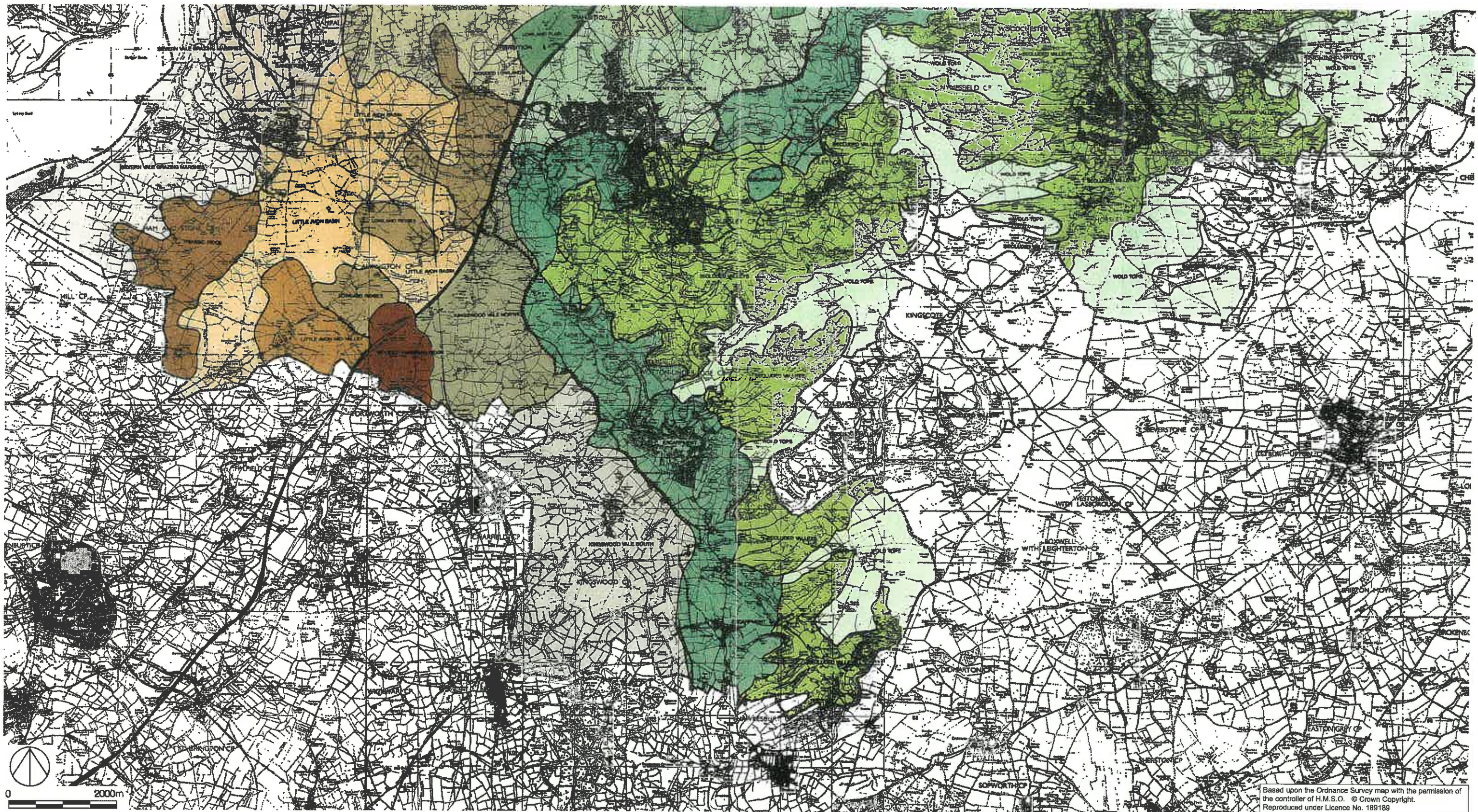
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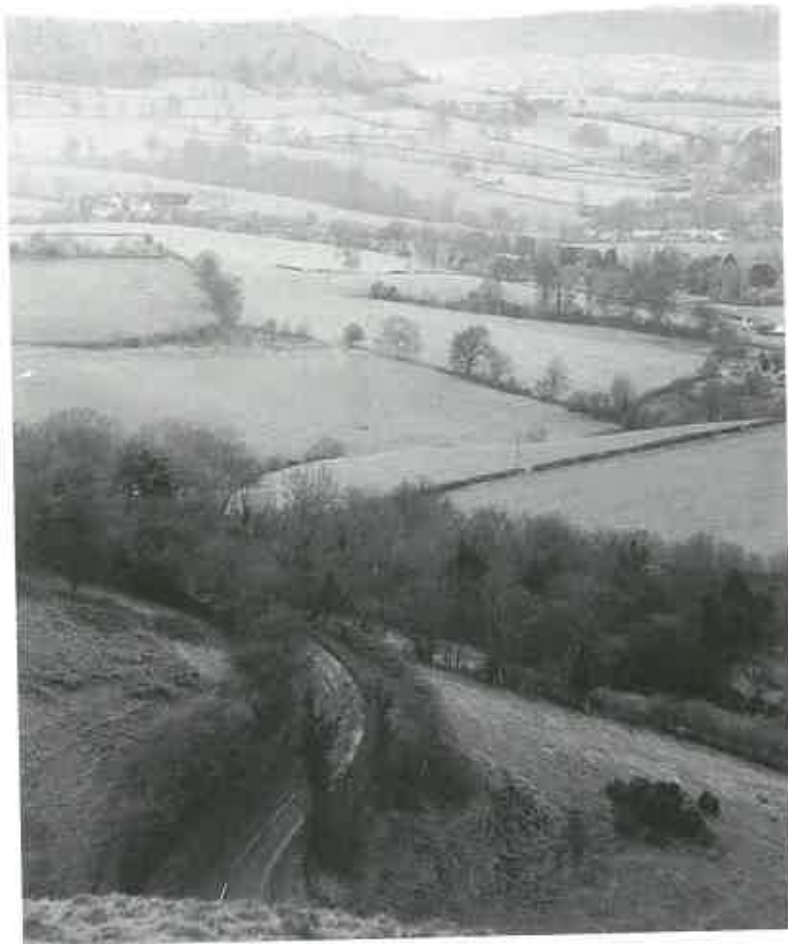


Landscape Character (South Sheet)



LANDSCAPE DESIGN ASSOCIATES

STROUD DISTRICT LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT



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