

10 HIGH WOLD DIP-SLOPE VALLEY

Character Areas

- 10A Middle Churn Valley
- 10B Middle Coln Valley
- 10C Upper / Middle Leach Valley



Key Characteristics

- Well-defined gentle concave valley form with intermittently very steep and indented valley sides dissected by minor watercourses, and distinctive convex profile at transition with the High Wold Dip-Slope;
- intermittent areas of predominantly broadleaved and mixed woodland extend across sections of the valley sides, particularly across the steeper sections;
- predominance of improved pastoral farmland extending between the wooded slopes, and along valley bottoms, together with pockets of arable land, particularly on the shallower slopes;
- occasional remnants of unimproved and calcareous grasslands;

- sheltered, visually contained and intimate valley systems;
- intermittent stone built villages occupy sheltered locations in valley bottoms, often in association with a bridging point;
- farmsteads and individual buildings within the more open valley sections link to farmed areas on the adjacent High Wold Dip-Slope;
- occasional private parklands within or adjacent to valleys influence character; and
- road network generally confined to a single valley bottom road, together with principal and local cross valley routes.

Landscape Character

The valleys flowing across the High Wold Dip-Slope form a transition from the steeper and more confined upper reaches, and the sections to the south-east that flow across the Dip-Slope Lowland to the Thames. As a consequence they share characteristics of both valley types, the differences often relating to the progressive change in elevation from the higher wolds down to the lowland areas that form the south-eastern boundary of the AONB.

The river valleys have a well-defined form with locally more incised sections, particularly within the principal tributary valleys that link into the main valley. At the crest of the valley slopes, there is a more gentle convex profile at the junction with the High Wold Dip-Slope. The main valleys sides are further dissected by a series of small secondary valleys that link into the main river, the majority of which are dry.

All of the valleys have a sheltered, and secluded character distinct and separate from the more open and extensive

High Wold Dip-Slope that define their limit. They display a mosaic of land uses, with a mix of intermittent areas of broadleaved, and occasionally ancient woodland clothing the steeper slopes and forming a backdrop to the areas of predominantly pasture land. Arable land is present, generally in small consolidated holdings and principally occurring on the shallower valley slopes, or connected to farms occupying the High Wold Dip-Slope edge.

Physical Influences

The Thames tributaries flow in well-defined valleys across the Great Oolite, with the Forest Marble Formation occurring in a band along many sections of the valley sides. Alluvial deposits are present within all of the valley bottoms forming a distinctive flat valley bottom across which the rivers meander. The soils of the floodplain are often poorly drained and therefore wet pasture grazed by cattle or even wet meadowland is predominant within the valley floor.

Along the fringes of the floodplain silty soils support fertile land for productive pasture and in some areas, less at risk from flooding, arable farming takes place. On the valley sides pasture predominates. On some slopes too steep for improvement and heavy grazing, calcareous grasslands survive and are an important nature conservation resource.

Riverside trees such as willow, ash and alder may often be seen in close proximity to the course of the High Wold Dip-Slope rivers. The intermittent mainly deciduous woodlands and copses, together with the enclosing topography, combine to limit views and reinforce the sense of enclosure and intimacy within the valleys. Hedgerows as well as stone walls on valley sides also contribute to the sense of a well-treed and enclosed landscape and provide some landscape structure. However, on the valley bottom, some post and wire fences occur together with areas of horse pasture.

Human Influences

The presence of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments throughout the course of the Thames tributary river valleys, from the High Wold down to the Dip-Slope Lowland, suggest that both these and other sections of the valleys were the focus of settlement in prehistoric times. It is also likely that the valleys were important trade and communication routes. The influence of the Roman occupation affects all of the High Wold Dip-Slope rivers, with Fosse Way crossing both the Coln and the Leach at important bridging points. To the west, Ermin Way, now followed by the A417(T), follows close to the western

perimeter of the Middle Churn character area in the vicinity of the principal tributary valley that extends to Shewel Wood.

Despite much earlier origins, many of the valley settlements were established in the Saxon or medieval periods. The geographical locations of settlements also indicate that river crossing points were the natural locations of many settlements. Today, dispersed villages of a radial form, and dispersed hamlets of a linear form predominate in the valley bottoms along with scattered individual dwellings. Dispersed hamlets and individual buildings also occur on valley terraces, although these are less frequent.

High Wold Dip-Slope Valley villages and hamlets are generally small and quiet. The apparent historic layout of the historic core of many villages, coupled with evidence of traditional building styles and materials, adds significantly to their visual appeal and character. Distinctive stone churches are often associated with these villages although they are not often at the centre, instead occupying a peripheral location close to the river channel. Northleach is a particularly notable settlement within the Leach Valley, at one time a key medieval wool trading centre.

Character Areas

10A

Middle Churn Valley

The Middle Churn Valley Character Area extends across the High Wold Dip-Slope from the south of Rendcomb to the northern perimeter of Cirencester, at the village of Baunton and the boundary of the AONB. Although the valley form is still distinct, it assumes a progressively broader form with shallower slope profiles to the south of the character area. The valley extends across the White Limestone Formation of the Great Oolite, but river erosion has cut through the rock strata to expose the Forest



Marble Formation along the middle and lower valley slopes. Extensive alluvial deposits occur within the valley bottom, which is noticeably wider than in the upper sections of the valley, extending up to 300m in width in some sections. There are also numerous braided sections within the river course, and a series of springs rise within the valley floor and lower slopes to feed into the river.

The land is predominantly under pasture, with occasional areas of arable, within a mosaic of regular and mainly medium-scale fields. Woodland cover within the Middle Churn Valley is generally sparse. There is, however, an intermittent cover of small rectilinear broadleaved woodlands on the lower valley slopes and bottom, together with riparian vegetation, and a mosaic of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. On the margins of the principal settlements of North Cerney and Baunton the introduction of 'decorative' species has resulted in a more domestic influence within the valley.

The A435 follows the valley bottom and is a busy and disruptive element within the valley. A further intrusion within the valley is the 19m high bridge between Baunton and Perrott's Brook that carries the A419(T) across the Churn Valley, and now forms a bypass to Cirencester and Stratton. The bridge structure, together with the approach roads which are in cutting, have a significant local effect on the southern section of the character area.

Settlement in the northern section of the character area is confined to the stone built village of North Cerney, and occasional farms and residential properties. Further south, however, in the vicinity of Baunton and the northern perimeter of Cirencester, urban influences are more apparent with a greater number of residential properties, and leisure uses including a caravan and camping site at Perrott's Brook, and a golf course west of Baunton. These impart a more settled character to the valley.

In contrast, the subsidiary valley to the west of the Churn that extends as far as Shewel Wood retains the same complex and deeply incised profile that is more typical of parts of the upper reaches of the Churn, particularly from Rendcomb to Colesbourne and within the Hilcot Brook Valley. Extensive areas of woodland extend along the valley slopes, including ancient woodland at Moor Wood. The valley is sparsely populated, and inaccessible to vehicles, except for a minor road that crosses the valley to the south of Shewel Wood.



10B Middle Coln Valley

The section of the Coln Valley that flows through the High Wold Dip-Slope is short in length extending from Stowell Park south to the small valley bottom villages of Calcot and Coln Rogers. A tributary of the Coln is also included in this character area, and from its confluence with the Coln at Fossebridge, extends westwards to the village of Chedworth.

In common with the Middle Churn, the Middle Coln flows across the Great Oolite but has exposed Forest Marble in the upper sections of the valley. Alluvium is also deposited along the valley bottom to form a well-defined flat valley floor across which river gently meanders within the broader meander form of the valley morphology. The valley is particularly broad below Stowell.

Much of the valley is managed as pasture, within medium to large regular fields of improved grassland as well as unimproved former water meadows. Small fields are common in the valley bottom, and on the perimeter of the villages. Remnants of calcareous grassland can also be found in the bottom of tributary valleys to the Coln. Occasional areas of arable also occur, notably in the vicinity of Moor Farm, west of Coln St Dennis. Woodland cover within the main valley is generally limited and confined to small rectangular copses within the tributary dry valley east of Coln St Dennis. Numerous bankside and isolated trees, as well as intermittent areas of river edge woodland and copses also occur along the valley bottom forming a distinctive backdrop or setting to the stone villages within the valley.

The sequence of small peaceful and unspoilt stone villages along the Coln valley has resulted in a rural settled character amidst the wider pastoral setting. There is some intrusion into the unspoilt rural character, however, notably where horse grazed pasture occurs, in association with features typical of 'horsiculture'.

The most notable archaeological feature within the character area is the Roman road Fosse Way, which crosses the river at Fosse Bridge. There is also evidence of ridge and furrow in places along the lower valley slopes and bottom. Stowell House is located on the upper slopes above a broad valley meander. The historic house and its parkland setting, with parkland trees, pasture and remnant features dominate the valley and contribute to the peaceful pastoral and parkland estate character.

The small tributary valley to the west of Fosse Bridge has a notably more incised valley form than the main valley. In contrast to many other smaller tributary valleys that extend across the High Wold Dip-Slope it has a settled character, with the village of Chedworth extending along the valley. The settlement form of the village is uncharacteristic of typical Cotswold valley villages with cottages spread along the valley sides, and climbing up the steep and narrow valley; indeed, in some sections, the settlement form is more reminiscent of the Stroud valleys. The wooded embankment that once supported the viaduct carrying the former Cheltenham to Cirencester railway line is also a notable feature within the valley.

10C

Upper / Middle Leach Valley



The River Leach rises from a series of springs in the village green of the small village of Hampnett, which is set in the bowl of an enclosed valley. Although extending for a short section into the High Wold landscape type, this Upper / Middle reach of the river has been considered as part of the sequence of High Wold Dip-Slope valleys. In common with the Churn and Coln, the river flows across the White Limestone Formation of the Great Oolite Group. Alluvial deposits also occur along the valley bottom.

Northleach is the principal settlement within the character area. This notable historic wool market town is located within a well-defined valley form, the Perpendicular tower of its 15th century 'wool' church forming a focus for views from the surrounding area. The river is culverted through the town and emerges at the southern end adjacent to an area of playing fields. To the south-east of Northleach, the valley has a well-managed appearance. The sequence of small stone hamlets of Upper, Middle and Lower End nestle low within the valley, and are sheltered by steep wooded valley sides and numerous trees, resulting in a secluded and intimate character.

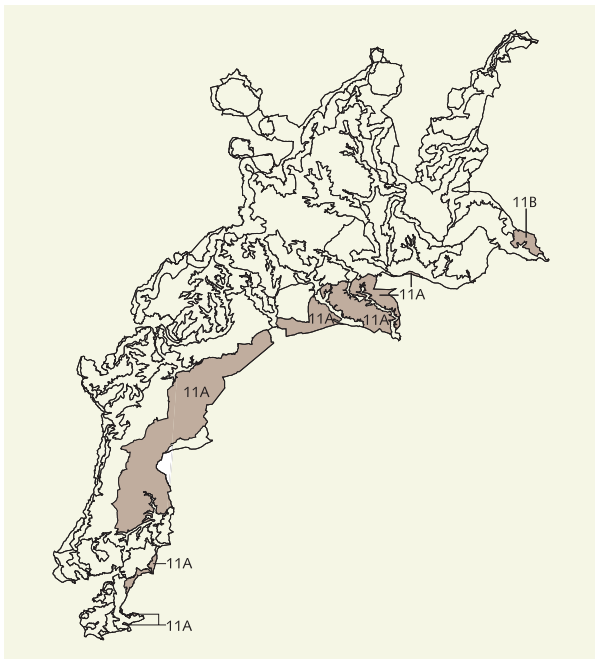
Land use within the valley is a mix of arable and pasture, the latter predominant within the valley bottoms. Woodland cover throughout the character area is intermittent with a notable area of ancient woodland at Prison Copse between Northleach and Hampnett. Further areas of valley side woodlands occur below Northleach, and also in association with Lodge Park, including Larkethill, which is classified as ancient woodland.

The Registered Historic Garden of Lodge Park is a notable feature at the southern limit of the character area. The parkland landscape associated with this extensive deer park forms part of the Sherborne Estate to the north. It is a unique example of a 17th century deer course and grandstand. Created in 1634 by John Dutton, it has now been restored by the National Trust, relying on archaeological evidence. The surrounding parkland, designed by Charles Bridgeman in 1725, extends across the west facing slopes of the valley.

11 DIP-SLOPE LOWLAND

Character Areas

- 11A South and Mid Cotswolds Lowlands
- 11B Stonesfield Lowlands



Key Characteristics

- Broad area of gently sloping, undulating lowland with a predominantly south-easterly fall, changing to a north-easterly fall in the southern perimeter of the area;
- lowland landform gently dissected by infrequent small watercourses flowing into the main rivers that cross the area, reinforcing the general grain of the topography;
- strong and structured farmland character, more intimate and smaller in scale than the High Wold and High Wold Dip-Slope;
- well-managed, productive agricultural landscape of mixed arable and improved pasture, together with more limited areas of permanent pasture, mainly within the valley bottoms;

- seasonal variations in colour and texture associated with mixed arable farming;
- medium to large scale, regular fields predominate mainly enclosed by hedgerows, with hedgerow trees, together with some stone walls or post and wire fencing;
- woodland cover limited to intermittent copses and shelterbelts within agricultural land, but balanced by extensive broadleaved, mixed and coniferous plantations within the large estates and associated farmland areas;
- limited areas of ancient woodland and species rich grassland;
- settlement pattern of intermittent small nucleated villages, hamlets, and isolated farmsteads, together with occasional larger settlements;
- distinctive pattern of large estates and associated planned parkland landscape and woodland occurring throughout the Dip-Slope Lowland; and
- evidence of long period of occupation of the area.

Landscape Character

The Dip-Slope Lowland comprises a broad tract of land that forms the transition between the High Wold Dip-Slope to the north-west, and the lower lying and flatter Thames Basin to the south-east. The principal section of this landscape type extends north of Bath near Marshfield and North Wraxall and then sweeps first northwards, and then north-eastwards along the south-eastern perimeter of the AONB as far as Burford. In contrast to this large and almost continuous tract of land, broken only by the valleys of the Churn and Coln, there are a number of much smaller and fragmented sections of this landscape type. These principally occur in the extreme south of the

AONB, forming small sections of a larger area of Dip-Slope Lowland that extends to the east of the Limpley Stoke section of the Avon Valley, and beyond the designated area, encompassing land extending up to the settlements of Bradford-on-Avon, Melksham and Corsham. A further area of Dip-Slope Lowland occurs in the north-eastern part of the AONB in the vicinity of Stonesfield, forming a transitional landscape above the Evenlode Valley.

The Dip-Slope Lowland is underlain by the limestone formations of the Great Oolite Group, including outcrops of the Forest Marble Formation. It comprises an area of gently undulating lowland, approximately 160m AOD to 100m AOD, with a gentle fall from north-west to south-east, except for the southern sector which assumes a more pronounced west-east fall. Tributary streams are generally infrequent, but where they do occur they have gently dissected the lowland area resulting in local variations in landform. These small valleys generally follow the orientation of the regional slope and dip of the underlying strata, and therefore give the landscape a well-defined grain.

Agriculture is the principal land use across the Dip-Slope Lowland with much of the land under mixed arable and improved pasture, and some permanent pasture predominantly within the valleys. It is generally well managed, within a mosaic of medium to large regular fields, mainly contained by hedgerows. There are also areas where stone walls predominate, generally confined to land surrounding villages, adjacent to farms and within the main estates. It therefore has a strongly structured and productive character. In contrast to the High Wold and Dip-Slope, the area has a smaller and more intimate scale, with views often limited by the flatter landscape and intercepting effect of the mosaic of fields and succession of field boundaries. Nevertheless, from a number of vantage points and more open sections, it is possible to obtain wider views to the south-east towards the North Wessex Downs.

Designed parkland and estate landscapes are a distinctive feature of this landscape character type and include a number of nationally important Registered Gardens and Parks. The extensive woodlands, and planned features, such as avenues and vistas, impart a dramatic and impressive scale to the landscape, and have a strong influence on local landscape character. The large scale of the estate woodlands contrasts with the otherwise generally limited woodland cover across the Dip-Slope Woodland, which is mainly confined to a pattern of small deciduous or mixed copses and shelterbelts, and occasional larger areas of woodland, within the farmed structure. Coniferous plantations of geometric shape are occasional conspicuous elements.

A pattern of small, mainly dispersed villages and hamlets, together with numerous isolated farmsteads and individual buildings, extends across the Dip-Slope Lowland, with Tetbury comprising the only larger settlement within the area. A network of mainly direct local roads connect the numerous villages, while the main section of the A433, a principal route within the area, crosses the general south-easterly grain of the landform. The M4 and main line railway crosses the southern part of the Dip-Slope Lowland.

Archaeological evidence indicates that this landscape has been occupied since the Neolithic period. The time layers of occupation, with successive patterns of land management, have largely been removed or integrated into the enclosure of the land that occurred in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is this process which has had the most significant effect on landscape character, with the resultant strong pattern of regular fields that extends across the area.

Physical Influences

The Dip-Slope Lowland is located at the eastern and south-eastern limit of the outcrop of Oolitic Limestone within the Cotswolds. Underlain by the succession of Middle Jurassic limestones and mudstones of the Great Oolite Group, including the Forest Marble Formation, only the adjacent and younger Cornbrash Formation is not represented. This latter rock unit underlies the adjacent Cornbrash Lowlands character type (Landscape Character Type 14), and is identified as a separate type as a consequence of the particular characteristics of the rock unit and its surface expression. Beyond this, and to the south-east, the younger Upper Jurassic Oxford Clay form the bedrock to the extensive, low-lying Thames Basin.

The drainage pattern across the main section of the Dip-Slope Lowland has two distinct and separate catchment patterns. The southern section forms part of the Bristol Avon catchment, which follows a particularly tortuous course across the southern perimeter of the AONB. The confluence of the two separate Sherston and Tetbury branches of the upper reaches of this river occurs at Malmesbury, beyond the AONB boundary to the south-west. Infrequent tributaries have gently dissected the lowland area, feeding into the Avon which flows initially within a generally south-west / north-east alignment. It is only beyond the Dip-Slope Lowland that its course alters to east-west, then south, before finally assuming a west flowing course to the Severn. Further north the Dip-Slope Lowland forms part of the Upper Thames Catchment area. Indeed, the source of the Thames is located within this character type, at Thames Head. The Thames catchment rivers of the Churn, Coln and Leach cross the Dip-Slope Lowland in north-west / south-east aligned valleys,

following the dip of the underlying strata. Tributaries of these three main rivers within the Lowland area are infrequent, but where they do occur, together with interconnecting networks of dry valley systems, the valley forms are locally significant.

The small, detached area of Dip-Slope Lowland on the eastern perimeter of the AONB in the vicinity of Stonesfield, forms part of the Evenlode Catchment. This is a gently sloping area with subtle landform variations reflecting dry valley systems connecting into the Evenlode.

Stone slates have been quarried at locations on the Dip-Slope Lowland, largely from the thin fissile limestones at the base of the Great Oolite. Perhaps the most famous are the Stonesfield Slates that were quarried from the fringes of Great Oolite in the vicinity of Stonesfield from the 16th century until the beginning of the 20th century. The extensive use of these natural stone 'slates' for roofing contribute as much to the character of local buildings and vernacular of the Cotswolds as does the stone used for buildings and walls.

As a result of the extensive agricultural 'improvements' and ploughing up of much of the Dip-Slope Lowland, old pasture and calcareous grassland is now very limited. There are, however, a few remnants of calcareous as well as mesotrophic (neutral) grassland remaining within the area, although their impact in the wider landscape is very limited. Ancient woodland is also sparse, although notable stands occur with the managed estates of Badminton and Westonbirt. Much of the woodland areas that cover the area today date from the previous two centuries and the period of enclosure, resulting in a 'planned' character. A pattern of geometric and linear plantations and shelterbelts therefore prevails.

Human Influences

A number of prehistoric long barrows, and burial mounds are present within the Dip-Slope Lowland. Although less numerous than on the High Wold and High Wold Dip-Slope, their presence is evidence of occupation of the land since the Neolithic. It also suggests that this lower part of the Cotswolds would also have been extensively cleared of trees from this period to ensure visibility of these symbolic features and territory markers, as well to enable cultivation of the land to support these early sedentary, farming communities.

Remnants of Roman occupation are also notable, with the Roman roads of Akeman Street, Fosse Way and Ermin Way running through the Dip-Slope Lowland, converging

on the significant Roman settlement of Cirencester (CORINIVM). Although Cirencester lies immediately outside of the Dip-Slope Lowland, and indeed the AONB, it is surrounded by this landscape type.

The series of historic parks, gardens and designed landscapes that permeate the Dip-Slope Lowland are one of the most significant visible historic landscape features. A number are very extensive, notably Badminton Park, Westonbirt Arboretum, and Cirencester Park, and exert a strong influence over wide tracts of the surrounding landscape as a result of the extensive woodlands, avenues, parkland and planned vistas. The impressive scale and formality of these estates contrast with the smaller scale rural landscape and field mosaic that surrounds them.

Field patterns across the Dip-Slope Lowland comprise a mosaic of both irregular enclosure reflecting former unenclosed cultivation patterns, and regular enclosure that ignores former unenclosed cultivation patterns. In some areas, such as around Rodmarton, the field pattern is identified as regular enclosure of former common pasture. Floated water meadow systems and riverine pastures and meadows are also prevalent along a number of the river channels.

Villages and hamlets tend to be dispersed, with villages mainly having a radial form and hamlets a linear form usually centred at the point where numerous roads converge, e.g. Luckington, and in sheltered locations within the small tributary valleys. Despite this predominance, examples of linear and organic dispersed villages can also be found along with examples of radial and organic dispersed hamlets that are relatively compact. Isolated farms and individual buildings are widespread across the landscape, often located adjacent to roads or at the end of short lanes off roads.

There is little in the way of formal recreation provision in the landscape. However, a number of the historic parks and gardens are open to the public, notably Westonbirt Arboretum, which is of national importance in respect of its tree collection. Numerous footpaths cross the landscape and the Macmillan Way, Thames Path, Wysis Way and Monarch's Way, all long distance footpaths, are located in the west of the landscape type.

There are few landmarks in the landscape although church spires and towers represent important focal features and points of orientation within the lower lying landform. Although infrequent, pylon lines have a significant impact where they occur. Views to the south from the Dip-Slope Lowland are often long and expansive, although to the north, landform of the High Wold limits the extent of views.



Character Areas

11A

South Cotswolds Lowlands

The South Cotswolds Lowlands forms an almost continuous area of Dip-Slope Lowland along the eastern and south-eastern side of the Cotswolds, broken only by the valley of the River Churn at Cirencester. Despite the linear extent of the area, there is a strong continuity in its character principally relating to the landform. Generally below the 160m AOD levels, the area has a gently sloping mainly south-easterly grain with more subtle undulations and shallower slope profiles than in the adjacent Dip-Slope Character Type. In the eastern part of the South Cotswolds Lowlands, however, small, often tree lined tributary watercourses and dry valleys systems have dissected the otherwise gentle terrain. There is a consistent pattern of well-managed, productive mixed arable and pastoral landscape across this lower tract of land enclosed by both stone walls and hedgerows with hedgerow trees being a common feature.

This main section of the Dip-Slope Lowland is remarkable for the concentration of Historic Parks, Registered Gardens and private estates throughout the area. A particularly strong cluster occurs in the south-west including Badminton, Westonbirt, Highgrove and Estcourt House, and part of the smaller Pinkney Park adjacent to the River Avon. Further east the planned landscape of Cirencester Park is noteworthy while further east again, Barnsley Park, and the Williamstrip Park adjacent to the Lower Coln Valley, are also significant historic parks. It is likely that the relatively more sheltered locations occurring on the lower slopes of the Cotswolds, together with marginally deeper soils than on the High Wold plateau areas, were important factors in influencing the location of these major estates.

Woodlands within this Character Area vary between the extensive woodlands and plantations within the large estates and a pattern of intermittent smaller woodlands associated with the farmed landscape. Many of the farm copses have been planted within the last two centuries following enclosure and are generally geometric in form, functioning as shelterbelts and game coverts. The extent of ancient woodland is limited, but there is a large area at the north-western side of the Badminton Estate at Swangrove, and, not surprisingly, also within the extensive woodlands associated with the Westonbirt Arboretum, at Silk Wood. Elsewhere, pockets of ancient woodland are generally small in scale such as Alderton Grove to the north of Littleton Drew, and at Shipton Wood to the south of Tetbury within the Estcourt House parkland. These are important but much-depleted remnants of a once more extensive cover. There are notable concentrations of parkland trees within the Badminton Estate and at Westonbirt, which increases the sense of tree cover.

There are very few areas within the Character Area where habitats are sufficiently important or rare to receive national designation. Land to the east of the village of Box and Box Hill is designated as a SSSI and cSAC. The area supports an important habitat and includes one of the few parts of the country where Box (*Buxus sempervirens*) grows naturally. The scattered and generally small areas of calcareous as well as neutral (mesotrophic) grassland are of considerable ecological importance, but their impact on landscape character is only of local significance. Local stone mines are of particular significance and form part of the Bath and Bradford-on-Avon Bats candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC). This is notable for the presence of the Greater Horseshoe Bat, one of the largest and rarest bats in the UK, and currently only found in south-west England and south and west Wales. The total UK population is about 5,000. In winter the bats depend on caves, abandoned mines and underground sites for undisturbed hibernation.

Apart from the network of principal and local roads that cross the area, the southern sector is crossed by the M4 and the Swindon / Bristol main railway line. Further north, the Swindon / Stroud railway crosses the area in the vicinity of Thames Head. These major transport routes follow the general grain of the Dip-Slope, and many sections are in cutting so their impact is limited. Nevertheless they generate noise and movement, which affects the peace of the surrounding rural landscape. High voltage power lines have a greater impact, and the sequence of pylons to the north east of Tetbury, and also to the north of the Leach Valley in the vicinity of Aldsworth, are intrusive elements in the landscape.

**11B****Stonesfield Lowlands**

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

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

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

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

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

12 DIP-SLOPE LOWLAND VALLEY

Character Areas

- 12A Upper By Brook Valley
- 12B Lower Coln Valley
- 12C Lower Leach Valley



Key Characteristics

Upper By Brook

- Narrow, deeply incised sections along the Upper By Brook and its tributaries;
- extensive areas of broadleaved woodland including ancient woodlands, and intermittent coniferous plantations interspersed with species rich grassland cloak steeper valley slopes bordering the By Brook and its tributaries.

Thames Tributaries (Coln and Leach)

- Well-defined valley form with convex slope profile at transition onto the adjacent Dip-Slope Lowland landscape;

- progressively shallower and more open valley form within the lower reaches;
- pronounced valley meanders, and interlocking spurs;
- rivers meander through flat alluvial valley bottoms that become progressively wider towards the lower reaches of the valley;
- linear belts of mixed and broadleaved woodland follow steeper landform and often extend up to the river edge. These often combine with hedgerow and hedgerow trees to create the impression of a well-wooded landscape.

All river valleys

- Intimate, small scale, settled landscape with landform and woodlands restricting long views out of the valley;
- predominance of open pastoral farmland of improved grassland interweave between intermittent wooded slopes and along valley bottoms, together with pockets of arable land, particularly on the shallower slopes;
- sequence of stone built villages occupying secluded locations in valley bottoms, often in association with a bridging point and on valley sides;
- occasional farmsteads within the more open valley sections linking to farmed areas on the adjacent Dip-Slope Lowlands;
- limited road network within valleys, generally confined to a single valley side road, or routes that cross the valley at long established bridging points; and
- some areas of the valleys, including tributary valleys, retain a remote rural character and are only accessible on foot.

Landscape Character

The Dip-Slope Lowland Valleys are a distinctive element within the broader Dip-Slope landscape. Whilst similar in many respects, the valleys forming part of the Thames catchment are generally shallower, less deeply incised and less wooded than those draining the Dip-Slope Lowland to the Avon and eventually into the Severn.

River valley water meadows and floodplain pastures are characteristically flat or very gently undulating with gently sloping land on either side. The sheltered, intimate, small scale wooded and pastoral pattern of the valleys contrast with the more open and exposed expanses of the Dip-Slope Lowland landscape, although the transition is generally harder to define where valley slopes are gentle and woodland cover not extensive.

Historically the lush, sheltered valleys have been intensively settled and the focus of communication routes. However, centuries of activity have obscured many of the remains of early activity. In contrast to shallower soils on the Dip-Slope Lowland, rich alluvial deposits in the valleys support fertile land for productive pasture farming. On drier land, most typically on the gentler valley slopes, arable farming predominates and adds seasonal variations in texture and colour to the otherwise verdant valley pastures.

The distinctive character of the valleys is in part a product of the woodland cover, with significant blocks of broadleaved woodland combining with riverside trees, and overgrown valley side hedgerows, to give the landscape a distinctly wooded character in some sections, and particularly within the By Brook Valley. A number of woodlands are ancient, particularly those on upper valley slopes and areas of steep landform.

In addition to riverine habitats, elements of the wider landscape are also of nature conservation value. Woodland, scrub and hedgerows provide cover for wildlife and add a variety of feeding and breeding sites to those provided by wet meadows and areas of tall riverside vegetation. Despite widespread improvement, areas of calcareous and mesotrophic grassland raise the nature conservation value of the valleys. Indeed, a number of SSSIs may be identified, particularly in the steeper valley systems of the By Brook.

Views within this landscape are generally restricted by landform and vegetation and channelled along the floor of the valley. However, from some areas relatively long distance views along the river course are possible, particularly from open valley sides. Farmed slopes and woodlands form a backdrop to many views from the valley floor, with seasonal changes in broadleaved woodlands and occasional arable fields adding much to the visual appeal of the valleys.

Physical Influences

The Thames tributary valleys that drain the Dip-Slope Lowland, comprising the Coln and Leach, are the lower reaches of the rivers that originate on the High Wold further north. At this lower elevation, their valley profiles are progressively broader and gentler as they approach the Thames Basin.

The Upper By Brook, a tributary of the Bristol Avon, also flows across the Dip-Slope Lowland, but in contrast to the Coln and Leach, this upper section of the river is close to its source in the adjacent High Wold Dip-Slope. The valley form therefore displays characteristics of a juvenile river, with a more deeply incised profile. It is believed that the Upper By Brook valley may at one time have been similar in profile and character to those of the Coln and Leach. However, as the Avon captured it as one of its tributaries, the river has eroded downwards to create its deep valley profile.

The level valley bottoms are formed from alluvial deposits of silty clay, with diamicton evident, forming narrower areas of floodplain along tributary streams. It is through these areas of flat landform that the rivers follow sinuous courses, meandering through the valley floor. The floodplain bordering the Coln and Leach are notably wider than that through which the By Brook flows. This is as a result of their contrasting valley profiles and erosional / depositional histories.

The rivers flow through Jurassic limestone, most notably the Great Oolite Group White Limestone and Forest Marble Formations, evident on upper valley slopes. Historically the valleys have proved a valuable source of building stone and numerous quarry sites may be identified on 1:25,000 mapping although these sites are hard to interpret in the landscape.

The soils of the floodplain are often poorly drained and therefore the valley floor is predominantly un-drained wet pasture grazed by cattle, or even wetland. Particularly important areas of meadow exist in Bibury. Here Rack Isle, a low-lying meadow surrounded by the Coln and Arlington Mill Stream, is a distinctive element of the village and an important wildlife resource. The floodplains at Honeybrook Farm south of Slaughterford are also important and designated as a SSSI on account of the unimproved neutral to calcareous hay meadows and ancient woodlands bordering an undisturbed stretch of the By Brook.

Along the fringes of the floodplain silty soils support fertile land for productive pasture and in some areas, less at risk from flooding, arable farming takes place. On the valley

sides pasture predominates. On some slopes too steep for improvement and heavy grazing, calcareous grasslands survive and are an important nature conservation resource. These may often be found in close proximity to ancient broadleaved woodlands. Indeed numerous SSSIs have been designated on the steep upper slopes of the By Brook Valley including Colerne Park and Monk's Wood, a floristically rich area of ash-wychelm woodland.

Riverside trees such as ash and alder may often be seen in close proximity to the course of the Dip-Slope Lowland rivers. These combine with largely deciduous woodlands and copses to limit views and reinforce the sense of enclosure and intimacy within the valleys, which combined with hedgerows on valley sides, contribute to the sense of a well-treed landscape. Changes in management practice, particularly the overgrown nature of many hedgerows due to lack of management, is reinforcing this sense of enclosure and tree cover giving the impression that the landscape is more wooded than it actually is. Stone walls are also frequent occurrences within the valleys. However, on the valley bottom, post and wire fences predominate. In places these have become colonised by tall weed and scrub growth, and therefore weaken the robust landscape framework.

Human Influences

The distribution of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments along the Dip-Slope Lowland rivers, suggests that similar to other local water courses, they were the focus of settlement in prehistoric times. It is also likely that the valleys were important trade and communication routes and indeed, a number of fortified sites overlooking the valleys may be identified including the Motte and Bailey at Castle Combe above the By Brook and Dean Camp overlooking the Leach.

Despite much earlier origins, many of the valley settlements were established in the Saxon or medieval periods. Place names and their geographical locations indicate that crossing points were the natural locations of many settlements. Indeed two villages on the By Brook contain the element 'ford' indicating the importance of the crossing point in the evolution of these settlements.

Many villages are located on the gentle valley slopes above the main course of the river or adjacent to the rivers and dispersed villages often have a distinct linear form. However, dispersed villages and hamlets with a radial form can also be identified at major crossing points, such as Bibury and Arlington.

Dip-Slope Lowland Valley villages and hamlets are generally small and quiet. The historic layout of the core of many villages, coupled with the vernacular building styles and materials, adds significantly to their visual appeal and character. As a consequence, some have developed into popular tourist destinations, such as the villages of Bibury and Castle Combe. Stone churches are often associated with these villages although they are not often at the centre, instead occupying a peripheral location close to the river channel.

Roads tend to run along the upper slopes of the valley or along the mid slope above the level of flooding. Occasional major routes cross the rivers at long established bridging points. Beyond the villages, many stretches of the valleys are inaccessible by motor vehicle and can only be reached on foot. Many areas are also in private ownership and not accessed by public footpaths, giving many areas a remote character.

Character Areas

12A

Upper By Brook Valley



The valley is drained by the upper section of the By Brook, which is fed by a number of small tributaries arising from springlines on the steep upper slopes. The Upper By Brook flows along the valley floor and into the lower section of the By Brook in Character Area 4D (Lower By Brook Valley), before entering the River Avon at Batheaston. The valley and its tributaries have deeply dissected the surrounding area of Dip-Slope Lowland to the north and west and the Cornbrash Lowlands to the east and as such contrasts with the gentler valley profiles of the Dip-Slope Lowland Valleys further to the north. The main valley is relatively narrow with steep sides containing the fast flowing By Brook, with the tributary valleys being smaller in scale, and narrow with

steeper sides. Whilst a number of tributaries are apparent as small streams, others are only wet flushes on the upper slopes. Alluvial deposits within the main and tributary valleys form flat valley bottoms.

Land use within the valley is dominated by pastoral land with areas of scrub and rough pasture located below woodland that dominates the upper slopes and valley rim. Hedgerows are the main boundary feature, and on upper slopes they are often gappy with tall, mature hedgerow trees. However, stone walls can be found along roadsides and within close proximity of settlements. Overall the valley is generally well wooded and consists mainly of broadleaved species, many of which are designated as ancient woodland. There are a number of significant coniferous blocks, however, including woodland to the east of Marshfield and to the west of Ford and Upper Pickwick. Although the majority of woodland is located on the upper slopes it tends to run along the course of the stream, in particular in the tributary valleys and this, along with the steep landform, creates a strong sense of seclusion. Interspersed between the areas of woodland, mainly on the upper valley slopes adjacent to surrounding areas of Dip-Slope Lowland, are areas of calcareous and mesotrophic grassland such as an area located at West Yatton Down Nature Reserve. South of Castle Combe, it is likely that such grassland has developed as the result of woodland removal. The areas south of Castle Combe are also designated as SSSIs, along with woodland south west of Castle Combe, West Yatton Down Nature Reserve and a significant area south of Slaughterford, which includes ancient meadow pasture systems and ash-wychelm wood.

Settlement within the valley includes the villages of Castle Combe, Ford and Slaughterford, which nestle in the valley bottom adjacent to the By Brook and a limited number of scattered dwellings, again located on the valley bottom and lower valley slopes. Connecting the development within the area is a network of minor roads, confined mainly to the valley floor although a number of roads extend up the valley sides surrounded by high banks and trees, often cloaked in ivy. The A420 is the only main road to pass through the valley at Ford before extending along the upper valley slopes south of North Wraxall. A number of the tributary valleys are accessible only on foot, and although minor roads are often within close proximity, there is a strong sense of rural seclusion. Stone is the dominant building material. This is evident not only in the dwellings and stone walls but also in the construction of arched bridges, in particular around the village of Castle Combe.

Although historic remains are limited within the valley, the close proximity of fortified sites, most notably on the edge of Castle Combe, demonstrate that the area has

been settled, and associated with a controlled route through the landscape, for a significant amount of time. During the 15th century the close proximity of flowing water and sheep grazing on the valley sides was a catalyst for the development of the weaving industry, and with it came the construction of weaving cottages, many of which can still be found throughout the valley.

12B

Lower Coln Valley



The Lower Coln Valley Character Area extends from the village of Coln Rogers south-eastwards to Coln St Aldwyns and Hatherop, and includes a small tributary valley that extends north-eastwards from Ablington Downs to Calcot Peak Farm. In common with the Middle Coln Valley, the course of the Coln continues to flow across the White Limestone of the Great Oolite. As a consequence of the river erosion through the Oolitic Limestone series, limited exposures of the Forest Marble Formation in the south of the character area occur on the west side of the river valley.

Although the valley form is well-defined, it is generally less deeply incised than in the upper sections of the valley. There are exceptions, however, notably the very steep slopes on the outer bends of the valley meanders that occur at Bibury, and further upstream at Ablington. At the transition with the High Wold Dip-Slope the valley lies just below 160 m AOD falling progressively south-eastwards to 130m AOD at the southern perimeter, at the boundary of the AONB.

Land use along the valley is predominantly pasture although areas of arable production also occur principally on the upper flatter areas of the valley slopes at the transition onto the adjacent more expansive Dip-Slope Lowland. Fields are generally rectilinear and medium in size although smaller irregular fields occur in the edge of the villages.



There is an intermittent cover of woodland within the valley mainly confined to the valley bottom and lower slopes, which gives a locally well-wooded character. In contrast, however, there are many open sections. Much of the woodland is broadleaved or mixed, with stands of ancient woodland to the west of Coln St Aldwyns, and at The Grove south of Bibury on the slopes rising above a prominent valley meander. The valley also supports some limited areas of calcareous grassland notably within the tributary valley north-east of Ablington Downs. An area of mesotrophic grassland to the south-east of Winson is designated as a SSSI.



This section of the valley is generally well settled with a succession of stone built valley bottom villages along the length of the valley, located at bridging or fording points, and frequently including a mill. The most notable of these is the linked settlement of Bibury and Arlington, a popular haven for visitors to the Cotswolds. Here, the combination of the weavers cottages of Arlington Row, Arlington Mill, and the island of rough wet grassland known as 'Rack Isle' on which the woven cloth was set out to dry on racks, combine to form an evocative image of cottage industry in the Cotswolds.

There are some interesting archaeological and historical features within the valley that are indicative of a long period of occupation of these sheltered Dip-Slope Lowland valleys. Substantial earthworks associated with the Rawbarrow Settlement are located on the upper east facing valley slopes overlooking Ablington. This is designated as a SAM, as are the remains of a Roman Building adjacent to the Coln immediately to the south of Bibury. The Elizabethan house of Bibury Court (now a hotel) is also a notable historic building.

The southern section of the character area, encompassing the village of Coln St Aldwyn, has a well-defined parkland estate character. Two historic parks are located in close proximity to each other, comprising Hatherop and Williamstrip Parks. The extensive parkland extending across the rising valley slopes with avenues, mature parkland trees and copses, grazed open pasture, and an enclosing structure of substantial areas of estate woodlands, combine to create a distinctive setting to the valley bottom stone built villages.

12C

Lower Leach Valley

Within the Dip-Slope Lowland the River Leach flows southwards from the southern side of Lodge Park, before assuming a south-easterly course to the village of Southrop and the boundary of the AONB. A series of small secondary valleys feed into the river, many of which are dry. The most notable tributary valley rises from a spring south of Sherborne Park within the High Wold Dip-Slope, with an intermittent watercourse flowing south to the village of Aldsworth and subsequently into the Leach.

In common with other Dip Slope Lowland rivers the Leach flows across the Great Oolite; below Eastleach Martin, however, exposures of Forest Marble are increasingly prevalent especially on the west bank of the valley and





adjacent to the wider valley bottom. The valley form varies from some notably incised sections to more gently sloping valley profiles, notably south of Lodge Park and also in the lowest part of the character area as the valley approaches the Thames Basin.

Between Dean Camp and the linked villages of Eastleach Turville and Eastleach Martin the valley displays a classic example of 'underfit river morphology' (see Section 2.4) with valley meanders up to ten times greater than stream meander wavelengths. Pronounced interlocking spurs and intermittent woodlands cloaking the valley meanders further emphasise the remarkable landform.

Land use within the valley is predominantly pastoral within regularly enclosed fields, although some areas of arable occur south of Lodge Park in the vicinity of Cocklebarrow Farm. Much of the pasture is improved, but there are isolated pockets of calcareous grassland east of Kilkenny Farm. Woodland cover within the valley is generally limited and confined to small rectilinear valley edge woodlands. There are, however, some notably larger stands within the deeply meandering section of the valley (see below). Much of this is broadleaved.

In contrast to the Upper / Middle reach of the river, settlement within the Lower Leach is notably sparse. From Lodge Park at the head of the character area to the Eastleach villages, a distance of some 12 km (7.5 miles), much of the valley is very remote with substantial sections detached from roads or footpaths. It is only in the lowest part of the area that settlements occur with the valley bottom villages, with the close succession of Eastleach Turville and Martin, Fyfield and Southrop, and the network of local roads and footpaths all contributing to a more settled character to the valley. The village of Aldsworth is located within the principal tributary valley of the Leach adjacent to the B4425 Burford to Bibury Road.

The earthworks associated with Dean Camp on the upper valley slopes to the south-east of Aldsworth is evidence of earlier occupation of the valley. This Iron Age feature is designated as a SAM. The line of the Roman road Akeman Street is also evident at the crossing point over the river.

13 LOW LIMESTONE PLATEAU

Character Areas

- 13A Paulton and Peasedown St John Ridge
- 13B Hinton Charterhouse Plateau



Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating open plateau;
- expansive long distance views across the open plateau to distant hills and immediate surrounding valleys;
- generally equal distribution of arable and pastoral land of medium and occasionally large sized, geometric fields enclosed principally by hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees;
- fields generally enclosed by hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees;
- sparse woodland cover of small farm woodlands and shelterbelts limiting the sense of exposure;

- limited areas of species rich grassland on the fringes of the landscape type;
- sparsely settled with little settlement beyond isolated farmsteads;
- communication routes principally limited to minor roads connecting small settlements and individual dwellings; and
- limited number of archaeological remains, although their presence verifies the long history of settlement and use of the area.

Landscape Character

The Low Limestone Plateau is characterised by small areas of plateau landscape with gentle undulations located in the most southern section of the Cotswolds AONB, south of Bath. These fragmented sections of the character type form part of a broader area of Low Limestone Plateau that extends to the south and west, beyond the AONB boundary. In common with the Oolitic Limestone that underlies the main part of the Cotswolds AONB the underlying geology has a unifying effect on character. Limited small settlements and scattered farmsteads harmonise with the landscape through the use of local materials, although modern farm buildings can look out of place due to their size, materials and design.

Arable and pastoral land combine in equal amounts to dominate land use within the area. Woodland planting is limited to small, scattered blocks that are regular in shape and fit with the pattern and texture of the landscape. Hedgerows provide the most common boundary feature with scattered hedgerow trees, which in areas can lead to the impression that the landscape is more wooded than it actually is.

The open nature of the plateau areas allows long views over valleys to surrounding hills, including views as far as the Wiltshire Downs. The sky provides an important feature of the views and tall elements such as pylons, masts and towers are consequently highly visible.

Physical Influences

The main plateau areas fall between approximately 110m and 150m AOD, with localised high points reaching 160m AOD and low areas falling to 70m AOD. The elevated plateaux surrounded by valleys allow expansive views over the landscape towards nearby hills and generally there is a limited sense of enclosure due to the lack of woodland although locally, hedgerows and hedgerow trees provide some seclusion.

The Low Limestone Plateau is principally underlain by the upper portions of the Great Oolite Group, which comprise a succession of Fuller's Earth, overlain by a series of limestone horizons including Forest Marble, and Cornbrash Formation. The soils are typically well-drained, although localised areas of poorly drained materials soils can be found. Drainage features on the plateau are not significant due to the flat nature of the landform and porous geology.

The calcareous brashy clay soils derived from the underlying geology support both arable and pastoral land uses in approximately equal amounts in this farmed area, although where Cornbrash Formation occurs, arable production is favourable. Fields are medium and occasionally large in size and are generally regular in shape and enclosed by hedgerow boundaries. Hedgerows are varied throughout the landscape and include tall, unclipped examples and low, well trimmed ones. Reinforcing post and wire fences can be found along a number of hedgerow boundaries, in particular where stock is farmed. Hedgerow trees are common features with species including oak and ash. Woodland cover within the area is very limited, although where they do occur they are generally small and regular reflecting surrounding field patterns with deciduous species predominating.

Human Influences

Due to the small areas of Low Limestone Plateau within the AONB, there are limited archaeological remains. However, it is likely that in common with other parts of the Cotswolds there has been continuous human habitation since the prehistoric period. Indeed, there is evidence of tumuli on the plateau areas, and the remains of a Roman road.

Throughout the majority of the plateau areas communication routes are limited to a small section of the A36(T) and B3110 with the remaining routes being minor roads. They generally run along the ridge of the plateau or across it and are enclosed by hedgerows. Settlement is sparse limited to small number of dispersed villages and hamlets and occasional scattered farmsteads located adjacent to the road network. Building materials include Oolitic Limestone, and red clay or brown concrete tiles, therefore harmonising buildings with the surrounding landscape. A number of footpaths cross the landscape and are frequently located along higher areas.

Character Areas

13A

Paulton and Peasdown St John Ridge

The Character Area to the south of Bath consists of a small area of low limestone plateau which separates the Cam and Wellow Brook Valleys to the north and south respectively. The Great Oolite series forms the capping layer giving way to bands of limestone and Fuller's Earth. The soils are generally shallow, well-drained, calcareous clays and where the Fuller's Earth Formation outcrops, the soil is more slowly draining and deeper, although still calcareous. The plateau ranges in height from 145m AOD to approximately 100m AOD.

Medium to large arable fields enclosed by hedgerows and post and wire fences predominate within the area. Hedgerows are usually low and clipped and frequently



contain oak and ash trees. There are also a limited number of calcareous grasslands. There is no woodland, thus creating an exposed plateau with views over the valleys.

Settlement within the area is limited to a few scattered farmsteads located adjacent to the minor road network which passes over the high points of the landscape.

13B

Hinton Charterhouse Plateau



The low limestone plateau located to the south of Bath separates the Wellow Brook and Frome/Avon Valleys to the west and east respectively. The Forest Marble Formation covers the majority of the area, below which further horizons of the Great Oolite Group limestones are evident on the fringes of the plateau. Cornbrash can be found on the highest points. The drainage of soil can be impeded over the Forest Marble mudstone, though is usually free draining over the Oolitic Limestone. The soils have a considerable amount of brashy limestone debris.

Fields of arable and pastoral land are medium in size, and occasionally large, enclosed by hedgerows and post and wire / rail fences. Mature hedgerow trees are frequent, usually oak, with a smaller number of ash, sycamore and beech. Stone walls can also be found around settlements and intermittently along roadsides. Woodland within the area is very limited, although where it does occur, deciduous species predominate with only limited areas of coniferous plantation.

The two main settlements within the area are the village of Hinton Charterhouse and the hamlet of Pipehouse, both typical dispersed rural settlements related to agriculture, with dwellings mainly constructed from Oolitic limestone with red clay or brown concrete tiles. There are also a number of individual farmsteads scattered across the plateau. Cutting across the area to the east is the A36(T) with the B3110 to the west, both of which run in a north south direction. Connecting the two roads and dwellings is a more minor road network.

Features of interest on the plateau include the water tower at Pipehouse, Hinton House and surrounding 18th century parkland and Hinton Carthusian Priory. A number of Second World War relics are also visible around Pipehouse, including pillboxes and anti-tank and infantry trenches. A small limestone quarry is located north of Pipehouse. Archaeological remains verify the long history of settlement and use of the area and include tumuli and a section of Roman road south west of Pipehouse, designated as a SAM.

14 CORNBRAsh LOWLANDS

Character Areas

- 14A Biddestone Lowland Farmland
- 14B West Malmesbury Lowland Farmland



Key Characteristics

- Flat or very gently undulating landform with occasional low hills;
- occasional wide views over productive farmland limited only by small farm copses and woodlands;
- vertical elements such as hedgerow trees and pylons gain visual prominence;
- network of tributary streams draining eastwards occupy shallow valleys with course of narrow streams marked by alder and other wetland tree species;
- fertile soils derived from the Cornbrash Formation bedrock;

- predominance of arable farming together with some pastoral land mainly bordering water courses;
- medium to large scale rectilinear fields with intermittent hedgerows and occasional stone walls;
- dispersed settlement pattern of mainly nucleated villages, hamlets and farms;
- infrequent woodland cover of mainly geometric broadleaf and coniferous plantations;
- network of principal roads surround or cross the area but have limited effect on the quiet settled rural character; and
- quiet rural lanes bordered by tall hedgerows, narrow grass verges and drainage ditches that weave through the landscape.

Landscape Character

The Cornbrash Lowlands landscape type extends beyond the eastern perimeter of the Cotswolds Dip-Slope Lowland. Within the boundary of the AONB, the areas of land classified as Cornbrash Lowland is very limited, and confined to two separate sections in the vicinity of Biddestone and immediately to the west of Malmesbury.

An examination of the wider context of the landscape that adjoins the Cotswolds AONB provides a better understanding of the setting of the designated area and the potential effects arising from landscape change and development within these adjacent landscapes. Therefore the descriptions below apply to areas of Cornbrash Lowland Landscape Character Type within the AONB, but consider their wider landscape setting.

The Cornbrash Lowlands form a transition from the South Cotswolds Lowlands area of Dip-Slope Lowland to the flatter and more open landscapes to the south-east, beyond the AONB. The area forms part of the catchment of the upper River Avon and its tributaries, which have dissected the area to form a subdued, gently undulating topography with occasional very low hillocks rising above the general landform. The rich and fertile soils derived from the underlying Cornbrash Formation that extends across the area, support a land use focused on arable cultivation, together with more limited pastoral areas, principally utilising wetter areas of land bordering water courses. The area has a predominantly rural character derived from the expanse of cultivated arable fields, and a dispersed pattern of small villages, hamlets and farms. Intermittent woodlands, mainly geometric in form, and comprising both broadleaved, and mixed coniferous and broadleaf trees, extend across the area. These provide local enclosure and landmarks within an otherwise undistinguished agricultural landscape.

A small number of towns and major roads are located within or bordering the boundary of the Cornbrash Lowlands. However, despite these factors, the landscape retains a quiet rural character.

Physical Influences

The Cornbrash Lowlands are confined to the south-eastern section of the AONB and represent a transition between the more elevated Dip-Slope Lowland to the west and the extensive and flatter agricultural landscapes to the east. The landscape shelves gently from west to east, dropping just 30m over a distance of as much as 2km (1.2 mile) and is generally perceived as being flat or only very gently undulating.

The landscape is underlain by Cornbrash Formation, the youngest rock within the Great Oolite Group. Cornbrash consists of a coarse, crumbly shelly limestone and outcrops on the perimeter of the Upper Jurassic Oxford Clay. The limestone is overlain by brown marl that produces a particularly fertile and friable soil well suited for arable farming and crops such as corn. Indeed the name of the rock relates specifically to its suitability for arable farming and was in usage in the 18th century. The Cornbrash is of little value for building or road-making, although it is used locally.

West of Malmesbury the area is drained by the upper reaches of the River Avon and its tributaries, at the commencement of the Avon's tortuous course eastwards, southwards and then westwards, eventually re-entering

the southern part of the Cotswolds at Bradford-on-Avon. These watercourses, together with the Avon's tributaries further south and west of Chippenham, have dissected the area to create a gently undulating landform. While occasional small hillocks rise above this lower lying terrain, such as Lan Hill to the east of Biddestone, the general topographical form is subdued. This makes the course of rivers and streams often difficult to trace in the wider landscape except at crossing points or where their course is marked by riverside trees and linear belts of woodland.

As would be expected on the Cornbrash, arable fields predominate. These are often located in large or moderately sized fields and are enclosed by a network of generally well-maintained hedgerows and occasional stone walls. Some of the larger fields may have been created by a process of field amalgamation and hedgerow removal. Improved pastures are generally located along the course of the main watercourses such as the Avon.

In this managed agricultural landscape, there are few areas of nature conservation interest. However, small remnant areas of unimproved mesotrophic and calcareous grasslands survive bordering the Tetbury Branch of the River Avon.

Some larger stands of woodland are located to the north of the M4 in the vicinity of the settlements of Pinkney Park. Elsewhere intermittent smaller woodland blocks permeate the farmed landscape providing local landmarks. These comprise a mix of coniferous plantations and broadleaved woodlands, including some areas of ancient woodland on the steeper southern banks of the Sherston Branch of the Avon.

Human Influences

In common with the Dip-Slope Lowland to the west, it is likely that this landscape has been occupied since the Neolithic period. However, the time layers of occupation and successive patterns of land use and land management have largely been removed or integrated into the field patterns created by the enclosure of the land that occurred in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is this that has had the most significant effect on landscape character, with the resultant strong pattern of medium to large regular fields that extends across the area. It is also to this period that many of the areas farm houses and impressive barns date.

Settlement within the Cornbrash Lowlands is confined mainly to compact hamlets, although examples of dispersed villages and hamlets can also be found. Scattered throughout the landscape are a number of farmsteads and individual buildings.

The course of the Fosse Way is a significant historic landscape feature although this is now preserved only in the course of field boundaries and footpaths. To the east of Easton Grey, a former villa site marks the point where the road crossed the Sherston Branch of the Avon. Other less tangible traces of early occupation also exist, most notably the earthwork within Whitewalls Wood; strip lynchets on the steep banks of the Avon; and a mound in woodland to the north of Hartham Park.

The area is surrounded or crossed by a network of major roads, notably the A4(T), A420, A350, and the A429 that bypasses Malmesbury. The east-west routes of the M4 and the Swindon to Bristol main line railway also pass within close proximity of the area within the Dip-Slope Lowland Character Type. Despite the local impact of these principal routes, the area retains a quiet, rural character focused on agriculture.

Character Areas

14A

Biddestone Lowland Farmland



The character area forms the western part of a local watershed between the By Brook Valley to the west, and the series of streams that flow eastwards into the River Avon, at or in the vicinity of Chippenham, located immediately east of the AONB. The gently domed and undulating landform supports a rural farmed landscape of predominantly arable and some pastoral fields. The area is crossed by the A420, together with a network of minor roads. Despite the impact of these principal routes, the area retains a quiet, rural settled character with occasional nucleated villages, notably Biddestone, West Yatton and Yatton Keynall, together with a pattern of dispersed farms. Well-maintained, neat hawthorn hedges enclose fields and border roads where they are located on banks above ditches. Although not



generally frequently found in the area, stone walls are located in the vicinity of Hartham Park. Housing surrounding the Park display details that are intricate and ornate.

Biddestone is the main settlement within the character area, and possibly dates back to the Saxon period when the village was founded by a Saxon settler named Beida. It has a compact form looking onto a village green. Many buildings date to the early part of the 18th century and were built from the profits of the wool trade. These, along with the ancient church, utilise the local warm grey stone. The walls are mostly built of rubble-stone, occasionally coursed and embellished with ashlar quoins and copings. The local stone also appears in garden walls and outbuildings and the great stone barns that are reached along narrow hedged lanes that radiate out from the village westwards towards the Upper By Brook Valley.

Woodland cover is generally sparse but there are a number of small, predominantly geometric areas of coniferous plantations to the south east of Biddestone. These provide some enclosure and local landmarks within this otherwise undistinguished but gentle rural farmed landscape.

14B**West Malmesbury Lowland Farmland**

This character area to the west of Malmesbury comprises part of the valley of the upper reaches of the River Avon, into which flow a number of small tributaries. Slope orientation and the general grain of the gently undulating or shallow falls of the landform have been largely determined by this drainage pattern. Thus to the north and south of the river, there is a general fall to the south-east and north-east, respectively. This is a quiet rural area dominated by arable farming although improved permanent pastures are prevalent in low lying areas bordering river channels. Fields are generally medium to large scale enclosed by hedgerows with hedgerow trees. These provide strong vertical elements within an otherwise flat landscape. A number of woodlands extend across the southern side of the River Avon and comprise a mix of small geometric coniferous farm plantations, and broadleaved woodland in the vicinity of the River Avon. A number of these are ancient in origin. Parkland trees and shelter belts contribute significantly to woodland cover in the character area, with three parks located in close proximity to each other bordering the Sherston section of the Avon valley.

In view of the limited extent of the character area, settlement is sparse and confined to the hamlets of Foxley Green and Easton Grey and the village of Brokenborough which is located at the northern perimeter of the character area. All are sited at crossing points over the river. At Easton Grey, for example, a cluster of whitewashed rubble stone houses are located adjacent to the stone bridge that crosses the river. Beyond these small villages, settlement consists of isolated farms. To the east the ancient town of Malmesbury borders the character area. It occupies a natural strongpoint on a hill almost entirely surrounded

by the Avon, which the Saxons occupied at an early date. It is close to their castle that an Irish monk Maildolph formed a hermitage in 642 AD, which was later to become a monastery in 676 AD.

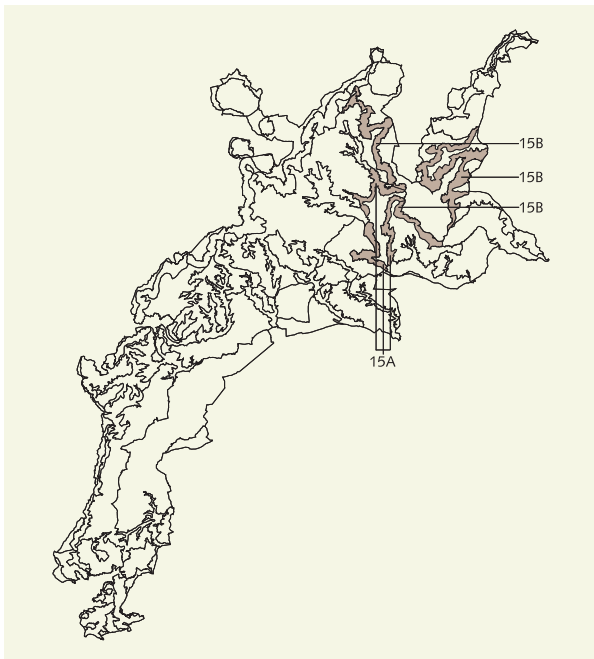
On the northern perimeter of the character area, the presence of a Romano-British Settlement and an earthwork provides evidence of earlier occupation of the area although few other traces remain.



15 FARMED SLOPES

Character Areas

- 15A Vale of Bourton Farmed Slopes
- 15B Vale of Moreton Farmed Slopes



Key Characteristics

- Transitional landscape between the High Wold and the Pastoral Lowland Vale;
- smooth gentle landform with gentler landform on lower slopes, and sense of exposure on some upper slopes;
- landform has a consistent north-south orientation following the lines of the Evenlode and Windrush;
- small, often geometric, broadleaf and coniferous woodlands and tree belts along watercourses draining the slopes;
- large deciduous and mixed woodlands bordering parkland, integrated by strong hedgerow network;

- limited ancient woodlands and species rich grasslands;
- numerous historic parkland landscapes;
- productive arable and pasture farmland with a strong pattern of hedgerows;
- small stone built villages and hamlets on slopes above the Pastoral Lowland Vale;
- areas of ridge and furrow on lower slopes; and
- scrub encroachment on some steeper slopes.

Landscape Character

Despite sharing many geological similarities to the escarpment, the Farmed Slopes are relatively low and gentle in comparison and have a more subtle profile and character. They represent a transitional landscape between the large fields and exposed nature of the High Wold and the lush, flat or gently rolling pastures of the Pastoral Lowland Vale. Their distinctive sloping profiles set them apart from the Vale landscapes they enclose, and wooded sides or arable fields, which rise gently from the plain, are visible from many points within the landscape and provide a sense of enclosure. They also provide a sense of orientation, the longer slopes generally being aligned north south.

The slopes themselves support a mosaic of mixed farmland and woodland, which provides a textural backdrop to the surrounding lowland farmland. Their elevated position allows for long distance views across the lowlands from upper slopes although these views are often only as far as the opposite stretch of the Farmed Slopes which sometimes appear as a line of blue hills in the distance.

The settlement pattern generally comprises dispersed stone built villages and farms with scattered outlying cottages and farmsteads strung out along local roads that climb the slopes and link the vale to upland landscapes beyond. Historic parks and gardens are also a significant feature of the Farmed Slopes, with numerous gardens and parks having been sited there to take advantage of the landform and extensive views across the lowland vale.

Physical Influences

The sequence of rock units range from Charmouth Mudstone of the Lias Group at lower elevations and the floor of the vale through a sequence of mudstones and siltstones and Bridport Sand Formation and Inferior Oolite Limestone, which forms the upper slopes and extends onto the High Wold beyond. This geological sequence is similar to that exposed on the escarpment. However, different erosion patterns have resulted in much softer landform and gentler gradients. Generally the slopes rise from 130 m AOD at the upper levels of the Pastoral Lowland Vale up to 200 m AOD where landform rolls over onto the neighbouring High Wold. Marlstone Rock is also evident, often appearing as a narrow band on the mid slope. In isolated areas, the Marlstone Rock Formation outcrop is larger and forms a distinct promontory, as at Dor Hill above Aston Magna and above Little Compton.

Despite the generally even, smooth slopes, areas of steeper landform are evident bordering streams draining the neighbouring uplands. These occupy incised gullies, their course often marked by lines of trees and scrub. These streams flow down the slopes where they combine and flow into the Evenlode and the Windrush on into the Thames. North of the Moreton-in-Marsh watershed the slopes drain northwards into the River Stour and ultimately into the Severn. The quick flowing nature of these streams has meant that alluvial deposits are not characteristic, deposition of sediments occurring below the foot of the slopes as streams slow down as they enter flatter landform.

Woodlands are generally not ancient in origin and indicate that widespread clearance for agriculture has taken place across the farmed slopes. These planted woodlands are generally small-scale deciduous farm woodlands and often form linear belts bordering streams and regular geometric copses close to farmhouses. Significant areas of woodland tend to be associated with historic parks and often mark the outer limits of grazed parkland. Where present, woodlands make a significant contribution to landscape character and form a textural backdrop to the Pastoral Lowlands, and often may be seen to merge with hedgerows and trees to give the impression that the slopes are more heavily wooded than they are.

Pasture and arable farming are in evidence across the Farmed Slopes and form a patchwork effect, fields being defined by a network of generally well-maintained hedgerows and stone walls. Various field patterns are in evidence and therefore indicate a range of enclosure histories. Pastures are all improved and intensively managed and therefore few species rich grasslands are in evidence. Some small remnants of calcareous grassland do, however, survive bordering the Dikler to the north of Lower Swell.

Human Influences

The Farmed Slopes border and define the Pastoral Lowland Farmland landscape type and have historically formed a close relationship with them. Villages such as Churchill and Icomb tend to be located on the drier slopes above the vale, and indeed numerous villages and hamlets may be identified on the slopes that date back to Saxon or medieval periods. It is likely that these settlements would have had seasonal grazing land and some arable fields associated with them in the vale. Ridge and furrow is evident on many of the slopes. These are remnants of the open fields that at one time surrounded many of the villages.

Small dispersed villages and hamlets on the Farmed Slopes are generally set around roads rising up the slopes onto the neighbouring uplands. Beyond these small villages and hamlets are numerous isolated farms, individual buildings and small linear hamlets scattered over the slopes. Where located in sheltered locations on lower slopes, farms and outbuildings are inconspicuous. When sited on upper slopes, however, large barns often may be seen against the skyline and gain visual prominence.

Chipping Norton is the largest town sited on the Farmed Slopes landscape type. Chipping means market and for a considerable period the market at 'Norton' was the commercial centre for the Evenlode valley. During the medieval period when the wool trade made the Cotswolds one of the wealthiest parts of England, the town assumed new importance as a gathering place for merchants and traders. Much of the town's attraction today is due to its many surviving buildings erected during times of great prosperity in the past. Among these are numerous 18th century houses and a 'wool' church.

Field patterns display a range of enclosure episodes, with hawthorn hedges marking the boundaries of various shapes and sizes of fields. These range from some expansive fields extending up from the upper Farmed Slopes onto the High Wold to moderately sized geometric fields on lower slopes, which are more characteristic of the Pastoral Lowland Farmland. Indeed in many instances

fields may be seen extending up onto the High Wold or down into the Vale, further blurring the transitions from one landscape type to the next.

Orchards, at one time much more extensive along the Farmed Slopes, are now few in number. Where present, they generally occur on gentle north facing slopes, and make an important contribution to landscape character with their regular rows of trees and fruit bushes.

Parklands are also an important characteristic feature of the Farmed Slopes, the site of houses and the layout of gardens often designed specifically to exploit dramatic landform and wide panoramic views. Many are registered, confirming their historic importance and landscape quality. Examples include Sezincote and Batsford Park, which are both listed Grade I on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens in England. The influence of larger estates on the wider landscape cannot be underestimated, with estate architecture and planting often evident for some distance beyond the park wall in the wider landscape.

Character Areas

15A

Vale of Bourton Farmed Slopes

The Vale of Bourton is narrower than the Vale of Moreton and significantly smaller. As a result, views from the upper portions of the Vale of Bourton Farmed Slopes are generally less extensive although views along the length of vale from higher vantage points are longer. Views to the opposite Farmed Slopes allow the pattern of fields to be clearly distinguished and as a result, any breakdown in the hedgerow pattern is clearly visible. The narrow nature of the vale and rural character of the pastoral lowlands below, also raises the visual prominence of development.



The Farmed Slopes of the Vale of Bourton are generally steeper than those defining the Vale of Moreton and therefore pasture is more prevalent. However, as the Farmed Slopes become gentler towards the south of Bourton-on-the-Water, more arable farming may be identified across the slopes, blurring with arable fields in on the floor of the vale and on the neighbouring uplands.

Settlements are typically small and are generally located on the eastern slopes with Wyck Rissington, Little Rissington and Great Rissington all occupying the slopes below the Rissington Plateau. The pattern of these settlements is also consistent; a cluster of houses bordering a direct route up the Farmed Slopes linking the High Wold and the upland plateau. The western slopes are less heavily settled and small isolated farms and individual buildings are more characteristic.

Woodlands are generally small coniferous and broadleaf copses and farm woodlands. These have no distinct patterning and occur close to streams and woodlands or dotted across the slopes. Larger belts of woodland tend to be associated with parklands such as Sherborne Park. Woodlands are generally well integrated with their surroundings, their geometric form often being softened by their relationship with landform and surrounding hedgerows and field trees.

15B

Vale of Moreton Farmed Slopes



This represents an extensive landscape character area and defines the Pastoral Lowland Vale of the Vale of Moreton within the AONB boundary. This landscape supports a high proportion of pasture land although significant areas of arable farming are evident rolling over the upper slopes onto the neighbouring High Wold and on lower gentler slopes neighbouring the Pastoral Lowland Vale. These

varying agricultural land uses form a patchwork of coloured fields on the gentle slopes, emphasised by the network of neat hawthorn hedges that define them. Fields at the base of the slope extend into the vale and are often moderately sized and regular in shape. Larger amorphous fields exist on the middle and upper slopes and are often used for arable farming. Sloping landform makes these landscapes highly visible from the vale and as a consequence, gappy sections of hedgerow are more readily identifiable.

The Vale is broadest in the north at over 7km (4.3 miles). Here, views from the upper Farmed Slopes of the far slopes of the vale are visible as a low scarp above the rolling pastoral lowlands. The Vale of Moreton, however, becomes narrower to the south and views across the lowlands to the opposite slopes become clearer and field patterns more discernible. Elevated views of the Farmed Slopes are also possible where they define a narrow valley to the west of Chipping Norton.

Woodlands, although not a significant feature of the landscape, make an important contribution to the visual appeal of the landscape and often provide a wooded backdrop to views across the vale. The most significant woodlands are associated with parkland landscapes, the most notable being Grade I listed parks at Sezincote and Batsford, the latter of which also contains an important arboretum. Orchards are more prevalent than on the Vale of Bourton Farmed Slopes. These tend to be small and sited on the lower slopes bordering the Pastoral Lowland Vale, as at Longborough.

Settlements are generally small and clustered along routes up the Farmed Slopes. Some are more closely associated with the High Wold, such as Fifield, and Nether Westcote and linked to the Pastoral Lowland Vale by tracks and footpaths. However, others such as Idbury and Longborough have strong links to both neighbouring landscape types and occupy sheltered positions on the middle of the slopes.

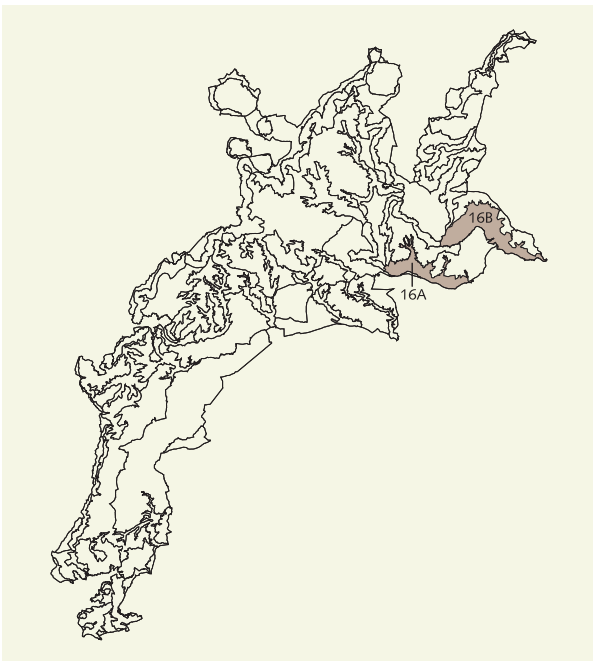


A significant local landmark is the mill and chimney located on the outskirts of Chipping Norton. It was built by William Bliss who founded the town's textile industry in the early 19th century.

16 BROAD FLOODPLAIN VALLEY

Character Areas

- 16A Lower Windrush Valley
- 16B Lower Evenlode Valley



Key Characteristics

- intimate, small scale settled and relatively busy landscape, contrasting with more remote areas of High Wold;
- well-defined broad valley profile of open flat floodplain, river terraces and gentle convex slopes;
- river floodplain features such as meanders, water meadows, ponds, old river channels and islands;
- floodplain and riverside trees including pollarded willows;
- wooded bluffs and areas of species rich grassland on areas of steep landform;

- river corridor marked by main transport routes through the valley;
- valley sides cloaked in improved pasture and arable land form a back drop to the valley floor landscapes;
- land use within valley floor and floodplain dominated by pasture although some extensive areas of arable land on areas less prone to flooding;
- fields defined by hedgerows and some stone walls although the robust framework is eroded by hedgerow loss and the use of post and wire fences;
- river channel habitats including standing water important to a diverse range of flora and fauna;
- prolific archaeological remains likely to be hidden by fluvial and human activity;
- linear settlements often located at ancient bridging points established in the Saxon or medieval period; and,
- historic character of villages evident in their distinctive layout, building styles and use of Cotswolds limestone.

Landscape Character

The broad river valleys that flow southwards to the Thames are a distinctive element of the north Cotswolds landscape. Valley sides and vegetation provide shelter and limit distant views ensuring that the valleys retain a distinctly coherent, intimate and pastoral character that contrasts strongly to the open rolling landscapes of the High Wold and High Wold Dip-Slope above.

The meandering watercourses are fringed by lush wet pastures and meadows on the floodplain, which are prone to seasonal flooding. These are bordered by a patchwork of improved pastures and arable fields that rise up onto

the gentle valley slopes. Woodlands and areas of rough grassland on steeper slopes add texture to this productive landscape, as do copses and shelterbelts associated with large parkland landscapes. Larger fields on the wide floodplain give way to medium to large fields on the valley sides.

Hedgerows and occasional stone walls form a strong boundary pattern in the landscape with drainage ditches and post and wire fencing demarcating field boundaries on wetter land.

Historically the lush, sheltered valleys would have been heavily settled and the focus of communication routes through the uplands. However, centuries of activity and natural deposition of alluvial sediment have obscured traces of earlier periods. Water meadows and ridge and furrow are important landscape features and evidence of the varied agricultural practices formerly employed in the valley up to the period of enclosure.

The distinctive character of the valley floor is in part a product of its open, unwooded character. Here, elements such as distinctive lines of pollarded willows punctuating the river channel gain visual prominence and are an important component of the floodplain landscape.

The valleys are ecologically valuable and contain a diversity of riverside habitats that support a range of species of flora and fauna. These habitats, and the rich archaeological resources are vulnerable, and their survival heavily dependant on traditional farming practices.

Physical Influences

The Evenlode and Windrush Rivers have cut broad shallow valleys through Jurassic limestones and Lias Group mudstones as they flow south eastwards to the Thames. These valleys have uneven convex sides which tend to be steeper to the south of the river channel and generally fall from the 150m contour to the floodplain which, within the AONB generally, occurs at or close to 100m AOD.

The broad floodplains are variable in width, with wider sections occurring where the river channel meanders through the valley floor. These have formed on deep alluvial beds and are bordered by deposits of sand and gravel and gravel terraces. Significant gravel terraces may be identified above the 100m contour on the north bank of the Evenlode below Chadlington.

The valley sides of the tributary streams draining the neighbouring High Wold or High Wold Dip-Slope are generally steeper than the main valley, and have very little

flat land in the valley bottom. These all tend to flow into the main channels from the north, reflecting the influence of the Dip-Slope on the wider drainage pattern in this area.

The flat valley bottoms are prone to flooding and are traditionally species rich summer pastures and meadows. The most frequently flooded land has remained as open floodplain with few trees and hedgerows, fields largely being divided by post and wire fences. Poaching is evident in some of these areas where large herds of cattle have been set to graze in wet weather. Where these areas have been drained and cultivated, improved and semi-improved grassland is found bordered by hedgerows, and occasionally stone walls where they lie in close proximity to villages and old bridging points.

On the gentler lower valley sides a patchwork of arable, improved and semi-improved pastures are evident. Again, these are divided up by a strong network of hedges and occasionally stone walls.



Woodland cover along the main river channel is not a characteristic feature, and tree cover is restricted to pollarded willows along the course of the river and occasional small copses. These tend to be located on the slopes above the floodplain. On river banks, however, linear belts of woodland may be identified as at Worsham and ancient broadleaved woodlands on slopes above the Evenlode to the west of Long Hanborough. More extensive woodlands are associated with parkland landscapes such as Cornbury Park and Wilcote House and on steep landform bordering tributary streams such as Tangle Woods which are ancient woodlands bordering the Coombe Brook.

Key habitats include remnants of unimproved wet meadow and hay meadow grassland which owe their species diversity to high water levels and the continuity of traditional farming methods. Areas of fen and open water features such as ditches, ponds and lakes are also

important, as are hedges, woodlands and areas of calcareous grassland on steeper valley slopes and river cliffs which were created by the more powerful erosive forces of the rivers in glacial periods. Examples include Reed Hill, Stonesfield Common and Taynton Quarry, all of which are designated as SSSIs. Wet valley grasslands are of considerable ornithological importance. Curlew, lapwing, snipe and redshank are all known to breed in the area, although populations are in decline due to over stocking and from earlier, more frequent cutting of hay and silage. The switch from spring to winter cereals has also had an impact by removing nesting and feeding sites.

Human Influences

The upper reaches of the Thames and its tributaries have been the focus of settlement for thousands of years and the appearance of the landscape has been greatly influenced by a succession of settlements from prehistoric times. Indeed it is thought that the gravel terraces of the Upper Thames tributaries provide some of the most important complexes of prehistoric settlement in Britain²² and form a rich archaeological resource.

Early settlements and trade routes, which may date back to the Mesolithic, were located adjacent to the main river channel on the marshy valley floor. However, the intensity of later human activity and fluvial activity has masked these early sites with alluvium and modern settlement. Despite the low survival rate of sites within the floodplain, the high water table may contain waterlogged deposits, which can be used to research local vegetative and environmental conditions within the valleys during prehistory.

As tools and agricultural practices became more sophisticated, widespread clearance of the valley woodlands was able to take place and settlements were able to occupy the upper valley slopes. Many settlement sites were consolidated or established in the Saxon period and it is clear from the Domesday survey that many of the existing valley settlements were in place by the 11th century. Their position on dry sites on valley sides, or on free draining gravels closer to the river were chosen as they offered settlers access to a reliable water supply and to the light easily worked soils of the neighbouring uplands.

Place name evidence, such as the 'ford' in Burford and Widford, indicates that river crossings were the natural location of some settlements. The historic core of these settlements is often compact and aligned along the course

of the river indicating the limits on expansion imposed by landform, or the desire not to encroach on valuable farmland. The resultant linear settlement form is still evident as it defines the framework for many present day valley villages. Interestingly, however, Burford betrays this pattern as the extension along the High Street, dating to its heyday as a coaching stop, is at right angles to the river. This 'new street' has gained prominence over the historic core of the village, which originally lay near the church and bridge over the Windrush. Other settlements that dominate the broad floodplain valley are dispersed villages, mainly radial in form and dispersed linear hamlets. Whilst the majority of settlements are located on the valley bottom adjacent to the river, there are a number of developments on the valley sides. Individual buildings and farms are commonly found within the area with the latter often being set back from the main valley roads on the edge of the floodplain and they are reached along straight access tracks.

From the medieval period, and perhaps even earlier, the valley farmland was used for seasonal grazing and hay meadows due to the generally poor drainage and the tendency of the land to flood. It was farmed as a part of larger mixed or dairy farm enterprises. Later, and as populations increased, the pressure to maximise agricultural output grew. The advent of the water meadow system enabled river edge land to be used more intensively, resulting in an earlier crop of grass, and enabling more animals to be fed over winter. The distinctive earthworks associated with these water meadows are still evident within areas of permanent pasture.

The large open fields associated with the valley settlements would have been located on the gentle slopes above the level of floodwaters. Remnants of these may still be seen in isolated areas of ridge and furrow. These ancient fields gave way to the present dense patchwork of edges associated with Enclosure Acts from the 17th century onwards.

The rivers also have a long history as a source of energy particularly for milling, and fulling. A number of corn mills and associated features such as leats provide evidence of this, although many are now disused and converted to residences. A series of ponds to the north of Swinbrook are evidence of water management.

In more recent times there has been a move away from traditional mixed dairy and livestock farming towards intensive grassland or arable production as improvements in land drainage and flood protection have occurred²³.

²². ADAS (1997) Upper Thames Tributaries Environmentally Sensitive Area Environmental Guidelines

²³. ADAS (1997) Upper Thames Tributaries Environmentally Sensitive Area Environmental Guidelines

A higher proportion of land is now given over to arable farming in the form of winter cereal or oilseed rape production. A small number of large dairy units are also found along the floodplain and on the valley slopes; however, livestock enterprises are likely to be based on sheep or beef production rather than dairying.

Evidence of the importance of the river valleys as a communication route is confirmed by a number of castle sites, such as those at Ascott Earl and Ascott-under-Wychwood. From the earliest times the river valleys would have been a major transportation route. This has persisted into the modern day, with modern roads following the course of the river and possibly occupying the site of ancient trackways. Interestingly, main routes appear on north sides of the same valley. Narrower lanes link these main roads and cross the river at ancient bridging points.

Character Areas

16A

Lower Windrush Valley



The Windrush emerges from the Vale of Bourton at Little Barrington from where it flows eastwards in a distinctive broad valley, which has an intimate and pastoral character. The valley floor is occupied by floodplain meadows and wet grasslands that are seasonally flooded, and indeed show evidence of poaching caused by overstocking in places. Pollarded willows line the course of the river, which is narrow, slow and winding. Post and wire fences are predominantly used to divide fields in the floodplain although stone walls are conspicuous in the vicinity of villages such as Asthall. At crossing points, Cotswold stone has been used to build simple bridges forming locally notable features that contribute to the local vernacular style.



Woodland within the area is limited mainly to small, scattered blocks. However, the tributary valley of the Coombe Brook feeding the River Windrush contains areas of more substantial areas of woodland planting, in particular on the lower slopes adjacent to the brook.

The gentle rolling slopes of the valley side are predominantly arable although improved pastures are also evident. Areas of semi-improved grassland are also evident on areas of steeper landform, especially in tributaries such as the Coombe Brook and the Swinbrook. The upper reaches of these are also notable for their areas of ancient broadleaved woodland.

The Windrush has a strong sense of history and the valley is rich in historic and prehistoric features. The most prevalent sites are medieval and include buildings such as the fine examples in settlements such as Burford, the church of which is a prominent landmark feature, particularly when viewed across the valley from the A40(T). Sites of medieval castles and manors, and remains of monastic buildings such as those at Minster Lovell, are also widespread and an important component of landscape character, as are the church and visible earthworks associated with the deserted medieval village at Widford.



**16B****Lower Evenlode Valley**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

17 PASTORAL LOWLAND VALE

Character Areas

- 17A Vale of Bourton
- 17B Vale of Moreton



Key Characteristics

- Extensive pastoral vale defined by the Farmed Slopes with flat or gently undulating land fringed by distinctive shallow slopes;
- generally human scale intimate landscape, but with intermittent open character and expansive views in some areas where vegetation cover is minimal, and from areas of raised landform;
- extensive drift deposits mask underlying solid geology;
- productive and verdant landscape of lush improved and semi-improved pastures;
- network of hedgerows of varying height and quality

with intermittent hedgerow trees and occasional stone walls;

- areas of wet meadow and species rich grassland bordering river channels;
- limited woodland cover including ancient woodland; and
- sparse settlement pattern.

Landscape Character

The Pastoral Lowland Vale landscape extends into the AONB below Shipston-on-Stour, on the north-eastern fringes of the designated area. Here, low pastoral landscapes bordering the upper reaches of the Evenlode and Windrush and their many tributary streams, sit below the neighbouring uplands of the High Wold, the High Wold Dip-Slope and the Ironstone Hills and Valleys. Whilst the Vale of Bourton is entirely within the boundary of the AONB only a small proportion of the Vale of Moreton is represented, the remainder of this landscape type extending northwards where it merges into the Vale of Evesham. Therefore, descriptive text, whilst



concentrating on areas of land within the AONB boundary, takes into account particularly distinctive features of the wider expanse of the Pastoral Lowland Vale landscape to the north.



The Pastoral Lowland Vale is a soft, largely pastoral landscape with areas of unimproved grassland and wet meadow bordering streams. Land use and land cover is strongly influenced by the nature of the extensive drift deposits that cloak the underlying solid geology. The pattern of small, hedged fields and occasional stone walls, undulating landform and field, stream and hedgerow trees combine to create an intimate, human scale landscape although in areas with wide views, an open expansive character is prevalent. Views are generally limited; however, on elevated land fringing the Farmed Slopes landscape type, wide panoramas across the Pastoral Lowland Vale landscape are possible. The Farmed Slopes enclosing the vale may often be seen to stretch around the vale and form a distinct backdrop to lowland landscapes, adding to the sense of intimacy and visual unity.

Settlement of the Pastoral Lowland Vale is sparse, with a network of narrow winding lanes linking a dispersed pattern of historic towns, small villages and hamlets on areas of raised landform in the valley bottom above the level of flooding. These often date to the Saxon or medieval period and contain historic churches and may be surrounded with remnant areas of ridge and furrow. However, the largest portion of the modern landscape displays evidence of 18th and 19th century enclosure with a patchwork of neat hawthorn hedges defining large and moderately sized geometric fields.

Physical Influences

The Pastoral Lowland Vales have an interesting and unique Glacial and Post Glacial history, which has had a profound influence on modern landscape character. During the

Ice Age a vast wall of ice in the Severn Valley trapped enormous quantities of water in the Vale of Evesham, forming a lake, referred to by geologists as Lake Harrison. Much later when the lake froze, ice advanced into the Stour Valley bringing deposits of boulder clay or till to form a moraine. The outwash fan of this Ice Age feature deposited sand, gravel and clay creating a vast, featureless plain which today extends across much of the Vale of Moreton.

Sand and gravel deposits bordering the main rivers of the Windrush and Evenlode are also evident, as are wide alluvial beds. These were deposited by rivers and streams flowing through the Vale from the surrounding uplands. They further contribute to the complex drift geology of the Vale landscape, which is so extensive that only a narrow rim of the underlying Jurassic Charmouth Mudstones of the Lias Group emerges at the lower fringes of the landscape bordering the Farmed Slopes.

In the northern part of the Vale, particularly between Shipston-on-Stour and Moreton-in-Marsh, the superficial clay has been eroded to form rounded hills and ridges between winding streams. These areas are slightly elevated and have therefore been the location of small linear settlements such as Todmarton and for the course of ancient routes such as the Fosse Way.

The gently rolling landscape of rounded slopes is dissected by numerous shallow valleys. Streams are direct and sometimes canalised and incorporate ponds or small man made lakes along their length, particularly around Bourton-on-the-Water. Due to their shallow nature and the rolling character of the landscape, their course can often only be traced by observing lines of pollarded willows and ash. The network of streams draining the surrounding uplands and the vale flow northwards via the River Stour into the Severn, and southwards via the Evenlode and Windrush into the Thames. The watershed between these catchments lies a short distance to the north of the AONB boundary around Moreton-in-Marsh. The multitude of tributary streams indicates that this low-lying landscape is subject to periodic flooding. Indeed, many of the fields are bordered by drainage ditches, with lush wet meadows and wide floodplain pastures lining watercourses.

The landscape is intensively farmed, lush improved pastures, stacks of silage bales, and a well-maintained network of low hawthorn hedges adding to the sense of a well managed and productive landscape. Arable farming is also evident, particularly on areas of elevated land where larger fields are also in evidence.

Stream-side copses and belts of trees bordering the meandering course of numerous rivers and streams offer more intimate landscapes and valuable riparian habitats. Large woodlands are not a characteristic feature. However, small and often geometric shaped broadleaved and coniferous copses may be found in the vicinity of farms. More significant broadleaved woodlands are associated with private estates such as Bruern Abbey. This was once the site of a Cistercian Abbey founded in 1147 but dissolved in 1536, of which nothing remains. The present Neo-classical house dates from 1710 to 1720 and was built of stone, most of which probably came from the ruined abbey.

Human Influences



It is likely that early prehistoric communities, possibly resident in the valleys on the neighbouring uplands, would have exploited wetland and marginal habitats in the Vale for game and fish. From the advent of farming, however, it is likely that the gravel terraces bordering rivers may have been the focus of some settlement. Indeed Salmonsbury, a large Iron Age settlement, is located on an area of gravel to the north of Bourton-on-the-Water; a site of strategic importance for both defence and trade as it commands an important approach from the Upper Thames to the Cotswolds Hills. It is thought that there were many farming settlements in the vicinity of this major centre. However, the low, poorly drained landscape may have remained marginal up until improved plough technology in the Romano-British and Saxon periods allowed the more heavily water-logged soils to become workable.

Throughout the medieval period, pressure on land elsewhere and improved drainage techniques allowed increasing areas of the landscape to enter production. Villages expanded and new settlements were established such as Moreton-in-Marsh, which was planned in the 13th century and founded on the site of an earlier Saxon village

first recorded in 714 AD. Indeed, place name evidence indicates that the majority of modern towns and villages of the vale have Saxon origins. Interestingly, many villages were established on the freer draining land of the Farmed Slopes, possibly utilising the Pastoral Lowland Vale as seasonal pasture land or on the gravel terraces above wetland areas bordering river channels. Indeed it is primarily on the Farmed Slopes and areas of the Pastoral Lowland Vale fringing them that traces of ridge and furrow may be found, indicating that many areas of the vale were too wet for arable farming.

Where present in the Pastoral Lowland Vale, villages and hamlets are dispersed and commonly of a radial or linear form, taking advantage of isolated areas of raised landform and are frequently focused on a village pond or green. Stone, often more orange in colour than that used elsewhere in the Cotswolds, is frequently used as building material in older houses and field barns. However, brick is prevalent, a significant amount of the brick used in the landscape having been made from the local clay at a site near Paxford. The advent of the railways also influenced the availability of a wider range of materials for use in construction.

Character Areas

17A

Vale of Bourton

The Vale of Bourton is largely underlain by Charmouth Mudstone Formation of the Lias group. This is only exposed above the 120m contour, however, lower elevations being cloaked in thick deposits of alluvial drift bordering the main river channel and diamicton and gravel in isolated deposits and along tributaries of the Windrush.

Drift deposits have created a flat or very gently undulating landscape that shelves gently from north to south just 30m over the length of the vale. The Vale is enclosed by the Farmed Slopes landscape type, and in many areas





the additional backdrop of the High Wold, which together creates a strong sense of visual enclosure.

Landcover is primarily improved pasture although arable does become more dominant south of Bourton-on-the-Water and on areas of freer draining or raised landform. Floodplain pastures and unimproved grasslands, often enclosed by post and wire fences are evident bordering the course of the Windrush and offer contrasting textures and colours to the bright greens of pastureland elsewhere in the vale. In amongst these wet marginal areas survive mesotrophic grasslands as at Salmonsbury Meadows which are a rare example of unimproved wet grassland and rich in wild flowers such as the southern marsh orchid.

In areas where hedgerows have been recently cut back, the landscape appears neat and the patchwork of fields may be readily identified. However, in areas where hedgerows have become overgrown, the pattern of fields becomes less discernible and the landscape takes on a more wooded appearance. Such hedgerows, along with isolated trees and hedges merging with farm copses and woodlands on neighbouring slopes can lead to the impression that the landscape is more wooded than it actually is.



Settlement is sparse. The principal village settlement of the Vale is Bourton-on-the-Water, one of the most popular tourist villages in the Cotswolds. Its position on the Windrush, which flows through the town as a shallow canal and crossed by numerous bridges, has led to the town being named 'The Venice of the Cotswolds'. The River Eye, a tributary of the Windrush, is also a notable feature of nearby Lower and Upper Slaughter, their names stemming from the old English term for a wet land or 'slough' upon which they lie. Gravel extraction has been extensive to the east of Bourton-on-the-Water; extraction pits now survive as a series of large lakes between the settlement and the course of the Windrush. North of Bourton-on-the-Water the Fosse Way Roman road passes through the area, linking to Stow-on-the-Wold. Beyond the AONB, the Fosse Way runs from Exeter to Lincoln.

17B

Vale of Moreton



The Vale of Moreton is a significant vale landscape extending southwards from the Vale of Evesham where it becomes increasingly enclosed by neighbouring Farmed Slopes. Two outliers, Ebrington Hill and Meon Hill define its northern extent and act as a 'gateway' to the Vale. The southern extent of the Vale merges gradually into the Broad Floodplain Valley of the Evenlode where the river occupies a more obvious river channel.

The Vale drains into the Evenlode south of Moreton-in-Marsh and is fed by numerous narrow winding streams bordered by wet rushy pastures, which are underlain by wide alluvial beds. Beyond these, the river channel is bordered by areas of sand and gravel, silt, clay and extensive deposits of diamicton. These superficial deposits are extensive and create a flat or very gently undulating landscape.

Permanent improved pasture predominates although some arable farming is evident. Lush pastures and fields of crops are divided up by a network of hedges. These are gappy in places and boundaries reinforced by post and wire fencing. Where this has occurred, the pattern of fields is difficult to discern in the landscape, particularly where agricultural land use is the same across a number of large fields.



Woodlands are generally very small and primarily rectilinear broadleaved farm copses. Larger areas occur, at Fifield and Bledington, however, where areas of broadleaved and coniferous planting mark areas of heath and may be associated with private estates. These are particularly interesting as they contain the only areas of ancient woodlands within the AONB section of the Vale of Moreton, indicating widespread clearance of the landscape in preceding centuries.

The settlement pattern in this deeply rural, agricultural landscape is sparse and restricted to a small number of villages and hamlets linked by winding lanes. These are often linear clusters with roads and villages occupying narrow areas of raised landform often on gravel, as at Upper and Lower Oddington and areas sheltered by



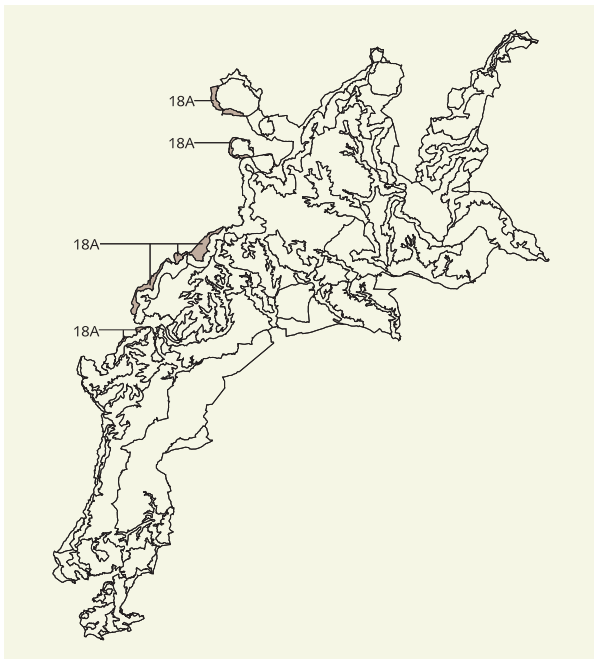
embayments in the surrounding Farmed Slopes, such as Blockley and Little Compton. Larger towns such as Chipping Campden and Moreton-in-Marsh are present. Older buildings are often constructed from Cotswolds stone. As a consequence of a brick works in the area, however, there are a number of brick built houses in local towns and villages. The brickworks are located on the outskirts of Paxford, the associated chimneys forming a local landmark.

Communication routes form an important feature of the landscape, the flat and gently undulating landscape having been exploited as a route through the surrounding hills for thousands of years. The Fosse Way is perhaps the most potent historic route through the Vale although the mainline railway is equally dramatic, its course marked by linear tree belts.

18 SETTLED UNWOODED VALE

Character Areas

18A Vale of Gloucester Fringe



Key Characteristics

- Soft gently undulating landform, with lower escarpment slopes forming a transitional area between the vale and escarpment;
- Cotswolds Escarpment defines the eastern limit of the Vale and provides a dramatic backdrop to vale settlements and landscapes;
- mixed arable and pasture land use with occasional orchards;
- well maintained hedgerows forming a strong landscape pattern;
- limited woodland and ancient woodland cover;

- quiet winding lanes linking villages, hamlets and farms at the foot of the escarpment;
- varied mix of building materials, including use of brick, timber and stone, and slate and thatch roofing, but with Oolitic Limestone still prevalent within the vale villages in closer proximity to the Cotswolds Escarpment;
- proliferation of modern 'suburban' building styles and materials;
- major transport corridors through vale;
- rural areas bordered by large urban and suburban areas and interspersed with commercial and industrial uses; and
- widespread network of pylons and transmission lines.

Landscape Character

The Settled Unwooded Vale landscape character type extends along the western perimeter of the Cotswolds, northwards from Dursley and Cam to the southern fringes of Bredon Hill. The main section, however, lies beneath the escarpment between Cheltenham and Stonehouse. Within the boundary of the AONB, the area of land classified as Settled Unwooded Vale is limited, confined to a narrow section of the landscape type at the base of the escarpment, merging into the broad lowland Vale of Gloucester that extends westwards to the floodplain farmland landscapes bordering the Severn, as well as the transition to the Vale of Evesham to the north. In view of the peripheral location in relation to the vale beyond, the key characteristics identified for the landscape type are not always typical of those that occur within the heart of the more extensive vale area. There is also a transition from this landscape type, where the influences of large urban

areas and major infrastructure are more dominant, to the adjacent Unwooded Vale (Landscape Character Type 19), which is more rural in character.

In the southern part of the AONB, the landscape character assessment undertaken by South Gloucestershire Council provides a more detailed examination of the landscape types that occur across the wider vale to the west of the Cotswolds escarpment, together with the mosaic of landscape character areas. Similarly, Worcestershire County Council's LCA provides a detailed examination of landscape types that occur across the Vale of Evesham Regional Character Area, including the land that extends into the AONB in the vicinity of Bredon Hill. To avoid any confusion or contradiction with the findings of these more detailed landscape character assessments, the landscape character area that occurs within the AONB Settled Unwooded Vale landscape type is named separately to differentiate it from those identified and described within the detailed LCAs.

The following description is principally confined to the transitional lowland 'edge' landscape that occurs below the escarpment and escarpment outliers. Where appropriate, reference is also made to the characteristics and features that occur within the adjacent Vale of Gloucester, including the significant built elements, in order to provide the context and linkage with this wider landscape type.

The Settled Unwooded Vale within the AONB is underlain by Lias Group mudstones and sandstone, which in places are overlain by extensive areas of drift deposits creating a soft, gently undulating landscape. This is cloaked in a regular patchwork of arable and pasture fields enclosed largely by neat hawthorn hedges and as such the agricultural landscape is typical of the wider vale. Woodland cover is restricted to a limited number of deciduous farm copses although field and hedgerow trees can give the impression that this is a well treed landscape.

Landscape and settlement patterns are heavily influenced by industrial age and modern development both in the villages and in neighbouring urban areas such as Gloucester, Stonehouse, Quedgeley and Cheltenham. Thus landscape character shows a mixture of agricultural, urban, suburban and industrial land uses.

Transportation routes and infrastructure elements to the west have a strong influence on the landscape. The principal route is the M5 although dual carriageways, a number of other major roads and bypasses are also responsible for eroding rural landscape character bordering transport corridors. Mainline and branch railways also occupy the wider vale landscape and introduce noise and movement to the landscape.

Notwithstanding these urbanising features, the Settled Unwooded Vale landscape type retains areas that have a strongly rural character with an emphasis on agricultural management.

Physical Influences

Much of the Vale of Gloucester Fringe is underlain by the mudstones of the Blue Lias and Charmouth Mudstone Formations. This geological framework, along with isolated drift deposits of sand and gravel, form a gently undulating landscape that shelves gently westwards from 100m AOD within the AONB boundary to 50m AOD. The eastern extent of the vale is marked by the distinct break of slope at the foot of the escarpment where more hummocky land resulting from landslips may be identified. The western limits of the Settled Unwooded Vale are defined partly by the Floodplain Farmland landscape types that extend along the course of the Severn at or below the 10m AOD contour.

Within the wider lowland vale a number of small low hills are evident. At Bondend to the east of Upton St Leonards a fine example of a vale hillock has been identified. Here Dyrham Formation Silty Mudstone forms an east-west orientated hill. The solid geology is similar to that on the escarpment to the east and therefore the hill, which rises to just 110m AOD from the vale level of approximately 50m AOD, represents a small outlier.

A high number of brooks and streams drain neighbouring slopes and upland areas through the wider vale to the Severn. The Frome is a significant river running east-west through the escarpment and the vale and is fed by narrow tributary streams that occupy shallow, winding valleys, often marked by linear belts of willow and other wetland tree species.

The type is characterised by a mosaic of improved grassland and arable land with small areas of neutral grassland. Woodland is largely absent although numerous small farm copses are conspicuous. Hedgerow and field oaks contribute significantly to local landscape character and help maintain the rural character of some areas by screening views to urban and suburban features. Stonewalls also create a number of field boundaries within the landscape type.

Improvements made to agricultural land and the proximity of urban areas limits the nature conservation value of the landscape although important habitats are found in the stream valleys. Hedgerows, dotted with hedgerow oaks and ash, are also important habitats and provide a network through which wildlife can move.

The landscape is perceived as being more intimate and sheltered in close proximity to the escarpment. Further to the west, and particularly beyond the course of the M5, the declining influence of the scarp slopes, flatter land, generally larger field patterns and fewer woodlands, give the landscape a more open character.

Human Influences

Similar to the Unwooded Vale there is only scattered evidence suggesting that the Settled Vale landscape was heavily utilised and inhabited in the prehistoric period. However, following the Roman invasion and the advance of the army into Wales under Scapula (AD 47-52) the vale landscape came to prominence, with the Twentieth Legion establishing itself at Gloucester in AD 49. Roman roads were quickly constructed to link the fort, and later the city of GLEVM and designated as a 'Colonia' AD97, to the wider Roman world. The principal route shared the course of the modern A38 through the vale that linked Gloucester to AQUA SVLIS (Bath) in the south, and SALINAE (Droitwich) in the north. The colonia developed suburbs and a thriving port on the river.

Within the wider Vale of Gloucester villages, many having their origins in the Saxon period, grew throughout the medieval period taking increasing areas of land into their open fields, remnants of which can occasionally be found as surviving tracts of ridge and furrow. The historic cores of many of these vale settlements contain medieval buildings that are largely half-timbered although many have now have been infilled with brick, or have a brick facade. A number of older buildings are also constructed of Cotswold stone. These are often clustered around medieval churches that are also built of stone, the materials of which were obtained from Cotswolds quarries and brought to the vale by packhorse. The spires and towers of these churches gain visual prominence in the lowland landscape and are important landscape features. The most prominent is the 15th century tower of Gloucester Cathedral, which acts as an orientation point in the lowland vale.

Larger vale settlements such as Gloucester continued to grow throughout the industrial period, displaying evidence of this in the rows of 19th century terraced houses, and occasionally mills, that have survived demolition. In contrast to settlements elsewhere in the Cotswolds, the vale settlements took advantage of good transport links (the Severn, numerous roads, canals and railways) for the import of building materials such as bricks and slate for roofing. Cheltenham and Gloucester also contain fine examples of Regency architecture, the distinctiveness of the buildings much enhanced by the locally available fine Cotswolds limestone used in their construction.

Post industrial and modern urban and suburban sprawl has had a profound impact on the landscape, in terms of physical change to land use and landscape patterns, the built environment, transport and infrastructure. The main north-south route through the Vale of Gloucester established by the Romans still persists, its course closely followed by the M5 motorway, the mainline railway between Bristol and Birmingham, and the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal. Apart from the visual impact of the transport infrastructure, the further effect of traffic noise and movement, lighting elements and nightglow also impact on the adjacent rural areas that extend into the AONB. The Roman route up the escarpment to Cirencester is also evident and is now occupied by the busy A417(T). Urban fringe sites close to major transport routes are often the site of industrial units and trading estates.

Beyond the main towns and villages the wider settlement pattern is restricted to dispersed hamlets, mainly linear in form and a small number of isolated farms and roadside dwellings. Whilst scattered across the Vale landscape, settlements have mainly developed in valley bottoms or on locally elevated land. The close proximity of the major towns of Gloucester, Cheltenham and Stroud, and their outlying suburbs such as Stonehouse, Leonard Stanley and Brockworth has, however, had a dramatic impact on local landscape and settlement character. For example, farm diversification has responded to and exploited the proximity of large local populations, leading to a proliferation of 'horsiculture' features across the rural landscape such as stables, ribbon fences, lighting and jumps. The close proximity of towns is also manifested in the proliferation of urban 'roadscape' features and light industry sites.

Buildings also reflect the influence of large towns, with suburban building styles such as rendering and mock Tudor additions, and materials extending out beyond the limits of the town into local villages, and may often be found in isolated dwellings and hamlets such as those in and surrounding Little Witcombe.

Even where urban influences are not obvious in rural areas of the landscape, the character of the Settled Unwooded Vale retains influences from neighbouring urban development. Such influences are often associated with the proliferation of masts and overhead transmission lines, and more subtly, from the effects of lighting.

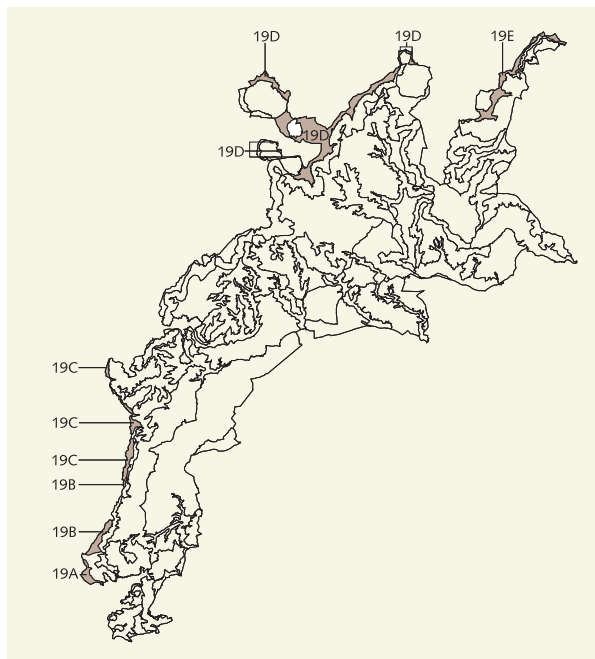
Character Areas

The Vale of Gloucester Fringe is the only landscape character area in the Settled Unwooded Vale landscape character type in the AONB. The text above therefore applies to this single Character Area.

19 UNWOODED VALE

Character Areas

- 19A Avon Valley
- 19B Boyd Valley
- 19C Wickwar Vale
- 19D Vale of Evesham Fringe
- 19E Vale of Feldon Fringe



Key Characteristics

- Soft rolling landscape on the lower slopes of escarpment forming a transitional area between the adjacent escarpment and vale area, and with intermittent ridges and valleys in southern part of vale;
- stretches of the Cotswolds escarpment, as well as the escarpment outliers, provide a dramatic backdrop to many views across the vale;
- wide, open, sparsely settled agrarian landscape;
- small areas of wet meadow and narrow floodplain bordering numerous streams and rivers;
- well maintained hedgerows, some of great antiquity;

- numerous mature field and hedgerow oaks, riverside trees and small woodlands;
- quiet winding lanes link isolated farms and hamlets;
- remnants of ancient open fields and moated sites;
- varied mix of brick, timber and stone for buildings, and slate and thatch roofing, with Oolitic Limestone still prevalent within the vale villages in closer proximity to the Cotswolds Escarpment; and,
- adjacent steep escarpment landform and associated woodlands generally limit views.

Landscape Character

The Unwooded Vale landscape character type forms part of the extensive lowland vales that are located along the western and northern perimeter of the Cotswolds AONB, extending from Bath to below Stinchcombe Hill, then re-commencing in a broad sweep northwards and then eastwards adjacent to the Vales of Evesham and Feldon. Within the boundary of the AONB, the areas of land classified as Unwooded Vale are very limited, confined to narrow and fragmented sections of the landscape type at the base of the escarpment, merging into the broader lowland vales. In view of their peripheral location in relation to the vales beyond, the characteristics that these areas display are not always typical of those occurring within the heart of the extensive vale areas. There is also a transition from this landscape type to the adjacent Settled Unwooded Vale (Landscape Character Type 18) where the influences of large urban areas and major infrastructure are more dominant.

In the southern part of the AONB, the landscape character assessments undertaken by South Gloucestershire and Bath and North East Somerset Councils provide a more detailed examination of the landscape types that occur across the wider vale to the west of the Cotswolds escarpment, together with the mosaic of landscape character areas. Similarly, Worcestershire County Council's LCA provides a detailed examination of landscape types that occur across the Vale of Evesham Regional Character Area, including the land that extends into the AONB in the vicinity of Bredon Hill. To avoid any confusion or contradiction with the findings of these more detailed landscape character assessments, the landscape character areas that occurs within the AONB Unwooded Vale landscape type are named separately to differentiate them from those identified and described within the detailed LCAs.

The following descriptions are principally confined to the transitional lowland 'edge' landscape that occurs below the escarpment and escarpment outliers. Where appropriate, however, reference is made to the characteristics and features that occur within the wider adjacent vales in order to provide the context and linkage with the wider landscape type.

The overall character of the landscape is distinctly rural, small scale and domestic and contrasts strongly with the exposed landscapes of the neighbouring Escarpment and Escarpment Outliers landscape character types.

The soft, rolling landform, underlain with Lias Group mudstones and sandstones and extensive drift deposits is cloaked in a patchwork of arable and pasture fields, generally medium to large in size, although locally, such as around Wickwar, small field patterns can be found. These are predominantly enclosed by a network of hedgerows, both well maintained and overgrown which often contain ageing oaks, and are valued for their nature conservation



value in an otherwise highly managed agricultural landscape. Stonewall boundaries can also be found within the unwooded vale.

Woodland cover is not a characteristic feature of this landscape type, and generally restricted to small deciduous copses and shelterbelts. Where woodlands do occur, they are often closely associated with farmsteads that are dotted throughout the landscape, although occasional more substantial areas of woodland do occur, notably to the east of Wickwar in the southern part of the vale. Elsewhere woodland cover is restricted to the narrow semi-natural woodlands bordering streams that drain the neighbouring uplands and broadleaved woodland within landscaped parks. Where present woodlands gain visual prominence in this low landscape and when viewed from ground level, merge with hedges and hedgerow and field trees leading to the impression that the landscape is more wooded than it actually is.

Beyond the AONB boundary, tributaries of the Severn, Bristol Avon, and the Stratford Avon weave through the wider vale. These occupy shallow, sometimes narrow valleys and are often only visible by the presence of alder and willow trees that line their banks. In contrast to this network of numerous secondary valleys, to the west of Bath the wide floodplain of the River Avon forms the southern boundary of the designated area. Softer landform and wet, rushy meadows and increased use of post and wire fencing are also characteristic features.

The settlement pattern is generally dispersed. Countless farmsteads largely dating to the time that the landscape was enclosed in the 18th and 19th centuries, are located throughout the vale. Villages and hamlets are predominantly small linear clusters bordering the lower slopes of the neighbouring escarpment. Larger settlements have also established, such as Winchcombe and Broadway. These take advantage of sheltered locations within embayments in the escarpment.

Ancient churches, and remnants of ridge and furrow of the former open fields, indicate that many of the vale settlements have their origins in the medieval period or earlier. Building materials vary. In the historic core of both Winchcombe and Broadway, for example, the older buildings are mainly constructed from stone. Some of the more recent developments that occur on the outskirts of these settlements beyond the historic core are constructed from brick. Within the vale settlements generally, many of the older buildings also use timber in their construction, indicating that suitable building was less available than elsewhere in the Cotswolds where stone built buildings

are prevalent. Since the arrival of the railways and canals, brick has formed the dominant building material within the Vale settlements.

Physical Influences

Beyond the AONB boundary, the majority of the vale is underlain by Triassic rocks. Within the AONB, however, the soft, undulating landform has formed on the Lias Group mudstones and sandstone, and is typically between 10 and 40m AOD, although in some areas the vale rises to 100m AOD. The sense of elevation is much diminished by local landform and intervening vegetation obscuring long distance views.

There is a general sense of land rising gradually to the east where the vale merges into the lower slopes of the escarpment. It is within this transitional zone that slips and detached masses of Oolitic debris create a hummocky landscape and areas of raised landform, and from which more extensive views are sometimes possible.

Beyond the AONB, the Vale landscape varies considerably from the small sections of rolling landform found at the base of the Escarpment. Both the Vale of Evesham Fringe, and Vale of Feldon Fringe provide a typically soft, rolling vale landscape rising only to heights between 30m and 50m. Elsewhere, the vale landscape beyond the AONB has more local variations. Within the area surrounding Bath the wide valley of the River Avon dominates the area, with the gently sloping valley sides rising up to the Escarpment on one side and beyond the AONB towards undulating open valleys and plateaux on the other. Around Wick, Downton and northwards towards the southern limits of Old Sodbury, land shelves from the escarpment and dips into the valley of the River Boyd, beyond the AONB. The Pucklechurch Ridge, beyond the River to the west, provides a prominent backdrop when viewed from the vale landscape within the AONB. Between Old Sodbury and Stinchcombe, the land shelves gently from the escarpment. Beyond the AONB boundary the vale landscape falls gently to the west towards the Yate Vale and the Severn Ridges Character Areas defined in South Gloucestershire Council's Landscape Character Assessment.

The underlying geology gives rise to heavy, cold and frequently waterlogged soils that tend to limit their capacity for arable farming. Improved pasture for cattle is therefore prevalent although some arable fields are conspicuous. Here, ditches have been cut to aid drainage and limit waterlogging. These ditches often border roads and define, along with hedgerows, regular 'parliamentary' field boundaries that suggest that they were a feature of the 19th century enclosures.

Orchards are well suited to the vale soils and microclimate, and were once a prominent feature of the vale landscape. The vast majority has been grubbed out and the land turned over to more lucrative arable or pasture farming.

Hawthorn hedgerows define a patchwork of relatively large fields. These are often well maintained and give the sense of a managed productive agricultural landscape. However, in some areas the hedgerow pattern is breaking down and is increasingly being replaced by post and wire fencing. Many hedges are of great antiquity and possibly predate the enclosures of the 18th and 19th century which are prevalent across the vale. These later boundary features may be easily identified in the landscape as the hedges are less species rich and define geometric 'parliamentary' fields. Hedgerow trees, predominantly oaks, are conspicuous and offer valued habitats for a range of birds and insects, particularly where dead timber is left in close proximity to provide additional habitats. In other areas, stone walls provide boundary features.

There is little woodland cover in this long settled landscape and not, therefore, a characteristic feature of the Unwooded Vale. Throughout the landscape it is restricted to small copses and shelterbelts although hedgerow trees and isolated field trees lead to the impression that it is more wooded than it actually is. Woodlands are most conspicuous when located on the lower slopes of the escarpment and on undulations within the vale.

Few large woodlands exist, although some significant areas may be observed bordering streams draining the escarpment and within landscaped parks that may often be found stretching up onto the lower slopes of neighbouring scarp and outliers.

Between undulations in the vale, a multitude of rivers and streams weave winding courses as they flow towards the Severn and Avon. These are often bordered by flatter, gentler landform and wet meadows above thick deposits of alluvium and diamicton. These areas are periodically flooded and pastures here are often wet and rushy. The watercourses flowing in these meadows are often only visible at crossing points where brick or stone bridges offer excellent vantage points. However, their route can also be traced by the alder and willow trees that often line their banks.

Human Influences

There is little evidence to confirm whether the vale was heavily exploited and settled during the prehistoric period. To the east of the Severn, settlement of the gravel terraces bordering the river has been established from at least the Neolithic period. However, it is likely that poor waterlogged soils and thick woodland cover prohibited settlement and farming on a large scale.

With the improved ploughs of the Middle Ages, and a rapidly expanding population, pressure grew for settlement of the poorer land to the east of the Severn. At the foot of the escarpment, and in the wider vale, numerous settlements were established, or earlier settlements expanded. Many would have been surrounded by open fields. The ridges and furrows deriving from this are still extant in the vale landscape today where they have survived beneath permanent pasture established at the time of enclosure. This is particularly evident where the vale meets the escarpment, with many of the open fields here having been under permanent pasture since the time of enclosure. Elsewhere, modern ploughing and development has resulted in the loss of vast areas of ridge and furrow.

Moated sites are conspicuous in the vale landscape although relatively infrequent in the AONB. These sites, often barely visible in the landscape, are likely to date from 13th century and rather than representing manorial centres, they are likely to have been the homes of wealthy yeoman farmers, as moated sites were a symbol of wealth and status during the medieval period. Many of the sites of moated farmsteads are in close proximity to more modern farms, indicating a continuity of settlement within the vale.

Perhaps the most potent evidence for human activity in the vale is the dominant pattern of regular hedged fields established during the enclosures of the 18th and 19th centuries. The neat, geometric patchwork created by hawthorn hedges is relentless and a monument to the surveyors and agriculturists that created them. These fields are interspersed with farms, often built at the time of enclosure and made conspicuous by large barns and outbuildings that often enclose a central yard.

Whilst the regular geometric pattern of hedged fields dominates the vale, it may often be observed to sit within a more organic framework of hedged boundaries, watercourses and winding roads. These are the remnants of the ancient open fields that surrounded vale villages into which the enclosures were imposed.

Villages within the vale are small and compact, lining roads approaching the neighbouring escarpment or the winding

lanes that encircle the outliers. However, more dispersed villages with a radial form are also evident. Their names often indicate their geographic location, Aston Subedge and Ashton-under-Hill being notable examples. The older centres of these settlements have an abundance of stone, red brick and timber-framed buildings. The older village properties are typically clustered around the church, which are often ancient and imposing stone structures, with a prominent spire visible from some distance from the village.

Beyond these villages the settlement pattern becomes dispersed with numerous farmsteads and hamlets, commonly with a linear form, scattered across the landscape, with farmhouses and individual buildings gaining visual prominence when they are sited on the top of undulations. Generally, development is located in valley bottoms, at the foot of hills and hill terraces. Roads descending off the escarpment tend to spread out at the foot of the scarp into a multitude of narrow winding lanes. These are often bordered by neat, square-cut hedgerows, wide grass verges and drainage ditches.

Some large settlements exist, Broadway and Winchcombe being notable examples. These are sited in the shelter offered by north facing combs and represent market towns that were established during the medieval period. Indeed Winchcombe was the earliest market town in the Cotswolds and remained the largest up until the 16th century.

Character Areas

19A Avon Valley

The Avon Valley Character Area extends from the western limits of Bath north-westwards to the south of Upton Cheyney. It is bordered to the east by the Escarpment and may be observed to extend westwards beyond the AONB boundary along the course of the River Avon.



The area is underlain by Lias Group limestone from Saltford to Kelston Park and Lias Group mudstones from Keynsham to Kelston, north of the limestone outcrop. However, drift deposits are an important component of surface geology with alluvium found throughout the floodplain as well as smaller outcrops of river gravel and head material.

The landscape consists primarily of the eastern flank of the meandering River Avon and its wide valley, with a flat or gently sloping valley floor that rises from approximately 15m AOD bordering the river channel to the foot of the escarpment. Local variations do exist, however, with steep river cliffs bordering the river between Saltford and Kelston Park. Here, deciduous woodlands cling to the steep landform. These are identified as being as ancient semi-natural woodland.

Soils are generally clayey in nature and at risk of flooding, although are better drained in limestone areas. Land use is varied, the landscape comprising a patchwork of arable and grassland. Arable fields are found particularly to the north of Saltford and around Corston, outside the AONB boundary. Fields are generally regular in shape representing enclosure of open fields in the later Middle Ages. Field boundaries vary with hedges, both clipped and un-clipped, some with and some without trees. Walls are localised and generally associated with farm buildings. In areas of horse grazing white tape is often used to divide paddocks. More open landscapes occur on areas of floodplain bordering the Avon. Here, rich wet grasslands were enclosed in the medieval period as areas of meadowland provided an early crop of grass. There is also a significant area of parkland at Kelston Park. This is a terraced garden and landscape park of some 75ha created between 1767 and 1768 by Capability Brown for Caesar Hawkins.

The Avon Valley is an important transport corridor. At one time the river was an important route for trade and communication. However, it is now largely used for recreational purposes. The eastern boundary of the character area is in part formed by the busy A431 between Bath and Kingswood. Beyond the AONB boundary, the Avon Valley is crossed by the A4 Bristol to Bath road and the Bristol to London mainline railway. This has been raised above the floodplain in places by steeply sloping embankments, with other sections at grade or in cuttings. The Avon Walkway runs alongside the river for a short distance. The Path was constructed on the trackbed of the former Midland Railway between 1979 and 1986. The Railway was important to the industry in the area but finally closed in 1976.

Settlement within the character area is sparse with only the village of Kelston located within its boundary. However, other villages and towns such as Swineford,



Saltford and Corston border or lie in close proximity to the AONB boundary. The City of Bath borders the character area to the east but is not prominent in views due to local landform.

The escarpment forms a striking backdrop to the vale landscape. Prominent features such as the distinctive tree group on Kelston Round Hill are local landmarks although the scarp slopes in general are important to provide a sense of orientation.

19B Boyd Valley



The Boyd Valley character area occupies the foot of the escarpment between Wick in the south and Old Sodbury in the north. It is part of a more extensive landscape that stretches westwards to Westerleigh and Siston. Landform shelves gently from the base of the escarpment (at approximately 100m AOD) to 80m AOD at the AONB boundary. Beyond this to the west, the landscape dips further to the channel of the River Boyd. Further to the west the landscape rises gently to the abrupt scarp edge of the Pucklechurch ridge.

The vale landscape is dissected by numerous tributaries of the River Boyd that drains southwards through the Golden Valley and into the Avon. Land cover comprises a roughly equal proportion of arable and pasture land in medium to large regular fields. Field boundaries are defined by a combination of clipped and overgrown hedges and some post and wire fencing. There is limited tree cover and infrequent woodland copses. Settlement in the character area is limited to a small number of scattered farmsteads and the villages of Beach and Doynton and houses on the southern outskirts of Wick. Buildings associated with Wick Quarry, located on the outskirts of the town are outside the AONB boundary but form a locally prominent landscape feature. A mixture of building materials is used although limestone is conspicuous in some areas such as Doynton where Cotswolds stone has been widely used in many of the buildings within it. Stone walls also enclose roads through the village.

The character area is bordered to the east by the escarpment. Landform features along it such as Hanging Hill form prominent local landmarks from where extensive views over the valley are possible towards Oldland Ridge and the Pucklechurch Ridge which also form significant landform features within the vale, to the east of the urban area of Kingswood. The line of mature beech trees on Freezing Hill on the crest of the escarpment also forms a notable landmark from the vale below.

The southern extent of the character area forms the eastern slopes of the Golden Valley; a north-east / south-west orientated valley through which flows the River Boyd. However, the river, which follows a tightly meandering course, and its floodplain are beyond the AONB boundary. The valley is formed from alluvium within the valley floor with a mixture of Middle Jurassic limestone, and Carboniferous rocks forming the valley sides. The river channel is bordered by riparian vegetation and irregular shaped medium and small pastoral fields, which lead to larger regular shaped fields on the upper valley slopes within the AONB. Field boundaries are generally tall and overgrown with some clipped and laid hedgerows along lanes.

Tracey Park golf course, which is situated within the grounds of a large stately house, is a significant landscape feature. Here, mature tree specimens, within sweeping lawns contained by stone walls, introduces managed landscapes to otherwise rural countryside. Another notable landscape feature is the remains of a burial chamber to the north of Coldharbour Farm.



19C Wickwar Vale

The Wickwar Vale landscape character area occupies the foot of the scarp between Old Sodbury in the south and Stinchcombe in the north. It is part of a wider landscape that extends westwards to the character areas defined in South Gloucestershire Council's Landscape Character Assessment of Yate Vale and the Severn Ridges around Thornbury. The rural landscape is gently undulating. Within the boundary of the AONB, however, the landscape shelves gently westwards off the escarpment from approximately 120m AOD to 90m AOD. To the north of Worsley, the landscape falls from approximately 90m AOD at the edge of the Rolling Hills and Valleys landscape type to 70m AOD at the AONB boundary.

The landscape is dissected by numerous rivers and streams. These flow westwards off the escarpment and through the Rolling Hills and Valleys landscape type (Landscape Character Type 3). The landscape is rural and, as is typical of the vale landscape type, displays a mixture of arable and pasture farming. Fields are predominantly irregular and small to medium sized. In the wider landscape, beyond the AONB boundary, woodland is a predominant landscape feature with Wetmoor Wood to the east of Wickwar representing an extensive area of ancient woodland of significant nature conservation value. Large areas of common land also exist beyond the AONB boundary. These comprise areas of rough grassland and heathland.

Within the AONB boundary the landscape is rural with settlement limited to scattered farms and hamlets. The largest settlement is the village of Hillesley, although the larger settlement of Wotton-under-Edge, located immediately beyond the character area, exerts a strong influence over the landscape, as it occupies a prominent position on the skyline. In the far north of the character area, the AONB boundary is defined by the M5 and reduces the rural and peaceful character of the landscape.

The escarpment forms a backdrop to the vale landscape. The Tyndale monument and distinctive beech hanger on Nibley Knoll, and Stinchcombe Hill, both form striking local landmarks and are important orientation points in the landscape.

19D

Vale of Evesham Fringe

The Vale of Evesham is a broad landscape type that extends from the western slopes of Oxenton Hill in the south, along the northern stretch of the Cotswold escarpment towards Stratford-upon-Avon. Only small areas are located within the AONB, however, principally lining the foot of the scarp slopes but also fringing the outliers and perhaps most significantly, the tracts of land surrounding Alderton, Dumbleton and Bredon Hills.

The vale is underlain by Blue Lias and Charmouth Mudstones of the Lias Group, which have created the soft, rolling landscapes. Land rises towards the escarpment and surrounding the outliers and high points reach 100m AOD in places. Elsewhere the vale has a consistent elevation of between 30m and 50m AOD. The landscape is typical of the vale and the gently undulating landform is cloaked in a patchwork of fields, boundaries being formed by neat, well-maintained hedgerows. Soils derived from the underlying geology are often heavy and wet. However, drainage and improvement allows mixed arable and pasture farming to prosper. Dairy farming is particularly conspicuous and cattle sheds are often large and visually obtrusive features of this relatively flat landscape. Less productive wet pastures are often located on the alluvial beds that lie adjacent to the many streams and rivers that flow northwards to the Avon. The principal river is the Isbourne that flows off the Winchcombe embayment.

Tree cover is typically limited to small deciduous woodlands and supplemented by occasional hedgerow, riverside and field trees. However, larger woodlands may be found fringing parkland such as those around Sudeley Castle, Stanway House and Toddington Manor. Orchards, prevalent elsewhere in the Vale of Evesham, are not numerous in the AONB indicating that many were removed and converted to farmland.

Broadway and Winchcombe are the largest towns in the landscape. The latter dominates the local skyline, along with Sudeley Castle, and occupies the head of the dramatic embayment overlooked by the Belas Knap long barrow. The road pattern is rural, and narrow winding lanes, bounded by hedgerows, grass verges and drainage ditches link numerous small villages and hamlets marking the base of the escarpment and the outliers. Farmhouses

tend to be located at the end of short lanes off the main road network..

The dramatic slopes of the wooded escarpment and outliers form a distinctive backdrop to these landscapes and offer many excellent vantage points from which to observe its vast scale and unified landscape character.

19E

Vale of Feldon Fringe

The Vale of Feldon Fringe is in the far north east of the AONB and occupies the foot of the escarpment of Edge Hill and the low-lying landscapes below the Ironstone Hills and Valleys landscape type (6) and the Brailes Hill outlier. Beyond this character area, the more extensive Vale of Feldon extends to the east and north.

Charmouth Mudstone Formation of the Lias Group is widespread and has created the typical vale landscape of very soft and gently rolling landform. Indeed, land only rises by 30m across the width of this landscape type, up to the break of slope at the foot of the Marlstone Rock escarpment. The area between Brailes and Stourton is even softer, with local rises of between 10 and 20m. This is due to the deep deposits of silty clay and river terrace gravels bordering the course of the River Stour, cloaking the underlying geology and further softening underlying landform features.

The name of this character area refers to a much broader area of Warwickshire south and east of the Avon and relates to the Anglo Saxon 'feld' meaning open area or field. This indicates that this landscape was cleared and cultivated from the first few centuries AD and hundreds of years of ploughing since this time have left traces of ridge and furrow beneath areas of permanent pasture throughout the area. Such early and widespread clearance may also explain the lack of ancient woodland in the





locality. The landscape pattern of neat, regular hedged fields evident today dates to the enclosures of the 18th and 19th century. Improved pasture is the predominant land use on these heavy soils although arable farming is also evident in many of the larger drained fields.

Hedgerow trees and field trees are important landscape features. These are typically oak, although willow and other wetland species predominate along the course of rivers and streams. In the absence of large woodlands, these, along with overgrown hedges, combine with the backdrop of scarp slopes woodlands to give the impression of a relatively well-treed landscape when viewed from ground level.

The Vale of Feldon Fringe is deeply rural with a small number of isolated farms dotted throughout the landscape. Warmington, Radway, Stourton, Cherington and Lower Brailes represent ancient nucleated villages at the foot of the scarp. Many older houses in these villages retain thatched roofs, with red brick and timber construction elements, indicating their close relationship to the wider vale where these building materials are prevalent. However, buildings in Radway and Warmington are notable due to the predominant use of ironstone, a building material typical of the Ironstone Hills above the escarpment. The use of stone is also evident in Warmington and Cherington.

Interestingly the local name for the wider area of the Vale of Feldon between Kineton and Edge Hill to the Stour valley is the 'Vale of the Red Horse', and refers to the figure of a horse that was cut into the iron rich soils of the escarpment, possibly in the Saxon period. Although the horse has now disappeared, the name still persists.

The site of the Battle of Edge Hill of 1642 is located to the east of the Vale of Feldon Fringe within the broader Vale area. A monument to the battle, which forms part of a public house, is located above the vale on the Edge Hill escarpment. The registered battlefield borders the boundary of the AONB to the west of Radway.

