



2.01 Introduction

Landscape is about the relationship between people and place. It is the result of the way that different components of the environment - natural and cultural - interact and are perceived.

Every landscape has its own character, a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape (i.e. trees, hedges, field systems, buildings, etc.) that makes one landscape different from another. This is why the Fens are different from the Derbyshire Dales which in turn are different from the Sussex Downs. The appearance of each of these areas represents the interplay between natural forces and human activity, that has resulted in the elements or combinations of elements which make a particular contribution to local distinctiveness.

This is not to say that the character of a landscape is in any way fixed and immutable. Human activity (and human default) mean that, to some degree, the landscape is always in a state of flux. Change has occurred in the past, is happening now and will invariably take place in the future. The recognition of this fact by society and the attendant desire to maintain those qualities that make a place 'special', are what makes the understanding of the English landscape so important. It is this need to 'understand' that provides the impetus for this report and the wider project of which it forms a part.

2.02 Characterisation of the Landscape

The determination of what makes one landscape different from another is known as 'characterisation'. It involves the identification of:

- **Landscape character types:** Distinct types of landscape that share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, and historical land use and settlement patterns. Character types are generic, in that they may occur in different areas in different parts of the country, a fact which is reflected in their non specific identification with terms like moorland, river valley or plateau.
- **Landscape character areas:** Single unique areas that are geographic examples of a particular type. For instance, the Upper Churn and Coln Valleys in Gloucestershire are both separate landscape character areas of the High Wold Valley type (refer 2.04).

Characterisation can be undertaken at a variety of levels, from national down to local, depending on the level of detail required. The result will be the classification and description of the landscape in terms of the factors - natural, social and cultural - that define its character (Swanwick & Land Use Consultants, 2002). Natural factors include geology, landform, river and drainage systems, soils and land cover. Social and cultural factors include land use, settlements patterns, patterns of field enclosure and what is termed 'time depth' (i.e. the historic dimension of the landscape).

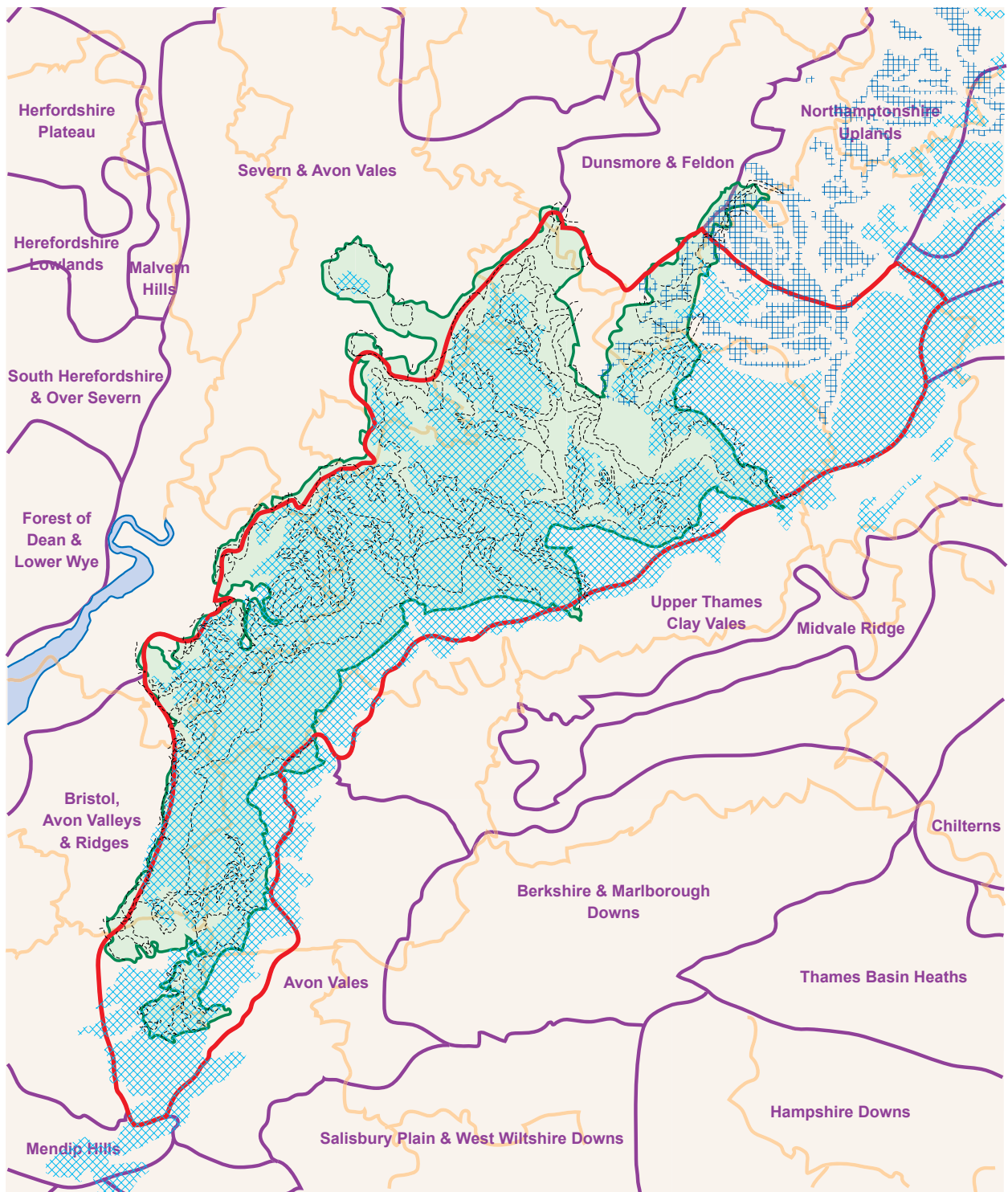
The power of characterisation is that it provides a framework in which planning policy and guidance can focus on key principles rather than on prescriptive formulae.

One of the key aims of this project is to record, document and - in the context of the character and evolution of the landscape as a whole - *explain and understand* a number of the key social and cultural factors that play a part in what makes the landscape of the AONB special, specifically those elements that comprise the built environment.

2.03 The Character of the Landscape of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The key characteristics of the Cotswolds region - as defined by the Countryside Agency - can be summarised as:

- Its underlying geology: a dramatic scarp rising above adjacent lowlands with steep combes, scarp foot villages and beech woodlands.
- Rolling, open high wold plateaux moulded by physical and human influences, with arable farming and areas of woodland, divided up by small, narrow valleys.
- Areas of incised landscape with deep wide valleys, and of flat, open dip slope landscape (i.e. a landscape that follows the underlying geology) with extensive arable farmland.



KEY

Boundaries

- Cotswolds Character Area
- Other Character Areas

- District and Unitary Authorities
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Underlying Geology

- ▣ Limestone
- ▣ Ironstone

MAP 02: THE COTSWOLDS AONB IN RELATION TO THE COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER MAP OF ENGLAND




















- Prominent outliers within the lowlands, vales to the west of the escarpment.
- Honey-coloured Cotswold stone in walls, houses and churches.
- Attractive stone villages with a unity of design and materials.

This is the definition of the region at a national level (Map 02), the definition that sets the boundaries of the Cotswolds as one of the 159 regions that make up the Countryside Agency's Character of England map (Countryside Agency, 1999, p.7 & pp.41-45). Although accurate within the context of the country as a whole, this characterisation of the Cotswolds is too generalised to be of much use in understanding local distinctiveness at the level of the built environment, not least since the boundary of the area at a national level differs significantly from that of the AONB. The character of the landscape needs to be defined in more detail if, - for example - one is to appreciate why a particular type of boundary (e.g. a stone wall) or roof covering 'belongs' where it is and nowhere else, or a certain pattern of settlement exists in a certain area and not another.

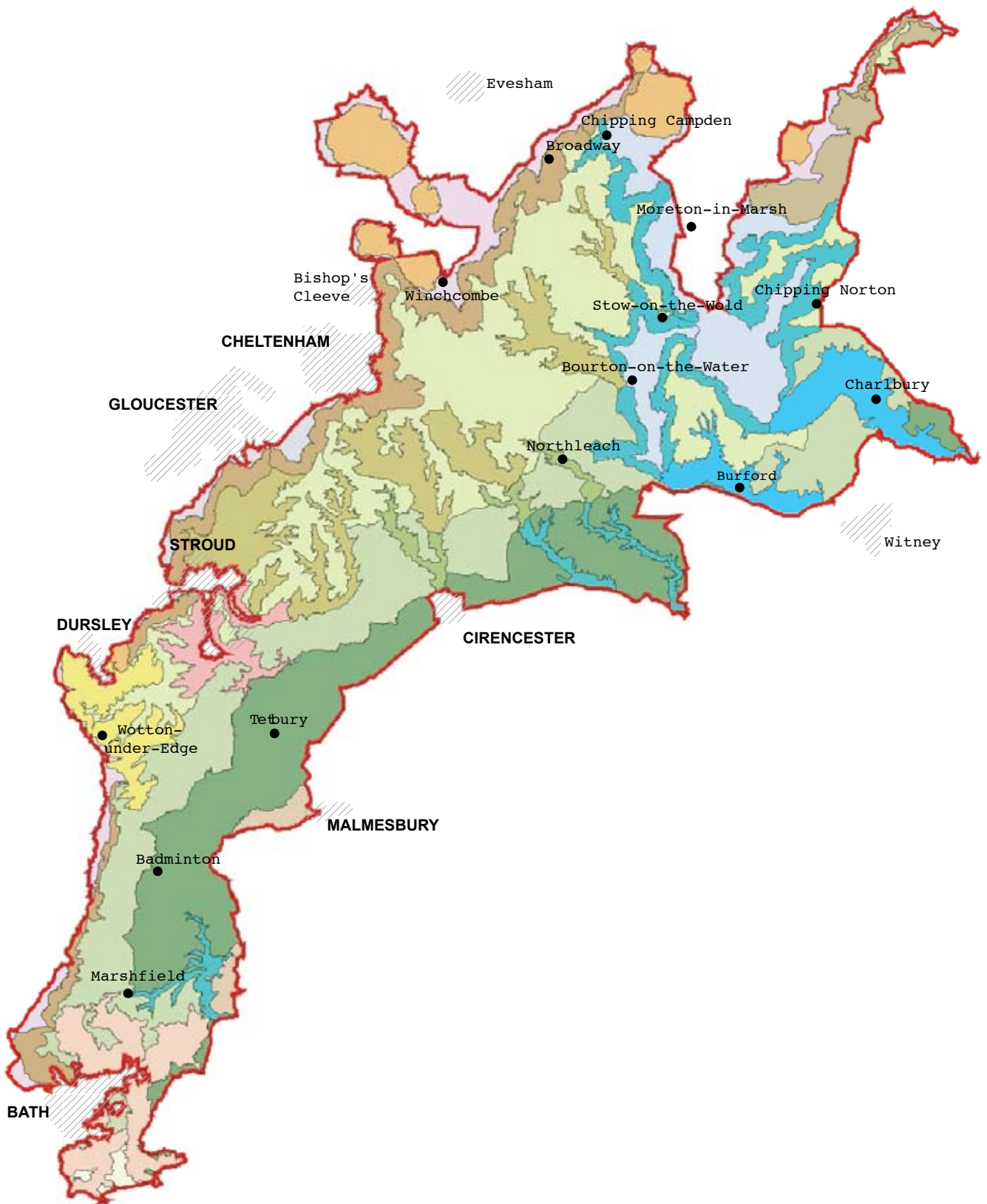
2.04

Landscape Character Types

An assessment of the Cotswolds AONB (Landscape Design Associates, 2003: Map 03) has revealed that, at a regional level, the AONB contains nineteen distinct types of landscape:

-  01 Escarpment Outlier
-  02 Escarpment
-  03 Rolling Hills and Valley
-  04 Enclosed Limestone Valley
-  05 Settled Valley
-  06 Ironstone Hills and Valleys
-  07 High Wold
-  08 High Wold Valley
-  09 High Wold Dip-Slope
-  10 High Wold Dip-Slope Valley
-  11 Dip-Slope Lowland
-  12 Dip-Slope Lowland Valley
-  13 Low Limestone Plateau
-  14 Cornbrash Lowlands
-  15 Farmed Slopes
-  16 Broad Floodplain Valley
-  17 Pastoral Lowland Vale
-  18 Settled Unwooded Vale
-  19 Unwooded Vale

The key features of each of these character types are summarised over the following pages. Specific character areas are also identified, through it must be understood that many of these extend beyond the confines of the AONB: Landscape character rarely relates to arbitrary administrative boundaries, a point clearly illustrated by Map 02, and which should be borne in mind throughout this report.



MAP 03: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER MAP OF THE COTSWOLDS AONB, SHOWING CHARACTER TYPES AND AREAS
(COURTESY OF LANDSCAPE DESIGN ASSOCIATES)

01 Escarpment Outlier



Cam Long Down, Peaked Down
& Downham Hills
Langley Hill
Oxenton & Dixton Hills
Dumbleton & Alderton Hills
Bredon Hill
Meon & Ebrington Hills
Brailes Hill & Castle Hill

The varied, sometimes steeply sloping topography of these distinctive hills sits detached to the west of the main Cotswold escarpment, rising above the neighbouring vale and offering dramatic, panoramic views away from and into the AONB.

Rough grassland and scrub occur on some sections of their upper slopes, and other steep areas, along with woodland belts and trees. Woodland and hedgerows form interlocking patterns. A network of hedgerows and occasional walls divide the improved pasture and arable farmland of the lower slopes.

Although the outliers themselves are sparsely settled, their hilltops, which are often the site of prehistoric hill forts or other defensive enclosures, are criss-crossed by footpaths that link to the vale villages below.

02 Escarpment



Bath to Beach Farm
Beach Farm to Hillesley
Uley to Coopers Hill
Coopers Hill to Winchcombe
Winchcombe to Dover's Hill
Dover's Hill to Mickleton
Edge Hill

Stretching 52 miles in an almost unbroken line and often cloaked in semi-natural broadleaved woodland, the Escarpment comprises an exposed west-facing slope with a distinct sense of elevation and dramatic views to the west. The continuity of the scarp is interrupted by a series of major valleys and embayments, and rock outcrops often marking the sites of former quarries.

A mosaic of woodland, hedgerows, scrub and isolated trees, and particularly the dramatic beech hangers, give the impression of a well wooded landscape, although the area is also well-suited to pasture and grassland.

Settlements are generally confined to the gentler slopes and in sheltered locations adjacent to spring lines. Roads and tracks rise up the slope, often surrounded by dense vegetation and occupying hollow ways. Numerous prehistoric sites, and follies such as Broadway Tower, sit on promontories and other elevated sections.

03 Rolling Hills and Valleys



Ozleworth Bottom &
Lower Kilcott
Stinchcombe & North Nibley

Although unified by continuity of form, the relatively enclosed and secluded character of the upper sections of these valleys and their narrow bottoms contrasts strongly with the broader and more open nature of the developed areas that meet the Vale beyond. Valleys sides are steep and concave, the upper slopes often dominated by woodland.

Most of the area is under pastoral use, although there are also scattered patches of arable land. Rough, scrubby pasture is often evident on the upper slopes. Fields are generally small in scale, mainly enclosed with hedgerows although post and wire fencing is also evident.

Larger settlements with pronounced urban influences sit at the valley mouths, with smaller and deeply rural settlements in the valley bottoms and on the upper valley slopes. Roads run along the valley bottoms and sides, although some do cut across the slopes, sometimes sunken between high banks.

04 Enclosed Limestone Valley



Cam & Wellow Brook Valleys
Bathampton & Limpley Stoke
Lam Brook & St Catherine's
Brook Valleys
Lower By Brook Valley
Perrymead Slopes

These areas are located to the south, east and north of Bath, and are characterised by enclosed river valleys with steep sides separated by areas of Low Limestone Plateaux and High Wold Dip-Slope. The strong physical enclosure of the valleys results in a secluded character, the sense of which is heightened by significant areas of woodland, some of which is ancient and semi-natural. Areas of pastoral and arable use are interspersed with pasture and scrub. Fields vary in size, and are mainly enclosed with hedgerows with frequent hedgerow trees.

Roads connecting settlements generally follow valley bottoms, with others serving isolated dwellings ascending the valley sides. The presence of canals, railways and mills, a number of which are abandoned, attest to the industrial heritage of the landscape.

05 Settled Valley



Nailsworth
Frome Golden Valley & Stroud

The Settled Valleys comprise areas of relatively narrow, high-sided valleys with steep upper slopes forming an abrupt break of slope with the High Wold and High Wold Dip-Slope.

Land use is predominantly pastoral with scattered areas of arable, mainly enclosed by a network of hedgerow boundaries. Stone walls are confined mainly to the valley bottoms, particularly surrounding settlements. Significant areas of development dominate the valley floors and extend up the valley sides in terraces, lending these areas a particularly urban character. Evidence of a strong industrial past, including communications, infrastructure and mill development, is confined to the valley floors. An extensive road network within the majority of the valleys connect the settlements with the High Wold above.

06 Ironstone Hills and Valleys



Whichford Hills & Valleys
Ratley Hills & Valleys

These two small areas of Ironstone Hills and Valleys are located in the north eastern section of the AONB, forming part of a broader area that extends further east. They comprise an upland area of rolling hills and valleys, with rounded ridgelines and intermittent isolated hills.

Both areas are principally under arable cultivation, although with some improved and permanent pasture, mainly within the valley slopes and bottoms. Fields are medium to large in scale, regular and rectilinear and mainly enclosed by hedgerows with frequent trees.

A settlement pattern of intermittent, nucleated villages and isolated farmsteads gains much of its character from the distinctive iron-bearing stone that make up the underlying geology of the area. Linear networks of local roads follow ridgelines, dropping down into valleys to connect rural settlements. Telecommunication masts are occasionally prominent.

07 High Wold



Nymphsfield & Kingscote Plateau,
& Minchinhampton Common
Bisley Plateau
Cotswolds High Wold Plateau
Rissington Plateau &
Milton Downs
Rollright & Chastleton Plateau
Over Norton Plateau
Edge Hill Ironstone Plateau

The High Wold comprises a broad, elevated, gently undulating plateau dissected by a network of dry valleys with distinctive convex profiles. It is an expansive, large-scale landscape with long views and an impression of cohesion that belies its fragmentation.

Land use is predominantly arable, with a limited amount of permanent and improved pasture. Fields are large and regular. Dry stone walls dominate the landscape with occasional hedgerows, some of which have propagated along the lines of walls. Small plantations and shelterbelts form a part of this geometric pattern.

Although there is much evidence of occupation since ancient times, settlement is sparse and generally limited to small villages, hamlets and isolated farmsteads, linked by roads following the ridge tops. Active and disused limestone quarries occasionally interrupt the landscape.

08 High Wold Valley



Toadsmoor, Holy Brook & Upper
Frome Valleys
Painswick & Slad Valleys
Upper Churn Valley
Upper Coln Valley
Upper Windrush Valley
Upper Dikler Valley

Two types of valley dissect the High Wold. Broad, shallow headwater valleys carry some rivers south-east towards the Thames, with some sections forming interlocking meanders.

Extensive areas of predominantly broadleaved woodland cloak the valley sides, between which, are areas of open land of mainly grassland pasture with pockets of arable that also extend along the valley floors. The valleys are sheltered and visually contained, giving a general impression of intimacy.

Villages occupy secluded locations in the valley bottoms or sides. Farmsteads can be found in the more open section, often linked to farms in the High Wold. Communication routes are generally confined to a single road that runs along the bottom of each valley, with other routes cutting across. The richly pastoral Painswick and Slad valleys are wider and more complex, with intermediate ridges intercepting the main valley form.

09 High Wold Dip-Slope



Sulis Manor Plateau
Bathampton & Claverton Down
Lansdown
Cotswolds High Wold Dip-Slope
Wychwood Forest
West Enstone Uplands

The High Wold Dip-Slope is a transitional landscape, with many of the characteristics of the High Wold and the Dip-Slope Lowland. It is a gentle, rolling landscape dissected by predominantly south-east flowing rivers and punctuated by numerous dry valley formations.

Widespread arable farming lends it a well maintained, productive character, with a strong framework of hedges and woodland defining a complex mosaic of small scale arable and pasture land.

Settlement is sparse, and is generally confined to intermittent, isolated farmsteads and hamlets. There is much evidence of small scale quarrying in 'delves', which are often overgrown, although stone walls are less prevalent than on the High Wold. Where present, the course of old Roman roads has influenced the grain of landscape patterns. The impact of airfields is also notable, as is the influence of large designed parklands.

10 High Wold Dip-Slope Valley



Middle Churn Valley
Middle Coln Valley
Upper/Middle Leach Valley

These valleys, like the High Wold Dip-Slope through which they cut, form a transitional zone between the High Wold Valleys and the Dip-Slope Lowland Valleys. Their well defined concave form is intermittently punctuated by very steep and indented valley sides, dissected by minor watercourses with areas of mainly broadleaved and mixed woodland.

Between the wooded slopes and along the valley bottoms is a predominance of pastoral farmland, with pockets of arable land on the lower slopes.

Villages occupy sheltered locations in valley bottoms, often associated with bridging points. Farmsteads within the more open valley sections link to those in the adjacent High Wold Dip-Slope. Occasional areas of parkland also play a part in defining landscape character. The road network is similar to that of the adjacent High Wold Valleys.

11 Dip-Slope Lowland



South & Mid Cotswolds Lowlands
Stonesfield Lowlands

The Dip-Slope Lowland forms a broad area of gently sloping, undulating lowland with a predominantly south-easterly fall, and provides the final transition between the high Cotswold country and the Thames Valley.

The lowland form is gently, although infrequently, dissected by small watercourses, with the overall impression of a well managed, productive landscape of mixed arable and improved pasture. Medium to large scale regular fields enclosed by hedgerows predominate, although fences and stone walls are not entirely absent.

Intermittent small villages and isolated farmsteads define the pattern of settlement, although there are some larger settlements present. There is also a distinctive pattern of large estates and their associated parks and woodland, some of which are of national importance. Otherwise, woodland is limited to isolated copses and shelter belts.

12 Dip-Slope Lowland Valley



Upper By Brook Valley
Lower Coln Valley
Lower Leach Valley

The distinctive valleys within the Dip-Slope landscape comprise the shallow, open lower reaches of tributaries that drain to the Thames, and the deeply-incised valleys that drain into the Bristol Avon. Both areas present a small scale, intimate and settled character, with long views restricted by topography and woodland.

A mainly pastoral farmland of improved pasture with pockets of arable land extends between intermittently wooded slopes, mainly broadleaved, and along the valley bottoms.

Sequences of villages also occur in the valley bottoms, often associated with bridging points. Farms are occasionally present in the more open sections of the valleys. A limited network of roads either cut across or run along the valley bottoms. Some areas are only accessible on foot, and hence retain a remote, rural character.

13 Low Limestone Plateau



Paulton & Peasedown
St John Ridge
Hinton Charterhouse Plateau

Located immediately to the south of Bath on the southern fringe of the AONB, these small areas of undulating plateau landscape are fragments of a broader area of Low Limestone Plateau that extends south and west towards the Mendips. The plateaux are open in character, with expansive views to distant hills and into the surrounding valleys.

Pastoral and arable fields exist in equal measure. Fields are generally medium-sized and mainly enclosed by hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees. A sparse woodland cover contributes to the overall sense of openness.

Small settlements, scattered farmsteads and individual dwellings are connected by a network of minor roads. The dominance of the sky means that elements such as masts and pylons are highly visible. Likewise some large modern farm buildings that look out of place due to their size, materials and design.

14 Cornbrash Lowlands



Biddestone Lowland Farmland
West Malmesbury Lowland
Farmland

The Cornbrash Lowlands provide the transition from the Dip-Slope Lowland of the south Cotswolds to the flatter, more open landscapes to the south-east, though only two small areas of this character type occur within the AONB.

It is a very gently undulating, rural landscape that offers wide views over productive farmland with vertical elements such as pylons having a strong presence. A network of tributary streams in shallow valleys run south-east to the River Avon. Rich, fertile soils derived from the underlying cornbrash geology support a predominance of arable farming, with some pastoral land bordering water courses. Fields are medium to large in size, bounded by intermittent hedgerows and the occasional stone wall. Woodland is infrequent and mainly confined to geometric plantations.

Nucleated villages, hamlets and farms make up the dispersed pattern of settlement.

15 Farmed Slopes



Vale of Bourton Farmed Slopes
Vale of Moreton Farmed Slopes

Despite sharing many geological features with the Escarpment, the Farmed Slopes have a more subtle profile, although their smooth, gentle landform gives way to a sense of exposure in some areas. It is a transitional landscape, linking the large-scale openness of the High Wold with the lushness of the Pastoral Lowland Vales of Bourton and Moreton. The slopes have a generally consistent north-south orientation, following the lines of the rivers Evenlode and Windrush.

Small, semi-natural woodlands and tree belts can be found along watercourses. Farmland comprises a mixture of pastoral and arable, interspersed by a significant number of historic parks, sited to take advantage of the dramatic landform and extensive views, and often bordered by deciduous woodland. The whole area is unified by a strong network of hedgerows.

16 Broad Floodplain Valley



Lower Windrush Valley
Lower Evenlode Valley

The lower valleys and broad floodplains of the Windrush and Evenlode rivers form a marked contrast with the valleys within the High Wold and High Wold Dip-Slope above. Small in scale and relatively 'busy', the valleys have a well defined profile that limits distant views and creates an impression of intimacy.

Floodplain landscape of valley floors is distinguished by lush wet pasture and meadow, bordered by a patchwork of improved pasture and arable fields. Woodland, rough grassland, copses and shelterbelts add texture. Large fields on the valley plain give way to medium to large fields on the valley sides. Fields are generally defined by a strong framework of hedges with some stone walls, although fencing has begun to encroach. Riverside and floodplain trees fringe the meandering watercourses that support a rich diversity of flora and fauna.

17 Pastoral Lowland Vale



Vale of Bourton
Vale of Moreton

The Pastoral Lowland Vale landscape borders the upper reaches of the rivers Windrush and Evenlode, and their many tributary streams. Whilst the Vale of Bourton is entirely within the bounds of the AONB, the Vale of Moreton extends northward into the Vale of Evesham beyond. It is a soft, flat or gently undulating landscape fringed by the distinctive shallow form of the Farmed Slopes.

Unimproved grassland and wet meadows border the streams, the small fields being bounded by a network of hedgerows. Woodland cover is limited and settlement is sparse.

A network of narrow, winding lanes links a dispersed pattern of historic towns and small villages sited above the flood plain. Although there is evidence of an older landscape, e.g. ridge and furrow field systems, much of the landscape displays the neat pattern of 18th and 19th century enclosure.

18 Settled Unwooded Vale



Vale of Gloucester fringe

Fragments of this character type, which extends westwards to the vale landscape of the River Severn, occur along the central western fringe of the AONB below the escarpment, and the southern edges of the Bredon and Oxenton Outliers.

Mixed arable and pasture dominate the soft, rolling landform enclosed by well maintained hawthorn hedges. There are limited area of deciduous woodland, although field and hedgerow trees give the overall impression of a wooded area.

The landscape is influenced by neighbouring large settlements such as Gloucester and Cheltenham, which has lead to a noticeable amount of 'suburbanisation'. Industry and major transport routes also exert a strong influence on the character of the area, although no such development occurs within the bounds of the AONB. Villages, hamlets and farms within the Vale at the foot of the Escarpment are linked by a network of quiet, winding lanes.

19 Unwooded Vale



Avon Valley
Boyd Valley
Wickwar Vale
Vale of Evesham fringe
Vale of Feldon fringe

An extensive area of Unwooded Vale extends along the western and northern perimeter of the AONB, from Bath to below Stinchcombe Hill then re-commencing in the broad northern and eastern sweep of the Vales of Evesham and Feldon. Narrow strips of the Vale occur along the edges of the AONB, and an area linking the Bredon and Dumbleton Outliers with the Escarpment. Although limited within the AONB, these landscapes form a part of a wider landscape that stretches westwards.

The soft agrarian landscape is wide, open and rolling, although sparsely settled. Areas of wet meadow and narrow floodplain border the many streams and rivers. Hedgerows, some of great antiquity, are well maintained. Mature field trees and hedgerow oaks, riverside trees and small farm woodlands break up what is generally a highly managed agricultural landscape. Remnants of the open field system and of moated sites also occur within the landscape type.