

South Gloucestershire

# Landscape Character Assessment

Supplementary Planning Document

Revised and Proposed for Adoption November 2014



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## Supplementary Planning Document

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**South Gloucestershire**

# Landscape Character Assessment

## Supplementary Planning Document

**Review 2014**

Since its original adoption in 2005, the South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment has been used to inform the assessment and determination of planning applications determined by this Council, and has also been used by the Planning Inspectorate in relevant appeal decisions.

As the English landscape generally evolves only slowly, many of the original descriptions contained in the LCA remain relevant today. However, this 2014 Review has taken account of the following changes:

Since 2005 development and land use changes have resulted in some significant changes to landscapes within some of the character areas. In addition South Gloucestershire's Core Strategy has identified areas for future growth and change, and there are also there are emerging pressures such as for renewable energy generation that can have significant implications for landscape character.

The Natural England National Character Area descriptions have also been reviewed and revised to incorporate information from across the environmental disciplines. South Gloucestershire's landscapes are covered by three of the National Character Area descriptions: the Severn and Avon Vales (No. 106), the Cotswolds (No. 107) and the Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges (No. 118), while there is a visual interrelationship across the estuary with Forest of Dean and Lower Wye (No. 105).

The Landscape Character Assessment has also been reviewed to reflect the current policy context and the Core Strategy in particular.

In addition, the landscape descriptions have been amended where there has been significant change. The primary focus for this review has been on the 'changing landscape' section for each character area, where emerging pressures and proposed changes are highlighted.

The original 2005 document had already taken account of the Historic Landscape Characterisation produced by the former Avon Council; however it did not specifically address biodiversity issues. The opportunity has therefore also been taken to ensure that the key biodiversity characteristics and values of each character area are outlined. As committed to in the 2005 document, high level strategic guidance is also provided to help guide the future evolution of key aspects of each landscape character area.

All Parishes were invited to input to the review of an early draft of this document prior to production of a revised draft. The Landscape Character Assessment Review was also the subject of public consultation alongside the emerging Supplementary Planning Document on Renewable Energy, and for which it provides technical background.

The Review of South Gloucestershire's Landscape Character Assessment was adopted by decision of the Planning, Environment and Transportation committee in November 2014.

Further detail setting out the process for the 2013 -14 Review of the Landscape Character Assessment is set out in the technical background paper published alongside the Landscape Character Assessment.

# Landscape Character Assessment

## Preface

The South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) was originally produced to support the Council's criteria-based landscape and other environmental policies in the South Gloucestershire Local Plan that was adopted in 2006. The LCA was adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), to help in the implementation of these landscape conservation and enhancement policies, and to provide a framework for other environmental initiatives. This approach has stood the test of time and changes in policy context.

This 2014 Review of the LCA is consistent with paragraph 170 of the National Planning Policy Framework (published March 2012), which advocates the use of landscape character assessments, and delivers on the NPPF (para 58) requirement that local plan policies should be based on 'an understanding and evaluation of (the area's) defining characteristics. This review of the LCA seeks to ensure that this SPD remains up to date in line with the NPPF's requirements (para 158). The 'saved' landscape related policies also remain in line with current guidance - being criteria based as recommended in paragraph 113 of the NPPF.

The South Gloucestershire Core Strategy (Adopted December 2014) places a high priority on the conservation and enhancement of the character and quality of the distinctive landscapes of South Gloucestershire.

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

The Council believes that adopting a character-based approach provides a robust and clearly justified set of landscape policies for the entire Council area, rather than just for areas previously protected by local landscape designations. The approach taken accords with with Natural England's guidance.

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

The initial pre 2005 assessment, carried out by Chris Blandford Associates, involved a desk study to review the existing landscape, based on written sources, map based data and previous assessments and was followed by extensive field survey work.

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

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

The 2014 review of the LCA incorporates input from the Council's technical specialist officers and input received via the informal consultation with the Parishes and also formal public consultation. This has highlighted a range of changes and emerging pressures since 2005. This has resulted in amendments principally to the 'Changing Landscapes' sections, but also to the OS base maps, character area descriptions and sketch maps where necessary. The review has also proposed strategic guidance to help secure the conservation and enhancement of the key characteristics of South Gloucestershire's landscapes, and where appropriate steer the future development of new landscapes where major new development is proposed.

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

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

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

**Section One: Introduction** provides information on the overall landscape character assessment, policy context, background, development of the Landscape Character Assessment and a

brief introduction to the landscapes of South Gloucestershire.

**Section Two: Landscape Character Areas** provides detailed information on and strategic guidance for all the 21 landscape character areas within South Gloucestershire.

In addition, Appendices provide information on the Approach and Methodology, an overview of the evolution of South Gloucestershire's landscapes, information on landscape classification and Conformity with Statement of Community Involvement, including stakeholder involvement and the Sustainability Appraisal, as well as an example of the site survey form.

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

# Section 1

## Introduction

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

### 1.1 The Landscape Character Assessment

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

The Landscape Character Assessment provides a statement of the character of South Gloucestershire's landscapes, their distinctive attributes and features, together with an assessment of the changes that are taking place in the landscape and strategic guidance to help steer future evolution. It has been prepared in accordance with Natural England's and Scottish Natural Heritage's Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002) and is also consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012) and its accompanying Planning Practice Guidance.

### 1.2 Policy Context

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) was signed by the UK Government in February 2006 and became binding from March 2007. It promotes landscape protection, management and planning as well as European co-operation on landscape issues. It applies to all landscapes, towns and villages as well as to open countryside, the coast and inland areas: and to ordinary or even degraded landscapes as well as those that are afforded protection.

The ELC defines landscape as 'an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors' (Council of Europe 2000), and highlights the importance of developing landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and creation of landscapes and sets procedures for stakeholder involvement in policy development and implementation.

Natural England's Framework for Implementation (of the ELC) in England (October 2007) points out that 'Landscape is a meeting ground between past, present and future as well as between natural and cultural influences. It has both a physical and emotional presence and sets a context for people's lives. It points out that English landscapes have undergone past, often dramatic, change, and that future landscapes will continue to be influenced by changes in climate, agriculture, housing and development needs, and by progress towards a low carbon society. Also that the ELC provides a challenge to improve perception, understanding and care for all landscapes including through public involvement and through the integration of policies and actions. Article 6 which sets out specific measures includes the identification and analysis of landscape characteristics and the forces for change, as well as the definition of landscape objectives involving interested parties and the population concerned.

Natural England state that the UK is recognised as already putting many of the principles of the ELC into practice, including the National Character Area Map of England (referred to in this LCA) and using Landscape Character Assessment to inform local policy making. Natural England's most recent Action Plan promoted landscape character led policies embedded in regulation and advice at all levels, including for example 'All landscapes matter'. South Gloucestershire's LCA is therefore considered to be consistent with the ELC and current Natural England advice.

Nationally, South Gloucestershire's LCA delivers on the NPPF recommendation (para 170) that landscape character assessments should be prepared and integrated with assessment of historic landscape character and landscape sensitivity to change.

The National Planning Policy Framework (published March 2012) (NPPF) emphasises the importance of conserving and enhancing character. For example, it sets out a list of core land-use planning principles (para 17) that should underpin both plan making and decision taking, including the need to 'take account of the different... character of different areas... (and) recognis(e) the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside', 'contribut(ing) to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and conserv(ing) heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to quality of life of this and future generations'. Section 11 of the NPPF also sets out policy to 'Conserve and enhance the natural environment', and para 58 states that planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments 'respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation'.

The NPPF (para 64) also states that 'Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions'.

NPPF policy on AONB's is of relevance to the designated area of the Cotswolds and its setting. Here, great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty (para 115) and paragraph 116 states that planning permission for major development should be refused except exceptional circumstances.

The Cotswolds AONB has its own LCA, which provides relevant context for this South Gloucestershire LCA.

Consistent with international and national policy, this Council's overall objective in respect of the landscape, is to conserve and enhance the character, diversity, natural beauty and amenity of the landscape for its own sake and to improve degraded areas.

In line with this, the adopted South Gloucestershire's Local Plan: Core Strategy, prioritises the conservation and enhancement of the landscapes of South Gloucestershire, including their heritage and biodiversity values. The following policies are of particular relevance:

- **CS1**, which seeks to secure the delivery of high quality design for all new development and makes specific reference to the need, where relevant, to take account of this LCA document.
- **CS2**: Green Infrastructure, **CS9**: Managing the Environment and Heritage, and **CS34**: Rural Areas, all make specific reference to the need to conserve and enhance landscape character and features.
- **CS3**: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Generation seeks to ensure that in areas covered by national designations and areas of local landscape value, such projects 'do not individually or cumulatively compromise the objectives of the designations, especially with regard to landscape character, visual impact and residential amenity',

- **CS16:** the density of new development should be informed by the character of the local area, and
- **CS17:** where building on gardens is proposed it should not adversely affect the character of an area,
- **CS19:** rural housing proposals should be modest in scale and in keeping with the form and character of the settlement and local landscape setting.

The issue of landscape character is also relevant to the formulation of proposals for new development, including in relation to the location of new development (**CS5**), infrastructure and developer contributions (**CS6**), the North and East Fringe and the growth areas, as well as Major Infrastructure Projects (policies **CS25 - CS33** inclusive and **CS36** and **CS37**).

Alongside the Core Strategy, number of policies contained in the South Gloucestershire's Local Plan Adopted January 2006 (subsequently referred to as the Local Plan or SGLP) remain in place as 'saved policies'. These include policies concerned with the conservation and enhancement of the landscapes across the Authority area, including L1, L2, L5 and D1. In particular, L1 sets out the Council's policy for the protection and enhancement of all the landscapes within the Plan area:

## Policy L1 states that:

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

A.

Those attributes of the landscape which make a significant contribution to the character of the landscape are conserved and where possible enhanced; and

B.

Those features in or of the landscape which make a significant contribution to the character or distinctiveness of the locality are retained, protected and managed in a manner which ensures their long-term viability; and

C.

The amenity of the landscape is conserved and where possible enhanced.

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

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

South Gloucestershire's Landscape Character Assessment is specifically referred to in policy CS1 of the Core Strategy, and para. 4.17 of saved Local Plan policy L1 which states that the document will provide the broad context for development proposals and will be used when assessing the appropriateness and / or the impact of proposals for development.

The Council will therefore expect planning applications, whether outline or detailed, to demonstrate how the Landscape Character Assessment has been taken into account in the development of proposals. In addition due to the fine grain nature of South Gloucestershire landscapes this LCA is strategic in nature and it will therefore be important that developers carry out their own more detailed landscape and visual assessment for a particular site, at an appropriate scale and level of detail.

It may be that in future Neighbourhood Plans will bring forward policies and proposals for which the consideration of landscape character will be a relevant consideration.

The Landscape Character Assessment was originally adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to support policies within the SGLP. This 2014 Review has been adopted to support and deliver on policies contained in the NPPF and Core Strategy, as well as relevant saved Local Plan policies.

### **Other relevant guidance and policies**

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

countryside and design policies contained within a wide range of planning policies, from national policy and guidance through to Local Plan policies.

Local Plan 'saved' policies:

- Policy L1 - Landscape Protection and Enhancement
- Policy L2 - Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Policy L4 - Forest of Avon
- Policy L5 - Open Areas within the Existing Urban Areas and Defined Settlements
- Policy L7 to L9 - Sites of and National Nature Conservation Interest, Sites of Regional and Local Nature Conservation Interest & Species Protection
- Policy L10 - Historic Parks and Gardens and Battlefields
- Policy L11 - Archaeology
- Policy L12 - Areas
- Policy L13 - Listed Buildings
- Policy L16 - Protecting the Best Agricultural Land
- Policy EP3 - Coastal Defences
- Policy GB2 – Proposed Expansion of the Green Belt: Land at Abbots Road, Hanham
- Policy LC10 - Quiet Enjoyment of the Countryside

Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan (March 2014)

City of Bath World Heritage Site Setting: Supplementary Planning Document August 2014 (relates to Ashwicke Ridges Character Area, part of which falls within the World Heritage Site setting)

Figure 1 gives an indication of some of the designations that apply to the landscapes of South Gloucestershire.

### 1.3 Background to a character-based approach to Landscape Policy

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

The main reasons for their conclusions were that:

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

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

The South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment is therefore considered to be an important tool in the implementation of character-based landscape and other environmental policies in the Local Plan, and is consistent with both international and more recently updated national policy including the NPPF.

### 1.4 Development of the Landscape Character Assessment

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

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

**Evaluation:** Informed judgements were then made to analyse and evaluate each area, looking at their landscape condition, recent changes and potential future trends for change, together with the sensitivity of areas to various types and levels of future change including land use, management and development changes.

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

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

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

Further details of the approach and methodology of this Landscape Character Assessment are included in Appendix 1.

Details of the stakeholder involvement and public consultation process in the development of the Landscape Character Assessment are included at Appendix 4.

### **1.5 Review of the Landscape Character Assessment 2014**

Since the South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment remains in line with national policy and best practice, and has proved effective in use through the development management process, the 2014 review has focussed only on updating the landscape character descriptions and sketch maps where there has been significant change on the ground. In addition, the 'changing landscape' section has been reviewed to ensure it is in line with the Core Strategy, in particular in relation to significant new development, such as the growth areas, the national policy designation of a site for the development of a new nuclear power station adjacent to the existing station at Oldbury.

It has also been reviewed to ensure that it reflects current pressures on the landscapes of South Gloucestershire as seen through planning enquiries and applications, and other change.

### **1.6 Scope of the Landscape Character Assessment**

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

### **1.7 Landscape Strategy**

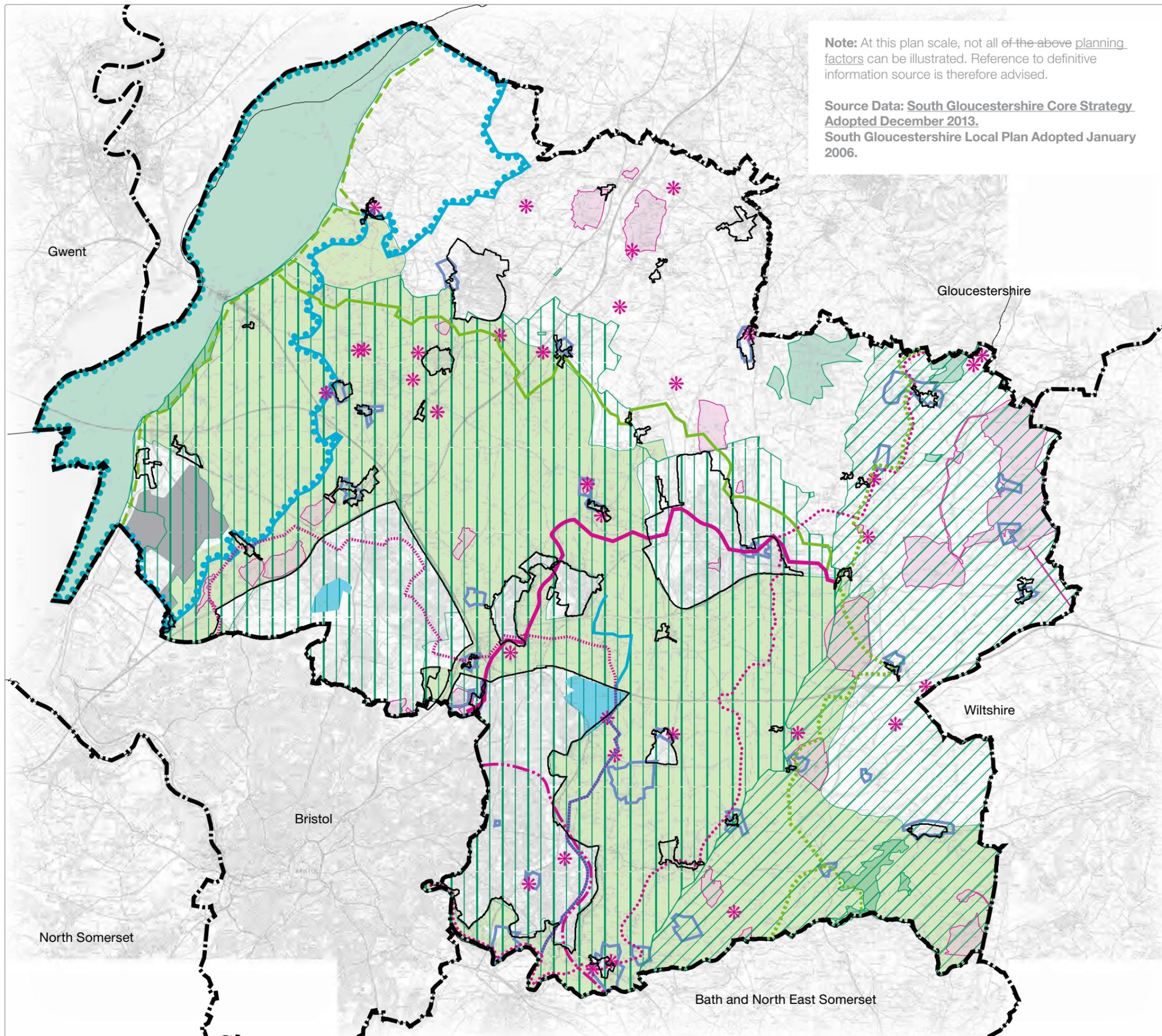
As was intended following the adoption of the original LCA, the 2014 review has also taken the opportunity to propose strategic guidance for the future evolution of each character area. This has largely been a desk based process based on the knowledge and development management experience of the Council's landscape architects, heritage and biodiversity officers which involves both desk based and extensive site work. It is proposed that the strategy is validated through public and stakeholder consultation on this review document.

Where statements regarding the future management of landscapes and features were made within the descriptive sections of the 2005 Landscape Character Assessment, these have been deleted and moved to the new Landscape Strategy sections.

# Landscape evolution

**Note:** At this plan scale, not all of the above planning factors can be illustrated. Reference to definitive information source is therefore advised.

**Source Data:** South Gloucestershire Core Strategy Adopted December 2013.  
South Gloucestershire Local Plan Adopted January 2006.



- South Gloucestershire Boundary
- Natural & Cultural Heritage**
- ▨ Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- ▨ Forest of Avon
- SSSI's and Sites of International Nature Conservation Interest
- Registered Historic Parks, Gardens and Battlefields
- \* Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- Conservation Areas
- Environmental Protection**
- ⋯ Coastal Zone
- Green Belt**
- Green Belt
- Economy and Settlement**
- Settlement Boundaries
- Major Employment Area with Historic Planning Permission
- Major Recreational Routes**
- Severn Way
- ⋯ Cotswold Way
- Frome Valley Walkway
- Jubilee Way
- Dramway
- ⋯ Monarch's Way
- ⋯ Limestone Link
- ⋯ Community Forest Path
- ⋯ Bristol & Bath Railway Path

0 5km



**Figure 1**  
Planning Context

## 1.8 Introduction to South Gloucestershire's Landscapes

South Gloucestershire is a large unitary authority covering approximately 49,700 hectares. It is situated along and includes part of, the Severn Estuary to the west and the Cotswolds to the east. To the south it encompasses the urban fringes of Bristol. The context is illustrated on Figure 2.

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

The South Gloucestershire area has a predominately rural, agricultural landscape greatly influenced by large scale scarp, ridges, vales, levels and estuary landforms / regional features, overlain by a variety of land cover, in places comprising unique natural or historic features.

The quality of agricultural land varies across South Gloucestershire, however the majority is grade 3, with significant areas of grade 2 and some areas of grade 1 land including along the M32 corridor and west of Winterbourne/Frampton Cotterell.

The landscapes of South Gloucestershire have many contrasts ranging from the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Severn Estuary (SSSI), to the urban landscape within the edge of Bristol. Here the landscape is undergoing significant change, with recent large areas of new residential, industrial and commercial development, such as Bradley Stoke, Emerson's Green and Kingswood, as well as the large retail and commercial development at Cribbs Causeway.

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

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

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

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

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

# Figure 2

## Context

-  South Gloucestershire Boundary
-  Main Settlements
-  Adjacent Authority Boundaries
-  Railway Line/Station
-  **M4** Motorway
-  **A46** 'A' Roads
-  Other Roads



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## 1.9 Development of the Landscape

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

A review of the variations in the physical factors of geology, soils, topography and drainage, how these have influenced landscape character and man's influence upon it, through agricultural practices and settlement pattern in particular, often driven by economic demands, is provided at Appendix 1.

Present evidence of historic evolution can be subtle, resulting from archaeology, cultural associations and landscape history, but still influence the way the landscape is perceived today. Other influences, such as settlement, infrastructure, communications and mineral exploitation are more obvious and have left more significant evidence within the landscape. 20th and 21st century commercial, residential and light industrial development, as well as changes in agricultural practice, have also had a marked effect on the more recent evolution of the landscape and the character of the landscape today.

The importance of the physical and historical features is often reflected in their national or local designations.

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

The physical features and elements in the landscapes across South Gloucestershire are discussed and illustrated in Appendix 2, together with the historical and more recent landscape influences. An analysis of the landscape components formed the basis for a definition of landscape character types and landscape character areas contained in the main body of this document. This section also discusses broadly some of the known changes and potential future changes which may affect the continuing evolution of the landscape and, therefore, its landscape character, in the 21st century.

## 1.10 National Character Areas (NCAs)

Natural England's National Character Areas have now replaced the Countryside Agency's Character of England regional landscape character areas showing the diversity of the landscape at a national scale. The National Character Areas divide England into 159 natural areas, each defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and economic and cultural activity. The profiles for each character area were updated in 2012/3 to pull together information across environmental disciplines, to identify key opportunities and context for local decision making and action. The character area maps (which remain unchanged from the Countryside Area boundaries) and the descriptions provide the top tier of landscape character assessment.

Within South Gloucestershire there are three national character areas, as identified in the National Map.

These include:

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

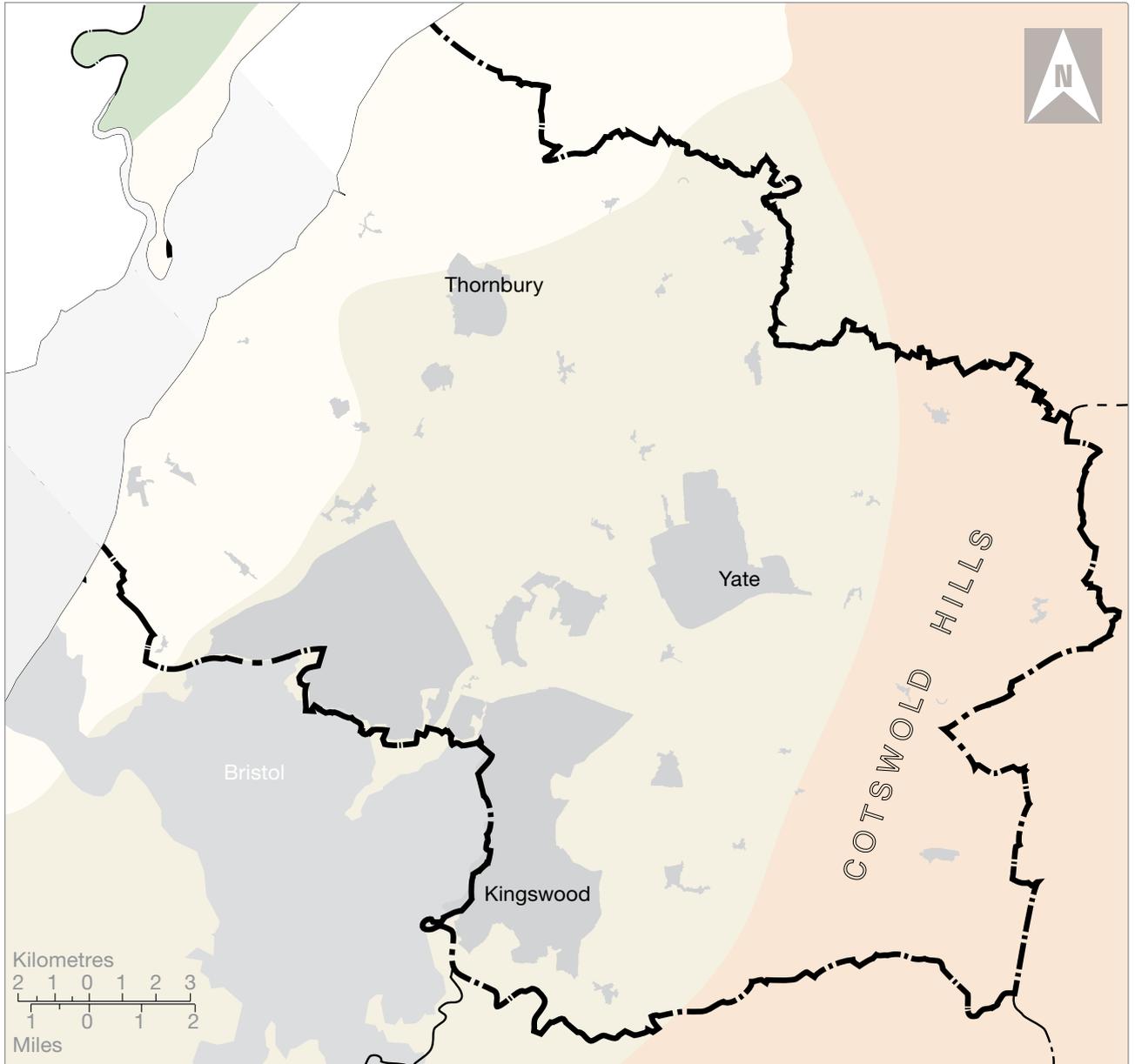
In addition:

- Forest of Dean and Lower Wye (No. 105) character area is visible from and forms part of the setting to South Gloucestershire, across the Severn Estuary to the west.

For further information please visit the National Character Areas section of the Natural England web site <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications/nca/default.aspx>

These are illustrated in Figure 3, and those key characteristics and opportunities that are considered to be of most relevance to South Gloucestershire's landscapes are summarised below.

# Character overview



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>- - - - -</b> South Gloucestershire Boundary | <b>- - - - -</b> National Character Area   |
| Main Settlements and Large scale industry       | Forest of Dean and Lower Wye (No. 105)     |
|   | Severn and Avon Vales (No.106)             |
|   | Cotswolds (No. 107)                        |
|   | Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges (No. 118) |

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**Severn and Avon Vales (no. 106)**

- A diverse range of flat and gently undulating landscapes strongly influenced
- and united by the Severn...
- Prominent outliers that break up the low-lying landscape.
- Woodland is sparsely distributed across this landscape but a well wooded impression is provided by frequent hedgerow trees, parkland and surviving traditional orchards.
- Small pasture fields and commons are prevalent in the west with a regular pattern of parliamentary enclosure in the east. Fields on the floodplains are divided by ditches (called rhynes south of Gloucester) fringed by willow pollards and alders.
- Pasture and stock rearing predominate on the floodplain and on steeper slopes, with a mixture of livestock rearing, arable, market gardening and hop growing elsewhere.
- Unimproved neutral grassland (BAP lowland meadow)... Along the main rivers, floodplain grazing marsh is prevalent. Fragments of unimproved calcareous grassland and acidic grasslands are also found.
- The River Severn flows broadly and deeply between fairly high banks, north to south...
- A strong historic time line is visible in the landscape...
- Highly varied use of traditional buildings materials, (related to local sources).
- Many ancient market towns and large villages are located along the rivers, (with) ... churches standing as prominent features in the relatively flat landscape.

The Character Area profile identifies Statements of Environmental Opportunity that include the following:

- **SEO 1** Protect and manage the landscape, heritage and biodiversity associated with the Severn Estuary, the river valleys and other hydrological features, planning for a landscape scale expansion of wetlands, intertidal habitats and unimproved grasslands along river floodplains through, restoration, expansion and re-linkage of existing remnant areas of semi natural habitat.
- **SEO 2** Seek to safeguard and enhance this area's distinctive patterns of field boundaries, ancient hedgerows, settlements, orchards, parkland, small woodlands, chases, commons and floodplain management with their strong links to past land use and settlement history, and for the benefits this will bring to soil erosion, soil quality and biodiversity.
- **SEO 3** Reinforce the existing landscape structure as part of any identified growth of urban areas, hard infrastructure and other settlements ensuring quality green infrastructure is incorporated enhancing health, access, recreation, landscape, biodiversity and geodiversity.
- **SEO 4** Protect geological exposures and maintain, restore and expand semi natural habitats throughout the agricultural landscape, linking them together to create a coherent and resilient habitat network enabling ecosystems to adapt to climate change, and
- Enhance and manage the relationship between access to the environment and conservation of the landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and historic qualities of this area.

**Cotswolds (no. 107)**

- Dramatic limestone scarp rising above adjacent lowlands with steep combs, and outliers... and dip slope that has influenced drainage, soils, vegetation, land use and settlement.
- Arable farming dominates... the high wold and dip slope, while permanent pasture prevails on the scarp with pockets of limestone grassland
- Drystone walls define the pattern of fields
- Ancient beech hangars line stretches of the upper scarp slopes, and scattered blocks of plantation on the high wold and dip slope.
- large areas of common land are characteristic of the scarp and dip slopes
- Rich history from Neolithic barrows, iron-age hill forts and Roman roads and villas to deserted medieval villages, grand country houses, cloth mills and Second World War airfields. The field patterns largely reflect both the medieval open field system, with fossilised areas of ridge and furrow, and later planned enclosures.
- Strong sense of unity and harmony from the use of locally quarried limestone as a building material.
- Prominent natural and built features in the landscape including (e.g. in S Glos Hawkesbury Monument)
- Safeguard and conserve the historic environment, cultural heritage and geodiversity that illustrate the history, evolution, foundations, land use and settlement of the Cotswolds landscape, and allow access to and interpretation of the relationship between natural processes and human influences.
- Protect, maintain and expand the distinctive character of the Cotswolds and the network of semi-natural and arable habitats, including limestone grassland, beech woods ... to strengthen ecological and landscape connectivity, support rare species and allow for adaptation to climate change.
- Safeguard and manage soil and water resources, allowing naturally functioning hydrological processes to maintain water quality and supply; reduce flooding; and manage land to reduce soil erosion and water pollution and to retain and capture carbon, and
- Manage the recreational and tourism opportunities to enhance enjoyment and understanding of the landscape's inspirational, diverse, open, tranquil and 'rural' qualities.
- Plan for the creation of new landscapes around settlements on the periphery of the area and inappropriate development within the area. Reinforce the existing landscape structure as part of any identified growth of urban areas, hard infrastructure and other settlements, ensuring that quality green infrastructure is incorporated enhancing health, access, recreation, landscape, biodiversity and geodiversity.

The Character Area profile identifies Statements of Environmental Opportunity that include the following:

- Protect and enhance the highly distinctive farmed landscape, retaining the balance between arable, pastoral and wooded elements and the open expansive views particularly from the scarp, high wold and dip slope.

**Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges (no. 118)**

- A varied landform of low lying shallow vales that contrast sharply with high open downland ridges, and reflects the underlying varied geology including coal measures
- The River Avon and its often steep sided valley, with woodland on steeper slopes
- Livestock rearing with arable on flatter land
- Settlements dating from the medieval period, clustered around springheads of the Cotswold scarp. Scattered settlement in the vales.
- Local ashlar as a building material in older village buildings, gentry houses and mansions.
- Motorways, commercial and residential areas occupy a significant area, including at Cribbs Causeway, Aztec West and Abbey Wood.
- The Character Area profile identifies Statements of Environmental Opportunity that include the following:
  - **SEO 1:** Conserve and manage the distinction between small rural settlements and the densely urban city of Bristol, the urban fringe transition zone and the commuter settlements; and ensure that new development is sensitively designed to contribute to settlement character, reduce the impact of the urban fringe and provide well-designed green infrastructure to enhance recreation, biodiversity and water flow regulation.
  - **SEO 2:** Protect and manage the strong sense of history and many historic assets ranging from prehistoric barrows to the mining legacy .. and the many varied geological exposures within the geologically significant landscape, to enable recreation and access, education, tourism and continued enjoyment of the heritage of the area.
  - **SEO 3:** Conserve and sustainably manage the gentle clay vales and limestone ridges and downs of the rural agricultural landscape and enhance the network of semi-natural habitats, linking them together to create a coherent and resilient ecological network, enabling ecosystems to adapt both to climate change and for the benefits to landscape, biodiversity, water flow, water quality, soil quality, soil erosion, rural heritage and culture.
  - **SEO 4:** Protect and manage the landscape, heritage and biodiversity associated with the River Avon corridor and other river valleys..., and
- Maintaining characteristic settlement patterns of the ridges and vales and encouraging sensitive development or alterations in villages, using vernacular materials to maintain their local and rural character.
- Conserve and provide interpretation for the area's rich and complex industrial heritage...
- Manage the recreational and tourism opportunities of the countryside surrounding Bristol to improve opportunities for enjoyment and understanding of the area's heritage and countryside... for their inspirational and diverse qualities.
- Landscape opportunities identified also include the restoration, maintenance and consolidation of areas of semi-natural grassland, the conservation and active management of woodland and hedgerows, the retention of rural character in villages.
- The associations with literary figures include Wordsworth and Coleridge as well as JK Rowling, author of the 'Harry Potter' books who was born at Chipping Sodbury.

**Forest of Dean and Lower Wye (no. 105)**

- Picturesque views outwards, including across the Severn Estuary to the Cotswold Hills, providing attractiveness for tourism and recreation
- A pastoral landscape with some dairying along the edge of the Severn and Avon Vale.
- A rich historic environment including the Anglo-Saxon earthwork known as Offa's Dyke that ends near the original Severn Bridge
- Main access routes including the M48

The Character Area profile identifies Statements of Environmental Opportunity that include the following:

- Protect and enhance assemblages of internationally important species associated with the River Severn estuarine SAC...

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

# Section 2

## Landscape Character Areas

**Landscape character areas are unique areas which have their own particular identity. This section provides the detailed mapped and written information on and presents a strategy to guide the future evolution of each of the landscape character areas that make up South Gloucestershire.**

### Introduction

This section describes in detail the 21 landscape character areas in South Gloucestershire as shown on Figure 3a. Following the identification of relevant National Character Areas, and identification of Landscape Types found in South Gloucestershire (as set out in Appendix 2), this is the final stage in the division of the landscape into a hierarchy of areas of similar characteristics. They are the result of a more detailed assessment of South Gloucestershire's landscapes and identify unique areas which have their own particular identity.

**It is important to recognise however that this Landscape Character Assessment provides strategic guidance on an area by area basis, setting a framework against which proposals for change may be assessed. Detailed and site specific assessments of the landscape context of individual sites will often be necessary to inform the development of proposals for new development and/or any other changes in land use or landscape management.**

**Figure 3a which shows** the location of the landscape character areas that cover South Gloucestershire, while Figure 3b shows the character areas in relation to Parish boundaries.

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

- **Key Plan**  
illustrating the location of each landscape character area in the context of South Gloucestershire and relative to other character areas.
- **Sketch Map**  
providing a "mental map" of each area, illustrating principally the landform and drainage pattern, with other key features such as woodland, settlement, roads etc. indicated where appropriate and where scale of map allows. Photograph viewpoints are also identified.
- **Summary Sentence**  
which encapsulates the overall character of each individual area.
- **Key Characteristics**  
comprising a series of bullet points summarising the principal landscape and visual characteristics of an area. Whilst these bullets largely comprise features or attributes that make a positive contribution to local character or distinctiveness, in some instances they also include features which have had a negative impact, but which none the less, by their presence, have a significant influence on local character.
- **Location**  
includes descriptions of boundaries and the relationship of the area to surrounding/ adjacent landscape character areas.

- **Physical Influences**

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

- **Land Cover**

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

- **Biodiversity**

A summary of the key habitats and/species that characterise each area, along with a summary of the national, international designations and where appropriate local designations.

- **Settlement and Infrastructure**

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

The key road and railway networks are described, together with broad references to the character of the minor road links. Major recreational roads through each area, which include national and local trails for pedestrians, cyclists and/or equestrians are described (the sections of Circular Rides described are specifically for equestrian use), together with general reference to the rest of the public rights of way network.

Whilst these routes rarely impact on the character of an area themselves (although they may follow or be bounded by historic features in the landscape), they provide the

means of access into and opportunity to experience, the countryside described.

The location of powerlines and other structures are also described.

- **Landscape Character**

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

- **The Changing Landscape**

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

- **Landscape Strategy**

Derived from a review of the policy context, the key characteristics of each area and the analysis of change, a series of bullet points set a high level strategy to guide the future evolution of each character area.

- **Photographs**

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

- **Landscape Character Area Boundary Map**

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

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

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

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

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

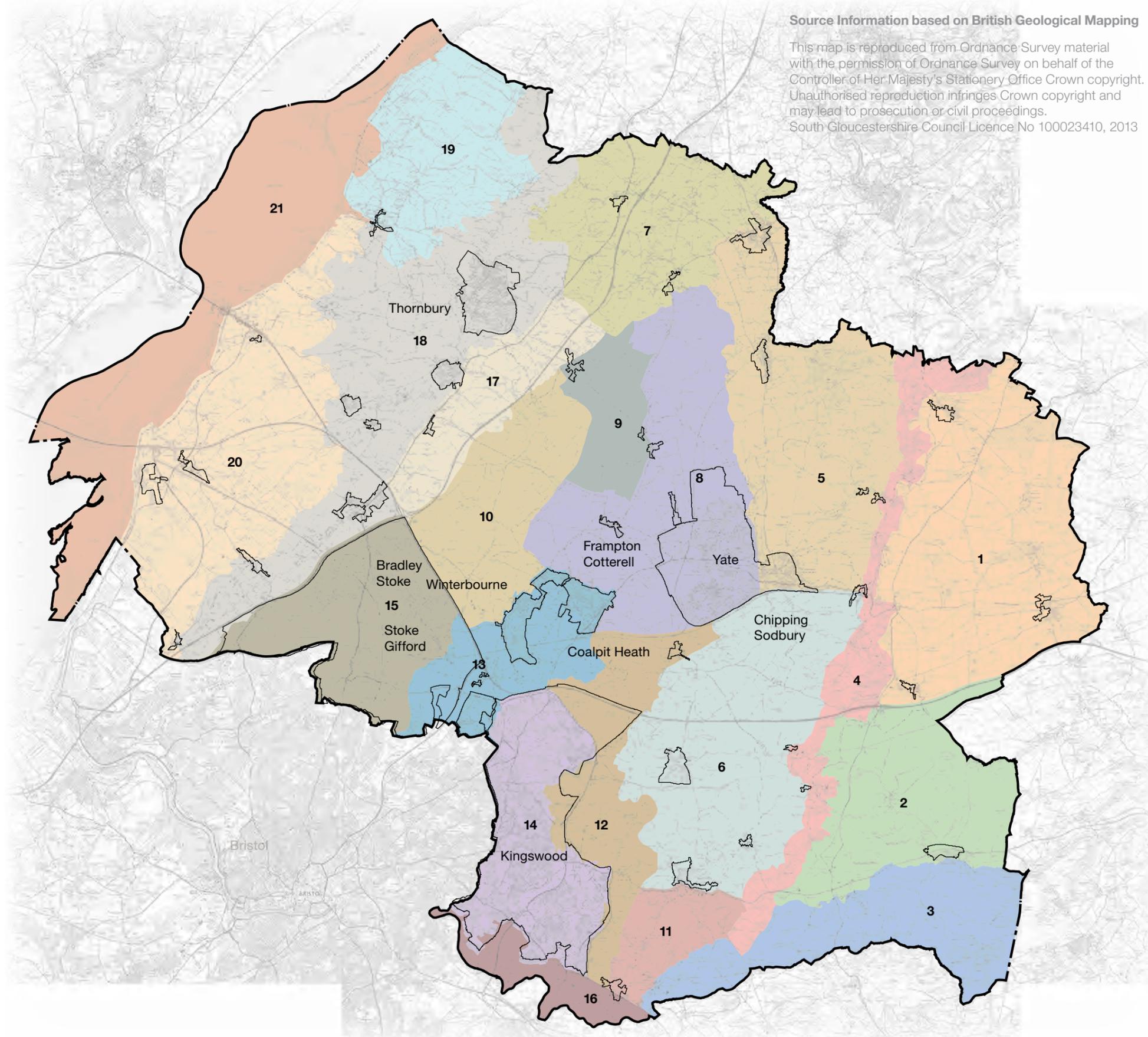
Due to the transitional nature of many of the landscape character area boundaries and the fact that landscape characteristics or features within one landscape character area may visually influence an adjoining landscape character area, it is important when looking at a particular area or site that an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

- **The Glossary of Terms, located in Section 3 of this document, provides further explanation and definition of the various terms used throughout this section of the report.**

## Character overview

**Source Information based on British Geological Mapping**

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-  South Gloucestershire Boundary
-  Badminton Plateau (1)
-  Marshfield Plateau (2)
-  Ashwicke Ridges (3)
-  Cotswold Scarp (4)
-  Wickwar Ridge & Vale (5)
-  Pucklechurch Ridge & Boyd Valley (6)
-  Falfield Vale (7)
-  Yate Vale (8)
-  Tytherington Plain (9)
-  Earthcott Vale (10)
-  Golden Valley (11)
-  Westerleigh Vale & Oldland Ridge (12)
-  Frome Valley (13)
-  Kingswood (14)
-  Patchway & Filton (15)
-  Avon Valley (16)
-  Rudgeway & Tytherington Ridge (17)
-  Severn Ridges (18)
-  Oldbury Levels (19)
-  Pilning Levels (20)
-  Severn Shoreline & Estuary (21)
-  Major areas of settlement



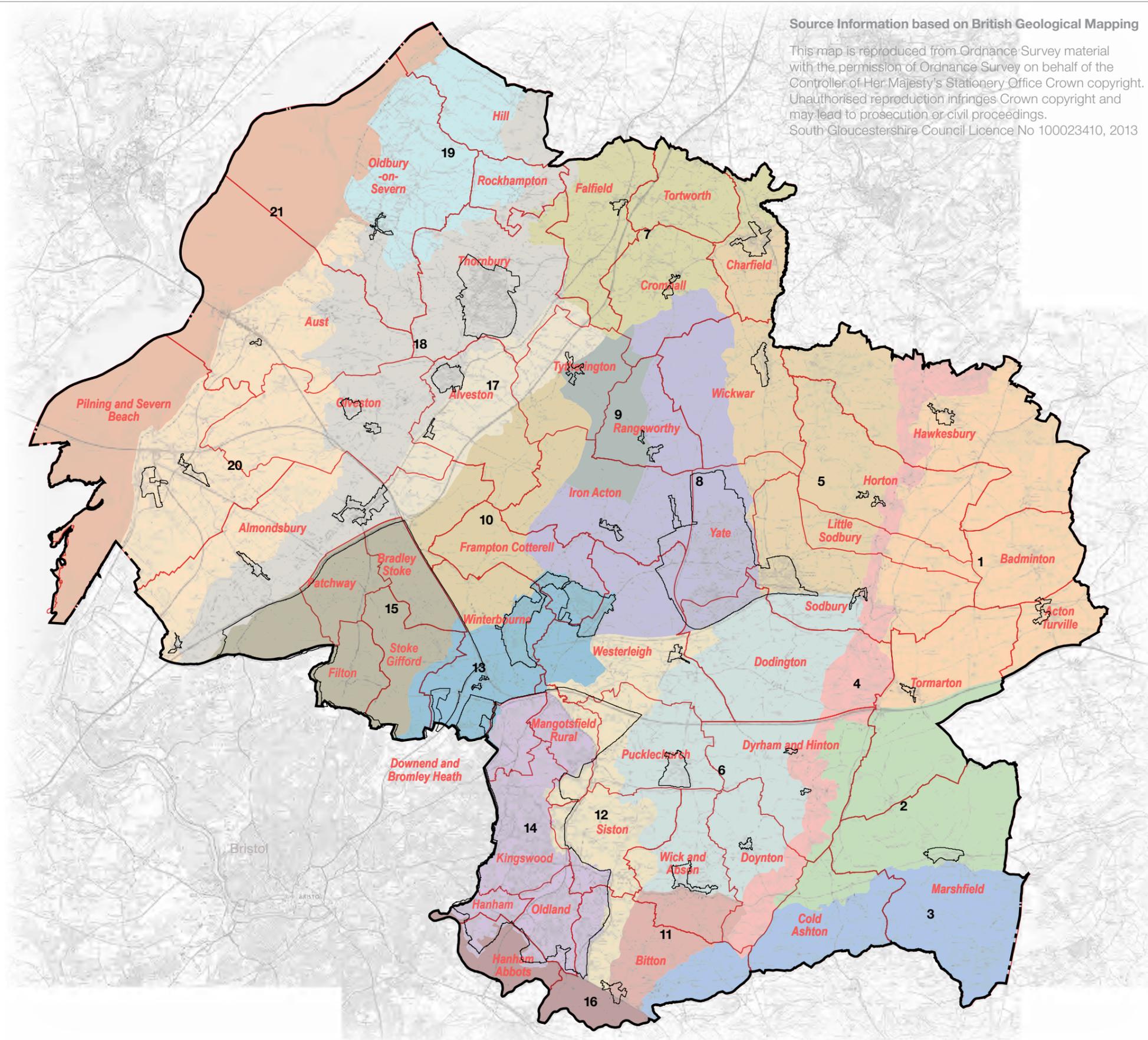
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**Figure 3a**  
Landscape Character Areas

# Character overview

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- Frome Valley (13)
- Kingswood (14)
- Patchway & Filton and the Stokes (15)
- Avon Valley (16)
- Rudgeway & Tytherington Ridge (17)
- Severn Ridges (18)
- Oldbury Levels (19)
- Pilning Levels (20)
- Severn Shoreline & Estuary (21)
- Major areas of settlement



**Figure 3b**  
Landscape Character Areas  
with Parish Boundaries