



# Area 10

## Earthcott Vale

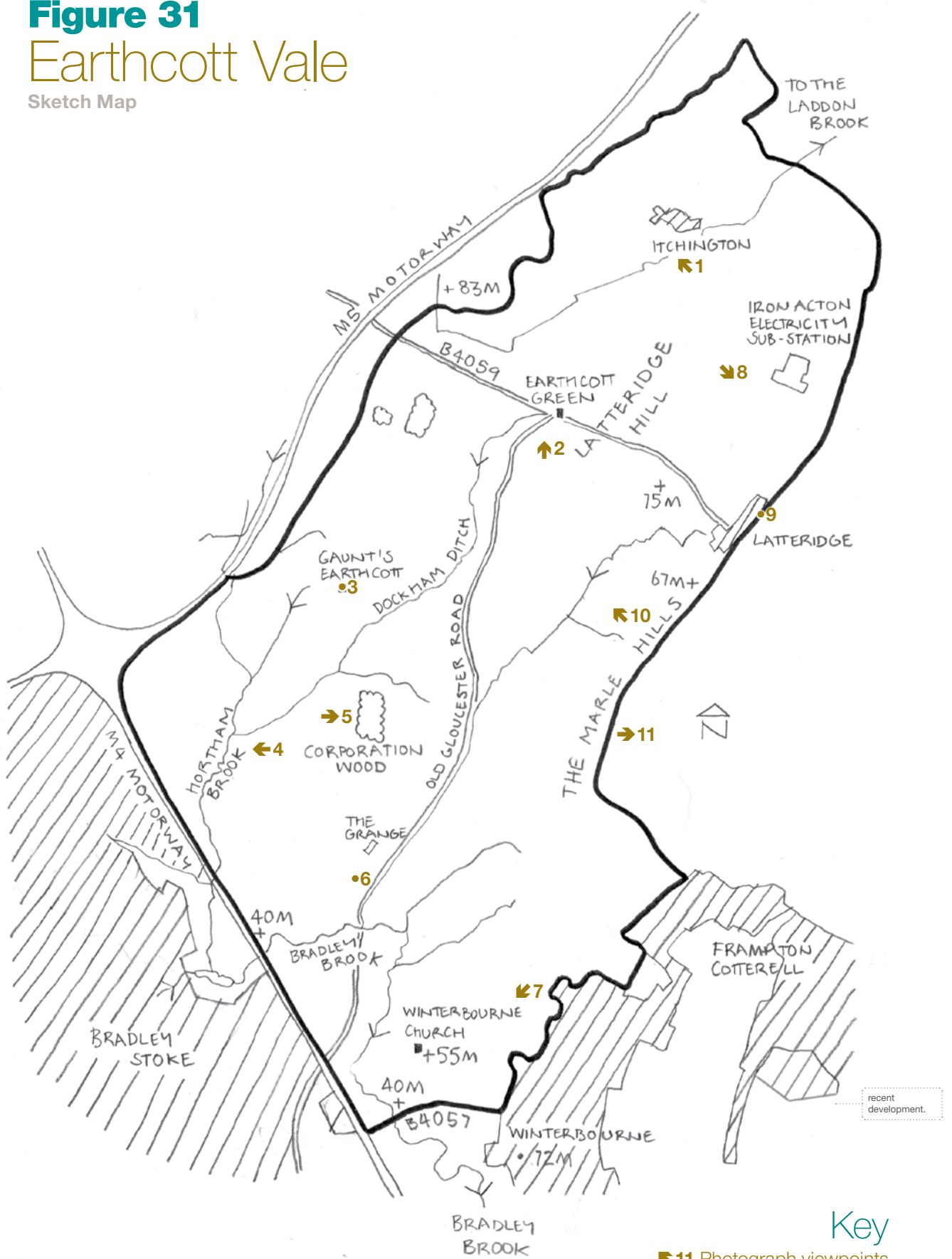


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# Figure 31 Earthcott Vale

Sketch Map



Key

➔ 11 Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

# Area 10

## Earthcott Vale

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



## Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating shallow vale with low ridges to the east at Latteridge Hill, The Marle Hills and Winterbourne, with small scale valleys to the south and small plateau area to the south west.
- Land cover of medium to small sized regular or irregular shaped pasture and arable fields, with some enlarged fields to the west.
- Several areas of calcareous and neutral grassland at Common Alm / Gypsies Platt provide attractive features in the landscape and support a diverse range of flora including areas of species-rich grassland, while the arable land provides nesting opportunities and winter foraging for a variety of farmland birds including Amber and Red Listed species.
- Fields are bordered by hedgerows that provide connectivity of habitat, varying from thick, clipped to overgrown or intermittent in places, with dense riparian vegetation in the south.
- The area is dissected by a number of watercourses with associated bankside vegetation that provide habitat and wildlife corridors for a range of species.
- Pennant sandstone walls define some fields and lanes near Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell, with more limited limestone or Pennant sandstone walls associated with properties and settlement elsewhere.
- Broadleaf woodland is relatively limited with a few areas scattered around the west, including one with standing water. Mature hedgerow trees are frequent in the north and west and variable elsewhere.
- Settlement is limited, with traditional scattered farms, houses & hamlets, largely built of limestone in the west and Pennant sandstone in the east, associated with the narrow minor roads/lanes, which cross and intersect the area.
- Winterbourne Church and Court form a local landmark and North Woods Park has a local influence within a small valley, both to the south of the area.
- Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell settlement edges define sections of the area's boundary. Bradley Stoke and the Bristol urban edge beyond the character area have some visual influence over the south western landscape.

## Key Characteristics

- The south west has a concentration of recreational land use comprising a golf course, water sports, rugby ground and horse paddocks.
- Traffic on the M4 motorway and associated infrastructure has a local effect in this area.
- Land raising operations adjacent to the M4/M5 interchange and along the M4 corridor have formed significant man-made landforms, some with artificial profiles covered by rough grassland or scrub.
- Numerous powerlines and associated pylons cross the area and are visible horizontal and vertical elements. They converge on the Iron Acton sub-station to the north east.
- This character area includes the site of South Gloucestershire's first consented wind farm, proposed to comprise three 100m tall turbines to be located to the northeast of Earthcott Green and west of the Iron Acton Substation.

### Location

The Earthcott Vale landscape character area is located in central South Gloucestershire, to the north east of Bristol.

The south west boundary is strongly defined by the M4, with the urban edge of Bristol beyond.

The north west boundary marks a transitional area, with a subtle change in landform and vegetation cover between the shallow vale of this area and the gently rising Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge to the west.

The north and north east boundary also marks a transition between the more sloping ground and frequent tree cover of this area, compared with the more open and flatter Tytherington Plain beyond.

The eastern boundary marks a subtle transition between this sloping vale and the adjacent Yate Vale, following The Marle Hills and then the settlement edges of Frampton Cotterell and Winterbourne to the south east. (See Figures 25 & 40).

### Physical Influences

The Earthcott Vale has varied geology, divided and orientated approximately along the line of the B4427, Old Gloucester Road, comprising White and Blue Lias limestone (largely at 60m a.o.d.) overlain by shallow Argillic Brown Earth soils to the west and Keuper marl (largely at 50m a.o.d. but rising to 67m a.o.d. at The Marle Hills) and overlain by clay / loam soils to the east.

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

This geology and resultant drainage pattern produces a gently undulating landform, with relatively higher ground centrally, in the area of Earthcott Green and Latteridge Hill, falling both north eastwards towards the Tytherington Plain and south westwards towards Bradley Stoke, both areas lying at about 50m a.o.d. on the boundary of this area.

The higher ground is dissected by shallow valleys and tributaries of the Dockham Ditch, Hortham Brook and Bradley Brook, which flow south west before joining the south eastwards flowing Bradley Brook beyond this area. In the north of the area, tributaries of the Ladden Brook flow north eastwards.

The valleys become more narrow and enclosed to the south, with tightly meandering natural channels. To the north, watercourses generally follow regular drainage ditches.

The landform, although subtle, is most evident centrally and to the east, with low south west - north east ridges formed at Latteridge Hill, The Marle Hills and Winterbourne, above lower lying valleys. Towards and beyond the western boundary the landform rises gradually, also in a south west – north east alignment, up to the Rudge way and Tytherington Ridge.

In the south west of the area a small plateau, south of Gaunt's Earthcott lies at 60 metres a.o.d., with land to the south east beyond Bradley Brook, rising towards the Winterbourne ridge.

### Land Cover

The area generally consists of pasture and arable land defined within a variety of field patterns. Field boundaries are commonly dense, clipped hedges, with overgrown thick hedges or intermittent laid hedges in places. The following variations are evident.

To the west of the B4427, Old Gloucester Road and north of Gaunt's Earthcott are medium sized regular fields, largely contained by clipped hedgerows, some intermittent, with mature hedgerow trees over the plateau, more infrequent to the west and north. Occasional hedgerow removal has formed some large fields and left isolated trees.

The area east of the B4427, south of Earthcott Green and rising to The Marle Hills, has a pattern of medium to small sized irregular fields, contained by clipped hedgerows and few

hedgerow trees (Photo 10).

In the south, adjacent to the well vegetated Bradley Brook and its tributaries, the irregular field pattern is contained by tall and overgrown hedgerows. Similarly, dense, tall vegetation cover of varying structure follows the course of the Hortham Brook to the south west (Photo 4).

The remaining area contains small, more irregular fields. To the north and east, these are defined largely by clipped hedgerows and frequent hedgerow trees, with a more varied mix of clipped and occasionally overgrown hedgerows with trees, adjacent to Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell.

A number of horse paddocks occur predominately within the south of the area, along lanes adjacent to the scattered settlement pattern and near the edge of Frampton Cotterell and Winterbourne. Timber fences have typically replaced the hedgerow boundaries.

Mature hedgerow trees of predominately oak and ash are frequent and dispersed throughout the north east and west; generally near settlement within the area as a whole, but are more infrequent in the south east. South west of Earthcott Green there are occasional copses and areas of deciduous woodland, Corporation Wood being the largest (Photo 5).

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

Pennant sandstone and limestone walls are a common boundary treatment associated with rural properties and settlements, although generally not typical as field boundaries. Pennant sandstone walls are however common around the edge of Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell and adjacent to country lanes. There are also examples of sunken lanes with hedge banks to the south.

A distinct area of parkland is evident at North Woods, around the Grange in the south, comprising mature tree specimens in grassland (Photo 6).

Formal recreational facilities lie to the south west and include Woodlands Golf Course to the east of the M4/M5 junction, comprising large scale earth mounding along the site's western and southern boundaries and an infrastructure of fairways, greens and tree planting, which retains some sections of the former mature hedgerow pattern; Almondsbury Windsurfing Lake, comprising an ad hoc development of buildings and earthworks around a quarried lake; and a rugby football club, comprising pitches, tall floodlights and buildings.

Land raising operations have also occurred along the south western boundary of this character area, both adjacent to the M4, with infilling of a field next to the Hortham Brook and, large scale earth mounding and tree planting parallel to the M4, south of Green Acres F arm.

Within the western fringes of Frampton Cotterell a large playing field, adjacent to the B4058, physically separates the settlements of Frampton Cotterell and Winterbourne. It is contained on two sides by housing and on the third by school grounds.

### Biodiversity

Earthcott Vale comprises a mosaic of grassland, woodland and farmland with a criss-crossing of watercourses and ponds connected by wildlife corridors including hedgerows. This makes the Earthcott Vale an important habitat for a diverse range of species.

The landscape includes scattered woodland and copses, mainly in the south of the area approximately 7ha of which is ancient woodland.

There are several SNCl within this character area, comprising a mosaic of habitats including grassland (both neutral and calcareous), broadleaved woodland (including ancient woodland) and flowing open water recognising

the importance of these habitats within the national context for flora and fauna. Key species likely to be associated with the broadleaved woodland include bats and dormice both of which are present across the District and are UK priority species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP).

An area of calcareous and neutral grassland is designated as a SNCl, providing a diverse habitat that supports a range of invertebrates and includes ant hills as a regular feature. These invertebrates in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats.

The Bradley Brook SNCl is designated for its flowing water and bankside vegetation, and along with the other watercourses will support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and water voles. In addition, ponds and pools within the area will support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

Much of the land use within this area is arable farmland, providing habitat for many species of ground nesting farmland birds including birds which have been listed as being Globally Threatened Red listed species, while the winter stubble provides a foraging resource.

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

### Settlement and Infrastructure

Settlement largely consists of small nucleated hamlets such as Itchington, Earthcott Green, Gaunt's Earthcott and Latteridge, which are generally located at key road junctions and crossroads. The rest of the area is scattered with isolated houses and farms (Photo 1, 2 & 3).

Winterbourne Court, Church and Tythe Barn complex to the south are important historically, as well as being a prominent local landscape feature, situated on the slopes of Bradley Brook valley (Photo 7), separate from the main settlement of Winterbourne. They are built of Pennant sandstone, which locally has a red-brown colour.

The Grange and Grange Court Farm are set within North Woods Park, on the upper slopes of a small tributary valley of the Bradley Brook. The estate architecture comprises the formal arrangement of large stone buildings of The Grange (a former asylum) to the north and a large house and farm complex at Grange Court Farm, to the south. Both have driveways across open lawns, with gatehouses adjacent to the Old Gloucester Road. The use of stone in the construction of older properties and boundary walls is typical, with the type of stone reflecting the local geological variation. Typically, Blue Lias limestone is used within the south west and Pennant sandstone in the south east and elsewhere.

Stone farm buildings largely form the hamlets of Gaunt's Earthcott, Earthcott Green, and Latteridge. Farm ponds are quite common around these hamlets, with a roadside pond forming a feature in Latteridge (Photo 9).

Adjacent to the M4 motorway, along the B4427 a small travellers' site, is enclosed by tall timber fences.

To the south east, the settlement edges of Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell form the boundary to this landscape character area. Situated on the slightly higher ground of a broad ridgeline, the settlement edge is mainly formed by traditional houses, cottages and farm buildings, built of Pennant sandstone, clustered at road junctions between the B4058 and country lanes which extend into this area. Short sections of traditional linear development also spread along the B4058, interspersed by long lengths of stone walls and hedgerows. A more recent pattern of predominantly brick houses lines a short section of the B4058 and B4057, near their intersection, in the south.

The road network consists of a number of minor roads and lanes which criss-cross the area and each other at regular intervals. These routes include the B4427, Old Gloucester Road (a former turnpike road between Bristol and Gloucester), which crosses the area south to north, continuing beyond Earthcott Green as a lane; and the B4059 and B4057 which cross the area approximately in an east to west direction. The narrow country lanes, many with sharp bends, are often contained by hedge banks instead of hedgerows, with sections of stone walling nearer settlements.

The M4 defines the area's south western boundary. It passes variously within shallow cutting, low embankment or at grade. The M4/M5 interchange, with its associated multiple flyovers and earthworks, is located to the south west beyond large scale earth mounding. The interchange and a short section of the M5 define this edge of the character area.

There are numerous overhead powerlines and steel pylons crossing the area in all directions, converging on the large electricity sub-station to the north east. Mobile phone masts are also located along the south western boundary of this area, adjacent to the M4.

One recreational route within the series of Circular Rides in South Gloucestershire crosses the area in a small circuit, largely along lanes and ancient trackways. The route leaves Winterbourne, travelling along, Green Lane, Church Lane past Winterbourne Court, northwards along minor roads passing the Grange, along Tynning's Lane, Lock's Lane, over The Marle Hills and into the adjacent area.

There are also a number of public rights of way which criss-cross the area to the west of Winterbourne and north east of Earthcott Green. Elsewhere, the pattern is more irregular and dispersed, linking scattered farms.

### Landscape Character

The Earthcott Vale landscape character area largely comprises a complex, gently undulating,

pastoral and arable landscape, with varying field pattern and landscape structure:

The northern area from Latteridge Hill, Earthcott Green to Itchington and the northern boundary, comprises a generally enclosed, small scale landscape of clipped and dense hedgerows, with frequent mature hedgerow trees within a gently rolling landform. Within this framework, the historic pattern of scattered farms, houses and the hamlets of Itchington, Earthcott Green and Latteridge, constructed from local Pennant sandstone, punctuate the area and are well integrated within the strong vegetation framework. Internal views are typically contained, with longer views possible along some road corridors, for example more elevated sections of the B4059 and from Latteridge Hill.

The limited and well integrated nature of settlement here, together with agricultural land use, visual enclosure formed by vegetation and a generally low lying landform, creates areas of tranquil and slightly remote character.

Woodlands Cemetery is located in a remote setting near Earthcott Green and is well integrated by hedgerow boundaries and the largely retained site hedgerows. The serpentine access road, new avenue tree planting, formal yew hedging and mown lawns, have introduced a more ornamental parkland structure, which is becoming more established with time. The reuse of farm buildings, largely intact hedgerow framework, low key use of the site and visual connection to the wider landscape, combines to ensure that the cemetery is becoming integrated with the surrounding rural character.

The Iron Acton electricity sub-station, located within this rural northern area, is generally well integrated as a result of the surrounding landscape framework, although the convergence of numerous powerlines and pylon towers are visually dominant locally (Photo 8). The powerline network is more evident within open views from higher ground in the adjacent character areas.

The elevated ridgeline of Rudgeway and

Tytherington Ridge, beyond the north western boundary, forms a backdrop within occasional views from the western side of this character area (Photo 1). The M5, crossing the side slopes of this landform, is evident from within occasional glimpsed views from around Itchington, with some audible influence within this area.

From the northern boundary, the settlement edge of Tytherington, set on rising ground against a wooded ridge in the adjoining area, is well integrated with its church tower forming a distinctive landmark.

The area east of the B4427, south of Earthcott Green and rising to The Marle Hills, has a slightly more open landscape of medium to small sized arable and pasture fields, contained by clipped hedgerows and few hedgerow trees. The Marle Hills allow some distant views eastwards to the Cotswold Scarp (Photo 11) and westwards to the Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge.

The plateau area to the west of the B4427 Old Gloucester Road and north of Gaunt's Earthcott has a semi-enclosed to open character, with medium sized fields, largely clipped hedgerows and frequent hedgerow trees, over a small plateau and a very gentle rolling landform. Hedgerow removal has created some large fields within this part of the character area, which in combination with fewer hedgerow trees to the west and north, has produced a more open character. Isolated, mature former hedgerow trees over the plateau form prominent features. Most of this area however, largely retains a strong landscape framework.

The few scattered areas of woodland within the west and south west are prominent features (particularly Corporation Wood, Photo 5), within views from the M5 and Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge character area to the north west.

Scattered farms to the north of Gaunt's Earthcott are local features (Photo 3) that are generally well integrated within this low lying area, with its strong vegetation structure.



Within this localised area, the generally low lying landform, good vegetation structure and hedge banks along lanes, restrict and contain views, with the adjacent Rudgey and Tytherington Ridge character area partly visible as a backdrop to the north west and the RAC tower (also outside the area) occasionally visible to the south west.

Within the south of the area, the small scale stream valleys form quite defined landform features compared with the broader rolling landscape elsewhere. Variations in land use and land cover have produced the following distinct areas:

- North Woods Park, with its parkland of mature trees and estate architecture of the Grange and Grange Court Farm, set elevated along a valley side, has a distinctive character and local visual influence along this small valley.
- Bradley Brook, Hortham Brook, Dockham Ditch and associated tributaries are lined by dense vegetation and trees, which visually emphasise their tightly meandering course. An area of overgrown hedgerows adjacent to the Bradley Brook, combine with the streamside vegetation, to produce a strong textured framework to the west and north of Winterbourne Church.
- To the east of the Bradley Brook, towards the edge of Winterbourne, rising ground is covered by open fields with a variety of field boundaries. Overgrown hedges with dead elm trees are occasionally prominent within local views. Clipped hedgerows and mature trees elsewhere, within a gently rolling landscape produce a simple, more open character (Photo 7).
- The open setting and position of Winterbourne Church and Court complex, above the Bradley Brook valley, form a striking local landmark. Pennant sandstone walls line the lanes and some fields, closer to the edge of Winterbourne (some in poor condition or overgrown) and permit some open views westwards.

The ongoing cycle of dead elm suckering is evident within a number of tall, overgrown hedgerows, generally in the south and near the edges of Frampton Cotterell and Winterbourne. These influence the condition, integrity and appearance of the landscape framework in the locality.

The formal recreation facilities in the south western corner of the area, variously influence local character:

The Almondsbury Windsurfing Lake and Rugby Football Club occupy a former quarry and agricultural fields, with overgrown hedgerow boundaries largely screening these areas and activities. Ad hoc buildings and earthworks adjacent to the regular shaped quarried lake and tall floodlight columns of the Rugby club, however, influence local views and character along Trench Lane.

Woodlands Golf Course and recent extension covers an extensive area and comprises an open to semi-enclosed landscape of mown fairways, new mound landform and linear tree planting (ornamental in places), visually contained to the south, west and north west by very large earth mounds. The existing course is partly visible from roads along its boundary and within middle distance views from higher ground beyond this area to the north west.

Within the Golf Course, the former agricultural field pattern has generally been restructured, with the loss or severance of some hedgerows, although isolated remnants of overgrown hedgerows and copses have been retained within parts of the golf course layout. Hortham Brook retains sections of its dense tree and scrub riparian vegetation.

Land raising, in association with the golf course and elsewhere, has had a significant impact on local landscape character:

- Existing earth mounding along the west and southern boundary of the golf course has produced a large scale, steep profiled landform, forming an artificial skyline and, covered by rough grassland, scrub, and developing tree cover, atypical of the surrounding landscape. This feature is highly prominent from the motorway interchange and its approaches. However, it is not particularly evident from within this character area, other than in local views and, it screens the M4/M5 interchange and dense commercial development of Almondsbury Business Park within the adjacent area.
- Further earth mounding, associated with the extension of the golf course has been implemented, but the landforms remain visible along the north west boundary of the site.
- A field abutting the Hortham Brook where it passes beneath the M4 has been filled, forming a steep faced, unnatural landform with rough grassland cover.
- Further south at Green Acres Farm, an elongated mound parallel to the motorway forms a medium scale landform, with steep slope profiles, rough grassland and new tree planting. These are evident from the M4 corridor outside the area, but are less evident within the wider area, partially screening the M4 and its traffic. This mound also provides partial screening to a large industrial building beyond the area and M4 to the west.

The settlement edge of Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell is set elevated above the Bradley Brook and its shallow tributary valleys, on the south eastern edge of this area. The northern settlement edge is largely well integrated, where the historic development pattern and materials of older buildings and forms relates and connects well to the adjacent agriculture field pattern of hedgerows (many overgrown) and frequent trees. To the south, the more regular linear pattern of houses along the B4058 and B4057 are more evident within local views, due to the limited boundary vegetation, fewer trees and therefore more open setting.

Middle to long distant views are possible from a number of elevated locations within this southern area:

- From the slightly higher ground above the Bradley Brook valley, south eastwards across the shallow vale, to Winterbourne and beyond. Frequent low undulating ridges, crowned by hedgerows and trees, the prominent middle distant ridgeline on which Winterbourne is located and the far distant Cotswold Scarp, form distinct layers within the landscape.
- The M4 provides a number of middle distant views between earth mounds, into the low valleys of this character area and across the undulating landform to higher ground at Winterbourne. This typically occurs where the M4 passes on embankment above the natural landform, with limited roadside vegetation.

The southern boundaries of this character area are contained by significant concentrations of settlement, with one boundary defined by the M4 corridor. These built elements variously influence landscape character:

Beyond the south west boundary and the M4 corridor, the variety and density of housing along the eastern fringes of Stoke Gifford and Bradley Stoke, together with adjacent commercial/ industrial development (some of which is on the skyline), in places creates an abrupt urban edge, with very limited vegetation or landform to provide integration with the adjacent landscape of this character area.

In open views from near the edge of Winterbourne, the eastern urban edge of Stoke Gifford is prominent and in stark contrast to the adjacent agricultural land use and the wider rural landscape of the Bradley Brook valley.

However, generally the visual impact of this urban edge is limited to the southern part of the character area, due to landform and intervening hedgerow and tree structure. In addition to the edge of Winterbourne, it influences the rural landscape immediately adjacent to the M4 corridor and country lanes as they approach this boundary.

Although the M4 itself is largely concealed either in cutting, by planting or by recent earth mounding at Green Acres Farm, large gantries and signage, tall light columns, traffic noise and mobile phone masts along this corridor have a wider influence within the south of the area.

There are a range of smaller scale, localised influences upon landscape character associated with land use and land use pressures within this area. These cumulatively can have a significant effect on landscape character:

- Horse paddocks, scattered within the south of the area and near Winterbourne, have in places disrupted the vegetation framework through changes in the management regimes of hedgerows and/or the replacement of hedgerows with timber fences. The consequence has been the creation of a more open landscape character than adjacent fields. This more open landscape increases the visibility of white tape electric fences subdividing fields, stables, parked vehicles, open storage, jumps and other features associated with the keeping of horses.
- The increased traffic volumes along some of the minor roads have, in places, caused the erosion of banks, verges and damage to walls, with traffic having an audible local effect.
- The travellers' site adjacent to the south western boundary is a small area off the B4427. The tall timber screen fence and dense cluster of caravans, contrasts greatly with the adjacent open rural setting. There is little vegetation either within or on the boundaries of the site to provide integration within the immediate locality and fly tipping in

the vicinity leads to an erosion of landscape character.

### The Changing Landscape

The Earthcott Vale landscape character area is a rural agricultural landscape with limited dispersed settlement, but which is subject to a range of significant pressures and changes that affect the landscape character and biodiversity value. In the south, parts of the area are influenced by recreational land use, the settlement edges of Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell, the M4 corridor and proximity of Bradley Stoke, beyond this area.

The existing landscape framework of hedgerow and tree structure throughout the landscape character area is generally intact and in a relatively good condition. However, the following variations are evident:

- Some of the fields over the plateau to the west of the B4427 Old Gloucester Road and area north of Gaunt's Earthcott, have been enlarged through hedgerow removal, resulting in some intermittent hedgerows with consequent erosion of landscape character and loss of habitat value and connectivity.
- Within the small stream valleys to the south and areas closer to Winterbourne, hedgerows are not actively managed, resulting in the development of tall overgrown hedgerows to fields and dense shrubs and trees along watercourses.
- Within some of these overgrown hedgerows in the south and nearer to Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell, sections of dead elm are apparent particularly in the summer.

The mature hedgerow tree and woodland structure throughout the area has few juvenile trees present to sustain the succession and therefore the framework in the long term. The decline of these features would significantly change the character and biodiversity value of the area.

Further removal of hedgerows would also result in a change of landscape character, creating a more open landscape than currently exists and loss of habitat and connectivity.

Whilst overgrown hedgerows provide structure and some degree of enclosure at present, in the longer term without management, the valley character may change as hedgerow species can eventually become over mature, allowing more open views beneath the canopies.

Similarly the present cyclical pattern of growth, decline and regeneration of elm suckers, already influences the degree of openness/enclosure within the landscape.

Ponds and pools are vulnerable to any loss of habitat including the terrestrial habitat around ponds as well as the ponds themselves.

Tree planting at Woodlands Cemetery, to the north east of Earthcott Green, is changing the character of the local area, increasing the strength of the landscape framework as the planting matures, in an area where tree cover was previously limited.

Restoration and enhancement works in other locations including at the Nature Reserve at Monks Pool and the restoration of Winterbourne Court Farm Barn have improved the fabric and settings of these heritage features, thereby contributing to the character, quality and distinctiveness of the surrounding landscape.

The recreational facilities in the south west of the character area have evolved within both a former agricultural landscape and one small former quarry site. These land uses are either contained by the original hedgerow pattern or, as in the case of the golf course, the agricultural pattern of hedgerows, trees and copses has been subsumed and often significantly changed.

This has produced an ornamental character within these sites which is different to the wider rural landscape.

In contrast large scale native planting has been implemented as part of the golf course expansion, to integrate the new landforms and land use pattern within wider views. A woodland structure will develop over time helping to provide screening and integration with the wider landscape as well as habitat value.

The hedgerows which presently contain these sites are largely overgrown, helping to screen these areas. However, without active management/ replanting, these hedgerows will decline in the long term, increasing the prominence of these recreational landscapes and their contrast with adjoining rural areas, primarily within local views.

The distinctive North Woods Park relies greatly upon its mature trees for its parkland character. Without replacement planting, the character of this parkland would decline in the long term.

The erosion of the landscape framework within the area as a whole, could raise the visual prominence of a number of built features which are currently well integrated. This would include the Iron Acton sub-station, pylons and powerlines to the north of the area, the settlement edge of Frampton Cotterell and Winterbourne to the south east, the limited scattered settlement pattern elsewhere and the Grange Solar Farm.

The network of narrow country lanes and roads are under pressure from traffic levels, due to the close proximity of and connection between Bristol, Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell in the south. An increase in traffic volumes and/ or a perceived need for highway improvement measures, has the potential to introduce standard highway design solutions including kerbs, new signage and materials, which could have a localised, but cumulative, effect eroding the existing rural character. Physical damage is occurring to roadside walls, hedges and verges as a result of the traffic volumes using these routes.

Pennant sandstone wall boundaries near Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell are in variable condition, being prone to damage from increased traffic along narrow lanes and deterioration due to limited maintenance of field boundaries elsewhere.

The sensitivity of the landscape to change varies considerably throughout the Earthcott Vale area, dependent on landform, the strength of the existing vegetation structure and the proximity and visual influence of settlement, the Bristol urban edge and built structures.

Given the strong vegetation structure and visual enclosure, the north and western areas are generally less sensitive to change. However, they are sensitive to the cumulative effect of change, for example built development, which has the potential to erode the generally tranquil nature within parts of this area.

The plateau area to the west of the B4427, Old Gloucester Road, north of Gaunt's Earthcott and east to The Marle Hills, is more open, but generally remains slightly remote, due to the relatively limited views obtained from within or over much of this area, and the very limited pattern of settlement, in the form of traditional farms and roads. The area is however sensitive to agricultural land use or management changes which might further erode the landscape framework, or to built development which might affect the pattern and integrity of the historic farm buildings.

The western boundary of this plateau area is visually influenced by the elevated Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge to the west and is therefore, potentially sensitive to changes along the ridge which might affect the rural character of this area.

The rural landscape in the south forms an important buffer between Winterbourne/Frampton Cotterell and the M4 and the urban edge of Bristol beyond, due to the elevated aspect and views from settlement edges, motorway and other routes.

The partially eroded vegetation framework contributes to the degree of visibility. These areas are therefore vulnerable to any change, which might affect the rural character of the locality. The proposed significant scale residential development to the south of the M4 around Maules Farm will have a visual impact on this buffer and the edge of Winterbourne due to its elevated position.

There are significant development pressures on land adjacent to settlement edges and principal roads for potential housing infill, business, industrial, amenity use or other forms of land use change, such as horse paddocks or land raising operations.

The following types of development and land use change which have already taken place, illustrate the range of pressures and impacts within this area:

- Land raising has introduced new, unnatural landforms and poorer quality soils which, without adequate maintenance, result in weed encroachment and visually different grassland to adjacent agricultural land. Some areas planted with trees will, in the long term, result in woodland cover, which will help to reduce the impact of the landform and contribute to the vegetation structure and Forest of Avon objectives in the area.
- A number of mobile phone masts along the motorway corridor have introduced new skyline features, evident from adjacent rural areas and the M4. The proliferation of these masts is a recent development trend, introducing new structures to often rural, elevated and consequently visible locations.
- The formal recreational facilities to the south are largely well integrated, due to the existing vegetation structure, although the associated buildings, entrance/access roads and lighting infrastructure influence local landscape character, particularly along Trench Lane.

- Recreational pressure for 'horsiculture' is evident in the south of the area, particularly adjacent to Winterbourne. This change in land use is a relatively recent trend, which in places has led to the loss or erosion of hedgerows. The cumulative effect of this and the proliferation of associated infrastructure including subdivisions of fields by electric tape fencing, pressure on hedges from grazing, the construction of stables, access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and floodlighting, can result in a marked change in landscape character. Lighting can also disturb wildlife.
- The travellers' site on the Old Gloucester Road is an isolated site. However, the tall timber fence boundary forms a locally prominent built feature, which does not relate well to its rural setting.

The effect of these changes on local character to the south west of the area, near the M4 corridor, are already apparent. However, further changes, or the effect of cumulative changes, which could influence the landscape structure of the area and character of the rural landscape could significantly affect the ability of this landscape to function as a physical and visual buffer between settlements, transport corridors and the Bristol urban edge.

The recently constructed solar park development at Grange Farm is not highly visible within the wider landscape but is partially visible through the hedge along Trench Lane. The accompanying

landscape scheme should reinforce the existing vegetation structure and, in time, with help to absorb this development into the landscape.

Probably the most significant change in the landscape of the Earthcott Vale will however be the implementation of the consented scheme for 3 x 100m high wind turbines, plus associated substation and access track to the south of Earthcott Green. Cumulative impacts of adding further electricity lines should be avoided by the proposed underground cable connection. The turbines are proposed to be built in a location where the landscape character is significantly influenced by the presence of pylon lines linking to the nearby Iron Acton substation. Although at the time of writing, construction of the turbines had not commenced.

It is possible that works may be required to the electricity pylon network as a result of the proposals for a new nuclear power station at Oldbury B. While these have the potential to compound existing impacts, during either construction or operation, a rationalisation of the wirescape could be beneficial to the locality.

## Landscape Strategy

- Succession planting of broadleaf woodland, parkland and hedgerow trees as well as at the settlement edges is necessary to sustain the differing characters of the character area into the future, and to maintain and enhance biodiversity value.
- To ensure the existing habitat resource is retained as a diverse mosaic of grasslands and woodlands with connectivity through wildlife corridors such as hedgerows.
- The subdivision of fields or replacement of hedges by fencing or electric tape should be resisted due to its erosion of landscape character and potential loss of habitat value and connectivity.

## Landscape Strategy

- Retention and active management of hedgerows to help to ensure the conservation of these key landscape and biodiversity features for the long term across the entire character area. This is important across the character area, but particularly pressing in the south where the erosion of the landscape structure is extending the urbanising influence of adjacent settlement and the motorway into the Earthcott Vale area.
- Any new highway works should seek to protect and incorporate traditional landscape features or replace them where necessary, so that the rural character of the road network is retained.
- To encourage and support the repair and retention of natural stone walls and other traditional features such as historic stiles, pennant stone kerbing and traditional street lights.
- To maintain the open nature of the fields surrounding the hamlet at Church Lane, Winterbourne, together with the sharp distinction between the core residential area and the rural context.
- Any built development, horsekeep or structures in the northern and western parts of the character area should incorporate robust landscape proposals and careful consideration of form, massing, lighting, materials and colour to ensure that the tranquil nature of the locality is protected and enhanced, including consideration of the effects on views from elevated ground to the west.
- Robust planting schemes should be implemented as part of any development, including recreational schemes, along with long term management and maintenance plans in order to maximise the integration of these developments into the surrounding landscape, and to avoid erosion of the character and biodiversity value of the rural landscape.
- Respond to consultations on National Grid schemes to seek to secure rationalisation of the plethora of electricity and pylon lines in the locality and consequential reductions in impact on the Earthcott Vale landscape. Should changes to the substation be required, seek to secure robust landscape proposals to screen the infrastructure and reintegrate the facility into the landscape.
- Consideration should be given to the provision of off site planting to mitigate the impacts of any highly visible developments in this and the adjacent landscape areas, particularly those to the north and east.
- Protect higher grade farmland from development.
- Encourage small woodland and hedgerow tree planting through the Bradley Brook valley and the edge of Winterbourne to filter views of the M4 and urban edge.
- Maintain and improve tranquillity and landscape quality by controlling light pollution, screening visually intrusive elements, repairing and maintaining the landscape structure, removing fly tipping.

**Landscape Character Areas**



**1** View towards Itchington, with narrow country lanes enclosed by hedgerows. The M5 motorway follows the skyline, with vehicles visible.



**2** Looking north west from Kites Hill towards the hamlet of Earthcott Green. The Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge forms the skyline.



**3** Typical old Gloucestershire farmhouse architecture at Green Farm, Gaunts Earthcott. The window styles are a more recent addition.



**4** Hortham Brook with open pasture and isolated trees. This area now forms part of Woodlands Golf Course.



**5** Southern edge of Corporation Wood. Surrounded by deep ditches filled with water. Isolated woodland surrounded by fields.



**6** Scots pine and groups of mature trees form parkland landscape within Grange Court Farm estate.



**7** Winterbourne Parish Church lies outside the village amid a mosaic of fields and hedges in a gentle landform.



**8** Pylon towers at Iron Acton electricity sub station.



**9** Farm pond at Latteridge.



**10** View from the Marle Hills north westwards. The middle distance shallow ridge continues to the right forming Pits Hill, Kites Hill and Latteridge Hill, with the wooded Rudgeway Ridge visible on the skyline.

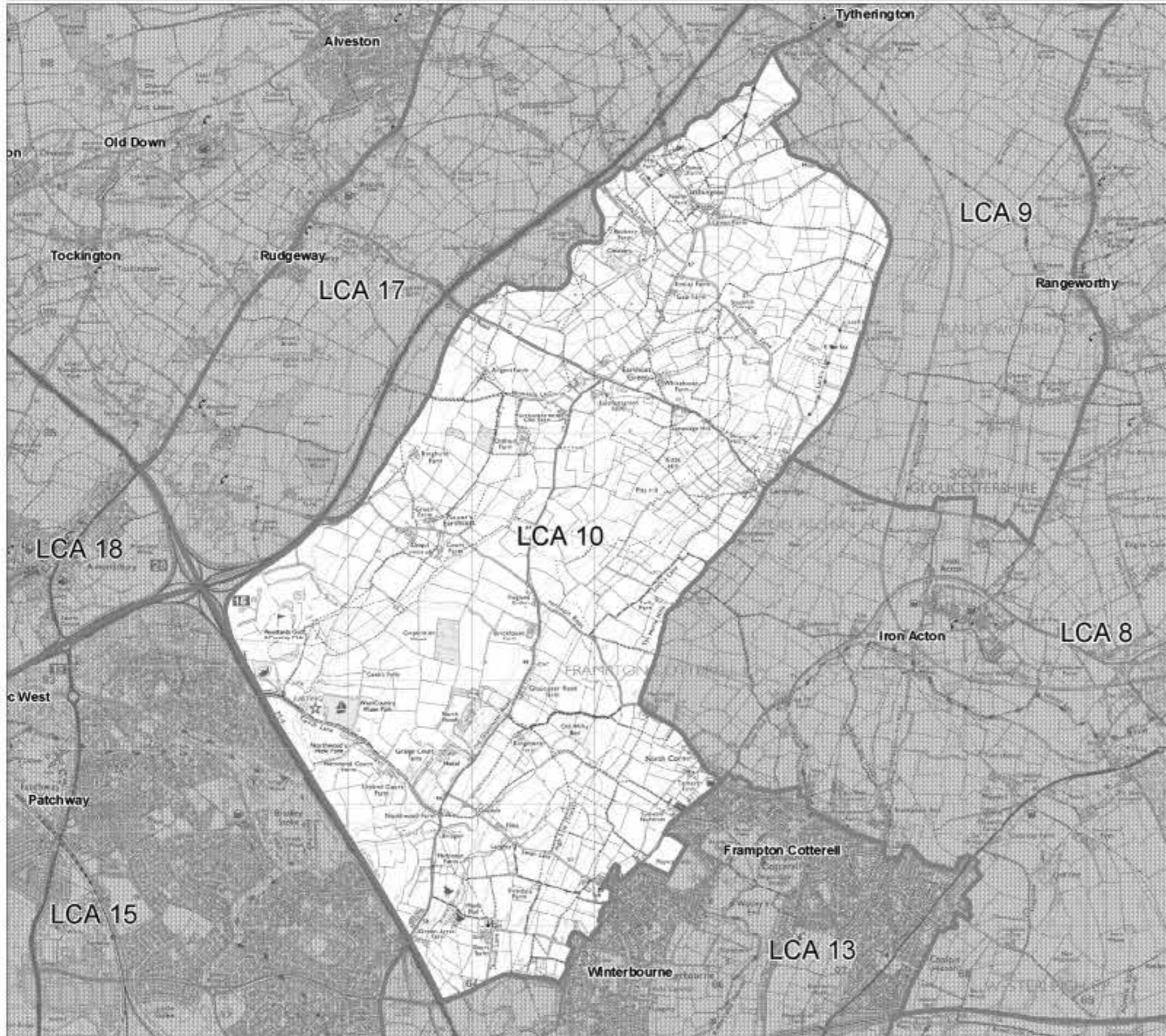


**11** View eastwards towards the Cotswolds from the Marle Hills, near Perrinpit Farm.



**Figure 32 – Area 10**  
Earthcott Vale



# LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS



## Legend

-  South Gloucestershire Boundary
-  Landscape Character Area

The Landscape Character Area boundary shown on this map is indicative, sometimes marking a distinct change, but more often representing a transition in character with adjacent areas.

Similar attributes may therefore be evident within adjacent areas. (For further information refer to Report Section 4.1)



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**Figure 33**  
Area 10  
Earthcott Vale