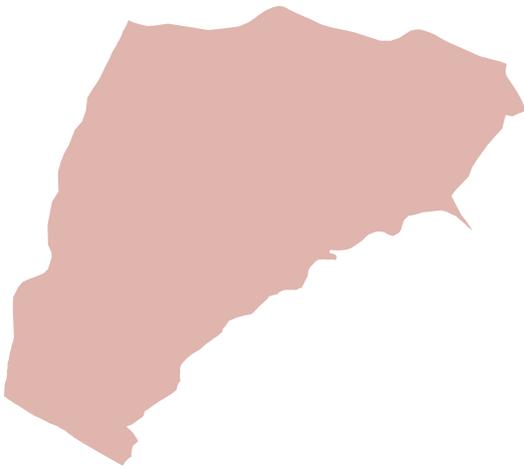




Area 11

Golden Valley



Contents

Sketch map	148
Key characteristics	149
Location	150
Physical influences	150
Land cover	150
Settlement and infrastructure	152
Landscape character	153
The changing landscape	155
Landscape strategy	157
Photographs	
Landscape character area boundary	

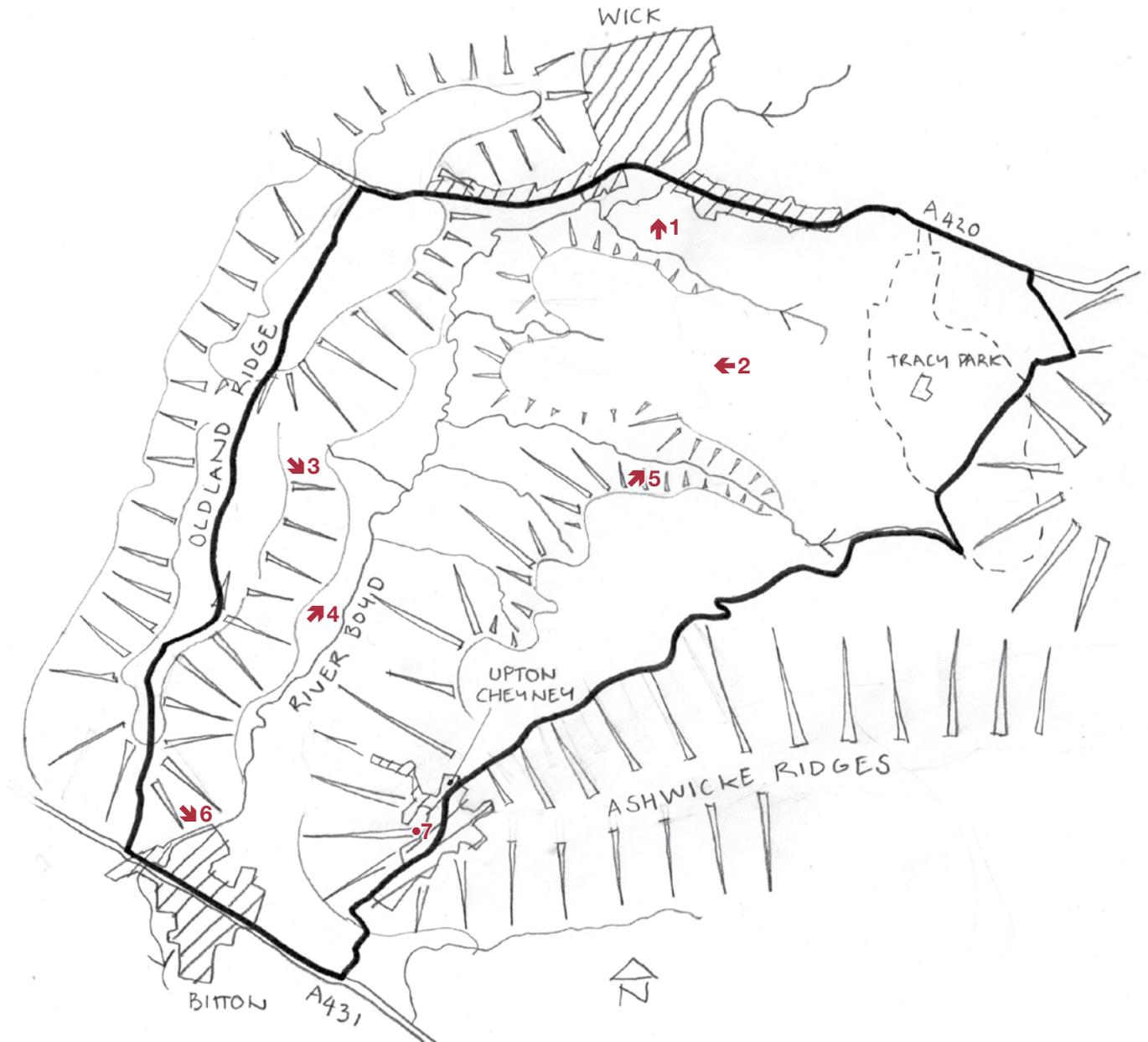


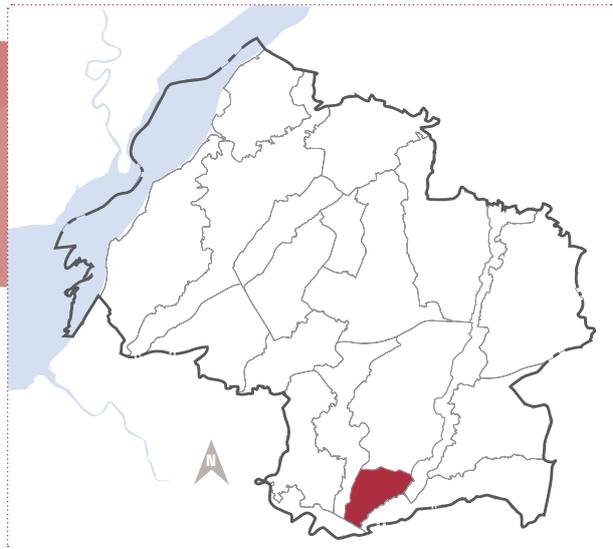
Figure 34
Golden Valley
Sketch Map

Key
↖7 Photograph viewpoints
Scale: not to scale

Area 11

Golden Valley

The Golden Valley landscape character area is a steeply sloping broad agricultural valley, containing the meandering River Boyd visually enclosed by the Oldland Ridge and the much higher Ashwicke Ridges.



Key Characteristics

- A narrow enclosed valley to the south, becoming broader to the north, contained by the Ashwicke Ridges to the east and the Oldland Ridge to the west.
- Rising above the tightly meandering River Boyd valley is a diverse mix of medium to small, regular and irregular shaped pasture and arable fields, with larger arable fields occupying the upper slopes. These arable fields provide ground nesting opportunities and winter stubble for foraging by farmland birds including Amber and Red listed species.
- A dense framework of trees and riparian vegetation along the River Boyd and its' tributaries provides valuable habitat and connectivity for wildlife.
- Fields are divided by a strong framework of largely overgrown hedges, trees and occasional scattered woodland, or copses that provides habitat and connectivity for notable species including European Protected Species. Boundaries also include a mix of clipped or laid hedges and some fences.
- Areas of calcareous grassland that form attractive landscape and ecologically valuable features with a diverse range of flora including species rich grassland.
- Oldland Ridge has little tree cover that includes a patchwork of scrub and, one very large arable field within a more regular pattern of medium fields.
- A golf course occupies land at Tracy Park, with an extension extending beyond this area and over lower slopes of the Cotswold Scarp.
- Limited settlement, with isolated and scattered houses, farms and hamlets within the area, with adjacent villages and major roads influencing northern and southern boundaries.
- Remnants of coal industry activity, small scale stone quarrying and mills lie within the valley.
- Few country lanes cross the area, some of which are sunk within steeper slopes.
- A landscape that is under pressure from increased recreational activity including horse keep.

Location

The Golden Valley landscape character area is located in the south of South Gloucestershire, to the east of the urban area of Bristol, from which it is separated by the Oldland Ridge.

The northern boundary follows the A420 and marks the transition between the enclosed upper River Boyd and the broader Golden Valley.

The southern boundary follows the A431, which generally follows the topographical change between the River Boyd valley and the open River Avon floodplain beyond.

The eastern boundary follows an approximate topographical transition between the lower broad slopes of the Golden Valley and the upper steeper slopes of the Ashwicke Ridges. To the south east the boundary follows a lane and glass houses, within an area of transition in slope aspect between the Golden Valley and the Piple Bottom Valley of the Ashwicke Ridges.

The western boundary follows the centre of the Oldland Ridge, the skyline of which is shared with the adjacent Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge area. (See Figure 37).

Physical Influences

The geology of the Golden Valley landscape character area is diverse, with a linear strip of Coal Measures (sandstone/shales) centrally within the valley, contained largely by Keuper marls/sandstones to the north. Lias clays and silts, occupy the southern and eastern area, with an irregular band of White and Blue Lias limestone in the area of the central and northern upper valley slopes. This geology is overlain by typical Argillic Pelosols, Brown Earth Loams over Clay to the south, with pockets of Brown Rendzinas to the north west and north east.

This geology and subsequent drainage pattern creates a steeply sloping north east/south west orientated valley landform, enclosed by the ridge of Hanging Hill, within the Ashwicke Ridges to

the east (forming the southern most extent of the Cotswold Scarp, within the South Gloucestershire area) and the lower Oldland Ridge to the west. The topography varies from 20 metres a.o.d. at the mouth of the valley near Bitton, to approximately 88 metres a.o.d. along the Oldland Ridge and to approximately 120 metres a.o.d., midway along Hanging Hill on the boundary of the area. Hanging Hill continues to rise in the adjoining character area to 235 metres a.o.d. at its summit.

The River Boyd flows southwards through the centre of the valley along a tightly meandering course. It flows from north of Wick, through the village and then south, flowing through Bitton before joining the River Avon. The valley to the south is narrower, contained to the west by the steep slopes and end of the Oldland Ridge and to the east by the more gentle lower slopes of Hanging Hill Ridge, which curve eastwards into the Piple Bottom Valley.

Adjacent to and to the north of Bitton, the river has formed a small floodplain, occupied by two man-made pools. The lower valley also includes a number of springs, one at Upton Cheyney is known locally as Joseph's Well (Photo 7). Flooding in Bitton has been controlled by river engineering but is still common within the upper valley.

The northern section of the valley is broader, with gentle slopes to the east, where minor tributaries flow from Hanging Hill and join the River Boyd at right angles, south of Wick. This has formed an upper valley landform of broad, descending spurs and undulating form.

Land Cover

Much of the River Boyd and its tributaries are lined by a wooded corridor of riparian vegetation from which irregular shaped, small to medium sized pastoral fields spread along the base of the valley and rise up the lower slopes. The eastern slopes also have a mix of more regular, rectilinear fields.

Further north and along the upper slopes there is a mix of larger regular shaped arable fields, with hedgerow removal forming a particularly large irregular shaped field along the Oldland Ridge, south of Highfield Park Farm (Photo 2).

Narrow enclosure fields are noticeable around Upton Cheyney and Bitton.

Field boundaries largely contour the valley sides, except along eastern valley slopes south of Wick, where field boundaries undulate across the broad descending spurs and below Upton Cheyney, where a rectangular hedgerow pattern extends down the slope, appearing to radiate from the village into the valley.

The field boundaries are largely tall and overgrown, with some clipped and laid hedgerows and hedgebanks along lanes, while the fields along the Oldland Ridge are defined by a mix of sporadic, thick and clipped hedges and occasional fences.

There is a strong mature tree cover with occasional small copses within the valley on the eastern slopes and lower north western slopes (Photo 3) and, in some places, associated with former coal mining and small quarry sites (Photo 4). In contrast there is little tree cover along the upper slopes of the Oldland Ridge. A large fishing lake has been developed on the floor of the valley to the north of Mill Lane.

To the north, adjacent to the A420, a small linear woodland plantation has recently been established, following the ridgeline.

Also along the Oldland Ridge, amongst the dominant arable and pasture cover, are some small isolated fields of scrub / rough grassland, associated with the steepest valley slopes. To the north is a large sweeping expanse of arable land following the removal of field boundaries (Photo 2).

To the north eastern corner of the area lies the Tracy Park Golf Course, with a more recent 9-hole extension, which extends beyond this area and over the lower slopes of the adjoining

Cotswold Scarp character area. The golf course is within the grounds of a large stately home, comprising parkland, mature tree specimens within sweeping lawns contained by Cotswold stone walls, a ha-ha and, prominent entrances defined by tall stone piers. The more recent golf course infrastructure with its more recent planting extends over former agricultural fields.

Horse stables and paddocks, along with electric and other fencing, stables, parking and access, have become prevalent across a significant area of the Golden Valley.

To the north of Coldharbour Farm (south of Wick) are the remains of a burial chamber. To the south west of Bitton within the adjacent Avon Valley, but visible from this area, is a round barrow at Barrow Hill (Scheduled Ancient Monument). The 'Roman Camp', also a SAM, lies to the north of Bitton.

Biodiversity

This character area comprises a mosaic of grassland, woodland and farmland dissected by watercourses and punctuated by ponds, with generally good connectivity including by hedgerows, providing important habitat for a diverse range of species.

The eastern part of the Golden Valley is within the nationally important calcareous grassland associated with the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The area includes 9 hectares of woodland within medium sized scattered woodlands and copses.

The Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) within this character area include a mosaic of habitats designated primarily for their grassland (both neutral and calcareous). The River Boyd is and SNCI with broadleaved woodland and flowing open water. These habitats are of importance in the national context for flora and fauna, supporting a range of invertebrates. Ant hills are also a regular feature. These invertebrates in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats.

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). There appears to be generally good connectivity for wildlife between the wooded areas via hedgerows and scattered trees.

The River Boyd and its tributaries drain the Golden Valley landscape and support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and water voles. Ponds and pools within the area will also support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

Agricultural land use within this area is a patchwork of arable and pastoral farmland, the arable farmland in particular is an ideal habitat for many species of ground nesting farmland birds including birds which are listed as being Globally Threatened Red listed species. The winter stubble also provides a precious foraging opportunity.

There is a golf course within the Golden Valley, which when appropriately landscaped and managed present the opportunity to provide a mosaic of habitats which can be utilised by a diverse range of species.

Settlement and Infrastructure

Settlement over much of this area is limited, comprising a village, hamlet, scattered farms and buildings primarily constructed of Lias limestone.

Dry and mortared Lias limestone walls, with random upright stone copings, are a distinctive feature around the edges of settlement and along the lanes which pass through them.

Bitton, to the south of the area, is designated a Conservation Area. It is a large village of Saxon origins with a planned linear pattern along the A431 and intersecting lanes, extending southwards into the adjacent character area of the Avon Valley (Photo 6). It consists of a mix

of buildings, mainly of limestone and render. There is a relatively large site comprising disused industrial warehouse buildings on the northern edge that are proposed for redevelopment.

An area of former low key, rural industrial activity, lies at the Old Mill to the north west of the village and comprises a scattering of buildings alongside the River Boyd. To the east of Bitton alongside the A431 and on the boundary of this area is a large nursery, including a recently expanded very large complex of glass houses.

Wick defines part of the northern boundary and is a large village with both linear and a more recent nucleated development pattern. It is situated both within and on the upper slopes of the River Boyd valley and is partly strung out along the A420 (Photo 1). It contains a number of limestone buildings, although more recent residential development comprises a mix of materials including brick, render and reconstituted stone.

The hamlet of Upton Cheyney, a Conservation Area, partly falls within this area and the adjacent Ashwicke Ridges. The settlement is scattered along a number of radiating country lanes, giving a linear character, set on the elevated mid slopes between the lower Golden Valley and rising ridgeline of Hanging Hill. The settlement generally consists of large traditional limestone cottages, farm houses and one small group of brick houses.

Copper slag coping stones and quoins (a by-product from the Warmley Brassworks within the Kingswood area), feature within a few walls and buildings within the area, for example wall coping stones are evident at Upper Cullyhall Farm on the Oldland Ridge and stone walling to a residential property along the A420, west of Wick, and quoins are evident within one house at Upton Cheyney.

The isolated farms and properties are typically scattered along the lower slopes of the valley, with a few along the top of the Oldland Ridge. They are generally older stone buildings, but with a mix of more recent properties. A more recent

large agricultural building has however been developed in the centre of the valley in the vicinity of Beech Hill.

Former rural industrial activity is evident within the heart of the Golden Valley, with a number of disused corn and paper mills along the River Boyd and a coal mine vent shaft near the disused Golden Valley Coal Works (Photo 4). A few sites of small scale quarrying are also scattered along the valley.

One small sewage works is located within the valley to the north.

The road network largely consists of country lanes, some sunken particularly where climbing steeper ground, others are contained by dense hedgerows (Photo 5).

The northern and southern boundaries are however formed by the A420 and A431 respectively, the A420 at grade descending and rising as it crosses the Boyd Valley and the A431 at grade, largely following the edge of Avon floodplain to the south.

One recreational route passes through this area and one briefly meets the western boundary:

- The Monarch's Way passes southwards from Wick along the valley close to the River Boyd, ascends the valley sides to Upton Cheyney, before descending to Bitton and the Avon Valley beyond.
- One of a series of Circular Rides briefly follows the western boundary at Upton Cheyney.

The public footpath network comprises a number of routes which largely descend into the valley to the central area of the Old Mill, or link Wick, via Coldharbour Farm, with the Ashwicke Ridges and plateau of Landsdown Hill.

Landscape Character

The Golden Valley landscape character area is an enclosed, visually contained valley, with broader upper slopes, defined to the east by the ridgeline of Hanging Hill within the Ashwicke Ridges and to the west by the Oldland Ridge.

Most of the area is covered by a diverse mix of irregular shaped medium and small pasture fields along the lower slopes and base of the valley, with the smallest fields generally adjacent to settlement. This gradually changes to larger regular shaped arable fields along the upper slopes and fringes, with a more open character. The largest fields are mainly within the northern half of the character area.

The dense tree structure within the valley floor, following the River Boyd, its tributaries and, the overgrown hedgerows defining a large proportion of the field boundaries, produce a strong framework.

Internal views are largely contained along the valley floor by the vegetation structure and upper slopes. Although the lanes are lined by a mix of hedges and hedgebanks, descending routes have some open views across the valley. Views along the valley slopes are largely restricted by vegetation, with vantages permitted from country lanes where they contour the valley.

The valley form is quite narrow within its southern half. This increases the sense of enclosure and perception of remoteness. The limited dispersed settlement and minimal roads are well integrated both by landform and vegetation structure, providing a sense of tranquillity within the valley landscape. This is reduced along the southern boundary by traffic noise associated with the A431 and in the north by the visual influence of Wick.

The cumulative impact of a significant number of horse keep developments (including parking, fencing, stables, jumps, paddocks and other features), both through the central section of the Golden Valley and to the north at Wick Court

as well as the recently developed fishing lake on the valley floor to the north of Mill Lane are altering the relatively tranquil, undisturbed and remote character of the area. Where fences have replaced hedgerows the visual influence of these developments spreads over a wider area, and where overgrazing takes place the sward becomes poached.

Wick, beyond the northern boundary, is visually evident within middle distance views over the northern, broader Boyd Valley. Housing is largely well integrated amongst a framework of copses and linear woodland along the river valley. The abrupt edge of dense modern housing on the upper valley slopes (Photo 1) and Wick Quarry and associated buildings, are however prominent, set above the adjacent vegetation framework. The large, elevated traditional building of Bury Manor, constructed from limestone, is a prominent distinctive landmark on an elevated knoll.

Tracy Park to the east has a distinctive, historic parkland character, with its prominent features of stone pillared entrances, stone walls, lawns and mature trees, providing the setting to the large stately home. The golf course infrastructure within the park is evident within local views, but is generally well integrated where the strong structure of mature parkland trees are a more visually prominent feature.

The extension to this golf course is however more visually intrusive. It occupies former agricultural fields beyond the park, where the hedgerow framework has now been fragmented. The site also extends over the more open, elevated slopes of Freezing Hill (lying within the adjacent character area). Here, the golf course, with its infrastructure of fairways and ground reshaping, remains prominent against the wider sweeping slopes of Freezing Hill. This land use contrasts with the wider agricultural hedgerow field pattern, which has a more simple and bold structure, well related to the hillside setting. However a developing framework of planting is gradually integrating it into the surrounding landscape.

The Oldland Ridge separates the Golden Valley from the urban area of Kingswood within the adjacent character area. The straight form of the ridge is overlain by a simple bold pattern of mixed agriculture, defined by a largely regular field pattern. This becomes more irregular within the Golden Valley, where influenced by textured pockets of scrub, linear woodland and a very large open arable field to the north.

Along the ridgeline the clipped, intermittent hedgerows, some of which are overgrown and post and wire fences, provide limited structure over this elevated landform.

From the crown of the Oldland Ridge there are extensive views westwards over the dense urban development of Bristol and eastwards of the large scale landform of the Hanging Hill ridge. The foreground roll of the Oldland Ridge restricts middle distance views in both directions.

Extensive views from Hanging Hill in the adjacent character area to the east are possible into the Golden Valley and beyond the Oldland Ridge to Bristol.

Bitton, located at the mouth of the Boyd Valley, is primarily visible in local views from adjacent higher ground at Bitton Hill (Photo 6) and Upton Cheyney. Within these views the older residential settlement pattern is distinctive, nestled within the valley and extending southwards beyond the A431 into the adjacent character area, on slightly elevated ground above the Avon Valley floodplain. However large disused warehouses to the north of the village, detract from and partly erode the rural village character within these views. From within the valley, the settlement area, industrial buildings to the north and glass houses to the east are well integrated by the valley landform and strong vegetation framework. St Mary's Church tower is a prominent distinctive landmark, visible on the edge of the Avon Valley.

The settlement pattern of Upton Cheyney, radiating pattern of lanes and rectilinear fields, reflects the promontory landform setting above the Boyd Valley. The framework of

hedgerows and trees integrates the slightly dispersed settlement pattern well. The strong interrelationship of scattered settlement, lanes and vegetation pattern to the landform within this hamlet, has produced a very distinctive and locally visible feature.

The A420 to the north and A431 to the south, are well screened by landform and existing dense vegetation, and have little visual influence upon the character of the area.

The Changing Landscape

The Golden Valley landscape character area is an enclosed valley landscape with a strong landscape infrastructure. The lack of major development reinforces its rural character and perception of tranquillity; however there are various threats to its landscape character and biodiversity value.

The landscape across the area is in varying condition. Within the Golden Valley, the hedgerow and tree structure is largely intact, however there are significant areas suffering from a lack of management and/ or removal of hedges. The prominent, overgrown hedgerows which presently provide this area's distinct character and enclosure are the result of little active management. At this level of management, these hedgerows will continue to evolve from the present linear structure, eventually to individual mature trees. The general sensitivity of the landscape is therefore likely to increase in the long term, as the tree canopy becomes more intermittent, with the potential for greater intervisibility within the area.

New woodland planting to the west of Wick, south of the A420 and following the Oldland Ridge skyline, is presently young and therefore subtle, but will form a significant feature within local views in the long term and will contribute to the landscape framework and biodiversity value of the character area.

Beyond the area to the north, a small proportion of dense modern residential development in Wick is prominent on the upper slopes of the Boyd Valley, above the adjacent vegetation structure. Future settlement expansion along this edge could potentially encroach towards or onto the skyline, further increasing the visual prominence of the settlement within the locality and eroding the rural landscape character. Similarly, any loss to the woodland framework around Wick Quarry, in the adjoining area, has the potential to raise the visual prominence of the existing buildings, affecting local character.

The settlement edges of Upton Cheyney and Bitton are visible elements from within the area and from the Ashwicke Ridges. They are sensitive to change or infill of a type which would visibly alter the existing scale and pattern of settlement, the vegetation framework or landform context which provide setting to these settlements. This change has the potential to erode rural characteristics of both landscape features and distinctive settlements.

The enclosed valley area is sensitive to change which might erode its essential rural characteristics. Change which might affect the physical landscape framework, or, the balance between the agricultural landscape and settlement, could erode the perception of tranquillity within the valley as well as its biodiversity value. Despite its enclosure, changes have the potential to be visible from the surrounding elevated ground, therefore influencing not only the local area, but the wider landscape.

A number of farmhouses have been converted to residential properties, especially along the valley bottom. This has brought about a change in the character of buildings and their boundaries by introducing modern, suburban details e.g. fences, conifer hedges and high stone walls/pillars and ornamental gates, within an otherwise distinctly rural location. In addition the introduction of larger scale modern farm buildings can have a significant effect on the landscape character of the locality.

The effect of the removal of hedgerows to maximise arable practices is already highly evident along the Oldland Ridge. The upper slopes on both sides of the valley are particularly visible and therefore sensitive to the disturbance of the field boundary pattern. Further hedgerow removal has the potential to erode the strong vegetation structure found within much of this area. This will have the effect of increasing the openness and eroding the perception of tranquillity and, in places, the visually remote character as well as reducing habitat value and connectivity.

The area is also under considerable recreational pressure due to its close proximity to and access from Bristol. The area has good footpath access along the valley, following the Monarch's Way, with links to the Ashwicke Ridges, with highly worn paths evident at several locations across this area.

Recreational pressure from 'horsiculture', is very significant with stable blocks, paddocks and a deterioration in field boundaries evident, particularly around Redfield Hill, Ryedown Lane, Cann Lane, Mill Lane, the northern end of Golden Valley Lane and on the slopes to the south of Beach Lane and in the north near Wich Court. The cumulative effect of this and the associated infrastructure of access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and floodlighting, has resulted in a marked change to and erosion of the landscape character of this valley and also disturbance to wildlife.

The golf course extension at Tracy Park, visible from this area (but lying within the adjacent character area), has introduced land use change that is highly prominent, given the elevated open slopes setting and distinctly different vegetation pattern, which is in marked contrast to the wider agricultural landscape context. This has resulted in an erosion of the rural landscape character in the locality and wider area, due to its visibility. However this is expected to diminish with time as the planting matures.

Increasing volumes of traffic on the narrow lanes has eroded their associated landscape features.

In the south of the character area, the disused industrial buildings at Bitton are proposed for redevelopment. This provides an opportunity to improve the canalised river corridor to a more sympathetic form and to enhance its biodiversity value. In addition the removal of the large scale industrial buildings presents an opportunity for replacement with a grain of development that is more in keeping with that of the adjacent village.

Landscape Strategy

- The conservation and enhancement of the landscape character should be given a high priority, hedgerow and hedgerow tree structure should be restored and strengthened, fencing should be avoided structures should be located and designed to maximise integration with and screening within the wider landscape.
- The scattered pools and ponds are vulnerable to any loss of or damage to both the water bodies and their surrounding terrestrial habitat.
- To encourage and support the repair and retention of natural stone walls and other traditional features such as historic stiles and copper slag coping stones and quions.
- Any new development in the valley or on its slopes, including on settlement edges and in the wider landscape should incorporate robust landscape proposals to ensure integration with and protection of the rural character of the Golden Valley.
- Any new buildings or structures require careful consideration in respect of their siting and relationship to the grain of the landscape to ensure maximum integration with the local landscape, as well as materials and colour to compliment the particular palette of the surrounding area.
- The landscape character of the locality has been significantly eroded as a result of the proliferation of horse keep activities and uses. Further development for horse keep that would impact on the character of the valley should be resisted.
- Both fencing and floodlighting which erode landscape character and biodiversity values should be avoided.
- Highway improvement schemes should seek to limit the damage to landscape features that can be caused by heavy traffic, and any improvement schemes should protect and incorporate traditional features.
- Secure improvements to the landscape structure and biodiversity value of the river corridor adjacent to the disused industrial buildings at Bitton.
- Resist proposals that result in proposals for works that would erode tranquility of the valley and its rural character, such as intrusive lighting, hedge removal, road widening, new signage and sources of noise disturbance.

1 Residential development within Wick, with the line of the properties to the right following the A420.



2 View west across the upper section of the River Boyd to the Oldland Ridge. The view features horse paddocks within the foreground, a large arable field and patchwork of scrub, in the distance.



3 Looking east, with the Golden Valley rising to the Hanging Hill ridgeline within the Ashwicke Ridge character area. The hillside includes Upton Cheyney to the right and Beach to the left.



4 Disused coal mine vent shaft near the Golden Valley Coal Works. The site is now overgrown with wire fencing and fly tipping evident.



5 View north along Oldbury Lane above the valley.



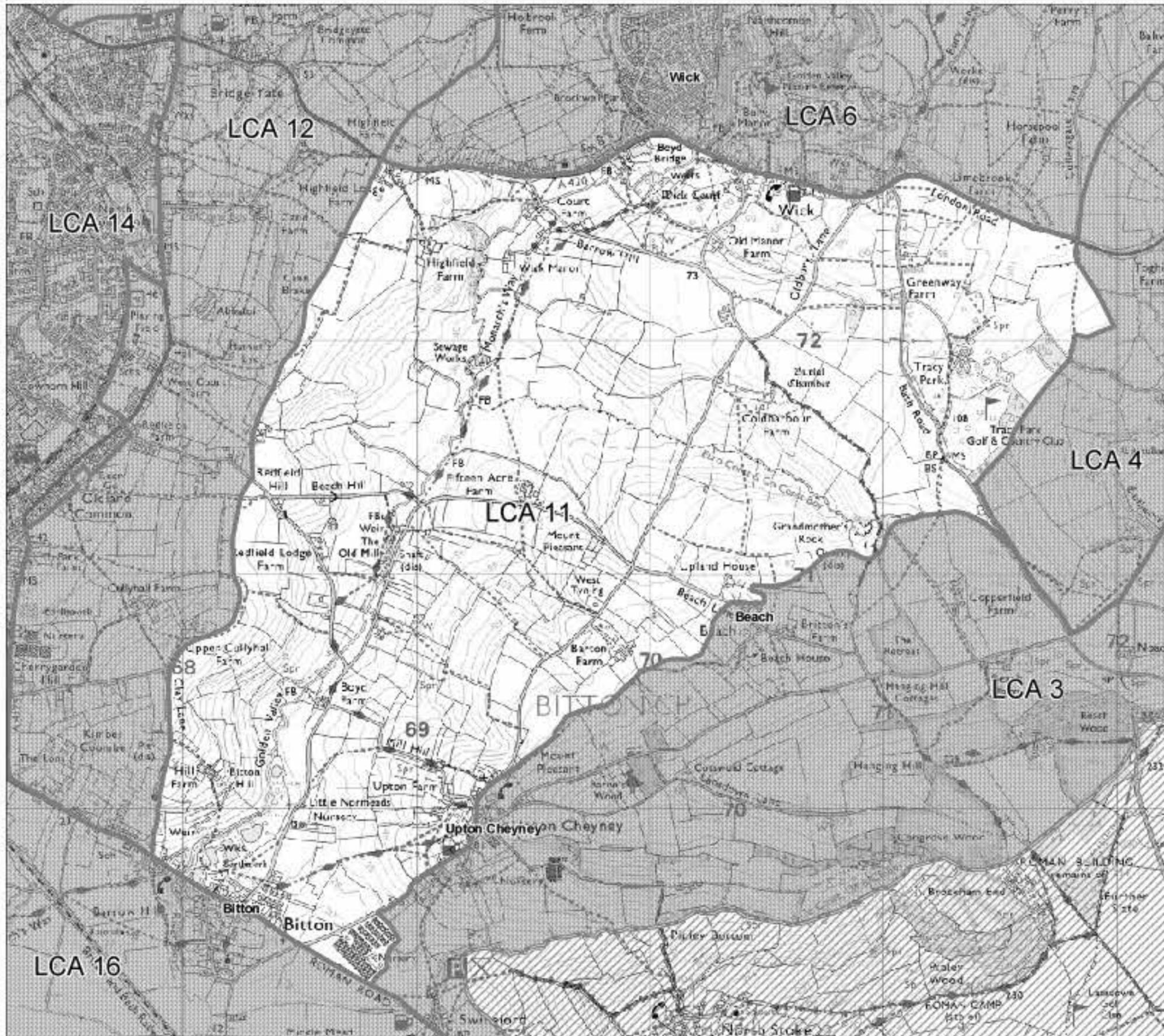
6 Bitton village from Bitton Hill. Centred on St Marys Church. Many well established and old tree specimens.



7 Joseph's Well - Upton Cheyney, named after a workman buried alive in a sewer trench. It is never known to run dry. One of many springs found in Pipeley Valley and Upton Cheyney.

Figure 35 – Area 11
Golden 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)



Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings.

South Gloucestershire Council Licence No100023410,2006

Figure 36
Area 11
Golden Valley