



Area 12

Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge



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Key

↖12 Photograph viewpoints

▨ Local Plan allocated site

Scale: not to scale

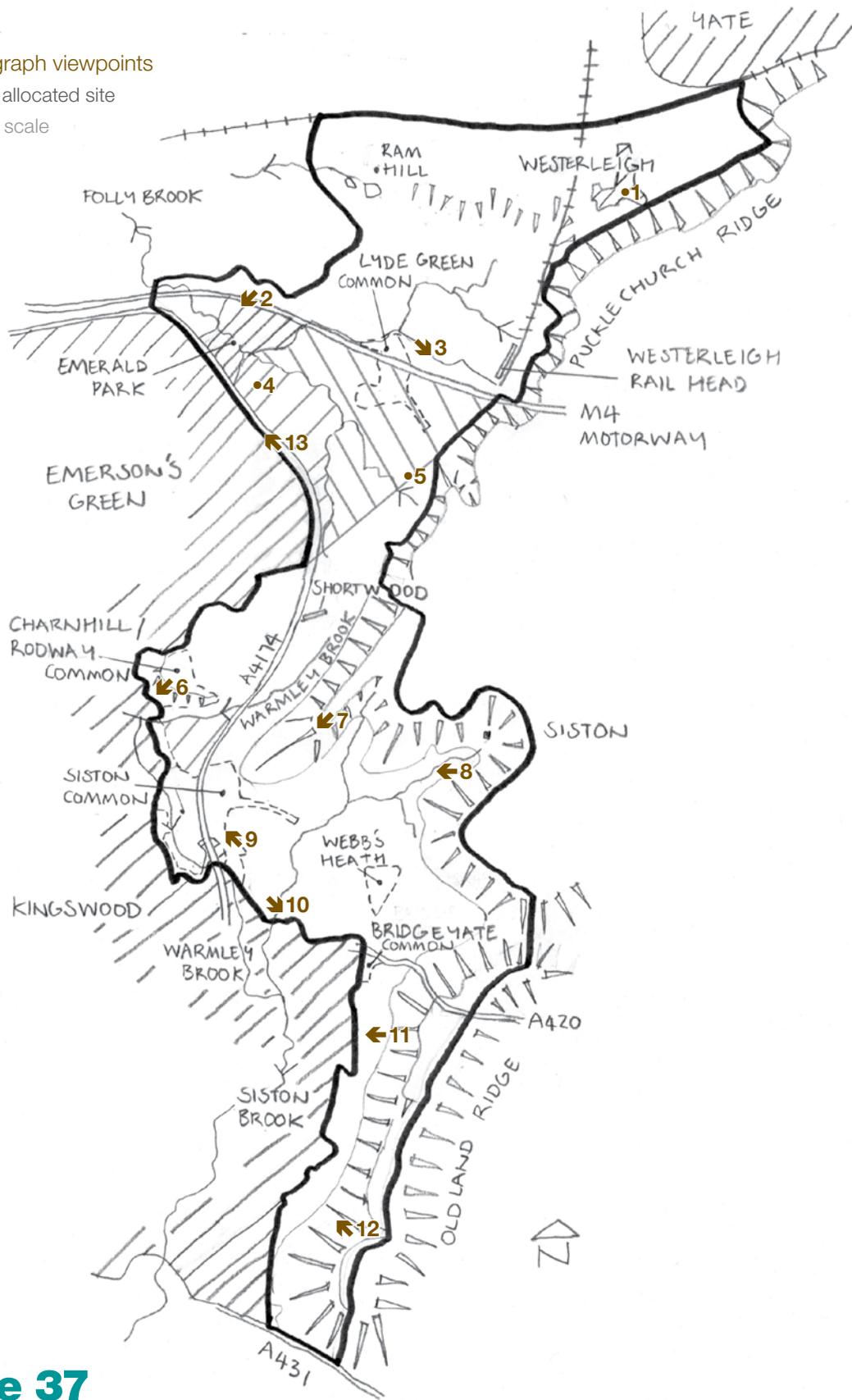


Figure 37

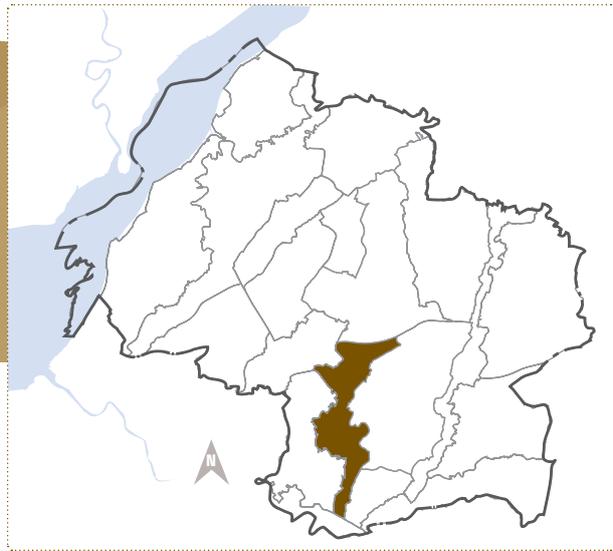
Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge

Sketch Map

Area 12

Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge

The Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge landscape character area comprises a diverse and intricate mix of farmland, settlement, roads, commons and industrial heritage.



Key Characteristics

- A gentle to rolling landscape, contained by the prominent Pucklechurch and Oldland Ridge to the east and influenced by the dominant and continuous urban edge of Bristol to the west.
- Great variety and mix of land uses including pasture, arable, horse paddocks, a golf course, with public open space and playing fields along the urban edge.
- The relatively limited arable farmland provides ground nesting opportunities while the winter stubble provides foraging potential for farmland birds including Amber and Red listed species.
- Common land is frequent and diverse.
- Diverse vegetation structure of overgrown and clipped hedges and limited areas of woodland providing habitat and connectivity across the character area. Variable hedgerow and woodland tree cover often associated with older settlement and commons, with generally more frequent cover to the east.
- Many and diverse habitats identified as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest, including neutral, marshy and acid grassland including those that are species rich, broadleaf and ancient woodland, flowing water and bankside vegetation.
- Generally a dispersed settlement pattern including a village, hamlets and scattered farms, with a significant area of new and proposed development to the east of Emerson's Green.
- Historic remains of coal industries are evident to the north and east of the area with disused tramways, railways, chimneys, scattered worker settlements, excavations and spoil mounds.
- Contained to the west by the residential urban edge, with large scale commercial/ industrial sheds in the north by M4.
- Major residential development between the M4 and the Ring Road is under construction and will become a prominent element in views from the Pucklechurch Ridge.

Key Characteristics

- Main roads cross and segment the area. Frequent, winding minor roads and lanes with grass verges / open grassland adjacent to commons, cross the area.

Location

The Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge character area is located along the eastern edge of the Bristol conurbation.

The eastern edge is contained by rising landform. The boundary follows the toe of the scarp of the Pucklechurch Ridge from the north to the area of Shortwood Hill, where the scarp peters out into less distinct rolling low hillsides, with more limited woodland cover. From here a transitional boundary approximately follows the skyline, separating the vale from the higher Pucklechurch plateau. From Bridgegate southwards, the boundary follows the Oldland Ridge. The short southern boundary follows the A431 and topographical boundary with the Avon Valley character area.

The western boundary follows the urban edge of Bristol to the M4. North of this, the boundary generally follows the skyline over low undulating ground and the edge of a golf course.

The northern boundary follows the distinct embankment of the South Wales to London railway line and marks a subtle transition in natural landform and a more distinct change in land cover and settlement pattern with the adjacent area. (See Figure 25).

Physical Influences

The underlying geology is mixed, with predominately Coal Measures (Upper and Lower series with sandstones, mudstones and shales) centrally, a band of Keuper marl and clays either side of the M4 corridor and along the lower

slopes of the Pucklechurch Ridge, with some small areas of White and Blue Lias (limestone) near Siston and along part of the Oldland Ridge. The soils are a combination of Gleys, Pelo-Stagnogleys and typical Argillic Pelosols.

The area has a varied topography that is given structure and containment by rising ground to the north and more significantly, along the eastern boundary. Broadly, the topographical features within the area comprise the broad bowl of the Folly Brook to the north, the central rolling Siston Brook valley and linear Warmley Brook valley, with the linear Oldland Ridge to the south.

Within the north, a broad shallow bowl at an average of 52 metres a.o.d. is contained to the north by low, gently rolling hills including Ram Hill, rising up to 84 metres a.o.d.; to the east, this area is bounded by the toe of the steep face of the Pucklechurch scarp, comprising a linear ridgeline rising up to 110 metres a.o.d. beyond the character area; and to the south, where land rises gently to the area of Orchard Farm at 80 metres a.o.d. (west of Shortwood). The westerly flowing tributaries of the Folly Brook largely follow an irregular, sinuous course within this bowl with some regular ditches along field boundaries to the east.

Centrally, the Siston Brook valley forms a complex landform. To the east, a broadly curving hillside is formed by gentle slopes and spurs rising to a flat skyline at approximately 100 metres a.o.d. The valley below comprises gently rolling low hills up to 74 metres a.o.d. A descending ridge to the west is a continuation of the Pucklechurch Ridge, forming a skyline and containment to the Siston Valley to the east, separating it from the Warmley Valley to the west.

The south westerly flowing meandering Siston Brook and its tributaries join Warmley Brook south of this character area, before continuing southwards to the River Avon.

The Warmley Brook follows a linear valley to the south of Shortwood, between the Pucklechurch Ridge and Rodway Hill. To the north its course is a natural channel, however to the south, some sections within Felicity Park, adjacent playing fields and across Siston Common, have been modified.

To the south, the linear ridge and gentle slopes of the Oldland Ridge rise to the east, from the generally level valley at approximately 45 metres a.o.d., to the ridge line at 80 to 88 metres a.o.d.

Land Cover

To the north of the area (north of the M4) the gently undulating landform is predominantly pastoral, with scattered pockets of arable land and horse paddocks near to settlement and a recently developed golf facility, driving range and fishing lakes to the south of the Westerleigh Road. Field sizes are typically medium (some large) and regular shaped to the north, with generally smaller fields, some of irregular shape, nearer the M4 and generally around the settlement edges. Boundaries are variable. Clipped hedgerows with few hedgerow trees are typical, with intermittent hedgerows or post and wire fences around horse paddocks. Dense linear sections of scrub and trees partially cover the South Wales to London railway embankment and line the old tramways and unpaved tracks in this area. Deciduous and mixed woodland areas cover higher ground at Ram Hill.

Around Ram Hill there are also some small scale, scattered, non-agricultural land uses, with inert material storage/sorting compounds, horse paddocks with associated ad hoc home-made stables and sheds, timber fences and use of old railway wagons.

South of the M4 a significant area is being developed including a science park and residential development. The existing fields are irregular and small to medium in size, and many of the associated hedgerows and hedgerow trees will be incorporated into the open space network of the new development.

To the south east of Emerson's Green, the regular pattern of medium to large fields generally follows the linear form of the Warmley Valley. Boundaries include a mix of clipped and overgrown hedgerows with frequent mature trees.

Within the Siston Valley, the pasture fields are medium to small and irregular shaped with thick, often overgrown hedges, supplemented with mature trees and small copses along upper slopes (Photo 8). Significant Community Forest woodland cover is now maturing within this hedgerow framework.

The field pattern is disrupted to the west of Siston, where the Shortwood Lodge Golf Club occupies a significant area in the centre of the valley. The planting pattern is largely unrelated to the former field pattern, reflecting the layout of greens and fairways.

The Oldland Ridge has a regular field pattern of pasture, with medium sized, linear fields generally following the contours, with smaller fields and horse paddocks associated with the irregular settlement edge (Photo 12). Fields are defined by clipped or overgrown, sometimes intermittent, hedgerows, with timber fences typically around paddocks. Along the ridge, post and wire fences supplement the intermittent hedges.

The degree of tree cover throughout the area is variable and largely relates to the pattern of hedgerow trees, commons, the disused railway track and Dramway. Hedgerow trees are often associated with the edges of older settlement pattern; generally intermittent along lower ground in the west along the urban edge, becoming more dense with thick hedges further east.

The irregular urban edge along the western boundary, from the B4465 southwards, is occasionally interwoven with or edged by commons, school playing fields, public open spaces and horse paddocks.

Land cover in places consists of rough, coarse grassland. These fields are often divided by a combination of hedge, fence and occasional stone wall boundaries.

A number of commons lie within the area:

- Lyde Green Common, severed by the M4, comprises a field and broad road verges of unimproved grassland, partly edged by water-filled ditches and dense hedgerows with intermittent trees.
- Charn Hill and Rodway Common, on the urban edge (Photo 6), comprise rough, unenclosed heathland and a dense scrub/ woodland framework, covering elevated ground and slopes of a steep sided valley. They lie on the western boundary and are partly contained by the urban edge.
- Siston Common and Webb's Heath comprise broad open areas of common with a mix of rough, unimproved grassland with thickets of hawthorn and blackthorn scrub, small groups of deciduous trees and informal hedges (Photo 9). Both are crossed by country lanes with scattered farms/houses and are defined variously by the adjacent field boundary pattern, property boundaries, or the urban edge. These two areas are linked by a linear common of broad roadside verges, following Webb's Heath Road, through Goose Green. Siston Common forms the most extensive common within the character area, but is now bisected by the Avon Ring Road.
- Bridgegate Common comprises two small areas with different patterns of open grassland and scattered trees. The western extent forms a regular space contained by the A420/A4175 road junction, scattered housing of varying age and hedgerows.

The eastern extent comprises a small field and irregular verges spread along a country lane, with scattered farms, houses and hedgerow boundaries. This corridor of irregular common land continues eastward for some distance, beyond the character area and provides a link with Holbrook Common at Wick. This is an attractive landscape despite the high volumes of traffic passing through it.

Close to the urban edge, much of the landscape has a high amenity/recreational use, with areas of public open space and playing fields. Shortwood Lodge Golf Course is an amenity landscape west of Siston, comprising an irregular pattern of conifers and deciduous tree planting with improved grassland cover (Photo 7), while another comprising golf and fishing facilities is located just to the north of the M4, Warmley Forest Park provides links to the cycle network and includes facilities such as a skate park and scout building.

Historic earthworks are evident to the south of Oldland Common, comprising a circular mound adjacent to the A4175.

Much of the area is influenced by former industrial activity:

- Coal extraction at Ram Hill has left Bitterwell Lake, once a header lake providing water to feed the steam pumps for the local pit, now a recreation feature.
- There are numerous tramways to the north, including one of the earliest railways in Britain, the 19th century Dramway. This connects Coalpit Heath to the north, just beyond this area, with the River Avon to the south and now forms the route of a public footpath passing centrally through the area.
- The original, now disused, Gloucester to Bristol railway passes south along the toe of the Pucklechurch Ridge and west below Rodway Common, to a former important rail junction at Mangotsfield. From here the Midland Railway had a branch to Bath, which travels southwards and through the built areas

of Warmley, North Common and then within the adjacent character area through Oldland Common. The Bristol and Bath Railway Path utilises these corridors.

- Remnants of coal extraction and brick works are very closely associated with the toe of the Pucklechurch scarp.
- Industrial archaeological features are evident within two sites forming the Parkfield Colliery, linked by the Dramway.

Most of the Parkfield North Colliery site and its chimney lie within the adjacent character area, on the lower slopes of the Pucklechurch Ridge. However scrub covered earthworks, to the west of the Dramway adjacent to the M4, are within this area.

Brandy Bottom (Parkfield South) Colliery includes a chimney (Photo 5), pit head buildings and earthworks, all now absorbed within a framework of scrub and trees. The site is a SAM and the most complete example of a 19th century coalmine in the Bristol Coalfield.

- The former Shortwood Brickworks lies near the toe of the Pucklechurch Ridge and partly extends beyond this character area, onto the lower scarp slopes. The brickworks themselves were demolished in the mid 1990's and the site is now being landfilled. A stockpile of previously extracted clay is stored for transportation to Cattybrook Brickworks within the Severn Ridges character area.

A disused railway forming a spur off the Bristol to Bath Railway Path, runs past the former collieries and Shortwood Claypit.

- Less visible remains of former land use within the landscape are found at Warmley Forest Park (adjacent to A420), previously the site of Warmley Clay Pipe Works, later a landfill site (Photo 10) and at Webb's Heath, where vegetated mounds indicate the remains of coal spoil and a coal mine ventilation shaft remains a local feature.

Biodiversity

Although immediately adjacent to the urban edge and bisected by major roads, this character area includes a diverse and ecologically valuable mosaic of grasslands, woodland and farmland with a criss-crossing of watercourses and ponds connected by wildlife corridors including hedgerows, these features provide important habitat for a diverse range of species.

There are approximately 3 hectares of ancient woodland comprising two small woodlands, representing less than ten percent of the total wooded cover within this area. Several woodland areas are designated as SNCI's. 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. There appears to be good connectivity for species such as these between the wooded areas via hedgerows and scattered trees.

There are fifteen sites designated as SNCIs due to the quality of the grassland (neutral, calcareous, acidic and marshy) present and includes areas of species-rich grassland. This diverse habitat supports a range of invertebrates and ant hills are a regular feature. These invertebrates in turn provide a food source for mammals, including bats.

There are many watercourses and their tributaries criss-crossing the landscape through this area. Many of the watercourses within this Landscape Character Area form part of an SNCI, including those at Folly, Warmley and Siston Brooks. These watercourses will support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and water voles. Ponds and pools within the area will support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

The majority of the agricultural land use within this area is pastoral farmland with a small area of arable farmland within the eastern section of the Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge. Arable farmland provides habitat for many species of ground nesting including some that are listed as being Globally Threatened Red listed species. The winter stubble in these areas also provides a foraging resource.

There is a history of coal industry in this character area, including mining, tunnels, and underground quarries. Mines and disused railway tunnels provide an ideal habitat for many species of bat including European Protected Species.

The golf course presents the opportunity for appropriate planting and management to present a mosaic of habitats of value to a diverse range of species.

Settlement and Infrastructure

Settlement forms a prominent, dense edge along much of the western boundary and is elsewhere scattered within a variety of patterns. Most of the older settlement pattern within this area, even where they have an earlier core expanded along roads, due to the need to house workers of the coalmines, railways and other industries.

The urban edge has in places a complex and irregular pattern of development, which has expanded and pushed the rural edge eastwards. More recent expansion has included large scale residential, commercial and industrial development.

The northern part of this urban edge, extending between the A4174 and the M4 comprises a recent employment area at Emerald Park, Emerson's Green, made up of very large distribution sheds, offices, light industry and road infrastructure (Photo 2). A framework of maturing recent planting extends along the site's periphery, including the A4174. Further development is extending east and south as a continuation of Emerson's Green.

Further north along the Westerleigh Road a number of recent developments including garden centres and nurseries have introduced large buildings, sheds, glass houses and parking areas and some new housing.

Emerson's Green residential development just to the south, lies in the adjacent Kingswood landscape character area (Photo 4). The recent large scale, dense residential development extends to the A4174, merging with occasional retail and commercial development off the A4174 road junctions. The development edge of residential roofscapes above tall timber screen fencing, together with the A4147 corridor, combine to form a distinct linear urban boundary to the area, with planting along this edge.

Of the original listed farmhouses which lie within the development area Hallen Farm and Lydes Green Farm have been restored and returned to residential use. Newlands Farm, also listed, next to the Ring Road, has been stabilised but not yet brought back into use.

Continuing south, the urban edge recedes westwards and includes a mix of old Pennant stone and more recent brick buildings, intermixed with a number of industrial complexes and school playing fields. This area comprises a complex and interwoven historic pattern of settlement, common land, small scale industry and agriculture.

The historic settlement pattern focuses upon the former village centres of Warmley, North Common and Oldland Common, within which and from which, small scale incremental infill and expansion along roads and lanes has occurred (Photo 11).

Two small areas of housing to the south of Rodway Hill sit largely within a rural framework. Siston Park, adjacent to Siston Common, includes mid 20th century housing and a more recent extension to the north. Recent housing development on Carson's Road, on a former factory site, abuts the new Avon Ring Road, enclosed on this boundary by timber fencing on top of an embankment.

Recent housing infill has also occurred along the A4175 at North Common. Along the toe of the Oldland Ridge, small groups of residential settlement extend into the rural fringe along lanes, perpendicular to the A4175. A complex of glass houses also lies adjacent to this road.

The wider rural landscape contains the village of Westerleigh, hamlets, scattered farms and recent industrial activities.

To the north east of the character area, Westerleigh village is located below the Pucklechurch Ridge and comprises a linear settlement with large Pennant stone houses and farms, brick terraces, and more recent reconstituted stone and rendered infill properties, built on the convergence of three roads, with the church and village green at its centre (Photo 1). The majority of the village is located on gently sloping ground, nestled below the Pucklechurch Ridge, with a more recent housing spur ascending the ridge, along Shorthill Road. The village is surrounded by agricultural fields, with a playing field to the south.

To the west, Ram Hill, a colliery settlement and Henfield, are small dispersed/linear and clustered hamlets respectively, consisting of a mix of, Pennant sandstone with more recent render and brick buildings, focused around a convergence of minor roads and lanes.

The isolated, clustered hamlet of Siston (a Conservation Area) comprises traditional limestone buildings and church, along lanes lined with limestone walls. It has Saxon origins and is located in close proximity to the former Kingswood Forest. A particularly distinctive feature is the adjacent Siston Court, an Elizabethan manor house, situated above the hamlet within a designed landscape setting, which extends into the adjacent character area.

Settlement groups elsewhere comprise linear development at Shortwood (Pennant sandstone and red brick workers houses), clustered properties along lanes, over common land at Webb's Heath, Goose Green and common edge

settlement at Bridgegate and Lyde Green (largely limestone buildings, with more recent brick buildings, some with ad hoc sheds). Scattered farms are common throughout the area, some with large modern agricultural barns.

Low Pennant sandstone walls are common features along roadsides, within the older centres of settlement to the south, and are often accompanied by stone piers of either Pennant sandstone or limestone and Victorian-style copings at property boundaries.

Copper slag coping stones (a by-product from the Warmley Brassworks, within the Kingswood area) are visible along boundary walls, e.g. Upper Cullyhall Farm on the Oldland Ridge. The use of this material is scattered widely within the rural areas of South Gloucestershire, and forms a distinguishing feature within buildings and boundary walls.

Recent industrial and non-agricultural activity within the rural framework include an abattoir and processing plant south west of Westerleigh, below the Pucklechurch Ridge. It comprises a large modern building unit adjacent to the rail infrastructure. Tall storage containers at the oil terminal at Westerleigh Rail Head are located to the north of the M4 (Photo 3).

The A4174 Avon Ring Road defines a section of the north western boundary and continues south through rural low lying parts of the area, where it generally follows the line of the former Bristol to Bath railway line. It travels variously at grade in the north, cut into higher ground to the west adjacent to and south of Emerson's Green, where it is associated with a large scale earth sculpture and is contained within cuttings and stone walling to the south. The associated infrastructure planting is maturing to integrate this road into the wider landscape and to screen adjacent development. The sculpted earth mound to the east of Emerson's Green and north of Pumphrey Hill provides a distinctive landmark and recreational area, affording wide ranging views of the wider landscape to the east, beyond the ringroad.

The M4 cuts across the northern area east to west, in slight cutting to the west, briefly at grade and then on embankment before cutting into the Pucklechurch Ridge.

The west-east South Wales to London railway line on high embankment, forms the northern boundary.

A number of roads cross east to west, connecting with the rural settlements of Westerleigh, Pucklechurch and Wick. The irregular pattern of minor roads and lanes generally follow gentle landform or spurs on steeper terrain.

A number of strategic recreational routes cross the area:

- The Bristol and Bath Railway Path follows the disused railway over low lying ground beneath the Pucklechurch scarp to the east of the urban edge, before following a new section adjacent to the Avon Ring Road, then entering the built up areas of Mangotsfield and Warmley.
- The Dramway is an important former industrial tramway. The original route is largely intact, although parts have been removed by the Avon Ring Road. It is now used as a public footpath. It passes centrally north to south through the area. The path follows the original tramway through the Folly Brook valley from Ram Hill, beneath the M4, west of Lyde Green Common, merging with the Bristol and Bath Railway Path, before following a new route adjacent to the Avon Ring Road, across Siston Common (Photo 9) within the Warmley Valley, close to the western urban edge and then out of the area at Warmley. In places the original limestone track sleepers are still evident.
- One of the circuits within the series of Circular Rides in South Gloucestershire passes through the north east of the area. It commences in Westerleigh and follows a track west and adjacent to the South Wales to London railway embankment, turns south and travels across the Folly Brook valley, beneath the M4 and along Lyde Green

Common, before briefly joining the Bristol and Bath Railway Path, and the lane and track ascending the Pucklechurch Ridge. The route continues through the adjoining character area, turning north to Westerleigh.

- The Community Forest Path, within the Forest of Avon, passes centrally through the area north to south. From south of Ram Hill the path travels across the Folly Brook valley, beneath the M4, ascending the Pucklechurch Ridge to Shortwood Hill. The route descends into the Siston Brook valley, over Siston Hill and to Warmley, before following the Bristol and Bath Railway Path southwards.

There is also an extensive network of public rights of way connecting the urban edge to the wider countryside. All combine to form an intricate network across the area. This is particularly dense in the southern part of the area.

One overhead powerline and associated pylons pass north to south centrally through the area, before bisecting the undulating Siston Brook valley, then turning south, over Bridgegate Common and along the lower slopes of the Oldland Ridge.

Landscape Character

The Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge landscape character area has great variety and distinct landscapes, influenced by the urban conurbation to the west, layers of industrial history and recent built and recreational development over an agricultural landscape, contained to the east by prominent rising ground.

The northern bowl of the Folly Brook valley of predominately low, gently sloping pasture, with some arable fields, is contained by the Pucklechurch Ridge to the east and urban edge of Emerald Park /Emerson's Green to the south west and is roughly bisected by the M4. Within this area lies the small dispersed/linear settlement of Ram Hill, clustered pattern of Henfield and scattered farms.

The area of Ram Hill and Henfield comprises a largely strong, irregular rural framework with areas of woodland, mixed overgrown/clipped hedgerows supplemented with wire fences, defining regular shaped fields. The clustered settlement pattern and non-agricultural activities such as storage compounds, and a fishing lake, are reasonably well integrated as a result of this framework. Horse paddocks are however locally evident where hedgerows have become replaced with fences. Associated ad hoc home-made stables and sheds and the use of old railway wagons are also evident and untypical of a rural landscape. Large modern agricultural sheds are prominent within older farm complexes within this area.

The South Wales to London main railway line cuts across the northern boundary of this area on high embankment. Recent scrub clearance to sections of the embankment, as part of maintenance works, has in places raised the prominence of this landform, with the elevated, artificial horizontal skyline now more evident within some local views. This feature however remains largely well integrated, particularly where nearby hedgerow trees, or overgrown hedgerows, provide a strong vegetation structure. This landform also forms a significant visual barrier to views northwards into the adjacent character area.

Westerleigh to the north east, largely nestles within undulating topography contained by the partially wooded Pucklechurch Ridge to the south and east, gently rising ground to the west and the railway embankment to the north. The embankment visually separates Westerleigh from the urban edge of Yate, located less than a kilometre away to the north east, in the adjacent character area. The church forms a distinctive focal point to the village and local landmark, visible against the skyline from the north. The linear settlement pattern radiates along three roads from the central green and church and is influenced by heavy traffic.

The village is largely well integrated by the landform setting and vegetation structure.

However, the linear expansion of the village to the east, comprising modern detached houses, has extended on to the lower slopes of the Pucklechurch Ridge and raised the visual prominence of this part of the village within local views.

The more recent housing development to the west of the village has also resulted in a new clustered settlement pattern, which although not particularly evident from the road corridor, is visible within open views from the Pucklechurch Ridge.

To the south west of Westerleigh, below the Pucklechurch Ridge, the abattoir/processing plant, oil terminal (Photo 3) and occasional line of goods wagons along the railway, form a scattered pattern of large structures, visible from the scarp, local landscape and M4. This concentration of features is taller than the adjacent vegetation structure and therefore is prominent within the local landscape.

The Pucklechurch Ridge, beyond the area's eastern boundary, is a prominent backcloth and skyline feature to the Folly Brook valley and in views from the urban edge. It also provides expansive panoramic views over the area, the Bristol conurbation and towards South Wales. The scarp's textured cover of woodland, rough grassland and scrub, coupled with historic industrial relics and scattered farms, is particularly visible and distinctive, influencing this area's character. The two chimneys and wooded spoil mounds along the scarp's toe variously add texture and form local landmarks.

The central bowl of the Folly Brook, north of the M4, contains a dense and textured framework of tall hedgerows, some clipped, over a mosaic of pasture, rough grassland and common land, with scattered farms. The M4 is screened to some degree by existing planting along the motorway embankments. It is however visually and audibly prominent in places, providing some views over this area.

To the west and south of the M4, the large warehouse buildings at Emerald Park are visually prominent within the locality and wider landscape (Photo 2). The landform and built form, large scale, massing, lighting and uniformity of materials of this development, with the loss of virtually all existing landscape features except the Folly Brook, has eroded the characteristic small scale landscape structure and pattern of the surrounding area. Although the maturing tree cover is providing some screening or buffering to this development, particularly along the M4, the silver colour of the sheds accentuates their prominence, both against the small scale residential roofscape to the west and against the rural backdrop near Ram Hill, north of the M4, particularly in views from Downend and other elevated locations.

The housing edge of Emerson's Green abutting the boundary of this area, the acoustic and screen timber fencing and linear planting, form a regular dense urban edge and a prominent built skyline, often elevated above the A4174. Established planting in places is wide and dense enough to integrate the timber screen fencing, but elsewhere is limited, resulting in a harsh linear built boundary.

The claypit stock piles at Shortwood are locally evident, with the rich red colour of the clay excavation areas and stockpiles contrasting with the surrounding dense green woodland framework. This framework connects to both the adjacent Brandy Bottom Colliery and the wider vegetation pattern on the Pucklechurch Ridge.

To the south, the Siston Brook valley within its upper reaches comprises a gently rolling enclosed pastoral valley, covered by a strong framework of hedgerows, copses and small woodlands, defining small to medium irregular shaped fields.

Siston hamlet is well integrated within the valley, with the more elevated Court, on the boundary of this area, evident within distant views from the west. One powerline and occasional middle distance views of the Bristol conurbation,

influence the perception of remoteness and tranquillity otherwise obtained within this part of the character area. The area to the west and south of Siston now has a more wooded character as the extensive Community Forest Woodland is now established.

The lower rolling hills to the west comprise a similar strong landscape framework, within which lies a distinct cover of dispersed open common/heathland. These areas comprise Siston and Webb's Heath Commons, typically rough open grassland, with small irregular scattered patches of scrub and trees, over hill tops or valley sides.

Bridgegate Common comprises a more balanced regular network of small open fields, partly fringed by housing and hedgerows, or forming an irregular corridor of broad verges, along Chesley Hill and Holbrook Lane. These areas are all associated with scattered stone farms and houses, with some small ad hoc sheds, along lanes. The western area of common is heavily influenced, both visually and audibly, by traffic along the A420 and A4175.

Open elevated views over these three commons are variously influenced, visibly and audibly, by traffic levels the close proximity of the urban edge of Kingswood, the Avon Ring Road, Shortwood Lodge Golf Course, powerline and A420, all of which influence and dilute the otherwise rural character of the area.

To the west, the low lying Warmley Brook valley forms a gentle uniform valley, with a small elevated plateau and recreational landscape of playing fields at Rodway Hill and broader landform to the south, contained by the rolling hills of the Siston Valley to the east. Within this context, the Shortwood Lodge Golf Course occupies the upper slopes and skyline between Siston and Warmley Valley. The fairways and greens are visually evident, contrasting in texture with adjacent pasture fields. Similarly, hedgerow removal and restructuring of the vegetation within the golf course has created a more open landscape, with irregular planting areas, which contrasts with the surrounding field pattern.

The valley landscape falls towards and overlooks the urban edge of Kingswood, with a complex mosaic of built development, commons, playing fields, horse paddocks, and roads within a receding agricultural landscape.

The irregular urban edge is prominent within local and elevated middle distant views from the ridge to the east, with limited vegetation structure following this edge. This settlement edge contains and visually influences the rural landscape to the east and south. Conversely, the rural ridgelines to the east of the area are a prominent feature within views from the urban edge and provide a strong sense of place and local distinctiveness.

Warmley and Bridgegate are located within the lower Siston Valley, extending along both its floor and lower eastern slopes. These villages have in effect merged, through piecemeal expansion of older settlement centres extending along roads into the character area, partly containing or segmenting the adjacent rural fringe. Clustered pockets of old and new residential development and old industrial units punctuate the rural area and are locally evident. The tree and vegetation cover associated with Siston Common and adjacent field hedgerows, plus tree cover within the settlement areas, provides generally good integration of these settlement areas.

The Avon Ring Road (A4174), significantly segments part of the area although its' associated planting is progressively absorbing the road into the landscape in local views.

The church spire at Warmley is a prominent and distinctive landmark, set within a pocket of urban development nestled within the valley (Photo 10).

The remaining agricultural landscape within the Warmley Brook valley comprises pasture with some rough grass, contained by largely overgrown hedges and intermittent trees. Along the urban edge, the elevated rolling, gently sloping commons at Rodway Hill and Charn Hill, edged to the west and south with steep wooded slopes, have both visually enclosed and open

aspects, due to the deciduous woodland edge and textured sporadic clumps of thicket and scrub within rough heath land.

Rodway Common has a clearly defined urban edge to the north and south and is visually prominent and distinctive from numerous urban edge and rural vantage points, due to its elevation.

Siston Common has become more fragmented over time and as a result of the Avon Ring Road. A linear strip to the south of the Bristol and Bath Railway Path, abuts an industrial fringe and is enclosed by housing development to the south (Lower Common). The common continues to the south, with open grassland extending along the Warmley Valley, now divided by the Avon Ring Road (Middle Common) and over the slopes and top of Siston Hill (Upper Common) providing open views of the area.

The amenity landscape of playing fields, school grounds and public open space forms a distinct, but low key, open landscape along the urban edge. These spaces provide an open green buffer and transition between the urban edge and the wider rural landscape, although their character, of mown grass and often limited vegetation structure, can contrast markedly with the adjoining rural landscape. Visually their openness, due to the lack of vegetation, increases the prominence of the settlement edge from the wider area.

The Oldland Ridge to the south forms a visually prominent and distinct linear rural landform of rising ground and skyline, forming a distinctive backdrop within views from the urban edge and in intermittent views from the A417 and A420 corridors.

Although influenced by the adjacent prominent urban edge and audible effect of traffic on the A4175, along its lower slopes, this area provides a rural setting to the urban area, with its rural framework of clipped and overgrown hedgerows defining the medium and small scale fields adjacent to the settlement edge.

Some hedgerows have been replaced by fencing around paddocks along this edge and post and wire fences along the ridge.

A powerline following the lower slopes is the only prominent built feature within this rural context. The few scattered farms and properties along lanes, which climb towards the ridge, are small scale and generally well integrated by the vegetation structure.

From the open upper slopes and crown of the ridge, there are extensive views of the urban edge and Bristol to the west and of the large scale landform of the Ashwicke Ridges to the east.

The Changing Landscape

The Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge landscape is influenced, both directly and indirectly, by the close proximity of Bristol to the west and the frequent points of access between the urban and rural areas, provided by the extensive road network. While significant change is taking place in a number of locations, particularly in the centre and north of the area, this character area retains pockets of distinctive rural landscape and areas in variable condition and sensitivity to change.

The western fringe of the Folly Brook valley to the north of the area is greatly influenced by the Bristol urban edge. Development, comprising a residential fringe, A4174 corridor and the industrial character of Emerald Park, has a prominent local influence, due to little integration with or transition into the wider agricultural landscape, which as a result, erodes the character of the adjacent rural area.

Relatively recent structure planting implemented at Emerald Park, is maturing and aims to provide a degree of integration of the new development within the surrounding area. However, the scale and massing of the development is such that, even in the long term, planting has limited potential to integrate the development within the surrounding small scale landscape structure. It is therefore likely that the buildings will remain

visually prominent in the local area and from elevated positions on the adjacent Pucklechurch Ridge.

Small scale settlement at Ram Hill and Henfield is largely well integrated within the framework of hedgerow trees and woodland. The area has a generally tranquil character, although the presence of stables and fences associated with the increase in land use change to 'horsiculture', modern large farm buildings and storage compounds, can detract from this, visually eroding the rural character and resulting in removal or fragmentation of hedgerows.

The visually enclosed nature of this area makes it less sensitive to change. However, the existing settlement pattern is sensitive to infill or incremental changes which might further erode the character and distinctiveness of this part of the character area, without appropriate integration measures.

More widely the character of the remaining open areas of the rural fringe is eroded by the presence of horsekeep and non agricultural landuse.

There is little evidence of active management of much of the existing vegetation framework, or new planting to create succession and sustain the landscape structure in the long term. Without this, the strength of the vegetation framework will decline in the future, potentially reducing its ability to integrate either existing, or future changes, and potentially reducing its biodiversity value. The scattered ponds and pools within this area along with their surrounding terrestrial habitat are vulnerable to any loss of habitat.

The more prominent development to the east, of Westerleigh Rail Head, abattoir and M4 corridor, reduces the perception of tranquillity and erodes the rural characteristics of the area, as does the more recent golf development adjacent to the M4, as well as the increasing presence of nursery/garden centre buildings, storage and carparking that are strung out along the Westerleigh Road.

Westerleigh is sensitive to further change which might affect the distinctive linear pattern and historic core of this village. The extension of the village along Shorthill Road, in terms of layout, building style and elevation above the vale, is in marked contrast to the original village core and has diluted the distinctive settlement character. Despite some detracting influences the Folly Brook valley landscape however, does have pockets of distinct character and a good vegetation framework, particularly around the area of Lyde Green, Hallen Farm and associated with the industrial heritage in the area below the Pucklechurch Ridge.

Despite its relatively strong vegetation framework, the landscape remains sensitive to change which would affect the character and setting of the commons and heritage features, or result in the loss of vegetation, which would reduce the biodiversity value and erode the landscape framework. Any change also has the potential to be visible from the Pucklechurch Scarp, potentially affecting the rural setting and character of this landform. The further encroachment of the urban edge has the potential to introduce significant landscape change into this area. The areas of ecologically important grassland can be particularly sensitive to changes in management or changes in drainage regime.

At Shortwood, landfill and progressive restoration is being implemented along the toe of the Pucklechurch Ridge and into a section of the lower scarp face in the adjoining area, with the ultimate aim of restoration back into the wider landscape, which should also create new habitat. The clay stockpile, is locally prominent.

The final restoration currently proposed will however restore the whole site, including the existing claypit and reintroduce a landscape framework across the area. New planting will incorporate a hedgerow structure similar to that existing before the works and a much more significant area of woodland, which will link with existing areas, contributing to and strengthening the landscape framework of the local area.

Extensions to the urban area are proposed within a number of locations. The Local Plan identifies an extensive area for employment, business and residential development, adjacent to Emerald Park and Emerson's Green. Planning approval has been granted for the westerly extension of Emerald Park and the new Science Park that is being implemented to the east. The new Science Park area incorporates more complex roof forms than those at Emerald Park, showing some more careful consideration of massing, colour and a robust landscape infrastructure that should mature to provide a new high quality landscape and valuable habitat.

Emerson's Green East development site covers an extensive area, extending to and along the toe of the Pucklechurch Ridge, contained to the north by the M4.

These developments will result in a significant large scale change in landscape character of the area, which was largely under agricultural use. Development will impact upon the setting of the adjacent Pucklechurch Ridge, however this is proposed to remain as a green and open backdrop to this character area.

The principal elements of the original landscape feature such as the Folly Brook tributary, Lyde Green Common, and much of the hedgerow and tree structure will remain as part of the open space network within the development area. The retained features will need to be re-inforced with woodland and tree planting through the development area to create a robust network of wildlife habitats and to filter views across the development area from the surrounding countryside.

Proposals for this area need to consider the setting of the Listed Buildings within the site, adjacent industrial archaeology, as well as the effect on SNCIs and common land within or bordering the site.

The M4 will replace the A4174 as the new urban edge. In the wider context, development of this area will alter the wider landscape setting to the M4 and around the north eastern edge of Bristol.

The Siston Brook valley is a relatively tranquil area, with a characteristic mosaic of strong and intact hedgerows, hedgerow trees and low key pattern of traditional buildings. Siston Conservation Area extends over the upper slopes of the ridge and beyond, into the adjacent character area. The collection of traditional and historic buildings of Siston within this elevated location, makes the visual setting particularly sensitive to change.

The distinctive character of the commons and heathland within the lower Siston Valley are also sensitive to change, such as settlement infill along lanes which cross these areas. The built form, landscape setting, condition and general maintenance of common edge properties greatly affects both the landscape character and habitat value of these spaces. Ad hoc development of sheds and variable maintenance of property boundaries also has a detracting visual influence.

Recent changes to the management regime for the commons is moving towards an annual cut with mowing only of edges and paths. This is expected to have a positive effect on both the character, appearance and biodiversity value of these areas.

Recreational pressure for 'horsiculture' is evident within many parts of the area, especially north of the M4 around Ram Hill and Henfield, along the urban edge of Bristol and adjacent to the Oldland Ridge at the settlement edge. 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 associated infrastructure of fencing, stables, access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and floodlighting, can result in a marked change in landscape character and disturbance to wildlife.

The maturing tree cover of the Community Forest planting along the upper valley sides of

Siston Valley and within Warmley Forest Park, on the reclaimed claypit, is providing a more well wooded landscape, increasing the degree of enclosure, whilst also providing recreational opportunities. The poor quality appearance of the parking area at Siston has a local detrimental effect on landscape character.

Increasing traffic on the adjacent roads has introduced significant visual and noise disturbance to Siston, Webb's Heath and Bridgegate Commons. The new Avon Ring Road has relieved vehicle pressure on the minor roads and lanes adjacent to the commons, enhancing their potential for recreational use, linking to the new network of footpaths and cycleways associated with the new road.

The Avon Ring Road, following a rural corridor within the Warmley Valley, has introduced significant visual and physical impact upon the local landscape character. The road corridor and associated junctions, overbridges, large scale earth sculpture, signage and lighting, introduced built form which locally erodes the rural character. However, the extensive infrastructure planting has created a generally robust vegetation framework that helps integrate and minimise these effects.

Siston Common was bisected by the Avon Ring Road, with part of the common becoming more enclosed by relatively recent residential development at Siston Park on one side and the urban edge on the other. This has brought changes in character, management, rural associations and an increase in recreational and urban edge pressures.

Relatively recent housing at Carson's Road, adjacent to the Avon Ring Road, presents a harsh built edge with little new planting to help integration, facing the gently rising rural landscape to the east. This built edge affects the rural character experienced along this road corridor. The common at Rodway Hill presently has signs of footpath erosion and is sensitive to inappropriate management which would lead to changes in its character.

Sections of the Dramway were removed by the construction of the Avon Ring Road, however new footpath connections provide a continuous route, albeit along tarmac paths in close proximity to the road corridor and its traffic.

The Avon Ring Road introduced a potential catalyst for change, leaving a mix of common land, school playing fields, public open spaces and remnant agricultural land sandwiched between the urban edge and the road. More recent changes have included the housing development at Siston Hill and the extensive area of playing fields creating a recreational landscape at Rodway/Pomphrey Hills, both of which have influenced the character of wider views across the surrounding landscape, including for example from Siston and Rodway Commons and high ground to the east. However the associated tree and woodland framework to these uses is progressively reducing their influence on the wider landscape. The density and levels of the Siston Hill development have had a particularly urbanising effect, while the increase in population increases pressure on nearby green spaces and footpaths.

Open spaces adjacent to the urban edge presently have visual and some physical links with the wider landscape. Their open character and views are visible both from the urban edge and from within these spaces. These spaces and their habitats are under pressure from current physical recreational activity and the level of potential future change, particularly from settlement encroachment, which may result in visual severance from the wider rural context.

The ridgelines and hills, generally to the east of the area, form distinct landforms with strong rural character. These include the ridges south of Pomphrey Hill and Shortwood Hill; the open rural hillside and skyline between Orchard Farm and Rodway Common to the west and the continuation of the Pucklechurch Ridge to the east then extending south between Siston Hill, Mounds Court Farm, Webb's Heath area and south along the Oldland Ridge. These ridgelines form natural skylines, with very limited

development, which are evident within local views and are therefore sensitive to change which might erode their distinctive character.

The hedgerow framework is a strong, generally intact feature of these ridgelines, contributing to landscape character, habitat value and connectivity, with the exception of the Oldland Ridge, where some has been replaced by fencing.

The Shortwood Lodge Golf Course, north of the Siston Valley, has changed the agricultural field pattern, resulting in a more open landscape and erosion of the rural character. The golf course is most evident where it extends over the upper valley slopes and less so where it is contained below the skyline.

The Oldland Ridge to the south has areas where landscape character has been eroded, due to the poor condition of some landscape features and particularly due to the visual prominence of the urban edge, which encroaches upon its lower slopes. Further change along this edge, would increase this effect and the erosion of the distinctive rural character of the area and threatens to reduce its habitat value.

Maintenance works to the railway embankments in the locality by Network Rail removed trees and scrub along the elevated slopes of the embankment resulting in a significant and long lasting impact on the previously green backdrop in local and more elevated views from the Pucklechurch Ridge. This in turn has introduced a more open character and revealing the artificial horizontal skyline of the embankment, making this a more prominent local feature, as well as increasing the perception of the railway itself.

The works also resulted in a significant reduction in woodland habitat. The proposed electrification of the line will introduce wires and gantries, further emphasising the presence of the embankment in the landscape. Modifications to or replacement of structures that cross the line also have the potential for impact.

Landscape Strategy

- Active management of both the hedgerow and woodland framework to help to ensure the conservation of the landscape and biodiversity value of these key features for the long term. Dependent on the number of hedgerow trees which are allowed to develop, or are planted, the landscape character could become more or less open as a result of hedgerow management, which could influence its future sensitivity to change.
- Ensure the conservation and enhancement of the diverse mosaic of habitats within this character area and ensure their continued connectivity via hedgerows, broadleaf tree cover and water courses. Seek to avoid the introduction of fencing in rural areas due to its landscape impact and lack of biodiversity value.
- Secure the delivery of robust landscape infrastructure to create a high quality setting both to the built development and the wider setting to the new northeast boundary of the Bristol conurbation.
- Strengthen the green open and rural character, and the landscape structure of the hillsides, ridges and skyline that form an important part of the rural setting to east of the existing the urban area and the proposed new development areas.
- Transport proposals including new structures should be sensitively located and designed to protect the character and amenity of the host landscape and wider views.
- Carefully consider issues such as layout, massing, colour and texture to ensure high quality views are maintained from surrounding elevated vantage points.
- Ensure that the character and biodiversity value of the remaining rural landscapes in this character area is reinforced, and that any new development is sensitively designed and landscaped to achieve this, including careful consideration of details such as lighting to ensure that wildlife is not disturbed.
- Encourage and support the management, restoration and enhancement of the relic industrial landscape of this area and the structures and tramways associated with the coal mining industry at Parkfield North, Brandy Bottom (Parkfield South) and Ram Hill Collieries.
- Ensure that new development does not harm the particular character, significance or setting of the formal grounds, former parkland, fields and woodlands associated with Siston Court.
- Enhance, extend and manage grasslands of ecological importance, including common land.
- Encourage and support the repair and retention of natural stone walls and other traditional features such as historic stiles, pennant stone kerbing and copper slag coping stones.
- While much of this character area comprises an enclosed valley, careful consideration should be given to ensure that new development or change does not adversely impact on the Cotswolds AONB or its setting, and conversely change in the AONB does not impact on prominent skylines that form the setting to the Golden Valley landscape.

Landscape Character Areas



1 Westerleigh with its village green. The focus of three roads, lined by older residential properties...



2 Looking south, with the large commercial sheds of Emerald Park and red roofs of Emersons Green. Bristol extends along the skyline with the M5 Motorway hidden by the foreground landform.



3 View from Lyde Green with the Oil Terminal and M4 visually prominent.



4 Emerson's and Lyde's Green are areas of significant change. These views in the Science Park show how existing trees and hedgerows along with new open spaces and planting provide a robust landscape setting within the new development.



5 Brick chimney remaining from South Parkfield Colliery on the Shortwood spur of the Bristol and Bath Railway Path.



6 Panoramic view of Kingswood from Rodway Common.



7 Shortwood Lodge Golf Course and powerlines, with the urban area of Kingswood forming the western skyline.



8 Siston Brook Valley looking west to the urban edge of Kingswood from Tut's Wood Hill.



9 The Dramway crossing Siston Common. Rural characteristics are overshadowed by the Kingswood urban edge. The Ring Road lies in cutting to the west (left).



10 View from Warmley Forest Park "Millennium Seat" looking southeast to Warmley Church spire and distant skyline of the Cotswold Scarp.



11 Fringe area on boundary with North Common. Farm and horsiculture development meet new light industry. Paddocks and stables are common. Kingswood and Bristol define the skyline.



12 View from the Oldland Ridge, north west to the varied urban fringe of Oldland Common with Kingswood and Bristol beyond.



13 View from the cycle path bridge over the Avon Ring Road showing the mature planting that provides a robust and effective screen and buffer to adjacent development.

Figure 38 – Area 12
Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge

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 39
Area 12

Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge