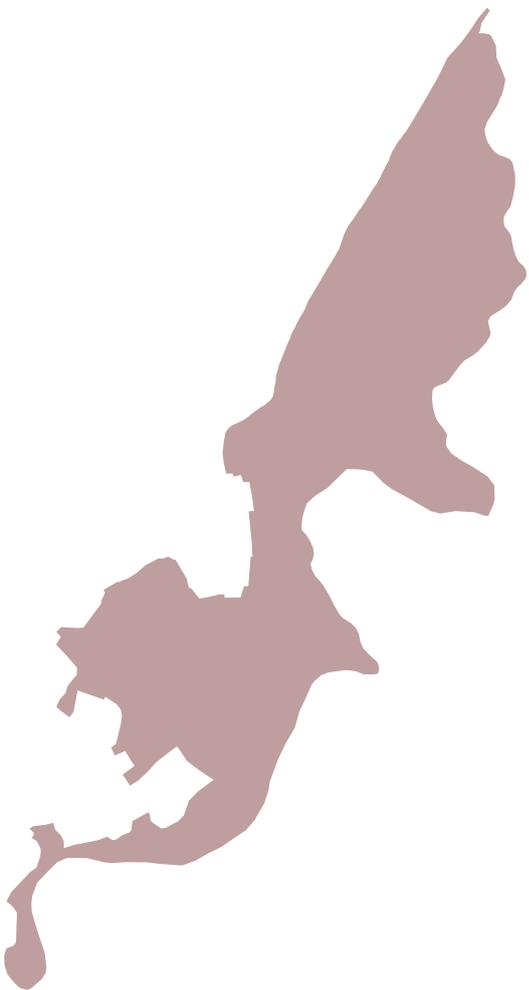




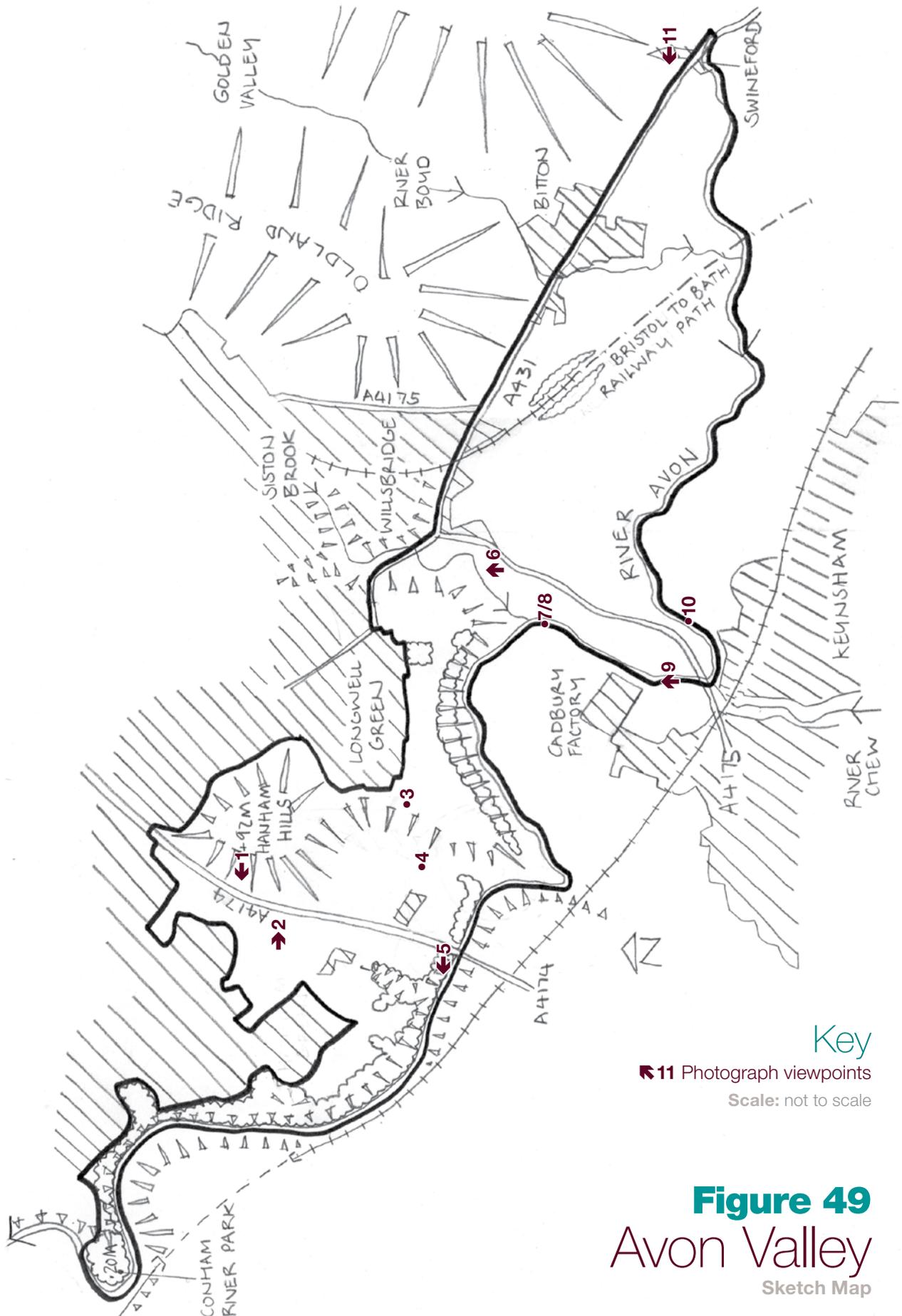
Area 16

Avon Valley



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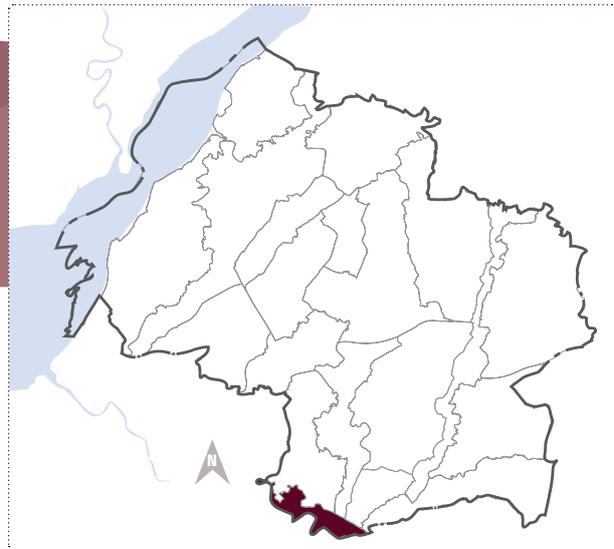
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Area 16

Avon Valley

The Avon Valley landscape character area consists of open river floodplain, enclosed steep wooded valley and gentle upper slopes defined by urban edge.



Key Characteristics

- Flat, large scale Avon floodplain to the east, with medium to large regular shaped pasture fields and meadows, some arable. Contained by clipped and overgrown hedges with occasional lines of trees and intermittent specimen trees, some pollarded.
- Enclosed steep sided river valley and linear broadleaved woodland including relatively large areas of ancient woodland to the west, with medium sized pasture fields and arable farmland providing habitat for notable species including European Protected Species.
- Sinuous and meandering form of the River Avon with its associated bankside vegetation defines the area's southern boundary and providing habitat and a wildlife corridor across the character area.
- Open, upper gentle slopes to the north west, contained to the north by the urban edge of Hanham and Longwell Green.
- Distinct hilltop of the Hanham Hills rises above the urban edge, enabling panoramic views over Bristol and to the Cotswold Scarp.
- The Avon Valley has historic industrial relics, including a disused railway, the Dramway, wharfs and lock gates along the river, the ruins of a copper smelting works at Conham, as well as the prominent but now disused Cadbury's factory just outside South Gloucestershire.
- Main roads cross the area only in two places. One powerline passes along the valley.
- Navigable river, now used mainly for recreation, with major recreational route following river bank.

Location

The Avon Valley landscape character area is located in the south of the South Gloucestershire area, on the boundary with Bath and North East Somerset Authority and to the east of Bristol.

The southern boundary follows the River Avon, which also defines the Authority boundary, although the character of this area continues southwards across the valley towards Keynsham and Saltford. The urban edge of Bristol defines the north western boundary. The A431 marks the north eastern boundary and edge of the floodplain, beyond which rises the Oldland Ridge north west of Bitton and the Ashwicke Ridges at Upton Cheyney. (See Figures 10 & 37).

Physical Influences

The Avon Valley area largely consists of Westphalian sandstone to the west, gradually changing to a mix of alluvium and Lower Jurassic limestone to the east. The soils are principally Brown Earth to the west, with a mix of Pello-alluvium Gley, typical Argillic Pelosols, Brown Rendzinas, Calcareous Pelosols and Brown Calcareous Earths over the rest of the area.

The topography varies from 10 metres a.o.d. along the River Avon, rising generally to 50-55 metres a.o.d. towards the urban edge of Bristol to the north and, at the highest point, rises to approximately 92 metres a.o.d. on the Hanham Hills above Longwell Green.

In the east of the area the landform is dominated by the broad river valley floodplain. The River Avon occupies a relatively broad channel, which meanders considerably as it flows north westwards towards Bristol.

Within the context of this broad floodplain, the former London to Midland railway (now a footpath and cycleway), is located on a high earth embankment, which physically bisects the flat valley floor.

Lock gates at several points allow navigable access, with weirs controlling river flow. The regular winter flooding of the valley floor is a feature of this area.

Further west, the valley profile becomes enclosed, with steep sided bluffs rising from the valley floor, with more gentle slopes above. North of the river these slopes continue to rise gently to the rounded hilltop of the Hanham Hills. This creates a prominent convex landform, which extends above the River Avon valley and into the surrounding urban edge to the north.

A number of tributaries flow southwards to the River Avon. These include (from east to west) the River Boyd south of Bitton village and Siston Brook south of Willsbridge. The River Boyd flows along a small slightly irregular shaped channel, fed by regular drainage ditches, across the floodplain. Siston Brook follows a meandering channel within a narrow steep sided valley.

Land Cover

The Avon Valley area is largely rural and has a variety of land cover closely related to the river valley form. The floodplain to the east comprises medium to large, generally regular shaped, pastoral fields with some arable land, contained by clipped and overgrown hedgerows, with some fencing. Tree belts line the river bank and disused railway line, with scattered specimen trees (some pollarded) within fields and hedgerows and wet meadows alongside the river (Photo 11).

Further west, where steep slopes contain the river valley, linear ancient and semi-natural woodland (largely of oak) is dominant, intermixed with areas of rough pasture. These areas are largely designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (Photo 5).

Conham River Park lies within a small meander loop of the River Avon, on the north western boundary of this area. The site comprises woodland cover, with open glades of rough grassland and informal footpaths.

The upper slopes to the north are covered by a mix of medium sized generally regular shaped, pasture and arable fields, with pastoral farmland generally on the higher ground, towards the Hanham Hills (Photo 8). The fields are contained variously by either woodland, clipped hedges or bands of mature deciduous trees. Thick and overgrown hedges are typical along the urban edge, although some boundaries are fencing.

Elements of a more ornamental landscape are evident in the area of Hanham Court, to the south of the Hanham Hills and include a formal avenue of mature trees (Photo 4).

Between the railway and the village of Bitton lies a round barrow (SAM) with scrub cover.

Biodiversity

A mosaic of woodland, grassland and farmland connected by the wildlife corridors formed by the meandering River Avon and its confluence with the River Boyd, plus a network of hedgerows combine to make the Avon Valley an important habitat for a diverse range of species.

The area includes approximately 33 hectares of ancient woodland, including some relatively large areas, representing approximately 60 percent of the total broadleaf wooded cover within this area. 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). Cleeve wood within the Avon Valley woodlands is also designated as a Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) for the floral species present, and further areas of the Avon Valley are designated as SNCI, including ancient woodland and geological SSSIs at Bickley and Cleeve Woods.

There are 5 sites designated as SNCIs for their neutral and calcareous grassland as well as marshy grassland at the River Boyd and wetland at the Hanham Hills fields. These include areas of species rich grassland, which support a range of invertebrates and hills are a regular feature.

These invertebrates in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats.

The watercourses and their tributaries which criss-cross the landscape through this area act as wildlife corridors and the adjacent woodland provide a wider habitat resource. The entirety of the River Avon through this Landscape Character Area is situated within an SNCI. The section of the River Boyd which joins the River Frome within the eastern extent of the area is also designated as an SNCI. These watercourses will support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and water voles. Elsewhere ponds and pools within the area will support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

There is good connectivity between habitats for species such as these throughout the Avon Valley.

The relatively small area of arable farmland provides some habitat for many species of ground nesting farmland birds including some listed as being Globally Threatened Red listed species, while the winter stubble provides a foraging resource.

There is a history of small scale stone quarrying within the Avon Valley. Underground quarries, mines and features such as lime kilns provide an ideal habitat for many species of bat including European Protected Species.

Settlement and Infrastructure

There are no major settlements within the area. Part of Bitton village lies within the area to the east, the rest of the village lying within the Golden Valley. Otherwise, settlement is limited to the hamlet of Swineford to the east, a number of scattered, isolated farms and buildings occurring along the A4175 and A431, on the periphery of, or above the floodplain and dispersed farms and houses along a minor road east of Hanham.

The area is however, bordered by dense settlement. To the north, the urban areas of Willsbridge, Longwell Green and Hanham include both dispersed and clustered groups of older Pennant sandstone and limestone cottages, houses, farms and outbuildings. These are distinct and variously distributed along major roads, extending into the landscape, or absorbed within more recent areas of brick housing or industry.

To the south of the Hanham Hills is the Hanham Abbots Conservation Area. This extends to the River Avon and includes an important historical building group at Hanham Court and Court Farm (Photo 3), with historical associations with the Ancient Kingswood Forest. Materials include limestone and Pennant sandstone within buildings and walls. Dating back to the 14th and 15th centuries, important features include St George's Church and Tithe Barn at Hanham Court and the 18th century 'Sally on the Barn' at Court Farm: these settlements are perched on the open slopes above the steep sided River Avon valley.

Other small settlements include Riverside Cottages, a scattering of cottages along the river to the west and farm houses, including cottages at Castle Inn Farm and Bickley Farm, with older properties typically enclosed by stone boundary walls.

Bitton, a nucleated village of predominantly limestone buildings and walls to the east, is a designated Conservation Area. Positioned on slightly higher ground on the edge of this area, it overlooks the floodplain of the Avon Valley and extends northwards into the Golden Valley character area.

The former London to Midland railway line (now the Bristol and Bath Railway Path) crosses the floodplain diagonally on embankment, heading towards Bath to the south east. Part of this route is shared with a steam railway.

The remnants of coal mining and small scale stone quarrying have left traces along the valley

sides to the west. A large area of tipped material from the Hanham Colliery forms a steep sided mound, well vegetated by woodland. The small quarry sites form frequent features, creating a number of stone outcrops, now enclosed by woodland.

The importance of the River Avon as a communication route is evident at frequent intervals along its course.

Londonderry Wharf, on a meander in the river, opposite and to the north east of the now disused Cadbury factory (Photo 7), was the terminus for coal barges, which collected coal transported along the Dramway from Mangotsfield and Ram Hill (Photo 8) and even from as far as Coalpit Heath to the north.

Numerous lock gates along the Avon and the Port Avon Marina at Keynsham, provide recreational facilities (Photo 10) and access to the wider river and canal systems of Bristol and Bath. Conham River Park and car park on the north western edge of the character area, enables easy access to the Avon Valley from the urban area for recreational use. Conham Ferry operates seasonally, allowing links across the river. The natural stone boundary walls to Conham Hall (demolished 1971) and the ruins of a copper smelting works can be found nestling within the woodland cover.

Two roads cross the area: the A4174 on an elevated bridge, spanning the narrow steep sided river valley to the west; the A4175, following naturally higher ground within a meander loop, before crossing the river. The A431 follows slightly higher ground along the northern edge of the floodplain and character area boundary.

A number of important recreational routes cross the area:

- The Bristol and Bath Railway Path passes from the settlement of Willsbridge into this area and across the floodplain and River Avon along an embanked route, continuing beyond the area to Bath.

A short section of this route to the south of Willsbridge is shared with a restored railway track and steam train.

- The Avon Valley Walkway follows the northern river bank from Bristol, joining and heading south along the Railway Path.
- The Dramway follows the eastern edge of the Siston Brook valley, concluding its route at the River Avon and the former Londonderry Wharf.
- The Monarch's Way crosses the floodplain between Bitton and Keynsham Lock on the River Avon, largely following field boundaries and passing beneath the Railway Path.
- The Community Forest Path follows the Dramway, joins the Avon Valley Walkway southwards, crossing the Avon on the A4175, then following the River Chew beyond this area.

A number of footpaths intersect and cross the hillsides above the Avon Valley and floodplain.

One powerline passes through the Siston Brook valley and then westwards along the River Avon valley.

Landscape Character

The Avon Valley area has a largely simple rural character comprising floodplain, enclosed wooded valley to the west and open hillsides to the north west, contained by dense settlement.

The Avon floodplain landscape is a flat, large scale area with, regular shaped pastoral fields, fringed by some arable fields. Fields are defined by clipped or overgrown hedges, periodic lines of tall trees (poplar and willow) defining the river's course and disused railway line, with scattered mature field and hedgerow trees elsewhere. These occasionally confine views, although overall the landscape is open, the flat topography and distinct tree lines creating a simple, well balanced pattern and tranquil character.

The tree lined railway embankment forms a significant physical landform and visual screen within the valley floor, containing east to west views and providing a more enclosed setting to the edge of Bitton. The elevated footpath/cycleway also allows occasional local and distant views over the adjacent floodplain and river.

The winter flooding of the river meadows contributes to seasonal visual changes and connection with natural processes and cycles.

The presence of over mature wetland trees, such as willow and poplar, provide both structure and a sense of age and place in the landscape. Many of the trees are old formerly pollarded willows and poplars, which have not been maintained for many years.

Conham River Park contains a similar tree structure near the river bank, with more even aged, planted lime trees enclosing the park's central area. Glimpsed views southwards include rock outcrops, which define the river valley's southern edge at this point, with housing partially visible along the skyline. Background road noise from the prominent elevated A4174 overbridge interrupts the otherwise very secluded and tranquil character of the area.

Villages such as Bitton on the area's boundary (Photo 11), also contribute to the distinctive character of the locality, with its rich mix of stone buildings and boundary walls on its fringes. The village's church tower is a prominent feature, visible from many parts of the valley.

The red brick building and tall chimney of now disused Cadbury's chocolate factory is located on the river at Somerdale, just outside this character area. The open character of the floodplain however, ensures this building is visually prominent in the locality and forms a key landmark in many local and wider views from within this area such as the Cotswold scarp. (Photo 9).

The large regular shaped fields beside the factory have intermittent hedges and fenced boundaries, creating a very open appearance, the flat landscape contrasting with the more undulating landform to the north of the river.

The narrow enclosed river valley to the west includes a combination of linear ancient and semi-natural woodland, clipped hedges, and bands of mature deciduous trees, creating a textured but simple enclosed landscape, which emphasises the sinuous form of the River Avon. Long views along the valley are possible from the elevated A4174, less so from the A4175 road bridges. Views are typically more contained from eye level along the valley floor and from slopes, due to the dense woodland cover.

One powerline passes through the enclosed valley area and is prominent locally within the valley confines (Photo 6).

The landscape to the north west, above the steep sided wooded valley, is visually separate from the River Avon and is varied, with some areas appearing relatively tranquil and remote in character, whilst others are heavily influenced by the urban edge along this area's boundary.

Starting in the west and roughly south of the Abbots Road and Court Farm Road, pasture fields are contained by the irregular woodland edge of the River Avon valley.

The scattered traditional stone properties and farms at The Batch, Castle Inn Farm and Bickley Farm are well integrated, due to the small scale scattered nature of development; the limited views in this area, resulting from the south westwards sloping landform, local woodland containment and, the variety of boundary and garden vegetation; strong structure of stone wall boundaries and the wider strong tree/woodland framework.

The urban area of Hanham, south of Abbots Road has a dense urban edge, which is largely well integrated to the south by boundary trees and hedgerows, but is less so along its eastern edge.

To the east of Hanham, the A4174, which is in cutting, remains visually unobtrusive, except within immediate views.

In the area of Hanham Court, a small hollow in the landform and diverse structure of adjacent hedgerows, forms a textured more enclosed and tranquil landscape, with distinctive historic built landmarks of the court and church. To the north, the linear housing edge of Longwell Green is, in places, well integrated by an adjacent framework of dense overgrown hedgerows, woodland and small scale vegetated back gardens, which provide some transition between the urban edge and rural fringe beyond.

Within the north west area, glimpsed views of the urban edge along adjacent higher ground and trains passing along the valley sides to the south erodes the otherwise tranquil character.

To the north, the Hanham Hills form a prominent rounded landform extending into the urban edge and rising some 30 metres above the adjacent area (Photo 2). This rising ground visually separates the urban edges of Hanham and Longwell Green. The medium sized irregular shaped pasture fields on the hills, bounded by clipped hedges with little tree cover, allow panoramic views. Extensive views are possible over the urban area and to open countryside beyond, including to the east the Oldland Ridge and Pucklechurch Ridge, the Avon Valley towards the Ashwicke Ridges and the Cotswold Scarp; to the west the Severn Ridge and Welsh Hills beyond Bristol; and to the south west, Dundry Hill (Photo 1).

These rural hills are a local landmark and important open space, prominent from the defined urban edge of Hanham and Longwell Green and within southerly views from Kingswood. In conjunction with open fields and public open space to the west, this area forms an important rural buffer to and the skyline from the urban edge. Although the hills are physically severed from the urban area by the A4174, since this lies in cutting, the open space adjacent to the urban edge and the hills are visually continuous.

From the Hanham Hills, to the north in the adjoining area, the retail centre at Longwell Green, comprising large scale light coloured commercial units and adjacent dense residential framework, forms a prominent urban edge. To the west, the recent housing development adjacent to Hanham Hall is also prominent, extending into the adjacent open landscape with no planting structure along its fringe to provide visual integration (Photo 1). To the south east, a section of Longwell Green forms a harsh and prominent urban edge, rising over the lower slopes of the hills.

Individual properties punctuate the line of the A4175, across slightly raised ground within the Avon Valley floodplain and are generally well integrated by surrounding vegetation.

The A431, where it defines the north eastern boundary of this area, has a varied character along this route, influenced by the extent to which settlement or open landscape fringe this corridor. Rural characteristics are, however, strong for much of its length, with scattered Pennant stone houses and cottages (with limestone more common to the east) forming a linear corridor pattern within an often strong vegetation structure, comprising hedgerows, trees and garden vegetation. A different, more concentrated settlement pattern is formed along the southern edge of Willsbridge and within the village of Bitton.

The Changing Landscape

The Avon Valley character area is a distinctive and quite simple rural landscape, with limited visible development except along its fringes, particularly the northern urban edge.

The distinctive and rural character of this area is sensitive to change and recreational pressure.

The proximity of the urban edge creates pressures for housing, business, transport, amenity and recreational development and use within the area. Any further significant physical or visual encroachment of the urban edge has the potential to erode the character of the rural landscape.

The area is popular for recreation, as seen from the number of footpaths providing informal recreation and use of the river by pleasure craft. Recent years have seen a significant increase in the number of houseboats/barges on the river and the duration of stays. Some associated domestic related activity has spread onto the banks with garden and storage areas being created. This has the potential to displace habitats of ecological value. There has also been intensification of recreational activities such as at Bitton football club. Such pressures and additional recreational facilities, have the potential to erode the distinctive rural character and perception of remoteness and to disturb wildlife.

Telecoms masts have had some urbanising influence across the valley landscape. At a more local level some areas have been prone to fly tipping.

Much of the existing strong landscape framework of woodland, trees and hedgerows is in a reasonable to good condition. There is a mix, however, of sporadic and intermittent hedges, often replaced or supplemented with fencing in the eastern areas and near the urban edge. The area has over recent years seen an increase in woodland management and more recent woodland planting that is now maturing, thereby strengthening the landscape structure and enhancing the habitat value of the area. A number of these initiatives include local community involvement and 'Friends' groups, such as at Conham River Park and the Avon Valley woodlands. The towpath has also been restored, improving recreational access.

Pennant stone boundary walls have in places fallen into disrepair and, in some instances, the stone has been removed.

Pools and ponds within the area are vulnerable to any loss of habitat including the terrestrial habitat around ponds as well as the ponds themselves.

The more wooded areas to the west and north create a strong, intact landscape structure and important wildlife habitat, however given the proximity of urban populations and access, recreational use such as mountain biking has the potential to erode or disturb wildlife habitat including ground flora.

Distinctive settlement occurs along the northern boundary at Hanham, Longwell Green, Willsbridge and Bitton. The often older pattern of settlement, use of local stone and traditional architectural style relate well to their rural fringe. These areas are sensitive to change from infill or coalescence, which might visually change the present distinctive character resulting from the relationship between settlement and adjoining rural setting.

The ongoing development at Hanham Hall has seen the restoration of this landmark building and also incorporated a robust landscape scheme that respects its setting.

The character of this area is also very much dependent on that of adjacent areas, both within and beyond the South Gloucestershire boundary. Any significant change in these areas potentially could influence the character of the South Gloucestershire Avon Valley. In particular redevelopment proposals for the visually prominent former Somerdale chocolate factory have the potential to have a significant effect on the character of and views across the Avon Valley.

Landscape Strategy

- Protect and enhance the rural characteristics and mosaic of habitats of the Avon valley landscape, including by strengthening the buffers around more recent urban areas and the Avon valley landscape, and also around and in association with recreational and other new developments.
 - Continue with and extend woodland management and replacement planting to secure the landscape structure and habitat value of the valley into the future.
 - Restore, manage and strengthen the hedgerow network.
 - Seek the restoration and ongoing management of pennant stone boundary walls.
 - Restore and maintain the rural character of the riverbanks.
 - Protect the open characteristics and undeveloped nature of the remaining rural skylines.
 - Encourage and support the management, restoration and enhancement of the relic industrial landscapes and structures associated with the coal mining and copper smelting industries along the Avon Valley.
 - Ensure that new development respects and integrates with the historic pattern of the host landscape or settlement pattern and also the historic industrial relics that contribute to local character.
 - Reinforce local distinctiveness through the use of materials such as local Pennant sandstone and limestone that compliment the local vernacular.
- Ensure that new development does not harm the character, significance or setting of Hanham Court, its gardens and rural landscape setting.
 - Manage recreational pressures in a manner that respects the rural and sometimes remote characteristics of the locality, including managing access to and use of both the woodlands and river banks to protect important habitats and landscape features.
 - Seek to ensure that redevelopment of the former Cadbury factory respects and enhances the character and views of and within the Avon Valley.
 - Where relevant, ensure that new development or change does not adversely impact on the setting to Cotswolds AONB, and conversely that change in the AONB does not impact on prominent skylines that form the setting to the Avon Valley landscape.



1 Panoramic view from Trig Point, Hanham Hills towards and beyond Hanham. The Avon Ring Road is hidden in cutting below the hill in the foreground.



2 View east to Hanham Hills from public open space at Hanham Hall. The Avon Ring Road passes through this area in the middle distance, hidden in cutting.



3 18th century 'Sally-on-the-Barn' Court Farm, built predominantly of blue lias limestone, prior to its conversion to housing.



4 Stephens Green through the kissing gate, Hanham Court.



5 View of Hanham Lock and Hanham Mills from the Avon Ring Road. The River Avon forms the southern boundary to South Gloucestershire here the river and woodlands are a SNCI.



6 The small side valley of the Siston Brook, joining the Avon Valley at Londonderry Wharf.



7 River Avon - Londonderry Wharf. Subject to annual flooding. Former terminus for coal barges and the Dramway linking coalpits, both local and as far north as Coalpit Heath.



8 Londonderry Wharf. Railway rails now used for field boundary fencing. Can be found all along the disused track together with original sleeper blocks.



9 Keynsham Lock Basin and part of Sydenham Mead water meadows. The Cadbury factory is a prominent local feature and a site of a former Roman Villa.



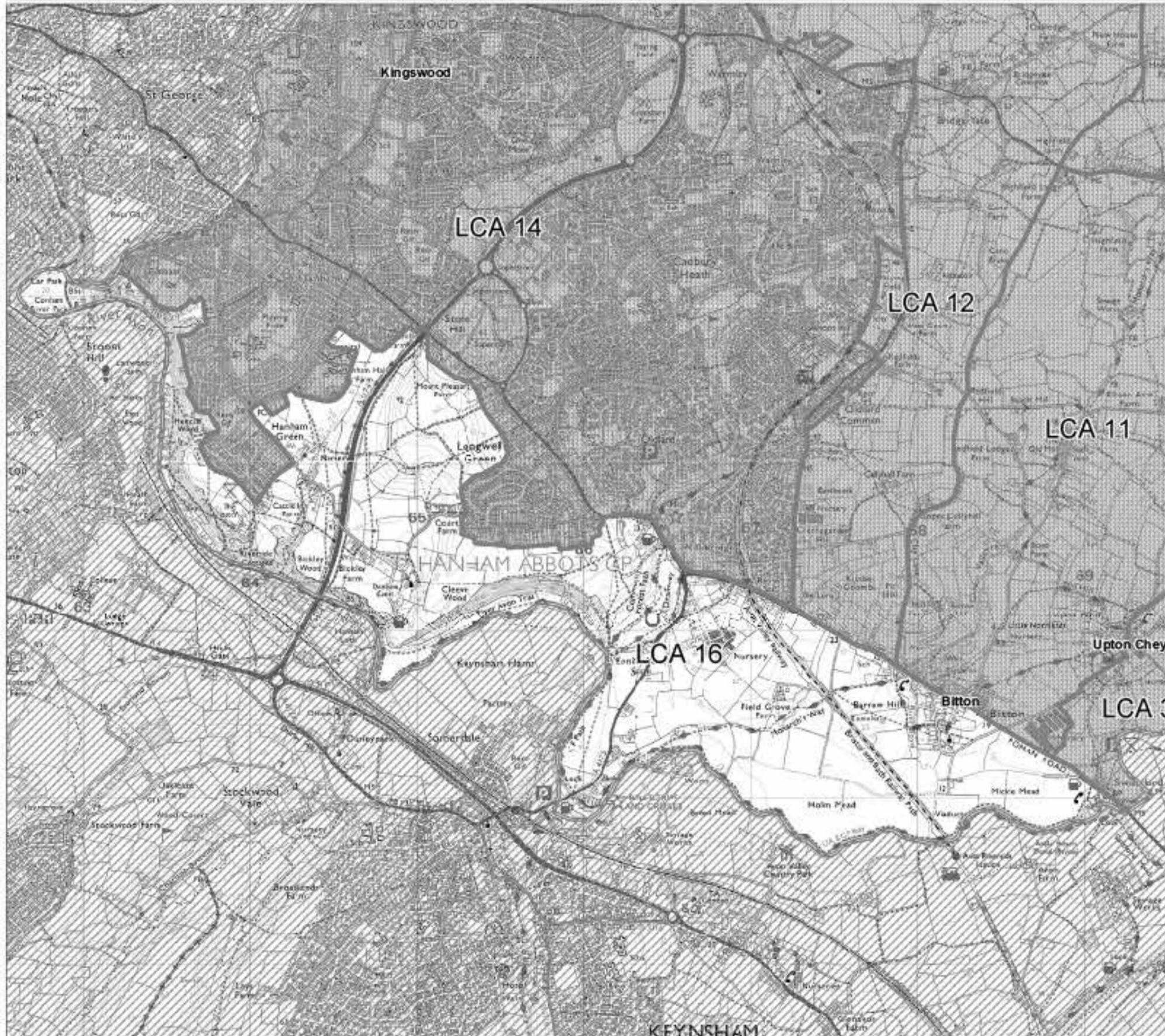
10 Port Avon Marina - Keynsham. Permanent access to the River Avon. Chandlery facility and Lock Keeper Public House provides for expanding leisure use of the river.



11 View from above Swineford (beyond the South Gloucestershire area), looking west over the Avon Valley floodplain. Swineford is in the middle distance, with Bitton, its church and glass houses beyond in the further distance. The flood plain and the river is to the left.

Figure 50 – Area 16
Avon Valley

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 51
Area 16
 Avon Valley