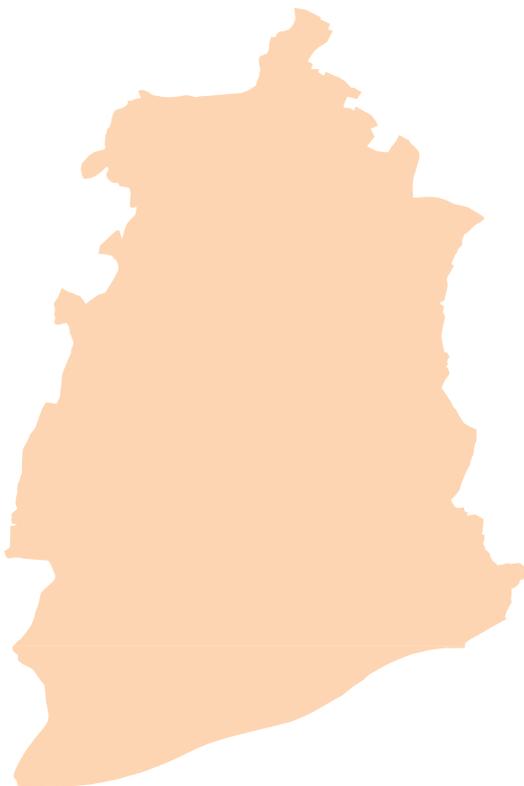




Area 1

Badminton Plateau



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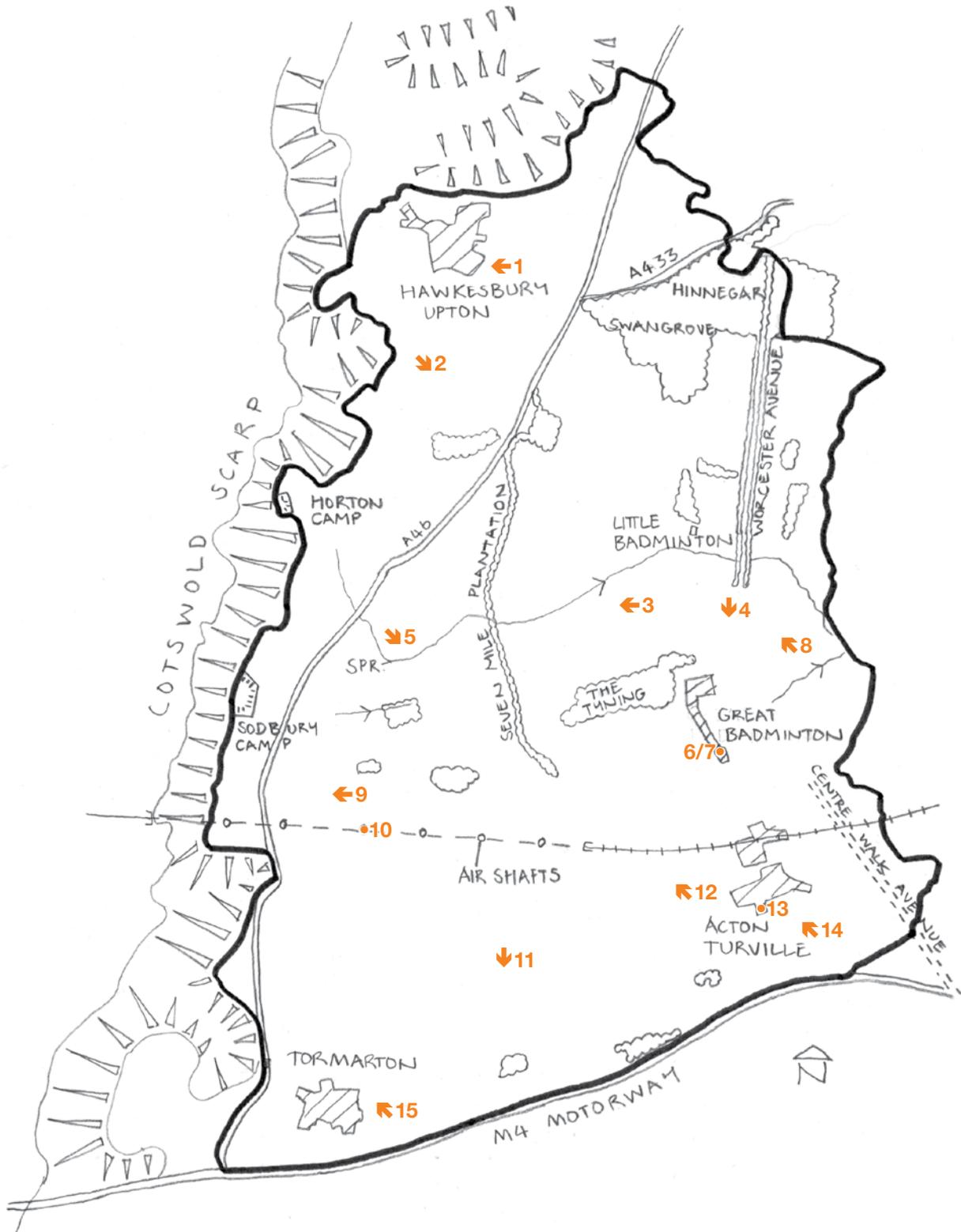


Figure 4
Badminton Plateau

Sketch Map

Key

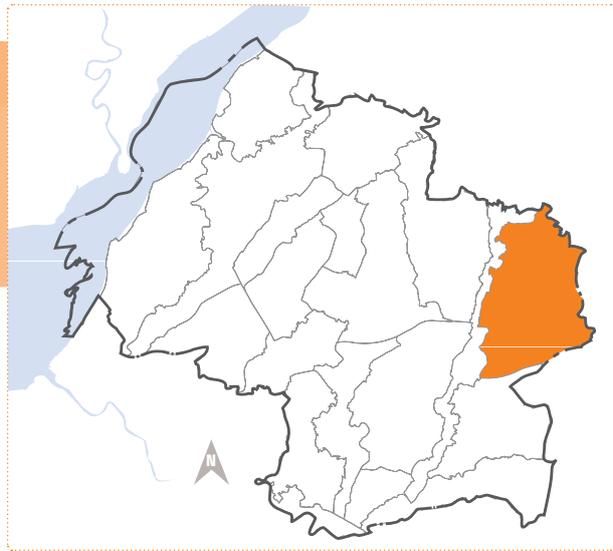
↖15 Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

Area 1

Badminton Plateau

The Badminton Plateau landscape character area is a gently sloping, open, agricultural area evenly scattered with Cotswold stone structures and field boundaries.



Key Characteristics

- Gently sloping and undulating, dip slope plateau landscape.
- Large regular shaped fields, mainly arable defined by Cotswold stone walls, (often in a state of disrepair), clipped hedgerows or in places by post and wire fencing. The hedgerows and walls provide connectivity and habitat for notable species including European Protected Species across the area.
- Open exposed landscape punctuated by mature trees, copses and scattered woodland of oak, ash, beech and sycamore including ancient woodland.
- Expansive views over the plateau are common, with limited focal points. Panoramic views westwards are obtained from the scarp plateau edge.
- Large areas of woodland, formal planned landscape and architecture associated with Badminton Park. The Badminton Estate covers and influences most of this character area.
- Calcareous grassland present across the Cotswolds including within the Badminton Plateau supports a diverse range of flora including areas of species-rich grassland.
- Arable farmland provides nesting opportunities in the spring and foraging potential in the winter for farmland birds Amber and Red listed species.
- Villages, hamlets and farm buildings are scattered over the plateau and are united through their common use of Cotswold stone as a building material.
- Quarries and mines across the Cotswolds provide habitat for many species of bat, including those on the Badminton Estate dating from the 1800s.
- Major roads cross the open landscape - the lack of significant surrounding vegetation making them a strong visible and audible element within the landscape. Away from these there are however tranquil areas that are undisturbed by visual, noise and other disturbance.

Location

The Badminton Plateau landscape character area is located in the north east of South Gloucestershire within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

This landscape character area is defined to the north and east by the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary, although the landscape character of the plateau does extend beyond.

The southern boundary follows the M4, which marks a subtle transition between the Badminton Plateau and the slightly more undulating Marshfield Plateau to the south. To the west, the boundary follows the often sharp change in topography, along the top of the Cotswold Scarp. (See Figures 7 & 13).

Physical Influences

The underlying geology of the area is a varied combination of principally north-south bands of Bathonian Limestone, Great Oolitic Limestones, Fullers Earth, Oolitic Limestone and Forest Marble Limestone. These bands of stone narrow towards the Cotswold Scarp to the west. The soil cover is a simple mix of Brown Rendzinas and typical Calcareous Pelosols.

This geology creates a landform of gentle dip slope and plateau, at approximately 200 metres a.o.d. in the west, sloping to 120 metres a.o.d. in the east.

There are very few watercourses in this area, due to the permeability of the underlying limestone. Short sections of stream rise from springs before flowing eastwards and disappearing into swallow holes (see Figure 10).

Land Cover

The Badminton Plateau area is largely influenced by the Badminton Estate, which covers most of this character area and extends over parts of the Marshfield Plateau and Cotswold Scarp. The estate includes Badminton Park and House at

its focus, with the remaining area covered by extensive, mainly arable, tenant farms. The large regular shaped fields are typically defined by Cotswold dry stone walls (in various conditions), low clipped hedgerows, and some post and wire fencing. The location of former stone wall boundaries are often evident as grass mounds within large fields, or remaining walls are sometimes overgrown with vegetation.

Some local variation in the field sizes and boundary type are found within the area. For example, large fields with stone walls to the south and east of Hawkesbury Upton (Photo 2); medium to large fields with stone walls and clipped hedgerows adjacent to Badminton Park; medium fields with stone walling within the area of Tormarton (Photo 15); and fields with clipped hedgerows in the area of Acton Turville (Photo 12).

Badminton Park occupies a significant area of land to the east. The Registered Historic Park is a combination of medieval park and 18th and 19th century designed ornamental landscape, with the settlement of Great Badminton and Badminton House at its focus.

The parkland includes stands and clumps of mature and over-mature beech and oak trees within open grassland, with lakes and ponds in the immediate area of Badminton House (Photos 4 & 8). Broad tree avenues project from the house northwards (Worcester Avenue) and south eastwards (Centre Walk Avenue). A prominent modern land use is the mown-grass landing strip to the west of Badminton Park (Photo 3). Badminton Park and its landscape features extend beyond this area, into the wider Badminton Estate to the east and north.

To the north east of the area lies a large and prominent area of mature mixed woodland / beech plantation, fringed by the A433 and segmented by country lanes and the northern extent of Worcester Avenue.

Within the wider plateau area, small copses and woodland blocks of oak, ash, beech and sycamore (Photo 5), punctuate the landscape,

with isolated specimen trees along some of the field boundaries.

The plateau also has a scattering of archaeological sites such as long barrows and tumuli, e.g. The Starveall Long Barrow and Round Barrow, north east of Hawkesbury Upton (both SAM's) and the Grickstone, which lies to the west of Great Badminton. There are also two prominent Iron Age hill forts located on the crest of the Cotswold Scarp, Sodbury Camp and Horton Camp (both SAM's), which give visible reminders of ancient land uses in this area.

Biodiversity

The Badminton Plateau comprises a mosaic of important habitat for a diverse range of species. These include nationally important habitats such as calcareous grassland and ancient woodlands.

Within this area there are seven separate wooded areas that include approximately 100 hectares of ancient woodland. Four of these ancient woodlands are also designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) and one, Bodkin Hazel Wood, is designated as both an SNCI and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), recognising the importance of these habitats within the national context for flora and fauna. Key species associated with these include bats and dormice. Good connectivity exists for species such as these between the wooded areas and other habitats via hedgerows and scattered trees.

There are five sites within the Badminton Plateau designated as SNCIs for the calcareous grassland present on the sites. 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.

As there are few watercourses within the Badminton Plateau area, species within these habitats are likely to be sensitive to any changes impacting upon the ponds and pools within the area. These may support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected

Species) which are vulnerable to any loss of habitat including the terrestrial habitat around ponds as well as the ponds themselves.

The characteristic and historic dry stone walls also provide valuable wildlife corridors, which can be utilised by a diverse range of species from invertebrates to reptiles and amphibians for commuting, foraging and as a refuge.

Much of the land use within this area is now arable farmland, an ideal habitat for many species of ground nesting farmland birds including birds which have been listed by BirdLife International as being Globally Threatened Red listed species. The stubble left over winter across the farmland provides a precious foraging resource when food sources are scarce for many farmland birds.

The Badminton Estate was quarried for Bath Stone in the 1800s and closed in the early C20th. These underground quarries provide an ideal habitat for many species of bat including European Protected Species.

Settlement and Infrastructure

Settlement on the plateau is scattered and limited to a number of nucleated villages including Hawkesbury Upton with its planned medieval core, Tormarton, Great Badminton, Little Badminton and Acton Turville (Photo 13), all designated Conservation Areas. The Somerset Monument, also within the extended Hawkesbury Conservation Area, is located north west of the village just outside the landscape character area.

The villages are typically a mix of former workers' cottages, farm buildings and 'grand' houses and properties (Photo 4, 7 & 13). A village green and/or church is typically present at the heart of the settlements which, together with the houses, creates a rich mix of building styles and sizes. The settlements have all been part of the Badminton Estate at some point in their history, influencing their use, growth and style.

The character of Great and Little Badminton contrasts noticeably with other villages within the area. Both comprise estate villages (Little Badminton is built on the site of a previous medieval village, with earthwork remains) set around and enclosing a village green, with wider parkland setting. The architectural style of the villages is varied, influenced by both estate and agricultural heritage, but unified through the use of Cotswold stone and vernacular details. Both villages have examples of stone tiled and thatched roofed cottages. Great Badminton has more prominent architectural structures associated with Badminton House (Photo 4). The stone wall-lined wide roads through the village are another distinctive feature.

Cotswold stone is the common building material used in all settlements, including the scattered and isolated farms and many field boundaries across the area.

The settlements are connected by a network of minor roads and lanes (Photo 11). The B4040 between Chipping Sodbury and Malmesbury runs east to west and passes through Acton Turville. The M4 defines the southern boundary of this landscape character area and connects to the A46, which runs north east to south west between Bath and Cirencester on the western fringes of this landscape character area.

The South Wales to London railway passes through the centre of this landscape character area from west to east, with the western half in tunnel. The track emerges in cutting and then continues at ground level to the east. Several brick airshafts designed to look like small castellated towers or turrets in a pastoral landscape demarcate the route of the underground section of the line (Photo 10). Both tunnel portals and the six airshafts are all designated as listed buildings (grade II) by virtue of their special architectural, design and engineering interest and group value.

Two major recreational routes pass through the area, the Cotswold Way and one of a series of Circular Rides. The Cotswold Way passes

north-south, west of Hawkesbury Upton along the crest of the Cotswold Scarp. The Circular Ride has several routes in the south west, linking Old Sodbury to Tormarton and to the west of Badminton.

A number of historic green lanes which are visible as unpaved paths, tracks and bridleways, often between stone walls, lie within the western part of the area. These include Marshfield Path (running north west to south east), Bodkin Hazel Lane and the former Bristol to Oxford road north of the M4 and Tynning Lane (Photo 9) (both running east/west).

Only one major powerline crosses the area in the south west, generally in a south easterly direction, passing east of Little Sodbury and Tormarton.

Landscape Character

The northern, western and southern areas, have an open and exposed simple character, arising from its combination of gently sloping and undulating topography together with a general lack of any significant barriers to the open views, or focal points within this expansive landscape. Views and a similar landscape character continue eastwards into Wiltshire. Views are partly obscured however along some roads, with the growth of self-seeded trees and shrubs.

The western boundary in contrast, provides extensive panoramic views from the Cotswold Scarp, over the lower vale landscapes to the west. Wetmoor Woods and the towns of Chipping Sodbury and Yate, form prominent large scale features in the middle distance.

The agricultural landscape within the dip slope and plateau contrasts significantly with the more planned landscape of Badminton Park to the east, which generally has a greater and richer vegetation cover.

The formal character of the park extends out into the broader landscape of the character area and into Wiltshire to the east and comprises a landscape of hedgerows, mature trees, woodland

and avenues. The distinctive vegetation cover of the park also gives definition and scale to the landscape from many view points within the character area.

Occasional blocks of woodland and copses are scattered throughout the area, beyond Badminton Park and help to contain views and provide the main definition of space and scale in the broader landscape.

Some hedges are overgrown and in need of appropriate management. Within the Badminton Estate however, hedgerows are clipped and better managed, with evidence of woodland management and new planting, for example at Caroline Wood.

Low grass mounds within fields indicate the location of former stone wall boundaries, in common with other areas where there has been a significant transition from pasture/mixed agriculture to arable and, where maintenance and management of field boundaries has declined.

Villages, hamlets and isolated houses are fairly evenly scattered throughout the plateau. The special character of the main settlements is recognised through their designation as Conservation Areas.

The architectural diversity within these settlements is united through the common use of Cotswold stone as the principal building material.

Cotswold stone also features in field and settlement boundaries and thus assists the gentle transition between settlement and the wider landscape, creating an integrated and harmonious appearance, particularly within the older settlements.

The historic settlements are often situated within slight depressions in the topography, or include mature trees and vegetation, which assists their integration within the wider landscape.

Acton Turville is however quite prominent within local views from the south (Photo 14). More recent built development, such as at Hawkesbury Upton, is situated on higher ground on the edge of the older village core, where the new rooftops break the skyline and there is little tree cover, making it visually prominent within the wider landscape (Photo 1).

Isolated properties and farms including their associated modern buildings are also prominent in the generally open landscape.

The Somerset Monument, to the north near Hawkesbury Upton, is situated on the crest of the Cotswold Scarp. Although outside the plateau character area, it is a prominent feature and distinctive local landmark, visible not only from the plateau, but also from the scarp and the lower ground to the west.

The earthworks at Sodbury Camp Hill Fort are a prominent local feature seen from the A46. The site forms a large, irregular landform and skyline feature on the western plateau edge.

The settlements, set within the open rolling countryside, are connected by a network of roads. The minor roads are generally lined by mostly low Cotswold dry stone walls (Photo 11), often in a state of disrepair or overgrown with vegetation and some have been removed completely. There are open views from these roads across the wider landscape with occasional tree belts enclosing some views.

The M4 cuts through the plateau running east to west and defines the southern boundary. Large portions are in cutting, minimising its visual and audible impact, although its traffic volumes impact on the otherwise rural and tranquil character of most of the area, and more recent gantries and signs have increased the prominence of the motorway. The A46 is largely unenclosed: the traffic on it creating a prominent visual and audible feature through the open landscape. Traffic movement along minor roads is similarly evident.

The overhead powerline which crosses the south western part of the character area is also a highly visible element within the open rolling landscape. Other powerlines are visible within the Marshfield Plateau to the south and beyond the South Gloucestershire boundary, in Wiltshire to the east.

The railway line, largely in cutting or within a tunnel, is not generally a visible element within the landscape. However, the prominent 'castellated' air-shafts provide distinctive features within the rural landscape.

The Changing Landscape

The character of the Badminton Plateau landscape character area is rural, with a significant part being strongly influenced by the designed landscape and distinctive architecture associated with Badminton Park and the agricultural landscape of the wider estate. A key aspect of the built environment of this area is the consistent use of Cotswold stone for buildings and other structures, including boundary walls. Where reconstituted stone has been used, the building form, appearance and weathering qualities integrate less well, resulting in an erosion of the distinctiveness and character of the area.

The framework of walls, hedgerows, woodland and trees within the Badminton Estate are largely well maintained. Measures to conserve the long term framework of trees and woodland within the park have seen relatively recent planting of young trees, laid out in avenues. The more recent tree planting of Caroline Wood is influencing views from the A46 as it matures, and providing additional habitat for a diverse range of species. Tree planting on the Badminton Estate is also changing the character of the historic landscape.

The character of the plateau landscape beyond the Badminton Estate is however influenced in places by limited maintenance of the area's principal landscape features:

- The characteristic landscape framework of dry stone walls is generally in a poor state of repair. In some locations the walls have not been maintained or rebuilt, so that only a remnant grass mound remains, and their habitat value has been lost. Their replacement with hedging or post and wire fencing, or visual loss behind self-seeded vegetation along verges, erodes local distinctiveness and character. Extensive sections of wall have however been repaired along the Badminton Estate boundary, following the A433 and at Dodington Park alongside the A46, where the entrance gates and landscaping has also been restored and is now in active management.
- A decline in the management and/or maintenance of existing hedgerow field boundaries, which provide landscape structure, would further erode the character of some parts of the area.
- Similarly, the tree structure is in a variable condition. Some areas retain an ageing structure of mature and over-mature trees. There are, however few juvenile trees to sustain this framework beyond the next few decades. This trend will similarly impact upon woodland with their eventual decline unless brought back under management.
- Self-seeded trees establishing along road verges throughout the area and within field boundaries, as well as other tree planting, whilst contributing to the landscape structure and habitat value, such tree cover has the potential to change the open character, vistas and views.

The open and exposed character and biodiversity value of this area means that it is highly sensitive to change. The change in agricultural land use, from pasture to predominantly arable in the 20th century, together with the loss of walls or hedgerows to increase field sizes, has resulted in a significant change in the colour and texture of the landscape on the plateau. Examples include:

- The development of horse paddocks, particularly around villages, with their associated subdivision of fields by electrified fencing, introduction of stables, exercise facilities, parking, sheds and other features erodes the character and quality of the landscapes around settlements.
- Potential interest in locating Solar farms and wind turbines
- The pressure for larger industrial style 'barns' can result in visual impact across a wide area of an open landscape, adversely impacting on the character of the wider area.
- Pressure for further barn conversions, can often result in a domestication of rural farm building complexes, and result in loss of habitat particularly for birds and bats. Pressure for larger farm buildings, and for 'agricultural workers dwelling' can result in pressure for larger visually prominent dwellings.
- Further changes in agricultural land use or management in the future may result in further significant impact, due to the open character of the area.

In common with the rest of South Gloucestershire telecom's masts have been introduced across a wide area, however where these have been incorporated onto electricity transmission infrastructure, this has reduced their impact by reducing the need for further poles in this sensitive landscape.

Any vertical built forms would be visible, not just from within the plateau, but potentially from the surrounding wider landscape.

Any development which 'breaks' the skyline, such as housing, large agricultural or other shed type buildings, wind turbines, masts, traffic on roads etc, has the potential to be visually prominent and introduce a discordant element within this open plateau. Similarly, the cumulative effect of a multiplicity of smaller impacts, such as loss of

walling, the introduction of fencing and the use of reconstituted stone materials, the introduction of insensitively located solar panels or alien building forms, can have a significant and erosive impact on the distinctiveness of this locality.

The M4 has been widened within the highway boundary resulting in a reduction of landscape mitigation works and the extent of habitat, and gantries and signage have been added, resulting in an increase in its prominence. To the north of the motorway, recently implemented land raising outside the highway boundary will provide some screening to the north.

At Tormarton, an informal 'park and share' facility is leading to the erosion of grass verges and the cluttering of the lane near the M4 roundabout with parked cars.

The annual Badminton Horse Trials leads to localised changes in land use and pressure on the road network from the influx of vehicles and visitors.

Landscape Strategy

- Retain the open and rural character of the Cotswold Plateau and the historic parkland landscape associated with the Badminton estate to the east
 - Conserve the existing populations of notable species and ensure that there is no net loss of biodiversity.
 - Retain and enhance the mosaic of grasslands and woodlands with connectivity through characteristic drystone walls and hedges.
 - Restore, conserve and manage the characteristic and historic pattern of dry stone wall and/or hedgerow framework, as appropriate to the particular character of the local landscape.
 - Retain, manage and enhance the areas of woodland, copses and formal planned landscapes that contribute to the character of the area.
 - Avoid the introduction of uncharacteristic features such as field subdivision by electrified and post and rail fences which are devoid of habitat value, and the degradation of the sward by overgrazing.
 - Ensure that any new development is integrated with, and where necessary screened from the wider landscape and avoids the domestication or industrialisation of the rural character of the locality. This includes consideration of the night time landscape and the retention of dark skies as well as protecting the tranquility of undisturbed areas.
 - Any new vertical development should avoid eroding the natural beauty of or the settings of heritage assets in the wider landscape.
- Where such development is acceptable, telecom's infrastructure, mast, pole or pylon sharing should be considered to avoid the need for addition of new towers or masts to the landscape.
- Wind turbines should be modest in scale and carefully located, in order to confine visibility, and to avoid intervisibility between installations.
 - Wind farms are likely to be inappropriate as are large scale biomass generation facilities¹.
 - Any new vertical development should avoid dominating, or visually competing with, other landmark landscape or heritage assets in the character area.
 - New development including buildings and other structures should use locally appropriate materials such as locally sourced Cotswold stone of the appropriate colour and texture that respect and enhances local distinctiveness and the traditional character of the area.
 - Control change of use to horse keeping where the erosion of landscape character would result.
 - Given the openness of the landscape and importance of maintaining the rural character of skylines, careful consideration should be given to the location and design of highway signage and lighting.
 - Cumulative impact with other developments will require particular consideration due to the openness of the landscape.

¹ Cotswolds Conservation Board Position Statement: Renewable Energy Projects October 2005

Landscape Character Areas



1 New development on the edge of and gateway to Hawkesbury Upton.



2 Large cornfields now a feature of the Cotswolds, replacing the grasslands, looking west towards Dunkirk.



3 His Grace's private landing strip, 1300 metres long. Showing part of 7 mile plantation, the boundary of Badminton Estate.



4 Badminton House with lake foreground. Celebrated lake jump at 3 day international horse trials event.



5 On top of the scarp land is used for cereal crops. New forestry planted to facilitate pheasant shooting. Seven Mile plantation was planted by Capability Brown.



6 Thatched Cottage. Toad Hall, Old Down Road, Badminton. One of only two on the Badminton estate.



7 Typical Estate cottages, Badminton. Built and maintained by Estate yard workers.



8 Badminton Park. Track leading from Luckington Road to sewage filter beds.



9 Green lane near Lyegrove (Tynning Lane). Dry stone walls in poor condition.



10 Air shaft turret for Sodbury rail tunnel. One of 6 in the LCA.



11 Oakes Lane with characteristics of an "Enclosure" road: straight with large verges. The Warren buildings on left and Park Farm on right. Names derived from medieval rabbit warren and Deer Park. Power lines cross the horizon.



12 View to north west from Sodbury Road. Flat arable land with railway cutting in middle distance and woods in background.



13 View from Burton Road at junction with The Street. The Fox and Hounds Public House, the Old Tithe Barn and Turnpike Cottage. Old Scots Pines along road.



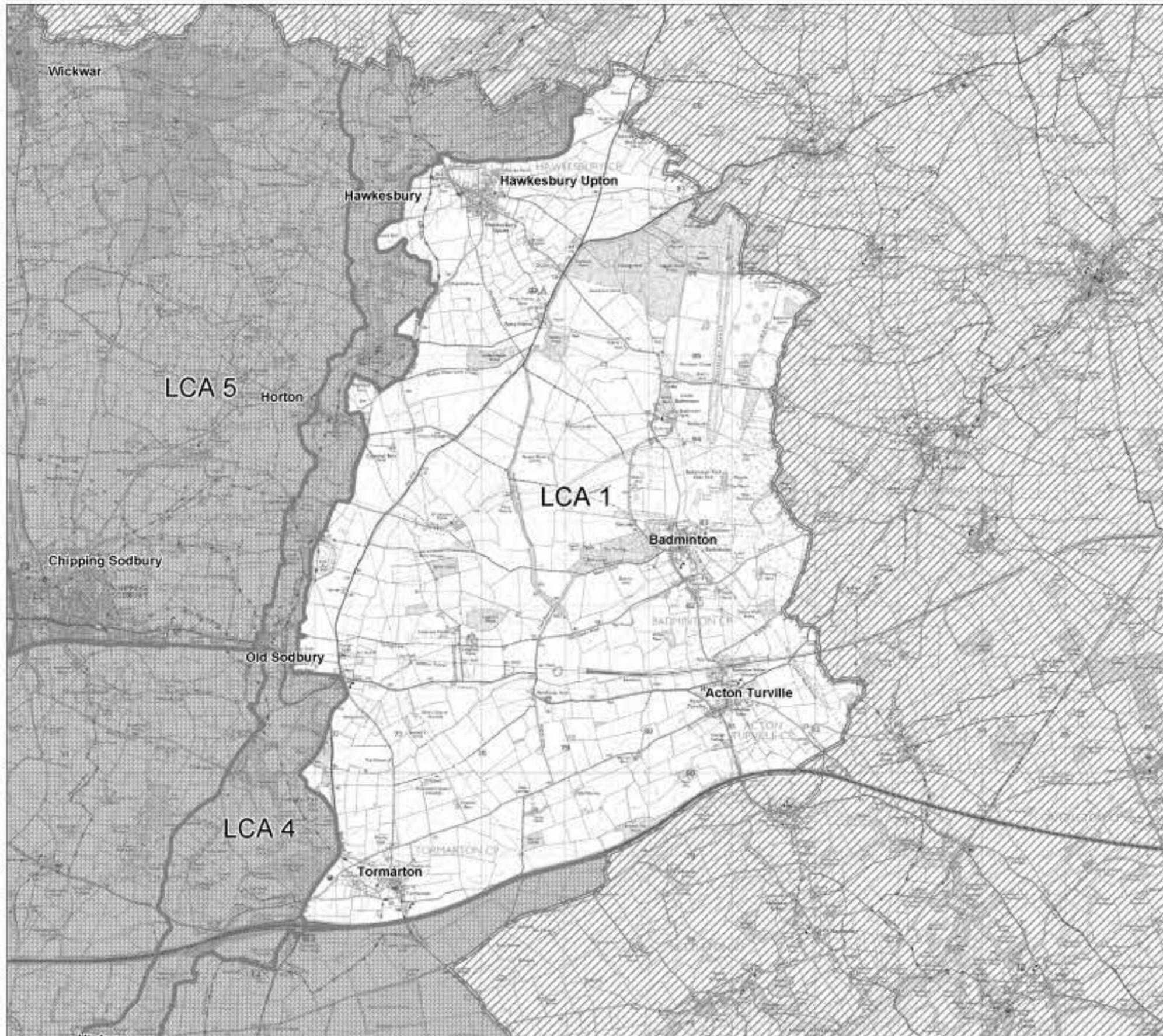
14 View from Burton Road back towards Acton Turville. Horses in field reflect the fact that horse breeding is a major activity in the area.



15 Tormarton from south east. All dry stone wall field boundaries predate 1637.

Figure 5 - Area 1
Badminton Plateau

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 6
Area 1
Badminton Plateau