



Area 2

Marshfield Plateau



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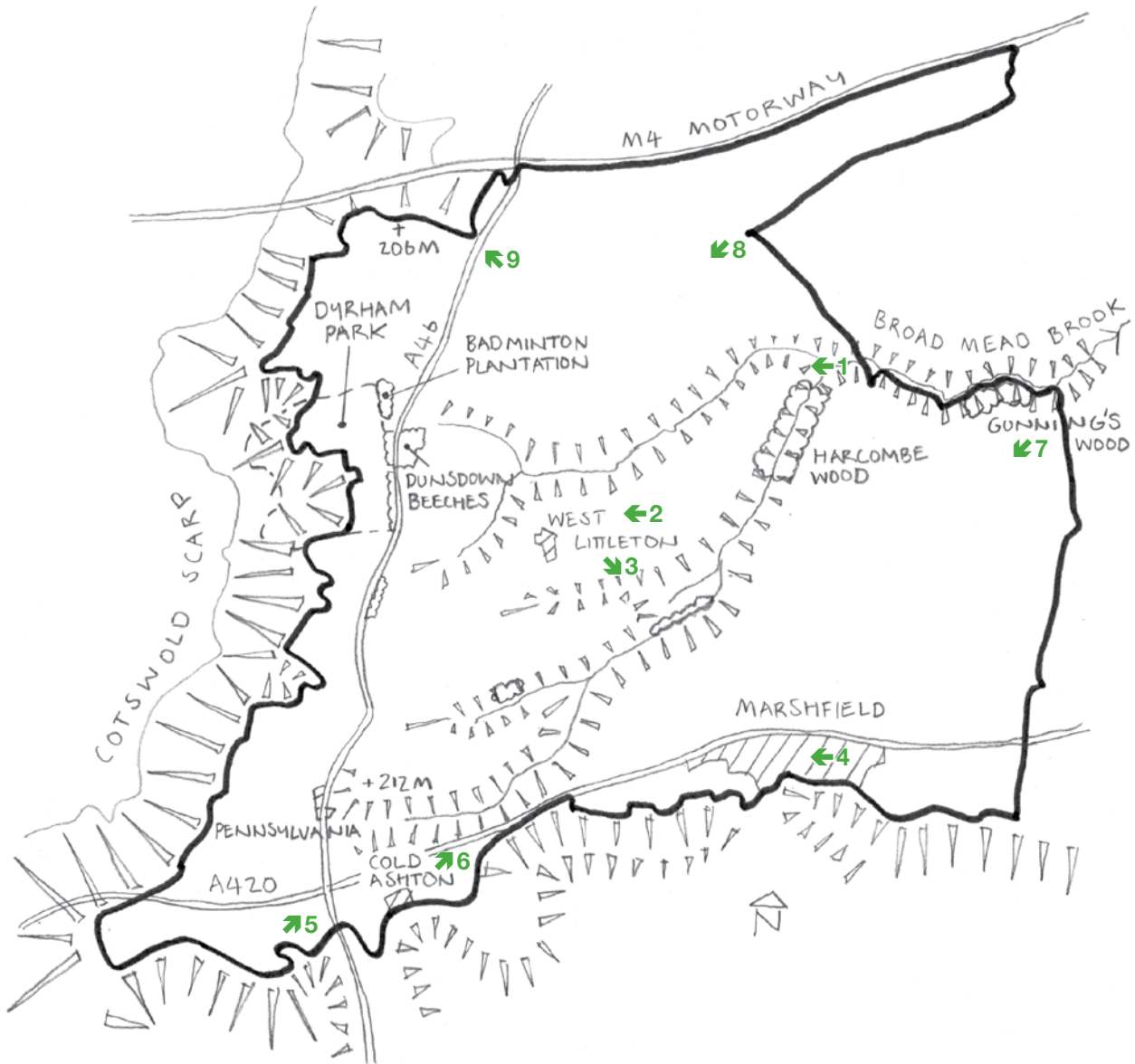


Figure 7
Marshfield Plateau

Sketch Map

Key

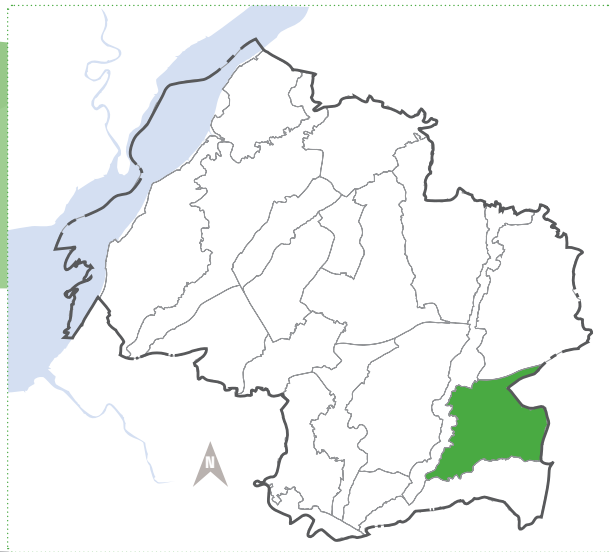
↖9 Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

Area 2

Marshfield Plateau

The Marshfield Plateau landscape character area is a gently sloping agricultural plateau dissected by two shallow river valleys.



Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating, upland plateau/dip slope landscape with open character. Covered by mainly large regular shaped arable fields generally defined by Cotswold stone walls, often in a state of disrepair but which provide some connectivity between other habitats, including for notable and European protected species.
- Areas of calcareous grassland that supports a diverse range of flora including areas of species rich grassland while arable farmland provides nesting and foraging potential for birds.
- Western and southern boundaries are defined by a significant change in topography, the Cotswold Scarp (west) and Ashwicke Ridges character area (south), offering extensive views beyond the area.
- Small scattered areas of woodland and copses of ancient woodland and few trees contribute to a generally simple, exposed landscape of open views.
- Plateau/dip slope landscape dissected by two river valleys, consisting of an enclosed and textured landscape of irregular, medium sized pasture fields and wetland meadows. Divided by hedges, some stone walls, with scattered woodland copses. Valleys contrast strongly with the open plateau.
- Limited settlement, comprising a town, villages, a hamlet and scattered isolated farms and buildings, united with the landscape through their common use of Cotswold stone as a building material. All are visible features contributing to landscape character.
- Major roads and one major pylon line cross the open landscape. The traffic and pylon line are visually intrusive and traffic is audible. Away from these there are however tranquil areas that are undisturbed by visual, noise and other disturbance.

Location

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

This landscape character area is defined to the east by the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary, although the landscape character of the plateau extends beyond. The northern boundary follows the M4, which marks a broad and subtle area of transition between the Marshfield Plateau and the slightly less undulating and more heavily vegetated Badminton Plateau to the north.

To the west, the boundary is defined by the fairly abrupt change in topography formed by the Cotswold Scarp. The southern boundary also follows an often distinct change in topography between the plateau and upper valley edges of the Ashwicke Ridges landscape character area, which includes incised valleys which lead towards the River Avon. (See Figures 10 & 13).

Physical Influences

The underlying geology of the area is predominantly Great Oolitic Limestone with Fullers Earth and a small area of Athelstan Oolitic Limestone to the west. The soils are predominantly Brown Rendzinas with a small proportion of typical Calcareous Pelosols.

This geology creates a landform of gently rolling upland plateau/dip slope, its highest point of 220 metres is at Tog Hill in the south west corner. The plateau is incised by two gently sloping valleys, formed by two branches of the Broadmead Brook, fed by a number of springs. The brook gently meanders along the valley bottom, flowing approximately north eastwards. (See Figure 7).

Along the eastern boundary the Broadmead Brook valley becomes more small scale, with a narrow steep sided valley profile. A number of side valleys are dry and there is only one small man-made pool to the north of West Littleton.

The local Marshfield stone used for many of the buildings is locally distinctive, being greyer than the more honey coloured stone found further east and north in the Cotswolds.

Land Cover

The plateau/dip slope area consists of large, mainly arable, regular shaped fields on the flat to gently sloping upland landscape (Photo 3). There is very little tree cover within the plateau, other than a few isolated copses and mature specimens along the field boundaries and around the edges of settlement. Exceptions on the plateau are small woodlands adjacent to the west and north west boundary. Some woodland is also found within the Broadmead Brook valleys (Photo 6), of which only Harcombe Wood is of any significant size.

Fields over the plateau area are largely divided by Cotswold stone walls. These are often in a state of disrepair and in some cases have been removed, with only remnant grass mounds left to define the former wall position.

There is a particularly strong framework of walls evident within the following areas:

- to the north west of the area, south of Tormarton;
- to the south around Marshfield, where the pronounced change between stone and hedgerow boundaries follows the sharp junction between plateau edge and scarp beyond;
- along the main roads and elsewhere close to settlements and farms.

Intermittent, thick and clipped hedges also form prominent field boundaries, principally to the west, adjacent to the Cotswold Scarp and within the Broadmead Brook valleys.

Land cover within the two valleys consists of a mixture of arable and pasture, with irregular shaped medium sized fields on the valley sides

and semi-enclosed meadows on the valley bottom (Photo 1).

Field boundaries within the valleys consist of a mix of stone walls and intermittent, clipped and thick hedges. There is a higher percentage of associated tree cover, formed by small areas of woodland on the valley sides and overgrown hedgerows/trees, which demarcate streams in the lower wetland areas.

Field size is often closely related to landform. Smaller fields have been formed from the enclosure of medieval open fields, generally found within the Broadmead Brook valleys. Over the plateau, much larger fields have been formed, by the enclosure of open common and downland.

Across the character area, where the transition has been made from sheep pasture/mixed agriculture to arable, the field boundaries have often been neglected and, in some cases, have been lost.

There were a number of tumuli and long barrows scattered over the plateau landscape, indicating its past historic importance. A Long Barrow at Lapdown Barn and Round at Littleton Down near West Littleton still exist and are both Scheduled Ancient Monuments. However, most of the others, especially the large group near Marshfield, have been removed. Ridge and furrow is also evident in some locations such as at West End, as are traces of mediaeval field systems in the form of strip lynchets in the valleys surrounding Cold Ashton.

Dyrham Park, a Registered Historic Park, to the west of this area, partly falls within this and partly within the adjacent Cotswold Scarp character area. The open parkland within this area includes linear woodland and Cotswold stone walling along the park boundary, with avenues, copses and individual tree specimens. Two areas of woodland, Badminton Plantation and Dunsdown Beeches are located adjacent to the boundary of the park.

Biodiversity

The mosaic of habitat in this character area provides for a diverse range of species.

This area includes nationally important habitats such as calcareous grassland and some 31 ha. of ancient woodland. Of the two areas of ancient woodland, one is designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest. Key species likely to be associated with these habitats include bats and dormice both of which are present across the District and are UK priority species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP). There appears to be some connectivity for species such as these between the wooded areas and other habitats via the stone walls, hedgerows and scattered trees.

There are eleven sites within the Marshfield Plateau designated as SNCIs for the calcareous and neutral grassland present on the sites and includes 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. Dyrham Park is also designated as an SNCI for the parkland present at the 100 hectare site.

The characteristic stone walls are of habitat value for a diverse range of species from invertebrates to reptiles and amphibians for commuting, foraging and as a refuge. Arable fields are important 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 few watercourses within the Marshfield Plateau area could host water voles, while ponds and pools within the area may well support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species). Both are vulnerable to any loss of habitat including the terrestrial habitat around the water feature as well as the water bodies themselves.

Settlement and Infrastructure

There are three main settlements within the area. The small town of Marshfield to the south, is situated on the edge of the plateau area with the A420 defining its northern edge. A Conservation Area, it comprises mainly 16th –18th century Cotswold stone buildings with a church towards its eastern end. The main street is characterised by narrow frontages reflecting the medieval layout of the town (Photo 4). Dry stone boundary walls extend from the town into the adjacent rural landscape.

The small linear villages of West Littleton and Cold Ashton, also Conservation Areas, are the other main settlements. They consist of scattered houses of a variety of styles and ages, with a church and manor of probably Saxon origin. Surrounding field boundaries are dry stone walls. The hamlet of Pennsylvania, to the south west, includes stone buildings and farm agricultural structures, as well as a petrol station. Unlike the above settlements, adjacent field boundaries are hedges.

Elsewhere, the irregular and scattered distribution of farm buildings across the agricultural landscape is closely related to springlines and watercourses, and the 'home farm' is often surrounded by trees.

Although generally a rural landscape there are occasional factory scale buildings including to the south east of Pennsylvania adjacent to the A46, and factory scale buildings alongside the A420 to the east of Marshfield.

These settlements are connected by a number of lanes lined with stone walls, which largely radiate from Marshfield (Photo 2). The lanes become more winding within the valleys, where they are largely enclosed by stone walls on banks, although these are frequently masked by hedgerow vegetation. Three main roads also cross the area. The M4 generally forms the northern boundary and this connects to the A46 (T) which runs north to south between Bath and Cirencester close to the western boundary. The

A420 runs east to west close to the southern boundary of the area and passes along the northern edge of Marshfield.

There are three major recreational routes that pass through the area:

- One of a series of Circular Rides crosses the centre of the area via West Littleton, along the western edge of Marshfield and then south.
- The Cotswold Way passes in a generally north to south direction near the western plateau/ scarp boundary. It crosses a section of the north western area, passes outside along the scarp then back into this area, south eastwards through Cold Ashton.
- The Limestone Link passes south east from Cold Ashton towards Bath.

To the north, one major overhead powerline supported by large steel pylons, crosses east to west through the area south of the M4. A tall telecommunications mast occurs close to the junction of the M4 and A46 (T), adjacent to the Cotswold Scarp.

Landscape Character

The Marshfield Plateau area has three principal landform elements which influence its character. These comprise the open plateau/dip slope landscape, the broad shallow and largely open valleys of the upper Broadmead Brook and the smaller scale enclosed lower Broadmead Brook valley to the east of the area.

The broad plateau/dip slope has an open and simple character, created through the combination of gently rolling arable land, which generally lacks any significant vegetation to screen views across the expansive plateau landscape (Photo 3 & 7). Field boundaries are generally limited to low stone walls, which are frequently overgrown or replaced with fencing. In some locations, walls have become overgrown with hedgerow vegetation and can be easily mistaken for hedgerows. There are also

occasional mature trees associated with these features.

The open character of the plateau/dip slope contrasts strongly with the smaller scale landscape associated with the two valleys of the Broadmead Brook and its tributary, which dissect the plateau (Photo 1 & 6). They consist of irregular shaped pasture and arable fields of a generally smaller size than on the plateau, divided by thick, overgrown and clipped hedges and some stone walls. They are interspersed with infrequent small woodland copses. In the east is a more intricate and textured, small scale and enclosed landscape formed by woodland, copses, individual trees and wetland meadows close to the valley bottom.

Part of Dyrham Park lies within the western boundary. The Deer Park includes open parkland with planted avenues, woodland belts, scattered mature ornamental trees, native tree specimens and copses. Woodland belts along the park boundary, following the A46, are visually prominent and contain westerly views from within the character area (Photo 8). Expansive open views are possible from within the park, over the lower vale landscape to the west, including views of the remainder of the park and its stately home.

Settlement is very limited within the area, comprising a small town, two small villages, a hamlet and a few isolated farms dwellings and other buildings. They all contain buildings of historic form and architectural style, with little evidence of modern additions.

West Littleton, located towards the centre of the area, partly nestles within the undulating wooded landscape of the valleys, with only the southern part of the settlement being visible over much of the western and central parts of the character area.

The town of Marshfield and village of Cold Ashton are located on high ground along the southern boundary and offer open views of the surrounding landscape, particularly extensive over the lower ground of the Ashwicke Ridges and valleys

to the south. Views of their settlement edge are possible over the open exposed plateau, although field boundary walls and intermittent vegetation on the settlement edge integrate these elements to some extent. The church tower forms a landmark feature in many views. Views from the adjacent character area to the south, towards these settlements, are either local or long distance, their extent determined by landform and the degree of enclosure along roads.

The quality of the architecture at Marshfield relates to the wealth created by the pre-industrial malting industry that grew up as a result of the light, free draining soils, and also reflects the town's role as the first major staging point on the Bristol to London route.

Views of the hamlet of Pennsylvania are limited to its immediate setting and a few points along roads in the locality. The modern petrol station structure is a utilitarian feature, out of character with the rest of the settlement.

Outside these villages and hamlets, there are only a few isolated farms and buildings, the open plateau landscape being largely unpopulated in comparison with most of South Gloucestershire. Exceptions are the large scale farm and other commercial shed type buildings to the east of Marshfield and the more recently developed Marshfield Bakery adjacent to the A46, all of which have an urban influence on the surrounding rural landscape.

In all cases, due to the general scarcity of settlement within the area, where it is visible, it is generally a significant feature within the landscape.

Settlements are united through their use of Cotswold stone, used both for traditional buildings and structures, including field boundaries.

The two Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the area are not visually distinct features within the landscape.

The exposed plateau/dip slope allows distant internal views from the highest vantage points. Extensive distant views from the area's boundaries are also possible, partly limited in places by a woodland belt at Dyrham Park and by the foreground skyline of the upper scarp edge. These include views westwards over the Cotswold Scarp (hidden below) to the vale beyond, views southwards across the Ashwicke Ridges and Avon Valley, views across to the Badminton Plateau to the north and into similar character areas in Wiltshire to the east.

The tranquillity and rural character evident over much of the character area is, in the south western part, affected by the main roads. The A46 (T) and A420 run generally at grade with the surrounding landform, or are occasionally partially enclosed by low Cotswold stone walls, often in a state of disrepair. These 'A' roads typically have higher traffic volumes, which are visible and influence the rural character of the plateau, at least locally. The A420, in particular, is a prominent route running along a ridgeline to the south, with open views in all directions, increasing the visual and audible influence of traffic not only within the Marshfield Plateau landscape character area, but also within the Ashwicke Ridges landscape character area to the south (Photo 5). The traffic is locally prominent where it crosses the often exposed plateau and ridge skyline to the west of Marshfield. The M4 generally forms the northern boundary of this landscape character area. Although mostly in cutting, the high traffic levels are an audible and sometimes visually prominent feature of the landscape along those lengths running at grade.

The open character of the plateau landscape also ensures that the powerline that runs east-west to the south of the M4 (Photo 8 & 9) and the mast near the M4 and A46 (T) junction are prominent visual features. A powerline within Wiltshire, beyond this area to the east, is also evident.

The Changing Landscape

The character of the Marshfield Plateau landscape character area is rural, largely unpopulated and distinctive through its simple, upland landscape of gently rolling open arable land and its small scale enclosed valley landscapes, with fields of pasture and arable land, mixed with small woodland copses and wetland meadows.

The rural character of the plateau/dip slope landscape has been eroded in places through the visual intrusion of major roads, traffic, powerlines and masts and more recently the introduction of large industrial scale barns and buildings, for example to the east of Marshfield and adjacent to the A46 north of Cold Ashton. The audible intrusion from traffic levels adds to this erosion of rural character.

The deterioration and sometimes loss of stone wall field boundaries has reduced the condition and integrity of physical boundaries, which are an important landscape feature within such an exposed and simple area. This is particularly evident along the road network and adjacent to settlement and results not only in change to the visual appearance and landscape character of the locality, but also to its habitat value.

The Broadmead Brook valleys, in contrast to the plateau, have very little visual intrusion from modern built development. Their diverse and textured valleys with woodland and meadows are unique within the area.

The open and exposed character of the plateau/dip slope ensures that it is highly sensitive to change. Any vertical built forms would be visible, not just from within the plateau, but from the surrounding wider landscape. Any development which 'breaks' the skyline, such as housing, 'sheds', wind turbines, communication masts or traffic on roads etc, has the potential to be visually prominent and introduce discordant elements within the open plateau, which could erode its distinctive character.

Telecommunications masts, including in the vicinity of the motorway junction and along the A420 are prominent due to the openness of the landscape. The implementation of a junction improvement scheme at Toghill has had a significant impact on the landscape particularly at night, where lighting on the skyline is visible in long distance views from the west.

Due to the visual openness of the plateau, the landscape is sensitive to agricultural change through a lack of maintenance or removal of existing field boundaries or key landscape features. In addition pressure for horse keep and exotics such as alpaca, with its subdivision of fields, fencing, stables and shelters continues to emerge in the landscapes surrounding villages. Such activities often erode the character and quality of the distinctive Cotswold plateau landscape, such as near West Littleton. Scrambling tracks have also been evident in the northwest and south east corners of this landscape character area, bringing degradation of the landscape and noise.

The species associated with the few watercourses and some ponds and pools within the character area, are likely to be sensitive to change both to the waterbody itself and its associated terrestrial habitat.

The transition from pasture and mixed agriculture on the plateau, to arable farmland in the 20th century, introduced changes in the colour and texture of the landscape. Due to the openness of the area, such changes have had, and any future changes will have, a significant impact on the appearance of the landscape. In addition, the growth of self-seeded trees and the introduction of new planting within the plateau area, whilst contributing to the landscape structure, have the potential to affect existing vistas and key views.

The continuing programme of landscape restoration and improvement at Dyrham Park includes the restoration of walls, hedges and woodland management. There are only two historic earthworks within the area, due to the removal of other such features. Both are

Scheduled Ancient Monuments. There is a need to ensure that present and future land use practices do not jeopardise these remaining features.

The recent construction of a new school building and installation of a single small wind turbine on the eastern edge of Marshfield has extended the built form in this location, and introduced a distinctive feature on the edge of the settlement and adjacent to a typically open plateau landscape.

Landscape Strategy

- Maintain the open and rural character of the Cotswolds Plateau, its associated and characteristic landscape features, as well as populations of notable species and mosaic of habitats - ensuring that there is no net loss.
- Restore, conserve and manage the dry stone wall and/or hedgerow framework and pattern, as appropriate to the local landscape and to enhance habitat value, and encourage the restoration of historic features.
- Vertical development should avoid eroding the natural beauty of the landscape 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 facilities².
- Any new vertical development should avoid dominating, or visually competing with, other landmark landscape or heritage assets in the character area.
- 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.
- Protect the tranquility of undisturbed areas including the retention of dark skies and avoiding the introduction of other sources of disturbance and noise.
- Cumulative impact with other developments will require particular consideration due to the openness of the landscape.

² Cotswolds Conservation Board Position Statement: Renewable Energy Projects October 2005

Landscape Character Areas



1 The Broadmead Brook Valley viewed from the road at Shire Hill. There are numerous springs in the valley sides. Broadmead Brook comes through Harcombe Wood to the left of Ebbdown Farm (skyline).



2 West Littleton from Furlongs Lane, with a complete piece of dry stone wall in the foreground. The A46 (on ridge) and Dyrham Park on the horizon.



3 One tree, from Furlongs Lane. Arable land looking towards Marshfield Parish, pasture in the valley behind.



4 Marshfield town, High Street scene.



5 Pennsylvania roundabout where two main routes meet A46/A420.



6 From the A420 Bristol Road, looking approximately north east, down the valley of the Broadmead Brook, which is fed by about 10 springs. Farm building (Oldfield Farm) on skyline.



7 Open dip-slope arable landscape, with stone boundaries adjacent to roads and hedgerows within fields. Rushmead Farm forms the small building in the distance.



8 Large arable fields and pylon towers. Dunsdown Beeches and Badminton Plantation over 3km away mark the the horizon and boundary of Dyrham Park.





9 View towards the A46 and Beacon Lane Plantation. Pylon towers within this particular location are lower in height to limit the visual impact as they cross the skyline of the Cotswold Scarp.

Figure 8 – Area 2
Marshfield Plateau

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

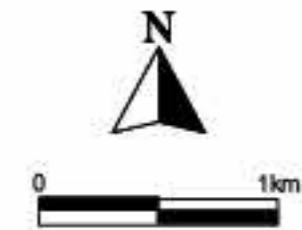


Legend

-  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 9
Area 2
Marshfield Plateau