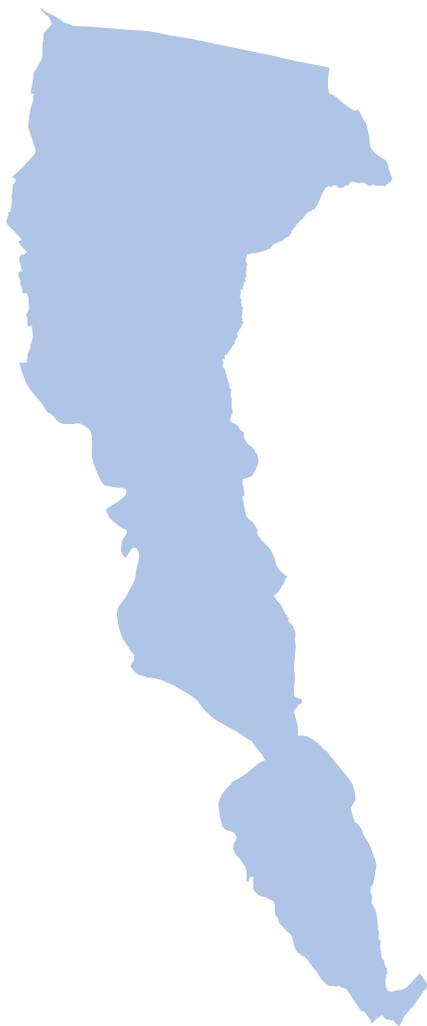




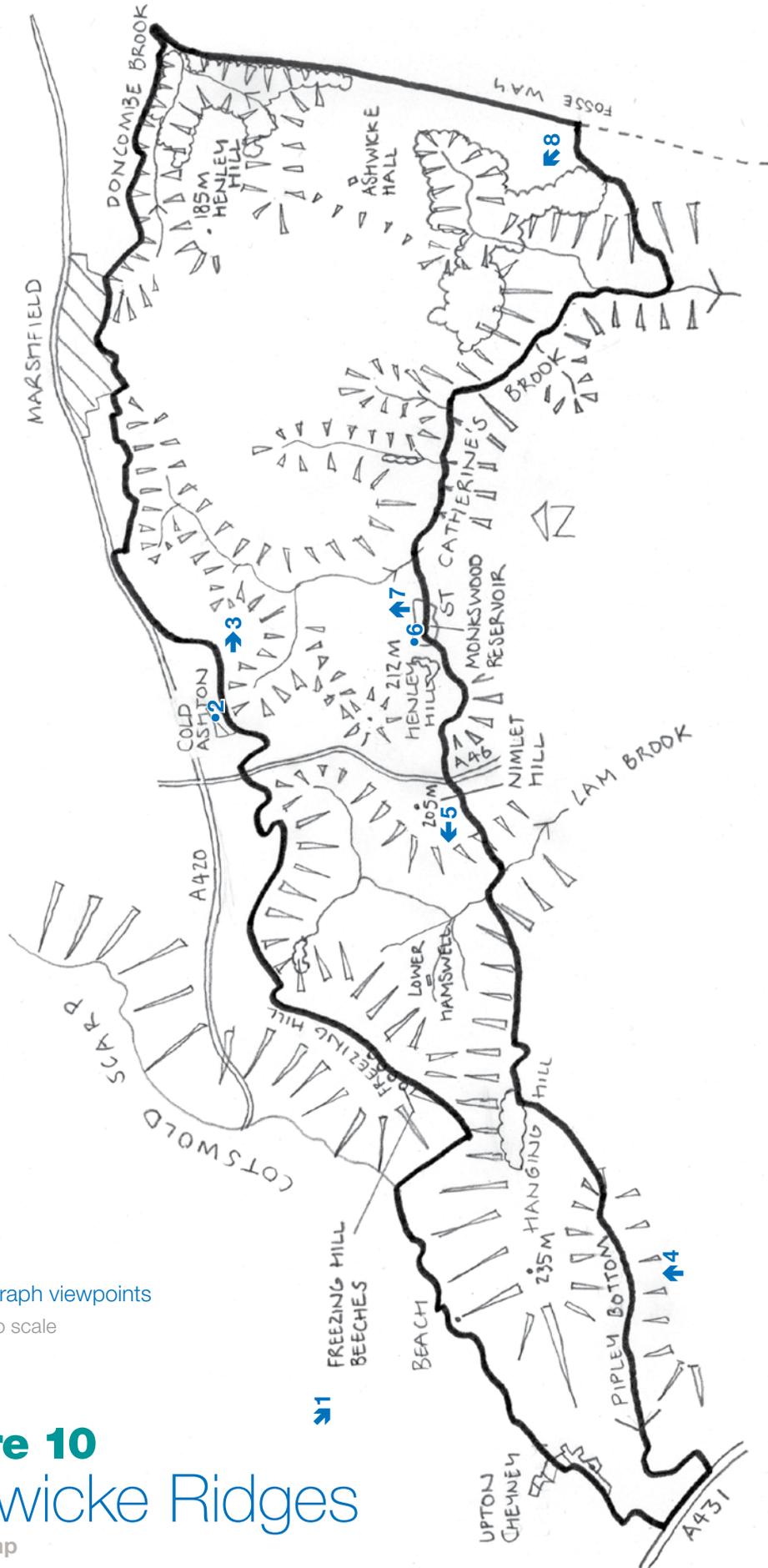
# Area 3

## Ashwicke Ridge



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**Key**

↖8 Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

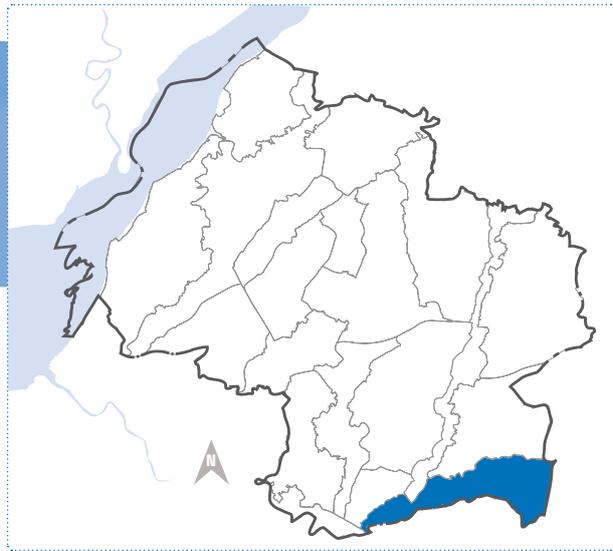
**Figure 10**  
**Ashwicke Ridges**

Sketch Map

## Area 3

### Ashwicke Ridges

**The Ashwicke Ridges landscape character area is a complex area of ridges and valleys covered by a diverse and varied mix of agricultural fields and woodlands.**



## Key Characteristics

- An area of complex landform, comprising a small plateau area of rounded upland hills, steep sided ridges, incised and broad valleys.
- Distinctive and harmonious landscape framework, with a variety of characteristics associated with different landforms. Extensive views are possible over the area from many points along the upper ridges.
- Part of the area around The Rocks has been identified as forming part of the wider setting of the Bath World Heritage site<sup>3</sup>.
- Open uplands of medium, regular shaped mixed pasture and arable fields, with clipped hedges and occasional Cotswold stone walls.
- Significant areas of calcareous and neutral grassland supporting a diverse and species rich range of flora.
- Small copses including ancient woodlands with connectivity via hedgerows and dry stone walls provides habitat for notable species including European Protected Species across the area
- Arable farmland provides nesting opportunities in the spring and foraging potential in the winter for farmland birds including Amber and Red listed species.
- Enclosed, incised and wooded St Catherine's Brook valleys, with irregular medium to small unimproved pastoral fields, with clipped and overgrown hedges.
- Broad open Hamswell Valley with irregular shaped fields, clipped/ overgrown hedges & irregular framework of mature trees within hedgerows and along watercourses. The Freezing Hill beech trees form a prominent skyline feature.
- No major settlements are present, buildings are scattered and infrequent, isolated houses and farms are united through the use of Cotswold stone.
- Main roads are limited, but locally visible and audible.

<sup>3</sup> City of Bath World Heritage Site Setting: Supplementary Planning Document August 2014 [http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/sitedocuments/Environment/Landscape/WHS/whs\\_spd\\_low\\_res.pdf](http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/sitedocuments/Environment/Landscape/WHS/whs_spd_low_res.pdf)

## Location

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

This landscape character area is defined to the east and south by the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary, although the landscape character of the ridges and valleys extends beyond this boundary into Wiltshire and Bath and North East Somerset.

The northern boundary follows an often distinct topographical change between the adjacent Marshfield Plateau and the upper valley edges of this area. (Figure 7) To the west, this boundary first abuts the Cotswold Scarp character area, (Figure 13) following the ridgeline of Freezing Hill, before descending to follow an approximate mid slope topographical boundary with the Golden Valley character area. The boundary then descends further to the A431, which forms a boundary with the Avon Valley character area. (See Figure 49).

## Physical Influences

The underlying geology is principally a mix of Fuller's Earth, Great Oolitic Limestone and Midford and Yeovil Sands. The Midford and Yeovil Sands follow the valley bottom. Fuller's Earth on the valley sides and Great Oolitic Limestone dominates the rounded exposed uplands.

The varied mix of soils present is closely linked to the underlying geology, where Brown Earth Loam over Clay follows the valley floors, typical Calcareous Pelosols lie on the valley sides and Brown Rendzinas on the exposed uplands.

This varied, tightly interwoven mix of geology has influenced topography, creating an undulating and varied landform of small plateau areas with rounded hills, steep sided ridges, incised and broad valleys. Height varies from 70 metres a.o.d. within the valleys to between 180 and 235 metres

a.o.d. on top of the hills; Hanging Hill in the west is the highest point, marked by a mast.

The small scale, steeply sided 'V'-shaped St Catherine's Brook valley occupies the eastern half of the area. Numerous tributaries within their own side valleys, often fed by springs, feed the tightly meandering St Catherine's Brook, producing a visually varied valley of descending interlocking spurs (Photo 7).

The South Gloucestershire boundary (southern boundary to this area) follows the St Catherine's Brook east and then south east, before it eventually joins the River Avon at Bath.

North and east, a plateau area rises to Henley Hill in the east near Marshfield. It is separated from the adjacent Marshfield Plateau character area by the steep sided, easterly draining Doncombe Brook valley and the upper tributary valley of St Catherine's Brook.

There are two ponds and two reservoirs within side valleys of the St Catherine's Brook valley. Monkswood Reservoir is a man-made lake located within the western reaches of this valley system (Photo 6). The South Gloucestershire boundary passes through the centre of this feature. To the east of the area is the small Oakford Reservoir and two pools.

High ground of a second Henley Hill to the south of Cold Ashton, separates St Catherine's Brook from the Hamswell Valley to the west. The upper reaches of the Hamswell Valley are broad open bowl contained to the west by Freezing Hill (Photo 5). It is drained to the south by the small and sinuous Lam Brook and its small tributaries, which are fed by springs. This valley continues south eastwards beyond the area, to the River Avon at Bath.

The saddle landform between Freezing Hill along the western boundary and Hanging Hill to the west, forms a prominent break in continuity of the upland landform.

The ridgeline of Hanging Hill runs westwards,

with side slopes falling north west into the Golden Valley character area (Photo 1) and south into the Piple Bottom Valley. It appears as a physical continuation of the Cotswold Scarp, although separated by a saddle, within views from character areas to the west.

The steep sided 'V'-shaped Piple Bottom Valley drains westwards into the River Avon on the boundary of this area. The South Gloucestershire boundary follows the Piple streamcourse, the southern valley slopes lying within Bath and North East Somerset.

### Land Cover

The Ashwicke Ridges landscape character area includes a diverse range of land cover, closely related to landform.

The upland undulating hills, located along the northern boundary and within the eastern central area of the landscape character area, form a transitional landscape between the adjacent Marshfield Plateau and incised valleys of this area.

Land cover largely consists of regular shaped, medium sized, arable and pasture fields bounded by clipped hedges, stock proof fencing, some Cotswold stone walls and limited tree cover. In the east, at Henley Hill, is an extensive area of woodland on the hill and valley slopes, rather than the hilltops, comprising linear blocks and a large continuous area of mixed woodland clothing the valley slopes of the Doncombe Brook valley.

To the south and west the valleys comprise steep slopes of convex landform, becoming concave near Freezing Hill to the west.

Within the St Catherine's Brook valley system, the steep landform has produced small to medium sized fields of irregular shape with unimproved pasture, many supporting wildflower meadows. Boundaries vary, including dense overgrown hedgerows or clipped hedgerows (occasionally laid or supplemented with fencing), some with mature trees (Photo 3).

Deciduous and mixed areas of woodland are distributed within these valleys. Distribution includes small areas around major houses, isolated deciduous linear woodland often along the upper valley edges and an extensive area of mixed woodland clothing the entire valley sides and a hill top of one tributary valley in the east.

Many of these areas of woodland have been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) or as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs).

Woodland, in conjunction with linear hedgerow trees and overgrown hedgerows, produces strong tree cover within this local area, in the south east (Photo 8).

To the west, the upper Hamswell Valley and sides of Freezing Hill and Hanging Hill include a more regular pattern of medium sized arable and pasture fields. They are defined by clipped hedges, which in places are overgrown, including an irregular pattern of mature hedgerow trees (Photo 5). This local area also includes limited small areas of woodland, with one large area to the east of Hanging Hill.

The highly prominent line of beech trees on Freezing Hill is a notable landmark for some great distance, both within and beyond the South Gloucestershire area to the north and west.

Historic relics and cultural associations within the landscape include the Roman road, The Fosse Way, earthworks, tumuli, field systems and battlefields. Traces of mediaeval field systems in the form of strip lynchets may be seen for example in the area surrounding Cold Ashton.

The most visible and extensive historic feature is the Fosse Way, forming the whole of the eastern boundary of the character area and which, historically, formed the boundaries of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and in part, Somerset. The Three Shire Stones alongside the Fosse Way, are a configuration of standing stones, which mark these original county boundaries between Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire (now

South Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset and Wiltshire). They are probably an 18th century folly, but may be based around a prehistoric burial site.

Other examples include the field terraces in the Pibley Bottom Valley south of Hanging Hill (Photo 4), The Royal Camp (SAM) on Freezing Hill, the Battle of Lansdown, a registered battle field (noted on the O/S map south of Freezing Hill, but covering a much wider area) and Iron Age field systems (strip lynchets) to the west of Cold Ashton.

The Rocks Garden adjoining the Fosse Way is a designed historic garden that includes an avenue of mature trees.

A high stone wall alongside the Fosse Way defines the eastern boundary.

### Biodiversity

This character area generally comprises a mosaic of grassland, woodland, arable and pastoral farmland with water courses and ponds. Together with the hedgerow and drystone wall network this character area provides a range of important habitat for a diverse range of species.

Within the Ashwicke Ridges there are approximately 116 hectares designated as ancient woodland which represents approximately half of the total woodland within this character area located across the landscape mainly as small scattered woodlands and copses with two larger wooded areas situated to the east of the area. All of these ancient woodlands are also designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). There are also three areas designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) comprising species-rich grassland and woodland. These designations recognise the importance of these habitats within the national context for flora and fauna. 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 good connectivity for species such as these between

the wooded areas and other habitats via hedgerows and scattered trees.

There are seventeen sites within the Ashwicke Ridges 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.

There are many watercourses and their tributaries crossing the landscape through this area. These watercourses will support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and otters. Ponds and pools within the area will 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.

Dry stone walls are less prevalent than in other Cotswold areas, however those that are present form a valuable habitat that can be utilised by a diverse range of species from invertebrates to reptiles and amphibians for commuting, foraging and as a refuge.

Some 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.

### Settlement and Infrastructure

There are no major settlements within this landscape character area. The town of Marshfield and villages of Cold Ashton to the north, Upton Cheyney and Beach to the west (all designated Conservation Areas) are on the periphery of the area or within the adjoining character areas, and are constructed principally of Cotswold stone.

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

The small hamlet of Beach comprises a mix of traditional Cotswold houses, cottages and farm buildings, loosely clustered around a junction of narrow country lanes.

The small hamlet of Lower Hamswell consists of isolated and scattered houses and farms. A number of the isolated farmsteads were originally centres of medieval settlement, their building style and layout having been influenced by the formation of the Ashwicke Hall Estate. Other farms and houses are of a variety of different styles, age and size. They are principally constructed from Cotswold stone.

The mid 19th century Ashwicke Hall, replacing an earlier dwelling probably dating from the late 16th century, is located on a prominent ridgeline on the eastern edge of the area. Lodges define the main entrances to the estate with the boundaries partly defined by stone walls. The house and other buildings, that until recently were used as a school, are set within a designed parkland and garden, also dating from the 19th century.

The A46 (T) to the west of Cold Ashton and secondary roads along the top of and to the south of Freezing Hill are the only major roads that cross the area. The A420 defines a very small section of the northern boundary to the west of Marshfield. Similarly, the A431 defines a very small length of the south western boundary. With the exception of the A431, these routes follow upland ridges or descending spurs.

Other routes within the character area are narrow country lanes, which typically radiate out from adjacent villages, largely following

open high ground or natural contours of the land. There are few east-west routes due to the limitations created by the north-south ridges and deeply incised valleys. The Fosse Way forms a distinctive north-south route along the eastern boundary.

Linking with the network of rural roads and lanes are three major recreational routes:

- One of a series of Circular Rides enters this area from the adjacent Marshfield Plateau and Cotswold Scarp character areas. It passes just to the west of Marshfield before descending into the St Catherine's Brook valley. It heads westwards climbing to Nimlet Hill, descending into the Hamswell Valley and passing through the saddle to the south of Freezing Hill and on to Upton Cheyney. It then turns eastwards, following the upper slopes of the Piple Bottom Valley.
- The Cotswold Way crosses the area north to south, to the south west of Cold Ashton through the Hamswell Valley, before continuing beyond the character area towards the Avon Valley.
- The Limestone Link passes south east from Cold Ashton into the St Catherine's Brook valley, following the authority boundary eastwards and then south, beyond the character area, also linking through to the Avon Valley.

### Landscape Character

The Ashwicke Ridges landscape character area is a varied and complex landscape of plateaux, hilltops, ridges and valleys, with a diverse land cover and very few built elements. These features combine to create a dramatic, distinct and in places, remote character.

There is a strong contrast between the open views obtained from the upper slopes and hilltops and the enclosure within the valleys.

The upland hills to the north have generally a simple, open landscape of arable land use over gentle slopes. Woodland cover is generally limited, so where it does feature, it creates texture and focus within the landscape. The woodland belts and large scale forestry within the St Catherine's and Doncombe Brook valleys combine with these valley landforms to produce an enclosed, relatively remote and intimate character. More expansive and dramatic views are obtained over the valleys and ridges.

Open views typically include the following:

- From Marshfield, A420, Cold Ashton and A46 looking southwards. Views of rolling upland agricultural hills, with ground falling steeply from pronounced edges of high ground, into adjacent textured valleys.
- From country lanes just south of Ashwicke Hall looking south towards Oakford in the St Catherine's Brook valley, views include dramatic landform, deep valleys with richly textured, mixed woodlands covering the hillsides.

Further south the landscape descends into a series of ridges and enclosed sinuous valleys of the St Catherine's Brook, with a diverse patchwork of mixed fields and woodland. This creates a quiet, enclosed, richly textured landscape.

The open ridgelines in the area of Freezing Hill (above the upper Hamswell Valley) and Pipeley Bottom Valley to the west, are large scale landforms. Freezing Hill is particularly striking with its sweeping, primarily grassed, slopes and mature beech trees prominent in silhouette on the horizon (Photo 5).

Throughout this undulating landscape, scattered farms and buildings are set within the varied landform, united through the use of Cotswold stone within buildings and boundary walls. There are no major settlements within this area, although Marshfield and the small villages of Cold Ashton, Upton Cheyney and Beach are on the

boundaries. Marshfield sits along the upper edge of the upper reaches of the St. Catherine's Brook valley and along with its church tower forms a prominent landmark from the open plateau and ridges to the south. Other settlement is largely well integrated as a result of its small scale nature and surrounding framework of stone walls and/or vegetation.

The church towers at Cold Ashton, together with its court (Photo 2), and at Marshfield, form locally visible focal points and distinctive features in the landscape.

The trees planted as part of the parkland and garden at Ashwicke Hall form a significant landscape feature and provide structure within the locality, to the east.

The overall rural character of this area is enhanced by the minimal road network. Where present, roads are typically well integrated within the surrounding landscape, due to the enclosure provided by the surrounding vegetation and undulating landform. In particular, the unclassified country lanes are largely enclosed by hedges which limit views into the surrounding landscape. However, the A420 and A46(T), with associated higher traffic volumes, are prominent locally where they follow the crown of open ridgelines.

The historic field systems and earthworks are locally prominent landform features, often on open steep hillsides, contributing an unusual form and texture to the landscape.

### The Changing Landscape

The character of the Ashwicke Ridges landscape character area is distinctly rural and largely tranquil, with a harmonious relationship between landform, vegetation and settlement.

The lack of urban influence, modern development, limited road access and containment of many views, adds to the feeling of remote countryside within the majority of the landscape character area and particularly

the deep valleys. This area is therefore highly sensitive to change, which has the potential to erode the distinctive physical and visual character of the area.

Adjacent to the A420 and A46, where traffic is particularly visually and audibly intrusive, rural landscape characteristics and tranquillity of the area have been diminished and eroded.

The visual attractiveness of the landscape may itself increase the recreational pressures within this area.

'Horsiculture' (although presently relatively limited within the area) and sometimes alpaca keeping are more recent trends which, in places, have led to the subdivision of fields, the introduction of alien field boundaries and/or the loss or erosion of hedgerows. The cumulative effect of this and the associated infrastructure of stables, access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and floodlighting, can result in a marked change in landscape character and disrupt habitat value.

Many of the landscape's constituent parts are vulnerable to less active management, with evidence present of limited hedge laying, poor condition of some stone walls and ageing tree/woodland structure without measures for replacement. In spite of the overall strong character of the area, the cumulative effect of limited management, or even a change in management, has the potential to alter the area's unique and distinctive character and alter or degrade its ecological value. There are however examples of more recent and appropriate planting and management such as the Forest of Avon leased 'Retreat' 5.18 ha community woodland on Marshfield Lane, Beach.

## Landscape Strategy

- Maintain and enhance the highly distinctive, rural and tranquil characteristics of the historic landscape of the Ashwicke Ridges with its and complex valleys, ridges and skylines.
- Conserve and enhance the biodiversity value of the diverse mosaic of habitats, including for example, ancient woodland, calcaerious and neutral grassland, and nesting opportunities for farmland birds and protected species.
- Restore, conserve and manage the dry stone wall network, hedgerow and woodland framework and pattern, including on the visually prominent hillsides, and encourage the restoration of other characteristic, historic and traditional landscape features.
- Resist change of use to the keeping of horses where this would affect the character of the landscape including from:
  - subdivision by electrified and post and rail fences
  - the degradation of the sward by overgrazing
  - introduction of parking, trackways and buildings
  - floodlighting
- Ensure that any new development and structures are sensitively located, and where necessary screened from the wider landscape to avoid eroding rural character of the character area, part of which contributes to the setting to the Bath World Heritage Site.
- Protect the tranquillity of the area including the retention of dark skies, and avoiding the introduction of noise.
- Conserve the rural skylines of the Ashwicke Ridges, avoiding vertical elements that could impact on the particular characteristics of the wider landscape character area, including the setting of the Bath World Heritage Site.
- 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 respects and enhances local distinctiveness and the traditional character of the area.
- Respect and conserve the historic landscapes, field systems, earthworks and other associated features that contribute to the character and interest of the area.
- Given the importance of maintaining the rural character of skylines, careful consideration should be given to the location and design of highway signage and lighting on high ground.

**Landscape Character Areas**



**1** The ridgeline of Hanging Hill set above the Golden Valley.



**2** Cold Ashton Manor.



**3** Side valley of the St Catherine's Brook Valley. Valley sides and bottom grazed and top cultivated. Westbury White Horse can be seen in the distance on a clear day.



**4** Piple Bottom valley with terraced fields. Ornamental trees were introduced by Canon Ellacombe of Bitton Church.



**5** The Hamswell Valley, site of the Battle of Lansdown with beech trees on the skyline at Freezing Hill, in the foreground an amenity man-made fishing lake. The Cotswold Way runs through the valley.



**6** Monkwood Reservoir, within the St Catherine's Brook Valley.



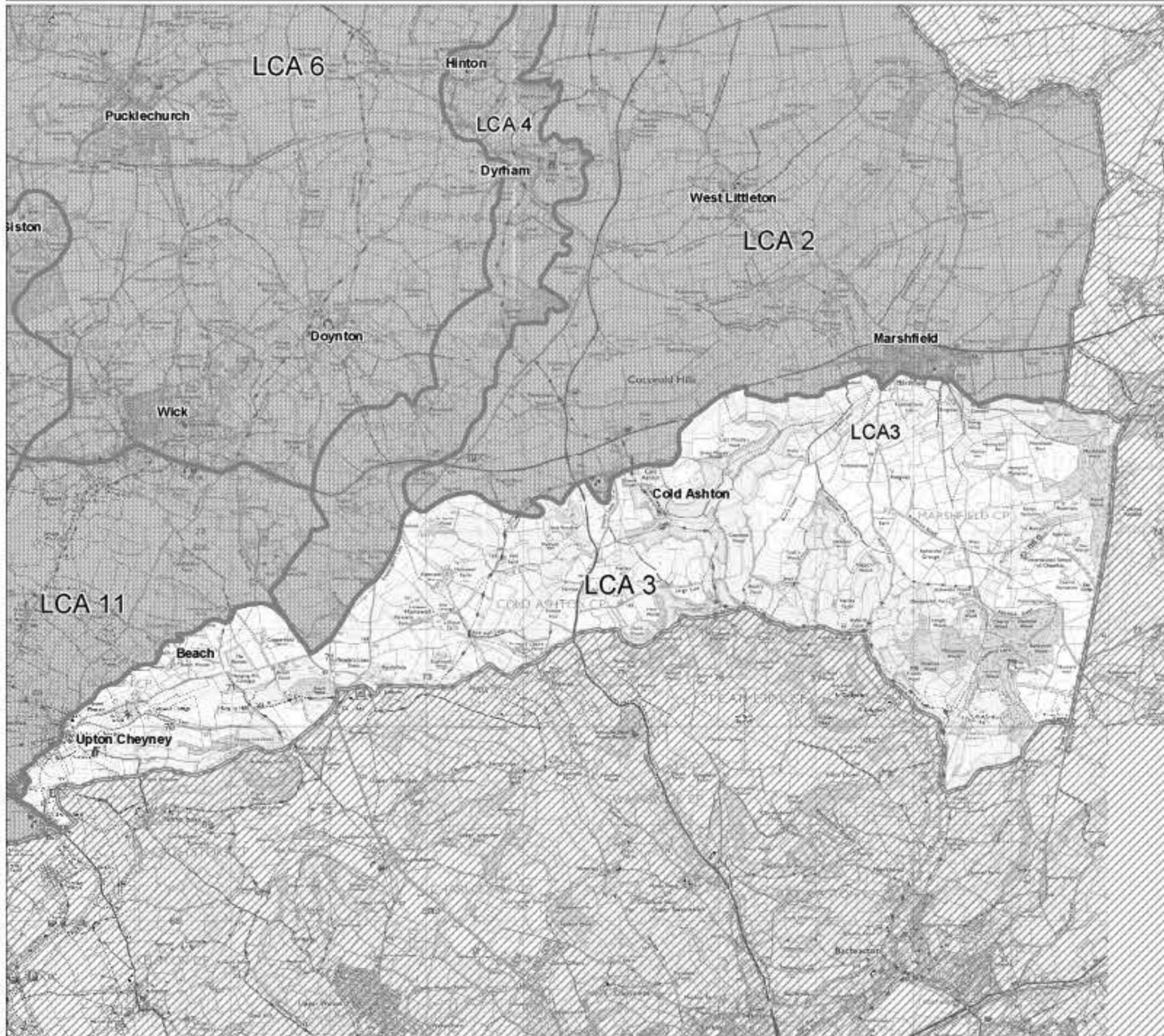
**7** St Catherine's valley looking towards Marshfield and beyond Cold Ashton Parish. Valley bottom and sides grazed, tops cultivated.



**8** Extensive woodland from near the Three Shire Stones on the south east boundary of the area.

**Figure 11 - Area 3**  
Ashwicke Ridges

## 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 12**  
**Area 3**  
Ashwicke Ridges