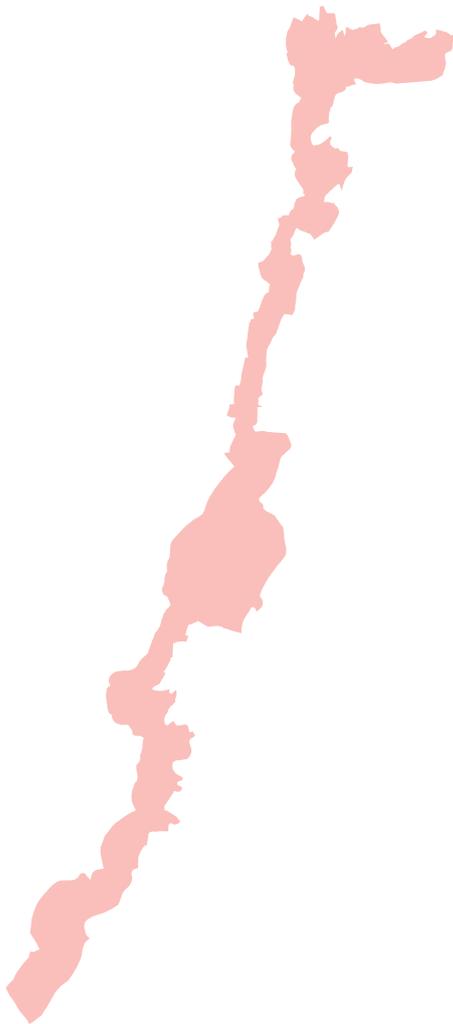




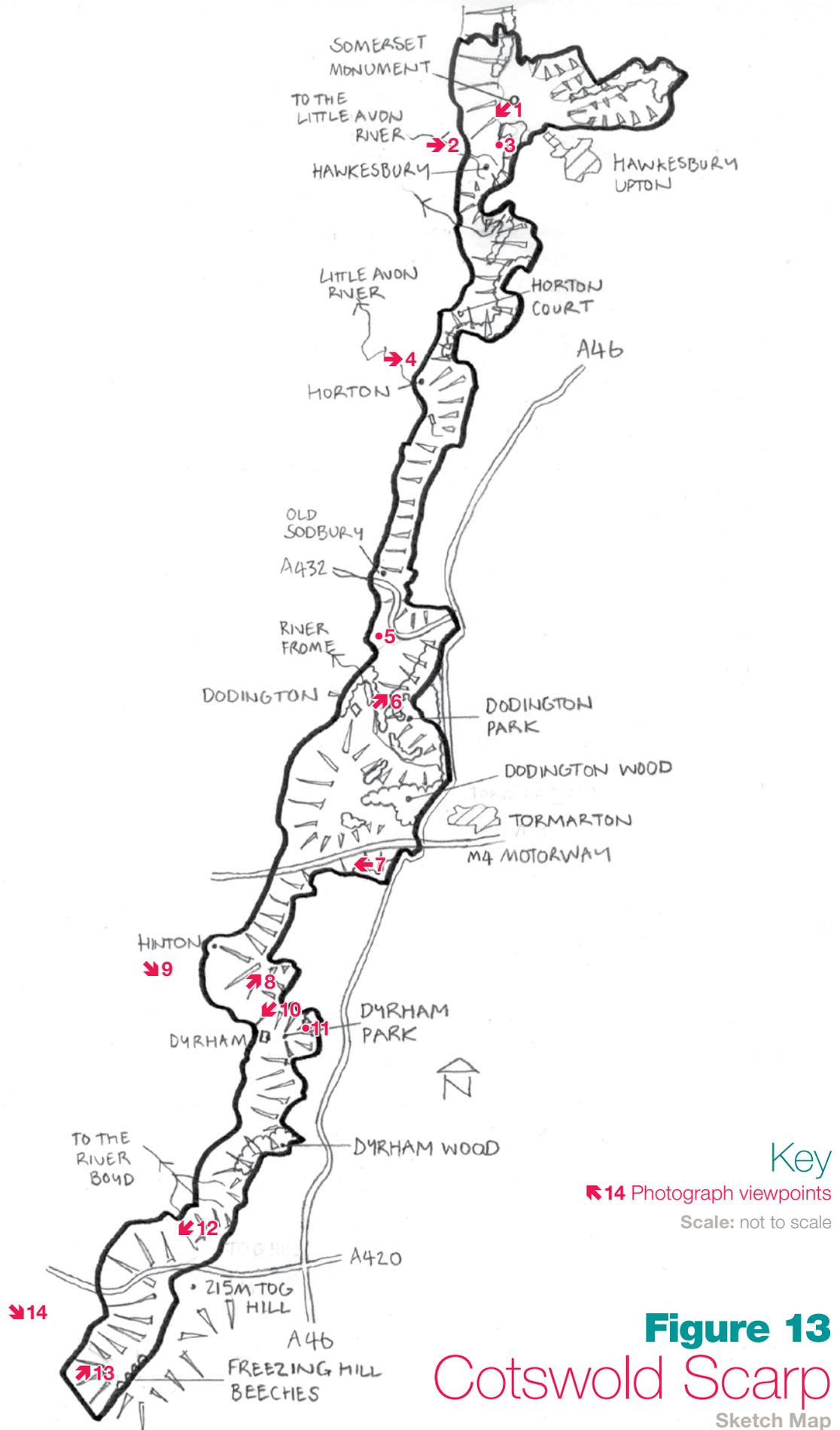
Area 4

Cotswold Scarp



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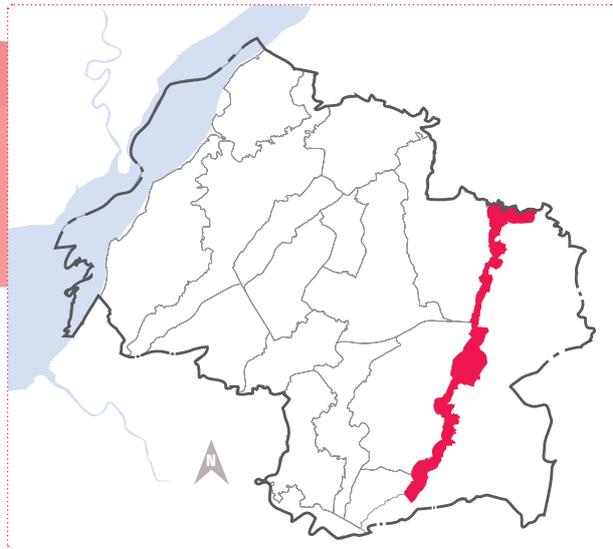
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Area 4

Cotswold Scarp

The Cotswold Scarp landscape character area is a steeply sloping, dramatic feature, dominated by its distinct topography.



Key Characteristics

- Distinct, extensive and large scale, steeply sloping and folded scarp landform, falling from the Cotswold Plateau westwards to lower vales.
- A largely undisturbed landscape with dramatic and panoramic views over the landscape to the west and is highly prominent as a backcloth to the lower lying landscape.
- Comprises a diverse land cover of largely small, irregular pasture fields, rough grassland, some regular arable fields, parkland, archaeological earthworks and a golf course.
- Calcareous grassland is an important feature supporting a diverse and species rich flora.
- Trees and hedgerows are important landscape elements. Areas of deciduous woodland including ancient woodland and small areas of scrub are generally associated either with valley landforms, or follow the contours along the upper scarp slopes.
- Fields defined by thick clipped hedges, some laid, often intermittent and supplemented with fences, with limited Cotswold stone wall field boundaries. These provide some connectivity between habitats
- Undisturbed grassland provides nesting opportunities in the spring and foraging potential in the winter for farmland birds including Amber and Red listed species.
- Numerous nucleated spring-line villages nestle within the landform along the toe of the scarp and often include churches and large houses.
- Sunken lanes climb the scarp enclosed by high banks, hedgerows or trees.

Location

The Cotswold Scarp landscape character area is a distinct and prominent landform running approximately north-south, defining the western edge of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the eastern part of South Gloucestershire.

The eastern boundary of the character area is typically marked by the sudden change in slope between the steeply rising scarp face and the open upland and flatter plateau/dip slope landscape to the east. (See figures 4 and 7) The western boundary of the Cotswold Scarp marks the approximate transition between the lower, gently undulating broad ridge and valleys to the west and the steeply sloping scarp. (See Figures 16 & 19).

This landscape character area extends northwards to the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary, although the landform continues beyond this boundary.

The southern boundary follows the base of Freezing Hill, within a saddle landform dividing a valley to the east, marking the change to the more undulating form of the Ashwicke Ridges and the more gently sloping land to the west, towards the Golden Valley.

Physical Influences

The Cotswold Scarp landscape character area is formed from a mix of geology including Middle Jurassic Limestone overlying Lower Jurassic Sandstone and Lias Clays which slope down from the plateau to the east. The soils are typically Brown Earths and Loam over Clay, forming a distinctive and fertile strip of land.

The large scale and generally steeply sloping landform varies from approximately 200 metres a.o.d. at its highest point to the east, falling westwards to a height of approximately 100 metres a.o.d.

Generally, the scarp gradient/aspect varies only slightly along its length. Sections of consistently uniform concave scarp are interspersed with small scale valley insertions of varying aspect. These have created in places both simple valley forms and a more complicated deeply folded scarp with convex upper slopes, knolls, rounded hills, promontories and descending broad spurs.

The scarp crest defines a watershed within the Authority, as many springs occur along the scarp edge and flow generally westwards, into the Little Avon River, River Frome and River Boyd and eventually to the Severn. Watercourses on the other side of the ridge flow eastwards. A number of the smaller folds and valley insertions into the scarp are dry.

More specifically, to the north between Hawkesbury and Horton, the scarp is typically concave with deeply incised valleys. Springs and streams flow generally westwards from these valleys, feeding the Little River Avon (Photo 2 & 4).

Further south within Dodington Park, the River Frome has formed a prominent valley feature which erodes some way into the scarp. The north west facing valley becomes a shallow 'U'-shaped valley with convex upper slopes creating an undulating profile, characteristically different from the typical scarp (Photo 6).

South of this area, west facing folds have been formed by tributaries of the River Boyd, which flow south westwards through the adjacent Pucklechurch Ridge character area. This has formed a convex scarp with broad rounded spurs extending into the landscape below.

At the southern boundary, a saddle between Freezing Hill and Hanging Hill forms a prominent break in the Cotswold Scarp. Here, Freezing Hill descends steeply in a concave slope (photo 14).

Land Cover

The steep landform of the Cotswold Scarp landscape character area is typically covered with small, irregular shaped pastoral fields, with rough grassland generally along the steepest sections. Field hedgerows generally closely follow the contours of the landform and flow down the scarp (perpendicular to the contours), with some large regular shaped arable fields extending beyond the base and crest of the slope. The woodland and hedgerow framework is an important feature along the scarp.

The scarp to the north is typically a mix of large, irregular shaped belts of deciduous woodland which generally follow the upper contours of the slope (Photo 4) and small areas of woodland and scrub, combined with small, irregular shaped pastoral fields. The fields are divided by a mix of thick clipped or laid hedges, some overgrown, sometimes supplemented with timber post and rail fencing.

Towards the centre and the south, woodland cover is typically more limited, with the exception of large areas within Dodington Park (Photo 6) and at Dyrham Wood (Photo 9). Smaller woods and copses are scattered amongst the mix of pasture fields and more open rolling grassland divided by clipped hedges. In a few locations, such as immediately north of the M4, open rough grassland with limited hedgerow or tree cover on bluffs, extends westwards into the lower vale.

A stand of mature beech trees, along the scarp edge at Freezing Hill in the south, is a distinctive feature on the boundary between this and the adjacent character area (Photo 14). On the lower slopes of the scarp are part of the grounds of Tracy Park golf course which extend from the adjacent character area. Land cover comprises more recent infrastructure of fairways, greens and developing tree planting.

Some Cotswold stone walls are present along the crest of the scarp, particularly to the south, where they extend eastwards from the scarp and onto the plateau/dip slope of the adjacent character

area. However, laid or clipped field boundaries are more common (Photo 5).

Contrasting with the agricultural and woodland landscape pattern along the scarp, are a number of historic parks and grounds to large houses. The location of these houses, associated features and grounds, have taken particular advantage of the often sculptural landform offered by the scarp and slightly elevated outlook. From north to south these sites include:

- Horton Court, this area includes the site of the original village of Horton, Horton Court house, Cotswold stone estate wall, fishponds and woodland, nestled within a prominent fold within the scarp. The estate grounds extend into the lower vale landscape to the west, into the adjoining character area.
- The manorial complex at Little Sodbury includes fishponds and a large area of earthworks, evident as pillow mounds, created for rabbit warrens.
- Dodington House and parkland (Registered Historic Park) includes the stately house and designed landscape setting, partly attributed to Capability Brown, with open undulating grassland and arable land use, with large sculptural woodland plantations, clumps of woodland, mature specimen trees and lakes, within the setting of the small scale naturalistic River Frome valley (Photo 6).
- Dyrham Park (Registered Historic Park) incorporates a medieval deer park with an 18th century house, with grounds designed by Humphrey Repton and Charles Harcourt Masters amongst others. The grand house is within a mature woodland framework set at the toe of the scarp, in a large scale bowl landform. A formal garden lies to the west of the house. The parkland extends eastwards beyond the scarp into the adjacent Marshfield Plateau character area. This area includes planted avenues, woodland belts and scattered mature ornamental trees, native tree specimens and tree clumps (Photo 10 & 11).

- The grounds of Tracy Park lie just outside of this character area and about the south western boundary.

The area also has important historic relics, evident from the presence of numerous long and round barrows of the Neolithic and Bronze Ages scattered along the scarp. Notable features include Hawkesbury Knoll medieval field system to the north, visually prominent lynchets and prehistoric burial mound (Photo 1), the Horton Camp (SAM), Sodbury Hill Fort (SAM) south of Little Sodbury and Hinton Hill Fort (SAM) and associated field systems of strip lynchets (Photo 8), just north of Dyrham Park.

Biodiversity

The mosaic of grassland, woodland, arable and pastoral farmland, water courses and framework of hedges and some walls makes the Cotswold Scarp an important habitat for a diverse range of species.

Within the Cotswold Scarp there are approximately 80 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. Approximately half of these ancient woodlands are also designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) in recognition of their importance in the national context for flora and fauna. Key species likely to be associated with the ancient woodland 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 good connectivity for species such as these between the wooded areas and other habitats via hedgerows and scattered trees. Veteran trees within parkland are important for lichens and invertebrates.

There are fifteen sites within the Cotswold Scarp designated as SNCIs for the calcareous and neutral grassland present on the sites, including species-rich grassland. Upton Coombe has

been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to the presence of species-rich calcareous grassland. This diverse habitat supports a range of invertebrates and ant hills are a regular feature. The 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 Hawkesbury Quarry SSSI is one of the few Inferior Oolite sections in the South Cotswolds, forming a vital link between the northern Cotswolds and the fossil bearing limestone found further south.

There are many springs along the scarp edge and their resultant 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).

Although dry stone walls are less prevalent in this area when compared with the Badminton and Marshfield Plateaus these features are 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.

Settlement and Infrastructure

The Cotswold Scarp is scattered with numerous nucleated villages, hamlets and farm building groups, united through their use of Cotswold stone as a building material. Many of the villages are spring-line settlements, located along the lower slopes of the scarp, with churches a common feature of most villages.

The villages comprise, from north to south, Hawkesbury, Horton, Little Sodbury, Old Sodbury, Dodington, Hinton and Dyrham, all of which include churches, except Hinton and Horton, where the church is located at Horton Court.

Hawkesbury, Horton and Dyrham are designated Conservation Areas, essential components of which are their Cotswold Scarp setting, often located on the lower slopes extending into adjacent flatter areas, common use of Cotswold stone in construction, historic layout variety in individual building form and size. Church towers are prominent local features within Hawkesbury and Dyrham (Photo 3).

The Somerset Monument is included within the Hawkesbury Conservation Area and is located on top of the scarp, to the north west of Hawkesbury Upton (Photo 2).

The scarp is ascended by a number of roads: the A432, B4465, M4 and A420, as well as several small sunken country lanes enclosed by high banks, hedgerows or trees. They generally take advantage of folds and valley formations within the landform, with the largest concentration of routes (country lanes) to the north.

Some earthwork cuttings are associated with the major routes, the M4 in particular, incorporating large scale re-profiling within an existing valley (Photo 7).

These routes are interconnected with north to south principally minor roads, which intermittently follow sections of the toe or upper scarp/plateau edge.

The interconnection of country lanes is most evident within the north of the area and more intermittent elsewhere.

Roads such as the A46 and 420 are ridgeway roads, historically taking the dry and relatively safer high ground, and sometimes visibly built up from years of surfacing.

The A46(T) provides a continuous north-south route, running approximately parallel to the scarp to the east. Whilst located close to the top of the scarp for short sections, typically it is located within the plateau area to the east, beyond this landscape character area.

Three major recreational routes cross the area, linking in part with the minor road network. The Monarch's Way enters this area at Little Sodbury and runs south to north below the scarp, partly following the network of lanes between Horton and Horton Court, Horton and Little Sodbury, as does a section of one of a series of Circular Rides linking to Hawkesbury.

The Monarch's Way then connects to the scarp edge, running northwards. The Cotswold Way follows a significant length of the scarp, over fields and along lanes both along the toe, flank or crest of the scarp, as well as within the plateau, ascending the scarp in several locations. The path passes along the crest of the scarp between Hawkesbury to Horton and between Dodington Park and Dyrham Park to the south. The Circular Ride network crosses and passes along the scarp at several locations, linking with the larger network of public rights of way.

Overhead powerlines set on pylons cross the scarp at two locations, north of Little Sodbury and south of the M4.

Landscape Character

The Cotswold Scarp landscape character area is a prominent physical feature, forming a highly visible and distinctive backcloth in views from the lowland vales and ridges to the west (Photo 9). This feature is regionally prominent, being evident from as far away as South Wales. The top of the scarp provides the highest vantage point within the South Gloucestershire area and thus allows extensive panoramic views westwards. Its distinct form defines a marked change in character from the plateau/dip slope landscape to the east and the lower undulating ridges and vales to the west.

The scarp's large scale form has a diverse cover of pasture, rough grassland, hedges and woodland, combined with historic parklands and small nucleated settlements. These elements are superimposed upon the scarp landform, creating a mixture of both bold, simple landscape forms and a more intricate textured landscape.

In places the extensive and prominent tree cover and hedgerow pattern visually link the various land uses. The largely linear form of woodland and hedgerow pattern complements the scarp by following the slope contours. Descending hedgerows often follow the slope gradient visually emphasising the intricacies and folds in the scarp, contributing to a strong and harmonious landscape framework (Photo 9 and 12).

Elsewhere, open grass hillsides, with small isolated tree clumps or scrub reveal the scarp's slope profile and exposed ridgeline.

The single line of mature beech trees along the ridgeline of Freezing Hill on the boundary to the south, superimposed upon the striking scarp landform, produces a distinctive landmark on the skyline visible both locally and from some great distance to the west and east (Photo14).

The historic designed parklands of Dodington House and Dyrham Park strongly influence the character of parts of the scarp. Both have a mature framework of woodland, copses, linear tree belts, scattered specimen trees and avenues (the latter at Dyrham Park) within open grassland. This planting provides structure and enclosure within pronounced natural landforms, which comprise a shallow valley, stream and lake (head waters of the River Frome) at Dodington House and curving bowl landform at Dyrham Park.

The large stately houses of both estates are prominent within their open parkland setting. Dodington Park also includes some arable land use with fields divided by fencing. Whilst this forms an open landscape not enclosed by hedgerows and therefore typical of parkland, the colour and texture of arable land is subtly different to traditional pasture normally found within

parkland. However, these areas of parkland, their houses and associated buildings, generally have little wider influence beyond their boundaries, due to the surrounding large scale landform and strong tree and woodland framework.

The golf course at Tracy Park, largely in the adjoining area, has introduced a new topography, pattern and texture within an existing agricultural landscape of open fields and hedgerows. Relatively recent tree planting is developing to absorb the golf course, thereby reducing its visual prominence in views from the scarp and local lower ground to the west (Photo 13).

The degree of enclosure varies considerably along the scarp. Landform, elevation, aspect, woodland and trees define the extent and focus of views both within and beyond the area. View characteristics vary between the heavily enclosed woodland in deeply incised valleys, more open historic parks, to the exposed rough grassland bluffs protruding beyond the scarp, which allow wide panoramic views over considerable distances. In particular important view points from the scarp include Dyrham Deer Park, Old Sodbury Church, the Somerset Monument and, Toghill picnic site together with sections of the Cotswold Way permit expansive views of the vale landscape below and as far as Wales in the distance.

The pattern and form of the historic settlements and country lanes has been influenced by landform and was closely related to surrounding rural agricultural practices. Settlements, typically set near the toe or nestled within folds of the scarp, are nucleated, small scale and well integrated, given the surrounding mature framework setting of hedgerows, trees and woodland and common use of Cotswold stone in building construction.

Six church towers are visible local features, with five associated with settlements, forming frequent local landmarks along the scarp toe and one associated with Horton Court (Photo 2 and 3).

The Somerset Monument (tower), to the north

of Hawkesbury, is a visually prominent and distinctive landmark featuring in many views, not only from the scarp and plateau, but from the lower vales and valleys to the west.

Horton Court to the north is a large house, prominent on the scarp, framed by woodland and visible from the vale to the west. Similarly, the pillow mound earthworks north of Horton Camp are also clearly visible from within local views below the scarp and along the top of the scarp from the A46, where the road passes close by.

The M4 cutting, through an existing valley in the scarp is a large, more uniform slope than the natural slope profile. The motorway rises up the scarp with the high traffic volumes a visible feature within distant western views and an audible feature locally. The motorway, on approaching the foot of the scarp, is elevated on a substantial embankment and is visually prominent in local views from the scarp and the adjacent character area to the west. The surrounding dense vegetation and undulating landscape along the scarp however limits this impact on more distant views along the scarp itself.

The powerline to the south of the M4 is also visible, the more open landscape of this area accentuating the prominence of the pylons on the scarp slope.

The Changing Landscape

The Cotswold Scarp landscape character area is a highly visible, distinct and visually varied landscape with prominent landscape features. It retains a distinct rural landscape character. The man-made landscape is old, with visual evidence of its past history in its agricultural land cover, parkland and settlement patterns, as well as its archaeological remains. There are only a few examples of visually intrusive modern built development and land use change, such as the M4, pylon towers, telecommunication masts and a golf course. The masts are located on the upper scarp and are therefore visually prominent.

The parkland estates at Dodington House and Dyrham Park influence land use, land management and therefore character, along sections of the scarp. Dodington Park includes some arable land use, enclosed by fences following the removal of hedgerows. Whilst this open landscape (with mature trees and woodland framework) is a typical characteristic of parkland, the colour and texture of this land use is subtly different to traditional pasture. Further, or wider land use changes could therefore potentially erode the typical parkland character.

The intactness of the key components of the landscape is typically better in the north, although outside Dodington and Dyrham, much of the existing framework of hedgerows and woodland lacks consistent management. Sporadic hedges, some becoming overgrown, or replaced with timber fencing, are evident. The decline of traditional management practices, such as laying hedges, is also a widespread trend. These features are particularly important to the distinctiveness of the area, due to the elevated aspect of the scarp, which is highly visible from the adjacent character areas to the west. Their loss or decline would therefore result in the erosion of the character of the area. This would also impact on biodiversity value, including loss of connectivity between habitats.

There are few Cotswold stone wall field boundaries within the area, but where these are present they typically occupy an area of landscape transition between the scarp and adjacent plateau/dip slope. Here, they form a strong framework feature, although condition is variable. While some of these features are in decline with a resultant impact on the character of the landscape including its biodiversity value, others have been restored.

In contrast, new stone walls within and adjacent to some settlements are evident, such as at Hawkesbury. These can be an indication of the investment often made in built property and, in Conservation Areas, of the planning requirements applied to conserve local character.

The mature tree structure has a general lack of juvenile trees to sustain succession and hence the woodland framework in the longer term. The landmark trees at Freezing Hill similarly, presently have no juvenile succession planting.

Landscape restoration and management continues to make a positive contribution at Dyrham Park, including avenue planting and woodland areas alongside the A46, on the park's eastern boundary (Photo 11) and restoration of boundary walls. New tree planting and restoration of walls is also evident at Dodington Park. Such restoration work will, as they mature, contribute to strengthening the landscape framework and biodiversity value.

The uniqueness of the small settlements is noted by the Conservation Area status of a number of villages.

Any changes in land use, particularly grazing and arable practices, are likely to change the visual texture of fields and existing scrub pattern with related impacts on habitat value and species. Pressure for horse keep is also affecting the character of some areas.

The elevated ground presented by the scarp, makes this character area and its features particularly visible within local and distant views. The variety in landscape framework produces both enclosed and open character, offering numerous vantage points across the area and adjacent landscapes. These characteristics make this character area particularly visually sensitive to change, both viewed from within this and across the adjacent character area to the west. Similarly, certain types of change within this character area could have a wide visual impact.

Vantage points and the extent of views are influenced by adjacent vegetation and its degree of management. For example, the panoramic view once obtained from Toghill picnic site is becoming curtailed by the growth of self-seeded trees. Without management, more of this view, and others within the character area, will be obscured in time.

Features which visually disturb the skyline or cause noticeable change to the physical landform or the landscape framework, or are discordant with the landscape or settlement framework/pattern, have the potential to erode the intrinsic characteristics and distinctiveness of the area and its role as a back cloth to many views from the west.

Applications for wind turbines on the Cotswold Scarp have been resisted due to their impact on the key characteristics of the landscape.

Widening within the highway boundary and the introduction of further signage and gantries along the M4 as it enters the character area has increased its prominence. However once landscaped, land raising to the north side can be expected to provide some screening and absorption of the motorway and its traffic into the wider landscape.

Landscape Strategy

- Maintain the rural character of the Cotswold scarp both in local views and as a backcloth to views across adjacent character areas to the west.
 - Conserve the rural Cotswold skyline, avoiding vertical elements and lighting that could impact on the particular characteristics and natural beauty of the wider landscape character area and also on views across the character areas to the west.
 - Protect the tranquility of the landscape including by avoiding intrusive lighting and structures, and by controlling the introduction of new sources of noise. Dark skies should be preserved..
 - Retain, manage and enhance the mosaic of habitat across the character area, ensuring no net loss of biodiversity habitat.
 - Restore, conserve and manage the dry stone wall and/or hedgerow and woodland framework and pattern in a manner that reinforces their landscape and biodiversity value and as appropriate to the local landscape including for example securing succession planting for the characteristic tree lines at Freezing Hill. Encourage the restoration of other historic and traditional landscape features.
 - Avoid the introduction of features and uses that can harm landscape character and biodiversity, including uncharacteristic planting and field boundaries, the subdivision of fields by electrified and post and rail fences, as well as the degradation of the sward by overgrazing.
- Ensure that any new development and structures are sensitively located avoid the need for earthworks that disrupt the landform, and where necessary screened from the wider landscape to avoid eroding rural character of the locality.
 - Any new vertical development should avoid dominating, or visually competing with, other landmark landscape features 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.
 - Respect and conserve the historic landscapes, field systems, earthworks and other associated features that contribute to the character and interest of the area.
 - To ensure that new development does not harm the character, significance or setting of the historic designed parklands and gardens associated with Horton Court, Dyrham Park and Dodington House.

Landscape Character Areas



1 Hawkesbury Knoll, with prehistoric burial mound and lynchets medieval field system.



2 The Somerset Monument is visible on the scarp (to the left) over considerable distances. Hawkesbury village is well integrated. The landform, woodland and tree clumps are characteristic of the scarp landscape.



3 Ancient village of Hawkesbury. The church, Church Farm and outbuildings with site of Old Manor.



4 Panoramic view of the parish from Mapleridge. Village running down escarpment, divided between Horton and Widden Hills. Village edge softened by surrounding trees and woodland. Main woodland areas on escarpment.



5 Traditional laid hedge near Chapel Lane, Old Sodbury.



7 The M4 looking west, descending to the Boyd Vale following a natural fold within the scarp's landform, enlarged by cutting.



6 Panorama from within the Dodington Estate.



8 Hinton Hill Fort and its strip lynchets constructed before the black death, seen from the Cotswold Way.



9 The Cotswold Scarp rising above the Boyd Vale, with Dyrham Woods nestled within a fold of the scarp.



10 Dyrham House and park with expansive views over the lower vale typical from the scarp.



11 Recently planted avenue of trees in Dyrham Park.



12 Cotswold Scarp rising to Tog Hill on the skyline.



13 Extension to Tracy Park Golf Course within the agricultural landscape.



14 Freezing Hill beech trees on the skyline of the Cotswold Scarp, form a distinctive feature and landmark with local and distant views.

Figure 14 - Area 4
Cotswold Scarp

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 15
Area 4
 Cotswold Scarp