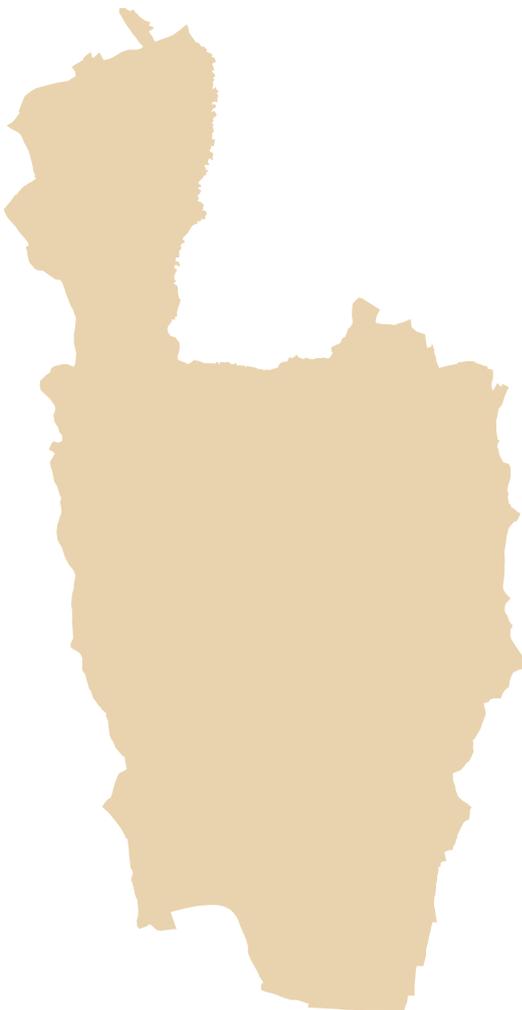




Area 5

Wickwar Ridge and Vale



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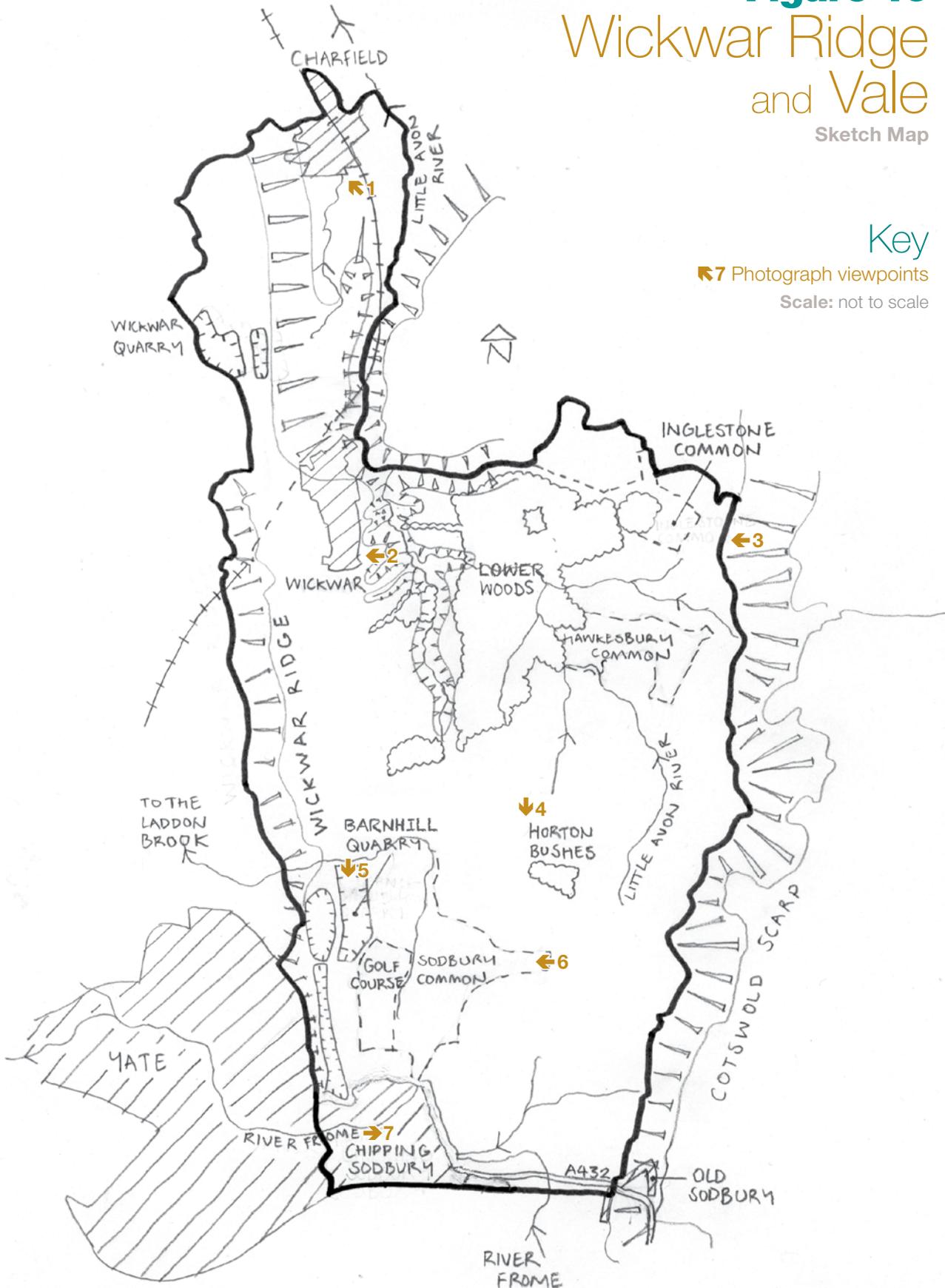
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Wickwar Ridge and Vale
Sketch Map

Key

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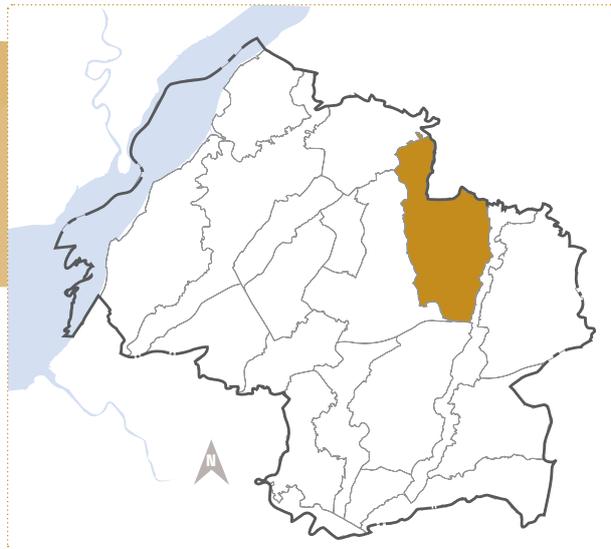
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Area 5

Wickwar Ridge and Vale

The Wickwar Ridge and Vale landscape character area is a diverse undulating landscape covered with a mix of farmland, woodland and common.



Key Characteristics

- Large scale undulating landscape with small and medium scale Little Avon River valley. The Cotswold Scarp to the east forms a significant backcloth and provides extensive views over the area. The Wickwar Ridge to the west forms a distinctive landscape feature in views across the adjacent Yate Vale character area and provides for expansive westward views across the landscapes to the north of Yate.
- A rural, and in places relatively remote landscape, characterised by varied land cover of irregular, small to medium mixed pasture and arable fields defined by hedgerows (clipped, thick and intermittent) trees & small areas of woodland interspersed with commons. The hedgerows provide important connectivity between the areas of woodland.
- Tranquillity is a particular characteristic of the landscapes of the northern and northeastern half of this character area.
- The extensive Lower Woods complex includes one of the largest areas of ancient woodland in the southwest of England and is of significant landscape and ecological importance within this area and the South Gloucestershire area as a whole, and provides habitat for a range of notable species including European Protected Species. These woodlands have a close interrelationship with the adjoining common land
- A number of commons of varying sizes have distinct land use types of rough grassland and scrub make a significant contribution to the character and distinctiveness of this area.
- There is an extensive mosaic of calcareous grassland present across the Wickwar Ridge and Valley, supporting a diverse range of flora including areas of species rich grassland.
- Areas of arable farming provide nesting opportunities in the spring and foraging potential in the winter for farmland birds including Amber and Red listed species.

Key Characteristics

- Settlement pattern is generally very limited, concentrated in one small town, two villages and scattered elsewhere.
- Views are expansive particularly from commons, more elevated locations, the edges of Churchend and Charfield and elsewhere largely contained by landform, woodland and hedgerows.
- Two quarries, two golf courses, 'B' roads, small settlements, a railway line and powerlines, largely have a local influence on character.

Location

The Wickwar Ridge and Vale landscape character area is located in the north east of the South Gloucestershire area, to the west of the Cotswold Scarp (within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).

The northern most boundary of the landscape character area largely follows the settlement edge of Charfield. The north eastern boundary follows the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary, which partly follows the course of the Little Avon River. Beyond the boundary to the north east, the landscape rises towards Kingswood and Wotton-under-Edge, the latter situated on the Cotswold Scarp. From these elevated positions there are views over this landscape character area and much of South Gloucestershire.

The eastern boundary then follows the approximate toe of the Cotswold Scarp south of Hillesley to Old Sodbury. The southern boundary follows the railway line cutting and southern settlement edge of Chipping Sodbury.

To the west there is a subtle transition in topography and landcover as the land falls westwards towards the adjacent Yate Vale landscape character area. (Figure 25) The character area boundary in the south west marks the approximate division between Yate and Chipping Sodbury, with Chipping Sodbury located on more elevated ground and with older

settlement more typically constructed from limestone, compared with Yate, associated with the lower vale and Pennant sandstone. The boundary then follows the distinct urban edge of Yate and then the approximate toe of the Wickwar Ridge northwards (See Figures 25).

Physical Influences

The underlying geology is mostly Jurassic Inferior Oolite Limestone, combined with Alluvium, Carboniferous Limestone and Llandovery Shales.

This creates an undulating landform, comprising the broad low lying Wickwar Ridge to the west, (ranging between approx. 80 metres and 100 metres a.o.d.), a central sloping vale situated below and to the west of the visually dominant Cotswold Scarp and the Little Avon River valley to the north, comprising both narrow and broad valley profiles.

To the north, between Wickwar and Charfield, lies the Little Avon River valley, with land falling from approximately 80 metres along the Wickwar Ridge to 30 metres a.o.d. within the valley. The Little Avon River flows northwards along a tightly meandering course. The valley is small scale and steep sided with concave lower slopes and convex upper slopes, becoming more open and broader to the north.

The eastern valley slopes lie beyond the South Gloucestershire boundary.

Around Lower Woods, a series of steep, 'V'-shaped, narrow tributary valleys of the Little Avon cut through the area. Further south, the landform evens out into gently undulating ground and almost flat vale in the area of Sodbury Common. From this area the ground rises gently eastwards to the character area boundary before rising steeply, forming the Cotswold Scarp.

To the south of the area, tributaries of the Ladden Brook flow northwards across Sodbury Common, before turning westwards out of the area. To the south east, tributaries of the River Frome flow generally westwards out of the area.

There is a scattering of small ponds around Charfield and Wickwar.

Land Cover

The Wickwar Ridge and Vale landscape character area includes a diverse mix of land cover. To the north, woodland is a predominant feature with the very large area of Lower Woods, east of Wickwar, dominating the area along with the adjacent Cotswold Scarp (Photo 3).

Lower Woods is an extensive area of ancient woodland (280 hectares) comprising 23 woods and coppices separated by ancient grassy trenches and tracks. Its boundaries have remained unchanged for several centuries, and it is of significant nature conservation value, designated an SSSI, a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) and a Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve. It is a unique feature, both within this character area and South Gloucestershire as a whole. There is also a Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS) designated within the woodland area.

The woodland combines with a complex pattern of clearings, comprising unimproved common land and 'trenches' (linear clearings providing route-ways through woodland).

Copses and smaller areas of woodland are also scattered throughout the rest of the character area.

Field size and shape is variable, with predominantly irregular, small to medium sized arable and pastoral use, typically bound by clipped, thick or intermittent hedges and fences (Photo 4).

To the south west of the area the fields tend to be more regular, generally small to medium in size. Hedgerow trees are mature, intermittent or in linear belts.

Intermixed with farmland are large commons of open rough grassland, Inglestone and Hawkesbury to the east and Sodbury Common near the southern boundary (Photo 6). These open areas include patches of scrub, but are largely devoid of tree cover except along their boundaries. Much of the field pattern on the edges of these commons resulted from the process of assarting, where woodland was removed by small scale enclosure and felling. Remaining trees may either predate the field formation or are successor trees.

Sodbury Common includes a golf course amongst the rough grassland. Chipping Sodbury Golf Course (north of Chipping Sodbury and just west of the common) in contrast, includes highly maintained fairways, greens and dense ornamental tree groups.

Colts Green Common, comprising a single field of wildflower meadow, lies to the east of Chipping Sodbury, sandwiched between the A432 and the railway.

There are a number of limestone quarries in the area, both active and disused. The Chipping Sodbury Quarry, on the area's south western boundary, comprises an extensive site. The disused, linear and flooded Barnhill Quarry lies to the south, part of which is a geological SSSI. This is now partly infilled and redeveloped for retail and housing development. The plant site lies to the north at Southfields, with active and expanding workings at the Hampstead Farm site to the east of the B4060 (Photo 5).

Mature screen planting along the B4060 is present adjacent to the existing working areas.

Wickwar Quarry lies on the north western boundary, to the north west of Wickwar. It comprises a disused quarry area and plant to the west with proposals for restoration coming forward, with active quarrying to the east of the B4509.

Small scale overgrown and wooded quarried outcrops are also located along the Wickwar Ridge at Yate Rocks and Bury Hill.

Biodiversity

This character area includes an important mosaic of grassland, both neutral and calcareous, woodland (including significant areas of ancient woodland), arable and pastoral farmland dissected by watercourses and including scattered ponds. These habitats are generally well connected by wildlife corridors including hedgerows. This combines to form a particularly important range of habitat for a diverse range of species.

The eastern edge of the Wickwar Ridge and Vale runs along the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which is of national importance of this area for habitats such as calcareous grassland and ancient woodlands. This character area also includes approximately 280 hectares ancient woodland, which is mainly located within the Lower Woods complex, although smaller scattered copses are also present within the area.

The Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) within this character area comprise a mosaic of habitats including grassland (both neutral and calcareous), broadleaved woodland (including large areas of the ancient woodland) and flowing open water represented by the Little Avon River and the River Frome. Four sites are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Key species 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 good connectivity for species such as these between the wooded areas and other habitats via hedgerows and scattered trees.

There are nine sites within the Wickwar Ridge and Valley 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 dissecting the landscape through this area. Three watercourses are designated as SNCIs for the flowing water and bankside vegetation; the Little Avon River, the River Frome and a tributary of Ladden Brook. These watercourses will support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and water voles. 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.

There are extensive areas of 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, while the winter stubble provides a valuable winter time foraging resource for many farmland birds.

There are disused and working quarries and mines across this area which can provide an ideal habitat for many species of bat including European Protected Species.

Settlement and Infrastructure

The main settlements within this landscape character area comprise the small town of Chipping Sodbury and the villages of Wickwar and Charfield. These principally include a mix

of limestone, rendered and brick buildings of a variety of ages and styles, with some recent infill housing development.

The medieval planned core of Chipping Sodbury (a Conservation Area) is unique within the South Gloucestershire area and of national importance, due to the settlement pattern and architectural content which survives virtually unaltered since it was laid out in about 1179 AD.

Developed along a broad high street and grid pattern, the houses and buildings are of a common historic architectural style, constructed of local limestone with some rendered buildings (Photo 7). Beyond the historic core, more recent infill housing is constructed from reconstituted stone or brick, with some rendered properties. The town is physically separated from Yate, being located on higher ground formed by the Wickwar Ridge. There is a noticeable climb from the Yate Vale to Chipping Sodbury on approaching from the west. The eastern edge of the town of Yate defines part of the south western boundary of the landscape character area .

The western edge of Wickwar, also designated a Conservation Area, comprises a medieval planned town. Developed along a main trade route from Droitwich to Sodbury and Pucklechurch it is focused along a broad, market street. Limestone boundary walls, mature trees to the north and west and archaeological remains (the medieval Horse Bridge to the west of the town is a Scheduled Ancient Monument) contribute to its historic character. This town was the first in the UK to be lit by electricity and a number of the original distribution poles survive.

Charfield, on the northern boundary of the area also has an historic core. The settlement having initially developed at the hamlet of Churchend to the south west. The present settlement of Charfield then developed towards the railway station, which has a distinctive collection of station buildings.

Other small hamlets, farms and houses are scattered throughout the area, tending to be clustered around the network of minor roads and lanes.

The road network is limited within the area and includes 'B' roads and narrow country lanes. The principal roads are orientated generally north to south, including the B4060 between Chipping Sodbury and Wotton-under-Edge and the B4509 between Wickwar and Falfield. Country lanes are orientated north to south near the Cotswold Scarp, connecting with a number of east-west routes, several of which end at isolated farms, with only two continuous routes linking to the wider road network. Running east west along the southern margin of the character area is the A432 linking Old and Chipping Sodbury's.

The Bristol to Gloucester railway line passes through the area just north of Wickwar, also orientated north to south. It is in a short section of tunnel to the west and north of Wickwar and then largely in cutting (with one short section on embankment) before passing through the centre of Charfield, heading northwards. Six stone airshafts follow the tunnel alignment at regular intervals in the area of Wickwar.

This transport network is supplemented by several major recreational routes that cross the area in the south east.

- The Jubilee Way passes generally north westwards from Old Sodbury, through agricultural fields, over Sodbury Common and along the boundaries of Chipping Sodbury Quarry.
- Monarch's Way passes around the eastern edge of Chipping Sodbury, running north eastwards over agricultural fields towards Little Sodbury and the Cotswold Scarp, at this point connecting with the Cotswold Way.
- The Frome Valley Walkway passes westwards from the Cotswold Scarp, following the River Frome, first over agricultural fields and then through Chipping Sodbury.

- Two of the series of Circular Rides cross a more extensive area. One travels around Lower Woods, linking Horton and Wickwar and passing beyond both the western and eastern boundaries. The other links the edge of Chipping Sodbury with Hawkesbury and Old Sodbury, crossing both Sodbury and Hawkesbury Common.

There is a particularly intense and intricate network of public footpaths to the east and south east of Lower Woods. Paths, tracks and bridleways also follow rides and clearings within Lower Woods. The remainder of the area has a more dispersed pattern of paths.

Two powerlines cross the area, one passing east to west, south of Lower Woods and one passing north to south, through part of the area west of Wickwar.

Landscape Character

The area is typically a diverse large scale landscape, its undulating landform covered with a mix of arable and pastoral fields, commons, two golf courses and large tracts of woodland, as well as smaller, scattered woodlands.

Topography is slightly variable through the area, with the Wickwar Ridge to the west (visible extending northwards from Wickwar and beyond Charfield and from outside the area to the west as a low ridgeline backdrop); the broad vale (visible from the Cotswold Scarp and open vale areas); and enclosed small 'V'-shaped valleys of the Little Avon River, becoming broader near Charfield (visible from local vantages and upper slopes).

A single extensive area and several isolated blocks of deciduous woodland provides the dominant structure and enclosure to the north east. Combined with a pattern of common land and small pastoral fields with a mix of field boundaries, it is a distinctive and intricate landscape.

Lower Woods is the single, most distinctive component of the area, comprising a medieval landscape of individual woodlands and coppices surrounded by ancient woodbanks and separated by fingers of grazed common land and old grassy roads called 'trenches'. Its large land coverage, remnant ancient woodland intermixed with common land and visibility from the Cotswold Scarp, all contribute to its importance in shaping the distinctive character in this area.

The combination of woodland and strong hedgerow boundaries along fields and lanes creates a sense of enclosure, with a relatively remote and tranquil character.

The common land which abuts Lower Woods is distinctive, with open unimproved grassland, and areas of scrub, edged by dense irregular and overgrown hedgerows, amongst which scattered farmhouses are well integrated.

Further south and north, woodland cover is less dominant. The landscape becomes more open, with views possible over the mixed farmland, divided by clipped, laid or intermittent hedgerows dotted with specimen trees and often supplemented with stock fencing.

The rough grassland and unenclosed commons distributed throughout the east and south of the area are particularly open in character, offering extensive views of the landscape area and the adjacent Cotswold Scarp from the unenclosed roads which cross them. The floriferous meadows are a particular characteristic of this character area.

Recreational uses have impacted on the character of the landscape to varying degrees. The character of the two golf courses contrasts with adjacent areas, with the low key informal course on Sodbury Common, with little more than flags to demarcate greens within grazed common land and the intensely managed Chipping Sodbury Golf Course, with more typical infrastructure of mown greens, fairways and enclosure from ornamental tree structure. The former has very little visual influence upon

the landscape and the latter has little influence beyond its boundary. In addition the extension of horse keep in the vicinity of Chipping Sodbury and extending towards Wickwar has impacted on the rural character of the locality.

Set within this mixed landscape and enclosed by a combination of woodland, hedges and gently undulating topography, the smaller settlements, roads and lanes have little direct impact on the surrounding landscape character.

The centre of Chipping Sodbury has a unique, enclosed, historic village character, with distant views eastwards of the Cotswold Scarp obtained along the High Street. The church forms a visible focal point when viewed from the wider landscape. Later phases of development are distinctly different in character, due to the form and pattern of buildings and the use of reconstituted stone, brick or render finishes. The settlement edge of Chipping Sodbury is generally well integrated by the diverse vegetation structure north and east of the town, partly associated with the River Frome corridor, as well as by the adjacent undulating landform. However, white rendered houses along the settlement edge are more prominent in views from the adjacent rural landscape.

Although lying within the adjacent character area, the more recent residential, commercial and business developments on the north east edge of Yate are typically more exposed, with few hedgerows and trees along the settlement edge to integrate it with the adjoining landscape.

More distant views are possible over these settlements from higher ground on the Wickwar Ridge to the east, from where the extensive urban development of Yate is particularly evident. Views from the Ridge are expansive, with Bristol, Pur Down ridge and Wales, forming distant features. The rising slopes and crest of Wickwar Ridge also form an important visual backdrop to the lower lying Yate Vale character area to the west.

Charfield, largely nestled within the Little Avon River valley, is not very prominent from the east,

set beneath the rising Wickwar Ridge. Recent development however, along the southern edge of Charfield, has extended over agricultural fields, the new settlement edge defined by the form of the existing linear and angular hedgerow field pattern, while infill development has also occurred within the village. The settlement edge has quite a harsh facade due to the regular edge of development and limited integration provided by the clipped hedgerows with no hedgerow trees along one boundary (Photo 1). Within the village itself areas of open space contribute to the character of the village and provide amenity and play space.

The more elevated parts of Charfield and perched location of Churchend, offer particularly expansive views north westwards to Wotton-under-Edge and the Cotswold Scarp, both beyond the character area. Although the surrounding hedgerow structure and wooded scarp slopes provide a setting and some containment to the Cotswold village, parts of the extensive settlement edge are visually prominent, due to the distinct linear pattern and abrupt built facades in an elevated location, visible on the skyline, above the vale of this character area.

Wickwar is prominent on the upper slopes of the Little Avon River valley, where both building facades and rooflines are clearly visible against the skyline in local views. This is due to the exposed setting, clipped low hedges and very limited tree cover (Photo 2).

The linear quarries at Chipping Sodbury, are well screened, with only a few glimpsed views possible from the B4060 along their eastern boundaries. The works buildings are also generally well screened by linear tree belts on bunds in views from the east. However, the crusher building is visible in longer views from the south and east, due to its scale and height which rises above the adjacent vegetation. The linear pattern of screen vegetation along the edges of roads is of a bold and regular form, which is visually different to the adjacent, irregular rural field pattern.

From within the area, Wickwar Quarry is visible only within glimpsed views from the adjacent roads which border the site.

The exposed quarry face of the disused section is however evident from beyond the area in the vicinity of Heath End, to the west.

The active quarries have dynamic, visible and noise creating activities associated with their works. These include frequent blasting operations, lorry movements along the road network and tailings mounds formed on adjacent land. Despite the size of the quarry the effects upon the landscape are largely local.

The increased traffic volumes along the A432, B4060 and B4509 have visible and audible local effect within the area eroding its rural character. Two powerlines cross the area to the south and west of Lower Woods and are generally prominent within local views, but are also evident within more distant views from the Cotswold Scarp.

The Bristol to Gloucester railway line is largely in tunnel, cutting, or enclosed by vegetation and/or topography, with only a short section on embankment. It is generally well integrated now, although has an audible effect upon local character.

The Changing Landscape

The Wickwar Ridge and Vale landscape character area is a diverse and intricate landscape with large distinctive areas of woodland, arable and pasture farmland and common.

The limited and low key extent of settlement and road infrastructure generally reinforces the rural, relatively remote character and perception of tranquillity, found within much of the area. The balance and interplay between these built features and their landscape setting is critical to maintaining the distinctive character of the area.

This character has already been eroded in some locations where large scale land use and built development of a regular pattern or bold linear

form has occurred and is visually discordant within the irregular rural framework:

- This is evident along the area's western boundary, where large scale quarrying follows the line of the Wickwar Ridge. Linear tree screens have little relationship with local field patterns. Similarly, the northern settlement edge of Yate (visible beyond this area), has little vegetation or landform structure to provide physical or visual integration with the adjacent rural area.
- The exposed, regular settlement edge of Wickwar, perched on the skyline above the Little Avon Valley, is stark and intrusive.
- The vertical and linear nature of pylon corridors is prominent within local views and evident within more distant views from the Cotswold Scarp.
 - Noise and visual activity, associated with the quarries, principal roads and railway within the area, locally erode the perception of tranquillity within this character area.
 - The extension of horse keep across the landscapes around Chipping Sodbury and up to Wickwar, resulting in the subdivision of fields and the proliferation of small buildings, sheds, stables, access points and fencing, while floodlighting can erode tranquillity and disrupt wildlife.
 - The use of barns for non agricultural uses and the storage of caravans north east of Chipping Sodbury.

The area's landscape features and its habitats are in varying condition and state of management and subject to varying degrees of pressure for change. This pressure for change is greatest in the south and central parts of the character area. To the west new neighbourhood will result in a northerly extension of the urban influence of Yate. This will be likely to increase recreational pressures on the Wickwar Ridge area in particular.

Lower Woods is a highly visible, large, robust landscape feature, interspersed with common land. Both elements are of significant historical and ecological importance. The woodland is owned by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and managed as a Nature Reserve, with the woodland and commons subject to management agreements, formulated with statutory and local agencies. The unique interrelationship of woodland and common land has created complex management issues, which need to find a balance between nature conservation and traditional land use practices. The ongoing management of this Nature Reserve, which will ensure its conservation and habitat value, including operations such as thinning, coppicing and scrub clearance can result in a degree of visible change, of varying scale, but will be appropriate to the site retaining its essential character and ecological value.

Although the woodland is visually less sensitive to change due to its large scale, the area is however ecologically very sensitive, with most open areas in and around the wood comprising common land.

The intricate network of footpaths and major recreational routes provides an important recreational resource along the base of the Cotswold Scarp in particular. Pressure from vehicle and pedestrian access has caused localised erosion in places.

The large commons of Inglestone, Hawkesbury and Sodbury are distinct areas within their locality. Their open character allows extensive views both within these areas, of the adjacent landscape framework and to the Cotswold Scarp. They are therefore sensitive to change both within and beyond these areas. The erosion of roadside verges is particularly evident. These areas are also prone to informal recreational pressures. Higher Level Stewardship of Hawkesbury, Inglestone, Assley and Hareley Commons for a 10 year period is encouraging management by grazing. This will conserve the traditional open character and biodiversity value of the commons and reduce scrub encroachment.

Some of the existing hedgerow and tree framework of the Wickwar Ridge and Vale character area is in poor condition. Many of the hedgerows have been replaced by stock fencing, particularly in the south. Dutch elm disease, evident in some hedgerows, with the cycle of tree growth, elm disease producing die back, followed eventually by regeneration influences the condition, integrity and appearance of the landscape framework in the locality.

The mature tree and woodland structure also has few juvenile trees present to sustain succession and hence this landscape framework and biodiversity network in future decades. Cumulative erosion of these rural features would reduce the integrity and intactness of the landscape structure.

Large extents of the area are overlooked from the Cotswold Scarp and to a lesser extent from Wotton-under-Edge, beyond the character area to the east and north. Coupled with the general open nature of this area, any change may be visible and could introduce a discordant element into the distinctive character of the area. The addition of modern buildings and structures within farmsteads and rural areas, where prominent, would potentially be visually intrusive and therefore influence the character of the area. In addition any potential pressure for wind turbines on the Cotswold scarp and potentially on the Wickwar Ridge have the potential for significant impact on the character of the wider landscape.

The ridgeline and lower slopes of the Wickwar Ridge make an important visual contribution to views from the edge of Yate, slightly elevated open ground within Yate, such as at Tyler's Field and the Yate Vale generally. This landform is sensitive to change, especially built forms along its slopes or crest, where these have the potential to be visually prominent, break the skyline of the ridge, or physically limit views from the ridgeline over lower areas to the west.

Conversely, the landscape to the north of Yate which is open to view from the adjacent Wickwar Ridge is proposed for the development of a new neighbourhood. This will result in a significant change in the character of the setting to this Landscape Character area. The consented residential and retail development to the north of Chipping Sodbury is much smaller in scale and visually more contained by the framework of quarry walls.

The two limestone quarries within the area both have potential for future expansion beyond their current extent.

- Chipping Sodbury Quarry has an existing permission for quarrying to the north, with the next phase most likely to be within two areas to the east and north of Brinsham Farm. The disused area of Barnhill Quarry has now been partially infilled at the southern end to facilitate retail and housing development. The remaining void may include a lake when all quarrying at Chipping Sodbury finally ceases.

The Chipping Sodbury extension is likely to continue along the Wickwar Ridge over a number of small fields, with the loss of their hedgerow boundaries and some trees within the two sites, either side of the Wickwar Road. Excavation to the eastern site has the potential to further denude the Brinsham Stream and its vegetation corridor, or remove this feature entirely, if the existing active quarry extends northwards.

Quarrying of the western site could potentially result in the removal of existing farm buildings at Brinsham Farm and the excavation of a small hill at Wickwar Ridge. The final restoration of the quarries to water will significantly alter the character of the ridge.

Wickwar Quarry has a preferred area for quarrying along the eastern side of the B4509 towards Churchend, with potential for landfill and restoration measures within the disused quarry area to the west. In addition, a small area of undisturbed ground to the south of the active quarry is covered by the existing permission.

The Wickwar Ridge currently forms a natural, largely undeveloped landform and visible backdrop to views from the adjacent character area. The impact of quarrying therefore has the potential to be visually prominent locally and physically erode the natural skyline of the ridge and existing strong woodland framework.

The expansion of Wickwar Quarry, identified in the Minerals & Waste Local Plan has commenced to the north of the current active excavation area, within a single, large field. With the exception of lanes along two sides, the site area is visually contained, located within a linear plateau, with a strong vegetation buffer along its eastern boundary. Unlike the disused flooded quarry to the west, this proposed extension would not visually breach the ridge. Proposals for the progressive restoration of sections of the Wickwar quarry are coming forward.

The expansion of the existing active quarry southwards, within the confines of the existing permission, has to date been restricted due to the potential significant visual and audible effect this would have upon the northern edge of Wickwar village.

The proposed electrification of the London to Wales line will introduce potentially intrusive electric gantries where the line runs near, at or above grade and may also impact on some structures that cross the line.

Landscape Strategy

- There is strong visual interrelationship between this LCA and the Cotswold Scarp which should be protected from development that would harm the natural beauty of the AONB and its setting. This includes views to the scarp and views from the scarp.
- Protect the remaining areas of tranquility from disturbance that would harm landscape character and biodiversity including through the control of lighting to retain dark skies and avoiding the introduction of sources of noise.
- Active management and where necessary restoration of the hedgerow, tree and woodland framework, and discourage the replacement of hedgerows by fencing that erodes landscape character.
- Encourage the management of commons by grazing to maintain their open character.
- Retain and enhance publicly accessible open spaces within settlements such as Charfield⁴ to improve their amenity, their contribution to the character of the settlement and biodiversity.
- Recreational development in the wider countryside should ensure that the traditional field and hedgerow patterns are reinforced, and buildings and structures are located to minimise their intrusion into the wider landscape.
- Ensure that future quarrying, landfill and restoration proposals take account of the need to protect the landscape character, amenity and distinctiveness of the local and wider landscape. Quarrying should avoid breaching the slopes of the Wickwar Ridge and enhance habitat diversity through woodland planting and limestone grassland creation.
- The extension of development, including for recreation outside existing settlement boundaries, requires sensitive treatment to ensure such changes are integrated within and absorbed into the wider landscape, and impact on any wider views from adjacent ridges is minimised. This is likely to require the provision of a robust framework of green infrastructure that picks up on the characteristic landscape features and framework of the surrounding area.
- Recreational pressures arising from any new development should be managed for example through provision of adequate green infrastructure within the development, by protecting vulnerable landscape features and habitats and / or by strengthening the structure of the wider landscape.
- Any significant vertical features on the skylines of the Cotswolds Ridge (in the adjacent Council area) and Wickwar Ridge should be carefully sited to ensure that the inherent sense of scale, tranquillity, rural character and remoteness of this character area are not compromised.
- Ensure that new development respects and integrates with the historic pattern of the host landscape or settlement pattern and reinforces local distinctiveness through the use of appropriate building materials.

⁴ Charfield Village Plan 2014



1 The southern edge of Charfield village showing the recently built housing in Woodlands Road. Wickwar Ridge can be seen on the skyline. Roof colouring in this development is more sympathetic to the area than some previous examples.



2 View of the eastern edge of Wickwar village, set above the Little Avon Valley.



3 Wetmoor Wood in the middle distance looking towards Wales, from the scarp.



4 The vale looking towards Horton Bushes showing typical square cut hedges.



5 Barnhill Quarry looking south towards Stub Riding. Peripheral mounding and planting assist in screening the site.

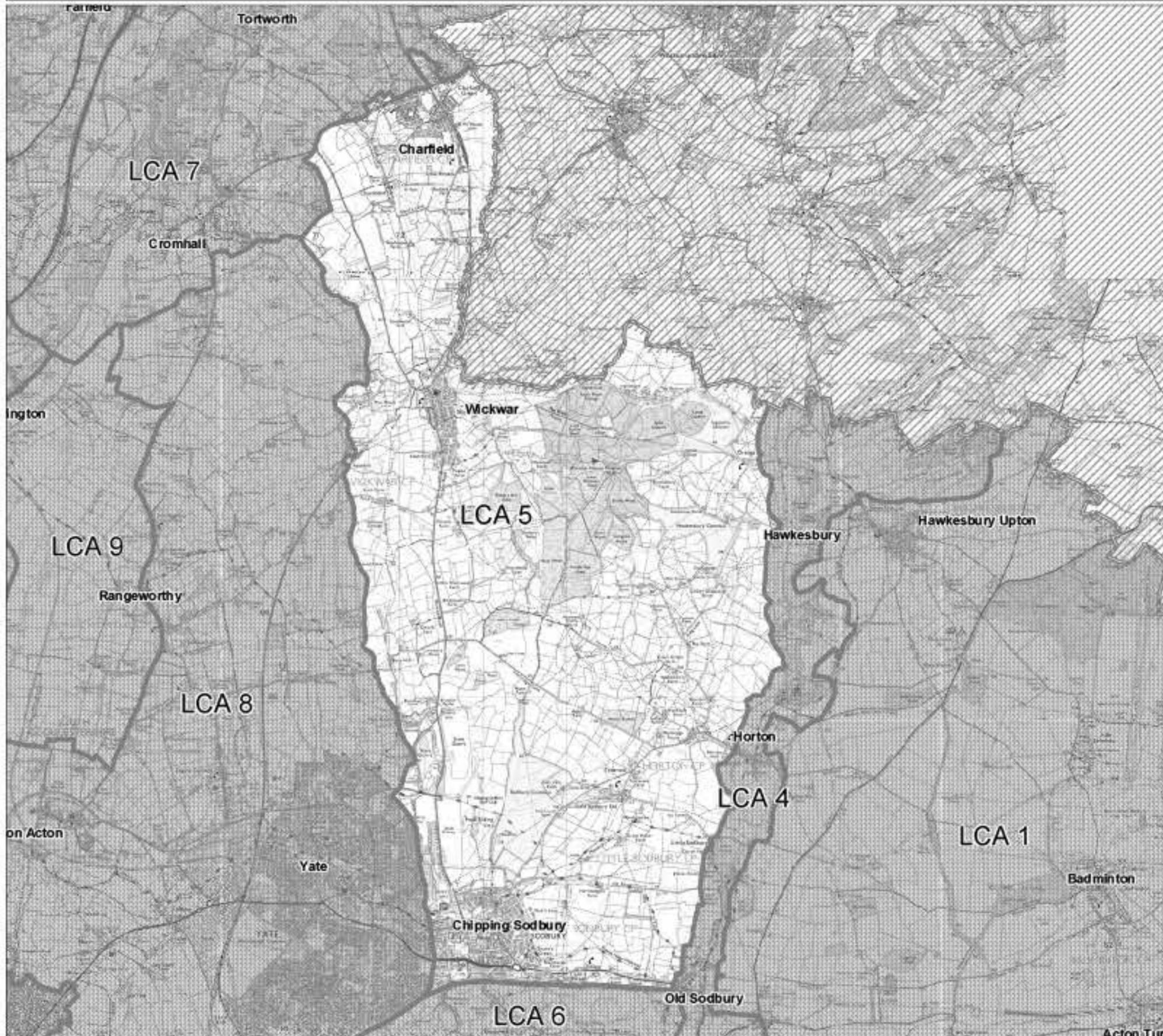


6 Common gate and common land at Little Sodbury End.



7 View along Chipping Sodbury High Street towards the 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 18

Area 5

Wickwar Ridge and Vale