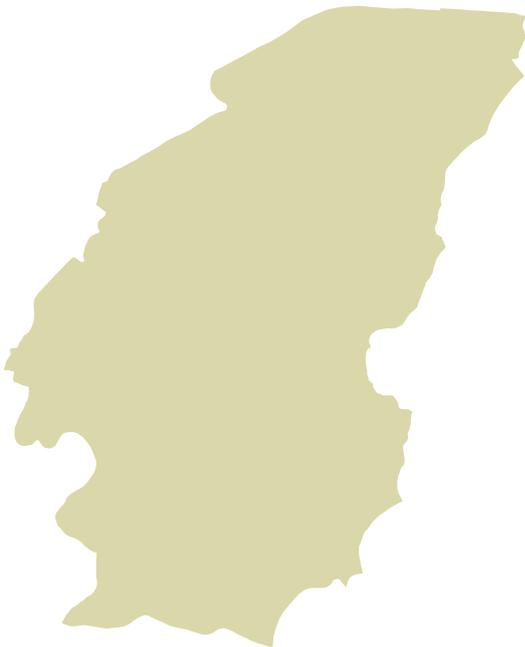




Area 7

Falfield Vale



Contents

Sketch map	96
Key characteristics	97
Location	98
Physical influences	98
Land cover	98
Settlement and infrastructure	100
Landscape character	101
The changing landscape	103
Landscape strategy	105
Photographs	
Landscape character area boundary	

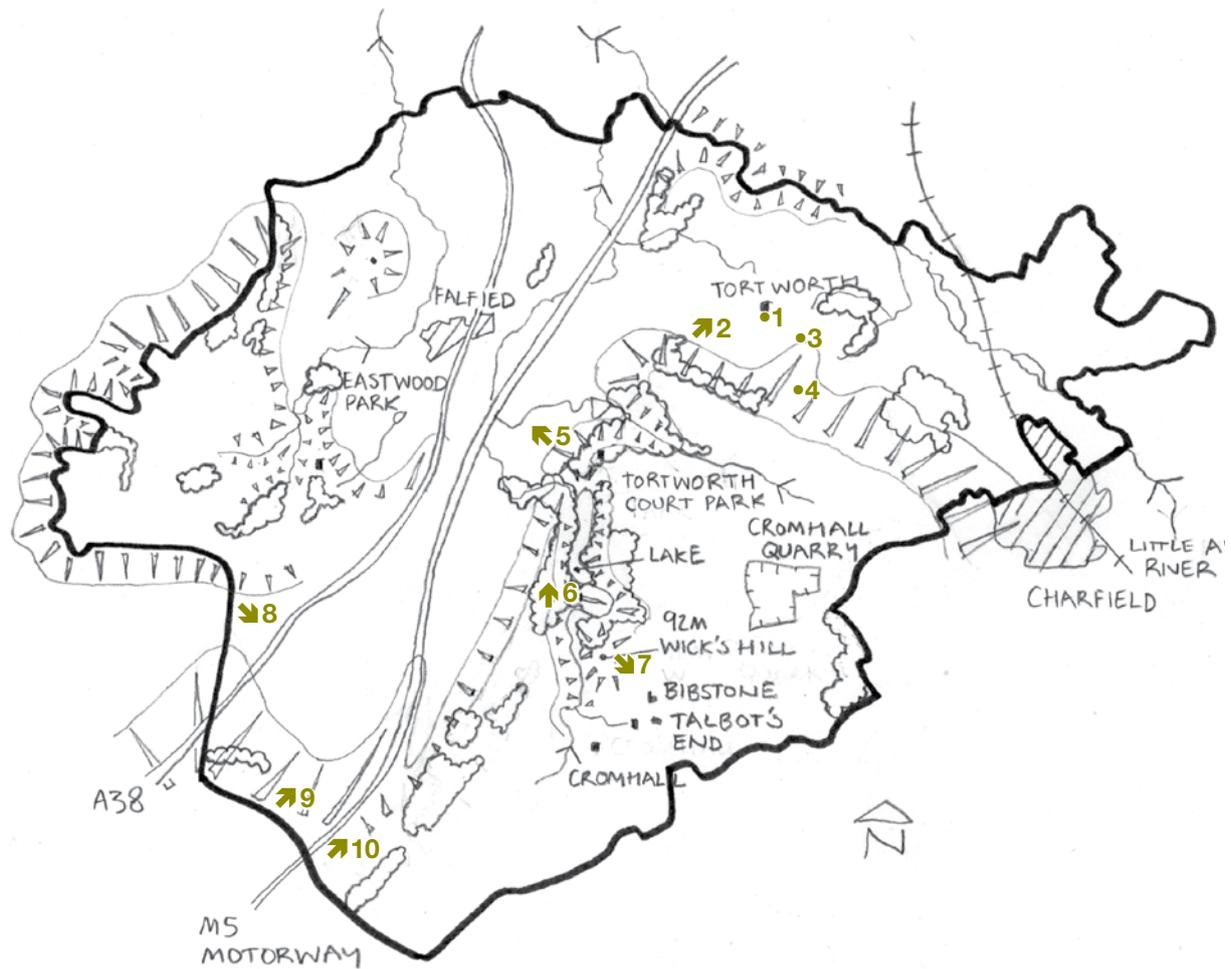


Figure 22
Falfield Vale

Sketch Map

Key

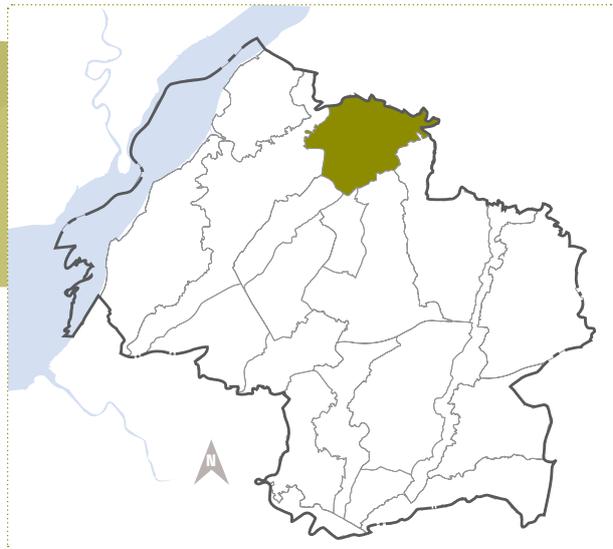
➤ 10 Photograph viewpoints

Scale: not to scale

Area 7

Falfield Vale

The Falfield Vale landscape character area is a shallow bowl comprising agricultural land and parkland, with a prominent mosaic of woodland, copses and mature trees on surrounding higher ground.



Key Characteristics

- Curving bowl shaped vale, enclosed to the east by the slopes of the Severn Ridge and to the west by gently rising ground, with an area of slightly higher undulating land to the east and south of the Severn Ridge.
- The area has a strong woodland framework based on historic parkland estates and with ancient woodland that is an ecologically and visually important element of the woodland cover together with small copses and mature parkland trees.
- A Parkland character arising from woodland planting and mature specimen trees in open grassland is characteristic of Tortworth Court Park and Eastwood Park estates.
 - Small areas of calcareous and neutral grassland support a diverse range of flora, including areas of species rich grassland.
 - Arable farmland provides nesting opportunities in the spring and foraging potential in the winter for a range of farmland birds, including Amber and Red listed species.
- Rural agricultural landscape with a concentration of medium to large regular shaped arable fields and wider scattered pattern of small to medium sized irregular and regular shaped pasture and arable use, divided by clipped hedges with sporadic hedgerow trees intermixed with strong woodland structure and mature trees. The hedgerow and woodland network provides important connectivity of habitat.
- Dark skies are a key feature in many parts.
- Limestone buildings and walls associated with dispersed small settlements, individual properties and park estate architecture.
- M5, A38, B4509 and railway line cut through the landscape, with road traffic locally prominent. Powerlines are locally prominent in the south.
- Two prison complexes, at Leyhill and Eastwood, are largely well integrated into the landscape with historic planting, although they have local influences.
- One large quarry is located in the east, and several other older/disused quarries, some of which are Sites of Special Scientific Interest for their geology and/or palaeontology.

Location

The Falfield Vale landscape character area is located in the north of South Gloucestershire, straddling the M5 corridor.

The northern limits of this landscape character area are defined by the South Gloucestershire Authority boundary and generally by the Little Avon River. To the east there is a subtle transition in landform and land cover between the Falfield Vale and Wickwar Ridge. The boundary follows physical features of settlement edge, woodland and roads in a southwards direction from Charfield. The southern boundary marks a transition with the northern end of the Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge (Figure 52 & 55) and follows the approximate watershed with the Tytherington Plain. The western boundary follows the top of the defined scarp edge, which falls to Rockhampton beyond this area. (See Figures 55).

Physical Influences

The underlying geology is a mix of Jurassic and Carboniferous Limestone, Wenlock Shales, Devonian Sandstone and Alluvium. This range of intricate and interwoven geological strata creates a gradually changing, bowl and vale landform.

Soils are a similar intricate mix varying from Rankers, Brown Soils, Brown Earth Loam over Clay, Pelo-Stagnogley, typical Argillic Pelosols, typical Stagnogley and Pelo-Alluvial Gley.

The landform consists of a bowl shaped vale open to the north, defined to the east and south east by the Severn Ridge which curves in an extended 's' shape, diagonally through the area (Photo 5). This ridgeline varies in height along its length, generally falling in a north easterly direction from 100m a.o.d. on the southern boundary to 80m a.o.d., before the ridge curves eastwards, merging with the Wickwar Ridge (near Charfield) at 85m a.o.d.

The ridge has a more complex form where a steep sided valley cuts south through this

area towards Cromhall. This has formed the rounded knoll of Wick's Hill at 92m a.o.d. and the meandering small scale valley within Tortworth Court Park. The north eastern curve gives way to the Little Avon River valley to the north at approximately 20m a.o.d.

To the east and south of the Severn Ridge, the land is generally undulating and drains northwards to and through the ridge.

To the west, land gently rises from the bowl shaped vale at approximately 30m a.o.d. to a scarp edge on this area's western boundary at 70m a.o.d. Beyond, the scarp falls steeply towards Rockhampton.

Drainage within the area flows generally northwards as tributaries of the Little Avon River. In the area of Tortworth Court Park, two watercourses flow through small scale meandering and enclosed valleys, cut into the Severn Ridge. These streams have in places been dammed to create ornamental lakes and pools (Photo 6). The Little Avon River follows a tightly meandering course on the northern boundary of the area, flowing north westwards through a shallow, broad valley and then within an enclosed steep sided valley.

A high railway embankment curves diagonally through and segments the Little Avon River valley, to the north west of Charfield.

Land Cover

The Falfield Vale area is characterised by a diverse mix of land cover, largely influenced by the estates of Tortworth Court Park and Eastwood Park.

Field patterns vary throughout the area. Small irregular shaped pasture fields are found to the east, above the Severn Ridge, within the vicinity of Bibstone, Townwell and Cromhall, on rising hills to the west of Falfield and a shallow valley north of Falfield and also west of Charfield. East of the A38 fields are also generally small but of a regular shape.

Medium to large arable fields of various forms cover a significant part of the area including the estates at Tortworth Court Park and Eastwood Park (the former a Registered Historic Park). Field patterns are particularly irregular north and west of Falfield. Fields are typically defined by dense, low clipped hedges and include sparsely distributed mature hedgerow trees (Photo 2 and 9).

Numerous large mixed and deciduous areas of woodland are prominent within the area, their linear form typically associated with the Severn Ridge (Photo 8). Tree pattern within the estates' parkland varies, including mature, deciduous and evergreen trees in groups or single specimens, within open grassland or hedgerows (Photo 2 & 4). Tortworth Court Park in addition includes an arboretum. Both parks include ornamental lakes and pools, more extensively within Tortworth Court Park, where a small enclosed valley has been dammed (Photo 6).

Historically, Tortworth Court Park replaced an earlier deer park based around the hamlet of Tortworth, the bounds of which can be easily traced within the landscape pattern. The Old Court includes the ancient Tortworth Chestnut tree, a veteran tree and unique landscape feature, which is at least 800 years old (Photo 3).

The Tortworth Estate influences a significant part of the character area through its extensive land ownership (the majority falling within the character area), which includes large areas of farmland and woodland, as well as parkland.

Eastwood Park to the west (under different ownership) is a designed landscape park which partly overlies a huge 16th century deer park. The field pattern in this area reflects the enclosure of the earlier park, with the boundary of the original park still evident in field boundaries and woodland pattern.

There are two Iron Age hill forts (SAMs) within the area: Bloody Acre Camp within Tortworth Court Park, on the brow of the Severn Ridge and Camp Hill on the area's western boundary, within Eastwood Park. The site of a roman villa (SAM)

lies to the south west of Cromhall.

There is one quarry in the area at Cromhall (limestone and quartzite). Quartzite extraction has ceased and this section of the quarry is in restoration, whereas the limestone section has an extant consent but at the time of writing is inactive.

Biodiversity

This character area comprises a mosaic of grassland, woodland and arable and pastoral farmland that is dissected by meandering watercourses and punctuated by ponds. Hedgerows and water courses provide wildlife corridors and together these habitats make the Falfield Vale an important habitat for a diverse range of species.

The Falfield Vale includes approximately 100 hectares of ancient woodland, mainly in scattered medium size woodlands and copses. This represents half of the total woodland within this character area. Many of these are designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) in recognition of their nationally important 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 good connectivity for wildlife between the wooded areas and other habitats via hedgerows and scattered trees.

There are three sites within the Falfield Vale designated as SNCIs for the calcareous and neutral grassland present on the sites and includes areas of 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 watercourses and their tributaries meandering through the landscape, including the stream by Moreslade Lane which is designated as a SNCI for the flowing water and bankside vegetation. Many of the watercourses within this Landscape Character Area are situated within an SNCI, and these will support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and water voles. The scattered ponds and pools within the area will support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

Agricultural land use within this area is a patchwork of arable and pastoral farmland. The arable farmland in particular is an ideal habitat for many species of ground nesting farmland birds including birds which have been listed as being Globally Threatened Red listed species, the winter time stubble provides a precious foraging resource when food sources are scarce for many farmland birds.

The disused and working quarries, including underground quarries, and mines across this area provide an ideal habitat for many species of bat including European Protected Species.

There are several geological sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) within the Falfield Vale area including Cullimore's Quarry and Brinkmarsh Quarry which expose the oldest rocks in South Gloucestershire (dating from the Silurian period, 440-470 million years ago).

There are several geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the Falfield Vale area, including Cullimore's Quarry and Brinkmarsh Quarry, which expose the oldest rocks in South Gloucestershire - dating from the Silurian period, 440 - 470 million years ago.

Settlement and Infrastructure

Settlement is typically small scale, limited and dispersed throughout the Falfield Vale area, with largely nucleated villages, hamlets, scattered farms and houses. There are also some large houses, estate architecture, buildings and

stone walls associated with the Tortworth and Eastwood Estates.

The villages and hamlets of Falfield, Tortworth, Cromhall, Bibstone, Townwell and Talbot's End are located on shallow slopes. Three are associated with churches and all are united through their use of limestone as a construction material. Boundary stone walls are common, particularly around the estates. More recent brick houses are present within the villages, either as single dwellings or grouped infill.

Falfield is a small nucleated village, located within the bowl on the A38. The church is a focal point. The village is generally constructed of limestone with estate-influenced architecture and some more recent brick houses.

Eastwood Park, immediately to the south, includes a group of old buildings concentrated around the large and imposing stately home, which is set on elevated ground above the parkland of the open bowl. The large 'shed' complex of Eastwood Park Prison is located on the northern lower slopes of the estate grounds.

The Tortworth Estate includes a number and diverse range of properties in Tortworth, Cromhall, Charfield, Falfield and Wickwar beyond the area. Tortworth hamlet, located to the north east, is a small estate settlement with a 'designed' regular layout, dominated by a stone church and surrounded by largely stone terraced estate cottages (Photo 1 & 2).

To the south of the hamlet within Tortworth Court Park, is the large Tortworth Court set within woodland and pleasure gardens, including an ornate gateway and lodge buildings.

The Leyhill Prison complex, within and to the east of the park, consists of a number of large, modern buildings, surrounded by a tall boundary stone wall, playing fields and a small area of housing.

Cromhall, Bibstone, Townwell and Talbot's End are small hamlets located close to each other

in the south east, above the Severn Ridge. Properties are largely concentrated around the intersection of country lanes, with some low density and irregular roadside development between hamlet centres (Photo 7).

Scattered throughout the area are isolated buildings, farms and building groups. These properties have a mix of building styles, although principally constructed of limestone or rendered, with stone property boundaries a common feature. Some farms include large modern shed outbuildings, constructed of timber and corrugated sheet materials.

A high frequency of individual properties is common along both major and minor roads, creating small sections of low density ribbon development.

On the boundary, but outside of this area to the east, is the large village of Charfield. It includes a mix of rendered and brick buildings of a variety of ages and styles, around an historic core, with more recent infill housing development.

The A38, B4058 and B4509 are the principal local distributor routes with significant traffic levels. The A38 and M5 with two overbridges (Photo 10) are the main roads which pass north to south, linking the often winding narrow country lanes, which generally run east to west to the adjacent settlements.

A short section of the Bristol to Gloucester railway passes through the north eastern edge of the area on embankment.

Two pylon corridors lie within the south: one enters the area from the west before turning southwards below Cromhall; the other runs close to the south eastern boundary.

There is a relatively low density of public rights of way within the area. They largely cross the higher landform, occasionally descending into the vale bowl. There is a particular concentration of intersecting routes within the shallow valley north of Falfield to the west of and linking settlement

around Cromhall. One of the series of Circular Rides is the only major recreational route. It briefly passes through the south of the area, connecting Cromhall with Tytherington to the west and Wickwar to the east, both outside the area.

Landscape Character

The Falfield Vale landscape has a varied character, largely associated with landform and the historic parkland estates.

The bowl shaped vale is a mix of open pastoral and arable agricultural landscapes of small to medium, regular and irregular shaped fields. A concentration of medium to large, regular arable fields are found within the parkland estates. Fields are typically defined by low maintained hedges and sparse native hedgerow trees.

Large woodland blocks and linear woodlands generally structure and provide enclosure along the upper slopes of the bowl shaped vale (Photo 8 and 9).

The Severn Ridge, rising to the east, is prominent within the area, with large areas of broadleaved native woodland clothing its upper slopes and hill tops. This bold structure covers a large proportion of Tortworth Court Park enclosing features such as the stately Tortworth Court and its associated buildings, the lakes, ponds and arboretum, plus the narrow steep sided valleys which cut into the ridge.

Leyhill Prison complex is largely contained by woodland and a high boundary stone wall. Associated with this complex and visible to the south from the adjacent road, are playing fields and a regular grouping of reconstituted stone houses, which are visually different in design, style and materials to the character of the traditional stone buildings in the area.

This development has introduced a slight suburban character to the locality. The lower slopes of the Severn Ridge include mature tree specimens, often standing within open fields.

To the west, the parkland character within the Eastwood Park estate is distinctive. Designed linear woodland, mature tree stands and specimen trees provide the backdrop and setting for the stately home at Eastwood Park (now used for conferences and events), with an open bowl of parkland around the house to the west, including mature tree stands within pasture. Large woodland blocks and linear planting continue westwards along higher slopes beyond the estate boundary. The house is primarily visible within middle distance views from the Severn Ridge to the east. The mature planting within the parkland requires management and succession planting.

The village of Falfield, with its cluster of largely traditional stone built properties, the church, Falfield Lodge and some stone walls at a junction with the A38, retains a distinctive character, although the traffic volumes along the A38 detracts from this character. More recent brick housing has formed concentrated pockets of development either side of the A38, which are set back from the road, largely contained by hedgerows and trees.

The linear pattern of brick houses near the Leyhill prison entrance are however, more prominent and detract from the local character and pattern of the village.

The Eastwood Park Prison complex within the park's grounds is primarily visible within local views from Falfield and its approach road. The architectural style of the complex and associated infrastructure of roads and security fencing are however alien features which erode the character of the locality.

Some irregular shaped areas of woodland are also located along the western boundary and scarp skyline, merging with woodland on the scarp face below.

Parkland and estate character is again distinctive in the area of Tortworth along the gentle slopes of the Little Avon Valley. The former deer park includes a broad open landscape of pasture, some arable, with mature tree specimens within

grassland and limited division by hedgerows. The hamlet of Tortworth, at its centre, visually contributes to the area's distinctiveness. The church tower and estate cottages are visually prominent within local and middle distance views (Photo 2). The Tortworth Chestnut tree is a particularly unique local feature, which provides further visual reference to the area's historic landscape development (Photo 3). Views from this area of the Little Avon Valley are extensive, stretching beyond the character area to include the Cotswold Scarp to the east.

Above the Severn Ridge to the south east, the gently undulating agricultural vale landscape around Cromhall is visually remote from the Falfield bowl. The area generally comprises small to medium, regular and irregular shaped fields, with clipped hedgerows and frequent native hedgerow trees. One large area of mixed woodland is visible on higher slopes to the east (Photo 7). The dispersed and clustered settlement pattern in this area is generally well integrated, within the lower landform of this local area, contained by the backdrop of Wick Hill and within an intact irregular landscape framework. Open views from adjacent high ground over this area are possible, although views within the area are generally more limited, due to the landscape structure and undulating landform.

The northern edge of Charfield remains largely well integrated. Small pockets of housing along the B4062 are set behind a strong structure of hedgerows and trees, with the extensive area of houses adjacent to the railway line, contained to the west by dense vegetation along the railway.

Cromhall Quarry is largely well screened by boundary vegetation. The large scale disused Wickwar Quarry (outside this character area to the east) is partly visible, with a section of exposed quarried rock face and buildings visible within middle distance views from the Bagstone Road, south of Townwell.

Individual properties and farms within the area and along the A38 are generally well integrated, given their dispersed distribution and the

intactness of hedgerows and tree cover. Modern farm sheds, due to their scale and massing, are however visible elements where the surrounding vegetation structure is more limited, particularly around the parkland estates. This often erodes the rural character and scale of the locality.

The Cotswold Scarp to the east and north is a strong visual element in long distance views, generally from higher vantage points within the character area and parts of the Little Avon Valley. The upper slopes of the Little Avon Valley are a more local feature. Both lie outside of this area but influence its character.

The M5 is a prominent built feature within the centre of the area, with two over-bridges and sections of road at grade. The A38 follows slightly higher ground to the west. Both routes have heavy traffic with visible and audible effects within the bowl landform.

The B4509 and network of lanes are typically visually enclosed by tall hedgerows. The heavy traffic carried to and from the motorway junction introduces noise in an otherwise tranquil area.

Pylon corridors to the south of the area are prominent visual features from the Cromhall area, where they form large built features within a generally low, gently undulating landscape. There has been some pressure for wind turbines within the adjacent authority, some of which may have the potential to affect landscape character in the Falfield Vale character area.

The railway line, on embankment, forms a significant built landform within the Little River Avon valley. It however remains generally well integrated and unobtrusive, given the scrub / tree cover along its embankment which connects with the dense riparian vegetation of the Little Avon Valley. The embankment and vegetation within this small scale valley forms strong visual enclosure in places. Further south, the railway is more prominent where it passes through Charfield.

The Changing Landscape

The Falfield Vale landscape character area has a strong historic landscape structure of parkland, agricultural field patterns, dense woodland, mature trees, hedgerows and stone walls near to farm and estate properties, overlying a large scale bowl landform.

The landscape across much of the area is in good condition and provides a range of habitat. Woodland areas of various sizes, stands of trees and specimens are important structural components of this landscape. Within the parkland estates, although management over previous decades has been limited, more recently, long term woodland management has resumed, with both clear felling and replanting taking place. The landscape outside the estates shows some evidence of new planting, but to a lesser extent. A new community orchard has been planted at Tytherington.

The area's scattered ponds and pools are vulnerable to any loss of habitat including the terrestrial habitat around ponds as well as the ponds themselves.

The area's historic parkland around Tortworth hamlet and within Tortworth Court Park and Eastwood Park are particularly sensitive to change. Their historic pattern and character are the result of a combination of designed parkland and agricultural land use practices, which have influenced hedgerow, tree patterns and settlements that have been in existence or changed little for hundreds of years.

Changes in land use, management or loss of trees could affect the present integrity, habitat value and structure of the landscape. Similarly, the introduction of built development has the potential to erode the existing character and be intrusive, as is evident already within this area from development at Leyhill Prison and Eastwood Park Prison.

The higher ground surrounding the shallow bowl of the Falfield Vale allows extensive open views across the agricultural landscape, making parts of this area sensitive to change. Any change within the bowl, small scale, cumulative change and larger vertical and linear forms, therefore has the potential to be visible and erode character, within the immediate locality and the wider bowl landscape.

As is already evident, strong vertical or horizontal elements are particularly prominent within the bowl, e.g. the M5, A38 (plus associated noise) and overhead powerlines and pylons.

The enclosure offered by woodland and folds within the landform provide areas generally less sensitive to change. The two prisons have been generally well integrated in the wider view, although they continue to have some local adverse visual influence upon character within the immediate locality, given their scale, form and building materials.

Housing infill has the potential for modifying the traditional, irregular and organic development pattern of most settlements and the spatial segregation found between roadside properties. Brick or reconstituted stone building construction, of an architectural style and pattern which does not reflect local character, is evident in Falfield and Leyhill. This has caused a dilution of local distinctiveness.

Wickwar Quarry buildings and its exposed rock face (beyond this area to the east) are currently partially visible from the vicinity of Bagstone Road, south of Townwell. Although expansion of the quarry may occur in the future, the preferred area for extraction, east of the B4509, is beyond the Wickwar Ridge skyline and is therefore unlikely to have a significant visual effect on views from this area.

Potential landfill and restoration of the disused flooded quarry may occur in the future. This has the potential to introduce visual and audible disturbances during operations, which could be evident from Bibstone, Townwell and Talbots End

and to impact on habitat value if underground areas are affected.

Cromhall Limestone Quarry is currently inactive, but has an existing permission for further extraction work. There is still potential for extraction to continue within the existing quarry site, before expansion of the quarry area is considered. Any future plan to recommence quarrying is therefore likely to introduce some local effects immediately adjacent to the site, but is likely to have limited wider effects upon landscape character.

Policies are included in both the Local Plan and Minerals & Waste Local Plan, which seek to ensure that future quarrying, landfill and restoration proposals for these sites take account of the need to protect the landscape character, amenity and distinctiveness of the local and wider landscape.

Landscape Strategy

- Maintain, manage and enhance the characteristic mosaic of habitats and landscape features, including woodland, parkland hedgerows, riparian corridors and ponds, as well as its pastoral and arable fields.
 - Maintain the integrity and setting of the distinctive parkland landscapes at Tortworth and Eastwood Park.
 - Secure the active management of the distinctive parkland landscape framework, including replacement or new woodland and arboretum planting. Supplementing hedgerow tree planting would help to strengthen and improve the biodiversity value of these key features and ensure their conservation for the long term.
 - Any future expansion of the prisons or other development within the parkland estates or their settings will require careful consideration of building design and measures for integration, to minimise the impact on the distinctive landscape character of the locality.
 - Seek screen planting along the southern margin of Eastwood Park Prison to reduce intrusion of the prison structures in the wider landscape.
 - Hedgerow planting and management should be encouraged across the character area, to enhance and reinforce landscape character and biodiversity value and connectivity. Avoid the subdivision of fields or replacement of hedges with fencing.
 - Building materials should respect and integrate with the local vernacular.
- Quarry restoration should integrate landform and land use of the site with adjacent areas, re-establishing a landscape framework, reinforcing local landscape character and biodiversity value, and reducing the present impact of the rock face and buildings on the amenity of the local and wider landscape. Loss of habitat in underground areas should be avoided.
 - Ensure that the tranquillity and dark skies of the rural areas is maintained including to protect biodiversity.
 - Ensure that any new vertical elements integrate with the landscape framework and minimise visual impact on the particular rural and parkland characteristics of the Falfield Vale.
 - Maintain the particular character and features of the rural lanes.
 - Re enforce wildlife habitat links across the character area, and expand areas of species rich grassland and woodland where opportunities arise.



1 Lodge House at Tortworth Old Court



2 Panoramic view of the Tortworth Estate (formerly deer park), Old Court and church. With one overgrown pond, ornamental Scots pine, pasture and some arable land. The Cotswold Scarp to north west, lies beyond the South Gloucestershire area.



3 Tortworth Chestnut. The largest middle trunk forms the centre of the tree, with numerous surrounding trunks growing from the same tree.



4 Former deer park around Old Tortworth Court (medieval) from near old chestnut tree (one of few grasslands which have not been re-seeded - thus retaining wild flowers which appear later in the year).



5 A view of the village from the east showing Falfield surrounded by high ground on three sides.



6 Looking towards the Boat House at Tortworth Lake, contained within a wooded valley.



9 Silage fields and arable land within a broad vale, from the south. The settlement of Whitfield on the A38, is visible within the distance to the left.



8 Arable land at Buckover Farm looking towards higher ground at Cromhall. The M5 is hidden from view and passes through this area, within the middle distance.

7 Taken from Wick's Hill (known locally as Butcher's Hill) looking east south east. Showing the undulating mainly pastoral landscape. The new development at the Burltons in Townwell is shown to the right. Wickwar Quarry along Wickwar Ridge is on the skyline. The photo shows settlement along the main road B4058. To the left on the skyline, Brand Wood, typical of many woods and copses within the area.



10 The M5 Motorway passing north east through the vale with wooded ridgelines typical of the area.

Figure 23 - Area 7
Falfield Vale

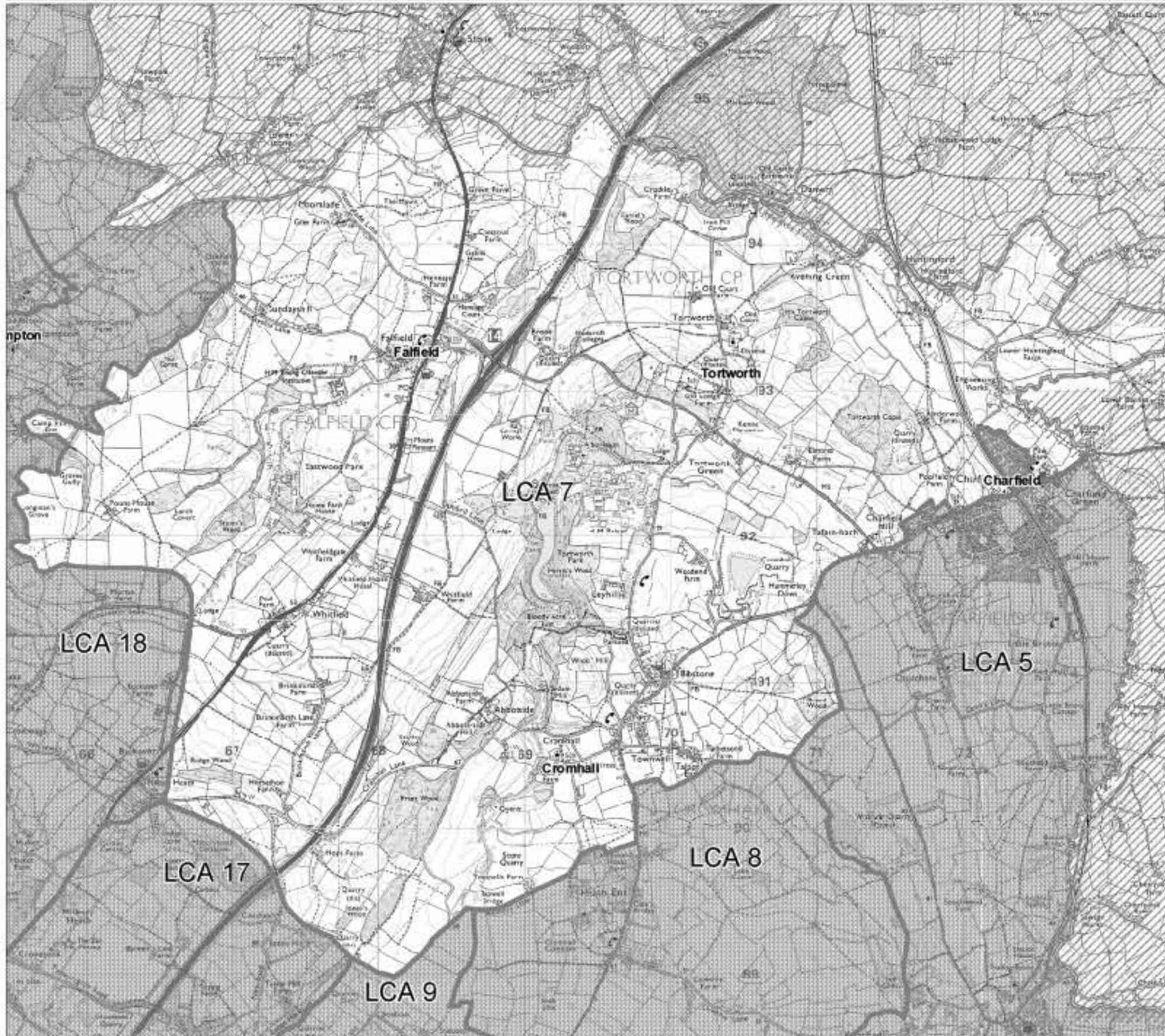
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

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 24
Area 7
Falfield Vale