



3.1 Introduction

The Cotswolds landscape, designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty from 1966, forms the best-known section of the outcrop of Oolitic limestone that stretches across England from Lyme Bay in Dorset to the North Sea, in North Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. The Cotswolds landscape attracts many visitors both from this country as well as from around the world, in response to its perception as a rural idyll.

Many of the features associated with this cherished landscape evoke strong images, particularly the dramatic escarpment and expansive high wolds, the network of limestone walls, beech woods clothing the escarpment, and secluded valleys and valley bottom meadows. The built environment is also very evocative ranging from the charm of the many picturesque villages and historic small towns to the individual houses, churches and mansions, and historic landscaped parks. Together these create a strong perception of harmony throughout the area. Despite this unifying pattern of common elements, however, a great variety of landscapes can be observed, each displaying distinctive patterns of landform, vegetation, and landscape elements.

The initial findings of the landscape character assessment have identified a total of 19 Landscape Character Types. The steep escarpment located on the western and northern perimeters of the Cotswolds is perhaps the most striking type, from which there are exhilarating and extensive views across the wide plains of the Vales of Berkeley, Gloucester to the west, and Evesham and Feldon to the north. The dramatic scenery of the escarpment creates a backdrop to the larger settlements of Bath and Stroud that nestle within deeply incised valleys that extend into the heart of the escarpment, and where steep valley sides and ridge crests are often accentuated by dense woodland. Beyond the escarpment in the west and north are outlying hills comprising remnants of the former alignment of the scarp edge, and now isolated by the progressive eastern retreat of the escarpment. Gently dipping away to the south-east the land forms a broad plateau of high wolds, dissected by a series of river valleys. The numerous Cotswolds valleys all have their own unique character; many have an intimate scale, and a secluded and 'secret' character. To the south-east of the high wold there is a progressive transition across the dip-slope to the lower lying dip-slope lowland where valleys are generally broader than on the high wold, and often form subtle undulations in the landscape. In the north-eastern part of the AONB the influences of the older Lias Group rocks are more evident. The sense of elevation is still apparent but

this is a softer, rolling, and often complex landform arising from the effect of geological faults and folding determining a succession of rock outcrops. The escarpment at Edge Hill is a prominent feature, but unlike the main Cotswolds escarpment, this is formed by the iron-rich Marlstone Rock Formation. Within this Ironstone region of the Cotswolds AONB, the characteristic warm-brown colour of the building stone within the villages, as well as the soils, is particularly notable. Although contrasting with the familiar Oolitic limestone terrain associated with the main part of the Cotswolds, the sense of unity and local distinctiveness is very apparent.

This assessment provides a detailed review of the AONB's landscape and recognises that **all** landscapes matter, not just those that are particularly well known or evoke strong images. The assessment acknowledges that each landscape character type and landscape character area has a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements that makes it different from another. Character makes each part of the landscape distinct and gives each its particular sense of place, regardless of perceptions of quality or value. The assessment provides a new descriptive map of the AONB that draws attention to the contrasts in landscape character that are so often taken for granted.

3.2 Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas

The *Cotswolds AONB Landscape Character Assessment* uses as a framework the Countryside Agency's *Character Map of England* and the draft *National Landscape Typology for England* (Figure 2). Descriptions of relevant Countryside Character Areas and National Landscape Types are presented in Appendix 4. For the area of the AONB within Gloucestershire, the *Draft County Landscape Typology* was also used. This recent study comprised a desk based assessment of landscape types for the entire county based on the *National Landscape Typology for England*. Reference has also been made to earlier landscape

character assessments carried out within the AONB, and in neighbouring county and district authorities and study areas. These are listed in the Section 5: *References* and illustrated in *Figure 3* and *Figure 4*. A comprehensive review of the Partnership Landscape Character Assessments that include part of the AONB, and those commissioned for the AONB only, is provided in a separate report to the AONB Partnership. (See Section 1.5 of this report).

The 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance', 2002 published by the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage sets out the spatial hierarchy for the assessment process with a top down cascade from the National Typology down to local level. As described above, this assessment has been based on a refinement of the latest data available for the National Typology, and through detailed desk and field study, has identified landscape character types based on a more detailed refinement of the National Types. These equate to the 'local authority scale' of assessment referred to in the Guidance. Within this network of landscape types, the landscape character areas identified across the AONB represent the geographically specific representation of the types. There is an opportunity for future studies to take the assessment to a more detailed local scale. For example, separate landform and land use facets may be identified within each of the types eg valley sides and valley bottoms within each of the valley landscape character types. These in turn would be identified by a local name to reflect the geographical location and local identity. As a further clarification of the landscape assessment methodology employed, a flow diagram is presented in Appendix 4.

Building upon this solid framework and methodology, the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Character Assessment has identified 19 landscape character types and 68 landscape character areas. These are listed in Table 3.1 and their distribution across the AONB is shown on *Figure 8*, confined to types only. *Figure 9*, comprising a more detailed map at 1:100,000, indicates both landscape types and areas, and is provided on CD at the back of this report.

Following this introduction, each of the generic landscape types is described. The key characteristics are summarised followed by a review of landscape character, and the physical and human influences that have shaped the landscape and contributed to its character. A description of the unique landscape character areas that occur within each landscape character type, and a summary of the principal features that are particular to each follow this.

3.3

Landscape Character Type and Area Boundary Determination

The boundaries of the landscape character types and areas have been mapped to 1:50,000 scale, using the range of data sets that were made available at this scale, and subsequently verified and refined in the field. Reference to 1:25,000 scale maps were also made as an integral part of the desk and field studies, to provide a more informed and detailed analysis of mapped features, and the pattern of field sizes and types in particular. The boundary lines are primarily defined by contours where these correlate with a well-defined landform, mark a change in slope profile or a general height above Ordnance Datum, or correlate with a change in the underlying geology where this has a significant surface expression. Within the principal discipline of geology, landform and land use, the boundaries are also drawn to contour lines and thereafter follow the perimeter of areas of woodlands, and roads, tracks and occasionally footpaths, where these form a well-defined landscape feature.

Changes in landscape character rarely follow clearly defined lines on the ground, and as a consequence many of the boundaries may be considered as transitional. This is particularly evident in the transition between the High Wold, High Wold Dip-Slope, and Dip-Slope Lowland. While other types are more clearly defined, such as the escarpment, even this distinctive morphological unit still demonstrates transitional characteristics, particularly at the base of the escarpment where rotational slipping, and slumping has resulted in hummocky ground at the junction between the Lias Group rocks and the overlying Oolitic Limestone.

Despite the transitional nature of landscape character, it is considered that the provision of a definitive line provides an essential reference point from which to commence the determination of specific outputs from the LCA. Throughout the study, therefore, the boundaries to landscape character types and areas are all definitive, based on the determining features associated with geology, landform and land use. In recognition of transitional nature of landscape character, however, the definitive lines represent the centre line of the transition. To provide a consistent level of control across the AONB, the centre line of transitional boundaries between types, and individual character areas, have been drawn to contour lines where landform change is a principal determinant of landscape character, together with identifiable features, notably roads, footpaths, and woodland edges.

Where the assessment of a particular site or area is undertaken that falls close to, or within 0.5 km of a boundary line, it is recommended that the characteristics, descriptions and management strategies for each of these adjacent landscape types / areas are taken into

consideration. This is particularly important in the evaluation and guidance of management requirements, as well as in the response to consultations, and the development of landscape and environmental projects.

Table 3.1
Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE	LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS
1 Escarpment Outliers	1A Cam Long Down, Peaked Down and Downham Hills 1B Langley Hill 1C Oxenton and Dixton Hills 1D Dumbleton and Alderton Hills 1E Bredon Hill 1F Meon and Ebrington Hills 1G Brailes Hill and Castle Hill
2 Escarpment	2A Bath to Beach Farm 2B Beach Farm to Hillesley 2C Uley to Cooper's Hill 2D Cooper's Hill to Winchcombe 2E Winchcombe to Dover's Hill 2F Dover's Hill to Mickleton 2G Edge Hill
3 Rolling Hills and Valleys	3A Ozleworth Bottom and Lower Kilcott 3B Stinchcombe and North Nibley
4 Enclosed Limestone Valley	4A Cam and Wellow Brook Valleys 4B Bathampton and Limpley Stoke 4C Lam Brook and St Catherine's Brook Valleys 4D Lower By Brook Valley 4E Perrymead Slopes
5 Settled Valley	5A Nailsworth 5B Frome Golden Valley and Stroud
6 Ironstone Hills and Valleys	6A Whichford Hills and Valleys 6B Ratley Hills and Valleys
7 High Wold	7A Nymphsfield and Kingscote Plateau, & Minchinhampton Common 7B Bisley Plateau 7C Cotswolds High Wold Plateau 7D Rissington Plateau and Milton Downs 7E Rollright and Chastleton Plateau 7F Over Norton Plateau 7G Edge Hill Ironstone Plateau

8 High Wold Valley	8A Toadsmoor, Holy Brook and Upper Frome Valleys 8B Painswick and Slad Valleys 8C Upper Churn Valley 8D Upper Coln Valley 8E Upper Windrush Valley 8F Upper Dikler Valley
9 High Wold Dip-Slope	9A Sulis Manor Plateau 9B Bathampton and Claverton Down 9C Lansdown 9D Cotswolds High Wold Dip-Slope 9E Wychwood Forest 9F West Enstone Uplands
10 High Wold Dip-Slope Valley	10A Middle Churn Valley 10B Middle Coln Valley 10C Upper / Middle Leach Valley
11 Dip-Slope Lowland	11A South and Mid Cotswolds Lowlands 11B Stonesfield Lowlands
12 Dip-Slope Lowland Valley	12A Upper By Brook Valley 12B Lower Coln Valley 12C Lower Leach Valley
13 Low Limestone Plateau	13A Paulton and Peasedown St John Ridge 13B Hinton Charterhouse Plateau
14 Cornbrash Lowlands	14A Biddestone Lowland Farmland 14B West Malmesbury Lowland Farmland
15 Farmed Slopes	15A Vale of Bourton Farmed Slopes 15B Vale of Moreton Farmed Slopes
16 Broad Floodplain Valley	16A Lower Windrush Valley 16B Lower Evenlode Valley
17 Pastoral Lowland Vale	17A Vale of Bourton 17B Vale of Moreton
18 Settled Unwooded Vale	18A Vale of Gloucester Fringe
19 Unwooded Vale	19A Avon Valley 19B Boyd Valley 19C Wickwar Vale 19D Vale of Evesham Fringe 19E Vale of Feldon Fringe