

Birmingham Development Plan 2031

Landscape Character Assessment



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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Scope of the Study

Arup were appointed by Birmingham City Council in March 2013 to undertake a landscape character and sensitivity assessment for areas identified in the Birmingham Green Belt designated to the north west of Birmingham.

Birmingham City Council requires a robust, evidence based assessment of the landscape character and sensitivity of the Birmingham Green Belt to inform the development of the Birmingham Development Plan 2031 (BDP). The purpose of this Landscape Character Assessment is threefold:

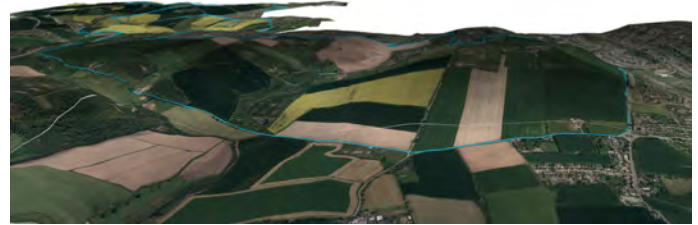
- To more fully understand the local landscape and visual resource within the Green Belt area
- To identify the relative sensitivity of the landscape within the Birmingham Green Belt to development
- To inform decision making for changes to the Green Belt and future land allocations in the BDP and any supporting supplementary planning documents

The current Green Belt within Birmingham was put in place in 1955 and has not been reviewed for 20 years. In October 2012 the BDP Options Consultation document (October 2012), included as an appendix a Green Belt Options report. This report reviewed options for both housing and employment development within Birmingham Green Belt. It contained a preliminary analysis of Birmingham's Green Belt Areas.

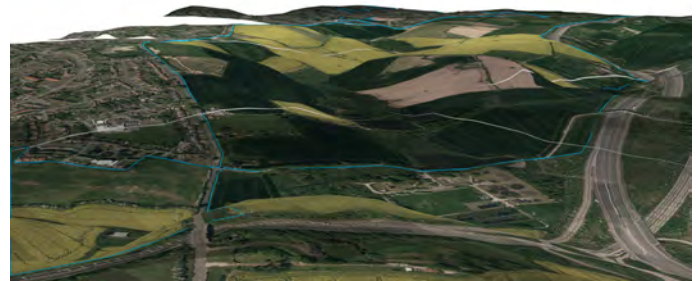
Four Option Areas within the Green Belt close to Sutton Coldfield met the review's search criteria and were identified for further study. These included:

- Hill Wood (Area A)
- An area west of the M6 Toll (Area B)
- An area west of the Sutton Coldfield Bypass (Area C)
- An area east of the Sutton Coldfield Bypass (Area D)

V1: View south across the north of the area



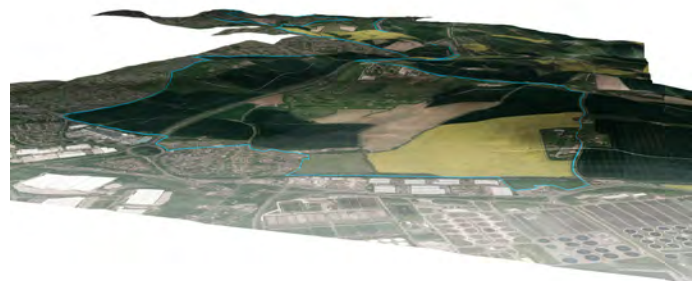
V2: View north west across the centre of the area



V3: View south west across the centre of the area



V4: View north across the south of the area



The 3D views above provide an overview of the study area and how it sits in relation to the urban edge and wider countryside. The arrows on Figure 01 indicate the location and direction of each view.

Legend


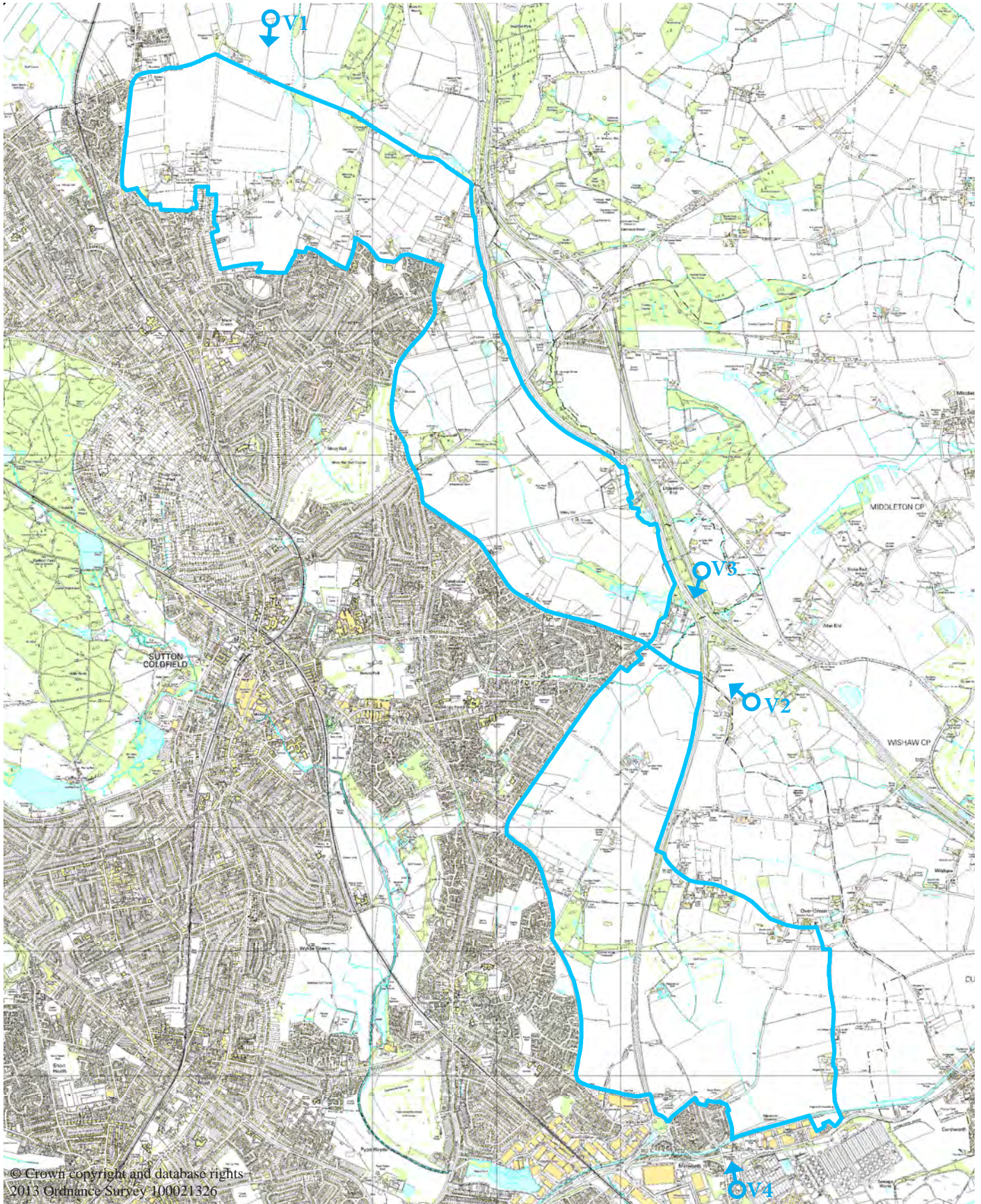
 Landscape Character Assessment Study Area

Figure 01

Study Area



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Each area was considered against its contribution to the five purposes of the Green Belt and then against a range of environmental and other criteria. The area of search boundary for the combined areas A, B, C and D established the study area for this Landscape Character Assessment.

Landscape character was considered to be a key consideration in each area and it was recognised that more detail was required leading to the commissioning of this study in February 2013.

1.2 Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape character assessment is described as the process of identifying areas of distinctive character, characterising and mapping them, and describing their characteristics. It is an aid to decision making with a role to help ensure that, where possible, change and development does not undermine the characteristic or valued elements of a particular landscape and that ways of improving the character of a place can be considered.

This landscape character assessment references the landscape and visual components of the four areas identified in the high level BDP Green Belt Options Appendix (October 2012) and expands the level of detail through a local level assessment. This landscape character assessment identifies different local character areas within the original overall BDP Green Belt Options Appendix search boundary but whose individual boundaries do not necessarily correspond to the internal divisions between Option Areas A, B, C and D previously identified. The study area is shown on Figure 01.

2 Methodology

The landscape character assessment has been informed by the guidelines set out in the Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland document prepared by Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Agency (2002).

The study methodology was split into three distinct phases. Firstly, to understand the local landscape character through desk top analysis and field surveys. Secondly to identify local landscape character areas. Finally, to prepare an evaluation of the landscape and visual sensitivity of each local character area to identify its relative sensitivity to certain types of development and suggest any potential high level mitigation measures.

2.1 Assumptions

Birmingham City Council have advised that an assumed limit for any new housing on land currently designated as Green Belt in this area would be within a range of between 5,000 to 10,000 dwellings over the plan period.

Residential development would be mainly 2 storey dwellings at around 40 dwellings per hectare, or 30 dwellings per hectare taking account of open spaces and non-residential uses.

An employment development requires a site of 50 hectares or more and, given the large floor plate of buildings, will be restricted to sites of relatively shallow gradients.

It is assumed that existing landscape features would be retained where possible within any new development.

2.2 Landscape Character

The landscape character assessment for this study makes reference to the National Character Area assessments undertaken by Natural England and develops local, more detailed landscape character areas relevant to the scale of the study area.

2.2.1 Desk Study

The desk study process was informed through use of the following datasets:

- National Character Areas (source: Natural England)
- National and Local Designations including landscape, ecology and cultural heritage (source: Natural England and Birmingham City Council)
- Aerial Photography (source: Birmingham City Council)
- Topography (source: Birmingham City Council)
- Ordnance Survey Mapping (source: Birmingham City Council)

Data management used ESRI ArcMap software to map, overlay and produce composites of layered information to identify the features, boundaries and characteristics of the area as the basis for further analysis.

This overlay mapping technique provided the team with an initial understanding of the entire study area and each potential local character area prior to testing through field survey. This technique was used to then refine area boundaries, interpolate key criteria such as slope analysis, identify landscape sensitivities and capture potentially significant landscape features.

2.2.2 Field Survey

Site visits were undertaken in March 2013 by two landscape architects working together and covered only publicly accessible land that included open space, transport corridors and public rights of way.

A set of survey proformas was produced that was used by the project team when undertaking the site survey work. This ensured consistency in methodology and to capture all aspects of landscape character to be considered and recorded whilst out in the field, in a consistent and structured way. This enabled direct comparison between areas during the assessment and analysis phase.

The forms included photo location and reference and headings for: Views; Form and Perception; Urban Features; and, Rural Features. Under each of these categories were more detailed criteria such as type of view and landscape descriptions such as; character, features, local distinctiveness, access, rarity, quality, form, land use, enclosure, microclimate, opportunities and threats.

Photographs were taken to record specific features or views identified.

2.2.3 Classification and Description

Landscape character areas are individual geographic areas that share homogenous characteristics and have their own particular identity. Attributes that contribute to landscape character of this area include:

- Landscape features that are commonplace / rare / distinctive
- Visual enclosure, openness, prominence and visibility from surrounding areas
- Land use and landscape features including vegetation, built form and watercourses
- Condition of landscape features through maintenance or completeness

- Wildlife habitat
- The effect of urbanising features such as buildings, highways and associated infrastructure
- Field pattern, scale and boundaries
- Landform including height, variation, gradient and aspect
- Visible and designated heritage assets including buildings, features and field structures
- Importance / Rarity
- Replaceability / Substitutability
- Experiential qualities including tranquillity, transition and access

The completed site proformas, notes, photographs and desk study information were reviewed to initially define a number of character areas that were then reviewed in the field.

Whilst in some locations boundaries between different areas may be well defined, there may be transitional areas at the edges. Where this occurs, the detail of the boundary and transition to the adjacent character area is described in the relevant description of each character area.

Each identified local landscape character area has been attributed a name and described according to the guidance set out in Chapter 6 of the Landscape Character Guidance for England and Scotland.

2.3 Sensitivity

This stage of the assessment identifies the relative sensitivity of each character area to potential harm arising from development.

The following guidance has been employed as the basis for the preparation of this sensitivity assessment:

- Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland, Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity. *Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Agency 2004*
- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA). *The Landscape Institute/*

The assessment sets out an evaluation that is founded on an approach that:

- Systematically identifies the relative landscape and visual sensitivity of each character area
- Describes opportunities for enhancement of each character area and mitigation of the potential impacts

Guidelines for the assessment of sensitivity acknowledge the inherent element of professional judgement involved in arriving at levels of sensitivity.

2.3.1 Landscape Sensitivity

Landscape sensitivity is based on the direct and indirect effect on the landscape resource and specific receptors such as landscape elements and features, as well as the sensitivity of the general landscape character and its condition and value.

The sensitivity of the landscape resource can be judged to be High, Medium or Low. Descriptions for the range of landscape sensitivity criteria is as follows:

High: Of high importance, rare within its location or limited opportunity for replacement. Good condition and / or high tranquillity.

Medium: Of medium importance, other examples exist around its location or some opportunity for replacement. Mixed condition and / or medium tranquillity.

Low: Of low importance, abundant around its location or easily replaced. Poor condition and / or low tranquillity.

2.3.2 Visual Sensitivity

Visual sensitivity is related to but distinct from landscape and is concerned with the sensitivity of the visual amenity of the area and views into and out of it.

The sensitivity of the visual resource can also be judged to be High, Medium or Low as a result of a combination of factors that are defined below:

High: Views across the area from residential property, parks or public rights of way. Distant views from within the area that are rare within the wider landscape. Limited opportunities to mitigate visual impact.

Medium: Views across the area from public property or users of recreational sites such as sports pitches. Middle distance views from within the area that have some rarity or are of specific feature/s within the landscape. Some opportunities to mitigate visual impact.

Low: Limited views into the area or views from a small number of higher sensitivity receptors. Views across the area from commercial property or transport routes. Limited and short distance views that are readily obtained elsewhere within the wider area. Visual impacts could be mitigated.

2.3.3 Relative Sensitivity to Development

The sensitivity of a landscape character to the proposed development is based on the form and nature of the change that is proposed to take place and the particular aspects of the landscape likely to be affected by the change (including aspects of an area's landscape and visual sensitivity).

The focus on a character area's sensitivity to development is based on identifying key aspects of the change that are likely to affect the landscape.

An overall assessment of sensitivity to the specific form of change or development requires that four sets of considerations should be brought together so that the sensitivity of individual types or areas of landscape to that particular form of development can be judged and mapped. They are:

- Effects upon particular aspects of landscape character including landform, land cover, enclosure and settlement pattern as a result of development
- Effects on aesthetic aspects such as the scale, pattern, movement and complexity of the landscape which can be retained or changed as a result of development
- Potential visibility of the development and the number of people of different types who are likely to see it (from property, PRow's, recreational areas, businesses or transport corridors), as well as the loss or retention of views beyond the study area and of particular features within the landscape

- Scope to modify visual impacts by various appropriate forms of mitigation measures by replacing or enhancing landscape features, providing visual screening of new development, or locating / designing development in a way which can reduce its impact

A sensitivity map provides an overview of areas where there is relatively low sensitivity to the particular type of change or development but does not indicate whether and to what extent such change or development would be acceptable in these areas.

The relative sensitivity of each character area to the outline assumptions for development described in Section 1.1 will be described as High, Medium or Low, with accompanying text to describe the reason for a character area's identified sensitivity.

It should be noted that the sensitivity at certain locations within a character area may be locally elevated or reduced because of the presence or absence of specific features linked to the sensitivity criteria described above.

The use of matrix tables to identify sensitivity to development is not considered current best practice, and as a result, such tables have not been used in this study.

3 National Character Areas

The National Character Area boundaries relevant to the study area are shown on Figure 02. The study area is located to the north and south of the boundary between National Character Area (NCA) 67: Cannock Chase and Cank Wood and NCA97: Arden. The boundary is located just to the north of Walmley and crosses the study area near the junction of Fox Hollies Road and Ox Leys Road. NCA69: Trent Valley Washlands is located just to the east of the study area.

A summary description of each of these areas is outlined below and their full profiles can be found on the Natural England website. Due to the study areas location on the boundary of these NCA's, the landscape character may be in transition and not necessarily reflect the boundaries of the National Character Areas which have been drawn at a larger scale.

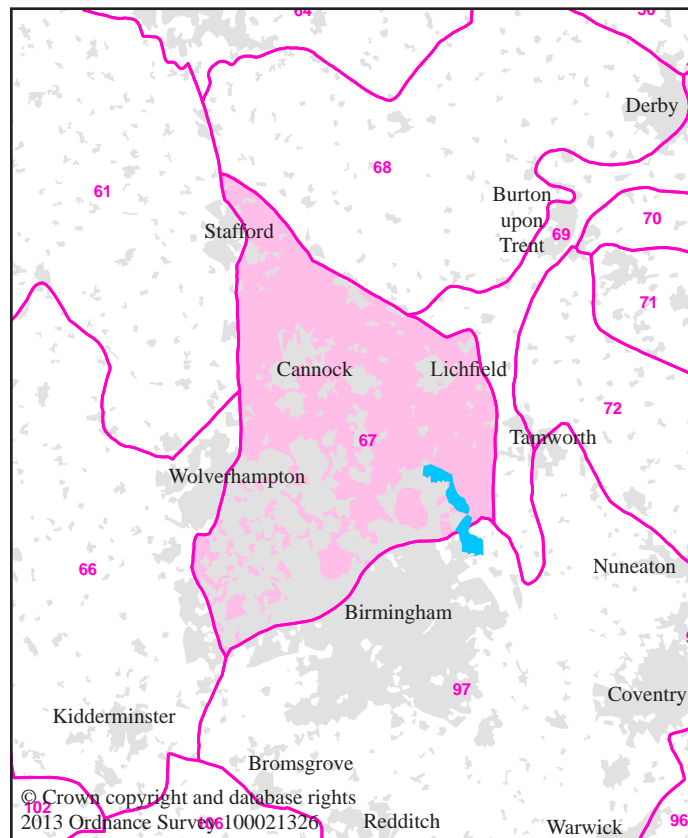
NCA67: Cannock Chase and Cank Wood

The character area boundary generally extends from Stafford in the north, south to Halesowen, north east to Sutton Coldfield, north of Lichfield, and finally north west back to Stafford. It includes a major proportion of the Birmingham conurbation, the historical hunting forest and AONB of Cannock Chase and Sutton Park National Nature Reserve.

The area is characterised by its variety including urban development towards the south, with conifer plantations, heathland and farmland towards the north. At the boundary with NCA97: Arden, the area is described as having close links through roads, railways and canals.



Fields generally have a regular pattern and are frequently enclosed by mature hedgerows with some hedgerow trees. Here farming is generally mixed with arable cultivation in large fields. Topography becomes more steeply undulating and wooded in the area between Tamworth and Sutton Coldfield.

The NCA has significant recreational and potential health benefits, provided through a large network of rights of way (totalling 797 km), the access network within the NCA is particularly important in allowing links to the wider countryside from the urban areas.

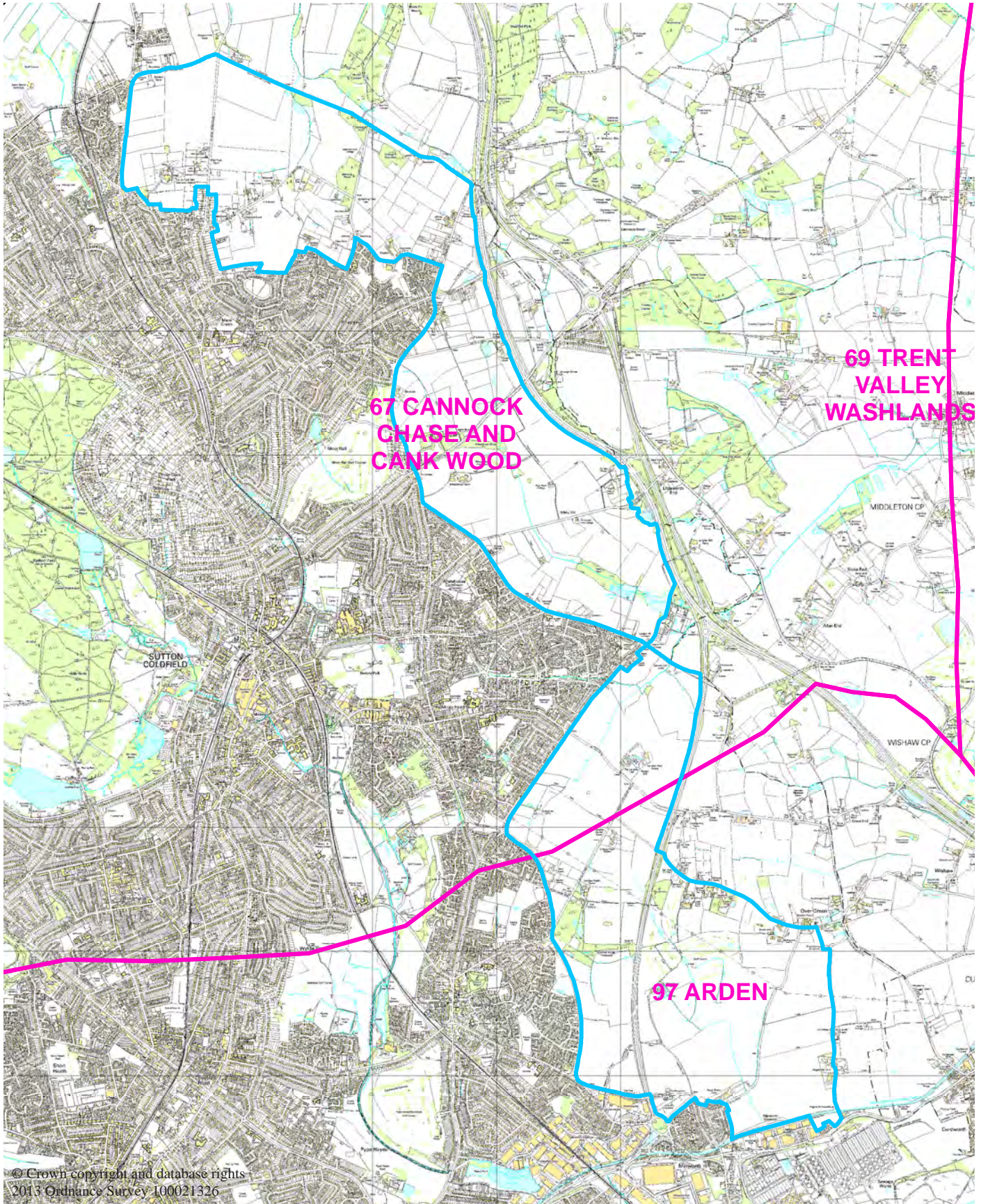


NCA67: Cannock Chase and Cank Wood (pink) and BDP character assessment area (blue)

Legend

-  Landscape Character Assessment Study Area
-  National Character Area Boundary

National Character Areas



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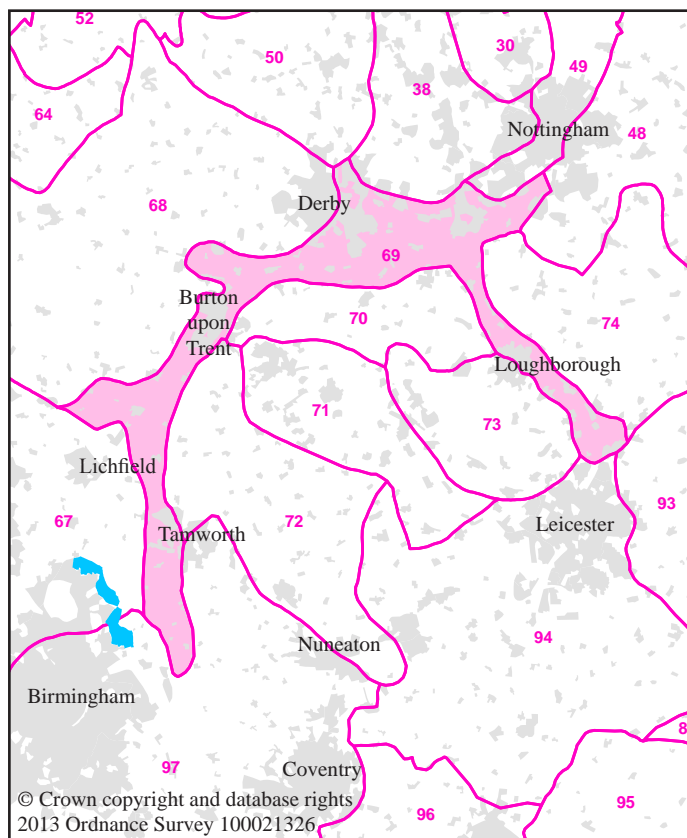
Recent developments include the expansion of residential settlements and industrial estates; reclamation of former mines and spoil tips; open cast mining; sand, gravel and clay extraction; waste disposal; and road developments - all of which are changing the character of the area. The construction of the M6 Toll has increased the opportunities for further land use changes. In many areas around the NCA, farming is now giving way to livery - particularly around the fringes of settlements.

Opportunities for the area are identified as (amongst others) managing, enhancing and expanding the network of green infrastructure, to enhance landscape, sense of place and tranquillity, and to increase resilience to climate change.

NCA69: Trent Valley Washlands

The character area is a narrow arc shaped corridor that follows the route of the River Tame, River Trent and River Soar. The area starts south of Tamworth and extends north along the River Tame to Alrewas, north east to Derby and Long Eaton along the River Trent and then south east past Loughborough along the River Soar.

The area is characterised by broad valleys and wide rivers with the presence of urban development and



NCA69: Trent Valley Washlands (pink) and BDP character assessment area (blue)

transport corridors along most of the area. There is a generally open character which is punctuated by cooling towers of power stations and influenced by pylons and sand and gravel extraction.

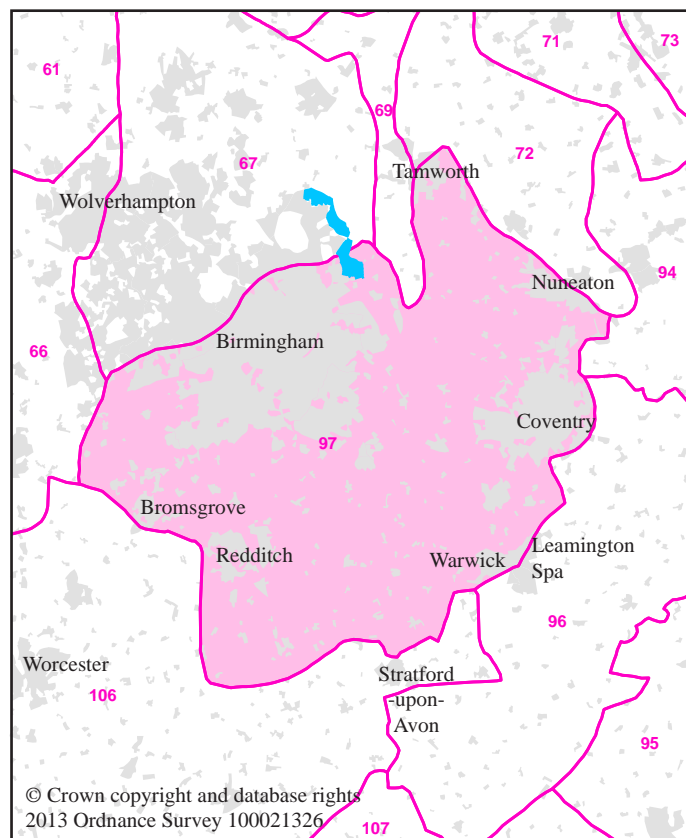
The extraction processes have resulted in a series of water filled pits across the area. Residential development continues to encroach on the floodplain and the impact is exacerbated by the consequent need for further flood defence structures.

The Natural England character area description states that although they are not part of the character area itself, it is important to consider the significance of the backdrops that contain the valleys.

NCA97: Arden

The character area boundary generally extends from Halesowen in the west, north east to Sutton Coldfield (along the boundary of NCA 67), around the boundary of NCA68 to Polesworth, south east to Nuneaton and Coventry, south west past Kenilworth and Warwick towards Alcester, north to Redditch, west past Bromsgrove and north back to Halesowen.

The area is characterised by the conurbation of Birmingham in the north and farmland and former wood-pasture to the south and east. The landscape of the lower lying central area is gently



NCA97: Arden (pink) and BDP character assessment area (blue)

4 Local Landscape Character Assessment and Findings

rolling with small fragmented semi natural and ancient woodlands. Mature oaks set in hedgerows, distinctive field boundaries, historic parklands and narrow river corridors are key features outside the heavily urbanised area.

There are numerous transport corridors through the area including road, rail, air and canals. There is likely to be increased development and greater pressure upon the existing infrastructure, particularly around Birmingham, Coventry and the main towns. This pressure could lead to the creation of a new Green Infrastructure linking the urban areas out into the more rural areas. There are 1,929 km of Public Rights of Way within the area.

Key characteristics of the area include well-wooded farmland with rolling landform, mature oaks within hedgerows and ancient woodlands that date from the time of enclosure. There are diverse field patterns, that range from well hedged, irregular fields and small woodlands that contrast with the larger semi regular fields on former deer park estates, e.g. Packington Hall and Stoneleigh Park.

Remnant ancient woodland is a key feature in the NCA. Some of the woodlands contain important populations of small mammals and Invertebrates. 3% of the area contains UK BAP Priority Habitat of broadleaved mixed and yew woodland.

Management of the area should include conserving, enhancing and restoring the area's ancient landscape pattern of field boundaries, historic (including farm) buildings, moated sites, parkland and pasture, manage and restore hedgerows and field trees, and reinforce its well wooded character.

Changes in the character of the area have been driven by historic Arden farmsteads being converted into wealthy residences and the land being used for grazing, hobby farming and equestrian use. Future opportunities for the character area include opportunities for good, sustainable design reflecting local settlement patterns and the associated potential for new green infrastructure building upon the network of sites in the urban fringe.

The landscape character assessment identified 19 separate local landscape character areas (LCAs), which are represented on Figure 03 with their Relevant Sensitivity to Development mapped on Figure 04.

The 19 individual landscape character areas, and the supporting survey data, provide a comprehensive understanding of the local landscape and visual resource within the Birmingham Green Belt area. Study area-wide plans Figures 05-10 provide an overview of natural and cultural factors across the study area that contribute to determining local characteristics.

Key features of the study area include:

- The area of higher ground to the north, contrasted by the valley landscapes in the centre and low basin in the south
- Views out into the wider landscape from LCAs 1, 4, 7, 8, 12 and 18 with inward facing or contained views from others
- More regular and smaller field patterns and greater pastoral land use to the north
- A number of PRoWs allowing access across the centre of the area
- Noticeable blocks of woodland and ancient woodland, particularly in the north and centre of the area.
- Listed buildings with open aspects across the surrounding landscape

A separate detailed description, plans, photographs and a sensitivity assessment is provided for each area in Section 5.

Through mapping, identifying and describing key characteristics and linking them to landscape and visual sensitivity a measure of Relative Sensitivity to Housing Development has been arrived at for each LCA and is mapped on Figure 04. The sensitivity of each LCA to employment development is judged to be high, with the exception of LCA14 due to its large scale nature and lack of landscape components and visual receptors (with the exception of Peddimore Hall and its surroundings). This is due to the larger scale of building heights and footprints which results

in reduced flexibility to design around existing landscape components and increased visibility from surrounding areas.

A high sensitivity to housing development suggests that development of the area would result in significant landscape and visual effects that may not be able to be satisfactorily mitigated. A medium sensitivity to housing development suggests that there may be significant landscape or visual effects and that some mitigation could be provided through landscape provision, visual screening or micro-siting of development blocks. A low sensitivity to housing development suggests that there are unlikely to be any significant landscape or visual effects (other than a change of landscape character) and that mitigation measures could be provided to receptors or landscape features.

Although each LCA has been given an overall sensitivity to housing development, there may be small pockets within each area that have elevated or reduced sensitivity due to the presence or lack of particular landscape features.

Whilst some LCA's may have the same landscape and visual sensitivity ratings, they may be judged to have a different relative sensitivity to development to each other due to the reasons set out in Section 2.3.3. The main reasons for variation in the relative sensitivity of each LCA within this study area are:

- Increased sensitivity as a result of views from urban areas or the presence of extensive views into the wider landscape, this is due in part to the gradient and aspect of slopes and presence of trees and vegetation
- Reduced sensitivity due to a lack of landscape components within an area, or the presence of components that are common in the wider landscape
- The amount of existing urbanising influences on an area as a result of transport corridors, built form, and infrastructure such as pylons or masts
- The physical presence and setting of visible or designated heritage assets

The implications of these factors is that if development takes place in one LCA careful consideration needs to be given to the influence that it may have on an adjacent LCA. This should include design that limits urban influence on surrounding areas, preserves the setting and visibility of visible or designated heritage assets and retains existing views.

The definition of landscape character areas combined with an assessment and mapping of their sensitivity to development can help inform decision making for changes to the Green Belt and future land allocations in the BDP as well as providing the basis for supporting supplementary planning documents.

To assist in progress towards a sustainable, robust and evidence based development of the Birmingham Development Plan 2031, the findings contained within this report should be cross-referenced with the Ecological Assessment and the Archaeology and Historic Environment Assessment as they also affect development capacity and overall sensitivity. From this, and to further inform decision making on future changes to the Green Belt, Draft Policy Zones (DPZ's) could be formulated using GIS software.

This would enable key characteristics from all three topics to be overlain and analysed to help determine:

- An overall picture of environmental resource within the Green Belt
- Locations where there is high and low environmental sensitivity
- Targeted approaches to managing percentages of environmental loss / gain
- Green infrastructure planning with local and strategic environmental links and corridors
- LCA's that may or may not be grouped together to form a single DPZ (e.g. combining character or environmental areas with obvious similarities of their attributes)

With sustainable forms of development a primary consideration in meeting development allocation targets draft policy zones would assist in providing a context that will enable policy making, planning and landscape management decisions to be made which respect to sustaining the diversity and character of the landscape and environmental assets rather than fossilising change.

Local Landscape Character Areas



Figure 04 Relative Sensitivity to Residential Development

Legend

High

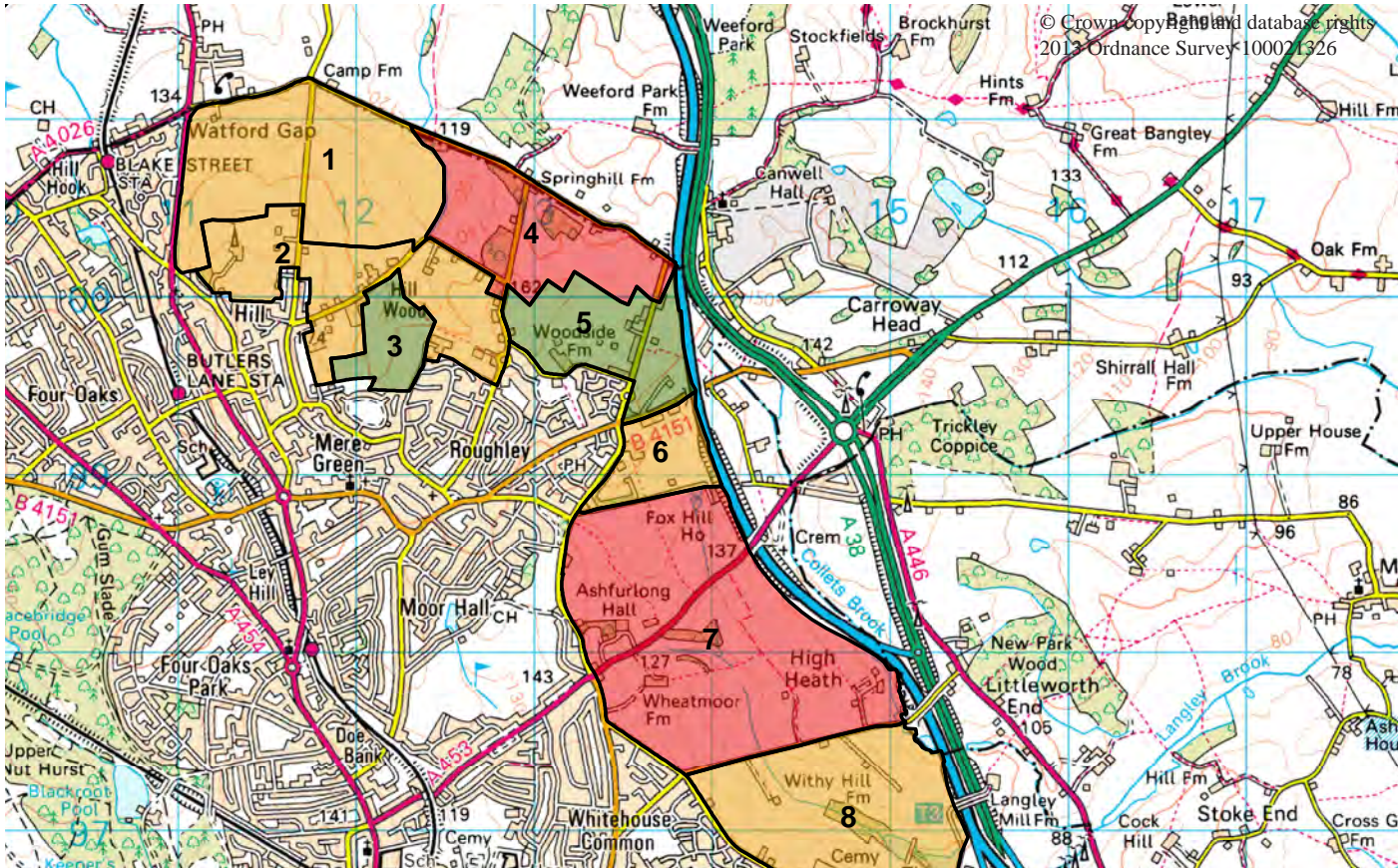
Development of the area would result in significant landscape and visual effects that may not be able to be satisfactorily mitigated.

Medium

There may be significant landscape or visual effects and that some mitigation could be provided through landscape provision, visual screening or micro-siting of development blocks.

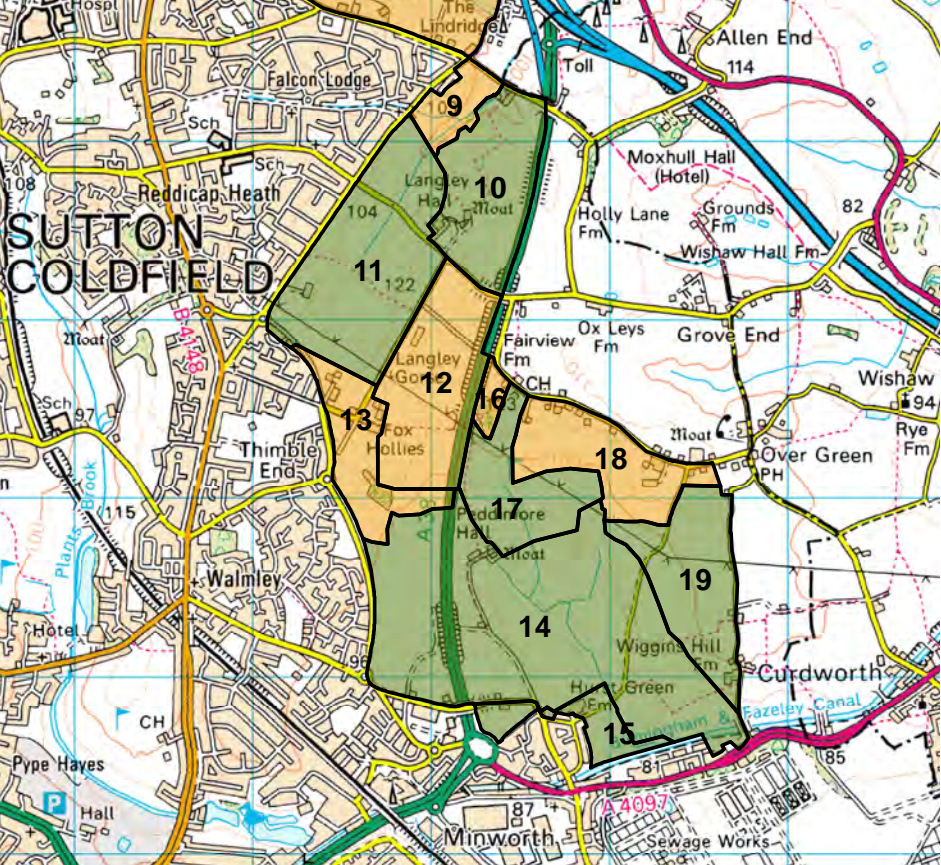
Low

There are unlikely to be any significant landscape or visual effects (other than a change of landscape character) and that mitigation measures could be provided to receptors or landscape features.



The relative sensitivities of each LCA is outlined below:

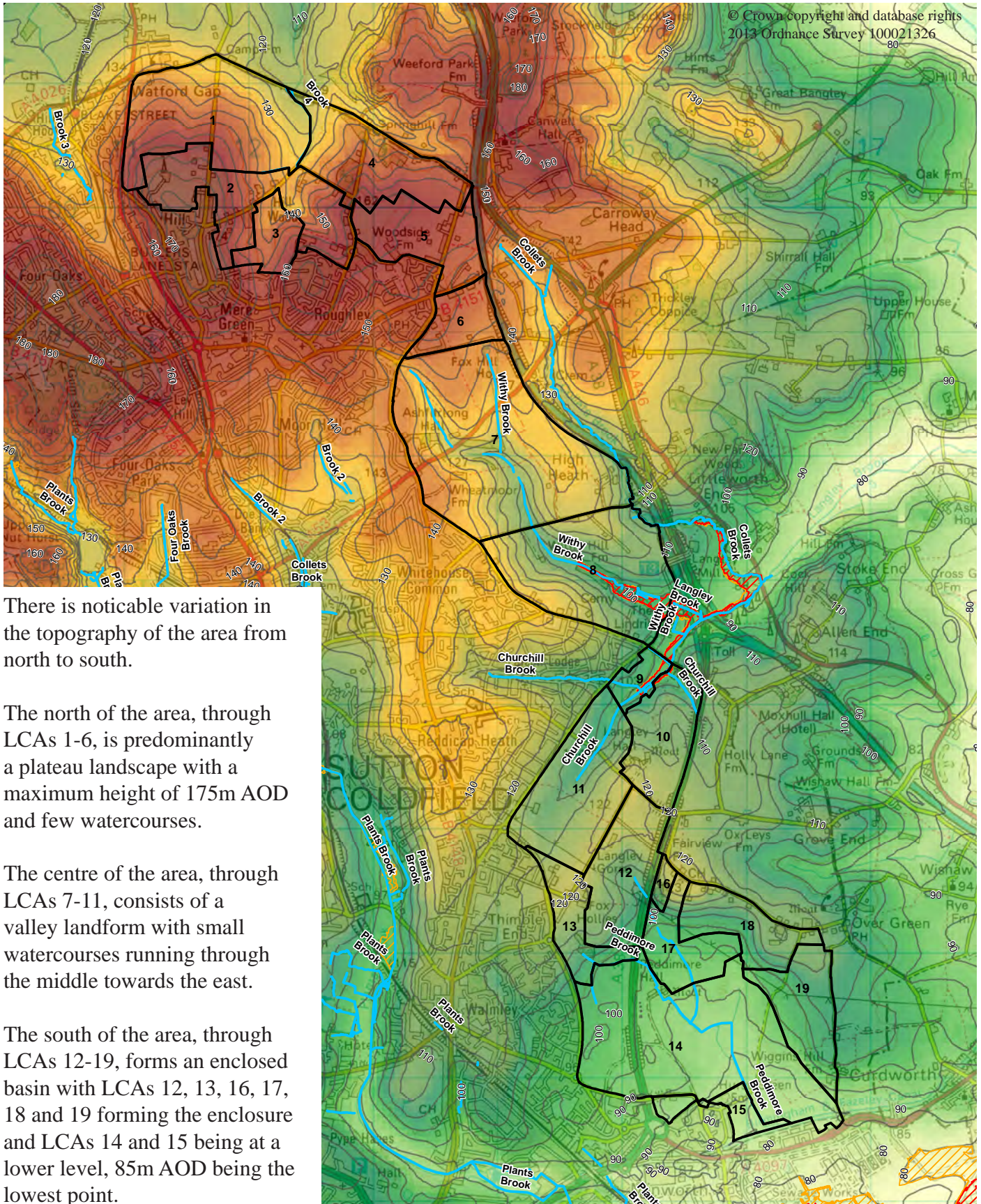
LCA	Landscape	Visual	Development
1	L	H	M
2	M	M	M
3	L	M	L
4	H	M	H
5	L	M	L
6	M	M	M
7	H	H	H
8	M	M	M
9	L	M	M
10	L	M	L
11	L	M	L
12	M	M	M
13	M	M	M
14	L	L	L
15	L	M	L
16	M	L	M
17	L	M	L
18	M	L	M
19	L	M	L



Topography & Watercourses

Legend

- Contours
- Water Courses
- Flood Zone 3
- Flood Zone 2
- Topography**
- High : 240
- Low : 48



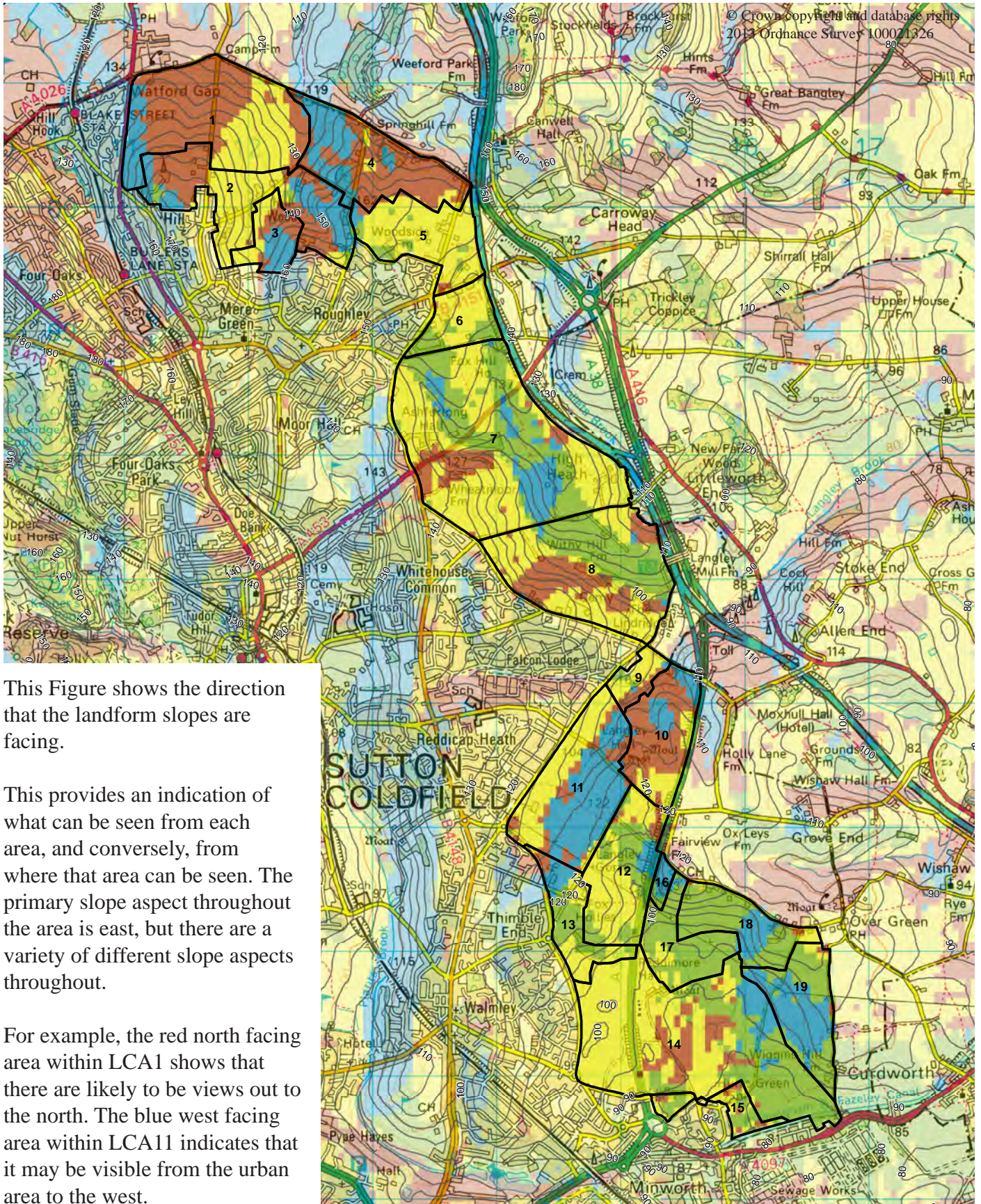
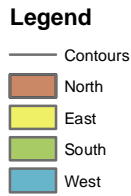
There is noticeable variation in the topography of the area from north to south.

The north of the area, through LCAs 1-6, is predominantly a plateau landscape with a maximum height of 175m AOD and few watercourses.

The centre of the area, through LCAs 7-11, consists of a valley landform with small watercourses running through the middle towards the east.

The south of the area, through LCAs 12-19, forms an enclosed basin with LCAs 12, 13, 16, 17, 18 and 19 forming the enclosure and LCAs 14 and 15 being at a lower level, 85m AOD being the lowest point.

Slope Aspect



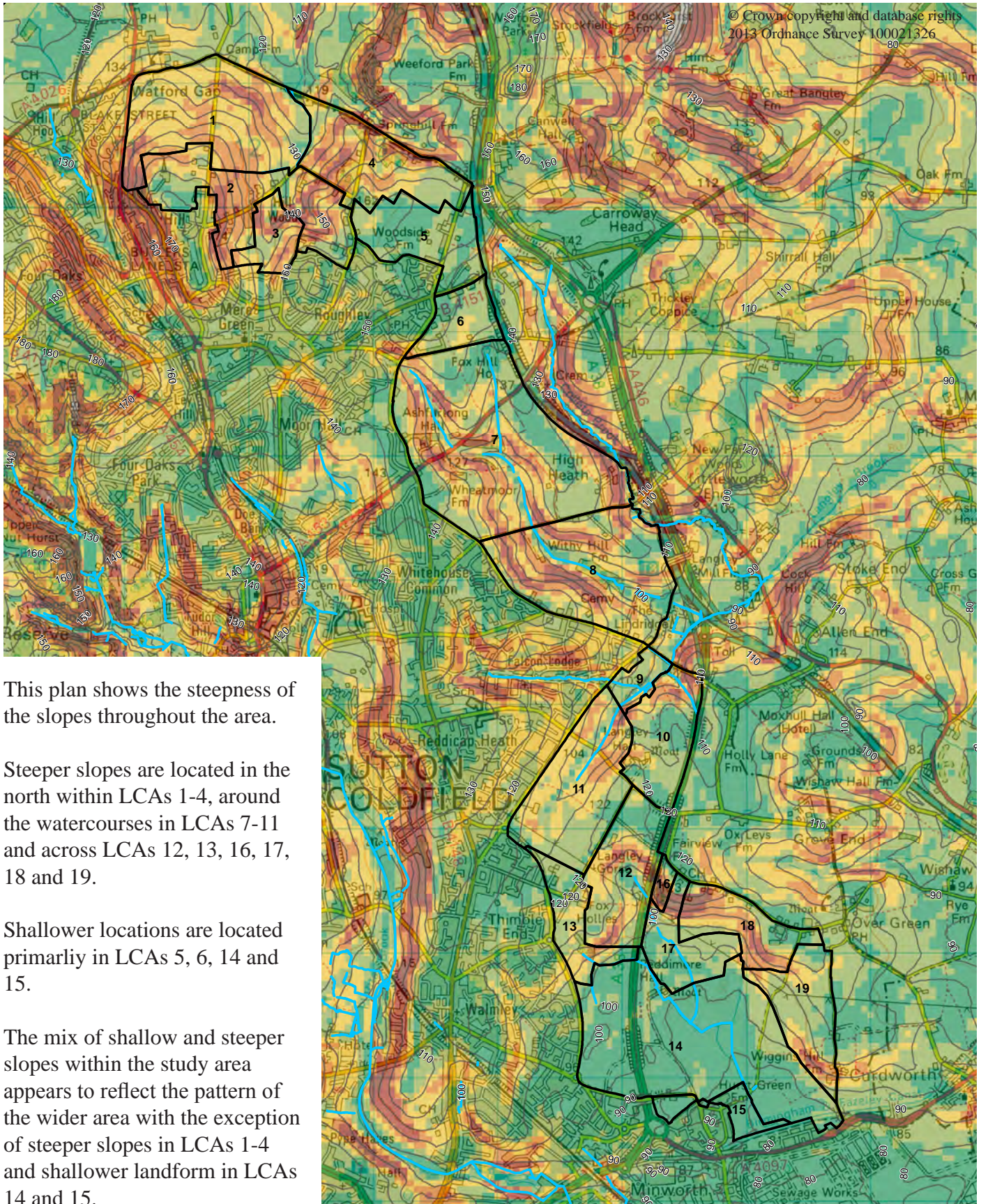
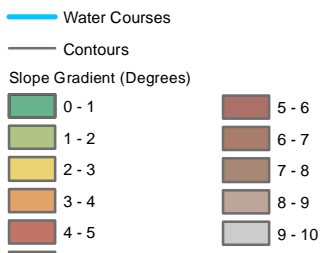
This Figure shows the direction that the landform slopes are facing.

This provides an indication of what can be seen from each area, and conversely, from where that area can be seen. The primary slope aspect throughout the area is east, but there are a variety of different slope aspects throughout.

For example, the red north facing area within LCA1 shows that there are likely to be views out to the north. The blue west facing area within LCA11 indicates that it may be visible from the urban area to the west.

Slope Gradient

Legend



This plan shows the steepness of the slopes throughout the area.

Steeper slopes are located in the north within LCAs 1-4, around the watercourses in LCAs 7-11 and across LCAs 12, 13, 16, 17, 18 and 19.

Shallower locations are located primarily in LCAs 5, 6, 14 and 15.

The mix of shallow and steeper slopes within the study area appears to reflect the pattern of the wider area with the exception of steeper slopes in LCAs 1-4 and shallower landform in LCAs 14 and 15.

Designated Heritage Assets

Legend

- Scheduled Monument
- Registered Parks And Gardens
- Ancient Woodland

Statutorily Listed Buildings

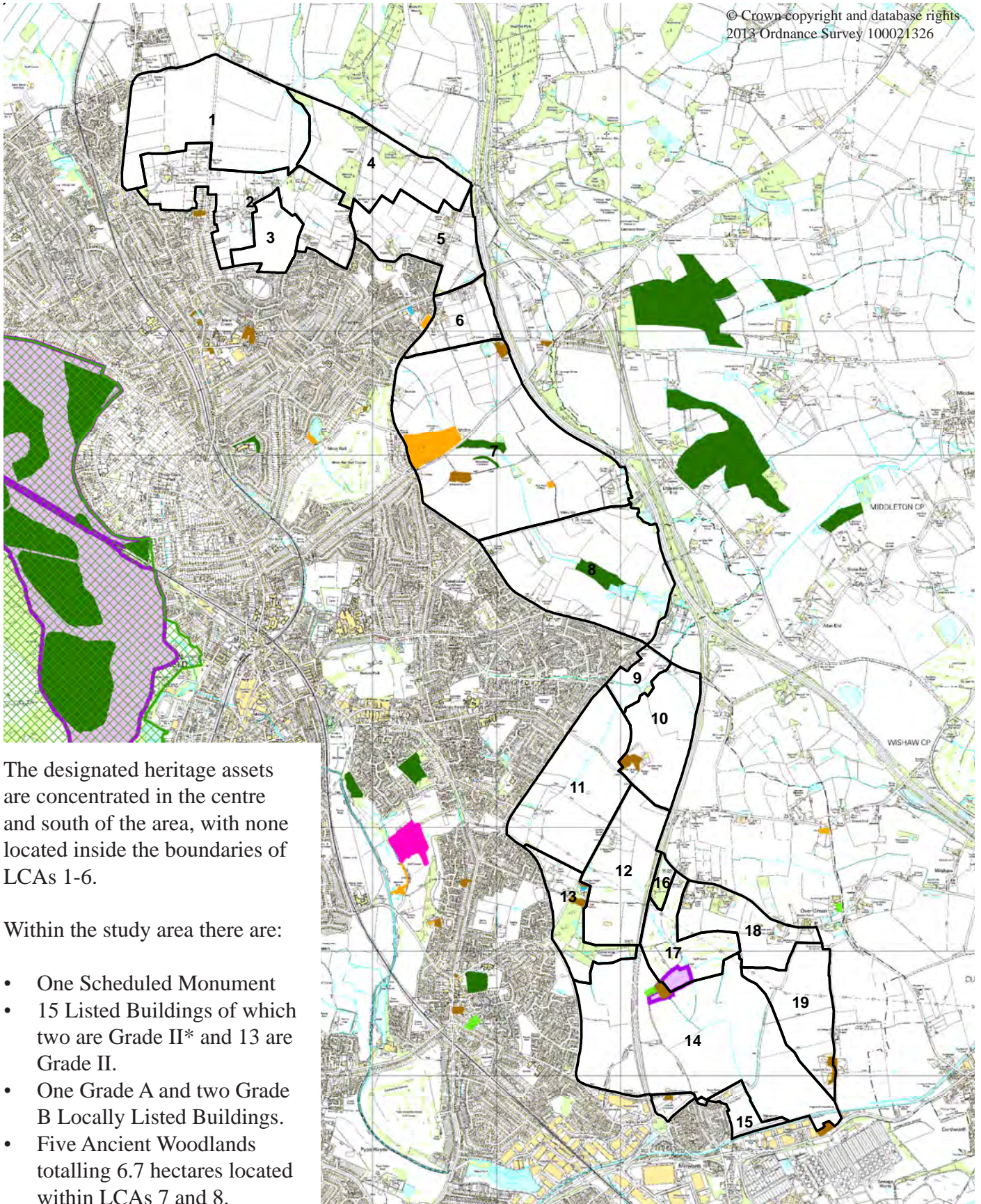
GRADE

- I
- II
- II*

Locally Listed Buildings

GRADE

- A
- B

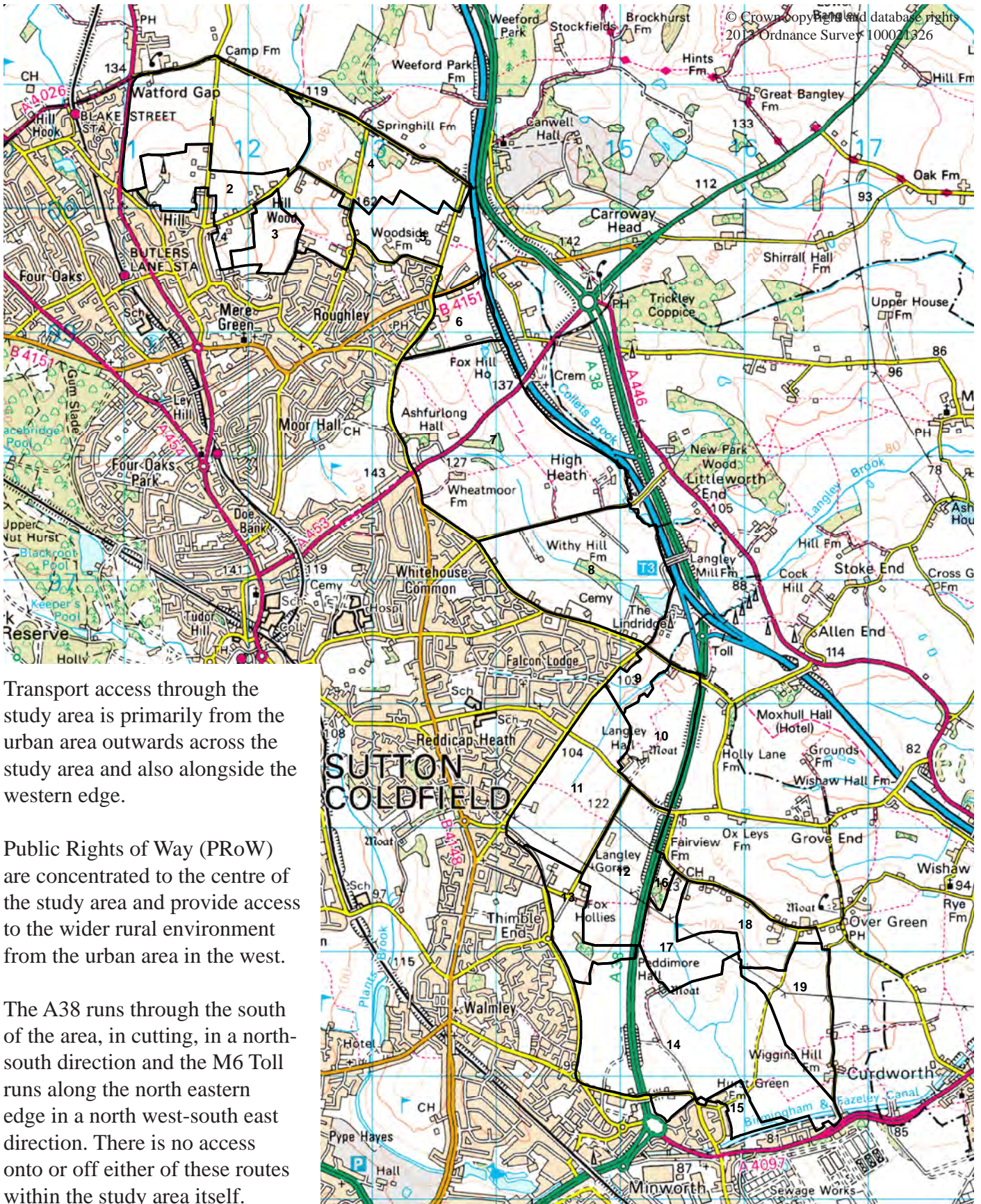


The designated heritage assets are concentrated in the centre and south of the area, with none located inside the boundaries of LCAs 1-6.

Within the study area there are:

- One Scheduled Monument
- 15 Listed Buildings of which two are Grade II* and 13 are Grade II.
- One Grade A and two Grade B Locally Listed Buildings.
- Five Ancient Woodlands totalling 6.7 hectares located within LCAs 7 and 8.

Transport and Access



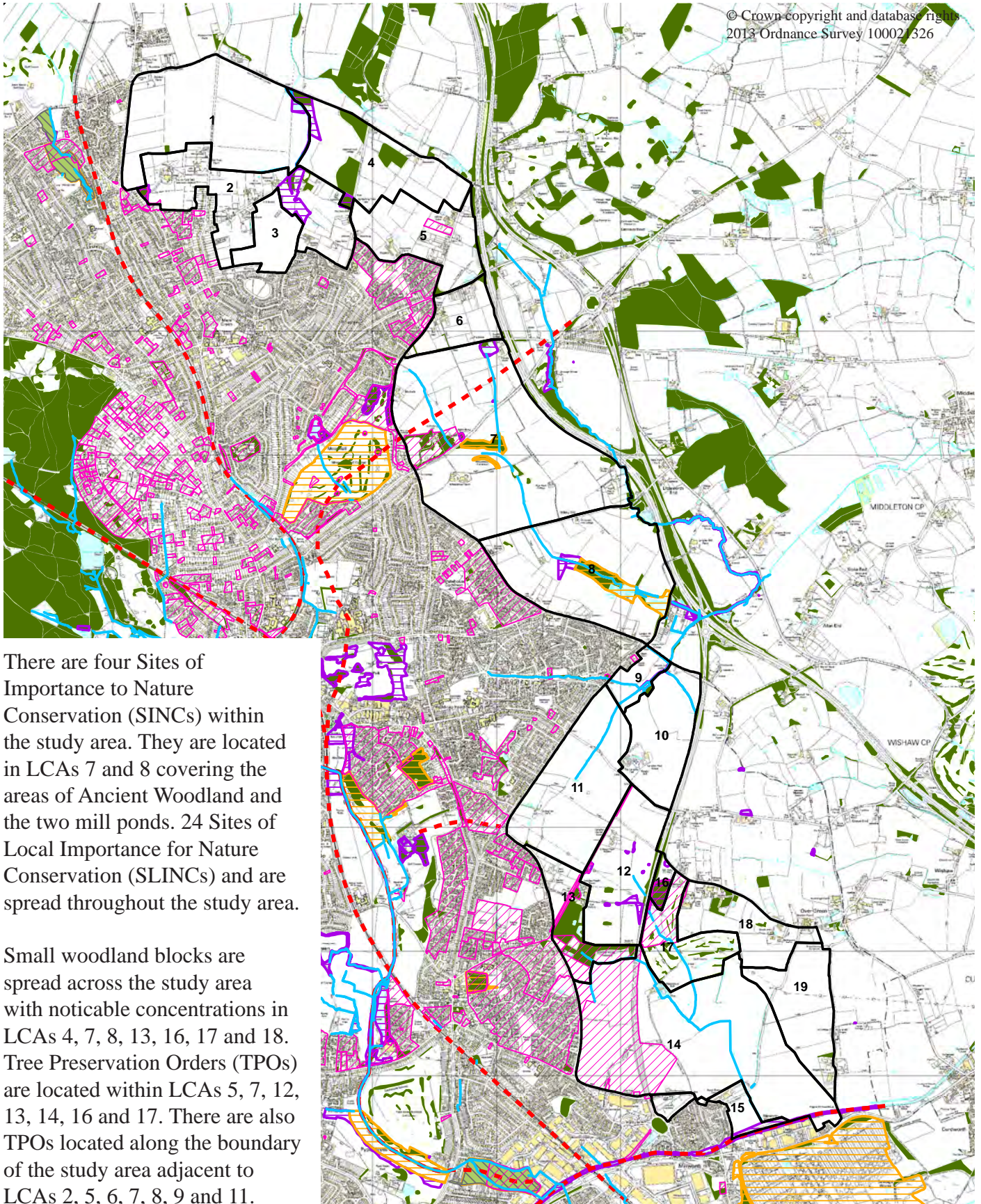
Transport access through the study area is primarily from the urban area outwards across the study area and also alongside the western edge.

Public Rights of Way (PRoW) are concentrated to the centre of the study area and provide access to the wider rural environment from the urban area in the west.

The A38 runs through the south of the area, in cutting, in a north-south direction and the M6 Toll runs along the north eastern edge in a north west-south east direction. There is no access onto or off either of these routes within the study area itself.

Vegetation and Ecology

- Legend**
- Water Courses
 - - - Wildlife Corridor
 - Local Nature Reserve
 - SINC
 - SLINC
 - Woodland
 - Tree Preservation Order



There are four Sites of Importance to Nature Conservation (SINCs) within the study area. They are located in LCAs 7 and 8 covering the areas of Ancient Woodland and the two mill ponds. 24 Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINCs) and are spread throughout the study area.

Small woodland blocks are spread across the study area with noticeable concentrations in LCAs 4, 7, 8, 13, 16, 17 and 18. Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) are located within LCAs 5, 7, 12, 13, 14, 16 and 17. There are also TPOs located along the boundary of the study area adjacent to LCAs 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11.

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