

Strategic Open Space Safeguarding

(R)F. Coleford 11

An area of land lying between Berry Hill and Milkwall and shown on the Inset Map will be retained primarily as open countryside. Only development with an essential need to locate within this area will be permitted, and in such cases should be designed and located so as not to detract from the open landscape character of the area.

INTRODUCTION

This report contains an assessment of the landscape features in existence in the landscape today. It ascertains their level of sensitivity to change and draws conclusions as to the potential impact of formal development within its landscape.

The assessment has been carried out in two parts: A desktop study consisting of a review of the designation set out District Local Plan Review Part 2 and the relevant section of the current landscape character assessment alongside an analysis of the landscape using GIS software. A Field Study also conducted consisted of 2 visits to review the landscape in the existing policy and 1 to assess the proposed new allocation.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

- A High undulating plateau

The land is elevated, approximately 220m at its highest point at Berry Hill Pike. It continues East at this height, in an arc following the line of settlements, falling to 191m at Palmers Flat in the Southern tip. The landscape flows into the lowest point at 169m at the cross in Coleford town centre, creating a bowl effect in which the town sits, visible from its surrounding landscape. (See Map & Panorama 1)

- An established Field Pattern

'Convex hills are cloaked by fields of improved pasture defined by a well maintained network of hedges.' 2c Coleford and Christchurch, LCA 2002.

Described in the most recent landscape character assessment, this established field pattern is still in existence today, enclosed by strong linear hedgerow boundaries and further emphasized by the convex nature of the landform, making the landscape highly visible from its environs.

The Grade 3 agricultural land is used, in the main, for the purpose of grazing, however some arable land is in evidence south of Bakers Hill. In general the land is well managed, with few neglected plots. For the most part the field pattern is enclosed by mature hedgerows, containing native species such as Hawthorn, Hazel, Blackthorn and Oak. Few examples of stone walling still remain today. (See Map & Panorama 2 & 3)

- An Absence of tree cover

There are few mature trees within the landscape, save for limited pockets of woodland and individual native species growing within hedgerows. There are a small quantity of trees with preservation orders including Oak, Ash, Wellingtonia Firs and a Laburnum, within the grounds of Bells Hotel. This absence of significant woodland cover contributes to the open character of the landscape. It ensures unimpeded views, reaching as far as the statutory forest, the backdrop to the outlying settlements. (See Map & Panorama 4)

- Arc of settlements

There are relatively few built elements within the bowl of the landscape itself, bar a number of isolated stone farmsteads scattered across the field pattern.

At the rim of the bowl is an arc of settlements running from Berry Hill in the North skirting in a South Easterly direction towards Palmers Flat. These ribbon developments constructed in an adhoc style during the 19th and 20th centuries, form a uniform settlement character. (See Map, Panorama 5 & Cluster 1)

- Settlement fringe

'In close proximity to the settlements, the influence of the urban fringe becomes more apparent; areas of neglected pasture and the manicured landscapes of golf courses contrast strongly with the patchwork of pasture fields.' 2c Coleford and Christchurch, LCA 2002.

On the outskirts of these settlements, parcels of land have been adopted for numerous recreational pursuits, these include 2 golf courses and a driving range. The manicured landscapes of which, still display remnants of the former field pattern and hedgerows. Three smaller sites; Broadwell Football Ground, Coalway Football Ground and Bells Club Football Ground are designated Protected Outdoor Recreation Spaces. These aforementioned sites along with a number of built elements, (a television mast, the golf club house) visible on the skyline, contribute to the erosion of the landscape character. (See Map, Panorama 6, Cluster 2 & Sequential Walk)

BOUNDARY

Whilst there are subtle changes in the landscape as you move eastward, such as variance in scale of field pattern and quality of management of land, the landscape remains essentially the same. The boundary to the South East is clearly defined by the disused railway track now Milkwall cycle path. Land west of the cycle path is Tuffhorn Industrial Estate, set aside for employment purposes and beyond that a number of housing estates developed in the 20th century around Tuffhorn Road. The current boundary to the North at Berry Hill Pike runs along Grove Road and is to be reviewed.

BOUNDARY REVISION

It is proposed that the boundary to the North be defined by the forest edge in the north west and extended westwards, taking in the settlements of the Scowles and Whitecliff. Continuing southwards as far as Beechams factory and concluding at the crest of the hill. *'The eastern extent of the character area is defined by the linear settlement of Scowles which runs parallel to the Crease Limestone which was mined for iron ore throughout history. To the south of Scowles is a large active limestone quarry. This is adjacent to Whitecliff where the remains of the first coke fuelled furnaces built in the Dean may be found.'* 2d Newland Hills, LCA 2002

The character of this landscape remains essentially the same as the aforementioned, until such a point as the gradient decreases and the land falls away steeply to the valley floor. Here the hill slopes are more heavily wooded and the agricultural quality of land decreases to rough pasture. Newland Road meanders along the valley floor and is populated by dwellings and small holdings. South of the Scowles is a large disused quarry, now used for recreational purposes and at Whitecliff the remains of the coke fuelled furnace. Running adjacent to the Wye Valley AONB, this landscape retains many of its characteristics. (See Map & Panorama 7-10)

'Small clusters of historic squatter settlement on valley sides surrounded by intricate pattern of small fields, narrow lanes and small deciduous woodlands.' 1 Wooded Valleys LCA 2002

The extension of the policy area will serve to protect the existing landscape and retain the character of both Coleford and the two outlying settlements. It is deemed appropriate to conclude the boundary at the crest of the hill as it will ensure the retention of views extending as far as the statutory forest and AONB.

CONCLUSION

'The open hillsides are particularly visually sensitive to the effects of large scale built development and change due to a combination of their elevation, the absence of significant woodland cover and a high degree of inter-visibility with surrounding landscapes. Sheltered valleys and areas which have a greater extent of woodland cover are perhaps less sensitive to change.' Landscape Strategy 2004

As concluded in the Landscape Strategy this landscape has a distinct character still in evidence today. Due to the nature of the landform and the absence of tree coverage it has a high degree of inter-visibility with its surroundings. This in turn makes it highly sensitive to change.

The character of which has, in places, notably along the fringes of settlements begun to erode with the addition of development during the late 20th century. As a direct result of the local policy designation the landscape has remained essentially unchanged, since the last Landscape character assessment in 2002, with the exception of a few small scale developments, such as Great Oaks Hospice.

Due to the particular location of the landscape, between the town centre and the outlying settlements, it can be concluded that the landscape is highly vulnerable to visually intrusive development, which would be harmful to its innate character. The potential long term impact being the eventual absorption of the outlying settlements into the market town of Coleford.

In order to maintain the distinct character of the landscape and safeguard against inappropriate development, it is therefore recommended that the policy should be retained, with a further extension to the boundary to the West as indicated on the map.