



Peripheral landscape study – Bruton

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1) Background to the study:

1.1. The forthcoming South Somerset Local Development Framework (LDF) will be required to allocate new development sites for both housing and employment for the period 2006-2026, with the focus of major growth placed upon Yeovil, thereafter the district's major towns and rural centres. As part of the process of finding suitable sites for development, a landscape study to assess the capacity of the settlement fringe to accommodate new development in a landscape-sympathetic manner, is commissioned. This will complement other evidence-based work that will contribute to the LDF process.

1.2 PPS 7 commends the approach to the identification of countryside character developed by the Countryside Agency (now Natural England) and suggests that it can assist in accommodating necessary change due to development without sacrifice of local character and distinctiveness. National landscape guidelines similarly advise that visual impact can be determined as being significant when judged against the context and sensitivity of the landscape, and where there is an incompatibility of scale and character between a proposal and the attributes of the receiving landscape: Consequently this landscape study seeks to evaluate both the landscape character and visual sensitivity of each of 13 selected settlements, to enable an assessment of their capacity to absorb additional development, and an indication of potential growth areas (areas of highest capacity).

1.3 Each assessment will establish and refine a study area for each settlement in 3-stages;

i) Using the settlement centre as fulcrum, a circle is drawn to include and contain the furthestmost spread of development, to thus define an area within a radius encompassing all growth associated with that settlement. This central focus is for the purpose of seeking settlement growth in close proximity to the town's commercial centre.

ii) Where pertinent, a second line is drawn beyond the town boundary, at a set distance from the current edge (the distance proportional to settlement size) to allow potential for a coherent urban extension alongside the town's current extent.

iii) Finally, these lines are adjusted to coincide with established and credible landscape boundaries to thus establish the study area. Adjacent villages in close proximity may be included within the study, to enable their separate identity to be considered in relationship to the main settlement.

Structure of the report.

1.4 A general description of the settlement acts as a preface to a character study of both the settlement and its surround. The sensitivity of the local landscape's character is then assessed, particularly in relationship to development form, alongside an appraisal of the visibility of each site, and its visual sensitivity. The potential of each study area's capacity to absorb an impact of built form and associated development is then evaluated using these character and visual profiles, with constraints factored into a capacity matrix, to arrive at an indication of potential development sites.

1.5 This study considers Bruton.

2) The settlement

2.1 Bruton lays in a sheltered valley alongside the river Brue, enfolded by the East Somerset Hills, in the northeast corner of the district. The A359 runs through the town, linking Yeovil with Frome, and the town is served by the main Plymouth – London rail line. It is a small market town of Saxon origins, once a royal estate of the West Saxon kings in the 7th century, and subsequently granted royal borough status with an estate of 9000 acres within Selwood Forest, as noted in the Domesday book. The High Street was laid out as medieval burgh development, and much of its pattern is still intact along with some fine old buildings. The town had a flourishing cloth industry from the middle ages, succeeded from the late 18th century by silk production, whilst the Kings School has grown around a 16th century core adjacent the River Brue. The town has undergone little growth, other than to the northeast of the town, and has a population approaching 3000 residents.

2.2 The town is primarily a linear settlement, aligned on a WSW-ENE axis, with the town's core parallel with the course of the river Brue, alongside which the early town was concentrated. Recent growth has extended in the form of ribbon development alongside the A 359, both north toward Frome, and southwest toward Pitcombe, though the main commercial area of the town remains concentrated on High Street. A small employment area is located to the east side of the town by the railway station. School buildings and their playing fields are also a substantial facet of the town, laying to either side of the rail corridor, and off the Pitcombe Road.

2.3 The immediate landscape setting of the town is defined by the valley associated with the River Brue, which is tightly contained by a series of low hills in close proximity to the town to the north of the river. The town is less markedly enclosed to the south of the river valley, with hillside gradients more relaxed, yet remains well contained, particularly by the knoll on which the National Trust's Dovecote stands.

Identification of the study area

2.4 Based upon the methodology outlined in para 1.3, the extent of the Bruton study area is broadly defined by field boundaries that run due east from the Evercreech road crossing of the Combe Brook, across Coombe Hill, to join with the Frome Road as far as the covered reservoir. The line then turns south to follow the Gilcombe valley, crossing the Brue to rise to Marydown Copse and pass Discover Farm, before heading west, crossing Godminster Lane below New House Farm, toward Sunny Hill, Pitcombe. The study area is completed along its west edge by following Sunny Lane to a crossing of the Brue below Gants Mill, prior to heading over Trendle and Chorley Hills, prior to a return to the Combe Brook valley to the north of Tolbury,

The study area is indicated on figure 1 – context.

3) Landscape Character

The national context:

3.1 Landscape character assessment is an approach that aids recognition and understanding of the differences between landscapes, and states what constitutes local distinctiveness. In 1996, the Countryside Agency (now Natural England) undertook a national study of the character of England's landscape, to enable definition and description of the range and diversity of the English landscape, and its categorisation into 'character areas'. This study was published as a national map, with accompanying regional volumes that describe the resultant areas in detail. Volume 8: South West England, places Bruton within character area 140 – *Yeovil Scarplands*. The key characteristics of this area as noted by the assessment are:

- i) *A very varied landscape of hills, wide valley bottoms, ridgetops and combes united by scarps of Jurassic limestone.*
- ii) *Mainly a remote rural area, with villages and high church towers.*
- iii) *A wide variety of local building materials including predominantly Ham Hill stone.*
- iv) *Small manor houses and large mansions with landscape parks.*
- v) *Varied land use: arable on the better low-lying land, woodland on the steep ridges and deep combes.*

3.2 The full descriptive text of the Yeovil Scarplands character area is available on the Natural England website, http://www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/CC/south_west/yeovil_scarplands.asp
The following extracts are typical of the Bruton area and its surrounding landscape;

... 'Rivers like the Brue, ... drain from the higher ground of the Scarplands cutting an intricate pattern of irregular hills and valleys which open out to the moorland basins. This is a landscape of very varied landform and complex geology which is united by the rhythm of the broad ridges and steep scarps of the Jurassic limestone. Much of the higher ground has sparse hedge and tree cover with an open, ridgetop, almost downland, character. In some areas, the high ground is open grassland falling away steeply down intricately folded slopes. In other areas of high ground, there is more arable and the ridges are broader. The steep slopes below these open ridge tops are in pasture use and are cut by narrow, deep valleys ('goyles') often with abundant bracken and scrub. Within the valleys there is a strong character of enclosure and remoteness'.

... 'An intricate network of winding lanes and holloways frames the landscape, contrasting with the straight roads and rectilinear field pattern on the downlands and valley bottoms. They link the numerous villages and hamlets, which are rarely more than two miles apart, while the farmsteads are generally to be found on the spring lines of the sheltered lower slopes and minor valleys'.

... 'Although the area has many settlements, these tend to lie in the valleys ... so that some views across the ridges give the impression of a sparsely settled land. The most favoured sites, near the streams and rivers, are the locations for towns'.

... 'The land is primarily in agricultural use with a mixture of arable, dairying and stock rearing. Grassland, is the principal land cover, with a range from lush, improved pastures in the valley bottoms to steep hillside pastures. The latter in places run to scrub and many are of nature-conservation interest. Hedges away from the Yeovil Sands are commonly thick with substantial banks. Small woodlands, scrub and copses are present, particularly in the sunken hollows and 'goyles'. Woodland, however, is most frequent on the steep slopes and, although there has been some planting of conifers, a number of semi-natural ancient woodlands survive'.

The local context:

3.3 A historic landscape characterisation study was undertaken by Somerset County Council Heritage team, completed in 2001. This study differentiates between unenclosed, anciently enclosed, and recently enclosed land, and notes ancient woodland sites and historic parkland. The character plan for the Bruton area (included at appendix 2) indicates field patterns deriving from the middle ages, alongside recently enclosed fields, and where pertinent, informs the landscape sensitivity appraisal, section 4.0.

3.4 SSDC undertook a detailed assessment of district-wide character; 'The Landscape of South Somerset' in 1993. This study places Bruton and its wider surrounds within the 'Escarpments, Ridges and Vales East of Yeovil' visual character region (VCR). Each VCR is sub-divided into landscape character areas (LCAs) and the following LCAs cover the Bruton study area;

- i) **Downland combes and holloways**, which cover the more deeply incised hills and combes to the west of the town, and;
- ii) **Woodland ridges and clay vales**, which broadly covers the landscape to the south and east of the town, and in most part overlays the Fullers Earth geology.

3.5 The '**Downland combes and holloways**' LCA, which for the purposes of this assessment is re-titled '***hills and combes west of Bruton***' covers the majority of the town's northwestern side. It is broadly described thus;

These landforms are part of the hill country which fringes the great central plain and extends from the Dorset borderland north-east to Castle Cary and Bruton. The hills are formed from the Middle and Upper Lias family of rocks overlain with Inferior Oolite limestones. The rocks from the Upper Lias are the familiar Yeovil sands and these, where exposed, give the characteristic land forms and land cover of coombe and holloway.

Where the slopes are steepest and soils are thin there are swards of flower-rich calcareous grassland and many of the hills continue to be sheep grazed thus maintaining this botanical interest. These largely treeless hills come close to the equivalent of the Dorset Downs and 'display graceful feminine contours' (Newman 1986). In places grazing has relaxed sufficiently to allow scrub to develop, and breaks of slope, particularly at lynchets or boundaries, have thick cloaks of bracken and gorse.

The oolitic plateau area between Bruton and Castle Cary displays particularly ancient signs of past cultivation in numerous strip lynchets. There are old drove roads and bridleways which create holloways. Locally distinctive are the hazel coppice hedges and numerous pollard ash trees and ridge top hedges which are now becoming overgrown and leggy. An unusual sight are the vineyards at Honeywick.

3.5 The '**Woodland ridges and clay vales**' LCA broadly covers the south and east side of the study area, and is re-titled for the purposes of this study as 'rolling hillsides'. The assessment identifies and describes the area thus;

This character zone is an amalgam of the Fullers Earth Clay vales and ridges and the Forest Marble/Cornbrash ridge. The landforms have more coherence in the south between Milborne Port and Maperton. North of this point the contours become very contorted due to considerable faulting of the underlying rocks.

There are some fine semi-natural ancient woodlands associated with the soils of these geological formations, notably Park Wood, Stoney Stoke and Cogley Wood, Bruton (a Site of Special Scientific Interest). Hedges are of excellent quality containing spindle, wayfaring tree, clematis and many old oaks. Elm is a significant returning component. Verges are extremely floristic with agrimony, hypericum and meadow cranesbill particularly eye-catching. Drainage is eastwards and the streams occupy their own heavily-wooded confining valleys. Fields are irregular shaped and pastoral and there is an ancient feel to the countryside.

Further to the east are the great Oxford Clay Vales. Divided by the Mere Faultline each clay vale has a distinctive character but generally it the same floristic make-up. The Oxford clays north of the Mere Fault are intractable and therefore pastoral in nature. However, influenced by the proximity of the Greensand ridge, the landscape is far more wooded. Numerous oaks spill down the slopes. Trees are located within fields as well as on the edges. Meadowland is uneven and hedges are few, replaced instead by linear bands of trees and woodland which snake down the slopes and protect several streams which have incised deep valleys, none more so than the infant Brue near Brewham.

3.7 Bisecting the two character areas but central to the character of the town, the 'River Brue corridor' can be identified as a third local character area.

3.8 The three landscape character areas noted above are indicated on figure 2 – landscape sensitivity.

4) Landscape sensitivity

4.1 Landscape sensitivity can be gauged from an assessment of landscape character in respect of how intact and well expressed its character is, along with its condition and time-depth. Negative factors to influence a sensitivity assessment will include detractors to local character. As this project is reviewing the likely impact of urban development upon its rural fringe, the prospect of new build relative to its context will be the prime consideration in this sensitivity appraisal, as will the extent of remoteness from urban form. Looking at each local landscape area in turn, the outcome of this stage of the study will be to grade areas of Bruton's periphery as possessing either high, moderate or low landscape sensitivity to development. The resultant areas are indicated on figure 2 – landscape sensitivity.

4.2 The previous chapter identified three landscape character areas as falling within the study area. The westernmost of these is that of the 'hills and combes west of Bruton'.

The hills and combes west of Bruton (character area A)

4.3 To the west of Bruton, the land form is more pronounced than to the east, primarily where water courses have cut through the gentle heads of the oolitic limestone hills to form steep-sided, narrow valleys. Both the River Brue, Coombe brook, and a headwater alongside Shute Lane, run through such enclosed valleys, where the topography is reinforced by tall hedgerows that enclose a small scale field pattern, and run along the heads of the combes. As described by the local character study, many of the hilltops are relatively open, whilst the combes are intricate, with a strong tree presence on the steeper ground below the hilltops, and in the hedgerows. Many green lanes run across the ridges, and wind down to the town in the form of embanked, tree-lined holloways, Huish and Trendle Lanes being notable examples. Much of this local character area is typically expressed by both the folding topography and the above landscape components, with its anciently enclosed pattern relatively intact. Consequently the greater part of this area is graded 'high' sensitivity.

4.4 Exceptions to this grading occur primarily in locations that have been the subject of the removal of landscape features: To the west of Tolbury Farm, the otherwise attractive hillside is atypical of local character, having lost a number of hedgerows to thus become a steep-sided single pasture field. Similarly the hillsides between Bride Hill and New Lake Farms, and to either side of Tower Hill, have also lost both hedgerow enclosure and the presence of small orchards. However, whilst suffering this loss of landscape features, the above locations are not imposed upon by urban form and thus are graded 'moderate' sensitivity. For two areas to the southwest of the town, adjacent to the A359 below Lusty Hill and by Sunny Lane in Pitcombe, it is the converse situation: Whilst abutted by urban form on two sides and therefore less sensitive due to this urban presence, both areas are well defined by traditional hedgerow boundaries, with their landscape pattern intact. They are thus also graded 'moderate' sensitivity.

The Rolling Hillsides (Character Area B)

4.5 This character area lays to the northeast and southeast of Bruton and is bisected by the River Brue. To the north of the river, the landform is divided into a series of broad fingers by a number of south-flowing headwater streams. The hilltops are a relatively open mix of arable and pasture fields, whilst the hillsides are pastoral. Hedge lines primarily run along the heads of the hills, and at right angles to the contour on the hillsides, with most hedgerows drawn-up, well stocked with specimen trees, and supplemented by small blocks of woodland on steeper ground, as above Higher Backway. The character differs from land to the west (area A) in that the topography is gentler, coincident with the underlying Fullers Earth geology; field size is mid-scale; and there is little evidence of scrub or strip lynchets on the hillsides. The landscape pattern is intact and well expressed in the main and is thus graded 'high' sensitivity. It is only where urban form impacts upon the rural character of adjacent land where character is degraded: First, to the north of the Uphills and Townsend Park estates, where fields that are otherwise typically expressed, are abutted on two sides by residential sites and thus graded 'moderate' sensitivity. Second, east of the Brue Avenue and Eastfields estates, where the residential areas already extend over much of the field, and impose a harsh, incongruous edge line along its length. Such is the extent of urban form here, and lack of natural boundaries, that the remainder of the field is graded 'low' sensitivity.

4.6 To the south of the Brue corridor, the rolling hillsides become gentler still and there is thus a lessened sense of enclosure as that found elsewhere around Bruton, in connection with its hillsides and valleys. Field scale is larger, overlain by an enclosure pattern in most part, and many of the hedgerows that define the pattern are trimmed, with few specimen trees, which adds to the general openness. There is little sense of Bruton in this quadrant, other than where the Kings School playing fields lay to the south of the town's railway station. In most part the landscape pattern is intact and has seen little change in the past 200 years, and with little relationship with urban Bruton, the majority of the area is graded 'high' sensitivity. Exceptions to this grading occur in two instances: first, land between Lusty and Discove Farm, where field scale has been enlarged through hedgerow removal, and second, to the east of Durslade Farm, where orchards have been removed. In both instances, these areas are graded 'moderate' sensitivity.

River Brue Corridor (Character Area C)

4.7 Within the study area, the River Brue passes from a tightly enclosed course as defined by the steep-sided combs to the west, to the gentler containment of the rolling hillsides to the east. It is at the area of transition - between Leggs Bridge and Darkey Lane - that the urban form of the town is the dominant landscape element of the valley, and the watercourse has a clear urban context. Thus land contained between these two points is graded 'low' sensitivity. Below Leggs Bridge, the riverside field has been subject of hedgerow removal and is thus graded 'moderate' sensitivity, as is a field to the east of Darkey Lane, where urban form has disrupted the field pattern. Otherwise, this is a typical river valley of the East Somerset Hills, lined primarily by alder, with ash and willow supplementation; narrow riverside pastures; and a sense of enclosure heightened by the adjacent rail embankments. It is thus graded 'high' sensitivity where removed from the urban edge.

5) Visual sensitivity

5.1 This section identifies the location and extent of the visual envelope that contains Bruton, and the nature of those landscape elements that visually buffer the town from an external perception. It then reviews first the intervening land between the town's edge and its immediate envelope; and second the land outside this envelope; to assess its visual relationship with Bruton, and sensitive receptors, along with identifying valued views and vantage points, and visual detractors. From this a measure of visual sensitivity to development will be graded low, moderate or high. The resultant sensitivity areas are indicated on figure 3 – visual sensitivity.

Visual envelope and containment

5.2 Settled primarily in a valley location, Bruton has in most part remained contained by the enclosing hillsides. It is only where the town has spread along gently rising gradient onto the lower hillsides around the town (as alongside the Frome Road) that its visual profile has become raised. Its visual setting is primarily defined by the hills surrounding the town; which are tight to the urban area within the hills and combes character area to the west, following the heads and upper hillsides of Trendle, Chorley and Combe Hills; whilst to the east the visual envelope is drawn 1-2 km beyond the town, running from Cuckoo Hill to the northeast, over high ground to Discove and Godminster hills to the south, before returning to Lusty Hill above Pitcombe. Whilst these hills provide the wider visual envelope to the town, the setting of the old town core is more immediate to the south, with the Dovecote's knoll and eastward shoulder, and Merrydown Copse containing the majority of close views to the south (the Frome Road housing aside). There are no locations outside the containing hills where the town can be viewed in its entirety, and it is only from Creech Hill Lane to the northwest, and from Selwood to the east, that any indication of Bruton's presence can be noted, namely buildings to the east of the Dovecote (photo 1) and Frome Road's housing, from the respective vantage points.

5.3 Whilst the town's zone of visual influence (as defined by its visual envelope) is closely drawn, the visual profile of the town is further diffused both by folding hillsides, which curve to restrict views from most approaching roads to the west until the town is reached, and the tracery of intervening roadside and field boundary vegetation, as witnessed from the Brewham Road to the east. This further emphasises how "visually discreet" the town is, and how emphatic its valley setting. In determining the potential for future development growth, it should also be noted that the core of the town and much of its edge is contained below the 85 metre contour and this is added as an additional qualifying factor in seeking peripheral sites that accord with the town's visual character in the following assessment.

Visual Sensitivity Of Land Within Bruton's Local Visual Envelope

5.4 Within the town's immediate visual envelope, the main areas of Bruton's periphery are identified as laying between:

- i. Frome Road and the eastward rail line;

- ii. Land north of Marydown Copse, linking to the Dovecote's knoll, and on to Lusty Hill;
- iii. Lusty and Trendle Hills;
- iv. Trendle and Chorley Hills;
- v. Chorley and Combe Hills; and
- vi. Combe Hill and the From Road

5.5 It is earlier noted that land to the east of the Frome Road is the main location that has seen residential development spread beyond the town's immediate setting, and that housing towards the head of the hill has a greater visual profile than the remainder of the town. This situation will be exacerbated by the development of land further to the north of the current housing edge, which will extend up to the edge of the cemetery (photo 2). To the east of the housing, the land falls to a shallow combe and then rises toward Cuckoo Hill: This hilltop and its convex shoulder of land falls south towards the Brewham Road, and provides visual containment of the town as viewed from the northeast, and is graded 'high' sensitivity for its containment value; its rural expression; and as it has a clear visual profile to surrounding vantage points. Exceptions to this grading are the fields in close proximity to the current housing (east) edge, which have a limited visual profile, share inter-visibility with the current housing edge and lay below the 85m contour (except where immediately alongside the Eastfield's housing edge). These areas are graded 'moderate' sensitivity, other than the lower southern end of the field alongside Brue Close, which is graded 'low' sensitivity due to its clear visual relationship with the current urban form - where mixed housing forms abut an ill-defined boundary – plus a lack of natural buffering (photo 3) and its low visual profile when viewed in the wider surround. Between the Brewham Road and the rail line, the Brue valley has a limited visual profile, but runs from a clear rural context towards the town's edge, to a point below Darkey Road where it has urban containment and is little perceived. This area is graded from 'high' to 'low' sensitivity accordingly as it goes through those transitions in its course from a rural context towards the town.

5.6 Other than a small corner field plot that lays alongside the school's playing fields and sports pavilion, and below the hillsides that have a greater visual profile to the south, the fields contained between the Kings School playing fields, Marydown Copse and the B3081 Wincanton Road, are graded high sensitivity, for they are widely perceived from footpaths and road approaches to the north (as from the Evercreech Road – photo 1) have a clear rural expression; and are visually detached from the urban edge and the town's setting. West of Station Road, the hill on which the Dovecote stands, provides both a degree of visual containment of the town (photo 4) and thus separation from the countryside to the southeast. The Dovecote also acts as a focal point in views over the town (photos 8 and 10). Hence this small knoll and its adjacent hillsides are graded 'high' sensitivity, whilst land of low visual profile at its toe facing toward the town is graded 'moderate'. Wooded hillsides rising to the head of Lusty Hill also share a degree of visual prominence and make a clear edge to the town below and are thus graded 'high' sensitivity, whilst a group of small paddocks and a field that lay in the 'saddle' between the two hills, and share a degree of close inter-visibility with development along Godminster Lane, are graded 'moderate'.

5.7 Between Lusty and Trendle, Trendle and Chorley, and Chorley and Combe Hills, a number of common principles are noted:

- a) The hilltops are open and rural in character, and clear to view from surrounding vantage points (photos 5 and 6, taken from the Dovecote) and clearly detached from the town. Forming part of the town's visual envelope when viewed from close quarters, these areas of hilltop and upper hillsides are all graded 'high' sensitivity.
- b) The combes and lower hillsides that only share a low degree of inter-visibility with the urban edge, are only perceptible to a restricted number of vantage points and are predominantly rural in expression, are graded 'moderate' sensitivity, as to either side of the Combe brook and Shute Lane by Tolbury and alongside the Brue above Gants Mill and to the south of Sunny Lane. A single exception is the valley around Gants Mill, which enjoys its own visual setting that whilst not widely viewed, is clearly rural in expression and lays outside the urban edge. It is thus graded 'high' sensitivity.
- c) Finally, there are areas that clearly abut the urban edge: South of Tolbury Lane and north of the High Street lay two small paddocks that are barely perceived, and contained by built form for much of their periphery. This area is graded 'low' sensitivity. Above Higher Backway, fields below Combe Hill lay alongside recent residential development and the school grounds. This edge is sensitive as it rises to the open crown of Combe Hill, has a high level of visibility and is clearly rural in expression, and viewed in the context of the hilltop, backdrop to the town (photo 5). It is thus graded 'moderate' sensitivity, rising to 'high' over the steeper upper hillsides.

5.7 The east-facing hillsides of Combe Hill fall toward a shallow valley between the hill and the Frome Road. In most part, these hillsides form part of the rural backdrop to the town and are clear to local view (photo 5) and are thus graded 'high' sensitivity. Conversely, a single field at the immediate edge of Burrowfield is graded 'low' sensitivity as it is contained by residential form to two sides, and is visually contained from outward perception, whilst land by the urban edge, but rising from the combe base and with a degree of local visibility is graded 'moderate'.

Visual Sensitivity Of Land Outside Bruton's Local Visual Envelope

5.8 The main area to be considered is the land that lays to the south of the Lusty and Dovecote Hills, the B3081 Wincanton Road and Marydown Copse. Other than where a low level of development has occurred in the saddle between Lusty Hill and Jubilee Park (with adjacent land graded 'moderate' para 5.5), the remainder of this land is clearly rural in expression; has a minimal visual correspondence with the town; and its gently rolling hillsides that rise to the wooded skylines of Godminster and Redlynch Woods are clearly visible from vantage points to the north (photos 1, 8 and 10) and are thus graded 'high' sensitivity. Similarly graded are the heads of Trendle, Chorley and Combe Hills to the northwest, which lay outside the town's visual envelope, due to their elevated visual profile; clear rural expression; and detachment from the town. Finally, the valleys that follow the Combe brook and the Wyke Road, whilst having a lesser visual profile, are clearly detached from both the town and its setting, and are emphatically rural in both appearance and context. Hence these areas also are graded 'high' sensitivity.

6) Value and Constraints

6.1 The study to date has already noted a number of landscape and historic features of value, and their intrinsic value will have already been weighted in the report. However, areas of wildlife value (and their margins) plus sites with specific cultural association or high recreational and amenity value are also considered, as are the topographical constraints of floodplain and slope, as factors that may limit potential - and thus a capacity - for development. These elements are indicated on figure 4; values and constraints.

6.2 There are a number of designated wildlife sites in close proximity to Bruton. These include Tolbury Mill county wildlife site (CWS) which is a species-rich unimproved grassland on a south-facing slope above Higher Backway, and Marydown Copse, a small semi-natural woodland alongside the Wincanton road. Godminster Lane Quarry, and Bruton Railway Cutting, are both railside sites of special scientific interest (SSSI's) primarily for their geological interest.

6.3 The historic Dovecote is already noted as both focal and vantage point, and its National Trust ownership ensures a steady trail of visitors to the town. The Leland Trail and McMillan Way national trails pass through the town, arriving from Castle Cary to the west, and continuing east towards the Selwood ridge, whilst the many green lanes and holloways that link to the town appear to be a well-used recreational resource.

6.4 The River Brue and its headwater tributaries have associated areas prone to flooding along their course (identified as flood zone 2 by the EA) particularly over land immediately above and below the town, and throughout the length of the main river. Whilst only a partial constraint to development in the past, it is recognised that floodplain is regarded as an undesirable area for development, and without associated attenuation and balancing features being built into any development, its form, extent and type will be constrained by flood risk.

6.5 Part of residential Bruton has been built over rising ground, and in areas of marked slope, an adverse visual impact of building mass is apparent. It is also accepted that building over steep slopes is contrary to sustainability objectives, for the increased energy and resources expended in detailed cut and fill works; additional import and use of construction materials; and the difficulty of achieving appropriate urban densities, are all negative factors. Visually, building mass over rising ground is difficult to mitigate, and can be an adverse and dominant element in the townscape. Hence slopes in excess of 15° are indicated as placing a constraint on development form, and will be factored into the capacity equation – such areas will primarily include steeper land on the hillsides and in the combes to the west of the town.

7) Landscape Capacity of Urban Periphery

7.1 In sections 4 and 5 of this report, both landscape character and visual sensitivities have been assessed, graded and mapped (figures 2 and 3). A landscape's capacity to accommodate built development will be the direct converse of the overall sensitivity judgement (a matrix representation of both character and visual sensitivities, see appendix 1) unless specific landscape values or development constraints are significant enough to reduce capacity one grade lower. The capacity plan for Bruton resulting from application of the matrix is indicated on figure 5 – landscape capacity.

7.2 The resultant plan indicates the study area divided into 5 broad categorisations of landscape capacity to accommodate built development, graded high; moderate-high; medium; moderate-low; and low, coloured red; orange; yellow; green and blue respectively. As the aim of this study is to identify land that has the capacity to be developed without too adverse an impact upon the landscape resource, it follows that those areas categorised as high and moderate-high capacity, and in a credible relationship with the town, should be investigated as potential development sites.

7.3 Two potential areas for development can be identified on the landscape capacity plan, being:

- i. Land to the east of Eastfields/Brue Avenue; and
- ii. Land to the west of Darkey Lane.

7.4 Area (i) indicates a single field immediately to the side of Bruton's current east residential edge, which has established a stark and unsympathetic boundary line. The land falls south and east from the current edge towards a robust field boundary, beyond which lays open countryside. Sitting alongside a lengthy residential boundary, additional housing would appear to be the most appropriate form of development in this location and would sensibly round off Bruton's eastward extent against a clear natural boundary. Whilst indicated as having only 'moderate' capacity for development, a field to the south of Brewham Road, opposite this site, could also be factored into a larger residential allocation, as it is well related to area (i) and also abuts Bruton along its western edge.

7.5 A single floodplain pasture lays to the west of Darkey Lane, contained by the Brue and a parallel side channel, with housing to the north and the trading estate to the south. Laying wholly within the flood plain, it is unlikely that this land could be considered as having a potential for development. However, with improved flood alleviation works now undertaken upstream, the possibility of employment use is not ruled out by this report.

8) Outline Proposals

8.1 Two potential areas of development have been identified by the landscape capacity plan, and their potential uses outlined in the previous section, paras 7.3 - 7.5. This final section of the report provides further guidance on the form of development acceptable in landscape terms, any necessary mitigation, and an indication of the potential extent of development.

8.2 To the east of Frome Road's current housing, a single field of an area approximately 5.2 ha is noted as being appropriate for residential growth, with a potential to raise this area to 7.4 ha by the inclusion of the field to the south of the site. An allocation here would be reliant upon the existing landscape surround to provide containment, although land within the site would need to be set aside for additional planting – to break up a massing effect over rising ground – and to provide recreational facilities. Hence a package of 1.4 ha for structural landscape and recreational space would leave approximately 6 ha available for residential development. Housing densities are proposed to be within a range of 35-40 dph, to satisfactorily respond to the landscape context, and to accommodate and work with the moderate gradient across the site.

8.3 Alongside the River Brue, should any form of development be allowed in the flood plain, then a field of 2.0 ha size may provide employment opportunity. The area available may well need to be less to allow for flood alleviation and building extent may also be limited in response to flooding concerns. The landscape containment provided by the existing woody waterside vegetation would be retained and supplemented, to buffer local perception of any site.

8.4 In summary, the following areas are put forward as having potential for development:

- | | | |
|-----|------------------|---|
| i. | E of Frome Road | 6 ha residential (35-40 dph)
1.4 ha recreation and structural
landscape provision |
| ii. | W of Darkey Lane | > 2 ha employment |

8.5 The above sites offer limited opportunity for employment expansion, but a potential for an additional 6.0 ha of residential land, which if built within a range of 35-40 dwellings per hectare, equates to an additional 225 houses (at net density). Beyond this, scope for further development is limited. And whilst the capacity plan indicates potential growth areas that would further elongate the settlement from its centre, the prime site is closely related to the urban edge, contained within credible landscape boundaries, and avoids land of landscape sensitivity, thus meeting with the prime objectives of this landscape study.

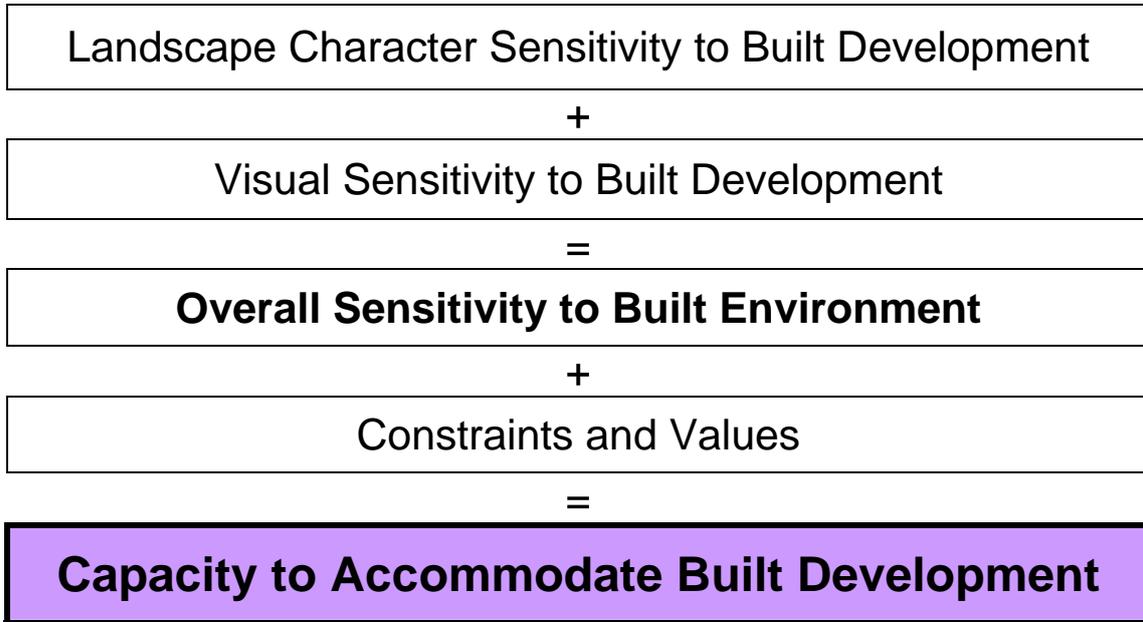
Robert Archer
12 June 2008

Peripheral landscape study – Bruton

Appendix 1 - landscape capacity matrix

Landscape Capacity Matrix:

A landscape's capacity to accommodate built development will be the direct converse of the overall sensitivity judgement (a matrix representation of both character and visual sensitivities) unless specific landscape values or development constraints are significant enough to reduce capacity one grade lower.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER SENSITIVITY	Low	Moderate	Moderate High	High Capacity
	Moderate	Moderate Low	Moderate Capacity	Moderate High
	High	Low Capacity	Moderate Low	Moderate
		High	Moderate	Low
		VISUAL SENSITIVITY		

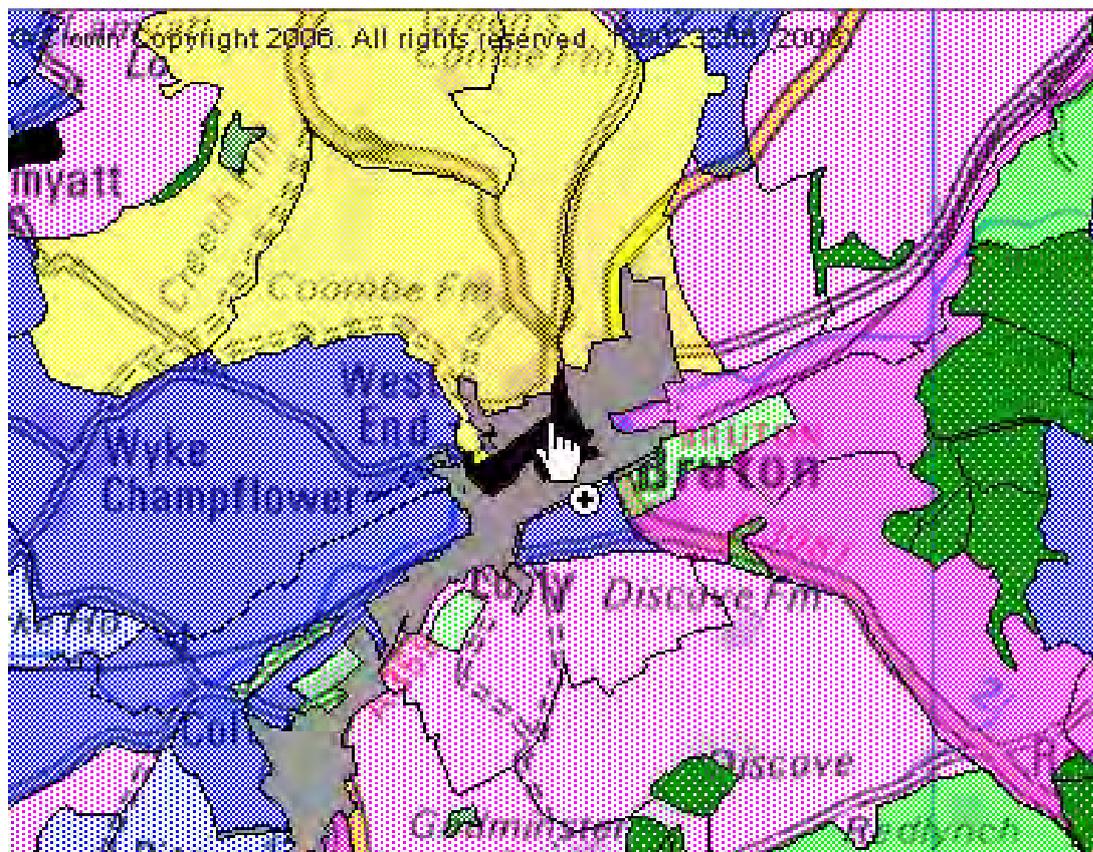
Landscape Capacity Matrix

Peripheral landscape study – Bruton

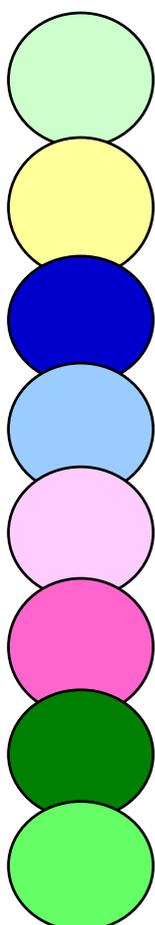
Appendix 2 - historic landscape character

Historic landscape characterisation – Bruton

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key:



Unenclosed pasture

Anciently Enclosed Land pre-17th century. General field size, 6-12ha. Between 25% and 50% boundary loss since 1905.

Anciently Enclosed Land modified 17th to 19th century. General field size, 6-12ha. Less than 25% boundary loss since 1905.

Anciently Enclosed Land modified 19th to 21st century. General field size, 6-12ha. More than 50% boundary loss since 1905.

Recently Enclosed Land 17th to 18th century. General field size 6-12ha. Between 25% and 50% boundary loss since 1905.

Recently Enclosed Land 18th to 21st century. General field size, 3-6ha. Less than 25% boundary loss since 1905.

Replanted ancient woodland (as defined by English Nature).

Historic Parkland

Peripheral landscape study – Bruton

Appendix 3 - photos



Photo 1: From Evercreech Hill, looking southeast toward Bruton, of which there is no perception of the town's core.



Photo 2: Looking southwest over recent housing alongside the Frome road, from the town's cemetery. Housing is planned for the intervening land.



Photo 3: Looking northwest toward housing at the town's east edge, from the Brewham Road approach.



photo 4: Looking WNW from the side of the B3081 Wincanton Road, with the Dovecote a focal point whilst little of Bruton is apparent.



photo 5: Looking north over the town from the Dovecote toward Combe Hill, noting housing over the lower ground and gentle hillside gradient.



photo 6: From the Dovecote looking NW over the town toward Evercreech Hill



photo 7: From the side of Trendle Hill looking south toward ribbon development along the valley linking with Pitcombe.



photo 8: By Huish Lane looking southeast over Tolbury. Little of the town is evident whilst the Dovecote draws the eye.



photo 9: From Tolbury Lane the town is well buffered by steep hillsides and mature tree presence.



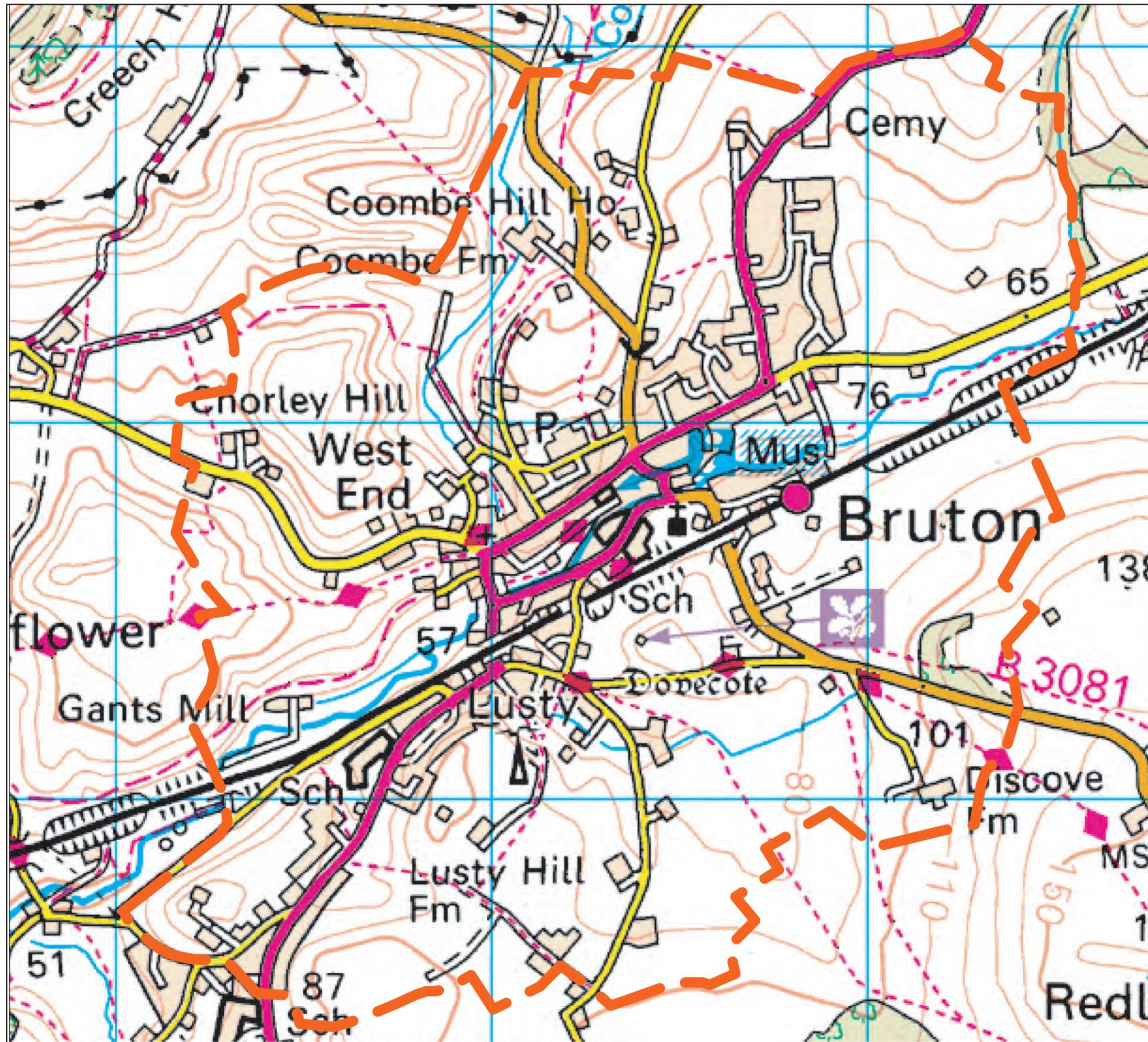
photo 10: Above Higher Backway looking SSE over town. Again, the Dovecote is the prime visual element to draw the eye.

Peripheral landscape study – Bruton

Appendix 4 - plans

Figure 1 - Context

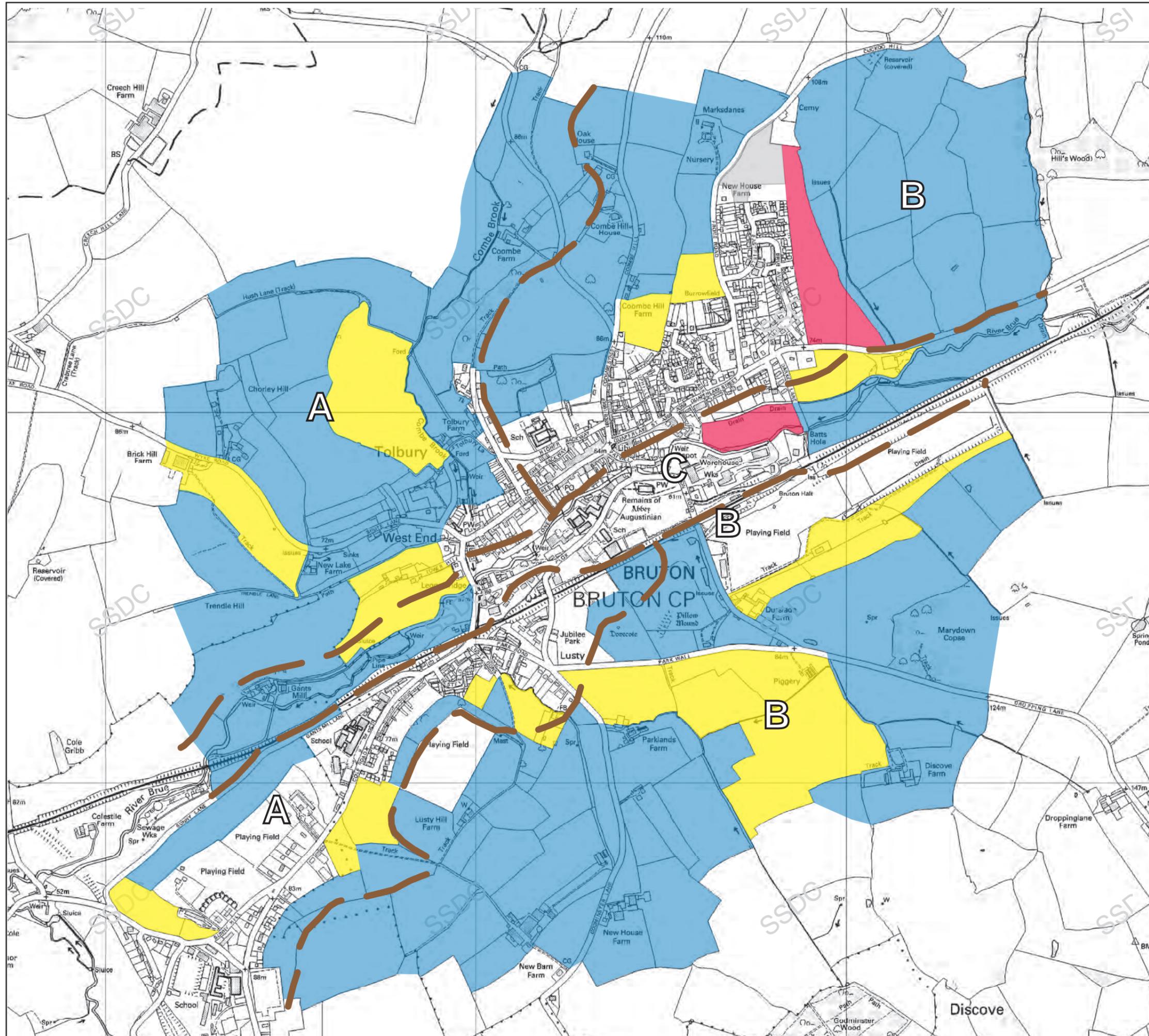
Bruton



scale 1:10,000 @ A3

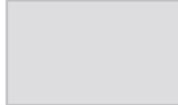
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Figure 2 - Landscape Sensitivity Bruton



 Local Landscape Character Areas

- A - Hills and Combes
- B - Rolling hills
- C - Brue Corridors

 Local Plan allocations & development sites

 Area of low landscape sensitivity

 Area of moderate landscape sensitivity

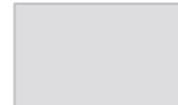
 Area of high landscape sensitivity

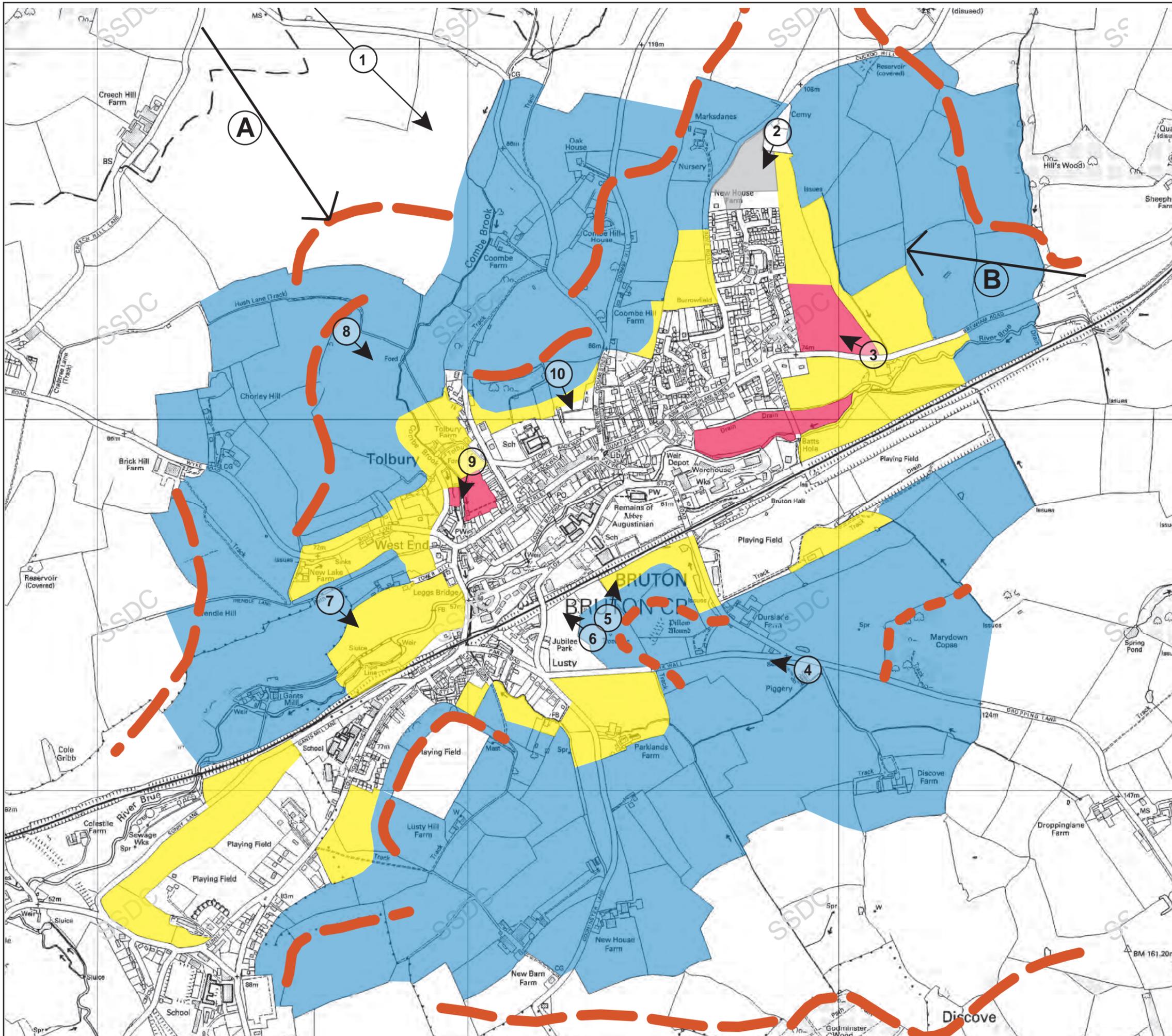
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Figure 3 - Visual Sensitivity Bruton

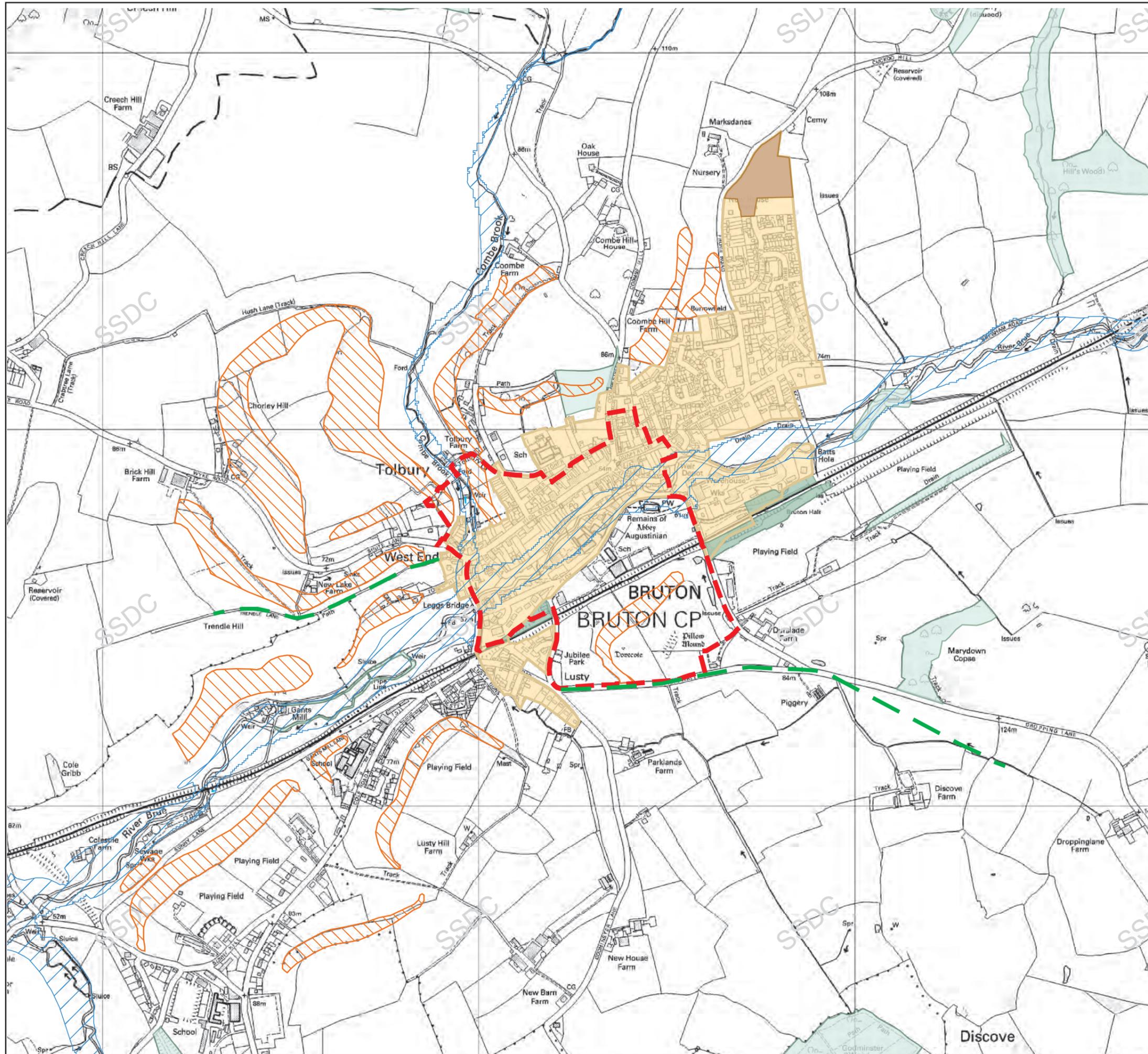
-  Prime line of Visual Containment
-  Secondary Line of Visual Containment
-  Photo Vantage Points
-  Line of distant viewpoint
-  Long Distance Views
 -  from Crech Hill
 -  from Selwood
-  Local Plan housing & employment allocations
-  Area of low visual sensitivity
-  Area of moderate visual sensitivity
-  Area of high visual sensitivity



scale 1:10,000 @ A3

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Figure 4 - Value & Constraints Bruton



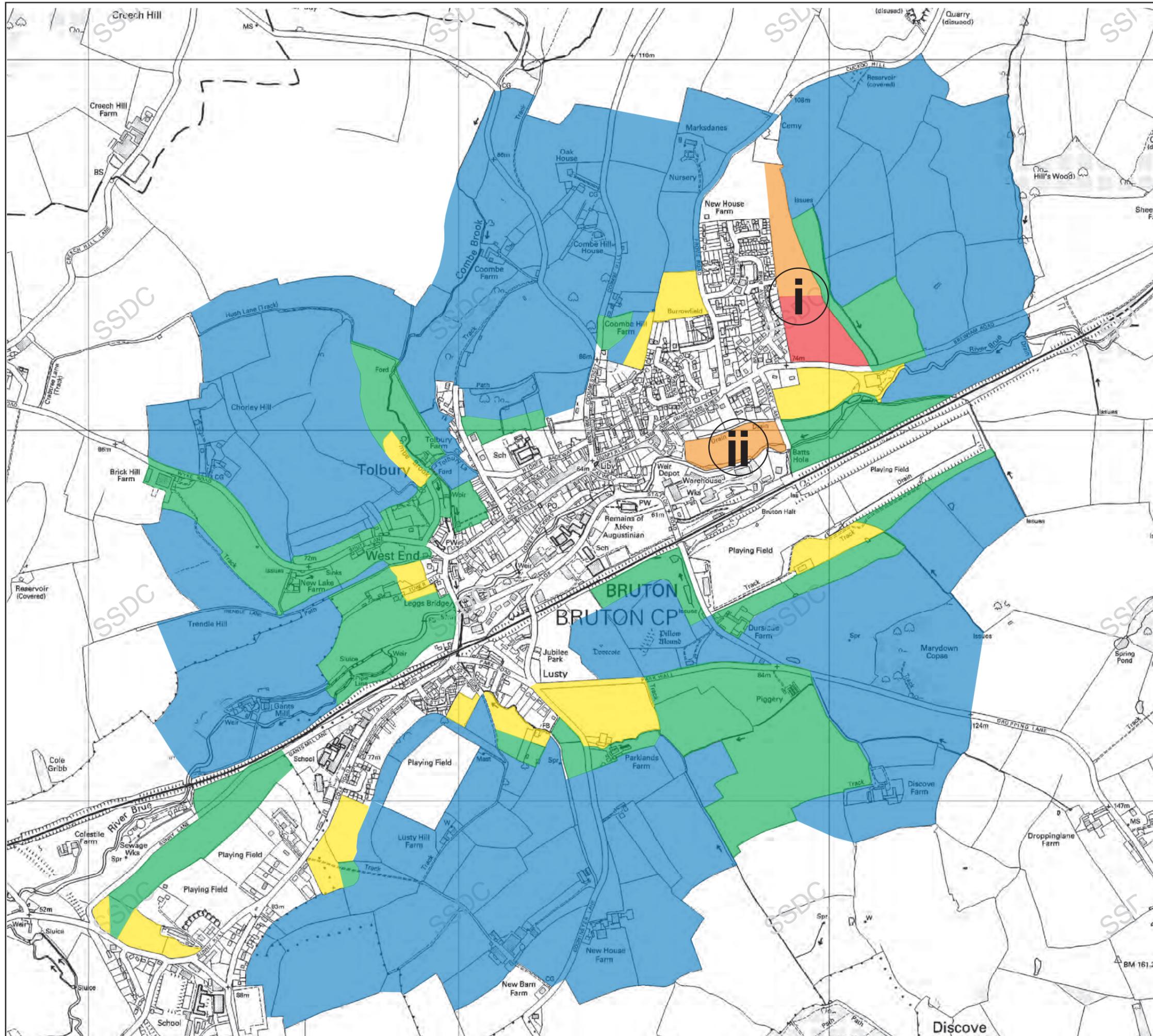
-  Development Area
 -  Local Wildlife Sites
 -  National Wildlife Sites
 -  Conservation Area
 -  Development Allocations
 -  Flood Zone
 -  Areas of pronounced slope
 -  Recreational Routes
- (The above categories as defined in the South Somerset Local Plan)

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Figure 5 - Landscape Capacity Bruton



-  Landscape with a high capacity to accommodate built development
-  Landscape with a moderate-high capacity to accommodate built development
-  Landscape with a moderate capacity to accommodate built development
-  Landscape with a moderate-low capacity to accommodate built development
-  Landscape with a low capacity to accommodate built development
-  Potential development areas

scale 1:10,000 @ A3



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