



Peripheral landscape study – Ilchester

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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 15 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 Ilchester.

2) The settlement

2.1 Ilchester is a small market town that lays at the eastern fringe of the Somerset moors, concentrated by the point at which the River Yeo crosses the alignment of the historic Fosse Way, and bounded to the west by the modern alignment of the A303 trunk road. The town lays between Yeovil, some 7km. to the south, and Somerton, a similar distance to the north. It is a settlement of Iron Age origins, become renowned as a small Roman fort settled by the Fosse Way on the south bank of the Yeo, and was briefly county town of Somerset in the twelfth century. The town has seen little growth until recent years, now having a population of a little over 2000 residents.

2.2 The settlement is stretched along the Fosse Way axis, with the main commercial area of the town concentrated at the southern end of the settlement by High and Church Streets, which is also the historic core of the town. The prime area of residential growth lays around this core, but is linked along the Fosse Way axis to a second nucleus of growth that has developed on the gently rising ground by the Somerton Road to the north, and this location has proven to be the main growth area of the town in the past 50 years, primarily to provide homes for RNAS Yeovilton personnel.

2.3 The immediate landscape setting of the settlement is defined by the edge of the open moors to both south and west of the town, whilst a low shoulder of land that defines the southern side of the Yeo river valley lays to the east, rising toward Limington. These features broadly contain the spread of the town and form part of its immediate rural edge. To the north the setting has become less well-defined, with the town having spread beyond its previous containment, as offered by the low rise of ground above Northover, leaving the raised section of the A303 road and Puddi Moor to provide a wider setting in this quarter.

Identification of the study area

2.4 Based upon the methodology outlined in para 1.3, the extent of the Ilchester study area is broadly defined by field boundaries that run north from the A303/A37 interchange, external and parallel to the alignment of the A303 to the west of the settlement, before swinging east to cross the Somerton road; A303; and Fosse Way by Moorlands Farm in close succession. It then follows field boundaries south to cross the Yeovilton road east of Costello Hill, before heading toward Limington's west edge on the far side of the Yeo valley. Crossing the Limington road immediately east of Glanfield Terrace, the study area line then heads west toward Ilchester mead, crossing the A37 Yeovil road above Three Oaks Farm, before rejoining the A303 interchange to complete the limit of the study area, which 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 Ilchester at the junction of *character area 140 – Yeovil Scarplands* and *areas 142/143 – Levels and Moors/Mid Somerset Hills*. The key characteristics of these areas as noted by the assessment are:

Yeovil scarplands -

- 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.*

Levels and Moors/Mid Somerset Hills

- i) Flat, open landscape of wet pasture, arable and wetland divided up by wet ditches or 'rhynes'.*
- ii) Absence of dispersed farmsteads or any buildings on levels and moors. Nucleated settlements on ridges/islands.*
- iii) Surrounded, and divided up, by low hills, ridges and islands which form distinctive skylines.*
- iv) Peat working and nature reserves contrasting with the rectilinear planned landscape of the Moors.*
- v) Sparse tree cover on Levels and Moors contrasting with woodland, hedges and orchards of surrounding hills.*
- vi) Sparsely populated Moors but settlements common on hills, ridges and islands.*
- vii) Historic landscape strongly evident in features ranging from prehistoric trackways and lake villages to postmedieval enclosures and peat working.*
- viii) International nature-conservation significance for wetland, waders and waterfowl. Flooding in winter over large areas.*

3.2 The full descriptive text of both the Somerset Levels and Moors, and the Mid Somerset Hills character areas is available on the Natural England website, http://www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/CC/south_west/somerset_levels_and_moors_mid_somerset_hills.asp with the text of the Yeovil Scarplands character area similarly found on that website, http://www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/CC/south_west/yeovil_scarplands.asp

3.3 Typical of Ilchester and its surrounding landscape are the following extracts:

Levels and Moors/Mid Somerset Hills

The strong planned element in the Levels and Moors landscape is evident in the towns and villages. Langport, for instance, is laid out along a single street and many of the villages are surrounded by strip fields.

The low ridges, hills and islands within the Moors have dense networks of lanes and footpaths connecting numerous villages and hamlets: trackways lead to farms and run down to the edge of the Levels. Although Blue Lias is quite frequently used, a variety of other materials have been used in older buildings including oolite, sandstone and conglomerate, whilst many 19th century buildings are in brick and pantile produced by the local industry centred on Bridgwater or imported from Flanders.

The land is predominantly used for agriculture, with dairying being the major industry on the Levels and Moors and a greater diversity of farming on the higher ground. On the Moors, there are bands of willow-dominated scrub around peat workings and within nature reserves. Clumps of trees are also present around farmsteads and decoy ponds. The land is mainly pasture but there are some areas of arable cropping. The predominant field pattern is rectilinear, bounded by deep, wide, wet 'rhynes'.

The Moors lie within the inland basins formed by the hills. Many parts are largely treeless and are dominated by the strong rectilinear pattern of the 'rhynes': the sense of a planned landscape reclaimed from wetland is all pervading. However, the abiding character of the Moors is a predominantly pasture, wetland landscape of long views across a foreground of 'rhynes', pollards and occasional withy beds to varied, wooded hills. There are virtually no buildings.

Yeovil scarplands -

Rivers like the Parrett and Yeo drain from the higher ground of the Scarplands cutting an intricate pattern of irregular hills and valleys, which open out to the moorland basins.

Between the scarps and ridges, the clay vales are mostly gently rolling landscapes of medium-size fields with a dominant field pattern extending up and over the rising ground. There are also areas with a strongly rectilinear pattern, which are mostly arable, and others where hedges are low or non-existent and trees largely absent. Here open fields survived until very recently and the landscape has been very open in character since well before the late Middle-Ages. Streamside willow pollards and alder provide the principal vegetation and streamside pasture survives, threading through many of the vales.

Although the area has many settlements, the villages and hamlets tend to lie in the valleys. The farmsteads are generally on the valley sides, 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, which grew from Saxon burghs to become market towns but still remain small and rural. There are small hamlets and villages and the use of local stone in the older buildings is a unifying feature within the area. Some of the settlements have substantial and often dominant churches, which serve to emphasise the significance of the stone.

The land is primarily in agricultural use with a mixture of arable, dairying and stock rearing. Arable predominates on the good, fertile soils like the Yeovil Sands around South Petherton. A very wide range of crops is grown and there are remnant orchards, commonly

lined with poplar shelterbelts. Grassland, however, is the principal land cover, with a range from lush, improved pastures in the valley bottoms to steep hillside pastures.

The local context:

3.4 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 Ilchester area indicates much of the surrounding land to be recently enclosed (18th – 21st centuries). It is included at appendix 2, and where pertinent informs the landscape sensitivity appraisal, section 4.0.

3.5 SSDC undertook a detailed assessment of district-wide character; 'The Landscape of South Somerset' in 1993. This study places Ilchester and its wider surrounds within visual character region (VCR) '**Central plain, Moors and river basins**'. Each VCR is sub-divided into landscape character areas (LCAs) and the following **Lower lias clay vales, Rivers and Floodplains** LCA covers the Ilchester study area. It is described thus;

This area is the most extensive of all the landscape character zones discussed here. It extends from the moors near Long Load north-east to the edge of the district at Babcary and south-east to Rimpton, encompassing the floodplains of the rivers Cary, Yeo and part of the Brue.

The geology and soils are perhaps more complex than first impressions suggest. Ancient river gravel and "head" deposits of sandy loams and limestone gravel create low undulations over the Lower Lias black bituminous shales of the low vales.

South of the Sparkford ridge lies the Vale of Ilchester. Another broad area of mixed farming, with arable mainly located on the slightly drier clay ridges or islands. Hedges are generally kept low and hedgerow trees are fairly infrequent.

The main visual features are the large settled "island" of Marston Magna and there are some significant blocks of woodland around Chilton Cantelo. The open 'feel' of the area is well described:

"From the south of the parish one is given a wide panoramic vista of the surrounding country, whilst in the centre of the village one is comforted with the feeling of homeliness and security." (Rimpton Parish Council 1991)

To the west the homogeneity of the clay vale landscape is interrupted by the great sea of concrete and outsize scale of buildings at RNAS Yeovilton. The sound of revving aircraft is a constant intrusion.

Ilchester and to the west the landscape is overtly concerned with the need to keep dry. There are a great number of ditches and rhynes, often reed filled, and fewer hedges. The River Yeo has been straightened and embanked.

The River Yeo is also a very attractive, ecologically sound river, particularly in its Mudford-Ilchester stretch. It is alder and willow-lined with many lily covered pools and thick stands of reed. West of Ilchester the river has been tamed by floodbanks anonymous within the expanse of grazing meadows of Kings Moor and Wet Moor.

3.6 Ilchester lays at the strategic crossing of the River Yeo by the Fosse Way. It marks the eastern extent of the central moorland, into which drain the river's Yeo,

Parrett and Isle. At this point, the course of the Yeo is narrowed by low rising hills, to the north and southeast of the historic town's centre. It is this transition from moorland to rolling vale that enables the study area to be subdivided into three local character areas to reflect this local variation in landscape character, to better facilitate the subsequent sensitivity evaluation:

- i) **'North low hills'**, covering the low-laying hills that rise gently north from the valley associated with the River Yeo;
- ii) The **'Yeo valley floodplain'**, which covers the Northover area and the main town and its low laying surrounds, and;
- iii) **'Limington Hill'** laying on rising ground to the east of Ilchester, and defining the setting of Limington village to its west.

3.7 The resultant 3 local 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 Ilchester'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 the 'Lower lias clay vales, Rivers and Floodplains' local landscape character area as covering the study area. This is subdivided according to local variation in landscape type. Taking these subdivisions in turn (as identified para 3.6) the first local character area to be considered is that of the north low hills that cover the northern quadrant of the countryside around Ilchester.

North Low Hills (Character Area A)

4.2 This local character area includes the main growth area of Ilchester over the past 50 years, in the form of housing associated with RNAS Yeovilton, which has spread north over the low hillsides facing the town, onto the broad head of the hill bisected by the B 3151 Somerton Road. It is this housing block, and the A303 road corridor to its west, which are the dominant built elements in this character area, with the dual carriageway road incising through these hills at a level trajectory in its route across the South Somerset plain.

4.3 To the west of the A303 lays open countryside, gently undulating arable land overlain by a late enclosure field pattern of trimmed hedgerows, with occasional specimen trees. Little change to the historic field pattern has occurred, and the regularly patterned character of the open farmland is relatively intact. With the wooded corridor of the A303's embankments providing the area with a strong degree of detachment from Ilchester, to thus place it in a clear rural context, this area is graded 'high' sensitivity. To the east of the A303 corridor, the landscape is similarly open, and it is only the tributary drains and green lanes that bring any strong woody incident to this traditionally open landscape. At the town's north edge, urban growth is delineated and contained by an ancient hedgeline, and the adjoining fields to the north clearly tie into the wider rural pattern of open fields. Yet noting these adjacent fields to have been enlarged through historic hedgerow removal, this general area is graded 'moderate' sensitivity. Hedgerow and orchard removal has also occurred within the field network north-east of Hainbury Farm, and whilst there is little outward expression of this change in relation to wider landscape character, this loss of a tighter field matrix by the town's edge also informs a 'moderate' grading.

Yeo Valley Floodplain (Character Area B)

4.4 To the west, south and immediately east of the town's historic core, the land lays flat, and is periodically inundated by floodwater, primarily during the winter months. The course of the River Yeo through this open moorland is demarcated by a sinuous line amongst pasture fields, reinforced to the east of the town by the presence of riverside trees, in most part alder, whilst below Northover and to the west of Ilchester, it is the pre-occupation of flood defence that is most apparent, in the form of raised embankments at the river's sides. Engineered embankments similarly emphasise the presence of the A303, particularly where linking with the A37 where the latter is raised to bridge the A303 to the west of the town. Tree planting over these embankments, and at the roadsides, helps to soften these structures, and delineate the routes by their linear expression of mixed plantings.

4.5 The landscape around Hainbury Mill is intricate in scale, containing a mix of small fields and copse plantings, whilst the course of the mill stream remains in place. To the south of Hainbury, the fields are open and primarily pasture, with the hedgerows trimmed low, allowing a sense of a moorland characteristic to sweep up close to the town's built edge on the town's east side. The field pattern is generally consistent with the historic layout, hence with much of this landscape typical of the Central Plain's character, it is graded as being of 'high' sensitivity. Exceptions to this grading are to the immediate edge of the housing areas, where either erosion of the hedgerow edge has occurred or the housing line has encroached into fields. This erosion has been compounded to the immediate east edge of Lyster Close, where a traditional orchard has been lost, thus this site is graded 'low' sensitivity, whilst adjacent areas are graded 'moderate'. A single field by Colebow Lane has been expanded in scale due to internal hedge removal, this is similarly graded 'moderate'.

4.6 Ilchester's historic open aspect to the south is now severed by the A37 link, leaving a narrow strip of land between road and urban edge that is dominated by both built features, and is thus graded 'low' sensitivity. South of the road, the open moorland extends to the town's edge, its character intact and expressed by the trapezoidal cut of narrow ryhnes, and trimmed hedges. This area is graded 'high' sensitivity, other than where adjacent road structures are raised and thus dominant elements; historic hedgelines have been removed; or built structures are obtrusive elements within the open sweep of the moorland. Such locations are graded 'moderate'. To the west of the town, and contained by its built form and the line of the A303, the Yeo divides a large area of pasture, in turn sub-divided by trimmed hedgelines laid out in enclosure pattern. Trees characterise the town's edge by Northover, and alongside the river's right bank, below the Fosse Way crossing, otherwise the land is open in character. However, trees have been removed from the river's edge to the west of the town, though the traditional field pattern is intact, thus the area is graded 'medium' sensitivity. Adjacent the RNAS housing, the field pattern has been encroached upon by this housing over rising ground, to thus be a dominant element alongside this part of the open fields, and is also graded 'moderate'. Similarly graded is the portion of 'Great Yard' field immediately alongside Abbots and Priory road's housing, for whilst it is contained by flood embankment, housing has encroached the open field in this quadrant. Finally, the walled enclosure below Ilchester Bridge is also graded 'moderate' to acknowledge its semi-derelict state.

4.7 The remainder of the character area which lays to the west of the A303, has little connection to Ilchester, and quite clearly relates to the wider moorland pattern of rectilinear fields, tree-lined droves, and the regular pattern of rhymes feeding into the Yeo. Typical of the wider moorland landscape, this area is graded 'high' sensitivity, other than where the road embankments are a dominant element, as above New Spittles Farm, and to the southeast of Southmead Farm, where recent landfill has created an incongruous landform, These areas are graded 'moderate' sensitivity.

Limington Hill (Character Area C)

4.8 Over rising ground to the east of Ilchester's historic core, Limington Hill marks the transition from the open moor to the west, toward the gently undulating vale of Ilchester. The hill is overlain by small-scale enclosure hedgerow pattern, which is robust and well-expressed, and contains a mix of small arable fields; pasture paddocks; and a remnant orchard. In good condition, this area is graded 'high' sensitivity, other than where built development has encroached into the field pattern to the side of the Limington Road: Such locations are graded 'moderate'.

5) Visual sensitivity

5.1 This section identifies the location and extent of the visual envelope that contains Ilchester, and the nature of those landscape and topographical 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 Ilchester and prime 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 Ilchester is settled toward the eastern end of the South Somerset moors, with its historic town core at the same general level as the moorland, whilst the 20th century RNAS housing to the north rises little more than 10 metres above the base of the Yeo valley. Yet this level is sufficiently elevated for the town to be visible across both floodplain and open moorland to the south and northeast of the town. It is from vantage points within these quadrants that the town has its widest visual profile, whilst to the both east and west, perception of the town's built presence is primarily limited to local vantage points.

5.3 Ilchester's moorland setting in the base of the Yeo vale has a mid-distance surround of hills to south, east and north, and it is this surround of low hills that define the town's visual envelope. From Ham Hill Country Park and St Michaels Hill, Montacute, circa 6 km SSE of the site, the town can be glimpsed as one of many settlements within the Central Plain, with the main visual element being the line of the A303 running to the west side of the town, whilst the bulk and reflective cladding of the Ilchester Cheese Factory at the town's northwest edge, acts to draw the eye to the town. The extension of this high ground across Yeovil's northern edge continues the southern extent of the envelope, which then swings east through the Dorset northwest escarpment to head through Corton Down toward Cadbury Castle. At an average distance of 6km, little of the town is visible from the east, and it is only the towers, large buildings and runways of RNAS Yeovilton that enable an orientation toward Ilchester, where the town's northern block of housing is barely discernible. In both instances to south and east, whilst this high ground defines the outer edge of the ZVI, much of the intervening land lays at a lower level, and is separated from the study area by woody hedgelines; small woodlands; and an imperceptible rise and fall in the topography. Thus there is no perception of the town until in close proximity (generally less than 1 km) of its edge from these quarters.

5.4 Whilst the visual envelope theoretically extends along the head of the East Somerset Hill's west-facing escarpment toward Castle Cary, the town's low elevation and distance enable it to escape notice. Instead, it is the head of Camel Hill that marks the credible extent of the town's wider visual envelope to the northeast. As from Corton Down, it is the housing on the town's northern shoulder that is the prime expression of its presence, with the greater part of the town hidden

behind this low hill, and the tree lines at the town's edge which provide diffuse cover. From Babcary and other settlements to the north-east of the town, only low trajectory views are possible, which have no sight of the town until within 2km of the settlement. Yet again, it is the town's northern shoulder and the housing on its skyline that provides the only indication of the town's presence, and this remains the case when viewing the town from Kingsdon Hill and Somerton's South Hill, 3 and 5km to the north and northwest respectively. However, from the open moorland of the west, the low trajectory of the land does not enable any long-distance view of the town, and it is only where approaching Ilchester from footpaths to its immediate west that the town becomes evident through the activity of the A303's traffic, whilst the carriageway's roadside planting provides a diffuse visual buffer of the town's edge.

5.5 The town's wider visual envelope (which defines its ZVI-zone of visual influence) can thus be drawn well beyond the study area to run east along the Yeovil Sands escarpment from Ham Hill, then north to Cadbury Castle, before turning west to join with Camel Hill. From all directions it is the A303 and A37 carriageways that the eye can follow, primarily to focus on building form at the town's north edge. The ZVI then becomes less distinct, for intervening tree blocks and hedge lines deflect clear view till in close proximity at Podimore and by Cary Fitzpaine, thereafter the higher ground of the hills to the north and northwest again gain a prospect of the town's north edge. The western quadrant again has a limited ZVI, again coming close to the town where the diffuse cover of the A303's roadside trees can provide a visual buffer in the summer, whilst winter containment is provided by blocks of alder carr, willow plantation and unmanaged hedgelines circa 1km further to the west.

5.6 Whilst the town's ZVI is widely drawn, it is also noted that a combination of topographical and woody landscape features provide a level of both local visual containment, and a definition of the town's immediate setting. The roadside tree planting which runs alongside the A303 is already noted for its capacity to visually buffer and contain the town to the west, and to a lesser degree the planting at the side of the A37 link performs a similar role to the south. Local views from the southeast are filtered through the double hedgerows that define Colebow Lane and the study area's extent, whilst the rising ground of Limington Hill and its robust hedgerow system provide a local visual buffer to the east, which merge with the River Yeo's tree lines by Limington that help filter a perception of Ilchester from this southwest quadrant.

5.7 It has been noted that the housing over the rising ground to the north draws the eye from all quarters of the ZVI. However, within close proximity to the north, whilst indicating the presence of Ilchester beyond, this skyline edge also obscures the remainder of the town and thus provides a degree of containment. Consequently, this higher ground to the north, which runs through Troubridge Park, is highlighted for its historical visual containment provided to the town, but it is accepted that the local ZVI lays beyond Costello Hill and the northeast extent of the study area.

Visual profile of Ilchester's immediate edge

5.8 Within the local visual envelope, the main open areas of Ilchester's periphery can thus be identified as:

- i) land laying inside the A303 and A37 link road lines;
- ii) land to the east of Ilchester, from south of Limington Road, to Costello Hill, and;
- iii) land north of Ilchester, between the A303 and the Yeovilton road.

5.9 The road corridors of the A303 and A37 link, with their associated roadside lines of tree planting, are already noted as providing a clear line of visual containment, and as such provide an emphatic local setting for the town. Within this area, there is a high level of intervisibility between the town's edge, and the local footpaths which run south and west from the town's edge, and views from these paths see the town as sharing the vale base, other than the developed low hillsides that marginally rise from the vale to the north, which are host to 20th century housing form and the 'Ilchester Cheese' employment site. Whilst these vantage points share the same context as the town, there is a degree of separation of moorland from built form both below Conygar Lane, which is provided by the mature tree stands around Northover, and to the south of the Yeo, as defined by flood bank containment and assisted by low-elevation housing at the edge of the town's historic core (photos 10 and 11). Hence the major (southern) part of this area is graded 'medium' sensitivity. The northernmost fields however, have direct view onto the low rise of housing mass, and share the same gentle rise of ground and visual context (photo 9). This area is thus graded 'low' sensitivity, as is the land between the A37 link and Pill Bridge Lane, which is viewed directly against the town's built edge (photo 12) to thus appear part of the urban context.

5.10 The Liberty Trail is a regional recreational footpath (and thus a sensitive receptor) that traverses the vale to the east of the historic core of Ilchester before rising over Limington Hill from where it can view the whole of the town in its moorland setting, at the edge of the North Low Hills. From this path and adjacent vantage points, whilst the edge of the town is clearly seen in open views across the vale, it is sub-dominant to the southward sweep of floodplain (photos 5 and 6). Mature plantings around Northover and Hainbury Mill also provide a clear visual buffer between these eastern vantage points and the town (photo 4) and with this separation emphasised by the clear rural pattern of pasture and hedgerows over the intervening ground to the fore of the town, the majority of this area is graded 'high' sensitivity. Land closer to the urban edge is subject of a greater level of intervisibility, and is contained between strong topographical features – such as the fields west of the Bearley brook – and the town's SE edge, thus emphasising the relationship of this land to the town's built form, whilst having a reduced visual profile within the wider floodplain. Such areas are thus graded 'moderate' sensitivity, other than where immediately abutted on two sides by housing, as to the north of Kingshams (photo 7) where sensitivity is assessed as being 'low'.

5.11 As noted previously, it is the housing mass that rises over land between the Somerton Road and the northward projection of the Fosse Way, which has broken through the topographic containment of the town previously provided the low

northern hills, and now expresses the town's presence to a wider area to the north and northeast. This hilltop spread of housing form is a strongly expressed built element, and with few landscape features present to buffer its presence (photo 1) there is clear intervisibility between this part of the town and its immediate surrounds. Hence land in immediate proximity and at the same general elevation to the north of the town is graded 'low' sensitivity, as is land immediately east of the housing's Fosse Way edge, which is seen to be contained toward the town's edge by the rising ground of Costello Hill, whilst laying immediately below the housing skyline (photo 2) and characterised by building form (Hainbury Farm – photos 3 and 4). The outward projections of these surrounding fields spread toward Puddi Moor and Costello Hill, and are seen from both the Liberty Trail and local roads, as providing a transition of the town's edge to open countryside, and to lay beyond the immediate context of the town's periphery. These intervening areas are thus graded 'moderate' sensitivity, whilst land beyond their edge, which is clearly rural and undeveloped in character, with clear vegetative boundaries and viewed as falling into the wider countryside context, is graded 'high' sensitivity.

Visual profile of land outside Ilchester's immediate visual envelope

5.12 There remains a minor extent of the study area that lays outside the town's immediate envelope. Most clearly divided from the town is that land to the west of the A303 road corridor, where the tree belts to both sides of the carriageway are now sufficiently developed to block outer lines of view from the west toward the town, and provide a line that clearly defines an edge to open rural moorland to the west. Even when the visual buffer is weakened where the Somerton road crossing links with the town (much of the planting is here in a cutting) there remains sufficient cover to maintain a distinct visual and land-use division between Ilchester and its wider surrounds. Hence all land to the west is graded 'high' sensitivity.

5.13 Planting alongside the A37 link to the south of the town lays a similar role in separating the town from its wider rural context, yet here there are indicators of the town's presence in the lengthy terraces of Ilchester Mead (photo 13) and the pavilion and other sports paraphernalia that expresses a recreational use. Seen against the filtered backdrop of the town's southern edge from the Fosse Way and Liberty Trail's southern approaches, yet clearly a part of the wider moorland, these areas are graded 'moderate' sensitivity, whilst the moorland proper is graded 'high' sensitivity. Finally land on Limington Hill is sufficiently divorced from the town; seen as laying over a separate topographical unit of the low hills that define the River Yeo's valley sides; removed from Ilchester's vale base context; and clearly rural in expression, to thus be graded 'high' sensitivity. Exceptions to this general grading only occur where isolated development has occurred by Limington Road, with such limited areas deemed as having a 'moderate' visual sensitivity.

6) Value and Constraints

6.1 The study to date has already noted a number of landscape features of interest, and their intrinsic value will have already been weighted in the report. However, areas of wildlife value (and their margins) plus sites with specific historic and 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 no designated wildlife sites in close proximity to Ilchester, the nearest being a county wildlife site, Kings Moor, which is a major grassland that hosts a large over-wintering bird population, and lays 2 km to the west of the town. Locally the River Yeo and its margins of mature trees and rough grassland, and the thick hedges that align the local droves, along with a number of relic orchards, are noted for their wildlife value.

6.3 The Leland Trail regional long distance path links Ham Hill with Alfred's Tower, and passes through the historic core of Ilchester. The trail approaches the town from the southwest, and leaves heading east from a point immediately above the weir. A number of rights of way lead out of the town, other than to the north where coverage is sparse. These paths are a well-used recreational resource, particularly where following the course of the River Yeo.

6.4 The historic core of Ilchester is a designated Conservation Area. Within and immediately adjacent this historic core is a series of small scheduled ancient monuments, which indicate remnants of Roman settlement. Older still, is Ilchester Mead, an 18 ha. late Iron Age enclosure which lays to the immediate south of the A37 link to the A303.

6.5 The River Yeo and its tributaries that flow through and around Ilchester have associated areas prone to flooding in close proximity to the town (identified as flood zones 3A and 3B by the EA) particularly along the Yeo corridor; land in proximity with the Oakley and Bearley brooks; and over Ilchester Mead. 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.

NB; Noise contours for RNAS Yeovilton may also pose a constraint for open market housing, specific information is not available for inclusion in the study at this stage.

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 Ilchester 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 Five potential areas for development can thus be identified on the landscape capacity plan being:

- i) to the immediate north edge of the town, between the A303 and Fosse Way;
- ii) between the Fosse Way and Yeovilton Road, in the vicinity of Hainbury Farm;
- iii) land to the southwest of Taranto Hill and Eagle Close;
- iv) at the southern edge of town, by the A37/B3167 roundabout; and
- v) between Pill Bridge Lane and the A37 link.

7.2 Whilst five areas have been identified following local values and constraints being factored in to the assessment, it is acknowledged that areas iv) and v) lay in locations prone to flooding, and immediately alongside the A37 link road. Both areas also abut the town's conservation area, which should also be accorded some sensitivity. As such, these areas are improbable development sites, and thus given no further consideration in this assessment.

7.3 **Area (i)** indicates the southern ends of two large fields that fall away to the north from the town's northern edge. The highlighted areas are those portions of the field that lay at the same general elevation as the adjacent urban edge, and in clear correspondence with it. With residential form characterising adjacent land, further housing would appear to be a logical development option, with the proviso that robust landscape treatment is incorporated to visually define any development's north edge, to ensure obtrusion of built form into open countryside is contained in a landscape-sympathetic manner.

7.4 One and a half fields in the vicinity of Hainbury Farm are indicated (**area ii**) between the Fosse Way and Yeovilton Road. This site gently falls toward the Yeovilton Road, and is primarily characterised by the agricultural buildings associated with Hainbury Farm by the roadside, and the skyline presence of

Troubridge Park's houses beyond the double hedgelines of the Fosse Way. It is feasible that the lower land by Hainbury Farm, and the Farm's buildings, may be an appropriate location for a small employment allocation. The remainder of the land, which has greater prominence, and a correspondence with adjacent housing, will be better suited for residential development. As with (i) above, a landscape buffer would be a requirement to better separate and contain the town from the fields that lay in open countryside to the northeast.

7.5 **Area (iii)** is a narrow corridor of land that lays between the residential areas of Taranto Hill, Eagle Close and Great Orchard, and the northward extent of the Yeo's floodplain. Access into this area may not be feasible, but if this can be arranged then given the residential context of the long adjacent north boundary, then residential growth would appear to be the only appropriate form of development in this location.

8) Outline Proposals

8.1 Three 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 **Site (i)** lays at the town's north edge, and offers a development area in the vicinity of 5.25ha. As this land lays at the northern edge of Ilchester, and grades into the open land toward Podimore and Lytes Cary, medium build densities would be appropriate, to better juxtapose the urban:rural interface. A site of this scale would require proportionate open space circa 1.05ha. The greater part of this would be best integrated along the outer boundary, as part of a landscape buffer to better separate and visually contain the site from the wider countryside.

8.3 In the vicinity of Hainbury Farm, a further 3.60 ha of open land, plus the current footprint of the farm (**site ii**) offers the potential for a mixed allocation of residential and employment uses, with the employment element being sited in the vicinity of, and possibly utilising, the farm buildings of Hainbury Farm. The constraint of rising ground practicably limits employment use to 1.6 ha approx, the remaining area of 2.0 ha being better suited for residential form. Again, net densities of 40 dph are considered suitable, with the 0.4 ha open space component incorporated into landscape treatment to define and contain the housing's northeast edge.

8.4 Laying at the immediate southern edge of an existing area of housing, and extending from Conygar Lane northwest toward the Ilchester Cheese employment site, **area (iii)** offers a development area in the region 5.00 ha. With residential form the adjacent land-use, there appears to be a potential for 4.00 ha of housing, with proportionate open space equating to 1.00 ha. There is also scope to extend the school's playing fields adjacent its current land, should this be required. To facilitate the integration of this new development with the current built fabric of the town, net densities of 40 dph are considered appropriate.

8.5 In summary, the following areas are proposed as having potential for development:

- (i) N of Troubridge Park - 4.2 ha residential
1.05 ha open space
structural landscape to NE boundary
- (ii) By Hainbury Farm - 1.6 ha residential
0.4 ha open space
1.6 ha employment
structural landscape to NE edge
- (iii) NW of Conygar Lane - 4.00 ha residential
1.00 ha open space
extended school grounds

8.6 In total, this equates to 9.80 ha of land capable of delivering circa 390 houses, net densities, with associated open space and a potential 1.6 ha site by

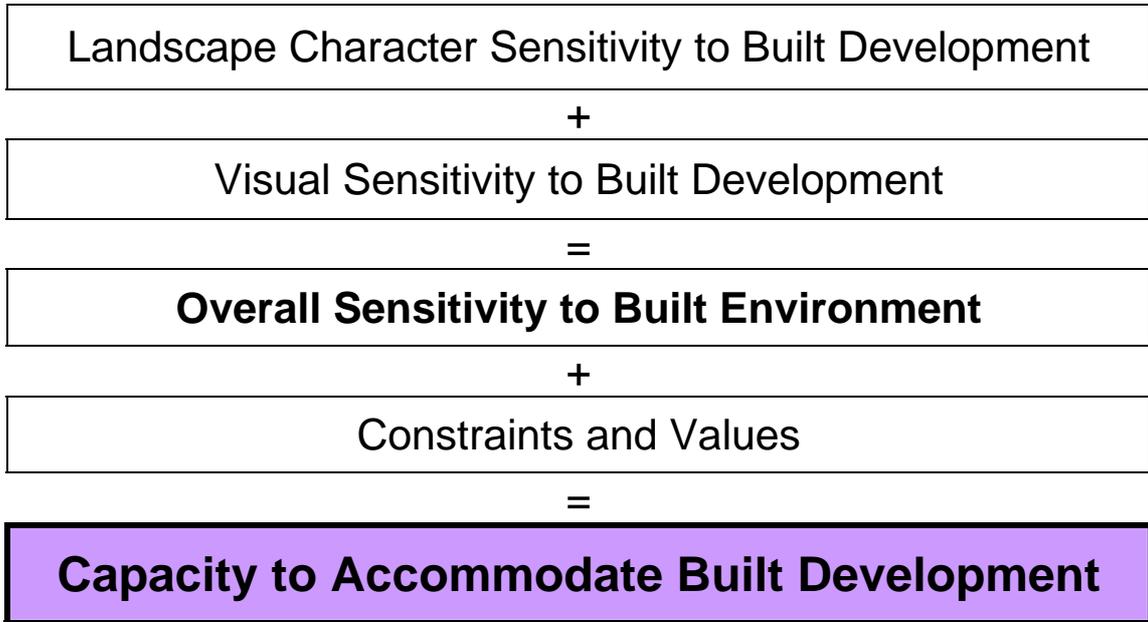
Hainbury Farm. Beyond that potential, the study indicates that Ilchester has limited scope for landscape-sympathetic growth, and presumes that environmental issues associated with RNAS Yeovilton to the east, could also be a constraining factor. All the identified sites lay around the town's expansion over high land to the north of the Yeo, and against the immediate built edge, thus avoiding land of high landscape sensitivity. Hence a potential for development can be planned to avoid an adverse impact upon both the town's immediate setting, and its wider landscape context, consistent with the objectives of this study.

Robert Archer
15 February 2010

Peripheral landscape study – Ilchester
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 – Ilchester

Appendix 2 - historic landscape character

Peripheral landscape study – Ilchester

Appendix 3 - photos



Photo 1: From the B3157 (Somerton Road) bridge crossing of the A303 looking ESE toward Troubridge Park development's north edge, where there is little visual containment of the housing edge.



Photo 2: Looking west from Costello Hill (approach road from Yeovilton) toward Ilchester's NE edge as expressed by the skyline presence of the Troubridge Park development.



Photo 3: Looking N along the Bearley Brook toward Hainbury Mill. Hainbury Farm is the lias stone farmhouse at the town's east edge.



Photo 4: From Limington cemetery looking NW toward Ilchester, where the spread of Troubridge Park housing over rising ground is the most evident element of the town.



Photo 5: Looking west from Limington cemetery across the River Yeo floodplain, toward the southern half of Ilchester, as expressed by housing off Limington road facing over the open fields.



Photo 6: Looking southwest from Costello Hill across the course of the River Yeo and its floodplain, toward the southern corner of the town by Limington Road and Back Lane.



Photo 7: From the course of the Leland Trail, looking west toward housing by Back Lane and Kingshams, where the edge of the town is demarcated by the course of the Yeo and flood defence embankments.



Photo 8: Looking east from the Ilchester bridge (Fosse Way) crossing of the River Yeo. The town's edge is contained by raised flood embankments, and there is direct connection to open countryside.



Photo 9: Looking northeast toward the Taranto Hill and Great Orchard housing areas of the northern half of Ilchester, as viewed from the banks of the Yeo to the west of the town.



Photo 10: From a similar vantage point, looking east toward Northover, with Vicarage Farm and Northover church prominent over a low rise in the ground.



Photo11: Looking southeast toward Abbots Road housing facing out over the mead, contained by flood embankments.



Photo 12: Housing facing south off Pill Bridge Lane, looking toward the A37 road link to the A303, and forming the town's southern edge.



Photo 13: The view south from the pedestrian bridge crossing of the A37-A303 road link, looking toward the distant terracing of Ilchester Mead.



Photo 14: Looking north toward the tree-lined corridor of the A37-A303 road link, with the town beyond. The playing fields in the foreground segue with ease into the wider open moorland.

Peripheral landscape study – Ilchester

Appendix 4 - plans

Figure 1 -
Context

Ilchester

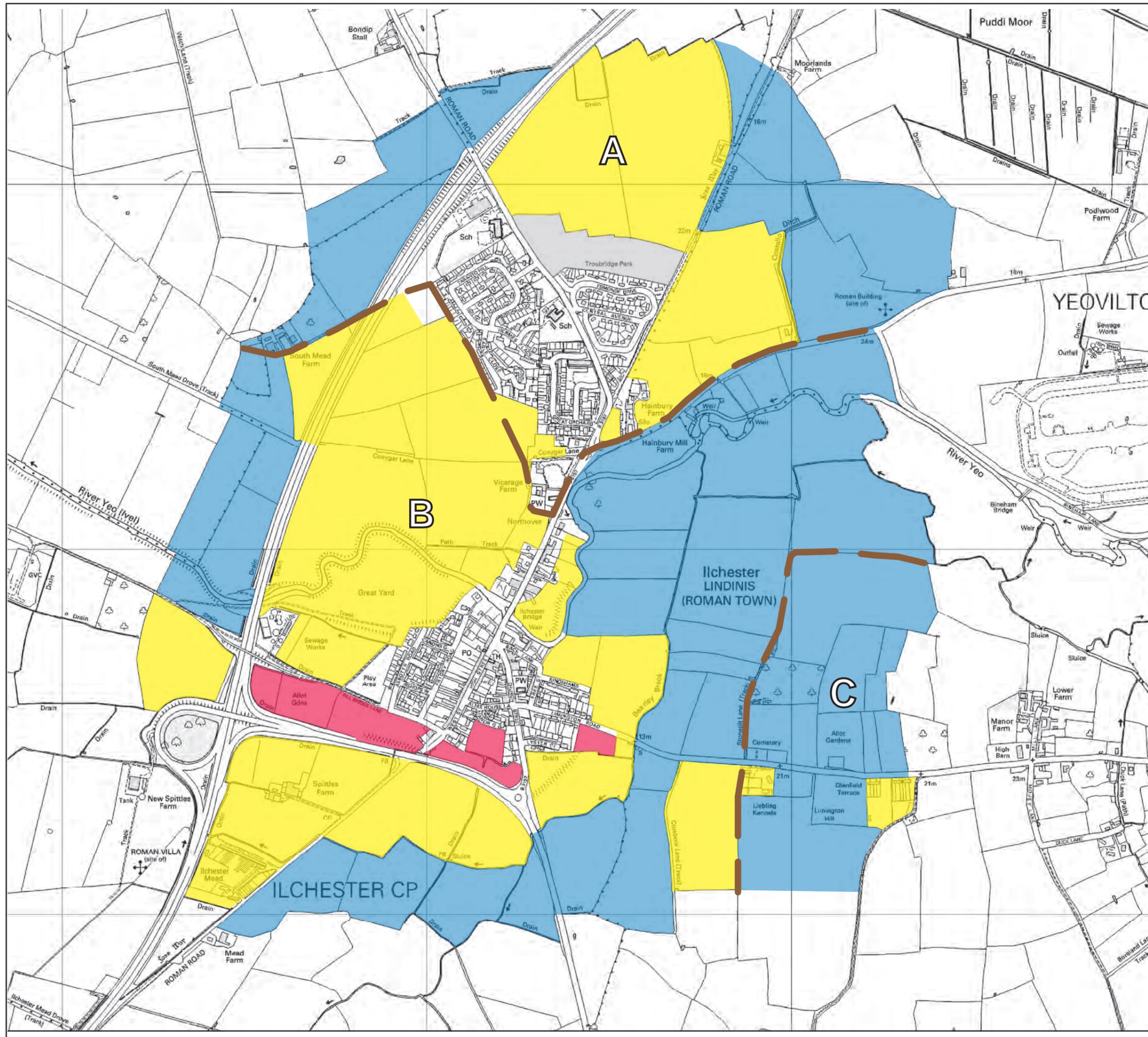


 Study Area

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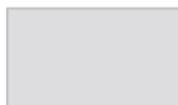
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Figure 2 - Landscape Sensitivity Ilchester



 Local Landscape Character Areas

- A - North Low Hills
- B - Yeo Valley Floodplain
- C - Limington Hill

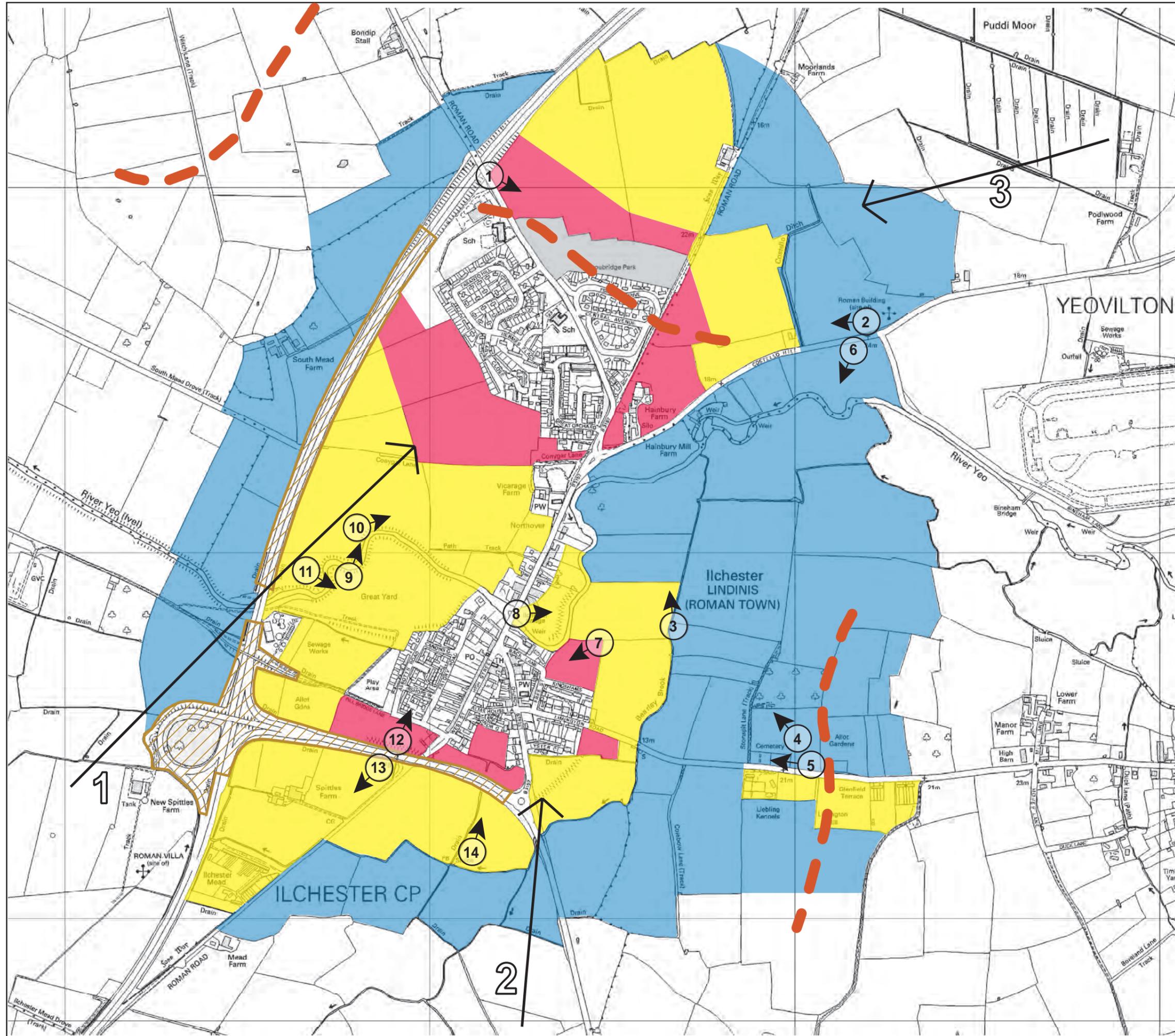
-  Area of low landscape sensitivity
-  Area of moderate landscape sensitivity
-  Area of high landscape sensitivity
-  Recent Development (post 2000)

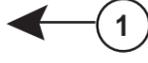


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Figure 3 - Visual Sensitivity Ilchester



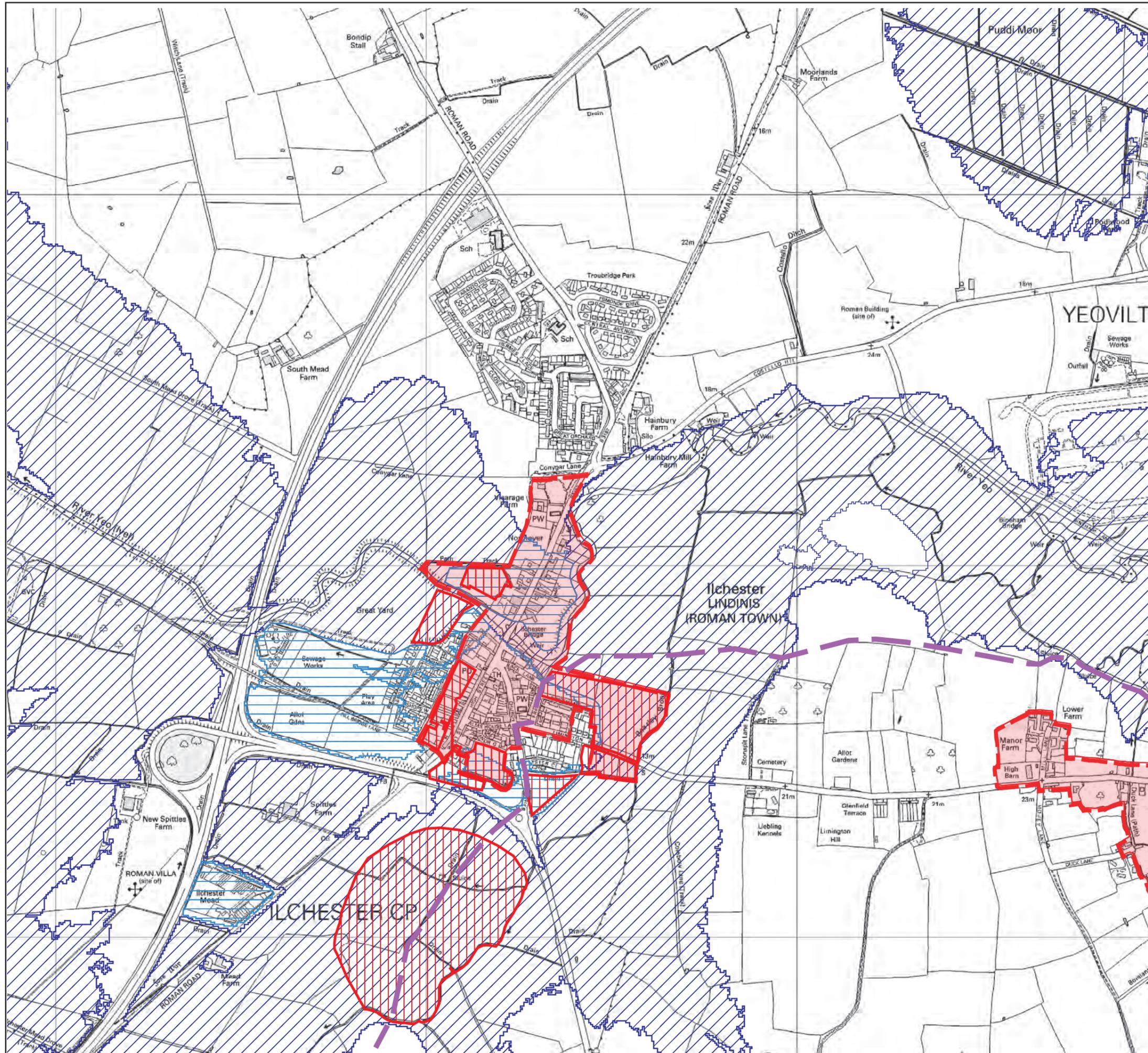
-  Diffuse Lines of Containment
-  Local Lines of Containment
-  Photo Vantage Points (1 - 14)
-  Long Distance Views from;
 - 1 - Ham Hill
 - 2 - Yeovil Sands Escarpment
 - 3 - Camel Hill
-  Area of low visual sensitivity
-  Area of moderate visual sensitivity
-  Area of high visual sensitivity
-  Recent development (post 2000)

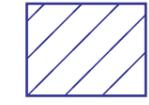


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Figure 4 - Value & Constraints Ilchester



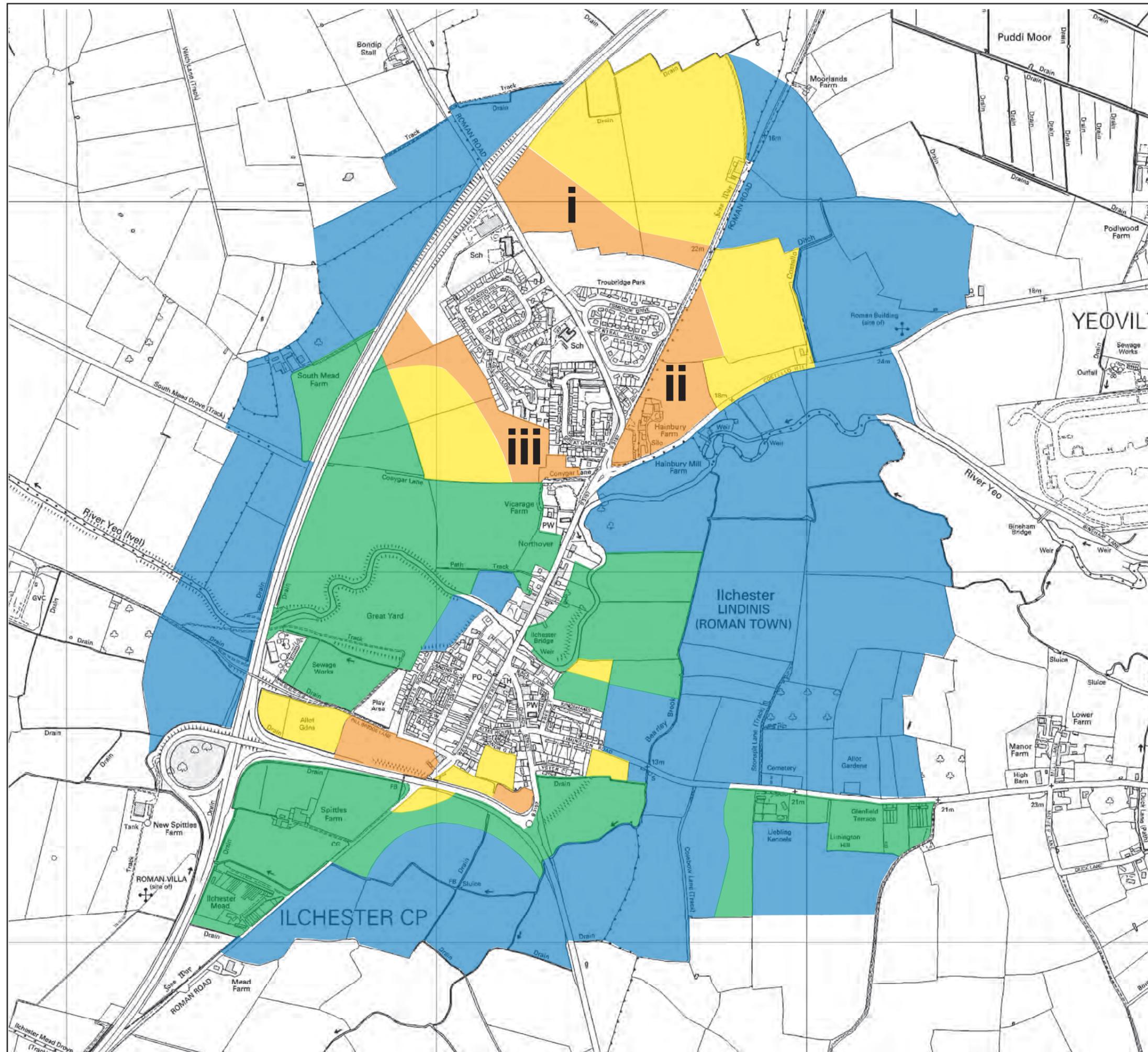
-  Flood Zone 3A
-  Flood Zone 3B
-  Scheduled Ancient Monument
-  Conservation Area
-  Leland Trail

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Figure 5 - Landscape Capacity Ilchester



- Landscape with a high capacity to accommodate built development
- Landscape with a moderate-high capacity to accommodate built
- 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
- i - iii** Potential development areas report sections 7 + 8

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