



Peripheral landscape study - Ilminster

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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 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 Ilminster.

2) The settlement

2.1 Ilminster lays to the west of the district, by the point at which the River Isle issues from the narrow valley formed between the Blackdown and Windwhistle foothills, toward the open vale to the north. The town centre is circa 1 mile to the east of both the course of the Isle, and the major road intersection of the A303 and A358, which provides links to the regional road network. It is a historic market town of Saxon origin, which prospered on cloth manufacture in the 17th century, and has undergone moderate growth in recent times, now having a population circa 4700 residents.

2.2 The town is primarily a linear settlement aligned on an east-west axis, settled in the valley associated with the Shudrick Stream, with the core of the town concentrated upon the market place and church, which lay between the stream and the lower slopes of Beacon Hill. Nineteenth century maps indicate settlement growth around and adjacent this core, and along the main E-W through route (Station Road > Bay Hill). Recent residential growth has spread both north, south and southwest of the town centre, whilst a large employment area has developed to the west of the town, adjacent the confluence of the Isle and Shudrick stream corridors, and convenient for access to the major road network.

2.3 The immediate landscape setting of the town is defined by 3 hills; Beacon Hill to the north, and Herne and Pretwood Hills to the southwest and southeast respectively, all of which rise to a little above 100 metres, and broadly contain the spread of the town and its immediate rural edge. To the west, the setting is less defined, with the town extending toward the open land of the River Isle valley, and an edge that is reinforced by the A303 road corridor.

Identification of the study area:

2.4 Based upon the methodology outlined in para 1.3, the Ilminster study area is broadly defined by Dillington House and Park to the north; a combination of the River Isle and the A303/358 to the west; whilst the Dowlish Brook valley forms the southern limit. An approximate line from Kingstone to Whitelackington completes 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 Ilminster within character area 140 - Yeovil Scarplands. Its key characteristics 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,

www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/CC/south_west/yeovil_scarplands.asp

Typical of Ilminster and its surround are the following extracts:

... 'much of the higher ground has sparse hedge and tree cover with an open character ... 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 valleys. Within the valleys there is a strong character of enclosure'.

... 'In the land around Ilminster, open fields survived until very recently and the landscape has been very open in character since well before the late Middle Ages'.

... 'There are also much grander landscapes found around the mansions built from the Elizabethan period such as ... Dillington House. The surrounding parklands of lime, oak and beech are conspicuous features, especially when ... the adjacent tree cover is not extensive'.

... '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. Arable predominates on the good, fertile soils like the Yeovil Sands'.

The district context:

3.3 A historic landscape characterisation study was undertaken by Somerset County Council Heritage team, which was 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 Ilminster area is included at appendix 2, 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 placed Ilminster within the landscape character zone 'Yeovil Sands, Hills and valleys' which describes the area thus;

This (area) covers the hilly country north and west of Crewkerne as far west as (Ilminster). This is a very attractive area where deep, bracken and gorse-covered coombes contrast with intensive arable lands crossed by deep wooded goyles. Apart from a few on road-sides, hedges are no longer a significant landscape feature.

The landscape to the north and west of Merriott village is described as an "interesting balance of low hills and small valleys, with medium sized fields, well hedged". This description also fits the outlying hills at Pretwood and Herne Hill, Ilminster. These form an attractive setting to that town with a particularly pleasing combination of broadleaved woodland, herb-rich pastures, old down-slope hedge patterns and an ancient ridge-top parish boundary. The 'reverse side' to the south is a contrast of intensive arable cropping and few trees.

3.5 The study also notes the close proximity of the Blackdown Hills' footslopes to the west; and the River Isle corridor close to the northwest of the town, noted as 'snaking its way creating broad corridors of pasture land' toward the central low hills and moors.

The local context:

3.6 The area can be sub-divided into local landscape character areas (LCAs) which will include the steep-sided **Shudrick Stream valley**, within which the residential core of Ilminster is the dominant element; The open **Isle Vale** to the west, which includes Ilminster's western fringes; and the farmed hilltops and dip slopes of **Herne, Pretwood and Beacon Hills** that contain the town. At the western fringe of the study area lay the low hills of the **Blackdown footslopes**; and the **River Isle and Dowlish Brook Valleys** to the southwest and south respectively. These are indicated on figure 2 (landscape sensitivity).

3.7 Ilminster demonstrates a number of characteristics typical of the Yeovil Scarplands, in that the town is settled in a river valley; enjoys a strong sense of enclosure from the bounding hills, which limit views across the town; and has a prime focus of a church tower. Within the context of the **Shudrick Stream valley**, the town can be zoned and described thus;

- a) The centre, which is dominated by the Minster with its tower a distinctive focal point. The central streets are narrow, full of twists and dips to negotiate rising ground, and rich in building styles, predominantly of local stone construction.
- b) Residential growth over the south and southwest slopes of Beacon Hill, with much condensed form of mixed building styles and ages. The north edge of the town is clearly drawn against the rectilinear field hedgerows near the hilltop, and contained to the east by the drive-side tree belts that link with Dillington House. The broad open ridge of Beacon Hill is a distinctive skyline above this development form
- c) Dilute, sporadic ribbon settlement toward Knott Oak at the head of the valley, abutting clearly defined hedge boundaries of the farmed hilltops to the north; and small fields and paddocks immediately south of this edge, partially hedge bound.
- d) Mixed farmland south of the Shudrick stream and east of Listers Hill, opposite to and overlooked from Beacon Hill. There is a strong sense of enclosure within the valley. Intricate pockets of broadleaved woodland, small-scale down-slope fields on falling ground, with mature oaks in the hedgerows are found on Pretwood Hillside, with a ridge-top parish boundary at its head.
- e) 20th century housing rises south over Listers Hill, contained by old hedge boundaries. The town recreation ground separates this housing from the town core, and links with playing fields below Herne Hill. The southern edge of housing lays within the saddle between Herne and Pretwood Hills, with some 'spill' south from the Shudrick valley watershed.
- f) Recent residential between Station road and Canal Way. Clearly defined by hedge lines, some newly created. Mixed farmland lays against this edge to the south, characterised by mid-scale fields, relatively open and primarily rectilinear in pattern, that rise gently from the town, toward the wooded crown of Herne Hill, which is a local landmark.

3.8 Ilminster extends west - beyond its valley containment – alongside Station Road, and below the B3168 Curry Rivel road. It is this area of the town that falls within the **Isle Vale** local character area, and can be broadly zoned;

- a) Mixed employment areas to south and north of Station road. Large-scale buildings and yards intrude into open arable fields to either side of river, with irregular and ill-defined boundaries, partially defined by hedgerows. Small residential and caravan park element interspersed in vicinity of former rail-line and Green Lane.
- b) Below Rose Mills, the vale narrows and field pattern reduces in scale to mixed agricultural land toward Donyatt, with hedge lines interspersed with mixed tree species.
- c) Winterhay Lane acts as the broad interface of the town's residential and employment areas. Housing here is somewhat divorced from the town setting by topography, running along the west toe of Beacon Hill, with small, unmanaged pastures between unkempt hedges that rise toward the B3168.
- d) Tracks and partial hedge lines demarcate the north edge of town toward Winterhay Green. There is little coherence to this edge, due in part to a differing mix of land uses and building scales. Little enclosure outside the green lanes is noted. The rectilinear pattern of mixed hedges and tree lines around Winterhay

Green contrasts with the adjoining irregular small-scale fields of the Shudrick and Isle confluence. The aural presence of the A303 corridor is ever present.

3.9 To the north of Winterhay Farm and Cottages, the **Isle Vale** is in agricultural use, relatively flat, and open in character toward Eames Mill. The watercourses are demarcated by sinuous lines of alder and willow, with a transition to managed hedgerows and specimen oaks by Ashwell. The sound and movement of the A303 is perpetually evident to the northeast, Ilminster's built form less so, other than filtered glimpses of the larger employment structures through the intervening hedgelines.

3.10 The north and eastward extent of **Beacon Hill**, along with the southward sides of **Pretwood Hill** share many characteristics: Both fall outside Ilminster's defining ridge surround, and are clearly rural in character. Both are gently undulating dip-slopes, predominantly open and almost exclusively in arable cultivation, and demarcated by managed hedgerows over a rectilinear pattern. There are few specimen trees within the farmed landscape, other than where Beacon Hill falls to Dillington House, which sits within a distinctive sylvan surround and a wider parkland setting of pasture and veteran trees; and where disrupted by the wooded goyle that runs south to north to enter Dillington Park W of Whitelackington. Both Whitelackington, and Kingstone to the south, are circa 1.5 km. distant from Ilminster, with a clear separation from the town by both landform and treecover.

3.11 The southward farmed slopes of **Herne Hill** differ in small part from Beacon and Pretwood's hillsides in their arable:pasture mix and mid-scale hedge pattern, which is defined by cross-radial hedgerows, the older of which include individual mature broadleaved trees. The hilltop is crowned by mixed-species woodland, which is as prominent to the south as it is above Ilminster. Individual farmsteads are sited on the lower slopes. Other than the southern edge of the Listers Hill housing at the head of the Pretwood-Herne saddle, there is no urban influence in this local character area.

3.12 The **Dowlish brook valley** defines the southern extent of both Herne and Pretwood Hills, and runs E-W to join the River Isle above Donyatt. Broadly, the valley above Dowlish Ford is characterised by an irregular small-scale field pattern bounded by mature hedgerows, many of which are unmanaged, which provides a sense of local enclosure. Conversely, the land around Sea is characterised by small rectilinear plots, with a mix of paddocks, smallholdings, and pastures, and there is a greater sense of openness as the valley widens to the W. Sea's built form is rural in character, but sporadic housing along the road to Dowlish Ford gives some sense of Ilminster to the north, most notably in the scale of the former Clark's factory and its associated parking areas.

3.13 The **Isle Valley** LCA runs north between the footslopes of the Windwhistle and Blackdown hills, widening to accommodate the Dowlish Brook catchment. Within the study area, the valley narrows at Donyatt, where it breaks through the gap between Herne and Donyatt Hills. This narrow valley, when combined with the mixed hedgerows and tree lines which fringe the valley pastures, provide an element of enclosure that contrasts with its entrance to the wider, open Vale to the north, the transition occurring between Park Farm and Rose Mills. This narrow valley can be viewed as part of Donyatt's setting, and it provides separation from Ilminster.

3.14 Finally, the study area abuts the fringe of the Blackdown footslopes in the vicinity of Cheshays Hill, which also defines Ilminster's local setting to the west. This immediate area is dominated by the bridging of the A303 by the A358, and both road corridors are characterised by their linear fringe of roadside plantations, hedgerows, and incessant traffic. Mid-scale rectilinear fields fall from the Hill toward the Isle Valley and Ilminster's employment area, with a transition toward larger open fields closer to the town.

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 historic evolution. 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 location 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 Ilminster's periphery as possessing either high, medium or low landscape sensitivity to development. The resultant areas are indicated on figure 2 – landscape sensitivity.

Shudrick Stream valley (character area A)

4.2 Within the Shudrick Stream valley - setting for most of residential Ilminster - there are 4 peripheral open areas beyond the built edge, namely;

- a) the head of Beacon Hill;
- b) land around Knot Oak;
- c) land to the south and east of the Tesco supermarket, rising toward Pretwood Hill, and;
- d) land to the south of Canal Way, rising to Herne Hill.

4.3 The residential edge of Ilminster by Beacon Hill is clearly defined by hedgelines, emphatically expressed along the contour above Highfields, the allotments, and Blackdown View. The hilltop fields above and beyond this edge are typical of local character in their openness, arable use, and sparse tree cover. Similarly, this open skyline edge is noted as locally distinctive. Whilst the close proximity of Ilminster's built form clearly contrasts with the rural expression of the open fields, the head of the hilltop can be zoned as having high landscape sensitivity, the intervening ground as medium sensitivity.

4.4 There is little urban expression in the town's eastward spread of sporadic ribbon development beyond Bay Hill and above Knot Oak. This edge abuts farmland that is similar in character to that of Beacon Hill, and this agricultural land extends east of the Kingstone Road, which lays outside the Shudrick Stream catchment. Because of the dilute, detached and non-urban character of this specific edge, its sensitivity can be graded high, along with the land beyond the town.

4.5 The land to the south and east of the Tesco supermarket, including the hillsides rising toward Pretwood Hill's ridge, is of varied character. The value of the Hill's mix of broadleaved woodland and specimen trees; old down-slope hedge patterns; and the ancient ridge-top parish boundary, are highlighted in the SSDC appraisal, and where these forms remain intact and well expressed, they are graded as being of high sensitivity. At time of writing, the base of the valley resembles a large building site, with the Tesco store and car-park newly completed, and preliminary work on the housing development to the east underway. This clearly imparts an urban character to the land beyond (and north of the Shudrick Stream) and as the character is partially intact and in mixed condition, the sensitivity is graded low. The intervening ground, whilst in close proximity to urban form, is graded medium, due to the decent condition

of the remnant small-scale field pattern and dense hedgerows that delineate them. For similar reasons, land to the east of Listers Hill is graded medium sensitivity, other than the areas in close proximity to the urban edge, where the emphatic urban edge is a major detractor, and thus considered low sensitivity.

4.6 The agricultural land to the south of Canal Way is defined by trimmed hedges with occasional specimen trees, and contrasts with the emphatic housing edge to the north. The openness of the fields allows for urban character to predominate, and recent development has cut across the grain of the field pattern, hence the sensitivity is considered to be low. By contrast, the head of Herne Hill, with its broadleaved crown and ridge extension and hedgerow links to Mitchells Hill, is a local landmark and expressive of local character and is thus graded high. The intervening ground is of moderate value, with part of its rural pattern intact, and in relationship with the mown space of the town's playing fields adjacent Listers Hill's housing.

Isle Vale (character area B)

4.7 Within the Isle Vale character area there are broadly three peripheral open areas beyond the built form, namely;

- i) south of Station Road;
- ii) north of Station Road, and Winterhay Green, and;
- iii) the lower slopes of Beacon Hill

4.8 The land immediately adjacent to the town's edge south of Station Road is degraded in character, due to the incursion of large employment structures into the field pattern, and the poor condition of its landscape components. Combined with the open fields adjacent Rose Mills, this poor quality landscape pervades toward the smaller fields, and thus is graded low sensitivity for all but the southern margins.

4.9 It has been noted that north of Station Road, the edge of the town has no coherent character, being a differing mix of building scales and land-uses, with boundaries ill-defined and poorly managed. Toward Winterhay Lane, green lanes provide some definition by the urban edge, yet many of its hedgerows are in poor condition, and built employment scale is the dominant form. Winterhay Green is characterised by its small rectilinear field pattern, though there is little strength of character due to inorganic planting mixes and the poor condition of much of the hedgerows, inclusive of elm and bramble. Consequently, this area is graded low sensitivity.

4.10 The lower slopes of Beacon Hill are characterised by small-scale pastures and tall hedgerows. This is marginal land, too close to the urban edge to be viable for farming, yet with slopes too steep to develop. Hence the area has an unkempt, neglected character and thus is considered to be of low sensitivity, rising to a medium sensitivity where the slopes mark a stronger distinction to the pasture and field patterns between valley floor development, and the individual properties on the sides of Beacon Hill.

4.11 The fields and relic orchards around the farm groups of Manor and Winterhay Farms marks a transition zone from Ilminster's edge to the wider countryside. There is a rural character that is in most part intact yet only partially maintained. This 'transition' zone is graded medium sensitivity. The wider vale stretches north, its expanse broken

by the line of the A303, but with its character in most part intact. The presence of the A303 is a detractor, yet there is little sense of Ilminster's built form. Thus the area alongside the A303 is zoned as medium sensitivity, whilst the well-tended hedgerows and plantations that contain the fields between Eames Mill and Ashwell Farm are considered to be of high landscape sensitivity.

Beacon, Pretwood and Herne Hills (character areas C and D).

4.12 The national character study indicates the parkland associated with Dillington House as particularly notable, and its pasture cover, specimen trees and plantations are distinctive in their contrast to the open, predominantly arable landscape surround. The House and Park are clearly of high landscape sensitivity. It is surrounded by the farmed dip-slopes of the Beacon Hill LCA, which along with Pretwood and Herne Hill are noted as typifying the Yeovil scarpland's hill and valley landscape by their rolling ridge tops; sense of openness; and mid-large field pattern, that is intact in most part despite areas of intensive farming. As the dip-slopes lay away from the town, these hillsides are clearly rural in their expression and can thus be graded as being of high sensitivity. The only exception to this grading is at the saddle between Herne and Pretwood Hills, where housing is established; and by Dowlish Ford, where the former Clarks factory and grounds imbue an urban characteristic. This area is regarded as being of medium sensitivity.

Dowlish Brook Valley (character area E)

4.13 The Dowlish Brook Valley is a mix of small pastures and farmsteads that lay adjacent the brook and the Ilminster road. It is a rural landscape in small scale, but with some sense of Ilminster to the north betrayed by road signage and the intermittent ribbon development approaching Dowlish Ford. This latter area is considered to be of medium sensitivity, whilst the wider valley is regarded as having a high sensitivity to development.

Isle Valley (character area F)

4.14 Finally, the Isle Valley LCA is compressed between Donyatt and the western toe of Herne Hill. The busyness of the A358 road corridor and its dominance of Donyatt's village centre is a detracting element within a wider context that is rural in character. Thus the corridor and its immediate fringe is considered to be of low sensitivity. Conversely in the vicinity of the Isle is a small-scale matrix of arable and pasture paddocks, lined by mixed hedgerows, and with the course of the river delineated by alders. As a positive and intact expression of river valley character, and in representing the separation between Donyatt and Ilminster, this area is graded as high sensitivity, with the remaining fields; larger in scale with fewer landscape components, and with the A303/358 road corridors adjacent graded medium.

5) Visual sensitivity

5.1 This section first identifies the nature and extent of the visual envelope that contains Ilminster, and the sensitivity of those landscape elements that visually buffer the town from an external perception. It then reviews the intervening land between the town and its envelope, to assess its visual profile in relation to Ilminster, along with identifying valued views, sensitive vantage points, and visual detractors. From this a measure of visual sensitivity to development will be graded low, medium or high. The resultant sensitivity areas are indicated on figure 3 – visual sensitivity.

Visual envelope

5.2 The character assessment identified the setting of Ilminster's centre as contained between Beacon, Herne and Pretwood Hills, whilst to the west the town opens to the Isle Vale, with its setting defined by a combination of the river (Isle) and road corridors, but with no emphatic topographical boundary. It is within this quadrant that visual containment is less definite.

5.3 The town's visual envelope can be clearly defined on its north side, where Beacon Hill intervenes to obscure all views toward the town from Puckington Hill and the intervening vale. Beacon Hill's ridge extends east toward, and south of Whitelackington, to continue the visual containment of the town. There are no public views of Ilminster from this quarter until the point the Seavington Road (former A303) reaches Bay Hill and immediately enters the town. Similarly, Pretwood and Herne Hills obscure all view of Ilminster from the south, other than where a saddle falls between the two hills. This dip in the hill surround allows perception of the Listers Hill housing edge from public vantage in the immediate vicinity, but there is no sight of the town beyond. Conversely, whilst this edge is obscured in longer views from Windwhistle, housing on the higher ground of Beacon Hill does become visible (Photo 1). With the envelope broken at this point, the desirability of both containing the Listers Hill housing edge, and ensuring no further development form over Beacon Hill is clear, to thus maintain the town's visual character and ensure no exacerbation of its external profile.

5.4 A small area of land at Knott Oak lays inside the prime visual envelope. There is minimal perception of the town in this location, with potential views from the Kingstone Road currently obscured by hedge lines, rising ground and a farm building group. This offers diffuse visual containment, but would be vulnerable to urban growth in this direction, and is thus considered sensitive.

5.5 It is the quadrant of land to the west and north of Ilminster (between Donyatt and Ashwell) where there is no prime visual envelope, and the town opens to views in from beyond its setting. There are numerous long views toward the town from the upper slopes of the Blackdown Hills, most notably from the A303 at Ham, which clearly sees the market town contained by the local hills, and its larger scale employment buildings in the broader Isle Vale, thus confirming the town's visual setting. Limited views are available from the A358 (Taunton) and adjacent approach roads, but these are low-trajectory and it is only the housing on Beacon Hillside plus glimpses of factory buildings (photo 2) that enable any perception of development, yet none of its extent. Again, the value of restricting further development over Beacon Hill

is emphasised, as are the roadside plantings alongside the A303, for providing a partial visual envelope to the town as viewed from this quarter.

5.6 Within the A303/358 road line, there is no clear visual containment of Ilminster's edge. From both north and south, it is the matrix of intervening tree lines and hedgerows that filter views in winter, offering more effective buffering in summer, allied to gentle rises in landform. This combination is particularly effective north of Winterhay Green (see photo 3) though heavily reliant on the continued vegetation presence when viewed in closer proximity to the edge, as is also the case from Donyatt. It is however, only the employment area that is partially apparent, the remainder of the town being hidden by its surround of hills. Consequently to both north and south of Station Road, it is a diffuse local visual envelope that can be identified, being the trees and hedgerows lining the lanes and fields associated with the River Isle, plus a short length of the disused rail line.

5.7 Finally, in relation to the grading of visual sensitivity of land outside the town's immediate envelope, it is pertinent that the national character study has identified that views available across the hills and ridges are valuable in providing an impression of a sparsely settled land. Hence with open views and visibility a prime component of visual character, all rural landscape with perceptible elevation within the study area is graded as high sensitivity, leaving only valley areas with limited inter-visibility graded as medium sensitivity (providing there are no detracting elements).

Visual Profile of Ilminster's immediate edge

5.8 Within the local visual envelope, the main open areas of Ilminster's periphery are identified as:

- i) Beacon Hill upper and side slopes;
- ii) Pretwood hillsides and associated valley;
- iii) Herne hillsides and adjacent valley;
- iv) fields south of Station Road, and;
- v) fields north of Station Road, and Winterhay Green

5.9 The open ridge of Beacon Hill is viewed as the town's northern skyline from prized public vantage points along the sides of Herne Hill (photos 7 and 8). It currently retains its prominence as skyline (other than its westernmost point) above housing encroachment. This open and emphatic rural headland is a prime landscape feature associated with Ilminster, thus its visual sensitivity is graded as 'high', as is the steep area of grassland that serves to separate the larger domestic plots of High Beacon from the employment-dominated vale. Between Knot Oak and Bay Hill the immediate urban edge is considered to be 'medium' sensitivity, for whilst its visual profile is limited, there is a diffuse and well established built edge that enables a comfortable transition to the town. This grading will change to 'high' toward the local skyline, cognisant of the sensitivity of the containing ridgeline.

5.10 The Pretwood Hill ridgeline forms both the backdrop to and containment of the town when viewed from within the core of the town, and from vantage points on its northern slopes (see photos 5 and 6). Its skyline is a distinctive mix of individual specimen trees and mature tree groups and it is emphatically rural in character, somewhat separate from current built form, yet in close association with Ilminster. Its

visual sensitivity is graded as high. The lower slopes have a reduced visual profile, yet similarly represent the strong rural elements that characterise the whole of the hill, with additional benefit of the small field's hedgerows acting as an effective visual buffer to longer views along this narrow valley. Thus the area's sensitivity is graded medium. The remaining land in the valley bottom, whose visual profile is low and where there is no containing element to intervisibility between the town edge and its immediate rural edge is graded low sensitivity.

5.11 The wooded head and upper slopes of Herne Hill is a focal landmark from many vantage points within the town (photo 9), and notably from the rights of way over Beacon Hill, from which the Hill is viewed against a panoramic backdrop. The hilltop woodland links along green lanes and robust hedgerows to Listers and Mitchells Hills, and like Beacon and Pretwood Hills, forms both skyline and containing feature. With such high level of visibility, the head of the Hill and adjoining ridge lines are graded high sensitivity. Open farmland rising toward the hilltop has a lesser visual profile, yet is a striking contrast to the woody crown, which helps emphasise its singularity. It is thus graded medium sensitivity. The lower ground – the valley floor - has a reduced visibility due to its low elevation and there are few distinguishing features beyond the trimmed hedgelines that demarcate the fields. This area is thus graded 'low' sensitivity.

5.12 It has previously been noted that the fields below Station Road are open in character, and that employment form is poorly contained. This lack of containment allows a potential for visual intrusion, and with few intervening landscape features to counter such impact, plus the general low level of visibility across these fields a further factor, the area is graded 'low' sensitivity. Conversely, the fields forming Cheshays hillsides define both the immediate edge to the Isle valley prior to its opening to the Vale, and feature in views west through the Conservation Area (photo 10) as intervening ground between Ilminster and the Blackdowns, thus adding to the value of their open visual profile, and are thus graded 'high' sensitivity. Similarly graded are the intricate small fields with their mixed hedge and tree-lined surround that provides the visual buffer between Donyatt and Ilminster. The intervening ground, of less visual profile but with some buffering element against intervisibility with the town edge, is graded 'medium' sensitivity.

5.13 North of Station Road, and west of the disused rail-line, there is a similar degree of openness, lack of containment, and visual intrusion from the scale of employment form, to thus merit 'low' sensitivity grading. Land between the urban edge and Manor Farm, west to the lane serving Winterhay Farm Cottages is similarly graded for similar reasons, and the indeterminate edge and scale of housing and employment form is viewed as a further visual detractor (photo 10). The low rise in ground level, and field hedgerows and tree lines are already described as a diffuse visual buffer to Ilminster (para 5.6) where there is little else to contain views of the town's built profile from this northern quarter, and thus are graded 'high' sensitivity. The intervening ground, of sufficient distance from the town's current edge not to be dominated by built form, yet with limited visual profile, is graded medium.

5.14 Finally, from within the town itself, views are available of its immediate and wider surround. The town centre lays low in the valley, and there are few views out, yet within the town's conservation area, there are specific vistas where a hillside break

within the housing, or a street's course over rising ground will align on Herne and Pretwood Hills, further emphasising their rural form and skyline profile as an integral element of historic Ilminster. Similarly the notable view down East Street aligning on the Minster (photo 10) views first Cheshays Hill, then the distant Blackdowns skyline as the rural backdrops to the town from this quarter. All these hills are already graded high sensitivity, a value reinforced by their landmark value relative to the town's historic core.

6) Value and Constraints

6.1 The study to date has already noted a number of landscape and historic features of value, such as Dillington's registered historic park and garden, and such 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 amenity value are highlighted, as are the topographical constraints of floodplain and slope, as factors that may limit potential and thus capacity for development. These elements are indicated on figure 4 – values and constraints.

6.2 Integral to Dillington House and Park is its approach drive from the south with its entrance marked by the twin lodges by Bay Hill, and characterised by the mature tree line that marks its course up and over Beacon Hill. In addition to the cultural association with the town, this tree line also demarcates an eastward limit to Blackdown View's development form, thus adding to its value.

6.3 Herne and Pretwood Hills both host areas of wildlife interest that are designated for their value at local level (i.e. county wildlife site), Herne for its woodland, and a field within Pretwood Hills small field matrix for its unimproved grassland, in association with species-rich adjacent hedgerows. The disused rail-line between Cold Harbour and Donyatt is also designated as a county wildlife site, primarily for its adventive bankside vegetation, as is the aquatic corridor of the River Isle downstream of Station Road. Finally, to the east and unrelated to the town, the woodland and ponds of the West Wood/Long Ponds Copse complex to the south of Dillington are noted for their ecological value.

6.4 Herne Hill and its upper slopes are held in particular regard by many Ilminster inhabitants, not only as landmark as viewed across the valley from the majority housing area over Beacon Hill's side, but also for as recreational asset, being managed for wildlife, access and amenity purpose for the town's benefit and enjoyment, further emphasising its value. The 'Old Road', a green lane traversing Beacon Hill and running from the town's High Street to Ashwell, along with Beacon Lane, is similarly highly used for its recreational value and superb views. Finally, heavy use of footpaths between Beacon Hill and Winterhay Lane, and the dis-used rail-line and cycleway link to Canal Way were also noted for popular use.

6.5 Both the River Isle and Shudrick stream have associated areas prone to flooding in immediate proximity (identified as flood zone 2 by the EA) particularly around their confluence to the north of Manor Farm. 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.

6.6 Much of residential Ilminster is built over rising ground, yet it is evident that areas of marked slope have been avoided. 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 10° are indicated as placing a constraint on development form, and will be factored into the capacity equation – such areas will primarily include land on the sides of Beacon, Herne and Pretwood Hills.

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 Ilminster 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 Four potential areas for development can thus be identified on the landscape capacity plan being;

- i) land east of Tesco supermarket, adjacent the Shudrick Stream;
- ii) land between the Canal Way development, and the foot of Herne Hill;
- iii) land to the south of Station Road, between the disused rail-line and the A303, and;
- iv) land to the north of Station Road between the A303 and the toe of Beacon Hill, extending north to the vicinity of Manor Farm.

7.4 Area (i) indicates 1½ fields, to the east of Swanmead School's playing fields, and to the south of the Shudrick Stream, plus two linear fields to the north of the stream, below Love Lane and Townsend. The valley is narrow in this vicinity, with a strong sense of enclosure, and the small field pattern below Pretwood Copse is considered a constraining landscape element, as is a streamside flood zone area, and the sensitivity of this site's east edge, thus defining the extent of a potential development area. Adjacent urban development – the supermarket aside – is primarily housing, and the intricate scale of the area would suggest further residential growth to be appropriate development in this location.

7.5 The land between Canal Way and Herne Hill (area ii) is relatively flat and has few constraints. The adjacent urban land is characterised by large-scale residential areas of Canal Way, Summerlands and Listers Hill, plus the intervening playing field complex north and west of Listers Hill. A potential for further residential development would appear appropriate here, plus consolidation of the open land dedicated to play and recreation, in a manner that respects the setting of Herne Hill. Whilst the Canal Way development includes a partially built employment allocation, given the rising elevation of land toward Cold Harbour and the sensitivity of land above the farm, large-scale building form typical of employment areas is not advocated here.

7.6 Land identified to the south of Station Road (area iii) is already allocated in-part for employment, and an extension of that use appears logical, providing flood

alleviation measures are agreed with the Environment Agency. The treatment of the southern edge will need to be visually robust, to ensure the current diffuse visual containment is not eroded.

7.7 Area (iv) identifies a large area of land north of and broadly parallel to the current development edge. Part of this area is already allocated for employment, and this intended use would appear to have scope for northward extension, again with the proviso that flood alleviation measures are built into any layout proposal. Land to the east of Winterhay Lane would appear to offer a third residential option, whilst between Winterhay Lane and the disused rail-line a potential for a residential/employment mix is possible, with flood risk a constraining factor. As with land to the south of Station Road, there will again be a need for a robust landscape edge, to consolidate visual containment, and a potential for wildlife –rich green corridors adjacent the watercourses.

8) Outline Proposals

8.1 Four potential areas of development have been identified by the landscape capacity plan, and appropriate uses outlined in the previous section, paras. 7.3 - 7.7. 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 Tesco supermarket, and adjacent the Shudrick Stream, an area circa 6 ha. is feasible housing land. This potential residential area abutts the current edge of the town, and it is anticipated that 50% of the housing could be built at high-density on ground of least landscape sensitivity, whilst below Townsend medium densities are more appropriate to reflect the close proximity of the rural edge. Housing immediately against Pretwood Hill's lower slopes and ancient hedge forms would be low-density, to enable some gradation into this valued landscape area. Landscape treatment would require the retention of existing hedge lines at the development edge, with wooded substantiation by the housing's east edge, and below Pretwood Hill.

It would appear logical to access the site via the newly constructed access to the Tesco supermarket, and bowls club: There may be potential to extend such access through the site, to link with the Kingstone Road to the east, thus offering greater permeability, through it is recognised that such a linkage would place development pressure on land sensitive to development. Additional low-density housing (of about 1 ha.) plus a buffering zone of planting and open space as mitigation and 'gateway' may be an acceptable solution in extending development toward the Kingstone Road.

8.3 To the South of Canal Way, a further 10.5 ha. residential land is feasible, again with approx. 50% suggested as high density housing where laying against the current urban edge, the remaining area grading through medium to low densities at the South and West edge, to respect landscape sensitivities. Landscape treatment would retain bounding hedgerows, supplemented by planting along the South and West edges, and include the open space of a proposed recreation field below Herne Hill adjoining the current recreation area, within which the town's future sports needs could be accommodated. Landscape corridors are anticipated as running through the residential areas where hedgerows merit retention. Access appears feasible off Canal Way, with the possible option of a second access from a spur off Canal Way's Westward extension.

8.4 To the South of Station Road, potential employment land of about 8.5 ha is suggested as a southward extension of land already allocated for employment in the current local plan. Accepting that part of this area is flood plain, additional land will need to be set aside for flood alleviation and balancing works, without which the allocation may not be acceptable. The entire Southwest edge between the A303 and disused rail line is indicated for mitigation, in the form of a substantial buffer zone of planting and open space, to visually contain the large scale of employment building form, and to maintain both visual and physical separation of the town from Donyatt village and its margins. This recognises that the current visual envelope in this area is diffuse and ineffective in countering and containing the potential large scale and mass of employment buildings.

8.5 Land to the North of Station Road by Hort Bridge is similarly allocated in the current plan for employment, and this study suggests a further 4 ha. extension northwards, plus land set aside for necessary flood alleviation works. There is also scope to extend an employment allocation of 2.5 ha east of the disused rail line, though it is noted that housing is also an option here, or a mixture of both. A separate 7.5 ha block of residential land is feasible below Winterhay, with at least 50% at high density, the remaining area potentially of medium density by the rural edge. On the assumption that extensive flood alleviation and balancing works will be necessary to enable any prospect of development in this location, a large area of flood plain would likely be zoned development-free to the west of the residential proposal and south of Manor Farm. Finally, landscape treatment would include structural planting to contain both the employment sites, and the north edge of any residential extension, to maintain a visual buffer to views from the north, plus a zone of open space (with some recreational potential) to assist with a graded transition into the adjacent agricultural land. Where in good condition, existing hedgerows will be retained and enhanced as a basis for establishing green corridors within the housing areas.

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

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---|------------------------|
| i) East of Tesco | - | 6.0 ha residential (R) |
| ii) South of Canal Way | - | 10.5 ha residential |
| | - | 3.5 ha recreational |
| iii) South of Station Road | - | 8.5 ha employment (E) |
| iv) North of Station Road/ | - | 4.0 ha employment |
| Winterhay Green | - | 7.5 ha residential |
| | - | 2.5 R, E or mixed use |

Note that 50% of the proposed residential areas are considered capable of absorbing housing built at 'high' density (i.e; 50 dph).

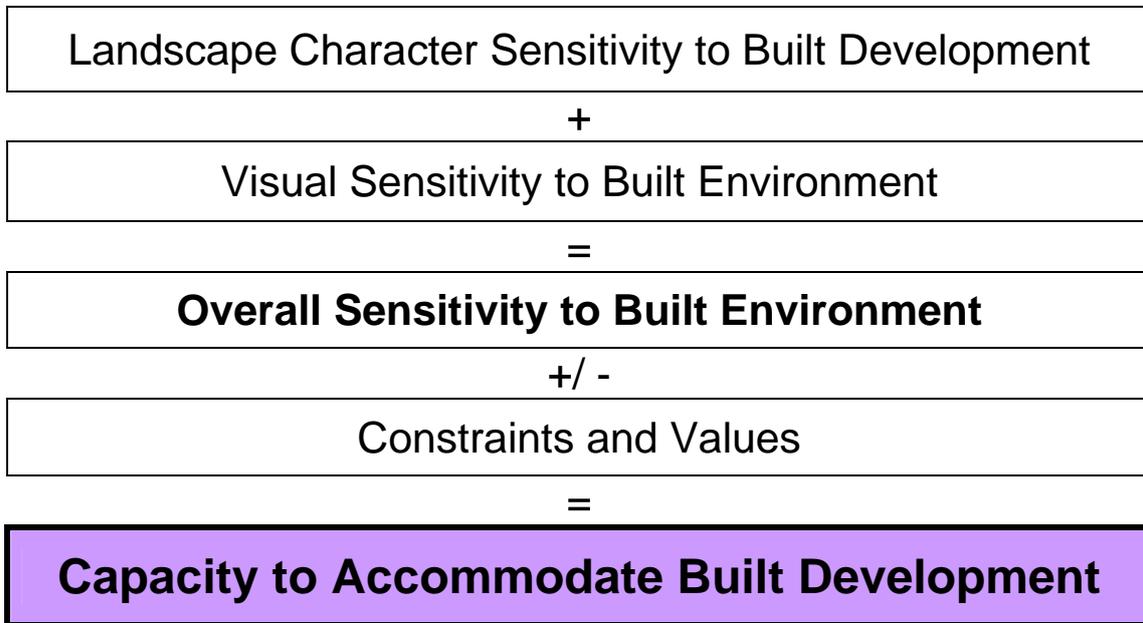
8.7 The above sites offer a potential total of between 24 and 26.5 ha of residential land, which if built out at a broad average of 40 dwellings per hectare, equates to a minimum of 960 houses. The initial indication from this capacity appraisal is that there is scope for an additional 12.5 ha of employment land, should flood risk allow. In tandem with land required for structural landscape provision, open space and community recreation, the potential development options outlined above aggregate to a substantial land-take for a town of Ilminster's size. However, it does not necessarily follow that all these potential development sites are developed within the LDF period 2006-2026, rather that these sites present options from which an allocation site can be selected, according to an assessment of Ilminster's needs and site availability. Yet having evolved the proposals plan through this landscape capacity study, there can be a confidence that not only the short - but also the longer-term - development needs of Ilminster can be met, without too adverse an impact on the town's setting, and wider landscape surround.

Robert Archer
1 November 2007

Peripheral landscape study – Ilminster
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 – Ilminster

Appendix 2 - historic landscape character

Peripheral landscape study – Ilminster

Appendix 3 - photos



Photo 1: South of Dowlish Ford, looking NNE – Housing at the head of Beacon Hill Is visible between the enclosing ground of Herne and Pretwood Hills



Photo 2: From the A358 roadbridge crossing of the A303 looking west - Little of Iminster is evident, other than the employment area chimney stack, and housing by the head of Beacon Hill



Photo 3: From B3168 above Ashwell, looking SSW - The town is obscured by land- and vegetation form.



Photo 4: Looking W from High Beacon, toward the current urban edge of mixed employment and housing forms against Winterhay Green



Photo 5: Beacon Hill, looking S - panoramic views over the town with the local ridge of Pretwood Hill evident to the left.



Photo 6: Looking SE from the Frog Lane cycleway - Pretwood Copse and ridgetop are local landmarks as viewed from the valley.



Photo 7: The town as viewed from Herne Hill, with housing rising from Canal Way to the head of Beacon Hill.



Photo 8: Looking NE from Herne Hill, housing extent lays below the Beacon Hill skyline, and contained by the tree avenue of the Dillington House southern approach.



Photo 9: Looking SW from the Butts, the wooded crown and upper slopes of Herne Hill are major landscape features in relation to the town.



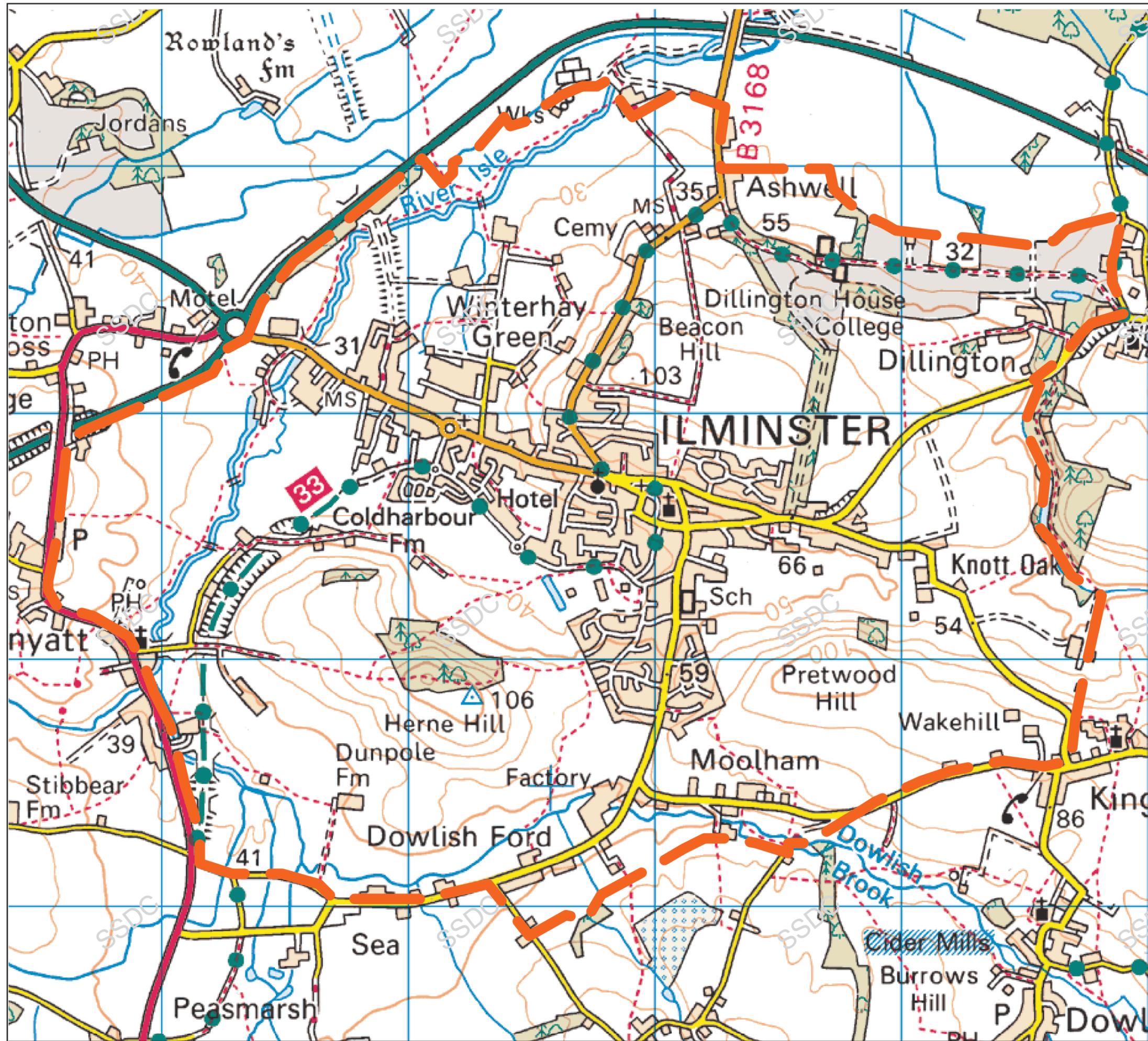
Photo 10: The historic core of the town characterised by the Minster's tower. The open hillsides of Cheshay Hill form the mid-ground backdrop.

Peripheral landscape study – Ilminster

Appendix 4 - plans

Figure 1 - Context

Ilminster



scale 1:15,000

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Figure 2 - Landscape Sensitivity Ilminster

 Local Landscape
Character Areas

- A - Shudrick Stream Valley
- B - Isle Vale
- C - Beacon Hill farmed
hilltop and dip - slopes
- D - Herne and Pretwood farmed
hilltops and dip - slopes
- E - Dowlish Brook Valley
- F - River Isle Valley

 Local Plan Employment
Allocation

 Area of low landscape
sensitivity

 Area of medium landscape
sensitivity

 Area of high landscape
sensitivity

scale 1:15,000 @ A3



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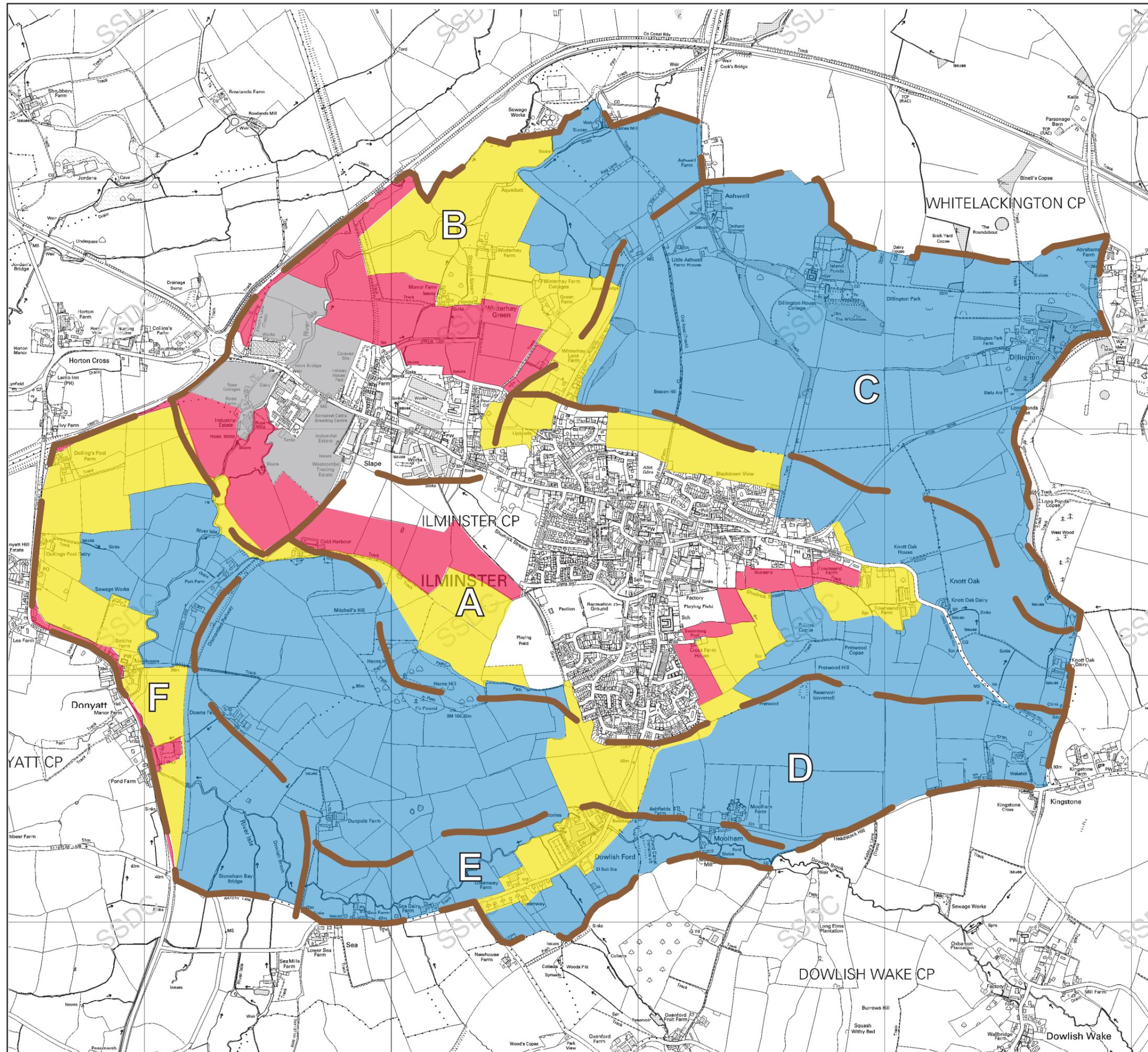
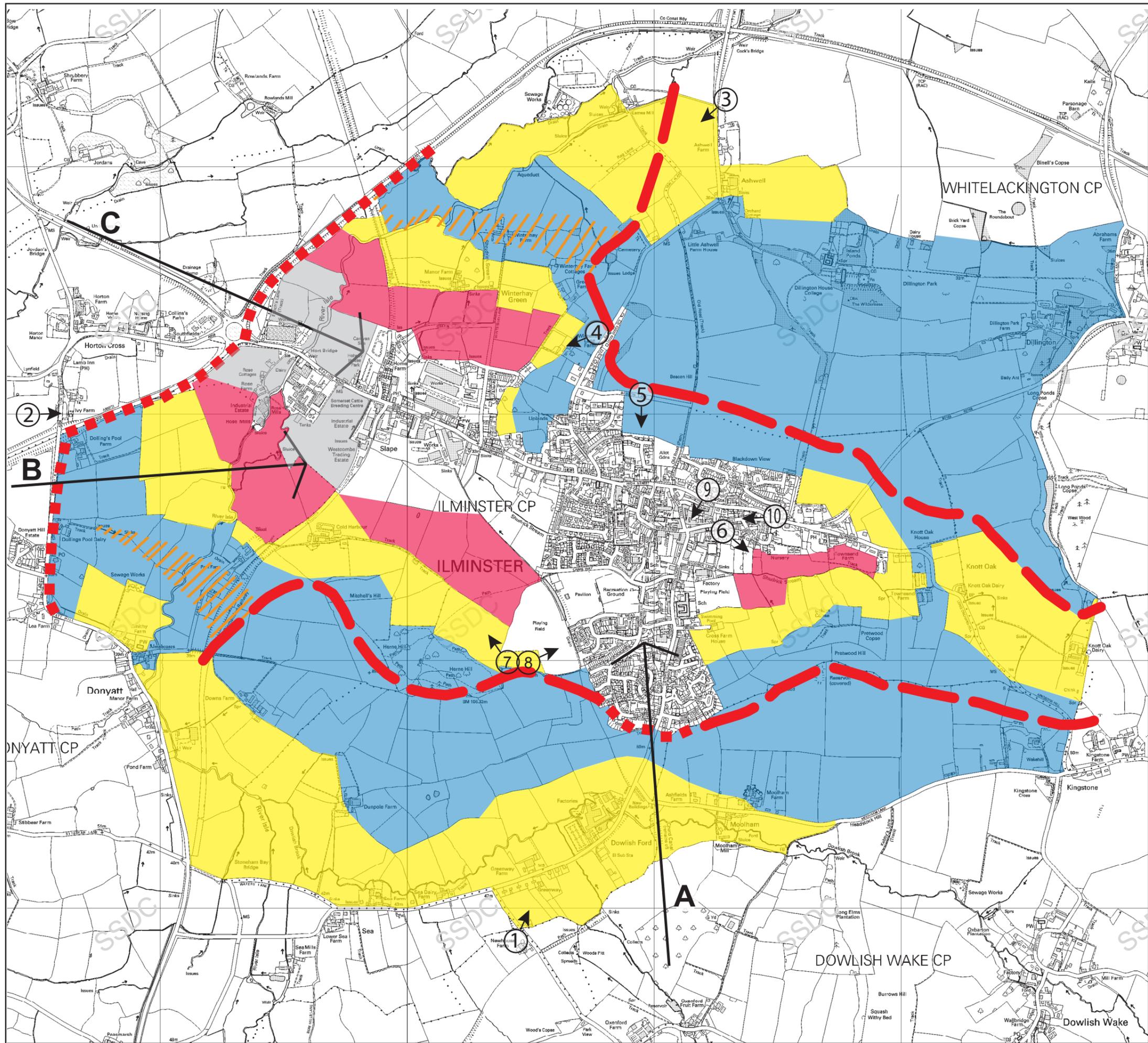
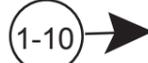
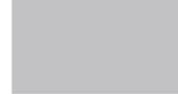


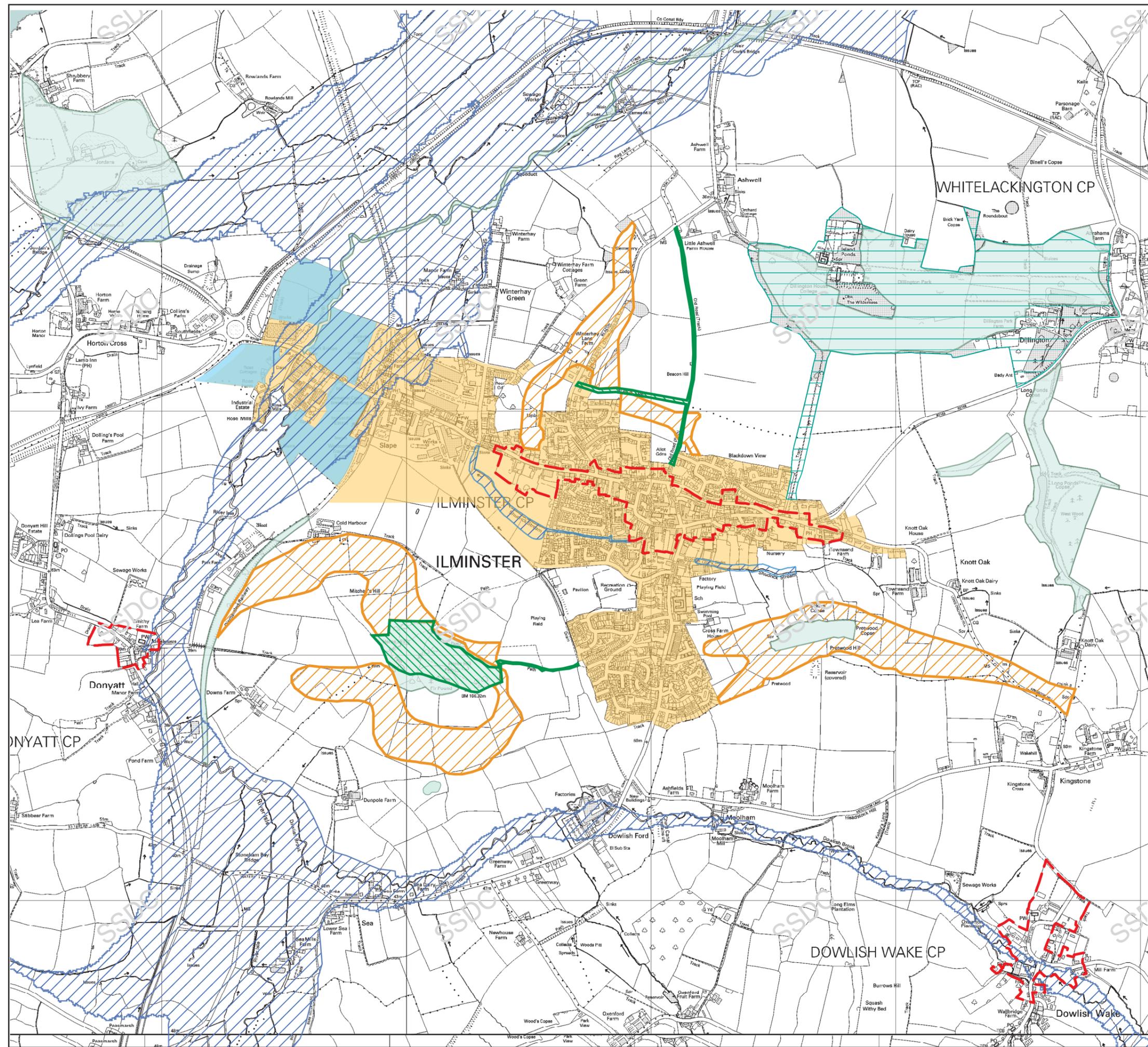
Figure 3 - Visual Sensitivity Iminster



-  Prime Visual Envelope
 -  Local Visual Envelope
 -  Diffuse Visual Envelope
 -  Long views toward town
A from Windwhistle
B from the Blackdown Hills
C from A358 (Taunton Road)
 -  Photo locations
(see appendix two)
 -  Local Plan Employment Allocation
 -  Area of high visual sensitivity
 -  Area of medium visual sensitivity
 -  Area of low visual sensitivity
- 
scale 1:15,000 @ A3

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Figure 4 - Value & Constraints Iminster



-  Iminster Development Area
-  Employment Allocations
-  Local Wildlife Sites
-  Flood Zone 2
-  Historic Parks & Gardens
-  Conservation Area
-  Steep ground constraining development
-  Areas of high recreational amenity

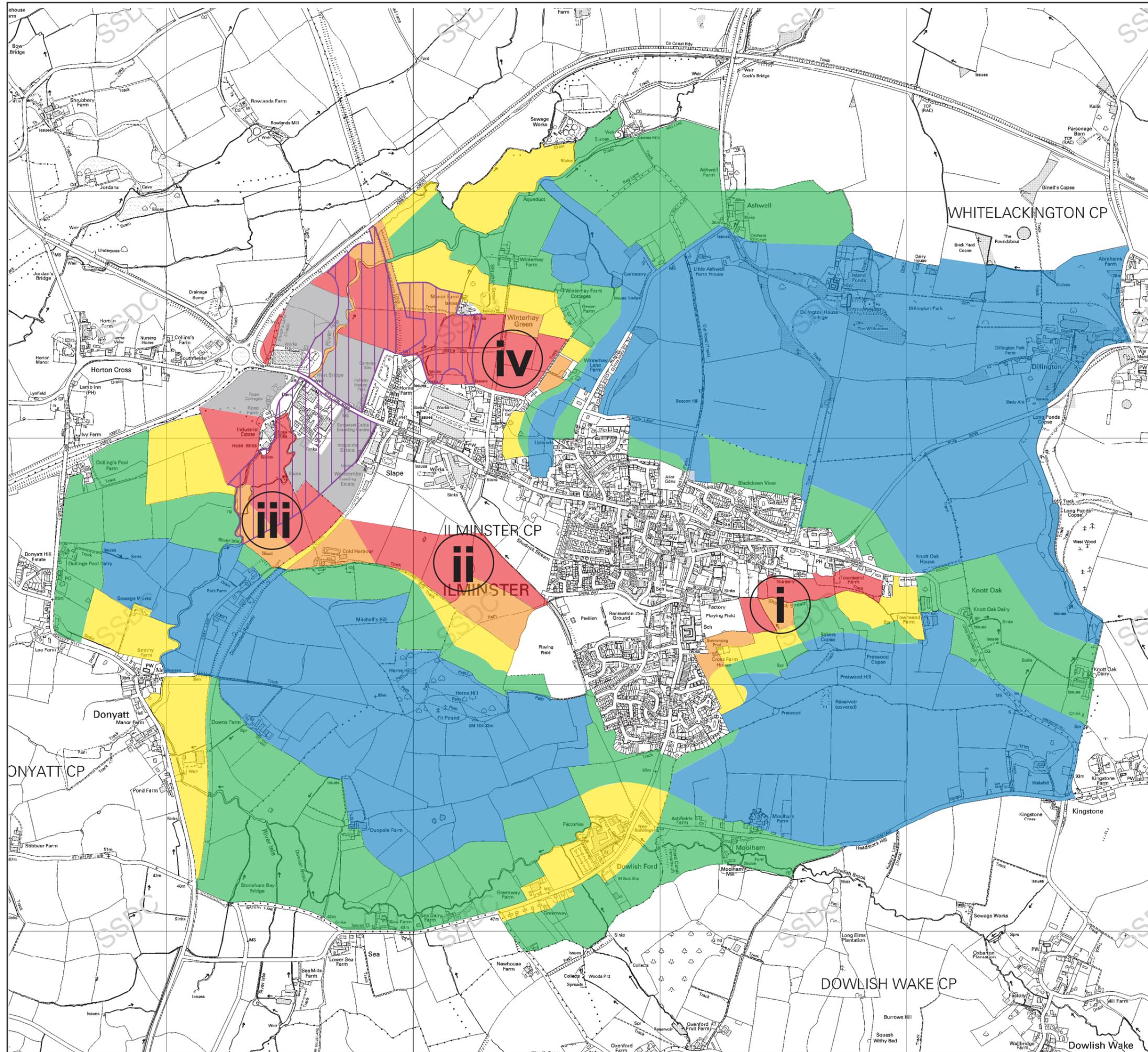
(The above categories as defined in the South Somerset Local Plan)

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Figure 5 - Landscape Capacity Ilminster



-  Local Plan Employment Allocation
-  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
-  Landscape with development potential providing flood risk is alleviated

i - iv Potential development areas report sections 7 + 8

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