



## Peripheral landscape study – Stoke sub Hamdon

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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 is commissioned, to assess the capacity of the settlement fringe to accommodate new development in a landscape-sympathetic manner. The study addresses 15 settlements within the district, and 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 settlement, 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 the village of Stoke sub Hamdon.

## **2) The settlement**

2.1 Stoke sub Hamdon lays to the immediate south of the A303 road corridor - an alignment of the Fosse Way - adjacent the northern toe of Hamdon Hill's Iron Age ramparts (now part of Ham Hill Country Park, and hereafter referred to as Ham Hill) some 7km west of Yeovil. It is a large parish, initially distinguished as two villages, East and West Stoke, with East Stoke the earlier Saxon settlement, whilst West Stoke is now grown to assume the main village centre, and is the subject of this study. There is evidence of Romano-British settlement to the northeast of the parish, whilst local estates were established in Saxon times, with ownership passing from Glastonbury Abbey in Saxon times, via Norman aristocracy, to the Duchy of Cornwall in the fifteenth century, which still holds much of the land. Quarrying of the local Ham stone and farming were the main occupations throughout the middle ages, later supplemented by a local gloving industry in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The village has undergone steady growth throughout the twentieth century, and now has a population approaching 2000 residents.

2.2 The village centre and main commercial area is concentrated in the vicinity of the junction of North, West and High Streets. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, residential growth initially spread along the North and High Streets, infilling the quadrant between the two at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whilst post-war development has extended the village north and west, in the form of moderately-scaled housing estates. A small employment area lays to the west of North Street.

2.3 The immediate landscape setting of Stoke sub Hamdon is to the fore of the steep north slope of Ham Hill, from where the settlement spreads north and west over a low terrace, above the valley floor associated with the Wellhams and Hurst Brooks. The steep sides of Ham Hill has constrained growth southeast, whilst to the north, the major road alignment and associated earthworks of the A303 draws an emphatic stop to the northern extent of the village. To the west and southwest, the village extent is not so clearly defined, with ribbon development aligned along both West Street and Norton Road toward open countryside.

### **Identification of the study area**

2.4 Based upon the methodology outlined in para 1.3, the extent of the Stoke sub Hamdon study area is broadly defined by a line that runs northeast along and beside the A303 from Percombe Hill to Venn Bridge, before swinging southeast to run across country to join with Mulberry then Windsor Lanes at East Stoke, to cross the Montacute road close to the parish church. The line then follows a local right of way to run along the base of Hedgecock Hill Wood, before climbing over Ham Hill to the south of the Prince of Wales PH, thereafter descending the hill's west face to run west toward New Road, Norton sub Hamdon. The study area is completed by following the parish boundary west, until swinging north to follow field boundaries, crossing West Street circa 150 metres west of the village edge, continuing north to the point it rejoins the A303 by Percombe Hill 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 Stoke sub Hamdon within character area 140 – Yeovil Scarplands. The key characteristics of these areas as noted by the assessment are:

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

3.2 The full descriptive text of the Yeovil Scarplands character area is available on the Natural England website, [http://www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/CC/south\\_west/yeovil\\_scarplands.asp](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/CC/south_west/yeovil_scarplands.asp) The following extracts are typical of the Stoke sub Hamdon area and its surrounding landscape:

*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.*

*Much of the higher ground has an open character, falling away steeply down intricately folded slopes. The steeper scarps are commonly wooded and in places, have prominent hillforts. 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. 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. Settlements are linked by narrow lanes, and the area is cut across by major roads which tend to follow valley bottoms. Smaller lanes and trackways lead from the settlements in the valleys up onto the higher ground.*

*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, with the soft yellow of Ham Hill stone widespread. Hamstone is the rich gold stone of the major country houses, often detailed and dressed, whilst in cottages and farmhouses it is often used in rubble construction, to take on another range of texture and colour.*

*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 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:**

3.3 A historic landscape characterisation study was undertaken by Somerset County Council Heritage team, completed in 2001. This study differentiates between unenclosed, anciently enclosed, and recently enclosed land, and notes ancient woodland sites and historic parkland. The character plan for the Stoke sub Hamdon area is included at appendix 2, and indicates the village periphery to be a mix of both anciently and recently enclosed land, whilst unenclosed pasture can still be found on the head of Ham Hill. Where pertinent, this study informs the landscape sensitivity appraisal, section 4.0.

3.4 SSDC undertook a detailed assessment of district-wide character, 'The Landscape of South Somerset' in 1993. This study places Stoke sub Hamdon and its wider surrounds within the visual character region (VCR) of '**Ham Hill plateau, Yeovil Sands, Escarpments and valleys**'. Each VCR is sub-divided into landscape character areas (LCAs) and the '**Northern Escarpments, Dipslopes and Foothills**' LCA is identified as covering the greater part of the Stoke sub Hamdon study area, the remainder being made up by the '**Ham Hill Stone hills and valleys**' LCA. The assessment identifies and describes the landscape character areas thus;

#### *1) Northern escarpments, dipslopes and foothills*

**This visual zone is the combination of three basic topographical units-the low Pennard Sands/Junction Bed escarpment which Yeovil surmounts. The Liassic Silts and Marls dip-slop with its minor escarpment at Chilthorne Domer, and the Yeovil Sands, Pennard Sands/Junction Bed footslopes and ridges which can best be viewed from the A3088 north of Montacute.**

Approached from the Vale of Ilchester to the north the escarpment is an important land-mark identifying the location of Yeovil. In places buildings are silhouetted on the ridge; in others woodland and trees provide an important screen. Gradients are not severe and cultivation or improved pasture reaches high up the slope. Lanes and roads spill over onto the plain below cutting deep holloways characteristic of the more sandy rock formations. Water courses have also cut deep tree-filled ravines of which Longcroft Wood is the best example.

To the west, the landscape is rolling mixed farmland. Hedges, usually of elm are generally intact but kept low. Remaining hedge-trees are few, usually ash and suffering die-back. The most significant landscape features are the alder and willow-lined streams such as Ball's Water and Wellham Brook; the latter having some fine willow pollards and traditional waterside buttercup-meadows.

2) *Ham hill stone hills and valleys*

This is an impressive dissected plateau where the Yeovil Sands are "protected" from erosion by the harder Hamstone capping.

The northern edge of this plateau is really an extension of the Ninesprings escarpment in Yeovil, but here it becomes a much higher and dramatic feature emphasised by high-forest woodland at Hedgecock near Montacute. The north-west "corner" consists of the dramatic profile of the Ham Hill hillfort. In 1620 the Spanish ambassador wrote to the King of Spain.

"From the fortress by Montacute can be seen one of the finest views in Europe"

(Source Norton Sub Hamdon Parish Council)

The southern flank of the plateau has several out-lying hillocks. The upper slopes are usually thick with gorse and bracken and there is a distinctive "scrub-line" between the cultivated footslopes and the rough sheep grazing.

3.5 The LCA is sub-divided to reflect local variation in landscape character, to better facilitate the subsequent sensitivity evaluation, as follows;

- i) ***Ham hill plateau and scarp***, which refers to the head of Ham Hill, and its steep upper hillsides to east, north and west
- ii) ***East Stoke combe***, being the valley formed between Ham and Hedgecock hills, which runs north to East Stoke;
- iii) ***Northern vale***, which identifies the low-laying farmland that lays to the north and northeast of the settlement, and covers the majority of the village, and;
- iv) ***Western terrace***, which covers land to the west of the village, which lays predominantly level, between Ham Hill and the floor of the Parrett valley.

3.6 The resultant 4 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 Stoke sub Hamdon'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 study area as falling within both the **Ham Hill plateau, Yeovil Sands, Escarpments and valleys** and the **Northern Escarpments, Dipslopes and Foothills** landscape character areas. These character areas are subdivided according to local variation in landscape type. Taking these sub-divisions in turn (as identified para 3.5) the first local character area to be considered is that of the *'Ham Hill plateau and scarp'*.

##### **Ham Hill plateau and scarp (character area A)**

4.3 Ham Hill is both ancient hill fort and active quarry, and is intrinsically linked both culturally and topographically with the village at its toe. Whilst much of the former quarry's extent is now disused, its open faces and spoil heaps now provide a context for the active use of the Country Park, and both the head of the hill, and the upper scarps, with their mix of rough pasture and scrub, are little changed from that indicated on the late Victorian OS maps. Whilst car parks are formed in cleared areas adjacent Ham Hill Road for users of the Country Park, these are sufficiently small-scaled and contained by the quarry landform to be unobtrusive. Consequently the head and upper hillsides of Ham Hill are assessed to be 'high' sensitivity due to its consistency of character expression; relative extent of intactness, and its clear time depth. Whilst housing is present on its western hillside, flanking Ham Hill road as it rises south from the village, the good majority of this housing is quarry-related, and at least 150 years old, and thus well established and not overtly scaled. As such it is not seen as a detractor to the Hill's character. There are however, two areas within this local character area that are not graded 'high' sensitivity, and these are two pasture fields that have both been enlarged due to past hedgerow removal to the rear of the houses at 'Highway' and at the toe of the western escarpment, within the parish of Norton Sub Hamdon. In both instances, whilst the intricacy of the field pattern is no longer expressed, both locations lay in a rural surround, and their scale is not unduly at variance with the wider landscape. They are thus graded 'medium' sensitivity.

##### **East Stoke combe (character area B)**

4.4 To the southeast of the main village is a pasture combe that lays between the hillsides of Ham Hill and Hedgecock Hill. It is this combe that provides a landscape context for East Stoke's southern side, an area that is part of Stoke Sub Hamdon parish, yet divorced from the main village due to the visual and

topographic separation provided by the lower slopes of Ham Hill in the vicinity of the vicarage. East Stoke thus has its own identity, with its historic core centred on the loose cluster of cottages and farmsteads spread between the parish church and Windsor Lane. This area is interspersed with small pastures, mature hedgerows, and a mix of both specimen and relic orchard trees, and little change is indicated by late Victorian OS maps. The area's time-depth is reinforced by its Conservation Area designation, its character retained despite the presence of 20<sup>th</sup> century housing to its west, which is both buffered and contained by adjacent hedgerows. This area is thus graded 'high' sensitivity. The combe itself lays to the south of East Stoke, rising to its enclosing hillsides, and has a simple cover of pasture within an irregular pattern of mature hedgerows, supplemented by mixed-native species copses. In good condition, and demonstrating minimal change from time-depth, this area is also assessed to be 'high' sensitivity.

### **Northern Vale (character area C)**

4.5 Whilst Stoke Sub Hamdon extends in linear fashion along North and West Streets, its core lays at the point where Ham Hill's lower slopes meet the watershed of the River Parret's feeder tributaries to the west, and those of Welham and Madey Mill Brooks to the east. It is this part of the latter catchment that is defined as the 'Northern Vale' within this assessment, and it contains the core – and older – part of the village, as defined by North and High Street's housing and that contained in the quadrant between. To the east of the village lays a matrix of irregular fields, the majority of which are in arable use and demarcated by either headwater courses, or native hedgerows, the majority of which are kept trim and are lacking in specimen trees. This is clearly a farmed landscape, and historical evidence indicates that much of the area has been subject of agricultural change, with a number of hedges removed to enlarge fields, whilst orchards by Castle Farm are no longer in evidence. Hence the majority of this local character area to the east of the village is graded 'moderate' sensitivity, for whilst these losses have occurred, the underlying framework to the field pattern remains discernible, and its rural character is clearly expressed, with the division between village form and open farmland well demarcated by the hedgerow network. There are two exceptions to this general grading; the first a group of small fields to the east of Queens Crescent that have retained their historic pattern and hedgerow containment, and a second in the vicinity of the vicarage, where again a small field group and adjacent wet woodland express an earlier origin. Both are graded 'high' sensitivity.

4.6 Northwest of the village, yet also within this local character area, lay a series of pasture fields in close proximity to both North Street and the A303. All correspond to a rectilinear pattern that broadly relates to the axis of the above roads, and are indicated as 'recently enclosed' by the historic characterisation study. Twentieth Century housing (Kings Road) obtrudes awkwardly into this pattern below North Street's interchange with the A303, and historical maps indicate heavy hedgerow removal at this part of the village edge, and it is thus graded 'low' sensitivity accordingly. Conversely, the fields that do not abut Stoke's edge, which extend west toward Percombe Hill; retain their enclosure pattern; and are robust and in good condition, are graded 'high' sensitivity. The remaining areas (i) to the north of the A303, and (ii) at Stoke's west edge by Glovers Close, have been subject of a small degree of hedgerow removal, and partially eroded by recent housing development.

However, these impacts are not so great that the underlying pattern is lost, and the hedgerows are relatively robust. Both areas are thus graded 'moderate' sensitivity.

#### **Western terrace (Character area D)**

4.7 This local character area includes Stoke's twentieth century extension along West Street and the Norton Road, over land that falls at a gentle gradient to west and south, feeding headwater tributaries that flow toward the River Parrett. To the north side of West Street, much of the area is given over to fruit production, with the fields full of blackcurrant bushes or orchard trees that are recently planted. Land to this side of the village has long had an association with fruit crops, and in most part this is undertaken within a rectilinear field pattern that correspond with the local lane network, framed by robust hedgerows that remain in good condition. Hence this northwest quadrant of the village is graded 'high' sensitivity, other than where hedge removal has taken place to extend a traditionally large field to the west of Cole Lane, and to the west of The Avenue, whose housing has brought about hedge removal. These two areas are accordingly graded 'moderate' sensitivity.

4.8 Below West Street, the land is generally open in character, with few hedgerow trees present in the landscape. The fields to either side of the Norton Road have been enlarged by the removal of single hedgerows, and housing has further eroded the field pattern. This is particularly marked in the instance of two fields between the junction of West Street and Norton Road, where built form is a dominant element, thus this specific area is assessed as 'low' sensitivity, with the adjacent larger fields graded 'moderate' as both hedge loss and housing intrusion is less, and the wider context predominantly rural in character. Four arable fields in the southwest corner of the study area, south of West Street and beyond the street's housing extent, are graded 'high' sensitivity, as their historic field pattern and defining hedgerows are intact, and their wider context is clearly rural. A series of narrow pastures and arable pockets at the western toe of Ham Hill, and east of Matts Lane which are crossed by sunken lanes laying between unmanaged tall hedgerows, retain a stronger sense of the historic landscape. Most are intricate in scale, and where no hedgerow loss has occurred, these fields are graded 'high' sensitivity. A single field inside the Norton parish boundary is graded 'moderate' due to hedgerow removal and its resultant larger scale, whilst immediately against the village edge, by Hamdon Close, the inclusion of both this housing, and the medical centre, into this field, has informed a 'low' sensitivity rating.

## 5) Visual sensitivity

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

### Visual envelope and containment

5.2 The character area assessment notes that the core of Stoke sub Hamdon originated by the northern toe of Ham Hill, with more recent growth spreading over even ground to the north and west of the village centre. Perched a little above the base of the vale, the housing line of High Street, extending across the lower north face of the hill, is viewed from a number of local vantage points at further distance to the north. Additionally, a small thread of housing climbs across the west face of Ham Hill, and its elevation overlooks the Parrett vale, from where the reverse view sees this housing as the main expression of the village to the west. With this manifestation of built form on higher ground, there is limited visual containment of Stoke's built extent in these quarters, with no emphatic landscape feature present to completely close out lines of view toward it from the west. Thus longer views toward the village - as it is currently expressed by its extent of built form - can be gained from a number of vantage points outside the study area to north and west, but becomes constrained by the local topography of Ham and Hedgecock Hills to the east and south.

5.3 Whilst Ham Hill offers superb views over Stoke sub Hamdon as a foreground element against the expansive backdrop of Somerset's central plain, the hill also acts to buffer longer views of the village from the southeast quadrant. Other than from the folly at the head of St. Michaels Hill, Montacute, there are no views that can be gained of the village once south of Vagg Hill (Yeovil Without parish) and this visual containment sweeps south and west until emerging from the 'shadow' of Ham Hill on the head of Chiselborough Hill, some 2 km to the south of Stoke, which views the village's linear spread along West Street, and toward Norton. With the River Parrett flowing through lower ground to the west of both Ham Hill and Stoke, the village's western extent and its hillside housing is rendered visible from higher ground to the southwest on the far side of the Parrett Vale, which looks across the Parrett valley toward Ham Hill, whose bulk initially draws the eye. As such, elevated vantage points in Merriott, Crewkerne and Hinton all gain a distant view of the village edge, but no perception of its core. It is similarly Ham Hill's housing that is only visible from the west, from land rising above the course of the Parrett, most notably by South Petherton's east edge, and this remains the prime visual element of the village's built form apparent to wider perception until vantage is gained to the east of Martock and from elevated ground by Ash and Tintinhull. From this quadrant, the housing on the lower north toe of Ham Hill, becomes the main

indicator of the village's presence, glimpsed through and slightly above intervening tree lines on the low laying farmland

5.4 Stoke's wider visual envelope (which defines its zone of visual influence) can thus be drawn well beyond the study area, to include Vagg, Ham and Hedgecock Hills to the east; Chiselborough and Chinnock Hill to the south and ground rising above Crewkerne and Hinton St George to the southwest. The extent of the envelope becomes less emphatic to the west, but broadly links high ground to the west of Over Stratton, to that of South Petherton's northeast edge, whilst to the north it is land of raised elevation by Martock's Foldhill Lane, and by the edge of Ash and Tintinhull that completes the outer extent of the ZVI.

5.5 Whilst Stoke Sub Hamdon's ZVI is widely drawn, primarily due to the elevation of housing along Ham Hills western face, it can also be noted that much of the intervening land between the village and the ZVI's extent, has no prospect of the settlement, due to the raised elements of the 'ridge and furrow' hill-lines to the south of the village obscuring intermediate views towards Stoke, and the dilute effect of vegetation tracery intervening in lower trajectory views from the north, which filters a prospect of the village from both the A3088 Cartgate Link, and the A303 until within circa 1.5km distance of Stoke's village core. It is the aggregation of these tree lines that provides some local visual buffering, but given their diffuse nature, a local envelope has no strong definition until combined with topography. In this instance it is noted that Percombe Hill, to the west of the village, offers both containment and screening of the village, from the area laying between South Petherton and Martock, whilst the northeast shoulder of Ham Hill creates a visual separation of Stoke Sub Hamdon from East Stoke.

### **Visual profile of Stoke sub Hamdon's immediate edge**

5.6 Within the area where visual containment is offered by the head and sides of Ham Hill, the main areas of Stoke Sub Hamdon's periphery can be identified as:

- i) the fields to the west of Ham Hill and south of West Street;
- ii) fields between West Street and the Percombe Hill ridge;
- iii) land between Percombe Hill and North Street;
- iv) fields laying between North Street and Castle Street; and
- v) land between Castle Street and Ham Hill's northern scarp head.

### **Area (i)**

5.7 Long distance views towards Stoke Sub Hamdon benefit from an immediate focal point by which to identify the village's location – that of the war memorial at the head of Ham Hill. It is the memorial, and the west facing hillsides that are the main elements to view from the distant west, and it is only once in close proximity that the rooftops of buildings by West Street and Matts Lane become apparent (photo 6) to thus signify the presence of the village. Whilst there is a thread of housing rising across the hillside by Ham Hill Road, this residential element is barely visible from the prime visual receptor of the hilltop itself (photo 1) and is clearly subservient to the matrix of scrub, unmanaged grassland and pasture (photo 5) which

characterises the hillside and lower slopes. As such, this visually prominent visitor destination and land clearly beyond the village edge is graded 'high' sensitivity. The one exception is land by Hamdon Close and the Medical Centre. Whilst apparent to local view (photo 6) this area is already characterised by development to 2 sides, and is thus viewed to be of 'moderate' sensitivity.

5.8 It is earlier noted that housing extends south from the village along Norton Road, and stops only a field's distance from similar linear development spreading north from Norton. This field's width is highly sensitive, for it ensures the separation of the two villages, and maintains a visual link between the wider countryside cover of the Parrett Vale, and the mixed landcover of the toe and side of Ham Hill. It is thus graded 'high' sensitivity to either side of Norton Road. Immediately to the rear of the Norton Road housing and to the south of West Street (photo 7) is an area of land characterised by building form to 2 sides, and with a limited visual profile. With no landscape features of note, this area is graded 'low' sensitivity, whilst land falling southwest away from West Street's final house, which is unattached to the village, open to view from the A356 to the west, and clearly within the wider rural context, is graded 'high' sensitivity. A single field that separates the above two land parcels, is accordingly graded 'moderate' sensitivity.

#### **Area (ii)**

5.9 Between Percombe Hill and West Street, the land falls gently toward a shallow valley that drains west toward the River Parrett. Beyond the street's edge, a group of 5 fields at the edge of the study area has no visual correspondence with the village, and clearly resides within the wider rural pattern, as is apparent in mid-distance views from the head of Ham Hill, and as seen from the A356. It is thus graded 'high' sensitivity. The remaining area is predominantly dedicated to fruit growing, and the apple trees in particular assist in buffering views of the Avenue as seen from the west (photo 8). Other than in overview from the head of Ham Hill, this general area does not have a substantive visual profile, and where abutting and contained in part by adjacent development, as between the rear of West Street and the Avenue, and Cole Lane relative to Glovers Close, in turn relative to Becks Close (photos 9 and 10) these edge areas are graded 'low' sensitivity. The remaining land is sufficiently removed from the village core to attract a 'moderate' grading.

#### **Area (iii)**

5.10 Falling gently north from the head of Percombe Hill, this area of land acts both as buffer to local views from the north east, and provides a degree of containment to the village. Having no visual correspondence with Stoke, and facing out toward the wider countryside, the whole of this area is graded 'high' sensitivity. Two exceptions are a pair of pasture fields that abut the village's northern extent to the west of Kings Road, and have a limited visual profile, to thus be graded 'moderate', and a single paddock contained by built form to 3 sides to the west of Walscombe Close with a minimal visual profile, which is assessed as having 'low' sensitivity.

#### **Area (iv)**

5.11 The fields that lay over land between North and Castle Streets lay in the northeast quadrant of the village, at a low elevation. As with the remainder of the settlement, it is clear to view from the head of Ham Hill (photo 3) from where the fields are seen to indent the village edge, particularly between Queens Crescent and Castle Farm. From all other vantage points in this quadrant, whether the Cartgate Link, A303 or local footpath network, this land has a low visual profile, barely seen in low trajectory views across these level fields where intervening field boundary vegetation acts as a filter to external vantage points. It is not until in close proximity to North Street that the peripheral fields are clearly revealed, and then they are seen against a backdrop of housing, as to the north of Castle Farm (photo 11). Well-related to the village edge, and with low visual profile, these edge fields are graded 'low' sensitivity. Larger fields stretching away from Stoke, as between the village edge and the A303; and toward Rixon Common; are better buffered by edge planting, and a degree more detached from the settlement nucleus. Whilst these fields retain a visual correspondence with the village, they clearly relate to the wider rural pattern, and are thus graded 'moderate' sensitivity. Finally, fields further to the north east are both buffered from the village edge, and provide a degree of filtering in local views. In being detached from settlement form in open countryside, and with minimal visual correspondence, they are graded 'high' sensitivity.

5.12 To the south of Castle Street, the land begins its rise toward Ham Hill's head. As seen from the north, the rough scrub and pasture of the Hill's flanks are clearly a separate visual entity from either village form or the local highway network (photo 12) and forms part of the wider hillside context and backdrop to the series of settlements threaded along its toe, between Montacute and Stoke. These hillsides, and the detached outer shoulder of land in the vicinity of the vicarage, which provides visual separate of the village from East Stoke, are thus graded 'high' sensitivity. The remaining fields, between Castle Street and High Streets, are graded 'moderate' sensitivity: Whilst immediately abutting built form on two sides, this grading recognises that (i) Castle Street's eastward extension is poorly related to the core of the village, and (ii) the fields rise to the south, to thus have a wider visual profile than much of the village edge, as demonstrated by Photo (4).

#### **Land beyond Stoke Sub Hamdon's immediate visual envelope**

5.13 There remains a small extent of the study area that lays outside Stoke's immediate vicinity, being the plateau head of Ham Hill, linking to the combe to the hill's east side, that in turn falls toward the settlement of East Stoke. Neither the hilltop nor its eastern sides are characterised by settlement form, and in being both prime visual receptors and possessing a high visual profile, this rural area is clearly of 'high' sensitivity. East Stoke itself is denoted by the loose grain of its early settlement, as expressed by the church and 2 adjacent farmsteads, whilst a tight nucleus of 20<sup>th</sup> century housing to its immediate west forms the main built area of the hamlet. There is no visual relationship between East Stoke and Stoke Sub Hamdon, Ham Hill's northeast shoulder ensuring separation. The settlement is also well contained by an immediate surround of mature trees, and the double hedgerows of adjacent roads and green lanes (photo 4). This area is thus classified as 'high' sensitivity, other than two small paddocks to the immediate east of

Stonehill, where back gardens are poorly buffered from the adjacent pasture, and are accordingly deemed to have 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 been weighted in the report. However, areas of wildlife value, plus sites with specific historical association or high recreational 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 Ham Hill Country Park lays to the immediate south of the village edge, covering the hillsides and head of Hamdon Hill. Much of this area is a designated SSSI (site of special scientific interest) primarily for geological reasons, and CWS (county wildlife site) mainly comprising neutral grassland; scrub; and ancient semi-natural broadleaf woodland. In addition to its wildlife interest, Ham Hill is also a scheduled ancient monument, primarily due to its Iron Age origins as one of the largest hill forts in Europe. Hedgecock Hill to the east is also a CWS and is similarly ancient semi-natural broadleaf woodland. To other sides of the village, the interest of the double hedge lines of the numerous green lanes are noted for their value as wildlife corridors, whilst headwater streams that flow off the hills are spring-fed, with associated small areas of wet grassland.

6.3 The village built conservation area is centred on the High Street/North Street confluence, and is broadly linear in area, extending along both North Street and up Ham Hill Road. East Stoke also has a smaller conservation area, which is an attractive open area of grassland and relic orchard trees, bounded by East Stoke House, Farm, and the church.

6.4 The Parrett, Liberty and Leland regional footpath trails all converge on Ham Hill, from which the Parrett Trail runs north off the hill through the centre of the village, heading back to the course of the River Parrett. The many green lanes that encircle the village are a well-used recreational resource, and all paths acting as links to the country park are intensively walked.

6.5 Trutts Brook, a tributary of the River Parrett to the north of the village, has associated areas prone to flooding (identified as flood zone 3B by the EA). 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 potentially constrained by flood risk.

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

## 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 Stoke sub Hamdon 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 areas of land with potential for strategic development can thus be identified on the landscape capacity plan, being;

- i) Four fields to the immediate west edge of the village off North Street, between Kings Road and Cole Lane;
- ii) two fields between Queens Crescent and Castle Farm;
- iii) land to the north of West Street, adjacent the Avenue;
- iv) land contained between West Street and Norton Road; and
- v) a single field to the south of Hamdon Close

7.4 **Area (i)** indicates two adjacent fields to the north and west of Glovers Close, and the eastern halves of two further fields to the west of Kings Road and Halscombe Close as having a moderate – high potential for development. The area has a gentle gradient and few landscape constraints, other than the hedgerows that currently delineate field boundaries. Adjacent urban development is housing along the east boundary, along with a small cluster of farm buildings immediately below Walscombe Close. Consequently residential growth would appear to be the most appropriate form of development in this location, although some small-scale work units could also be incorporated, as are currently serviced off Glovers Close. Strategic landscape treatment would also be essential, to buffer the north edge from the relentless presence of traffic along the A303.

7.5 Two fields to the east of North Street/Queens Crescent (**area ii**) by Castle Farm are indicated with a moderate – high potential for development. This area is abutted by a mix of residential form and traditionally scaled farm buildings, plus 3 small paddocks associated with the farm that lay within the village conservation area. Its development would necessitate a new access to be formed off North Street, but if this could be negotiated then again there is scope for both residential and small-scale employment units, the latter to be compatible with the scale of the farm's traditional buildings.

7.6 The southern end of two fields is indicated to the rear of both West Street and The Avenue (**area iii**) with a moderate – high potential for development. An access through the West Street frontage would need to be negotiated to deliver the site, and part of the area is recently planted with commercial fruit trees. Should these constraints be overcome, then the gentle gradient and adjacent residential form would appear to imply further residential form as the most appropriate use. Landscape treatment would be required to both contain and soften the site's northward extent.

7.7 **Area (iv)** indicates two small fields that are partially contained by West Street and Norton Road, with road frontage onto West Street. With residential form the main built characteristic of the locality, and noting the land to be level and free from landscape constraint, then further residential development would appear to be the favoured development form in this location. Landscape treatment would be necessary to define and contain the sites southward extent.

7.8 Finally, a single field lying to the immediate south of Hamdon Close (**area v**) is indicated as having a moderate – high capacity for development. With access potentially available through the existing residential site, a further extension of housing form would appear to be the obvious form of development in this location. However, it is noted that the land rises at a moderate gradient from the valley floor by Matts Lane, to a level of some prominence in the field's eastern corner. This latter area is assessed as only having a moderate capacity for development, and it is considered that an allocation of informal open space provides the most landscape-sympathetic form of development in this quarter of the site.

## 8) Outline Proposals

8.1 Five potential areas of development have been identified by the landscape capacity plan, and their potential uses outlined in the previous section, paras 7.4 - 7.8. 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 to the west of North Street's residential area, with a potential access off Glovers Close, and offers a potential development area in the vicinity of 5.00 ha. As this land would form a new development edge at the rural interface, medium build densities (circa 40 dph net) would be appropriate to create a sympathetic urban:rural balance. A site of this scale would require proportionate open space, equating to 1.00 ha unless part of the land area were to be utilised for small-scale employment. Part of the open space would best be utilised along the west boundary, as part of a landscape buffer to better separate the site from the wider countryside. Strategic planting to buffer the site, of at least 0.25 ha, would also be essential to counteract the impact of light and sound from the A303's vehicular traffic.

8.3 To the east of Castle Farm, 4.40 ha of open land (**site ii**) lays a short distance from North Street, from which access would be a necessity to facilitate site development. Again there is a potential for a mixed-use development, though primarily of residential use. Assuming an allocation of 2.40 ha housing, at a density of 40 dph, then open space of 0.60 ha would be a minimum requirement. There is also the option of utilising land by the side of North Street (indicated as moderate capacity – fig. 5) for open space, thereby releasing the whole of this area for building form. This would enable a theoretical mix of 3.00 ha residential, and 1.40 ha employment.

8.4 Laying to the rear of West Street and adjacent to The Avenue, **area iii** is another site that would be dependent upon a new access being created to facilitate development. Such would enable 2.50 ha coming forward as a potential housing site, with 2.00 ha available for housing, the remainder to provide informal open space, part of which would best be provided along the northern edge to buffer development from the wider countryside.

8.5 **Site (iv)** lays within a quadrant formed by development along both West Street and Norton Road. With potential for access from West Street, an area of 2.10 ha offers potential for residential development, with commensurate open space circa 0.40 ha. To enable a degree of consistency with surrounding housing form, net densities of 40 dph should not be exceeded.

8.6 Finally, **site (v)** has the potential to provide 1.40 ha of housing development to the south of Hamdon Close. Within this field, an elevated area of land circa 0.40 ha is evaluated as unsuitable for development, yet well placed to accommodate open space and structural landscape treatment. Whilst the adjacent housing edge is quite compact, net densities of 40 dph are considered to be a maximum due to the moderate slope across the site, and to accommodate the woody vegetation that currently provides both surround and context for the site.

8.7 In summary, the following areas are proposed as having a potential for development.

- (i) W of Glovers Close - 2.50 > 4.00 ha residential  
> 1.50 ha employment  
1.00 ha open space  
structural landscape to the N boundary
- (ii) E of North Street - 2.40 > 3.80 ha residential  
> 1.40 ha employment  
0.60 > 0.95 ha open space  
access requirement
- (iii) N of West Street - 2.00 ha residential  
0.50 ha open space  
access requirement
- (iv) West End - 1.70 ha residential  
0.40 ha open space
- (v) Off Hamdon Close - 1.40 ha residential  
0.40 ha open space

8.8 The capacity study indicates that Stoke Sub Hamdon has both scope for landscape – sympathetic growth, and a choice of development sites: In total, the above sites offer a minimum of 10.00 ha of residential land capable of delivering circa 400 houses, if built at an average of 40 dwellings per hectare. An allowance of up to 2.90 ha for employment land is an addition to the above numbers, and each site has the capacity to provide commensurate open space. By Stoke sub Hamdon’s standards, the aggregated areas are substantial and will offer some choice of potential development options in the forthcoming plan period. As such, a potential for development can be planned to avoid an adverse impact upon Stoke’s immediate setting, and its wider landscape context, consistent with the prime objectives of this assessment.

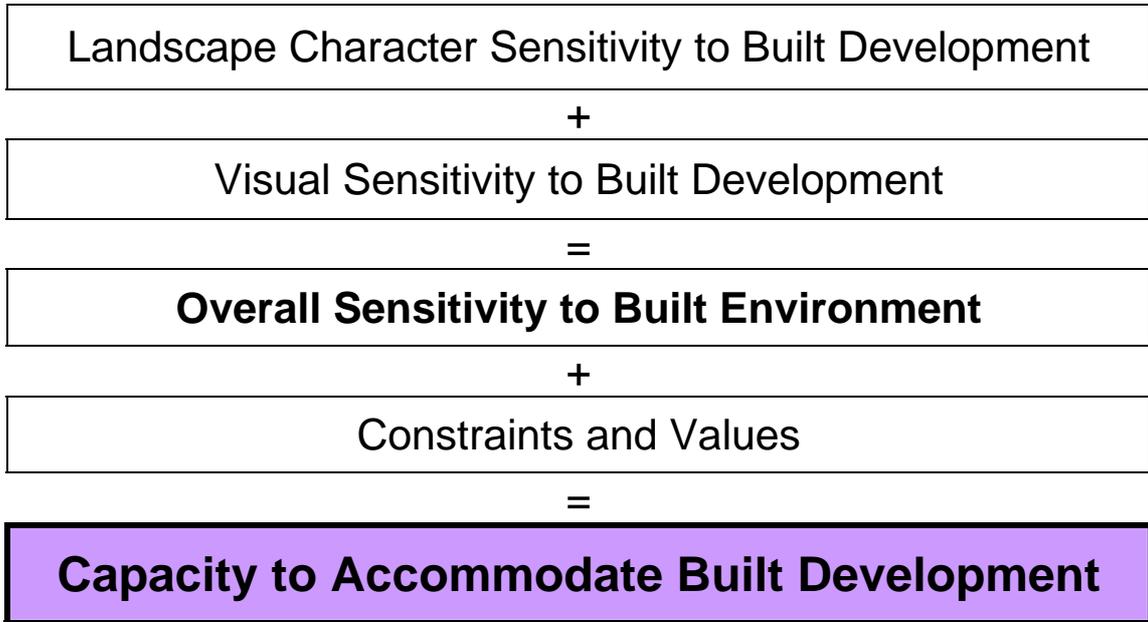
Robert Archer  
12 March 2010

## **Peripheral landscape study – Stoke sub Hamdon**

### **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 |                   |               |

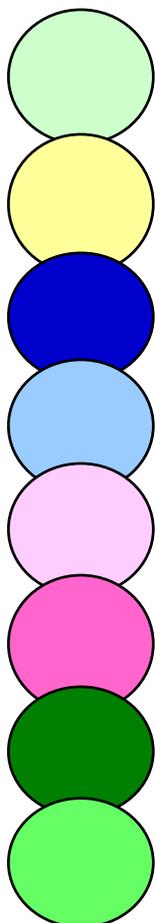
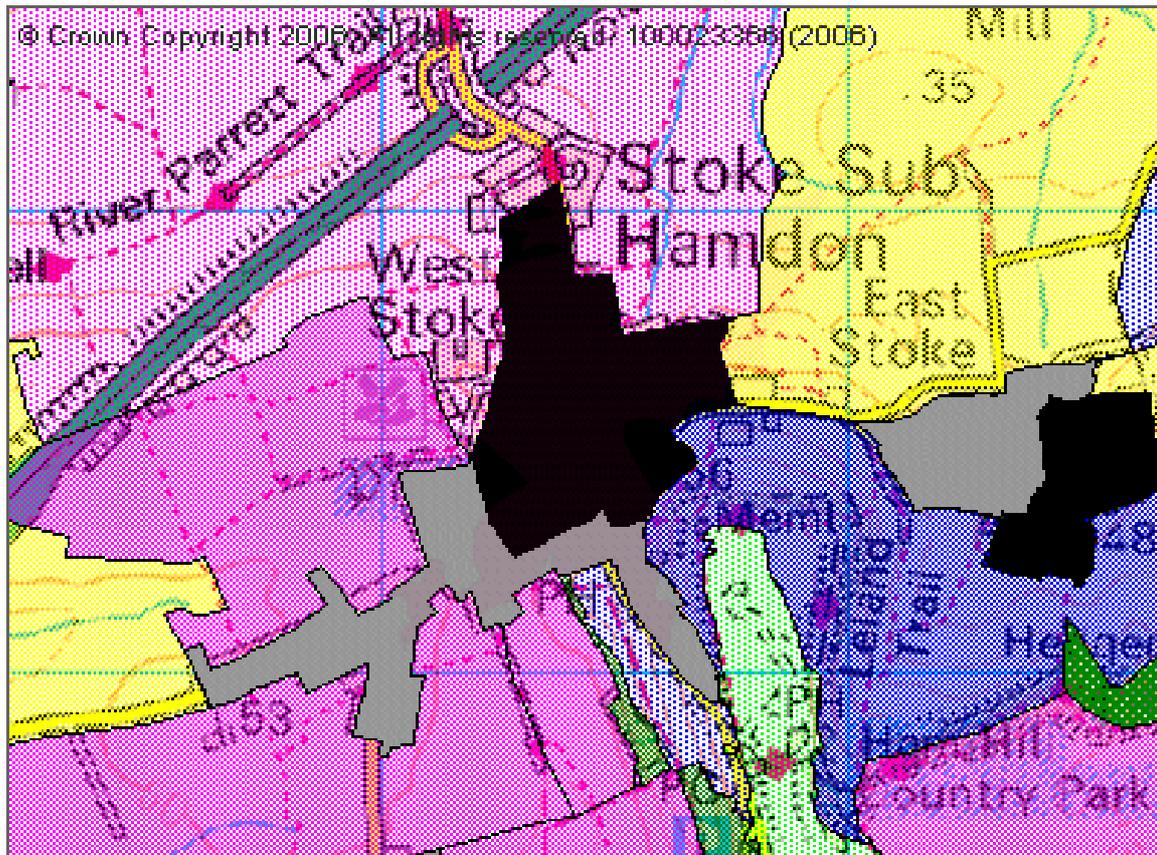
**Landscape Capacity Matrix**

**Peripheral landscape study – Stoke sub Hamdon**

**Appendix 2 - historic landscape character**

## Historic landscape characterisation – Stoke sub Hamdon

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### key:

Unenclosed pasture

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

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

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

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

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

Replanted ancient woodland (as defined by English Nature).

Historic Parkland

## **Peripheral landscape study – Stoke sub Hamdon**

### **Appendix 3 - photos**





Photo 1: From Ham Hill looking west over the village, with West Street and the Norton Road characterised by linear housing development.



Photo 2: Looking northwest across the village from Ham Hill, with recent development on Duchy land clearly in evidence in the mid-distance.



Photo 3: Looking north from Ham Hill's War Memorial, with Castle Street's extent into open countryside in evidence in the middle ground.



Photo 4: From the east side of Ham Hill, looking north down 'The Combe' toward East Stoke in its sheltered location between Ham and Hedgecock Hills.



Photo 5: Looking northwest from the west flank of Ham Hill, with the village's western extent set against a backdrop of orchards and fruit fields.



Photo 6: From Norton's edge looking NE across the fruit fields, with the housing rising up Ham Hill Road the most evident facet of the village' built form when viewed from this southwest quarter.



Photo 7: From the public footpath south of West End Garage, looking into the rear of housing along both West street and the Norton Road



Photo 8: Looking across the fruit fields into land between West Street and The Avenue, with Ham Hill Road's housing evident in its hillside ascent as backdrop.



Photo 9: Looking northwest from Cole Lane over small pasture fields to the rear of Glovers Close at the village edge.



Photo 10: Land to the rear (west) of Becks Close, as viewed from the adjacent footpath to the northwest. Ham Hill's war memorial is prominent on the skyline.



Photo 11: Looking southwest toward housing to the rear (east) of North Street, from the adjacent footpath network.



Photo 12: Castle Street's housing in the middle distance clearly projects east beyond the established village edge



Photo 13: From the eastern extent of Castle Street, looking west toward the village edge, with the spire of the United Reform Church on the skyline.



Photo 14: Looking northwest from the High Street entrance to the village, over the east edge of the village, and noting Castle Street's linear extent into open land.



**Peripheral landscape study –  
Stoke sub Hamdon**

**Appendix 4 - plans**

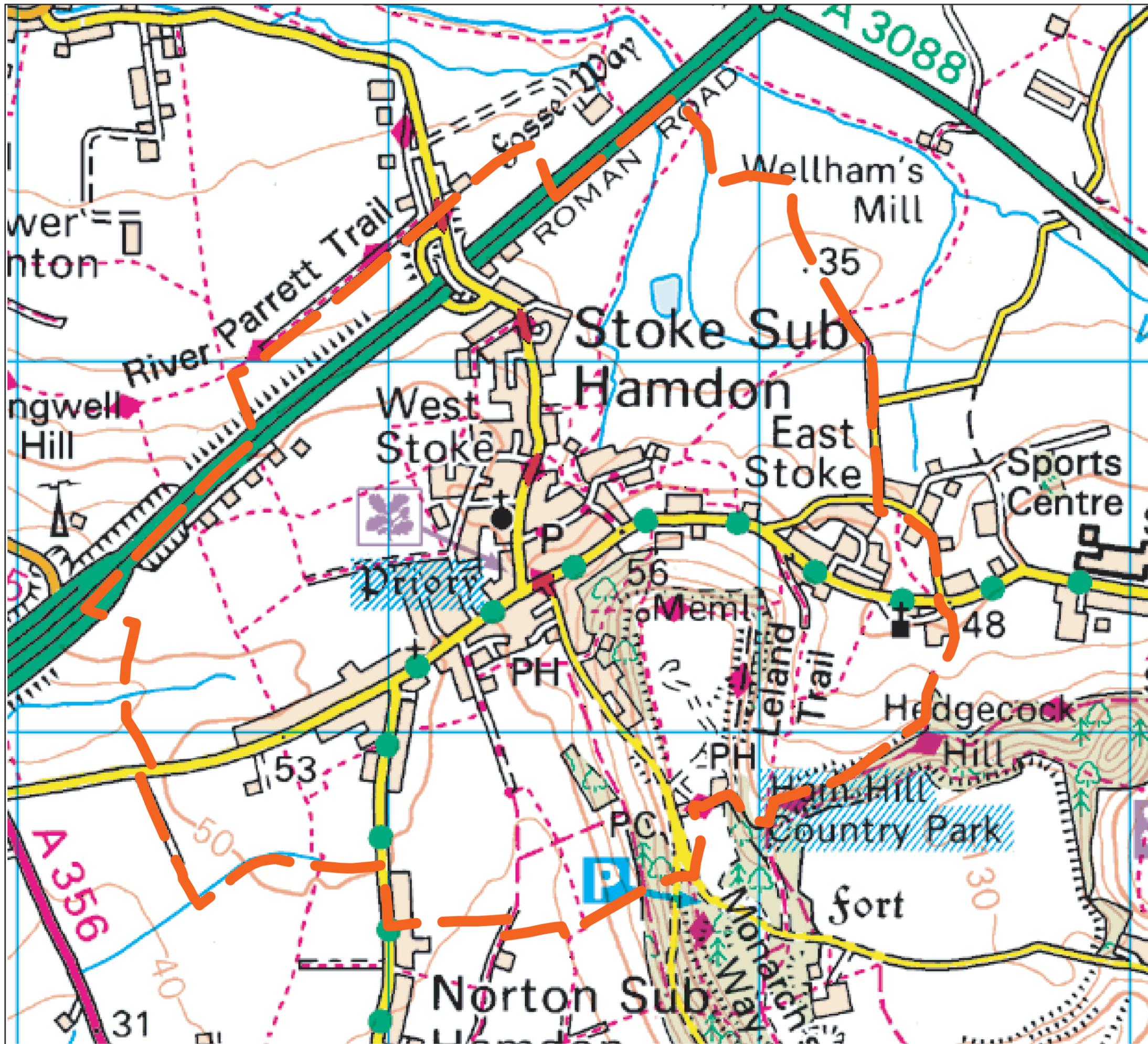


Figure 1 -  
Context

Stoke sub  
Hamdon

 Study Area

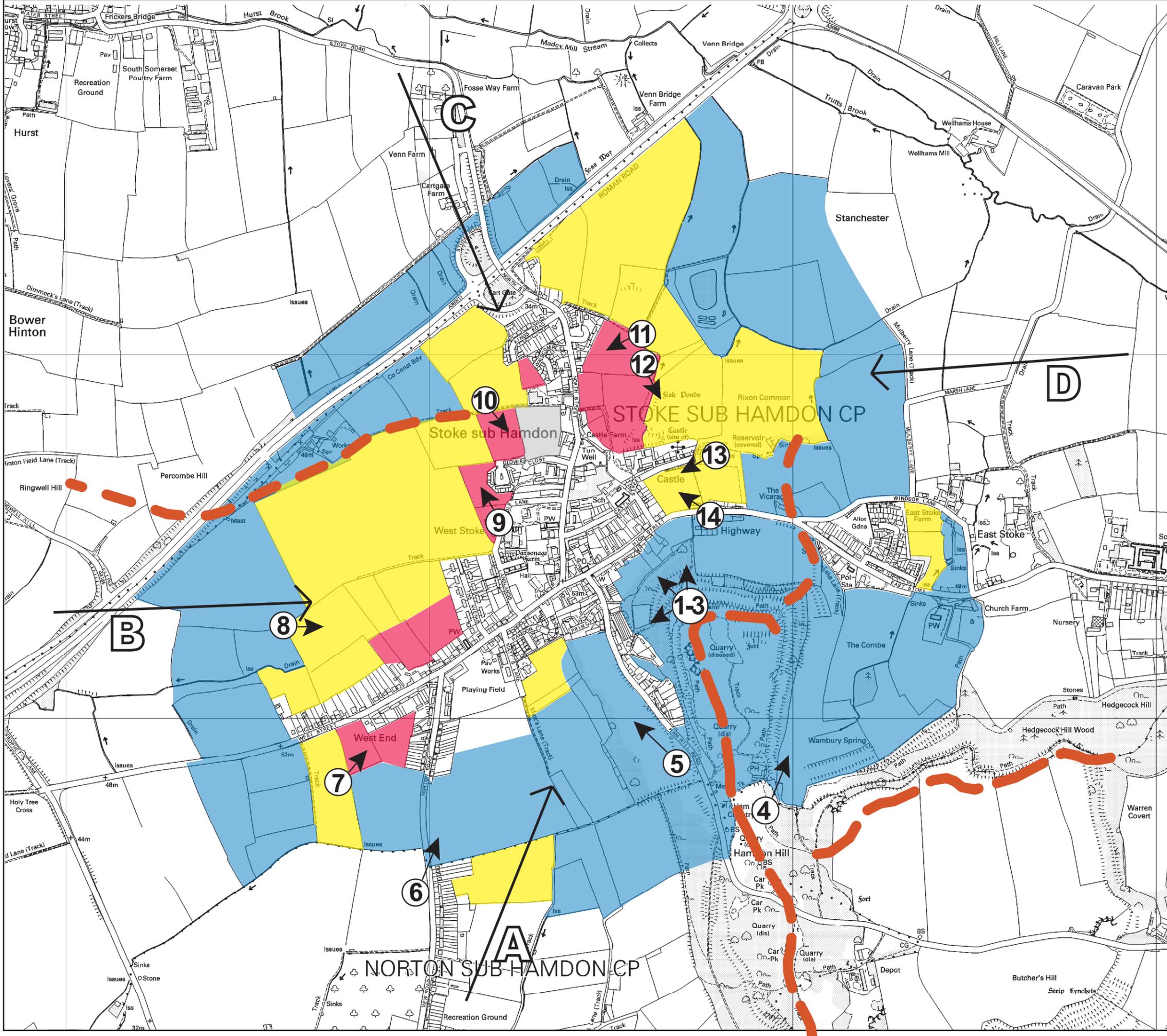
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# Figure 3 - Visual Sensitivity Stoke sub Hamdon

-  Prime line of Visual Containment
-  Secondary Line of Visual Containment
-  Area of low visual sensitivity
-  Area of moderate visual sensitivity
-  Area of high visual sensitivity
-  Photo Vantage Points (1 - 14)
-  Long Distance Views
- A - Crewkerne
- B - South Petherton
- C - Martock
- D - Vagg Hill

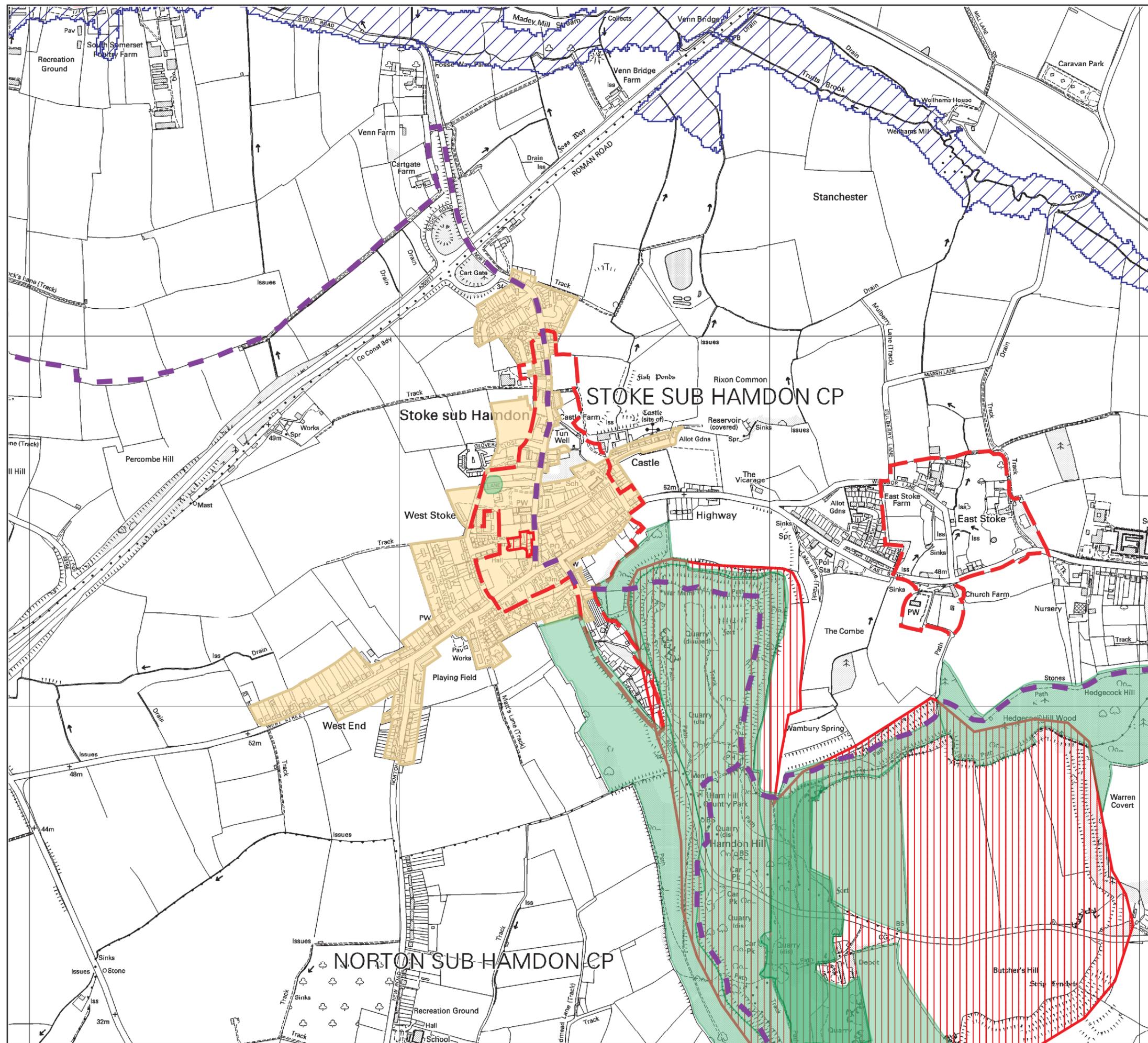


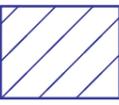
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# Figure 4- Values & Constraints Stoke-sub-Hamdon



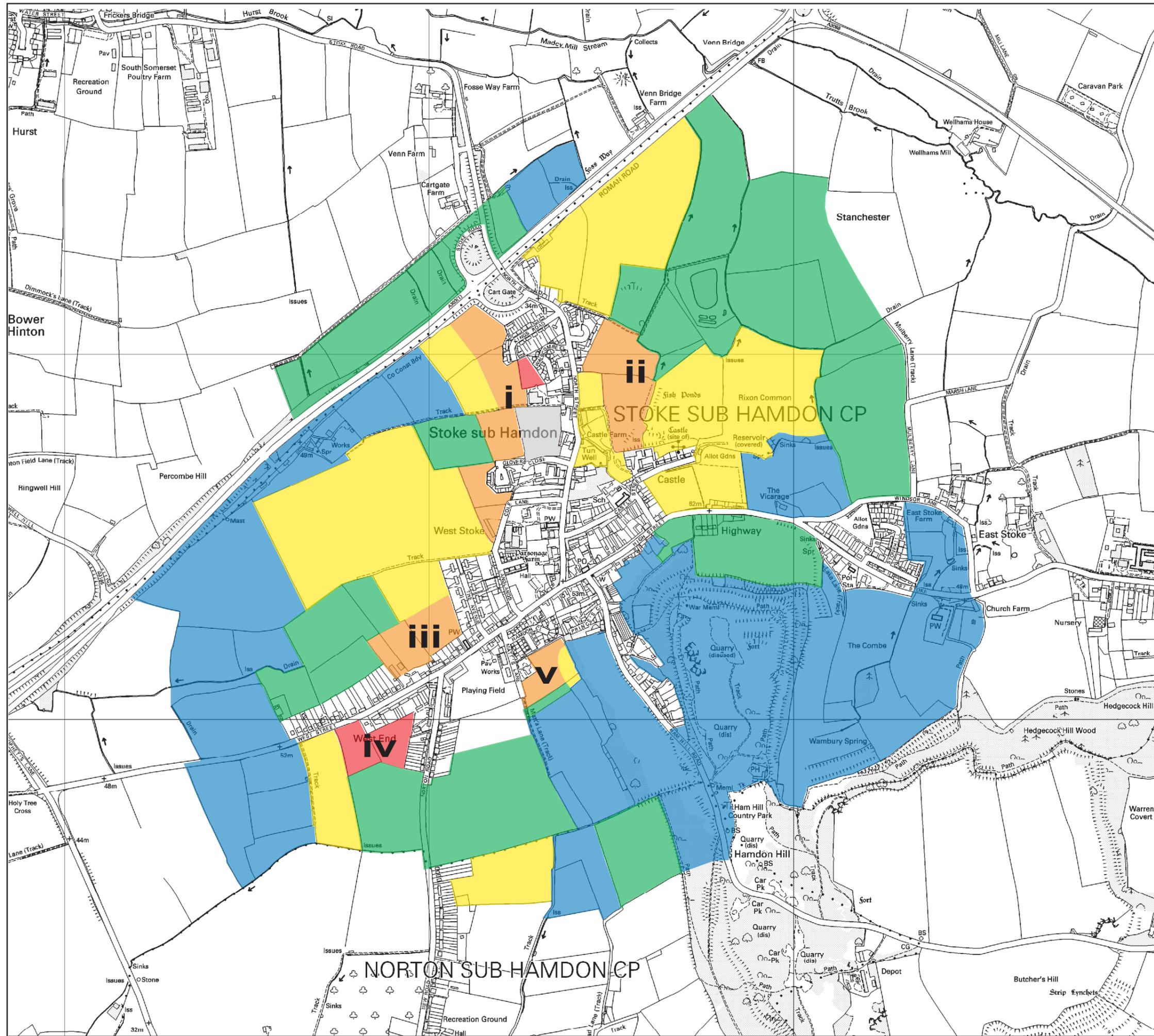
-  County Wildlife Sites
-  Development Area
-  Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
-  Flood Zone 3B
-  Scheduled Ancient Monument
-  Conservation Area
-  Regional Footpath Trails

scale 1:10,000 @ A3



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# Figure 5 - Landscape Capacity Stoke sub Hamdon



 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

**i - v** Potential development areas report sections 7-8

scale 1:10,000 @ A3



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