



Peripheral landscape study – Wincanton

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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. This will complement other evidence-based work that will contribute to the LDF process.

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

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

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

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

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

Structure of the report.

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

1.5 This study considers Wincanton.

2) The settlement

2.1 Wincanton lays to the east of the county close to the Dorset/Wiltshire border, and is one of the district's larger market towns with a population approaching 4800. It is sited toward the northern head of the Blackmore Vale, overlooking the Cale valley, to the east of the intersection of the A303 London - Exeter, and A371/357 Shepton Mallett – Blandford Forum roads. Its name means 'settlement on the Wincawel stream', and the town's Saxon origins were founded on the east bank of the Cale, in the vicinity of the Church, to then extend up the hill toward the current High Street with the establishment of burgage plots in the 13th century. Wincanton's strategic location for trade encouraged its steady growth from medieval times onward, later boosted by its position on the main Exeter- London coach route. Cloth manufacture contributed to the local economy through the middle-ages, whilst clock making was an 18th century specialism of the town. The building of the Cow and Gate milk factory in the 1930's marked the ongoing contribution of the dairy industry to the town's prosperity.

2.2 The town has spread south, east and west from its High Street core, though the main commercial area of the town remains concentrated on the Market Place and High Street. Residential growth spread initially along the main arterial roads from the early 19th century, whilst the past 50 years has seen the infill of land between these roads, primarily in the form of large housing estates in the northwest and southeast quadrants. The main employment area lays to the southwest of the town, concentrated by the north side of the A303.

2.3 Whilst founded in a valley location, Wincanton has developed as a hillside town with a southerly aspect, with the majority of the town's area now laying over ground to either side of the narrow valley cut by the River Cale between West Hill and Windmill Hill. These hilltops broadly define the town's northward extent, whilst the Blackmore Vale's edge coincides with Wincanton's southerly limit, as currently defined by the artificial line of the A303, which runs east-west across the head of the vale.

Identification of the study area:

2.4 Based upon the methodology outlined in para 1.3, the Wincanton study area is broadly defined by the race course to the north, projecting east parallel with Rectory Lane to include Charlton Musgrove church and Bayford village street. The boundary then runs due south to Shaftesbury Lane, to turn west to cut across the Blackmore Vale circa 1km below the line of the A303. Below Great Hatherleigh Farm, the line then turns northwest, and joins the A371 through to Holbrook House before turning northeast to head cross country by Suddon Grange, to return to the racecourse. The limit of the study area is indicated on figure 1 – context.

3) Landscape Character

The national context:

3.1 Landscape character assessment is an approach that aids recognition and understanding of the differences between landscapes, and states what constitutes local distinctiveness. In 1996, the Countryside Agency (now Natural England) undertook a national study of the character of England's landscape, to enable definition and description of the range and diversity of the English landscape, and its categorisation into 'character areas'. This study was published as a national map, with accompanying regional volumes that describe the resultant areas in detail. Volume 8: South West England, places Wincanton within character area 133 – *Blackmoor Vale*, whilst area 140 – *Yeovil Scarplands* lays within the western quadrant of the study area. The key characteristics of the Blackmore Vale as noted by the assessment are:

- *A complex mosaic of mixed farming: undulating, lush, clay vales fringed by Upper Greensand hills and scarps.*
- *Small, rectilinear pasture fields with hedgerow oak trees and many scattered small broadleaved woodlands.*
- *Many streams and waterside trees.*
- *Wooded Upper Greensand scarps and outliers with historic parks.*
- *Open arable Upper Greensand and dip slopes.*
- *Broken, low, limestone ridges with shallow valleys crossing the clayey Blackmoor Vale and steeper valleys around the margins of the area.*
- *Small villages and hamlets form nucleii within a patchwork of fields, hedges, woods and trees.*
- *Many villages at scarp foot, river crossing points and strategic sites.*
- *A wide variety of local building materials and techniques, including half timbering. Todber Freestone and Upper Greensand are widely used in the east.*

3.2 The full descriptive text of the Blackmore Vale character area is available on the Natural England website,

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

Typical of Wincanton and its surrounding landscape are the following extracts:

The core of the Blackmoor Vale character is the lush, clay vales, predominantly in pasture use. They have an even pattern of straight-sided hedged fields, scattered woodlands, dense hedgerows and common hedgerow trees. Streamside willows and alders and the hanging mists add to a low-lying, almost wetland atmosphere. Farmsteads and small hamlets are scattered through the landscape but there are few villages. A varied pattern of lanes and roads, sometimes narrow and twisting, sometimes straight, with wide verges rich in wildflowers connects the settlements.

To the east and north, the Vale landscape is broken by low limestone hills. There are occasional dramatic forms, like the almost conical Duncliffe Hill, as well as low rounded hills.

In the west, rising out of the clay vale in broken fashion are low limestone hills. They divide the main part of Blackmoor Vale into east and west sections and eventually merge with the Yeovil Scarplands beyond. The fields are typically larger than in the adjacent clay vale and the hedgerow trees are less evenly spaced and dominant, emphasising the regular pattern on the clay all the more. Small strategically-sited towns like (Wincanton) overlook the Vales and the views from these high points ... are often spectacular.

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 Wincanton 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 places Wincanton within visual character region (VCR) '**Escarments, Ridges and vales east of Yeovil**'. Each VCR is sub-divided into landscape character areas (LCAs) and the following LCAs cover the Wincanton study area;

- i) Downland, Combes and Holloways, to the west, and;
- ii) Wooded ridges and clay vales.

3.5 The 'Downland, Combes and Holloways' LCA broadly covers the western quadrant of the study area, hereafter identified within this study as '**dissected dip-slope**'. This area comprises the gentle east-falling dipslope of the East Somerset hills as cross-dissected by headwater streams of both the Brue and Cale rivers. The assessment identifies and describes the area thus;

These hills are formed from the Middle and Upper Lias family of rocks overlain with Inferior Oolite limestones. The rocks from the Upper Lias are the familiar Yeovil sands and these, where exposed, give the characteristic land forms and land cover of coombe and holloway. The limestones cap the Yeovil Sands and fall away in a shallow eastward dip-slope, which is largely treeless and hedgeless presenting large fields with broad sweeping vistas of ripening cereals.

The oolitic plateau area between Bruton and Castle Cary displays particularly ancient signs of past cultivation in numerous strip lynchets (Fig 24). There are old drove roads and bridleways which create holloways. Locally distinctive are the hazel coppice hedges and numerous pollard ash trees and ridge top hedges which are now becoming overgrown and leggy.

This is a landscape offering contrasts in light and shade-enclosed dark holloways and coombes and broad sunlit grassy vistas. It is an ancient landscape inviting exploration on foot.

3.6 The 'Wooded ridges and clay vales' covers the majority of the town's built area, along with the broad clay vales to both north and south of the town, and the dividing line of hills (in the vicinity of the Mere fault) that separate the two vales. This larger area is identified and described by the assessment as follows;

Generally -

The geology is a series of northeast to southwest-aligned rock formations forming a succession of ridges, dip slopes and vales. To the north beyond a major fault line, the Mere Fault, coincident with the A303 at Leigh Common, the bands of rock become more complex in form, more convoluted and with a much more varied landform.

The larger settlements are located on the more benign gentle slopes and better-drained soils of the oolitic limestones and Yeovil Sands. The Oxford Clays are particularly intractable and these areas are sparsely populated even today.

Land use today is predominantly pastoral with improved grass leys for silage. Dairy herds are on the less well-drained soils in the clay vales and sheep grazing takes place on the unimproved steeper slopes.

Lower clay vale -

To the east are the great Oxford Clay Vales. Divided by the Mere Faultline each clay vale has a distinctive character but generally it the same floristic make-up. The Blackmoor Vale is one of the great topographical features of the district. Flat and poorly drained it has remained a landscape of little change since its enclosure from the Selwood Forest in the 17th and 18th century. The rectilinear hedge and field pattern south of Shaftesbury Lane may be a result of late enclosure.

The vale is notable for the quality of its hedged landscape, its flower filled droves and roadside verges and many aquatic habitats and marshy fields. There is a notable absence of settlement with few roads. The very wide verges may be due to the efforts of medieval carters to find a drier route across a winter quagmire.

Upper vale -

The Oxford clays north of the Mere Fault are equally intractable and therefore pastoral in nature. However, influenced by the proximity of the Greensand ridge, the landscape is far more wooded. Numerous oaks spill down the slopes. trees are located within fields as well as on the edges. Meadowland is uneven and hedges are few, replaced instead by linear bands of trees and woodland which snake down the slopes and protect several streams which have incised deep valleys, none more so than the infant Brue near Brewham.

The A303 highway is situated on an east west alignment which disrupts the continuity of the north-south geological and topographical 'grain' of the landscape as it slices through the ridges creating huge cuttings.

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

- i) **Upper vale**, which describes the raised valley laying to the north of Wincanton, as drained by the river Cale, and overlooked by the distant Selwood ridge;

- ii) **Low hills**, which identifies the group of hills that link the raised limestone hills to the east, with the East Somerset Hills and associated dipslope to the west, thus acting to divide the clay vale above and below Wincanton, and;
- iii) **Lower Vale**, which broadly covers that part of the Blackmore Vale that lays to the south of the town

3.8 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 character area in turn, the outcome of this stage of the study will be to grade areas of Wincanton'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 two landscape character areas as falling within the study area, with the greater area, 'wooded ridges and clay vales' subdivided according to local variation in landscape type, as identified para 3.6. The first local character area to be considered is that of the 'upper vale'.

Upper Vale (Character Area A)

4.3 This area lays to the north of the town and is a broad vale drained by the River Cale and its headwater streams, laying between the undulating form of the East Somerset Hills to the west, and the distinctive line of the Selwood ridge to the east. Within the study area, the Upper Vale encompasses part of the Wincanton race course, from which the land falls east on a gentle, relatively even gradient beyond Charlton Musgrove church. The vale's southern end is denoted by a marked fall into the valley incised by the River Cale, before rising sharply over the intervening limestone hills.

4.4 To the east of the B3081, an enclosure pattern overlays fields in mixed agricultural use, though a number of the bounding hedgerows are species-rich, inclusive of specimen oak and ash trees, and are likely to pre-date enclosure. There is little evidence of loss of landscape features and with much of this area distinctly rural, it is graded 'high' sensitivity. The exception is two fields adjacent to the race course stands which, lacking specimen trees, are more open in character and thus allow the physical presence of the stands to pervade beyond the roadside boundary. They are accordingly graded 'moderate' sensitivity, as is the racecourse and its associated land. The stands themselves, and related buildings are an incongruous feature divorced from an urban setting, and are thus graded 'low' sensitivity.

Low hills (Character Area B)

4.5 The second local character area is that of the 'Low Hills' which comprise a series of individual hills that link and thus separate the wider Blackmore Vale to the south, from the upper vale to the north of the town. These hills are incised by the River Cale and its headwater streams, which has resulted in an undulating topography that is distinct from the broader landform of the dip-slope to the west. Windmill Hill is the main landmark in this area and it is over its southern hillsides that the greater part of Wincanton has grown. In this respect, Wincanton differs

from South Somerset's major towns, in being a hillside settlement, primarily expressed by residential growth that has spread across the south and southwest slopes of Windmill Hill, falling to larger employment structures at the foot of the hill, to either side of the River Cale, and north of the A303.

4.6 Within this character area, the urban edge opens to the wider countryside to both north, east and southeast, and this zone abutting the town can be broken into 3 broad peripheral areas, namely:

- a) Windmill hill top and northern hillsides;
- b) Land around Bayford, to the east of the town; and
- c) Land to the southeast of the A303 corridor.

4.7 The relatively flat head of Windmill Hill has long marked the open edge of the town's residential growth to both north and east. Both hilltop and the outer hillsides are primarily pasture cover, defined by robust hedge lines containing irregular mid-scale fields that decrease in size as they descend over the lower, steeper slopes that face north, away from the town. Specimen trees become more plentiful on these steeper slopes, where a number of the hedgerows are also unmanaged, thus bringing a sense of enclosure to these lower hillsides, adjacent to the valley formed by the River Cale. Slope gradient and limited accessibility to the hilltop has precluded intensive agricultural management of this area, and the field pattern is little changed over time, hence this area is graded 'high' sensitivity, other than two locations immediately by the urban edge (above Overton and by Windmill Farm) where urban presence informs a 'moderate' grading.

4.8 Bayford lays in a shallow valley between Windmill Hill to its west, and Sunny Hill to the northeast. Whilst linked to Wincanton by the former alignment of the A303 coach road, alongside which the ribbon of Bayford's housing joins with the town's east edge on Bayford Hill, the town is otherwise separated from the village by the raised saddle of ground that extends from Windmill Hill, southeast alongside Devenish Lane toward Coneygore Hill (by Stoke Trister village). This topographic separation places Bayford apart from Wincanton, within an individual valley setting. Here, the village is bounded by small-mid scale fields, that are delineated by flailed hedgerows, of which many are species-rich. Specimen trees abound in hedgerows and field corners, and mix with scrub on steeper slopes. Other than a mix of alder, ash and willow along the stream corridor, this is oak country. The historic landscape pattern is in most part intact, hence the greater part of this area is graded 'high' sensitivity. Exceptions occur where the A303 corridor slices through Bayford Hill (Devenish Lane) and at the east edge of the village, where road re-alignment has removed traditional features; and over part of the parkland south of Bayford Lodge, where field boundaries have been lost, along with specimen trees. These areas are thus graded 'moderate' sensitivity, other than the single field immediately alongside Wincanton's residential east edge, where with lack of a credible boundary, urban presence now dominates this narrow field, thus informing a 'low' sensitivity grading.

4.9 To the south of the A303 and Devenish Lane, a low ridge extending southwest from Coneygore Hill contains a shallow valley sited to the (east) side of, and slightly separated from, the wider Blackmore Vale. This area is open in

character, with mid-scale fields delineated by trimmed hedgerows, many of which run along the contour, and contain occasional specimen trees. It is a landscape of mixed agriculture, which has led to a degree of hedge removal, particularly within the area adjacent to the A303. This area is thus graded 'moderate' sensitivity, other than immediately alongside the A303, where the disruption of the road boundary upon the landscape pattern, some recent non-native plantings, and gappy hedgerows arising from inappropriate management, informs a 'low' sensitivity grading. Conversely, the historic field pattern on the lower hillsides of Coneygore Hill is relatively intact, with thick meandering mixed-species hedge lines and mature oaks a traditional feature within a clear rural context. This area is thus graded 'high' sensitivity.

Lower Clay Vale (Character Area C)

4.10 To the south of the town and immediately below the A303 road corridor, the valley floor widens into a broad, open vale. This area is a large-scale enclosure landscape, with mid-large rectilinear fields enclosed by trimmed hedges, interspersed with occasional specimen trees, predominantly ash. Where the field boundaries coincide with deep ditches and watercourses, a wetland characteristic is more to the fore, as typified by willows and lines of reed. For much of this area, the distinctive Blackmore Vale character, as expressed by a lack of development form, the rectilinear field pattern, and its distinctive vegetation mix and wetland elements, is relatively intact, and is thus graded 'high' sensitivity. However, many of the fields closer to the town have suffered some erosion of character due to historic hedgerow removal; harsh or inappropriate hedgerow management, and the planting of inappropriate tree species. Such areas are thus graded 'moderate' sensitivity, other than where the modern engineering of large road and sewage treatment structures is superimposed on the landscape, to thus inform a 'low' sensitivity grading.

Dissected dip-slope (Character Area D)

4.10 This area is an eastward extension of the 'low hills' character area (B) with its main difference laying in being a single topographical entity, comprising a westward rising dip-slope dissected by swift-running streams in narrow valleys, rather than the series of individual hills that characterise the 'low hills'. The hilltops are broad yet well hedged with an irregular mid-scale field pattern of mixed agriculture, much of which predates nineteenth century enclosure. Whilst there are few trees over the head of the dip-slope, many hedges are robust and drawn up, to thus provide a sense of containment. The valleys are topographically contained, with their steeper slopes determining a land-use that is primarily pastoral, with smaller fields and a mix of scrub and tree growth supplementing the hedgerows. Away from the urban edge, much of the landscape pattern has remained intact and is well expressed and is thus graded 'high' sensitivity.

4.11 During the twentieth century, Wincanton spread into this character area to the west of the River Cale, primarily in the form of residential growth over West Hill. It is set to spread further to the west, in the form of the key site allocation adjacent to New Barns Farm. This urban edge lays adjacent to the following peripheral areas:

- a) the Hook Brook valley;
- b) land west of New Barns Farm; and
- c) land to the northwest of Dancing Lane.

4.12 The Hook Brook valley runs parallel with, and to the north of, the A303 road corridor. This is an area of variable quality, ranging from the 'high' sensitivity of the fields by Lawrence Hill, as characterised by the sinuous, robust species-rich hedgerows, streamside vegetation, and pasture cover interspersed with specimen oaks, grading through to an area of 'low' sensitivity relating to the field immediately alongside the employment site, where building form is the dominant character. To the west of Lawrence Hill, the remainder of the valley is graded 'moderate' for the ancient landscape pattern has been compromised in-part by road realignment, the planting of inappropriate tree species, and some removal of hedging in favour of post and rail fencing, yet is sufficiently divorced from the town's urban form to be considered a countryside location.

4.13 Land to the west of New Barns Farm covers the rising hillside above the Hook Brook and the hilltop field extending west from West Hill. Whilst the traditional pattern is in most part intact, there has been some deterioration in the condition of both the hedgerows, which have become gappy through lack of management and elm die-back; and the orchard, which has lost many of its fruit trees, whilst others are in uncertain health. The area is thus graded 'moderate' sensitivity.

4.14 To the northwest of Dancing Lane's housing, the fields are well-hedged and define a mid-scale, irregular landscape pattern, that is historically intact and in good condition, hence the majority of this area is graded 'high'. The exception is restricted to the fields immediately alongside the present residential edge, which are graded 'moderate' sensitivity where an urban character pervades beyond its boundary edge, falling to 'low' sensitivity where the bounding hedgerow between housing and field is no longer in evidence, thus enabling urban character to become the dominant element of the field.

5) Visual sensitivity

5.1 This section identifies the location and extent of the visual envelope that contains Wincanton, and the nature of the 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 profile in relation to Wincanton and prime sensitive receptors, along with identifying valued views and vantage points, and visual detractors. From this a measure of visual sensitivity to development will be graded low, moderate or high. The resultant sensitivity areas are indicated on figure 3 – visual sensitivity.

Visual envelope and containment

5.2 The character assessment notes that whilst originating from a valley setting, Wincanton's formative growth spread across the south face of Windmill Hill to thus establish the town as a hillside settlement. Residential development over more of West and Windmill Hill's southerly hillside aspect has further compounded this character. With this manifestation of urban form onto higher ground, there is limited visual containment of Wincanton's built extent, with no emphatic landscape feature present to completely close out lines of view toward it. Thus long views toward the town, as it is now expressed by built form, are consequently gained from vantage points to all external quarters outside the study area, notably:

a) Elevated vantage points to the east, along the head of Selwood's west-facing escarpment, only view a narrow skyline profile of development on the crown of the town's two hilltops (i.e. Windmill and West Hills) with the town laying unseen to the far side. However, it is the racecourse that is the prime indicator of Wincanton's presence: The stands and associated structures draw the eye as seen from viewpoints as distant as Alfreds Tower - over 6 km distant to the NE - as well as other public viewpoints within the AONB by Penselwood, whilst elevated lines of view are also available to west-bound travellers on the A303 as it begins its descent from Leigh Common.

b) Coneygore Hill (by Stoke Trister) briefly intercedes to break lines of view toward the town from the head of the limestone escarpment to the east, but from Cucklington, extending south along the top of the ridge to Kington Magna, elevated views look toward the town, and view it as commanding the head of the Blackmore Vale in its south facing hillside position. It is similarly viewed throughout the southern quadrant, both from the base of the vale (as photo 11, taken from Grove Lane, Cheriton) and the East Somerset hills to the west. However, from these hills, views toward the town tend to be realised as glimpses only, as the dissected landform often intercedes to obscure clear views of the town.

c) To the west of the town, the low gradient and folding ground of the hills enables few clear views of the settlement, other than from elevated vantage points, such as Cheriton Hill (photo 12) and from above Elliscombe, from where much of the town's hillside concentration is evident against the backdrop of the Selwood ridge.

d) To Wincanton's north side, there is limited view of the town, that comprises little more than a skyline silhouette of roofs glimpsed from locations in close proximity (photo 10) similarly so from high ground to the east of Bratton Seymour, and the B3081 approach from Round Hill, Charlton Musgrove, where distance ensures minimal perception. Otherwise, the low trajectory of lines of view, buffered by an intervening mix of small woods, hedgerows and the crests of rolling ground, ensures that the town is not visible through this quadrant.

5.3 Wincanton's wider visual envelope (which defines the town's zone of visual influence) can thus be drawn well beyond the study area: From Cucklington, a line taken south to Kington Magna, across the base of the vale by Henstridge to Templecombe, then following high ground by Wilkin Throop, through North Cheriton to Elliscombe, describes an extensive ZVI (zone of visual influence) that views the town presenting a south facing aspect in its prime position at the head of the Blackmore Vale. Conversely, the envelope is less extensive, diffuse, and more difficult to ascertain to the north of the town, from where little built form is visible. The ZVI will however include high ground east of Bratton Seymour, drawn tight by Charlton Musgrove church, to link with Sunny Hill north of Bayford, whilst acknowledging a minimal overview from the Selwood ridge and Leigh Common.

5.4 The town's zone of visual influence is thus widely drawn, with its influence when viewed from the south noted as strong, conversely as minimal when viewed from the north. This is primarily due to the town's southern aspect, but also acknowledges the combination of topography and woody landscape features as providing a level of both visual containment, and definition, of the town's immediate setting to the north. This is most clearly stated where the head of Windmill Hill, reinforced by hedge lines to the east, is viewed as (in most part) clear of development form, thus obscuring development as viewed from Charlton Musgrove and Bayford. A lower ridge extends southeast from Bayford Hill, its line momentarily disrupted by a deep cutting on the A303, to link with Coneygore Hill, from which a secondary ridge falls to the Blackmore Vale, to similarly offer local containment of land northeast of the junction of Shaftesbury Lane with Common Road. The vale opens expansively to the south, but further to the west, local views toward Wincanton are blocked by woodland planting by Higher Hatherleigh Farm. This visual barrier links with Lawrence Hill, and - a narrow width of the Hook Valley apart - extends north along the east head of the combe below Abergavenny, thereafter following the gentle head of higher land between Suddon Grange and Farm, to link with hedgerow screening beyond the study area to provide a level of containment in closer proximity to the town.

Visual profile of Wincanton's immediate edge

5.5 Within this sporadic line of local visual containment, the main open areas of Wincanton's periphery can be identified as:

- (i) Land around Wincanton Common, to the south of the A303;
- (ii) The Blackmore Vale to the south of the town;
- (iii) The Hook brook valley; and;
- (iv) Land to the west and north of Dancing Lane.

Area (i)

5.6 Below the A303, an area of land is identified in the vicinity of Wincanton Common. It is contained to north, east and south by rising ground, the head of which is previously identified as providing some separation of Wincanton from its rural surround, and is valued for restricting external views toward the town from south and east. This higher land is thus graded 'high' sensitivity, because of its high visual profile, rural character and the degree of visual containment it provides. Land at lower elevation, which has a reduced visual profile, abuts the urban edge, yet does express a rural character to local viewpoints, is graded 'moderate' sensitivity (photos 2 and 3).

Area (ii)

5.7 The main head of the vale immediately below the A303, extends from the southern edge of Lawrence Hill in the west, across to (and including) the Sports Ground in the east. Lawrence Hill and the adjoining woodland to the south are noted as the only features that offer a degree of visual buffering to the southwest of town, and have some prominence when viewed by the main road corridors passing through the study area. They are thus graded 'high' sensitivity. The land in between is primarily open in character and there is a high degree of inter-visibility across the vale in this location. This enables urban Wincanton to be perceived as the prime built element, thus an urban characteristic pervades beyond the dividing line of the A303, substantiated by the buildings and manicured grassland of the Sports Ground, and the utilitarian structures of the sewage works. However, despite sight of these urban characteristics in this area, the rural land cover of the wider vale is the stronger characteristic, and with its clear visual presence as seen from vantage points on higher ground, it is graded 'moderate' sensitivity. The one exception is an area of agricultural land that lays immediately alongside the A303's southern access/exit road serving Wincanton, which is contained by the former rail line and associated woody features to the east and lines of planting to the south. This results in the area having a low visual profile and subsisting alongside the intrusive urban elements of both major road engineering features (to the north) and the structures of the town's sewage works to the east. It is thus graded 'low' sensitivity.

Area (iii)

5.8 Land within the Hook brook valley lays to the immediate west edge of the allocated Wincanton key site. Employment structures are already established, and with the valley narrow in this location, their scale has become a dominant urban influence (photo 8). With the valley base having a low visual profile, these low fields are thus graded 'low' sensitivity. Lawrence Hill is already noted as being 'high' sensitivity (para 5.7) and the opposite head of the valley above New Barns Farm is similarly graded, as it forms a local skyline, is prominent to local view, and expresses a rural character. The intervening ground is graded 'moderate' for whilst it has a relatively low visual profile, it is sufficiently distant from the town for its rural land cover to be viewed as the main visual characteristic (photo 7).

Area (iv)

5.9 Land to the west and north of Dancing Lane can be broadly described as a plateau area. Where this flat land terminates above an adjacent valley, the plateau edge will thus possess a degree of visual prominence as skyline where viewed from lower ground. Such is the case for the plateau edge to the west of New Barns Farm, and above the valley extending northwest from Verrington Lane, and as both express a strong rural character, a 'high' sensitivity grade is assessed. Conversely, plateau land to the immediate north edge of Dancing Lane abuts residential form (photo 9) and has a low visual profile, being contained by the housing forms and mature field hedgerows, which screen out low-trajectory views from the few public vantage points in the vicinity. Hence those fields with which there is both inter-visibility and a close correspondence with the urban edge, are graded 'low' sensitivity. A further field's width to the west and north of this 'low' graded area are then graded as 'moderate' sensitivity, for either their visual profile has greater prominence in public perception, as is the case for the fields to the west of West Hill and by Verrington Farm, or they lay outside land with any element of visual urban character, as do the fields away from those immediately adjacent Dancing Lane's housing. Radiating further out to north and west, toward and around Suddon Grange, the land is emphatically rural and divorced from the urban edge, and with this strong countryside expression to local view, is graded 'high' sensitivity.

Visual profile of land outside Wincanton's immediate visual setting

5.10 There remain four areas of land that lay within the study area, yet outside those landscape features that provide local containment to the town. These are:

- (v) Land between Abergavenny and the A357/371 roundabout;
- (vi) Land to the north of Verrington hospital;
- (vii) Land north of Windmill Hill; and
- (viii) Land around Bayford

Area (v)

5.11 This area comprises two narrow internal valleys, which drain southeast toward Hook Valley Farm. Whilst divorced from Wincanton's landscape setting, the area has a low visual profile and in part lays adjacent to the trunk road network, whose engineered form and embankments introduce a visual characteristic at variance with the wider countryside. It is thus graded 'moderate' sensitivity.

Area (vi)

5.12 To the immediate north of Verrington hospital lays a deep combe, which provides a clear separation of the town from the countryside. However, the base of the combe is already characterised by residential development alongside Verrington Lane, and this immediate area is both well-contained visually, small-scale, and subservient to existing built form that stands at higher elevation (by Dancing Lane). It is consequently graded 'low' sensitivity. Beyond the immediate urban edge, the combe is expressed as farmland and thus is integrated visually with the wider countryside. Whilst its visual profile remains limited, once above Verrington Farm it is clearly divorced from the urban edge, and is thus graded 'moderate' sensitivity.

Area (vii)

5.13 Windmill Hill is viewed both as the open hilltop above the town's northward spread (photo 6) and the skyline that contains the town's urban edge (photo 10) to which a 'high' degree of sensitivity is afforded due to its function as both a containing element, and in providing a distinct edge to the town's setting. This 'high' grading is also extended to the racecourse and adjacent land extending east, for whilst the structures appear incongruous, their high visual profile (as observed para 5.1) and degree of detachment from the town, mark this as an area of some visual sensitivity. Land at lower elevation by Burtons Mill Farm has a reduced visual profile, being associated with the narrow valley formed by the River Cale northwest of Windmill Hill, and the resultant low visual profile informs a 'moderate' sensitivity grading, falling to 'low' immediately below Old Hill, due to its visual containment and relationship to adjacent built form.

Area (viii)

5.14 Finally, the valley occupied by Bayford hamlet enjoys a high degree of detachment from the town, with the proximity of Wincanton perceptible only as a skyline silhouette of residential form across both Bayford and Windmill Hilltops (photo 1). The greater part of the outward shoulder of these hills is open and expressed as farmland, and with this higher land having some visual prominence in the locality, and its open shoulder affording some separation to Bayford from Wincanton, a 'high' level of sensitivity is graded, which also extends to the high ground to the northeast of the hamlet's core. The base of this valley, however, is graded 'moderate' sensitivity, due to its lower visual profile and the close relationship to the compact expression of built form along Bayford's main street.

6) Value and Constraints

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

6.2 The Monarchs Way national trail passes through the town, linking the East Somerset Hills to the West Wiltshire Downs, whilst the many footpaths that encircle the town are a well-used recreational resource, particularly to the east.

6.3 Furze Wood, to the south of Abergavenny, is designated as a county wildlife site, primarily due to its ancient woodland origins, though now a broadleaved plantation. Whilst not statutorily designated, stretches of both the Hook brook, and the River Cale are noted for their ecological interest, primarily due to their marginal bankside vegetation, and general tree cover.

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

6.5 Much of residential Wincanton has been built over rising ground, and whilst the town's essential character is that of a hillside town, 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 and in the narrow valleys to the north of the town.

7) Landscape Capacity of Urban Periphery

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

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

7.3 Five potential areas for development can thus be identified on the landscape capacity plan being;

- i) to the east of Common Road, and south of the A303;
- ii) south of the A303 westbound access/exit roundabout;
- iii) to the west of Wincanton Business Park;
- iv) northwest of Dancing Lane, and;
- v) north of the Verrington Lane junction with the B3081.

7.4 **Area (i)** indicates four small fields immediately alongside the southern side of the A303, to the east of Common Road. Relative to the topography of much of the town, this area is at a lower elevation than the greater part of the Deansley Way development site on the opposite (north) side of the road; has a gentle gradient; and few landscape constraints. The northwest boundary is dominated by the A303 corridor, with housing rising above it toward Bayford Hill, whilst to the southeast are open fields that are visually relatively discreet. The A303 corridor exacerbates the perception of separation of this area from the town, yet with residential form characterising adjacent land, further housing in this location would appear to be a logical development option.

It is noted that 3 further mid-scale fields are graded as being of 'moderate' capacity immediately alongside the above 'moderate-high' area, but lay southward of the above site, toward the open countryside adjacent Shaftesbury Lane. As a residential proposal to the south of the A303 constitutes a departure from the confines of the current town plan, the scope to further extend a residential allocation into a proportion of this 'moderate' land may be deemed unacceptable. However, if such a proposal were to include the delivery of a strategic open-space and a landscape buffer to its east and southern edges, then additional land here could be considered for development, to provide a credible strategic option, without too adverse a landscape impact.

7.5 Three fields are indicated (**area ii**) to the immediate south side of the A303, as accessed by a slip road off the westbound access/exit road of the A303. This land lays at low level in the base of the vale, and is relatively self contained, being surrounded by planting which define its extent. As with the previous area, it lays to the south of the town, but opposite Wincanton's main employment area. As this quarter of the town is less sensitive visually, thus offering less constraint on scale and mass, then employment forms of development are considered an appropriate option for growth in this area.

It is noted that 4 further mid-scale fields are graded as being of 'moderate' capacity immediately alongside the above 'moderate-high' area, but lay further out from the town, toward the Blackmore Vale. As the open character of this area allows a capacity for visual intrusion, and there is no strong containing landscape element to counter the likely scale of employment buildings, the scope to extend an employment allocation further into this 'moderate' land is likely to be unacceptable, without a substantial landscape buffer formed to its southern edge. However, should a credibly sized employment proposal include scope for the delivery of a commensurately scaled strategic landscape buffer, then it is assessed that a larger allocation is feasible here without too adverse a landscape impact.

7.6 To the west of Wincanton business park (**area iii**) three fields are indicated with a capacity for development. Adjacent both housing and employment allocations relating to the current key site, these would appear to offer potential for a small-scale extension of the town. However, one field hosts the vestiges of an orchard, whilst mature tree lines adjacent the employment site, to the north of the A371, coincide with the course of the Hook brook, and in both instances impose a landscape constraint on large-scale structures. Hence a residential extension to the town would appear to be the most appropriate form of development in this location.

7.7 **Area (iv)** indicates four small fields backing onto the current housing edge that aligns Dancing Lane. The fields are enclosed by robust mixed hedgerows, and buffered from open land to the west by the school's playing field. With a further field indicated immediately alongside as having 'moderate' capacity for development, there would appear to be potential here for compact residential growth that ties closely with the town's edge.

7.8 Finally, two small fields are indicated (**area v**) to the north of the junction of the B3081 with Verrington Lane. The aggregate area is not of sufficient scale to offer strategic development potential, and is thus noted as having limited potential, but discounted from further investigation within this assessment. .

8) Outline Proposals

8.1 Four potential areas of development have been identified by the landscape capacity plan, and their potential uses outlined in the previous section, paras 7.3 - 7.7. 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 The first site lays in a compact quadrant, to the east of Common Lane, and alongside the southern edge of the Deansley Way development site, yet divided from the town by the alignment of the A303 dual carriageway. In laying to the south side of this major road corridor, an allocation here would be a departure from the town's current boundary, yet in its close proximity to both a permitted housing site, and the town's major sports provision, plus its linkage via Common Lane, the site is well connected to the town, and lays over the same general landform at the head of the vale.

The extended site area amounts to 14ha with housing a logical use of this land. The proximity of the site to the A303 would indicate a need for a landscape buffer at the road's side, whilst the southern boundary, denoted by a headwater stream of the River Cale, would benefit from a strategic buffer of open space and planting provision to demarcate a limit to the town's southern extent. The site can comfortably accommodate residential form and, allowing for recreational/amenity open space and structural landscape provision, an area of 11.25ha housing appears feasible. The site has a moderate visual profile, and with the greater part of its edge having a rural surround, a density range of 30-50dph would appear suitably responsive to the landscape context.

8.3 Similarly south of the A303, and seemingly with a potential access from its exit/access road to the south of Morrisons supermarket, an area of approx. 20ha is indicated for employment growth, given the site's low visual profile, and close relationship with the town's current urban form. As with the site by Common Road, a proposition to extend south into open countryside raises landscape concerns, due to its degree of detachment from the town, and the lack of definitive landscape containment. Commensurate landscape provision to mitigate the potential adverse impact of development form in this rural location would be essential. Yet with the provision of a robust landscape buffer, particularly to the site's southern edge, to counter development impact, then growth here is feasible. Given the site's low visual profile, relatively level ground, and proximity to the town's main employment area, this site's development favours further employment growth, over an area extending to 17.5ha.

8.4 West of the town's current key site allocation, approx 5.5ha is indicated for residential growth. The site has a number of landscape constraints, primarily the mature tree lines alongside the Hook brook, which also help to buffer the existing employment edge, plus the vestiges of an orchard, and rising ground to the southwest edge. Allowing for the integration of the best of these features into open space provision, a resultant area of 4.25ha residential growth appears feasible, at moderate densities, circa 40dph.

8.5 Alongside Dancing Lane’s residential area to the northwest side of the town, an adjacent area of approximately 7.5ha is suggested as providing scope for a small extension of the town. Whilst the land has a relatively gentle gradient, its low visual profile is predominantly reliant upon the thick, robust hedgerows in the vicinity that counter the presence of built form. Large, taller structures however would not be assimilated without visual impact, hence it is residential development only that appears suitable for this location, with commensurate areas of open space and structural landscape provision (inclusive of the retention and integration of the site’s best hedgerows) to counter and contain development form, particularly to the northern edge. Sited at the town’s rural edge, and at a higher elevation than much of the town, a density range of 30-50dph appears suitably responsive to landscape sensitivities, over an area of 5.75ha with the remainder dedicated to a strategic landscape buffer dedicated to open space, recreational and landscape treatment integrated at the site’s outward edge to ensure a moderated landscape impact arising from development in this location.

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

- | | | | |
|-------|------------------------------------|---|---|
| (i) | East of Common Road | - | 11.25ha residential (30-50dph)
2.75ha open space and structural
landscape provision |
| (ii) | South of A303 access | - | 17.5ha employment
2.5ha structural landscape |
| (iii) | West of Wincanton
business park | - | 4.25ha residential (40dph)
1.25ha open space and structural
landscape provision |
| (iv) | By Dancing Lane | - | 5.75ha residential (30-50dph)
1.75ha open space and structural
landscape provision |

8.7 This capacity study indicates that Wincanton has limited scope for landscape – sympathetic growth. Hence the above sites maximise the scope of potential development areas, by inclusion of some land graded as ‘moderate’ capacity, to enable credible allocations to be considered. The resultant areas offer a potential of 17.5ha of employment land, and 21.5ha residential. If housing is to be developed at an average of 40dph, then there is broadly a potential for 860 houses, located on 3 separate development sites.

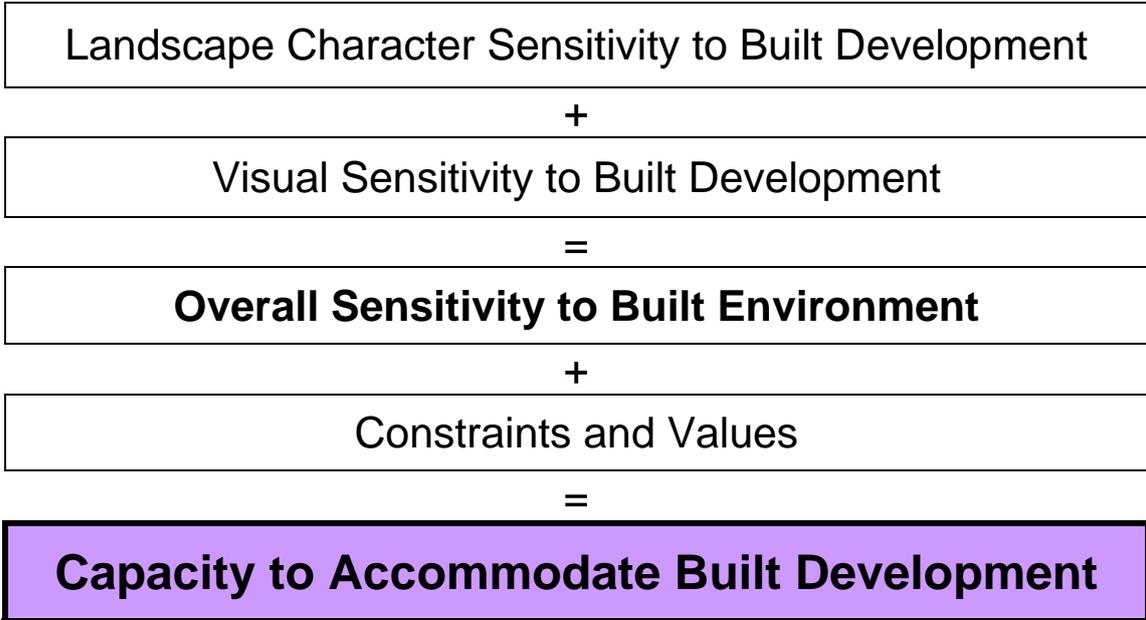
The above areas aggregate to a substantial land take when set alongside Wincanton’s current extent, and offer a choice of potential development sites both within, and possibly beyond, the LDF period 2006-2026 as will be determined by the town’s economic needs, and to its capacity for sustainable growth. Arising from this study, it is clear that the main growth potential lays to the south of the town, within Wincanton’s prime ‘head of vale’ setting, and avoids land of high landscape sensitivity. Such locations will thus enable a potential for development that is planned to avoid an adverse impact upon both the town’s immediate setting, and the wider landscape context, consistent with the objectives of this study.

Peripheral landscape study – Wincanton

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		

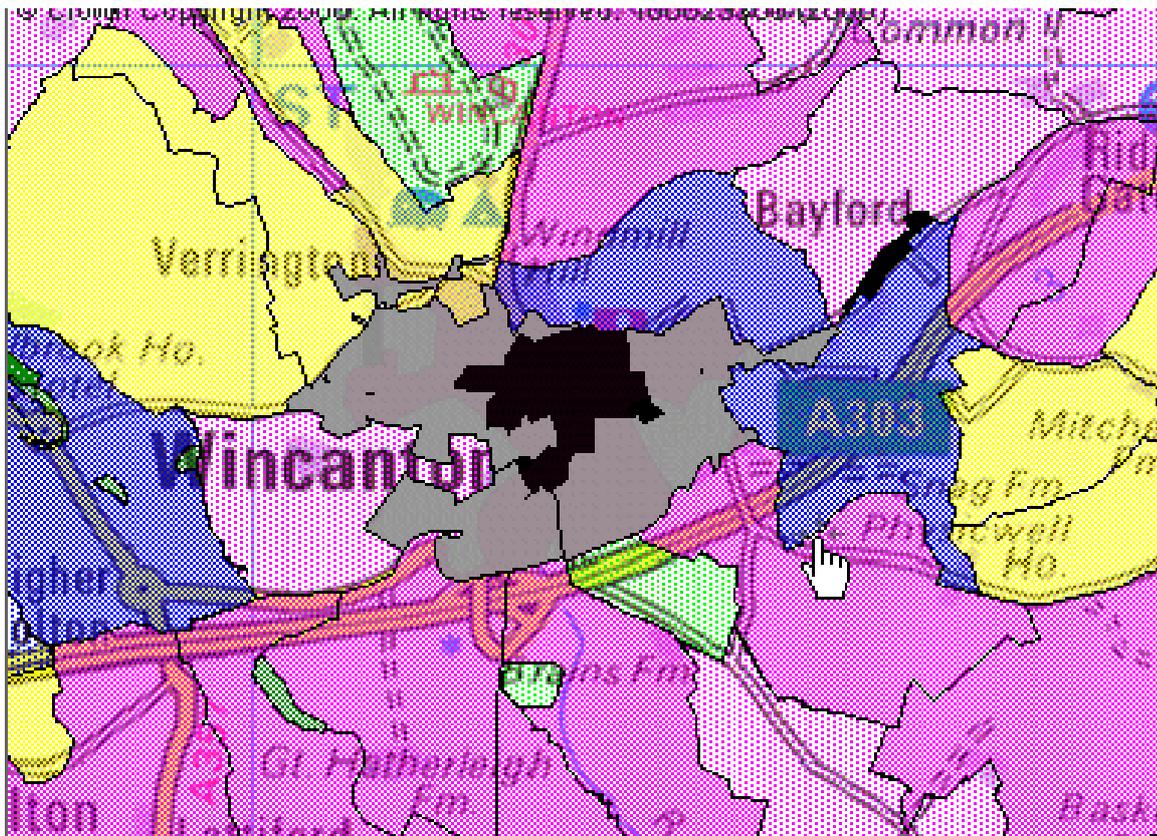
Landscape Capacity Matrix

Peripheral landscape study – Wincanton

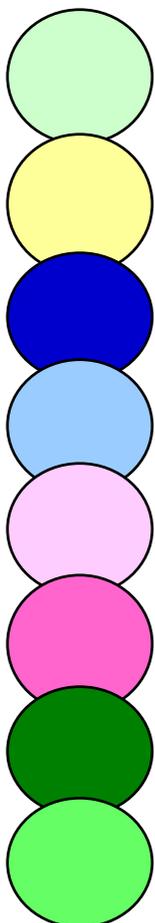
Appendix 2 - historic landscape character

Historic landscape characterisation – Wincanton

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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 – Wincanton

Appendix 3 - photos



Photo 1: From Bayford, looking west toward Wincanton, which is denoted by the housing profile along the skyline.



Photo 2: From Bayford Hill, looking south across the Deansley Way site, where the lower shoulder of Coneygore Hill intercedes in long views across the Vale.



Photo 3: From Shaftesbury Lane, looking NW toward the site of the Deansley Way residential proposal, with the A303 to its fore, and Bayford Hill above.



Photo 4: From Shaftesbury Lane, looking WNW toward the town.



Photo 5: From Windmill Hill, looking west over the town toward the green fields of the key site, below West Hill.



Photo 6: From West Hill, looking back across the town toward Windmill Hill.



Photo 7: From Lawrence Hill, looking across the Hook Brook valley, toward New Barns Farm, the westernmost point of the key site allocation.



Photo 8: From Lawrence Hill, looking northeast over the town's main employment area. The fields below West Hill are allocated for housing.



Photo 9: Looking east from the PROW to the rear of Dancing Lane, toward the town's northwest residential edge



Photo 10: Looking south from the B3081/Rectory Lane junction, where only the roofline profile is visible above the line of the (Windmill) hilltop



Photo 11: From Grove Lane looking northeast. Typical of views from the Blackmore Vale, it is the housing on higher ground that is widely visible.



Photo 12: From Cheriton Hill looking northeast, with Wincanton prominent in the middle-ground some 3 km distant.

Peripheral landscape study – Wincanton

Appendix 4 - plans



Figure 1 -
Context
Wincanton

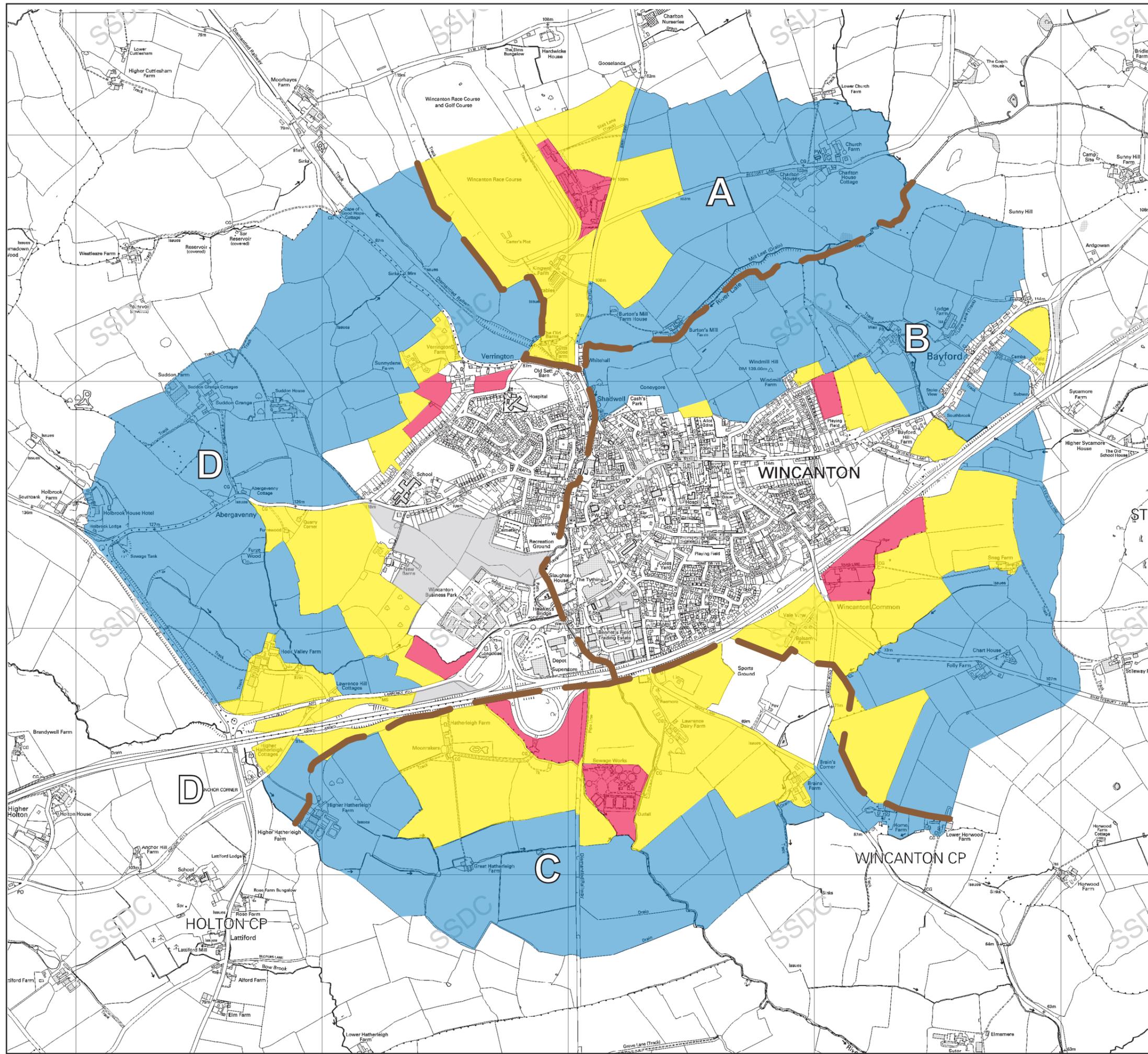
 Study Area



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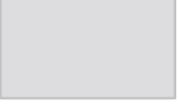
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Figure 2 - Landscape Sensitivity Wincanton



 Local Landscape Character Areas

- A - Upper vale
- B - Low hills
- C - Lower clay vale
- D - Dissected dip slopes

 Local Plan Housing & Employment allocations

 Area of low landscape sensitivity

 Area of moderate landscape sensitivity

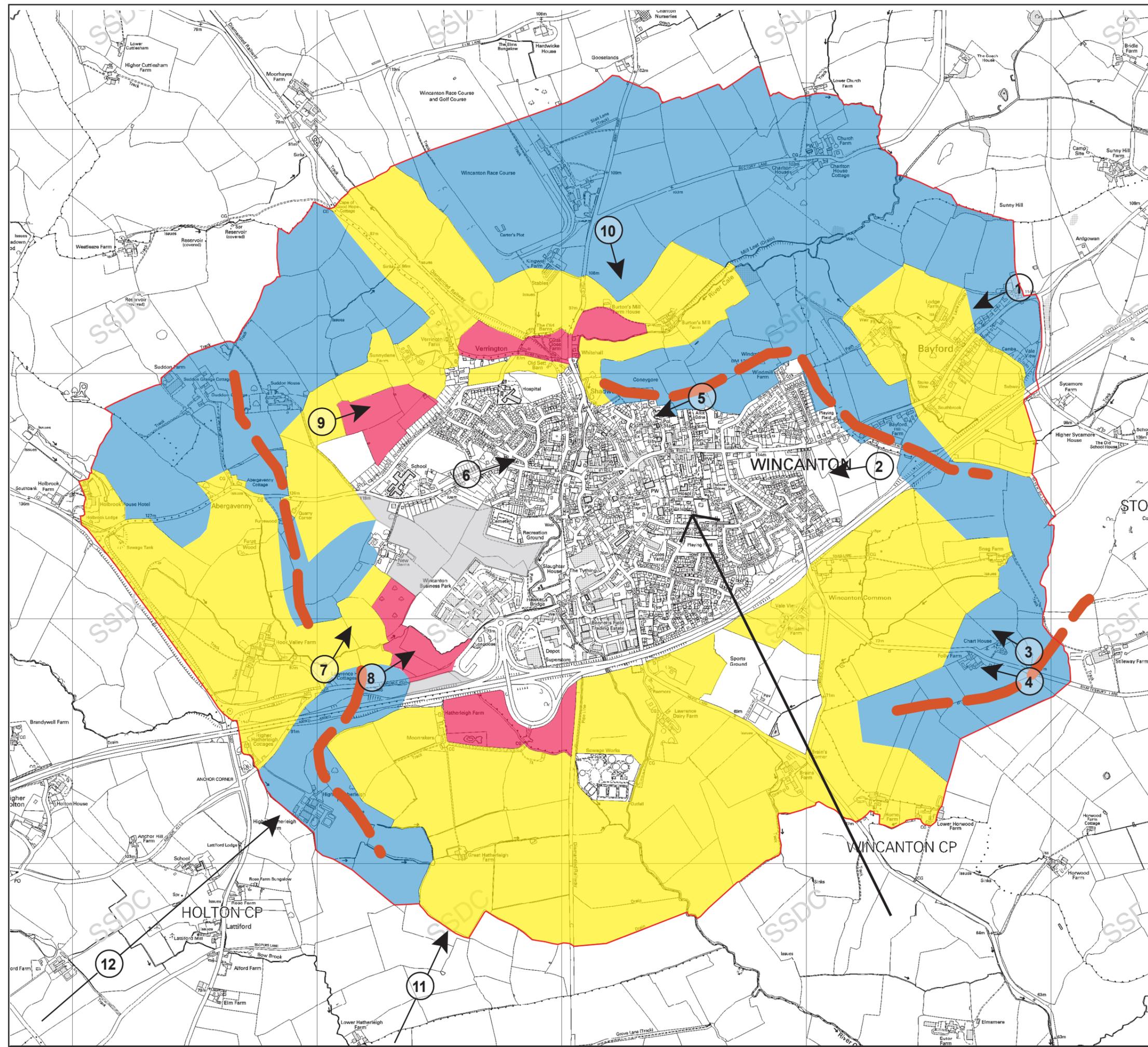
 Area of high landscape sensitivity

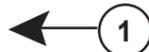
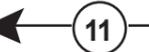
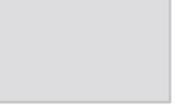


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Figure 3 - Visual Sensitivity Wincanton



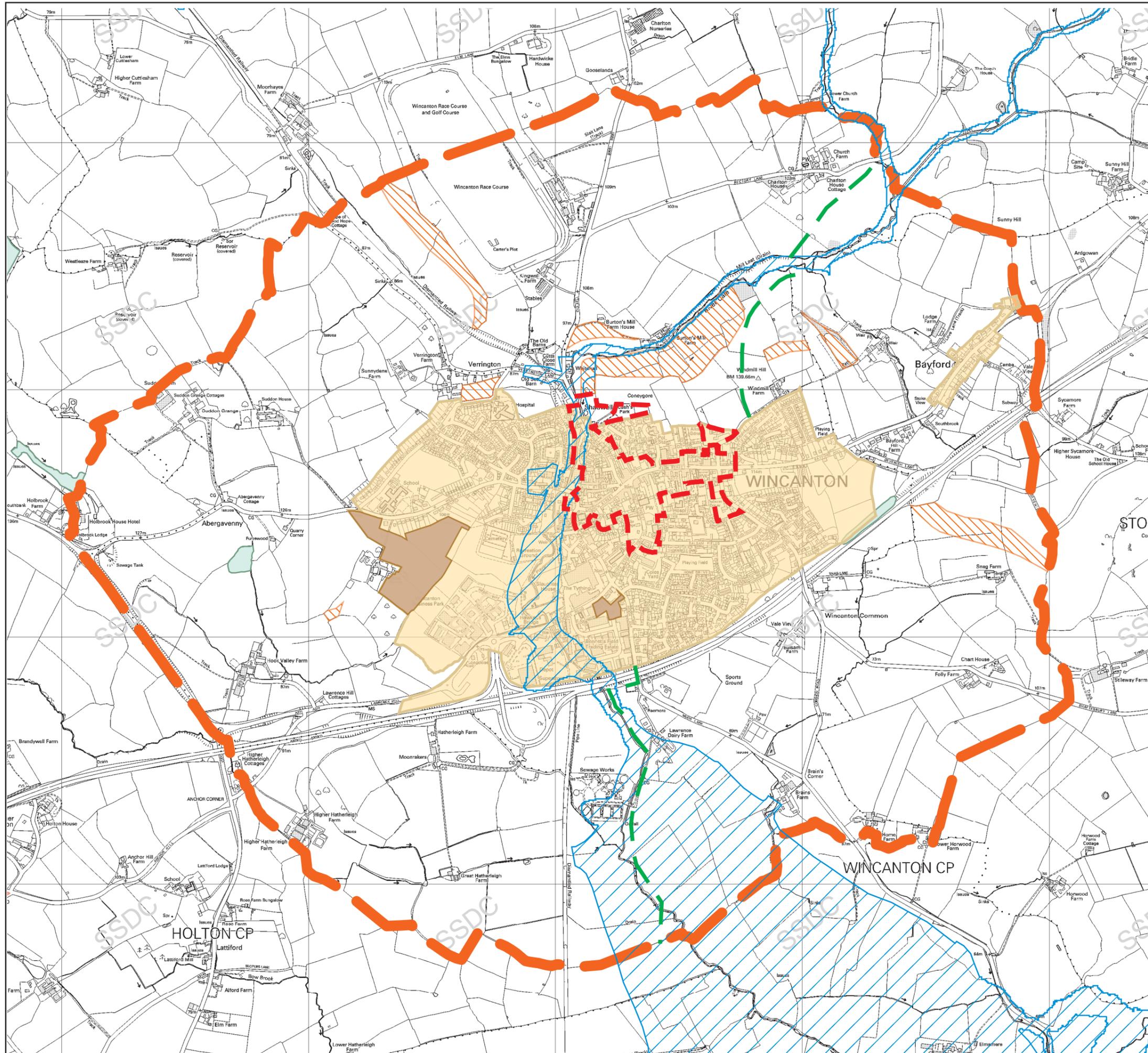
-  Line of Local Visual Containment
-  Photo Vantage Points
-  Line of photo view from external position
-  Long distance views from: Blackmore Vale
-  Local Plan housing and employments allocations
-  Area of low visual sensitivity
-  Area of moderate visual sensitivity
-  Area of high visual sensitivity

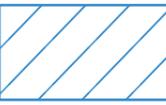
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Figure 4 - Value & Constraints Wincanton



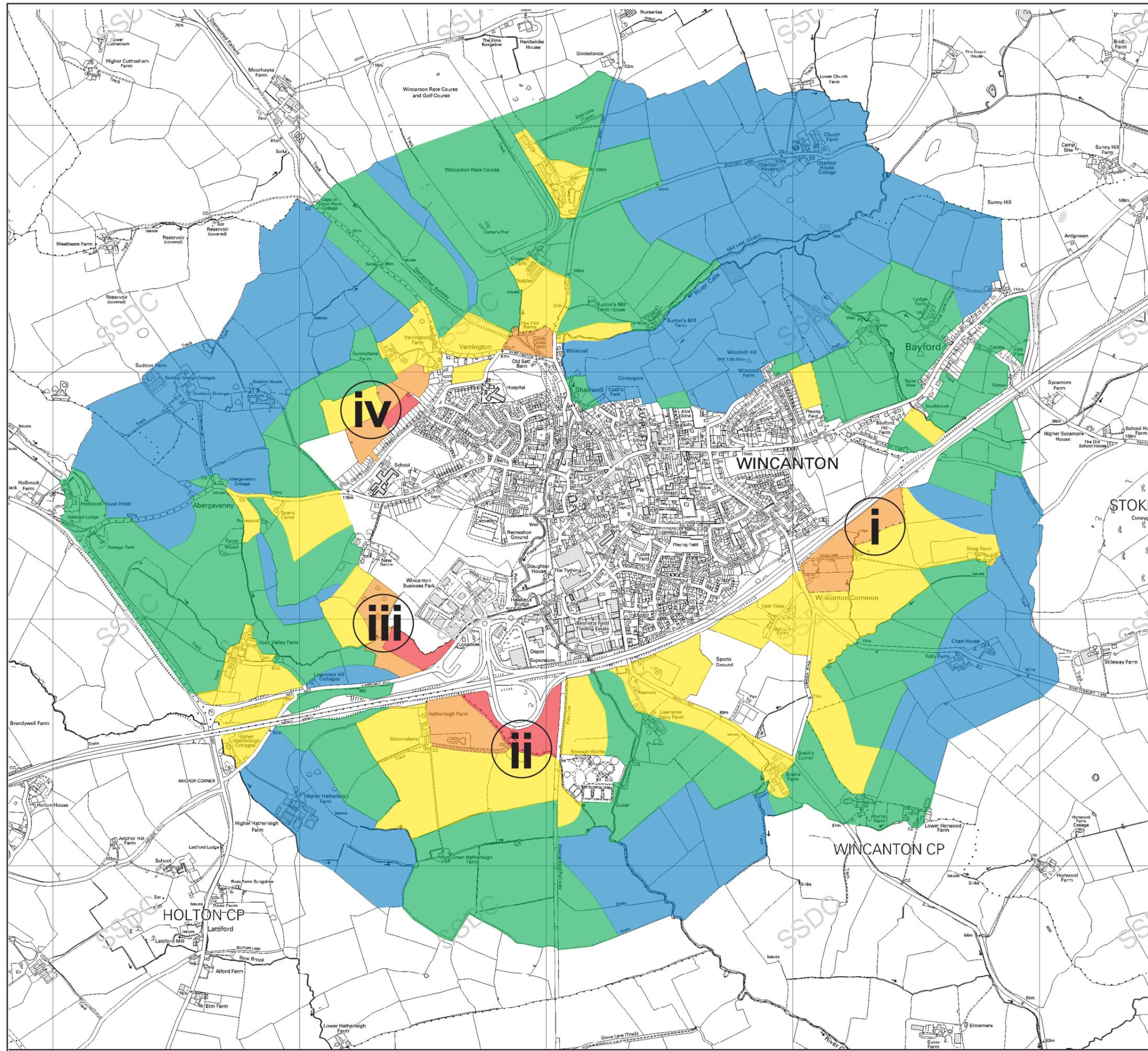
-  Study Area
 -  Wincanton Development Area
 -  Local Wildlife Sites
 -  Conservation Area
 -  Development Allocation
 -  Flood Zone 2
 -  Areas of 15° + gradient
 -  Recreational Routes and Areas
- (The above categories as defined in the South Somerset Local Plan)

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Figure 5 - Landscape Capacity Wincanton



- 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 - iv** Potential development areas



scale 1:15,000 @ A3

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