
Landscape Character Assessment Preston Neighbourhood Plan

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Please note:

Prior to the construction of the A417/A419 Cirencester by-pass, the A419 was historically called the Cricklade road. Google maps identify it as the Cirencester Road and this name is now adopted for this report.

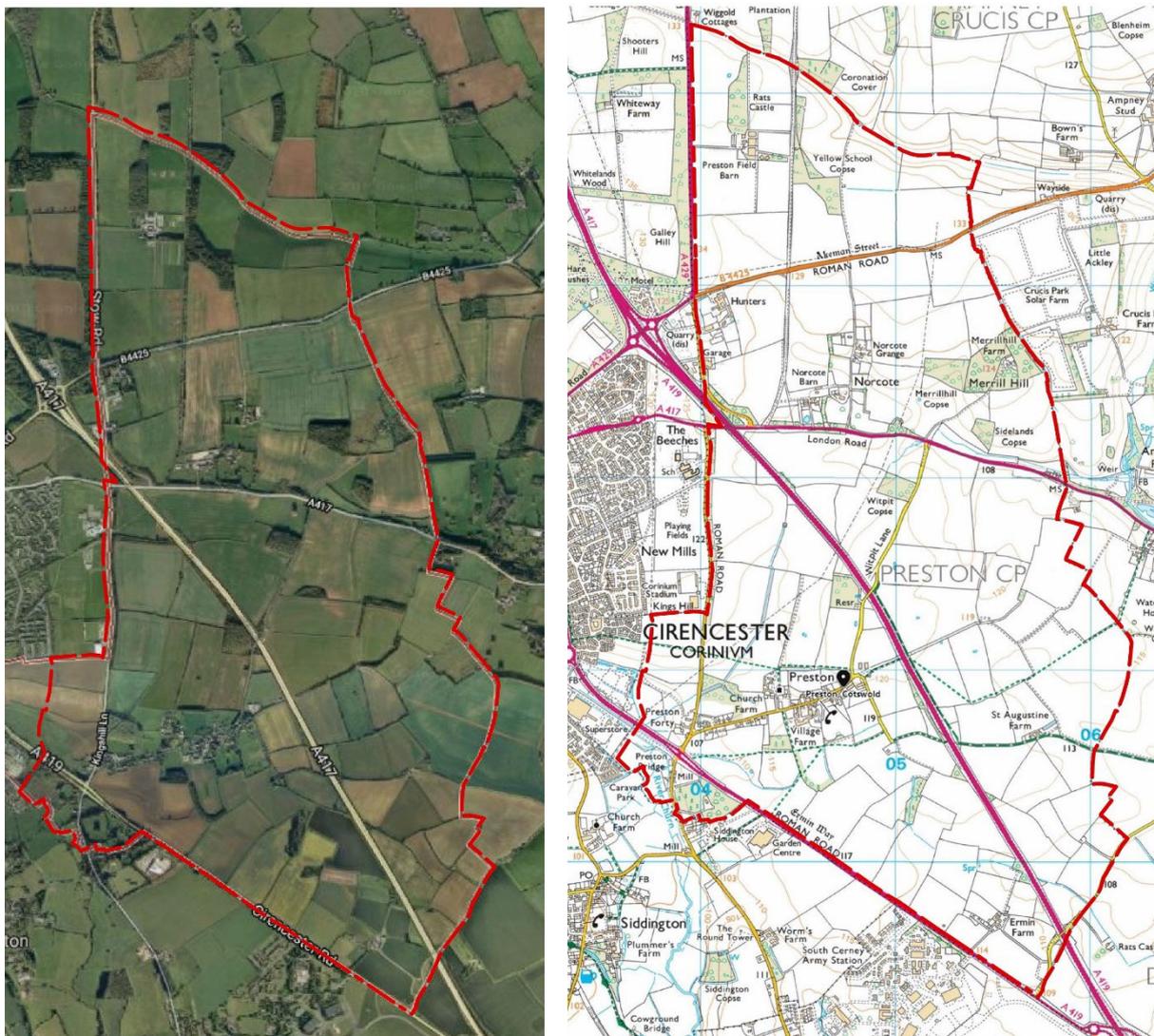
Introduction

This document, commissioned by the Preston Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, has been prepared by Portus + Whitton Landscape Architects to form part of the evidence base for the Preston Neighbourhood Plan - specifically with reference to the assessment of the landscape.

The Character Assessment identifies and summarises the key defining features which characterise the village and parishes sense of place- defining what sets Preston apart and makes it distinctive. The report considers the landscape character within the neighbourhood plan study area (coincident with the Preston parish boundary, **Figure 1**) and how the landscape has been shaped through history to the present day.

The assessment will inform the neighbourhood plan which aims to provide the evidence to support the local community to shape and guide the conservation and enhancement of the areas local character. It will enable the local authority to assess the impacts of any proposed change in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2018).

Figure 1 Aerial view Preston parish boundaries (left) and OS map (right)



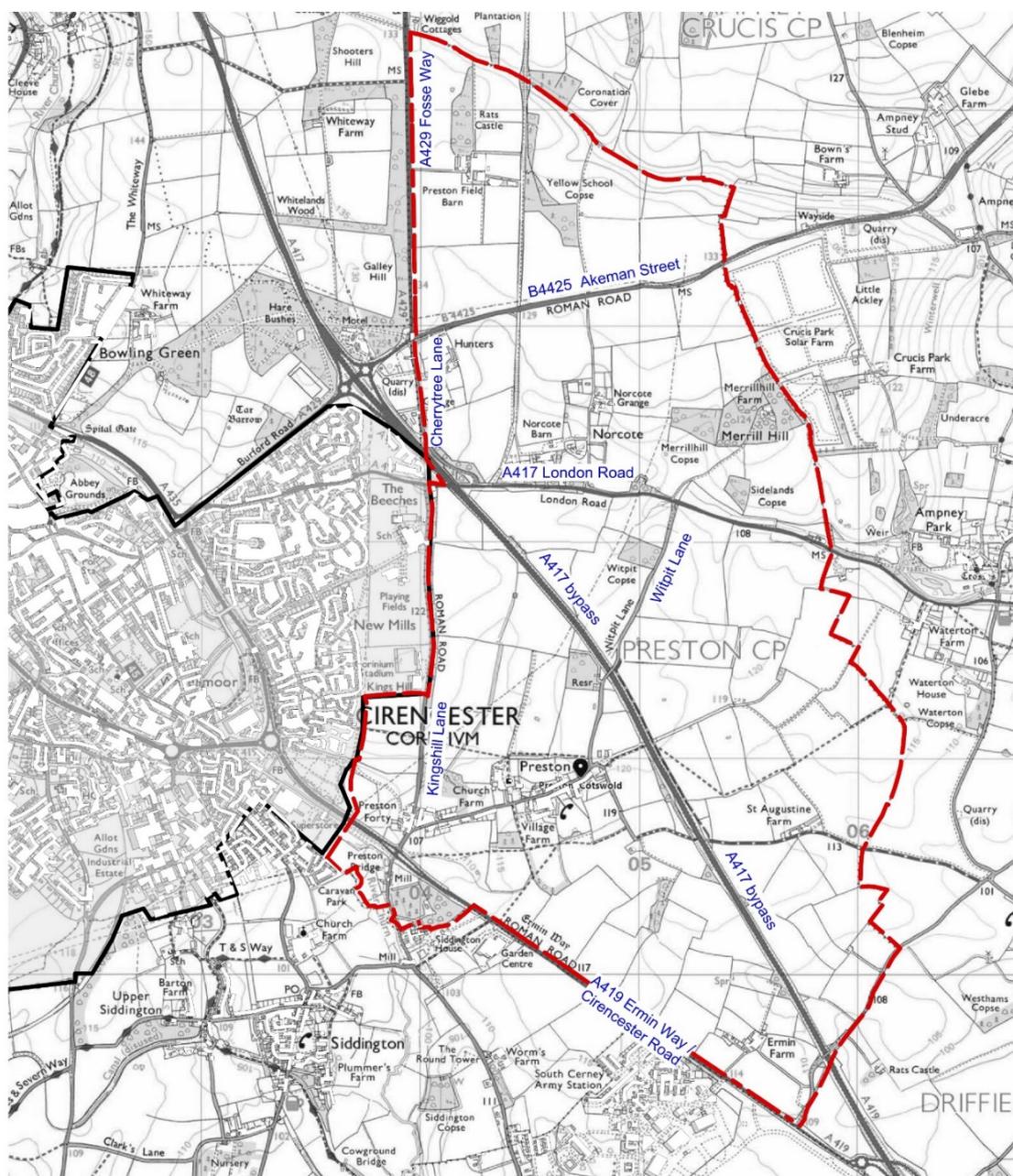
Scope and Purpose

Site Area

Preston is located within the heart of the Cotswolds AONB a worldwide renowned landscape famous for its strong sense of place created by its quintessentially English villages of honey-coloured stone immersed in a pastoral landscape.

The village of Preston is located less than 2 miles from Cirencester, the District's main work and leisure centre, see **Figure 2**. The proximity to Cirencester and good transport links to Cirencester makes Preston a particularly desirable locations for further residential development. However, despite their physical proximity in both mileage and the presence of several roads, Preston offers a predominantly rural landscape in direct contrast with the character of Cirencester Town.

Figure 2 Preston parish main transport links and footpaths



Background and Policy Context

The scales, density and urbanising character of the recent residential development in the immediate setting of the parish, has progressively eroded the agricultural character of the local landscape. This is evidenced by the Kingshill Meadow expansion to the east of Cirencester, which breached the previously drawn boundaries of Preston parish, and 6 dwellings built to the south of the A419 Swindon Road (Preston Leigh). Threatening the identity of Preston as an individual settlement as well as the rural identity of the village and its setting. As such a key aspiration of the local community, highlighted in the responses to the Neighbourhood Plan consultation, is to maintain a 'local gap' to prevent coalescence between Cirencester and Preston and preserve the character of the parish.

The existing relevant documents which support and shape the design of any development proposals within Preston, include;

- Cotswold District Council Cotswold Design Code.
- 'Design in Preston' Statement.

However, there are currently no policies relating to responding to local scale and sensitivities, which are complementary to the strategic policies of the Local Plan.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2019) recognises the role of neighbourhood plans as devices *“to support the delivery of strategic policies contained in local plans or spatial development strategies; and should shape and direct development that is outside of these strategic policies”*¹.

Furthermore, it is recognised:

*“Neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to develop a shared vision for their area. Neighbourhood plans can shape, direct and help to deliver sustainable development, by influencing local planning decisions as part of the statutory development plan.”*²

The recently adopted Cotswold District Council Local Plan 2011-2031 (CDC, August 2018) encourages *“wider community involvement in the natural and historic environment, for example through neighbourhood planning”*³.

The Local Plan has not designated any residential allocations within Preston parish however the plan has made an allowance for several windfall developments, some of which may fall within the parish. Therefore the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group acknowledges the need to provide an overarching landscape-based criterion to assess future proposals and their effects and contribution to the local landscape character and views.

¹ GOV (2019). National Planning Policy Framework; para 13. Accessed 19.11.19 Accessed from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810197/NPPF_Feb_2019_revised.pdf

² GOV (2019). National Planning Policy Framework; para 29. Accessed 19.11.19 Accessed from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810197/NPPF_Feb_2019_revised.pdf

³ CDC (2018). Local Plan policy EN1; EN12; INF7. Accessed 19.11.19 Accessed from <https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/media/1621895/Cotswold-District-Local-Plan-2011-2031-Adopted-3-August-2018-Web-Version.pdf>

Scope

This plan aims to provide the evidence to support and inform the policy framework to ensure that future development, which may be proposed either within or near to Preston parish is appropriate to its character and setting.

The plan identifies the parameters for appropriate landscape change and examines: the quality of natural form and human intervention, design, recognition and response to local character, scale, appearance, materials, detailing and choice of siting.

The assessment makes informed judgements on both its intrinsic value and its value within the wider region. Which will be used to inform the policies that express and define the aspirations and the vision of the parish residents.

Methodology and Sources

This report considers the character of the landscape within the parish boundaries, its qualities and its relationship with the wider context. It draws conclusions on its sensitivity with regards to change, including future development.

The assessment does not prioritise between individual land parcels and whilst these are described and analysed in detail, it is recognised that their contribution to the landscape character is as a whole and greater than the mere sum of its individual parts.

The report involved a detailed review of a wide range of relevant evidence base and guidance documents. A summary of the key evidence documents is set out in **Table 1**.

Table 1 Existing evidence

Theme	Existing evidence
CDC Development framework	Local Plan (2011-2031)
	Cotswold Design Code (2018)
	Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA, 2017);
	Infrastructure Delivery Plan (Arup, 2016)
Preston Parish	Design Statement for Preston : <i>*A Design Statement for Preston parish was published in 2017, this provides a summary of the distinctive features of the village and parish and Guidelines to aid maintaining the character of the village when analysing the appropriateness of proposed developments. This hasn't been formally endorsed by the District Council but is to be considered informal planning guidance by the parish Council</i>
Access - to public rights of way, open space, allotments etc.	Green Infrastructure Open Space and Play Space Strategy (CDC, 2017)
Historic landscape	Gloucestershire Historic Landscape Characterisation
	Historic Environment Strategy (CDC, 2016)
Landscape and visual amenity	National Character Areas: 107 'Cotswolds' and 108 'Upper Thames Clay Vales'
	Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Landscape Character Assessment (LDA, 2004), Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines, Local Distinctiveness and Landscape Change (Cotswolds AONB, 2004)
	Gloucestershire LCA: Other Vales (LDA, 2006)
	Cotswold Water Park Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (2009).
	Tranquillity and Dark Skies map from CPRE.
	Special Landscape Areas Review (White Consultants, 2017)

The European Landscape Convention of Landscape summarises the landscape as:

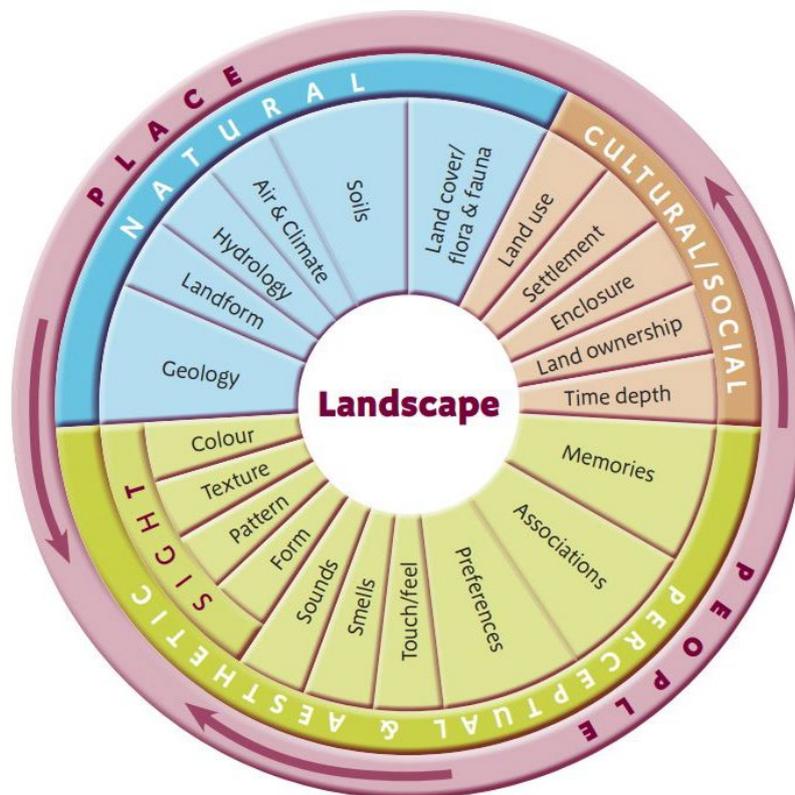
“...an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and / or human factors”.

Landscape character is defined as:

“...a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another”.

Using the documents above and the attributes which characterise a landscape as defined by the European Landscape Convention of Landscape, see **Figure 3**, the plan uses available mapping layers and aerial photography to undertake a detail review.

Figure 3 What is Landscape? (An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, Natural England, 2014)



The landscape factors identified in the above documentation have been reviewed and compared with site findings, highlighting where possible the multi-functional benefits of the local landscape assets.

The landscape review focused specifically on:

- Historic and current Ordnance Survey maps at various scales;
- Heritage and landscape designations;
- Non designated landscape and heritage assets;
- Topography and an assessment of the potential inter-visibility between areas.

Consultation with Preston residents undertaken by the parish steering group has been successful in gathering local knowledge and interpreting the existing baseline information, to distil the distinctive characteristics of landscape surrounding the village which make it precious, unique and valued.

Visual Receptors and Photography

Site and photographic surveys were carried out in February, March & May 2019 in good weather conditions and fairly-good visibility. Drone photography was also provided by the Steering Group. A selection of site photographs informs this report and provides evidence and a reference point for future assessments (**Appendix A**).

The presence of Public Rights of Way within the parish is limited therefore the road network was recognised as the primary visual receptors and our analysis was based primarily on views from the roads rather than the restricted PRow network. The two main public footpaths are further compromised by the fact that their route now travel across a busy dual carriageway. These roads split the landscape into legible individual parcels which are experienced by road users as they travel along these routes.

Whilst general guidance considers road users less sensitive to landscape than footpath users, in the case of Preston all the rural roads can be considered as integral to the character of the parish and constitute some of the primary receptors to any potential changes to the landscape alongside other PRowS. Because of the layout of these routes, several elevated viewpoints exist within the parish which should also be included as important visual receptors.

Generally, the most utilised routes are very minor rural roads where drivers are likely to be driving slowly and appreciating the view. Many of these transport links experience very high levels of traffic and sometimes congestion, and whilst traffic is a main detracting feature in the landscape of the parish, road users can still experience the rural landscape of the parish.

This is especially relevant for users of the A419 Ermin Way driving towards Cirencester; whilst the A417/A419 dual carriageway mostly caters for regional traffic and is partially screened by maturing vegetation along most of its course across the parish, road users can catch a glimpse of the Church spire whilst still immersed in the rural character of the parish.

Planning Context

National Planning Policy Framework (2019)

Chapter 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 'Achieving well-designed places' states that *"the creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve"* (para 124).

"Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- *are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*
- *are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change;*
- *establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;*
- *optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and*

- *create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users.” (para 127).*

The Cotswold District Council Local Plan (2011-2031)

Preston is a parish in Cotswold District. The recently adopted Cotswold District Local Plan 2011-2031 (August 2018) includes the village amongst the ‘Non-Principal Settlements’ and the parish sits within the strategic South Cotswold Sub-area.

The Local Plan highlights the role of the Principal Settlements to deliver anticipated growth. The development strategy identifies the Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) of the District to account for 8,400 dwellings and at least 24 hectares of B Class employment land to be delivered during the plan period. Policy DS1 ‘Development Strategy’ states that sufficient land will be allocated in the Principal Settlements to deliver these proposed figures. In terms of housing supply, the identified requirement of 8,400 includes: completed schemes and deliverable and developable extant planning permissions, 1,800 dwellings within the Chesterton Strategic Site, and estimates several windfall sites up to 1,191 (April 2017-March 2031).

Development Boundaries were drawn around the Principal Settlements to define the existing built-up areas and help maintain the focus of development in the most sustainable settlements. The boundaries also aim to protect smaller settlements (and the open countryside) from larger scale development (Policy DS2 ‘Development within development boundaries’).

Policy DS3 and Policy DS4 provide the criteria to regulate development of small scale residential and open market housing inside and outside non-principal settlements.

Policy DS3 states: *‘In non-Principal Settlements, small-scale residential development will be permitted provided it:*

- A. *demonstrably supports or enhances the vitality of the local community and the continued availability of services and facilities locally;*
- B. *is of a proportionate scale and maintains and enhances sustainable patterns of development;*
- C. *complements the form and character of the settlement; and*
- D. *does not have an adverse cumulative impact on the settlement having regard to other developments permitted during the Local Plan period.’*

Policy DS4 states : *‘New-build open market housing will not be permitted outside Principal and Non-Principal Settlements unless it is in accordance with other policies that expressly deal with residential development in such locations.’* There are no other specific policies that apply to the neighbourhood area.

In terms of strategic infrastructure requirements relevant to the site, Policy SA1 ‘Strategy delivery - South Cotswolds Sub-area’ include highway junction improvements at A429 / Cherry Tree Lane (within Preston parish).

The relationship between Cirencester Town and the surrounding countryside is addressed by the Local Plan; this recognises the contribution made by the Cotswold AONB as it wraps around Cirencester and the presence of agricultural land which creates ‘*green wedges*’ and maintains views of the Parish Church tower when approaching the town from various directions (para 7.2.3).

The Plan states that: *‘In planning terms, Cirencester is considered to include the developed parts of*

adjacent parishes that abut, and are effectively part of, the built-up area of the town’ (including Kingshill Meadow, para 7.2.7).

Other Local Plan policies relevant to the landscape assessment of the site are summarised in the table below.

Table 2 Summary of relevant policies

Policy	Summary
Policy EN1 ‘Built, Natural and Historic Environment’	<p><i>‘The Cotswold character is recognised as being key to the area’s sense of place, its local distinctiveness and the quality of life of residents and visitors’ (para 10.1.1). ‘Although the AONB designation refers primarily to “natural beauty”, that natural beauty is very closely tied to the historic value of the landscape. Those linkages include the landscape archaeology of the area, such as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• field patterns and the ancient roadways;</i> <i>• use of local materials for building;</i> <i>• historic structures from Neolithic burial mounds to arts and crafts cottages;</i> <i>• setting of settlements; and</i> <i>• natural” landscape itself which is as much a man-made construct as a natural one.’ (para 10.1.2)</i> <p><i>‘One of the key pressures facing the District is planning positively to meet the objectively assessed need for growth, whilst safeguarding the sensitive built, natural and historic environment from the less positive aspects of development and simultaneously seeking enhancements where possible.’ (para 10.1.4)</i></p> <p>The policy states: <i>‘New development will, where appropriate, promote the protection, conservation and enhancement of the historic and natural environment by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>A. ensuring the protection and enhancement of existing natural and historic environmental assets and their settings in proportion with the significance of the asset;</i> <i>B. contributing to the provision and enhancement of multi-functional green infrastructure;</i> <i>C. addressing climate change, habitat loss and fragmentation through creating new habitats and the better management of existing habitats;</i> <i>D. seeking to improve air, soil and water quality where feasible; and</i> <i>E. ensuring design standards that complement the character of the area and the sustainable use of the development.’</i>
Policy EN2 ‘Design of the Built and Natural Environment’	<p><i>‘The Cotswolds is widely recognised as an outstandingly beautiful area, rich in the architecture of every period and style. Many towns and villages contain impressive set pieces, ranging from a scatter of cottages around a green to gently curving town streets and marketplaces. The design quality achieved in the past was generally very high. Local standards of traditional craftsmanship have been exceptional for hundreds of years’ (para 10.2.2).</i></p> <p><i>‘Heritage themes that contribute to the distinctiveness of the local built environment include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• local stone building materials – dry-stone walls, Cotswold building stone, natural stone roof tiles;</i> <i>• distinctive Cotswold vernacular;</i> <i>• rural (agricultural) settlement patterns of isolated farmsteads and villages with market towns and</i> <i>• a number of country houses with associated estates; Key local architects including important proponents of the Arts and Crafts Movement; and</i> <i>• Roman archaeology of the District focused on Corinium. Obvious Roman</i>

Policy	Summary
	<p><i>roads, still in use as main roads through the District.</i></p> <p><i>The policy states: ‘Development will be permitted which accords with the Cotswold Design Code (Appendix D). Proposals should be of design quality that respects the character and distinctive appearance of the locality.’</i></p>
<p>Policy EN4 ‘The Wider Natural and Historic Landscape’</p>	<p><i>‘It is vital that the character, visual quality and historic value of the landscape of the District is conserved and, where possible, enhanced.’ (para 10.4.2)</i></p> <p><i>The policy states:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>‘ Development will be permitted where it does not have a significant detrimental impact on the natural and historic landscape (including the tranquillity of the countryside) of Cotswold District or neighbouring areas.</i> • <i>Proposals will take account of landscape and historic landscape character, visual quality and local distinctiveness. They will be expected to enhance, restore and better manage the natural and historic landscape, and any significant landscape features and elements, including key views, the setting of settlements, settlement patterns and heritage assets.’ ‘Within and outside the designated landscapes there is a range of individual landscape assets and features, including key views, skyline features, settlement patterns, field boundaries and early cultivation systems. Such features are worthy of conservation and enhancement.’ (para 10.4.9)</i>
<p>Policy EN5 ‘Cotswolds AONB’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>‘1. In determining development proposals within the AONB or its setting, the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape, its character and special qualities will be given great weight. Major development will not be permitted within the AONB unless it satisfies the exceptions set out in national Policy and Guidance.’</i> • <i>‘The design of new developments should reflect the analysis of the special qualities of the AONB and opportunities for enhancement as described in the AONB Management Plan and relevant landscape character assessments (see also the Cotswold Design Code at Appendix D). Notwithstanding the relatively uniform character of the landscape across much of the AONB, there are changes in landscape character and distinctiveness within it and it is important that these are recognised and reflected in the design of new development.’ (para 10.5.4)</i>
<p>Policy EN7 ‘Trees, Hedgerows and Woodlands’</p>	<p><i>This policy addresses how development should protect, conserve and enhance these landscape resources or, (in case of proposed removals) provide appropriate compensatory planting.</i></p>
<p>Policy EN10-EN12 ‘Historic Environment’</p>	<p><i>These policies address the protection of historic environments, specifically relating to designated heritage assets, Conservation Areas and non-designated assets.</i></p>
<p>Policy INF7 ‘Green Infrastructure’</p>	<p><i>This clarifies the requirements for development proposals to contribute to the protection and enhancement of existing Green Infrastructure and / or the delivery of new Green Infrastructure, which is expected to link to the wider network and to be designed in accordance with principles set out in the Cotswold Design Code.</i></p>

2 Landscape Context

The following chapter presents the unique landscape attributes which contribute to the locally distinctive character of Preston parish.

Preston Parish

The parish is crossed by the following Roman Roads: the Fosse Way (which forms the parish western boundary), Akeman Street (B4425 to Barnsley) and the Ermin Way (A419 to Swindon). These roads are of Roman origin and run radially from the centre of Cirencester crossing the parish in a north-easterly and south-easterly direction, respectively. Other transport links of note include the recent A417/A419 dual carriageway which connects to the wider transport network i.e. the M5 to the North West and the M4 to the South East.

The village itself is located to the south of the parish and has a loose linear arrangement along the only village road. Within the parish there is also the small hamlet of Norcote further to the north and several farmsteads.

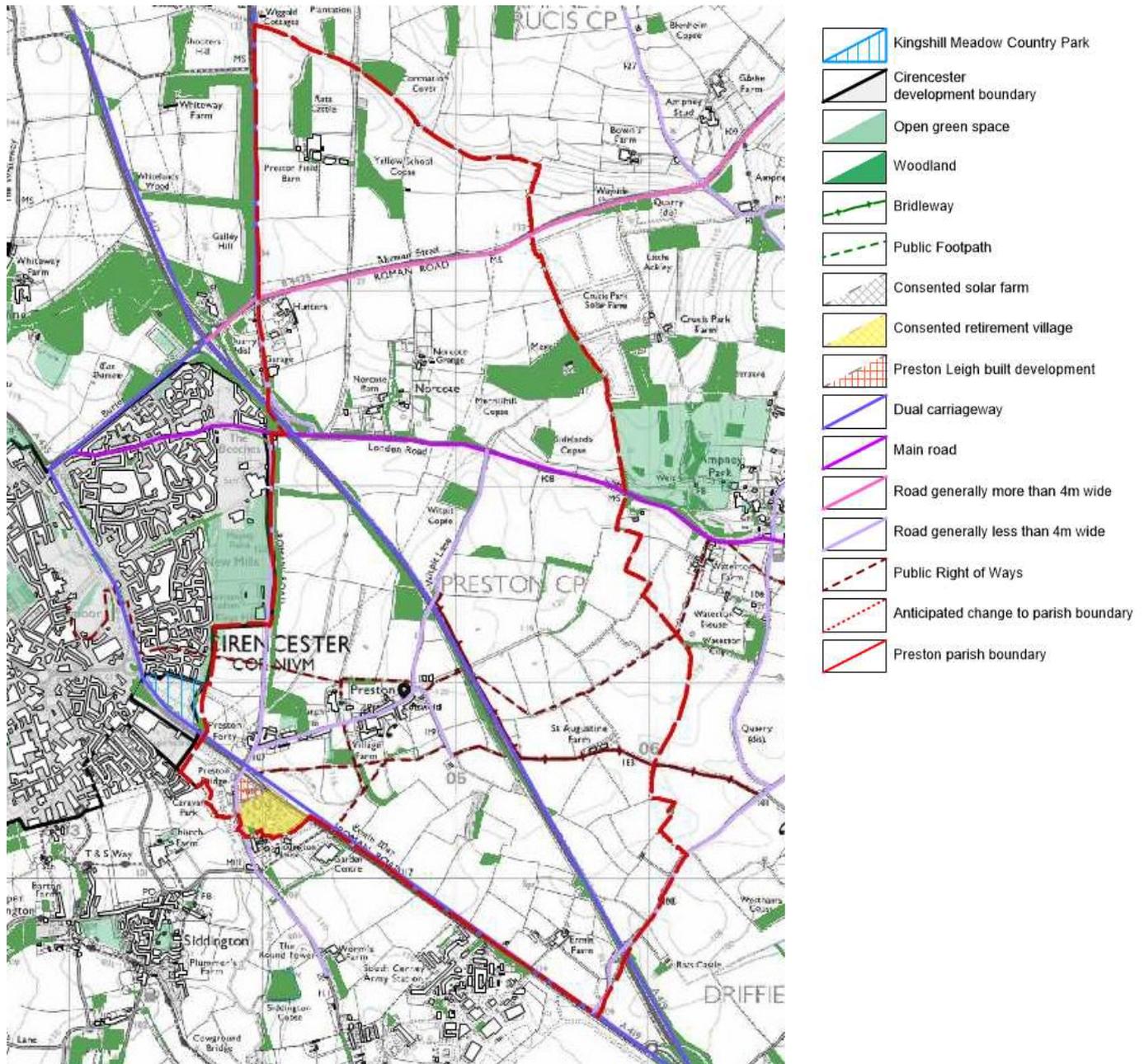
Public footpaths and other Public Rights of Ways are generally only present in the south of the parish and provide connections primarily in east-west direction, linking the village to Cirencester to the west and Ampney Crucis and Driffield to the east. The presence of the dual carriageway has affected connectivity across the parish, and though two access / crossing points exist for walkers in addition to Witpit Lane, these are treacherous and effectively inaccessible in heavy, fast moving traffic. Public rights of way also cross the A419 Ermin Way to the south, in similarly hazardous conditions.

In terms of land use, the parish comprises mostly of arable farmland with a percentage of grazed fields. The whole of the parish is designated Grade 3 (Good to Moderate quality) in the Agricultural Land Classification.

Gently undulating fields are bounded by hedgerows and dry-stone walls. The presence of numerous drainage ditches and historic dew ponds, as well as linear tree belts and rectilinear copses defines the open agricultural character of the parish.

See **Figure 4 Local landscape context**.

Figure 4 Local landscape context

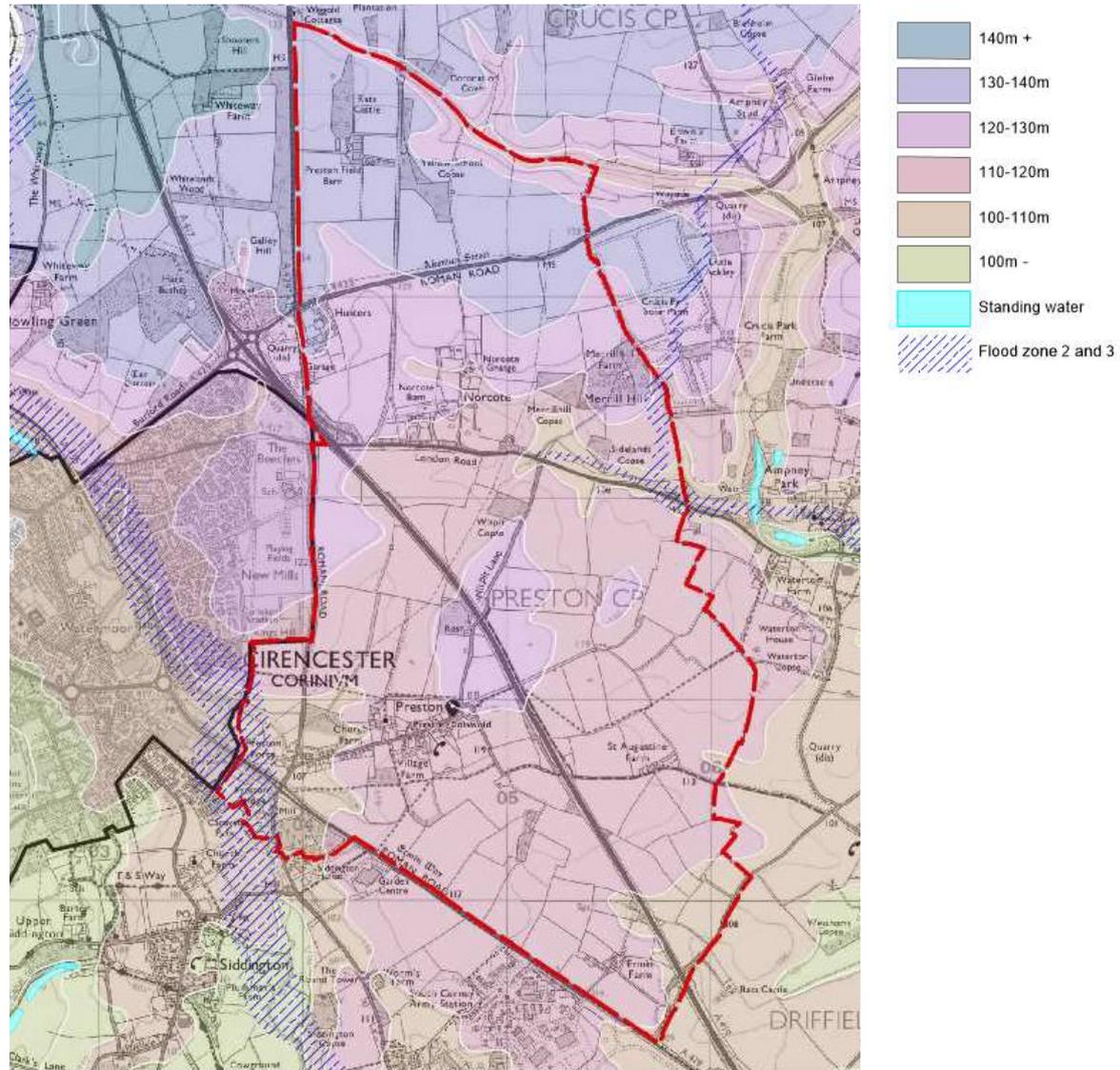


Topography

In terms of its physical characteristics, the study area covers an area of approximately 818 hectares; it lies on very gently sloping land with a predominant south-easterly fall at the northern edge of the Upper Thames Valley. The topography map shows very little variation across the parish, between approximately 135m to the north and 100m AOD to the south, see **Figure 5**.

A portion of the parish to the south-west is within flood zones 2 and 3.

Figure 5 Topography plan showing flood zones

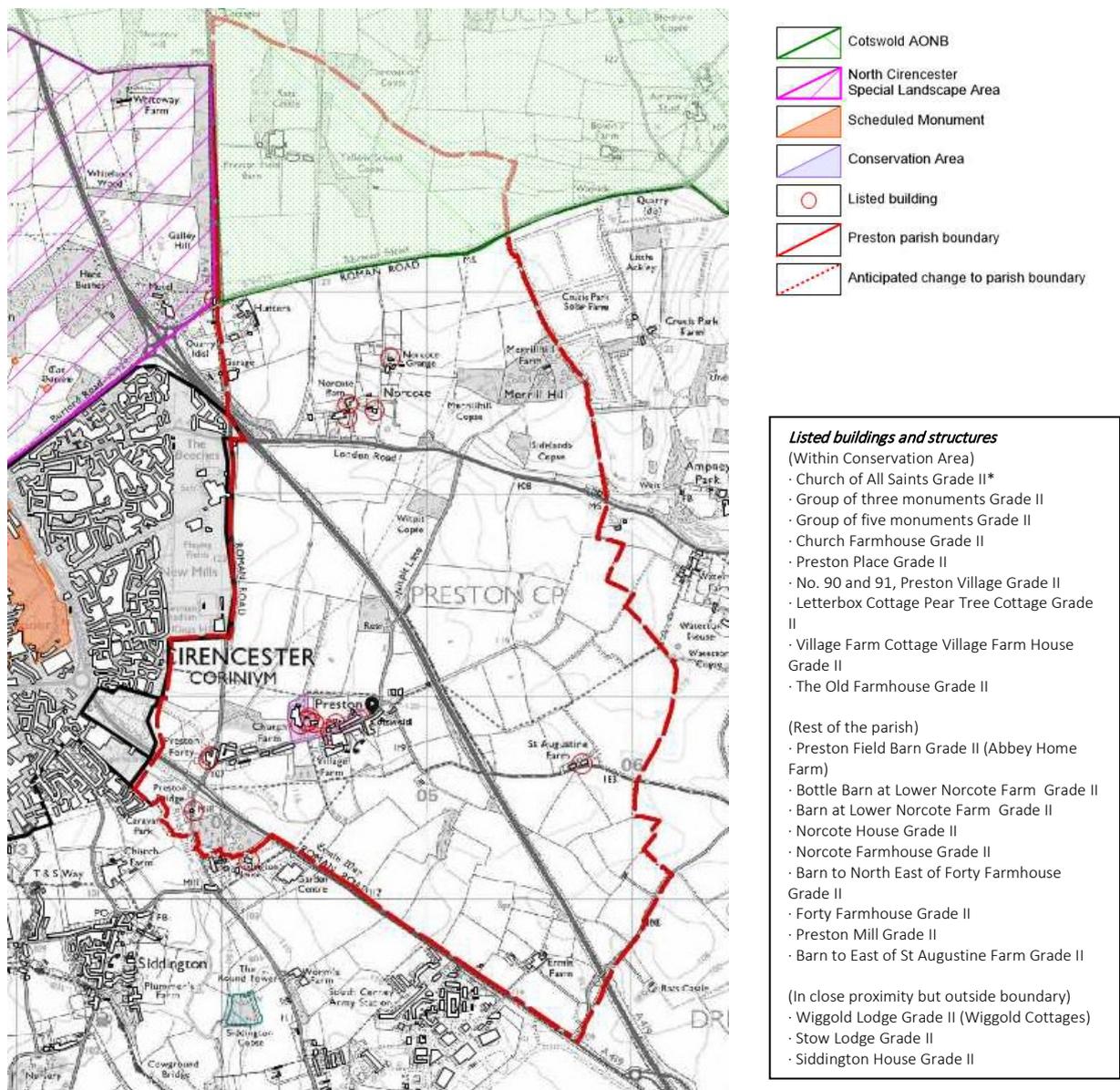


Designations

Several designations are present within the study area and in its immediate setting. The northern section of the parish, north of Akeman Street (B4425) falls within the Cotswold AONB.

The parish is situated adjacent to a designated Special Landscape Area (SLA), which affords a similar level of protection, at local scale, as the AONB at national scale. The importance of its designation is linked to its proximity and continuity of character with the adjacent Cotswold AONB. Whilst the AONB designation protects the classic Cotswold character, the SLA forms an important transition zone and setting to the AONB. The landscape of Preston parish is of a comparable quality and character to that of the North Cirencester SLA and it forms another important transition zone with the adjacent Cotswold AONB. Whilst the parish does not hold a recognised designation, because of its equivalent importance, it should be protected in a similar manner. The designations are highlighted below in **Figure 6**.

Figure 6 Designations plan



village road. The community up to this point was largely agricultural and the village comprised of farmhouses, cottages, a school and a rectory clustered around the church. Few of the larger larger individual houses (Foxleaze, Preston Cottage and Ermin Cottage) were built during the early 1900s.

The residential extension to the village developed from the 1950s onwards, with new dwellings built along the roadside which elongated the ribbon form of the village both to the east and west. Alongside new dwellings, development also consisted of conversion of existing farm buildings into residential and small commercial property and Infill development within large plots.

In more recent years, development within the parish has largely occurred along the edges of Cirencester, as the town has expanded to the east. This includes the Tesco superstore, its large car park and residential expansion of the Kingshill estate, which crossed the previously drawn parish boundaries. Additional recent planning consents within the parish include a solar farm scheme on fields north of the dual carriageway, a residential care village, and six large detached residential properties (the recently completed Preston Leigh development) on the site of Preston Mill, near the Toll Bar junction south of the A419.

Changes To The Landscape

Preston has been shaped by the significant changes in the way we travel and use the landscape. This has had considerable impact on the character and setting of the parish.

By the early 1880s the expansion of the railway throughout Britain saw the development of Midland and South Western Junction Railway; including the section of the line which crossed the parish (north to south) leading to Watermoor Railway Station. The line closed in 1970 and though the line has now been demolished the linear tree belts which formally marked its boundary still mark the route of the railway line, see **Figure 8**.

More recently the construction of the dual carriageway (c.1990s) effectively split the parish in two, crossing from the north-west to the south-east. The layout of the carriageway conflicts with the general pattern of Roman roads radiating from the centre of Cirencester. Furthermore, the carriageway has impacted the interconnectivity of existing roads with the parish and has caused severance of several local and minor roads, which are now retained as public rights of way.

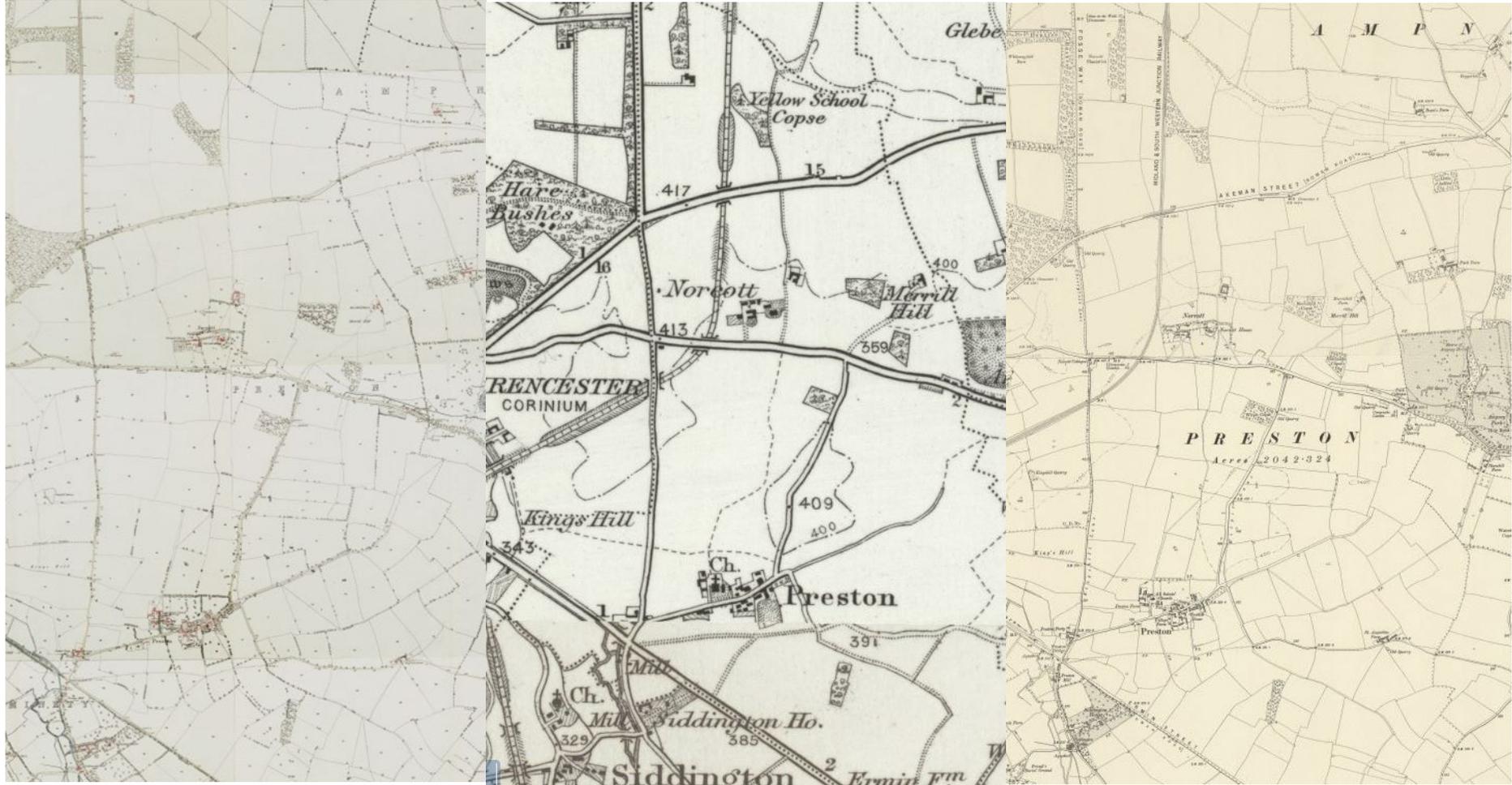
When comparing the historic plans to a contemporary OS map, it is apparent that some of the fields boundaries have been removed, resulting in larger agricultural fields with a reduced sense of enclosure. On the other hand, new areas of woodland copses have been planted and numerous linear shelterbelts generally associated with transport infrastructure. There have been changes to the pattern of enclosure where in certain areas fields have been enlarged by removing previous enclosures, and other areas where the opposite has happened.

Apart from the above major developments, whilst there have been changes to agricultural practices and trends throughout history, the overall open character of the landscape in the parish has remained fundamentally unaltered since the time of the enclosure, see **Figure 9**. As such the most appropriate approach would be to retain its current condition of openness.

Figure 8 Historic maps 1873-1888 OS

1885-1900 OS

1888-1913 OS



Landscape Character Context

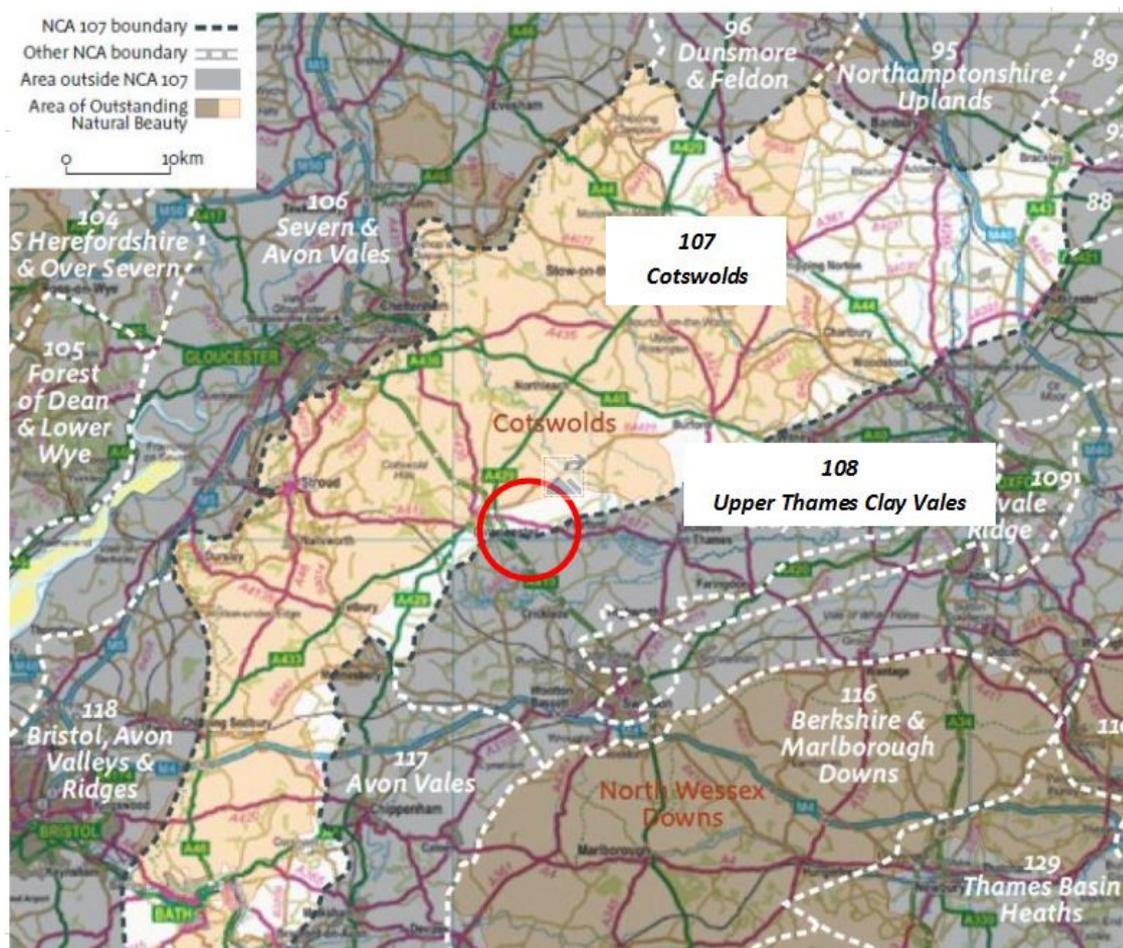
National character Areas

The parish is situated at the fringe of two National Character Areas: NCA 107 'Cotswolds' and NCA 108, 'Upper Thames Clay Vales' (**Figure 10**). Generally the characteristics of the parish are more aligned with the NCA 107 'Cotswold' apart from the south western edge which can be characterised by having more open, gently undulating lowland farmland as highlighted in NCA 108 'Upper Thames Clay Vales'.

Relevant key characteristics of the Cotswold NCA include:

- *Arable farming dominates the high wold and dip slope while permanent pasture prevails on the steep slopes of the scarp and river valleys with pockets of internationally important limestone grassland.*
- *Drystone walls define the pattern of fields of the high wold and dip slope. On the deeper soils and river valleys, hedgerows form the main field boundaries.*
- *Rich history from Neolithic barrows, iron-age hill forts and Roman roads and villas to deserted medieval villages, grand country houses, cloth mills and Second World War airfields.*
- *Locally quarried limestone brings a harmony to the built environment of scattered villages and drystone walls, giving the area a strong sense of unity for which the Cotswolds are renowned.*

Figure 10 National Character Areas 107 and 108



Local Character Areas

The Landscape Character Assessments (LCA) which are relevant to the site are: the Cotswolds AONB LCA (LDA Design, 2004), Upper Thames Valley LCA (Various Vales LCA, LDA Design, 2006) and the Integrated Landscape Character Assessment for the Cotswold Water Park (LDA Design, 2009). Though analysed in separate Landscape Character Assessments, the character of the site is very much uniform and is identified with the 'Dip-Slope Lowland' character type by the above studies.

The northern part of the parish falls within Area 11A 'South and Mid Cotswolds Lowlands' and is described by the Cotswold AONB LCA as follows:

- *'Broad area of gently sloping, undulating lowland with a predominantly south-easterly fall ...*
- *lowland landform gently dissected by infrequent small watercourses ...*
- *strong and structured farmland character, more intimate and smaller in scale*
- *well-managed, productive agricultural landscape of mixed arable and improved pasture, together with more limited areas of permanent pasture, mainly within the valley bottoms;*
- *medium to large scale, regular fields predominate mainly enclosed by hedgerows, with hedgerow trees, together with some stone walls or post and wire fencing;*
- *woodland cover limited to intermittent copses and shelterbelts within agricultural land*
- *settlement pattern of intermittent small nucleated villages, hamlets, and isolated farmsteads, together with occasional larger settlements, contribute to the strong rural character. ...'*

The southern part of the parish falls within the Area TV 3B 'The Ampneys' and is described by the Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment (see **Figure 11**) as follows:

'Generally falling below 140m AOD, the character area has a gently sloping, mainly south easterly grain with subtle undulations, frequently marked by minor watercourses or dry valleys. ... Large scale, well managed arable fields generally predominate, interspersed with pastoral fields often small in scale, both improved and with evidence of scrub encroachment. ... As with the wider Dip Slope Lowland landscape, fields are enclosed by both stone walls and hedgerows of varying condition.

Where hedgerows are present, wooden post and wire or post and rail fences reinforce the hedgerows where they have become gappy. Occasional mature trees are scattered along field boundaries, and where hedgerows have become overgrown, they are often perceived as tree lines across the landscape, combining in areas with small woodland copses to create the local impression of a relatively well treed landscape. Whilst significant woodland blocks are not characteristic of the Dip Slope Lowland, a number of small copses, predominantly with a mixed or deciduous composition are scattered across the area. ... In a number of views, these small blocks combine to create a moderately well wooded horizon.

Villages and hamlets are scattered across the character area, with a greater concentration to the west. The majority of villages have a broadly linear form. All the Ampney villages, together with Preston, are designated as Conservation Areas. Beyond the main settled areas is a pattern of scattered farms and dwellings, often accessed via a network of minor tracks, but also located adjacent to roadsides. Surrounding a number of farms are small rectangular woodland copses providing a sense of enclosure and shelter to the farm buildings.

On the western side of the character area, a network of principal roads converges on Cirencester, notably the A417, A429 and the A419. These form part of the system of Roman roads that link into the town and signify the importance of the settlement during the Roman occupation.

Beyond this, a network of minor country roads, broadly aligned north-south and east-west, connect the smaller settlements.

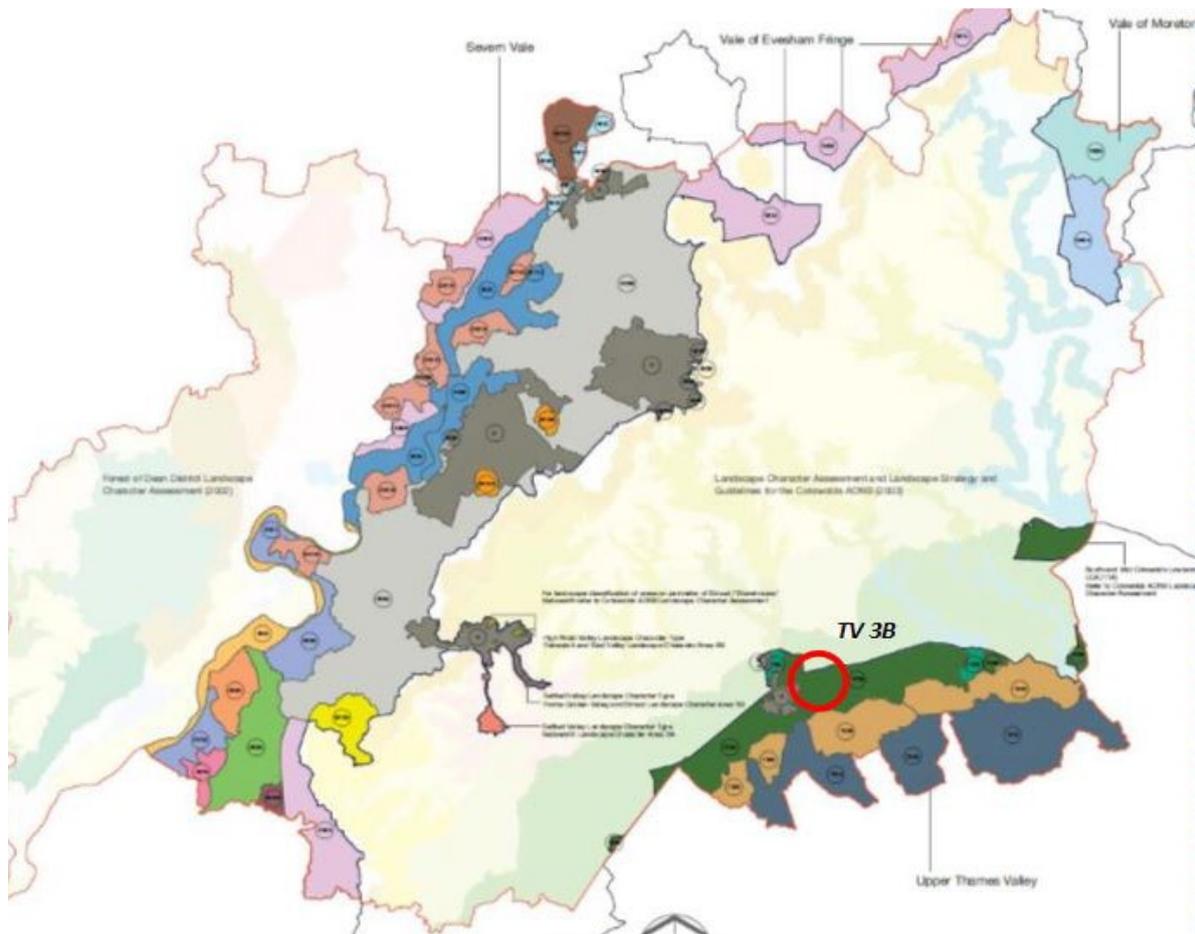
The frequently low boundaries bordering the road network allows open and often panoramic views across the landscape towards the wider Upper Thames Basin to the south. One of these minor roads bordering the northern boundary of the character area, and marking the southern edge of the Cotswolds AONB, is the Roman road of Akeman Street. A further section of Roman road east of Cirencester and close to the western boundary of the character area aligns with the A429 Stow Road.'

Whilst there are no management recommendations in the Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment, the Cotswold Conservation Board has published several documents to aid the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the Cotswold AONB, including a Management Plan and a Landscape Strategy and Guidelines.

In terms of landscape sensitivity, the Landscape Strategy and Guidelines (2016) for LCT 11 : 'Dip Slope Lowland' states:

'The strongly structured cultivated Dip-Slope Lowland landscape is sensitive to large scale developments that might interrupt wide views across the landscape and in particular to developments that would introduce tall vertical elements such as pylons and wind turbines. However, the presence of more intensively managed landscapes makes the Dip Slope Lowlands generally less sensitive than remoter and more elevated landscapes on the High Wold and High Wold Dip-Slope. Areas where a strong woodland framework exists are particularly suited to accommodate development. However, development proposals should avoid extensive new woodland planting to screen developments, as this would compromise the open character of the landscape and long views across the Dip-Slope Lowlands. ... Care should be taken to ensure that developments do not compromise elements that constitute the wider setting of designed parklands such as estate villages and tree plantations.'

Figure 11 Gloucestershire Landscape Character Areas



The Guidelines provide detailed recommendations for each character type and highlight the following potential forces for change:

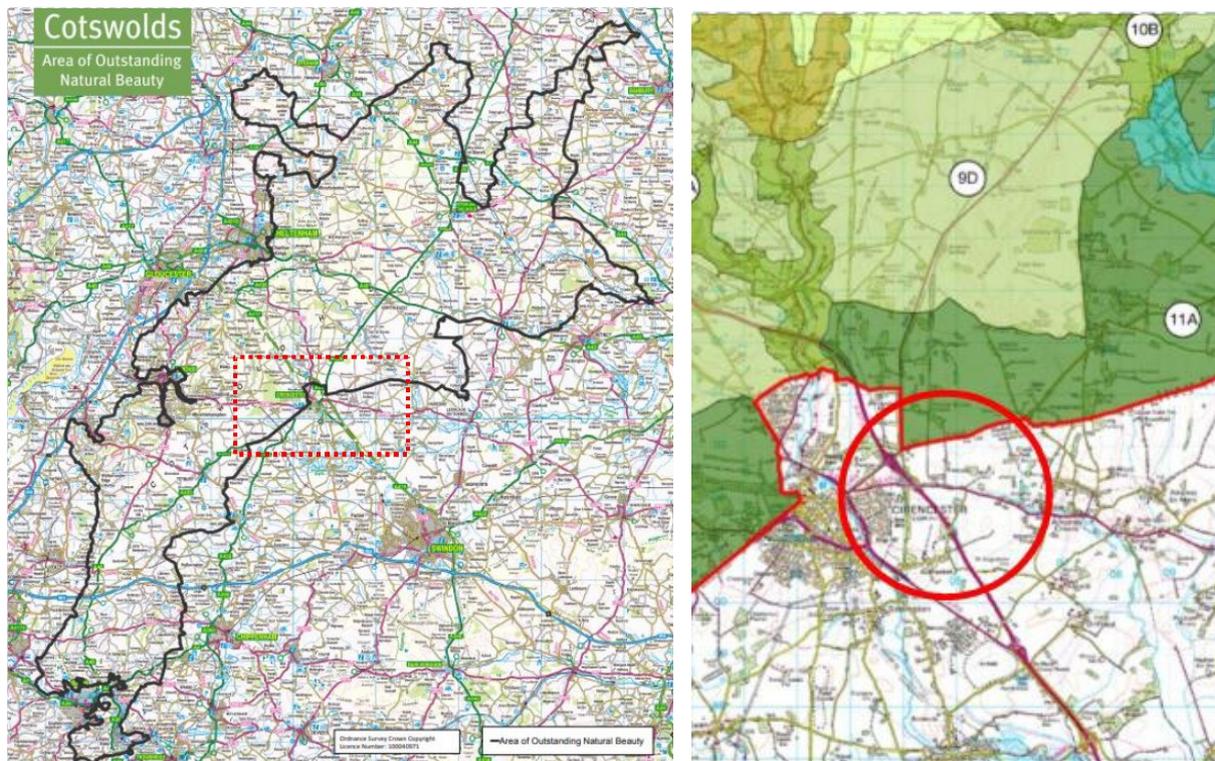
- *Development, expansion and infilling of settlements including residential, industrial and leisure.*
- *Isolated development such as new single dwellings and conversion of farm buildings that might compromise rural landscape character and dispersed settlement patterns.*
- *Conversion of traditional farm buildings to new uses Deterioration in condition of vernacular farm buildings.*
- *Solar Farms*
- *Licensed spreading of waste on agricultural land*
- *Introduction of vertical elements such as communication masts, wind turbines and electricity pylons, particularly in locations that impact on panoramas.*
- *Road upgrading and improvements, especially of minor country roads, as a result of development or general improvement schemes.*
- *Excessive traffic and/or speed on minor local roads and lanes. Increase in size of vehicle using lanes.*
- *Deterioration in condition of vernacular farm buildings*
- *Agricultural intensification and diversification*
- *Planting of energy crops such as Miscanthus, short rotation coppice and short rotation forestry*
- *Loss of dry-stone walls due to abandonment, development of volunteer hedges, replacement with hedges or fences or removal to build/restore a wall elsewhere*
- *Separation of farmhouse/agricultural housing from the working farm for sale with a plot of*

land. Sub-division of farmland for 'lifestyle' plots

- Development of scrub and trees on roadside verges Mowing of verges at inappropriate times
- Creation of woodland; Creation of 'shelterbelts' to provide seclusion for private dwellings
- Maturation and decline of enclosure age pine and beech corner copses, roadside shelterbelts and farm copses.
- Impact of tree disease such as Chalara Dieback of ash.'

For each of the above, a list of relevant strategies and guidelines is provided. This chapter of the Cotswold AONB Strategy and Guidelines is included as an appendix to this document as it is very relevant to inform the management recommendations for the landscape of the parish, see **Figure 12**.

Figure 12 Cotswolds AONB Landscape Character Assessment



The key management objectives can be summarised as:

- *Maintain the open, sparsely settled character by limiting new woodland and shelterbelt planting to retain open panoramas*
- *Protect the traditional field pattern by encouraging hedgerow and dry-stone wall restoration*
- *Conserve traditional farm buildings and their relationship to the surrounding land*
- *Conserve dark skies*
- *Avoid tall vertical elements and the use of visually prominent security fencing, masts, road signs*
- *Promote the use of design and materials appropriate to local character*
- *Landscaping schemes should encourage the planting of appropriately sized native trees, shrubs and traditional fruit varieties'.*

The landscape character across the parish is consistent with the description of the Dip Slope Lowland type, featuring the typical undulating lowland with a gentle south-easterly fall, dissected by small watercourses and drainage ditches.

Preston has a strong productive farmland character formed by medium to large scale regular fields, largely enclosed by hedgerows with hedgerow trees and dry-stone walls. The woodland cover is limited to intermittent copses and shelterbelts which create expansive views. The character of the village is consistent with the description of settlements in this landscape character type: small nucleated village with scattered hamlets and farmsteads, which contribute to the strong rural character.

3. Preston, Cotswold: A Distinctive Environment

Parish Character and Description

The parish landscape is an area of transition between the high Cotswold country and the Thames Valley, which is characterised by gently sloping, undulating landform, dissected by small watercourses. The parish leaves an overall impression of a well-managed, productive landscape of mixed arable and improved pasture. It consists of medium to large scale fields of a planned nature enclosed by hedgerows. Small villages and isolated farmsteads define the settlement pattern, with typical stone wall enclosures and woodland structure limited to copses and shelter belts. Across the whole of the study area, there is a remarkable uniformity of defining landscape features

Whilst only a small proportion of the parish is within the AONB, it forms part of its setting due to its proximity and the uniformity of its character. The parish's close location to Cirencester determines and emphasises by contrast the importance of its open landscape setting to the largest of the Cotswold towns.

The character of Cirencester is strongly informed by areas of open landscape which, through varying degrees of parkland and agricultural character, reach close to the town centre from various directions, principally from the west (Bathurst estate), the north-east (Abbey Home Farm estate) and the south-east (Preston parish). The largely unspoilt agricultural area of the parish serves this important 'green wedge' purpose, which is described by the Local Plan as follows:

'The 'green wedges' and views of [Cirencester] parish Church tower, are particular characteristics of Cirencester when approaching the town from various directions.' (para 7.2.3)

The open arable farmland surrounding Preston village forms a typical agricultural setting for the historic rural village. Despite the developments of the last century which have eroded the agricultural landscape, the overarching impression in the parish is of a rural landscape with scattered farmsteads, well integrated within the landscape structure. The landscape of the parish shares many of the characteristics of areas of the AONB situated adjacent to the parish therefore any changes within the parish could impact upon the setting of the AONB. The AONB management guidelines for this shared character type forms a useful starting point for considering change within the parish.

The existing landscape structure, comprising of drainage ditches, shelterbelts, hedgerows and copses, provides valuable habitats and corridors for wildlife. Whilst these habitats do not hold a statutory designation, they are of local importance and should be preserved and where possible enhanced. Any enhancement should be expanded in a manner that is consistent with the overarching landscape character type and habitat management and enhancement strategy.

Land Use and Amenity

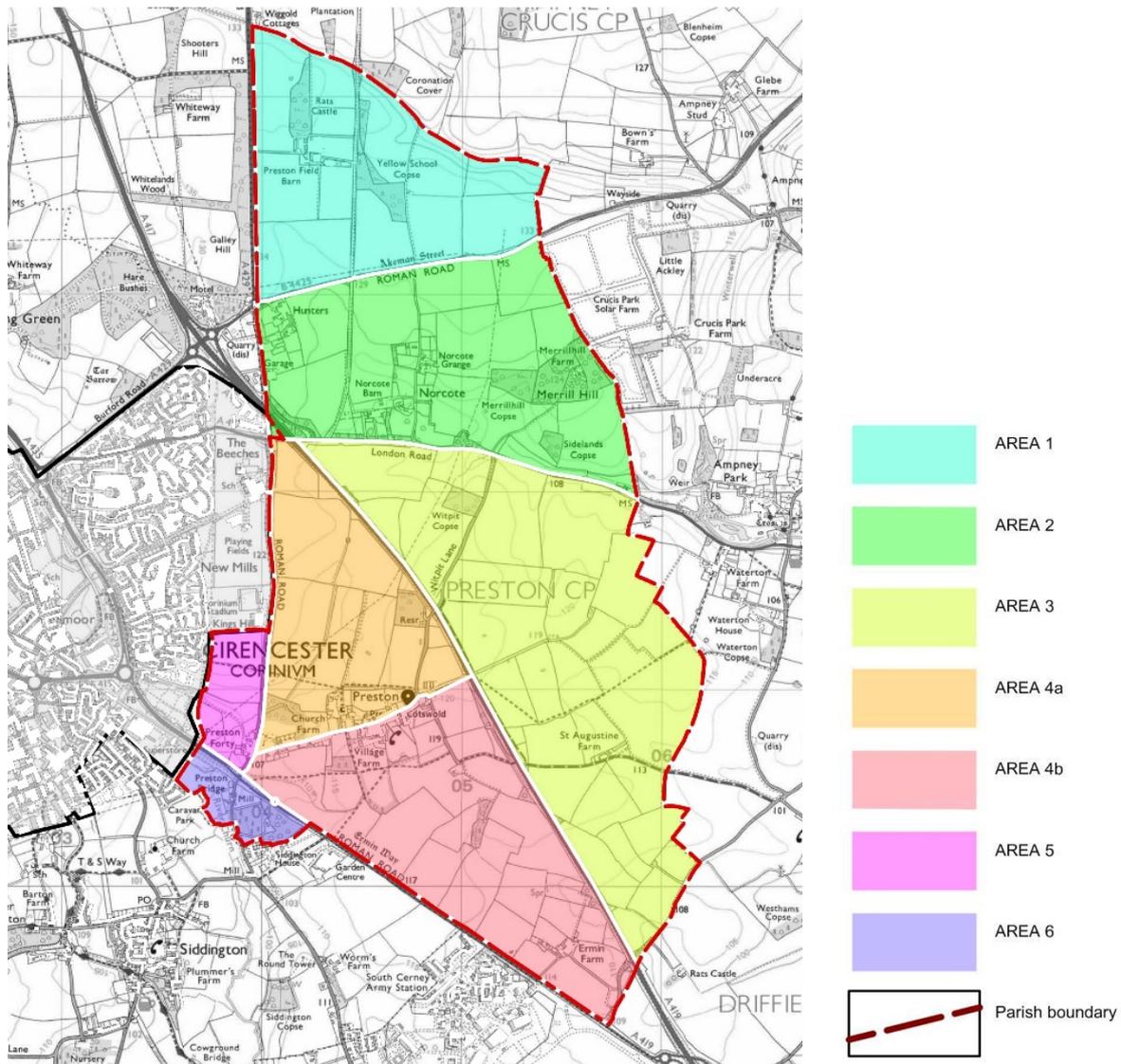
Land uses include arable and pasture for the largest part, but also agroforestry, horticulture, parkland, and consented renewable solar farming. Abbey Home Farm is also an important regional resource to disseminate sustainable, organic farming techniques through a range of tours, residential courses, and workshops for adults and children.

Several transport routes cross the parish and have in time contributed to shaping the development of the landscape. Many of which have been important transport links since Roman times.

Preston Sub-Areas

The assessment of the local landscape character and analysis of transport routes allowed for the partition of the parish into sub areas, see **Figure 13**. The assessments for each sub areas are provided over the following pages. The assessment identifies the sub-areas individual contribution to the character and identity of the parish. The assessment provides landscape management and enhancement suggestions which will inform policy. These assessments are accompanied by supporting maps and photos.

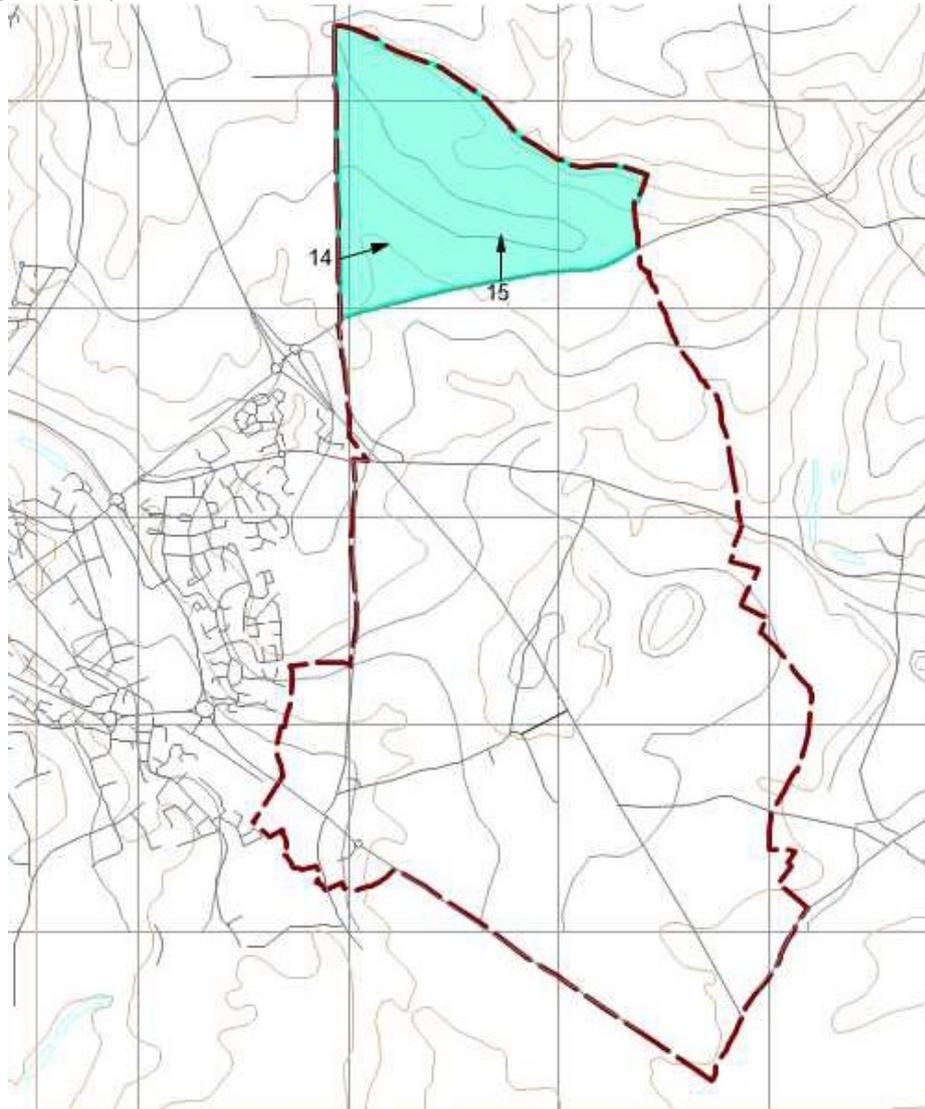
Figure 13 Preston sub-areas plan



Sub-area 1

Figure 14 Sub-areas inset Area 1

See viewpoint photographs 14 and 15 below.



Description

The area is flanked by the A429 Fosse Way and by the B4425 Akeman Street, which constitute its boundaries to the west and south respectively. The north boundary of the sub-area is defined by the parish boundary. This area is designated as AONB.

This area mostly comprises of Abbey Home Farm, an organic farm with an award-winning farm shop, café, cookery and craft residential courses, educational visits and campsite. Users of Abbey Home Farm and walkers along the Farm permissive footpaths are primary landscape receptors. Other relevant landscape receptors include road users of the Fosse Way who get an informal experience of this area of the parish as they drive along the road or wait at the traffic light

Sub-area 1		
Characteristics	<u>Topography</u>	Very flat with a central slightly elevated plateau between the minor valleys of the Winterwell and Ampney Brook, mostly consistently at 130m AOD.
	<u>Field Pattern and enclosure</u>	Fields in this area follow a general north-south alignment, fairly evenly sized, loosely rectangular and square. They have a perpendicular alignment to ancient roman roads. There is a significant presence of copses, possibly acting as wind shelter, these also follow a north-south alignment and are loosely planted along field boundaries.
	<u>Developments</u>	Changes to the field patterns were made in response to the construction of the railway line in the early 19th century. The location and extent of woodland copses has been maintained since the first OS map. Preston Field Barn Farm (now Abbey Home Farm) is present since the first OS map, however it has been substantially extended since 1974. Close to its eastern edge, a large solar farm (just outside of the parish boundary) has been implemented in recent years (first power output in 2014) but due to topography and aspect, is not visible from within this sub-area.
	<u>Visual sensitivity</u>	<p>Sensitive receptors to this sub-area are primarily the users of Abbey Home Farm and walkers on the Farm permissive footpaths. Views from these and generally from land within the Farm are not strictly public views. Other, less sensitive receptors include users of the Fosse Way and of the B4425 Akeman Street, as there are no PRowWs. Views from the Fosse Way are for the largest part screened by deciduous trees planted consistently along the road verge to the parish side. Views to the north from along the B4425 are more open as the verge is planted with fairly low hedgerows and sparse trees; however, due to the flat topography, views are limited by field boundaries on a low horizon. Notwithstanding that this part of the parish is designated as AONB, the value of the landscape in this area is heightened by the communal and educational facilities, and due to the fact that Abbey Home Farm is accessible to the public. Detracting landscape features in this area include the presence of low pylons along the B4425. The operations and visible paraphernalia within the Farm are intrinsically linked to the functions it performs and contribute to the character of this area.</p> <p>Changes to the landscape which result from developing the educational, horticultural, and communal offer of Abbey Home Farm, should continue to respect the agricultural character of their surroundings, and remain subject to the guidelines and overarching constraints set by the AONB designation.</p>

Figure 15 Sub- area 1 view east from A429



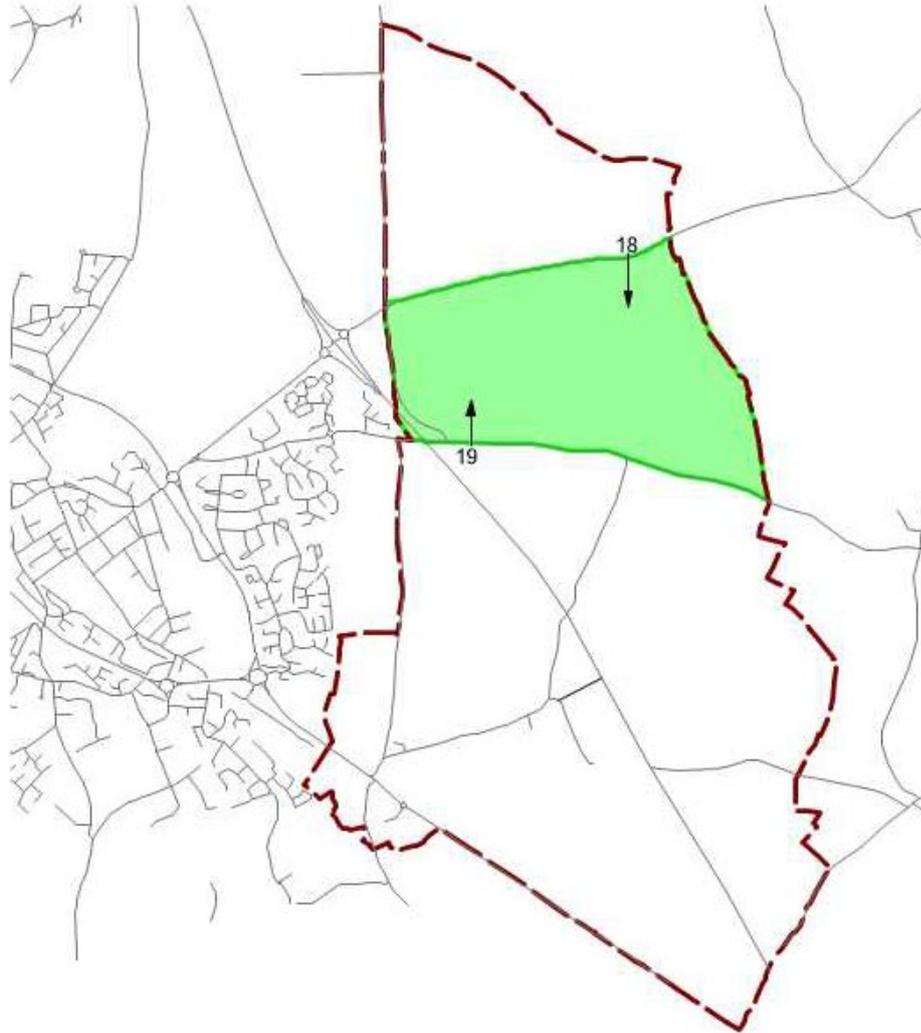
Figure 16 Sub-area 1 view north from B4425



Sub-Area 2

Figure 17 Sub-areas inset Area 2

See viewpoint photographs 18 and 19 below.



Description

This area is bounded by Cherrytree Lane (which runs along the historic Fosse Way) to the west, the A417 London Road to the south, Akeman Street to the north, and the parish boundary to the east. At its south-west corner, following construction of the dual carriageway, a bridge was built which has altered the topography and created a viewpoint along the A417. This sub-area contains the hamlet of Lower Norcote, a garage and a residential care home (Hunters) along Cherrytree Lane.

Sub-Area 2		
Characteristics	<u>Topography</u>	Within the parish, this sub-area has the most accentuated slope, though it follows the overarching slope to the south and east. The steeper character is due to the landform being shaped by a tributary of the Winterwell, running along London Road. London road slopes down west to east from the high point of the bridge over the dual carriageway (approx. 130m AOD) to approx. 110m AOD as it crosses the boundary of the parish to the east.
	<u>Field Pattern and enclosure</u>	Fields in this area follow a north-south alignment, fairly evenly sized, medium to large, loosely following a perpendicular alignment to ancient roman roads. Looking at the historic maps, the fields within this sub-area were much smaller in the 1770s compared to their current size (more than half of the original enclosures has been lost). This sub-area features a more treed character when experienced from public highways, due to the extensive presence of linear shelterbelts, especially along the south boundary / London Road and the large Merrillhill and Sidelands Copses.
	<u>Developments</u>	The railway line built in the early 19th century cut across some existing field boundaries. The location and extent of woodland copses have varied since the first OS map, an historic copse to the north of Norcote Grange has been lost, whereas the original Merrillhill copse has been considerably extended, to reach the parish eastern boundary. Historic farms are still present: Merrillhill, Norcote Grange, Norcote Farm and House, all visible on the first OS map. A number of historic quarries are visible on the first OS map, these have all disappeared and integrated within the fields structure. The most evident changes from the historic maps relate to the development of the A417 dual carriageway which passes by the sub-area's western boundary, and commercial development along Cherrytree Lane and near the junction with the Akeman Street. This also extends to the west of the parish boundary and includes recent residential development beyond to the south-west boundary of the parish.
	<u>Visual sensitivity</u>	Sensitive receptors to this sub-area are primarily the users of the B4425 Akeman Street and London Road, as there is no PRoW. This area has a more intimate, discrete character and views from the south and west are mostly screened by structural vegetation - trees and hedgerows, with some limited detracting features. These are primarily linked to the recent development of the dual carriageway and commercial development along Cherrytree Lane. There are panoramic views south of the B4425 (Akeman Street) which are very sensitive to any change, due to the road verge being mostly short hedgerows. The remainder of the sub-area is not in full view from other adjacent roads or from publicly accessible points. Due to the level of enclosure and topography, the area to the north of the A417 London Road may have some potential capacity to absorb a limited amount of new residential development in association with the prevailing agricultural use.

Figure 18 Sub-area 2 view south from B4425



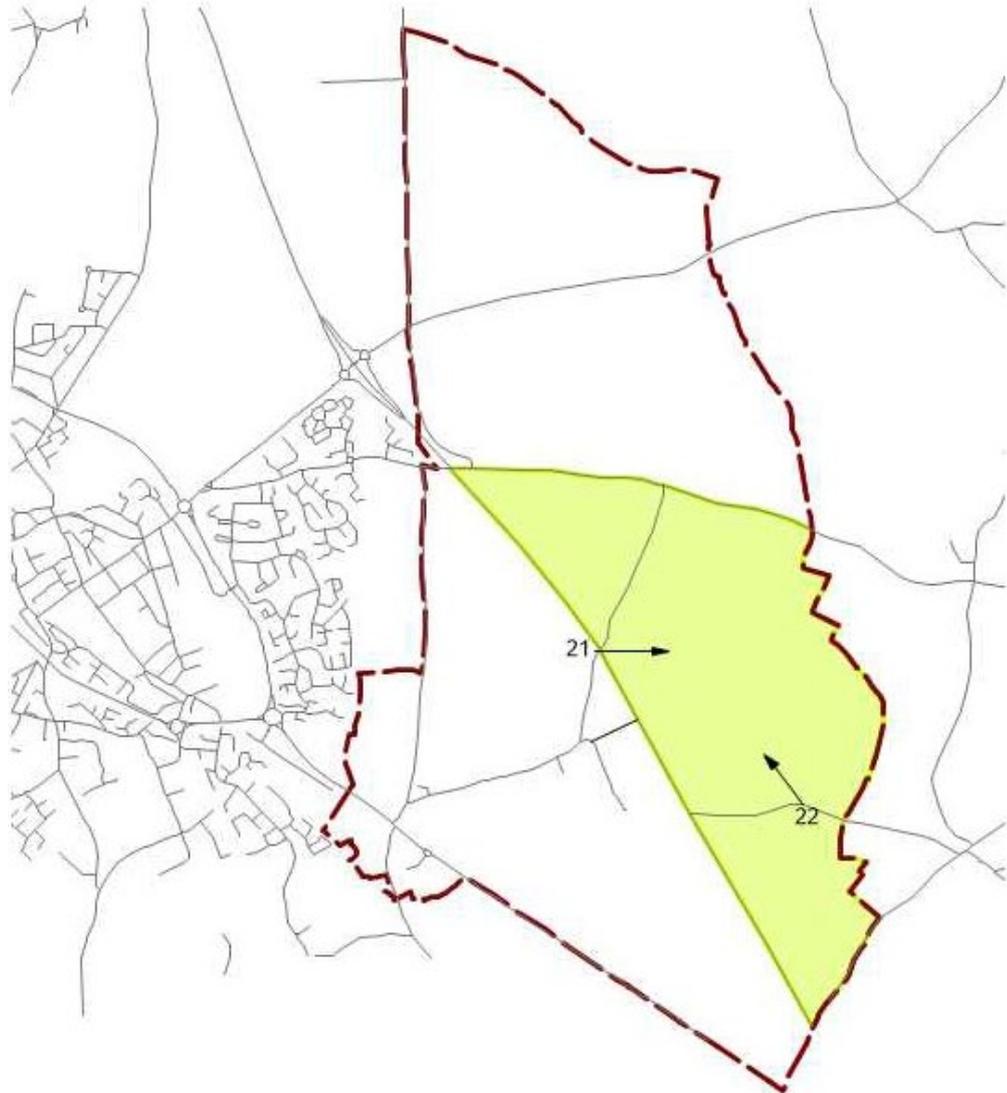
Figure 19 Sub-area 2 view north from London road



Sub-Area 3

Figure 20 Sub-areas inset Area 3

See viewpoint photographs 21 and 22 below.



Description

This area is determined by the A417 London Road to the north, the parish boundary to the east and the A417 dual carriageway to the south and west. It is crossed by Witpit Lane and by two Public Rights of Way. Some of the course of the dual carriageway is within a cutting in the landscape, and bound by a vegetated shelterbelt on both sides, offering only passing glimpses of the agricultural landscape of the parish. The fields east of the bridge on Witpit Lane have consent to be developed as solar farm.

Sub-Area 3

Characteristics	<u>Topography</u>	Generally gently sloping to the south east from its north-west corner (approx. 125m AOD) to its south-east edge (approx. 110m AOD). There is a steep embankment near the parish boundary to the east which cause views south from London Road to be truncated because of the rising topography.
	<u>Field Pattern and enclosure</u>	Fields in this area historically followed an east-west alignment and were fairly evenly sized. Since the 1850s some of the smaller fields were amalgamated into larger ones, and this trend has continued and was significantly informed by the development of the dual carriageway. Today this area features the largest fields within the parish, with a polygonal, slightly erratic layout. Field boundaries comprise mostly of hedgerow but there are significant sections of dry-stone walls.
	<u>Developments</u>	The main changes to the landscape within this sub-area are a consequence of the development of the dual carriageway. This has required an extensive area of cutting in the landform along the northern section, caused the severance of two pre-existing routes, the need to build a bridge on Witpit Lane, and created the need for extensive buffer planting along the dual carriageway. The historic St. Augustine Farm is still extant, though the route which connected it to Preston is retained as a byway only. Future developments will include the implementation of the solar farm.
	<u>Visual sensitivity</u>	<p>The more sensitive receptors in this sub-area include the users of the two PRow, of Witpit Lane and, to a much lesser extent, of the A417/A419. The course of both public footpaths has been severed by the dual carriageway and though crossing points exist, these are extremely dangerous to attempt on foot. Users of Witpit Lane have elevated views over this area of the parish when they approach the bridge.</p> <p>In terms of landscape detractors, the A417/A419 is a major intrusion in the landscape and, notwithstanding that the dual carriageway is flanked by maturing vegetation, the tranquillity in this sub-area is greatly affected by noise and traffic. Lighting impact of cars driving along the dual carriageway also detracts from the rural character of this area at night.</p> <p>Most of the landscape of the parish is effectively hidden from views to users of the dual carriageway and viceversa, both by the steep banks and the vegetation planted along the verges. Some views are available towards Witpit Copse. Views southwards from London Road are limited by rising topography.</p> <p>Any proposed changes that may affect the landscape in this area should strive to bring about positive enhancements to the area, including the restoration of historic hedgerows by sub-division of larger fields. There is an aspiration to achieve improved connectivity across the parish by resolving the footpath links across the dual carriageway.</p> <p>Any potential residential development in this sub-area would be remote and disconnected from the rest of the village. Other constraints to potential built development include the lack of connecting routes, the presence of traffic noise and the impact that this would have on the open agricultural character of this area. Views from along Witpit Lane overlook most of the area, which due to the sparse presence of vegetated enclosures present itself as a very open landscape that would not be able to accommodate development without the introduction of very robust mitigation measures.</p>

Figure 21 Sub-area 3 view east from Witpit Lane



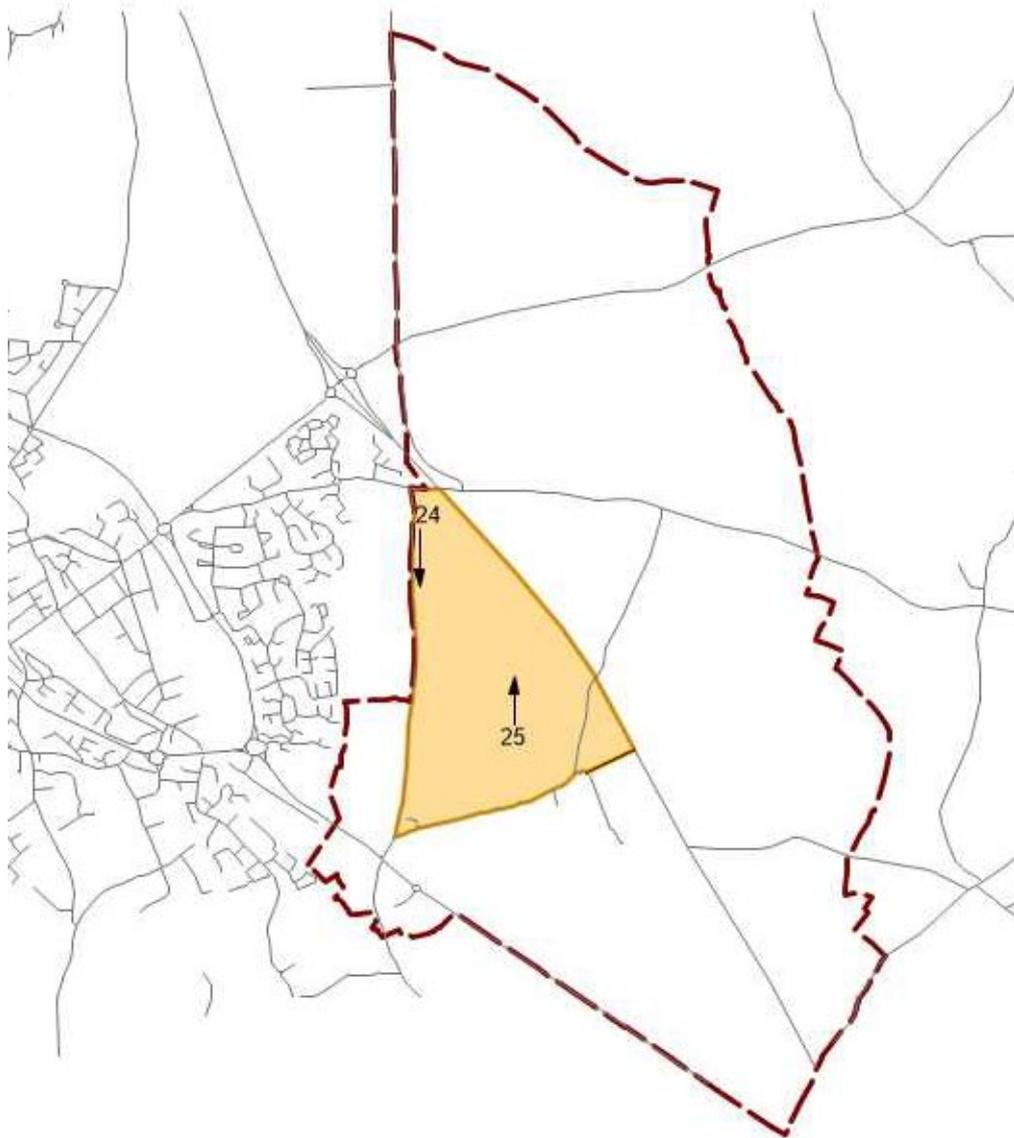
Figure 22 Sub-area 3 view north-west from PRoW 113



Sub-Area 4a

Figure 23 Sub-areas inset Area 4a

See viewpoint photographs 24 and 25 below.



Description

This area is bound by Kingshill Lane to the west, the dual carriageway to the north-east, and Preston village northern edge to the south. There is a small watercourse which cuts across the area north to south towards the river and a very dense shelterbelt along most of Kingshill Lane which includes a substantial amount of evergreen species.

Sub-Area 4a

Characteristics	<u>Topography</u>	This area has a general westerly aspect as it slopes from its north corner (at 125 AOD) towards the River Churn to the junction with the Ermin Way at its south-west corner (110 AOD).
	<u>Field Pattern and enclosure</u>	Fields follow a perpendicular alignment to the Roman Fosse Way (Kingshill Lane) and loosely radial to Cirencester. They are generally rectangular in size, though some have been affected by the construction of the dual carriageway. The size of the fields has increased since the first edition OS with several enclosures getting lost since the early 1900s.
	<u>Developments</u>	Changes to the landscape have included the extension to the north-east and south-west of the village along its main artery; extensive woodland planting (including shelterbelts along Kingshill Lane) and a large deciduous tree plantation near the sub-area south-west corner.
	<u>Visual sensitivity</u>	<p>Sensitive receptors include primarily the residents of the village. Other receptors are the users of both Kingshill and Witpit Lane and the PRoW. Views from Kingshill Lane are mostly screened by the extensive verge planting, whereas from the main route through the village there are open views across fields in the gaps between one group of houses and the next. The main public footpath runs on an east-west axis north of the village and intersects a footpath running northwards from the parish church. These footpaths offer panoramic views both of the surrounding landscape to the north and back towards the village. Detracting features of these key views include the presence of the A417/A419, and numerous pylons in the view. A key characteristic of Preston village is the way in which the rural landscape permeates into the village and its main road, with the presence of gaps between the houses enabling views out into the adjacent countryside. Any proposed development should respect this character of the village and of the Conservation Area and not inhibit existing views through to the open countryside.</p> <p>Any further built development, even if of suitable scale and design, would be difficult to accommodate without significant negative effect on the landscape character within this sub-area, and due to inter-visibility and the presence of important public vantage points, whose visual amenity would be negatively affected. It would be desirable to implement a succession tree planting plan to replant the woodland copse between Church Farm and Kingshill Lane with native tree species to screen views of the urban edge of Kingshill Meadow and to extend the shelterbelt along Kingshill Lane southwards. The openness of the landscape and the amenity of views from the PRoWs and from within the village that this provides should be maintained and the agricultural setting to the village should be preserved in its current integrity. This is to ensure that the sense of identity of Preston is not further compromised by sub-urban residential development of a scale and density which would be incongruous with the historic open and loose grain of the village. For any proposed development to be considered appropriate in this sub-area, it would have to ensure that the open landscape character of the landscape around the village of Preston is retained, the visual amenity of PRoWs is retained, the agricultural setting of the village is respected, and the historic open and loose grain of the settlement pattern is preserved.</p>

Figure 24 Sub-area 4a view south along the Roman Road



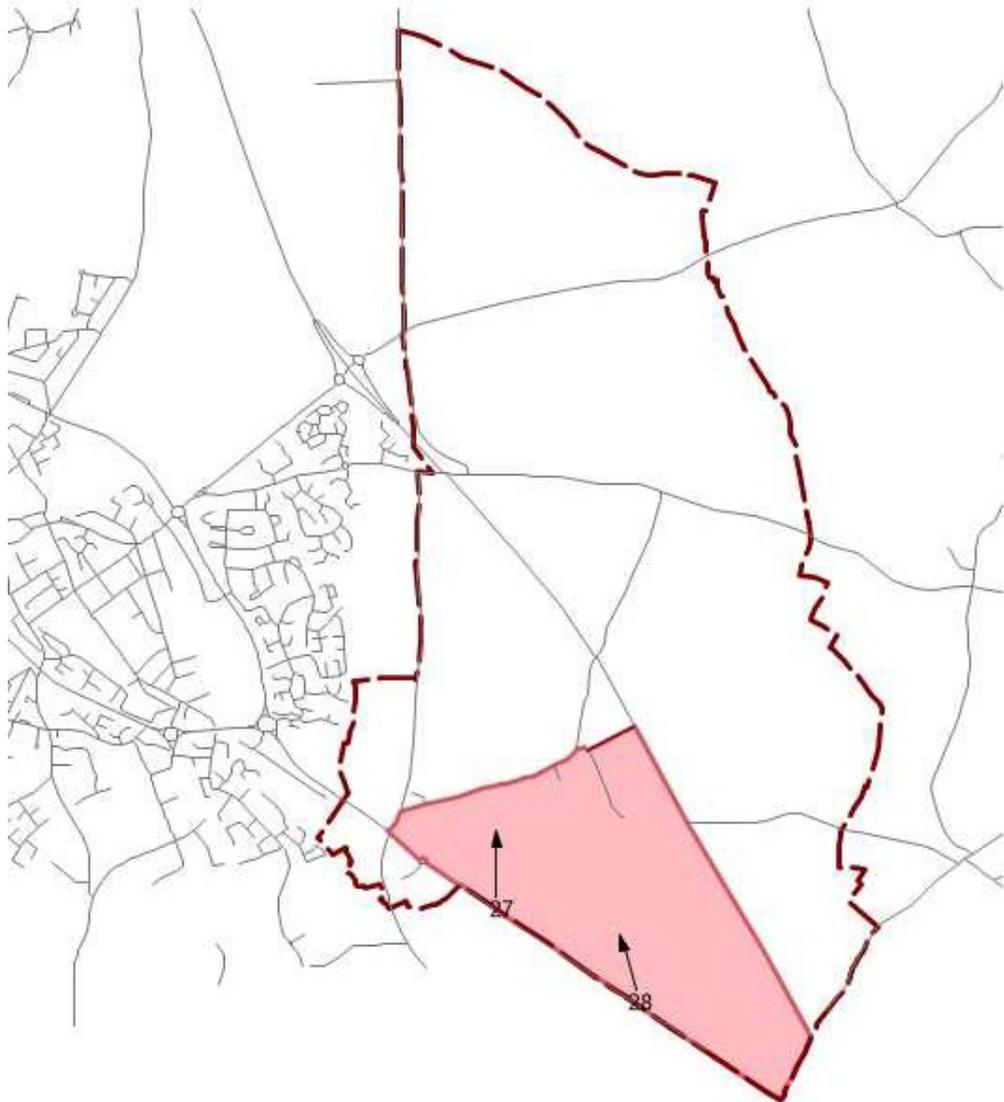
Figure 25 Sub-area 4a view north from Preston footpath 6 near the church



Sub-Area 4b

Figure 26 Sub-areas inset Area 4b

See viewpoint photographs 27 and 28 below.



Description

This area is bound by the village edge to the north, the dual carriageway to the east, and the A419 Ermin Way to the south.

Sub-Area 4b

Characteristics	<u>Topography</u>	Mostly flat and level with a variation of approx. 10m across the whole sub-area.
	<u>Field Pattern and enclosure</u>	Fields follow a perpendicular alignment to the Roman Ermin Way. Whilst historically they were mostly rectangular, they are now more polygonal and random in size and layout, and even more so since the construction of the dual carriageway. The size of the fields has increased since the 1850s, with several enclosures getting lost.
	<u>Developments</u>	The major changes relate to the expansion of the village along its main road and new tree and woodland planting associated with this and with the development of the dual carriageway. A single residential dwelling built in the early 1900s in the countryside south-east of Preston village is prominent in views from the Ermin Way. Between the 1950s and the 1980s new dwellings were built on intermittent sites along the main village road both from the west and east. More recent development in the village have included conversions of existing buildings, the establishment of the commercial premises at Village Farm and a number of new individual residential buildings.
	<u>Visual sensitivity</u>	<p>Sensitive receptors include the residents of the village, the users of both the Ermin Way and Witpit Lane, and of the PRoW network. Views southwards from the village are available because of the intermittent character of the settlement, these contribute importantly to the perception of the village within its agricultural landscape. This has been eroded by the presence of development to the south of the Ermin Way, which is very prominent from the village, including the recently completed Preston Leigh development. Public footpaths link to both east-west.</p> <p>In terms of landscape detractors, these can be summarised as large-scale development along the Ermin Way, both recent residential and less recent commercial, the trafficked A417 and the military base just south of the parish boundary. Approaching the parish from the south, the rural character of the landscape is obfuscated by the presence of the airfield and barracks located south of the Ermin Way. As one drives towards Cirencester, the historic town and the church spire appear in view, and the village, separated by the Kingshill Estate with its dense and urban character. The developed edge of Cirencester was already part of the picture from views along Ermin Way, however the new development has brought it further into view and reduced the extent of open landscape and the physical distinction between the distinctive rural character of the village and the urban densities of the new estate, which is even more prominent as is located on high ground. The large scale of buildings to the south-west of the A419 Ermin Way (Garden centre, Tesco, recent housing) also comes in view as one approaches the town, creating a strong contrast with the tranquil character of the agricultural fields and village to the north-east of the A419.</p> <p>The character of this sub-area is very rural in contrast to the largely developed landscape south of the Cirencester Road, this provides a visible strong edge to the built development. Any proposed development within this sub-area would be very hard to incorporate within the agricultural landscape, without negatively affecting the openness and the setting of the village and the visual amenity of users of the footpaths.</p> <p>The character of Cirencester is strongly informed by areas of open landscape which, though varying degrees of parkland and agricultural character, reach close to the</p>

		<p>town centre from various directions, principally from the west (Bathurst estate), the north-east (Abbey Home Farm estate) and the south-east (Preston parish). The largely unspoilt agricultural section of the parish serves this important 'green wedge' purpose, which is described by the Local Plan as follows: 'The 'green wedges' and views of Cirencester Parish Church tower are particular characteristics of Cirencester when approaching the town from various directions.' (para 7.2.3)</p> <p>On the approach to Cirencester, the open landscape of this sub-area is then visually linked to Kingshill Meadow Country Park and the small area of parkland south of the A419, which is perceived as a whole entity. Any proposed development in this sub-area would need to respect the importance of this open rural landscape and maintain a meaningful green wedge that continues to provide this setting function for Cirencester.</p>
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Figure 27 Sub-area 4b view north from the Roman road



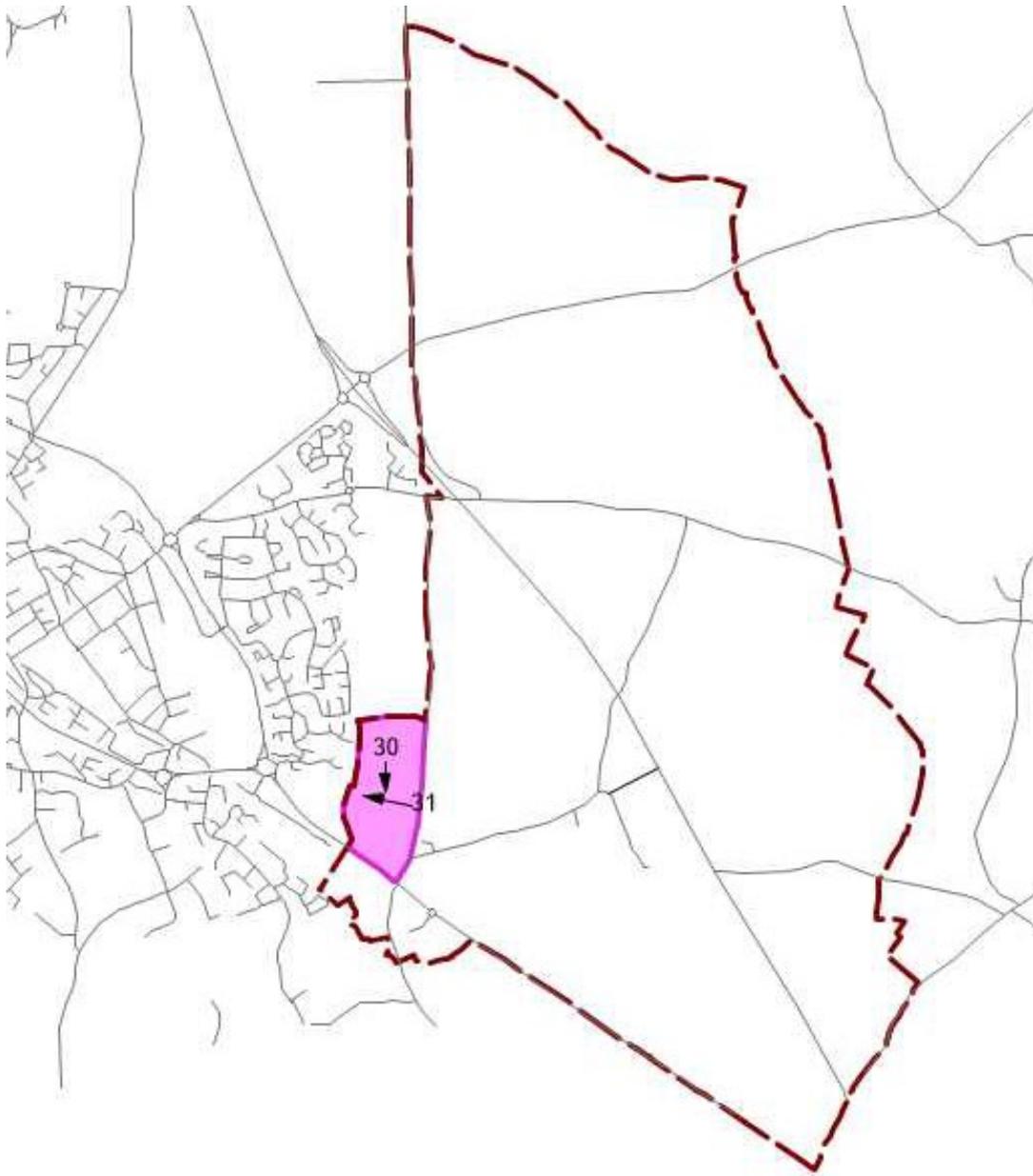
Figure 28 Sub-area 4b view north west along the Roman road



Sub-Area 5

Figure 29 Sub-areas inset Area 5

See viewpoint photographs 30 and 31 below.



Description

Limited by the parish boundary to the north, Kingshill Lane to the east, and the A419 Ermin Way to the south, this area abuts the recently established residential estate of Kingshill Meadow and the annexed Country Park along the southern boundary. The land drains towards the water meadows which were historically managed by a system of sluices, channels and ridges, now incorporated into the Country Park

Sub-Area 5

Characteristics	<u>Topography</u>	Slope north to south which is more accentuated to the north, with the southern portion being fairly flat and level.
	<u>Field Pattern and enclosure</u>	The extant fields have a general east-west arrangement and are arranged loosely radially to Cirencester. They are generally rectangular in shape and even in size. Whilst the southern edge of this area is fairly densely vegetated, especially the evergreen buffer planting to the south of Forty Farm, within the area itself vegetation is limited to hedgerows with very sparse hedgerow trees. This pattern of vegetation will be complemented by the young trees which are present within the Country Park and which will, in time, provide a leafier treescape character at the edge of Cirencester.
	<u>Developments</u>	The east side is still agricultural with Forty Farm adjacent to the junction with Witpit Lane. A number of planning applications for further residential development were made for the western part of this area but have been withdrawn.
	<u>Visual sensitivity</u>	<p>Sensitive receptors are the users of the Country park, the village residents, users of Kingshill Lane and of the public footpath which runs east to west along the north of this area, and users of the A419 Ermin Way. Views of the Kingshill Meadow estate are prominent on the approach to Cirencester, although the presence of the recently established parkland along the road will create screening to this development in the longer term.</p> <p>For any proposed development to be considered appropriate in this sub-area, it would need to retain the open agricultural character of the landscape, ensure the identity of the village of Preston to be retained as a separate settlement and with its own countryside setting, maintain the visual amenity of PRoWs, and ensure that the green wedge approach to Cirencester is retained. It would be appropriate if the existing country park along the Ermin Way is extended to the east.</p>

Figure 30 Sub-area 5 view south from Preston footpath 4



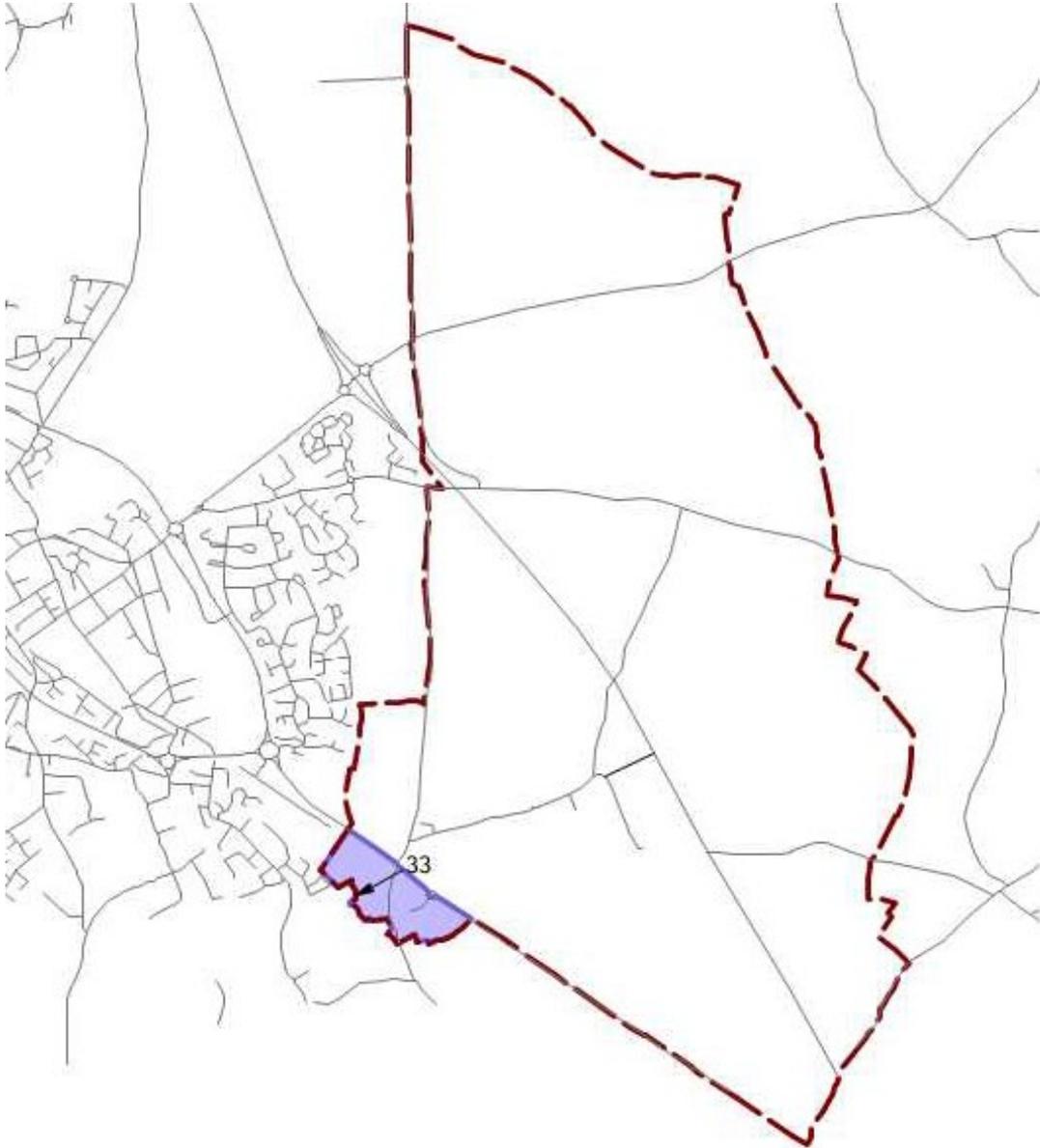
Figure 31 Sub-area 5 view west from the Roman road



Sub-Area 6

Figure 32 Sub-areas inset Area 6

See viewpoint photograph 33 below.



Description

This area is a small portion of the parish south of the A419 Ermin Way. It is close to the settlement edge of Cirencester and abuts its commercial fringe, with a very different character from the rural landscape of the rest of the parish. Most of it lies within the flood plain of the River Churn, which runs through this area.

Sub-Area 6

Characteristics	<u>Topography</u>	Very flat and low lying, at approximately 100m AOD. Historically occupied by plant nurseries, due to its proximity to the river
	<u>Field Pattern and enclosure</u>	Whilst there are only few extant agricultural fields in the area, these tend to vary in scale and layout, though generally there is a dense degree of enclosure provided by trees planted along field boundaries and road verges, and small but dense woodland areas with a high percentage of evergreen species. The unused section of the old Cricklade road is flanked on both sides by rows of lime trees. These form a dense screen to the field immediately to its south which shows extensive colonisation of aquatic species. The degree of enclosure and the level topography have created the conditions for large developments to be accommodated in this area, though the recent development of Preston Leigh is very prominent in views from within sub-area 4b and from Preston village.
	<u>Developments</u>	Whilst this area was historically for the largest part in agricultural use with an area of parkland, approximately half of this area is now developed or under development, with the housing development at Preston Leigh and the on-going construction site of a retirement village. The degree of enclosure and the amount of structural planting has increased since the 19th Century.
	<u>Visual sensitivity</u>	Sensitive receptors are users of A419 Ermin Way / Swindon Road, the lane to Siddington village and users of the public footpath within area 4b and village residents. Historically, Preston was an agricultural village surrounded by countryside and scattered isolated farmsteads. There has now been a significant amount of development in this area in recent years resulting in its agricultural setting being eroded both from the south-west and the west. Any further larger scale development to the north west of Preston Bridge i.e. adjacent to Tesco's development would have the potential to link built development from Dobbies Garden Centre to Cirencester. However, by nature of the low lying land and its close proximity to the River Churn, development is anticipated to be unlikely.

Figure 33 Sub-area 6 view south west from the Roman road



4. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The national, regional and local designations and policies outlined within this report, define the qualities of valued landscapes, setting out appropriate parameters for any change that may be proposed and providing protection of their intrinsic character.

Of significance, the northern part of the parish forms part of the Cotswold AONB. As noted in the individual character area analysis, in terms of quality and integrity the landscape that merited this important status differs only marginally in character from the landscape within the remainder of the parish.

This section considers the significance of the Preston landscape as a whole and its relevance to the wider setting in order to inform a series of policies which underpin, at a local level, the existing legislative framework.

Landscape Summary and How It Is Experienced

Across the whole of the study area, there is an element of uniformity of defining landscape features, namely:

- The presence of rectilinear woodland copses;
- Linear shelterbelts;
- The use of hedgerows as field boundaries;
- Dry stone walling;
- Gentle variations in topography;
- Several areas of very flat, low-lying ground; and
- Land uses which include arable and pasture for the largest part, but also include forestry, horticulture, parkland, and renewable solar farming.

As there are a limited number of Public Rights of Ways within the parish and since two of the main footpaths are compromised as they travel across a busy dual carriageway, the road network is recognised as a primary visual receptor alongside the PROWs.

Several key transport routes cross the parish and have since the Roman times continued to contribute to shaping the development of the local landscape. The road network splits the landscape into legible individual parcels which are experienced by road users as they travel across the Parish and is therefore integral to the character of the parish both in terms of how the landscape is experienced and by informing historic development. It also forms a primary receptor to any potential changes to the landscape.

In terms of their contribution to the landscape, this is both positive and negative; whilst on one hand the minor rural roads provide a means of access to and a platform from which to have an experience of the landscape, on the other hand even the local roads can be trafficked at times and the noise and visual intrusion are detracting features in the otherwise tranquil and rural character of the area.

The A417/A419 dual carriageway mostly caters for regional traffic and despite it being screened by maturing vegetation along most of its course across the parish, its presence affects both the tranquillity and public accessibility between the east and west portions of the parish as it has severed pre-existing public footpaths.

The Significance and Intrinsic Quality Of The Landscape.

Preston parish is of high landscape quality; this is evidenced by the landscape inclusion within the Cotswolds AONB designation (sub-area 1) and the parish location adjacent to the designated North Cirencester Special Landscape Area (SLA) Area 6, affording a similar level of protection, at local scale, as the AONB at national scale.

The findings of this landscape character assessment characterise the parish landscape as fairly uniform which can be read in its entirety as a generally open agricultural landscape and which performs a number of important functions. Sub-area 6, whose character is more closely linked to that of the adjacent commercial fringe of Cirencester, represents the only exception to the above.

Due to the continuity of landscape character with Sub-area 1, the remainder of the Preston parish, namely sub-areas 2 – 5, would benefit from a policy that would afford an equivalent status and enforceability to that of a Special Landscape Area. The direct precedent for this level of protection is the North Cirencester Special Landscape Area 6. This designation provides recognition for locally significant and attractive landscapes that are contiguous to and of comparable quality to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and for that reason their landscape character and qualities should be protected and enhanced. In such circumstances any proposed development would then be considered appropriate when its contribution is not anticipated to be harmful to the recognised special character of the landscape. Instead the proposals would recognise and strengthen the qualities as detailed for each sub-area.

Its Importance As A 'Green Wedge' To Cirencester

The character of Cirencester is strongly informed by areas of open landscape which, through varying degrees of parkland and agricultural character, reach close to the town centre, primarily:

- Bathurst estate (west)
- Abbey Home Farm estate (the north-east)
- Preston parish & Kingshill Country Park (the south-east).

The largely unspoilt agricultural landscape of the parish serves as an important 'green wedge', described by the Local Plan as follows:

'The 'green wedges' and views of [Cirencester] Parish Church tower, are particular characteristics of Cirencester when approaching the town from various directions.' (para 7.2.3)

In this context, Preston parish lies at a critically important location as an open landscape setting to the largest of the Cotswold towns. Its immediate proximity to Cirencester forms a major constituent of one of the 'green wedge' approaches. This is emphasised by contrast to the open views of the urban town itself.

Policy Suggestions

This section sets out our policy recommendations. These summarise the findings of the landscape character assessment of each sub-area and is suggested that are incorporated within the Neighbourhood Plan for approval by Cotswold District Council.

Table 3 Policy suggestions

ID	Policy
1	Create a local designation policy area 'Preston Special Landscape Area no. 1' to ensure any proposed development respects the recognised qualities of the landscape and contributes to the enhancement of the existing open landscape character of the parish - in particular character areas 2 – 5. This policy should be of equal status and enforceability to that of a District level designated Special Landscape Area.
2	Retain the 'green wedge' approach to Cirencester to the north east of the A419 / Ermin Way.
3	Replant non-native tree plantations with native broadleaved native species as part of the woodland succession planting.
4	Avoid extensive new woodland planting including new dense linear shelterbelts, particularly in character areas 4a, 4b & 5, which would enclose the character of the landscape at points where it is currently open.
5	Manage existing shelterbelts with selective thinning to retain native specimens and open up views below their canopies.
6	Maintain dry-stone wall boundaries and restore any in disrepair.
7	Restore historic hedgerow lines.
8	Maintain the existing network of ditches and streams to ensure continuity of irrigation to fields and surface water management to grass and agricultural land.
9	Protect open views between buildings of Preston's agricultural setting when viewed from the village main street (Witpit Lane).
10	Establish a pedestrian link using the route of the old railway line to create a public footpath which connects the whole of the parish on a north-south axis.
11	Ensure that any proposed development (including solar farm) does not encroach on key views across the parish.
12	Re-surface wearing course of the dual carriageway to reduce traffic noise.
13	Resolve footpaths links across dual carriageway to improve connectivity across the parish.

