

Joint Core Strategy Landscape Characterisation Assessment and Sensitivity Analysis



Gloucester
City Council


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GLOUCESTER

Landscape Characterisation Assessment and Sensitivity Analysis

Introduction

Gloucester sits at the head of the Severn Estuary the city itself sitting within the Vale of Gloucester. To east there is the Cotswold escarpment and the significant outliers of Robinswood and Churchdown (or Chosen) hill. To the South, North and West the flood plain of the Severn dominates, though the land rises gently to the Forest and Malvern hills. The landscape around the city is varied as reflected the 5 different landscape types identified in the LDA study. This report looks at each LDA landscape character type separately describing in more detail each separate character area.

See Appendix 1 for landscape character map.

Landscape Character Type: Settled Unwooded Vale

The landscape character type of „Settled Unwooded Vale“ (as classified in the Gloucestershire LCA, LDA 2006) is one of the most extensive character types within the Gloucester urban fringe. The character type is further subdivided into the Vale of Berkeley to the south of Gloucester, and the Vale of Gloucester to the east and north. The following key characteristics (drawn from the Gloucestershire LCA, 2006 and recent site investigation) can broadly be applied to the entire character area. Further to the Gloucestershire LCA the Settled Unwooded Vale has been divided into a number of areas based on frequency of certain features, proximity to built form, and sense of enclosure.

Key Characteristics

- Soft, gently undulating to flat landscape, but with intermittent locally elevated areas that project above the otherwise flatter landform;
- Area drained by a series of east west aligned tributaries of the Severn, including the Cam,

Frome and Chelt, and the Stratford Avon flowing into the Severn from the north;

- Mixed arable and pastoral land use enclosed by hedgerow network, in places forming a strong landscape pattern;
- Limited woodland cover with mature hedgerow trees and occasional orchards;
- Rural areas bordered by large urban suburban areas and interspersed with commercial and industrial premises;
- Varied mix of building materials including brick, timber, and stone, and slate and thatch roofing;
- Proliferation of modern „suburban“ building styles and materials;
- Major transport corridors pass through the Vale, frequently aligned north south, beyond which is a network of local roads and lanes linking villages and hamlets; and
- Widespread network of pylons and transmission lines.

W: Hempsted

Designations

- **Scheduled Ancient Monuments** – Our Lady's Well and the village cross.
- **Listed buildings** – within the village
- **Gloucester Local Plan: Landscape Conservation Area**
- **Gloucester Local Plan: Public Open Space and Private Playing Field**
- **Gloucester Local plan: Cordon Sanitaire**
- **Gloucester Local Plan: Conservation Area** (part of Hempsted village)
- **Gloucester Local Plan: Housing Commitment** (achieved since the publication of the Local Plan)

The village of Hempsted is located on a small elongated hill to the west of Gloucester and has undergone significant residential expansion. Several buildings and features of historic importance such as the village cross, church and various houses, remain to give a depth of time to the area. However, a variety of 20th century housing estates have led to a general loss of traditional small village character. This is very much reflected in the surrounding landscape. The western escarpment demonstrates remnant field patterns with reasonably well maintained hedge or treed field boundaries, and an orchard site dating back to the 1884 OS map. However, where residential estates have encroached across the hill, particularly along the eastern boundary of the area (A430), the landscape has been lost, fragmented or degraded. The somewhat degraded pastoral fields on the flatter hilltop and western bank play a vital role in keeping a rural character to the village.

Notable detractors include large industrial units which can be glimpsed to the south east, beyond the A430; and an abandoned MOD site which lends an industrial feel to the very north of the area.

This study has removed the low-lying land either side of the A430 (adjacent to the sewerage works) from Settled Unwooded Vale type as the landform, waterlogged condition, balancing ponds and raised A-road are more characteristic of the Floodplain Farmland landscape character type.

Visual context

Although scrub and tree planting that runs parallel with the A430 provides screening in the

east, the City of Gloucester and immediate industrial units can easily be viewed. Owing to the generally developed eastern edge of the Hempsted hill the views from Gloucester of the area are generally non-descript and of an urban nature.

To the south east Robinswood Hill can be easily viewed beyond the built environment of Gloucester. The Cotswold AONB escarpment can also be easily viewed in the distance.

The hill overlooks the Floodplain Farmland of Minsterworth Ham and Gloucester landfill site to the west, while the Vale Hillocks create a distant backdrop in the north-west. When viewed from the west the western escarpment of Hempsted provides an important visual continuation of rural character that screens the rural Floodplain Farmland from views of urban encroachment.

Clear views of the southern agricultural slopes can be gained from the A430.

Visual receptors

- Users of the Severn Way National Trail;
- Residents of Hempsted village;
- Users of the A430;
- Users of the public footpaths located to the base of the hill in the south and west;
- Residents of Rea Lane;
- Residents of Minsterworth with direct views to the south east (glimpsed/distant views); and
- Users of the public footpaths and Gloucestershire Way National Trail across Minsterworth Ham (glimpsed/distant views).



Looking towards Lady's Well from landfill road.

Landscape Character Type: Floodplain Farmland

Within the county LCA the landscape character type of „Floodplain Farmland“ is divided into three character areas, two of which are in close proximity to Gloucester – namely Elmore Back and Minsterworth Ham, and The Rea, Maisemore Ham and Longford.

Key Characteristics

- Flat floodplain landscape, with areas subject to annual winter flooding which provides fertile farmland and productive lush meadows and pastures for summer grazing;
- An open and expansive area as a result of the flat landform and very limited tree cover;
- Extensive pattern of ditches, streams, brooks, rivers and rhymes draining the floodplain landscape, a number of which provide important wetland habitats;
- A predominantly pastoral landscape with unimproved and improved grassland, with some areas of arable farming;
- Both active and disused canals present with the landscape;
- Urban and industrial land uses and influences in the vicinity of Gloucester together with road and rail infrastructure;
- With the exception of the section to the west and north of Gloucester, settlement is very limited, frequently associated with former as well as existing crossing points over the river and on higher land at the edges of the floodplain landscape;
- Access very limited with occasional roads, often linking to existing bridging points and former ford or ferry river crossings;
- Recreational activities, including camping and caravan sites and public houses, the latter often associated with former river crossing points or supply points; and
- Areas of wetland meadows, designated as SSSIs and Key Wildlife Sites, and Local Nature Reserves, and managed to retain high biodiversity interest.

X: Hempsted floodplain

Designations

- **Gloucester Local Plan: Landscape Conservation Area**
- **Gloucester Local Plan: Floodplain**
- **Gloucester Local Plan: two Sites of Nature Conservation Interest**
- **Gloucester Local Plan: small area of Housing Allocation and Employment Commitment** (apparently not addressed since the publication of the Local Plan)
- **Gloucester Local Plan: small area of Public Open Space**
- **BAP priority habitat** - Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh and Lowland Meadows

Sewerage works, landfill, disused gas works, pylons, and industrial units of the Gloucester periphery have a strong industrial influence upon an otherwise pastoral floodplain landscape. A stark contrast between typical Floodplain Farmland landscape and industrial land uses is evident.

Where landfill has been completed the landscape character is no longer in keeping with a Floodplain Farmland landscape due to the undulating landform and the small industrial pipe/chimney features. Views into and out of the area are subsequently significantly altered.

There is some evidence of remnant field boundaries and orchards shown on the 1884 OS map. However most have been altered by industry or infrastructure (A430).

The security fencing, loud noise, and windswept of the active landfill and adjacent industrial units have a detrimental effect on the rural aesthetic and reduces the sense of tranquillity and security to the north of the area.

Please note, this survey has altered the Floodplain Farmland – Settled Unwooded Vale interface south of Hempsted and at Lower Rea, to give a more accurate account of landscape character

Visual context

Access to the north of the site is generally restricted by industrial units and active landfill; views are therefore generally reduced to the immediate vicinity, although the floodplain to the west can be perceived as a visual extension of the area in places. Although the completed landfill area does offer a high viewing platform, it is not traversed by public footpaths. The undulating landfill is the notable landmark of the area and can be seen from the A48. The raised land of Hempsted provides an immediate visual backdrop to the area in the east. From the Severn Way National Trail the landscape to the west is clearly visible with the Vale Hillocks providing distant enclosure. To the south of the site the Vale Hillock of Monks" and Hockley Hills is an immediate visual feature, while pylons create focal points across the area.

Visual receptors

- Westerly residents of Hempsted;
- Residents of Rea and Rivers Mead farm;
- Possibly residents of Elmore;
- Easterly residents of Minsterworth;
- Users of the A48;
- Users of the Severn Way and possibly the Gloucestershire Way National Trails



Looking towards Hempsted across Church Farm Hams

G36 Lower Rea: Medium - low sensitivity

The northern section of this compartment is elevated and offers extensive views over Gloucester in the east, and Minsterworth Ham in the west. Although a well treed pond, remnant orchard, occasional tall scrub boundary, and some deciduous mature trees offer landscape interest within the elevated area field size is large, and hedge boundaries are degraded. Furthermore a dense conifer plantation occupies the steep western slope, and a row of poplars, and several mature pines at Riversmead Farm create bold features that are not in keeping with the landscape character. The landscape continues to be degraded by agricultural intensification in the south. Although extensive views of Gloucester are lost some association can still be made with the dense Quedgeley development in the east. Settlement pattern is scattered within the zone and two footpaths and links with the canal corridor provide some doorstep amenity value. Occasional orchard provides interest

Reasons

- Easily associated with Gloucester - both immediate and some extensive views
- Treed landscape features create a somewhat disjointed landscape character - and landscape character is generally degraded by agricultural intensification
- Good amenity value - some footpaths (and links with river-side walk) and road link to Quedgeley

G37 Hempsted and sewage works: Medium - low sensitivity

This predominantly low-lying compartment has been fragmented by the A430 and is encroached upon by industrial buildings. Tranquillity is therefore lost. Despite urban and industrial associations some well managed landscape features such as the ponds, orchard and small woodland adjacent to the sewerage works endure (although woodland is not characteristic of a floodplain landscape). Remnant agricultural land on scarp to south of Hempsted appears intensively managed as field size is large, boundaries have been lost, and remaining hedges are often low and degraded. Mature boundary trees are sparsely scattered across the zone, with tree and scrub cover increasing along Rea Lane and towards the sewerage works. Low lying topography, tree planting and built form provides visual containment and creates strong urban associations. However, the fields directly south of Hempsted occupy an elevated position and are subsequently highly visible and offer extensive views.

Reasons

- Visually related to the City, not the rural hinterland
- Some rural features are retained including hedges, ditches, ponds, and mature trees
- Rural character is degraded by intensive agricultural use, Hempsted markets, elevated infrastructure and proximity to industrial units

G38 West Hempsted floodplain: Medium sensitivity

This compartment has retained landscape characteristics typical of the floodplain landscape and is strongly visually associated to the rural west. Landform and treed boundaries prevent views to the urban east. Landscape features such as vegetated ditches, scrub and tree boundaries, low hedgerows, and wet grassland are evident. Scattered settlement, including some traditional brick cottages, follows the narrow Rea Lane. To the south the area becomes a narrow strip contained between landform in the east (with dense conifer belt) and the Severn in the west.

Reasons

- Visually related to the rural floodplain in the west, not the City
- Landscape character predominantly conserved

G39 West Hempsted Scarp: High - medium sensitivity

This compartment plays a key role in containing the urban east from the rural west. It is an elevated, sloping zone consisting of historic field pattern (albeit with degraded hedge boundaries in places), a scheduled monument, and is associated with the historic church and older part of the village. Housing at Hempsted is visible from the floodplain; pylons and landfill can be viewed from the zone; and a belt of conifers detract from the rural character. However, public footpaths provide doorstep amenity value and link with the Severn Way, and structural diversity is created by boundaries of varying height.

Reasons

- Elevated and visually prominent (although there are few visual receptors in the west)
- Historic importance and associations
- Rural character has largely been conserved
- Visually related to the rural floodplain farmland, not the City
- Important in visually containing the city from the rural west

G40 Hempsted Landfill: Low sensitivity

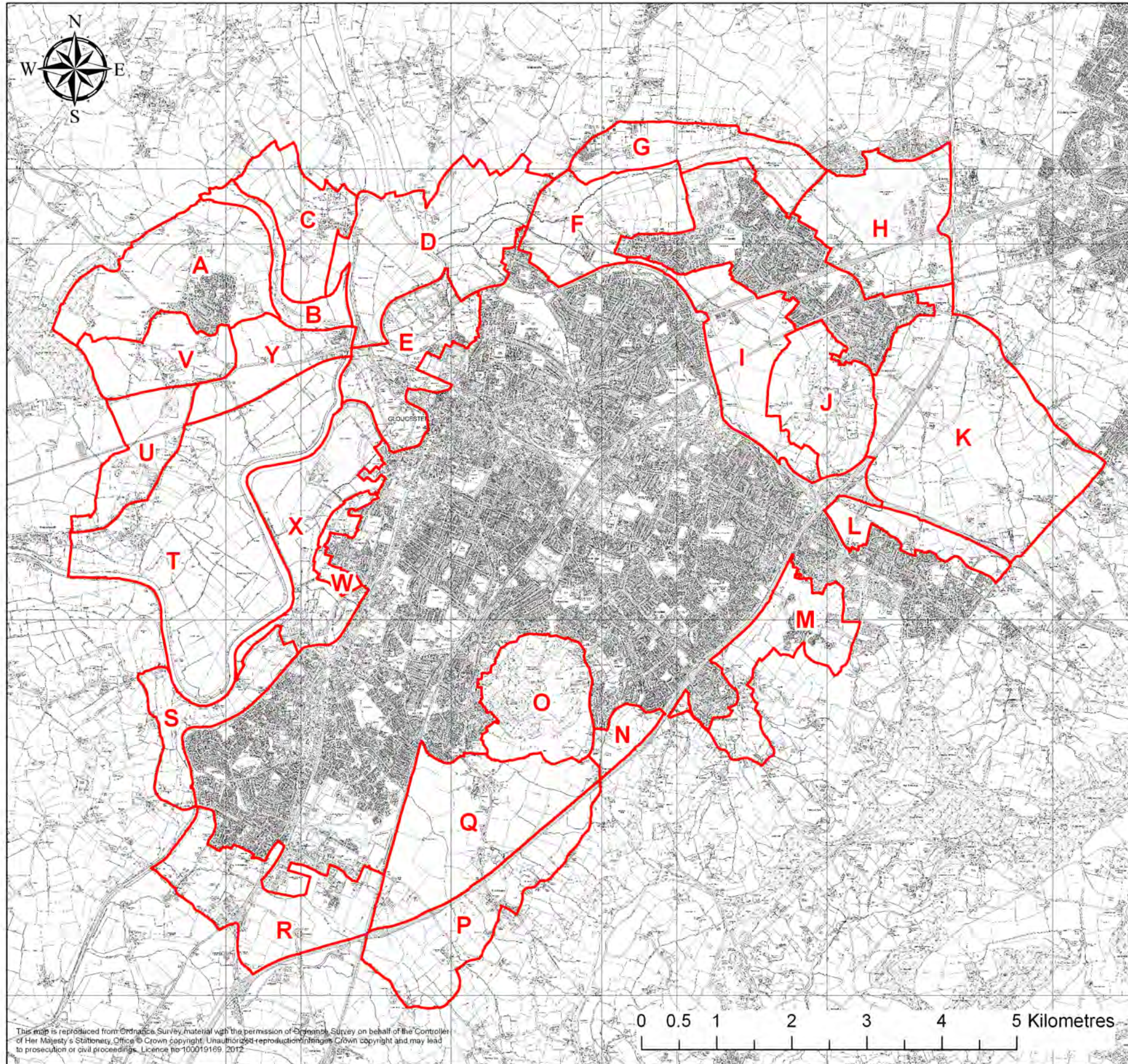
The floodplain landscape character of this compartment has been lost due to a significant change in land-use, and subsequently landform. There are a high number of industrial detractors including noise, windswept rubbish, pylons, and industrial structures associated with the active landfill and adjacent industrial/business units. The elevated landfill area is a visible feature from the higher ground at Minsterworth. Proximity to River Severn corridor and visual links with adjacent floodplain help retain a natural character to the westerly periphery of the area, although small pipes associated with the landfill do punctuate the area. Where the landfill has been completed the landscape has become undulating and pastoral. Although the completed landfill is visually less degraded than the active landfill landscape character has been lost and occasional industrial features are still apparent (linear ditches, pipes etc).

Please note: Gloucester Local Plan (2002) incorporates the landfill area in the Landscape Conservation Area. In its current, partly active, state the landfill is of a low sensitivity. However its proximity to the River Severn corridor, potential for remediation once landfill is complete (albeit with alterations to landform), and visibility from the higher ground at Minsterworth indicate that scenic quality and amenity value may increase significantly in coming years.

Reasons

- Loss of landscape character
- Loss of tranquillity
- Numerous industrial detractors - both permanent and temporary
- River Severn corridor provides an enduring landscape feature and the pocket of land to the very north of the compartment is of higher value due to a stronger floodplain character
- The Severn Way passes through the zone

Appendix 1 – Gloucester Landscape Character Area



Gloucester Landscape Character/Study Area

- A - Lassington & Rodway Hills
- B - River Leadon Corridor
- C - Maisemore Hillock
- D - Maisemore Ham & surrounding floodplain
- E - Alney Island (S of A40) & Walham
- F - Longford to Twigworth
- G - Twigworth to Down Hatherley
- H - Gloucestershire Airport & surrounding land
- I - West of Chosen Hill
- J - Chosen Hill
- K - Brockworth to Badgeworth
- L - North Brockworth
- M - Upton St Leonards to Gloucester Business Park
- N - South Matson
- O - Robinswood Hill
- P - Colethrop, Brookthorpe & West of Whaddon
- Q - South of Tuffley
- R - South Hardwicke & South Waterwells
- S - Longney to Lower Rea & Sewage Works
- T - Minsterworth Ham
- U - West Minsterworth
- V - Hignam Court
- W - Hempsted
- X - Hempsted floodplain
- Y - Over Farm & surrounding landscape

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Appendix 2 – Gloucester Landscape Sensitivity Area

