

CHAPTER 3 - The Forest Area Today

Background

- 3.1** The Community Forest covers in total some 57,300 ha (221 square miles). Of this, 35% or 19,800 ha (76 square miles) is urban or not in agricultural use, for example airfields and docks, leaving 37,500 ha of farm and open land, the target planting area.
- 3.2** Some 864,387 people live in, or within 8 km of the Forest area. If this radius is extended to 32 km, easy travelling distance, the catchment population easily exceeds 1.2 million.
- 3.3** The boundary is shown on Figure 3.1. This boundary was identified throughout the early consultation stages of the Forest and broadly follows the green belt around Clevedon, Nailsea

and Thornbury, whilst meeting the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to the east. The Forest will permeate into the very heart of the city and towns in the area and therefore has no inner boundary. The urban areas are not significant within planting targets but will be the focus for complementary urban forestry, greenways and improved links to the countryside.

- 3.4** The Forest area as we see it today is the result of both geological and human influences. The geology is complex and formed primarily of carboniferous limestone structures, eroded and overlain by more recent Triassic and Jurassic deposits. Coal measures are extensive to the north of Bristol, though mining ceased over 30 years ago. Quarrying for building stone and aggregates continues today. The major river of the Forest, the Avon, flows through the

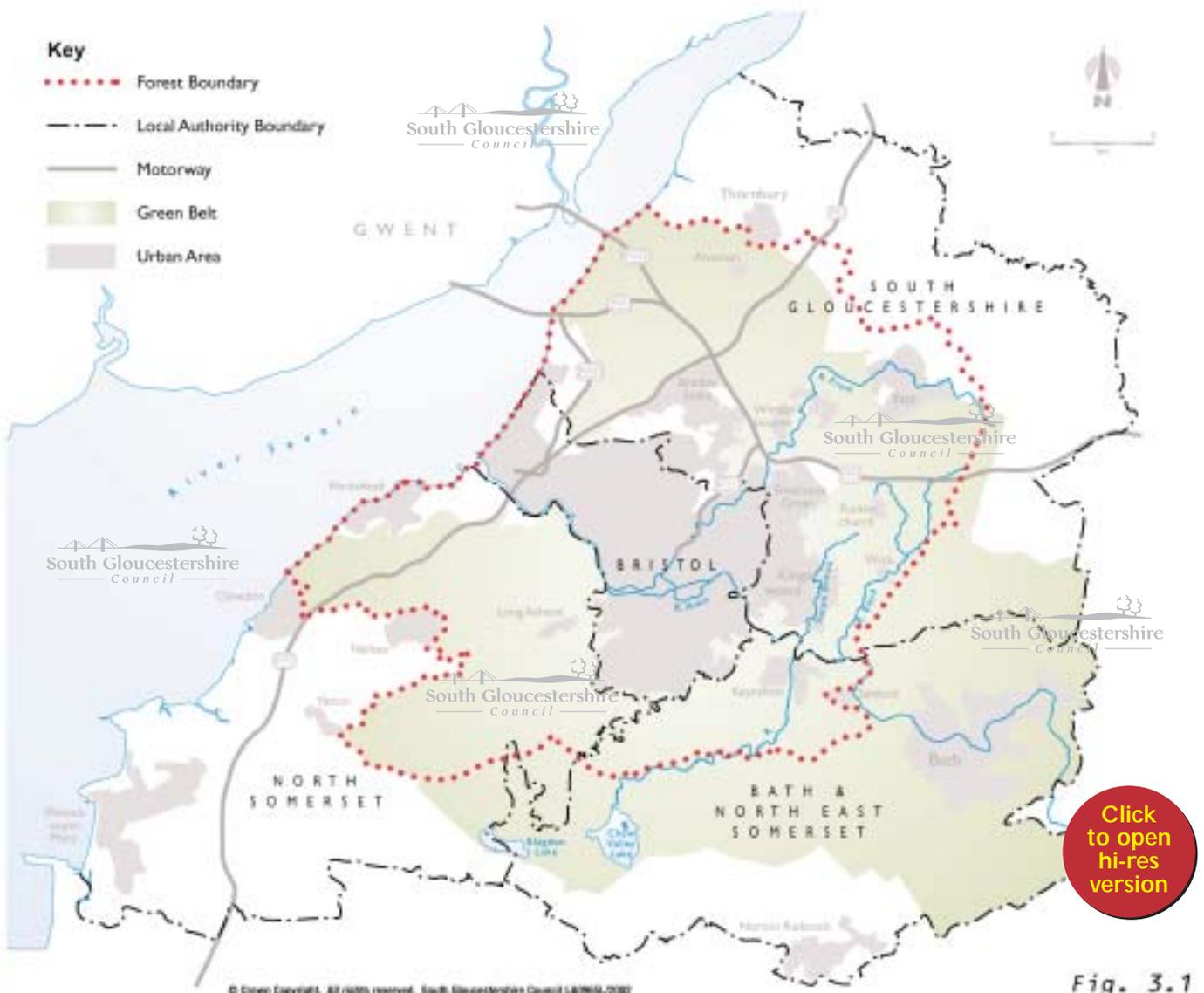


Fig. 3.1

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limestone in spectacular fashion in the Avon Gorge. Alluvial deposits have created low-lying, flat land along the coast, punctuated by a predominantly limestone and sandstone ridge from Clevedon to Portishead.

- 3.5 Following the last ice age, some 12,000 years ago, most of the area would have been predominantly broadleaved woodland. Over time, this cover has been gradually removed to meet the needs of permanent settlements, woodland remaining mostly on poor soils or steep slopes. Indeed, the majority of woodland clearance was probably completed by the end of the Iron Age. Some areas, e.g. the Severn Levels were open marshland until medieval times.
- 3.6 From Saxon times the area was dominated by the Forest of Kingswood, which was a source of income and provided shelter for armies as well as being a great hunting forest. Perhaps only a third was covered in woodland. The remainder was marsh, scrub, heath or down. The chief tree species were oak, ash, and 'fir' with immense hollies. This forest extended from the Sodbury Hills to the Severn marshes and southward to Bitton, Lansdown and Bristol. In 1228 a Charter of Disafforestation brought about the conversion of large areas to common land and the Forest became a Chase until 1631. When the Civil War broke out soon after, the Chase was open to all, who killed deer, cut timber, opened coal pits and built cottages and enclosures wherever they liked. Powerful lords of the manor and owners of Liberties filched the whole chase from the Crown. In time, mining and cultivation took over with remnants of common land, for example at Yate, Sodbury and Rodway Hill, providing evidence of the past.
- 3.7 The forest extended to the south of the Avon, part of which was called Filwood. Even today, evidence of man's influence abounds in the Forest area, with prehistoric sites, Roman settlements, mediaeval field patterns, fields and hedges, designed landscapes, settlements, industrial sites, transport corridors and modern development all showing the dynamic nature of the landscape.

Community

- 3.8 Many community groups, parish councils, town councils and individuals have been doing sterling work in the area for many years. Tree planting, hedgelaying, traditional wall building, path maintenance, events, interpretative leaflets and habitat management have all added to the quality of

the local countryside and greenspace, and people's enjoyment of it. Parish and town councils are often the focus for local activity and concern.

- 3.9 This community level work is supported by a wide range of organisations, each with specific aims and expertise. These organisations work with local people, youth groups, the unemployed and volunteers in the field of practical conservation. This work is increasingly focused on helping local groups and communities develop an interest in and channel energy into specific sites.
- 3.10 Since the Forest partnership began, a wide range of events, training courses, planning for real, practical work days and fun days have boosted the level of community involvement and ownership of the local environment.

Between 1994 and 2000 there have been:

- 12500 volunteer days
- 1000 community events
- 230 farmers events

- 3.11 Forest partners have involved local people in a wide range of ways, from 'Planning for Real' exercises through practical volunteering to establishing liaison groups to guide strategies and action locally. Much of this work emerges from Local Agenda 21 initiatives and the integration of the Forest's implementation with the social, environmental and economic themes of LA 21 are becoming increasingly important. The establishment of Tree Wardens, Parish wardens, Link Groups and 'Friends of' schemes are all helping people take a leading role in caring for their environment.
- 3.12 The impetus for many projects comes from local people and will continue to do so, and, whilst many of these efforts would carry on regardless of the Forest, there is a need for focus, priority setting and a sense of greater context which the Forest will be able to provide. Even though the current levels of community activity are impressive, there is a vast untapped reserve of energy and enthusiasm which the Forest can help to release and co-ordinate. Recent shifts in UK and global thinking place these types of community-based initiatives as central to the theme of primary environmental care and sustainability.

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Planting Event 2001, Manor Road Keynsham (Photo: Mark Simmons)

Between 1994 and 2000

- £1,540,250 has been secured from private and grant sources

Local landscapes

- 3.13** Communities include people who work and earn their living in the rural areas of the Forest. However, the numbers of people employed in agriculture and the countryside have fallen consistently since the Second World War. Even in the last 10 years, the total agricultural workforce in the area decreased by 16.6% to 1,692, the decrease being most marked in the full-time workforce. Forestry employs just under 100 people in the whole of Avon. Many villages have become commuter dormitories for Bristol and the surrounding towns. The Forest offers an opportunity to help to stem the decline of rural unemployment and to bring activity to villages through more-diverse farm businesses, countryside tourism and forestry.
- 3.14** Business and employment around Bristol suffered in recent recessions but, more importantly, the decline in defence and aerospace industries has created a sense of urgency in attracting new investment, industry and jobs to parts of the area. Already, the area has become host to a number of financial-sector companies, notably the Bristol and West and Lloyds-TSB Bank, changing its engineering and technological tradition. Import/export and logistics are becoming more important elements of the local economy, based on good road, rail and seaport links.
- 3.15** The business community has been involved in environmental initiatives for many years, and the Forest partners, often with the help of the Forest Team have secured increasingly more resources from the private sector through sponsorship, help in kind, activity days and professional advice and assistance.
- 3.16** The poor quality of some of the landscape was recognised in the Avon county structure plan, for which the Avon Landscape Strategy (Avon County Council 1988) provided supplementary planning guidance, designating areas of Priority Landscape Improvement and Special Tree Planting Areas (largely in response to the loss of hedgerow trees and loss caused by Dutch elm disease). Natural disasters, e.g. the storms of 1990, have also had an effect. Landscape character assessments are being carried out by the local authorities and this work will be reflected in the emerging local plans.
- 3.17** English Nature, English Heritage and the Countryside Agency produced work on Natural Areas across the whole of England, integrating habitat, landscape and historic value. This broad brush survey, published by the Countryside Agency, and new guidance to accompany it, will inform the work of more detailed countryside character assessment currently under way with the unitary authorities. In turn this will help inform the detailed implementation of the Forest. It is not envisaged at this stage that the Forest planting strategy areas will change.
- 3.18** Post-war and more recent road and built development around Bristol has occurred, unfortunately with little new tree and woodland planting to match. Landscape treatment associated with development has been limited to its immediate environs and in future much larger-scale planting is needed to achieve major, strategic benefits. The notable image of Bristol and its high quality of landscape expressed by the Avon Gorge, Brunel's Suspension Bridge and the surrounding woods is not mirrored in the outskirts. The city's environs look much the same as most towns in the UK and, indeed, may be visually poorer than those where large-scale planting and screening has created an attractive setting for work, living and leisure. New woodlands and tree planting are needed, both around and within the city to redress the balance whilst retaining the best open landscapes and views.

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3.19 Towns such as Yate and Keynsham show similar problems in regard to their surroundings, often with an unrelieved edge between housing, industry and the surrounding countryside. Small-scale tree planting may do much to improve the immediate environment but large areas of woodland will be needed to improve the broader setting of towns and some of the larger villages in the landscape.

3.20 Analysis of the existing landscape, using the Countryside Commission's methodology, identified eight broad landscape zones (Figure 3.2) on the basis of physical characteristics, current and past land use and management practices. These landscape zones can be further broken down into subzones defined by local landform, land use and landscape value, and have been used in formulating forest strategy areas (see Chapter 18). The landscape zones are:

The Levels: a flat, open landscape less than 10 m above sea level adjacent to the Severn Estuary, with small largely improved fields bounded by strong low hedges. Drainage is via a grid of man-made ditches and rhynes. The area has less than 1% woodland cover and no ancient woodland. There are few villages or roads except where the ground rises at the edge of the zone. It is a pastoral landscape which in parts has a timeless quality and detailed interest. Large-scale industrial development along the Severn has had a brutalising effect and an intrusive visual impact over much of the area. More development to the north of the Avon and adjacent to Portishead is planned.

Severn Ridge: a ridge of high ground running next to the Severn from Portishead to Clevedon, and then doubling back inland northwards to Thornbury. The river Avon bisects the ridge, creating the dramatic feature of the Avon Gorge. The landform is of steep slopes with a flat plateau top, rising from sea level to 160 m. The zone has the highest amount of woodland cover, approximately 17% of the area, about a third of this being ancient woodland, found largely on the steeper slopes. This zone also contains large areas of historic parkland, particularly to the south-west of the river Avon, and many important sites for wildlife.

Ashton Vale: the Community Forest contains only a small part of this zone of low ground between the Severn Ridge and the Lulsgate Plateau. The area drains east to the Avon and west to the Land Yeo river. It is an undulating pastoral landscape of small fields, strong hedges and some ditches. Woodland cover is less than 2%. Being the easiest route between two areas of high ground, the area contains a concentration of settlements and transport routes, which have fragmented it.

Dundry and Plateau: the high ground which forms the southern boundary of Bristol, consisting of a plateau area at the centre of which Dundry Hill rises, with very steep slopes and a narrow ridge top. Dundry Hill is a prominent feature clearly visible from the centre of Bristol.

Woodland cover is strong in the west with two of the largest woods, each over 250 ha, in the Community Forest. However, the rest of the area has less than 1% woodland cover. Agriculture tends to be mixed on the plateau areas, with pasture on the steeper ground. Hedgerows are thin and gappy with few trees.

Chew Valley: a small river valley with an undulating landform, creating a lively landscape. It is mainly pastoral with an attractive tapestry of small fields, good hedges, copses and woodland on the steeper slopes. Woodland cover is about 5%, almost half of which is ancient. The bottom of the valley contains stone-built villages and the meandering Chew, crossed by small road bridges. This is a high quality landscape with good views. This otherwise peaceful area is active with cars, horse-riders and people.

Avon Valley: this valley has for centuries been a major transport route, and parts of it are now fragmented by major roads and railways on embankments, disrupting the natural fall of the land to the river, which is not a prominent feature, except where it goes through the Avon Gorge. The character of the valley varies considerably within the Community Forest, in terms of both landform and land use, from a meandering river in wide arable flood plains, to the dramatic Avon Gorge with the impressive Suspension Bridge. Woodland cover is 9%.

Pucklechurch Ridges: open rolling countryside, with medium to large fields of mixed agriculture, variable hedgerows and less than 2% woodland cover.



Improving the urban environment, M32 (Photo: Forest of Avon)

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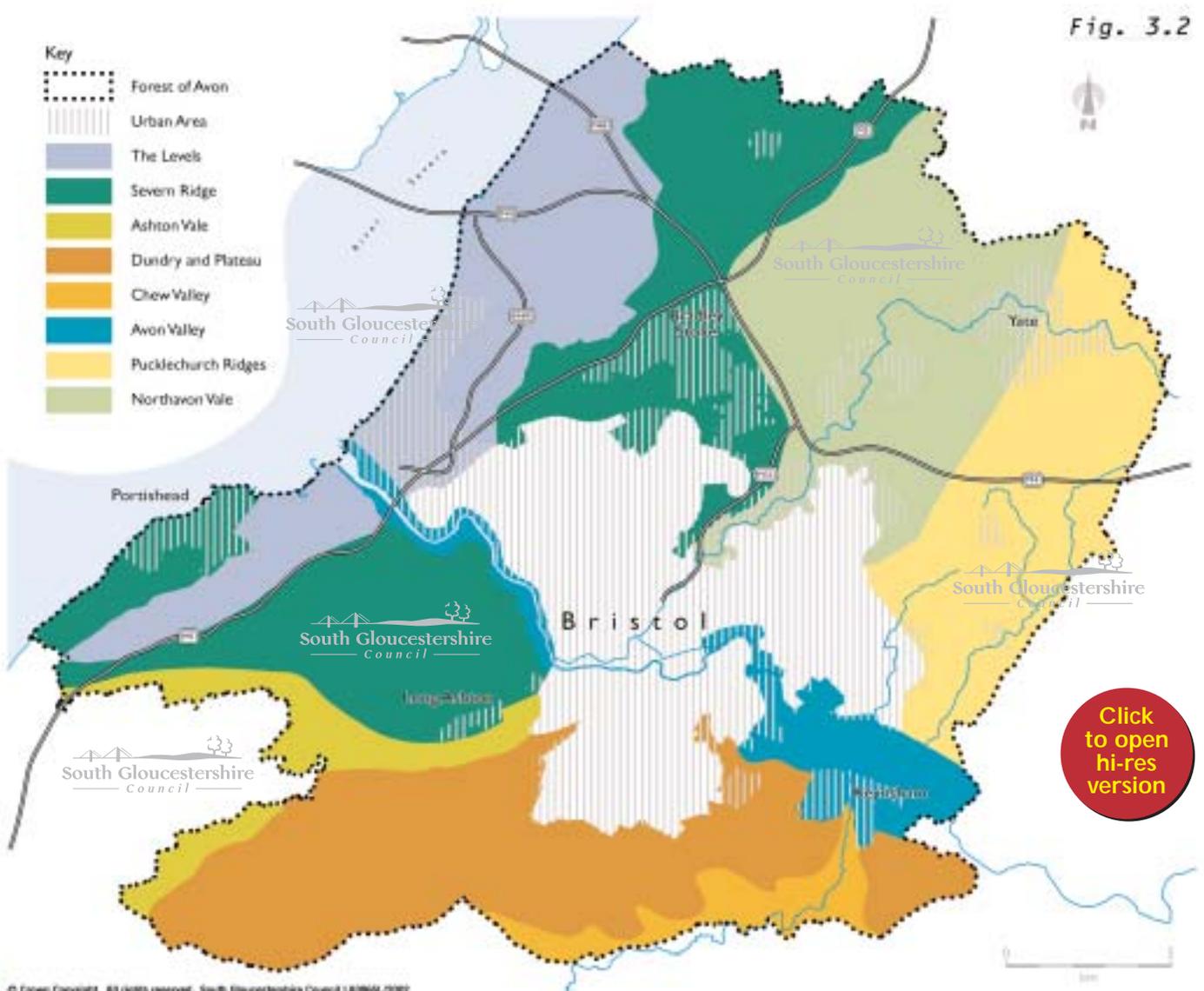
Views to the steep slopes of the Cotswold Edge are a prominent feature. In the south, the rolling landscape becomes two distinct river valleys. The area contains several large settlements including Yate, Chipping Sodbury, Pucklechurch and Wick. Chipping Sodbury, the edge of Kingswood and some of the smaller villages have associated commons. Some areas suffer from their proximity to the urban fringe and the associated pressures.

Northavon Vale: (similar to 'Northavon Central Plain' in Northavon Landscape and Conservation Strategy) (Northavon District Council 1992) gently undulating low-lying ground, with a few small hills and numerous small streams and brooks. Woodland cover is low, less than 2%. It has a strong hedgerow pattern, but few hedgerow trees; pylon lines dominate much of the landscape. There are several large settlements within the area, but away from these and the major roads it has a peaceful, agricultural

character. The small Frome valley remains a valuable finger of countryside penetrating into the heart of Bristol to the south-west and into Yate to the north-east.

3.21 The landscape of the Forest is one of immense variety and the assessment has enabled it to be broken down into three broad categories based on quality (Figure 3.3). The categories are:

- High quality landscapes are those with strong physical characteristics, a lack of visually intrusive elements, and a strong sense of local identity, usually reflecting historic land use, buildings, field patterns and tree cover.
- Medium quality landscapes are those which have lost much of their form and structure through agricultural changes, have lost trees and woods, include intrusive



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elements such as roads and pylon lines, and have views to or are influenced by built development.

- Poor quality landscapes have been transformed by changes in land use and development, breaking down the original structure. They are often dominated by built development, roads and pylons and have few trees, hedges or woods to act as screens or to soften harsh edges. Farmland may be fragmented, poorly managed and have buildings, gates and fences constructed of waste materials.

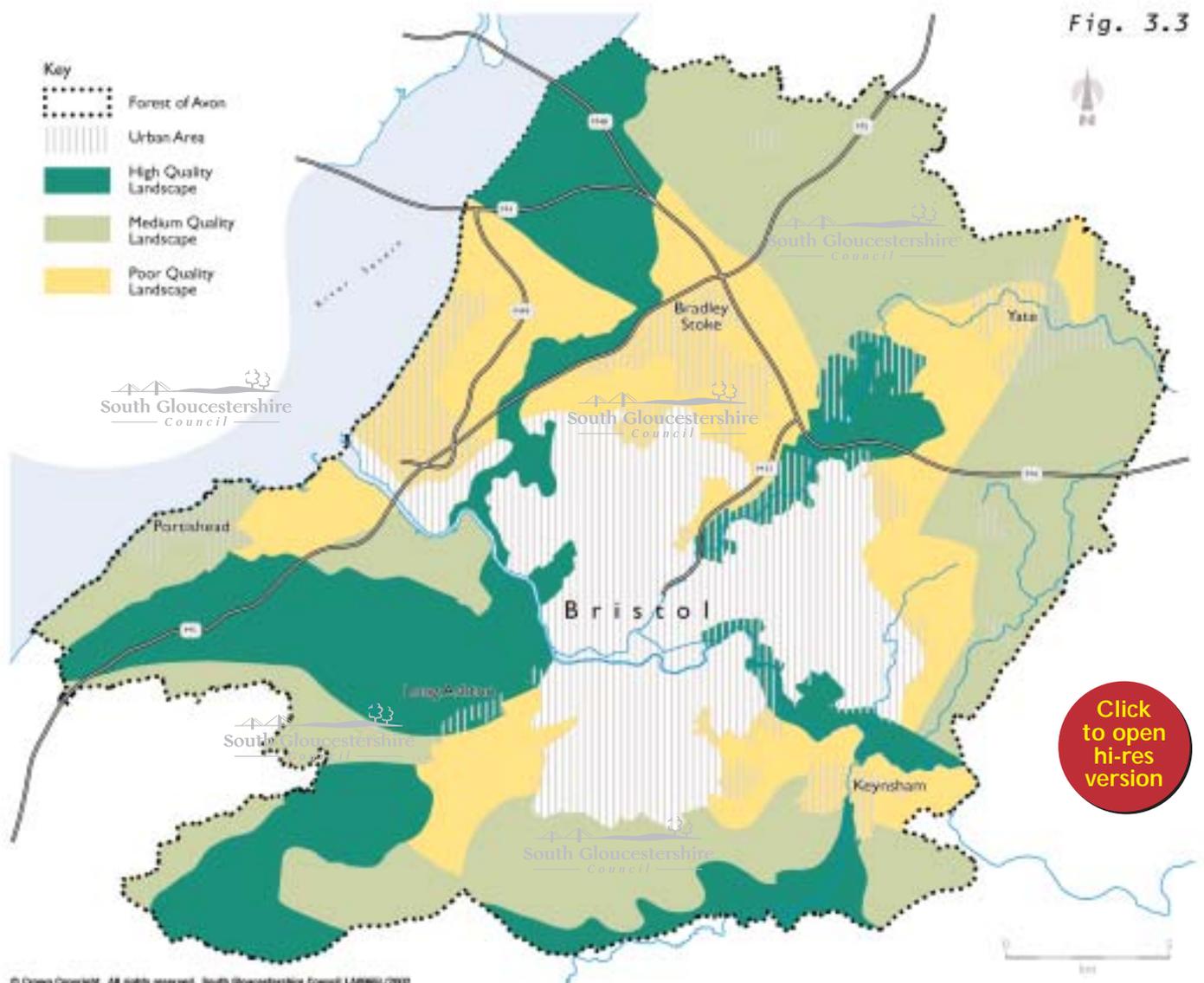
3.22 Forest strategies are proposed in the Plan (see Chapter 18) which aim to conserve and enhance the best landscapes and to improve significantly those of lower quality through tree and woodland planting.

3.23 Up to 2000 woodland planting in the Forest

amounts to 303 ha. This is not yet of sufficient critical mass, or age to impact on the wider landscape but will do so in some areas in the coming years.

Woodlands and forestry

3.24 Woodland currently accounts for 5.9% of the total Forest area (the average for England is 7.5%) covering nearly 3400 ha of land. Most is in private ownership but significant areas, amounting to some 530 ha, are in public ownership or have free access on foot (Figure 3.5). Blaise Castle and Ashton Court estates (Bristol City Council), Stoke Leigh Woods and Ashton Hill plantation (Forest Enterprise), Leigh Woods (National Trust), Abbots Pool (North Somerset Council), Haw Wood (British Aerospace) and Bickley



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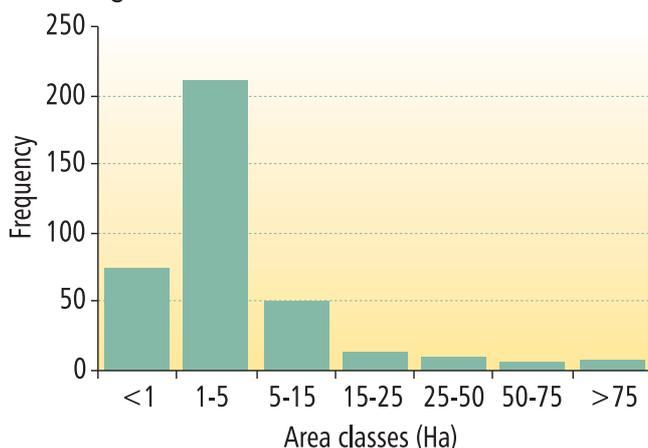
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Artwork at the Woodland Trust's Abbots Wood, Keynsham (Photo: Forest of Avon)

and Hencliffe Woods (South Gloucestershire Council) are the most notable whilst the paths and bridleways of the large complex at Brockley are well used. These are practically all to the south-west of Bristol, contrasting the poor woodland cover in the rest of the area. The Woodland Trust is currently acquiring some farmland close to urban areas, with the aim of creating new community woodlands in addition to its existing woods with public access.

Figure 3.4 Woodland size distribution



3.25 Most woods are small, under 10 ha, and only 25 are over 25 ha (Figure 3.4). The small woods are often 'neglected' i.e. not managed, due to the economies of scale needed to realise timber value, lack of knowledge by the owner or poor access, resulting in net expenditure. A small woodland training facility exists at The Rocks, to the east of the Forest, in Wiltshire. The timber value of many woods is low, firewood or pulp being the only

markets of significance. However, skilled management, especially in marketing, may help owners maximise their woodland assets and where possible achieve a net financial return. Substantial management input is required, which further research would quantify. Commercial forestry is almost exclusively concentrated on the Brockley complex and the Forest Enterprise woods and estates to the south-west of the city.

3.26 There are only two major sawmills in or close to the Forest (Fountain Timber Products, at Brockley, and Bendry Brothers, at Warmley). These mainly produce planked timber, fencing materials, gates, garden products and pallets from saw logs. Most of the timber used by these mills is not grown locally, but is trucked in.

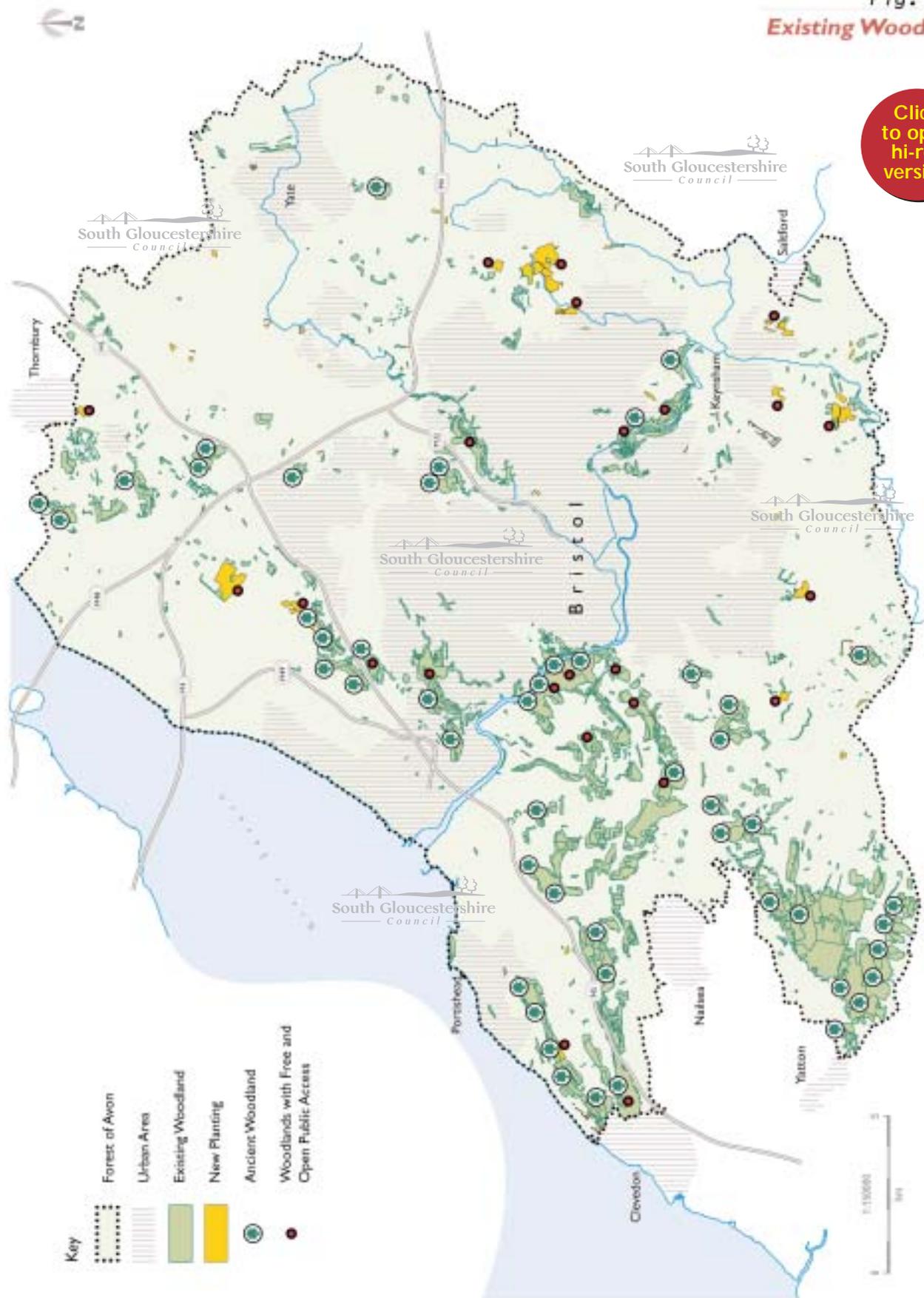
3.27 There is a small but significant craft industry involved in specialist timber use most of whom are affiliated to the Forest of Avon Wood Products Co-operative. These include wood turners, timber framers, charcoal makers, rustic furniture makers and firewood producers (contact the Forest Team for details). A local farmer is host to a Department of Energy trial plot for energy coppice on farmland.

3.28 Some 1173 ha (30%) of the existing woodland is ancient, i.e. in existence before 1600 but possibly including 'exotic' species or conifers. Ancient semi-natural woodland fulfils the same date criterion but comprises only native species and is Britain's equivalent of first-growth forest. It is of great nature conservation and historical value, forming part of our natural heritage and is irreplaceable. The most frequent species in semi-natural woodland in the Forest are ash, oak, hazel, field maple, lime and willow.

3.29 Significant areas of woodland already exist within town and city boundaries and, together with individual trees and copses, make an important contribution to the environment.

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Fig. 3.5
Existing Woodland



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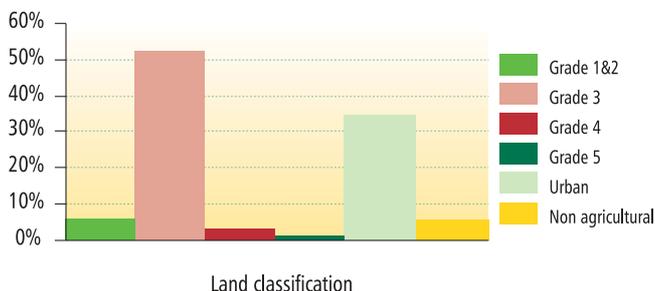
Between 1994 and 2000:

- The Woodland Trust has acquired 36.5 ha of land for new community woodlands
- Forest Enterprise has acquired 70 ha of land at Siston for new woodland
- In all, 303 ha of new woodland have been planted
- 1442 Ha of existing woodland has been brought into management, over half the target.
- 453 Ha of existing woodland has been opened or improved for public access, over three times the target figure.
- The Forest of Avon Wood Products timber marketing co-operative has been established.

Agriculture

3.30 Agricultural land dominates the Forest area outside the towns and cities. The current agricultural landscape reflects millennia of changes due to different agricultural practices, ranging from the fields of Roman origin remaining in some parts of the Cotswold Edge, through the early mediaeval enclosures of the Levels and later parks and planned Enclosures to the modern landscapes resulting from the changing fortunes of agriculture in the twentieth century.

Figure 3.6 Agricultural land classification



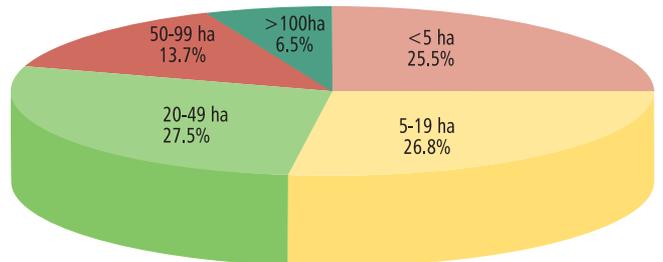
3.31 Agricultural land is classified into five main grades: Grade 1 (the best, most versatile land) to Grade 5 (the poorest, least versatile). Figure 3.6 shows the breakdown of land by grade in the Forest area taken from published provisional maps.

These give a broad indication of the likely grades but do not show the sub-grades of Grade 3 which accounts for 85% of agricultural land in the Forest area. Accurate grading can only be ascertained by field work.

3.32 The best and most versatile agricultural land should be protected from irreversible development, as indicated in PPG 1: The Countryside and the Rural Economy (Department of the Environment 1992). This comprises Grades 1 and Grade 2 land (8% of the Forest area) as well as subgrade 3a. Grade 1 land occurs on ground sloping down to flat valley bottoms, particularly the Gordano and Yeo valley bottoms, particularly the Gordano and Yeo valley near Nailsea. Grade 2 land is found in association with Grade 1 and is also scattered through the Avon valley, alongside the M32 and the Ladden and Bradley Brooks.

3.33 There are now 694 registered agricultural holdings on 25,500 ha. in the Forest area. This represents a reduction of 11% on the area of land in agricultural use since 1988. Some 75% of the agricultural area is owned and 25% rented. The number of wholly rented farms is small, though the ownership figures mask a complexity of part tenancy and ownership, family ownership and so on, which is constantly changing.

Figure 3.7 Size of agricultural holdings

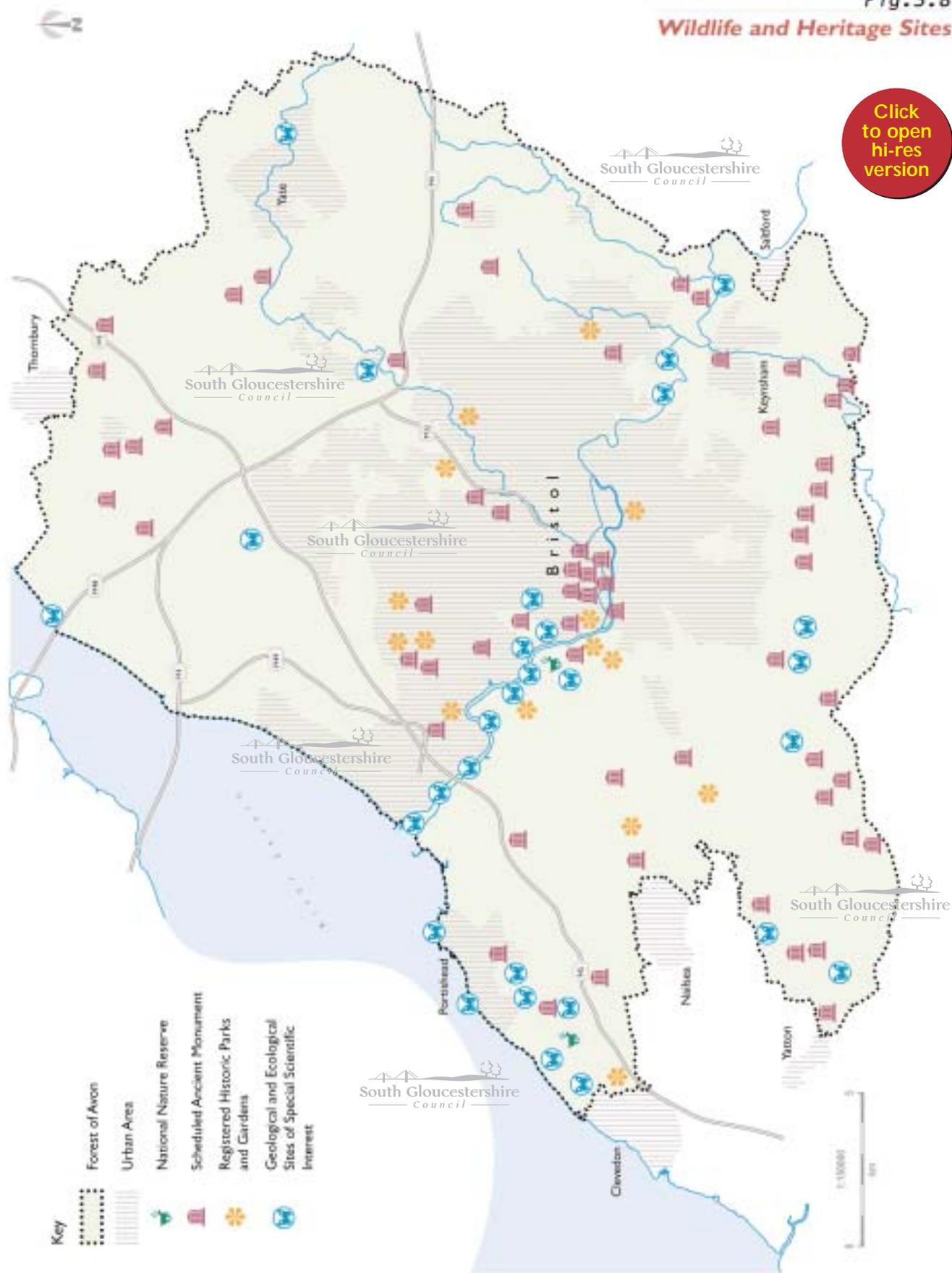


3.34 The size of holdings is shown in Figure 3.7. The trend over recent years has been for large farms to get larger and for the number of holdings to decrease. Also, the total agricultural workforce has declined by over 19% since 1998 mainly due to reduction of the full time workforce. In 1999, only 8% of holdings were over 100 ha within the Forest area compared with 17% for England as a whole. Smaller farms may have less scope for substantial woodland planting.

3.35 Dairying and stock farming are the dominant enterprises in the Forest with 65% of the area under grass and 25% arable. However the dairy herd has been reduced by 24% over the last 10

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Fig.3.8
Wildlife and Heritage Sites



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Farmer's Event, Siston (Photo: Forest of Avon)

years and the area under grass has declined by 19% over the same period. The area of arable land fluctuates but has shown only slight net decline since 1988. Arable farming tends to be concentrated into the south east of the Forest area.

- 3.36** Farm incomes across the country have fallen substantially in recent years, due in large measure to the strength of the pound. For the first time since the Depression of the 1930's this has applied to all agricultural sectors so it has not been possible to maintain income by switching to more profitable enterprises. For 1997-98 average net farm incomes in the South-West were assessed as -£713 for lowland livestock farms and +£439 for mainly cropping farms. However land capital values have been supported at high levels by sales funded from outside farming.
- 3.37** Woodland establishment has nevertheless been occurring in the Forest, but on a limited scale. DEFRA census statistics show that the area of farm woodland has increased from 673 ha in 1988 to 986 ha in 1998. It is not possible to identify whether this can be accounted for by the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme.
- 3.38** Around 63% of holdings in the Forest are classed as part time, i.e. theoretically incapable of supporting one full time worker. Additional sources of income include accommodation and leisure provision, agricultural contracting, on-farm processing and speciality products. Other farm-based businesses include the provision of workshop facilities, warehousing, kennels and livery. These often make the easiest conversion of farm resources, though location and planning permission are critical.

3.39 In addition to the more traditional diversification opportunities there are future prospects for growth in organic food production, non-food crops, the development of renewable energy, on-farm food processing and collaborative marketing. It is expected that these activities will be supported by EU funding, paid through DEFRA.

Table 3.1 Types of Farm in the Forest

	NUMBER OF HOLDINGS	% CHANGE 1982-92
Dairy	140	-24.7
Cattle and sheep	60	+20
Pigs and poultry	10	-52.4
Cropping	15	0
Horticulture	45	-2.2
Mixed	10	0
Part time	485	-0.6

- 3.40** Much of the farmland on the urban fringe is subject to trespass, fly tipping and vandalism. This results in the worrying of livestock, damage to expensive machinery and theft. As a result, many farmers are limited to non-breeding livestock or crops. However, the financial returns of such enterprises are low. Urban-fringe holdings also tend to be smaller. Small parcels of land in multiple ownership also present a considerable challenge in terms of woodland establishment, access agreements and joint management.
- 3.41** Farmland which is close to towns and, in particular, growing cities is often sold off or let in small paddocks at prices well above agricultural values. This is only one of the possible forms of farm diversification which can utilise the benefits of the location of such land. However, the use of land for equestrian activities can lead to problems both through the visual degradation of the landscape if poor quality fencing and buildings are erected and if increased numbers of horses use roads where bridleways are inadequate. South Gloucestershire Council produces guidance for people wishing to create pony paddocks.
- 3.42** The main support for environmental protection and improvement on farmland is provided through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS), now run by DEFRA. and providing the following benefits:

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Between 1992 and 1999

■ Habitat management	Total 700 ha
Waterside grassland	71 ha
Calcareous grassland	75 ha
Lowland pasture	457 ha
Lowland hay meadow	67 ha
Orchard restoration	28 ha
Various margins	2 ha
■ Planting and restoration of hedges and walls	Total 32660 m
■ Access:	
open	101 ha
footpaths	3450 m
educational access schemes	2 no

This represents 53 agreements made within the Forest area, receiving around £545750 of grant.

Biodiversity (Wildlife and nature conservation)

- 3.43** Agriculture and development have over the years reduced much of the diversity of species and habitats in Great Britain. The Forest area is no exception to this trend.
- 3.44** The best sites of national importance are protected by National Nature Reserve (NNR) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) status whilst those of local importance are recognised and protected in the structure plan and local plans under conservation policies as sites of local nature conservation importance (SNCIs). The Severn Estuary is of international importance. Other sites are established as Local Nature Reserves (LNR). Ancient semi-natural woodland is widely recognised as being of particular importance, supporting very diverse species of plants and animals and deserving of protection and appropriate management, primarily for nature conservation. Acid, limestone, neutral and marshy grassland and wetland habitats are particularly rare and sensitive within the Forest.
- 3.45** The Forest includes 2 NNRs, 27 SSSIs, 6 LNRs and 1173 ha of ancient woodland (see Figure 3.8). Whilst these designations recognise the 'best' sites, a significant amount of wildlife exists in 'ordinary' hedgerows, woodlands, commons, rivers and

wetlands. These form wildlife refuges and corridors through which wildlife can move and colonise new areas, even into the city. The Greater Bristol Nature Conservation Strategy identifies sites and wildlife corridors within and close to Bristol. The Northavon Landscape and Conservation Strategy (Northavon District Council 1992), North Somerset Countryside Strategy (1995) and Wandsyke Nature Conservation and Landscape Strategy (1995) identify wildlife corridors and linear habitats which provide connecting links.

- 3.46** Most sites are recorded by the Bristol and Avon Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC), though the species coverage is by no means comprehensive. The Phase One habitat survey records are kept there and the Avon Flora Project, a voluntary initiative supported by BRERC and the councils, is seeking to extend and update knowledge of sites. New and accurate information is constantly being sought, changing the perception of the importance of some sites as it comes in.
- 3.47** Several nature reserves and sites of wildlife importance are also used for informal recreation. There is rarely a conflict that cannot be resolved by thoughtful management. Sites also provide a key educational resource, for example the Wildlife Trust's Willsbridge Mill, particularly for those schools with no grounds.
- 3.48** The Wildlife Trust, English Nature and the local authorities have a leading role in the protection, management, advice, education and interpretation of the natural environment within the Forest; and other bodies, including the local authorities, the



Wildflowers adjacent to Barrow Wood (Photo: Forest of Avon)

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Environment Agency and the water companies, employ staff with a specific remit relating to wildlife and nature conservation. Avon Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) employs an adviser who works primarily with farmers.

- 3.49** In the recent past, Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) and Habitat Action Plans (HAPs) have been developed by statutory agencies and local authorities as part of the UK's undertaking to sustainable development agreed at the Rio Conference. The development of the Forest offers an opportunity to help put these plans into action.

Between 1996 and 2000:

- **4 new LNRs have been designated**
- **124ha of land has been acquired by the Wildlife Trust for nature conservation and biodiversity benefit**
- **302ha of land is now under appropriate management for nature conservation and biodiversity benefit**

Archaeology and local history

- 3.50** The Forest area holds a rich diversity of sites representative of all periods of prehistory to the present day. The Forest area is in itself a historic artefact. From hill forts to Brunel's engineering feats, the Forest inherits a time log of social, agricultural and industrial change of national, regional and local importance. Ashton Court Estate, for example, shows evidence of man's influence from the Neolithic through to the Romano-British, Saxon and mediaeval periods and the Industrial Revolution up to the present day. The archaeological resource is not restricted to sites of national importance but also includes other sites of local importance, as well as wider historic landscapes.
- 3.51** There are currently over 60 archaeological sites of national importance which are protected by law as Scheduled Ancient Monuments (see Figure 3.8). Sites and finds of regional and local importance are recorded in the councils' Sites and Monuments Registers, an extensive and growing record of evidence of our past and industrial heritage. The record is not complete, however, as new finds are made and the importance and significance of known sites is reassessed. Few of these sites are easily accessible to the public.

- 3.52** Historic parks and designed landscapes such as Ashton Court, Blaise Castle, Kingsweston, Oldbury and Stoke Park are on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens (English Heritage 1985) indicating their national importance, see Figure 3.8. They also play an important role in informal recreation. Locally notable parks and gardens are recorded in a gazetteer produced by Avon County Council and the Avon Gardens Trust and are recorded on the Councils' Sites and Monuments Records. Whilst many are in private ownership and have no public access they nevertheless add to the landscape and the historical texture of the area. The National Gardens Scheme provides access to many private gardens and landscapes, the proceeds going to charity. Parkland is particularly evident on the Severn Ridge. Other historic landscapes, such as the pattern of drainage ditches and small fields within the Severn Levels or the remains of pre-historic and medieval field systems are not deliberately designed.

By 1999,

- **Bristol City Council received offers of £7.27m from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards the restoration of Blaise and Ashton Court Estates.**

- 3.53** The area also contains many fine listed buildings and conservation areas, which are protected for their architectural, historical and visual interest; and councils employ specialist staff to give advice and guidance.

Informal recreation and leisure

- 3.54** The population living and having access to the Forest area is just under 1 million, creating an expressed demand for participation in countryside sports and recreation of between 240,000 to 300,000 people. There is also considerable latent demand. Population in the four unitary councils' area is predicted (Source: Office of National Statistics) to grow by 10.6% between 1996 and 2021, from 894,800 to 1,088,700. Interestingly, the age profile is predicted to change, resulting in a higher proportion in the older age groups.
- 3.55** Local trends will generally mirror national data which indicate that walking is by far the most popular activity and is growing faster than other activities. Cycling is booming and field sports have grown in popularity.

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3.56 Participation in sport and recreation tends to be highest among the more affluent social class groups, which comprise 80% of the resident population. The 20% making up the less affluent and less mobile groups tend to be concentrated in localised neighbourhoods.

3.57 A key recreational asset in the Forest is its network of public rights of way, including bridleways and byways. There is 1127 km of rights of way in the Forest, of which 80 km are bridleways and 44 km are byways or roads used as public paths. Most parts of the Forest are served by footpaths, and whilst they may not all be usable 'on the ground', the local authorities' Rights of Way teams are working towards the Countryside Agency's target for rights of way. Many paths are waymarked and managed in conjunction with parish councils, many of whom show great enthusiasm for getting their paths 'up to scratch' and maintaining them. There are a number of well-publicised routes which are well signed and usually have some interpretative materials available (see Figure 3.9). The Community Forest Path, Frome Valley Way, Jubilee Way, Two Rivers Way, Avon Walkway, Dramway, Severn Way and Coastal Path are the most notable. A number of green corridors already penetrate the city: the Frome Valley, the Malago Greenway and the Avon Valley. These routes also serve to link key parks and open spaces of great value to the community.

3.58 For cyclists, there is a range of on-and off-road routes proposed or under construction. The best known is the Bristol-Bath Railway Path on the old Midland Railway, developed by Sustrans as the first of its type in the country, which is extensively used for both recreation and commuting. The Avon Cycleway provides some 130 km of signed routes on minor roads and cycleways. The councils' cycle teams have identified a number of potential routes using existing bridleways and byways within the Forest which could be used by all-terrain bikes with a minimum of investment. Some irresponsible all-terrain biking threatens historic sites and sites of nature conservation importance where controls are ignored.

3.59 The Sustrans Millennium National Cycle Network has brought new investment and routes to the Forest area which will help provide the skeleton for more local connections and to increase the scope to encourage more people to ride for pleasure and to work.

3.60 Bridleways are not common and often do not link together, though the Round Avon Ride is being added to and improved, to create a safer and more enjoyable ride, using bridleways, byways, permissive routes and minor roads. This Ride is the focus of a number of circular routes, promoted through a series of leaflets. In Kingswood, where horse-based activity is prevalent, surfaced routes have been created, linking areas of common land. There are 13 riding establishments in the Forest area as well as a large number of horses kept in paddocks, adding to a significant demand for off-road, safe facilities. Heavily used bridleways can create problems for walkers because of surface damage, impaired drainage and the fear of physical contact with horses. Grazing by horses is often the only management available in urban fringe areas and needs to be kept at an appropriate level. Over-grazing of marginal land may lead to loss of flora, reducing wildlife value.



Community Forest Path, Dundry (Photo: Forest of Avon)

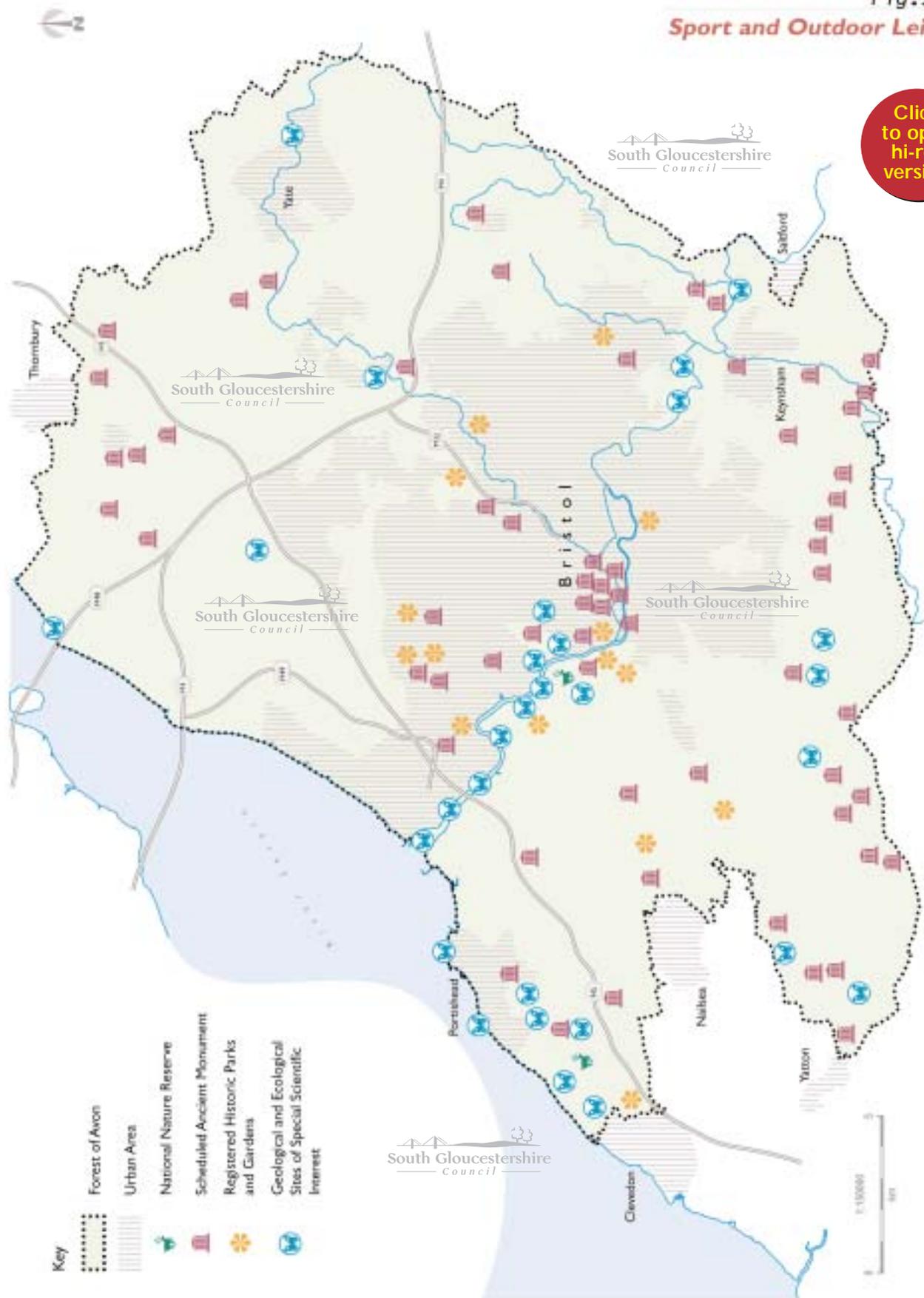
3.61 Byways and roads used as public paths attract a number of motor cyclists, most of whom are responsible members of clubs. However, a minority of thoughtless individuals cause problems of noise and harassment to walkers and riders, particularly close to urban areas.

3.62 The railway and bus networks provide an excellent basis for access to the countryside, and a number of new stations are under consideration. However, Sunday services are generally poor and cycles are not easily taken on trains. Local initiatives, e.g. the Severn Beach partnership aim to increase the use of local lines, partly through recreational promotions.

3.63 There are also a number of key open spaces which attract and encourage informal activities. Woodland locations have been previously mentioned (see paragraph 3.24).

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Fig.3.10
Sport and Outdoor Leisure



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Others include the Downs, Ashton Court, Eastville Park/Oldbury Court Estate/Frome Valley, Stoke Park/Purdown, Eastwood Farm, Hengrove Park and Charlton Common. The commons in Kingswood and around Yate/Chipping Sodbury play an important role in providing space with the freedom to roam.

- 3.64** The only Country Parks in the Forest are privately owned and commercially run, at Olddown near Thornbury and in the Avon Valley near Saltford. These incorporate pick-your-own produce with a range of other attractions and represent examples of farm diversification.
- 3.65** A number of picnic areas exist in the Forest, at Conham, Leigh Woods, Ashton Court and Abbots Pool. These are often simply tables adjacent to parking areas. Tog Hill picnic site, on the Cotswold Edge and Swineford picnic site near Bitton, are close by the Forest.
- 3.66** The size of population of the Forest suggests a demand for greater provision of facilities such as country parks and picnic areas. At present the Forest area is poorly provided for in comparison with other areas. This results in many people driving away to the Mendips, the Cotswolds and the Forest of Dean for a countryside experience.

Between 1994 and 2000:

- **900 km of paths and rights of way have been improved / upgraded**
- **The 72 km Community Forest Path has been completed**
- **New leaflets and events have promoted access to an increasing number of people**

Countryside sport and outdoor recreation

- 3.67** The countryside around Bristol and the surrounding towns already provides for a number of sports, see Figure 3.10. The most evident are playing fields for soccer, rugby, cricket and hockey, etc. usually close to the urban edge, and golf courses. There are 17 golf courses at present, and several new sites with planning permission. The recession caused a number of new courses to falter. There is an identified need for more Pay as you Play facilities.

- 3.68** Orienteering is a well-established sport and is well suited to a woodland setting, whilst beginners and less competitive orienteers can participate on open land and parks. Maps specially created for orienteering exist for 13 areas within the Forest, of which seven are woods. Permanent facilities exist at Ashton Court and Blaise Castle estates. Simpler permanent courses are currently being designed for use by schools and beginners in city parks (Eastville, Victoria and St. George's).

- 3.69** Target and field archery are both to be found in the Forest area, Chelvey Butts having a field archery course, well away from the public.

- 3.70** Water sports are restricted to a few sites on the Avon, coastal waters and the city docks, which are at their maximum level of use according to the Environment Agency. A fairly recent addition has been the West Country Water Park at Almondsbury which caters mainly for wind-surfing and jet skiing. Sailing is available at Chew Valley Lake, Cotswold Water Park and Axbridge Reservoir, all of which are outside the Forest area, and along the coast. Day-ticket trout fishing is available on three reservoirs at Barrow Gurney, totalling 50 ha. Angling clubs are well established and cover suitable waterways in addition to a number of new fishing lakes.

- 3.71** A recent addition to countryside activity is paintball games, with a well-used facility at the privately owned Brockley complex and other sites just outside the Forest area. Forest Enterprise does not allow paintball games on its land. This sport does cause disturbance in woods with wildlife value and English Nature has recently published guidelines regarding paintball activities in woods.

- 3.72** There is one full-bore and one small-bore range within the Forest. Sporting shooting is found in private woods, predominantly on the ridge to the south-west of Bristol, associated with large estates. Access may be restricted in areas with permissive access because of disturbance and poaching of game birds and safety. Shooters should take special care where public rights of way exist. The British Association of Shooting and Conservation publishes guidance for owners and tenants. Clay-pigeon shooting occurs on an occasional basis within the 14-day rule, unless the site gains full planning permission.

- 3.73** There is no venue for regular motor sports, either car or motor cycle, in the Forest though Castle Combe, several miles to the east, provides a circuit



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for cars (saloons, sports and sports-racing). Occasional scrambles, trials and grasstrack events run on an infrequent basis, usually on farmland under the 14-day planning rule. Illegal motor cycle riding on waste land and on open spaces around housing causes severe noise, surface damage and safety problems. Policing and motor projects aim to reduce this problem.

3.74 Larger publicly owned sites host a wide range of sports and events, including golf and grass skiing. In addition, the International Balloon Fiesta, the Bristol Community Festival, and International Kite Festival are major attractions bringing thousands of people to the area.

3.75 Outdoor pursuits and adventure sports are provided for through outdoor activity centres, aimed largely at young people. These are at Avon Quay in the City Docks, at Eastwood Farm and Goblin Combe.

3.76 Sport England (previously the English Sports Council) is the lead organisation for sport and as such is responsible for developing and maintaining the infrastructure for sport, as well as being responsible for distributing National Lottery funds. The Sports Council (SW) and Countryside Commission undertook a study 'Sport and Recreation for the Bristol/ Avon Community Forest' in May 1994. This remains the main strategic document at the local level. Figures from the General Household Survey (1996) indicate that walking remains the most popular form of sport and physical activity (two thirds of adults surveyed had gone for a walk of two miles or more).

Since 1997

- Forest Fever fortnight has promoted over 50 events each summer to young people

The local planning context

3.77 The whole of the Forest area falls within the four unitary authorities of Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire and is therefore subject to the policies contained in the Joint Structure Plan. The councils are also producing Minerals and Waste local plans. All the local authority partners are preparing or revising their district-wide local plans, which will also contain policies or proposals

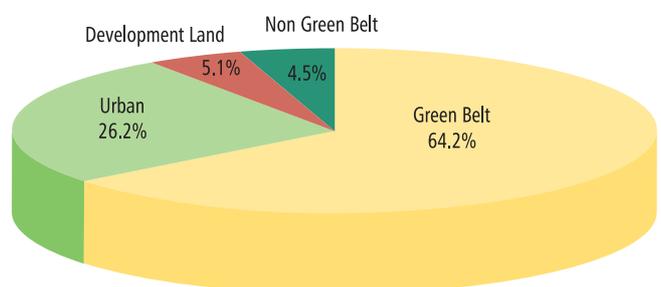
complementing or assisting the implementation of the Forest. Work is in hand to develop Supplementary Planning Guidance for use by the partners and developers.

3.78 Most of the Forest area is in the Bristol/ Bath Green Belt, shown diagrammatically on Figure 3.11, where there is a presumption against inappropriate development. Detailed boundaries of the Green Belt are identified in local plans. Only 4.5% of the Forest area is outside the Green Belt, on the northern side of Yate. The focus will be on the continuation and enhancement of appropriate open uses, particularly agriculture, forestry and countryside recreation. The Forest will offer positive alternative uses for land within the Green Belt, which are consistent with and support that policy.

3.79 Other policy documents that are important in terms of the Forest are the councils' nature conservation, landscape and countryside strategies. Local authorities are producing transport plans which will also have a bearing on the Forest. The transport plans aim to expand park-and-ride facilities, develop walkways and cycleways, enhance the public transport system, e.g. light rail, and improve network links. All the local authorities are producing Local Agenda 21 Plans, though these are not part of the statutory Planning system.

3.80 Planning agreements, planning conditions and Section 106 agreements of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 may offer ways of seeking Forest benefits in relation to approved development and have already been used to secure large-scale resources for tree planting in relation to a new power station in Severnside.

Figure 3.11 Green belt in the Forest area



3.81 There is very little derelict land in the Forest area; only 200 ha has been identified, the majority of which is in the urban area and not available for planting.



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- 3.82** Local authorities own approximately 1600 ha of smallholdings and agricultural land in addition to their open space and woodlands. This land is usually leased and is therefore not readily available for dedication to Forest purposes. Nevertheless, some woodland planting, management and access agreements are already in existence, indicating ways forward, for example at Warmley Forest Park, Kingswood and Manor Road, Keynsham. When land is being considered for disposal, there is potential to put the land to Forest purposes. South Gloucestershire Council has adopted supportive policies and endeavours to work with tenants to seek opportunities to pursue community forest objectives. Dedication as open space or woodland would represent income forgone to the authority concerned.
- 3.83** The Forest Plan will be used by local authorities to aid decision making and policy implementation. In the long term, the plan may be formally adopted and become supplementary planning guidance. National research into the relationship of community forest plans and local plans should assist in guiding this process.
- 3.84** Following Local Government Reorganisation, the new unitary authorities have all maintained their leading role as Forest Partners and have all enshrined the Forest within relevant planning documents.
- 3.85** Work is underway at policy and implementation levels to ensure that the planning system can become a key tool in delivering Forest objectives within the existing policy framework. The Forest represents a means to move towards sustainable development.

Arts, culture and education

- 3.86** Woodlands in town and country are seen increasingly as places where theatre, events, and creative skills can be applied to enrich the experience of visitor and locals alike. Already, sculpture in Bristol's estates and along the Bristol-Bath Railway Path provide interest, humour and an added dimension for visitors to enjoy. Major events such as the Community Festival are well known; poetry, painting and drawing workshops, though they attract less attention, are equally appreciated. Tree dressing, environmental arts and activity days and similar events demonstrate the link between arts and the environment.
- 3.87** Craft workers in metal, wood and stone all add to the diversity of the Forest and locally based initiatives, including the parish maps project, have drawn out people's creative talents and responses in relation to their own place.
- 3.88** Involving innovative design and craft skills to the signs and furniture of the Forest will give a permanent record for the future, whilst events involving performance and participation can excite and expand people's experience and perceptions. The Forest will provide a theme of immense scope and scale for a wide range of arts activities, perhaps giving a unifying theme for 'green' and countryside events and works.
- 3.89** Councils have, or are in the process of developing arts and cultural strategies and these will help in identifying ways in which the Forest can be a place for arts and cultural activities to thrive.

Since the partnership formed, a wide range of sculpture creation, animated walks, mural painting, and arts events have been developed by the partners.

- 3.90** A school grounds working group helps to co-ordinate training and support to schools, while SEENET (Sustainability, Environmental and Education Network) focuses on environmental issues, the National Curriculum events and training. Many schools have developed nature areas and use their local environment for study. Several schools have implemented Woodland Grant Scheme planting within their grounds to the benefit of landscape, nature conservation and curriculum needs and as a positive use of 'surplus' land.



Locally crafted waymarker, Badocks Wood, Southmead (Photo: Forest of Avon)

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There are, however, pressures to dispose of such surplus land, to the possible detriment of future environmental and amenity options.

- 3.91** The Wildlife Trust operates an extensive programme of schools, activities at Willsbridge Mill, involving over 300 teachers each year alongside their pupils; this also acts as a form of informal in-service training.

Between 1996 and 2000:

- **Each year, over 300 schools have been involved in learning about the Forest or using it as a resource, either through school grounds, visits or recycling projects. The Forest Education Initiative Bristol and West Cluster group has also developed innovative work with schools.**
- **Over 40 training courses have been run for Tree Wardens.**
- **Dozens of students have used the Forest for research purposes.**
- **Hundreds of people have learned to plant trees, lay hedges, build dry stone walls and have developed practical countryside skills.**

- 3.92** The two centres of higher education within the Forest, Bristol University and the University of the West of England, as well as the nearby University of Bath provide an excellent base for expertise, data and research, both in relation to sites within the Forest and to its growth and impact on the area.

Tourism

- 3.93** Most tourist activity in the Forest area focuses on the urban areas of Bristol, now being promoted as the 'Great Western City', and Bath, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and 'Georgian City'. The two cities attract visitors in their own right and doubtless many also use the Railway Path, the river Avon or visit the Avon Valley Railway at Bitton Station. Dyrham Park (National Trust) is just beyond the eastern boundary of the Forest. Clevedon Court (National Trust) is just within the Forest area.
- 3.94** The Youth Hostels Association International Centre in Bristol has acted as an information centre for visitors wishing to find out more about the

countryside. The Bristol Tourist Information Centre also carries leaflets relating to walks and places of interest. However, there is a need to develop a better focus for the provision of countryside information for the benefit of visitors and residents alike.

- 3.95** The River Avon now connects with the Thames via the Kennet and Avon Canal and there is a growing demand for cruising from local people and holiday makers.
- 3.96** One of the most important uses of the Forest is for day visits by local people, walking, cycling and exploring the countryside. This also has the potential of bringing money activity to the surrounding rural economy.

