

CHAPTER 18 - Strategy Area: Severn Vale and Ridge

This area comprises the Severn Ridge and Levels landscape zones north of the river Avon. The existing woodland cover of this area is approximately 5.6%.

The ridge runs north-east from the Avon Gorge to Thornbury. It is made up of steep slopes, with an undulating top. In general, the ridge is not such a distinct land-form as it is to the south of the gorge. The woodland cover is also less, particularly close to the edge of Bristol, where new warehouses and major roads dominate.

The Levels landscape adjacent to the Severn is generally defined by the 8m contour above sea level and consists largely of small fields predominantly of improved pasture defined by a complex network of drainage channels and rhines dating back in some cases to Saxon times. The Levels is an area of high archaeological potential and historic landscape value. Earthwork remains, the historic drainage pattern (albeit altered by later inclosure), and 19th century planting makes the levels particularly valuable as an historic landscape. The protection and enhancement of these features will form a key element of any planting or development strategy.

There are few trees and very little woodland therefore existing hedgerows are very important. The southern part, the Severnside area, is very flat and dominated by industrial development. There are extensive proposals for new development in association with the Second Severn Crossing which are transforming the natural environment. The northern section of the area remains rural in character and the land-form becomes slightly more undulating, with more mature hedgerows.

The area is primarily grade 3 agricultural land, with a small area of grade 1 adjacent to the M32. It is more productive than most of the land in the Forest, with the highest level of full-time farming and the largest farms. Dairying is the major full-time farm type, although this has decreased recently in favour of sheep and cattle.

The estuary and adjacent land is of very high nature conservation value (RAMSAR and SPA).

The whole of this area lies within the boundary of the ancient Forest of Kingswood and there is a concentration of historic parkland on the ridge.

Throughout the area, major roads and railway lines present a considerable barrier to walkers, cyclists and horse-riders.

The priorities in this area will be to:

- visually improve the northern edge of Bristol, with new woodland planting;
- use woodland structure planting to create an attractive setting for new development in the Severnside area;
- improve the management of hedgerows and existing woodland, particularly in the north of the area; increase the number of hedgerow trees in the south;
- establish new woodland along the ridge to strengthen its character;
- improve recreational links across major road and rail corridors;
- promote improved access on foot, bike and horse in association with new development at Severnside;
- strengthen and protect the existing wildlife corridors and habitats, especially where new development and transport corridors are fragmenting the landscape.
- pay particular attention to the historic landscape and archaeological potential below the 8m contour.

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1. Brentry to Tockington



2. Alveston



3. Severnside



4. Aust

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Brentry to Tockington



Description

This continuation of the Severn Ridge creates a visual and physical boundary between Bristol and the Levels. It is mainly pastoral with a small area of market gardening adjacent to the M32; hedgerows are generally poor. The landscape structure is fragmented by new land uses including three motorway corridors, railway lines, a large new development and Filton airfield. Some woodland remains, most notably at Haw Wood and Spaniorum Hill. In these areas and parts of the western side of the ridge there are tranquil pockets in an otherwise disturbed landscape.

Existing woodland cover: 10.2%.

Local strategy

Significant landscape change to create a well-wooded landscape, to reduce the impact of intrusive elements and create attractive woodland. Tree cover will be extended on the steep slopes and adjacent to the major roads, particularly between Shirehampton and the M5 and beside the M32. Extensive new woodland establishment will be promoted in association with development at Cribbs Causeway and the M4/M5. Where development density precludes woodland establishment, tree planting and recreation improvements will be the priority. Improved hedgerow management will be encouraged, along with the establishment of new hedgerow trees. A management plan will be developed for the attractive area of countryside between Haw Wood and Charlton Common, which is close to a large residential area but is currently of limited recreational use because of lack of access and fragmentation.

Proposed woodland cover: over 30%

Woodlands

- Encourage management of existing woodlands and extend with carefully designed new planting to establish a continuous network of tree cover along the steeper and upper parts of the ridge.
- Promote community involvement in the management of new and existing woodlands adjacent to residential areas.

Wildlife

- Encourage the management of the identified wildlife corridors.
- Promote the development of a continuous web of woodlands and strong hedgerows from the urban area out along the ridge.
- Encourage improved management of pastoral areas.

Heritage

- A restoration plan for Stoke Park, on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens, has been produced.
- Almondsbury is a conservation area.

Recreation

- This part of the strategy area is most affected by major roads and railway lines creating a barrier to recreational movement from the urban area out into the countryside. There are only two footpath links across the M4 which the Patchway Greenway and the Community Forest Path make use of, but there remains a great need to establish a comprehensive network of recreational links out into the countryside. Reinstating the bridge over the railway line near Brentry would help to improve access.
- The Round Avon Ride and the Avon Cycleway pass through the edges of the area.
- Haw Wood is a 25 ha woodland which could have free and open public access. Blaise Castle, just within the city, contains large areas of woodland and is public open space.
- Blaise Castle and Stoke Park will be considered as large gateway sites in the Forest.
- Small gateways will be investigated near Charlton Common and Haw Wood, with a need for a direct footpath link between the two. Small gateways will also be investigated near Savages Wood, Bradley Stoke and at Cribbs Causeway.

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Alveston



Description

A further continuation of the Severn Ridge as a mixed agricultural landscape. The western side is rolling, with large fields and poor hedgerows framed by woodland. The M4 is of limited visual intrusion. The eastern side is open, and close to Bristol has little woodland, poor hedgerows and large fields. The M5 and pylon lines are dominant elements in much of the landscape.

Existing woodland cover: 7.3%.

Local strategy

Landscape improvements to create a well-wooded agricultural landscape, through the promotion of increased tree cover within a restored landscape pattern. New woodland will be concentrated on the higher ground and the sloping area between the A38 and the M5, with an objective of extending the well-wooded ridge character down to the edge of the Northavon Vale. The improved management of hedgerows will be promoted along with an increased number of hedgerow trees, particularly on the eastern side of the ridge. Views from the A38 will be retained.

Proposed woodland cover: 20-30%.

Woodlands

- Encourage management of existing woodland, and investigate opportunities for increased recreational use.
- New woodland establishment will be of medium sized woods to extend cover in close relation to local topography.
- Around urban edges there is an opportunity to create community woodlands.
- Woodland planting will be designed to improve views to and from the M4, M5 and the Second Severn Crossing link road (M49).

Wildlife

- Approximately 30% of the existing woodland is ancient.
- Where ancient semi-natural woodland is being extended, natural regeneration may be considered as a means of establishing the new native woodland.
- New woodland and hedgerow improvements should aim to connect fragmented areas of woodland to create a strong network of wildlife corridors.

Recreation

- The Round Avon Ride, Jubilee Way and the Avon Cycleway all cross the area.
- Promote greater recreational use of existing woodland, and develop the network of recreational routes.
- Improve the environment of the existing golf course.
- Provide community woodlands close to urban areas. (Filnore Woods at Thornbury is a good recent example).

Heritage

- Retain valuable field patterns and promote suitable management.
- Olveston, Tockington and Tytherington are all conservation areas.

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Severnside



Description

A Levels landscape of flat open pastoral fields, with a degraded hedgerow pattern and several pylon lines, adjacent to heavy industry. Dilapidated chain-link fencing forms the only boundary between industry and agriculture, resulting in the industry being highly intrusive. Views to the wooded Severn Ridge and the small-scale interest of the rhyes remain attractive features in a degraded landscape. New development is proposed in much of this area; the motorway links to the Second Severn Crossing also cross the area. Archaeology is particularly important below the 8m contour.

Existing woodland cover: 0.2%.

Local strategy

Significant landscape change providing a strong woodland framework to new development to enable the attractive Levels landscape to be retained in pockets with a woodland backdrop rather than one of buildings. This will at the same time create a more attractive setting for development and enable human-scale environments to be created within it. Every opportunity will be taken to maintain and enhance the existing Levels landscape in areas away from development, where new planting will be established within the existing small field pattern and used to screen intrusive pylon lines and views of development.

Proposed woodland cover: 10-20%.

Woodlands

- Creation of a woodland structure to the development area should include structure planting of 40 m between the newly developed site and the countryside or major roads. Buffer planting will also be necessary to protect the rhyes within the development area
- Structure planting will be planted in association with all the major roads to ensure that their impact is minimised and the view from them is enhanced. Between the Severn Ridge and the M49, the woodland character will be extended down from the ridge. Tree planting in hedgerows should be promoted, to strengthen landscape character.
- In the north of the area, planting can more directly reflect the typical Levels character, being of small blocks, reinforcing the existing field pattern.
- The creation of community woodlands will be promoted, adjacent to villages.

Wildlife

- Protect manage, link and extend existing wildlife sites, particularly rhyes.
- Where the water table is appropriate, new planting in this area should be of wet woodland carr species. All planting beside rhyes within the development area is to be designed to enhance the area's wildlife value.
- New planting and habitat creation will be necessary to counteract the fragmentational effect of the new development.

Recreation

- The Second Severn Crossing is a visitor attraction at Severn Beach, where the coastal area already has some recreational facilities.
- The large amount of industry and new roads will limit the area as a whole for recreational use, but there is potential to improve the facilities that do exist along the coast, particularly the route of the Severn Way.
- There is also an opportunity to enhance informal recreational use of the area, between the M49 and the Severn Ridge; this area also contains the Community Forest Path which will act as a 'spine' for other link routes.
- Within the developments at Avonmouth, there should be attractive footpaths and cycleways and information readily available at places of work on access into the city and countryside.
- Circular walks will be developed from the villages in the area.

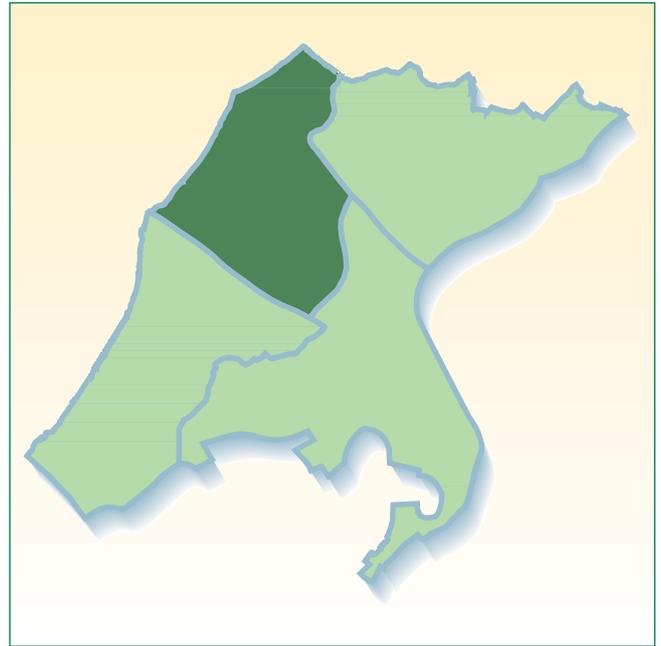
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- New bridleways will be created, especially adjacent to the Severn Ridge, where there is an existing need.
- A Gateway will be investigated at Lawrence Weston Community Farm.

Heritage

- Pay particular attention to archaeological potential and remnants of the historic landscape.

Aust



Description

A flat, open pastoral Levels landscape, slightly more undulating than in the south, with strong low hedgerows, pollarded willows, ditches and rhynes. This area is rural in character with few roads and hamlets, disrupted to some extent by the M4 by the access roads to the Second Severn Crossing. Views of the existing Severn Bridge are a feature of the area. Archaeology and the historic landscape are particularly important below the 8m contour.

Existing woodland cover: 1.0%.

Local strategy

Conservation of the existing Levels landscape character, whilst reducing the impact of new development. Small areas of new woodland will be concentrated adjacent to the link roads to the Second Severn Crossing and on the eastern edge of the area.

Proposed woodland cover: below 10%.

Woodland

- Small-scale planting within the existing field pattern, with wet carr woodland as appropriate in wetter areas. Pay particular attention to archaeology and the historic landscape.
- Energy crops will be promoted; their impact given careful consideration, on a site-by-site basis.



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- On the eastern side of the area, planting at the base of the Severn Ridge will be promoted to extend the wooded ridge character down the slope and link visually the Ridge with the Levels.
- The creation of community woodland adjacent to Olveston will be promoted.
- Improve the management of hedgerows and existing woodland.

Wildlife

- The greatest existing wildlife value is associated with sections of the rhynes. There will be a general aim to improve the wildlife value of all the watercourses.
- The improved management of hedgerows, ditches and pollarded willows within hedgerows will be promoted.

Recreation

- The routes of the Avon Cycleway, the Round Avon Ride, the Severn Way and Jubilee Way all go through the area, so the aim will be to enhance these.
- Circular walks into the countryside from villages will be promoted.

