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STRATFORD-ON-AVON DISTRICT

SPECIAL LANDSCAPE AREAS STUDY



Final Report

for

Stratford-on-Avon District Council

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PART A CONTEXT

1. Introduction

- 1.1. White Consultants, in association with Steven Warnock, were appointed in March 2012 to undertake a review of Special Landscape Areas in Stratford-on-Avon District. The project offers an opportunity to protect and enhance the more valued landscapes in the district.
- 1.2. The concept of Special Landscape Areas in Stratford-on -Avon District was first devised in the County Landscape Plan of 1978 and later incorporated into policies in the Warwickshire Structure Plan. These were areas of landscape considered to be of local importance and requiring protection from inappropriate development.
- 1.3. The Local Plan Review 1996-2011 identified four Special Landscape Areas [SLAs] as follows:
 - Arden
 - Cotswolds Scarp Slopes
 - Feldon Parklands
 - Leam Valley
- 1.4. These were protected under Policy EF2 of the Local Plan Review until that policy was deleted in July 2009.
- 1.5. The brief asks that the landscape character and visual appearance of these areas are assessed to provide guidance to the District Council as to whether there is a good case, backed up by evidence, for reinstating these local designations in the emerging Core Strategy.
- 1.6. The brief also requests that the assessment assesses whether the emerging Draft Core Strategy policies relating to Landscape provide adequate protection or whether there are local landscape features that require extra protection. This could be through the reinstatement of the listed SLAs but the case for new SLAs also should be explored. If the study identifies new areas for designation, these should be discussed with the District Council and reasons for designation should be set out.
- 1.7. An interim report exploring policy issues, the landscape character of the district, potential criteria for designation and outline areas of search was prepared in April 2012. The client instructed the consultant to proceed to carry out site assessments of candidate areas to establish if the SLA designation was justifiable.
- 1.8. This report is the draft report which puts forward candidate SLAs with statements of importance for each. The decision as to whether these are taken forward in the current policy context is a decision for the District Council. The report includes much of the content of the interim report to show context and the method used, and so supercedes it. The report is structured in two parts. Part A explores the policy context [2.0], reviews the use of SLAs elsewhere [3.0], explores the criteria used to identify SLAs [4.0] and sets out the landscape character context [5.0]. The statements of importance for each Candidate SLA are then set out in Part B.

2. Planning Policy Context

- 2.1. The planning policy context has changed significantly recently. The National Planning Policy Framework, issued on 27 March 2012, has implications for the study. It supercedes Planning Policy Statements [PPS] 1 and 7 which were the national documents most relevant to SLAs.
- 2.2. Overall, the NPPF states that the purpose of the planning system is to achieve sustainable development [6]. The three dimensions of sustainable development are economic, social and environmental. The environmental role is defined as *'contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment...'* [7].
- 2.3. One of the 12 principles of planning is to *'take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognizing the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting the thriving rural communities within it...'* [17]. This suggests that studies which describe the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside are useful. This clearly includes landscape character assessments but may also be relevant to landscape designations, including SLAs.
- 2.4. The document states that planning decisions must reflect relevant EU obligations and statutory requirements. In combination with statements, such as the principle above, the NPPF may be construed as broadly consistent with the European Landscape Convention [ELC] to which the UK is a signatory, albeit the ELC is derived from the Council of Europe, not the EU.
- 2.5. The planning system should *'contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils...'* [109] [our underlining]. This appears to justify SLAs potentially. The guidance continues *'local authorities should set criteria-based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites or landscape areas will be judged. Distinction should be made between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites, so that protection is commensurate with their status and gives appropriate weight to their importance and the contribution they make to wider ecological networks'* [113]. At face value the second sentence appears to relate to all designations but in fact it references a footnote which references Circular 06/2005 which is concerned with statutory obligations for biodiversity and geological conservation, not landscape.
- 2.6. The document goes on to say that local planning authorities [LPAs] should set out a strategic approach in their local plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure. Great weight is given to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 2.7. Overall, the document is silent about local landscape designations [LLDs]/SLAs. This is a departure from PPS 7 which expressly discouraged LLDs but set out how they might be justified through *'a formal and robust assessment of the qualities of the landscape concerned'* [25].
- 2.8. The environmental objectives of the NPPF could be supported by encouraging positive management of the characteristics, elements and features of the relevant SLAs, integrating with green infrastructure and other objectives. This should not be seen as excluding development but to ensure that it responds to, conserves and enhances the area's defined qualities.

Stratford-on-Avon Draft Core Strategy - third draft for consultation 2012

- 2.9. This document has recently been issued for consultation. The vision is:
'To maintain and enhance their heritage and green environment of the district while building healthy, safe, informed and active communities who are able to enjoy local services and employment opportunities.'(8)
- 2.10. Policy CS1 Sustainable Development states
'.....
All new development proposals should contribute toward sustainable development and accord with the following principles:
- *Protect, enhance and manage the character and appearance of the individual towns and villages and landscape within Stratford on Avon district, maintaining and strengthening the distinctiveness of the special qualities, and protecting the integrity of the District's countryside.....'*
- 2.11. Landscape matters are covered by Strategic Objective 2 - Planning to protect the character of settlements and the countryside and Strategic Objective 3 - Planning to protect the District's heritage and distinctiveness.
- 2.12. Policy CS10 Landscape states:
'A Landscape character and enhancement
Development should have regard to the local distinctiveness of the historic character of the district's different landscapes.
Development should protect landscape character and avoid detrimental effects on patterns and features which make a significant contribution to the character, history and setting of the settlement or area.
Wherever possible, measures should be incorporated into development schemes to enhance the landscape character of the locality.
B Visual impacts
Proposals the development should include an assessment of the likely visual impacts of the development on the local landscape or townscape, and the site's immediate setting. Applications for major developments should be accompanied by a full landscape and visual impact assessment.
Where visual impacts are predicted, new landscaping should be incorporated to reduce the impact and enhance the existing landscape.
C. Trees, woodland and hedges
Due to the quality of ancient semi-natural woodland and veteran trees in the former Forest of Arden, and their relative scarcity elsewhere in the district, the onus is on those making development proposals that would affect these features to make clear how they are safeguarded.
Proposals that will have an impact on woodlands, hedges and trees should incorporate measures to recognize their contribution to landscape character, public amenity and biodiversity.
Where possible, proposal should enable the expansion of native woodland to help climate change adaptation by buffering expending fragmented ancient woodlands, to promote recreation, public health and the local economy.'(51)
- 2.13. The explanation refers to the European Landscape Convention [ELC], the context of national and county landscape character areas and the importance of tree cover in the district. The potential for the reinstatement of SLAs is referred to.

- 2.14. Overall, the policies are broad brush and are not area specific.

European Landscape Convention

- 2.15. The European Landscape Convention (ELC) was signed up to by the UK government in 2006 and has to be implemented and incorporated into policy. It acknowledges *'that the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas'*.

- 2.16. The ELC has useful definitions:

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

Landscape policy means an expression by the competent public authorities of general principles, strategies and guidelines that permit the taking of specific measures aimed at the protection, management and planning of landscapes.....

Landscape protection means actions to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape, justified by its heritage value derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity.

Landscape management means action, from a perspective of sustainable development, to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape, so as to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes.

Landscape planning means strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes.'

- 2.17. Each signatory undertakes to identify landscapes and their characteristics and establish landscape policies taking into account the particular values assigned to them by the interested parties and the population concerned.
- 2.18. Overall, the definition of SLAs may be seen as contributing to the knowledge of the landscape and its values although it would be important in policy terms not to neglect other landscapes.

Approach to SLAs in the UK

- 2.19. Natural England encourages a landscape character based approach, rather than SLAs, whilst having a duty to protect and enhance nationally designated landscapes. In a 'Review of Local Landscape Designations' for the Countryside Agency completed in June 2006, CBA's conclusions included the following:
- Many planning authorities were moving away from SLAs due to PPG 7 and the Countryside Agency's views.
 - Planning Inspectors were consistently criticising SLAs policies on the basis that many were often confusing, misleading, inadequately justified or unnecessary.
 - SLAs often pick up any shortcomings in the definition of AONB boundaries which have been poorly defined.
 - If SLAs were to be abandoned with confidence, local landscape character needed to be formally assessed with the identification of particular landscape characteristics which needed to be protected, conserved and enhanced.

- 2.20. In Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage [SNH] have issued relatively recent guidance on how to define local landscape designations¹. As part of an all-landscape approach to Scotland's landscapes, SNH believe that local landscape designations can play an important role in promoting awareness, pride and care of the country's most valued local landscapes, and also protecting those which are most vulnerable. It is significant that SNH have taken this approach even though they have adopted the landscape character approach alongside Natural England, and also subsequent to the adoption of ELC in the UK. The SNH approach to defining areas is discussed in more depth in the next section.
- 2.21. In Wales, SLAs are used based on a method developed by the Countryside Council Wales [CCW]. This draws on the SNH guidance but is adapted to utilise the LANDMAP information which differs in structure and approach to both the landscape character or LDU approach used in England. It is therefore of limited applicability to this study.

Use of SLAs in adjacent authorities

- 2.22. The use of SLAs in adjacent authorities is limited to three local planning authorities [LPAs]:
- **Cotswold District**- SLAs were reviewed and redefined in a report by White Consultants in 2001. These have become adopted as Policy 8 of the Local Plan 2001-2011 [adopted 2006]. The relevant SLA abutting the SADC boundary is the Moreton-in-Marsh Surrounds SLA which lies on the fringes of the Cotswolds AONB. This may be continued as part of the LDF as the basis for the designation is currently considered to be robust, but clearly this needs to be consulted on.
 - **South Northamptonshire District**- SLAs are covered in saved Policy EV7 in the Local Plan and derive from the first County Structure Plan and subsequently amended and extended through a consultant's study. The area abutting the SADC boundary comprises the Aynho, Cherwell Valley and Eydon Area. It is not known if the SLA policy is to be continued in the LDF.
 - **Daventry District**- SLAs are covered in saved Policy EN1 in the Local Plan and derive from the first County Structure Plan and amended as part of the 1989 Structure Plan. The areas abutting the SADC boundary extends that in South Northamptonshire and, though unnamed in the policy, comprises the Northamptonshire Ironstone Hills. It is not known if the SLA policy is to be continued in the LDF although it is understood that officers are currently studying the implications of the NPPF.

Preliminary conclusions on the validity of SLAs as designations

- 2.23. SLAs are not encouraged in England by national planning policy, the European Landscape Convention or by Natural England's approach. However, there is nothing stated in national policy or the ELC which specifically rejects the approach and there are 'hooks' which could be used to justify their use. Natural England still put some considerable weight on the use of 'value' in terms of protecting nationally designated landscapes so their approach is not entirely character-based. SNH clearly feel they can be justified. At least neighbouring Cotswold District is considering continuing their SLA policy into their next Local Plan. Overall, therefore, a case could be made for defining SLAs in the district, albeit against Natural England's guidance.

¹ Guidance on Local Landscape Designations, Scottish Natural Heritage, 2006

- 2.24. The NPPF is silent on how SLAs may be identified so the best approach would be to take into consideration superseded PPS 7's advice on undertaking a formal robust assessment. This could be achieved through looking at SNH's approach for local landscape designations and at Natural England's criteria on value used for the national landscape designations. This is set out in the next section.

3. Defining criteria for assessing SLAs

Natural England's approach to landscape value

- 3.1. The current Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland, Countryside Agency and SNH, 2002 considers value. Though there is a draft update pending this has not been issued by DEFRA/Natural England. The criteria for assessing landscape value [p57] are:
- Landscape quality
 - Scenic quality
 - Rarity
 - Representativeness
 - Conservation interests
 - Wildness
 - Associations eg to people, artists, events etc
 - Consensus
 - Tranquillity
- 3.2. Natural England have subsequently defined a process and criteria for assessing national designations [2009]² which, whilst focussing on the 'most iconic and intrinsically valued countryside'³ in England, have some relevance to local designations. The first stage is to identify the character of an area using 'value free' descriptions. This has already been carried out in the district. The next stage is to evaluate the area against the broad criteria of natural beauty and the potential for open-air recreation. The latter relates to National Parks and so is not considered further. In relation to natural beauty the criteria are as follows [p8]:
- Landscape quality - this is a measure of the physical state or condition of landscape
 - Scenic quality - the extent to which the landscape appeals to the senses (primarily, but not only, the visual senses)
 - Relative wildness - the degree to which relatively wild character can be perceived in the landscape makes a particular contribution to sense of place
 - Relative tranquillity - the degree to which relative tranquillity can be perceived in the landscape

² Guidance assessing landscape is the designation, Natural England, 2009

³ Natural England's position on protected landscapes, April 2010

- Natural heritage features - the influence of natural heritage on the perception of the natural beauty of the area
 - Cultural heritage features - the influence of cultural heritage on the perception of natural beauty of the area
 - Cultural associations - the degree to which associations with particular people, artists, writers or events in history contribute to the perceptions of natural beauty on the area.
- 3.3. The guidance makes clear that there is no need for designated areas to display a distinctive or coherent identity. Designations can contain different landscapes as long as the designation as a whole satisfies the natural beauty criterion. Also, not all factors or indicators have to be present across a designation. The weight and relative importance of different factors may vary depending on the geographic context. For instance, wildness may be of less relevance to lowland landscapes in proximity to major centres of population. Comparisons are not to be made with other designated areas but against 'ordinary countryside'.
- 3.4. When considering the desirability of a designation the significance of the area should be considered which takes into account:
- Special qualities- defined by the various aspects of natural beauty above
 - Opportunities for understanding and enjoyment [less relevant to SLAs]
 - Consensus- this can include past recognition of the area
 - Rarity or representativeness- this can add weight but is not an essential requirement.

SNH approach to landscape value

- 3.5. As Natural England do not support or focus on SLAs it is worth considering SNH's approach which is more relevant to the local level. The SNH guidance¹ states that '*an all-landscapes approach is not itself a substitute identifying and taking action over landscapes which merits special attention....because they are recognized as being of particular value....*' [2.7]
- 3.6. The role local landscape designations can play are:
- Designations as accolades
 - As a means to focus policies and objectives
 - As a tool for management
- 3.7. As a tool for local authorities they can be used:
- *'To safeguard important landscapes and landscape features*
 - *To promote understanding and awareness of the distinctive character of the special qualities of the landscapes of a local authority area*
 - *To promote some of the most important outdoor settings for recreation and tourism within the local authority area*
 - *To contribute to wider policies where guiding urban expansion by specifically identifying and safeguarding areas of landscape importance within or close to existing settlements.* [2.8]
- 3.8. The SNH guidance goes on to define landscape criteria and practical criteria in defining SLAs.

Landscape Criteria:

- **Significance:** To what extent does the character and qualities of a particular landscape have special importance in the context of the local authority area.
- **Representativeness:** To what extent do the character and qualities of a particular landscape contribute to the distinctive or regional identity of the local authority.
- **Relative Merit:** To what extent do the character and qualities of a particular landscape merit designation compared to other parts of the local authority area.

Practical Criteria:

- **Need:** To what extent will designation provide for more effective safeguards, management or promotion of the special attributes of the area being considered for designation?
- **Integrity:** Is the area to be designated both coherent enough and of sufficient size to make it practical to develop policies for its protection, management and promotion?
- **Support:** Is there sufficient support for the area to be designated amongst the communities and other stakeholders in the area.

- 3.9. These are helpful in taking a pragmatic and justifiable approach to SLAs and there is overlap with the Natural England guidance. The report to be prepared can apply the landscape criteria and most of the practical criteria but support will be gauged only through consultation in the Local Plan process.

The approach to identifying SLAs in Stratford-on-Avon

- 3.10. Taking the above guidance into account, the study process has been carried out as follows:
- Policy review
 - Defining criteria
 - Reviewing landscape character of the district
 - Establishing the need for the designation
 - Identifying and agreeing areas of search
 - Drawing up and agreeing boundaries
 - Defining the qualities and relevant management of those areas
 - Preparing a statement of importance
- 3.11. The criteria proposed for identifying SLAs in this study are:
- Scenic quality
 - Landscape quality
 - Natural heritage features
 - Cultural heritage features
 - Cultural associations
 - Other perceptual matters eg tranquillity
 - Integrity/coherence/size

- Rarity
 - Representativeness
 - Consensus [historical]
- 3.12. The statement of importance for each proposed SLA is set out in Section 6 onwards and is structured as follows:
- Name and location
 - Summary of key qualities
 - Description
 - Justification of need [applying criteria]
 - Explanation of boundary
 - Key management recommendations
 - Map
 - Sample photographs
- 3.13. The descriptions and key characteristics will be based on a combination of desk study using the Warwickshire landscape guidelines and subsequent assessments which may be paraphrased for consistency and the findings of the site assessment.
- 3.14. The boundaries for each area are defined by a combination of LDU boundaries, roads, canal and field boundaries, including areas which reflect the qualities of the SLA.

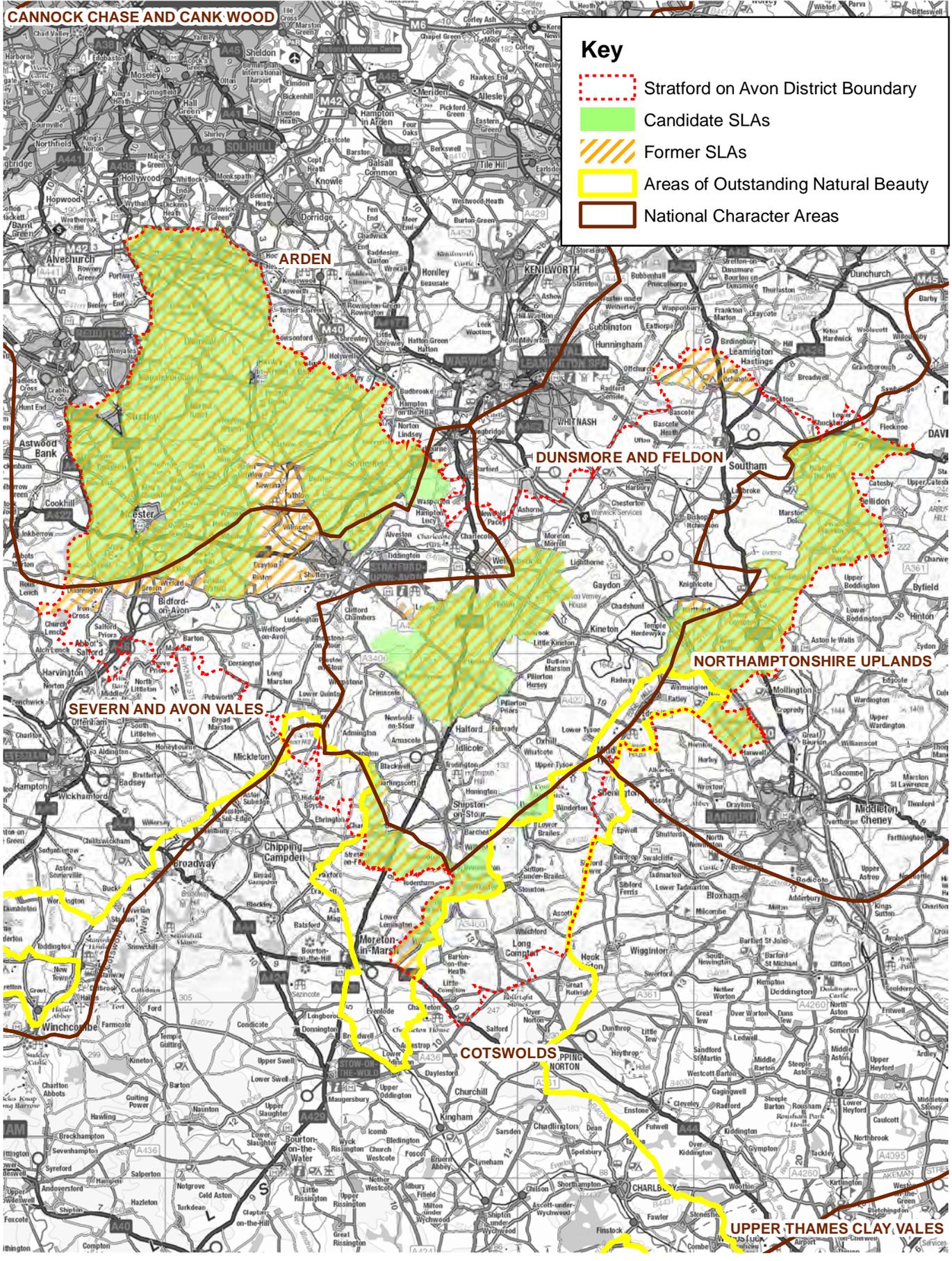
4. Landscape Character

- 4.1. Having carried out the policy review and defined criteria and a method we move on to review the landscape character of the district.

Stratford-on-Avon District landscape Information

- 4.2. The landscape information available is:
- National Landscape Character Areas
 - Warwickshire Landscape Assessment and Guidelines [1993]
 - Stratford-on-Avon District Design Guide [2001]
 - Land Description Unit [LDU] framework
 - Various settlement edge landscape studies identifying GIS based Land Cover Parcels [LCPs], working within LDU framework. These have limited relevance to the SLA study.
- 4.3. The relevant data is discussed in more detail below in conjunction with the SLA boundaries previously identified by the Council and discontinued in 2009.
- 4.4. The National Landscape Character Areas [NCAs] were updated in 2005, based on the areas originally defined in the 1995 Character Map of England. The areas covering the district are the Severn and Avon Vales, Arden, Cotswolds, Dunsmore and Feldon, and the Northamptonshire Uplands (see Figure 1). Profiles for each area are being updated with the first being available in September 2012.
- 4.5. The Warwickshire Landscape Assessment and Guidelines [1993 identifies regional character areas including Arden, Avon Valley, Feldon and Cotswolds which are

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Key

- Stratford on Avon District Boundary
- Candidate SLAs
- Former SLAs
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- National Character Areas

0 5 10 20 km

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Figure 1
National Character Areas with former SLAs and Candidate SLAs

- divided into landscape types (eg the Vale Orchard Belt in the Avon Valley). This is still on the County website but the boundaries are not formally on GIS although the team have approximately defined their extent (see Figure 2).
- 4.6. The Stratford-on-Avon District Design Guide [2001] further refines the character areas into Arden, Avon and Stour valleys, Feldon, Ironstone Uplands and Cotswold fringe, breaking these down into revised types. The boundaries are not thought to be available on GIS.
 - 4.7. The GIS based Land Description Unit [LDU] framework [around 2004/5] works within the National Typology at Level 3 (see Figure 3). Boundaries are a potentially useful guide to the boundaries of SLAs.
 - 4.8. Development of the landscape assessment information across Warwickshire has become patchy in recent years. Rugby Borough Council have an updated landscape assessment based on the LDU work, with landscape types derived, effectively refining the original Warwickshire assessment. This has proved to be a useful resource. This work has not been carried out in Stratford-on Avon District so there is no information linking the older types and the LDU level work.

Forces for Change and discussion of need at a district level

- 4.9. Stratford-on-Avon District is the most rural of the districts in Warwickshire. It encompasses a range of pleasant and attractive rural landscapes from Arden in the north to the Cotswolds AONB to the south. There is the large conurbation of Birmingham and Coventry to the north with Redditch and Warwick as outliers. The M40 runs through the district to the east. Stratford-upon-Avon, as the largest settlement, is a major international cultural destination based on Shakespeare's life and work. Government policy promoting low carbon energy generation means that there may be potential pressure for wind farm development in the district.
- 4.10. There are therefore significant pressures on the district to accommodate development at all scales, on the edge of settlements as well as in the countryside itself. Therefore, it could be argued that there is a need to protect the district's landscapes as far as possible, balanced with the need for sustainable development.
- 4.11. The role of an SLA would be to protect, enhance and facilitate better management of the best of the area's landscapes outside the Cotswolds AONB. SLAs, if agreed, would be focussed on larger scale areas which are of higher landscape value. However, it should be noted that other tools are available to protect the landscape in various areas. These include the Green Belt to the north west of the district, Areas of Restraint in and around settlements and the Landscape sensitivity studies around the main settlements and villages which identify localised areas of high and medium to high sensitivity. The existing county-wide landscape character assessment already comprehensively describes the District's landscapes and makes recommendations on management. The boundaries and grain of this assessment have been superceded by the more detailed LDU framework but this has yet to be turned into an accessible, formal updated assessment which, if implemented, would support a character based approach underpinning criteria-based policies.

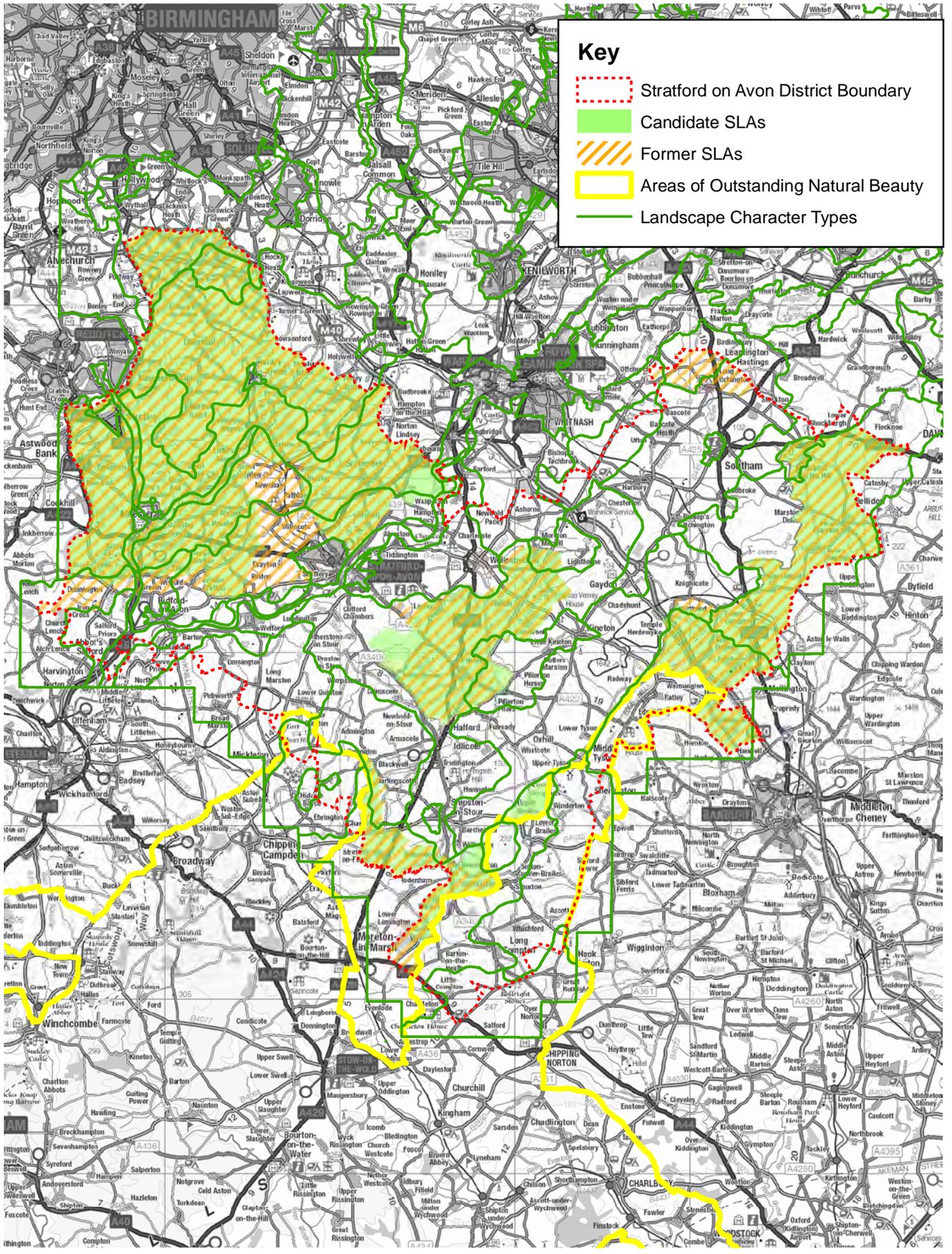


Figure 2

Landscape Character Types with former SLAs and Candidate SLAs



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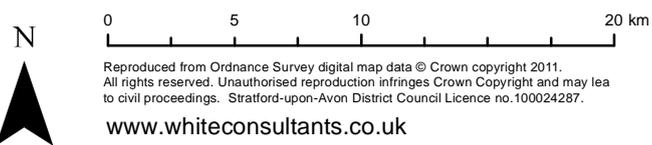
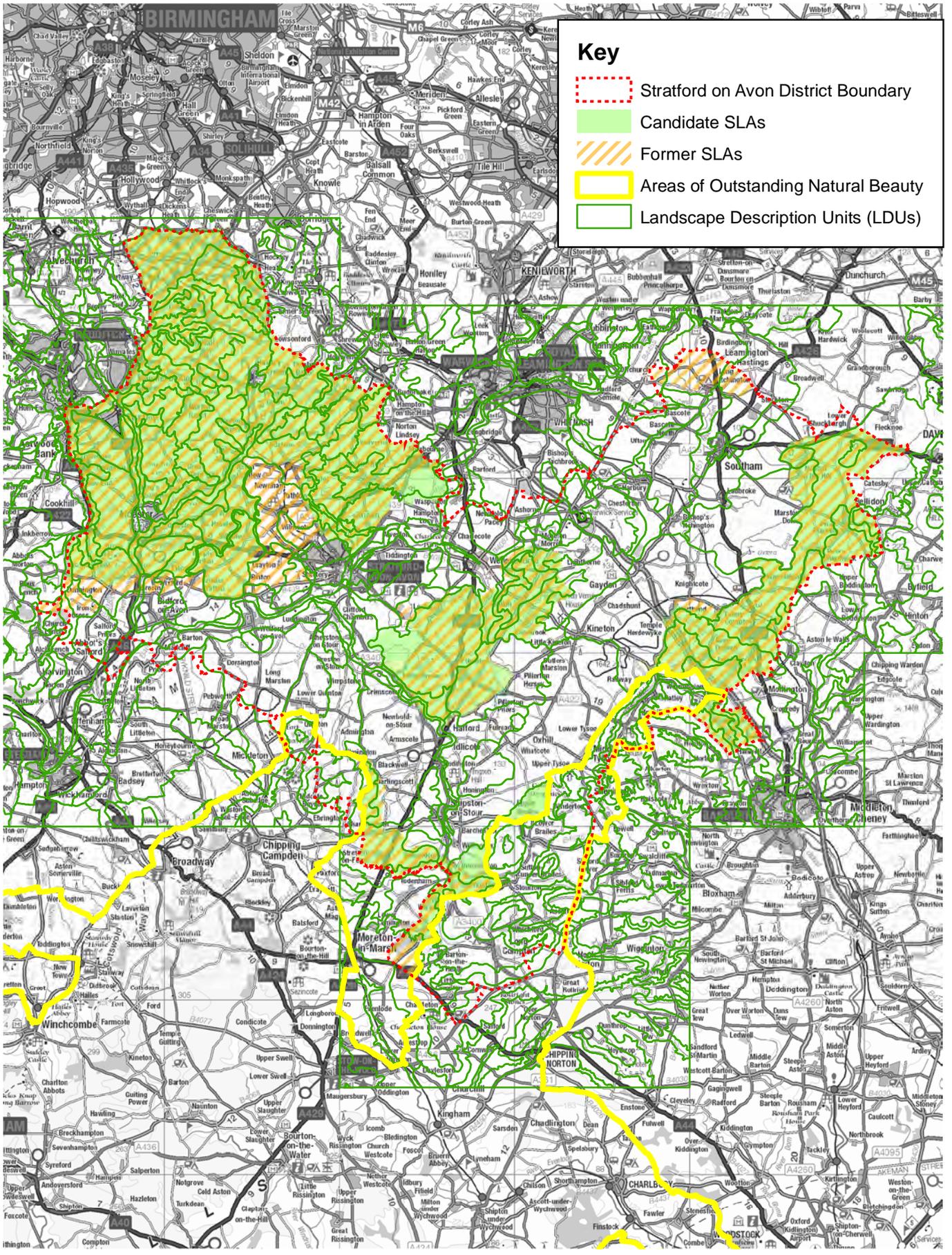


Figure 3
Landscape Description Units (LDUs)
with former SLAs and Candidate SLAs

5. Defining broad search areas for SLAs

- 5.1. The District has a range of pleasant and attractive landscapes. These have been reviewed in terms of their suitability as SLAs. SLAs have to be, by definition, 'special' at a district level to merit inclusion. Though all landscapes are important, especially to their local populations, to define an entire district as 'special' would potentially be a contradiction in terms. Designation has to be driven by the key qualities of a given area.
- 5.2. The areas outside the former SLAs include the Avon Vale and the Feldon Vale. These are gently rolling settled landscapes, with river courses such as the Avon and Stour running through them. The rivers and their tributaries are important landscape features. They are also important in terms of green infrastructure providing recreational and nature conservation services. The river courses and their environs need protection, conservation and enhancement but they are relatively small, linear features with limited impact on the intervening gently undulating land with its subtle boundaries and character. These characteristics do not lend themselves to SLA designation.
- 5.3. The candidate SLAs focus on those areas of more pronounced undulating topography with more easily defined boundaries, or on areas of particularly ancient character. The desk study overview has led to the following conclusions as to their suitability. The full descriptions and justifications are set out in the following chapters.

Arden SLA

- 5.4. The former SLA covered the following landscape types: Ancient Arden, Arden Parklands, Wooded Estate land, Arden Pastures and the Vale Orchard Belt within the Avon valley. It bordered Stratford-upon-Avon to the north, east and west. Within the area there are a number of high and moderate natural landscape sensitivity areas, especially to the north (see **Figure 4**). There are also numerous nature conservation designations, especially ancient woodland (see **Figure 5**). Cultural landscape sensitivity is generally moderate or high to the north (see **Figure 6**) while cultural designations are fairly dense including Conservation Areas, listed buildings and registered parkland (see **Figure 7**). As a result, there is a strong justification for an SLA in this broad area. The proposed extent is focussed on the qualities of the Arden landscapes including its river valleys. The review considers that much of the Vale Orchard Belt in the Avon Valley to the south should be removed apart from the Welcombe Hills to the north east of Stratford-upon-Avon and Binton Hill to the north of Welford. Bordon Hill is very important to the setting of Stratford but is somewhat isolated from the main bulk of the candidate SLA by subtle landscapes with characteristics which reflect the Avon Valley rather than Arden.

Cotswold SLA

- 5.5. The western part of the former SLA covered the Cotswold Fringe and part of the Vale Farmlands landscape types adjacent to the AONB. An existing SLA to the south exists in Cotswolds District. Within the area there are only low natural landscape sensitivity areas (see **Figure 4**) and no nature conservation designations (see **Figure 5**). Cultural landscape sensitivity is generally low (see **Figure 6**), but there are some cultural designations including Conservation Areas and listed buildings (see **Figure 7**). The primary justification for an SLA in this area is therefore based on its relationship with the AONB where it forms a transitional low hill landscape. The proposed extent is focussed on the Cotswold fringe landscape type and is extended to the north east.

- 5.6. The eastern part of the former SLA extended from the Cotswolds AONB north east to include parts of the Ironstone Hills. Existing SLAs lie to the south and east in Daventry and South Northamptonshire Districts. Within this area there are moderate natural landscape sensitivity areas around the Burton Dassett Hills, Napton Hill and Shuckburgh (see **Figure 4**). There is also an area of ancient woodland at Shuckburgh (see **Figure 5**). Cultural landscape sensitivity is generally low but high around Shuckburgh (see **Figure 6**). Cultural designations include village Conservation Areas, listed buildings and registered parkland (see **Figure 7**). There is justification for an SLA in this area due to its prominent landform and ironstone villages. The proposed extent includes the Plateau Redlands and Edge Hill landscapes and parts of the Ironstone Fringe to the north-east including outliers such as Napton-on-the-Hill. It is suggested that this area should be renamed as it is quite distinct from the Cotswold landscapes to the south.

Feldon SLA

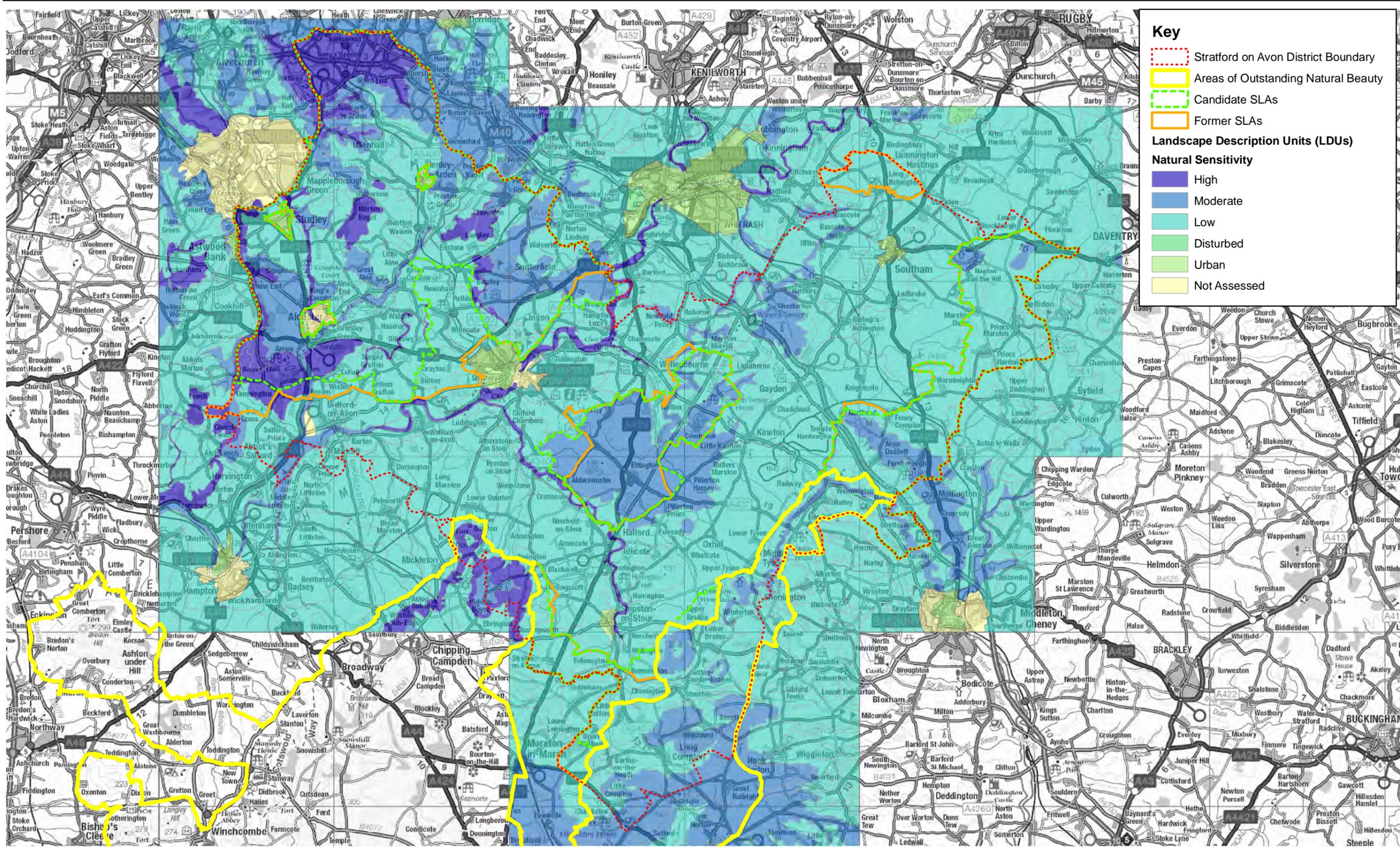
- 5.7. This area lies in the heart of Feldon primarily including the Feldon Parklands landscape type and parts of the Lias Village Farmlands. It is perhaps not as well defined as the SLAs previously discussed. The area has a mainly moderate natural landscape sensitivity areas which differs from the surrounding Vales (see **Figure 4**). There are a number of nature conservation designations within the area, especially related to ancient woodlands (see **Figure 5**). Cultural landscape sensitivity is generally moderate (see **Figure 6**) while cultural designations are focussed on villages with listed buildings and registered parklands, such as Compton Verney (see **Figure 7**). There is potential justification for an SLA associated with more marked undulating topography defining the edge of the Avon Vale to the north and Stour valley to the west, and the parklands in the area, notably Compton Verney.

Leam Valley SLA

- 5.8. This is a small isolated area lying to the north of Long Itchington on the boundaries of the district. There is little reason for an SLA in this area due to modest and subtle landscape character and a lack of any SLAs in neighbouring districts which would make the area very limited in size. The Villages Landscape Sensitivity study considers the sensitivity around the settlement and it is considered that this is adequate to protect what is important within the landscape in this area. It is therefore proposed that this SLA is discontinued.

Candidate SLAs

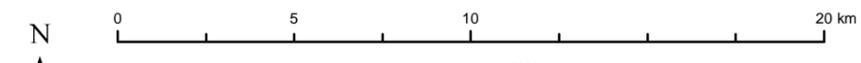
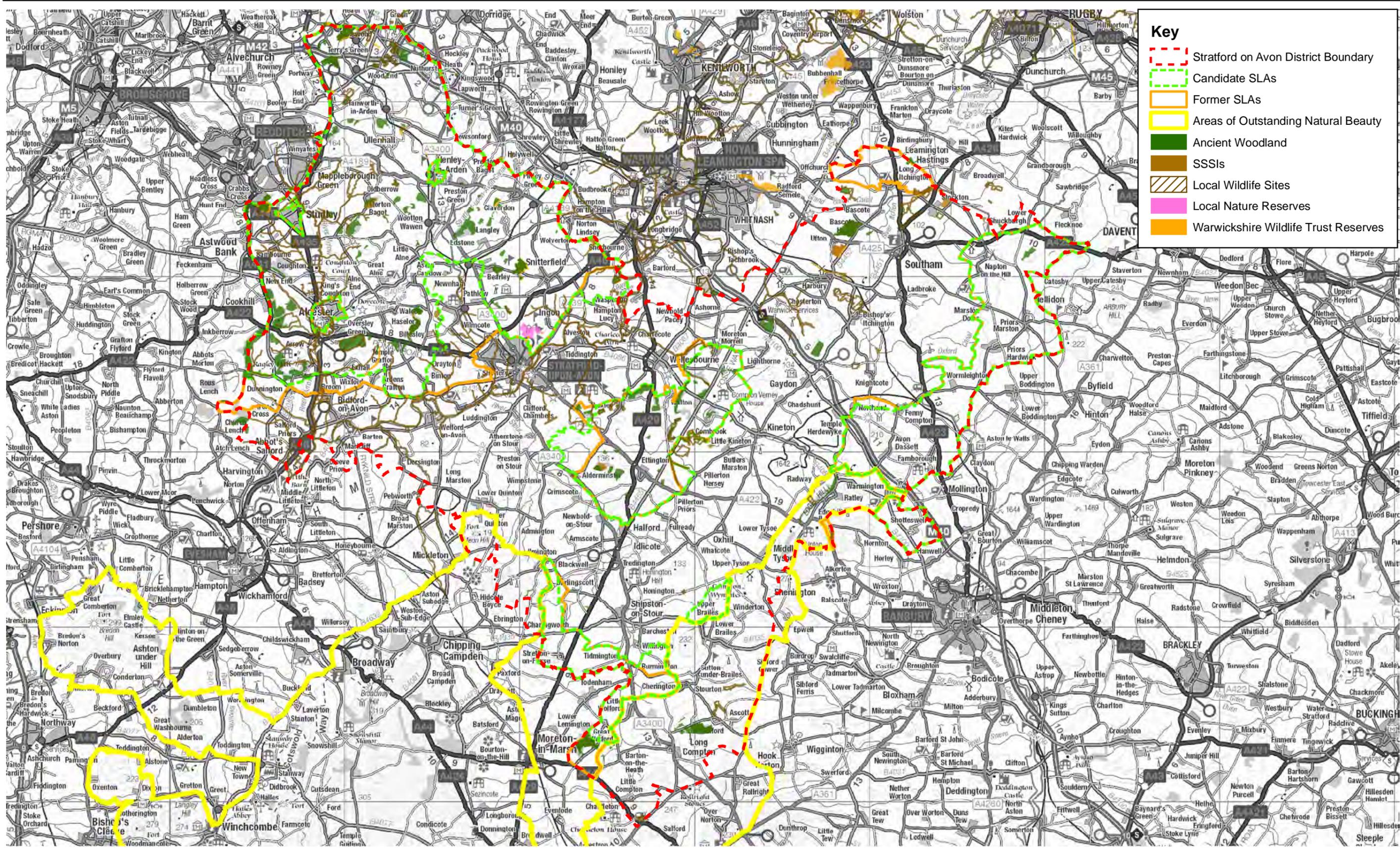
- 5.9. The candidate SLAs are described and justified in Section B.



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Figure 4
LDU Natural Sensitivity with former SLAs and Candidate SLAs



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Figure 5
Nature Conservation Designations with former SLAs and Candidate SLAs

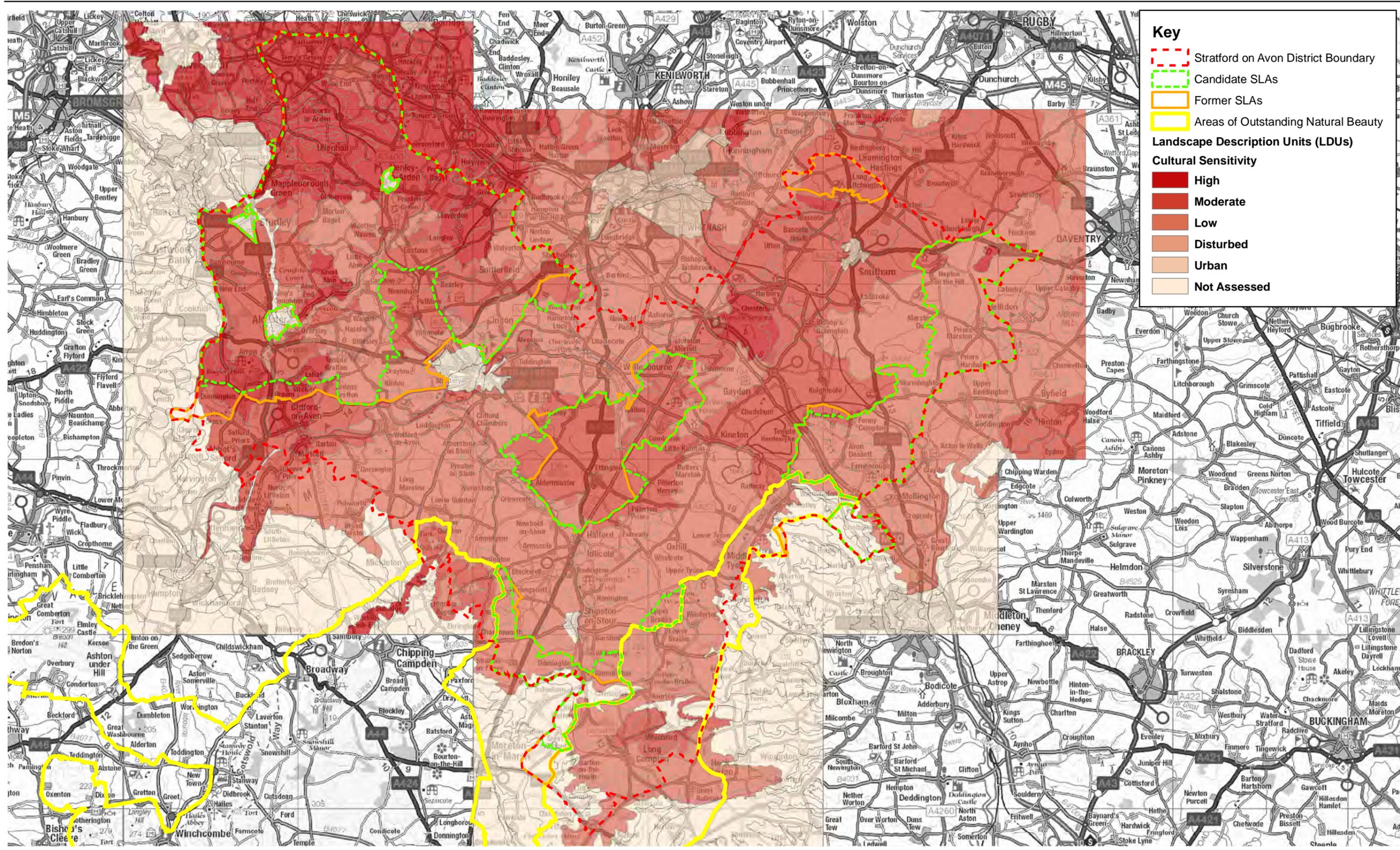


Figure 6
LDU Cultural Sensitivity with
former SLAs and Candidate SLAs

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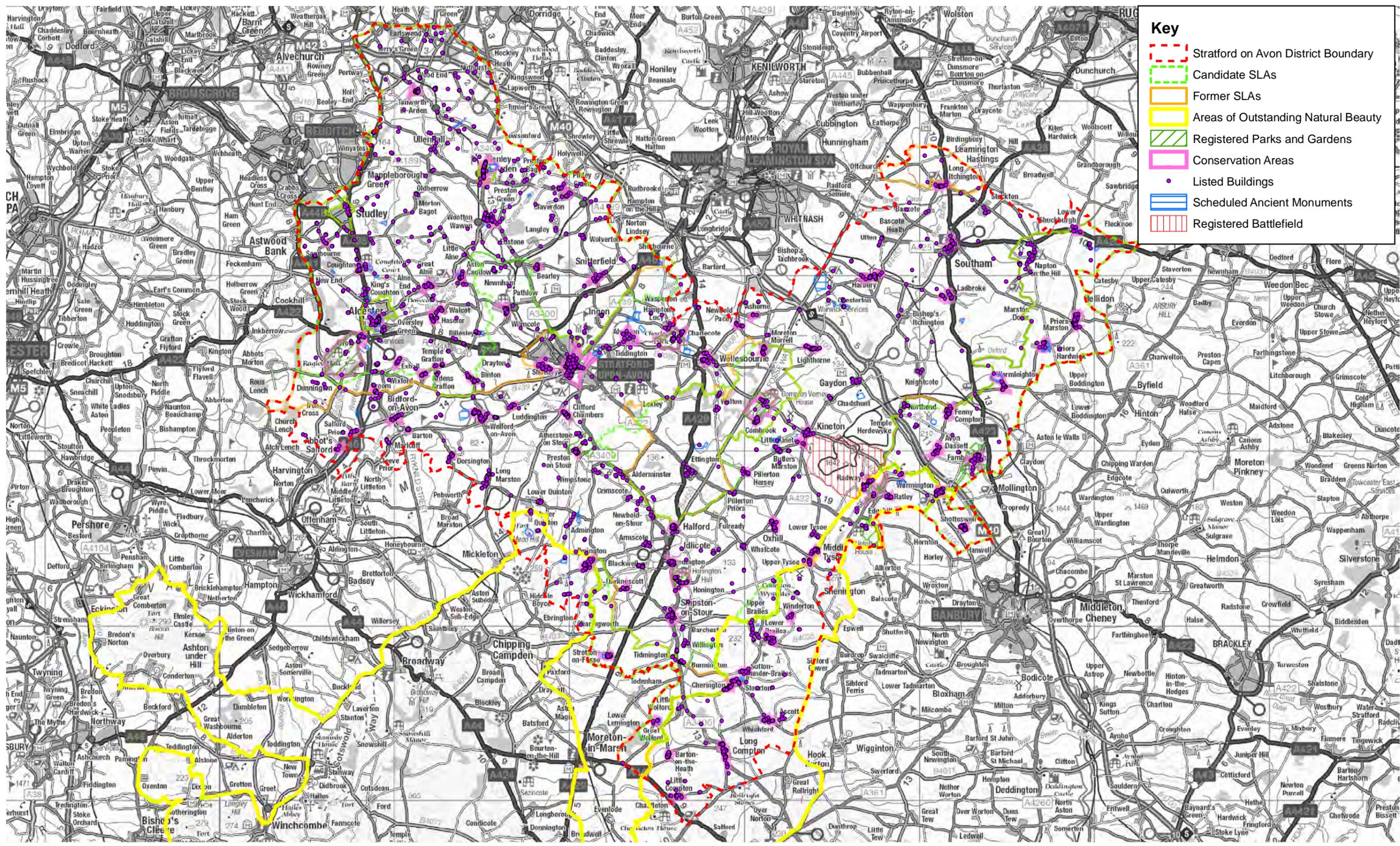


Figure 7
Cultural Heritage Designations with former SLAs and Candidate SLAs

PART B: STATEMENTS OF IMPORTANCE

6. Arden

Key qualities

6.1. The key qualities of the area are:

- A varied undulating topography with steep scarp slopes in places and river valleys.
- A range of field patterns from small scale irregular in Ancient Arden to larger more rectilinear patterns in the Wooded Estatelands but with strong hedgerows dominated by mature oaks.
- Woodlands, some ancient, on hillsides and hilltops forming the skyline in many places, dominated by oak.
- Lanes and tracks with strong hedgebanks and oaks.
- An enclosed landscape in Ancient Arden and to the north often associated with permanent pasture and field ponds.
- Large country house and parklands with specimen trees and remnant deerparks and associated boundaries.
- Small scale intimate river valleys with narrow floodplains defined by curvilinear hedgerows, natural watercourses and riparian vegetation including willow pollards.
- Traditional building materials of timber frame and brick but with some Arden sandstone and Blue Lias limestone.
- Settlement on valley floors or hilltops avoiding steep slopes.

Description

6.2. The area lies broadly in the National Character Area of Arden. It comprises former wood pasture and ancient farmlands with features of significant historic interest. It includes a number of landscape types with an underlying character of hilltop woodlands and steep valley sides, often with an irregular and well treed field pattern that was created from woodland assarting. Some areas have fewer trees and more regular fields but form a rolling countryside complementary to the more wooded areas. The main traditional building materials are timber frame and brick but with some Arden sandstone and Blue Lias limestone. The landscapes include Ancient Arden, Arden Pastures, Arden Parklands, Wooded Estatelands, the northern fringes of the Avon valley which have similar characteristics, and the Arrow and Alne valleys. Each type is described below.

6.3. Ancient Arden forms the core of the area. It has varied undulating landform with occasional steep scarp slopes. Oaks are the dominant tree species occurring in hedgerows, along roadsides and within relict ancient woodlands. These woodlands often define the skyline. The ancient field pattern tends to be small to medium-sized and irregular. Pasture has traditionally dominated, but there is now increasing arable land. Field ponds are associated with permanent pasture. There is a network of winding lanes often confined by tall hedgebanks. The settlement pattern includes many scattered hamlets and farmsteads, mostly on slopes, but there are also occasional villages or small towns, often on hill tops (eg Tanworth-in-Arden with its church spire).

6.4. The Arden pastures lie to the north on very gently rolling landform. This is a small scale enclosed landscaped with strong hedgerows and belts of woodland,

- some ancient, both dominated by oak. The pastoral field pattern tends to be small to medium-sized and regular. In places, hedges had been cleared leaving mature field oaks. Settlement pattern tends to be more recent and linear, with a suburban character in places, although there are older brick Arden cottages in places. The Earlswood Lakes are a distinctive feature and a popular recreational resource.
- 6.5. Arden parklands is an enclosed, gently rolling landscape with a well defined pattern of woodlands and belts of trees, dominated by oak. These enclose a mixed pastoral and parkland landscape with many tall, thick hedgerows. Many of the woodlands are ancient, often with irregular outlines, which define the skylines. There are large country houses set within parkland, and remnant deerparks and avenues of trees are a special feature in this landscape.
- 6.6. The Wooded Estatelands have a large scale rolling topography with occasional steep scarp slopes. Large woodlands often occur on the slopes and define the skyline. Fields are medium to large in size, often arable, in a semi-regular pattern with trimmed hedgerows. Oaks dominate, but are more scattered than in ancient Arden, resulting in a more open landscape. As the name implies, farming is dominated by estates. There is a varied settlement pattern of small villages and farmsteads, with the larger towns of Alcester, Henley-in-Arden and Studley on the fringes.
- 6.7. The valleys of the Alne and Arrow are smaller scale intimate landscapes with narrow alluvial floodplains often defined by curvilinear hedgerows. The natural courses of the rivers are defined by riparian vegetation including willow pollards. Grazing meadows often include wet grassland. These areas provide a contrast to the more open adjacent wooded estateland landscapes. Settlement avoids the floodplains generally, and the occasional traditional buildings, such as mills, complement the character of the landscape.
- 6.8. The areas of the Avon Valley included in the candidate SLA reflect the characteristics of the Wooded Estatelands. The landscape just north of Welford, including Binton Hill, has rounded hills with wooded crests and slopes with more gentle slopes to the north. The Welcombe Hills also have similar characteristics and provide a partially wooded ridge with parkland as a backdrop to Stratford-upon-Avon. The obelisk in the country park is a distinctive landmark. The hills to the east of this, and west of Welford, slope more gently to the Avon Valley but still provide a continuation of higher ground with occasional woodland blocks. All these areas provide rural hillside backdrop to the Avon Valley.

Justification of Need

- 6.9. The justification for this SLA is on the grounds that:
- The area has scenic quality in terms of its juxtaposition of well wooded rounded hilltops and slopes enclosing valleys, its fine oak dominated hedgerows, its intimate pastoral scenes, views from hilltops such as across the Avon Valley, the relationship between the landscape and settlements including church spires and towers and red brick cottages and its small scale water-related landscapes of the rivers and lakes.
 - The area is generally well managed with strong woodland and hedgerow tree cover including oaks resulting in generally high landscape quality although this has been eroded by hedgerow removal in places.
 - The area's natural heritage features include many ancient woodlands (eg Old Park Wood to the west and Hampton Wood to the east). Several are SSSIs (eg Bannam Wood SSSI, Aston Grove and Withycombe Wood SSSI, Rough Hill and Wire Hill Woods SSSI). There are other SSSIs including

River Blythe SSSI adjacent to the Earlswood Lakes local wildlife site and Copmill Hill SSSI near Wilmcote. Clopton/Welcombe local nature reserve lies on the hill east of Stratford-upon-Avon.

- The area's cultural heritage features are numerous and give richness to the landscape. Major features include Ragley Hall registered Park and Garden and Conservation Area with associated ancient woodland and Beaudesert Mount motte and bailey castle SAM and Conservation Area. Other Conservation Areas are located in Henley- in-Arden, Alcester, Tanworth-in-Arden, Aston Cantlow, Wooton Wawen, Exhall, Ardens Grafton, Snitterfield and Bearley. Numerous listed buildings are located in settlements such as Henley and in numerous scattered hamlets and individual dwellings/ farmsteads (eg Oversley Farmhouse).
 - The strong tree cover means that though the area is fairly well developed this is often screened and areas of countryside can feel very tranquil, particularly in Ancient Arden. River corridors such as the Alne also have this quality.
 - Hilltop woodlands and the strong presence of the hedgerow oak give the area a sense of unity and integrity although there is some variation in scale. The area is large, covering much of the north of the district.
 - Arden extends to the north outside the district but its ancient well treed landscape type is relatively rare in criteria-based policies in safeguarding, managing or promoting the special attributes England.
 - The area's character is representative of assorted landscape types.
 - The area has been defined as an SLA before [to slightly different boundaries] and so there is a degree of consensus as to its perceived value.
- 6.10. The extent to which the SLA designation will be more effective than criteria-based policies in safeguarding, managing and promoting the special attributes of each area are:
- The area has a particular distinctive character which deserves special recognition eg the hilltop and steep slope woodlands, oak tree cover and hedgerow pattern of Arden.
 - The area has a particular distinctive character which is being eroded over time and needs specific management eg retention and enhancement of hedgerows.
 - The area is under pressure for development in places being close to the Midlands conurbation and this development needs to respect the special qualities of the area.

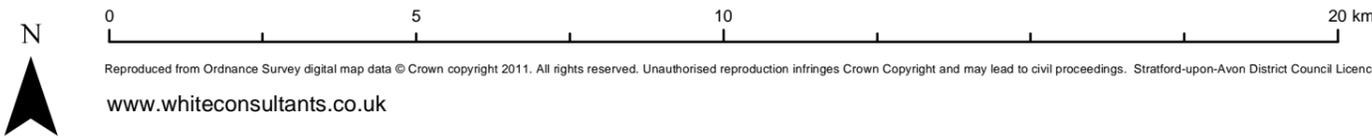
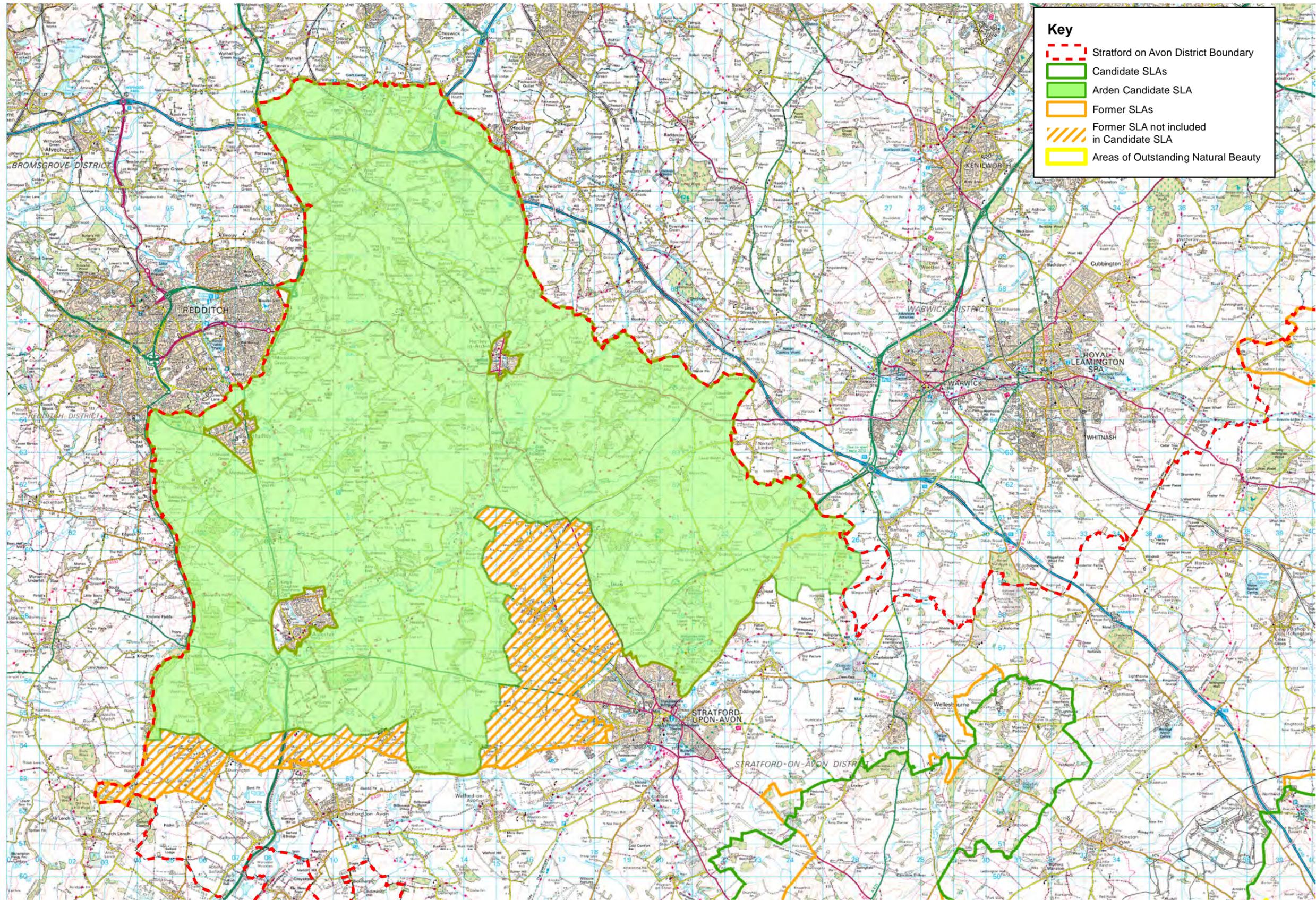
Explanation of Boundary

- 6.11. The candidate SLA is shown on **Figure 8**. It is recommended that the boundary for this area changes the former SLA to include those areas that reflect the key qualities and remove those that do not. The boundaries are drawn up close to, and exclude, larger urban areas such as Alcester and Studley, but include smaller settlements, some of which contribute to the character of the area. The boundaries are described as follows:
- The northern, eastern and western boundaries are defined by the district boundary as the characteristics of the area run beyond into other districts/boroughs.

- The southern boundary to the west is defined by the Ragley Hall estate and its hilltop woodlands, to the south of which the landscape becomes more open as it falls away into the Avon Valley. The boundary then extends eastwards following roads and field boundaries, to include the more landscapes enclosed by hills and the low wooded hills to the north of Welford-on-Avon. It then heads north to separate the more treed landscape with hillside woodlands to the west from the more open, settled arable farmland around Wilmcote to the east. The boundary then returns on an easterly path to include the parkland and wooded hills around Bearley, before heading south again to include the Welcombe Hills and country park. The boundary keeps close to the Stratford-upon-Avon settlement edge in this area, before heading north again along the A439. Finally it turns east to meet the district boundary and encompass the relic deerpark on Castle Hill. Roads are kept to where possible for simplicity, but where necessary field boundaries are also followed.

Key Management Recommendations

- 6.12. The following management recommendations are proposed to maintain and enhance the key qualities of the SLA:
- Manage woodlands to ensure continuity of woodland cover, especially ancient woodlands, and restore using native broadleaf species where necessary, with oak as the dominant species. Plantations should also become broadleaf on a phased basis. New woodland should reflect the character and scale of existing woodland.
 - Conserve old oaks and encourage oak seedlings to regenerate in hedgerows, woodlands and as specimens to ensure continuity of character.
 - Manage hedgerows to maintain and enhance a strong characteristic hedgerow pattern, reinstating hedgerows where these have been removed beneath oaks. New hedgerows in the landscape and around houses/development should include native species only.
 - Conserve and enhance permanent pasture encouraging species diversity.
 - Conserve field ponds, particularly in areas of permanent pasture.
 - Conserve the continuity of river corridors, maintaining the river course and floodplain character, riparian vegetation and associated traditional grassland.
 - Conserve parkland and its features, restoring these where possible.
 - Conserve settlement character by restricting development to that which reflects the vernacular style, scale, pattern and materials.
- 6.13. It should be noted that the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines and Stratford-on-Avon Design Guide provide an in depth series of descriptions and management recommendations which should be followed in addition to the above.



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Figure 8
Arden Candidate SLA

Photos

Photos that illustrate the typical character of the area are set out below:



Typical skyline woodland on steep slopes and hilltops which define valleys within and on the edge of the area



Typical hedgerow oaks with woodland on skyline



Strong enclosure of hedgerow oaks in the Arden Pastures



Tanworth-in-Arden- a hilltop village in Ancient Arden



Earlswood Lakes in the Arden pastures - canal reservoirs popular for recreation



Welcombe Hills country park and obelisk on the edge of the Avon Valley

7. Cotswold Fringe

Key qualities

- 7.1. The key qualities of the area are:
- A simple landscape of small rounded hills, slopes and valleys which form the transition between the Cotswolds AONB and the Feldon Vale.
 - A medium to large scale regular field pattern.
 - Mixed farmland with pockets of permanent pasture with ridge and furrow.
 - Small scale watercourses with riparian vegetation.
 - Small scale plantations and tree belts.
 - A sparse settlement pattern of small nucleated villages with Cotswolds or Hornton stone buildings, some with drystone boundary walls.
 - Often straight roads such as the Fosse Way.
 - Unspoilt, wide views of the open Feldon Vale and Feldon Parklands to the north with the strong backdrop of the Cotswolds scarp to the south.

Description

- 7.2. The area lies predominantly in the National Character Area of the Cotswolds fringing Dunsmore and Feldon to the north. It is a transitional landscape in terms of topography comprising low rounded hills and slopes rising from the vale to the higher, steeper slopes of the Cotswold hills to the south. The slopes tend to be fairly open with medium to large regular fields and very sparse settlement. The simple, rounded hills form the local skyline in places. Farmland is mixed arable and grassland with some pockets of permanent pasture with ridge and furrow. Hedges are trimmed in places and outgrown elsewhere, and have been removed in places, rationalising arable fields. Tree cover tends to be limited to a few hedgerow trees, small plantations and along linear features such as small watercourses or dismantled railway lines. Settlement is sparse, avoiding more exposed slopes, and tends to be focussed in small nucleated villages such as Stretton-on-Fosse. There are isolated farmsteads in sheltered locations. The vernacular building materials are Cotswold or Hornton stone, some with drystone boundary walls. Roads are often straight, such as the Fosse Way which passes through the area.

Justification of Need

- 7.3. The justification for this SLA is on the grounds that:
- The low rounded hills mark a distinct change in topography from the gently undulating Feldon Vale to the north, providing a pleasing, simple, rounded local skyline and complementing the steep slopes of the Cotswolds AONB as a scenic backdrop to the vale.
 - The topography complements and integrates the nucleated villages of attractive stone buildings and structures into the landscape.
 - The ridge and furrow give a pleasing texture and interest to the landscape and expresses its historical use.
 - The area is generally well maintained although hedges have been lost or are poorly maintained in places.

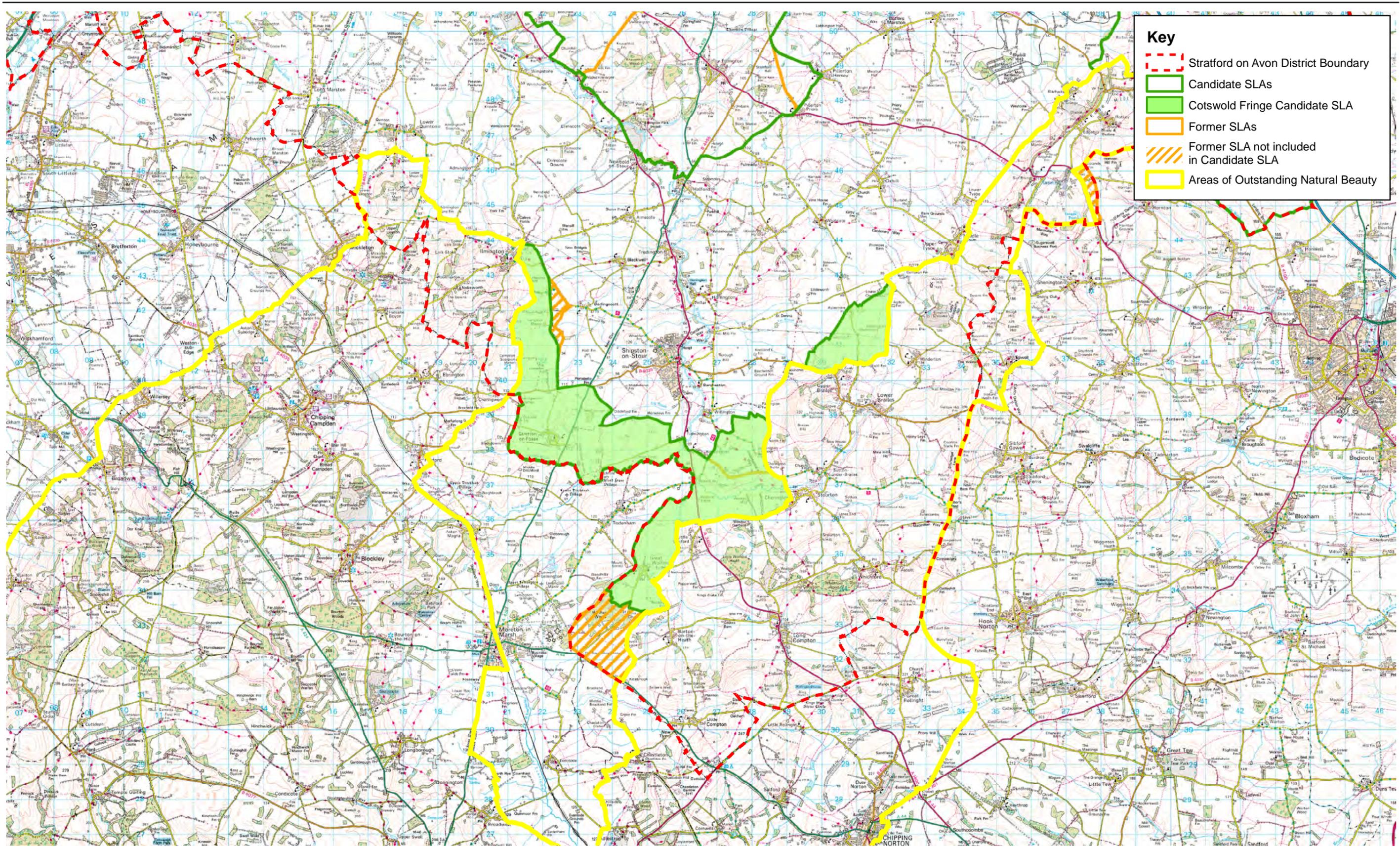
- The area's natural heritage features are limited to a few potential Local Wildlife Sites due to its simple pattern and management.
 - The area's cultural heritage features include Stretton-on-Fosse and Great Wolford Conservation Areas and the edge of Ilmington Conservation Area to the north west. There is a moated site SAM in Great Wolford. Listed buildings lie on the edge of the area in Burmington (eg Church of St Barnabas and St Nicholas), and in isolated hamlets such as Longdon Manor. The Fosse Way Roman road passes through the area and ridge and furrow is apparent.
 - The area's marginal location with limited settlement means it is generally tranquil away from the Fosse Way.
 - Although in two parts, the area is coherent as the transitional hill and slope landscape related to the Cotswolds.
 - The area has been defined as an SLA before [to slightly different boundaries] and so there is a degree of consensus as to its perceived value.
- 7.4. The extent to which the designation will be more effective than criteria-based policies in safeguarding, managing or promoting the special attributes of the area are:
- The simplicity, openness and prominence of the area in places, its ridge and furrow and its sparse settlement pattern needs protection.
 - The location of the area abutting the Cotswolds AONB and its hill backdrop increases its sensitivity.
 - The area is under pressure from rural development, such as large single houses, being close to the Cotswolds and this development is inappropriate in this open landscape with its discreet built form. All development needs to respect the special qualities of the area.

Explanation of Boundary

- 7.5. The candidate SLA is shown on **Figure 9**. It is recommended that the boundary for this area changes the former SLA to include those areas that reflect the key qualities and exclude those that do not. The boundaries are described as follows:
- The Cotswolds AONB forms the western, eastern and part of the southern boundary.
 - The district boundary forms part of the southern boundary as the characteristics of the area run further south and are defined currently as SLAs by Cotswold District Council.
 - South of Great Wolford, the SLA is terminated where the landform becomes a gentle vale.
 - The northern boundaries are defined by the break of slope between the low hills and the gentle vale and are generally defined by minor roads or a dismantled railway line to the west.
 - The additional candidate area to the north of Brailes is defined by the break in slope along field boundaries.

Key Management Recommendations

- 7.6. The following management recommendations are proposed to maintain and enhance the key qualities of the SLA:
- Conserve and enhance permanent pasture encouraging species diversity.
 - Conserve the remaining ridge and furrow landscapes.
 - Consider converting arable land back to pasture.
 - Conserve the historic pattern of large hedged fields and manage hedgerows to enhance primary hedgelines.
 - Enhance and manage tree cover and plantations, especially on rising ground, using native broadleaf species.
 - Encourage regeneration of trees in hedgelines.
 - Conserve riparian vegetation.
 - Conserve settlement character by restricting new development to nucleated villages and reflecting the vernacular style, scale, pattern and materials.
 - Avoid development on and near the Fosse Way to retain its historic linear and rural character.
- 7.7. It should be noted that the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines provide an in depth series of descriptions and management recommendations which should be followed in addition to the above.



Key

- Stratford on Avon District Boundary
- Candidate SLAs
- Cotswold Fringe Candidate SLA
- Former SLAs
- Former SLA not included in Candidate SLA
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty



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Figure 9
Cotswold Fringe Candidate SLA

Photos

Photos that illustrate the typical character of the area are set out below:



Simple rounded skyline of small hills flanking Ilmington



Small hills of SLA complementing the form of the higher Cotswolds AONB hills behind



Rolling hills with strong tree cover and hedgerows in places- near the Fosse Way



Outgrown hedges on rising land with ridge and furrow

8. Feldon Parklands

Key qualities

8.1. The key qualities of the area are:

- A large scale rolling topography with occasional steep scarp slopes, especially to the north.
- Small scale water courses in valleys incised into higher ground.
- Large woodlands, some ancient, with linear woodlands associated with steep slopes.
- Plantations, small coverts and belts of trees.
- Subsidiary large scale field pattern with low cut hedges.
- Large country houses set in mature parkland, some with water features.
- A nucleated pattern of small estate villages.
- Large isolated brick farmsteads.
- Roads are often direct/straight, including the Fosse Way Roman road.
- Unspoilt rural skyline when viewed from the surrounding vale.

Description

8.2. The Feldon Parklands lie in the Dunsmore and Feldon National Character Area. The area has a generally large scale rolling topography elevated above the surrounding vale with steep scarp slopes to the north, abutting the Avon Vale. The slopes to the south are gentler with less well defined breaks in slope. There are small scale incised valleys such as around Combrook and Walton Park. The scarp slopes and steep valley sides are wooded, giving them added drama and forming a distinct edge to the area to the north. There are also large scale woodlands and plantations on the upper plateau, which, with smaller scale coverts and tree belts give some enclosure in an otherwise large scale open landscape. The sweeping and wooded skylines are an important feature of the area. The field pattern is generally large scale with trimmed hedges and land use includes a mix of arable and pastoral farmland with woodlands. Settlement appears to be dominated by an estate pattern with nucleated small estate villages, occasional large farmsteads and large country houses in parkland. The vernacular style is generally red brick with blue brick edging and slate roofing but stone is used in places such as at Combrook with its estate cottages. The parklands are often well wooded with specimen trees such as Wellingtonia, and there are water features. Compton Verney is the most extensive and best preserved with its extensive lakes but others, such as at Ettington, Moreton Hall and Walton Park contribute strongly to local landscape character. The remnant parkland at Ettington also displays extensive ridge and furrow, a feature which is also apparent elsewhere. Roads are often direct and straight, such as the Fosse Way Roman road which traverses the area.

Justification of Need

8.3. The justification for this SLA is on the grounds that:

- The area has scenic quality in terms of its juxtaposition of well wooded scarp with the vale to the north, sweeping skylines with trees, the intimate wooded incised valley slopes and the parkland such as at Compton Verney with its fine lake, buildings and structures.

- The area is generally well managed with strong woodland and plantations resulting in generally high landscape quality although this has been eroded by hedgerow removal.
 - The area's natural heritage features include many linear ancient woodlands eg Wellesbourne Woods and Bath Hill Wood on slopes to the north, Knavehill Wood SSSI and ancient woodland to the south west including Ettington Grove. Oxhouse Farm nature reserve and SSSI [herb rich meadows] lie to the south east.
 - The area's cultural heritage features include Compton Verney registered Park and Garden with associated ancient woodland, which is also a Conservation Area with Combrook with its listed buildings and structures (eg obelisk, bridges). There is a Conservation Area at Moreton Morrell and at Halford on the edge of an area, and listed buildings in Ettington and around Walton Hall.
 - Away from the Fosse Way and other busy roads there is some degree of tranquillity.
 - The area has integrity and coherence in terms of its change in level from the Vale and the prevalence of parkland and estate farming.
 - The scarp slope woodlands and parkland have a degree of rarity.
 - The area has been defined as an SLA before [to slightly different boundaries] and so there is a degree of consensus as to its perceived value.
- 8.4. The extent to which the area will be more effective than criteria policies in safeguarding, managing or promoting the special attributes of the designation are:
- The area has a particular distinctive character which deserves special recognition eg the scarp slope woodlands, unspoilt skylines and valley parklands.
 - The area has a character which is being eroded over time and needs specific management eg woodland and parkland management.

Explanation of Boundary

- 8.5. The candidate SLA is shown on **Figure 10**. It is recommended that the boundary for this area changes the former SLA to include those areas that reflect the key qualities and exclude those that do not. The boundaries are described as follows:
- The northern boundary follows the approximate foot of the slope between the rising ground of the SLA and the vale to the north. This is well defined in places where there is a steep slope and less well defined in others. The estate parkland at Moreton House and settlement at Moreton Morrell is included in the area. At Walton Hall, the incised wooded valley is also included with parkland and the estate settlement.
 - Further south west lower rounded wooded hills are included as they relate more to the undulating parklands than the vale.
 - The south western boundary follows the break of slope along the Stour Valley initially but then crosses the river to include the parkland associated with Ettington Park. It then follows the river course to Halford where it strikes north. From here the boundary follows roads which rise

to Pillerton Priors and Pillerton Hersey as the break of slope is poorly defined to the south.

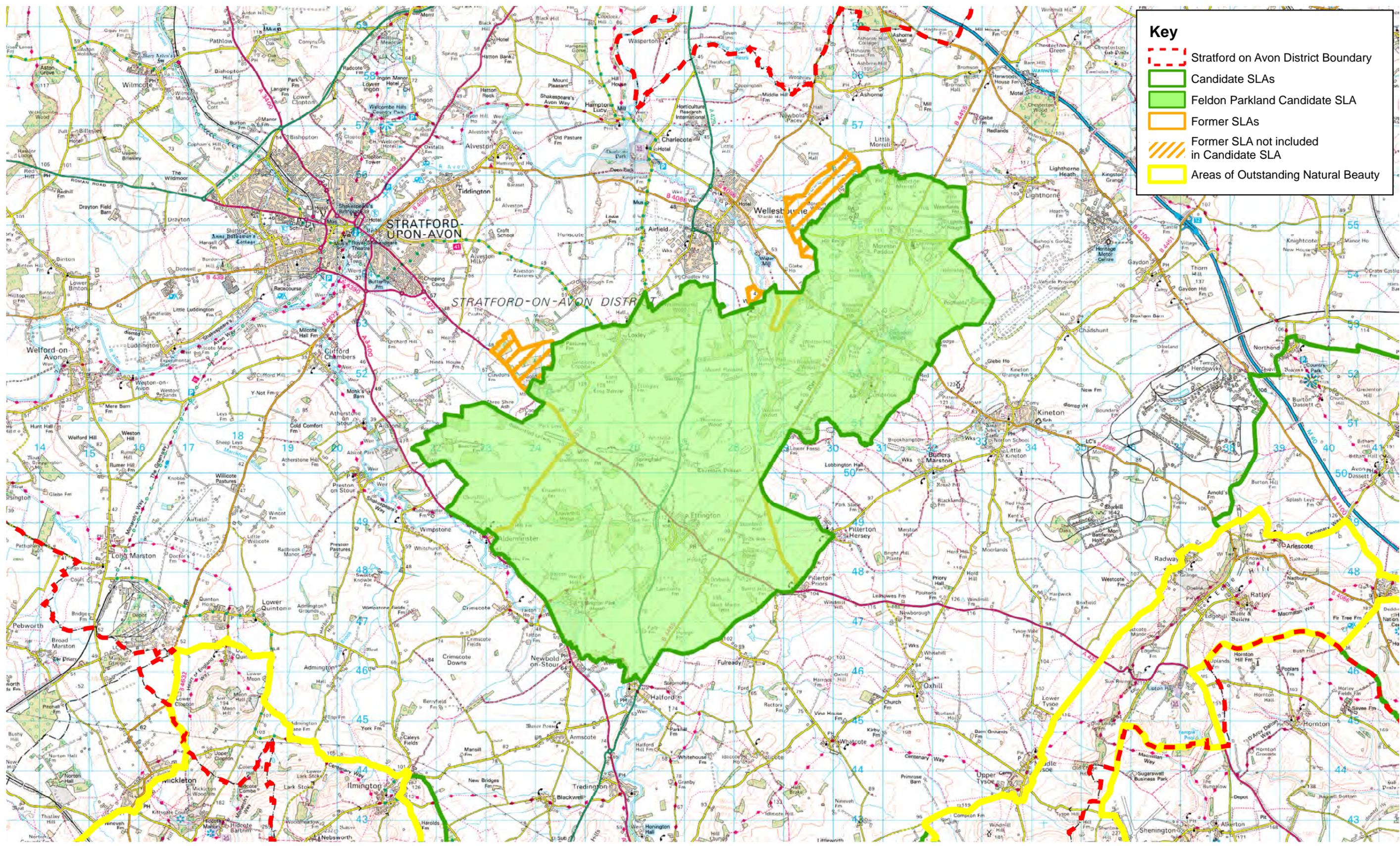
- The south eastern boundary continues north to include the Fosse Way and then strikes east so that it incorporates the park and estate lands associated with Compton Verney.
- The north eastern boundary then strikes north to avoid the Gaydon Vehicle Proving Grounds and to meet the break of slope boundary around Moreton Morrell.

Key Management Recommendations

8.6. The following management recommendations are proposed to maintain and enhance the key qualities of the SLA:

- Manage woodlands to ensure continuity of woodland cover, especially ancient woodlands and woodlands on skylines and steep slopes, and restore using native broadleaf species with oak as the dominant species as necessary. New woodland should reflect the character and scale of existing woodland.
- Long rotation coppicing can be used in neglected small woods and coverts.
- Conserve the historic pattern of large hedged fields and manage hedgerows to enhance primary hedgelines, encouraging the natural regeneration of oaks.
- Conserve parkland and its features, restoring where possible.
- Conserve the remaining ridge and furrow landscapes.
- Conserve the continuity of watercourse corridors, maintaining the river course character and riparian vegetation.
- Conserve settlement character by restricting development to that which reflects the vernacular style, scale, pattern and materials.
- Avoid development on and near the Fosse Way to retain its historic linear and rural character.

8.7. It should be noted that the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines provide an in depth series of descriptions and management recommendations which should be followed in addition to the above.



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Figure 10
Feldon Parkland Candidate SLA

Photos

Photos that illustrate the typical character of the area are set out below:



Steep wooded slopes with parkland on the northern edge of the SLA at Walton Hall



Intimate wooded valley with pasture at Combrook



Strong woodland creating some enclosure on undulating upper plateau



Distinctive wooded skyline of SLAs northern edge viewed from the Feldon Vale



Road illustrating undulating landform on plateau and strong hedgerows with oak

9. Ironstone Hill Fringe

Key qualities

9.1. The key qualities of the area are:

- A rolling landscape including occasional prominent ironstone hills, ridges and slopes which forms the transition between the Northamptonshire Ironstone Hills and the Feldon Vale.
- A medium to large scale regular strongly hedged field pattern with occasional trees.
- Occasional woodlands, some large on hills such as at Shuckburgh, with smaller copses in places such as those associated with steep hillsides.
- Mixed farmland, now dominated by arable, with pockets of permanent pasture, some with ridge and furrow.
- A sparse settlement pattern of small nucleated villages often on rising ground with Ironstone buildings, some thatch or stone tiles, and with drystone boundary walls.
- Features such as wooded parkland at Shuckburgh, the disturbed historical landscape of quarries at Burton Dassett and deserted medieval village sites.
- Few roads with large areas of inaccessible countryside.
- The Oxford Canal on the boundary often defining the break in slope and providing a sinuous landscape feature with historical interest, with users enjoying views of the hill fringe.
- Unspoilt, wide views of the Feldon Vale to the north from viewpoints, in particular from the Burton Dassett Hills Country Park.

Description

9.2. The Ironstone Hill Fringe lies predominantly in the Northamptonshire Uplands National Character Area. It is a rolling landscape of occasional prominent ironstone hills, ridges and slopes which forms the transition between the Northamptonshire Ironstone Hills and the Feldon Vale. Hills such as those at Shuckburgh and Napton-on-the-Hill and at Burton Dassett are noticeable from the vale to the north west. Within the area, there are further hills, such as Marston Hill, which reach higher elevations. Woodlands are relatively few although prominent woods at Shuckburgh are an exception. In places, copses and belts of trees are associated with steep slopes, such as at Burton Dassett and east of Priors Marston. Once mainly pasture, the area is now dominated by arable, with pockets of permanent pasture with ridge and furrow, mainly on steeper slopes. Fields are medium to large scale and regular with well trimmed or outgrown hedges with occasional trees, often depending if the use is arable or pasture. Settlement is sparse consisting of small nucleated villages often on rising ground with Ironstone buildings, some of which are thatched or stone tiled, and with drystone boundary walls. Few roads link the villages resulting in large areas of inaccessible and tranquil countryside. The area has some significant historic interest. Deserted medieval village sites are apparent at Wormleighton, Shuckburgh and Priors Hardwick. Farnborough Hall is a Registered Park and Garden with listed buildings and Conservation Area. Most villages are Conservation Areas. The area enjoys views of the unspoilt vale to the north from

various elevated viewpoints, such as the distinctive former quarry landscape of Burton Dassett Hills Country Park, and from the Oxford Canal which acts as the boundary for some of the area.

Justification of Need

9.3. The justification for this SLA is on the grounds that:

- The area has scenic quality in terms of the juxtaposition of its steep hills with the vale, the distinctive elevated green landscape of former quarry 'lumps and bumps' of the Burton Dassett Hills Country Park, the well wooded rounded hill at Shuckburgh, the pleasing undulating countryside with strong field boundaries and ridge and furrow in places, Ironstone villages and buildings, occasional parkland and the wide views over the Feldon Vale.
- The area is generally well managed with strong hedgerows resulting in generally high landscape quality although this has been eroded by hedgerow removal in places.
- The area's natural heritage features include Ancient Woodland at Long Hill Wood, Shuckburgh to north east and a number of potential local wildlife sites.
- The area's cultural heritage features are numerous. Farnborough Hall is a registered Park and Garden with listed buildings and Conservation Area. There are Medieval settlements SAMs at Wormleighton, Shuckburgh and Priors Hardwick. Gredenton Hill Camp is also a SAM. Conservation Areas lie in almost all villages ie Fenny Compton, Avon Dassett, Shotteswell, Wormleighton, Priors Marston, Priors Hardwick, Lower Shuckburgh, and the bordering villages of Arlescote and Warmington in the Cotswolds AONB. Listed buildings are mainly clustered in settlements. For instance, at Northend listed buildings include the elegant Manor House and there are many listed buildings in Napton-on-the-Hill. The structures on the Oxford canal, such as locks and bridges, are also listed. The distinctive beacon tower on Burton Dassett Hills is listed.
- The very limited number of roads and clustered settlement pattern mean that the area enjoys a significant degree of tranquillity, away from the M40.
- The area has a distinctive character, coherence and integrity with the hill slopes and elevation defining it from the gentler vale to the north.
- The area has a number of features which are rare in the district such as the Burton Dassett Hills and the distinctive ironstone villages.
- The area has been defined as an SLA before [to slightly different boundaries] and so there is a degree of consensus as to its perceived value.

9.4. The extent to which the designation will be more effective than criteria-based policies in safeguarding, managing or promoting the special attributes of the area are:

- The openness and prominence of the hill slopes and ridge and furrow need protection.
- The distinctiveness of the Burton Dassett Hills and Ironstone villages need particular recognition due their rarity in the District.

- The area's sparse settlement pattern and tranquillity need special protection, the latter complemented by the Oxford canal.

Explanation of Boundary

9.5. The candidate SLA is shown on **Figure 11**. It is recommended that the boundary for this area changes the former SLA to exclude areas that do not reflect the key qualities. The boundaries are described as follows:

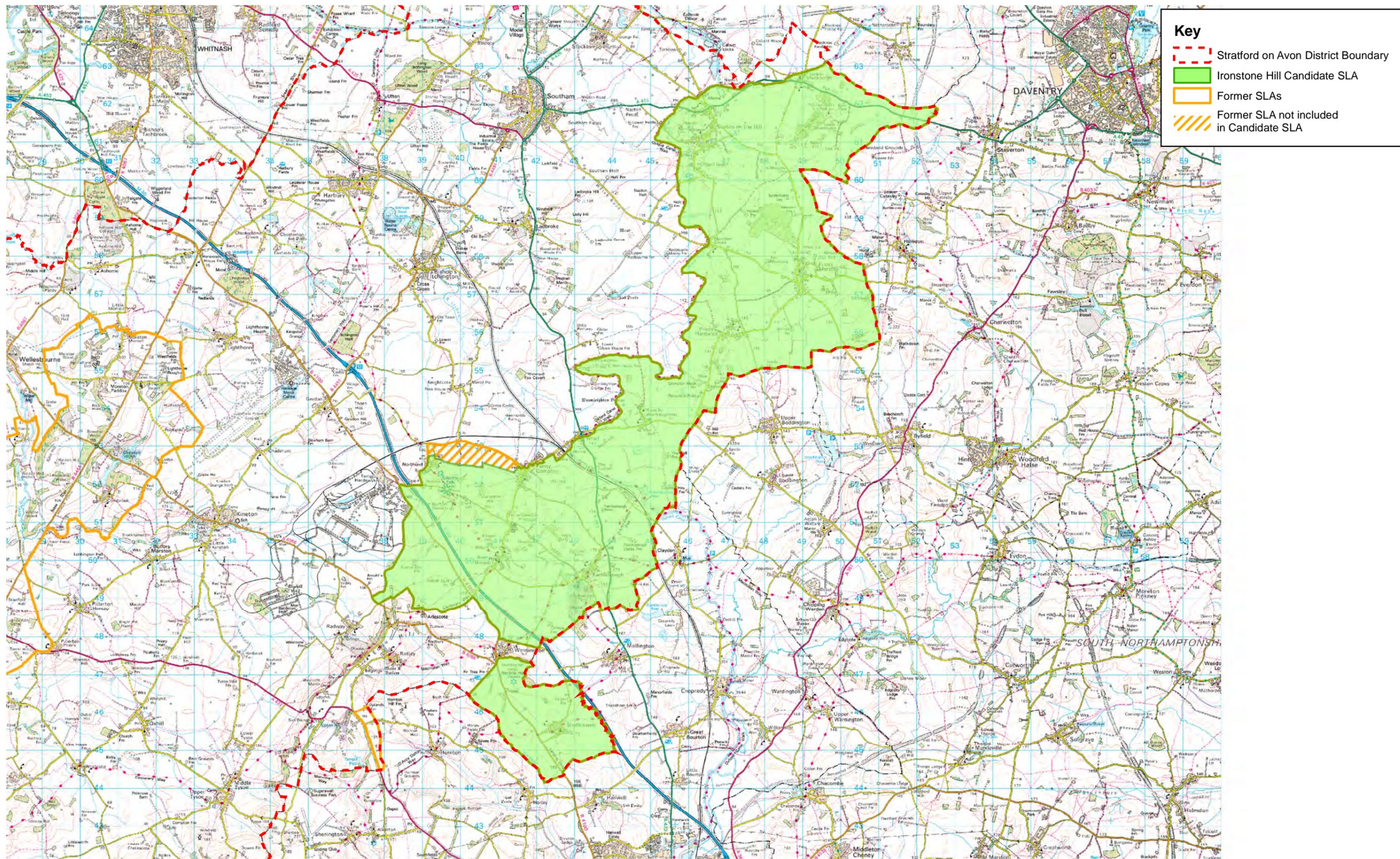
- The southern area is divided from the northern area by the furthest north east extension of the Cotswolds AONB at Warmington which includes a steep slope and the village. The candidate SLA here forms a flat hilltop and hill slopes which are reflected by the landscapes to the south, east and west and so the boundary of the area is the district boundary. The areas to the east are currently defined as Special Landscape Areas by the relevant districts.
- North of Warmington, the boundary follows the AONB boundary on slightly lower land and then turns north east close to the break of slope on a minor road. The bulk of the village of Northend is included on rising ground at the foot of the Burton Dassett Hills, and then the boundary follows field boundaries on the break of slope to and beyond Fenny Compton.
- To the north east of the village, the boundary picks up and follows the Oxford Canal until it crosses the District boundary, north east of Lower Shuckburgh. Though the canal ventures a little way into the Feldon Vale it often follows the break of slope, consistently follows contours and is an important and positive landscape feature in itself. It also defines the edge of outlying but distinctive hill settlements such as Napton-on-the-Hill with its windmill.
- To the north and east, the boundary follows the District boundary because the landscape character continues into Northamptonshire.

Key Management Recommendations

9.6. The following management recommendations are proposed to maintain and enhance the key qualities of the SLA:

- Conserve the historic pattern of large hedged fields and manage hedgerows to enhance primary hedgelines.
- Conserve the diversity of unimproved grassland on steep hillsides through regular grazing.
- Conserve all remaining ridge and furrow landscapes.
- Enhance tree cover with woodland planting on rising ground.
- Conserve parkland and its features, restoring where possible.
- Conserve the remote and tranquil character of the landscape by limiting new development.
- Conserve settlement character by restricting development to that which reflects the vernacular style, scale, pattern and materials.

9.7. It should be noted that the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines and Stratford-on-Avon Design Guide provide an in depth series of descriptions and management recommendations which should be followed in addition to the above.



Key

- Stratford on Avon District Boundary
- Ironstone Hill Candidate SLA
- Former SLAs
- Former SLA not included in Candidate SLA

0 3 6 12 km



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Figure 11
Ironstone Hill Candidate SLA

Photos

Photos that illustrate the typical character of the area are set out below:



View from Burton Dassett Hills along Ironstone Fringe hillsides to Feldon Vale with woodland and ridge and furrow apparent on slopes



The distinctive elevated landscape and Beacon Tower at Burton Dassett Hills Country Park



Woodland, arable and pasture in well defined pattern on hillside



Road with trimmed thorn hedges running along foot of steep slope near the edge of the SLA



Sweeping skyline with trees near the southern limits of the SLA near Shotteswell



An ironstone village with wooded backdrop- Priors Marston