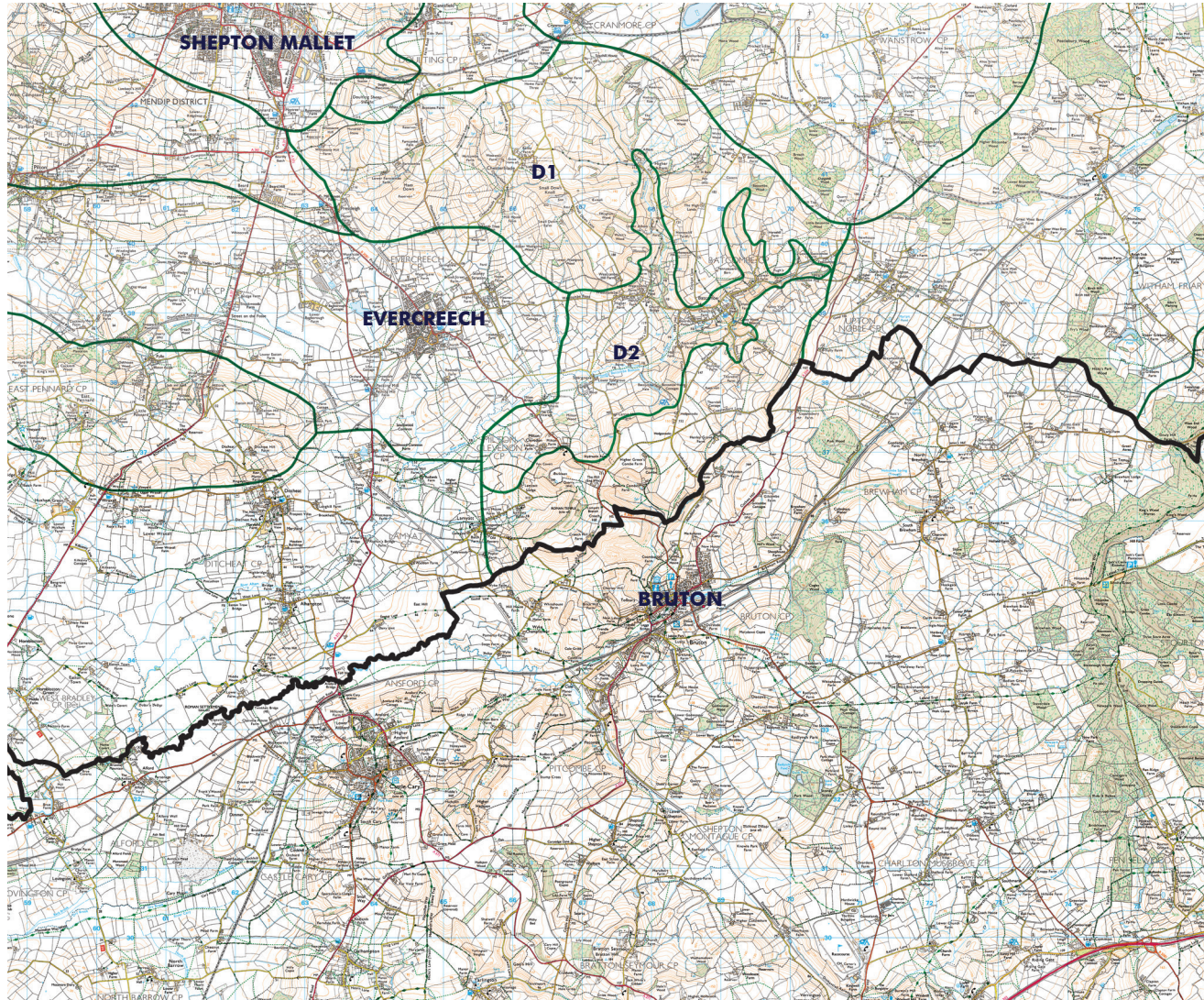


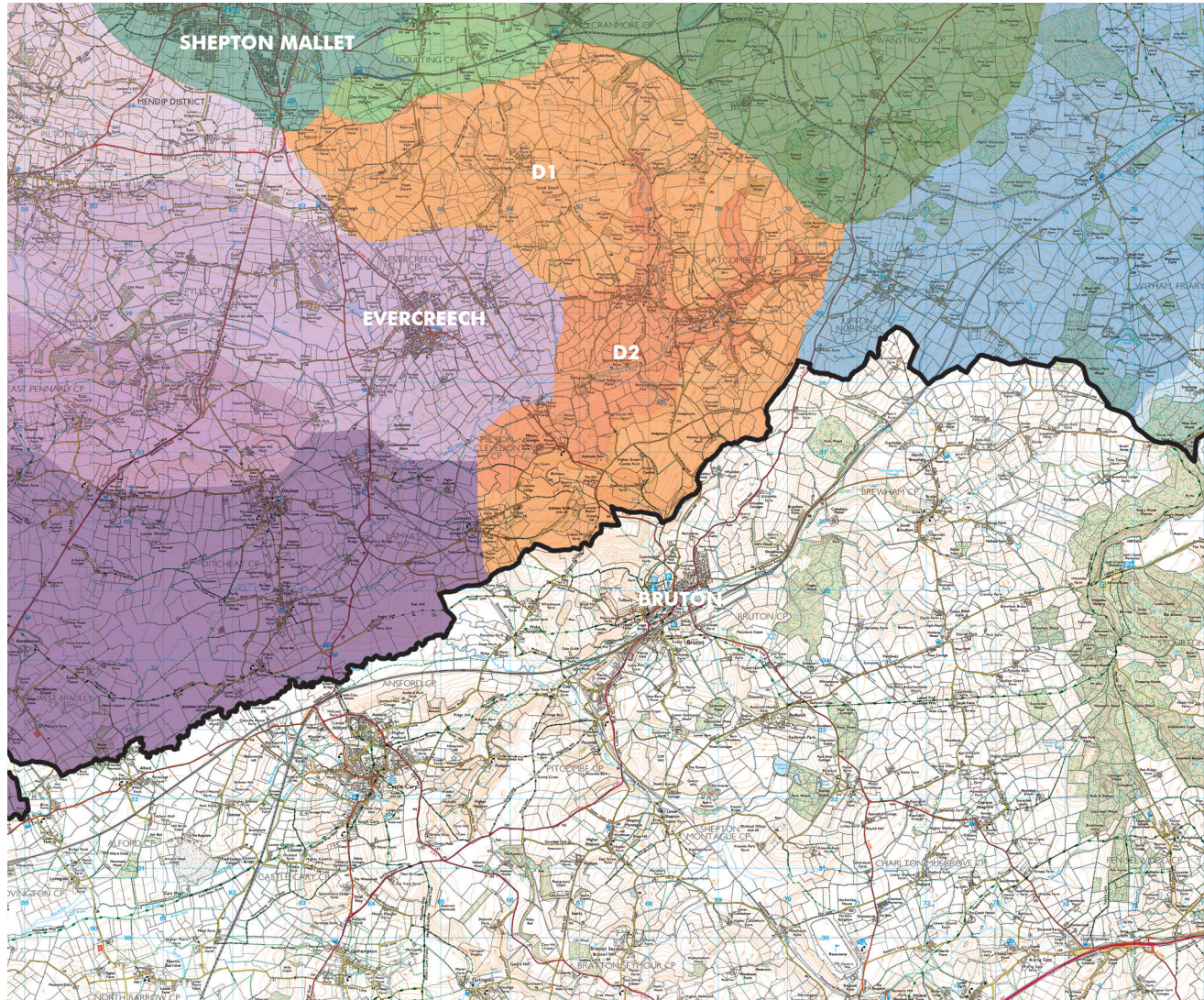
6.5 BATCOMBE DOWNS AND VALLEYS



MENDIP CHARACTER AREAS

- D1** **The Downs, Slopes and Valley Heads**
- D2** **The Alham Valley**

6.5 BATCOMBE DOWNS AND VALLEYS



MENDIP CHARACTER AREAS

- D1 The Downs, Slopes and Valley Heads
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- **D1** **The Downs, Slopes and Valley Heads**
- **D2** **The Alham Valley**

South Somerset

- **SS-6** **Escarments Ridges & Vales East of Yeovil**
■ **SS-7** **Central Plain, Moors & River Basins**

6.5 BATCOMBE DOWNS AND VALLEYS

- 6.5.1 Located at roughly the mid-point on the southern edge of the MDC District area this small area provides an interesting transition between the enclosed vale that contains the upper Frome Valley (LCA B1) and the lower more open valleys of the Brue and Whitelake (LCA E1 and E2). The area is an elevated arc of high downland hills with the deep headwater valley of the Alham River.
- 6.5.2 The eastern boundary of the area is essentially the watershed between the Frome and Alham. To the north the landscape merges into the Mendip ridge; with subtle divisions of the watersheds of the Nunney Brook and Sheppey Valley.
- 6.5.3 To the south the district boundary cuts across the area with similar landscape extending into South Somerset. The small towns of Bruton and Castle Cary are located across the border within this same landscape; the location of these towns and main line railway outside of the Mendip district area away from the character areas described below has helped ensure they have more tranquil timeless qualities.
- 6.5.4 The overall area is subdivided into two distinct character areas as follows;
- D1 The Downs, Slopes and Valley Heads which relate to the higher ground of the arc around the second area;
 - D2 The Alham Valley

DI THE DOWNS, SLOPES AND VALLEY HEADS

- 6.5.5 Close to Shepton Mallet the land rises up steeply into the start of the a series of Downland hilltops at Whitstone Hill (at 203 m AOD). Further east the high ground continues to the south of Cranmore; to the south east of the village, Withywood Lane marks the watershed between the Alham and Whatley Bottom streams (LCA A 10.4 & A11). Further east again the A359 follows the ridge that separates this area from the upper valleys of the River Frome. The high ground extends around to Milton Clevedon in the south.
- 6.5.6 While the hill tops within this area are all generally around the same level of approximately 200 m AOD, suggesting a former plateau the whole area has been cut down into with a series of deep combe valleys (LCA D2). The ridges between the branches of the Alham valley remain as remnant fingers of this plateau characterised by gently rolling open landscape. By contrast the valley sides often drop away steeply into the deep narrow combes.
- 6.5.7 The area is not heavily wooded or treed; there are a few small farm woodland areas. The landscape is predominantly grassland grazing or hay and silage cropped fields. On the flatter land of the ridgeline plateaus some localised arable production is included. The fields are a mix of smaller scale irregular patterns on the slopes and larger regular enclosures on the ridge tops. Most areas are enclosed with close cut hedges with occasional hedgerow trees, in places these have been replaced with wire fencing.
- 6.5.8 The landscape is not heavily settled there are a few dispersed farmsteads and a few very small clusters

of properties including Chesterblade and Higher Alham. These are all nestled into small hollows or valley sides rather than being on the highest points. The area is served only by long winding mostly single tracked roads. As a consequence the hamlets feel isolated; and with mostly historic local stone cottages and farmhouses quite timeless

- 6.5.9 At the head of a Alham tributary Southhill House sits in a small area of parkland landscape. The small country house glimpsed from the public lane is Grade I listed and includes work of John Wood the Younger from Bath. Parts of the parkland are enclosed by metal estate railing. Historic mapping indicates the parkland was once heavily treed; some free-standing parkland trees remain.
- 6.5.10 Earlier traces of settlement exist in the area in the form of two Iron Age hilltop forts (Small Down Knoll and Fox Covert) and a Roman temple site near the district boundary. All three are scheduled ancient monuments and Fox Covert sits within a Special Landscape Feature Area. While the hill forts would naturally have long ranging views they are not openly accessible; nearby lanes provide a sense of the spectacular outlook that would have been gained. Another historic mark on the hills is the Hundred Stone on Whitstone Hill linked to the Anglo-Saxon court at Cannards Grave.
- 6.5.11 The area is not easily accessed due to the topography and the lack of strategic routes connecting through the area. Consequently the character area is generally free of significant infrastructure. A power transmission line crosses the area south of Whitstone Hill and Withy Wood Lane. The line climbs up from the west on to the downs within a shallow side valley; which helps reduce the scale of the pylons in the landscape.

Once on the top of the downs the route crosses the upper parts of the small combe valleys (including parts of LCA D2). With the rolling landform and otherwise dramatic views the scale and intrusion of the line is diminished.

6.5.12 Although the area includes various minor lanes well suited for recreational access the higher hill areas are not extensively accessible via public footpaths. Those that do exist and lanes provide varied routes which also connect with more of a PROW network in the lower valleys (LCA D2). The lanes provide many and views out across the down-land hills to the wider landscape. Several of these routes are ridgeline routes which accentuate the available panoramic views.

BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENTS FROM '97 ASSESSMENT

Slight adjustment to boundary between D1 and D2 to reflect incised form of Alham Valley and correct slight shift in boundaries position from original mapping



View over Batcombe Valley from Seat Lane

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF :- LCA D1 THE DOWNS, SLOPES AND VALLEY HEADS	
PHYSICAL/NATURAL CHARACTERISTICS	SETTLEMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE
- Dramatic landform of small downs & deep combe valleys - Mixed pattern of predominantly small scale irregular fields with some larger arable - Limited woodland cover	- Sparsely populated higher areas, farmsteads & occasional dwellings in sheltered spots - Main road skirts area on high ridge between LCA areas. - Power transmission line crosses
LAND USE/MANAGEMENT/HUMAN INFLUENCES	PERCEIVED CHARACTERISTICS
- Majority of area managed farmland with improved grasslands, including wildlife site grasslands - Occasional steeper areas lighter management - Areas of ancient woodland	- Remote & isolated - Tranquil away from main road - Secluded area reinforced by network of narrow lanes - Occasional dramatic expansive views / exposed condition on the higher lanes, contrast with more intimate secluded viewpoints lower down.
SPECIAL FEATURES – NOTE NOT ALL FEATURES DESIGNATED	
- Iron Age Forts & Roman SAM - Creech Hill SLF	
LANDMARKS, VIEWS AND VIEWPOINTS	
Extensive views to the west in various directions - including some spectacular views across the low lying land to the west of the Tor, north to Cranmore Twer and Alfred's Tower. Other notable landforms/hill tops add to visual interest.	

D2 THE ALHAM VALLEY

- 6.5.13 The River Alham rises as several small streams within small combe valleys that come together in and around the village of Batcombe. These are deeply incised down into the Downland Landscape of LCA D1. Downstream of the village the main valley widens out into a more open landscape. Near Milton Clevedon the valley is contained on its southern side by the steep slopes of the Down but to the north the landform is a much more gentle open vale extending towards Stoney Stratton and Evercreech (LCA E1.1).
- 6.5.14 As suggested by the various 'Combe' place names the landscape is defined by small scale narrow valleys. These contrast strongly with the down-land plateaus of the hilltops above (LCA D1). In places the hillside slopes exhibit the narrow terraces of 'sheep-walks' (mini terraces in the ground profile potentially caused by soil movement on steep slopes).
- 6.5.15 With the steep valleys the streams are fast flowing, but include frequent weirs, sluices and various ponds and channels. A few mill buildings/references are noted on the maps at Spargrove (listed) Mill Farmhouse (listed) and the Mill Lane in Batcombe. At the lower end of the character area the stream slows down into a flatter meandering course.
- 6.5.16 In the upstream sections the valley slopes include small areas of woodland cover. The field pattern in the valleys is small scale irregular shaped with hedged boundaries. The field areas are used mainly for grazing. Some of the steeper slopes appear as unimproved grasslands and include various local plan wildlife sites.

- 6.5.17 In contrast to the Downland landscape above the lower parts of the valley are settled. The villages of Batcombe and Westcombe being the main areas. Other smaller clusters of houses and farms also follow the valley. Within the village areas most of the properties are dispersed along small scale lanes. Within Batcombe and to a lesser extent Westcombe there are sections of more terraced street frontage. Both these and the smaller settlements also include a few larger houses. These include the Batcombe and West Combe Houses, and the moated manor at Spargrove (listed buildings group and scheduled ancient monument). Westcombe House is noted as having been contained within an enclosed parkland.
- 6.5.18 An area around the Spargrove Manor SAM is also identified as a Special Landscape Area protecting a complex of medieval farms and mills.
- 6.5.19 Within Westcombe a long stone wall marks the boundary to the former Westcombe House. The house (long demolished) was set within a small parkland. The Alham stream is shown on historic maps passing through the grounds, with weirs damming to make ornamental ponds. Whilst the main house has gone the stable block (Grade II listed) two garden bridges and a grotto are noted as remaining elements of the historic landscape.
- 6.5.20 A few small orchards remain around the villages and farms. Reference to the historic mapping indicates how these are only a small proportion of the historic orchard settings to the villages.
- 6.5.21 As the valleys and villages are accessed via a series of small winding lanes with steep hills and/or some distance off the main roads the area has a remote isolated character. With the majority of the local

buildings being traditional historic character and with the strong landscape setting the area has a tranquil and very unspoilt condition. The area contains minimal modern infrastructure.

- 6.5.22 The area is served by a modest network of PROW's and the minor single track lanes providing some recreational access into the quiet and attractive valley areas. In addition a small woodland area at Coney Wood is a woodland trust nature reserve open to public access. The valley also contains a campsite and a local brewery that hosts a beer and cheese festival within Westcombe village.



The Alham Valley



The Alham Valley

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF :- LCA D2 THE ALHAM VALLEY	
PHYSICAL/NATURAL CHARACTERISTICS	SETTLEMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE
• Deep small scale valleys • Small irregular field pattern • Areas of unimproved grasslands - inc wildlife sites • Small orchards	• Villages contained within dramatic valley settings
LAND USE/MANAGEMENT/HUMAN INFLUENCES	PERCEIVED CHARACTERISTICS
• River includes various weir & mill structures	• Remote & isolated villages • Tranquil landscapes • Secluded valley landscapes
SPECIAL FEATURES – NOTE NOT ALL FEATURES DESIGNATED	
• Small dispersed historic villages • Spargrove Manor SAM & SLF • Small parklands • Orchards • Coney Wood Nature Reserve	
LANDMARKS, VIEWS AND VIEWPOINTS	
• Secluded landscape but with attractive visual amenity - complex landform provides added variety/interest to ever changing views	

BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENTS FROM '97 ASSESSMENT

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