

The Cotswolds represents the best known section of the oolitic limestone band that arcs across England from Dorset to the Humber. The western face of the Cotswolds forms a prominent escarpment with fine views across the vales of Berkeley, Gloucester and Evesham to Wales, the Forest of Dean, and the Malvern, Shropshire and Likkey Hills. Behind the escarpment lies the undulating dip slope, draining south eastwards with most rivers as tributaries of the Thames.

The landscape of the Cotswolds is the result of millions of years of natural evolutionary and climatic processes and some 6,000 years of human activity. It is a landscape rich in historical, social, economic, cultural, geographical and ecological features.

## Joint Character Areas (JCA)

The Countryside Agency and English Nature produced a map 'the Character of England: landscape, wildlife and natural features'. The map depicts the natural and cultural dimensions of the landscape.

The Cotswolds AONB lies mostly within the Cotswolds JCA which is about 1/3 as large again as the AONB, extending both northeast and south of the AONB. Parts of the Cotswolds AONB lie within:

- Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges JCA
- Avon Vale JCA
- Upper Thames Clay Vales JCA
- Northamptonshire Uplands JCA
- Dunsmore and Feldon JCA
- Severn and Avon Vale

A particularly significant part of the AONB lies within the Severn and Avon Vales JCA. This is Bredon Hill and the 'arm' of the AONB that reaches out from the scarp across the vale to capture the hill.

## Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)

The LCA is a tool for identifying features that give a locality its 'sense of place' and pinpoints what makes it different from its neighbouring areas. The assessment provides a framework for describing an area in a systematic way.

A Landscape Assessment was produced in 1990 for the then Countryside Commission to inform the review of the AONB boundary and the subsequent enlargement of the AONB to its present area. A more comprehensive Landscape Assessment and Environmental Guidelines was produced by ADAS for the Cotswolds AONB Joint Advisory Committee in 1994.

A new methodology for Landscape Character Assessments was adopted by the Countryside Agency in 2002, making the existing documents virtually obsolete. In late 2003 a new Landscape Character Assessment was completed by Landscape Design Associates for the Cotswolds AONB. It identified and described 19 different landscape types within which 68 separate landscape areas have been identified and also described.

Each of the landscape types has on average 12 key characteristics. However, the LCA has enabled the principle elements of the AONB as a whole to be identified. These elements contribute either singly, or in combination, to the unique character and quality of the Cotswold landscape and are:

- drystone walls
- hedges
- ancient semi-natural woodland and veteran trees
- permanent pasture including unimproved calcareous grassland
- archaeological sites and their setting and remnant historic landscapes
- vernacular stone buildings and their setting
- settlement patterns and relationship to landscape
- parkland and historic designed landscapes.

### Cotswolds Conservation Board

Cotswolds Discovery Centre at The Old Prison, Fosse Way, Northleach, Gloucestershire GL54 3JH

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## Landscape Strategies and Guidelines

Using the Landscape Character Assessment, Landscape Strategies and Guidelines have been produced for each of the 19 landscape character types.

Local planners and decision makers can use this information to help them make informed decisions about the suitability of proposed development or change within the Cotswold Landscape.

The Landscape Character Assessment and the Landscape Strategies and Guidelines are available on the Board's website at [www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk](http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk)

Paper copies are also available. Tel: 01451 862000.

You can also download a short booklet about the landscape of the Cotswolds.

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