

## 6 BIODIVERSITY

### 6.1 Aims

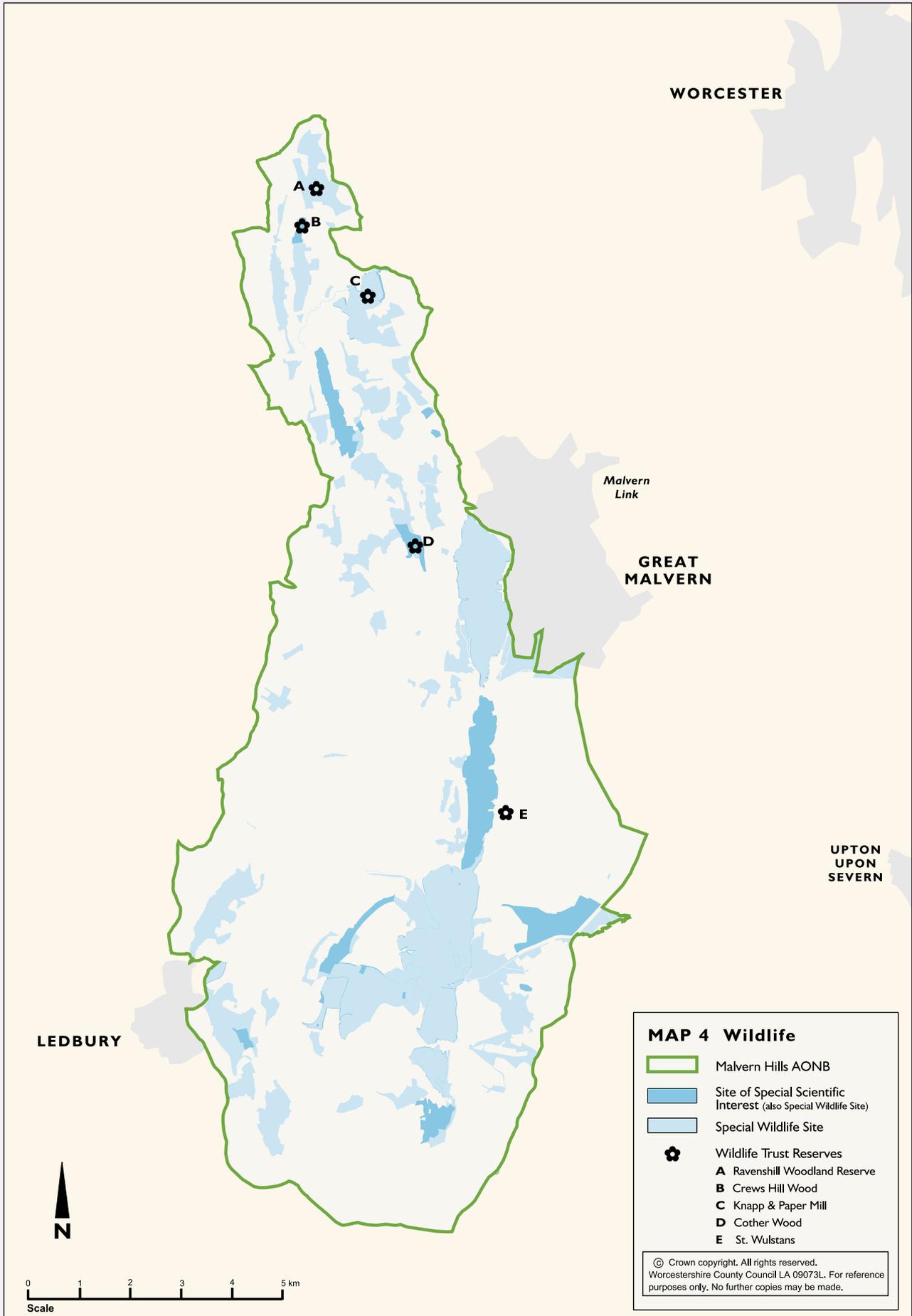
To protect, restore and enhance those habitats and species which contribute to the biodiversity of the Malvern Hills AONB

### 6.2 Background

Biodiversity describes the variety of plants, animals, birds and habitats found in an area. It is a considerably important asset to the AONB, related to its landscape and geological variety. The result is a landscape which supports a rich and varied diversity of flora and fauna. Biodiversity is important in its own right as well as for the wider well-being of the environment and the human population, and the variety and condition of habitat and species can be considered as indicators of the well being of the environment. Biodiversity Action Plans for



the United Kingdom and at County level (BAPS) to this end provide a framework for the identification, conservation, enhancement and monitoring of priority types of wildlife within the AONB. A Biodiversity Action Plan for the AONB is a key action of this Management Plan.



## 6.3 Special Features

The following are considered as being special habitats and species within the AONB, and in some instances are legally protected, for example the fourteen SSSIs and one Local Nature Reserve. Non-statutory designation is afforded by Special and Key Wildlife Sites, by the respective County Wildlife Trusts and Local Authorities.

### Lowland mixed deciduous broadleaved woodland

Over half of this type of woodland in the AONB has been in continuous tree cover for at least 400 years, and is therefore classified as Ancient Semi-natural Woodland. Within the UK it is a major concentration of ancient woodland and provides for a range of wild plants and animals.

### Acid grassland

This is well represented on the upper slopes of the Hills, and on some of the commons. It is unique as it represents an upland habitat in lowland England. It is unimproved (i.e. has not received artificial fertilizers, herbicides, drainage or ploughing) and is a habitat of major value in the AONB.

### Lowland limestone grassland

Nationally scarce, and is found on the limestone to the north and west of the AONB.

### Unimproved neutral grasslands or meadows

Rich in wildflowers, the grasslands are traditionally cut for hay or grazed by livestock, and are found within the farmed landscapes and some commons.

Autumn trees in Colwall



## Traditional standard orchards

These are important for their botanical interest in the unimproved pasture beneath the trees, and the trees offer significant support for insects and birds.

## Historic parkland

Ecologically important because of often unimproved grass, and contains lowland mixed broadleaved woodland (e.g. Bromesberrow Estate). The largest area (Eastnor Park) is an SSSI, primarily because of insects, veteran trees, bats and hole-nesting birds.

## Veteran trees

Veteran trees represent highly valued and specialized habitats for insects, bats and

Lime pollard in Alfrick Pound



birds. Some of these veteran trees are black poplar, which is nationally rare and found in concentrations in the south east of the AONB.

## Watercourses

The 3 largest brooks in the AONB (Cradley, Glynch and Leigh) support significant wildlife habitats. There are some areas of marsh, e.g. at Castlemorton Common, and a large number of ponds, some created by previous quarrying which are developing into habitats of value.

## Hedgerows and hedgerow trees

A feature of many of the landscape character types, they are important for providing food, shelter and nesting places for a range of birds, mammals and insects. They also represent 'corridors' for wildlife movement across agricultural land. People who actively manage land for countryside pursuits, conserve and manage hedgerows for the benefit of biodiversity.

## Internationally protected and nationally rare species.

The following occur within the AONB, and are identified for urgent conservation in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan:

- Dormouse;
- Bats - Lesser Horseshoe, Barbastrelle, Pipistrelle, Bechsteins;
- Bullfinch, Skylark, and Song Thrush;
- Great Crested Newt;
- High Brown Fritillary butterfly.

## Animals, birds and plants with local conservation priority include:

- Black Poplar
- Polecat
- Barn Owl
- Adder
- Peregrine Falcon
- Kestrel

Many other Biodiversity Action Plan Species, especially invertebrates, fungi and plants may occur in the AONB.

## 6.4 Key issues

### 6.4.1 Information

Recent and complete information on the state or condition of the AONB's wildlife and habitat resources is lacking. The existing Biodiversity Action Plans have been undertaken on a county wide basis rather than for the AONB as a separate and unique entity. Also, a major factor is the lack of funding for such surveys. Incomplete information inhibits the influence of biodiversity within decision making in the land management and development control processes. Without this information, changes in condition and quality as a result of factors

such as climate change and land management practices cannot be measured.

### 6.4.2 Visitor Pressure

The impact of people in pursuit of recreation can be acute in many parts of the AONB, and has undoubtedly led to the damage of some sensitive habitats, e.g erosion from walking and cycling and horse riding. Recreational pursuits can disturb sensitive habitats to the detriment of the wildlife they support, and dog roaming has been identified as one such activity. Other consequences of visitor pressure, such as traffic levels, unrestricted parking and litter, could be contributing to this damage and disturbance, but as yet are un-quantified. Visitor pressure in many cases inhibits appropriate management.

Boxing Day at Blackhill





Galloways on the hilltop

plants such as Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, New Zealand pygmy weed, common ragwort and giant hogweed are all dominant species and suppress native growth particularly where management is not effective. Deer can be problematic where sympathetic management is absent.

### 6.4.3 Land Management Practices

The special wildlife of the AONB is closely related to its special landscapes and centuries of farming and forestry traditions. The maintenance of this wildlife and its habitats is dependent upon good land management practices such as grazing the hill tops, coppicing the woodlands, laying the hedges. Dramatic shifts have occurred in the last 50 years in farming and forestry practices arising largely from economic pressures. This has caused amongst other things, the loss of wildlife corridors, such as hedgerows which in turn leads to isolated and vulnerable wildlife populations.

### 6.4.4 Problem Species

Some species of plant and animals exist within the AONB at particular sites that are considered to be detrimental to the biodiversity of the AONB. Trees such as sycamore, birch, laurel and mountain ash are increasing on the open hills (MHC Management Plan 2000-2005) and other

### 6.4.5 Development

Insensitive development can lead to direct loss or adverse effect on biodiversity, for example, the conversion of barns which disturbs bat habitats, and the fragmenting of wildlife corridors. Designation protects many sites, but many more habitats are damaged by development.

### 6.4.6 Climate Change

The potential habitat change from altering weather patterns and temperature ranges is significant for the future of many species, not only in distribution but their very existence within the AONB. Information is needed as to the potential risks, and which species are most vulnerable.

## 6.5 Strategic Objectives

- 6.5.1 Establish an agenda for research within the AONB to secure complete information on the state of the AONB's biodiversity resource in co-operation with appropriate bodies such as the Biological Records Centres;
- 6.5.2 Help to prevent further loss, damage and decline to key habitats and species as identified in the Local and UK Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs), and support their enhancement and extension;
- 6.5.3 Encourage and support the improvement of degraded and lost habitats, and the creation of new habitats in line with Local and UK BAPs;
- 6.5.4 Promote awareness of the importance of the biodiversity resource to the AONB, its community and its economy;
- 6.5.5 Support opportunities for people to enjoy the recreation and biodiversity and geological value of the AONB without damaging its integrity;
- 6.5.6 Ensure that land management, agricultural and development practices are supportive of the need to protect the AONB's biodiversity, and demonstrate best practice within and adjacent to designated sites, and in relation to wildlife corridors;
- 6.5.7 Monitor climate change and its effect on the presence and distribution of biodiversity in the AONB.



Specialized tractor on the common

# 7 HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

## 7.1 Aims

To support the conservation and enhancement of the wider historic environment and improve awareness and appreciation of the historic environment within development and land use management practices.

## 7.2 Background

The historic environment of the Malvern Hills is a very important element of the uniqueness of the AONB. It identifies the legacy left by centuries of human activity and culture, a record that is rich and diverse and contributes significantly to the Hills' sense of place and identity.

Some elements of the historic environment are afforded statutory protection - e.g. individual monuments and buildings and conservation areas. However, many more features such as those important locally, for example road signs, milestones, gas lamps, bridges etc., and wider contexts such as townscapes, are not protected. Their

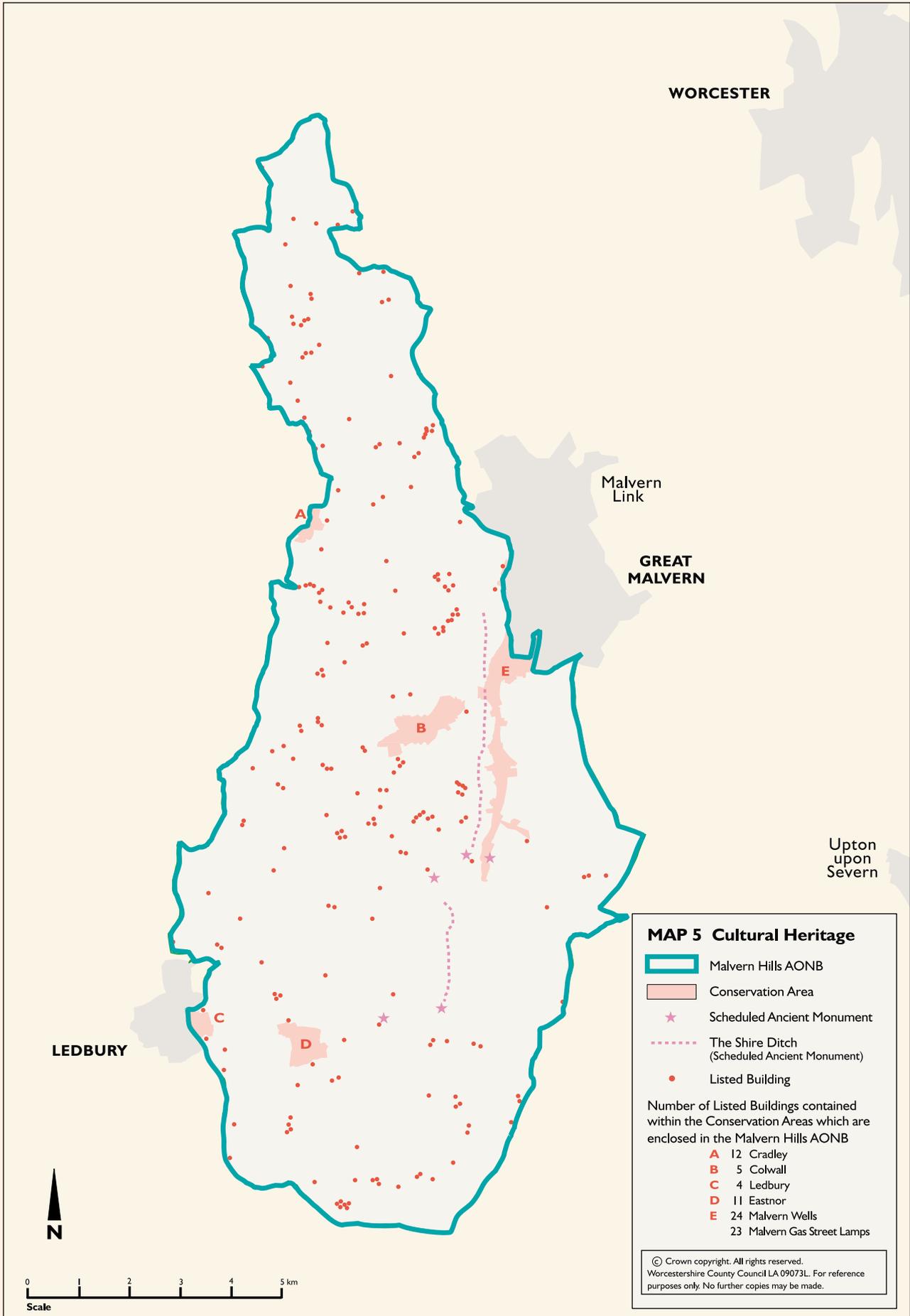
significant contribution to the AONB needs to be analyzed and protected where appropriate.

To this end, Historic Landscape Character assessments have been completed, or are being prepared, for the three counties represented in the AONB. The assessments provide a framework for describing and understanding how successive cultures have left their mark on the modern AONB landscape. It is hoped that the assessments will enable those features not statutorily protected to become fully recognized in the planning system and other land management processes.

Over the past years, English Heritage and the County Archaeological Services have been surveying the AONB and the results bear testament to the diversity of the historic landscape. Within the life of this plan, a monograph of the findings will be published.

**Topiary Garden at Little Malvern Court**





### 7.3 Special Features

Bronze Age burial grounds, for example at Colwall and Mathon;  
Iron Age hill forts of national importance, at Herefordshire Beacon ('British Camp') and Midsummer Hill;  
Industrial architecture such as limekilns, tunnels and quarry cottages;  
Scheduled Ancient Monuments;  
Designed parks and landscape gardens of national and local historic interest, such as at Eastnor and Hope End;  
Listed buildings, e.g. Eastnor Castle, Bromesberrow Place and Little Malvern Priory;  
Half timbered buildings;  
Victorian villas of Malvern (Malvern stone and render);  
Victorian tree plantings, for example lime boulevards in Colwall;  
Springs and wells;  
Artistic associations with poets (Elizabeth Barrett Browning), architects (Voysey) and composers (Elgar);  
Veteran trees;  
Gardens and parks of local significance, e.g. Old Colwall and Bromesberrow;  
Medieval deer parks.

### 7.4 Key Issues

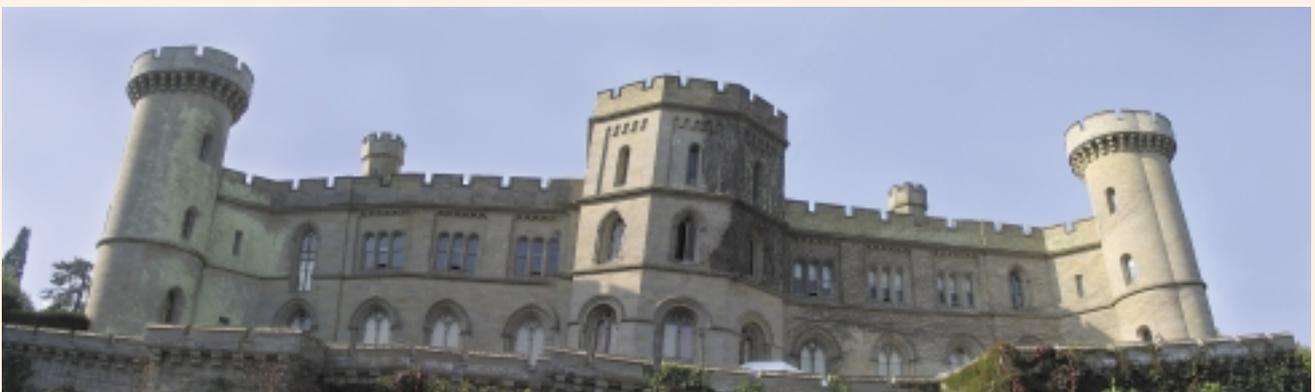
#### 7.4.1 Protection and conservation of prominent features

Many aspects of the historic environment in its broadest sense are not protected by law through designation or listing. Some protection is offered to the broader context of historic buildings, for example through conservation area designation. Further protection comes from the adoption of village design statements as supplementary planning guidance. However the wider historic context of settlement patterns, for example, is susceptible to development pressures unless the combined importance of individual features and attributes of the historic environment is recognised and protected.

#### 7.4.2 Failure to respect the vernacular and local distinctiveness

Much of the modern development that has taken place in and adjacent to the AONB has failed to respect those features of the existing built environment that distinguish them as being local. These features not only include building styles and materials that have been commonly used in the past, but also densities, size and particular locations, as well as road signs, railings and lamp-posts for example. Completion of Historic Landscape

Eastnor Castle south front



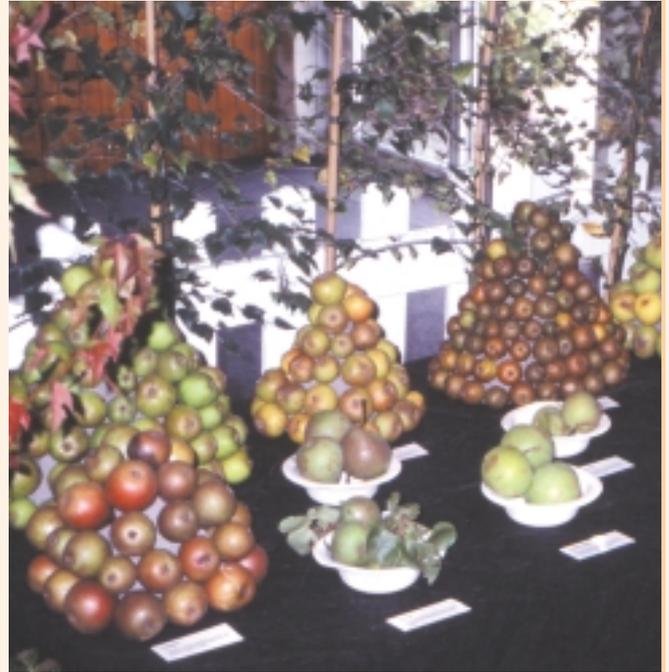
Character Assessments for the counties will provide a basis for identifying the features and uniqueness that can be incorporated in development control and management.

### 7.4.3 Impact of rural land use and recreation

Farming and forestry practices can have an impact on the historic environment without knowing it, largely because much of what is collectively important is not statutorily protected, or identified (e.g. archaeological heritage). For the same reasons, recreational pressure can be detrimental to this heritage.

### 7.4.4 Poor awareness of the historic environment

This is not only in terms of the wider context as identified above, but also among the public and landowners in general.



Increasing awareness about the historic environment, the individual and collective importance of features, and the education and economic value in its conservation and promotion, will aid its conservation and help establish it as a rural economic asset.

## 7.5 Strategic Objectives

- 7.5.1 Support measures which protect the features which contribute to the AONB's historic environment;
- 7.5.2 Encourage consideration of the wider historic environment within the development planning system and land management practices;
- 7.5.3 Co-ordinate information and awareness of the historic environment to alleviate the impact of pressure from development and human activity;
- 7.5.4 Ensure that development processes and other activities respect the historic environment with respect to the vernacular and local distinctiveness;
- 7.5.5 Identify priorities for conservation to help reduce the number of properties and sites currently at risk from decay and neglect;
- 7.5.6 Promote the historic environment as an educational, recreational and economic resource.