

**Landscape Character Assessment
for
Land South of Warwick and Leamington**

February 2009

Prepared for
**Warwick District Council
Riverside House
Milverton Hill
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Landscape Character Assessment For Land South of Warwick

1.0 Background.

- 1.1 In August 2008, Smith Stuart Reynolds Planning were appointed to undertake an assessment of land around Coventry, Nuneaton, Kenilworth, Warwick and Leamington and to identify whether areas might be suitable for future urban expansion. The study was undertaken jointly on behalf of Coventry City Council, Rugby Borough Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council and Warwick District Council. The land parcels defined were all contained within the West Midlands Green Belt. The study sought to identify land that contributed the least towards the Green Belt and was the least constrained in environmental and physical terms. The data gathered will inform each Council's emerging Core Strategy. Richard Morrish Associates Ltd (Chartered Landscape Architects, and a registered practice of the Landscape Institute) worked with Smith Stuart Reynolds to provide a preliminary landscape assessment of the study areas and to provide an evaluation of the extent to which they contributed towards the planning purposes of Green Belt as set out in PPG2.
- 1.2 The West Midlands Green Belt only extends to areas located north and west of Warwick and Leamington and therefore land south of Warwick and Leamington was not considered in the joint authority Green Belt study.
- 1.3 In December 2008 Richard Morrish Associates (RMA), were appointed to provide a preliminary landscape assessment of land to the south of Warwick and Leamington Spa. The objective was to assess the contribution that these study areas presently make to the existing urban structure of Warwick and Leamington and to evaluate which areas might be considered most important in preserving the character and appearance of the towns in the longer term.
- 1.4 The following report briefly summarises the study methodology and then describes conclusions regarding the study areas. More comprehensive notes on the assessment are provided as Appendix A. As RMA were also involved in the wider Smith Stuart Reynolds study, it has also been possible to make some comparisons with possible development expansion areas identified elsewhere in the District.

2.0 Method of Assessment.

- 2.1 The study has been undertaken using desk-top studies and two field visits undertaken in January and February 2009. Although this time of year has some limitations for landscape assessment, reduced vegetation cover does often allow unrestricted views over the landscape.
- 2.2 The landscape assessment methodology employed has followed advice set out in the published *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* (GLVIA) produced by the Landscape Institute in conjunction with the Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment (first published in 1995 and reproduced with amendments in 2002).

- 2.3 Reference has been made to previous landscape studies and plans of the area including:

The Countryside Agency Landscape Character Map of Britain (1999)
The Warwickshire Landscapes Guidelines (1993)
The Warwick District Local Plan (1996–2011 – adopted 2007)

Data has also been gained from reviewing information on ecology, history and national planning designations from websites and other sources. A number of previous studies and statements regarding some of the study areas were also reviewed.

- 2.4 Landscape character areas from the *Warwickshire Landscapes* studies have been mapped as Figure 2.0. A desktop topographical analysis has helped to identify some principle viewsheds in the locality (see Figure 3.0).
- 2.5 In order to avoid lengthy description in this report the findings of the landscape assessment are presented as a tabulation (see Appendix A). This approach provides a simple means of presenting a large data set in a systematic and accessible format. Annotated plans of the sites are also presented in this appendix. More information about local landscape character is provided as Appendix B.

3.0 The Study Areas.

- 3.1 Warwick District Council have identified the following nine study areas: These are identified on Figure 1.0. (Note that there is no 'Area I' to avoid confusion on plans.)

Site A: Land adjacent Stratford Road (approximately 5 hectares)
 Site B: Home Farm, Longbridge (approximately 30 hectares)
 Site C: Europa Way triangle (approximately 70 hectares)
 Site D: Land south of Gallows Hill (approximately 130 hectares)
 Site E: Land south of Harbury Lane (approximately 130 hectares)
 Site F: Land at Woodside Farm (approximately 9 hectares)
 Site G: Land east of Sydenham (approximately 50 hectares)
 Site H: Land south of Sydenham (approximately 45 hectares)
 Site J: Land south of Fieldgate Lane (approximately 4 hectares)

4.0 The Information Gathered.

- 4.1 The tabulated information included in Appendix A provides the following data.
- A general description of the study area and its boundaries.
 - A description of the principal landscape character types and landscape components. (Refer also to Figure 2.0.)
 - General remarks about visual issues. Consideration of the extent to which a development on the site might be seen from other localities.
 - Any historical or cultural information about the site that has been available through brief internet research. We recommend further work is undertaken. The *Warwickshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Project* may assist this research when published (see Appendix B).

- Any ecological data that has been available after brief internet research and the field visit. (A Habitat Biodiversity Audit undertaken on behalf of Warwickshire County Council has been reviewed in which potential SINC sites were identified. These have been mapped – see Appendix A.)
- A general statement on landscape condition.
- A summary of principal planning policy constraints that have been identified.
- Conclusions.

5.0 Summary of Conclusions.

- 5.1 Warwick and Leamington Spa have highly-valued historic cores and Warwick Castle and the associated Castle Park have national heritage significance. Protecting the setting of these features must be considered a principal goal of future development planning in the locality. In addition, and particularly as the towns are important tourist destinations, the quality of approaches to the town should be considered in all development planning. A combination of protection of landscape assets and enhancement or removal of landscape detractors should be considered in strategic planning.
- 5.2 The protection of the River Avon corridor and the river environment must also be given high priority. Seven of the nine study areas are directly related to tributaries of the Avon or Leam and will therefore influence catchment waters. Sustainable development should ensure that any urban expansion does not degrade the Avon environment.
- 5.3 The then Countryside Agency working with Groundwork in 2005 developed a blueprint for successful, sustainable, urban fringe landscapes, some aspects of which might be considered in future planning around Warwick and Leamington. Their recommendations included:
- Creating ‘bridges’ to the countryside for residents by developing an excellent network of off-road paths that avoid barriers such as major roads. This is important for health, recreation and sustainable transport planning.
 - Providing a cultural legacy where the history of the locality is protected and enshrined in the landscape.
 - Creating a nature reserve – where ecological corridors and habitat islands are integrated into settlement ensuring a rich biodiversity and providing many other educational and social benefits.
 - Ensuring a living landscape – where remaining areas of agricultural land are still viable and productive, where woodland and public open space might also be managed for wildlife and/or renewable products, and where renewable energy and sustainable design requirements are integrated into the urban structure.
- 5.4 We summarise our conclusions on the nine study sites as follow:

Study Area	Relative value as the setting for Warwick and Leamington	Comments
A: Land off Stratford Road	Low to Medium	These paddocks are unlikely to be possible to retain as viable agricultural land in an increasingly urban context. Good quality development here could enhance an important approach to Warwick. However constraints include Gog Brook and flood risk, the <i>cordon sanitaire</i> , access to Leafield Farm and proximity to Castle Park.
B: Home Farm, Longbridge	Low to Medium	We would score this area as ‘Low’ at the north end, where well-considered development that met with the site constraints could enhance the approach to Warwick. However at the south end we feel the meadows and farmland setting are important in views of Warwick from the M40. Development that retained this setting would be beneficial.
C: Europa Way Triangle	Low to Medium	Although this wedge of undeveloped land has been a strategic break between ‘Warwick’ and ‘Leamington’, we feel its value to the setting of the towns has been greatly diminished by surrounding land use. We feel that carefully considered

		development here could enhance the setting of the towns and provide a better transition from rural to urban land.
Site D: Land south of Gallows Hill	High	This is generally an area of well maintained agricultural land that is important to the setting of Castle Park and prominent in approaches to Warwick. We feel it should be safeguarded from development. However the former landfill site at Turnbull's Gardens is an anomaly in the landscape that needs additional consideration.
Site E: Land south of Harbury Lane	Medium to High	This area is on a ridge of higher ground that is prominent in some views from the south. Development here would be a relatively prominent urban extension. However sensitive development could at least be contained 'naturally' by Tach Brook, and it would be reasonably easy to integrate to existing development.
Site F: Land at Woodside Farm	Medium	Although this site is partly on high ground, if sensitively developed it could be a relatively discreet urban extension.
Site G: Land east of Sydenham	Medium to High	We feel that retention of this 'green wedge' is essential for the character of Radford – but that small-scale urban expansion on the Radford boundary could be achieved without harming the overall landscape setting. Sensitive design will be essential.
Site H: Land south of Sydenham	Medium	The railway line makes a definitive edge to Whitnash and there are constraints for development of this area. However, as it is relatively hidden from the main towns and their approaches, in theory this area could be developed without significant harm to the landscape setting of Warwick or Leamington.
Site J: Land south of Fieldgate Lane	Medium	This small site is well contained and development here would not have a major impact on the overall setting of the towns. However it has some historical value and could set a precedent for further expansion south.

5.5 Eleven land parcels lying to the north of Warwick and Leamington and within the West Midlands Green Belt were defined in the *Joint Green Belt Study (JGB)*, prepared by Smith Stuart Reynolds and published in January 2009. The scoring by Smith Stuart Reynolds is not directly comparable to that described above as additional criteria were defined in that report. However, for general comparison, the JGB scores are given below – with notes to describe some landscape considerations. (See also Appendix C for a plan of the land parcels.)

Study Area Reference	'Landscape Value' from JGB Study	Comments
WL1 (Land south of Hampton)	High	Generally low lying Avon terrace – prominent in views from major roads and beyond present settlement envelope.
WL2 (Land east of Hampton Magna)	High	Generally quite prominent land, intervisible with historic Warwick and beyond the present settlement envelope. However in the analysis for the JGB study it was considered that there might be scope to enhance the appearance of Hampton Magna with small-scale urban expansion. It was also concluded that there might be scope to enhance the landscape around Warwick Parkway Station, and land to the north and south of the Grand Union Canal with sensitively designed

		mixed-use development. It seemed likely that this could be undertaken without impacting on the setting of the historic core.
WL3 (Northwest of A46)	High	Note above for area around Grand Union Canal.
WL4 (Northwest of A46)	High	These areas function well as Green Belt. It was concluded that 'jumping' the A46 with development would be problematic.
WL5 a / b (Milverton / Avon)	High	Important Avon green wedge with many other Green Belt functions.
WL6 a / b (Sandy Lane / Blackdown)	Medium	The existing settlement edge is quite well defined but there are areas of degraded land along Sandy Lane and possible development opportunities around Blackdown.
WL7 (Blackdown / West Hill)	High	Well preserved rural landscape on higher ground, opposite an established settlement boundary.
WL8 (North of Cubbington)	High	As above.
WL9 (East of Cubbington)	High	As above.
WL 10 (Hill Farm, Lillington)	Medium	It was concluded that urban expansion on the higher ground between Lillington and Cubbington might be possible. Although this would be potentially prominent and there would be constraints with the valley catchment below, it was considered that sensitive design could help mitigate the existing urban edge – which is considered harsh and already prominent.
WL11 (Newbold Comyn)	High	Important recreational 'wedge' between the River Leam and Campion Hills.

- 5.5 We conclude by stressing the importance of promoting high quality sustainable development for any large urban expansion. This will help to ensure the protection of the character and appearance of Warwick and Leamington.
- 5.6 We would recommend that release of land for urban expansion in future is linked to site-specific design guidance and that innovative and distinctive architecture and site master planning is encouraged. New building regulations and the Code for Sustainable Homes should ensure that the technical requirements for good quality development are followed.
- 5.7 We also urge the adoption of policy that will support and sustain better landscape infrastructure within and around development and that the ongoing establishment and management of these areas is enshrined within development control. We feel that emphasis is generally placed on the 'day one' appearance of landscape schemes and not on their long-term management and development. We feel that responsible developers may in fact welcome the concept of spreading landscape implementation costs over a longer period. There is also great potential for community involvement in landscape management works and this can be a catalyst for building good community relations and strong civic pride. Social development and community building should be considered an essential part of sustainable design.

Figures:

Figure 01 Study Areas.

Figure 02 Landscape Character Types

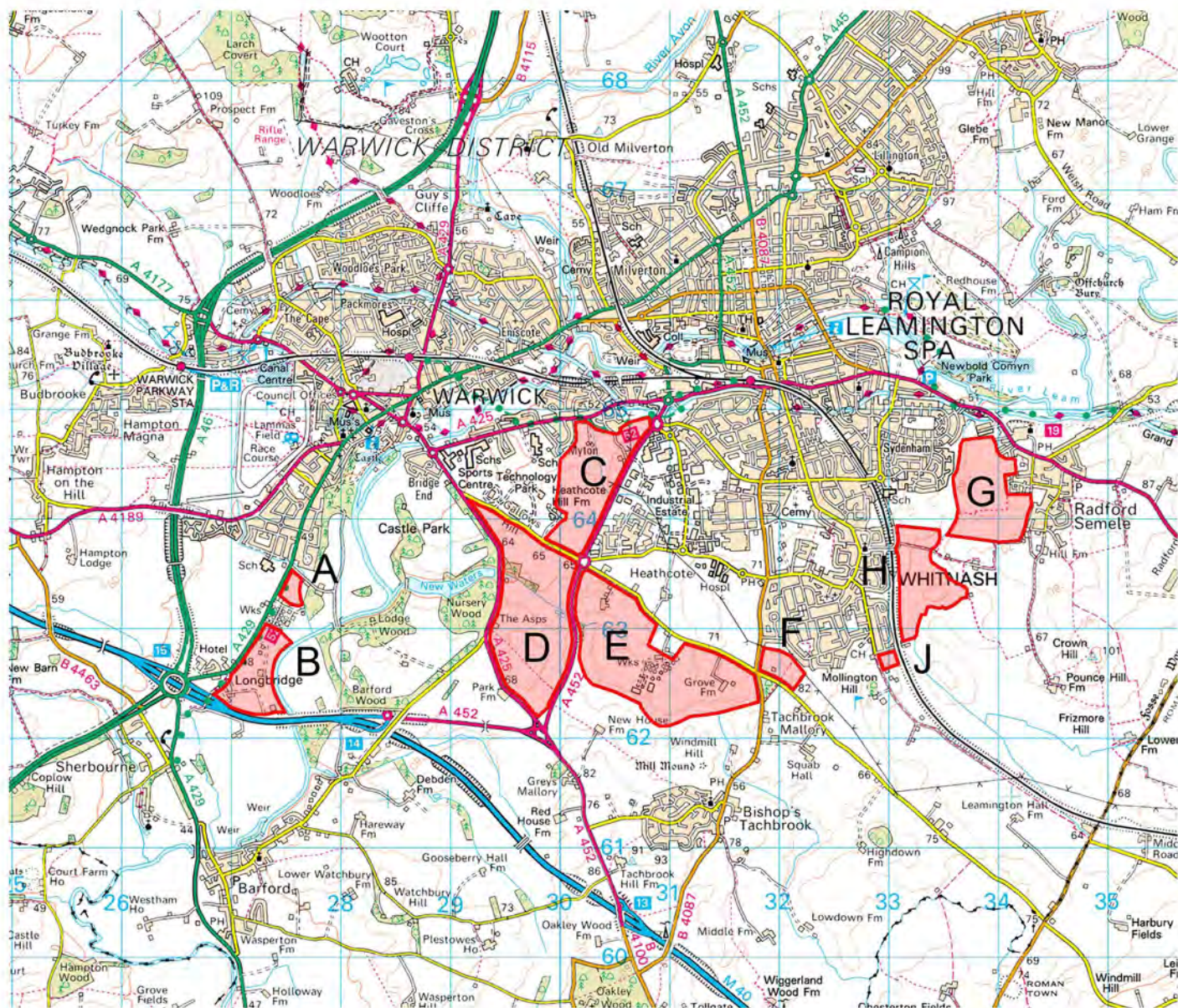
Figure 03 Topographical Analysis

Appendices:

Appendix A: Tabulated assessment for nine study areas
 1:10,000 Annotated plans of all Study Areas
 Annotated photographs from each study site

Appendix B: Additional information on Landscape Character

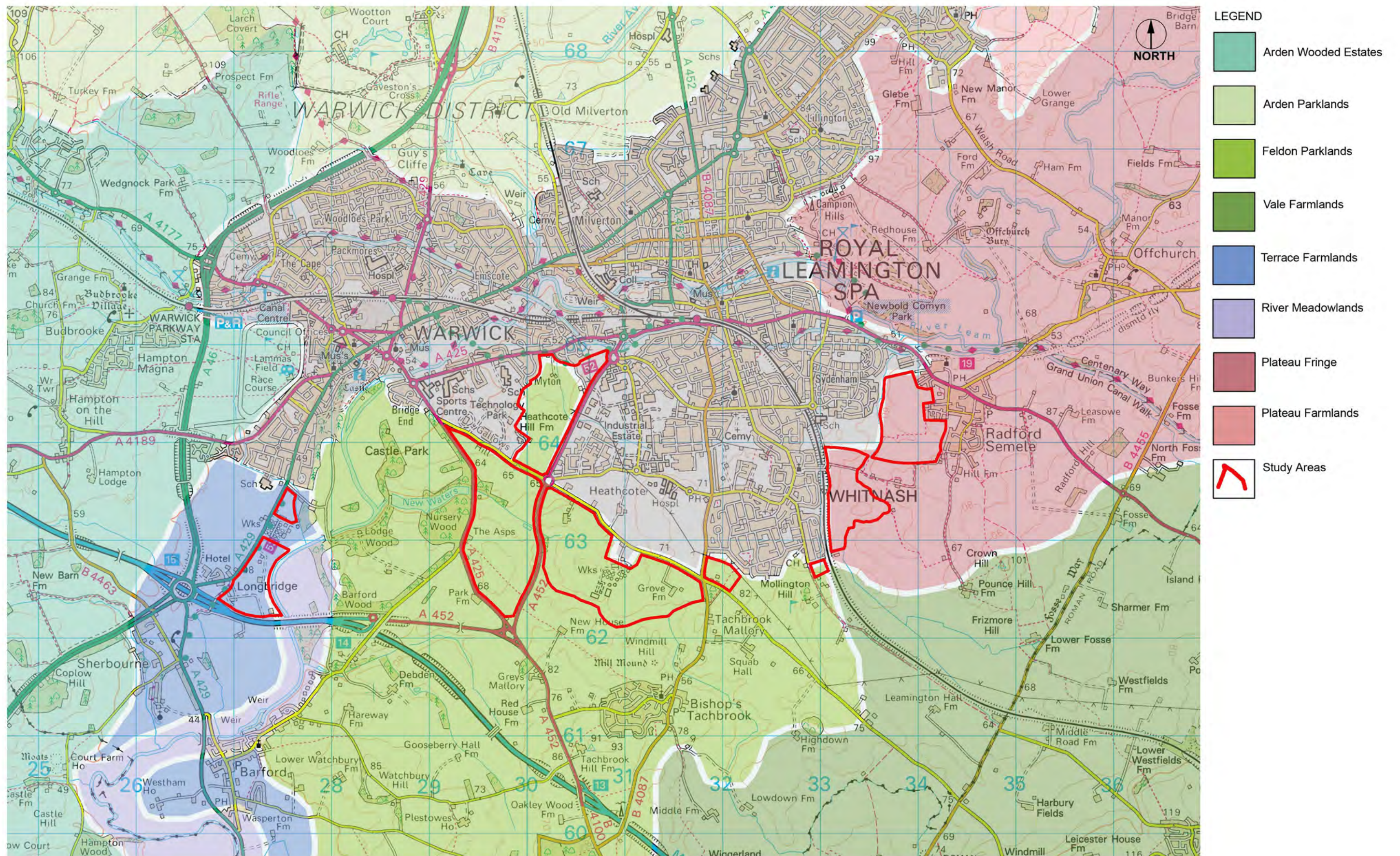
Appendix C: Plan – Warwick Land Parcels from the Joint Green Belt Study (Jan 2009)



- A - Land at Stratford Road
- B - Home Farm, Longbridge
- C - Europa Way triangle.
- D - Land south of Gallows Hill
- E - Land south of Harbury Lane
- F - Land at Woodside Farm
- G - Land east of Sydenham
- H - Land south of Sydenham
- J - Land south of Fieldgate Lane

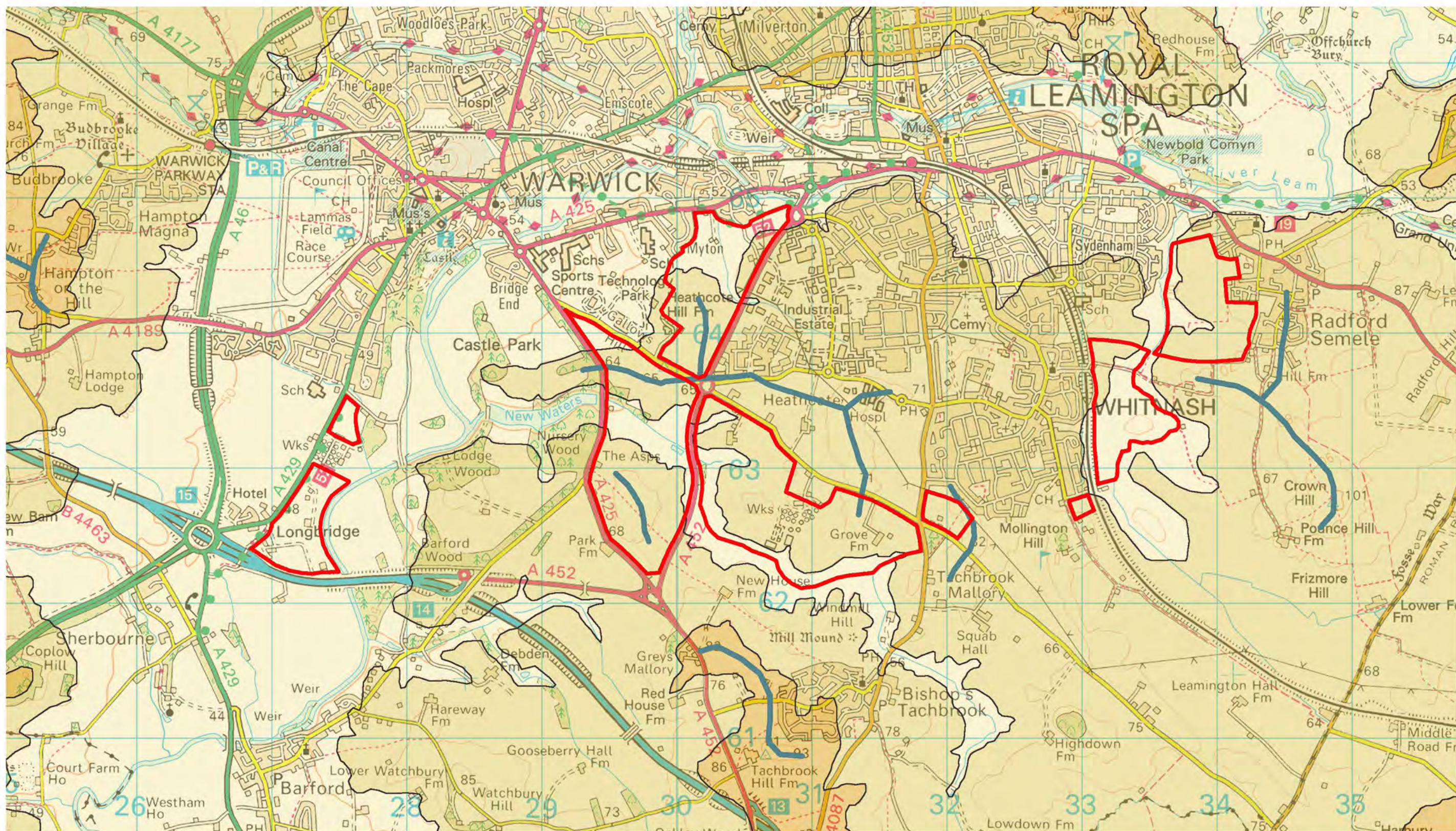
1:50,000 OS data provided by Warwick DC.
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South Warwick Landscape Study.
 Figure 1.0 - Location Plan



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South Warwick Landscape Study
 Figure 2. Landscape Types



Legend

 100-80m AOD	 80-60m AOD	 >60m AOD	 Study Areas	 Indicative ridge lines
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South Warwick Landscape Study.
Figure 3.0 - Topographic Analysis