

Kimbolton Neighbourhood Development Plan

Characterisation Study

December 2016

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All photographs attributable to the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

- 1.1.1 This Characterisation Study was undertaken as part of the preparation of the Kimbolton Neighbourhood Development Plan. The work commenced in the Spring of 2016 and from the outset the Study was conceived as a mixture of the effort of local volunteers and professional support provided by the Neighbourhood Plan consultant. The design and execution of the Study drew upon the experience of other Neighbourhood Plans.
- 1.1.2 The Study aims to address the historic character and local distinctiveness of the area. It also identifies buildings and places of historical significance and interest.

1.2 The Structure of the Report

- 1.2.1 The first part of the Report explains the approach taken to the study, and in particular the process of defining the character areas and those for more detailed assessment.
- 1.2.2 The second part of the Report describes the overall character of the whole of the Neighbourhood Plan area, based primarily on the Herefordshire Landscape Character Assessment (HLCA) and the National Character Areas project undertaken by Natural England.
- 1.2.3 The third part of the Report provides an assessment of the rural parts of the Parish based on a series of Character Areas based on the HLCA.
- 1.2.4 The fourth part of the Report then comprises a detailed assessment of the main settlement – Kimbolton village.
- 1.2.5 The final parts of the Report summarise the key findings identified in the Study and a series of recommendations on how the Neighbourhood Plan can help to support proposals to address these issues. Unless otherwise stated, the photographs are by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

2.0 Method

2.1 Stages of the study

- 2.1.1 The Study can be broken down into four key stages which were carried out broadly in the order in which they are described here, although there was considerable overlap between the stages in some cases.
- 2.1.2 As a first stage, a desk-based assessment was carried out to consult the substantial amount of information which already existed on Kimbolton Parish. This included consultation of the Herefordshire Landscape Character Assessment and Historic Environment Record, as well as historic and modern mapping.
- 2.1.3 The second stage was the training of members of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group – all local volunteers; followed by the third stage of fieldwork – the great majority of which was undertaken by the volunteers. This was based in part on a survey tool developed by Planning Aid England and subsequently used in a number of Neighbourhood Development Plans nationally.
- 2.1.4 The fourth and final stage was the compilation of two Reports – the first a set of draft character profiles and secondly this final Report.

2.2 Desk-based characterisation

- 2.2.1 A primary purpose of the initial desk-based element of the study was to review existing studies into the character of the area. This review was used to determine which parts of the area would benefit from a more detailed assessment. This process was used to allocate Steering Group members to each part of the area.
- 2.2.2 The starting point for the study was the Herefordshire Landscape Character Assessment (HLCA) published by the Council in 2004 as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The HLCA was started in 1997 through a funding partnership involving the previous Hereford & Worcester County Council, the District Councils, Countryside Commission, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency, English Heritage and Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE). The HLCA took account of and integrated with the Countryside Agency Countryside Character project and the English Nature Natural Areas study.
- 2.2.3 The HLCA covers the whole of Herefordshire and provides a sound assessment of the character of the Neighbourhood Plan area as a whole. However, the HLCA recognises that for preparation of more detailed studies such as Parish Plans, the HLCA 'must be considered an over-view to which the local community will need to add the finer grain in detail in order to produce a meaningful and useful document' (HLCA SPD para 6.1.3).
- 2.2.4 For the purposes of the Neighbourhood Plan it was considered that this more detailed finer grain assessment would be required for the whole of the area, with an emphasis on

Kimbolton village which is the principal settlement in the area. While there are other settlements within the Neighbourhood Plan area, the focus on the Kimbolton village was adopted in response to the strategic planning framework set out in the Herefordshire Core Strategy which forms the statutory context for the Neighbourhood Plan. Policy R2 of the Core Strategy identifies Kimbolton village as the principal location for housing growth within the Neighbourhood Plan area and this study will provide a key part of the evidence base to determine the most appropriate locations within the settlement where new development could be directed.

- 2.2.5 Outside Kimbolton village, the Core Strategy severely restricts new development and so it was not considered that such a detailed assessment of its character would be required. Instead, a lighter touch approach was taken, based heavily on the HLCA supplemented by fieldwork.

2.3 Training of the Steering Group volunteers

- 2.3.1 Volunteers were recruited from the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to contribute to the characterisation Study. Training was provided in April 2016 which included a fieldwork exercise in the nearby village of Stoke Prior.

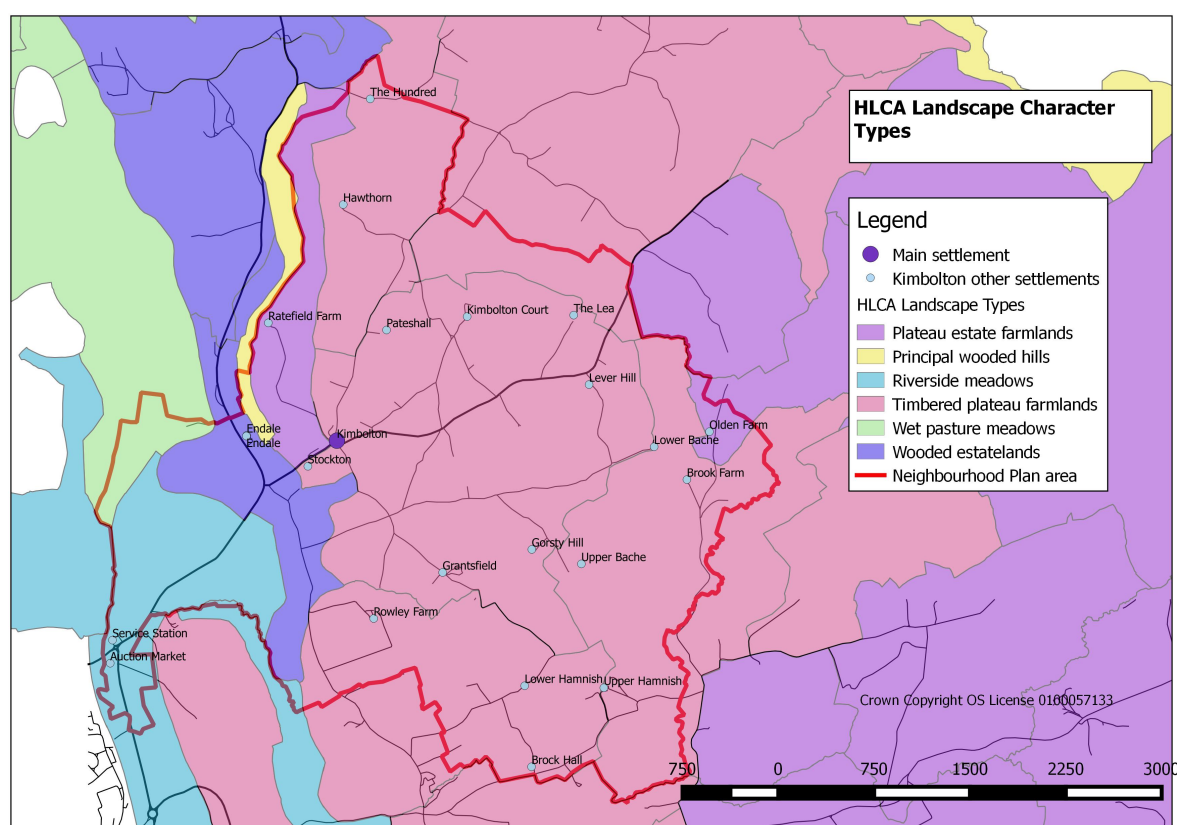
2.4 Fieldwork

- 2.4.1 Fieldwork was conducted between April and November 2016. It involved visiting the six character areas within Kimbolton village for intensive assessment and the further six rural character areas for a lighter touch assessment and completing a character assessment proforma for each. While the members of the survey teams live across the Neighbourhood Plan area it was agreed that they would survey the settlements where they do not live in order to ensure an objective approach. The planning consultant provided a further level of objectivity and consistency in reviewing the output from the fieldwork and preparing this report.

3.0 The landscape setting

3.0.1 In this section of the Report the overall landscape character of the Neighbourhood Plan area is described. This provides the context for the detailed character assessment of the countryside character areas in section 4.0 and Kimbolton village in section 5.0. The evidence base which underpins this part of the Report is the HLCA described in Section 2.0. The HLCA identifies 22 distinctive landscape character types within the County. Each of the landscape character types is described in detail with additional information relating to design guidelines and management issues. The landscape character types within the Neighbourhood Plan area are shown on Map 1 below.

Map 1 – HLCA Landscape Character Types



3.0.2 The six Landscape types within the Neighbourhood Plan area are summarised below:

- **Plateau estate farmlands** – the western and eastern fringes of the Parish - ordered, estate landscape of regularly shaped, medium sized fields separated by prominent single species hedgerows and small woodlands.

The HLCA priority for these areas is the conservation, restoration and enhancement of the distinctive estate characteristics – using opportunities for additional broadleaf native woodland and the restoration of distinctive ornamental planting.

- **Principal wooded hills** – the area of dense woodland on the north-western boundary of the Parish - upstanding, densely wooded hilly landscape with a steeply sloping topography.

The HLCA priority for these areas is the restoration of the ancient semi-natural character of the woodland cover and maintaining an overall interlocking pattern of woodland and grazed fields with a high proportion of hedgerow and streamside trees.

- **Riverside meadows** – the low lying area in the far south west of the Parish - linear, riverine pastoral landscapes associated with a flat, well-defined alluvial floodplain framed by steeply rising ground.

The HLCA priority for these areas is to discourage built development and conserve and restore wetland habitats and biodiversity by retuning the land to a controlled annual flooding regime.

- **Timbered plateau farmlands** – the dominant landscape type occupying the central part of the Parish - varied, agricultural landscapes of hedged fields, scattered farms, woods and wooded valleys with undulating relief.

The HLCA priority for these areas is the conservation and management of existing hedgerows and woodland – for example the replacement of lost hedgerow oaks and encouraging the natural regeneration of existing woodland and wooded dingles.

- **Wet pasture meadows** – a small area of the Parish to the west of the A49 near Endale - flat, low lying and largely uninhabited landscapes.

The HLCA priority for these areas is the conservation of the unsettled undeveloped character with opportunities for landscape and biodiversity enhancement.

- **Wooded estate-lands** - the gently rising land between Kimbolton village and the low-lying valley of the River Lugg – wooded agricultural landscapes of isolated farmsteads, clusters of wayside dwellings and occasional small estate villages.

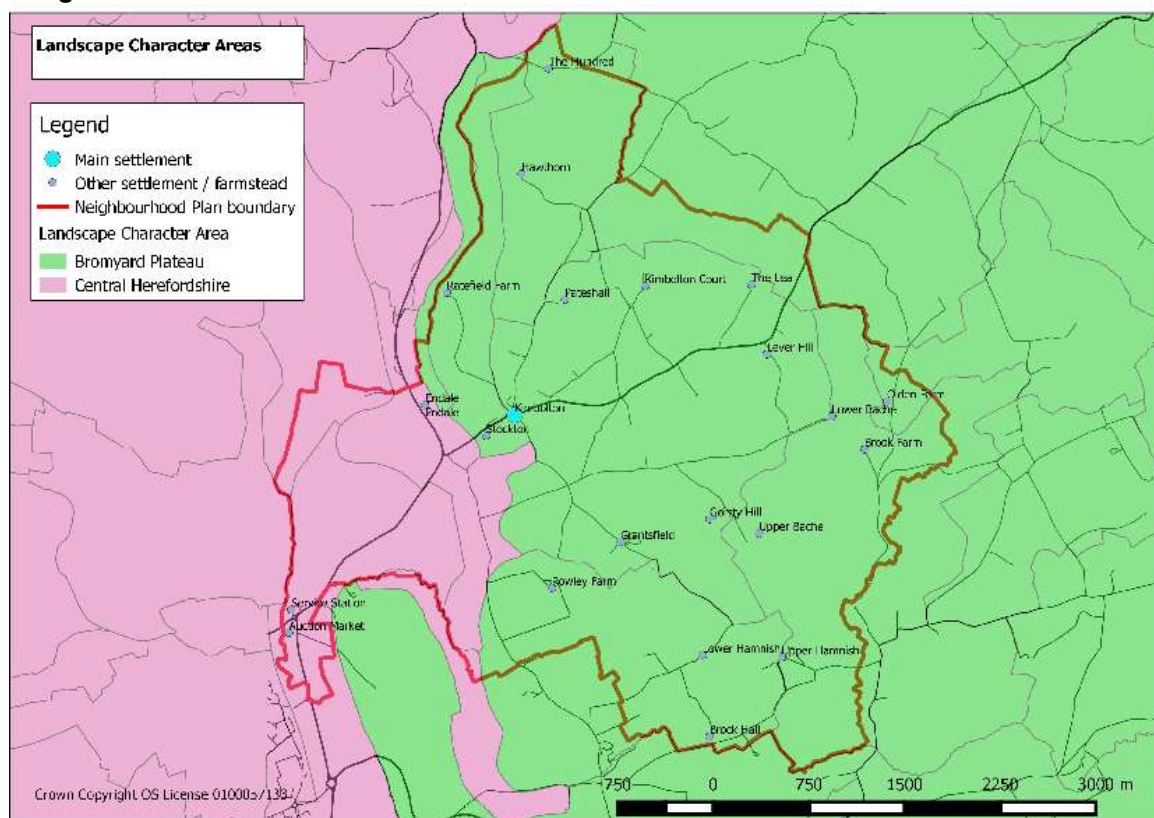
The HLCA priorities for these areas are the conservation and restoration of the hedgerow fabric, with a focus on the primary hedgerow pattern of ownership, parish and roadside boundary hedges. The existing broadleaf woodland should be conserved with opportunities for enhancement through planting additional broadleaf woodland.

- 3.0.3 These 22 landscape character types were used to classify the whole of the County into a series of 12 sub-regional character areas which broadly correspond to the National Character Areas identified by Natural England. These sub-regional character areas are described in detail below.

3.1 The landscape in a sub-regional context

3.1.1 The area falls within two sub-regional character areas as shown on Map 2 below.

Map 2 – Regional Character Areas



3.1.2 The great majority of the Neighbourhood Plan area is within the northernmost part of the Bromyard Plateau (also referred to as the Herefordshire Plateau) which covers an extensive area of land in north-east Herefordshire. A small part of the Plan area to the west of Kimbolton village is within the lower-lying Central Herefordshire (also known as the Herefordshire Lowlands) Character Area.

3.1.3 The Bromyard Plateau is a generally level area of land at an elevation of around 200m rising abruptly from the Herefordshire Lowlands to the west and the Teme Valley to the north. The elevated position provides a number of far-reaching views towards Titterstone Clee and the Mortimer Forest to the north and north-west, and the Black Mountains to the west.

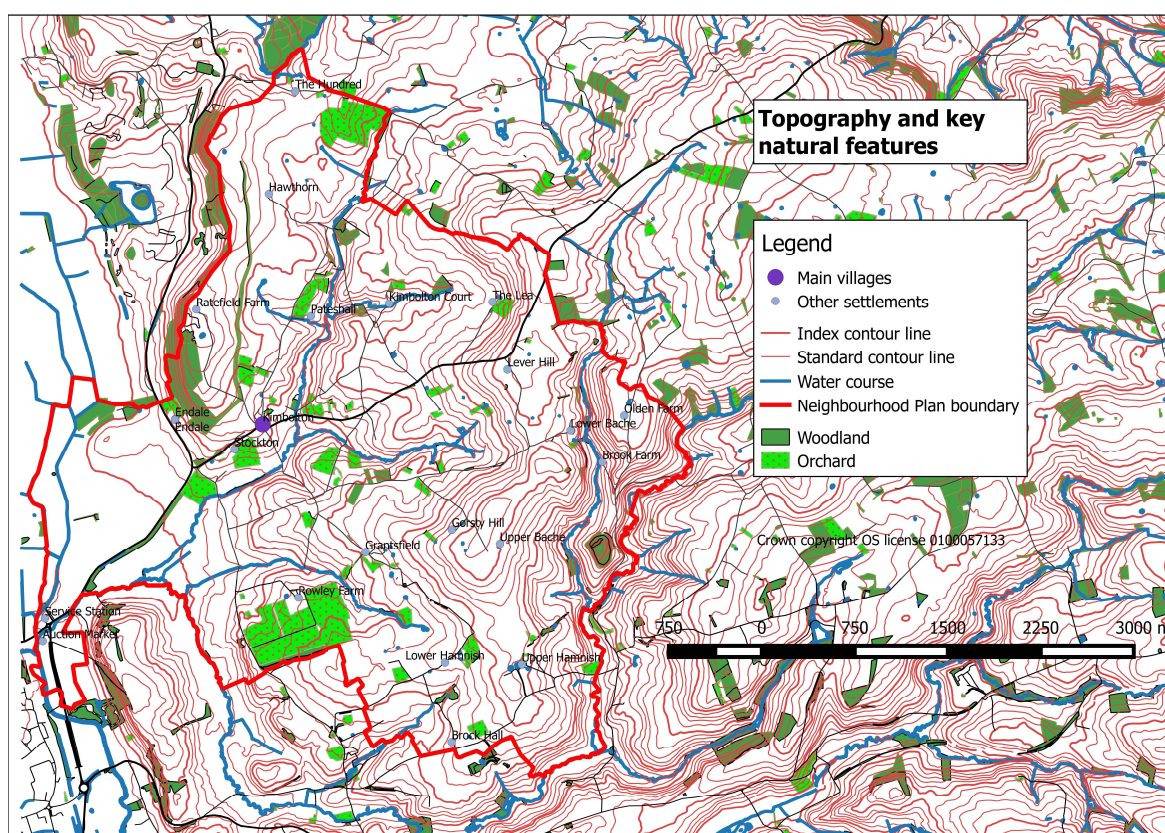
3.1.4 The Central Herefordshire Character Area lies almost entirely in Herefordshire, with small areas to the north and east in Shropshire and Worcestershire and to the south-east in Gloucestershire. The landscape is gently undulating with some steep-sided hills dominated by ancient woodland of ash, field maple and oak. The area is important for commercial agriculture supported by fertile and high-grade soils with a number of traditional and newly planted orchards.

3.1.5 The LCA describes the Bromyard Plateau and Central Herefordshire as tranquil and largely undisturbed - the Bromyard Plateau being more deeply rural and escaping the pressure of modern development to a greater degree than Central Herefordshire. The settlement pattern is dispersed with scattered villages, hamlets and farmsteads, with the area retaining much of its traditional historic built character including stone, red-brick and some timber-framed buildings. Field patterns differ between the two areas – the Bromyard Plateau associated with a dense network of enclosed fields whereas Central Herefordshire is more typically associated with larger fields in the wide, meandering valleys of the River Wye, Lugg and Arrow.

3.1.6 The key elements of the landscape within the Neighbourhood Plan area as described in the HLCA are:

- The majority of the Plan area is characterised by the **gently rolling elevated countryside** of the Bromyard Plateau. The area is dissected by a number of small narrow valleys including the Yolk and Cogwell Brooks which run through Kimbolton village and the centre of the Parish and the Whyte Brook in the east. This area of elevated plateau is separated from the lower-lying western parts of the Plan area by the steep sided Long Wood escarpment in the north-western corner of the area, and the valley of the Cheaton Brook to the south-west. The topography of the area is shown on Map 3.
- A geology of Old Red Sandstones. The Bromyard Plateau is overlain by shallow, poor soils and heavier loams and clays in the narrow valleys where they have cut into the underlying mudstones. The low-lying western parts of the area are characterised by better quality, more fertile soils.
- **Medium to large arable fields** dominate the lower lying western parts of the Neighbourhood Plan area on either side of A49, and to a lesser extent on the gentle slopes of the plateau area to the north of the A4112 around Kimbolton Church and the Hundred.
- The more undulating central and south-eastern parts of the Neighbourhood Plan area around Bache and Gorsty Hill are more typically characterised by **smaller irregular shaped fields**.
- A number of **traditional orchards**, once extensive across the whole of the area are present as scattered remnants, but with two larger more recent plantations at Rowley Farm and the Hundred as shown on Map 3.
- **Wide and varied views** over the Herefordshire lowlands and Black Mountains to the west and the Shropshire Hills to the north-east.

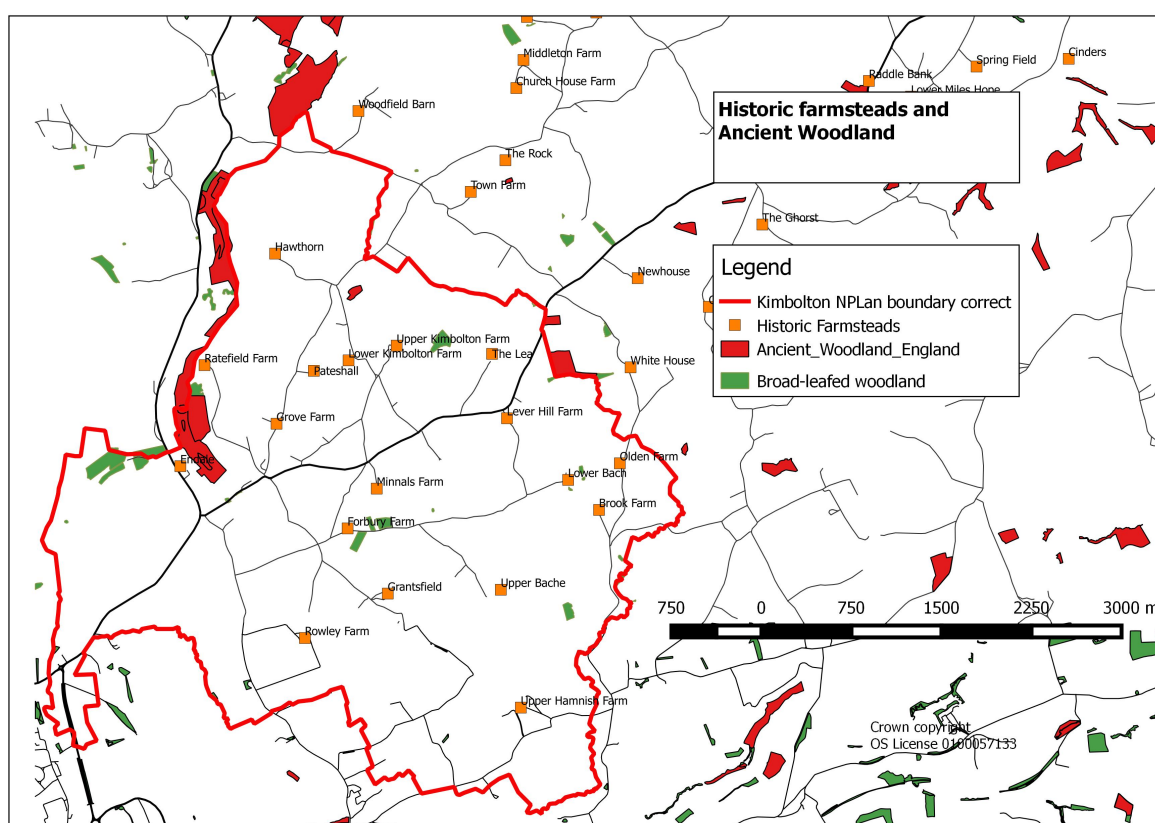
Map 3 – Topography



- A variety of **farmsteads and farm buildings** from many periods illustrating changing agricultural trends and close associations with livestock production, mixed farming and particularly fruit and cider production and hop growing. The Herefordshire Historic Farmsteads Project identifies 18 traditional farmsteads in the Plan area and these are shown on Map 4.
- A strong sense of **history and historical land use settlement**. Rich evidence of historic settlement including the Bache iron age hillfort, shrunken medieval villages at Stockton and Kimbolton and remnants of historic parkland at Hamnish and Hennor House.
- A distinctive, often narrow network of **sunken or hedged lanes**.
- A number of **ancient and semi natural woodland** on steep slopes particularly on the north-western edges as shown on Map 3. The ancient woodland is dominated by ash, oak and field maple. There is also an extensive layer of dogs mercury.
- Extensive **network of hedgerows** with prominent hedgerow trees, and veteran trees scattered across the area including many ancient oaks which form important habitats for invertebrates.
- A **low density of development** characterised by scattered groups of houses and farmsteads. The settlements are limited to the hamlets of the Hundred, Hamnish and the village of Kimbolton.

- The majority of traditional buildings are of **sandstone rubble construction with a limited number of timber structures**. More modern dwellings are concentrated into Kimbolton village and large scale agricultural buildings are scattered across the area. There is a cluster of commercial buildings in the south-western quarter of the area at the Auction Mart and roadside service station on the A49.
- The traditional orchards host important lichen communities and invertebrate populations, for example a strong population of chafer beetle, classified as vulnerable in the UK, a species which is virtually confined to old orchards. Woodpecker holes in orchard trees also provide roosts for rare bats such as the lesser horseshoe and Bechstein's.
- The Parish is a key area for mistletoe, which thrives in old fruit trees, lime and poplar. Mistletoe along with annual orchard blossom and fruit displays and occasional hop yards produce striking seasonal features that have strong cultural associations.

Map 4 – Historic Farmsteads, ancient woodland and broadleaf woodland



3.1.7 The National Character Area profile produced by Natural England for each of the LCAs sets out a series of opportunities to maintain and strengthen the character of the Bromyard Plateau and Central Herefordshire. These include:

- Manage and enhance the landscape through the restoration of hedgerow boundaries especially where they will reinforce historic field patterns and enhance landscape character in arable areas.

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- Seek to integrate environmentally beneficial options into the farmed landscape that will help pollinators
 - Manage traditional orchards
 - Protect the agrarian character of the area by making the most of versatile and fertile soils to produce food while integrating semi-natural features and reinforcing the strong sense of character.
 - Restore or maintain traditional buildings associated with orchards such as cider houses
 - Protect and manage the historic and cultural landscape including medieval settlement patterns and sunken lanes
 - Plan for expansion, restoration and creation of lowland meadow, traditional orchard, broadleaved woodland so that extensive connected wildlife habitats area created in accordance with landscape character.
 - Protect and manage the water environment of rivers, streams and other water bodies and maintain where possible natural meanders, their associated vegetation and marginal habitats.
 - Protect, manage and restore flood water storage capacity and strengthen the ability of the landscape to adapt to climate change.
 - Conserve and manage the rich architectural legacy and distinct pattern of historic dispersed settlement which extends from scattered settlements, small manor farms, medieval timber-framed manor houses to gentry houses, traditional reddish-brown sandstone buildings to occasionally distinctive timber-framed buildings.
 - Manage and significantly enhance the variety of ancient and broadleaved woodland including expanding and reconnecting woodland where possible.
 - Strengthen and enhance access to geodiversity.
 - Protect and enhance the intimate rural character, lack of intrusion and tranquillity while supporting a working landscape that provides essential food, homes and recreational opportunities. Plan for reduced carbon affordable housing that enhances landscape and biodiversity, using local materials built to high environmental standards.
 - Manage the existing access network of rights of way and cycle routes and plan for new links.