highways england

A417 Missing Link
TR010056

6.4 Environmental Statement
Appendix 6.3 Historic Landscape
Characterisation

Infrastructure Planning

Planning Act 2008

**The Infrastructure Planning
(Applications: Prescribed Forms
and Procedure) Regulations 2009**

A417 Missing Link

Development Consent Order 202[x]

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**6.4 Environmental Statement
Appendix 6.3 Historic Landscape Characterisation**

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1   Introduction

1.1.1   Landscapes, alongside buildings, monuments, archaeological sites, places or areas, can possess significance derived from their heritage interest[1]. This report is an assessment of the historic landscape character of the area surrounding the proposed scheme, produced to inform the baseline scenario.

1.1.2   Historic landscape character is the attributes and qualities of a landscape which reflect past land use and settlement and are legible in the present. Over the last twenty years there has been an extensive programme of assessing and mapping 'Historic Landscape Character' (HLC) across the country. This data is invaluable for understanding the nature of the historic landscape, establishing methods to manage and protect it, and to assess potential impacts from development upon it[2]. However, since the first HLC was produced in Cornwall in 1994 the methodology for the assessment of historic landscapes has evolved, meaning that there tends to be inconsistency in the data across different parts of the country. There are also limitations in how HLC data, in its raw form, can be used in the context of assessing the potential impacts of large-scale infrastructure projects such as the proposed scheme. This is because the individual areas of land identified tend to be relatively small in comparison to the area affected, which can lead to an overstating of adverse impacts in proximity to the proposed scheme footprint while understating the overarching effect on the wider historic landscape. The approach used in this assessment takes the Gloucestershire HLC assessment as a foundation from which larger Historic Landscape Character Areas (HLCA) have been identified. These encompass areas of consistent patterns in the components of historic landscape, which share an overarching nature and quality.

1.1.3   A 2km study area buffered from the DCO Boundary has been used for this assessment. From this area the following sources have been used to inform the baseline:

- The Gloucestershire HLC mapping[3]
- The Cotswold National Landscape Area report[4]
- Historic mapping including tithe maps and historic Ordnance Survey maps
- Historic Environment Record (HER) data
- Aerial photography
- Walkover survey

2   Historic landscape characterisation

2.1   Summary

2.1.1   The area considered in this assessment is a mostly rural landscape, partially located within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The Cotswolds form a distinctive regional scale landscape featuring a steep limestone scarp, high open wolds, and wooded valleys[5]. The escarpment line runs through the study area from south to north, forming a dominant physical boundary in the landscape and marking a change between the higher ground to the east and the expanse of the Vale of Gloucester to the west.

2.1.2   Although largely agricultural and situated beyond the major centres of settlement in the region today, it was a place of importance in prehistory. In the Iron Age, the hillfort at Crickley Hill, located on a prominent spur on the edge of the Cotswold escarpment, was an important centre of influence and still commands views across the landscape to the west.

2.1.3   While much of the landscape has changed since that time there remains an area of thick woodland along the escarpment edge south of Great Witcombe, which is of considerable antiquity and may have been part of a larger area of woodland which would have been familiar to the Iron Age inhabitants of Crickley Hill. In the centuries that followed the Romans built a major road, Ermine Street, through the centre of the study area, cutting a straight line to allow quick passage from Cirencester to Gloucester. This remained a routeway over the centuries and its course is reflected in the arrangement of later fields in the eastern part of the area.

2.1.4   The majority of parish boundaries follow Ermine Street or other natural landscape features including the escarpment edge and watercourses.

2.1.5   Changes in historic landscape character appears to have been driven more by topography with land use on either side of the parish boundaries following similar trends, excepting those areas where the parish and topographic changes follow the same lines.

2.1.6   The landscape today is characterised by a mixture of fields, often bounded by hedgerows or drystone walls, and interspersed by small villages and isolated farmsteads commonly built in the local Cotswold stone. Much of the agricultural land has retained boundaries which reflect the piecemeal enclosure[6] of medieval or early medieval areas of cultivation or pasture, lending legibility and time depth to the modern farming landscape.

2.1.7   Five HLCAs have been identified: three areas of agricultural land, characterised by different forms of enclosure, as well as the eastern part of Brockworth, and a dense area of woodland (ES Figure 6.3 Historic landscape character areas (Document Reference 6.3)).

2.2   HLCA01: Area of irregular enclosed fields east of Brockworth (Figure 1)

2.2.1   Summary: A large expanse of agricultural land to the east of Brockworth, characterised by irregular enclosure. To the east of the area rises the Cotswold escarpment, the wooded slopes forming a clear boundary to the area. The HLCA

is scattered with small villages and farmsteads and cut through by major roads including the A417.

2.2.2   The HLCA is an agricultural landscape of hedgerow-bound, irregularly shaped fields, typical of those surviving from the piecemeal enclosure of medieval cultivated land in the earlier centuries of the post-medieval period. The area is scattered with post-medieval farmsteads and interspersed with villages, including Shurdington, Badgworth and Witcombe, and buildings are often in local Cotswold stone. There are also surviving elements of deer parks and landscaped gardens at Badgeworth and Witcombe, reflecting land use by the ruling classes. Pockets of woodland and the gently undulating topography means that it is an area where hiddenness can be as characteristic as visibility, even within the relatively open landscape of fields.

2.2.3   The area is dominated by Crickley Hill, a spur of the Cotswold escarpment which has been an important centre in prehistory, with evidence of Neolithic and Iron Age occupation and defensive activity. Historic roads bisect the HLCA, including the Roman road (Ermine Street) and Shurdington Road (A46), which is likely to have medieval origins. These roads are respected in the layout of the adjacent fields which suggests they these have changed little over the centuries. More recently, major roads including the A417, have truncated the historic field patterns. This landscape is primarily of historic interest, retaining legible features of the pre-enclosure farming landscape and forming the setting for several historic villages and estates. This HLCA is of medium/low significance.

2.3   HLCA02: Woodland south of Great Witcombe (Figure 2)

2.3.1   Summary: A large area of historic woodland.

2.3.2   The wooded slopes south of Great Witcombe form a distinctively different HLCA to the surrounding area. The woodland is formed of several historic woods, encompassing Witcombe Wood, Buckle Wood, Cranham Wood, Buckholt Wood, and Brockworth Wood. The boundaries of the woodland are sinuous, something which is often indicative of early woods which predate the surrounding enclosed fields[7]. This area of woodland is believed to have been part of the original wildwood which arose with the retreat of the ice sheets in the last glaciation[8]. These have been utilised since the 12th century as a reliable source of raw materials and were historically managed by coppicing[9]. Open areas within the woodland were cleared in the post-medieval period. The woodland has historic interest as a survivor of the medieval or earlier landscape. This HLCA is of medium significance.

2.4   HLCA03: Agricultural landscape around Brimpsfield and Birdlip (Figure 3)

2.4.1   Summary: Agricultural landscape surrounding the villages of Brimpsfield and Birdlip, including areas of historic woodland and a mixture of field types reflecting different patterns of post-medieval enclosure.

2.4.2   The HLCA is part of the agricultural landscape of the Cotswolds, located on the gently sloping land east of the high escarpment which forms the western boundary of the HLCA. The landscape comprises a mixture of field types which reflect both the layout of enclosed fields which mostly ignored the earlier medieval cultivation patterns, and those which partially reflected those earlier patterns in

their layout; the latter being more irregular in form. In the centre of the HLCA is the village of Brimpsfield, a medieval village with buildings constructed in local Cotswold stone. South and east of Brimpsfield is an area of historic woodland and areas of former woodland which were cleared in the post-medieval period.

2.4.3   Through the centre of the HLCA, north of Brimpsfield, runs the Roman road of Ermine Street, which forms a distinct boundary in the landscape with a subtle shift in the pattern of enclosed fields on either side. Birdlip is a small roadside settlement which may have Roman origins. The former route of the A417 passed through the village before being bypassed in the late 20th century. Its historic roadside location at the edge of the escarpment means that it has always acted as a stopping point with several public houses and inns. West of the village, and the HLCA, the line of the Roman road briefly vanishes as it transverses the escarpment slope, before becoming legible again near Witcombe. This HLCA is of local historic interest and is of low significance.

2.5   HLCA04: Agricultural landscape south of Seven Springs (Figure 4)

2.5.1   Summary: This HLCA is characterised by irregular, often drystone walled, fields reflecting post-medieval and earlier use of the land as upland pasture, now mostly turned to arable cultivation. Several small settlements and a large modern golf course are present within this HLCA.

2.5.2   This HLCA is characterised by the irregular fields, now mostly under arable cultivation, which reflect patterns of unenclosed pasture which was developed for more intensive sheep farming in the post-medieval period. Wool was historically one of the main agricultural products of the Cotswolds (Natural England, 2015) and the upland area on the eastern slopes behind the escarpment would have been farmed for sheep in the medieval and post-medieval periods. There was a decline in the fortunes of the wool industry in the 19th century and areas of historic pasture, such as that within the HLCA, saw a shift to arable farming (*ibid*).

2.5.3   There are a number of small settlements within the HLCA, including Coberley, Ullenwood and Seven Springs. The historic wealth from the wool trade would have supported the estates within this HLCA at Ullenwood, Cowley and Seven Springs. Most of the historic parkland surrounding Ullenwood has been transformed into the Ullenwood Manor Golf Course, and the landscape around Seven Springs House is only distinguished by the boundaries of the current fields. Cowley, in contrast, still retains legible features, including an avenue of trees, ornamental lakes and areas of woodland plantation.

2.5.4   The gardens around Cowley Manor were laid out under James Hutchinson, the lord farmer of the manor, in the mid-19th century. His landscaped park is designated as a Grade II* Registered Park and Garden[10]. Although the HLCA contains individual elements which are of greater heritage interest, such as Cowley Manor, the overall HLCA is of more local interest, with elements which are indicative of considerable time-depth overlaid by more recent changes in land use. It is of low significance.

2.6   HLCA05: Brockworth (east of the M5) (Figure 5)

2.6.1   Summary: Part of Brockworth, a large village on the edge of Gloucester. The HLCA comprises the area of the village east of the M5 which is mostly industrial in character.

2.6.2   Brockworth developed as a small village on Ermine Street, expanding in the 20th century into a much larger settlement with industrial development dominating the area east of the M5. The industrialisation of the settlement was linked to the development of the aircraft industry in the parish. The Gloucester Aircraft Company (later, Gloster) was established at the start of 20th century and proved to be pivotal in the production of military aircraft during the Second World War. Brockworth became an important military site with its aircraft produced and air industry factories protected by anti-aircraft defences[11]. The works were closed in 1964 (BAE Systems, 2009) and the disused airfield was redeveloped as Gloucester Business Park and residential complexes[12]. The repurposing of the factory sites has resulted in the area which retains a semi-industrial character. Brockworth has historic interest as a place of continuous settlement over many centuries and an association with aircraft production. However, the redevelopment of the area in the late 20th century has made this less legible and as a result this HLCA is of low significance.
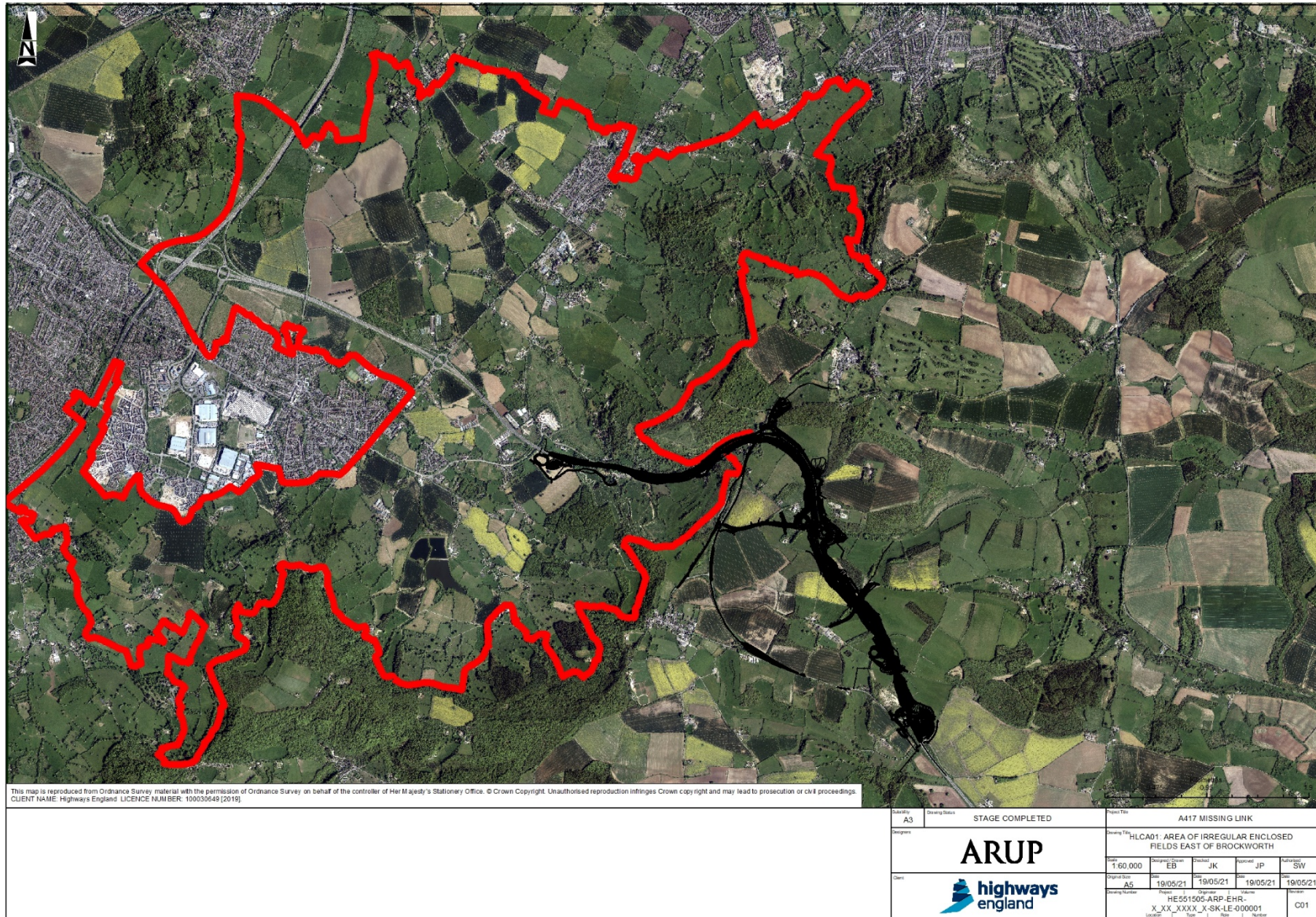
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Figure 1: HLCA01 Area of irregular enclosed fields east of Brockworth
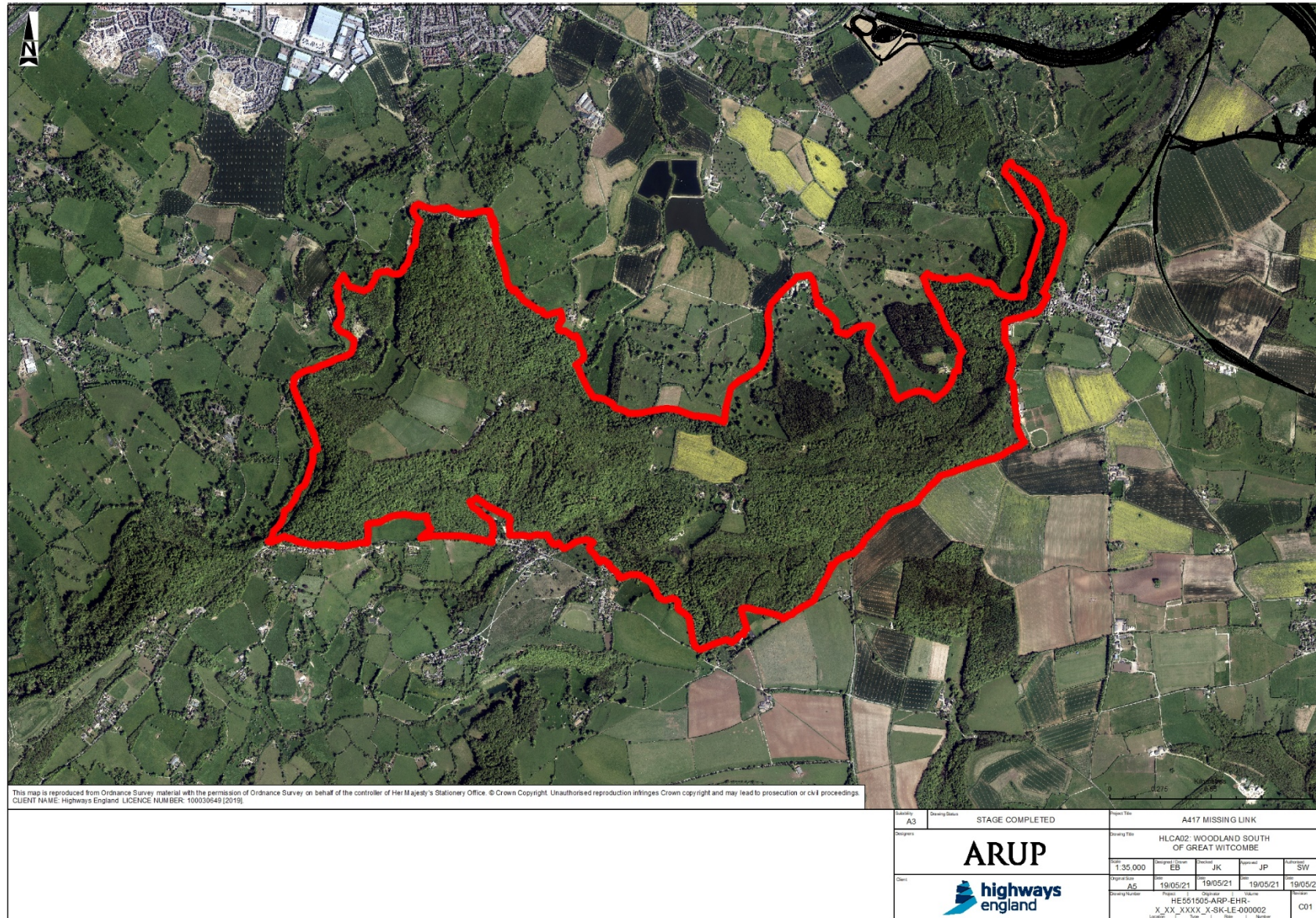
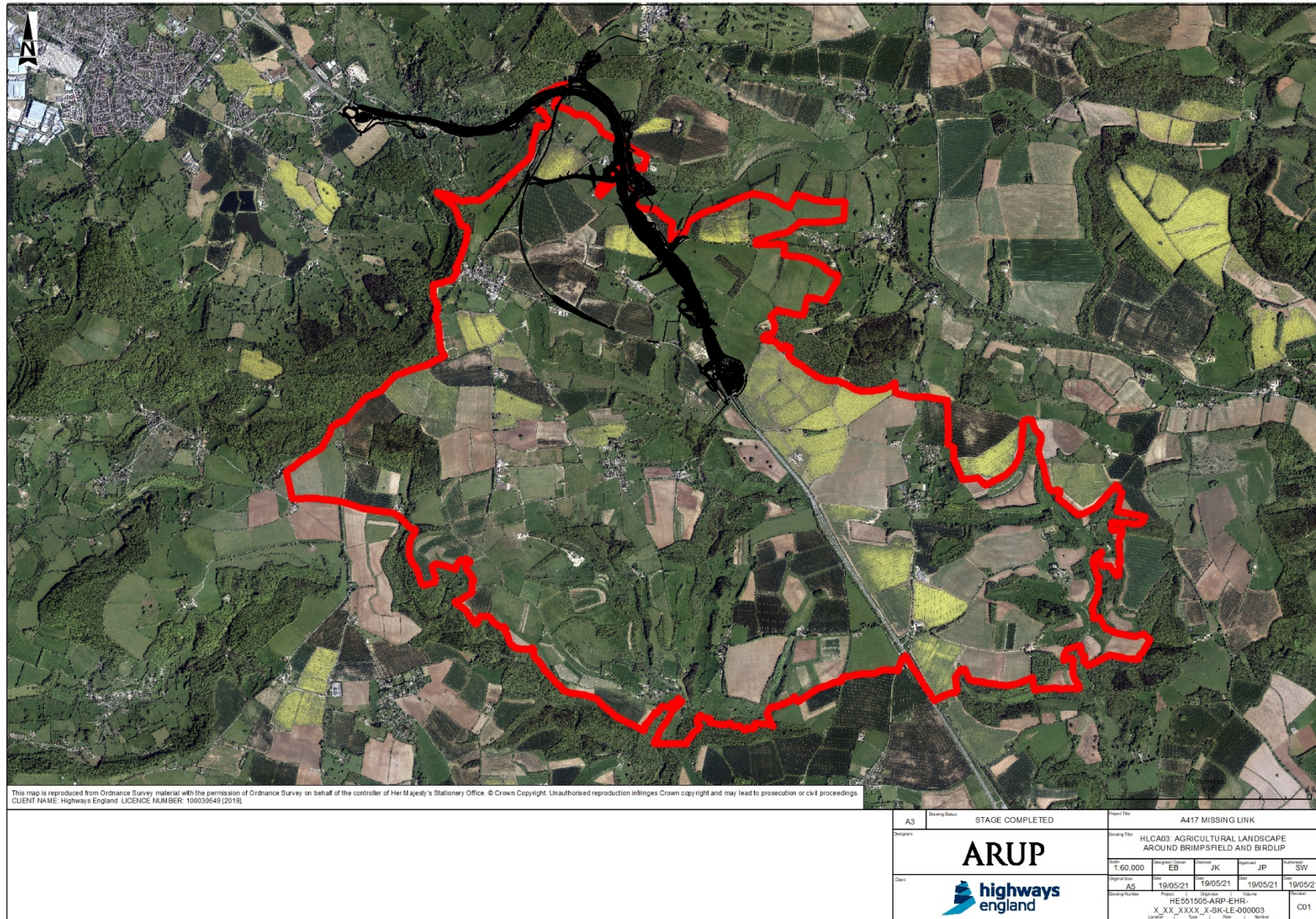**Figure 2: HLCA02: Woodland south of Great Witcombe**

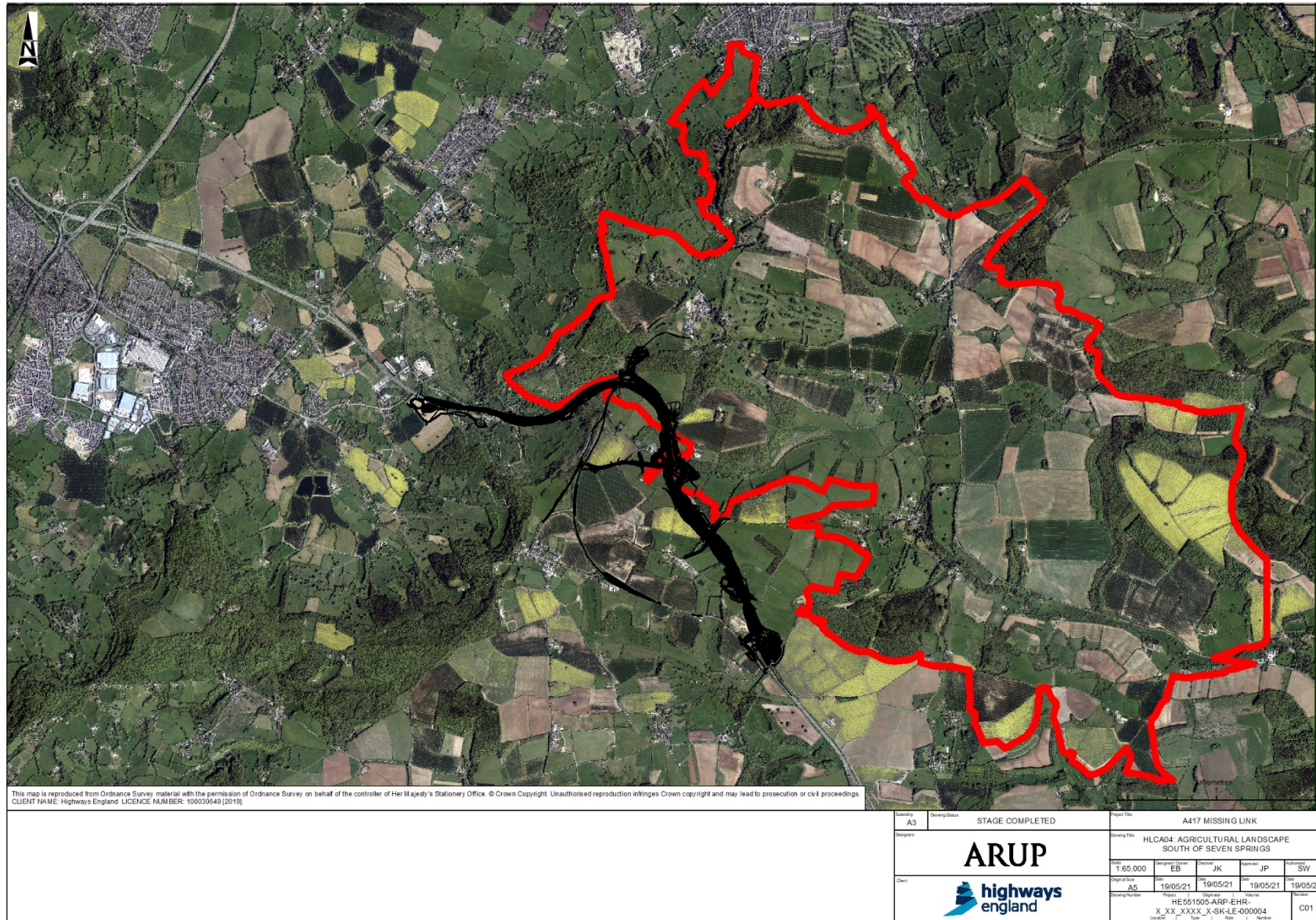**Figure 3: HLCA03: Agricultural landscape around Brimpsfield and Birdlip**

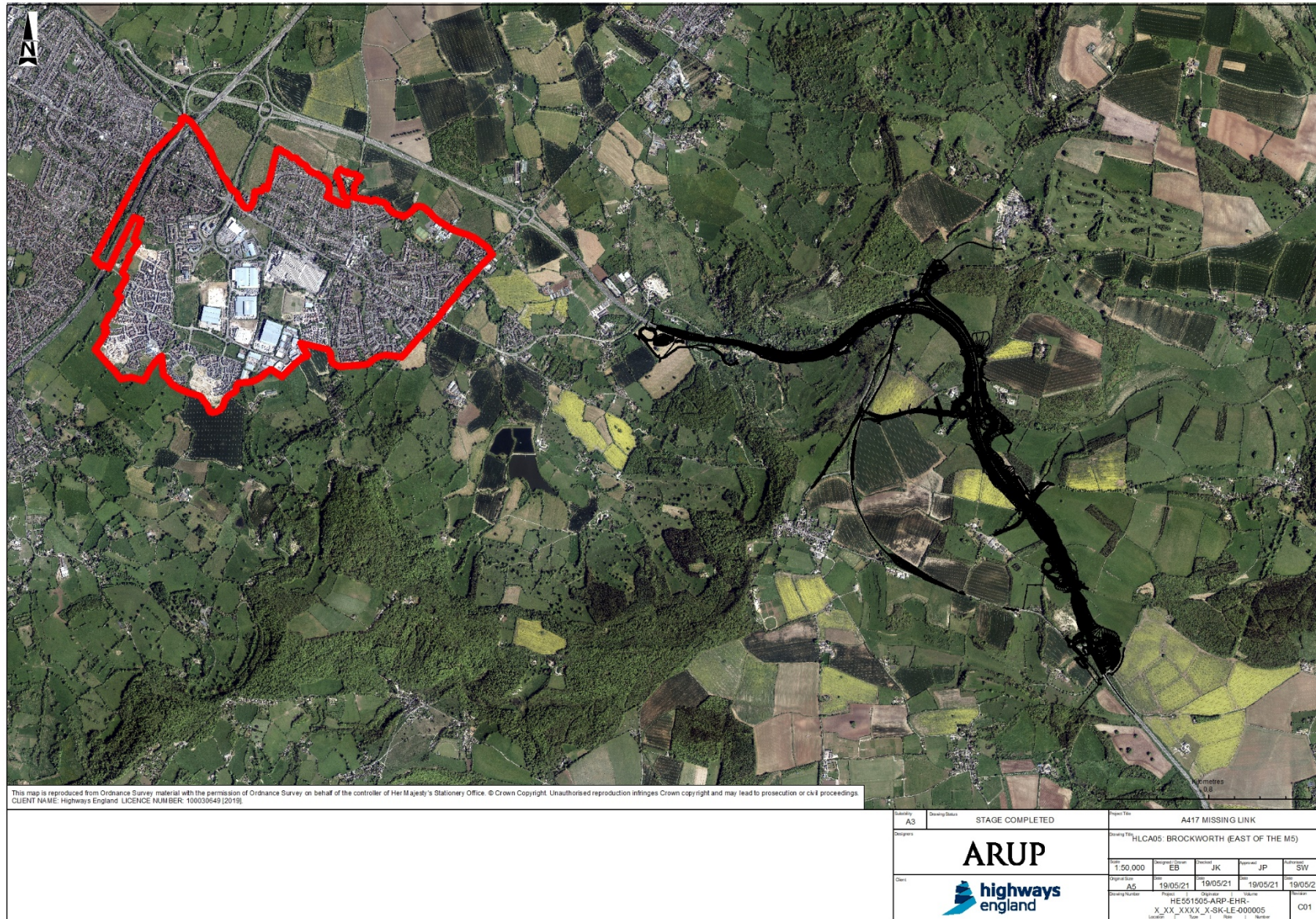**Figure 4: HLCA04: Agricultural landscape south of Seven Springs**

Figure 5: HLCA05: Brockworth (East of the M5)

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[1] Highways England, Transport for Scotland, Welsh Government, Department for Infrastructure (2019) Design Manual for Roads and Bridges. LA 106 Cultural Heritage Assessment.

[2] Clark, J., Darlington, J. and Fairclough, G. (2004) Using Historic Landscape Characterisation. English Heritage's review of HLC Applications 2002-03. English Heritage and Lancashire County Council.

[3] Hoyle, J. (2006) Historic Landscape Characterisation: Gloucestershire. The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Gloucestershire County Council

[4] Natural England (2015) National Character Area Profile. 107. Cotswold. Available online at: http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5900626?category=587130.

[5] Natural England (2015) National Character Area Profile. 107. Cotswold. Available online at: http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5900626?category=587130.

[6] Enclosure is a term which refers both simply to an area enclosed by a boundary, such as a ditch, wall, bank or hedgerow, and specifically to the process by which agricultural land was divided up into bounded fields in the post-medieval period. From the 16th century onwards there is the gradual, piecemeal enclosure of earlier open field systems. Fields surviving from this time are often irregularly shaped, or even preserve the shape of the long 'strip' fields used in medieval cultivation. Later enclosure, formalised under acts of Parliament, typically leaves patterns of regular fields.

[7] Hoyle, J. (2006) Historic Landscape Characterisation: Gloucestershire. The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Gloucestershire County Council

[8] Natural England (2012) Buckholt Wood: Cotswold Commons and Beechwoods National Nature Reserve. Available online at: http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/1736969

[9] Ibid

[10] Historic England (1986) Cowley Manor. Available online at: https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000759.

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