

Landscape (and settlement) character assessment: the Green Ring 2 West (includes areas 12 Milkwall Enclosure, part of 20 Perrygrove, 34 West Coleford, 37 Scowles) and thus the following hamlets: **Whitecliff, Mill End, The Scowles, Crossways**

Location

The Green Ring 2 lies off the A4136 Gloucester to Monmouth road, and to the west of Coleford town. It links into the Wye Valley AONB which crosses into Coleford Parish in this area. The Dean Edge Limestone Hills management zone borders just south of Whitecliff Furnace, circles to the north by Stowfield, and includes Highmeadow Woods to the north of the parish.

Geology and relief are important. The Forest is a steep-sided, deeply dissected plateau, forming a dome, and Coleford parish forms the western edge. The geology however is virtually reversed – a syncline- so the older rocks are in the middle, and some Old Red Sandstone is quarried just outside the boundary of the parish to the south east. In this west is the younger Carboniferous limestone, currently quarried for road metalling (see later) and there is some coal, ochre, iron of great importance historically, but no longer produced in the parish.

Relief and geology are very significant in the Green Ring 2 in terms of functions –past and present, vegetation and the relative isolation of the dispersed settlement. It also influences the location of the 3 hamlets which are strongly related to the minerals and industrial heritage.

Landscape

This Green Ring 2 is the edge of the valleys in which Coleford town sits, and gives a natural end to the settlement. The green is the dominant feature, with a little dispersed or hamlet settlement, but little new building. Mineral working or ex-working is strong, alongside agriculture.

There are three sub areas within this landscape:

- a. in the south, adjacent to the southern arc , there is a shallow valley which lies to the east of the southern arc, this slopes away from the town down to the south-east, then rises again at Lambsquay. Much of this is woods, meend, some pasture.
- b. behind Puzzle Wood and adjacent to Newland parish (near Clearwell) are a series of steep valleys stemming from interlocking spurs. Those trend down to the abandoned incised meander at Newland. In these valleys small brooks run, including the Whitecliff Brook which feeds down from much of Coleford. The land rises steeply to the west and north from there.
- c. The rise plateaus around the top of Scowles, to Crossways, then rises slowly again over the A4136 to Highmeadow Woods.

a.Milkwall Enclosure: adjacent to Gorsty Knoll and Milkwall, the green-ness dominates. Woodlands are on the rise toward Lambsquay and Ellwood, meend links to Milkwall and Sling, this is an old landscape, matured since the heavy industrial times. The large areas of woodland lie next to, or are penetrated by the many tracks which were once tram roads and footpaths to work. All these functions have ceased, but the undergrowth and pattern of the trees still show a maze of paths. The few fields are small but mainly regular, carved out of the forest as smallholders extended their space.

The Ellwood Road crosses the area, and the main tram road crosses that from the old Colour Works toward the disused rail line and Gorsty Knoll. The B42228 Chepstow gateway goes through this sub area on the edge with b). Sheep tracks and footpaths are evident linking Sling, Clearwell and Coleford, Milkwall.



*1.Green and rural.
Note the grass path/ sheep track leading toward the lone house on the meend edge with the forest, deep green backcloth.*

The woods are mainly deciduous: oak, ash, beech with holly and elder as understorey. (NB from Nelson's time at least 25% of all trees in Dean is oak). Some conifers are found centrally away from the road.

Bracken and foxgloves, rose-bay willow herb and the like follow the lines of forest paths/ tram roads. Meend is crossed by paths, with grass, gorse, bracken.

Small, regular fields with walls and hedge/fences were probably where miners and others worked the sheep which lived in the forest most of the year. Some of them still have sheep but many house horses today.

Very diverse habitats here for a wide variety of wildlife: squirrel, rabbits, sheep, deer, wild boar and woodland birds of all sorts

Houses are few, older, mainly pre20C, individual styles and 2 storey. They often relate to the forest, or to industrial functions, now gone, so their layout is historic eg by the rail crossings. Around them forest waste is often used for informal parking. The local stone houses and buildings are often rendered, with varied pitches of roofs and walled gardens.

There are very few buildings for the size of the area; an irregular layout with some clustering. Most dwellings are away from the roads and are surrounded by woodland, bracken or grassland. The only area where dwellings are close together is at the St James caravan park, next to the tramway crossing. Here there are stretches of kerb and pavement, otherwise grass verges are characteristic.

The **Colour Works** can be picked out by its edged slate roof. Here the ochre was worked, and underground water was tapped in that process. (Clearwell caves, in Newland parish, half a mile away the other side of the hill, still produces some ochre, from below the iron caves, though it is mainly a tourist attraction.)

Some buildings are adapted for engineering and commercial units, but small scale, and mainly off the Ellwood Rd eg a garage and some units on a Forestry Commission site.

The impression is of informal, squatter nature of the settlement, dominated by the forest. Smallholdings are immersed in woods, on commons. There is a timeless, quality to an old landscape.

b) Steeper valleys including Whitecliff



2. Tram road leading from the old station site at Milkwall toward the colour works, old quarries and pits toward Sling.



3. One of the few 20C houses with a small field, hedged and with a stable for horses, seen from the tram road at the edge of the forest and looking toward Gorsty Knoll



4. This local stone shows keys which are irregular, and differently sized blocks, possibly built by a quarryman for their family. The forest shed on the right and the plot shows practicality as well as ownership.



5. Green backdrop behind the Park



6. The arrow shows the position of the Colour Works against the view of Milkwall enclosure looking into the area

and toward Sling

On the east side of the B4228, from Perrygrove and Pingry toward Whitecliff and up to Scowles are a series of small, steep and interlocking valleys with streams which flow via Newland into the Wye.

The limestone here has been quarried in the past, with steep faces still exposed (8). Whitecliff quarry is now used for off-road driving training and sometimes for refitting locomotives, rather than for its stone.

The limestone landscape shows craggy exposures where the rock tends to be worked along its cleavage. Water drains through its cracks, so erosion can emphasise the look, and underground caves are a feature locally. Some of these extend for miles. Minerals such as ochre -3 different colours – are still mined at Clearwell Caves, just over the boundary in Newland parish.

Much of the flow of water into the Coleford bowl is culverted, and it all continues via Valley Brook or drains via Whitecliff route toward Newland. The brook itself has a tendency to disappear/change position, believed to be partly due to faulting in that part of the valley. The flow is strong at times of intense rain and drains back up so flooding is a frequent problem here.

The main drains run along the roads in a combined sewer. Welsh Water have responsibility for the sewer, whilst Severn Trent deal with surface water. The issue of the stream, drain size, collapsed culverts have contributed to the problems.

Given the steepness of slopes, landslips can occur, and water runs from the banks either side into the road.

On the steeper slopes, woods dominate the grassland. Where the coniferous stands are being worked just to the north of this oval bridge, there is little undergrowth and deeply rutted paths. However, this steep cutting (12) crossed by the former railway shows tongue ferns, moss, algae, consistent with a deep, wet valley where little sun enters much of the year.



7. The view toward Mill End showing the interlocking spurs in subarea b toward Newland



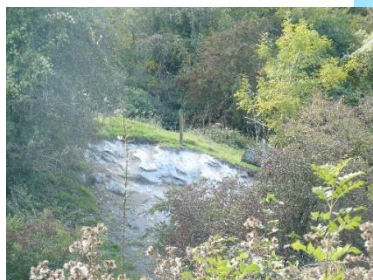
8. Whitecliff quarry face exposed behind the steep slopes with coniferous at the base and deciduous at the top (policy now changed by Forestry Commission).

Note the white chimney (centre) seen peering over the grass.



9 Whitecliff brook runs alongside the furnace, but is culverted for much of its way to the end of Whitecliff

10. Culvert collapse (since repaired) near to the quarry entrance.



11 Land slip near the Burial Path



12. The dressed red Forest stone is used for the retaining walls and bridge, but Coleford bricks form the arch and this is carried right underneath.

This ecology is found especially in the local scowles, of debatable origin. They could be due to mining practices in pre-historic or Roman times, or due to the fault lines. It is possible people worked along the seams using the faults and digging out the iron to form these holes. It is also likely that the water eroded some of the weaknesses. Puzzle Wood on the outskirts of Coleford is known for these features, and often used for film scenes as well as being a tourist attraction.

Industrial archaeology is very important in the Whitecliff valley in particular. The stream and local coal as well as the iron led to the perfection by David Mushet of the Bessemer process. That made it a more profitable enterprise, employing many local people either in the works, or mining (see Gorsty Knoll Green Ring 3).

This first furnace is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

There are few roads, and only small ones in the area. Many hark back to previous industrial workings/ functions or sheep farming. The lanes run mostly in valley bottoms.

Grassland for grazing is evident alongside the routes, part of the former mining culture, where local people often own some sheep. These may be farmed on a smallholding or released into the Forest proper for much of the time. All the houses have large gardens to produce their own food, often to the rear, but some alongside the road where the gradient is very steep.

There is some commercial activity, and down Whitecliff is a site with permission for holiday chalets but it has not been developed, and for sale for some time.



14 Old orchards in the foreground against the wooded hillside, with a typical Forest stone boundary wall

Dispersed houses are older, stone built, and some are barn conversions

10 Scowles vary in form from this well developed one, deep and hollow to many less developed, or collapsed which give an industrial pocked look to the landscape. The Scowles hamlet is named after them.



11 Whitecliff Furnace is undergoing restoration, and is included in a Forest wide Heritage Lottery Fund project



12 Houses fit into the roadside, and cluster around the stream/ iron workings. The adit form of mining – digging into hillsides to gain minerals- was the usual practice in the Forest

*13 Steep paths, like this **Burial Path** cross the valleys, often through grazing land with irregular fields and hedges, walls and trees on boundaries*



15 Narrow, winding roads, used by HGVs including some quarry lorries

In the hamlets, individual houses are grouped into a communities of their own, but the functions have now disappeared



16 Older possibly medieval house to the rear, with buttresses, raised floor above the flood level, and a barn conversion



17 Whitecliff cluster borders the AONB. The weight restriction indicates the steep, narrow road, and the nearness of the bridge shown above

Views

- **Newland Church is visible from the south, and in hearing of the bells.**
- **Mill End (18) and (7)**
- **Whitecliff quarry from Clearwell Rd (8)**



18 Mill End, with the Georgian House obscured by its mature trees on the right. The cluster is near to the mill.

c) Plateau, the Scowles and Highmeadow

Around Highmeadow Farm, by The Scowles and toward Crossways, the landscape becomes less hilly, plateaus by Robin Hood lights, then rises again, but slowly, toward Highmeadow Woods in the north.

The land opens out here, and where the grassland dominates there are long distance views.



19 View from Highmeadow Farm toward the Welsh Mountains (shown by arrow). Note the hummock in middle left, a local reservoir.

The woodlands, including Highmeadow, comprise mainly mixed deciduous forest, most of which is managed by the Forestry Commission. Some is in the AONB. The Highmeadow enclosure is evident on the skyline of the hills to the north, the highest point of the Green West. This is still limestone country, but the vegetation is more farmland (still mainly grassland) and deciduous woods.



20 The approach via the A4136 from Monmouth looking over toward Highmeadow Wood and the Christchurch caravan site



21 AONB with green verge, amenity belt and mature deciduous trees, with undergrowth. Old Man's Beard in the right foreground.



22. Note the coniferous trees are planted to emphasise the gradient (more modern Forestry Commission policy) and deciduous trees also form an amenity belt along the main road

Woods in the north have minimum 25% oak (Dean requirement) but chestnut and hazel coppices, beech and a variety of mainly deciduous trees with undergrowth are also found. The leaf litter is very deep here, and small mammals are evident, making use of the variety of nuts and masts.



24. Cameras positioned as part of the data collection for a study of wild boar in the Forest of Dean (H Clayton).



23 coppicing and deep litter giving a rich habitat for mammals, insects and birds.

In addition, larger mammals are around, including an increase in the number of wild boar. A study of these creatures in their habitat is currently being carried out (24)

Near Stowfield (see later) there are many Protected & Priority Species: dormouse, lesser horseshoe bat, pretty chalk carpet moth, lesser butterfly orchid, great crested newt, polecat, wood white, small heath butterfly, small pearl-bordered butterfly and cinnabar moth. The grass to almost heath border to the woods gives a variety of habitats, and an SSSI is located here too.

Paddocks are frequent as well as sheep grazing, and these larger fields are bounded with mature trees left in tall hedgerows. Some hedges are traditionally laid, and then much shorter.

Underlying the limestone there is a principal aquifer, a layer of clay, which is critical to the drainage and ecology in the area. There is a well right in the north by Beeches Farm, and a lake at the sawmills by Robin Hood (artificially created).



25 Lake at disused sawmills at Robin Hood traffic lights. Now stocked and fished.

In season warning signs are used to warn motorists on the B4228 as this is an important frog crossing point.

In geological terms, the carboniferous limestone is quarried on a large scale for road metalling at Stowfield near the Scowles. In the draft Minerals Local Plan (which was out for consultation 2014) it is noted that the current productive capacity is 800,000 tpa and that HGVs use their specific lorry route through the woods onto the B4228 and thence the A4136. Most of Gloucestershire's road metalling comes from the Forest.



26 Quarry lorries use own road through woods then onto B then A road.

Assuming a similar level and the existing reserves, quarrying is estimated to continue until approx. 2030 based on the existing area. (See also Looking Ahead for proposals under this Draft Minerals Plan.)

With the scowles, ironworking and iron pits the archaeological evidence is significant and designated. The woodland enclosures themselves are of historical note, although the working forest is not original.

Housing in this area is mainly dispersed and older, reflecting a more agricultural landscape. In The Scowles, the original functions which were part of a



27 Scowles Farm with its carved pediment and stone mullion windows. These are unusual, given the, irregular, not dressed, stones. The slate roof and chimney look newer.

village have disappeared, though eg the old schoolhouse is recognisable.

Now a hamlet, it is on a no through road, though the footpath goes straight through to Coleford. A new cyclepath is being debated from Christchurch Forest Holidays via Mary's Lane to Angus Buchanan Recreation Ground and into Coleford town centre.

Forest tracks, bridlepaths and footpaths are frequent in the wooded areas especially, and many are signed.

There is a permanent orienteering course in Highmeadow Wood, near to the ForestHolidays, an important tourist destination.



30 Forest Holidays have chalets in the woods near Christchurch. The campsite has places for tents, mobile caravans and fixed caravans.



28 The post box remains at Scowles, the last function...



29 Path through The Scowles to Angus Buchanan Rec in Coleford



29 Way marked paths are well used by visitors in early spring and autumn as well as summer. They link through to Christchurch.



31 The shop is the focus for sporting and leisure opportunities. It is reached through Berry Hill by metalled roads, but is situated in Coleford parish.

Tourism and leisure is an important part of diversification of farming too, with Highmeadow Farm, Rushmere, (and Greenways at Scowles) both catering for caravans and tents. Bed and breakfast is also available in Green Ring 2.

Key views

- Highmeadow Farm to Welsh mountains (19)
- A4136 from Staunton across to Highmeadow woods(20)

Key features of Green West : natural biodiversity and green rural surroundings

- **Whitecliff furnace (scheduled ancient monument)**
- **Whitecliff quarry.**
- **Railway bridge on Scowles road near Whitecliff**
- **Stowfield quarry**
- **Highmeadow Woods**
- **Christchurch: Forest Holidays**
- **Scowles**
- **Lake & old sawmills near Robin Hood traffic lights**
- **SSSI Dingle Wood**

Positive features and special qualities

- Varied landscape
- Feels tranquil and much more rural and “natural” than other parts of the parish.
- Biodiverse and accessible to nature. AONB and SSSI; bat sites
- No intrusive modern buildings.
- Industrial archaeology: brown field gone to green.

- Mineral workings provide jobs
- Scowles

Negative features and detracting elements

- Steeper slopes mean some buildings (often farms) are isolated
- Narrow roads restrict traffic
- Flooding at Whitecliff unresolved
- Impact of HGV traffic and dust/noise at Stowfield

Looking ahead

- Depending on the resultant published Minerals Plan, 3 hectares of woodland could be additionally quarried, but existing reserves are estimated to allow Stowfield quarry to continue until c2030
- New cyclepath is underway: others could follow
- Increase tourism: scope for walking holidays immense: link into Walkers are Welcome; boars attract and put off tourists: using boar study, manage animals accordingly, perhaps restricting extent of cover.
- Increased facilities and thus more local jobs