

Herefordshire Natural Environment Evidence Update

Open Space Assessment

Herefordshire County Council

Draft report

Prepared by LUC

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 LUC was commissioned in June 2022 to develop the Natural Environmental Evidence for Herefordshire Council, to support the delivery of the new Local Plan, providing a framework to guide sustainable development. The Local Plan will cover the period 2021-2041. LUC prepared updates to the Landscape Character Assessment; a review of the Open Space Assessment; a data analysis and mapping of Habitat and Species; and an updated Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy that ties the other three studies together.

1.2 This report contains an Open Space Assessment (hereafter, 'the study') for Herefordshire Council (hereafter, 'the Council'), covering the whole county. The study involves a partial review and update of the previous Open Space Study, which was completed in 2006. The 2006 work assessed open space as well as outdoor sport and recreational facilities. Assessment of open spaces was based on guidance in Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG17). An update of the playing pitch assessment has been commissioned separately.

Structure of this report

1.3 The structure of the study is set out below:

- **Chapter 2** sets out the study methodology.
- **Chapter 3** provides an overview of the planning policy framework within which this study has been undertaken and sets out the strategic context for the assessment.
- **Chapter 4** provides an overview of the socio-economic, demographic and environmental context in Herefordshire, to build up a picture of the needs of residents in Herefordshire, as well as additional benefits open space can provide in the county. This includes a summary of findings from consultation.

- **Chapter 5** defines the typology and hierarchy of open space used for this assessment.
- **Chapter 6** sets out the findings from the quantity assessment, identifies quantity standards for the county and assess the quantity of open space in relation to these standards.
- **Chapter 7** summarises the results from the quality and value audit informed by site surveys undertaken in 2022 and sets out the results of desk-based assessments including tree canopy coverage.
- **Chapter 8** identifies accessibility standards for the county and sets out the results of these access buffers across Herefordshire.
- **Chapter 9** provides key areas for enhancement and recommendations to maximise benefits from open spaces in Herefordshire and ensure quantity, accessibility and quality targets are met.

Chapter 2

Methodology

2.1 The methodology for the assessment of open spaces in Herefordshire reflects the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF) and the standards and approach set out within Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework (GI Framework). The approach has also been informed by recognised guidance on planning for open space and play space. The methodology followed five key steps and each step is described in more detail below:

1. Identifying local need;
2. Auditing local provision;
3. Setting local standards;
4. Applying local standards; and
5. Making policy recommendations.

Step 1: Identifying local need

Policy review and understanding local context

2.2 A review of relevant national and local planning policy was undertaken in order to develop an understanding of the local context in Herefordshire. This was supplemented with a desk study to consider specific characteristics of the

population and environmental make-up of Herefordshire to further understand the needs of the county.

Consultation

2.3 Stakeholder engagement took place through a public survey asking for residents' views on open spaces. The survey was hosted on an online survey platform and promoted through the Council website and via social media. This was used to gauge opinions on current facilities and use of open spaces, as well as expectations of open spaces.

Step 2: Auditing local provision

Collating and reviewing open space data

2.4 Existing data on open spaces within Herefordshire was collated and reviewed. This was primarily drawn from the PPG17 open space data set from 2006. Within this data set open spaces were divided according to land ownership. In these cases, the open spaces were merged together again to better reflect how open spaces were experienced by users on the ground. A full list of open spaces is included in **Appendix A**.

2.5 Open spaces were updated and cross referenced with other data sets, including open access and common land, aerial imagery and OS Greenspace layers.

2.6 These sites were categorised according to typology (based on the function of the open space) and the hierarchy, based on the size of the open space. The following typologies were used:

- Amenity greenspace;

- Natural and semi-natural greenspace;
- Green corridors and chains;
- Incidental greenspace;
- Civic spaces;
- Provision for children and teenagers;
- Allotments;
- Outdoor sports provision; and
- Cemeteries and churchyards.

Site audits

2.7 Green Flag Award criteria were used to create a detailed audit form to collect information on the range of features and facilities present (Value) and the condition of features and management aspects (Quality). Priority areas for enhancement for each open space was also collected. An example audit form is included within **Appendix B**.

2.8 Site audits prioritised accessible greenspaces over 0.5ha, which includes all the sites within the amenity greenspace, natural and semi-natural greenspace and green corridors and chains typology. Provision for children and teenagers were also prioritised within the site visits.

2.9 Site audits were conducted by various parties between September 2022 and January 2023. Detailed scoring guidance was produced by LUC to ensure consistency in all audits. This is provided in **Appendix B**.

- During September 2022, LUC audited 82 sites within Hereford and its immediate surroundings.
- From September to October 2022 Herefordshire Council officers audited 78 sites within each of the market towns and their immediate surroundings.

- Between September 2022 and January 2023 parish councillors audited 40 sites within the rural parts of the county.

2.10 All audits were collated and assembled centrally to analyse the findings. Three audits submitted from the parish councils did not include sufficient information to link to spatial data for the open space and were discounted from the analysis. This gave a total of 197 open spaces with complete audited data.

Step 3: Setting local standards

2.11 Following the audit of local provision, open space standards for quantity, accessibility, and quality and value were proposed. The development of the standards considered the consultation findings and the assessment local need within Herefordshire.

2.12 Quantity and accessibility standards were set based on good practice guidance and the standards proposed in the GI Framework. Standards varied for the different typologies and hierarchies of open space.

2.13 Standards were set for quality and value, providing a benchmark against which each site can be assessed. Quality and value standards have been set for each level of the hierarchy (where appropriate) to ensure that sites are compared 'like for like' with sites that would be expected to provide a similar offer.

2.14 Standards for outdoor sports provision will be provided in the Herefordshire Playing Pitch Strategy and have such have not been considered here. Cemeteries and churchyards and civic spaces contribute to open space provision, but their primary function is not necessarily public recreation so no standards have been set for these spaces.

Step 4: Applying local standards

2.15 The application of proposed standards provides a picture of how current open space provision stands, and where enhancements could be made. For the purposes of understanding spatial variation in Herefordshire, the standards have also been applied at seven localities:

- Hereford;
- Bromyard;
- Kington;
- Ledbury;
- Leominster;
- Ross-on-Wye; and
- Rural areas.

2.16 These areas are aligned with housing growth areas. The boundaries for Kington, Ledbury, Leominster and Ross-on-Wye have been taken from the Neighbourhood Development Plan Boundaries. Boundaries for Hereford and Bromyard have been digitised based on aerial mapping and coincide with the settlement boundaries used in the Landscape Character Assessment.

Applying quantity standards

2.17 The performance of the whole county in terms of quantity of open space was assessed against the quantity standards. More localised analysis was undertaken for each of the localities.

2.18 Separate analysis has been undertaken on the quantity of equipped play areas.

Applying quality and value standards

2.19 The audit form results for open spaces were compared to the relevant quality and value benchmarks (according to typology and size hierarchy) and categorised as either:

- Higher quality and higher value;
- Higher quality and lower value;
- Lower quality and higher value; and
- Lower quality and lower value.

2.20 Along with the quality audit, the amount of tree canopy cover within open spaces was assessed. Tree canopy cover was calculated using the National Tree Map data from Bluesky. This is a detailed dataset that provides location, height and canopy extent for individual trees over three metres in height. The accuracy is to >90% of canopy coverage. The canopy coverage area for each space was calculated as a percentage of the overall area.

Applying accessibility standards

2.21 Accessibility standards have been expressed as straight-line 'walk time' distances. These were applied in GIS to produce a series of maps showing buffers around the boundaries of open spaces to indicate areas which have poor access to different types of open space at various levels of the hierarchy.

Step 5: Making policy recommendations

2.22 The findings from previous steps were brought together to provide recommendations on:

- Addressing future open space needs through planning;

Chapter 2 Methodology

- Highlighting areas that would benefit from improved open space provision;
- Policy direction for enhancing open spaces, particularly to support their role as part of a wider GI network; and
- A framework to support decision-making around prioritisation for investment and developer contributions.

Chapter 3

Policy context

3.1 The assessment of open space quantity, quality and accessibility has been developed in the context of national, regional, and local policy. It takes account of guidance in respect of setting standards for open space.

National context

3.2 The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021 [**See reference 1**] recognises the importance of access to high quality open spaces for the health and wellbeing of communities and provides the rationale for the preparation of open space strategies. The NPPF also acknowledges the wider benefits to nature and climate change adaptation that open space can provide.

3.3 Paragraphs 98 requires that up-to-date assessments of open space need are undertaken to support the development of policies. Information from assessments should determine what open space, sport and recreational provision is required “which plans should then seek to accommodate”. The NPPF provides a mechanism by which local authorities can protect some open spaces through 'Local Green Space' designations (paragraph 101).

3.4 Paragraph 99 sets out the only circumstances in which open space can be developed. It clarifies that existing open space should not be built on unless:

- An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space to be surplus to requirements; or
- The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or

- The development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.

3.5 Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) provides further detail on the development and implementation of policies within the NPPF. PPG of most relevance to the preparation of open space standards includes:

- Open space, sport and recreation facilities, public rights of way and local green space [See reference 2]; and
- Natural environment [See reference 3].

3.6 The 25 Year Environment Plan [See reference 4] also sets out several actions that relate to delivering social benefits through the provision of natural spaces near to where people live and work and encourage more interaction in these spaces to improve public health and wellbeing.

3.7 Natural England's GI Framework [See reference 5] provides guidance for delivering and maintaining GI in the UK. This acknowledges the importance of open spaces in forming the GI network and provides standards for the quantity, accessibility and quality of greenspaces. The GI Framework includes a set of standards [See reference 6], which includes specific targets for the quantity and accessibility of accessible greenspace, as well as guidance on quality.

3.8 The headline standards for greenspace provision are:

- Local authorities have at least 3ha of publicly accessible greenspace per 1,000 of the population;
- Everyone has access to good quality green and blue spaces 'close to home'. This is defined as:
 - A 1km distance from a medium sized neighbourhood accessible greenspace (at least 10ha); AND
 - Either a 200m of a doorstep accessible greenspace (at least 0.5ha); OR
 - A 300m of a local accessible greenspace (at least 2ha).

- Accessible greenspace should meet the Green Flag Award Criteria and the best practice in accessibility for all Sensory Trust guidance.

Local context

3.9 Herefordshire's Local Plan provides a framework to guide strategic planning and shape the future development in the county until 2031. A key document within this is the Core Strategy (2011 – 2031) which was adopted in 2015 [See [reference 7](#)].

3.10 Core strategy objective 2 is to improve the health, wellbeing, and quality of life of residents, through ensuring any new developments in Herefordshire contribute to better access, provision, and use of open spaces and sports recreation.

3.11 In the local plan, Policy SS7-Addressing climate change outlines that development proposals will be required to mitigate their impact on climate change through specific measures. This may include energy efficient methods of development design, supporting local and affordable food production, processing and farming, and appropriate development in sustainable locations. Considerations will also need to be taken to reduce heat islands effects, via open space provision.

3.12 Under Policy HD2-Hereford city centre in the Local Plan, residents of new homes will be required to have access to public open space, and green corridors linking green areas.

3.13 The Council is in the process of updating this current Local Plan Core Strategy. The Local Plan 2021- 2041 will set out the planning framework for the county for the period to 2041 and will cover issues such as housing provision, the economy, retail and town centres, strategic and community infrastructure and the environment.

3.14 Ongoing consultation on this plan has included:

- Spatial Options Consultation (January 2022) [\[See reference 8\]](#)
- Policy Options Consultation (April 2022) [\[See reference 9\]](#)
- Place shaping Options Consultation (June 2022) [\[See reference 10\]](#)

3.15 The vision outlined within the Spatial Options Consultation focuses on the environment, community and economy. All three areas of the vision have aspects that could be delivered through high quality open space. Specific objectives include:

- “To enhance and extend Herefordshire’s natural capital, green infrastructure and nature recovery networks”;
- “To create good quality, attractive places to work and do business to appeal to all age groups and sectors”;
- "To support good-health and wellbeing, through easy access to open space, sports facilities, and active travel options”; and
- “To support the renewal of the county’s high streets and town centres”.

3.16 The Herefordshire County Plan [\[See reference 11\]](#) sets out a vision for the future, with ambitions also grouped according to the environment, community and the economy. Whilst there is no explicit mention of green and open space, this includes the aim to: “Protect and enhance the county’s biodiversity, value nature and uphold environmental standards”, which can be provided by open space.

3.17 Herefordshire Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy [\[See reference 12\]](#) provides a framework and assessment methodology of outdoor sports pitches and facilities in the county, setting priorities for sports development, planning, developments a holistic approach to improving open spaces. The provision of high-quality sports provision within accessible and biodiverse open spaces can enhance the quality of life in urban areas.

Chapter 4

Identifying local need

4.1 The following section reviews the social and environmental characteristics of Herefordshire. This will create a local context to understand the ‘need’ for open space.

Population and demographics

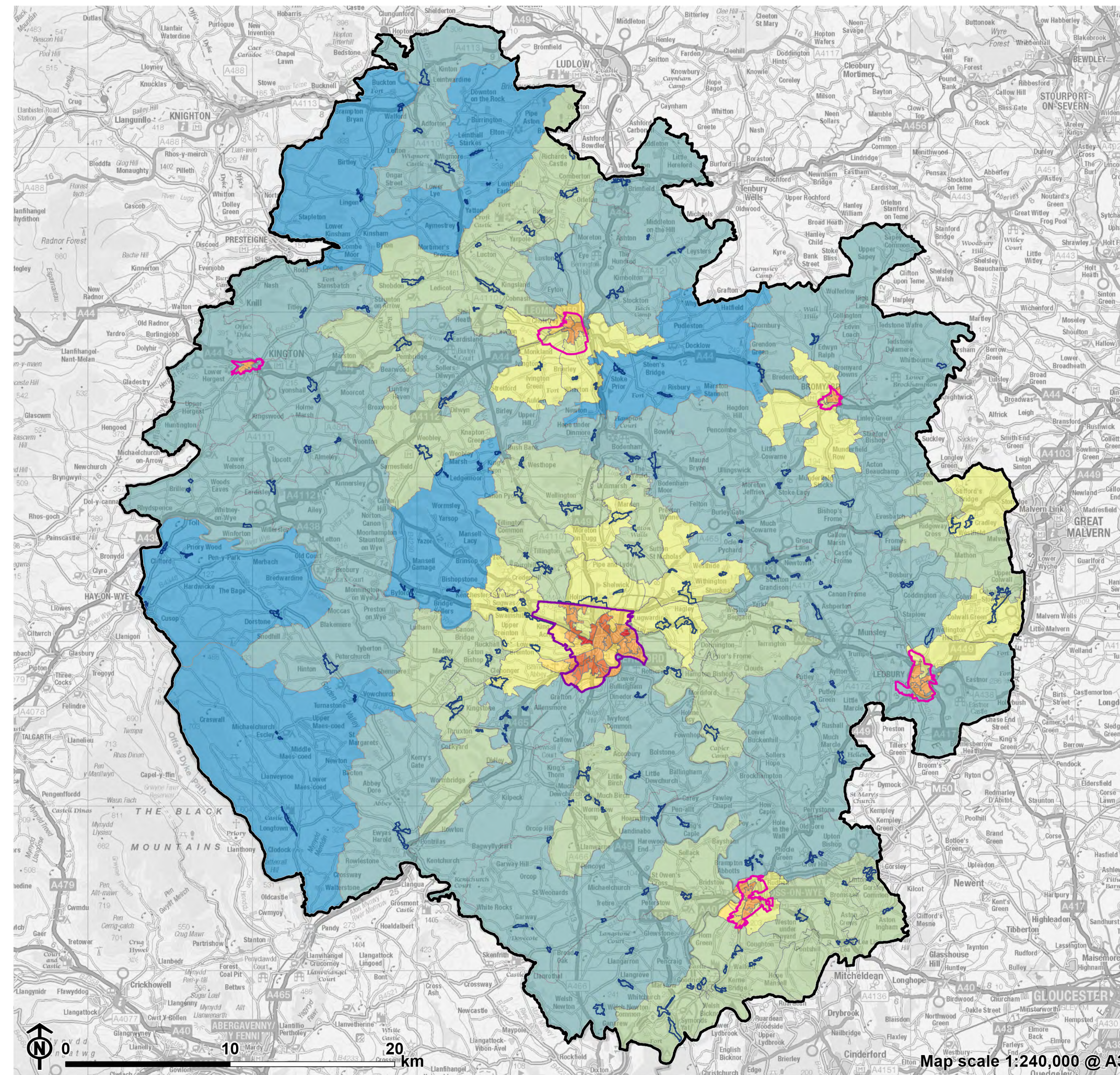
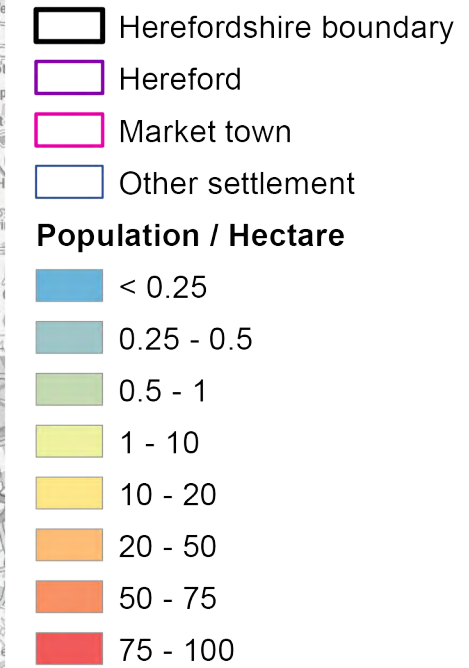
4.2 The population of Herefordshire in 2021 was 187,100 an increase of 2.0% since 2011. This is less than the average for England, where population increased by 6.6%. This is also lower than the population increase in neighbouring counties and districts including Shropshire, Worcestershire, Forest of Dean and the Malvern Hills [\[See reference 13\]](#).

4.3 Since the 1990’s, the main driver of population growth in Herefordshire has been migration, as there have been fewer births than deaths in the region. [\[See reference 14\]](#). As a result of this, the population of Herefordshire is aging. Since 2011, the population of over 65s has increased by 24%, whilst the population of under 15s has decreased by 4.3%.

4.4 Herefordshire is a largely rural county, with the lowest population density in the West Midlands. Herefordshire has a population density of 86 residents per km². This is five times smaller than the England average population density of 434 residents per km² [\[See reference 15\]](#). A map of population density in Herefordshire is shown in **Figure 4.1**.

4.5 In 2011, 6% of Herefordshire’s residents were of BAME origin, and the largest minority group were designated as white: other (not British, Irish, Irish Traveller or Gypsy) making up 3.9% of the population [\[See reference 16\]](#).

Figure 4.1: Population density by LSOA* in Herefordshire



*Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are small geographic neighbourhood areas across England

Source: Herefordshire Council, Office for National Statistics, Ordnance Survey

Future trends

4.6 The emerging Local Plan for Herefordshire is currently projecting a requirement for 17,000 between 2021 and 2041. This is divided up as follows:

- Hereford – 5,000 (29% of new homes)
- Bromyard – 750 (4% of new homes)
- Kington – 150 (1% of new homes)
- Ledbury – 1,700 (10% of new homes)
- Leominster – 2,100 (12% of new homes)
- Ross-on-Wye – 2,000 (12% of new homes)
- Rural areas – 5,320 (31% of new homes)

4.7 The average household size in Herefordshire in 2021 was 2.26 persons per dwelling. This has been applied to housing targets to produce population projections through to 2041.

Health, wellbeing and deprivation

4.8 The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 provides a set of relative measures of deprivation for small geographic neighbourhood areas (Lower-layer Super Output Areas or 'LSOAs') across England. The IMD are based on seven domains of deprivation including 'Income', 'Employment', 'Education, Skills and Training', 'Health and Disability', 'Crime', 'Barriers to Housing and Services', and 'living Environment'.

4.9 The IMD gives Herefordshire County a rank of 97th most deprived out of 152 county or shire council authorities. While this is within the least deprived half of counties, it is a higher deprivation rank than its geographical neighbours. For instance, Worcestershire ranks as 105, Shropshire as 110, and Gloucestershire as 124. **[See reference 17].**

4.10 There are 10 LSOA's in Herefordshire that are within the 25% most deprived nationally (see **Figure 4.2**). Half of these areas are found in south Hereford (Golden Post-Newton Farm, Hunderton, Bishops Meadow-Hunderton, Redhill-Belmont Road, Newton Farm-Brampton Road), three are in Leominster (Ridgemoor, Leominster-Gateway, and Leominster-Grange), one is in Bromyard (Bromyard Central), and one is in Ross-on-Wye (John Kyrle) **[See reference 18]**.

4.11 Deprivation in Herefordshire is largely within the domain of barriers to Housing and Services. This predominantly comprises geographic barriers resulting from the dispersed, rural population. Herefordshire is the 18th most deprived upper tier local authority in England on this basis. In addition, Herefordshire falls below the national average for indoor living environment **[See reference 19]**.

Environmental health and flood risk

4.12 Flooding is a key issue in Herefordshire, with 8.1% of the total land area (189.2km²) identified as being within an active flood plain. Large areas of the county are listed under flood zone 2 and 3, putting these sites at risk of flooding. These flood zone risk areas extend along the River Wye impacting Hereford City, Ross-on-Wye, and across the west of Herefordshire in Whitney-on-Wye. Leominster in the north is at risk of flooding from the River Lugg whilst Bromyard in the east is at risk from the River Frome. The market town of Kington in the west is also at risk from the River Arrow, as is the village of Eardisland. The villages of Hampton Bishop and Wellington are at risk of widespread flooding. **[See reference 20]**.

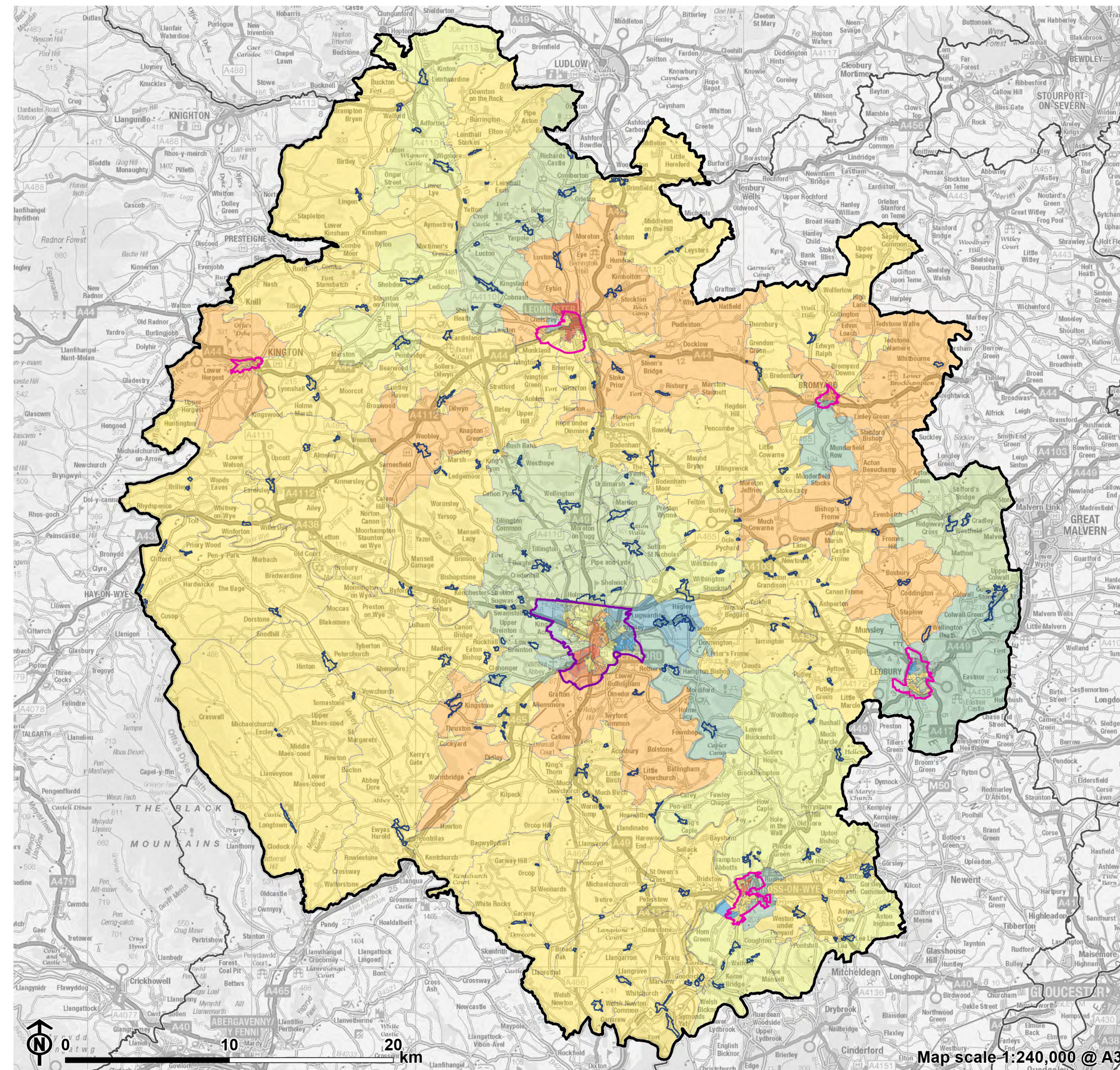
4.13 Air quality is an issue in places and there is ongoing monitoring of air quality at pinch points across Herefordshire. Latest published figures from 2021 show that 46 sites were monitored for NO₂ concentrations. The highest levels were in at the junction of Edgar Road and A49 and at Victoria Street in Hereford, and along Bargates in Leominster **[See reference 21]**. These fit into the two 'Air Quality Management Areas' (AQMA) which have been identified in

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the county and are designated AQMAs for nitrogen dioxide levels. This is caused by the presence of traffic near housing [See reference 22]. (See **Figure 4.3**).

Figure 4.2: Deprivation in Herefordshire

- Herefordshire boundary
 - Hereford
 - Market towns
 - Other settlement
- Index of Multiple Deprivation**
- 0 - 10% (most deprived)
 - 10 - 20%
 - 20 - 30%
 - 30 - 40%
 - 40 - 50%
 - 50 - 60%
 - 60 - 70%
 - 70 - 80%
 - 80 - 90%
 - 90 - 100% (least deprived)

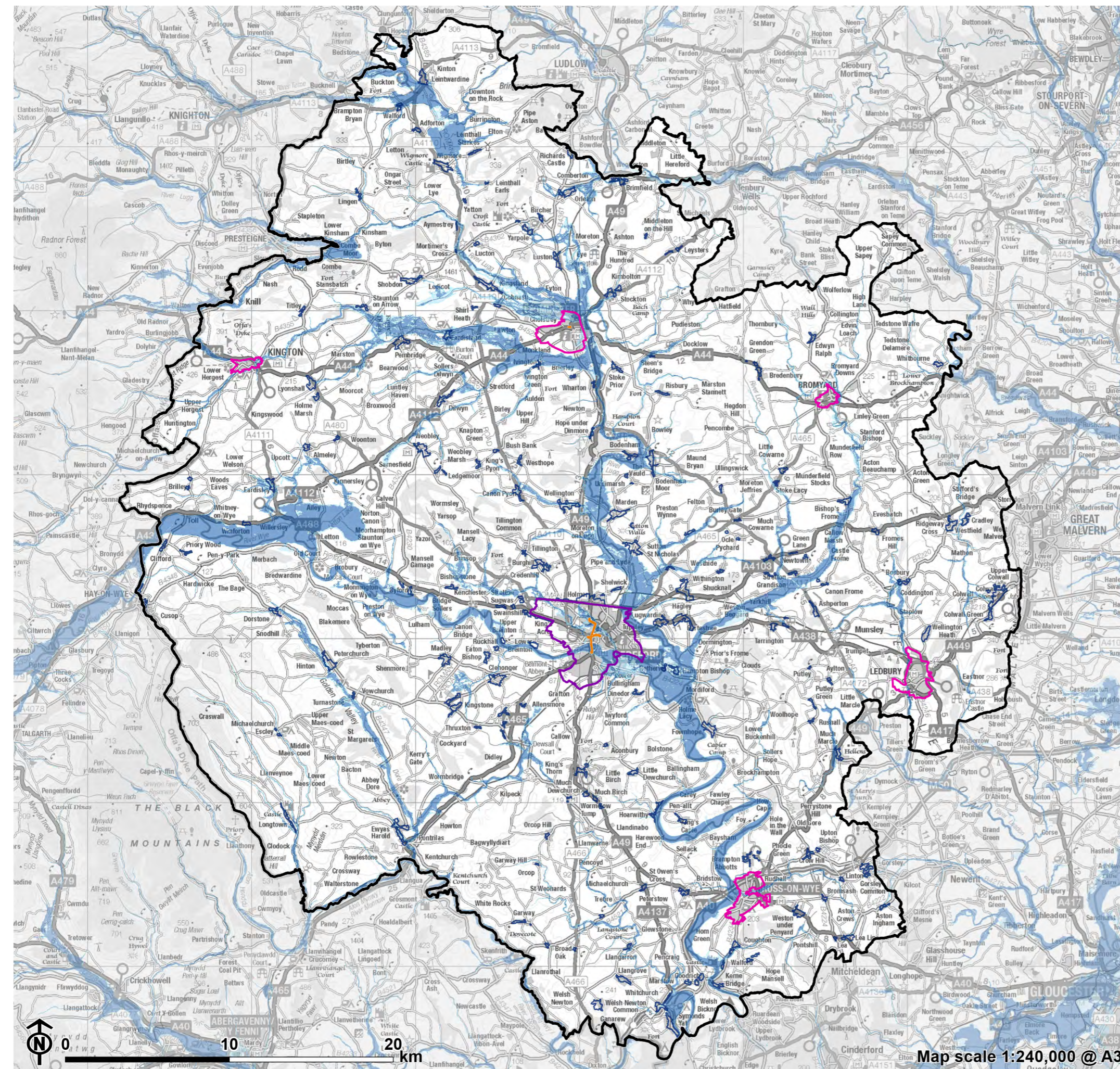


Source: Herefordshire Council, Office for National Statistics, Ordnance Survey

Map scale 1:240,000 @ A3

Figure 4.3: Environmental health in Herefordshire

- Herefordshire boundary
- Hereford
- Market towns
- Other settlement
- AQMA
- Flood zone 2
- Flood zone 3



Source: Herefordshire Council, Natural Resources Wales, Natural England, Ordnance Survey

Map scale 1:240,000 @ A3

Transport infrastructure

4.14 Herefordshire is a predominantly rural district with limited transport networks and infrastructure throughout much of the county. As a result, there is a high dependency on personal vehicles.

4.15 The major road network consists of A roads which connect Hereford with the surrounding market towns of Kington, Leominster, Bromyard, Ledbury and Ross-On-Wye. Additionally, the A417 and A44 provide connections further north. The M50 is located in the south west of the county.

4.16 The Welsh Marches Line railway extends through Herefordshire. There are four railway stations in the county: Hereford; Leominster; Ledbury and Colwall **[See reference 23]**. Direct rail links are available between stations in Herefordshire, and to Worcester, Birmingham, Cardiff, Manchester and London. Railway usage in Hereford has shown a 27% increase between 2008 and 2018. However, this is much lower than the 39% increase in railway usage nationally, showing a much lower use of railway transport in the region **[See reference 24]**.

4.17 Bus services provide connectivity within Hereford and each of the market towns (with the exception of Bromyard) and between these settlements. Subsidised services connect Hereford to the rural area. Bus services within the rural area are variable **[See reference 25]**. Key routes include:

- Hourly or twice hourly services between Hereford and each market towns, Ross-on-Wye to Gloucester, and Kington to Llandrindod Wells;
- At least daily services Kington to Knighton and Prestiegne, Leominster to Ludlow, and Ledbury to Worcester, Malvern and Gloucester; and
- Weekly or twice weekly services from Bromyard to Ledbury and Bromyard to Leominster.

4.18 The significant gaps in public transport infrastructure highlight the importance of cycle and walking infrastructure for ensuring open space is accessible to all residents.

4.19 There is national level cycle provision in the south of the county. Route 46 of the National Cycle Network (NCN) connects Hereford southeast towards Neath. There is a stage of route 46 still in development which will link Hereford to Worcester [See reference 26] More locally, there is an increasing provision of cycle infrastructure within the settlements. The council have produced 'Mini Maps' which outline the traffic-free routes and best on-road connections between these for the settlements of Hereford, Ledbury and Leominster [See reference 27] Cycle infrastructure is more limited in other settlements and within the rural parts of the county.

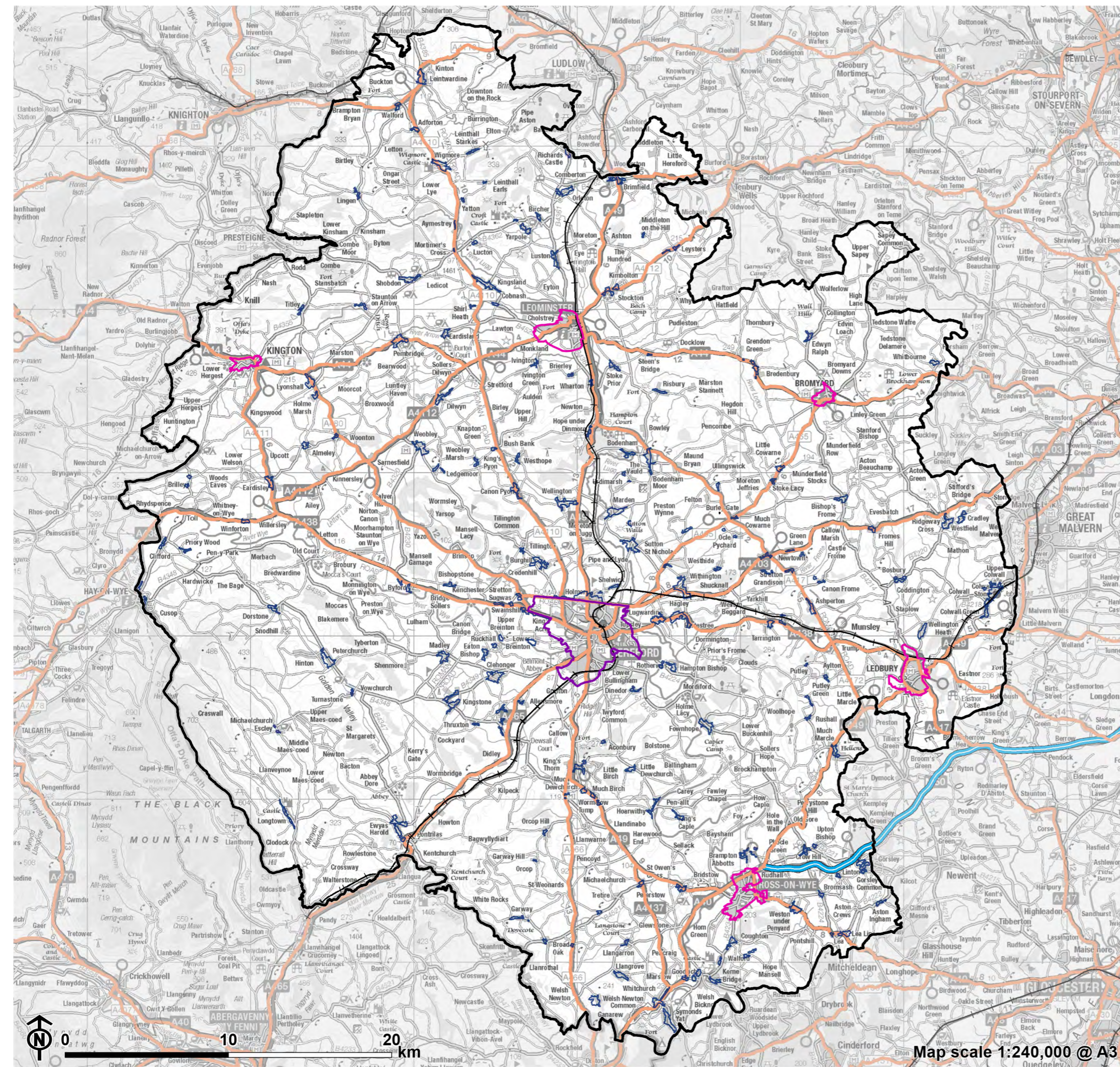
4.20 There is an extensive Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network, including a number of national, regional and local designated routes. The components of the PRoW network comprise:

- 3015km footpath;
- 417km bridleway;
- 32km restricted byway; and
- 34km byway open to all traffic.

4.21 Major transport infrastructure is shown in **Figure 4.4** below.

Figure 4.4: Transport infrastructure in Herefordshire

- Herefordshire boundary
- Hereford
- Market towns
- Other settlement
- Motorway
- A road
- Railway



Source: Herefordshire Council, Natural England, Ordnance Survey, Open Street Map

Map scale 1:240,000 @ A3

Stakeholder consultation key findings

4.22 As part of the open space assessment, LUC and Herefordshire Council ran a public consultation, comprising an online survey which ran from 5th August 2022 to 9th September 2022. The survey asked respondents about their thoughts on greenspace in general, and views on individual parks they visit.

4.23 The key findings are summarised below, including what this means for open space provision. The full results from the survey are in **Appendix C**.

Key findings

- Over 80% of respondents gave parks an importance score of 5 out of 5.
- Over 80% of respondents travelled to open spaces on foot and over 40% travelled by car. 20% of people usually travelled to parks and green spaces by cycling.
- Over three-quarters of respondents said it took less than ten minutes to reach their nearest park or greenspace.
- The most reported types of open space as being within 5 minutes of people's homes were areas with space to walk or run, and semi-natural greenspaces.
- Over half of respondents agreed that Herefordshire needed more of all types of open space. Natural and semi-natural greenspaces were considered to be the type of open space where there is greatest need for more provision, with three-quarters of respondents agreeing that more of this was needed.
- The two most important improvements to greenspaces were considered to be better management of the natural environment and park clean-ups / reduced litter.
- The most popular types of physical activities in parks were walking and dog-walking.

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- The results suggest there is an appetite for increased provision of gym equipment and for the open spaces to host outdoor fitness classes.
- Over 40% of respondents did not partake in physical activities in parks and open spaces due to poor maintenance of these spaces.
- Nearly 50% of respondents said they would be interested in participating in general tidy-up / litter picks.
- Over 40% of respondents said that they would be interested in participating in practical volunteering opportunities relating to wildlife.

4.24 These findings highlight the need for strong footpath networks to open spaces, to strengthen access for pedestrians which is the most common way for travelling to open spaces. There is also the need for enhanced management of open spaces, including to enhance nature, with the potential to increase participation from local residents. Access to natural open space was a priority for increasing provision.