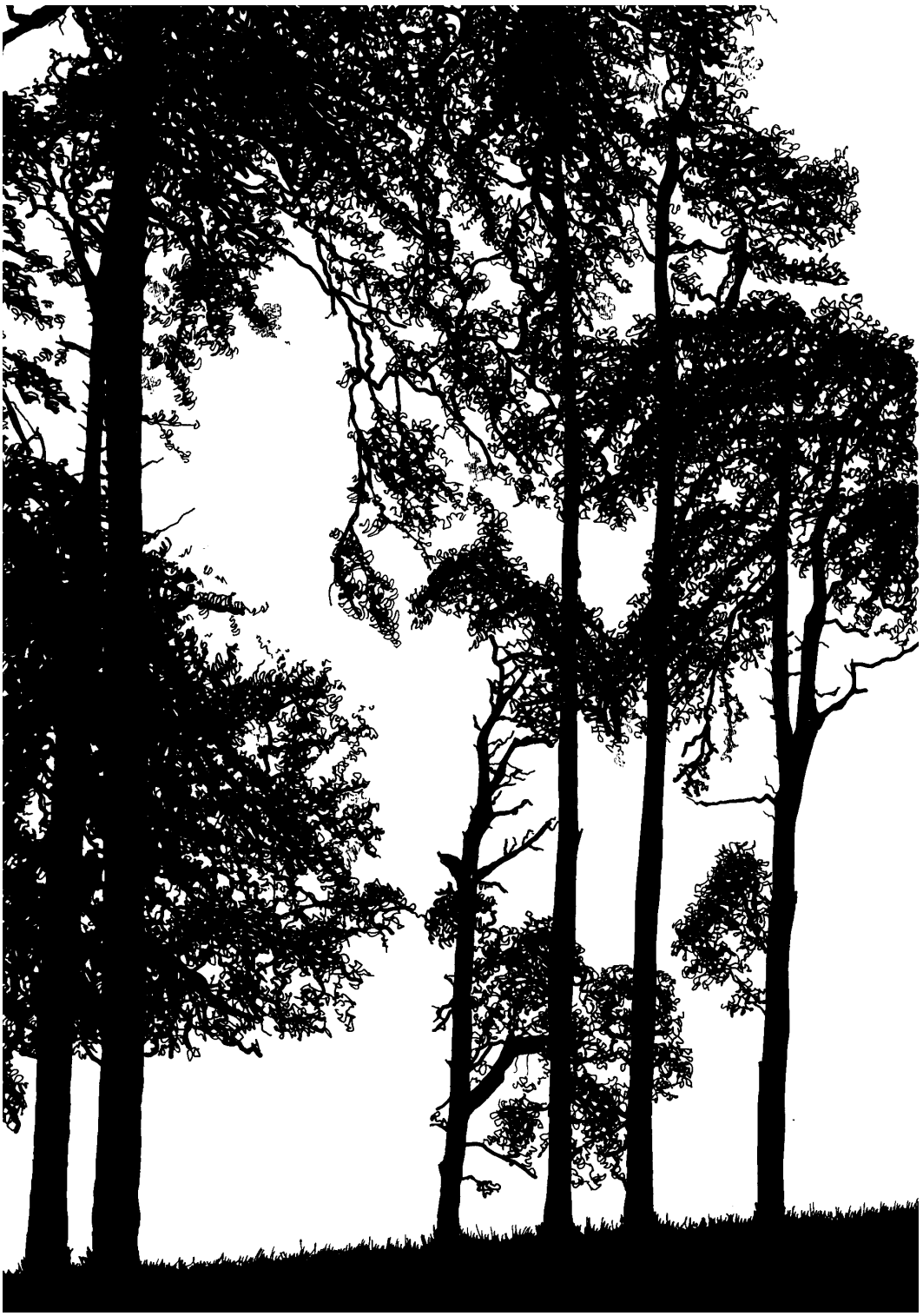
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Planning for Landscape Change: Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan 1996 – 2011 Appendix 2: A Strategic Statement on Preferred Areas for Woodland Initiatives



Planning for Landscape Change:

Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan, 1996 – 2011

Appendix 2: A Strategic Statement on Preferred Areas for Woodland Initiatives

Staffordshire County Council,
Development Services Department, 2000

Adopted on 10 May 2001 as
Supplementary Planning Guidance
to the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
Structure Plan 1996-2011

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INTRODUCTION

1. The *England Forestry Strategy* (Forestry Commission, undated) sets out the Government's priorities and programmes for forestry in England for the next five to ten years. These are considered under four themes, which are:

   - **Forestry for Rural Development**, covering forestry's role in the wider countryside, including its contribution to the rural economy and timber and marketing opportunities;

   - **Forestry for Economic Regeneration**, encompassing the role that woodlands can play in strategic land-use planning, including the restoration of former industrial land and the creation of a green setting for future urban and urban fringe development;

   - **Forestry for Recreation, Access and Tourism**, addressing the promotion of public access to woodlands and the use of woods and forests for a wide range of recreational pursuits.

   - **Forestry for the Environment and Conservation**, embracing the role that woodlands can play in conserving and enhancing the character of the environment and cultural heritage, and in delivering the Government's nature conservation, biodiversity and climate change objectives.

2. One of the Government's aims is to target its resources for implementation of forestry policy to those geographical areas, woodland types and projects which reflect the priorities in the *Strategy*, and which have been identified with greater precision in regional and local agendas, such as this Supplementary Planning Guidance. At the national level key targets for woodland creation are:

   - the creation of larger woodlands, where they can bring greater benefits;

   - the creation of woodlands in the urban fringe;

   - the restoration of former industrial land;

   - reversing the fragmentation of ancient woodland.

3. In response to the *England Forestry Strategy* a series of seven maps has been prepared, indicating those areas to which, in the view of the Strategic Planning Authorities, resources would be best targeted to deliver the strategy's objectives. Those maps which identify, respectively, areas of search for land for wood fuel production and areas of the greatest concentration of former industrial land have been prepared as a direct response to the *Strategy*; the remaining five maps draw heavily on work that was carried out for the preparation of an Indicative Forestry Strategy (IFS) for Staffordshire. A Discussion Paper on the work was published and put out to public consultation in 1995, (Staffordshire County Council, 1995) but work on the IFS was curtailed by changes to the arrangements for local authority consultation on forestry proposals.

4. These maps indicate primarily preferred areas for woodland initiatives that might be implemented through development or land use change. However, they could also be of value in assisting the targeting of resources through e.g. the Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme. Each of the detailed descriptions of landscape character types, in the main body of the Guidance, indicates the potential value of new woodland planting within that landscape, and provides guidelines on location and design.

5. Each of the maps that follows is accompanied by a brief description of its derivation.

MAP 1: AREAS OF SEARCH FOR LAND ON WHICH WOOD FUEL PRODUCTION COULD BRING ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

The *England Forestry Strategy* indicates that Government will support a targeted programme for short-rotation coppice planting and encourage the use of wood fuel for energy production using the most efficient technology.

This response to that part of the *Strategy* makes use of the 'areas of search' approach, which attempts to map those landscapes that are most likely to yield specific sites meeting appropriate criteria.

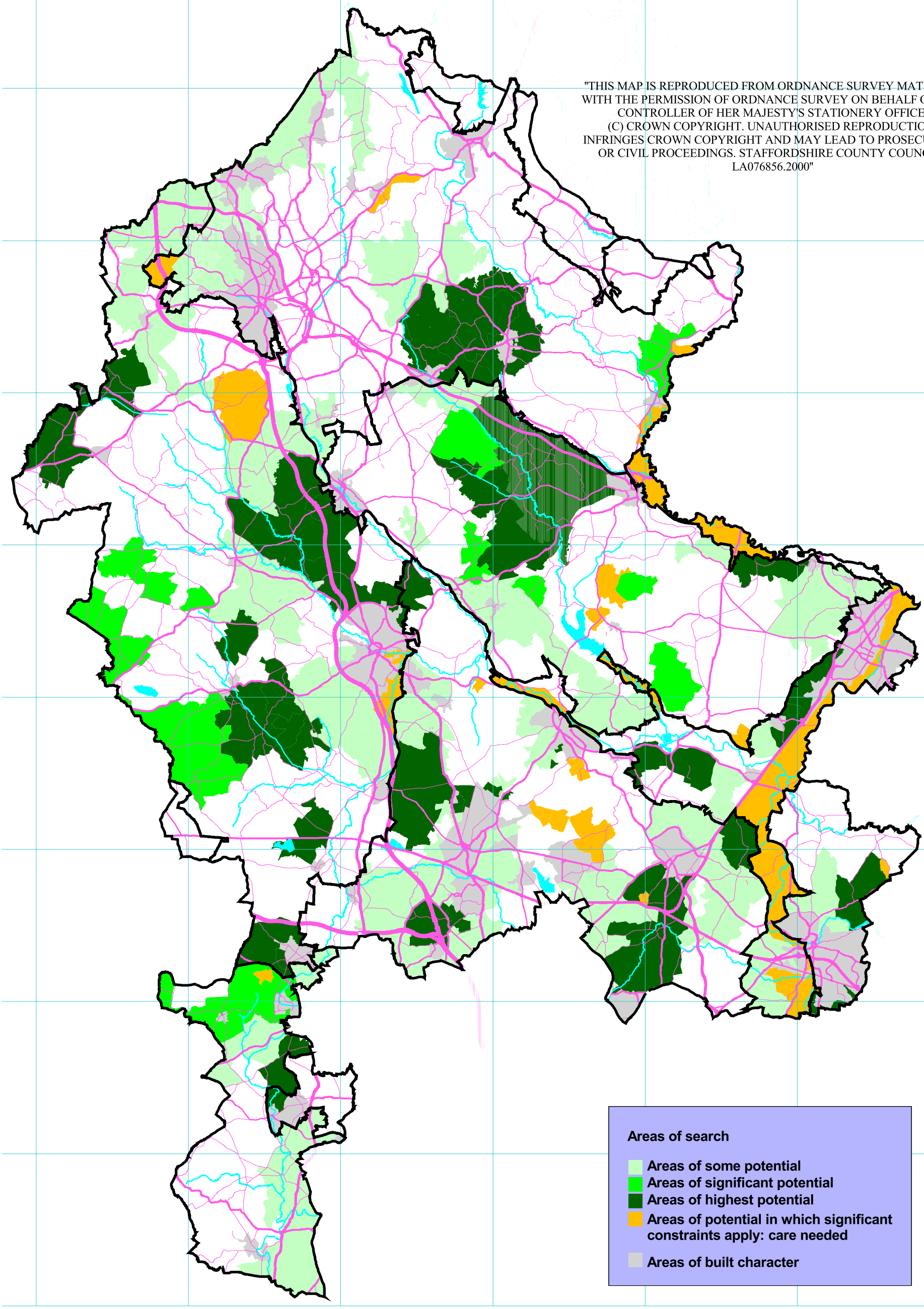
Planting for woodfuel is likely to deliver higher environmental benefits in landscapes of lower quality, where landscape regeneration, restoration or enhancement is the appropriate policy objective, subject to those areas not being sensitive to planting in terms, e.g., of their existing value for biodiversity. These are the 'areas of some potential.' Within that group planting will deliver higher benefits in the more open, generally visible areas, because it can help to recreate enclosure and to define field patterns that are otherwise in danger of being lost. These are the 'areas of significant potential.' Within that group the 'areas of highest potential' are those that are not defined as tranquil or semi-tranquil and vulnerable. This is because woodfuel production will bring with it the need for plant for energy generation and/or the need for the fuel to be transported by road, and either of these could have an adverse impact on tranquil areas, which are therefore best avoided if possible.

Areas of some potential which are not sensitive, but in which some significant constraints have been identified, are shown with a separate colour coding. In these areas more detailed site-specific assessment would be required to determine the likely environmental impacts of woodfuel production.

(For a discussion of landscape quality and sensitivity, including tranquillity, see Section 7 of the Supporting Documentation.)

Map 1: Areas of search for land on which wood fuel production could bring environmental benefits

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Areas of search

- Areas of some potential
- Areas of significant potential
- Areas of highest potential
- Areas of potential in which significant constraints apply: care needed
- Areas of built character

MAP 2: AREAS OF SEARCH FOR FORMER INDUSTRIAL LAND

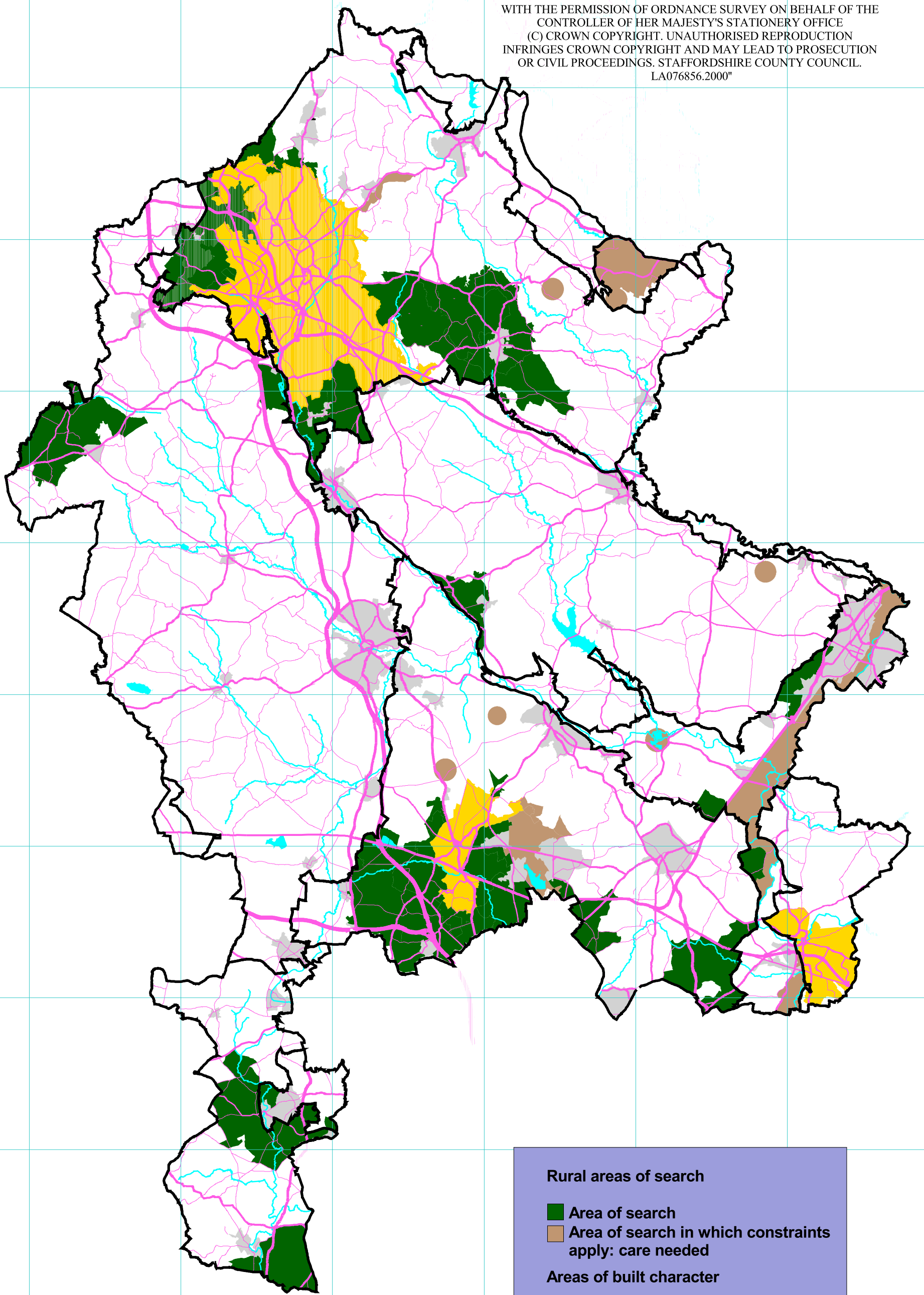
The *England Forestry Strategy* notes that recent research has identified some 175,000 ha. of 'former industrial land' in England. This includes land previously worked for minerals, land used for waste disposal, and derelict and degraded land that is capable of being planted to woodland. The current rate of transfer of such land to forestry is very low, and one of the aims of the *Strategy* is to promote the role of forestry in its restoration and sustainable use.

This map makes use of the 'areas of search' approach to identify those landscapes most likely to contain significant concentrations of former industrial land. Any land recognised as such should in a general sense be available for planting, e.g. land successfully restored to agriculture and now farmed economically should not be included. Any mapping exercise at this strategic level should concentrate on whole landscapes or tracts in which former industrial land is well represented, rather than discrete or isolated sites.

For these reasons any mapping exercise is a matter of judgement rather than simple identification. Wherever possible the map employs Land Description Units (LDUs: see Section 6 of the Supporting Documentation), as the mapping unit. Occasionally this has not been appropriate, e.g. in the case of large but isolated minerals sites, and in these cases the area of search is denoted by a circle.

Map 2:
Areas of search for former industrial land

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Rural areas of search

- Area of search
- Area of search in which constraints apply: care needed

Areas of built character

- Areas of built character
- Urban areas of search

MAP 3: AREAS OF RESTRICTED OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOODLAND RECREATION

The *England Forestry Strategy* indicates Government's intention to target grants to encourage woodland owners to provide public access to their woods, particularly in areas where such access opportunities are in short supply.

This map aims to assist in that targeting, within the Structure Plan area. It is based closely on the *Proposed priority areas for Community Woodland Supplement Payments* map included in the *Discussion Document on Staffordshire's Indicative Forestry Strategy*, as the underlying rationale is applicable both to new planting and to existing woodlands.

In producing this map the following assumptions have been made:

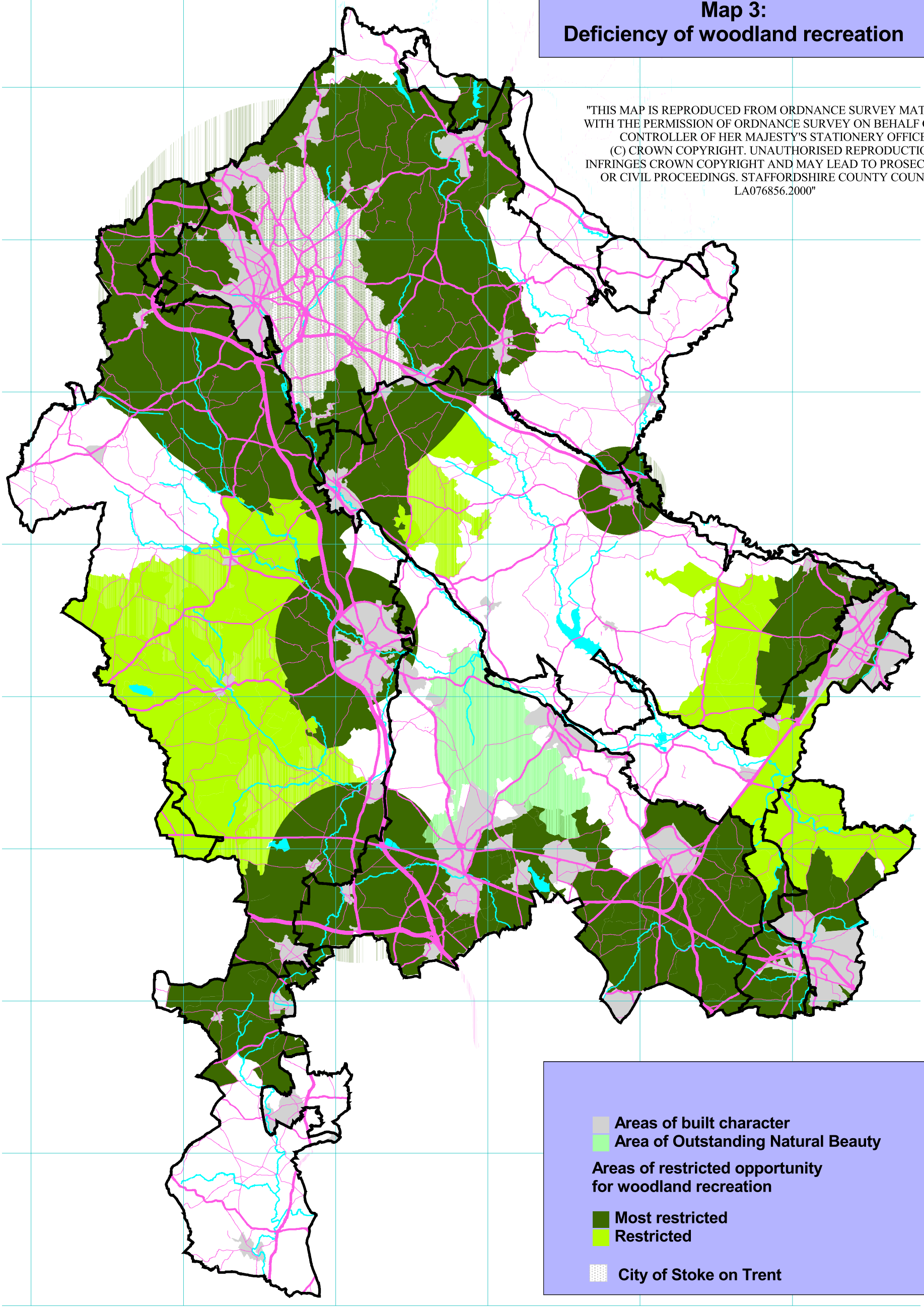
- A reasonable target for publicly accessible woodland, available for quiet informal recreation, is one hectare per 500 people;

- the recreational value of such woodlands is related strongly to their proximity to centres of population. Woodlands within walking distance of home are most valuable, whilst those at a distance of five miles provide little community benefit, even if they have particular features to attract visitors.

The areas shown as 'most restricted' are those closest to such centres of population, and most deficient in publicly accessible woodlands. These are the areas where the need to increase access opportunities is felt most strongly, and where the targeting of grant aid to that end would bring the greatest benefit. The areas shown as 'restricted' are also deficient, by the criteria adopted, but the deficiency is experienced by smaller and more dispersed rural communities who will have better access to footpaths in the countryside. These areas could therefore be regarded as of slightly lower priority for targeting grant aid.

Map 3:
Deficiency of woodland recreation

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Areas of built character
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Areas of restricted opportunity for woodland recreation

Most restricted
Restricted

City of Stoke on Trent

MAP 4: REVERSING ANCIENT WOODLAND FRAGMENTATION

Government has expressed an intention, in the *England Forestry Strategy*, to target grants through the Woodland Grant Scheme to reverse the fragmentation of existing native woodlands.

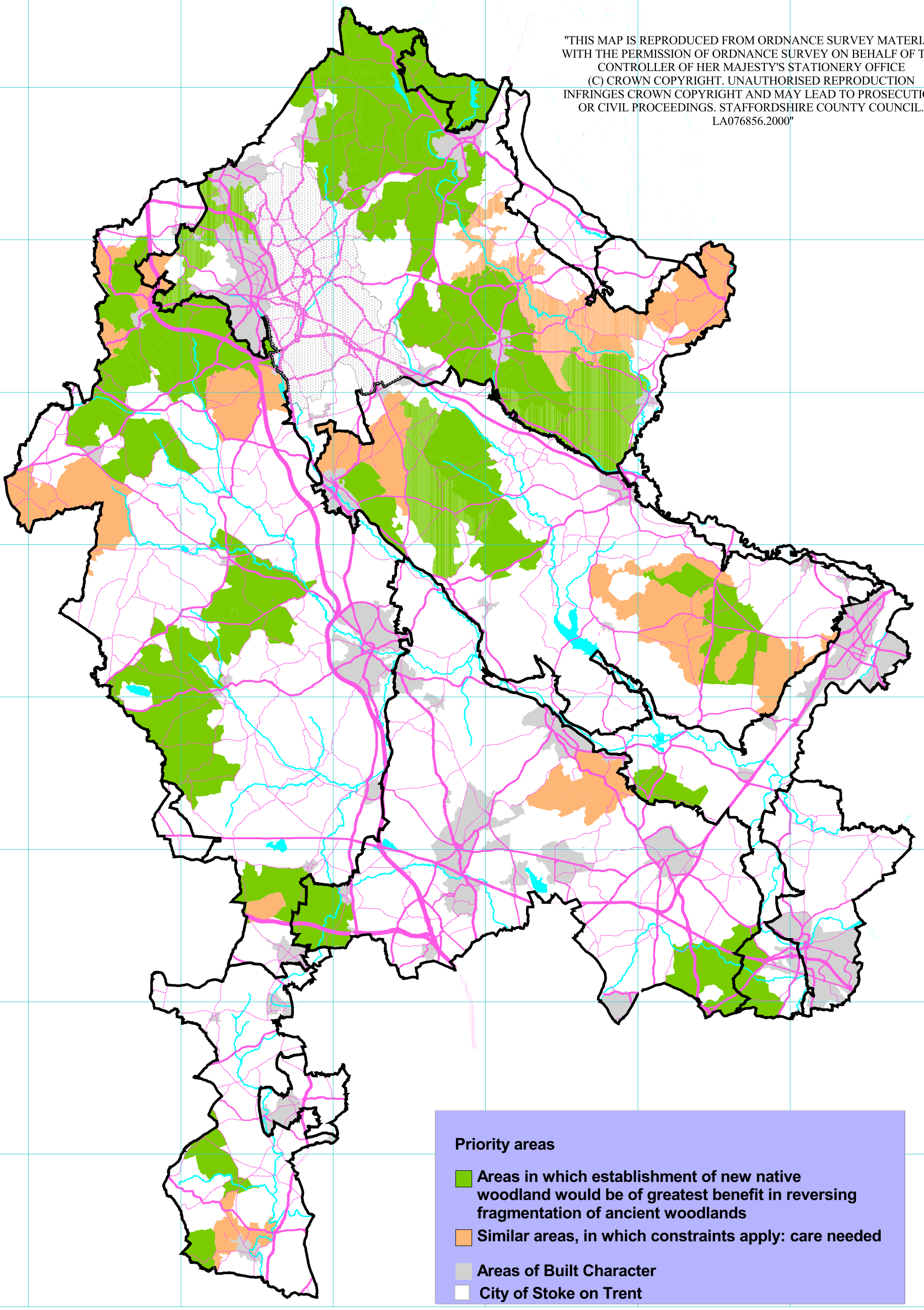
Many plants and animals are dependent on woodland as habitat to a greater or lesser extent. Some species which evolved in a completely wooded environment are totally dependent on those conditions and cannot survive in or disperse through open countryside. Their range is restricted to the surviving areas of woodland which have descended from the wildwood, which occupied most of Britain after the end of the last Ice Age; they are the so-called ancient woodland indicator species. Others came to adapt to the heterogeneous landscape of woodland, heathland, wetland and semi-natural grassland that resulted from clearance of the original forest and the development of agriculture. As that has become more intensive and as roads, canals and railways have dissected the countryside there has been increasing fragmentation and isolation of these landscape elements.

As a result of these changes many woodland animals and plants, including trees, have been reduced to small populations which are isolated to a greater or lesser extent from each other, They face the dual dangers of genetic degeneration, because of enforced inbreeding, and of local extinctions caused by chance events such as extreme weather. The effects can be particularly severe in ancient semi-natural woods, as they are habitat for some of our rarest and most extinction-prone species which are unable to re-colonise woodlands from which they have been lost. The solution to the potential problems of degeneration and local extinction is to facilitate the movement of plants and animals, or their genes, between woodlands. New planting of woodlands of locally native species (often referred to as new native woodland) could be of great potential benefit to woodland plants and animals because the greater the number of suitable woodlands within dispersal range of each other, the greater will be the opportunity for exchange between these woods.

This map identifies those landscapes which contain significant clusters of ancient woodlands, as identified by the *Staffordshire Inventory of Ancient Woodland* (Nature Conservancy Council, 1993), within which the strategic siting of new native woodland would significantly reduce ‘nearest neighbour’ distances between woods.

Map 4:
Reversing ancient woodland fragmentation

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MAP 5: PRIORITY AREAS FOR WOODLAND MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES

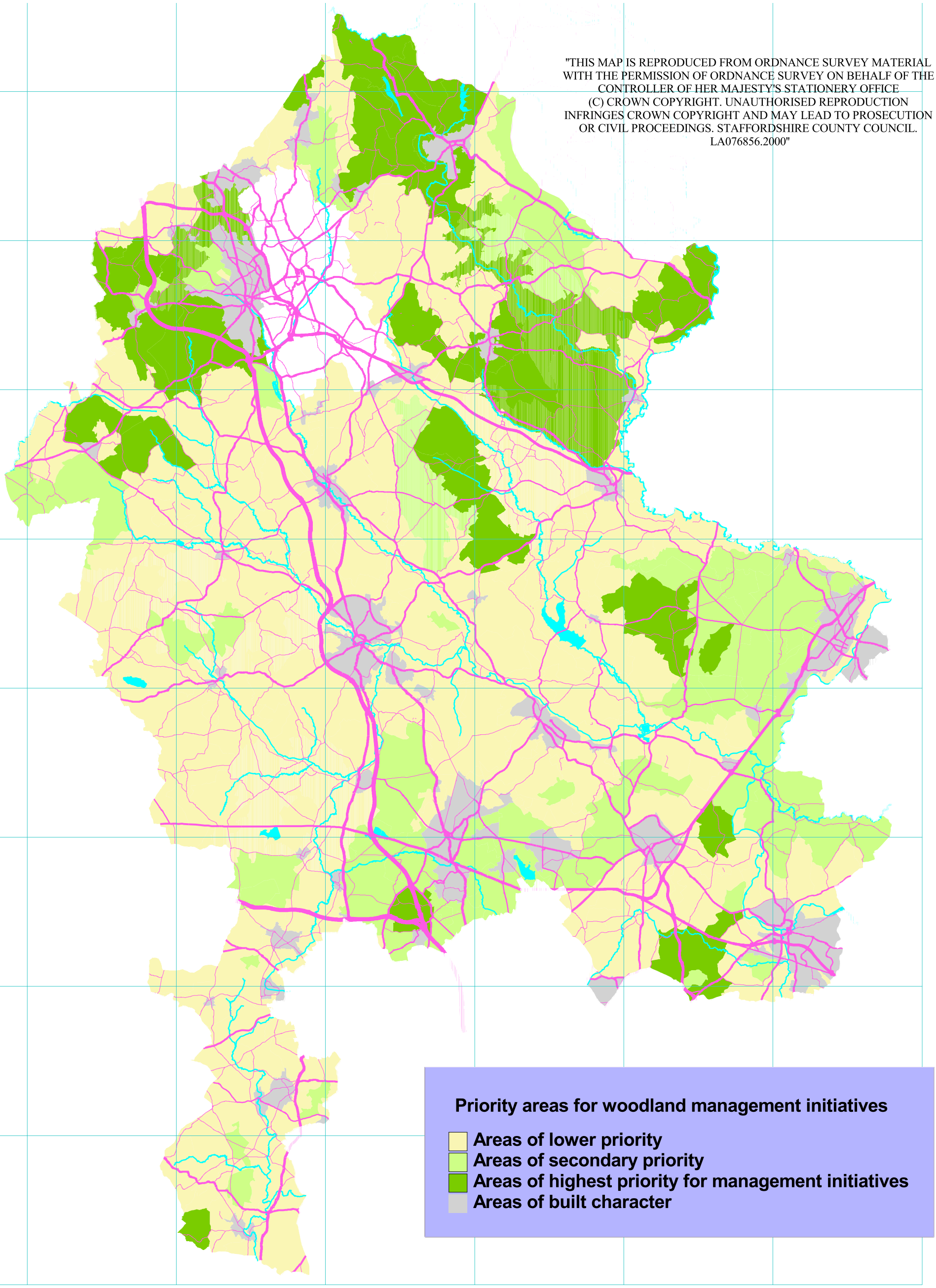
This Map should be used in conjunction with Map 4, as improving the management of ancient and semi-natural woodlands is as important as new planting in combating the effects of fragmentation, as the *England Forestry Strategy* reflects.

This has been derived from the *Staffordshire Inventory of Ancient Woodland*, and from records of Woodland Grant Scheme application notifications, from which those ancient woodlands which appear to be unmanaged can be identified. The priority areas are those landscapes containing significant numbers of unmanaged ancient woodlands.

Two thirds of the Structure Plan area's ancient semi-natural woodlands, amounting to 44% of their total area, appear to be unmanaged. There is a very real danger that a significant proportion of the most valuable and attractive wildlife habitat in the area will be degraded or lost completely as a result of lack of appropriate management.

Map 5:
Priority areas for woodland management initiatives

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Priority areas for woodland management initiatives

- Areas of lower priority
- Areas of secondary priority
- Areas of highest priority for management initiatives
- Areas of built character

MAP 6: THE NEED FOR LARGE WOODLANDS

The *England Forestry Strategy* acknowledges that the Woodland Grant Scheme has been successful in recent years in establishing small broadleaved woodlands. Government now wishes to encourage larger-scale activity targeted at locations where woodlands will realise greater overall benefits than other land uses.

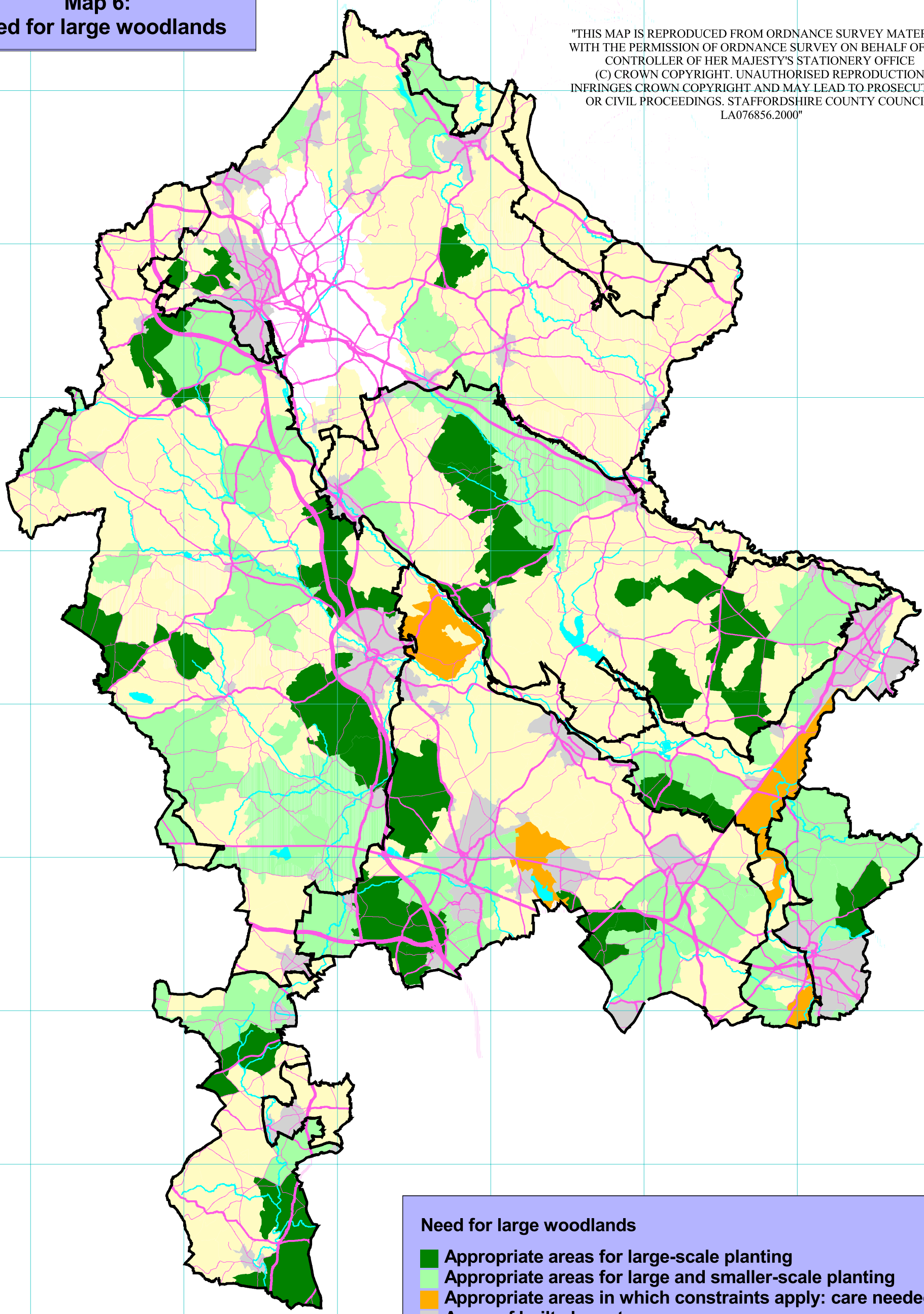
This map is drawn directly from the output of the landscape assessment carried out originally for the *Discussion Document on Staffordshire's Indicative Forestry Strategy*. The 'appropriate areas for large scale planting' are generally those which have lost most of their landcover, in the form of woodlands and hedges. Large woodland blocks are visually appropriate because of the large scale of these landscapes, which have gone beyond the point at which hedgerow reinstatement and field corner planting would be helpful, and they would also provide significant 'habitat islands'.

Where the process of landscape fragmentation is less complete, e.g. where some hedgerows and small woods still remain, it will be important to tie new woodlands into that surviving landscape structure, both visually and in terms of maintaining a structural continuity of habitat. These are the 'appropriate areas for large and smaller-scale planting'.

Some areas which would otherwise be appropriate for the siting of large new woodlands are constrained, e.g. by the requirements of river flood control measures or by competing nature conservation objectives. Particular care will be required in siting new woodlands in the areas so indicated on the map.

Map 6:
Need for large woodlands

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Need for large woodlands

- Appropriate areas for large-scale planting
- Appropriate areas for large and smaller-scale planting
- Appropriate areas in which constraints apply: care needed
- Areas of built character

MAP 7: PREFERRED AREAS FOR WOODLAND INITIATIVES

This is effectively a Schematic Strategy Map, as defined in Department of the Environment Circular 29/92, *Indicative Forestry Strategies*. It is the *Potential Schematic Strategy Map* of the *Discussion Document on Staffordshire's Indicative Forestry Strategy*, modified as a result of the public consultation exercise.

Both the National Forest and the Forest of Mercia have their own published strategies, to which reference should be made for more detailed guidance. In the remaining part of the Structure Plan area the preferred and sensitive areas were identified by determining the potential benefits and adverse impacts of new woodland planting with respect to the following areas of interest:

- landscape impacts
- nature conservation and biodiversity
- impacts on the water environment, including ground water and flood control
- archaeological impacts
- impacts on 'aesthetic landscapes' (e.g. historic parks and gardens)
- job creation opportunities
- opportunities for provision of woodland recreation
- sustainability issues

These areas of interest are discussed in detail in the *Discussion Document on Staffordshire's Indicative Forestry Strategy.*

As Map 7 shows, the Structure Plan area can be divided into the following 'zones' with respect to the benefits of further woodland planting:

i) the National forest and the Forest of Mercia within Staffordshire, each of which have their own strategies in place;

ii) first priority preferred areas, in which new planting following accepted good practice (e.g. Forestry Commission, 1998) would bring multiple benefits;

iii) second priority preferred areas, in which new planting following accepted good practice would bring benefits with respect to one or more of the areas of interest listed above;

iv) third priority preferred areas, in which there is no pressing need for significant new planting, but where it would be of overall net benefit;

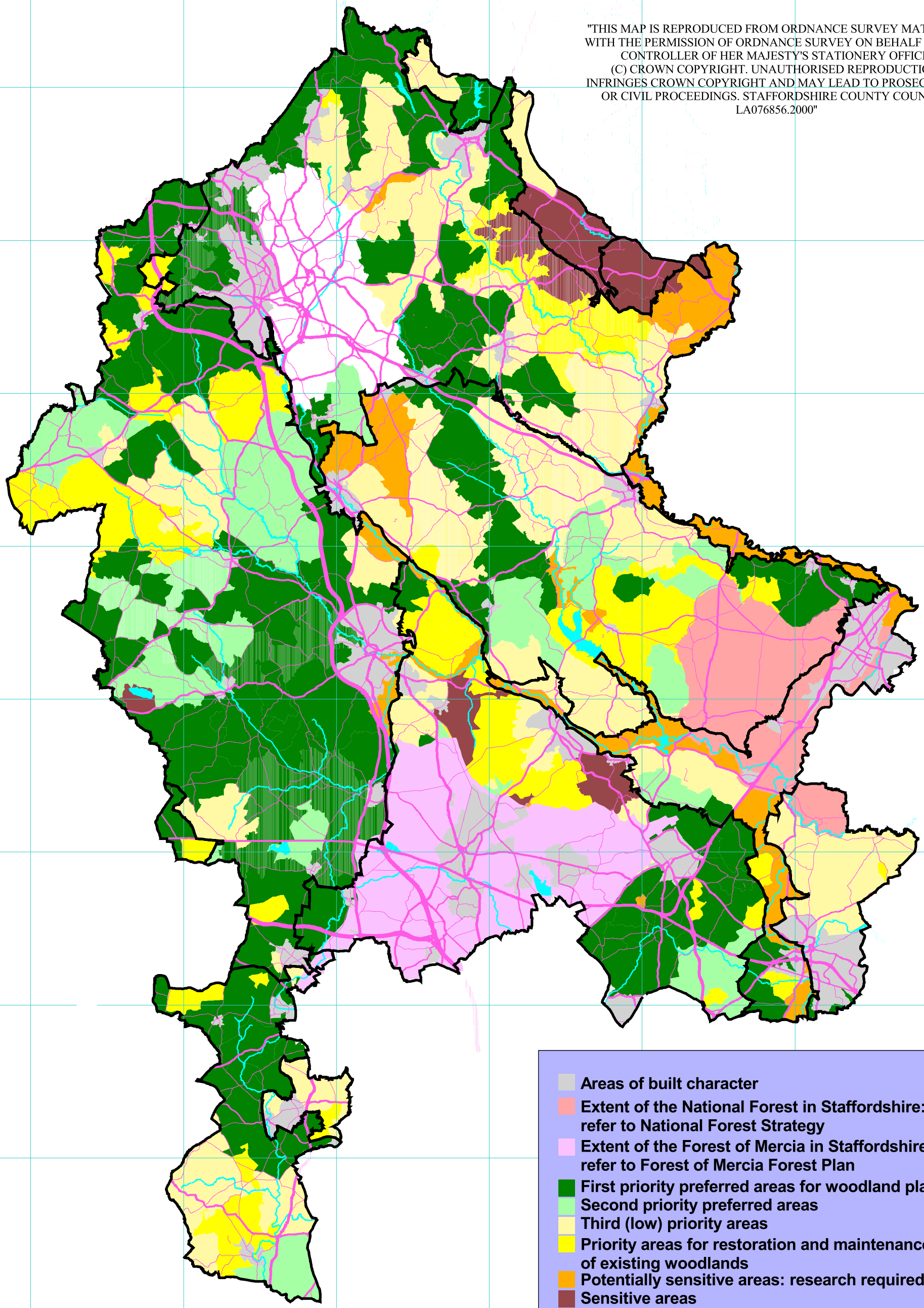
v) priority areas for the restoration and maintenance of existing woodlands, where their conservation is more important than additional woodland planting;

vi) potentially sensitive areas, where new planting may bring some benefits, but where there are significant constraints, such as existing areas of nature conservation value or the need to limit woodland establishment in the interests of flood control. In these area the value of new planting proposals has to be assessed on a case-by-case basis;

vii) sensitive areas, where the creation of new woodland on any appreciable scale would not be appropriate because of their present value in terms of the areas of interest listed above.

Map 7:
Preferred areas for woodland planting initiatives

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