



CHARACTER AREAS

5A Lus Hill

5.5.1 Key Characteristics

- Rolling elevated ridgeline with occasional isolated outliers, defining a linear outcrop of the Stanford and Coral Rag Formation Limestones;
- Gently sloping or level ridge summits with accordant heights contrasting with the steep slopes that extend down to the surrounding clay lowland;
- Predominantly pastoral landscape with some arable fields;
- Large fields with a network of hedgerow with numerous hedgerow trees;
- Scattered tree clumps and woodland blocks, with some ancient woodland, including prominent woodlands on summit areas and isolated outliers;
- A settled landscape with a number of villages and small towns, and scattered farmsteads;
- A variety of building styles ranging from distinctive stone buildings in historic village centres to modern development using a mix of materials;
- Urban influences due to the proximity of Swindon and other settlements, military complexes and the principal road network;
- An intricate network of rural roads connecting the villages and farms; and
- Panoramic views from higher ground, particularly from the north-west facing scarp slopes.

5.5.2 The Settled Limestone Ridge within the Cotswold Water Park Study Area

The Settled Limestone Ridge Landscape Character Type is represented by a very small area within the south-eastern part of the



study area, forming an outlier of a ridge of elevated land that extends through Oxfordshire and into the north-eastern and central northern part of Wiltshire, to Lyneham and Bremhill. It forms a prominent area of elevated land that rises above the Thames River Basin Clay Vale to the north and the broad Vale of the White Horse to the south. The ridge is variously referred to as 'The Golden Ridge' and 'The Corallian Ridge' in Oxfordshire and also the Midvale Ridge by Swindon Borough.

While the descriptions that follow are applicable to the broader Landscape Character Type, they are principally focused towards the area to the south-east of the Cotswold Water Park study area, where the ridgeline forms a well-defined skyline.

5.5.3 Landscape Character

The Settled Limestone Ridge comprises a belt of north-east / south-west aligned limestone hills, together with a series of locally distinctive outliers. The prominent ridgeline and outliers rise sharply up from the lower lying Clay Vale along the north-western boundary with a steep scarp slope in places. The boundaries of the type generally follow the base of the slopes to the surrounding lower lying Vale. To the south-east, however, the transition to the Clay Vale areas is more gradual. Land cover is predominantly pastoral farmland although there are pockets of arable and horse pasture. The fields are generally large

and divided by a network of hedgerows with numerous hedgerow trees and intermittent woodland clumps, although the hedgerows have become flailed and more open in places. Smaller, more sinuous fields indicative of medieval enclosure are also present in more isolated areas. Settlement has a considerable influence over the area, notably the ridge top settlements of Highworth and Broad Blunsdon, and further south, the more extensive urban area of Swindon.

5.5.4 Physical Influences

The ridgeline is underlain by the sandstones and limestones of the Stanford and Coral Rag Formations of the Jurassic Period. The superior resistance of these rock formations has resulted in an elevated ridge that rises above the softer and more easily eroded Oxford Clay to the north that underlies the Thames River Basin Clay Vale.

The belt of rolling land rises from approximately 90m to 140m AOD. The north-western facing slopes are generally steep, while the eastern slopes are gentler, with a more gradual transition into the neighbouring Gault Formation Mudstone that underlies the Vale of the White Horse. A number of outliers are located along the north western face of the ridge such as Crouch Hill, Little Crouch Hill and Lus Hill. These represent remnants of the ridgeline which has retreated south-eastwards through progressive erosion.

5.5.5 Human Influences

The hill fort at Castle Hill to the north-east of Broad Blunsdon is evidence of occupation of the area in the Iron Age period. The Romans established a settlement on Swindon Hill, and the area was more widely settled during the Saxon period, with evidence of the foundation of settlements during this period, such as Swindon and Wootton Bassett. The smaller villages in the area also have Saxon or often medieval cores. Enclosure of the landscape occurred through the medieval period with small irregular field patterns still visible today in the more remote parts of the area. However, most fields are indicative of more recent enclosure.

5.5.6 Buildings and Settlement

Settlement has a strong effect on the character of the Landscape Type. The influence of the urban centre of Swindon and other large settlements such as Wootton Bassett, Purton, and Highworth is significant. The edge of Swindon is mixed in character with a number of different land uses including large industrial warehouses, residential estates, recreation areas and transport infrastructure creating a fragmented feel.

Perched on the higher ground of the ridgeline, the settlements of Highworth, Hannington and Broad Blunsdon are clearly visible from the study area and the lower lying Thames River Basin Clay Vale. Although less distinct, the northern fringe of Swindon is also evident in the eastern part of the study area with the town forming a distant built horizon that contrasts with the rural landscape of other

sections of the ridgeline. Elsewhere, settlement consists of smaller villages, connected by a network of rural roads. Originally nucleated and centred at junctions, the villages have frequently expanded through ribbon development along the lanes. Building materials and styles are mixed, with the central cores of the villages frequently include fine stone buildings. Beyond the historic core, more recent developments have used a variety of materials including Coral Rag in rubble walls, Cotswold limestone, wood cladding and brick.

5.5.7 Landscape Character Area

5A Lus Hill

Lus Hill comprises a small, isolated outlier of the Settled Limestone Ridge located to the north-west of the most northerly spur of the ridge in Wiltshire. It is underlain by the sandstones and limestones of the Stanford and Coral Rag Formations. Rising above the surrounding River Basin Clay Vale to a height of 113m AOD, it forms a small but distinctive conical hill with steep slopes on all sides. Its prominence is enhanced by a block of predominantly deciduous woodland that cloaks its north-eastern slopes. The elevated summit affords expansive views across the River Basin Clay Vale to the west, north and east, and particularly across the Castle Eaton and Inglesham Clay Lowlands in the foreground.



In common with the settled character of the wider Landscape Type, Lus Hill supports a substantial stone property, located within the woodland on the summit of the hill. In addition to this private residence, and its woodland setting, the hill is also farmed, with Lus Hill Farm occupying the lower north-west facing slopes. The hill slopes are predominantly under pasture contrasting with the mixed arable and pasture land within the surrounding lower lying land within the Vale.