

South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment

Annex I: Visually Important Hillside

South Gloucestershire Council

Final Draft Report for Adoption

Prepared by LUC

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 A key characteristic of the South Gloucestershire landscape are the hills, ridges, pronounced scarps, and valley sides which may provide an important backdrop in views, or form focal features and points of reference in the landscape. Collectively, these features are known as visually important hillsides (VIHs), which need to be protected so that their function within the landscape is retained and not diminished by inappropriate forms of development.

1.2 VIHs vary in character to include distinct hillside landforms (e.g. Hanham Hills), outward facing scarps to plateau areas (e.g. Cotswold Scarp delineating the western edge of the Cotswold National Landscape), prominent valley sides (e.g. northern valley side of the River Avon), and in some locations may define two sides of a broad ridgeline (e.g. ridgeline lying between the western facing slope known as the Wickwar Ridge and eastward facing slope known as the Churchend Ridge).

1.3 The South Gloucestershire Core Strategy 2006-2027 (adopted 11th December 2013) identified VIH as strategic green infrastructure (GI) assets on its 'Key – Strategic Green Infrastructure Network' Diagram (Figure 1) supporting Policy CS2: Green Infrastructure. The VIHs were also described and illustrated within the 2014 adopted South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). In 2022 the Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor Mapping Project considered VIHs and other GI assets to give spatial expression to South Gloucestershire's strategic Green Infrastructure corridor network. As part of this corridor project, and the updated Landscape Character Assessment SPD, the boundaries of the VIHs were spatially defined on OS mapping.

1.4 This report forms Annex I of the refreshed and updated 2023 South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment SPD. It contains an analysis

of both previously identified VIHs, together with those identified through the Stage 3 Local Plan consultation process (December 2023 to February 2024) and provides the justification as to why they are categorised as being visually important, or as local hillsides. The hillsides have been tested against the criteria set out in **Chapter 2**, which relate to the topics of Distinctiveness and Identity; Visual Prominence; and Character and Value. Following the New Local Plan Phase 3 consultation, some of the VIH boundaries were refined to better reflect their appearance and function within the landscape, new VIH features identified where they met the criteria, and the assessment criteria slightly modified to make clearer how VIHs are defined in relation to their distinctiveness and identity.

1.5 All the VIHs previously identified within the CS2 Diagram, and 2014 Landscape Character Assessment SPD are considered to either meet all or most of the criteria. Where several distinct landform features do not meet the assessment criteria they have been identified as local hillsides (e.g. Mount Hill/Cock Road Ridge).

1.6 The VIHs have been grouped together where they form related landform features, as shown on **Figure 3.1**. A full profile for each VIH is contained within **Chapters 4 - 18**.

1.7 Guidance notes have been provided in **Appendix A**, that provide a checklist of issues that new development proposals will need to take into consideration to ensure that the prominence and distinctive appearance of VIHs, and their relationship to the surrounding landscape and townscape, is protected.

Chapter 2

Criteria

2.1 This chapter sets out the criteria that each potential visually important hillside (VIH) has been assessed against, under three topic headings. For a hillside to be categorised as visually important, it has to meet all or most of the criteria depending upon its context within the landscape of South Gloucestershire.

Distinctiveness and identity

- VIH forms a readily identifiable as a natural landform feature on OS mapping (e.g. more closely spaced contour lines, steeper gradient slopes, representing an appreciable difference in landform height, summit marked by a triangulation pillar, promoted viewpoint, or hillfort).

VIH exhibits a noticeable change in slope gradient from the surrounding topography, with this gradient typically being some 10-12% or steeper, and the upper slope edge being some 20m to 25m higher than the level of the surrounding topography. In some locations, the lower slopes of a VIH may become less steep as they transition into the surrounding landform, but still form an integral and distinctive part of its landform profile.

- Distinctive feature with a strong sense of identity (e.g. noted in the South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment SPD, or Conservation Area appraisals).

Visual prominence

- Prominent/pronounced hillside, plateau edge, scarp, or valley side in views across the landscape (as noted in the Landscape Character Assessment SPD).

- Visible from several public vantage points and/ or a key feature in views from a Strategic Viewpoint (see South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment SPD Annex II).

Character and value

- High visual/sensory/perceptual value (as noted in the Landscape Character Assessment SPD).
- Contributes to the setting of Conservation Areas and/ or the character of Registered Parks and Gardens (RPGs).
- Character and appearance of the VIH are largely unspoilt by visual detractors such as inappropriate forms of development, manmade structures, or land use (analysed through mapping and verified on site).
- Elevated landform of VIH provides the opportunity for views across the landscape of South Gloucestershire, and a sense of prospect (e.g. the location of a Strategic Viewpoint).
- Has a role in the landscape e.g. forms a visual backdrop, provides a visual watershed, contains / defines character areas, provides visual separation between settlements.

Chapter 3

Analysis of Visually Important Hillsides

3.1 There are fifteen groupings of Visually Important Hillsides (VIHs) within South Gloucestershire, identified according to the criteria described in **Chapter 2**. These are set out below, and their location is shown on **Figure 3.1** in relation to their associated landscape character area(s). A list of the full landscape character area (LCA) names is set out in **Table 3.1**, with each area being described in the main landscape character assessment report.

Table 3.1: Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas

Plateau and Scarp LCT	
LCA 1	Badminton Plateau
LCA 2	Marshfield Plateau
LCA 3	Ashwicke Ridges
LCA 4	Cotswold Scarp
Shallow Ridge LCT	
LCA 5	Wickwar Ridge & Vale
LCA 6	Pucklechurch Ridge & Boyd Valley
Parkland Vale LCT	
LCA 7	Falfield Vale
Shallow Vale LCT	
LCA 8	Yate Vale
LCA 9	Tytherington Plain
LCA 10	Earthcott Vale

Enclosed Valleys LCT	
LCA 11	Golden Valley
LCA 16	Avon Valley
Broad Valleys LCT	
LCA 12	Westerleigh Vale & Oldland Ridge
LCA 13	Frome Valley
LCA 14	Kingswood
LCA 15	Patchway, Filton and the Stokes
Undulating Ridge LCT	
LCA 17	Rudgeway Ridge & Tytherington Ridge
LCA 18	Severn Ridges
Estuary, Shoreline and Levels LCT	
LCA 19	Oldbury Levels
LCA 20	Pilning Levels
LCA 21	Severn Shoreline & Estuary

3.2 A full profile for each VIH is contained within **Chapters 4 to 18**, providing clear justification against the criteria. A typical view towards each VIH is also provided to illustrate its character and presence within the landscape of South Gloucestershire. Such views may vary depending upon the location of the viewer and length and variation of a given VIH.

3.3 The VIHs are as follows:

- **Ashwicke Ridges** (including Henley Hill, Nimlet Hill, and Hanging Hill). This VIH defines the boundaries of LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges which it is located fully within. It forms a southerly extension to the Cotswold Scarp VIH and adjoins the Oldland Ridge and Cotswold Lower Slope VIH in the west.

- **Cotswold Scarp** (including Hawkesbury Knoll, Broad Hill, Birch Hill, wooded slopes of Doddington Park and Dryham Park, Tog Hill and Freezing Hill). This VIH defines the boundaries of LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp which it is located mostly within, apart from a small area straddling the south-western corner of LCA 2: Marshfield Plateau at Tog Hill. It adjoins the Ashwicke Ridges VIH in the south.
- **Wickwar Ridge** (including Bury Hill) which defines parts of the western and eastern boundaries of LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale and LCA 8: Yate Vale respectively, as well as delineating the western slope of the broad ridge upon which Wickwar is located.
- **Churchend Ridge** (including Charfield Hill) which is located mostly within LCA 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale, with a small part extending into LCA 7: Falfield Vale in the north. It adjoins the Wick's/Butcher's Hill and Baden Hill VIH at Tortworth in the north-west, and delineates the eastern slope of the broad ridge upon which Wickwar is located.
- **Pucklechurch Ridge** (including Shortwood Hill, Siston Hill, Claypit Hill, Westerleigh Hill, Coxgrove Hill and Holbrook Common) which defines parts of the western and eastern boundaries of LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley and LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge respectively. It adjoins the Oldland Ridge and Cotswold Lower Slopes VIH in the south at Wick.
- **Wick's/Butcher's Hill and Baden Hill** (including Abbots-side Hill and outlying slopes between Howcroft Cottages and the Little Avon River) which is located mostly within LCA 7: Falfield Vale, apart from a small part in the south that extends into LCA 17: Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge. It adjoins the Churchend Ridge VIH at Tortworth in the north-east, and the Severn Ridges VIH in the west at Buckover.
- **Eastwood Park Spur** (including outlying Sundays Hill) which is located mostly within LCA 7: Falfield Vale, apart from its western extent which straddles the edge of LCA 18: Seven Ridges.
- **Oldland Ridge and Cotswold Lower Slopes** (including Beach Hill, Cann Break, Bitton Hill, Barrow Hill, Mount Pleasant and Mill Hill) which is located mostly within LCA 11: Golden Valley and straddles the boundary of LCA 12: Westerleigh Vale and Oldland Ridge in the west. Small areas

extend into LCA 6: Pucklechurch Ridge and Boyd Valley in the north and LCA 3: Ashwicke Ridges in the south. The western part (Oldland Ridge) adjoins the Pucklechurch Ridge VIH in the north at Wick, and the eastern part (Cotswold Lower Slopes) adjoins Ashwicke Ridges VIH in the south-east.

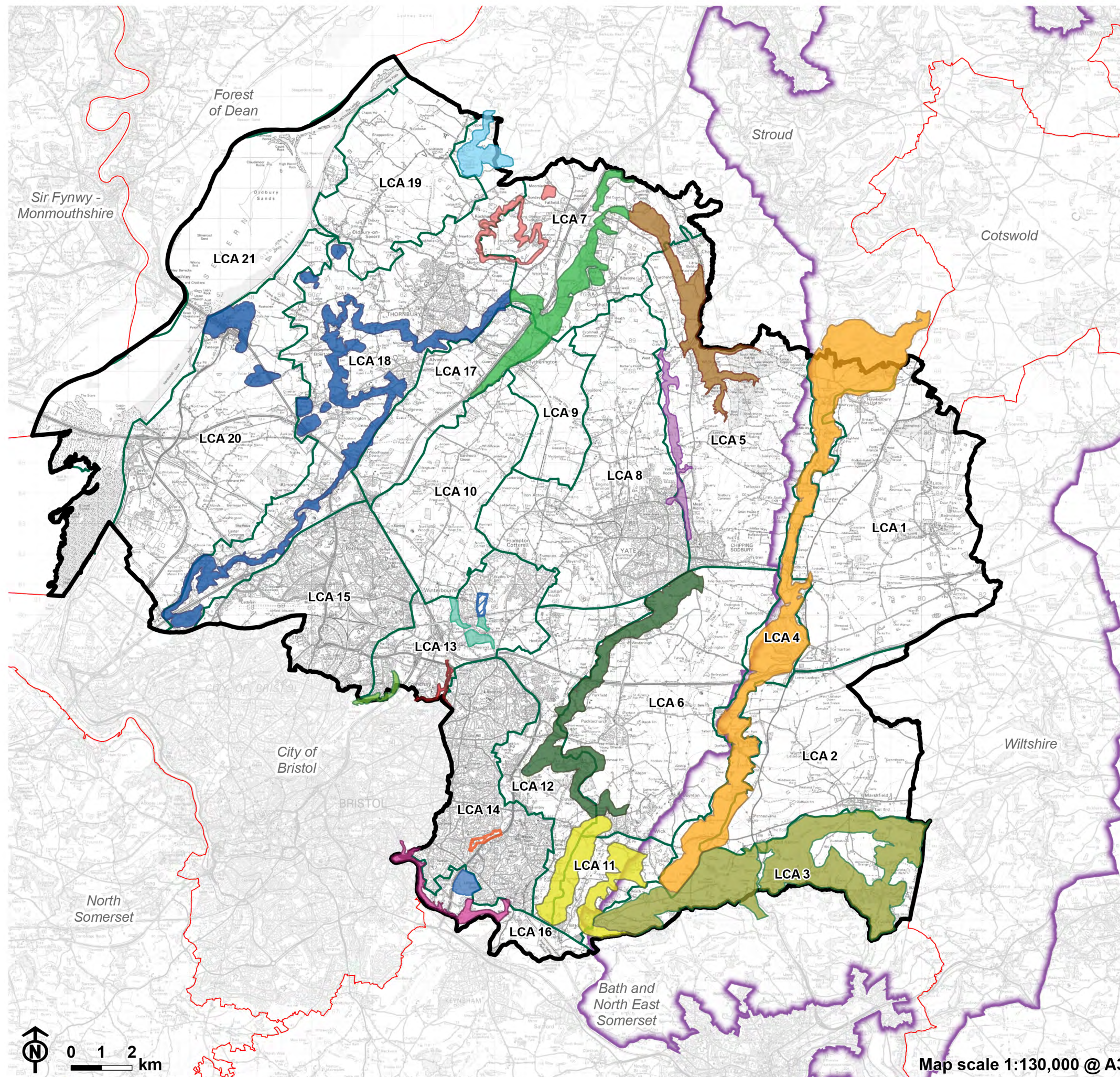
- **Bury Hill and Winterbourne Hill** which is located fully within LCA 13: Frome Valley.
- **Sims' Hill** which is located fully within LCA 13: Frome Valley.
- **River Frome** (steeper valley sides) which is located fully within LCA 13: Frome Valley.
- **Hanham Hills** which is located fully within LCA 16: Avon Valley. It adjoins the River Avon VIH in the south.
- **River Avon** (steep northern side) which is located fully within LCA 16: Avon Valley. It forms a southerly extension of the Hanham Hills VIH.
- **Upper Hill** which is located fully within LCA 18: Seven Ridges and forms a continuation of the prominent ridgeline to the east within Stroud District.
- **Severn Ridges** (including Fowler's Hill, Titters Hill, Henley Hill, Tockington Hill, Spaniorum Hill and Milbury Heath, and the outlying hills at Cow Hill, St Arilda's Church, Catherine's Hill, Eastcombe Hill, Awkley Hill, Ingst and Aust cliff edge). This VIH defines the boundaries of LCA 18: Seven Ridges, with the outlying hill at Ingst within LCA 18: Pilning Levels, and the edge of this landscape character area partly defined by Aust Cliff. The Severn Ridges VIH adjoins the Wick's / Butcher's Hill and Baden Hill VIH in the north-east at Buckover.

3.4 A further two areas are identified as Local Hillsides (LHs) which represent landforms that are considered to be locally important, but do not meet sufficient criteria to be considered a VIH. The LHs are set out below and their location is shown on **Figure 3.1**.

3.5 The LHs are as follows:

- **LH 1: Mount Hill/ Cock Road Ridge** – a small local ridge rising up from the northern edge of the A4174, which is located fully within LCA 14: Kingswood. It is readily identifiable as a natural landform feature on OS mapping with a noticeable change in slope gradient from the surrounding topography, and is seen in views within and beyond the district. However, its distinctiveness and prominence as a hillside is somewhat diminished by its small scale, and the built environment of Bristol surrounding it. The dense coverage of woodland overlaying the hillside disguises the true form of its slope, which appears as a typical wooded road embankment. It is not a key feature in views from a Strategic Viewpoint.
- **LH 2: North of Huckford Viaduct** – a small local ridge on the eastern edge of Winterbourne, descending towards the River Frome in the east, and extending north from the edge of the Huckford Viaduct. It is located fully within LCA 13: Frome Valley, and its southern edge adjoins the Bury Hill and Winterbourne Hill VIH. It is somewhat identifiable as a natural landform feature on OS mapping, although away from the northern edge of the viaduct, the distance between consecutive contour lines start to increase with the gradient becoming shallower. It is recognised as a valley side but is not particularly prominent, especially when seen in context of the steeper landforms that make up the Bury Hill and Winterbourne Hill VIH. It provides the opportunity for views across the landscape, with the strategic viewpoint at Flax Pits Pond, Hicks Common Road (SVP 30) but is not a key feature in views from other strategic viewpoints.

Figure 3.1: Location of Visually Important Hillside and Local Hillside



- Council boundary
- Neighbouring local authority
- Landscape Character Area
- Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB) boundary
- Visually Important Hillside**
 - Ashwicke Ridges
 - Bury Hill and Winterbourne Hill
 - Churchend Ridge
 - Cotswold Scarp
 - Eastwood Park Spur
 - Hanham Hills
 - Oldland Ridge and Cotswold Lower Slope
 - Pucklechurch Ridge
 - River Avon Valley
 - River Frome
 - Severn Ridges
 - Sims Hill
 - Upper Hill
 - Wicks/Butchers Hill and Baden Hill
 - Wickwar Ridge
- Local Hillside**
 - Mount Hill/ Cock Road Ridge
 - North of Huckford Viaduct



Map scale 1:130,000 @ A3

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