

## 2 SPECIAL QUALITIES

### 2.1 Landscape and Geology

The richness of the Malvern Hills landscape and its biodiversity is inextricably linked to its geology. The distinctive ridge owes its skyline to pre-Cambrian rocks dating back 700 million years (representing some of the oldest rocks in the country), whilst the north west of the AONB is characterised by steep limestone topography. To the south east, sandstones and marls support the fertile arable plain, whilst to the west, limestone and shale give rise to the undulating hills and vales. The different soils and rocks support a variety of different vegetation types, wildlife, and land uses, giving the Malvern Hills their distinctive array of landscapes and natural habitats. The geology also gives rise to springs which provide another of the Malverns' unique assets – its spring water.

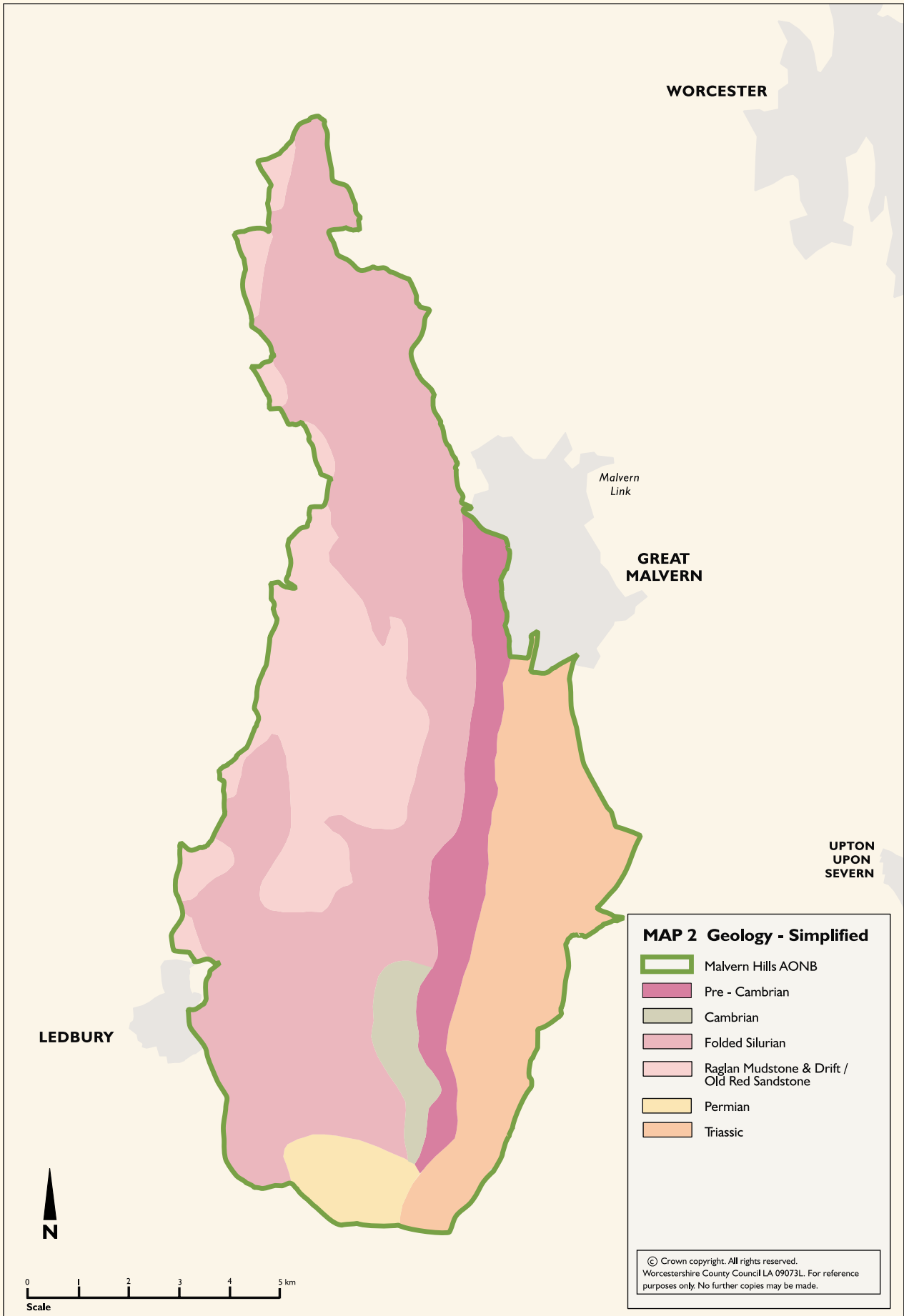
This geological diversity is of national significance. The AONB contains a number of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which legally protect the special geology, and

the biodiversity within them. Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) are also identified in the AONB, and there are further areas of geological significance which could be designated in this way.

The Malvern Hills AONB is unique for containing a wide variety of landscapes in a small area. Landscape Character Assessments for Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire have considered the geology, topography, soils, land use, tree cover and settlement patterns to establish 10 types of landscapes within the AONB, and they are explored in fuller detail in Chapter 5. These assessments provide an objective understanding of the nature of these landscapes, and what the pressures upon them are likely to be. Distinctive landscape features that occur throughout the AONB include orchards, parklands, ridgelines, ponds, quarries, hedgerows, and watercourses.



Well Dressing  
at Evendine



WORCESTER

Malvern Link

GREAT MALVERN

UPTON UPON SEVERN

LEDBURY



## 2.2 Biodiversity

The AONB is endowed with a rich variety of habitats and wildlife, which are a result of the geological and landscape variety and the influence of thousands of years of human manipulation and activity. Many wildlife habitats and species are located within the AONB, several of which are nationally rare and have significant representation in the Malvern Hills. Some are legally protected in the 14 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and one Local Nature Reserve designated within the area, and others are protected by Special and Key Wildlife Sites (non-statutory designations) and in nature reserves managed by conservation bodies in the AONB. Development Plan policies also provide some level of protection for sites of species and habitat importance. Drawing upon the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, Local Biodiversity Action Plans cover the AONB, but do not specifically represent a unique conservation framework for the AONB. The following habitats are discussed in further detail in Chapter 6 on Biodiversity:

- Lowland mixed deciduous broadleaved woodland, including ancient woodland and scrub.
- Acid, lowland limestone and unimproved neutral and wet grassland;
- Traditional standard orchards, historic parkland and veteran trees;
- Hedgerows, hedgerow trees and field trees;
- Watercourses, including ponds, streams and marsh;



High Brown Fritillary

- Internationally protected and locally important animals, plants and birds.

## 2.3 Historic and Built Environment

Today's AONB landscape reflects a heritage created by the settlements and development of successive human cultures and their artefacts, features, architecture and buildings. The historic built environment within the AONB has a richness and diversity which needs careful conservation.

Some elements of the historic built environment are afforded statutory protection, for example the Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Listed Buildings. However, many more are not, for example the townscapes and local features which collectively make an important contribution to the AONB landscape. These unique, locally distinct features help give the built environment its spirit of place, and are an integral part of the environment, needing to be conserved, restored and, where possible and appropriate, enhanced.

In a similar process to the Landscape Character Assessment, the historic character of landscape is described and analyzed for that part of the AONB that lies within Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. Worcestershire's Historic Landscape Character Assessment is under completion. These assessments together provide a description of the features which contribute to the area's historic record, and offer a context for managing change in the historic built environment of the AONB.



## 2.4 Quiet Enjoyment of the Countryside.

Since early Victorian times, the area has been a refuge from a more hectic world. Sedentary and stout Victorians came to quite literally 'chill out' under the cold douches and exercise regimes of the Water Cure. Many of these regimes involved walking through the countryside. Today the douches are dispensed with, but 67% of respondents in the Visitor Survey 1999-2000 cited their reason for visiting the AONB to be walking.

Sir Edward Elgar, a local resident, was as keen on his music as he was on his bicycle, and enjoyed cycling through the local lanes. This same enthusiasm was reflected in a project done by Ledbury Youth First in Colwall in 2002/3. When the youth of Colwall were asked what activities they would like to have organised for them, the second most popular choice was cycle rides around the lanes. All age ranges appreciate the tranquillity of the countryside.

Likewise the growth of riding schools and livery stables in the area allows those who prefer reins to handle bars, to quietly enjoy the countryside.



Photograph by Julia Boyle

## 3 LINKED ISSUES

### 3.1 Links

The plan is set out on a topic basis, but many of the objectives and actions contained in separate chapters will also benefit issues and topics in other chapters. For example, objectives and actions to conserve and enhance hedgerows and hedgerow trees will contribute not only to landscape character, but also biodiversity and historic environment objectives. Another example is the careful management of footpaths, with objectives not only aiding improved access and recreation in the AONB, but also helping to conserve vulnerable sensitive habitats. It is important that the Plan is read and implemented with this integration of strategy and objectives in mind.

### 3.2 Overall Issues

There are also themes or issues which have the potential to affect all of the special qualities of the AONB – sustainability (including climate change), and development and rural land use, and these are outlined below.

### 3.3 Rural Land Use, Activities, and Development

Landscape features within the AONB such as the hedgerows, field size, woodlands and tree cover, are influenced as much by man as they are by nature. The land use practices that helped create these landscape features have changed dramatically, particularly in farming over the last twenty years or so, and could continue to change the integrity and quality of the character of the AONB's landscape, and how it supports its biodiversity.

The changing face of agriculture, forestry and diversification initiatives needs careful guidance to conserve and enhance the landscapes and core features of the Malvern Hills AONB. New roles may need to be found for those features and qualities of the AONB, and new links that are compatible with modern farming and forestry practices. The residents, landowners and managers, and visitors should all be engaged and encouraged to help achieve this vision together.

Hereford cattle in a Suckley orchard





**A poetry reading on the lawns of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's childhood home**

There is immense pressure on some parts of the AONB from high numbers of visitors undertaking a variety of recreational pursuits. There is a danger that unlimited and unchecked access will destroy the essence of the Malvern Hills, their tranquillity, features and attributes and the biodiversity which enriches them. There may be a conflict between those who see recreation and tourism as a substitute for, or answer to the woes of the farming industry, and those who wish to conserve and enhance the landscape character and biodiversity qualities of the AONB. A consensus on what constitutes sound stewardship is in the long term interest of all.

The strategy of this plan must be to encourage the use of land within the AONB, in ways that do not damage the landscape character, historic environment, biodiversity, and archaeological remains and special environmental qualities, nor its long term economic and social value.

### **3.4 A Sustainable Environment**

The effect of land use activities and development in the AONB should also be considered for their impact on the general environment (for example on air, land and water quality), on the efficient use of resources and on the overall wellbeing of the AONB. Over time climate change may well affect numerous features and qualities

of the area. If these issues are carefully addressed within good resource management and promotion of best practice, there is the potential for positive benefits on the conservation and enhancement of the environment, and for the identification of the Malvern Hills AONB as a visionary, environmentally aware community.

### **3.5 Awareness of the AONB**

The Malvern Hills AONB Visitor Survey found that over 90% of respondents had heard of the term 'AONB' but that only about 20% understood what the point of the designation was. Community projects such as the Jigsaw Project have brought the AONB to the attention of the local community. The visitor newspaper, the Hills Hopper bus service, and the Literary Guide all help to raise the profile of the AONB amongst visitors. Press articles, village projects and grants to landowners all bring the AONB to the attention of local people. There is however a lack of understanding of purpose of the designation. This applies to residents, landowners, visitors and relevant authorities. To remedy this, a clear message should accompany all that the AONB does.

## 4 VISION

The Vision is one of a landscape in perfect balance with its communities, economies and visitors, where the special qualities – the landscape, wildlife, cultural heritage and tranquillity – are cherished, and conserved and which in return deliver a sustained high quality of life for its residents, wonderful opportunities for visitors to sample local food and picturesque scenery, a skilled labour market and diverse economy of agriculture and high tech industries.

The aspiration is one of a protected landscape which has met the challenges of change in the rural economy and local communities yet maintains its timelessness and richness of natural beauty sustained by farming and other industries which shows the way forward for rural England.

Photograph by D. Morgan



Photograph by G. Elvins



The Vision for each of The Special Qualities is:

A rich and thriving diversity of distinctive landscapes in prime condition with a characteristic network of hedgerows, a proliferation of old and new hedgerow trees, open hills and commons, ancient coppiced woodlands, a characterful balance of pasture and cropped land, traditional orchards, restored hop yards, historic parklands and peaceful streams.

A place where wildlife thrives, not just in the nature reserves but throughout the managed landscape, where wildflower grasslands on the open hills, commons and meadows flourish, where ancient rock formations are preserved, where all of the ancient woodlands are restored to their former Medieval glory, where hedgerows and other trees provide a widespread network of corridors, where traditional orchards, streams, brooks and ponds reverberate with a diversity of life and where people can come close to and enjoy this rich resource.

A landscape providing a rich and vividly illustrated record of the historic environment, where field patterns, monuments, historic parklands and buildings jewel the land, where

the distinctive character of villages is sustained by really high standards of development, where the myriad of old signs, wells and milestones enrich the country lanes and where schoolchildren, landowners, visitors and local residents appreciate, understand and care for the heritage.

An oasis of tranquillity where the air is pure, the land free from litter, the water clean, the rural views from the main Hills uninterrupted by development, the skies clear of low-flying aircraft and filled only with the sound of skylarks.

The Vision subscribes to the Special Qualities being in perfect balance and partnership with:

A profitable and buoyant farm economy engaged in the production of highly sought after and high quality local produce which helps sustain the small-scale mixed farm traditions and which lies at the heart of the conservation and restoration of the special qualities of the area.



A bustling woodland estate yielding a constant supply of high quality timber, charcoal, firewood and other woodland products within a well-managed and extensive broad-leaved resource which flourishes with rare wildlife on ancient

woodland sites, scrubs carbon dioxide from the air, records the legacy of past generations and provides peaceful walks for locals and visitors alike.



Photograph by G. Elvins



A place which welcomes tourism, enjoyment and recreation, where the visitors' experience is high quality and open to all in society, where visitors' enjoyment of the dramatic views and tranquil paths is well informed and respectful of local residents, where local shops, pubs and farm gates serve a bounty of local produce and where the only impression left is a cherished memory.

A local transport network that services the needs of the local community and economy whilst providing a place of tranquil lanes where walkers, cyclists and others enjoy precedence over car traffic, where the noise and intrusion of cars are hardly noticed, where regular train and bus services link seamlessly servicing residents and visitors alike and where cycle lanes proliferate from the villages to the country, encouraging environmentally friendly transport and a healthy lifestyle.



Antique sewage vent, West Malvern

A vibrant, harmonious and diverse local community which engages in local decision making and enjoys a high quality of living, which benefits from well used and excellent local facilities sustained by residents and visitors, which celebrates the richness of its cultural heritage, and which enjoys numerous local employment opportunities drawn to the area offering a highly skilled workforce and attractive environment.

Vintage tractor fair below British Camp



## 5 LANDSCAPE

### 5.1 Aims

To protect and, where appropriate, enhance those characteristics and features that contribute to the landscape beauty and amenity of the Malvern Hills AONB.

To manage change in the landscape in such a way as to maintain the high quality of the AONB's landscape character while promoting sustainable development.

### 5.2 Background

The Malvern Hills display remarkable contrasts of geology which together with centuries of manipulation by human activity, give rise to a landscape of great physical, ecological and historical diversity. The Pre-Cambrian and Cambrian ridge is the dominant feature of the AONB. Resulting features are bare hill top sustaining particularly vulnerable acid grassland which turns to bracken and gorse on the slopes. In contrast, at the southern end of the main ridge, parts of the slopes retain natural woodland cover. To the west, shales overlay sandstone and quartzite. From these softer rocks, valleys have formed with wooded knolls.

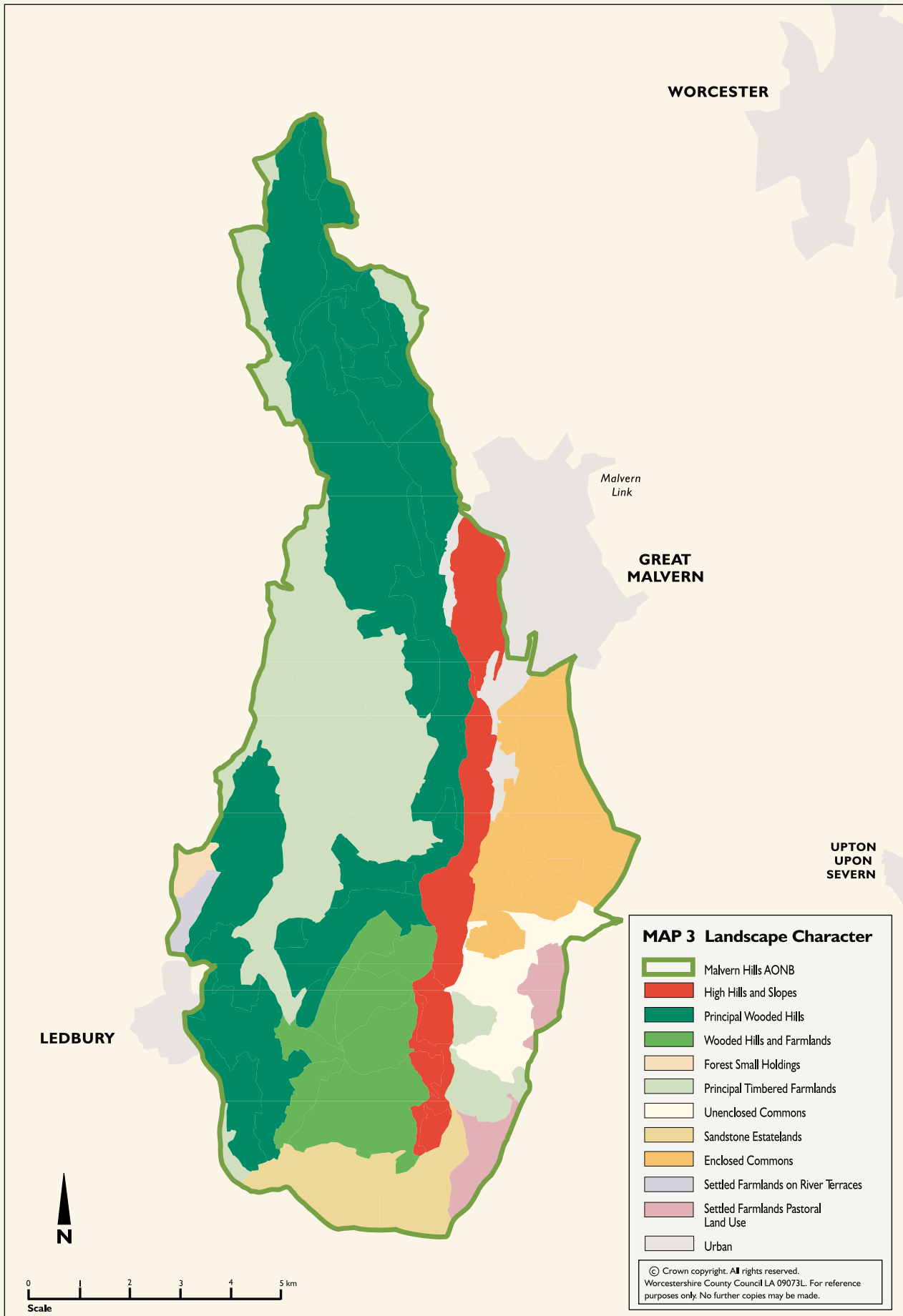
Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) are considered worthy of protection for their educational, research, historic or aesthetic importance. Numerous RIGS and SSSI's have been designated for their geological importance, and potential exists to increase the number of RIGS and make them more accessible to the public.

### 5.3 Landscape Character Assessment

Herefordshire and Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessments provide an objective and cohesive understanding of the nature of the landscape and have been fully integrated to also include the small part of Gloucestershire falling within the AONB. Ten rural landscapes are identified within the AONB, as shown in Map 3. Further detail on landscape character assessment can be found in the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Supplementary Planning Guidance documents. The urban landscape has yet to be addressed.

The Gullet Quarry, a Geological SSSI





## 5.4 Special Features

There are ten Landscape Character types described below. They are derived from the Landscape Character Assessments. For each character type, the special features are drawn out under that category.

### 5.4.1 High Hills and Slopes



High hills and slopes

These are areas of unenclosed highland which are characterised by steep slopes and extensive tracts of rough grassland and heath. The landscape is open, exposed and wild with large scale views and an absence of human habitation. This landscape comprises the main north – south ridge surrounded to the north, west and south by a series of smaller hills.

#### 5.4.1.1 Special features

- Prominent, steeply sloping highland topography;
- Extensive area of acid grassland and heath,

and generally unwooded;

- Expansive area of unenclosed land with rough grazing;
- Exposed, panoramic views;
- Unsettled landscape with few signs of human presence.

#### 5.4.1.2 Forces for landscape change

Significant reduction of sheep and cattle grazing has dramatically increased scrub, bracken and secondary woodland cover, and consequently decreased the percentage of open grassland. Increasing visitor pressure has resulted in path and grassland erosion.

### 5.4.2 Principal Wooded Hills

These are upstanding, densely wooded, hilly landscapes with a sloping topography. The landscapes comprise large, irregular shaped and interlocking areas of ancient woodland,



Principal wooded hills

### 5.4.3 Principal Timbered Farmlands



Principal timbered farmlands

with small cleared fields linked by hedges and wooded streams. It is sparsely settled with farmsteads and wayside cottages, and is typical to the north (Suckley Hills) and west of the main hills.

#### 5.4.2.1 Special features

- Varied, often steeply sloping landscape;
- Mixed broadleaved woodland, often of ancient origin;
- Occasional hedged fields of pasture;
- Views framed by blocks of woodland;
- Scattered settlement.

#### 5.4.2.2 Forces for landscape change

Previous forestry practices, introducing a high proportion of conifers, have disrupted the visual unity of these landscapes and compromised the nature conservation value of the woodland. More recent woodland clearance and gradual loss of trees along hedgerows and stream sides damages both biodiversity and the visual integrity between areas historically cleared and those still wooded.

This landscape is comprised of rolling lowlands with occasional steep sided hills and low escarpments, has a small scale, wooded, agricultural appearance characterised by filtered views through densely scattered hedgerow trees. A densely dispersed pattern of farmsteads and wayside cottages is typical. They are found primarily in the western part of the AONB.

#### 5.4.3.1 Special features

- Hedged fields;
- Ancient wooded character portrayed by woodland of varying scale and densely scattered, predominantly oak hedgerow trees;
- Filtered views between hedgerow trees;
- A small scale landscape with an organic enclosure pattern.

#### 5.4.3.2 Forces for landscape change

The landscape's deterioration is very evident and continuing, primarily marked by the decline and fragmentation of the tree cover;

particularly the hedgerow trees. The gradual increase in arable farming is reducing the need for hedgerows, which will eventually lead to the demise of the hedgerow structure and pattern. However, current Hedgerow Regulations offer some protection against this. Inappropriate management means that little new stock or regeneration of hedgerow oaks is being encouraged to replace the predominantly mature oaks. Density of new development does not respect the characteristic dispersed settlement patterns of this landscape.

#### 5.4.4 Wooded Hills and Farmlands

##### 5.4.4.1 Special features

- Varied sloping topography leading to visually prominent field boundary hedgerows;
- A pattern of large discrete blocks of ancient woodland;
- Mixed farming land use;
- Medium framed views;
- Sparsely clustered settlement pattern.



Wooded hills and farmlands

These are medium to large scale wooded landscapes with sloping topography, similar to the Principal Wooded Hills but containing a higher proportion of farmland. Mixed farming is interspersed with large, often discrete, blocks of ancient semi natural woodland which frame enclosed hedged fields and small villages or hamlets. This landscape can be found to the west of the main ridge of the Malvern Hills, around Eastnor.

##### 5.4.4.2 Forces for landscape change

The strength and scale of character has been reduced by loss of hedgerows, hedgerow and streamside trees, and the addition of inappropriate small scale features. Previous conifer planting in some areas contributes significantly to the loss of character.

## 5.4.5 Estate Sandlands



Estate sandlands

These are very open rolling landscapes with a pattern of large arable fields, straight roads and estate plantations. Strong regular field patterns with discrete blocks of woodland give structure to, and dominate, this planned landscape. There are tree belts and tree-lined watercourses, but hedgerow trees are notably sparse. Isolated brick farmsteads and clusters of wayside dwellings are interspersed with occasional small estate villages. They are found in the most southern part of the AONB, around Bromsberrow.

### 5.4.5.1 Special features

- Arable land use;
- Hedged field boundaries;
- Planned enclosure pattern of straight boundaries and roads;

- Planned woodland character and discrete woodland pattern;
- Heathy/acid grassland ground vegetation;
- Clustered settlement pattern.

### 5.4.5.2 Forces for landscape change

Dominance of the intensively farmed land by arable cropping has led to a reduced need for hedgerows and continued deterioration in their condition. Intensive management of land destroys the grasslands and native plant communities. Encroachment on parkland by other land uses leads to many parkland trees being marooned in a sea of arable crops.

## 5.4.6 Unenclosed Commons



Unenclosed commons

These are open landscapes characterised by a lack of enclosure and generally notable for their overall sense of wilderness. The commons are traditionally grazed and are associated with a high nature conservation value. They are a predominantly unsettled landscape but wayside cottages set in small plots of irregular shape exist around the perimeter of the commons. Large tracts of Unenclosed Commons are found in the Castlemorton area to the east of the main ridge.

#### Enclosed commons



#### 5.4.6.1 Special features

- Rough grazing land use;
- Unenclosed and unwooded;
- Heathy/acid grassland vegetation;
- Small wayside cottages found on common perimeter, often constructed from red brick or stone.

#### 5.4.6.2 Forces for landscape change

There has been a marked trend away from pursuing the traditional commoners' rights to grazing over the last 50 years. The low density or absence of grazing on the commons has led to encroachment by

scrub density or absence of grazing on the commons has led to encroachment by scrub and bracken. Under-resourced management and maintenance of the commons for recreation and amenity purposes has led to a decline in the commons character, and the integrity of the traditional cottage and settlement is being altered by uncharacteristic development of properties.

### 5.4.7 Enclosed Commons

These landscapes have an ordered pattern of large fields of regular outline, straight roads and estate plantations. Tree cover along watercourses can contribute significantly to the landscape although hedgerow and tree cover is less significant. The farmed landscapes have typically poor soils and a pastoral land use, together with a settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads and wayside dwellings. They occur on the low lying areas to the south-east of the Hills.

#### 5.4.7.1 Special features

- Hedgerow boundaries to fields;
- Planned enclosure pattern of straight boundaries and roads;



- Open farmland with pastoral land use;
- Planned woodland character with pattern of discrete blocks;
- Gently rolling topography.

#### 5.4.7.2 Forces for landscape change

The strong regular enclosure pattern is deteriorating and the hedgerow trees are being lost or replaced by fencing in places. There are notable areas of horse culture and small industrial units in parts of the area.

### 5.4.8 Settled Farmlands with Pastoral Land Use



Settled farmlands with pastoral land use

These comprise small to medium scale lowland settled agricultural landscapes with a dispersed pattern of farmsteads and wayside cottages linked by a dense network of narrow winding lanes. They have a predominantly pastoral land use with a pattern of small to medium sized hedged fields. Tree cover is most notable along watercourses, and hedgerows. These landscapes occur on low lying land to the south east of the AONB.

#### 5.4.8.1 Special features

- Hedgerow boundaries to fields;
- Tree cover character represented by hedgerow and streamside trees as opposed to woodlands;
- Small scale landscape;
- Pastoral land use;
- Heavy soils;
- Groups of wayside dwellings and scattered farmsteads.

#### 5.4.8.2 Forces for landscape change

Hedgerow loss and deterioration is reducing the scale and spatial character of these landscapes. In places the strong pastoral land use is declining, becoming replaced by arable farming. The condition and age composition of tree cover along watercourses and hedgerows varies and is notably lacking in places.

### 5.4.9 Forest Smallholdings and Dwellings

This is an intimate, densely settled landscape characterised by strings of wayside cottages and associated smallholdings. They nestle within a complex mosaic of pastoral fields and narrow lanes, which are bounded by trees in hedgerows. This landscape is limited to Wellington Heath on the AONB's western boundary.



Forest smallholdings and dwellings

#### 5.4.9.1 Special features

- Prominent thick field boundary hedgerows;
- Individual densely scattered trees in hedgerows and gardens;
- Densely settled pattern of smallholdings and wayside cottages, with distinctive buildings of red brick or stone;
- Complex network of narrow intersecting lanes;
- Non-conformist chapels often constructed of corrugated iron;
- Heathy/acid grassland ground vegetation;
- Pastoral landscape.

small interspersed areas of rough land and pasture with new development. An increase in horse and pony ownership with small pastures changing to paddocks has led to a degradation and loss of hedgerows and grassland.

#### 5.4.10 Settled farmlands on river terrace

This landscape has highly fertile soils which give rise to horticultural cropping. Fields are small to medium scale, with sparse hedgerow tree cover and settlement is dispersed. This landscape only occurs within the AONB near Ledbury.

Settled farmlands on river terrace

#### 5.4.9.2 Forces of landscape change

The increasing urbanisation of this landscape is its greatest threat. Changes in character of the original cottages result from extensions and remodelling, and the settlement density is altered by infilling the



### 5.4.10.1 Special features

- Horticultural cropping land use;
- Hedgerows delineate the field boundaries;
- Sparsely dispersed settlement limited to small discrete clusters;
- Open views.

### 5.4.10.2 Forces for landscape change

The demands of modern horticulture have resulted in a landscape that is generally denuded of hedgerow trees, and where the remaining hedgerows are themselves in very poor condition. Tree cover is limited to those around buildings and those growing along water courses where the land is not required for crops.

## 5.5 Key Issues

### 5.5.1 Changes in Agriculture

British agriculture has fallen victim to cataclysmic change. The increasingly globalised nature of agricultural commodities, falling farm gate prices, the increasing costs of heightened welfare, hygiene, biosecurity and traceability initiatives, the continuing loss of agricultural skills and workers (Statistical Digest) together with the inability of co-operatives to act effectively against the growth of purchaser power, all have grave implications for the viability of farming.

Consumer confidence in

British food has also been undermined by the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) crisis and recent outbreaks of Classical Swine Fever and Foot-and-Mouth Disease. These trends have particularly influenced stock farming, which plays a pivotal role in the maintenance of the Malvern Hills agricultural landscapes. There is a continued decline in livestock numbers (Statistical Digest p23/24) within the Malvern Hills, together with a trend toward conversion to arable production which is less labour intensive. This trend, known nationally as 'arabalisation', has real implications for the Malvern Hills landscape with regard to the reduced capacity for commons grazing, the loss of unimproved and semi-improved grasslands and disincentives for the maintenance of vigorous stockproof hedgerows.

Farming needs to be able to realise social and economic needs while delivering a whole range of demanding 'environmental' non-market goods including healthy food, biodiversity, high landscape quality, high air and water quality, high animal welfare standards



and opportunities for public recreation and spiritual refreshment.

The future viability of farming is fundamental to the appearance of the Malvern Hills landscape and many of the problems can only be solved by national and European policy changes. The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and the proposals for the expansion of EU membership are liable to further influence agricultural policy. The process of 'Decoupling', supporting a general move away from production support mechanisms to those providing enhanced environmental benefits, and 'Modulation', encouraging more investment in Rural Development at the expense of production support, is likely to continue. However, the outcomes are still unclear.

In 1998, the Countryside Agency recommended to Government that ESA status should be extended to all AONBs. While the Malvern Hills has a strong case for Environmentally Sensitive Area status, no enhanced agri-environmental schemes are currently available to farmers in the Malvern Hills. The ESA designation is currently under review and is likely to be replaced nationally. Every effort should be made to ensure that any new 'higher tier' scheme is applicable to the Malvern Hills situation.

## Forestry

The principal markets for timber products are construction, joinery, fencing, firewood and other wood products such as pulpwood for paper, card and pressed fibreboards.

While the UK is self-sufficient for only about 15% of its wood products, the market for locally produced timber is far from buoyant.

A combination of factors continue to depress timber prices which in turn discourages investment in, and management of, the AONB's woodlands.

- Timber prices had fallen by 50% in 1999 to their lowest level since the 1980s, the strength of sterling and cheap imports resulting from the recent catastrophic European gales and new resources in eastern Europe continue to depress prices. Standing timber sale prices continue to fall and are now lower in real terms than the low prices of the 1980s.



- Softwood production continues to grow faster than consumption, creating overcapacity in sawmills and ferocious price competition.
- Technological innovation continues to increase the efficiency in which timber is utilised, reducing overall costs and also offering market substitution i.e. composite beams for structural lumber; softwood for hardwood, steel for timber.
- A consumer led move away from sustainably produced timber to recycled wood products now sees wood pulp accounting for less than half of the raw material used for paper production.
- The high degree of fragmentation in the timber products and processing industry is being exacerbated by companies' competitive pressures which are forcing companies to withdraw from round timber production by either mothballing

or dismantling equipment. As a result, harvested timber being transported greater distances is increasing costs and reducing competitiveness.

### 5.5.2 Visitor Pressures

1.25 million visitors come to the AONB annually and over two thirds of these come to walk. Much of this activity is concentrated on the hills themselves and not spread evenly over the AONB resulting in the High Hills and Slopes and the Unenclosed Commons bearing the brunt of this. The feet of visitors erode the paths and their dogs discourage graziers. The evidence of ticket sales from car parks on the hills and commons is that still more visitors are coming than ever.



### 5.5.3 Development Pressures

Farms within the AONB are being broken into smallholdings (Statistical Digest). With this comes the desire to enlarge properties and add value such as loose boxes for horses.

The growth of farm shops (Statistical Digest) and diversification of farm buildings into thriving non agricultural businesses has meant that many agricultural buildings have taken on new lives.

### 5.5.4 Climate Change

Although trends in climate change may be discernible, their local effect is unpredictable. Flooding, so prevalent in recent years, may encourage the reintroduction of water meadow management. Hot dry summers

increase the fire risk on the hills and effectively raze the scrub. Winters, without bitter weather, allow microbes to survive in greater numbers to infect livestock and plants in the following year. Lack of freezing conditions affect the germination of many of the native species of tree. Changes in climate may isolate wildlife populations in their local habitats, making the presence of wildlife corridors yet more important. Warmer weather may also increase visitor pressure as the desire for holiday warmth can be satisfied in Britain. (WMCCIS 2001)

Floods in Mathon



## 5.6 Strategic Objectives

- 5.6.1 Define a process for collecting and analysing detailed information about the state of landscape character, in order to identify priorities for maintaining, restoring and enhancing landscape character, and monitoring change within the framework of the Landscape Character Assessment;
- 5.6.2 Implement measures to conserve, restore and enhance distinctive characteristics and attributes of each Landscape Character type, particularly those that have been degraded significantly, or are least resilient to change;
- 5.6.3 Provide guidance for other bodies, agencies, businesses and individuals upon good practice which will benefit the landscape of the AONB;
- 5.6.4 Work with AONB partners and other relevant bodies and organisations to promote initiatives aimed particularly at agriculture and forestry where this would retain landscape character;
- 5.6.5 Seek resources to promote landscape management and improvements;
- 5.6.6 Promote awareness of the important landscape attributes and character amongst residents and visitors, providing opportunities for their involvement in identifying locally distinctive features, views and landscape concerns, and traditional maintenance of the commons.