

# 14 North Dorset Limestone Ridges

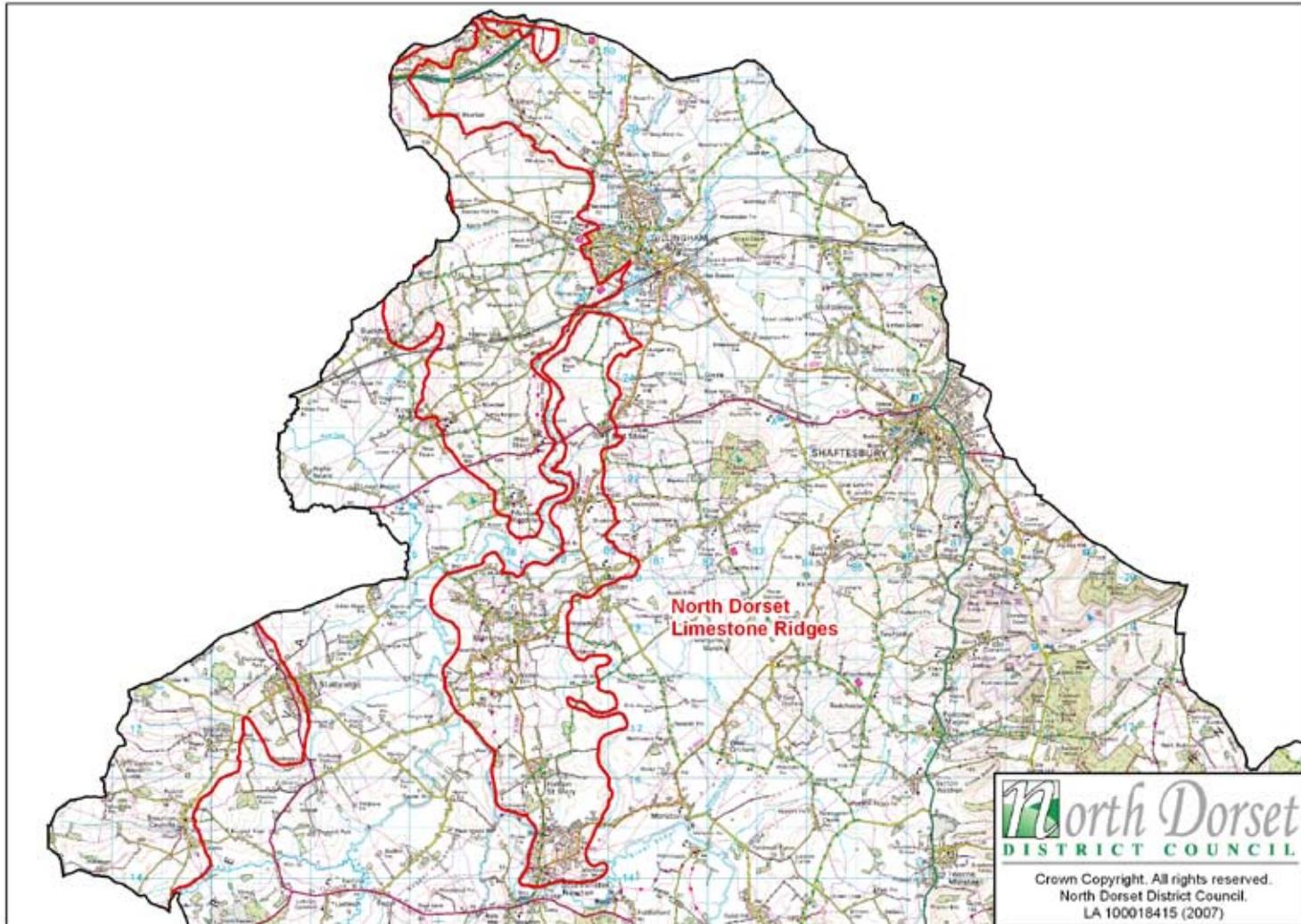


Figure 14.1  
North Dorset  
Limestone Ridges



Figure 14.2 Looking towards Stalbridge from Silton



Figure 14.3 Looking to the South West from Stalbridge Weston

## Key Characteristics

- Elevated open plateau areas of undulating farmland landscape with distinctive sloping edges in places.
- Thick dense hedgerows and frequent small copses and plantations.
- Open views from higher areas across the Vale to the chalk escarpment.
- Many scattered villages and farmsteads and a distinctive settlement pattern along the ridges or on the side slopes to the ridges.
- The traditional use of locally available and distinctive limestone in the villages and in other buildings and structures.
- Numerous twisting hedge lined lanes, straighter ridge top roads and many public Rights of Way.
- Stalbridge Park is a key local feature of interest.
- Twinwood Coppice is a key local feature of interest.

# Landscape Description

## *Land shape and structure*

- 14.1 Overall the area has the same character but it is divided into two separate parts. One is the low north-south rounded ridge extending from Sturminster Newton to Bourton which divides the Blackmore Vale into two and the second area is a rolling, elevated, plateau landscape between Stalbridge and Stourton Caundle. The latter area forms part of a large area of limestone hills and ridges extending west to Sherborne and beyond. Both areas are diverse being a mainly pastoral farmed landscape with some arable and characterised by relatively thick hedgerows, often trimmed alongside the roads and tall and straggly in other places. The medium sized fields are irregularly shaped and there are frequent copses and plantations often on the high points. There are fewer hedgerows here than in the adjacent Blackmore Vale and willows and alders are often found in the small brook valleys between the undulating landform. The farmed undulating and plateau landscapes forms a distinct and unified feel which blurs with the edges of the Blackmore Vale and the Blackmore Rolling Vales in places.

## *Settlement and land cover*

- 14.2 There are several small disused quarries in the area and at least one existing open Limestone quarry. The lanes are often twisting, all with small or no verges but always hedge lined. There are many scattered farmsteads and agricultural buildings throughout the area. The area between Sturminster Newton and Bourton forms a distinctive long rounded profile when seen from the west and is gently divided by the River Stour Valley which runs north to south through this ridge line and forms its western boundary to the south. The eastern slopes of the area are more gradual to the Vale pastures but there is a more distinct change in slope on the western side between Fifehead Magdalen and Buckhorn Weston. There is widespread use of locally distinctive and available stone which contributes to the character of the buildings and settlements. In this area the main stone used is the Corallian limestone known locally as Marnhull stone. The settlement pattern is distinctive with some on the plateau tops such as Marnhull and Hinton St Mary and other villages 'hanging' onto the side slopes such as at Kingston Magna, Fifehead Magdalen and Buckhorn Weston. Twinwood Coppice at Hinton St Mary forms a key feature in this upland landscape. Sturminster Newton is situated at the southern tip of the ridge at a key crossing point of the Stour. Both Sturminster Newton and Marnhull have some poorly integrated urban edges. At Bourton the high and steep curved slopes at the northern end of the Blackmore Vale form the southern extent of the Greensand hills which extend north into Somerset. There is a distinctive ridge top road running from Sturminster Newton to Gillingham.
- 14.3 The area to the west between Stalbridge and Stourton Caundle has a more undulating and elevated plateau feel to it and there are open views from high points across the Blackmore Vale towards the chalk escarpment. The area is more wooded than the area to the east with many of them being designated SNCI and Ancient Woodland. There are several distinctive copses situated on high points. There is a distinct edge to the eastern boundary of the area where Stalbridge 'sits' overlooking the Blackmore Vale, but the rest of the edges gently roll into the adjacent Vale landscape. The parkland landscape at Stalbridge Park and in particular the Estate roadside walls are key features in this area. The locally distinctive limestone in this part of the area is Forest Marble and Cornbrash which is widely used across this area and contributes to the character of the villages, other buildings and structures such as walls. Forest Marble in particular is used for buildings since Cornbrash is more rubbly.

## References for this character area

- ❑ Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Yeovil Scarplands Character Area.
- ❑ English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: Wessex Vales.
- ❑ Landscape Description Unit Nos: 281, 274, 272, 181.