

**CRANBORNE CHASE AND WEST  
WILTSHIRE DOWNS  
AONB**

**INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE  
CHARACTER ASSESSMENT**

**Final Report**

**Prepared for  
The Countryside Agency  
by  
Land Use Consultants**

**June 2003**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Land Use Consultants (LUC) has prepared this report on behalf of the Countryside Agency, with specialist expertise on the historic environment provided by Wessex Archaeology and specialist expertise on socio-economic issues provided by Segal Quince Wickstead. LUC's team consisted of Kate Ahern, Rebecca Knight, Emma-Jane Lee, Kate Milner, Robert Deane, Robert Hutchinson and Bernie Warmington (authors) and Cressida Jones and Flo Harrison (GIS and graphics).

The study has been steered by an Advisory Group with the following members:

Amanda Grundy	Countryside Agency
Linda Nunn	Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB Unit
David Carman	Hampshire County Council
Alan Turner	East Dorset District Council

We are grateful for the guidance and advice provided by the Advisory Group. However, the views and recommendations in this report are those of Land Use Consultants, Wessex Archaeology and Segal Quince Wickstead.





# I. INTRODUCTION

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## A Nationally Significant Landscape

- I.1. Cranborne Chase and the West Wiltshire Downs is a landscape of national significance as recognised by its designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is recognised to be of equivalent importance in terms of landscape quality as a National Park.
- I.2. Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB is an area of 983 sq km forming part of the extensive belt of chalkland which stretches across southern England. Its designation as an AONB was confirmed in October 1983. It abuts the Dorset AONB (**Figure 1.1**) and includes part of the South Wessex Downs Environmentally Sensitive Area.
- I.3. The AONB is divided into its two areas by the fertile wooded *Vale of Wardour*. To the south is Cranborne Chase with its smooth rounded downs, steeply cut combes and dry valleys typical of a typical chalk landscape. The dip slope gently descends to the south-east where it meets the Dorset Heaths. To the north, the Wiltshire Downs are more elevated, the landform rising to a subtle ridge at Great Ridge/Groveley Wood. Both areas are fringed by impressive scarps, cresting above the adjoining greensand terraces.
- I.4. Traditional downland pasture is now largely confined to steeper slopes while large rectangular fields emphasise the chalkland's open character. The chalkland valleys of the Wylde and Ebble support a larger proportion of permanent pasture, with many copses and hedgerows. In the northwest, the AONB's sandstone fringe of wooded ridges and valleys includes rich parklands such as Longleat and Stourhead.
- I.5. The AONB is of great ecological importance. Its protected sites range from ancient downland, herb-rich fen and river meadow to scattered deciduous woodland which includes remnants of the ancient Cranborne Chase hunting forest and the former Royal Forests of Selwood and Gillingham. It is rich in prehistoric sites with many ancient monuments and field patterns on the downs, whilst the Vale of Wardour is dominated by large 18th and 19th century estates, parklands and associated villages.
- I.6. This is a deeply rural area with scattered villages and narrow roads. There are no large settlements in the AONB but nearby country towns such as Salisbury, Shaftesbury and Warminster are growth areas. Although there are a few sites attracting a large number of visitors, such as Longleat, Stourhead and Centre Parcs, the AONB is not a developed tourist area as yet, although demand for caravan sites, holiday and second homes is increasing.

## The 1995 Landscape Assessment of the AONB

- I.7. In 1995 the Countryside Agency commissioned a landscape assessment of Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB. This was undertaken by Land Use Consultants and involved a thorough and robust assessment, based on the 1993

landscape assessment guidance<sup>1</sup>. However, since the publication of this guidance the approach to landscape character assessment has moved on. The new guidance<sup>2</sup> provides the current accepted methodology.

## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

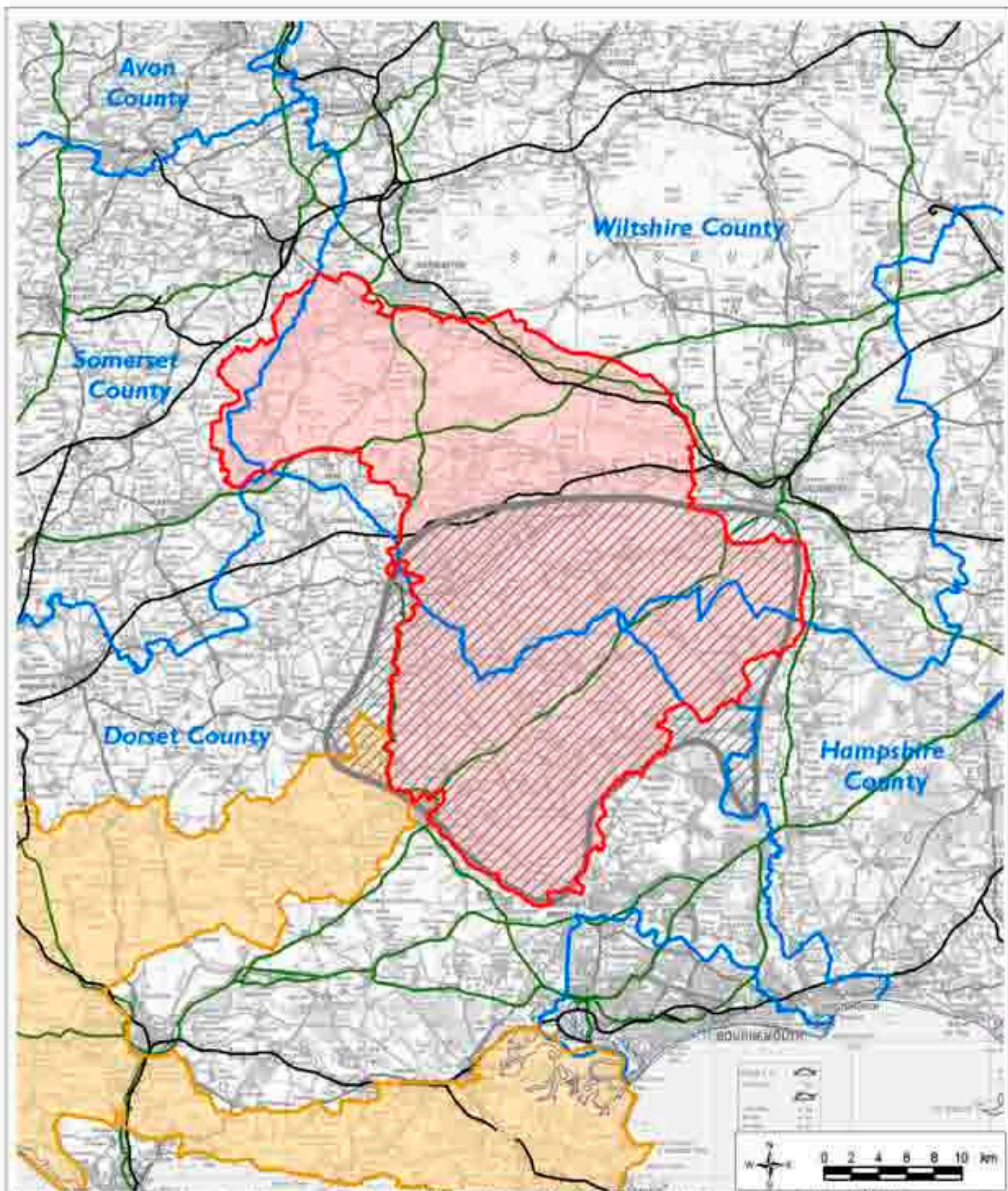
### Hierarchy of Assessment

- I.8. The Countryside Character Initiative came about because it was recognised that there was a need for a new approach to landscape assessment which would look at the whole of England's countryside, rather than just specific designated areas, and provide a consistent national framework for more detailed local landscape assessments.
- I.9. The Countryside Agency has mapped the whole country into 159 separate, distinctive character areas. The features that define the landscape of each area are recorded in individual descriptions which explain what makes one area different from another and shows how that character has arisen and how it is changing. Cranborne Chase and the West Wiltshire Downs is covered by 5 different Countryside Character Areas. The majority of the AONB is covered by three areas, area I32: **Salisbury and West Wiltshire Downs**, area I33: **Blackmoor Vale and the Vale of Wardour** and area I34: **Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase**. Area I17: **Avon Vale** borders the AONB to the north and area I35: **Dorset Heaths** borders the AONB to the south-east. These are shown in **Figure I.2**.
- I.10. Cranborne Chase and the West Wilts Downs AONB covers four counties and seven districts. In undertaking this integrated landscape character assessment it was important to take into account existing work to ensure the work fits within the hierarchy already set by national, regional and local character assessments.
- I.11. The differences in approach and terminology between these make interpretation of the assessments confusing, particularly for those who are not familiar with the concept of landscape character assessment. This sense of inconsistency is further emphasised by the fact that character assessment coverage of the AONB is incomplete at the local authority level.
- I.12. There is clearly a need for an assessment which moves beyond the level of detail provided by the 1995 AONB assessment (by inclusion of such criteria as socio-economic and recreation as influences upon character) and in a manner which sets the benchmark for bridging the gaps in coverage, technical approach and presentation/terminology. This will ensure a seamless hierarchy of character from the national to the regional scale and from which future assessments, at district level can take their lead and thus continue this consistent method through to the local scale. **Appendix 3** presents the similarities and differences in classification between the 1995 assessment and this assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> Countryside Commission (1993) Landscape Assessment Guidance CCP 423

<sup>2</sup> Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002) Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland CAX 84



### CRANBORNE CHASE AND WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS AONB LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

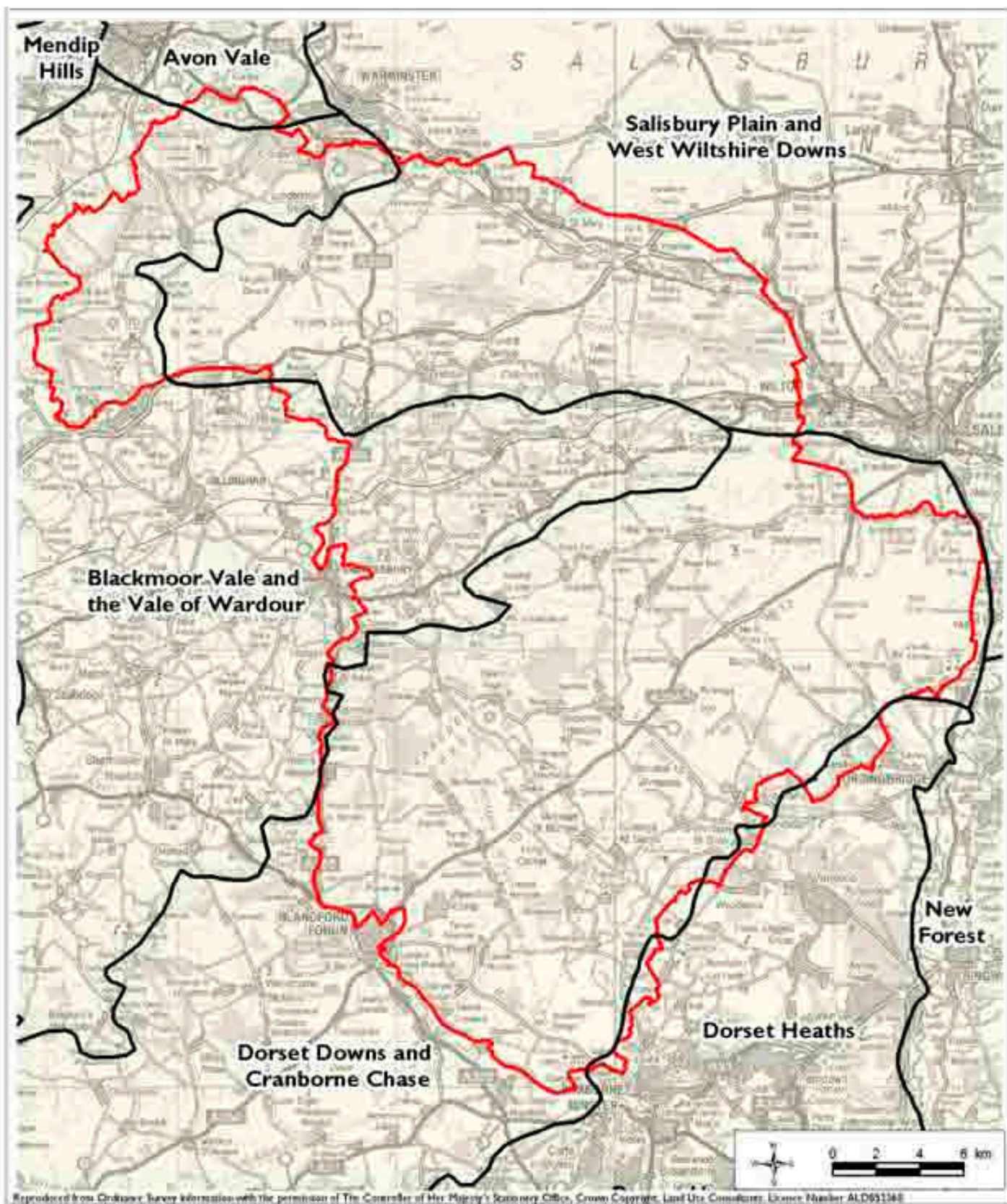
Figure 1.1:  
Regional Context  
of the AONB

- Key**
- AONB boundary
  - Dorset AONB
  - 17th C. Outer Chase boundary
  - County boundary
  - Primary route
  - Railway
  - Coastline

Source: East Dorset District Council  
Cranborne Chase Landscape Assessment, 1997

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Figure 1.2:  
Joint Character Areas

- Key**
- AONB boundary
  - Joint Character Areas

Source: English Nature and Countryside Agency

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- I.13. A Scoping Report setting out proposals for further work was produced in September 2002.

## **INTEGRATED CHARACTER ASSESSMENT**

- I.14. The assessment seeks to present a fully integrated view of the landscape incorporating all the features and attributes that contribute to the special and distinctive character of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB. These include the physical, ecological, visual, historic and cultural forces that have shaped the present day landscape. It also recognises the AONB today as a living and working landscape and considers the social, economic and recreational characteristics that contribute to its current character.
- I.15. For this final draft report we have brought together a number of different studies, including studies into the socio-economics of the AONB, the agricultural character, historic character, recreational characteristics, ecological characteristics of the AONB and visual information based on survey work conducted in the field. The evaluative stage teases out the key issues affecting the AONB, proposes a broad management objective and a number of aims for each landscape character area.

## **STRUCTURE OF THE DRAFT REPORT**

- I.16. The structure of this report is as follows:

**Chapter 1: Introduction:** Introduces the landscape of the AONB and the hierarchy of landscape assessment that already exists in the area.

**Chapter 2: Physical Influences:** Establishes the physical factors that have influenced the character of the AONB, including geology, topography, hydrology and soils.

**Chapter 3: Ecological Character:** Provides an overview of ecological characteristics across the AONB that relate to their underlying physical environment.

**Chapter 4: Human Influences:** Establishes the human factors that have influenced the character of the AONB.

**Chapter 5: Social and Economic Influences:** Provides an overview of social and economic influences across the AONB.

**Chapter 6: Overview of Agricultural Character:** Provides key features of the agricultural character of the AONB based on DEFRA June Census data.

**Chapter 7: Recreational Influences:** Provides an overview of recreational influences across the AONB.

**Chapter 8: The Landscape Character of Cranborne Chase and the West Wiltshire Downs:** This is the main body of the report and contains an introduction to each landscape type followed by detailed descriptions for each character area, identification of key issues and a broad management objective for each area.

**Chapter 9: Managing the Nationally Important Landscape:** This concluding chapter summarises the special character and outstanding qualities of the AONB, considers changes occurring within the AONB and provides Broad AONB Management Aims.

**Appendix 1:** The Agricultural Character of Cranborne Chase and the West Wiltshire Downs. This section provides a description of the agricultural characteristics of the 'farming character areas' across the AONB and their contribution to the economy of the AONB.

**Appendix 2:** Perceptions of the Landscape. Provides an overview of perceptions of the landscape as expressed through literature and art.

**Appendix 3:** Comparison of the landscape classification with the 1995 Assessment

**Appendix 4:** Method Statements

**Appendix 5:** Sample Field Survey Form

## 2. PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

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- 2.1. Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB like all landscapes is a palimpsest of the various influences that have, over vastly different time-scales, acted upon it. The character of the landscape has evolved in response to the basic underlying geological characteristics of the land upon which natural processes and human activities have operated, in turn influencing patterns of land use as well as ecological and cultural character.
- 2.2. In order to understand the character of Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB today and why the varied character of the modern landscape has arisen, it is necessary to explore those conditions that have affected its form, patterns of land use and ecological character, ranging from the basic underlying geological characteristics of the land and the natural processes which have acted upon it to historical and more recent activities of humans.

### GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 2.3. Above all else, Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB is dominated by Chalk, a rock which has formed the distinctive convex landforms of the open downland and which has had a profound influence on the history of human activity, influencing the patterns of agriculture, settlement and artistic expression. The Chalk downs are deceptive. The wide open spaces and exposed, upland character give the impression that Chalk is a very hard rock, resistant to thousands of years of weathering. Of course, the opposite is true, as Trueman described:
- 2.4. *'On account of its porosity, however, and the scarcity of surface streams, Chalk escapes most of the effects of river erosion and its surface is not lowered to anything like the same extent as the clays which lie along its borders: the Chalk thus stands out in ridges as surely as if it were a harder rock.'*
- 2.5. The Chalk beds were laid down during the latter part of the Cretaceous period, some 100 million years ago, when the land mass had subsided and much of southern Britain lay under 200-300 metres of sea water. Deposition of clays and sands (represented by the underlying layers of Gault Clay and Upper Greensand) gradually gave way to accretion of the calcite remains of microscopic algae and larger invertebrates. These deposits, mixed with clay, formed a marly layer which comprise the basal layers of Chalk. As the process of Chalk formation continued (spanning some 20 million years), so the proportion of clay decreased and the rock became purer and harder. The Chalk beds are generally divided into three. The oldest and least pure is the Lower Chalk, comprising beds as little as 30 metres thick, while the youngest and purest is the Upper Chalk, a layer which ranges between 250 and 400 metres in thickness. **Figure 2.1** presents the surface geology of the area and **Figure 2.2** illustrates topography across the AONB.
- 2.6. Embedded within the Chalk are flints which have been formed at different periods during and after the deposition of the Chalk. The flints are formed from silica, a hard, insoluble material derived from the skeletons of the sponges which lived in the seas where the Chalk was deposited. At various stages since the Chalk was deposited

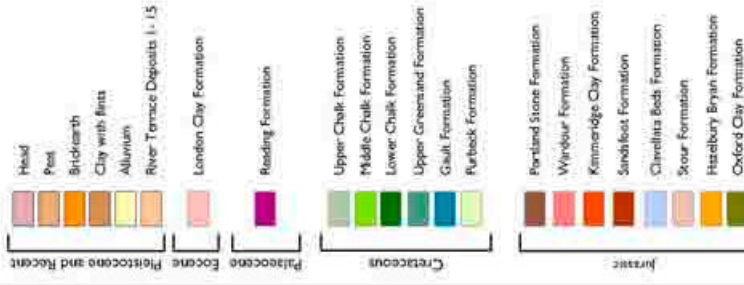
the silica was concentrated in the voids formed by burrows or along faults and joints in the Chalk. Flint remains long after the softer Chalk has been either eroded or dissolved away and the occurrence of the stone attracted prehistoric populations to the Chalk lands where they were able to collect flints from the surface and to mine the stone, manufacturing sharp tools and implements.

- 2.7. These processes thus resulted in the formation of the Chalk beds which cover large parts of southern and eastern England. Equally important have been a range of tectonic and geomorphological processes which have had a major influence on the landscape that we see today. Foremost among these are a series of compressions and intervening relaxations which affected the whole of the Hampshire Basin. These had the effect of creating a series of east-west faults (where the Chalk beds were vertically sheared from one another) and folds (where the beds are compressed into 'ripples'). The Chalk was weakened along these lines and rivers and streams were more easily able to remove material to form valleys, often leaving escarpments where the ends of the chalk strata are exposed and gentler slopes which follow the inclined surface of the Chalk. Within the AONB the Vale of Wardour and the Ebbel Valley both follow east-west anticlinal axes. The Wylle Valley, on the other hand, follows the line of the Mere Fault.
- 2.8. The highest parts of the Chalk downs, notably the ridges between the valleys of the Rivers Wylle, Nadder and Ebbel, represent the remains of a once extensive Chalk surface. In places they are capped with a thin mantle of red clay with flints, which comprises a combination of more recent sedimentary deposits which were laid down over the Chalk and the remnants of the broken down Chalk itself. There is remarkable coincidence between these deposits and remaining tree-cover on the downs, for instance at Great Ridge and Grovely Wood, suggesting that the presence of clay may have influenced land use and that, conversely, the woodland may have protected the deposits from erosion. The clay with flints may represent the remains of a once more extensive layer of capping.
- 2.9. In the Ebbel Valley, the removal of weakened Chalk has created a Broadchalke valley. In the Vale of Wardour, however, the process of erosion has progressed further, cutting through the Chalk and into the older rocks which underlie it. As the land drops down into the Vale, the Chalk gives way to Upper Greensand which forms a broad terrace and a series of dissected hills to the south and a further series of knolly hills to the north. Between these hills, the River Nadder has revealed even older Oolitic Limestone (known locally as Chilmark Stone) and Kimmeridge Clay, both of which were formed during the Upper Jurassic Period, up to 150 million years ago. The exposures of Chilmark Stone are limited to a comparatively small area in the eastern part of the Vale. However, it has been quarried since Roman times, finding extensive use in many of the finer buildings in the area as well as in Salisbury Cathedral. The effect of the Vale of Wardour's differing geology (geologists refer to it as a Jurassic inlier) is immediately evident in the contrast between the landscape of the Vale and the surrounding downland. In place of the smooth, open Chalk upland is a much smaller, pastoral valley contained between the wooded knolls of the Greensand hills. Villages are hidden among these hills, focused on the springline at the junction of the Chalk and Greensand, and scattered over the floor of the Vale

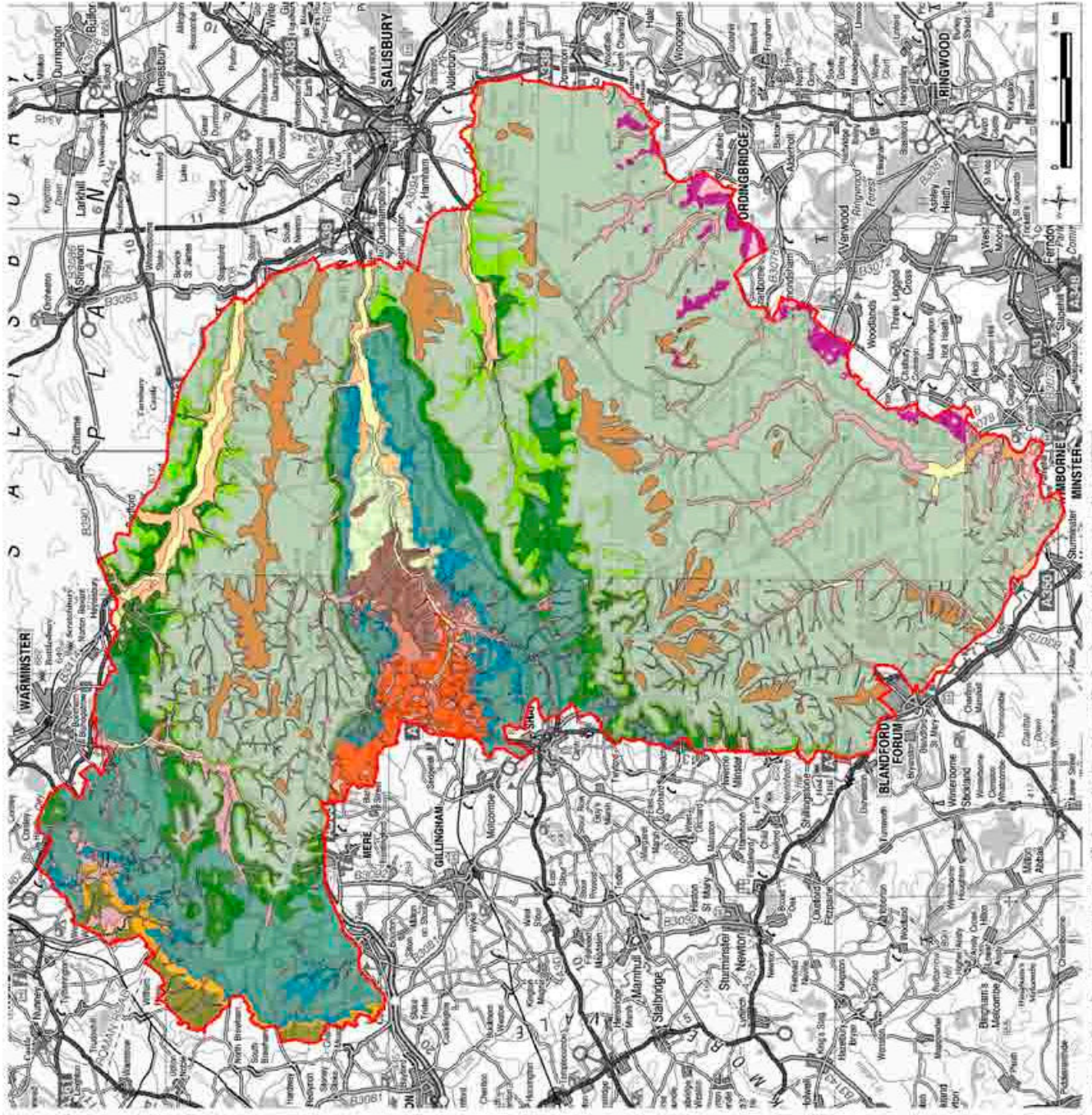


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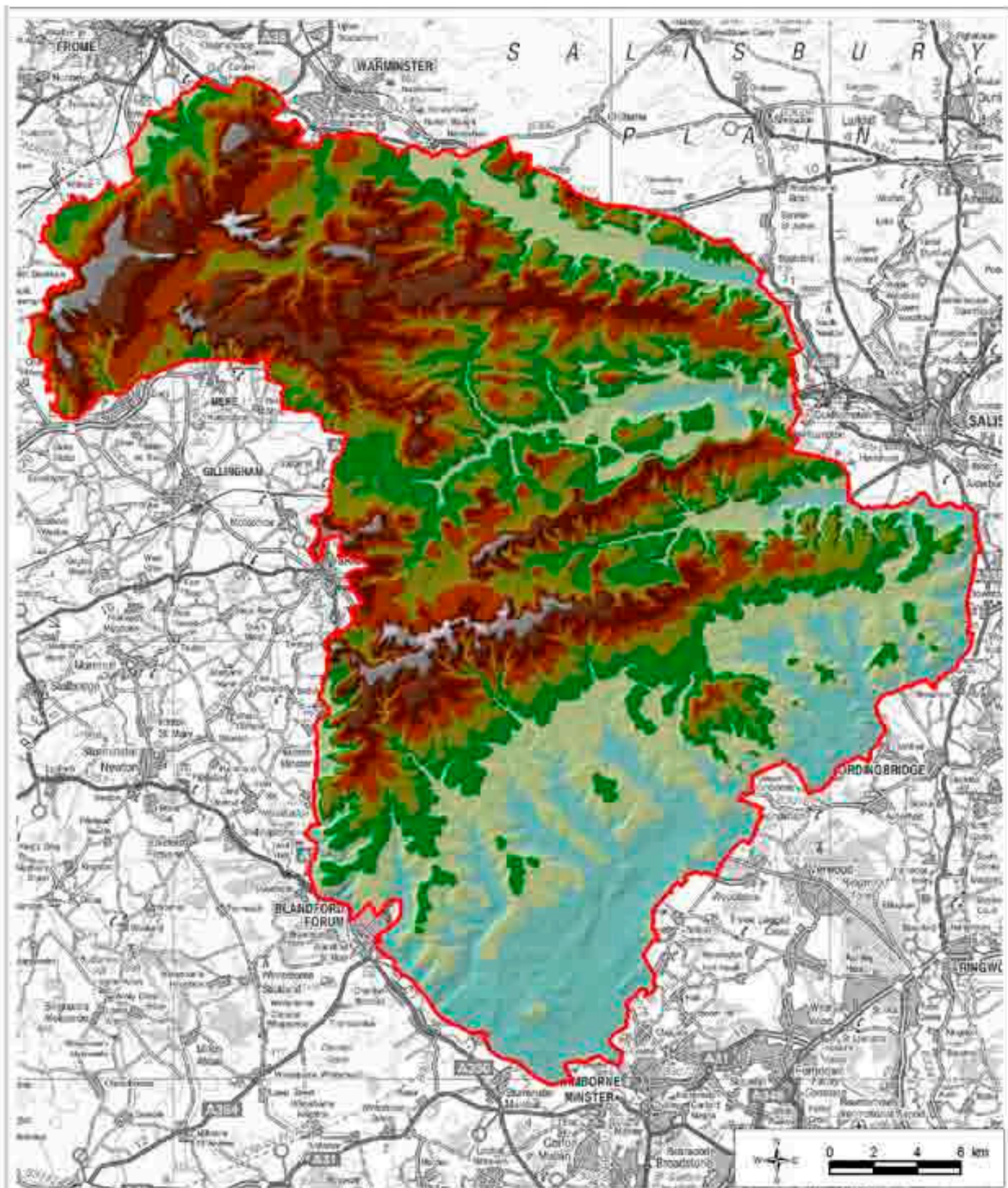
**Figure 2.1: Surface Geology**



Source: British Geological Survey  
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**Figure 2.2:  
Topography**

**Key**

 AONB boundary

**Elevation (m)**



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where access to water supplies is not generally a major constraint governing settlement location.

- 2.10. Older rocks have also been revealed along the western edge of the AONB. North of Mere, for example, a high and in places fragmented escarpment gives way to a broad Greensand terrace some two or three kilometres wide, extending from Mere to Maiden Bradley and Longbridge Deverill. The western edge of this terrace is marked by a steep, well wooded escarpment leading down to the Oxford Clay of Blackmore Vale.
- 2.11. Returning to the Chalk, it is evident that, in addition to the riverine erosion which has exploited faults and anticlines, more extensive erosion processes have created the dry valleys that are found throughout the downs. These range from the shallow undulations south of the Ebble Valley to the deeply incised and branching system of valleys and combs which cut into the chalk further west. Above Tollard Royal, for example, the valleys cut into the inclined surface of the Chalk threaten to cut through the escarpment to reach the vale of Wardour a few tens of metres to the north.
- 2.12. The mechanism responsible for the formation of these valleys has attracted some discussion. This reflects the porosity of the rock and the consequent tendency for water to pass into the ground rather than flowing over the surface in streams and rivers. In the absence of such watercourses, the creation of the valleys remains open to debate.
- 2.13. Two principal mechanisms are thought to have been instrumental in chalk valley formation. Much of the erosion may have taken place under periglacial conditions at the end of the last Ice Age when rain water failed to penetrate the frozen ground, instead flowing across the surface in streams and rivers. Frost action is also thought to have contributed to the movement of material downhill. The valleys formed during the periglacial period are likely to have lowered the watertable as the Rivers Wylde, Nadder and Ebble cut down into the Chalk, improving drainage, with the result that streams in other valleys disappeared. The pattern of land use, particularly the retreat of settlement from higher ground since Roman times suggests that a further, more recent fall in the water table has occurred, though the cause is unknown. Modern abstraction of water to supply surrounding towns has further lowered groundwater levels, with the effect that rivers such as the Tarrant and Crane now rise far further south than in the past.

## HYDROLOGY

- 2.14. The main drainage pattern of the AONB rivers can be split into two, differentiating hydrological activity between the north and the south of the AONB. See **Figure 2.3**.
- 2.15. The key rivers influencing the landscape of the northern half of the AONB are the tributaries of the River Avon which drains north to south and runs through the centre of Salisbury just beyond the boundary of the AONB. These significant tributaries are the Rivers Wylde, Nadder and Ebble - cutting through the chalk following lines of weaknesses to create a sequence of valley landscapes. The Wylde drains north-south along lines of weakness through the Chalk. The Nadder and

Ebble both drain east to west with all three rivers connecting with the south flowing Avon.

- 2.16. Within the south of the AONB the Rivers follow a different route. Here, they drain the dip slope of the Chalk – flowing down through the landform in a north south direction. The Rivers Tarrant and Allen drain to join with the River Stour that runs parallel to, and in places touches, the south-western boundary of the AONB. The Tarrant meets the Stour south east of the town of Blandford Forum whilst the Allen and Stour converge on the southern edge of Wimborne Minster. The Allen River and The River Crane, further east, both drain to meet the River Avon.

## **SOILS AND AGRICULTURAL CAPABILITY**

- 2.17. Soil types and condition are intrinsically linked to the nature of the underlying geology of the landscape, the drift deposits and the influences of hydrology. This in turn has a direct bearing on the nature and intensity of land uses as well as the landscape's capacity or suitability to support different assemblages of natural vegetation. **Figure 2.4** presents a land cover map of the AONB and **Figure 2.5** illustrates the differing agricultural capability across the AONB.

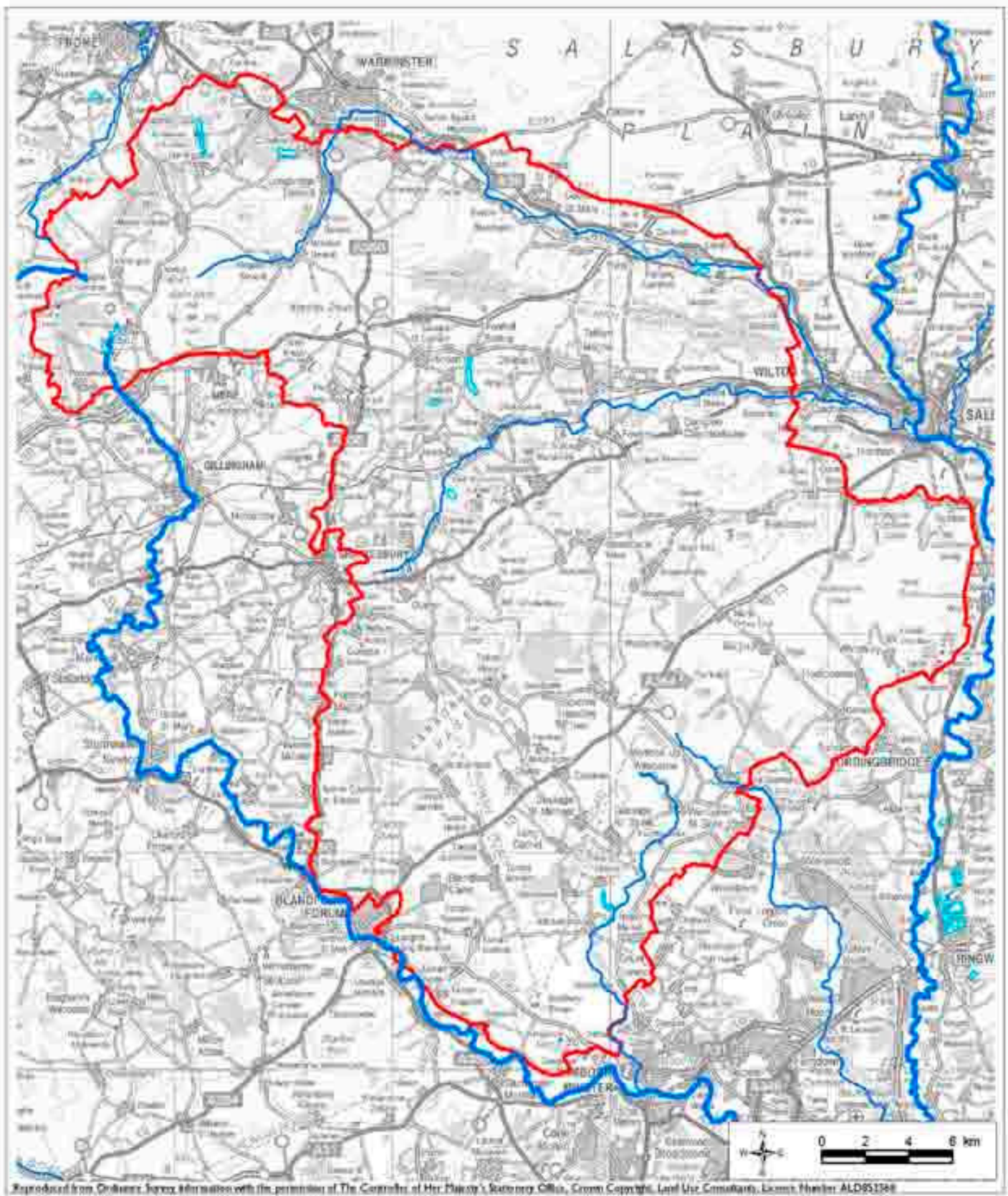
- 2.18. There are seven soils groups within Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB:

- Rendzinas
- Brown earths
- Argillic brown earths
- Paleo-argillic brown earths
- Brown Calcareous earths
- Stagnogley soils
- Groundwater gley soils

- 2.19. Each of these soil groups is outlined below with a description of the subgroups occurring within the AONB.

### **Rendzinas**

- 2.20. This soil group is associated with the broad sweeping *Open Chalk Downland* landscape types - to the north located between the Rivers Nadder and Wylde and to the south of the AONB overlying the chalk downland south of the Vale of Wardour. The dominant subgroup found in the AONB is the brown rendzinas – shallow well-drained calcareous silty soils that overly the chalk and are associated in landform terms with slopes and crests. These soils are linked with winter cereals and short-term grassland with dairy farming and stock rearing and some woodland.
- 2.21. Although not as common, grey rendzinas also occur within the *Open Chalk Downland* landscape and are associated with river valleys such as the River Nadder and Allen.



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Figure 2.3:  
Hydrology

### Key

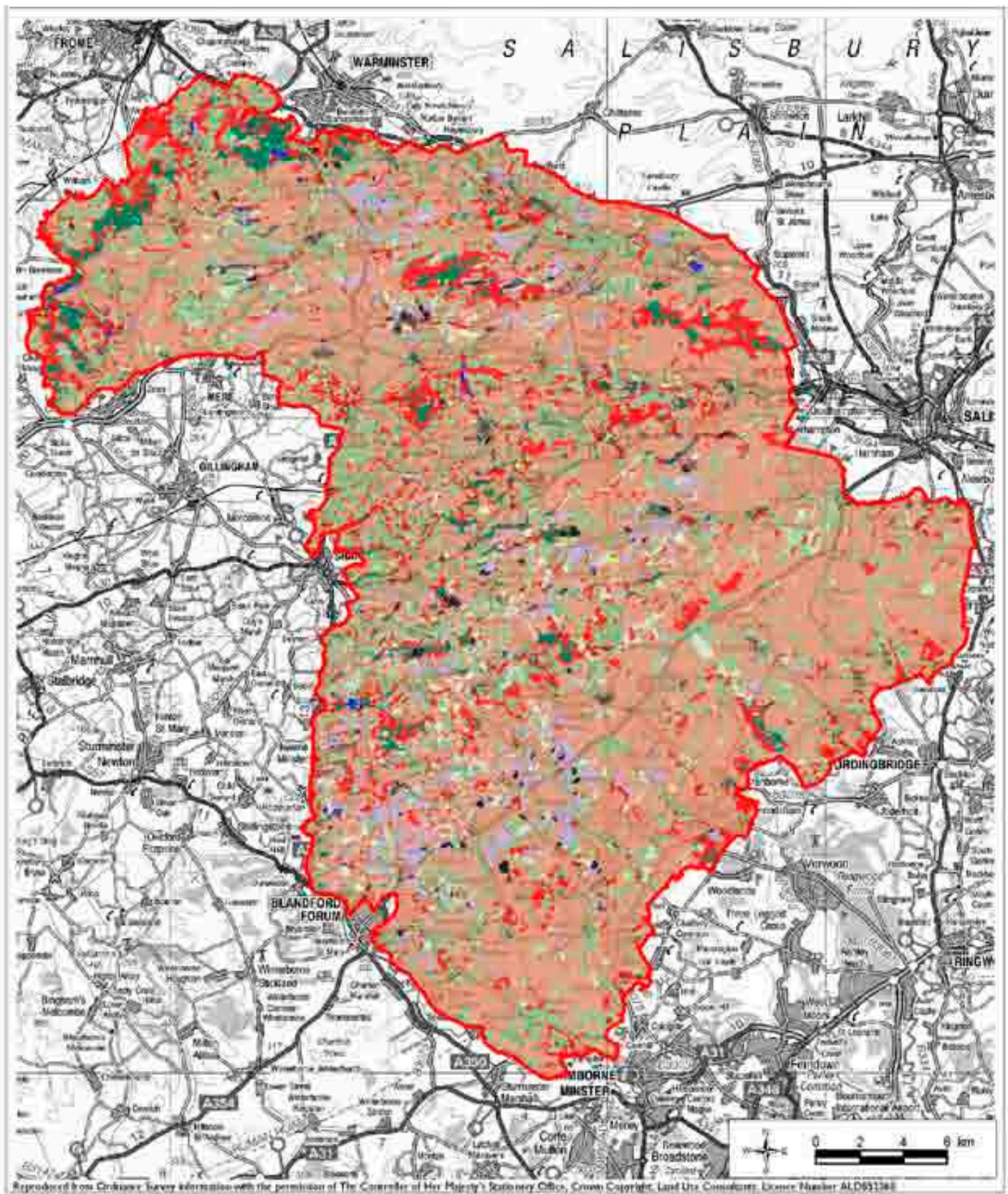
- ▭ AONB boundary
- Main River
- Secondary River
- Lake

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Figure 2.4:  
Land Cover

**Key**

- AONB boundary
- 1.1 Broad-leaf / mixed woodland
- 2.1 Coniferous woodland

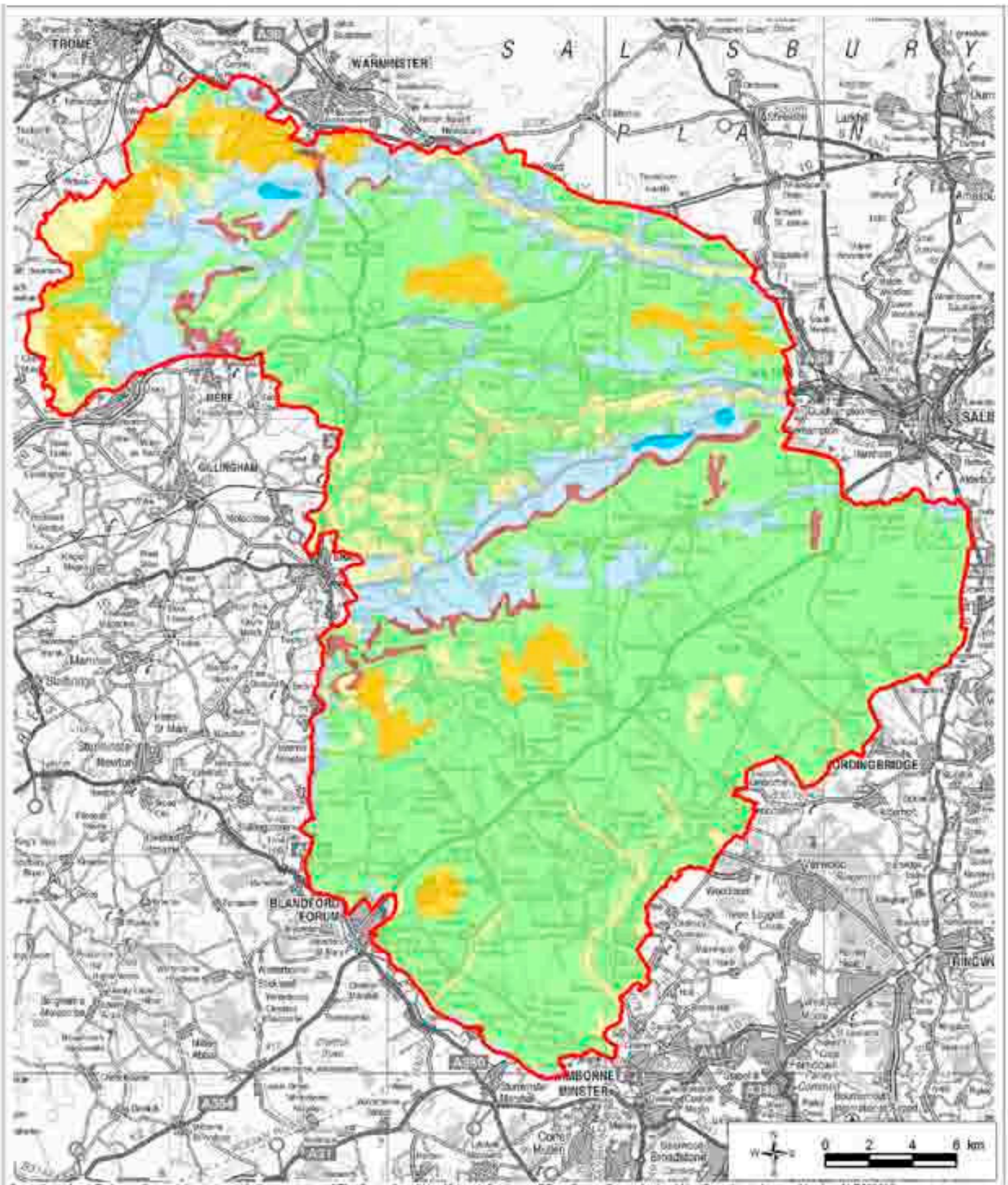
- 4.1-4.3 Arable cereals, arable horticulture and arable non-rotational
- 5.1 Improved grassland
- 6.1 Neutral grass
- 5.2 Setaside grass
- 7.1 Calcareous grass
- 8.1 Acid grass
- 9.1 Bracken
- 10.1 Dense dwarf shrub heath
- 10.2 Open dwarf shrub heath
- 11.1 Fen, marsh, swamp
- 12.1 Bog (deep peat)
- 13.1 Water (inland)
- 15.1 Montane habitats
- 16.1 Inland bare ground
- 17.2 Continuous urban
- 17.1 Suburban / rural development

Source: Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) (Natural Environment Research Council (NERC))

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**Figure 2.5:**  
**Agricultural Land Classification**

**Key**  
 AONB boundary

-  Grade 1 - Land with very minor or no physical limitations to agricultural use
-  Grade 2 - Land with some minor limitations which exclude it from Grade 1
-  Grade 3 - Land with moderate limitations due to soil, relief or climate, or some combination of these factors which restricts the choice of crops, timing of cultivations, or level of yield
-  Grade 4 - Land with severe limitations due to adverse soil, relief or climate or a combination of these
-  Grade 5 - Land with very severe limitations due to adverse soil, relief or climate, or a combination of these

 Non Agricultural

Source: DEFRA

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- 2.22. Humic rendzinas are also found within the AONB. These soils are shallow, well drained calcareous soils that overlie chalk and on slopes and hills tops. This is true within the AONB where these soils overlie the chalk surface geology of the *Chalk Escarpments* landscape type. These soils are associated with permanent grassland, downland habitats and deciduous woodland on steep scarps, recreation and military uses.
- 2.23. The rendzinas soil group are generally covered by agricultural land with a Grade 3 Agricultural Land Classification. Grade 3 land represents moderate limitations to agricultural use.

### **Brown calcareous earths**

- 2.24. These are non - alluvial loamy or clayey soils and have a weathered calcareous subsoil. The group occurring within the AONB is the 'typical brown calcareous earths' of which two associations are present. These soils are well drained, calcareous, fine and silty soils that occur within the AONB in the *Greensand Terraces* landscape type and . They are primarily associated with cereal cropping, grass rotations, dairy farming and stock rearing.
- 2.25. The brown calcareous earths within the AONB are largely linked with an Agricultural Land Classification of Grade 2 indicating only minor limitations to agricultural use.

### **Brown earths**

- 2.26. *Brown earths* are non-alluvial loamy soils that have a non-calcareous subsoil. The subgroup of this soil occurring within the AONB is 'typical brown earths' and is a well drained coarse loamy soils of a reddish colour mainly overlaying soft sandstone. It can be subject to seasonal waterlogging and is at risk from water erosion. These soils are associated with the Upper Greensand geology of the *Greensand Hills and Greensand Terrace* landscape type. The main crops associated with these soils are cereals, sugarbeet and potatoes, field vegetables and fruit and, where areas are moist, grassland. These soils are associated with an Agricultural Land Classification Grade 3 meaning moderate limitations to agricultural use.

### **Argillic brown earths**

- 2.27. Argillic brown earths are loamy, clayey soils with significant clay enrichment in the sub-surface horizon. The subgroup of this soil occurring within the AONB (typical argillic brown earths) is separated further into two separate soil associations.
- 2.28. The first of these soil associations is defined as well drained, mainly fine loamy soils overlying chalk strata geographically and is linked to the predominant Upper Chalk geology found with in the character areas of the *Downland Hills* landscape type found to the southeast of the AONB. Here the Agricultural Land Classification is largely Grade 3, indicating moderate limitations to agricultural use and with some smaller areas classified as Grade 4 and having severe limitations for agricultural land use. These soils are associated with rotations of cereal and grassland, fruit and field vegetables and permanent grassland on steep slopes.

- 2.29. The second comprises well-drained fine silty over clayey soils that are flinty in places. This is associated with the Upper Greensand geology of the *Greensand Hills* and *Greensand Terrace* landscape type, particularly in the far north-west of the AONB. Here the Agricultural Land Classification is Grade 2 and therefore has only minor limitations to agricultural use.

### **Paleo-argillic brown earths**

- 2.30. Paleo-argillic brown earths are loamy and clayey soils distinguished by a reddish (or reddish mottled) clay-enriched subsoil – reflecting the soil formation processes occurring before the last Ice Age. There is one soil subgroup occurring within the AONB – the typical paleo-argillic brown earths, defined as often very flinty, well drained, silty and clayey.
- 2.31. These soils are linked to the clay with flints surface geology that caps the chalk, for example as seen on Cranborne Chase and at Great Ridge and Grovely Wood. These soils are also found between the river valley of the Allen and the settlement of Blandford Forum. These soils are associated with winter cereals, rearing of stock and both deciduous and coniferous woodland. Within the AONB, the land use primarily associated with this soil group is woodland. Where the landscape is not under woodland cover, the agricultural land is largely of classification grade 3 with moderate limitation to agricultural land use.

### **Stagnogley soils**

- 2.32. These soils have a distinct topsoil and occur widely across lowland Britain. The subgroup occurring within the AONB is typical stagnogley soil of which one soil association is present. This soil occurs over a geological base of drift over Jurassic and Cretaceous clay or mudstone. It is a slowly permeable fine loamy, clayey or silty soil that experiences seasonal waterlogging.
- 2.33. Within the AONB this soil subgroup is associated with the Kimmeridge clay geology found in the western half of the *Rolling Clay Valley* landscape type, north east of Shaftesbury. It is also directly linked with the Oxford Clay with Kellaway Beds of the *Greensand Hills* landscape type along the Somerset fringe between Penselwood and Warminster. This soil is associated with a land use of dairy farming across the south west of England. Within both landscape types the agricultural land classification varies between Grade 3 and 4- ranging from moderate to severe limitations to agricultural use.

### **Ground-water gley soils**

- 2.34. These are soils that have developed in loamy or clayey alluvium of at least 30cm thickness. There are two subgroups – calcareous alluvial gley soils and pelo-alluvial gley soils. The former are associated with the valley gravels and alluvium of the *Chalk River Valleys* namely the Wylde Valley, Ebble Valley and the Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys. These are shallow calcareous and non-calcareous loamy soils overlying flint gravel. They are affected by groundwater and are at risk of flooding. These soils are associated with the land uses of permanent grassland, with dairying and stock rearing, wetland habitats and recreation.

- 2.35. The second subgroup is linked to the river alluvium, valley gravels, and the Wealdon and Upper Purbeck geology of the Nadder Valley. This soil is stoneless and clayey and calcareous in places. It is associated with flat land at risk of flooding and commonly linked with rearing of livestock, permanent grassland and cereals (where the threat of flooding is reduced). Both subgroups relate to Agricultural Land Classification Grade 4 – severely restricting agricultural use of the land.





## 3. ECOLOGICAL CHARACTER

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### ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT

- 3.1. Natural Areas (NAs) are sub-divisions of England identified by English Nature as being unique on the basis of their physical, wildlife, land use and cultural attributes. This approach provides a wider context for conservation action, and offers a framework for setting objectives relevant to nature conservation. **Figure 3.1** shows the location of these NAs across the AONB.
- 3.2. There are four NAs within the AONB, two of which namely the Thames and Avon Vales NA and the Dorset Heaths NA, constitute only very small areas and are considered to contribute little to the overall ecological character of the AONB. Far more representative of the area as a whole and covering a much greater proportion of the AONB are the Wessex Vales NA and the South Wessex Downs NA.
- 3.3. The Wessex Vales NA covers the north-west corner of the AONB and extends to form a spur which almost dissects the AONB from west to east. The location of the Wessex Vales NA within the AONB corresponds approximately with the extent of sand and clay deposits, which overlie the chalk bedrock. These deposits give rise to a variety of soil types ranging from acid through to basic, which is in contrast with the more or less homogenous chalk soils associated with the South Wessex Downs NA. This wide range of soil types supports a variety of associated habitat types, such as wet woodland, acid woodland, and both neutral and calcareous meadows.
- 3.4. The remainder and majority of the AONB falls within the South Wessex Downs NA, which is a landscape strongly characterised by the underlying chalk geology, forming a series of valleys, downs, escarpments and combes. The South Wessex Downs NA is an internationally important area for its chalk grassland and chalk rivers, and for the many notable, and often rare species associated with these habitats.
- 3.5. Although areas of high ecological value are found throughout the AONB, particularly high concentrations of such sites are found in association with the steep scarp slopes, where large tracts of unimproved chalk grassland have escaped agricultural improvement. Chalk grasslands are notable for supporting an exceptional diversity of plant species and invertebrates, many of which have a restricted distribution in the UK. Plant species which have a stronghold in the AONB include the internationally important early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*), which is a national rarity and UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) priority species. Additional habitats found in association with chalk grassland, include chalk heath and scrub mosaics, which where present provide valuable habitat diversity, and contribute significantly to the ecological value of these areas. **Figure 3.2** shows the distribution of Statutory Nature Conservation Designations across the AONB.
- 3.6. Although extensive areas of unimproved chalk grassland have been retained along the scarp slopes, the dominant land use within the AONB is agricultural farmland. Although much of this agricultural land is intensively managed for commercial crop production, the AONB supports a number of important species which are partly dependent on or associated with agricultural land uses.

- 3.7. In addition to chalk downland landscapes, the AONB also supports biologically rich chalk river systems. Particularly notable examples are the Rivers Nadder and Wylye. These two rivers are part of the extensive River Avon System (Special Area of Conservation, SAC) and are of high ecological interest for the diversity of aquatic plants, fish and invertebrates which they support.
- 3.8. The AONB also has significant woodland cover, ranging from the extensive woodland of Cranborne Chase, through to small remnant ancient woods, and recently planted shelterbelts. **Figure 3.3** shows the distribution of different types of woodland across the AONB.

## WILDLIFE ATTRIBUTES

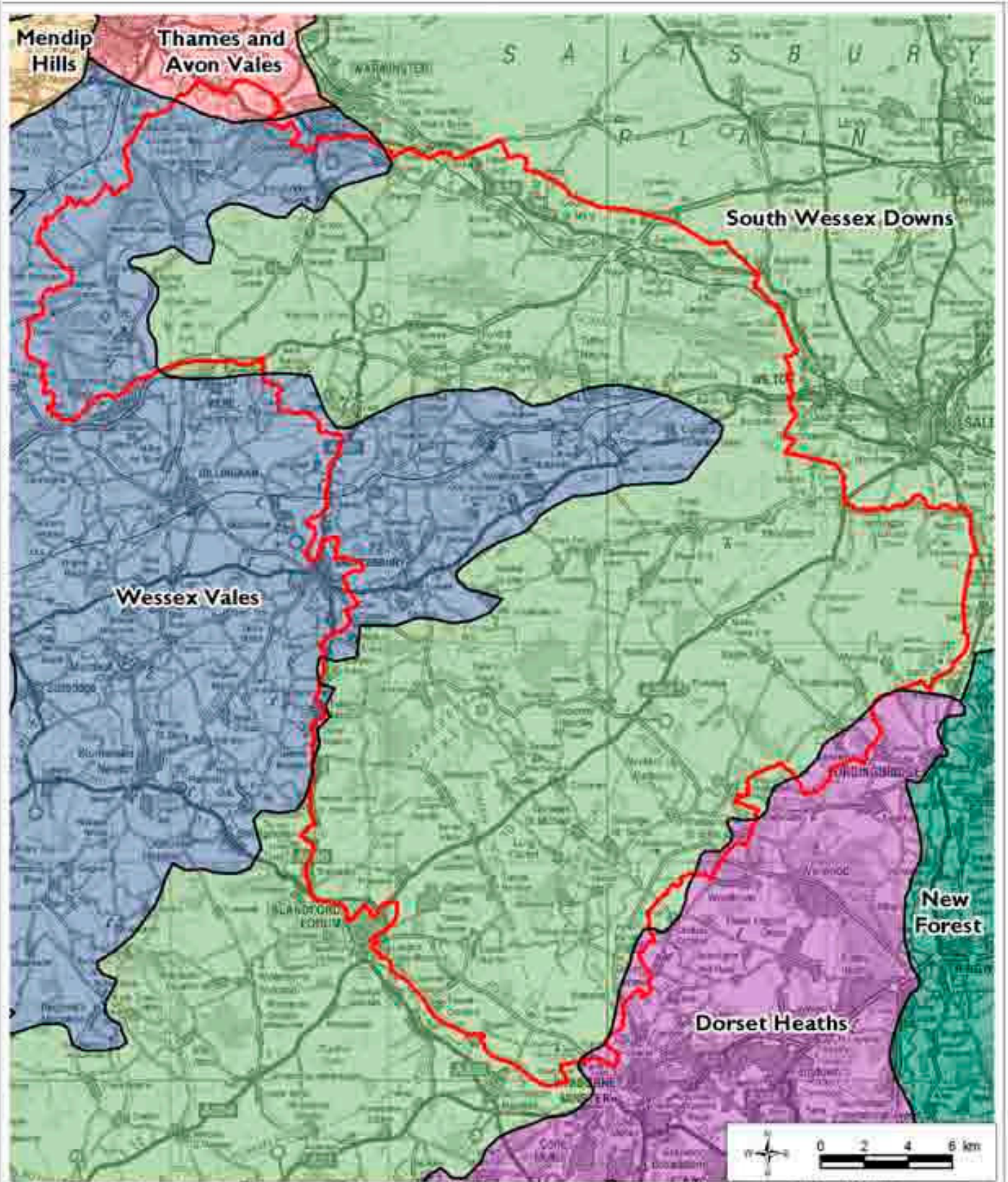
- 3.9. Assessment of local and national BAPs and statutory wildlife site data indicate that a wide range of habitats and associated animal species occur within the AONB. The most characteristic and valuable habitat types can be summarised as:
- Calcareous grassland and associated habitats
  - Arable farmland and pasture
  - Rivers and associated habitats
  - Woodland

### Calcareous Grassland and Associated Habitats

- 3.10. Unimproved calcareous grassland is a key habitat within the AONB and represents a significant biological resource. Over the past 50 years chalk grassland has suffered an overwhelming 95% national decline, and it is estimated that the AONB currently supports between 9.6-14.4% of the UK's nationally important lowland chalk grassland<sup>3</sup>, including a number of large sites.
- 3.11. Chalk grassland is characterised by species-rich plant communities, and supports a diverse range of grasses and herbs. A number of common species are characteristic of chalk grassland, including sheep's fescue (*Festuca ovina*), oat grass (*Helictotrichon pratense*, *H. pubescens*), glaucous sedge (*Carex flacca*), salad burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*) and wild thyme (*Thymus polytrichus*). In addition, chalk grasslands support many nationally rare and scarce plant species, such as early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*), tuberous thistle (*Cirsium tuberosum*), dwarf sedge (*Carex humilis*), and bastard toadflax (*Thesium humifusum*). In addition to their botanical significance, these grasslands also support diverse assemblages of butterflies, including internationally important populations of the marsh fritillary (*Eurodryas aurinia*), and the rare silver spotted skipper (*Hesperia comma*), as well as many other notable invertebrates.

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<sup>3</sup> The estimate of between 9.6-14.4% is based on figures provided by the UK Biodiversity Group (1998) Tranche 2 Action Plans, Volume II. It is estimated that 25,000-32,000ha of chalk grassland remains in England and Wales, of which 60-70% currently carries statutory designation. The total area of chalk grassland within the AONB with statutory designation is around 2,155ha.



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## CRANBORNE CHASE AND WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS AONB LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Figure 3.1:  
Natural Areas

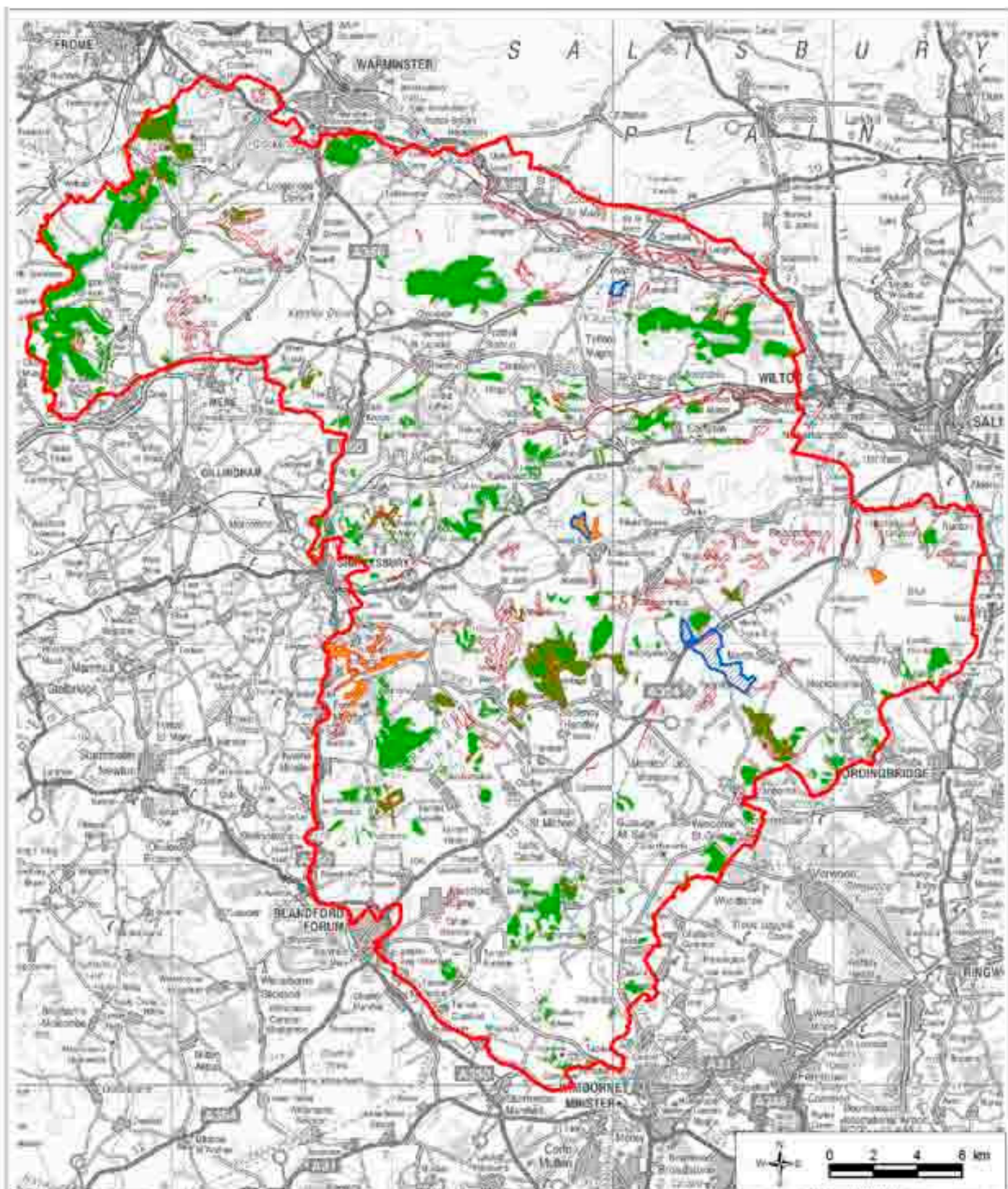
- Key**
- AONB boundary
  - Natural Area

Source: English Nature

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### CRANBORNE CHASE AND WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS AONB LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

**Figure 3.2:**  
Statutory Nature Conservation Designations

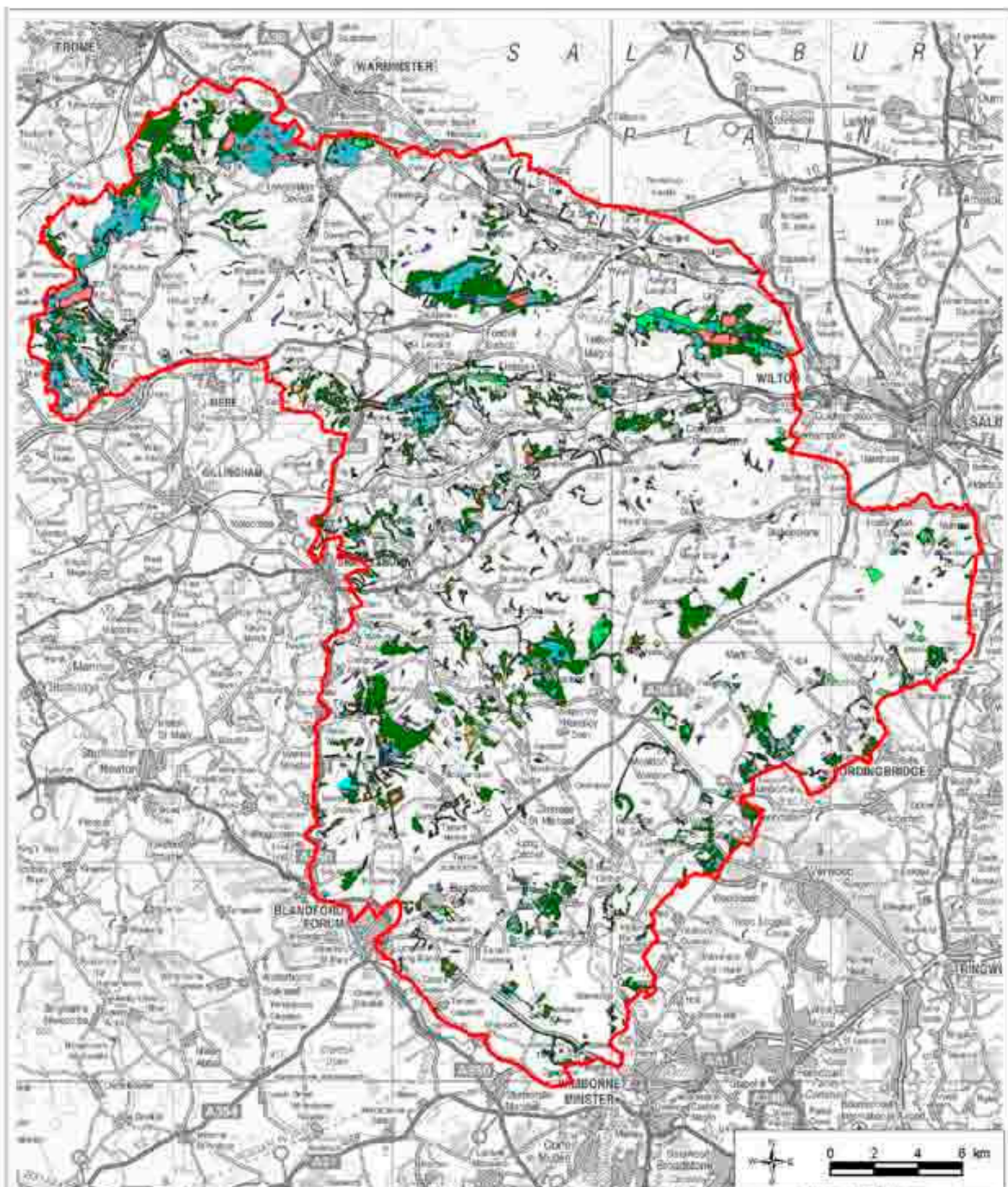
- Key**
- AONB boundary
  - Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
  - Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
  - National Nature Reserve (NNR)
  - Ancient Woodland (AW)

Source: English Nature

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### CRANBORNE CHASE AND WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS AONB LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Figure 3.3: Woodland Inventory

**Key**

- AONB boundary
- Broadleaved
- Coniferous

- Coppice
- Coppice with standards
- Felled
- Ground prepared for planting
- Mixed
- Shrub
- Young trees
- Unclassified

Source: Forest Research (Forestry Commissions)

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- 3.12. Additional habitats found in association with chalk grassland, include chalk heath and scrub, and when managed appropriately this habitat diversity increases the ecological value of an area.
- 3.13. **Chalk heath** occurs locally where thicker soils develop, for example on plateaus or acidic surface deposits such as where gravels overlie the chalk. Plants more typical of acidic conditions such as heather and gorse often indicate such situations. Local variations in topography which bring the chalk closer to the surface can result in mixtures of chalk grassland, chalk heath and acid grassland, such as observed at Martin and Tidpit Down (National Nature Reserve, NNR).
- 3.14. The majority of the chalk grassland sites within the AONB support a component of **scrub**, and where management maintains an appropriate balance, this scrub / grassland mosaic enhances the ecological value. Calcareous scrub communities are often rich in woody species, and usually include dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*), spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*) and whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*). However, a lack of management, in particular grazing, is a common threat to open chalk grassland and has, in many instances, allowed scrub to colonise large areas of species-rich downland turf. Some types of scrub that occur within the AONB, such as juniper (*Juniperus communis*) scrub are declining in the UK, and are listed as priority habitats under the UK BAP due to their rarity and inherent biological interest.

#### **Arable Farmland and Pasture**

- 3.15. Farmland currently accounts for some 89%<sup>4</sup> of the land area within the AONB, and contributes significantly to its overall character and ecological value. The majority of this farmland is arable land which is intensively managed under modern farming systems. The steep chalk scarps and river valleys are often farmed less intensively, and are associated with a greater variety of commercial crops, which are often grown in rotation with grassland leys. This mixed farmland often supports a rich biodiversity, including a number of nationally declining plant and animal species.
- 3.16. At a national level, the rapid changes in agricultural practice over the past 60 years have been responsible for a decline in many species of plants and animals associated with farmland. In particular, farmland birds and arable weeds represent two of the most rapidly declining groups, and several species have been identified as priorities under the UK BAP.
- 3.17. The West Wiltshire Downs and Cranborne Chase AONB represent an important area for a number of nationally declining plant and animal species associated with agricultural land, relevant examples include:
- a range of farmland bird species, including stone curlew (*Burhinus oedicephalus*), grey partridge (*Perdix perdix*), tree sparrow (*Passer montanus*) and skylark (*Alauda arvensis*). These species have suffered rapid decline across the UK due to changing agricultural practice, and they are priority species under the UK BAP;

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<sup>4</sup> Refer to Chapter 6 'Overview of Agricultural Character'

- nationally scarce arable weeds such as red hemp-nettle (*Galeopsis angustifolia*), dense-flowered fumitory (*Fumaria densiflora*) and narrow-fruited cornsalad (*Valerianella dentata*). These species and many others have declined due to a shift from mixed farming and spring sown crops to increased specialisation, early autumn sowing and the increased use of fertilisers and pesticides.
- 3.18. Opportunities for landowners to enhance local biodiversity are available through voluntary agri-environment schemes, such as Countryside Stewardship. Such schemes provide a mechanism to compensate farmers for costs incurred in changing their land management practices to bring about environmental benefits. Examples of such measures include the management of arable field margins, and in some cases whole fields, which can be used to benefit arable plants, ground nesting birds and invertebrates. The integration of nature conservation and commercial production objectives presents a real opportunity for retaining and enhancing biodiversity within the AONB.

### **Rivers and Associated Habitats**

- 3.19. Chalk rivers are common features of the AONB, including the Rivers Wylye, Nadder, and Ebble (tributaries of the River Avon), and the Rivers Allen and Tarrant (tributaries of the River Stour). These rivers represent an important nature conservation resource, and contribute significantly to the overall ecological value of the area. The River Wylye and Nadder are of particularly high biological interest, and form a part of the internationally important River Avon System (SAC).
- 3.20. These chalk rivers are typically gravel bottomed, and characterised by clear, fast flowing water. They are valued for supporting abundant and rich aquatic plant communities, diverse fish assemblages, and for their varied aquatic invertebrate fauna, including many species with a restricted distribution within the UK. Of the aquatic vegetation types present, beds of floating water crowfoot (*Ranunculus* subgenus *Batrachium*) are particularly notable, as this vegetation type is uncommon in chalk rivers across the UK and throughout Europe.
- 3.21. Although some small areas of rough pasture and fringing woodland occur within the floodplains of these rivers, associated wetland habitats such as traditional water meadows and unimproved marshy grassland are now uncommon. Most of these wetland features have been subject to agricultural improvement, and arable agriculture and improved grassland now dominate the floodplains.

### **Woodland**

- 3.22. The AONB supports significant woodland cover, incorporating a wide range of different woodland types, from ancient semi-natural woodland through to coniferous shelterbelts associated with the arable landscapes. Particularly well-wooded areas are found around Cranborne Chase, on the Penselwood and Longleat Hills and on the clay with flint deposits found on the plateaus of the West Wiltshire Downs.
- 3.23. **Ancient woodlands** are widely scattered throughout the AONB, and are of high nature conservation importance, due to the diverse animal and plant communities which they support. Their character varies largely according to the underlying soils. Acid woodland is present, but calcareous woodland predominates with characteristic

woody species including, beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), oak (*Quercus robur*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*). These ancient woodlands range from Cranborne Chase, a large and ecologically diverse woodland with a long and complex history of management, through to small remnant fragments which are interspersed within the agricultural matrix.

- 3.24. The AONB also supports areas of **yew woodland** (*Taxus baccata*), which is a highly valued woodland community due to its restricted distribution within Europe. Great Yews (Site of Special Scientific Interest, SSSI) is an important example, and contains many large individual yew trees, many of which are thought to be over 200 years old, with girths well over 4.5m.
- 3.25. **Broad-leaved, mixed and coniferous plantation** occur as small copses and shelterbelts throughout the AONB, although not considered to have as high ecological value as the ancient woodlands, they do enrich agricultural landscapes at the local level.



## 4. HUMAN INFLUENCES

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- 4.1. The landscape of Cranborne Chase and the West Wiltshire Downs as we see it today is the product of a series of major changes through which its character has been transformed by the interaction of natural and human or anthropogenic processes. Like most areas of Britain, the landscape of the AONB bears the imprint of successive periods of human inhabitation and land use. While the basic landforms have remained the same, the vegetation covering and land use have been subjected to constant change, although some periods of change have been far more rapid and radical than others have been.
- 4.2. This Chapter provides a chronological narrative on past human influences on the landscape and ends with an introduction to buildings and settlement within the landscape. The narratives provide an up to date picture based on recent understandings of the past that have emerged within archaeology and utilising new archaeological evidence or publications.

### Early Prehistory

- 4.3. There is little evidence for Palaeolithic occupation within the AONB, other than a few finds of scattered flint handaxes. During the time of the last glacial maximum, from 18 000 to 11 000 BC, the area would not have been underneath an ice sheet, but would nevertheless have been extremely cold, with tundra vegetation. As the climate began to warm pine, juniper and birch forest spread, giving way to hazel scrub and then more mixed broad-leaved oak forest with elm, ash, alder, lime and hazel. Some areas such as the Allen valley may have consisted of more open grassland.
- 4.4. By 8500 BC people had returned to the AONB, and evidence for the Mesolithic period consists of scatters of worked flint and chert (a poorer form of flint). Sometimes there is more evidence for settlement as at Downton, where the remains of campfires and tents or shelters of brushwood or hide were excavated. Elsewhere, there may have been hunting stands, foraging camps and areas set apart for initiations and rituals. Dense flint scatters on Pentridge Hill and Handley Common suggest that groups were repeatedly returning to favoured places, perhaps because they were close to resources such as water, wood and game, but also because there were already stories, myths and memories surrounding them. There were natural solution hollows or dolines still open on Cranborne Chase at this time, and these may have been considered especially mysterious. It is likely that the Mesolithic people first began the process of forest clearance and may also have closely managed 'wild' plant and animal populations in ways that were precursors to domestication.
- 4.5. There is very little archaeological evidence for permanent settlement structures during the Neolithic. The evidence indicates a landscape that was still substantially wooded, although areas of grassland were now established and some erosion of soil had begun. In some cases there was secondary regrowth of scrub and woodland in previous clearings within the forest. Flint scatters and pottery fragments are evidence for Early Neolithic occupation from 4000 BC, and many Neolithic sites overlie Mesolithic flint quarry hollows and occupation sites, perhaps suggesting these places had historical and mythic significance. The many long barrows served partly as

burial places for some people from these communities, but also as foci for a variety of social gatherings and ritual practices. Some were positioned so that they were intervisible, or had lines of sight to earlier monuments and natural features. Causewayed enclosures such as those on Whitesheet Hill near Kilmington and Hambledon Hill were perhaps places where the dead were exposed or defleshed, where ritual deposits of artefacts and food were made, and where people met to trade, marry, exchange objects and livestock, and dance, feast and tell stories. The Dorset Cursus on Cranborne Chase consisted of two banks and ditches set some sixty metres apart, but nearly ten kilometres long. This may have been the setting for ritual processions, or it may have been an 'avenue of the dead', built by the living for the use of the ancestral spirits.

- 4.6. By 3000 BC and the Late Neolithic, there is more evidence for scrub, grassland and cereal cultivation, though some stands of old woodland remained in the landscape, particularly on slopes and valley sides. There were increasing areas of rough pasture, as pastoralism was still very important. Demand for timber would have become greater with the construction of monuments such as the small timber circles on Cranborne Chase and the complex of henges at Knowlton. Again, these monuments may have served as communal centres for ritual ceremonies and other social gatherings. Across southern England there are few sites where structural remains of late Neolithic or early Bronze Age settlements have been discovered, and where they are present these often seem to have been insubstantial and short-lived, lasting just a few months or a few seasons. However, sometimes these locales, rather than the structures themselves, were returned to repeatedly over decades or even centuries.

### **The Bronze and Iron Ages**

- 4.7. The Early Bronze Age is regarded as beginning around 2400 BC. Many Early Bronze Age round barrows are still visible across the Chase, often in groups, some concentrated around earlier features. There are concentrations near Tollard Royal, along the western edge of the West Wiltshire downs, and along the escarpments to the south of the Nadder Valley. Dozens of others have been ploughed away however. The inhumation and cremation burials within these barrows hint that individuals were becoming more recognised in society, and social elites were probably emerging.
- 4.8. During the Middle Bronze Age from 1500 BC, round barrow construction continued, but the most dramatic change in the landscape was the widespread appearance of field systems defined by banks, ditches and possibly hedges. Some Bronze Age field boundaries were orientated on round barrows, or took great care to avoid them, suggesting that they must still have had great cultural and historical significance. Associated with these fields were small enclosures containing roundhouses and ancillary buildings, and these would have been the farmsteads of extended family groups. It used to be thought that rising population and the need for greater agricultural intensification were behind these dramatic changes, but palaeo-environmental evidence suggests that there was not a significant rise in either arable cultivation or pastoral farming. This suggests that field systems were not created for more intensive agricultural production, and were instead the result of changes in the

internal social and political structure of these communities, and their links with other groups.

- 4.9. In the Late Bronze Age from 1100 BC larger linear earthworks were constructed that often cut across the earlier fields, and it has been suggested that these were territorial markers, perhaps defining lands and 'valley territories' claimed by specific groups of people, who may have practised predominantly pastoral agriculture. By now, substantial areas of the downs were grassland, and remained so until medieval agricultural expansion in the 13th and early 14th century. Woodland was probably carefully managed. Earthworks such as Grim's Ditch, Bokerley Dyke and the cross dykes on Win Green and Melbury Hill may have their origins in the Late Bronze Age, although they were later re-used. Sheep were becoming more important, for their meat but also for their wool, as there is much greater evidence for weaving from this period.
- 4.10. In the Early Iron Age from 700-400 BC, most people lived in open settlements of roundhouses, and field systems continued to be used, or were re-used from earlier periods. Hillforts also appeared, for example at Penbury Knoll, Winkelbury and Chiselbury, Hambledon Hill and Hod Hill. These constructions used to be regarded as evidence for full-scale 'Celtic' warfare caused by population growth and further pressure on land and resources, but the development of hillforts was not necessarily the result of conflict. They may have often been more concerned with communal gatherings, trading and storage than they were with defence. Although many hillforts had large defensive banks and ditches, these may have been linked to status and display rather than warfare. Most hillforts had been largely abandoned by the end of the Middle Iron Age.
- 4.11. During the Late Iron Age of 100 BC to AD 43, fields and farmsteads were linked together by trackways and complex social networks of kinship, reciprocity and trade. The range of arable crops was greater than at any other period until the 19th century, and sheep became the most numerous animals. Cattle and pigs were also kept though, and may have had associations with wealth and status. Placed deposits of metalwork, pottery and human and animal bones in grain storage pits, ditches and watery places were an important part of Iron Age beliefs. On Cranborne Chase, excavated Iron Age enclosure sites such as Tollard Royal, Pimperne and Gussage All Saints have provided a wealth of information about the period, the latter site in particular containing evidence for high-status metalwork production. The unexcavated Iron Age settlement complex at Gussage Down may have been an important regional centre.

### **The Roman-British Period**

- 4.12. Following the successful Roman invasion of Britain in AD 43, some Dorset hillforts such as Hod Hill were reoccupied, but were swiftly captured by Roman forces. The fact that many field systems, farmsteads and roundhouses continued in use into the Romano-British period signals that the acculturation process was a long and complex one, with native beliefs and practices merging with Roman ideas. However, in valley locations some villa estates such as Rockbourne, Tarrant Hinton, Iwerne Minster, Knowlton, Minchington and Barton Hill were established, many over previous Iron Age settlements.

- 4.13. Roman roads such as the Ackling Dyke were an important development. New markets and consumers were created as a result of these roads. The Romans introduced some agricultural innovations, especially in equipment, and better breeds of livestock. Many areas of the chalk downlands may have remained relatively little changed in appearance however. Arable field systems may have expanded further into previously open areas, and some of this was also enclosed as pasture to meet the demand for wool. Further woodland clearance took place, in part driven by increased demands for firewood and charcoal for pottery kilns and smithies.
- 4.14. Beyond the re-use of existing fields and boundary ditches, there appears to have been little significance given to the prehistoric monuments. During the later Roman period it was once thought that there was a 'retreat' from the chalk downs caused by soil exhaustion and falling water tables, but this is not born out by recent archaeological evidence. Any changes may have been a result of developments in agricultural and social practices rather than population movements and abandonment. Arable farming might have exhausted soil fertility in some places, but there may also have been a shift to pastoral regimes instead.

### **The Anglo-Saxon Period**

- 4.15. By the late 4th century AD Saxons were among the raiders pillaging the southern and eastern areas of England, but some were invited to settle England as paid mercenaries. Although Saxon settlement of the Salisbury area may have taken place by the later sixth century, it may not have been on any scale within the area of Cranborne Chase and the West Wiltshire Downs until the seventh century. Bokerley Dyke was constructed in the later fourth or early fifth century AD as a bulwark against Saxon invaders, possibly built over a previous Bronze Age linear ditch and bank.
- 4.16. The decline of centralised political control following the withdrawal of the legions created a power vacuum, and the loss of the market that had driven the agricultural economy meant that agricultural production returned largely to subsistence levels. Ploughing of the higher downs may have decreased due to declining soil fertility, but this does not mean that agriculture 'contracted'. These areas would have formed unenclosed grazing or hay cropping, which under the foggage system meant that extra grassland was made available for winter feed. Many earlier Saxon burials were inserted into Neolithic long mounds or Bronze Age round barrows. Many burials were accompanied with rich grave goods, and examples have been found at Oakley Down, Winkelbury Down and Swallowcliffe Down. At Wor Barrow several decapitated skeletons were found that might be the victims of Saxon executions.
- 4.17. Saxon settlements were probably concentrated in the valleys. There is little evidence for this period, although some modern villages may overlie Saxon settlements. Land units were often developed in the form of strips that dissected the valleys from side to side, thereby giving access to a range of arable and pastoral areas and other resources. Some Saxon estate boundaries may still be reflected in early modern or modern landscape boundaries. Heylesbury and Donhead St. Mary were possible Saxon mother churches, sited at the centre of large estates. Officials called reeves administered these estates, and political and ecclesiastical power was thus already becoming interlinked. From the late tenth or eleventh century this system began to



be replaced with the parochial parish church system. In the Saxon period the manor of Cranborne was part of the estate known as 'The Honour of Gloucester', owned by one Brictric.

### **The Norman and Later Medieval Period**

- 4.18. The Norman conquest of England from 1066 replaced an English speaking elite with a French speaking nobility, based in castles and manor houses. Brictric was dispossessed, and an earldom created. This passed into Royal ownership when King John became the Earl of Gloucester. The Crown, the nobility, the bishoprics of the Church and the great monastic houses owned most of the chalk downlands between them, and the parochial system began to replace the earlier Anglo-Saxon system based on mother or minster churches. Each medieval parish contained a group of tithings, which on the downland often retained the long, thin shapes from the Anglo-Saxon period. The Domesday survey of 1086 shows that medieval villages were also located in the valleys, and some may have been continuations of Saxon settlements.
- 4.19. Many chalkland villages adopted two field systems, where half the arable land was left untilled each year to be grazed by cattle, manured and thus recover its fertility. In more fertile areas villages adopted three or four field systems, with the land cultivated for two years for cereal crops, and then left fallow for a third year. Extensive tracts of ridge-and-furrow are evidence for this. Individuals had the rights to farm different strips within each larger field. This allocation of strips ensured that no-one had all the best land, and it also reduced risks from crop failure, blight and flooding.
- 4.20. Trade became wider and large-scale once more, with wool and livestock being the predominant downland exports. This was taken to burgeoning market towns often located on the fringes of the downs, such as Warminster and Salisbury. Many medieval droeways and tracks may have had earlier origins, and some were themselves incorporated into later roads. Throughout the 12th and 13th centuries there was an expansion in both arable cultivation, and a large rise in sheep grazing, the result of growing populations and the increase in the woollen trade. On steeper slopes within the AONB many strip lynchets reflect this period of agricultural expansion, and there are particularly pronounced examples near Mere. The ridge and furrow on the higher downland is often not very pronounced, reflecting the shallow soils and temporary nature of the cultivation.
- 4.21. The Saxons had established hunting parks, but it was the Normans who codified their management in the Forest Law. Forests, which included areas of woodland, downland, arable and pasture, and settlements, did not necessarily belong to the king, but Forest Law gave the Crown rights to exploit the land's resources. Forests provided deer and revenue (in the form of fines) for the king, but the areas of woodland also provided timber for construction, wood for fuel, grazing for animals, particularly pigs, and other resources for the local communities. Large areas of Dorset and Wiltshire were regarded as forest. These included Holt Forest to the east of Wimborne, Grovely Forest in Wiltshire, the Forests of Gillingham and Selwood on the borders of Somerset and the Forest of the White Hart in Blackmoor Vale.

- 4.22. Chases were unenclosed but nevertheless delimited hunting preserves, usually for the nobility. Cranborne Chase was granted by William Rufus to Robert Fitzhamon, and remained for a long period under the control of the Earls of Gloucester. The accepted definition of what are termed the outer or greater metes or bounds of the Chase is contained in the Quo Warranto of Edward I, issued in or about the year 1280<sup>5</sup>. The approximate Outer Bounds of the Chase are shown in **Figure 1.1**. In 1470 it passed back into Royal hands, and remained crown property until 1616 when James I gave it to the Earl of Salisbury. Royalty and nobles visited the fine hunting lodge at Tollard Royal.
- 4.23. The phase of agricultural expansion was slowed or even reversed during the later 14th century, with the Black Death causing rural depopulation and an economic depression. Some villages such as Yarnfield near Maiden Bradley and Knowlton were completely deserted, and in parts of the AONB cultivation may have retreated from the higher slopes and downs. However, some desertion or shrinkage of villages took place over centuries rather than years or decades. Most of the Tarrant villages along with Farnham, Long Crichel and Brockington follow this pattern. Again, people did not necessarily 'retreat' from downland areas, but arable declined whilst pastoral agriculture increased. There was growing specialisation in sheep farming, and records show that the flocks of neighbouring manors were often run together as thousands of animals. By the 15th century, in many areas of the chalk downlands this led to the consolidation of land blocks and their enclosure as fields using hedges, banks or ditches. Assarts or intake fields in areas cleared of woodland were common in some areas too. Serfdom largely disappeared after the Black Death, and paid labourers and classes of landed peasants and yeoman farmers emerged. These changes were tied into wider social developments, including the gradual breakdown of the feudal system.

### **The Post-Medieval Period**

- 4.24. The post-medieval period is conventionally defined as the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, and is marked by the transformation to a capitalist market economy. By the 16th century there was a distinct 'middling sort' or middle-class yeomanry emerging in the countryside. The expansion of the woollen cloth industry and the sale of monastic properties following the Dissolution encouraged this. Many field systems remained little altered in some areas until the 18th century, but elsewhere enclosure during the 15th and 16th centuries meant land use became more intensive. In some cases enclosures were informal and the result of moves within the communities involved, but in others they were forcible events dictated by Crown officials or wealthy landowners. Large areas of former arable land on the downs were converted to pasture, and increases in stock numbers led to shortages of late winter and early spring fodder. From the 16th century systems of managed water meadows developed in many valley bottoms, able to produce early grass crops, and hay later in the year. Particularly fine examples of such water management features are found at Wyllye, Broadchalke and Damerham. Many meadows have now reverted to marsh or dry pasture.

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<sup>5</sup> Desmond Hawkins (1980, 1993) Cranborne Chase, The Dovecote Press Ltd.

- 4.25. The system of sheep-and-corn agriculture involved the folding of large flocks of sheep onto arable land overnight, their dung fertilising the poorer downland soils and increasing crop yields of wheat and barley. Hurdle fences made from hazel coppices were used to create temporary pens, and the small managed woods were therefore important elements in the downland landscape. Long sheep runs were created between existing roads, tracks and paths, often several kilometres long, and some are still reflected in present-day field patterns. Fields continued to be worked from existing villages.
- 4.26. By the 18th century informal, piecemeal enclosure had created a patchwork of small, irregularly shaped fields and winding lanes and tracks in many areas. From the later 18th century though, some areas of down pasture were converted to arable, and common woods, heaths and grasslands were also enclosed. The rectangular, regular patterns of field systems bounded by hedges on low field banks seen in many parishes today were the result of these later enclosures. They are especially evident south of the Ebble Valley and on the West Wiltshire Downs. Many of the ordinary, previously land-owning peasantry thus lost rights to common land, and became paid labourers in the employment of larger farms.
- 4.27. Many villages became completely deserted during the post-medieval period, as their populations continued to fall. Some early 16th and 17th century enclosure and the creation of estates for deer parks or 'polite' landscape gardens may also have contributed to this process. In some instances though, emparking was made easier because villages had long been deserted. These polite estates for the aristocracy and rural gentry were also associated with the building of new, large houses or the refurbishment of existing ones. These estates were often characterised by extensive areas of short-turfed grass, plantings of trees, including many exotic species, and the construction of a variety of follies. There was an increasing preference for more naturalistic designs, with irregular plantations and sweeping panoramic vistas. Enclosure was a prerequisite for the creation of these parks, removing the tightly bound and inter-weaved rights of landlord and tenant to communal land, and restricting access to the now private land.
- 4.28. During the 18th century there were further changes, partly prompted by the onset of the Napoleonic Wars. There were land improvements and drainage, new crops and breeds of cattle, sheep and pig were introduced. Chalk was often extracted and burnt in lime kilns to produce lime fertiliser. The demands of the navy and industry for timber and fuel meant that many surviving woods and copses were clear felled, or substantially reduced. Turnpike roads were a significant improvement in communication.

### **The Early Modern and Modern Period**

- 4.29. Following the Napoleonic Wars conditions in the countryside for the poor were dire, and town populations grew rapidly. By the end of the 19th century more people were working in industries based in towns than were working in agriculture. There were economic crises in the 1820s and 1870s, and the 'Captain Swing' riots took place across Wiltshire in 1830. Even at the beginning of the 20th century most farm labourers still lived in thatched or tiled cottages with open fires and no running

water. Shepherds often lived on their own on the downs, in wheeled huts, sometimes remaining there even in winter.

- 4.30. The First World War saw further woodland and scrub clearance, and large areas of open downland ploughed up for cereals. Following the end of the war there was increased mechanisation on farms, and farm labouring as a way of life declined rapidly. There were further falls in rural population, partly because so many labourers and gamekeepers had been killed during the war. The shortage of labour meant that steam ploughs were increasingly used to plough fields. Market plots for vegetables and the '3 acres and a cow' scheme were launched by the government of Lloyd George to encourage smallholders. In the 1920s however prices for wheat, cattle and milk fell, and there was further economic and social hardship as part of the Great Depression. In the 1930s transportable milking parlours were introduced onto some farms, and there were government drives to increase arable production with the threat of war. During the Second World War many areas of downland that had been under pasture for centuries were ploughed up again to maximise arable production.
- 4.31. Post-war intensification of agriculture continued with the ploughing of slopes and elevated downland, and the removal of hedgerows and field boundaries to create large scale fields. This resulted in loss of archaeological features and, in some instances, loss of topsoil, a decline in chalk grasslands and hedgerows, with an associated decline in wild plant, bird and insect species. Some areas are now once again improving - hedgerows are being re-planted and agri-environment schemes have started to encourage animal and plant species back to the downlands.

## **SETTLEMENT AND BUILDINGS**

### **Rural Settlement Character**

- 4.32. Settlement landscapes across England are related to the underlying landscape, particularly topography and proximity to water. Within the AONB the structure of the Chase villages is also affected by its history as a hunting ground. The towns, for example Shaftesbury, Blandford, Ringwood, Wimborne and Salisbury are all just outside the bounds of the former Chase. The real centres of activity on the Chase were the manor houses and their associated villages. The Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB falls within the 'East Wessex' sub-province of England as described in the Atlas of Rural Settlement in England<sup>6</sup>. It is described as an area of overall low density settlement where the location of nucleated settlements is strongly affected by terrain.

### **Linear Villages**

- 4.33. As a result of the terrain of the AONB, the settlement often falls into chains along valleys where they are assured a supply of water. These types of linear village are seen within the tributary valleys of the Stour and Avon along watercourses and include Rockbourne, Martin, Cranborne, Wimborne St Giles, the Gussages and the Tarrants.

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<sup>6</sup> Roberts B & Wrathmell S (2000) An Atlas of Rural Settlement in England, English Heritage

- 4.34. Many of these started as a single street in medieval times with building plots and houses on either side – the ‘tofts’ and ‘crofts’. Sometimes there was a back lane too. These patterns have been preserved in some modern settlements, and Farnham, Gussage All Saints, Martin and Rockbourne all follow this pattern. Individual hamlets often expanded during the 12th and 13th centuries to form linear villages.

#### ***Deserted Medieval Villages***

- 4.35. The pattern of medieval settlements reflects the concerns, within the feudal system of land-tenure, that manorial estates had access to the full range of economic resources, from the pastures along the river, and open fields around along the valley sides to the common grazing land on the downs. Some of these have survived today, but others lie deserted, such as Bowerswain and Brockington close to Gussage All Saints. Also, only three of the eight medieval villages in the Iwerne valley have survived today.

#### ***Springline Villages***

- 4.36. Elsewhere, settlement has grown up along the springline, at the foot of the chalk scarps where they can exploit the downland landscape above it. This is particularly noticeable in the Wylve Valley where villages such as Steeple Langford, Stockton, Wylve, Sherrington, Corton and the two Codfords (Codford St Peter and Codford St Mary) occur along the springline, at the foot of the chalk escarpment. This pattern of settlement is also visible along the Ebbel Valley where Bishopstone, Broadchalke and Ebbesbourne Wake occur at the spring line. A striking feature of settlement throughout the chalklands is the density of villages and hamlets found along these river valleys, and the contrast with the surrounding expanses of open downland. For example in the Wylve valley the hamlets and villages are often less than a kilometre apart.

#### ***Downland Villages***

- 4.37. Nucleated settlement on the downs is very rare. Sixpenny Handley, Tollard Royal, Ashmore, Farnham, Chilmark and Pentridge are among the only villages. The first four of these are the real Chase villages – they provided the headquarters of the keeper and foresters. For example, Tollard Royal grew up from a Medieval hunting lodge used by King John whilst hunting on Cranborne Chase in the 13th century. Sixpenny Handley is an ancient village located close to two medieval hundreds of Saxpena and Hanlege. Pentridge is another ancient village and is today one of the few places in Wessex to preserve its ancient place name. It comes from the Welsh: pen - hill, twrch - boar indicating its wild location on the downs. Chilmark is a Saxon settlement that became well established during the 13th and 14th century due to its quarries whose stone was used in the construction of Salisbury and Chichester cathedrals.

#### ***Medieval Market Towns***

- 4.38. Hindon was established by the bishopric of Winchester in the years around 1220. following a contemporary trend in establishing new boroughs as commercial ventures with a market, fair and associated church. The weekly market was laid out along the

line of the present wide High Street, with market stalls in front of the cottages and burgage plots behind. Tracks led from the street to fields behind the town, a pattern that largely survives today. By the 17th century, Hindon had one of the busiest fairs in South Wiltshire and traded cattle, sheep, horses, pigs and cheese. The market and fair survived to the late 19th century. Despite rebuilding and infill the pattern of this compact medieval town can still be traced on the ground today.

### ***Dispersed Farmsteads***

- 4.39. The dominant settlement pattern on the chalk downs in the pattern of dispersed farmsteads. Some of these have grown into small hamlets. These farmsteads lie scattered across the downland at a low density.

### **Vernacular Building Styles**

- 4.40. Most medieval rural people lived in long, single-storey dwellings, of cruck construction with cob or wattle and daub walls. Half of the internal space of these buildings served as byres for the stalling of animals. During the 14th and 15th centuries half-timbered, one or two storey buildings became more common, and animals were now more often stalled in separate barns and buildings. In the post-medieval vernacular architectural tradition, the open hall gradually disappeared, and fireplaces and chimneys, ceilings, staircases, window glass and house subdivisions became more commonplace in the 16th and 17th centuries.
- 4.41. Traditionally buildings were constructed of local materials. Across the AONB a number of different materials were used, and these often determined the building style and method of construction. In the Wylde valley, for example, the shortage of building stone means that distinctive cottages, built from a chequer pattern of knapped flint and clunch (a soft stone derived from chalk), developed.
- 4.42. In the southern part of the area the lack of available stone meant that from the 18th century brick was increasingly important building material, this coming from the claylands south of the AONB. It was used to dress flint or clunch walls, and for the construction of chimney stacks and fireplaces. In some timber-framed cottages the brick walls have been laid in elaborate patterns.
- 4.43. The relative scarcity and expense of stone meant that it is found in vernacular buildings in a limited area, mainly around Stourton in the north-west of the AONB, and around Chilmark, where there was a quarry yielding a distinctive honey-coloured stone. However, churches, tithe barns, manor houses and halls were also constructed of stone. Many fine vernacular, ecclesiastical and elite buildings are preserved across the AONB. 15th century farmhouses survive at Cranborne and Pamphill, and there are parts of 16th century houses surviving at Woodlands and Wimborne St. Giles. 17th century buildings include examples at Minchington and Sixpenny Handley.
- 4.44. The porosity of the chalk meant that thatched or tiled roofs were necessary to cap off the walls, whilst substantial stone or brick footings prevented the ingress of water at their bases. The soft outline of the thick, billowy and rounded shapes of hay

thatch differs from the sharper, crisp profile of Norfolk or European reed, now increasingly used as an alternative.





## 5. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INFLUENCES

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- 5.1. This chapter provides an overview of the economic and social character of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It includes population characteristics, the structure of employment and a summary of the key economic sectors both internal and external to the AONB. The information in this chapter has been provided by SQW Limited through a review of public data sources and consultations with economic development professionals from the local authorities in which the AONB is situated. A method statement and information about the data sources used are provided in **Appendix 2**.
- 5.2. **Data sources on economic and social characteristics have been compiled at the ward level. Figure 5.1 illustrates the boundaries for wards included in the AONB. Clearly, ward boundaries are not consistent with the AONB boundary and the statistics quoted in this chapter should be interpreted accordingly.**

### OVERVIEW

- 5.3. The economic and social characteristics of Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB are influenced by its location. Parts of the AONB have good access to London and the South East via the A303, which passes from east to west across the north of the area connecting to the M3 to the East and the A30 and Exeter to the West. This route is important to the local economy allowing the area to benefit from the higher added value business that this proximity brings. The A36 route from the eastern boundary to the M27, Southampton and its Container Port, may also have an important influence on the area and in particular appears to concentrate economic pressures around Salisbury. The boundary of the AONB touches a number of towns including Salisbury, Wimborne Minster, Blandford Forum, Shaftesbury and Warminster. These small towns do provide important employment and economic activity, resulting in an outward-looking economy both towards these towns and more importantly regional centres beyond, such as Southampton, Bournemouth, Poole and Bath.
- 5.4. The economic and social characteristics of the AONB are shaped by the traditional and unique attributes of the locality at one level and its location in relation to large regional centres including London at the other. With daily commuting patterns around its circumference and between the boundary towns and beyond, and trading links with regional centres, the AONB cannot be seen as a discrete area in social and economic terms, but one that is influenced by external factors and its infrastructure. Its attractiveness as a location to live and relative proximity to expanding employment centres has resulted in an increase in population, particularly in some peripheral areas and those parts of the AONB linked by good road access. This has created a high demand for housing within the AONB which, in common with many rural areas, is having a significant impact on the social and community characteristics. In particular, an imbalance has become apparent between rising house prices and the earnings structure of employment within the AONB.

## POPULATION AND EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE

### Population

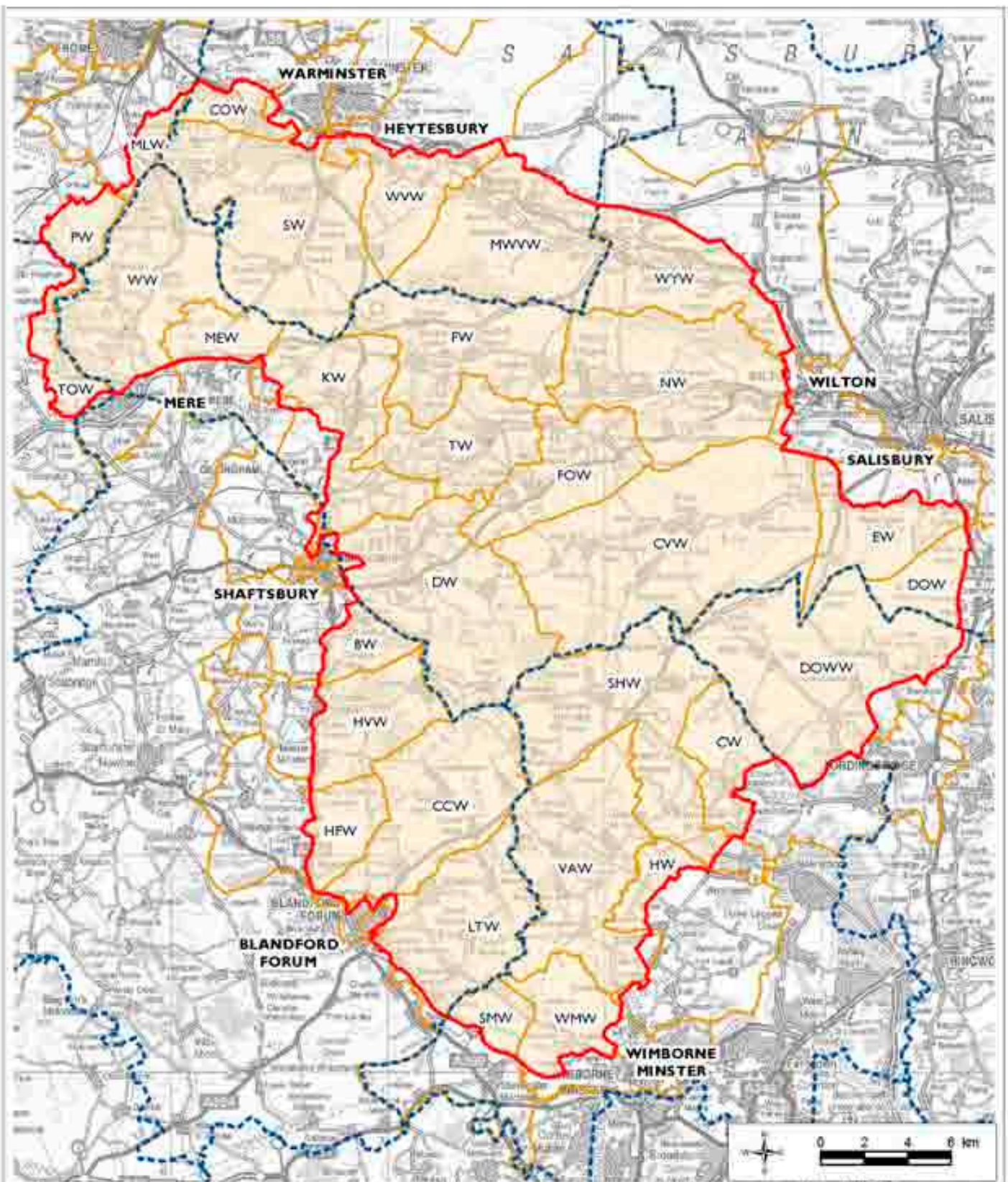
- 5.5. The total population of the wards included within the AONB is approximately 51,400 (30,000 is the estimate of the population living within the AONB boundary), according to the latest available mid-year estimates at ward level (1998). This is sparsely populated compared to the rest of southern England and other AONBs, such as the neighbouring North Wessex Downs, which is almost twice the size of Cranborne spatially, but has a population of approximately 125,000. The AONB is characterised by remote scattered dwellings, hamlets and occasional small villages.
- 5.6. Demographic change within the AONB from 1991 to 1998 is illustrated in table 1. The figures in this table represent changes that have occurred in the wards within the AONB and not the whole of the local authority administrative area. The table indicates an overall growth rate in the AONB population of approximately 5.1% between 1991 and 1998. This is relatively low compared to the 7.8% experienced on average across the AONB districts as a whole, with the highest growth rate of 16% in North Dorset although there has been a slight decline in West Wiltshire. This is as expected and can be explained by fewer housing completions in the AONB as a result of development restrictions imposed by conservation policy.

**Table 5.1 Population Change within Wards in the AONB compared to District Average.**

Administrative area	Area in AONB				% Change in District Overall
	1991	1998	Actual Gain	% Change	
West Wiltshire	4,694	4,700	6	0.1	-0.1
Salisbury	19,249	20,600	1,351	7.0	7.1
East Dorset	16,308	17,100	792	4.9	5.2
North Dorset	6,851	7,200	349	5.1	16.1
New Forest	1,792	1,800	8	0.4	9.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>48,894</b>	<b>51,400</b>	<b>2,506</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>7.8</b>

*Source: 1991 Census of Population (Nomis); Oxford University Population Estimates 1998 (ONS Neighbourhood Statistics)*

- 5.7. There is considerable differentiation in population change across the AONB. The table shows higher growth rates for the parts of Salisbury, East Dorset and North Dorset which fall within the AONB than for West Wiltshire and the New Forest. This can be explained in part by migration trends in and out of the area. For example, the area of East Dorset in the AONB has experienced net in-migration in all four wards between 1992 and 1999, according to figures from Dorset County Council, around the growing town of Wimborne Minster and the dispersed population in the surrounding villages and countryside. One of its wards, Sixpenny Handley, benefited from a range of private and social house building in the 1980s and 1990s, helping to sustain this growth. Within the Salisbury District, wards in the centre of the AONB, situated between Shaftesbury and Salisbury, have also



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### CRANBORNE CHASE AND WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS AONB LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

**Figure 5.1:**  
**Ward Boundaries and Peripheral Towns**

- Key**
- AONB boundary
  - District boundaries
  - Ward boundaries
  - BW - The Beacon Ward
  - CCW - Cranborne Chase Ward

- COW - Corsley Ward
- CVW - Chalke Valley Ward
- CW - Crane Ward
- DOW - Downton Ward
- DOWW - Downlands Ward
- DW - Donhead Ward
- EW - Ebbie Ward
- FOV - Fovant Ward
- FW - Fonthill Ward
- HFV - Hill Fords Ward
- HHV - Hills and Vale Ward
- HW - Holt Ward
- KW - Knoyle Ward
- LTW - The Lower Tarrant Ward
- MEW - Mere Ward
- MLW - Mells Ward
- MWVW - Mid Wyllye Valley Ward
- NW - Nadder Ward
- PW - Postlebury Ward
- SHW - Sixpenny Handley Ward
- SMW - Sturminster Marshall Ward
- SW - Shearwater Ward
- TOW - Tower Ward
- TW - Tisbury Ward

- VAW - Vale of Allen Ward
- WMW - Wimborne Minster Ward
- WVW - Wyllye Valley Ward
- WW - Western Ward
- WYW - Wyllye Ward

Source: Local Authorities within the CCG&WWD AONB

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experienced significant net in-migration between 1992 and 1999. This in-migration represents approximately 35% of the total population growth in the AONB over this period. By comparison, the areas lying within West Wiltshire and New Forest have not grown over this period, but forecasts indicate that in-migration is expected in both parts of the AONB, particularly in the wards surrounding the town of Warminster (West Wiltshire).

- 5.8. The AONB as a whole has an older population than the average across Southern England, with 25% of the total population above the age of 60, relative to 23.5% in the South West and 20.9% in the South East. In some parts this proportion is even higher, such as 32% in Wimborne Minster (East Dorset). There is little evidence to indicate the composition of in-migrants by age, but with many districts suffering from an ageing population, if in-migration is mostly through retirement (for example to the central areas of the AONB), rather than growing employment opportunities (around the peripheral towns), it may lead to future difficulties in recruiting staff for employers in the area.

### **Employment Patterns**

- 5.9. The economically active population of the wards in Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB is approximately 23,300, with an estimated 19,000 employees (jobs) in the AONB, suggesting that employment is relatively self-contained. Evidence suggests, however, that a large proportion of the economically active population commute out of the area to work in the more prosperous surrounding urban areas, the rest of the south-east and west and even London. In most cases, across the AONB, out-commuting is characterised by the pattern of professional staff, choosing to live in the attractive rural areas and commuting to areas that offer better employment opportunities. This is likely to be balanced by in-commuting to employment located within the AONB, with the general trend for these jobs to be in lower paid sectors.
- 5.10. Patterns of commuting vary across the AONB. The A354 enhances accessibility of commuters in the North and East Dorset parts of the AONB to Salisbury, and it is known that approximately half of the economically active population of Downlands ward (New Forest) commute out to work, mostly to Salisbury. Others in North and East Dorset commute to Bournemouth, Poole and Southampton, with some in North Dorset also commuting to the peripheral towns of Blandford and Shaftesbury, and some commuting to London by rail, via Gillingham. Salisbury District residents within the AONB are employed mostly in Shaftesbury and Salisbury town, and further out in Poole, Bournemouth and Southampton. Residents of the West Wiltshire parts of the AONB tend to commute to the boundary town of Warminster, or further to Trowbridge or Bath.
- 5.11. Within the AONB the majority of employment is located around the periphery (related to the adjacent towns), with approximately 20% of the employees in the area located around Salisbury (Ebble ward), 10% around Blandford (The Lower Tarrants ward, North Dorset), 25% around Wimborne Minster (East Dorset). 5-20% are employed in the central parts of the AONB. Employment growth in the AONB has been strong in recent years, growing by 25% between 1995 and 2000. This is mostly attributable to employment growth in the areas around Blandford and

Salisbury. The areas directly surrounding the A30, in the centre of the AONB, linking Shaftesbury and Salisbury, have also enjoyed significant employment growth. Consultation with local economic development officers revealed a consensus that much of this employment growth could be explained by the trend towards increased home-working, a high rate of self employment and micro business start-ups, particularly in ICT activities (notable examples being in East Knoyle, north of Shaftesbury).

- 5.12. Overall, the economy is generally strong, relative to national trends, in terms of economic and employment growth, which has led to a growth in jobs, including high value-added industries within relatively short journeys from villages in the AONB. It is suggested that this has contributed to the development of ‘commuter villages’ in parts of the AONB. As a result, there is a significant imbalance in the housing market between house prices and average earnings from local (in AONB) employment. As a consequence, much of the local housing stock is not affordable for local people. Housing Associations provide some affordable housing, but this is limited and inadequate in supply in most areas. The New Earnings Survey (Table 2) provides data on the earnings of people who work in an area and indicates that average earnings from employment located within the districts covering the AONB are below the regional and national average (more detailed information on average earnings for the area covered by the AONB only is not available). Evidence from the West Wiltshire Economic Partnership suggests that there is increasing polarisation between those on high incomes who live in the area (and commute out of the area to work) and very low earnings amongst those who work in the rural areas, which is likely to be a trend repeated across the AONB.

**Table 5.2: Gross Weekly Pay**

Gross Weekly Pay (£)	
England	392.01
South West	343.19
Salisbury	333.80
West Wiltshire	333.64
New Forest	378.18
East Dorset	336.33
North Dorset	288.21

Source: New Earnings Survey (Nomis)

### Unemployment and Deprivation

- 5.13. The unemployment rate within the AONB wards, given by the number of Job Seeker’s Allowance (JSA) claimants as a percentage of the estimated economically active population in 1998, is approximately 0.8%. This is very low compared to the national rate in 1998 of 4.3% and 3.8% in the South West region. Recent estimates for 2002 suggest that claimant count rates are low in the AONB districts as a whole at 1.1% on average, relative to the region (1.9%) and England (3%). The lowest unemployment rates are in the central, rural areas of the AONB, in Nadder and

Chalke Valley wards (south west of Salisbury) and Hills and Vale (North Dorset) and Holt (East Dorset), in the south of the AONB.

- 5.14. It is possible that these figures mask 'hidden' unemployment, caused by long term or structural unemployment, as a result of which people simply give up seeking work (and hence claiming JSA benefit) and drop out of the labour market or retire early. Recent research suggests that hidden unemployment can be identified in incapacity benefit claimant statistics, as this group increases where structural unemployment occurs and individuals drop out of the workforce. Incapacity benefit figures for wards within the AONB, however, suggest that this is not the case, as there are fewer claimants relative to the workforce, compared to the South West and England as a whole. Nonetheless, hidden unemployment is believed to be a particular issue in Salisbury relating to spouses and families of the military population employed at the Barracks at Wilton, Warminster, who have little incentive to find temporary work whilst in the area for one to two years.
- 5.15. There is also a perceived recruitment problem in Salisbury, due to low pay and insufficient promotion of opportunities. Graduate retention is seen as a problem in North Dorset, as few employment opportunities or career prospects encourage graduates to stay in the area. Employers also feel that they cannot offer high enough wages to attract graduates.
- 5.16. The AONB as a whole is relatively affluent, with some wards (Fonthill, Tisbury, Cranborne Chase and the Lower Tarrant) ranked within the top 20% least deprived areas in England according to the DETR Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2000. These wards include some of the areas described above with the highest rates of population growth and in-migration, such as Tisbury. However, table 3 shows that there are also pockets of severe deprivation in terms of access to local services, with some localised deprivation on the housing ranking (of the IMD) in Ebble (southern outskirts of Salisbury) and education ranking in Mere (western edge of the AONB, north of Gillingham).

**Table 5.3: DETR Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000 Rankings** (Where 8414 is the least deprived and 1 is the most deprived of wards in England)

Ward	Overall IMD Ranking	Access Ranking
<b>AONB Average</b>	<b>5371</b>	<b>1075</b>
<i>Worst 5 wards:</i>		
Shearwater	3922	261
Knogle	3914	155
Chalke Valley	5376	75
Vale Of Allen	5249	54
Mid Wylke Valley	3909	51

- 5.17. Access is a particular problem in Shearwater and Mid Wylke (West Wiltshire) and Knogle and Chalke Valley (Salisbury District), all of which are located in the more rural, dispersed areas of the AONB. There are several schemes in Downlands (New

Forest) to address problems caused by a poor public transport network, such as an 'on demand' bus service to link Martin with Salisbury, Blandford and Ringwood. Access by public transport in East Dorset is also limited for villages north of Wimborne Minster. Lack of access may not be a problem if more residents are working from home or are self-employed in home-based businesses, for example, but quality of life may be affected by lack of access to services such as health care and training or education, and if local businesses rely on access to suppliers and distribution networks, this could pose a further constraint on economic growth.

## **FEATURES OF THE AONB ECONOMY**

### **Employment by Sector and Occupation in the AONB and Adjacent Area**

- 5.18. As a primarily rural area, agriculture and forestry has historically been an important sector to the AONB. However, employment figures suggest that agriculture is not a major employer within the AONB, representing only 1.8% of total employment. This is only slightly higher than the percentage for this sector across the whole of the South West (1.5%) in 2000 (0.8% employed in this sector across England). However, this figure is no doubt affected by the Ward level data that has been used for this analysis, artificially increasing the total population and therefore decreasing the proportion of the population in agriculture, since the Wards include a high proportion of employment in other sectors at the boundaries of the AONB i.e. within adjacent towns. The data in chapter 6 suggests that agricultural employment could account for a much higher proportion of employment in the AONB. 5.18. There are concentrations of agricultural based economic activity in the central parts of the AONB, such as Holt (East Dorset) and Downlands (New Forest), but the majority of employment in most wards across the AONB is in public administration, hotels and catering and manufacturing. Nevertheless, it is recognised that agriculture is a fundamental component of the local economy, providing a basis for jobs in a wide range of other sectors such as the food industry, transport and, potentially, tourism.

### **Employment sectors: Public Administration, Distribution and Manufacturing**

- 5.19. **Public administration** is the largest employer within wards that fall within, or partially within, the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB - representing approximately 38% of total employment. In East Dorset, the majority of employment is concentrated in Wimborne Minster, with major employers including the Dorset Healthcare NHS Trust and East Dorset District Council. Salisbury hospital and research labs in Ebble, on the outskirts of Salisbury, provide a concentration of employment in public administration (approximately 90% of local employment). The Lower Tarrant in North Dorset (Outside Blandford) hosts the Blandford Royal Signals at Blandford Camp, an army communication base that accommodates 4,000 trainees each year and a large body of administrative staff on site.
- 5.20. **The Distribution, Hotels and Catering** sector represents approximately 20% of total employment in the AONB. This sector is concentrated around the leisure



industry and consists primarily of pubs, restaurants and hotels, with a local brewery in the North Dorset area of the AONB, employing 250 individuals. Distribution represents approximately 15% of employment within this sector (3% overall), a result perhaps of the constraints imposed by limited infrastructure, both within the AONB and links to other regional and national economic centres.

- 5.21. **Manufacturing** is also an important sector, employing 14% of all AONB employees. There is a concentration of manufacturing employment in Mere (north of Gillingham), due to the activity of the Quarry Maid industrial estate and the presence of a number of individual manufacturing companies, many of which are encouraged by easy access to the A303, providing routes to Exeter and the West country and to the M3 into London to the East. This concentration has been developing for about 20 years and further land is allocated for industrial development, but is unlikely to be taken up due to a recent dip in demand for property.

## **Employment Sectors: Agriculture and Tourism**

### ***Agriculture***

- 5.22. The following provides a brief summary of agricultural employment within wards covered by the AONB. It should be cross referenced to chapter 6 'Overview of Agricultural Character' which provides a more detailed picture using finer-grain agricultural statistics (Defra, June 2001 Agricultural Census Data). Agricultural employment across the Wards in the AONB is concentrated in Holt and Sixpenny Handley (East Dorset) and the Downlands ward of the New Forest District, representing 16%, 9% and 8% of total employment respectively. By comparison, in rural Wiltshire less than 5% of employment is in agriculture, with the majority employed in business services, retail, distribution, manufacturing and public administration. East Dorset has recently received LEADER+ funding to secure more value from the local agricultural sector through developing and selling local produce locally. This work also aims to help local workers to adjust to changes in the agricultural sector, such as providing a centre for farmers to carry out and receive training in the processing of agricultural products.

**Equestrian Businesses:** Horses are not classified as agricultural animals and employment or land use associated with the training, breeding or use of horses is not agricultural. However, although there is very little information on their collective importance equestrian businesses are considered to form a substantial part of the rural economy. Equestrian businesses operating in the AONB include horse training, breeding, stabling, businesses associated with hunting and recreational activities including riding lessons and trekking.

### ***Tourism***

- 5.23. Tourism is widely recognised as an increasingly important sector for the AONB, as it is often based around the local environment, such as open gardens, woodland trails, fishing, and cycling. It is acknowledged in some local Districts, that tourism could be important in diversifying local activity (particularly linked to agriculture) in order to raise or sustain local incomes and to sustain local facilities and services that are under threat, by attracting visitors to the area. It will also be important to ensure that the

development of local tourism is environmentally sustainable, for example publicly funded projects such as the upgrading of parts of the Wessex Ridgeway in North Dorset to a bridleway.

- 5.24. Despite its relatively small base, with 8% of employment across the AONB in Hotels and Restaurants and a further 2.5% in recreational activities, there are several opportunities for development of tourism in the AONB through promotion of natural and historic features or development of current attractions such as the North Dorset annual Steam festival, Cranborne Manor Gardens, and Holt Heath National Nature Reserve. The Downlands Ward area, for example, provides a popular environment for day visitors, but without hotel facilities, it is unable to attract overnight stays. Nonetheless, there have recently been a large number of applications for a change of use of redundant agricultural buildings for Guest House accommodation, which may bring in additional income to owners, mostly farmers.

### **Growth Prospects and External Influences**

- 5.25. The large concentration of employment in public administration introduce an element of vulnerability to the AONB economy, potentially risking large-scale structural unemployment if one site relocates or down-sizes. However, the number of large employment sites (over 100 employees) is limited within the AONB and the relative stability of public sector employment suggest that this may not be a significant pressure on future prospects in the area. Dependency on low added value manufacturing, which is evident in parts of the AONB, such as around Salisbury, may limit the growth potential of the area and, in particular, could be keeping an historically low wage structure below the regional average.
- 5.26. The need for diversification of the industrial base is evident within some parts of the AONB, but perhaps not others. It is not a particular issue in Downlands (New Forest), with new employment unlikely to be sustainable, not least due to the lack of access within the area and beyond. Similarly, North Dorset employment is across a range of sectors including added value activity, such as the processing and distribution of local produce. East Dorset, however, with relatively large agricultural and manufacturing sectors, has benefited recently from local regeneration initiatives aimed at developing and diversifying agricultural activity. The credit union has also been expanded to become more inclusive of rural areas to facilitate low cost borrowing and business start-ups in rural areas. Projects to strengthen and diversify the local economy, including promotion of sustainable tourism, access to training and employment, social inclusion and community development, are also supported by the Wiltshire Rural Development Programme.
- 5.27. It is considered to be important to continue to attract and encourage the development of higher added value industries, such as 'new media' industry and ICT, to achieve higher wage levels in the area and help address the income gap and housing market imbalance. Strong growth in business services, IT and electrical equipment manufacture is evident already, particularly in West Wiltshire, driven by external markets both nationally and internationally. Net new business formation is however relatively weak in the AONB as a whole. A major constraint to development of more 'high tech' industries could be the lack of development of suitable infrastructure, such as broadband, which is not cost effective for private

suppliers to install due to the lack of critical mass of population in the dispersed areas. In addition, problems sustaining and attracting a suitable volume and quality of local labour will limit the attractiveness of the area to investment from higher added value business.

## **SUMMARY**

- 5.28. The economy of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB benefits from the strength of the regional economy and the towns surrounding its borders. A consequence of this, however, is the negative impacts on the social structure of the AONB and access to services and affordable housing. The overall growth in employment and general well-being masks some pockets of serious deprivation, particularly caused by poor access to services.
- 5.29. Higher added value service employment<sup>7</sup> is needed in the area to raise wage levels, but it is important that new employment is appropriately matched to the skills of the local workforce, and that training and learning opportunities to overcome any skill imbalance are more widely available. Access issues for individuals and for higher added value<sup>8</sup> business investment will require infrastructure and transport issues to be addressed, such as the availability and quality of public transport services, particularly in the more remote rural areas and the development of broadband communications technology.
- 5.30. Recent difficulties and structural and technological change in the farming industry suggest that diversification and development of agricultural activity may be necessary to ensure sustainability of the sector in the future, such as adding value through the local sale of local produce and developing tourist attractions linked to the environment and existing natural and historic features. Moreover, the large proportion of employment in low added value manufacturing and other activity, and the vulnerability of large public sector employment sites indicate that diversification of the general sectoral base may be appropriate across parts of the AONB.
- 5.31. The principal challenge for the future will be to develop the economy by building on local strengths, the high quality environment and high quality of life, using the strength of the peripheral towns in a way that is complementary to the character and sensitivities of the area.

### **Summary of Key Characteristics**

- Sparse population
- Ageing population

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<sup>7</sup> employment involving knowledge or technology intensive activities e.g. New Media, ICT or technowledge intensive agriculture.

<sup>8</sup> Value added is the difference between the price at which goods are sold and the costs of the materials used to make them. High value added is used when there is a large difference and hence more money remains in the local area increasing local job opportunities and income.

- Affluent area but pockets of severe deprivation in terms of poor geographical access to services<sup>9</sup>
- Outward looking economy
- Concentration of employment in service industries (public administration and tourism)

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<sup>9</sup> based on the Access Domain of the Index of Multiple Deprivation. This domain is made up of four indicators: access to a post office, access to food shops, access to a GP and access to a primary school

## 6. OVERVIEW OF AGRICULTURAL CHARACTER

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- 6.1. Agricultural data for the whole AONB are summarised in **Table 6.1**. The information is based on the Defra Agricultural June Census 2001. Some key agricultural features of the AONB are set out below. These are compared with the South West and South East regions to identify similarities and differences.
- There were a total of 855 registered agricultural holdings in June 2001, which occupied 89% of the total AONB area. The corresponding percentages of farmland for the South West and South East are 77% and 63%, illustrating the high importance of agriculture as a land use in the AONB.
  - Over a third (37%) of registered agricultural holdings in the AONB are smaller than 5ha in area and about a quarter (26%) are larger than 100ha. In comparison, both the South West and South East regions have more holdings under 5ha (46% and 45% respectively) and fewer holdings greater than 100ha (11% and 13%). This suggests that farms in the AONB tend to be larger than the average for either region.
  - 470 people considered themselves to be full time farmers (including farming spouses, partners and directors) out of a total agricultural labour force of nearly 2,000 farmers, managers, employees and casual staff. In other words, full time farmers make up 24% of the total agricultural labour force, which is intermediate between the South West (30%) and the South East (19%). This figure also suggest that the agricultural labour force accounts for a significant proportion of the economically active population of the AONB.
  - Over half of the farmland is used for cropping (52% of the farmed area), with cereals being the main type of crop (38% of the area) and wheat being the main cereal (20% of the area) although barley is also important. The respective proportions for the South West are 27% cropland, 18% cereals and 9% wheat and for the South East are 44% cropland, 28% cereals and 18% wheat. There are also significant areas of set-aside in the AONB (9%), which is similar to the South East but greater than the South West (5%).
  - About a third of the farmland (34%) is grazing land, most of which is permanent grassland (in grass for 5 years or more). This is similar to the South East (37%) but in the South West region much more of the farmland is used for grazing (63%).
  - Sheep are the most common livestock in the AONB by number, followed by dairy cattle and then beef cattle. On a livestock unit basis, however, dairy cattle are the most important livestock, followed by beef cattle and then sheep.<sup>10</sup> This pattern is broadly repeated in the South West and South East although dairy

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<sup>10</sup> Livestock units (LU) are a system for comparing livestock in relation to their food intake, e.g. a dairy cow is assigned 1.0 LU and a breeding ewe is assigned 0.11 LU so one dairy cow requires the same amount of pasture (or other feed) as about 9 ewes. See notes to Table X.1 for livestock unit factors.

cattle are less common in the South East than the South West (2.9 dairy cows per beef cow in the South West, 3.2 in the AONB and 1.6 in the South East).

- Horticultural enterprises such as field scale vegetables, fruit orchards, glasshouse and nursery crops are rare, accounting for about 0.1% of agricultural land. In this respect the AONB is more like the South West (0.6% horticulture) than the South East (2.0% horticulture).

6.2. In summary, the Cranborne Chase AONB is characterised by relatively large, arable farms with livestock grazing being of secondary importance. In most respects it is more like the South East than the South West and in fact arable land uses are even more dominant in the AONB than they are in the South East. On the other hand, the AONB is more like the South West region in its low proportion of horticulture and its high proportion of dairy livestock.

**Table 6.1: Agricultural statistics for the Cranborne Chase AONB**

<b>OVERALL AREAS</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of total</i>	<b>GRAZING LAND</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of farmed</i>
Total area of FCA	98,056		Temporary grassland <sup>e</sup>	7,131	8%
Farmed area	87,317	89%	Permanent grassland	18,069	21%
Number of holdings	855		Rough grazing	4,161	5%
<b>HOLDINGS BY SIZE<sup>a</sup></b>		<i>% of holdings</i>	<b>MAIN CROP TYPES</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of farmed</i>
0 to < 5 hectares		37%	Total cereals <sup>f</sup>	32,870	38%
5 to < 20 hectares		15%	Wheat	17,500	20%
20 to < 50 hectares		11%	Oilseed rape	4,977	6%
50 to < 100 hectares		11%	Peas (harvested dry)	3,027	3%
100 hectares or more		26%	Maize	2,199	3%
<b>LABOUR FORCE</b>	<i>number</i>	<i>per km<sup>2</sup> farmed</i>	<b>LIVESTOCK</b>	<i>number</i>	<i>LU per ha grass</i>
Full time farmers <sup>b</sup>	470		Dairy cows	15,811	
Part time farmers <sup>b</sup>	614		Beef cows	4,993	
Total labour force <sup>c</sup>	1,973	2.3	Total cattle & calves	46,348	1.1
			Total sheep	80,821	0.2
<b>MAIN LAND USES</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of farmed</i>	Total grazing LUs <sup>g</sup>	39,544	1.3
Total crops and fallow <sup>d</sup>	45,014	52%	Total pigs	51,532	
Total grassland	29,361	34%			
Woodland on farms	3,280	4%			
Set-aside	7,620	9%			
All other land	2,042	2%			

Notes to Table:

- (a) Area of all crops, fallow and grazing land but not including woodland, set-aside and other land uses
- (b) Includes farmers, spouses, partners and directors.
- (c) Includes full time and part time farmers/directors, permanent staff and casual staff.

- (d) Includes all land used for cereals, arable and horticultural crops and fallow land, but not set-aside.
- (e) Grassland less than 5 years old.
- (f) All cereals excluding maize.
- (g) Livestock unit values: dairy cow 1.0, beef cow 0.75, other cattle over 1 year 0.7, other cattle under 1 year 0.34, breeding ewes 0.11, lambs 0.04, other sheep 0.08.

## VALUING PRIMARY AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

- 6.3. This sub-section of the report provides an estimate of the income generated through the primary production of crops and livestock in the AONB – termed ‘farmgate’ income. This is important in giving an indication of the relative economic contribution of the different areas of the AONB and of the different land uses within those areas.
- 6.4. The estimates of farmgate income presented below have been multiplying the area of land or number of livestock that were recorded in the DEFRA Agricultural June Census for 2001 by typical yields (as provided by industry experts) and current (December 2002) market prices for the commodities involved.
- 6.5. Estimates have been made for all the major farming sectors in the AONB as follows:
- Combinable crops. Specifically seed from the crops: wheat, barley, oats, oilseed rape, combinable peas, field beans, linseed; cereals straw; and set-aside
  - Milk from dairy cows
  - Beef, making assumption from the number of breeding suckler cows and from offspring from the dairy herds
  - Sheep from the sale of lambs and wool
  - Pigs from the sale of pigmeat
- 6.6. No assessment has been made on the value of production from the poultry, horticulture (including potatoes) or forestry sectors because of a lack of reliable data on production, both at the level of the AONB and in smaller areas within it. Estimates have been made of the value of direct subsidies (arable area payments and livestock premia) received from the CAP, but not of payments from the Rural Development Programme (such as from the South Wessex Downs ESA). No account has been taken of the value added through processing of agricultural products either by farmers or other businesses in the AONB.
- 6.7. **Table 6.2** shows the estimates values, in £ millions, derived by farmers from the sale of primary agriculture products and from direct subsidy payments from the Common Agricultural Policy (shown graphically in **Figure 6.1**). **Table 6.2** shows the numbers of different farm holdings, as categories into standard European Commission farm types by DEFRA in Agricultural Census of June 2001. The following key points arise from these tables:
- Nearly half (49%) of the farmgate income in the AONB comes from the arable sector, which uses 43% of the AONB or 48% of the farmed area and accounts for 31% of the businesses (the cereals, general cropping and mixed farm types combined).

- The dairy sector accounts for 29% of the total farmgate income from 9% of the farm businesses (not taking account of the 'mixed' type, some of which will be dairy farms). Dairy farms tend to have an intensive management of grassland, almost all of which will be agricultural improved and reseeded regularly. They also grow forage crops, the most significant of which is maize.
- The pig sector accounts for 13% of farmgate income from 2% of farm businesses. Its use of land is generally very small though the area of land given over to the rearing of outdoor pigs has increased sharply in the AONB in recent years.
- The beef and sheep sectors account for 9% of total farmgate income from around 33% of farm businesses (the cattle and sheep and mixed categories combined). Beef and sheep tend to be grazed less intensively than dairy cattle and will be responsible for managing almost all of the environmentally significant unimproved permanent grassland in the AONB.
- Direct payments from the CAP account for 15% of total farmgate income, with the arable sector receiving 83% of this, the beef sector 13% and the sheep sector 4%. The pig and dairy sector receiving no direct support (though the dairy sector, like the cereals, beef and sheep sectors receive a degree of indirect price support).

**Table 6.2. Estimate of farmgate value of the different agricultural sectors in 2002**

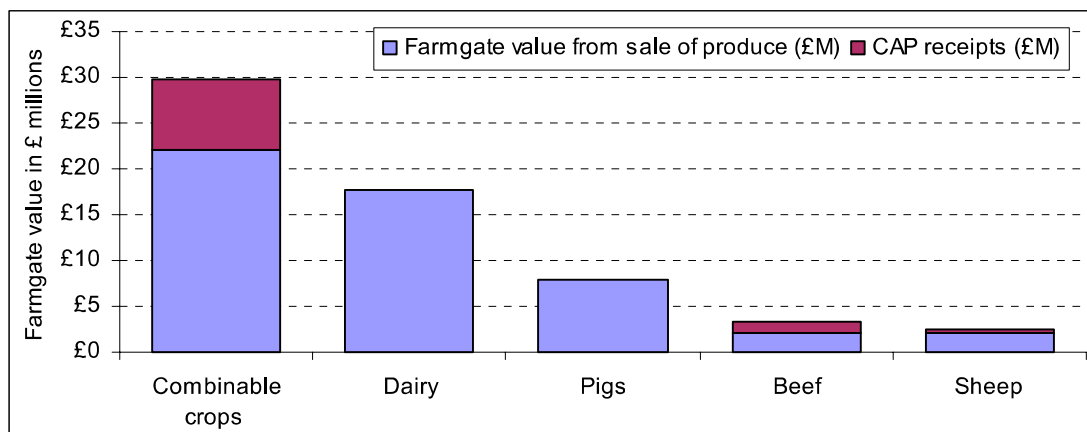
Whole AONB	Farmgate value from sale of produce (£M)	CAP receipts (£M)	Total farmgate value (£M)	% of total farmgate value (£M)
Combinable crops	£22.0	£7.7	£29.7	49%
Dairy	£17.7	£0.0	£17.7	29%
Pigs	£8.0	£0.0	£8.0	13%
Beef	£2.1	£1.2	£3.3	5%
Sheep	£2.1	£0.4	£2.5	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>£51.9</b>	<b>£9.3</b>	<b>£61.2</b>	100%

% of total farmgate value	85%	15%	100%
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**Figure 6.1. Estimate of relative contributions of sales of products and CAP receipts between the main farming sectors in 2002.**



**Table 6.3. Division of farming enterprise types in the AONB in 2001**

EC farm type	Number of holdings	% of total
Cereals	175	20%
General Cropping	8	1%
Horticulture	21	2%
Pigs and Poultry	21	2%
Dairy	80	9%
Cattle and Sheep	200	23%
Mixed	83	10%
Other Types	267	31%
<b>All Types</b>	<b>855</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: DEFRA Agricultural June Census 2001

## AGRICULTURAL PRESSURES FOR CHANGE IN THE AONB

- 6.8. This section categorises the main pressures driving change in the agricultural land use of the AONB. This is done under seven headings. None of these pressures for change are free standing and several are acting in concert to ensure a strong divergence of land management between different types of businesses and areas, which are summarised at the end of the section.

### Low farm incomes

- 6.9. There has been a sustained period of low farm incomes in all the main sectors present in the AONB since 1996. Official Defra figures show a 75% fall<sup>11</sup> in net farm incomes over this period. The fundamental cause of this has been the strength of the pound relative to the euro which affects both the competitiveness of UK farm produce in European markets and the level of CAP subsidies received by UK farmers. Other causes have been the legacy of BSE, reduced price subsidies under the CAP, and a fall in international commodity prices. Together these have combined to drive down prices and subsidies and drive up costs.

<sup>11</sup> National figure – indicative of the likely change within the AONB.

- 6.10. Farmers have responded to these pressures by shedding costs, particularly salaried labour (as opposed to unsalaried family labour which has declined less sharply). Although the economic contribution of agriculture through employment is still significant in the AONB, as described in the previous section, the loss of labour has resulted in a decline in many forms of environmental management, with farmers commenting<sup>12</sup> that they no longer have the time available for tasks such as hedge laying and ditch clearance.
- 6.11. A further result of the financial squeeze has been a lack of capital for farmers and landlords to invest in the infrastructure of farm businesses and often withdrawal from certain enterprises on the farm, such as the loss of dairy and pig enterprises – underscored by a continuing push away from mixed farming. Where capital is being invested, this is more often in the establishment or development of diversified enterprises.

### **Long term structural change in farm holdings**

- 6.12. This fall in farm incomes has also served to further hasten a trend that was already well established by the beginning of the 1990s, namely that of fundamental structural change in landownership and management. This structural change is characterised by:
- the amalgamation of land holdings into larger commercial management units. This may be achieved by the sale of whole farm units or by contract management with all or part of a farm being managed under contract as part of a much larger management unit – but with the long term control of the land remaining with the original owner/ tenant (who may still live in the holding). This is apparent in the AONB with many of the large Estates choosing to amalgamate tenanted farms when they become vacant, or letting them to existing tenants. Many of the smaller farmers in the AONB now choose to contract out farming operations such as silage making, hedge cutting and grain harvesting.
  - a rapid increase in small non-commercial holdings with the transfer of whole or parts of farms to non farmers. Residential sales of former farmhouses or houses with land have also remained strong.
- 6.13. Whether these structural changes in the management of agricultural land, lead to the dominance of fragmented holdings or large amalgamated units is strongly influenced by the underlying agricultural character, physical attributes and property market of the area. Thus, the AONB can be divided between the large commercial landholdings that dominated over the open chalk downland and scarps, where the emphasis is on the significant enlargement of agricultural management units and the smaller (often increasingly commercially marginal) small family farms along the river valleys and around the villages, where the pressure is for whole farms and fragmented units to pass out of mainstream agriculture and be managed as amenity units.
- 6.14. It follows from this analysis that the greatest pressure for redevelopment of agricultural buildings has tended to be on the smaller units, usually on the edge of villages, when they change ownership or management. The pressure for

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<sup>12</sup> Based on comments received during a meeting held with local farmers in Dorchester 2002.

diversification of businesses and buildings out of mainstream agricultural use is considered separately below.

### **Legislation and market demand**

- 6.15. New legislation and demand from consumers are working together to encourage higher standards of agricultural production. This is particularly the case in the areas of food safety, animal welfare and environmental protection. Some of the key pieces of legislation affecting land management within the AONB are as follows:
- the ban on the sale for human consumption of cattle over thirty months of age as a result of BSE in 1996, forcing the more intensive rearing of beef cattle and reducing the cattle available to graze extensive permanent pasture;
  - the introduction of Nitrate Vulnerable Zones to roughly half of the AONB (in the eastern and southern areas) in December 2002 which limits the amount of organic manure that can be spread in these areas (though farmers report that the limit exceeds normal agricultural practice in most areas, so the practical impact may be limited);
  - the hedgerow regulations in 1997, which protect ancient and species rich hedges from being removed;
  - the Environmental Impact Regulations introduced in February 2002 which require farmers to consult Defra before intensifying agricultural production on uncultivated land or semi-natural areas.
- 6.16. The main area in which consumer demand has affected the standards of agricultural land management is through farm assurance schemes. The majority of farmers in the AONB are thought to be members of at least one of the 'baseline' British Farm Standard assurance scheme. Membership of these schemes is a requirement of many of the UK food processors and retailers and the standards, which are inspected annually, involve farmers demonstrating that they comply with key legislation and codes of practice. The main schemes operating in the AONB are the Assured Combinable Crops Scheme, Farm Assured British Beef and Lamb and National Dairy Farm Assured Scheme.
- 6.17. A smaller number of farmers in the AONB are involved in assurance schemes with enhanced standards, chief amongst these being the organic farming standards.
- 6.18. The major impact of both legislation and farm assurance is the increased requirement to keep records and, in the case of farm assurance schemes, the cost of membership, rather than significant changes in agricultural practice (the exception being the enhanced assurance schemes such as organics). The short term impact on the landscape is therefore likely to be small, but the long term focus on gradually increasing standards of land management will be significant in reducing losses of semi-natural habitats and levels of pollution.
- 6.19. Interest from consumers in purchasing food and craft items direct from producers at farm shops and farmers markets is increasing in and around the AONB. There are farmers markets held regularly at Salisbury, Shaftesbury, Wimborne, Blandford Forum

and Wareham. While the number of farmers taking part and supplying these markets, and selling through farm shops, is increasing it still represents a small proportion of all farmers and farm land. It is livestock and dairy farmers, particularly smaller businesses, who are interested in producing a specialist or 'niche' product, who benefit most from the growing consumer in farmers markets and farm shops. The impact on the landscape of the AONB is currently small, particularly on the chalk downs, but is likely to encourage small livestock businesses in the valleys.

- 6.20. The impact of the Foot and Mouth Disease epidemic of 2001 is best considered in this section. There were no cases of the disease in the AONB (the closest being near Marlborough in Wiltshire) but all the livestock farmers in the AONB were subject to strict controls over the movement and sale of their livestock – controls which, though relaxed, continue today. In addition, normal patterns of trade were disrupted during the most of 2002 with the closure of the livestock markets at Shaftesbury, Salisbury and Yeovil. The market at Shaftesbury has not re-opened since.
- 6.21. The long term impact of the Foot and Mouth epidemic, coupled with the impact of BSE, will be the increasing professionalisation of livestock farming. While this is likely to bring livestock farmers, particularly beef and sheep farmers, closer to the market and to consumer demands through increasing contractual relationships with processors and retailers, the animal welfare and movement controls are also likely to making it more difficult for livestock to be kept as a part time hobby. The availability of livestock to graze land of low agricultural but high environmental value will therefore become more limited.

### **Environmental land management schemes**

- 6.22. There are a range of schemes available to farmers and land managers through the CAP Rural Development Programme in the AONB to conserve and enhance the environment. The most significant of these, in terms of the area under management agreement is the South Wessex Downs Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) which has led to a significant area of arable land being converted to chalk grassland, as well as 'conservation headlands' (low input arable field margins). Recent changes to the tiers in the scheme have sought to encourage greater environmental enhancement of existing grassland. Outside the ESA, the Countryside Stewardship Scheme has focussed on the conservation of neutral meadows and pastures and the restoration of hedgerows and traditional orchards, though demand for the scheme has exceeded the budget available in most recent years. The Woodland Grant Scheme has encouraged the management and replanting of existing woodland and, together with the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme, the establishment of new woodland, though the impact of these schemes relative to the area of existing under-managed woodland has been light.
- 6.23. The future of the Rural Development Programme environmental schemes is currently under consideration. A pilot Entry Level Scheme is being trialled (but not in the AONB) during 2003 with a national scheme anticipated in 2005. This is likely to be available to all farmers in the AONB encouraging the adoption and retention of a range of relatively modest environmental management options. It is likely that the

ESA and Countryside Stewardship Scheme will be brought together in one 'Higher Level Scheme' in 2005.

### **CAP Reform**

- 6.24. In addition to the review of Rural Development Programme schemes, the structure of the CAP is under discussion as part of a 'Mid-Term Review'. The European Commission published its proposals in January 2003. If adopted, these would:
- Replace the existing area and headage payments with a single farm payment, independent of levels of production;
  - Make receipt of the single farm payment conditional on compliance with environmental, food safety and animal welfare standards, as well as the requirement to keep all farmland in good condition;
  - Establish a stronger rural development policy with new measures to promote quality, animal welfare and to help farmers to meet EU production standards; and
  - Reduce the single farm payment to bigger farms to generate additional money for rural development and make savings to finance further reforms
- 6.25. While these proposals are likely to be subject to significant detailed change before being implemented, it is likely that the relatively large farms in the AONB, particularly the predominantly arable farms on the chalk downland, will face a significant reduction in their subsidy income. With reductions in price support, farmers, particularly in the arable sector with its globally traded commodities, will also be faced with more volatile market prices.
- 6.26. Some in the industry predict a further substantial fall in the profitability of the arable sector which, accompanied by decoupling of subsidies from production, will cause significant areas of the more margin arable land to be abandoned from production. While this may occur on the thinnest chalk soils and steeper slopes in the AONB, it is unlikely to occur across whole landscape in this region of the UK where the advantageous climate and farm structures mean that arable productivity is amongst the highest in the country.
- 6.27. Given that the European Commission's proposals envisage an enhanced budget available for Rural Development Schemes, agri-environment schemes are likely to be available to divert unwanted arable land to environmental management – particularly reversion to chalk grassland on the steeper slopes and thinner chalk soils. However, there has been speculation that the EU funding arrangements for the UK Rural Development Scheme may mean that the increase in funding is not as significant as some expect.

### **Technological developments**

- 6.28. Faced with falling incomes and higher input costs, farmers have been looking closely at the efficiency of their production and have been adopting new techniques to ensure economically optimal activity. In terms of land management, the use of 'precision farming' techniques to more accurately measure crops' need for nutrients

and the risk of pests and diseases, has tended to focus agricultural production more effectively on the areas of greatest production potential and to reduce or withdraw production from less profitable areas. Thus many farmers in the AONB have converted some of their steepest land or thinnest chalk soils from arable production to permanent grassland or woodland, often with the help of agri-environment schemes.

- 6.29. New varieties of crops continue to be used, with the emphasis increasingly being on higher quality and resistance to pests and diseases rather than higher yields. There have been no genetically modified varieties grown in the AONB, though several of the Government's Farm Scale Evaluations of GM oilseeds varieties have taken place on farms in Dorset.

### **Diversification**

- 6.30. The fall in the agricultural incomes and the structural change in the ownership and management of farm land have led an increasing number of farmers and land managers in the AONB to diversify their businesses out of traditional agriculture. In terms of the landscape of the AONB, these changes are evident in the conversion of agricultural buildings to residential or industrial uses and the growing of new crops. Recreation and tourism are presenting some farmers with the opportunity either to change their business so that this forms the mainstay of their business (such as Farmer Giles Farmstead near Teffont in the north of the AONB) or to establish secondary enterprises such as farm house accommodation or shoots.
- 6.31. There has been a substantial increase in the area of game cover crops in the last 20 years grown by commercial shoots. There is growing interest in non-food crops, particularly those grown for energy use (such as biodiesel grown from grain and biomass from short rotation coppice). However, the areas of these crops are currently small. The creation of a biodiesel processing plant at Henstridge in Dorset and the interest in pharmaceutical products grown from poppies from a company at Devizes in Wiltshire may stimulate growth in these areas. The environmental impact of novel crops is difficult to predict and will depend both of the variation that the crops present from current land use and their intensity of production.

### **Summary**

- 6.32. The pressures for change identified above can be summarised as follows:
- Divergence between large specialist commercial farm units and smaller more mixed holdings
  - Increasing transfer of land, especially with residential properties, from agricultural to amenity use
  - Concentration of many agricultural management operations in the hands of fewer specialist contractors
  - Decline in traditional forms of environmental management due to decline in farm labour and lack of available cash

- Redevelopment of agricultural buildings to residential, amenity or industrial use creating broader economic activity but a change in landscape character
  - Reduction in numbers of cattle and sheep available to graze grassland of higher environmental value
  - New opportunities for adding value to livestock and dairy products and craft items through direct sales at farmers markets and farm shops
  - Increasing focus by farmers on the quality of production and on reducing environmental impacts enforced through farm assurance schemes and assisted by precision farming techniques
  - Significant areas of marginal agricultural land, particularly arable land on steep slopes and thin soils, becoming available for other uses, particularly environmental management through agri-environment schemes.
  - Potential for novel crops on land marginal for conventional crops.
- 6.33. Furthermore, these pressures will be felt differentially, suggesting a divergence of land management activity between the larger commercial farm units that tend to dominate the landscape of the open downland and the smaller family-run holdings that are concentrated in the valleys and around the settlements.
- 6.34. For the large commercial farms, continued reliance on internationally traded commodities, particularly wheat, under very tight economic conditions, will result in these businesses optimising production on the best land, with uneconomic areas becoming available for new crops or for environmental management regimes. The scale of production at both the field and business scale will continue to grow with fewer businesses, employing fewer people, being responsible for managing an increasing proportion of the AONB. These businesses are likely to specialise more closely in particular sectors and there is thus likely to be a decline in the diversity of land use on these larger units (probably manifest in a decline in livestock and increased reliance on arable). The drive to higher standards of land management is likely to reduce levels of pollution and environmental damage.
- 6.35. For the smaller holdings, non-farming sources of income are likely to become more important, particularly where holdings change hands. The prime motivation for land management on many of these holdings will move from agricultural production to amenity use. Where agricultural production continues to be the main factor dictating land management, higher value products rather than commodities will be the main output.





## **7. RECREATIONAL INFLUENCES**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

- 7.1. This chapter reviews the recreational character of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB, including both open access land, rights of way and main visitor attractions. It also briefly outlines recreation/tourism strategies that affect the AONB.

### **OVERVIEW**

- 7.2. The pattern and diversity of Rights of Way within the AONB is one of its most important and distinctive features and is fundamental to the character of the area. Many of the rights of way are of immense historic importance, originating as long distance routes across the upstanding freely draining chalk. The chalklands provided accessible ridge top routes between the lower lying, wetter clays of the Thames Valley to the east and the bogs and marshes of the Somerset Levels to the west. These routes connected into a huge arc of chalk across southern England continuing along Salisbury Plain, the North Wessex Downs, the South Downs and the North Downs as well as following the chalk geology along the Chilterns into East Anglia. The historic routeways such as the Great Ridgeway frequently connect to ancient cultural sites such as Stonehenge and Avebury, beyond the AONB. The location of the AONB at the hub of this great arc of chalk increases the strategic significance of these routes.
- 7.3. Much of the present rights of way system within the AONB is the 'ghost' of a once much denser network of ancient roads connecting the main towns in the south and west of England. The ancient trackways have a very visible expression in the landscape today, with numerous green lanes designated as bridleways, Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs) and Roads Used as Public Paths (RUPPs) as well as many unrecorded, but well-used routes. Today, these routes have immense recreational value providing unrivalled opportunities for informal recreation, notably walking, horse riding and cycling and linking areas of open access land. They represent an important recreation resource for the future, for example with potential for promoting green tourism. Recreation management will be critical, in particular, in determining appropriate levels of use of this fragile resource and resolving conflicts between the different users.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF THE CROW ACT**

- 7.4. The Countryside and Rights and Way Act (CRoW) 2000 is probably the most significant piece of countryside legislation for the last 50 years. The Act includes provisions for strengthening the protection and management of AONBs (and SSSI) as already outlined in this report. It also introduces new procedures with regard to access to the open countryside and rights of way. This section, briefly, summarises the legislation relating to access to 'open country' and public rights of way and notes implications for Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB.

## **Access to Open Country**

- 7.5. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000 paves the way for the introduction of new rights of access to substantial areas of 'open country' in England and Wales. The Government is committed to introduce the new rights before the end of 2005. This forms part of a process that will provide people with the right to walk over 4,000 square miles of English countryside.
- 7.6. Areas of open country are defined as mountain, moor, heath and down, while the assignment of registered common will also result in new rights of access. Work to define these areas started in January 2001 and the draft maps are held by the Countryside Agency. There has been a strong response to public consultation on the draft maps. The target date for the publication of final conclusive maps and introduction of the new rights of access throughout England is the end of 2005.
- 7.7. Within Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB the new rights of access will cover significant areas of chalk downland. These areas frequently have high biodiversity and cultural value with the unploughed downland turf providing an important record of the past. Some areas of open access land are also in sensitive locations, with a large proportion of remaining downland located on the steep and highly visible chalk escarpments, which may be vulnerable to erosion from recreational use. Not least, is a concern that there may be a demand for visitor facilities, including car parking within these open undeveloped landscapes. Good access management will be crucial to maintaining local landscape character.

## **Rights of Way**

- 7.8. The Act also aims to improve legislation dealing with the administration and management of rights of way. In particular it aims to help authorities to meet the national target for rights of way to address backlogs on recording, managing and publicising their rights of way and complete their definitive maps. There are also proposals for improving the rights of way network and Highways Authorities have five years to produce a rights of way improvement plan for their area. The legislation should therefore bring many positive changes and there is an important role for the AONB unit to play in co-ordinating the work of the four separate Highways Authorities operating within the AONB. Nevertheless, some provisions of the legislation have raised concerns regarding implications within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs, as noted below.
- 7.9. The Act contains proposals for extinguishments of old footpaths and bridleways, which existed before 1949, where they are not recorded on the definitive map by 1<sup>st</sup> January 2026. Within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB there are many miles of unrecorded historic rights of way across the downlands that are known and well used by local people for recreation. There is a local concern that the AONB is in danger of losing these 'lost ways' because their historical line is not recorded or their recorded line is not correct. However, the Government is committed to supporting research to prove the existence of historic rights of way and this, therefore, represents an important opportunity for the AONB.

- 7.10. The Act allows for the reclassification of all Roads Used as Public Paths (RUPPs) as restricted byways – a new category of highway open to walkers, horse-riders, cyclists and horse-drawn vehicles. This will have a positive impact on the AONB in terms of managing conflicting uses, although a local issue has been raised about the importance of these historic routes for off-road vehicle use.

## **RECREATIONAL CHARACTER BY LANDSCAPE TYPE**

- 7.11. The AONB represents a wealth of recreational opportunities due to its nationally important scenic beauty, its rich history and wealth of archaeological remains and its ecological character. Both the local AONB population as well as visitors from the adjacent urban areas and surroundings appreciate these values and the area forms an important recreational resource for residents, visitors and tourists alike.
- 7.12. The following paragraphs review the recreational character of each landscape type. The emphasis is on the main visitor attractions, however it is important to highlight the importance of open access land and rights of way as a recreational resource for local people providing opportunities for walking, horse-riding, cycling and ‘enjoyment’ of the environment. In this area, where access to services is frequently poor, these recreational facilities have immense value to the AONB residents.

### **Chalk Escarpments**

- 7.13. The Chalk Escarpments are well served by Public Rights of Way – bridleways, footpaths, byways and roads used as public paths are typical and provide good connections to the landscapes that lie to either side of the scarps. In places, such as south of Barford St Martin along the character area *Fovant and Chalke (IC)*, paths can be found following the line of the escarpment ridge, providing dramatic open views. The elevated nature of this landscape type ultimately offers a number of designated viewing locations – Win Green for example which, on a clear day, offers views to the coastline and Isle of Wight. Key attractions within this landscape type are the many hill features carved into the chalk along the escarpment face. The Fovant Badges, originating from 1916, for example are dramatic focal points. There are also areas of National Trust land and some Nature Reserves on the escarpment. The escarpments support small areas of Registered Common Land with large areas proposed as Open Country, as outlined in the Draft Maps prepared by the Countryside Agency.

### **Open Chalk Downland**

- 7.14. The Open Chalk Downlands are popular with walkers, ramblers and horse riders with a large number of Public Rights of Way providing excellent access and connections between the vast open hills, the settlements and characteristic woodland such as at Great Ridge. These include important recreational trails such as the Wessex Ridgeway, the Jubilee Trail and Monarch’s Way. Between them, these long distance recreational routes cover vast tracts of the landscape. Archaeological features are prolific within this landscape type – ancient burial grounds or tumuli, earthworks such as Grim’s Ditch and ancient field systems such as the visually distinct strip lynchets are characteristic features, providing visual stimulus, surprise views and general recreation interest. Buildings of historic interest such as Chettle House are also important visitor attractions. As a result of the predominantly arable cropping

land use of the *Open Chalk Downland* landscape type, it tends to support only small areas of proposed Open Country as outlined in the Draft maps prepared by the Countryside Agency.

### **Wooded Chalk Downland**

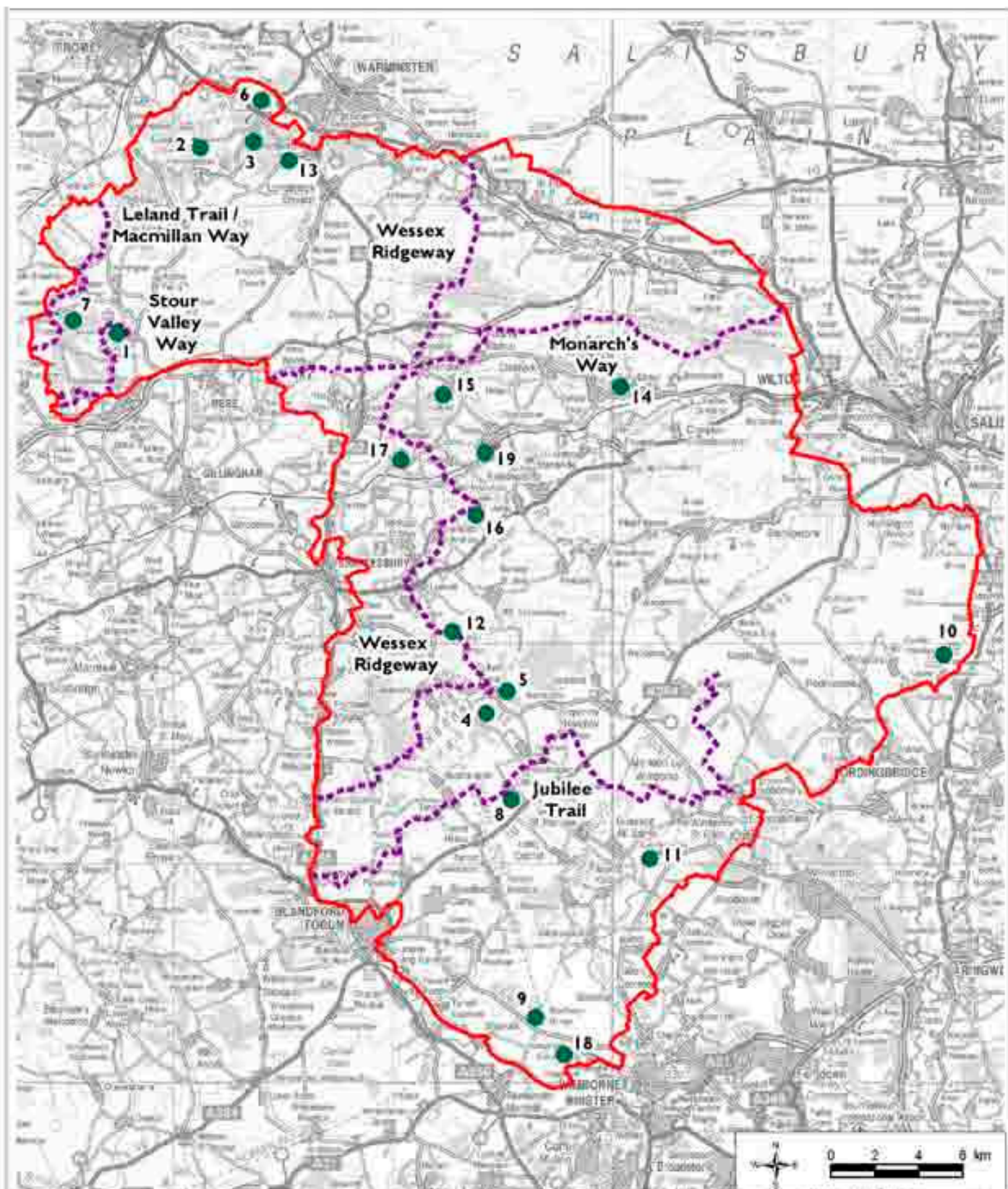
- 7.15. The combination of rich history and dramatic physical landscape makes this landscape a highly popular area for recreation. It is well served by Public Rights of Way, which provide a range of viewing experiences from intimate, enclosed hills to the impressive, big sky views of the rolling downland. Until 150 years ago, Cranborne Chase was a private forest and governed by its own law. As a consequence, it remained free from modern agricultural practices until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century leaving many historic features largely intact. Cranborne Chase is the site where modern British field archaeology was pioneered through the excavations of General Pitt-Rivers in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The majority of the different types of field monument within the south of England occur within Cranborne Chase – making it highly important as an educational and recreational resource amongst archaeologists.
- 7.16. The Rushmore Estate covers a significant area within this landscape and, housing the Larmer Tree Gardens and Rushmore 18 hole golf course, provides a focus of recreation. The Larmer Tree gardens are Victorian Pleasure gardens and are located on high ground - commanding fine views over the Chase. Created in 1880, the gardens are recognised as having national importance and contain a collection of Colonial and Oriental buildings, Roman Temples and an Open Air Theatre. The gardens are now promoting both cycling and walking within Cranborne Chase, with mapped circular routes potentially increasing visitor numbers and frequency of visits.
- 7.17. The *Wooded Chalk Downland* is less intensively farmed than the *Open Chalk Downland* landscape type. This means it supports larger areas of proposed Open Country as outlined in the Countryside Agency's Draft Map.

### **Downland Hills**

- 7.18. The provision and location of Public Rights of Way within this landscape appears to correspond with adjacent landscapes – with density increasing where the Downland Hills lie closest to the Avon and Stour Tributary Valleys and particularly where valley settlements occur. Other visitor attractions within this landscape are Breamore House and Museum and the Manor house and Fort north of Whitsbury which is bound on its western edge by a bridleway. There are also a number of archaeological features of interest – Giant's Grave Long Barrow, tumuli, ancient earthworks and field systems.

### **Chalk River Valleys**

- 7.19. The provision of Public Rights of Way varies within the different chalk river valleys. Within the Wylde River Valley for example, there are large tracts of land along the river without public access. Similarly some of the Avon and Stour tributary valleys rights of way are largely absent. The Ebbles Valley has more regular access provision with footpaths and bridleways typically running along the ridgelines - providing views across the dry river valleys. The Wylde Valley route - Horningsham to Salisbury - is a



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## CRANBORNE CHASE AND WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS AONB LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Figure 7.1:  
Recreation

### Key

- AONB boundary
- Recreational paths

● Tourist attractions referred to in text

- 1 Stourhead Park
- 2 Longlest House, Garden and Safari Park
- 3 Centre Parcs
- 4 Larmer Tree Gardens
- 5 Rushmore 18 hole Golf Course
- 6 Cley Hill Fort
- 7 Altrad's Tower
- 8 Chettle House
- 9 Badbury Rings
- 10 Breamore House and Museum
- 11 Knowlton Church and earthworks
- 12 Win Green

- 13 Shear Water
- 14 Philipp's House
- 15 Fonthill Abbey
- 16 Old Wardour Castle
- 17 Pythouse
- 18 Kingston Lacy House
- 19 Medieval village of Wyck

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promoted and signposted Wiltshire cycleway route. The many picturesque hamlets and villages found aligning the river are themselves visitor attractions. Fishing is also associated with the river valleys.

- 7.20. The *Chalk River Valleys* support areas of proposed 'open country' as defined in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. These tend to occur on the steepest valley sides where downland survives, for example on the valley sides of the Wyllye and Ebblye.

### **Greensand Terrace**

- 7.21. There is no obvious pattern to the network of rights of way however, where the *Terraces* meet with the adjacent *Chalk Escarpments*, rights of way take varied routes up and over the scarps, for example running up the coombes where contours are not so steep or following terraced paths that cut diagonally across, to forge good connections with the landscapes on the other side. Many of the rights of way crossing the Kilmington Greensand Terrace link directly with the Stour Valley Way in the adjacent *Greensand Hills* landscape.

### **Greensand Hills**

- 7.22. The heavily wooded character of this landscape makes it a focus for visitors and recreation. The hills to the west of Warminster are amongst the most visited parts of the AONB, within easy reach of Bristol, Bath and the M4. Here, the attractions of Centre Parcs Holiday Village, Longleat Estate and National Trust properties including Stourhead, Alfred's Tower, and Cley Hill Fort are located. Although the public footpath network is generally fairly sparse due to large areas of private land and commercial forestry, there are many local forest walks and some significant long distance footpath routes pass over the hills. These include the Macmillan Way/Leland Trail, the Stour Valley Way past Stourhead, Monarch's Way and the Wessex Ridgeway. There are a number of lakes associated with this landscape – Bisham lake and Shear Water for example, attracting fishing enthusiasts. There are also a number of small areas of Registered Common Land occurring across this landscape type.

### **Rolling Clay Vales**

- 7.23. The Vale of Wardour is well served by both footpaths and bridleways with the Wessex Ridgeway National Trail running across the landscape in a south-easterly direction. Significant lengths along the course of the Nadder are lined with footpaths providing direct access to the water. There are a number of archaeological sites of interest such as the site of the Medieval village of Wyck. Of historic interest is Pythouse and Park. The River Nadder and its tributary the Sem, provide opportunities for fishing. There are small areas of proposed 'registered common land' as defined in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, particularly around Semley and Semley Common.

## **RECREATION/TOURISM STRATEGIES**

7.24. At the regional level, the joint strategy from the English Tourism Council and the Countryside Agency<sup>13</sup> identifies sixteen priorities for action, grouped under four subheadings. These apply to all rural areas and can be implemented at any level. They are:

### **Influencing and enabling visits by:**

- Strengthening the marketing of rural products and destinations
- Increasing the local impact of visitor information
- Improving access for all visitors

### **Enriching the rural tourism experience by:**

- Providing a wide range of quality accommodation
- Bringing out local distinctiveness, culture and heritage
- Promoting local produce and gastronomy
- Making more of activity-based tourism

### **Fostering rural tourism enterprises by:**

- Providing more focused business support
- Relating planning decisions to economic, social and environmental benefits
- Increased networking between rural tourism businesses
- Improving the impact of businesses on the local environment and community

### **Improving the management of rural destinations by:**

- Identifying rural tourism destinations for integrated quality management
- Strengthening the role of market towns in tourism
- Improving visitor and traffic management
- Supporting the conservation of landscapes and biodiversity
- Involving local communities in tourism management

7.25. There is no single AONB-wide tourism or recreation strategy, with promotion coming from a number of Counties and Districts. However, these strategies tend to be County or District based and are not necessarily focussed on the areas within the AONB. For example, The New Forest District Tourism and Visitor Management

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<sup>13</sup> Countryside Agency/English Tourism Council (2001) Working for the Countryside: A strategy for rural tourism in England 2001-2005



Strategy focuses on the most visited areas within the New Forest District, such as the area within the New Forest perambulation. Other strategies/factual documents include:

- Dorset County Council's Regeneration and Tourism Strategy 2002-5
- Salisbury Districts' Strategy for Sport and Recreation in Salisbury and South Wiltshire
- Tourism 2000 Partnership's Strategy: Shaping the Future of South Wiltshire's Tourism
- Somerset County Council's Tourism in Somerset: The Facts

7.26. Of these the Tourism 2000 Partnership document is the most relevant as a large proportion of the AONB falls within Salisbury District. The objectives of the strategy are:

- To promote the District as a centre for tourism in the UK and overseas;
- To encourage visitors to spend longer in the District by promoting Salisbury and South Wiltshire as a touring base;
- To encourage visitors throughout the year for the economic benefit of the area;
- To ensure that existing markets are protected and developed and to expand into new growth markets;
- To act as a driving force behind tourism development within Salisbury and South Wiltshire.

7.27. Dorset County Council's strategy is also very relevant as a large proportion of the AONB falls into the County of Dorset. The central objectives of the strategy are to:

- Facilitate the development of competitive and sustainable economic activity in rural areas, including a thriving agricultural sector as a shaper of the landscape;
- Enhance the role of towns as vibrant and vital service and employment centres;
- Increase the number, diversity and sustainability of small businesses, including vital village services;
- Ensure that the land and premises needs of a vibrant and sustainable local economy are met;
- Address effectively the difficulties experienced by communities and individuals in seeking to achieve their full potential.



## 8. THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF CRANBORNE CHASE AND THE WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS

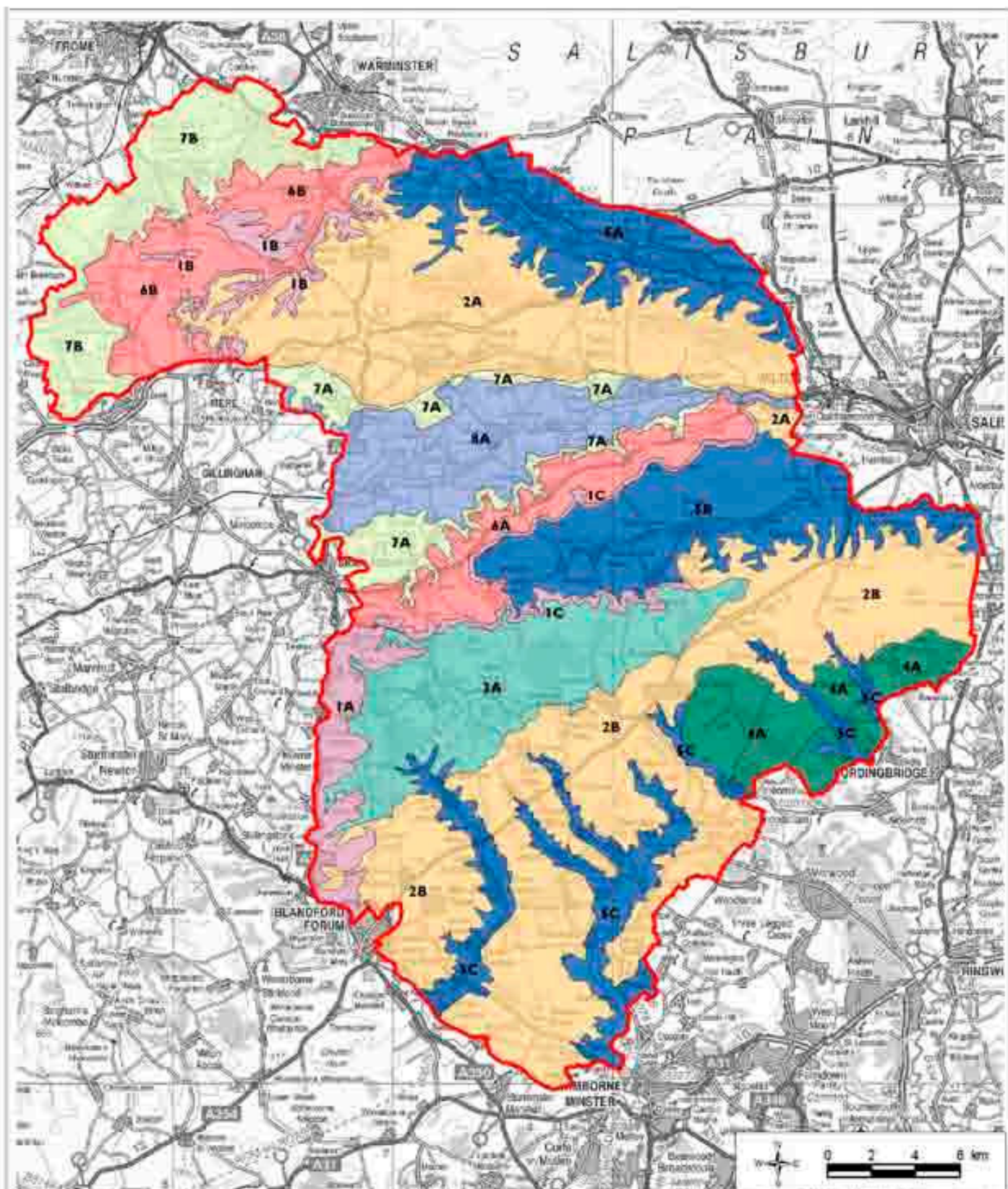
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### Introduction

- 8.1. The physical, cultural, social and economic influences described in the previous chapters have combined to create the unique and distinctive character of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB. The area is characterised by a diversity of landscapes and these variations and differences are represented by eight **landscape types**.
- 1: Chalk Escarpments
  - 2: Open Chalk Downland
  - 3: Wooded Chalk Downland
  - 4: Downland Hills
  - 5: Chalk River Valleys
  - 6: Greensand Terrace
  - 7: Greensand Hills
  - 8: Rolling Clay Vales
- 8.2. Each of the generic landscape types has a distinct and relatively homogenous character with similar physical and cultural attributes, including geology, landform, land cover, and historical evolution. The landscape types can be further sub-divided into component **landscape character areas**.
- 8.3. These are discrete geographic areas that possess the common characteristics described for the landscape type. Each character area has a distinct and recognisable local identity.
- 8.4. The landscape classification for the AONB is set out in **Table 8.1** (overleaf) and illustrated on **Figure 8.1**. **Figure 8.1** has been prepared on a Geographic Information System (GIS), with mapping undertaken at a scale of 1:25,000. It should however be noted that there are subtle differences between and within the individual landscape types and character areas. The boundaries illustrated therefore usually indicate transitions rather than marked changes on the ground.

**Table 8.1: Landscape Classification**

<b>Landscape Types</b>	<b>Landscape Character Areas</b>
1 Chalk Escarpments	1A Melbury to Blandford 1B West Wiltshire Downs 1C Fovant and Chalke
2 Open Chalk Downland	2A West Wiltshire Downs 2B Southern Downland Belt
3 Wooded Chalk Downland	3A Cranborne Chase
4 Downland Hills	4A Martin - Whitsbury
5 Chalk River Valleys	5A Wylde Valley 5B Ebbel Valley 5C Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys
6 Greensand Terrace	6A Fovant Terrace 6B Kilmington Terrace
7 Greensand Hills	7A Donhead - Fovant Hills 7B Penselwood - Longleat Hills
8 Rolling Clay Vales	8A Vale of Wardour



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### CRANBORNE CHASE AND WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS AONB LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Figure 8.1: Landscape Character Areas

**Key**

AONB boundary

1 Chalk Escarpments  
 1A Melbury to Blandford  
 1B West Wiltshire Downs  
 1C Fovant and Chalke

2 Open Chalk Downland  
 2A West Wiltshire Downs  
 2B Southern Downland Belt

3 Wooded Chalk Downland  
 3A Cranborne Chase

4 Downland Hills  
 4A Martin - Whitbury

5 Chalk River Valleys  
 5A Wylve River Valley  
 5B Ebble River Valley  
 5C Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys

6 Greensand Terrace  
 6A Fovant Terrace  
 6B Kilmington Terrace

7 Greensand Hills  
 7A Danhead - Fovant  
 7B Perisewood - Longleat

8 Rolling Clay Vales  
 8A Vale of Wardour

*Nbs- Digitised data is held by the AONB Management Unit on GIS*

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# I. CHALK ESCARPMENTS



## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

**1A Melbury to Blandford**

**1B West Wiltshire Downs**

**1C Fovant and Chalke**





# TYPE I: CHALK ESCARPMENTS

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## Description

The escarpments, which often mark the transition between chalk and adjoining rocks, are amongst the most dramatic elements of the chalk landscape. Such escarpments are often formed where the layers of chalk have been compressed to form a fold, or where the chalk has been faulted, resulting in accelerated erosion along the line of weakness. The retreating chalk strata stand as steep escarpments, often towering over the older rocks which are exposed at the base. The old chalk 'surface' remains behind the escarpment as a gently sloping, often highly eroded dip slope.

These are large scale landscapes where repeating patterns of rounded spurs and deep combs cast strong shadows in strong sunlight. The scarps frequently support internationally important nature conservation sites and ancient field systems, some which are still dramatic features of the landscape today. Recreational opportunities are mainly limited to public footpaths, although the scarps contain large areas of 'Open Country' as mapped (in draft) by the Countryside Agency. There are three distinct areas of chalk escarpment within the AONB.

## Key Characteristics

- Dramatic chalk escarpments eroded into rounded spurs and deep combs.
- Underlying geology of Lower, Middle and Upper Chalk giving rise to the predominantly calcareous soils.
- Areas of unimproved chalk grassland of international importance on steeper slopes.
- Field systems on the lower slopes, including strip lynchets close to medieval villages sited along the springline.
- Improved pasture and arable fields occupy the shallower, more accessible, slopes where straight-sided fields represent late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure.
- Hanging woodland and sunken lanes are features of the steep, enclosing chalk combs.
- Panoramic views over adjacent landscapes.



# IA MELBURY TO BLANDFORD CHALK ESCARPMENT

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Managed, dense hedgerows align rural roads with prominent stands of scots pine and beech copses.



Sunken lanes and hanging woodland are typical e.g. at Littlecombe Bottom.



Thatched and rendered cottages are characteristic e.g. at Iwerne Minster.



Woodland, mixed and coniferous, crowns the steep ridges.



Panoramic views over surrounding landscapes.



Arable cultivation is often found on shallower slopes at the foot of the steep wooded scarp face.



# IA MELBURY TO BLANDFORD CHALK ESCARPMENTS

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## Key Characteristics

- Dramatic chalk escarpment on the western edge of the AONB with rounded spurs and deep combes.
- Underlying geology of Lower, Middle and Upper Chalk giving rise to the predominantly calcareous soils.
- Areas of unimproved chalk grassland of international importance on steeper slopes interspersed with broken areas of scrub.
- Arable crop production and improved pasture on the shallower slopes.
- Hanging woodland and sunken lanes are features of the steep, enclosing chalk combes.
- Beech copses, Scot's pine and hanging woodland enhance the sense of woodedness, increase enclosure and act as focal points.
- Elevated and uninterrupted landform, provides panoramic views over adjacent landscapes.
- Round barrows and cross-ridge dykes along the escarpment edge.
- Field systems on the lower slopes, including strip lynchets close to medieval villages sited along the springline.
- Straight-sided fields represent late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure.

## Location and Boundaries

The *Melbury to Blandford Chalk Escarpment (IA)* forms the western boundary to the AONB between Shaftsbury and Blandford Forum, the boundary being defined by the A350 running along the base of the escarpment slope. To the east, the crest of the scarp marks the boundary of character area 3A – *Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland*, the transition to this landscape evidenced by the regular occurrence of woodland. To the north, the landscape is bounded by *The Ebble Chalk River Valley (5B)*.

## Summary of Visual Character

The escarpment is a dramatic feature in the AONB landscape, in part because of its steep, convoluted appearance - its repeating pattern of rounded spurs and deep combes - and in part due to the effect of the distinctive pattern of woodland, scrub and grassland. This area forms a transition from the chalk landscapes of *Cranborne Chase* and the *Southern Downland Belt* to the lowland clays of the Stour valley. The open, remote scarp with its unenclosed chalk grassland and woodland contrasts with the enclosed and more domestic appearance of the lowland created by the denser structure of hedges and the scattering of farms and

villages. The panorama, which the escarpment provides over the vale, is as impressive as the barrier that the scarp represents when seen from the west.

## **PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**

### **Geology and Soils**

Lower, Middle and Upper Chalk define the geological strata of the escarpment. The fluvial action of the tributaries running west towards the River Iwerne (just beyond the character area boundary), have carved through the chalk exposing these older layers. River Terrace and Head deposits of the Quaternary era define the surface drift along the tributary valleys.

The dominant soil group is Rendzinas – calcareous soils synonymous with an underlying chalk geology. Grey rendzinas is the most common subgroup – a shallow, well drained soil associated with moderately steep to very steep sloping land – corresponding with their mid-slope location. Humic rendzinas also occur but are confined to the far north – shallow, mostly humose, well drained soils on steep slopes and hill tops. Brown rendzinas are found to the south of the character area. Brown calcareous earths are also present – with typical brown calcareous earths strongly affiliated with the tributary valleys.

### **Landform and Hydrology**

Although Hod Hill and Hambleton Hill are separated from the main body of chalk by the River Iwerne (and lie beyond the AONB boundary), this scarp is largely continuous. It is far from straight, however, the chalk having been eroded into steep valleys or combes, separated by rounded spurs which push out towards the Stour below. The drama of the scarp is underlined by the sharp changes in gradient along its crest and at its foot.

From the comparatively gentle slopes which blend into the chalk downs around Blandford Forum, the escarpment grows in both scale and drama as it runs north. Smooth, broad spurs such as France Down become the steep, narrow ridges which are typical of Fontmell Down and Melbury Hill in the north. Intervening valleys become dramatic chalk combes; long, narrow and steep-sided valleys. The most dramatic of these contains the settlement of Melbury Abbas. To the north of this valley, the escarpment swings east to join the *Fovant and Chalke Escarpments (IC)*. Zig Zag Hill forms the boundary between the two.

From low ground to the west, and from along the A350, which currently runs north-south at its foot, the escarpment signals a dramatic transition from the rolling clay of the Stour valley to the large scale chalk landscape.

### **Land Cover**

Successive improvements in farming techniques and demands to increase agricultural production have encouraged farmers to 'improve' the chalk grassland along many parts of the escarpment. In many cases, arable fields on gentler slopes give way to vivid green improved pastures on steeper slopes, with once characteristic areas of chalk grassland and woodland now confined to the very steepest of slopes. In many cases the chalk grassland along the top of the escarpment has also been converted to arable cultivation, the edges of the fields visibly define the crest of the scarp slope. The steepest slopes on the escarpment are often clothed with areas of scrub – bringing distinct textural qualities to the landscape.

*Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland (3A)* lies above the escarpment and woods spill over onto the scarp in places - crowning several of the steep ridges and filling the combes below. The woodland is a mixture of deciduous, beech or oak woodland and coniferous plantations. There are also a number of small coppices (Furzeland, Ash Oaks and Little Coppice). Many of the steeper bluffs support dense, hanging woodland, appearing as a blurring counterpoint to the linear scarp slope. Hanging woodland is a key feature where sunken lanes pass through woodland – such as Littlecombe Bottom.

## Ecological Character and Biodiversity

This chalk escarpment has retained a number of unimproved chalk grassland sites, particularly on the steeper slopes to the north of the character area. This includes the internationally important Fontmell and Melbury Downs (SAC), one of the largest remaining chalk grasslands within the AONB. This site is notable for supporting a variety of grassland types, and a number of notable plant species such as early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*), bastard toadflax (*Thesium humifusum*) and lesser butterfly orchid (*Platanthera bifolia*). The range of grassland types present, together with scrub mosaics support a rich associated butterfly fauna, with many local and endangered species, such as the marsh fritillary (*Eurodryas aurinia*) and the silver spotted skipper (*Hesperia comma*), both UK BAP priority species.

Adjacent to this large chalk grassland reserve is Sutton Combe (SSSI), a 16ha unimproved chalk grassland site, notable for its rich flora and fauna. The character area also contains a number of smaller sites, all chalk grassland, and designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). Scattered along the escarpment are a number of small woodland blocks, including beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) copses and mixed / coniferous blocks, which enrich the landscape at a local level, providing valuable refuge for a variety of bird species.

The table below highlights the features of key ecological interest for each statutory site.

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha)	Summary of importance
Fontmell and Melbury Downs	SAC SSSI	260.7 287.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, with scrub mosaics</li> <li>• Large colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> <li>• Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>) a species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II) and UK BAP priority species</li> <li>• Population of the silver-spotted skipper (<i>Hesperia comma</i>) a nationally rare butterfly in Britain, and a UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Sutton Combe	SSSI	16.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unimproved chalk grassland, with scrub mosaics</li> <li>• Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>) a species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II) and UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>

## **HUMAN INFLUENCES**

### **Evidence of Past Social Structure**

The siting of a number of prehistoric burial monuments along the escarpment, and the continuation of cross-ridge dykes and other linear earthworks over the edge of the scarp, highlight the relationship of this landscape area to the adjacent downs with their high concentration of prehistoric burial, settlement and territorial features.

### **Field Patterns, Boundaries and Predominant Date of Enclosure**

Field systems, including areas of strip lynchets, close to Fontmell Magna and Iwerne Minster, may represent the expansion of arable farming onto marginal land at times of pressure on cultivable land, probably during the medieval period. The field boundaries, which are predominantly straight despite the steep curving escarpment, are characteristic of late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure.

### **Land Use and Recreation**

Semi-natural landcover has largely been lost to intensive farming – particularly on the shallower slopes towards the base of the escarpment. However, on the steeper slopes chalk grassland is grazed and woodland remains. Field boundaries are for the most part delineated by post and wire fencing – allowing the sense of continuity and smooth line of the escarpment to be uninterrupted. Hedges do occur in places but are mainly associated with the rural lanes that cross east-west through the character area. Leylandii planting, demarcating some of the farms on shallower slopes, brings rather stark colour variation not characteristic of this landscape. Communications masts frequently occur on the areas of highest ground.

The A350 defines the western edge of this character area – a busy north-south route linking Blandford Forum with Shaftesbury. Rural lanes run west-east up the face of the escarpment, connecting the A350 with the road that runs along the top of the escarpment.

In terms of recreation, this landscape contains a number of Public Rights of Way (including the Wessex Ridgeway) connecting lowland and upland areas. Conservation walks and bridle paths occur at Littlecombe Bottom – these are well signposted and user information is provided. In addition, grassy areas or gallops align the bridleway in this area – providing an alternative facility for horse riders. To the north of the character area, between Fontmell Magna and Melbury Abbas, much of the escarpment is owned by the National Trust, offering good public access and parking places. Spread Eagle Hill forms part of this National Trust land from where there are panoramic views over the Blackmore Vale and the River Stour beyond the AONB boundary. A large proportion of the escarpment has been mapped (in draft) as an area of Open Country by the Countryside Agency. This designation relates to the remnant downland areas and is therefore found on the steepest scarps. There is also a significant area of Registered Common Land at Melbury Wood/Compton Down providing open public access.

### **Historic Development of Settlement and Relationship with the Landscape**

The topography of the escarpment means that settlements are located mainly at the foot of the scarp - being sited along the springline. The movement of livestock to and from the



downland grazing is evident in the surviving parallel layout of tracks leading onto the downs. The proximity of the strip lynchets to the villages of Fontmell Magna and Iwerne Minster point to the likely relationship between the exploitation of this marginal land and adjacent centres of population, although only three of the eight medieval villages in the Iwerne valley have survived as villages.

### **Settlement and Built Character**

While the escarpment is almost entirely devoid of settlement, a series of nucleated villages are found at its foot, enjoying both the shelter provided by their lower altitude and, perhaps more importantly, springs which are found along the junction of the chalk and underlying clays. Iwerne Courtney, Iwerne Minster, Fontmell Magna and Compton Abbas are typical of such villages, tucked tightly into the foot of the scarp, or almost hidden in the chalk combs, their stone or red-brick cottages clustered around small parish churches. At Melbury Abbas, Compton Abbas and Fontmell Magna, cottages tend to be built from Shaftesbury stone – a glaucanitic sandstone that matures to a pleasant grey-green colour. Further south towards Iwerne Minster, chequerboard flint and sandstone, white render, tudor style properties and thatch roofs are found, typical of river valley landscapes.

The historic importance of the chalk downs and the valley pastures to these villages is reflected in their relative proximity (often little more than a kilometre apart) and the alignment of parish boundaries to encapsulate a 'slice' of downland and lowland. Narrow lanes bordered by high hedges and roadside woodland link the scarp-foot villages to the chalk downs above. The east-west alignment of many of the roads reflect the historic relationship between settlement and the downs.

The pattern of settlement along this escarpment is quite distinctive, with sparsely settled areas along the escarpment itself contrasting with the spring line villages which cluster at its foot. The physical and visual separation of these villages has been maintained and, for the most part, new development has respected both the nuclear layout of the villages and the use of local building materials.

### **Historic Environment**

The escarpment also conveys a sense of antiquity and history which has often been obscured or lost in the more intensively worked and constantly adapting lowland landscape below. A comparative lack of agricultural activity, traditionally far less intense on the meagre soils of the escarpment, has preserved the strip lynchets, barrows, cross-dykes and fortifications which reflect patterns of activity dating back thousands of years. The woodland spilling over from Cranborne Chase adds a further layer to this historic landscape.

This escarpment has a distinctive pattern of human settlement, including many remains which date back to prehistory. Melbury Hill has many archaeological remains, and its defensive and territorial earthworks and cross-dykes combine with the ancient strip lynchets to emphasise the monolithic, timeless character of the chalk hill. Other cross-dykes, lynchets and barrows are found along the escarpment and in the narrow valleys which carve their way into it, while the minor road which runs along its crest is one of the ancient ridgeway tracks which characterise escarpment landscapes throughout the AONB.

## EVALUATION

### Strength of Character

This landscape is judged to have a **strong** character. The landform of the escarpment is dramatic – a recognisable system of rounded spurs and deep combs giving a convoluted appearance. This is combined with a distinctive landcover pattern of woodland, scrub and chalk grassland. Although the landcover mosaic has changed as a result of mechanised farming on the scarp, this landscape remains distinct and has a strong sense of place.

### Current Condition

Many features of the historic environment (strip lynchets, barrows, cross dykes and fortifications) have survived the less intensive agricultural practices on the steep scarp slopes. In terms of land cover and land use there is little evidence of lack of management or underused pockets of land although scrub encroachment is occurring on some steeper slopes. One of the largest remaining pockets of chalk grassland is located on the scarp – the internationally important Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC – and this contributes to the overall good ecological condition of the scarp. Settlement condition, at the foot of the scarp is good - offering a high quality built environment. The current condition of the landscape is judged to be **good**.

### Past and Present Change

- In the past, loss of chalk grassland as a result of intensive arable agricultural practices, has been one of the most damaging changes to the scarp.
- Lack of grazing has resulted in encroachment of scrub in some areas.
- Creation of enclosures and new boundaries have interrupted the visually intact, smooth sweeping escarpment in places.
- Past planting of geometric coniferous plantations have interrupted the sinuous lines of the escarpment.
- Pressure for new built development at the foot of the scarp has led to erosion of the traditional nucleated character of the settlement in places. Future pressure could continue this.

### Possible Future Trends

Increasing professionalisation of livestock farming, as a result of the impacts of the Foot and Mouth Epidemic and BSE, is likely to limit the availability of livestock to graze land of low agricultural value such as chalk grassland. This could result in low grazing pressure and increased scrub encroachment on the scarps.

Areas of 'Open Country' proposed by the Countryside Agency under the CRoW Act could result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape. Visitor management will be a priority.

The prominent elevated character of the scarp is likely to bring demand for construction of tall structures, including communication masts and possibly wind turbines.

Increased efficiency of production is likely to divert unwanted arable land, such as the steepest slopes and areas with thinnest soils, to environmental management, such as reversion to chalk grassland. The proposed Entry Level Scheme and the bringing together of the ESA and Countryside Stewardship Scheme into one 'Higher Level Scheme' in 2005 is likely to result in continued environmental management of the landscape.

Future trends in landscape condition look set to be **stable** in this area.

### **Management Objective**

**The overall management objective should be to conserve the uninterrupted landform, strong open skyline and the distinct mosaic patterning of woodland, scrub and chalk grassland and to seek opportunities to restore and enhance habitats and historic features.**

- Seek positive management for areas coming out of active farming, notably opportunities for restoration of chalk grassland. Monitor continued encroachment of scrub on the steepest slopes.
- Promote the use of visually permeable boundaries such as post and wire fencing to demarcate field units in order to retain the sense of continuity and openness across the escarpment.
- Conserve the distinct pattern of woodland cover (coppices, hanging woodland and woodland swathes at the base of the escarpment). Woodland management is the main requirement. Further woodland planting is not a key objective for this area, with the aim being to maintain the balance of open land and woodland cover.
- Consider opportunities to soften the edges of coniferous plantations through mixed and deciduous planting. Encourage the use of native species along property boundaries and discourage the planting of Leylandii as shelterbelts.
- Monitor pressures for erection of tall structures and seek to prevent visual clutter on the escarpment skyline.
- Promote sustainable management and recreational access to Open Country, viewpoints and Registered Common land.
- Maintain the undeveloped character of the scarp and the contrast with the scarp foot villages. New residential developments should respect the distinct nucleated form of these ancient villages and should not extend onto the lower scarp slopes.



# IB WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS CHALK ESCARPMENT

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Woodland swaths at the break of the slope delineate the escarpment from the adjacent Greensand Terrace.



Good views from the escarpment over the surrounding vales that lie outside the AONB.



Ancient strip lynchets create strong landform patterns on the escarpment.



Sculpted and convoluted landform creates dramatic shadows in strong sunlight.



The escarpment forms a strong backdrop to *the Vale of Wardour (8A)*.



Settlement is typically sited at the base of the escarpment slope.



# IB WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS CHALK ESCARPMENT

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## Key Characteristics

- Fragmented, eroded chalk escarpment broken by the course of the River Wylye marking the boundary between the Greensand Terrace landscape to the north and the Chalk Downland to the south.
- Sculpted, convoluted landform comprising deeply incised combe valleys that create surprise views and dramatic shadows in strong sunlight.
- Dominated by a Lower and Middle Chalk surface geology giving rise to calcareous soils.
- Strong sense of continuity and consistency due to the absence of boundaries and the grazed, smooth nature of the grassland cover with scattered scrub.
- A pastoral landscape with sheep and cattle grazing the steep slopes.
- Extensive tracts of SSSI designated chalk grassland.
- Straight-sided fields representing late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure are highly visible where they cut across the contours.
- Woodland swathes associated with the break of the slope, following the line of the contours and delineating the contrast between the escarpment and adjacent Open Chalk Downland landscape.
- Neolithic and Bronze Age burial monuments, particularly on the outlying chalk outcrop north of the River Wylye.
- Later prehistoric/Romano-British landscape divisions incorporating long bank and ditch earthworks and associated cross-ridge dykes.
- Strip lynchets near the medieval settlements at Mere, Kingston and Monkton Deverill.

## Location and Boundaries

Located within the northern half of the AONB, the *West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment (1B)* marks the northern edge of the *West Wiltshire Open Chalk Downland* at the point where the high chalk drops to the lowland of the *Kilmington Greensand Terrace (6B)*. It starts just south of the settlement of Sutton Veny (at the western extent of the Wylye River Valley), with the main body of the escarpment running in a convoluted south westerly direction to meet the AONB boundary just east of the town of Mere. In addition, there are three outlying hills that are separated from the escarpment by the River Wylye.

## Summary of Visual Character

Although not as conspicuous as other escarpments within the AONB, its pronounced form above the Greensand Terrace gives it strong presence. This is a large-scale landscape – a

vast chalk escarpment with associated outlying hills that stand proud of the *Kilminster Greensand Terrace (6B)* landscape - providing a strong contrast in relief.

The escarpment, formed where layers of chalk have been compressed<sup>14</sup> comprises a surface geology of Lower and Middle Chalk. These older chalk strata have been uncovered due to fluvial processes and high levels of erosion of the River Wylye (and its tributaries) whose course has followed fault lines to break through the chalk and thus interrupt the continuity of the landscape, creating a fragmented escarpment and a small series of chalk hills (Brimsdown Hill, Little Knoll and Long Knoll). The processes of riverine erosion over millions of years has led to deep incisions – forming combe valleys.

The escarpment provides commanding long distance views over the neighbouring *Kilminster Terrace (6B)* and conversely it can be viewed from long range. The magnitude of this landscape is seemingly exaggerated by the simplicity of its land cover. Predominantly comprising grassland, there is a sense of uniformity or consistency of character that adds to the experience of openness, expanse and remoteness and provides a strong sense of visual unity and intactness.

## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

### Geology and soils

In common with all the escarpments within the AONB, Lower and Middle Chalk predominate. The Middle Chalk strata are associated with the middle to upper ranges of the escarpment slope - occurring for example on the hilltop of Little Knoll Hill and along the southern edge of the main escarpment block where it meets the open chalk downland landscape of the *West Wiltshire Downs (2A)*. The Lower Chalk strata defines the geology at the lowest reaches, and base, of the escarpment slope. Here the Chalk geology meets the drift Head deposits of the River Wylye and marks the transition from the Chalk to the landscape defined by Upper Greensand - the character area defined as the *Kilminster Greensand Terrace (6B)*.

### Landform

Although deeply eroded, the escarpment remains a dominant feature, with the north-eastern edge of the scarp forming a distinct boundary with the flat *Kilminster Greensand Terrace (6B)*. The steepest parts of the escarpment lie to the north (around Sutton Veny) and the south (around Mere) where the steepness of the slope is most acute, rising sharply towards the level summits at Cow Down and White Sheet Hill. To the north of Mere, the escarpment has a particularly complex form - the deep combes of Great Bottom, Chetcombe Bottom and Aucombe Bottom exaggerate the convoluted pattern of this landscape. The topographic form of the middle escarpment section is less pronounced but the scalloped edges are highly distinctive.

### Land Cover

The land cover is dominated by grassland, including unimproved chalk grassland sites. Woodland does occur but is generally small scale and confined to the sheltered combes.

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<sup>14</sup> to form a fold, or where the chalk has faulted.



The isolated hills, support the majority of woodland cover (Little Wood, Long Knoll Wood, Marcombe Wood, Bidcombe Wood and Woodcombe Wood). The most significant area of woodland is specifically linked to Brimsdown Hill, Bidcombe Hill, Whitecliff Down and Bidcombe Down. This ancient woodland is distinctive due to its association with the break of the slope, clearly marking the boundary between the *Kilminster Greensand Terrace (6B)* and the escarpment.

## Biodiversity

The *West Wiltshire Downs Escarpment* has retained significant ecological interest, including three unimproved chalk grassland sites carrying statutory nature conservation designation. These are Brimsdown Hill (SSSI), Whitesheet Hill (SSSI) and Long Knoll (SSSI). The sites form extensive tracts of chalk grassland, both well over 100ha, and all are notable for supporting botanically rich grassland communities.

Although Brimsdown Hill (SSSI) is predominantly composed of chalk grassland, the northern scarp also supports a small area of ancient woodland. This woodland grades from ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) dominated on the calcareous slopes, through to oak (*Quercus robur*) and downy birch (*Betula pubescens*) woodland on the more acidic plateau. Buzzards (*Buteo buteo*) are known to use this area of ancient wood, and the site is unusually rich in ground dwelling chalk mosses, including *Scapania aspera*, which is known from only one other site in Wiltshire.

Whitesheet Hill (SSSI) is located in the southern section of the main escarpment. Although dominated by chalk grassland, the site also contains smaller areas of scrub, mesotrophic grassland and open chalk face (from past quarrying activities), which provide a valuable range of habitats for a range of invertebrate species, many of which have restricted distribution in the UK.

The table below highlights the features of key ecological interest for each statutory site.

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha)	Summary of importance
Brimsdown Hill	SSSI	193.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, with areas of scrub and ancient woodland</li> </ul>
Long Knoll	SSSI	34.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics</li> </ul>
Whitesheet Hill (72% of this SSSI falls within LCA 1B)	SSSI	136.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive area of unimproved chalk and mesotrophic grassland with scrub mosaics</li> <li>Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>) a species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>

## HUMAN INFLUENCES

### Evidence of Past Social Structure

While the Neolithic long barrow on Cold Kitchen Hill may have symbolised ancestral rights to territory for an early farming community, the form and content of the more numerous

Bronze Age round barrows suggest an ideological representation of individual power and status. Both types were sited in on the escarpment where they could be viewed both from the valley and combe bottoms as well as from the downs. In the later prehistoric and Romano-British periods, the extensive lengths of linear ditch and bank earthwork which run along the scarp slope north of the River Wylve, with a short length of cross-ridge dyke extending from it, indicate a more direct means of controlling territory. These earthworks provided both an effective territorial boundary and a barrier to the movement of stock and, potentially, people.

### **Field Patterns, Boundaries and Predominant date of enclosure**

Areas of strip lynchets at Mere and at Kingston and Monkton Deverill, and other field systems on the steep slope of the escarpment, may represent the expansion of arable farming onto marginal land at times of pressure on cultivable land, probably during the medieval period. The pillow mounds, usually situated on marginal land, as seen at the base of Whitesheet Hill, would have been used for the rearing of rabbits, an increasingly important component of the economy from the 13th century.

The field boundaries, which are predominantly straight, despite the steep curving escarpment, are characteristic of late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure, although many field boundaries are likely to have been lost in recent years.

### **Land Use and Recreation**

This is largely a pastoral landscape, with grazing of both unimproved chalk grassland and improved pasture. Improved pasture characterises the shallower slopes towards the base of the escarpment where it meets the floodplain of the River Wylve. The steeper slopes, due to their unsuitability to mechanisation have generally remained free from intensive farming and as such are characterised by rough grazing and remnant chalk grassland. The simplicity of landcover accentuates the undulations of the landform.

There are few roads crossing this character area. Where roads do occur, they generally cut across the contours at steep gradients connecting the Greensand Terrace landscape with the West Wiltshire Downs via the shortest possible route. There are a number of public footpaths and bridleways in the area providing informal recreational opportunities. A large proportion of the escarpment is proposed Open Country as defined in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and as mapped (in draft) by the Countryside Agency. These areas relate to the remnant downland areas and are therefore found on the steepest scarps.

### **Historic Development of Settlement and Relationship with the Landscape**

The steep topography of the chalk escarpment has prevented settlement on the scarp slope, although the proximity of strip lynchets to the villages of Mere and Kingston Deverill point to the likely relationship between the exploitation of this marginal land and adjacent centres of population in the medieval period.

### **Settlement and Built Character**

The absence of settlement along the escarpment is one of its most striking features of this landscape forming a strong contrast with the adjacent *Kilminster Greensand Terraces (6B)*, where settlements occur, following the course of the River Wylve nestled at the base or

break of the escarpment slope. The Deverills are a good example – Kingston, Monkton and Brixton Deverill located where the Wylfe has cut through the chalk. The Deverills are considered in more detail under character area *6B Kilmington Greensand Terrace*.

## Historic Environment

The chalk escarpment south of the River Wylfe represents the transition between the *Kilmington Greensand Terrace* and the open chalk downland of the *West Wiltshire Downs*. Apart from the localised groupings of strip lynchets near the villages of Mere and Kingston and Monkton Deverill, which represent the deliberate exploitation of this marginal zones, most of the earthwork features, such as linear banks and ditches and round barrows extend into this zone from their main areas of distribution on the open downs. The isolated chalk hills that form part of this escarpment, however, gave the area a particular strategic significance during the prehistoric period. This is reflected in the relative density of monuments, including the Cold Kitchen Hill long barrow, numerous round barrows and extensive linear earthworks as well as lengths of cross-ridge dyke.

## EVALUATION

### Strength of Character

Character is judged to be **strong** - representing the inherent elements and features that define the landscape type. Although not as conspicuous as other scarps, this character area remains a prominent feature and forms a strong contrast with the adjacent low lying *Kilmington Greensand Terrace (6B)* – providing commanding views. The sense of scale and openness is exaggerated by the simple land cover, here the close grazed grassland compliments the smooth landform and uninterrupted skyline. It is this visual distinctiveness and the relationship of physical, ecological and historical characteristics that create a strong sense of place.

### Current Condition

The condition of this landscape character area is perceived to be **good**. The traditional land use (predominantly grazing) has survived and continues to characterise the slopes. The escarpment has retained significant ecological interest in its chalk grassland sites and shows good survival of historical features such as strip lynchets.

### Past and Present Change

- Past change has seen encroachment of arable farming onto parts of the scarp slope, displacing pasture or unimproved chalk grassland.
- On the other hand, as land has become more marginal for agriculture, reduced grazing has resulted in the encroachment of scrub. Further scrub encroachment may threaten the quality of the remaining chalk grassland and change the smooth, open character of the scarp.
- Evidence of pressure for communication masts and other tall structures, such as at White Sheet Hill.

## Possible Future Trends

Increasing professionalisation of livestock farming, as a result of the impacts of the Foot and Mouth Epidemic and BSE, is likely to limit the availability of livestock to graze land of low agricultural value such as chalk grassland. This is likely to result in low grazing pressure and increased scrub encroachment on the scarps.

Areas of 'Open Country' proposed by the Countryside Agency under the CRoW Act could result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape. The prominent character of the scarp is likely to bring demand for construction of tall structures, including communication masts and possibly wind turbines.

Increased efficiency of production is likely to divert unwanted arable land, such as the steepest slopes and areas with thinnest soils, to environmental management, such as reversion to chalk grassland. The proposed Entry Level Scheme and the bringing together of the ESA and Countryside Stewardship Scheme into one 'Higher Level Scheme' in 2005 is likely to result in continued environmental management of the landscape.

Future trends in landscape condition look set to be **stable** in this area.

## Management Objective

**The overall objective is to conserve the overriding sense of openness, the smooth undeveloped ridge, and the simplicity of the scarp landform. Within this open, pasture dominated landscape there are significant opportunities to restore and link areas of chalk grassland.**

- Conserve and manage the broad hedges and bands of ancient woodland at the break of the slope which create the distinction and contrast with the adjacent Greensand Terrace. Limit further woodland planting within this area to maintain the smooth, open character of the scarp.
- Continue grazing management of grassland to limit scrub encroachment and maintain the distinctive, smooth landform and ecological richness of the chalk grassland.
- Seek opportunities to restore areas of chalk grassland with the intention of improving links to existing chalk grassland sites for increased ecological value. This is a key opportunity on the steepest slopes which are more marginal for agriculture.
- Promote the use of visually permeable boundaries such as post and wire fencing to demarcate field units in order to retain the sense of continuity and openness across the escarpment.
- Promote sustainable management of recreation particularly in relation to the proposed Open Country designation. Ensure erosion of the scarp (due to visitor pressure) and the provision of associated facilities (such as parking) do not threaten the remote qualities of the landscape.
- Conserve the important archaeological features of the scarp landscape particularly in the light of potential increases in visitor numbers.
- Ensure that tall structure, such as communication masts and wind turbines do not create 'visual clutter' on the skyline of the scarp.

- Maintain the undeveloped character of the scarp and the contrast with the scarp foot villages. New development should retain the distinct nucleated form of the villages and should not extend onto the scarp slope.



# IC FOVANT AND CHALKE CHALK ESCARPMENTS

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The vast escarpment looms over the adjacent terrace and forms dramatic shadows.



A largely pastoral landscape comprising both unimproved and improved pasture.



Woodland swathes or 'Ivers' at the foot of the scarp mark the transition between escarpment and terrace landscapes.



Geometric game coverts are strong landscape features on the skyline.



The Fovant Badges are key landmark features of the steep slopes. Note the quarry scar on the lower slope.



Erosion on the face of the scarp reveals the underlying chalk.





# IC FOVANT AND CHALKE ESCARPMENT

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## Key Characteristics

- Two distinct escarpments (Fovant and Chalke) separated by and bounding the *Ebble River Valley (5B)*.
- Lower and Middle Chalk strata defining surface geological character and giving rise to calcareous, shallow and well drained soils.
- Dramatic landform - due to the sheer scale and elevated nature of the escarpment – looming over adjacent landscapes.
- A largely pastoral landscape comprising both unimproved and improved pasture but with introduction of arable cultivation associated with the upper and lower reaches of the scarp.
- Significant tracts of unimproved chalk grassland, with a total of five statutory nature conservation sites falling wholly or partly within the character area.
- Wooded character in places with broadleaf (some of ancient origin), mixed and coniferous woodland occurring across the escarpment in distinctive patterns.
- Distinct distribution of Bronze Age burial monuments along the edges of the escarpments.
- Chalk hill figures, in particular the Fovant Badges, are highly visible landmark features.
- Panoramic views across the surrounding landscapes.
- Absence of settlement heightening a sense of isolation.

## Location and Boundaries

This character area occupies a central location within the AONB, and comprises two roughly parallel sections. The northern-most escarpment (referred to here as the Fovant Escarpment) runs between Burcombe and Berwick St John, while the southern escarpment (the Chalke Escarpment) extends from the character area *Melbury to Blandford Chalk Escarpment (1A)* to Knowle Hill at Mead End.

The Fovant escarpment rises steeply from and is bound along the full length of its northern edge by the lower lying *Fovant Greensand Terrace 6A*. The Chalke escarpment's rises steeply from the *Ebble Valley 5B* with the southern edge marking the transition to character area *3A - Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland*.

## Summary of Visual Character

These two escarpments are dominant features in the landscape and make a substantial contribution to the character of the AONB as a whole. In part, their value is derived from their height, steepness and continuity together with the contrasts between open chalk

grassland and the cultivated land on the *Fovant Greensand Terrace (6A)*. The escarpments are very visible - appearing as a range of stark hills dominating the more domestic landscapes of the Vale of Wardour, the skyline punctuated by the copses and woodland blocks along the crest. The scarp also provides the location for fine views over immediate surrounding landscapes, the *Vale of Wardour (8A)* and towards the *West Wiltshire Downs Open Chalk Downland (2A)*.

## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

### Geology and Soils

In common with all the escarpments within the AONB, Lower and Middle Chalk predominate. The Middle Chalk strata are associated with the middle to upper ranges of the escarpment slope. Lower Chalk underlies the lowest reaches, and base, of the escarpment slope marking the transition to a Greensand. Shallow, calcareous and well drained humic rendzinas are the dominant soil type.

### Landform

These escarpments are among the most dramatic features of the AONB landscape forming steep high walls of chalk that tower over the adjacent greensand terrace and valley landscapes and are visible as strong ridges from the *Vale of Wardour (8A)* and much of the downland to the north.

The Fovant Escarpment extends from Barford St Martin in the east following a series of gentle curves around Compton Down, Fovant Down and White Sheet Hill before it ends quite abruptly near Berwick St John. Though a very steep escarpment and scalloped in places, there are few of the incised valleys and elongated spurs that are found on other scarps. The one exception is the hammer-shaped hill which extends out from the escarpment near Swallowcliffe. In places the natural landform has been interrupted by mineral extraction - along the scarp face for example, where the Fovant Badges are located.

### Land cover

The landscape is dominated by pasture and significant areas of unimproved chalk grassland remain on the steep slopes. Woodland also plays an important role and the occasional coniferous blocks occupying prominent ridgeline locations are a distinct feature. These have a strong geometric form and cap the crest of the scarp with a striking uniformity contrasting with the rounded form of the escarpment and interrupting the smooth ridgeline. Mixed and deciduous woodland is found throughout this character area, but is particularly characteristic of the Chalke escarpment. Deciduous woodland largely follows the lines of the contours in a sinuous form and this is most apparent where woodland swathes or 'Ivers' line the base of the escarpments, stretching to mid-slope. This woodland buffer is a significant landscape feature marking the transition from the steep downland slopes to the intensively cultivated land below. Game coverts, often planted as rectangular blocks of conifers at the foot of the escarpment, are also frequent, particularly between Wilton and Berwick St John.

The beech woodland aligning Zig Zag hill at the far west of the Chalke escarpment is a particularly distinctive feature, dramatically restricting views and bringing localised sense of enclosure. Areas of scrubby vegetation are also a characteristic of this landscape.

## Biodiversity

The Fovant and Chalke Escarpments are characterised by significant unimproved chalk grassland cover, with a total of five statutory nature conservation sites falling wholly or partly within the character area. In addition, the scarp slopes support scattered woodland blocks, many of which are of ancient origin, and mostly comprise beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) or oak (*Quercus robur*) dominated stands. These woodlands make a considerable contribution to the ecological value of the area.

The Chalke escarpment supports the majority of the nationally important chalk grassland reserves, including Bowerchalke Down (SSSI), Win Green Down (SSSI), Winklebury Hill (SSSI) and Pincombe Down (SSSI). The first three of these sites are particularly notable for supporting colonies of the rare and UK BAP priority plant species, early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*). The largest of these sites is Bowerchalke Down (SSSI), which forms an extensive area of floristically rich chalk grassland and supports a number of restricted plant species, such as dwarf sedge (*Carex humilis*) and musk orchid (*Herminium monorchis*), as well as a variety of butterfly and bird species.

Located on Fovant Escarpment is Burcombe Down (SSSI) a 47ha site, which is of particular note for the presence of scattered juniper (*Juniperus communis*), a declining and UK BAP priority species.

The table overleaf highlights the features of key ecological interest for each statutory site.

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha)	Summary of importance
Bowerchalke Down (85% this SSSI falls within LCA IC)	SSSI	128.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics</li> <li>• Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> </ul>
Burcombe Down (49% of this SSSI falls within LCA IC)	SSSI	47.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics</li> <li>• Colony of juniper (<i>Juniperus communis</i>) a UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Pincombe Down	SSSI	23.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics</li> </ul>
Win green Down	SSSI	26.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics</li> <li>• Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> </ul>
Winklebury Hill (82% of this SSSI falls within LCA IC)	SSSI	63.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland and scrub mosaics</li> <li>• Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> </ul>

## HUMAN INFLUENCES

### Evidence of Past Social Structure

A number of Bronze Age round barrows are sited in positions on the escarpments where they could be viewed both from the valley and coombe bottoms and from the downs, their form and content suggesting an ideological representation of individual power and status. In the later prehistoric and Romano-British periods, a number of the cross-ridge dykes which contribute to the territorial division of the open downs, some being associated, for instance, with the Iron Age hillfort at Winklebury, extend onto the downs, providing both an effective territorial boundary and a barrier to the movement of stock and potentially people.

### Field Patterns, Boundaries and Predominant Date of Enclosure

Although, in places, areas of ancient field system extend onto the escarpment slopes from the adjacent downs, the steeper slopes of the escarpment have remained largely as unimproved grazing land, although encroached on by cultivation, both in the prehistoric and historic past, and increasingly so in the 20th century. The field boundaries, which are predominantly straight despite the steep curving escarpment, are characteristic of late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure, although many field boundaries are likely to have been lost in recent years. The escarpment slopes are broken by small areas of possibly surviving ancient woodland and more recent plantations.

## Land Use and Recreation

These escarpments are predominantly open, often unimproved pasture with cattle, sheep and horses grazing the steep slopes. Gentler slopes towards the foot and crest of the scarp have often been brought into arable cultivation where the landform is more suited to mechanisation - extending arable character from the lower lying, flatter landscapes.

Rights of Way are an important recreational feature - being popular due to the extent and nature of fine views. The viewpoint of Win Green, although falling within the adjacent character area *3B Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland*, provides commanding views across the striking landform of the Chalke escarpment. Rights of Way are generally terraced into the slope and provide good connections to the landscapes on either side. One exception to this trend is the by way of Ox Drove (on the Chalke escarpment) which follows the line of the ridgeline – providing extensive views near to Win Green.

Perhaps the most obvious features of recreational value to note are the Hill Figures adorning the steep scarp slopes. These striking figures, some more than 200 feet wide, are cut into the chalk and act as distinct landmark features. Five of the eight surviving ‘Fovant Badges’ (the most distinctive collection) were carved by World War I soldiers between the 1914-1918 period. Three badges were subsequently added between the 1950s and 1970s. Natural weathering from wind and rain over time, combined with visitor pressure, has led to the erosion of these figures<sup>15</sup>. Disused chalk pits are also visible on the face of the escarpment.

## Historic Development of Settlement and Relationship with the Landscape

The steep topography of the chalk escarpment has prevented settlement on the scarp slopes, although individual farmsteads and nucleated settlements are in many cases located close to its base.

## Settlement and Built Character

The *Fovant and Chalke Escarpments (1B)* are largely devoid of settlement. However, old ox droves, hill forts (e.g. Winklebury above Berwick St John), barrows and the many grassy tracks carved into the hill slope reflect past patterns of land use. Even farm buildings are few, limited to the intensive agricultural units that are sited along the crest of the scarp near Fovant and screened by coniferous planting.

## Historic Environment

The *Fovant and Chalke Escarpments* represents the transitional zones between the *Ebble Chalk River Valley (5B)*, with its adjacent chalk dipslope and downs, and the Fovant Greensand terrace to the north and Cranborne Chase wooded chalk downland to the south. Most of the earthwork features of the scarps, such as cross-ridge dykes and round barrows, appear to extend into this zone from their main areas of distribution on the downs. The eight regimental badges carved into the chalk scarp mark the former military encampment straddling the villages of Fovant, Compton Chamberlayne and Sutton Mandeville. The key visible historic components are:

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<sup>15</sup> A restoration society has been founded to avoid the loss of these unique landscape features.

- The distribution of Bronze Age burial monuments along the edges of the escarpments.
- Later prehistoric/Romano-British landscape divisions incorporating cross-ridge dykes extending onto the scarp from the adjacent downs.
- Straight-sided fields representing late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure, interspersed with areas of ancient woodland and small modern plantations.
- Military badges and emblems carved into the chalk.

## EVALUATION

### Strength of Character

The *Fovant and Chalke Escarpments (IC)* is a landscape of **strong** character. The escarpment's strength of character comes not least from its prominent, unmistakable form and vast scale making it instantly recognisable, visible from long distances and distinctive from the adjacent landscapes. Much of the traditional (pastoral) land use has survived with some areas smooth and open but with woodland and scrub also making a significant contribution to character – occurring at the base, face and crest of the slope. Prominent hill figures – the Fovant Badges – are points of focus and important landmark features. There are however some detracting features – block coniferous plantations for example provide a stark visual contrast and encroachment of arable cultivation has changed the character. Despite the introduction of some elements less characteristic of the landscape type, (such as coniferous game covert planting), this landscape still retains a strong sense of place.

### Current Condition

The condition of the landscape is perceived to be **moderate**. There is evidence of erosion of the scarp face, perhaps as a result of surface water run-off, but also as a result of recreational pressures. For example, the condition of the Fovant Badges has suffered from natural weathering as well as visitor pressure. At the foot of the Fovant escarpment, the landform is scarred from previous quarrying activity – the exposed hollow of the chalk interrupting the smooth lines of the scarp face. Scrub invasion is evident across the escarpment.

### Past and Present Change

- Decline of deciduous woodland at the break of the slope has created a harsh transition between the scarp and adjacent terrace landscape with the arable fields of the terrace appearing to encroach up onto the slopes at the foot of the scarp.
- Previous extraction of chalk has left exposed hollows on the scarp face – interrupting the smoothness of the landform.
- Coniferous (game covert) planting has had a marked influence on landscape character. Further planting of a similar nature could dramatically change the intrinsic, open quality of the scarp and its rounded, smooth flowing form.

- Pressure from visitors due to the attraction of the Fovant Badges and proximity to the A30.

### **Possible Future Trends**

Increasing professionalisation of livestock farming is likely to result in low grazing pressure and further scrub encroachment on the scarps. Although scrub mosaics are a key feature of the landscape, unmanaged encroachment of scrub may threaten the extent/quality of the chalk grassland.

Areas of 'Open Country' proposed by the Countryside Agency under the CRoW Act could result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape. The prominent character of the scarp is likely to bring demand for construction of tall structures, including communication masts and possibly wind turbines.

Increased efficiency of production is likely to divert unwanted arable land, such as the steepest slopes and areas with thinnest soils, to environmental management, such as reversion to chalk grassland. The proposed Entry Level Scheme and the bringing together of the ESA and Countryside Stewardship Scheme into one 'Higher Level Scheme' in 2005 is likely to result in continued environmental management of the landscape. There are plans for the restoration of the Fovant Badges.

Future trends imply that landscape condition may be **improving** in this area.

### **Management Objective**

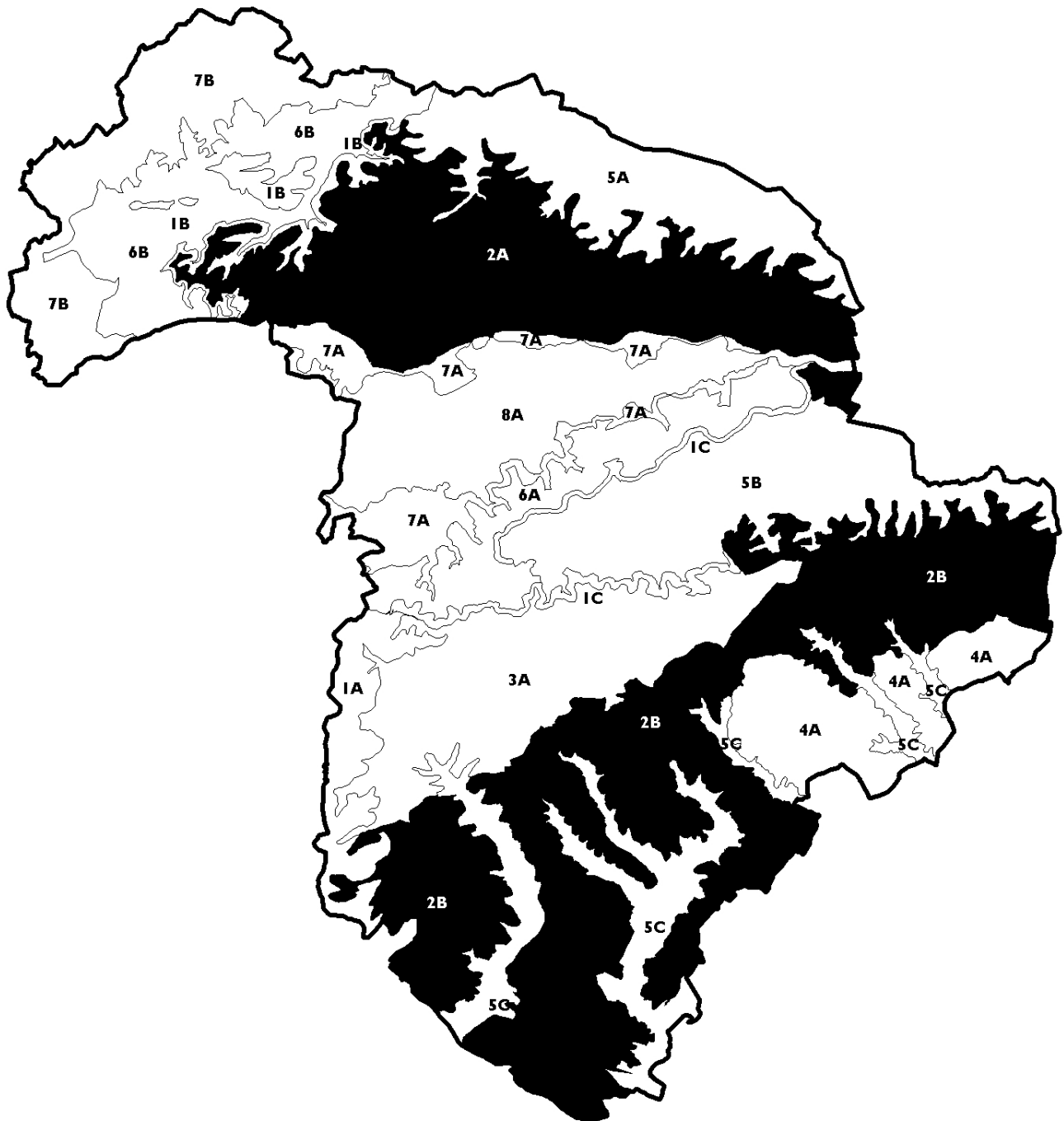
**The overall management objective is to conserve the large scale, open character of the escarpments including their smooth flowing, rounded landform, distinctive pattern of woodland, peaceful perceptual qualities and ecological value.**

- Conserve the distinct pattern of deciduous woodland particularly at the break of the slope where the woodland creates the distinction with the adjacent *Fovant Greensand Terrace (6B)*. Appropriate management of the woodland resource is a priority. Further planting of small coniferous coverts should be discouraged.
- Promote sustainable management of recreational access to proposed areas of Open Country and viewpoints, and monitor erosion as a result of visitor pressure.
- Continue with the planned restoration of the Fovant Badges.
- Maintain a balanced scrub and chalk grassland mosaic and encourage grazing management to maintain the intactness and ecological integrity of the chalk grassland
- Seek opportunities to diversify and restore other areas of chalk grassland with the intention of creating links to existing chalk grassland sites. This is a particular opportunity for areas on the steepest slopes which may be marginal for farming.
- Ensure that tall structure, such as communication masts and wind turbines do not create 'visual clutter' on the skyline of the scarp.





## 2. OPEN CHALK DOWNLAND



### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

2A West Wiltshire Downs

2B Southern Downland Belt



## **TYPE 2: OPEN CHALK DOWNLAND**

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### **Description**

Two large tracts of open chalk downland, divided by the Vale of Wardour, account for a large proportion of the AONB area. Unlike the often dramatic escarpments which are found along several of the boundaries of the chalk, and which represent the retreating faces of chalk strata, the chalk downs have a much more subdued landform of gently rolling spurs and dry valleys. Only where these valleys come close to an escarpment do they deepen to create convoluted, dividing valley systems. In geological terms, the open downs comprise the dip-slope of the chalk; a gently inclined landform representing the original chalk 'surface'.

These uninterrupted rolling hills and gentle slopes give a real sense of openness. The land is now predominantly under arable fields but with areas of chalk grassland surviving. *Open Chalk Downland* occurs in two extensive areas making it the most significant landscape type in terms of area covered.

### **Key Characteristics**

- Large-scale landform of broad rolling hills intercepted by a dry river valley.
- Dominated by an Upper Chalk surface geology with drift clay with flints capping on higher ground.
- A predominantly arable landscape divided into large, regular field units with straight-sided fields representing late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure.
- Remnant chalk grassland, ancient broadleaved woodland and Yew woodland are important habitats.
- Main roads cut across the undulating landscape linking major settlements on either side of the AONB.
- Large open skies and distant panoramic views.
- Low density scattered settlement of farmsteads and the occasional downland village.
- Numerous Neolithic burial and ritual monuments and Bronze Age Barrows.
- Later prehistoric and Romano-British ditches and defensive earthworks.



## 2A WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS OPEN CHALK DOWNLAND

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A large scale predominantly arable landscape of broad rolling hills.



Sheep graze on improved pasture.



Intensive agricultural land use means the landscape is divided into large scale, geometric fields.



The Terrace - a small tree covered escarpment south-west of Fonthill Bishop - provides an interesting landform feature.



Limestone and thatch are typical of the villages, for example at Teffont Magna.



Grovely wood and Great Ridge are two extensive areas of woodland that occupy the subtle ridgeline running west to east.



## 2A WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS OPEN CHALK DOWNLAND

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### Key Characteristics

- A large-scale landscape of broad rolling hills and undulating land separated by dry river valleys.
- Dominated by an Upper Chalk surface geology with drift clay with flints capping on higher ground.
- Grovely Wood Royal forest, and Stockton Wood, reflecting clay-with-flint soils
- Straight-sided fields representing late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure, with large-scale fields resulting from 20th century boundary loss.
- Settlement pattern comprising small villages, dispersed hamlets and isolated farmsteads. Villages tend to be located on the south facing slopes where the landform offers increased shelter.
- Broad leaved copses and clumps (round stands) are eye catching features on the hilltops.
- Isolated Neolithic long barrow burial monuments, and Bronze Age round barrows are visible in this ancient landscape.
- Series of Iron Age hillforts and defended enclosures overlooking the *Wylve Valley*, including the localised preserved prehistoric/Romano-British landscapes at Whitesheet Hill, Stockton Wood and Hamshill Ditches.
- Prehistoric/Romano-British landscape divisions such as Grim's Ditch re-used as a parish boundary, and cross-ridge dykes.
- The Roman road between Old Sarum and the Mendips follows the top of the downs.
- Fast moving transport corridors, A303 and A350, running across and through the landform in cuttings and on embankments.

### Location and Boundaries

Occupying an extensive area within the northern half of the AONB, the character area of the *West Wiltshire Downs Open Chalk Downland (2A)* extends from the village of Wilton in the east (sited on the edge of the AONB boundary) to Mere in the west. To the south lies the *Vale of Wardour (8A)* and to the north lies the deep chalk valley, the *Wylve Valley (5A)*. The north-west edge is defined by the distinctive *West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment (1B)*.

### Summary of Visual Character

The character area defined as the *West Wiltshire Open Chalk Downland (2A)* is a distinctive, large scale landscape covering an extensive area. With a surface geology of Upper Chalk, the landscape is typically characteristic of the Open Chalk Downland landscape type,

comprising a series of rolling hills and dry river valleys. Predominantly given over to arable farming, the intensive agricultural land use brings with it a simple land cover (vast tracts of arable production with few field boundaries). The landscape is not simple in terms of colour variation with the cultivation, growing, and harvesting of arable crops bringing much seasonal change.

Woodland, both large and small scale makes an important contribution to character – adding a sense of scale and distinctive visual interest. Although woodland interrupts some long distance views, there is a feeling of exposure and expanse across the entire landscape. This heightens the sense of remoteness as well as providing wide open views and the impression of being in an upland landscape. This is a quality enjoyed by many walkers and riders using the extensive network of rights of way that cross the downs.

With the exception of small hamlets and a village in the south of this character area, settlement is largely absent and this adds to the sense of remoteness and simplicity although this is disturbed by the visible movement along the main transport corridors – the A303 and A350.

## **PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**

### **Geology and Soils**

The solid geology of this character area is almost entirely defined by the Upper Chalk stratum of Seaford Chalk. Variation in surface geology is found at the west of the character area where Lewes Modular Chalk (also of the Upper Chalk stratum) is exposed towards the *West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment (1B)*. Here, the older Chalk stratum has been exposed as a result of the erosional influences of tributaries of the River Wylye. A further geological feature of this area is the clay with flints drift that caps the ridgeline between Great Ridge and Grovely Wood.

The underlying chalk geology has given rise to thin, calcareous soils known as Rendzinas. However, there are also pockets of brown earths associated with the clay with flints drift that caps the ridgeline. The clay with flints soil is silty and flinty, well drained and commonly supports woodland, as seen at Great Ridge and Grovely Wood.

### **Landform and Hydrology**

The uniformity of the Chalk gives rise to the characteristic downland landform of this character area - typical of the *Open Chalk Downland* landscape type, rising from approximately 130m above Ordnance Datum (AOD) in the east to 240m AOD in the west. The entire area comprises undulating and gently rolling hills that are both broad and convex in form and separated by shallow, dry river valleys. The undulating landform is particularly apparent to the east where a series of dry valleys on the dip slope of the chalk drain from north to south.

There also a number of level hill tops, or small plateaus, for example, to the north of the area at Cow Down and Whiten Hill and to the west at Rodmead Hill. Discernable ridgelines are also a feature - the ridge occurring to the east of White Sheet Hill gives the impression of a long chalk plateau. An interesting landform feature bringing localised variation is The



Terrace – a small, tree covered chalk escarpment to the south west of Fonthill Bishop. This sudden landform change provides unexpected views to the south.

Water is noticeably absent from this landscape with the exception of some minor tributaries occurring to the east, draining the dip slope south towards the River Nadder.

## Land Cover

As well as the extensive areas of arable crop production, woodland also plays a key role in defining the character of this landscape. Grovely Wood and Great Ridge are two extensive areas of woodland cover, clothing the subtle ridgeline that runs east to west from the northwest of Wilton to the northeast of Higher Pertwood. Both Grovely Wood and Great Ridge are a mosaic of deciduous, coniferous and mixed woodland and both include significant tracts of Ancient Woodland. Infill planting with coniferous blocks has resulted in the coniferous canopy standing above the broad leaf tree canopy.

Elsewhere across the downs woodland frequently occurs, either as small farm woods or geometric conifer plantations. Copses and clumps of trees are a particularly distinctive feature of the downland landscape, crowning a number of hilltops. These small woodland groups add variety and interest to an otherwise homogenous landscape and provide a sense of scale by acting as focal points and bringing some degree of enclosure.

Other tree cover within this landscape occurs along the main arterial route – the A303 where Leylandii shelterbelts mark the perimeter of service facilities such as cafes. There are also a number of areas where small pockets of new shelterbelt/copse planting is occurring.

Unimproved chalk grassland is still a feature of this downland landscape particularly to the north of the character area.

## Biodiversity

Although this character area is dominated by arable agriculture, it has retained substantial ecological value, and supports a variety of habitat types, several examples of which are considered to be of national importance. In total, eight Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) fall wholly or partly within the character area, one of which, namely Wylve and Church Dean Down is also designated as a National Nature Reserve (NNR).

The majority of the remaining unimproved chalk grassland is associated with the northern edge of the character area, and extends onto the north facing slope of *the Wylve River Valley* (5A). These sites are relatively large and include Burcombe Down (SSSI), Edsbury Down (SSSI), and Stockton Wood and Down (SSSI). Among the outstanding ecological features of these sites include the third largest colony of the nationally rare tuberous thistle (*Cirsium tuberosum*) in the British Isles, which is found at Wylve and Church Dean Down (NNR), and a colony of the rare early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) found at Edsbury Down (SSSI).

Away from the northern boundary of the character area, there are only three small reserves with SSSI status. The first, Charnage Down Chalk Pit (SSSI) is designated for its geological importance. The second, Baverstock Juniper Bank (SSSI) supports small remnant areas of chalk grassland, but is most notable for its rich scrub communities containing sixteen woody species, and including a large colony of juniper (*Juniperus communis*) a declining and UK BAP

priority species. Lastly, Tytherington Down (SSSI) is a relatively small area of unimproved chalk grassland, which supports a small colony of the tuberous thistle (*Cirsium tuberosum*).

In addition to sites of national importance for nature conservation, the area also supports two significant blocks of ancient oak (*Quercus robur*) dominated woodland. These woodlands, namely Great Ridge and Grovely Wood are associated with elevated plateaus where the chalk is capped by clay with flints. Although not considered to be of national importance, these woods are of substantial ecological value for a variety of flora and fauna, with Great Ridge for example supporting a number of notable bird species including nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) and nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*).

The table below highlights the features of key ecological interest for each statutory site.

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha)	Summary of importance
Baverstock Juniper Bank	SSSI	2.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Woody species-rich scrub, including large colony of juniper (<i>Juniperus communis</i>), a UK BAP priority species</li> <li>Some remnant unimproved chalk grassland</li> </ul>
Burcombe Down (46% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2A)	SSSI	47.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics</li> <li>Colony of juniper (<i>Juniperus communis</i>) a UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Charnage Down Chalk Pit	SSSI	3.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Geologically important site</li> </ul>
Edsbury Down (39% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2A)	SSSI	53.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics</li> <li>Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> </ul>
Stockton Wood and Down (71% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2A)	SSSI	61.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mosaics of unimproved chalk grassland, scrub and woodland</li> <li>Large colony of juniper (<i>Juniperus communis</i>) a UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Tytherington Down	SSSI	5.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unimproved chalk grassland</li> <li>Small colony of tuberous thistle (<i>Cirsium tuberosum</i>) a nationally rare plant species in the British Isles</li> </ul>
Whitesheet Hill (26% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2A)	SSSI	136.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive area of unimproved chalk and mesotrophic grassland with scrub mosaics</li> <li>Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>) a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), and UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>

Wylve and Church Dean Down (29% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2A)	NNR SSSI	34.0 80.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive area of unimproved plateau chalk grassland with scrub mosaics</li> <li>• Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>) a species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and UK BAP priority species</li> <li>• Large colony of tuberous thistle (<i>Cirsium tuberosum</i>) a nationally rare plant species in the British Isles</li> </ul>
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## HUMAN INFLUENCES

### Evidence of Past Social Structure

The Neolithic causewayed enclosure at Whitesheet Hill is among the earliest visible evidence of the prehistoric societies that exploited both the downland and the wider landscape. This communal monument, the setting for various forms of social gathering, represents a link to the more dispersed groups whose individual territories may have been marked by long barrow burial mounds. The frequent round barrow burial mounds of the Early Bronze Age, which provide evidence suggesting a greater emphasis on individual power and status, point to major social and economic changes which continued into the Iron Age. The settlement enclosures as at Stockton Wood, Cow Down and Hamshill Ditches, some with associated field systems, indicate an intensity of agricultural exploitation of the downs accompanied by an increasing concern for the defence of land and territory. This is most clearly illustrated by the Grim's Ditch linear earthwork, the frequent of cross-ridge dykes, and the string of hillforts and defended enclosures overlooking the Wylve valley, such as Whitesheet Hill, Bilbury Rings, Hanging Langford, and Grovely Castle. Following the hiatus of the post-Roman period there developed new feudal social structures, centred at locations off the downs and leaving less visibly surviving remains on the downs, other than the pattern of small dispersed hamlets and farmsteads.

### Field patterns, boundaries and predominant date of inclosure

The landscape was largely cleared of woods as a result of prehistoric and Romano-British farming, although the two large areas of woodland and modern plantation remain. The prehistoric field systems may have been re-used temporarily in the medieval period, and Grim's Ditch certainly retained some significance, being incorporated in a historic land boundary and surviving as a modern parish boundary. However, during most of the medieval and post-medieval periods the downs were used largely as unenclosed grazing land, an essential component of the predominant sheep-and-corn agriculture, although there may have been some small-scale and temporary encroachment of cultivation onto marginal land. From the late 18th century there was some inclosure and burnbaking, a method of turf removal in preparation for short-lived or intermittent cultivation, evident in a number of bake field and place-names, and by c. 1810 the downland was probably fully enclosed. The present pattern of large straight-sided and predominantly arable fields is the product of 20th century agricultural intensification.

## **Land Use and Recreation**

This is an intensive agricultural landscape with the majority of the land given over to arable crops. Fields are large, geometric and of regular shape typifying intensive, mechanised arable production. Although hedgerows do exist these are largely denuded and have been repeatedly replaced by post and wire fencing. The large fields units and the lack of many field boundaries compounds the sense of openness across the downs with few obstacles to interrupt far-reaching views.

There are two main 'A' roads crossing the Open Chalk Downland - the A303 and A350. The former follows a broadly east - west route with the latter running north to south. These roads run perpendicular to one another in a cross formation. The absence of roads within the northern half of the character area is distinctive and adds to the sense of remoteness, with the lack of through routes reflecting the absence of settlement. To the south, the opposite is true. Here, there are a number of secondary roads, the B3089 linking the hamlets and villages of Teffont Magna, Chilmark, Fonthill Bishop and Hindon and other minor feeder roads connecting the settlements to the main arterial routes.

In recreational terms, this is a landscape popular with walkers, ramblers and horse riders. Of significance are the recreational paths of the Wessex Ridgeway and Monarch's Way. In addition, there are a large number of rights of way that criss-cross the landscape. Grovely Wood forms an extensive area of Registered Common Land and there are also number of smaller adjacent sites of proposed Open Country that link to this common land.

## **Historic Development of Settlement and Relationship with the Landscape**

Despite the presence of the Whitesheet Hill Neolithic enclosure, evidence for the pattern of prehistoric settlement on the downs is scarce until the Iron Age. The complex of enclosures, linear ditches and lynchets focused on the Stockton Earthworks, representing settlements, land boundaries and extensive field systems, indicate the close relationship between settlement, production and landscape that continued through the Iron Age, with the development of defended hillforts, and into the Romano-British period. In the post-Roman period the focus of settlement retreated to less exposed locations off the downs, and the settlement pattern that subsequently developed, and which survives to a degree in the present landscape, is one that reflects the evolution, ascendancy and decline of the feudal manor in the Saxon, medieval and post-medieval periods. Beyond the two main settlements at Hindon and Chilmark, on the edge of the downs, there are a number of small, dispersed hamlets and farmsteads.

## **Settlement and Built Character**

In the north of the character area, built form and settlement are notably absent with the exception of the occasional farmstead concealed within small copses which also act as windbreaks. The occasional dew-pond, man made ponds lined with puddled clay, point to the historic importance of water, both for people and their animals. This low density settlement can be attributed to the bleak, exposed nature of the landscape and the lack of water supplies. To the south, settlement is much more common and relates to the sheltered conditions on the south facing dip slope and proximity to water. Here the village and hamlets of Hindon, Fonthill Bishop, Chilmark and Teffont Magna sit at the head of the River Nadder tributary valleys. With the exception of Teffont Magna these settlements have

a nucleated form, growing around crossroads on the B3089. Hindon was established around 1220 following a contemporary trend in establishing new boroughs as commercial ventures with a market, fair and associated church. The weekly market was laid out along the line of the present wide High Street, with market stalls in front of the cottages and burgage plots behind.

The open downs are characterised by agricultural buildings of red brick and flint with red clay tiles. The southern villages are characterised by the local limestone (Chilmark Stone), such as Teffont Magna, with thatch, slate or red clay tile roofs.

## Historic Environment

Although the West Wiltshire Downs do not match the preserved ancient landscape of Salisbury Plain to the north, or Cranborne Chase to the south, the localised preservation of a range of earthworks suggest that this area was exploited in similar ways. The combination, for instance, of Neolithic causewayed enclosure, Bronze Age round barrows, Iron Age enclosed settlement and late prehistoric/Romano-British cross-ridge dykes on Whitesheet Hill points to a continuity of economic, social and strategic roles for the downs. A comparable group of features, including Iron Age and Romano-British settlement enclosures and associated field systems, Grim's Ditch linear earthwork and the Roman Road from Old Sarum to the Mendips, are found around Stockton Wood. Elsewhere, other earthwork features, including areas of field system, appear largely isolated in a landscape dominated by the large scale fields characteristic of the recent amalgamation of late 18th/early 19th century enclosed fields.

## EVALUATION

### Strength of Character

This strength of character of this landscape is judged to be **strong**. The strength of character is largely derived from the distinctive large scale smooth rolling landform and strongly exposed character allowing distant, panoramic views. Although the regularity of the arable farming does not appear to respond to the sinuosity of the underlying landform, this large scale arable production imparts a strong character to the landscape. The scale and prominence of the areas of woodland at Grovely Wood and Great Ridge, which are visible from long distances, act as important landmark features. The ecological richness and surviving archaeological features also contribute to this distinct and recognisable landscape.

### Current Condition

Although this landscape is actively farmed, the intensive farming methods mean that some landscape features have declined. For example, hedgerows are fragmented, gappy or over-managed with post and wire fencing often acting as infill where hedgerow sections have been lost. However, the intensively farmed nature of the landscape also means that there are few areas of under-used or derelict land. This landscape is largely unsettled but where settlement occurs, visual unity is afforded by the consistent use of materials and good condition of the built environment. Overall landscape condition is **moderate**.

## Past and Present Change

- Conversion from sheep grazing on unimproved grassland to intensive arable production is one of the most dramatic changes to have occurred across the AONB over the past three centuries.
- The past 20 years has seen a substantial increase in the number of game coverts grown by commercial shoots.
- New woodland belt planting is visible which may, when mature, begin to reduce the distinctive open character of the landscape.
- There is pressure for development and facilities along transport corridors e.g. the A303 and A305. Development and shelterbelt planting along transport corridors alters views across the downs and diminishes the sense of openness for those travelling through the landscape.
- The loss of features such as hedgerows, combined with varied approaches to field boundary management affects the visual integrity of the landscape.
- Intensive farming practices including a shift from spring sown to autumn sown crops and more intensive grassland management has resulted in changes in the visual character of the landscape as well as a decline in farmland birds.
- Pressure for residential development is changing the character of the small nucleated villages and hamlets in places.

## Possible Future Trends

A potential fall in the profitability of the arable sector, as a result of the CAP reform, is likely to result in more marginal arable land being abandoned from production and reverted to chalk grassland or woodland with the help of agri-environment schemes. This could result in increased landscape diversity. There may also be diversification into other crops such as biomass crops and diversification of farm businesses into secondary enterprises such as farm house accommodation or commercial shoots. These new land uses may result in increased sense of enclosure. .

Areas of 'Open Country' and 'Registered Common Land' proposed by the Countryside Agency under the CRoW Act could result in erosion and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape.

It is likely that there will be pressure for development of tall structures, such as communication masts and wind energy developments in this elevated, open and windswept landscape.

Future trends imply that, although landscape character may change, landscape condition is likely to be **stable** in this area.

## Management Objective

**Overall, management of this landscape should conserve the simple, open character of the landscape, long views, sense of scale and remoteness. Management should also seek to restore key features that have been lost or are**

**declining such as areas of chalk grassland and the reinstatement of denuded hedgerows.**

- Conserve the open character of the downs and retain the simple land cover.
- Encourage restoration of chalk grassland particularly in areas that are connected to existing SSSI sites, notably in the northern part of the character area.
- Promote appropriate management of arable farmland to create a wildlife-rich habitat supporting farmland birds. This will include retaining areas of fallow land and maintaining an unploughed margin around fields plus management of hedgerows.
- Discourage unsympathetic ribbon development and associated planting (such as Leylandii hedges) along transport corridors in order to conserve open views and safeguard the character of the built environment.
- Manage the distinctive deciduous woodland clumps and consider a programme of replanting to maintain these as features.
- Ensure that the development of tall structures, such as communication masts and wind energy developments, are in scale with the landscape and do not threaten the setting of important archaeological earthwork features.





## 2B SOUTHERN DOWNLAND BELT OPEN CHALK DOWNLAND

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A large scale open landscape of broad rolling hills forming a gentle chalk dip slope.



The landscape becomes more undulating to the west where panoramic and long distance views are typical.



Coniferous blocks create harsh edges - a stark contrast to the gentle slopes.



Mature beech trees line this stretch of the B3082 forming an impressive avenue.



Tumuli provide visual and archaeological interest.



Ackling Dyke is a Roman Road that is clearly visible in the landscape today.



## 2B SOUTHERN DOWNLAND BELT

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### Key Characteristics

- A large-scale landscape of broad rolling hills and gentle slopes cut to the south by a series of distinct river valleys.
- Dominated by an Upper Chalk geology with drift clay with flints capping on higher ground.
- A predominantly arable landscape divided into large, regular field units with straight-sided fields representing late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure.
- Mixed woodland is a significant feature to the west where the land is more undulating.
- Settlement is scarce (predominantly dispersed farms to the east and south) emphasising the remoteness of the landscape.
- The A354 runs in a north east direction from Blandford Forum to Salisbury and is a prominent feature creating a corridor of movement.
- Numerous Neolithic burial and ritual monuments, such as the Wor Barrow, the Knowlton henge complex and the Dorset Cursus, and large groupings of Bronze Age round barrows, as on Wyke Down and Oakley Down.
- Later prehistoric and Romano-British earthworks including Badbury Rings and Buzbury Rings hillforts, linear ditches and defensive earthworks, such as Grim's Ditch and Bokerley Dyke.
- Roman road from Old Sarum to Badbury Rings forms a straight line in the landscape.
- A large skyscape and panoramic, distant views to the west.

### Location and Boundaries

This character area extends across the southern part of the AONB. It is bound to the north by *Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland (3A)* and the *Ebble River Valley (5B)*. The *Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys (5C)* cut through the downland landscape. In addition the *Martin-Whitsbury Downland Hills (4A)* define the eastern half of the southern boundary. Here the landscape becomes more undulating, wooded and enclosed – marking a distinct change from the open downland slopes.

### Summary of Visual Character

*The Southern Downland Belt (2B)* is a large scale landscape with a solid geology of Upper Chalk giving rise to shallow well-drained calcareous silty soils. Gentle slopes and the convex profile of the shallow ridges allow intensive arable farming which is the dominant land use. The uniformity of arable fields creates a simple land cover, however in terms of colour the landscape is rich with a range of arable crops and associated seasonal changes.

Woodland is more significant to the west of the character area where the land becomes more undulating creating a greater sense of enclosure. When they occur, coniferous blocks and shelterbelts gain unusual prominence - their presence making a stark contrast to the gently sloping landscape.

The scarcity of settlement and uniformity of landcover emphasises the open character of the landscape. Villages are located only where the landform provides more shelter, such as below the Hill Fort at Whitsbury. Otherwise, the only buildings evident are occasional agricultural barns scattered at low density throughout the area.

## **PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**

### **Geology and Soils**

As with the *West Wiltshire Downs Open Chalk Downland (2A)* the solid surface geology of this character area is almost entirely defined by Upper Chalk stratum. It is this geology that is responsible for the distinctiveness of the downland scenery. This Chalk gives rise to brown rendzina soils that are typical of downland landscapes.

In places, such as at Manswood, Little Yews and Great Yews, plateau drift (clay with flints) geology supports loamy brown earth soils. As in *West Wiltshire Downs Open Chalk Downland (2A)* this well drained silty and flinty soil is associated with deciduous and coniferous woodland. Flint is visible in places on the surface soil of ploughed fields.

### **Landform and Hydrology**

The landform of the southern dip slope gently slopes towards the south east. Unlike the *West Wiltshire Downs (2A)*, which include a series of dry, very gentle valleys, these downs are cut by a series of distinct river valleys defined as a separate character area - the *Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys (5C)*.

The characteristic downland landform comprises gently rolling hills and slopes separated by river valleys. To the west the land is more undulating with a greater sense of enclosure, this corresponds to the approach of the *Melbury to Blandford Chalk Escarpment (1A)*.

### **Land Cover**

Today, very little of the original chalk grassland remains and the majority of the area is under arable cultivation with some smaller areas of improved pasture and remnant chalk grassland. Pockets of woodland occur corresponding to the loamy brown earth soils that overlie the Clay with Flint drift deposits. The landscape is more wooded towards the valleys and towards the west of the character area. Coniferous woodland blocks also feature; their harsh edges can sometimes intrude on this otherwise smooth and simple landscape. However they can also add points of interest within the vast expanses of arable fields.

### **Biodiversity**

Although the *Southern Downland Belt* is characterised by intensive and widespread arable agriculture, the area has retained a significant number of sites of nature conservation importance. This includes twelve sites designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which fall wholly or partly within the character area. Chalk grassland is the most

characteristic habitat type, but a variety of other habitats are also represented, including ancient broadleaved woodland, Yew woodland, river valley and neutral meadow.

Nationally important chalk grassland sites include Blandford Camp (SSSI), Clearbury Down (SSSI), and Martin and Tidpit Down (NNR). Blandford Camp (SSSI) is notable for supporting the largest Dorset populations of two nationally scarce plant species namely dwarf sedge (*Carex humilis*) and bastard toadflax (*Thesium humifusum*), and also for its colony of the rare early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*).

Small blocks of ancient woodland are generally widely scattered across the southern downland belt. However a large complex of ancient woodlands, known collectively as Chetterwood, occupies the high ground between the Rivers Tarrant and Allen, where deposits of clay with flints overlie the chalk. Among these woodlands is Oakhill Coppice (SSSI) which is predominantly of the oak (*Quercus robur*) – bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) – bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) type, and supports a rich lichen flora, including species with restricted distribution in the UK. Other notable sites include Great Yews (SSSI), which has also been designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) due to the restricted distribution of this habitat type within the UK and throughout Europe. The site represents one of the two best examples of this habitat type in Wiltshire.

The table below highlights the features of key ecological interest for each statutory site.

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha)	Summary of importance
Blandford Camp	SSSI	28.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unimproved largely plateau chalk grassland with scrub mosaics</li> <li>Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> </ul>
Clearbury Down	SSSI	31.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics</li> </ul>
Great Yews	SAC SSSI	28.7 29.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive area of almost pure Yew (<i>Taxus baccata</i>) woodland, a habitat listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex I) and a UK BAP priority habitat</li> </ul>
Handcock Bottom (10% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	54.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ancient woodland with rich associated lichen flora</li> <li>Unimproved chalk grassland</li> <li>Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>) a species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Knighton Downs and Woods (10% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	203.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, scrub and semi-natural woodland</li> <li>Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>) a species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Martin and Tidpit Down (50% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	NNR SSSI	342.0 379.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, chalk heath and scrub</li> <li>Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> <li>Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>) a species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and UK BAP priority species</li> <li>Population of the silver-spotted skipper (<i>Hesperia comma</i>) a nationally rare butterfly in Britain, and a UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Moors River System (0.1% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	296.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>River system noted for its exceptional diversity of aquatic and wetland plants and rich assemblages of aquatic invertebrates</li> <li>Populations of bullhead (<i>Cottus gobio</i>) and brook lamprey (<i>Lametra planeri</i>), both species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II)</li> </ul>
Oakhills Coppice	SSSI	14.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ancient woodland particularly important for communities of epiphytic lichens</li> </ul>
Odstock Down (15% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	12.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unimproved chalk grassland</li> </ul>
Pentridge Down (23% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	77.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, acid grassland and scrub</li> <li>Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> <li>Colony of juniper (<i>Juniperus communis</i>), a UK BAP priority species</li> <li>Population of fairy shrimp (<i>Chirocephalus diaphanus</i>) a nationally rare crustacean in the British Isles</li> </ul>
Sutton Meadows (23% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	4.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Neutral to mildly acidic hay meadow</li> </ul>
Toyd Down and Quarry	SSSI	7.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unimproved and pioneer chalk grassland communities</li> </ul>

## **HUMAN INFLUENCES**

### **Evidence of Past Social Structure**

The wide range of monuments on these open downs provides an unparalleled insight into social developments from the Neolithic period. The concentration of Neolithic and Bronze Age mortuary, burial and ceremonial monuments, including long barrows and round barrows, henges and pit alignments, in a landscape dominated by the 10km long Dorset Curses, indicates that this was not a normal prehistoric landscape but one in which certain areas were imbued, for millennia, with a distinct symbolic significance.

The scale of the features (as on Salisbury Plain to the north) suggests social developments in which communal ritual developed from being an expression of social cohesion among a dispersed early farming population, into the dominant economic force, absorbing, directing and transforming the surpluses of economic production. It is evident, however, that by the end of the Bronze Age power no longer depended on the possession of ideological and symbolic status, but was increasingly linked to the physical enclosure, control and ultimately defence of land and territory, as indicated by the development of extensive field systems, enclosures, boundary earthworks and hillforts.

The imposition on the prehistoric landscape of the Roman road, Ackling Dyke, between Old Sarum and Badbury Rings (which then split south to Poole, west to Dorchester, and north into the Nadder valley) contrasts with the overall continuity of Romano-British agricultural settlement and production on the downs. The siting of Saxon burial monuments in relation to earlier features, as on Oakley Down, points to their continuing significance in the landscape.

### **Field Patterns, Boundaries and Predominant date of Enclosure**

Although the landscape was largely cleared of woods as a result of prehistoric and Romano-British farming, earthwork boundaries from these periods, such as Grim's Ditch and Bokerley Dyke, may have retained a significance and use into the medieval period, the latter marking the modern boundary between Hampshire and Dorset. During most of the medieval and post-medieval periods the downs were used largely as unenclosed grazing land, an essential component of the predominant sheep-and-corn agriculture. The present pattern of medium to large straight-sided and predominantly arable fields is characteristic of late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure, followed by 20th century agricultural intensification. Only Martin Down remained unenclosed, commoner's rights surviving until the late 20th century.

### **Land Use and Recreation**

Unhindered by physical constraints, this is an intensive agricultural landscape, dominated by mechanised arable production, with limited areas of grassland remaining. Many of these cereal fields are very large, often regular in shape, divided by hedges which are seldom little more than narrow brambly strips or banks and which appear insignificant against the expanse of the fields they border. Other hedges are more substantial, though often gappy and/or outgrown. Replacement by post and wire fencing is also apparent.

Kingston Lacy is an important feature - a National Trust house and garden set in wooded parkland. Badbury Rings, an Iron Age Hill Fort is a popular visitor attraction, drawing

visitors from the nearby Wimborne Minster. The stretch of B3082 which links Badbury Rings and Kingston Lacy is lined with mature beech trees which form an impressive avenue and approach to both of these visitor attractions. Other historic locations that attract visitors are Clearbury Ring, Bokerley Ditch, the Dorset Cursus and Ackling Dyke, the latter being publicly accessible along most of its route. The character area is well served by rights of way. The Jubilee Trail passes Pimperne before dipping in and out of the *Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys (5C)* and their associated picturesque settlements. Martin Down is an area of Registered Common Land, a popular recreational area and is heavily used particularly in summer. In addition to Martin Down, there are a number of other areas of Registered Common Land and some small areas of proposed Open Country as mapped in draft by the Countryside Agency.

The area is crossed by the A354 increasing the access to this area from Salisbury and Blandford. This is a straight road, partly Roman in origin, which rises and falls as it crosses the succession of gentle ridges and shallow valleys, together with a network of equally straight minor roads which link the valley villages with the downs above. The B3082 runs parallel to the south west boundary of the AONB from Blandford Forum to Wimborne Minster and also provides visitor access into the landscape.

### **Historic Development of Settlement and Relationship with the Landscape**

The scale of prehistoric activity suggests a relatively large population, with the distribution of long barrows, for instance, possibly symbolising a group's claim to settled and productive land. There is, however, little direct evidence of permanent settlement before the Middle Bronze Age and it is possible that there was a significant element of transhumance within a pastoral economy, particularly in the Early Bronze Age. The landscape remained densely settled during the Iron Age, and in the Romano-British period when the agricultural economy was stimulated by the military and urban markets accessed via the major communication route of Ackling Dyke, the former Iron Age hillfort at Badbury Rings becoming a focal point for redistribution in the Romano-British landscape. In the medieval period, however, settlement gravitated to the adjacent valleys and the downs have since remained sparsely populated. Today settlement is characterised by low density scattered farms and downland hamlets.

### **Settlement and Built Character**

The extreme east and south of the character area is largely unpopulated, farms, hamlets and villages favouring the sheltered, watered locations of the valleys that form the deeper folds of the dip slope. The villages of Chettle and Farnham lie at the heads of *Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys*. Sixpenny Handley, Blandford Camp and Pimperne are the only other settlements in the area. There is a variety of building age and style in the nucleated village of Sixpenny Handley. Brick, painted brick and flint with clay or slate tiles are distinctive. Pimperne is also a nucleated settlement but is dominated by post 1960s development of bungalows. Blandford Camp is a military base on the downs above Blandford Forum – military vehicles and aircraft are apparent.

### **Historic Environment**

The wealth of archaeological remains on the downs, including the Dorset Cursus, give a unique historic character to the landscape. The combination of Neolithic and Early Bronze



Age funerary, communal and ceremonial monuments with evidence of later prehistoric and Romano-British field systems, open and enclosed settlements, hillforts and earthwork boundaries, points to the long term development of the downland landscape's economic, social and strategic roles. There is, however, a marked discontinuity between those features and the present pattern of parliamentary type arable fields which now dominate the downs.

## EVALUATION

### Strength of Character

The strength of character of this area is judged to be **moderate**. Although the elements making up the character of the landscape are recognisable, overall the combination and patterning appears less consistent and therefore less distinct than the *West Wiltshire Downs Open Chalk Downland*. It is essentially a large scale landscape of broad rolling hills mainly under arable production with woodland occurring on steeper slopes. As with the *West Wiltshire Open Chalk Downland*, there are a number of sites of nature conservation importance including a range of habitats from woodland to chalk grassland and scrub mosaics. There is wealth of archaeological remains on the downs. Settlement is geographically distinct – associated with the dipslope valleys.

### Current Condition

Although this landscape is actively farmed, and therefore managed, the intensive farming methods mean that landscape features have declined. For example, hedgerows are fragmented, gappy or over-managed with post and wire fencing often acting as infill where hedgerow sections have been lost. However, the intensively farmed nature of the landscape also means that there are few areas of under-used or derelict land. This landscape is largely unsettled but where settlement occurs, visual unity is afforded by the consistent use of materials and the good condition of the built environment. Overall landscape condition is **moderate**.

### Past and Present Change

- Conversion from sheep grazing on unimproved grassland to intensive arable production is one of the most dramatic changes to have occurred across the AONB in the past.
- There is evidence of pressure for built development along major transport corridors e.g. the A354. Leylandii planting, as a visual screen, has an alien appearance in this landscape.
- The loss of features such as hedgerows, combined with inconsistent field boundary management has led to a reduction in the visual integrity of the landscape.
- Where coniferous blocks of planting have been introduced, for example at Blackbush Down, these create harsh edges in the landscape.
- Intensive farming practices including a shift from spring sown to autumn sown crops and more intensive grassland management has resulted in changes in the visual character of the landscape as well as a decline in farmland birds.

## Possible Future Trends

A potential fall in the profitability of the arable sector, as a result of the CAP reform, is likely to result in more marginal arable land being abandoned from production and reverted to chalk grassland or woodland with the help of agri-environment schemes. This could result in increased landscape diversity. There may also be diversification into other crops such as biomass crops and diversification of farm businesses into secondary enterprises such as farm house accommodation or commercial shoots. These land uses may result in an increased sense of enclosure as a result of the presence of woodland and biomass crops that would block views across the landscape.

Areas of 'Open Country' and 'Registered Common Land' proposed by the Countryside Agency under the CRoW Act and the proximity to populations of surrounding towns could result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape.

It is likely that there will be pressure for development of tall structures, such as communication masts and wind energy developments in this elevated, open and windswept landscape.

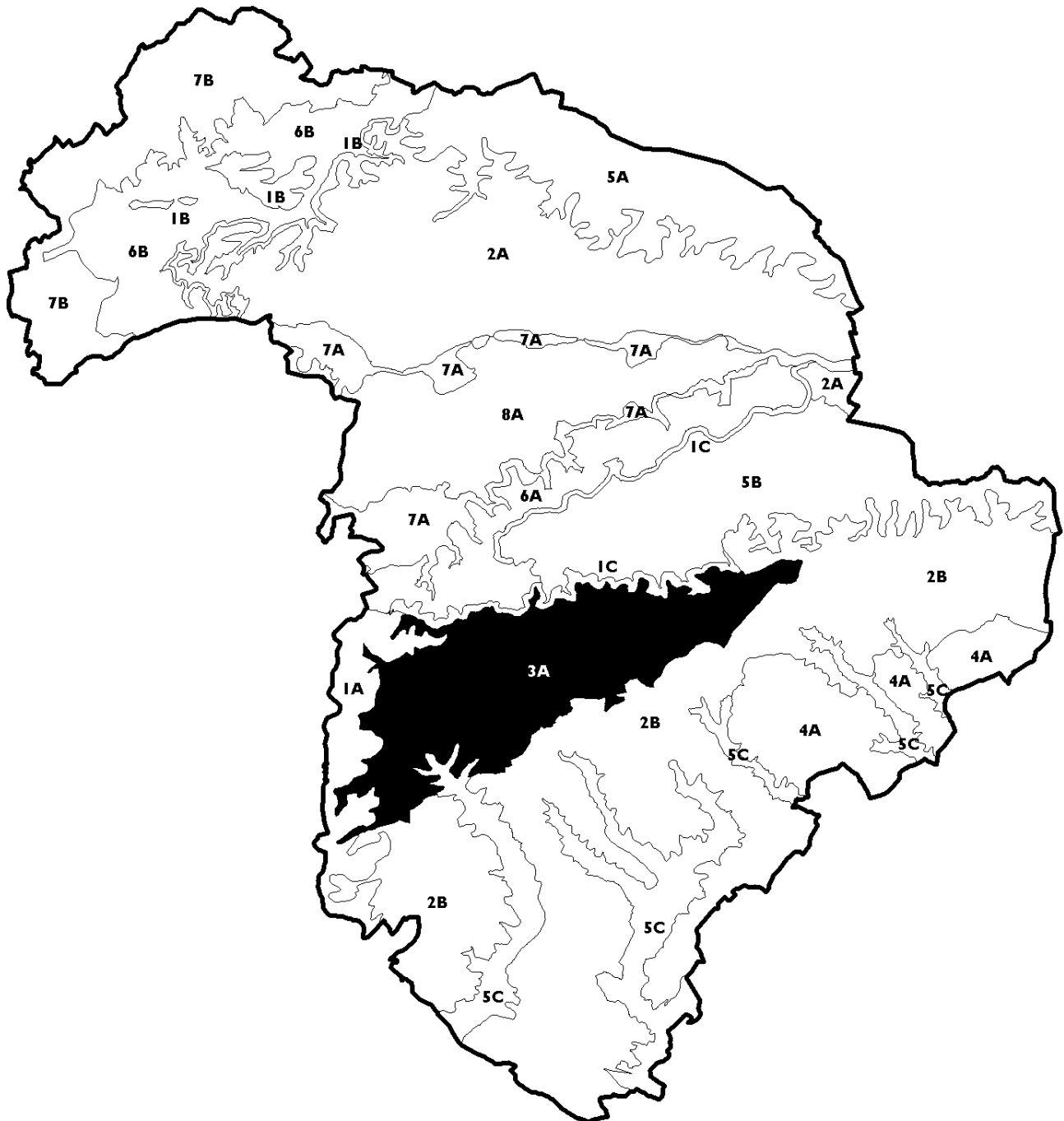
Future trends imply that, although landscape character may change, landscape condition is likely to be **stable** in this area.

## Management Objective

**Overall, management of this landscape should endeavour to conserve the distinct downland landscape of broad rolling hills and gentle slopes whilst improving the condition of many of its characteristic features to increase visual unity and sense of integrity and make the combination and pattern of elements more distinct.**

- Monitor development along the A354 to ensure planting and built form is both sympathetic and complementary to landscape character.
- Conserve the distinctive open character of the landscape and the long ranging views - especially from roads.
- Ensure further pylons, masts and other vertical elements such as wind turbines are carefully sited and the number restricted to avoid visual clutter and further interruption of the characteristic open views.
- Consider opportunities for extending and linking native habitats such as chalk grassland, ancient broadleaved oak woodland, yew woodland, and neutral meadows.
- Consider opportunities for deciduous planting around the edges of coniferous blocks to reduce their angular, geometric shape.
- Conserve integrity of archaeological features and promote cultural value perhaps through interpretation for visitors.
- Promote appropriate management of arable farmland to create a wildlife-rich habitat supporting farmland birds. This will include retaining areas of fallow land and maintaining an unploughed margin around fields plus management of hedgerows.

### 3. WOODED CHALK DOWNLAND



#### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

3A Cranborne Chase



## TYPE 3: WOODED CHALK DOWNLAND

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### Description

The *wooded chalk downland* landscape type is similar to the *open chalk downland* landscape type in terms of its underlying geology, elevation, hydrology and early history. The most distinguishing feature is its woodland cover which is present in the form of large woods, shelter belts, copses, and clumps creating a series of enclosed spaces or 'rooms' surrounded by trees. This creates a downland mosaic of woodland, grassland and arable land that wraps around the steeply undulating landscape of upstanding chalk ridges and deeply incised combes. There is just one area of *wooded chalk downland* in the AONB - Cranborne Chase.

### Key Characteristics

- An elevated downland landscape with dramatic intersecting combe valleys and rounded upstanding ridges.
- Dominated by an Upper Chalk surface geology with drift clay with flints capping higher ground.
- A well wooded landscape with large woods, shelter belts, copses, and clumps creating a series of enclosed spaces or 'rooms' surrounded by trees.
- Mosaic of unenclosed downland, improved grassland and arable fields, dating from 19th century inclosure, between the woodland.
- Chalk grassland and ancient woodland provide important nature conservation habitats.
- Typically low density, scattered settlement of individual farmsteads with the occasional downland village or Medieval hunting lodge.
- Visible archaeological features including Neolithic long barrows, Bronze Age round barrows, prehistoric to Romano-British earthworks and field systems.
- Panoramic views from upstanding chalk ridges to adjacent ridges and into valleys/combes.



## 3A CRANBORNE CHASE WOODED CHALK DOWNLAND

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Deeply incised combe valleys provide a sense of drama at Quarry Bottom and Ashcombe Bottom.



Beech woodland provides a sense of enclosure and changing seasonal colour.



Settlement is scarce, but where it exists lies sheltered by landform and vegetation.



Large scale arable and pastoral fields cuts across the strongly undulating landform.



The regularity of coniferous plantations interrupt the flowing lines of the landform.



Beech clumps adorn the sloping land - this example is south of Rushmore Estate.





## 3A CRANBORNE CHASE

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### Key Characteristics

- An elevated downland, deeply eroded to create a dramatic series of combe valleys and ridges.
- Dominated by an Upper Chalk surface geology with drift clay with flints capping on higher ground.
- A mosaic of both pastoral and arable land uses with arable dominating to the south and east.
- Medieval Royal hunting grounds, defined by surviving park pale, with large areas of surviving managed woodland.
- Shelterbelts, copses, clumps and parkland trees, contribute to distinct estate and parkland character, particularly around the Rushmore Estate.
- Beech avenues and beech hedgerows provide dramatic seasonal colour change.
- Chalk grassland and ancient woodland provide important nature conservation habitats.
- Neolithic long barrows and numerous Bronze Age round barrows, particularly concentrated around Tollard Royal.
- Surviving earthworks indicating late prehistoric to Romano-British settlements and field systems, cross-ridge dykes and linear earthworks, such Grim's Ditch and Bokerley Dyke.
- Low density settlement pattern with few villages and dispersed farmsteads, with 19th century inclosure.
- Panoramic views from Win Green over adjacent escarpment and low-lying terrace and valley landscapes.

### Location and Boundaries

The character area of *Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland (3A)* is located within the southern half of the AONB. The *Melbury to Blandford Chalk Escarpment (1A)* defines the western boundary and the *Fovant and Chalke Chalk Escarpment (1C)* defines the northern boundary. To the south is a less clear boundary, where the landform becomes more subtle and the woodland less dense, forming a transition to the *Southern Downland Belt (2B)*.

### Summary of Visual Character

*Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland* is one of the most remarkable landscapes of the AONB, comprising a mixture of dramatic chalk valleys, ridges and plateaux, diverse woodland, copses, shelterbelts and parkland trees, together with villages, parklands and estates found throughout the area. It is a landscape which shows strong human influences, not only in the archaeological remains, but in the managed forests, woodlands, copses and

avenues along with the parklands and gardens. Together these create a classical English landscape.

## **PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**

### **Geology and Soils**

The solid surface geology of this character area is predominantly defined by Blandford Chalk - an Upper Chalk of the Upper Cretaceous era. Older chalk strata layers of Lewes Chalk and New Pit Chalk are exposed in the deep combs of Quarry Bottom, Ashcombe Bottom and Stubhampton Bottom. On areas of highest ground drift deposits of Clay-with-Flint overlie the chalk.

Soils correspond with the underlying geology. Rendzinas (shallow, calcareous and well drained soils) are found overlying the chalk. Paleo-argyllic brown earths (well-drained clayey and silty soils) cap the Clay-with-Flint.

### **Landform and Hydrology**

The landform of Cranborne Chase is particularly distinctive, exhibiting perhaps the most dramatic topography of the AONB. Moving north from the gently undulating dip slope of the Southern Downland Belt, the drama of this landscape increases, culminating in the dramatic deep chalk combs of Quarry Bottom, Ashcombe Bottom and Malacombe Bottom which are scooped out of the chalk downs around Tollard Royal. These dry tributary valleys are an important feature of the AONB, their valley heads cutting deeply into the downs behind the escarpments to the north and west. This has created a deeply eroded landscape of valleys, ridges and remnants of the old chalk plateau which stand as gently rounded hills.

### **Land Cover**

The prominent woodland cover gives this part of the AONB a very distinctive character. Much of the woodland is ancient reflecting the origins of Cranborne Chase as a royal hunting ground. The area is not entirely wooded however (much of the area comprising either arable farmland or open parkland) but it is the nature of the woodland and its relationship to the chalk landform which lies at the heart of the area's special character. A number of large woods, together with shelter belts, copses, and clumps of parkland trees give it a well-wooded appearance, creating a series of enclosed spaces or 'rooms' surrounded by trees.

Around Tollard Royal, the village in the central part of the Chase, beeches and groups of trees are a prominent feature, extending the parkland landscape of Rushmore Park into the surrounding area. Broadleaf woodland also fills a number of the chalk bottoms or valleys along the northern edge of the Chase. Valleys such as Ashcombe Bottom contain a mass of woodland which contrasts with the open downland above. A number of the chalk valleys, notably Stubhampton Bottom, have been replanted as coniferous plantations. Whereas the rounded shapes and changing colours of the beech and oak trees compliment the smooth profiles of the chalk, the dark ranks of conifers do not sit so easily in this landscape, transforming hillsides into uniform evergreen plantations.

## Biodiversity

This area is characterised by significant woodland cover, with around 20% of the total area currently under broadleaved or coniferous woodland cover. Areas of chalk grassland have also been retained, including the extensive Rotherley Downs (SSSI) which comprises an area of floristically rich chalk grassland, scrub and ancient woodland, and is particularly notable for supporting a colony of the rare early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*). Chickengrove Bottom (SSSI), is an example of a much smaller site, and consists of an intimate mixture of chalk grassland, scrub and woodland and is particularly notable for supporting a small colony of the rare tuberous thistle (*Cirsium tuberosum*) and dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) a UK BAP priority species. Other nationally important chalk grassland sites are partly found within the character area and are mostly associated with the edge of the Fovant and Chalke escarpment, which borders Cranborne Chase to the north.

Of the woodland sites Cranborne Chase (SSSI) itself comprises a large tract of ancient semi-natural woodland derived from ancient hunting forest and includes remnants of traditional coppice woodland and wood pasture. The site supports a number of woodland types but the majority consists of either ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and field maple (*Acer campestre*) dominated woodland, which occurs on freely drained soils or oak (*Quercus robur*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) woodland where heavy calcareous soils occur. The ground flora varies according to historical management and soil conditions, but is species-rich and includes many species indicative of ancient woodland. The site is also of high ecological interest for the range of lower plant species, including many bryophytes and lichens that are rare in the UK, and for a diverse invertebrate fauna.

Ancient woodland blocks are commonplace throughout the character area, and include extensive areas such as Ashmore Wood, together with a number of small copses often associated with farmsteads. Many of these sites have been affected by widespread replanting, and subsequently their ecological value has diminished.

The table below highlights the features of key ecological interest for each statutory site.

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha)	Summary of importance
Bowerchalke Down (7% of this SSSI falls within LCA 3A)	SSSI	128.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics</li> <li>Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> </ul>
Chickengrove Bottom	SSSI	9.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intimate mixture of unimproved chalk grassland, scrub and woodland</li> <li>Small colony of tuberous thistle (<i>Cirsium tuberosum</i>) a nationally rare plant species in the British Isles</li> <li>Small population of dormouse (<i>Muscardinus avellanarius</i>) a UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Cranborne Chase	SSSI	451.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive tract of enclosed medieval coppice, wood pasture and 19<sup>th</sup> century</li> </ul>

			<p>hazel plantation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exceptionally rich lower plant flora</li> <li>• Population of a nationally rare hoverfly (<i>Brachypalpus laphriformis</i>)</li> <li>• Population of dormice (<i>Muscardinus avellanarius</i>) a UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Handcocks Bottom (90% of this SSSI falls within LCA 3A)	SSSI	54.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ancient woodland with rich associated lichen flora</li> <li>• Unimproved chalk grassland</li> <li>• Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>) a species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Knighton Downs and Wood (27% of this SSSI falls within LCA 3A)	SSSI	203.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, scrub and semi-natural woodland</li> <li>• Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> <li>• Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>) a species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Martin and Tidpit Downs (10% of this SSSI falls within LCA 3A)	NNR SSSI	342.0 379.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, chalk heath and scrub</li> <li>• Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> <li>• Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>) a species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Rotherley Downs	SSSI	120.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, scrub and ancient woodland</li> <li>• Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> </ul>
Winklebury Hill (18% of this SSSI falls within LCA 3A)	SSSI	63.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland and scrub mosaics</li> <li>• Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> </ul>

## **HUMAN INFLUENCES**

### **Evidence of Past Social Structure**

The presence of burial monuments of early Neolithic date reflects the importance of the downland to early farming communities, an importance which grew as the structure of prehistoric society developed. This involved a change in focus from interests of the community to the status of the individual. This change is evident in the construction of large ceremonial monuments on the open downland, and the large numbers of early Bronze Age round barrows, particularly around Tollard Royal. Social and economic changes continued into the later prehistoric period, with an increasing concern to enclose land. This is evident in the development of field systems with associated open settlements, enclosures, linear ditch and bank boundaries (such as Grim's Ditch), cross-ridge dykes, and ultimately in defended Iron Age hillforts (such as Caesar's Camp). The continuity of downland settlement and agriculture in the Romano-British period is evident in the Roman road between Badbury Rings and the Nadder valley. In the medieval period the character of the area was dominated by its use as a Royal hunting ground, restricting the local communities rights of habitation and agriculture, and still evident in the pattern of settlement and landuse.

### **Field patterns, Boundaries and Predominant Date of Enclosure**

Many of the late prehistoric earthwork boundaries, such as Grim's Ditch, and the late Romano-British defensive earthwork of Bokerley Dyke, are likely to have continued in use in later periods, and in places these features have continued as property and administrative boundaries. The overarching imposition of forest law in the Royal hunting grounds of the medieval period is evident in the partial survival of the park pale of the Inner Bounds of the Chase. Continuing restrictions of the private hunting grounds in the post-medieval and later periods are responsible for the survival of large areas of unenclosed woodland, in marked contrast to the open downland areas to the south. The Chase was disenfranchised in 1829, and the generally medium to large straight-sided fields which are found around the areas of surviving woodland, including the areas of parkland such as Rushmore Park, date mainly from this period.

### **Land Use and Recreation**

Where the land is not covered by woodland, a mosaic of both arable and improved pasture largely defines the land use of this character area. Although fields are straight sided they often have an irregular form – reflecting the sinuous and varied nature of the landform. There is no distinct or overriding field pattern although field size generally increases both to the east and along the southern boundary. Native hedgerows frequently define the field margins. Banked beech hedges, iron railings and beech avenues are also a feature reflecting the presence of the Rushmore Estate and its parkland setting.

This landscape is a popular area for recreation. It is well served by rights of way that provide a range of viewing experiences from intimate, enclosed hills to the impressive, open views of the rolling downland. Hamlets and farms are linked by a surprisingly dense network of lanes, tracks and footpaths, many of which follow the gentle ridges between the chalk bottoms. Until 150 years ago, Cranborne Chase was a private forest and governed by its own law. As a consequence, it remained free from modern agricultural practices until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century leaving many historic features largely intact. Cranborne Chase is

the site where modern British field archaeology was pioneered through the excavations of General Pitt-Rivers in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The majority of the different types of field monument within the south of England occur within Cranborne Chase – making it highly important as an educational resource.

The Rushmore Estate covers a significant area within this landscape with the Larmer Tree Gardens and Rushmore 18 hole golf course, providing an important recreation resource. The Larmer Tree Gardens are Victorian Pleasure gardens and are located on high ground - commanding fine views over the Chase. Created in 1880, the gardens are recognised as having national importance and contain a collection of Colonial and Oriental buildings, Roman Temple and Open Air Theatre. The gardens are now promoting both cycling and walking within Cranborne Chase, with mapped circular routes, and this will inevitably increase visitor numbers and frequency of visits. Breeze Hill is an areas of Registered Common Land. In addition a number of areas of downland have been proposed as Open Country as outlined in the Draft Countryside Agency maps. This will create public rights of access across the landscape.

### **Historic Development of Settlement and Relationship with the Landscape**

There are remains in the landscape of almost continuous settlement from the Iron Age (and possibly earlier) to the present, although the existing settlement pattern dates mainly from the medieval period. Although the existence of the Royal forest imposed restrictions of landuse, the forest included the villages of Tollard Royal (sited in the steep combe bottom) and Ashmore (sited high on the downs). Elsewhere, however, the Chase was sparsely populated.

### **Settlement and Built Character**

In contrast to the areas of downland which surround it. Cranborne Chase is comparatively densely settled owing to the presence of Tollard Royal and Ashmore. Tollard Royal, traditionally at the heart of the Chase and site of the house where King John would stay when he hunted there, lies in the southern part of Ashcombe Bottom at the point where the valley deepens. Red brick and flint and white render typify the character of buildings, with thatch, clay and slate tiles common roofing materials. Estate railings define the approach to Tollard Royal. Ashmore is semi-nucleated, its buildings grouped around a large pond which is said to date back to Roman times. It is also one of the few hill-top settlements in the AONB, sited on a rounded plateau and is thought to be the only village in Dorset dating to pre Roman times. Between these villages lie dispersed hamlets, farms and lodges.

Cranborne Chase is comparatively untouched by modern development. Although the busy A354 runs close to its southern edge, the Chase itself is crossed only by the winding B3081 between Sixpenny Handley and Shaftesbury.

### **Historic Environment**

The landscape has a rich and varied landscape displaying features from the Neolithic to the modern era. The survival of a range of prehistoric and Romano-British burial, settlement, agricultural and territorial features is complemented by the specific character given to the landscape by the long-term presence of first Royal, and later private, hunting grounds. The

creation of areas of parkland, and the pattern of straight-sided fields, represents fundamental changes in land ownership, in the 19th century, giving an added dimension to the landscape.

## EVALUATION

### Strength of Character

The strength of character of this landscape is judged to be **strong**. This landscape exhibits a distinct and recognisable pattern of elements, such as the unique combination of dramatic landform and survival of the Chase Woods that form a series of 'outdoor rooms'. The presence of beech and oak, the pattern of tree planting in clumps and shelter belts, the survival of unimproved chalk grassland, and the visible layers of past human influence on the landscape add to the strong character.

### Current Condition

Overall the landscape is well managed with much of the area forming part of the Rushmore Estate. It has a visual integrity and the condition of ecological habitats (woodland, chalk grassland and scrub) is generally good, although some ancient woodland sites have been affected by re-planting. The built environment is generally in a good state of repair and as the Chase remained free from modern agricultural practices until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century many historic features have remained intact. Overall, the current condition of the landscape is **good**.

### Past and Present Change

- Decline of hedgerows and estate boundaries is evident in the landscape.
- Some ancient woodland sites have been affected by widespread replanting in the past, and their ecological value has diminished.
- Loss of traditional management techniques has led to decline in coppice woodland and wood pasture over many years.
- There has been some encroachment of arable cultivation onto chalk grassland and open downland in the past - this is particularly noticeable on the visible chalk bluffs and hillsides.
- The presence of planted individual and parkland trees associated with the Estates means that many trees will become mature at the same time.

### Possible Future Trends

A potential fall in the profitability of the arable sector, as a result of the CAP reform, is likely to result in more marginal arable land being abandoned from production and reverted to chalk grassland or woodland with the help of agri-environment schemes. The condition of the landscape is likely to depend on the success of the agri-environment schemes.

The proposed designation of areas of downland as Areas of 'Open Country' and 'Registered Common Land' under the CRoW Act may bring with it pressures for recreational and

tourist facilities in the open countryside plus potential for erosion and damage to important features.

There may be pressure for development of tall structures, such as communication masts and wind energy developments in this elevated, open and windswept landscape.

Future trends imply that landscape condition is likely to be **stable** in this area.

### **Management Objective**

**The overall management objective should be to conserve the distinctive classical English landscape created by the dramatic chalk valleys, ridges and plateaux, diverse woodland, copses, shelterbelts, avenues and parkland trees. In particular there is a need to re-invigorate woodland management within this area.**

- Restoration of hedgerows where gappy and fragmented and repair or replacement of estate boundaries where in decline.
- Encourage planting of native species to restore deciduous character and ecological diversity of re-planted woodlands. Beech may also be an appropriate species in this area, particularly planted as hedgerows and clumps.
- Conserve the parkland character by promoting a programme of tree planting to replace individual and parkland trees as they become over-mature and die.
- Encourage traditional management techniques and marketing of local wood products to restore the character of coppice woodland and wood pasture.
- Consider opportunities for reversion from arable to chalk grassland on hills and bluffs where highly visible.
- Conserve integrity of archaeological features and promote cultural value perhaps through interpretation for visitors.
- Promote sustainable management of recreation particularly in relation to the proposed Open Country designation.



# 4. DOWNLAND HILLS



## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

4A Martin - Whitsbury



## 4A MARTIN - WHITSBURY DOWNLAND HILLS

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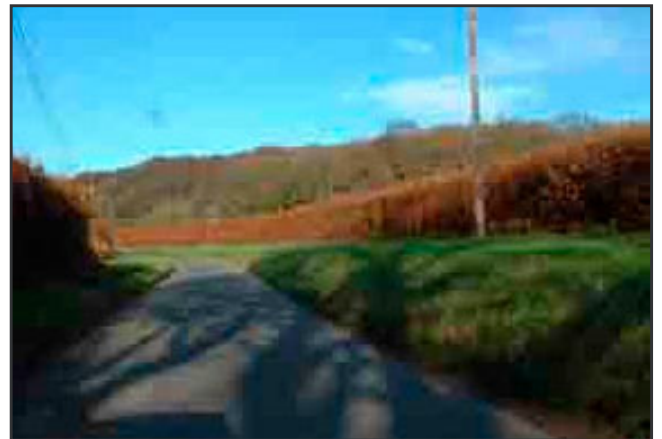
Mixed woodland edges soften the appearance of coniferous blocks on the crests of slopes.



Wooded lanes create enclosure, contrasting with the openness of the downland.



Farm buildings are the main form of development in this sparsely settled landscape.



Beech hedges mark the approach to Whitsbury.



Whitsbury - the only significant settlement in this character area. Red brick is a common building material.



Pockets of woodland and hedgerow trees provide a visual link to the wooded silhouettes on the skyline.



## TYPE 4: DOWNLAND HILLS

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### Description

The Downland Hills are formed from the dissected remnants of an older chalk escarpment. Over the millennia, the rivers which once drained the chalk dip slope of the AONB have cut through eroding the remnants of the escarpment into a series of rounded bluffs. These appear as a series of low 'whale-backed' ridges that stand out from the surrounding downland. The highest hill tops tend to be capped with clay with flints and small areas of Reading Beds. Ploughed slopes and enlarged fields create a vast patchwork of arable land with isolated remnants of chalk grassland and ancient semi-natural woodland that provide significant ecological interest. The range of archaeological remains in this landscape type reflects that of the wider chalk downs, and imparts a similar historic character to the landscape. There is just one area of this landscape type in the AONB, the *Martin-Whitsbury Downland Hills (4A)*.

### Key Characteristics

- A series of prominent knolls and hills.
- Dominated by an Upper Chalk surface geology giving rise to argillic brown earths.
- Land cover is predominantly arable, with improved pasture on lower ground towards the River Valleys.
- Dominated by a pattern of medium to large Parliamentary type fields.
- Deciduous and coniferous woodland silhouette against the skyline, clothing the crests of the slopes.
- Low density, dispersed settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads.
- The absence of major roads contributes to the feeling of remoteness.
- A number of ancient woodlands including Burwood, Ashwood Copse and Bouldsbury Wood (SSSI).
- Neolithic and Bronze Age burial monuments, prehistoric and Romano-British enclosures, settlements, field systems and linear boundaries and hillforts contribute to the plethora of visible historic features of the landscape.
- Panoramic views from hill tops.



## 4A MARTIN –WHITSBURY DOWNLAND HILLS

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### Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating and shelving landform with prominent knolls and hills.
- Dominated by an Upper Chalk surface geology giving rise to argyllic brown earths.
- Land cover is predominantly arable, with improved pasture on lower ground towards the River Valleys.
- Small irregular fields east of Cranborne indicate early assart inclosure, but elsewhere a pattern of medium to large Parliamentary type fields dominates.
- Deciduous and coniferous woodland silhouette against the skyline, clothing the crests of the slopes.
- Visual contrasts typified along the road from Cranborne to Tidpit where dense woodland opens out into distant views across downland.
- Low density, dispersed settlement of scattered farmsteads. The village of Whitsbury is an exception.
- The absence of major roads contributes to the feeling of remoteness.
- Neolithic and Bronze Age burial monuments, prehistoric and Romano-British enclosures, settlements, field systems and linear boundaries, including Grim's Ditch and Bokerley Dyke, and the Whitsbury Castle hillfort contribute to the plethora of visible historic features of the landscape.
- Breamore Manor House provides visitor interest.

### Location and Boundaries

Located to the east, within the southern half of the AONB, this character area is intersected by the *Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys (5C)*. The northern edge of the character area meets the *Southern Downland Belt (2B)* with the southern edge being defined by the AONB boundary. The village of Cranborne adjacent to the southern boundary and a number of other tributary valley settlements abut the edge of the character area.

### Summary of Visual Character

This is a landscape of contrast with enclosed areas of woodland opening out to provide extensive views across large fields. Both framed views from sunken lanes and open views from hills can be enjoyed. Arable crop production is the dominant land cover with some improved pasture on the slopes approaching the *Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys (5C)*. Woodland crowns the tops of slopes – mixed woodland occurs alongside coniferous blocks softening their edges. Scattered copses and mature hedgerow trees provide a connection between arable fields and the wooded hilltops.

Pentridge Hill, Dunberry Hill, Damerham Knoll and Penbury Knoll are chalk protrusions that add visual interest. The absence of settlement and transport routes contribute to the remoteness and tranquillity of this landscape. However, extensive tracts of large fields and the inconsistency of field boundaries create a sense of over-intensive agricultural land.

## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

### Geology and Soils

Blandford Chalk, an Upper Chalk geology of the Cretaceous era, is the dominant surface geology. The Upper Chalk gives rise to typical argillic brown earths - well drained mainly fine loamy soils that provide good soils for agriculture.

Reading Beds of the Palaeocene era cap the area of highest ground resulting in the distinct areas of woodland in these elevated areas. Here, the brown earths are coarser than those occurring directly over the Chalk. A small outcrop of London Clay (of the Eocene era) also occurs within this landscape – underlying the small woodland area of Burwood.

In the areas of highest elevation, clay with flints drift caps the Chalk, for example on the south east slope of Pentridge Hill. Argillic brown sands, non-calcareous deep well drained, sandy and coarse loamy soils, occur to the north and south of Pentridge Hill.

### Landform and Hydrology

This is a landscape of gentle slopes, shelving in places and becoming steeper toward the west of the character area, culminating in the distinctive 'whale back' form of Pentridge Hill.

The upstanding *Martin-Whitsbury Downland Hills* would have once formed a north-facing escarpment between Blackbush Down and Whitsbury Fort. However, over the millennia, the rivers which once drained the dip slope of the *Southern Downland Belt* (the Tarrant, Allen, Crane etc) cut through the escarpment, eroding the remnants of the escarpment into a series of rounded bluffs. The geomorphological origin of these downland hills is evident in their steep northern slopes and gentler southern dip slopes.

### Land Cover

As with the *Southern Downland Belt (2B)*, land cover is predominantly defined by arable crops with some pasture occurring on the slopes leading towards the river valleys. Remnants of calcareous grassland can also be found at Martin and Tidpit Downs and Pentridge Down.

There is a strong wooded character within the southern part of the area defined by scattered areas of woodland including Martin Wood, Bouldsbury Wood and Burwood (ancient broadleaf woodlands). In addition both coniferous and deciduous woodland occurs on the crests of hills, for example on Blagdon Hill and Boveridge. These woodlands and the occurrence of copses are a key feature - emphasising the height and form of the hills. In contrast, the sharp edges and vertical uniformity of coniferous plantations break the subtle flow of the chalk landform and while the other components of the landscape change with season the coniferous plantations remain stubbornly the same. However the two woodland types often occur side by side with the mixed woodland softening the harshness of the coniferous blocks. Sunken lanes with overhanging trees and shaded fern understories, contribute further to the wooded appearance of this character area.



Woodland copses on the summits of the downland hills are a key feature in this otherwise open chalk landscape. The summit of Pentridge Hill, known as Penbury Knoll, is distinguished by the gorse bushes and low pines which grow on the clay which covers the hilltop.

## Biodiversity

This character area is largely dominated by arable agriculture and pastoral land uses. However, it has retained significant ecological interest and includes substantial areas of chalk grassland and ancient semi-natural woodland. Of the chalk grasslands, the areas contains a significant proportion of both Martin and Tidpit Downs (NNR) and Pentridge Down (SSSI) both of which are important sites for the rare and internationally protected early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*). Pentridge Down (SSSI) also supports a colony of juniper (*Juniperus communis*) a UK BAP priority species, and a population of the fairy shrimp (*Chirocephalus diaphanus*) a rare crustacean in the British Isles.

The area also contains a number of ancient woodlands including Burwood, Ashwood Copse and Bouldsbury Wood (SSSI), a nationally important woodland consisting of a number of separate broadleaved woodlands, together with areas replanted with conifers. This large woodland reflects the varied soil conditions over which it has formed, and over ten separate stand types have been recorded. The ground flora is exceptionally rich, in fact the richest vascular plant flora of any Hampshire wood, with over 60 ancient woodland indicator plant species.

The table below highlights the features of key ecological interest for each statutory site.

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha)	Summary of importance
Bouldsbury Wood	SSSI	119.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive area of ancient woodland, with rich and varied woodland flora and invertebrates</li> </ul>
Martin and Tidpit Downs (39% of this SSSI falls within LCA 4A)	NNR SSSI	342.0 379.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, chalk heath and scrub</li> <li>Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> <li>Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>) a species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Pentridge Down (77% of this SSSI falls within LCA 4A)	SSSI	77.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, acid grassland and scrub</li> <li>Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> <li>Colony of juniper (<i>Juniperus communis</i>), a UK BAP priority species</li> <li>Population of fairy shrimp (<i>Chirocephalus diaphanus</i>) a nationally rare crustacean in the British Isles</li> </ul>

## **HUMAN INFLUENCES**

### **Evidence of Past Social Structure**

The range of prehistoric and Romano-British features in this area, including Neolithic long barrows and Bronze Age round barrows, open and enclosed settlements and associated field systems, and linear earthwork boundaries, indicates similar developing social structures as found on the adjacent downland. However, its position at the transition from the chalk downs to the clay valleys and heaths to the south may have given it added strategic significance, as illustrated by the multi-vallate hillfort at Whitsbury Castle, similar in size and location to Badbury Rings to the southwest.

### **Field Patterns, Boundaries and Predominant date of enclosure**

The prehistoric and Romano-British earthwork boundaries of Grim's Ditch and Bokerley Dyke may have retained a significance and use into the medieval and later periods. Although the pattern of small irregular fields with interspersed copses around Crendell, east of Cranborne, suggests early assart inclosure, most of the area, like the downs, was used in the medieval and post-medieval period largely as unenclosed grazing land as part of the predominant sheep-and-corn agriculture. The dominant pattern of medium to large straight-sided fields is characteristic of late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure, followed by 20th century agricultural intensification. Expansive geometric fields of regular pattern become smaller and more regular towards the wooded edges and Martin Down, however, remains unenclosed, with commoner's rights surviving until the late 20th century, and there are large areas of woodland north of Cranborne.

### **Land Use and Recreation**

This is largely an arable landscape, with some areas of pasture. Post and wire fences have often been used to replace degraded hedges but in places there is active hedge cutting and management. Occasionally shelterbelts form an edge to fields. The introduction of forestry plantations has changed the character of the native broadleaf woodland.

Rights of Way networks are particularly dense through woodland areas and around Whitsbury. The rest of the character area is less well served by Rights of Way. However, a bridleway runs through Tidpit Common Down to meet Bokerley Ditch providing access to these areas. The Jubilee Trail, a long distance recreational route, cuts across Black Bush Down, Pentridge Hill and Bokerley Down from where there are dramatic views across the surrounding area. Breamore House is an Edwardian manor house set in historic parkland, and this includes the associated Breamore countryside museum.

Registered common land lies to the north of Blagdon Hill and a number of areas have also been proposed as Draft Open Country (Tidpit Common, on Blackbush Down and to the north west of Pentridge Hill). These areas will increase the scope for informal recreation in the area.

### **Historic Development of Settlement and Relationship with the Landscape**

As with the downs, the prehistoric and Romano-British settlement did not continue into the medieval period, but gravitated to the valleys which bisect the landscape, and the present settlement pattern consists mainly of a low density scattering of farmsteads. Historically, the

rounded bluffs provided defensible sites for hill-forts and several of the hills are crowned with ramparts which point to their past importance. Such fortifications can be found at Whitsbury, Damerham Knoll and Penbury Knoll.

### **Settlement and Built Character**

The area is largely unsettled with the exception of Whitsbury, a linear village located in the north east of this area. Grass verges and beech hedges align the approach to the village with red brick walls marking the entrance to the village. Red brick and thatch are common material with white render and cob also featuring. Flint and brick walls reflect the occurrence of flint geology in this character area.

### **Historic Environment**

The range of archaeological remains in this area reflects that of the wider chalk downs, and imparts a similar historic character to the landscape. However, the more varied field pattern and the preservation of more extensive areas of woodland, reflects its transitional position between the downs and the valleys.

## **EVALUATION**

### **Strength of Character**

This is a landscape of **strong** character. The gently undulating landform, prominent knolls and hills, large scale arable land use and significant areas of woodland make this a landscape of contrasts. In particular the contrast of scale and enclosure is felt where the intimacy of the enclosed wooded lanes gives way to the open rolling arable fields. These are distinctive perceptual experiences that add to a strong sense of place.

### **Current Condition**

The natural form of the land is highly distinctive. In addition, there remains a legacy of historic features - linear ancient earthworks and burial grounds that have survived amidst intensive working of the land. The intensive arable working of the land in this area has led to poorly maintained field boundaries it also means that there are few derelict or underused areas of land. Although the general state of habitats within intensively farmed areas is not good, there are some isolated areas where condition of habitats is outstanding. These are the substantial areas of chalk grassland and ancient semi-natural woodland e.g. Martin and Tidpit Downs, Pentridge Down, Ashwood Copse and Bouldsbury Wood. The built environment and landscape within settlements e.g. in Whitsbury is in good condition. The overall condition of this character area is judged to be **good**.

### **Past and Present Change**

- There has been some encroachment of arable cultivation onto chalk grassland and open downland in the past - this is particularly noticeable on the visible chalk bluffs and hillsides.
- The presence of coniferous forestry plantations jarr with the soft outlines of the deciduous woodlands and hill top copses.
- Some scrub encroachment is visible on downland turf.

- Intensive farming practices, including a shift from spring sown to autumn sown crops, has resulted in loss of field margins and decline in farmland birds.

### **Possible Future Trends**

A potential fall in the profitability of the arable sector, as a result of the CAP reform, is likely to result in more marginal arable land being abandoned from production and reverted to chalk grassland or woodland with the help of agri-environment schemes. The future condition of these areas is likely to be dependent upon the success of the agri-environment schemes.

The proposed designation of areas of downland as Areas of 'Open Country' under the CRoW Act at Blackbush Down, Bokerley Down, Tidpit Common Down and Pentridge Hill may bring management issues due the potential increase in visitor numbers and the pressure for associated facilities.

There may be pressure for development of tall structures, such as communication masts and wind energy developments in this elevated, open and windswept landscape.

Future trends imply that landscape condition will probably be **stable** in this area.

### **Management Objective**

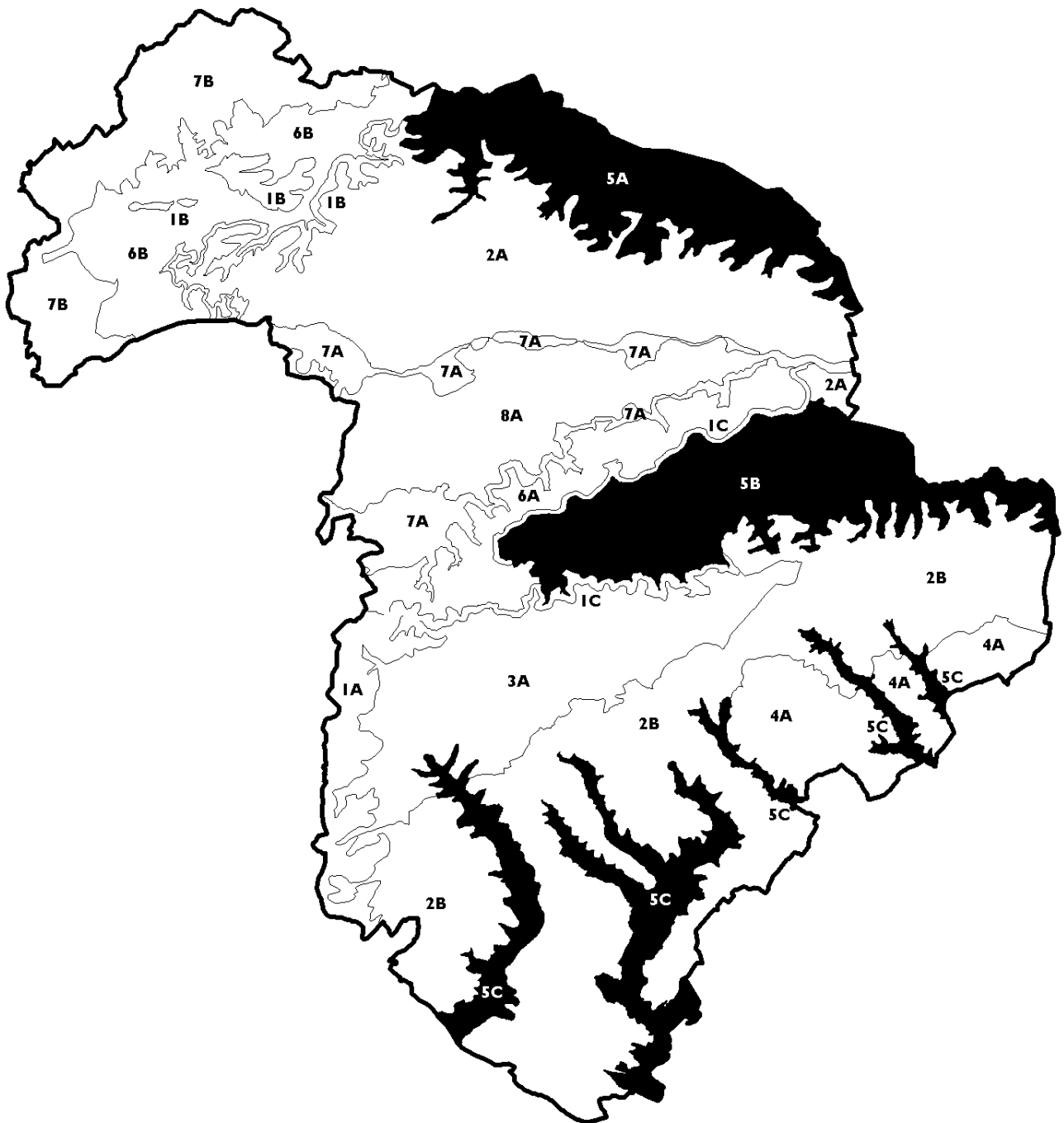
**The overall management objective should be to conserve the pattern and contrast of the landscape created by the open areas of arable downland and distinct pattern of woodland, including copses on the summits of the hills and the tracts of ancient woodland that form a dramatic backdrop to the open downland.**

- Promote a consistent approach to hedgerow restoration and field boundary management. This will include the use of more visually unobtrusive field boundaries on the more elevated, open slopes so as not to fragment the smooth rolling landform and hills.
- Increase deciduous planting to complement the undulating landform and soften the outline of coniferous plantations. Follow the existing distinct pattern of woodland cover.
- Promote traditional woodland management and consider opportunities for the marketing of woodland products.
- Consider restoration of chalk grassland to extend area coverage and links with existing SSSI sites to enhance ecological value.
- Promote appropriate management of arable farmland to create a wildlife-rich habitat supporting farmland birds. This will include retaining areas of fallow land and maintaining an unploughed margin around fields plus management of hedgerows.
- Ensure further pylons, masts and other vertical elements are carefully sited and the number restricted to avoid visual clutter and further interruption of the characteristic open views.

- Conserve integrity of archaeological features and promote cultural value perhaps through interpretation for visitors.
- Opportunity for visitor management



## 5. CHALK RIVER VALLEYS



### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

5A Wylde River Valley

5B Ebble River Valley

5C Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys





## **TYPE 5: CHALK RIVER VALLEYS**

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### **Description**

The river valleys which drain the chalk downs of Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB are a key element of the landscape. In contrast to the often unsettled downland, villages tend to be concentrated in these valleys, sited at the springline, just above the water meadows and floodplain.

In physical terms, these valleys can be divided into two groups. First there are the river valleys which follow lines of weakness in the underlying chalk, often associated with retreating escarpments to the south. Such valleys tend to flow 'across' the chalk landform, from west to east. The Wylye and Ebbel fall into this category. The second group of river valleys consists of those which drain the dip slope of the chalk, tending to flow 'down' the landform, from north to south. Along the southern dip slope a series of active rivers, the Tarrant and Allen that drain into the Stour and the Crane and Allen that drain into the Avon, have eroded valleys as they drain towards the south east.

### **Key Characteristics**

- Strongly enclosing valley sides, frequently eroded to form dry tributary valleys.
- The steepest valley slopes have retained their semi-natural chalk grassland or are clothed in 'hanging' woodland while the shallow valley sides have been exploited for arable cultivation.
- The clear fast flowing chalk rivers and streams are a key habitat.
- The floodplains support watermeadows, cress beds and damp pastures.
- The valleys typically provide convenient transport corridors, containing major roads and railways.
- Straight-sided fields represent late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure, with large scale fields resulting from 20th century boundary loss.
- Field boundaries and footpaths often reflect the tracks, droves and hollow ways that took the livestock to and from the downs in the Medieval period.
- A series of linear springline villages typically lie at the foot of the valley slopes.
- Isolated Neolithic long barrow burial monuments, Bronze Age round barrows and watermeadow channels on the valley floor contribute to the visible archaeology.
- The rural landscapes are sometimes interrupted by the large volumes of traffic that use the valleys as transport corridors.



## 5A WYLYE CHALK RIVER VALLEY

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Channels of post-medieval watermeadows are visible on the valley floor.



The shortage of building stone is reflected in 'chequerboard' patterns of stone knapped flint. Thatch is also common.



New built development constructed from local materials, such as flint and clunch and in local styles.



The enclosing chalk valley sides form a strong backdrop to views.



Flood meadows are characteristic of the Wylde floodplain.



The valley floor is dominated by pasture where cattle graze in the shade of the parkland trees.



## 5A WYLYE CHALK RIVER VALLEY

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### Key Characteristics

- The Wylye Valley has carved a deep valley through the chalk following a line of structural weakness along a geological fault.
- Strongly enclosing chalk valley sides have been eroded by a series of tributaries to form dry tributary valleys.
- The River Wylye meanders across a flat valley floor forming a corridor which maintains a constant width of about 1 kilometre.
- The steepest valley slopes have retained their semi-natural chalk grassland or are clothed in 'hanging' woodland.
- Water meadows and cress beds on the valley floor, surrounded by straight-sided fields representing late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure, with larger scale fields resulting from 20th century boundary loss.
- A series of springline villages and manors lie at the foot of the valley slopes on the gravel river terraces where they are protected from flooding.
- Major transport routes use the valley as an east-west corridor between Warminster and Salisbury and the rural landscape is interrupted by large volumes of traffic.
- Field boundaries and footpaths often reflect the tracks, droves and hollow ways that took the livestock to and from the downs in the Medieval period.
- The shallow valley sides have been exploited for arable cultivation while the steeper valley sides have remained wooded or grazed by sheep.
- Isolated Neolithic long barrow burial monuments, Bronze Age round barrows and watermeadow channels on the valley floor contribute to the visible archaeology.

### Location and Boundaries

The Wylye Valley runs eastwards from Warminster to Wilton, though only the section between Sutton Veny and Stapleford lies within the AONB boundary. The character area encompasses the flat floodplain of the river and its steeply enclosing valley sides to the skyline. To the south is the large, open expanse of the *West Wiltshire Downs Open Chalk Downland (2A)* while to the north Salisbury Plain stretches out beyond the AONB boundary.

### Summary of Visual Character

The *Wylye Valley* has carved a deep valley through the chalk so that it is enclosed by steep chalk slopes. The steepest valley sides support unimproved chalk grassland and hanging woodland while the less steep valley sides, have been exploited for the cultivation of arable crops or improved pasture. The valley floor is a rural landscape where sheep and cattle graze the floodplain within irregular fields bound by intermittent hedgerows. The Langford

Lakes, once exploited for gravel extraction, now provide areas of open water. The valley provides a corridor for movement with the Salisbury-Warminster railway line and A36 trunk road running along the gravel terraces either side of the floodplain. Attractive linear or nucleated villages are scattered along these east-west routes, their 'chequerboard' buildings of stone and knapped flint a distinctive feature. Despite the relatively large-scale landform of the valley, this is an intimate landscape with a semi-enclosed character. Its variety in texture, colourful villages and country houses provide visual interest. Although characterised by busy transport corridors, both along and across the valley, the floodplain retains a peaceful quality.

## **PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**

### **Geology and Soils**

The Wylde Valley has carved a deep valley through the chalk so that the Upper, Middle and Lower Chalk is exposed on the valley sides. These chalk slopes support well drained, shallow calcareous soils. Quaternary deposits of chalky and gravelly river alluvium and valley gravels dominate the surface geology of the valley bottom. These give rise to loamy soils that are affected by groundwater and there is risk of flooding in these areas.

### **Landform and Hydrology**

The River Wylde runs in a relatively straight course following a line of structural weakness along a geological fault. To the north the valley slopes, which have been eroded by a series of small, dry tributaries, rise comparatively gently. The southern slopes, which represent the eroded remains of an escarpment, are steeper and more convoluted. The valley floor is fairly flat, forming a corridor which maintains a constant width of about 1 kilometre. The river itself meanders its way eastwards, carving a series of very low hills from the floodplain, which provide natural sites for settlement.

### **Land Cover**

The *Wylde Valley* contains a variety of types of landcover. The gentler valley slopes to the north and south of the valley are invariably in arable cultivation. Steeper sections have retained areas of chalk grassland or are clothed in 'hanging' woodland. Arable fields give way to dry pastures on the lower valley slopes, these in turn being replaced by meadows and damper pastures within the floodplain. In places the valley floor has been drained and the pastures ploughed for arable cultivation. Many of the hill-tops and rounded bluffs on the valley sides are capped with small copses and plantations which are characteristic in the chalk landscape.

Tree cover is a vital part of the landscape along the valley floor. Gentle rises in level are sometimes picked out and emphasised by small beech plantations. More significant, though, are the lines of willows and poplars which follow field boundaries together with the past and present courses of the Wylde and its tributaries. These, in combination with the greens of the meadows and pastures give the valley floor a pastoral, sheltered character which contrasts with the more exposed open downs. The floodplain trees also play a valuable role in providing screening, thereby helping to maintain the visual separation of the villages.

## Biodiversity

Ecologically important features of the Wylfe River Valley include a 10 mile stretch of the River Wylfe, which forms part of the internationally important River Avon System (SAC), and several areas of species-rich unimproved chalk grassland which are associated with the steeper slopes of the valley sides.

The northern tributaries of the River Avon, including the River Wylfe are clay influenced calcareous Rivers. They support an exceptional diversity of aquatic plants, including floating beds of water crowfoot (*Ranunculus* section *Batrachium*); an aquatic plant community which is rare in chalk Rivers in Europe, and several notable species of fish, and mollusc. The majority of the habitats associated with the River valley, such as damp pastures have been improved through drainage and reseeded, to enhance value of the land for grazing animals. Wet woodland is now mostly restricted to a narrow line of willow (*Salix* spp.) and alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) along the immediate river banks.

Remnant areas of unimproved chalk grassland remain along the steep valley slopes, including part of Edsbury Down (SSSI), Starveall and Stony Down (SSSI), Stockton Wood and Down (SSSI) and Wylfe and Church Dean Downs (NNR). These chalk grasslands support a diverse range of plant species, including several with restricted distribution in the UK, together with a rich associated invertebrate fauna.

Within this character area, woodland is restricted to small clumps and linear shelterbelts. It is mostly of relatively recent origin, and includes broadleaved, mixed and coniferous types.

The table below highlights the features of key ecological interest for each statutory site.

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha)	Summary of importance
Edsbury Down (60% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5A)	SSSI	53.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics</li> <li>Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> </ul>
River Avon System (6% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5A)	SAC SSSI	498.2 507.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>River system noted for its exceptional aquatic plants, diverse fish fauna and range of aquatic invertebrates</li> <li>Supports stands of floating <i>Ranunculus</i>, a vegetation type of European importance as listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex I)</li> <li>Population of sea lamprey (<i>Petromyzon marinus</i>), brook lamprey (<i>Lampetra planeri</i>), Atlantic salmon (<i>Salmo salar</i>), bullhead (<i>Cottus gobius</i>) and Desmoulin's whorl snail (<i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i>) all listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and the latter a UK BAP priority species</li> <li>Populations of the large-mouthed valve snail (<i>Valvata macrostoma</i>) and the freshwater pea mussel (<i>Pisidium tenuilineatum</i>) both nationally rare molluscs and latter also a UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
River Till (0.3% of this SSSI falls)	SSSI	32.07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>River system noted for its aquatic plants, diverse fish fauna and range of aquatic invertebrates</li> </ul>

within LCA 5A)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports stands of floating <i>Ranunculus</i>, a vegetation type of European importance as listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex I)</li> <li>• Population of otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>) Atlantic salmon (<i>Salmo salar</i>), bullhead (<i>Cottus gobius</i>) and Desmoulin's whorl snail (<i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i>) all listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and the latter a UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Starveall and Stony Down (55% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5A)	SSSI	22.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unimproved chalk grassland</li> <li>• Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>) a species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Steeple Langford Down (93% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5A)	SSSI	21.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unimproved chalk grassland</li> </ul>
Stockton Wood and Down (29% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5A)	SSSI	53.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics</li> <li>• Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> </ul>
Wylde and Church Dean Downs (71% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5A)	NNR SSSI	34.0 80.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive area of unimproved plateau chalk grassland with scrub mosaics</li> <li>• Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>) a species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and UK BAP priority species</li> <li>• Large colony of tuberous thistle (<i>Cirsium tuberosum</i>) a nationally rare plant species in the British Isles</li> </ul>

## HUMAN INFLUENCES

### Evidence of Past Social Structure

Although most of the evidence for prehistoric activity is to be found on the downs flanking the Wylde valley, the survival of Neolithic long barrows on the valley floor, as near Sherrington, as well as a number of Bronze Age round barrows, indicates that the valley was probably a favourable environment for early farming activity, one over which social groups sought to claim rights. The lower slopes and combe bottoms provided fertile, well drained soils, and fields systems on the valley sides indicate the increasing organisation and intensity of cultivation in the later prehistoric period. The strategic importance of the valley is evident in the series of Iron Age hillforts that flank it on the edges of the downs and the Norman motte and bailey earthworks at Sherrington indicate the continued strategic importance of the valley. The subsequent pattern of medieval settlements along the valley, largely surviving today, reflects the concerns, within the feudal system of land-tenure, that manorial estates had access to the full range of economic resources, from the pastures along



the river, and open fields around along the valley sides to the common grazing land on the downs

### **Field Patterns, Boundaries and Predominant date of Enclosure**

In the medieval period the valley sides would have been the focus of open field cultivation, and although these have been overlain by the regular straight-sided fields that followed late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure, the medieval system of sheep-and corn agriculture largely determined by the layout of tracks, droves and hollow ways that took the livestock to and from the downs, created the bounds within which modern fields are still largely contained. Post-medieval agricultural improvements included the creation of water meadows, the channels of which are still visible components of the valley landscape, and watercress beds.

The large, geometric fields on the valley sides contrast with the small, sinuous and irregular fields that occupy the valley floor.

### **Land Use and Recreation**

The shallow valley sides have been exploited for arable cultivation while the steeper valley sides have remained wooded or grazed by sheep. The valley floors are mostly given over to grazing although some arable cropping exists. The river terraces on the valley floor have been exploited for gravel extraction in the past (for example at Langford Lakes) and also provide higher ground for roads and settlement - villages with their private gardens and manor houses with their designed parkland are all located on the terraces here. The Wylye Valley provides an important communication corridor between Salisbury and Warminster and Bristol, including a railway along the south side of the valley and the upgraded A36 trunk road, which bypasses a number of villages along the north side of the valley. The A303 trunk road also crosses the valley on a viaduct.

A relatively low density of footpaths however, there are a number of bridleways both north and south of the river. Some of these bridleways forms strong connections across the AONB and beyond to Salisbury Plain. The Wessex Ridgeway crosses the Wylye Valley between Corton and Knook. A trekking centre is located at Codford. The Langford Lakes are a key recreational resource, providing fishing opportunities. Most of the large country houses and parklands are privately owned and do not contribute to the recreational resource. The Australian Commonwealth Military Forces cut a badge (a 'Rising Sun') into the steep chalk slope just above the A36 at Codford in 1916. This badge is of the same design as the one cut into the escarpment at Fovant, although not as detailed, and is some 150ft tall.

There are a number of proposed areas of 'open country' as defined in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, and drawn on the Countryside Agency's draft maps of 'open countryside and registered common land'. These correspond to areas of chalk downland on the Wylye valley sides.

### **Historic Development of Settlement and Relationship with the Landscape**

The rich pastures in the Wylye Valley would have attracted many small homesteads probably since the Early Neolithic period circa 4000 BC. Bronze Age (3000 - 3500 BC) fortifications

which were further developed in the Iron Age are evident today on nearby hills, for example Battlesbury, Scratchbury and Clay Hills, and when Stonehenge was erected circa 3000 BC there was probably a thriving community in the Wylde Valley. Over the years small homesteads merged into settlements.

An important factor in determining the location of settlement in the river valleys has been the presence of water. The level of the water table is believed to have fallen over the thousands of years since the last Ice Age, so that the bulk of the chalk downland is now dry. Human settlement reacted to this by focusing on the river valleys where water was more freely available.

The arrangement of settlements in the Wylde valley is largely determined by the pattern that emerged in the medieval period, with villages strung out along both sides of the valley exploiting the varied resources on the valley floor, valley sides and adjacent downs. The presence of village earthworks, for instance at Little Langford, Hanging Langford and Fisherton de la Mere, points to the varying degrees to which such settlements thrived, contracted or even disappeared during the medieval period.

The proximity of the Wylde Valley to Warminster and Salisbury Plain ensured that Sutton Veny and the surrounding villages in the upper Wylde Valley area, provided an ideal location to barrack troops in the First World War. The Second World War saw the rebuilding of many of the camps, though not on the scale of the First War. A substantial number of buildings and huts remain today.

### **Settlement and Built Character**

There is a very high density of villages along the valley. Parishes (each focused on a village) cut across the valley, taking in an area of watermeadow, valley sides and downland. Villages such as Tytherington, Corton and Boyton are often little more than a kilometre apart, linked by narrow lanes which run along the valley, but which rarely cross it.

Several of the villages are of a linear design, others are nucleated, but all are focused on small parish churches or manor houses - the spires of these churches are prominent elements in the landscape. Cottages, churches and larger houses are typically built of grey or honey-coloured stone, often with slate or thatch roofs. The shortage of building stone is reflected in the popular 'chequerboard' patterns of stone and knapped flint (the church at Little Langford illustrates this building style). Some, more recent cottages are built of red bricks. Another feature are the high 'cob' walls, often rendered in pale yellow or grey and topped with thatch or tiles, that surround the larger houses. Although there has been some more recent development around existing settlements, many of these villages retain their distinctive character - the product of building styles, materials, size and layout. There are also a handful of modern residential developments in more open locations, some perilously close to the floodplain. These weaken the settlement pattern of the villages and undermine the structure of the valley with the essential visual and physical gaps between settlements.

### **Historic Environment**

The dominant character of historic landscape is its medieval settlement pattern, with closely spaced settlements, some identified now only by manor houses, farms and contracted or deserted villages. These form part of a changed agricultural landscape, one improved in the

post-medieval period, enclosed in the late 18th/early 19th century, and further rationalised in the 20th century. Channels of post-Medieval water meadows are visible on the valley floor east of Steeple Langford. Neolithic long barrows and Bronze Age round barrows are also features of the valley floor.

## EVALUATION

### Strength of Character

This is a landscape of **strong character** as a result of the distinctive valley landform, sense of visual unity and consistent character throughout. The distinct and recognisable pattern of features such as grazed valley floor pasture, historic water meadows, parklands, tight-knit medieval villages and dry tributary valleys reinforce the strength of character of this chalk river valley. There are relatively few detracting features to dilute character, except for unsympathetic planting and signage that occur along the A36 corridor, and infrastructure associated where the A303 crosses the valley.

### Current Condition

The natural form of the valley is strong and has been little altered by man. The built environment is generally in a good state of repair, but boundaries (hedgerows, fences and estate rails) are often in a declining state. The condition of semi-natural habitats on the valley floor (wet meadow and riverine habitats) and valley sides (chalk grassland and scrub mosaics) has declined over the years. Today very few areas of semi-natural habitat remain. For example, former extensive wet woodland is now mostly restricted to a narrow line of willow along the river and traditional water meadow management is no longer practiced. Leylandii is a familiar sight along transport corridors. Overall landscape condition is **moderate**.

### Past and Present Change

- Conversion from chalk grassland to an arable land use on the valley sides has been one of the most significant changes affecting the landscape of the chalk river valleys - the arable fields and their geometric boundaries on the valley sides detracting from the smooth, unenclosed grasslands that are typical of the chalk scarps and slopes.
- Traditional watermeadow management is no longer practiced with watermeadows only occurring as remnant landscape features. Other valley pastures and meadows have been drained, enlarged and ploughed up for cereal crops.
- The condition of many of the hedges and other boundaries, such as iron railings and estate fences, on the valley floor is now declining.
- There is evidence of past pressure for extraction of sharp sand and gravel on the floodplain of the valley floor.
- Loss of elm is one of the key changes that has occurred in the twentieth century. Some of the floodplain trees are becoming over-mature and will eventually die.
- Wet woodland is now mostly restricted to a narrow line of willow (*Salix* spp.) and alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) along the immediate river banks.

- The presence of major transport corridors, particularly the A36 trunk road, has brought pressures for development and associated amenity planting and signage.
- Modern residential developments in more open locations, some close to the floodplain, have weakened the pattern of tight knit villages in the past.
- The A303 trunk road that crosses the valley on a viaduct and its junction with the A36 disrupts visual unity along the valley.
- Water abstraction, either from bore holes drilled into the chalk aquifer or directly from the watercourse, has resulted in a notable reduction in flow along the chalk rivers in the past with serious implications for nature conservation, landscape character and activities such as game and coarse fishing.

### **Possible Future Trends**

A potential fall in the profitability of the arable sector, as a result of the CAP reform, is likely to result in more marginal arable land being abandoned from production and reverted to chalk grassland or woodland with the help of agri-environment schemes. The impact on the condition of the landscape will be determined by the success of the agri-environment schemes. However, the decline in farm labour and lack of income is likely to result in decline in traditional forms of environmental management such as management of hedgerows and ditches.

The impact of the Foot and Mouth epidemic and BSE means that there is likely to be increasing professionalisation of livestock farming making it more difficult to keep livestock as a part time hobby and limiting the availability of livestock to graze land of low agricultural, but high environmental, value such as flood plains. Traditional agricultural areas such as the Wylve Valley are likely to diversify, resulting in the conversion of agricultural buildings to residential or industrial uses and the establishment of secondary enterprises. This may include establishment of commercial shoots or growth of novel crops such as biomass crops which could alter the sense of enclosure in the valley bottom.

Sharp sand and gravel extraction should not be a pressure for change in the future because the Wiltshire Structure Plan presumes against extraction within the AONB 'except in extreme circumstances'. There may be development pressures in relation to former military sites within the valley.

Future trends imply that landscape condition may **decline** in the future.

### **Management Objective**

**The overall management objective should be to conserve the strong visual unity of the valley, the diversity of semi-natural habitats and the pattern of springline villages and to restore features such as wet woodlands, meadows and boundary features.**

- Consider opportunities for re-planting hedgerows and hedgerow trees where these have been lost. In particular, the comparatively dense structure of willows, poplars and other moisture loving trees should be retained along field boundaries and the course of the

river. Encourage maintenance of boundaries, particularly the estate railings that are typical of the Wylde Valley.

- Consider opportunities for reversion from arable cropping back to chalk grassland on the valley sides (possible area for agri-environment targeting).
- Identify, conserve and restore remnant water meadow systems that are an important historic landscape feature - and consider opportunities for reinstatement of traditional management techniques (opportunity for Local Heritage Initiative Project).
- There should be a presumption against mineral extraction within the valley, but where it is unavoidable sympathetic restoration plans and long term management are critical.
- Consider planting a new generation of floodplain trees to replace those that are becoming over-mature and to replace elms that were lost during the twentieth century.
- Consider extending wet woodland on the valley floor.
- Encourage areas of fallow arable land within the arable matrix.
- Resist excessive signage associated with new development along the A36.
- Encourage use of native planting in any new landscape scheme associated with new development and consider removal of unsympathetic species, such as the Leylandii screening hedges that stand out in the landscape.
- Conserve the pattern of tight knit villages, maintaining the physical and visual gap between them.
- Maintain a sense of landscape scale when planning new road junctions - junctions that are too large will become eyesores and disrupt visual unity along the valley.
- The local authorities and AONB Partnership could consider publishing design guides as Supplementary Planning Guidance outlining local designs, materials, layouts, village form etc together with good practice in designing details such as driveways, garages etc.
- The problem of reduced flows resulting from water abstraction is now recognised by the Environment Agency and steps are being taken to reduce the volume of water being abstracted in the upper catchment. Consider monitoring changes.



## 5B EBBLE CHALK RIVER VALLEY

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A broad river valley with varied landform and dry tributary valleys.



The River Ebble gently meanders across the floodplain.



*The Fovant and Chalke Escarpment (IC) frames the valley and provides a strong backdrop to the floodplain.*



The land use of the valley is dominated intensive arable production.



Stone and knapped flint chequerboarding on cottages is characteristic of the built environment.



Trees on the floodplain provide a strong enclosing character.





## 5B EBBLE CHALK RIVER VALLEY

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### Key Characteristics

- Narrow course of the fast flowing River Ebble flows in a large scale, undulating, broad river valley.
- Tributary valleys that have deeply eroded the chalk slopes are now dry.
- Valley is dominated by intensive arable production contained within a system of extensive field units, enlarged during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Smaller areas of unimproved chalk grassland and rough pasture on steeper slopes and floodplain including nine nationally important grassland sites.
- Remnant water meadows and cress beds on the valley floor dating from the post-medieval and modern periods.
- Small remnant woodland blocks and belts occurring on the floodplain with willow and poplar following the course of the river.
- Many tumuli, a hill fort at Chiselbury and Ackling Dyke Roman road between Old Sarum and Badbury rings contribute to the visible archaeology.
- Linear hamlets and villages are sited on the valley bottom spaced at close intervals along both sides of the river
- Brick, flint, thatch and slate are common building materials and typify settlement character.

### Location and Boundaries

This character area is centrally located within the AONB. It stretches from Berwick St John in the west where the two sections of the *Fovant and Chalke Escarpment (1C)* wrap around to enclose the head of the valley. Its easterly extent is defined by the AONB boundary - in reality the river valley continues beyond the boundary to join the River Avon south of Salisbury.

To the north lies the steep *Fovant Escarpment (1C)*. To the south west the *Chalke Escarpment (1C)* encloses the valley. The south eastern valley sides are met by the *Southern Downland Belt (2B)*. Here the landscape is defined by the edge of the deeply incised combe valleys that mark the transition to the distinctly open, large-scale landform of the downland.

### Summary of Visual Character

The *Ebble Chalk River Valley (5B)* is a broad valley of shallow slopes and dry tributary valleys. The River Ebble follows a largely straight course along a narrow floodplain, with picturesque hamlets and villages sited regularly along its length. The lush character of the valley floor is emphasised by the presence of willow and poplar along the route of the River Ebble. The visual connectivity to the landscapes of open chalk downland is emphasised by the

predominant arable land use contained within fields that are extensive in size, the previous pastoral land use having given way to arable crop production. Pasture is largely defined by improved ley and is intensively grazed. Some areas of rough pasture also survive but are largely limited to small grazing pockets on the flood plain or steepest valley sides.

## **PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**

### **Geology and Soils**

Upper Chalk is associated with areas of higher ground where levels of fluvial erosion have been less severe. In contrast, exposure of the Middle and Lower Chalk strata has occurred close to the main body of the River Ebble, along its floodplain and along the tributary valleys where the Upper Chalk Stratum has been eroded over time. Drift deposits of valley gravels and alluvium of the Recent and Pleistocene era define the course of the Ebble and a significant area of clay with Flints geology is located to the north west of Broad Chalke.

Rendzinas is the most common soil group within the valley and is largely synonymous with Upper Chalk geology and the alluvium and valley gravels aligning the river. The presence of the Clay-with-flint geology has given rise to paleo-argillic brown earths that support a localised area of woodland to the north west of Broad Chalke.

### **Landform and Hydrology**

Like the Wylye, the River Ebble follows a line of weakness in the chalk downs, eroding a course along an east-west fold in the strata. In contrast to the Wylye, however, this is a comparatively broad valley (about 4 kilometres from ridge-top to ridge-top). Many dry tributary valleys are deeply eroded into the chalk slopes giving rise to an undulating landform. The shallow slopes and contrasting deep chalk combs give the valley a distinct downland appearance and it is not until the valley bottom is reached that the valley character becomes particularly strong. The valley is relatively straight and the river runs through a narrow floodplain.

The distinct landform changes from open flat floodplain to gently sloping open downland to distinctive sharp slopes and hills (with an elevation range from 80 to 200+m AOD). This provides a variety of viewing experiences and also changes the sense of enclosure, exposure and scale within the landscape.

The River Ebble flows east-west across this character area to meet the River Avon at Salisbury. One minor tributary flows north from Bowerchalke to meet the River Ebble at Broad Chalke.

### **Land Cover**

The valley is dominated by arable fields, although some areas of chalk grassland survive. These are now largely restricted to the steepest locations (typically the tributary valley sides). There is evidence of scrub encroachment within these areas of Chalk grassland.

This is an open landscape and, like other areas, the small amount of woodland present forms an important feature and is a key characteristic of this landscape. The regular occurrence of small copses, shelterbelts and avenues gives a distinctly textured quality to the landscape and an impression of more tree cover than is actually the case. On Gurston Down and Knapp

Down, to the north west of Broad Chalke, a series of shelter belts structure the otherwise open landscape. These belts comprise deciduous swathes and mixed blocks.

Although by no means extensive, small woodland belts and scattered trees are a feature of the valley bottom, for example the willows and poplars that line the narrow floodplain and are conspicuous along the course of the river. The now fragmented beech avenue which rises from Broad Chalke to Knowlton Hill forms a valuable landscape feature within the valley, providing a 'tunnelled' lane up the hillside.

## Biodiversity

Although arable farmland supports some important arable weeds and farmland birds, the steeper slopes of the valley sides support the most important areas. This includes nine nationally important chalk grassland sites of Gallows Hill (SSSI), Homington and Combe Bisset Down (SSSI), Knapp and Barnett's Down (SSSI), Throope Down (SSSI) and Prescombe Down (NNR).

Prescombe Down (NNR) represents botanically diverse chalk grassland, with dense clumps mixed calcareous scrub occurring at the northern end of the site. The site supports a number of notable plant species, including the national scarce dwarf sedge (*Carex humilis*) which dominates large parts of the short downland turf, and also a colony of the rare and endemic early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*). In addition to its floristic diversity Prescombe Down (NNR) also supports nearly twenty species of breeding butterfly, including the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*) a species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and UK BAP priority species.

Woodland, especially that of ancient semi-natural origin is a fairly uncommon feature of this character area, however the small broadleaved and coniferous shelterbelts that are present provide valuable nesting and feeding habitat for a range of farmland bird species.

The table below highlights the features of key ecological interest for each statutory site.

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha)	Summary of importance
Bowerchalke Downs (5% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5B)	SSSI	128.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics</li> <li>Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> </ul>
Gallows Hill	SSSI	27.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unimproved chalk grassland</li> </ul>
Homington and Combe Bisset Downs	SSSI	25.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Several blocks of unimproved chalk grassland</li> </ul>
Knapp and Barnett's Down	SSSI	71.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland</li> </ul>
Knighton Downs and Wood (64% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5B)	SSSI	203.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, scrub and semi-natural woodland</li> <li>Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>) a species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Odstock Down (85% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5B)	SSSI	12.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unimproved chalk grassland</li> </ul>
Prescombe Down	NNR SAC SSSI	42.3 76.1 76.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland</li> <li>Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> <li>Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>) a species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Throope Down	SSSI	39.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics</li> <li>Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>) a species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and UK BAP priority species</li> </ul>
Stratford Toney Down	SSSI	23.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics</li> </ul>

## HUMAN INFLUENCES

### Evidence of Past Social Structure

The range of prehistoric earthworks, particularly on the north side of the Ebble valley, indicate a continuity of settlement and exploitation of the chalk valleys sides. The Neolithic long barrow at White Sheet Hill indicates an emphasis on the ideological and symbolic use of landscape while the Bronze Age and Iron Age field systems and earthwork boundaries indicate a greater reliance on physical control of the landscape, exemplified by defended enclosures such as the Chiselbury hillfort. Ackling Dyke, the Roman road between Old Sarum and Badbury Rings, reflects the subsequent imposition of Roman authority on the landscape, the later arrangement of valley bottom manors, farms and settlements reflects the pattern of Anglo-Saxon settlement, and the feudal system of land-tenure that accompanied it, which provided the basis for the organisation of the landscape through the medieval, and into post-medieval, period.

### Field Patterns, Boundaries and Predominant Date of Enclosure

In the medieval period the valley sides would have been the focus of open field cultivation, between the valley floor meadows and the upland grazing, as a component of sheep-and corn agriculture. This system of mixed farming affected the arrangement of later enclosed fields, the layout tracks, droves and hollow-ways which survive to the present being influenced largely by the movement of livestock to and from the downs. Agricultural innovations in the post-medieval and modern periods saw the creation of water meadows, as at Broad Chalke, and later cress beds, on the valley floor, in places still a visible component of the landscape. These periods also saw the inclosure of the open fields

adjacent to the villages, and the extension of arable farming onto the adjacent downs, as reflected in the siting of field barns at a distance from the river, in contrast to the valley bottom locations of most of the farms. The predominantly large scale fields on the northern dip slope are the result of the recent amalgamation of earlier straight-sided fields characteristic of late 18th/early 19th century parliamentary inclosure.

### **Land Use and Recreation**

The shallow slopes along much of the Ebbles valley mean that there is a predominance of arable agriculture, comprising large fields on the valley sides. In addition, there are some significant areas of improved pasture for intensive pastoral farming but these do not dominate. Outdoor pig farming is also found along the valley. Chalk grassland would once have been much more extensive and today tends to be restricted to the steep sides of tributary valleys, often demarcated by regular fields. Field boundaries are varied – comprising post and wire fencing in places, native hedgerows and a scattering of hedgerow trees.

One significant area of woodland occurs to the northeast of the character area where the landscape meets the *West Wiltshire Downs Open Chalk Downland (2A)*. This woodland sited on undulating, hilly land encompasses the woodlands of Netton Clump, Bishopstone Down and New Covert. This woodland cluster is visually connected to the larger block of woodland immediately to the east - Hare Warren, standing just beyond the AONB boundary but which, in association with the parkland setting of Wilton House, enhances the overall sense of woodedness.

The recreational character of this valley is characterised by the footpaths, bridleways, byways and cycle routes that cross the landscape. These generally follow a north-south path, the exception being the Old Shaftesbury Drove track (a byway and cycle route) that runs the full length of the character area, east-west, following the line of the adjacent *Fovant Escarpment (1C)*, following the line of the scarp. There are also a number of footpaths following the east-west path of the River Ebbles, connecting the villages that occur along its course. Opportunities for camping and caravanning occur within this character area with a site found immediately north of Stratford Tony.

There are a number of proposed areas of Open Country as mapped in draft by the Countryside Agency. These correspond to the areas of chalk downland on the valley sides.

### **Historic Development of Settlement and Relationship with the landscape**

The Saxon and medieval settlement patterns, consisting of manors and villages spaced at close intervals along both sides of the river, survives to the present day. Some of the medieval settlements along the valley have shifted or been abandoned, a number having survived as earthworks, others being marked only by farmsteads. Other settlements have expanded, their original, in many cases linear layouts being still apparent in the present arrangement of property boundaries. The post-medieval and modern expansion of arable cultivation can be seen in the isolated locations of a number of field barns and farmsteads in the combs and on the higher downland slopes.

## Settlement and Built Character

Settlement within the Ebble River Valley predominantly comprises linear villages and hamlets such as Combe Bissett, Stratford Tony, Bishopstone, Broadchalke and Ebbesborne Wake which occur regularly along the course of the river. Some of the settlements extend up and onto the shallow downland slopes. Elsewhere, within this landscape settlement is notably absent. Evidence of rural diversification is present where converted farm buildings are being let for business.

Brick and flint are common building materials within the settlements. Broadchalke and Bowerchalke for example contain stone and flint chequer boarding, red brick, and black weatherboarding whilst thatch and slate are characteristic roofing materials. New development is occurring within the villages. Settlement edges are often defined by concrete roadside kerbs – changing the rural character.

## Historic Environment

The higher areas of the chalk dipslope and downs to the north of the River Ebble are similar in many respects to the areas of open chalk downland, with a range of surviving earthwork features of prehistoric date. The Neolithic long barrow on Whitesheet Hill is among the earliest components of a landscape which also includes numerous Bronze Age round barrows, field systems, the Chiselbury hillfort and extensive linear earthworks, cross-ridge dykes and enclosures. To the south of the river, in contrast, the majority of prehistoric features lie on the adjacent downs, above the more prominent scarp.

The key visible historic components are:

- Isolated Neolithic long barrow burial monuments, and Bronze Age round barrows.
- Field systems of probable late prehistoric date, earthworks enclosures and cross- ridge dykes as on Swallowcliffe Down, and Chiselbury hillfort.
- Ackling Dyke Roman road between Old Sarum and Badbury rings cutting through the eastern end of the valley.
- Chain of small medieval settlements along the river, as well as water meadows and cress beds on the valley floor.
- Straight-sided fields representing late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure, with large scale fields resulting from 20th century boundary loss.

## EVALUATION

### Strength of Character

This landscape has a **moderate** strength of character. The gradual change from pastoral to overtly arable character has diluted the distinction between the previously pastoral character of the floodplain and the arable character of the downland valleys sides which now seem to merge together. Similarly the loss of areas of chalk grassland has reduced land cover variety and richness within the valley, creating an increasingly simple coverage. The

underlying landform does however ensure a range of visual experiences. There has also been a dilution of built character in places where unsympathetic, suburban-style development has, and is, impacting upon traditional building style, arrangement and detailing.

### **Current Condition**

The natural landform of this landscape has retained its distinctive form and strong sense of intactness and continuity – the open, flat floodplain giving way to the gently sloping valley sides with its dry tributary valleys. Numerous tumuli, ancient earthworks, as well as a section of a Roman Road are surviving elements of the physical landscape. Due to the extent of arable farming, much of the landscape is actively managed and in good condition. However, the condition of habitats is less good. Today very few areas of semi-natural habitat remain - former extensive wet woodland is now mostly restricted to a narrow line of willow along the river and traditional water meadow management is no longer practiced. The loss of features such as hedgerows and the poor/inconsistent management of those that survive, gives an unkempt appearance to the landscape. Signs of decline are also evident at settlement edges due to poor maintenance of some farm outbuildings that evoke an untidy approach to settlements. Overall landscape condition is **moderate**.

### **Past and Present Change**

- Water abstraction, either from bore holes drilled into the Chalk aquifer or directly from the watercourse, has resulted in a notable reduction in flow with serious implications for nature conservation, landscape and activities such as game and coarse fishing.
- Valley pastures and water meadows have been drained, enlarged and ploughed up in the past for cereal cropping with the result that traditional meadow management is no longer practiced and watermeadows have become a remnant landscape feature.
- Wet woodland is now mostly restricted to the willow (*salix spp*) and alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) aligning the course of the river.
- Increasingly intensive farming practices, including the shift from spring-sown to autumn-sown crops, has resulted in a change in landscape character and decline in farmland birds in recent years.
- Modern development which, although respecting the use of local materials, is less sympathetic to traditional form, scale and layout of buildings has affected some settlements in the Ebble Valley.
- Decline in grazing pressure in recent years has resulted in scrub invasion on chalk grassland.

### **Possible Future Trends**

A potential fall in the profitability of the arable sector, as a result of the CAP reform, is likely to result in more marginal arable land being abandoned from production and reverted to chalk grassland or woodland with the help of agri-environment schemes. This will increase the diversity found within the valley. The impact on the condition of the landscape will be determined by the success of the agri-environment schemes. However, the decline in farm

labour and lack of income is likely to result in decline in traditional forms of environmental management such as management of hedgerows and ditches.

The impact of the Foot and Mouth epidemic and BSE means that there is likely to be increasing professionalisation of livestock farming making it more difficult to keep livestock as a part time hobby and limiting the availability of livestock to graze land of low agricultural, but high environmental, value such as flood plains. Traditional agricultural areas such as the Ebble Valley are likely to diversify, resulting in the conversion of agricultural buildings to residential or industrial uses and the establishment of secondary enterprises. This may include establishment of commercial shoots or growth of novel crop such as biomass crops which could alter the sense of enclosure in the valley bottom.

The proposed designation of areas of chalk downland on the valley sides as Areas of 'Open Country' under the CRoW Act may bring management issues due the potential increase in visitor numbers and the pressure for associated facilities.

Future trends imply that landscape condition may **decline** in the future.

### **Management Objective**

**The overall management strategy should be to conserve the dramatic character of the landform, the distinctive settlement pattern on the valley floor and to restore declining features such as wet woodlands, meadows, chalk grassland and boundary features.**

- Consider opportunities for replanting hedgerows, particularly where fencing is decline and where hedgerow lengths are gappy.
- Encourage areas of fallow arable land within the arable matrix and conserve farmland features such as hedgerows, ponds and field margins to encourage arable weeds and farmland birds.
- Consider the reversion of some arable fields back to pasture on the floodplain and consider employing traditional water meadow system management techniques (e.g. seasonal flooding practices) for nature conservation purposes.
- The problem of reduced flows resulting from water abstraction is now recognised by the Environment Agency and steps are being taken to reduce the volume of water being abstracted in the upper catchment.
- Conserve the pattern of linear villages on the valley floor, maintaining the physical and visual gap between them.
- Resist further dilution of traditional settlement character through establishment and use of building design guidance.
- Consider extending and thickening up areas of wet woodland on the valley floor.
- Consider providing guidelines on characteristic planting on the edge of settlements to prevent harsh boundaries between rural and urban areas.



- Reinforce landscape features such as the beech avenue which rises from Broad Chalke to Knowlton Hill.
- Consider opportunities for reinstatement of chalk grassland, particularly on sites that lie adjacent to existing chalk grassland sites and ensure grazing pressure is managed to maintain a mosaic of grass and scrub habitats.
- Promote sustainable management of recreation particularly in relation to the proposed Open Country designation.



## 5C STOUR AND AVON TRIBUTARY CHALK VALLEYS

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The influence of estates is evident in the presence of features such as avenues.



Linear villages are a feature of these tributary valleys.



Red brick, flint and thatch are locally distinctive building materials.



Streams are often small and hidden in the valley bottom.



The valleys provide a sheltered environment for country houses and their designed parkland.



Properties within the villages are accessed via small bridges over tributaries of the Stour and Avon.



## 5C STOUR AND AVON TRIBUTARY VALLEYS

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### Key Characteristics

- Dipslope streams have eroded shallow valleys into the upper chalk - the upper parts of most of these valleys are dry.
- The shallow nature of the valleys means that they have been exploited either as improved pasture or, more commonly, large arable fields.
- Smaller, narrow fields, in places fossilising old strip patterns, predominate around the villages.
- Mature willows and poplars form a dense ribbon of trees, tracing the course of the river. Withy beds were once characteristic of the valleys and some survive today as features.
- Country houses and their designed parkland contribute features such as avenues, shelter belts and brick walls.
- Picturesque villages inhabit the valley bottoms, following the course of the river in a linear form - the stream typically runs through the village with cottages reached via small bridges.
- Deserted Medieval villages are marked only by farmsteads or individual houses.
- Red brick, flint and thatch are locally distinctive materials.
- Roads occupy each valley floor.
- The Dorset Cursus, and numerous Bronze Age round barrows and channels of post-medieval water meadows contribute to the visible archaeology.
- This rural area is lush farming country that provides a peaceful and unified environment.

### Location and Boundaries

The *Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys* character area occupies the series of parallel valleys of the tributary streams that intersect the southern dipslope of the chalk (*Southern Downland Belt 2B*) towards the south-eastern boundary of the AONB. The area includes the valleys of the Tarrant and Allen that drain into the Stour and the valleys of the Crane and Allen Rivers that drain into the Avon.

### Summary of Visual Character

The tributaries of the Stour and Avon Valleys that drain the chalk dipslope have eroded shallow valleys into the upper chalk. Most of the valley sides are shallow and have been exploited for the cultivation of arable crops or improved pasture. However, some of the steeper valley sides still support unimproved chalk grassland or woodland. The narrow floors of the tributary valleys contain streams marked by poplars and willows. The valleys also provide corridors of movement and support distinctive linear villages of cottages



accessed via bridges across the watercourses bordering the village street. These villages contain cottages of locally distinctive materials, most notably red brick and flint with thatch. These valleys provide an intimate landscape with a semi-enclosed character contrasting with the adjacent open chalk downs. The designed landscapes surrounding country houses provide additional interest in the form of avenues, copses, tree clumps and boundary detailing. These valleys are unified by the pattern of linear picturesque villages that occupy the valley floors.

## **PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**

### **Geology and soils**

The dipslope streams have eroded shallow valleys into the Upper Chalk with valley gravels deposited during the Quaternary Period. These valley gravels are composed of the constituents of the Plateau Gravels that cap the surrounding chalklands and give rise to shallow calcareous and non-calcareous loamy soils over flint gravel. Alluvium is the most recent deposit of the streams and occurs in the lower reaches of the tributary streams. These areas of alluvium give rise to well drained fine silty soils. The shallow chalk valley sides support shallow, well drained calcareous soils.

### **Landform and Hydrology**

The *Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys* differ from the valleys of the Ebbles and Wylkes in that they originated as streams draining the inclined surface of the chalk strata, rather than exploiting and following a line of lateral weakness. As described above, it is likely that Damerham Knoll, Pentridge Hill together with other hills along the dipslope once formed a continuous, north facing escarpment between Salisbury and Blandford. Over the millenia, the streams which drained the shallow dipslope of this escarpment cut down into the chalk, eventually breaking through the chalk escarpment to form the distinct hills and knolls that are visible today. At the same time, the catchment of the rivers grew as they were able to penetrate the downland to the north of the former escarpment.

Today the lowering of the water-table means that the upper parts of most of these valleys are dry. North of the downland hills, in their upper reaches, most of these valleys lose their narrow, comparatively deep profiles, instead blending into the open downland. The principal exception to this is the Tarrant which rises in the heart of Cranborne Chase before flowing for about ten kilometres across the chalk.

### **Land Cover**

The *Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys* have largely been exploited for improved pasture or, more commonly, arable crop production. However, woodland still exists on steeper slopes and wet pastures or watermeadows in the valley bottoms. Wetland/aquatic species are common. Avenues associated with designed parkland are features of the landscape in the valleys. The narrow valley bottom is often distinguished by the mature willows and poplars which form a dense ribbon of trees, formerly part of more extensive wet woodlands, tracing the course of the river.

## Biodiversity

This relatively small character area is dominated by arable agriculture and improved pastures that provide important habitats for farmland birds. Species which are reliant on farmland and traditional agricultural practices (e.g. arable weeds and farmland birds) are among the most rapidly declining group in the UK, and are of significant ecological and nature conservation interest.

This valley does have a number of small woodland blocks and shelterbelts, which although mostly of relatively recent origin do enhance the ecological value at the local level. These largely farmed landscapes can possess a significant level of ecological interest, especially where associated habitats such as hedgerows, farm ponds and field margins are intact and managed thoughtfully.

The table below highlights the features of key ecological interest for the Moors River SSSI.

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha)	Summary of importance
Moors River System (0.1% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5C)	SSSI	296.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• River system noted for its exceptional diversity of aquatic and wetland plants and rich assemblages of aquatic invertebrates</li><li>• Populations of bullhead (<i>Cottus gobius</i>) and brook lamprey (<i>Lampetra planeri</i>), both species listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II)</li></ul>

## HUMAN INFLUENCES

### Evidence of Past Social Structure

Because these are shallow valleys that drain the dip slope of the chalk it is difficult to separate them from the surrounding downland landscape in terms of early social structure. This is illustrated visibly by the fact that the Dorset cursus, a 10km long Neolithic ceremonial monument, crosses the valleys of the River Crane and the Gussage. Similarly, the profusion of other Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments, and later earthwork features such as settlements, enclosures and linear boundaries, which are found on the downs flanking these valleys, extend into them reflecting the same social dynamics during the prehistoric and Romano-British periods. It is only in the Medieval period and later that the valleys became a clearly distinct zone with the arrangement of valley bottom manors, farms and settlements reflecting the pattern of Anglo-Saxon settlement, and the feudal system of land-tenure that accompanied it, and providing the basis for the organisation of the landscape into the post-medieval period.

### Field Patterns, Boundaries and Predominant date of enclosure

To a large degree the field systems on the valley floors mirror those on the adjacent downs. However, while on the downs the process of late 18th/early 19th century inclosure involved the enclosure of open downland, in the valleys it involved the enclosure of open strip fields, this being evident in the present pattern of small narrow fields around some of the villages. Post-medieval agricultural improvements also included the creation of water meadows, the



channels of which are still visible components of the valley landscape, for instance at Damerham on the River Allen, and further south where the valley widens. There are surviving withy beds along the River Allen at Crichel Lake.

In places the large scale arable fields conflict with the otherwise intimate, small scale nature of these valleys. Smaller, narrow fields, in places fossilising old strip patterns, predominate around the villages.

### **Land Use and Recreation**

The shallow valley sides have been exploited for arable cultivation while the steeper valley sides have remained wooded or grazed by sheep. This is a working agricultural landscape with the valley floors mostly given over to grazing although some arable cropping exists. The valleys' role as corridors of movement between the Stour/Avon Valleys and the open chalk downlands is reflected by the presence of roads that occupy each valley floor. The valleys provide a sheltered environment for country houses and their designed parkland, for example Tarrant Gunville, Crichel House, High Hall, Gaunts House, Wimborne St Giles, Cranborne Manor.

The low densities of public Rights of Way suggest the presence of low levels of informal recreation in this area. The most important recreational route is the Jubilee Trail that crosses the River Tarrant at Tarrant Gunville, the River Allen at Monkton up Wimborne and then follows the River Crane north of Cranborne. Apart from this long distance recreational route many of the valleys are inaccessible except by road. The large country houses and their parklands tend to be in private ownership although some are open to the public for retreats (e.g. Gaunts House) or simply to visit the grounds (e.g. Cranborne Manor Gardens).

There are two areas of Registered Common Land at Hinton Parva and High Hall.

### **Historic Development of Settlement and Relationship with the Landscape**

Although the Roman villa at Rockbourne indicates the importance of valley settlements during the Romano-British period, the present arrangement of settlements along the valleys is determined largely by the pattern that emerged in the Saxon and Medieval periods, with villages spaced at close intervals along the valleys exploiting the varied resources on the valley floor, valley sides and adjacent downs. Many villages have a linear form, with properties laid out along the roads. However, many of the original settlements disappeared during the medieval period, with most of the Tarrant villages, for instance, surviving only as farms or single houses, and Long Crichel consisting now only of a loose string of mostly 19th century estate cottages. The creation of large country estates in valley locations also affected the pattern of settlement, the centre of Moor Crichel being occupied by Crichel House in its scenic park, with its accompanying estate buildings.

### **Settlement and Built Character**

Settlement is a characteristic feature of these dip slope valleys, often comprising linear villages such as Rockborne or Martin. Often the stream runs through the village with cottages reached via small bridges. A variation on this pattern is found at Wimborne St Giles and elsewhere, where the village spreads along parallel lanes separated by the open water

meadows and river. Bridges at either end link the two halves of the village. Some of these villages tend to straggle-off with farms and Victorian Villas extending the influence of the settlement along the valley.

These villages tend to sit easily in the landscape. In part, this reflects the fact that there has been comparatively little recent development and that many of the villages have a rich 'treescape' of mature native trees together with ornamentals associated with some of the large parklands that are found in the valleys. From Rockbourne church, for example, the village blurs into the woodland, plumes of smoke from chimneys signalling the presence of settlement in the valley. And although the overall layout of the village is linear (reflecting the shape of the valley and the influence of water and communications), many cottages and farms tend to be sited behind the main line of buildings, reached by footpaths or stony tracks off the lane. This ad hoc appearance is part of the character, preventing them falling into a simple, ribbon-like plan.

Many of the individual buildings have a distinctive character, some built right at the edge of the road, others at right angles or set back a few metres. Cottages are timber framed with render or brick infilling and with thatched roofs. Equally important are the larger houses and associated parklands which are found in many of the valleys. Examples include Crichel House, High Hall, Gaunts House, Wimborne St Giles and Cranborne Manor. Parkland estates tend to be highly visible because of the ornamental trees and specific patterns of planting (avenues etc) which are more formal and structured than the surrounding landscape. In many cases, their influence extends beyond the immediate garden and surrounding parkland, into the countryside in the form of avenues, copses and delineating shelterbelts. Perhaps the most impressive of these is the belt of woodland which surrounds Wimborne St Giles.

Each of these valleys has a distinct character and sense of identity. This is best illustrated by the 'families' of villages, linked by the rivers and lanes that occupy the valley floor. Eight villages take their name from the Tarrant River, for example, ranging from Tarrant Gunville in the north, through Tarrant Hinton, Launceston, Monkton, Rawston, Rushton, Keyneston to Tarrant Crawford. Other families include the two Wimbornes, three Gussages and two Crichels.

## **Historic Environment**

These valleys have little visible archaeology compared to the adjacent open downland. However, the Dorset Cursus, a scattering of tumuli, the course of the Roman Road past Tarrant Monkton and the remains of the Roman Villa at Rockbourne provide visible archaeology. The most obvious contribution of the historic environment to landscape character today is the medieval settlement pattern, with closely spaced settlements, some having shrunk to individual farms.

## **EVALUATION**

### **Strength of Character**

This is a landscape with a **moderate** strength of character. Although the combination of flood plain meadows, streams, transport corridors, linear medieval settlements and country houses form a distinct and recognisable pattern in these valleys, these tributary valleys do

not have the strong valley landform associated with the Wylde and the Nadder. The influence of the downs on these valleys (encroachment of large arable fields into the valleys often at the expense of woodland and grassland) further dilutes the character of these valleys.

### **Current Condition**

The intactness of the valleys has been affected in the past by the encroachment of arable farming into the valleys from the adjacent downs. The landform is in good condition - it has not experienced human interference. There are few areas of under-used land - the working agricultural landscape is well managed, except perhaps for the boundaries on the valley floor that are in declining condition. The condition of the ecological environment is not as high as it once was. For example, much of the Crane valley between Pentridge and Cranborne was chalk grassland, but today only the name Bottlebrush Down remains as a reminder of the old downland. The built environment is in a good state of repair with properties inhabited and well maintained. Overall landscape condition is **moderate**.

### **Past and Present Change**

- Conversion from chalk grassland to arable on the valley sides has been one of the most significant changes affecting the landscape of the chalk river valleys.
- Loss of the former practice of fertilising the watermeadows by 'drowning' the floodplain each year. Old valley pastures and watermeadows have been drained, enlarged by grubbing out hedges and ploughed up for cereal crops.
- Many of the hedges, farm ponds and field margins are now in decline as a result of increasing dominance of large specialist commercial farm units and intensive agricultural practices.
- Decline of farmland birds over recent years as a result of increased use of herbicides, the shift from spring-sown to autumn-sown crops (consequent loss of winter stubble) and more intensive grassland management.
- Wet woodland is now mostly restricted to a narrow line of willow (*Salix* spp.) and alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) along the immediate river banks.
- There is comparatively little recent development in villages. However, in some villages modern development has sprawled out along the road in a ribbon or become regimented or 'suburban' in character.
- Water abstraction, either from bore holes drilled into the chalk aquifer or directly from the watercourse, has resulted in a notable reduction in flow along the chalk rivers in the past.

### **Possible Future Trends**

A potential fall in the profitability of the arable sector, as a result of the CAP reform, is likely to result in more marginal arable land being abandoned from production and reverted to chalk grassland or woodland with the help of agri-environment schemes. This will increase the diversity found within these tributary valleys. The impact on the condition of the

landscape will be determined by the success of the agri-environment schemes. However, the decline in farm labour and lack of income is likely to result in decline in traditional forms of environmental management such as management of hedgerows and ditches.

The impact of the Foot and Mouth epidemic and BSE means that there is likely to be increasing professionalisation of livestock farming making it more difficult to keep livestock as a part time hobby and limiting the availability of livestock to graze land of low agricultural, but high environmental, value such as flood plains. Traditional agricultural areas are likely to diversify, resulting in the conversion of agricultural buildings to residential or industrial uses and the establishment of secondary enterprises. This may include establishment of commercial shoots or growth of novel crop such as biomass crops which could alter the sense of enclosure in the valleys.

Floodplain trees and trees that form important elements in villages are likely to become over-mature and will eventually die, with a programme of replacement planting required.

Future trends imply that landscape condition may **decline** in the future.

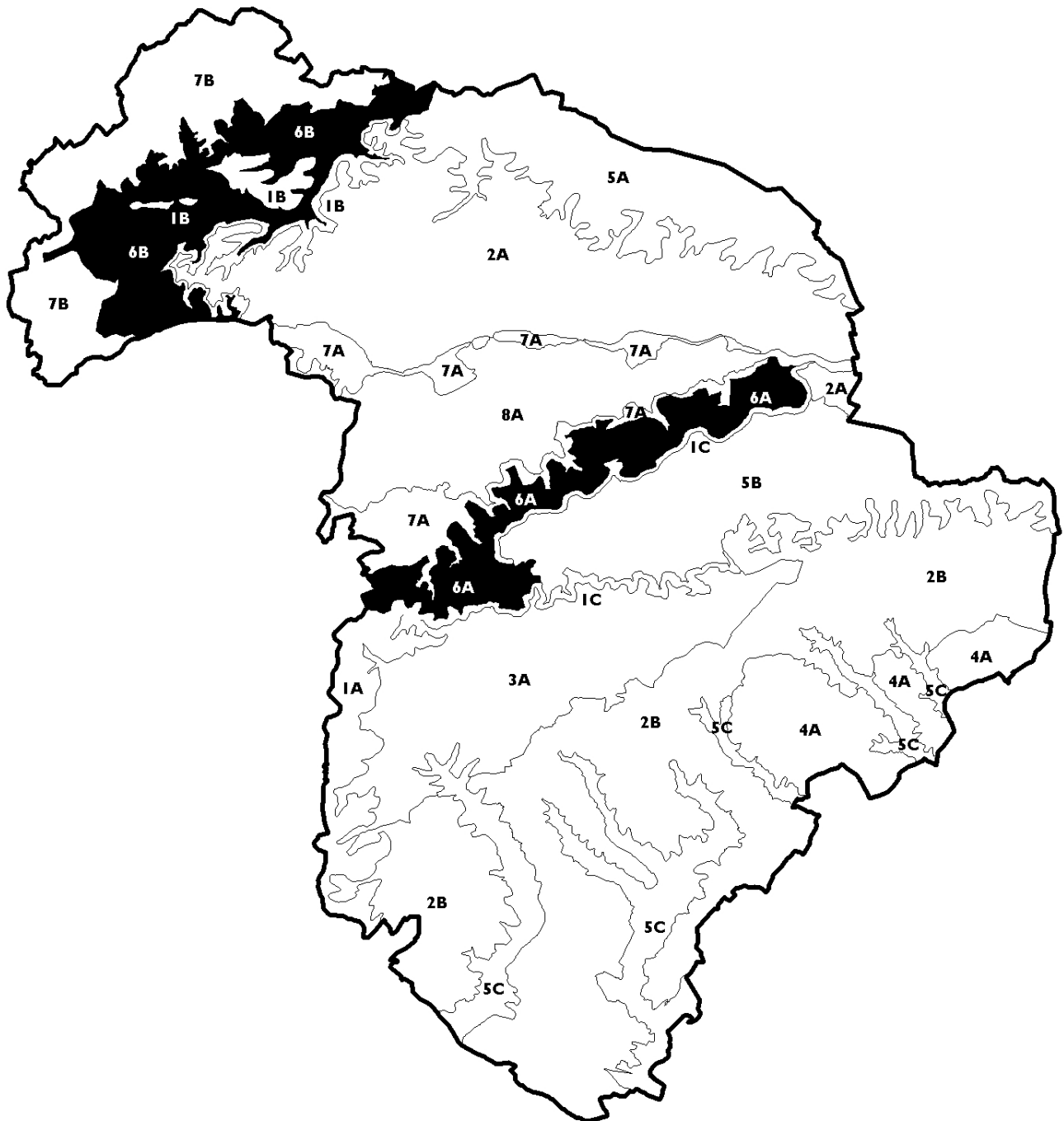
### **Management Objective**

**The overall management objective should be to conserve the strong visual unity of these valleys, the pattern of linear villages and semi-natural habitats, and to restore declining features such as wet woodlands, meadows, chalk grassland, valley side woodlands and boundary features.**

- Consider re-planting hedgerows and hedgerow trees where these have been lost and encourage conservation of farmland habitats (hedgerows, farm ponds, field margins and fallow fields) that are important for arable weeds and farmland birds.
- Retain the comparatively dense structure of willows, poplars and other moisture loving trees along field boundaries and the course of the river and consider extending wet woodland on the valley floor.
- Consider reversion from arable cropping back to chalk grassland on the valley sides and to watermeadows on the valley bottom.
- Encourage traditional management techniques such as fertilising the watermeadows by 'drowning' the floodplain each year and encourage restoration of floodplain habitats (i.e. pasture with an appropriate grazing regime).
- Consider planting a new generation of floodplain trees and trees within villages to replace those becoming over-mature.
- Maintain and encourage the ad hoc appearance of linear villages (with properties sited behind the main line of buildings, reached by footpaths or stony tracks off the lane) and prevent them falling into a simple, ribbon-like plan.
- The traditional association between the settlement and the river, often reflected in the small bridges which give access to cottages, should be reflected in new development. Culverting of streams through villages should be resisted and, where opportunities arise, culverts constructed in the past should be removed to reveal the open stream.

- Any new development should be assessed in relation to the effect it has on the proportion of 'old' buildings to new, the extent to which the development will be visible, orientation to the road.
- Attention to details such as drives, curbs, footways, fencing and even plot size should ensure that new development does not appear suburban.
- Local authorities should consider publishing design guides as Supplementary Planning Guidance outlining local designs, materials, layouts, village form etc together with good practice in designing details such as driveways, garages etc.
- Consider a tree planting strategy within villages to ensure all trees do not reach maturity at the same time.
- The problem of reduced flows resulting from water abstraction is now recognised by the Environment Agency and steps are being taken to reduce the volume of water being abstracted in the upper catchment. Consider monitoring these changes.

# 6. GREENSAND TERRACE



## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

6A Fovant Terrace

6B Kilmington Terrace



## TYPE 6: GREENSAND TERRACE

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### Description

The *Greensand Terrace* landscape types corresponds to the level terraces that lie between the greensand hills and chalk escarpments. The geology has given rise to rich brown earths and these soils support arable crop production. The large rectangular arable fields which dominate the terrace landscapes are characteristic of Parliamentary inclosure of a probable late 18th/early 19th century date. Calcareous subsoils tend to be found on the edge of the landscape type, closer to the foot of the chalk escarpment and it is here that mixed woodland typically marks the transition and edge of the terrace. The wooded copses provide valuable nesting and feeding habitat for a range of typical farmland bird species, a declining bird group within the UK. Coniferous blocks, planted as game coverts, are typical features of the terrace landscape. Low density, scattered farmsteads characterise settlement and built character. There are two *Greensand Terraces* within the AONB, the *Fovant Terrace* and the *Kilmington Terrace*.

### Key Characteristics

- Flat aprons of land from which the dramatic chalk escarpments and hills rise.
- Dominated by arable fields of Parliamentary inclosure.
- Large geometric fields and open skies contrast with the smaller scale, enclosed landscape of the adjacent *Greensand Hills*.
- Upper Greensand geology giving rise to rich brown earth soils that have a high agricultural value.
- Land use is predominantly agricultural, including cereal cropping, grass rotations, dairy farming and stock rearing.
- Mixed woodland runs in discontinuous belts along the base of the chalk escarpment.
- Coniferous belts shelter dispersed farmsteads.
- General absence of prehistoric earthworks.





## 6A FOVANT GREENSAND TERRACE

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Field scale is large and patterns are geometric



The flat landform of the terrace contrasts strongly with the adjacent chalk escarpment.



Farm buildings are scattered along the terrace. The Fovant Badges adorn the adjacent scarp.



Many hedgerows have been lost in the past, but hedgerow replacement is evident.



Post and wire fencing is typical of the open terrace - this creates an expansive character.



Thatch and stone building materials are typical, for example at Berwick St John.



## 6A FOVANT GREENSAND TERRACE

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### Key Characteristics

- A flat terrace of arable fields at the foot of the imposing Fovant and Chalke escarpment.
- Large geometric fields and open skies contrast with the smaller scale, enclosed landscape of the Greensand Hills to the north.
- Upper Greensand geology giving rise to rich brown earth soils that have a high agricultural value.
- Land use is predominantly agricultural, including cereal cropping, grass rotations, dairy farming and stock rearing.
- Mixed woodland runs in discontinuous belts along the base of the chalk escarpment.
- Coniferous shelter belts run at right angles to the escarpment cutting across the contours.
- Settlement is sparse - dispersed farm buildings are dotted along the route of the A30, a busy transport corridor.
- Uninterrupted views of the adjacent chalk escarpment from the terrace. Views to the Fovant Badges provide visitor interest and link this landscape to the Chalk escarpment.

### Location and Boundaries

Centrally located within the AONB, this distinctive terrace forms a flat platform between the undulating *Donhead to Fovant Greensand Hills (7A)* to the north and the dramatic chalk *Fovant and Chalke Escarpment (1C)*, to the south. The area extends from the outskirts of Shaftesbury in the west to Barford St Martin in the east.

### Summary of Visual Character

The *Fovant Terrace (6A)* is a flat, open landscape providing impressive views to the adjacent *Fovant and Chalke Escarpment (1C)* which rises above the open terrace and offers a sense of containment. Arable farming is the dominant land use with large fields and the presence of many new farm buildings a key feature.

Mixed woodland nestles at the foot of the adjacent chalk escarpment forming a transitional belt and marking the distinctive change in landform at the edge of the terrace. Coniferous block planting at the junction with the escarpment, by comparison provides a more abrupt contrast. Localised changes in landform are most marked towards the settlement of Charlton, where the land becomes more undulating and tree cover increases – evoking a more enclosed character.

Settlement pattern is dispersed and characterised by scattered farmsteads. The sense of remoteness in this landscape is disrupted by the busy A30 transport corridor that runs along the full length of the terrace.

## **PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**

### **Geology and Soils**

Much of the terrace is defined by an Upper Greensand geology that extends beyond this character area boundary and defines the Greensand Hills to the north. Lower Chalk marks the terrace at the base of the adjacent chalk escarpment. This change is consistent with a change in land cover as arable fields give way to mixed woodland along at the junction with the scarp.

The geology has given rise to rich brown earths which are well-drained, loamy soils suited to arable crop production and reflected by the intensive arable land use over much of the terrace.

### **Landform and Hydrology**

Perceptually, the landscape appears very flat. However, the land is gently sloping away from the *Donhead to Fovant Greensand Hills (7A)* towards the Fovant and Chalk Escarpment (7B). The flatness of the landscape and the steep face of the adjacent escarpment makes for a dramatic contrast in landform. Springs arise at the junction with the chalk and greensand geology and these mark the sources of the tributary streams that flow north into the *Vale of Wardour (8A)* to meet the River Nadder. The landform becomes distinctly more undulating towards the west where these tributaries have eroded gentle undulations in the surface of the terrace.

### **Land Cover**

This landscape, particularly to the east of Swallowcliffe is dominated by arable crop production. To the west, the land use is more varied with areas of improved pasture occurring amongst the arable fields. Belts of woodland occur along the boundary with the chalk escarpment where the soils are more calcareous. These woodland belts are an important visual component – marking the transition with, and exaggerating the distinction from, the escarpment landscape. Occasional coniferous blocks planted at right angles to the escarpment interrupt the smooth, open character of the terrace and do not compliment the character of the native woodland. Generally, tree cover increases towards the west of the area and, combined with the more undulating landform, provides a greater sense of enclosure.

### **Biodiversity**

This area is characterised by intensive arable agriculture, together with smaller areas of improved pasture and small, planted woodland blocks and shelterbelts. These woodland areas are widely scattered throughout the landscape and provide valuable nesting and feeding habitat for a range of typical farmland bird species, a declining bird group within the UK. Occasional small blocks of ancient woodland also remain, and further add to the ecological

potential of the landscape. There are no sites with statutory nature conservation designation within this area.

## **HUMAN INFLUENCES**

### **Evidence of Past Social Structure**

The terrace is cut to the west by the course of the Roman road between Badbury Rings and the Nadder valley. Otherwise, this is a predominantly agricultural landscape, although there are traces of former parkland at Ferne Park.

### **Field patterns, boundaries and predominant date of inclosure**

The large rectangular arable fields that dominate the terrace landscape are characteristic of Parliamentary inclosure of a probable late 18th/early 19th century date. These form a distinct patterning with field boundaries consistently running at right angles to the escarpment.

### **Land Use and Recreation**

The majority of land within this character area is under intensive arable production reflected in the large scale geometric fields and the denuded hedgerows. Some replanting of hedgerows has occurred at Berwick St John but in most cases, post and wire fencing serves as a replacement.

The A30 is a busy transport corridor and runs across the character area, connecting the major towns of Shaftesbury and Salisbury. The flatness of the landform makes the road highly visible and it has a dominant influence, in an otherwise peaceful landscape.

In terms of recreation, this landscape has a number of Public Rights of Way. Some of these follow the routes of the ancient drove roads and hollow ways that took the livestock to and from the downs in the Medieval period - Green Drove for example. The Wessex Ridgeway, an important long distance recreational route, crosses the terrace. Footpaths provide direct access to the Fovant Badges on the escarpment and viewing points are provided along the A30 where visitor information on the historic hill figures is provided. Almost the entire length of the adjacent *Fovant Escarpment (IC)* is proposed as Open Country (as outlined in the Draft maps prepared by the Countryside Agency) and this may bring future change to the use of the footpaths on the terrace that provide direct access to the escarpment.

### **Historic Development of Settlement and Relationship with the Landscape**

The terrace has historically been largely unsettled. The main exception is the village of Berwick St. John, whose existence owes more to its position at the head of the Ebbles Valley. There are, however, a series of farmsteads spaced at quite regular intervals across the terrace.

### **Settlement and Built Character**

Settlement is sparse in comparison with the adjacent Greensand Hills – mainly comprising farms that are dispersed along the main A30. These typically comprise of stone farmhouses with recent additions of modern farm buildings.

At Berwick St John, a nucleated settlement, stone and thatch are the key building materials. Stone walls, laurel and beech hedges are notable along the roadsides marking the approach to the village. In some places villages traditionally associated with the adjacent *Greensand Hills* have extended south onto the terrace – Swallowcliffe, Fovant and Compton Chamberlayne for example.

### **Historic Environment**

The continuity and intensity of arable cultivation on the Greensand terrace may account for the general absence of prehistoric earthworks, as found on the immediately adjacent Chalk scarp and Ebble valley dip slope to the south. The key visible historic components of the landscape are the Parliamentary-type inclosures characterised by large rectangular fields and the former parkland at Ferne Park.

## **EVALUATION**

### **Strength of Character**

This landscape is judged to have **strong** character. The flatness of the landform is exaggerated by the dramatic backdrop of the escarpment. Predominantly under arable crop production (contained within a regular, geometric pattern of fields bounded by post and wire fencing) the simplicity of the landcover compounds the sense of openness and expanse.

### **Current Condition**

Although the simple landform and land cover, are consistent, the landscape is interrupted by the A30 which frequently has poor quality margins. Lay-bys along the A30 are also degraded - making some of the most visible areas within the landscape the poorest in terms of condition. The land is very intensively farmed – evident through the presence of large fields and absence of features such as hedgerows and woodland copses. Intensive arable farming has also accounted for the loss of visible historic components in the landscape. The extent of arable farming also means that this area has restricted biodiversity value. Current landscape condition is **moderate**.

### **Past and Present Change**

- Amalgamation and enlargement of arable fields and addition of new agricultural buildings in the past has resulted in increasing landscape scale.
- The loss and decline of field boundaries is apparent, especially along the A30. Some planned hedgerow restoration is in evidence.
- Litter accumulation and dumping in lay-bys along the A30 evoke a sense of neglect.
- Loss and inconsistent management of the woodland ivers at the base of the scarp and replacement with coniferous blocks in the past has resulted in a sharp transition between the scarp and terrace.
- Growing intensity of farming practices, including the shift from spring sown to autumn sown crops, has resulted in a change in landscape character and decline in farmland birds.

- Past expansion of villages has resulted in encroachment of buildings from the adjacent *Donhead to Fovant Greensand Hills (7A)* onto the terrace.

### **Possible Future Trends**

A potential fall in the profitability of the arable sector, as a result of the CAP reform, is likely to result diversification into other crops such as biomass crops and diversification of farm businesses into secondary enterprises such as farm house accommodation or commercial shoots. These land uses may result in a change in landscape character, although landscape condition is likely to be stable or even improved (particularly if agri-environment grants result in enhancing biodiversity).

Future trends imply that landscape condition is likely to be **stable** in the future.

### **Management Objective**

**Overall, management of this landscape should conserve the simple, flat, open character of the landscape and the important (undeveloped) physical and visual relationship between terrace and escarpment. Restoration of lost and/or declining features such as field boundaries and woodland ivers will improve condition, quality and visual integrity of the landscape as well as its ecological value.**

- Conserve characteristic open views across the terrace towards the escarpment.
- Consider compiling local design guidance for farm buildings to help ensure new buildings reflect the sense of place.
- Restrict further residential development in this largely unsettled landscape.
- Seek to restore hedgerows and apply consistent management techniques.
- Appropriate roadside management (regular litter picking, monitoring of fly tipping) along the A30 will improve the appearance of lay-bys and verges.
- Thicken and replant woodland at the break of the scarp to enhance the transition between the scarp and terrace, and provide valuable nesting and feeding habitat for farmland bird species.
- Coniferous plantations interrupt the landscape. Further coniferous planting would intrude on the character of the deciduous woodland and on the visual relationship between scarp and terrace.
- Promote appropriate management of arable land including retaining areas of fallow land and maintaining an unploughed margin around fields to encourage wildlife, particularly farmland birds.



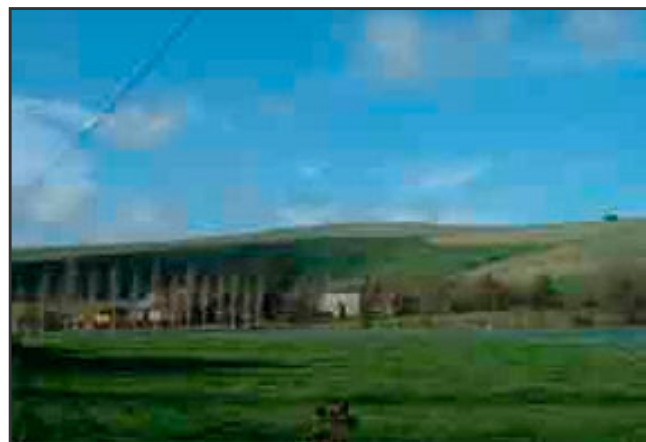


## 6B KILMINGTON GREENSAND TERRACE

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The prominent outlying chalk hills of the *West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment (1B)* contrast with the flat terrace.



The West Wiltshire Downs Escarpment forms an impressive moody backdrop to the terrace.



Many traditional hedgerow networks survive.



Stone and red brick are common building materials.



Surviving woodland clearly marks the transition from terrace to escarpment landscape.



Pockets of pasture lie amongst the arable fields.



## 6B KILMINGTON GREENSAND TERRACE

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### Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating and shelving terrace of Upper Greensand in the north-west of the AONB.
- The chalk escarpment to the south-east provides a dramatic backdrop to the terrace.
- Brown earths have a high agricultural value and support arable crop production.
- Medium to large scale field units reflect intensive farming of arable crops. Some smaller fields characterise remaining areas of (largely improved) pasture.
- Absence of tree cover contributing to the sense of openness.
- Presence of Bronze Age round barrows close to the River Wylfe reflect the survival of remnant areas of pasture.
- Medieval settlements including the deserted medieval village at Yarnfield.
- Upper reaches of the River Wylfe cross the Greensand terrace, following the line of two geological faults.
- Settlement is focussed around the River Wylfe (The Deverills and Sutton Veny).
- Well served by transport routes with the main A350 and a number of secondary roads criss-crossing the terrace.

### Location and Boundaries

The *Kilmington Greensand Terrace (6B)* is located within the north western part of the AONB. Bound along its entire western edge by the *Penselwood-Longleat Greensand Hills (7B)* and along its southern edge by the *West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment (1B)* the terrace is located neatly between the two elevated, landscapes on either side.

### Summary of Visual Character

The Kilmington Greensand Terrace is an open, largely treeless landscape dominated by arable crop production. The character of this landscape is well defined by its relationship with the adjacent *West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment (1B)* forming a prominent backdrop. This is a simple landscape, appearing uncluttered and offering few distinguishing features – the large scale regular field units reinforcing the sense of openness. Settlement is a key feature – the attractive nucleated settlements of the Deverills villages for example found towards the east of the area clustered along the upper Wylfe valley.

## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

### Geology and Soils

Upper Greensand defines the geology of the character area. Towards the base of, and marking the transition to, the *West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment (1B)* Lower Chalk dominates. Drift head deposits from the Quaternary era define the line of the River Wylye where it runs through the character area. There are three main soil groups occurring within this landscape. Typical argyllic brown earths are found within the western half of the character area, corresponding with the underlying Upper Greensand geology. Typical brown calcareous earths roughly cover the eastern half of the character area. Typical brown earths occur within the north east of the character area.

### Landform and Hydrology

The Kilmington Terrace forms a broad terrace at the foot of the fragmented *West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment (1B)*. There is a strong contrast between the low lying plain and the drama of the scarp face. The south-eastern edge of the terrace is defined by the sweeping curves of the main escarpment with much of the central area influenced by the presence of the outlying escarpment hills. Although appearing flat, the terrace does gently undulate – dropping away towards the River Wylye and rising again before meeting with the scarp. The open character of the terrace plays an important role in emphasising the drama of the *West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment (1B)*.

The River Wylye rises within this character area, to the west of White Sheet Down, and roughly flows in a north easterly direction towards the AONB boundary, south of Warminster.

### Land Cover

The *Kilmington Greensand Terrace* has a simple landcover dominated by arable crops. Woodland and tree cover is fairly sparse - confined to hedgerow trees, occasional poplars that define property margins and individual trees that pick out the course of the River Wylye and woodland at the base of the escarpment. The uniform land cover evokes a simple character.

### Biodiversity

The Kilmington Terrace is almost exclusively in arable cultivation and has retained little in the way of tree cover. Occasional shelterbelts, the majority of which comprise relatively recent broadleaved plantation, occur throughout the character area, but these are generally of small extent. The farmland landscape, scattered trees, remnant hedges and shelterbelts provide valuable habitat for a range of typical farmland bird species. Although only a small part of the River Avon System falls within the character area, the table below sets out the features of key ecological interest in this designated area.

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha)	Summary of importance
River Avon System (0.1% of this SSSI falls	SAC SSSI	498.2 507.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>River system noted for its exceptional aquatic plants, diverse fish fauna and range of aquatic invertebrates</li></ul>

within LCA 6B)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports stands of floating <i>Ranunculus</i>, a vegetation type of European importance as listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex I)</li> <li>• Population of sea lamprey (<i>Petromyzon marinus</i>), brook lamprey (<i>Lampetra planeri</i>), Atlantic salmon (<i>Salmo salar</i>), bullhead (<i>Cottus gobius</i>) and Desmoulin's whorl snail (<i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i>) all listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and the latter a UK BAP priority species</li> <li>• Populations of the freshwater pea mussel (<i>Pisidium tenuilineatum</i>) a nationally rare mollusc and UK BAP priority species, and <i>Valvata macrostoma</i> a nationally vulnerable mollusc</li> </ul>
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## HUMAN INFLUENCES

### Evidence of Past Social Structure

Although there is little direct evidence for Neolithic settlement, the henge west of Sutton Veny is likely to have been a social focus for late Neolithic communities dispersed within the wider landscape. The location of Bronze Age round barrows, such as those beside the River Wylde west of Kingston Deverill, may indicate the continued importance of the river in a largely pastoral economy dependant to a large extent on the adjacent downland grazing.

### Field Patterns, Boundaries and Predominant Date of Enclosure

The process of field enlargement is far progressed and extensive fields now create an unremitting arable landscape. Towards the northeast, fields are predominantly straight-sided and rectangular, although varying in size from small to large, and are characteristic of late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure. Closer to settlements, fields reduce in size. Between the settlements of Kilmington and Maiden Bradley they are less regular in form, possibly indicating an earlier process of inclosure around the series of relatively close-spaced farmsteads that are distributed across the terrace. The area is largely devoid of woodland, which survives mainly at the edges of the terrace, on the adjacent chalk escarpment and greensand hills.

### Land Use and Recreation

Land use is predominantly defined by arable cultivation and cropping. The vast areas of arable production are characterised by a regular field pattern – with field units consistently medium to large in size. Fields are bounded by both rural post and wire fencing and hedgerows (some banked). Much of the traditional hedgerow network is intact, however, in places hedgerows are in decline and gappy. Overmaturity of hedgerows and other standard trees is also evident but there are some signs of active management or replenishment with immature tree stock occurring in hedgerows that align the roads. Although not dominating the landscape, areas of improved pasture are also evident.

There are a significant number of roads criss-crossing the terrace landscape. The A350 is the main arterial route (connecting the major urban areas of Warminster and Shaftesbury) but this road is confined to a short north-south section that cuts across the River Wylde at Longbridge Deverill. Secondary or rural roads also cut across the landscape, providing

direct connections between the villages – the B3095 for example connecting the Deverills villages and the Deverill Road linking the settlements of Longbridge Deverill with Maiden Bradley in the far west.

There are a number of Public Rights of Way crossing the terrace – some following the source of the River Wylye and other connecting with and crossing the adjacent escarpment and outlying hills and greensand hills where routes link with the Stour Valley Way.

### **Historic Development of Settlement and Relationship with the Landscape**

Most of the settlement evidence from this area is of Saxon, medieval and later date - the Deverill villages being sited along the river, and other settlements, including the deserted medieval village at Yarnfield, being more widely dispersed towards the edge of the terrace.

### **Settlement and Built Character**

Compared with the *Fovant Greensand Terrace (6A)* this landscape contains a significant amount of settlement. Kingston Deverill, Monkton Deverill, Brixton Deverill, Hill Deverill and Longbridge Deverill are a series of villages strung along the River Wylye – collectively known as ‘The Deverills’. Kingston Deverill - the most southerly of the villages has a scattered linear form, consisting of cottages and farms that align the rural lanes.

Heading northwest, the next village is Monkton Deverill - a compact village of nucleated form - its central church now standing redundant. North from Monkton Deverill is Brixton Deverill, a nucleated village with a number of attractive thatch and stone cottages surrounding the church - St Michael’s - that dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. Hill Deverill is found further north along the B3095 and contains only a few houses. These dwellings form a dispersed ribbon of development along the B3095 and gives the impression that Hill Deverill is now attached to the next village - Longbridge Deverill which extends along the B3095 from the other direction. A significant industrial estate occupies a prominent position on the terrace between Longbridge Deverill and Sutton Veny.

Other settlements within this character area are Kilmington – a linear and dispersed settlement lying to the far west of the character area and Maiden Bradley - a settlement of nucleated form abutting the *Penselwood - Longleat Hills (7B)* character area.

Chert, greensand and red brick are the most common building materials within this character area, with clay tiles and thatch characterising the roofs.

### **Historic Environment**

The continuity and intensity of arable cultivation on the *Kilmington Greensand Terrace (6B)* is likely to be responsible in part for the general absence of prehistoric earthworks. The presence of Bronze Age round barrows close to the River Wylye reflects areas of pasture in and suggests that the landscape at the base of the chalk escarpment was settled from an early date. The key visible historic components are:

- Isolated prehistoric earthworks, including a henge and round barrows.
- Medieval settlements with surviving earthworks showing that some have contracted, such as Hill Deverill, or been deserted, as at Yarnfield.

- Possibly early inclosure around Kilmington and Maiden Bradley, with late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure in other areas.

## EVALUATION

### Strength of Character

The strength of character of the Kilmington Greensand Terrace is perceived to be **moderate**. This is a simple landscape offering few distinctive features due to the extensive coverage of arable crop production.

### Current Condition

This character area has retained its landform features and its intensively farmed character means there are few areas of underused or derelict land. The extent of arable farming has led to the loss of biodiversity and cultural value. For example, there are few semi-natural habitats, many sections of hedgerow have been lost or replaced with post and wire fencing, and there is a general absence of prehistoric earthworks. Settlement, however, is in good condition and is integrated through the consistent use of stone, brick, clay tiles and thatch. Overall landscape condition is judged to be **moderate**.

### Past and Present Change

- The previous loss (through field enlargement for arable farming) and continued decline of hedgerow boundaries in places has diluted the field pattern across the terrace.
- Overmaturity and non-replacement of old tree stock (evident within the hedgerows) has resulted in the loss of trees as landscape features.
- The intensity and expansion of arable farming has reduced ecological value and resulted in the loss of archaeological features.
- Loss of semi-natural woodland where the terrace meets the scarp, plus creation of new coniferous plantations on the terrace has resulted in a change in visual and ecological character.

### Possible Future Trends

A potential fall in the profitability of the arable sector, as a result of the CAP reform, is likely to result diversification into other crops such as biomass crops and diversification of farm businesses into secondary enterprises such as farm house accommodation or commercial shoots. Agri-environment schemes are likely to divert unwanted arable land to environmental management. These changes may result in a change in landscape character, although landscape condition is likely to be stable or even improved (particularly if agri-environment grants result in enhancing biodiversity).

Future pressure for linear expansion along the Wylye Valley may result in merging of villages and loss of settlement identity.

Overall, future trends imply that, although landscape character may change, landscape condition is likely to be **stable** in the future.



## **Management Objective**

**The overall management strategy should conserve the open farmed character of the terrace with its distinct pattern of settlement and the contrast with the adjacent escarpment. Restoration of lost and/or declining features such as field boundaries and woodland ivers will improve condition, quality and visual integrity of the landscape as well as its ecological value.**

- Improve the condition and character of hedgerow boundaries by thickening and replanting where lost and denuded to increase the distinctiveness of the field pattern.
- Replace hedgerow trees where overmature and dying.
- Conserve the open character of the terrace and retain the concentrated character of the settlement by resisting linear growth along transport routes such as has occurred between Longbridge Deverill and Hill Deverill. Consider developing guidance for built development to ensure future development respects traditional settlement form.
- Encourage new native woodland planting at the base of the slopes to mark the transition between the arable terrace and pastoral escarpment.
- Consider opportunities for re-planting trees and woodland following the course of the River Wylye.

# 7. GREENSAND HILLS



## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

**7A Donhead - Fovant**

**7B Penselwood - Longleat**



## TYPE 7: GREENSAND HILLS

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### Description

The transition from the clay lowlands to the elevated chalk beyond is marked by a series of greensand hills. These run along the north and south sides of the *Vale of Wardour (8A)* and along the north-western boundary of the AONB between Penselwood and Warminster. Although composed of Upper Greensand, tributaries of the major rivers have eroded the Greensand to expose underlying older deposits. These hills are characterised by tight valleys, sunken lanes and are typically covered in woodland. The patterns of settlement are also distinctive. Villages are hidden among these hills, focused on the springline at the junction of the Chalk and Greensand, tucked into the valleys. The hills have historically provided desirable locations for siting large houses and parklands as well as providing strategic sites for fortified settlements and buildings where they have commanding views over the adjacent lowlands. Views vary between enclosed and framed to open and panoramic.

### Key Characteristics

- Upper Greensand is exposed as a band between the older clays and younger chalk.
- The Greensand typically forms upstanding hills that have been eroded by tributaries of the major rivers into a series of rounded knolls and deep valleys.
- Hills support a large proportion of woodland, both deciduous and coniferous.
- Country houses and estates, set within landscaped parkland contribute to the scenic beauty of the area.
- Distinctive patterns of settlement include villages hidden in the shelter of the deep valleys.
- Fortifications are strategically located on the hill tops.
- Ancient sunken lanes wind their way through the hills.
- Small and irregular fields characterise areas of agricultural land use.
- Meadows and wet woodland are typical of the valley floors.



## 7A DONHEAD - FOVANT GREENSAND HILLS

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Steep slopes are clothed in woodland, both deciduous and coniferous.



Deep coombs provide shelter for settlement.



The land form is distinctly undulating.



The wooded ridges of the Greensand Hills stand out above the *Vale of Wardour* (8A).



Stone villages are sheltered within the steep-sided valleys.



Ancient sunken lanes are enclosed by high banks and shaded by trees.



## 7A DONHEAD – FOVANT HILLS

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### Key Characteristics

- The *Donhead-Fovant Hills* occur as exposures of Upper Greensand around the anticline of the *Vale of Wardour (8A)*.
- The Upper Greensand has been eroded into a series of rounded knolls by tributaries of the River Nadder, many of which have carved deep valleys (or combes) into the Greensand.
- Steep slopes are clothed in woodland, both deciduous and coniferous.
- Irregular and indented outlines around many of the areas of woodland indicate early assart incursions and inclosure of fields.
- Villages are hidden in the shelter of the deep valleys, or combes, which cut through the Upper Greensand.
- Fortifications are strategically located on the hill tops overlooking the *Vale of Wardour*.
- Ancient sunken lanes, enclosed by high banks and shaded by trees, produce strongly framed views.
- Historic estates and parkland are typical, including Fonthill Abbey and Phillips House.
- Woodlands and meadows are important nature conservation habitats.
- A peaceful landscape with great variety at the small scale, but with an overall unified character.

### Location and Boundaries

The *Donhead-Fovant Hills* character area wraps around the *Vale of Wardour (8A)*, enclosing it on all sides. To the south, the hills separate the rolling valley landscape of the *Vale of Wardour (8A)* from the flat landscape of the *Greensand Fovant Terrace (6A)*. To the north the hills separate the rolling lowland landscape of the *Vale of Wardour (8A)* from the upland chalk landscape of the *West Wiltshire Downs Open Chalk Downland (2A)*.

### Summary of Visual Character

The *Donhead-Fovant Hills* is a landscape with a distinctive undulating landform. Its tight valleys, sunken lanes and high proportion of woodland cover all contribute to an enclosed landscape of intimate spaces. Stone villages contain picturesque cottages that lie nestled within the tight valleys, sheltered by landform and woodland. The strong silhouette of the *Fovant and Chalke Escarpment (1C)* forms a skyline beyond the hills to the south. This is a landscape of contrasts, between the shaded sunken lanes and the open and exposed hill tops - providing a range of viewing experiences from strongly framed views down the enclosed sunken lanes to the panoramic views over the *Vale of Wardour (8A)*.



## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

### Geology and soils

The younger chalk has been eroded away to expose outcrops of Upper Greensand that occur as narrow strips around the anticline of the *Vale of Wardour (8A)*. Younger layers of Upper Greensand remain upstanding at the hill tops while older rocks, including Gault, are exposed at the boundary with the *Vale of Wardour (8A)*. Greensand is a sandy rock giving rise to a well drained fine loamy soil that is slowly permeable and is susceptible to water erosion. This is evident around the headwaters of the Nadder where water erosion has caused widespread landslip.

### Landform and Hydrology

The Upper Greensand forms an undulating band of hills, generally between 80 and 200m AOD, along the southern and northern sides of the *Vale of Wardour (8A)*. Along the south side of the vale the hills represent the north-facing edge of the *Fovant Greensand Terrace (6A)* and have been carved into a series of rounded knolls by the streams which drain northwards into the River Nadder. Several of these streams have cut through the greensand ridge to form steep sided valleys draining the *Fovant Greensand Terrace (6A)*. Elsewhere the landform is remarkably smooth, for example where it forms the setting for Wardour Castle. Around the settlement of Donhead St Mary, the Upper Greensand has been eroded into a series of deep valleys by the headwaters of the River Nadder.

The band of Upper Greensand along the northern side of the valley is narrower than that to the south, creating a less distinct series of hills between Dinton and East Knoyle. At Dinton the hills create a ridge which must be crossed before the gently sloping West Wiltshire Downs are reached. Tributary valleys push through the *Greensand Hills* at Fonthill Bishop and Chilmark. Further west, the Greensand band widens, forming Beacon Hill near East Knoyle.

### Land Cover

This area contains a mosaic of permanent pasture and mixed woodland with fen and neutral meadows on the valley floors. The steep slopes of the *Donhead-Fovant Hills* along the northern and southern sides of the *Vale of Wardour (8A)* are clothed in woodland. Although there are some areas of broadleaf woodland (some of ancient origin), coniferous plantations predominate, giving the hills a very different character to the chalk downs. The sandy influence of the soils is visible in the presence of acidic woodlands. Around Donhead St Mary, and in the valleys and bowls along the southern side of the *Vale of Wardour (8A)*, hill top woodland give way to pasture as the land drops away towards the valley below.

### Biodiversity

In contrast with the open landscape associated with the widespread chalk downland, the *Donhead – Fovant Greensand Hills* represents a heavily wooded landscape. Much of this woodland, for example Compton Wood, is of ancient origin, while some such as that around Fonthill Abbey have been widely planted with coniferous species. Two woodlands within the character area have statutory nature conservation designation, namely Hang Wood (SSSI) and Gutch Common (SSSI).

Hang Wood (SSSI) is botanically rich woodland formed in a moderately sloped valley with a central stream. The woodland composition varies according to topography, but generally falls within two broad community types namely, wet ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and field maple (*Acer campestre*) woodland or acid oak (*Quercus robur*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and ash woodland. The site has a history of traditional coppice management, and supports a rich associated ground flora, with species such as bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), dog's-mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*), and sweet woodruff (*Galium odoratum*) the most conspicuous species.

The majority of Gutch Common (SSSI) also falls within the character area, and comprises a mosaic of habitat types including wet and dry acid woodland, open bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) stands and a neutral meadow. This habitat diversity has resulted in the site supporting a wide range of plant species, together with a good range of woodland birds.

Aside from the significant contribution that these woodlands make to the biodiversity of the area, other habitat types are also represented, for example at Lower Coombe and Ferne Brook Meadows (SSSI) where important examples of fen meadow and neutral meadow can be found.

The table below highlights the features of key ecological interest for the designated areas.

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha)	Summary of importance
Hang Wood	SSSI	20.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ancient valley woodland, with rich associated woodland flora and fauna</li> </ul>
Gutch Common (71% of this SSSI falls within LCA 7A)	SSSI	35.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mosaic of wet – dry acid woodland, meadows, bracken stands and acidic wet flushes</li> </ul>
Lower Coombe and Ferne Brook Meadows	SSSI	11.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fen meadow and unimproved neutral grassland</li> </ul>
Teffont Evias Quarry / Lane Cutting (55% of this SSSI falls within LCA 7A)	SSSI	3.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Geologically important site</li> </ul>

## HUMAN INFLUENCES

### Evidence of Past Social Structure

The strategic importance of the hills as transitional landscapes flanking the *Vale of Wardour* (8A), the *West Wiltshire Downs* (2A) to the north and the *Fovant Greensand Terrace* (6A) to the south, is reflected in the presence of Iron Age hillforts at Wick's Ball Camp, Castle Ditches and Castle Rings. The wider western extents of the hills have remained essentially rural in character, but elsewhere a number of large country estates, such as at Wardour Castle, surrounded in the 18th and 19th centuries by landscaped parkland and plantations, are dominant features of the landscape.

## **Field Patterns, Boundaries and Predominant date of enclosure**

The dominant field pattern in the area is small and irregular with many fields divided by ditches and banked hedgerows. The irregular indented outline of many of the woodland areas indicates early assart incursions and inclosure of fields. The wider areas to the west are characterised by a mixture of relatively small fields, some with irregular boundaries indicating the early (pre-Parliamentary) inclosure of open fields. Others, with straight sides, possibly reflect the later rationalisation of an earlier field system. Some of the larger areas of woodland, plantation and parkland reflect the locations of a number of substantial landscaped estates, such as Wardour Castle and Fonthill - the site of William Beckford's collapsed mock gothic Fonthill Abbey.

## **Land Use and Recreation**

This area contains a mosaic of permanent pasture and mixed woodland. The steeper slopes are characterised by deciduous or coniferous woodland with hanging woodland a feature of the steepest slopes. The commercial nature of many of the woods is reflected in the presence of coupes which have been clear felled and re-planted, creating irregular skylines on some of the hills. This mosaic of land uses further accentuates the small scale character of the area. A network of ancient sunken lanes follow the valley bottoms providing links between the *Vale of Wardour* and adjacent chalk landscapes. Many of these lanes are enclosed by steep banks and shaded by woodland.

The Wessex Ridgeway briefly crosses the Greensand ridge west of Beacon Hill. The landscape parks and historic houses form an important visitor resource. Philipps House is a neo-Grecian house and a National Trust property that is open to the public. The surrounding landscape park of Dinton has been restored and offers many attractive walks. Although the remains of Fonthill Abbey are private, to the south lies Fonthill House Gardens and these are open to the public several times a year.

## **Historic Development of Settlement and Relationship with the Landscape**

Although there is evidence, for instance at Castle Ditches hillfort, of substantial early settlement, occupation may have been temporary - either seasonal or during times of political tension - offering security to a farming population which for most of the time was widely dispersed in the adjacent landscape. To the west the hills were relatively densely settled during the medieval and post-medieval periods, with closely spaced villages, hamlets and farmsteads.

## **Settlement and Built Character**

The *Donhead-Fovant Hills* are surprisingly well settled. Along the south side of the *Vale of Wardour (8A)* a series of villages are hidden in the deep valleys, or combes, which cut through the Upper Greensand. Ansty, Swallowcliffe and Fovant, for example, are almost triangular villages set at the heads of the valleys which separate the rounded greensand hills. Although roads between the *Fovant Greensand Terrace (6A)* and *Vale of Wardour (8A)* pass through these valleys and the villages within them, the villages are generally well concealed when viewed from the surrounding landscape. The location of villages would have provided water together with access to the downs (reflected in their names e.g. Fovant Down and Swallowcliffe Down) and the pastures of the *Vale of Wardour* to the north. The hills also provided defensible sites as indicated by Castle Ditches Fort and Wardour Castle.

Around Donhead St Mary and Donhead St Andrew the valleys carved by the headwaters of the Nadder are laced with narrow lanes. Cottages and farms are scattered along these lanes, furthering the impression of an intimate, settled landscape.

A similar, though less obvious, pattern of settlement is found along the north side of the *Vale of Wardour (8A)*. Villages such as Teffont Magna, Chilmark and Fonthill Bishop are sited at the heads of shallower valleys which drain through the greensand to the valley below. Although these villages are hardly visible within the wider landscape they do have a particular character, reflecting their unusual valley-head location and the use of local building materials (such as the local Chilmark stone) and styles. Clay tiles and thatch are the dominant roof materials.

## Historic Environment

The presence of large areas of commercial forestry reflects the former presence of deerparks and landscaped parkland along the fringes of the Nadder Valley, locations popular with the landed gentry. Beyond these, the tightly spaced farmsteads and small villages, with evidence of earlier inclosure, indicate the mixed agricultural character of the wider landscape, a feature evident in the locations of the late prehistoric enclosures. The key visible historic components are the Iron Age hillforts at Wick's Ball Camp, Castle Ditches and Castle Rings, and the landscaped parkland and country houses at as at Fonthill and Phillips House.

## EVALUATION

### Strength of Character

This is a landscape of **strong** character as a result of its distinct and recognisable pattern of elements - the rounded knolls clothed in woodland and crowned by ancient fortifications, with villages and ancient sunken lanes hidden in the shelter of combes. It is an instantly recognisable landscape forming a strong contrast to the adjacent chalk and clay landscapes.

### Current Condition

The landscape possesses a high degree of intactness and integrity with good survival of landform and earthwork features, survival of the typical small scale, irregular fields, few areas of underused land and a good state of repair of built features. However, the replanting of native woodlands by blocks of conifers has eroded the ecological condition of some of the woodlands and many hedgerows have been heavily flailed or lost altogether. The overall condition of the landscape is perceived to be **good**.

### Past and Present Change

- Some hedgerow field boundaries have been intensively flailed or lost altogether.
- Agricultural improvement in the past has resulted in rationalisation of an early field system of small, irregular fields into larger field units and decline of fen and neutral meadows on the valley floors.
- There has been a gradual decline in traditional woodland management techniques as skills have been lost and forestry has concentrated on coniferous species.

- Conifer coupes within deciduous woodland are visually intrusive, particularly where they occur on skylines. The presence of coniferous coupes means rate of change in the landscape is rapid during felling of large coupes.
- There is evidence of a decline in grazing with marginal pastures no longer actively grazed and being invaded by scrub.
- There are considerable pressures for new built development within the attractive villages as well as redevelopment of agricultural buildings to residential, amenity or industrial use creating broader economic activity but a change in landscape character.

### **Possible Future Trends**

The impact of Foot and Mouth and BSE will result in increasing professionalisation of livestock farming resulting in the decline of small livestock businesses making it more difficult to keep livestock as a part time hobby. This means that there is likely to be limited availability of livestock to graze marginal land (often of high environmental value). The result of this may see a possible transfer of land from agricultural to amenity land use. There is also likely to be a decline in traditional forms of environmental management, such as hedgerows and ditches, due to a decline in farm labour and lack of money for such activities.

There is likely to be further pressure for new built development within the attractive villages as well as redevelopment of agricultural buildings to residential, amenity or industrial use.

The presence of coniferous coupes means rate of change in the landscape is potentially rapid - felling of large coupes results in instant change and sharp lines on the hills. There is likely to be an improvement in woodland structure and management.

Overall, future trends imply that landscape condition may **decline** in the future.

### **Management Objective**

**The overall management objective should be to conserve the rich mosaic of land uses and the contrast between the shaded, enclosed combes and exposed hills. Woodland conservation and management is key in this wooded landscape.**

- Consider re-planting hedgerows and hedgerow trees where these have been lost.
- Encourage traditional management of hay meadows on the valley floors.
- Conserve the small scale pattern of irregular fields that are characteristic of the hills.
- Consider restoring traditional management techniques, such as coppicing to encourage a diverse age structure and a rich ground flora. Encourage interest in, and marketing of, local wood products.
- Consider removal of conifers where they are particularly visible, for example on skylines. Typical woodland types in this area include wet ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and field maple (*Acer campestre*) woodland or acid oak (*Quercus robur*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and ash woodland.

- Encourage sensitive forestry practices, for example mixing different species and felling small coupes.
- Encourage extension of semi-natural habitats such as fen meadow, unimproved neutral grassland, acid woodland, meadows and wet flushes.
- Avoid urbanisation of lanes through addition of signs, road markings and concrete kerbs or lamp posts.
- Further built development should respond to the villages' character, avoiding the use of standard 'suburban' designs and details - attention to details such as drives, curbs, footways, fencing and plot size will be critical.



## 7B PENSELWOOD - LONGLEAT GREENSAND HILLS

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Cley Hill is an isolated outcrop of Upper Chalk supporting an Iron Age Hill Fort.



Forestry is a major land use of the area.



Deep valleys have been carved by tributary streams.



Many of the hills are densely wooded,



Thatched cottages lie hidden in the woodland.



Settlement is scattered along the valleys - older buildings are constructed from limestone.





## 7B PENSELWOOD – LONGLEAT HILLS

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### Key Characteristics

- A series of eroded Upper Greensand hills creating a sinuous escarpment containing some deep valleys.
- Fluvial erosion of the Frome and Stour tributaries has exposed older rocks.
- The hills are clothed in deciduous woodland and coniferous plantations.
- Neatly laid hedges, tree clumps, avenues and grazing animals associated with private estates contribute to the scenic beauty of the area.
- Fields are predominantly small and of an irregular form - indicative of early inclosure.
- Extensive landscaped parks surrounding large country houses at Longleat and Stourhead.
- A wide range of habitat types including wet woodland, unimproved chalk grassland and ancient woodland, with five designated nationally important wildlife sites.
- Pockets of dense development occur in the shelter of the deep valleys that cut through the Upper Greensand.
- Earthworks and ruins of hill forts and castles are strategically located, on the hill tops.
- Landscape parks and historic estates provide important recreation attractions including Centre Parcs Holiday Village, Longleat Estate and National Trust properties.
- A peaceful landscape with great variety at the small scale, but with an overall unified character.

### Location and Boundaries

The *Penselwood-Longleat Hills* are the west-facing edge of the band of Greensand that extends beyond the *Kilminster Greensand Terrace (6B)* from Mere to Warminster – to the south-west and north-east of the AONB respectively. Their boundary of the hills with the terrace landscape is clearly defined by a change in density of contours and amount of woodland. To the north-west is a gradual transition into the clay valley of the Frome that lies beyond the AONB boundary.

### Summary of Visual Character

The *Penselwood-Longleat Hills* is a landscape with a steeply undulating landform- it is a landscape of secretive valleys and exposed hills where the sunken lanes high proportion of woodland cover contribute to an enclosed character. Picturesque villages lie sheltered by landform where mature oaks and stone walls provide a sense of history and permanence. Views vary between enclosed and framed to the open and panoramic. Extensive woodland, forestry operations and designed parkland provide a unifying feature across the area and form a strong contrast to the open character of adjacent farmed landscapes. This area

remains peaceful and rural despite the large number of visitors that are accommodated within its bounds.

## **PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**

### **Geology and soils**

There is greater variation in the underlying geology of this character area than in the *Donhead-Fovant Hills (7A)*. The younger chalk has been eroded away to expose the Upper Greensand series of the Cretaceous period over much of the area. However, towards the north-west older rocks are exposed, particularly where tributaries of the Frome or Stour have eroded the Greensand to expose underlying older deposits such as Corallian Rocks and Oxford Clays of the Jurassic Period. A prominent outcrop of Upper Chalk is left standing at Cley Hill beside the A362 to Warminster. Greensand is a sandy rock that gives rise to a well drained fine loamy and silty soils that are generally well drained. Soils in the valleys tend to be loamy, clayey, slowly permeable and seasonally waterlogged.

### **Landform and Hydrology**

The *Penselwood-Longleat Hills* comprise the west facing edge of the band of greensand which extends from Mere to Warminster at an elevation of between 120m and 245m AOD. The Upper Greensand has been eroded by a series of small streams and rivers, in this instance draining north and west towards the river Frome and south towards the Stour. Around Penselwood and Stourton the headwaters of the Stour have eroded a series of deep river valleys which cut in behind the main greensand escarpment. Similarly, around Horningsham and Longleat the headwaters of the Frome have created a series of valleys and rounded hills. Much of the western edge of this character area drains towards the River Brue.

### **Land Cover**

The comparatively steep slopes of the hills are clothed in woodland. Although much of the woodland is managed as coniferous plantation, some substantial areas of broadleaved woodland remain, for example west of Longleat and Stourton. At Stourhead and Longleat the stately homes and their immediate parklands are set within extensive areas of wooded pasture. As well as woodland and parkland, pastoral fields and hay meadows contribute important landcover elements to the landscape.

### **Biodiversity**

The *Penselwood – Longleat Greensand Hills* support significant ecological and nature conservation interest, including a wide range of habitat types, such as wet woodland, unimproved chalk grassland, neutral hay meadow and a small section of the River Avon System. However, ancient woodland is perhaps the most distinguishing feature and is still relatively widespread throughout the character area, despite much having been replanted with coniferous species. In total the area contains all or part of five nationally important wildlife sites, these being Bradley Woods (SSSI), Cley Hill (SSSI), Heath Hill Farm (SSSI), Longleat Woods (SSSI) and the River Avon System (SSSI).

Bradley Woods (SSSI) is an extensive area of lowland alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) woodland, with oak (*Quercus robur*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*) dominating on the drier ground. The site has largely been managed under a coppice regime, and supports a rich ground flora. Many plant

species are present which indicate a long continuity of woodland cover, for example dog's mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*), yellow archangel (*Lamium galeobdolon*) and ramsons (*Allium ursinum*), and several locally restricted plants such as marsh violet (*Viola palustris*), and thin-spiked wood sedge (*Carex strigosa*). However, the most notable feature of this woodland is its exceptional diversity of bryophytes and lichens, including several species with nationally restricted distribution.

Longleat Woods (SSSI) provides a further example of a nationally important ancient woodland site found within the character area. This woodland has a high forest structure, and has developed over a range of soil conditions reflected in the diverse range of woodland stand types.

Aside from the dominant wooded habitats, this character area also supports nationally important grassland sites, including the botanically rich chalk grassland of Cley Hill (SSSI). This site is located to the north of the AONB, and situated on a steep hill, which is elevated some 80m from the surrounding land and represents an outlying site formed on the Middle and Upper chalk. Heath Hill Farm (SSSI) is an important example of unimproved neutral to calcareous hay meadow and pasture - representing a fine example of this rapidly diminishing habitat type.

The table below highlights the features of key ecological interest for each statutory site.

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha)	Summary of importance
Bradley Woods	SSSI	48.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive area of lowland alder wood, with rich associated lichen and bryophyte flora</li> </ul>
Cley Hill	SSSI	26.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unimproved chalk grassland</li> <li>• Colony of early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>), a species listed under the Habitat Directive (Annex II), a UK BAP priority species and UK endemic</li> </ul>
Heath Hill Farm	SSSI	20.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A number of adjacent unimproved neutral to calcareous hay meadows and permanent pastures</li> </ul>
Longleat Woods	SSSI	249.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive ancient woodland with high forest structure</li> <li>• Population of dormice (<i>Muscardinus avellanarius</i>) a UK BAP priority species</li> <li>• Supports a wide range of breeding bird species</li> </ul>
North Brewham Meadows (0.5% of this SSSI falls within LCA 7B)	SSSI	8.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wet, neutral hay meadow</li> </ul>
River Avon System (0.4% of this SSSI falls within LCA 7B)	SAC SSSI	498.2 507.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• River system noted for its exceptional aquatic plants, diverse fish fauna and range of aquatic invertebrates</li> <li>• Supports stands of floating <i>Ranunculus</i>, a vegetation type of European importance as listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex I)</li> <li>• Population of sea lamprey (<i>Petromyzon marinus</i>), brook lamprey (<i>Lampetra planeri</i>), Atlantic salmon</li> </ul>

			<p>(<i>Salmo salar</i>), bullhead (<i>Cotto gobius</i>) and Desmoulin's whorl snail (<i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i>) all listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and the latter a UK BAP priority species</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Populations of the freshwater pea mussel (<i>Pisidium tenuilineatum</i>) a nationally rare mollusc and UK BAP priority species, and <i>Valvata macrostoma</i> a nationally vulnerable mollusc</li> </ul>
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## HUMAN INFLUENCES

### Evidence of Past Social Structure

A series of earthwork enclosures and hillforts along the edge of the Greensand terrace (such as at Park Hill Camp and Castle Wood, Stourton and Roddenbury Hill, and on outlying hills, as at Cley Hill in the north) indicate the strategic importance of the Greensand Hills. These hills were important because they formed the boundary between the downland landscape to the east and the clay vales to the west, each offering different economic resources. Cley Hill is an Iron Age hill fort (about 300 BC) with a single rampart that encloses 17 acres. Two Bronze Age barrows, excavated in the early 19th century, lie inside the hilltop. One of these is silhouetted for miles.

The present day wooded character of the area reflects the originally more extensive medieval Royal forest of Selwood Forest, forest law giving the Crown rights to exploit the land's resources, especially for hunting. The continuing strategic importance of the landscape is evident through the presence of a number of castles, such as the motte and bailey earthworks at Coneygore and Zeals Row, to the south, and Woodhouse Castle and Hale's Castle further north.

### Field Patterns, Boundaries and Predominant date of enclosure

Much of the woodland within the area comprises coniferous plantations, bounded by pastures along the foot of the Greensand escarpment. The dominant field pattern in the area is small and irregular (particularly apparent to the west) and is indicative of early inclosures. These contrast with the straight-sided but still irregular fields at the edges of the woodland – a likely reflection of the 19th century or later rationalisation of earlier inclosed fields, and the influence of agricultural improvements associated with the large area of estate land. Individual fields are often divided by hedgebanks and hedgerows that are generally intact. Limestone walls are also strongly associated with the estates and villages.

### Land Use and Recreation

Although there are some considerable areas of broadleaved ancient woodland, there are also large tracts of coniferous plantation, exploited as commercial timber. The presence of felling coupes, stacked wood and saw mills add a distinctive character to the area. Other land uses include permanent pasture and private gardens/parkland. Although these cover a smaller area, they provide an important contribution to landscape character where neatly laid hedges, tree clumps, avenues and grazing animals contribute to the scenic beauty of the area.

This is a landscape of significant leisure and recreation interest including the attractions of Centre Parcs Holiday Village, Longleat Estate and National Trust properties including Stourhead, Alfred's Tower, Cockroad Wood and Cley Hill Fort. Centre Parcs is sited amongst hundred-year-old Giant Redwoods and comprises cycle paths and a sports lake. The Longleat Estate provides many attractions including Longleat House, Longleat Safari Park, extensive grounds and mazes. It also provides coarse fishing and puts on special events such as ballooning. The National Trust's Stourhead House and Garden attracts many visitors due to its outstanding example of the English landscape style, laid out between 1741 and 1780. Classical temples are set around the central lake at the end of a series of vistas. The site also contains mature woodland and an extensive collection of exotic trees. Alfred's Tower, to the north-west of Stourhead Gardens is one of the finest triangular folly towers in the country. Parking areas tend to be accommodated within woodland where they are unobtrusive.

There are also many local forest walks and three long distance Public Rights of Way routes - the Macmillan Way/Leland Trail that follows the ridge past Alfred's Tower, the Stour Valley Way past Stourhead and the Monarch's Way that passes Ballands Castle.

### **Historic Development of Settlement and Relationship with the Landscape**

The number of enclosures and hillforts along the Greensand scarp indicates the relationship to the settlement of the adjacent terrace landscape during the late prehistoric period. Although the presence of Royal forest in the medieval period did not preclude settlement, the establishment in the 16th and 17th centuries of large estates and, in the following centuries, the laying out of extensive landscape parks at Longleat and Stourhead have had a significant influence on the settlement pattern, as well as the physical appearance of the landscape as a whole.

### **Settlement and Built Character**

Significant parts of the *Penselwood-Longleat Hills* remain unsettled, reflecting both the gradient and the dominance of forestry. However, pockets of dense development occur along the minor lanes that access the hills, for example around Penselwood/Zeals and Crockerton, and around Stourhead and Longleat. The historic houses, their immediate gardens and parkland surrounds, together with estate woodland and farmland make a very positive contribution to the character and quality of the landscape. Their influence extends well beyond the strict confines of the estates. There are also a handful of hamlets, such as Gasper and Gare Hill, often comprising little more than a row of houses and a telephone box. Typical building materials are red brick and limestone with clay tile roofs.

### **Historic Environment**

The historic character of the present landscape is largely influenced by the large country estates and their landscaped parkland. The key visible historic components are:

- The series of late prehistoric earthwork enclosure and hillforts along the Greensand scarp, mirrored by a series of castles in the medieval and post-medieval periods.
- Extensive landscaped parks surrounding large country houses, at Longleat and Stourhead.

- Post-medieval to modern coniferous plantations, and estate farmland, with a low level of settlement.

## EVALUATION

### Strength of Character

This is a landscape of **strong** character as a result of its distinct and recognisable pattern of elements - the rounded knolls, ancient woodland and designed parkland landscapes. It is an instantly recognisable landscape that is popular for recreation and forms a contrast to the adjacent open chalk landscapes.

### Current Condition

The condition of the landscape is perceived to be **good**. Overall the landscape possesses a high degree of intactness with good survival of historic earthwork features, early inclosure patterns and ancient broadleaved woodland. There are few areas of underused land and built features are in a good state of repair. The estates are well managed and this has an influence on the condition of the wider landscape. However, the replanting of native woodlands by blocks of conifers has eroded the ecological condition of some of the native woodlands.

### Past and Present Change

- The principle issues affecting the Penselwood-Longleat Hills in the past have related to forestry, the loss of ancient woodland and the landscape impacts of felling and replanting large areas.
- Large numbers of visitors have exerted pressures on the landscape, bringing traffic and requirement of services, facilities and accommodation. The presence of visitor traffic has resulted in road improvements including widening, signage, and lighting.
- There has been a gradual decline in traditional woodland management techniques as skills have been lost and forestry has concentrated on coniferous species.
- Invasion of exotic species from parkland landscapes into the native woodlands is evident in some areas.
- Wetland habitats on valley floors have been lost in the past.

### Possible Future Trends

The main land uses in this area are commercial forestry and tourism. Although forestry has affected the landscape in the past and felling of large coupes will continue, there is unlikely to be further change in landscape condition as a result of such operations. If anything, changes are likely to be positive with the planting of more native species and softening edges of plantations. There are currently issues affecting tourism across the whole of the UK. The future of tourism is difficult to predict at this stage.

The increasing professionalisation of livestock farming may affect the small number of pastoral areas between the woodland. There may be a limited availability of livestock to graze marginal land (often of high environmental value).

There is likely to be further pressure for new built development because of the area's proximity to local towns such as Warminster, Frome and Wincanton.

Overall, future trends imply that landscape condition is likely to be **stable** in this area.

### **Management Objective**

**The overall management objective should be to conserve the woodland, parkland and the mosaic of pastures and meadows that characterise the landscape. Woodland conservation and management is key in this wooded landscape.**

- Reduce impact of forestry operations by encouraging sensitive forestry practice, for example mixing different species and felling small coupes.
- Consider restoring traditional management techniques, such as coppicing to encourage a diverse age structure and a rich ground flora.
- Encourage woodland management of the remaining deciduous woodlands to check invasion of exotic species and encourage a healthy new generation of woodland trees.
- Encourage interest in, and marketing of, local wood products.
- Resist urbanisation of the country lanes or excessive signage that detracts from the rural character of the area. Consider the use of signage that fits with the rural character of the landscape.
- Ensure that new development does not affect the character of hamlets and villages and that it does not impinge upon the setting of Stourhead and Longleat.
- Monitor the effects of incremental, small scale change in the built environment. Local authorities can minimise the impacts of incremental change by providing suitable design guidance and encouraging applicants to enter into discussions at an early stage in the preparation of their proposals.
- Conserve and protect the remnant semi-natural habitats including the wetland habitats on the valley floor and isolated areas of hay meadow. Opportunities to restore and extend these rare habitats should be considered.
- Encourage management of parkland and designed landscapes that are characteristic of the area. Consider targeting these for funding such as Heritage Lottery Grant funding.
- Promote sustainable management of recreation particularly in relation to the proposed Open Country designation at Cley Hill.



## 8. ROLLING CLAY VALES



### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

8A Vale of Wardour



## TYPE 8: ROLLING CLAY VALES

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### Description

Millions of years ago complex geomorphological processes created a series of east-west faults where the Chalk beds were vertically sheared from one another. These east-west anti-clinal axes allowed further erosion to cut through the Chalk and into the older Jurassic rocks that underlie it (Upper Greensand, Portland Stone and Kimmeridge Clay). The result of this process gave rise to wide open vales exhibiting a number of different geological exposures. These vales provide a contrast to the adjacent upland chalk downland and are characterised by a pastoral valley of small scale fields divided by lush hedgerows and scattered with woods and copses - both mixed and deciduous. The layout of fields, farms and villages illustrate the pattern of medieval settlement, clearance and farming, and the post-medieval process of agricultural improvement and estate development.

Within the AONB there is only one *Rolling Clay Vale*, known as the *Vale of Wardour*.

### Key Characteristics

- Vale occupying a geological anti-clinal between the chalk.
- Varied underlying geology with many different geological exposures.
- Pastoral landscape of small scale fields divided by lush hedgerows and scattered with woods and copses.
- Layout of fields, farms and villages illustrate the pattern of medieval settlement, clearance and farming.
- Rivers and their tributaries meander through the vale.
- A sense of enclosure is provided by the surrounding upland landscapes.
- A mixed agricultural landscape of lush improved pastures and arable production with water meadows on the valley floor.
- Wooded character with broad leaf and mixed woodland (some of ancient origin) scattered across the vale.
- Villages dispersed over the floor of the vale.



## 8A VALE OF WARDOUR

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Picturesque, pastoral scene at Teffont Manor.



Alder and willow align and mark the course of the River Nadder.



The Tithe Barn north east of Tisbury is one of many historic elements displaying evidence of past settlement and land use.



Black and white wooden signposts are characteristic - some are in a poor state of repair.



Tree cover contributes to a strong wooded character across the Vale.



Parts of the Vale have a distinctly arable character.



## 8A THE VALE OF WARDOUR

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### Key Characteristics

- Varied landform character - a deep and narrow valley to the east widening to form a wide and open vale in the west.
- The River Nadder and its tributary The Sem wind their way across the floodplain.
- A varied underlying geology with Clay, Gault, Portland and Purbeck Stone predominating.
- Soils varying from loamy to calcareous reflecting changes in underlying geology.
- A mixed agricultural landscape comprising improved pastures and arable cropping.
- Strong wooded character with broad leaf and mixed woodland (some of ancient origin) scattered across the vale.
- A sense of enclosure provided by the surrounding landscape of the *Fovant Greensand Hills (7A)*.
- A settled landscape containing Tisbury – the only town within the AONB.
- Nationally important geological (fossil beds) and biological (bat roosting) SSSIs.
- Visible historic components displaying evidence for past settlement and agriculture.

### Location and Boundaries

The character area defined as *The Vale of Wardour (8A)* occupies a central location within the AONB. The boundaries marking the northern and southern extents of this landscape are almost entirely defined by the character area *Donhead to Fovant Greensand Hills (7A)*. However, to the east, beyond the settlement of Barford St Martin, the Vale narrows to push through the *West Wiltshire Open Chalk Downland (2A)*. At this point the character of the surrounding downland extends into and defines the valley sides.

### Summary of Visual Character

The *Vale of Wardour* is a rolling clay valley defined by mix of pastures and arable crops – distinctly different from the chalk landscapes which dominate elsewhere in the AONB. Contained between the greensand hills to the north and south, it is a settled landscape of farms, hamlets and villages that sit within the folds of the valley bottom. The River Nadder and its tributary, the Sem, flow west to east seemingly contradicting the shape of the vale which appears to mature (and widen) in the opposite direction. The changing landform from deep valley to wide open vale provides a variety of viewing experiences but the repetition of key features across the landscape provides a unified character.

## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

### Geology and Soils

To the west of the vale, the geology is defined by Kimmeridge Clay of the Jurassic era with drifts of clay with flints and older Head deposits. The central area of the vale is geologically defined by Portland Stone from the Jurassic era and to the east the Purbeck Stone formation predominates. Drift geology of the Quaternary era (Alluvium, River Terrace and Head deposits) occur within and adjacent to the floodplain. Blue Clay (Gault) of the Upper Cretaceous era defines the northern and southern boundaries of this landscape – marking the transition to the sand and sandstone defining the adjacent *Donhead to Fovant Greensand Hills (7A)*.

There are three main soil types within this character area – each reflecting the nature of the underlying geology. To the west and south, associated with the presence of Kimmeridge Clay and Gault geology, Typical Stagnogley soils are most common. Associated with the Portland Stone formation surrounding Tisbury, Brown Rendzinas (Lithomorphic soils) occur - calcareous soils that overly chalk. Following the line of the River Nadder and occurring on the floodplain are Pelo-alluvial gley soils – clayey, stone free occurring on flat land where there is a risk of flooding.

### Landform and Hydrology

The *Vale of Wardour* has a varied landform, gradually changing along its length from a narrow, deep valley in the east to a broad and shallow valley in the west. The landform contradicts the flow of the River Nadder and the tributary River Sem, which flow eastwards with a narrowing valley form. The Nadder and Sem follow a relatively winding course – the Sem flowing west to east and the Nadder flowing south to north before the rivers meet to the northwest of Wardour Castle. At this point the rivers become one – The Nadder – which then flows eastwards before meeting with the River Wylye at Wilton.

### Land Cover

The *Vale of Wardour* is dominated by a mix of arable and pasture. Interspersing the fields are a number of woods and copses – both mixed and deciduous. Some of the woodlands are classified as ancient - to the north of Upper and Lower Chicks Grove and to the south of Fonthill Ridge for example. Areas of woodland vary both in terms of size and shape with larger woodland swathes occurring at the base of the Greensand Hills such as south of Fonthill Abbey Wood and at Compton and Fovant Woods. Here, the woods appear to roll off the surrounding hillsides and into the Vale – forming a strong connection between the two landscapes. Woodland occurring to the west of the character area, on the Kimmeridge Clay geology, is generally broad leaf, smaller, more fragmented and of a loose and sinuous nature in comparison with the more regular, geometric form of woodland occurring to the east of Tisbury e.g. Pit Wood. Woodlands associated with large country houses and historic parkland are also a feature, for example Pythouse, southeast of Newtown, and Phillips House close to Dinton.

Shelterbelts also occur within this character area – aligning rural roads or defining field boundaries. Scattered trees, act as focal points and are regularly in view – spreading oaks



for example are a common sight as are alder along the floodplain, following the course of and aligning the River Nadder.

## Biodiversity

Although the *Vale of Wardour* is dominated by arable agriculture and pastoral land uses, the area has retained a reasonable woodland cover, including several sites which are considered to be of ancient origin.

The area has many sites which are of high scientific interest for geological rather than biological reasons, mainly for their rich fossil beds. These important geological sites include, Dinton Quarry (SSSI), Dinton Railway Cutting (SSSI), Lady Down Quarry (SSSI), Teffont Evias Quarry / Lane Cutting (SSSI) and Upper Chicks Grove Quarry (SSSI).

Of the biologically important sites is a 12km stretch of the River Nadder, which falls under the River Avon System (SAC). This section of River is primarily calcareous in character but shows influences of the greensand through which it flows for some of its length. It is of significant ecological and nature conservation interest and supports a wide range of aquatic flora and fauna, including floating *Ranunculus* vegetation, and diverse assemblages of invertebrates, fish and birds.

A further distinguishing feature of this character area is the presence of caves, (created during past quarrying activity), and man-made follies, which support important numbers of roosting bats. Chilmark Quarries (SAC) for example, is home to the largest UK wintering roost of the rare Bechstein's bat (*Myotis bechsteini*) as well as significant numbers of other bat species. A further nationally important bat roosting site is located at Fonthill Grottoes (SSSI).

The table below highlights the features of key ecological interest for each statutory site.

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha)	Summary of importance
Chilmark Quarries	SAC SSSI	9.7 9.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>System of undisturbed caves supporting large wintering bat roosts</li> <li>Largest UK wintering roost of the rare Bechstein's bat (<i>Myotis bechsteini</i>)</li> </ul>
Dinton Quarry	SSSI	0.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Geologically important site</li> </ul>
Dinton Railway Cutting	SSSI	0.26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Geologically important site</li> </ul>
Gutch Common (29% of this SSSI falls within LCA 8A)	SSSI	35.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mosaic of wet – dry acid woodland, meadows, bracken stands and acidic wet flushes</li> </ul>
Fonthill Grottoes	SSSI	0.69	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Three eighteenth century follies supporting large wintering bat roosts</li> <li>Wintering roost of the rare Bechstein's bat (<i>Myotis bechsteini</i>) and barbastelle bat (<i>Barbastella barbastellus</i>)</li> </ul>
Lady Down Quarry	SSSI	0.23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Geologically important site</li> </ul>

River Avon System (3.6% of this SSSI falls within LCA 8A)	SAC SSSI	498.2 507.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• River system noted for its exceptional aquatic plants, diverse fish fauna and range of aquatic invertebrates</li> <li>• Supports stands of floating <i>Ranunculus</i>, a vegetation type of European importance as listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex I)</li> <li>• Population of sea lamprey (<i>Petromyzon marinus</i>), brook lamprey (<i>Lampetra planeri</i>), Atlantic salmon (<i>Salmo salar</i>), bullhead (<i>Cottus gobius</i>) and Desmoulin's whorl snail (<i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i>) all listed under the Habitats Directive (Annex II), and the latter a UK BAP priority species</li> <li>• Populations of the freshwater pea mussel (<i>Pisidium tenuilineatum</i>) a nationally rare mollusc and UK BAP priority species, and <i>Valvata macrostoma</i> a nationally vulnerable mollusc</li> </ul>
Teffont Evias Quarry / Lane Cutting (45% of this SSSI falls within LCA 8A)	SSSI	3.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geologically important site</li> </ul>
Upper Chicks Grove Quarry	SSSI	5.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geologically important site</li> </ul>

## HUMAN INFLUENCES

### Evidence of Past Social Structure

A small number of monuments, including a reported stone circle/henge at Tisbury (reputedly dismantled in the 18th century to form part of the grotto at Old Wardour), a Bronze Age round barrow and field system east of Fonthill, and an enclosure at Baverstock, point to the range of social and economic activities during the prehistoric period. The contrast between the essentially rural character of the closely spaced farmstead and hamlets, and the artificial parkland landscapes of the large estates reflects the inequalities of post-medieval and 19th century society.

### Field Patterns, Boundaries and Predominant Date of Inclosure

To the east of Catherine Ford Bridge the valley floor is dominated by the channels of the former water meadows. To the west, around Semley, the pattern of small irregular fields and narrow lanes interspersed with irregular remnants of woodland represent early clearance and the later systematic inclosure in the post-medieval period. During this period parcels of land changed hands to form large estates such as Wardour, Fonthill, Chicks Grove and Pythouse, around which the larger more regular fields may reflect agricultural improvement on the estate farmlands.

### Land Use and Recreation

This is an agricultural landscape defined by both crop production and grazing with significant areas of improved pasture. The floodplain is largely under pasture. However, in places,

arable farming has extended from the valley sides and onto the valley floor (with drainage incorporated to reduce flooding and water logging of crops). This encroachment of arable production has weakened the distinction between the lush pastures of the valley floor and the traditional arable character of the valley sides or downland. A number of hedgerows (and hedgerow trees) have survived modern agricultural practices, however, many have been lost and subsequently replaced by post and wire fencing. Those that do remain are showing signs of poor management and are in a varied state of condition.

Aside from agricultural land use, the Vale has previously been the focus for mineral extraction and this continues today with stone quarrying occurring west of Chicksgrove for example.

With the exception of the A350 marking the western boundary of the character area and the A30 marking the northern boundary to the east, there are no major roads within this character area. A number of secondary roads do run both east-west and north-south across the landscape. The B3089, branching from the A30 at Barford St Martin and continuing through Dinton and on to Tisbury, is distinct due to its relationship with the River Nadder closely following the course of the River south of Teffont Elias until Tisbury where it branches away at the confluence with the Sem.

A number of Public Rights of Way cross the vale including the Wessex Ridgeway that enters the vale south of Knoyle Ridge and runs southeast to meet Old Wardour Castle. A large number of the footpaths are associated with the course of the Nadder and its tributaries. There are a number of Public Rights of Way in and around Tisbury. Surrounding the settlement of Semley, to the far west of the vale, are a number of areas of Registered Common Land. These provide local recreational access for residents.

Visitor attractions include National Trust land and properties - Phillips House and Dinton Park are two such examples.

### **Historic Development of Settlement and Relationship with the Landscape**

While there is some evidence of prehistoric settlement in the Nadder Valley, the present settlement pattern originates in the Saxon period, Tissebiri (Tisbury), being first mentioned in AD 759. There is a string of smaller villages, with long-established farmsteads at their nucleus, along the course of the river and more dispersed hamlets and farmsteads particularly where the valley widens to the west. Village earthworks, for instance at Ugford and North Burcombe, west of Wilton, and at the site of Wyck, southwest of Tisbury, indicate the variable extent to which some villages thrived or contracted during the medieval period.

### **Settlement and Built Character**

This is quite a settled area, including Tisbury, the only town within the AONB, and a number of hamlets and villages such as Semley, Newtown and Upper and Lower Chicksgrove. Settlements are largely of a nucleated form. A dense network of lanes links the many farms which are found within the valley.

Settlements are generally located on the sheltered valleys sides of the tributary rivers close to the water, for example Teffont and Fovant, with many centred around a pond or village green such as Semley. Traditional stone cottages are common, with clay roof tiles

characterising the varied pitches and rooflines. Stone walls mark the approach and form attractive entrances to many settlements.

The largest settlement – Tisbury - is a mix of old and new development displaying a range of materials but with red brick and stone predominating. Some modern small scale housing estate developments on the edge of the town are less sympathetic to the traditional built form and character.

### **Historic Environment**

The vale landscape contrasts markedly with the chalk downland to the north, displaying little evidence now of any prehistoric settlement. The layout of fields, farms and villages illustrate the pattern of medieval settlement, clearance and farming, and the post-medieval process of agricultural improvement and estate development. The key visible historic components are the small irregular fields, particularly in the west, suggesting early assart of woodland and inclosure, the water meadows in the lower reaches of the vale; the Medieval settlement pattern and deserted medieval villages, as at South Ugford and Wyck; and the large country houses with extensive estates, including some landscaped parkland.

## **EVALUATION**

### **Strength of Character**

This is a landscape of **strong** character. The rolling landform and transition from a deep and narrow valley to a wide open vale, combined with the mixed agricultural land use creates a landscape with a variety of viewing experiences. Although varied, the landscape is unified by the repeated occurrence of key features across the vale - the settlement pattern, the presence of woodland, scattered spreading oaks, and the consistent use of stone as a building material together create a combination of elements evoking a strong sense of place.

### **Current Condition**

This ancient vale has retained a substantial area of pasture, unlike the adjacent chalk downlands and chalk valleys. It exhibits a diversity of land cover and land uses and a reasonable woodland cover, including several sites which are considered to be of ancient origin. Ecological condition is therefore good. A number of hedgerows have been lost – some have been replaced by post and wire fencing . Boundaries are therefore varied and discontinuous – reducing the sense of intactness across the vale. There are also a number of overmature and stagheaded trees. The natural landform has been influenced by humans through previous and present day quarrying activities but many of the redundant quarries are now important scientific sites of biological and geological interest. Settlement and built character is in good condition. Overall, landscape condition may be described as **moderate**.

### **Change**

- In the past many hedgerows have been lost either through field enlargement or through lack of management. Erection of post and wire fencing has created a discontinuous character to boundaries.

- Many scattered trees are becoming overmature and stagheaded.
- Previous quarrying activities has disturbed the landform, but created areas of biological and geological interest.
- There is evidence that traditional farm buildings are being converted into flats and apartments in the vale.
- There has been a change of character along rural lanes due to road engineering – particularly concrete kerbing.
- Traditional black and white wooden signposts at cross roads and junctions are falling into decline.
- Pressures for new residential development are threatening the distinctiveness of settlement patterns.

### **Possible Future Trends**

The impact of Foot and Mouth and BSE is likely to result in increasing professionalisation of livestock farming resulting in the decline of small livestock businesses. This is likely to affect this pastoral landscape. There is likely to be an increasing dominance of large specialist commercial farm units and further decline in smaller more mixed holdings resulting in loss of hedgerows and amalgamation of fields into larger units. This is likely to be accompanied by a decline in traditional forms of environmental management, such as hedgerows and ditches, due to a decline in farm labour and lack of money for such activities.

There is likely to be a further decline in tree population as trees reach maturity and loss of the distinctive black and white signposts that are falling into disrepair. There is also likely to be further pressure for new built development within the attractive villages as well as redevelopment of agricultural buildings to residential, amenity or industrial use.

This landscape could see a great change in the future and the trends stated here imply that landscape condition may **decline** in the future.

### **Broad Management Objective**

**The overall management objective for the Vale of Wardour should conserve the pastoral character of the vale and the diversity of habitats. The key features that unify the landscape must be conserved such as the consistent use of building materials and the presence of scattered trees. Restoration of many key features, such as the hedgerows and characteristic rural signage is also required to enhance the sense of intactness and continuity across the landscape.**

- Replant hedgerow sections where gappy and discontinuous and apply consistent cutting and management regimes.
- Plant a new generation of standard trees to replace overmature/dying stock.
- Traditional black and white signs should be replaced, in the same style, where weathered and falling into decline.

- Conserve the ancient pattern of small irregular fields and narrow lanes interspersed with irregular remnants of woodland that is unusual in the AONB.
- Employ appropriate restoration schemes for quarries when excavation ceases.
- Monitor road engineering to safeguard the rural character of the lanes.
- Consider developing guidance for built development to ensure both future construction and changes to existing buildings are designed to integrate with the existing character and structure of settlements.

## 9. MANAGING THE NATIONALLY IMPORTANT LANDSCAPE

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- 9.1. The Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB is a landscape of national significance as recognised by its formal designation as an AONB in 1983. The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. The character and qualities of the landscape that contribute to its outstanding quality and special sense of place have been identified through this integrated assessment. The challenge for the statutory AONB Management Plan, currently being prepared, is to articulate what is special about Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs and develop a vision of how these qualities can be sustained in the future. It will provide a mechanism for reconciling diverse interests and develop an integrated and positive way forward to help guide and manage the process of change. Together, the character assessment and management plan should provide a strong framework for managing this nationally important landscape.
- 9.2. This concluding chapter identifies opportunities for the landscape character assessment to inform the AONB management plan. It draws together the detailed information contained in the report and presents the main conclusions for the AONB as a whole. The information is provided as a summary of initial 'thoughts' or 'ideas' for the management plan emerging from the process of character assessment. It will need to be integrated with the results of the in-depth and wide ranging work generated through the separate on-going management planning process.

### **Special Character and Outstanding Qualities**

- 9.3. Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs is an area of great diversity and contrast as represented by the definition of eight landscape types ranging from the high open remote downlands, the ancient forests and woodland of Cranborne Chase, the dramatic steep escarpment slopes, to the more intimate secluded chalk river valleys with their distinctive pattern of settlement. The 15 individual character areas further define this diversity.
- 9.4. In summary the special character and outstanding qualities of the AONB, include:
- Simple and elemental character of the open downland - wide expansive skies, dominant skylines, dramatic escarpments and panoramic views;
  - Unity of the underlying chalk expressed in the distinctive and sometimes, dramatically sculpted landforms, open vistas, escarpments and coombes;
  - A peaceful, tranquil, deeply rural area – largely 'unspoilt' and maintained as a working agricultural landscape;
  - Strong sense of remoteness with expanses of dark skies;
  - Juxtaposition and contrast of the open exposed downland incised by intimate settled valleys and vales;

- A landscape etched with the imprint of the past – visible historic features including prehistoric earthworks, hill forts, field systems and water meadows and unique landscapes associated with the former Royal hunting forests;
- Sparsely populated with absence of any large scale settlement – reinforcing strong AONB communities and sense of place;
- Distinctive settlement pattern along the valleys and vales and small medieval villages along the scarp springline. Local vernacular building styles including the chequer pattern of knapped flint and clunch and straw thatch;
- Overlain by a woodland mosaic – including the eye catching hill top copses, veteran parkland trees and avenues plus more extensive areas of wooded downland and ancient forest;
- Rich ecological character – expressed in diversity of habitats including the distinctive herb rich chalk downland, clear fast flowing chalk streams and rivers, chalk heath, ancient woodlands including calcareous woodland and yew woodland and watermeadows;
- Legacy of halls and houses with their characteristic estate and parkland landscapes forming an important visual element;
- Strong sense of place and local distinctiveness represented by small scale vernacular features such as the sunken lanes and distinctive black and white signposts.

## Change

- 9.5. Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs is a dynamic landscape that has evolved over time to create the distinctive character that is valued today. It will continue to change in the future, however, the pace of change is accelerating and may impact on the qualities that make this landscape special. Key forces for change have been highlighted in the character assessment. In summary these include:

**Fundamental changes in the agricultural economy** including long term structural change in farm holdings with a divergence of land management activity between the larger commercial farm units characterising the arable dominated downs and smaller family-run holdings characterising the vales and valleys. It is likely that this will lead to increasing specialisation in agricultural sectors and potential for marginal land to come out of the farming system. On the other hand, there are also significant opportunities presented by reforms of the CAP and importance of Rural Development Schemes in influencing environmentally led land management,

**Development pressures** particularly for residential development in the accessible and attractive villages that characterise the landscapes of the chalk river valleys, vales and wooded downland. This will result in gradual loss or blurring of the distinctive settlement pattern and built form. At the same time there are pressures for larger scale development including tall structures, notably communication masts and wind energy infrastructure having potential to be highly visible on the skylines of the rolling downland and escarpments. Cumulatively, the impact of development threatens the



special perceptual sense of remoteness and tranquillity that pervades much of the AONB. Lighting associated with development already has an impact on the expanse of dark skies.

### **Other Changes**

- 9.6. Alongside the major changes associated with agriculture and development are a range of other forces for change including:
- Traffic and transport issues;
  - Changes in the social and economic character of the local communities, notably an ageing population, polarity across the AONB with affluence masking severe pockets of deprivation;,
  - Changing patterns of recreation and tourism in particularly associated with the future recognition of large areas of remaining chalk downland as open access land.
  - Global change such as climate change and its impact on the characteristic habitats and species of the AONB;
  - Incremental erosion of small scale local features leading to gradual loss of valued characteristics and distinct sense of place.
- 9.7. These forces for change may act in different ways on different character areas. Each character evaluation contains a description of the forces acting on, or likely to act on, the landscape and how this may result in changes to landscape condition. This allows a prediction to be made, based on certain assumptions, on future landscape condition. **Figure 9.1** provides an overview of current landscape condition and predicted landscape condition. This map will help the AONB to target resources to those areas that are especially vulnerable.
- 9.8. The key areas where future change is expected to have a negative effect on the landscape are the Chalk River Valleys (Landscape Type 5) of the Wylde, Ebbly, and Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys and the Rolling Clay Vales (Landscape Type 8) of the Vale of Wardour. These areas are broadly characterised by a grazed pastoral landscape with small- medium sized livestock farms. Such areas will be affected by predicted changes in livestock farming. Similarly, these areas also contain the greatest concentration of villages and settlements and are likely to be the focus of pressure for further built development.

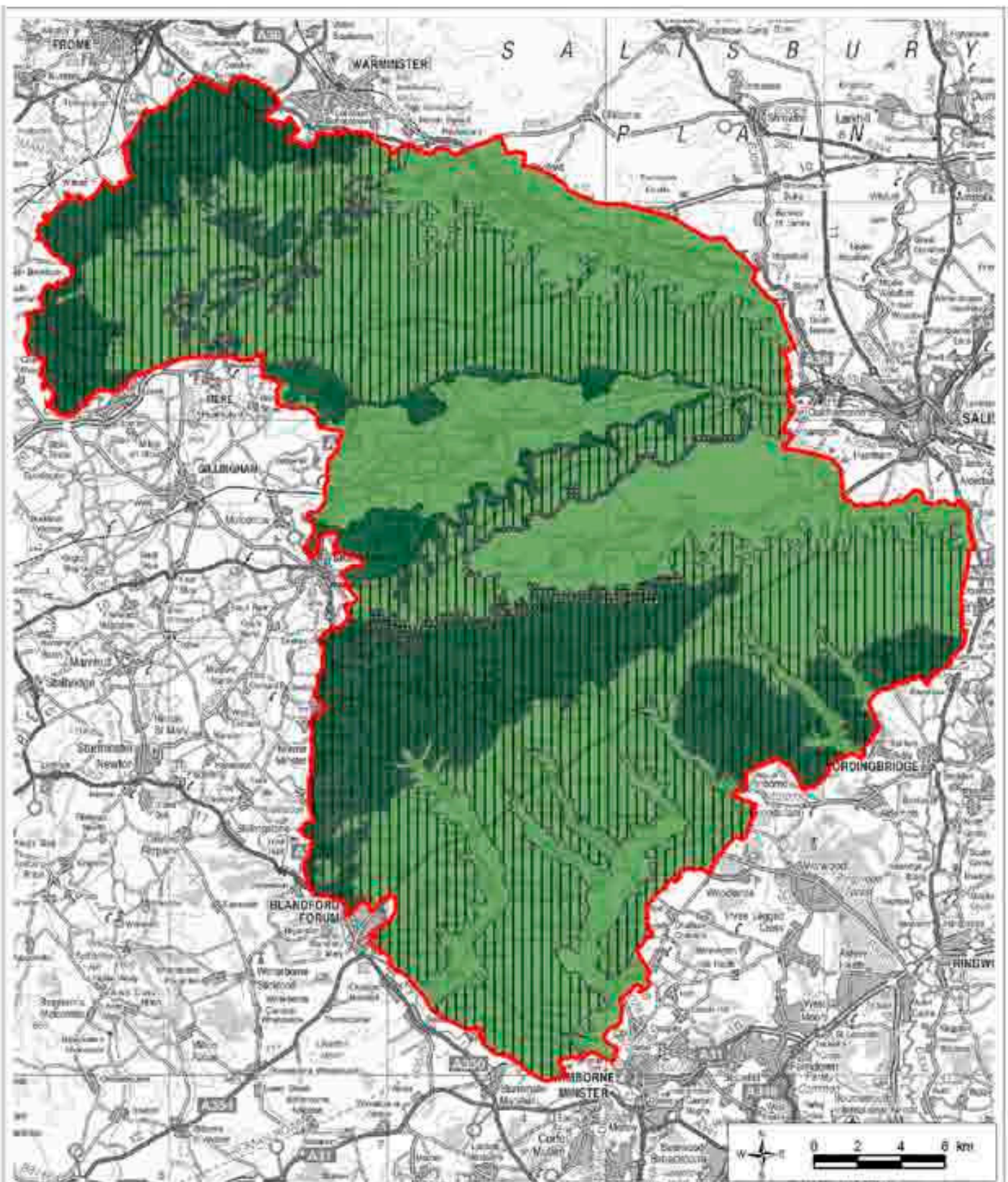
### **Broad AONB-Wide Management Aims**

- 9.9. The challenge for the management plan is to understand, manage and direct future change in a sustainable way that ensures that the outstanding landscape quality and its valued features and attributes, are conserved and enhanced.
- 9.10. A review of the special character and qualities and forces for change can help establish a vision for the future of the AONB. The character assessment suggests the following broad AONB-wide management aims.

- Conserve the simple and elemental character of the open downland - wide expansive skies, dominant skylines and panoramic views;
- Maintain the rural, tranquil character of the landscape, strong sense of remoteness and dark skies;
- Conserve the diversity of the landscape and sense of place represented by the eight landscape types and 15 draft character areas and ensure that decisions on guiding future change respect local character. In particular reinforcement of contrast between different areas;
- Maintain the AONB as a living working countryside and seek to support strong vibrant and balanced communities;
- Conserve the distinctive settlement pattern and vernacular building styles as represented by the tight knit springline villages and more informal loose pattern of linear settlement in river valleys contrasting with the sparsely settled remote downland;
- Maintain the distinct pattern of woodland cover including replanting as necessary of hill top copses, veteran parkland trees and avenues and floodplain pollards. Promote appropriate management of the woodland resource including sensitive forestry practices in relation to areas of commercial woodland;
- Conserve and enhance the rich ecological character of the AONB with particular emphasis on the important and distinctive habitats of chalk grassland, chalk heath, chalk streams and rivers, watermeadows, ancient woodland and the distinctive yew woodland;
- Ensure the sustainable conservation and management of the historic environment, including research/survey to further understanding of the historic resource;
- Conserve the small scale pattern and detail of the landscape, including ancient sunken lanes, distinctive signposts, historic water meadow systems that contributes to local distinctiveness and sense of place;
- Promote opportunities for sustainable access and recreation. Manage visitor and recreational use and in particular seek to ensure positive change in relation to the provisions of the CROW Act (managing recreational pressure on areas of open access and encouraging recognition of 'historic lost' rights of way).
- Encourage greater public (local community and visitors) appreciation and understanding of the AONB landscape.

### **Monitoring Change**

- 9.11. The following table sets out suggestions of indicators for monitoring change within the AONB. Further work will need to be undertaken by the AONB unit to develop this table, including identifying suitable sources of readily available and measurable information to monitor change. It is suggested that the table of indicators is developed to respond to the specific objectives of the AONB management plan. The



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**CRANBORNE CHASE AND WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS AONB LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT**

**Figure 9.1:**  
Current Condition and Predicted Future Change

- Key**
- AONB boundary
  - Current Condition**
  - Good
  - Moderate
  - Poor
  - Predicted Future Change**
  - Improving
  - Stable
  - Declining

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indicators should be developed in partnership with others who have an interest in the management of the AONB landscape. They should be meaningful to the lay person and ideally should capture public attention.

## AONB-WIDE INDICATORS

Potential Changes	Possible Indicators
<b>Landscape</b>	
Positive landscape management schemes	Uptake of agri-environment schemes Extent of woodland in active management (Woodland Grant Scheme)
Sense of remoteness/tranquillity	Extent of dark skies/tranquil areas (e.g. from satellite mapping)
Improved design of built development 'fitting local character'	Published Local Design Guides adopted as SPG and number of Village Design statements prepared
<b>Recreation and Access</b>	
Increase in visitor access particularly areas of 'Open Country'	Erosion of chalk downland Demand for visitor facilities (planning applications)
Recognition of 'lost' historic rights of way	Identification of 'lost ways' and inclusion on the definitive maps
<b>Biodiversity</b>	
Increase in number and extent of important and distinctive habitats	Extent of chalk grassland, chalk heath, water meadows ancient woodland, yew woodland Water quality of streams and rivers
<b>Historic Environment</b>	
Improvement in managing the historic resource	Number of SAM Management Plans
<b>Agriculture</b>	
Changes in farm size	Average farm size (Defra June Census Data)
Marketing of local produce	Number of farmer's markets within the AONB or surrounding towns
Land use change	Main land uses (Defra June Census Data)
Amount of grazing stock	Livestock statistics (Defra June Census Data)
Improved management of wildlife rich arable farmland	Number of farmland birds

<b>Socio-Economic Character</b>	
Access to local services	Access Domain of the Index of Multiple Deprivation
An ageing population	Percentage of the population below the age of 60
Access to broadband communications technology	Extent of AONB connected to broadband

## **CHARACTER AREA SPECIFIC INDICATORS**

<b>Potential Positive Changes</b>	<b>Possible Indicators</b>	<b>Character Area</b>
Increase in chalk grassland	Area of agricultural land reverted to chalk grassland (e.g. through agri-environment schemes)	1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5A, 5B, 5C,
Reversion of agricultural land to woodland	Area of agricultural land reverted to woodland (e.g. through Woodland Grant Scheme)	2A, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5A, 5B, 5C, 7A, 7B,
Change from conifer to broadleaf	Area of conifer as a percentage of total woodland cover	1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5A, 5B, 5C, 6A, 6B, 7A, 7B,
Reinstatement of traditional management such as coppicing	Area of woodland under coppice management	3A, 4A, 7A, 7B,
Improved hedgerow condition	Length of hedgerow in active management	2A, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5A, 5B, 5C, 6A, 6B, 7A, 7B,
Increase in neutral meadows	Area of neutral meadow	5A, 5B, 5C, 7A, 7B, 8A,
<b>Potential Negative Changes</b>	<b>Possible Indicators</b>	<b>Character Area</b>
Encroachment of scrub onto chalk grassland sites	Area of chalk grassland turned to scrub	1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5A, 5B, 5C,
Loss of ancient broadleaf oak woodland	Area of ancient broadleaf oak woodland	1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5A, 5B, 5C, 7A, 7B,
Decrease in extent and condition of valley and vale pastures	Extent of grazing pasture (Defra June Census Data)	All areas, but particularly 5A, 5B, 5C and 8A

Loss of veteran trees	Number of veteran trees	All areas, but particularly 3A and 8A
Loss of distinctive hill top clumps	Number of surviving hill top tree clumps	2A, 2B, 3A, 4A,
Decline in wet woodland on valley floors	Area of wet woodland	5A, 5B, 5C,
Neglect of marginal land	Extent of agricultural land not in management	All areas, but particularly 7A, 7B,
Erection of tall structures such as communication masts and wind turbines	Number of applications and schemes granted planning permission	1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, 2B, 3A, 4A,
Demand for residential development	Number of planning applications for housing	All areas, but particularly 5A, 5B, 5C and 8A





**APPENDIX I:**  
**The Agricultural Character of**  
**Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB**



# THE AGRICULTURAL CHARACTER OF CRANBORNE CHASE AND WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS AONB

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This description of agriculture in the AONB is based on information from the June 2001 Agricultural Census.

As a means of characterising agriculture within the AONB, landscape character areas with broadly similar agricultural features have been amalgamated into larger areas called farming character areas (FCAs) (*Figure 10.1*). Such larger areas are desirable so that each contains a reasonably large number of farm holdings.

## AGRICULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF FARMING CHARACTER AREAS

### Overview

In terms of the main types of land cover the seven farming character areas fall into three main groups. The FCAs with proportions of cropping land, set-aside and grassland very similar to the AONB as a whole are the Wylve River Valley FCA, the West Wiltshire Downs FCA, the Fovant and Ebbel FCA and the Cranborne Chase FCA. Two FCAs, the Penselwood-Longleat Hills and the Vale of Wardour, are dominated by livestock enterprises with much higher proportions of grassland and correspondingly less cropping land than the average. The Southern Downland Belt FCA, which is the largest farming character area, is dominated by cropping enterprises and set-aside land with grassland being relatively unimportant.

Each farming character area is described in more detail in the following pages.

## AI PENSELWOOD – LONGLEAT HILLS

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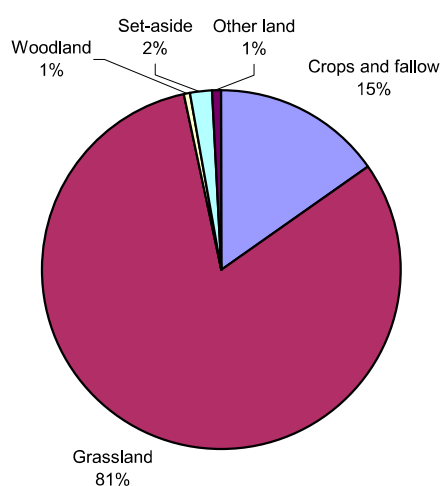
The Penselwood - Longleat Hills farming character area is one of the smallest FCAs, being 6,430ha in area. It covers the same area as the *Penselwood-Longleat Hills* landscape character area.

### Key Agricultural Characteristics

- Agricultural holdings account for only 39% of the total area, much of the remainder being woodland<sup>1</sup>.
- It is a livestock farming area, 81% of the farmland being in some form of pasture, most of which is permanent grassland (Figure AI). Within the AONB only the Vale of Wardour comes close to this proportion of grassland. Dairy farming is the main livestock enterprise.
- Many of the holdings are small with over half being smaller than 5ha. This corresponds with the predominance of livestock farming, as livestock farms tend to be smaller than arable farms. The total labour force per unit of farmland area (4.0 persons per km<sup>2</sup>) is relatively high, which again reflects the importance of labour-intensive livestock farming.
- Cropping is relatively unimportant in the Penselwood-Longleat Hills with only 15% of the farmland in crops and fallow land, being mainly cereals and maize.

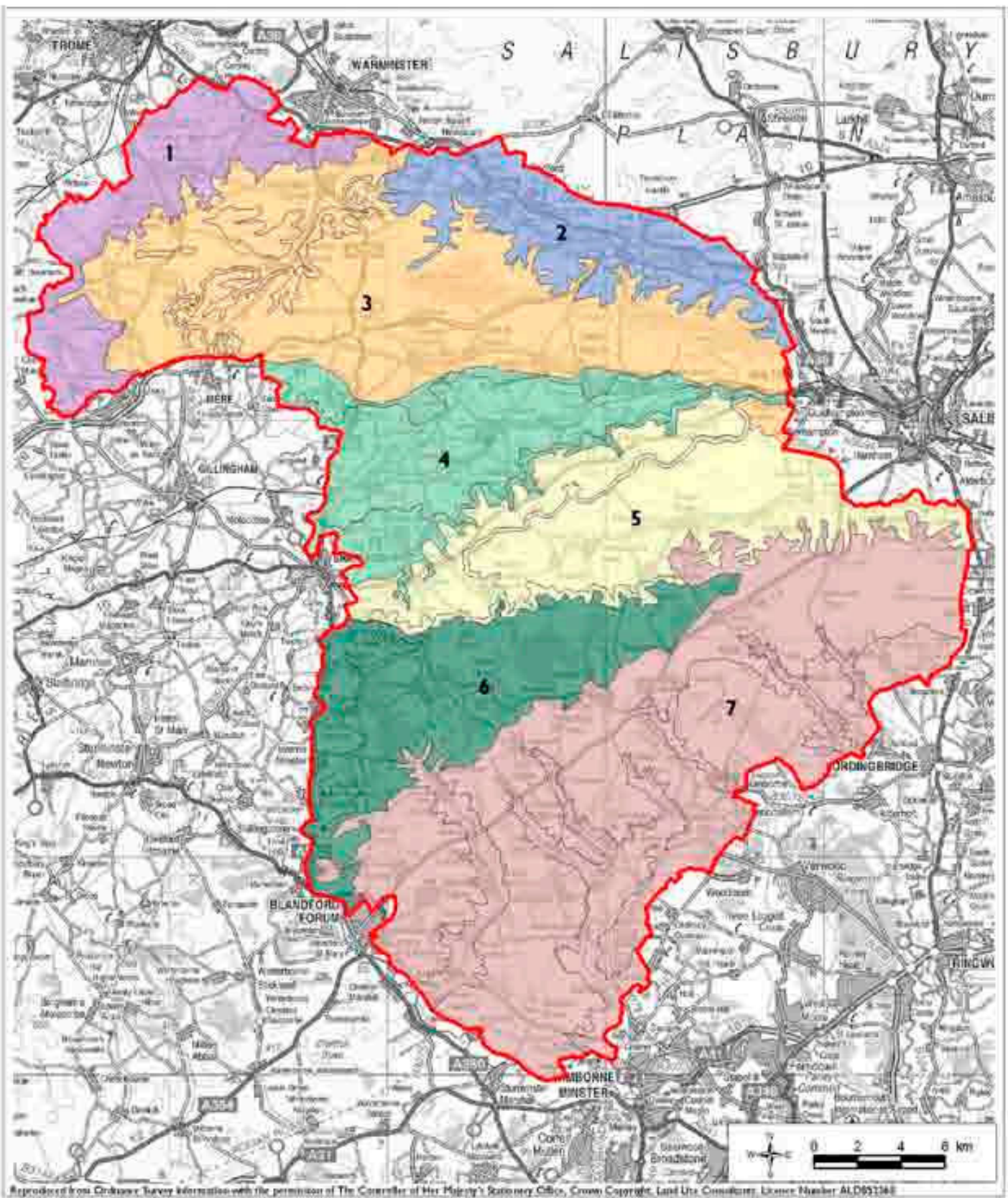
The key agricultural features are summarised in **Table AI** overleaf.

**Figure AI: Main agricultural land uses as a percentage of farmland:**



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<sup>1</sup> Note that **Figure AI** indicates that there is 1% woodland but this refers only to woodland on farms, whereas much of the woodland is in large tracts not located on farms.



### CRANBORNE CHASE AND WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS AONB LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Figure 10.1:  
Farming Character Areas

- Key**
- AONB boundary
  - 1. Penselwood - Longleat Hills
  - 2. Wylde River Valley
  - 3. West Wiltshire Downs
  - 4. Vale of Wardour
  - 5. Fovant and Ebble
  - 6. Cranborne Chase
  - 7. Southern Downland Belt

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**Table A1 Agricultural statistics for the Penselwood – Longleat Hills farming character area**

<b>OVERALL AREAS</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of total</i>	<b>GRAZING LAND</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of farmed</i>
Total area of FCA	6,430		Temporary grassland	263	10%
Farmed area	2,531	39%	Permanent grassland	1,650	65%
Number of holdings	55		Rough grazing	146	6%
<b>HOLDINGS BY SIZE</b>		<i>% of holdings</i>	<b>MAIN CROP TYPES</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of farmed</i>
0 to < 5 hectares		54%	Total cereals	224	9%
5 to < 20 hectares		10%	Wheat	162	6%
20 to < 50 hectares		7%	Oilseed rape	***	***
50 to < 100 hectares		13%	Peas (harvested dry)	0	0%
100 hectares or more		16%	Maize	130	5%
<b>LABOUR FORCE</b>	<i>number</i>	<i>per km<sup>2</sup> farmed</i>	<b>LIVESTOCK</b>	<i>number</i>	<i>LU per ha grass</i>
Full time farmers	35		Dairy cows	1,138	
Part time farmers	49		Beef cows	388	
Total labour force	102	4.0	Total cattle & calves	3,213	1.1
			Total sheep	4,479	0.2
			Total grazing LU	2,686	1.3
			Total pigs	***	

\*\*\* Missing data due to DEFRA data privacy policies. Data are excluded where there are few farms in a category, so the value can usually be assumed to be low.

† Some errors are associated with this figure, due to methodology used to assign farm holdings to farming character areas.

## A2 WYLYE VALLEY

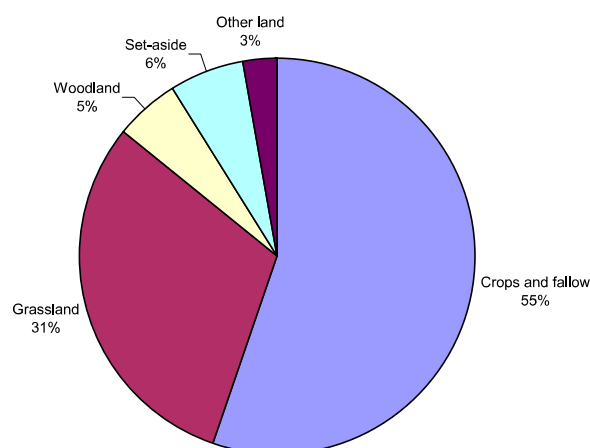
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The Wylve River Valley is another small farming character area, covering 6,209ha. It covers the same area as the *Wylve Valley* landscape character area.

### Key Agricultural Characteristics

- Agricultural holdings account for almost all of the total area<sup>2</sup>.
- The distribution of farmland use between cropping and livestock enterprises is typical of the AONB as a whole with most of the farmland (55%) in crops, a further 6% in set-aside and 31% in grassland (**Figure A2**).
- The distribution of holding sizes is quite similar to the whole AONB although there is a slightly higher proportion of holdings smaller than 20ha.
- The overall intensity of grazing is relatively high (1.7 livestock units per ha of grazing land compared with 1.3 for the AONB). This may be due to the better quality land in the river valley although further research would be needed to verify this. Most of the grazing livestock are cattle<sup>3</sup>.
- The labour intensity of agriculture is relatively low (2.0 persons per km<sup>2</sup>) which is probably due to the predominance of large scale cropping enterprises.

**Figure A2 Wylve Valley farming character area: Main agricultural land uses as a percentage of farmland.**



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<sup>2</sup> The agricultural census returns data suggest that 101% of the land is farmed, clearly this is an error due to the way agricultural holdings are assigned to geographical areas in that some land outside this area will be farmed by holdings located within the area.

<sup>3</sup> The relative importance of dairy and beef cattle cannot be compared because of data suppression, which in itself suggests that a few large farms account for most of the cattle.



**Table A2 Agricultural statistics for the Wylve Valley farming character area**

<b>OVERALL AREAS</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of total</i>	<b>GRAZING LAND</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of farmed</i>
Total area of FCA	6,209		Temporary grassland	393	6%
Farmed area	6,275	101% †	Permanent grassland	1,257	20%
Number of holdings	35		Rough grazing	279	4%
<b>HOLDINGS BY SIZE</b>		<i>% of holdings</i>	<b>MAIN CROP TYPES</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of farmed</i>
0 to < 5 hectares		43%	Total cereals	2,493	40%
5 to < 20 hectares		18%	Wheat	1,486	24%
20 to < 50 hectares		6%	Oilseed rape	385	6%
50 to < 100 hectares		6%	Peas (harvested dry)	287	5%
100 hectares or more		27%	Maize	241	4%
<b>LABOUR FORCE</b>	<i>number</i>	<i>per km<sup>2</sup> farmed</i>	<b>LIVESTOCK</b>	<i>number</i>	<i>LU per ha grass</i>
Full time farmers	25		Dairy cows	***	
Part time farmers	41		Beef cows	***	
Total labour force	123	2.0	Total cattle & calves	4,043	1.5
			Total sheep	4,245	0.2
			Total grazing LU	3,248	1.7
			Total pigs	***	

\*\*\* Missing data due to DEFRA data privacy policies. Data are excluded where there are few farms in a category, so the value can usually be assumed to be low.

† Some errors are associated with this figure, due to methodology used to assign farm holdings to farming character areas.

## A3 WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS

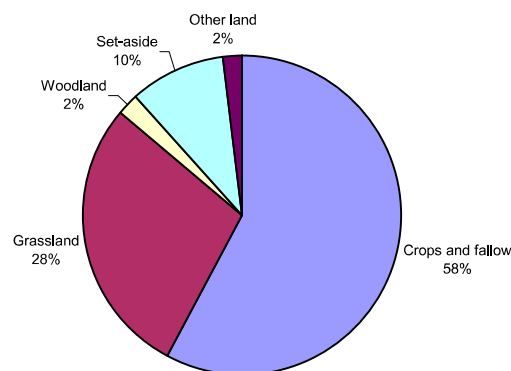
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The West Wiltshire Downs farming character area covers 20,325ha and includes the *West Wiltshire Downs Escarpments*, the *West Wiltshire Downs Open Chalk Downland* and the *Kilmington Greensand Terrace* landscape character areas.

### Key Agricultural Characteristics

- Agricultural holdings account for 94% of all land.
- Land use is typical of the AONB as a whole but with a slightly higher proportion of cropping land and set-aside and correspondingly less grazing land (**Figure A3**).
- Holdings tend to be larger than the average for the AONB, with 40% of holdings larger than 100ha.
- The relative proportions of dairy cattle, beef cattle and sheep are similar to those for the AONB. In addition there are a significant number of pigs (about 5,000).
- The labour intensity of agriculture is very low (1.7 persons per km<sup>2</sup>), probably because of the predominance of large scale cropping enterprises.

**Figure A3 West Wiltshire Downs farming character area: Main agricultural land uses as a percentage of farmland.**



**Table A3 Agricultural statistics for the West Wiltshire Downs farming character area**

<b>OVERALL AREAS</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of total</i>	<b>GRAZING LAND</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of farmed</i>
Total area of FCA	20,325		Temporary grassland	982	5%
Farmed area	19,049	94%	Permanent grassland	3,409	18%
Number of holdings	138		Rough grazing	997	5%
<b>HOLDINGS BY SIZE</b>		<i>% of holdings</i>	<b>MAIN CROP TYPES</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of farmed</i>
0 to < 5 hectares		31%	Total cereals	8,043	42%
5 to < 20 hectares		10%	Wheat	4,039	21%
20 to < 50 hectares		8%	Oilseed rape	1,636	9%
50 to < 100 hectares		11%	Peas (harvested dry)	534	3%
100 hectares or more		40%	Maize	313	2%
<b>LABOUR FORCE</b>	<i>number</i>	<i>per km<sup>2</sup> farmed</i>	<b>LIVESTOCK</b>	<i>number</i>	<i>LU per ha grass</i>
Full time farmers	107		Dairy cows	2,987	
Part time farmers	79		Beef cows	1,049	
Total labour force	333	1.7	Total cattle & calves	8,726	1.2
			Total sheep	18,625	0.3
			Total grazing LU	7,713	1.4
			Total pigs	4,820	

\*\*\* Missing data due to DEFRA data privacy policies. Data are excluded where there are few farms in a category, so the value can usually be assumed to be low.

† Some errors are associated with this figure, due to methodology used to assign farm holdings to farming character areas.

## A4 VALE OF WARDOUR

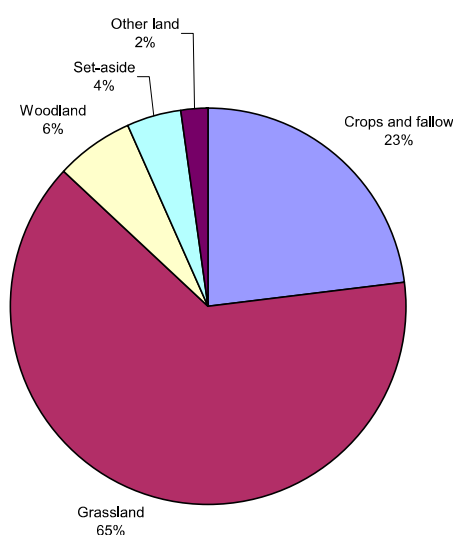
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The Vale of Wardour farming character area (9,855ha) includes the *Vale of Wardour* and the *Donhead - Fovant Hills* landscape character areas. Like the Penselwood – Longleat Hills FCA it is mainly a livestock grazing area with relatively little cropping.

### Key Agricultural Characteristics

- Agricultural holdings account for 74% of all land, which is less than the average for the AONB.
- Grazing land makes up 65% of the farmland while crops, fallow land and set-aside together comprise a little over one quarter of farmland (**Figure A4**).
- There is a high proportion of small holdings. Holdings smaller than 20ha account for 66% of all holdings and only 9% of holdings are greater than 100ha. As noted earlier, smaller holdings are characteristic of livestock farms.
- The relative proportions of dairy cattle, beef cattle and sheep are similar to those for the AONB.
- The grazing land is mostly permanent pasture but there is a substantial proportion of temporary grassland (13% of farmland) and very little rough grazing (3% of farmland).
- The labour intensity of agriculture (4.3 persons per km<sup>2</sup>) is the highest of any farming character area, reflecting the importance of livestock farming.

**Figure A4 Vale of Wardour farming character area: Main agricultural land uses as a percentage of farmland.**



**Table A4 Agricultural statistics for the Vale of Wardour farming character area**

<b>OVERALL AREAS</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of total</i>	<b>GRAZING LAND</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of farmed</i>
Total area of FCA	9,855		Temporary grassland	945	13%
Farmed area	7,270	74%	Permanent grassland	3,446	47%
Number of holdings	184		Rough grazing	254	3%
<b>HOLDINGS BY SIZE</b>		<i>% of holdings</i>	<b>MAIN CROP TYPES</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of farmed</i>
0 to < 5 hectares		44%	Total cereals	1,235	17%
5 to < 20 hectares		22%	Wheat	763	10%
20 to < 50 hectares		14%	Oilseed rape	133	2%
50 to < 100 hectares		10%	Peas (harvested dry)	***	***
100 hectares or more		9%	Maize	206	3%
<b>LABOUR FORCE</b>	<i>number</i>	<i>per km<sup>2</sup> farmed</i>	<b>LIVESTOCK</b>	<i>number</i>	<i>LU per ha grass</i>
Full time farmers	77		Dairy cows	2,551	
Part time farmers	144		Beef cows	742	
Total labour force	314	4.3	Total cattle & calves	6,887	1.1
			Total sheep	15,768	0.3
			Total grazing LU	6,267	1.3
			Total pigs	***	

\*\*\* Missing data due to DEFRA data privacy policies. Data are excluded where there are few farms in a category, so the value can usually be assumed to be low.

† Some errors are associated with this figure, due to methodology used to assign farm holdings to farming character areas.

## A5 FOVANT AND EBBLE

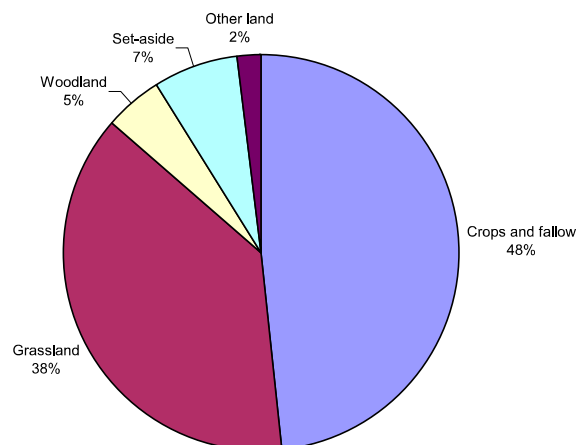
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The Fovant and Ebble farming character area (12,700ha) includes the *Fovant Greensand Terrace*, *Fovant and Chalke Escarpment* and *Ebble Valley* landscape character areas and a small part of the *West Wiltshire Downs LCA* adjacent to Wilton.

### Key Agricultural Characteristics

- Agricultural holdings account for nearly all of the total land area<sup>4</sup>.
- Land use is generally typical of the AONB as a whole with about half of the land used for cropping and fallow land, a further 7% in set-aside and much of the remainder in grazing land (**Figure A5**).
- Farm sizes are also quite similar to the AONB as a whole but with a slightly higher proportion of holdings larger than 100ha (30% of holdings compared to 26% for the AONB).
- The proportion of grazing land (38% of farmland) is slightly higher than the AONB because of a high proportion of rough grazing (9% of farmland). The low overall grazing intensity (1.0 LU per ha of grazing land) and the fact that sheep make up a greater proportion of all livestock units in the Fovant and Ebble FCA are consistent with the higher proportion of rough grazing. Rough grazing is less productive than temporary or permanent grassland and sheep are often grazed on poorer pasture.
- The relatively low ratio of dairy cows to beef cows (1.8 compared with 3.2 for the AONB) also suggests a tendency to lower quality pasture in this FCA as dairy cows require good quality grazing.

**Figure A5 Fovant and Ebble farming character area: Main agricultural land uses as a percentage of farmland.**



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<sup>4</sup> As in the case of the Wylve River Valley FCA the agricultural census returns data suggest that more than 100% of the land is farmed, which is assumed to be an error due to the way agricultural holdings are assigned to geographical areas

**Table A5 Agricultural statistics for the Fovant and Ebble farming character area**

<b>OVERALL AREAS</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of total</i>	<b>GRAZING LAND</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of farmed</i>
Total area of FCA	12,700		Temporary grassland	917	7%
Farmed area	13,689	108% †	Permanent grassland	3,039	22%
Number of holdings	101		Rough grazing	1,270	9%
<b>HOLDINGS BY SIZE</b>		<i>% of holdings</i>	<b>MAIN CROP TYPES</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of farmed</i>
0 to < 5 hectares		36%	Total cereals	5,042	37%
5 to < 20 hectares		10%	Wheat	2,412	18%
20 to < 50 hectares		14%	Oilseed rape	505	4%
50 to < 100 hectares		11%	Peas (harvested dry)	353	3%
100 hectares or more		30%	Maize	322	2%
<b>LABOUR FORCE</b>	<i>number</i>	<i>per km<sup>2</sup> farmed</i>	<b>LIVESTOCK</b>	<i>number</i>	<i>LU per ha grass</i>
Full time farmers	67		Dairy cows	1,427	
Part time farmers	97		Beef cows	797	
Total labour force	276	2.0	Total cattle & calves	5,869	0.7
			Total sheep	17,288	0.3
			Total grazing LU	5,222	1.0
			Total pigs	762	

\*\*\* Missing data due to DEFRA data privacy policies. Data are excluded where there are few farms in a category, so the value can usually be assumed to be low.

† Some errors are associated with this figure, due to methodology used to assign farm holdings to farming character areas.

## A6 CRANBORNE CHASE

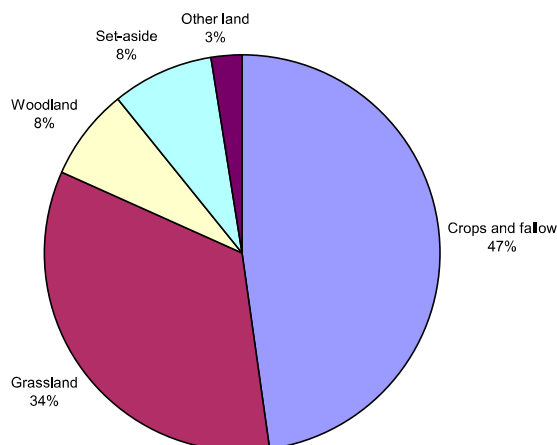
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The Cranborne Chase farming character area (10,467ha) includes the *Cranborne Chase* and the *Melbury to Blandford Escarpment* landscape character areas.

### Key Agricultural Characteristics

- Agricultural holdings account for 81% of the total land area. Much of the remaining land is occupied by woodland.
- Land use in this FCA is similar to the Fovant and Ebbles FCA and to the AONB as a whole (**Figure A6**) but with more woodland on farms (8% of farmland) and slightly less cropland (47% compared to 51% for the AONB).
- The proportion of holdings in the smallest size class (less than 5ha) is the lowest of all the FCAs (27% compared with 37% in the AONB) and there is a correspondingly higher proportion of holdings between 20ha and 100ha in area.
- There is a lower proportion of permanent grassland and a higher proportion of rough grazing than the average for the AONB. The FCA also has a low overall grazing intensity (1.0 LU per ha grazing land) and an over-representation of sheep relative to cattle. As discussed in relation to the Fovant and Ebbles FCA these factors are probably linked.
- The labour intensity of agriculture (1.7 persons per km<sup>2</sup>) is among the lowest of all FCAs. This is probably due to few holdings smaller than 5ha, larger holdings being more efficient in their use of labour, but other factors could be involved such as the use of contractors (which do not appear in the DEFRA June Census data) on arable farms.

**Figure A6 Cranborne Chase farming character area: Main agricultural land uses as a percentage of farmland.**





**Table A6 Agricultural statistics for the Cranborne Chase farming character area**

<b>OVERALL AREAS</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of total</i>	<b>GRAZING LAND</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of farmed</i>
Total area of FCA	10,467		Temporary grassland	752	9%
Farmed area	8,465	81%	Permanent grassland	1,479	17%
Number of holdings	65		Rough grazing	625	7%
<b>HOLDINGS BY SIZE</b>		<i>% of holdings</i>	<b>MAIN CROP TYPES</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of farmed</i>
0 to < 5 hectares		27%	Total cereals	2,687	32%
5 to < 20 hectares		14%	Wheat	1,506	18%
20 to < 50 hectares		17%	Oilseed rape	312	4%
50 to < 100 hectares		14%	Peas (harvested dry)	529	6%
100 hectares or more		28%	Maize	132	2%
<b>LABOUR FORCE</b>	<i>number</i>	<i>per km<sup>2</sup> farmed</i>	<b>LIVESTOCK</b>	<i>number</i>	<i>LU per ha grass</i>
Full time farmers	37		Dairy cows	***	
Part time farmers	53		Beef cows	***	
Total labour force	147	1.7	Total cattle & calves	2,751	0.7
			Total sheep	13,300	0.3
			Total grazing LU	2,937	1.0
			Total pigs	***	

\*\*\* Missing data due to DEFRA data privacy policies. Data are excluded where there are few farms in a category, so the value can usually be assumed to be low.

† Some errors are associated with this figure, due to methodology used to assign farm holdings to farming character areas.

## A7 SOUTHERN DOWNLAND BELT

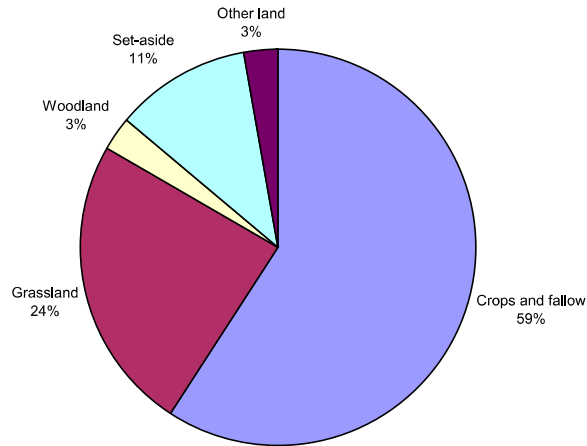
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The Southern Downland Belt farming character area (32,070ha) is the largest FCA and includes the *Southern Downland Belt* landscape character area, the *Martin - Whitsbury Downland Hills* landscape character area and the *Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys* landscape character area.

### Key Agricultural Characteristics

- Agricultural holdings account for 94% of the total area.
- The majority of the farmland is used for cropping (59%) and a further 11% is in set-aside (**Figure A7**), which are the largest proportions of these land uses among the seven FCAs. A further quarter of the farmland is grazing land.
- Holdings tend to be larger than the average for the AONB, with fewer holdings smaller than 20ha and more holdings larger than 100ha.
- Of the grazing land a high proportion is temporary grassland, which tends to be highly productive, and there is a very low proportion of rough grazing. These factors contribute to a high overall grazing intensity (1.6 LU per ha grazing land). Almost half of the grazing livestock units are accounted for by dairy cows with the remainder of livestock units being fairly evenly distributed among herd replacements (both dairy and beef), beef cows, young cattle (less than one year old) and finishing cattle.
- The Southern Downland Belt FCA differs from other FCAs in that pig farming is a major industry there. Of the 51,500 pigs recorded in the AONB at June 2001, three quarters (38,600) were in the Southern Downland Belt FCA.
- The labour intensity of agriculture (2.3 persons per km<sup>2</sup>) is the same as the AONB. The existence of many large-scale arable holdings would tend to suggest a lower labour intensity than the average for the AONB but this may be countered by the relative importance of dairy and pig farming, both of which are labour intensive enterprises.

**Figure A7 Southern Downland Belt farming character area: Main agricultural land uses as a percentage of farmland.**



**Table A7 Agricultural statistics for the Southern Downland Belt farming character area**

<b>OVERALL AREAS</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of total</i>	<b>GRAZING LAND</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of farmed</i>
Total area of FCA	32,070		Temporary grassland	2,879	10%
Farmed area	30,037	94%	Permanent grassland	3,790	13%
Number of holdings	212		Rough grazing	591	2%
<b>HOLDINGS BY SIZE</b>		<i>% of holdings</i>	<b>MAIN CROP TYPES</b>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>% of farmed</i>
0 to < 5 hectares		31%	Total cereals	13,146	44%
5 to < 20 hectares		17%	Wheat	7,132	24%
20 to < 50 hectares		10%	Oilseed rape	1,999	7%
50 to < 100 hectares		10%	Peas (harvested dry)	1,315	4%
100 hectares or more		32%	Maize	856	3%
<b>LABOUR FORCE</b>	<i>number</i>	<i>per km<sup>2</sup> farmed</i>	<b>LIVESTOCK</b>	<i>number</i>	<i>LU per ha grass</i>
Full time farmers	120		Dairy cows	5,354	
Part time farmers	151		Beef cows	1,438	
Total labour force	678	2.3	Total cattle & calves	14,859	1.5
			Total sheep	7,116	0.1
			Total grazing LU	11,477	1.6
			Total pigs	38,578	

\*\*\* Missing data due to DEFRA data privacy policies. Data are excluded where there are few farms in a category, so the value can usually be assumed to be low.

† Some errors are associated with this figure, due to methodology used to assign farm holdings to farming character areas.

## FARMING CHARACTER AREAS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE ECONOMY OF THE AONB

The income generated through the primary production of crops and livestock in the AONB is termed 'farmgate' income. This is important in giving an indication of the relative economic contribution of the different areas of the AONB and of the different land uses within those areas.

The estimates of farmgate income presented below have been calculated by multiplying the area of land or number of livestock that were recorded in the DEFRA Agricultural June Census for 2001 by typical yields (as provided by industry experts) and current (December 2002) market prices for the commodities involved.

Assigning farmgate value between the different Landscape Character Areas of the AONB is difficult due to limitations of the DEFRA Census data on the area of crops and numbers of livestock (see the method statement in **Appendix 4**). However, it is possible to divide the AONB into seven 'farming character areas' by amalgamating the LCAs to areas of similar farming character, at which level reliable Census data is more complete. **Appendix 1** of this report gives a detailed description of the farming characteristics of each of these areas.

Based on the proportion of the AONB's crops or livestock in each of these 'farming character areas' it is possible to estimate the proportion of the AONB's total farmgate value that is earned in each of the sub areas. **Table A8** shows farmgate values allocated to each of these areas. No values are given for pig production because data on the number of pigs in each area was not available.

**Table A8. Estimate of farmgate values between 'farming character areas'**

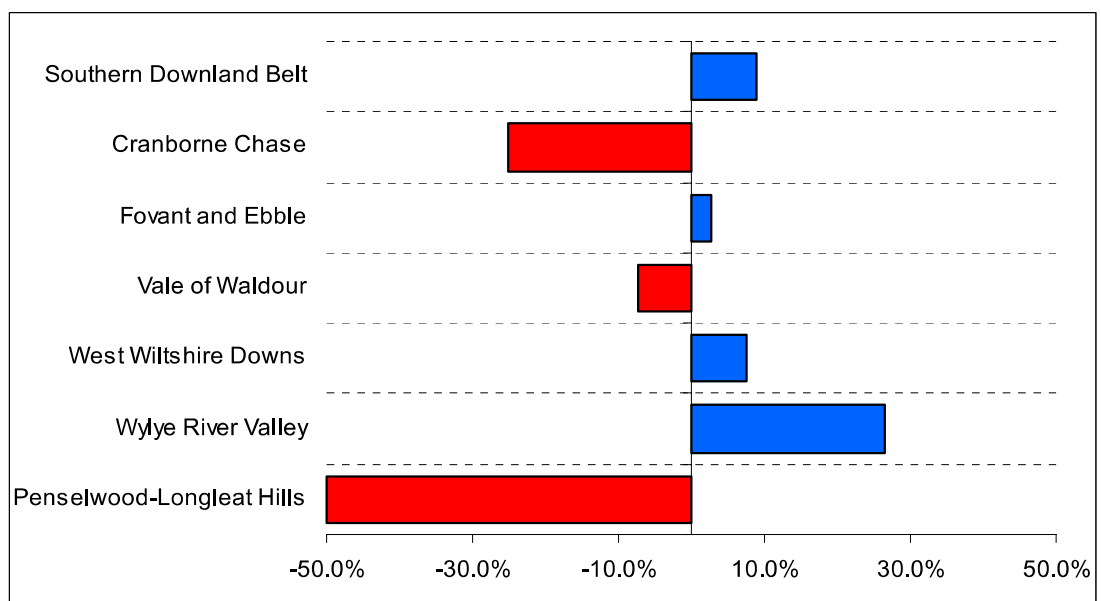
Farmgate value in £M	Penselwood-Longleat Hills	Wylve River Valley	West Wiltshire Downs	Vale of Wardour	Fovant and Ebble	Cranborne Chase	Southern Downland Belt
Combinable crops	£0.2	£2.3	£7.3	£1.1	£4.4	£2.6	£11.8
Dairy	£1.3	£1.5	£3.3	£2.9	£1.6	£1.0	£6.0
Beef	£0.1	£0.3	£0.7	£0.5	£0.5	£0.2	£0.9
Sheep	£0.1	£0.1	£0.5	£0.5	£0.5	£0.4	£0.2
<b>Total (not incl pigs)</b>	<b>£1.7</b>	<b>£4.3</b>	<b>£11.8</b>	<b>£5.0</b>	<b>£7.1</b>	<b>£4.3</b>	<b>£19.0</b>
% of AONB total	3%	8%	22%	9%	13%	8%	36%

% of total land area of AONB	7%	6%	21%	10%	13%	11%	33%
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**Figure A8** gives an indication of the relative economic contribution of each area, compared to the proportion of the AONB that it occupies (total land area). The following tentative conclusions can be drawn about the relative contribution of the different parts of the AONB from these data. A word of warning however should be given about the robustness of the Census data at these relatively small areas, particularly where the data from large estates which cross boundaries between areas is all assigned by DEFRA to one area.

- The greatest economic contributions, relative to their proportion of the AONB area seem to come from the Wylde River Valley, Southern Downland Belt and West Wiltshire Downs. Further analysis of the data in Table X.3 suggests that it is the dairy and arable sectors in the Wylde Valley, the arable sector in the Southern Downland Belt and West Wiltshire Downs that are responsible for this relatively high contribution.
- The least economic relative economic contributions seem to be made by the Penselwood and Longleat Hills and Cranborne Chase. In these areas, further analysis of Table X.3 suggests that it is relative unimportance of the arable sector in the Penselwood and Longleat Hills and of the dairy and beef sectors in Cranborne Chase which reduce the relative contributions in these areas.

**Figure A8 Variance of the farmgate contribution of farming character areas from the AONB average, relative to land area**



### **Economic contributions to the local economy**

Based on the farmgate values estimated above, and using standard industry costings<sup>5</sup> that assign the costs of agricultural production to different categories of activity such as labour and physical inputs, it is possible to estimate how farming in the AONB supports 'upstream' (i.e. supply-side) businesses. **Table A9** makes estimates of these production costs for the whole AONB. **Figure A9** shows these graphically. The following conclusions can be drawn from these data:

- The largest group of input costs are the fertiliser, seed and pesticides (22%) used mainly by the arable sector. These will tend to be paid to business (agricultural merchants) outside the AONB and most of this value will be passed quickly to their suppliers who are large national or international companies. A small amount of cereal seed will be grown within the AONB.

<sup>5</sup> Taken from Nix J, 2002. Farm Management Pocketbook, Wye College, Kent.

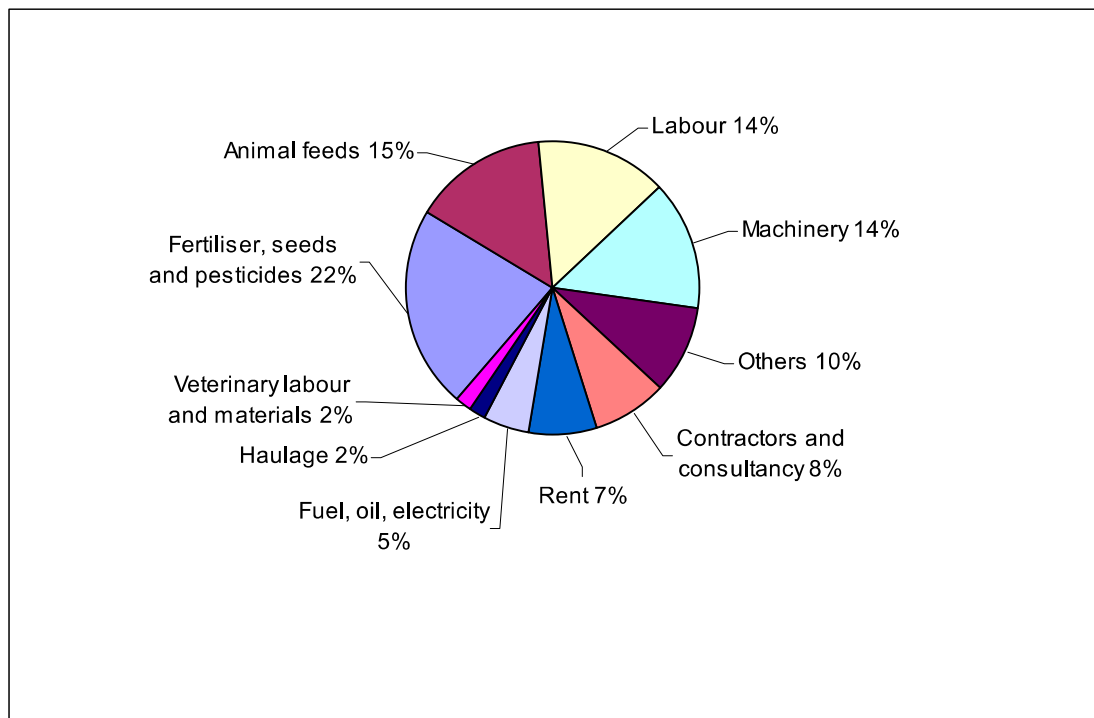
- Animal feeds are the second largest group of costs (15% of the total), some of which will be grown on farm, or supplied by other farms in the area through feed merchants. A relatively high proportion of this costs will therefore be retained locally.
- 14% of costs are labour costs (the cost of unsalaried family labour has not been included in these costings, so total costs of labour will be higher), all of which will be sourced and retained locally. The value of employed labour is split fairly evenly between the cropping and livestock sectors.

**Table A9. Estimate of agricultural production costs in the AONB in 2002**

Production costs in £M	Combinable crops	Livestock	Total	% of total costs
Labour	£3.77	£2.69	£6.46	14%
Animal feeds	£0.00	£6.68	£6.68	15%
Fertiliser, seeds and pesticides	£8.34	£1.63	£9.97	22%
Machinery	£5.06	£1.28	£6.33	14%
Contractors and consultancy	£1.19	£2.45	£3.64	8%
Fuel, oil, electricity	£1.50	£0.80	£2.30	5%
Veterinary labour and materials	£0.00	£0.70	£0.70	2%
Haulage	£0.77	£0.11	£0.88	2%
Rent	£2.53	£0.71	£3.24	7%
Others	£1.01	£3.35	£4.36	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>£24.16</b>	<b>£20.39</b>	<b>£44.55</b>	<b>100%</b>

% of total costs	54%	46%	100%
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**Figure A9. Relative value of agricultural production costs in the AONB in 2002**



**APPENDIX 2:**  
**Perceptions of the Landscape**





## PERCEPTIONS OF THE LANDSCAPE

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A landscape can assume national significance not only because of its particular character and qualities, but also because of special cultural associations that it may have with nationally important characters, writers or artists. Examination of the way in which others have perceived the landscape over time can also provide pointers to a consensus view about why an area is considered special and what particular features have consistently attracted attention and comment. It can also show how opinions about an area have changed. These perspectives of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB are examined below.

### HISTORICAL, LITERACY AND ARTISTIC ASSOCIATIONS

Notable figures associated with the area include Sir Christopher Wren who was born and grew up in East Knoyle, where his father was rector. Little survives to celebrate the birthplace of this great architect, although the store above which he was born is known as 'Wren's Shop'. Sir Christopher Wren's Master Mason, Edward Strong, was also born in East Knoyle where he built a cottage and farm.

General Augustus Henry Pitt-Rivers of Rushmore inherited Rushmore in 1880 when Horace, the sixth and last Lord Rivers died. With his inheritance, General Pitt-Rivers was able to indulge in his main interest – that of archaeology. His principal 'digs' which subsequently contributed so much to archaeological knowledge, included the Iron Age hill-fort at Winkelbury, the Romano-British settlements at Woodcutts and Rotherley and the excavation of the Bokerley Dyke. It is not unjustly that Pitt-Rivers is known as the 'father of archaeology'.

Another major figure, following in the footsteps of Pitt-Rivers, was Heywood Sumner, a member of the Arts and Crafts Movement who retired to the edge of the area in 1902. In addition to writing a series of topographical books, Sumner rapidly became a leading archaeologist, continuing the high standards of excavation and recording established by Pitt-Rivers. His experience as an illustrator is reflected in the fine prints, maps and plans that many of his publications contain.

Writers associated with the area include the poet and barrister Sir John Davies, and John Aubrey (1626-1697) the antiquarian. The poet William Barnes was born near Pentridge in 1800 and was later a rector and schoolteacher at Mere. Barnes frequently spoke out against the enclosure of downland and commonland which left the peasants as little more than trespassers. The final verse of his poem *The Leane* (in local dialect like much of his writing) reflects his fears for the future <sup>1</sup>:

“Vor to bree the young fox or the heare,  
We can gi'e up whole eacres o'ground,  
But the greens be-grudg'd, vor to rear,  
Our young children up healthy an' sound;  
Why, there woon't be a-left the next age  
A green spot where their veet can goo free;  
An, the goocoo wull soon be committed to cage

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<sup>1</sup> Barnes, W (1962), *The poems of William Barnes*, Centaur Press, Arundel

Vor a trespass in zomebody's tree.  
Vor 'tis locken up, Thomas, an'blocken up.  
Stranger or brother  
Men mussen com nigh woone another."

American born W H Hudson, based his book *A Shepherd's life* on his conversations with a shepherd named Dawes from Martin. In this book, Hudson renamed the village Winterbourne Bishop.

Relatively few artists are associated with the AONB, possibly reflecting its deeply rural character. Pissarro is known to have painted at least 20 canvases at East Knoyle while staying at Clouds House, while Turner and Constable both worked in the area. Lesser known artists include Reynolds Stone who produced many woodcuts and engravings of Cranborne Chase. The photographer Edwin Smith also worked in the AONB, his pictures including the landscape around Deptford, just to the north of the Wylde Valley, while the sculptor Dame Elizabeth Frink lived near Blandford Forum.

Musical associations include the conductor John Eliot Gardiner, founder of the Monteverdi Choir and Orchestra and Julian Bream, the classical guitarist. Finally, other historical figures connected with the AONB include Cecil Beaton, who lived at Broad Chalke and Anthony Eden who is buried at Alvediston.

## **DESCRIPTIVE WRITINGS**

### **The Downs**

The writings of W H Hudson, an author closely associated with chalk landscapes, describes the downs above Martin <sup>2</sup>

"A wide, empty land, with nothing on it to look at but a furze bush... That emptiness seemed good for both mind and body."

On the other hand, Hudson also described the downs' "bleak nakedness" arguing that: "The wind and driving rain are not for you but against you, and may overcome you with misery. One feels their loneliness, monotony, and desolation on many days, sometimes even when it is not wet".

Not surprisingly, perhaps, many writers have been inspired by the sinuous escarpments that tower over the surrounding landscape and the deep, bowl like valleys that have been carved from the downs along the dip slope. Treves <sup>3</sup> in his book entitled *Highways and byways in Dorset* captured both the drama and the energy, which seem to be embodied in the escarpment:

"Straight ahead, on the horizon, towers a range of jade-green downs, smooth rounded and steep. They rise up like a masterful comber gathering to break on a helpless beach, so that it seems as if the pent up mass of the downs was about to burst forth thundering on to the plain."

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<sup>2</sup> Hudson, W H (1910), *A shepherd's life*, republished in 1981 by Macdonald Futura Press, London

<sup>3</sup> Treves, Sir F (1906), *Highways and byways of Dorset*, Macmillan, London

Treves<sup>3</sup> noted the contrast between the pastoral Vale of Blackmoor and the chalk upland to the east, describing the: "...bare wind-driven heights, on the southern slope of which lies Cranborne Chase. As the foot of the hills is approached the pasture land ends in ploughed fields and patches of corn. The trees become fewer, the oak is changed for the fir, the dell of ferns for the clump of gorse, until at last, as the side of the slope is reached, there is nothing left but close cropped grass. The great plain is intensely green, but this brilliant tint belongs only to the stretch of country about the foot of the hill, for the atmosphere which floods the valley is blue; any mist that hangs in its hollows would seem to belong to the moonlight, while the far off heights, on many a summer's day, are as blue as the iris."

Hawkins was on Melbury Hill, overlooking the Vale, on Coronation night:

"It was a splendid place to be on the night of the Coronation bonfires, with Melbury and Win Green both ablaze; but at any time it is an impressive vantage point with a wide prospect westward to Blackmoor Vale."

### **Cranborne Chase**

In Cranborne Chase the drama of the chalk landform is overlain with a mosaic of rich woodland, pastures and farmland and a legacy of fine houses and estates. As Aubrey<sup>4</sup> noted "These were the places where our kings and queens used to divert themselves in the hunting season." Hawkins' description, taken from his book entitled Cranborne Chase, captures the spirit of the chase superbly<sup>5</sup>:

"the chalk scarp rears up steeply: a winding zigzag road twists round the hairpin bend to reveal suddenly a broad plateau that undulates into the blue distance. To come upon it in this dramatic way is like stumbling on to a lost world...It is a bold landscape, an unexpectedly big landscape, with the satisfying amplitude that makes line more important than colour. This is Cranborne Chase...The open simplicities of rolling downland are bordered and diversified by the many woods and copses that still survive from the days when no tree or shrub could be destroyed without the consent of the Lord of the Chase."

Cranborne Chase ('The Chase') featured in Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*<sup>6</sup> described as:

"...a truly venerable tract of forest land, one of the few remaining woodlands of England of undoubted primeval date, wherein Druidical mistletoe was still found on aged oaks, where enormous yew trees, not planted by the hand of man, grew as they had grown when they were pollarded for bows."

William Chafin, author of *Anecdotes of Cranborne Chase*<sup>7</sup> a character described by Sir Walter Scott<sup>8</sup> as "a Parson mad upon sport" recounted a conversation with a retired Keeper of the Earl of Pembroke at Fernditch Lodge:

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<sup>3</sup> Treves, Sir F (1906), *Highways and byways of Dorset*, Macmillan, London

<sup>4</sup> Aubrey, J (1969), *The natural history of Wiltshire*, David and Charles, Newton Abbot

<sup>5</sup> Hawkins, D (1993), *Cranborne Chase*, Dovecote Press, Stanbridge, Wimborne, Dorset

<sup>6</sup> Hardy, T (1968 edition) *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Macmillan, London

<sup>7</sup> Chafin, W (1818), *Anecdotes of Cranborne Chase* publisher unknown

“...and he remembered that one Sunday he heard the parson in his sermon talk about a place that he called Paradise, which he could not help listening to; ‘for, by the account he gave of it seemed to be desperate pleasant place; and I thought of it’ he said ‘when I got home; but when I had considered everything, I made up my mind to believe, and I do now believe, notwithstanding what the parson said, that if there was but a good trout-stream running down Chicken Grove bottom, Fernditch Lodge would beat it out and out’.”

## **River valleys**

The river valleys, which are the focus for communication and settlement, appear to have inspired much more in the way of descriptive writings than the open downland above. Common themes include the character and density of old villages, the close juxtaposition of river, watermeadows, arable fields and grass downland, and the way that the valleys are hidden among the folds of the downs. Indeed, Defoe<sup>9</sup> wrote that:

“while you view the downs, and think the country wild and uninhabited; yet when you come to descend into these vales you are surprised with the most fertile country in England.”

He described how:

“these hills and plains are most beautifully intersected, and cut through by the course of divers pleasant and profitable rivers; in the course, and near the banks, of which there is always a chain of fruitful meadows and rich pastures....”.

The Wylde Valley is regarded as being particularly attractive. Cobbett<sup>10</sup> writing in 1830, wondered at the concentration of “one and thirty churches in the space of twenty seven miles” and described the “innumerable flocks of sheep, watermeadows” and the cornfields which were sometimes up to 40 hectares in size.

Hutton<sup>11</sup> agreed, writing that:

“Of all the valleys of South Wiltshire I love best the Wylde valley, not only because it seems to me the most beautiful, but because it sums up in itself all that I love in the rest...It is impossible to describe the quietness of this valley or its serene English beauty of meadow and grove and slowly moving stream, all set with dear steadings and old farms enobled with trees, among which the elm is chief.”

Hudson described the character of the old stone and flint cottages that make up villages within these valleys:<sup>12</sup>

“they are weathered and coloured by sun and wind and rain and many lowly vegetable forms to a harmony with nature. They appear related to the trees amid

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<sup>8</sup> Sir Walter Scott’s inscription on the fly-leaf of the Duke of Montagu’s copy of ‘Anecdotes of Cranborne Chase’, c1818. Cited in Hawkins, Desmond (1991) *Wessex, a literary celebration*, The National Trust/Century, London.

<sup>9</sup> Defoe, D (1962), *A tour through England and Wales in 1722*, Everyman.

<sup>10</sup> Cobett, W (1922), *Rural rides*, Cambridge University

<sup>11</sup> Hutton, E (1928), *Highways and byways in Wiltshire*, Macmillan, London.

<sup>12</sup> Hudson, W H (1910), *A shepherd’s life*, republished in 1981 by Macdonald Futura Press, London

which they stand, to the sloping downs at the side, and to the sky and clouds over all.”

The river valleys draining the chalk downs to the south of the Ebbles and Nadder Valleys are less well known, yet, as Hawkins<sup>13</sup> suggests, it is here that some of the most tranquil and unspoilt parts of the AONB are found:

“Below Brockington is one of the Allen’s most charming stretches, shaded and softended with trees, bushes and reeds, bright on the surface of the river with the flowers of water-crowsfoot, and animated with the calls and movements of reed-buntings and sedge and reed warblers....”. In all these chalk river valleys, the landform and availability of water has had a profound influence on the settlement pattern, as Massingham<sup>14</sup> observed:

“River and hill-scarps....squeeze out such villages into long, irregular, parallel lines and yet, by the courteous, unforced habit of the river’s passage through the chalk and the generosity of slope along the hill-flanks, allow the houses plenty of elbow room to settle in. The street that gently winds in conformity with the river and down and the spacious disposition of the houses great and small, together or detached, catch the genius of the chalk and translate it into a different medium.”

Turning, finally, to the Nadder, a valley distinguished by its greensand, clay and limestone geology, descriptions reflect the contrast with neighbouring chalk valleys. Whitlock<sup>15</sup> appreciates the contrast, highlighting the effect that freely available water supplies has had on the settlement pattern:

“Between the towering crest of Great Ridge and Grovely to the north and the impressive scarp of chalk hills to the south, the Nadder villages are scattered over a broad vale of green meadows, abrupt wooded hills and gentle streams. In this well-watered land they do not need to cling to the river-banks, like the villages of other valleys, but sit around haphazardly.”

He also described the unusual shape of the valley – broadest in its higher reaches, narrowest just before its confluence with the Wylye, noting the difficulty in defining the watershed near East Knoyle.

## **Agriculture and the Economy**

As Chapter 1 demonstrated, the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB has seen many phases of agricultural change as specialisation in sheep was replaced by mixed corn-sheep husbandry and, more recently, by extensive arable cultivation. Aubrey’s rather romantic account, dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, illustrates the dependency on sheep farming<sup>16</sup>:

“The turf is of a short sweet grasse, good for sheep, and delightful to the eye, for its smoothnesse like a bowling green...about Wilton and Chalke, the doens are intermixt with boscages that nothing can be more pleasant, and in the summer time

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<sup>13</sup> Hawkins, D (1993), *Cranborne Chase*, Dovecote Press, Stanbridge, Wimborne, Dorset

<sup>14</sup> Massingham, H J (1936), *The English downland*, Batsford, London

<sup>15</sup> Whitlock, R (1976), *Wiltshire*, Batsford, London

<sup>16</sup> Aubrey, J (1969), *The natural history of Wiltshire*, David and Charles, Newton Abbott

does excel arcadia in verdant and rich turfe and moderate aire, but in winter in deed our air is cold and rawe.”

Defoe, writing in the first part of the 18th century, greeted the advent of mixed corn and sheep husbandry on the downs around Salisbury<sup>17</sup> “the vast flocks of sheep, which one every where sees upon these downs.....is a sight truly worth observation. But ‘tis more remarkable still; how a great part of these downs comes by a new method of husbandry, to be not only made arable, which they never were in former days, but to bear excellent wheat, and great cops too....and never known to our ancestors to be capable of such a thing....But experience has made this present ages wiser...for only by folding the sheep upon the ploughed lands, those lands which otherwise are barren, and where the plough goes within three or four inches of the solid rock of chalk, are made fruitful and bear very good wheat, as well as rye and barley.”

Not everyone was so appreciative however. A Mrs Haughton, in her book *In a Wiltshire valley*<sup>18</sup>, wrote that:

“Where the modern system of farming has broken up the down, there I most willingly allow that nothing can be so ugly, so dreary, so wild and desolate as the Wiltshire Downs! What used to be a vast expanse of grass, is now turned into as many miles of turnips, or ploughed fields, and it is only in the harvest time that there is any redeeming feature in the view.” By the middle of the 20th century the conversion of downland pasture to arable cultivation was almost complete.

Massingham<sup>19</sup> mourned the change, arguing that:

“Yes, sheep are the treasure of the downs...it was sheep whose teeth created the very tapestry of the downland surface....and I have noticed how disastrously the decline of the village community combined with the post-war depression in agriculture have, by the withdrawal of multitudes of sheep from the uplands, affected the growth and quality of their pasture.”

## **Archaeology**

It is fitting that many writers describe the ancient earthworks and other remains that are found throughout the AONB, the interest in the area no doubt reflecting in part the work Pitt-Rivers, the father of modern archaeology. The remains at Knowlton Circles point to the continuity and organic change, which characterises much of the area. Hawkins<sup>20</sup> writes:

“...and if any of these memorable sights can epitomize the long continuity of habitation here it is the little ruined church at Knowlton, Norman in origin or perhaps even Saxon, and standing with a sort of hopeful defiance in the midst of a Neolithic circle, sanctifying an old forgotten ritual with alter one, testifying to something shared that bridges millennia.”

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<sup>17</sup> Defoe, D (1660), *A tour through England and Wales in 1722*, Everyman

<sup>18</sup> Haughton, Mrs (1874), *In a Wiltshire valley*, publisher unknown

<sup>19</sup> Massingham, H J (1936) *The English downland*, Batsford, London

<sup>20</sup> Hawkins, D (1993), *Cranborne Chase*, Dovecote Press, Stanbridge, Wimborne, Dorset

Simpson sounds a note of caution however, setting the richness of the surviving remains against our ability to destroy them<sup>21</sup>:

“...the whole man-made landscape, both functioning as well as relict features, is a great composite monument in which the surviving contributions of the successive centuries may still be perceived, though all too often only dimly. No century has had such opportunities and capacity to study it, nor it seems such an urge to mutilate it, as our own.”

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<sup>21</sup> Simpson, D (1975), 'Introduction to the Prehistoric, Roman and Saxon Remains', in Pevsner, Nikolaus, *The buildings of Wiltshire*, Penguin, Harmondsworth





## **APPENDIX 3:**

### **Comparisons between 1995 Classification and 2003 Classification**



## COMPARISON BETWEEN THE 1995 CLASSIFICATION AND 2003 CLASSIFICATION

### Boundary Changes

The current classification is closely related to the 1995 classification. The main difference is that the 1995 assessment was drawn on a 1:50,000 base. The updated assessment has defined all boundaries to a scale of 1:25,000 providing a greater degree of accuracy.

1995 Landscape Types	1995 Landscape Character Areas	Boundary/Area Changes
1 Chalk Escarpments	1 Melbury to Blandford Escarpment	Escarpment has been drawn more accurately to reflect the visual 'skyline'.
	2 West Wiltshire Downs Escarpment	Escarpment has been drawn more accurately to reflect the visual 'skyline'.
	3 Wylve Valley Fringes	Now incorporated into the Wylve Valley to reflect the classification on the northern side of the Wylve Valley.
	4 Fovant and Chalke Escarpments	Escarpment has been drawn more accurately to reflect the visual 'skyline' at 1:25,000.
2 Open Chalk Downland	5 West Wiltshire Downs	Boundary between West Wiltshire Downs and Nadder Valley re-drawn to reflect topography and geology.
	6 Southern Downland	Boundary between Southern Downland and Southern Valleys redrawn closer to rivers.
3 Wooded Chalk Downland	7 Cranborne Chase	Boundary of Cranborne Chase more accurately drawn to reflect wooded character on the ground - now includes Vernditch Chase in its boundaries.
	8. Great Ridge and Grovely Wood	Omitted - these are features within the West Wiltshire Downs.
4 Downland Hills	9. Downland Hills	More accurately drawn to reflect underlying geology and land use.

5 Chalk River Valleys	10 Wylde Valley	Now includes the Wylde Valley Fringes as part of the Valley. The valley includes the floodplain and steeply enclosing valley sides north and south of the River Wylde. In the 1995 assessment the Wylde Valley was a 'one-sided' valley, including the northern valley sides but not the southern valley sides.
	11 Ebbel Valley	Boundaries drawn more accurately to encompass the valley slopes to the 'skyline'.
	12 Southern Valleys	Boundary between Southern Downland and Southern Valleys redrawn closer to rivers.
6 Greensand Terrace	13 Fovant Plain	Drawn more accurately at the eastern end to reflect underlying geology.
	14 Kilmington Plain	Now includes Sutton Veny that lies on Greensand.
7 Greensand Hills	15 Nadder Valley	Area of hills north of the Nadder Valley has been altered to reflect the underlying geology and character in the field. The influence of this narrow band of hills is not as great to the north as it is to the south.
	16 Selwood Forest	More accurately drawn to reflect wooded character.
8 Rolling Clay Vales	17 The Vale of Wardour	Boundary re-drawn and extended to the east to follow river valley through chalk.

## Name Changes

The names of the landscape types remain unchanged. However, the 2003 assessment includes some name changes to the landscape character areas. These are summarised as follows:

<b>1995 Landscape Character Areas</b>	<b>2003 Landscape Character Areas</b>	<b>Comment</b>
1 Melbury to Blandford Escarpment	1A Melbury to Blandford Escarpment	
2 West Wiltshire Downs Escarpment	1B West Wiltshire Downs Escarpment	
3 Wylde Valley Fringes	Omitted	Now incorporated into the Wylde Valley to reflect the classification on the northern side of the Wylde Valley.
4 Fovant and Chalke Escarpments	1C Fovant and Chalke Escarpment	
5 West Wiltshire Downs	2A West Wiltshire Downs	
6 Southern Downland	2B Southern Downland Belt	
7 Cranborne Chase	3A Cranborne Chase	
8. Great Ridge and Grovely Wood	Omitted	Omitted - these are features within the West Wiltshire Downs.
9. Downland Hills	4A Martin - Whitsbury	Downland Hills is not a character area name so we have given this area a geographically specific name.
10 Wylde Valley	5A Wylde Valley	
11 Ebble Valley	5B Ebble Valley	
12 Southern Valleys	5C Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys	Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys is a more geographically specific name.
13 Fovant Plain	6A Fovant Terrace	The landscape type name is 'Greensand Terrace' so 'terrace' is more suitable than 'plain' in the character area name.

I4 Kilmington Plain	6B Kilmington Terrace	The landscape type name is 'Greensand Terrace' so 'terrace' is more suitable than 'plain' in the character area name.
I5 Nadder Valley	7A Donhead - Fovant Hills	These are hills not valleys - the name valley is misleading.
I6 Selwood Forest	7B Penselwood - Longleat Hills	The area is well known for Longleat therefore could be incorporated into title.
I7 The Vale of Wardour	8A Vale of Wardour	

**APPENDIX 4**  
**Method Statements**





# METHOD STATEMENT FOR THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

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The method for undertaking the landscape assessment follows the accepted method promoted by the Countryside Agency as set out in the document “*Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland 2002*”. The AONB-wide assessment has been prepared within the framework set by the Agency’s Countryside Character Initiative as shown on the Character of England Map. It also fits within the context provided by the Agency’s emerging National Landscape Typology.

The assessment builds upon the existing 1995 AONB assessment to develop a comprehensive and consistent characterisation for the AONB. The local authority assessments have also been integrated into the AONB assessment, with the AONB-wide study providing the overarching framework for these more detailed studies.

**Table I: Existing Assessments in the AONB**

Area	Contact	Has a LCA been undertaken?	Are boundaries available digitally?
<b>National Level</b>			
Country-wide	Countryside Agency	The Countryside Character Initiative	Yes - in GIS format
Country-wide	Countryside Agency	The Landscape Typology for England	Yes - in GIS format
<b>County Level</b>			
Dorset County	Sarah Barber	Yes	Currently being digitised by Andy Elliott 01305 224861.
Hampshire County	David Carmen	Yes	Yes - in GIS format
Somerset County	Chris Bowers	Some work was undertaken a year ago, but no official landscape assessment.	No
Wiltshire County	Amanda Widdess	No	No
<b>District Level</b>			
New Forest District	Neil Williamson	Yes	Yes - in GIS format
Salisbury District	Amanda Mathews	Consultants have been	No

		appointed to undertake a pilot Historic Landscape Assessment for the District (excluding the AONB),	
West Wiltshire District	Forward Planning Department	No - in the middle of public inquiry into the Local Plan and will be considering new work after the Inquiry.	No
East Dorset District	Alan Turner	Yes - landscape assessment in 1992 for that part of the AONB within its administrative area. Has been adopted as SPG to the Local Plan.	Based on the OS 1:50,000. The boundaries are on a drawing layer that could probably be separated and used as a raster base for GIS work.
North Dorset District	Kevin Morris	North Dorset have used the Landscape Character Areas defined by the Dorset County study to inform their local plan policies.	No
Mendip District	Joan Milling	Yes. A Landscape Character Assessment was conducted in 1997 following the Countryside Commission's character assessment of the Mendip Hills AONB.	No
South Somerset District	Robert Archer	Undertaken 1992, published 1993.	No
<b>Other</b>			
South Wessex Downs Environmentally Sensitive Area Landscape Assessment	RDS Offices in Bristol/Taunton	Undertaken by DEFRA in 1994	No

The assessment seeks to present a fully integrated view of the landscape incorporating all the features and attributes that contribute to the special and distinctive character of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB. These include the physical,

ecological, visual, historic and cultural forces that have shaped the present day landscape. It also recognises the AONB today as a living and working landscape and considers the social, economic and recreational characteristics that contribute to its current character.

This Appendix provides a summary method statement and illustrates how the diverse aspects of the study have been integrated.

The process for undertaking the study and the integration of the specialist studies involved five main stages, namely:

- Data Collation;
- Characterisation;
- Survey;
- Integration and Evaluation;
- Consultation.

Each of these stages is described below. Throughout the study GIS was used as the tool for collating, manipulating and presenting data. It is anticipated that the GIS database developed as part of the study will provide an important tool for future management of the AONB.

## **DATA COLLATION**

**Baseline Data:** This stage involved the collation and mapping of a wide range of existing information on the characteristics of the AONB from sources including baseline maps of geology, topography, soils and drainage. Information was also gathered through a series of structured telephone interviews with key individuals within statutory agencies, local authorities and other organisations.

**National Context:** As part of this initial stage the context provided by the framework of joint Character Areas and the emerging national Landscape Typology was reviewed and boundaries mapped to place the AONB in context within this national hierarchy.

**Local Context:** Part of the AONB is covered by local authority assessments. Each of these assessments was reviewed to ensure the AONB assessment is not in disagreement.

## **CHARACTERISATION**

The process of characterisation drew together all the information outlined above, to develop a draft classification for the AONB. The approach follows best practice as promoted by the Countryside Agency in the *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland 2002* in maintaining a clear distinction between landscape types and character areas, and developing a hierarchical approach as follows:

- **Landscape Character Types** - which are generic and share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation and human influences, e.g. Open Downland or River Valleys;

- **Character Areas** - which are single and unique, discrete geographical areas of the landscape type, e.g. Marlborough Downs or Kennet Valley.

The classification was informed by the ongoing specialist studies, particularly in the case of the historic environment. It is, however, important to note that the approach does not involve a range of separate characterisations of the historic landscape, recreation attributes and socio-economic data. The emphasis throughout has been on the integration of these diverse studies within the overall framework established by the landscape character assessment.

The draft characterisation of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB is presented in this report. It is anticipated that there may be some further refinement of the classification and fine tuning of boundaries to reflect local circumstances. The draft classification encompasses eight landscape types, each with a set of component character areas.

## **SURVEY**

A field survey was undertaken to:

- refine boundaries and ensure a consistent approach across the AONB for example in the definition of the scarps and river valleys;
- fine tune the classification, paying particular attention to skylines and boundaries around valleys;
- record information on landscape character on specifically tailored field survey sheets;
- assess condition, key trends and forces for change.

A systematic and rigorous approach was adopted for the survey, with information recorded on 1:25,000 scale maps and on field survey forms (an example is included in **Appendix 5**).

## **INTEGRATION**

A process of integration and analysis followed the field survey. In particular emphasis was placed on the assimilation and synthesis of information from the specialist studies and used these to develop integrated descriptions of the AONB and its component landscape types and character areas.

The table below shows how the information has been integrated within the report structure.

<b>Specialist Study</b>	<b>AONB-WIDE</b>	<b>Character Area Level</b>
Ecological Character	✓	✓
Historic Landscape	✓	✓
Recreation	✓	✓
Socio-Economic Character	✓	
Agricultural Character	✓	Farming Character Areas
Perceptions	✓	✓

Details on the methods used for the specialist studies are provided in subsequent chapters.

## **EVALUATION**

An evaluation of each landscape character was undertaken in order to determine strength of character, condition and to provide an judgement related to inherent and visual sensitivity of the landscape. Changes to the landscape (past, present and predicted) have been outlined, an overall management objective determined. Making judgements regarding strength of character and condition of the landscape has been determined as set out below.

### **Strength of Character**

The strength of character of each character area will be determined by judging how distinct and recognisable the pattern of elements is that defines the character of the landscape. This means the combination of physical and human influences on the landscape, the sense of place that combination evokes and how the landscape is perceived by people.

### **Current Condition**

Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland 2002, notes that landscape condition (or quality) “*is based on judgements about the physical state of the landscape, and about its intactness, from visual, functional, and ecological perspectives. It also reflects the state of repair of individual features and elements which make up the character in any one place*”.

In order to assess and make a judgement on the ‘current condition’ of the landscape character areas within Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB, the ‘physical state’ or ‘intactness’ of key elements characteristic to each landscape have been evaluated. In order to be consistent and to draw clear connections with the description of character, a number of the main headings used to define character have been used as indicators of condition. The variables or indicators used to determine overall landscape condition are:

#### **Landform**

Has the natural form of the land been retained or has there been sufficient human interference e.g. mineral extraction that detracts from the overall sense of intactness of the shape of the land?

Have important artificial landforms such as ancient earthworks and burial grounds survived and are these in good condition?

***Field Patterns and Boundaries***

Are field boundaries consistent and well managed e.g. are hedgerows intact or gappy and are they being regularly managed.

***Land Cover and Land Use***

Are there significant areas of derelict or underused land affording a neglected or unmanaged character or, is the landscape well managed or over intensively farmed?

***Ecological Character and Biodiversity***

What is the general state or condition of habitats?

***Settlement and Built Character***

Considering the general state of repair of the built environment e.g. are there any buildings that appear neglected or derelict.

Consideration of each of the above parameters allows for a holistic approach to judging overall condition of the landscape.

**Past and Present Change**

This section picks out the main past and present changes that have occurred in the landscape through consultation responses, field survey and reference material. Past and present change is described as good, moderate or poor.

**Possible Future Trends**

This section integrates information from the assessment and consultation to predict the likely change in condition of the landscape. As agricultural land use is the main influence on the landscape of the AONB, information is drawn mainly from predictions on agricultural change. However, other changes such as the potential effects of the CroW Act 2000, particularly as a result of potential visitor pressure on vulnerable areas of open countryside, have also been taken into account. Predicted future change is described as improving, stable and declining.

**CONSULTATION**

The consultation process during production of the report involved:

- Attendance at the Issues Conference on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2003.
- Attendance at the Working Group Meetings during March 2003.
- Attendance at the AONB Partnership Day in March 2003.

To inform the evaluation process, a range of consultees were contacted, representing a range of organisations. Response or comments by letter, email or telephone conversation were received by:

David Ball - Government Office South West (DEFRA)

Duncan Coe – English Heritage

Jonathan Cox – Dorset Conservation Officer (English Nature Dorset Team)

Richard Copas – The Environment Agency

Judy Crompton – Environment Agency, South West Region

Julia Gallagher (RSPB South West Regional Office)

Robert Lloyd – South Wiltshire Conservation Officer (English Nature Wiltshire Team)

Richard Preston – Forestry Commission

Andrew Reid – Southern Tourist Board

Peter Reynolds - Meat and Livestock Commission

Mel Sanders - Policy Advisor, National Farmers' Union





# METHOD FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHARACTER STUDY

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A study of the economic and social characteristics of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB was undertaken by Segal Quince Wickstead to inform the wider Character Assessment.

## PURPOSE

The study seeks to provide an overview of the economic and social characteristics of the AONB. The economic and social characteristics of this rural area can not be considered in isolation and a particularly important element of the study has been an understanding the interrelationship between the AONB and its surroundings.

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Statistical data is difficult to obtain as the AONB intersects different economic regions, counties and districts, all of which collate data in a range of different ways. Consequently, this report draws upon a number of different data sources. These include local economic strategies and policy documents, consultations with economic development professionals from the local authorities in which the AONB is situated and public data sources.

## METHOD

Statistical data was obtained for the wards which cover the AONB<sup>1</sup>. The data was reviewed to develop the AONB-wide context with a summary of the population characteristics, structure of employment and key economic sectors. It was not possible to provide any finer grained characterisation, e.g. by landscape type, although distinctions have been drawn between different areas within the AONB where appropriate.

The consultations with the economic development professionals sought to gain insight into the state of the local economy and the latest local economic issues. These interviews complemented both the literature and statistical reviews in helping to understand the patterns being revealed by the data and “bottom out” local economic issues.

## REFERENCES

New Forest District Council Economic Strategy (not dated)

Essex, S. (2001) Confidential Report on Participatory Needs Assessment in Martin (village in Downlands Ward in New Forest District)

Dorset County Council Website, Town Factsheets for Wimborne, Blandford and Shaftesbury

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<sup>1</sup> The boundary of the AONB cuts across some of the wards. The wards at the boundary were reviewed and a decision made on whether to include them in the analysis based on the extent of their area which falls within the AONB. Wards which had 30% or less of their area in the AONB were not included in the analysis. Table I details the wards which were included and excluded from the analysis.

West Wiltshire Economic Partnership, West Wiltshire Economic Profile 2002

Wiltshire and Swindon Economic Assessment 2001-2002

West Wiltshire Economic Partnership Action Plan 2001/2

Wiltshire and Swindon Economic Strategy, December 2000

South Wiltshire Economic Assessment 2002

South Wiltshire Economic Partnership Strategy 2002-2010

## **INTERVIEWEES**

Neil Miller - New Forest District Council

Kevin Poulton - East Dorset District Council

Celine Mills - Salisbury District Council

Dave Walsh - Dorset County Council

Hilary White - North Dorset District Council

Adrian Garai - West Wiltshire Economic Partnership

## **WARDS INCLUDED AND EXCLUDED FROM THE ANALYSIS**

<b>County</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Ward</b>	<b>Approx. % in AONB (Comment)</b>
Wiltshire	West Wiltshire	Shearwater	100% - included
		Mid Wylye Valley	55% - included
		Corsley	40% - included
		Wylye Valley	<i>Less than 30% - excluded</i>
	Salisbury	Western	95% - included
		Mere	50% - included
		Knogle	70% - included
		Donhead	100% - included
		Tisbury	100% - included
		Fonthill	100% - included
		Forant	100% - included
		Nadder	100% - included
		Chalke Valley	100% - included
		Ebble	60% - included
		Wylye	40% - included
		Downton	<i>Less than 30% - excluded</i>
Hampshire	New Forest	Downlands	90% - included

Dorset	East Dorset	Sixpenny Handley	95% - included
		Crane	40% - included
		<i>Holt</i>	<i>Less than 15% – excluded</i>
		Vale of Allen	100% - included
		Wimborne Minster	60% - included
		<i>Sturminster Marshall</i>	<i>20% - excluded</i>
	North Dorset	The Beacon	40% - included
		Hills & Vale	70% - included
		Cranborne Chase	100% - included
		<i>Hill Forts</i>	<i>30% - excluded</i>
		The Lower Tarrants	100% - included
Somerset	Mendip	<i>Postlebury</i>	<i>15% - excluded</i>
		<i>Mells</i>	<i>10% - excluded</i>
	South Somerset	Brue	<i>10% - excluded</i>



# METHOD STATEMENT FOR THE HISTORIC INPUT TO THE LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

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A study of the historic landscape characteristics of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB was undertaken by Wessex Archaeology to inform the landscape Character Assessment.

## PURPOSE

The study sought to provide information on the historic landscape and show how human influence has contributed to the present-day landscape character of the Cranborne Chase and West Wilts Downs AONB. By providing an overview of the main periods of change to the landscape, from the prehistoric period to the present-day, time-depth can be added to the Landscape Assessment.

The study also provided an understanding of past patterns of settlement and land use for each of the landscape Character Areas, as a means of understanding the landscape's evolution and how it has changed throughout history.

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

In order to provide an overview of the formative human influences on the landscape, a review of readily available sources was undertaken. The base-line data included relevant work on historic landscapes, regional archaeological syntheses and English Heritage National Mapping programme data.

It should be noted, however, that the study did not use SMR data, primarily due to the size of the area involved. Four separate county SMRs fall within the boundary of the AONB, and not all are in a position to provide readily available data in an easily accessible and interpretable format. The non-use of the SMR was also considered desirable as it avoided using point data in an area characterisation. The following table presents sources of data used:

Information	Source
Cultural History/ Archaeology - Prehistory	Barrett, J.C., Bradley, R. and Green, M. 1991. Landscape, Monuments and Society. The Prehistory of Cranborne Chase. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  Bradley, R. 1998. The Significance of Monuments. On the Shaping of Human Experience in Neolithic and Bronze Age Europe. London: Routledge.  Cunliffe, B. 1993. Wessex to AD 1000. London: Longman.  Green, M. 2000. A Landscape Revealed. 10,000 Years on a Chalkland Farm. Stroud: Tempus.  Tilley, C. 1994. A Phenomenology of Landscape. Places, Paths and Monuments. Oxford: Berg.
Cultural History/Archaeology - Saxon and medieval periods	Aston, M. and Lewis, C. (eds.) 1994. The Medieval Landscape of Wessex. Oxbow Monographs 46.  Betthey, J.H. 1986. Wessex from AD 1000. London:

	<p>Longman.</p> <p>Groube, L.M. and Bowden, M.C.B. 1982. The Archaeology of Rural Dorset. Past, Present and Future. Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society Monograph 4. Dorchester: Friary Press.</p> <p>Penn, K.J. 1980. Historic Towns in Dorset. Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society Monograph 1. Dorchester: Friary Press.</p>
Field boundaries and patterns of communication	1:25,000 OS paper base maps
Historic Landscape Character Assessment of part of Cranborne Chase	<p>Wessex Archaeology 2000. South-west Wiltshire Historic Landscape Character Assessment. Unpublished report.</p> <p>Hampshire Historic Landscape Character Assessment</p> <p>New Forest District Historic Landscape Character Assessment</p>
Registered Historic Parks and Gardens and Battlefields - digital boundaries/spot locations and citations/attribute data	Local Authorities
Conservation Area boundaries/spot locations and names	Local Authorities
Conservation Area appraisals	Local Authorities
SAMs - spot locations	Local Authorities

## METHOD

The method employed by Wessex Archaeology broadly followed national guidance (Countryside Commission 1993; Countryside Agency 2002) and is informed by previous examples of approaches to historic landscape characterisation (e.g. Lambrick and Bramhill 1999; Fairclough 1999). It provided a summary overview to inform the landscape character assessment rather than a full historic landscape characterisation.

The work comprised two main stages: characterisation of the historic landscape by desk study, followed by evaluation of the written and mapped data.

### Stage I: Summary Overview

This was a desk-based exercise and involved the gathering and reviewing of background data in order to gain an understanding of the key historic processes and events that have taken place within the landscape of the AONB.

Wessex Archaeology investigated the persistence of place in some areas, to try and understand why certain locales were repeatedly returned to again and again during the past. It also examined past human movements and occupation of the landscape.

The methodology employed by Wessex Archaeology followed national guidance (Countryside Commission 1993; Countryside Agency 1999) and was informed by previous examples of approaches to historic landscape characterisation (e.g. Lambrick and Bramhill 1999; Fairclough 1999).

## **Stage 2: Inputs to Character Area Descriptions**

Information from the historical analysis was used to synthesise the archaeological and historic development of each Landscape Character Area and a brief description compiled which comprised:

- evidence of past social structure;
- field patterns, boundaries and predominant date of enclosure;
- historic development of settlement and relationship with the landscape;
- the typical archaeological and historic features that contribute to the local distinctiveness.





# **METHOD STATEMENT FOR THE AGRICULTURAL CHARACTER OF CRANBORNE CHASE AND WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS AONB**

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## **PURPOSE**

Agricultural land use is the main influence on the landscape of the AONB and it also has a strong influence on the economic and social characteristics of the AONB. To assist understanding of how agriculture has shaped and continues to shape the AONB it has been necessary to examine the agriculture sector in detail, including:

- The overall agricultural features of the AONB such as the broad distribution of land use among various agricultural sectors (e.g. cropping and livestock), the types of activity within those sectors (e.g. crop types and livestock types), the numbers and size of farm holdings and the level of agricultural employment.
- The variation in agricultural activities among different parts of the AONB (Farming Character Areas) and how agricultural activities are influenced by and in turn influence the landscape.

## **SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

The description of agriculture in the AONB is based on information from the June 2001 Agriculture Census. The Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) compiles these statistics from census forms completed and returned by farmers. The census provides, therefore, a snapshot in time of agriculture across the AONB. The 2001 census was chosen because it is the most recent available and because DEFRA updated its system for identifying and locating farms in 2001. The effects of the foot and mouth disease outbreak will have made 2001 somewhat abnormal in terms of livestock numbers but overall it was considered the most appropriate year for the purposes of this study. There were no recorded cases of foot and mouth disease within the AONB, but normal movements of livestock (e.g. sale of store cattle) would have been affected by the livestock movement controls.

The economic analysis of agricultural income and costs built on the agricultural census data, used the following additional sources of information:

- Typical yield data for southern England obtained from industry sources
- Market prices for commodities at December 2002
- Input costings from the Farm Management Pocketbook (Nix, J. 2002. Wye College, Kent).

## METHOD

As a means of characterising agriculture within the AONB, landscape character areas with broad similar agricultural features have been amalgamated into larger areas called farming character areas (FCAs) (*Figure 10.1*). Such areas are desirable so that each contains a reasonably large number of farm holdings.

The Agricultural Census data was analysed at three geographical scales:

- Regional (South West and South East regions);
- AONB wide; and,
- Farming Character Areas within the AONB.

This enabled comparison of the AONB with the two adjoining regions and comparison of the FCAs with one another.

The Agricultural Census records statistics such as areas of various crop types and livestock numbers against individual farm holdings. Because DEFRA uses a single set of map co-ordinates (the 'centroid') to identify the information for a holding, errors can arise when summarising this information for a farming character area. The errors occur if the centroid for a holding is located in one farming character area but parts of the farm are located in another area. There is a greater chance of this affecting the results if the farming character area is small or if it is long and narrow. For larger areas the errors are more likely to average out.

Other limitations of the survey are that it only includes registered holdings and it does not include land uses associated with horses. In addition, DEFRA advised that poultry statistics for recent years are not reliable due to problems in its collection so these have been omitted.

Analysis of likely trends in agriculture over time was based on a knowledge of the national trends in the various farming sectors, which was applied to the types of farming present in the AONB.

An attempt has been made to value the production of agricultural commodities within the AONB in financial terms. Due to the various assumptions that needed to be made in doing so the value obtained should be viewed as indicative only.

**APPENDIX 5**  
**Field Survey Form**



# CRANBORNE CHASE & WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS AONB LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT at 1:25,000 FIELD SURVEY FORM

<b>LANDSCAPE TYPE:</b>
<b>DRAFT LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA:</b>

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ WEATHER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHOTOGRAPH NUMBERS \_\_\_\_\_ LOCATION NUMBERS ON FIELD MAP \_\_\_\_\_  
**LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES**.....  
 .....  
 .....

**KEY WORDS/SUMMARY OF VISUAL CHARACTER**.....  
 .....  
 .....

## VISIBLE FEATURES

<input type="checkbox"/> Motorway <input type="checkbox"/> Dual carriageway <input type="checkbox"/> Rural road <input type="checkbox"/> Rural lanes/tracks <input type="checkbox"/> Sunken lanes <input type="checkbox"/> Bridleway <input type="checkbox"/> Footpath <input type="checkbox"/> Railway	<input type="checkbox"/> Farm buildings <input type="checkbox"/> Manor/parkland <input type="checkbox"/> Landmark building <input type="checkbox"/> Mills <input type="checkbox"/> Church <input type="checkbox"/> Fortifications <input type="checkbox"/> Hill Forts <input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Earthworks <input type="checkbox"/> Moats <input type="checkbox"/> Ridge and furrow <input type="checkbox"/> Tumuli <input type="checkbox"/> Hamlet <input type="checkbox"/> Village <input type="checkbox"/> Town edge <input type="checkbox"/> Suburb	<input type="checkbox"/> Nucleated settle. <input type="checkbox"/> Linear settle. <input type="checkbox"/> Dispersed settle. <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial workings <input type="checkbox"/> Masts/Poles <input type="checkbox"/> Telecom Masts <input type="checkbox"/> Other
--	---	---	---

## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

### GEOLOGY

<input type="checkbox"/> Alluvium (Drift) <input type="checkbox"/> Valley Gravel (Drift) <input type="checkbox"/> Clay with flints (Drift) <input type="checkbox"/> London Clay <input type="checkbox"/> Reading Beds <input type="checkbox"/> Upper Chalk <input type="checkbox"/> Middle Chalk <input type="checkbox"/> Lower Chalk <input type="checkbox"/> Upper Greensand	<input type="checkbox"/> Gault <input type="checkbox"/> Wealdon <input type="checkbox"/> Upper Purbeck <input type="checkbox"/> Middle Purbeck <input type="checkbox"/> Lower Purbeck <input type="checkbox"/> Limestone <input type="checkbox"/> Kimmeridge Clay <input type="checkbox"/> Oxford Clay with Kellaway Beds <input type="checkbox"/> Landslips
--	--

### ELEVATION

Lowland (under 50m)   
  Transitional (50-200m)   
  Upland (over 200m)

**LANDFORM**

- |                                     |  |                                       |   |
|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flat       | <input type="checkbox"/> Steep slopes  | <input type="checkbox"/> Escarpment   | <input type="checkbox"/> Broad Valley   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shelving   | <input type="checkbox"/> Gentle slopes | <input type="checkbox"/> Knoll        | <input type="checkbox"/> Narrow Valley  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rolling    | <input type="checkbox"/> Floodplain    | <input type="checkbox"/> Plateau      | <input type="checkbox"/> Shallow Valley |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Undulating | <input type="checkbox"/> Hills         | <input type="checkbox"/> Coomb Valley | <input type="checkbox"/> Deep Valley    |

**SOILS**

.....

**HYDROLOGY**

.....

**HUMAN INFLUENCES**

**LAND USE**

- |  |   |  |                                   |
|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Farmland          | <input type="checkbox"/> Residential        | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial      | <input type="checkbox"/> Natural  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Forestry/Woodland | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial         | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation  | <input type="checkbox"/> Military |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic Parkland | <input type="checkbox"/> Leisure/Recreation | <input type="checkbox"/> Mineral Working | <input type="checkbox"/> Other    |

**LAND/VEGETATION COVER**

- |  |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arable            | <input type="checkbox"/> Amenity grassland | <input type="checkbox"/> Small farm woods | <input type="checkbox"/> Heathland        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Permanent pasture | <input type="checkbox"/> Conif.plantation  | <input type="checkbox"/> Shelterbelts     | <input type="checkbox"/> Scrub            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pasture           | <input type="checkbox"/> Christmas Trees   | <input type="checkbox"/> Copses/clumps    | <input type="checkbox"/> Wetland/Aquatics |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ley/improved      | <input type="checkbox"/> Decid.woodland    | <input type="checkbox"/> Woodland belt    | <input type="checkbox"/> Gardens          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rough grazing     | <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed woodland    | <input type="checkbox"/> Hanging woodland | <input type="checkbox"/> Common           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wet meadow        | <input type="checkbox"/> Parkland          | <input type="checkbox"/> Scattered trees  | <input type="checkbox"/> Green            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chalk Grassland   | <input type="checkbox"/> Avenues           | <input type="checkbox"/> Hedgerow trees   | <input type="checkbox"/> Paddocks         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Set-aside         | <input type="checkbox"/> Orchards          | <input type="checkbox"/> Hedgerows        | <input type="checkbox"/> Other            |

**FIELD PATTERNS AND BOUNDARIES**

- |  |   |                                    |                                 |
|--|---|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Banks         | <input type="checkbox"/> Fence – rural  | <input type="checkbox"/> Geometric | <input type="checkbox"/> Small  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ditches       | <input type="checkbox"/> Fence – urban  | <input type="checkbox"/> Sinuous   | <input type="checkbox"/> Medium |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walls – rural | <input type="checkbox"/> Hedge          | <input type="checkbox"/> Irregular | <input type="checkbox"/> Large  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walls – urban | <input type="checkbox"/> Hedgerow Trees | <input type="checkbox"/> Regular   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other  |

**SETTLEMENT WITHIN THE LANDSCAPE**

Pattern.....

Density.....

Age, style and materials.....

Relationship to the landscape.....

Settlement edge character.....

**RECREATION**

Evidence of recreational use/character.....

Evidence of recreational pressure on the landscape.....

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC

Evidence of social structure.....  
Predominant economic function.....

## AESTHETIC AND PERCEPTUAL QUALITIES

<b>VIEWS</b>	distant	framed	intermittent	panoramic	corridor
<b>SCALE</b>	intimate	small	medium	large	
<b>ENCLOSURE</b>	confined	enclosed	semi-enclosed	open	exposed
<b>VARIETY</b>	complex	varied	simple	uniform	
<b>TEXTURE</b>	smooth	textured	rough	very rough	
<b>COLOUR</b>	monochrome	muted	colourful	garish	
<b>MOVEMENT</b>	remote	vacant	peaceful	active	
<b>UNITY</b>	unified	interrupted	fragmented	chaotic	
<b>TRANQUILITY</b>	remote	peaceful		interrupted	noisy
<b>NATURALNESS</b>	undisturbed	restrained	tamed	disturbed	

## KEY CHARACTERISTICS

## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND CONDITION

### OVERALL STRENGTH OF CHARACTER IN RELATION TO LANDSCAPE TYPE

Weak                       Moderate                       Strong

Notes on strength of character.....  
.....

### CURRENT LANDSCAPE CONDITION

Weak                       Moderate                       Strong

