

7. Landscape Character, Qualities and Spatial Issues

Introduction

- 7.1. The characteristics and qualities of the landscapes of this AONB are the primary justification for the designation of the area to conserve and enhance its natural beauty for the nation.
- 7.2. Their description is by broad landscape character type, and specific landscape character area. The key characteristics of the landscape types are set out here to provide an understanding of the scope, range, and scale of these landscape qualities. Further details of the character of the landscape areas are in both the Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (2003) and the briefer Sustaining Landscape Character (2006).
- 7.3. The inherent sensitivities of the landscapes of this AONB are set out in the Landscape Sensitivity Study (2007). A detailed Historic Landscape Characterisation (2008) supplements the Integrated Landscape Character Assessment. In addition, Historic Environment Action Plans (2012) gives topic by topic, and area by area, advice for sustaining our cultural heritage. The booklet, A Landscape view of trees and woodlands (2009), addresses the contributions trees, woodlands, and their associated habitats make to landscape matters.
- 7.4. There is a more refined landscape character assessment for the Heritage Lottery funded Cranborne Chase and Chalke Valley Landscape Partnership project area (2018). It identifies 14 local Landscape Character Areas and provides greater detail on the character and qualities of these central parts of this AONB.
- 7.5. This wealth of information and analysis contributes to our understanding of the character of the AONB. To gain a full understanding of the character and qualities of this AONB requires a study of all the highlighted documents.

You can download all the supporting documents from the Cranborne Chase AONB website at <http://www.ccwwdaonb.org.uk/publications/planning-related-publications/>

Issues and Challenges

- 7.6. There are issues and challenges faced by the landscapes and communities of Cranborne Chase AONB that apply to many or most landscape character types. Whilst the viability of family farms and development pressures arising from demographic changes are two examples, the challenges of renewable energy are probably the most widespread. The growing of crops, such as oil seeds and biomass, on agricultural land as alternative fuels stimulates a debate on whether farms are primarily food or fuel producers. Proposals to install fields of photovoltaic (PV) panels provide an additional strand to that debate. They also bring about long term changes to the appearance of the countryside. However, the increasing popularity of wood-burning stoves, and the associated need for wood-fuel, can provide a new economic reason for managing farm woodlands.



- 7.7. Visually intrusive energy and communications developments affect not just the aesthetics of the AONB landscapes and associated views; they also affect the integrity of the finest of the nation's landscapes.
- 7.8. The appearance, and appreciation, of the AONB from areas outside relates to all landscape types; as do the qualities of the views to and from the AONB. This is particularly relevant to the escarpment, hill, and downland landscapes. Their elevated positions make possible long and wide ranging views. The areas within those views contribute to the setting of the AONB, an aspect that is of increasing value for heritage assets.
- 7.9. Awareness of the significance of Ancient Woodlands and Veteran Trees has increased. Nevertheless, action is largely voluntary, and often dependent on the skills and enthusiasm of a few individuals. Furthermore, there are parts of this AONB where trees and hedges are not typical or historically significant features. In these areas, well-intentioned planting continues to change and block extensive views of the open downlands. New planting should take full account of landscape character and historic features.
- 7.10. The availability of funding for incentives and actions to conserve and enhance at a landscape scale is a challenge for the whole AONB.
- 7.11. The changes to agricultural support and agri-environment schemes flowing from the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union will occur during the period of this Management Plan. Government is taking forward the Natural Capital concept, seeking to sustain and enhance the nation's natural assets. Linked with this, DEFRA states that there will be an agricultural transition period to implement a 'public goods for public money' approach to future schemes. The clear intention is that farmers will then receive funding for the environmental benefits they provide rather than the volume of their products or the extent of their holding.
- 7.12. Defra has called for tests or trials to help evaluate the basis for any new agri-environment schemes. This AONB Partnership has considerable experience working with, and facilitating, self-help farm clusters to enhance farmland wildlife and habitats. It is happy to engage pro-actively with any tests or trials within potential new agri-environment schemes. Further refinement of landscape character data is, therefore, likely.
- 7.13. The landscape characteristics and qualities of the eight landscape types of this AONB are set out overleaf. It then focuses on the additional issues and challenges that are particularly pertinent to each of them. The Management Plan policies and actions seek to address these issues and to reinforce and enhance landscape character.



Landscape type 1: **Chalk Escarpments**



This Landscape Type comprises the following Landscape Areas:

Character Area 1A - Melbury to Blandford Chalk Escarpment

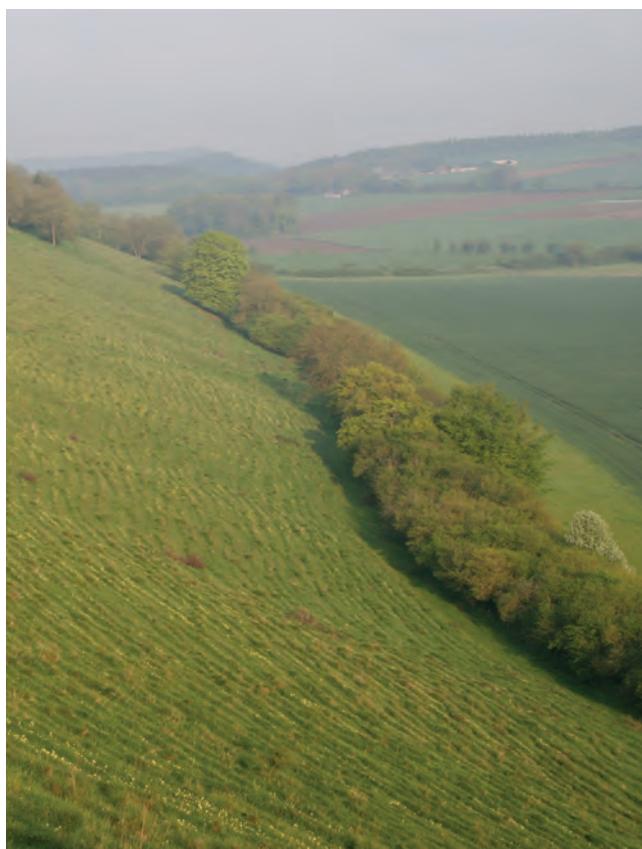
Character Area 1B - West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment

Character Area 1C - Fovant and Chalke Chalk Escarpment

- Dramatic chalk escarpments eroded into spurs and deep coombes, with a generally sharp transition from the associated downlands.
- Underlying geology of Lower, Middle and Upper Chalk giving rise to predominantly thin calcareous soils.
- Areas of unimproved chalk grassland of international importance, traditionally maintained by livestock grazing.
- Steepness of slope leads to an absence of farmsteads and settlements.
- Field systems on lower slopes, including strip lynchets, close to Medieval villages sited along the spring line.
- Improved pasture and arable fields occupy the shallower, more accessible slopes where straight-sided fields represent late 18th / early 19th century enclosure.
- Cross dykes and Bronze Age features on the escarpment edge.
- Hanging woodland and sunken lanes are features of the steep, enclosing chalk coombes.
- Tracks and bridleways typically follow diagonal routes across the steep slopes.
- Panoramic views over adjacent landscapes.

Issues and challenges

- Decreases in livestock grazing leading to loss of grassland habitat to scrub.
- Visibility of changes within the landscape and areas round it.
- A350 corridor, intensification of use and highway paraphernalia, and potential visibility of any development.
- Maintenance of heritage assets.
- Visibility of changes within the A30 corridor and associated Greensand Terrace fields.
- Management and renovation of Fovant Badges (and similar features).
- Conservation of historic features.



Landscape type 2: **Open Chalk Downland**



This Landscape Type comprises the following Landscape Areas:

Character Area 2A - West Wiltshire Downs

Character Area 2B - Southern Downland Belt

- Large-scale landform of broad rolling hills interspersed by wide valleys, some with high quality chalk rivers whilst others are seasonal or dry.
- Dominated by Upper Chalk geology with drift clay and flint capping, with associated woodland and eye-catching tree clumps, on higher ground.
- A predominantly arable landscape divided into large, rectangular units with straight-sided fields representing late 18th / early 19th century enclosure from extensive open grazing areas.
- Remnant chalk grassland, ancient broad-leaved woodland, and yew woodland are important habitats.
- Beech trees line lanes and comprise formal avenues.
- Large blocks of woodland and coppice contrast with the open arable fields.
- Main roads cut across the undulating landscape linking major settlements on either side of the AONB.
- Ancient route ways follow east-west ridges.
- Large open skies and extensive panoramic views.
- Low density scattered settlement of farmsteads and the occasional downland village.
- Numerous Neolithic burial and ritual monuments and Bronze Age barrows.
- Later pre-historic and Romano-British ditches and defensive 'castle' earthworks.

Issues and challenges

- Arable crop changes influenced by globalisation, commodity prices, farm inputs and costs impacting on both the aesthetics and the landscape functions.
- Exposed transport corridors - A303 / A350 / A354 - intensification of use and highway paraphernalia, and potential visibility of any development.
- Erosion and truncation of Ancient Monuments.
- Hedge planting blocking views and modifying the open, expansive, character.
- Fertilizer use and impacts on aquifers.
- Visual and soil impacts of extensive pig keeping.
- Rectangular, unsympathetic, 20th century game coverts.



Landscape type 3: **Wooded Chalk Downland**



This Landscape Type comprises the following Landscape Area:

Character Area 3A - Cranborne Chase

- An elevated downland landscape with dramatic intersecting coombe valleys and rounded upstanding ridges.
- Dominated by an Upper Chalk 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.
- Beech lined lanes and tracks criss-cross the downland.
- Mosaic of unenclosed downland, improved grassland and arable fields, often dating from 19th century enclosure, between the woodland.
- Chalk grassland, ancient woodland, and coppice 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/coombes.



Issues and challenges

- Conservation of heritage/archaeological interests.
- Impacts of climate change on mixed farming and forestry/ancient woodlands.
- Connectivity between woodlands and maintenance of enclosures.
- Hedge and screen planting, coupled with reduced management, blocking views and modifying character.
- Declining coppice management.



Landscape type 4: **Downland Hills**



This Landscape Type comprises the following Landscape Area:

Character Area 4A Martin - Whitsbury Downland Hills

- A series of small scale but prominent hills and knolls.
- Dominated by Upper Chalk geology giving rise to argyllic brown earths.
- Land cover is slightly more arable than grassland, with improved pasture on lower ground towards the river valleys.
- Dominated by a pattern of medium to large Parliamentary enclosure type fields.
- Deciduous and coniferous woodland, clothing the crests of the slopes, silhouetted against the skyline.
- Low density, dispersed settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads.
- The absence of major roads contributes to the feeling of remoteness and tranquillity.
- 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 hill forts contribute to the plethora of visible, historic features of the landscape.
- Panoramic views from hill tops.



Issues and challenges

- Conservation of archaeology and ancient woodlands.
- Development pressures on the villages.
- ‘Horsiculture’ and changes in sense of place.
- Decrease in agricultural stock grazing.



Landscape type 5: **Chalk River Valleys**



This Landscape Type comprises the following Landscape Areas:

Character Area 5A - Wylve Chalk River Valley

Character Area 5B - Ebble Chalk River Valley

Character Area 5C - Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys

- Strongly enclosing valley sides, frequently eroded to form dry valleys, but in some places quite wide. (e.g. Ebble.)
- 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 cultivation.
- The clear, fast-flowing chalk rivers are a key habitat.
- The floodplains support water meadows, cress beds and damp pasture.
- The valleys typically provide convenient transport corridors, with the Wylve valley containing a trunk road and railway.
- The rural landscapes are sometimes interrupted by the large volumes of traffic that use the valleys as transport corridors to organised events.
- Straight-sided fields represent late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary enclosure, with large scale fields resulting from 20th century boundary loss.
- Field boundaries and footpaths often reflect the tracks, droves and hollow ways that took livestock from and to the downs in the Medieval period.
- A series of linear spring line villages typically lie at the foot of the valley slopes.
- Isolated Neolithic long barrows, Bronze Age round barrows and water meadow channels on the valley floor contribute to visible archaeology.



Issues and challenges

- Water flows and water resource management.
- ‘Horsiculture’ and loss of sense of place.
- Development pressures. (Expensive properties, high demand, gentrification, replacement dwellings.)
- Highway ‘improvements’.
- Infrastructure clutter. (e.g. Telephone and electricity poles, signs.)



Landscape type 6: Greensand Terrace



This Landscape Type comprises the following Landscape Areas:

Character Area 6A - Fovant Greensand Terrace

Character Area 6B - Kilmington Greensand Terrace

- Flat aprons of land from which the dramatic chalk escarpments and greensand hills rise.
- Dominated by arable fields of Parliamentary enclosure.
- 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, and isolated, farmsteads.
- Settlements tend to be at the interface with, or within, the Greensand Hills.
- General absence of prehistoric earthworks.
- Long views which are also the setting of views from the escarpments and hills.



Issues and challenges

- A30 corridor.
- Highway paraphernalia, traffic volumes, and loss of tranquillity.
- Field sizes, hedge management, and intensification of farming.
- Development pressures.
- Visual intrusion of farm buildings.



Landscape type 7: Greensand Hills



This Landscape Type comprises the following Landscape Areas:

Character Area 7A Donhead - Fovant Hills

Character Area 7B Penselwood - Longleat Hills

- Upper Greensand is exposed as a band between the older clays and younger chalk between Mere and Wilton; elsewhere the hills overlook the Greensand Terraces.
- The Greensand typically forms upstanding ridges and hills that have been eroded by tributaries of the major rivers into a series of rounded knolls and deep valleys.
- Hills and ridges support a large proportion of woodland, both deciduous and coniferous.
- Extensive woodlands 'hide' recreational development, e.g. Center Parc.
- Country houses and estates, some very large and spreading across the Greensand Terraces, are set within landscaped parkland, and 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 hilltops.
- Ancient and narrow 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.



Issues and challenges

- Heritage conservation especially in parklands with visitor pressures.
- Infrastructure clutter (e.g. telephone and electricity poles, signs).
- Viability of commercial forestry.
- Livestock grazing.
- Limited access due to narrow lanes.
- Traffic and development leading to loss of tranquillity.
- Enlarged replacement dwellings.



Landscape type 8: **Rolling Clay Vales**



This Landscape Type comprises the following Landscape Area:

Character Area 8A - The Vale of Wardour

- Predominantly clay vale occupying a series of eroded anticlinal axes between the chalk downlands.
- Varied underlying geology with many different geological exposures leading to outcrops of hard rock.
- A mixed agricultural landscape with small scale fields of lush improved pasture and arable with water meadows on the valley floor.
- Wooded character, with broadleaf and mixed woodland and copses (some of ancient origin) scattered across the Vale, reinforced by bushy hedgerows bounding most fields.
- Layout of fields, farms and villages illustrate the pattern of Medieval settlement, clearance and farming.
- A predominantly enclosed landscape, with close views limited by hedges, and frequent ups and downs resulting from the varied geology.
- Narrow, twisty, lanes.
- Rivers and their tributaries meander through the vale.
- A further sense of enclosure is provided by the surrounding upland landscapes.
- Villages dispersed over the floor of the vale.



Issues and challenges

- Viability of family farms and dairying.
- Water regimes (Nadder and Sem rivers).
- Transportation and vehicle accessibility.
- Infrastructure clutter (e.g. telephone and electricity poles, signs).
- Greater benefits from the railway, and associated parking needs.
- Development pressures, particularly around Tisbury, and potential loss of character.

