Landscape Character Assessment

September 2024

Cranborne Chase National Landscape

Landscape Character Assessment

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Acknowledgements

CBA has prepared this updated Landscape Character Assessment on behalf of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape Partnership[1].

We are grateful for the guidance and advice provided by the Cranborne Chase National Landscape Team, in particular:

- Linda Nunn, Director
- Richard Burden, Principal Landscape & Planning Officer
- Gemma Worswick, Nature Recovery Officer
- Harry Bell, GIS Consultant

The study builds upon and acknowledges the work undertaken by LUC in preparing the previous 2003 Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment.

The CBA team comprised Dominic Watkins, Harriet Stanford and Kate Goodchild.

[1] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/about-us/the-national-landscape-partnership/

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Cranborne Chase National Landscape

1.1.1 Cranborne Chase is a National Landscape, a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)[2]. National Landscapes are protected for the nation and are of equal landscape value to National Parks.

1.1.2 The area was designated as the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB in 1981 under the National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act 1949. The criteria for designation include valuable wildlife, habitats, geology and heritage, as well as scenic views. The primary purpose of the designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area, now and for future generations.

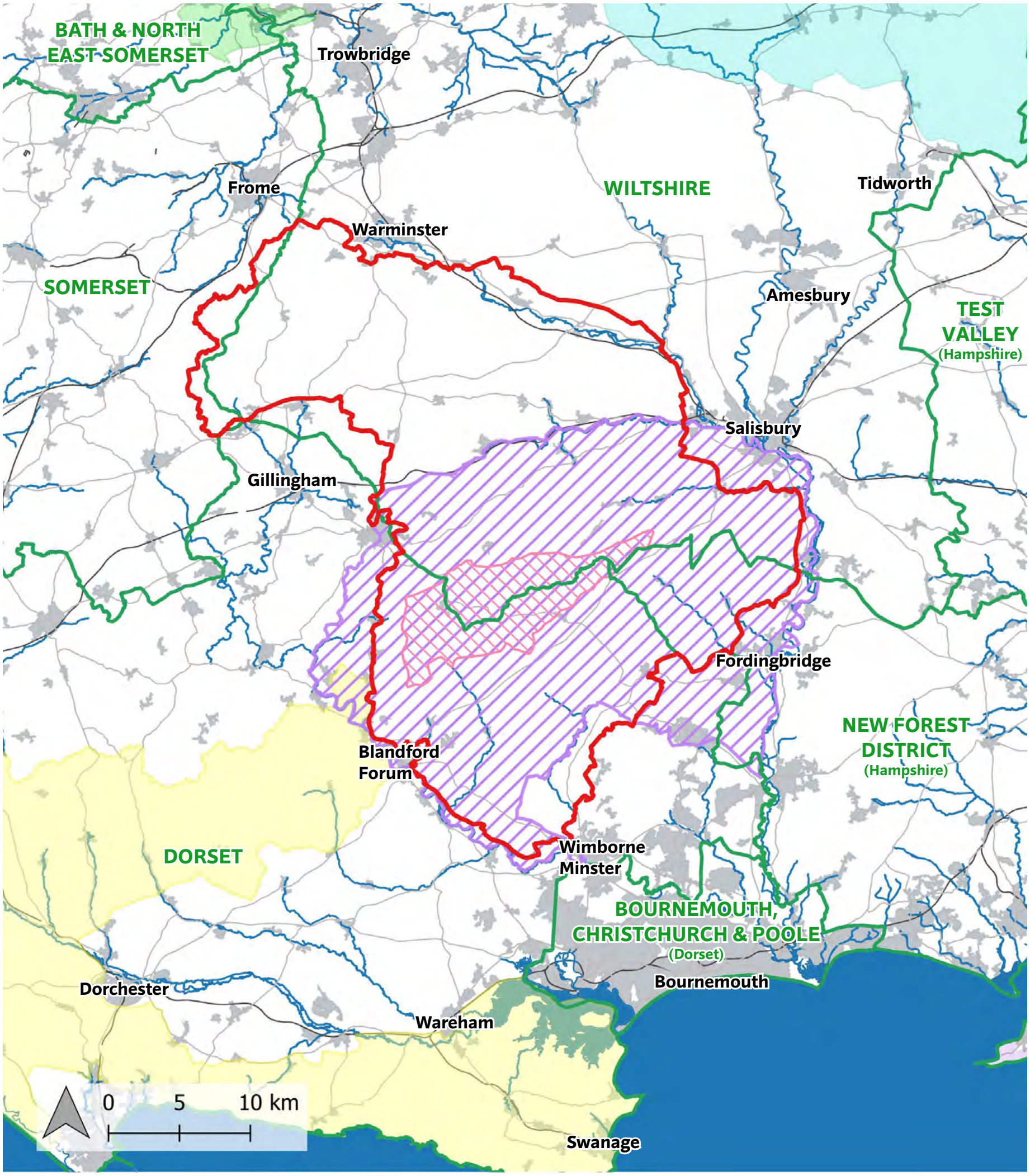
1.1.3 The Cranborne Chase National Landscape covers an area of 983 sq km (380 sq miles) of countryside overlapping the boundaries of Wiltshire, Dorset, Hampshire and Somerset, and abutting the Dorset National Landscape **(Figure 1.1).**

1.1.4 Cranborne Chase has one of the lowest population densities in the South West of England (c.33,000), although there are ½ million people within thirty minutes' drive of the National Landscape in surrounding market towns and the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole conurbation. Farming is by far the biggest land use in the National Landscape with more than 89% classed as farmland.

1.1.5 Cranborne Chase is a diverse landscape of rich archaeological and historical significance with distinctive areas of rolling chalk grassland (almost 14% of the UK's important chalk grassland is found here), ancient woodlands, chalk escarpments, downland hillsides and chalk river valleys.

1.1.6 The National Landscape is broadly 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

[2] AONBs were rebranded as National Landscapes following the Glover Landscapes Review in 2023 www.gov.uk/government/consultations/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-implementing-the-review/outcome



KEY

- Cranborne Chase National Landscape
- Dorset National Landscape
- Cotswolds National Landscape
- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- 17th Century Outer Chase Boundary
- Inner Chase Boundary (Indicative)
- Local Authority Boundaries
- Railways
- Main Roads
- Built up areas

CRANBORNE CHASE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

FIGURE 1.1
REGIONAL CONTEXT

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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/Grovely Wood. Both areas are fringed by impressive scarps, cresting above the adjoining greensand terraces.

1.1.7 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 Wylye and Ebble support a larger proportion of permanent pasture, with many copses and hedgerows. In the northwest, the National Landscape's sandstone fringe of wooded ridges and valleys includes rich parklands such as Longleat and Stourhead.

1.1.8 The National Landscape 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.

1.1.9 This is a deeply rural area with scattered villages and narrow roads. There are no large settlements in the National Landscape. Nearby country towns include Salisbury, Shaftesbury, Blandford, Wimborne, Fordingbridge, and Warminster. Longleat, Stourhead, Kingston Lacy, and Centre Parcs are significant visitor destinations within the National Landscape.

1.1.10 Cranborne Chase National Landscape is an International Dark Sky Reserve. One of only 21 International Dark Sky Reserves (IDSRs) worldwide, these Reserves are places recognised for the quality of their night skies, and which take measures to maintain and improve this quality.

1.2 What is Landscape Character Assessment?

What is Landscape?

1.2.1 The landscape provides the ever-changing backdrop to people's daily lives in the Cranborne Chase National Landscape, and is more than just 'the view' – it is about the relationship between people, place and nature.

1.2.2 Natural England's guidance[3] defines landscape as '*an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors*'...that are...*'essential components of people's surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of their identity.'*[4]

Why assess Landscape Character?

1.2.3 Landscape results from the way that different components of the natural and cultural environment interact and are experienced and perceived by people. As people value landscape for many different reasons, understanding how it evolved, what the landscape is like today (including its historic landscape character or "time depth") and how it is likely to change in the future is important.

1.2.4 In order to protect Cranborne Chase National Landscape for the future, we need an accurate description of the landscape as it is now; both in terms of its physical and cultural attributes and the forces that are directing landscape change. This is known as Landscape Character Assessment.

1.2.5 Landscape Character Assessment includes physical landform, ecological, aesthetics and human settlement aspects along with an understanding of how landscape is used and has evolved. This process helps us identify and appreciate the character of different landscape types, locally distinctive features and sense of place.

[3] An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, Natural England, 2014
[4] European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe 2000

1.2.6 Landscape Character Assessment seeks to identify local landscape features, the broad character of a locality, indigenous materials and all the other elements that contribute to the particular sense of place.

1.2.7 Landscape Character Assessment therefore presents an integrated view of the landscape and includes all the features which contribute to the special and distinctive character of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape. It plays a crucial part in enabling the Cranborne Chase National Landscape Partnership to conserve and enhance the National Landscape.

1.3 The Landscape Character Assessment

1.3.1 The Landscape Character Assessment set out in this report has been prepared by CBA on behalf of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape Partnership. It aims to provide an up-to-date and consistent understanding of the key features and attributes that contribute to the distinctive character and special qualities of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape.

1.3.2 The study builds on and updates the 2003 Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment[5] undertaken in line with the Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage 2002 Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (see **Appendix 1** for details of the methodology). This work drew on the broad-brush 1995 Landscape Assessment of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB[6].

1.3.3 The updated Landscape Character Assessment reflects the principles of current technical guidance provided by Natural England's 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment' (2014).

1.3.4 In undertaking this updated study, other relevant assessments have been reviewed to ensure that it fits with the landscape classification hierarchy provided by current national and regional/local character assessments.

[5] Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (LUC for the Countryside Agency, 2003)
[6] Landscape Assessment of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB (LUC for the Countryside Agency, 1995)

1.3.5 At the national level, Natural England has identified the following National Character Areas (NCAs) within and around the Cranborne Chase National Landscape (**Figure 1.2**):

- NCA Profile 132: Salisbury Plain and West Wiltshire Downs
- NCA Profile 133: Blackmore Vale and the Vale of Wardour
- NCA Profile 134: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase
- NCA Profile 117: Avon Vales
- NCA Profile 135: Dorset Heaths

1.3.6 The NCA Profiles published by Natural England include Statements of Opportunity, which should be read and used in conjunction with this Landscape Character Assessment to inform assessments, proposals and decision-making at a range of scales.

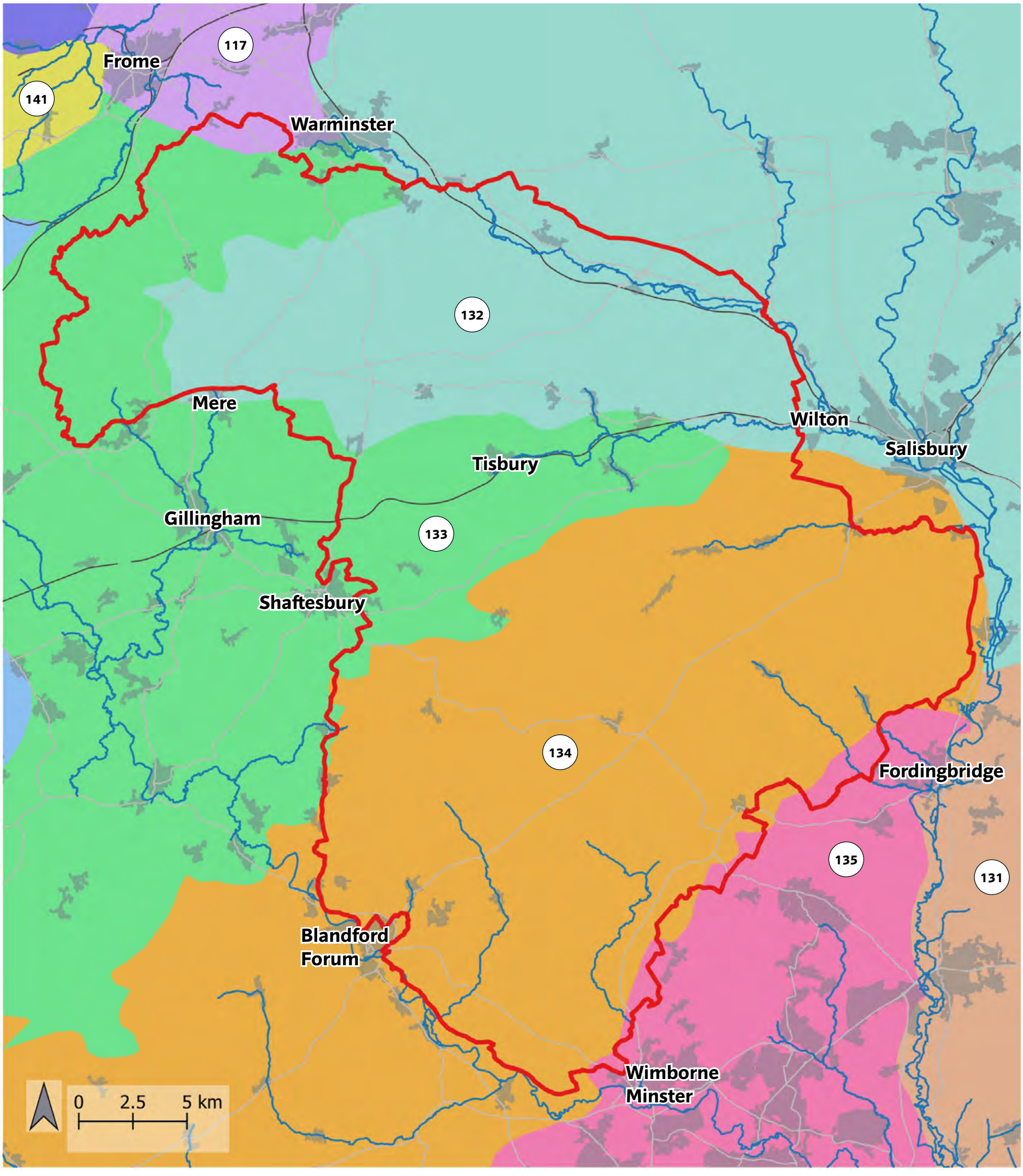
1.3.7 At the regional/local level, the following assessments that overlap and/or abut the Cranborne Chase National Landscape have been considered:

- Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment[7]
- Cranborne Chase & Chalke Valley Landscape Character Assessment[8]
- Dorset National Landscape Landscape Character Assessment[9]
- Hampshire Landscape Character Assessment[10]
- Mendip Landscape Character Assessment[11]

1.3.8 Informed by a review of the above national and local landscape character assessments, the 2003 landscape classification for the Cranborne Chase National Landscape has been updated where appropriate (see **Appendix 2**).

1.3.9 The updated assessment set out in this document seeks to present a fully integrated view of the landscape incorporating all the features and attributes that contribute to

[7] Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment (CBA for Wiltshire Council, 2024, unpublished – replaces the 2005 Study)
[8] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CCCV_LPS_HI-Res.pdf
[9] https://dorset-nl.org.uk/resources/landscape-character-assessment
[10] https://www.hants.gov.uk/landplanningandenvironment/environment/landscape/integratedcharacterassessment
[11] https://macgregorsmith.co.uk/mendip/index.html



KEY

National Character Areas:

- 117 - Avon Vales
- 107 - Cotswolds
- 141 - Mendip Hills
- 140 - Yeovil Scarplands
- 133 - Blackmore Vale and Vale of Wardour
- 132 - Salisbury Plain and West Wilshire Downs
- 134 - Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase
- 135 - Dorset Heaths
- 131 - New Forest
- National Landscape Boundary
- Watercourse
- Railways
- Main Roads
- Built up areas

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FIGURE 1.2
NATIONAL CHARACTER AREAS

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the distinctive character and special qualities of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape. These include the physical, ecological, visual, historic and cultural forces that have shaped the present day landscape. It also recognises the National Landscape today as a living and working landscape and considers the social, economic and recreational characteristics that contribute to its current character.

1.3.10 The Landscape Character Assessment has been informed by the 2008 Cranborne Chase Historic Landscape Characterisation Project[12], which provides a tool for helping understand the "time depth" in the present landscape. The findings of the Historic Landscape Characterisation Project have been used to refine the landscape classification, and are integrated into the descriptions of human influences within the Landscape Character Areas in **Chapter 3** (in particular with respect to field patterns).

1.4 Structure of the Report

1.4.1 The structure of the report is as follows:

- **Chapter 2: Physical and Cultural Influences on the Landscape:** provides an overview of the main physical and cultural factors that have shaped the evolution and character of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape (including geology, topography, hydrology and soils; ecological character; human influences; perceptions of the landscape in literature and art; social and economic influences; agricultural character; and recreational influences).

- **Chapter 3: Landscape Character of Cranborne Chase:** the main body of the report sets out the updated classification and descriptions of landscape character types and areas within the Cranborne Chase National Landscape. Brief descriptions of each landscape character type are provided, followed by more detailed descriptions of the component landscape character areas that include an evaluation of the areas' strength of character, forces for change and recommended management objectives.

[12] www.historiclandscape.co.uk

- **Chapter 4: Sustaining the National Landscape:** this concluding chapter identifies the special qualities of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape, highlights the key forces for change that have the potential to affect these qualities and outlines the role of the Landscape Character Assessment in helping manage and monitor landscape change to sustain the National Landscape for the future.

1.4.2 **Appendix 1** provides details of the 2003 assessment methodology, which remains relevant as it broadly reflects Natural England's current best practice guidance. The review of the 2003 assessment is set out in **Appendix 2**, which includes a comparison between the 2003 and 2024 landscape classifications.

2.0 PHYSICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON THE LANDSCAPE

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 This section provides an overview of the main physical and cultural factors that have shaped the evolution and character of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape (including geology, topography, hydrology and soils; ecological character; human influences; perceptions of the landscape in literature and art; social and economic influences; agricultural character; and recreational influences).

2.2 Physical Influences

Overview

2.2.1 Cranborne Chase National Landscape 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.

2.2.2 In order to understand the character of Cranborne Chase National Landscape 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 the historical and more recent activities of humans.

Geology and Topography

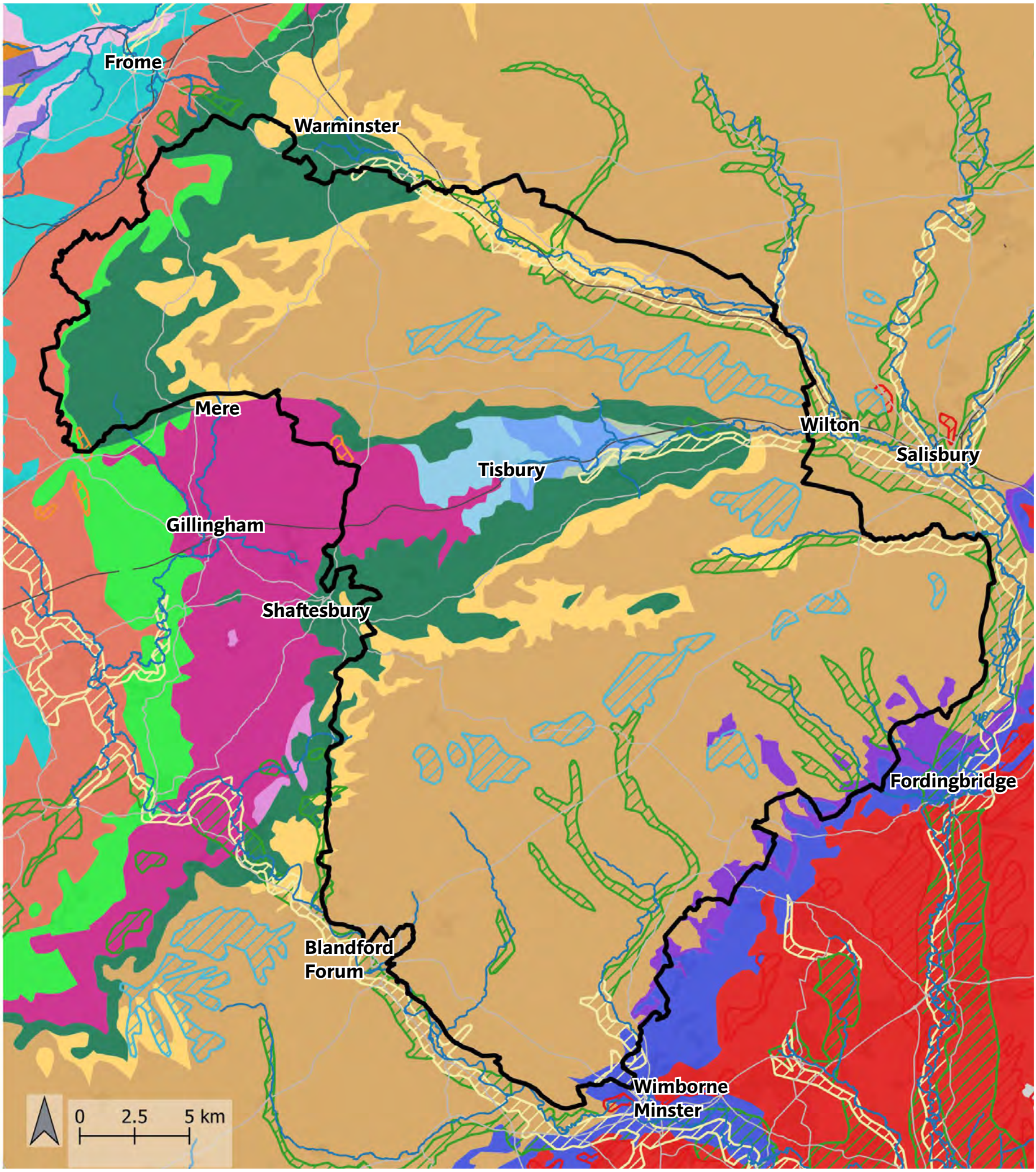
2.2.3 Above all else, Cranborne Chase National Landscape is dominated by Chalk, a rock which has formed the distinctive convex landforms of the open downland and which has had a profound influence on the history of human activity, influencing the patterns of agriculture, settlement and artistic expression. 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:

2.2.4 '*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*.'

2.2.5 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 geology of the area and **Figure 2.2** illustrates topography across the area.

2.2.6 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.



KEY

Superficial depositis:

- Alluvium
- Clay-with-flints
- Landslip
- River Terrace Deposits (Undifferentiated)
- Sand and Gravel of Uncertain Age and Origin

Bedrock Geology:

- Bracklesham Group and Barton Group (Undifferentiated)
- Corallian Group
- Dinantian Rocks (Undifferentiated)
- Gault Formation and Upper Greensand Formation (Undifferentiated)
- Great Oolite Group
- Grey Chalk Subgroup
- Inferior Oolite Group
- Kellaways Formation and Oxford Clay Formation (Undifferentiated)
- Lambeth Group
- Lower Greensand Group
- Portland Group
- Purbeck Limestone Group
- Solent Group
- Thames Group
- Triassic Rocks (Undifferentiated)
- Upper Devonian Rocks (Undifferentiated)
- Wealden Group
- West Walton Formation, Ampthill Clay Formation and Kimmeridge Clay Formation (Undifferentiated)
- White Chalk Subgroup

- National Landscape Boundary

CRANBORNE CHASE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

FIGURE 2.1
GEOLOGY

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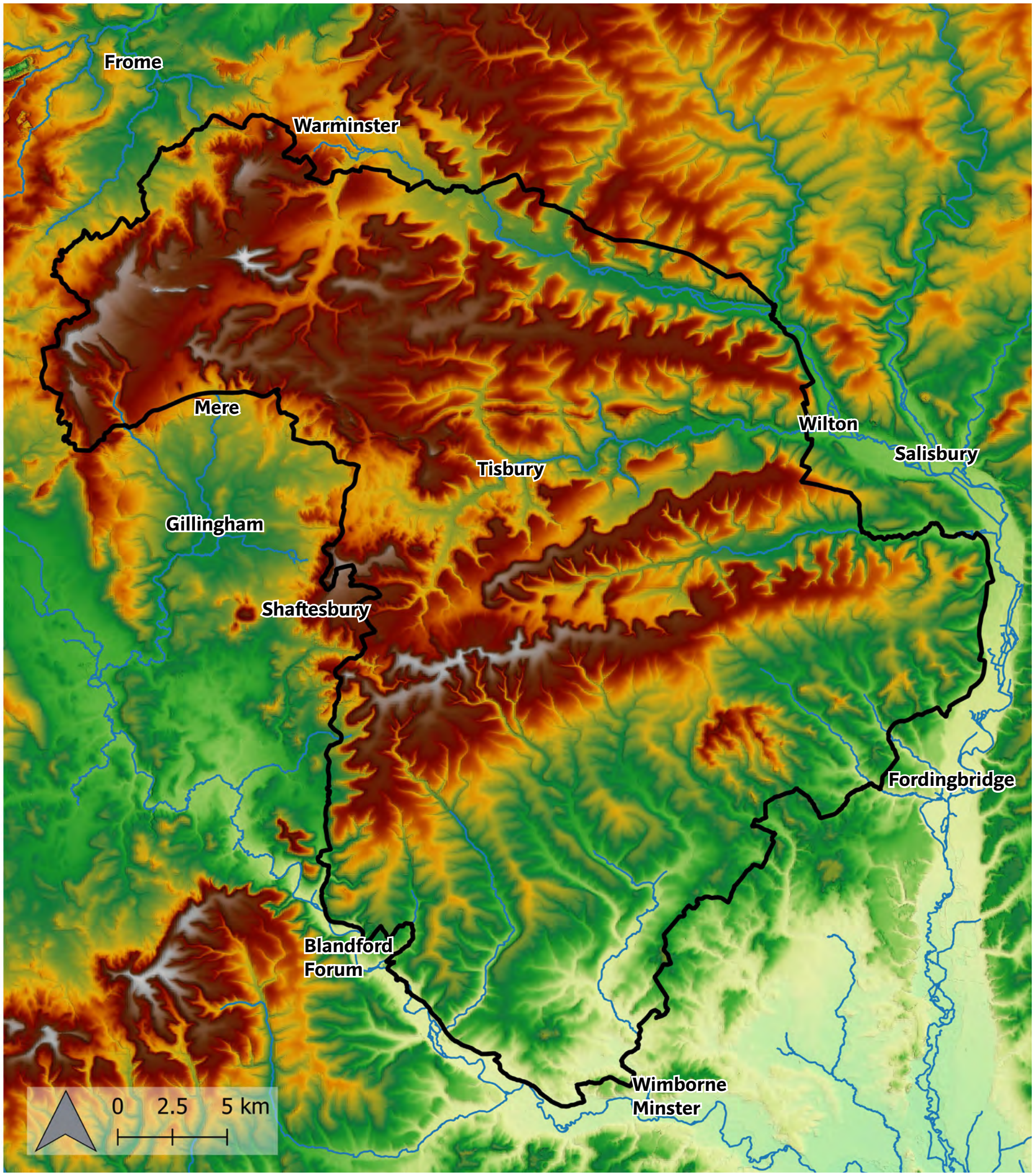

KEY

5m AOD

290m AOD

National Landscape Boundary

Watercourse

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FIGURE 2.2
TOPOGRAPHY

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2.2.7 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 National Landscape the Vale of Wardour and the Ebble Valley both follow east-west anticlinal axes. The Wylye Valley, on the other hand, follows the line of the Mere Fault.

2.2.8 The highest parts of the Chalk downs, notably the ridges between the valleys of the Rivers Wylye, Nadder and Ebble, 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.

2.2.9 In the Ebble Valley, the removal of weakened Chalk has created a broad chalk 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 where access to water supplies is not generally a major constraint governing settlement location.

2.2.10 Older rocks have also been revealed along the western edge of the National Landscape. 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.

2.2.11 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 coombes 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.

2.2.12 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.

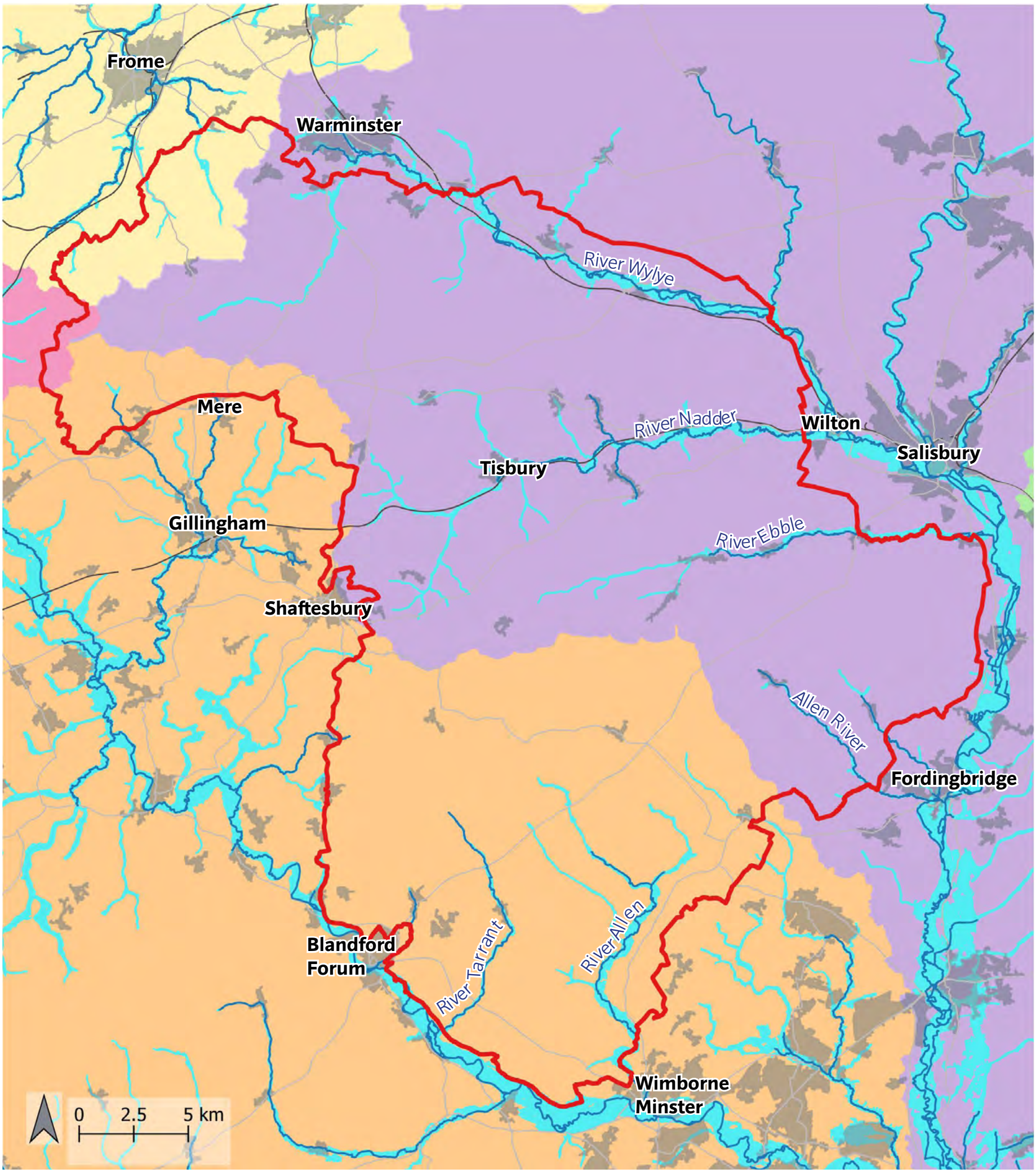
2.2.13 Two principal mechanisms are thought to have been instrumental in chalk valley formation. Much of the erosion may have taken place under periglacial conditions at the end of the last Ice Age when rain water failed to penetrate the frozen ground, instead flowing across the surface in streams and 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 Wylye, 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

2.2.14 The main drainage pattern of rivers in the National Landscape can be split into two, differentiating hydrological activity between the north and the south of the area. See **Figure 2.3**.

2.2.15 The key rivers influencing the landscape of the northern half of the National Landscape 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 National Landscape. These significant tributaries are the Rivers Wylye, Nadder and Ebble - cutting through the chalk following lines of weaknesses to create a sequence of valley landscapes. The Wylye drains along lines of weakness through the Chalk in the north of the National Landscape. The Nadder and Ebble both drain east to west with all three rivers connecting with the south flowing Avon.

2.2.16 Within the south of the National Landscape the Rivers follow a different route. Here, they drain the dip slope of the Chalk. 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 National Landscape. The Tarrant meets the Stour south east of the town of Blandford Forum whilst the Allen and Stour converge on the southern edge



KEY

Management Catchments:

- South and West Somerset
- Avon Bristol and North Somerset Streams
- Dorset
- Avon Hampshire
- Test and Itchen

- Watercourses and Waterbodies
- Flood Map for Planning Rivers and Seas (Flood Zone 2 and 3)
- National Landscape Boundary
- Railways
- Main Roads
- Built up areas

CRANBORNE CHASE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE
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FIGURE 2.3
HYDROLOGY

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of Wimborne Minster. The Allen River and the River Crane, further east, both drain to meet the River Avon.

Soils and Agricultural Capability

2.2.17 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 National Landscape and **Figure 2.5** illustrates the differing agricultural capability across the National Landscape.

2.2.18 There are seven soils groups within Cranborne Chase National Landscape:

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

2.2.19 Each of these soil groups is outlined below with a description of the subgroups occurring within the National Landscape.

Rendzinas

2.2.20 This soil group is associated with the broad sweeping Open Chalk Downland landscape types - to the north located between the Rivers Nadder and Wylye and to the south of the National Landscape overlying the chalk downland south of the Vale of Wardour. The dominant subgroup found in the National Landscape 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

KEY

Land Cover:

- Arable
- Calcareous grassland
- Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
- Coniferous woodland
- Deciduous woodland
- Lowland fens
- Freshwater
- Lowland calcareous grassland
- Lowland dry acid grassland
- Lowland heathland
- Heather
- Heather grassland
- Improved grassland
- Inland rock
- Suburban
- Traditional orchard
- Urban
- Fen
- Lowland meadows
- Good quality semi-improved grassland
- Neutral grassland
- No main habitat but additional habitats present
- Purple moor grass and rush pastures
- National Landscape Boundary
- Watercourse
- Railways
- Main Roads
- Built up areas

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FIGURE 2.4
LAND COVER

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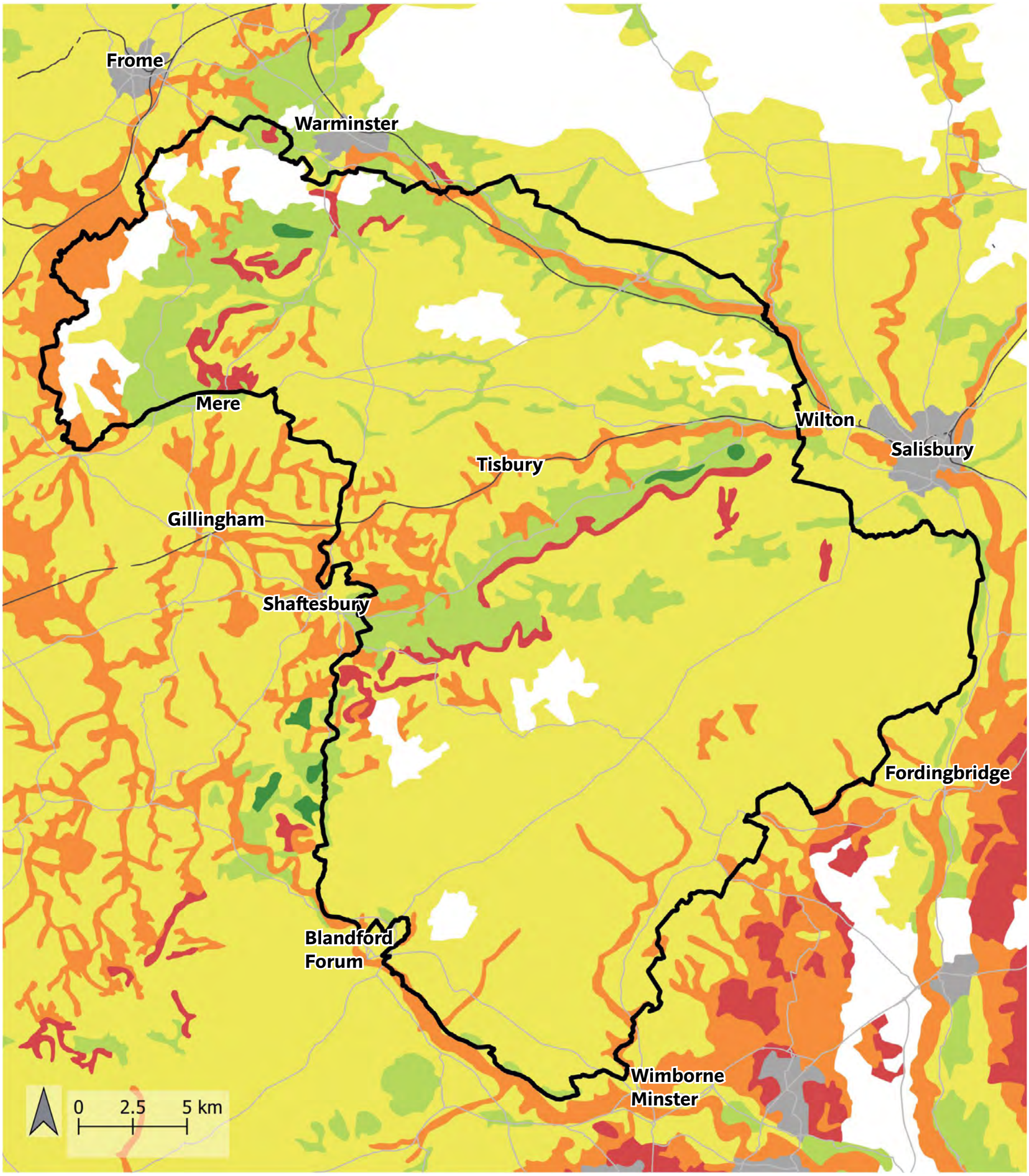

KEY

Agricultural Land Classification:

- 1 (Very good quality)
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 (Very poor quality)
- Non-agricultural
- Urban*

- National Landscape Boundary
- Railways
- Main Roads

*As classified by the ALC - other small settlements are not included in this classification and therefore not shown

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FIGURE 2.5
AGRICULTURAL LAND CLASSIFICATION

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winter cereals and short- term grassland with dairy farming and stock rearing and some woodland.

2.2.21 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.

2.2.22 Humic rendzinas are also found within the National Landscape. These soils are typically shallow, well drained calcareous soils that overlie chalk and on slopes and hills tops. This is true within the National Landscape 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.

Brown calcareous earths

2.2.23 These are non - alluvial loamy or clayey soils and have a weathered calcareous subsoil. The group occurring within the National Landscape is the `typical brown calcareous earths' of which two associations are present. These soils are well drained, calcareous, fine and silty soils that primarily occur within the National Landscape in parts of the Greensand Terrace landscape type. They are primarily associated with cereal cropping, grass rotations, dairy farming and stock rearing.

Brown earths

2.2.24 Brown earths are non-alluvial loamy soils that have a non-calcareous subsoil. The subgroup of this soil occurring within the National Landscape 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.

Argillic brown earths

2.2.25 Argillic brown earths are loamy, clayey soils with significant clay enrichment in the sub-surface horizon. The subgroup of this soil occurring within the National Landscape (typical argillic brown earths) is separated further into two separate soil associations.

2.2.26 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 within the character areas of the Downland Hills landscape type found to the southeast of the National Landscape. 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 or woodland on steep slopes.

2.2.27 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 National Landscape.

Paleo-argillic brown earths

2.2.28 Paleo-argyllic 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 National Landscape – the typical paleo-argyllic brown earths, defined as often very flinty, well drained, silty and clayey.

2.2.29 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 National Landscape, the land use primarily associated with this soil group is woodland.

Stagnogley soils

2.2.30 These soils have a distinct topsoil and occur widely across lowland Britain. The subgroup occurring within the National Landscape 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.

2.2.31 Within the National Landscape this soil subgroup is associated with the Kimmeridge clay geology found in the western half of the Rolling Clay Vales 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.

Ground-water gley soils

2.2.32 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 Wylye 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.

2.2.33 The second subgroup is linked to the river alluvium, valley gravels, and the Wealden 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).

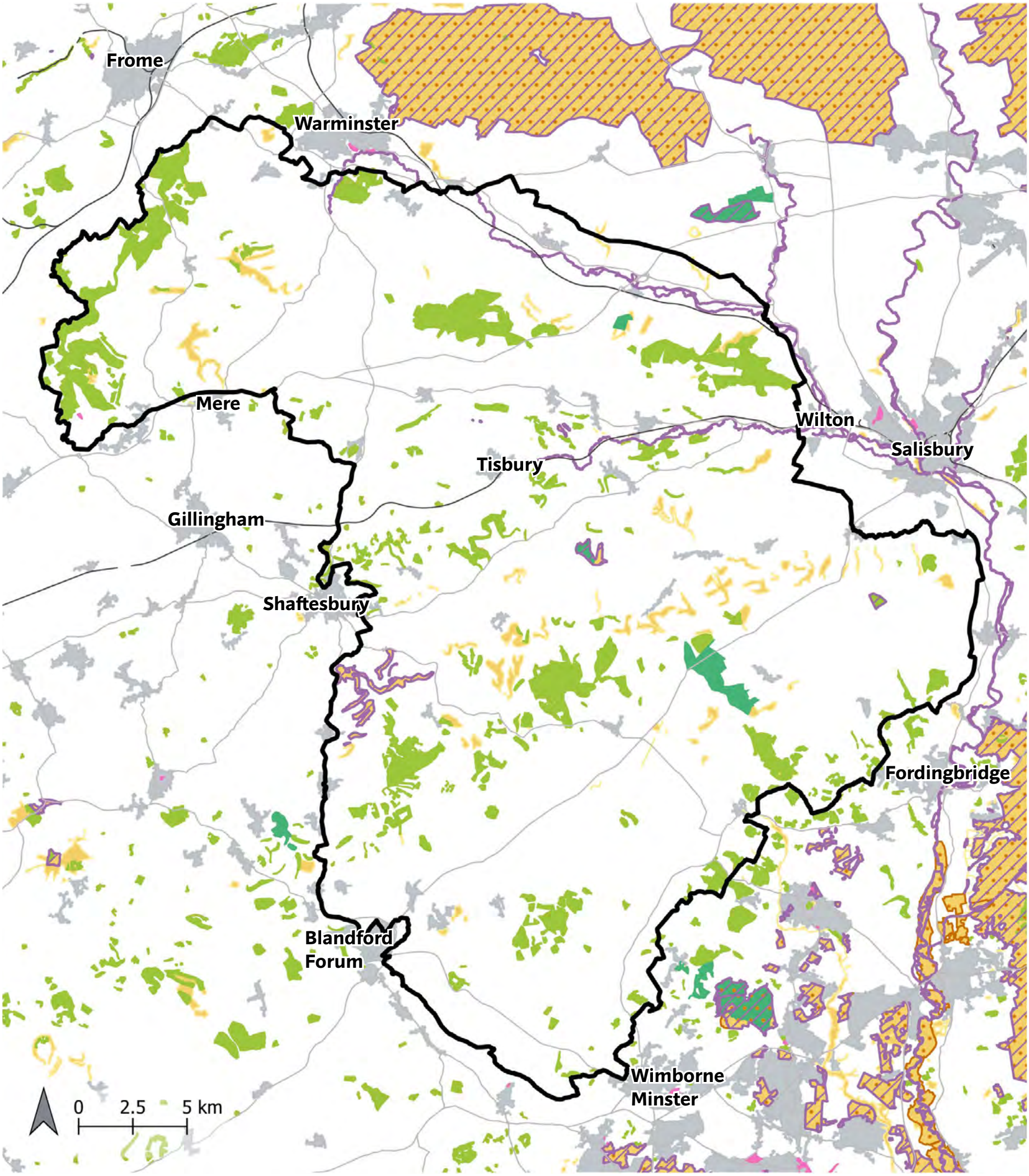
2.3 Ecological Character

Context

2.3.1 The varied underlying geology and associated varied soils across the National Landscape support a variety of habitat types, such as wet woodland, acid woodland, and both neutral and calcareous meadows. Much of the landscape is strongly characterised by the underlying chalk geology, forming a series of valleys, downs, escarpments and combes. This has resulted in Cranborne Chase being an internationally important area for its chalk grassland and chalk rivers, and for the many notable, and often rare, species associated with these habitats.

2.3.2 Although areas of high ecological value are found throughout the National Landscape, 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 National Landscape include the internationally important early gentian *(Gentianella anglica)*, which is a national rarity and priority species under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework. Additional habitats found in association with chalk grassland, include chalk heath and scrub mosaics, which when present provide valuable habitat diversity, and contribute significantly to the ecological value of these areas. **Figure 2.6** shows the distribution of Nature Conservation Designations across the National Landscape.

2.3.3 Although extensive areas of unimproved chalk grassland have been retained along the scarp slopes, the dominant land use within the National Landscape is agricultural farmland. Although much of this agricultural land is intensively managed for commercial crop production, the National Landscape supports a number of important species which are partly dependent on or associated with agricultural land uses.



KEY

- Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Ancient woodland
- National Nature Reserve (NNR)
- Local Nature Reserve (LNR)
- National Landscape Boundary
- Railways
- Main Roads
- Built up areas

CRANBORNE CHASE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

FIGURE 2.6
NATURE CONSERVATION DESIGNATIONS

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2.3.4 In addition to chalk downland landscapes, the National Landscape 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.

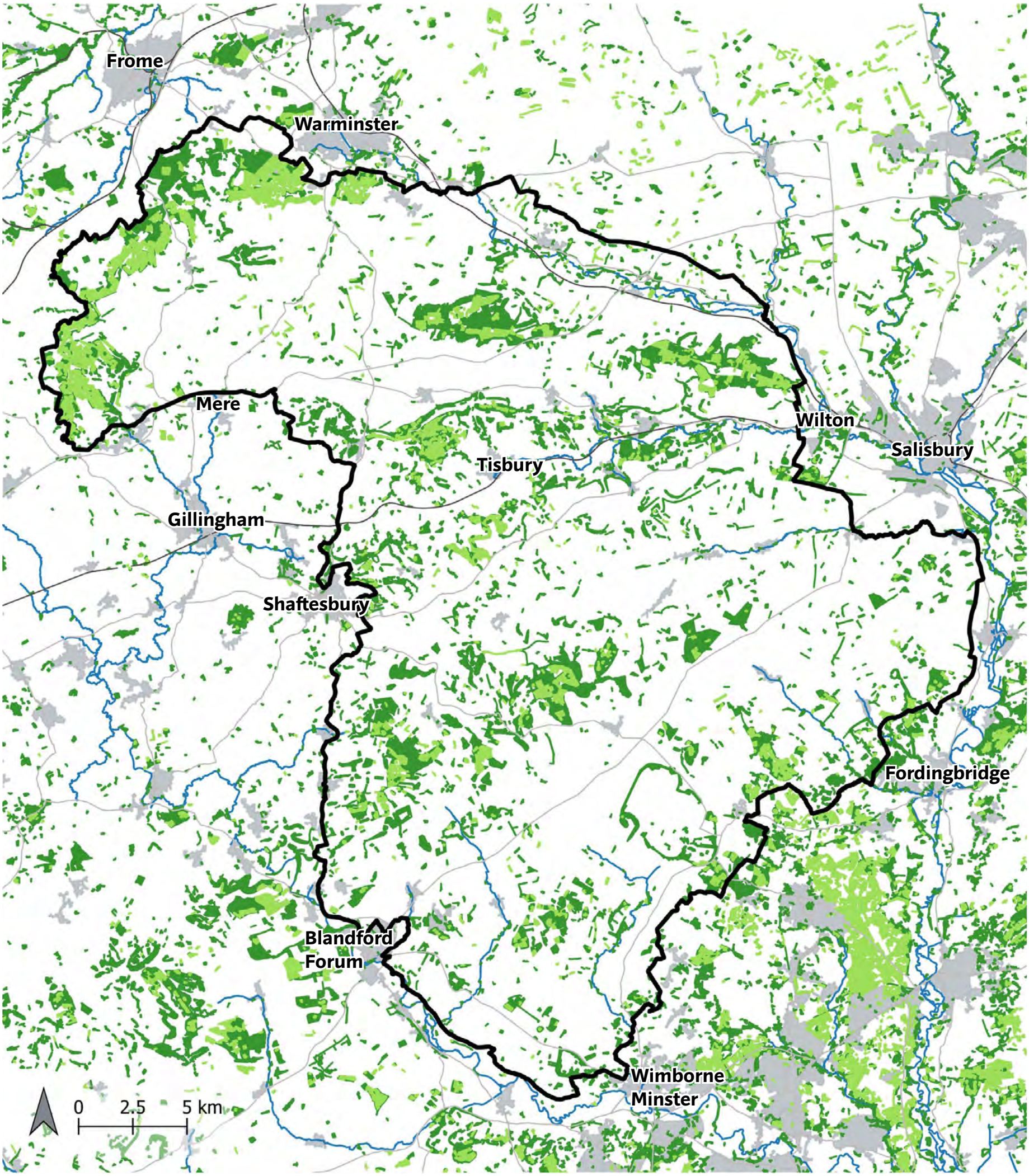
2.3.5 The National Landscape also has significant woodland cover, ranging from the extensive woodland of Cranborne Chase, through to small remnant ancient woods, and more recently planted shelterbelts. **Figure 2.7** shows the distribution of different types of woodland across the National Landscape.

Wildlife Attributes

2.3.6 The Priority Habitats Inventory (Natural England) indicates that a wide range of habitats and associated animal species occur within the National Landscape. Priority habitats within the National Landscape (**Figure 2.8**) include:

- Lowland calcareous grassland
- Good quality semi improved grassland
- Lowland meadows
- Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
- Deciduous woodland
- Traditional orchard
- No main habitat but additional habitats present

2.3.7 **Lowland calcareous grassland** is a key habitat within the National Landscape and represents a significant biological resource. Lowland calcareous grassland was once widespread wherever suitable substrate occurred. However, changes to agriculture meant that more accessible sites began to be ploughed from around 1700. The 'Chase' status, and application of forest law in the central southern part of the National Landscape resulted in a delay in the implementation of agricultural improvements until the 19th Century, and hence habitats and landscape pattern have changed less in this area. The rate of loss of calcareous grassland accelerated rapidly in the second half of the 20th century, and now the only areas remaining



KEY

National Forest Inventory:

- Broadleaved / Mixed mainly broadleaved
- Conifer / Mixed mainly conifer
- National Landscape Boundary
- Watercourse
- Railways
- Main Roads
- Built up areas

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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

FIGURE 2.7
WOODLAND INVENTORY

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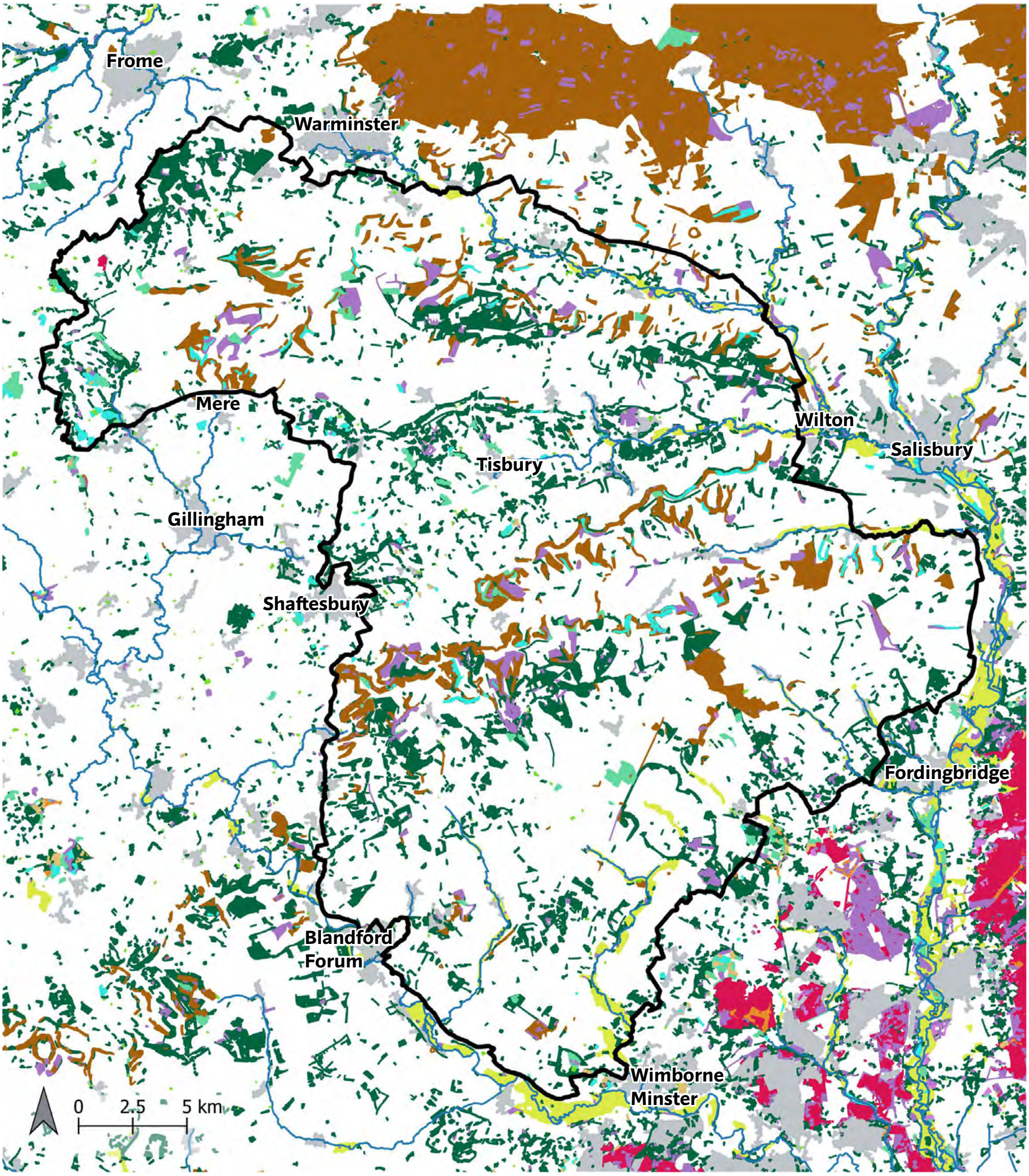

KEY

Priority Habitat:

- Deciduous woodland
- Good quality semi improved grassland
- No main habitat but additional habitats present
- Lowland meadows
- Traditional orchard
- Lowland calcareous grassland
- Lowland dry acid grassland
- Purple moor grass and rush pastures
- Lowland heathland
- Lowland fens
- Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
- National Landscape Boundary
- Watercourse
- Built up areas

CRANBORNE CHASE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

FIGURE 2.8
PRIORITY HABITATS

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tend to be on valley sides or escarpments too steep to plough or re-seed. Recently efforts have been made to increase connectivity between fragmented sites to increase climate change resilience[13].

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.

2.3.8 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.

2.3.9 **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 Down (National Nature Reserve, NNR).

2.3.10 The majority of the chalk grassland sites within the National Landscape 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,

[13] https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/habitats/grassland/lowland-calcareous-grassland

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 National Landscape, such as juniper (Juniperus communis) scrub are declining in the UK, and are listed as priority habitats due to their rarity and inherent biological interest.

2.3.11 **Farmland** contributes significantly to the overall character and ecological value of the National Landscape. 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.

2.3.12 At a national level, the rapid changes in agricultural practice over the past 80 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.

2.3.13 The Cranborne Chase National Landscape represents 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 oedicnemus*), 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;

- 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.

2.3.14 Opportunities for landowners to enhance local biodiversity are available through voluntary agri-environment schemes. 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 National Landscape.

2.3.15 **Chalk rivers** are common features of the National Landscape, 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).

2.3.16 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.

2.3.17 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.

2.3.18 The National Landscape 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. Ivers (linear woodland swathes) are often found along the lower edges of chalk escarpments.

2.3.19 **Ancient woodlands** are widely scattered throughout the National Landscape, 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.

2.3.20 The National Landscape 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.

2.3.21 **Broad-leaved, mixed and coniferous plantation** occur as small copses and shelterbelts throughout the National Landscape, although not considered to have as high ecological value as the ancient woodlands, they do provide some interest and variation in predominantly agricultural landscapes at the local level.

2.4 Human Influences

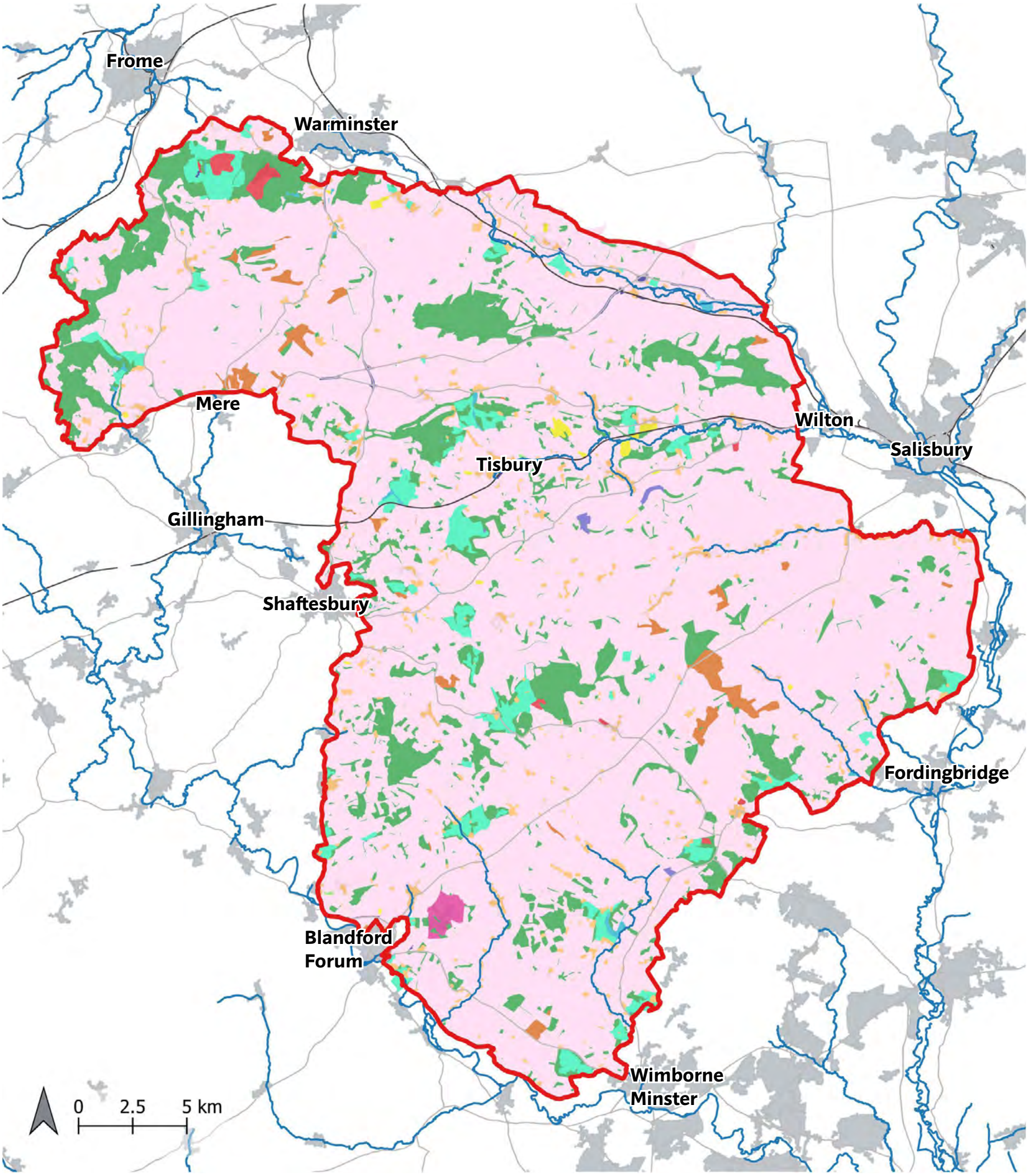
Overview

2.4.1 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 National Landscape 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. Broad Historic Landscape Character Types are shown on **Figure 2.9**, with further details of historic landscape character outlined in **Section 3.0**[14].

2.4.2 Historic Environment Assets designated for their value are shown on **Figure 2.10.** This includes Historic Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Monuments and Conservation Areas across the National Landscape. These historic assets contribute significantly to the character and qualities of natural beauty in Cranborne Chase. Conserving these elements is therefore an important element in conserving and enhancing the National Landscape. Examples from the 18 Registered Historic Park and Gardens within or immediately adjacent to the National Landscape include Longleat Grade I Listed Historic Park and Garden and Fonthill Grade II* Listed Historic Park and Garden. Scheduled Monuments in Cranborne Chase (which number more than 550 individual designations) include a vast range of assets including, but not limited to: medieval field systems, Romano-British settlements, Roman roads, bowl barrows and long barrows.

2.4.3 This Section 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.

[14] http://www.historiclandscape.co.uk/conserving_hlc.html



KEY

- Archaeology
- Civic
- Designed and Ornamental
- Enclosed Land
- Industry
- Inland Communications
- Military
- Open Land
- Recreation
- Settlement
- Water Association
- Woodland
- National Landscape Boundary
- Watercourse
- Railways
- Main Roads
- Built up areas

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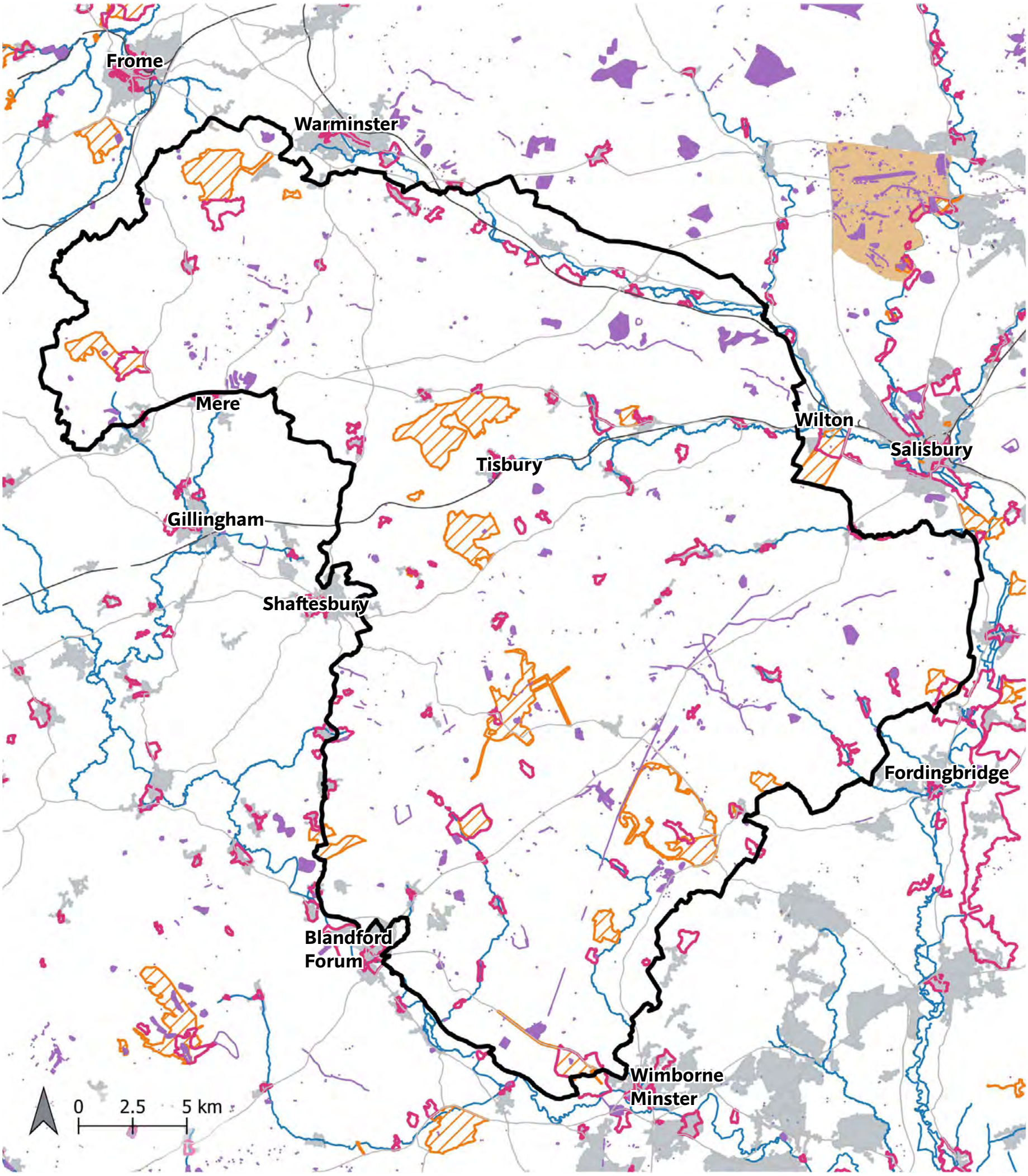
FIGURE 2.9
HISTORIC LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISATION
BROAD TYPES



KEY

Historic Environment Assets:

- Historic Parks and Gardens
- Conservation Areas
- World Heritage Sites
- Scheduled Monuments
- National Landscape Boundary
- Watercourse
- Railways
- Main Roads
- Built up areas

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CRANBORNE CHASE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

FIGURE 2.10
HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT ASSETS

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Early Prehistory

2.4.4 There is little evidence for Palaeolithic occupation within the National Landscape, 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.

2.4.5 By 8500 BC people had returned to the National Landscape, 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.

2.4.6 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.

2.4.7 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

2.4.8 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.

2.4.9 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.

2.4.10 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.

2.4.11 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.

2.4.12 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

2.4.13 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.

2.4.14 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.

2.4.15 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

2.4.16 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.

2.4.17 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. 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.

2.4.18 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. Heytesbury 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

2.4.19 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.

2.4.20 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.

2.4.21 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 droveways 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 National Landscape 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.

2.4.22 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, as well as protecting vension (deer and wild pigs) and vert (the undergrowth needed to feed the venison). 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 Blackmore Vale.

2.4.23 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 1, issued in or about the year 1280[15]. The approximate Outer Bounds of the Chase are shown on **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.

2.4.24 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 National Landscape 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

2.4.25 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

[15] Desmond Hawkins (1980, 1993) Cranborne Chase, The Dovecote Press Ltd.

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 Wylye, Broadchalke and Damerham. Many meadows have now reverted to marsh or dry pasture.

2.4.26 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.

2.4.27 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.

2.4.28 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.

2.4.29 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

2.4.30 Following the Napoleonic Wars conditions in the countryside for the poor were dire, and town populations grew rapidly. Changes to the agricultural landscape also began to occur, following the end of Forest Law in 1828 when the Chase was disfranchised.

2.4.31 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.

2.4.32 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.

2.4.33 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, in places blocking out iconic views from roads across the downland, and agri-environment schemes have started to encourage animal and plant species back to the downlands.

Settlement and Buildings

Rural Settlement Character

2.4.34 Settlement landscapes across England are related to the underlying landscape, particularly topography and proximity to water. Within the National Landscape 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

National Landscape falls within the `East Wessex' sub-province of England as described in the Atlas of Rural Settlement in England[16]. It is described as an area of overall low density settlement where the location of nucleated settlements is strongly affected by terrain.

Linear Villages

2.4.35 As a result of the terrain of the National Landscape, 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.

2.4.36 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

2.4.37 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

2.4.38 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

[16] Roberts B & Wrathmell S (2000) An Atlas of Rural Settlement in England, English Heritage

noticeable in the Wylye Valley where villages such as Steeple Langford, Stockton, Wylye, 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 Ebble 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 Wylye valley the hamlets and villages are often less than a kilometre apart.

Downland Villages

2.4.39 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

2.4.40 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

2.4.41 The dominant settlement pattern on the chalk downs is 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

2.4.42 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.

2.4.43 Traditionally buildings were constructed of local materials. Across the National Landscape a number of different materials were used, and these often determined the building style and method of construction. In the Wylye 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. In places, particularly in areas on or close to the greensand geology (for example at Kilmington and Maiden Bradley), greensand is used as a building stone. As a result, there is also some pressure to extract it.

2.4.44 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 National Landscape. 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.

2.4.45 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 National Landscape, 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 National Landscape. 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.

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

2.5 Perceptions of the Landscape

2.5.1 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 National Landscape are examined below.

Historical, Literacy and Artistic Associations

2.5.2 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 at 'Wren's Shop'. Sir Christopher Wren's Master Mason, Edward Strong, was also born in East Knoyle where he built a cottage and farm.

2.5.3 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 modern archaeology'.

2.5.4 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.

2.5.5 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 common land 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[17]:

"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 sooon be committed to cage
Vor a trespass in zomebody's tree.
Vor 'tis locken up, Thomas, an'blocken up.
Stranger or brother
Men mussen com nigh woone another."

2.5.6 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.

2.5.7 Relatively few artists are associated with the AONB, possibly reflecting its deeply rural character. Pisarro 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 Wylye Valley, while the sculptor Dame Elizabeth Frink lived near Blandford Forum.

2.5.8 Musical associations include the conductor Sir 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 Sir Cecil Beaton, who lived at Broad Chalke and Anthony Eden (Earl of Avon) who is buried at Alvediston.

[17] Barnes, W (1962), *The poems of William Barnes*, Centaur Press, Arundel

Descriptive Writings

The Downs

2.5.9 The writings of W H Hudson, an author closely associated with chalk landscapes, describes the downs above Martin[18]

" 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".*

2.5.10 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[19] 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."

2.5.11 Treves noted the contrast between the pastoral Vale of Blackmore 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."

[18] Hudson, W H (1910), A *shepherd's life*, republished in 1981 by Macdonald Futura Press, London
[19] Treves, SirF (1906), Highways and byways of Dorset, Macmillan, London

2.5.12 Hawkins was on Melbury Hill, overlooking the Vale, on Coronation night (1953):

"*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

2.5.13 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[20] 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[21]:

"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."

2.5.14 Cranborne Chase ('The Chase') featured in Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*[22] 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."

2.5.15 William Chafin, author of *Anecdotes of Cranborne Chase*[23] a character described by Sir Walter Scott[24] as "a Parson mad upon sport" recounted a conversation with a retired Keeper of the Earl of Pembroke at Fernditch Lodge:

20 Aubrey, J (1969), The natural history of Wiltshire, David and Charles, Newton Abbot
21 Hawkins, D (1993) , Cranborne Chase, Dovecote Press, Stanbridge, Wimborne, Dorset
22 Hardy, T (1968 edition) Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Macmillan, London
[23] Chafin, W (1818), Anecdotes of Cranborne Chase publisher unknown
[24] 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.

"...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

2.5.16 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, water meadows, arable fields and grass downland, and the way that the valleys are hidden among the folds of the downs. Indeed, Defoe[25] 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."

2.5.17 He described how:

2.5.18 "*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....".*

2.5.19 The Wylye Valley is regarded as being particularly attractive. Cobbett[26] 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, water meadows" and the cornfields which were sometimes up to 100 acres (40 hectares) in size.

2.5.20 Hutton[27] agreed, writing that:

[25] Defoe, D (1962), A tour through England and Wales in 1722, Everyman
[26] Cobett, W (1922), Rural rides, Cambridge University
[27] Hutton, E (1928), Highways and byways in Wiltshire, Macmillan, London.

"Of all the valleys of South Wiltshire I love best the Wylye 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."

2.5.21 Hudson described the character of the old stone and flint cottages that make up villages within these valleys:[28]

"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 which they stand, to the sloping downs at the side, and to the sky and clouds over all."

2.5.22 The river valleys draining the chalk downs to the south of the Ebble and Nadder Valleys are less well known, yet, as Hawkins[29] 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….".

2.5.23 In all these chalk river valleys, the landform and availability of water has had a profound influence of the settlement pattern, as Massingham[30] 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."

2.5.24 Turning, finally, to the Nadder, a valley distinguished by its greensand, clay and limestone geology, descriptions reflect the contrast with neighbouring chalk valleys. Whitlock[31] appreciates the contrast, highlighting the effect that freely available water supplies has had on the settlement pattern:

[28] Hudson, W H (1910), A shepherd's life, republished in 1981 by Macdonald Futura Press, London
[29] Hawkins, D (1993), Cranborne Chase, Dovecote Press, Stanbridge, Wimborne, Dorset
[30] Massingham, H J (1936), The English downland, Batsford, London
[31] Whitlock, R (1976), Wiltshire, Basford, London

"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."

2.5.25 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

2.5.26 The Cranborne Chase National Landscape 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 17th century, illustrates the dependency on sheep farming[32] :

"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 does excel arcadia in verdant and rich turfe and moderate aire, but in winter in deed our air is cold and rawe."

2.5.27 Defoe, writing in the first part of the 18th century, greeted the advent of mixed corn and sheep husbandry on the downs around Salisbury[33]

"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."

[32] Aubrey, J (1969), The natural history of Wiltshire, David and Charles, Newton Abbott
[33] Defoe, D (1962), A tour through England and Wales in 1722, Everyman

2.5.28 Not everyone was so appreciative however. A Mrs Haughton, in her book In a Wiltshire valley[34], 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."

2.5.29 By the middle of the 20th century the conversion of downland pasture to arable cultivation was almost complete. Massingham[35] 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

2.5.30 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[36] 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."

2.5.31 Simpson sounds a note of caution however, setting the richness of the surviving remains against our ability to destroy them[37]:

[34] Haughton, Mrs (1874), In a Wiltshire valley, publisher unknown
[35] Massingham, H J (1936) The English downland, Batsford, London
[36] Hawkins, D (1993), Cranborne Chase, Dovecote Press, Stanbridge, Wimborne, Dorset
[37] Simpson, D (1975), 'Introduction to the Prehistoric, Roman and Saxon Remains', in Pevsner, Nikolaus, The buildings of Wiltshire, Penguin, Harmondsworth

"...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."

2.6 Social and Economic Influences

Overview

2.6.1 This section provides an overview of the economic and social character of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape. It includes population characteristics, and information about the economy and deprivation in the National Landscape.

2.6.2 The economic and social characteristics of Cranborne Chase National Landscape are influenced by its location. Parts of the National Landscape 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, may also have an important influence on the area and in particular appears to concentrate economic pressures around Salisbury. The boundary of the National Landscape 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.

2.6.3 The economic and social characteristics of the National Landscape 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 National Landscape 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 National Landscape linked by good road access. This has created a high demand for housing within the National Landscape 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 National Landscape.

Population

2.6.4 The total population of the National Landscape is approximately 34,302 (based on the the mid-2020 estimate of the population living within the National Landscape boundary)[38]. This is sparsely populated compared to the rest of southern England and other National Landscapes, such as the neighbouring North Wessex Downs, which is almost twice the size of Cranborne spatially, but has a population of approximately 103,155 (mid-2020). The National Landscape is characterised by remote scattered dwellings, hamlets and occasional small villages.

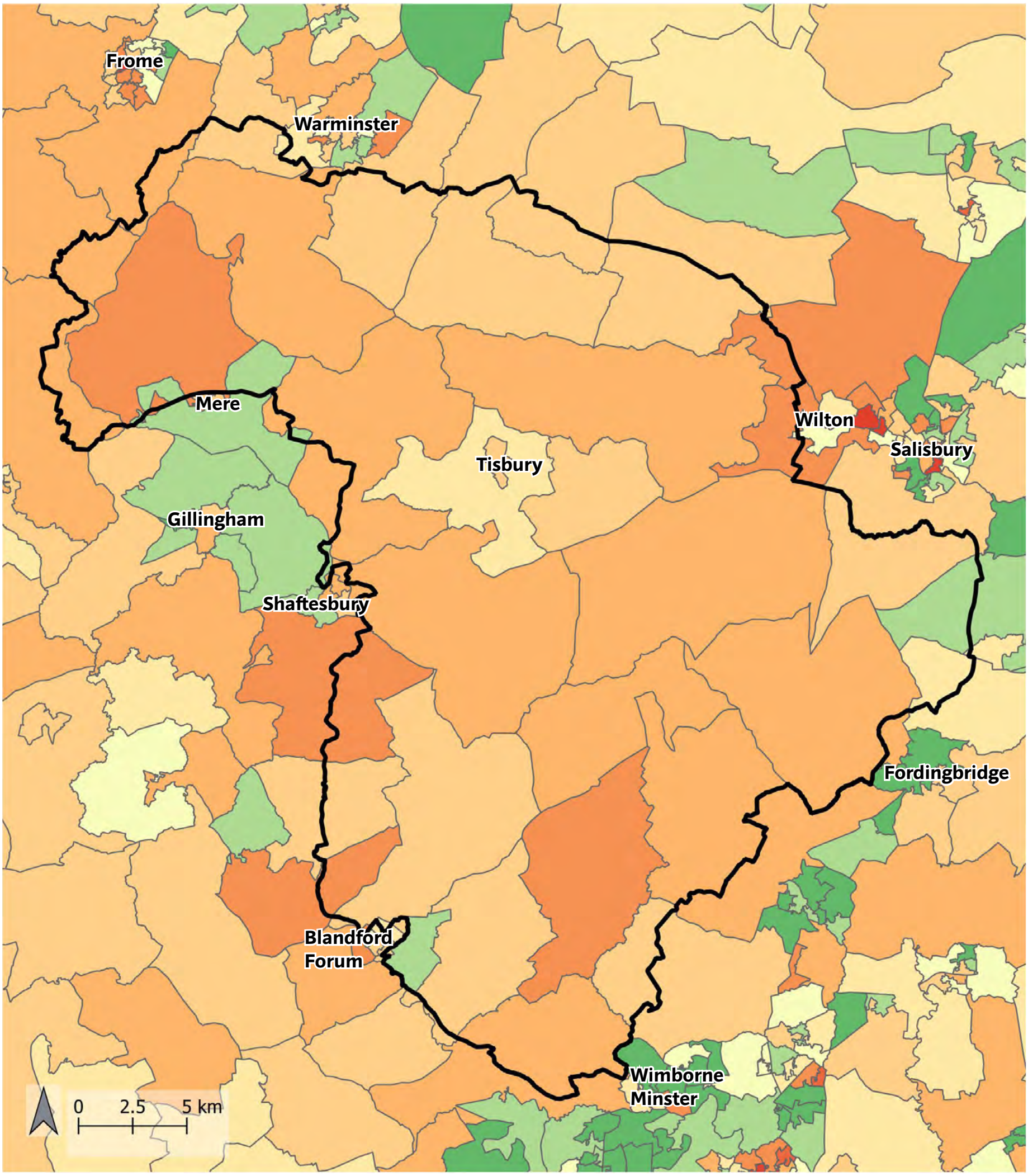
2.6.5 Population level is relatively unchanged over the last decade, with the mid-2011 estimated to be 34,520.

2.6.6 Towns on the edge of the National Landscape, such as Blandford Forum, have seen increases in population since 2011. For example, Blandford Forum's population has increased from 9,983 (2011) to 10,359 (2021), and Shaftesbury has increased from 7,314 (2011) to 9158 (2021).

Deprivation

2.6.7 The National Landscape as a whole is relatively affluent, with much of the area ranked within the top 50% least deprived areas for income deprivation in England according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019. However, when deprivation is considered as a whole (including the domains of income, employment, education, health, crime, barriers to housing and services and living environment) the area as a whole does not score particularly highly (see **Figure 2.11**). This is due to severe deprivation in terms of barriers to housing and services (most of the National Landscape scores in the lowest 10% when ranked against the rest of England), and in terms of living environment, where

38 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/adhocs/15185areasofoutstandingnaturalbeautyaonbpopulationestimatesformid2011tomid2020basedonbestfittingofoutputareastoaonb



KEY

Index of Multiple Deprivation: Overall Decile

- 1 (most deprived)
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 (least deprived)

- National Landscape Boundary
- Watercourse
- Railways
- Main Roads
- Built up areas

CBA

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FIGURE 2.11
INDEX OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION

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the indoor living environment scores particularly poorly (placing much of the area in the lowest 10% when ranked against the rest of England).

2.6.8 The National Landscape scores well in terms of housing and disability deprivation, with most of the area scoring in the top 20-30% (ranked against the rest of England), with only occasional pockets of lower scoring areas on the periphery of some of the larger settlements that surround the National Landscape, such as near to Shaftesbury and Blandford Forum. The area also has very mixed scores for education deprivation, ranging from top 10% to bottom 30%.

Features of the Economy

2.6.9 As a primarily rural area, agriculture and forestry has historically been an important sector to the National Landscape. Industry figures[39] suggest that agriculture still forms a significant component of enterprise within the National Landscape and its surrounding areas. Alongside agriculture, game shooting and its associated activities are important to some of the farms and estates. Other important industries include construction; professional, scientific and technical services; retail trade; administrative and support services; and manufacturing (particularly food products/beverages, and wood or metal products, including furniture). Industries related to tourism, such as accommodation and food service activities also contribute to the economy.

5.23. Tourism is widely recognised as an increasingly important sector for the National Landscape, as it is often based around the local environment, such as open gardens, woodland trails, fishing, and cycling. It will be important to ensure that the development of local tourism is environmentally sustainable.

Summary

2.6.10 The economy of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape 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 National Landscape and access to services and affordable housing within the National Landscape itself. The

[39] https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/construct/summary.asp?menuopt=200&subcomp=

overall growth in employment and general well-being masks some pockets of serious deprivation, particularly caused by poor access to services. Whilst there have been attempts locally to maintain and support community shops, rural village shops and Post Offices are reducing in number, NHS health practices are under pressure, and getting to services by public transport is rarely feasible. There are also very few fuel stations within which means trips have to be made out of the National Landscape to facilitate transport within it.

2.6.11 An ongoing 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.

2.7 Agricultural Character

Overview

2.7.1 Agricultural data for the whole National Landscape are summarised below in **Table 6.1**[40].

Farm Types (number of farms)	
Total Holdings	528
Cereals	151
General Cropping	68
Horticulture	12
Specialist Pigs	#
Specialist Poultry	#
Dairy	33
Grazing Livestock (Less Favoured Area)	0
Grazing Livestock (lowland)	202
Mixed	48
Other	5

Land Use (area - hectares)		
Total Area	87,247	c. 89%*
Rented land[(c)]	26,179	c. 27%*
Owned land	58,089	c. 59%*
Crops & bare fallow	47,868	c. 49%*
Temporary grass	6,787	c. 7%*
Permanent grass	21,877	c. 22%*
Rough grazing (sole right)	1,838	c. 2%*
Woodland	7,588	c. 8%*
Other land	1,288	c. 1%*

Number of animals	
Cattle - Dairy herd	8,155
Cattle - Beef Herd	3,400
Cattle - Calves <1yr	10,859
Other Cattle	9,190
Total cattle	31,604
Pigs - Female breeding herd	2,651
Other pigs	12,831
Total pigs	15,482
Sheep - Breeding ewes	36,262
Sheep - Lambs under 1yr	36,191
Other sheep and rams	2,425
Total Sheep	74,878
Poultry - Total Fowl	217,245
Other Poultry	64,350
Total Poultry	281,595
Goats	157
Horses	891

Crops (area - hectares)		
Total Cereals	34,518	c. 35%*
All other arable crops	11,159	c. 11%*
Horticultural crops	192	c. 0.2 %*

Labour (number of people)	
Farmers Full-time	440
Farmers Part-time	446
Salaried managers Full-time	55
Salaried managers Part-time	30
Employees Full-time	310
Employees Part-time	184
Casual workers	140
Total labour	1,603

= suppressed to prevent disclosure of information about individual holdings.

* = Approximate percentage of total National Landscape land area (NL area – 983 km^2)

[40] The information is based on the Defra June Survey of Agriculture (2021), with cattle results sourced from the Cattle Tracing System. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/structure-of-the-agricultural-industry-in-england-and-the-uk-at-june

2.7.2 Some key agricultural features of the National Landscape are set out below.

- There were a total of 528 registered agricultural holdings in June 2021[41], which occupied c. 89% of the total National Landscape area. The corresponding percentages of farmland for the South West and South East are c.74% and c. 60%, illustrating the high importance of agriculture as a land use in the National Landscape.

- Only 68, or 12.9% of registered agricultural holdings in the National Landscape are smaller than 5ha in area and over 42% are larger than 100ha, this shows a pattern of decreasing numbers of smaller holdings and increasing larger holdings over the past 2 decades. In comparison, both the South West and South East regions have more holdings under 5ha (both c. 15%) and fewer holdings greater than 100ha (c.19% and c.23% respectively). This suggests that farms in the National Landscape tend to be larger than the average for either region.

- 440 people considered themselves to be full time farmers out of a total agricultural labour force of 603 farmers, managers, employees and casual staff. In other words, full time farmers make up 27.45% of the total agricultural labour force, which is intermediate between the South West (34%) and the South East (22%).

- Over half of the farmland is used for cropping (c.55% of the farmed area), with cereals being the main type of crop. The respective proportions for the South West are 28% cropland, with 47% for the South East.

- Nearly a third (c.29%) of the farmland is pasture or rough grazing land, most of which is permanent grassland (in grass for 5 years or more). This is slightly lower than the South East (41%) and in the South West region much more of the farmland is used for grazing (64%).

- Sheep are the most common livestock in the National Landscape by number, followed by cattle and then pigs. Dairy cattle (breeding herd) outnumber beef cattle (breeding herd) by around 2.4 to 1. This pattern is broadly repeated in the South West and South East although dairy cattle (breeding herd) are less common in the South East than the South

[41] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/structure-of-the-agricultural-industry-in-england-and-the-uk-at-june

West (2.4 dairy cows per beef cow in the South West, and 1.1 beef cows per dairy cow in the South East).

- Horticultural enterprises such as field scale vegetables, fruit orchards, glasshouse and nursery crops are rare, accounting for about 0.4% of cropped land. In comparison, the South West includes c. 3% (of cropped land) as horticulture, and the South East has 4%.

- In places across the National Landscape, arable crops are chosen and harvested to facilitate game shooting. This, alongside other associated industry such as provision of holiday accommodation gives an extension to the economically productive farming season.

2.7.3 In summary, the Cranborne Chase National Landscape 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 National Landscape than they are in the South East. On the other hand, the National Landscape is more like the South West region in its high proportion of dairy livestock.

Agricultural Pressures for Change in the National Landscape

2.7.4 This section categorises the main pressures driving change in the agricultural land use of the National Landscape. 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.

Environmental land management schemes

2.7.5 To ensure the sustainable management of rural land, it is essential that farmers are encouraged to adopt good environmental and agricultural practices. The Government's 25-year Environment Plan and ministerial commitment that public money (for agriculture) must produce public goods (environmental gains) create environmental opportunities. In the transition to a new agri-environment regime, there are opportunities

to test options that restore soil health, produce healthy food, conserve wildlife, sustain clear air and clean water, and enhance landscapes within sustainable farming.

2.7.6 The UK Government is undertaking significant reform of agricultural policy and spending in England, moving from the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to Environmental Land Management schemes, designed for the countryside and environment. The new system phases out subsidies for land ownership and tenure. The new schemes will pay farmers and land managers to provide environmental goods and services alongside food production; and provide one-off grants to support farm productivity, innovation, research and development.

Changes to farm type and land use

2.7.7 Cattle and sheep numbers have remained relatively steady over the past decade whilst pig figures show a drastic reduction from c.47,500 in 2007, to c. 15,500 in 2021. This will include an equivalent reduction in the shelters associated with extensive pig rearing, which can have a detrimental visual impact in open landscape areas.

2.7.8 There has been a pattern of decreasing numbers of smaller farm holdings and increasing larger holdings over the past 2 decades.

2.7.9 Additional rural land management in the National Landscape includes game shooting, and woodland management. Game shooting has a significant effect on the local economy. In 2011 game management provided significant employment and housing,. It attracts large numbers of day and weekend visitors and supports a significant hospitality service outside of the main tourist season[42]. In addition, a 2007 study within Cranborne Chase National Landscape suggests that game shooting operations may increase to some extent in the future[43]. This may provide opportunity for increasing wildlife habitats.

2.7.10 With regards to woodland management, some woodlands are either under-managed or do not have a coherent management plan. The wood-fuel market continues to offer an opportunity to bring more small woodlands into positive management, including

[42] Cranborne Chase Partnership Plan 2019-2024
[43] Raising Our Game, D. Blake, 2007

providing a regular supply of quality timber to support local employment and local timber processing industries[44]. There may also be opportunities for woodland extensions or creation, appropriate to the relevant landscape character. With the increasing incidence of pests and diseases, landowners may need to be flexible in considering the species chosen for planting schemes[45]. A need has also been identified to maintain sustainable access, including provision for recreation within the woodlands o Cranborne Chase, taking opportunities to enhance the experience where appropriate[46].

Climate change

2.7.11 Agriculture is one of the most vulnerable sectors to the impacts of climate change, with changing temperatures and rainfall, shifting pests and diseases, and increasingly frequent extreme weather events affecting food production and security globally. However, agriculture could become more resilient to climate change impacts through new technology or by diversifying crops. Changing food demands and farming practices may also enable land to be taken out of agricultural use for land uses that deliver climate change mitigation and adaptation.[47]

2.7.12 Written evidence submitted by the National Farmer's Union to the UK Parliament in 2022 outlines the challenge of a changing climate[48]:

"*Climate change is arguably the greatest challenge facing the stability and long-term sustainability of global food production, and British farmers face increasingly frequent weather extremes. July 2022 was the driest July in England since 1911 and November 2021 to July 2022 were the driest since the seventies. There was only 24% average rainfall in July. In the NFU's last weather and climate survey, almost two-thirds of NFU members noticed an increase in extreme weather from 2005-2015. Over half of farm businesses had been affected by at least one severe event with flooding or very wet conditions dominating in that period.*"

[44] Woodlands of Cranborne Chase & North Dorset Forest Plan, Forestry Commission, 2016
[45] Cranborne Chase Partnership Plan 2019-2024
[46] Woodlands of Cranborne Chase & North Dorset Forest Plan, Forestry Commission, 2016
[47] https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-0600/POST-PN-0600.pdf
[48] https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/114316/pdf/#:~:text=Climate%20change%20is%20arguably%20the,the%20changing%20climate%20this%20year.

Diversification

2.7.13 Falling agricultural incomes, pressured by a changing climate, the increasing costs of inputs such as seed and fertiliser, changing global supply/demand for produce and the structural change in the ownership and management of farmland have led an increasing number of farmers and land managers in the National Landscape to diversify their businesses out of traditional agriculture. In terms of the landscape of the National Landscape, these changes are evident in the conversion of agricultural buildings to residential or industrial uses and the growing of new crops, including energy crops/feed stocks for biodigesters. There is also increasing pressure for the implementation of field-scale solar panel schemes. Recreation and tourism are presenting some farmers with the opportunity either to change their business so that this forms the mainstay of their business or to establish secondary enterprises such as farmhouse accommodation or shoots.

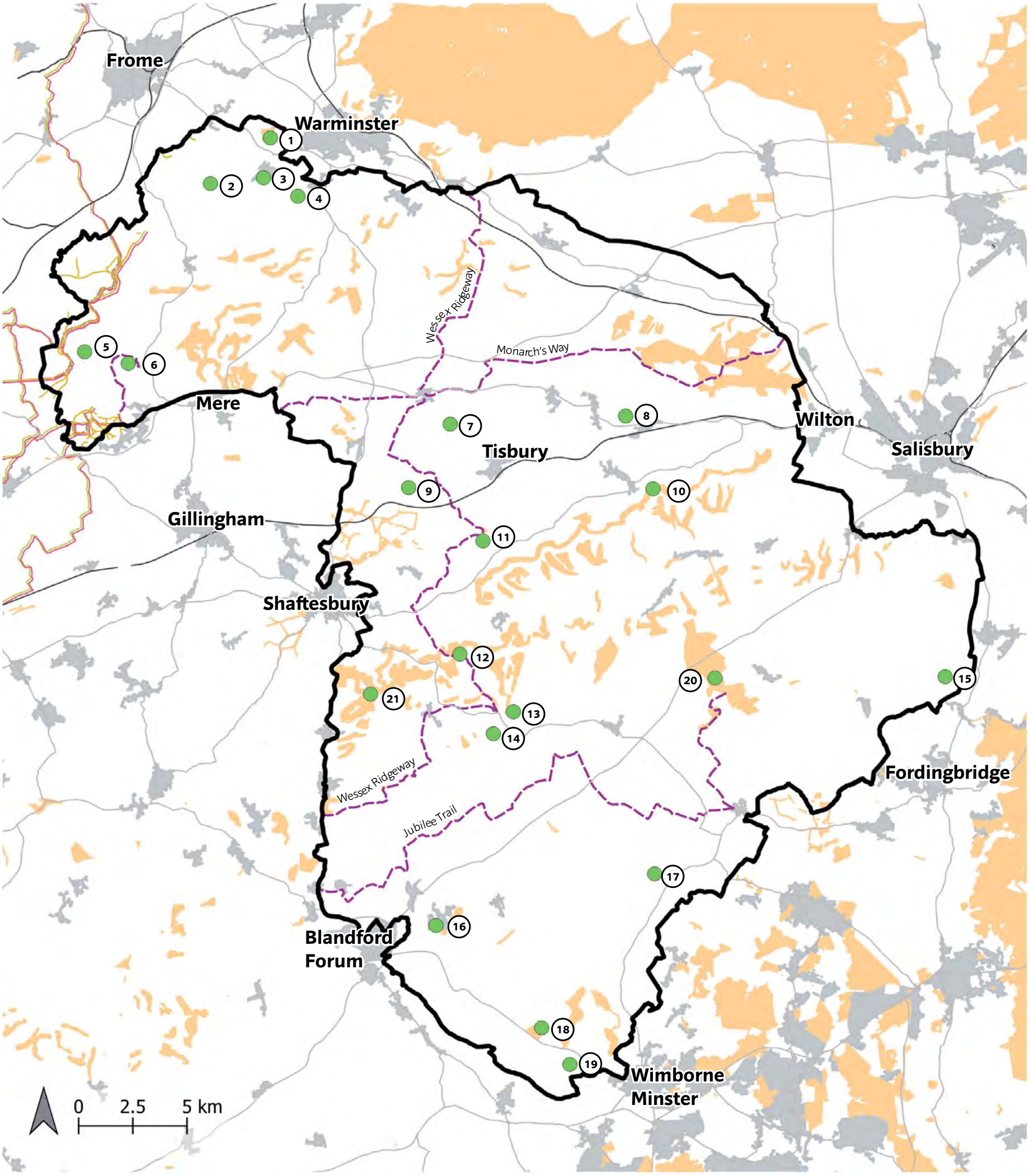
2.8 Recreational Influences

Overview

2.8.1 This section reviews the recreational character of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape, including access land, rights of way and main visitor attractions (**Figure 2.12**).

2.8.2 The pattern and diversity of Rights of Way within the National Landscape 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 National Landscape. The location of the National Landscape at the hub of this great arc of chalk increases the strategic significance of these routes.

2.8.3 Much of the present rights of way system within the National Landscape 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 and Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs) 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.



KEY

- Promoted Recreational Paths
- Access Land
- National Landscape Boundary
- Railways
- Main Roads
- Built up areas

Key Tourist Attractions:

1. Cley Hill Fort
2. Longleat House
3. Centre Parcs
4. Shear Water
5. Alfred's Tower
6. Stourhead Park
7. Fonthill Abbey
8. Philipps House
9. Pythouse
10. Fovant Badges
11. Old Wardour Castle
12. Win Green
13. Rushmore Golf Course
14. Larmer Tree Gardens
15. Breamore House and Museum
16. The Royal Signals Museum
17. Knowlton Church and Earthworks
18. Badbury Rings
19. Kingston Lacy House
20. Martin Down NNR
21. Fontmell and Melbury Downs

CRANBORNE CHASE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

FIGURE 2.12
RECREATION

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111424-LCA-Figs-2024-09.indd

Recreational Character by Landscape Type

2.8.4 The National Landscape 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 National Landscape 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.

2.8.5 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 National Landscape residents.

Chalk Escarpments

2.8.6 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 Escarpment (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, 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 Open Access Land.

Open Chalk Downland

2.8.7 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 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 Open Access Land.

Wooded Chalk Downland

2.8.8 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 hunting forest and governed by its own forest law. As a consequence, it remained free from modern agricultural practices until the middle of the 19th 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 19th 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.

2.8.9 The Rushmore Estate covers a significant area within this landscape and, housing the Larmer Tree Gardens and Rushmore 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.

2.8.10 The Wooded Chalk Downland is less intensively farmed than the Open Chalk Downland landscape type. This means it supports larger areas of Open Access Land.

Downland Hills

2.8.11 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

2.8.12 The provision of Public Rights of Way varies within the different chalk river valleys. Within the Wylye River Valley for example, there are large tracts of land along the river without public access. Similarly, in some of the Avon and Stour tributary valleys rights of way are largely absent. The Ebble Valley has more regular access provision with footpaths and bridleways typically running along the ridgelines - providing views across the dry river valleys. The Wylye Valley route - Horningsham to Salisbury - is a promoted and signposted Wiltshire cycleway route. The many picturesque hamlets and villages found aligning the river are themselves visitor attractions. Fishing is a core recreational pastime, associated with the river valleys, and the rivers are significant breeding sites for salmonids.

2.8.13 The Chalk River Valleys support areas of Open Access Land on the steepest valley sides where downland survives, for example on the valley sides of the Wylye and Ebble.

Greensand Terrace

2.8.14 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

2.8.15 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 National Landscape, 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 – Shear Water for example, attracting fishing enthusiasts. There are also a number of small areas of Open Access Land occurring across this landscape type.

Rolling Clay Vales

2.8.16 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 Open Access Land around Semley and Semley Common.

Recreation and Tourism

2.8.17 The Statutory Management Plan for the Cranborne Chase National Landscape 'Cranborne Chase Partnership Plan 2019-2024'[49] incorporates tourism[50]. The plan states that the high-quality environment offers immense opportunities for the further development of low impact, sustainable, rural tourism. 'Green' sustainable tourism within the National Landscape can provide an income for local people and support awareness and enjoyment of the landscape remains, as yet, under-developed. There are many sustainable, low impact tourism opportunities in the area including walking, cycling and horse riding, visiting historic sites or enjoying the range of local events.

[49] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/publications/aonb-management-plan/
[50] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CCAONB-Management-Plan-2019-2024-for-WEB.pdf

3.0 THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF CRANBORNE CHASE

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 This chapter sets out the updated classification and descriptions of landscape character types and areas within the Cranborne Chase National Landscape. Brief descriptions of each landscape character type are provided, followed by more detailed descriptions of the component landscape character areas that include an evaluation of the areas' strength of character, forces for change and recommended management objectives.

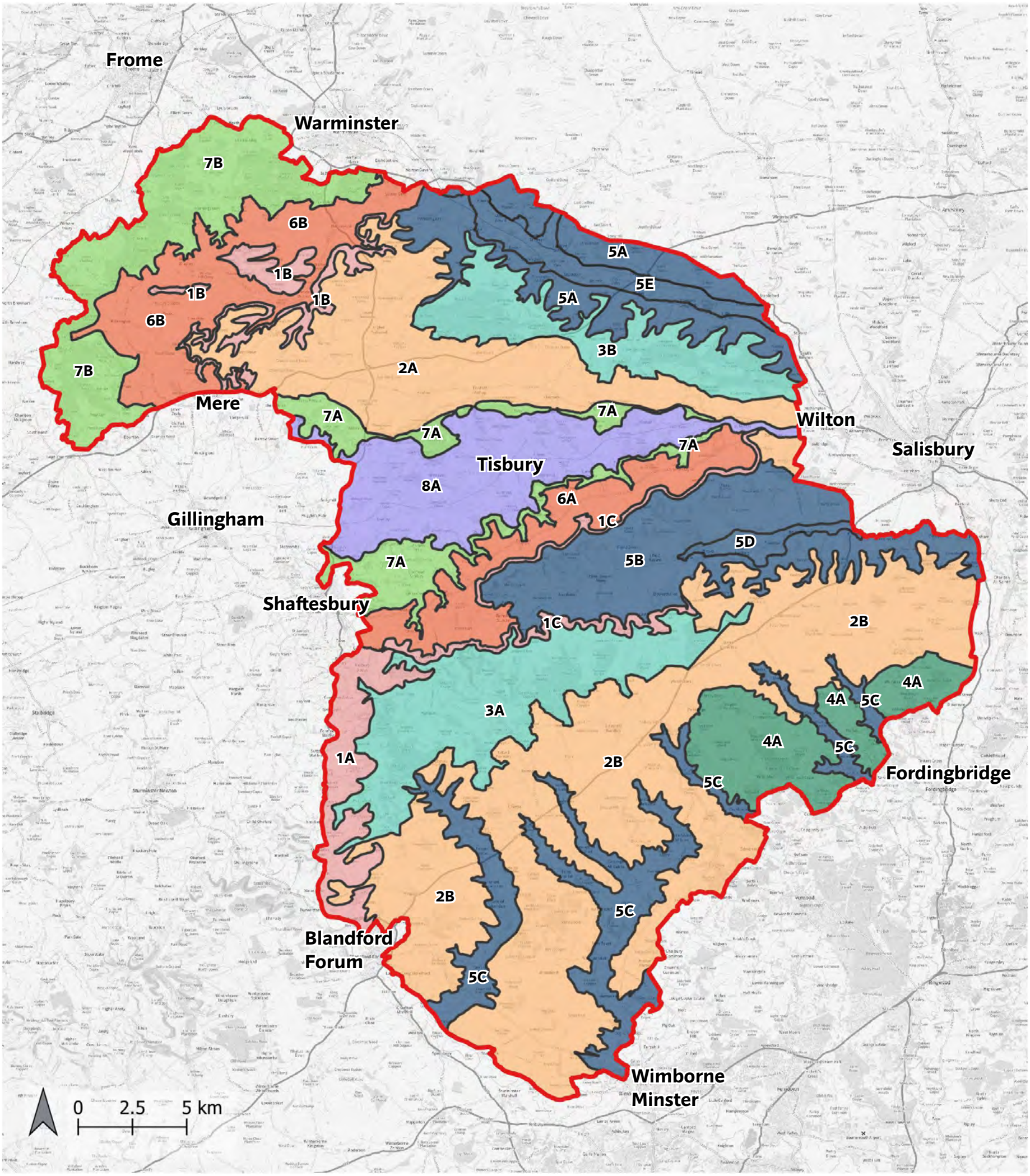
3.2 Landscape Classification

3.2.1 The physical and cultural influences described in **Chapter 2** have combined to create the unique and distinctive character of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape. The area is characterised by a diversity of landscapes and these variations and differences are represented by eight **Landscape Character 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

3.2.2 Each of the Landscape Character Types has a distinct and relatively homogeneous character that share broadly similar patterns of physical and cultural attributes in terms of geology, topography, drainage patterns, land cover, ecology and historic evolution. They may occur repeatedly in the study area, or in just one place.

3.2.3 The Landscape Character Types can be further sub-divided into component **Landscape Character Areas**. These are discrete geographic areas that share common characteristics with other areas of the same Landscape Character Type. Each Landscape Character Area has a distinct and recognisable local identity and sense of place.



KEY

Type 1: Chalk Escarpments

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

Type 2: Open Chalk Downland

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

Type 3: Wooded Chalk Downland

3A Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland
3B West Wiltshire Downs Wooded Chalk Downland

Type 4: Downland Hills

4A Martin –Whitsbury Downland Hills

Type 5: Chalk River Valleys

5A Wylye Chalk River Valley Sides
5B Ebble Chalk River Valley Sides
5C Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys
5D Ebble Chalk River Valley Floor
5E Wylye Chalk River Valley Floor

Type 6: Greensand Terrace

6a Fovant Greensand Terrace
6B Kilmington Greensand Terrace

Type 7: Greensand Hills

7A Donhead – Fovant Hills
7B Penselwood – Longleat Hills

Type 8: Rolling Clay Vales

8A The Vale of Wardour

National Landscape Boundary

CRANBORNE CHASE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

FIGURE 3.1
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES AND AREAS

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3.2.4 The updated landscape classification of Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas for the Cranborne Chase National Landscape is set out in **Table 3.1**. A comparison between the 2003 and 2024 landscape classifications is provided in **Appendix 2**.

Table 3.1: Landscape Classification

Landscape Character Types	Landscape Character Areas
1: CHALK ESCARPMENTS	**1A Melbury to Blandford Chalk Escarpments**
	1B West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment
	1C Fovant and Chalke Escarpment
2: OPEN CHALK DOWNLAND	**2A West Wiltshire Downs Open Chalk Downland**
	2B Southern Downland Belt Open Chalk Downland
3: WOODED CHALK DOWNLAND	**3A Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland**
	3B West Wiltshire Downs Wooded Chalk Downland
4: DOWNLAND HILLS	**4A Martin – Whitsbury Downland Hills**
5: CHALK RIVER VALLEYS	**5A Wylye Chalk River Valley Sides**
	5B Ebble Chalk River Valley Sides
	5C Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys
	5D Ebble Chalk River Valley Floor
	5E Wylye Chalk River Valley Floor
6: GREENSAND TERRACE	**6A Fovant Greensand Terrace**
	6B Kilmington Greensand Terrace
7: GREENSAND HILLS	**7A Donhead – Fovant Hills**
	7B Penselwood – Longleat Hills
8: ROLLING CLAY VALES	**8A The Vale of Wardour**

3.2.5 The spatial relationships between the Landscape Character Types and Areas are illustrated on **Figure 3.1**. The landscape classification mapping[51] has been prepared in a Geographic Information System at a scale of 1:25,000. It should be noted that there are subtle differences between and within the individual landscape character types and areas. The boundaries illustrated therefore usually indicate transitions in landscape character rather than marked changes on the ground.

[51] The data is available on the Cranborne Chase National Landscape Team's Geographic Information System

3.3 Landscape Character Descriptions

3.3.1 Descriptions of the Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas are included in this section, which follow the format outlined below:

Landscape Character Type Descriptions

- Description
- Key Characteristics (bullet points)

Landscape Character Area Descriptions

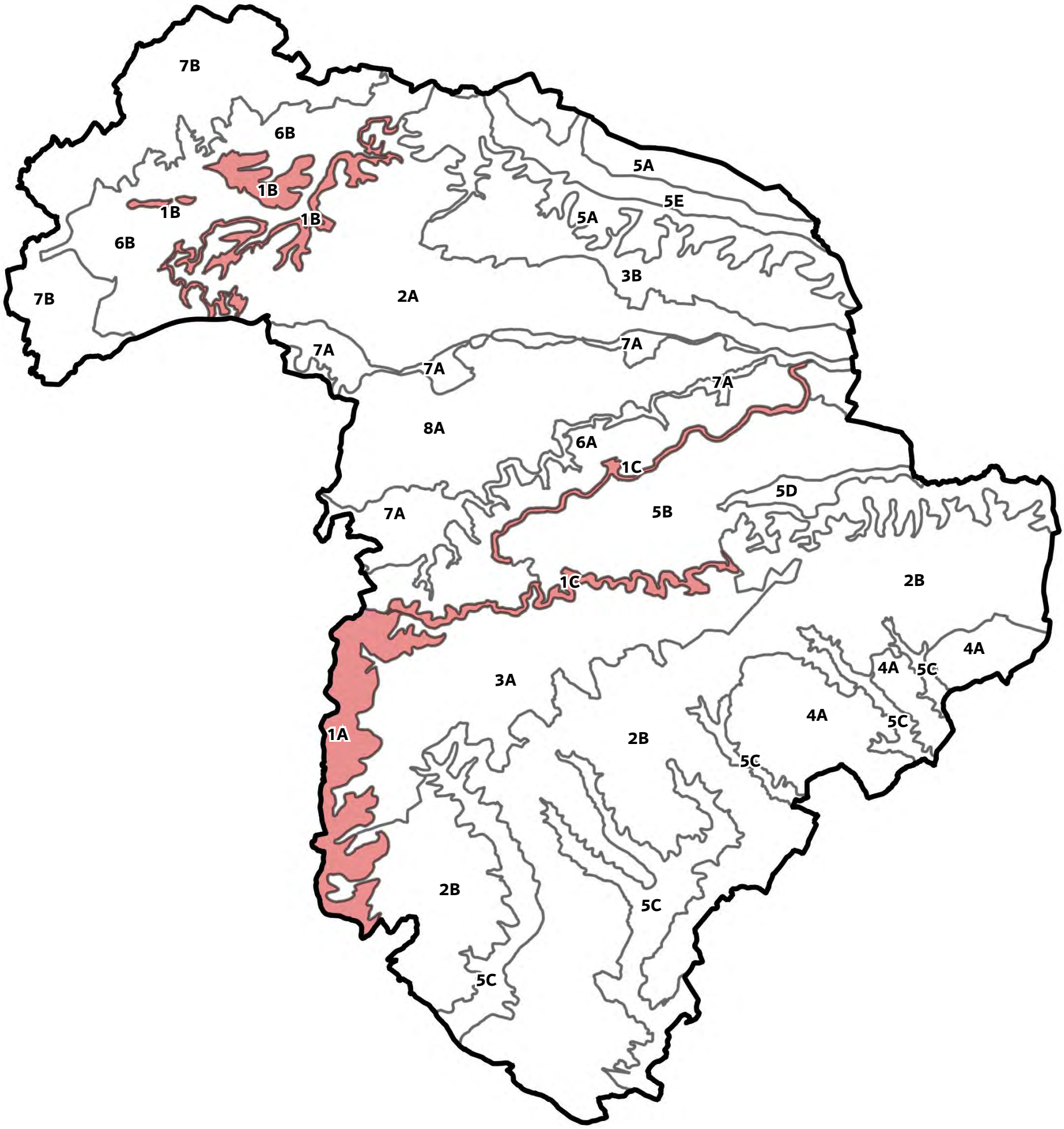
- Key Characteristics (bullet points)
- Location and Boundaries
- Summary of Visual Character
- Physical Influences:
  - Geology and soils
  - Landform and hydrology
  - Land cover
  - Biodiversity
- Human Influences:
  - Evidence of past social structure
  - Field patterns, boundaries and predominant date of enclosure
  - Land use and recreation
  - Historic development of settlement and relationship with the landscape
  - Settlement and built character
  - Historic environment
- Evaluation:
  - Strength of Character
  - Current Condition
  - Past and Present Change
  - Possible Future Trends
  - Management Objective

3.3.2 The strength of character of the Landscape Character Area is evaluated on a three-point scale of weak, moderate or strong based on judgements about how distinct and recognisable the pattern of physical and cultural attributes is that defines the character of the landscape, and the sense of place that they evoke.

3.3.3 The current overall condition of the Landscape Character Area is evaluated on a three-point scale of poor, moderate or good. This is based on judgements about how the condition and intactness of the different individual components (for example habitats, hedgerows, etc) in combination create a perception of the overall condition of the landscape.

3.3.4 Founded on an understanding of the current and future forces for change that may erode or enhance local distinctiveness, a management objective is recommended for each Landscape Character Area. These management objectives offer broad guidance on how landscape change might best be managed to protect and enhance the landscape features that make a key contribution to the area's local distinctiveness and sense of place. This guidance is not intended to be prescriptive, and local circumstances should be taken into account in consideration of proposals for landscape change.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE 1: CHALK ESCARPMENTS



Landscape Character Areas:

1A Melbury to Blandford Chalk Escarpment

1B West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment

1C Fovant and Chalke Escarpment

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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE 1: CHALK ESCARPMENTS

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 coombes 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 accessible Open Access Land. There are three distinct areas of chalk escarpment within the National Landscape.

Key Characteristics

- Dramatic chalk escarpments eroded into 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.
- 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 enclosure.
- Hanging woodland and sunken lanes are features of the steep, enclosing chalk coombes.
- Panoramic views over adjacent landscapes.

1A Melbury to Blandford Chalk Escarpment

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.

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1A MELBURY TO BLANDFORD CHALK ESCARPMENTS

Key Characteristics

- Dramatic chalk escarpment on the western edge of the National Landscape with rounded spurs and deep coombes.
- 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 coombes.
- 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 enclosure.
- Panoramic views with open sky from the top of the escarpment

Location and Boundaries

The *Melbury to Blandford Chalk Escarpment (1A)* forms the western boundary to the National Landscape 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 *Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland (3A)*, the transition to this landscape evidenced by the regular occurrence of woodland. To the north, the landscape is bounded by *The Fovant Greensand Terrace (6A)*.

Summary of Visual Character

The escarpment is a dramatic feature in the National 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 (3A)* and the *Southern Downland Belt (2B)* to the lowland clays of the Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys (5C). 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 panoramic view, 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 Hambledon Hill are separated from the main body of chalk by the River Iwerne (and lie beyond the National Landscape boundary), this scarp is largely continuous. It is far from straight, however, the chalk having been eroded into steep valleys or coombes, 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 coombes; 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 (1C*). 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 coombes 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.

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 and SSSI), one of the largest remaining chalk grasslands within the National Landscape. 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*).

Adjacent to this large chalk grassland reserve is Sutton Combe (SSSI), a 16.7ha 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 locally for their nature conservation interest. 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) within LCA	Summary of importance
Fontmell and Melbury Downs (97.4% of this SSSI and SAC falls within LCA 1A)	SAC SSSI	256.8 256.8	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, with scrub mosaics • Large colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*) • Population of the silver-spotted skipper (*Hesperia comma*) a nationally rare butterfly in Britain
Sutton Combe	SSSI	16.7	• Unimproved chalk grassland, with scrub mosaics • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia)*

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 enclosure.

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are 18th, 19th and 20th century fields. The 18th and 19th century fields include planned enclosure and the large scale enclosure of downland. There are some new, modified and enlarged 20th century fields, with a smaller number of irregular and semi-irregular pre-1800 fields, for instance close to Iwerne Minster and Fontmell Magna.

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.

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. 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 National Landscape boundary. A large proportion of the escarpment is Open Access Land. This designation relates to the remnant downland areas and is therefore found on the steepest scarps. There is also a significant area of Open Access 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 coombes, 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 (3A)* 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 National Landscape.

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 coombes giving a convoluted appearance, with panoramic views from the escarpment. 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, 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 SSSI– 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 overall 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.
- 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

Decreases in livestock grazing leading to loss of grassland habitat to scrub.

Heavy use of areas of CRoW Act access land can result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape. Visitor management, particularly in the aftermath of increased local usage and 'staycations' that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic, will continue to be a priority.

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

Increased efficiency of production may divert less productive arable land, such as the steepest slopes and areas with thinnest soils, to environmental management, such as reversion to chalk grassland.

The evolving, post Brexit, Environmental Land Management schemes accessible to farmers will support 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. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- 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.

- 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 Access Land and viewpoints.
- 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.

1B West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment

Woodland swathes 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 National Landscape.

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.

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1B WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS CHALK ESCARPMENT

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.
- Panoramic views with open skies
- 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 enclosure 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 National Landscape, the *West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment (1B)* marks the northern edge of the *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 Chalk River Valley Sides (5A)*, with the main body of the escarpment running in a convoluted south westerly direction to meet

the National Landscape 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 National Landscape, 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 *Kilmington Greensand Terrace (6B)* landscape - providing a strong contrast in relief.

The escarpment, formed where layers of chalk have been compressed[52], 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 have led to deep incisions – forming coombe valleys.

The escarpment provides commanding long distance views over the neighbouring *Kilmington 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 National Landscape, 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 define the geology at the lowest reaches, and

[52] to form a fold, or where the chalk has faulted.

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 *Kilmington 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 *Kilmington 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 coombes 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 coombes.

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 *Kilmington Greensand Terrace (6B)* and the escarpment.

Biodiversity

The *West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment (1B)* 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, 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) within LCA	Summary of importance
Brimsdown Hill (98.4% of this SSSI falls within LCA 1B)	SSSI	182.3	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, with areas of scrub and ancient woodland
Long Knoll (99.6% of this SSSI falls within LCA 1B)	SSSI	34.4	• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics
Whitesheet Hill (70.6% of this SSSI falls within LCA 1B)	SSSI	99.5	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk and mesotrophic grassland with scrub mosaics • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (Eurodryas aurinia)

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 Wylye, 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 enclosure, although many field boundaries are likely to have been lost in recent years.

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are mainly Semi-enclosed Escarpments created primarily in the 20th century, the creation of these fields has involved the enclosure of the previously open chalk downland escarpments. They are very steep and sinuous in nature, with curving and semi-irregular boundaries at the top and bottom of the slope. Other types of 18th, 19th and 20th century fieldscapes are present including parliamentary enclosure. In the escarpments to the west of Brixton Deverill, 18th and 19th century enclosure boundaries have been incorporated into the edges of the regularly spaced subdivision of the escarpment. The fact that these escarpments were only enclosed relatively recently means that they preserve traces of older land use. These include prehistoric earthworks such as cross dykes, and medieval strip lynchets, most notably just north of Mere.

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 Wylye. 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 Open Access Land as defined in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. 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 *Kilmington Greensand Terraces (6B),* where settlements occur, following the course of the River Wylye nestled at the base or break of the escarpment slope. The Deverills are a good example – Kingston, Monkton and Brixton Deverill located where the Wylye has cut through the chalk. The Deverills are considered in more detail under character area *Kilmington Greensand Terrace (6B)*.

Historic Environment

The chalk escarpment south of the River Wylye represents the transition between the *Kilmington Greensand Terrace (6B)* and the open chalk downland of the *West Wiltshire Downs (2A)*. 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 overall 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.

Possible Future Trends

Decreases in livestock grazing leading to loss of grassland habitat to scrub.

Areas of Open Access Land could result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape. Visitor management, particularly in the aftermath of increased local usage and 'staycations' that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic, will continue to be a priority. The prominent character of the scarp may to bring demands for construction of tall structures, including communication masts and wind turbines.

Increased efficiency of production may divert less productive arable land, such as the steepest slopes and areas with thinnest soils, into environmental management, such as reversion to chalk grassland.

The evolving, post Brexit, Environmental Land Management schemes accessible to farmers will support 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. Tree and hedgerow planting should follow the key principles and guidance set out in the Cranborne Chase 'Right Tree, Right Place' guidance document[53].
- 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. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- 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 Open Access Land. 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 structures, 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.

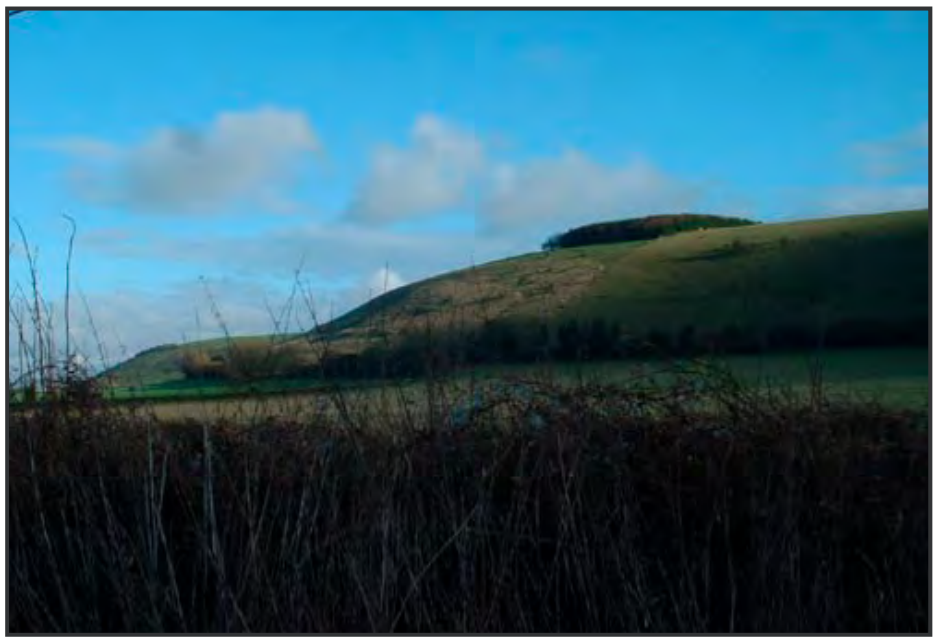
[53] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RTRP-Guidance-WEB-JUNE-2022.pdf

1C Fovant and Chalke Escarpment

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. alongside scrub growth/encroachment.

September 2024
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1C FOVANT AND CHALKE ESCARPMENTS

Key Characteristics

- Two distinct escarpments (Fovant and Chalke) separated by and bounding the *Ebble Chalk 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 seven statutory nature conservation sites falling 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, with open skies.
- Absence of settlement heightening a sense of isolation.

Location and Boundaries

This character area occupies a central location within the National Landscape, 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 River Valley (5B)* with the southern edge marking the transition to character area *Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland (3A)*.

Summary of Visual Character

These two escarpments are dominant features in the landscape and make a substantial contribution to the character of the National Landscape 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 (8A)*, 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)*. Mixed woodland nestles at the foot of the chalk escarpment forming a transitional belt and marking the distinctive change in landform at the edge of the greensand terrace.

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and Soils

In common with all the escarpments within the National Landscape, 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 National 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 (1C)* are characterised by significant unimproved chalk grassland cover, with a total of seven statutory nature conservation sites falling 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 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 45.6ha site, which is of particular note for the presence of scattered juniper (*Juniperus communis*), a declining species.

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

Site name	**Designation**	**Site area (ha) within LCA**	**Summary of importance**
Bowerchalke Down (86.7% this SSSI falls within LCA 1C)	SSSI	116.3	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Colony of early gentian (Gentianella anglica)
Burcombe Down (48.2% of this SSSI falls within LCA 1C)	SSSI	22.0	• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Colony of juniper (Juniperus communis)
Pincombe Down (99.97% of this SSSI falls within LCA 1C)	SSSI	22.7	• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics
Win Green Down (94.9% of this SSSI falls within LCA 1C)	SSSI	24.7	• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Colony of early gentian (Gentianella anglica)
Winklebury Hill (82.6% of this SSSI falls within LCA 1C)	SSSI	53.5	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland and scrub mosaics • Colony of early gentian (Gentianella anglica)
Fontmell and Melbury Downs (0.03 % of this SAC and SSSI falls within LCA 1C)	SAC SSSI	0.07 0.07	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, with scrub mosaics • Large colony of early gentian (Gentianella anglica) • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (Eurodryas aurinia) • Population of the silver-spotted skipper (Hesperia comma) a nationally rare butterfly

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 Winkelbury, 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 enclosure, although many field boundaries are likely to have been lost in recent years. The escarpment slopes are broken by small areas of surviving ancient woodland and more recent plantations.

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are mainly Semi-enclosed Escarpments created primarily in the 20th century, the creation of these fields has involved the enclosure of the previously open chalk downland escarpments. They are very steep and sinuous in nature, with curving and semi-irregular boundaries at the top and bottom of the slope. Other types of 18th and 19th century fieldscapes are present including parliamentary enclosure.

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 *Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland (3A)*, 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 Word War I soldiers between the 1914- 1918 period. Three badges were subsequently added between the 1950s and 1970s, the Poppy was added as part of the 2018 commemorations (100 years after World War I), and the 'map' of Australia has recently been restored. Natural weathering from wind and rain over time, combined with visitor pressure, has led to the erosion of these figures[54].

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 (1C)* are largely devoid of settlement. However, old ox droves, hill forts (e.g. Winkelbury 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.

[54] A restoration society has been founded to avoid the loss of these unique landscape features.

Historic Environment

The *Fovant and Chalke Escarpments (1C)* represents the transitional zones between the *Ebble Chalk River Valley (5B)*, with its adjacent chalk dip slope and downs, and the *Fovant Greensand Terrace (6A)* to the north and *Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland (3A*) to the south. Most of the earthwork features of the scarps, such cross-ridge dykes and round barrows, appear to extend into this zone from their main areas of distribution on the downs. The regimental badges and other significant markings 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:

- 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 enclosure, 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 (1C)* 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 overall 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 growth and encroachment onto the chalk grassland has also occurred.

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.
- 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 may 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 Access Land could result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape. Visitor management, particularly in the aftermath of increased local usage and 'staycations' that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic, will continue to be a priority. The prominent character of the scarp may bring demands for construction of tall structures, including communication masts and possibly wind turbines.

Increased efficiency of production may divert less productive arable land, such as the steepest slopes and areas with thinnest soils, to environmental management, such as reversion to chalk grassland.

The evolving, post Brexit, Environmental Land Management schemes accessible to farmers will support continued environmental management of the landscape.

The Fovant Badges Society aims to continue the preservation and maintenance of the Fovant Badges[55].

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

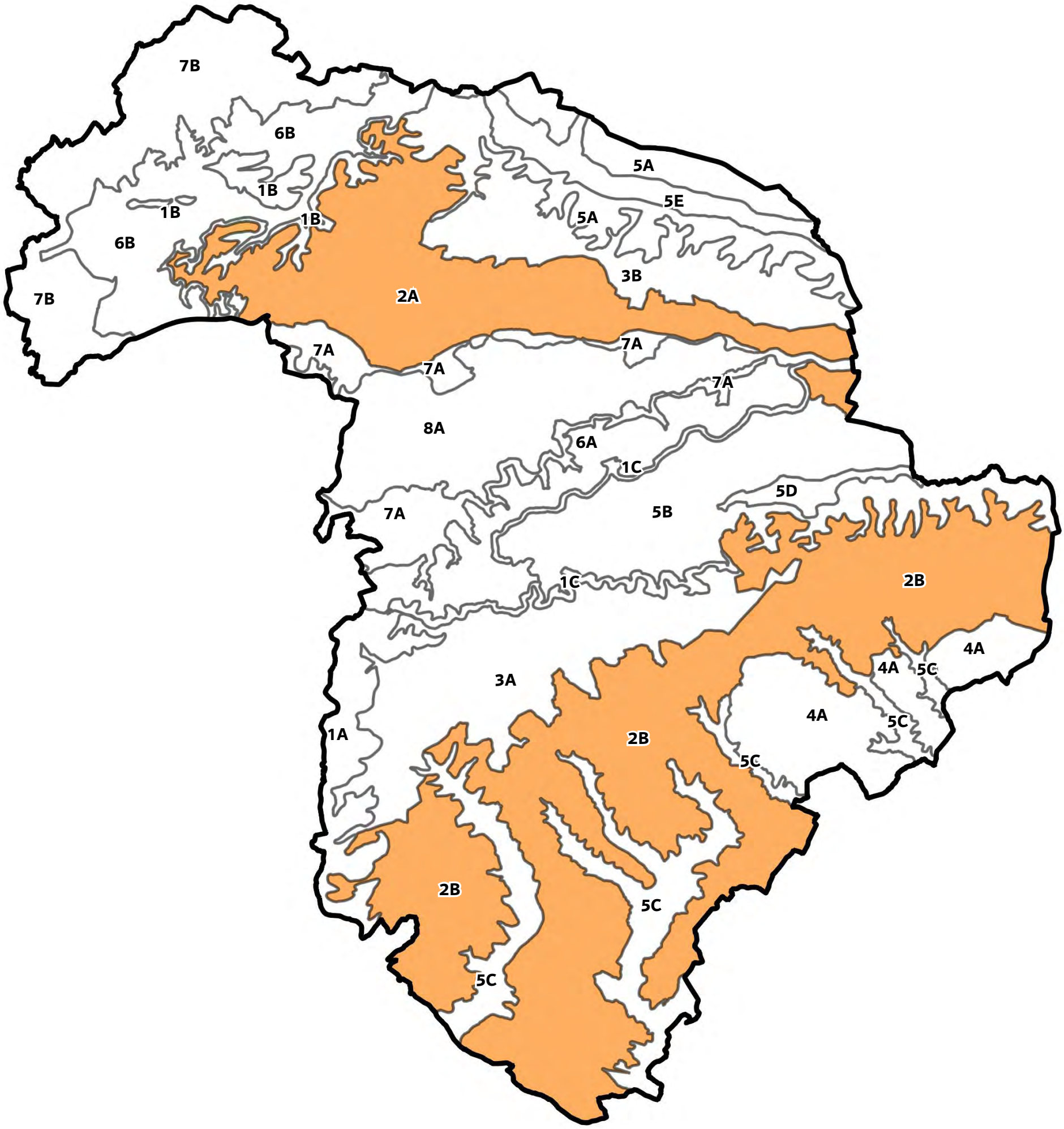
Management Objective

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. Restoration of lost and/or declining features such as the woodland ivers which occur in places along or near to the break of slope will improve condition, quality and visual integrity of the landscape as well as its 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.
- Promote sustainable management of recreational access to areas of Open Access Land and viewpoints, and monitor erosion as a result of visitor pressure.
- Continue with the ongoing management and renovation of the Fovant Badges (and similar features).
- 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. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- Ensure that tall structure, such as communication masts and wind turbines, do not create `visual clutter' on the skyline of the scarp.

[55] https://fovantbadges.com/

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE 2: OPEN CHALK DOWNLAND



Landscape Character Areas:

2A West Wiltshire Downs Open Chalk Downland

2B Southern Downland Belt Open Chalk Downland

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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE 2: OPEN CHALK DOWNLAND

Description

Two large tracts of open chalk downland, divided by the *Vale of Wardour (8A)* account for a large proportion of the National Landscape. 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 enclosure.
- 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 National Landscape.
- 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

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.

Historic routeways across the downs

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2A WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS OPEN CHALK DOWNLAND

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.
- Straight-sided fields representing late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary enclosure, with large-scale fields resulting from 20th century boundary loss.
- Large-scale agricultural landscape with open skies and long views
- 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.
- Broadleaved 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 including the localised preserved prehistoric/Romano-British landscapes at White Sheet Hill
- Prehistoric/Romano-British landscape 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 National Landscape, 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 National Landscape boundary) to Mere in the west. To the south lies *Donhead – Fovant Greensand Hills (7A)* and the *Vale of Wardour (8A)* and to the north lies the *West Wiltshire Downs Wooded Chalk Downland (3B)* and the *Wylye Chalk River Valley Sides (5A)*. The north-west edge is defined by the distinctive *West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment (1B)*.

There is a smaller area of West Wiltshire Downs Open Chalk Downland (2A) to the south east, separated from the main area by the Vale of Wardour (8A).

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.

There is a feeling of exposure and expanse, with open skies 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 in the *West Wiltshire Downs Woodland (3B) and* crosses the boundary into the *West Wiltshire Downs* (2A).

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 at the boundary with the *West Wiltshire Downs Woodland (3B)*.

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.

There are 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

The landscape has extensive areas of arable crop production, and 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, four Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) fall wholly or partly within the character area.

There are two small reserves with SSSI status wholly within the character area. The first, Charnage Down Chalk Pit (SSSI) is designated for its geological importance. The second, Tytherington Down (SSSI) is a relatively small area of unimproved chalk grassland, which supports a small colony of the tuberous thistle (*Cirsium tuberosum*).

Part of White Sheet Hill (SSSI) crosses over into the character area from the *West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment (1B).* 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.

A small area of Burcombe Down (SSSI), is located within the southern section of the character area, which is of particular note for the presence of scattered juniper (*Juniperus communis*), a declining species.

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

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha) within LCA	Summary of importance
Burcombe Down (46.3% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2A)	SSSI	21.1	• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Colony of juniper (*Juniperus communis)*
Charnage Down Chalk Pit	SSSI	3.6	• Geologically important site
Tytherington Down	SSSI	5.7	• Unimproved chalk grassland • Small colony of tuberous thistle (*Cirsium tuberosum*) a nationally rare plant species in the British Isles
White Sheet Hill (26.9% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2A)	SSSI	37.9	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk and mesotrophic grassland with scrub mosaics • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*)

HUMAN INFLUENCES

Evidence of Past Social Structure

The Neolithic causewayed enclosure at White Sheet 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 Cow Down 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 frequency of cross-ridge dykes, and the string of hillforts and defended enclosures overlooking the Wylye valley, such as White Sheet Hill. Following the hiatus of the post-Roman period there developed new feudal social structures, centered 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 Enclosure

The landscape was largely cleared of woods as a result of prehistoric and Romano-British farming, although modern plantation remains. The prehistoric field systems may have been re-used temporarily in the medieval period. 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 enclosure 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.

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are 18th, 19th and 20th century fields, with a small number of regular, semi-irregular and irregular pre-1800 fields, for instance close to Chilmark and Hindon. The 20th century fields include a mix of medium new fields, modified fields and large fields.

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. 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. There are also a number of small sites of Open Access Land to the western boundary of the character area, for example at Pertwood Down.

Historic Development of Settlement and Relationship with the Landscape

Despite the presence of the White Sheet 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 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 (2A)* do not match the preserved ancient landscape of Salisbury Plain to the north, or *Cranborne Chase (3A)* 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 White Sheet Hill points to a continuity of economic, social and strategic roles for the downs. 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 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 National Landscape over the past three centuries.
- Arable crop changes influenced by globalisation, commodity prices, farm inputs and costs impacting on both the aesthetics and the landscape functions.
- An increase in the number of rectangular, unsympathetic, 20th century game coverts grown by commercial shoots.
- 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 A350. Development and shelterbelt planting along transport corridors alters views across the downs and diminishes the sense of openness for those travelling through the landscape. Intensification of use and highway paraphernalia, and potential visibility of any development.
- The loss of features such as hedgerows, combined with varied approaches to field boundary management affects the visual integrity of the landscape, with new hedge planting blocking existing views and modifying the open, expansive character.
- 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.
- Visual and soil impacts of extensive pig farming.

Possible Future Trends

Potential diversification into other crops such as biomass crops and diversification of farm businesses into secondary enterprises such as farmhouse accommodation or commercial shoots. These new land uses may result in increased sense of enclosure.

The evolving, post Brexit, Environmental Land Management schemes accessible to farmers will support continued environmental management of the landscape.

Heavy use of areas of Open Access Land can result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape. Visitor management, particularly in the aftermath of increased local usage and 'staycations' that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic, will continue to be a priority.

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, 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.

- 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. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- 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. Tree and hedgerow planting should follow the key principles and guidance set out in the Cranborne Chase 'Right Tree, Right Place' guidance document[56].
- Ensure that the development of tall structures, such as communication masts and wind energy developments, are in scale with the landscape.
- Ensure development of any structures do not threaten the setting of important archaeological earthwork features.

[56] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RTRP-Guidance-WEB-JUNE-2022.pdf

2B Southern Downland Belt Open Chalk Downland

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

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.

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2B SOUTHERN DOWNLAND BELT OPEN CHALK DOWNLAND

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 enclosure.
- 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 National Landscape. It is bound to the north by *Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland (3A)* and the *Ebble Chalk 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 (2B)* is characterized by intensive and widespread arable agriculture, the area has retained a significant number of sites of nature conservation importance. This includes 18 sites designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which fall wholly or partly within the character area. Lowland calcareous grassland is the most characteristic priority habitat type, but a variety of other habitats are also represented, including deciduous woodland and good quality semi-improved grassland.

Nationally important chalk grassland sites include Blandford Camp (SSSI), Clearbury Down (SSSI), and Martin and Tidpit Down (NNR and SSSI). 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 (2B)*. 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) within LCA**	**Summary of importance**
Blandford Camp	SSSI	28.7	• Unimproved largely plateau chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*)
Clearbury Down	SSSI	31.2	• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics
Great Yews	SAC SSSI	29.1 29.1	• Extensive area of almost pure Yew (*Taxus baccata*) woodland
Handcock Bottom (9.1% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	5.0	• Ancient woodland with rich associated lichen flora • Unimproved chalk grassland • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*)
Knighton Downs and Woods (9.9% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	20.6	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, scrub and semi-natural woodland • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*), • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*)

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha) within LCA	Summary of importance
Martin and Tidpit Down (50.7% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B) (54.2% of this NNR falls within LCA 2B)	NNR SSSI	184.8 186.5	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, chalk heath and scrub • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica)* • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*) • Population of the silver-spotted skipper (*Hesperia comma*)
Moors River System (0.1% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	0.4	• River system noted for its exceptional diversity of aquatic and wetland plants and rich assemblages of aquatic invertebrates • Populations of bullhead (*Cottus gobio*) and brook lamprey (*Lametra planeri*)
Oakhills Coppice	SSSI	14.4	• Ancient woodland particularly important for communities of epiphytic lichens
Odstock Down (14% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	1.8	• Unimproved chalk grassland
Pentridge Down (21.1% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	13.2	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, acid grassland and scrub • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*), • Colony of juniper (*Juniperus communis*) • Population of fairy shrimp (*Chirocephalus diaphanus*)
Sutton Meadows (27.4% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	1.4	• Neutral to mildly acidic hay meadow
Toyd Down and Quarry (96% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	6.4	• Unimproved and pioneer chalk grassland communities
Stratford Toney Down (0.11% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	0.03	• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics
Homington and Coombe Bissett Downs (0.1% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	0.03	• Several blocks of unimproved chalk grassland

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha) within LCA	Summary of importance
Bowerchalke Down (1.6% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	2.1	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*)
Throope Down (5.1% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	1.9	• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*)
Cranborne Chase (1% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	4.5	• Extensive tract of enclosed medieval coppice, wood pasture and 19th century hazel plantation • Exceptionally rich lower plant flora • Population of a nationally rare hoverfly (*Brachypalpus laphriformis*) • Population of dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*)
Chickengrove Bottom (0.95% of this SSSI falls within LCA 2B)	SSSI	0.1	• Intimate mixture of unimproved chalk grassland, scrub and woodland • Small colony of tuberous thistle (*Cirsium tuberosum*) a nationally rare plant species in the British Isles • Small population of dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*)

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 Cursus, 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

enclosure, followed by 20th century agricultural intensification. Only Martin Down remained unenclosed, commoners' rights surviving until the late 20th century.

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are 18th, 19th and 20th century fields. There are a number of pre-1800 regular, semi-irregular and sinuous fields, for instance near Martin and Chettle. The 20th century fields include a mix of new, enlarged and modified fields, whilst the 18th and 19th century fieldscapes are comprised of parliamentary and planned enclosure.

Land Use and Recreation

Unhindered by physical constraints, this is an intensive agricultural landscape, dominated by 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 Open Access 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 Open Access Land.

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 National Landscape 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 (5C)*. 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, and there is a recent housing development to the north comprised of c.14 family homes. Blandford Camp is a military base on the downs above Blandford Forum.

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 (2A)*. 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 Downs Open Chalk Downland (2A),* 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 National Landscape 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. Intensification of use and highway paraphernalia, and potential visibility of any development.
- 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 with new hedge planting blocking existing views and modifying the open, expansive character.
- Where coniferous blocks of planting have been introduced, for example, to the north west of Breamore 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. Arable crop changes influenced by globalisation, commodity prices, farm inputs and costs impacting on both aesthetics and landscape functions.

Possible Future Trends

The evolving, post Brexit, Environmental Land Management schemes accessible to farmers will support continued environmental management of the landscape.

Areas of Open Access Land and the proximity to populations of surrounding towns could result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape. Visitor management, particularly in the aftermath of increased local usage and 'staycations' that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic, will continue to be a priority.

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

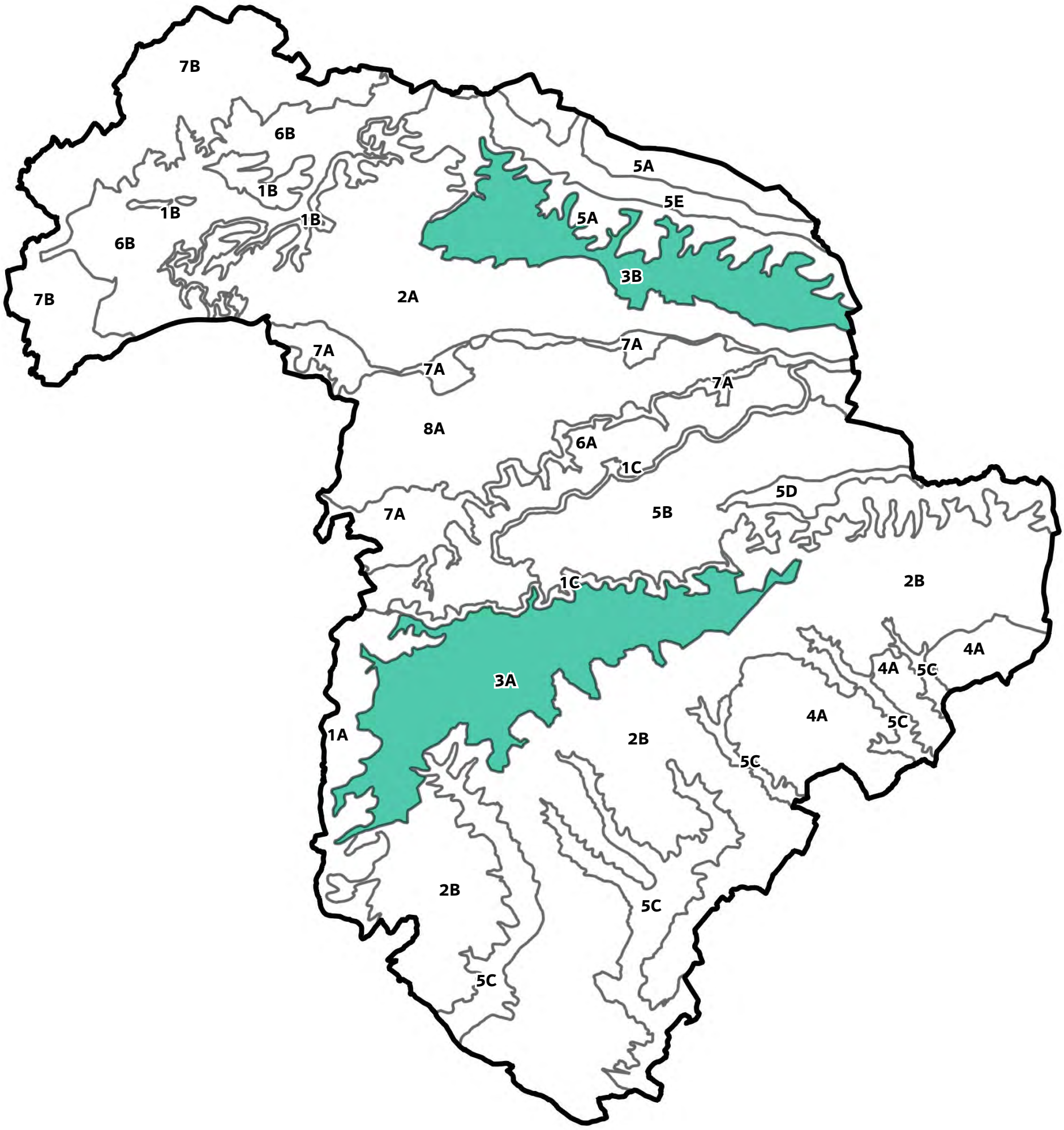
Management Objective

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 intrusion, 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. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- Consider opportunities for deciduous planting around the edges of coniferous blocks to reduce their angular, geometric shape. Tree and hedgerow planting should follow the key principles and guidance set out in the Cranborne Chase 'Right Tree, Right Place' guidance document[57].
- 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.

[57] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RTRP-Guidance-WEB-JUNE-2022.pdf

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE 3: WOODED CHALK DOWNLAND



Landscape Character Areas:

3A Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland

3B West Wiltshire Downs Wooded Chalk Downland

September 2024

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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE 3: WOODED CHALK DOWNLAND

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 are two areas of wooded chalk downland in the National Landscape– *Cranborne Chase (3A)* and *West Wiltshire Downs (3B)*.

Key Characteristics

- An elevated downland landscape with dramatic intersecting coombe 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 enclosure, 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/coombes.

3A Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland

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.

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3A CRANBORNE CHASE WOODED CHALK DOWNLAND

Key Characteristics

- An elevated downland landscape with dramatic intersecting coombe valleys and rounded upstanding ridges.
- Dominated by an Upper Chalk surface geology with drift clay with flints capping higher ground.
- A mosaic of both pastoral and arable land uses with arable dominating to the south and east.
- Medieval Royal hunting grounds, with large areas of surviving managed woodland as a result of historic implementation of Forest Law.
- Surviving park pale in some locations
- A well wooded landscape with large woods, shelterbelts, copses, clumps and parkland trees, contribute to distinct estate and parkland character, particularly around the Rushmore Estate.
- Beech lined lanes and tracks crisscross the downland providing dramatic seasonal colour change.
- Chalk grassland, ancient woodland, and coppice provide important nature conservation habitats.
- Visible archaeological features including 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 enclosure.
- 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 National Landscape. The *Melbury to Blandford Chalk Escarpment (1A)* defines the western boundary and the *Fovant and Chalke Chalk Escarpments (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 (3A) is one of the most remarkable landscapes of the National Landscape, 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 coombes 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 National Landscape. Moving north from the gently undulating dip slope of the *Southern Downland Belt (2B)*, the drama of this landscape increases, culminating in the dramatic deep chalk combes 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 National Landscape, 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 National Landscape 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, whilst Stubhampton Estate has seen an increase in broadleaved planting. There is a general decline in coppice management, and in places hazel coppice is growing out to high forest. Whilst 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. 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 semi-natural 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*). Other nationally important chalk grassland sites such as Bowerchalke Downs (SSSI), are partly found within the character area and are mostly associated with the edge of the *Fovant and Chalke Escarpments (1C)*, which borders *Cranborne Chase (3A)* 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) within LCA	Summary of importance
Bowerchalke Down (6.1% of this SSSI falls within LCA 3A)	SSSI	8.2	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*)
Chickengrove Bottom (98.8% of this SSSI falls within LCA 3A)	SSSI	10.4	• Intimate mixture of unimproved chalk grassland, scrub and woodland • Small colony of tuberous thistle (*Cirsium tuberosum*) a nationally rare plant species in the British Isles • Small population of dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*)
Cranborne Chase (99% of this SSSI falls within LCA 3A)	SSSI	459.1	• Extensive tract of enclosed medieval coppice, wood pasture and 19th century hazel plantation • Exceptionally rich lower plant flora • Population of a nationally rare hoverfly (*Brachypalpus*

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha) within LCA	Summary of importance
			laphriformis) • Population of dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*)
Handcock Bottom (90.9% of this SSSI falls within LCA 3A)	SSSI	49.5	• Ancient woodland with rich associated lichen flora • Unimproved chalk grassland • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*)
Knighton Downs and Wood (26.4% of this SSSI falls within LCA 3A)	SSSI	54.7	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, scrub and semi-natural woodland • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*)
Martin and Tidpit Downs (10.4% of this SSSI falls within LCA 3A) (11.2% of this NNR falls within LCA 3A)	NNR SSSI	38.3 38.3	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, chalk heath and scrub • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*)
Rotherley Downs	SSSI	120.7	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, scrub and ancient woodland • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*)
Winkelbury Hill (16.8% of this SSSI falls within LCA 3A)	SSSI	10.9	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland and scrub mosaics • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*)

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha) within LCA	Summary of importance
Fontmell and Melbury Downs (2.4% of this SAC and SSSI falls within LCA 3A)	SAC SSSI	6.3 6.3	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, with scrub mosaics • Large colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*) • Population of the silver-spotted skipper (*Hesperia comma*)
Win Green Down (5.1% of this SSSI falls within LCA 3A)	SSSI	1.3	• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*)

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 (**Figure 1.1**). 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.

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are 18th, 19th and 20th century fields. There are a number of pre-1800 fields across the character area with sinuous, irregular, semi-irregular and regular patterns. The 20th century fieldscapes are mostly new medium and large fields and semi-enclosed escarpments, whilst the 18th and 19th century fieldscapes are comprised of parliamentary and planned enclosure.

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 c. 200 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 19th 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 late 19th 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. There are small areas of Open Access Land near Tollard Green, and also crossing into the area from Martin Down (NNR and SSSI). In addition there are a number of areas of Open Access Land such as Rotherley Down, creating 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 on landuse, the forest included the villages of Tollard Royal (sited in the steep coombe 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 (3A)* 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 beyond the southern part of Ashcombe Bottom at a point where the valley narrows and 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, the highest village in Dorset, 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

National Landscape, 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 (3A)* 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 19th 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

The evolving, post Brexit, Environmental Land Management schemes accessible to farmers will support continued environmental management of the landscape.

Heavy use of areas of Open Access Land can result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape. Visitor management, particularly in the aftermath of increased local usage and 'staycations' that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic, will continue to be a priority.

Impacts of climate change on mixed farming and forestry/ancient woodlands.

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.

- Better management of hedge and screen planting to reduce limitation of views and modification of character. Tree and hedgerow planting should follow the key principles and guidance set out in the Cranborne Chase 'Right Tree, Right Place' guidance document[58].
- 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. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- Improve connectivity between woodlands (where appropriate) and maintenance of enclosures.
- Improved management of coppice, with appropriate frequency to prevent growing out to high forest.
- 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 areas of Open Access Land

[58] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RTRP-Guidance-WEB-JUNE-2022.pdf

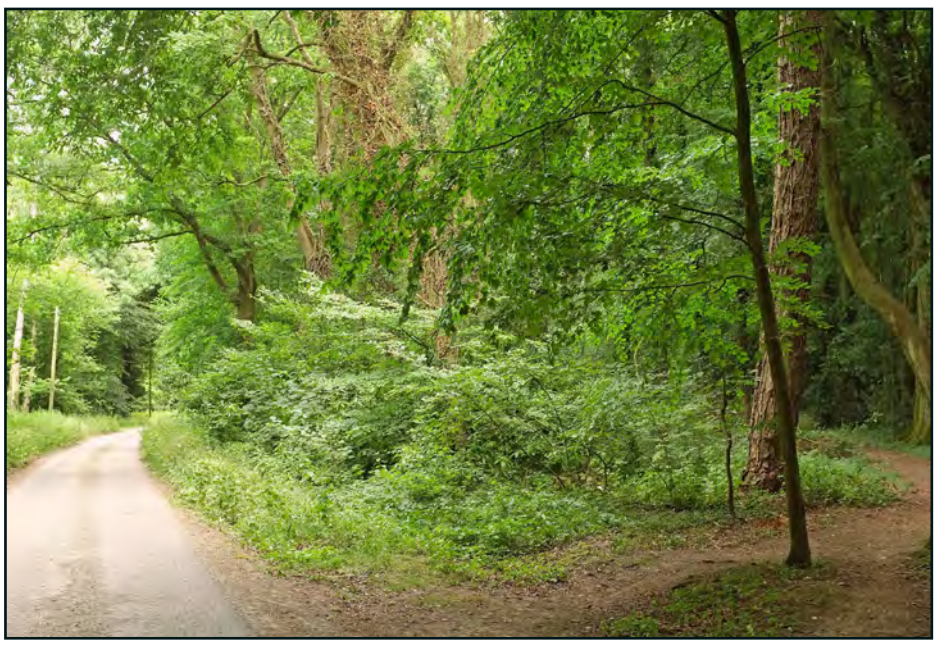
3B West Wiltshire Downs Wooded Chalk Downland

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

Woodland, both large and small scale, interspersed with fields

Landscape of broad rolling hills, woodland, and occasional scattered settlement

Coniferous woodland at Great Ridge



Tracks and paths through the woodland

Grovely Wood and adjacent fields

September 2024
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3B WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS WOODED CHALK DOWNLAND

Key Characteristics

- A large-scale landscape of broad rolling hills and undulating land
- 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 enclosure, with large-scale fields resulting from 20th century boundary loss.
- Settlement pattern comprising isolated farmsteads
- Broadleaved 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 Wylye Valley, including the localised preserved prehistoric/Romano-British landscapes at Stockton Wood and Hamshill Ditches.
- Prehistoric/Romano-British landscape divisions such as Grim's Ditch re-used as a parish boundary
- The Roman road between Old Sarum and the Mendips follows the top of the downs.
- Fast moving transport corridor of the A303 cuts through the centre of the character area

Location and Boundaries

Occupying the northern part of the National Landscape, the character area of the *West Wiltshire Downs Wooded Chalk Downland (3B)* extends from northwest of the village of Wilton in the east (sited on the edge of the National Landscape boundary) to northeast of Higher Pertwood in the west. To the south lies the West Wiltshire Downs Open Chalk Downland (2A) and to the north lies the deep chalk valley, the Wylye Chalk River Valley Sides (5A) and Wylye Chalk River Valley Floor (5E).

Summary of Visual Character

The character area defined as the West Wiltshire Downs Wooded Chalk Downland (3B) is a distinctive, landscape covering an extensive area. With a surface geology of Upper Chalk, the landscape is typically characteristic of the Wooded Chalk Downland landscape type, comprising a series of wooded rolling hills and dry river valleys. Predominantly comprising woodland and arable farming, the landscape is not simple in terms of colour variation with the woodland and cultivation, growing, and harvesting of arable crops bringing seasonal change.

Woodland, both large and small scale makes an important contribution to character – adding a sense of scale and distinctive visual interest. Though the woodland interrupts many long distance views, there is a feeling of exposure and expanse in places. This heightens the sense of remoteness 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 isolated farmsteads, 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 corridor of the A303.

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and Soils

The solid geology of this character area is almost entirely defined by the Upper Chalk stratum of Seaford Chalk. A 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 landscape type, rising 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.

There are also a number of level hill tops, or small plateaus, for example at Hadden Hill and West Hill. Water is noticeably absent from this landscape.

Land Cover

As well as pockets of arable crop production, woodland 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 broadleaf tree canopy.

Aside from these large woodlands, elsewhere across the downland 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.

Lowland calcareous grassland is a feature of this landscape, particularly in the north of the character area.

Biodiversity

This landscape retains substantial ecological value, and supports a variety of habitat types, several examples of which are considered to be of national importance. In total, four Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) fall wholly or partly within the character area, one of which, namely Wylye 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 Wylye Chalk River Valley Sides (5A). These sites are relatively large and include 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 Wylye and Church Dean Down (NNR and SSSI), and a colony of the rare early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) found at Edsbury Down (SSSI).

In the south east of the character area, the Baverstock Juniper Bank (SSSI) supports small remnant areas of chalk grassland, but is most notable for its rich scrub communities and including a large colony of juniper (*Juniperus communis*).

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 plateaux where the chalk is capped by clay with flints. Although not considered to be of national wildlife 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) within LCA**	**Summary of importance**
Baverstock Juniper Bank	SSSI	2.4	• Woody species-rich scrub, including large colony of juniper (*Juniperus communis*) • Some remnant unimproved chalk grassland
Edsbury Down (40.4% of this SSSI falls within LCA 3B)	SSSI	21.5	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*)
Stockton Wood and Down (71.1% of this SSSI falls within LCA 3B)	SSSI	42.9	• Mosaics of unimproved chalk grassland, scrub and woodland • Large colony of juniper (*Juniperus communis*)

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha) within LCA	Summary of importance
Wylye and Church Dean Down (28.8% of this SSSI falls within LCA 3B) (3.5% of this NNR falls within LCA 3B)	NNR SSSI	1.2 23.3	• Extensive area of unimproved plateau chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (Eurodryas aurinia) • Large colony of tuberous thistle (Cirsium tuberosum)

HUMAN INFLUENCES

Evidence of Past Social Structure

The round barrow burial mounds of the Early Bronze Age, for example near East Castle, provide evidence suggesting a greater emphasis on individual power and status, and point to major social and economic changes which continued into the Iron Age. The settlement enclosures as at Stockton Wood 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, and the string of hillforts and defended enclosures overlooking the Wylye valley, such as 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 Enclosure

The landscape was partly 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

enclosure and burnbaking, a method of turf removal in preparation for short-lived or intermittent cultivation, evident in a number of fields 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.

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are 18th, 19th and 20th century fields, with a small number of pre-1800 assarts, for instance near Grovely Wood and east of Rowdean Hill. The 20th century fields include a mix of modified and new large fields.

Land Use and Recreation

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 is one main 'A' road crossing the character area - the A303, which follows a broadly east - west route cutting through the character area to the east of Stockton Wood. The general absence of roads within the character area is distinctive and adds to the sense of remoteness, with the lack of through routes reflecting the absence of settlement.

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 and a number of smaller adjacent sites form an extensive area of Open Access Land.

Historic Development of Settlement and Relationship with the Landscape

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. Within this character area there is an absence of main settlement but there are a number of small, dispersed farmsteads.

Settlement and Built Character

In this 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.

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 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 rolling landform and exposed character allowing occasional distant, panoramic views. Although the regularity of the arable farming does not appear to respond to the sinuosity of the underlying landform, the areas of large scale arable production impart 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 between the woodland areas also means that there are few areas of under-used or derelict land. This landscape is largely unsettled. 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 National Landscape over the past three centuries.
- Arable crop changes influenced by globalisation, commodity prices, farm inputs and costs impacting on both the aesthetics and the landscape functions.
- A substantial increase in the number of rectangular, unsympathetic, 20th century game coverts grown by commercial shoots.
- There is pressure for highway paraphernalia along the A303.
- 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 with new hedge planting blocking existing views and modifying the areas of more open, expansive character

Possible Future Trends

The evolving, post Brexit, Environmental Land Management schemes accessible to farmers will support continued environmental management of the landscape.

There may also be diversification into other crops such as biomass crops and diversification of farm businesses into secondary enterprises such as farmhouse accommodation or commercial shoots. These new land uses may result in increased sense of enclosure.

Heavy use of areas of Open Access Land can result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape. Visitor management, particularly in the aftermath of increased local usage and 'staycations' that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic, will continue to be a priority.

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

- Encourage restoration of chalk grassland particularly in areas that are connected to existing SSSI sites. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- 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.
- Manage the distinctive deciduous woodland clumps and consider a programme of replanting to maintain these as features. Tree and hedgerow planting should follow the key principles and guidance set out in the Cranborne Chase 'Right Tree, Right Place' guidance document[59].

[59] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RTRP-Guidance-WEB-JUNE-2022.pdf

- Ensure that any development of tall structures, such as communication masts and wind energy developments, are in scale with the landscape and do not intrude on skylines or threaten the setting of important archaeological earthwork features.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE 4: DOWNLAND HILLS

Landscape Character Areas:

4A Martin – Whitsbury Downland Hills

September 2024

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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE 4: DOWNLAND HILLS

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 National Landscape 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 National Landscape, the *Martin-Whitsbury Downland Hills (4A)*.

Key Characteristics

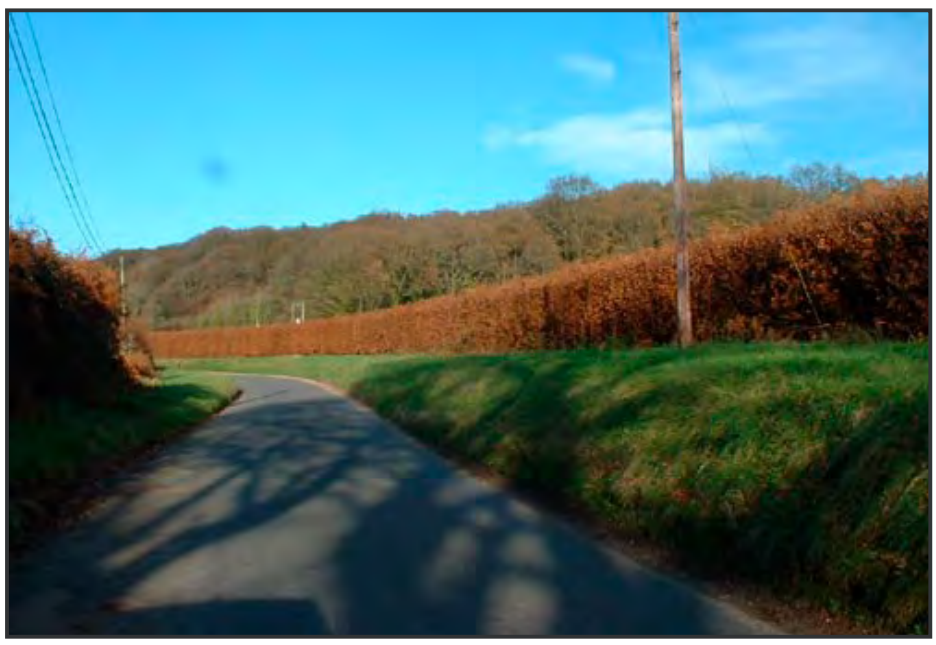
- A series of small scale but prominent knolls and hills.
- Dominated by an Upper Chalk surface geology giving rise to argyllic brown earths.
- Land cover is predominantly arable, with improved pasture on lower ground towards the River Valleys.
- Dominated by a pattern of medium to large Parliamentary enclosure 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 and tranquility.
- A number of ancient woodlands including Burwood, Lower Breach Copse and Boulsbury 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 with open skies from hill tops.

4A Martin – Whitsbury Downland Hills

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.

4A MARTIN – WHITSBURY DOWNLAND HILLS

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 enclosure, but elsewhere a pattern of medium to large Parliamentary type fields dominates as well as new, modified and enlarged 20th century fields.
- 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 National Landscape, 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 National Landscape 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 (4A)* 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 (2B)* (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, Boulsbury 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 understoreys, 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 area contains a significant proportion of both Martin and Tidpit Downs (NNR and SSSI) 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*), 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, Lower Breach Copse, and Boulsbury 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 the ground flora is exceptionally rich.

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

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha) within LCA	Summary of importance
Boulsbury Wood	SSSI	119.9	• Extensive area of ancient woodland, with rich and varied woodland flora and invertebrates
Martin and Tidpit Downs (38.9% of this SSSI falls within LCA 4A) (34.6% of this NNR falls within LCA 4A)	NNR SSSI	118.1 143.0	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, chalk heath and scrub • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*), • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*) •
Pentridge Down (78.3% of this SSSI falls within LCA 4A)	SSSI	48.8	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, acid grassland and scrub • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) • Colony of juniper (*Juniperus communis*) • Population of fairy shrimp (*Chirocephalus diaphanus*)

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 enclosure, 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 enclosure, followed by 20th century agricultural intensification. Expansive geometric fields of regular pattern become smaller and more regular towards the wooded edges. 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.

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are 18th, 19th and 20th century fields. There are a number of pre-1800 fields, including assarts north east of Crendell. The 20th century fields include a mix of new, enlarged and modified fields, whilst the 18th and 19th century fieldscapes are comprised of parliamentary and planned enclosure.

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.

Open Access Land lies to the north of Blagdon Hill and a number of areas are also designated as accessible near Tidpit Common Down and to the north of Pentridge Hill.

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 materials 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 reflect 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 rolling arable fields with open skies. 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 in places. 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, Lower Breach Copse and Boulsbury 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 jars 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.
- Past decreases in stock grazing.
- Spread of 'horsiculture', leading to localized changes to sense of place.

Possible Future Trends

The evolving, post Brexit, Environmental Land Management schemes accessible to farmers will support continued environmental management of the landscape.

Heavy use of areas of Open Access Land can result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape. Visitor management, particularly in the aftermath of increased local usage and 'staycations' that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic, will continue to be a priority.

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

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.

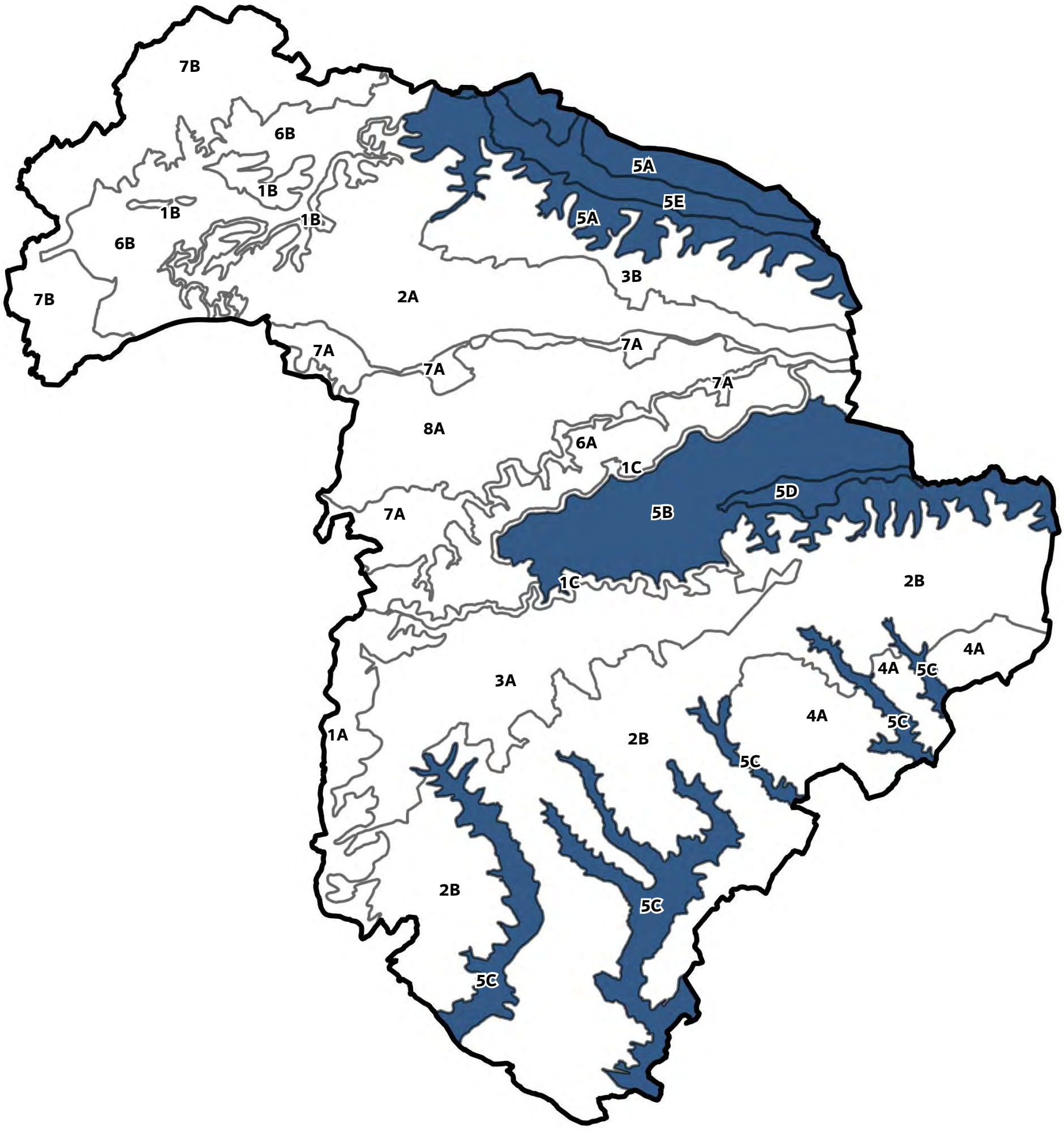
- Promote a consistent and character appropriate approach to hedgerow restoration and field boundary management. This will include the use of more visually unobtrusive field boundaries on the more elevated, open slopes so as not to fragment the smooth rolling landform and hills.

Tree and hedgerow planting should follow the key principles and guidance set out in the Cranborne Chase 'Right Tree, Right Place' guidance document[60].

- 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. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- 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 intrusion, visual clutter, and further interruption of the characteristic open views.
- Conserve the integrity of archaeological features and promote cultural values, perhaps through interpretation for visitors.
- Opportunities for improved visitor management.

[60] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RTRP-Guidance-WEB-JUNE-2022.pdf

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE 5: CHALK RIVER VALLEYS



Landscape Character Areas:

5A Wylye Chalk River Valley Sides
5B Ebble Chalk River Valley Sides
5C Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys
5D Ebble Chalk River Valley Floor
5E Wylye Chalk River Valley Floor

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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE 5: CHALK RIVER VALLEYS

Description

The river valleys which drain the chalk downs of Cranborne Chase National Landscape 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 Ebble 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 flow, including the Tarrant and Allen. The Tarrant flows broadly south eastwards, and south of Tarrant Rushton turns to flow south westwards to the Stour. The River Allen flows south westwards, capturing a number of streams that flow south eastwards, until south of Witchampton it flows south-southeastwards to Wimborne where it joins the Stour.

Key Characteristics

- 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 arable cultivation.
- The clear, fast flowing chalk rivers and streams are a key habitat.
- The floodplains support water meadows, cress beds and damp pasture.
- The valleys typically provide convenient transport corridors, with the Wylye Valley containing a trunk road and railway.
- 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 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 water meadow 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 to access organised events.

5A Wylye Chalk River Valley Sides

The enclosing chalk valley sides form a strong backdrop

Settlement at Tytherington

Occasional pockets of equestrian land uses

Field boundaries and footpaths often reflect historic tracks

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5A WYLYE CHALK RIVER VALLEY SIDES

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 steepest valley slopes have retained their semi-natural chalk grassland or are clothed in 'hanging' woodland.
- Straight-sided fields representing late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary enclosure, with larger scale fields resulting from 20th century boundary loss.
- 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 steep valley sides have remained wooded or grazed by sheep.
- Occasional pockets of equestrian land uses around settlement.
- Isolated Neolithic long barrow burial monuments and Bronze Age round barrows contribute to the visible archaeology.
- Areas of large-scale fields have open skies and longer views

Location and Boundaries

The Wylye Valley runs eastwards from Warminster to Wilton, though only the section between Sutton Veny and Stapleford lies within the National Landscape boundary. The character area encompasses the steeply enclosing valley sides, which enclose the flat floodplain of the river, the *Wylye Chalk River Valley Floor (5E)*. To the south is the *West Wiltshire Downs Woodland (3B)* and the large, open expanse of the *West Wiltshire Downs Open Chalk Downland (2A),* while to the north Salisbury Plain stretches out beyond the National Landscape boundary.

Summary of Visual Character

The River Wylye 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 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. Despite the relatively large-scale landform of the valley sides, this is an intimate landscape with a semi-enclosed character. Its variety in texture, colourful villages and country houses provide visual interest.

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and Soils

The Wylye River 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.

Landform and Hydrology

The River Wylye 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 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 *Wylye 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. 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.

Biodiversity

Ecologically important features of the *Wylye River Valley Sides (5A)* include several areas of species-rich unimproved chalk grassland which are associated with the steeper slopes.

Priority habitats associated with the river valley sides include deciduous woodland, lowland calcareous grassland, good quality semi-improved grassland, lowland meadows and no main habitat but additional habitats present.

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 Wylye and Church Dean Downs (NNR and SSSI). 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) within LCA	Summary of importance
Edsbury Down (59.6% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5A)	SSSI	31.7	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*)

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha) within LCA	Summary of importance
River Avon System (0.006% of this SAC falls within LCA 5A) (0.006% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5A)	SAC SSSI	0.03 0.03	• River system noted for its exceptional aquatic plants, diverse fish fauna and range of aquatic invertebrates • Supports stands of floating *Ranunculus* • Population of sea lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*), brook lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*), Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*), bullhead (*Cotto gobius*) and Desmoulin's whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*) • Populations of the large-mouthed valve snail (*Valvata macrostoma*) and the freshwater pea mussel (*Pisidium tenuilineatum*)
Starveall and Stony Down (55% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5A)	SSSI	12.4	• Unimproved chalk grassland • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*)
Steeple Langford Down (84.1% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5A)	SSSI	20.1	• Unimproved chalk grassland
Stockton Wood and Down (28.9% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5A)	SSSI	17.4	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*)
Wylye and Church Dean Downs (71.2% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5A) (96.5% of this NNR falls within LCA 5A)	NNR SSSI	32.7 57.4	• Extensive area of unimproved plateau chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*) • Large colony of tuberous thistle (*Cirsium tuberosum*) a nationally rare plant species in the British Isles

HUMAN INFLUENCES

Evidence of Past Social Structure

Although most of the evidence for prehistoric activity is to be found on the downs flanking the Wylye valley, the survival of Neolithic long barrows for example near Corton, 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

coombe 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. The subsequent pattern of medieval settlements along the valley mostly contained within the *Wylye Chalk River Valley Floor (5E)*, 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, although these have been overlain by the regular straight-sided fields that followed late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary enclosure. However, the older medieval system of sheep and corn agriculture (which was 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 *Wylye Chalk River Valley floor (5E),* some of which cross over the character area boundary slightly into the *Wylye Chalk River Valley Sides*.

The large, geometric fields on the valley sides contrast with the small, sinuous and irregular fields that occupy the *Wylye Chalk River valley floor (5E).*

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are 18th, 19th and 20th century fields. The majority of fields are 20th century, including a mix of new, enlarged and reorganised fields on valley slopes, whilst the 18th and 19th century fieldscapes are comprised of parliamentary and planned enclosure. There are some pre-1800 regular, semi-irregular and irregular fields located near Tytherington, as well as strip Lynchets to the north east of Edsbury Hill.

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 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 A36 trunk road, which bypasses a number of villages along the north side of the valley runs along the character area boundary between the *Valley Sides* and *the Wylye Chalk River Valley Floor (5E)*. 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 National Landscape and beyond to Salisbury Plain. The Wessex Ridgeway crosses the Wylye Valley between Corton and Knook. 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 -1917. This badge is of the same design as the one cut into the escarpment at Fovant, although not as detailed.

There are a number of areas of Open Access Land in the southern section of the character area as defined by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and a small area of Open Access Land crossing over into the character area from the *West Wiltshire Downs Woodland (3B)*. 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 Cley Hills, and when Stonehenge was erected circa 3000 BC there was probably a thriving community in the Wylye 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 Wylye 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 Wylye Valley to Warminster and Salisbury Plain ensured that Sutton Veny and the surrounding villages in the upper Wylye 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 water meadow, valley sides and downland. Settlement is largely contained within the *Wylye Chalk River Valley Floor (5E),* except for the small village of Tytherington, and settlements such as Hanging Langford and Codford St Mary which cross over into the *Wylye Chalk River Valley Sides (5A)* from the *Wylye Chalk River Valley Floor (5E).*

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. Some more recent cottages are built of red bricks. Another feature is 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.

Historic Environment

The dominant character of historic landscape is its medieval settlement pattern, with the outskirts of the closely spaced settlements encroaching onto the valley sides in places, some identified now only by manor houses and farms. 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. There is a Neolithic long barrow near Corton and several tumuli across the character area.

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 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 small pockets of built environment on the edge of the valley floor settlements are 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 sides (chalk grassland and scrub mosaics) has declined over the years. Today very few areas of semi-natural habitat remain. 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.
- Landscape management for shooting, with woodlands maintained for this purpose and crop rotations managed accordingly.
- The presence of major transport corridors, particularly the A36 trunk road, has brought pressures for development and associated amenity planting and signage.

- The A303 trunk road that crosses the valley on a viaduct and its junction with the A36 disrupts visual unity along the valley.

Possible Future Trends

The evolving, post Brexit, Environmental Land Management schemes accessible to farmers will support continued environmental management of the landscape.

Heavy use of areas of `Open Country' under the CRoW Act, and of public rights of way can result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape. Visitor management, particularly in the aftermath of increased local usage and 'staycations' that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic, will continue to be a priority.

Future trends imply that landscape condition will probably be **stable** 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 boundary features.

- Where appropriate to local character, consider opportunities for re-planting hedgerows and hedgerow trees where these have been lost. Encourage maintenance of boundaries, particularly the estate railings that are typical of the Wylye Valley. Tree and hedgerow planting should follow the key principles and guidance set out in the Cranborne Chase 'Right Tree, Right Place' guidance document[61].
- Consider opportunities for reversion from arable cropping back to chalk grassland on the valley sides. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- Encourage areas of fallow arable land within the arable matrix.
- Resist excessive signage associated with new development along the A36.

[61] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RTRP-Guidance-WEB-JUNE-2022.pdf

- Encourage use of native planting in any new landscape scheme associated with new development and consider removal of unsympathetic species, such as Leylandii screening hedges that stand out in the landscape.
- Conserve the pattern of tight knit villages together with the *Wylye Chalk River Valley Floor (5E),* 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.

5B Ebble Chalk River Valley Sides

A broad river valley with varied landform and dry tributary valleys

Small woodland blocks and belts

The Fovant and Chalke Escarpment (1C) frames the valley and provides a strong backdrop to the floodplain.

Windmill Hill

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

Views from tracks across the across the landscape

5B EBBLE CHALK RIVER VALLEY SIDES

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 20th century.
- Smaller areas of unimproved chalk grassland and rough pasture on steeper slopes and floodplain including nationally important grassland sites.
- Small remnant woodland blocks and belts 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.
- Areas of large-scale fields have big skies and long views

Location and Boundaries

This character area is centrally located within the National Landscape. 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 National Landscape 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 coombe valleys that mark the transition to the distinctly open, large-scale landform of the downland.

The eastern half of *Ebble Chalk River Valley (5B)* contains the *Ebble Chalk River Valley Floor (5D).*

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 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 east 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-argyllic brown earths that support a localised area of woodland to the north east 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 coombes give the valley a distinct downland appearance. The valley is relatively straight, and the river runs through a narrow floodplain.

The distinct landform changes from open flat floodplain of the *Ebble Chalk River Valley Floor (5D)* 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 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. The now fragmented beech avenue which rises from Broad Chalke in the *Ebble Chalk River Valley Floor (5D)* to Knowle 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 the nationally important chalk grassland sites of Gallows Hill (SSSI), Homington and Coombe Bissett Down (SSSI), Knapp and Barnett's Down (SSSI), Throope Down (SSSI) and Prescombe Down (NNR, SAC and SSSI).

Prescombe Down (NNR, SAC and SSSI) 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, SAC and SSSI) also supports multiple species of breeding butterfly, including the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*).

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) within LCA	Summary of importance
Bowerchalke Downs (5.7% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5B)	SSSI	7.6	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*)
Gallows Hill	SSSI	23.2	• Unimproved chalk grassland
Homington and Coombe Bissett Downs (99.9% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5B)	SSSI	25.1	• Several blocks of unimproved chalk grassland
Knapp and Barnett's Down	SSSI	66.8	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha) within LCA	Summary of importance
Knighton Downs and Wood (63.6% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5B)	SSSI	131.8	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, scrub and semi-natural woodland • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*)
Odstock Down (86.0% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5B)	SSSI	11.0	• Unimproved chalk grassland
Prescombe Down	NNR SAC SSSI	47.8 76.2 76.2	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*)
Throope Down (94.9% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5B)	SSSI	35.9	• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*)
Stratford Toney Down (99.9% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5B)	SSSI	23.9	• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics
Winklebury Hill (0.6% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5B)	SSSI	0.4	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland and scrub mosaics • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*)
Pincombe Down (0.03% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5B)	SSSI	0.01	• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics
Burcombe Down (4.9% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5B)	SSSI	2.2	• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Colony of juniper (*Juniperus communis*)

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 enclosure 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 enclosure.

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are 18th, 19th and 20th century fields. There are a number of pre-1800 irregular, semi-irregular, regular and sinuous fields, for instance near Odstock. The 20th century fieldscapes are mostly new medium and large fields and semi-enclosed escarpments, whilst the 18th and 19th century fieldscapes are comprised of parliamentary and planned enclosure.

Land Use and Recreation

The shallow slopes along much of the Ebble 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 National Landscape 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. Opportunities for camping and caravanning occur within this character area with a site found immediately north of Stratford Tony.

There are a number of areas of Open Access Land. 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 coombes and on the higher downland slopes.

Settlement and Built Character

Settlement within the *Ebble Chalk River Valley Sides (5B)* predominantly comprises linear villages and hamlets such as Ebbesbourne Wake which continue to occur regularly along the *Ebble Chalk River Valley Floor (5D)*, 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. Bowerchalke for example contains 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 dip slope 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 White Sheet 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
- Straight-sided fields representing late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary enclosure, 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. 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

- Valley pastures have been drained, enlarged and ploughed up in the past for cereal cropping with the result that traditional meadow management is no longer practiced.
- 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

The evolving, post Brexit, Environmental Land Management schemes accessible to farmers will support continued environmental management of the landscape.

Heavy use of areas of Open Access Land can result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape. Visitor management, particularly in the aftermath of increased local usage and 'staycations' that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic, will continue to be a priority.

Future trends imply that landscape condition will probably remain **stable** 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.

- Where appropriate to local landscape character, consider opportunities for replanting hedgerows, particularly where fencing is in decline and where hedgerow lengths are gappy.

Tree and hedgerow planting should follow the key principles and guidance set out in the Cranborne Chase 'Right Tree, Right Place' guidance document[62].

- 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.
- Conserve the pattern of linear villages which continue into the *Ebble Chalk River Valey Floor (5D)*, maintaining the physical and visual gap between them.
- Resist further dilution of traditional settlement character through establishment and use of building design guidance.
- Reinforce landscape features such as the beech avenue which rises from Broad Chalke to Knowle 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. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- Promote sustainable management of recreation particularly in relation to areas of Open Access Land.

[62] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RTRP-Guidance-WEB-JUNE-2022.pdf

5C Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys

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.

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5C STOUR AND AVON TRIBUTARY VALLEYS

Key Characteristics

- Dip slope 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.
- Small parts of 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 (5C)* character area occupies the series of parallel valleys of the tributary streams that intersect the southern dip slope of the chalk (*Southern Downland Belt (2B)*) towards the south-eastern boundary of the National Landscape. 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 (5C)* that drain the chalk dip slope 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 dip slope 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 (5C)* differ from the valleys of the Ebble and Wylye 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 dip slope once formed a continuous, north facing escarpment between Salisbury and Blandford. Over the millennia, the streams which drained the shallow dip slope 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 (5C)* have largely been exploited for improved pasture or, more commonly, arable crop production. However, woodland still exists on steeper slopes and wet pastures or water meadows 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 landscape 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 each statutory site.

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha) within LCA	Summary of importance
Moors River System (0.03% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5C)	SSSI	0.1	• River system noted for its exceptional diversity of aquatic and wetland plants and rich assemblages of aquatic invertebrates • Populations of bullhead (*Cottus gobius*) and brook lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*)
Pentridge Down (0.6 % of this SSSI falls within LCA 5C)	SSSI	0.3	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, acid grassland and scrub • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) • Colony of juniper (*Juniperus communis)* • Population of fairy shrimp (*Chirocephalus diaphanus*) a nationally rare crustacean in the British Isles
Toyd Down and Quarry (4% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5C)	SSSI	0.3	• Unimproved and pioneer chalk grassland communities

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, on the downs the process of late 18th/early 19th century enclosure involved the enclosure of open downland, while 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 Allen River, 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.

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are 18th, 19th and 20th Century fields. There are a number of pre-1800 irregular, semi-irregular, regular and sinuous fields, for instance near Stubhampton The 20th Century fieldscapes are mostly new medium and large fields, together with modified and enlarged fields. The 18th and 19th Century fieldscapes are comprised of parliamentary and planned enclosure. Water meadows are also present, for instance following the Allen River near Damerham.

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, Gaunt's 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. Gaunt's House) or simply to visit the grounds (e.g. Cranborne Manor Gardens).

There are two areas of Open Access 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 Rockbourne 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, Gaunt's 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 in the style of Capability Brown 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 Wylye 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 submerging the watermeadows each year – this encouraged greater hay crops and richer grazing land through the use of channels, which were cut in grassland so that water could be diverted to flow across the grass depositing rich silt onto the meadow[63]. This also had the benefit of increasing soil temperature, initiating earlier grass

[63] https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/histories/history-of-meadows

growth[64]. Old valley pastures and water meadows 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 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

The evolving, post Brexit, Environmental Land Management schemes accessible to farmers will support continued environmental management of the landscape.

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

Future trends imply that landscape condition will probably remain **stable** 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.

- Where appropriate to local landscape character, consider re-planting hedgerows and hedgerow trees where these have been lost and encourage conservation of farmland habitats (hedgerows,

[64] http://www.swcm.org.uk/water-meadows.html

farm ponds, field margins and fallow fields) that are important for arable weeds and farmland birds. Tree and hedgerow planting should follow the key principles and guidance set out in the Cranborne Chase 'Right Tree, Right Place' guidance document[65].

- Consider reversion from arable cropping back to chalk grassland on the valley sides, and to water meadows on the valley bottom. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- 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.
- Encourage traditional management techniques such as submerging the watermeadows each year – this encourages greater hay crops and richer grazing land through the use of channels, cut in grassland so that water is diverted to flow across the grass depositing rich silt onto the meadow[66]. This also has the benefit of increasing soil temperature, initiating earlier grass growth[67]. Also 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.
- 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.
- Consider a tree planting strategy within villages to ensure succession planting and replacement of trees as required.

[65] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RTRP-Guidance-WEB-JUNE-2022.pdf
[66] https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/histories/history-of-meadows
[67] http://www.swcm.org.uk/water-meadows.html

5D Ebble Chalk River Valley Floor

The River Ebble gently meanders across the floodplain.

The River Ebble

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

Watercress Beds

Trees on the floodplain provide a strong enclosing character.

All Saints Church, Broad Chalke

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5D EBBLE CHALK RIVER VALLEY FLOOR

Key Characteristics

- Narrow course of the fast flowing River Ebble flows in a large scale, undulating, broad river valley.
- Valley is dominated by intensive arable production contained within a system of extensive field units, enlarged during the 20th century.
- Smaller areas of unimproved chalk grassland and rough pasture on the floodplain.
- 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.
- 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 located centrally to the eastern boundary of the National Landscape. It stretches from Knapp in the west and its easterly extent is defined by the National Landscape boundary - in reality the river valley continues beyond the boundary to join the River Avon south of Salisbury.

The character area is enclosed by the *Ebble Chalk River Valley Sides (5B)*.

Summary of Visual Character

The *Ebble Chalk River Valley Floor (5D)* contains the River Ebble which 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. 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.

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and Soils

Exposure of the Middle and Lower Chalk strata has occurred close to the main body of the River Ebble, along its floodplain 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.

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.

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. The shallow slopes and contrasting deep chalk coombes 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 the open flat floodplain of the *Ebble Chalk River Valley Floor (5D)* to gently sloping open downland to distinctive sharp slopes and hills of the *Ebble Chalk River Valley Sides (5B)* (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 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 in the west of the character area.

Land Cover

Although by no means extensive, small woodland belts and scattered trees are a feature of the valley floor, 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 Knowle Hill forms a valuable landscape feature within the valley, providing a 'tunnelled' lane up the hillside into the *Ebble Chalk River Valley Sides (5B).*

Biodiversity

Although arable farmland supports some important arable weeds and farmland birds, the steeper slopes of the *Ebble Chalk River Valley Sides (5B)* support the most important areas.

Woodland is a fairly uncommon feature of this character area, however the small shelterbelts that are present provide valuable nesting and feeding habitat for a range of farmland bird species.

There are no designated areas of statutory nature conservation in this landscape character area.

HUMAN INFLUENCES

Evidence of Past Social Structure

The Roman road between Old Sarum and Badbury Rings crosses the character area in the east and 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, providing the basis for the organisation of the landscape through the medieval, and into the post-medieval, period.

Field Patterns, Boundaries and Predominant Date of Enclosure

In the medieval period the *Ebble Chalk River Valley Sides (5B)* 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 enclosure of the open fields adjacent to the villages, and the extension of arable farming onto the adjacent downs beyond this character area, 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.

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are 18th, 19th and 20th century fields. There are a number of pre-1800 regular, semi-irregular and sinuous fields for instance near Broad Chalke and Croucheston. The 20th century fieldscapes are mostly new medium and large fields, crossing over into the *Ebble Chalk River Valley Sides (5B),* whilst the 18th and 19th century fieldscapes are comprised of parliamentary and planned enclosure.

Land Use and Recreation

The shallow slopes along much of the Ebble 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. Field boundaries are varied – comprising post and wire fencing in places, native hedgerows and a scattering of hedgerow trees.

The recreational character of this valley is characterised by the footpaths, bridleways and byways that cross the landscape. There are a number of footpaths following the east-west path of the River Ebble, connecting the villages that occur along its course.

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, others being marked only by farmsteads. Other settlements have expanded, with their original, in many cases linear layouts being still apparent in the present arrangement of property boundaries.

Settlement and Built Character

Settlement within the *Ebble Chalk River Valley Floor (5D)* predominantly comprises linear villages and hamlets such as Stratford Tony, Bishopstone and Broad Chalke which occur regularly along the course of the river.

Brick and flint are common building materials within the settlements. Broad Chalke for example contains 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 key visible historic components are:

- Ackling Dyke Roman road between Old Sarum and Badbury rings cutting through the eastern end of the valley floor.
- 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 enclosure, 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. 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 of the *Ebble Chalk River Valley Floor (5D)* giving way to the *Ebble Chalk River valley sides (5B)* with its dry tributary valleys. A section of a Roman Road is a surviving element 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 considered to be **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 water meadows 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 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.

Possible Future Trends

The evolving, post Brexit, Environmental Land Management schemes accessible to farmers will support continued environmental management of the landscape.

Heavy use public rights of way can result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape. Visitor management, particularly in the aftermath of increased local usage and 'staycations' that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic, will continue to be a priority.

Future trends imply that landscape condition will probably remain **stable** in the future.

Management Objective

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

- As appropriate to local landscape character, consider opportunities for replanting hedgerows, particularly where fencing is decline and where hedgerow lengths are gappy. Tree and hedgerow planting should follow the key principles and guidance set out in the Cranborne Chase 'Right Tree, Right Place' guidance document[68].
- 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. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- 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.

[68] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RTRP-Guidance-WEB-JUNE-2022.pdf

- Reinforce landscape features such as the beech avenue which rises from Broad Chalke to Knowle Hill in the *Ebble Chalk River Valley Sides (5B)*.
- Consider opportunities for reinstatement of chalk grassland, particularly on sites that lie adjacent to existing chalk grassland sites in the neighbouring *Ebble Chalk River Valley Sides (5B)* and ensure grazing pressure is managed to maintain a mosaic of grass and scrub habitats.
- Promote sustainable management of recreation particularly in relation to public rights of way.

5E Wylye Chalk River Valley Floor

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

Flood meadows are characteristic of the Wylye floodplain.

All Saints Church, Steeple Langford

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5E WYLYE CHALK RIVER VALLEY FLOOR

Key Characteristics

- The Wylye Valley has carved a deep valley through the chalk following a line of structural weakness along a geological fault.
- The River Wylye meanders across a flat valley floor forming a corridor which maintains a constant width of about 1 kilometre.
- Water meadows on the valley floor, surrounded by straight-sided fields representing late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary enclosure, 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.
- Isolated Neolithic long barrow burial monuments, Bronze Age round barrows and water meadow 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 National Landscape boundary. The character area encompasses the flat floodplain of the river and is enclosed by the steep *Wylye Chalk River Valley Sides (5A)*.

Summary of Visual Character

The River Wylye has carved a deep valley through the chalk so that it is enclosed by steep chalk slopes. The valley floor is a rural landscape where sheep and cattle graze the floodplain within irregular fields bound by intermittent hedgerows. The Langford Lakes Nature Reserve, once exploited for gravel extraction, now provides 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 River Wylye has carved a deep valley through the chalk so that the Upper, Middle and Lower Chalk is exposed on the valley sides. 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 Wylye runs in a relatively straight course following a line of structural weakness along a geological fault. 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 Wylye Valley contains a variety of types of landcover. 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.

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 Wylye 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 *Wylye Chalk River Valley Floor (5E)* include a 10 mile stretch of the River Wylye, which forms part of the internationally important River Avon System (SAC and SSSI)

The northern tributaries of the River Avon, including the River Wylye 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 floodplain grazing marsh, have been improved through drainage and reseeding, 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.

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) within LCA	Summary of importance
River Avon System (6% of this SAC and SSSI falls within LCA 5A)	SAC SSSI	27.9 27.9	• River system noted for its exceptional aquatic plants, diverse fish fauna and range of aquatic invertebrates • Supports stands of floating *Ranunculus* • Population of sea lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*), brook lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*), Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*), bullhead (*Cotto gobius*) and Desmoulin's whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*) • Populations of the large-mouthed valve snail (*Valvata macrostoma*) and the freshwater pea mussel (*Pisidium tenuilineatum*)
River Till (0.2% of this SSSI falls within LCA 5A)	SSSI	0.1	• River system noted for its aquatic plants, diverse fish fauna and range of aquatic invertebrates • Supports stands of floating *Ranunculus* • Population of otter (*Lutra lutra*) Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*), bullhead (*Cotto gobius*) and Desmoulin's whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*)

HUMAN INFLUENCES

Evidence of Past Social Structure

Although most of the evidence for prehistoric activity is to be found on the downs flanking the Wylye 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 coombe 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.

Field Patterns, Boundaries and Predominant Date of Enclosure

In the medieval period the valley sides would have been the focus of open field cultivation, although these have been overlain by the regular straight-sided fields that followed late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary enclosure. However, the older medieval system of sheep and corn agriculture (which was 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. Small, sinuous and irregular fields occupy the valley floor.

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are 18th, 19th and 20th century fields. The valley floor features several water meadows along the course of the river channel, as well as pre-1800 regular, semi-irregular, sinuous and irregular fields. The 20th century fieldscapes include a mix of new, enlarged and modified fields, whilst the 18th and 19th century fieldscapes are comprised of parliamentary and planned enclosure.

Land Use and Recreation

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 A36 trunk road, which bypasses a number of villages along the north side of the valley, along the boundary with the *Wylye Chalk River Valley Sides (5A)*. The A303 trunk road also crosses the valley floor on a viaduct.

The area has a relatively low density of footpaths, with a number of bridleways both north and south of the river. Some of these bridleways form strong connections across the National Landscape and beyond to Salisbury Plain. The Wessex Ridgeway crosses the Wylye Valley between Corton and Knook. 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 public recreational resource.

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 Cley Hills, and when Stonehenge was erected circa 3000 BC there was probably a thriving community in the Wylye 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 Wylye 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 Wylye Valley to Warminster and Salisbury Plain ensured that Sutton Veny, and the surrounding villages in the upper Wylye 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 water meadow, valley sides and downland. Villages such as 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 and tight-knit medieval villages 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) in a declining state in places. The condition of semi-natural habitats on the valley floor, for example the riverine habitats, is unfavourable. 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

- Traditional water meadow management is no longer practiced with water meadows 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 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

The evolving, post Brexit, Environmental Land Management schemes accessible to farmers will support continued environmental management of the landscape.

Heavy use public rights of way can result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape. Visitor management, particularly in the aftermath of increased local usage and 'staycations' that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic, will continue to be a priority.

Future trends imply that landscape condition will probably remain **stable** 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.

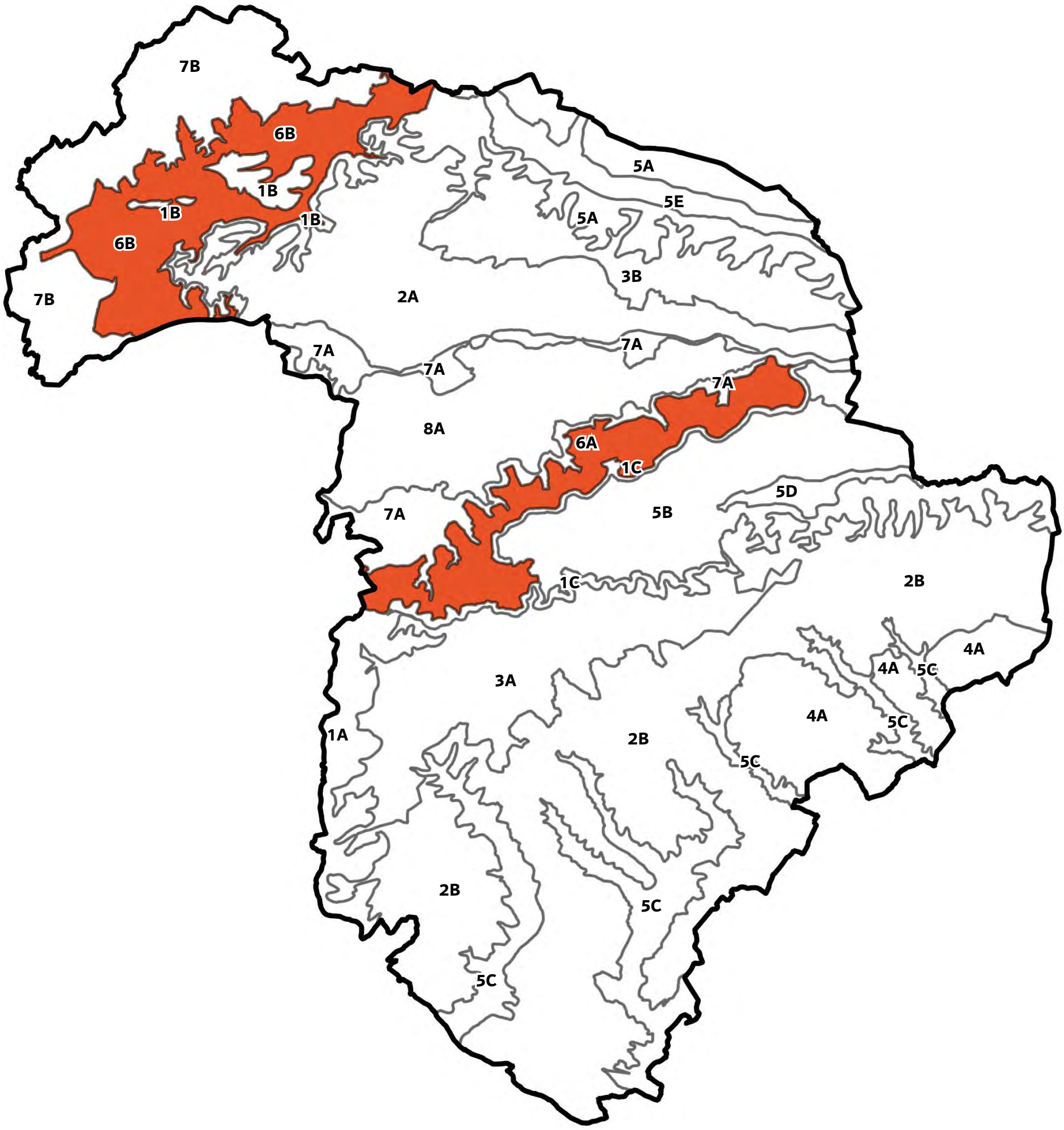
- Identify, conserve and restore remnant water meadow systems that are an important historic landscape feature - and consider opportunities for reinstatement of traditional management techniques. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- Where appropriate to local landscape character, 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. Tree and hedgerow planting should follow the key principles and guidance set out in the Cranborne Chase 'Right Tree, Right Place' guidance document[69].

- Encourage maintenance of boundaries, particularly the estate railings that are typical of the Wylye Valley.
- Consider an ongoing strategy of replacement 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 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.

[69] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RTRP-Guidance-WEB-JUNE-2022.pdf

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE 6: GREENSAND TERRACE



Landscape Character Areas:

6A Fovant Greensand Terrace

6B Kilmington Greensand Terrace

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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE 6: GREENSAND TERRACE

Description

The *Greensand Terrace* landscape type 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 enclosure 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. Low density, scattered farmsteads characterise settlement and built character. There are two *Greensand Terraces* within the National Landscape, the *Fovant Terrace (6A)* and the *Kilmington Terrace (6B)*.

Key Characteristics

- 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, frequently along either side of the boundary between the Greensand Terrace and Chalk Escarpment landscape types.
- Tree belts provide shelter around dispersed and isolated farmsteads.
- Settlements tend to be at the interface with, or within, the Greensand Hills.
- General absence of prehistoric earthworks.
- Long views across adjacent landscapes
- The landscape provides the setting of views from the escarpments and hills.

6A Fovant Greensand Terrace

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.

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6A FOVANT GREENSAND TERRACE

Key Characteristics

- A flat terrace of arable fields at the foot of the imposing *Fovant and Chalke Escarpments (1C)*.
- Large geometric fields and open skies contrast with the smaller scale, enclosed landscape of the *Greensand Hills (7A)* 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, frequently along either side of the boundary between the Greensand Terrace and Chalk Escarpment landscape types
- 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 National Landscape, this distinctive terrace forms a flat platform between the undulating *Donhead - Fovant Greensand Hills (7A)* to the north and the dramatic chalk *Fovant and Chalke Escarpments (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 Escarpments (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 late 20th century 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 - Fovant Greensand Hills (7A)* towards the *Fovant and Chalke Escarpments (1C)*. 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.

Only a small part of the Burcombe Down (SSSI) 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) within LCA	Summary of importance
Burcombe Down (0.6% of this SSSI falls within LCA 6A)	SSSI	0.3	• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics • Colony of juniper (*Juniperus communis*)

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. There are areas of designed landscape at Ferne Park, with parkland creation and restoration over the past century.

Field Patterns, Boundaries and Predominant Date of Enclosure

The large rectangular arable fields that dominate the terrace landscape are characteristic of Parliamentary enclosure 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.

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are 18th, 19th and 20th century fields. The majority of fields are 20th century, including a mix of new, enlarged and reorganised fields, whilst the 18th and 19th century fieldscapes are comprised of parliamentary and planned enclosure. There are some pre-1800 regular, semi-irregular and sinuous fields, for instance near Sutton Mandeville.

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 (1C)* is Open Access Land.

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 Ebble 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 late 20th Century 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 enclosures 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 occasional loss and decline of field boundaries is apparent.
- Loss and inconsistent management of the linear 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 - Fovant Greensand Hills (7A)* onto the terrace.

Possible Future Trends

The evolving, post Brexit, Environmental Land Management schemes accessible to farmers will support continued environmental management of the landscape.

There may be further pressure for new built development within the attractive villages as well as redevelopment of agricultural buildings to residential, amenity or industrial use.

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.
- Restrict further residential development in this largely unsettled landscape.
- Where appropriate to local landscape character, seek to restore hedgerows and apply consistent management techniques. Tree and hedgerow planting should follow the key principles and guidance set out in the Cranborne Chase 'Right Tree, Right Place' guidance document[70].
- 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. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- 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.

[70] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RTRP-Guidance-WEB-JUNE-2022.pdf

- 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

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.

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6B KILMINGTON GREENSAND TERRACE

Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating and shelving terrace of Upper Greensand in the north-west of the National Landscape.
- The chalk escarpment to the south-east provides a dramatic backdrop to the terrace, which is also framed by the Greensand Hills to the north and west.
- 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 Wylye reflect the survival of remnant areas of pasture.
- Medieval settlements including the deserted medieval village at Yarnfield.
- Upper reaches of the River Wylye cross the Greensand terrace, following the line of two geological faults.
- Settlement is focussed around the River Wylye (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 National Landscape. 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. The *West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment (1B)* also intrudes into the Greensand Terrace landscape at Long Knoll and Little Knoll, and in a larger area around Cold Kitchen Hill.

Summary of Visual Character

The *Kilmington Greensand Terrace (6B)* 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, and with the *Penselwood – Longleat Greensand Hills (7B)* providing a more wooded backdrop to the northwest. This is a simple landscape, appearing uncluttered and offering few distinguishing features – the large scale regular field units reinforcing the sense of openness and big skies. 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 Wylye 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 (6B)* 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 Downs, and roughly flows in a north easterly direction towards the National Landscape boundary, south of Warminster.

Land Cover

The *Kilmington Greensand Terrace (6B)* 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 (6B)* is almost exclusively in arable cultivation and has retained little in the way of tree cover. Occasional shelterbelts, the majority of which comprise 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. Small parts of four statutory sites fall within the character area.

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

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha) within LCA	Summary of importance
River Avon System (0.1% of this SSSI and SAC falls within LCA 6B)	SAC SSSI	0.5 0.5	• River system noted for its exceptional aquatic plants, diverse fish fauna and range of aquatic invertebrates • Supports stands of floating *Ranunculus* • Population of sea lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*), brook lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*), Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*), bullhead (*Cotto gobius*) and Desmoulin's whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*) • Populations of the freshwater pea mussel (*Pisidium tenuilineatum*) and the mollusc *Valvata macrostoma*
Long Knoll (0.4% of this SSSI falls within LCA 6B)	SSSI	0.1	• Unimproved chalk grassland with scrub mosaics
Brimsdown Hill (1.6% of this SSSI falls within LCA 6B)	SSSI	2.9	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk grassland, with areas of scrub and ancient woodland

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha) within LCA	Summary of importance
Whitesheet Hill (2.4% of this SSSI falls within LCA 6B)	SSSI	3.5	• Extensive area of unimproved chalk and mesotrophic grassland with scrub mosaics • Population of the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Eurodryas aurinia*)

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 Wylye west of Kingston Deverill, may indicate the continued importance of the river in a largely pastoral economy dependent 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 enclosure. 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 enclosure 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.

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are 18th, 19th and 20th Century fields. The 20th Century fields are new, enlarged and reorganised, whilst the 18th and 19th Century fieldscapes are comprised of parliamentary and planned enclosure. There are several pre-1800 regular and semi-irregular fields, for instance near Norton Ferris.

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 Wylye 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 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 northeast, 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 13th 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 enclosure around Kilmington and Maiden Bradley, with late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary enclosure in other areas.

EVALUATION

Strength of Character

The strength of character of the *Kilmington Greensand Terrace (6B)* is perceived overall to be **moderate**. This is a simple landscape offering relatively few distinctive features due to the extensive coverage of arable crop production which has diluted the landscape structure, though it has some settlement with a stronger character.

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

The evolving, post Brexit, Environmental Land Management schemes accessible to farmers will support continued environmental management of the landscape.

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 which encroach in places along the southern edge of the area will improve condition, quality and visual integrity of the landscape as well as its ecological value.

- Where appropriate to local landscape character, improve the condition and character of hedgerow boundaries by thickening and replanting where lost and denuded to increase the distinctiveness of the field pattern. Tree and hedgerow planting should follow the key principles and guidance set out in the Cranborne Chase 'Right Tree, Right Place' guidance document[71].
- 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.
- Encourage new native woodland planting at the base of the slopes to mark the transition between the arable terrace and pastoral escarpment. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- Consider opportunities for re-planting trees and woodland following the course of the River Wylye.

[71] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RTRP-Guidance-WEB-JUNE-2022.pdf

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE 7: GREENSAND HILLS

Landscape Character Areas:

7A Donhead – Fovant Hills

7B Penselwood – Longleat Hills

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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE 7: GREENSAND HILLS

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 National Landscape 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 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. Centre Parcs, and create a sense of enclosure.
- 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 hill tops.
- 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.

7A Donhead – Fovant Hills

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.

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7A DONHEAD – FOVANT HILLS

Key Characteristics

- The *Donhead - Fovant Hills (7A)* 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 coombes) 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 enclosure of fields.
- Villages are hidden in the shelter of the deep valleys, or coombes, which cut through the Upper Greensand.
- Fortifications are strategically located on the hill tops overlooking the *Vale of Wardour (8A)*.
- 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 Philipps 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 (7A)* 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 (7A)* 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 Escarpments (1C)* forms a skyline beyond the hills to the south. This is a landscape of contrasts, between the shaded sunken lanes and the open skies 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 Open Chalk Downland (2A) 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 (7A)* 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 (7A)* 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 each statutory site.

Site name	**Designation**	**Site area (ha) within LCA**	**Summary of importance**
Hang Wood	SSSI	20.1	• Ancient valley woodland, with rich associated woodland flora and fauna
Gutch Common (70.3% of this SSSI falls within LCA 7A)	SSSI	26.0	• Mosaic of wet – dry acid woodland, meadows, bracken stands and acidic wet flushes
Lower Coombe and Ferne Brook Meadows	SSSI	11.5	• Fen meadow and unimproved neutral grassland
Teffont Evias Quarry / Lane Cutting (64.1% of this SSSI falls within LCA 7A)	SSSI	1.0	• Geologically important site
River Avon System (0.002% of this SAC and SSSI falls within LCA 7A)	SAC SSSI	0.007 0.007	• River system noted for its exceptional aquatic plants, diverse fish fauna and range of aquatic invertebrates • Supports stands of floating *Ranunculus* • Population of sea lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*), brook lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*), Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar*), bullhead (*Cotto gobius*) and Desmoulin's whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*) • Populations of the freshwater pea mussel (*Pisidium tenuilineatum*), and the mollusc *Valvata macrostoma*

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 enclosure 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) enclosure 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.

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are 18th, 19th and 20th century fields. The 20th century fields are mostly new and modified, whilst the 18th and 19th century fieldscapes are comprised of parliamentary and planned enclosure. There are several pre-1800 regular and semi-irregular fields and assarts for instance near Donhead St Mary.

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 (8A)* 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. Dinton Park and 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 (7A)* 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 coombes, 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 (8A)* 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 deer parks 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 enclosure, 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 Philipps House.

EVALUATION

Strength of Character

This is a landscape of **moderate** character overall. It has a distinct 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 coombes. The landscape forms a contrast to the adjacent chalk and clay landscapes, however the predominant lack of views due to the constituent elements of the landscape, is perceived to make its strength of character moderate.

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 occasional hedgerows have been heavily flailed or lost altogether. The overall condition of the landscape is perceived to be **good**.

Past and Present Change

- 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 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

There may 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. Theremay 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 coombes and exposed hills. Woodland conservation and management is key in this wooded landscape.

- Where appropriate to local landscape character, consider re-planting hedgerows and hedgerow trees where these have been lost. Tree and hedgerow planting should follow the key principles and guidance set out in the Cranborne Chase 'Right Tree, Right Place' guidance document[72].
- 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. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- 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.
- Seek to improve heritage conservation, especially in parklands with visitor pressures.

[72] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RTRP-Guidance-WEB-JUNE-2022.pdf

7B Penselwood – Longleat Hills

Cley Hill is a small-scale but distinctive 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.

September 2024
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7B PENSELWOOD – LONGLEAT HILLS

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 enclosure.
- 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 (particularly away from the core recreational assets in and around the Longleat Estate and Stourhead House and Garden) with great variety at the small scale, but with an overall unified character.

Location and Boundaries

The *Penselwood - Longleat Hills (7B)* are the west-facing edge of the band of Greensand that extends beyond the *Kilmington Greensand Terrace (6B)* from Mere to Warminster – to the south-west and north-east of the National Landscape 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 National Landscape boundary.

Summary of Visual Character

The *Penselwood - Longleat Hills (7B)* is a landscape with a steeply undulating landform - it is a landscape of secretive valleys and exposed hills where the sunken lanes and 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 panoramic views with open skies. 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 (7B)* 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 (7B)* 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 (SAC and 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 (*Lamiastrum 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 in the north of the National Landscape, 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) within LCA**	**Summary of importance**
Bradley Woods	SSSI	48.9	• Extensive area of lowland alder wood, with rich associated lichen and bryophyte flora
Cley Hill	SSSI	26.7	• Unimproved chalk grassland • Colony of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*)
Heath Hill Farm	SSSI	20.8	• A number of adjacent unimproved neutral to calcareous hay meadows and permanent pastures
Longleat Woods	SSSI	222.4	• Extensive ancient woodland with high forest structure • Population of dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) • Supports a wide range of breeding bird species
River Avon System (0.4% of this SAC and SSSI falls within LCA 7B)	SAC SSSI	1.8 1.8	• River system noted for its exceptional aquatic plants, diverse fish fauna and range of aquatic invertebrates • Supports stands of floating *Ranunculus* • Population of sea lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*), brook lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*), Atlantic salmon*Salmo salar*), bullhead (*Cotto gobius*) and Desmoulin's whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*) • Populations of the freshwater pea mussel (*Pisidium tenuilineatum*), and the mollusc *Valvata macrostoma*

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 enclosures. 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 enclosed 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.

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are 18th, 19th and 20th century fields. The 20th century fields are mostly clustered to the northern boundary of the National Landscape and are comprised of enlarged, new and modified fields. The 18th and 19th century fieldscapes are mainly planned enclosure. There are several pre-1800 irregular and semi-irregular fields and assarts for instance near Penselwood.

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, 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 can be 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 status 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 (7B)* 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. 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 overall condition of the landscape is perceived to be **good**. The landscape possesses a high degree of intactness with good survival of historic earthwork features, early enclosure 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 principal issues affecting the *Penselwood - Longleat Hills (7B)* 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.

Heavy use of Public Rights of Way can result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape. Visitor management, particularly in the aftermath of increased local usage and 'staycations' that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic, will continue to be a priority.

There may be further pressure for new built development because of the area's proximity to local towns such as Warminster, Frome and Wincanton, and the abundance of tourism infrastructure in this area.

Overall, future trends imply that landscape condition is likely to be **stable** in this area.

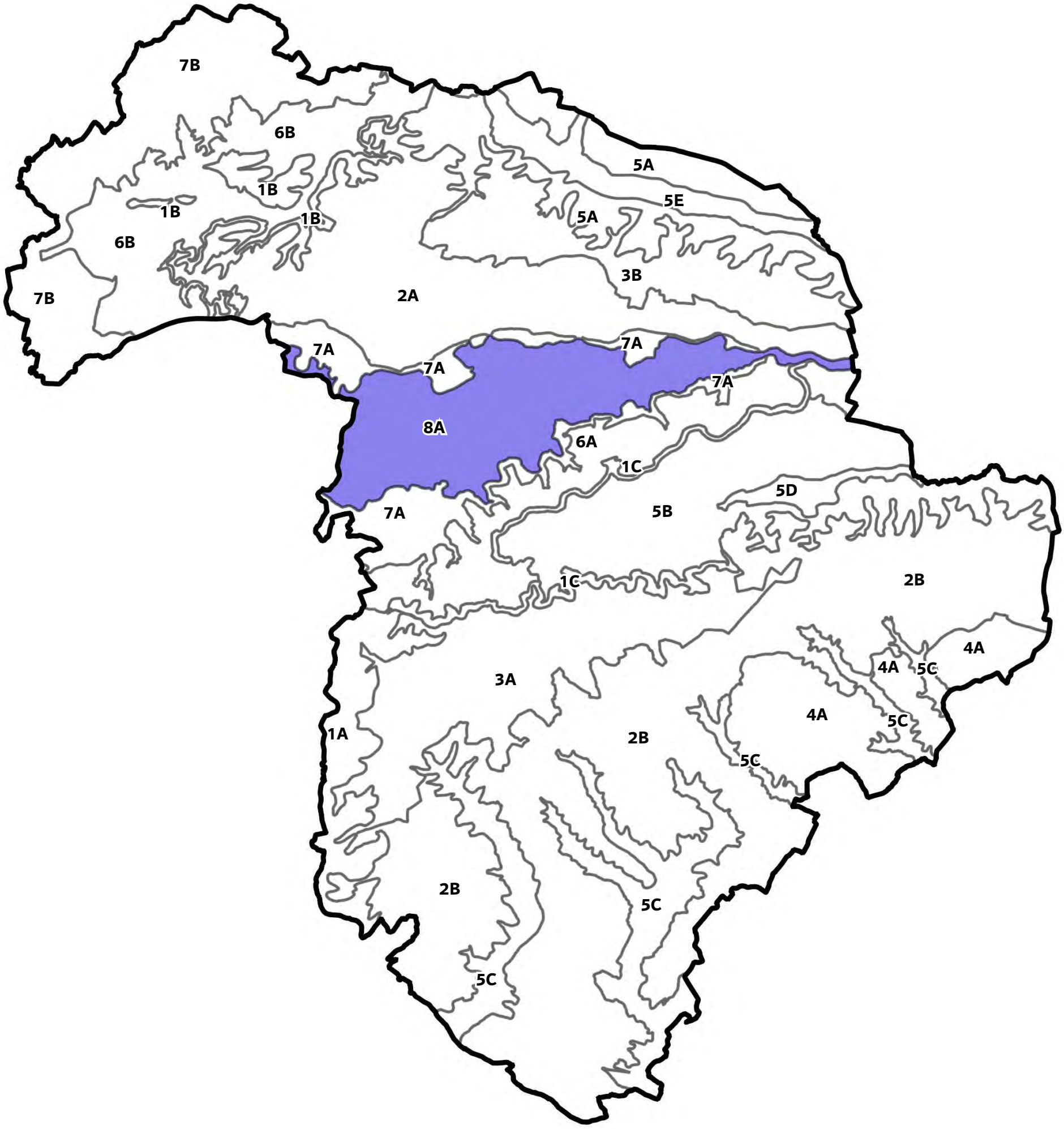
Management Objective

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. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- 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.
- 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.
- Promote sustainable management of recreation.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE 8: ROLLING CLAY VALES



Landscape Character Areas:

8A The Vale of Wardour

CBA

September 2024
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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE 8: ROLLING CLAY VALES

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 National Landscape there is only one *Rolling Clay Vale*, known as the *Vale of Wardour (8A)*.

Key Characteristics

- Predominantly clay vale occupying a series of eroded anti-clinal axes between the chalk downlands.
- Varied underlying geology with different geological exposures leading to outcrops of hard rock.
- A mixed agricultural landscape with small scale fields of lush, improved, pasture and arable production 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.

8A The Vale of Wardour

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..

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8A THE VALE OF WARDOUR

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 valley is narrowest at its lowest level.
- 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 broadleaf and mixed woodland (some of ancient origin) scattered across the vale.
- A sense of enclosure provided by the surrounding landscape of the *Donhead - Fovant Greensand Hills (7A)*.
- A settled landscape containing Tisbury – the only town within the National Landscape.
- Historic parkland and large country houses, including New Wardour Castle
- Nationally important geological (fossil beds) and biological (bat roosting) SSSIs.
- Visible historic components displaying evidence for past settlement and agriculture.
- Limited easy vehicular access to and within the Vale with narrow and twisty lanes.

Location and Boundaries

The character area defined as The *Vale of Wardour (8A)* occupies a central location within the National Landscape. 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 Downs 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 (8A)* is a rolling clay valley defined by mix of pastures and arable crops – distinctly different from the chalk landscapes which dominate elsewhere in the National Landscape. 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 (8A)* 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 (8A)* 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 Chicksgrove 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 broadleaf, 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. Pits Wood. Woodlands associated with large country houses and historic parkland are also a feature, for example Pythouse, southwest of Newtown, and Phillips House close to Dinton.

Shelterbelts also occur within this character area – lining 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 lining the River Nadder.

Biodiversity

Although the *Vale of Wardour (8A)* 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 Chicksgrove Quarry (SSSI).

Of the biologically important sites is a 16km stretch of the River Nadder, which falls under the River Avon System (SAC and SSSI). This section of the 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 and SSSI) for example, is home to 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) within LCA**	**Summary of importance**
Chilmark Quarries	SAC SSSI	10.4 9.7	• System of undisturbed caves supporting large wintering bat roosts, including for Bechstein's bat (*Myotis bechsteini*)
Dinton Quarry	SSSI	0.3	• Geologically important site
Dinton Railway Cutting	SSSI	0.25	• Geologically important site
Gutch Common (29.7% of this SSSI falls within LCA 8A)	SSSI	11.0	• Mosaic of wet – dry acid woodland, meadows, bracken stands and acidic wet flushes
Fonthill Grottoes	SSSI	0.7	• Three eighteenth century follies supporting large wintering bat roosts • Wintering roost of the rare Bechstein's bat (*Myotis bechsteini*) and barbastelle bat (*Barbastella barbastellus*)
Lady Down Quarry	SSSI	0.3	• Geologically important site

Site name	Designation	Site area (ha) within LCA	Summary of importance
River Avon System (4.3% of this SAC falls within LCA 8A and 4.2% of this SSSI falls within LCA 8A)	SAC SSSI	20.2 20.2	• River system noted for its exceptional aquatic plants, diverse fish fauna and range of aquatic invertebrates • Supports stands of floating *Ranunculus* • Population of sea lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*), brook lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*), Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*), bullhead (*Cotto gobius*) and Desmoulin's whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*) • of the freshwater pea mussel (*Pisidium tenuilineatum*), and the mollusc *Valvata macrostoma*
Teffont Evias Quarry / Lane Cutting (35.9% of this SSSI falls within LCA 8A)	SSSI	0.6	• Geologically important site
Upper Chicksgrove Quarry	SSSI	5.8	• Geologically important site

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 pattern of Medieval settlement through the vale demonstrates that this area was being intensively exploited by this period, marked by the deserted Medieval settlements in the valley. Post dissolution newly ennobled families came to prominence, including Barons Arundells of Wardour, who are notable for their involvement in the English Civil War and their castle at Wardour (the Old Castle in adjacent LCA *Donhead - Fovant Greensand Hills, 7A*) was mined and irreparably damaged under Parliamentary siege in 1644. 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 Enclosure

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 enclosure in the post-medieval period. During this period parcels of land changed hands to form large estates such as Wardour, Fonthill, Chicksgrove and Pythouse, around which the larger more regular fields may reflect agricultural improvement on the estate farmlands.
At Semley pasture was mostly common land in the Middle Ages but significant areas were enclosed between 1599 and 1769. Proposals to enclose the remaining 300 acres (120 ha) of Semley's common pasture were made but not implemented in 1813 and 1836, leaving them in common, mostly in strips forming wide verges to roads and lanes.[73]

Fieldscapes identified in the Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment are 18th, 19th and 20th century fields. The 20th century fields are comprised of enlarged, new and modified fields. The 18th and 19th century fieldscapes are mostly of planned and parliamentary enclosure. There are several pre-1800 irregular and semi-irregular fields and assarts clustered to the western boundary. Water meadows are present along sections of the river channels.

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

[73] Jane Freeman, Janet H Stevenson, 'Parishes: Semley', in *A History of the County of Wiltshire: Volume 13, South-West Wiltshire: Chalke and Dunworth Hundreds*, ed. D A Crowley(London, 1987), *British History Online* https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/wilts/vol13/pp66-79 [accessed 10 September 2024].

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. Part of the B3089 (branching from the A30 at Barford St. Martin), and a series of minor roads (branching from the B3089 at Teffont Evias), follow the course of the River Nadder 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 Open Access Land. These provide local recreational access for residents.

Visitor attractions include National Trust land and properties - Philipps 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 National Landscape, 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, 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 enclosure, 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**.

Past and Present 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

There may 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.

- Where appropriate to local landscape character, replant hedgerow sections where gappy and discontinuous and apply consistent cutting and management regimes. Tree and hedgerow planting should follow the key principles and guidance set out in the Cranborne Chase 'Right Tree, Right Place' guidance document[74].
- 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.

[74] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RTRP-Guidance-WEB-JUNE-2022.pdf

- Conserve the ancient pattern of small irregular fields and narrow lanes interspersed with irregular remnants of woodland that is unusual in the National Landscape.
- Conserve and enhance deciduous woodland habitats, in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.
- Identify, conserve and restore water meadow systems that are an important historic landscape feature - and consider opportunities for reinstatement of traditional management techniques.
- 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.

4.0 SUSTAINING THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 This chapter identifies the special qualities of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape, highlights the key forces for change that have the potential to affect these qualities and outlines the role of the Landscape Character Assessment in helping manage and monitor landscape change to sustain the National Landscape for the future.

4.2 Special Qualities of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape

4.2.1 The Cranborne Chase National Landscape is of national significance as recognised by its formal designation as an AONB in 1981. The primary purpose of the designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

4.2.2 Cranborne Chase is an area of great diversity and contrast as represented by the definition of eight Landscape Character 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 individual Landscape Character Areas further define this diversity.

4.2.3 The special characteristics and qualities that make the Cranborne Chase National Landscape special, as a whole, with regards to landscape are identified in Section 8 of the current Management Plan[75] (see **Section 4.4**) as follows:

- *A peaceful, tranquil, deeply rural area; largely 'unspoilt' and maintained as a living agricultural landscape.*
- *The scale of the landscape is often grand and dramatic with the 'intensity' of landscape character almost palpable.*
- *The open downland offers wide expansive skies, dominant skylines, dramatic escarpments and panoramic views.*

[75] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/publications/aonb-management-plan/

- *Unity of the underlying chalk expressed in the distinctive and sometimes dramatically sculpted landforms, open vistas, escarpments and coombes.*
- *A rich land use history with many ancient hilltop forts and barrows.*
- *A bountiful mosaic of habitats playing host to a myriad of wildlife.*
- *Overlain by a woodland mosaic – including the eye-catching hill-top copses, veteran parkland trees and avenues, extensive areas of wooded downland and ancient forest together with more recent game coverts.*
- *Three major chalk river valleys with their individual distinctiveness.*
- *Distinctive settlement pattern along the valleys and vales, and small Medieval villages along the scarp spring line.*
- *Local vernacular building styles include the patterns of knapped flint, brick, cob, clunch, clay tiles and straw thatch.*
- *Strong sense of place and local distinctiveness represented by the use of local building materials and small-scale vernacular features such as the sunken lanes and distinctive black and white signposts.*
- *Strong sense of remoteness.*
- *Expanse of dark night skies and ability to see the Milky Way.*

4.2.4 These special characteristics and qualities are reflected in the Statement of Significance set out in Section 2 of the Cranborne Chase Management Plan.

4.3 Key Forces for Landscape Change

4.3.1 Cranborne Chase is a dynamic landscape that has evolved over time to create the distinctive character that is valued today. The landscape has been shaped by thousands of years of human activity with the environment. Impressive geological formations and natural processes have created landforms which people have helped shape into distinctive landscapes. Farming, forestry, and local industries have all left their mark, giving a unique sense of place and character to the countryside. Many of the patterns and features of past use have survived through centuries of change.

4.3.2 The landscape will continue to change in the future, however, the pace of social, economic and environmental change into the 21st century is accelerating and may

impact on the qualities that make Cranborne Chase special. Without careful planning and management, the quality and condition of the landscape could irreversibly decline.

4.3.3 Key forces for change affecting, or likely to affect, the landscape are summarised below.

Agriculture

4.3.4 Agriculture and farming practices shape the rural environment and our distinctive natural and cultural landscapes. The Cranborne Chase National Landscape continues to experience fundamental changes in the agricultural economy. This includes 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 the ever-reducing number of smaller, often 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.

4.3.5 On the other hand, there are also significant opportunities presented by the new agricultural system established by the 2020 Agriculture Act[76] based on the principle of paying public money to farmers and other land managers for public goods and services that provide societal benefits alongside food production. The new Environmental Land Management scheme, including programmes for encouraging sustainable farming practices in protected landscapes, aims to protect or improve the quality and character of the landscape while also supporting nature recovery, mitigating the impacts of climate change and providing opportunities for people to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape and its cultural heritage.

Development Pressures

4.3.6 The Cranborne Chase National Landscape continues to experience 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 may result in gradual loss or blurring of the distinctive settlement pattern and built form.

[76] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2020/21/contents/enacted/data.htm

4.3.7 In addition, significant development pressure in settlements on the edges and in the setting of the National Landscape are increasing the population nearby, accumulating pressures on the National Landscape for recreation, adding to wear and tear on the landscape, and contributing to loss of tranquillity.

4.3.8 At the same time there are existing and future pressures for larger scale infrastructure including solar development on farmland, and tall structures, notably communication masts and wind energy infrastructure. These changes have the potential to be highly visible on the skylines of the rolling downland and escarpments, and in views into the National Landscape that contribute to its setting.

4.3.9 Agricultural Permitted Development Rights are an ongoing and changing pressure. These Rights mean that building and land use changes can progress without reference to the Local Planning Authority/National Landscape Team and, cumulatively this type of development can result in significant loss of tranquillity and remoteness. Over recent years examples of this type of development include huge white/grey fibre cement roofs installed over silage clamps to control rainwater runoff, which do not blend in with the surrounding landscape.

4.3.10 Cumulatively, the impact of such development may threaten the strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity that pervades much of the National Landscape. Poorly designed lighting associated with development can have an impact on the extent and quality of dark skies, potentially impacting Cranborne Chase's designation as an International Dark Sky Reserve.

Other Changes

4.3.11 Alongside the major changes associated with agriculture and development pressures there is a range of other forces for change affecting the Cranborne Chase National Landscape. These include:

- Global changes such as climate change and its potential impact on the characteristic habitats and species of the National Landscape.
- Traffic and highway infrastructure issues.

- Changes in the social and economic character of the local communities, notably an ageing population across the National Landscape with affluence masking severe pockets of rural deprivation.
- Loss of local facilities and services leading to an even greater reliance on personal transport.
- Changing patterns of recreation and tourism following the global coronavirus pandemic, which increased visitor pressures and impacts on natural and cultural environment assets in some areas.
- Incremental erosion of small-scale local features leading to gradual loss of valued characteristics and distinct sense of place.

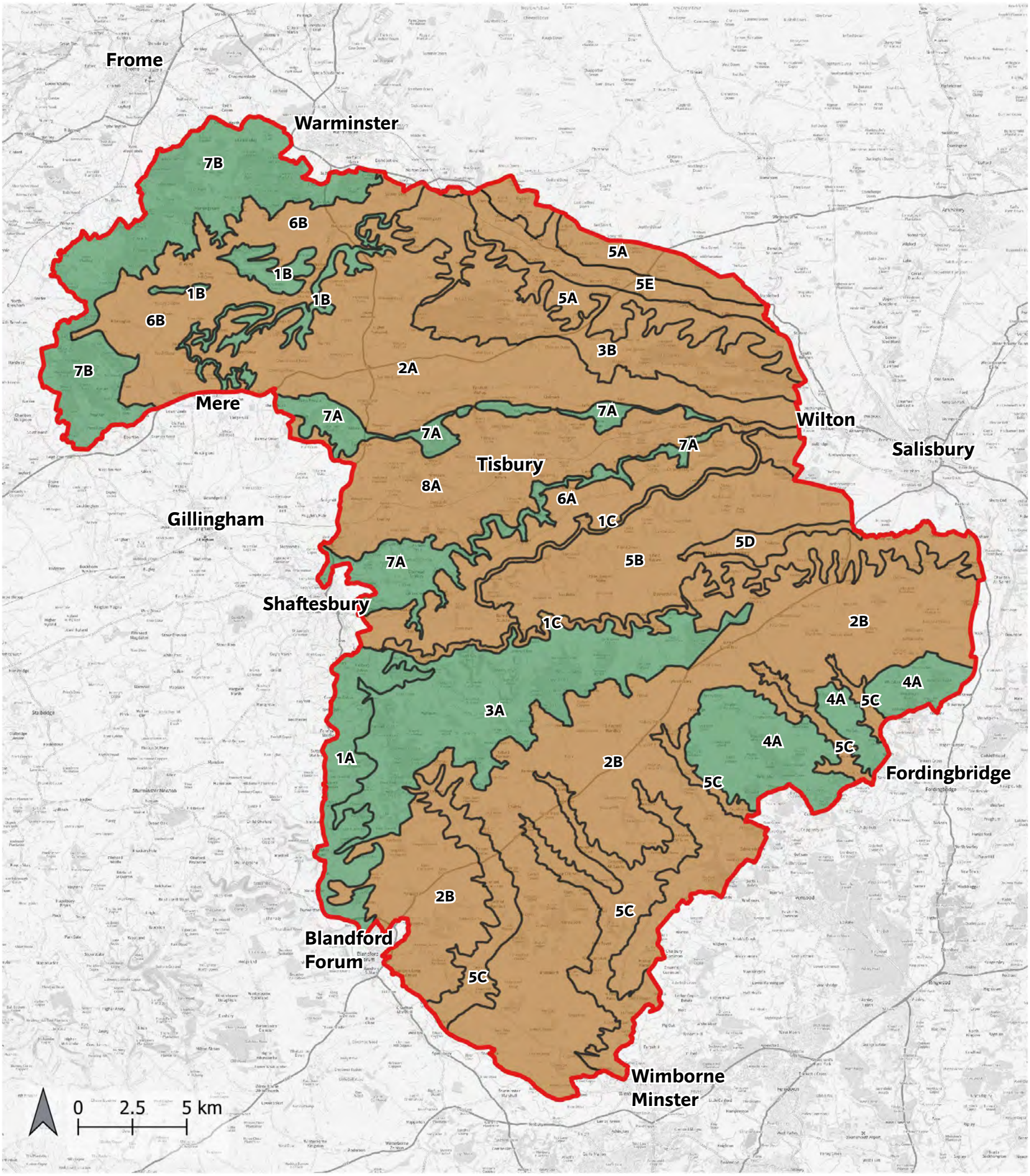
4.3.12 These forces for change may act in different ways in different areas. Each Landscape Character Area contains an evaluation of the present forces for change and possible future trends that are, or may, result in changes to landscape condition. **Figure 4.1** provides an overview of current landscape condition. This map will help the National Landscape to target resources to those areas that are especially vulnerable.

4.4 Managing Landscape Change

Management Plan

4.4.1 The Cranborne Chase Management Plan presents objectives and policies to help partners conserve and enhance this nationally important landscape. This statutory plan is prepared on behalf of the local authority partners and adopted by the Cranborne Chase National Landscape Partnership Board and the relevant local authorities.

4.4.2 The Management Plan articulates what makes Cranborne Chase special (see **Section 4.2**), and presents a vision of how these special qualities can be sustained for the future. It provides a mechanism for reconciling diverse interests and develops an integrated and positive way forward to help guide and manage the process of change. Together, this Landscape Character Assessment and Management Plan provide a strong framework for managing this nationally important landscape.



KEY

Landscape Condition

Good

Moderate

National Landscape Boundary

CRANBORNE CHASE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

FIGURE 4.1
CURRENT LANDSCAPE CONDITION

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4.4.3 The Management Plan aims to understand, manage and direct future change in a sustainable way that ensures that the special qualities of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape are conserved and enhanced. The current Management Plan[77] outlines a vision for the National Landscape focused around conserving and enhancing Outstanding Landscapes, Living & Working Landscapes and Special Landscapes to Enjoy.

Nature Recovery Plan

4.4.4 The emerging Nature Recovery Plan for the Cranborne Chase National Landscape[78] aims to address habitat and species recovery at a landscape-scale to support the Management Plan's vision for a beautiful, resilient landscape, rich in wildlife. This Plan will feed into wider Local Nature Recovery Strategies prepared under the 2021 Environment Act[79].

4.4.5 Spatial opportunities for protecting, creating and restoring habitats in ways that strengthen landscape character can be informed by the biodiversity information and management objectives set out in the individual Landscape Character Areas.

Neighbourhood Planning

4.4.6 Recognising landscape in Neighbourhood Plans provides an opportunity to identify what it is that gives the place where people live its local distinctiveness and unique sense of place.

4.4.7 The information and management objectives set out in the individual Landscape Character Areas can be used to help ensure that the special qualities and distinctive characteristics of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape are protected and enhanced, in line with the Good Practice Note on Using Landscape Character Assessments in Neighbourhood Planning[80].

[77] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/publications/aonb-management-plan/
[78] https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/8a0f68d4bfc74010beb6660ed1ccae6c
[79] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents
[80] Cranborne Chase AONB Good Practice Note 9: Using Landscape Character Assessments in Neighbourhood Planning (2016)

Tree and Hedgerow Planting

4.4.8 Planting the wrong kind of tree, or planting it in the wrong place, can result in unintended negative consequences for nature, heritage, views, and the appearance of the landscape. For example, views from roads and footpaths can be blocked by continuous lines of hedgerows, making it impossible for users to see or appreciate the wider landscape.

4.4.9 The information and management objectives set out in the individual Landscape Character Areas can be used to help ensure that the special qualities and distinctive characteristics of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape are protected and enhanced by planting the right type of trees, hedgerows or small woodlands in the right location, in line with the Right Tree, Right Place guidance[81].

4.4.10 In addition, the forthcoming document 'Trees in the landscape: Guidance for enhancing landscape character through tree planting' will describe how trees contribute to landscape character within the National Landscape, and how this character can be enhanced in the future through carefully considered tree planting. In some locations this will mean retaining the current sense of openness, whilst in other locations it will mean expansion of existing tree cover. The document will also explain the importance of considering tree planting in the context of wider landscape functions such as nature recovery, food production, and carbon storage within soil.

4.5 Monitoring Landscape Change

4.5.1 **Table 4.1** and **Table 4.2** set out suggested updated indicators for monitoring change within the National Landscape. Further work will need to be undertaken by the National Landscape Team to develop these, including identifying suitable sources of readily available and measurable information to monitor change. The indicators should be developed in partnership with others who have an interest in the management of the National Landscape. They should be meaningful to the lay person and ideally should capture public attention.

[81] https://cranbornechase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RTRP-Guidance-WEB-JUNE-2022.pdf

Table 4.1: National Landscape-Wide Indicators for Monitoring Landscape Change

Potential Changes	Possible Indicators
Landscape	
Positive landscape management schemes	Uptake of agri-environment schemes Extent of woodland in active management
Sense of remoteness/tranquility	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 SPD and number of Neighbourhood Plans prepared
Recreation and Access	
Increase in visitor access particularly in the form of domestic tourism	Erosion of chalk downland Demand for visitor facilities (planning applications)
Biodiversity	
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
Historic Environment	
Improvement in managing the historic resource	Number of Scheduled Monument Management Plans
Agriculture	
Changes in farm size	Average farm size (Defra June Census Data)
Marketing of local produce	Number of farmer's markets within the National Landscape 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

Table 4.2: Character Area Specific Indicators for Monitoring Landscape Change

Potential Changes	Possible Indicators	Character Area
Increase in chalk grassland	Area of agricultural land reverted to chalk grassland (e.g. through agri-environment schemes)	1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 5A, 5B, 5C
Reversion of agricultural land to woodland	Area of agricultural land reverted to woodland	2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 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, 3B, 4A, 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5E, 6A, 6B, 7A, 7B
Reinstatement of traditional management such as coppicing	Area of woodland under coppice management	3A, 3B, 4A, 7A, 7B,
Improved hedgerow condition	Length of hedgerow in active management	2A, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5E, 6A, 6B, 7A, 7B
Increase in neutral meadows	Area of neutral meadow	5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5E, 7A, 7B, 8A
Encroachment of scrub onto chalk grassland sites	Area of chalk grassland turned to scrub	1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 5A, 5B, 5C
Loss of ancient broadleaf oak woodland	Area of ancient broadleaf oak woodland	1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5E, 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, 5D, 5E and 8A
Loss of veteran trees	Number of veteran trees	All areas, but particularly 3A, 3B and 8A
Loss of distinctive hill top clumps	Number of surviving hill top tree clumps	2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A
Decline in wet woodland on valley floors	Area of wet woodland	5C, 5D, 5E
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, 3B, 4A
Demand for residential development	Number of planning applications for housing	All areas, but particularly 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5E and 8A

APPENDIX 1
2003 ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

Source: Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs AONB
Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (LUC for the Countryside Agency, 2003)

METHOD STATEMENT FOR THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

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 1: Existing Assessments in the AONB

Area	**Contact**	**Has a LCA been undertaken?**	**Are boundaries available digitally?**
National Level			
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
County Level			
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
District Level			
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
Other			
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.

Specialist Study	AONB-WIDE	Character Area Level
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 on15th 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

APPENDIX 2
REVIEW OF THE 2003 ASSESSMENT

APPENDIX 2 - REVIEW OF THE 2003 ASSESSMENT

All LCT/LCA text updated as appropriate including reflecting landscape change, and to incorporate the Historic Landscape Character Assessment work and other up-to-date sources of information.

The following table outlines where, and why, amendments have been made to the 2003 landscape classification:

Landscape Character Types and Areas	
TYPE 1: CHALK ESCARPMENTS	
1A Melbury to Blandford Chalk Escarpments	No boundary/name change
1B West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment	No boundary/name change
1C Fovant and Chalke Escarpment	No boundary/name change
TYPE 2: OPEN CHALK DOWNLAND	
2A West Wiltshire Downs Open Chalk Downland	Split to include new area 3B West Wiltshire Downs Wooded Chalk Downland - this is an extensive area of woodland character, also including HLC similar to other areas of the Wooded Chalk Downland type.
2B Southern Downland Belt	Amended boundary between 3A and 2B – to align with the 2018 Landscape Partnership Scheme LCA – refinement of earlier work to reflect areas of open downland between the woodland
TYPE 3: WOODED CHALK DOWNLAND	
3A Cranborne Chase	Amended boundary between 3A and 2B – to match the 2018 Landscape Partnership Scheme LCA – refinement of earlier work to reflect areas of open downland between the woodland
New LCA **3B West Wiltshire Downs Wooded Chalk Downland**	New LCA **3B West Wiltshire Downs Wooded Chalk Downland** - this is an extensive area of woodland character, also including HLC similar to other areas of the Wooded Chalk Downland type.
TYPE 4: DOWNLAND HILLS	
4A Martin –Whitsbury Downland Hills	No boundary/name change
TYPE 5: CHALK RIVER VALLEYS	
Renamed LCA **5A Wylye Chalk River Valley Sides**	Split to include new LCA 5E Wylye Chalk River Valley Floor, and renaming **5A Wylye Chalk River Valley Sides** – for consistency of approach with 5B/5D. NB – this is also in alignment with the forthcoming Wiltshire LCA update.
Renamed LCA **5B Ebble Chalk River Valley Sides**	Split to include new LCA 5D Ebble Chalk River Valley Floor, and renaming as **5B Ebble Chalk River Valley Sides** – to align with the 2018 Landscape Partnership Scheme LCA – refinement to

	reflect the differences between the valley sides and valley floor. NB – this is also in alignment with the forthcoming Wiltshire LCA update.
5C Stour and Avon Tributary Valleys	No boundary change
***New LCA** **5D Ebble Chalk River Valley Floor**	New LCA **5D Ebble Chalk River Valley Floor**, and renaming 5B Ebble Chalk River Valley Sides – to align with the 2018 LPS LCA – refinement to reflect the differences between the valley sides and valley floor. NB – this is also in alignment with the forthcoming Wiltshire LCA update.
***New LCA** **5E Wylye Chalk River Valley Floor**	New LCA **5E Wylye Chalk River Valley Floor**, and renaming 5A Wylye Chalk River Valley Sides – for consistency of approach with 5B/5D. NB – this is also in alignment with the forthcoming Wiltshire LCA update.
TYPE 6: GREENSAND TERRACE	
6a Fovant Greensand Terrace	No boundary/name change
6B Kilmington Greensand Terrace	No boundary/name change
TYPE 7: GREENSAND HILLS	
7A Donhead – Fovant Hills	No boundary/name change
7B Penselwood – Longleat Hills	No boundary/name change
TYPE 8: ROLLING CLAY VALES	
8A The Vale of Wardour	No boundary/name change

Nottingham Studio Third Floor, The Birkin Building, 2 Broadway, Nottingham NG1 1PS

Contact +44 (0)115 8386737 mail@cbastudios.com www.cbastudios.com

Directors D Watkins BSc MSc MRTPI FRGS FLI • A Croft BA MA MCIfA