



Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Historic Environment Action Plans

Area 5: West Wiltshire Downs





This document forms part of a suite of documents which together comprise the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB Historic Environment Action Plans.

The HEAPs provide a summary of the key characteristics of the historic environment of the AONB at a landscape scale, they then set out the significance, condition and forces for change affecting the historic fabric and character of this special landscape and identify proactive actions to conserve and enhance these special characteristics. These summaries are divided into two groups:

1. Summaries of the historic environment of the AONB by area
2. Summaries of the historic environment of the AONB by theme

These core documents are accompanied by documents which provide background information, supplementary information and detail on the methodologies used to create these documents.

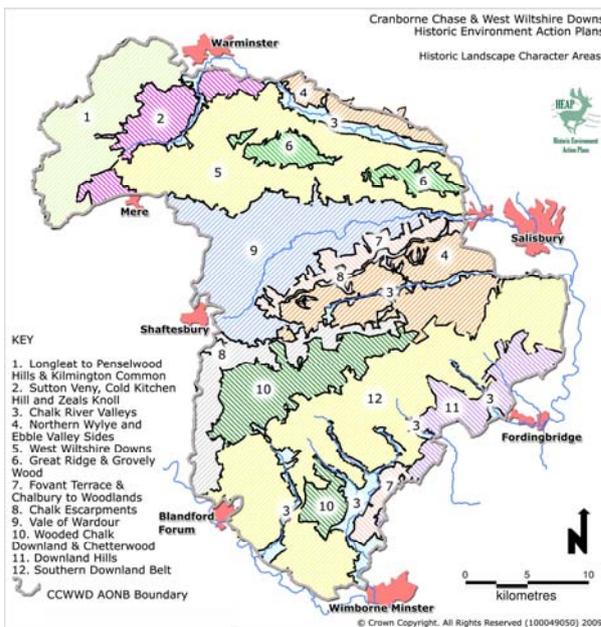
A series of icons help you navigate this suite of documents:

-  **Background** - Provides an introduction to the AONB Historic Environment Action Plans and provides background information on the history and archaeology of the landscape **(B1 to B10)**
-  **Area** - Summarises key characteristics of discrete geographical areas within the AONB, they then set out the significance, condition and forces for change affecting the historic fabric and character of each area and identify proactive actions to conserve and enhance its characteristics **(A1 to A12)**
-  **Theme** - Summarises key characteristics of historic environment themes, each document then sets out the significance, condition and forces for change affecting the historic fabric and character of each theme and identify proactive actions to conserve and enhance its characteristics **(T1 to T14)**
-  **Supplementary** - A series of documents which explore supplementary issues of relevance to the Historic Environment Action Plans **(S1 to S2)**
-  **Method** - Introduces the methodology behind the production of the Historic Environment Action Plans **(M1 to M3)**

Contents

Introducing the Historic Landscape Character Areas 1
 Location, Geology, Land Use and Topography 1
 Location Map 2
 Summary 3
 Linkages to other Historic Landscape Character Statements..... 4
 History and Context 5
 Key Secondary Sources 6
 Landscape Scale Characteristics and Components 7
 Statement of Significance 10
 State of the Historic Environment 14
 Historic Environment Actions 17

Introducing the Historic Landscape Character Areas



Twelve distinct Historic Landscape Character Areas have been identified in the AONB. The attributes used to identify the Historic Landscape Character Areas was based on information in the AONB Historic Landscape Characterisation. The HLC provided two key pieces of information:

1. The present day historic landscape character present in the AONB.
2. The surviving evidence of the historical development of the area.

The following descriptions aim to provide an overview of each area

which encapsulates the main features of the Historic Environment present and include both the archaeological and historical, the very old and the more recent.



The process through which the Historic Landscape Character Areas were identified, and mapped, and the sources of information used to create these descriptions is documented in the methodological statement 'Creating and Describing Historic Character Areas'.

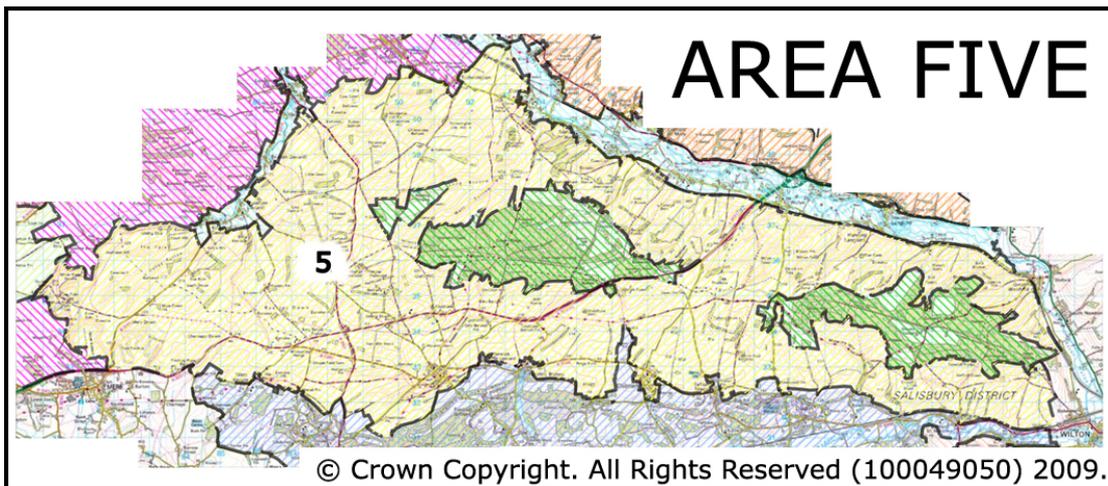
Location, Geology, Land Use and Topography

This area comprises one discrete area of the AONB.

The West Wiltshire Downs is a distinctive large scale landscape covering an extensive area of the northern half of the AONB. The West Wiltshire Downs extends from the village of Wilton in the east to Mere in the West. It is bounded by the Wylde valley to the north (see Area 3) and the Vale of Wardour (see Area 6) to the south. This area of upper chalk is comprised of a series of rolling hills and dry river valleys. The area is predominantly given over to arable farming. The northern slopes of the area also form the southern valley sides of the Wylde Valley. The valley slopes represent the eroded remains of a chalk escarpment and area steep and convoluted. The steepness of this slopes has lead to the survival of areas chalk grassland and hanging woodland the majority of rest of the land having been converted to arable. The western edge of the West Wiltshire Downs is comprised of a much steeper deeply eroded escarpment running in a convoluted south westerly direction towards Mere. This Historic Landscape Character Area is bounded to the west by the greensand terrace (see Area 1 and Area 2) and the upper reaches of the Wylde Valley (see Area 3).



Location Map



Summary

Summary of Key Characteristics

- Large scale open 19th and 20th century fields the boundaries of which often cut across the prevailing topography. These were created from vast areas of former downlands.
- Pockets of open downland survive.
- Extremely rich archaeological record
- The area is notable for its Iron Age and Romano British archaeology,
- The areas are crisscrossed by Roman roads and other ancient routeways such as droveways.
- Building evidence is sparse except in the villages to the south of the area

Summary of Statement of Significance

- *The area is fairly significant both in terms of the coherence of the historic landscape character, and the presence of prehistoric and roman earthworks.*
- *Earlier traces of historic land uses have been obscured except where pockets of open downland survive.*
- *Medieval strip lynchets form visually dominant features on steeper slopes.*
- *Significant evidential value particularly for prehistoric and roman archaeology.*
- *The settlements on the southern edge of the area have important historic value.*

Summary of Forces for Change

- *Changes in Agriculture and Farming*
- *Changes in Climate*
- *Changes in Land Holdings*
- *Changes in Natural Environment*
- *Changes in Settlement and Infrastructure Development*

Summary of State of the Historic Environment

- *This is a strong and coherent landscape which has been radically transformed in the last 100 years. Vast tracts of open chalk grassland have vanished and with them much of the sense of time depth in the landscape, to the extent that the remaining visible vestiges of historic land use and past human activity of even more precious.*
- *The archaeology of the area is under considerable threat from ploughing.*

Summary of Historic Environment Actions

- *ACTION 1: Provide an AONB wide synthesis of the distinctive character of historic settlements.*
- *ACTION 3: Identify and record components of historic highways*
- *ACTION 5: Reduce unintended/accidental damage to buried archaeology or extant monuments*
- *ACTION 6: Gain AONB wide coverage of mapping and interpretation of archaeological features from aerial photographs*
- *ACTION 10: Gain greater understanding of historic farm buildings and farmsteads*
- *ACTION 11: Enhance appreciation of the Prehistoric archaeology of the area*
- *ACTION 12: Widen knowledge of ways and means of maintaining historic farm buildings*
- *ACTION 15: Increase understanding of Medieval landscape elements of the AONB by academics, teachers and public.*
- *ACTION 17: Improve management of historic boundaries and ensure they are retained*

Linkages to other Historic Landscape Character Statements

This statement forms one of 12 Historic Landscape Character Area statements which cover the whole of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. These are accompanied by AONB wide Historic Landscape Character Theme statements. These documents together build up a picture of the key characteristics of the Historic Environment of the AONB at a landscape scale.

Other Historic Landscape Character Areas adjacent to this area are:

-  Area 2: Sutton Veny, Cold Kitchen Hill and Zeals Knoll
-  Area 3: Chalk River Valleys
-  Area 9: Vale of Wardour

Historic Landscape Character Themes of particular relevance to this area are:

- T2** Theme 2: Farms and Farming
- T3** Theme 3: Fields in the Landscape
- T5** Theme 5: Hunting Landscapes
- T8** Theme 8: Landscapes of Prehistory
- T9** Theme 9: Open Land
- T10** Theme 10: Routeways in the Landscape

History and Context

The West Wiltshire Downs was up until 150 years ago a large area of open chalk downland. Today the open downland in this area is limited to small areas on the edge of escarpments, or in steeped sided coombes. However, historic ordnance maps show that as recently as 50 years ago parts of the West Wiltshire Downs was dominated by open downland and unimproved grassland.

These high downlands were typified by vast uninterrupted vistas, lack of dwellings, few marked roads and very large flocks of sheep. The open downland, areas of rough grazing, and furze were all extremely important features of the landscape in the past, much of these areas were subject to common rights which gave people access to fuel, summer grazing and materials for construction. These more marginal lands were increasingly encroached upon as the land was more intensively farmed in the 19th and 20th centuries. These pressures meant that the open land in the AONB shrunk to a fraction of its former size. The locations where it is still found mark an important historical survival, therefore, which is often also of great ecological significance.

The historic settlements on the southern edge of the area exploited this resource, for example the village of Hindon was planned by a bishop of Winchester and founded in the early 13th century with a thriving market.

- B2** See *Background Paper 2* for an overview of the archaeology and history of the AONB by time period.
- B6** See *Background Paper 6* for an overview of the key historical figures associated with the AONB.
- B7** See *Background Paper 7* for an overview of Major historical events trends and fashions and their impact on the AONB.

Key Secondary Sources

The main source of detail on the historic landscape is the AONB Historic Landscape Characterisation report available from www.historiclandscape.co.uk

The main archaeological record for the area is the county based Historic Environment Record in Dorset and the Sites and Monuments Record in Wiltshire.

Information on the listed buildings in the area is available from English Heritage's Listed Buildings Online <http://lbonline.english-heritage.org.uk>.

Information on historic farm buildings in the area is only available at the scale of National Character Area as part of English Heritage's preliminary characterisation of historic farmsteads.

The Wiltshire Community pages on the Wiltshire Council Website provide a wealth of information on the parishes in the area. This is complemented by descriptions of parishes in the Victoria County History of Wiltshire which are organised by Hundred.

Nearly all parishes in the AONB have had parish histories created for them and these are available from the relevant county reference library.

Information on the woodland in the area can be found in the AONB booklet 'A landscape view of trees and woodland' (2010).

The Causewayed Enclosure on Whitesheet Hill was originally excavated by Stuart Piggott in 1952 and is written up in the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 54: 404-10. The subsequent investigations following the laying of a water pipeline across the monument are recorded in the same publication in 2004, volume 97: 63-67.

The Late Iron Age sites of the AONB and the evidence for Durotrigian coinage and ceramic styles is discussed by Mark Corney in a paper on 'The Romano-British nucleated Settlements of Wiltshire in *Roman Wiltshire and After* (2001) published by the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Museum. The same volume also contains a paper by Paul Robinson on *Religion in Roman Wiltshire* which discusses the Iron Age evidence from the shrine on Cold Kitchen Hill. Nan Kevill's brief report on the original excavations of the site are published in the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 1925 vol 43: 180-191, 1926 vol 43: 327-32, 389-94 and 1928 vol 44: 138-42.

Wiltshire Parliamentary enclosures are discussed in *Abstracts of Wiltshire Inclosure Awards* published by the Wiltshire Record Society in 1971.

B10

A full list of References is provided in Background Paper 10.

Landscape Scale Characteristics and Components

Ancient Boundaries and Land Ownership

- The western edge of the West Wiltshire Downs was within the boundary of Selwood Forest. Grovely Forest was a small Medieval hunting forest which was also its own ancient parish.
- The ancient parishes in the West Wiltshire Downs are comprised of a series of thin and linear parishes running north-south. The spine of the Downs forms the boundary which separates these parishes.

T1

See 'Ancient Boundaries and Landownership' for more information on this theme

Farms and Farming in the Landscape

- Today arable dominates across the West Wiltshire Downs, interspersed with pockets of unimproved grassland in steeper coombes. Historically these were large scale areas of open chalk grassland grazed by large flocks of sheep, with small areas of open fields around the historic settlements on the southern edge of the area.
- Farm buildings do not start to appear across the area until the 18th century and even then they are isolated and small, associated with a loose courtyard plan. Farm houses tend to be constructed from brick.

T2

See "Farms and Farming" for more information on this theme.

Fields in the Landscape

- There is a wealth of dated and undated field systems and many undated linear features and enclosures. In Wiltshire transcriptions from aerial photographs illustrates the density of these features.
- The western edge of the West Wiltshire Downs is marked by Medieval strip lynchets above Mere, these are visually dominant feature in the landscape.
- This downland is characterised by blocks of large modern fields and regular grid like 19th century parliamentary and planned enclosure which have over the last 200 years divided up and enclosed great swathes of formerly open downland. This leaves a homogenous landscape.

T3

See 'Fields in the Landscape' for more information on this theme.

Historic Parks and Gardens in the Landscape

- There are no historic parks and gardens on the West Wiltshire Downs.

T4

See 'Historic Parks and Gardens in the Landscape' for more information on this theme.

Hunting Landscapes

- The Southern Downland Belt is nearly wholly within the ancient hunting grounds of the Cranborne Chase, with the exception of the far south-eastern edge, which falls within the Medieval Badbury Forest. It comprises the vast majority of the outer bounds of the Chase.

T5

See 'Hunting Landscapes' for more information on this theme.

Industry in the Landscape

- The downlands are dotted with the remnants of small chalk quarries.

T6

See 'Industry' in the Landscape for more information on this theme.

Landscapes of Militarism, Commemoration and Defence

- N/A

T7

See 'Landscapes of Militarism, Commemoration & Defence' for more information on this theme.

Landscapes of Prehistory

- These areas have an extremely rich archaeological record, including nationally important Prehistoric archaeology.
- Long barrows are distributed along the north side of the West Wiltshire Downs above the Wylve Valley and across the Southern Downland Belt.
- There is a causewayed enclosure on the western side of the West Wiltshire Downs at Whitesheet Hill as well as an Iron Age hillfort.
- There is a very dense distribution of Bronze Age round barrows especially on the western edge of the West Wiltshire Downs
- There is a high density of Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age finds between Grovely and Great Ridge on the West Wiltshire Downs.

T8

See 'Landscapes of Prehistory' for more information on this theme.

Late 20th Century activity in the Landscape

- N/A

Open Land

- Pockets of former downland survive, notably in the semi-enclosed escarpments of the western edge of the West Wiltshire Downs.

- Unimproved grassland is also semi-enclosed with fencing on steep slopes and at the edge of combes.

T9

See 'Open Land' for more information on this theme.

Routeways in the Landscape

- The West Wiltshire Downs is crossed by two major roads. The A303 runs east-west across the area and before it was widened was the line of the former 18th century turnpike. Several milestones representing this former history survive. The A350 is on the western side of the Downs and runs north-south. This was also a former turnpike road.
- The junction between the A350 and the A303 at Willoughby Hedge was also an important post Roman meeting point of ways, though the modern junction has transformed the character of the area.
- There are few modern roads leading off the A303 and only one leading North to the Wylde Valley. There is, however, a network of north-south bridledways and footpaths which run through Great Ridge and Grovely Wood. The east-west routes represent ancient track ways, including the Harrow Way, and there are more tracks to the north running into the Wyle Valley. These represent survivals of a much larger number of possible routes across the formerly open downland. On the western edge of the West Wiltshire Downs there is a more complex network of footpaths leading to the Deverill Valley.
- A Roman road leads east-west across the spine of the West Wiltshire Downs.

T10

See 'Routeways in the Landscape' for more information on this theme.

Settlement in the Landscape

- There has been a shift in settlement on the West Wiltshire Downs. The higher ground along the spine of the Downs was the focus for settlement during the Iron Age and Romano-British period. This legacy is still visible in a series of impressive earthworks and field systems.
- In the post Roman period settlement shifted to the north into the Wylde Valley and southwards to sit in the southern dip slope of the downs at the head of the Nadder tributaries. Chilmark is an example of a village which follows this pattern. Hindon is the only village not to follow this pattern, forming a distinctive planned Medieval town with its regular plan of burbage plots.
- Present day settlement in the West Wiltshire Downs is a dispersed pattern of a few pre 1800 hamlets and farm complexes, with larger villages on its southern edge. There is no settlement on the western escarpment due to the steep topography, but this area is intimately related to settlement on the Kilmington terrace to the east.
- The settlement on the open areas of the West Wiltshire Downs is formed of red brick and flint, with the villages often using Chilmark Stone, with thatch, slate and local clay tiles for roofing materials.
- There are 2 Conservation Areas Chilmark and Hindon.

T11

See 'Settlement in the Landscape' for more information on this theme.

Water in the Landscape

- N/A

T12

See 'Water in the Landscape' for more information on this theme.

Woodland and Trees in the Landscape

- There has been a gradual increase in the number of small linear and rectangular plantations especially along the northern edge of the West Wiltshire Downs
- Noticeable losses of woodland have occurred on the West Wiltshire Downs around Great Wood, Grovely Wood, Pertwood and Upper Pertwood
- Across the West Wiltshire Downs there is small scale scattered woodland leading to a feeling of exposure and expanse across the entire landscape. the sparse hedgerows and copses shelter some extraordinarily large ash boles, ancient thorns and very occasionally a pollarded oak or even a yew.
- The years AD 1750 – 1900 saw very little woodland established across the West Wiltshire Downs, except where the Fonthill Woodlands overlap from the Greensand Hills. Twentieth century woodland frequently occurs elsewhere across the downs, either as small farm woods or geometric conifer plantations. Many of the smaller conifer plantations have broadleaved species in their centre, being planted as game coverts. Copses and clumps of trees are a particularly distinctive feature of the downland landscape, crowning a number of hilltops.

T13

See 'Woods and Trees in the Landscape' for more information about this theme'

Statement of Significance

Introduction

The area is fairly significant both in terms of the coherence of the historic landscape character, and the presence of Prehistoric and Roman earthworks. There are a high number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments and the area has a strong evidential value and a fairly strong historical value. Surviving blocks of open grassland are significant both as a historic landscape type and due to the archaeological earthworks they contain.

Coherence, Local Distinctiveness, Rarity, and Time Depth

The wider historic landscape character of this area is extremely coherent; this includes landscape of blocks of large modern fields and regular grid like 19th century Parliamentary and planned enclosure. These are visually dominant and distinctive to chalk downland landscapes and have obscured earlier traces of land uses. The historic patterns of routeways across the area are much more prominent.

Built settlement evidence is generally sparse but the villages on the south of the area have coherent historic settlement patterns, especially the planned village of Hindon which is a rare settlement form in the AONB, and are associated with many listed buildings.

Traces of former land uses are confined to pockets of surviving open chalk grassland. Time depth in the wider landscape is mainly displayed where Prehistoric archaeological earthworks are visible in the landscape especially in the form of the traces of Iron Age and Roman settlement on the edge of the woodlands. However many of the known sites, especially the Prehistoric and Roman field systems are only visible as crop marks which reduces their coherence.

Typical surviving components of the area

- Ancient parish boundaries.
- Ancient large scale linear banks and ditches.
- Homogenous landscape of blocks of large modern fields and regular grid like 19th century Parliamentary and planned enclosure.
- Dense distribution of Bronze Age round barrows.
- Long barrows and Iron Age and Roman field system and settlement surviving as earthworks.
- Pockets of former downland survive.
- Evidence for former Roman roads, droveways and turnpikes.
- Dispersed pattern of a few pre 1800 hamlets and farm complexes, with larger villages on its southern edge.
- Pre 1800 small scale scattered woodland and 20th century smaller conifer plantations.

Nationally Protected Heritage



See Background Paper 8 'Designated Heritage Assets' in the AONB for an introduction to nationally designated heritage.

There are a very high number and density of Scheduled Ancient Monuments (84) compared with other areas. This includes a large number of Bronze Age round barrow and other Prehistoric monuments. The West Wiltshire Downs is dominated by Prehistoric and Roman field systems and settlements while the Southern Downland Belt includes the Prehistoric sites which cluster around the Dorset Cursus, multi-period field systems, and Medieval settlements.

There are 138 listed buildings. These are associated with the historic settlements or farms but a significant number are milestones and boundaries features. There is 1 Grade II* listed building the parish church in Chilmark.

There are no registered parks and gardens.

There are 2 Conservation Areas.

Archaeological Fieldwork in the AONB



See Background Paper 3 'History of Archaeological Discovery in the AONB' for more information on this topic.

On the West Wiltshire Downs William Cunnington (1754-1810) and his patron Richard Colt Hoare, who lived at Stourhead in Wiltshire, excavated many barrows systematically, recording their findings and using stratigraphy to distinguish between primary and secondary burials.

Archaeological investigations by Wessex Archaeology in 1989 preceded the laying of a pipeline in the northern half of the AONB. This includes investigation of the Neolithic Causewayed Enclosure on Whitesheet Hill.

Evidential Value

Parts of the area have been subject to detailed archaeological excavation and systematic survey (*Legacy of Archaeological Discovery* above). Where information is available the county Historical Environment Records amongst other sources indicate features including:

- Archaeological Sites such as:
 - Seven Neolithic long barrows.
 - Neolithic causewayed enclosure on Whitesheet Hill.
 - Large numbers of Bronze Age round barrows.
 - Three Iron Age hillforts.
 - Iron Age and Roman Burials and a Roman cemetery.
 - A Roman temple.
 - Iron Age and Roman enclosures, settlements, field systems and trackways.
 - Early Medieval settlements surviving as earthworks adjacent to existing settlements and farmsteads.
 - Late Medieval settlements surviving as earthworks adjacent to existing settlements and farmsteads.
 - Ten Medieval and Post Medieval pillow mounds.
 - Large numbers of undated circular features, linear features and enclosures.
 - Extensive undated field systems.

In general these sites are under the plough so can only be seen as crop marks or as slight earthworks. Where chalk grassland survives for example on the edge of Grovely Forest and Great Ridge and on Whitesheet Hill many sites survive as impressive earthworks. Some Scheduled Ancient Monuments have been placed in set aside.

- 136 find spots, the majority being Prehistoric and Roman, including flint tools, metalwork and pottery.
- Milestones.

- Planned and organic Medieval settlement and the buildings associated with them including:
 - Vernacular architecture
 - Farmhouses and farm buildings
 - Historic inns
 - Historic churches and the buildings associated with them.

The key to the unique historic landscape character of the area is the long survival of chalk grassland. This helped to preserve the ancient historic landscape characteristics of the area including open chalk grassland and relic Prehistoric and Roman farming patterns.

Historical Value

Illustrative Value

Prehistoric monuments, field systems and settlement sites existing as visible earthworks.

The earthworks on the edge of Grovely Wood are a legible reminder of the impact of Iron Age and Roman culture on the landscape.

Planned Medieval village at Hindon illustrates the rise of the wool trade in this area.

Highly legible post dissolution pattern of landownership can be used to illustrate the rise of the new peers, landed gentry and yeoman classes AD 1600-1800.

The small number of late 18th or early 19th century out-farms surviving on the downs can be used to provide linkages to the sheep/corn system of agriculture.

The modern picture of extensive arable holdings on former downland areas interspersed with remnant grasslands still used as grazing can be used to illustrate the enclosure of land through Parliamentary acts and informal enclosure.

The expansion of arable land across downland areas can be used to illustrate the expansion of agriculture during the 19th and 20th Century.

The lasting legacy of war graves and memorials provide a visible link to the First and Second World Wars.

Associative Value

Hindon is associated with the Bishop of Winchester who founded the village in 1218.

Aesthetic Value

The aesthetic value of the area is derived from the homogenous imposition of large scale arable fields on the landscape juxtaposed with pockets of much older land use, including pockets of ancient chalk grassland and Prehistoric and Roman field systems and strip lynchets.

Communal Value

The villages in this area are strong vibrant communities which value the historic characteristics of their villages and the strong sense of time depth present.

State of the Historic Environment

Introduction

This is a strong and coherent landscape of large scale 19th and 20th fields which have replaced formerly open downland. Remnant areas of open chalk downland are an important historical survival. The archaeological resource in this area is under considerable threat from ploughing.

Current Knowledge

The archaeological and historical sites and features in the areas have only been subject to limited study.

There are significant gaps in our knowledge and understanding of this area:

- There has not been a systematic assessment of aerial photographs of the area and it is therefore likely that other features remain to be discovered.
- Building records for the area are sparse, especially in relation to the character of historic farmsteads.
- There have not been any systematic surveys of the features associated with ancient parish boundaries, or any studies of their interrelationships.

The AONB Historic Landscape Characterisation has revealed the character of the wider historic landscape, but further information is required on the history and development of settlement on the southern edge of the area.

The AONB Historic Landscape Characterisation has revealed the character of the wider historic landscape.

The area is associated with a pattern of long distance Rights of Ways but the historic characteristics of all the routeways have not been systematically recorded.

Existing Levels of Protection and Heritage at Risk

Nearly half (37) of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments are at high risk. The majority of SAMs in this area are under threat from arable clipping and ploughing, although scrub and tree growth, and vehicle erosion also has a part to play (English Heritage at Risk Register 2009). This is indicative of the risk to the wider known archaeological record.

Four of the six Conservation Areas have appraisals.

Loss and condition

The most striking feature of this area is the loss of former areas of open downland and their enclosure during the 19th and 20th century, meaning that only small pockets of open land survive.

During this period small angular blocks of woodland were created across the northern side of the area.

The ploughing up of former grassland resulted in the loss of archaeological earthworks to the extent that most archaeological sites in the area are only visible as crop marks, with the exception of the sites on the edge of Grovely and Great Ridge.

The historic footprint of the settlements on the southern edge of the area has been expanded in the last 100 years. The state of the wider built heritage in the area is unknown, but as many of the known listed features are within the Conservation Areas, and are in active management as residential buildings, it can be postulated that the condition of most buildings is good. The main risk being to any redundant farm buildings and features with high maintenance costs, such as churches and monuments.

Coherence

This is a strong and coherent landscape which has been radically transformed in the last 100 years. Vast tracts of open chalk grassland have vanished and with them much of the sense of time depth in the landscape, to the extent that the remaining visible vestiges of historic land use and past human activity are even more precious.



See Background Paper 4 for an overview of the change in land use patterns in the AONB.

Forces for Change

Overview of the sensitivities of the landscape area to change

The characteristic open, expansive qualities of these landscapes make them highly sensitive to most forms of development and land management changes, as the introduction of new characteristics into the landscapes would be readily perceptible in most views. These are large-scale landscapes of broad rolling hills and gentle slopes, with a large 'skyscape' and panoramic, distant views. The typical rolling chalk 'upland' relief ensures that this landscape has few concealed corners and areas which appear relatively well hidden from one viewpoint are likely to be fully exposed from another. The sensitivity of the landscape is high in the west and north of the character area on the West Wiltshire Downs, and moderate-high in the south.

For more information see "Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB Landscape Sensitivity Study 2007".

Overview of forces for change operating on the historic environment

Theme 1: Agriculture and Farming

- Increased positive management of elements of the historic environment by landowners until 2013 as an increasing number of farmers enter agri-environment schemes for a 10 year period. Maintenance of current levels of agri-environment scheme monies would increase the numbers of land holdings undertaking positive management of historic environment assets. However the likely possibility of reduced levels of agri-environment money post 2013 could have a major impact on the positive management of archaeological sites and the wider historic landscape in the future. Changes in stocking densities and grazing regimes have the potential to rapidly affect the appearance of this historic landscape. Archaeological monuments on surviving grassland need carefully planned grazing regimes if they are to remain free of scrub.
- Archaeological monuments already under the plough will continue to be ploughed for the foreseeable future. New crops and further intensification may increase damage to buried archaeology, and change appearance of landscape, and result in further removal of field boundaries.
- Major changes to the way in which fields are managed and used, increased mechanisation has the potential to lead to the need for larger agricultural buildings served by larger machinery, increased redundancy, and conversion of historic farm buildings.

Theme 2: Climate Change

- A possible increase in the frequency of extreme weather, or a change in its geographical distribution, which could pose an increased risk of damage to some historic landscapes and buildings as well as trees.
- Construction of new renewable energy infrastructure, including wind turbines. Wind turbines and wind farms could, if insensitively located, compromise significant landscapes, the visual settling of important sites and buildings, or the integrity of the wider historic environment.
- New biomass crops may pose a risk to buried archaeology or radically change the appearance of the wider historic landscape character.
- Some micro-renewable might be suitable to fit on historic buildings.
- Energy saving measures could detract from the historic character and fabric of buildings.

Theme 4: Land Holdings in the AONB

- Landscape scale legacy of the great estates remain visible. In some areas conservatism in land use practices is encouraged and tolerated by estates, through the use of covenants leading to the maintenance of historic landscape character.

Theme 5: Natural Environment

- Increased levels of soil erosion have potential for major erosion of important archaeological sites. Loss or impoverishment of soil will affect viability of agricultural businesses, with knock-on affect on patterns of agricultural exploitation and thus on historic landscape character.

- Increased water extraction has potential impact on buried archaeological remains and, in particular, those that are currently waterlogged.
- Closer dialogue between historic and natural environment interests should lead to the design of initiatives that have mutual benefit. A better understanding of long term historical change may suggest potential for more innovative schemes that could include some reversion of intensively used land.

Theme 7: Settlement and Infrastructure Development

- Reuse of historic farmsteads provides increased opportunities for maintaining these structures that contribute much to the historic landscape character of the AONB as long as care is taken on the design of any conversions to retain original materials, openings and character. The creation of new farmyards with standardised farm buildings adjacent to the historic farmstead may lead to neglect of these historic assets or conversely to opportunities to ensure their future through well considered conversion.
- Continuance of the current road maintenance regime may lead to an increasing erosion of the historic character of rural roads; alternatively the character of historic routeways could be improved through the implementation of rural roads protocol. The visual impact of overhead power lines on the historic landscape continues to be reduced by undergrounding.
- New settlement on the edge of this area may place increased strain on the historic road network, impact on view from key historic landscapes within the AONB. Increased threat to buried archaeological remains, archaeological earthworks and historic field patterns on the edge of the AONB from development. Increased light pollution may blur the distinction between urban and rural areas and affect people's perception of a sense of long-established cultural heritage.



For more information see supplementary document "Forces for change operating on the historic environment of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB at a landscape scale and their past, current and future impacts".

Summary of Key Threats

- Loss or damage to buried archaeology through ploughing.
- Erosion of historic landscape character in key historic settlements lacking Conservation Area Appraisals.
- Potential loss of historic farm buildings and other built heritage not in active management.

Historic Environment Actions



See Background paper 9 for a full list of Historic Environment Actions and the stages identified in their implementation.

ACTION 1: Provide an AONB wide synthesis of the distinctive character of historic settlements.

The Threat and the Opportunity – Guiding change within the AONB's numerous historic villages is done best when there is an informed understanding of their particular development and character. Over half of the Conservation Areas in the AONB do not have a Conservation Area Appraisal, and there are only three Village Design Statements. Only one District has a design guide. This means that there is no easily available information source identifying the distinctive character of either individual settlements or the rural settlements of the AONB overall.

The Potential Mechanism – Characterisations of local settlements could be prepared to provide an accessible source of information on the historic characteristics of individual settlements and the range of characteristics found in the AONB's settlements as a whole to inform planning decisions and ensure that the distinctive character of the AONB settlements is conserved and enhanced.

ACTION 3: Identify and record components of historic highways

The Threat and the Opportunity - The historic highways of the AONB are an under appreciated component of the environment of the AONB and there is no coherent approach to their management and maintenance. The forms of the numerous routeways that thread through the AONB's countryside, and the lines they take, reveal much about their complex history. They are often the means by which people still move around and appreciate the Area's landscape, but like all other parts they are subject to change and the erosion of character and fabric can lead to a loss of historic meaning. Although individual historic features associated with ancient highways, such as milestones, are recorded, the way that these features relate to each other, and the setting of the historic highways, is often ignored. This action would increase understanding, appreciation and knowledge of historic highways and by doing so ensure that their key features are retained and appropriately managed. This action is intended to draw attention to the issues at the same time as realising the potential of routeways to enhance people's enjoyment of the AONB.

The Potential Mechanism - attention could be focused initially on the droveways of the AONB as these represent some of the oldest routeways and are served by a good Rights of Way network. One possible Mechanism could be through the creation of self-guided trails.

ACTION 5: Reduce unintended/accidental damage to buried archaeology or extant monuments

The Threat and the Opportunity - Approximately 55% of the agricultural land in the AONB is cultivated. One result of this activity is the unintended damage and loss of buried archaeology. This is especially damaging in the AONB due to the complex archaeological remains which survived into the 19th century, for example prehistoric settlements set within extensive field systems. This damage can be mitigated against through advice to land owners delivered, in part, through agri-environment schemes. Another area where advice can be of assistance is in increasing awareness and appreciation of more recent components of the historic landscape such as historic field boundaries (see Action 17).

The Potential Mechanism - Examples from other areas in the country suggest that advice to landowners aimed at reducing damage is most effectively delivered by specialist advisors. Many local authorities maintain a Historic Environment Countryside Advisor Service (HECAS) to maximise the gain for the historic environment from the various schemes designed to support the environment and rural economy (Higher and Entry Level Environmental Stewardship, Woodland Grant Schemes the AONB's own Sustainability funding, etc). A HECAS officer can be crucial in transforming the potential of these schemes into reality and in so doing help a range of agencies achieve their wider aims with regard to managing and enhancing the historic environment. In the CCWWD AONB it may be expected that a key role for a HECAS would be to provide targeted agri-environment advice aimed at reducing damage and loss of buried archaeology through ploughing.

ACTION 6: Gain AONB wide coverage of mapping and interpretation of archaeological features from aerial photographs

The Threat and the Opportunity: The buried or surviving archaeology of the AONB has never been systematically recorded from crop marks or earthworks displayed in aerial photographs. This means that there is potential for important archaeological sites to be damaged or inappropriately managed because they have not yet been recognised.

The Potential Mechanism - A mapping project for the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB could fill gaps in knowledge of plough damage sites, uncover new sites (through crop marks, earthwork patterns etc.), and spatially link known buried archaeology. The aim of English Heritage's National Mapping Programme (NMP) is to enhance the understanding of past human settlement, by providing primary information and synthesis for all archaeological sites and landscapes visible on aerial photographs, or other airborne remote sensed data

ACTION 10: Gain greater understanding of historic farm buildings and farmsteads

The Threat and the Opportunity - Historic farm buildings and farm complexes are a key feature of the locally distinctive vernacular architecture of the AONB. There is, however, a lack of information on the location and character of historic farm buildings in the AONB, including their types, ages, typical components, materials, the ways buildings and spaces like yards work together within farmsteads, and the ways they have changed in the last few decades.

The Potential Mechanism - The national farmstead characterisation work championed by English Heritage could be built on to fill gaps in our knowledge of historic farm buildings and thereby help to ensure that they are properly conserved and enhanced in the future, or to ensure that any reuse is undertaken sensitively and on the basis of full understanding of the original form and function of the structures and spaces. One approach would be to:

- Collate existing information and make it accessible
- Undertake additional research & survey

ACTION 11: Enhance appreciation of the Prehistoric archaeology of the area

The Threat and the Opportunity - Although the Cranborne Chase is widely accepted in academic circles as containing internationally important complexes of Prehistoric archaeology, this is not widely appreciated by local people and visitors.

The Potential Mechanism - The lack of appreciation of the AONB's Prehistoric archaeology could be combated through the establishment of a series of self guided trails through which people could explore different aspects of the Prehistoric archaeology of the AONB.

ACTION 12: Widen knowledge of ways and means of maintaining historic farm buildings

The Threat and the Opportunity - The Historic Environment Action Plan Steering Group identified that although there had been some good examples of schemes which had reused historic farm buildings, while still maintaining their historic characteristics, these were not widely known.

The Potential Mechanism - Good examples of the maintenance and reuse of historic farm buildings could be celebrated and shared with Local Planning Authorities and land owners thereby helping to inspire the conservation and enhancement of other historic farm buildings and farmsteads.

ACTION 15: Increase understanding of Medieval landscape elements of the AONB by academics, teachers and public.

The Threat and the Opportunity - There is perceived to be a lack of appreciation of the Medieval components of the AONB's landscape: settlements, buildings, castles, fields, pastures, woodlands, roads, mills, hunting chase, parks, etc, all of which contribute greatly to the fabric and character of the AONB as it survives today.

The Potential Mechanism - The lack of appreciation of the Medieval components of the AONB landscape could be combated by a seminar and the creation of a research framework that encourages and sets out a range of achievable goals for further research in the area.

ACTION 17: Improve management of historic field boundaries and ensure they are retained

The Threat - The historic fieldscapes of the AONB are key characteristics of the AONB landscape which are not at present subjected to integrated and holistic management. There has consequently been loss and gradual removal of the historic patterns of pre 1800 boundaries, including the distinctive pattern of small curving irregular fields around the Donheads. Elsewhere older field boundaries have not been maintained and are either degrading or, if originally hedgerows are becoming overgrown.

The Potential Mechanism - This action would aim to halt the decline in the condition of particular field boundaries and the legibility of historic field patterns by providing

training for agri-environment and other land management advisors. There is already much advice available on historic field boundary conservation (including implementation of the 1997 Hedgerow Regulations) and management, often generated via the HECAS officers mentioned under Action 5, but most of this is specific to the region's where it was generated. However, this material can be reviewed and tailored to suit the needs of the AONB once a clearer understanding has been gained of the character and needs of the field boundaries within the Area.

This material should then form the basis of training sessions for farmers and land managers working within the AONB. Involvement in such an initiative might be attractive to partners such as FWAG, the National Trust, Natural England and the local Wildlife Trusts.



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Background	B1	Introducing the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB Historic Environment Action Plans
	B2	Description of the Archaeology of the AONB by Time Period
	B3	History of Archaeological Discovery
	B4	Land Use
	B5	Local Distinctiveness
	B6	People in the Landscape
	B7	Major Historical Events, Trends and Fashions
	B8	Designated Heritage Assets
	B9	Full List of Historic Environment Actions
	B10	References and Glossary
Area	A1	Longleat to Penselwood Hills and Kilmington Common
	A2	Sutton Veny, Cold Kitchen Hill and Zeals Knoll
	A3	Chalk River Valleys
	A4	Northern Wylde and Ebbel Valley Sides
	A5	West Wiltshire Downs
	A6	Great Ridge and Grovelly Woods
	A7	Fovant Terrace and the Area Between Chalbury and Woodlands
	A8	Chalk Escarpments
	A9	Vale of Wardour
	A10	Wooded Chalk Downland of the Cranborne Chase and Chetterwood
	A11	Downland Hills
	A12	Southern Downland Belt
Theme	T1	Ancient Boundaries and Land Ownership
	T2	Farms and Farming
	T3	Fields in the Landscape
	T4	Historic Parks and Gardens in the Landscape
	T5	Hunting Landscapes
	T6	Industry in the Landscape
	T7	Landscapes of Militarism, Commemoration & Defence
	T8	Landscapes of Prehistory
	T9	Open Land
	T10	Routeways in the Landscape
	T11	Settlement in the Landscape
	T12	Water in the Landscape
	T13	Woodland and Trees in the Landscape
	T14	Historic Features of Local Value
Supplementary	S1	Planning and Historic Landscape Character: A Guide for the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB
	S2	Forces for Change Operating on the Historic Environment of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB at a Landscape Scale and their Past, Current and Future Impacts
Method	M1	Creating Historic Environment Action Plans for Protected Landscapes
	M2	Creating and Describing Historic Environment Areas
	M3	Creating and Describing Historic Environment Theme

Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Historic Environment Action Plans

www.historiclandscape.co.uk

This document forms part of a suite of documents which together comprise the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB Historic Environment Action Plans, or HEAPs for short. The HEAPs provide a summary of the key characteristics of the historic environment of the AONB at a landscape scale, they then set out the significance, condition and forces for change affecting the historic fabric and character of this special landscape and identify proactive actions to conserve and enhance these special characteristics.



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