



Spatial Issues by landscape

"Yes, sheep are the treasure of the downs... it was sheep whose teeth created the very tapestry of the downland surface"

HJ Massingham, 1936

Introduction

There are issues and challenges faced by the landscapes and communities of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB that apply to many or most landscape types. One example is the viability of the family farm; and development pressures resulting from national demographic predictions are another. The funding of incentives for activities that conserve and enhance at a landscape scale is an overarching challenge.

However, this appraisal focuses on those issues and challenges that are particularly pertinent to individual landscape types defined in the Integrated Landscape Assessment for the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs.

Landscape type 1:

Chalk Escarpments

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

Issues and challenges

- Decreases in livestock grazing leading to loss of grassland habitat
- Visibility of changes
- A350 corridor and potential visibility of any development



Landscape type 2:

Open Chalk Downland



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

Issues and challenges

- Arable crop changes influenced by globalisation, commodity prices, farm inputs and costs
- Exposed transport corridors - A303 / A350 / A354 - and potential visibility of any development
- Erosion and truncation of Ancient Monuments

Landscape type 3:

Wooded Chalk Downland

- An elevated downland landscape with dramatic intercepting combe valleys and rounded upstanding ridges
- Dominated by an Upper Chalk geology with drift clays with flints capping higher ground
- A well wooded landscape with large woods, shelter belts, copses and clumps creating a series of enclosed spaces or 'rooms' surrounded by trees
- Mosaic of unenclosed downland, improved grassland and arable fields, dating from 19th century inclosure, between the woodland
- Chalk grassland and ancient woodland provide important nature conservation habitats
- Typical 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 valley coombes

Issues and challenges

- Conservation of heritage / archaeological interests
- Impacts of climate changes on mixed farming and forestry / ancient woodlands
- Connectivity between woodlands and maintenance of enclosures



Landscape type 4:

Downland Hills



- A series of prominent hills and knolls
- Dominated by Upper Chalk 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 type fields
- Deciduous and coniferous woodland silhouetted against the skyline, clothing the crests of the slopes
- Low density, dispersed settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads
- The absence of major roads contributes to the feeling of remoteness
- A number of ancient woodlands including Burwood, Ashwood Copse and Bouldsbury Wood (SSSI)
- Neolithic and Bronze Age burial monuments, prehistoric and Romano-British enclosures, settlements, field systems and hill forts contribute to the plethora of visible, historic features of the landscape
- Panoramic views from hill tops

Issues and challenges

- Conservation of archaeology and ancient woodlands
- Development pressures on the villages
- 'Horsiculture' and change of sense of place
- Decrease in agricultural stock grazing

Landscape type 5:

Chalk River Valleys

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

Issues and challenges

- Waterflows and water resource management
- 'Horsiculture' and loss of sense of place
- Development pressures (expensive properties and high demand)



Landscape type 6:

Greensand Terrace

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

Issues and challenges

- A30 corridor, traffic volumes, and loss of tranquillity
- Field sizes and pressures on farming
- Development pressures



Landscape type 7:

Greensand Hills



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

Issues and challenges

- Heritage conservation especially parklands
- Viability of commercial forestry
- Livestock grazing

Landscape type 8:

Rolling Clay Vales

- Vale occupying a geological anticlinal between the chalk
- Varied underlying geology with many different geological exposures
- Pastoral landscapes of small scale fields divided by lush hedgerows and scattered with woods and copses
- Layout of fields, farms and villages illustrate the pattern of medieval settlement, clearance and farming
- Rivers and their tributaries meander through the vale
- A sense of enclosure is provided by the surrounding upland landscape
- A mixed agricultural landscape of lush improved pasture and arable production with water meadows on the valley floor
- Wooded character with broad leaf and mixed woodland (some of ancient origin) scattered across the vale
- Villages dispersed over the floor of the vale

Issues and challenges

- Viability of family farms and dairying
- Water regimes (Nadder and Sem rivers)
- Transportation and vehicle accessibility
- Development pressures, particularly around Tisbury, and potential loss of character

