

Local Development Framework

Landscape Character Area Assessment



Evidence Base
March 2008



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1 Introduction

- 1.1 North Dorset's unique identity has been formed by both natural and human factors. The natural vegetation combined with the historic management of the landscape bring locally distinctive variety and character to the area. Evidence of North Dorset's rich historical background can be seen all over the district, in the form of historic buildings, ancient landscapes and monuments. This heritage, along with the outstanding character of the natural environment, is irreplaceable.
- 1.2 North Dorset's unique character and ecological interest is recognised through a variety of environmental designations ranging from the extensive and nationally important Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) down to small locally important ecological sites. There are two AONB in the District, the Dorset AONB which covers approximately 17% of the district and the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB which covers approximately 21% of the North Dorset District. The special qualities of the AONB include its dramatic landform and views, rich habitats, diverse mixed farmland, rich historic and built heritage, and its tranquillity and remoteness. The district also possesses a wealth of ecological interest, as shown by the numerous European, National, Regional and local designations.
- 1.3 The South Wessex Downs Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) comprises two separate areas of land covering an area of 50,714 ha. The southern area, part of which lies in North Dorset, extends from south west of Salisbury, across Cranborne Chase and continues south of the Blackmore Vale to just north of Dorchester. This ESA is considered to be of high environmental value owing to its sweeping scarp slopes, cultivated rolling dip slopes and sheltered stream valleys. It is noted for its areas of species-rich chalk grassland habitats which contain a number of rare plant species and support many populations of butterflies and birds. A scheme was set up by Defra which provided grants for landowners to manage the ESA. In 2005 the ESA scheme was superseded by a new Environmental Stewardship Scheme.
- 1.4 This report describes and assesses how the landscapes of North Dorset contribute to the special character of the District. Following the introduction the report is divided into four further sections which are as follows:
 - An explanation of landscape character assessment;
 - The planning policy context for the assessment;
 - Previous landscape assessment undertaken; and
 - The 17 landscape character areas for North Dorset.

Consultation

- 1.5 A draft report was sent out for a 8 week consultation period between December-January 2008. Comments received during this consultation period have been incorporated into the final document.

2 Landscape Character Area Assessment

- 2.1 Landscape Character Area Assessment provides a structured framework for describing an area in a systematic way. Through understanding and mapping what is present and what is distinct in the landscape, future management and development can be guided to conserve or enhance local character, and even change it, if that is what's desired. The assessment provides the evidence base for emerging landscape policies in the Local Development Framework and for the review of AONB Management Plans. It can be used to help determine planning applications and in the future as the basis for more specific Supplementary Planning Documents. Each landscape area lists the key characteristics.
- 2.2 The process of mapping and describing landscape character has followed the 'Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland' (Countryside Agency, 2002). The key steps of this process and procedure followed to produce the report are shown in Appendix 1.
- 2.3 Landscape Character Assessment can be used in many situations, for example, in devising indicators to gauge countryside change, in helping local people prepare Village Design Statements, Parish Plans and Market Town Health Checks, and in devising environmental improvement strategies for places undergoing regeneration. It is intended to be used by the following audiences:
- Residents and community groups in developing community plans;
 - Local businesses, farmers and landowners in performing land and landscape management;
 - Developers, architects, planners and designers in taking into account planning, management and design considerations;
 - Local planning authorities in developing Planning Policy and determining planning applications;
 - Highway engineers in developing highway schemes;
 - Elected members and officers of local and parish councils in formulating responses to development proposals;
 - Public utilities in performing works;
 - Countryside management organisations in delivering landscape scale projects.

3 Policy Context for Landscape Character Assessment

- 3.1 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) made changes to the existing planning process. It introduced the concept of a Local Development Framework which is a portfolio of documents which replaces the existing District Wide Local Plan.

National Policy

- 3.2 Planning Policy Statements are policy documents which set out the Government's national policies on different aspects of planning. The protection and enhancement of the countryside and landscape is mentioned in a number of Planning Policy Statements (PPS) which are set out as follows:
- ❑ PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development, February 2005. Planning Policies should seek to protect and enhance the quality, character and amenity value of the countryside and urban areas as a whole.
 - ❑ PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, August 2004. Paragraph 13 of the PPS states "Local planning authorities should prepare policies and guidance that encourage good quality design throughout their rural areas, in accordance with Annex C to PPS1, and utilising tools such as Landscape Character assessments..." The objectives of this PPS include good quality sustainable development that respects and, where possible, enhances local distinctiveness and the intrinsic qualities of the countryside; and continues protection of the open countryside for all with the highest level of protection for our most valued landscapes. Paragraph 24 of PPS7 states that, in relation to areas of landscape outside nationally designated areas that are particularly highly valued, locally carefully drafted criteria-based policies in LDDs, can be protected by using landscape character assessments without the need for rigid local designations.
 - ❑ PPS9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation. This sets out how biodiversity and geological conservation must be considered in planning decisions.
 - ❑ PPG15: Planning and the Historic Environment. This refers to the wider historic landscape, in particular in defining policies for the countryside.

Regional Policy

- 3.3 Regional policy is set out in the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) (June 2006). The South West Regional Assembly is responsible for preparing the RSS. The RSS provides a broad development strategy for the region for a 20 year period 2006-2026. It sets the context for emerging policy in North Dorset. A key priority in the RSS is the protection of the countryside and the biodiversity of the region. Paragraph 7.2.6 of the draft RSS states that “landscape provides an important setting for settlements and contributes to local distinctiveness and a sense of place. Policy ENV 2 Landscape Character Areas states “The distinctive qualities and features of the South West’s landscape character areas will be sustained and enhanced by Local Planning Authorities undertaking assessments of landscape character at a strategic level and in partnership with adjoining authorities (where landscape character areas cross administrative boundaries) in order to identify priority areas for the maintenance, enhancement and/or restoration of that character and provide an appropriate policy framework in Local Development Documents for each area”. Policy ENV3 relates to the AONBs and their settings.

North Dorset Local Development Framework

- 3.4 The Development Plan for North Dorset is still in the transitional stage and consists of the RSS, the County Structure Plan, the District Wide Local Plan and the Minerals and Waste Local Plan. Policies in the plans are currently saved until they are replaced by policies in the Regional Spatial Strategy or the Local Development Framework/Minerals and Waste Development Framework. The current landscape framework used in the North Dorset Local Plan was prepared by Graeme Cox from the work done by the County Landscape Character Assessment in 1993.
- 3.5 The district is in the process of preparing its Core Strategy, which will state North Dorset’s vision and will include policies to guide development over the next 20 years. References to landscape policy will be included in the Core Strategy Policies, Development Control Policies, Area Action Plans and/or Supplementary Planning Documents.

4 Previous Landscape Character Assessments

- 4.1 At a national level, the character of the English countryside has been described and mapped into 159 character areas. These are commonly referred to as 'Joint Character Areas' through a joint project between the Countryside Agency and English Nature (now Natural England). A survey at national level does not have sufficient detail for use at local and district level.
- 4.2 Three character areas are wholly or partly within the District which provide a context in which to examine landscape character at a more local level. These three areas are the Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase, Blackmore Vale and Vale of Wardour and the Yeovil Scarplands. The key characteristics of the broad character areas within the district are described in Appendix 3.

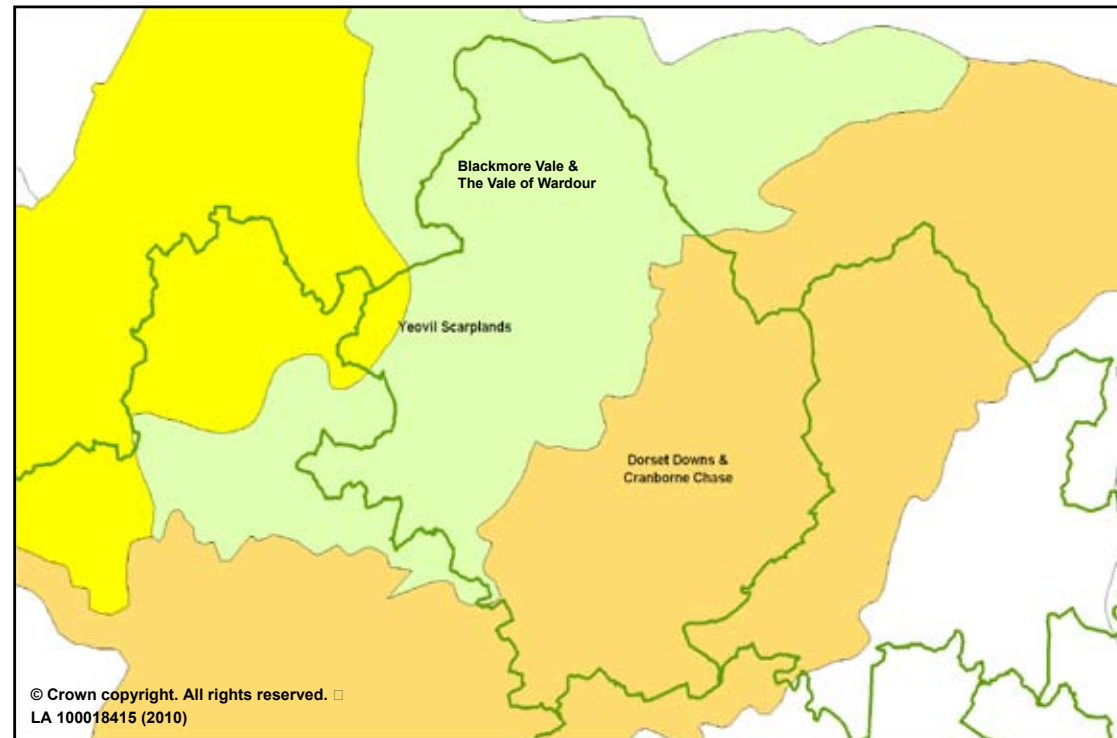


Figure 4.1 Joint Character Areas within the District

4.3 In describing and understanding the diverse landscape character of the district, the updated work presented in this document has built on the previous work across Dorset. Due to publication of recent guidance on producing Landscape Character Assessments, 'Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland' (Countryside Agency, 2002), the past work no longer meets the standards as set out in the Guidance. However, the past work still provides a valuable resource in understanding the evolution and character of the Dorset landscape and should be read as context to this document. The following documents have been used to inform the development of this work:

- The Dorset Downs, Heaths and Coast Landscape (Countryside Commission, 1993)
- Dorset Landscape Character Assessment (LDA, 1993)
- The landscape of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs (1995)
- A New View of Dorset: An Exploration of Dorset's Landscapes and Guidance for their Future Management by Richard Burden et al (1996)
- Dorset Historic Landscape Characterisations (Dorset County Council)
- Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB Historic Landscape Characterisation (CCWWD AONB)
- Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (Land Use Consultants on behalf of the Countryside Agency, 2003)
- Sustaining Landscape Character (Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 2006)

Landscape Character Types	Landscape Character Areas
Limestone Hills	North Dorset Limestone Ridges
Chalk Valley and Downland	Upper North Winterborne Valley, Lower Winterborne Valley, Upper Milborne Valley, Lower Milborne Valley, Tarrant Valley, Bloxworth/Charborough Downs, Chettle/Abbeycroft Downs, East Blandford/Pimperne Downs
Open Chalk Downland	South Blandford Downs, Chettle/Abbeycroft Downs
Chalk Escarpment/Ridge	North Dorset Chalk Escarpment
Wooded Chalk Downland	Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland
Rolling Vales	North Blackmore Rolling Vales, South Blackmore Rolling Vales
Clay Vale	Blackmore Vale
Valley Pasture	Upper Stour Valley, Mid Stour Valley

Table 5.1 Table showing Landscape Character Areas in each Landscape Character Type

5 Landscape Character Areas for North Dorset

- 5.1 Each landscape character area falls within a specific landscape character type. Landscape character types are landscapes with broadly similar patterns of geology, soils, vegetation, landuse, settlement and field patterns. Within North Dorset 8 landscape character types have been defined. The 17 landscape character areas have been examined and categorised into a specific landscape type, for example, the Chalk Valley and Downland is a landscape character type within which there are several landscape character areas including the Upper North Winterborne Valley, the Lower Winterborne Valley and the Upper Milborne Valley. Table 5.1 identifies the North Dorset character types and character areas.
- 5.2 There are 17 Landscape Character Areas within North Dorset as shown in Figure 5.1. Some of these areas fall within the Dorset AONB and the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB. The Dorset AONB has recently consulted on a document entitled “Conserving Character, Landscape Character Assessment for the Dorset AONB”. This document has been considered in the preparation of this Landscape Character Area Assessment for North Dorset and any changes have been incorporated into this report where applicable.
- 5.3 If the key characteristics and/or features which are identified for each area were to change or are lost there would be significant consequences for the current character of the landscape. This would usually be negative but sometimes positive where some characteristics/features currently have a negative influence.

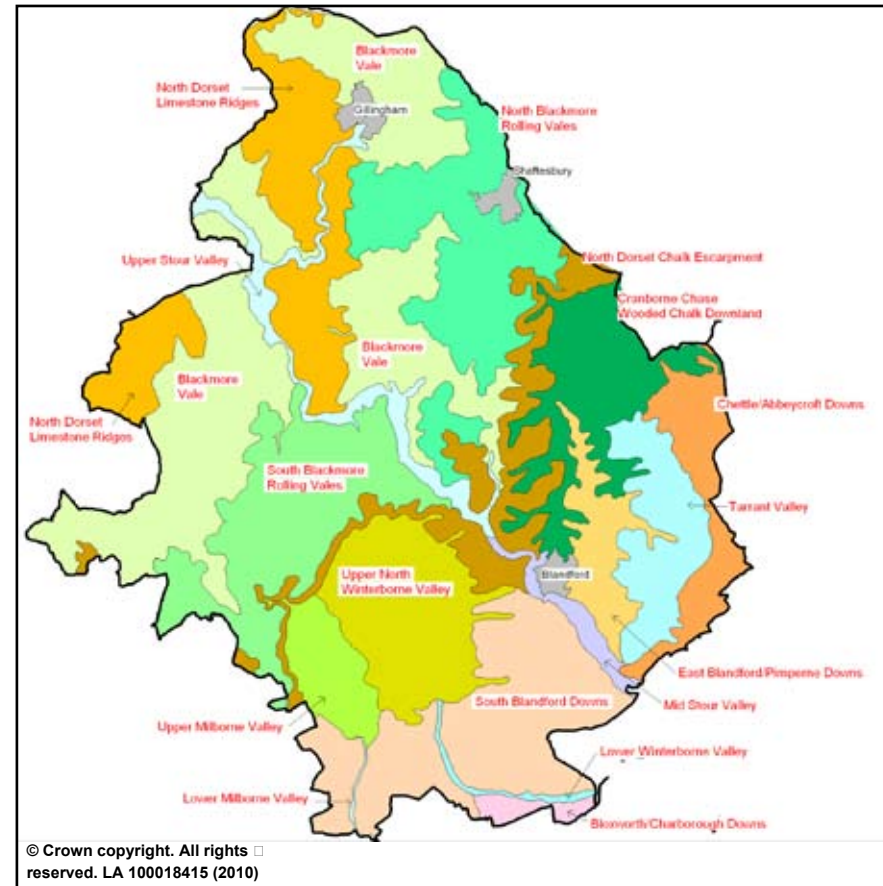


Figure 5.1 Landscape Character Areas for North Dorset

6 Lower Winterborne Valley

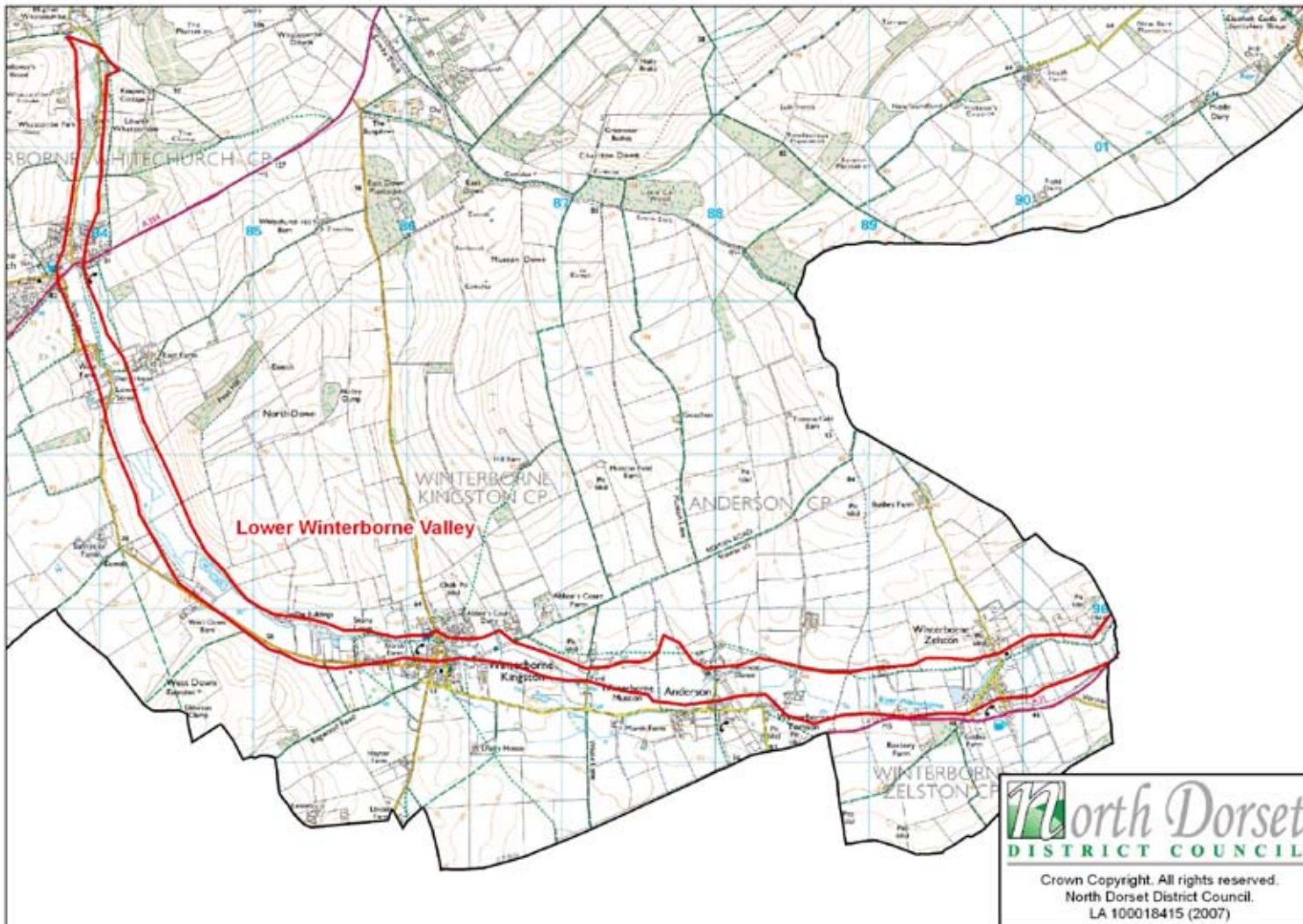


Figure 6.1
Lower Winterborne
Valley Character
Area



Figure 6.2 River Winterborne



Figure 6.3 View towards the southern edge of Winterborne Stickland

Key Characteristics

- A flat valley floor with sloping sides up to chalk downland on either side.
- Narrowly defined stream corridor.
- Winding ribbons of trees along the stream corridor.
- The road network and settlement pattern follows the stream corridor.
- Historic river crossings are the focus of settlements.
- Important tree groups at settlement edges.
- The parkland landscape of Watcombe Park is an important local feature.
- Winterborne Whitechurch is the main settlement and a key feature on the valley floor at the junction with the A354.
- Locally distinctive boundary and building materials used, such as brick and flint.
- Distinctive built features such as Clenston Church, the wall around Whatcombe Park and small terrace of farm cottages.

Landscape Description

Land shape and structure

6.1 A narrow chalk stream corridor and valley sides defined in most places by a clear break in slope. The valley drains from the wider North Winterbourne Valley Character Area to the north and flattens out and widens into a broader flood plain as the stream flows east to eventually join the River Stour at Sturminster Marshall. The valley separates two areas of chalk downland.

Settlement and land cover

6.2 The land is intensively farmed and the area is more pastoral than the adjoining arable chalk downland. There are occasional groups of planted poplars and willows which, together with the naturally occurring tree groups, form characteristic linear features along the streamside. The settlement pattern and road network follow the stream corridor to create a distinctive pattern. The settlements are found at historic crossing points to the stream and the use of locally distinctive material such as brick and flint is evident in places such as roadside walls. The presence of large country houses in big gardens with mature trees contributes to the character of the settlements on the valley floor. The stream breaks into a number of tributaries along the length of the area, which flood out across the valley floor in winter.

References for this character area

- Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase Character Area.
- English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: South Wessex Downs.
- Landscape Description Unit Nos: 399.

7 North Blackmore Rolling Vales

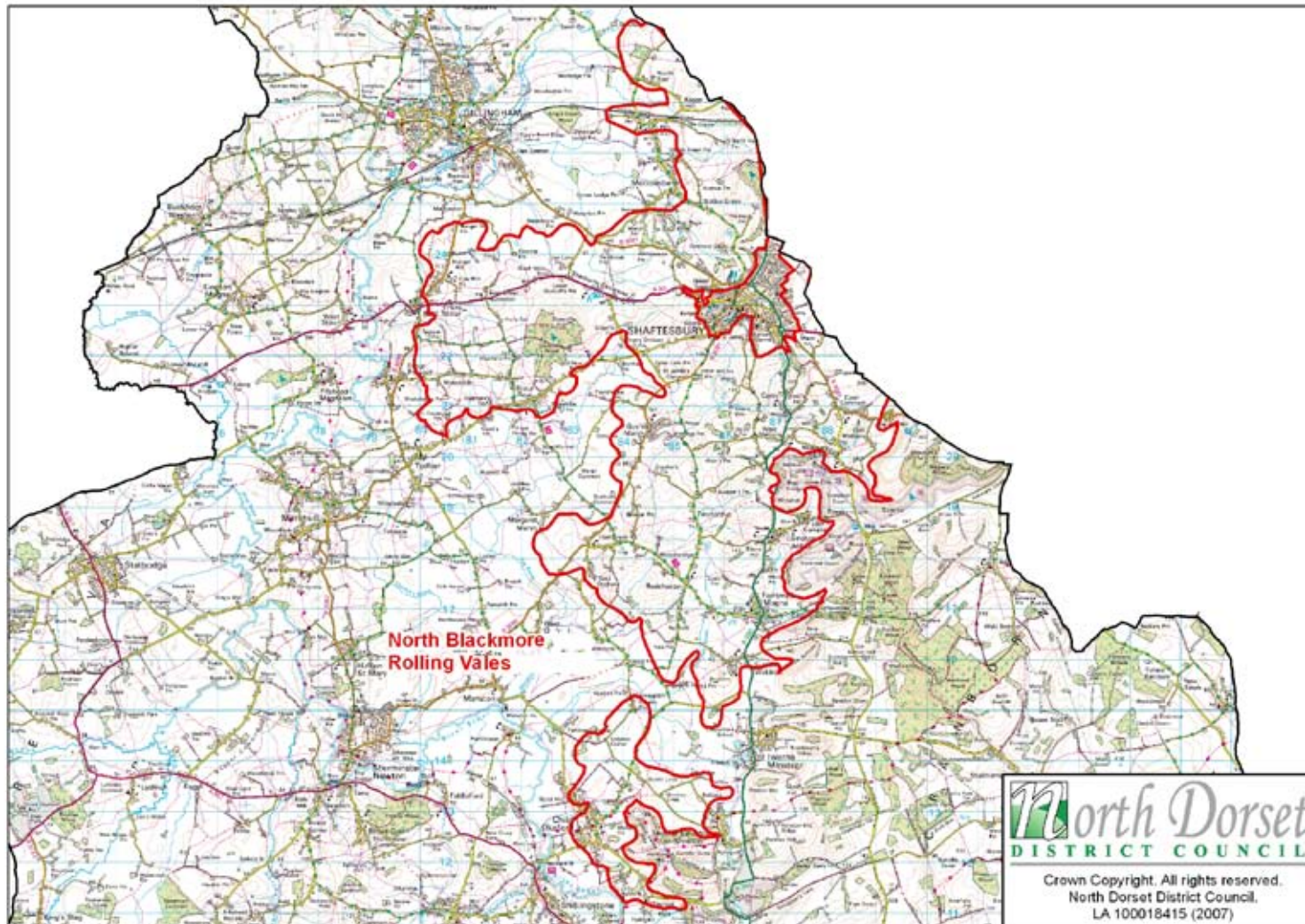


Figure 7.1
The North Blackmore
Rolling Vales



Figure 7.2 Looking towards Fontmell Down and Melbury Beacon from Hambledon Hill

Key Characteristics

- Undulating, rolling farmland hills forming a transition zone between the Blackmore Vale and the chalk escarpment foothills.
- Divides the Blackmore Vale north and south of the area
- Irregular pattern of farmland, fields, copses, streams, dense hedgerows and copses.
- Many dispersed and isolated hamlets and farmsteads.
- Settlements are found towards the foothills at the base of the chalk escarpment.
- A tranquil, peaceful landscape.
- Duncliffe Wood is a key feature of Upper Greensand with a distinctive wave-shaped profile.
- The escarpment to the east forms an important feature and backdrop to the area.
- There are some important views over the Vale from high places.
- Many small streams and brooks.
- The area provides a rural, important setting for Shaftesbury which overlooks the area
- Kingswood, Handford Park Estate and the manor house and grounds at Child Okeford are all key features.
- The A350 and the C13 are busy north-south routes through the area.

Landscape Description

Land shape and structure

7.1 A varied undulating series of clay and greensand farmland hills which forms a transition zone between the Blackmore Vale proper and the main chalk escarpment to the east which forms an important backdrop to the area. In the east part of the area there are rolling, twisting and folded foothills adjacent to the main chalk escarpment which form a distinctive landform, with a well treed and wooded feel. In these foothills the small, irregular-shaped fields with thick hedgerows and small copses, together with the narrow, twisting, hedge-banked lanes which in places are very steep, create an interesting and varied landscape. It is more treed, wooded and more hilly than the rolling farmland to the west and there is an abrupt level change between this area and the steep sides of the chalk escarpment.

Settlement and landcover

7.2 It is a mainly pastoral landscape which becomes more open and flat and larger in scale to the north-east on the plateau of the greensand terrace. The lanes in the foothills follow the tight folds and bends in the landform and the picturesque settlements, such as Melbury Abbas, Compton Abbas, Waldron, Cann and Child Okeford, are typically found at the very foot of the escarpment along the spring line. The A350 is a busy north-south road through the area but, because of the landform, has a reduced impact on the overall character of the area. The C13 also runs north-south through the area via Melbury. Kingswood in the north and Handford Park Estate in the south are both key features, as is the manor house and grounds at Child Okeford at the foot of Hod and Hambledon Hills. There are several important grassland and woodland SNCIs and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) throughout the area.

7.3 The area gradually flattens out to the west nearer the Vale where in places there are some steep and distinctive folds and high points such as Pen Hill and Duncliffe Wood where open views across the Vale are possible. The field pattern across the whole area is more irregular than the Vale and the fields are bounded by reasonably thick, tall hedgerows and some mature hedgerow trees. These, together with the isolated trees, hedgerow copses and woodlands, create a patchwork landscape pattern. The hedgerow oaks are not as distinctive as in the Vale proper, partly due to the rolling landform. The western parts of the area are similar to the Vale but are more undulating and rolling and the hedge-lined lanes are generally wider than the foothills, with wider grass verges. There are many small streams and brooks present in the area flowing between the slopes in the landscape. Duncliffe Hill and its wood are distinctive landmarks and are designated as SNCIs. The settlement edges of Motcombe create a hard urban edge in this part of the area and the Guys Marsh Young Offenders' Institute and its chimney creates a detracting feature in the landscape.

References for this character area

- Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Blackmore Vale and Vale of Wardour.
- English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: Wessex Vales.
- Small parts are with within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB
- Landscape Description Unit Nos. 19, 303, 88, 262, 260, 261.



North Dorset Chalk Escarpment

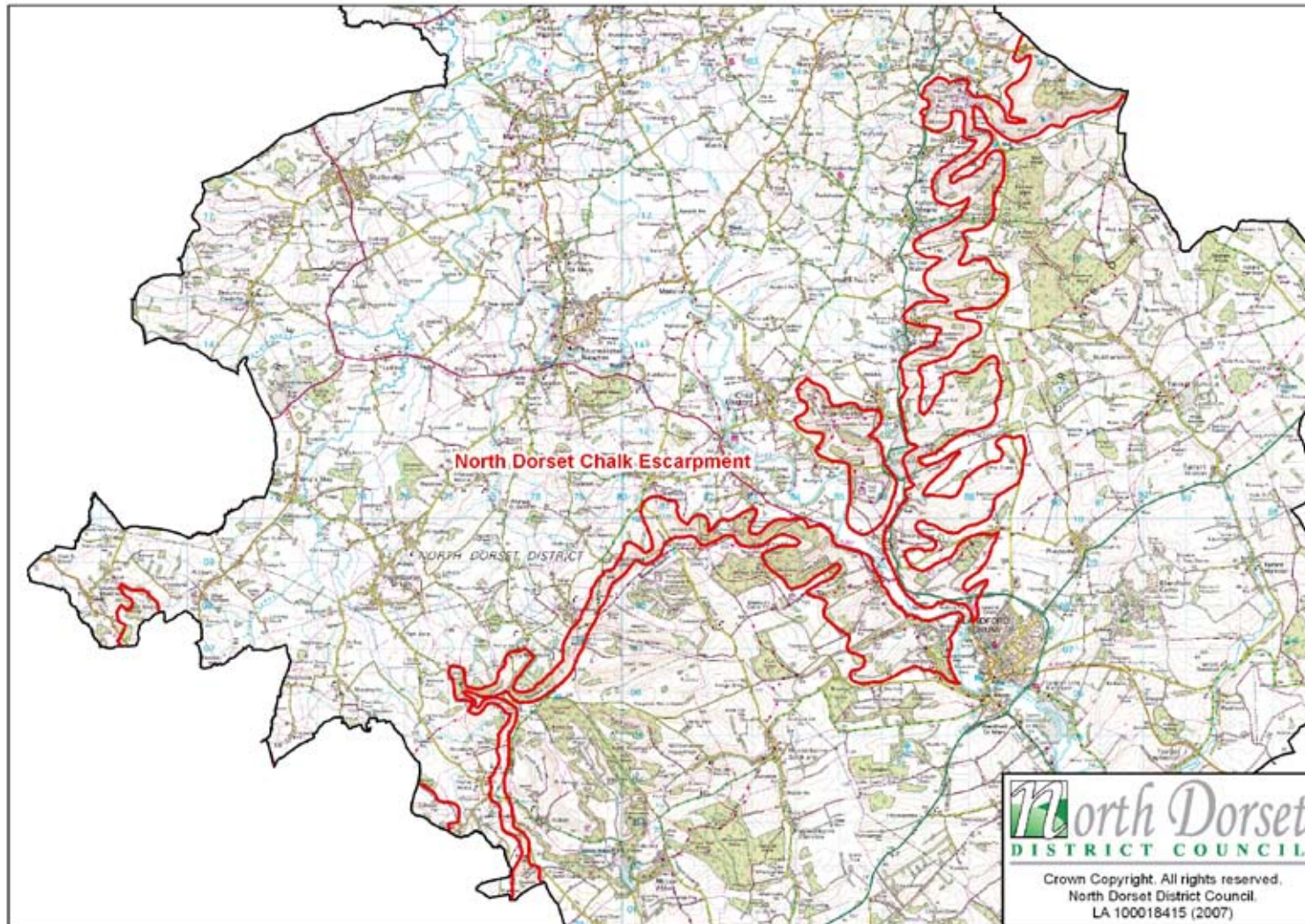


Figure 8.1
North Dorset
Chalk Escarpment
Character Area



Figure 8.2 Looking west towards Bulbarrow Hill



Figure 8.3 Looking towards Hambledon and Hod from Hayward Bridge, near Shillingstone

Key Characteristics

- A dramatic, exposed, steep and narrow escarpment with rounded spurs and deep coombes.
- A patchwork of small scale pastoral fields on the lower slopes, with scattered farmsteads at the ridge bottom spring line.
- Areas of unimproved chalk grassland on slopes and ridge tops.
- Large, straight-sided arable fields on escarpment top.
- Hanging ancient oak, ash and hazel woodlands on the lower slopes.
- Dense gorse scrub on the steep ridge sides.
- Thin calcareous soils with the underlying geology of lower, middle and upper chalk.
- Panoramic views of the surrounding landscape.
- Bronze Age barrows and prominent hill top forts.
- Ancient, sunken winding lanes with an open character towards the top.
- Ponds on the hill top at Bonsley Common.

Landscape Description

Land shape and structure

- 8.1 The North Dorset Chalk Escarpment is a dramatic and imposing landscape which dominates and provides a backdrop to the Blackmore Vale below. It has a steep, twisting and incised landform with extensive views. The rounded spurs and deep coombes provide important rough grazing and short grass habitats and the areas of scrub and broadleaf woodland also provide an important habitat. This is reflected in the extensive coverage of SSSIs and SNCIs.

Settlement and land cover

- 8.2 There are areas of arable farming along the convex ridge tops with the occasional small clipped hedgerows. There is a patchwork of small scale pastoral fields and hanging ancient woodland on some of the lower slopes. The area merges with the chalk downland landscape to the east and south, and there is a sinuous but abrupt edge with rolling farmland hills to the west and north. There are no settlements on the escarpment itself apart from a few isolated farms. Settlements are all found below the north and west scarp bases along the spring line at the foot of the slope. Telecom masts at Bulbarrow are prominent, detracting features. The road network is limited to exposed lanes and some hill tops with ancient sunken hedge lined steep lanes cutting up the scarp sides.

Historical influences

- 8.3 The area has many Bronze Age and Iron Age barrows and fortifications, prominent hill forts and Roman features, many of which are scheduled ancient monuments and all of which contribute to the areas historic and cultural importance - Hod and Hambleton Hills form an isolated, and therefore very prominent, hilltop landscape separated from the main escarpment by the Rivers Stour and Iwerne.

References for this character area

- Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase Character Areas.
- English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: South Wessex Downs.
- The south part of the area is within the Dorset AONB and the north within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB
- Landscape Description Unit Nos: 43, 87, 278, 279, 193, 285.

9 Mid Stour Valley

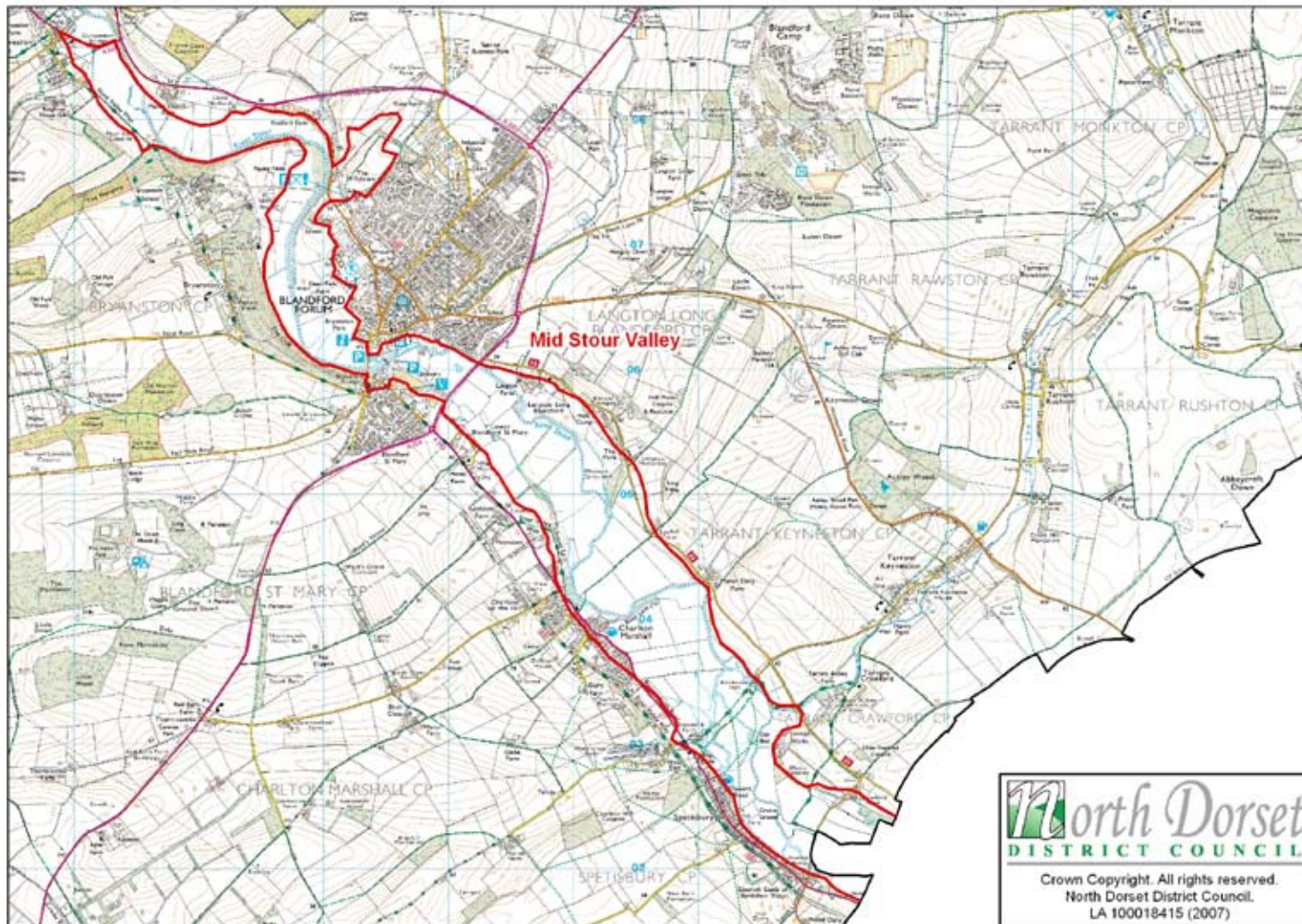


Figure 9.1
Mid Stour Valley
Character Area



Figure 9.2 The River Stour from the bridge at Spetisbury



Figure 9.3 Looking towards Durweston from the Durweston Bridge

Key Characteristics

- ❑ A flat and wide flood plain with gently rising sides to the northeast and steeper on the south western side.
- ❑ Meandering river and associated sub-channels, ditches and streams.
- ❑ Distinctive linear settlement pattern along the sides of the flood plain with locally distinctive use of flint and stone.
- ❑ The road network follows either side of the valley floor at the junction with the chalk downland landscape.
- ❑ Small copses, wet woodland, tree groups and individual trees follow the river course and the edges of the area.
- ❑ Important historic crossing points, for example, at Blandford.
- ❑ Provides an important setting and context for Blandford.
- ❑ Steep valley side plantation woodland (The Cliff) and the parkland landscape at Bryanston are key features.
- ❑ The remnants of traditional river valley features, such as old withy beds, oxbow lakes, mills, weirs and the water meadows are all important features across the area.

Landscape Description

Land shape and structure

- 9.1 A wide and flat river flood plain landscape bounded and enclosed by the rising chalk downland landscape to the northeast and southwest. The River Stour meanders through this mainly pastoral landscape and there are many trees and small copses following its course, as well as several individual, important mature trees standing in isolation within the flood plain. These trees around the settlement edges help integrate the ribbon development along the valley sides. The trees also add diversity to the otherwise flat landform. The Mid Stour Valley forms part of the setting of the southern edge of the CCWWD AONB and small parts of the character area include, along its north eastern edge, parts of the CCWWD AONB.

Settlement and land cover

- 9.2 The roads follow the edges of this landscape on both sides of the flood plain, as does the settlement pattern, which particularly follows the southern side. Here it forms an almost continuous linear or ribbon pattern of development along the A350 through Spetisbury and Charlton Marshall. This development forms a distinctive sloping edge to the character area. There are several key historic and important crossing points at 90° to the river. The area forms an important open, undeveloped setting to the southern side and entrance to Blandford, and the steep wooded slopes and the parkland landscape at Bryanston are key features. The valley is crossed by several footpaths from where there are some open views of the flood plain landscape and the Stour Valley Way follows the course of the river in this area. The A350 which runs down the Valley side creates a busy feel to the valley and its impact is noticed across whole area. The Tarrant Valley runs north from the Stour Valley near Spetisbury and there are a number of smaller side channels, streams and ditches which characterise the area. At the northern end of the character area it becomes more tightly confined by the surrounding steep chalk escarpment.

References for this character area

- Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase Character Area.
- English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: South Wessex Downs.
- Part of the area is within the Dorset AONB
- Landscape Description Unit Nos: 400.

10 Tarrant Valley

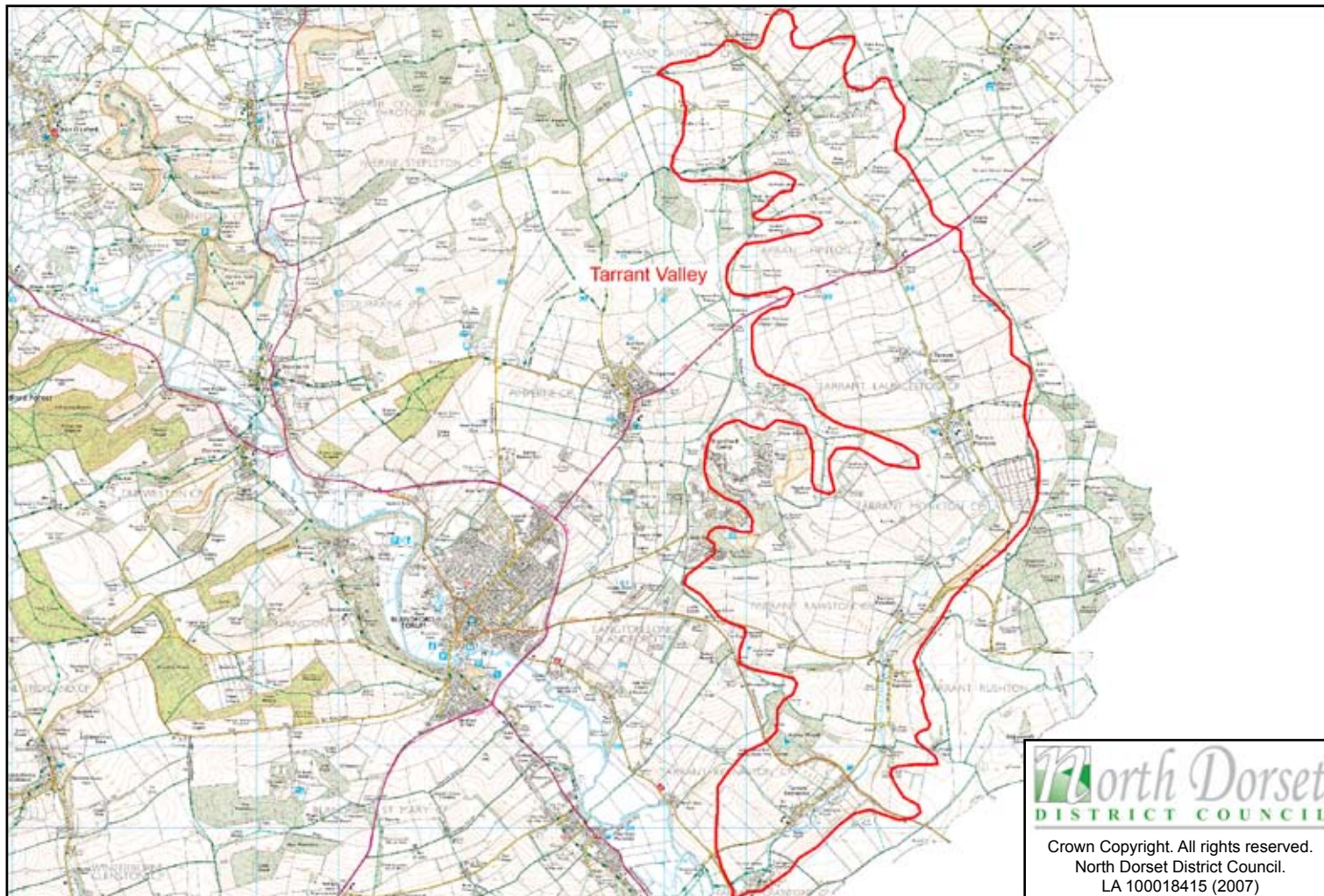


Figure 10.1
Tarrant Valley
Landscape
Character Area



Figure 10.2 Looking to the north east from Tarrant Rushton



Figure 10.3 The Ford at Tarrant Monkton

Key Characteristics

- A very distinctive and unique settlement pattern created by the Tarrant 'family of villages'.
- A distinctive chalk valley comprising valley floor, side slopes and elevated upland.
- The steep scarp slope and beech hanger at Tarrant Rawston is a key feature.
- Steeper side slopes to the east than the west.
- Shallow but unified chalk stream in narrow stream corridor.
- Mature willows and poplars form ribbons of trees along the stream side.
- Narrow lanes run along the valley floor crossed at 90 degrees by other roads at bridging points.
- Use of locally distinctive building materials.
- Country houses contribute to the setting and provide important features such as brick walls, shelter belts, woods and mature trees.
- Historic fords and/or bridge crossing points.
- Tarrant Abbey is a scheduled ancient monument and a key feature in the lower part of the Valley.
- Blandford Camp is a locally prominent landmark and creates an urban impact at the western edge of the area.
- The estate wooded landscape around Tarrant Gunville is a key feature of interest.

Landscape Description

Land shape and structure

10.1 The character area is a distinctive chalk valley with a shallow stream running along the narrow valley floor. The Tarrant drains the wider valley and is a tributary of the River Stour that cuts into the south facing dip slope of the surrounding chalk downland. The sloping sides to the valley are typical chalk downland with an undulating and indented landform with dry coombes and elevated open downland around the watershed. It is generally steeper with some distinctive steep scarp slopes along the eastern side, for example at Tarrant Rushton and more gentle and rolling shape to the west.

Settlement and land cover

10.2 It is intensively farmed area and often right up to the edge of the stream side with very few marginal areas. Generally the fields are geometric and large scale and bounded by thin weak hedges or replacement wire fencing. Trees and copses, and lines of willows and poplars are found all along the stream corridor, with larger wooded areas in places to form key features such as at Ashley Wood. These larger wooded areas on the valley floor are often associated with the designed landscapes of large country houses. The valley has a very distinctive linear settlement pattern, with buildings dispersed up the valley. The picturesque Tarrant 'family of villages' are regularly spaced out and are often at stream crossings. There are several historic fords and bridges at these settlement locations which have become key features. The 'family of villages' contain many buildings which use locally distinctive materials such as red brick, flint and thatch which, together with the smaller field size near the villages and the associated trees, help to create an intimate landscape along most of the valley floor and a unique sense of identity. The northern end of the valley is characterised by the estate parkland landscape associated with Eastbury and Gunville Park which form distinctive key features around Tarrant Gunville. There is a distinctive geometric road pattern with one road following the valley floor with cross roads at 90degrees to this often at bridging points. There are relatively few public rights of way in the valley but the Jubilee Trail crosses the valley at Tarrant Gunville. The elevated mixed plantation woodland associated with Blandford Camp is also a key feature, with the Camp itself providing a major urban feature on the western side of the character area.

References for this character area

- Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase Character Areas.
- English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: South Wessex Downs.
- The area is within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB
- Landscape Description Unit Nos: 47 and parts of 267
- Dorset County Council 1993 Landscape Character Area: Chalk Valley

11

Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland

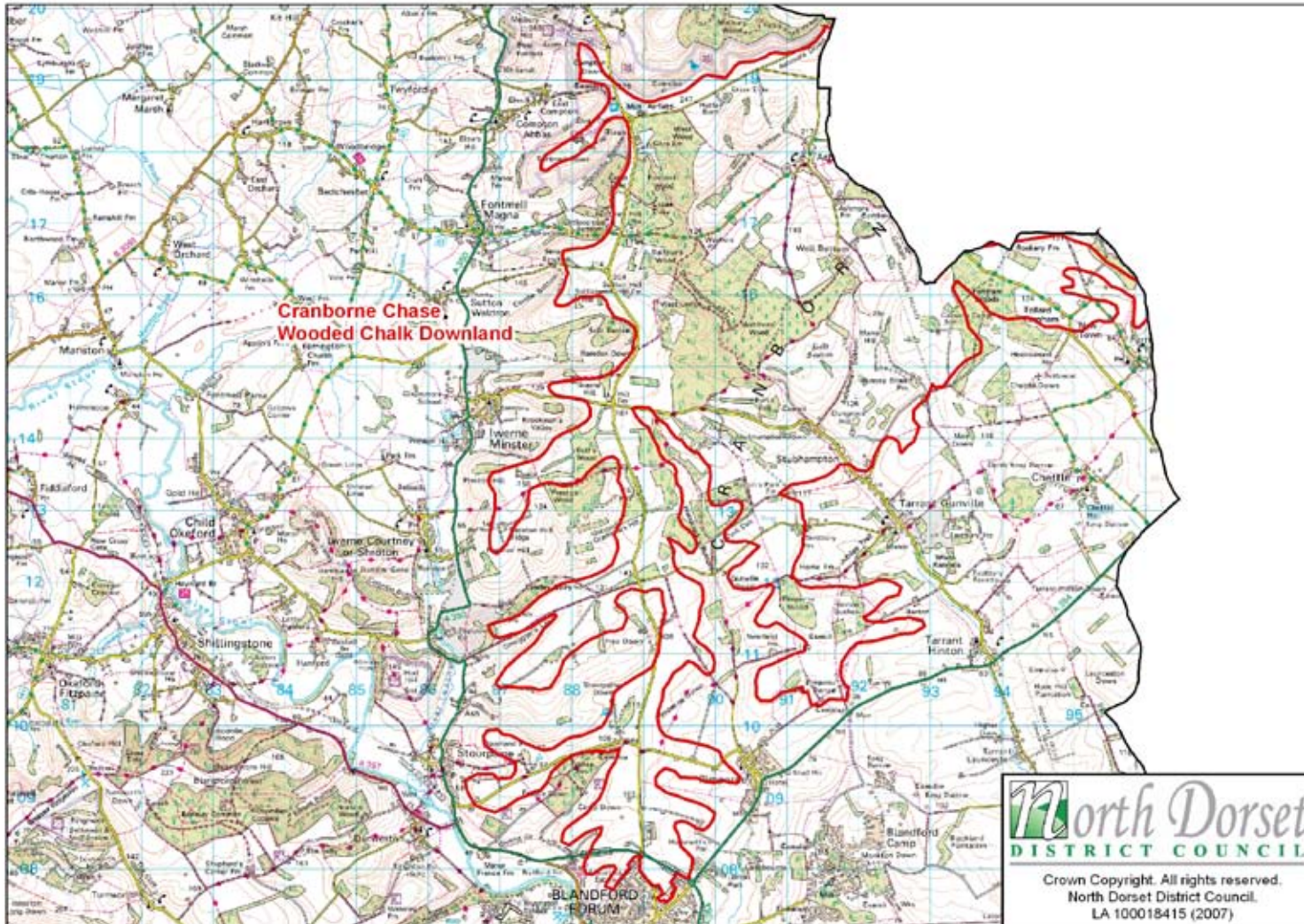


Figure 11.1
The Cranborne
Chase Wooded
Chalk Downland



Figure 11.2 Looking across the Chase towards Ashmore Wood

Key Characteristics

- Medieval royal hunting grounds with surviving features such as park pales.
- Few settlements and dispersed scattering of farmsteads.
- An exposed and elevated wooded chalk downland landscape with dramatic folds and dry coombes, ridges, smaller valleys and plateaus.
- A mixed arable and pastoral landscape with arable dominating further south.
- The Rushmore Estate provides a typical 'estate managed' landscape with exceptional trees and distinctive managed copses, shelter belts, plantations, parkland trees and hedgerows in a well managed built environment.
- A mosaic of chalk grassland, broadleaf and conifer woodlands and arable farmland.
- Numerous barrows, tumuli and other prehistoric earthworks.
- Panoramic views over the adjacent escarpment and foothills.
- Many SNCI grasslands and woodlands of importance, such as Ashmore Wood
- Several Scheduled Ancient Monuments such as cross dykes and earthworks which form key features across the area.

Landscape Description

Land shape and structure

11.1 This is a dramatic, distinctive and historic landscape with a characteristic topography of steep chalk valleys, dry coombes, ridges and plateaus. This deeply eroded landform together with the distinctive land cover of ancient woodland and open downland creates its special, unique character and sense of place with the land cover creating enclosed spaces surrounded by trees. Most of the area was ancient royal hunting ground and has a greater percentage covering of woodland than the adjacent chalk downland areas. The fields are medium to large, often getting larger to the south in the chalk upland areas and, due to the landform, often have irregular shapes, for example caused by the dry coomb curved valleys. Clipped hedgerows provide the field boundaries to most fields and to the generally straight roads and lanes which run across the area.

Settlement and land cover

11.2 The area has been settled continuously from the Iron Age but now there are few settlements with Ashmore being the only hilltop village in the area grouped around a large pond. The rest of the buildings, hamlets, farms and old lodges are dispersed throughout the area and are often linked via a dense network of bridleways and footpaths. These bridleways and footpaths together with the unique landscape of the Chase help to make the area an important recreational resource. The buildings across the area often use locally distinctive material such as redbrick, flint, white render, thatch and slate.

References for this character area

- ❑ Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase Character Area.
- ❑ English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: South Wessex Downs.
- ❑ The area is within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB
- ❑ Landscape Description Unit Nos: 48, 173.

12 South Blackmore Rolling Vales

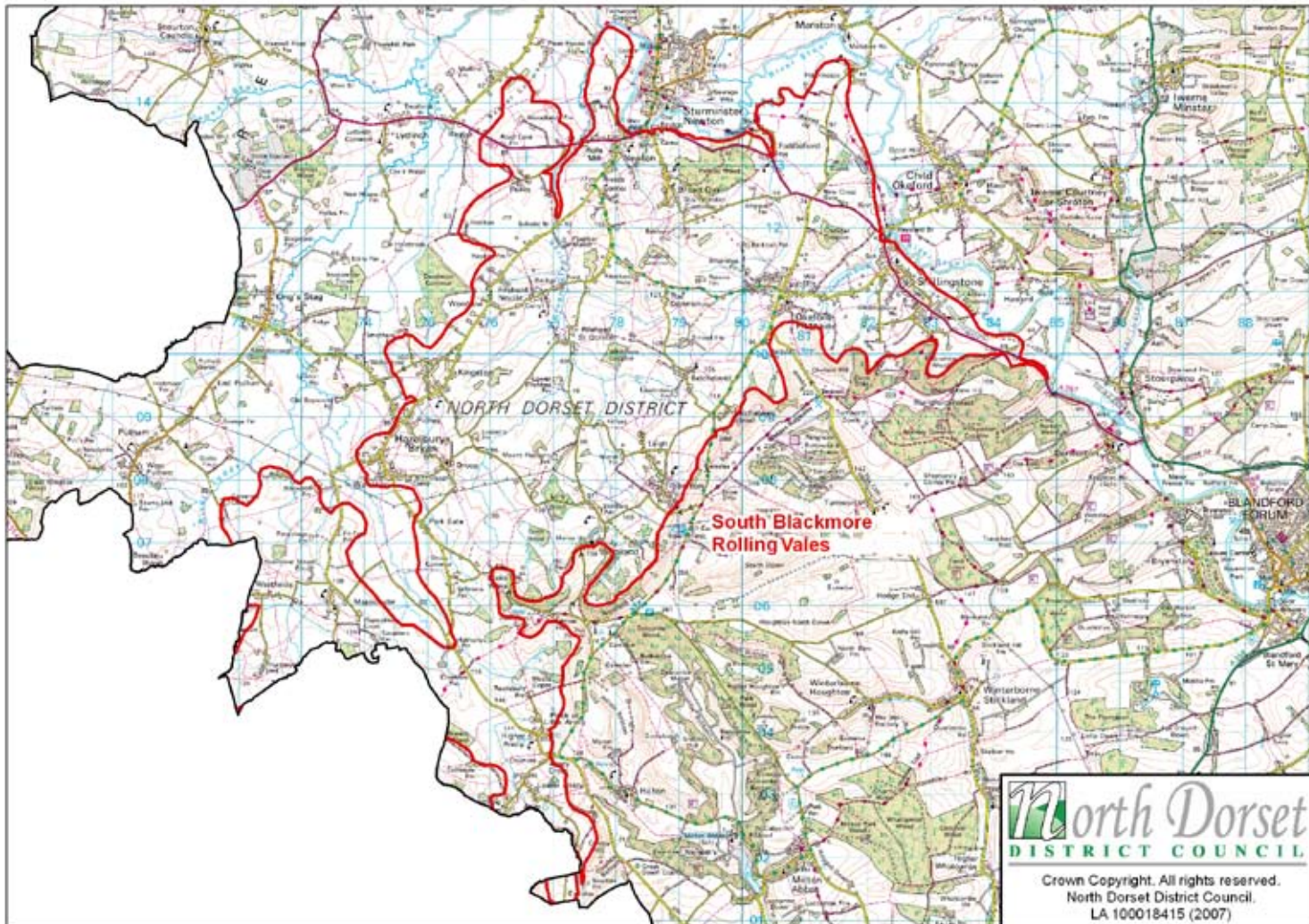


Figure 12.1
South Blackmore
Rolling Vales



Figure 12.2 Looking to the west from Hambledon

Key Characteristics

- Undulating and rolling farmland hills forming a transition zone between the Blackmore Vale and the chalk escarpment.
- The chalk escarpment forms a backdrop and landmark to the area.
- A more folded landscape at the foot of the escarpment.
- Irregular shaped fields bounded by thick hedgerows.
- Mature hedgerows are important features nearer the Blackmore Vale.
- Twisting hedge lined lanes with narrow verges.
- Small bridged stream crossings are key features often with low parapets.
- Settlements are often situated at the foot of the escarpment or on elevated slopes overlooking the Vale
- There are numerous scattered farmsteads.
- Frequent use of locally distinctive building materials, mainly stone and brick, adds to character.
- A tranquil and unified landscape.
- The 'tongue' of rolling hills at Shillingstone, where the River Stour breaks through the chalk escarpment, is a key feature.
- Piddles Wood is an important SSSI woodland in the north of the area on the edge of the Stour Valley.

Landscape Description

Land shape and structure

12.1 This is a similar landscape to the North Blackmore Rolling Vales with the same underlying geology. It acts as a transition zone between the flatter Blackmore Vale and the chalk escarpment. In this area, the foothills though are less distinctive than they are around Shaftesbury but the area does gradually become more hilly, folded and more wooded near the escarpment. The escarpment still provides a backdrop and skyline to the south and east and helps to visually enclose the area. The rolling farmland hills continue into the deeply indented valleys created by the chalk escarpment, typically in places such as Shillingstone and in the deep valley extending south to Ansty. The undulating, rolling, mainly pastoral landscape is characterised by medium sized irregularly shaped fields sub-divided by thick but often trimmed hedgerows. There are mature hedgerows similar to the Blackmore Vale in the area but they are not as distinctive in this rolling landscape. The presence of isolated 'stag headed' oaks are a sign of the increasing maturity of these features. There are some small scale deciduous copses and woodlands, some of which are designated as SNCI as well as some mixed plantation woodland in the area. The areas on the edge of the Blackmore Vale inevitably have characteristics similar to both areas and hence this is being a transitional character area.

Settlement and land cover

12.2 The roads and lanes are often twisting, with narrow grass verges and often with well trimmed hedgerows on both sides. In the areas nearer to the Blackmore Vale, there are the occasional small hump backed bridges as the lanes pass over small brooks and streams, often with brick or stone bridge parapets. The double 90° bends in the lanes are characteristic of this landscape as well as the Blackmore Vale itself. The settlement pattern is quite distinctive in that villages and hamlets are either at the foot of the escarpment on the spring line such as Okeford Fitzpaine, Belchalwall Street, Ibberton, Shillingstone, Woolland and Ansty or on the elevated parts of the area such as at Hazelbury Bryan and Mappowder. Some of the newer urban edges to Hazelbury Bryan in particular are prominent in the landscape. There are numerous isolated farmsteads and buildings across the area and several new large agricultural buildings.

Historical Influences

12.3 There are a few small Scheduled Ancient Monuments such as isolated hill forts and a Roman villa in the area.

References for this character area

- Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Blackmore Vale and Vale of Wardour Character Areas.
- English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: Wessex Vales.
- Parts of the area are within the Dorset AONB
- Landscape Description Unit Nos: 79, 80, 81, 90, 74, 273, 134.

13 Upper Stour Valley

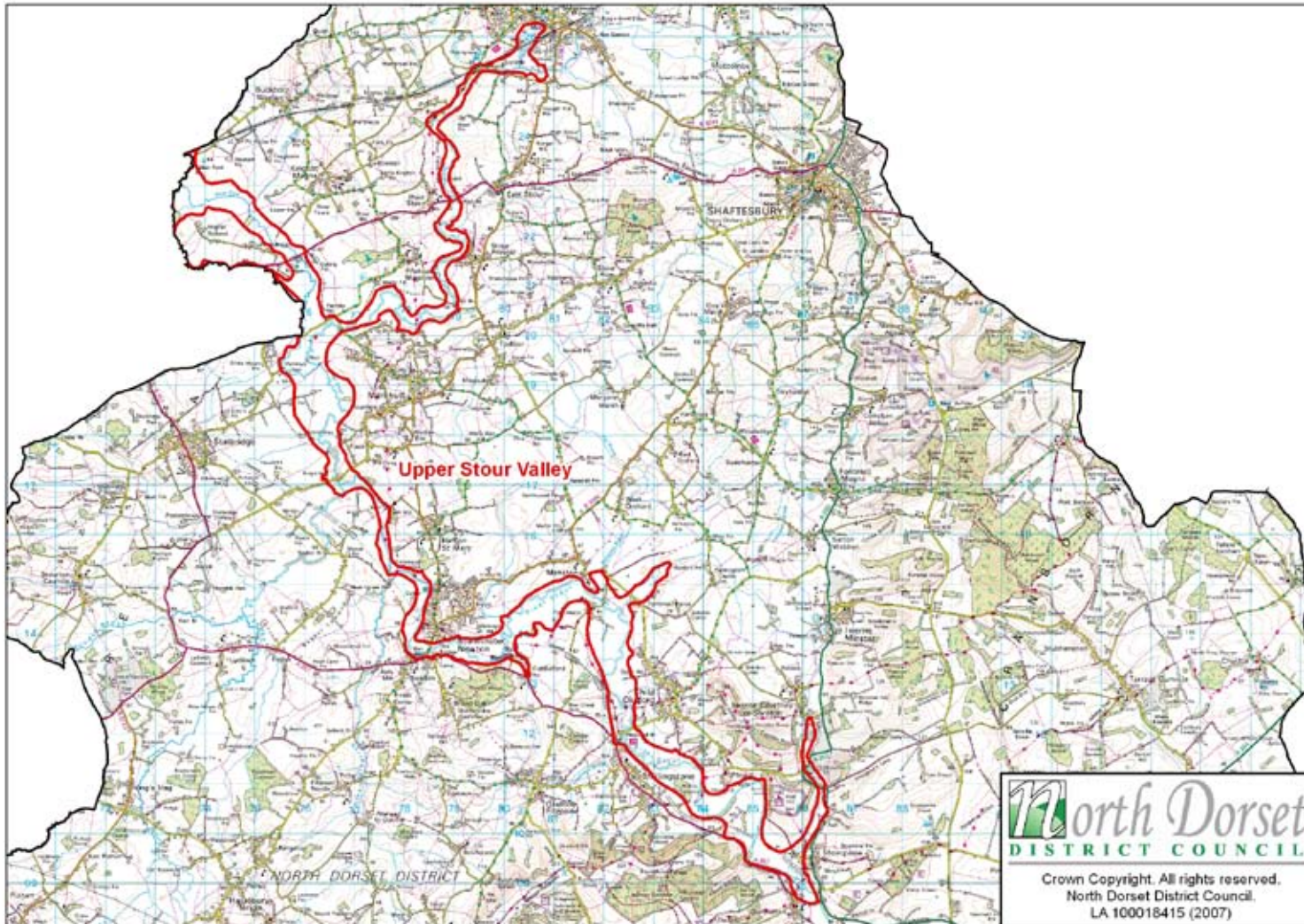


Figure 13.1
The Upper Stour
Valley



Figure 13.2 Area 1, The Stour at Stour Provost



Figure 13.3 Area 2, The Stour at King's Mill Bridge



Figure 13.4 Area 3, The Stour at Sturminster Newton Mill



Figure 13.5 Area 4, The Stour from Hayward Bridge looking towards Shillingstone

Key Characteristics

- ❑ A varied but generally flat, pastoral river valley landscape as it flows through the Limestone Ridges and Blackmore Vale character areas.
- ❑ Often a narrow river channel intensively farmed up to its edges with few marginal areas.
- ❑ Similar characteristics in places as the Blackmore Vale but less trees.
- ❑ Important associated groups and ribbons of trees following the course of the river in places to include visually important mature Willows and Alders.
- ❑ The meandering channel of the river itself is a key feature.
- ❑ Steeper wooded side slopes in places are key features.
- ❑ Old derelict mills, mill ponds, areas of reed and marginal vegetation and old bridges crossing the river are all key features.
- ❑ The riverside meadows at Sturminster Newton are key features of historic and cultural importance.
- ❑ Small bridges crossing brooks on rural lanes are key features.
- ❑ Locally distinctive architecture and a few settlements are key features of interest.

Landscape Description

Land shape and structure

13.1 A flat, mainly pastoral flood plain and riverside landscape on alluvial soils which alters as the river flows south from Gillingham and gradually broadens and changes character at Durweston to become the Mid Stour Valley. There are four sub-divisions to this area:

- ❑ **Area One** - South of Gillingham: the intimate valley landscape here becomes quite distinctive and contained by the rising valley sides which are steep in places with areas of trees and thick hedgerows. The small scale grazed fields run up to the river side and contrast with the arable fields on the higher grounds around this twisting part of the area. The meandering channels often have groups or ribbons of Alder or Willow following its course and the narrow lane follows the valley side for a while. The valley opens up as it sub-divides the Limestone Ridge character area before joining the River Cale on the edge of the Blackmore Vale.
- ❑ **Area Two** - North of Sturminster Newton: This area drains the Blackmore Vale to the west and has a similar character to the Vale but is often less treed with fewer and weaker hedgerows. The river is in a narrow channel and the flood plain spills out into the surrounding Blackmore Vale landscape making the distinction between the two areas less apparent. There are occasional marginal areas of pasture and reed with occasional mature Willows and Alders still following the channel in places. There are numerous side channels and islands and it is still farmed intensively up to the river edge. There are small woods on the occasional steep side slopes to the area and some important and distinctive old features such as stone pedestrian bridges, derelict old mills and ponds. In places, to the east of Nyeland for example, there are few features of interest and it is a bland flat landscape of large fields.

- ❑ **Area Three** - Sturminster Newton: Immediately adjacent to the town the river widens and flows into a confined valley which slopes up to the limestone ridge areas to the north. In places these valley slopes are well wooded and create a distinctive contained landscape. The riverside meadows are a very distinctive and an important recreational resource for Sturminster Newton and have many mature trees lining the river. The old bridge, mill and meandering river and its meadows create an important and intimate historic and culturally significant landscape.
- ❑ **Area Four** - Between Sturminster Newton and Durweston: The valley gradually opens up again past Sturminster Newton to resemble the eastern part of the Blackmore Vale landscape which it drains as the River Stour flows northeast and then southeast. It is still an intensively farmed landscape where the hedgerows are tightly clipped in places and in others left to grow tall and straggly. There is little marginal vegetation on the edges of the river channel, it being farmed and grazed up to the edges. There are the occasional groups of trees or small copses of Willows and Alders. As in the Blackmore Vale there is the frequent use of locally distinctive material such as redbrick tiles and thatch in the few small settlements in the area. This use of locally distinctive materials together with the small lane bridges and parapets, country houses in mature grounds and the trees associated with them are all key features in this part of the valley, as are the old lime works and the quarry at Shillingstone Hill. The lanes in the valley are often narrow, twisting and hedge lined. The valley and tightly meandering river cuts through the chalk escarpment at Shillingstone and it forms a distinct, steep and often wooded valley side landscape and flat valley floor.

References for this character area

- ❑ Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Blackmore Vale and Vale of Wardour Character Areas.
- ❑ English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: Wessex Vales.
- ❑ Parts of the area are within the Dorset AONB.
- ❑ Landscape Description Unit Nos: 281, 274, 272, 181.

14 North Dorset Limestone Ridges

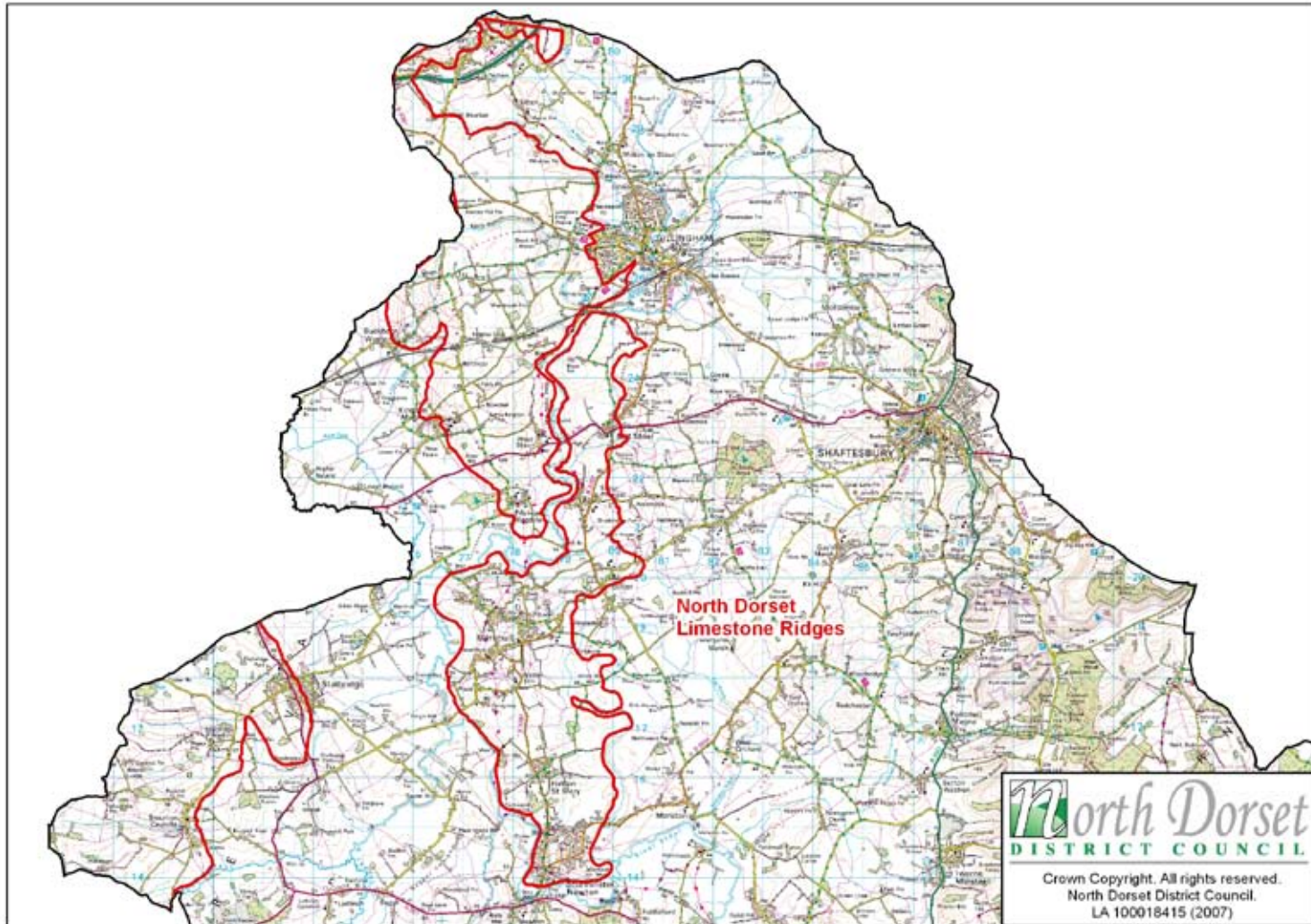


Figure 14.1
North Dorset
Limestone Ridges



Figure 14.2 Looking towards Stalbridge from Silton



Figure 14.3 Looking to the South West from Stalbridge Weston

Key Characteristics

- Elevated open plateau areas of undulating farmland landscape with distinctive sloping edges in places.
- Thick dense hedgerows and frequent small copses and plantations.
- Open views from higher areas across the Vale to the chalk escarpment.
- Many scattered villages and farmsteads and a distinctive settlement pattern along the ridges or on the side slopes to the ridges.
- The traditional use of locally available and distinctive limestone in the villages and in other buildings and structures.
- Numerous twisting hedge lined lanes, straighter ridge top roads and many public Rights of Way.
- Stalbridge Park is a key local feature of interest.
- Twinwood Coppice is a key local feature of interest.

Landscape Description

Land shape and structure

- 14.1 Overall the area has the same character but it is divided into two separate parts. One is the low north-south rounded ridge extending from Sturminster Newton to Bourton which divides the Blackmore Vale into two and the second area is a rolling, elevated, plateau landscape between Stalbridge and Stourton Caundle. The latter area forms part of a large area of limestone hills and ridges extending west to Sherborne and beyond. Both areas are diverse being a mainly pastoral farmed landscape with some arable and characterised by relatively thick hedgerows, often trimmed alongside the roads and tall and straggly in other places. The medium sized fields are irregularly shaped and there are frequent copses and plantations often on the high points. There are fewer hedgerows here than in the adjacent Blackmore Vale and willows and alders are often found in the small brook valleys between the undulating landform. The farmed undulating and plateau landscapes forms a distinct and unified feel which blurs with the edges of the Blackmore Vale and the Blackmore Rolling Vales in places.

Settlement and land cover

- 14.2 There are several small disused quarries in the area and at least one existing open Limestone quarry. The lanes are often twisting, all with small or no verges but always hedge lined. There are many scattered farmsteads and agricultural buildings throughout the area. The area between Sturminster Newton and Bourton forms a distinctive long rounded profile when seen from the west and is gently divided by the River Stour Valley which runs north to south through this ridge line and forms its western boundary to the south. The eastern slopes of the area are more gradual to the Vale pastures but there is a more distinct change in slope on the western side between Fifehead Magdalen and Buckhorn Weston. There is widespread use of locally distinctive and available stone which contributes to the character of the buildings and settlements. In this area the main stone used is the Corallian limestone known locally as Marnhull stone. The settlement pattern is distinctive with some on the plateau tops such as Marnhull and Hinton St Mary and other villages 'hanging' onto the side slopes such as at Kingston Magna, Fifehead Magdalen and Buckhorn Weston. Twinwood Coppice at Hinton St Mary forms a key feature in this upland landscape. Sturminster Newton is situated at the southern tip of the ridge at a key crossing point of the Stour. Both Sturminster Newton and Marnhull have some poorly integrated urban edges. At Bourton the high and steep curved slopes at the northern end of the Blackmore Vale form the southern extent of the Greensand hills which extend north into Somerset. There is a distinctive ridge top road running from Sturminster Newton to Gillingham.
- 14.3 The area to the west between Stalbridge and Stourton Caundle has a more undulating and elevated plateau feel to it and there are open views from high points across the Blackmore Vale towards the chalk escarpment. The area is more wooded than the area to the east with many of them being designated SNCI and Ancient Woodland. There are several distinctive copses situated on high points. There is a distinct edge to the eastern boundary of the area where Stalbridge 'sits' overlooking the Blackmore Vale, but the rest of the edges gently roll into the adjacent Vale landscape. The parkland landscape at Stalbridge Park and in particular the Estate roadside walls are key features in this area. The locally distinctive limestone in this part of the area is Forest Marble and Cornbrash which is widely used across this area and contributes to the character of the villages, other buildings and structures such as walls. Forest Marble in particular is used for buildings since Cornbrash is more rubbly.

References for this character area

- ❑ Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Yeovil Scarplands Character Area.
- ❑ English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: Wessex Vales.
- ❑ Landscape Description Unit Nos: 281, 274, 272, 181.

15 Blackmore Vale

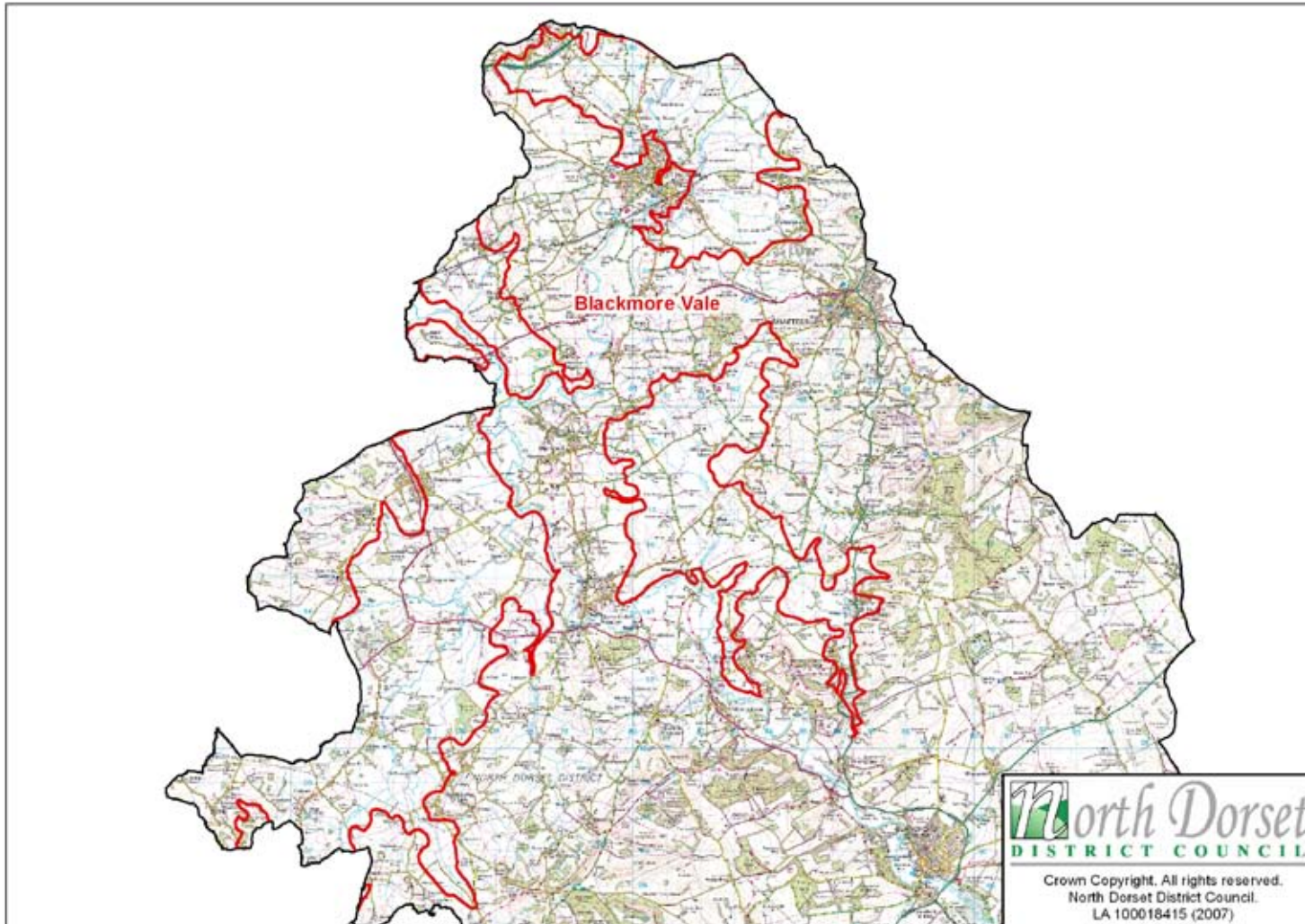


Figure 15.1
The Blackmore Vale



Figure 15.2 Looking across the Blackmore Vale towards Margaret Marsh

Key Characteristics

- ❑ A broad expansive clay Vale which is tranquil and unified.
- ❑ A unique mosaic of woods, straight hedgerows and grassland fields 'dotted' with distinctive mature hedgerow Oaks.
- ❑ Open views across the undulating to flat pastoral landscape to the chalk escarpment backdrop.
- ❑ Dense network of twisting lanes often with grass verges and sharp double 90o bends.
- ❑ Small hump backed bridges with low stone or brick parapets
- ❑ Many very small villages and hamlets built with locally distinctive materials, such as stone, redbrick, tile and thatch.
- ❑ A network of ditches, streams and brooks which drain into the tributaries of the Stour.
- ❑ Lydlinch Common (an SSSI) and Stock Gaylard Deer Park (an SNCI) are both key locally important features.

Landscape Description

Land shape and structure

- 15.1 A broad, gently undulating clay vale drained by the River Stour and its main tributaries, the River Lydden and the River Cale, together with many small streams and brooks. It is an open and expansive landscape with long views particularly to the chalk escarpment which defines its eastern and southern edges. The limestone ridge from Sturminster Newton to Bourton divides the Vale into two separate halves, west and east, with the western part extending into neighbouring West Dorset and Somerset. There is a blurring at the edges of the area particularly with the flat Stour Valley character area. The Vale becomes more undulating at the transition with the Blackmore Rolling Vales and Limestone Ridges character areas. There are a few more elevated and prominent areas within the Vale itself for example at Manston.

Settlement and land cover

- 15.2 It is a predominantly pastoral and intensively farmed landscape with medium sized to small irregularly shaped fields divided by straight, broad and often flat topped trimmed hedgerows. A key feature of the Vale are the distinct mature hedgerow Oak trees which are regularly spaced out and together with the hedgerows and flat landform provide a distinct mosaic and pattern to the landscape. Many of the Oaks have become over mature and therefore 'stag headed'. There are also many small copses and plantations scattered across the Vale with groups of trees often associated with the villages and hamlets. Some of the small copses are designated as SNCIs. Another key feature of the Vale are the many small streams and brooks which are often bridged at lane junctions by small hump backed bridges with distinctive low stone or brick parapets. Alders and Willows occasionally grow in these watercourses.
- 15.3 The narrow lanes are twisting and form a contorted network with distinctive double 90° bends in places and connect the many small villages and tiny hamlets. In places the lanes have wide grass verges and ditches running alongside the hedgerows which are a feature of former cattle driving routes. The dispersed settlement pattern often contains many small hamlets and collections of buildings many using locally distinctive materials such as stone, redbrick, tile and thatch. Gillingham dominates a large part of the north eastern part of the Vale with some visually prominent and detracting urban edges.

References for this character area

- ❑ Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Blackmore Vale and the Vale of Wardour Character Areas.
- ❑ English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: Wessex Vales.
- ❑ Landscape Description Unit Nos: 94, 175, 176, 184, 187, 98, 277, 280, 84, 85, 276, 263, 275, 75, 76, 281, 106, 77, 78, 273, 105.

16 Lower Milborne Valley

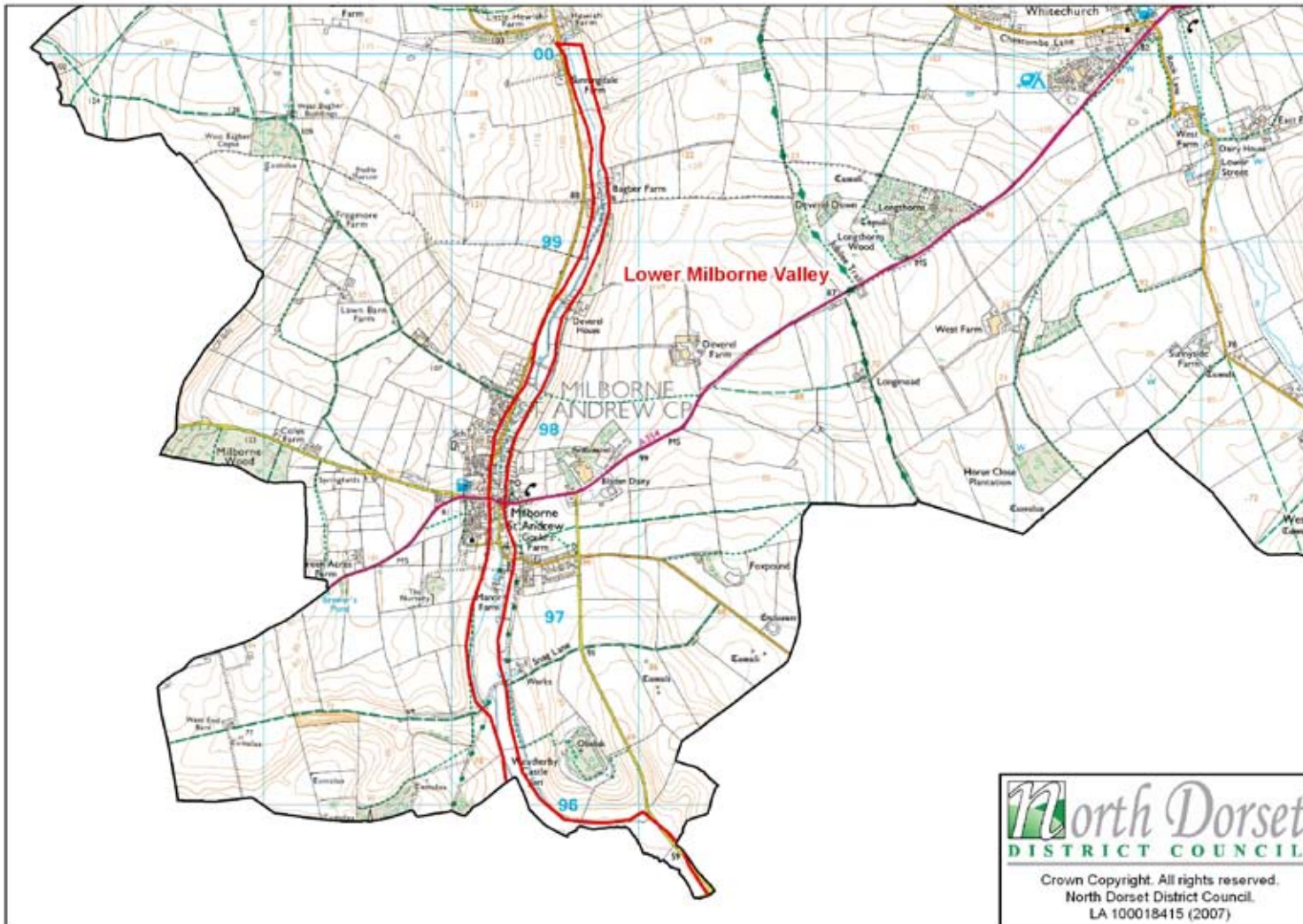


Figure 16.0
Lower Milborne
Valley Character
Area



Figure 16.1 View of the stream



Figure 16.2 View towards the eastern edge of Milborne St Andrew

Key Characteristics

- Flat valley floor within a tightly confined character area which merges into the downland landscape to the west and east.
- Narrow defined stream corridor farmed up to its edges.
- Some important groups of trees on the side slopes and following the stream corridor itself.
- The road network and settlement pattern follow the valley floor.
- Milborne St Andrew is the main settlement at the crossing point on the stream and on the junction with the A354 which has some weak urban edges.

Landscape Description

Land shape and structure

16.1 This character area is a narrowly defined chalk stream valley which creates a tightly confined character area with similar attributes to the Lower Winterborne Valley. It drains from the broader heart-shaped Upper Milborne Valley character area to the north and broadens out and flows east into the Bere Stream and ultimately into the Piddle Valley to the south. It is bounded by chalk downland landscapes on both sides which rise up to the west and east of the area. The narrow stream corridor is often lined with willows and alders which follow its course in places. In winter the stream spills out into the narrow flood plain. There are some important groups of trees and copses along some of the steeper parts of the valley sides.

Settlement and land cover

16.2 The settlement and road network pattern forms a distinctive chalk stream pattern of development following the flat valley floor. Parts of the Milborne St Andrew development have crept up the side slopes of the valley to create visually intrusive edges in places.

References for this character area

- Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase Character Areas.
- English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: South Wessex Downs.
- Landscape Description Unit Nos: 388

17 Upper Milborne Valley

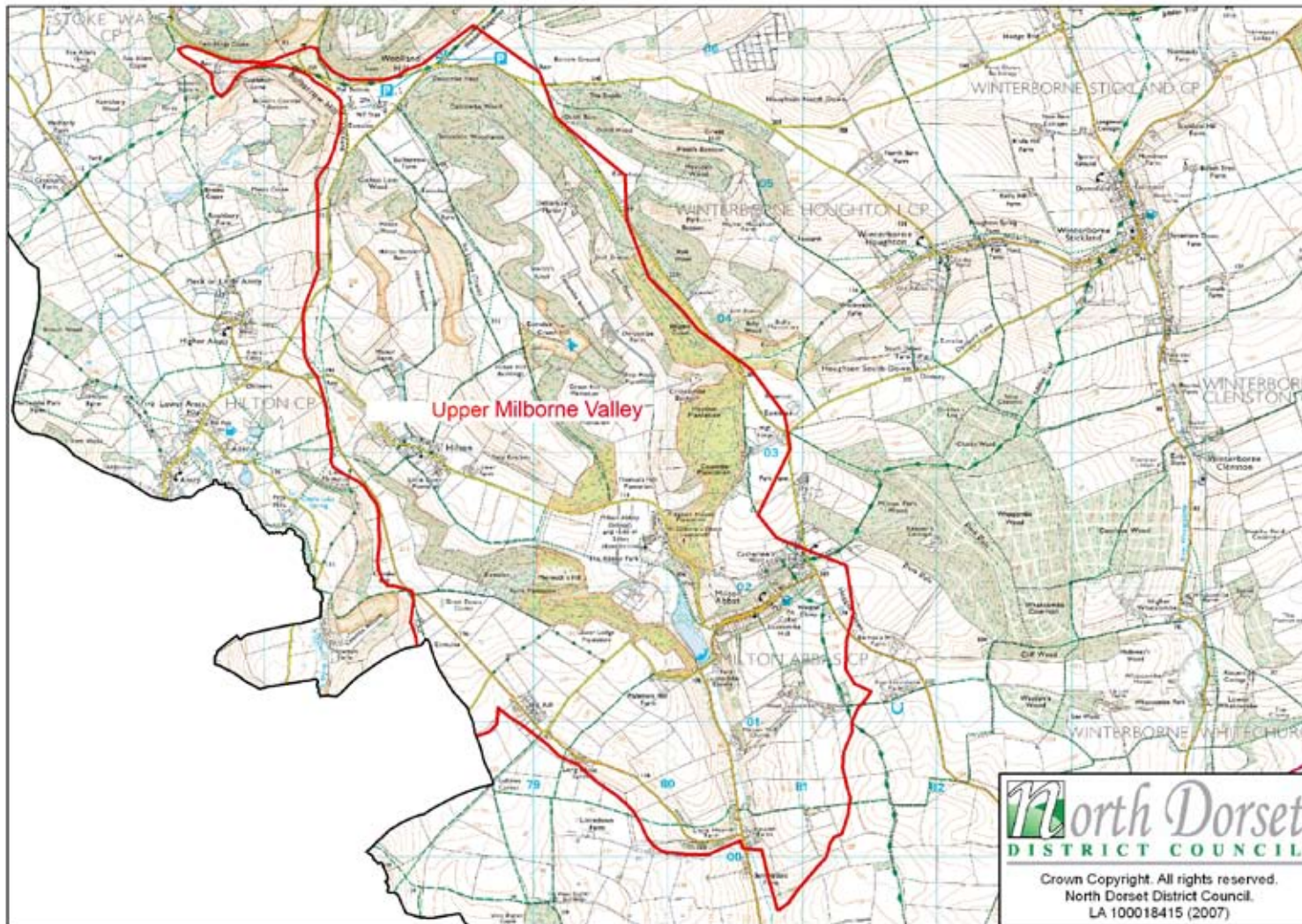


Figure 17.1
Upper Milborne
Valley Character
Area



Figure 17.2 Looking east towards Hilton village



Figure 17.3 Looking towards Milton Abbey

Key Characteristics

- ❑ Heart-shaped valley enclosed with dry tributary valleys and deep coombes.
- ❑ Steeply incised valley slopes with patches of semi-natural chalk grassland and extensive broadleaf woodlands.
- ❑ Remnant winding chalk Winterborne with flood plain supporting occasional water meadows, wet woodlands, cress beds and rough damp meadows.
- ❑ Winding rural lanes which form historical transport routes along the valley floor with a series of small linear and nucleated villages of flint, stone, thatch and cob
- ❑ Straight-sided arable fields (late 18th Century early 19th Century enclosures on the valley floor) with species rich hedgerows and small broadleaf woodlands.
- ❑ Thin calcareous soils with underlying geology of the lower, middle and upper chalk
- ❑ The designed and Grade II Listed parkland landscapes associated with Milton Abbas with veteran trees, railings and country houses along the valley floor providing key features of interest
- ❑ A secluded intimate and tranquil character

Landscape Description

Land shape and structure

17.1 The Upper Milborne Valley is a distinctive chalk landscape dominated by a dramatic designed 18th Century parkland setting and the associated historic Milton Abbey and St Catherine's Chapel. The area has a great sense of seclusion and enclosure defined by the surrounding deep complex twisting valley sides and in particular the chalk escarpments to the west and north. Dense Beech, Ash and Sycamore woodland along the slopes further enhance the sense of enclosure emphasising the dramatic topography as the woods follow a series of small deep coombes around the valley bottoms.

Settlement and land cover

17.2 Within the valley floor gently rolling arable farmland gives way to long sweeping views and vistas with a wooded background. Small dark woodlands along winding lanes with parkland railings and dense hedgerows and hedge banks seclude villages and clustered farm buildings. Frequent use of locally distinctive brick, flint, cob and thatch further emphasise the traditional rural character of the area with the picturesque villages of Hilton and Milton Abbas adding further interest to this tranquil and historic landscape. The area is part of the wider chalk landscape to the south and opens out into the downland landscape of South Blandford Downs and the Lower Milborne Valley. There are many grassland and woodland SNCIs in the area reflecting its contribution to local biodiversity.

References for this character area

- Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase Character Areas.
- English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: South Wessex Downs.
- Within the Dorset AONB
- Landscape Description Unit Nos: 58, 57, 305, 304.

18 Upper North Winterborne Valley

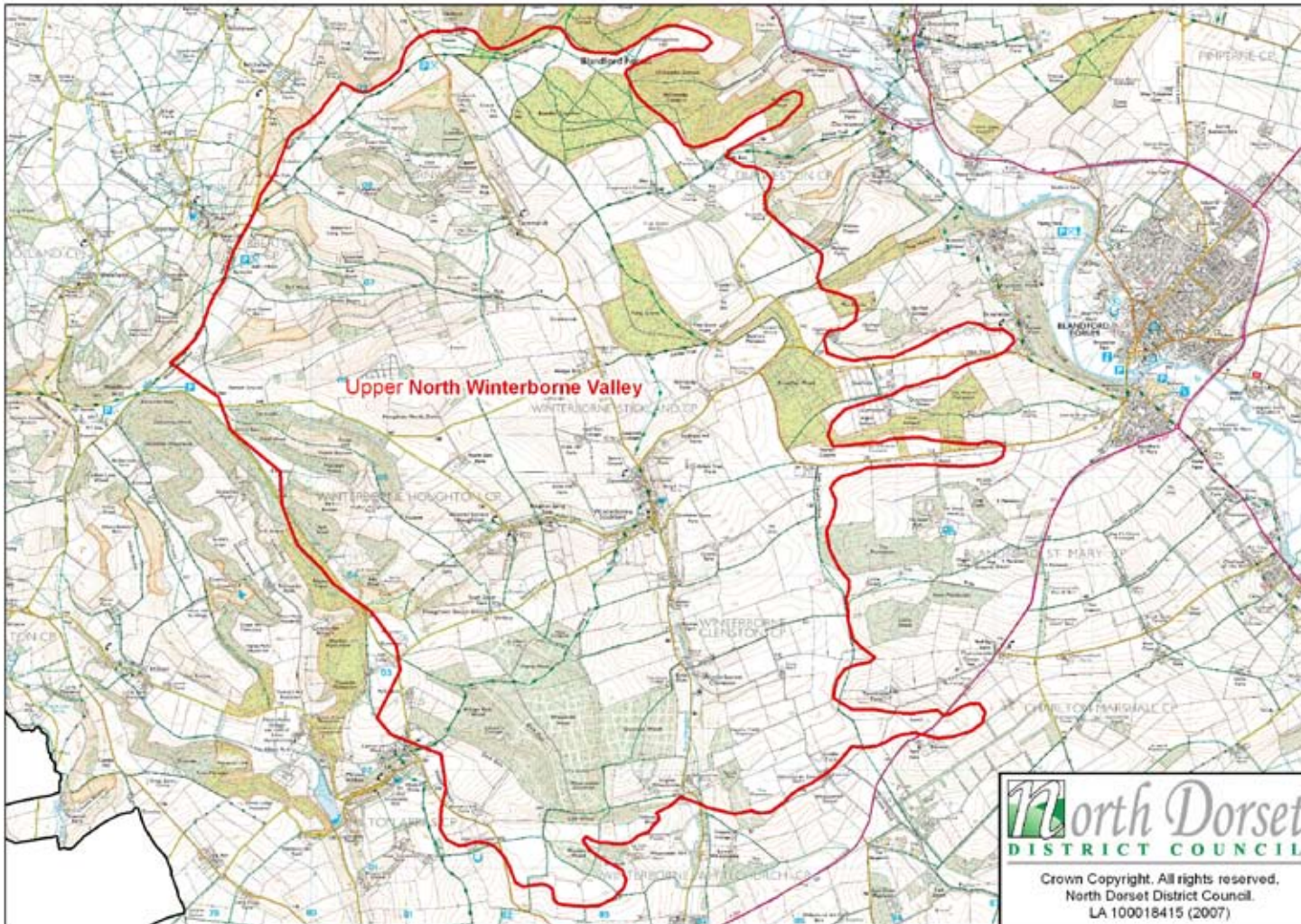


Figure 18.1
Upper North
Winterborne Valley
Landscape Character
Area



Figure 18.2 View towards the North East from Houghton North Down



Figure 18.3 The stream in Winterborne Stickland

Key Characteristics

- ❑ Linear intimate v-shaped chalk valley with associated Winterborne and surrounding steep branching valleys and open chalk uplands.
- ❑ Thin calcareous soils with underlying geology of the lower, middle and upper chalk.
- ❑ Incised valley slopes with patches of semi-natural chalk grassland and occasional broadleaf woodlands.
- ❑ The clear chalk Winterborne with flood plain supporting occasional water meadows, wet woodlands, cress beds and rough damp meadows.
- ❑ Winding rural lanes, which are the historic transport routes, along the valley floor connect to a series of small linear and nucleated villages using locally distinctive flint, stone, thatch and cob.
- ❑ Smaller scale pastures and fields on the valley floor with species, rich dense hedgerows, small broadleaf woodlands and the occasional hedgerow trees.
- ❑ The design parkland landscapes, for example at Turnworth Park and associated veteran trees, railings and country houses on the valley floor form distinctive, locally important features.
- ❑ Straight sided arable fields (late 18th Century early 19th Century enclosures on the open chalk upland).
- ❑ Secluded, intimate, unified and tranquil character.

Landscape Description

Land shape and structure

18.1 The Upper North Winterborne Valley and associated Winterborne chalk stream is characterised by a sweeping, shallow, v-shaped valley with sheltered picturesque linear villages. The landscape has several distinctive elements. Historical transport routes that connect villages along the valley floor are enclosed by small scale pastoral fields with dense hedgerows. There is a branching pattern of narrow, steep sided dry coombs off the main central valley with small pockets of broadleaf woodland. Towards the upper slopes the valley becomes broader in scale, a bare chalk downland studded with a rich archaeology. Large arable field patterns and significant blocks of dark conifer plantation on the higher slopes and occasional scattered farms provide a gradual transition to the surrounding open chalk uplands. Towards the northern upper reaches of the valley where the landform rises towards the chalk escarpment the landscape becomes more intimate and tranquil. The chalk escarpment defines and encloses the northern end of the valley. The area is part of the wider chalk landscape to the south where it opens out into the downland landscape of the South Blandford Downs and the Lower Winterborne Valley. There are many grassland and woodland SNCIs in the area reflecting its contribution to local biodiversity.

Settlement and land cover

18.2 The distinctive settlement pattern along the valley floor includes settlements of Winterborne Stickland, Winterborne Houghton, Turnworth and Winterborne Clenston which all have well defined edges. The old water meadows along the flood plain and the remnant parkland help to create an intimate and enclosed landscape of subtle colours with connections to the past.

References for this character area

- ❑ Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase Character Areas.
- ❑ English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: South Wessex Downs.
- ❑ Within the Dorset AONB
- ❑ Landscape Description Unit Nos: 305, 304.

19

Bloxworth/Charborough Downs

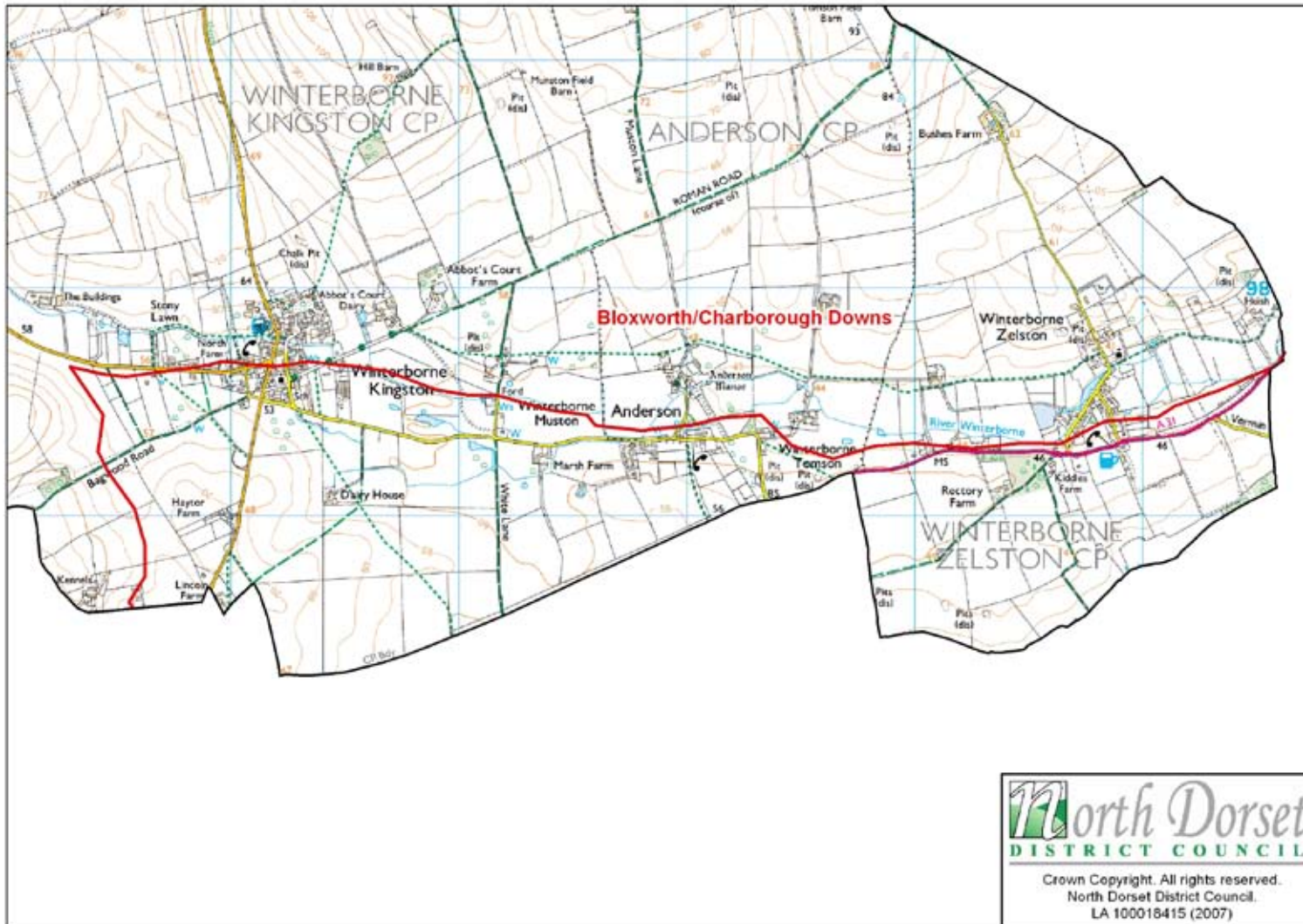


Figure 19.1
Bloxworth/
Charborough
Downs



Figure 19.2 Looking northwards from the A31 towards Marsh Farm

Key Characteristics

- Open and rolling expansive chalk landscapes
- Individual mature parkland trees
- Old estate lodges, gateposts and walls abutting lanes are key features in parts of this area
- Interconnected and enclosing woodland blocks along high ground
- Hedge lined lanes
- Open views from elevated positions
- Flat chalk valley side edges as the area merges with the Winterborne Valley where there is a distinctive settlement and road pattern

Landscape Description

Land shape and structure

19.1 A varied character area but largely dominated by open chalk upland which gradually slopes down to the Lower Winterborne Valley along its northern fringes. The rolling intensively farmed regular sized large fields are subdivided by thin and weak hedgerows with the occasional hedgerow tree characteristic of a 'planned enclosure' landscape. There are a few barrows, some of which are scheduled ancient monuments.

Settlement and land cover

19.2 There are open views across the Winterborne valley from elevated positions. The area has few settlements with Winterborne Kingston, Tomson, Anderson, Zelston and Muston (all part of the linear Winterborne 'family' of villages/hamlets) being found along the edges of the area abutting the Winterborne valley and following the straight valley floor road network. There are a few isolated farmsteads in the area and the A31 cuts through its north edges creating in particular an audible impact on the character area. The area is reasonably well served by public rights of way.

References for this character area

- Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase Character Area.
- English Nature; Natural Areas 1997: South Wessex Downs.
- Landscape Description Unit Nos: 340, 406 & 407.

20 East Blandford/Pimperne Downs

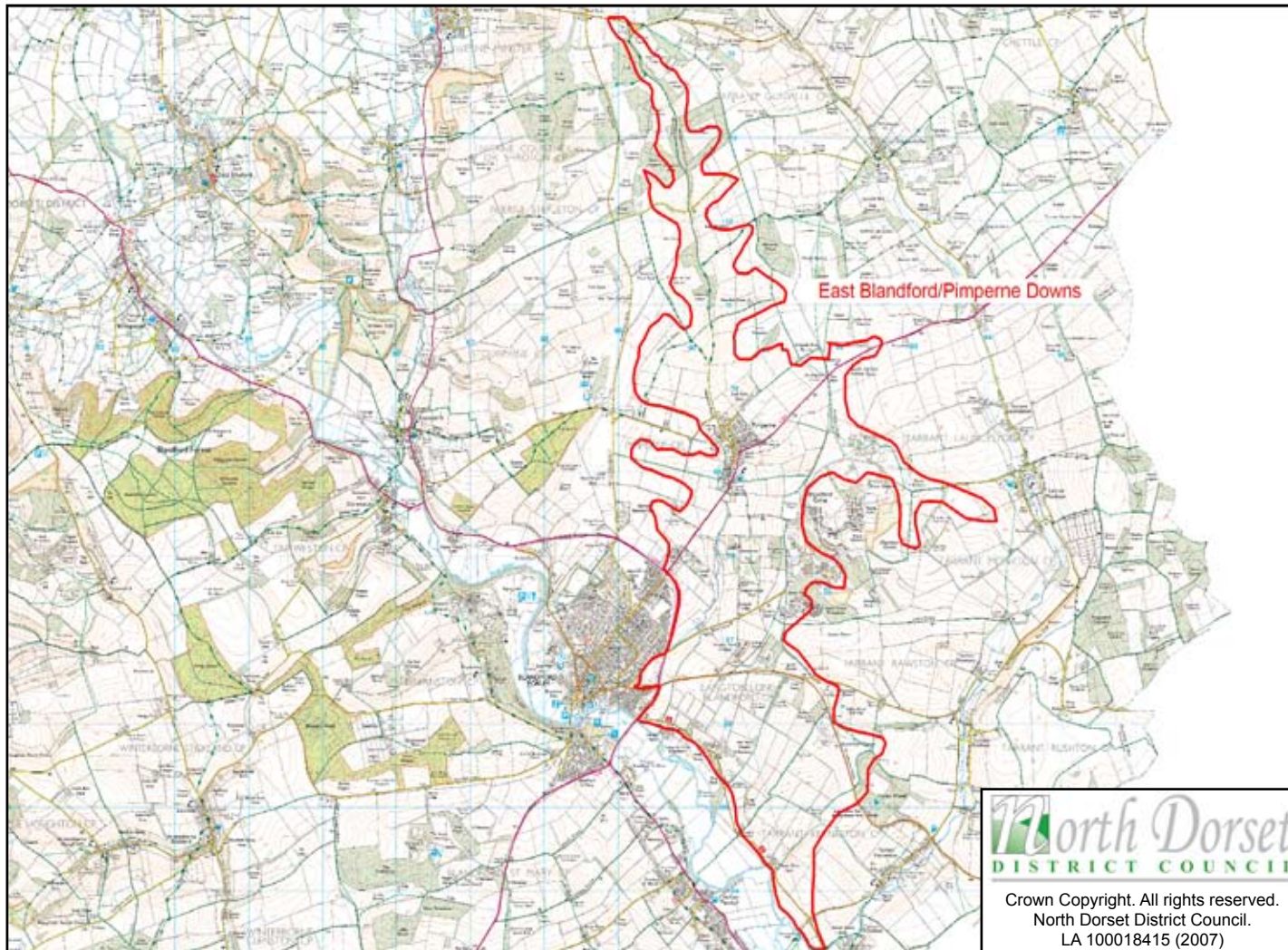


Figure 20.1
East Blandford/Pimperne
Downs Landscape
Character Area



Figure 20.2 East Blandford/Pimperne Downs

Key Characteristics

- A typical chalk landscape comprising valley floors, undulating and indented side slopes and elevated open uplands around the watershed.
- Some distinctive elevated plateaus and wide ridgelines which afford wide views
- Open, large scale geometric-shaped and mainly arable fields often bounded by thin, straight and weak hedgerows or replacement fencing.
- Straight roads, lanes and footpaths run across the area, along valley floors and the edges of the side slopes.
- Lanes lined with clipped hedgerows and the occasional group of trees.
- Several Neolithic barrows, tumuli and rings on the elevated ridge lines.
- The area is well served by bridleways and footpaths.
- The visually prominent edges to Blandford, Blandford Camp and Pimperne create hard and visually distracting edges to the area.
- A few steep-sided and wooded or scrub-covered slopes provide important key features of local interest at the far northern end of the area.
- Pimperne Valley and its associated narrow stream and/or lane along the valley floor is a feature of interest.
- The A354 forms a major visual corridor across the area detracting from character.

Landscape Description

Land shape and structure

20.1 This is a largely uniform area of rolling and undulating chalk downland and valley to the east of Blandford. The southern section forming the side slopes running down to the Stour Valley and the northern section is a complete small chalk valley based on the stream which runs through Pimperne and drains into the Stour just south of Blandford. There are distinctive folded and indented edges to the side slopes which create small dry coombes and rounded ridges. It is an open and expansive landscape with long views from the prominent edges elevated plateaus and windswept, exposed highpoints to the area. An example of the latter being at Keynston Down where Badbury Rings is a key feature also designated as a SNCI and Scheduled Ancient Monument. The landscape is more intimate along the valley floors. The far northern end of the area is more enclosed with a tight, confined but still folded landform as well as being more wooded as it merges with the Cranborne Chase landscapes.

Settlement and land cover

20.2 The area is intensively farmed with large geometrically shaped fields bounded by thin, straight and weak hedges typical of the late 18th Century and early 19th Century parliamentary enclosure. In places all the hedges have been removed to create very large featureless fields. There are the occasional isolated regularly shaped plantation woodlands as well as some important SSSI and SNCI grassland sites and coppices in the tight northern valley. There are several Neolithic tumuli, barrows and rings characteristic of chalk downland on the elevated open land in the east of the area. Pimperne on the A354 is the only significant settlement in the area and has some poorly integrated urban edges. The A354 forms a major visual corridor across the area. Parts of the Blandford Camp and in particular the eastern edges of Blandford also create distracting and prominent hard urban edges to the area. Several straight hedge lined roads and lanes run across the grain of the landscape as well as along the valley edges and floors. There are a few isolated large agricultural buildings and several dispersed farmsteads in the area which is well served by footpaths and bridle ways.

Historical Influences

20.3 There are several Neolithic tumuli and barrows characteristic of the down lands dotted across the area, some of which are Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

References for this character area

- Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase Character Area.
- English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: South Wessex Downs.
- Dorset County Council 1993 Landscape Assessment Character Area: Chalk Uplands.
- The area is within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB
- Landscape Description Unit Nos: 267 & 52

21 Chettle/Abbeycroft Downs



Figure 21.1
Chettle/Abbeycroft
Downs Landscape
Character Area



Figure 21.2 Looking towards Tarrant Hinton from the A354

Key Characteristics

- Some very large fields with no boundaries at all, but all of a geometric shape.
- Sparsely populated and intensively farmed agricultural landscape.
- Distinctive, narrow and coniferous shelter belt plantation strips.
- A typical chalk landscape comprising valley floors, undulating and indented side slopes and elevated open uplands.
- Well wooded central and northern areas of designated Ancient woodland.
- Straight hedge lined lanes widely spaced out.
- Open elevated plateaus rising above the Tarrant valley.
- Chettle and Farnham are distinctive chalk valley floor settlements
- The parkland landscape associated with Chettle House is a key feature.
- The area is well served by rights of way and the Jubilee Trail passes through Chettle and its parkland.
- Several isolated large farm buildings and farmsteads.

Land shape and structure

21.1 An extensive area of uniform, open chalk upland which forms part of a wider area of downland extending into East Dorset district. It is an open, expansive and rolling landscape with distinctive elevated plateaus and windswept, exposed highpoints which offer open and wide views. The elevated plateaus are typically found on the eastern side of the area above the Tarrant valley. They are less undulating than the rest of the area which has gently curving and convex profiles. The elevated plateaus merge with the downland landscapes towards Badbury Rings. The northern end of the Crichel valley creates a small bowl at the valley head where Chettle is located. The far north east part of the area forms the upper end of the Allen valley where Farnham is sits on the valley floor.

Settlement and land cover

21.2 The area is intensively farmed with large geometrically shaped fields bounded by thin, straight and weak hedges typical of the late 18th Century and early 19th Century parliamentary enclosure. In places all the hedges have been removed to create very large featureless open fields. There are the several distinctive geometric woodlands and narrow coniferous shelter belt plantations which are characteristic in the northern part of the area. The central part of the area is well wooded with many of the woods being designated as SSSI/SSSI with many being Ancient woodlands. The far northern part of the area also has a high coverage of Ancient woods and old hazel coppices as it merges with the wooded chalk downland landscapes in the Chase. There are several Neolithic tumuli, barrows and historic field systems characteristic of chalk downland. The few roads in the area are straight and hedge lined. There are a few isolated large agricultural buildings and several dispersed farmsteads in the area which is well served by footpaths and bridle ways with the Jubilee Trail passes through the area at Chettle. The area is sparsely populated with Chettle and Farnham being the only two settlements. The parkland landscape setting around Chettle House provides a key feature.

References for this character area

- Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase Character Area.
- English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: South Wessex Downs.
- Dorset County Council 1993 Landscape Assessment Character Area: Chalk Uplands.
- The area is within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB
- Landscape Description Unit Nos: 267 & 52

22 South Blandford Downs

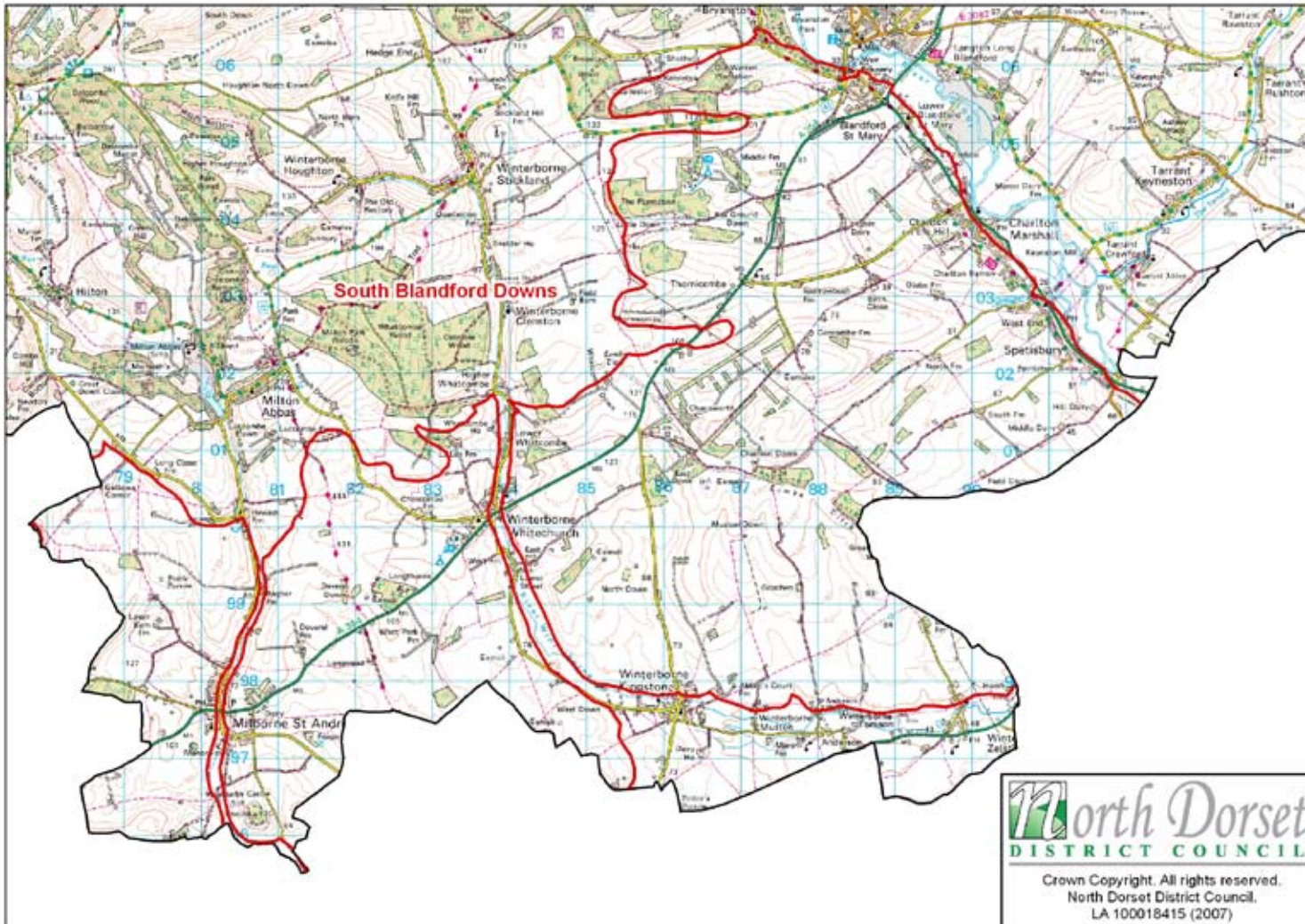


Figure 21.1
South Blandford
Downs Landscape
Character Area



Figure 22.2 Looking to the west from Spetisbury Rings.

Key Characteristics

- An undulating open chalk downland landscape distinctively subdivided by four chalk river valleys
- These river valleys create distinctive sub divisions within the area
- Medium to large scale fields bounded by low, straight and clipped hedgerows
- Intensively farmed and arable landscape.
- Regular-shaped small plantation woodlands dot the landscape.
- Narrow, widely spaced out straight lanes are bounded by continuous clipped hedgerows with the occasional hedgerow trees.
- The urban settlement edges to Milborne St Andrew and Winterborne Whitechurch at the junction of the chalk stream valley and upland landscape form detracting features in places.
- A distinctive linear settlement edge along the eastern side of the area as it dips steeply down to the Stour Valley.
- Blandford St Mary creates a hard urban edge to the north of the area on the outskirts of Blandford and forms a detracting feature.
- Weatherbury Castle, which is an SNCI and SAM, is a key feature.
- The Spetisbury Rings are both an SAM and a SNCI and a feature of interest.

- ❑ The Jubilee Trail, which crosses the area, is a key feature.
- ❑ Long Falls Wood, which is partly an SNCI and its surrounding tumuli which is a SAM, is also a key feature.
- ❑ Some important SNCI woodland copses and plantations.
- ❑ Milborne Wood is a key feature and an SNCI
- ❑ A distinctive network of straight bridleways and paths, some of historic importance.
- ❑ The parkland landscape at Watcombe Park is an important local feature.

Landscape Description

Land shape and structure

22.1 An undulating area of chalk downland distinctively subdivided by the predominantly south flowing chalk valleys of the rivers Winterborne, Milborne, Devils Brook and Stour. It has a gentler undulating landform than the East Blandford Downs with less distinctive elevated areas, slopes and ridges and it merges with the downland areas to the south. It is still however an expansive landscape with some open views to the horizon.

Settlement and land cover

22.2 It is separated from the East Blandford Downs by the Mid Stour valley along which the eastern boundary of the area has a distinct break in slope heavily ribbon developed along the A350 which creates a distinctive settlement pattern. The area is intensively farmed with large to medium sized geometrical shaped fields bounded by low, straight clipped hedges, generally in a better condition than in the East Blandford Downs. Right across the area there are examples of ongoing estate management, for example, hedgerow management practices.

22.3 There are several small, geometric-shaped plantation woodland blocks which dot the landscape and define the horizon in many places. Several of these copses/woodlands are designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) Milborne Wood is an important feature of biodiversity interest in this intensively farmed landscape.

22.4 There are widely spaced out, straight roads lined by low clipped hedgerows and the A354 dominates the central part of the area, as it crosses the upland. The bridleway and footpath network also follow straight routes across the area and the Stour Valley Way and Jubilee Trail both run in and across the area. Settlements are few and found mainly along the edges of the Stour Valley with a few isolated farmsteads scattered across the area. Parts of the urban edges of Winterborne Whitechurch and Milborne St Andrew become visible, and create an impact, as they have developed up the side slopes of the downland over time. In the far south of the area around Weatherby Castle, a more intimate valley landscape is created as it becomes tighter and constricted by topography and there is a corresponding reduction in field size.

Historical influences

22.5 There are several tumuli and barrows across the area, some of which are designated as Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs). The Spetisbury Rings are both an SAM and a SNCI and a feature of interest.

References for this character area

- ❑ Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase Character Area.
- ❑ English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: South Wessex Downs.
- ❑ The area is within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB
- ❑ Landscape Description Unit Nos: 352, 56, 266, 338, 53, 402, 401

Methodology for Mapping and Describing Landscape Character

The process of mapping and describing landscape character has followed the “Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland”. The key steps of this process are as follows:

Desk Study

This was primarily carried out by Diacono Associates and it was at this stage that the ‘building blocks’ of the landscape, the Landscape Description Units (LDU) were identified and mapped. (This stage is not part of the standard guidance.) Each Landscape Description Unit has its own associated database on geology, soils, ecology, physiography, settlement pattern and land use and cover. These datasets are used to define and separate the individual LDUs. The mapped Landscape Description Unit boundaries and databases can be viewed on ‘MapInfo’ GIS (Geographical Information Systems) at www.north-dorset.gov.uk/index/gis.htm.

Field Survey

The field survey of the Dorset AONB was started in 2005 and expanded to cover the rest of the District in early summer 2006. In order to ensure consistency of approach a standard field survey sheet was devised. This included an assessment of landscape condition for each Landscape Description Unit and/or Land Cover Parcel and a photographic record for each. The photos were taken from selected key viewpoints to best represent the areas character.

Classification and Description

This involved the identification, classification, mapping and description of distinctive areas of recognisable and consistent character and was carried out by a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute. These are known as Landscape Character Areas and are based on the mapped boundaries of the LDUs. This process included the analysis of existing assessments such as the Dorset County Council Landscape Assessment dated 1993 as well as the Joint Character Map of the England dated 1996 and the 1997 Natural Area profiles by English Nature. Analysis of GIS layers such as the draft county wide Historic Landscape Characterisation also took place together with consultation with the Dorset AONB team to ensure consistency with their assessment work. Some further field verification was also required. Each area was described in a relatively value free and objective way and its key characteristics identified

Definition of Terms

Joint Character Areas

At a national level the character of the English countryside has been described and mapped into 159 character areas. These are commonly referred to as “Joint Character Areas” through a joint project between the Countryside Agency and English Nature (now Natural England). There are three joint character areas wholly or partly within the District. Details of these areas are listed in Section 4.3.

Landscape Character Types

Landscape character types are landscapes with broadly similar patterns of geology, soils, vegetation, landuse, settlement and field patterns. Landscapes belonging to a particular type in North Dorset, for example Chalk Valleys, are shown in Appendix 3.

Landscape Character Areas

Character areas are unique areas- geographically discrete examples of a particular landscape type. For example, Lower Winterbourne Valley is within the Chalk Valleys, landscape character type. A landscape character area’s key characteristics are those aspects of character which give an area its distinct sense of place. It can include key features of importance, which are those elements of the landscape of particular prominence or those which catch the eye such as tumuli and old gravel pits. Each Landscape Character Area is based on one or more Landscape Description Units.

Landscape Description Units

These are the building blocks of the landscape. Each LDU has its own associated database on geology, ecology, physiography, settlement pattern, landuse and cover and area used as the basis for the Landscape Character Area.

Details of the Joint Character Areas within North Dorset

The following describes the key characteristics of the broad character areas within the district as stated within 'Countryside Character, volume 8, Countryside Agency, 1999:

Dorset Downs & Cranborne Chase

- A rolling, chalk landscape with dramatic scarps and steep-sided, sheltered valleys;
- Scarp slopes with species-rich grassland, complex coombes and valleys, spectacular views, prominent hill forts and other prehistoric features;
- Open, mainly arable, downland on the dip slope with isolated farmsteads and few trees;
- Varied valleys with woodlands, hedged fields, flood meadows and villages in flint and thatch; and
- Distinctive woodlands and historic parkland.

Blackmoor Vale & the Vale of Wardour

- A complex mosaic of mixed farming: undulating, lush, clay vales fringed by Upper Greensand hills and scarps;
- Small, rectilinear pasture fields with hedgerow oak trees and many scattered small broadleaved woodlands;
- Many streams and waterside trees;
- Wooded Upper Greensand scarps and outliers with historic parks;
- Open arable Upper Greensand and dip slopes;
- Broken, low, limestone ridges with shallow valleys crossing the clayey Blackmoor Vale and steeper valleys around the margins of the area;
- Small villages and hamlets form nuclei within a patchwork of fields, hedges, woods and trees;
- Many villages at scarp foot, river crossing points and strategic sites;
- A wide variety of local building materials and techniques, including half timbering; and
- Todber Freestone and Upper Greensand are widely used in the east.

Yeovil Scarplands

- ❑ Mainly a remote rural area with villages and high church towers;
- ❑ Wide variety of local building materials including predominantly Ham Hill Stone;
- ❑ Small manor houses and large mansions with landscape parks; and
- ❑ Varied land use: arable on the better low-lying land, woodland on the steep ridges and deep coombes.



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