6. Chute Forest

Character Area 6: Cute Forest
Overview

A block of chalk upland landscape which forms the eastern end of Salisbury Plain and is defined to the west by the Bourne Valley, to the north by a steep north-facing scarp and to the east and south by the District boundary. Deposits of Clay-with-Flints capping the chalk support extensive areas of woodland and a dense network of hedgerows and trees. These distinguish this area from the more open landscape of the Plain to the west and are more typical of the wooded Hampshire Downs which extend beyond the District to the east. Apart from the Bourne Valley, the smoothly rolling downland is also dissected by a number of minor dry valleys and bournes. Military activity is much less conspicuous in this area and is largely confined to the south-western corner around the settlements of Ludgershall and Tidworth.

Geology and Landform

The geology of the area is almost exclusively the Upper Chalk, the Middle and Lower Chalks outcropping only in narrow bands along the scarp above the Vale of Pewsey. Sporadic outcroppings of Clay with Flints occur across the central part of the area, at Buttermere in the north east and at South Tidworth. The base of the Bourne Valley is overlain by alluvium and river gravels, and these deposits also occur in some of the deeper bournes. Topographically, the landform is similar to both the rest of Salisbury Plain to the west and the Savernake Plateau to the north west, with a rolling form dissected by dry valleys, and the steep sided valley of the Bourne on the western edge. The northern scarp extends from Ham Hill in the east, which reaches 287 metres AOD, to Collingbourne Kingston in the west. Other high land occurs at Wexcombe Down, and at Fosbury Hill.

Landcover

Landcover varies considerably across the area. Open and enclosed arable downland occurs on the high chalk near the scarp, while in the central part there are large areas of woodland and woodland/farmland mosaic associated with the caps of Clay with Flints.

Historic Landscape Character

During the Neolithic period woodland clearance and settlement had extended sufficiently to demonstrate a preference for the more easily worked downland soils, and specifically avoiding the heavier Clay-with-Flint derived soils. By the Iron Age period virtually the only occupation within this zone was at Fosbury hill fort, with possible associated field systems to the west, these field systems possibly continuing into the Romano-British period. The Romano-British period also saw the construction of Ermine Street from the south-east to Cunetio (Mildenhall), passing through the area. This road enters the district at Hampshire Gate, and detours around Fosbury Hill in a broad curve to the south-west via Chute Causeway.

Although there is very little evidence of Saxon activity within the area, apart from settlements at Grange Farm, Chute Standen and Little Down, by the medieval period the area was comparatively densely occupied, particularly with the establishment of Ludgershall Castle and village. Conholt Park was also established during this period. By the 14th century, the area (collectively referred to as the Forest of Chute) covered c. 98 square miles, broadly comparable with Savernake Forest to the north. The heavy clay soils present throughout this area have restricted the impact of arable farming, and preserved large areas of woodland, survivors of the Royal Forest. The field system, as it survives today, is largely a result of post-medieval enclosure, although those elements closest to the
Roman road that passes across the area may represent an early Roman landscape.

**Settlement and Buildings**

Within the wooded areas small villages and hamlets occur in folds in the chalk topography and on more open south-facing slopes.

Isolated farms and mansions (e.g. Conholt House) also may be found in the countryside. Characteristic building materials include brick and flint banding in traditional buildings, a style taken up and repeated locally by the Victorians. The larger settlements are found along the Bourne Valley, and include Collingbourne Ducis, Collingbourne Kingston and Ludgershall.

The Collingbournes have some attractive building groups in local brick, flint, cob, tile and straw thatch together with some timber framing. Like the Chutes, they are situated in small valleys within the chalk and tend to follow a linear pattern as a result.

The garrison town of Tidworth dominates the southern part of the area and possesses extensive modern built up areas as well as development from the 19th century. The nearby expanded village of Ludgershall also has areas of modern residential and military stores-related development. These areas combine residential development of estates and apartment blocks with barracks and parade grounds in close proximity, and have largely masked the original settlements on which they were centred. Ludgershall retains some core identity with a Conservation Area including the 11th century castle. Tidworth is recognised as a component of the archaeological landscape for its relict military features of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

**Landscape and Visual Character**

The character of the southern part of the area is influenced by the garrison towns of North Tidworth and Ludgershall which are expansive, and which have only a narrow gap between them. North Tidworth is surrounded by a varied mixture of parkland, amenity land, woodland and woodland/farmland mosaic, while Ludgershall is set within a predominantly arable landscape. These factors combine with areas of intense military activity around the towns to create a fragmented landscape character some areas of which are quite degraded. Elsewhere the area can be divided between the broad belt of arable land which follows the line of the scarp, and the eastern block where woodland and woodland mosaic predominate. The cultivated area is characterised by sweeping open arable landscapes above the scarp, sloping down to the Bourne valley in the west. The wooded areas by contrast have a much more intimate character with a low degree of intervisibility. They combine with areas of parkland and estate to create a very attractive landscape. The valley floor of the Bourne is weakly defined and often insignificant within the wider chalkland setting.

Individual components of the area may be broken down, and key characteristics are illustrated in Figure 13.1, and summarised below.

*Open Chalk upland;*
- characteristic chalky soils;
- strong topography of dry valleys and ridges;
- hedgerows generally absent and few other boundary features;
- in some places fence lines may have become defined by tall weed and scrub growth to the extent that they can appear as very weak, gappy hedges;
- some punctuation by groups of trees notably beech, in ridgeline and scarp top locations.
- often forming the most featureless expanses of chalk upland;
• open and expansive with very high intervisibility.

Enclosed Chalk upland:
• definite boundary structure formed by hedgerows and/or small groups of trees;
• individual fields may be extensive, but have a clear perimeter hedgerow;
• may be arable or pasture;
• hedgerows often eroded and gappy, and may be replaced with fences;
• few hedgerow trees.

Wooded Chalk upland
• mosaic of woodland and farmland;
• scattered, isolated woodland blocks within open downland;
• woodland extensive and largely continuous, open fields are occasional and insignificant in relation to the tree cover;
• woodland interspersed with blocks of pasture and arable land.

Steep Chalk scarps and valley sides
• steep sided bournes and smaller scarps;
• extensive structures extending complete for a number of miles;
• smaller features which fade out and reform;
• permanent pasture on the steepest slopes, sometimes associated with strip lynchets;
• scattered scrub.
• steep slopes dominated by arable farmland;
• woodland, scrub, pasture mix may occur as strong features which can identify scarps and steepest slopes in the landscape at some distance.

Valley floor pasture.
• Occupying the river floodplain; underlain by alluvium and generally under permanent pasture;
• characterised by willows and alders in hedges and along watercourses;
• attractive, pastoral character;
• generally strong hedgerow structure, and in particular a richness in mature riparian trees such as willows and alder.

Amenity Landscapes
• intensively managed for amenity purposes;
• golf courses with their distinctive features of greens, roughs, fairways, bunkers etc.;
• sports fields and other areas under amenity use.

Formal parkland and designed landscapes
• areas of formal C18 and C19 designed parkland with a distinctively pastoral and mature character;
• characteristic features such as parkland trees set in pasture, avenues, rides, copes and blocks of woodland, lakes, formal gardens, estate boundaries (walls or railings), ornamental features, estate buildings etc.

Estate farmland
• traces of a former parkland character or which displays typical estate characteristics;
• fields enclosed by blocks of woodland and belts of trees;
• regular single-species hedgerow trees, avenues;
• estate fencing (railings and post and rail);
• game coverts.

Key Landmarks and Landscape Features
• the northern scarp above the Vale of Pewsey;
• Chute Causeway and Hippenscombe;
Landscape Quality and Key Issues

Most of this character area lies within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, confirming its outstanding quality and national significance. A small area to the north of North Tidworth lies within the wider Special Landscape Area indicating its quality and local importance. The area around North Tidworth and Ludgershall lies outside the designated areas.

The character area also includes a number of other features of conservation value which contribute to its overall significance, including:

- **Conservation Areas** at Collingbourne Ducis, Collingbourne Kingston, Brunton, Lower Chute, Chute Cadley, Upper Chute, Ludgershall (around the castle) and Oxenwood;
- **Sites of Special Scientific Interest** at Ham Hill and Botley Down, for chalk grassland interest. Elsewhere there are a large number of non-statutory sites of nature conservation interest which are chalk grassland and semi-natural ancient woodland;
- a large number of **Scheduled Ancient Monuments** which include many tumuli, field systems and hill forts
- **Historic Park and Garden** at Biddesden House.

The landscape of the central portion of this area is particularly attractive and important, and is dominated by remnants of the Chute Forest.

Elsewhere, intensive agriculture and military uses/development have resulted in fragmented or weaker landscapes where strategies for management and enhancement may be appropriate. Different strategies for management and enhancement are shown in Figure 13.2

The principal threats and issues important to landscape quality in this character area are:

- agricultural intensification, particularly the conversion of chalk grassland and permanent pasture to arable, and the loss or poor maintenance of field boundaries within formerly enclosed chalk landscapes;
- management and enhancement of the extensive remnant woodlands of the former Chute Forest and the characteristic patchwork of farmland and woodland;
- the intrusion of military activity and associated built development on the landscape;
- management and enhancement of parkland and estate landscapes;
- the conservation of archaeological features;
- drainage and cultivation of floodplain pasture within the River Bourne corridor.
Guidelines for Chute Forest Landscapes

Enhancement priorities

- encourage management of existing woodlands to maximise landscape and wildlife value, including the reintroduction of traditional coppice management and diversification of uniform plantations to favour native broadleaved species;
- plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland on arable or cultivated land, to link with existing woodlands and to restore or reinforce a mosaic of woodland and farmland;
- conserve and manage woodland as representative of an historic landscape in their own right;
- maintain existing roadside hedgerows and trees, including avenues, and replace where these have been removed or weakened through neglect;
- retain and manage areas of valley floor permanent pasture, wet grassland and meadows along the Bourne Valley, and discourage further ploughing and field enlargement;
- encourage traditional practices of willow pollarding and ditch management along the Bourne Valley;
- in more open floodplain areas, introduce new tree planting along watercourses and in lines and groups within the valley floor, using typical riparian species, e.g. willow and alder;
- maintain and where necessary restore parkland landscapes, including distinctive elements such as parkland trees, avenues, woods, copses, boundary walls and structures;
- plant new blocks and belts of broadleaved woodland within estate farmland to reinforce and maintain an enclosed, mature wooded character;
- strengthen landscape structure and the quality of boundaries around airfields and military areas to reduce the impact of intrusive structures, fencing and land uses;
- relict railway cuttings and embankments of the Andover to Crofton branch line are historic landscape components of significance in relation to the development of the Kennet District, and their value should be considered in any proposals likely to affect their survival;
- establish strong landscape structure to accommodate existing or new development on the fringes of urban areas and settlements;

Development sensitivities

- the whole area has an essentially rural, agricultural character within which only small-scale, sensitively-designed development, associated with existing built form, could be successfully accommodated without adverse landscape impacts;
- the remnant areas of unimproved grassland on the steep scarps are visually prominent and of particular landscape and ecological value, and therefore highly sensitive to change;
- the open arable landscapes within this area are very visually exposed and development of any kind, but particularly large-scale or tall structures such as communications masts, would be very prominent;
- areas of enclosed farmland with an intact hedgerow structure are more visually contained. These areas are potentially more able to accommodate that essential development which must be located in the countryside, but only where it would not compromise their rural, unspoilt character;
- dense blocks of woodland are comparatively robust and potentially more able to accommodate development but only where their wooded character is maintained and where they are of planted origin and of low nature conservation value;
- areas of parkland or estate landscape have particularly distinctive and attractive qualities and are sensitive to development.