Character Area 8: Salisbury Avon Valley

1. Avebury Plain
2. Marlborough Downs
3. Savernake Plateau
4. Horton Down
5. Salisbury Plain (West) (East)
6. Chute Forest
7. Kennet Valley
8. Salisbury Avon Valley
9. Vale of Pewsey
10. Bristol Avon Clay Vale
11. Spye Parklands
8: Salisbury Avon Valley
Landscape Character

Overview

The valley of the Salisbury River Avon runs southwards from Upavon on the southern edge of the Vale of Pewsey, bisecting the chalk uplands of Salisbury Plain. Like the Kennet Valley, it forms an enclosed and distinctive corridor of pastoral landscape which has traditionally been a focus for settlement and which contrasts with the exposed chalk uplands through which it passes.

Geology and Landform

Alluvium and valley gravels overlie the base of the area throughout its length, and these deposits also extend north beyond the area onto the base of the Vale of Pewsey. The valley sides are a mixture of Lower and Middle Chalk as far south as Littlecote, while further downstream the Upper Chalk predominates. The valley is steep sided and narrow, and the chalk slopes smoothly down on either side, generally in a convex form. The river follows a sinuous course through the chalk, meandering within the valley floor which itself winds through a sequence of softly interlocking chalk spurs.

Landcover

The valley floor is dominated by pasture throughout its length, with a varying landscape structure created by willows, poplars and hedgerow enclosure. Sporadic settlement occurs in many places, often in close proximity to the river itself.

Historic Landscape Character

There are virtually no records for Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age or Romano-British occupation within the River Avon valley, although many extant monuments associated with these periods (and in particular Bronze Age barrows) overlook the river valley on the upper edges of the adjacent Salisbury Plain. There is evidence for a steady increase in settlement within the valley during the Saxon and medieval periods. Medieval settlement comprised compact linear settlements, the forerunners of the present day river valley villages, along streets parallel to the rivers. Meadows were generally restricted to the land adjoining the river, whilst arable cultivation occurred on the better drained land towards the outer edges of the river valleys. Pasture was generally restricted to the adjoining areas of downland, resulting in distinctive narrow parishes that traverse the line of the rivers and extend up onto Salisbury Plain. The distinctive earthworks for medieval water meadow systems occupy large sections of the river valley, their construction possibly as a result removing any earlier evidence of occupation.

The Salisbury Avon Valley landscape is essentially post-medieval, resulting from the water meadow system which originally followed the floodplain of the river along its entire length through the District. The string of small villages that are spaced along the principle road through the valley are certainly medieval in origin, and may even have Saxon origins, but the later post-medieval influences will have removed almost all of the aspects of their surrounding contemporaneous landscape. The profile of the valley is an artificial one, created by the deposition of silt resulting from the water-meadows at work.
Settlement and Buildings

The settlements in this area occupy attractive valley settings located just outside the floodplain, with open spaces near the river created by the need to provide for winter flooding, and containment to development provided by the river valley and hills of Salisbury Plain. The mix of building materials include timber frame, brick, cob and clunch, with flint, straw thatch, tile and stone found as roofing materials.

Enford is an attractive village of rural character, with a linear serpentine form resulting from its valley location which is typical of the settlements in the valley. Other villages include East Chisenbury, Fittleton and Haxton, and Netheravon where modern MOD housing has a particular influence on the character of the village, although it may also be seen elsewhere in the valley. Mills may be found at Enford, East Chisenbury, Coombe and Netheravon.

Landscape and Visual Character

This area is strongly contained by the valley sides which rise steeply from the floodplain, creating a backdrop of open and semi-enclosed farmland to the more strongly pastoral valley. Upstream of Littlecott the landscape is relatively open with a weak structure to the pasture lands on the valley floor. Downstream of Littlecott the valley floor pasture has a more robust framework, with copses of alder and willow together with attractive individual trees and a good hedgerow structure. In the most southerly part of the area built development around Netheravon becomes more dominant, with military buildings and sports facilities prominent. The whole area is bounded by roads which run along both sides of the valley, to an extent eroding the otherwise rural riparian character.

Individual components of the area may be broken down, and key characteristics are illustrated in Figure 15.1, and summarised below.

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;
- in the northern part, open valley floor pasture with weak structure;
- in the northern part, poor hedgerow structure and relatively few mature trees along watercourses; open character;
- semi-enclosed valley floor pasture with intact structure;
- further south, 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;
- sports fields and other areas under amenity use.
Landscape Quality and Key Issues

This character area lies within the Special Landscape Area, indicating its quality and local importance.

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

- **Conservation Areas** at East Chisenbury, Enford, Netheravon Fittleton and Haxton, Upavon;
- **Site of Special Scientific Interest** on the River Avon throughout the valley, for its chalk river and wetland interest. Elsewhere there are a large number of non-statutory sites of nature conservation interest which include wetlands and chalk grassland;
- a small number of **Scheduled Ancient Monuments**, most of which are churches in the villages;

Overall the Salisbury Avon Valley is an attractive blend of riparian and pastoral landscapes. There are a small number of areas, however, where strategies for management and enhancement may be appropriate. Different strategies for management and enhancement are shown in Figure 15.2.

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

- agricultural intensification, particularly drainage and improvement of floodplain pasture and water meadows within the river corridor and the loss or poor maintenance of field boundaries and riparian vegetation;
- the proliferation of poplar within field boundaries and riparian woodland;
- the maintenance of water quality and flows within the Salisbury River Avon;
- the intrusion of roads and the influence of built development on the fringes of settlements within the corridor.

Guidelines for Salisbury Avon Valley Landscapes

**Enhancement priorities**

- retain and manage areas of valley floor permanent pasture, wet grassland and meadows, including riparian vegetation, and discourage further ploughing and field enlargement
- encourage traditional practices of willow pollarding and ditch management
- in more open floodplain areas, introduce new tree planting along watercourses and in lines and groups within the valley floor, using typical riparian species such as willow and alder
- retain the tranquil, intimate and unspoilt qualities of the river corridor and improve landscape structure and land management on the fringes of settlements and along main roads, to mitigate adverse impacts on river corridor landscape
- encourage repair, replanting and extension of hedgerow network and development of hedgerow trees in areas where a remnant structure remains, using native species typical of the locality, and discourage further hedgerow removal and replacement by fencing
- seek to reverse damaging effects of low flows and poor water quality

**Development sensitivities**

- the whole area has an essentially tranquil, intimate and pastoral character within which only small-scale, sensitively-designed development, associated with existing built form, could be successfully accommodated without adverse landscape impacts;
• valley floor pastures and meadows along the River Avon corridor represent a scarce landscape and ecological resource, making them particularly unsuitable for development;

• the open arable landscapes with a weak hedgerow structure along the valley sides are particularly visually sensitive and built development would be highly prominent and exposed;

• areas of enclosed farmland with an intact hedgerow structure along the valley sides are visually contained. In landscape and visual terms small-scale essential development which must be located in the countryside potentially could be accommodated in such areas, where they did not adversely affect the attractive, rural and unspoilt character of the river corridor.