Overview

A major block of chalk upland landscape which runs across the south of the District and forms part of the northern edge of the vast rolling chalk landscape of Salisbury Plain. The area is defined to the north by a steep chalk escarpment which forms the southern edge of the Vale of Pewsey, to the east by the valley of the River Bourne and to the west and south by the District boundary. For the purposes of the landscape assessment the valley of the River Avon forms a separate character area, and therefore Salisbury Plain comprises two parts, one either side of the river valley. The Plain is dominated by extensive areas of unimproved grassland and open arable fields punctuated only by occasional blocks of woodland and scrub, with an open, exposed and at times very remote character. The activity of the military is a dominant influence on the area, both in maintaining its untamed and inaccessible character and in the visual and audible presence of military training.

Geology and Landform

The geology of the area is dominated by the Upper Chalk which forms the main upland areas of the Plain giving way to Middle Chalk along the scarp above the Vale of Pewsey and above Collingbourne Kingston. Middle Chalk also outcrops in the larger dry valleys of the Plain such as Water Down Bottom, on the Westdown Artillery Range, and in the valley followed by the A360 south of West Lavington. Lower Chalk outcrops in places on the scarp and on the edge of the Avon Valley, and as a more significant area at Great Cheverell Hill. An important difference from the Marlborough Downs and Savernake Plateau is that Clay with Flints only outcrops in a few small areas, notably at Chirton Maggot, Upavon Down and on the prominent Sidbury Hill near North Tidworth where an outcrop of Reading Beds also occurs on the hilltop.

Landform is typical of the upland chalk with an open, rolling topography which slopes gently toward the south. The surface of the plain is dissected by dry valleys some of which are large features linking into true river valleys such as the Avon, and the Till south of Tilleshed.

Landcover

In the western block of the area landcover is largely open rough unimproved grassland across the core of the area, with peripheral zones of predominantly unenclosed arable downland.
This pattern reflects the military use of the Plain. Cultivation extends to many of the scarp slopes, while on the steepest slopes open pasture and woodland predominate. The eastern block has more evenly varied cover, reflecting the fact that its northern half is less constrained by live firing needs, and therefore is subject to more cultivation. Landcover is divided fairly evenly between open rough grassland and open arable downland, with a block of more wooded land to the north of Everleigh.

**Historic Landscape Character**

Neolithic long barrows located within the Kennet District part of Salisbury Plain, include examples on Netheravon Down, Charlton Down, and on Weather Hill as part of the Snail Down complex of prehistoric earthworks. The proliferation of Bronze Age remains on Salisbury Plain demonstrates the intensity with which the downlands were occupied and farmed throughout this period. At least 500 round barrows are recorded on Salisbury Plain, with significant groups clustered between the Rivers Avon and Bourne at Snail Down, Everleigh Down, Pewsey Down and Milton Hill. Associated field systems are not as prolific as the round barrows, but dated examples are located at Wilshford Down and East Chisenbury. The latter is also the site for a massive 10 acre midden complex, located on a spur overlooking East Chisenbury village. It is possible that many of the Iron Age field systems noted below originated during the Bronze Age period. Wessex Linear Ditches, distinctive earthworks that extend over many kilometres and appear to represent territorial boundaries, are recorded on Salisbury Plain, e.g. the group focused on Sidbury Hill and Dunch Hill in the eastern part of the Plain.

The Iron Age period saw the establishment of hill forts, including Sidbury Hill, Broadbury Banks and Casterley Camp. Extensive field systems are also recorded, particularly in the region between the Rivers Avon and Bourne, but also concentrated on Thorham and Charlton Downs to the west. Romano-British settlement continued the pattern established during the later Bronze Age and Iron Age periods, with at least 11 known settlements located on Salisbury Plain.

In general, these settlements occupied the spurs of hills, with the main nucleus on the south-facing slopes. Although the focus for Romano-British settlement remains the area between the Rivers Avon and Bourne, the pattern appears to spread further to the west, occupying the higher ground towards the escarpment overlooking Market Lavington, Urchfont etc.

Most of the Romano-British settlements were abandoned by the end of the 5th century, and the Saxon period witnessed a withdrawal from the downlands into the river valleys and the Vale of Pewsey. This pattern continued into the medieval period when the village of Everleigh was probably established as well as the Collingbourne villages along the River Bourne, and in particular Collingbourne Ducis.

There is virtually no post-medieval settlement on the plain itself with the exception of a few farms and field barns established in the late 18th and early 19th century. Most of these were subsequently abandoned by the end of the 19th century when the War Department/Ministry of Defence purchased most of Salisbury Plain for training purposes. Many of the figures cut into the chalk escarpments throughout the Wessex region are post-medieval in date, including the white horse on the escarpment overlooking Pewsey. The essentially prehistoric open landscape of Salisbury Plain is preserved largely as a result of the late 19th and 20th century MoD occupation of the area. Without this restrictive influence on arable farming in particular, Salisbury Plain would undoubtedly have changed in the same manner as the Marlborough Downs. The military occupation has also resulted in many of the distinctive copses and plantations now found on the plain, which were originally planted as tree cover for army manoeuvres. The open treeless landscape is predominantly the result of Bronze Age preference for the chalk downlands, resulting in the widespread deforestation of the area. Such clearance must have been virtually absolute, as there is no evidence for significant woodland regeneration following the withdrawal of settlement from the Plain following the Romano-British period. A secondary contribution to the present landscape from deforestation is the volumes of colluvium present in coombe bases, raising their base by at a metre or more in some areas.
Settlement and Buildings

Everleigh is the only settlement in the area - a small compact village set high on the Plain. The Manor, a Georgian brick building, stands in landscaped grounds on a hill to the north. The original village and church were rebuilt on a new site in 1810-11 but The Crown Inn predates this, and was the former Dower House to the Manor. Apart from Everleigh, there are a few outlying farms above the Avon valley, and, further into the Plain, groups of field barns.

Upavon Airfield and Trenchard Lines situated on the Downs above the village of the same name is a locally prominent feature with large hangars next to the road, and a complex of security fences with extensive tarmac areas. It is a well established base, which is surprisingly inconspicuous in longer distance views due to the surrounding topography. The grass airfield at Netheravon is less locally prominent, having few boundary features and only a small number of more modest buildings, including a Listed hangar.

Landscape and Visual Character

The area has a strong and distinctive character of openness and comparative lack of human intervention. This is particularly true in the western part of the area where the restricted access and lack of cultivation has created an expansive wild landscape of particular attraction. Views are often very long distance, and southward extend across the Plain to well beyond the District boundary. To the north there are outstanding views across and along the Vale of Pewsey. The homogenous character of the Plain is eroded in some places by sporadic geometric blocks of woodland planted for military purposes, notably on Netheravon Down and West Lavington Down. In the eastern block the impact of military vehicles is more prominent, with chalky tracks and significant areas of denuded land around Sidbury Hill. Further to the north, around Everleigh, intensive arable downland stretches over many miles contributing to the character of extreme openness and high intervisibility.

Individual components of this area may be broken down, and key characteristics are illustrated in Figures 12.1 and 12.2, and are summarised below.

Open Chalk upland:
- rough, predominantly unimproved coarse grassland, typical of the military ranges on Salisbury Plain;
- prairie-like arable land;
- characteristic chalky soils;
- strong topography of downland dissected by dry valleys;
- 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.
- areas of rough scrub and scattered woodland blocks, mostly planted for military or amenity purposes;
- open grazed downland sheepwalks, with scattered scrub and woodland blocks;
- 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 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.

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

**Airfields**
- characteristic fencing, large buildings and other features.

**Amenity Landscapes**
- golf courses with their distinctive features of greens, roughs, fairways, bunkers etc;

**Formal parkland and designed landscapes**
- characteristic features such as parkland trees set in pasture, avenues, rides, copses and blocks of woodland, lakes, formal gardens, estate boundaries (walls or railings), ornamental features, estate buildings etc.

### Key Landmarks and Landscape Features

- the northern scarp above the Vale of Pewsey;
- Sidbury Hill;
- military structures and tree planting;
- the expanse of the Plain itself.
Landscape Quality and Key Issues

The north eastern part of this character area lies within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, confirming its outstanding quality and national significance, and the whole of the remainder 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:

- The Salisbury Plain Site of Special Scientific Interest which covers the largest expanse of chalk grassland in Europe and which affects much of the area; and Great Cheverell Hill SSSI, also chalk grassland. The Plain is also a Candidate Special Area of Conservation, and a Special Protection Area. Elsewhere there are a large number of non-statutory sites of nature conservation interest, most of which are chalk grassland; but which also include semi-natural ancient woodland;
- a large number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments which include many tumuli, field systems and hill forts.

The landscape of much of the Salisbury Plain area is a product of the unique management regime which has arisen from military use. The key aspect of this is the absence of cultivation or other agricultural management over large parts of the area, which has resulted in the basic landscape remaining little changed over many years. Elsewhere, intensive arable farming remains a key influence on the landscape, accompanied by expansive areas of pig farm east of Everleigh. The main exception to these influences is the isolated block of woodland mosaic and parkland at Everleigh. Different strategies for management and enhancement are shown in Figures 12.3 and 12.4.

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

- management of extensive chalk grassland habitats and open downland landscape of the Plain;
- the intrusion of military activity and associated built development and planting on the landscape;
- agricultural intensification, particularly the enclosure and conversion of chalk grassland and permanent pasture to arable, and the loss or poor maintenance of field boundaries within enclosed chalk landscapes;
- the conservation of archaeological features.

Guidelines for Salisbury Plain Landscapes

Enhancement priorities

- encourage reversion of arable land to grassland, particularly along the northern scarp;
- retain open character of chalk uplands and long views, and discourage tree or hedgerow planting in areas of traditionally unenclosed chalk downland
- encourage removal of scrub where this threatens areas of chalk grassland and manage other areas of dense scrub to prevent succession to woodland
- encourage removal of any inappropriate planted belts of trees and woodlands (e.g. non-native species, isolated features not related to farmsteads etc.) but retain isolated groups of trees where these form distinctive landscape features and do not threaten ecological interest;
- discourage intrusion of further signage, structures, tracks or fencing in areas of open chalk upland landscape and site essential features as discreetly as possible to minimise visual intrusion
• avoid disturbance to sensitive grasslands through the use of vehicles and allow areas of bare ground to recolonise naturally
• protect above ground archaeological features from damage by vehicles, trampling or military activity, preferably by discreet pallisading rather than planting;
• avoid tree planting where it may have an adverse physical and visual impact on both upstanding earthworks and below ground archaeological remains. The treeless nature of Salisbury Plain is largely the result of prehistoric woodland clearance, and as such should be considered an ancient landscape;
• military occupation of the Plain has restricted arable cultivation to a minimum, preserving many extant monuments. Any increase in the use of ploughs on the Plain should be resisted;
• the use of specific tank routes/tracks should be encouraged in order to minimise damage to archaeological, ecological and landscape resources;
• encourage repair, replanting and extension of hedgerow network and development of hedgerow trees in areas where a remnant structure remains and is historically/ecologically appropriate, using native species typical of the locality
• strengthen landscape structure and the quality of boundaries around airfields and military bases to reduce the impact of intrusive structures, fencing and land uses
• encourage use of locally appropriate planting character and native species within golf course landscapes, e.g. avoiding the use of conifers on chalk etc., and encourage less intensive management of fairways and roughs to encourage a more diverse grassland sward

Development sensitivities

• a large expanse of Salisbury Plain has a wild, remote and inaccessible character which would be significantly compromised by built development;
• the area as a whole 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 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 parkland or estate landscape are of high landscape value and very sensitive to development;
• mosaics of woodland and farmland are more visually contained and in landscape and visual terms small-scale essential development which must be located in the countryside potentially could be accommodated in such areas, where it did not adversely affect their intrinsically rural, unspoilt and attractive character;
• modified landscapes of golf courses and recreation grounds are potentially more tolerant of change but built development would alter their essentially ‘green’ character.