4.11 Chalk River Valley (Type J)

Key Characteristics

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

Summary of Visual Character

The Chalk River Valley Landscape Type encompasses the sides and floodplain of the narrow river valley (River Wylye), which cuts through the Chalk Uplands. The river corridor is cut into the solid geology generally of the Upper Chalk. The Chalk has been overlain by Alluvium immediately along the river courses and River Terrace Deposits at the valley sides. The latter have created brown calcareous loamy/clayey soils which are well drained and suited to arable farming while the Alluvium has formed ground water gleys which are susceptible to water logging and riverine flooding and so used for pasture. The river irrigates the floodplain to create a rich mosaic of associated wetland habitats including water meadows, damp pasture, wet woodland and fens. The rivers irrigate the valley floodplains to create a rich mosaic of associated wetland habitats including water meadows, damp pasture, wet woodland and fens. The river valleys have long been a focus for occupation, partly because of the range of resources they supply (for example, fish, fowl, rich alluvial deposits, and characteristic fast-flowing clear streams) and this is reflected in the range of archaeological sites and artefacts from the prehistoric period onwards. The river valley corridor forms an important route through the landscape. Building materials show a rich vernacular tradition with frequent red brick, sometimes combined in intricate chequerboard patterns with flint, chalk, render plus timber frame and weatherboard and thatch or clay tile roofs.

Character Areas

J1. Wylye Chalk River Valley
J2. Chitterne Brook Chalk River Valley
J3. Upper Wylye Chalk River Valley
J1 : WYLYE CHALK RIVER VALLEY

Location and Boundaries

The Wylye Floodplain extends along the floor of this major chalk river valley that cuts through and separates Salisbury Plain to the north and the Great Ridge to the south.

Key Characteristics

- Enclosed valley with an intimate scale contrasting with the surrounding open upland landscape
- Level valley floor with generally smooth, steep sides
- Pastoral land use along the valley floor with small scale fields contrasts with arable farmland on the valley sides with medium to large geometric fields
- Hedgerows and hedgerow trees add to the lush and enclosed feel of the valley
- Riparian woodlands, lines of poplar along ditches and willow pollards
- Diverse mosaic of land cover and habitats includes meadows, fen and wet woodland on valley floor
- Clear fast flowing chalk river and streams are a key habitat
- Valley contains a concentration of settlement in contrast to the adjacent unsettled downs
- Many long established villages, sited along the spring line and built of a rich variety of vernacular materials
- Isolated Neolithic long barrow burial monuments, Bronze Age round barrows and water meadow channels on the valley floor contribute to the visible archaeology\(^{85}\)
- Valley used as transport corridors with major roads and railway lines along valley sides
- Rural landscape sometimes interrupted by the large volume of traffic.

Summary of Visual Character

The Wylye Chalk River Valley runs eastwards from Warminster enclosed by generally smooth, steep chalk slopes. The valley floor is a rural landscape where sheep and cattle graze the floodplain within small irregular fields bound by intermittent hedgerows. Tree cover includes small beech plantations and lines of willows and poplars which follow field boundaries together with the past and present courses of the Wylye and its tributaries. The floodplain provides a corridor for movement with the Salisbury-Warminster railway line and A36 trunk road running along the gravel terraces either side of the floodplain. Attractive linear or nucleated villages (Bapton, Stockton, Sherrington, Boyton, Upton Lovell, Knook, Norton Bavant and Bishopstrow) are scattered along these east-west routes, their traditional buildings are predominantly of stone, and there are some with distinctive flint and

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\(^{85}\) Refer to 5A: Wylye Chalk River Valley Character Area, within Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty : Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (Land Use Consultants, June 2003).
(a) Looking across the River Wylye towards Corton

(b) The village of Upton Lovell, close to the River Wylye

(c) The River Wylye on the edge of Warminster
limestone chequers. The long history of human occupation of the valley is made evident by the
survival of Neolithic long barrows on the valley floor, as well as a number of Bronze Age round
barrows, the Norman motte and bailey earthworks at Sherrington and the pattern of medieval
settlements along the valley, largely surviving today. Post-medieval agricultural improvements
included the creation of water meadows, the channels of which are still visible components of the
valley landscape, and watercress beds. Despite the relatively large-scale landform of the valley, this
is an intimate landscape with a semi-enclosed character. Although characterised by busy transport
corridors, both along and across the valley, the floodplain retains a peaceful quality.

**Historic Environment**

- Range of archaeological sites and artefacts from the prehistoric period onwards
- Numerous manors and villages, many of which are recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086
- Many well-preserved deserted or shrunken Medieval villages, often surviving as complex
earthworks adjacent to the current settlements
- Water meadows of 17th century origin.

**Biodiversity**

As part of the Hampshire Avon, the River Wylye is designated as a Special Area of Conservation for
internationally rare/vulnerable species – populations of Atlantic salmon, bullhead and brook and sea
lamprey – and for its habitat value for flowing water vegetation and Desmoulin’s whorl snail. This is
due, in part to the high-quality of the base-rich water which is naturally clear and fast flowing. The
river irrigates the valley floodplain to create a rich mosaic of associated wetland habitats including
water meadows, damp pasture, wet woodland, and fens. Other elements of ecological value include
the network of hedgerows.

**Evaluation**

**Current Condition**

The overall condition of the landscape is good with its chalk river of high water quality and rich
biodiversity, its largely intact hedgerow network, riparian woodland and compact well kept villages.
However there are some elements of declining condition: some hedgerows in poor condition and the
loss of traditional land management methods such as water meadows has lead to decline in ecological
value of the wet grasslands.

**Inherent Landscape Sensitivities**

- Small scale enclosed landscape
- High water quality and outstanding ecological richness of the chalk river
- Remnants of water meadows including a few in active management plus other historic floodplain
  feature such as mills and leats and watercress beds
- Rich floodplain landscape of small scale grazed pastures, riparian vegetation and damp woodlands
- Small distinctive villages and manors built of rich variety of local materials
- Peaceful rural landscape away from the major roadways
- Valley crests are visually sensitive.

**Key Landscape Changes**

- Nutrient pollution from riverside arable land plus road and urban run off affecting the high water
  quality of the river
- Intensification in farming leading to drainage and improvement of permanent pasture and water
  meadows on the floodplain and loss of riparian vegetation
Potential changes in farming practices - including loss of livestock with some remaining valley pastures and meadows no longer being grazed with consequential scrub encroachment.

Wet woodland is now mostly restricted to a narrow line of willow and alder along the immediate river banks.

The presence of major transport corridors particularly the A36 trunk road has brought pressures for development and associated amenity planting and signage.

Modern residential developments in more open locations, some close to the floodplain, have weakened the pattern of tight knit villages in the past.

Changes in agriculture leading to lack of maintenance of traditional valley features including watercress beds and historic features - water meadow systems, mills and leats.

Loss of hedgerows boundaries and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows.

Increased traffic on the road network, plus improvements to the lanes including kerbing, widening, signing and new river crossings which, in places create a more ‘urban’ character.

Development pressures, particularly for new housing which will affect the character of the existing small settlements - villages may appear to coalesce along the valley side roads.

Development pressure may also affect the rivers through increased abstraction causing lower flows.

Increasing road use which will further diminish the rural tranquillity of the valley landscape.

**Management Strategy and Objectives**

The strategy is to conserve the tranquil, intimate and rural character of the landscape. This will include maintenance of key features including permanent pasture, wet grassland and riparian woodlands and historic features associated with the mills and water meadows, and vernacular villages. There are opportunities for restoration of waterside pastures, replanting and management of hedgerows and limited native tree planting/regeneration. Specific management objectives are to:

- Consider opportunities for re-planting hedgerows and hedgerow trees where these have been lost. In particular, the comparatively dense structure of willows, poplars and other moisture loving trees should be retained along field boundaries and the course of the river.
- Identify, conserve and restore remnant water meadow systems that are an important historic landscape feature - and consider opportunities for reinstatement of traditional management techniques.
- Identify, conserve and consider opportunities for reconnecting and recreating wetland habitats such as wet woodland, fen, marsh and swamp.
- Resist excessive signage associated with new development along the trunk road corridors, and maintain a sense of landscape scale when planning new road junctions - junctions that are too large will disrupt visual unity along the valleys.
- Monitor road engineering to safeguard the rural character of the lanes.
- Conserve the pattern of tight knit villages, maintaining the physical and visual gap between them.
- Consider developing guidance for built development to ensure both future construction and changes to existing buildings are designed to integrate with the existing character and structure of settlements.
- Protect nature conservation value of the River Wylye.
**J2 : CHITTERNE BROOK CHALK RIVER VALLEY**

**Location and Boundaries**

The valley and floodplain of Chitterne Brook, first becomes visible within the landscape to the south of Chitterne village, at the southern edge of Salisbury Plain Chalk Downland. The area is accessible via Chitterne Road, which meanders along the brook corridor, connecting Chitterne (in the north) to Codford St. Peter in the south (which in turn connects to the A36 to the south).

**Key Characteristics**

- Brook and floodplain contained within relatively steep-sided valley
- Tributary of main River Wylye to the south
- Codford Hill provides strong sense of enclosure to the east
- Small pockets of deciduous and mixed woodland are scattered along the floodplain corridor
- Predominantly arable fields, cover the slopes of the valley sides, arranged in a large-scale, relatively regular and geometric field pattern
- Settlement pattern is generally sparse along the brook corridor
- Strong sense of tranquillity and a generally intimate, small-scale, rural character.

**Summary of Visual Character**

The valley, which contains the floodplain of Chitterne Brook, is relatively steep-sided and cuts through surrounding steep underlying chalk. To the east, the Brook is overlooked by the dramatic landform of Codford Hill, which provides a strong sense of enclosure. Chitterne Brook is principally a winterbourne stream and meanders southwards from Chitterne to join the main River Wylye to the south. In places, at the northern end of the brook corridor, water is relatively fast flowing. A number of small pockets of deciduous and mixed woodland are scattered along the floodplain corridor, which comprises lush improved pasture and meadows in places. Predominantly arable fields, cover the slopes of the valley sides, arranged in a large-scale, relatively regular and geometric field pattern, with hedges, gappy in places, demarcating field boundaries. Chitterne Road (connecting Chitterne to Codford St. Peter) provides the main route along the floodplain and through the valley and brook corridor is crossed is bridged in three places, providing access to isolated farmsteads along the valley sides. Settlement pattern is sparse along the brook corridor. To the east, Codford Hill provides a strong sense of enclosure, whilst to the west, more open views to adjacent sloping landscapes can be gained. There is a strong sense of tranquillity throughout the area, which has a generally intimate, small-scale, rural character.

**Historic Environment**

- Isolated Neolithic long barrow burial monuments, Bronze Age round barrows and water meadow channels on the valley floor contribute to the visible archaeology.
(a) Looking upstream of the Chitterne Brook

(b) Looking down to Chitterne Brook
Biodiversity

The landscape in this character area encompasses a mix of arable farmland on the slopes of the valley sides, and improved pasture/meadows along the river corridor. Several small patches of deciduous and mixed woodland are scattered in the area, none of which are ancient.

Evaluation

Current Condition

Overall, landscape pattern is generally intact. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, in places, hedgerows have been lost.

Inherent Landscape Sensitivities

- Patchwork of riparian habitats lining the brook
- Mature vegetation along the brook
- Strong sense of tranquillity
- Small patches of woodland along the floodplain corridor
- Isolated settlement pattern.

Key Landscape Changes

- Potential nutrient pollution of brook from adjacent arable land.
- Noise and visual intrusion associated with Chitterne/Codford Road
- Loss of hedgerow boundaries and poor management of remaining hedgerows
- Increased traffic on Chitterne/Codford road, with associated signage and lighting and loss of sense of tranquillity
- Maintenance of small patches of woodland
- Potentially visually intrusive new modern agricultural or residential development along the valley sides.

Management Strategy and Objectives

The overall strategy for the area is to conserve the tranquil and intimate rural character of the area and enhance existing landscape features such as the hedgerow network, which is gappy in places. Specific management objectives are to:

- Consider opportunities for re-planting hedgerows and hedgerow trees where these have been lost, using species appropriate to local landscape character
- Identify, conserve and consider opportunities for reconnecting and recreating wetland habitats such as wet woodland, fen marsh
- Conserve the generally rural character of the minor road, avoiding excess signage or lighting, which may affect the predominantly rural character of the area
- Conserve the existing, relatively intact landscape pattern
- Conserve views across and along the valley corridor
- Conserve the existing sparse settlement pattern and avoid larger developments that would be out of scale and character within the existing situation
- Promote appropriate management of the woodland clumps in the area
- Seek to encourage ecological management of the arable fields by keeping an unploughed margin around the fields to promote wildlife.
J3 : UPPER WYLYE CHALK RIVER VALLEY

Location and Boundaries
This narrow valley separates two areas of chalk downland to the south of the village of Hill Deverill, and extends to the south west and the edge of the district.

Key Characteristics
- Enclosed valley of intimate scale in contrast to the surrounding open downlands, where there are extensive views from the hilltops
- Level valley floor with smooth steep sides
- Medium to large-scale arable fields on the lower slopes of the valley; smaller grazing fields on the valley floor
- Clear, fast flowing chalk river is a clear habitat
- Settlement is focused along the River Wylye – principally the small villages of Brixton Deverill, Monkton Deverill and Kingston Deverill
- Strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity
- Valley accommodates the only main road route (B3095) which links Longbridge Deverill and Mere.

Summary of Visual Character
The Upper Wylye Chalk River Valley runs south eastwards from the village of Hill Deverill (in the adjacent character area of G7: Longbridge Deverill Greensand and Chalk Terrace). The character of this river valley is well defined by its relationship with the adjacent Chalk Downland Ridge landscapes – namely, Cold Kitchen Hill (H4) and The Deverills to Stockton (H5) – which form a prominent backdrop. The character area is enclosed by generally smooth steep chalk slopes, with medium to large-scale arable fields on the lower slopes. The valley floor is a rural landscape with generally small grazing fields. The fields are generally bound by, mostly intact, hedgerows. Settlement is a key feature along the course of the River Wylye, comprising the attractive nucleated settlements of the Deverills villages - Brixton Deverill, Monkton Deverill and Kingston Deverill. Several farms are also scattered throughout the area. The traditional buildings are predominantly of stone, with some flint. The B3095 runs through the valley, following the course of the River Wylye, and connecting Longbridge Deverill and Mere. Away from the B3095, a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity is apparent.

Historic Environment
- Range of archaeological sites and artefacts from the prehistoric period onwards
- Several manors and the Deverills, all three of which are recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086
(a) Looking down the valley of the Upper Wylye

(b) Monkton Deverill

(c) The Upper Wylye at Brixton Deverill
Biodiversity

The upper course of the River Wylye is locally designated as a County Wildlife Site. The farmland landscape, scattered trees, the hedgerows and shelterbelts provide valuable habitat for a range of typical farmland bird species.

Evaluation

Current Condition

This character area has retained its landform features and its intensively farmed character means there are few areas of underused or derelict land. The hedgerow network is largely intact, however, some sections have been lost or replaced with post and wire fencing. Settlement is in good condition and is integrated through the consistent use of stone, brick, clay tiles and thatch. Overall landscape condition is considered to be moderate to good.

Inherent Landscape Sensitivities

- Small scale enclosed landscape
- High water quality and outstanding ecological richness of the chalk river
- Rich floodplain landscape of small scale grazed pastures and riparian vegetation
- Small distinctive medieval villages and several manors built of rich variety of local materials
- Peaceful rural landscape away from the major roadways.

Key Landscape Changes

- Nutrient pollution from riverside arable land plus road and urban run off affecting the high water quality of the river
- Loss and continued decline of hedgerow boundaries in places
- Intensity and expansion of arable farming has reduced ecological value and resulted in the loss of archaeological features
- Future pressure for linear expansion along the Wylye Valley may result in merging of villages and loss of settlement identity
- Increased traffic on the B3095 threatens the rural tranquillity of the villages.

Management Strategy and Objectives

The strategy is to conserve the tranquil, intimate and rural character of the landscape. This will include maintenance of key features including permanent pasture, riparian vegetation, hedgerows and vernacular villages. Specific management objectives are to:

- Consider opportunities for re-planting hedgerows and hedgerow trees where these have been lost. In particular, the comparatively dense structure of willows, poplars and other moisture loving trees should be retained along fields boundaries and the course of the river
- Monitor road engineering to safeguard the rural character of the area
- Conserve the pattern of tight knit villages, maintaining the physical and visual gap between them
- Consider developing guidance for built development to ensure both future construction and changes to existing buildings are designed to integrate with the existing character and structure of settlements
- Protect nature conservation value of the River Wylye