

## 4.9 Chalk Downland Edge (Type H)

### *Key Characteristics*

- Dramatic scarps eroded into rounded spurs and deep combes
- Underlying geology of Lower, Middle and Upper Chalk
- Panoramic views of the valleys and plateaus from the scarp slopes and valley sides
- Steeply rising scarp slopes are visually dominant in surrounding lowland areas
- Remnant chalk grassland is an important habitat on the steep slopes of the scarps.

### *Summary of Visual Character*

Chalk Downland Edge landscapes are amongst the most dramatic elements of the chalk landscape within the district. Escarpments are often formed where the layers of chalk have been compressed to form a fold, or where the chalk has been faulted, resulting in accelerated erosion along the line of the weakness. Landscape is underlain by a combination of Lower, Middle and Upper Chalk. Chalk Downland Edges often support remnant chalk grassland, which provides an important and diverse ecological habitat. Characteristically, panoramic views across adjacent lowland Landscape Character Types and across adjacent Chalk Downland can be gained from the Chalk Downland Edge. Landscape pattern is large and expansive, the pattern of chalk elements creating strong recognisable and dramatic sense of place.

### *Character Areas*

- H1. Bratton Chalk Downland Edge
- H2. Bishopstrow and Codford Down Chalk Downland Edge (including H2a – Middleton Down Sub-Area)
- H3. Norton Bavant Chalk Downland Edge
- H4. Cold Kitchen Hill Chalk Downland Edge
- H5. The Deverills to Stockton Chalk Downland Edge

## H1 : BRATTON CHALK DOWNLAND EDGE



### Location and Boundaries

Located in the centre of the district, this character hugs the northern edge of Salisbury Plain West Chalk Downland to the south, with the low-lying landscapes of the Greensand Terrace and Rolling Clay Lowlands to the north.

### Key Characteristics

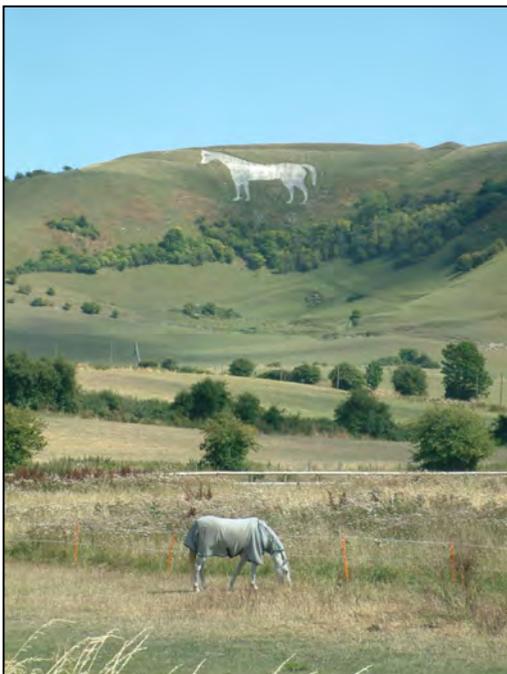
- Dramatic, steeply sloping scarp face of higher Chalk Downland to the south and east
- Long, sinuous nature of the scarp slopes, wrap tightly around the Downland, covered with small patches of deciduous, coniferous and mixed woodland
- Narrow combe valleys cross the Downland Edge at right angles
- Land cover is dominated by rough grassland
- Extensive, panoramic, sweeping views across adjacent Rolling Clay Lowland to the north
- Bratton Camp fort and associated long barrow (at the edge of this character area) provide recognisable archaeological and landscape features
- Landmark Westbury White Horse, which has been carved from the underlying chalk.

### Summary of Visual Character

This character area encompasses the dramatic, steeply sloping scarp face of higher Chalk Downland to the south and east. The long, sinuous nature of the scarp slopes, wrap tightly around the Downland and are covered with small patches of deciduous, coniferous and mixed woodland. Narrow combe valleys cross the Downland Edge at right angles, and then are often associated with the site of villages at the foot of the slopes. Landscape is generally devoid of water features, as a result of the underlying porosity of the chalk bedrock. Land use is dominated by rough grassland, with the terrain generally too steep to sustain agricultural use. The dramatic nature of the topography facilitates extensive, panoramic, sweeping views across adjacent Rolling Clay Lowland to the north. Throughout the character area, there is a strong sense of exposure, remoteness and tranquillity. Sense of isolation is further enhanced by lack of settlement pattern. To the east of Combe Bottom, the dramatic Bratton Camp fort and associated long barrow provide recognisable archaeological and landscape features, in their position which commands views across the adjacent lowland landscape. Another landscape feature, which contributes to recognisable sense of place within and in views to the area, is the Westbury White Horse, which has been carved from the underlying chalk. This landmark is highly visible within views south and eastwards from Heywood Rolling Clay Lowlands landscape character area.



**(a) Downland edge above Edington – close up**



**(b) One of the district's most famous landmarks**



**(c) The wooded downland edge above Coulston**

## Historic Environment

- Medieval strip lynchets are a feature of this landscape; examples are west of Patcombe Hill where a flight of well preserved lynchets with steps over 2m in height<sup>68</sup>; and south of Greater Lane Farm<sup>69</sup>. Lynchets provide distinctive traces of medieval and earlier agricultural activities in downland areas, indicating the level of intensity of land use and farming practices through time
- Ancient and semi-natural woodland at Coulston Hillside Wood and Baynton Hillside Wood<sup>70</sup>
- Bowl barrows, funerary monuments dating from the Late Neolithic period to the Late Bronze Age, can be seen at Picquet Hill<sup>71</sup> and south east of Fitzroy Farm<sup>72</sup>, these show the longevity of the occupation sequence of this area.

## Biodiversity

The steep scarps are predominantly covered with species rich rough chalk grassland – White Scar Hanging Chalk and Bratton Chalk are designated for their grassland value as County Wildlife Sites. The grassland areas are interspersed with small patches and belts of deciduous, coniferous and mixed woodland, some of which is ancient (Coulston Hillside Wood and Baynton Hillside Wood). Hedgerows are generally absent. Much of the area is included within Bratton Down SSSI, which offers valuable habitats for invertebrates, rare plants and birds.

## Evaluation

### *Current Condition*

The current condition of this landscape character area is perceived to be good. The traditional land use has survived and continues to characterise the slopes. The escarpment has retained significant ecological interest in its chalk grassland sites and shows good survival of historic features, such as Bratton Camp.

### *Inherent Landscape Sensitivities*

- Visible archaeological earthworks (Bratton Camp)
- Landmark Westbury white horse carving
- Open, panoramic views across adjacent lowland landscapes
- Strong sense of isolation and tranquillity throughout the character area.

### *Key Landscape Changes*

- Pressure for car parking to accommodate visitors to the Westbury White Horse and Bratton Camp
- Erosion by walkers
- Protection and availability of archaeological sites from and to the public
- Prominent character of scarps may bring about demand for construction of tall structures such as telecommunication masts and wind turbines
- Potential for new visually intrusive development on the scarp slopes which would be highly visible from surrounding landscape character areas.

<sup>68</sup> <http://www.magic.gov.uk/rsm/10014.pdf>

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.magic.gov.uk/rsm/33521.pdf>

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.magic.gov.uk/website/magic/>

<sup>71</sup> <http://www.magic.gov.uk/rsm/31699.pdf>

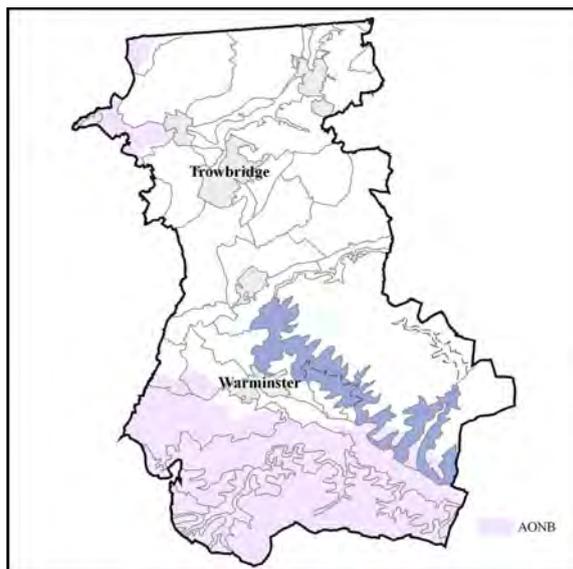
<sup>72</sup> <http://www.magic.gov.uk/rsm/31698.pdf>

### ***Management Strategy and Objectives***

The overall strategy of the area is to conserve the intact landscape pattern and open nature of the Chalk Downland edge, whilst also managing sites of archaeological and ecological importance. Specific management objectives are to:

- Conserve and manage blocks and strips of woodland on the scarp slopes and limit further woodland planting within this area to maintain the generally open character of the scarps
- Encourage continued grazing management of grassland to limit scrub encroachment and maintain the distinctive smooth landform
- Conserve important archaeological features (such as Bratton Camp) on the scarp landscape and manage for visitor pressure
- Ensure that tall structures, such as communication masts and wind turbines do not create visual clutter on the skyline of the Chalk Downland Edge
- Maintain the generally undeveloped, rural character of the area
- Maintain open, panoramic views from the scarp, across adjacent lowland landscapes.

## H2 : BISHOPSTROW AND CODFORD DOWN CHALK DOWNLAND EDGE (including H2a – Middleton Down Sub-Area)



### Location and Boundaries

Located between Warminster and Westbury, running in a line to the south east edge of the District, Bishopstrow and Codford Down Chalk Downland Edge spreads along the western scarp edge of the higher Salisbury Plain Chalk Downland to the north and east. The area is accessible in places via minor roads, running at right angles to the main A350 (Warminster Road) and the A36, which encircle the base of the Chalk mass. Parts of the area are inaccessible as a result of their location within Salisbury Plain army training area. The Middleton Down sub area is surrounded by chalk downland edge on three sides, and by small areas of chalk and greensand terrace on the southern and south western boundaries.

### Key Characteristics

- Series of Chalk Downland Edges, which fall sharply and dramatically from the higher Chalk Downland to the north and east
- Series of narrow valleys break through the continuous belt of edge or scarp of the chalk
- Slopes are covered with a patchwork of arable fields (with predominantly mature and intact hedgerow field boundaries) and rough grassland
- Series of footpaths lead up from surrounding lowland landscapes, to the base of the Chalk Downland Edge
- Dramatic, panoramic views across adjacent lowland landscapes and Warminster to the south and west.

### Key Characteristics of Sub-Area H2a

- Bowl-like feature with chalky soils, set into, and overlooked by, rounded chalk downland slopes
- Large regular arable fields; hedgerows virtually absent
- Enclosed isolated area with limited views from within
- Strong sense of tranquillity, apart from noise from military training activities.

### Summary of Visual Character

This character area encompasses a series of Chalk Downland Edges (Upton Cow Down, Warminster Down, Boreham Down, Bishopstrow Down, Middleton Down, Knook Down and Codford Down), which fall sharply and dramatically from the higher Chalk Downland to its north and east. A series of narrow valleys break through the continuous belt of edge or scarp of the chalk, running at right angles to the natural course of the chalk. In places (where the steep topography is not limiting), the slopes are covered with a patchwork of arable fields (with predominantly mature and intact hedgerow field boundaries). Other patches of the Downland Edge are covered with rough grassland. A series of footpaths lead up from surrounding lowland landscapes, to the base of the Chalk Downland Edge. Overall, however, the area is generally inaccessible and there is generally a sense of isolation. Patches of woodland are scattered along the scarps, however, generally there is a sense of openness throughout the area. A series of earthworks and tumuli are also peppered across the slopes. The strong form of topography within the area facilitates dramatic, panoramic views across adjacent lowland landscapes



**(a) Looking across to Battlesbury Hill from the top of Cradle Hill**



**(b) H2a – an isolated area with large arable fields – note the strip lynchets on the right**



**(c) The Badge on the hillside, east of Codford**

and Warminster to the south and west. Overall sense of tranquillity throughout the area, away from main roads, is strong.

### **Historic Environment**

- An Iron Age hillfort, an unenclosed Iron Age settlement, a cemetery, three bowl barrows, a field system and enclosure within the hillfort, and two strip lynchet systems outside the hill fort, collectively known as Battlesbury Camp Monuments, situated within this area represent one of the few extant archaeological 'landscapes' in Britain and are considered to be of special significance because they differ in character from those in other areas with comparable levels of preservation<sup>73</sup>
- Field system on Codford Down, represent occupation from the Bronze Age (2000-700 BC) to the end of the fifth century AD<sup>74</sup> and strip lynchets south of Bigbury Wood provide distinctive traces of medieval and earlier agricultural activities in downland areas, indicating the level of intensity of land use and farming practices through time.

### **Biodiversity**

The chalk slopes are covered with a patchwork of arable farmland and rough chalk grassland, interspersed with patches and belts of deciduous, coniferous and mixed woodland, a tiny section of which (in the north, including Dirtley Wood) is ancient. Some other down areas such as Knook Down, Well Bottom Down, East Codford Coombside and Codford Down have been locally designated as County Wildlife Sites for their grassland value. A large section of the landscape is included in Salisbury Plain Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated for its grassland habitats and for the marsh fritillary butterfly and orchid species. The same area of landscape is also a Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA) with the hen harrier, stone curlew, hobby, and quail as valued species.

### **Evaluation**

#### *Current Condition*

The current condition of this landscape character area is perceived to be generally good. The traditional land use has survived and continues to characterise the slopes. The escarpment has retained significant ecological interest in its chalk grassland sites and shows good survival of historic features, such as Battlesbury Camp.

#### *Inherent Landscape Sensitivities*

- Visible archaeological earthworks and tumuli
- Open, panoramic views across adjacent lowland landscapes
- Patches of woodland
- Hedgerow network (where present)
- Strong sense of isolation and tranquillity throughout the character area.

#### *Key Landscape Changes*

- Erosion by walkers
- Protection and availability of archaeological sites from and to the public
- Prominent character of scarps may bring about demand for construction of tall structures such as telecommunication masts and wind turbines
- Potential for new visually intrusive development on the scarp slopes, which would be highly visible from surrounding landscape character areas.

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.magic.gov.uk/rsm/10081.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> <http://www.magic.gov.uk/rsm/33522.pdf>

### ***Management Strategy and Objectives***

The overall strategy of the area is to conserve the intact landscape pattern and open nature of the Chalk Downland edge, whilst also managing sites of archaeological and ecological interest. Specific management objectives are to:

- Conserve and manage blocks and strips of woodland on the scarp slopes and limit further woodland planting within this area to maintain the generally open character of the scarps
- Encourage continued grazing management of grassland to limit scrub encroachment and maintain the distinctive smooth landform
- Conserve important archaeological features on the scarp landscape and where necessary manage for visitor access
- Seek to ensure that tall structures, such as communication masts and wind turbines do not create visual clutter on the skyline of the Chalk Downland Edge
- Maintain the generally undeveloped, rural character of the area
- Maintain open, panoramic views from the scarp, across adjacent lowland landscapes
- Protect the nature conservation value of the SAC and SPA.

### H3 : NORTON BAVANT CHALK DOWNLAND EDGE



#### Location and Boundaries

Situated to the east of Warminster and north east of Heytesbury, this character area is surrounded on its western and south eastern edges by areas of Greensand Terrace. The character area lies adjacent to the A36 main road corridor, however it is generally inaccessible via roads, other than the two minor roads running directly to the east and west.

#### Key Characteristics

- Three distinctive, steeply sloping hills, which form a distinct and somewhat isolated unit of Chalk Downland Edge
- Long fields, which are predominantly arable
- Occasional patches of rough grassland and scrub situated on the top of the hills
- No apparent settlement pattern
- Strong sense of openness
- Sense of tranquillity throughout the area is strong
- Number of tumuli scattered throughout the area.

#### Summary of Visual Character

This character area encompasses three distinctive, steeply sloping hills, which form a distinct and somewhat isolated unit of Chalk Downland Edge. The hills are covered with long fields, which are predominantly arable, with occasional patches of rough grassland and scrub situated on the top of the hills. Regular patches and belts of mixed woodland populate parts of the slopes. Imber range perimeter paths runs across the top of the hills, providing public access to the area. There is no apparent settlement pattern, and a strong sense of openness throughout the area. Overall, sense of tranquillity throughout the area is strong. Extensive panoramic views across adjacent Greensand Terrace downland and distant lowland landscapes can be gained from the top of the hills and along the slopes of the Chalk Downland Edge. A number of tumuli provide visible archaeological and landscape features within the landscape.

#### Historic Environment

- Scratchbury Hill Iron age hillfort, round barrows and enclosures, which are associated with contemporary archaeological features such as field systems and land boundaries, show continuity of settlement in this area from c.1000BC and the remains of Middle Hill round barrow take occupation of this area even further back to around c.3000<sup>75</sup>

<sup>75</sup> <http://www.magic.gov.uk/rsm/10212.pdf>



**(a) Looking northwest along the hilltops along the Wessex Ridgeway/ Imber Range perimeter**



**(b) Scratchbury Hill with tumulus visible on top**



**(c) Arable fields in the north west of the area, with Scratchbury Hill beyond**

- Middlehill settlement and associated cultivation earthworks, the site of a deserted medieval village, provide distinctive traces of medieval and earlier agricultural activities in Downland areas, and indicate the degree of intensity of land use and farming practices through time.<sup>76</sup>

## **Biodiversity**

The chalk hills are covered with arable fields interspersed with occasional patches of rough species rich calcareous grassland and Juniper scrub. Occasional mixed woodland belts on the slopes serve as wildlife corridors. A large part of the area is designated as the Scratchbury and Cotley Hills SSSI.

## **Evaluation**

### *Current Condition*

The current condition of this landscape is perceived to be generally good. The escarpment has retained significant ecological interest in its chalk grassland sites and shows good survival of historic features, such as the numerous tumuli scattered throughout the area.

### *Inherent Landscape Sensitivities*

- Patches of woodland running along and up the slopes
- Hedgerow network where present
- Strong sense of openness and tranquillity throughout the area
- Predominantly rural character
- Extensive panoramic views across adjacent areas of Greensand Terrace chalk downland and other lowland landscapes.

### *Key Landscape Changes*

- Erosion by walkers
- Protection and availability of archaeological sites from and to the public
- Prominent character of scarps may bring about demand for construction of tall structures such as telecommunication masts and wind turbines
- Potential for new visually intrusive development on the scarp slopes, which would be highly visible from surrounding landscape character areas.

### *Management Strategy and Objectives*

The overall strategy of the area is to conserve the intact landscape pattern and open nature of the Chalk Downland edge, whilst also managing sites of archaeological and ecological interest. Specific management objectives are to:

- Conserve and manage blocks and strips of woodland on the scarp slopes and limit further woodland planting within this area to maintain the generally open character of the scarps
- Encourage continued grazing management of grassland to limit scrub encroachment and maintain the distinctive smooth landform
- Conserve important archaeological features on the scarp landscape and manage for visitor pressure
- Seek to ensure that tall structures, such as communication masts and wind turbines do not create visual clutter on the skyline of the Chalk Downland Edge
- Maintain the generally undeveloped, rural character of the area
- Maintain open, panoramic views from the scarp, across adjacent lowland landscapes

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<sup>76</sup> <http://www.magic.gov.uk/rsm/10087.pdf>

- Promote sustainable management of recreation – especially in relation to the Scratchbury and Cotley Hills, where some parts are designated as ‘open country’.

#### H4 : COLD KITCHEN HILL CHALK DOWNLAND EDGE



##### Location and Boundaries

This area comprises an outlying hill between the Longbridge Deverill Greensand Terrace and the Upper Wylde Chalk River Valley.

##### Key Characteristics

- Sculpted, convoluted landform comprising deeply incised combe valleys that create surprise views and dramatic shadows in strong sunlight<sup>77</sup>
- Dominated by a Lower and Middle Chalk surface geology giving rise to calcareous soils
- Strong sense of continuity and consistency due to the absence of boundaries and the grazed, smooth nature of the grassland cover with scattered scrub
- A pastoral landscape with sheep and cattle grazing the steep slopes
- Extensive tracts of SSSI designated chalk grassland
- Straight-sided fields representing late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure are highly visible where they cut across the contours
- Woodland swathes associated with the break of the slope, following the line of the contours and delineating the contrast between the escarpment and adjacent Open Chalk Downland landscape
- Neolithic and Bronze Age burial monuments
- Later prehistoric/Romano-British landscape divisions incorporating long bank and ditch earthworks and associated cross-ridge dykes.

##### Summary of Visual Character

Cold Kitchen Hill stands proud of the surrounding Greensand Terrace and Chalk River Valley landscapes – providing a strong contrast in relief. The hill comprises a surface geology of Lower and Middle Chalk. These older chalk strata have been uncovered due to fluvial processes and high levels of erosion of the River Wylde (and its tributaries) whose course has followed fault lines to break through the chalk and thus interrupt the continuity of the landscape, creating a fragmented escarpment. The processes of riverine erosion over millions of years has led to deep incisions – forming combe valleys.

The hill provides commanding long distance views over the neighbouring landscapes and conversely it can be viewed from long range. The magnitude of this landscape is seemingly exaggerated by the simplicity of its land cover. Predominantly comprising grassland, there is a sense of uniformity or

<sup>77</sup> Refer to 1B: West Wiltshire Downs Character Area within Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (Land Use Consultants, June 2003).



**(a) Linear woods at the base of the downland edge; here below Bidcombe**



**(b) View of Cold Kitchen Hill above Whitepits**

consistency of character that adds to the experience of openness, expanse and remoteness and provides a strong sense of visual unity and intactness.

### **Historic Environment**

- As an isolated chalk hill this gave the area a particular strategic significance during the prehistoric period
- Numerous monuments, including the Cold Kitchen Hill long barrow, numerous round barrows and extensive linear earthworks as well as lengths of cross-ridge dyke.

### **Biodiversity**

The area has retained significant ecological interest, including Brimsdown Hill SSSI. Although Brimsdown Hill is predominantly composed of chalk grassland, the northern scarp also supports a small area of ancient woodland. This woodland grades from ash dominated on the calcareous slopes, through to oak and downy birch woodland on the more acidic plateau. Buzzards are known to use this area of ancient wood, and the site is unusually rich in ground dwelling chalk mosses, including *Scapania aspera*, which is known from only one other site in Wiltshire. Other, smaller areas – Marcombe Wood, Woodcombe Wood, Bushcombe Bottom, Boars Bottom and Brims Down – are locally designated as County Wildlife Sites.

### **Evaluation**

#### ***Current Condition***

The condition of this landscape character area is perceived to be good. The traditional land use (predominantly grazing) has survived and continues to characterise the slopes. The escarpment has retained significant ecological interest in its chalk grassland sites and shows good survival of historical features such as strip lynchets.

#### ***Inherent Landscape Sensitivities***

- Views to scarp slopes from lowland areas
- Variety of woodlands including wood pasture, coppice and veteran trees
- Settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads built of local materials
- Highly rural, peaceful, isolated character
- Chalk grassland
- Pattern of roads, tracks and paths following dry valleys linking the lowland valleys and vales with the downs
- Archaeological remains of barrows and hillforts.

#### ***Key Landscape Changes***

- Encroachment of arable farming onto parts of the scarp slope, displacing pasture or unimproved chalk grassland
- Reduced grazing has resulted in the encroachment of scrub. Further scrub encroachment may threaten the quality of the remaining chalk grassland and change the smooth, open character of the scarp
- Increasing professionalisation of livestock farming, limiting availability of livestock to graze the chalk grassland
- Erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape
- Construction of tall structures, including communication masts and possibly wind turbines
- Reversion to chalk grassland through continued enhancement and environmental management of the landscape.

### ***Management Strategy and Objectives***

The overall objective is to conserve the overriding sense of openness, the smooth undeveloped ridge, and the simplicity of the scarp landform. Within this open, pasture dominated landscape there are significant opportunities to restore and link areas of chalk grassland. Specific management objectives are to:

- Conserve and manage the broad hedges and bands of ancient woodland at the break of the slope which create the distinction and contrast with the adjacent Greensand Terrace. Limit further woodland planting within this area to maintain the smooth, open character of the scarp
- Continue grazing management of grassland to limit scrub encroachment and maintain the distinctive, smooth landform and ecological richness of the chalk grassland
- Seek opportunities to restore areas of chalk grassland with the intention of improving links to existing chalk grassland sites for increased ecological value. This is a key opportunity on the steepest slopes which are more marginal for agriculture
- Promote the use of visually permeable boundaries such as post and wire fencing to demarcate field units in order to retain the sense of continuity and openness across the escarpment
- Promote sustainable management of recreation particularly in relation to the areas designated as ‘Open Country’
- Visitor access and any parking should be carefully managed to protect the remote qualities of the landscape
- Conserve the important archaeological features of the scarp landscape particularly in the light of potential increases in visitor numbers
- Ensure that tall structures, such as communication masts and wind turbines do not create ‘visual clutter’ on the skyline of the scarp
- Maintain the undeveloped character of the scarp and the contrast with the scarp foot villages. New development should retain the distinct nucleated form of the villages and should not extend onto the scarp slope.

## H5 : THE DEVERILLS TO STOCKTON CHALK DOWNLAND EDGE



### Location and Boundaries

The Deverills to Stockton Chalk Downland Edge marks the northern edge of the Great Ridge Chalk Downland. The area rises above the lowland of the Longbridge Deverill Greensand Terrace and Wylve Valley to the north and west.

### Key Characteristics

- Fragmented, eroded chalk escarpment broken by the course of the River Wylve marking the boundary between the Greensand Terrace landscape and Chalk Valley to the north and west, and the Chalk Downland to the south
- Sculpted, convoluted landform comprising deeply incised combe valleys that create surprise views and dramatic shadows in strong sunlight<sup>78</sup>
- Dominated by a Lower and Middle Chalk surface geology, giving rise to calcareous soils
- Strong sense of continuity and consistency due to the absence of boundaries and the grazed, smooth nature of the grassland cover with scattered scrub
- A pastoral landscape with sheep and cattle grazing the steep slopes
- Areas of SSSI designated chalk grassland, and numerous areas designated as County Wildlife Sites
- Straight-sided fields representing late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure are highly visible where they cut across the contours
- Woodland swathes associated with the break of the slope, following the line of the contours and delineating the contrast between the escarpment and adjacent Open Chalk Downland landscape
- Neolithic and Bronze Age burial monuments
- Later prehistoric/Romano-British landscape divisions incorporating long bank and ditch earthworks and associated cross-ridge dykes
- Strip lynchets near the medieval settlements at Kingston and Monkton Deverill.

### Summary of Visual Character

The pronounced form of the escarpment above the Greensand Terrace and Wylve Valley gives this area a strong presence. This is a large-scale landscape – a vast chalk escarpment that stands proud of the lower lying landscape providing a strong contrast in relief. The escarpment, formed where layers of chalk have been compressed, comprises a surface geology of Lower and Middle Chalk. These older chalk strata have been uncovered due to fluvial processes and high levels of erosion of the River Wylve (and its tributaries) whose course has followed fault lines to break through the chalk and thus interrupt the continuity of the landscape, creating a fragmented escarpment. The processes of riverine erosion over millions of years has led to deep incisions – forming combe valleys. The escarpment

<sup>78</sup> Refer to 1B: West Wiltshire Downs Character Area within Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (Land Use Consultants, June 2003)



**(a) Haycombe Bottom dry valley**



**(b) Strip lynchets near Monkton Deverill**



**(c) View of downland edge above Sherrington**

provides commanding long distance views over the neighbouring Greensand Terrace and Wylde Valley, and conversely it can be viewed from long range. The magnitude of this landscape is seemingly exaggerated by the simplicity of its land cover. Predominantly comprising grassland, there is a sense of uniformity or consistency of character that adds to the experience of openness, expanse and remoteness and provides a strong sense of visual unity and intactness.

### **Historic Environment**

- Localised groupings of strip lynchets near the villages of Kingston and Monkton Deverill, which represent the deliberate exploitation of this marginal area
- Earthwork features, such as linear banks and ditches and round barrows, extend into this area from their main areas of distribution on the open downs.

### **Biodiversity**

Species-rich chalk grassland dominates on the chalk downland edge. There are 2 SSSIs – Stockton Wood and Down, and Tytherington Down –, and numerous County Wildlife Sites designated for their natural grassland value. Woodland blocks often associated with the break of the slope, add to the biodiversity value of the site. The upper River Wylde is also designated as a County Wildlife Site.

### **Evaluation**

#### ***Current Condition***

The condition of this landscape character area is perceived to be good. The traditional land use (predominantly grazing) has survived and continues to characterise the slopes. The escarpment has retained significant ecological interest in its chalk grassland sites and shows good survival of historical features such as strip lynchets.

#### ***Inherent Landscape Sensitivities***

- Views to scarp slopes from lowland areas
- Variety of woodlands including wood pasture, coppice and veteran trees
- Settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads and few small villages built of local materials
- Highly rural, peaceful, isolated character
- Designed landscapes of parkland, avenues, tree clumps
- Chalk grassland
- Pattern of roads, tracks and paths following dry valleys linking the lowland valleys and vales with the downs
- Archaeological remains of barrows and hillforts.

#### ***Key Landscape Changes***

- Encroachment of arable farming onto parts of the scarp slope, displacing pasture or unimproved chalk grassland
- Increasing professionalisation of livestock farming, limiting the availability of livestock to graze chalk grassland
- Erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor facilities in the open landscape. The prominent character of the scarp is likely to bring demand for construction of tall structures, including communication masts and possibly wind turbines
- Reversion to chalk grassland through continued environmental management of the landscape.

### ***Management Strategy and Objectives***

The overall objective is to conserve the overriding sense of openness, the smooth undeveloped ridge, and the simplicity of the scarp landform. Within this open, pasture dominated landscape there are significant opportunities to restore and link areas of chalk grassland. Specific management objectives are to:

- Conserve and manage the broad hedges and bands of ancient woodland at the break of the slope which create the distinction and contrast with the adjacent Greensand Terrace. Limit further woodland planting within this area to maintain the smooth, open character of the scarp
- Continue grazing management of grassland to limit scrub encroachment and maintain the distinctive, smooth landform and ecological richness of the chalk grassland
- Seek opportunities to restore areas of chalk grassland with the intention of improving links to existing chalk grassland sites for increased ecological value. This is a key opportunity on the steepest slopes which are more marginal for agriculture
- Promote the use of visually permeable boundaries such as post and wire fencing to demarcate field units in order to retain the sense of continuity and openness across the escarpment
- Promote sustainable management of recreation particularly in relation to the areas designated as 'Open Country'
- Visitor access and any parking should be carefully managed to protect the remote qualities of the landscape
- Conserve the important archaeological features of the scarp landscape particularly in the light of potential increases in visitor numbers
- Ensure that tall structure, such as communication masts and wind turbines do not create 'visual clutter' on the skyline of the scarp
- Maintain the undeveloped character of the scarp and the contrast with the scarp foot villages. New development should retain the distinct nucleated form of the villages and should not extend onto the scarp slopes.