

## 9. RECREATIONAL INFLUENCES

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### Introduction

This chapter reviews the recreational influences on the landscape of Wiltshire, including open access land, rights of way and main visitor attractions. It also briefly touches upon the recreation and tourist strategies that affect the county.

The county of Wiltshire is rich in recreational resources, many of which are founded on the landscape, in particular its outstanding archaeological heritage of ancient routes and monuments, the tranquil open landscapes of the downs and the contrasting intimate, rural river valleys.

### Overview

Wiltshire County Council is currently developing a number of strategies that will influence recreation and tourism within the county. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 which paved the way for new rights of access to open areas and common land, requires Local Authorities to formulate a Rights of Way Improvement Plan. To date, Wiltshire County Council has completed the first stage in meeting this requirement by preparing a Framework for Managing rights of Way in England. The County Council are also preparing a Tourism Strategy to succeed the current system of annual plans and replace the 1996 strategy. This is due for completion in 2005 and will feed into the regional South West Tourism Strategy. Each of the Wiltshire Districts is also responsible for producing local tourism strategies.

**Open Access** – There are a large number of areas of open access to the countryside in Wiltshire as identified on the Countryside Agency's Access to the Countryside Map. However in some areas (in particular in the *High Chalk Plain Landscape Type*) use of the land by the MOD means public access to this land is restricted.

**Routes** – There are a number of important recreational routes in the area which, although not extending to all areas, help to promote access to the countryside. These routes include national trails and long distance routes (the Ridge Way, the Thames Path) as well as more local routes such as the White Horse Trail, Wessex Ridgeway, Monarch's Way, Avon Valley Path and the Imber Ridge Perimeter Path.

**Attractions** – Wiltshire is rich in tourist attractions, some of local importance and others renowned across the world. These include Stonehenge, Avebury, Longleat Safari Park, Old Sarum and the White Horse cuttings.

The next section identifies these key influences in the different types of landscape identified in the character assessment.

### Types

#### I. *Open Downland*

The *Open Downland* Landscape Type has a fairly sparse network of public rights of way, crossing the high downland, and running down the scarp slopes and valley sides linking the

downs to the surrounding lower ground. Notable routes are the Ridge Way, a national trail, which skirts the tops of the north western scarps linking Liddington Castle Fort and Barbury Castle and leading to the Sanctuary. The Wessex Ridgeway continues to the west and the White Horse Trail sweeps across the type largely following the earthwork of the Wansdyke. There are significant ancient remains in the type; sites such as the West Kennet Long Barrow, Oliver's Castle Fort and Barbury Castle, as well as being of historic interest, offer atmospheric views down over the adjacent lower ground. This type is largely intensively farmed arable land and there are just a few scattered areas of proposed open access land for instance at Fyfield Down, Monkton Down and Knap Hill.

## **2. Wooded Downland**

The *Wooded Downland* type is well served by public rights of way, which provide a range of viewing experiences from intimate, wooded landscapes to the impressive, big sky views of the more open areas of downland. Ancient sites positioned on prominent hill tops such as White Sheet Hill provide viewpoints. This type is characterised by the presence of Hunting Forests such as Savernake and Cranborne Chase which remained comparatively free of modern agricultural practices until the 19<sup>th</sup> century leaving many historic features largely intact. The *Wooded Chalk Downland* supports areas of proposed open access which include substantial areas of scarp slopes such as at Bowerchalke and Whitecliff Down and also Registered Common Land such as at Grovely Wood. There is a variety of attractions including the Downton Moot Gardens and the Rushmore Estate with its gardens and golf course.

## **3. High Chalk Plain**

A large proportion of the *High Chalk Plain* Landscape Type is Ministry of Defence (MOD) land in active use for military training, so that although substantial sections of the type are proposed open access land, it is likely that the use of the land will continue to restrict public access. Rights of way are largely clustered at the edges of the plains skirting the danger areas and leading down the scarp slopes. From routes such as the Imber Range Perimeter Path (part of the White Horse Trail) there are wide views of the open downland and panoramic views across the adjacent lowland. The Wiltshire Cycleway circles the perimeter of the area. Attractions in the type are diverse and well dispersed and include the outstanding archaeological sites of Old Sarum, Stonehenge and Woodhenge, along with Ludgershall Castle, Cholderton rare breeds farm, Urchfont Hill open space, Arn Hill Nature Trail and Westbury White horse, the Iron Age forts of Yarnbury Castle, Sidbury Hill, Figsbury Ring and Scratchbury Hillfort and earthworks associated with a Roman settlement on Charlton Down.

## **4. Low Chalk Plain**

A fairly sparse network of public rights of way crosses this area, and the intensive use of the land for arable farming is reflected in the small area of Open Access Land. The Ridgeway National Trail and the White Horse Trail run through the type. Attractions include Avebury Stone Circle, museum and country house, the white horse cuttings at Cherhill and Broadtown and National Trust land at Hinton Parva and Windmill Hill.

## **5. Chalk River Valleys**

The provision of Public Rights of Way varies in the *Chalk River Valley* type. In some of the valley for instance the *Wylve Chalk River Valley* there are large tracts of land along the river without public access while in others footpaths follow the courses of the rivers and rise up the valley sides connecting with the downs above. The *Wylve Valley* route - Horningsham to Salisbury - is a promoted and signposted Wiltshire cycleway route. The many picturesque ancient hamlets and villages found along the rivers are themselves visitor attractions along with the towns of Marlborough and Wilton and City of Salisbury. Fishing is also associated with the river valleys. There is little open access land in this landscape type.

## **6. Greensand Terrace**

There is no obvious pattern to the network of rights of way however, where the *Terraces* meet with the adjacent *Chalk Escarpments*, rights of way take varied routes up and over the scarps, for example running up the coombes where contours are not so steep or following terraced paths that cut diagonally across, to forge good connections with the landscapes on the other side. Many of the rights of way crossing the *Kilmington Greensand Terrace* link directly with the *Stour Valley Way* in the adjacent *Greensand Hills* landscape. *Cley Hill Fort* provides a dramatic viewpoint in the *Warminster Greensand Terrace*. The intensive use of the land for arable crops means that there is little open access land apart from *Cley Hill*.

## **7. Wooded Greensand Hills**

The heavily wooded character of this landscape along with the number of outstanding historic houses, parkland and gardens, makes it a focus for visitors and recreation. This type includes the attractions of *Centre Parcs Holiday Village*, *Longleat Estate* and *National Trust* properties including *Stourhead*, *Alfred's Tower*, and *Cley Hill Fort*, along with the privately owned *Bowood*, *Spye Park* and *Fonthill*. Although the public footpath network is generally fairly sparse due to large areas of private land and commercial forestry, there are many local forest walks and some significant long distance footpath routes pass over the hills. These include the *Stour Valley Way* past *Stourhead* and the *Wessex Ridgeway*. There is little open access land in this type but there are some small areas of *Registered Common Land* such as *Bewley Common*.

## **8. Limestone Ridge**

The *Limestone Ridge* have a loose network of public rights of way linking them to the lowland areas to east and west and affording wide views from the elevated slopes. They are crossed at *Wootton Bassett* by the *Wiltshire cycleway* and also contain the *Coate Water Country Park* with its water sports and fishing centre. There is no open access land in this type.

## **9. Limestone Wold**

The *Wiltshire cycleway* marks the edge of the *Limestone Wold* running towards *Bradford on Avon* but there are practically no other leisure routes or attractions in the type and no open access land.

## **10. Limestone Valleys**

Public rights of way often follow the rivers along the *Limestone Valleys* or travel along the wooded slopes linking the villages and manor houses. The Wiltshire cycleway runs through the type and the Macmillan Way follows the course of the By Brook. Attractions are limited in this comparatively small area of land but include Barton Farm Country Park, Iford Manor Gardens, Bradford on Avon Tithe Barn, Castle Coombe motor racing circuit and Corsham Court. There are also a few areas of open access land in this type such as at West Yatton Down.

## **11. Rolling Clay Lowland**

The *Rolling Clay Lowland* has a loose-knit network of public rights of way and a scattering of attractions such as Southwick Country Park, Lydiard Park and the famous flight of locks west of Devizes. Woodlands offer opportunities for walking, particularly in the former Hunting Forest of Braydon for instance at Ravensroost Wood and Somerford Common. There is little or no open access land and just a few small isolated areas of registered common land such as at Marston

## **12. Open Clay Vales**

This landscape type is dominated by water with the two major rivers of the Bristol Avon and the Thames, the large open water bodies of the Cotswold Water Park and the Kennet and Avon Canal. Public access to these waterways varies with the canal towpath and the National trail of the Thames Path providing good access while the network of public rights of way provides only partial access to the Bristol Avon. An outstanding attraction is Lacock Village with its Abbey and the Fox Talbot Museum while to the north is the Swindon and Cricklade Railway and facilities for fishing and water sports at the Cotswold Water Park. There is little or no open access land but some registered common land – most notably the North Meadow above Cricklade.

## **13. Wooded Clay Vale**

The Vale of Wardour is well served by both footpaths and bridleways with the Wessex Ridgeway National Trail running across the landscape in a south-easterly direction. Significant lengths along the course of the Nadder are lined with footpaths providing direct access to the water. The River Nadder and its tributary the Sem, provide opportunities for fishing. There are small areas of proposed registered common land, particularly around Semley and Semley Common. Attractions are limited in this area but include Pythouse (historic house), Bush Farm Bison Centre, and Philipps House and Dinton Park.

## **14. Forest - Heathland Mosaic**

The Heathland Mosaic landscape covers the area of the New Forest contained within Wiltshire. The Wiltshire Cycleway runs from Salisbury up the western edge of the area and there are public rights of way through many of the woods in the type. There is little open access land but a substantial area of registered common land at Whiteparish Common. Other attractions in the area include the Landford Manor and Blackmoor Copse Country Park.

### ***15. Greensand Vale***

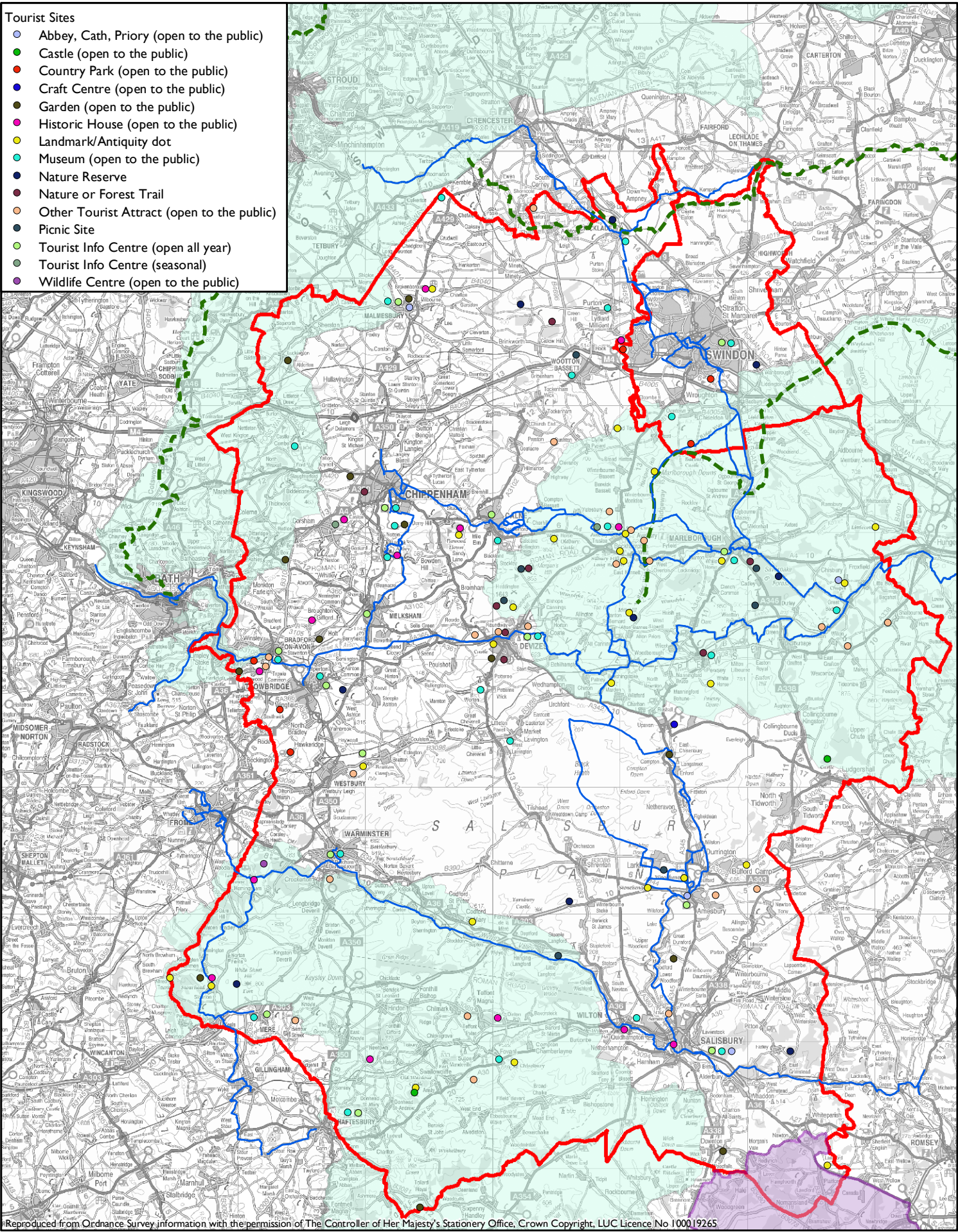
Through the centre of the *Greensand Vale* runs the Kennet and Avon Canal with its tow path, Canal Centre and Days Afloat Attraction. The Wiltshire Cycleway also cuts across the area from west to east. Other attractions in the area include Devizes Castle and Museum, the Pewsey Downs National Nature Reserve, Hatfield Earthworks, Pewsey Heritage centre and Castle and the Crofton Beam Engines and Pumping Station. There is no strong pattern of rights of way in this type and little or no open access land.

### ***16. Limestone Lowland***

Public rights of way vary in density through this type with some areas well served with footpaths and other with little access. There are no areas of open access land. Attractions are also limited but include Malmesbury Abbey and Museum, Luckington Court and Corsham Court and Park.



- Tourist Sites**
- Abbey, Cath, Priory (open to the public)
  - Castle (open to the public)
  - Country Park (open to the public)
  - Craft Centre (open to the public)
  - Garden (open to the public)
  - Historic House (open to the public)
  - Landmark/Antiquity dot
  - Museum (open to the public)
  - Nature Reserve
  - Nature or Forest Trail
  - Other Tourist Attract (open to the public)
  - Picnic Site
  - Tourist Info Centre (open all year)
  - Tourist Info Centre (seasonal)
  - Wildlife Centre (open to the public)



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**WILTSHIRE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT**

Figure 18:  
Leisure & Recreation

Key

- Wiltshire and Swindon
- National Cycle Route
- National Park
- AONB
- Long Distance Footpaths

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