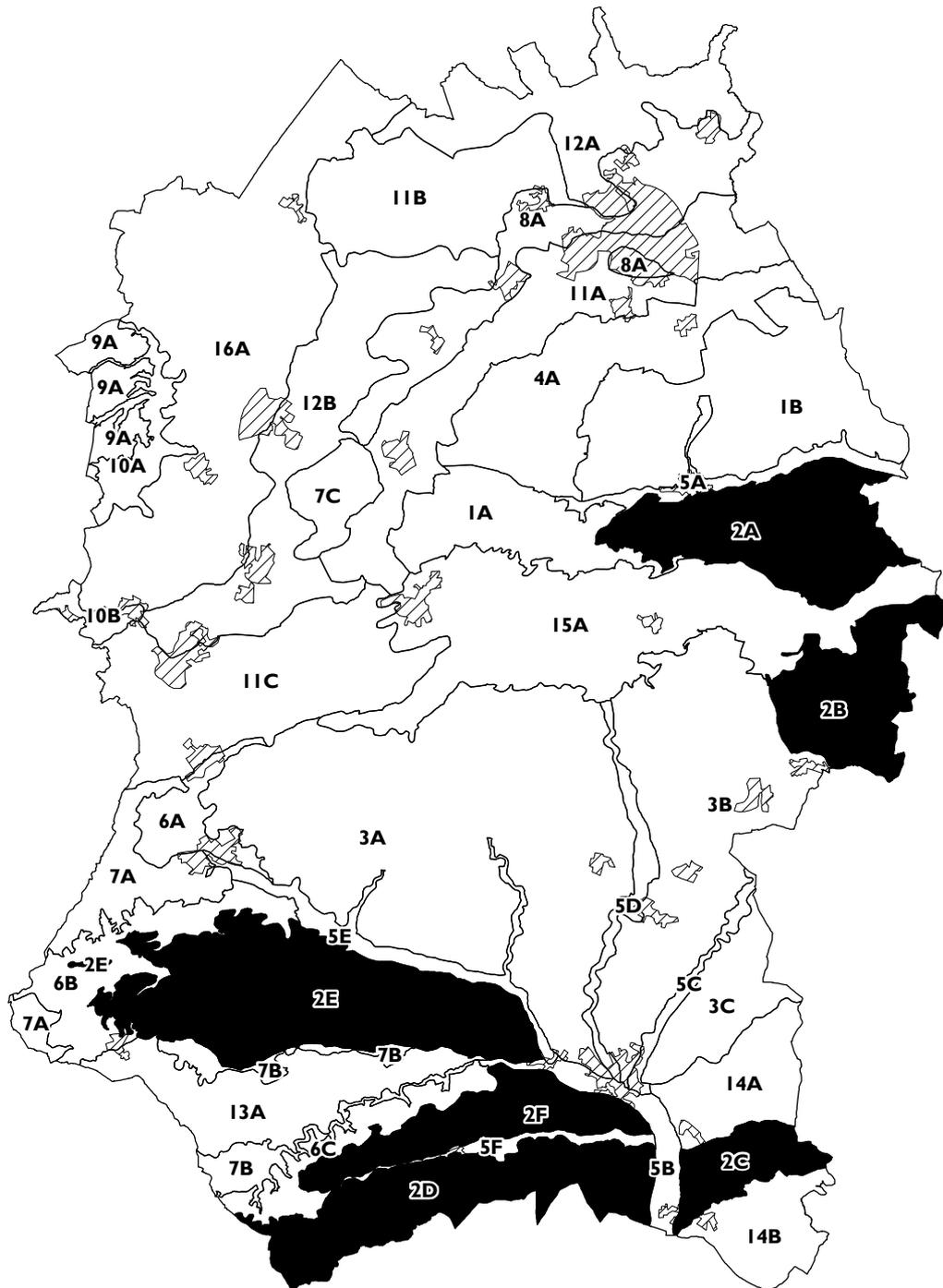


LANDSCAPE TYPE 2: WOODED DOWNLAND



2: WOODED DOWNLAND



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

- 2A** Savernake Plateau
- 2B** Chute Forest
- 2C** Witherington Wood Downland
- 2D** Cranborne Chase Wooded Downland
- 2E** West Wiltshire Downs Wooded Downland
- 2F** Fovant Down Wooded Downland

 **Urban Area**

TYPE 2: WOODED DOWNLAND

DESCRIPTION

Location and boundaries

The *Wooded Downland* Landscape Type encompasses the Chalk uplands at the south and mid-east of the county where deposits of Clay-with-Flint overlie the Chalk. There are five character areas in the type: 2A: *Savernake Plateau* sited on the eastern boundary in the middle of the county; 2B: *Chute Forest* to the south of area 2A; 2C: *Witherington Wooded Downland* at the south east of the county and 2D: *Cranborne Chase Wooded Downland*, 2E: *West Wiltshire Downs Wooded Downland* and 2F: *Fovant Down Wooded Downland* fanning out from the south of the county northwards separated by river valleys.

Boundaries are defined by changes in topography, land cover and geology for instance areas 2E and 2F are separated by a chalk river valley and the boundaries of these areas follow contours and roads marking the break of slope at the base of the valley sides while other boundaries are less clearly defined and are based on the change in land cover to more open arable land.

The majority of the type falls within the North Wessex Downs AONB and the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB.

Key characteristics

- Elevated chalk upland, dominated by Upper Chalk with a capping of Clay-with-Flint with escarpments of Upper, Middle and Lower Chalk.
- Strongly rolling landform with gently domed hill tops, dry valleys and dramatic scarps eroded into rounded spurs and deep combes.
- Contrasts between wide open views of rolling downland, to large scale 'rooms' of arable farmland enclosed by woodland, to panoramic views of the valleys and plateaus from the scarp slopes and valley sides.
- The steeply rising scarp slopes are visually dominant in the surrounding lowland areas, enriched by highly visible historic features such as the Fovant badges and Neolithic hill forts and barrows.
- Varying mix of two dominant land cover elements – the open arable fields and the woodland blocks and belts, which are linked and unified by the network of hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- Tree cover includes shelterbelts, copses and ancient and secondary semi-natural woodland, wooded pasture and parkland, much of it founded on the Royal Hunting Forests of Savernake, Cranborne Chase and Chute.
- Remnant chalk grassland is an important habitat on the steep slopes of the scarps and valley sides.
- Field pattern dominated by large rectangular fields typical of eighteenth and nineteenth century enclosure with some remnant small scale medieval patterns close to villages.

- Historic parks and designed landscapes, many originating as medieval deer parks or as parts of the Royal Hunting Forests.
- Low density scattered settlement of farmsteads and occasional villages often sheltering in the valleys.
- Varied vernacular built form includes redbrick, flint, stone and render with roofs of tile and thatch.
- Network of lanes often rising up the dry valleys linking the high downs to the lowlands, with sunken shady lanes in some more wooded zones plus a few main roads crossing the areas.
- Frequent Bronze Age and Iron Age monuments such as hill forts and barrows situated on scarps and hill tops forming very visible and distinctive features.
- A peaceful, tranquil and secluded rural landscape, with sheltered enclosed woodland areas contrasting with more open, remote downland and steep uninhabited scarps.

Physical influences

The underlying solid geology of the rolling uplands of the *Wooded Downland* is Upper Chalk, which gives rise to similar topography to the *Landscape Type 1: Open Downland*. The *Wooded Downland* is distinguished by the plateau drift geology of Clay with Flints. This covers the Upper Chalk to different degrees in the various character areas giving rise to loamy brown earth soils associated with woodland in contrast to the open downland. On the escarpments and the valley sides the Lower and Middle Chalk predominate with the Middle Chalk associated with the middle and upper parts of the slopes and the Lower Chalk and Greensand towards the more shallow slopes of the bases. Shallow, well drained calcareous rendzinas are the dominant soil types on the scarp slopes.

Biodiversity

The *Wooded Downland* is characterised by intensive and widespread arable cultivation however the type also supports a significant number of sites of nature conservation importance particularly woodland. On the downland these are frequently interconnected creating a wooded framework enclosing the mosaic of arable farmland. Woodland habitats consist of shelter-belts, wooded pasture, parkland, copses and ancient semi-natural woodland blocks. A number of the steep slopes of the dry valleys are also extensively wooded and sinuous woodland blocks run along the base of the scarp slopes. There are many designated woodland sites and numerous remnants of ancient semi-natural woodland. The parklands, many of which originated as medieval deer parks, contain an important veteran tree resource. Notable sites include Savernake Forest (SSSI) and the internationally significant yew woodland of Great Yews (SSSI and SAC).

Remnants of floristically rich chalk grassland are an important habitat component within the landscape type surviving, in particular, on the scarp slopes and the steep valley sides. Examples include the SSSIs Brickworth Down and Dean Hill, Bowerchalke Downs, Burcombe Down and Rotherley Downs.

County Wildlife Sites include: West Woods, ancient semi-natural beech woodland with a rich fungal diversity; Great Ridge Woods, largely ancient semi-natural woodland with a long established pond and with historical records of many butterfly species including silver-

washed fritillary and dark green fritillary; and Ashcombe Bottom Complex, a mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodland, chalk grassland and scrub with notable species including frog orchid, early gentian, dwarf sedge and skylark.

Historic environment

The landscape is rich in burial, settlement, agricultural and territorial features dating from the Neolithic to the modern era including Neolithic long barrows, Bronze Age round barrows, Iron Age hill forts and later prehistoric and Romano-British ditches and defensive earthworks such as Grim's Ditch.

The character of the *Wooded Downland* Landscape Type has been highly influenced by the long-term presence of first Royal, and later private, hunting grounds. Wooded commons and deer parks are a particular feature originating from medieval deer parks enclosed from areas of Royal Forest. A number of these deer parks were refashioned in the eighteenth century and are now important designed landscapes such as Tottenham Park and Rushmore Park.

Fields in the *Wooded Downland* are predominantly large and rectangular, typical in pattern of the Parliamentary enclosure of the 18th and early 19th centuries, in places further combined and enlarged in the 20th century.

Settlement and built character

The *Wooded Downland* is sparsely settled mainly with widely scattered farmsteads and a small number of villages often sheltering in the folds of the dry valleys. Buildings feature local brick, flint - notably for churches, along with timber frame, chalk cob and thatched or tiled roofs. The steep valley sides and scarp slopes and are devoid of settlement although the pattern of paths, tracks and field boundaries tend to reflect past patterns of land use linking the downs with the valleys and plateaus.

CHARACTER AREAS

2A: Savernake Plateau

The *Savernake Plateau* is a high plateau of rolling downland dissected by small valleys, founded on Upper Chalk overlain with deposits of Clay with Flints. To the east of the area the Chalk is overlain by London Clay, the Reading Beds, Bagshot Beds and Plateau Gravel. These drift deposits create heavier soils supporting the highly wooded character of this area which includes Savernake Forest (a Royal Hunting Forest) and West Wood - ancient oak wood pasture and eighteenth and nineteenth century beech and oak plantation with many notable veteran trees. These sit within a wider woodland farmland mosaic which includes some more open arable areas and is knitted together by hedgerows with many hedgerow trees. Historic parkland and designed landscapes feature with Tottenham Park and Littlecote Park containing permanent pasture, parkland trees, avenues and rides. The *Savernake Plateau* is a peaceful, secluded landscape, with sparse settlement. Villages of locally produced rust coloured brick with some timber framing and distinctive flint churches, are concentrated in the east of the area in the valley of the River Dun and the Kennet and Avon Canal runs through Dun Valley with associated industrial archaeological features.

2B: Chute Forest

Chute Forest is underlain by the Upper Chalk, capped by clays and with varied topography of high rolling hills cut by steep sided dry valley, scarps and dramatic combs. Extensive woodland cover is associated with the Clay-with-Flint covered summits with large blocks of woodland on the higher areas and long sinuous hangers clinging to the slopes of the steep combs where they are intermixed with pasture. The farmland woodland mosaic also includes areas of arable land, and parkland and estate farmland provide further variation as at Conholt Park. The woodlands range from areas of ancient woodland to more recent mixed plantations and shelterbelts with ash/field maple dominating the more calcareous soils, whilst the acidic clays support birch/pedunculate oak. Hedgerows with hedgerow trees link the woodland blocks and vary from strong and full to low, flailed and gappy in places. The area is sparsely populated, with small villages and hamlets sheltering in the folds of the chalk topography particularly on the south facing slopes, for example the Chutes, as well as scattered isolated farmsteads and mansions (Conhault). Buildings in the area are predominantly of brick and flint, roofed with tile. Harder chalk was sometimes used in walls, and some older buildings retain timber framing, chalk cob and thatch. An intricate network of rural lanes winds across the area and there are few main roads so that the *Chute Forest* retains a tranquil rural character despite its proximity to Andover and Tidworth.

2C: Witherington Wooded Downland

Witherington Wooded Downland is founded on Upper Chalk, with its rolling landform of hills and dry valleys descending to north and west to the valleys of the River Dun and River Avon. The area is known locally as the Pepper Box. To the east of the area the chalk is capped in places by Clay with Flints and here woodland blocks such as Gatmore Copse and Mean Wood together with smaller sinuous woodland blocks and variable hedgerows create a more enclosed character contrasting with the large scale open arable fields to the north of the area. Amidst the woodland farmland mosaic the scarp slopes of Dean Hill and Brickworth Down (SSSI) retain areas of chalk grassland, scrub and woodland of ash, oak and yew of high nature conservation value. The centre of the area is sparsely settled with just a few scattered farmsteads while the edge of the area contains the margins of villages set in the adjacent valleys such as West Dean and Downton with their brick, stone and flint buildings. Just a small number of lanes and the A36 cross the area and the *Witherington Wooded Downland* retains a peaceful, highly rural character away from this one main road.

2D: Cranborne Chase Wooded Downland

The *Cranborne Chase Wooded Downland* comprises a dramatic chalk landscape, with elevated downland to the south descending through a series of steep combe valleys northwards to the *Ebble Chalk River Valley Character Area* and eastwards to the *Lower Avon Chalk River Valley*. To the west of the area escarpments mark the transition from the downs to the rolling lower slopes of the valley sides and the *Greensand Terrace*. The upland is dominated by Upper Chalk with Clay with Flints capping while the scarp slopes and valley sides are of Middle and Lower Chalk.

The undulating downland is characterised by a woodland farmland mix with large rectangular arable fields dominant to the east with remnant chalk grassland, ancient broadleaved woodland and yew woodland such as Great Yews (SSSI and SAC). There is rather more woodland cover to the west of the downland centred on the Royal Hunting Ground of

Cranborne Chase and the designed landscape of Rushmore Park. Large woods, shelter belts, copses and clumps of parkland trees create a series of enclosed spaces or 'rooms' of arable farmland or open parkland surrounded by trees. Hedgerows link the woodlands with a few hedgerow trees. The scarps are mainly pasture with significant tracts of nationally important unimproved chalk grassland on the steep slopes for instance at Bowerchalke Down. Woodland, much of it ancient beech and oak stands, follows the line of the contours along the base of the escarpments along with game coverts of rectangular blocks of conifers. The lower valley slopes are characterised by large scale rectangular arable fields, linking these areas to the downs above.

This area is rich in archaeological remains with Bronze Age round barrows sited on the escarpments and downs plus later prehistoric and Romano-British earthworks such as Grim's Ditch. Settlement is sparse in the *Cranborne Chase Wooded Downland* mainly comprising a few scattered farmsteads on the downs plus the villages of Bowerchalke and Tollard Royal to the east, the latter closely associated with the Royal Hunting Forest. A network of lanes crosses the area often rising up the dry valleys linking the valley with the downs.

2E: West Wiltshire Downs Wooded Downland

The *West Wiltshire Downs Wooded Downland* is an area of broad rolling hills. At its western and southern edges dramatic scarp slopes descend to the adjacent *Greensand Terrace* while to the north undulating dry tributary valleys lead down to the *Wylve Chalk River Valley*. The upland is founded on Upper Chalk with Clay with Flints capping the higher ground, reflected in the presence of the extensive ancient oak woodlands of Grovely Wood, and Great Ridge.

The rest of the downland is dominated by arable farmland with straight-sided fields representing late 18th/early 19th century Parliamentary enclosure, and large-scale fields resulting from 20th century boundary loss. Small woodland blocks are frequent linked by hedgerows creating a semi-enclosed but still large scale landscape. The steepest valley and scarp slopes have retained their semi-natural chalk grassland (of high ecological value as at Whitesheet Hill SSSI) or are clothed in sinuous 'hanging' woodland which follows the contours of the slopes. The shallow valley sides have been exploited for arable cultivation with the same pattern of large rectangular fields as on the downland.

Settlement comprises isolated farmsteads, dispersed hamlets and a few small villages such as Teffont Magna and Fonthill Bishop which tend to be located on the sheltered south facing slopes. There are few roads in the area apart from the transport corridors of the A303 and A350 which cross the landform in cuttings and on embankments.

There are many archaeological monuments in the *West Wiltshire Downs Wooded Downland* from isolated Neolithic long barrow burial monuments, and Bronze Age round barrows to a series of Iron Age hillforts and defended enclosures overlooking the *Wylve Valley*, as well as preserved prehistoric/Romano-British landscape features at Whitesheet Hill and Grim's Ditch.

2F: Fovant Down Wooded Downland

Fovant Down Wooded Downland is a sinuous ridge of Upper Chalk, descending to the *Ebble Chalk River Valley* to the south and *Lower Avon Chalk River Valley* to the north east through a series of undulating dry river valleys. To the north west a dramatic scarp descends to the *Greensand Terrace* forming a highly visible feature in the lowland of the Vale of Wardour.

The highest ground is capped by Clay with Flints and includes the substantial woodland block of Hare Warren while the surrounding high, rolling downland is under intensive arable production punctuated by small copses and shelterbelts. The scarp and valleys have a wooded character in places with broadleaf (some of ancient origin), mixed and coniferous woodland often following the contours at the base of the scarp slopes.

There is rough pasture (with fencing replacing hedgerows in places) and important areas of unimproved chalk grassland on the steeper slopes including nationally significant chalk grassland sites such as Burcombe Down (SSSI), Gallows Down (SSSI) and Prescombe Down (NNR and SAC).

There is a distinct distribution of Bronze Age burial monuments along the edges of the escarpment, and the chalk hill figures of the Fovant Badges are highly visible landmarks.

The *Fovant Down Wooded Downland* is largely unsettled and has few roads heightening the sense of isolation of this highly rural area however the outskirts of Salisbury at the far east of the area has a local influence through views to the urban area, the immediate suburban edge and lighting and kerbing of roads.

EVALUATION

Positive landscape features of significance

- Distinctive topography of rolling high downs, undulating dry valleys and dramatic scarp slopes.
- Mosaic of arable farmland and woodland with variety of patterns from isolated woodland blocks within the open landscape to framing woods enclosing farmland linked by hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- Peaceful rural landscape with sparse settlement of scattered farmsteads and occasional small villages with many vernacular buildings sheltering in valleys.
- Wide variety of woodlands including Royal Hunting Forests with wood pasture, ancient woodland and veteran trees.
- Parkland landscapes with tree clumps, avenues and open grassland.
- Chalk grassland of significant ecological value on the steep scarp slopes and valley sides.
- Wide open skies over the downs and valley sides and views from the scarp slopes.
- Winding roads following dry valleys and ancient routes linking the downs and the lowlands.
- Rich archaeological remains of Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows and Iron Age hill forts, plus Romano-British features and more recent chalk badges.

Forces for change

- Loss of hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees plus poor management of remaining hedgerows.
- Pressure for enlargement of arable fields and further loss of field boundaries.
- Need for sustainable woodland management including traditional maintenance techniques where appropriate to conserve ancient woodlands and particularly surviving areas of wood pasture and coppice.
- Encroachment of scrub into grassland due to changes in farming practices leading to change in balance of grassland/scrub mix.
- Pressure for expansion of villages particularly those close to large settlements and transport links.
- Pressure for development on main road corridors such as services which are highly visible in more open sections of the type.
- Increasing traffic on narrow rural lane network leading to urbanisation through kerbing, additional lighting and signage.
- Damage to ancient monuments from intensive arable cultivation.
- Recreational pressure on chalk scarps.

Condition

The condition of the *Wooded Downland* is generally **good**. The varied woodland cover, often linked by full hedgerows frame the arable fields enriching the ecology and visual interest of the type. The few settlements are largely of traditional brick, flint, stone and render with thatch and tile roofs. The remaining chalk grassland on the steep slopes and rich variety of woodlands is of high ecological value. There are some elements showing signs of decline in places particularly the loss and poor maintenance of some hedgerows, the localised influence of suburban edges of settlements and the wear caused by recreational access to fragile chalk habitats and archaeological monuments.

Strength of character

This landscape type has a **strong** character based on its varied Chalk geology, with rolling downland, steep scarps and undulating dry river valleys and closely linked to this, its rich history made visible through many ancient monuments and the influence of the former Royal Hunting Forests. The simple, mainly arable land cover is relieved by the variety of woodlands which in places enclose areas of rolling landform to create distinctive large scale 'rooms'. In contrast the type also has wide open views across the downs and panoramic views over the nearby lowlands from the steep scarps. The small villages largely retain their traditional form and varied local materials.

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 hill forts.

Strategy

The strategy for the *Wooded Downland* is to **conserve** the highly rural, peaceful character of the type with its highly distinctive and varied topography with landcover of woodland and arable mix, grassland scarps and valleys with small sheltered villages and sparse scattered farmsteads. Elements requiring restoration are field boundaries and hedgerow trees.

Broad management objectives

- Conserve the sense of remoteness and isolation, with sparse settlement and road network and limited visible development.
- Conserve the areas of chalk grassland and pasture, encourage management to improve species diversity and prevent scrub encroachment. Consider opportunities for extending and linking chalk grassland along the scarps and dry valley bottoms whilst preserving hotspots of arable biodiversity.
- Encourage sustainable woodland management of the varied woodlands using tradition techniques such as coppicing where appropriate to maintain the special historic character especially of the areas of former Royal Hunting Forests.
- Encourage management and restoration of parkland and designed landscapes that are characteristic of the area.
- Minimise small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or improvements to the road network which could change the rural peaceful character of the landscape.
- Conserve the character of the small hamlets and villages.
- Protect the remaining sites of historic interest and above ground archaeological features. Consider opportunities for extending areas of pasture around archaeological monuments.

THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER CONTEXT

The character of the Wiltshire landscape has already been investigated in a number of studies as detailed in Appendices 1 and 2. The *Wooded Downland Landscape Type* is

covered in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002), the Kennet District Landscape Character Assessment (1998) and the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Landscape Character Assessment (2003).

The Wooded Downland Type includes parts or all of the following landscape types from these existing assessments:

North Wessex Downs

Type 1: Open downland

Type 2: Downland with woodland

Type 3: Wooded Plateau

Kennet District

Open arable or cultivated downland

Enclosed downland with weak hedgerow structure

Woodland and farmland mosaic

Wooded downlands

plus small areas of a number of other types

Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs

Type 1: Chalk escarpment

Type 2: Open chalk downland

Type 3: Wooded chalk downland

Type 5: Chalk river valley

The relationship of the Wiltshire character areas to the areas in existing assessment is outlined below.

2A: Savernake Plateau covers the same area as the Savernake Plateau character area from the North Wessex Downs AONB assessment.

2B: Chute Forest covers the same area as the Chute Forest Character Area from the North Wessex Downs AONB assessment.

2C: Witherington Wooded Downland is not covered by any previous assessments.

2D: Cranborne Chase Wooded Downland includes parts of four areas from the Cranborne Chase assessment (2B: Southern Downland Belt, 3A Cranborne Chase, 1C: Fovant and Chalke Escarpment and 5B: Ebble Chalk River Valley). Of these the first three continue outside the county boundary. Boundaries are defined by the county boundary to the south and follow the break of slope at the base of the slope down to the Wiltshire character areas of *Ebble Chalk River Valley* and the *Lower Avon Chalk River Valley* to the north.

2E: West Wiltshire Wooded Downland includes three areas from the Cranborne Chase assessment (2A: West Wiltshire Downs Open Chalk Downland, 1B: West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpments and 5A: Wylve Chalk River Valley). It encompasses the whole of the first two areas and part of type 5A. Boundaries follow the Cranborne Chase areas apart from to the north where the boundary with the Wiltshire area *5D: Wylve Chalk River Valley* is defined by the break of slope at the base of the valley sides.

2F: Fovant Down Wooded Downland includes parts of three areas from the Cranborne Chase assessment (1C: Fovant and Chalke Escarpment, 5B: Ebbles Chalk River Valley and a small section of 2A: West Wiltshire Downs Open Chalk Downland). There is also a section of the area to the east that is outside the AONB and so not covered by an existing assessment. Boundaries to the north follow those of 1C: Fovant and Chalke Escarpment, and to the south the boundary with the Wiltshire area 5E: *Ebbles Chalk River Valley* is defined by the break of slope at the base of the valley sides.