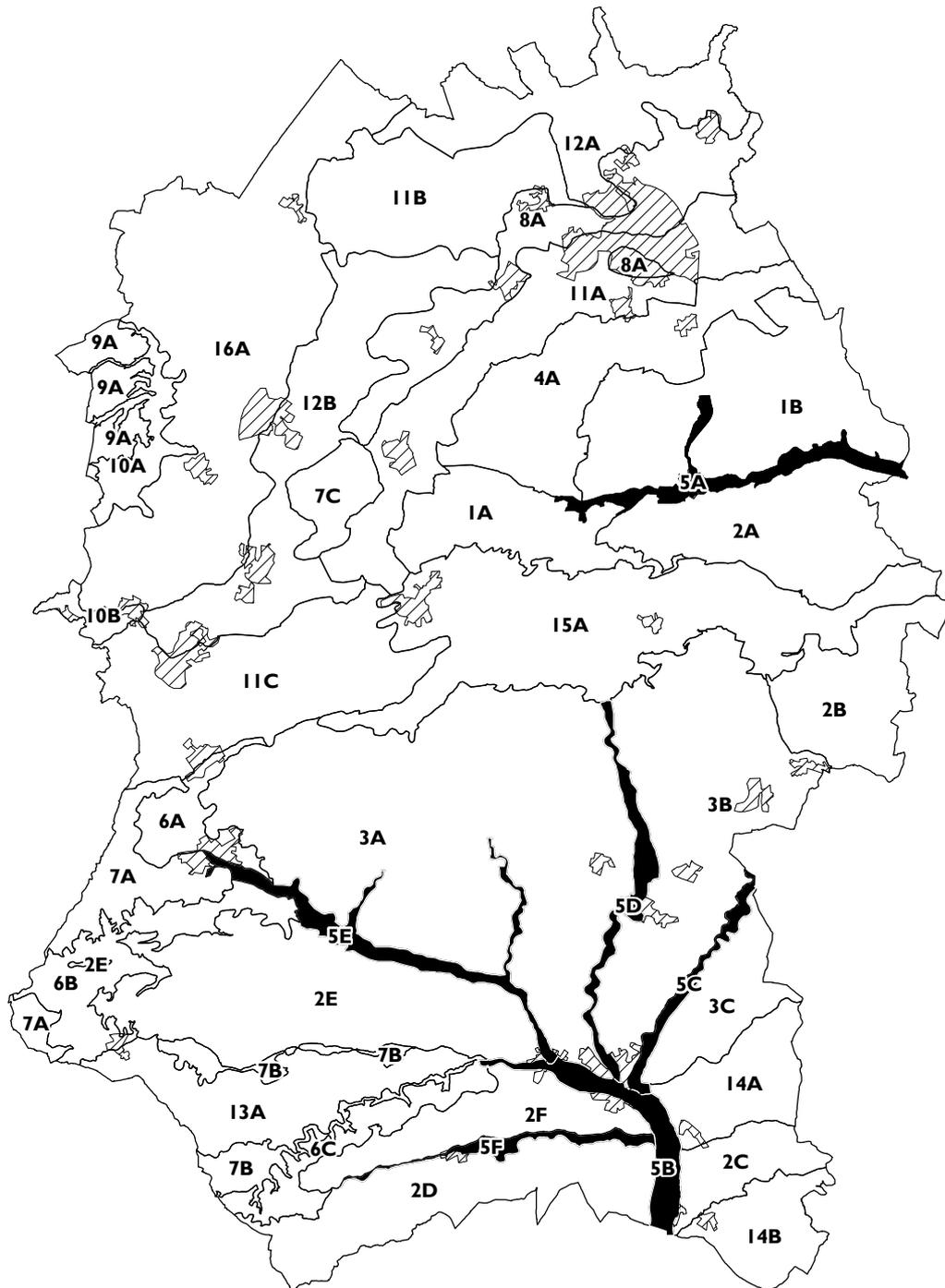


LANDSCAPE TYPE 5: CHALK RIVER VALLEY



5: CHALK RIVER VALLEY



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

- 5A** Kennet Chalk River Valley
- 5B** Lower Avon Chalk River Valley
- 5C** Bourne Chalk River Valley
- 5D** Upper Avon Chalk River Valley
- 5E** Wylde Chalk River Valley
- 5F** Ebbles Chalk River Valley

 **Urban Area**

TYPE 5: CHALK RIVER VALLEYS

DESCRIPTION

Location and boundaries

The *Chalk River Valleys* Landscape Type encompasses the narrow river valleys cutting through the Chalk uplands of the county. Area 5A: *Kennet Chalk River Valley* cuts across the mass of chalk downs to the north east of Wiltshire, while area 5B: *Lower Avon Chalk River Valley* is located to the south centring on Salisbury and areas 5C: *Bourne Chalk River Valley*, 5D: *Upper Avon Chalk River Valley* and 5E: *Wylde Chalk River Valley* radiate out over Salisbury Plain.

Boundaries are based on topography with the valleys defined as the floodplain and immediate valley sides. The boundaries usually follow a physical feature, often a road that runs along the first contour above winter flooding level.

Area 5A lies within the North Wessex Downs AONB and areas 5E and 5F are largely within the Cranborne Chase AONB.

Key characteristics

- Strongly enclosed valleys with an intimate scale contrasting with the surrounding open upland landscape.
- Level, often narrow valley floors with relatively 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 valleys.
- 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 rivers and streams a key habitat.
- Valleys contain 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.
- Valley used as transport corridors with major roads and railway lines along valley sides.
- Rural landscape sometimes interrupted by the large volume of traffic.

Physical influences

The rivers are all cut into the solid geology generally of the Upper Chalk at an elevation varying from 40m to 100m AOD. 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.

Biodiversity

The spring fed streams and rivers, which incise the chalk upland are rich in plant and animal communities, deriving, in part, from the high-quality of the base-rich water which is naturally clear and fast flowing. 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 high ecological importance of the *Chalk River Valley* Landscape Type is reflected in the number of SSSI within the Type. Notable amongst these are Lower Woodford Water Meadows SSSI and Britford Water Meadows SSSI which are the last two actively managed water meadows in Wiltshire and retain the grassland communities typical of this type of management. Land formerly managed as water meadows and retaining significant ecological value include Chilton Foliat Water Meadows SSSI and East Harnham Water Meadows SSSI.

Substantial proportions of the River Kennet, River Avon System and River Till SSSIs lie within the type and the international significance of the River Avon and River Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain are indicated by their designation as SACs. The River Avon has over 180 species of aquatic plant recorded plus one of the most diverse fish faunas in Britain and part of its upper reaches is also a County Wildlife Site.

Other County Wildlife Sites include Chilton Foliat Wet Meadows, former water meadows alongside the River Kennet, west of the SSSI of the same name. The site consists of wet neutral meadows, ditches and streams with fen vegetation and plant species including early and March orchids and marsh valerian. It is important for breeding waders such as woodcock, and for Cetti's warbler, grasshopper warblers and for nightingales. Another water meadow County Wildlife Site is Winterbourne Earls Meadow, large disused water meadows dominated by tall herbs, but with a species-rich flora and historical records of native crayfish.

Also Langford Lakes, former gravel pits with breeding waterfowl including gadwall and great crested grebe, visiting bittern and osprey and also otters and water voles.

Historic environment

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.

Historically, settlement was concentrated in the river valleys, close to the water supply is, as reflected in the numerous manors and villages, many of which are recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086. There are many well-preserved deserted or shrunken Medieval villages along these river valleys often surviving as complex earthworks adjacent to the

current settlements. Water meadows of 17th century origin are often a strong feature of the flood plains, particularly in the Avon south of Salisbury.

The structure of the land also defines communication patterns. The river valleys form important routes, particularly those of the Rivers Kennet, Wylde and Avon.

Settlement and built character

The river valleys contain a concentration of settlement, following a very distinctive pattern. Both nucleated and linear villages occur at regular intervals along the valley sides, at a height just above the winter flood level. The settlements include tiny hamlets clustered around a church, many small villages, a few small towns such as Marlborough and Amesbury and the major settlements of Warminster and Salisbury.

The latter has a major influence on the type as, apart from the Kennet, all the *Chalk River Valleys* converge at Salisbury. Views of the cathedral are characteristic of area 5B: *Lower Avon Chalk River Valley* in particular.

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

5A: Kennet Chalk River Valley

The *Kennet Valley Chalk River Valley* has relatively steep sides and a narrow valley floor, providing a strong sense of enclosure. Alluvium and gravel deposits line the valley floor which is dominated by pasture while the valley sides are generally under arable cultivation. The valley has a varied and attractive landscape with tracts of lush floodplain pasture, marsh and reedbeds, lines of willow pollards and poplars plus hedgerows enclosing the fields and stands of regenerating alder, birch and oak along the river banks. It is well wooded, with sinuous belts of woodland lining the valley sides and some larger broadleaved woodland blocks on the valley floor particularly in the east. Further diversity is provided by the historic parklands, which include Ramsbury Manor and Chilton Foliat. The River Kennet is an important chalk river habitat and designated as a SSSI. The rich biodiversity of the floodplain is reflected in its status (with the floodplain of the River Lambourn) as an SAC. Providing a main east-west communications corridor, the route of the A4 road follows the valley west of Marlborough. Elsewhere minor roads follow the lower valley sides. Settlements, from manor houses and hamlets to the market town of Marlborough include those of Saxon and Medieval origins. Building materials generally reflect the local geology, with brick/flint and clay tile dominating east of Marlborough, and sarsen stone and brick dominating to the west. Mills and churches are distinctive built features within the valley. In the upper reaches of the river, archaeological monuments associated with Avebury World Heritage Site (WHS), including The Sanctuary stone circle, are a prominent feature.

5B: Lower Avon Chalk River Valley

The *Lower Avon Chalk River Valley* is wider than the others in the type, containing the confluence of the Rivers Wylde, Nadder, Bourne and Ebbel with the Avon. To the south of Salisbury the valley contains a complex system of channels and water meadows largely

inaccessible and highly rural and tranquil in feel despite the closeness of Salisbury. Views of the cathedral spire are striking in this rural context and have long been appreciated by artists as in Constable's famous painting of *Salisbury Cathedral from the River*. The area is pastoral with small fields with lush hedges, mature hedgerow trees as well riparian vegetation such as willow and alder. Water meadows were typical of the area and East Harnham Pastures SSSI is one of these areas which, despite no longer being in active management as a water meadow, has retained its herb rich grassland. Settlement is in the form of a few villages and farmsteads plus historic houses and parklands such as Longford Castle and Park, and Wilton House. The river winds through Salisbury skirting the historic core of the city as well as more suburban areas on the south banks. More rural village buildings are of red brick combined with flint, and with red tiled roofs or thatch. Major trunk roads follow the sides of the *Lower Avon Chalk River Valley* but despite their noise and movement this character area retains substantial areas of rural and remote pastoral landscape.

5C: Bourne Chalk River Valley

The *Bourne Chalk River Valley* runs southwards from Cholderton to Salisbury where the Bourne joins the Avon. It divides two *High Chalk Plain* areas and especially to the north, has shallower sides and is less enclosed than the other *Chalk River Valleys*. The river corridor is characterised by lines of willows and the presence of water meadows, for instance at Porton Meadows SSSI. The shallow valley sides to the north of the area support arable and are less distinct from the surrounding chalk upland. The area is settled to the south in particular with Porton and the Winterbournes tending to merge along the roadways. To the south the presence of the northern fringes of Salisbury is felt in settlement on either side of the valley which has a more suburban style.

5D: Upper Avon Chalk River Valley

The *Upper Avon Chalk River Valley* runs southwards between two *High Chalk Plain* areas and is a narrow strongly contained valley particularly to the north and south. The middle section is wider and more level and contains the settlements of Durrington and Amesbury. The sheltered and enclosed valley with its intricate pattern of small pastoral fields, woodlands and scattered villages contrasts strongly with the open, simple landscape of the downs. The area has a rich ecology with the River Avon (SAC), wet woodlands, commercial poplar plantations, hanging valley side woodlands linked by full hedgerows and hedgerow trees, plus meadows including outstanding example of actively managed water meadow system at Lower Woodford Water Meadows SSSI. There is a long history of settlement in the *Upper Avon Chalk River Valley* from the Long Barrow at Bulford, tumuli elsewhere, the Fort and Abbey at Amesbury, and Manor houses at Great Durnford and Little Durnford. The A345 trunk road runs along to northern section of the area and it is crossed at Amesbury by the A303, while minor roads follow valley sides to south. Despite the busy roads and settlement the *Upper Avon Chalk River Valley* remains predominantly a highly rural landscape.

5E: Wylde Chalk River Valley

The *Wylde Chalk River Valley* runs eastwards from Warminster to Wilton and is a deep valley enclosed by 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, while the lower valley sides support the cultivation of arable crops or improved pasture in larger more geometric fields. 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 Wylde and its tributaries. The valley 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. The A303 trunk road also crosses the valley on a viaduct. Attractive linear or nucleated villages are scattered along these east-west routes, their chequerboard buildings of stone and knapped flint a distinctive feature. 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.

5F: Ebble Chalk River Valley

The *Ebble Chalk River Valley* encompasses the narrow floodplain and lower valley sides of the River Ebble as it flows eastwards to join the River Avon near Nunton. The shallow slopes along much of the Ebble valley mean that there is a predominance of arable agriculture, comprising large fields on the lower valley sides and this has diluted the visual distinction between the previously pastoral character of the floodplain and the arable downland valley sides. The valley supports a range of associated riverine habitats and is of significant ecological interest. This includes small areas of rough pasture that are now largely limited to small grazing pockets. Field boundaries are varied – comprising post and wire fencing in places, native hedgerows and a scattering of hedgerow trees. Small woodland belts and scattered trees are a feature of the valley bottom, for example the willows and poplars that line the narrow floodplain and are conspicuous along the course of the river. Settlement within the Ebble River Valley predominantly comprises linear villages and hamlets such as Combe Bissett, Stratford Tony and Bishopstone which occur regularly along the course of the river. Brick and flint are common building materials within the settlements whilst thatch and slate are characteristic roofing materials. New development is occurring within the villages and settlement edges are often defined by concrete roadside kerbs – changing the rural character. As well as this chain of small medieval settlements along the river, historic components of the landscape are water meadows and cress beds.

EVALUATION

Positive landscape features of significance

- Intimate, small scale rural landscape.
- Chalk rivers and streams with their characteristically clear, fast-flowing waters.
- Seasonal flood meadows, grazed pastures, marsh and damp woodlands of high ecological value.

- Distinctive features relating to past management of the flood plain such as water meadows, watercress beds and remnants of mill systems including leats and pools.
- Distinctive pattern of settlement of small villages of rich and varied vernacular materials.

Forces for change

- Nutrient pollution from riverside arable land plus road and urban run off affecting the high water quality of the streams and rivers.
- 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 trunk roads 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 extraction causing lower flows.
- Increasing road use which will further diminish the rural tranquillity of the valley landscape.

Condition

The overall condition of the *Chalk River Valley* Landscape Type is **good** with its chalk rivers 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.

Strength of character

The *Chalk River Valley* Landscape Type has a **strong** character with its generally narrow, steep sided landform, small scale rural settled and tranquil landscape of pastoral fields bounded by hedgerows, villages built of local vernacular materials and in traditional patterns and outstanding ecological interest in its water courses and meadows. The visual and historic relationship between the river valleys and the city of Salisbury further enriches the Type. Detracting from the rural, peaceful small scale landscape are the busy trunk roads and some suburban edges of larger settlements.

Inherent landscape sensitivities

- Small scale enclosed landscape.
- High water quality and outstanding ecological richness of the chalk rivers.
- 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.

STRATEGY

The strategy for the *Chalk River Valley* Landscape Type 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, historic parklands and vernacular villages. There are opportunities for restoration of waterside pastures, replanting and management of hedgerows and limited native tree planting/regeneration.

Broad management objectives

- 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 roads 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.

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 *Chalk River Valley* Landscape Type is covered in the landscape character assessments for Kennet District, the North Wessex Downs AONB and Cranborne Chase AONB.

Area 5A: Kennet Chalk River Valley is covered in the Kennet District and North Wessex Downs AONB assessments as the Kennet Valley character area. Boundaries vary from these assessments in that the valley of the River Og is included as far north at Ogbourne St George in this county assessment to ensure consistency in boundary treatment through the county.

Area 5B: Lower Avon Chalk River Valley and *5C: Bourne Chalk River Valley* are not included in an existing assessment.

Parts of *areas 5D: Upper Avon Chalk River Valley* are covered in the Salisbury Plain Training Area Landscape Character Assessment under the River Valley Farmlands and Enclosed Downlands landscape types and a number of character areas.

Areas 5F: Ebble Chalk River Valley and *5E: Wylve Chalk River Valley* are covered in the Cranborne Chase Landscape Character Assessment under the Chalk River Valley landscape type and Ebble Chalk River Valley and Wylve Chalk River Valley character areas. The boundaries of the valleys in the Cranborne Chase assessment take in the valley sides up to the skyline however in this county assessment the boundaries of all the valleys in this type encompass just the valley floor and the immediate valley sides hence varying from the Cranborne Chase boundaries. This is consistent for all the Chalk Valleys.