

# LANDSCAPE TYPE 9: LIMESTONE WOLD

---





# TYPE 9: LIMESTONE WOLD

---

## DESCRIPTION

### Location and Boundaries

The *Limestone Wold* landscape type is a small area in the north-west part of the county forming part of the Cotswolds on an area of gently undulating limestone dip slope that extends well beyond the country boundary. The *Limestone Wold* landscape type, contains one character area 9A: *Cotswolds Dip Slope*. This area is split into two separate sections by a narrow valley formed by tributaries flowing into By Brook, but is described as a single area because the sections are similar in character and connect together beyond the county boundary.

The *Limestone Wold* Landscape Type forms part of the Cotswolds AONB.

### Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating landscape underlain by Great Oolite Limestones dissected by narrow, steep valleys.
- Rural and open with a sense of elevation.
- Agricultural landscape, varying in scale from large open arable fields to smaller scale mosaic of arable and pasture
- Limited woodland cover with intermittent copses and shelterbelts within the agricultural land.
- Strong hedgerow structure, but few hedgerow trees. Drystone walls more prominent around settlement.
- Sparsely settled with a pattern of small nucleated villages, isolated farmstead and military barracks.
- Network of rural lanes connect villages and farmsteads.

### Physical Influences

The geology of the *Limestone Wolds* is predominantly oolitic limestone underlain by the succession of Middle Jurassic limestone and mudstones from the Great Oolite group, including the Forest Marble Formation. Generally sloping eastward, the topography gently undulates from around 160m to 120m AOD. The area is also dissected by two steep and narrow tributary valleys, flowing into the By Brook and forming part of the Bristol Avon catchment.

### Biodiversity

The *Limestone Wolds* are predominantly under arable farmland, although some small pastoral fields remain. The fields are divided by a network of thick and tall hedgerow, although these

are deteriorating in places and there are few hedgerow trees. Drystone walls are prominent along some roads and in the vicinity of settlements. Limited, patches of ancient woodland survive to the north of the area. The wider grass verges of the rural lanes are also valuable and support a range of species.

This area includes one SSSI at Little Grubbins Meadow, a herb rich limestone grassland overlying ridge and furrow and recorded as being arable since 1841. Bats are considered to be an important ecological feature associated with this area.

County Wildlife Sites include: Colerne Airfield, an area of limestone grassland at the side of the airfield with a fairly species-rich floral composition including pyramidal and bee orchids, and rich fauna including great crested newts, skylarks, golden plover and a good assemblage of butterflies; and Hanger & Garrick Wood, an ancient semi-natural woodland containing old coppice and supporting a rich diversity of flora and fauna, including ancient woodland indicators such as pendulous sedge, town hall clock and sweet woodruff, as well as abundant lichens and mosses.

### **Historic environment**

Sites of historic interest are limited in the *Limestone Wold*, although there are at least two long barrows, probably of Neolithic origin. The majority of forest was also probably cleared at this time as it became settled. The alignment of the field patterns has been influenced by the Roman road, the Fosse Way. The settlement pattern of sparse scattered farmsteads and small villages is also likely to derive in part from the Roman settlement pattern of villas with extensive farming estates. There are sites of a Roman villa at Truckle Hill and of Roman settlement to the north of West Kingston Wick.

### **Settlement and built character**

Settlement in the *Limestone Wold* landscape type is limited to a handful of small villages, such as the linear Nettleton and more nucleated Upper Wraxhall. There are also several farmsteads. The southwest of the area is dominated by barracks associated with airfield near the large village of Colerne. Building materials are traditionally stone although the newer development associated with the barracks is brick. The settlements are characterised by drystone walls boundaries.

## **CHARACTER AREAS**

### **9A: Cotswold Dip-Slope**

The *Cotswold Dip Slope* forms an area of raised and gently undulating farmland sloping to the east. The area is dissected by two steep and narrow valleys containing tributaries flowing to the By Brook. The farmland is predominantly arable laid out in medium large fields and intermittent smaller pastoral fields. The fields are bounded by hedgerows with drystone walls closer to settlement. These vary in quality through the area with thick species rich hedgerow giving way to gappy hedges and overgrown, fallen down drystone walls. There are few hedgerow trees and woodland is limited to a few small isolated blocks to the north of the area. Settlement is also limited but varied with small traditional villages and scattered farmsteads. The southern section is dominated by the modern development associated with military barracks and the airfield.

## EVALUATION

### Positive landscape features of significance

- Peaceful rural character.
- Areas of ancient woodland.
- Little Grubbins Meadow SSSI plus wide grassy verges of the rural lanes supporting limestone flora.
- The network of hedgerows and drystone walls.
- Historic features including Neolithic long barrows and Roman settlement sites.
- Small, contained villages.

### Forces for change

- The conversion of remaining grassland sites to arable farming.
- The loss or poor management of remaining field boundaries breakdown the structure of the landscape.
- Ad hoc woodland and shelterbelt planting would compromise the otherwise open character of the landscape.
- Pressures for development which would change the character of the small nucleated villages.
- Development of industrial scale buildings on farms and associated with the airfield.

### Condition

The *Limestone Wold* is predominantly an intensively managed arable landscape, with some important areas of ecological and historical interest surviving. However, these are limited and in some areas field boundaries are becoming degraded with gappy hedgerows and overgrown drystone walls. Traditional settlement is generally contained well in nucleated villages. Although, newer development around the military barracks, is visually intrusive. The overall condition of the landscape is perceived to be **moderate**.

### Strength of character

This is a peaceful rural landscape judged to be of **moderate** strength of character with few distinguishing features. It should be noted however, that the *Limestone Wold* forms part of a larger area, the majority of which falls outside the county boundary and the remit of this study. The area within the country forms the south-eastern extremity of the landscape type and perhaps does not display its character to its full potential.

### Inherent landscape sensitivities

- The peaceful, rural open character of the landscape.

- Remaining areas of high ecological value, such as the ancient woodland and herb rich grassland particularly the wide grassy verges that characterise roads.
- The surviving field boundaries, although these are vulnerable - hedgerows becoming gappy and drystone walls overgrown.
- The small contained villages - further development would change their character and they are vulnerable to ribbon development along the rural lanes.

## Strategy

The overall strategy for the *Limestone Wold Landscape Type* is to **conserve** the rural character and the important surviving landscape features such as the remaining ancient woodland and herb rich grassland. It will also be necessary to **improve** those features that are declining or incongruous to the landscape, such as the breakdown of traditional field patterns and large scale development around the airfield.

## Broad Management Objectives

- Retain rural character by limiting further large scale development and urban influences (e.g. signing, kerbing of rural roads).
- Encourage management of the remnant ancient woodland and herb rich grassland and seek opportunities to extend grassland habitats. In particular conserve and manage the wide grassy verges alongside roads which contain an important limestone grassland resource.
- Protect the remaining sites of historic interest and above ground archaeological features.
- Retain and strengthen the traditional field patterns through the improvement of hedgerows and rebuilding of drystone walls, particularly walls along roads and in the vicinity of settlement.
- Seek to minimise the visual and aural impact of the airfield and barracks. Sensitive woodland screen planting maybe an appropriate option in this area.
- Limit new woodland and shelterbelt planting apart from locations where it could improve the setting of incongruous features and does not compromise the open character of the wold.
- Maintain the small scale contained character of settlements.

## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER CONTEXT

The character of the Wiltshire landscape has already been investigated in a number of studies as detailed above in Appendices 1 and 2. The *Limestone Wold Landscape Type* is covered by the existing Landscape Character Assessment and Guidelines for the Cotswolds AONB 2004 (currently in draft form) types '9: High Wold Dip-Slope' and '11: Dip-Slope Lowland'.

The character area *9A: Cotswold Dip-slope* forms part of area '9D Cotswolds High Wold Dip-Slope' and '11A: South and Mid Cotswold Lowlands' in the Cotswold Assessment.