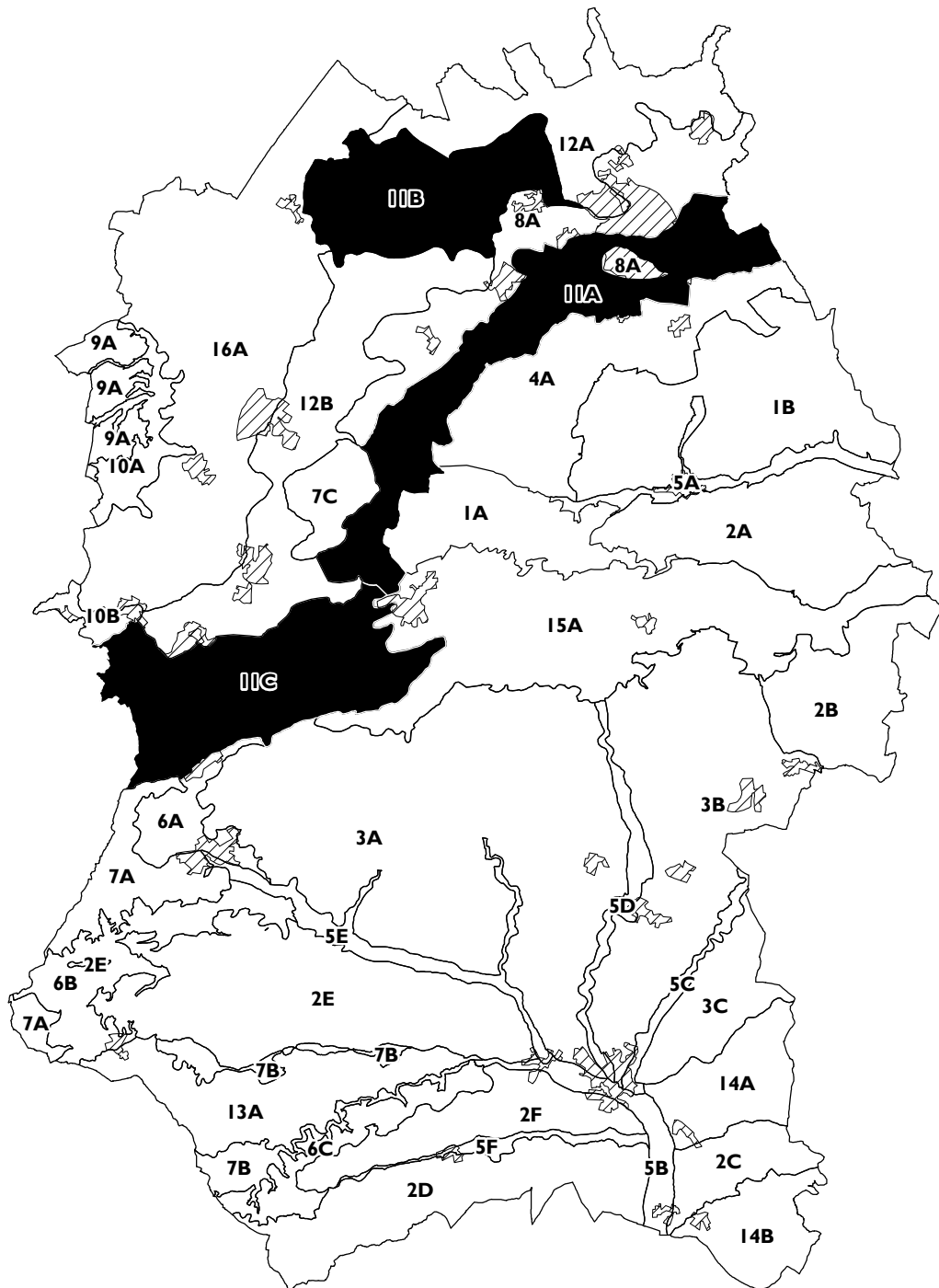


LANDSCAPE TYPE II: ROLLING CLAY LOWLAND



11: ROLLING CLAY LOWLAND



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

- IIA: Calne Rolling Clay Lowland**
- IIB: Minety Rolling Clay Lowland**
- IIC: Trowbridge Rolling Clay Lowland**
-  **Urban Area**

TYPE II: ROLLING CLAY LOWLAND

DESCRIPTION

Location and boundaries

The *Rolling Clay Lowland* Landscape Type is a group of low lying areas founded on Clay and situated broadly to the north west of the county. There are three areas in the type: *IIA: Swindon-Calne Rolling Clay Lowland* sited centrally in the northern half of the county; *II B: Minety Rolling Clay Lowland* further to the north; and *II C: Trowbridge Rolling Clay Lowland* to the west.

Boundaries are defined by changes in topography, geology and land cover, for instance Area *IIA: Swindon Calne Rolling Clay Lowland* is largely bounded by the more elevated areas to west and east and boundaries follow contours at the base of the slopes. Other boundaries are less clearly defined as for the boundary between Area *II B: Minety Rolling Clay Lowland* and Area *II 6A: Malmesbury-Corsham Limestone Lowlands* where the boundaries are along roads that broadly follow the change in geology and land cover to the more wooded landscape of the *Limestone Lowlands*.

Key characteristics

- Gently rolling lowland based on Clay.
- Mixed arable and pastoral land use with pasture concentrated around the water courses.
- Variable field pattern with network of full hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees.
- Presence of streams marked by lines of willows and crossed by modest bridges.
- Woodland blocks including some ancient woodland and wet woodland of high ecological value plus scattered mature trees.
- Small number of meadows of neutral and unimproved grassland.
- Scattered settlement of towns, small villages and farmsteads, many using vernacular materials of brick, half timber, stone, tiles and thatch.
- Roads largely minor and rural with a few trunk roads and sections of motorway.
- Views vary from semi-enclosed by intact hedgerows, riparian vegetation and woodland blocks to more open with views to the rising scarps of the chalk uplands.
- A largely peaceful, rural landscape.

Physical influences

The *Rolling Clay Lowland* Landscape Type is a gently undulating landscape with areas *IIA: Swindon Calne Rolling Clay Lowland* and *II B: Minety Rolling Clay Lowland* varying from 70 to 130m AOD and area *II C: Trowbridge Rolling Clay Lowland* ranging from 50 to 80m AOD. The type is largely founded on Clay of the Jurassic period with Oxford Clay underlying area *II B*

and Ampthill Clay and Kimmeridge Clay under *IIA* and the eastern section of *II B*. To the west of *II B: Minety Rolling Clay Lowland* there are Corallian and Cornbrash limestones. The underlying clay geology and the many small watercourses give rise to seasonally wet soils of deep clay and loam to clayey soil over shale.

Biodiversity

The *Rolling Clay Lowland* Landscape Type is dominated by a mix of intensively farmed arable and pasture. The landscape is a valuable habitat for bats. The chief elements of biodiversity interest are the woods scattered at varying degrees of density across the agricultural land. The largest blocks and highest density of coverage occurs in area *II B: Minety Rolling Clay Lowland* signifying the remains of the Royal Hunting Forest of Braydon. Here there are a number of ancient and semi-natural woodlands including the largest semi-natural remnant of the Forest, Ravensroost Wood SSSI, a botanically rich wet ash-wych elm and wet ash-maple woodland with a coppice with standards structure that is a legacy of many years of consistent management. Another example of ancient woodland is Picket and Clanger Wood SSSI in *II C*. Here despite extensive conifer planting and lack of maintenance of the coppice, there is a rich semi-natural vegetation of broadleaved woodland of pedunculate oak, ash and hornbeam.

Green Lane and Biss Wood in *Trowbridge Clay Vale* is of international importance for bats particularly Bechsteins (maternity roosts) and also Barbestelle and Horseshoe bats.

Amongst the pattern of arable and pasture there are some isolated areas of traditionally managed hay meadow such as Cloatley Manor Farm SSSI, Goldborough Farm SSSI and Emmett Hill Meadows SSSI.

County Wildlife Sites include: Clyffe Pypard Wood, an ancient semi-natural woodland with some active coppice; Morningside Farm Meadows, unimproved/semi-improved neutral meadows with good species diversity including great burnet and pepper saxifrage; and Somerfield Common Wood, a large wood with remnant semi-natural broadleaved woodland and unimproved neutral grassland glades - this site has a rich butterfly assemblage, which includes brown hairstreak, marsh fritillary and grizzled skipper.

Historic environment

The lowland Clay areas of Wiltshire contrast with the Chalk landscapes in their much later settlement and clearance. In the Saxon period the locations of later towns like Calne began to emerge as centres of population while the pattern of villages derives from the more populous medieval times. The presence of Braydon Forest, a Royal Hunting Forest has influenced the landscape of area *II B: Minety Rolling Clay Lowland* where there are still substantial blocks of semi-natural woodland.

Much of the traditional field pattern has been replaced by large open fields of arable or improved pasture for intensive farming methods, however substantial area of smaller, more sinuous fields survive particularly in Area *II C: Trowbridge Rolling Clay Lowland*.

Surviving traces of medieval ridge and furrow have often been enclosed by hedgerows in the 18th or 19th centuries forming a valuable two phased landscape.

Settlement and built character

Settlement within the *Rolling Clay Lowland* generally follows a pattern of sparsely scattered small nucleated villages with farmsteads. There are a few towns; Calne, Westbury and the larger settlements of Trowbridge and Swindon.

Brick built buildings reflect the widespread use of the local clay, with red tiled roofs also common. There are some older stone dwellings with stone slated roofs reflecting the influence of the Limestone areas to the west. Views to the large scale industrial buildings on the outskirts of Trowbridge and Swindon and noise and light pollution from urban centres and transport corridors detract from the rural, tranquil feel of the adjacent areas.

CHARACTER AREAS

I IA: Swindon-Calne Rolling Clay Lowland

The *Swindon-Calne Rolling Clay Lowland* is a long, narrow gently undulating area sandwiched between the uplands of 4A: *Avebury Plain* and 8A: *Swindon-Lyneham Limestone Ridge*. Views to the surrounding hills and chalk scarp emphasise the comparatively level and open character of the area. The *Swindon-Calne Rolling Clay Lowland* is a mix of arable and pasture with the former more prominent to the north above Swindon. The arable fields tend to be large scale and rectangular with a mix of medium sized irregular fields and small regular strips to the south. Fields are bounded by hedgerows although these have been replaced by fences in some areas and hedgerow trees are sparse. The hedges, scattered small woodland blocks (some ancient) and riparian vegetation particularly willows, give a more enclosed and rural feel to the landscape in some sections. There are also remnant areas of hay meadow of high ecological value such as Goldburgh Farm SSSI. Around Swindon large scale buildings on the outskirts dominate immediate views but the area to the north which is very sparsely settled retains a rural remote feel. To the south views of the modern built edges of Calne influence the surrounding landscape, although this is mitigated to some extent by woodland cover. Elsewhere there is little settlement and rural roads criss cross the area giving access to the uplands to east and west.

I IB: Minety Rolling Clay Lowland

The *Minety Rolling Clay Lowland* lies to the north of the county largely surrounded by other low lying land including areas of *Open Clay Vale* to north and south. The *Minety Rolling Clay Lowland* is more wooded and sparsely settled than the others in the type, showing the strong influence of its historic land use as part of the Royal Hunting Forest of Braydon. Substantial blocks of woodland dominate the central part of the area, including some where traditional maintenance methods are still in place as at Ravensroost Wood SSSI and a remnant of wood pasture at Somerford Common. Fields are medium to large, mainly pastoral with a strong hedgerow network in good condition with many mature oak hedgerow trees. The central area is crossed by straight minor roads with sparse dwellings scattered along them and at crossroads. To east and west the pattern is more like the rest of the type with small nucleated villages such as Cloatley, Minety and Charlton with its historic parkland, linked by winding roads. Buildings tend to be of stone at the west of the area such as at Charlton, with brick and render more frequent to the east reflecting the change from Limestone to Clay geology.

I IC: Trowbridge Rolling Clay Lowland

Area I IC: *Trowbridge Rolling Clay Lowland* lies at the mid point of the east of the county with the Chalk uplands of *Salisbury Plain West* to the south and the *Avon Open Clay Vale* to the north. *Trowbridge Rolling Clay Lowland* is a gently undulating, largely rural area of mixed arable and pasture land. Medium to large rectangular fields are bounded by thick hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees. Combined with scattered woodland blocks (some ancient) and rich riparian vegetation along the stream lines the hedgerows make this a semi-enclosed landscape allowing intermittent views to the steep scarps of the Chalk uplands. Settlement is sparse to the east of the area with scattered nucleated and linear villages and farmsteads. Building materials are red brick and tiles to the east and stone for the older buildings to the west, with some more brick and modern stone in more recent developments. To the west there is more settlement including the southern part of Trowbridge with some large scale industrial buildings and modern housing estates tending to extend along roads south towards North Bradley, Southwick and Westbury. This western section of the area, which also contains the A350 trunk road and a concentration of railway lines, is considerably less rural and tranquil than the east of the area.

EVALUATION

Positive landscape features of significance

- Largely rural, tranquil landscape.
- Strong pattern of hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees.
- Many streams with rich riparian vegetation.
- Woodland blocks of high ecological value.
- Small scattered villages of traditional pattern and vernacular materials.
- Views to Chalk scarps and Limestone ridge.

Forces for change

- Agricultural intensification and introduction of arable rotation threatens the remaining medieval field patterns and traditional pastoral landscape.
- Hedgerow trees are generally mature with few new trees to replace them.
- Elm loss of 1970s.
- Need for sustainable woodland management including traditional maintenance techniques where appropriate to maintain ancient woodlands and particularly areas of coppice and wood pasture.

- Pressure for further expansion of settlement and new development threatening the character of the small villages and scattered farmsteads.
- Pressure to build new roads and upgrade existing roads through additional kerbing and signage to accommodate an increase in traffic volume.

Condition

The condition of the *Rolling Clay Lowland* is generally judged as **good**. These are areas of mixed pastoral and arable farmland with intact hedgerows, some woodlands and hay meadows of high ecological value and villages of vernacular materials. There are a few elements in poorer condition such as hedgerow trees that are over-mature with few replacement young trees.

Strength of character

The *Rolling Clay Lowland* is in places a peaceful rural landscape with intact hedgerows, woodland blocks and small villages and scattered farmsteads of vernacular materials. However the varied land use of mixed arable and pastoral farming, the coniferous planting which has affected the character of the historic woodlands and the influence of prominent urban edges and transport corridors including noise and light pollution make the strength of character of the type **moderate** overall.

Inherent landscape sensitivities

- Rural tranquillity.
- Hedgerow pattern.
- Watercourses and streamside willows and other riparian vegetation.
- Isolated remnant hay meadows.
- Woodlands of ecological value.
- Views to the scarp slopes of the adjacent chalk downlands.
- Settlement pattern of nucleated villages with variety of vernacular building materials.

STRATEGY

The strategy for the *Rolling Clay Lowland* is to **conserve** the peaceful rural landscape with its hedgerow network, rich riparian vegetation, remnant meadows, ancient woodlands and pattern of small villages and scattered farmsteads and to **strengthen** its character through measures to minimise the urbanising influence of large towns, new settlement and transport routes and to improve the woodlands and farmlands by encouraging management to retain or enhance their biodiversity and historic character.

Broad management objectives

- Retain and manage the dense hedgerow network and nurture new hedgerow trees.
- Promote appropriate management of arable land including retaining areas of fallow land and maintaining an unploughed margin around fields to encourage wildlife, particularly farmland birds.
- Retain and manage hay meadows.
- Introduce new tree planting along watercourses using typical riparian species such as alder and willow.
- Encourage sustainable woodland management of the varied woodlands using traditional techniques such as coppicing where appropriate to maintain the special historic character and ecological interest.
- Encourage new woodland edge planting of native deciduous broadleaved to reduce the visual and ecological impact of the coniferous plantations.
- Enhance woodland, cattle and horse pasture habitats for bats.
- 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.
- Ensure that landscape is at the foundation of decisions about the growth of settlements (e.g. Swindon and Calne) and that landscape is used to provide a strong framework within which changes can happen in a sustainable way.
- Consider strengthening the enclosed character of the landscape and screening views to intrusive urban edges through nurturing existing and planting new woodland.
- 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. A large proportion of the *Rolling Clay Lowland* Landscape Type is included in the North Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment (2004) where it is largely classified under the Lowland Clay Farmland Landscape Type. *11A: Swindon-Calne Rolling Clay Lowland* covers much the same area as the Hillmarton Rolling Lowland; while *11B: Minety Rolling Clay Lowland* includes parts of Braydon Wooded Plateau, Minety and Malmesbury Rolling Lowland and Thames Valley Lowland.

The Kennet District Landscape Character Assessment includes a small sector of Character area *11C: Trowbridge Rolling Clay Lowland* in its Bristol Avon Clay Vale character area but the rest of *11C* is outside Kennet and is not covered by any existing assessment.