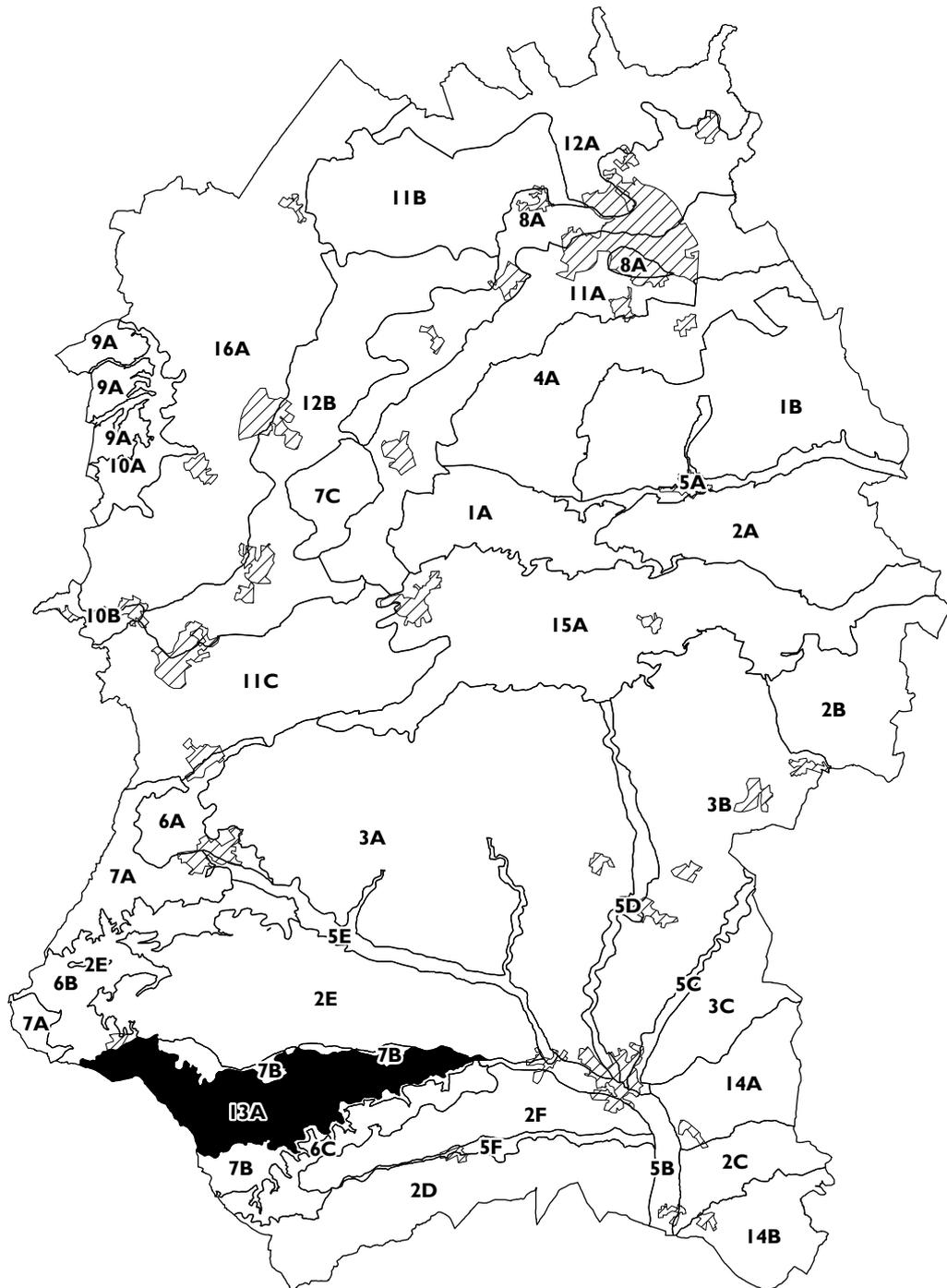


LANDSCAPE TYPE 13: WOODED CLAY VALE



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

13A The Vale of Wardour

 **Urban Area**

TYPE 13: WOODED CLAY VALE

DESCRIPTION

Location and Boundaries

The *Wooded Clay Vale* Landscape Type contains a single character area, *13A: the Vale of Wardour*, located towards the south of the county. Its boundaries to the north and south are almost entirely defined by the character area *Donhead-Fovant Hills (7B)* and to the east by the county boundary. Boundaries follow the break of slope at the base of the *Donhead-Fovant Hills*. The *Vale of Wardour* lies largely within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB.

Key Characteristics

- Gently rolling vale with varied underlying geology of Clay, Gault, Portland and Purbeck Stone.
- Mixed pastoral and arable landscape of small scale fields divided by hedgerows and scattered with woods and copses.
- Layout of fields, farms and villages illustrate the pattern of medieval settlement, clearance and farming.
- Rivers and their tributaries meander through the vale.
- Intimate wooded landscape with a sense of enclosure provided by the surrounding upland landscapes.
- A mixed agricultural landscape of lush improved pastures and arable production with water meadows on the valley floor.
- Wooded character with broad leaf and mixed woodland (some of ancient origin) scattered across the vale.
- A settled landscape with small villages dispersed over the floor of the vale.
- Visible historic components displaying evidence for past settlement and agriculture.

Physical Influences

The Vale of Wardour exhibits a number of different geological exposures consisting of Kimmeridge Clay with drifts of flints and older head deposits to the west, Portland Stone in the central area, and Purbeck Stone to the east. Drift geology of the Quaternary era (Alluvium, River Terrace and Head deposits) occur within and adjacent to the floodplain. The soils in the vale vary according to the underlying geology with typical Stagnogley soils to west and south, Brown Rendzinas centrally and Pelo-alluvial Gley soils in the flood plain of the River Nadder.

Biodiversity

Although the *Vale of Wardour* is dominated by arable and pastoral land uses, the area has retained a reasonable woodland cover, including some ancient woodlands such as those to north of Upper and Lower Chicks Grove and to the south of Fonthill Ridge. Areas of woodland vary in size through the area with larger swathes at the base of the adjacent *Greensand Hills* connecting the two landscapes types.

Part of the River Nadder, which falls under the River Avon System (SAC) is of significant ecological and nature conservation interest and supports a wide range of aquatic flora and fauna.

The area has many sites which are of high scientific interest for geological rather than biological reasons, mainly for their rich fossil beds. These important geological sites include Dinton Quarry (SSSI), Dinton Railway Cutting (SSSI), Lady Down Quarry (SSSI), Teffont Evias Quarry / Lane Cutting (SSSI) and Upper Chicks Grove Quarry (SSSI).

A further distinctive feature of this character area is the presence of caves and man-made follies, such as Chilmark Quarries (SAC) and Fonthill Grottoes (SSSI) which, as part of the SAC, support internationally important numbers of roosting bats.

County Wildlife Sites include: Fonthill Terrace Woods, ancient woodlands on shallow-steep slopes, with notable species including white helleborine and bird's nest orchid; Wardour Wood, which has remnant ancient semi-natural woodland areas particularly in the wetter areas along the valley floors along with a shallow lake, with species of interest including wood sorrel, greater stitchwort and lesser pond sedge; and Semley Common, a large area of several ponds, wide verges and open fields of unimproved/semi-improved neutral grassland running alongside the roads near Semley - floral species present include meadow foxtail, cuckoo-flower and soft rush, with fauna including snipe and water vole.

Historic environment

The vale landscape contrasts markedly with the chalk downland to the north, displaying little evidence now of any prehistoric settlement. The layout of fields, farms and villages illustrate the pattern of medieval settlement, clearance and farming, and the post-medieval process of agricultural improvement and estate development. The key visible historic components are the small irregular fields, particularly in the west, suggesting early assart of woodland and enclosure, the water meadows in the lower reaches of the vale; the Medieval settlement pattern and deserted medieval villages, as at South Ugford and Wyck; and the large country houses with extensive estates, including some landscaped parkland such as Dinton Park and Fonthill.

Settlement and built character

This is a settled area, including the town of Tisbury and a number of hamlets and villages such as Semley, and Upper and Lower Chicks Grove. A dense network of lanes links the many farms which are found within the valley and there are few major roads.

Settlements are largely of a nucleated form and generally located on the sheltered valleys sides of the tributary rivers close to the water, for example Teffont and Fovant, with many centred around a pond or village green such as Semley. Traditional stone cottages are

common, with clay roof tiles characterising the varied pitches and rooflines. Stone walls mark the approach and form attractive entrances to many settlements. The largest settlement – Tisbury - is a mix of old and new development displaying a range of materials but with red brick and stone predominating. Some modern small scale housing estate developments on the edge of the town are less sympathetic to the traditional built form and character and this type of development can also be seen at Dinton.

EVALUATION

Positive landscape features of significance

- Gently rolling vale with enclosing views to wooded hills.
- Small and medium scale fields enclosed by hedgerows with hedgerow trees.
- Variety of woodlands including ancient woods, plus scattered trees.
- Ecologically rich river courses edged with alder and willow.
- Winding lanes linking farms and villages with modest bridges over the rivers and tributaries.
- Settlements predominantly built of stone and tile.
- Previous quarrying activities have disturbed the landform, but created areas of biological and geological interest.

Forces for change

- Loss of hedgerows due to field enlargement or lack of management.
- Scattered trees becoming over mature and stag headed.
- Change of character along rural lanes due to road engineering, particularly concrete kerbing.
- Traditional black and white wooden signposts at cross roads and junctions are falling into decline.
- Present day quarrying activities introduce issues related to future restoration of land.
- Pressures for new residential development that is unsympathetic to traditional character and form of settlements.

Condition

The condition of the landscape is judged to be **moderate**. A number of hedgerows have been lost with some being replaced by post and wire fencing while maintenance of the surviving hedgerows varies greatly. Boundaries are therefore varied and discontinuous reducing the sense of intactness across the vale. There are also a number of over mature and stag headed trees. The natural landform has been influenced by humans through

previous and present day quarrying activities although many of the redundant quarries are now important scientific sites of biological and geological interest.

Strength of character

The rolling landform of the *Wooded Clay Vale* combined with the mixed agricultural land use creates a varied landscape. This is unified by key features which are consistent throughout the vale – the presence of woodland and scattered trees, the settlement pattern and use of stone as a building material. So that, despite some loss of distinctiveness due to new development on the edge of settlements, the type retains a **strong** character.

Inherent landscape sensitivities

- Pattern of small to medium scale fields.
- Hedgerows with hedgerow trees.
- Variety of woodlands including ancient woods plus scattered trees.
- Water courses of high ecological value edged with alder and willow.
- Rural lanes linking farms and villages with characteristic signage and modest bridges.
- Settlements in historic pattern of farmsteads and scattered nucleated villages with traditional building materials of stone and tile.

Strategy

The overall strategy for Wooded Clay Vale Landscape Type is to **conserve** the pastoral, wooded character of the vale, its diversity of habitats, scattered trees, consistent settlement pattern and traditional building materials while **restoring** elements of the landscape that are in decline. Key features to restore are the hedgerows, hedgerow trees and characteristic rural signage.

Broad Management Objectives

- Replant hedgerow sections where gappy and discontinuous and apply consistent cutting and management regimes.
- Plant a new generation of standard trees to replace over mature/dying stock.
- Restore or replace traditional black and white signs, in the same style, where weathered and falling into decline.
- Conserve the ancient pattern of small irregular fields and narrow lanes interspersed with irregular remnants of woodland.
- Employ appropriate restoration schemes for quarries when excavation ceases.
- Monitor road engineering to safeguard the rural character of the lanes.

- 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 *Wooded Clay Vale Landscape Type* is sited largely within the Cranborne Chase AONB and covers the same area as Type 8: Rolling Clay Vales in the Cranborne Chase AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2003). Boundaries are identical apart from the far north west of the type which extends outside the AONB boundary towards Mere and the change in geology at the boundary with *Type 6: Greensand Terrace*.