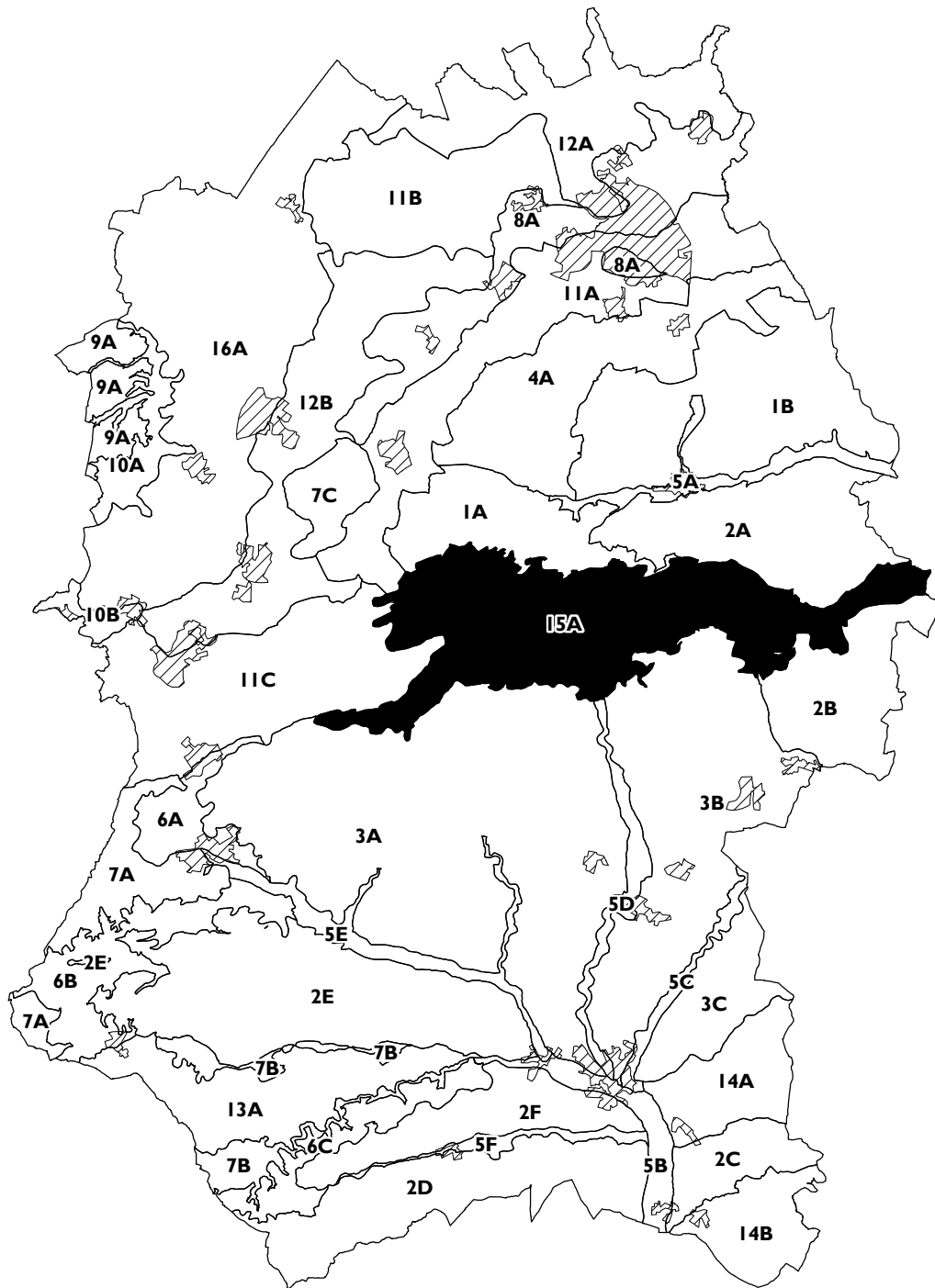


# LANDSCAPE TYPE 15: GREENSAND VALE

---



# I5: GREENSAND VALE



## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

15A Vale of Pewsey

 Urban Area

# TYPE 15: GREENSAND VALE

---

## DESCRIPTION

### Location and boundaries

The *Greensand Vale* Landscape Type consists of a single character area *15A: The Vale of Pewsey* which runs east west across the central section of the east of the county separating the two blocks of chalk downland, Salisbury Plain to the south (character areas *3A* and *3B*) and *1B: Marlborough Downs* and *2A: Savernake Plateau* to the north. The *Greensand Vale* is a lowland landscape at generally less than 130m AOD and the boundaries of the type follow contours along the foothills at the base of the steep scarps that rise to north and south. The western edge is defined by contours along the slope marking the transition from Greensand to Gault clay underlying *Landscape Type 11: Rolling Clay Vale* to the west. *The Vale of Pewsey* lies largely within the North Wessex Downs AONB apart from the far west of the area round Devizes.

### Key characteristics

- Underlain by Upper Greensand with a series of low undulating foothills of Lower Chalk flanking the vale sides.
- Broad, low lying, level vale, becoming gently undulating as it narrows to the east.
- Contained and enclosed by the dramatic escarpments of chalk upland to either side.
- Varied land cover with pasture along tributaries and arable in medium to large fields enclosed by hedgerows.
- Chalk foothills in arable land use with very open large scale fields.
- Weak hedgerow structure with few hedgerow trees and boundaries replaced by fencing.
- Threaded by numerous minor streams draining to the headwaters of the River Avon, lined by riparian vegetation with strips of alder and willow and some important wetland habitats - meadow, marsh and wet woodland.
- A settled landscape with compact small towns, clustered villages, hamlets and many dispersed residential and farm buildings.
- Built form includes soft red brick and flint, often used in decorative styles, limestone, sarsen, cob and timber frame, with roofs of thatch or clay tile.

### Physical influences

The flat base of the vale is formed on Upper Greensand with small areas of Gault Clay at the western edge. On the flanks of the vale the landform rises as a series of low undulating foothills of Lower Chalk. These gradually grade down to the level floor of the central part of the Vale although isolated outliers of the Lower Chalk form distinctive 'stranded' hills. At the junction of the porous chalk and impermeable greensand numerous springs issue which

collect within the vale forming minor streams draining to the headwaters of the Salisbury Avon. These waterways have deposited bands of alluvium, producing rich soils in the mid part of the vale, with the remainder of the floor covered by deep well drained loamy soils. To the far east in the narrower section of the vale toward Shalborne there are lighter sandy soils and the streams run northwards to the River Kennet rather than to the Avon.

## **Biodiversity**

The *Vale of Pewsey* is predominantly an intensively farmed agricultural landscape within which there are a variety of habitat types including wetlands, grasslands, woodland (particularly along streams) and heathland. The most significant of these is the wetlands. The upper part of the River Avon (SSSI) and its tributaries where they thread through the vale represent a classic chalk river. Another SSSI, Jone's Mill, provides a good example of a calcareous valley mire supporting a number of rare wetland species.

County Wildlife Sites include: Wilsford Meadows and Swamp, a grazed meadow with wetland species such as lesser celandine and water avens, and an area of swamp-type vegetation, including species such as water mint, lesser pond sedge and water figwort; and Wilcot Withered Bed, an area of wet woodland alongside a canal with abundant wood sedge present.

## **Historic environment**

The intensive land use within the vale means that archaeological evidence is limited compared to the nearby chalk uplands. A few bronze age barrows are evident on ridges and hilltops such as Swanborough Tump. Sustained settlement began in the Romano-British period, with expansion in Saxon time including the establishment of the central vale villages such as Pewsey itself.

This well watered pasture land has long been associated with dairy farming, with arable and sheep farming historically played a comparatively minor role. The vale was enclosed into small farms in pre-medieval or medieval times or by piecemeal arrangements between tenants during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However large scale straight sided fields, typically formed as a result of the Parliamentary Enclosure Acts of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, now dominate the vale landscape. The nineteenth century saw the completion of the Kennet and Avon Canal and the construction of the railway line both exploiting the vale as a east west communication route.

## **Settlement and built character**

The concentration of settlement is one of the defining features of the vale landscape. This includes compact nucleated villages (such as Pewsey), hamlets and widespread scattered farmsteads. Many of the villages are located along the southern fringes of the vale, spring line settlements nestling at the foot of the Salisbury Plain escarpment, such as Urchfont and the Cheverells. A number of small hamlets developed along the canal such as Honeystreet. Buildings are constructed out of a variety of materials and styles, with many of red brick and flint, sometimes with stone trim and with thatch or clay tile roofs. Other materials include limestone, sarsen, cob and timber frame. Some modern developments particularly at the edges of the villages, small towns and the larger town of Devizes are unsympathetic in character to the historic settlements.

## EVALUATION

### Positive landscape features of significance

- Views to dramatic scarp slopes of the Chalk downs.
- Network of minor waterways with waterside pastures and riparian woodlands add variety and biodiversity value.
- The Salisbury Avon, an ecologically important chalk river.
- Continuity in settlement pattern of numerous nucleated villages and scattered farmsteads dating from Saxon and medieval times.
- Variety of locally produced building materials such as brick, flint and stone, often combined to decorative effect.
- The Kennet and Avon Canal with its traditional structures including bridges and locks.

### Forces for change

- Intensive arable farming leading to loss of biodiversity by drainage and cultivation of permanent pasture, widespread loss of riparian vegetation plus nutrient run off to chalk rivers.
- Potential changes in farming leading to less livestock grazing and consequent scrub encroachment or management as horse paddocks.
- Loss of hedgerow boundaries and mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows.
- Elm loss of the 1970s.
- Localised intrusion of roads, overhead power lines and pylons all of which are highly visible in the flat low lying landscape.
- Increased traffic on the rural lane leading to road engineering such as kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, in places, creates a more urban landscape.
- Intense development pressures, particularly for new housing which impacts on the character of the villages and their edges so that settlements are less assimilated into the landscape.

### Condition

The condition of the *Greensand Vale Landscape Type* is judged to be **moderate**. This is largely due to the loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, which has reduced the unity and biodiversity of the landscape, along with the loss of riparian vegetation lining waterways and some urbanisation of rural roads. The numerous traditional settlements are in good condition but some modern development at their edges tends to erode their historic pattern and character.

## Strength of character

The *Greensand Vale Landscape Type* is **moderate** in strength of character. The vale is highly settled yet still agrarian in character however the effects of intensive arable farming in reducing the variety and richness of the area's vegetation particularly wet woodland and permanent pasture and the loss of hedgerows have weakened its rural character. This has also been affected by urbanisation of lanes through introducing kerbs and signage, the visual influence of pylons and power lines and of unsympathetic modern development on the edges of settlements.

## Inherent landscape sensitivities

- Remnant pastures and meadows along the vale floor.
- Views across the open vale landscape to the scarp slopes of the adjacent chalk downlands.
- Waterways and wetlands of high ecological value.
- Settlement pattern of nucleated villages with variety of vernacular building materials.

## STRATEGY

The overall strategy for the *Greensand Vale Landscape Type* is to **conserve** and **improve** the rural, agricultural character of the vale, maintaining the pattern of discrete small villages set within a quiet rural landscape. This includes the pattern of hedgerows, streams, and remnant waterside pastures, wet meadows and woodlands and historic features such as parkland and the traditional structures associated with the Kennet and Avon canal corridor. There are opportunities for creation of new riparian woodlands, hedgerow planting and restoration of waterside pasture. The clear skylines and backdrop of the surrounding slope should be maintained.

## Broad management objectives

- Retain and manage areas of permanent pasture, wet grassland and meadows within the vale floor.
- Introduce new tree planting along watercourses using typical riparian species such as alder and willow.
- Encourage repair, replanting and extension of the hedgerow network, improved maintenance of the existing hedgerows
- Restore hedgerow treescape by nurturing new hedgerow trees.
- Restore and maintain traditional features of the Kennet and Avon canal landscape such as locks, bridges and other structures and retain tranquil quality of the canal corridor.
- 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 *Greensand Vale Landscape Type* has been assessed in the Kennet District Landscape Character Assessment (1998) and the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

The boundaries for the type (and single character area) are largely the same as those defined for the Vale of Pewsey Character Area in the Kennet study.

In the North Wessex Downs the area is covered by two separate areas both of the Vales Landscape Type; 6A: the Vale of Pewsey and 6B: Shalbourne Vale but the section of the area around Devizes is not in the AONB so is not assessed in the study.