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VOLUME 2

Natural Environment and Landscape Policy Recommendations

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1 Introduction

The Study Area

1.1 This study describes the landscape character of North Wiltshire. The district covers 674 square kilometres and is located to the west of Swindon, sitting astride the M4. It is a diverse, though essentially gentle, landscape dominated by rivers and influenced on the fringes by hills. The River Avon runs in a gentle valley north to south through the centre of the area while the River Thames passes through the north east corner. To the south east the dramatic topography of chalk scarp of the North Wessex Downs with distinctive White Horses dominate the landscape. To the west, the dipslope and wooded valleys of the Cotswolds provide further variety. Both these areas are designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The main settlements of the area are Chippenham, Calne, Wootton Bassett and Malmesbury. Other smaller nucleated settlements are spread throughout what is a settled lowland landscape.

Background and Context

1.2 North Wiltshire District Council, commissioned White Consultants on the 11th February 2004 to prepare a landscape assessment and strategy for the district. The assessment is intended to inform and support policies in the Local Plan 2011. It may form supplementary planning guidance or subsequently become a supplementary planning document relating to the Local Development Framework. The aim of the study is to ascertain a clear understanding of the landscape resource and set out management guidelines which will contribute to the environmental enhancement of the district.

Approach and Methodology

1.3 The assessment has been carried out in line with the latest guidance from the Countryside Agency 'Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland' published in 2002.

1.4 In undertaking the landscape assessment, the process has been as follows:

- Field Survey using agreed field study forms, 1:25,000 mapping and photography. Each character area was assessed from three defined viewpoints to define the intrinsic character and accurately refine boundaries.
- Refined landscape types and character areas mapped and digitised. Descriptions, management guidelines and landscape sensitivity assessment undertaken for each of the character areas.
- National and local planning framework studied and designations reviewed, to identify policies which will contribute to the Local Plan and link into the overall landscape assessment.

1.5 The landscape sensitivity assessment has been carried out primarily in relation to ability of a landscape to absorb new development such as housing.

Report Structure

1.6 The report is divided into two volumes. The first for the landscape assessment and management guidelines and the second for policy recommendations.

1.7 The first section summarises the main characteristics of the North Wiltshire landscape in a landscape overview. The second section addresses each character area in turn, firstly providing a general overview, then main characteristics, management guidelines and landscape sensitivity.



Liddington Scarp

2 Overview of North Wiltshire's landscape

Physical Influences

2.1 Much of the landscape character of North Wiltshire is dominated by underlying geology of the middle to late Jurassic period, with elements of rock from the later Cretaceous period. The age of the rock bed moves roughly from the older Middle Jurassic to the west through the Upper Jurassic to the Lower and Upper Cretaceous in the south east .

2.2 In the west of the district the landscape is underlain by limestone, more specifically the 'Great Oolite Series'. This forms the eastern edge of the Cotswolds. Forest Marble limestone dips south east, gradually giving way to Cornbrash limestone which yields well drained soil for corn production. The deeply eroded and incised valleys to the south, By Brook and its tributaries, expose the underlying Fullers Earth and pockets of Lower Jurassic Sands are revealed.

2.3 The limestone gives way to the undulating landscape of Kellway clay and the higher strata of the Oxford Clays towards the east. The dominance of the underlying Upper Jurassic geology is disrupted by alluvium deposits and river terraces of the Avon and Thames and their major tributaries. The Thames crosses the northern fringes of the district from west to east and the Avon runs north to south both cutting through the underlying clay. Within the Kellway Beds are pockets of Kellway Sand, providing free draining ground in this heavy clay landscape.

2.4 To the east of the Avon Valley, the landscape rises in a significant scarp slope, where thin beds from the Corallian Series of the Upper Jurassic period are present. The higher ground is dominated by Coral Rag[stone] which in places gives way to the more fertile lower Calcareous Grits.

2.5 Further east, the Corallian series gives way to an undulating landscape as the underlying fine mudstone of Kimmeridge Clay becomes dominant. The presence of this clay follows low lying ground below the Cretaceous chalk scarp, rising in the south east of the district.

2.6 The south east corner of North Wiltshire is exclusively Cretaceous. These include the Lower Greensands of the Lower Cretaceous period (a thin bed in which siliceous iron-rich sands and sandstones prevail) which area evident at the base of the Cretaceous Scarp. Gault Clay forms the next layer and Chalks overlie this forming the more resistant layer which forms the higher ground of plains and downs. Lower Middle and Upper Chalk are both present. This Cretaceous landscape forms part of the extensive Wessex Downs, which extends both to the south and east.

2.7 The geology is shown on Figure 1 and topography and drainage is shown on Figure 2.

Human Influence

2.8 Archaeological evidence throughout the district signifies human interventions in the landscape since Neolithic times. Discoveries from this era are chiefly focused in the south east on the upper chalk, although marks and earthworks are present through much of the rest of the area. Remains of long and round barrows are widespread throughout the area, and Iron Age hill forts can be found above Box, on the chalk downs to the south east and at Malmesbury.

2.9 There is significant evidence from the Romano-British era, the most apparent being the network of Roman Roads forming a triangle around the fringe of the district, often acting as the district boundary. Ermin Way runs south east to north west on the north eastern edge of the district as it heads to Cirencester. The Fosse Way, runs south west to north east across the western fringes and Sandy Lane runs east to west along the southern boundary. The presence of this communication network and the areas close proximity to Bath and Cirencester encouraged the development of related settlements. There have been numerous finds across the whole of the district, with the exception of the Braydon Wood area.

2.10 A number of settlements present today relate to the Saxon era. These include Cricklade, Wootton Bassett and Chippenham, the latter being an administration centre. Corsham in the south east of the district was a royal seat, and royal possession was retained into Norman times.

2.11 The area denoted as Braydon Wood was recorded in the Domesday survey of 1086 as Royal Forest. It retains part of its ancient woodland cover as remnants from the more extensive woodland of the Roman era. Elsewhere across the district, significant areas of ancient woodland have been retained around Bowood, part of the previously extensive Chippenham Wood and in the valleys above Box.

2.12 The existence of a more extensive Medieval settlement pattern in rural areas than at present points to a significant reduction in the population due to the Black Death and subsequent changes to less labour intensive agricultural practices.

2.13 Much of the area developed through the cloth industry, a strong cottage industry developing across the area. Poor transport connections meant the area was late turning to the factory system. The extension of the Wiltshire and Berkshire canal and later the construction of the GWR London to Bristol line allowed the area to develop.

Settlement

2.14 The district is predominantly a rural area, with small, scattered settlements throughout. The settlement pattern to the south, with the larger settlements of Chippenham, Calne and Corsham lying on the A4 is generally more intense than that of the north where large tracts of land especially

around Braydon are sparsely populated. Swindon is a significant urban presence on north east boundary of the District, lying on the M4, close to its outlier, Wootton Bassett. The area close to the town is subject to urban fringe pressures. Cricklade is located on the edge of the Thames valley, close to the Ermin Way while the historic town of Malmesbury is isolated in the north west corner of the area a little distance from the Fosse Way. Much of the district is serviced only by minor road system.

2.15 The main lines of modern communication are east west, leading to London. These include the M4, A4 and London to Bristol railway lines which diverge at Wootton Bassett and the Cheltenham line running from Swindon.

2.16 Across the area there is a significant presence of military installations, both active and redundant. These take the form of airfields, associated barracks and depots, evident on higher flat ground [eg Lyneham] and in the Thames valley [eg Fairford]. Land to the west of Corsham is significantly influenced by military infrastructure.

Ecology

2.17 The main strands of the ecological character of the district relate to the presence of woodland, grassland and the wetland environments/water bodies which exist throughout the area.

2.18 Although woodland is often sparse, there are significant pockets. The most important woodland ecology is linked to the ancient mixed deciduous woodlands of Braydon and Chippenham woods [around Bowood] and isolated areas within the steeper valleys to the south west of the district and along scarp edges. Yew is frequently present in these woodlands. Many of these woodlands have been designated as SSSI's. New planting in some areas, especially of coniferous plantation is reducing the integrity and value of these habitats.

2.19 The wetland ecology of the district is primarily found related to water courses such as the Avon and Thames. However, significant interest is found in man made water elements, particularly the gravel pits of the Cotswold Water Park to the north, which have developed into marl lakes, a nationally rare habitat. A number of wetland meadows are designated SSSI's.

2.20 Calcareous and chalk grassland are important. The former is present across the west and the south east of the district. These fragile, herb rich habitats have been maintained often on the least accessible land.

2.21 The combination of woodland, wetland, and grassland present in many areas creates important complexes of habitats.

Agriculture

2.22 The majority of the land in the district is of classified as lower quality agricultural land, predominantly at grade 3 and 4. This is related to

the underlying heavy clays. Areas of grade 5 are rare but are present on steeper ground.

2.23 There are isolated pockets of higher grade land through the area (Grades 1 & 2). These exist primarily on freer draining soils within the clay landscape or on the lighter Cornbrash, evident to the west of the district. The landscape within the Avon Valley exhibits a significantly higher quality of agricultural land on the pockets of fertile, freer draining ground. The Chalk plains to the south are also of consistently higher quality at grade 2.

2.24 The landscape of the district exhibits mixed agricultural practices to varying degrees. Arable practices dominate on much of the higher grade, freer draining and more fertile level land. Pastoral agriculture dominates on the poor grade, wetter and steeper topography, the valley and scarp sides, along watercourses and across much of the rolling heavy clay landscape.

2.25 To the west, on the edge of the Cotswolds, the fields are frequently bounded by limestone walls, many of which are in need of repair. Away from the west, evidence of stone walls soon disappear, replaced by hedges of mixed species and varied management. Boundaries around more intensively farmed land appear more degraded than those in the pastoral landscape.

2.26 The overall picture across the district is of a patchwork of mixed agricultural land.

Recreation

2.27 Recreation within the district is on numerous levels from local to national, covering a wide range of activities, from walking to motor sports.

2.28 Across the whole district there is a comprehensive network of parish, district and national footpaths. The latter consisting of the 450 miles Macmillan Way, which runs from Boston on the North Sea coast to Abbotsbury on the Dorset coast, and the Wessex Ridgeway which runs from Marlborough to Lyme Regis on the Dorset coast.

2.29 There is considerable recreation use of the gravel pits of the Cotswold Water Park to the north. Taken together with the lakes in the neighbouring Cotswold District these act as a regionally important destination for tourism including boating of all sorts, accommodation and fishing.

2.30 Corsham, Bowood, Bowden, Lydiard and numerous minor parks held on the Historic Parks and Gardens Register act as significant visitor attractions along with their surrounding landscape and features.

2.31 The use of the countryside by 4x4's, mountain biking and other forms of transport can lead to conflict and damage in places.

3 Landscape Character Types

3.1 The analysis of the district's landscape reveals a series of landscape character types. These are partly derived from the national landscape typology which defines both types and description units for England, and partly from detailed desk study and site assessment. Each landscape character area is based on a landscape type and shares its boundaries. Table 1 shows the Landscape Character Areas and their type and Figure 3 shows the location of the areas.

3.2 Each type is briefly described below:

Alluvium River Terrace farmland: Low lying, flat river valley landscape dominated by water in the form of rivers or drainage ditches with associated riparian vegetation including pollarded willow. Mixed farming with hedges and mature trees. River terraces form the only topographical variation. There is limited settlement.

Lowland Clay Farmland: A gently undulating lowland landscape on heavy clay soils forming a transition between the valley bottom and higher ground. Mixed farming and a dispersed settlement pattern enclosed by hedges with trees. Watercourses influence lower lying areas.

Urban Fringe Scarp: Rolling lowland hills with a scarp slope and mixed farming. Influence of settlements which have been significantly extended in the 20th century and evidence of urban fringe uses.

Lowland Clay Woodland: Gently undulating lowland dominated by woodland cover on clay. Larger fields, mixed farming and relatively recent settlement dispersed pattern.

Settled Farmland Valley: Distinct valley, enclosed in places, focussed on valley floor and river course. Mixed farming and scattered rural settlement.

Lowland Limestone (Forest Marble) Farmland: Gently undulating lowland farmland underlain by limestone. Open landscape with broad low hills and shallow river valleys. Limestone walls boundaries in places and stone built settlements.

Wooded Lowland Valley: Enclosed valley with mosaic of strong woodland cover and pasture. Scattered settlement. Strong hedgerow cover and riparian vegetation.

Rolling settled lowland: Rolling lowland farmland with hedges and woodland. Strong influence of settlement in parts.

Lowland River Farmland: Low lying mixed farmland centred on river and associated watercourses and riparian vegetation. Damp meadow and pasture on valley floor with species such as poplar and willow. Hedges are main enclosure. Scattered settlement in slightly higher areas.

Wooded Parkland Hill: Elevated rolling hill landscape of historic parkland, woodland and enclosed pasture. Small enclosed valleys. Settlement dominated by estate buildings.

Settled Hill Farmland: Elevated area of hill and ridge with mixed farming enclosed by hedgerows and woodland. Visual influence of urban settlement.

Rolling Chalk Farmland: Undulating chalk downland and scarp dominated by an open arable and open pasture grassland respectively. Very limited settlement except at base of slope.

Chalk Scarp Farmland: Chalk scarp slope dominated by pasture grassland with woodland. Very limited settlement except at base of slope.

Chalk Plateau Farmland: Open chalk downland dominated by arable farmland with enclosure limited to settlement. Occasional beech plantations.

Table 1 Landscape Character Types and Areas		
<i>No.</i>	<i>Landscape Character Areas</i>	<i>Landscape Character Types</i>
1.	Thames Valley Floor	Alluvium River Terrace Farmland
2.	Thames Valley Lowland	Lowland Clay Farmland
3.	Swindon Fringe	Urban Fringe Scarp
4.	Braydon Wooded Plateau	Lowland Clay Woodland
5.	Minety and Malmesbury Rolling Lowland	Lowland Clay Farmland
6.	Upper Avon Valley	Settled Farmland Valley
7.	Sherston Dipslope lowland	Lowland Limestone (Forest Marble) Farmland
8.	Hullavington Rolling Lowland	Lowland Limestone (Forest Marble) Farmland
9.	By Brook Valley	Wooded Lowland Valley
10.	Corsham Rolling Lowland	Rolling settled lowland
11.	Avon Valley lowland	Lowland River Farmland
12.	Bowood and Bowden Parkland	Wooded Parkland Hill
13.	Lyneham Hills	Settled Hill Farmland
14.	Hilmarton Rolling Lowland	Lowland Clay Farmland
15.	Cherhill Down	Rolling Chalk Farmland
16.	Liddington Scarp	Chalk Scarp Farmland
17.	Avebury Plain	Chalk Plateau Farmland



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Figure 3
Landscape Character Types
709



0 4km
Scale



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Figure 4
Landscape Character Areas
710

Character Area 2

Thames Valley Lowland

General description

4.23 This area stretches from the low wetlands of the Thames Floodplain between Cricklade and Purton, westwards to the higher ground south of Minety. The land changes from the flatter landscapes in the east, at about 85m AOD, to the undulating or rolling land up to 100m AOD. Consistent with this change in topography, the area forms a transition between the flatter, wetter landscapes with some open water ditches and waterside willows, through to a more pastoral landscape of mixed pasture and arable with mature hedgerows and specimen oak trees.



4.24 The area lies almost entirely on Oxford Clay, a heavy blue-grey clay, with an arm of alluvial deposits running south west through the area from the Thames floodplain along the course of the River Key and along the River Ray on the eastern boundary of the District. These give rise to heavy soils which support mainly permanent pasture, but with extensive arable crops in places. Field sizes vary from small and irregular, especially in the east of the area and close to the River Key, to medium sized regular fields from later periods of enclosure. Close to Cricklade, fields in aerial photographs dated 1967 show extensive ridge and furrow patterns, most of which have now been lost through ploughing. Whilst hedgerows in good condition are typical as field boundaries, some stone walls are also found, especially in relation to settlements.

4.25 The lowland meadows are agriculturally unimproved grassland communities are usually hay meadows except where subject to frequent or prolonged flooding when swamp or inundation communities are more common.

4.26 Settlement is sparse and dispersed throughout the area. Cricklade is the major centre of population, located on the slightly higher ground above the Thames floodplain, with the land rising to the immediate west of the town and containing the 20th century expansion of the residential area. The town is a Saxon settlement, with strong

evidence locally of Roman occupation, and focuses on a high street of terraced two and three storey buildings, with a diversity of building materials from timber framed to stone and brick, many of medieval origin. The church spire forms a prominent landmark in the flat or undulating rural context.

4.27 Other settlement comprises hamlets and farmsteads, some of which are located on slight rises, such as Purton Stoke and Leigh. Most vernacular buildings are built of limestone from the Cotswolds, with some brick and clay tile also in evidence. The use of local clay as a building material has been evident from Roman times, with brick, tile or ceramic kilns found at Minety and Purton. As the flatter land rises to meet the villages of Witham and Purton, a more urban fringe character begins to be evident, with some service land uses such as a waste disposal site, and a more eclectic mix of building styles.

4.28 To the west of Cricklade, a disused airfield occupies a large tract of land of approximately 2x1 km. Despite the extensive nature of this land use, however, it remains largely unseen from the public domain due to the relatively level ground and screening from roads by hedges.

4.29 A major railway line crosses the area in a north westerly direction from Swindon, with most of the minor roads in the area crossing it on bridges which afford slightly longer views over the landscape. The disused Swindon to Cricklade railway runs along the eastern edge of the area, and forms part of network of routes known as the Cricklade County Way.

4.30 Whilst woodland is largely absent from the area, the large plantation at Red Lodge containing the house and farm, forms a significant visual backdrop to many views in the west of the area. Other views in the area are constrained by the intervening hedges in the largely level or gently undulating ground, although in many places one can see the higher ground to the south forming the hills of Purton and Broad Blunsdon, and to the north of the area there are opportunities to glimpse wide views over the Thames floodplain.



Main characteristics

4.31 The main characteristics of the area can be defined as follows:

- Low, level or undulating ground at between 85m and 100m AOD, on Oxford clay or alluvial deposits.
- Wetland features on the lower ground, including open water ditches and mature willows.
- Continuous hedges with many mature oak and ash, although there is sparser tree cover in the east close to the River Thames.
- Field sizes varying from small and irregular, to medium sized and regular shaped enclosures.
- Predominantly pasture, with some arable, with some ridge and furrow patterns.
- Dispersed or nucleated settlement on higher ground, within a largely pastoral landscape, with a strong sense of place in the use of stone and local brick, which begins to break down in the southern approaches to Purton.
- A general absence of woodland, with the exception of a few smaller woodlands in the east of the area.
- Some wetland and meadow habitats of nature conservation interest.
- Generally contained views but with longer views and a sense of containment by high ground to the south, and some wide views over the Thames floodplain.

Management guidelines

4.32 The overall objectives for the area are to conserve and enhance its rural pastoral character. The diversity of the area should be maintained, reflecting how it gradually changes from the lowest areas with their open water, streamside vegetation and irregular fields, to the undulating higher ground with continuous hedgerows and mature trees.

4.33 New development, such as housing, should be contained within defined envelopes within or adjacent to existing towns or villages, and care should be taken to limit the ribbon development north of Purton. Any new buildings in this area should aim to improve the currently dislocated urban fringe character while maintaining appropriate gaps for views into the landscape.

4.34 Biodiversity should be promoted, especially through the management of wetland areas, and through encouraging the planting of woodland copses and individual trees in farmland.

4.35 The airfield at Cricklade may be the subject of future development proposals, which should be critically considered in the light of the tranquil rural character of the area and relative absence of built development in the countryside.

Management strategy: actions

4.36 The following actions are recommended to help realise the overall objectives for the area:

Short term

- Conserve wetland features including open ditches, meadows and associated tree species – especially willow – in particular along the course of the River Key and River Ray.
- Enhance the wetland character by pollarding willows, planting new reed beds, and planting alder, willow and poplar along water courses in informal groups and broken lines.
- Conserve hedgerows and mature trees, including planting new trees in existing hedges and planting specimen trees in field corners etc, especially in the eastern part of the area where tree cover is sparse.
- Discourage arable cropping on areas of remnant ridge and furrow.
- Encourage the planting of new woodland copses.
- Ensure development reinforces the locally distinctive character and respects the vernacular. The use of traditional building materials including limestone, red brick and clay tiles are important in this area.
- Discourage development which would detract from the tranquil, rural character.
- Consider where development related to principal settlements is most appropriate in terms of landscape and visual effects.

Long term

- Review development or reclamation opportunities at Cricklade airfield to be consistent with the tranquil rural character.

Key views management strategy

4.37 The main consideration in respect of views is the maintenance of hedgerows and tree lines, in order to contain views. Views to individual focal points such as the church spire at Cricklade should be opened up, however, in planning any changes which affect view corridors or vistas in the landscape.

4.38 Indicators of change from chosen viewpoints within this character area might include:

- Loss of waterside trees, especially pollarded willows.
- Loss of hedgerows and mature oak and ash.
- Loss of open ditches.
- Built form using traditional stone, brick and clay tile.

Landscape sensitivity

4.39 Whilst most of this area is relatively intact in its distinctive landscape elements, some areas have lost defining features such as hedgerow trees, and close to Purton, there is evidence of new land uses which are typical of the urban fringe. These two issues – the loss of hedgerows and mature trees, and encroaching urban fringe land uses – are the main threats to the character of the landscape in this area, and will be an on-going issue in the

Purton fringes and with regard to the future of Cricklade airfield.

4.40 The proximity to Swindon brings with it particular pressure for development. The landscape is therefore vulnerable to change either through cumulative small scale development which over time will change the area's character or through larger scale developments which have a more obvious immediate effect.

4.41 The majority of the area has an essentially rural, agricultural character within which only small-scale, sensitively designed development, appropriately associated with existing built form, could be successfully accommodated without adverse landscape impacts.

4.42 The area is not highly visible, being a quiet rural hinterland, but the railway line, the A419 and local traffic on B roads through the area, open the area up to views for many. There are also distant views over the area from housing at the edges of Purton and from suburban areas on the north west edge of Swindon.

4.43 The landscape is rich in features which contribute to its maturity, especially the mature trees and continuous hedgerows. These could be lost through intention or neglect, especially if agricultural futures for pastureland in particular become more uncertain. Similarly the remaining ridge and furrow patterns could either be lost under the plough, or disappear under invading scrub if marginal fields are abandoned. The riverside and wetland elements too, could easily be lost in future generations if not actively conserved and enhanced.

December 2005

Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment

FINAL REPORT



Prepared on behalf of
Wiltshire County Council
By Land Use Consultants



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**WILTSHIRE LANDSCAPE
CHARACTER ASSESSMENT
Final Report**

**Prepared for
Wiltshire County Council
by
Land Use Consultants**

December 2005

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The assessment builds upon and integrates a number of existing landscape character assessments within Wiltshire and thanks are due to the organisations who produced these, they are detailed in full in Appendix 3: References.

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10. THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF WILTSHIRE

Introduction

The physical and cultural influences described in the previous chapters have combined to create the unique and distinctive character of Wiltshire. The area is characterised by a diversity of landscapes and these variations and differences are represented by sixteen **landscape types**.

Type 1: Open Downland	Type 9: Limestone Wold
Type 2: Wooded Downland	Type 10: Limestone Valleys
Type 3: High Chalk Plain	Type 11: Rolling Clay Lowland
Type 4: Low Chalk Plain	Type 12: Open Clay Vale
Type 5: Chalk River Valley	Type 13: Wooded Clay Vale
Type 6: Greensand Terrace	Type 14: Forest-Heathland Mosaic
Type 7: Wooded Greensand Hills	Type 15: Greensand Vale
Type 8: Limestone Ridge	Type 16: Limestone Lowlands

Each of the generic landscape types has a distinct and relatively homogenous character with similar physical and cultural attributes, including geology, landform, land cover, biodiversity and historical evolution. The landscape types can be further sub-divided into component **landscape character areas**.

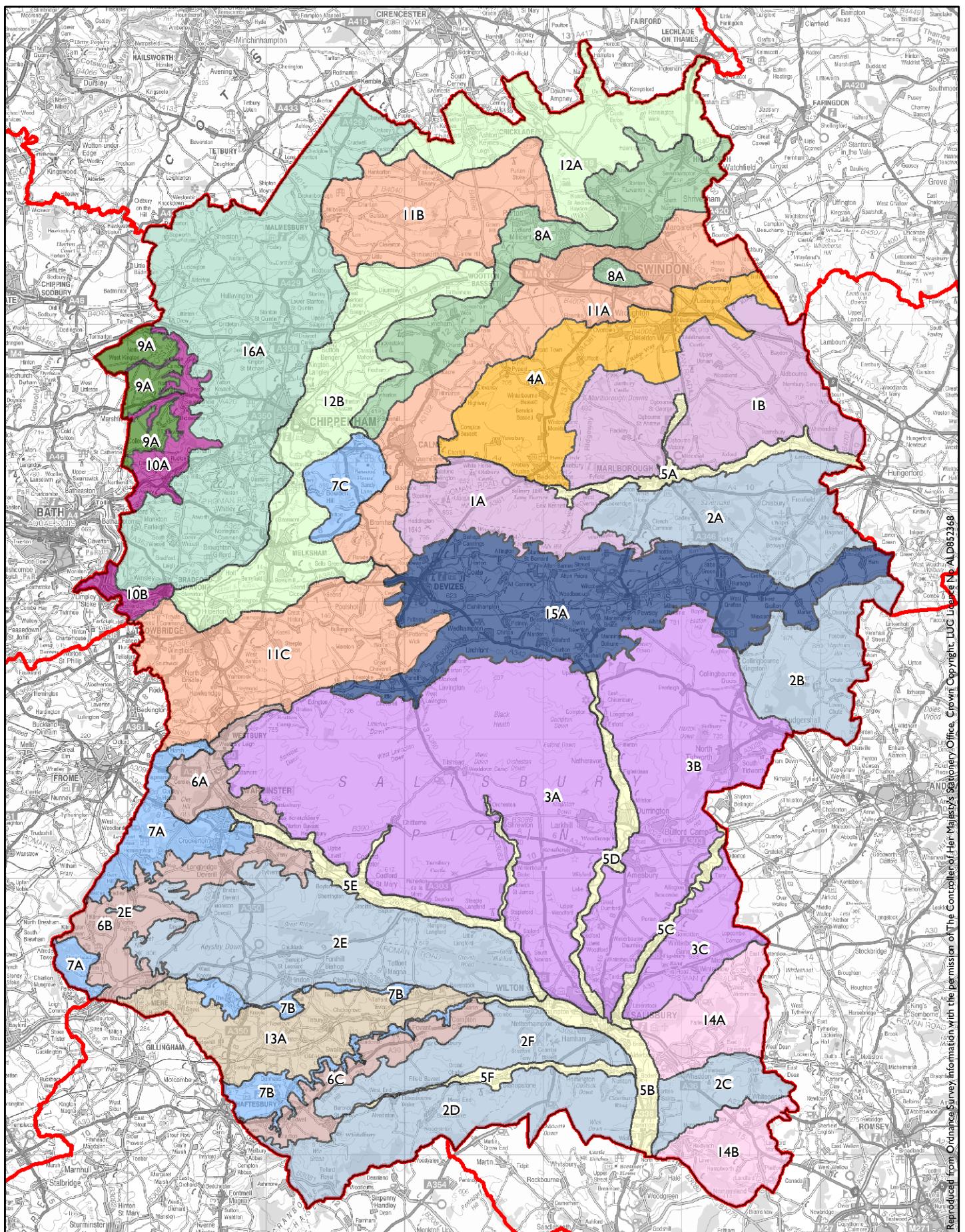
These are discrete geographic areas that possess the common characteristics described for the landscape type. Each character area has a distinct and recognisable local identity.

The landscape classification for the District is set out in the table below and illustrated on **Figure 19**. **Figure 19** has been prepared on a Geographic Information System (GIS), with mapping undertaken at a scale of 1:50,000. It should however be noted that there are subtle differences between and within the individual landscape types and character areas. The boundaries illustrated therefore usually indicate transitions rather than marked changes on the ground.

Landscape classification

Landscape Character Types	Landscape Character Areas
Type 1: Open Downland	
	1A: Horton Downs
	1B: Marlborough Downs
Type 2: Wooded Downland	
	2A: Savernake Plateau
	2B: Chute Forest
	2C: Witherington Wooded Downland
	2D: Cranborne Chase Wooded Downland

	2E: West Wiltshire Downs Wooded Downland
	2F: Fovant Down Wooded Downland
Type 3: High Chalk Plain	
	3A: Salisbury Plain West
	3B: Salisbury Plain East
	3C: Porton Down
Type 4: Low Chalk Plain and Scarp	
	4A: Avebury Plain
Type 5: Chalk River Valley	
	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: Ebbel Avon Chalk River Valley
Type 6: Greensand Terrace	
	6A: Warminster Terrace
	6B: Kilmington Terrace
	6C: Fovant Terrace
Type 7: Wooded Greensand Hills	
	7A: Longleat-Stourhead Greensand Hills
	7B: Donhead-Fovant Greensand Hills
	7C: Bowood Greensand Hills
Type 8: Limestone Ridge	
	8A: Swindon-Lyneham Limestone Ridge
Type 9: Limestone Wold	
	9A: Cotswolds Dip Slope
Type 10: Limestone Valleys	
	10A: By Brook Limestone Valley
	10B: Avon Limestone Valley
Type 11: Rolling Clay Lowland	
	11A: Calne Rolling Clay Lowland
	11B: Minety Rolling Clay Lowland
	11C: Trowbridge Rolling Clay Lowland
Type 12: Open Clay Vale	
	12A: Thames Open Clay Vale
	12B: Avon Open Clay Vale
Type 13: Wooded Clay Vale	
	13A: The Vale of Wardour
Type 14: Forest Heathland Mosaic	
	14A: Farley Forest
	14B: Landford Forest
Type 15: Greensand Vale	
	15A: The Vale of Pewsey
Type 16: Limestone Lowland	
	16A: Malmesbury-Corsham Limestone Lowlands



WILTSHIRE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Figure 19:

Landscape Character Areas

Key — County Boundaries

Landscape Character Types

1 Open Downland	5 Chalk River Valley	9 Limestone Wold	13 Wooded Clay Vale
2 Wooded Downland	6 Greensand Terrace	10 Limestone Valleys	14 Forest-Heathland Mosaic
3 High Chalk Plain	7 Wooded Greensand Hills	11 Rolling Clay Lowland	15 Greensand Vale
4 Low Chalk Plain & Scrap	8 Limestone Ridge	12 Open Clay Vale	16 Limestone Lowland

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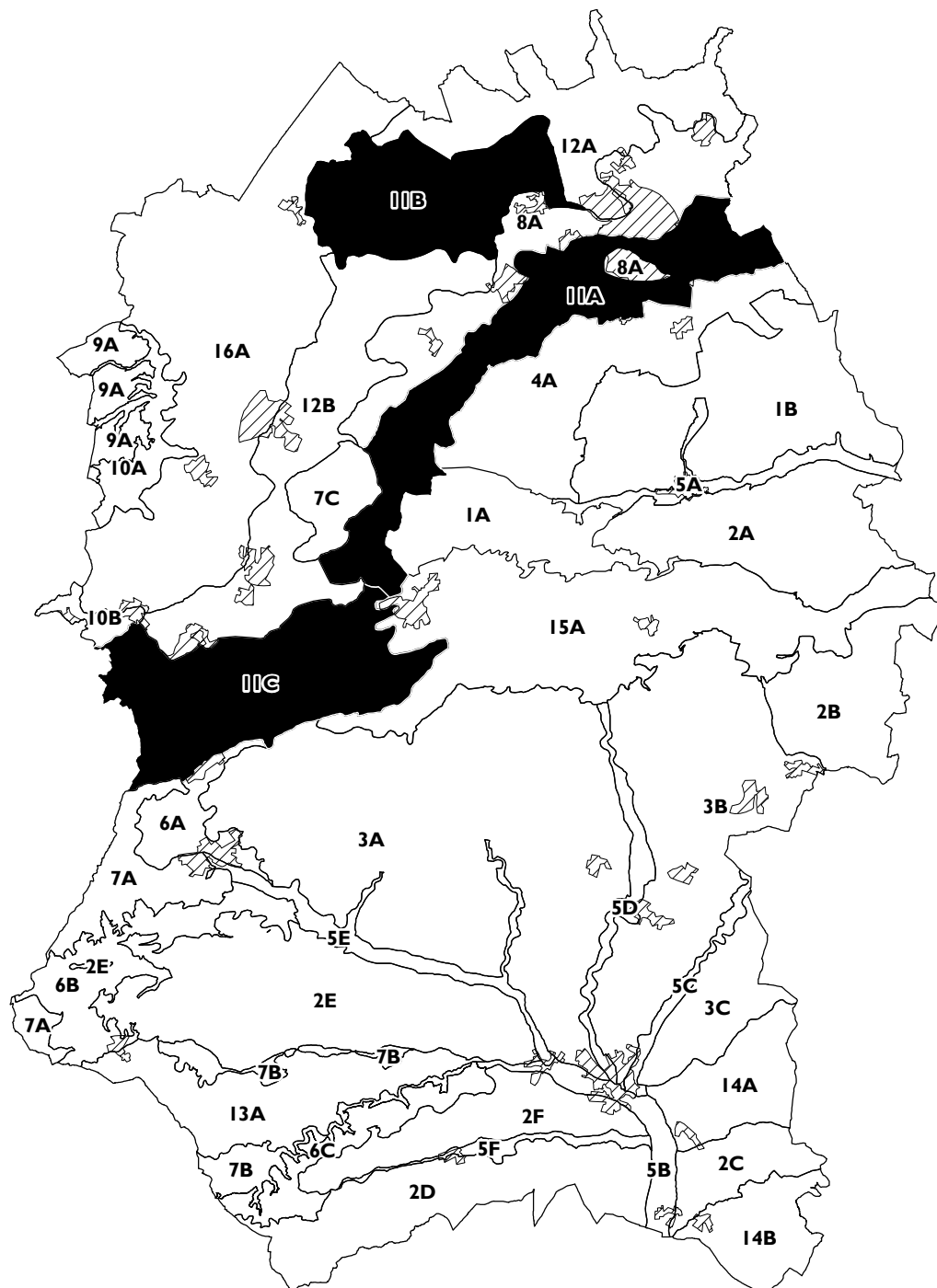
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LANDSCAPE TYPE 11: ROLLING CLAY LOWLAND



11: ROLLING CLAY LOWLAND



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

II A: Calne Rolling Clay Lowland

II B: Minety Rolling Clay Lowland

II C: 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 IIB. To the west of IIB: *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 IIB: *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 IIC. 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 IIB: *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 IIC: *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

11A: 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.

11B: 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.

IIC: Trowbridge Rolling Clay Lowland

Area IIC: 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.

II. CONCLUSION

This assessment has confirmed the landscape of Wiltshire as of largely strong character and good condition as would be suggested by the large proportion of the county designated as AONB.

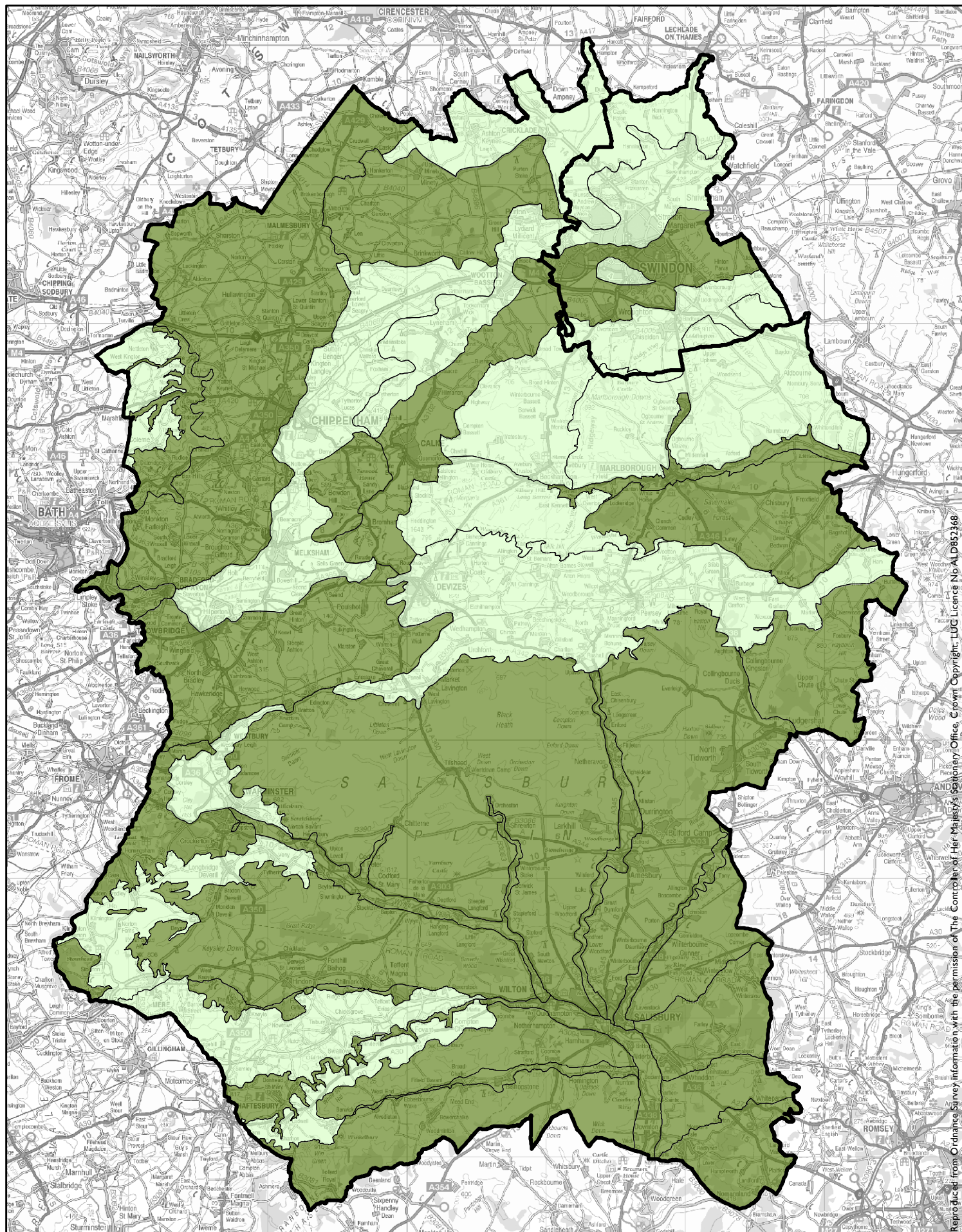
Figure 20: Condition and **Figure 21: Strength of Character** summarise these aspects of the Wiltshire landscape by landscape type. From these it can be seen that around a third of the landscape of the county is in moderate condition with none in poor condition. Most of chalk uplands of the south of the county, and the limestone areas to the north west are in good condition.

The chalk downs that dominate the county are considered strong in character along with the greensand hills and limestone valleys, while the less distinctive clay and limestone lowlands and greensand terraces are moderate in strength of character. Again there are no landscape types considered to be of weak character.

Combining these two measures of landscape character determines the strategies for individual landscape types and these are shown in graphic form in **Figure 22: Landscape Strategy**. The methodology for determining the strategy is outlined in Appendix I. This map is a summary of the strategy county-wide; the text for each landscape type gives the detailed strategies for the areas with the specific characteristics and features that require conservation, restoration, strengthening or improvement.

As will be seen from **Figure 22** in large areas of the county, particularly the chalk plains and river valleys to the south, the strategy is to conserve these landscape of strong character and good condition. Here the emphasis is on conservation of existing character and of the particular features that contribute to this character. The aim should be to continue the current management regime and/or adopt best practice approaches. New characteristics should be introduced only with great care.

Elsewhere either the character of the landscape is less strong or the condition is moderate and in these areas the policies are of conservation combined with restoration, strengthening or improvement. Here the emphasis is on restoring elements that have been lost or are declining and on improving enhancing character. This may include improvements to landscape management practices and the introduction of positive new elements or features.



WILTSHIRE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Figure 20:
Land Condition

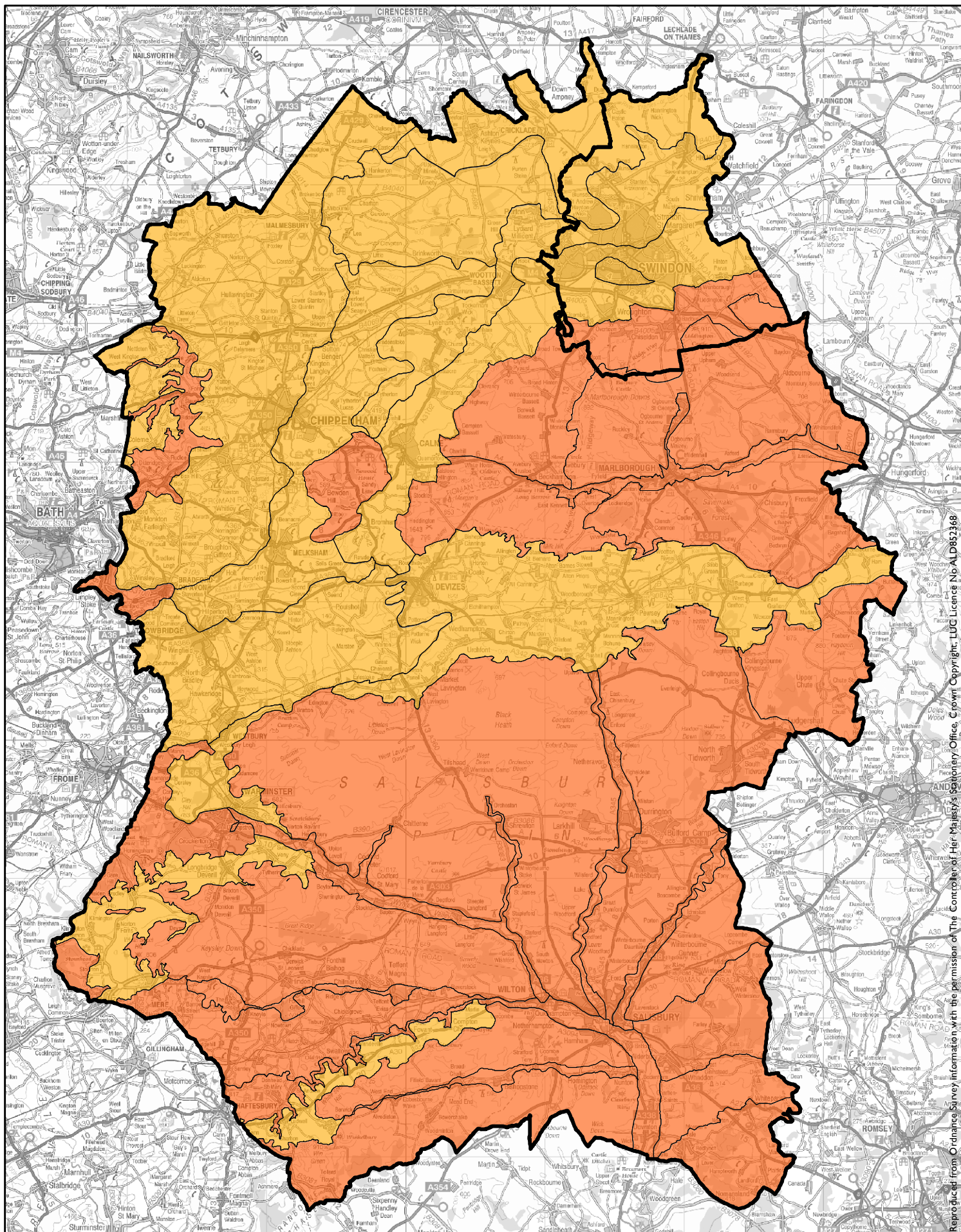


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WILTSHIRE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Figure 21:
Strength of Landscape Character

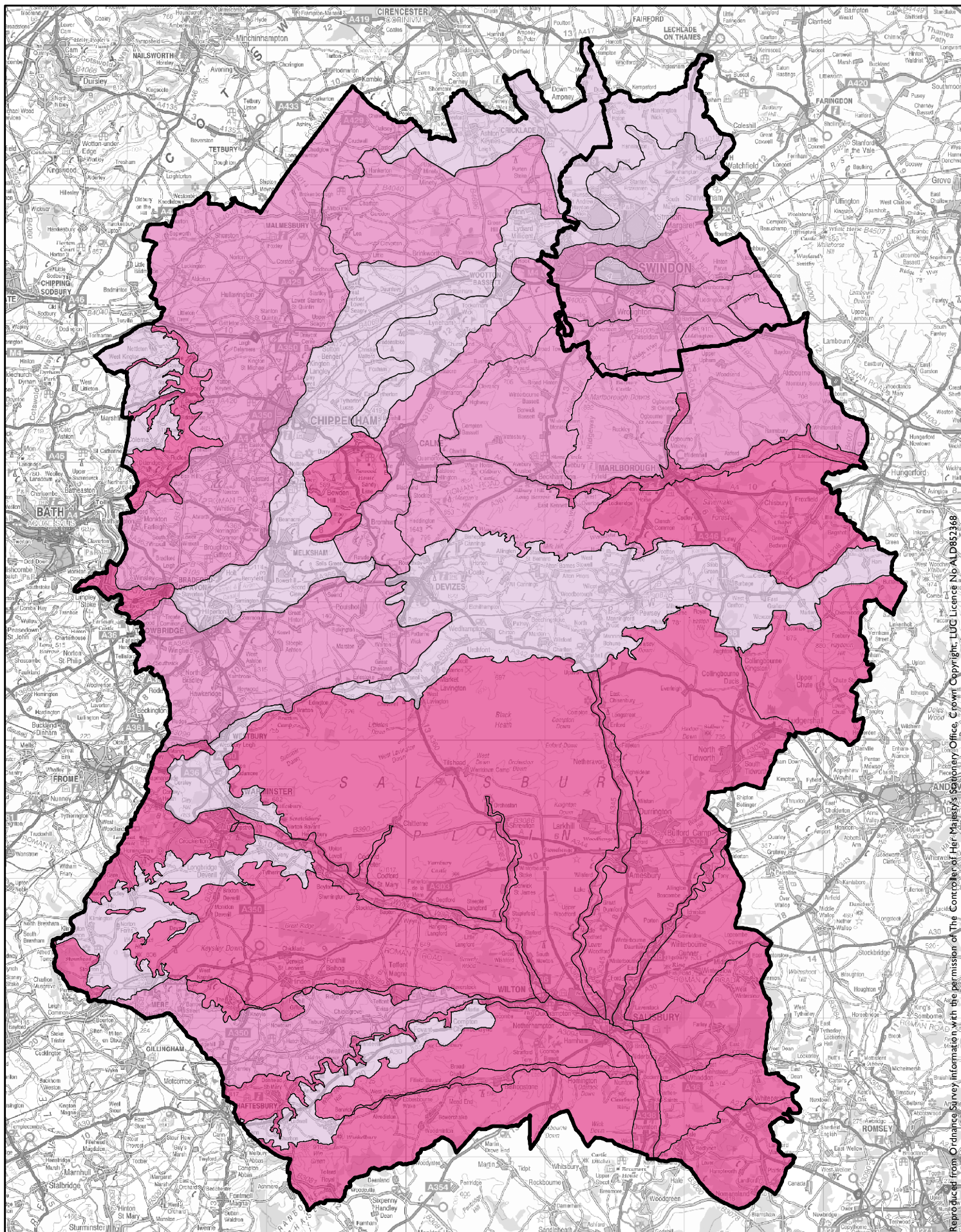


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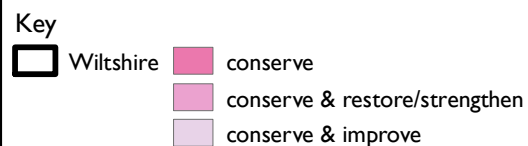
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Figure 22:
Landscape Strategy



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