

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES

(extract from Dorset Assessment)

Clay Valley

Location

The Clay Valley landscape type is found in two locations on the Isle of Purbeck; in the Corfe valley and in the sweeping landscapes of the Kimmeridge Coast. It is also found in the broad Bride Valley east of Burton Bradstock.

Key Characteristics

- varied landform from broad open valley to more sweeping valley and areas which are more secluded.
- enclosed and defined by dramatic steep chalk and limestone escarpments and ridges.
- patchwork of small-scale pasture, irregular dense hedges and copses with larger arable fields, grassland, and scrub on the steeper slopes.
- small, nucleated, and scattered villages and farmsteads.
- distinctive church towers act as local landmarks.
- occasional small wet woods, springs, and flushes on valley floors.
- larger scale woods on valley sides.
- winding rural lanes with mixed boundaries from stone walls to hedge banks.
- distinctive coastal landmarks and features.

Each of the three areas of the Clay Valley landscape type has its own unique identity. The surrounding dramatic escarpments and ridges enclose and define these valley landscapes with the Purbeck chalk ridge in particular forming an imposing backdrop to the Corfe valley. The areas generally have a settled rural character with an intimate secluded feel in places and nearer the coast a more windswept, remote, and exposed character. There are some dramatic and distinctive coastal landmarks and features. The patchwork of generally small-scale rolling pastures, dense hedgerows, scattered woodlands, and scrub on steeper slopes, have been shaped by centuries of woodland clearance and agricultural improvement. There are occasional small wet woods and

springs and flushes on the valley floors with larger woods on the valley sides and from the elevated areas glimpses of the sea. The winding rural lanes have mixed boundaries including old stone walls and hedge banks with the stone walls more noticeable nearer the Purbeck plateau.

The small farmsteads and nucleated picturesque villages such as at Swyre, Puncknowle, Litton Cheney and Burton Bradstock are often hidden and dotted throughout the landscape. The church towers at Steeple, Church Knowle and Kingston are particularly prominent landscape features with the views over the valley to Corfe Castle from Kingston being one of the distinctive panoramas in the area. The hard western edges of Swanage and to a lesser extent the eastern edges of Bridport, detract from the character of the area. The popular and distinctive ruined castle and village at Corfe Castle, the historic folly of Clavell's Tower and the prominent landmarks of Swyre Head and Worbarrow Tout are all key landmarks in the area. Several of the planned parkland landscapes across the area are also key features.

Management Objectives

The overall management objective for the Clay Valley Landscape Type is to conserve and restore the intimate patterns of grasslands, woodlands, field boundaries and nucleated settlements.

Key land management guidance notes

- restore and enhance the condition of existing small broadleaved woodlands.
- consider extending wet woodland on the valley floor, particularly around existing settlements, and farmsteads.
- encourage low impact grazing and conservation of permanent pastures including calcareous grassland and wet grasslands to protect wildlife and historic features.
- encourage maintenance and restoration of boundaries, particularly dense hedgerows and banks along the valley floors and stonewalls towards the higher ground.
- the development of scrub may be encouraged as it provides important habitat in areas where the establishment of trees is affected by coastal climate.
- encourage grazing on the chalk and limestone ridges to manage scrub encroachment on important grasslands.
- maintain and enhance the sweeping views of the coast.
- seek opportunities to establish small-scale broadleaved native planting around existing settlements and farmsteads to reduce the visual impact of existing intrusive developments.
- conserve the pattern of tight knit nucleated villages and the use of local limestone for new build and/or restoration work.

- conserve views of key landmarks such as church spires e.g. through the careful control of building heights.
- conserve the intimate character of rural lanes and open character towards the coast e.g. by the careful consideration of new development design, positioning, and height.
- reduce the impact of car parks and other visitor-based development e.g. through sensitive signage and improved management of built features such as walls and other boundaries.

Coastal grassland

Location

The Coastal Grassland type is found in one location in Dorset, between Burton Bradstock and Abbotsbury along the Bexington coastline.

Key Characteristics

- exposed, largely treeless and windswept landscape with open, dramatic views along the coast.
- sloping and gently undulating rough coastal limestone grassland and scrub.
- enclosed and defined by the chalk escarpment to the north.
- patchwork of regular fields and low and stunted hedges.
- unsettled with the occasional farmstead and some remaining strip fields.
- steeper slopes closer to the escarpment with grazed pastures and scrub.
- lower slopes nearer the beach contain reeds and grazing marsh.

Coastal grasslands, as a habitat, are found along much of the immediate coastline but it only becomes a landscape type where the characteristic coarse grasses, exposed by the full force of the coast, are backed by the southern escarpment and divide it from the inland landscapes. Due to the lack of trees, smooth landform and since the escarpment prevents views inland; a very strong link with the coast is created enabling panoramic views along the curve of Chesil Beach to Portland and beyond. It is characterised by south facing undulating chalk and limestone slopes of homogenous rough grasslands, patches of scrub with stunted hedgerows and the occasional windswept tree. It is an area of rough grazing with a gradual transition from scrubby longer grassland and some reedbed near the beach, to shorter grass on the steeper slopes inland. Small grazed regular strip fields often have wire fencing as boundaries due the lack of hedgerows. A lack of development, the

sweeping panoramic coastal views and exposed character underpin the natural appearance of this narrow and confined type. West Bexington is the only settlement in the area with its distinctive linear pattern and exposed beach car park. There are occasional farmsteads scattered across the undeveloped area.

Management Objectives

The overall management objective for the Coastal Grassland Landscape Type should be to conserve the open and undeveloped coastal character whilst enhance the characteristic features of rough coastal grasslands, patches of scrub and reeds. Reduce the impact of visitor based development.

Key land management guidance notes

- encourage low impact grazing along the coast and inland ridges to reduce scrub encroachment on important grasslands.
- conserve the pattern of stunted hedgerows, maintaining a balance between post and wire fencing in more open areas.
- protect and enhance the management of reed beds for nature conservation.
- woodland planting is not an objective for the area, but the development of scrub may be acceptable as it forms an important coastal feature, and can be managed as a successional habitat.
- protect watercourses and associated wildlife from soil erosion and the effects of diffuse pollution in the Fleet.
- protect the surviving pattern of strip fields.
- identify, protect and conserve the sweeping views of the coast and in particular of the Fleet, Chesil Beach and Portland e.g. via Parish Action Plans, Village Design Statements and other Settlement Appraisals.
- reduce the impact of car parks and other visitor based development e.g. through sensitive signage and improved management of built features such as walls.
- conserve and enhance the open character of coastal roads e.g. by the careful consideration of new development design, positioning, and height.
- identify, conserve, and enhance characteristic fingerposts and street/road furniture.

Chalk ridge / escarpment.

Location

The Chalk Escarpment/Ridge landscape type defines the furthest extent of the chalk landscapes of the county around its north, west and southern outer margins.

1.1 Key Characteristics

- steep, distinctive and bold ridge and scarp slope on the edges of the chalk landscapes.
- dramatic visual edge enclosing and providing a backdrop to the surrounding countryside.
- marked variation in character and landform along the scarp.
- undeveloped and open character with panoramic views.
- distinctive and bold pattern of land cover including hanging mixed woods and patches of chalk grassland.
- woodlands are often visually prominent landmarks.
- settlements concentrated along the foot of the scarp.
- narrow twisting lanes often with high hedgebanks.
- many ancient and distinctive hillforts on escarpment highpoints such as Eggarden and Hod/Hambledon Hills.

The Chalk Escarpment/Ridge landscape forms a steep, distinctive and dramatic backdrop to, and gives panoramic views of, much of the surrounding patchwork lowland landscape. It is a bold, dominant and prominent visual edge which helps enclose the surrounding landscapes. Although in geological terms an escarpment is slightly different to a ridge, they have been grouped together for this assessment as they share very similar characteristics and management requirements. However the northern, western and southern sections do have variations in character and landform often based on geology and patterns of erosion. With an undeveloped, open character and bold skyline, this landscape type supports important patches of chalk grassland and hanging mixed woodlands which together often form broad distinctive patterns and adds variety along the steep scarp slopes. The woods are often very visible landmarks. In many locations the small scale pattern of fields extends up the scarp slopes from the valleys below gradually giving way to larger fields or open downland. Settlements such as Compton Abbas, Durweston, Ibberton, Litton Cheney and Askerswell are concentrated at the foot of slopes, along the spring line and apart from these, which are on the fringes of the area, there are only a few scattered farms. The network of narrow, steep and twisting lanes often have high hedge banks which create 'tunnels' before emerging on the ridgetops. There are many ancient hillforts several of which are key landmarks, including

Fontmell Down and Melbury, Hod, Hambledon, Eggarden and Bulbarrow Hills. These dramatic landscapes have been captured by the romantic paintings and writings of Wilsdon Steer, Moffat Linder, Daniel Defoe and Lamora Birch.

Management Objectives

The overall management objective for the Chalk Escarpment Landscape Type should be to conserve the uninterrupted landform, strong open skyline and the distinct mosaic patterning of woodland, scrub and chalk grassland and to seek opportunities to restore and enhance habitats and historic features.

Key land management guidance notes

- promote the use of visually permeable boundaries such as post and wire fencing on higher ground and enhance the sense of continuity and openness across the escarpment/ridge tops and associated monuments.
- monitor continued encroachment of scrub on the steepest slopes. Manage scrub as a valued habitat component, and encourage grazing where appropriate and avoid cutting vegetation in straight lines to minimise visual impact. Retain occasional small patches of scrub for aesthetic and wildlife benefits.
- seek opportunities to recreate, link and restore important grassland sites and buffer from intensive management
- further woodland planting is not a key objective for this area, with the aim being to maintain the balance of open land and woodland cover with enhanced woodland management.
- ensure conservation and restoration of low impact grassland management around prehistoric features, particularly barrows and hill forts.
- promote sustainable management and recreational access to Open Access areas and important viewpoints.
- consider location of game cover crops in visible locations to minimise visual impact.
- maintain the undeveloped character of the scarp and the sharp contrast with the scarp foot settlements e.g. by the careful control of settlement edges and boundaries.
- any new development should be small scale and should respect the distinctive nucleated 'scarp foot' settlement pattern and should not extend onto the lower slopes.
- conserve the rural character of the narrow sunken lanes and protect sensitive hedgebanks from further erosion e.g. by identification of key sites through Parish Action Plans or similar and/or via Conservation Verge 'designation'.

- identify, protect and enhance important views to and from the ridge/escarpment e.g. via Parish Action Plans, Village Design Statements and other Settlement Appraisals.

Ridge & vale

Location

The Ridge and Vale landscape type is found to the east and west of Weymouth.

Key Characteristics

- broad evenly spaced ridges and valleys which follow a west-east alignment
- enclosed and defined by the dramatic chalk escarpment to the north
- mixed farmed area with a patchwork of geometric fields divided by straight hedges
- larger fields in the valleys and on the open ridges
- open views along the coast from the smooth, broad and hog-back shaped ridges
- distinctive settlement pattern along the valley floor and at the foot of the escarpment
- smaller scale and secluded landscape around Osmington
- the edges of the Weymouth conurbation create a negative impact on landscape character

The Ridge and Vale landscape type is enclosed to the north of the area by the imposing and dramatic chalk ridge/escarpment landscape type, which forms the setting and prominent backdrop to the area. This landscape is characterised by evenly divided low lying hog-backed limestone ridges running east to west, separated by undulating clay vales of mixed farming in a patchwork of medium sized geometric fields divided by straight hedgerows. There are larger scale fields on the open ridge tops and in the flatter valleys where there are also more hedgerow trees. Most of the woods are on the valley side slopes.

Management Objectives

The overall management objective for the Ridge and Vale Landscape Type should be to restore the characteristic features of grasslands and field boundaries along the coast, re-create and improve the urban fringe landscapes with new woodland planting, greenspace provision and reduce the impact of urban fringe.

Key land management guidance notes

- repair and maintain dry stonewalls along the coast and other important boundary features.
- encourage grazing on the coast and inland limestone ridges to reduce further scrub encroachment.
- manage permanent pastures including calcareous grassland and wet grasslands to protect wildlife and historic features.
- prevent the loss of key landscape features and enhance archaeological features such as barrows through low impact grazing.
- an integrated approach to increased informal access, nature conservation and 'greenspace' provision is needed especially because of the proximity of an urban population to important habitats.
- where appropriate, encourage the planting of small-scale copses/woodlands to reduce visual impact of urban areas especially around the urban fringes.
- identify, protect and conserve the sweeping views of the coast e.g. via parish action plans, village design statements and other settlement appraisals.
- conserve and enhance the open character of coastal roads e.g. by the careful consideration of new development design, positioning and height.
- encourage planting, habitat enhancement and other measures to reduce the visual impact of caravan parks where the open character is not affected. resist further expansion in open, sensitive locations.
- conserve the pattern of tight knit nucleated villages.