



# West Dorset Landscape Character Assessment

February 2009



*Working for West Dorset*



## INTRODUCTION

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### Background: Landscape Character Assessment for West Dorset.

- (i) The landscape of West Dorset is very varied, dramatic and rich in wildlife. It is a working and living landscape with mixed farmland and a rich historic and built heritage. Over 70% of the district falls within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Even outside the AONB, there is a considerable variation in landscape character in the district.
- (ii) In 1996 the former Countryside Commission (now Natural England) produced a map of Joint Character Areas for the whole of England<sup>1</sup>. Following this, a more detailed landscape character assessment for West Dorset was undertaken<sup>2</sup>. In 2002 a revised approach to assessing landscape character was agreed nationally<sup>3</sup>, meaning that the work previously undertaken should be reviewed, so that it would continue to form robust guidance locally.
- (iii) The information provided in this landscape character assessment will help guide future planning policy, provide information on local character to support policies in the Design and Sustainable Development planning guidance, and be used in deciding planning applications.
- (iv) The overall aim of the assessment is to inform the development process so that significant harm to landscape character can be avoided where possible, and identify opportunities to preserve and enhance that character. As a planning tool, the assessment is formatted to be succinct and easy to use and strikes an appropriate balance between subjective and more factual, objective, descriptions.

### How the assessment was carried out

- (v) The assessment began with a desk study that involved reviewing any relevant background information, including mapped information

showing the location and distribution of important landscape designations and features, and previous landscape characterisation work.

- (vi) Landscape description units were then identified, which are small pockets of landscape with common attributes in terms of geology, landform and natural features, rock type, soils and associated habitats, attributes relating to settlement, farm type and field boundaries, tree cover and associated landuses.
- (vii) Draft landscape character areas were then traced by grouping together landscape description units of common character. The draft character area boundaries were tested and refined by field surveys. The field survey work was carried out from a viewpoint recorded within each landscape description unit. In addition to refining the character area boundaries, the survey also recorded the aesthetic and perceptual qualities of the landscape and the condition of landscape elements that was not always discernable from the desk study. To ensure a consistent approach in describing each character area, the field survey used a standard checklist, and each survey was carried out by two landscape professionals to promote discussion and ensure a consensus of opinion.
- (viii) Using the information gathered in the desk study and field survey, the last stage of the characterisation process was to finalise the character area boundaries, their descriptions, the key landscape characteristics and detrimental features. The section on detrimental features identifies elements within each character area that are in poor condition or that have an adverse impact on the landscape character. Forces for change such as widespread disease (for example the Dutch Elm fungal infection) and changing farm and land management practices are also identified where they have an impact on character. These sections were further refined by input from specialist and local stakeholder organisations, such as Natural England and Town and Parish Councils.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/CC/jca.asp](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/CC/jca.asp)

<sup>2</sup> West Dorset 2000, adopted by the council as supplementary planning guidance in February 2002

<sup>3</sup> Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland, the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural History, 2002

(ix) Landscape types, which are made up of landscape character areas with similar geology, topography, landuse and settlement, were also identified. The same landscape type can be found in more than one location across the county, for example Heath and Forest Mosaic is found in both East Dorset and West Dorset. There are often several character areas identified within each landscape type. Initial consultation on the landscape types and character areas for the Dorset AONB took place in 2007 , as this work was needed to inform the review of the AONB Management Plan. The assessment and initial consultation for the remaining area in West Dorset took place in 2008 . The information contained in both documents has now been incorporated into this document, which was subject to a further 6 week consultation in late 2009 alongside the West Dorset Design and Sustainable Development planning guidelines,

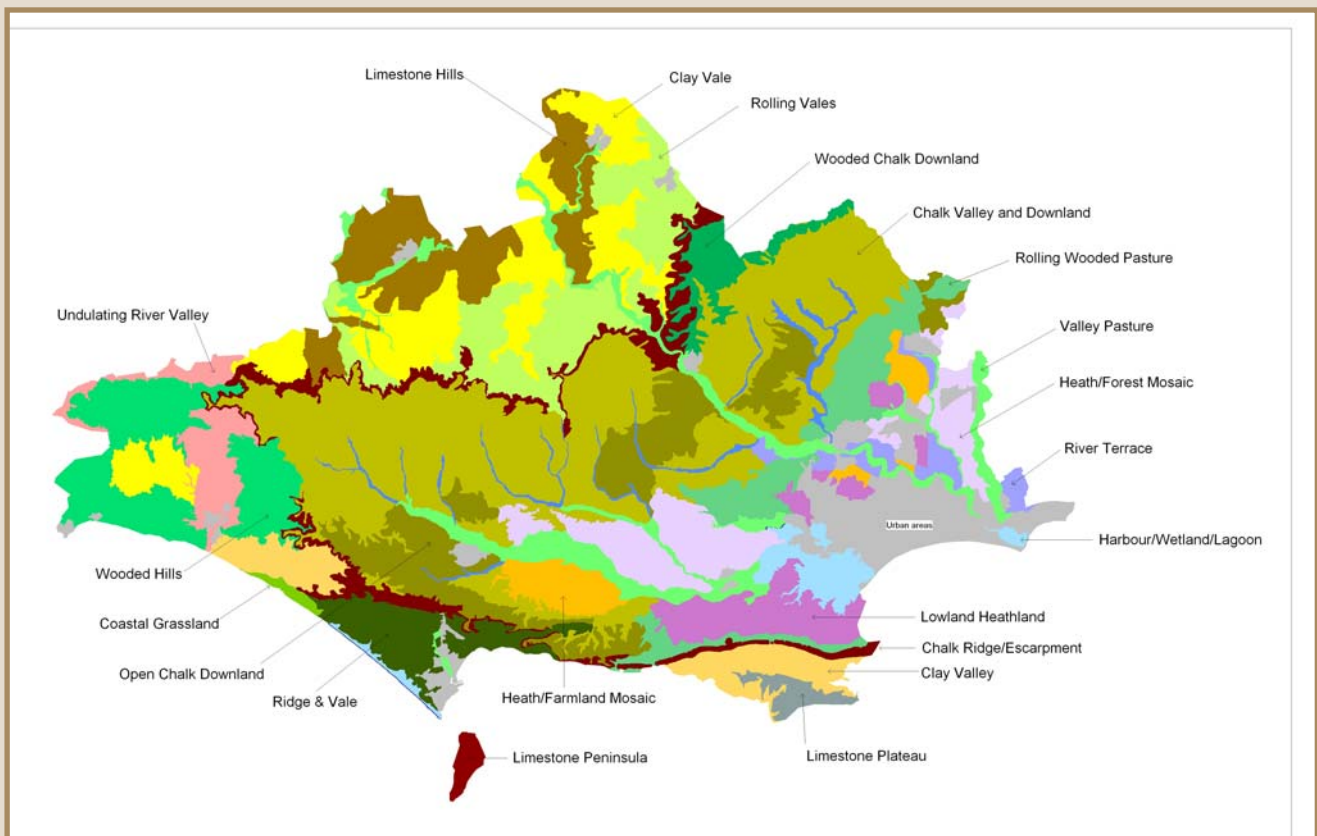
prior to being adopted by the district council on 3 February 2009.

## What this assessment covers

(x) This assessment looks at the countryside areas outside the main towns and villages in West Dorset. It focuses on the landscape character areas and provides a location plan, a brief description of the various elements and how they contribute to the distinctive character of the area, and a list of key landscape characteristics and detrimental features. Figure 1 shows the approximate extent of the landscape character types for the whole of Dorset, which will be finalised once the landscape assessments are completed for all the districts.

Figure 2 shows the landscape character types and areas within West Dorset.

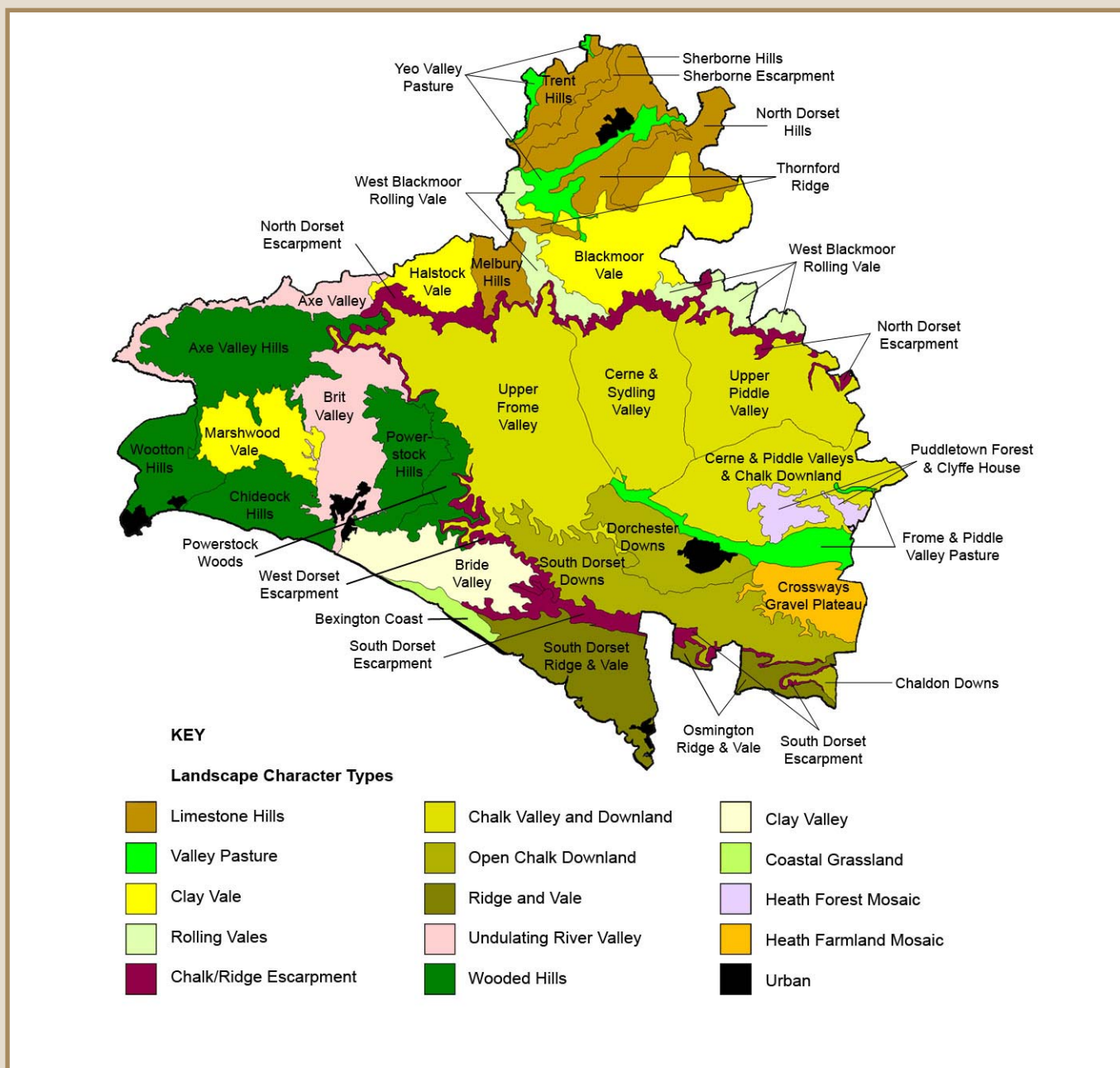
**Figure 1 Draft landscape character types across Dorset**



<sup>4</sup> A draft assessment was published for a 10 week public consultation in summer 2007. Copies were made available at all council offices and public libraries, and on the Dorset AONB website (with links from [www.dorsetforyou.com](http://www.dorsetforyou.com)). All parish councils and relevant interest groups and organisations were contacted. The work was further promoted through local press and radio interviews.

<sup>5</sup> A 6 week consultation ran from 19 May to 27 June 2008. Copies of the draft document were made available at the district council offices, local libraries and online at [www.dorsetforyou.com/landscapecharacter/west](http://www.dorsetforyou.com/landscapecharacter/west).

**Figure 2: Landscape character types and landscape character areas for West Dorset**



(xi) An index to the character areas is provided overleaf. In order to help you find the relevant character area, a list of settlements with the character area they lie in is also provided.

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9.	North Dorset Escarpment.....	28
10.	Melbury Hills .....	30
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17.	Brit Valley.....	44
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19.	Powerstock Woods.....	48
20.	West Dorset Escarpment .....	50
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31.	Puddletown Forest And Clyffe House.....	72
32.	Cerne And Piddle Valleys And Chalk Downland .....	74
33.	Upper Piddle Valley.....	76
34.	Cerne And Sydling Valley.....	78
35.	Upper Frome Valley.....	80

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Allington	Brit Valley	44
Alton Pancras	Upper Piddle Valley	76
Alweston	North Dorset Hills	22
Askerswell	Powerstock Woods	48
Athelhampton	Cerne & Piddle Valleys & Chalk Downland	74
	Frome and Piddle Valley Pasture	68
Batcombe	North Dorset Escarpment	28
Beaminster	Brit Valley	44
Beer Hackett	Yeo Valley Pasture	18
Bettiscombe	Axe Valley Hills	36
	Marshwood Vale	38
Bincombe	Osmington Ridge and Vale	60
	South Dorset Escarpment	52
Birdsmoorgate	Axe Valley Hills	36
Bishops Caundle	North Dorset Hills	22
Blackdown	Axe Valley Hills	36
Bothenhampton	Bride Valley	54
Bradford Abbas	Sherborne Hills	16
Bradford Peverell	Dorchester Downs	66
	Frome and Piddle Valley Pasture	68
Broadmayne	South Dorset Downs	64
	Crossways Gravel Plateau	70
Broadwindsor	Axe Valley Hills	36
Buckland Newton	North Dorset Escarpment	28
	West Blackmoor Rolling Vales	26
Burleston	Cerne & Piddle Valleys & Chalk Downland	74
	Frome and Piddle Valley Pasture	68
Burstock	Axe Valley Hills	36
Burton	Frome and Piddle Valley Pasture	68
Burton Bradstock	Bride Valley	54
Castleton	Yeo Valley Pasture	18
Cattistock	Upper Frome Valley	80
Caundle Marsh	Blackmoor Vale	24
Cerne Abbas	Cerne and Sydling Valley	78
Chalmington	Upper Frome Valley	80
Charlestown	South Dorset Ridge and Vale	58
Charlton Down	Cerne & Piddle Valleys & Chalk Downland	74
Charminster	Cerne & Piddle Valleys & Chalk Downland	74
Charmouth	Chideock Hills	42
Chedington	North Dorset Escarpment	28

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Chetnole	Blackmoor Vale	24
Chickerell	South Dorset Ridge and Vale	58
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Chilcombe	Powerstock Woods	48
Chilfrome	Upper Frome Valley	80
Clifton Maybank	West Blackmoor Rolling Vales	26
Coldharbour	Frome and Piddle Valley Pasture	68
Compton Valence	Upper Frome Valley	80
Corscombe	Halstock Vale	32
	North Dorset Escarpment	28
Crossways	Crossways Gravel Plateau	70
Dewlish	Upper Piddle Valley	76
Dottery	Brit Valley	44
Drimpton	Axe Valley Hills	36
Duntish	West Blackmoor Rolling Vales	26
East Chelborough	North Dorset Escarpment	28
Evershot	Upper Frome Valley	80
Eype	Chideock Hills	42
Fleet	South Dorset Ridge and Vale	58
Folke	North Dorset Hills	22
Forston	Cerne and Sydling Valley	78
Frampton	Upper Frome Valley	80
Frome St Quinton	Upper Frome Valley	80
Frome Vauchurch	Upper Frome Valley	80
Goathill	Thornford Ridge	20
Godmanstone	Cerne and Sydling Valley	78
Halstock	Halstock Vale	32
Hayden	North Dorset Hills	22
Hermitage	Blackmoor Vale	24
Higher Bockhampton	Cerne and Piddle Valleys and Chalk Downland	74
	Puddletown Forest and Clyffe House	72
Higher Halstock Leigh	Halstock Vale	32
Higher Kingcombe	Upper Frome Valley	80
Higher Kingston	Cerne and Piddle Valleys and Chalk Downland	74
Higher Woodsford	Crossways Gravel Plateau	70
Hilfield	North Dorset Escarpment	28
	Blackmoor Vale	24
Holditch	Axe Valley Hills	36
Holnest	Blackmoor Vale	24
Holwell	Blackmoor Vale	24
Holywell	Upper Frome Valley	80

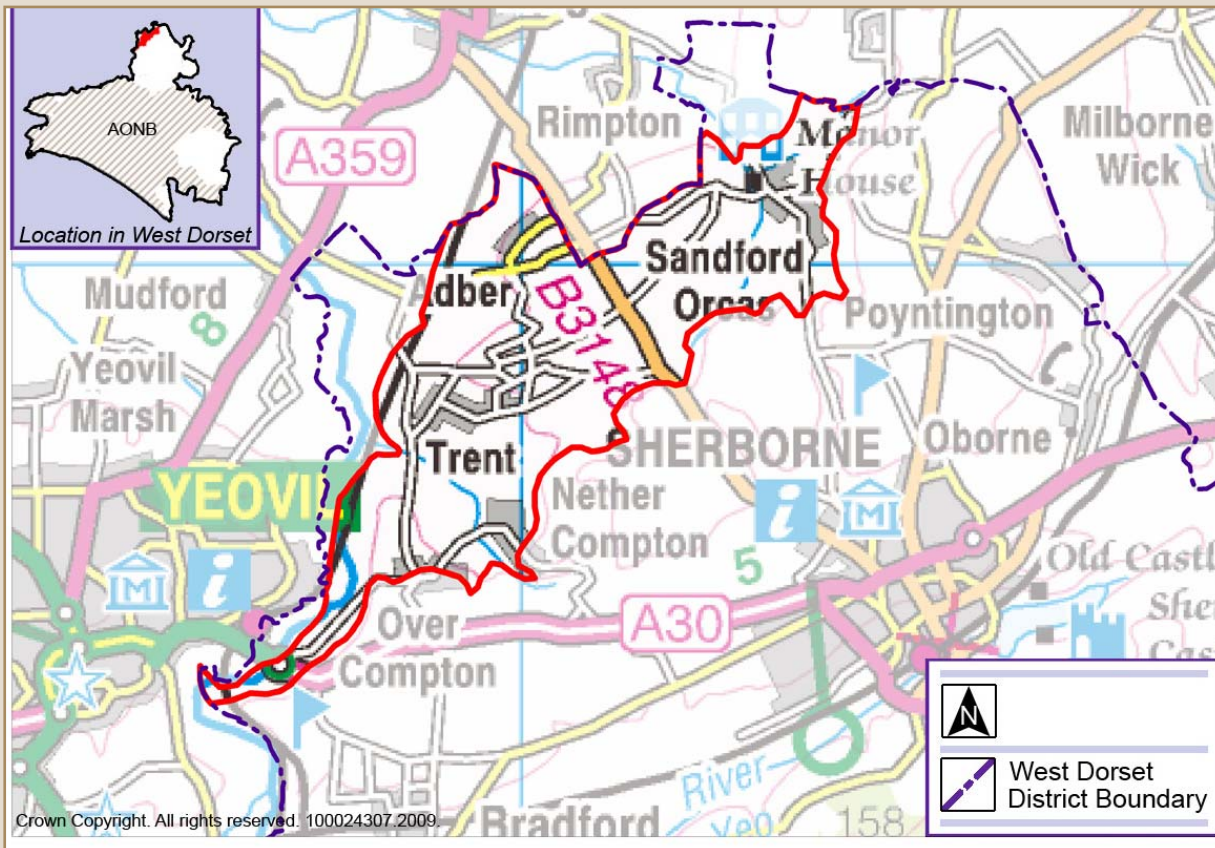


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Hooke	Upper Frome Valley	80
Kingston Russell	Bride Valley	54
Knighton	Thornford Ridge	20
Langton Herring	South Dorset Ridge and Vale	58
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Loders	Powerstock Hills	46
Long Bredy	Bride Valley	54
Longburton	North Dorset Hills	22
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	Frome and Piddle Valley Pasture	68
Lower Eype	Chideock Hills	42
Lower Halstock Leigh	Halstock Vale	32
Lower Kingcombe	Upper Frome Valley	80
Lyon's Gate	North Dorset Escarpment	28
	West Blackmoor Rolling Vales	26
Maiden Newton	Upper Frome Valley	80
Mapperton	Powerstock Hills	46
Marshalsea	Axe Valley Hills	36
Marshwood	Axe Valley Hills	36
	Marshwood Vale	38
Martinstown	Dorchester Downs	66
	South Dorset Downs	64
Melbury Bubb	North Dorset Escarpment	28
	West Blackmoor Rolling Vales	26
Melbury Osmond	Melbury Hills	30
	West Blackmoor Rolling Vales	26
Melbury Sampford	Melbury Hills	30
Melcombe Bingham	Upper Piddle Valley	76
Melplash	Brit Valley	44
	Powerstock Hills	46
Middlemarsh	Blackmoor Vale	24
Minterne Magna	Cerne and Sydling Valley	78
Monkton Wyld	Wootton Hills	40
Morcombelake	Chideock Hills	42
Moreton	Crossways Gravel Plateau	70
Mosterton	Axe Valley	34
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Nether Cerne	Cerne and Sydling Valley	78

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	Sherborne Escarpment	14
Netherbury	Brit Valley	44
North Chideock	Chideock Hills	42
North Poorton	Powerstock Woods	48
North Wootton	North Dorset Hills	22
Osborne	Sherborne Hills	16
Osmington	Osmington Ridge and Vale	60
Osmington Mills	Osmington Ridge and Vale	60
Over Compton	Trent Hills	12
	Sherborne Escarpment	14
Owermoigne	Crossways Gravel Plateau	70
	South Dorset Downs	64
Piddlehinton	Upper Piddle Valley	76
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Piddletrenthide	Upper Piddle Valley	76
Pilsdon	North Dorset Escarpment	28
	Axe Valley Hills	36
Plush	Upper Piddle Valley	76
Portesham	South Dorset Ridge and Vale	58
Powerstock	Powerstock Hills	46
Poxwell	South Dorset Downs	64
Poyntington	Sherborne Hills	16
Puddletown	Cerne and Piddle Valleys and Chalk Downland	74
Puncknowle	Bride Valley	54
Purse Caundle	North Dorset Hills	22
Rampisham	Upper Frome Valley	80
Rodden	South Dorset Ridge and Vale	58
Ryall	Chideock Hills	42
Ryme Intrinseca	Thornford Ridge	20
Salway Ash	Brit Valley	44
Sandford Orcas	Trent Hills	12
Seaborough	Axe Valley	34
Seatown	Chideock Hills	42
Sherborne	Sherborne Hills	16
Shipton Gorge	Bride Valley	54
	Powerstock Hills	46
South Bowood	Brit Valley	44
South Perrott	Axe Valley	34
Stinsford	Cerne and Piddle Valleys and Chalk Downland	74
Stockwood	West Blackmoor Rolling Vales	26
Stoke Abbott	Brit Valley	44

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Stratton	Frome and Piddle Valley Pasture	68
Swyre	Bride Valley	54
Sydling St Nicholas	Cerne and Sydling Valley	78
Symondsburly	Chideock Hills	42
Thorncombe	Axe Valley Hills	36
Thornford	Thornford Ridge	20
Tinctleton	Cerne and Piddle Valleys and Chalk Downland	74
	Frome and Piddle Valley Pasture	68
Toller Fratrum	Upper Frome Valley	80
Toller Porcorum	Upper Frome Valley	80
Toller Whelme	Upper Frome Valley	80
Tolpuddle	Cerne and Piddle Valleys and Chalk Downland	74
Trent	Trent Hills	12
Up Cerne	Cerne and Sydling Valley	78
Up Sydling	Cerne and Sydling Valley	78
Uploders	Powerstock Hills	46
Walditch	Powerstock Hills	46
	Brit Valley	44
Warmwell	Crossways Gravel Plateau	70
Waytown	Brit Valley	44
West Bay	Bride Valley	54
West Bexington	Bexington Coast	56
West Chelborough	North Dorset Escarpment	28
West Compton	Upper Frome Valley	80
West Knighton	Crossways Gravel Plateau	70
West Milton	Powerstock Hills	46
West Stafford	Crossways Gravel Plateau	70
Whitchurch Canonicorum	Chideock Hills	42
	Marshwood Vale	38
Whitcombe	Crossways Gravel Plateau	70
	South Dorset Downs	64
White Lackington	Upper Piddle Valley	76
Winterborne Abbas	South Dorset Downs	64
Winterborne Monkton	Dorchester Downs	66
	South Dorset Downs	64
Winterborne Steepleton	South Dorset Downs	64
Woodsford	Frome and Piddle Valley Pasture	68
Wootton Fitzpaine	Wootton Hills	40
Wraxall	Upper Frome Valley	80
Wynford Eagle	Upper Frome Valley	80
Yetminster	Thornford Ridge	20

# 1. TRENT HILLS



## Landscape Type: Limestone hills

### Overview

- 1.1 The Trent Hills character area comprises of a series of undulating hills. It is a varied landscape ranging from the intimate villages and valleys with their filtered views, to the larger scale and generally undeveloped higher ground with open views. There are impressive views to the northwest of this area over the lower lying land of the Yeo Valley in Somerset.

### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 1.2 Strongly undulating landform comprising of a series of limestone hills. Large arable fields are most common on the higher ground and hilltops, with smaller arable fields and some pasture on lower ground. There are occasional small woodlands.

### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 1.3 The main settlements are small villages, mostly linear in pattern, that are found in the lower parts of the area. The villages tend to be enclosed by the surrounding hillsides and appear well contained within the landscape and generally have clearly defined boundaries. Buildings are constructed with a distinctive cream/brown coloured Inferior Oolitic limestone. The higher areas are undeveloped. A network of minor rural lanes cross this area connecting the villages.

### Landscape characteristics

- 1.4 ■ The higher land and hilltops have an open feel and are characterised by large arable fields.

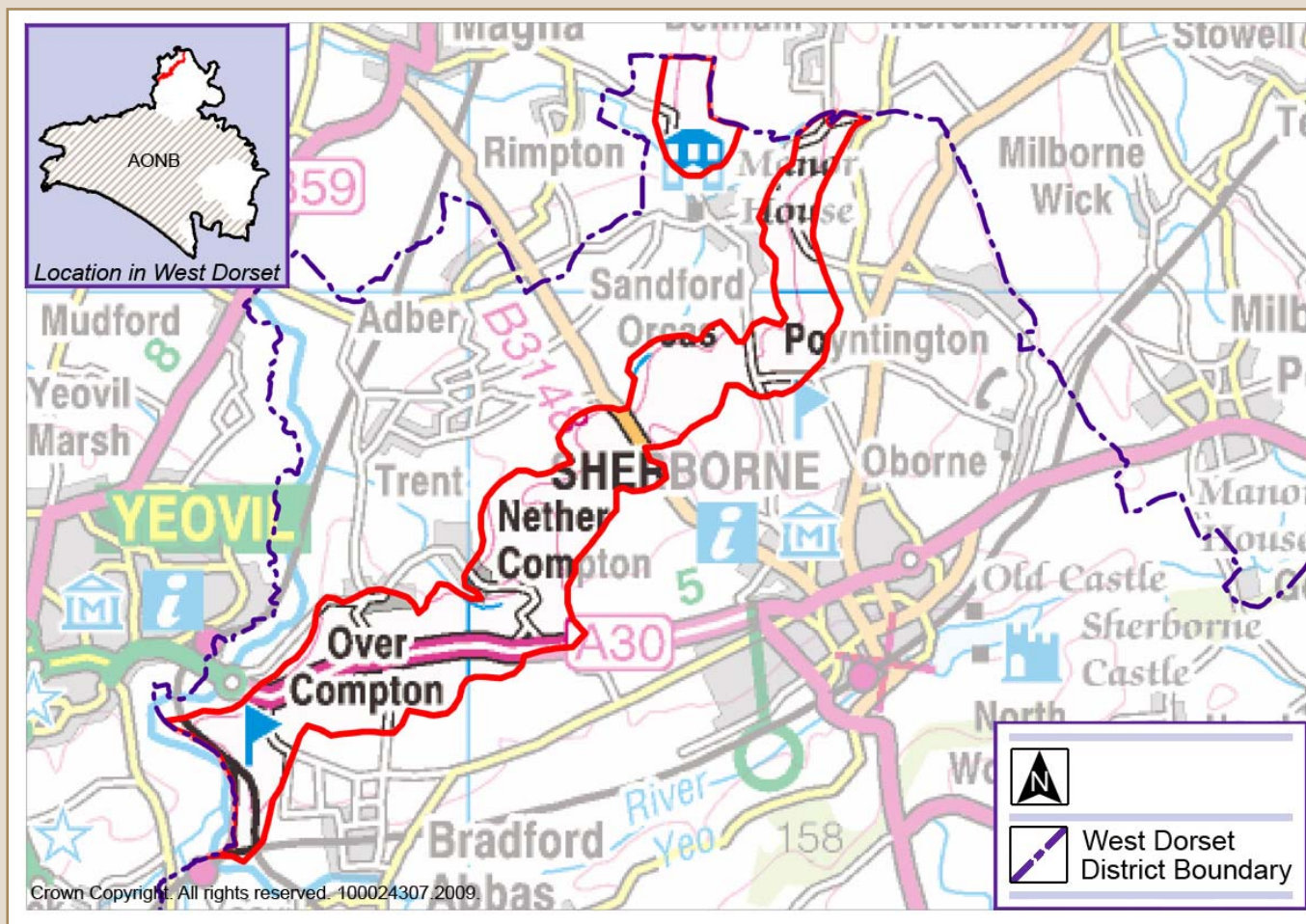
- Areas of pasture and smaller field enclosures are mostly found near villages, giving the impression of small-scale episodes of enclosure either by individuals or by communities.
- Field boundaries are marked by mature mixed hedgerows with ash and oak hedgerow trees.
- Occasional small woodlands which are usually associated with the lower areas, steep slopes, villages or streams. The numerous fragments of woodland suggest that some of the more irregular piecemeal creation of fields may have been via woodland clearance rather than enclosure.

### **Detrimental features**

- 1.5
- Large agricultural buildings have a visual impact, particularly on higher ground.
  - There is a lack of hedgerow trees in some places.
  - Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Sections of hedgerow have been removed in the past as fields have been enlarged.
  - Some remaining hedgerows have become gappy.



## 2. SHERBORNE ESCARPMENT



### Landscape Type: Limestone hills

#### Overview

- 2.1 The Sherborne Escarpment comprises a series of twisting, steep sided slopes to the north of Sherborne that run along a northeast to southwest axis, mainly facing in a north westerly to westerly direction. The slopes are occasionally incised by deep valleys. The dramatic landform of the escarpment forms a strong feature that provides a distinctive backdrop to views from surrounding areas. The area has a quiet, rural character and is largely undeveloped, apart from the A30 dual carriageway.
- 2.2 Compton House in the west has had an influence on this area with its associated landscaped grounds.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 2.3 Steeply sloping limestone escarpment. Much of the area is covered in woodland, which is mostly conifer plantation. Some pasture on lower slopes with larger arable fields on higher ground. Areas of species rich neutral grassland on the steep slopes.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 2.4 This area is largely undeveloped but for the hamlets of Stallen and Holway plus some scattered farmsteads. Oolitic limestone (Inferior Oolite) is the common local building stone.

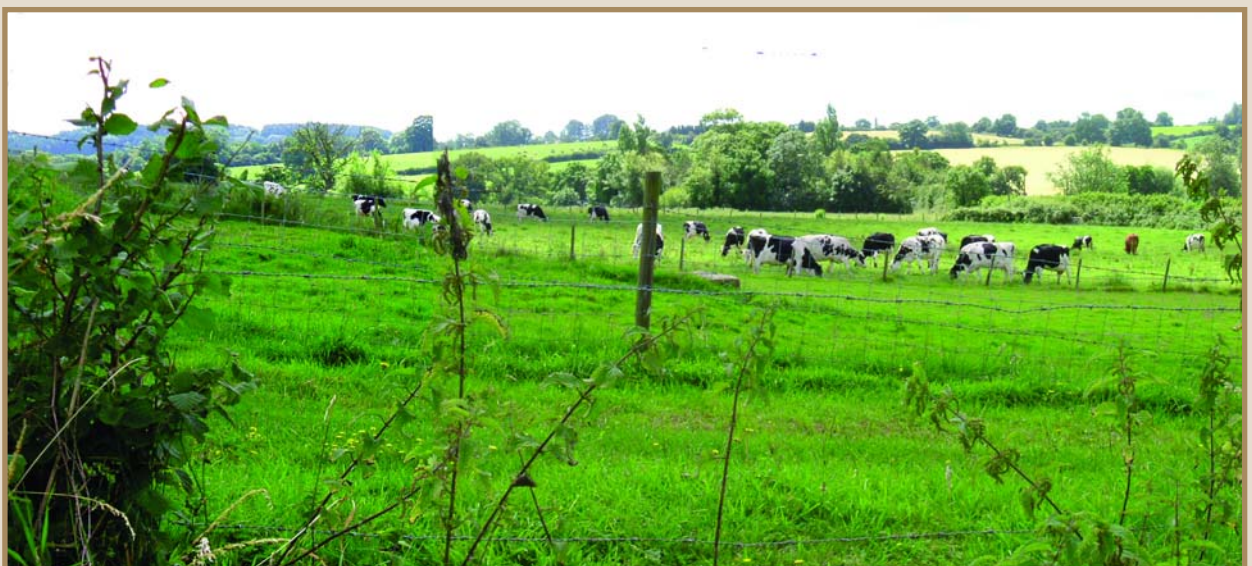
- 2.5 The A30 dual carriageway road has a significant impact. The new road appears to have been constructed along the line of the historic transport route, as the adjacent field patterns relate to the road. In several locations rock faces have been exposed as a result of road building and the need for cuttings through the steeper slopes, and some of these features have been designated as a SSSI for their geological interest.

### Landscape characteristics

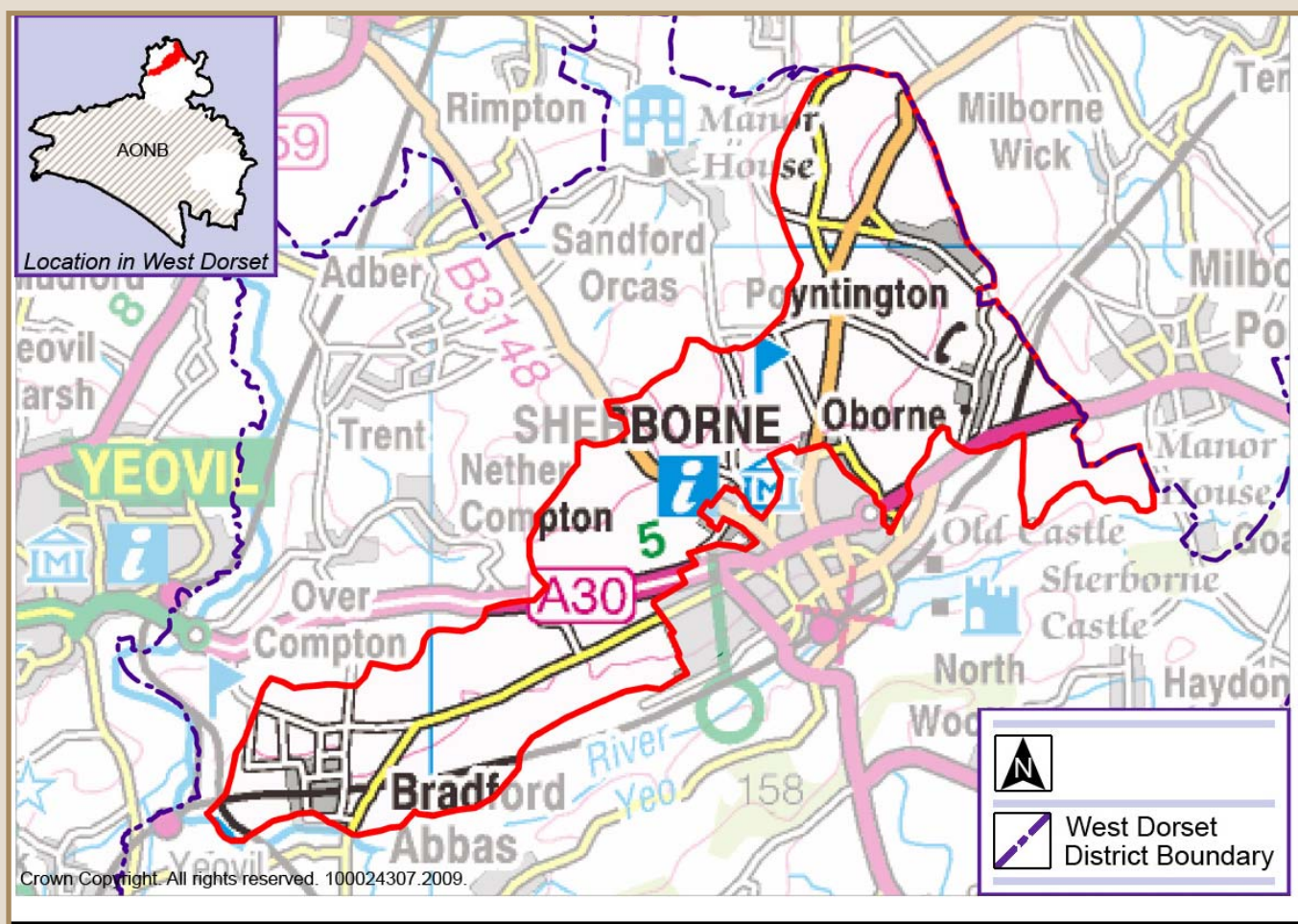
- Often an intimate scale with filtered views within the many wooded areas. Outside of the woodlands there are open views over the Trent Hills and beyond.
- These hills and woodlands form a distinctive dark backdrop to many of the views back from the north.
- Significant areas of woodland, with linear woodlands and conifer plantations usually found on the steepest slopes.
- Areas of species rich neutral grassland can also be found on the steep slopes.
- Some larger arable fields on higher ground. Mostly small, irregular shaped fields used for pasture on the lower slopes.
- Fields enclosed by mixed hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Hedgerow trees are mostly ash or occasionally oak.

### Detrimental features

- 2.6
- The A30 dual carriageway road has marked physical, visual and noise impacts locally. The road also forms a barrier, dividing the north and south parts of this area.
  - To the south the modern field patterns and golf course have eroded the historic character of this part of the area.
  - Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Conifer plantations have a landscape impact.



### 3. SHERBORNE HILLS



**Landscape Type: Limestone hills**

#### Overview

3.1 The Sherborne Hills area is the broad and sloping south facing valley side of the River Yeo.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

3.2 A complex underlying geology of limestone gives rise to a sloping landform with a smooth to gently undulating profile incised by small-scale steep sided valleys and coombes. Shallow and free draining soils support intensive arable and pasture fields.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

3.3 This area is heavily influenced by the development of the town of Sherborne, and historically by the Sherborne Abbey, and the two Sherborne castles.

3.4 There are close knit settlements of local Cornbrash and Oolitic limestone located within the shelter of the valley floor, connected by historic transport routes. Elsewhere, narrow lanes that often turn at right angles along the distinct kinked field boundaries connect isolated houses and farmsteads.



## Landscape characteristics

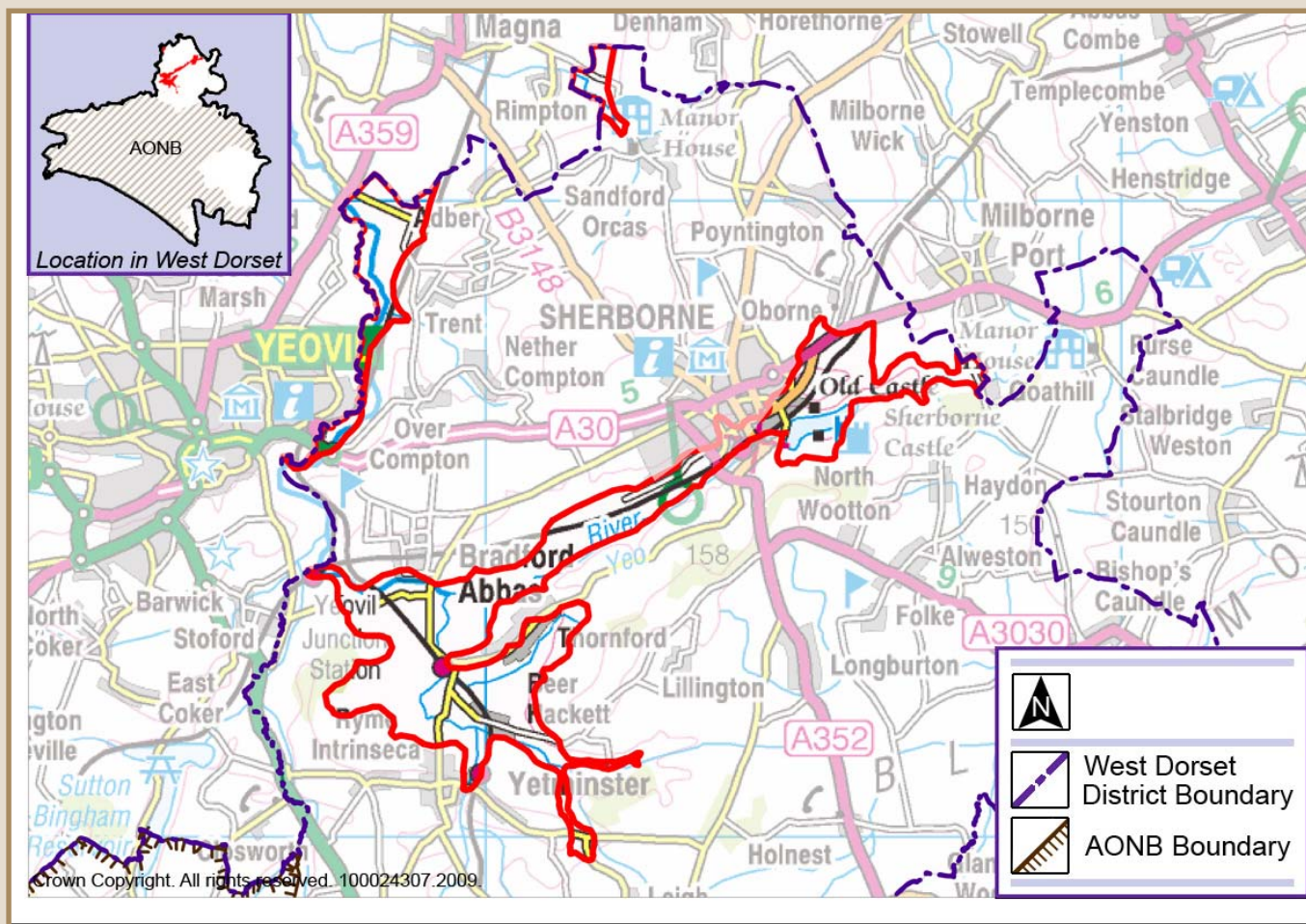
- Long and open views across the Yeo Valley.
- Large regular and small irregular shaped fields of predominantly arable and some improved pasture.
- Herb rich lowland meadow within small- scale valleys and coombes.
- The fields are defined by uniform trimmed hedgerow boundaries and hedgerow banks. Occasional hedgerow ash trees.
- Small regular native copses associated with built form and functioning as shelterbelts.

## Detrimental features

- Sherborne and Bradford Abbas have some conspicuous hard urban edges that are highly visible and prominent in the countryside.
- Modern transport corridors including the A30 and London-Exeter railway sever the landscape.
- Some hedgerows have been removed to increase field sizes. Some remaining hedgerows are poorly managed reducing their wildlife and landscape value.
- Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.
- Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
- Some large agricultural buildings have an adverse visual impact.



## 4. YEO VALLEY PASTURE



### Landscape Type: Valley pasture

#### Overview

- 4.1 This character area covers the low-lying and flat floodplain of the River Yeo and its main tributary, the Wriggle River. A remote and flat landscape enclosed by tree cover and the surrounding sloping landform.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 4.2 Formed of fluvial deposits, deep clay soils support a variety of farmland and historically were managed as floodplain meadows. Much of this land is now used for arable farming although some areas of pasture remain, providing grazing for dairy herds. To the north, the urban edge of Sherborne, and the 18th century gardens and parkland of Sherborne Castle have an important influence on the character of the landscape. The old Sherborne Castle, which is now a ruin, and the key road and river crossing points have also influenced the landscape.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 4.3 Settlement within the floodplain area is generally sparse, as development has tended to be on the drier and more sheltered slopes of the valley sides. To the west, narrow lanes connect scattered small villages and hamlets, built predominantly of Forest Marble, Inferior Oolite and Fullers Earth Rock.

## Landscape characteristics

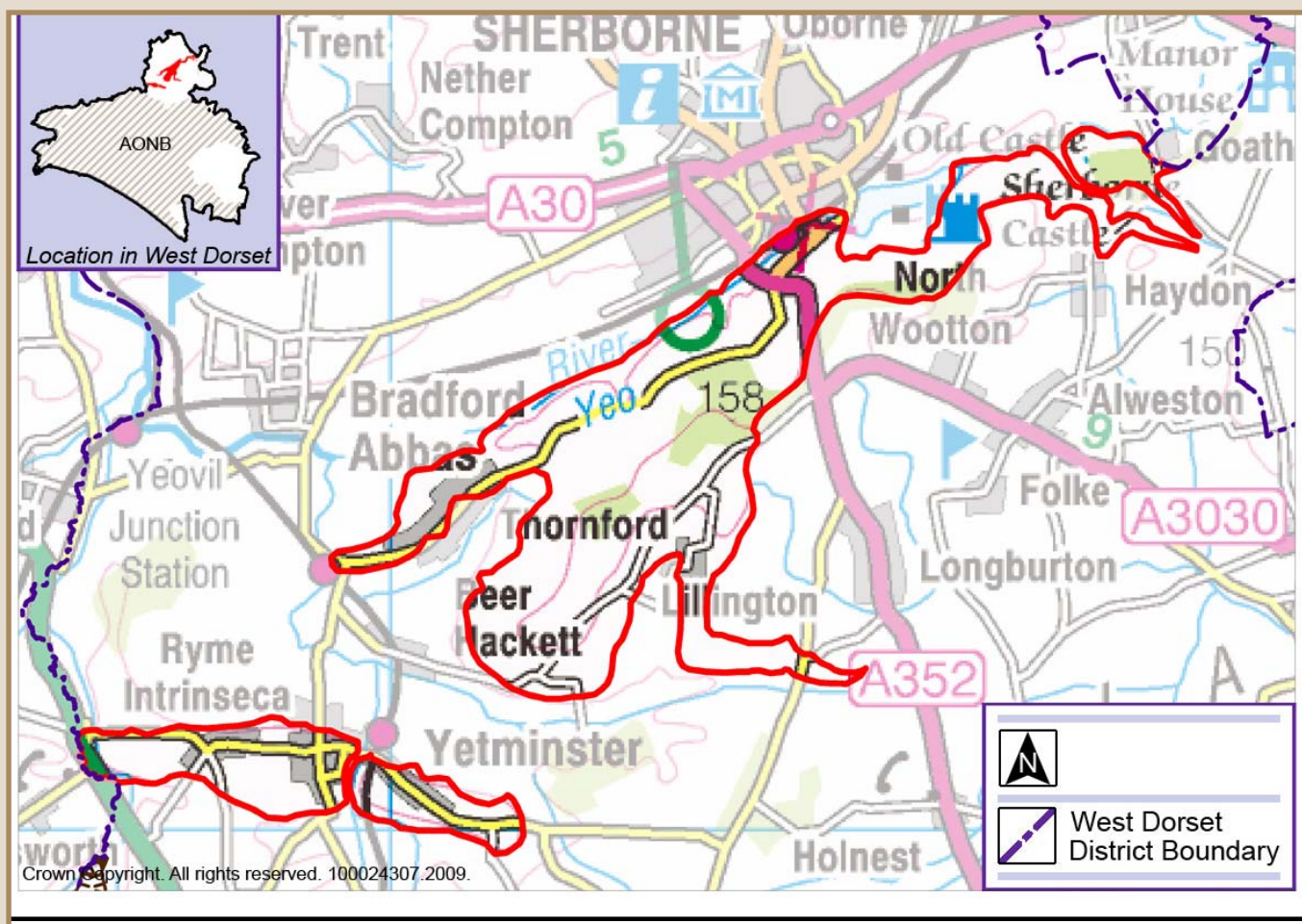
- 4.4
- The landform is generally flat and largely open in character, gently sloping towards the river floodplain.
  - Carr woodland and seasonally wet pasture, drained by networks of straight ditches.
  - Medium to large arable and pasture fields bordered by trimmed hedgerows with hedgerow trees.
  - Small deciduous woodland, copses and tree groups associated with buildings or occupying the corners of fields.
  - Riparian vegetation such as Alder and Willow flank the river corridor.
  - Parkland landscape and 18th century gardens created by Capability Brown around Sherborne Castle.
  - A network of transport routes crosses the flat valley floor including the railway line. Small historic bridges, of local stone, provide crossing points over the waterways.

## Detrimental features

- 4.5
- Urbanising impact on some areas adjacent to settlements. At Bradford Abbas, insensitive modern development and large-scale roads with wide verges contrasts with the narrow local rural lanes.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Increase in agricultural intensification and extent of arable farming on the valley floor has reduced river corridor vegetation and hedgerow cover.
  - Some hedgerow field boundaries are poorly maintained, particularly noticeable along the valley floors. Hedgerows have been replaced with post and wire fencing in places.
  - Incremental loss of floodplain trees and woodland. Wet woodland is often now restricted to small blocks of willow and alder along the immediate riverbanks.



## 5. THORNFORD RIDGE



### Landscape Type: Limestone hills

#### Overview

- 5.1 This area is the distinct series of stepped linear ridges and oblong hills that form the north facing side of the Yeo Valley. It is a dramatic and sloping landform with lush green fields and wooded ridges, commanding a presence across the Yeo Valley. At Sherborne Park the open grassland peppered with individual trees, many of veteran age, is distinctly recognisable across the sloping ridgeline.
- 5.2 Underlying geology and predominant land use
- 5.3 An underlying geology of Cornbrash and Oolitic Limestone gives rise to shallow soils supporting a mosaic of farmland, woodland and parkland connected by a network of thick mixed hedgerows and hedgerow trees.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 5.4 Due to the steep topography, development is relatively sparse but for the ridge top village of Thornford whose linear form is the result of modern extension. Elsewhere, a few small stone and thatch settlements, farmsteads and dwellings, nestle in the shelter of the lower slopes, connected by relatively straight, minor historic transport routes that follow the ridgeline contours. Common local building stones include Inferior Oolite and Forest Marble.

5.5 The track at Gainsborough Hill forms part of an historic route that ran between Sherborne and Dorchester.

### Landscape characteristics

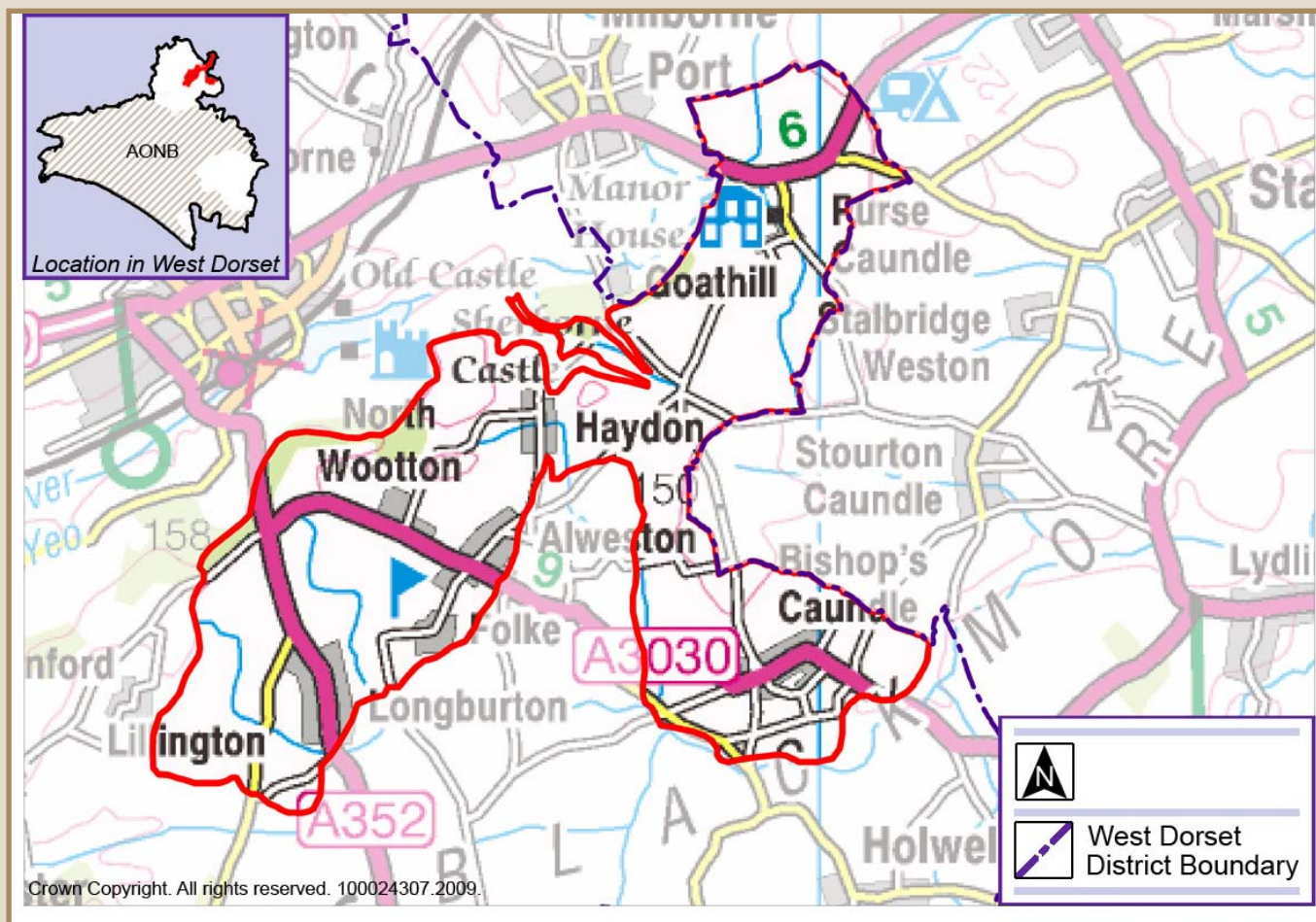
- 5.6
- Large-scale pattern of arable and pasture fields. Those formed during the enclosures of the late medieval or post medieval period are identifiable by the distinct curving and dogleg field boundaries.
  - Clusters of smaller fields and paddocks exist around the fringes of the settlements, largely due to small-scale 'hobby' farming and horse paddocks. The fields are defined by hedgerow boundaries with incidental hedgerow trees.
  - Medium to large areas of mixed or deciduous woodlands and forests including some ancient semi natural woodland plus scattered deciduous copses and tree groups.
  - Extent of hedgerow trees variable, usually oak or ash.
  - Spring fed, minor streams drain towards the Yeo Valley.
  - Sherborne Park with its wooded pasture and parkland is an important historic and landscape feature.

### Detrimental features

- 5.7
- Some hedgerows have been poorly managed reducing their wildlife and landscape value.
  - Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Hard urban edges at Thorncombe stand out in the wider countryside.
  - Some large agricultural buildings have a negative visual impact.
  - Conifer plantations have a landscape impact.



## 6. NORTH DORSET HILLS



### Landscape Type: Limestone hills

#### Overview

- 6.1 This area is located at the end of a broad chain of low-lying hills that extend north of Bishops Caundle into North Dorset and South Somerset. Small scale valleys and streams incise a sloping and undulating large-scale landscape offering long distance views across the Blackmoor Vale.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 6.2 An underlying geology of limestone has resulted in highly fertile lime rich and clayey soils supporting a diversity of habitats including ancient woodlands, orchards, and riverside vegetation. There are also pockets of plateau gravel supporting ericaceous species such as azalea and rhododendron. Overall landcover is predominantly arable fields with some pasture.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 6.3 Linear or nucleated settlements built from Cornbrash and Forest Marble, centred on a small village green or road junction. Scattered farmsteads and historic Manor houses with their garden and parkland features such as stone walls.
- 6.4 The track at Gainsborough Hill running into Green Lane forms part of the historic route that ran between the centre of Sherborne and Dorchester.

## Landscape characteristics

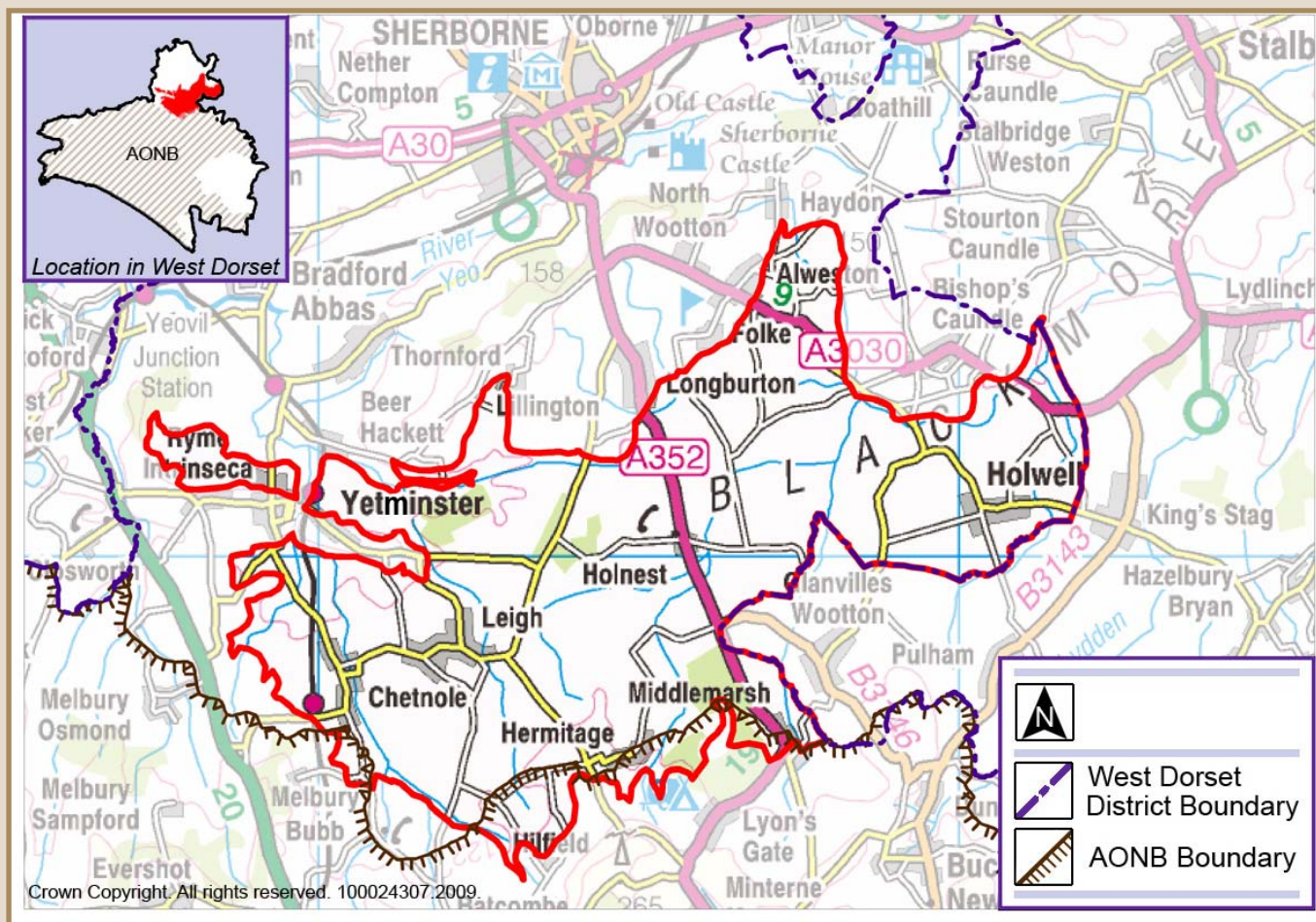
- 6.5
- Broad series of sloping and undulating hills incised by small-scale valleys with streams.
  - Fields of various size and shape, predominantly arable with some pasture for grazing livestock.
  - Trimmed hedgerows with field margins, of mixed species or uniform Hazel / Hawthorn, plus hedgerow Oaks in areas.
  - Medium sized blocks of mixed conifer and deciduous woodland plus small native copses occupy the corners of fields or run parallel in strips alongside roads.
  - Orchards.
  - Major roads radiate from Sherborne interconnected by a network of minor roads and lanes that turn at right angles. Medieval tracks/greenways and sunken lanes follow the historic kinked field boundaries lined with mature hedgerows.
  - Several wells, ponds and springs feed into minor streams.
  - Mature riverside vegetation associated with watercourses.

## Detrimental features

- 6.6
- Unsympathetic new extensions to villages have undermined their historic character.
  - Landscape character degraded by tree belts of ornamental, often coniferous, species planted to screen modern development.
  - Boundaries of modern development, including private gardens, are sometimes out of character with the surrounding countryside.
  - Some hedgerows have been poorly managed reducing their wildlife and landscape value.
  - Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Conifer plantations have a landscape impact.



## 7. BLACKMOOR VALE



### Landscape Type: Clay vale

#### Overview

- 7.1 The Blackmore Vale is a traditional, pastoral clay vale with consistent patterns of trimmed hedgerows and distinctive, mature hedgerow oak trees. There are dramatic views of the chalk escarpment rising up steeply to the south of the Blackmore Vale, with the limestone hills enclosing the vale to the north. The Blackmore vale extends eastwards into North Dorset District.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 7.2 Flat or gently sloping and undulating clay vale. Consistent patterns of landuse as grazing pasture along with numerous small oak, ash and hazel woodlands.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 7.3 The area is generally undeveloped with most settlements comprising small clustered hamlets and farmsteads. Scattered farmsteads underpin the largely undeveloped and tranquil character, reflecting the long tradition of dairy farming. Older buildings are built of Forest Marble or Cornbrash in a rubble form. Other common building materials include Ham Hill stone, Inferior Oolite, Upper Greensand and brick.
- 7.4 A network of minor lanes crosses the area with wide grass verges backed by ditches and trimmed



hedges. There are several tracks and lanes known as Droves that have wide grass verges, and were historically used for the transport of cattle over the clay soils. Broke Lane forms part of the historic route that ran between the centre of Sherborne and Dorchester.

### Landscape characteristics

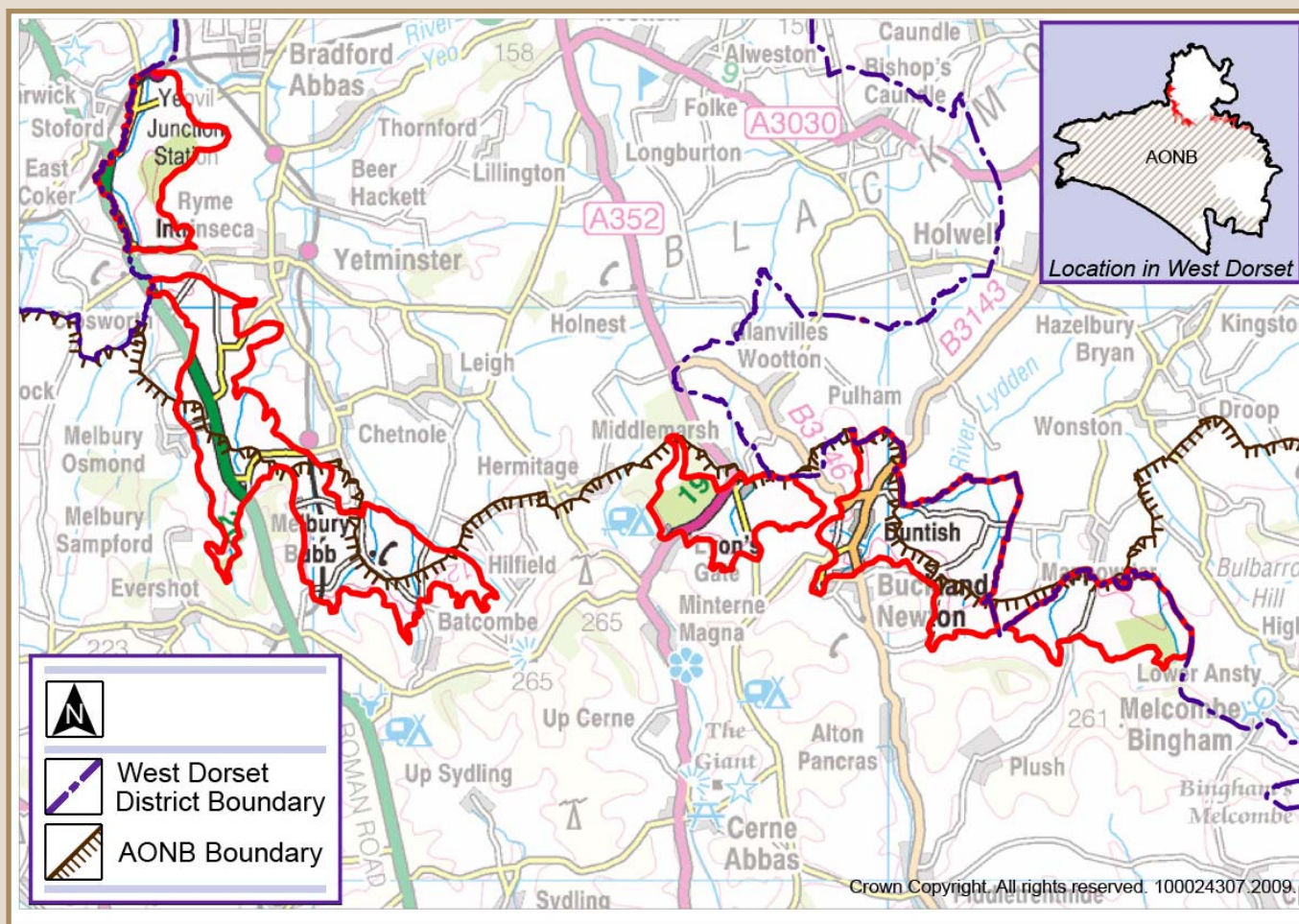
- 7.5
- The area has an intimate feel with its comparatively low, flat landscape surrounded by the elevated chalk escarpment and limestone hills. Views are open or framed across the vale with these higher lands in the distance.
  - There are many small woods and copses, which enclose or frame wider views, and numerous streams and ditches. Many of the bigger woodlands have been replanted with conifer trees whilst retaining broadleaf trees on their outer edges.
  - Small pasture fields of varied size and shape are bordered by a continuous network of trimmed hedgerows that contain frequent, mature hedgerow oak trees.
  - The clay soils are drained by the extensive network of streams, which are often associated with small woodlands. There are important areas of lowland neutral grassland.
  - Roadside hedges are often set back behind a wide grass verge with a ditch immediately in front of the hedge.

### Detrimental features

- 7.6
- Some agricultural buildings and village edges are visually intrusive.
  - Plantations of conifer trees within woodlands appear out of character.
  - Hedgebanks are in poor condition.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.
  - Existing hedgerow oak trees are mature specimens, sometimes stag headed.



## 8. WEST BLACKMOOR ROLLING VALES



**Landscape Type:** Rolling Vales

### Overview

8.1 The West Blackmore Rolling Vales forms a transitional landscape between the distinctly flatter land of the Blackmore Vale to the north and the dramatic, steeply rising North Dorset Escarpment to the south. Land use and appearance is predominantly pastoral as with the Vale; however this land is more elevated and hilly.

### Underlying geology and predominant land use

8.2 Undulating clay, Gault and Lower Greensand hills that are generally higher towards the escarpment. Mainly improved pasture fields of varying size and shape with arable fields on more gentle slopes. Small deciduous woodlands and conifer plantations.

### Settlement pattern and characteristics

8.3 The area is generally undeveloped with occasional scattered hamlets and farmsteads. The predominant building stone is Forest Marble limestone.

## Landscape characteristics

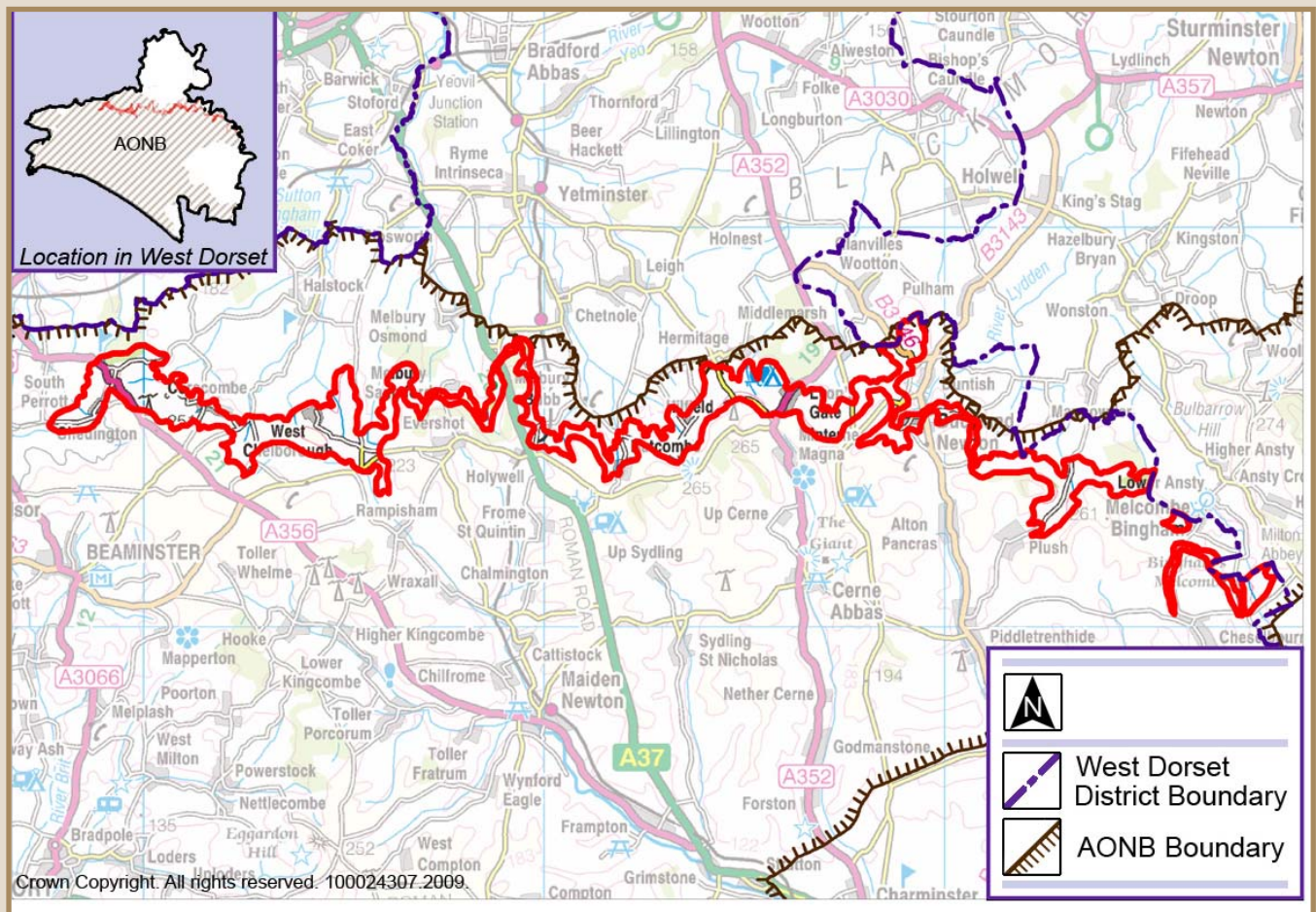
- 8.4
- The area can have an enclosed feel particularly in some parts adjacent to the chalk escarpment. Other parts have open views north across the lower lying adjacent vale.
  - There are many small deciduous woods and copses, which enclose or frame wider views. Some woodland now have substantial conifer plantations.
  - Many springs and small streams, often with woodland, and damp areas.
  - Mostly pasture fields enclosed by hedges with mature hedgerow oak trees.

## Detrimental features

- 8.5
- Hedgerows are poorly managed or have been lost in some parts.
  - Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Plantations of conifer trees have a negative landscape impact.
  - Concrete post and wire fencing for some boundaries appears out of character.



## 9. NORTH DORSET ESCARPMENT



**Landscape Type:** Chalk ridge / escarpment

### Overview

9.1 The North Dorset Escarpment with its steep, twisting and incised landform provides a contrasting backdrop to the Blackmore Vale further north and the series of chalk valley landscapes to the south. It is a largely unsettled landscape with occasional isolated farms set within broadleaved woodlands and open grasslands. It has a more subtle character than the other escarpments with a variety of colours, textures and land use. Between Higher Melcombe and Evershot, the ridge is narrow and at its steepest with significant coverage of ancient woodlands. Towards the Halstock Vale, the slopes become more gradual. The extensive, panoramic views of the surrounding countryside provide a great sense of isolation with an unspoilt quality.

### Underlying geology and predominant land use

9.2 Thin calcareous soils with underlying geology of chalk and greensand. The steep slopes support occasional broadleaved woodlands, conifer plantations, patches of scrub and species rich grasslands. Large arable fields and some pasture fields are found on the top of the escarpments once the land levels off. Pastoral and arable fields give a more structured appearance towards the bottom of the escarpment.

## Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 9.3 The escarpment is mostly unsettled with occasional isolated farmsteads. The local building stone varies between Inferior Oolite, Forest Marble and some Ham Hill Stone in the west, to Chalk, Forest Marble, Upper Greensand, Flint and Purbeck Corallian in the east.

## Landscape characteristics

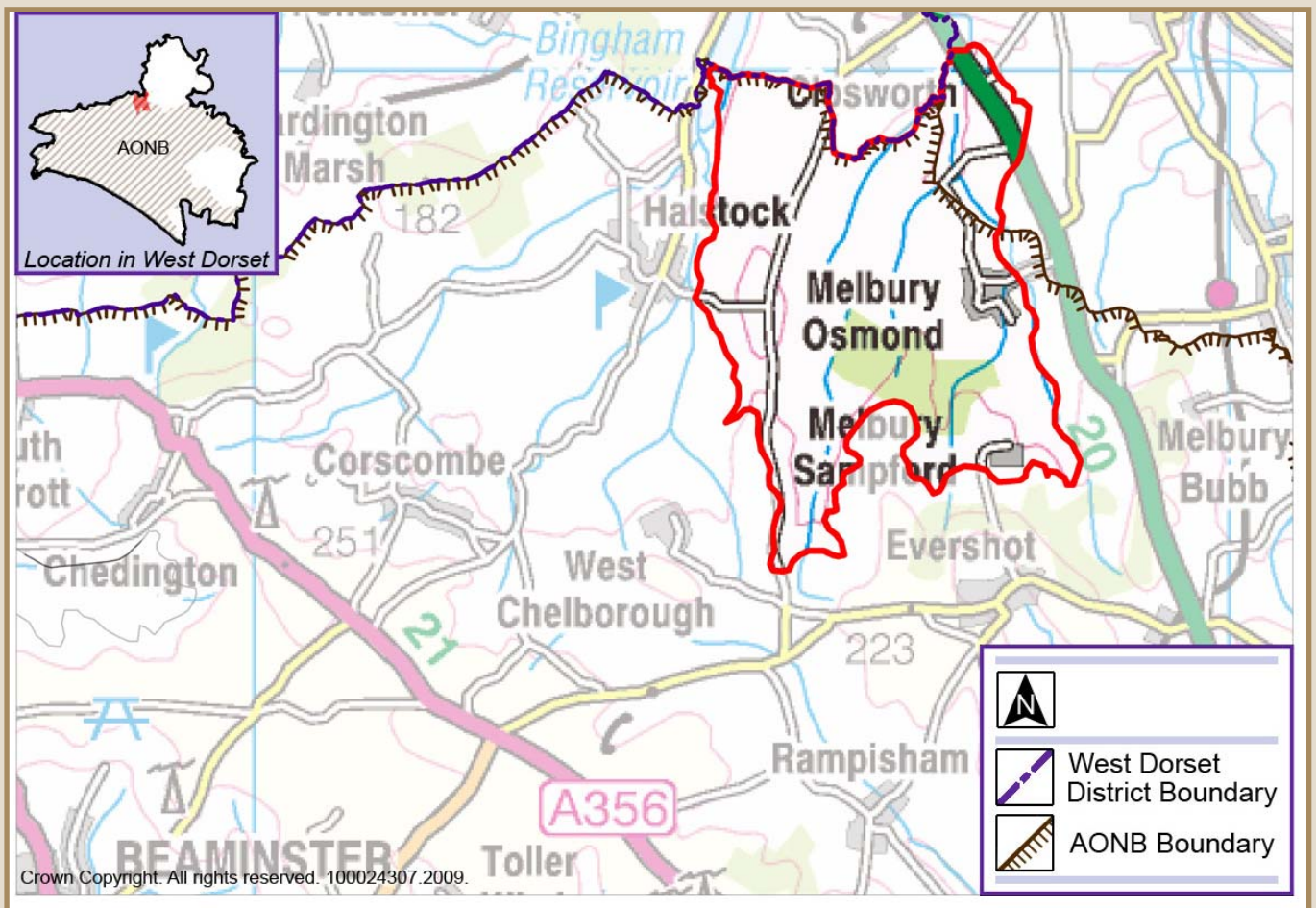
- 9.4
- Towards the top of the escarpment, views are extensive with large, straight-sided arable fields (late c18th / early c19th enclosures) and occasional thin hedgerows.
  - Panoramic long distance views of the surrounding Blackmore Vale landscape to the north.
  - Prehistoric barrows and prominent hilltop forts are located in elevated positions.
  - Areas of open, unimproved calcareous turf on steep slopes with patches of scrub.
  - Ancient sunken, winding lanes with an open character towards the top.
  - A dramatic and exposed steep and narrow escarpment with rounded spurs and deep coombes, textured soil creep, patches of scrub, and unimproved calcareous turf adding to the ecological interest.
  - Towards the lower slopes, the escarpment becomes more intimate with small scale mixed grassland fields, small woodland blocks of hanging ancient oak, ash, hazel and dense hedgerows.

## Detrimental features

- 9.5
- Pylons and masts are visually prominent creating visual clutter and detracting from the characteristic open views.
  - Some fragmentation of grasslands through conifer plantations and arable encroachment from the surrounding uplands.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlement.
  - Agricultural barns sited on the skyline have an adverse visual impact.
  - Some traditional barns and farm buildings are in a poor state of repair.
  - Invasive scrub vegetation has encroached on areas of grassland.
  - Roadside banks are subject to erosion in the narrow, sunken and the open lanes.



## 10. MELBURY HILLS



### Landscape Type: Limestone hills

#### Overview

- 10.1 The Melbury Hills is a rural, largely agricultural landscape characterised by a series of low limestone ridges running north to south incised by deep river valleys. To the south, an extensive deer park at Melbury Park has a significant positive impact on the character of the area with its associated parkland landscape of mature ash, oak, beech and birch trees. Although this character area feels enclosed along the valley floors, the higher ridges afford good views over the Halstock Vale.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 10.2 Complex geology of rounded limestone ridges with incised clay valleys. Landcover is mainly arable fields or improved pasture. There are numerous woodlands, often alongside streams, and including conifer plantations. Important historic parkland also covers a significant area.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 10.3 Small, nucleated villages of Forest Marble limestone connected by a series of winding lanes with trimmed hedgerows.

## Landscape characteristics

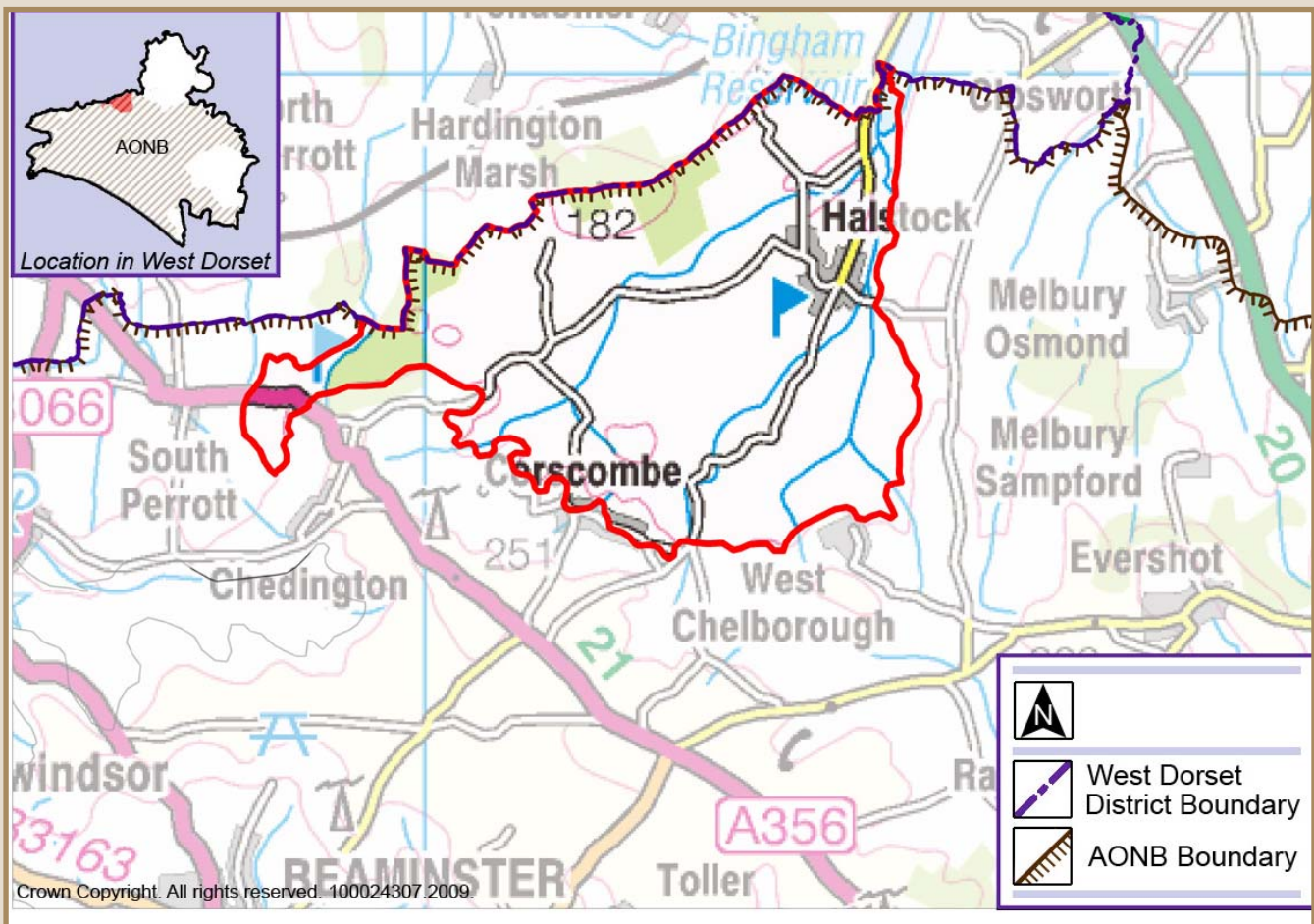
- The surrounding hills are covered in extensive broadleaved woodlands along low limestone ridges. Small irregular woodlands and hedgerow trees on the valley sides add to the sense of enclosure.
- Regular patchwork of arable fields and neutral pastures with hedgerows and trees.
- Network of small springs and small stream corridors with linear wet woodlands and wet neutral pastures.
- Extensive rolling parkland landscape with veteran trees and traditional metal estate fencing to boundaries.

## Detrimental features

- 10.4
- Hedgerows becoming gappy or over-managed. Some sections of missing hedgerow have been replaced with post and wire fencing.
  - Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Areas of rough pasture and wet meadows on the valley floor have been lost following conversion to larger fields of arable use.
  - Scrub has encroached over some areas of rough grassland on the slopes.
  - Extensive areas of conifer plantation have a landscape impact.
  - Large agricultural buildings can have a visual impact.



## 11. HALSTOCK VALE



### Landscape Type: Clay vale

#### Overview

- 11.1 The Halstock Vale is a traditional, grassland clay vale with consistent patterns of trimmed hedgerows and hedgerow oaks. It has a more intimate character and undulating landform than the Marshwood Vale with large broadleaved woodlands on the gentle slopes around the central part of the vale. To the north, the vale is enclosed by limestone hills with the slopes of the chalk escarpment to the south.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 11.2 Flat clay vale with a characteristic landcover of irregular damp neutral pasture. There are small oak, ash and hazel woodlands and larger mixed plantations.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 11.3 Settlement pattern of dispersed small nucleated villages and scattered isolated farmsteads built from a variety of vernacular building materials including thatch and flint, plus various limestones such as Forest Marble, Inferior Oolite, Cornbrash and Chalk. Winding rural lanes with trimmed hedgerows and steep species rich verges.



## Landscape characteristics

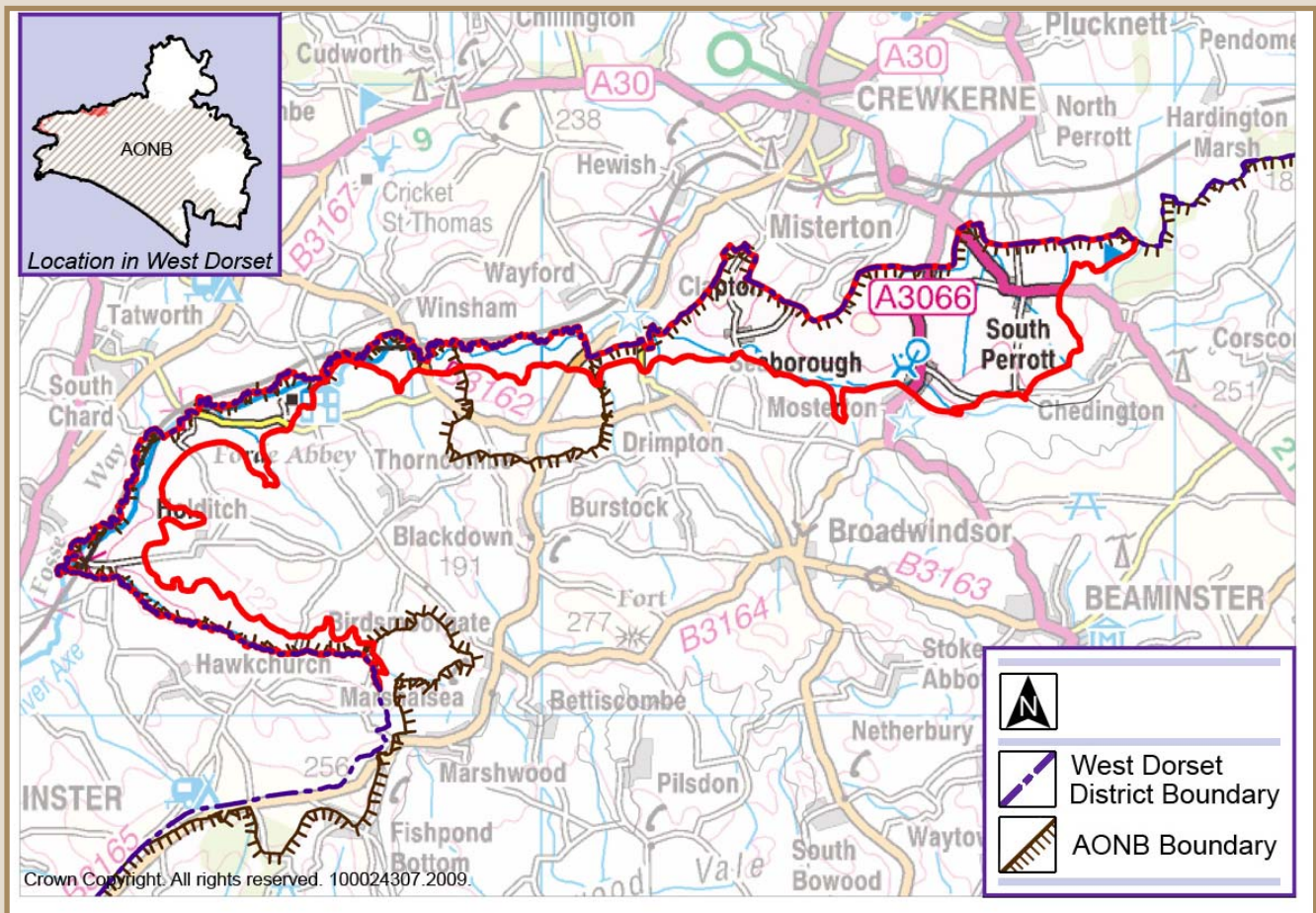
- Intimate gently rolling lowland grassland vale.
- Consistent field pattern with network of trimmed hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees, providing a speckled appearance to the landscape.
- Small scale watercourses and streamside willow, alder and other riparian vegetation.
- Occasional meadows of unimproved, neutral grasslands.
- Occasional orchards and parkland landscapes.
- A peaceful, tranquil and rural character with wide open skies.

## Detrimental features

- 11.6
- Some agricultural buildings and conifer plantations are visually intrusive.
  - Some traditional barns and farm buildings are in a poor state of repair.
  - Historic loss of wet woodlands, meadows, and traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Fragmentation of hedgerows
  - Loss and decline in hedgerow trees.
  - Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.



## 12. AXE VALLEY



### Landscape Type: Undulating river valley

#### Overview

- 12.1 Circling the north western part of the AONB, the Axe Valley shares a similar character to the floor of the Brit Valley. The wide terraced floodplain and associated meandering River Axe is enclosed by the surrounding undulating hills.
- 12.2 Forde Abbey and its associated parkland landscape are key features of the area. There is a subtle change in character to the surrounding wooded hills.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 12.4 The flat bottomed valley floor and associated terraces have been formed from fluvial deposits. Undulating greensand hills form the valley sides. Landcover is mostly mixed arable and improved pasture. Parkland at Forde Abbey adds to landscape interest.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 12.5 Scattered nucleated settlements along the valley floor terraces. The locally used building stone consists of Inferior Oolite limestone and Upper Greensand.

## Landscape characteristics

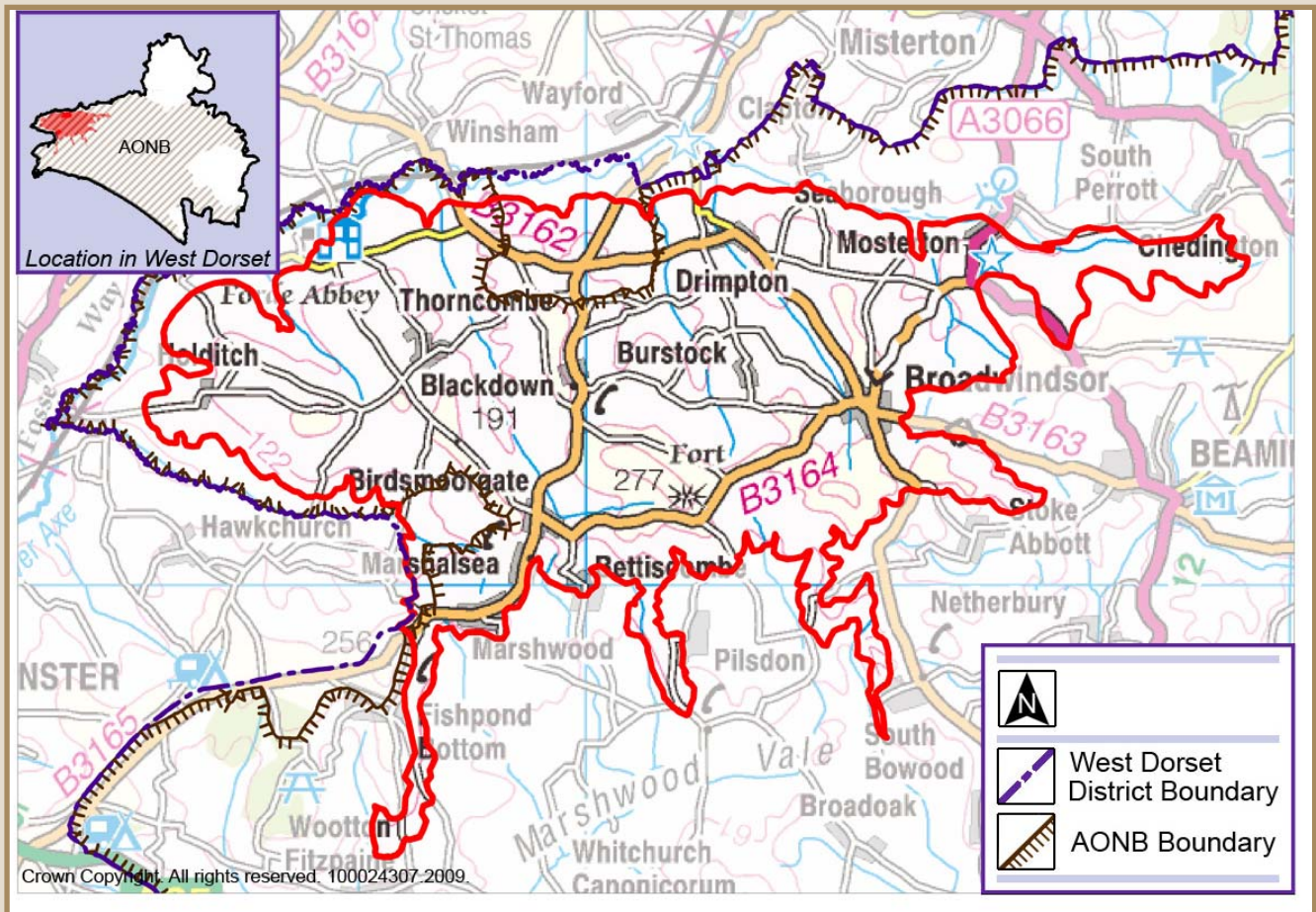
- 12.6
- Occasional small oak and ash woodlands on upper terraces with large arable and grassland fields.
  - Trimmed hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees are set around a patchwork of medium fields of arable and improved pastures.
  - Meandering terraced river floodplain with damp neutral pastures and ribbons of wet woodland and wet flushes add to the ecological interest.
  - Long open views along the valley floor.
  - Parkland landscapes and former medieval deer parks.
  - Historic bridges made from local stone cross the river.

## Detrimental features

- 12.7
- Along the valley floor, some hedgerows have become fragmented with hedgerow trees in decline.
  - Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.
  - Historic loss of wet woodland, pasture and traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Some areas of wet, unimproved pasture have been drained and are now cultivated as arable fields.
  - Poplar trees and conifer plantations have a landscape impact.
  - Intrusive industrial and residential developments around the urban fringe weaken the surrounding rural character.
  - Some agricultural buildings and village edges are visually intrusive.
  - Negative impacts from industrial and mineral development



## 13. AXE VALLEY HILLS



### Landscape Type: Undulating wooded hills

#### Overview

13.1. Similar to other areas within the west of the AONB, the Axe Valley Hills are characterised by a series of linear hills running north to south, formed from underlying greensand ridges. These are particularly dominant where the heathy summits form the backdrop to the Marshwood Vale including Pilsdon Pen, Lewesdon Hill and Waddon Hill forts. There are a series of small valleys with streams, including the Synderford and Temple Brook, draining into the Axe Valley further north. An intimate and tranquil quality confined by the surrounding steep hills.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

13.2 Greensand hills separated by deep, branching clay valleys. Landcover is mostly grazed pasture with some arable on the valley sides along with occasional coniferous plantations.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

13.3 Scattered dispersed settlements of golden limestone and thatch along the valley bottoms. Deep, narrow winding lanes with deep hedge banks. The local building stone consists of Upper Greensand chert and Inferior Oolite.

## Landscape characteristics

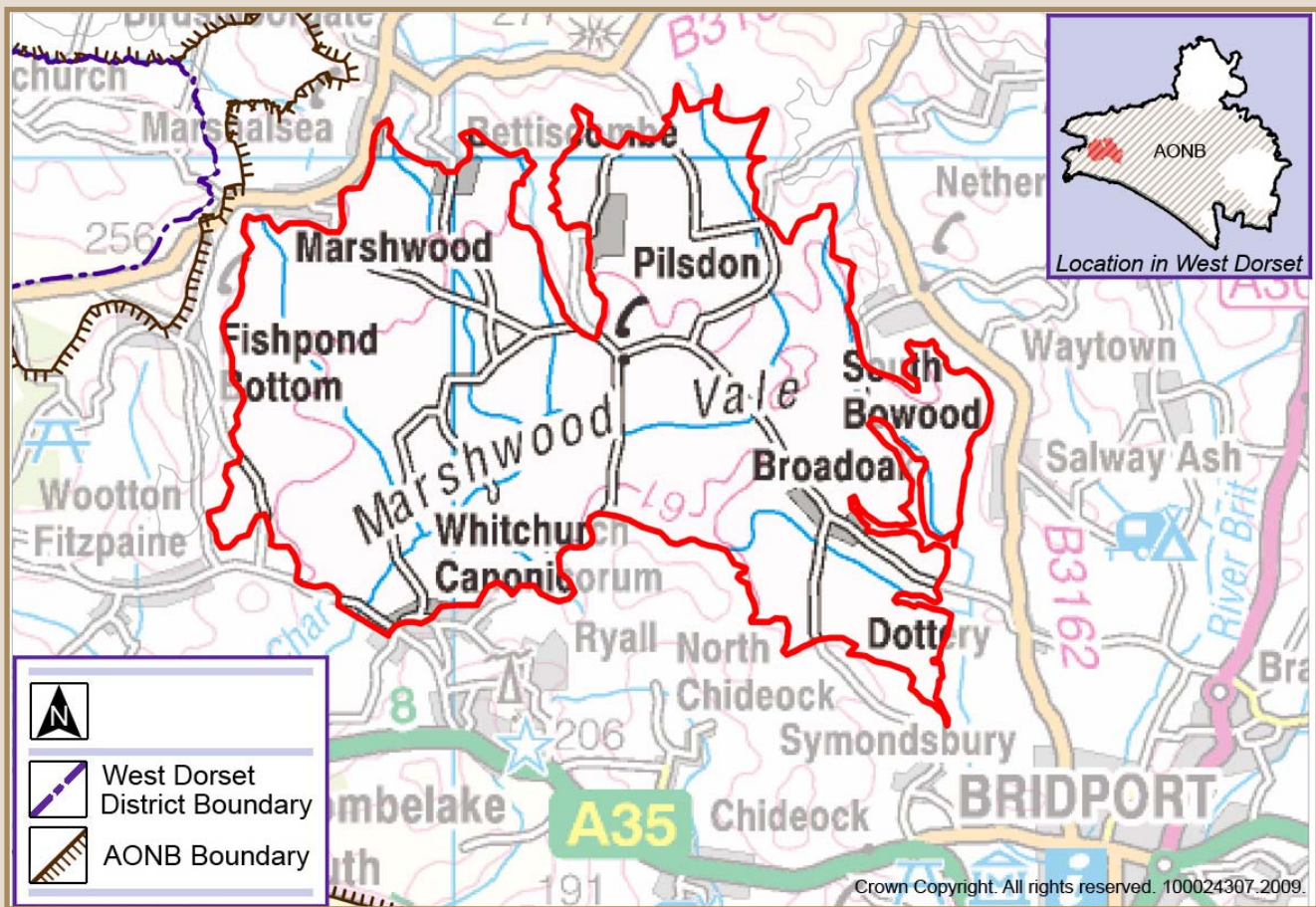
- 13.4
- Hilltops are open and undeveloped, with the notable exception of dramatic hillforts. The presence of bracken, heather and gorse plant communities give a heathland character to the greensand summits. Occasional beech trees avenues run along open ridge tops. There are long views over the Axe Valley.
  - Small oak and ash coppice woodlands and arable fields with regular enclosures on valley sides with some strip lynchets
  - Patchwork of small, regular wet neutral pastures on valley bottoms with patches of rush, dense species rich hedgerows, hedgerow trees and large linear wet woodlands.
  - Occasional orchards along valley floors and lower sides

## Detrimental features

- 13.5
- Conifer plantations on some of the greensand summits have an adverse landscape impact.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Fragmentation of hedgerows.
  - Loss and decline in hedgerow trees.
  - Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.
  - Some game coverts have unnatural looking geometric edges.



## 14. MARSHWOOD VALE



### Landscape Type: Clay vale

#### Overview

- 14.1 The Marshwood Vale, draining the rivers Char and Simene, is a traditional, largely undeveloped grassland clay vale with large areas that are prone to flooding. It has a strong sense of rural tranquillity and character. A sense of distant enclosure is provided by surrounding greensand summits, particularly to the north, south and west. A break in slope is marked by the Char valley towards the south.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 14.2 Broad, bowl shaped, gently rolling clay vale consistent land use as grazing pasture.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristic

- 14.3 Settlement pattern of dispersed small clustered hamlets with variety of vernacular building materials such as thatch and brick, plus Oolitic limestone, Blue Lias and Upper Greensand stone. Scattered, isolated farmsteads. Sunken, winding rural lanes with steep species rich verges.

#### Landscape characteristics

- 14.4 ■ The visual character is dominated by consistent regular field patterns defined by trimmed hedgerows and hedgerow oaks. Viewed from a distance the hedgerow oaks are the defining feature, creating a speckled appearance to the landscape.

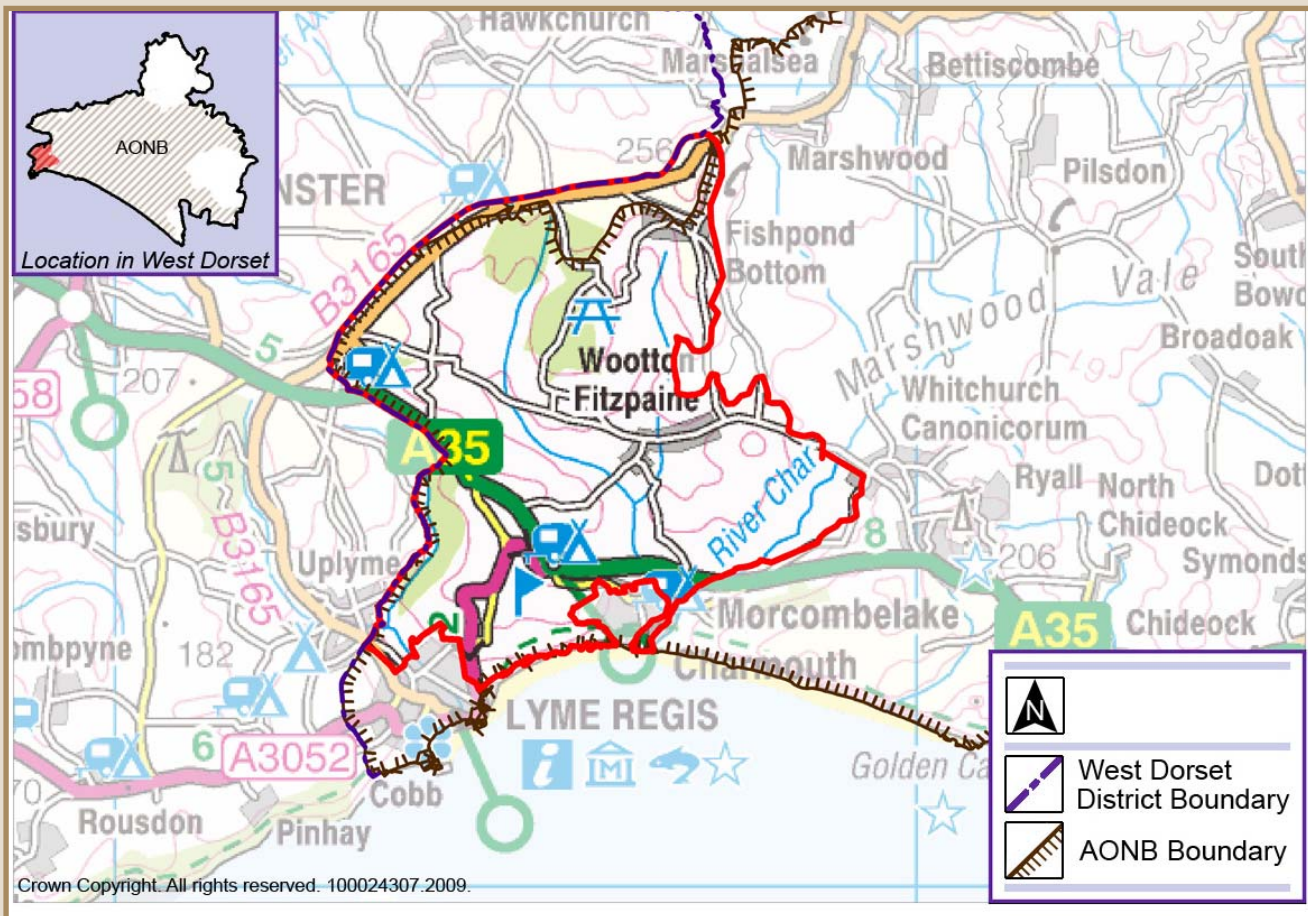
- Winding network of watercourses and narrow belts of streamside vegetation including willows and alder. Meadows of neutral unimproved grassland with patches of rush.
- Small patches of oak, ash and hazel coppice around the vale edge.
- Occasional orchards.
- A peaceful, tranquil and rural character with wide open skies.

### **Detrimental features**

- 14.5
- Some agricultural buildings are visually intrusive.
  - Some traditional barns and farm buildings are in a poor state of repair.
  - Historic loss of wet woodlands, meadows, and traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Fragmentation of hedgerows.
  - Loss and decline in hedgerow trees.
  - Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.
  - Conifer plantations have a landscape impact.
  - Main pylon line crosses the area.



## 15. WOOTTON HILLS



### Landscape Type: Undulating wooded hills

#### Overview

- 15.1 Similar to other areas within the west of the AONB, the Wootton Hills are characterised by a series of conical hills. These are particularly dominant where these summits form the backdrop to the Marshwood Vale and along the coast where they shape small secluded valleys and remote headlands. The area has an intimate and tranquil quality confined by the surrounding steep hills. The remote coast has a spectacular visual quality with impressive views towards the landslides west of Black Ven.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 15.2 Conical hills of greensand with deep, branching clay valleys. Landuse is mostly for grazing pasture with oak, beech and coniferous woodlands on valley sides.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 15.3 Scattered clustered villages of stone and thatch along the valley bottoms are connected by a network of deep, narrow winding lanes with hedge banks. The A35 cuts across the area with associated urban influences towards Charmouth and Lyme Regis. Common local building materials include Upper Greensand and Blue Lias stone plus some cob and brick.



## Landscape characteristics

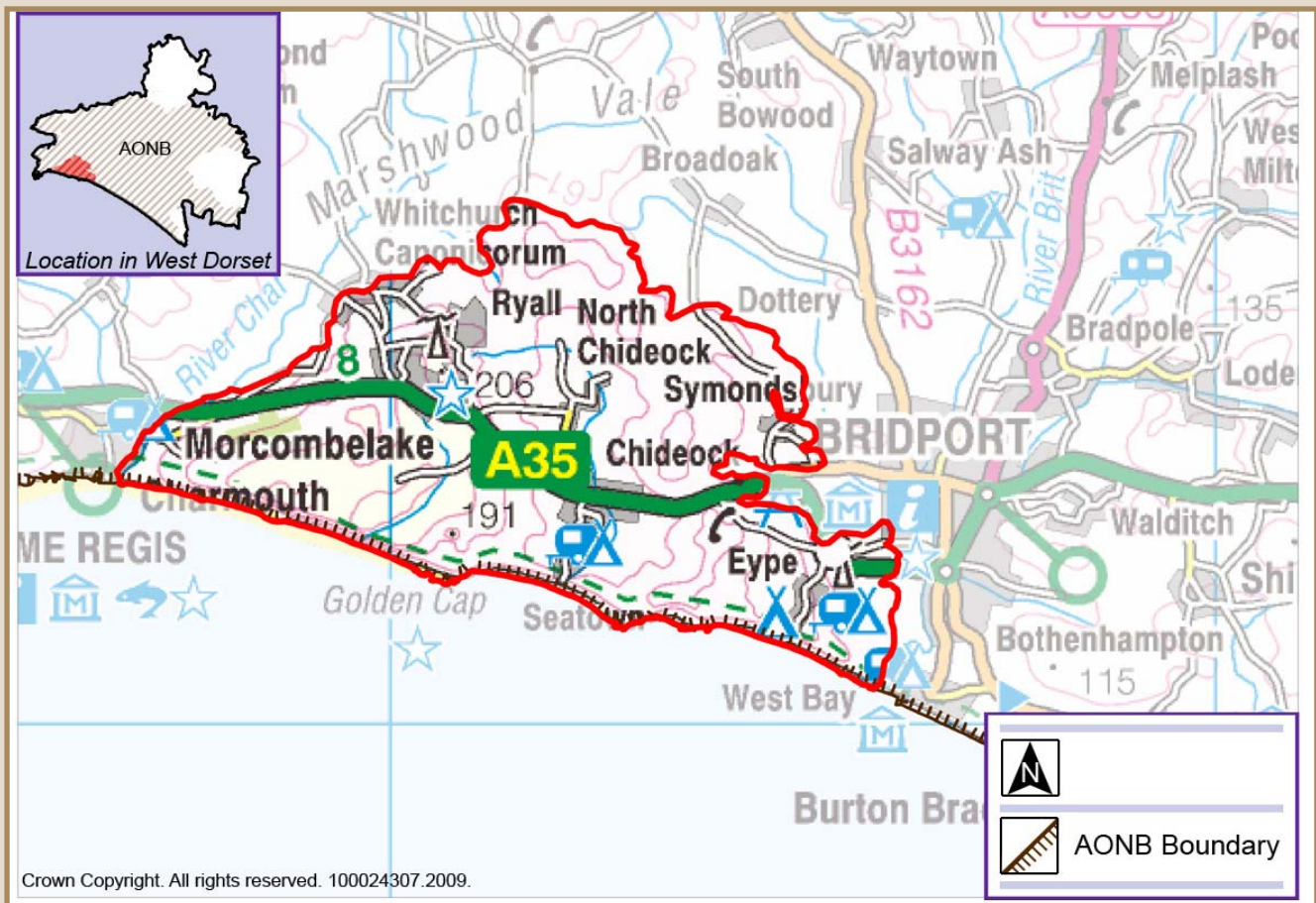
- 15.4
- Open hilltops, with a heathland character of bracken, heather and gorse, with dramatic Iron Age hillforts. Along the ridge tops beech lined avenues lead towards open summits and occasional beech tree groups or woods.
  - Large oak and ash woodlands and arable fields on valley sides. Patterns of strip lynchets.
  - Patchwork of small, regular unimproved grassland fields on valley bottoms with dense species rich hedgerows, hedgerow trees and small broadleaved woodlands.
  - Occasional orchards.
  - Dramatic remote coastline of imposing summits, coastal landforms and sheltered valleys.

## Detrimental features

- 15.5
- Caravan parks have a negative visual impact. Urban fringe land uses around Lyme Regis impact on the rural character.
  - Conifer plantations have an adverse landscape impact.
  - Fragmentation of hedgerows.
  - Loss and decline in hedgerow trees.
  - Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Game coverts sometimes appear unnatural with strongly geometric edges.
  - Some traditional barns and farm buildings are in a poor state of repair.



## 16. CHIDEOCK HILLS



### Landscape Type: Undulating wooded hills

#### Overview

- 16.1 The Chideock Hills are characterised by a series of conical hills, formed from underlying greensand ridges. These are particularly dominant where the summits form the backdrop to the Marshwood Vale and along the coast where they shape small, secluded valleys with an intimate and tranquil quality confined by the surrounding steep hills. The remote coast has a spectacular visual quality with impressive summits and coastal landforms. There is a gentle transition to the Wootton Hills bordered by the river Char in the west, with a marked contrast to flatter landscape further east and north.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 16.2 Numerous conical hills of greensand with deep, branching clay valleys. Landcover is mostly grazed pasture on the valley bottoms with arable and large oak and beech woodland and conifer plantations on the valley sides.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 16.3 Scattered clustered settlement villages of golden limestone and thatch, connected by a network of deep, narrow winding lanes with hedge banks and occasional dark tree canopies. Common building materials include Upper Greensand, Inferior Oolite and Blue Lias stone plus some brick and cob. The A35 cuts across the area with associated urban influences.

## Landscape characteristics

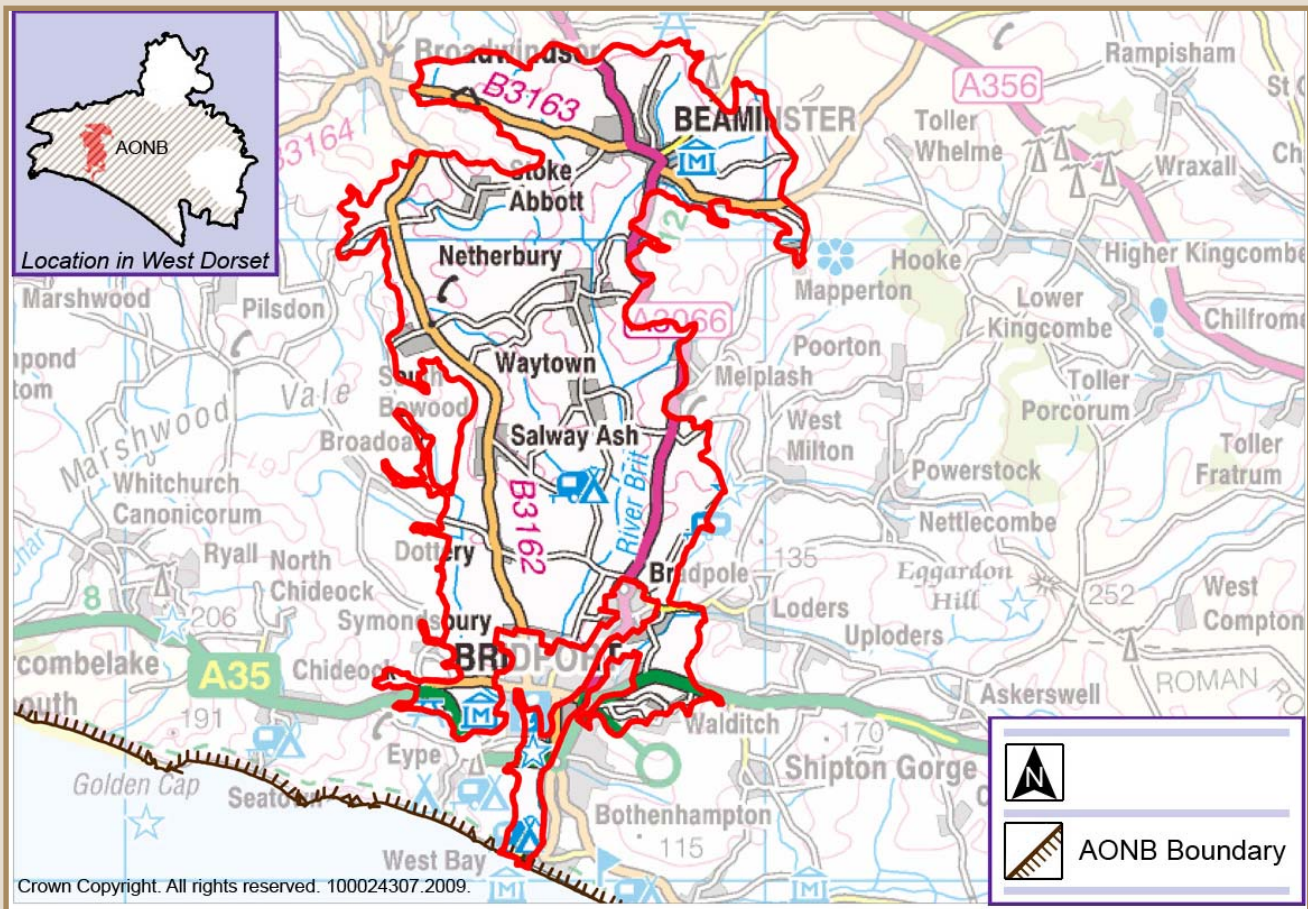
- 16.4
- Open hilltops, with greensand summits and an associated heathland vegetation character of bracken, heather and gorse.
  - Important archaeological interest with hillforts on summits and scattered burial mounds.
  - Large oak and ash woodlands with arable fields on valley sides.
  - Patchwork of small regular pastoral fields on valley bottoms with dense species rich hedgerows, hedgerow trees and small broadleaved woodlands.
  - Occasional orchards.
  - Dramatic remote coastline of imposing summits, coastal landforms and sheltered valleys.

## Detrimental features

- 16.5
- Conifer plantations have an adverse landscape impact.
  - Fragmentation of hedgerows.
  - Loss and decline in hedgerow trees
  - Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Some game coverts have unnatural looking geometric edges.
  - Some agricultural buildings, village edges, and caravan parks are visually intrusive.
  - Negative impact of visitor based development towards the coast
  - Neglected traditional barns and farm buildings in a poor state of repair.



## 17. BRIT VALLEY



### Landscape Type: Undulating river valley

#### Overview

- 17.1 The diverse settled river valley of the Brit runs from the bowl shaped vale around Beaminster, southwards towards Bridport and finishes at West Bay on the coast. It drains the meandering rivers Brit and Mangerton within an open rolling valley.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 17.2 The flat bottomed valley floor is formed of fluvial deposits. The surrounding rolling valley sides are formed from Bridport Sands with occasional outcrops of limestone and greensand. Landcover is mostly grazed pasture on valley floors with mixed arable and pasture on the valley sides.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 17.3 Market towns of Bridport and Beaminster have a strong industrial heritage. Scattered clustered settlements of predominantly oolitic limestone (Inferior Oolite) and thatch along the branching valley bottoms.

#### Landscape characteristics

- 17.4 ■ Small oak, ash and hazel woodlands on rolling valley sides with large arable and grassland fields

enclosed by trimmed hedgerows. Some strip lynchets are still visible.

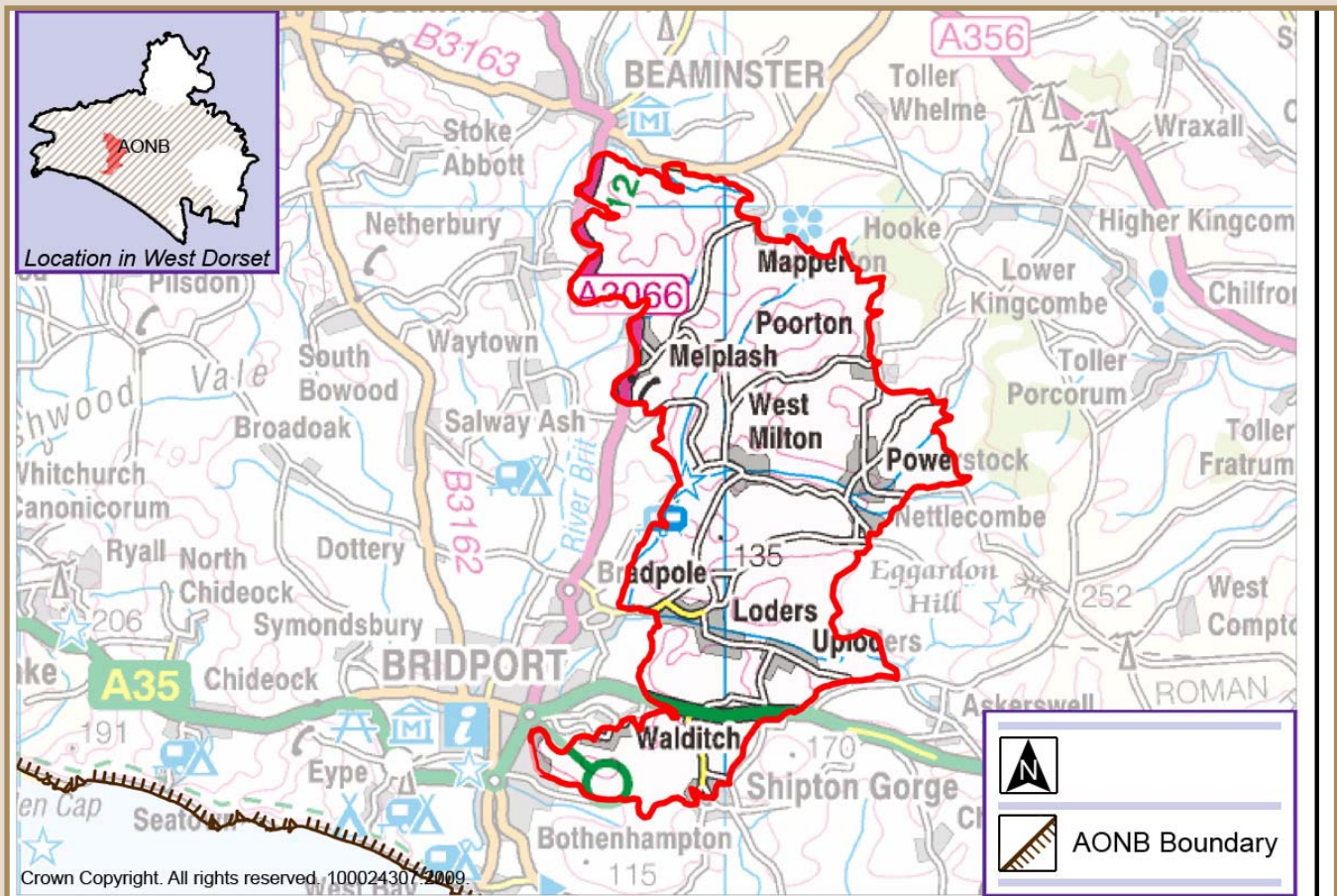
- Long open views along the valley floor. Patchwork of small, open fields on valley bottom with trimmed hedgerows, trees and occasional stone walls
- Meandering flat river floodplain with water meadows, damp neutral pastures and linear wet woodlands.
- Historic bridges and watermills of local stone. Areas of wet flushes are dotted along the valley with significant grazing marsh and reed beds near Bridport.
- Occasional orchards and areas of parkland and medieval field systems have survived the intensive urban and industrial land uses around Bridport and Beaminster.
- Remnants of the main towns' industrial heritage are apparent in the landscape. Lime kilns and watermills are found along the valley floor.

### **Detrimental features**

- 17.5
- Some agricultural buildings and settlement edges are visually intrusive. The town of Bridport, in particular, has an urbanising impact on its fringes.
  - The main A35 road has an impact on parts of the valley.
  - Negative impact of visitor based development towards the coast
  - Some stonewalls, hedgerows and hedgerow trees have been poorly maintained or lost.
  - Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Poplar tree planting appears out of character in parts of this landscape.
  - Areas of wet, unimproved pasture have been drained and turned to arable fields. Water meadows and wet woodlands have been lost.



## 18. POWERSTOCK HILLS



### Landscape Type: Undulating wooded hills

#### Overview

- 18.1 The Powerstock Hills has one of the most distinctive and intimate landforms of the AONB. A unique pattern of small conical hills with wooded sides surrounds a branching network of deep, intimate river valleys. There is a gentle transition to the surrounding hills with a marked contrast to the more flat and open character of the Brit Valley further west.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 18.2 The area has underlying Bridport Sands with outcrops of limestone, shaping a complex landscape of numerous small, conical hills with steep slopes and incised clay valleys. Landcover is almost entirely rough grazed pasture on the valley floors with small irregular woodlands on the valley sides.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 18.3 Scattered nucleated settlements of local golden Oolitic limestone (predominantly Inferior Oolite and some Forest Marble) and thatch and occasional country houses along the valley bottoms.

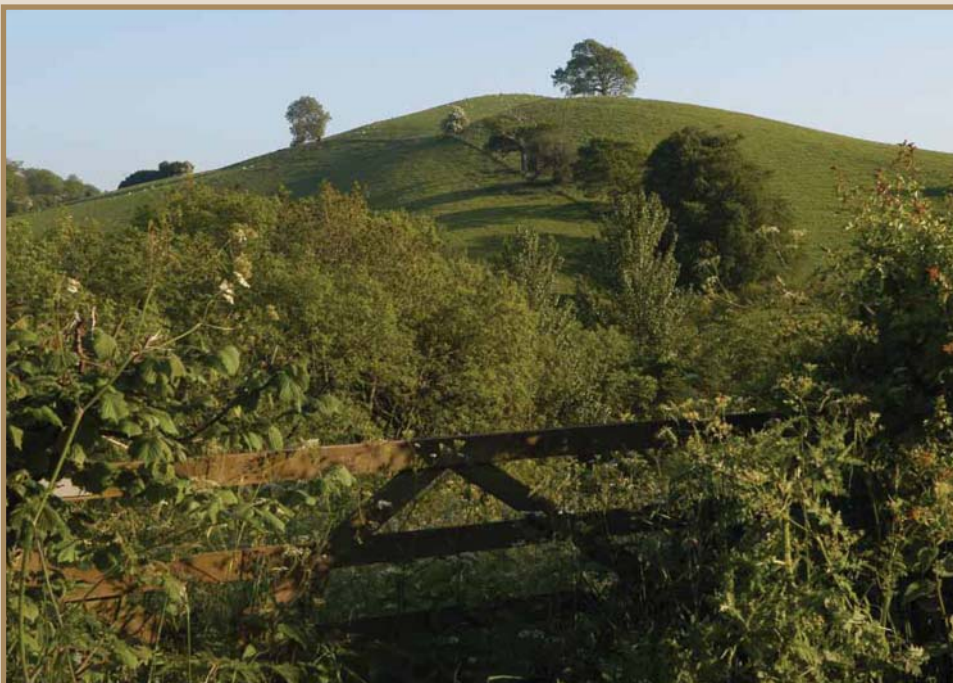
#### Landscape characteristics

- 18.4 ■ Complete landform of deep branching valleys and distinctive conical hills that form prominent local landmarks.

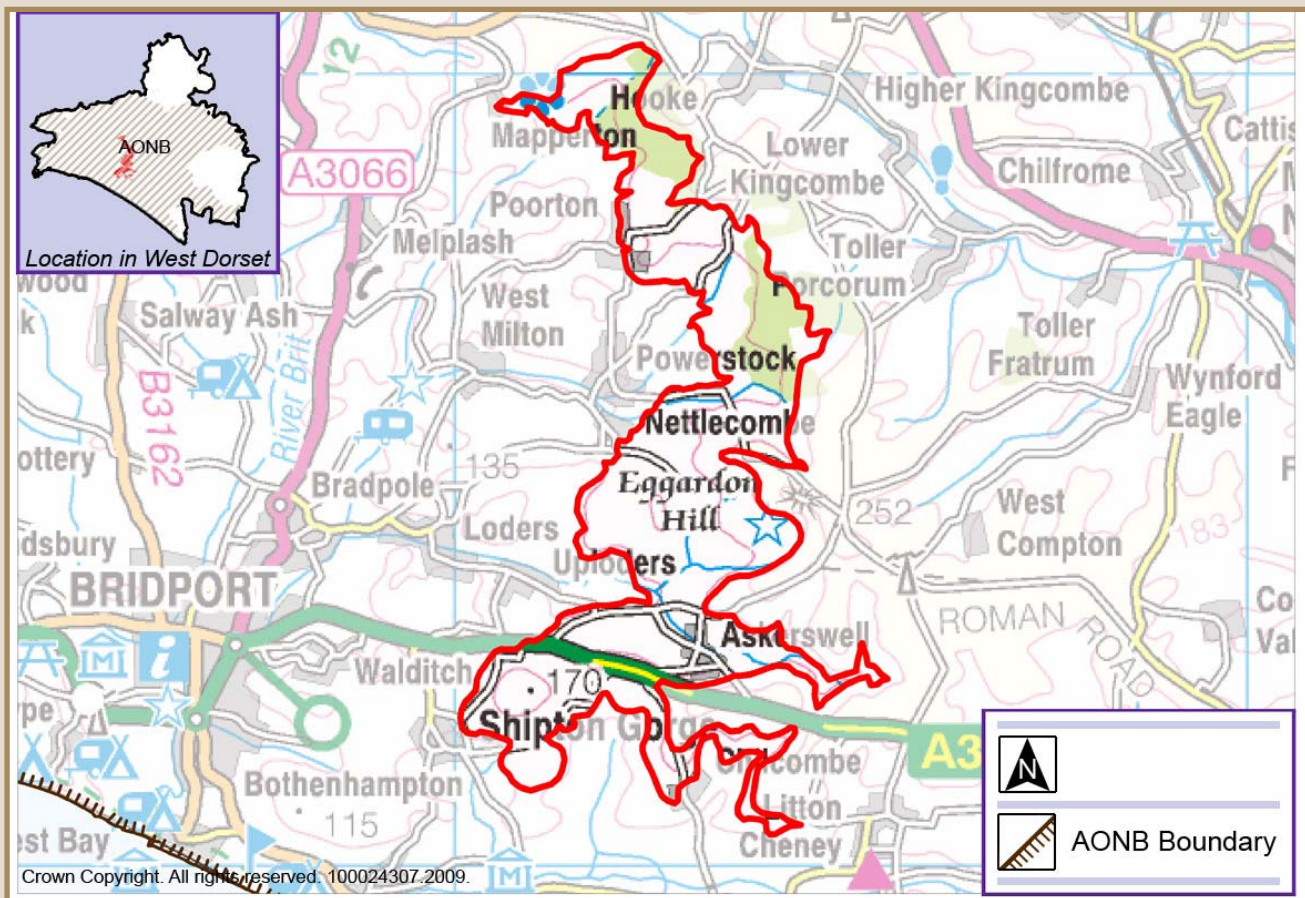
- The area has an undeveloped character with impressive views from the largely open hilltops.
- A complex network of deep, narrow and incised winding lanes with species rich hedge banks and occasional dark tree canopies gives a distinct sense of intimacy.
- Small regular shaped broadleaved woodlands on steep valley slopes, and occasional orchards on the valley sides.
- Along the valley floor, small scale regular pastures with dense species rich hedgerows and scattered hedgerow trees add to the intimate quality. Damp areas of rush and scrub are common within the rough valley floor pasture.
- Significant yew woodland found to the north of the area.

### **Detrimental features**

- 18.5
- Some loss or poor management of hedgerows.
  - Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Increase in pony paddocks, sometimes resulting in loss of assarts.
  - Major electricity cables cross the area, although the visual impact is minimised by the complex landform.
  - Visual impact of agricultural buildings.



## 19. POWERSTOCK WOODS



### Landscape Type: Undulating wooded hills

#### Overview

- 19.1 Although similar in character to other areas within the west of the AONB, the Powerstock Woods marks the transition between the rolling grassland landscapes of West Dorset and the chalk landscape in the east. The area has a significant woodland cover with Powerstock Common and Hooke Park in the north. Further south, the area has a more agricultural appearance. The area has an intimate and tranquil quality confined by the surrounding steep hills.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 19.2. Rolling hills of greensand / limestone with small steep sided, branching clay valleys. Large parts of this character area are covered by mixed woodland. There is some grazed pasture and large arable fields on valley sides, particularly to the south.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 19.3 Scattered clustered settlements of golden Oolitic limestone (Inferior Oolite) and thatch found along the valley bottoms are connected by a network of deep, narrow winding lanes with steep hedge banks.

#### Landscape characteristics

- 19.4 ■ Numerous rolling hills with significant areas of woodland cover.



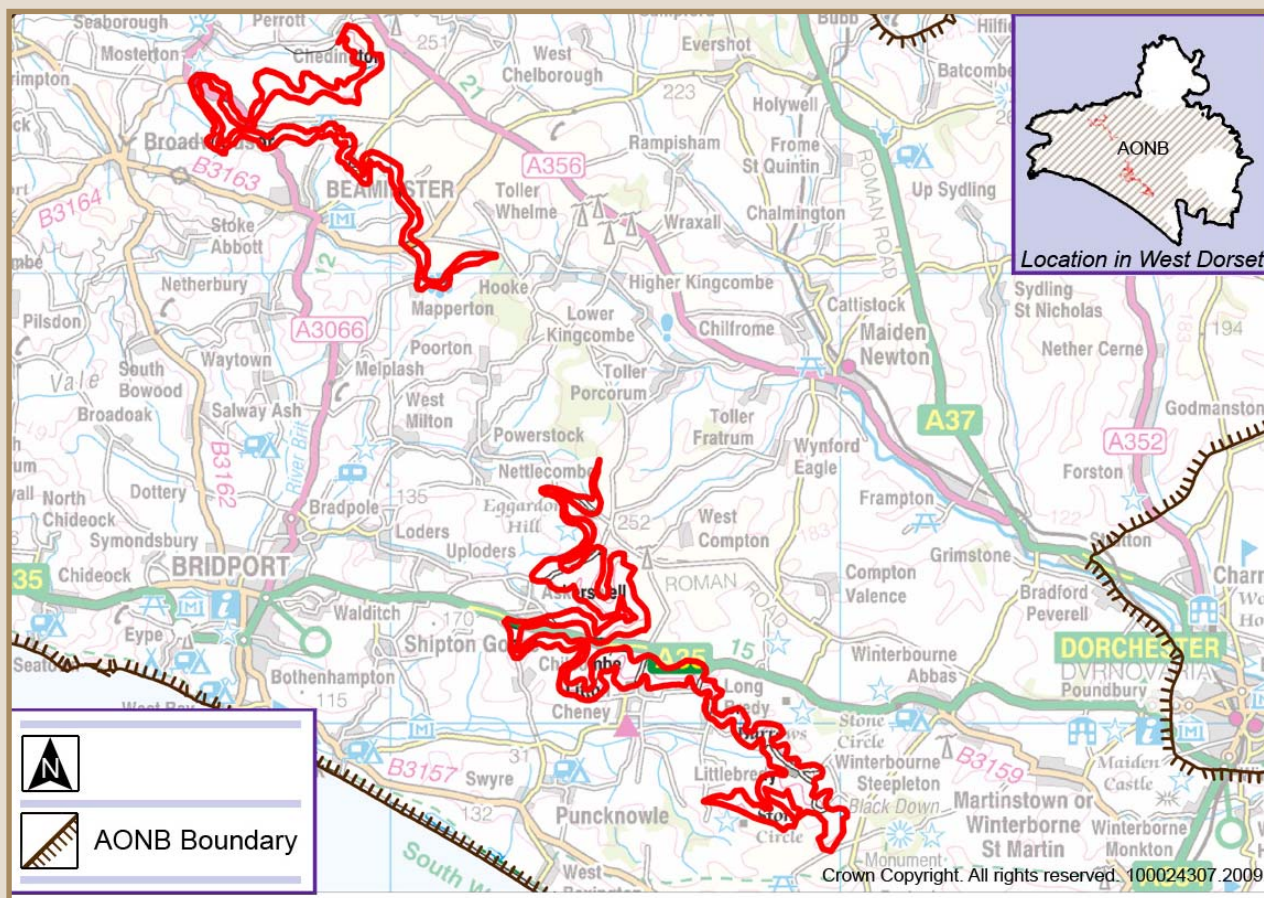
- Patchwork of small, regular unimproved grassland fields on the valley bottoms with dense species rich hedgerows, hedgerow trees and small broadleaved woodlands, damp pastures, rushes and wet flushes.
- Steep hedgebanks alongside narrow lanes.
- Significant oak and hazel woodlands at Hooke Park and Powerstock Common.
- Occasional orchards.

### **Detrimental features**

- 19.5
- Game coverts can appear unnatural with very geometric edges.
  - Conifer plantations have a landscape impact.
  - Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Visual impact of agricultural buildings.



## 20. WEST DORSET ESCARPMENT



**Landscape Type: Chalk ridge / escarpment**

### Overview

20.1 The West Dorset Escarpment forms a dramatic backdrop to the intimate valleys and vales of West Dorset. The character varies from open steep, twisting and incised landforms to more shallow wooded slopes, with a break in slope around Powerstock Common. The slopes around Beaminstor and Askerswell are particularly steep with a good cover of broadleaved woodlands contrasting to extensive open grasslands south of Eggardon Hill.

### Underlying geology and predominant land use

20.2 Thin calcareous soils with underlying geology of chalk. The steep slopes of the escarpments and associated forts support occasional coppice woodlands, patches of scrub and species rich chalk grasslands, particularly around Eggardon Hill. Towards the base of the escarpment, greensand gives rise to damper soils and associated vegetation. Woodland is most prevalent around Beaminstor and Askerswell. Although the area is largely uncultivated, there are some arable and pasture fields with large geometric fields on the top of the escarpment.

### Settlement pattern and characteristics

20.3 A largely unsettled landscape with occasional isolated farmsteads. The common local building stones are Inferior Oolite and Forest Marble, with Portland limestone and Purbeck Corallian used occasionally.

## Landscape characteristics

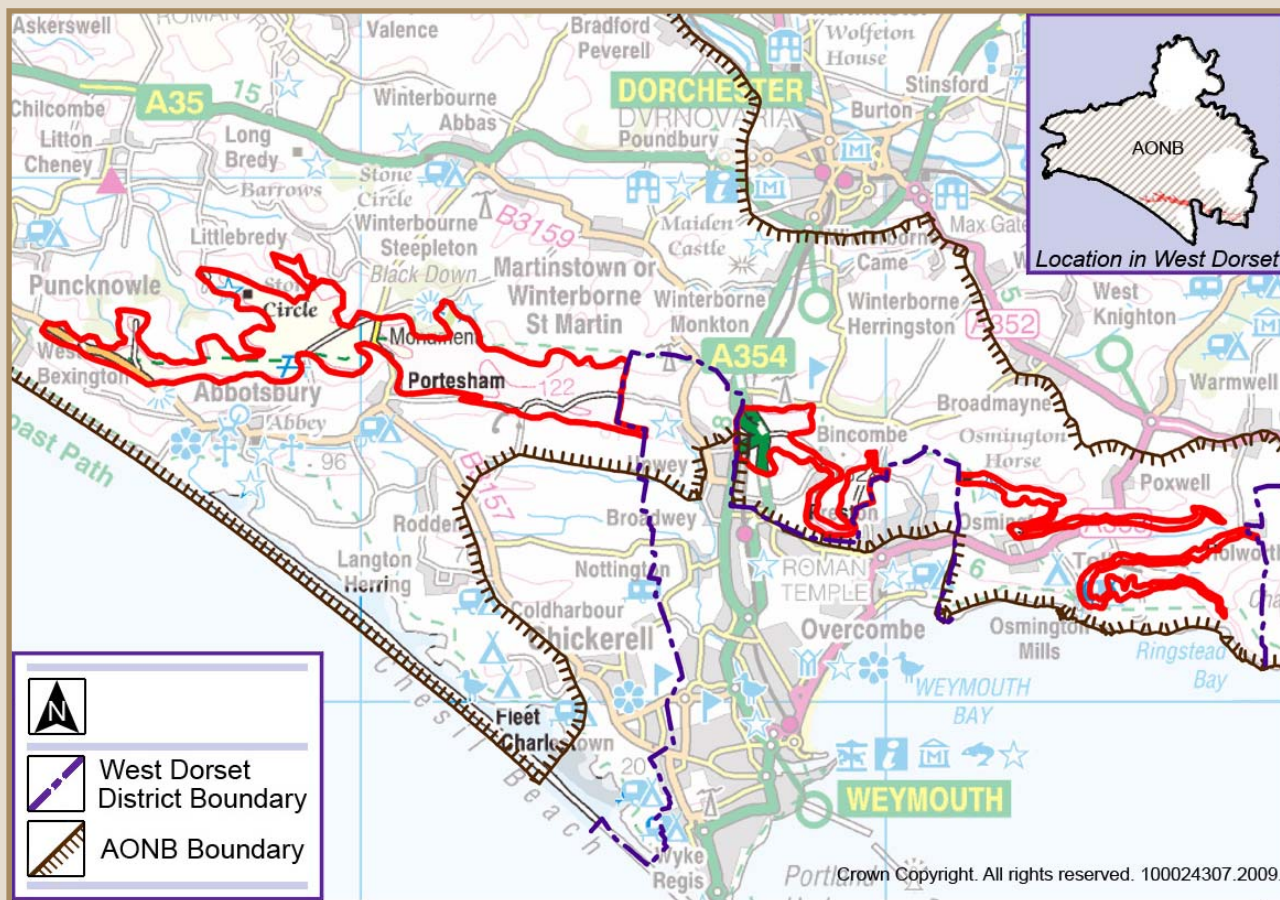
- 20.4
- A dramatic and exposed escarpment, with extensive long distance views along the top of the ridge, particularly from the imposing Eggardon Iron Age Hillfort. Post and wire fencing on higher ground.
  - Prehistoric barrows and prominent hilltop forts.
  - Ancient sunken, winding lanes with an open character towards the top.
  - Mixed arable and grassland fields of piecemeal enclosures on escarpment sides.
  - Along the slopes, the rounded spurs and deep coombes, textured soil creep, patches of dense gorse scrub and unimproved calcareous downland turf, which adds to the ecological interest.
  - Towards the lower slopes, the ridge becomes more intimate with irregular patchwork of small-scale grassland fields and hanging ancient oak, ash, hazel coppice woodlands.

## Detrimental features

- 20.5
- Pylons and masts are visually prominent creating visual clutter and interrupt the characteristic open views.
  - Some traditional barns and farm buildings are in a poor state of repair.
  - Occasional conifer plantations and the large pylon line have a significant visual impact on the Lodars Valley.
  - Invasive scrub vegetation has encroached onto some areas of grassland.
  - Roadside banks are subject to erosion in the narrow, sunken and the open lanes.



## 21. SOUTH DORSET ESCARPMENT



**Landscape Type: Chalk ridge / escarpment**

### Overview

21.1 The South Dorset Escarpment has a more consistent character and landform than the more twisted escarpments to the west and north. The landform becomes rounded towards the foot of the escarpment with regular fields of pastures, which are smaller scale and more intimate around the Bride Valley. The landscape is particularly open and exposed around the higher ground at Abbotsbury with impressive views over the Weymouth lowlands, the Isle of Portland, the Fleet and the open seas beyond.

### Underlying geology and predominant land use

21.2 Thin calcareous soils with underlying geology of chalk. The steep topography ensures a near continuous cover of rough, open grasslands and arable fields. The existing balance of open land and woodland cover should be retained.

### Settlement pattern and characteristics

21.3 A largely unsettled landscape with occasional isolated farmsteads set within breaks in the ridge surrounded by small broadleaved woodlands and open grasslands. Common local building stones include Purbeck. Lower Purbeck and Portland limestones.

## Landscape characteristics

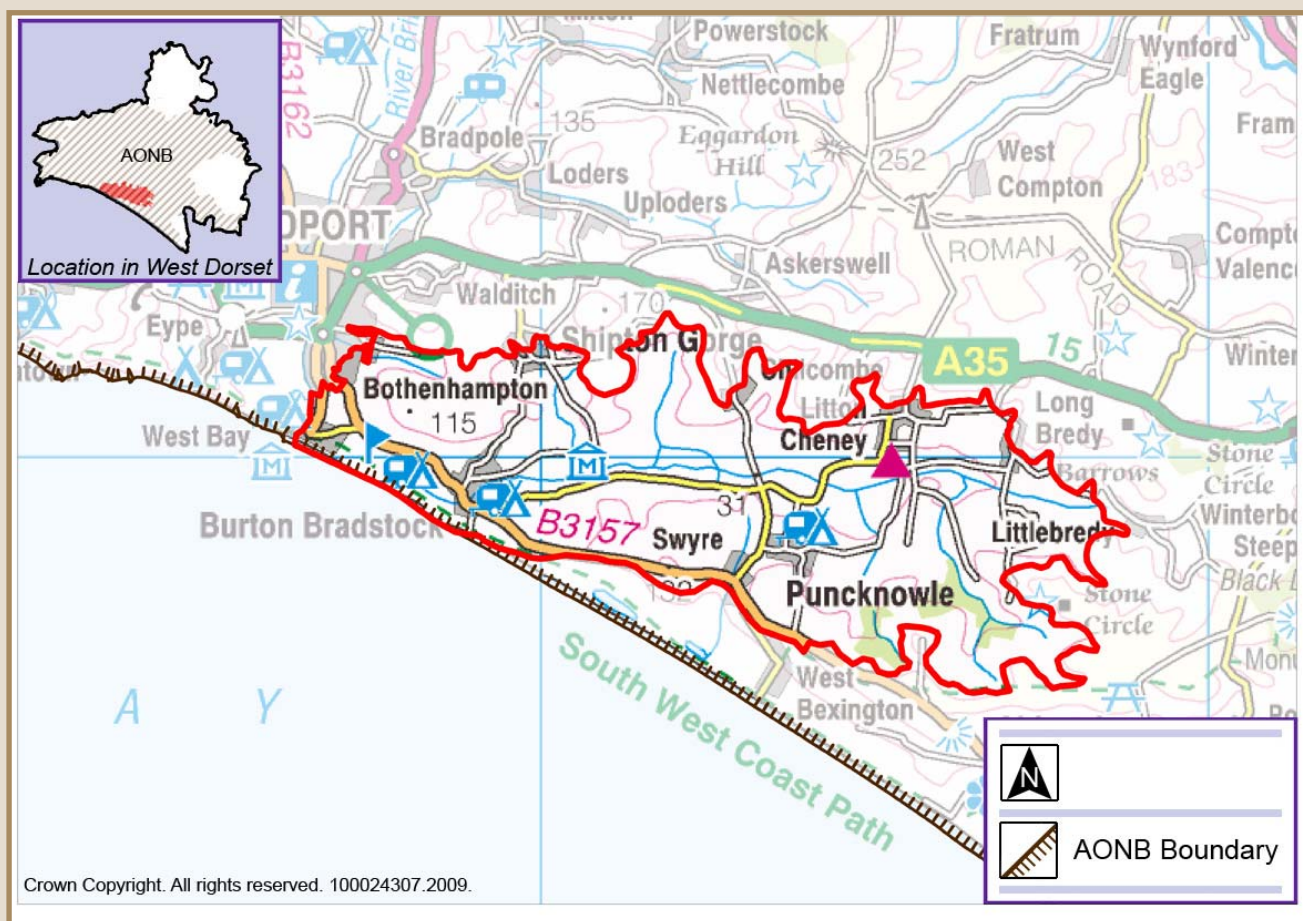
- 21.4
- A dramatic and exposed steep and narrow escarpment with occasional rounded spurs and deep coombes.
  - Panoramic long distance views to and from the ridge / escarpment, particularly of the surrounding coastal landscape.
  - Large, straight-sided arable fields (late c18th / early c19th enclosures) on escarpment top, with post and wire fencing retaining the openness of character.
  - Prehistoric barrows, prominent hilltop forts and extensive prehistoric field patterns.
  - The steep slopes, with some sparse hedgerows, are covered in areas of rough unimproved calcareous downland turf and patches of scrub. These are subject to extensive soil creep.
  - Patchwork of small scale grassland fields and occasional hanging ancient oak, ash, hazel woodlands on lower slopes.
  - Ancient sunken, winding lanes with an open character towards the top.

## Detrimental features

- 21.5
- Pylons and communication masts are visually prominent creating visual clutter and interrupting the characteristic open views.
  - The main road corridors can have a detrimental impact in some places.
  - Some agricultural barns have a negative visual impact.
  - Invasive scrub vegetation has encroached onto areas of grassland.
  - Some fragmentation of grasslands through conifer plantations and arable encroachment from the surrounding uplands.
  - Roadside banks are subject to erosion in the narrow, sunken and the open lanes.



## 22. BRIDE VALLEY



### Landscape Type: Clay valley

#### Overview

22.1 The sweeping broad profile of the Bride Valley marks a transition to the intimate pastures of the West Dorset Landscape and the broader chalk and coastal landscapes to the east. The head of the valley is marked by the South Dorset Escarpment to the north and a smaller limestone escarpment to the south. The surrounding valley sides are the source of many small springs that feed the river Bride at the heart of the valley. The source of the Bride is at Blackdown Hill to the east of Littlebredy on an isolated bed of gravels.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

22.2. Broad clay valley enclosed by chalk and limestone escarpments with outcrops of greensand and gravels. Landcover is mostly grazing pasture and occasional small woodlands along the valley floor with mixed arable and pasture on the valley sides, farmed by large estates.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

22.3 Small, nucleated villages of limestone and thatch, with locally prominent churches, on the valley sides and isolated manor houses along the valley floor. Building stone used consists of Forest Marble, Inferior Oolite and Portland Limestone.

## Landscape characteristics

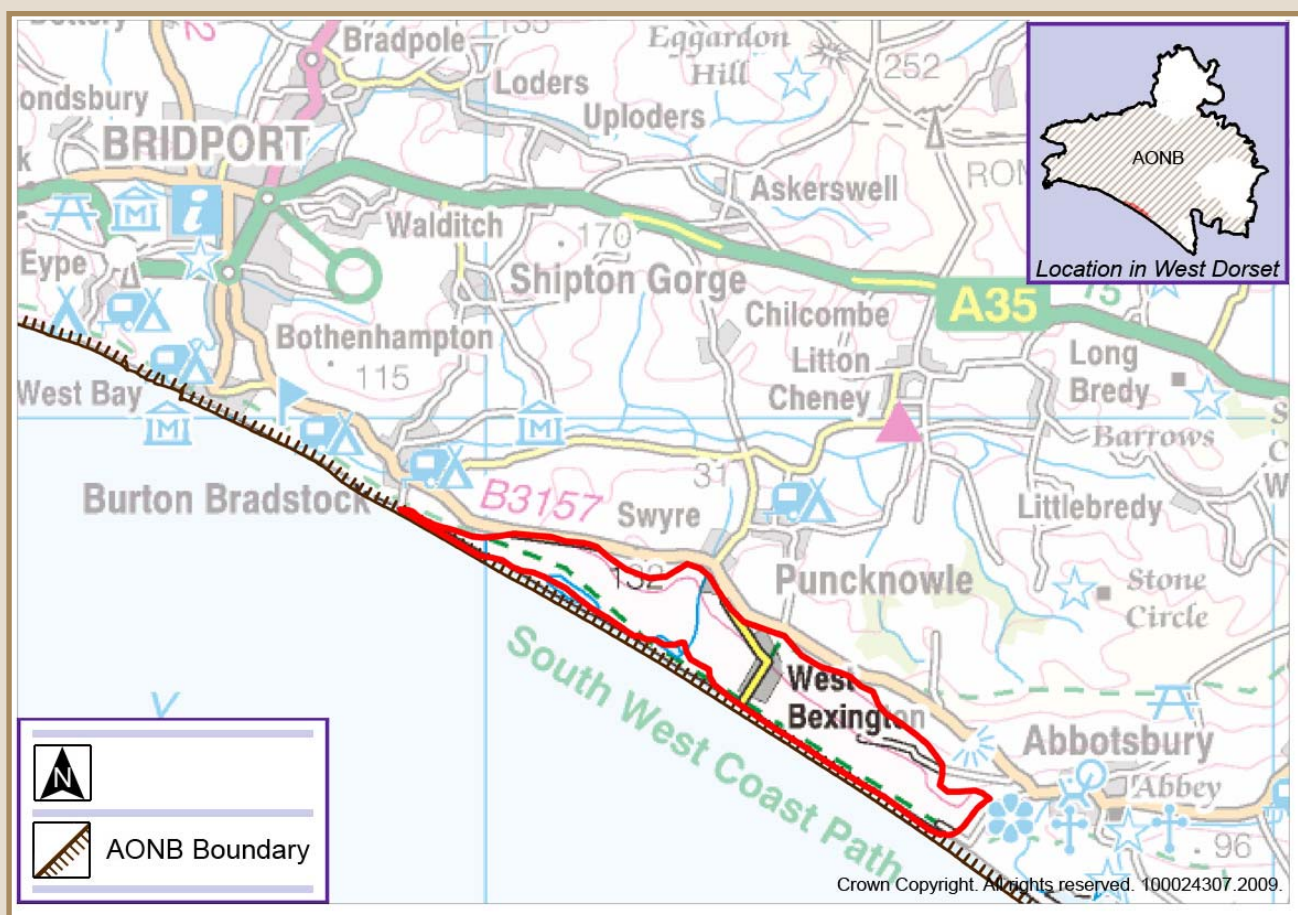
- 22.4
- The open valley sides contain large arable fields defined by stone walls with blocks of occasional broadleaved woodland.
  - Patches of scrub and calcareous / limestone grassland can be found on the steeper slopes.
  - Glimpses of the coast can be gained from locally prominent hills and higher ground.
  - The clay valley floor has an intimate and tranquil character with a continuous patchwork of small regular neutral pastures.
  - Mixed boundaries mainly consisting of dense hedgerows with hedgerow oak trees towards the valley floor and stone walls towards the coast.
  - Blocks and ribbons of small wet woodlands on the valley floor with occasional large woodlands on the valley sides.
  - Road network of rural winding lanes with an intimate character becoming more open towards the coast.

## Detrimental features

- 22.5
- Conifer plantations have an adverse landscape impact.
  - Occasional unsympathetic leylandi planting has a landscape impact.
  - Depleted mature tree stock due to historic loss of elm to Dutch Elm Disease.
  - Fragmentation and loss of hedgerows and stonewalls.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Intrusive, impact of car parks and other visitor based development towards the coast.
  - Excessive traffic signage has an impact on some rural roads.



## 23. BEXINGTON COAST



### Landscape Type: Coastal grassland

#### Overview

- 23.1 Running from the mouth of the river Bride along to Abbotsbury, the Bexington Coast is an open, windswept landscape of rough coastal grasslands and patches of scrub. Backed by the South Dorset Escarpment to the north, the undulating south facing chalk and limestone slopes are exposed to the forces of the coast with dramatic views of the Fleet, Portland and towards Lyme Bay.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 23.2 Chalk and limestone slopes supporting rough grasslands and patches of scrub, with areas of arable and pasture farmland further inland.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 23.3 The area is mostly undeveloped, except for West Bexington village, occasional farmsteads, small-scale tourist development and car parks along the coast. The common local building stone is Forest Marble limestone although Inferior Oolite, Corallian, Purbeck and Portland limestones are also found. Cob is also present.



## Landscape characteristics

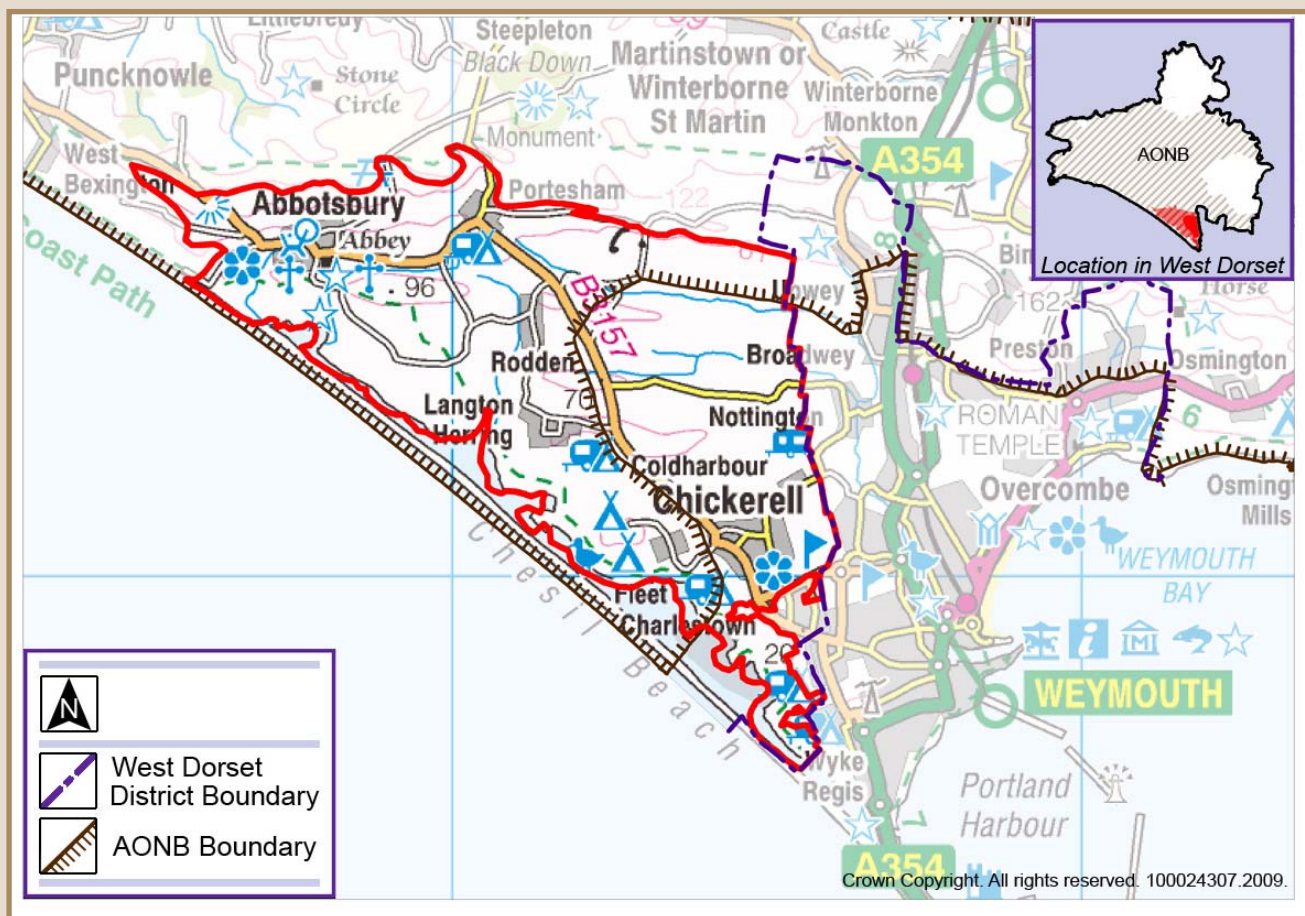
- 23.5
- South facing, undulating chalk and limestone slopes.
  - Rough grassland and patches of scrub nearest the coast.
  - Steeper inland slopes of grazed pasture and scrub.
  - Stunted hedgerows and post and wire fencing divide the expansive areas of rough grasslands and patchwork of regular arable and pasture fields.
  - A few surviving strip fields remain.
  - Landscape largely devoid of trees, except for occasional specimens with characteristic, wind shaped canopies.
  - Open and sweeping views of the coast.
  - Towards the coast, areas of reedbeds and grazing marsh remain leading towards the western end of the Fleet.

## Detrimental features

- 23.6
- Pylons and masts are visually prominent creating visual clutter and detracting from the characteristic open views.
  - Some traditional barns and farm buildings are in a poor state of repair.
  - Use of post and wire fencing.
  - Visual impact of car parks and other visitor based development.
  - Some of the steeper inland slopes of grazed pastures have been invaded by scrub.



## 24. SOUTH DORSET RIDGE AND VALE



### Landscape Type: Ridge and vale

#### Overview

24.1 The South Dorset Ridge and Vale landscape is characterised by a series of small limestone ridges and clay vales running east to west, enclosed by the South Dorset chalk escarpment to the north. Towards Abbotsbury in the west of the area, the landscape becomes more intimate due to the undulating topography. Further east towards Weymouth, the landscape is broader in scale with urban fringe land uses encroaching into the open countryside. The shingle bank and saline lagoon of the Fleet has a particularly exposed and wild character with little evidence of development. There are sweeping views towards the smooth ridge tops, the fleet and coast.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

24.2 Limestone ridges and clay vales run from east to west. Landcover has remained largely pastoral on the higher ground with mixed arable and pastoral farming and small woodlands in the vales.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

24.3 Nucleated settlements with well defined edges are found along the vales. Common local building stones include Forest Marble sandstone plus Lower Purbeck, Portland and Forest Marble limestones. Abbotsbury has a distinctive appearance with consistent use of Corallian limestone as a building material. Other materials include some brick, flint and cob.

## Landscape characteristics

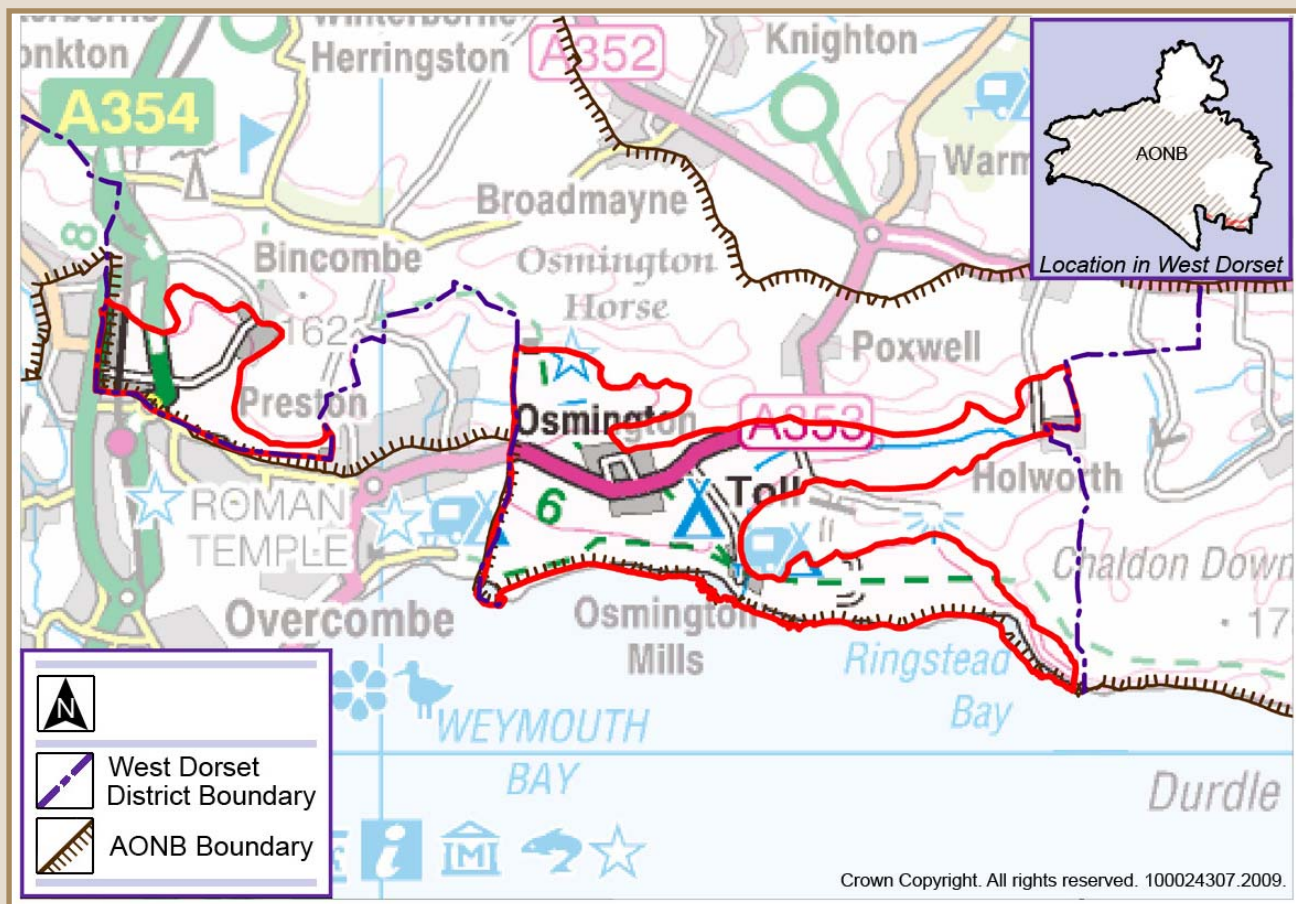
- 24.4
- Smooth ridge tops, where the character is open and there are stunning views towards the Fleet and coast. Small limestone ridges with rocky outcrops running east to west.
  - Continuous patchwork of planned enclosures becoming larger and open at higher elevations. Remnant patches of acid grassland are found along the ridge tops. Mixed boundaries of stone walls and hedges and occasional hedgerow trees.
  - Stunted and clipped hedgerows towards the coast due to exposure to the elements and intensive agricultural management regimes.
  - Tall and bushy hedgerows towards the settlement edge of Weymouth and Chickereil due to less intensive management regimes associated with urban fringe uses such as hobby farming and horse/pony paddocks.
  - Along the vale floor and ridge slopes, small broadleaved woodlands of oak and ash and occasional hazel coppice add texture and diversity to the landscape.
  - Patches of exposed, rough coastal grazing marsh with scrub at Abbotsbury.
  - The cultural value of the landscape becomes more apparent towards Abbotsbury with medieval field patterns, strip lynchets and gardens. Roads have an open, rural character with characteristic features such as fingerposts.

## Detrimental features

- 24.5
- Pylons and masts are visually prominent creating visual clutter and detracting from the characteristic open views.
  - Some traditional barns and farm buildings are in a poor state of repair.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Urban fringe land uses, including equine development, around the edges of Weymouth and Chickereil have an urbanising influence in this locality.
  - Visual impact of caravan parks and other visitor based development.
  - Visual impact of excessive road signage.
  - Deterioration of some lengths of dry stone walling.
  - Hedgerows are intensively managed with a lack of hedgerow trees in the clay vale.
  - Towards the coast, rough grasslands are subject to scrub encroachment and a lack of management.



## 25. OSMINGTON RIDGE AND VALE



### Landscape Type: Ridge and vale

#### Overview

25.1 The Osmington Ridge and Vale landscape is similar in character to the South Dorset Ridge and Vale landscape with the typical series of small limestone ridges and clay vales running east to west and enclosed by the South Dorset Escarpment to the north, and sweeping views of the coast and the dominant Isle of Portland. As with the South Dorset Ridge and Vale, the landuse becomes more intensive around Weymouth with horse paddocks, caravan parks along the coastal strip and other urban influences.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

25.2 Limestone ridges and clay vales run from east to west. Land use is mainly pastoral on the higher and steeper ground with mixed arable and pastoral farming with small woodlands along the broad valleys and vales.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

25.3 Tight knit nucleated villages are located along the chalk escarpment base and valley floors. The common local building stones include both Portland and Purbeck limestone. Rural roads with characteristic features such as fingerposts.

## Landscape characteristics

- 25.4
- Continuous patchwork of complex regular fields becoming larger towards the ridge tops. Remnant patches of acid grassland found along the ridge tops. Mixed boundaries include stone walls and hedges with occasional hedgerow trees.
  - Stunted and clipped hedgerows towards the coast due to exposure to the elements and intensive agricultural management regimes
  - Tall and bushy hedgerows towards the settlement edge of Weymouth and Chickerell due to less intensive management regimes associated with urban fringe uses such as hobby farming and horse/pony paddocks.
  - Sweeping views towards smooth ridge tops, Portland and the coast, where the character is open.
  - Occasional barrows.
  - Along the shallower slopes and settled vale floors, larger fields of arable use are enclosed by clipped hedgerows and ribbons of hedgerow trees. Small broadleaved woodlands of oak and hazel coppice.
  - Deep valleys of rough pasture, blocks of organic shaped woodland of oak and hazel and patches of scrub provide an intimate feel (particularly around Osmington).

## Detrimental features

- 25.6
- Pylons and masts are visually prominent creating visual clutter and detracting from the characteristic open views.
  - Some traditional barns and farm buildings are in a poor state of repair.
  - Urban fringe land uses, including equine development, around the edges of Weymouth have an urbanising influence in this locality.
  - Hedgerows around the urban fringe are intensively managed with a lack of hedgerow trees along the vales.
  - Deterioration of some lengths of dry stone walling.
  - Visual impact of excessive road signage.
  - Visual impact of caravan parks and other visitor based development.



## 26. CHALDON DOWNS



### Landscape type : Open chalk downland

#### Overview

26.1 The Chaldon Downs are characterised by broad, open and rolling downlands, undulating chalk slopes and small incised valleys. Along with the other chalk upland landscapes to the west, they cover a significant part of the AONB and have a largely undeveloped, rural character. There is a marked transition to the surrounding chalk escarpment to the west and south.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

26.2 Dominated by a chalk surface geology supporting thin calcareous soils. A predominantly arable landscape, with some pasture and occasional small broadleaved woodlands. Remnant chalk grasslands are important habitats on steeper slopes.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

26.3 Undeveloped except for occasional scattered farmsteads. Common building materials include Portland and Purbeck stone plus some brick and cob.

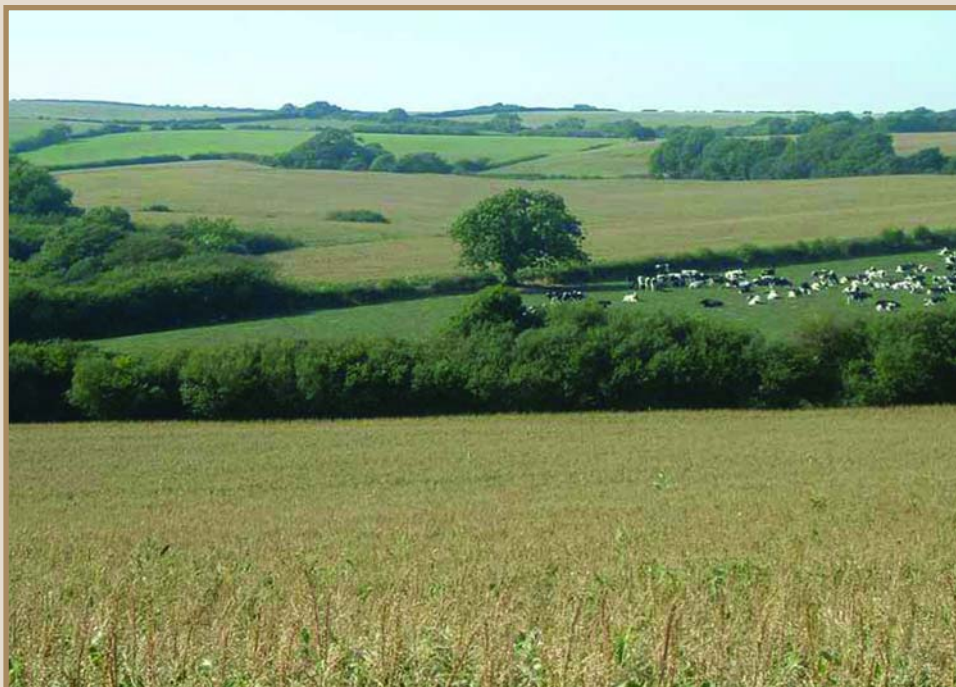
#### Landscape characteristics

26.4 ■ The area has a textured appearance due to agricultural patterns of arable cultivation on gentle slopes, some rough grazing on the deeper valley sides and largely arable along the valley floors.

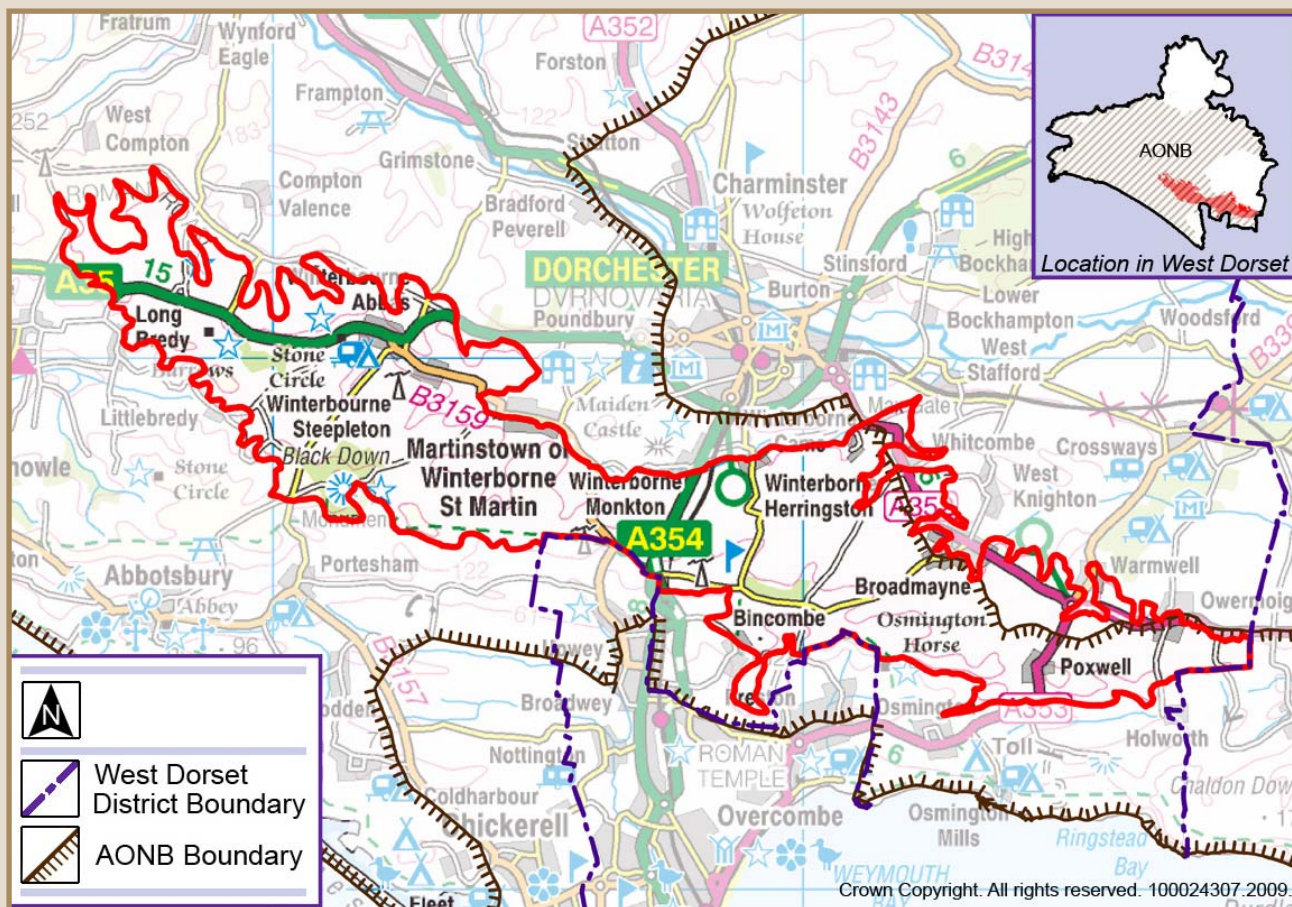
- Large-scale landform of broad rolling hills incised by small river valleys with occasional linear tree belts and wet grasslands around the springs.
- Large open skylines and distant panoramic views.
- Large, straight-sided fields (late c18th /early c19th enclosures) with hazel hedgerows. Post and wire boundary fencing used on the higher ground. Field boundaries and footpaths often reflect the tracks, droves and hollow ways that took the livestock to and from the downs possibly in prehistoric times.
- Numerous prehistoric barrows on higher ground and extensive medieval field systems.
- Occasional old hazel coppice stands and small broadleaved woodlands on gentle slopes, remnant chalk grasslands are important habitats on steeper slopes.
- Secluded, intimate and tranquil character within the valleys.

### Detrimental features

- 26.5
- Pylons and masts are visually prominent creating visual clutter and detracting from the characteristic open views.
  - Some hedgerows have become fragmented and gappy or have been over-managed with post and wire fencing acting as infill where hedgerow sections have been lost.
  - Loss of open field systems.
  - Some boundaries block important open views.
  - Neglected traditional barns and farm buildings in a poor state of repair.



## 27. SOUTH DORSET DOWNS



**Landscape Type: Open chalk downland**

### Overview

27.1 The South Dorset Downs is an expansive, agricultural area of open chalk downland running from Blackdown in the west to Owermoigne in the east. The rolling downland hills drain from the South Dorset Escarpment into the South Winterborne, towards the River Frome.

### Underlying geology and predominant land use

27.2 Thin calcareous soils with underlying geology of chalk. The landscape has a textured appearance due to agricultural patterns of arable cultivation on gentle slopes, some rough grazing on the steeper valley sides and pasture on the broad valley floors. A capping of gravels supports a heathland plant community at Blackdown, along with large plantations of conifer trees.

### Settlement pattern and characteristics

27.3 Small nucleated and linear villages are sited along the valley floor. There are occasional farmsteads. Local building materials consist of local Portland and Purbeck limestone plus some brick, flint, cob and thatch

### Landscape characteristics

27.4 ■ The area is dominated by broad, open and rolling uplands, with gentle convex slopes and small broad



valleys giving way to large open views and skylines.

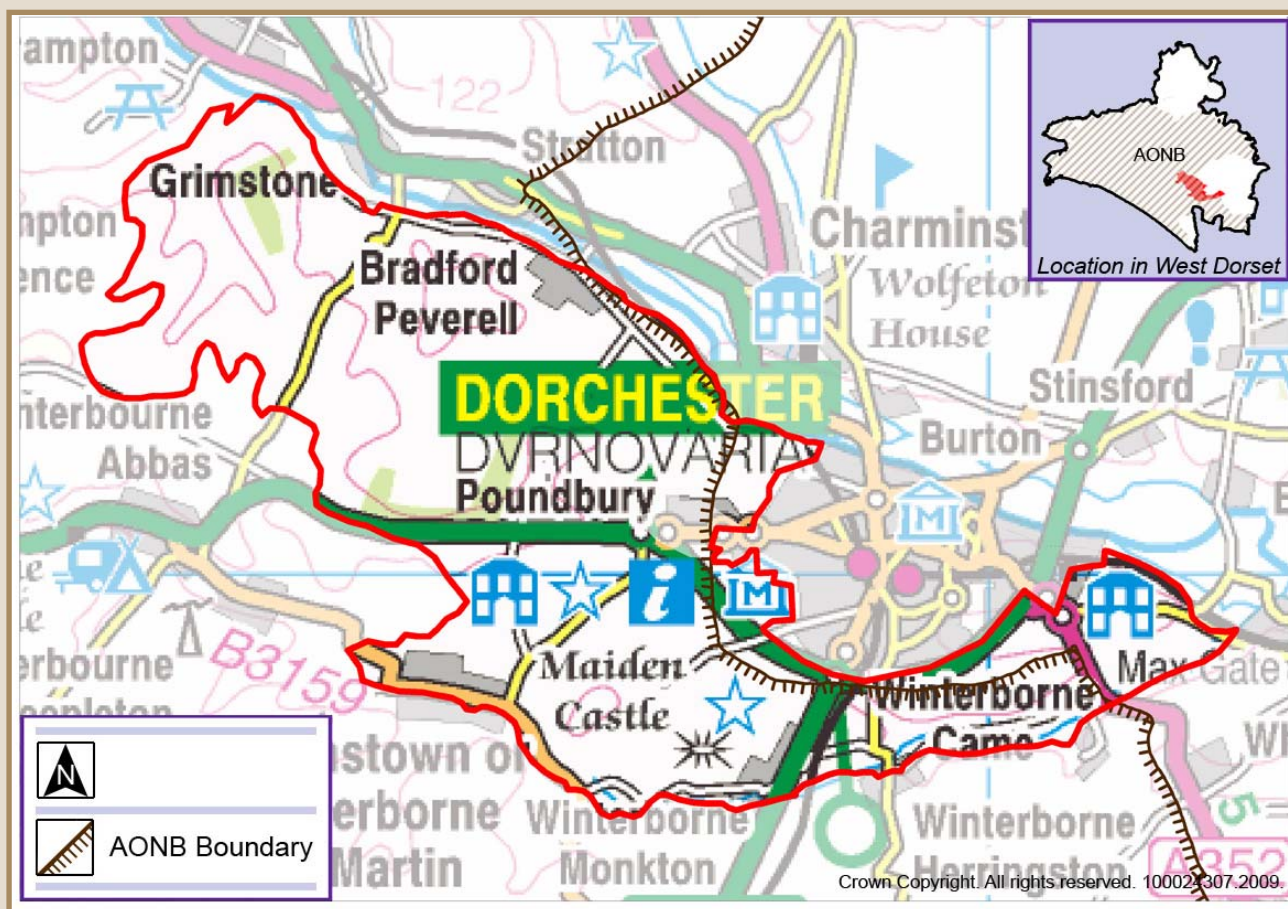
- Large, straight-sided arable and grassland fields (late c18th / early c19th enclosures) with hazel hedgerows, with post and wire on higher ground.
- Extensive scattering of prehistoric monuments on higher ground.
- Network of stone walls towards the South Dorset Escarpment.
- Valley slopes with patches of semi-natural chalk grassland, old hazel coppice stands and occasional small broadleaved woodlands.
- Remnant winding chalk winterbourne with floodplain supporting occasional water meadows, wet woodlands, water cress beds and rough damp meadows.
- Straight rural lanes have an open character and characteristic finger posts and furniture.

### **Detrimental features**

- 27.5
- Pylons and masts are visually prominent creating visual clutter and detracting from the characteristic open views.
  - The main road corridors and some urban fringe areas can have an urbanising and detrimental impact in some places.
  - Some boundaries block important open views.
  - Neglected traditional barns and farm buildings in a poor state of repair.
  - Conifer tree plantations have a negative visual impact.
  - Intensive farming has led to loss of some landscape features with fragmented hedges and stone walls often replaced with post and wire fencing.



## 28. DORCHESTER DOWNS



### Landscape Type: Open chalk downland

#### Overview

28.1 The Dorchester Downs is a diverse downland landscape, defined by broad, open and rolling downland, undulating chalk slopes and small, broad valleys. Maiden Castle, the largest Iron Age Hillfort in Europe, dominates the surrounding open landscape south of Dorchester. Towards the west, the wooded character of the area adds a sense of enclosure marking it apart from other more open upland areas. Further east, the landscape has a parkland character. There is a marked transition to the surrounding chalk escarpment and incised chalk valleys and the flat Frome Valley Pastures to the north.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

28.2 Thin calcareous soils with underlying geology of chalk. Resulting in a textured landscape due to agricultural patterns of arable cultivation on gentle slopes, some rough grazing on the steeper valley sides and mixed grassland and arable use on the broad valley floors.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

28.3 A series of small linear villages of Purbeck limestone, brick and flint, cob and thatch. There are occasional isolated farmsteads.

28.4 Although large areas retain a rural character, parts have a more developed and complex character due to the proximity of main roads and larger scale urban developments.

## Landscape characteristics

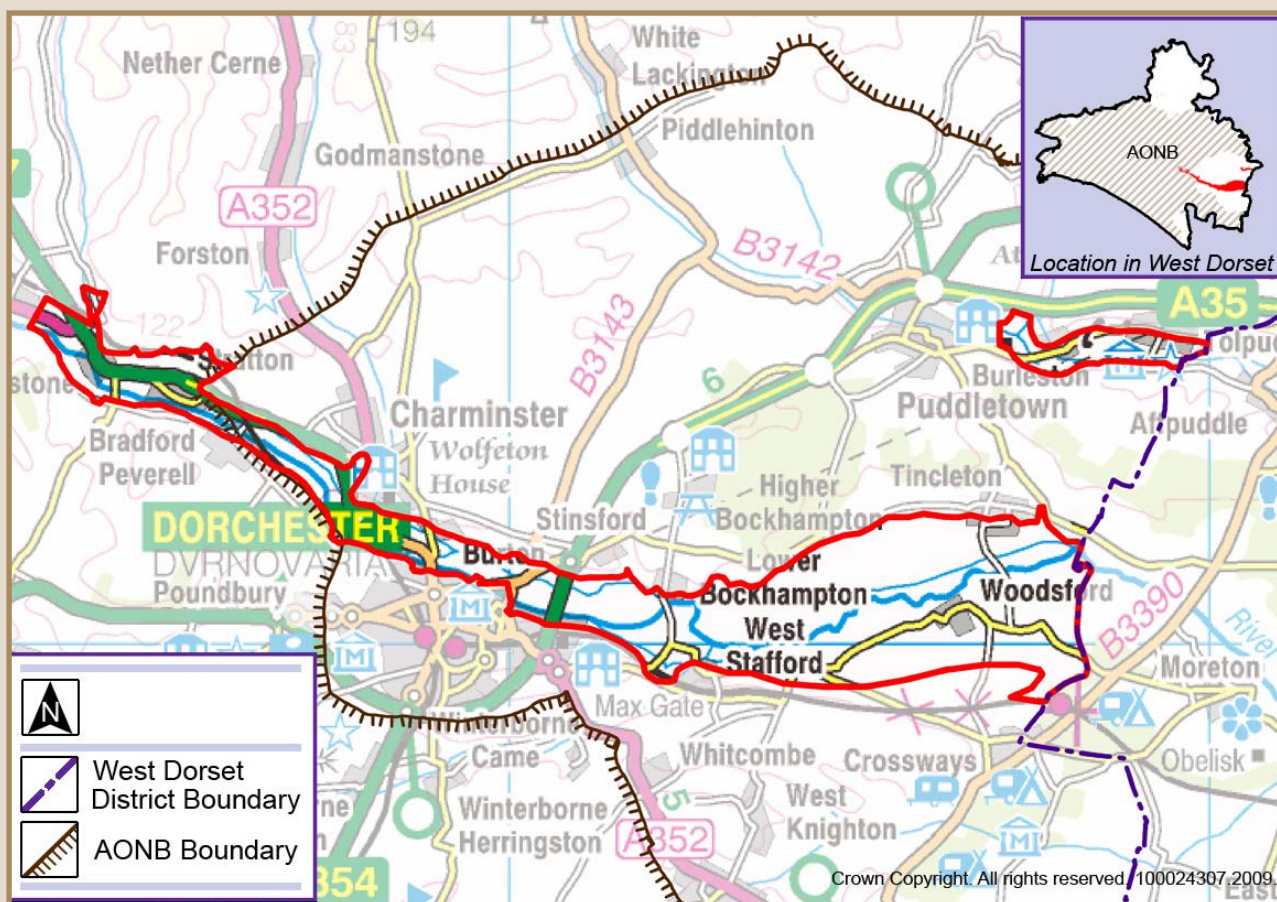
- 28.5
- Broad open rolling uplands with convex slopes and incised dry valleys give way to large open views and skylines.
  - Extensive scattering of prehistoric monuments on higher ground.
  - Large, straight-sided arable and grassland fields (late c18th / early c19th enclosures) with hazel hedgerows, or post and wire on higher ground.
  - Occasional small broad leaved woodlands and trees on upland slopes provide a sense of enclosure.
  - Complex twisting valley slopes with patches of semi-natural chalk grassland and old hazel coppice stands.
  - Parkland character with estate railings and parkland trees on the valley floors.
  - Straight rural lanes of open character, with characteristic finger posts and furniture.

## Detrimental features

- 28.6
- Pylons and masts are visually prominent creating visual clutter and detracting from the characteristic open views.
  - The main road corridors and some urban fringe areas can have an urbanising and detrimental impact in some places.
  - Some boundaries block important open views.
  - Neglected traditional barns and farm buildings in a poor state of repair.
  - Some sections of hedgerow have become fragmented and replaced with post and wire fencing.



## 29. FROME AND PIDDLER VALLEY PASTURE



### Landscape Type: Valley pasture

#### Overview

29.1 The Frome and Piddle Valley Pasture is characterised by a flat valley floor and associated floodplain and river terraces. Meandering river channels cut through wide, open floodplains where wet woodlands, large pastures and water meadows are typical landscape features. Most of this character area retains a peaceful, very rural and tranquil character. However parts in the west are subject to an urban influence as the valley skirts around the edge of Dorchester where it is also crossed by main roads.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

29.2 The flat-bottomed valley floor is formed of fluvial deposits with gravel terraces forming the outer fringes of the valley floor. There is a consistent use of land as seasonal pasture on the flat valley floor, whereas the slightly higher ground to the edges on the river terraces is mostly arable farmland.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

29.3 Much of the area remains undeveloped. Settlements are sited on the slightly higher terraces on the outer margins of the river floodplain and have grown up along historic transport routes. Settlement patterns are characterised by small, compact and linear villages. The historic transport routes remain as minor roads and follow the edges of the valley floor along slightly higher ground on the river terraces just above the winter flooding level. Linking roads with many small and low humped, historic stone bridges cut across the flood plain. Common local building materials include Purbeck limestone, and flint, cob and brick.

## Landscape characteristics

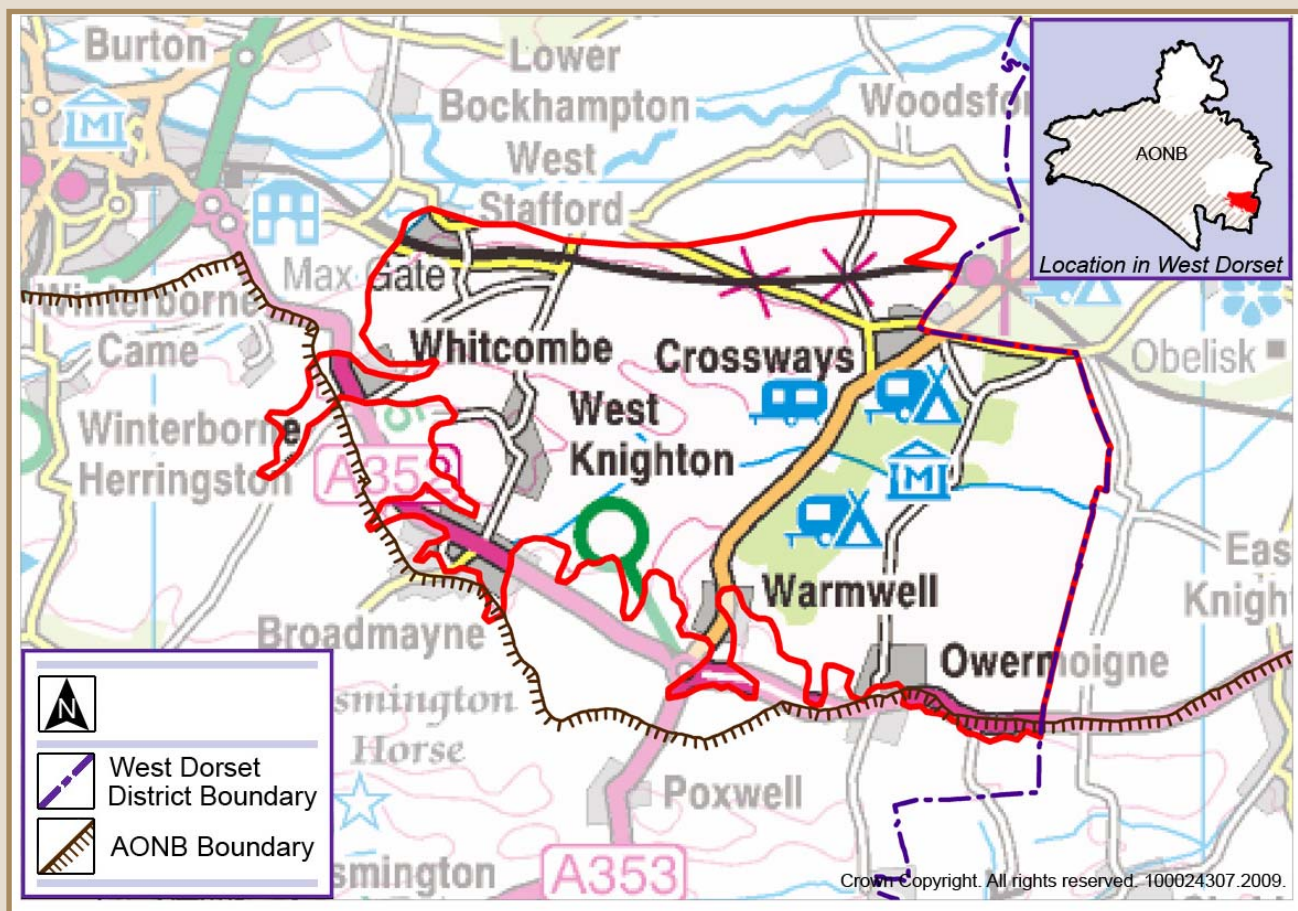
- 29.5
- A medium scale flat, predominantly open, landscape that gives long views both across and along the wide valley floor.
  - The meandering river channels cut through the wide, flat floodplain and connect to a complex network of side streams and ditches. Lines of individual trees, trace the lines of watercourses.
  - There are numerous remnants of historic water meadow systems clearly visible although traditional water meadow management is no longer practised.
  - Important wetland habitats including wet pasture, alder and willow carr and marsh are found on the valley floor. The aquatic and bankside vegetation of the River Frome shows a downstream trend from a purely chalk stream community type to a lowland mixed geology community.
  - The river valleys have a high potential for archaeological remains due to the lack of disturbance from modern development.
  - Fields on the valley floor are bordered by hedgerows and the network of wet ditches and streams. Mixed hedgerows border the fields on the higher river terraces. Some boundaries marked by traditional metal estate fencing.
  - Occasional small, wet woodlands and dense copses of oak, hazel and holly. Neutral grassland and mixed broadleaf and yew woodland are important lowland habitats found within the floodplain.

## Detrimental features

- 29.6
- Uncharacteristic planting including lines of poplar trees that are conspicuous in the landscape.
  - Electricity pylons crossing the Frome valley in the east are conspicuous in this flat open landscape.
  - Urban influences are apparent in parts around Dorchester.
  - Boundary fencing neglected and in poor condition.
  - Main roads and their associated signing and lighting have an impact around the Dorchester area.
  - Sections of hedgerow have been lost and replaced with post and wire fencing.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Decline in condition and extent of semi-natural features within the floodplain, for example former extensive wet woodland has reduced in size and traditional water meadow management is no longer practised.



## 30. CROSSWAYS GRAVEL PLATEAU



**Landscape Type: Heath / forest mosaic**

### Overview

30.1 This is a distinctive, mostly rural, area that has been impacted on by urban fringe development and extensive mineral workings. Historically, the sandy, acidic and infertile soils would have been covered by heathland. Changes in land use have since resulted in the current mosaic of different habitats, and agricultural land uses. However heathland associated vegetation is a unifying feature throughout. The southern and eastern parts of this character area have a more intimate feel due to the undulating landform and increased woodland cover.

### Underlying geology and predominant land use

30.2 The free draining, acidic, sandy and loamy soils support a range of habitat types, and agricultural land uses. Land use is for mineral extraction, arable and pasture farming, along with areas of heathland, woodlands, wetland, grassland and scrub. Extensive mineral workings have resulted in modern localised changes to the landscape and topography, including excavations and new screening bunds surrounding the works.

### Settlement pattern and characteristics

30.3 Settlement is mostly confined to small towns and villages, which have a nucleated or planned form. The largest settlement, Crossways, occupies an open location on the flat river terrace. There are

isolated farms and occasional isolated houses. Common local building materials are Purbeck and Portland Limestone, brick and cob. The area contains some caravan parks, which are visually well contained as they tend to be sited within wooded areas.

- 30.5 Roads are single carriageway or minor lanes, which carry substantial amounts of through traffic and large quarry vehicles. A main railway line passes east-west through the northern part of the area.

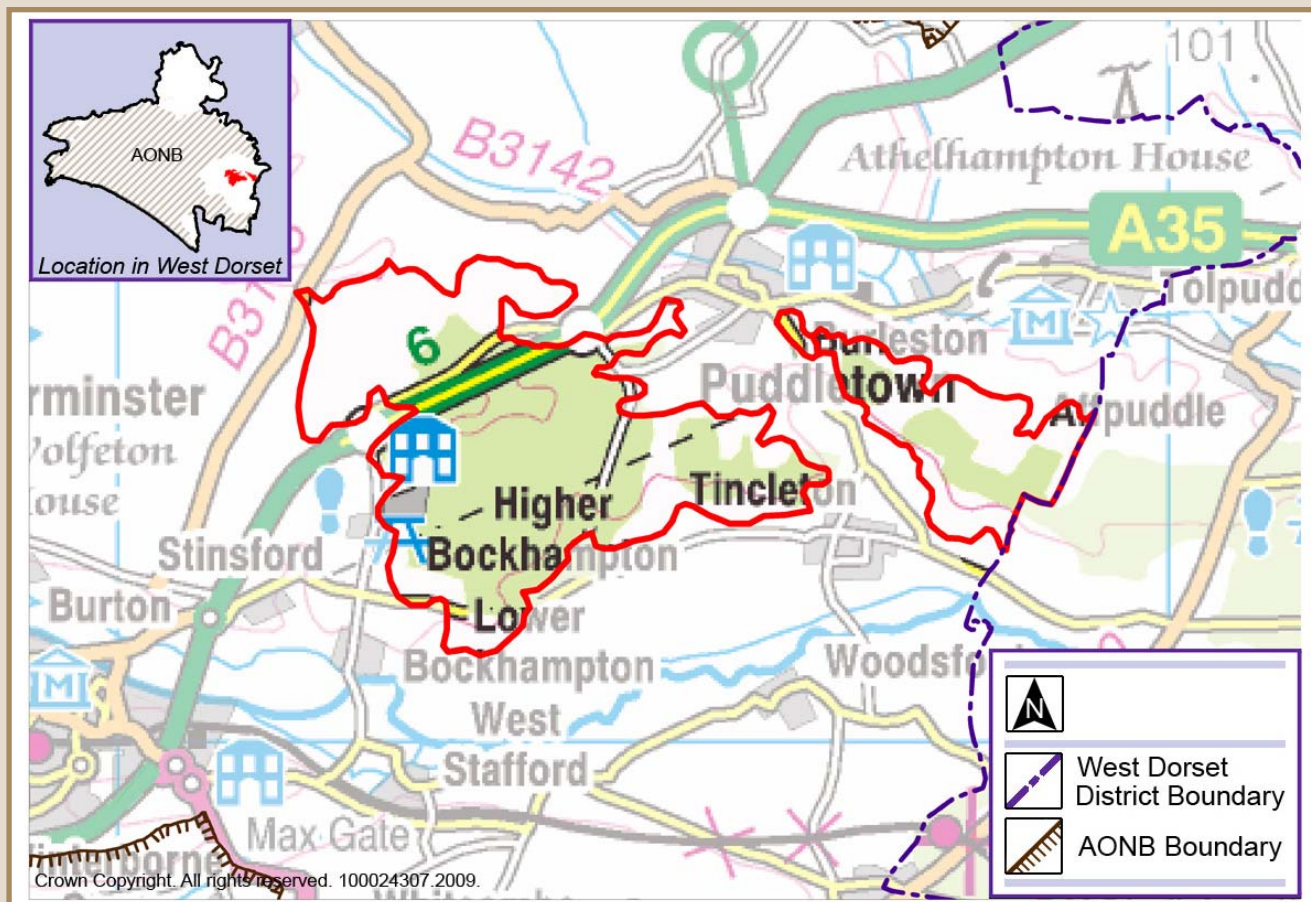
### **Landscape characteristics**

- 30.6
- The scale of this area changes with its varied land use and topography. There are large-scale, wide views across the Frome valley from the plateau areas. This contrasts with the intimate landscape and filtered views from within the wooded and undulating land in the east. The differing agricultural uses along with areas of heathland, grassland and scrub gives a mosaic of varied land cover.
  - There are significant areas of woodland, often with conifers and mixed plantations in irregularly shaped blocks. Small isolated woodlands and copses remain as deciduous planting. Streams are often associated with woodland and small ponds.
  - Gorse, bracken and birch scrub, grassland and wetland habitats also form part of this mosaic.
  - Small scale irregular shaped fields with a mix of arable and pasture farming, defined by thick, mixed hedges. Gorse and bracken are found in many hedges and give a consistent heathland feel throughout the area.
  - Although much of the character area has a unifying 'heathland feel' only very limited areas actually remain as intact heathland.
  - Deserted medieval villages at Broadmayne Church and Fryermayne, plus a significant Roman and Medieval site at Moigne Court. Evidence of Bronze Age activities with many round barrows, plus Iron Age and Roman habitation at Osmington Drove a medieval greenway defined by an avenue of Beech Trees.

### **Detrimental features**

- 30.7
- Woodlands have been replanted with conifers. Large areas of woodland have been colonised by invasive rhododendron.
  - Some hedgerow field boundaries are very patchy or missing, either replaced with post and wire fencing or simply left undefined.
  - Some heathland is poorly maintained and does not link with surrounding heath habitats.
  - Extensive sand and gravel pit workings particularly to the west of Crossways gives a sense of deterioration and neglect, and has removed evidence of previous field boundaries in some large areas.
  - Urbanising impacts are noticeable at the edge of settlements where development has spread and in the case of Broadmayne and West Knighton merged the two settlements. Crossways is a temporary settlement that has had an urbanising influence on the surrounding rural area.
  - A high voltage transmission line bisects the area and its cables and large pylons are often visually dominant.
  - Some roads have lost their rural character.

## 31. PUDDLETOWN FOREST AND CLYFFE HOUSE



**Landscape Type: Heath / forest mosaic**

### Overview

- 31.1 A landscape of contrasts, with a varied patchwork of colours and textures. Extensive tree cover at Puddletown Forest and Southover Heath dominates the area. Clyffe House and its surviving traces of landscape features at Southover Heath are of interest.

### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 31.2 An underlying geology of chalk overlain with gravel beds and sandy soils supports a mosaic of forestry and woodland, farmland and lowland heath. The area is scattered with swallets and dolines, geological hollows, formed by the erosion of the soluble chalk by water.

### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 31.3 Due to the steep topography and dense tree cover, the area is largely unsettled except for a few farms and houses at the edge of the forest. Where settlement does occur, common local building materials include Purbeck limestone, plus some flint, brick and cob.

### Landscape characteristics

- 31.4 ■ Extensive tree cover at Puddletown Forest and Southover Heath dominates the area consisting of varied irregular shaped blocks of coniferous and mixed deciduous woodland. The vertical



nature of the woodland enhances the sinuous and undulating landform.

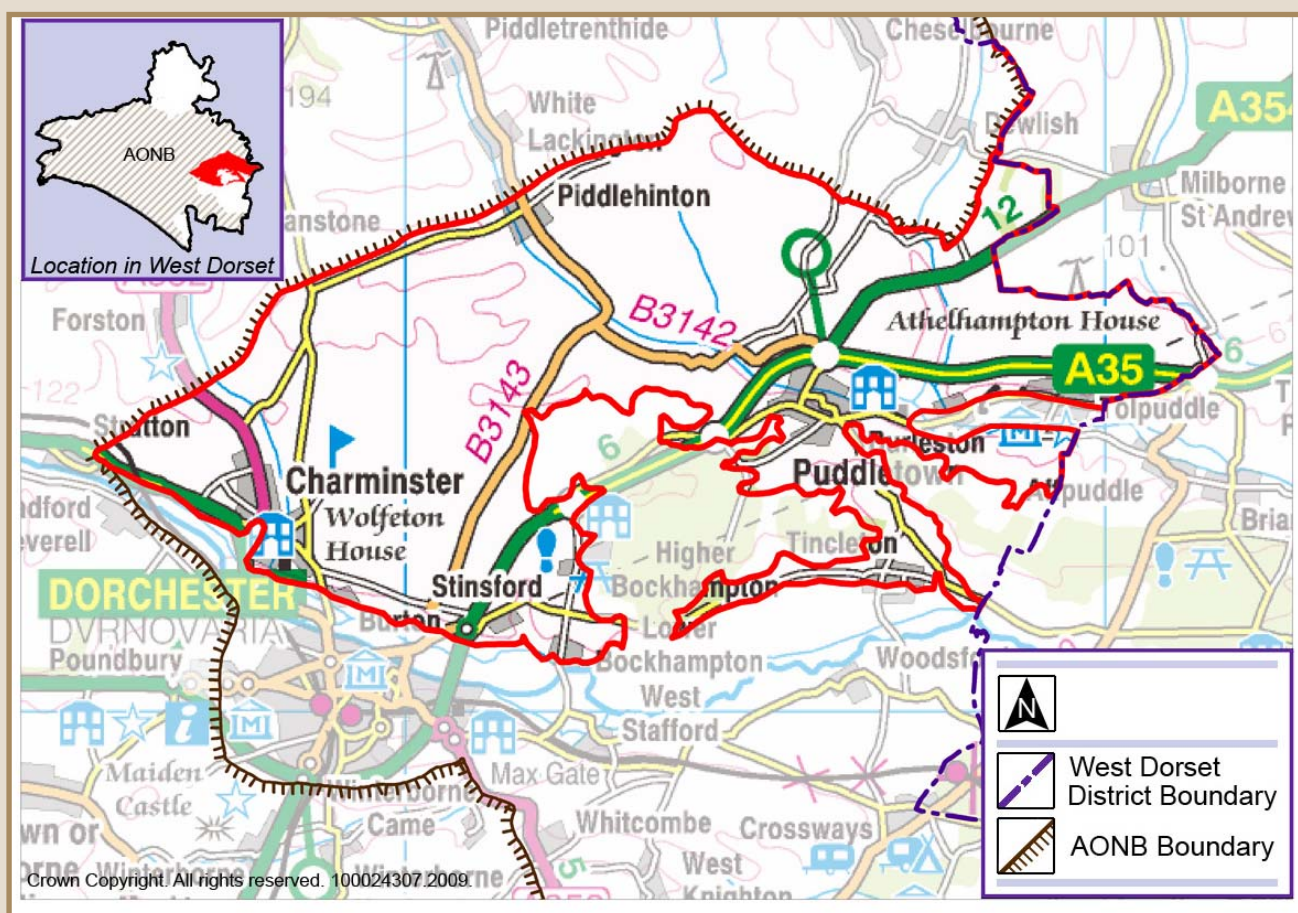
- Species such as Bracken and Rhododendron are prevalent along the roadside.
- Rural roads and an intricate network of public rights of way and private access tracks provide access throughout the area. There are also the remains of a distinct straight Roman road that would have historically provided connection to the roman town of Dorchester, together with the modern A35 through Puddletown Forest.
- The field pattern is varied with evidence of both large regular planned enclosures, and smaller irregular fields of piecemeal enclosure, often reflected in the random edges of the woodland blocks. Hedgerow boundaries.
- There are patches of lowland heath at Duddle Heath and Bhompston Heath.
- Bronze Age features such as the bowl barrows at Rainbarrows on Duddle Heath.
- Few ponds scattered at lower and flatter elevations.

### **Detrimental features**

- 31.5
- Straight edges of tree blocks and coniferous plantations appear unnatural the landform.
  - Hedgerow field boundaries are poorly maintained in places.
  - Some heathland is poorly maintained and does not link with surrounding heath habitats.



## 32. CERNE AND PIDDLE VALLEYS AND CHALK DOWNLAND



### Landscape Type: Chalk valley and downland

#### Overview

32.1 The flat-bottomed River Piddle Valley and its associated pattern of deep branching valleys and dry coombes incise the upstanding hills of the chalk downland. In the northern parts of the valleys, the field pattern appears piecemeal suggesting enclosure by individuals or local communities. In contrast, the field pattern to the south appears more organised suggesting enclosure of large areas or manors by powerful tenants or landlords.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

32.2 Across the downland an underlying geology of chalk gives rise to thin and free draining calcareous soils. These open areas are used for large arable and pasture fields. The chalk valley sides have a mixture of arable, pasture fields and grassland with pasture most frequent on the valley bottoms.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

32.3 The exposed downland areas are sparsely settled with a few remote farmsteads accessed by narrow lanes and tracks. A continuous strip of both current and deserted medieval villages is situated in the shelter of the valley floor, set in gardens and parkland with ancient woodland, veteran trees, railings and flint walls. These are connected by rural lanes that run along historic transport routes. Common local building materials include flint, brick and cob and Purbeck limestone.

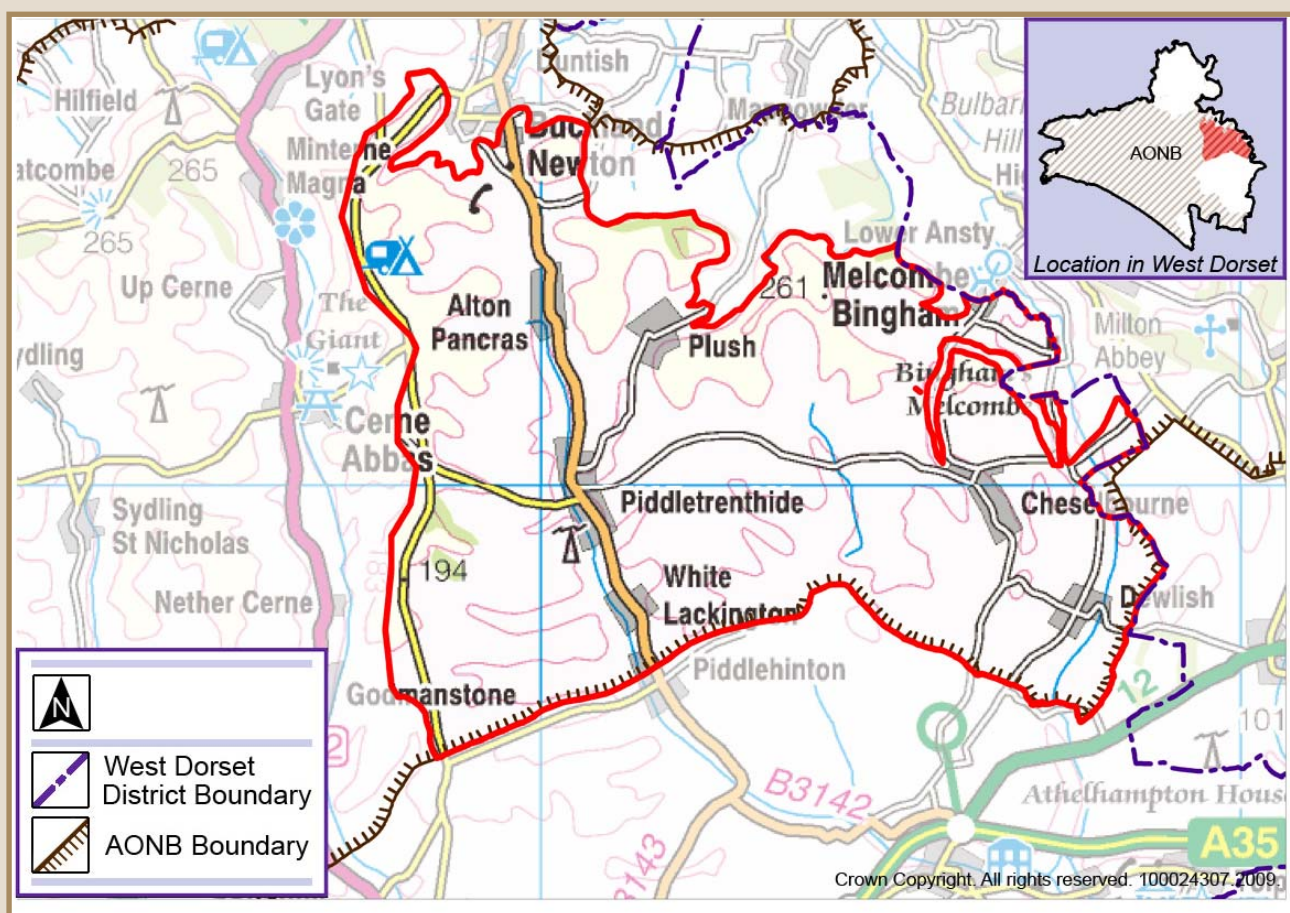
## Landscape characteristics

- 32.4
- Open and expansive chalk downland incised by flat-bottomed valleys and associated branching chalk streams and dry coombes.
  - Regular pattern of large-scale arable fields (typical of planned late c18th / early c19th modern enclosure), with trimmed hazel hedgerow boundaries at lower elevations and post and wire fencing at higher elevations offering long distance views.
  - Many prehistoric monuments such as barrows and prehistoric field systems have survived and are often visible as humps along the skyline.
  - Occasional small regular native woodlands and tree groups associated with built form and corners of fields, or functioning as shelterbelts.
  - On the south facing dry slopes, surviving patches of semi-natural chalk habitat support a rich diversity of grassland, scrub and woodland including relic hazel coppice. Soil creep is often visible across the steep valley sides.
  - Small-scale pattern of pasture fields within the valley floor. The fertile alluvial soils support a diversity of vegetation and wet grazing pasture enclosed by thick, species rich hedgerows and occasional hedgerow trees. Historic water meadows are evident as subtle field patterns and some water meadow channels survive.
  - Linear woods of riparian species such as willow and alder follow watercourses flanked by wet sedge and rush.
  - The A35 road corridor is a major feature in this open landscape.
  - Lanes have a rural character with small humped bridges, and traditional fingerpost signs. Straight Roman roads radiate from nearby Dorchester.

## Detrimental features

- 32.5
- The A35 corridor has localised major impact within this open landscape. The majority of the road in this area is dual carriageway with the associated grade separated junctions and substantial, very angular cuttings. The associated noise and lighting also add to the impact.
  - Pylons and masts are visually prominent creating visual clutter and interrupting the characteristic open views.
  - Unsympathetic Leylandii and conifer planting has a detrimental impact on landscape character.
  - A growth in the use of pastures for horse grazing is changing the rural character of settlement edges.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Some traditional barns and farm buildings are in a poor state of repair.

## 33. UPPER PIDDLER VALLEY



### Landscape Type: Chalk valley and downland

#### Overview

- 33.1 The Piddle Valley, with the associated River Piddle, Devils Brook and Cheselbourne, has an enclosed intimate character defined by a 'V' shaped profile and dry, rounded coombes. There is a branching pattern of narrow, steep-sided dry coombes, off the main central valley with small pockets of broadleaved woodland and relic hazel coppice with rough chalk pastures and patches of scrub.
- 33.2 A landscape of subtle colours and historical associations. Towards the northern escarpment the landscape becomes smaller in scale with steep valley sides.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 33.3 Thin calcareous soils with underlying geology of chalk. Landcover is typically pasture along the valley floor with extensive arable fields on the surrounding downlands. Small woodlands and found dotted along the valley sides and relic unimproved chalk grassland and scrub on some of the steeper slopes.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 33.4 A series of linear villages and hamlets are connected by straight rural lanes travelling along historical transport routes. The southern part of the Upper Piddle valley has a more urbanised character than

other chalk valleys with urban fringe landuse, including settlements, business and industrial uses, encroaching into the open countryside. Building materials consist of Lower Purbeck and Portland Limestone plus brick, flint and cob.

### Landscape characteristics

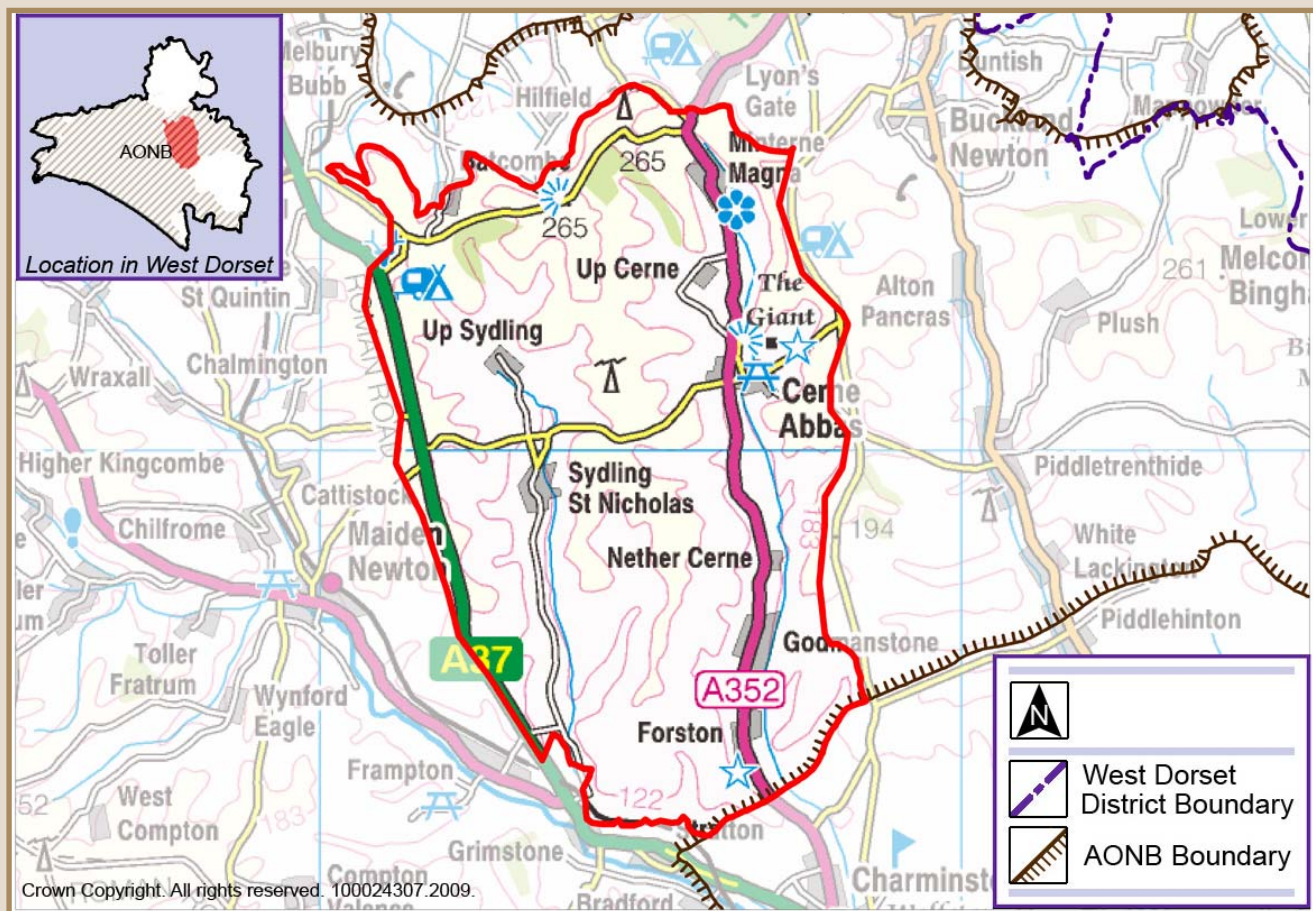
- On the upper slopes, open and expansive chalk uplands of large, straight-sided arable fields (late c18th / early c19th enclosures) are crossed with straight roads leading down the valley sides. These are enclosed by post and wire fencing, merging into hazel and thorn hedgerows further down slope. Towards the top of the escarpment, views are extensive and the skyline uninterrupted.
- Incised valley slopes with remnant patches of semi-natural chalk grassland, soil creep, and occasional small broadleaved woodlands and relic hazel coppice.
- Smaller scale pastures and field patterns on valley floor with species rich dense hedgerows, small broadleaved woodlands and occasional hedgerow trees.
- Clear chalk streams with floodplain supporting occasional water meadows, wet woodlands, old cress beds and rough damp meadows. Occasional water meadow channels on the valley floor contribute to the visible archaeology.
- Remnants of parkland landscapes with veteran trees, parkland railings, flint walls along the valley floors.

### Detrimental features

- 33.5
- Pylons and masts are visually prominent creating visual clutter and interrupt the characteristic open views.
  - Patches of remnant chalk grassland have become fragmented by conifer planting and extensive arable use on the valley sides.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - The river channel has been changed by engineering in places with an associated negative landscape impact.
  - Settlement edges often intrude into the open countryside. Unsympathetic Leylandii and conifer planting has a detrimental impact on landscape character.
  - Some traditional barns and farm buildings are in a poor state of repair.
  - Some important boundaries, particularly parkland railings and flint walls, are in a poor state of repair. Some hedgerow boundaries are fragmented.
  - Excessive traffic signage is apparent along some roads.



## 34. CERNE AND SYDLING VALLEY



### Landscape Type: Chalk valley and downland

#### Overview

34.1 The Cerne and Sydling valleys and associated chalk streams are characterised by a sweeping 'U' shaped landform with flat valley bottoms, steep valley sides, rounded hollows, and incised coombes leading up towards the surrounding rounded, open chalk uplands. The landscape is intimate and enclosed with subtle colours and strong rural associations.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

34.2 The underlying geology of chalk gives rise to thin calcareous soils. There are occasional outcrops of greensand. Landcover is arable and pasture fields with areas of chalk grassland. There are numerous deciduous woods and conifer plantations, usually on the steepest slopes.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

34.3 Series of small nucleated villages connected by winding rural lanes running along the valley floor. Common local building materials are predominantly flint, brick, cob and chalk but Lower Purbeck limestone and Ham Hill stone, is used in some villages.

#### Landscape characteristics

- Towards the upper slopes the valley becomes broader in scale with large, straight-sided arable field

patterns and occasional scattered farms, providing a gradual transition to the surrounding open chalk downlands. At lower elevations boundaries are defined by hazel and thorn hedgerows, with post and wire fencing across the elevated chalk downland. Towards the top of the escarpment, views are extensive and the skyline uninterrupted.

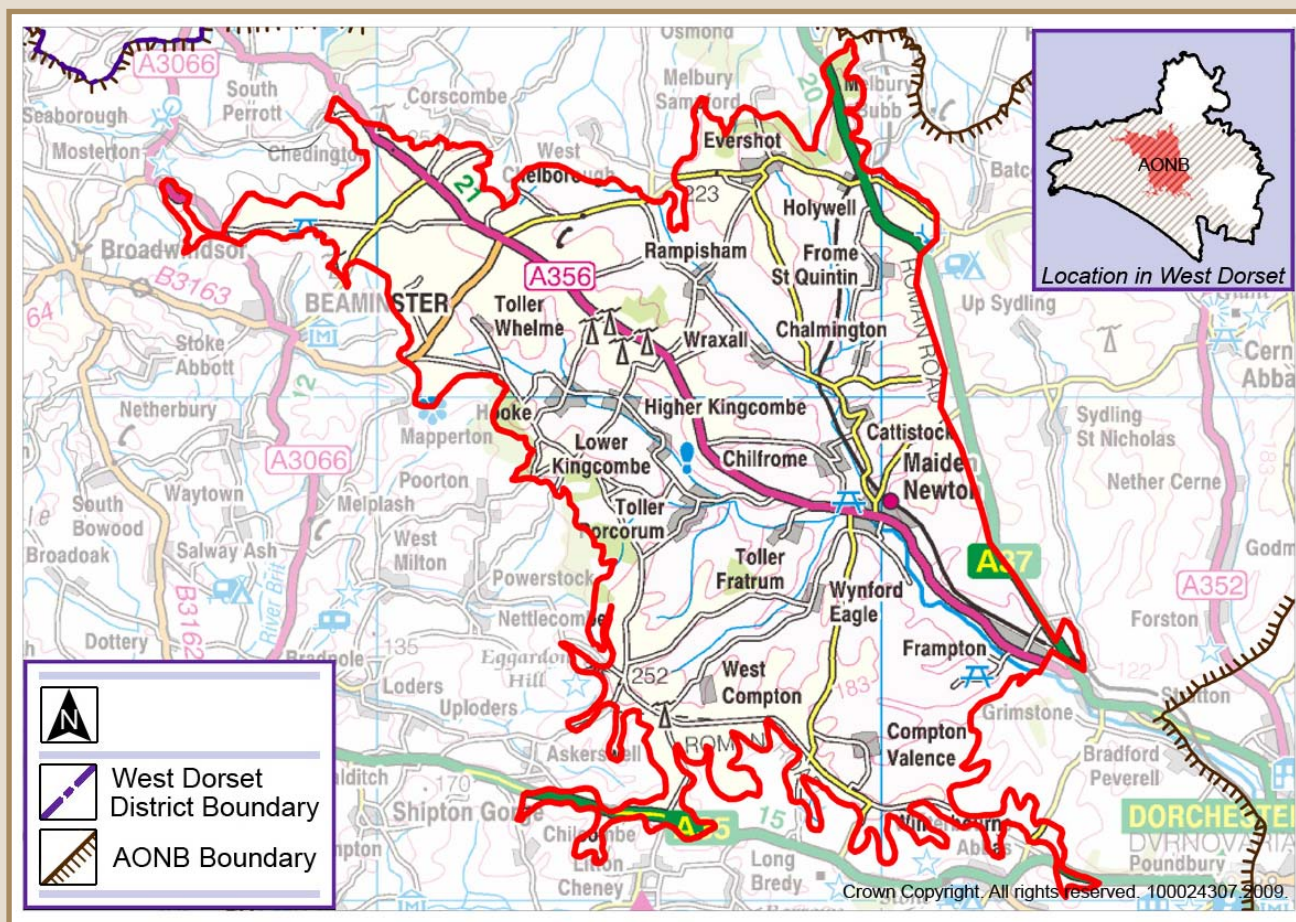
- There is a branching pattern of narrow, steep-sided dry coombes off the main central valley, with small pockets of occasional oak and ash broadleaved woodland, relic hazel coppice and rough chalk pastures with patches of scrub. Medieval field systems on the valley sides and barrows contribute to the visible archaeology.
- Smaller scale pastures on valley floor with species rich dense hedgerows, small broadleaved woodlands and occasional hedgerow trees provide a strong sense of enclosure.
- Clear chalk streams with floodplains supporting occasional water meadows, wet woodlands, old cress beds and rough damp meadows. Occasional water meadow channels on the valley floor.
- Parkland landscapes with veteran trees, railings, flint walls and country houses along the valley floors.
- Secluded, intimate and tranquil character within the valley floors.

### **Detrimental features**

- 34.4
- Some traditional barns and farm buildings are in a poor state of repair.
  - Hedgerow boundaries are fragmented and parkland railings are in a poor state of repair.
  - Historic loss of relic hazel coppice and traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Excessive traffic signage can have a negative visual impact.
  - Conifer plantations within woodlands have a landscape impact.
  - Leylandii and other screen planting with non-native species in exposed rural locations appears out of character.



## 35. UPPER FROME VALLEY



**Landscape Type: Chalk valley and downland**

### Overview

35.1 The Upper Frome Valley has a more undulating landform and variety of habitats than other chalk valleys. Enclosed by the escarpment to the north, the valley bottoms are wide with gentle slopes and small coombes. The area has a good woodland cover with a scattering of small copses, pastures and hedgerow trees along the valley floor. This creates a more intimate landscape than the more powerful landforms to the east. Extensive arable downlands surround these secluded valleys.

### Underlying geology and predominant land use

35.2 A complex geology of thin calcareous soils with underlying geology of lower, middle and upper chalk and extensive outcrops of greensand. Landcover is typically pasture along the valley floor with extensive mixed arable and pastoral fields on the surrounding uplands with large oak and ash broadleaved woodlands.

### Settlement pattern and characteristics

35.3 Scattered, clustered villages and hamlets of stone, cob, brick, flint and thatch. Local building stones include Ham Hill Stone, Inferior Oolite, Forest Marble and Chalk, with Upper Greensand becoming more common within the southern half of the area. Settlements are linked by rural lanes that follow historical transport routes along the valley floor.



## Landscape characteristics

- 35.4
- Large, straight-sided arable and grassland fields (late c18th / early c19th enclosures) with hazel and thorn hedgerows, and post and wire fencing on the chalk downland.
  - Shallow valley slopes with patches of acid and neutral grassland and many small broadleaved woodlands and relic hazel coppice.
  - Smaller scale pastures and fields patterns on valley floor with species rich dense hedgerows, small broadleaved woodlands and hedgerow trees.
  - Clear chalk streams with floodplains supporting occasional water meadows, wet woodlands, cress beds and rough damp meadows and rush pasture.
  - Parkland landscapes with veteran trees, railings, flint walls and country houses along the valley floors.
  - Secluded, intimate and tranquil character within the valley floors.
  - Lanes have characteristic traditional finger post signing and dense hedgebanks.

## Detrimental features

- 35.6
- Some settlement edges have an urbanising influence on the surrounding landscape. The large cluster of communications towers at Rampisham Down has a far reaching negative impact over much of the AONB.
  - Conifer plantations have an adverse landscape impact.
  - Leylandii screen planting appears out of character
  - Some traditional barns and farm buildings are in a poor state of repair.
  - Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
  - Excessive traffic signage can have a negative visual impact.





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*Working for West Dorset*