

Landscape type: Chalk Ridge/Escarpment

- Character areas:
- Purbeck Ridge
 - North Dorset Escarpment
 - South Dorset Escarpment
 - West Dorset Escarpment

The North, West and South Escarpments and the Purbeck Ridge form dramatic backdrops to, and give views of, much of the surrounding AONB. Although in geological terms an escarpment is slightly different to a ridge, they have been grouped together for this assessment as they share very similar characteristics and management requirements. With an undeveloped and open character, this landscape type with its steep sides, supports important patches of chalk grasslands and hanging woodlands. These dramatic landscapes have been captured by the romantic paintings and writings of Wilsdon Steer, Moffat Linder, Daniel Defoe and Lamora Birch.

Landscape change

- Policy driven farming changes over the last sixty years have resulted in concentration of stock levels. This has limited the availability of livestock to graze land of low agricultural value along the scarp face. In places, this has resulted in low grazing pressure and increased scrub encroachment on the steeper slopes.
- Some historical loss of chalk grassland as a result of intensive arable agricultural practices have fragmented grassland habitats with issues of soil erosion.
- Pressure for new built development at the foot of the scarp has led to erosion of the traditional nucleated character of the settlements. Future pressure could continue this trend.
- The prominent elevated character of the ridge and escarpments is likely to bring further demand for construction of tall structures, including communication masts.
- Agri-environment schemes are likely to result in continued environmental management of the landscape, with significant areas managed by conservation bodies.
- Agriculture is becoming more market driven with intensification of production and farm diversification. This may result in short term changes in agricultural patterns in the landscape.
- Inappropriate lighting from surrounding development can affect the setting of the escarpment faces. Future pressures could continue this trend.
- Climate change may result in changes to important grassland habitats, landcover types and the demand for renewable energy provision.
- Increasing use of motor vehicles along tracks may cause erosion and noise.

Landscape Guidelines

The overall management aim should be to conserve the historic character, uninterrupted landform, tranquillity, strong open skyline and the distinct mosaic patterning of woodland, scrub and chalk grassland. Seek opportunities to restore and enhance habitats and historic features.

Planning guidelines

- Maintain the undeveloped character of the scarp and the contrast with the ridge base farmsteads. Any new development should be small scale and should respect the distinct nucleated form along the surrounding edges of the area and should not extend onto the lower slopes. Encourage the use of native species along property boundaries.
- Conserve the rural character of the narrow sunken and open lanes and protect sensitive banks from further erosion.
- Monitor and ensure pylons, masts and other vertical elements are carefully sited and the number restricted to avoid visual clutter and further interruption of the characteristic open views. Encourage the under-grounding of small powerlines in open, sensitive locations and removal of redundant infrastructure.
- Ensure new agricultural dwellings and barns enhance the local character and are sited away from open views and skylines. Encourage the restoration of traditional barns and farm buildings.
- Protect and enhance important views to and from the ridge/escarpment.

Management guidelines

- Promote the use of visually permeable boundaries such as post and wire fencing on higher ground and enhance the sense of continuity and openness across the escarpment/ ridge tops and associated monuments.
- Monitor continued encroachment of scrub on the steepest slopes. Manage scrub and encourage grazing where appropriate and avoid cutting vegetation in straight lines to minimise visual impact. Retain occasional small patches of scrub for aesthetic and wildlife benefits.
- Seek opportunities to recreate, link and restore important grassland sites.
- Further woodland planting is not a key objective for this area, with the aim being to maintain the balance of open land and woodland cover with enhanced woodland management.
- Ensure conservation and restoration of low impact grassland management around prehistoric features, particularly barrows and hillforts.
- Promote sustainable management and recreational access to Open Access areas and important viewpoints.
- Consider location of game cover crops in visible locations.

The overall management aim should be to conserve the historic character, uninterrupted landform, tranquillity, strong open skyline and the distinct mosaic patterning of woodland, scrub and chalk grassland. Seek opportunities to restore and enhance habitats and historic features.

Monitor and ensure pylons, masts and other vertical elements are carefully sited and the number restricted to avoid visual clutter and further interruption of the characteristic open views.

Ensure conservation of low impact grassland management around prehistoric barrows and hillforts.

Protect and enhance important views to and from the ridge/escarpment.

Maintain the undeveloped character of the scarp and the contrast with the ridge base farmsteads.

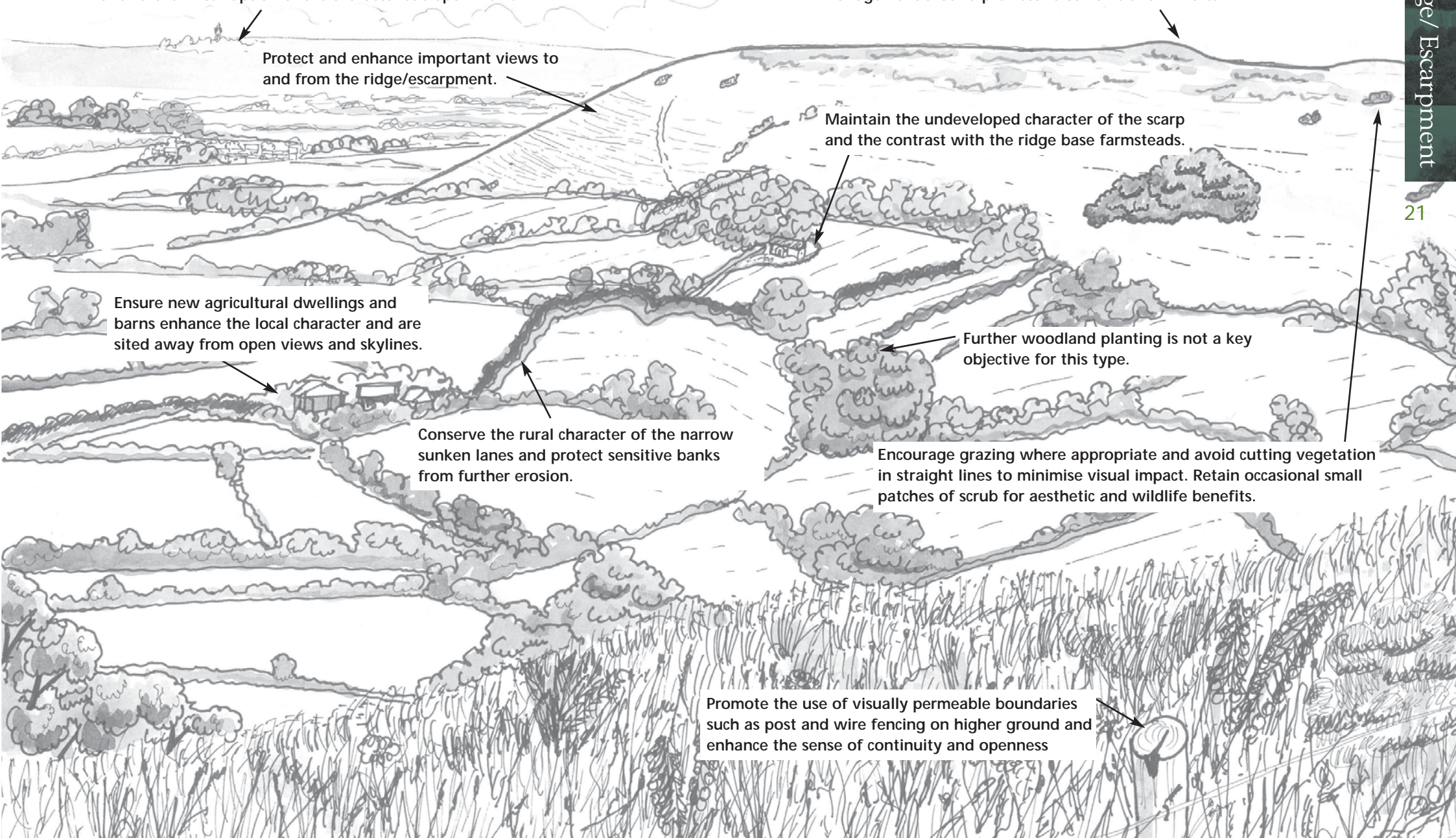
Ensure new agricultural dwellings and barns enhance the local character and are sited away from open views and skylines.

Further woodland planting is not a key objective for this type.

Conserve the rural character of the narrow sunken lanes and protect sensitive banks from further erosion.

Encourage grazing where appropriate and avoid cutting vegetation in straight lines to minimise visual impact. Retain occasional small patches of scrub for aesthetic and wildlife benefits.

Promote the use of visually permeable boundaries such as post and wire fencing on higher ground and enhance the sense of continuity and openness



Character Area:

Purbeck Ridge

The Purbeck Ridge is a dominant steep sided, undulating chalk ridge, separating and contrasting to the flat heathlands in the north and the patchwork landscape of the Corfe Valley to the south. The physical dominance of this dramatic landform is clearly evident from the surrounding landscapes. With its bold dominant form, it provides a significant visual barrier only broken by the fascinating gap by Corfe Castle and smaller passes through Ulwell and Cocknowle. The open flat ridge top consists of a mixture of pastoral and arable land use with significant patches of scrub encroachment. There are important areas of chalk grassland along the southern length of the ridge and attractive

woodlands on the northern side that blend into the surrounding wooded landscapes towards the heaths. Landmarks and historical interest along the ridge add cultural value to this exposed and inspiring formation. These include Creech Barrow, with its conical shape and rough vegetation, and Flowers Barrow, Nine Barrow and Bindon Hill. Towards the eastern end of the ridge, the area is influenced by a large patchwork of pastoral grasslands located on a gently sloping hill. The Glebeland Estate is clearly visible from a distance with little effort to screen the development within a rural setting.

Key characteristics

- A dramatic and exposed steep, narrow ridge with dry valleys
- Underlying geology of chalk with greensand, giving rise to predominantly thin calcareous soils
- Patchwork of small scale pastoral fields on lower slopes with scattered farmsteads along the ridge bottom
- Extensive areas of unimproved calcareous downland turf on steep slopes
- Large rectangular arable fields on the ridge top
- Ancient oak, ash, maple woodlands on the lower northern slopes
- Patches of dense gorse scrub on steep ridge sides
- Panoramic long distance views of the surrounding landscapes
- Prehistoric barrows dotted along ridge top
- Ancient sunken, winding lanes with an open character towards the top



Description

Land shape & structure

The landform consists of a steep sloping ridge with summit plateau extending across most of the area with occasional dry valleys. Although chalk is a soft rock, it is also relatively resistant to sea water, so when the sea levels dropped it left a steep sided chalk ridge with a band of Upper Greensand. The ridge top has a largely smooth profile with convex slopes, typical of a chalk upland landscape. The white chalk face of 'Old Harry's Rock' at the eastern end of the ridge is a distinctive landmark.

Soils and vegetation

The underlying chalk provides thin, light free draining calcareous soils supporting unimproved chalk grassland habitats with patches of gorse and scrub along with ancient woodland on the northern lower slopes. Towards the west, an outcrop of greensand is indicated by a patch of bracken and heather at Creech Barrow.

Settlement and land cover

The area is devoid of settlement except for occasional small farmsteads, at least medieval in origin, on the lower slopes of the ridge. It is largely uncultivated along the slopes with unenclosed grazing of rough pasture. The west of the area is dominated by the Ministry of Defence ranges. On the ridge top, there are large geometric fields of arable and grass.

Historic character

The historic character is largely defined by the open rough ground with planned enclosure and strip fields at the eastern end with a good survival of prehistoric remains. The ridge is the defining feature of the area, forming a natural barrier which Corfe Castle was built to control. That the ridge drew the attention of prehistoric man can be seen in the string of Bronze Age barrows or burial mounds along its length, in some places clustered together into cemeteries, for example, at Ballard Down, Ailwood Down and Nine Barrow Down. Later prehistoric activity can be seen in the form of two Iron Age monuments: Flowers Barrow, a hillfort, and Bindon Hill, a large enclosure which may have played a defensive role but perhaps served in some way to control the harbour at Lulworth Cove.

Visual character & perceptions

The ridge dominates the surrounding landscape with a textured appearance of scrub and extensive darker areas of woodland. It has a powerful, wild appearance due to its open and exposed nature with commanding views of most of Purbeck, Poole Harbour and the coast.

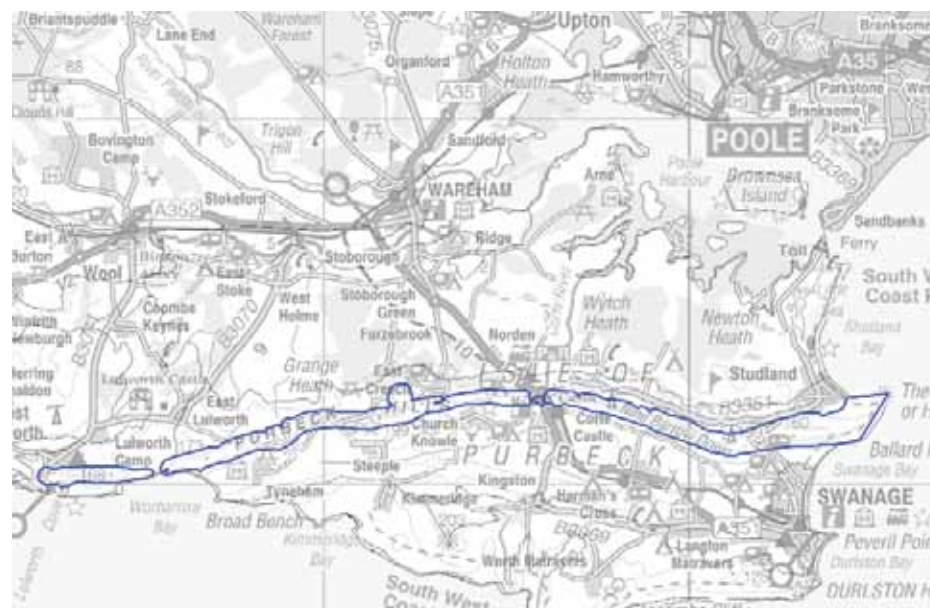
Evaluation

Strength of character

This landscape maintains a **strong** character, primarily due to its dramatic and exposed landform and survival of historic features. This is emphasised by the characteristic land cover pattern of calcareous downland turf and largely intact ancient woodland. Although some change to arable has taken place over time, the ridge maintains its strong association with traditional landuse.

Condition

Extensive patches of unimproved chalk grassland and ancient woodland help ensure the continuity of past land management practice remain. Along with good ecological condition of these important habitats, there is a good coverage of environmental land management schemes. Although some arable change has taken place, this has not greatly affected the condition of the landscape, with little evidence of poor management and a good survival of prehistoric remains. However, scrub encroachment is a constant threat to the viability of grasslands and monuments and requires constant management to maintain the balance of habitats. The setting of historic monuments is largely in good condition although fencing can be an issue. There is a high quality of vernacular farm buildings at the foot of the ridge. Communication masts have a negative landscape impact in places, particularly around Cocknowle. The landscape is judged to be in **good** and **improving** condition.



Character Area:

North Dorset Escarpment

The North Dorset Escarpment with its steep, twisting and incised landform provides a contrasting backdrop to the Blackmore Vale in the north and the series of chalk valley landscapes to the south. It has a more subtle character than the other escarpments with a variety of colours, textures and land use. It is a largely unsettled landscape with occasional isolated farms set within broadleaved woodlands and open grasslands. Towards the top of the escarpment, views are extensive with large arable fields and occasional thin hedgerows. Along the slopes, rounded spurs and deep coombes, textured soil creep, patches of scrub and unimproved grasslands add to the ecological interest.

Towards the lower slopes, the escarpment becomes more intimate with small woodland blocks and dense hedgerows. Broken from the main escarpment by the flat Stour Valley Pastures, Hod and Hambledon Hills are prominent, dramatic Iron Age hilltop forts with impressive sweeping, sinuous forms. Further west, between Ansty and Evershot, the ridge becomes narrower and steeper 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.

Key characteristics

- A dramatic and exposed steep and narrow escarpment with rounded spurs and deep coombes
- Patchwork of small scale mixed pastoral fields on lower slopes with scattered farmsteads along the springline
- Prehistoric barrows and prominent hilltop forts, cross dykes and prehistoric field systems
- Areas of open unimproved calcareous turf on steep slopes with patches of scrub
- Large, straight-sided arable fields of late 18th or early 19th century enclosures on escarpment top
- Hanging ancient oak, ash, hazel woodlands on lower slopes
- Thin calcareous soils with underlying geology of chalk and greensand
- Panoramic long distance views of the surrounding landscape to the north
- Ancient sunken, winding lanes with an open character towards the top



Description

Land shape & structure

The landscape character of the North Dorset Escarpment is largely determined by its steep, winding topography rising up to over 200m. This is particularly steep around Ansty. The lower shallow slopes of greensand give way to the steep chalk escarpment of rounded spurs and deep coombes. Towards the escarpment top, the landform has a largely smooth profile with convex slopes, before it breaks away towards the chalk valleys to the south.

Soils and vegetation

The higher areas of underlying chalk provide thin, light free-draining calcareous soils. These steep slopes of the escarpment and associated forts support occasional broadleaved woodlands, patches of scrub and species rich chalk grasslands. Woodland is most prevalent around Ibberton Hill and towards Ansty and Evershot, with both dry and wet woodlands found on the north side of the Bulbarrow scarp. Where greensand is prevalent along the lower slopes, soils become damper supporting lush vegetation.

Settlement and land cover

Largely due to the topography, the escarpment is mostly unsettled with occasional isolated farmsteads. There are several modern barns and prominent telecommunication masts on Bulbarrow Hill. Towards the lower slopes, small farmsteads and nucleated villages, at least Medieval in origin, lie along the spring line towards the Blackmore Vale. The area is largely uncultivated with unenclosed grazing of rough pasture. In places on the top, there are large geometric fields of arable and grass with significant blocks of hazel coppice and geometric conifer plantations. Pastoral and arable fields give a more structured appearance towards the bottom of the escarpment.

Historic character

The wider character is mostly piecemeal enclosure with deciduous woodland and coppice towards the western end. To the east, enclosures are more regular with pasture with large areas of woodland. Notable archaeology includes Rawlsbury Camp, Bulbarrow, Green Hill, Okeford Hill and Bell Hill with various round barrows and cross-dykes. Hambledon Hill with the sweeping, sinuous curves of the double embankments which contour around its summit makes it one of the most impressive examples of an Iron Age hill fort in Britain.

Visual character & perceptions

The scarp dominates the surrounding landscape with a textured appearance of scrub and significant dark patches of woodland. It has a powerful, dramatic appearance due to its open and exposed nature with commanding views of the Blackmore Vale.

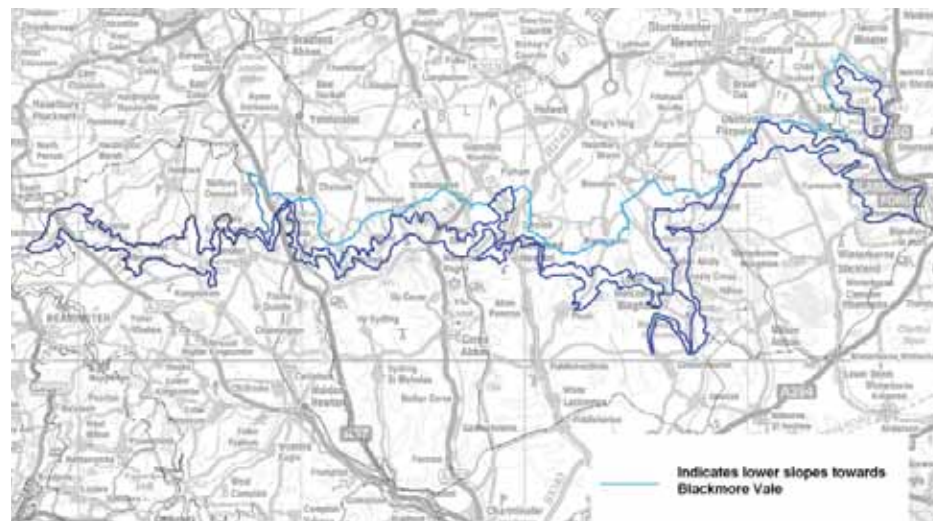
Evaluation

Strength of character

This landscape maintains a **strong** character, primarily due to its dramatic and exposed landform. This is emphasised by the pattern of characteristic spurs and coombes and land cover of unimproved calcareous downland turf. Although some land use change and fragmentation of habitats has taken place with recent enclosure of open land, the escarpment maintains a strong association with traditional land use.

Condition

Extensive patches of unimproved chalk grassland and ancient woodland ensure the continuity of past land management practices remain, with generally good ecological condition of these important habitats. Scrub encroachment and invasive species control are a constant threat to the viability of grasslands and requires constant management to maintain the balance of habitats. The setting of historic monuments is largely in good condition, with high quality vernacular farm buildings at the foot of the escarpment. Post war arable use has affected some below and above ground archaeology although the recently enclosed nature of much of the landscape means that prehistoric remains in particular have survived in reasonable condition. Some fragmentation of grasslands has taken place through conifer plantations and arable encroachment from the surrounding uplands. This has affected the condition of the landscape in places. Communication masts and skyline barns have a negative landscape impact in places, particularly around Ibberton Hill. The landscape is judged to be in **moderate** and **stable** condition.



Character Area:

South Dorset Escarpment



The South Dorset Escarpment has a more consistent character and landform than the more twisted escarpments to the west and north. The steep topography ensures a near continuous cover of rough, open grasslands. The steep slopes, with some sparse hedgerows, are covered in patches of scrub and extensive soil creep. 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. It is a largely unsettled landscape with occasional isolated farmsteads set within breaks in the ridge surrounded by small broadleaved woodlands and open grasslands.

Key characteristics

- A dramatic and exposed steep and narrow escarpment with occasional rounded spurs and deep coombes
- Patchwork of small scale pastoral fields on lower slopes with scattered farmsteads located at gaps in the escarpment.
- Areas of rough unimproved calcareous downland turf on steep slopes with soil creep
- Large, straight-sided arable fields of late regular 18th or early 19th century enclosures on escarpment top
- Occasional hanging ancient oak, ash, hazel woodlands on lower slopes
- Dense gorse scrub on steep ridge sides
- Thin calcareous soils with underlying geology of chalk
- Panoramic views of the surrounding coastal landscape
- Prehistoric barrows, prominent hilltop forts and extensive prehistoric field patterns
- Ancient sunken, winding lanes with an open character towards the top



Description

Land shape & structure

The landscape character of the South Dorset escarpment is largely determined by its steep, winding topography rising up to over 200m. The landform is less sinuous than the other escarpments across the AONB, running almost in a straight east-west line, forming a physical barrier to the chalk landscapes to north and the coastal landscapes to the south. The shallow slopes at the foot of the escarpment give way to regular field patterns, marking the transition to the Ridge and Vale landscapes either side of Weymouth.

Soils and vegetation

The underlying chalk provides thin, light free draining calcareous soils. The steep slopes of the escarpments and associated forts support occasional broadleaved woodlands, patches of scrub and species rich chalk grasslands. The area is less wooded than the other escarpments due to the coastal influences and thinner soils on the steep sides.

Settlement and land cover

Largely due to the steep topography, the escarpment is mostly unsettled with occasional isolated farmsteads. Towards the lower slopes, small farmsteads and nucleated villages, at least medieval in origin, lie along the spring line with regular enclosures towards the base of the escarpment. The slopes are largely uncultivated, enclosed grazing of rough pasture. In places towards the uplands, there are large rectangular fields of arable and grass and isolated woodlands. There are several modern barns and a convergence of major powerlines towards Weymouth.

Historic character

The escarpment is mainly regular enclosures with fragments of heath, downland and piecemeal enclosures. Medieval farmsteads and manors are found at gaps in the escarpment. Notable visible archaeology includes the site of a medieval village at Holworth and the impressive Chalbury Hillfort over looking Preston towards the coast. Nestled within a coombe is the Valley of Stones, with occasional barrows and remaining prehistoric fields systems.

Visual character & perceptions

The ridge dominates the surrounding landscape with an open, rugged appearance of rough grasslands. It has a powerful, almost wild appearance due to its open and exposed nature, subject to powerful coastal forces.

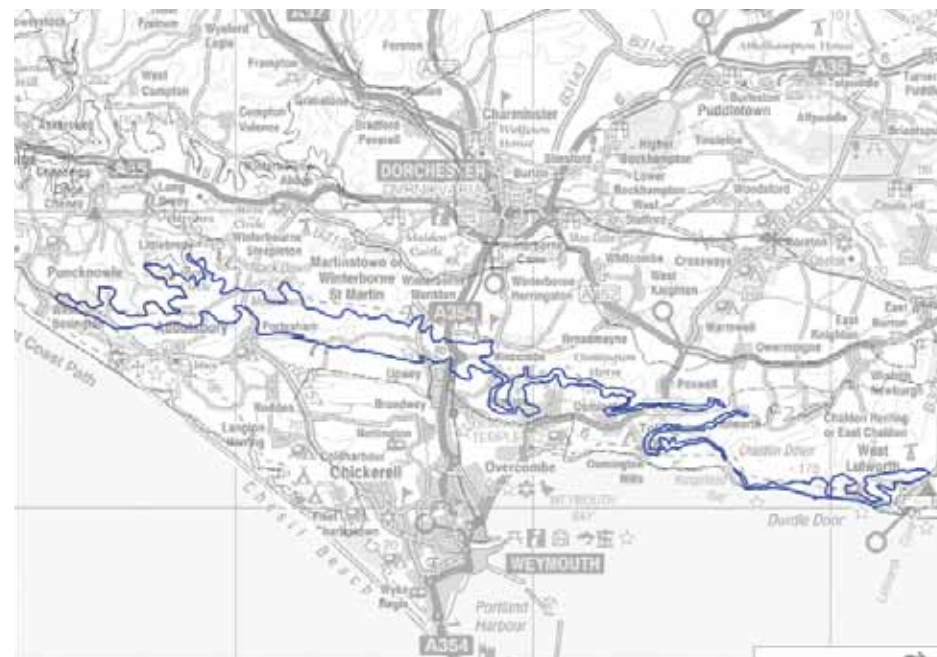
Evaluation

Strength of character

This landscape maintains a **strong** character, primarily due to its dramatic and exposed landform. This is emphasised by the extensive pattern of characteristic land cover of rough grasslands. Although some change to arable and recent enclosures has taken place, the escarpment maintains a strong association with past landuse.

Condition

Occasional patches of unimproved chalk downland ensure the continuity of past land management practice remains, along with good ecological condition of these important habitats. Although some arable change has taken place, this has not greatly affected the condition of the landscape, with little evidence of poor management. However, scrub encroachment is a constant threat to the viability of grasslands and requires constant management to maintain the balance of habitats. The settings of historic monuments are largely in good condition, with high quality vernacular farm buildings at the foot of the escarpment. Communication masts, modern barns, major roads and powerlines have a negative landscape impact in places, particularly towards Weymouth. The landscape is judged to be in **moderate** and **declining** condition.



Character Area:

West Dorset Escarpment

As a geological continuation from the North and South Dorset Escarpments, 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 contrasting to more shallow wooded slopes. There is a break in slope around Powerstock Common. The slopes around Beaminster and Askerswell are particularly steep with a good cover of broadleaved woodlands contrasting to extensive open grasslands south of Eggardon Hill. Along the top of the ridge

views are extensive, particularly from the imposing Eggardon Iron Age hillfort. Along the slopes, the rounded spurs and deep coombes, textured soil creep, patches of scrub and unimproved grasslands add to the ecological interest. Towards the lower slopes, the ridge becomes more intimate with irregular field patterns leading towards a series of wooded springline villages and intimate, winding rural lanes.



Key characteristics

- A dramatic and exposed steep and narrow escarpment with rounded spurs and deep coombes
- Patchwork of small scale pastoral fields on lower slopes with scattered farmsteads at the ridge bottom springline
- Areas of unimproved neutral and calcareous downland turf on steep slopes
- Mixed arable and pastoral fields of piecemeal enclosures on escarpment sides
- Hanging ancient oak, ash, hazel coppice woodlands on lower slopes
- Dense gorse scrub on steep ridge sides
- Thin calcareous soils with underlying geology of chalk and greensand
- Panoramic views of the surrounding West Dorset landscape
- Prehistoric barrows and prominent hilltop forts
- Ancient sunken, winding lanes with an open character towards the top



Description

Land shape & structure

The landscape character of the West Dorset Escarpment is largely determined by its steep and twisted sides rising up to over 200m. The shallow slopes give way to the steep escarpment of rounded spurs and deep coombes. The ridge top has a largely smooth profile with convex slopes, before it breaks away towards the chalk valleys to the east. There is a marked break in slope around Powerstock Common, exaggerating the imposing Eggardon Hill to the south.

Soils and vegetation

The underlying chalk provides thin, light free draining calcareous soils. 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 Beaminster and Askerswell.

Settlement and land cover

Largely due to the topography, the escarpment is mostly unsettled with occasional isolated farmsteads. There are occasional modern barns towards the foot of the escarpment with a prominent power line running up from Loders. Towards the lower slopes, small farmsteads and clustered villages, at least medieval in origin, lie along the spring line towards the Powerstock Hills and beyond. The area is largely uncultivated with unenclosed grazing of rough pasture. In places on the top, there are large geometric fields of arable and grass. Mixed pastoral and arable fields give a more structured appearance towards the bottom of the escarpment.

Historic character

The area is defined by almost exclusively piecemeal enclosures and coppice woodland. The escarpment drew the attention of prehistoric man, which can be seen in occasional prehistoric barrows along its length. Iron Age fortifications, in particular the imposing Eggardon Hill with well preserved ramparts provides extensive views towards the vales and greensand hills in the west. Fragments of more recent coniferous plantation are found at the western end with the influences of landscape parkland at Melbury. Other visible features include 'pillow mounds', earthworks used to farm rabbits around Medieval times.

Visual character & perceptions

The escarpment dominates the surrounding landscape with a textured appearance of scrub and significant darker areas of woodland. It has a powerful appearance due to its open and exposed nature with commanding views of West Dorset.

Evaluation

Strength of character

This landscape maintains a **strong** character, primarily due to its dramatic and exposed landform. This is emphasised by the pattern of characteristic spurs and coombes, cover of unimproved grasslands and piecemeal enclosure. The escarpment still maintains a strong association with traditional land use. The survival of monuments is less than the Purbeck Ridge for example. Some change to arable has also taken place.

Condition

Extensive patches of unimproved grassland, and remnants of ancient woodland ensure the continuity of past land management practice remains, along with generally good ecological condition of these important habitats. Some arable change has taken place particularly along the escarpment tops, affecting the condition of the landscape, with some evidence of poor management. The setting of historic monuments is largely in good condition. The quality of vernacular farm buildings at the foot of the escarpment is generally good. However, scrub encroachment is a constant threat to the viability of grasslands and requires ongoing management to maintain the balance of habitats. Occasional conifer plantations and the large pylon line have a significant visual impact up the Loders valley with other communications masts clearly visible on the open skyline. The landscape is judged to be in **moderate** and **stable** condition.

