

Landscape type: **Wooded Hills**

Character areas:

- Axe Valley Hills
- Wootton Hills
- Chideock Hills
- Powerstock Hills
- Powerstock Woods

Significant areas of the western end of AONB form the intimate Wooded Hills landscape type, with several clusters of conical shaped hills formed around the Marshwood Vale. Typically, woodland is found on the valley sides with a network of dense hedgerows, winding lanes and small clustered settlements dotted throughout the pastoral landscape. The market and coastal towns in and around the area support a long tradition of artistic interpretation of the landscape and local cultural traditions.

Landscape change

- Policy driven farming changes over the last sixty years, resulting in concentration of stock levels, has limited the availability of livestock to graze land of low agricultural value such as chalk grassland. In places, this has resulted in low grazing pressure and increased scrub encroachment on the steeper slopes.
- In the past some hedgerows have been lost either through field enlargement or through lack of management.
- Some rough pasture and wet meadows on the valley floor have been lost from conversion to larger fields of arable use.
- The planting of game coverts on the valley sides has been one of the most significant changes in the past. Although this reinforces the sense of enclosure, it can detract from the semi natural broadleaved woodlands found elsewhere.
- 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.
- Modern residential and tourist developments in more open locations towards the open coast, threaten to weaken the pattern of tight knit villages. There is evidence of traditional farm buildings being converted into holiday lets towards the coast.
- Some orchards have suffered from a lack of management due to wider economic forces.
- There is also likely to be further pressure for new built development on the fringes of larger settlements, along the A35 as well as redevelopment of agricultural buildings to residential, amenity or industrial use.
- Coastal erosion is threatening valued habitats and residential and visitor based development.
- Assarts being destroyed through growth in pony paddocks.
- Coppice management is economically unviable in many woodlands.

Landscape Guidelines

The overall objective for the Wooded Hills should be to conserve the intimate, undeveloped and pastoral appearance and protect the wooded character. Ongoing protection of hedgerows, rural lanes, small scale pastures, open skylines and settlement character are important considerations.

Planning guidelines

- 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.
- Promote the use of locally sourced stone in new developments. Any planting should reflect local character, using appropriate native species. Conserve the pattern of tight knit villages.
- Prevent further expansion of caravan parks in sensitive locations and promote enhanced management of existing sites.
- Maintain undeveloped character and resist intrusive developments on sensitive hillside locations.
- Minimise small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or improvements to the road network which could change the rural peaceful character of the landscape. Protect hedgebanks along winding lanes and conserve characteristic finger posts and furniture.
- Consider screening views to intrusive agricultural buildings and settlement edges through planting new small scale broadleaved woodlands.
- Conserve the ancient pattern of small irregular piecemeal enclosures, assarts and strip fields. Protect patterns of strip lynchets and their setting.

Management guidelines

- Conserve the ancient pattern of small irregular piecemeal enclosures, assarts and strip fields.
- Protect the wooded character and enhance woodland management with small scale planting of broadleaves along valley sides. Protect the character of important open skylines from future planting.
- Conserve and enhance permanent grassland and prevent loss to agricultural improvement and damage to wildlife and archaeological features. Promote low impact grassland management.
- Conserve existing orchards and promote new establishment.
- Encourage maintenance of species rich hedgerows and trees, particularly along the valley floors and replant any gaps where necessary. Resist use of post and wire.
- Manage the retreat of coastal landscapes and associated coastal corridor.
- Restore important patches of heathland through phased conifer felling and introduce grazing regimes.

The overall objective for the Wooded Hills should be to conserve the intimate, undeveloped and pastoral appearance and protect the wooded character. Ongoing protection of hedgerows, rural lanes, small scale pastures, open skylines and settlement character are important considerations.

Restore important patches of heathland through phased conifer felling and introduce grazing regimes.

Prevent further expansion of caravan parks in sensitive locations and promote enhanced management of existing sites.

Protect the wooded character and enhance woodland management with small scale planting of broadleaves along valley sides. Protect the character of important open skylines from future planting.

Conserve the ancient pattern of small irregular piecemeal enclosures, assarts and strip fields.

Protect patterns of strip lynchets and their setting.

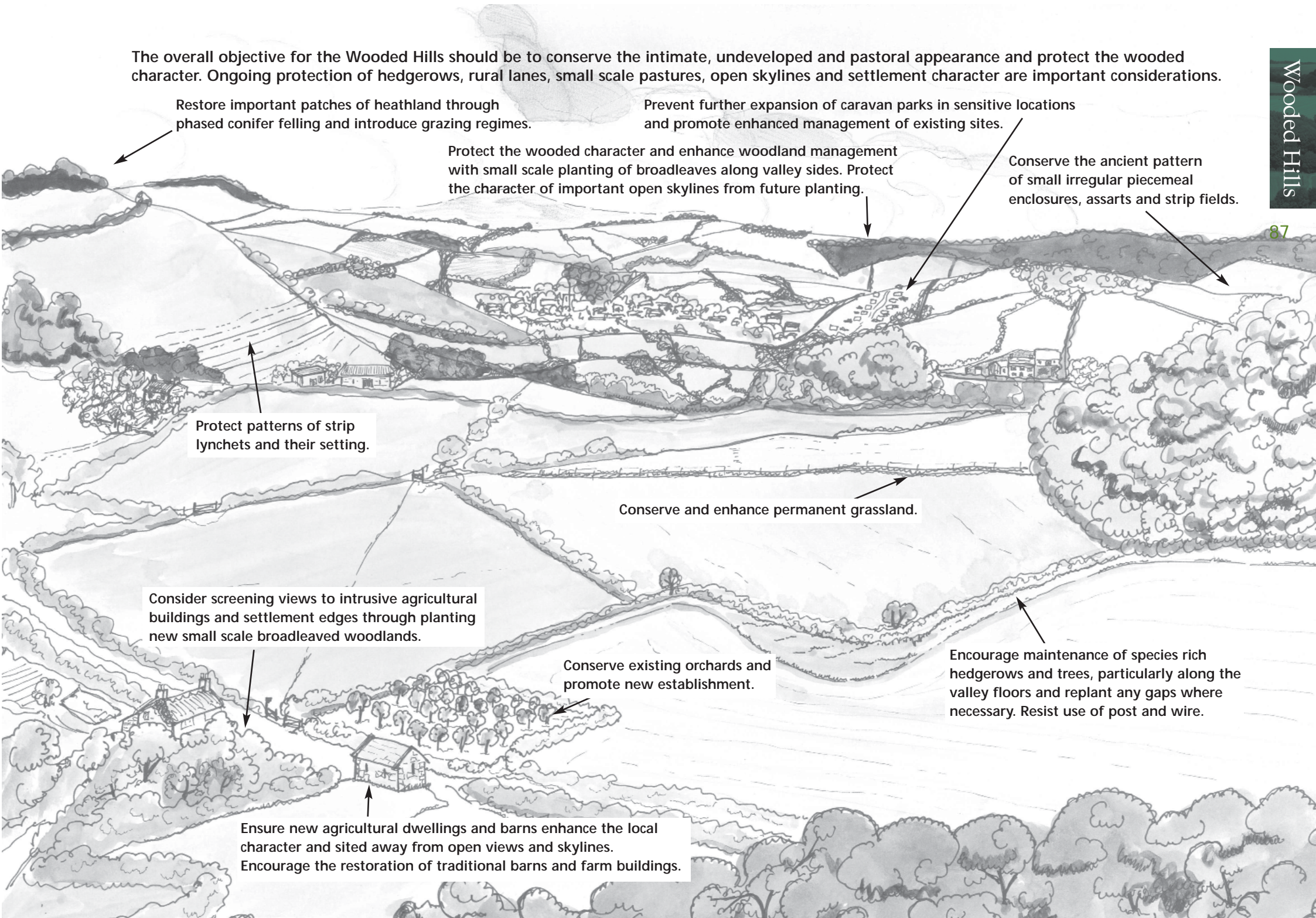
Conserve and enhance permanent grassland.

Consider screening views to intrusive agricultural buildings and settlement edges through planting new small scale broadleaved woodlands.

Conserve existing orchards and promote new establishment.

Encourage maintenance of species rich hedgerows and trees, particularly along the valley floors and replant any gaps where necessary. Resist use of post and wire.

Ensure new agricultural dwellings and barns enhance the local character and sited away from open views and skylines. Encourage the restoration of traditional barns and farm buildings.



Character Area:

Axe Valley Hills

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. Along the valley bottoms, dense hedgerows and small scale regular pastures are surrounded by arable fields with small dense woodlands. Dispersed settlement patterns of stone villages are connected by a network of narrow winding lanes, with an intimate and tranquil quality confined by the surrounding steep hills. Along the ridge tops beech lined avenues lead towards open summits.

Key characteristics

- Numerous linear hills with deep, branching clay valleys
- Open hill tops of greensand summits, with a heathy character of bracken, heather and gorse, often with dramatic hillforts
- 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.
- Deep, narrow winding lanes with deep hedge banks leading to occasional beech tree canopies and avenues along open ridge tops
- Small oak and ash coppice woodlands with regular enclosures on valley sides with some strip lynchets
- Open landscape with long views over the Axe Valley
- Scattered dispersed settlements of golden limestone and thatch along the valley bottoms
- Occasional orchards along valley floors and lower sides



Description

Land shape & structure

The landform is defined by a series of rounded greensand hills running north to south, set around a network of winding sheltered clay valleys. These hills often form prominent landmarks, particularly towards the Marshwood Vale. The area has several tributary valleys of the River Axe including the Synderford and Temple Brook.

Soils and vegetation

The contrast of deep wet soils along the valley floor to thinner soils on the steep slopes has influenced a diverse range of characteristic habitats. Along the narrow valley bottoms, rough neutral pastures are abundant with wet patches of rush, scrub and wet woodlands enclosed by dense species rich hedgerows and trees. On the valley sides, small oak and ash broadleaved woodlands with hazel coppice contrast with the open fields, with heather and gorse on the higher greensand summits.

Settlement and land cover

Landcover is mostly grazed pasture with some arable on the valley sides along with occasional coniferous plantations. A network of deep, winding rural lanes, sometimes enclosed by mature beech canopies, connects small dispersed villages of golden limestone and thatch located on valley floor. Large agricultural buildings are dotted throughout the valleys along with more traditional farmsteads and hamlets. Although the area has an undeveloped character, the villages of Broadwindsor, Thorncombe and Drimpton sit comfortably in the landscape.

Historic character

Perhaps the most significant historical influence on landscape character is the consistent and intricate pattern of Medieval, or perhaps prehistoric, fields evolved over centuries of agricultural production and woodland clearance. Enclosures are largely regular with trimmed hedgerows, banks and hedgerow oaks. Some piecemeal enclosures survive along with some limited parliamentary enclosure. Strip lynchets on valley sides are found throughout the area along with the hillforts of Pilsdon Pen, Waddon Hill and Lewesdon Hill forming key landmarks in the area.

Visual character & perceptions

Impressive views over the Marshwood Vale and towards the Axe Valley are afforded from many of the open hilltops. The dense blocks of woodland found along the valley sides evoke a strong sense of enclosure and texture. Within the valleys, there is a strong sense of intimacy and unspoilt rural character.

Evaluation

Strength of character

This is a landscape judged to have a **strong** character. The rolling, hilly landform with greensand summits and transition to deep and narrow valleys combined with the strong pastoral character creates a landscape with a variety of viewing experiences. Although varied, the landscapes are unified by the repeated occurrence of key features across the wooded pastures with clustered settlement patterns, woodland on hillsides, dense hedgerows and winding lanes, and the consistent use of stone as a building material. This creates a combination of elements underpinning a strong sense of place.

Condition

This ancient pattern of wooded hills has retained a substantial area of pasture, unlike the chalk downlands and chalk valleys. However, management is intensive in places with some change to arable have taken place. The area exhibits a consistent land cover and land uses and a reasonable woodland cover, including several field patterns which are considered to be of medieval origin. Along the valley floors, rough grasslands and abundant species rich hedgerows are largely intact. Some of the greensand summits have been replanted with conifer plantations and there is a lack of woodland management on smaller sites with some game coverts having geometric edges. Settlement and built character is in good condition within the smaller villages and hamlets. Overall, landscape condition is described as **moderate** and **stable**.



Character Area:

Wootton Hills

Similar to other areas within the west of the AONB, the Wootton Hills are characterised by a series of conical hills, formed from underlying greensand ridges. 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. These summits often form Iron Age hillforts with a heathy character. Along the valley bottoms, dense hedgerows and small scale regular pastures are surrounded by arable fields with large dense

woodlands. Clustered stone villages are connected by a network of narrow winding lanes, with an intimate and tranquil quality confined by the surrounding steep hills. Along the ridge tops beech lined avenues lead towards open summits. The A35 cuts across the area with associated urban influences towards Charmouth and Lyme Regis. The remote coast, accessible by the South West Coast Path, has a spectacular visual quality with impressive views towards the landslides west of Black Ven.

Key characteristics

- Numerous conical hills of greensand with deep, branching clay valleys
- Open hill tops of greensand summits, with a heathy character of bracken, heather and gorse, often with dramatic hillforts
- Patchwork of small, regular unimproved pastoral fields on valley bottoms with dense species rich hedgerows, hedgerow trees and small broadleaved woodlands
- Deep, narrow winding lanes with hedge banks and occasional beech tree canopies and avenues along ridge tops
- Large oak and ash woodlands and arable fields on valley sides
- Dramatic remote coastline of imposing summits, coastal landforms and sheltered valleys
- Intimate and enclosed landscape of close horizons
- Scattered clustered settlements of golden limestone and thatch along the valley bottoms.
- Occasional orchards



Description

Land shape & structure

The landform is defined by a series of rounded greensand summits set around a network of winding sheltered clay valleys. These hills often form prominent landmarks, particularly towards the more open coast at Black Ven. Between Charmouth and Lyme Regis, complex landslides and undercliffs are constantly eroding. The mouth of the River Lim is found at Lyme Regis, draining the surrounding hills.

Soils and vegetation

The contrast of deep wet soils along the valley floor to thinner soils on the steep slopes has influenced a diverse range of characteristic habitats. Along the narrow valley bottoms, rough neutral pastures are abundant with wet patches of rush, scrub and wet woodlands enclosed by dense species rich hedgerows and trees. On the valley sides, small oak and ash broadleaved woodlands with hazel coppice contrast with open rough grasslands and heather and gorse on the higher greensand summits. Along the coast, a range of important grassland and scrub habitats are found, particularly along Charmouth Cliffs.

Settlement and land cover

Landcover is mostly grazed pasture with small geometric shaped oak, beech and coniferous woodlands on valley sides. A network of deep, winding rural lanes, sometimes enclosed by mature beech canopies, connects small dispersed villages of golden limestone and thatch located on valley floor with occasional paddocks. Large agricultural buildings are dotted throughout the valleys along with more traditional farmsteads and hamlets. The towns of Lyme Regis and Charmouth are important coastal resorts.

Historic character

As with many areas within the Wooded Hills landscape type, the most significant historical influence on landscape character is the consistent and intricate pattern of Medieval or perhaps prehistoric fields in origin. Piecemeal enclosures predominate with fragments of downland, common and rough ground. The Wootton Hills retain strong Medieval patterns of historical landuse with irregular fields and a network of rural lanes. Strip lynchets on valley sides are found throughout the area with Lamberts Castle and Coney's Castle Iron Age hillforts providing impressive views over the area.

Visual character & perceptions

Impressive views of coastal landforms are found along the entire coast with Lyme Regis and Charmouth set against sweeping landslides. Inland the dense blocks of woodland found along the valley sides evoke a strong sense of enclosure and texture. Within the valleys, there is a strong sense of intimacy and unspoilt rural character.

Evaluation

Strength of character

This is a landscape judged to have a **strong** character. The rolling, hilly landform with greensand summits and transition to deep and narrow valleys combined with the strong pastoral character creates a landscape with a variety of viewing experiences. Although varied, the landscapes are unified by the repeated occurrence of key features across the wooded pastures with clustered settlement patterns, woodland on hillsides, dense hedgerows and winding lanes, and the consistent use of stone as a building material. This creates a combination of elements evoking a strong sense of place and unspoilt rural character.

Condition

This ancient pattern of wooded hills has retained a substantial area of pasture, unlike the chalk downlands and chalk valleys. However, management is intensive in places with some change to arable taken place. The area exhibits a consistent land cover and land uses and a reasonable woodland cover, including several field patterns which are considered to be of medieval origin. A significant stretch of the coast is managed by the National Trust with extensive rough grasslands, hay meadows and abundant species rich hedgerows. Some of the greensand summits have been replanted with conifer plantations and there is a lack of woodland management on smaller sites with some game coverts having geometric edges. Settlement and built character is in good condition within the smaller villages and hamlets. However, towards the coast and along the A35, more intensive landuses such as caravan parks have a negative visual impact along with urban fringe pressures towards Lyme Regis. Overall, landscape condition is described as **moderate** and **stable**.



Character Area:

Chideock Hills

The Chideock Hills are characterised by a series of conical hills, formed from underlying greensand ridges. 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. These summits often form Iron Age hillforts with a heathy character. Along the valley bottoms, dense hedgerows and small scale regular pastures are surrounded by wooded hills towards the open summits. Clustered settlement patterns of stone villages are

connected by a network of narrow winding lanes, with an intimate and tranquil quality confined by the surrounding steep hills. 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. The A35 cuts across the area with associated urban influences. The remote coast, accessible by the South West Coast Path, has a spectacular visual quality with impressive summits and coastal landforms.

Key characteristics

- Numerous conical hills of greensand with deep, branching clay valleys
- Open hill tops of greensand summits, with a heathy character of bracken, heather and gorse, often with dramatic hillforts
- Patchwork of small regular pastoral fields on valley bottoms with dense species rich hedgerows, hedgerow trees and small broadleaved woodlands
- Deep, narrow winding lanes with hedge banks and occasional dark tree canopies
- Large oak and ash woodlands with arable fields on valley sides
- Dramatic remote coastline of imposing summits, coastal landforms and sheltered valleys
- Intimate and enclosed landscape of close horizons
- Scattered clustered settlements of golden limestone and thatch along the valley bottoms
- Occasional orchards



Description

Land shape & structure

The landform is defined by a series of rounded greensand summits set around a network of winding sheltered clay valleys. These hills often form prominent landmarks, particularly towards the more open coast, with Golden Cap the highest point along the south coast. The River Char and several tributaries drain the Marshwood Vale and surrounding hills with several small streams found along the coast.

Soils and vegetation

The contrast of deep wet soils along the valley floor to thinner soils on the steep slopes has influenced a diverse range of characteristic habitats. Along the narrow valley bottoms, rough neutral pastures are abundant with wet patches of rush and scrub, enclosed by dense species rich hedgerows and trees. On the valley sides, small oak and ash broadleaved woodlands with coppice contrast with open rough grasslands and heather and gorse on the higher greensand summits. Along the coast, a range of important grassland and scrub habitats are found, particularly along Charmouth Cliffs.

Settlement and land cover

Landcover is mostly grazed pasture on the valley bottoms with arable and large geometric oak and beech and coniferous plantations on valley sides. A network of deep, winding rural lanes, sometimes enclosed by mature beech canopies and cut into stone, connects small dispersed villages of golden limestone and thatch located on valley floor. Large agricultural buildings are dotted throughout the valleys along with more traditional farmsteads and hamlets. The landscape has a parkland character around Chideock Manor. Unlike most of the other settlements, Charmouth has a planned character.

Historic character

The Chideock Hills retain strong medieval patterns of historical landuse with irregular fields and a network of rural lanes. Piecemeal enclosures are found throughout most of the area with fragments of downland, common and rough ground on the hill tops. Strip lynchets on valley sides are found throughout the area with Chideock Hillfort, scattered burial mounds, and Beacons at Thorncombe and Golden Cap particular features of interest.

Visual character & perceptions

Impressive sweeping views of coastal landforms are found along the entire coast set against the greensand summits of Golden Cap, Thorncombe Beacon and the wooded Langdon Hill. Inland just west of Bridport, Colmer's Hill is a recognisable landmark planted with a group of isolated conifers. Further north, these summits form the backdrop to the Marshwood Vale. Within the valleys, there is a strong sense of intimacy and unspoilt rural character.

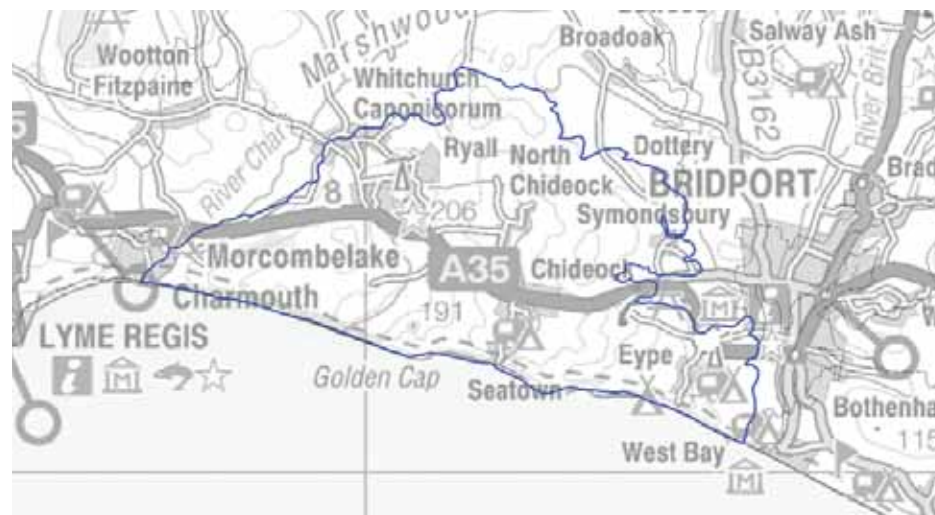
Evaluation

Strength of character

This is a landscape judged to have a **strong** character. The rolling, hilly landform with greensand summits and transition to deep and narrow valleys combined with the strong pastoral character creates a landscape with a variety of viewing experiences. Although varied, the landscapes are unified by the repeated occurrence of key features across the wooded pastures with clustered settlement patterns, woodland on hillsides, dense hedgerows and winding lanes, and the consistent use of stone as a building material. This creates a combination of elements evoking a strong sense of place and unspoilt rural character.

Condition

This ancient pattern of wooded hills has retained a substantial area of pasture, unlike the chalk downlands and chalk valleys. However, management is intensive in places with some change to arable taken place. The area has consistent patterns of land cover and land use and a reasonable woodland cover, including several field patterns which are considered to be of Medieval origin. A significant stretch of the coast is managed by the National Trust with extensive rough grasslands and abundant species rich hedgerows. Some of the greensand summits have been replanted with conifer plantations and there is a lack of woodland management on smaller sites with some game coverts having geometric edges. Settlement and built character is in good condition within the smaller villages and hamlets. However, towards the coast and along the A35, more intensive landuses such as caravan parks have a negative visual impact. Overall, landscape condition is described as **moderate** and **stable**.



Character Area:

Powerstock Hills

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. Along the valley floor, dense hedgerows and small scale regular pastures add to the intimate quality. The complex network of narrow incised winding lanes is a real feature of this

tranquil landscape. The area has an undeveloped character with impressive views from the largely open hill tops. 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.

Key characteristics

- Highly complex landforms of conical hills and deep, branching valleys
- Small, irregular permanent pastoral fields with dense species rich hedgerows and scattered hedgerow trees
- Small regular shaped broadleaved woodlands on steep valley slopes
- Deep, narrow winding lanes with species rich hedge banks and occasional dark tree canopies
- Open hilltops with impressive surrounding views
- Intimate and enclosed landscape of close horizons from within the valley floor
- Scattered nucleated settlements of local golden limestone and thatch and occasional country houses along the valley bottoms
- Occasional orchards on the valley sides



Description

Land shape & structure

The area has underlying Bridport Sands with outcrops of limestone, shaping a landscape of numerous small conical hills with steep slopes and incised clay valleys. These hills often form prominent local landmarks.

Soils and vegetation

The contrast of deep wet soils along the valley floor to thinner soils on the steep slopes has influenced a diverse range of characteristic habitats. Along the narrow valley bottoms, rough neutral pastures are abundant with wet patches of rush and scrub, enclosed by dense species rich hedgerows and trees. Along the valley sides, small broadleaved woodlands and coppice contrast with open rough grasslands with significant yew woodland found to the north of the area.

Settlement and land cover

Landcover is almost entirely rough grazed pasture on the valley floors with small irregular woodlands on valley sides. A maze of deep, winding rural lanes, sometimes enclosed by mature beech canopies, connects small villages of golden limestone and thatch located on the valley floor. Large agricultural buildings are dotted throughout the valleys along with more traditional farmsteads and hamlets.

Historic character

The Powerstock Hills retain strong medieval patterns of historical landuse with irregular fields and a network of rural lanes. Open fields predominate with some regular enclosures. There is less piecemeal enclosure suggesting late enclosure. This suggests prehistoric monuments are more likely to survive. Strip lynchets on valley sides are found throughout the area with a Medieval motte and bailey castle, remains of St Mary Magdalene Chapel and large old mill buildings adding to the interest of the area. Some fragments of Medieval deer parks also survive.

Visual character & perceptions

The area has an overriding small scale and intimate character with limited views. The dark woodlands and trees contrast with the open hills and skies. The colourful golden buildings and rural lanes are important features of this tranquil landscape.

Evaluation

Strength of character

This is a landscape judged to have a **strong** character. Largely undeveloped, landuse change has been limited helping to conserve the strong historical patterns of landscape features. The rolling, hilly landform contrasting to the deep and narrow valleys, combined with the strong pastoral character creates a landscape with a variety of experiences and strong sense of place. Although complex and varied, the area has a consistent pattern of rough pastures, dense hedgerows, wooded hillsides, nucleated settlement patterns, and winding lanes. The consistent use of golden limestone in small thatched cottages evokes a strong sense of place.

Condition

Historical agricultural intensification has been limited by the complex landform, helping to conserve a rich and diverse landscape of natural and cultural interest. Dense species rich hedgerows, although sometimes fragmented, are abundant along the valley bottoms, with significant areas of wet pastures. Hedgebanks along the rural lanes have a high conservation value. The valley sides are well wooded, but could benefit from ongoing management to retain their species diversity. Strip lynchets have mostly remained intact, enhancing the visual quality of the area. Although a significant pylon line crosses the area, its visual impact is minimised by the complex landform. Settlement and built character are in good condition within the smaller villages and hamlets, with the use of golden limestone enhancing the strong sense of place. Overall, landscape condition is described as **good** and **stable**.



Character Area:

Powerstock Woods

Although similar in character to other areas within the west of the AONB, the Powerstock Woods marks the transition between the rolling pastoral landscapes of West Dorset and the chalk landscape in the east. Several small steep sided valleys run east to west with a series of conical hills, formed from underlying greensand ridges and limestone. The area has a significant woodland cover with Powerstock Common and Hooke Park defining the character of the northern

parts of the area. Further south, the area has a more agricultural appearance. Along the valley bottoms, dense hedgerows and small scale regular pastures are surrounded by small damp neutral meadows and patches of rush with small wet woodlands. Clustered settlement patterns of stone villages are connected by a network of narrow winding lanes, with an intimate and tranquil quality confined by the surrounding steep hills.

Key characteristics

- Numerous rolling hills of greensand / limestone with deep, branching clay valleys
- Significant oak and hazel woodlands at Hooke Park and Powerstock Common
- Patchwork of small, regular unimproved pastoral fields on the valley bottoms with dense species rich hedgerows, hedgerow trees and small broadleaved woodlands, damp pastures, rushes and wet flushes
- Deep, narrow winding lanes with steep hedge banks
- Intimate and enclosed landscape of close horizons
- Scattered clustered settlements of golden limestone and thatch along the valley bottoms
- Occasional orchards



Description

Land shape & structure

The predominant underlying geology of Bridport Sands with Fullers Earth clay with some outcrops of limestone and greensand has shaped a diverse landscape of steep sided valleys and rolling hills. The River Asker drains westwards towards the Brit Valley.

Soils and vegetation

The contrast of deep wet soils along the valley floor to thinner soils on the steep slopes has influenced a diverse range of characteristic habitats. Along the narrow valley bottoms, rough neutral pastures are abundant with wet patches of rush, scrub and wet woodlands enclosed by dense species rich hedgerows and trees. Extensive oak, alder and ash broadleaved woodlands with hazel coppice are found at Powerstock Common and Hooke Park. This contrasts to the open rough grasslands and heather and gorse on the higher greensand summits. A range of grassland and heath habitats are found at Powerstock Common.

Settlement and land cover

Landcover is mostly mixed woodland with some coppice and grazed pasture with large arable fields on valley sides, particularly further south. A network of deep, winding rural lanes, sometimes enclosed by mature beech canopies, connects small clustered villages of golden limestone and thatch located on the valley floor. Large agricultural buildings are dotted throughout the valleys along with more traditional farmsteads and hamlets. The village of Askerswell nestles in the valley bottom.

Historic character

Where open areas exist, the historic character is a mix of rough ground and piecemeal enclosures, particularly towards the south. The area retains some Medieval patterns of historical landuse with irregular fields and a network of rural lanes. Strip lynchets on valley sides are found throughout the area with a few scattered barrows and Shipton Hillfort providing impressive views over the area.

Visual character & perceptions

Within the valleys, there is a strong sense of intimacy and unspoilt rural character defined by the steep valley sides. To the north of the area, the extensive woodlands dominate the character of the area with a more open and agricultural appearance towards the south.

Evaluation

Strength of character

This is a landscape judged to have a **strong** character. The rolling, hilly landform with greensand summits and transition to deep and narrow valleys combined with the strong pastoral character creates a landscape with a variety of viewing experiences. Although varied, the landscapes are unified by the repeated occurrence of key features across the wooded pastures with clustered settlement patterns, extensive woodlands, dense hedgerows and winding lanes, and the consistent use of stone as a building material. This creates a combination of elements evoking a strong sense of place and unspoilt rural character.

Condition

The area has a good woodland cover, with the range of diverse habitats in positive management by conservation bodies. Wet pastures with rush and abundant species rich hedgerows have largely survived along the valley floors. There is a lack of woodland management on smaller sites with some game coverts having geometric edges. Along the valley sides, management is intensive in places with some change to arable taken place. Some assarts are also being lost to paddocks. Settlement and built character is in good condition and provides a positive contribution the landscape. Overall, landscape condition is described as **good and stable**.

