

## **Part 3: Town Context**





### 3.1 The Setting of the Town

No town exists in isolation. All towns are shaped and influenced by their surrounding landscape. Topography and geology have a profound influence on the way a town develops; constraining development, shaping communication routes, and providing raw materials for building and other economic activity, amongst other things. In order to understand the character of a town, its surrounding landscape and natural context need to be understood. This section of the report briefly sets out the wider context of the town and the landscape character of its hinterland.

borne Brook which flows southwards towards Milborne St Andrew and in Luccombe Bottom, a tributary valley to the east (Figure 3). Milton Abbey lies on the floor and lower slopes on the eastern side of the widest part of the valley bottom, where it is joined by a valley running down from Hilton to the west. The designed landscape park of Milton Abbey covers the whole of the valley floor and the adjacent valley slopes. The present village of Milton Abbas lies in a narrow valley running down to the west to join the east side of the Milborne valley at a point where it narrows considerably. Milton Abbey lies at a height of about 110m and Milton Abbas rises from about 105m to about 170m to the east. The surrounding countryside comprises rolling chalk downland hills rising up to about 230m.

### 3.2 Topography

Milton Abbas lies within the valley of the Mil-

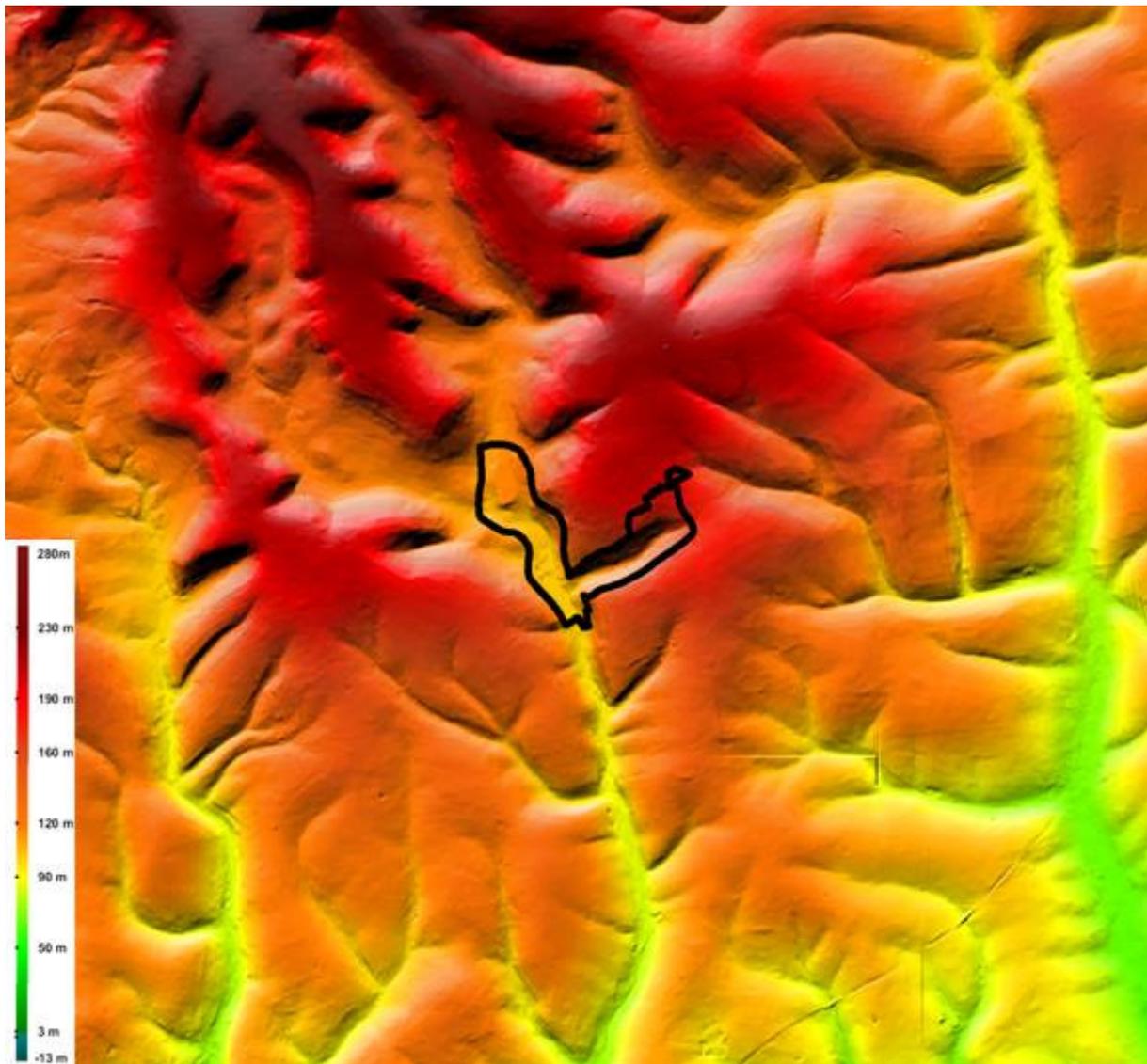


Figure 3: Milton Abbas' topographic setting

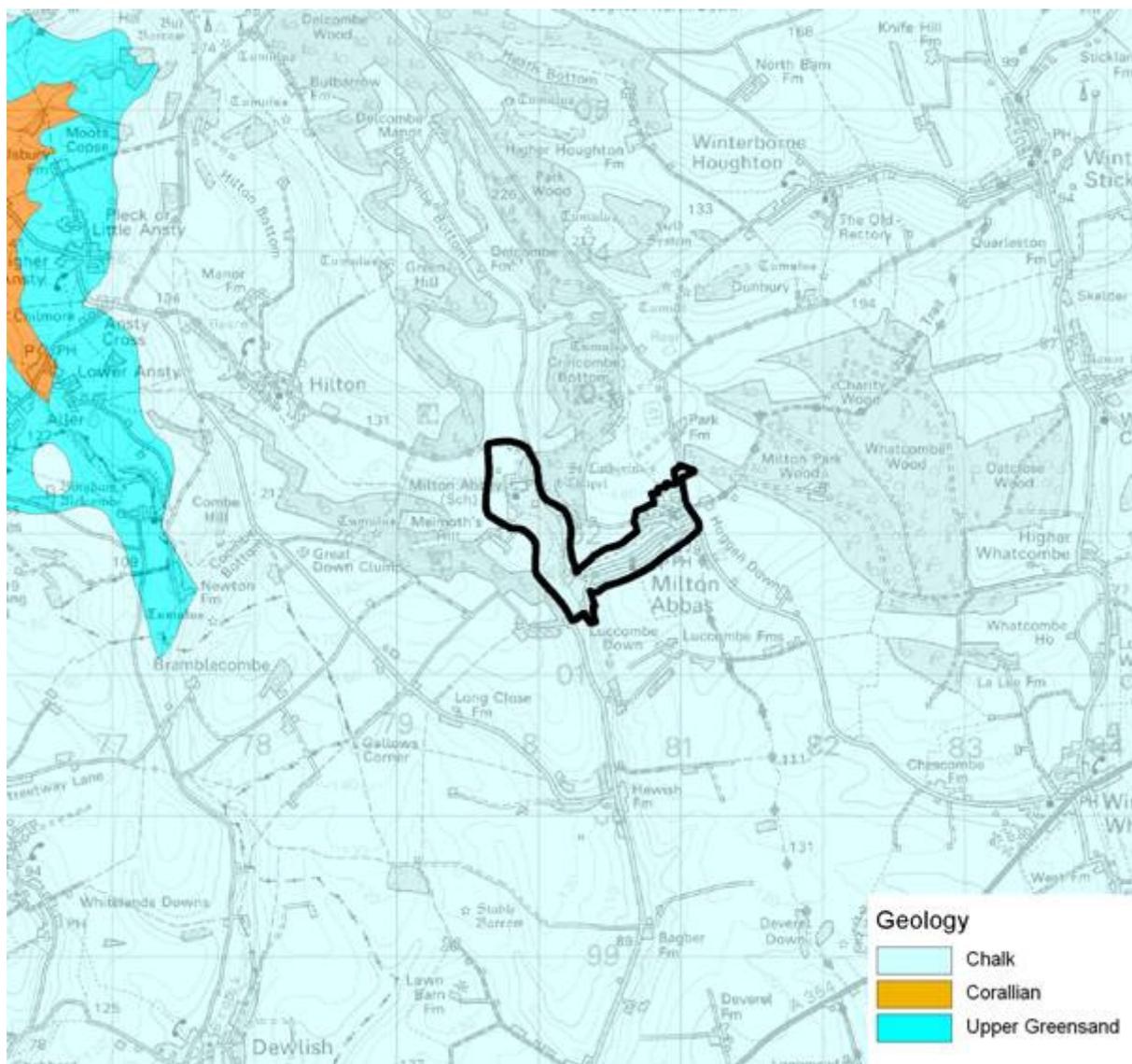


Figure 4: Geology of the Milton Abbas Area.

### 3.3 Geology

Milton Abbas lies on the Cretaceous Lower Chalk (Figure 4). The geology to the northwest comprises Upper Greensand and Corallian limestones.

### 3.4 Landscape Character

Milton Abbas lies within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), recognised as a nationally important landscape. This area has been the subject of several landscape character assessments, which help place the town into its wider surroundings.

In the national assessment of countryside character, Milton Abbas lies within National Character Area 134 Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase (Countryside Agency 1999).

The key characteristics of National Character

Area 134 are listed as:

- A rolling, chalk landscape with dramatic scarps and steep-sided, sheltered valleys.
- Scarp slopes with species-rich grassland, complex combes and valleys, spectacular views, prominent hillforts and other prehistoric features.
- Open, mainly arable, downland on the dip-slope with isolated farmsteads and few trees.
- Very varied valleys with woodlands, hedged fields, flood meadows and villages in flint and thatch.
- Distinctive woodlands and deer parks of Cranborne Chase.

Milton Abbas is included within the Landscape Character Assessment of the Dorset AONB (Dorset AONB, 2008) and the North Dorset District Landscape Character Assessment

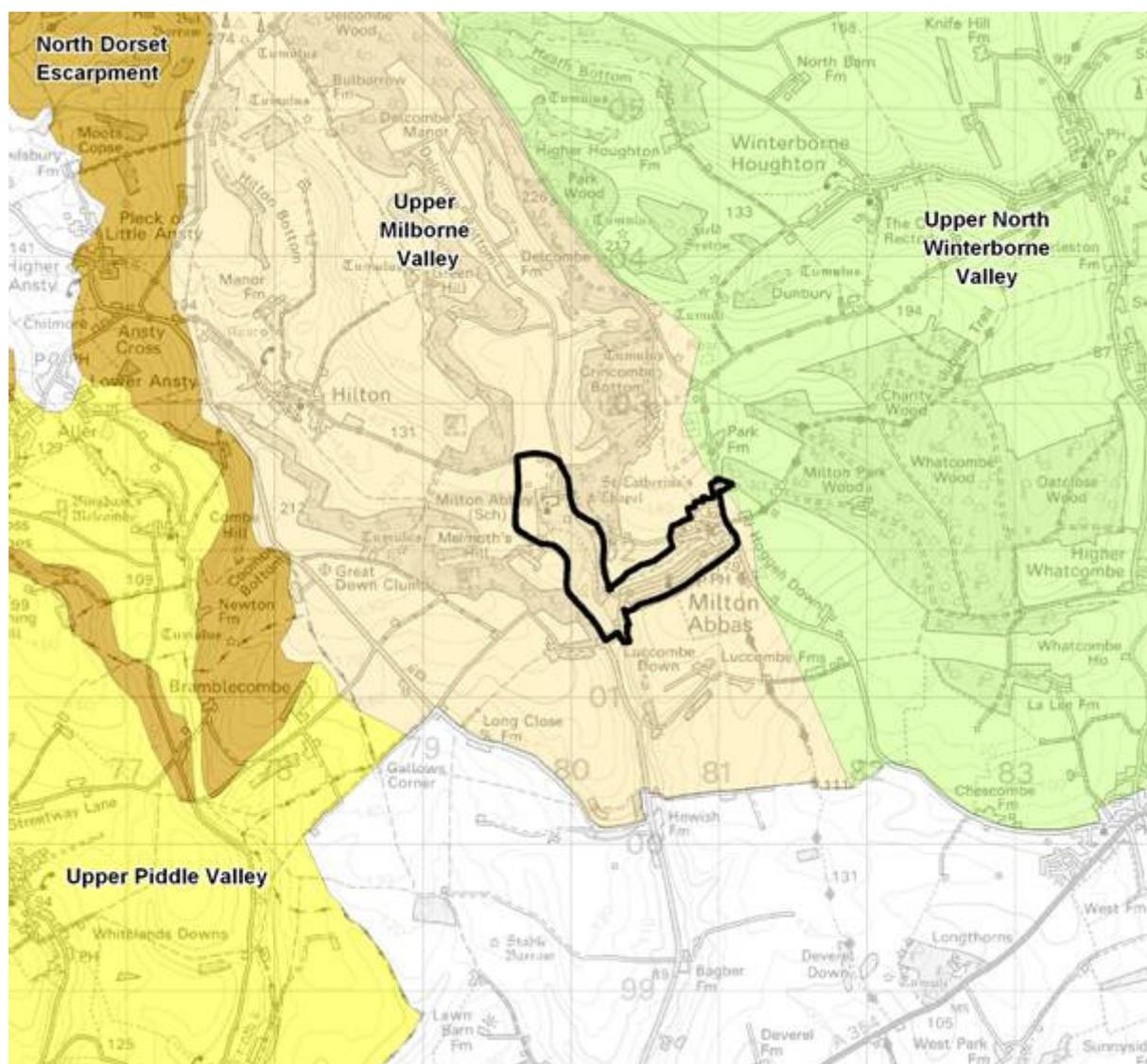


Figure 5: Milton Abbas in its landscape character setting (Dorset AONB Landscape Characterisation).

(NDDC 2008). In these assessments, Milton Abbas lies within the Upper Milborne Valley Character Area, with a very small area on the eastern side of the Study Area within the Upper North Winterborne Valley Character Area, both part of the Chalk Valley and Downland Landscape Type (Figure 5).

The key characteristics of the Upper Milborne Valley area are:

- Heart shaped valley enclosed with dry tributary valleys and deep coombes
- Steeply incised valley slopes with patches of semi-natural chalk grassland and extensive broadleaved woodlands
- Remnant winding chalk winterbourne with floodplain supporting occasional water meadows, wet woodlands, cress beds and rough damp meadows
- Winding rural lanes along the valley floor

with a series of small linear and nucleated villages of flint and stone, thatch and cob

- Straight-sided arable fields of late 18th or early 19th century planned enclosures on valley floor with hazel and thorn hedgerows and small broadleaved woodlands
- Thin calcareous soils with underlying geology of chalk
- Designed parkland landscapes with veteran trees, parkland railings and country houses along the valley floor
- Secluded, intimate and tranquil character.

The key characteristics of the Upper North Winterborne Valley area are:

- Linear intimate 'V' shaped chalk valley with associated winterbourne and surrounding steep branching valleys and open chalk downlands
- Thin calcareous soils with underlying geol-

ogy of chalk

- Incised valley slopes with patches of semi-natural chalk grassland and occasional broadleaved woodlands
- Clear chalk winterbourne stream with floodplain supporting occasional water meadows, wet woodlands, old water cress beds and rough damp meadows
- Winding rural lanes along the valley floor with a series of small linear and nucleated villages of brick, flint, stone, thatch and cob
- Smaller scale pastures and fields patterns on valley floor with species rich dense hedgerows, small broadleaved woodlands and occasional hedgerow trees
- Designed parkland landscapes with veteran trees, railings, flint walls and country houses along the valley floor
- Large, straight-sided arable and pastoral regular fields of late 18th or early 19th century enclosures with thorn and hazel hedgerows, with post & wire on chalk downlands
- Secluded, intimate and tranquil character.

The draft Historic Landscape Character mapping shows Milton Abbas sitting within a complex mosaic of mixed and deciduous woodland, deciduous woodland plantations, amorphous enclosed fields, small areas of enclosed strip fields, planned enclosures and other regular enclosures. There are small areas of enclosed paddocks close to the village of Milton Abbas.

### 3.5 The Present Town

The modern built-up area of Milton Abbas lies completely within the parish of Milton Abbas and covers an area of about 26 ha. It lies about 13 km from Blandford Forum and 16 km from Dorchester. It has no rail links, the nearest station is at Dorchester. The population of the parish is 930 (2006 population estimate) (DCC 2008). The population has grown in the post-war period, largely the result of net inward migration. There were an estimated 260 dwellings in Milton Abbas in 2007 (DCC 2008). There is a large private school at Milton Abbey.

There is no industry in Milton Abbas, which is largely a dormitory settlement for Blandford Forum, Bournemouth, Dorchester and further afield. It is a popular tourist destination for day-trippers, but has not developed as a tourist resort.

The data used in this section have been obtained from the *Milton Abbas Parish Plan* (MAPC 2003) Dorset County Council's *The Dorset Data Book 2008* (DCC 2008).

## Part 4: Sources





## 4.1 Previous research

The earliest history of Milton Abbas is that of John Hutchins (1774). Hutchins had been a curate of the abbey and an assistant master of the grammar school from 1723. The major historian of the old town of Middleton was Rev Herbert Pentin who was vicar of Milton Abbas from 1901-1914. He wrote a number of papers and short books on 'old Milton' and the grammar school (Pentin 1904ab, 1905). The only other general history on Milton Abbas is that by Richeldis Wansborough (1974), which concentrates mainly on the major landowners and their families. There is also a good local guidebook to the present village written by Christopher Fookes (2004), which contains many snippets of information not otherwise recorded.

There have been a small number of histories of specific aspects of Milton Abbas. The major historical work on the abbey is that by J P Traskey (1978). A good recent history of the grammar school was written by G V Nelmes (1983). The history of Milton Abbey School has been written by David Baggaley (1995).

## 4.2 Historic Maps

The earliest detailed map of Milton Abbey is by Philip Byles and dated 1659, but known from a 1757 copy by Andrew Dury (DHC D919/1), which shows the abbey and its grounds and the town of Middleton in some detail. William Woodward's survey of 1769-70 for Lord Milton (DHC D919/5) also shows the town and holdings in some detail. These two maps are the main sources for the extent and layout of the former town. There are a number of later maps and plans showing the Milton Abbey House and park and the new village. An anonymous plan of about 1770 shows the town largely removed with only a few small scattered properties still remaining in existence within the park (DHC Ph 67). The characterisation was largely based on the Woodward map and the 1:2500 scale Ordnance Survey maps dating from 1887 onwards.

## 4.3 Documentary Evidence

The records of the abbey were scattered or lost after Dissolution, but there are a small number of surviving medieval documents. There is very little surviving documentary evidence for the town of Middleton, and most belongs the period when the estate belonged to Lord Milton in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century, in the context of Milton's attempts to remove the town.

## 4.4 Archaeological Evidence

There has been very little archaeological investigation in Milton Abbas and no findspots of

archaeological material have been recorded either. Three investigations have been undertaken in the area of the abbey and the former town. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments did some excavation around the Abbey Church in the 1950s, which revealed a number of details of the present and earlier church plans (Gee 1955, 1956, 1957; RCHME 1970). The Royal Commission also undertook an earthwork survey of the remains of the former town (RCHME 1970). An archaeological watching brief on the site of the Milton Abbey School Astro-turf pitch and an evaluation of the area surrounding the headmaster's house did not reveal any significant archaeological remains (Oakey 2001; Wessex Archaeology 2007).

The only archaeological investigation in the present village of Milton Abbas was the recording of a well in Milton Abbas School in the late 1980s (Keen 1989).

Two other archaeological investigations have taken place immediately outside the study area. An archaeological evaluation and survey of an area to the south of Pond Head cottage recorded the surviving earthworks of medieval strip lynchets (Valentin 2000). An evaluation of an area immediately north and west of Catherine's Well revealed no archaeological features (Wessex Archaeology 2003).

## 4.5 Historic Buildings

The historic buildings of Milton Abbas can be separated into four types: buildings associated with the abbey; buildings associated with the old town of Middleton; buildings associated with Milton Abbey House and park; and buildings associated with the model village of Milton Abbas.

Two abbey buildings survive, the abbey church and the abbot's Great Hall. Both have been incorporated into the later landscaped park and the latter now forms part of Milton Abbey House. Both the abbey buildings are major medieval buildings in Dorset. Immediately outside the study area lies St Catherine's Chapel, which is late 12<sup>th</sup> century in origin with later alterations.

There are only two surviving structures relating to the old town of Middleton – the medieval market cross base and one house, Green Walk, which probably dates to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Milton Abbey House is a major late 18<sup>th</sup> century country house designed by Sir William Chambers, with later additions and alterations. The 18<sup>th</sup> century stables and other outbuildings of

probable 19<sup>th</sup> century date also survive. The landscaped park includes a two lodges and gate piers within the study area, but there are several other lodges and other structural elements which lie outside.

Milton Abbas village contains a large number of historic buildings including the majority of the original late 18<sup>th</sup> century cottages of the planned village, a late 18<sup>th</sup> century church designed by James Wyatt, the late 18<sup>th</sup> vicarage by Sir William Chambers and some late 18<sup>th</sup> century former brewery buildings. There are a small number of 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings including the former village school, cottage hospital and Wesleyan Methodist chapel. A few 19<sup>th</sup> century houses are found within the village, replacing the original buildings where these have been destroyed by fire.