

15 Blackmore Vale

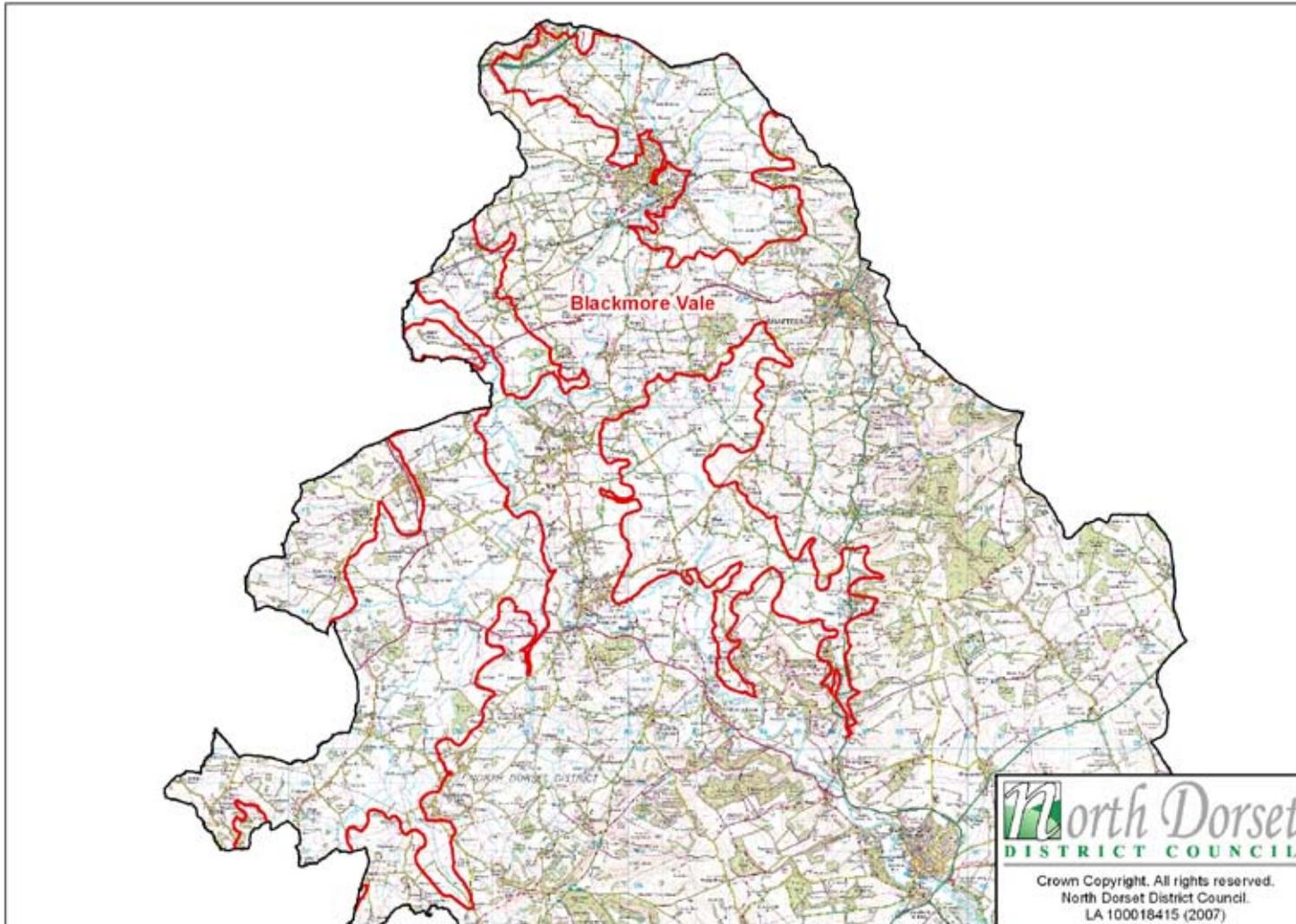


Figure 15.1
The Blackmore Vale



Figure 15.2 Looking across the Blackmore Vale towards Margaret Marsh

Key Characteristics

- ❑ A broad expansive clay Vale which is tranquil and unified.
- ❑ A unique mosaic of woods, straight hedgerows and grassland fields 'dotted' with distinctive mature hedgerow Oaks.
- ❑ Open views across the undulating to flat pastoral landscape to the chalk escarpment backdrop.
- ❑ Dense network of twisting lanes often with grass verges and sharp double 90o bends.
- ❑ Small hump backed bridges with low stone or brick parapets
- ❑ Many very small villages and hamlets built with locally distinctive materials, such as stone, redbrick, tile and thatch.
- ❑ A network of ditches, streams and brooks which drain into the tributaries of the Stour.
- ❑ Lydlinch Common (an SSSI) and Stock Gaylard Deer Park (an SNCI) are both key locally important features.

Landscape Description

Land shape and structure

- 15.1 A broad, gently undulating clay vale drained by the River Stour and its main tributaries, the River Lydden and the River Cale, together with many small streams and brooks. It is an open and expansive landscape with long views particularly to the chalk escarpment which defines its eastern and southern edges. The limestone ridge from Sturminster Newton to Bourton divides the Vale into two separate halves, west and east, with the western part extending into neighbouring West Dorset and Somerset. There is a blurring at the edges of the area particularly with the flat Stour Valley character area. The Vale becomes more undulating at the transition with the Blackmore Rolling Vales and Limestone Ridges character areas. There are a few more elevated and prominent areas within the Vale itself for example at Manston.

Settlement and land cover

- 15.2 It is a predominantly pastoral and intensively farmed landscape with medium sized to small irregularly shaped fields divided by straight, broad and often flat topped trimmed hedgerows. A key feature of the Vale are the distinct mature hedgerow Oak trees which are regularly spaced out and together with the hedgerows and flat landform provide a distinct mosaic and pattern to the landscape. Many of the Oaks have become over mature and therefore 'stag headed'. There are also many small copses and plantations scattered across the Vale with groups of trees often associated with the villages and hamlets. Some of the small copses are designated as SNCIs. Another key feature of the Vale are the many small streams and brooks which are often bridged at lane junctions by small hump backed bridges with distinctive low stone or brick parapets. Alders and Willows occasionally grow in these watercourses.
- 15.3 The narrow lanes are twisting and form a contorted network with distinctive double 90° bends in places and connect the many small villages and tiny hamlets. In places the lanes have wide grass verges and ditches running alongside the hedgerows which are a feature of former cattle driving routes. The dispersed settlement pattern often contains many small hamlets and collections of buildings many using locally distinctive materials such as stone, redbrick, tile and thatch. Gillingham dominates a large part of the north eastern part of the Vale with some visually prominent and detracting urban edges.

References for this character area

- ❑ Countryside Commission/English Nature Joint Character Map 1996: Blackmore Vale and the Vale of Wardour Character Areas.
- ❑ English Nature, Natural Areas 1997: Wessex Vales.
- ❑ Landscape Description Unit Nos: 94, 175, 176, 184, 187, 98, 277, 280, 84, 85, 276, 263, 275, 75, 76, 281, 106, 77, 78, 273, 105.