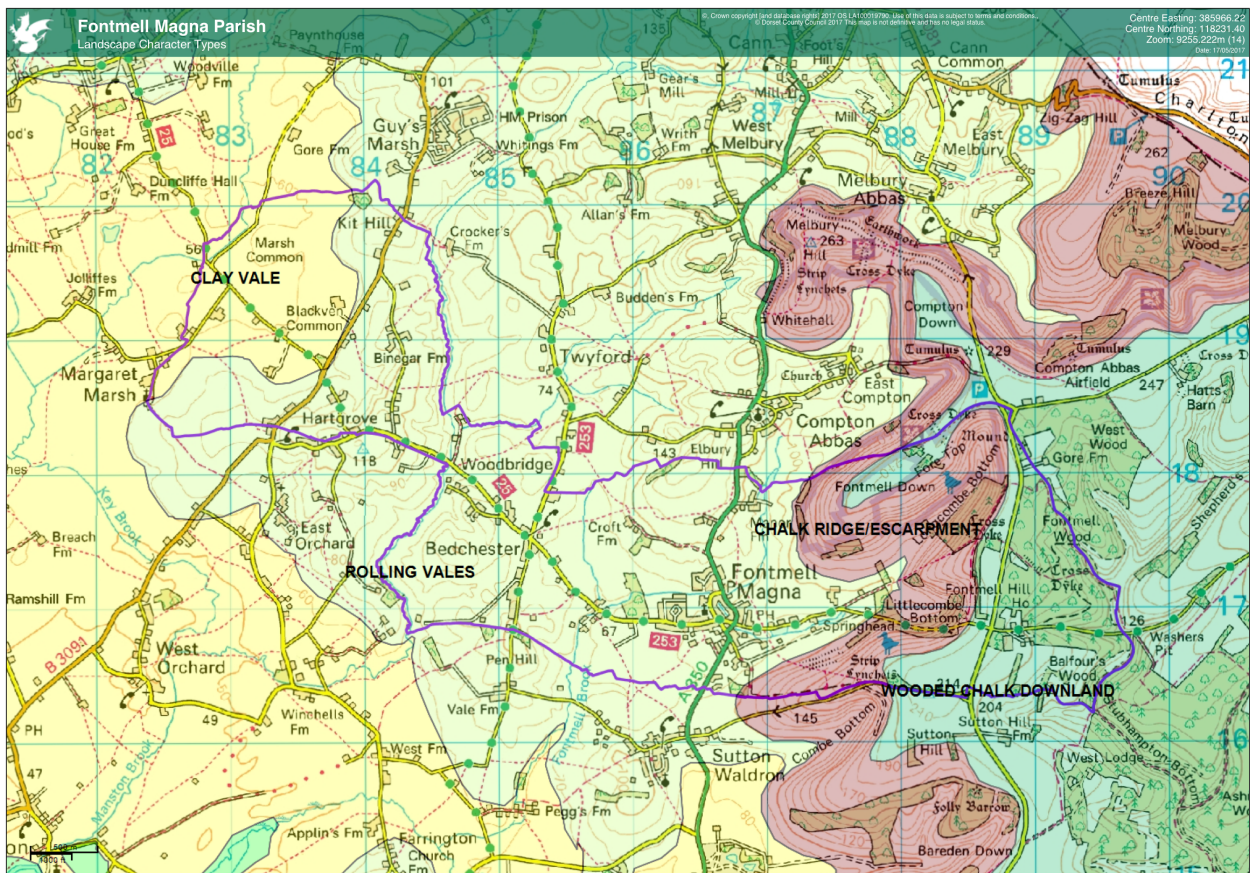


FONTMELL MAGNA CIVIL PARISH LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Landscape Character Area Assessment is a means to describe an area in a systematic way. By the study and recording of the distinctive features in a landscape, future development can be formulated to conserve or enhance local character.

This assessment is being prepared for the Fontmell Magna Neighbourhood Plan Working Group to help in formulating the policies of the Neighbourhood Plan. The Environment Focus Group who are part of the Working Group will carry out the assessment. Any relevant material from the local authority, the local AONB, the Dorset Wildlife Trust or the National Trust will be used if it is considered appropriate. When completed the assessment will be circulated to other members of the Working Group.

The area to be studied is the Civil Parish of Fontmell Magna, this will be divided into landscape types and then more detailed work will be carried out in the form of field surveys in each character area.



Landscape Types

Wooded Chalk Downland –
Chalk Ridge/Escarpment –
Rolling Vales –
Clay Vale –

Landscape Character Areas

Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland
North Dorset Chalk Escarpment
North Blackmore Rolling Vales
Blackmore Vale

Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland

This covers the eastern end of the parish from the top of the downs along the C13 down to Washers Pit, with an extension to the west along the top of Fontmell Down. Fontmell Down belongs to the National Trust and forms part of a Dorset Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve.

The western part of this area consists of the high ridge at the western extent of Cranborne Chase with a long spur to the west (Fontmell Down). The rest of this landscape type in the parish consists of the dip slope of the chalk ridge which falls away to the east.

There are a few houses to the east of the crossroads of Mill Street and the C13 and one large group of farm buildings (Gore Farm).

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The eastern slope has two large plantations of mixed broadleaf and conifer woodland on either side of the road down to Washers Pit (Fontmell Wood and Balfour's Wood). The remainder of this area is a mix of arable and pasture land with smaller wooded areas to the west and south of the 2 main woodlands.



There is evidence of prehistoric settlement shown by the Cross Dykes on Fontmell Down and in Fontmell Wood and the tumuli to the west of Gore Clump.

There are extensive views to the west over the villages of Compton Abbas, Fontmell Magna and Sutton Waldron. The whole of the Blackmore Vale and the hills beyond are visible from the highest points.



North Dorset Chalk Escarpment

As it passes through the parish the steep scarp slope of the chalk downs winds around Fontmell Down, Longcombe Bottom, Littlecombe Bottom and Brandis Down (the north side of Sutton Hill).

The key feature is the dramatically steep and narrow escarpment with rounded spurs and deep coombes. It is mostly unimproved chalk grassland with hanging woodlands on some of the slopes and with gorse and scrub around Littlecombe Bottom and the eastern part of Brandis Down.

The older hanging woodlands consist mainly of ash and beech with a few hawthorn and other species. There are newer plantations of beech and ash around Littlecombe Bottom and to the south east of Longcombe Bottom. Apart from the plantations the slopes are used as rough grazing and there are some open areas of short grassland.

There are SSSIs around Longcombe Bottom and on Brandis Down belonging to the National Trust and Dorset Wildlife Trust. (See the attached Dorset Wildlife Trust description of the nature reserves)

There are no dwellings or settlements anywhere in this area.

On the lower slopes of Brandis Down there are medieval Strip Lynchets.

North Blackmore Rolling Vales

The parish from Springhead in the east to Hartgrove and the B3091 in the west falls into this landscape character type.

It consists of a series of clay and greensand hills enclosed to the east by the abrupt slope of the chalk escarpment and ending in the west after Hartgrove where it meets the open expanse of the Blackmore Vale. Most of it is farmland with small irregular-shaped fields

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with thick hedgerows consisting mainly of permanent pasture and meadow with the occasional arable field.

The narrow and twisting lanes with their hedge topped banks, mature hedgerow trees and small copses form a patchwork pattern that creates an interesting and varied landscape. Even the one major road that bisects the area from north to south, the A350, shares the characteristic twists and high banks of the lanes.

Most of the dwellings in the parish are in this area and the main settlement in the parish, Fontmell Magna, is built around the course of the brook that issues from the springs at Springhead. The oldest parts of the village are along the original north south route of North Street, Church Street, the Knapp and South Street, with other older dwellings along West Street, Crown Hill and Mill Street. There are also a few older houses in Lurmer Street although some of the oldest buildings have been demolished and replaced.



There are small hamlets at Bedchester and Hartgrove and the rest of the area is scattered with dairy farms and isolated cottages. The Gupples Lane and Hartgrove area has several old farmhouses that have been converted to substantial modern dwellings but have retained their characteristic features.

Collyers Brook leading to Fontmell Brook is the main watercourse of the parish, there is also the Sturkel Brook which crosses from north to south at the narrowest point of the parish at Woodbridge.

In the Domesday Book three mills are recorded in Fontmell Magna, Higher Mill (Springhead), Middle Mill and Lower or Town Mill, two more mills were built at a later date on the Fontmell Brook, Piper's Mill and Hurdles Mill. There was also a mill at Woodbridge on the Sturkel Brook. There are 40 listed buildings in the village of Fontmell Magna and a further 13 in Bedchester and Hartgrove.

Blackmore Vale

The northwestern end of the parish to the west of the B3091 consisting of Blackven Common and Marsh Common falls into this area.

It is flat open clay vale extending beyond Kit Hill and Hartgrove Hill towards the west. The fields are small to medium sized pasture meadows and arable fields with clipped hedges and the occasional hedge tree.

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There are several large isolated dairy farms joined by narrow lanes but there are no other settlements in this part of the parish. Black Venn Farm is no longer a working farm, the buildings have been converted to light industrial use.



Appendix

Fontmell Down Nature Reserve - DWLT

This is an internationally recognised area of chalk downland with stunning views across the Blackmore Vale, supporting a huge variety of plants and insects.

Ancient chalk grassland is now very rare. In the last 70 years an estimated 80% of Britain's chalk grassland has been lost, but here at Fontmell Down the large expanse of unsplit grassland supports nine orchid species and the rare endemic early gentian, as well as a large number of other scarce wild flowers. The mosaic of grassland and scrub habitats on site provides an ideal home to the 35 recorded species of butterfly, and several notable species of bird, mammal, moth, fly, bug, moss and lichen!

The reserve is split into three parts. The largest area encompasses; the south facing slope of the main 'Fontmell Down' and the north facing opposite downland, mainly kept short to allow a carpet of wildflowers to flourish amongst the grasses and to provide ideal conditions for the associated invertebrate species, such as the rare silver-spotted skipper; the 'Catswhisker' woodland; and a patchwork of longer grassland and scrub on the lower slopes, which adds to the diversity of habitats and supports its own suite of specialist species including dormouse, yellowhammer and the barred tooth-striped moth. On the opposite side of the road to the south, the smaller north facing Brandis Down provides a similar mix of habitats and, on the far side of the hill, the third part of the reserve is an area of longer calcareous grassland and scrub, Jerry's Hole, where grazing later in the season allows for plenty of structure and seed setting for invertebrates, birds and small mammals.

Habitats

Calcareous grassland, scrub, deciduous woodland.

Species

Early and autumn gentian, bee, frog and fragrant orchid, autumn lady's tresses, white helleborine, chalk milkwort, harebell, kidney vetch, horseshoe vetch; silver-spotted skipper, Adonis blue and chalkhill blue; barred tooth-striped; skylark, stonechat, yellowhammer; dormouse.

Springhead

FONTMELL MAGNA CIVIL PARISH LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT



DORSET GARDEN TRUST
LOCAL LIST

Springhead

Address: Springhead, Fontmell Magna, Dorset SP7 0NU

District: North Dorset District Council **Parish:** Fontmell Magna

Map Series: Landranger **Map Sheet:** 184 **Grid Reference:** 873 169

Area (ha): 4 ha

Site owner(s): Springhead Trust

Designation: Dorset Gardens Trust Local List

Site designers: Not known

Brief description of site:

Springhead lies in a coombe where as its name implies, several springs rise from the surrounding hills. The site runs east to west with the east being the high ground. The spring fed stream runs towards Fontmell Magna village and eventually joins the River Stour. Springhead house and mill are mid way along the site at the western end of the lake. The sides of the valley around the lake have been formed into gardens of an informal nature.

Brief history of site:

It was originally a mill site in the ownership of Shaftesbury Abbey until the dissolution of the monasteries. The mill and surrounding lands passed to the Arundel family. In the early 19th century it was acquired by the Glyn family in whose ownership it remained until the 1926 when it was bought by Harold Squires.

Mr. Squires, with the assistance of his gardener, created the beginnings of the current garden with alterations to the lake. In 1932 the property was bought by Rolf and Mirabelle Gardiner and Mrs. Gardiner undertook further work on the gardens. Springhead was created as an Educational Trust in 1973 by the Gardiner family.

Significance:

Historical mill site combined with natural spring fed lake. Romantic 20th century landscaping and features. Believed to be influenced by Brenda Colvin.

Sources:

Timothy Mowl Historic Gardens of Dorset p 156-9 illus. 21

Rosalind Richards : Springhead - DGT Newsletter Issue 15