

15 FARMED SLOPES

Character Areas

- 15A Vale of Bourton Farmed Slopes
- 15B Vale of Moreton Farmed Slopes



Key Characteristics

- Transitional landscape between the High Wold and the Pastoral Lowland Vale;
- smooth gentle landform with gentler landform on lower slopes, and sense of exposure on some upper slopes;
- landform has a consistent north-south orientation following the lines of the Evenlode and Windrush;
- small, often geometric, broadleaf and coniferous woodlands and tree belts along watercourses draining the slopes;
- large deciduous and mixed woodlands bordering parkland, integrated by strong hedgerow network;

- limited ancient woodlands and species rich grasslands;
- numerous historic parkland landscapes;
- productive arable and pasture farmland with a strong pattern of hedgerows;
- small stone built villages and hamlets on slopes above the Pastoral Lowland Vale;
- areas of ridge and furrow on lower slopes; and
- scrub encroachment on some steeper slopes.

Landscape Character

Despite sharing many geological similarities to the escarpment, the Farmed Slopes are relatively low and gentle in comparison and have a more subtle profile and character. They represent a transitional landscape between the large fields and exposed nature of the High Wold and the lush, flat or gently rolling pastures of the Pastoral Lowland Vale. Their distinctive sloping profiles set them apart from the Vale landscapes they enclose, and wooded sides or arable fields, which rise gently from the plain, are visible from many points within the landscape and provide a sense of enclosure. They also provide a sense of orientation, the longer slopes generally being aligned north south.

The slopes themselves support a mosaic of mixed farmland and woodland, which provides a textural backdrop to the surrounding lowland farmland. Their elevated position allows for long distance views across the lowlands from upper slopes although these views are often only as far as the opposite stretch of the Farmed Slopes which sometimes appear as a line of blue hills in the distance.

The settlement pattern generally comprises dispersed stone built villages and farms with scattered outlying cottages and farmsteads strung out along local roads that climb the slopes and link the vale to upland landscapes beyond. Historic parks and gardens are also a significant feature of the Farmed Slopes, with numerous gardens and parks having been sited there to take advantage of the landform and extensive views across the lowland vale.

Physical Influences

The sequence of rock units range from Charmouth Mudstone of the Lias Group at lower elevations and the floor of the vale through a sequence of mudstones and siltstones and Bridport Sand Formation and Inferior Oolite Limestone, which forms the upper slopes and extends onto the High Wold beyond. This geological sequence is similar to that exposed on the escarpment. However, different erosion patterns have resulted in much softer landform and gentler gradients. Generally the slopes rise from 130 m AOD at the upper levels of the Pastoral Lowland Vale up to 200 m AOD where landform rolls over onto the neighbouring High Wold. Marlstone Rock is also evident, often appearing as a narrow band on the mid slope. In isolated areas, the Marlstone Rock Formation outcrop is larger and forms a distinct promontory, as at Dor Hill above Aston Magna and above Little Compton.

Despite the generally even, smooth slopes, areas of steeper landform are evident bordering streams draining the neighbouring uplands. These occupy incised gullies, their course often marked by lines of trees and scrub. These streams flow down the slopes where they combine and flow into the Evenlode and the Windrush on into the Thames. North of the Moreton-in-Marsh watershed the slopes drain northwards into the River Stour and ultimately into the Severn. The quick flowing nature of these streams has meant that alluvial deposits are not characteristic, deposition of sediments occurring below the foot of the slopes as streams slow down as they enter flatter landform.

Woodlands are generally not ancient in origin and indicate that widespread clearance for agriculture has taken place across the farmed slopes. These planted woodlands are generally small-scale deciduous farm woodlands and often form linear belts bordering streams and regular geometric copses close to farmhouses. Significant areas of woodland tend to be associated with historic parks and often mark the outer limits of grazed parkland. Where present, woodlands make a significant contribution to landscape character and form a textural backdrop to the Pastoral Lowlands, and often may be seen to merge with hedgerows and trees to give the impression that the slopes are more heavily wooded than they are.

Pasture and arable farming are in evidence across the Farmed Slopes and form a patchwork effect, fields being defined by a network of generally well-maintained hedgerows and stone walls. Various field patterns are in evidence and therefore indicate a range of enclosure histories. Pastures are all improved and intensively managed and therefore few species rich grasslands are in evidence. Some small remnants of calcareous grassland do, however, survive bordering the Dikler to the north of Lower Swell.

Human Influences

The Farmed Slopes border and define the Pastoral Lowland Farmland landscape type and have historically formed a close relationship with them. Villages such as Churchill and Icomb tend to be located on the drier slopes above the vale, and indeed numerous villages and hamlets may be identified on the slopes that date back to Saxon or medieval periods. It is likely that these settlements would have had seasonal grazing land and some arable fields associated with them in the vale. Ridge and furrow is evident on many of the slopes. These are remnants of the open fields that at one time surrounded many of the villages.

Small dispersed villages and hamlets on the Farmed Slopes are generally set around roads rising up the slopes onto the neighbouring uplands. Beyond these small villages and hamlets are numerous isolated farms, individual buildings and small linear hamlets scattered over the slopes. Where located in sheltered locations on lower slopes, farms and outbuildings are inconspicuous. When sited on upper slopes, however, large barns often may be seen against the skyline and gain visual prominence.

Chipping Norton is the largest town sited on the Farmed Slopes landscape type. Chipping means market and for a considerable period the market at 'Norton' was the commercial centre for the Evenlode valley. During the medieval period when the wool trade made the Cotswolds one of the wealthiest parts of England, the town assumed new importance as a gathering place for merchants and traders. Much of the town's attraction today is due to its many surviving buildings erected during times of great prosperity in the past. Among these are numerous 18th century houses and a 'wool' church.

Field patterns display a range of enclosure episodes, with hawthorn hedges marking the boundaries of various shapes and sizes of fields. These range from some expansive fields extending up from the upper Farmed Slopes onto the High Wold to moderately sized geometric fields on lower slopes, which are more characteristic of the Pastoral Lowland Farmland. Indeed in many instances

fields may be seen extending up onto the High Wold or down into the Vale, further blurring the transitions from one landscape type to the next.

Orchards, at one time much more extensive along the Farmed Slopes, are now few in number. Where present, they generally occur on gentle north facing slopes, and make an important contribution to landscape character with their regular rows of trees and fruit bushes.

Parklands are also an important characteristic feature of the Farmed Slopes, the site of houses and the layout of gardens often designed specifically to exploit dramatic landform and wide panoramic views. Many are registered, confirming their historic importance and landscape quality. Examples include Sezincote and Batsford Park, which are both listed Grade I on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens in England. The influence of larger estates on the wider landscape cannot be underestimated, with estate architecture and planting often evident for some distance beyond the park wall in the wider landscape.

Character Areas

15A

Vale of Bourton Farmed Slopes

The Vale of Bourton is narrower than the Vale of Moreton and significantly smaller. As a result, views from the upper portions of the Vale of Bourton Farmed Slopes are generally less extensive although views along the length of vale from higher vantage points are longer. Views to the opposite Farmed Slopes allow the pattern of fields to be clearly distinguished and as a result, any breakdown in the hedgerow pattern is clearly visible. The narrow nature of the vale and rural character of the pastoral lowlands below, also raises the visual prominence of development.



The Farmed Slopes of the Vale of Bourton are generally steeper than those defining the Vale of Moreton and therefore pasture is more prevalent. However, as the Farmed Slopes become gentler towards the south of Bourton-on-the-Water, more arable farming may be identified across the slopes, blurring with arable fields in on the floor of the vale and on the neighbouring uplands.

Settlements are typically small and are generally located on the eastern slopes with Wyck Rissington, Little Rissington and Great Rissington all occupying the slopes below the Rissington Plateau. The pattern of these settlements is also consistent; a cluster of houses bordering a direct route up the Farmed Slopes linking the High Wold and the upland plateau. The western slopes are less heavily settled and small isolated farms and individual buildings are more characteristic.

Woodlands are generally small coniferous and broadleaf copses and farm woodlands. These have no distinct patterning and occur close to streams and woodlands or dotted across the slopes. Larger belts of woodland tend to be associated with parklands such as Sherborne Park. Woodlands are generally well integrated with their surroundings, their geometric form often being softened by their relationship with landform and surrounding hedgerows and field trees.

15B

Vale of Moreton Farmed Slopes



This represents an extensive landscape character area and defines the Pastoral Lowland Vale of the Vale of Moreton within the AONB boundary. This landscape supports a high proportion of pasture land although significant areas of arable farming are evident rolling over the upper slopes onto the neighbouring High Wold and on lower gentler slopes neighbouring the Pastoral Lowland Vale. These

varying agricultural land uses form a patchwork of coloured fields on the gentle slopes, emphasised by the network of neat hawthorn hedges that define them. Fields at the base of the slope extend into the vale and are often moderately sized and regular in shape. Larger amorphous fields exist on the middle and upper slopes and are often used for arable farming. Sloping landform makes these landscapes highly visible from the vale and as a consequence, gappy sections of hedgerow are more readily identifiable.

The Vale is broadest in the north at over 7km (4.3 miles). Here, views from the upper Farmed Slopes of the far slopes of the vale are visible as a low scarp above the rolling pastoral lowlands. The Vale of Moreton, however, becomes narrower to the south and views across the lowlands to the opposite slopes become clearer and field patterns more discernible. Elevated views of the Farmed Slopes are also possible where they define a narrow valley to the west of Chipping Norton.

Woodlands, although not a significant feature of the landscape, make an important contribution to the visual appeal of the landscape and often provide a wooded backdrop to views across the vale. The most significant woodlands are associated with parkland landscapes, the most notable being Grade I listed parks at Sezincote and Batsford, the latter of which also contains an important arboretum. Orchards are more prevalent than on the Vale of Bourton Farmed Slopes. These tend to be small and sited on the lower slopes bordering the Pastoral Lowland Vale, as at Longborough.

Settlements are generally small and clustered along routes up the Farmed Slopes. Some are more closely associated with the High Wold, such as Fifield, and Nether Westcote and linked to the Pastoral Lowland Vale by tracks and footpaths. However, others such as Idbury and Longborough have strong links to both neighbouring landscape types and occupy sheltered positions on the middle of the slopes.



A significant local landmark is the mill and chimney located on the outskirts of Chipping Norton. It was built by William Bliss who founded the town's textile industry in the early 19th century.