

9 HIGH WOLD DIP-SLOPE

Character Areas

- 9A Sulis Manor Plateau
- 9B Bathampton and Claverton Down
- 9C Lansdown
- 9D Cotswolds High Wold Dip-Slope
- 9E Wychwood Forest
- 9F West Enstone Uplands



Key Characteristics

- Soft, gently undulating rolling landscape dissected by a series of predominantly south-east flowing rivers;
- transitional landscape displaying many of the characteristics of the neighbouring High Wold and Dip-Slope Lowland landscape character types;
- network of dry valley systems;
- large scale open arable fields with little tree cover, as well as a more complex mosaic of smaller scale arable and pasture contained within a strong framework of hedges and woodland;
- stone walls less prevalent than on the High Wold, but notable adjacent to roads and in vicinity of settlements;

- intermittent long distance views towards the high wold and across neighbouring lowlands;
- sparsely settled with intermittent isolated farmsteads and dispersed hamlets, many marking fording or bridging points;
- evidence of small scale quarrying in shallow delves, often overgrown by trees and scrub;
- grain of landscape patterns often aligned along the course of Roman roads that cross the area;
- intermittent occurrence of airfields on shallow sloping elevated landscapes;
- distinctive pattern of large estates and associated planned parkland landscape and woodland are evident across the Dip-Slope Lowland; and
- significant areas of ancient woodland, and evidence of assarting in Wychwood Forest and Cirencester Park.

Landscape Character

The High Wold Dip-Slope comprises the gently rolling landscapes that generally fall south-eastwards away from the areas of the High Wold plateau to where they merge into the Dip-Slope Lowlands landscape character type. Within the southern sections of this landscape type, however, drainage is generally to the north east. The landscape shares many key characteristics with both of these neighbouring landscape types and therefore represents a transitional zone between the two.

The High Wold Dip-Slope may be identified extending beneath the High Wold from the West Enstone Uplands in the far east of the AONB in an arc to the outskirts of Bath in the south. In this location the High Wold Dip-Slope is bordered to the west by the escarpment.

The landscape is characterised by gently rolling landform with an elevated and open character, but distinctly more sheltered and intimate when compared to the High Wold due to the Dip-Slope landform limiting views to the north-west. The gentle south-easterly dip in the landform is perceptible from many locations with long distance views over the Dip-Slope Lowlands possible from many locations. In these wide south-facing panoramas, the Dip-Slope landform is often clearly identifiable. Within the Dip-Slope the High Wold plateau to the north and west can often be viewed on the horizon.

The landscape is dissected by an increasing number of deep dry valleys and tributary streams when compared to the High Wold creating more discrete and intimate landscapes than are present on the plateau. These valleys are generally wider as they proceed downstream and further reduce the perceptions of exposure and elevation that is more characteristic of landscapes to the north-west.

Intensive arable farming predominates on the Dip-Slope, giving the landscape a productive and well-maintained character. The impression is one of a large-scale landscape that is simple and smooth in texture. Improved pastures are also evident, but mainly sited within the valley systems, resulting in a lush appearance. The large fields are separated by stonewalls, some of which are obscured by overgrown regenerating vegetation and hedges, together with neat hedgerows, and post and wire fencing. Although evident, the dry stone walls are less common than on the High Wold plateau.

The thin, dry calcareous soils over limestone result in generally sparse woodland cover although large areas of woodland are associated with the ancient Wychwood Forest and parklands such as Cirencester Park.

Settlement patterns are similar to the High Wold with dispersed villages and hamlets predominating. However, villages tend to be a little larger and more frequent, particularly along the valleys. Whilst barrows and hillforts are still an important feature of the landscape, they are fewer in number and are perhaps less of a characteristic feature than the adjacent High Wold.

Physical Influences

The northern section of the High Wold Dip-Slope is underlain by the Great Oolite Limestones. However, along the eastern fringes of the landscape bordering the Dip-Slope Lowlands, particularly in the vicinity of Wychwood and south of Daglingworth, Forest Marble Formation predominates.

Great Oolite would have at one time covered the whole of the Cotswolds, but subsequent tilting of the Cotswolds massif has led to denudation of its eastern flank. The south-easterly tilt of the Dip-Slope is between 1 and 2 degrees and conspicuous across much of the landscape. It has dictated the drainage pattern of the landscape, and to a lesser extent the layout of roads and settlements.

The landform is gently undulating and generally occurs between the 210 m AOD and 150 m AOD contours. However, the landform change between the neighbouring landscape types of both the High Wold, and the Dip-Slope Lowland, is subtle and the boundary between these landscape types is therefore transitional.

The drainage pattern of the Dip-Slope represents a continuation of that present on the High Wold, and as on the High Wold, the Dip-Slope is dissected by a number of rivers such as the Windrush and Coln. However, these occupy a much broader valley form, and often perceived as undulations in the wider landscape. (See Landscape Character Type 16). Smaller, narrow valleys with convex slopes also occur, however, often comprising dry valleys that were carved during the Ice Age by glacial melt waters. A fine example is the valley to the west of Barnsley, and Barnsley Wold Wood.

Arable farming predominates on the Dip-Slope with large fields cloaking the countryside and offering seasonal variations in colour and texture. These are enclosed by a combination of hedgerows and sometimes dry stone walls although where the boundary pattern is breaking down, post and wire fencing is increasingly being used. Where present, stone walls are an important indication of the underlying geology, the material often locally sourced by farmers from narrow quarries at the edge of the fields they were enclosing or picked from the fields.

Similar to the High Wold, woodland cover is sparse and restricted to small deciduous and mixed plantations many of which date to the period of enclosure in the 18th and 19th centuries. In contrast to the High Wold, however, larger areas of ancient woodland survive. Large blocks are particularly evident forming the wider parkland setting of Cirencester Park and at Wychwood, which is the remains of an ancient Royal Hunting Forest. In the vicinity of these large woodlands the landscape adopts a more intimate and human scale, with wide panoramas interrupted by trees.

Human Influences

In common with the High Wold and Dip-Slope Lowland, the enclosures of the 18th and 19th centuries impart the dominant landscape pattern. Beneath this, and in contrast to the close association of the High Wold with prehistoric features, the Dip-Slope landscape may be regarded as being most heavily influenced by the Romans. The Dip-Slope is criss crossed by numerous major Roman Roads including long stretches of the Fosse Way and the Ermin Way. Their course still dominates areas of the landscape and dictates the alignment of later field patterns and ownership boundaries, and may often be perceived in the line of modern roads, hedgerows and footpaths. Monuments of the prehistoric period are still evident in the landscape but are less numerous and have less of an impact on the character of the wider Dip-Slope landscape.

Historically fewer quarries were worked on the Dip-Slope than on the High Wold, and where present, they were often shallow workings, visible today as shallow grassy depressions known as delves. Many are hidden from view by scrub growth and tree copses.

A conspicuous feature of the Dip-Slope Lowland landscape is the many airfields and landing strips that are located across it. These range in size from the extensive airfield and barracks on the eastern fringe of Minchinhampton to the single landing strip to the west of Badminton Park. Many military sites were established or greatly expanded during the Second World War. They utilise the extensive areas of flat or gently undulating landscape and would have had many different functions. Colerne, for example, was constructed in 1940 as an RAF fighter base. Many still retain structures associated with their wartime functions such as barracks, hangars and control towers; however, many have been modernised or adapted for new uses. Colerne is now an RAF training base and is used to hold motor-sport events.

The wider settings of large designed landscapes such as west of Badminton Park, and Cirencester Park have a perceptible influence on the High Wold Dip-Slope landscape. These are often subtle and include significant linear woodlands, such as the Seven Mile Plantation to the west of Badminton Park, and the large woodlands to the west of Cirencester Park. At a more local scale, their influence may also be seen in the architectural detailing of buildings in the landscape such as the castellated farm house to the west of Worcester Lodge which marks the entrance to Badminton. Features associated with the designed and planned landscapes exert an influence well beyond the extent of the estate parkland into the surrounding agricultural landscape. For example, the

notable planned woodlands of the Centre Walk Avenue and the Seven Mile Plantation provide strong physical and historic links to the Badminton Estate located within the Dip-Slope Lowland landscape character type to the east.

Settlement patterns are similar to that on the High Wold, with scattered farmsteads and individual dwellings occurring across the landscape. The more frequent occurrence of dispersed villages and hamlets indicates that the landscape is more hospitable than on the exposed areas of the High Wold. Settlements are located in the shelter offered by valleys and some, such as Tormarton and Hawkesbury Upton, gain shelter from being sited beneath areas of raised landform that protect them from northerly winds.

Many settlements are located off the main routes that pass through the area. The orientation of the principal routes mirrors the situation on the High Wold with roads running north eastwards such as the A46 (T) and A429. Either side of these, a network of minor roads link villages and towns to more isolated farms and hamlets. These tend to run down the Dip-Slope at right angles to the main arterial routes, often fringing the upper slopes of Dip-Slope Valleys.

Character Areas

9A

Sulis Manor Plateau

The Sulis Manor Plateau is a discrete area of plateau fringing the southern limits of Bath's suburbs and the valley landscape of the Cam Brook. The plateau rises to 150 m AOD above Week Farm although a general plateau of 170 m AOD can be identified around Sulis Manor.

Landcover is primarily improved pasture together with some arable, with fields being divided by a network of well-maintained hedgerows interspersed with hedgerow trees. Calcareous grasslands, more typical of the steep upper slopes of the neighbouring Broad Limestone Valley, are also present on the plateau and indicate limited improvement of some pastures. Woodland within the area is sparse, consisting of small deciduous blocks or linear plantations of young trees along the top of the valley slopes.

Settlement is also very limited, the area marking the outer limits of Bath's southernmost suburbs. These have a significant influence on the landscape, with built development, and in particular the communications mast to the north of Sulis Manor having an urbanising influence on views northwards across the landscape. Sulis Manor is the most significant built element of the landscape. It is notable for its fine 1930s gardens.

The principal feature of historic interest within the Character Area is the Wansdyke. This massive linear bank and ditch earthwork is a significant landscape feature, running eastwards along the AONB boundary from Sulis Manor for approximately 1000 m. The Wansdyke is a major landscape monument and in the wider landscape stretches eastwards for 18 kilometres from Morgans Hill to Savernake Forest near Marlborough, near the southern edge of the Marlborough Downs. It was constructed as a defensive earthwork by the Anglo Saxons to defend from attacks from the north, as the ditch is located on the northern side of the bank. Later it became a traffic route for drovers bringing their flocks and herds to the great stock fair on Tan Hill, located to the north-east of Devizes in Wiltshire. It remained a traffic route well into medieval times, and is now a public right of way for most of its length.

9B

Bathampton and Claverton Down



The Bathampton and Claverton Down Character Area represents a detached area of Dip-Slope landscape. The downs rise to 204 m AOD dipping southwards to 150 m AOD. Many thousands of years ago, this area was contiguous with the Dip-Slope landscapes extending across Lansdown and onto the Cotswolds High Wold Dip-Slope. However, powerful rivers such as the Avon and By Brook have eroded deep valleys that almost encircle it, and leave the area as a detached remnant of the Dip-Slope landscape.

The close proximity of Bath has had a profound influence, with Bath University, schools and large housing estates all exerting a strong suburbanising influence on the character of the local landscape. Despite this, farming is evident and a significant area of the landscape is devoted to arable and pasture farming. Fields are generally divided up by neat hedgerows, often containing mature hedgerow trees. Woodland within the character area is limited to small areas of woodland, mainly in the south, north west

of Combe Down, and extending along the road, south of Claverton Down. A significant area of calcareous grassland exists in the north of the University campus.

To the north of the University, overlooking the heart of Roman and Regency Bath, sits a large enclosure named Caer Badon comprising of a mound and ditch. No evidence has been found for occupation, and it is widely thought to represent a large stock enclosure. There is also evidence for extensive Celtic field systems on the hills, and earlier barrows, obviously sited on a dramatic location overlooking the Avon valley.

Quarrying of the local limestone (Bath Stone) has been undertaken since Roman times. However, the stone here is of poor quality and enterprises were therefore short lived.

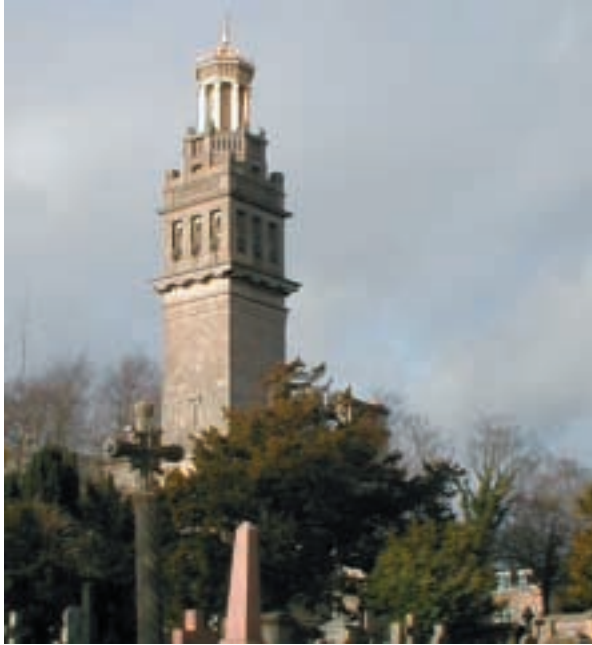
9C

Lansdown

The Lansdown Character Area comprises a gently rolling plateau which has become separated from the main area of the Dip-Slope landscape character type by the steep landform associated with the escarpment north of Bath, and the valley of the Lam Brook, and the series of tributary valleys, including the Pipleay Stream valley, which together define the eastern perimeter of the plateau.

The rural landscape is generally devoted to improved pasture farming, and large fields are bounded by stone walls and hedgerows. Hedgerow trees and woodlands are uncommon and some wide expansive views are therefore possible. A sense of elevation and exposure is also characteristic. Much of the pasture land is improved, but remnants of calcareous grassland survive close to ancient woodlands on the upper slopes of the escarpment and plateau at The Tumps and Hanging Hill. Indeed





a significant area has been designated as a SSSI due to the herb rich calcareous grassland communities that are present on areas of the varied topography of humps and hollows marking the site of former quarrying activities.

Lansdown Road, a minor but very busy road, passes along the centre of the plateau linking the small village of Lansdown to Bath in the south. Numerous developments are located alongside this road, including a large complex of Government offices, car parks and sports pitches in the south, and a golf course and Lansdown Racecourse in the west. These features exert a strong suburbanising influence on the landscape.

The landscape contains a number of important historic sites. An Iron Age site overlooks the Vale to the west of the racecourse, and as is typical, sits at the edge of the Escarpment. The far north of the area is part of the site of the Battle of Lansdown Hill (1643), a Registered Battlefield. The battle was a major confrontation of the English Civil War where Parliamentarian lines defending the hill met Royalist troops who were positioned on Freezing Hill to the north. The open grazed grassland over which the battle was savagely fought still remains, and the centre of the battle is marked by a monument, built in 1720, commemorating the Royalist general Sir Bevil Grenville.

A further impressive landscape monument is located in the south of the character area, within a large cemetery that was once part of a grand mile-long designed landscape. Beckford's Tower is an impressive neo-classical Italianate tower built in 1827 for William Beckford as a retreat, and which housed part of his art collection.



9D

Cotswolds High Wold Dip-Slope

The Cotswolds High Wold Dip-Slope landscape is an extensive character area stretching in a wide arc from Freezing Hill in the south to the north of Charlbury in the north-east of the AONB. The southern extent of the character area is marked by a dramatic beech stand, its close regimental formation mirroring the ranks of Royalist troops that were positioned here prior to the Battle of Lansdown Hill in 1643. Although reminiscent of the troops that occupied the hill prior to battle, it is not known whether these trees were planted to commemorate the battle.

Land cover and land use is typical of the High Wold Dip-Slope with a predominance of arable farming and occasional pasture fields in valley locations. The differences to the neighbouring landscape types are subtle. However, the transition is best appreciated when travelling through the Cotswolds High Wold Dip-Slope character area from the High Wold into the Dip-Slope Lowlands along the south-east orientated roads. Landform is gently rolling and wide valleys are often perceived as part of the rolling





landscape. Narrow valleys also occur. These are often dry, such as at The Warren on Ampney Down and west of Barnsley. Where streams occur these are frequently crossed by fords, in association with adjacent farms, or small hamlets such as at Middle Duntisbourne.

From a number of locations the absence of large woodlands allows for wide views over the neighbouring lowlands and northwards to the hills. The Dip-Slope landform can be particularly well appreciated from the wide panorama obtained from the Knollbury Hill Fort.

In this extensive landscape, landmarks and landscape features are numerous. The earliest historic sites include funerary monuments from the Neolithic and Bronze Age and Iron Age hillforts such as the impressive enclosure at Old Sodbury and Hinton Hill. These are indications of the long history of settlement on the Dip-Slope. However, the overriding character of the landscape is derived from the parliamentary enclosures and farms that date from the 18th and 19th centuries. The influence of designed woodlands is also of significance, for example the extensive planned linear woodlands and avenues that form part of the wider estate landscape associated with Badminton Park to the east within the adjacent Dip-Slope Lowland landscape type.

Roads passing along and down the Dip-Slope give the landscape a distinct grain. Many of these have ancient origins. More modern communication routes also have a significant impact on local landscape character, good examples being the course of the M4, and the line of air shaft turrets associated with the rail line that passes beneath the Dip-Slope between Old Sodbury and Acton Turville.

Place names indicate that many settlements on the Dip-Slope were established or consolidated in the Saxon period. Many are located in valley locations and contain ancient churches such as Duntisbourne Rouse. The extensive use of Cotswold stone throughout the numerous villages and hamlets is a defining characteristic of this area.

War-time links are also perceptible across the Cotswolds High Wold Dip-Slope character area in the numerous landing strips and former airbases in the area. The largest is at Colerne where hangars and former military buildings exert a strong influence on local landscape character.

9E Wychwood Forest



Wychwood Forest is a discrete landscape character area in the far east of the AONB occupying the high ground between the valleys of the Windrush and Evenlode. Interestingly, much of the character area boundary shares its alignment with the boundary of the wooded area at the time of the Domesday survey.

The landscape is smoothly rolling and underlain by Forest Marble, from where the rock formation gets its name. At Leafield and Ramsden, however, localised cappings of Oxford Clay and glacial drift mask the underlying limestone. These have a localised influence on vegetation character and give rise to islands of poorer soil. It is possible that these were some of the first areas to be cleared for settlement in the forest. As is typical of the Dip-Slope, the area has an elevated and expansive character with long sweeping views from higher areas of land punctuated by occasional copses. Land cover is typically large-scale arable farmland with field patterns largely dating from the times of enclosure. Walls and hedgerows are evident. Hedgerow removal is conspicuous in some areas, however, weakening the pattern created by field boundaries. To the south of the main Forest the land use is mixed, with concentrations of irregular field pattern boundaries, and pockets of woodland and mature hedgerow trees that may have evolved from the process of assarting where fields were carved out of areas of woodland. Despite the broad similarities of the open landscape with other areas of the Dip-Slope, the Wychwood Forest character area is distinguished by the presence of extensive areas of broadleaved woodland.

The woodlands of the Wychwood Forest are a particularly valuable natural habitat and a significant area of the Forest west of Cornbury Deer Park has been designated as a SSSI, and represents the largest continuous area of ancient broadleaved woodland in Oxfordshire. Areas of limestone grassland and a number of old marl lakes, which are nationally rare, are also important features of the designated area. The Forest is mostly oak-ash woodland and much of it was formerly managed as coppice with standards although it is now high forest. There is also an unusual example of forest with maple occurring as standards over an understorey of hawthorn or hazel coppice. Over 360 flowering plants and ferns have been identified in the area with particularly uncommon species found in the glades and rides. The area also supports a diverse invertebrate fauna and includes many uncommon species.

The site's historic associations underlie much of its character. Its name is thought to derive from Hwiccewudu, 'Hwicce' referring to a Saxon tribe that inhabited the area that was later absorbed into Mercia. Wood from the Forest was an important commodity in the Saxon period and provided a source of fuel for the Droitwich salt industry, where Hwicce princes had a monopoly. By the time of the Domesday survey the area was part of a well-established royal hunting forest that stretched across west Oxfordshire, a royal hunting lodge being established under the reign of Ethelred II (978-1016) at nearby Woodstock. As with other forests of the type, it was administered using Forest Laws and was not continuously wooded. Indeed, Wychwood was divided into eighteen parcels with one cut back each year.

Place names confirm that although termed 'Forest', the area was not necessarily cloaked in woodland. 'Shipton' indicates that there was an area of sheep pasture within the forest. By the 12th and 13th century the pressures of a growing population led to increasing demands for land. Many of the forest villages date from these centuries with Ramsden first recorded in 1146 and Leafield in 1213. These villages are often quite straggling in form, reflecting their origins as assarted fields cleared from woodland. Many of them did not have village churches until the 19th century. Local place names such as Asthall Leigh and Field Assarts are also clear signs of clearance and occupation within areas of woodland.

Interestingly, the large number of barrows in the landscape indicates that during the Neolithic and Bronze Age, the landscape was cleared of much of its woodland, as these monuments were meant to be seen. This implies that the Forest may have naturally regenerated prior to the establishment of the royal hunting forest in the Saxon period.

9F

West Enstone Uplands

The West Enstone Uplands occupy a high limestone plateau in the far east of the AONB north of the Evenlode. The landscape may be seen stretching further to the east beyond the AONB boundary as far as Middle Barton. In this wider landscape may be found the River Glyme, the town of Enstone, Heythrop Park and a large disused airfield.

Across much of the area the underlying limestone has formed a smooth, rolling plateau with a distinctly elevated and open character. Thin dry calcareous soils are free draining and well suited to arable farming and indeed much of the landscape is characterised by large fields enclosed by stone walls or low, clipped hedges and a sparse natural vegetation cover. Woodlands are restricted and no ancient woodland exists in the area. The largest woods comprise a linear shelterbelt along the A361 and a rectangular copse of newly planted trees to the west of Knollbury.

Settlement is sparse and restricted to a small number of isolated farms and individual dwellings. Their regular distribution suggests that many were the product of parliamentary enclosure when the open grasslands and wastes were parcelled into individual farming units centred around a new farmhouse. Roads are also infrequent and radiate out from Charlbury and Chadlington in the Evenlode Valley through the landscape to the B4026, which forms the AONB boundary in many places.

There are few landmarks or sites of historic interest in this landscape except for the impressive Knollbury Fort and the Hawk Stone, both sited to take advantage of views over the Evenlode Valley.