

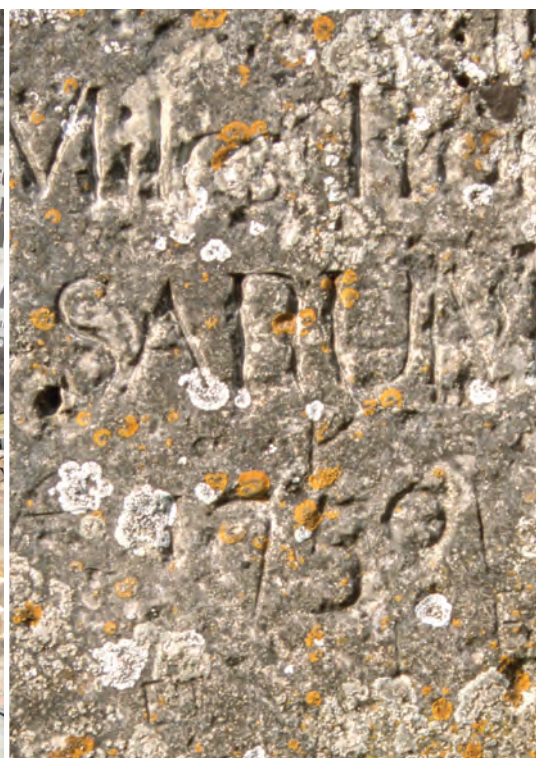


Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Historic Environment Action Plans

Theme 13: Woodland and Trees
in the Landscape










This document forms part of a suite of documents which together comprise the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB Historic Environment Action Plans.

The HEAPs provide a summary of the key characteristics of the historic environment of the AONB at a landscape scale, they then set out the significance, condition and forces for change affecting the historic fabric and character of this special landscape and identify proactive actions to conserve and enhance these special characteristics. These summaries are divided into two groups:

1. Summaries of the historic environment of the AONB by area
2. Summaries of the historic environment of the AONB by theme

These core documents are accompanied by documents which provide background information, supplementary information and detail on the methodologies used to create these documents.

A series of icons help you navigate this suite of documents:

-  **Background** - Provides an introduction to the AONB Historic Environment Action Plans and provides background information on the history and archaeology of the landscape **(B1 to B10)**
-  **Area** - Summarises key characteristics of discrete geographical areas within the AONB, they then set out the significance, condition and forces for change affecting the historic fabric and character of each area and identify proactive actions to conserve and enhance its characteristics **(A1 to A12)**
-  **Theme** - Summarises key characteristics of historic environment themes, each document then sets out the significance, condition and forces for change affecting the historic fabric and character of each theme and identify proactive actions to conserve and enhance its characteristics **(T1 to T14)**
-  **Supplementary** - A series of documents which explore supplementary issues of relevance to the Historic Environment Action Plans **(S1 to S2)**
-  **Method** - Introduces the methodology behind the production of the Historic Environment Action Plans **(M1 to M3)**

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Introducing the Theme Statements

Fourteen distinct Historic Landscape Themes have been identified in the AONB. These were chosen by the HEAP Steering Group as representing the topics which best encapsulate the historic character of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB.

The theme descriptions aim to provide an overview of each theme which encapsulates the main features of the Historic Environment present and include both the archaeological and historical, the very old and the more recent.



The process through which the Historic Landscape Character themes were identified, and mapped, and the sources of information used to create these descriptions is documented in the methodological statement 'Creating and Describing Historic Character Themes'.

Introduction to Theme 13: Trees and Woodland in the Landscape

“a truly venerable tract of forest land, one of the few remaining woodlands in England of undoubted primeval date”

Thomas Hardy 1891

The aim is to provide an overview of the key archaeological and historic characteristics of the woodland and trees in the AONB and to focus on evidence of physical surviving remains in today's landscape. The AONB is characterised by large swathes of ancient woodland, designed woodland elements also dominate.



Woodland on Badbury Rings Hillfort

Summary of Key Characteristics

- Ancient broad leaved woodland which coincide with key areas of the Medieval hunting chase and Medieval forests.
- The ancient woodlands are associated with archaeological earthworks, including ancient field systems.
- The Cranborne Chase Woodlands centred on Tollard Royal form the centre of an important and, in some places, surviving underwood industry.
- The ancient woodland on Great Ridge forms the only large area of ancient semi-natural woodland not associated with a Medieval hunting area.
- Ancient copses exist at the bottom of Chalk escarpments, known locally as 'Ivers' and are of unknown antiquity.
- Copses and mature hedgerows around fields marking the location of woodland clearance, especially notable in the Vale of Wardour.
- Ancient and veteran trees associated with Medieval deer parks, parkland and ancient boundaries.
- Large scale planting of trees and woodland belts associated with the creation of 18th and 19th century landscape parks. This is best demonstrated by the construction of the great Brownian Ride at Wimborne St Giles, and by Longleat.
- Woodlands formed structural planned elements in the landscape characterised by great avenues of trees, for example at Kingston Lacy and in the Chalke Valley.
- Large scale plantations of conifers especially in the 19th century and post 1918, for example to the east of Longleat. These mark the impact of the great estates on the landscape.
- Increase in woodland cover in the downland areas in the 20th century, characterised by the creation of linear and angular plantations and belts of trees for fox and game coverts.

Linkages to Other Historic Landscape Character Statements

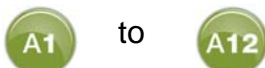
This statement forms one of 14 AONB wide Historic Landscape Character Theme descriptions. These are accompanied by a series of 12 Historic Landscape Character Area descriptions which cover the whole of the AONB. These documents together build up a picture of the key characteristics of the Historic Environment of the AONB at a landscape scale. These statements combined inform the Historic Environment Action Plans created for the AONB landscape.

Other Themes of particular relevance to this theme are:



Theme 1: Ancient Boundaries and Land Ownership
Theme 4: Historic Parks and Gardens in the AONB
Theme 5: Hunting Landscapes in the AONB

All the Historic Landscape Character Areas are of relevance to this theme.



History and Context

Woodland is a major component of the landscape of the AONB. Many areas of woodland in the AONB have Medieval origins and are associated with ancient trees, coppices and semi-natural habitats. Just as important, however, are the post 1800 additions to the woodlands of the AONB. These include new geometric blocks of woodland used as game cover which have been imposed on some areas of downland. Just as striking are the ornamental additions linked to the creation of the great 18th and 19th landscape parks of the AONB. Although many areas of old woodland have been cleared or replanted since the Medieval period, the general trend over the last 200 years has been towards a more dispersed woodland landscape punctuated by ancient blocks of woodland. There are, of course, exceptions to this pattern, for example around the Donheads, in the Vale of Wardour ancient enclosures and assarts nestle alongside dispersed bands of ancient trees and wooded over common land.

Key Secondary Sources

The main source of detail on the historic landscape is the AONB Historic Landscape Characterisation report available from www.historiclandscape.co.uk

Information on nationally important historic parks and gardens in the AONB are available from the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.

Information on the woodland in the area can be found in the AONB booklet 'A landscape view of trees and woodland' (2010).

The main archaeological record for the area is the county based Historic Environment Record in Dorset, Hampshire and Somerset and the Sites and Monuments Record in Wiltshire.



Fonthill woods in autumn

Landscape Scale Characteristics and Components

1. Overview of Historic Character of Woodland

Background

Much of the pre 1800 woodland in the AONB is of considerable antiquity, representing traces of the Medieval hunting forests, chase and parks in the AONB. This woodland is also associated with concentrations of ancient coppices and an area of less intensively managed woodland. Approximately 60% of the woodland in the AONB is pre 1800 in date.

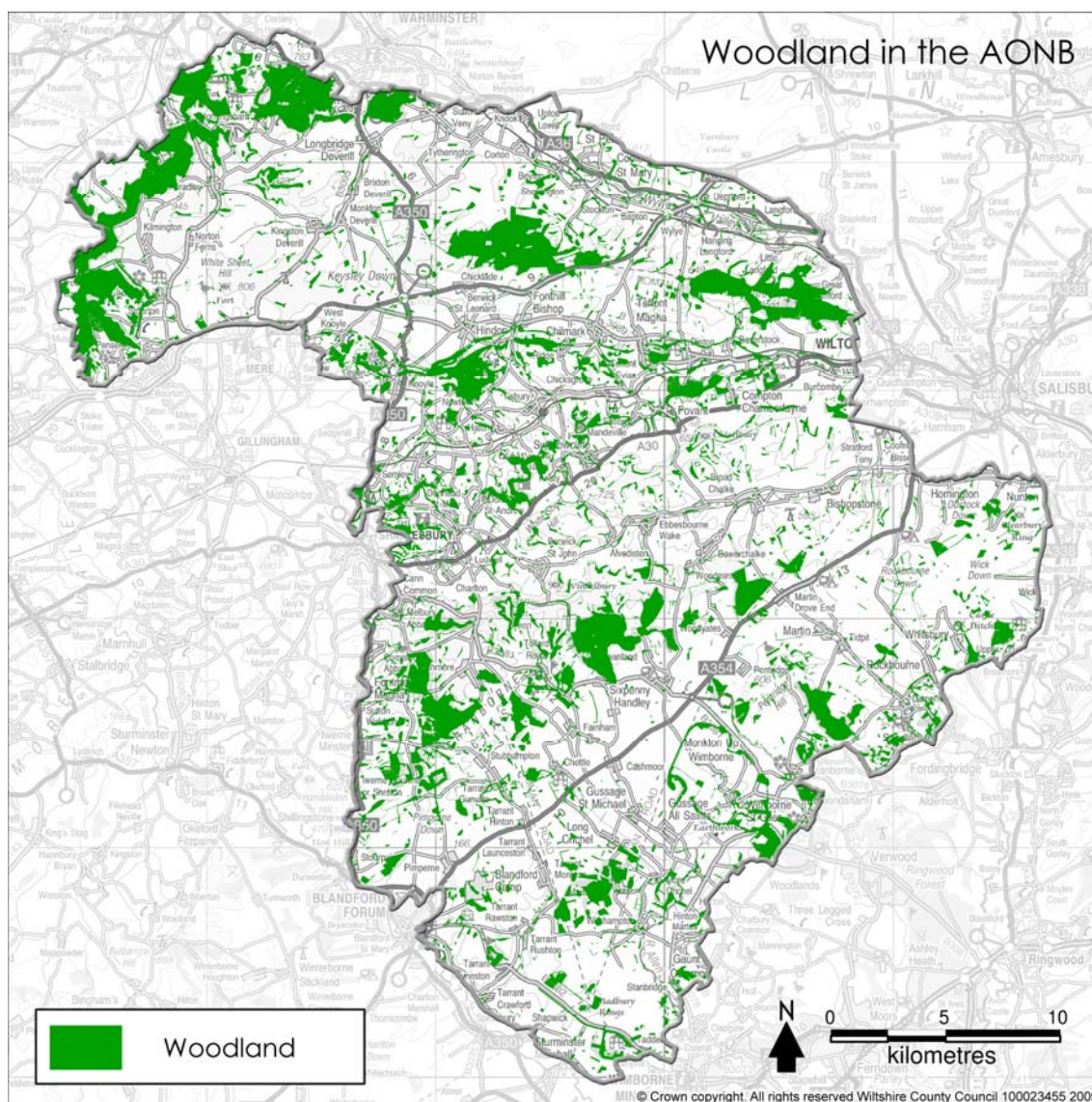


Figure One: Woodland in the AONB.

Landscape scale impact

Woodland is found across the whole AONB. Larger woodland blocks are found across the wooded chalk downland of Cranborne Chase and the West Wiltshire Downs. There is a continuous belt of woodland along the north-west greensand hill and to the south of Warminster. This is infilled by more dispersed smaller woodland blocks. Woodland is largely absent from the Ebble Valley, the head of the Wylde Valley, in the area to the north of Mere, to the south of A303 and through parts of the southern downland belt especially along the A354.

Ancient woodland in the AONB also contains many archaeological sites and earthworks which remain undiscovered concealed by the woodland canopy. This include prehistoric and historic sites including evidence of the historic management of the woodland such as wood banks and saw pits. The trees themselves also form living archaeology holding information on past woodland management including coppicing and pollarding.

2. Ancient Woodland Associated with Medieval Hunting Areas*Background*

The Medieval hunting areas of the AONB each had a swathe of veteran woodland at their core. This tended to consist of high forest (oak and elm) and large areas of coppice, predominantly hazel. Within the AONB there were three areas recognised as Medieval hunting forests – Selwood Forest in the northwest, Grovely in the northeast and Badbury in the far southeast. There is also one large hunting chase, the Cranborne Chase, a geographical name still in modern usage.

Landscape Scale Impact

The core of the former Medieval forest of Selwood Forest is formed of a sinuous wide ribbon of forest which runs from Warminster to just north of the A303 at Penselwood, along the greensand escarpment. In the present day this woodland is dominated by conifers, with some remnant semi-natural woodland. This woodland had been extended in the northwest with the addition of large plantations in the 20th century. The woodland belt has seen the clearance of small areas of woodland during the 20th century and small scale addition of woodland on its edges.

Grovely Wood in the north east of the AONB forms the core of the Medieval forest of Grovely. It is associated with an elevated plateau where the chalk is capped by clay-with-flints. The wood today is formed of a mosaic of deciduous woodland, with large amounts of coniferous and mixed woodland with fragments of ancient woodland surviving. Twentieth century planting with coniferous blocks inside these woodlands replaced oak – ash stands and has resulted in the coniferous canopy standing above the broadleaf canopy, altering the skyline. Ancient trees are very common. Noticeable losses of woodland have occurred on the West Wiltshire Downs around Great Wood, Grovely Wood, Pertwood and Upper Pertwood

The woodlands of the wooded chalk downland of the Cranborne Chase and Chatterwood are within the former inner bounds of the Cranborne Chase hunting area. These woodlands are associated with ancient woodland with veteran trees, semi-

natural woodland species, coppice stands and wood banks. Very large ash stools are found in the hedgerows and there are many grand beech trees that were planted in the late 1700s and early 1800s, in woodlands and copses. There has been a large proportion of woodland loss and little woodland gain since 1800. This is most noticeable in the north east of the area between Chase Woods, Stonedown Wood and Vernditch Chase which at the beginning of the 19th century contained extensive areas of coppice. Irregular woodland clearance also occurred in the area to the south of Ashmore Wood with the creation of new fields in the 20th century, though in this area these fields were interspersed with new smaller linear plantations.



Grovely Woods

2. Other Ancient Woodland in the AONB

Background

Ancient woodland also lies outside the area of delimited Medieval hunting areas, these form large ancient woodlands, small scale copses, woodlands and wooded hedgerows, ancient boundaries, and valley bottom woodlands.

Landscape scale impact

Other large ancient woodlands in the AONB:

- Two large woods exist in the far north of the AONB at Southleigh and Eastleigh.
- Large woodlands are also to be found at Great Ridge on the crest of the West Wiltshire Downs. This woodland is associated with an elevated plateau where the chalk is capped by clay-with-flints. The wood today is formed of a mosaic of deciduous woodland, with large amounts of coniferous and mixed woodland with fragments of ancient woodland surviving.

Pre 1750 hedgerows, copses and small woodlands:

- The Kilminster Terrace has retained some excellent ancient trees in hedgerows, river banks and alongside springs.

- Belts of natural ash woodland occur along the boundary with the Fovant terrace and the chalk escarpment
- Ancient woodland is dispersed throughout Vale of Wardour. Most of the woodland was present prior to 1750 and is either broadleaved or mixed in character. The edges of the Vale have seen piecemeal loss of woodland along its edges, especially in the area to the north of Semley Hill, in the area near Summerleaze, at Teffont Evias and at Hardene Wood. Woodland creation has also occurred, albeit at a much smaller scale, and mostly abutting or adjacent to existing woodlands. Areas of woodland vary both in terms of size and shape with larger woodland swathes occurring at the base of the Greensand Hills such as south of Fonthill Abbey Wood and at Compton and Fovant Woods. The edge of the area is interspersed with more recent plantations of conifers. Woodland occurring to the west of the character area, on the Kimmeridge Clay geology, is generally broad leaved, smaller, more fragmented and of a loose and sinuous nature in comparison with the more regular, geometric form of woodland occurring to the east of Tisbury.
- On the greensand to the north of Shaftesbury a belt of oak woods, some of which have been converted to conifer production, occur on the Greensand Hills. They can be seen in the AONB at East and West Knoyle, Semley and the Donheads. Much of the woodland around East and West Knoyle was present prior to 1750 and has been the addition of hill top woodlands around the Donheads as formerly open common land scrubbed up.
- The Downland Hills in the south east of the AONB is one of the most wooded landscapes. The larger woodlands of the Downland Hills are broad leaved and mixed and a large proportion (over 70%) were present prior to 1750. On the Downland Hills, particularly in the area to the north east of the Allen Valley in the vicinity of the Bokerley Dyke plantation, there has been noticeable woodland reduction during the 20th century.
- Ancient woodland is also associated with the chalk escarpments of the AONB. It is located within the combes of the escarpment. This woodland possibly has a Medieval origin. These are known as 'ivers' and follow the contours in a sinuous form. They are a significant landscape feature marking the transition from the steep downland slopes to the intensively cultivated land below. This has been supplemented in the 20th century by small scale plantations on the crest of the chalk escarpment.



Old Ash in the Downland Hills in the southeast of the AONB

Ancient Boundaries:

- The majority of ancient and veteran trees in the AONB will be found in boundary features, particularly the ancient hedgerows and roadsides. The longevity of the boundaries in the AONB, some even dating back to the Bronze Age, make the hedgerows and woodland strips associated with the boundaries extremely special. This includes the Shire Rack, the county boundary between Dorset and Wiltshire.



Line of the ancient Bokerley Dyke at West Woodyates

The woodlands of the chalk river valleys:

- In the Wylde Valley tree cover is a vital part of the landscape along the valley floor. Lines of willows and poplars follow field boundaries and the past and present courses of the Wylde and its tributaries.
- In the Ebble Valley small broadleaved woodland belts and scattered trees line the narrow flood plain and are conspicuous along the course of the river.
- The narrow valley bottom of the south AONB chalk river valleys are distinguished by the mature willows and poplars which form a dense ribbon of trees tracing the course of the river. The woodlands that occur here are mostly broadleaved.

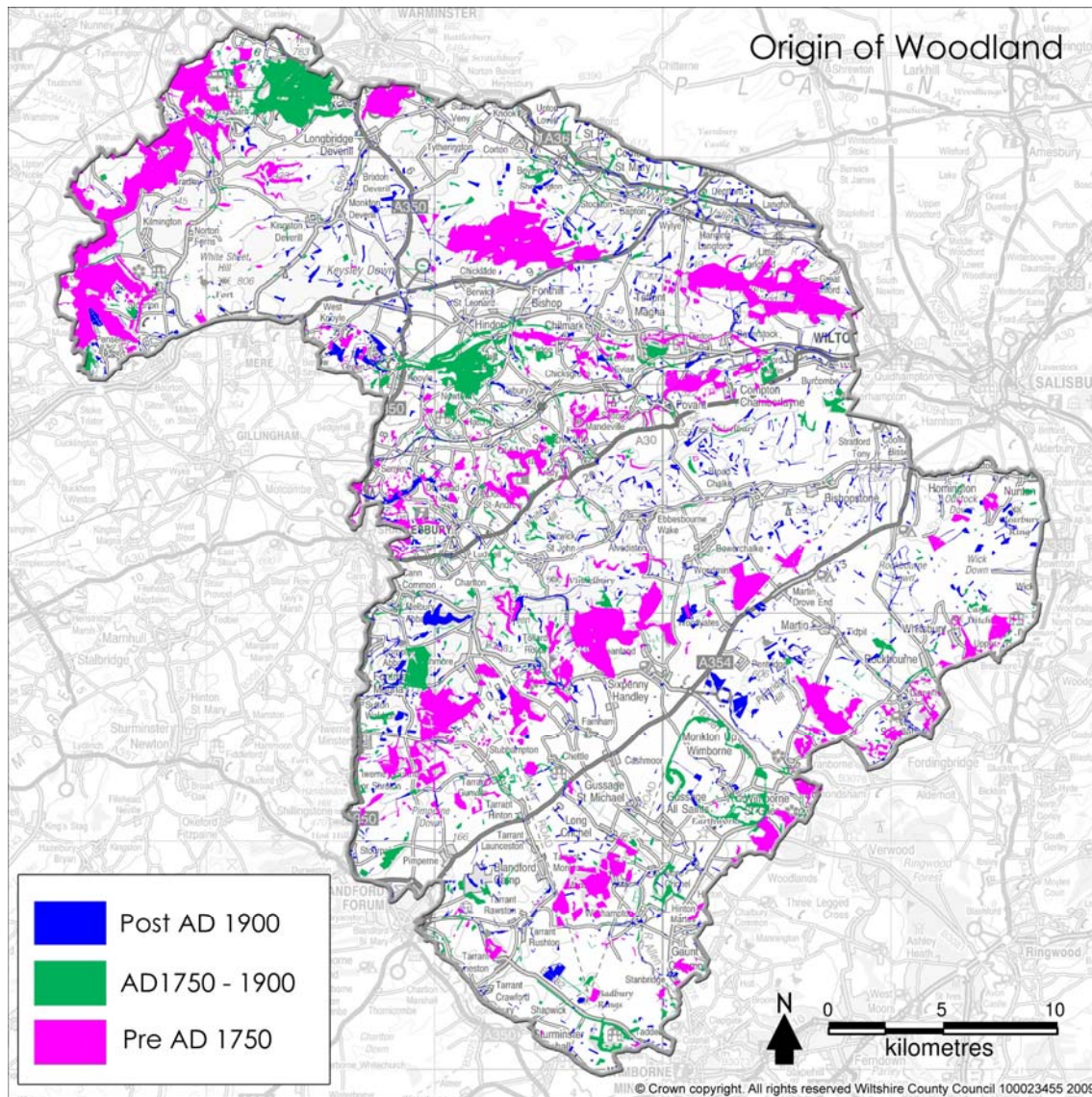


Figure Two: Origin of Woodland

3. Historic Parks and Gardens and Trees and Woodland (18th, 19th, 20th century)

Background

Woodland and trees form an integral part of the Historic Parks and Gardens in the AONB, often being manipulated to achieve a particular design.

Landscape Scale Impact

Existing trees and woodlands were often incorporated into 18th and 19th century parkland. However, commonly this was augmented by new planting schemes. For example, the avenues of beech planted by General Augustus Pitt Rivers at Rushmore Park in the 19th century. This sometimes formed landscape scale schemes of planting. In the AONB this includes the famous avenue at Kingston Lacy and now fragmented beech avenues in the chalke valley created by the Earls of Pembroke.

*Beech Avenue, Broadchalke*

4. 19th Century Changes in Woodland Character

Background

In the 19th century there were large scale changes to the composition of the woodland in the AONB. This included large scale removal of woodland, the creation of new commercial plantations and the scrubbing up of former open land.

*Plantations in area of Longleat*

Landscape Scale Impact

Large scale coniferous plantations were created in the AONB in the 19th century including around Longleat and at the Fonthill Abbey estate in the Vale of Wardour.

The pre-1750 woodland around Semley has been added to as the commonland has scrubbed up and formed natural woodland.

Extensive areas of coppice were cleared in the 19th century on the Wooded Chalk Downland of the Cranborne Chase. This is most noticeable in the north east of the area between Chase Woods, Stonedown Wood and Vernditch Chase.

5. 20th Century Woodlands in the AONB

Game Cover in the Chalk Valley

Background

20th century woodland in the AONB is associated with large blocks of coniferous species planted over large areas as commercial crops, smaller blocks planted in geometric shapes associated with a mixture of native and non-native species planted as game covers and shelter belts, and smaller, irregular often sinuous blocks relating to natural infilling and the planting of ornamental belts of trees, associated with a mixture of native and non-native species.

Landscape Scale Impact

Twentieth century woodland frequently occurs across chalk downland areas in the AONB, either as small farm woods or geometric conifer plantations. Many of the

smaller conifer plantations have broadleaved species in their centre, being planted as game coverts. Copses and clumps of trees are a particularly distinctive feature of the downland landscape, crowning a number of hilltops, and creating geometric patterns on the sides of valleys.

This patterns contrasts with the pattern of woodland creation in the Vale of Wardour. New broadleaved woodland has been created at Mackintosh-Davidson Wood with shelterbelts planted throughout the rest of the vale.

Historic Environment Actions



See Background paper 9 for a full list of Historic Environment Actions and the stages identified in their implementation.

ACTION 2: Record and maintain historic orchards

The Threat and the Opportunity – Orchards were once found on the edges of most of the AONB's villages, but few survive. There is no coherent approach to the maintenance of surviving traditional orchards in the AONB. However before this issue can be dealt with more information is required on the location, extent and survival of historic orchards.

The Potential Mechanism - 19th century Ordnance Survey maps show that orchards were once numerous, especially in the chalk river valleys of the AONB. This action would first identify the location and extent of both former and surviving orchards within the AONB, then consider the issues involved in their sustainable maintenance and then identify the next steps to ensure that they are conserved and enhanced.

ACTION 7: Record information on hazel underwood trade

The Threat and the Opportunity - Hazel coppice is a major component of the woodlands of the Cranborne Chase which until recent times were still managed traditionally. However, there is a lack of easily available information on the recent economic and social history of the industry (who practiced it, what the markets for produce were, why it flourished here in particular, and why it declined, etc). there is also a lack of information recorded on historic management practice and the condition of surviving hazel coppice. With increased understanding should come better material for presenting this part of the AONB's history, and a clearer rationale for any efforts to revive aspects of the industry. This information would help assist with the modern management of the woodland and provide an opportunity for increasing awareness and understanding of this important historic land use.

The Potential Mechanism It is likely that such understanding would best be developed through discussion with people of the area, those who may have practiced coppicing or those who remember aspects of the activity. The individuals who were involved in the traditional hazel underwood trade are now retired and there is an opportunity to record their memories and knowledge of managing the hazel coppice via an oral history project.

ACTION 8: Increase knowledge of woodland archaeology in the AONB

The Threat and the Opportunity - The woodlands are a feature of the AONB which conceal a wealth of information on past human activity. This includes archaeological sites such as settlements and field systems, as well as information on the historic management of the woodland, such as ancient pollards and wood banks, and evidence for historic woodland industries including saw pits, charcoal burning pits and lime kiln. The lack of information on the archaeological and historic features in the woodland means potentially nationally important and locally distinctive historic assets could be under threat from inappropriate management.

The Potential Mechanism – One approach to filling the gap in our knowledge of the archaeology concealed in the ancient and new woodlands of the AONB is undertaking a LiDAR (Light Detection And Ranging) survey. This could provide woodland owners and managers with the information they need to conserve and enhance these features. LiDAR is an optical remote sensing technology, normally used when flying over a study area. It is normally able to penetrate the canopy of woodland and accurately record as dense arrays of points the positions of earthwork and structural remains that would take considerable resources to plot with traditional ground survey. Quality of LiDAR results in tree cover is very dependent on how much finance was invested in the original air coverage, and it is likely that this action will require new surveys to be commissioned

ACTION 14: Increase understanding of extensive woodland not part of former Medieval hunting areas

The Threat and the Opportunity - Several large woodlands in the AONB, including Great Ridge, are notable for not forming the core of a Medieval hunting forest. This means that their development and history, which is likely to have been different from that of woodland in the hunting grounds, is not very well understood.

The Potential Mechanism - This action will target these areas and historical and archaeological investigations will provide the context to their key archaeological and historical features; investigate the likely reasons why they were not incorporated into a Medieval hunting landscape; and establish how their medieval and later histories may have differed from the hunting landscape woodlands.

ACTION 16: Make more widely available enhanced and targeted information on managing archaeology in woodland.

The Threat and the Opportunity - The Historic Environment Action Plan Steering Group felt that there was a lack of simple readily available information targeted at woodland owners to help them more effectively manage the heritage assets in their woodland. The use of the heavy machinery involved in woodland management and harvesting can be very damaging to archaeological remains and lack of awareness of issues amongst forestry operatives has so far been a major stumbling block.

The Potential Mechanism – Invest effort in improving working relationships between forestry operatives, managers and archaeologists. An information base could be created for forestry operatives to help them better conserve and enhance the archaeology of woodlands, including information on protected heritage, good practice,



information sources and heritage grant schemes for woodland. This could be promoted through a training day.

Version 1 December 2010. Written by Emma Rouse, HEAP Officer
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	A5	West Wiltshire Downs
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	A8	Chalk Escarpments
	A9	Vale of Wardour
	A10	Wooded Chalk Downland of the Cranborne Chase and Chetterwood
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	S2	Forces for Change Operating on the Historic Environment of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB at a Landscape Scale and their Past, Current and Future Impacts
	M1	Creating Historic Environment Action Plans for Protected Landscapes
	M2	Creating and Describing Historic Environment Areas
	M3	Creating and Describing Historic Environment Theme

Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Historic Environment Action Plans

www.historiclandscape.co.uk

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