



Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Background



Area



T3

Theme



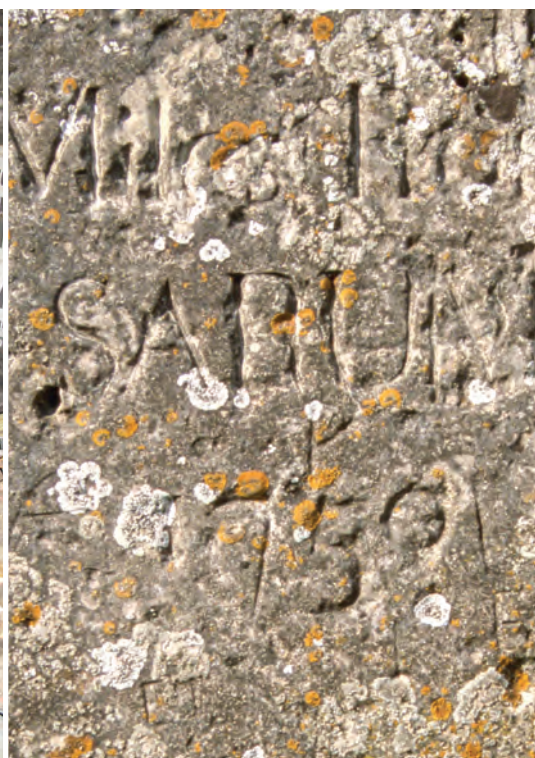
Supplementary



Method

Historic Environment Action Plans

Theme 3: Fields 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 3: Fields in the Landscape

“But ‘tis more remarkable still: how a great part of these downs come by a new method of husbandry, to be not only made arable, which they never were in former days but to bear excellent wheat”

Daniel Defoe 1725

The aims are to provide an overview of the key archaeological and historic characteristics of fields in the landscape and to focus on the evidence of physical surviving remains in today’s landscape.

From patchworks of ancient field systems to bold strip lynchets which form striking features on the sides of chalk escarpments in low winter light. The pattern of enclosure in the AONB is a key feature of its distinctive character.

The downland areas are characterised by very large fields which contrasts greatly with the smaller more irregular and sinuous fields in the Vale of Wardour and in the chalk valleys.



Parliamentary fields viewed from Whitesheet Hill

Summary of Key Characteristics

- Ancient field systems covering large areas, especially on former downland, dating from the Bronze Age onwards. These are often undated and over lie each other. Many are under the plough but there are surviving pristine examples, such as at Pertwood.
- Prehistoric fields systems surrounding Prehistoric settlements, for example, Iron Age earthworks on the West Wiltshire Downs.
- Striking Medieval lynchets prominent on chalk escarpments, for example, to the north of Mere.
- Less visible, but more extensive, fossilised Medieval strip fields in the vicinity of Martin and in the Gussage Valley.
- Small pre 1800 regular and irregular fields occur across the AONB some of these are locally distinctive such as the irregular curving fields in the vicinity of the Donheads. These are often hedged and associated with copses.
- Field boundaries with mature trees and hedgerows coinciding with ancient parish and county boundaries.
- Evidence for planned and Parliamentary enclosure of the 18th and 19th century. These fields are especially visible on the greensand terrace at the foot of the Fovant escarpment and in the south east of the AONB near Knowlton. There is a later and a less prominent impact of Parliamentary enclosure in the area bounded by Cranborne Chase, due to the late survival of hunting rights in this area.
- Relic water meadow systems in the bottom of the chalk valleys covering an extensive area and in variable condition.
- 20th century large open fields on downland areas; these are much larger in size and scale than on the Dorset Downs to the west. They are often associated with fences and less mature hedgerows and in some cases have been created through the removal of earlier boundaries.



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 2 Farms and Farming

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

 to 

History and Context

The Neolithic period sees the introduction of pottery, domesticated livestock and cereal cultivation. However there is no evidence for Neolithic field systems within the AONB. Fieldscapes first appear in the landscape of the AONB in the Bronze Age.

Cultivation appears to be carried out on a large scale in the Early Bronze Age after which notable volumes of colluvium began to accumulate in dry valleys. This becomes a more widespread change around 2000 BC with subsistence becoming increasingly based on cereal cultivation. Ploughing appears for the first time as an agent of landscape change and often proceeds the establishment of settlement and field boundaries.

The Middle Bronze Age 1500-1000 BC sees the creation of a domesticated landscape. Substantial round houses appear and the wider landscape was defined and bounded by field systems. In the Late Bronze Age 1000 – 700 BC, there is some evidence for the reorganisation of the landscape with “Wessex linear ditches” cutting across Middle Bronze Age fields.

In the Iron Age, 700 BC to AD 43, settlements are set within large scale field systems. Many of the well preserved field systems on the Chalkland are Iron Age in date.

The importance of this rural area increased in the Roman period, AD 43 to AD 400, especially during the later Roman period as the southwest region as a whole prospered. There are several Roman villas within the AONB which would have formed the centre of farming ‘estates’.

During the Early Medieval period (400 AD to 1066) the villa system of the Roman period was transformed into a manorial system. Lords, and particularly in the AONB ecclesiastical powers, controlled landholdings supported by a legally subject part of the peasant population under his jurisdiction. This system was further developed by the arrival of the Normans in the 11th century. Evidence for Medieval farming in the AONB is represented by limited ridge and furrow, strip lynchets on the chalk escarpments and the fossilisation of strips in modern fields for example. These fields existed within a mixed pattern of rough grazing, open downland, common land and woodland.

The present day fieldscape of the AONB has been studied, mapped and analysed by the AONB Historic Landscape Characterisation.

The broadest information recorded from the Historic Landscape Characterisation strongly reflects the deeply rural nature of the AONB, 80% of the area has been characterised as enclosed land - the vast majority of this being farmland.

The process of the creation of the modern fieldscapes in the AONB has its origins with the Medieval open strip fields, some of which remain fossilised in the landscape today, through the creation of enclosed piecemeal irregular fields. At the same time new irregular piecemeal fields were created from open land and the assarting of ancient forest became increasingly common.

The first formally arranged and larger scale attempts at enclosure occurred from the 16th century onwards and became politically formalised with the Parliamentary

Enclosure Acts of the 18th and 19th centuries. In the 20th century period the enclosure process accelerated with the creation of large prairie fields and the reorganisation of existing field systems. The impact of 20th century changes on the landscape can largely be linked to the large scale changes in agricultural practice and the intensification of farming. The further expansion of fields onto open chalk downland can be directly attribute to historical events, including the Second World War and the post war emphasis on food security. These processes all combine to create the fieldscapes with which we are so familiar today, and the evidence for all of these processes is still written in the landscape.



Fields in the Vale of Wardour

Key Secondary Sources

Known archaeological evidence for traces of Prehistoric, Roman and Medieval field systems in the AONB landscape are recorded in the county Historic Environment Records.

The pattern and history of fields in the present day landscape of the AONB is recorded and analysed in the AONB Historic Landscape Characterisation (Rouse 2008).

The historical processes and expansion of Parliamentary enclosure in the AONB have been studied in Wiltshire and Hampshire and can be accessed in *A Guide to Enclosure in Hampshire 1700-1900* by Chapman and Seeliger (1997) and *Abstracts of Wiltshire Inclosure Awards* by R.Sandell (1971).

Landscape Scale Characteristics and Components

1. Ancient Field Systems

Background

The earliest evidence for fields in the AONB landscape comes from the fossilised evidence for prehistoric field systems existing as cropmarks and earthworks.

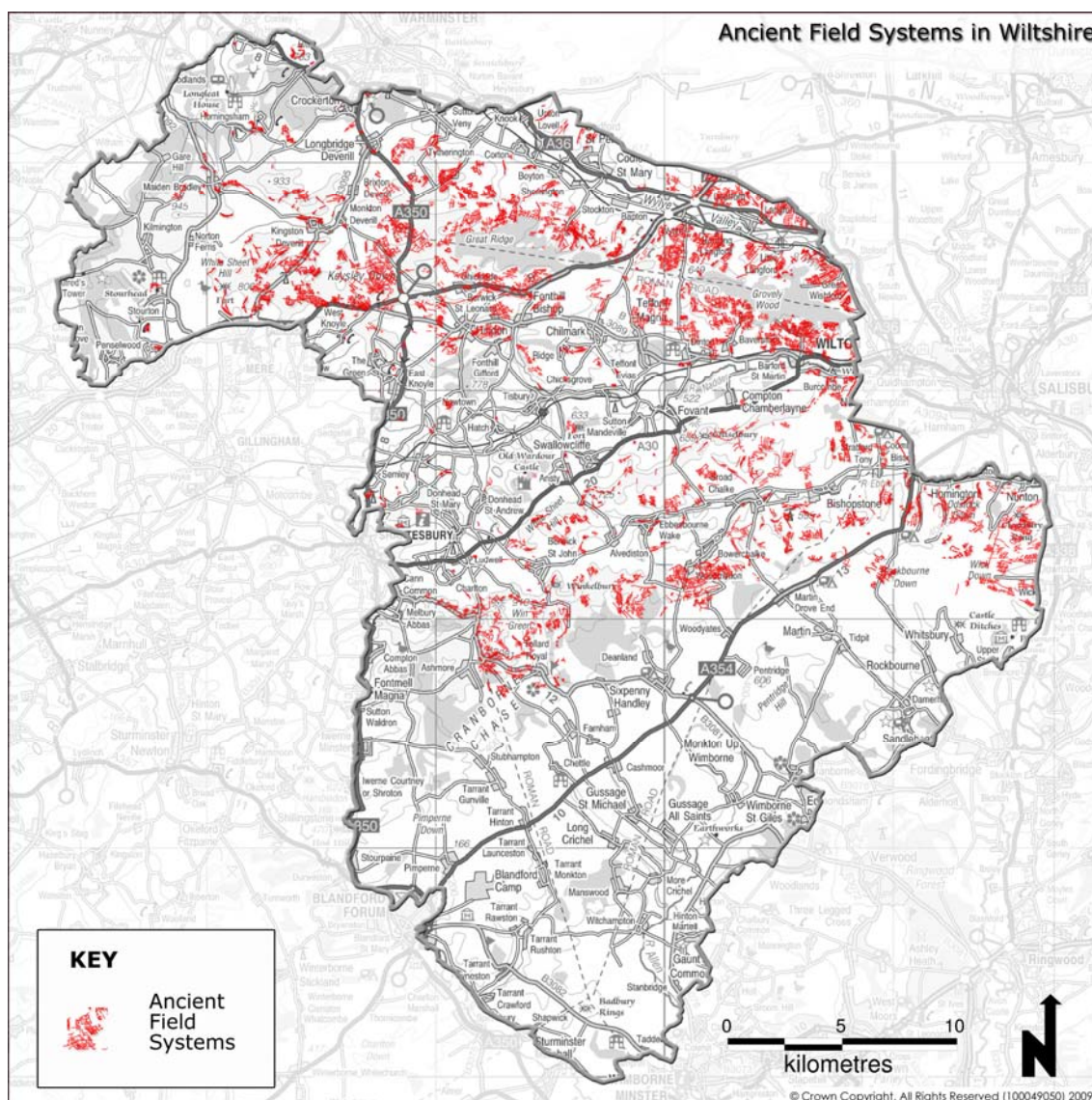


Figure One: Ancient Field Systems in Wiltshire

Landscape scale impact

Ancient field systems are known across the AONB. The Wiltshire Sites and Monuments Record has transcribed these traces from aerial photographs (see Figure 1), this shows the density and spread of ancient field systems across Wiltshire and is indicative of the wider AONB. The majority of these are only visible as cropmarks and are undated. In

in addition prehistoric, Roman and later field systems often overlap, complicating the picture.

Firmly dated ancient field systems in the AONB are often associated with other features such as enclosures. A good example of this pattern is the Iron Age settlement sites on the West Wiltshire Downs, including sites Hanging Langford Camp and Stockton Earthworks. These represent highly ordered landscapes with enclosed and unenclosed settlements surrounded by extensive field systems.

These field systems tend to occur as earthworks on chalk grassland on steep slopes and on the edge of escarpments. This includes prehistoric and Roman fields. The most striking example is the Medieval strip lynchets on the West Wiltshire Downs and on the side of chalk escarpments, for example north of Mere.



Strip Lynchets

2. Present Day Pattern of Fields

Fields are a dominant feature of the landscape. The patterns that their boundaries and outlines create in the landscape form a major landscape component dominating most views of the AONB.

The way individual fields and blocks of fields appear today has been created and shaped through successive stages of historic land use and agricultural activity. These individual examples of differing land use history build up to create the overall pattern of fields in the AONB. *See Figure Two.*

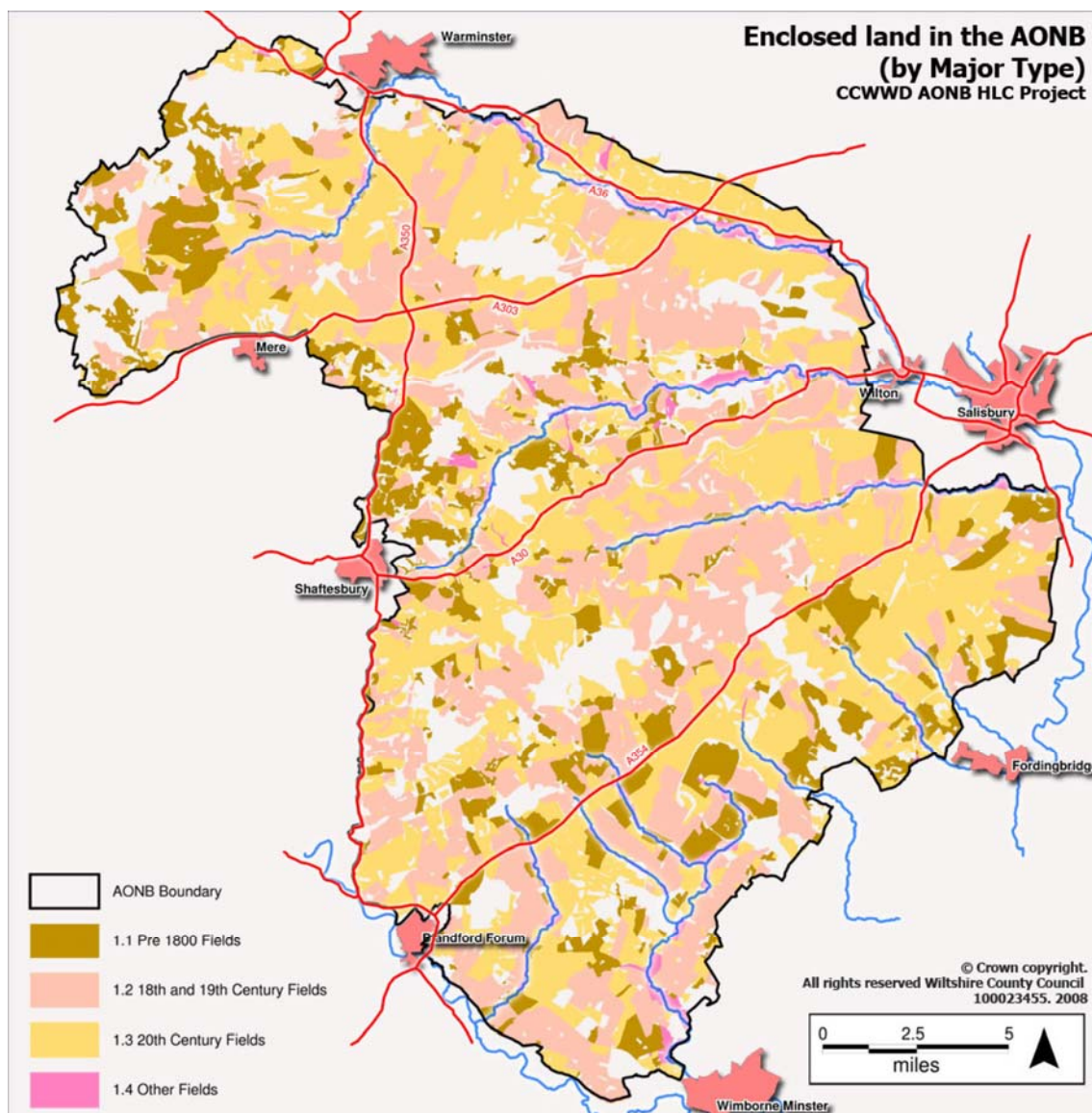


Figure Two: Enclosed land in the AONB by date

2.1 Pre 1800 Enclosure

Background

The earliest traces of pre 1800 fields exist only as a fossilised type. These traces have probably been created through the fossilisation of Medieval open strip fields which would have originally been characterised by features such as ridge and furrow, headlands, and furlongs. These open fields then appear to be enclosed through a piecemeal process of enclosure to form pre 1800 fields.

Many of the other regular, semi-irregular and irregular fields recorded as pre 1800 fields may have been created through informal or formal agreement. This occurred prior to the formalised Parliamentary Enclosure Acts of the late 18th and 19th centuries. The exact mechanisms through which this enclosure occurred will not be known without more detailed archaeological and documentary research.

Landscape scale impact

Many of the examples in the southern half of the AONB, especially around Martin, recorded as pre 1800 regular fields may be examples of the process of fossilising Medieval strip fields. The traces of this process have a restricted distribution, they occur in dense clusters: -

- in the area around Martin;
- in the area around Camp Down to the north of Blandford;
- west of Cranborne;
- and finally around Gussage St Michael and Gussage All Saints.

Similarly, the sinuous fields that tend to occur on the sloping sides of valleys may be created by the enclosure of formerly open Medieval strips, thus explaining the slight curve in some of their boundaries.

Earlier traces of pre 1800 enclosure has also been documented in two discrete concentrations of small curving irregular fields, found just to the south of Penselwood and in the parish of Semley in the western half of the Vale of Wardour. They are associated with thick hedges with mature trees, small areas of woodland between the fields and ancient and semi-natural woodland, which suggests that these fields may have originated as ancient assarts of Medieval or post Medieval date. Further research may indicate that they are of even greater antiquity.

2.2 18th and 19th Century Fields in the Landscape

Background

18th and 19th century fields mark a time of great upheaval and change in the landscape, when common rights were extinguished and large swathes of formerly open chalk downland enclosed. The evidence for this upheaval takes a range of forms and has been created by a range of processes which includes replanned fields, fields created by agreement, and parliamentary enclosure.

This type is dominated by fields which are regular in size and shape with straight boundaries, which are often hedged. These boundaries can follow the line of newly created straight linear boundaries. These boundaries have been imposed across the landscape regardless of topography and can extend for several kilometers. However the morphology of these fields can also vary with response to local topography, pre-existing route ways, or boundaries.

Landscape Scale Impact

Late 18th and 19th century fields are widely distributed throughout the AONB with slightly higher concentration occurring in the area around the Ebble Valley and on the West Wiltshire Downs.

Over 30% of these fields have been created through the process of Parliamentary Enclosure. Land in the AONB has been identified as the type “parliamentary enclosure” where the pattern of fields indicated on the enclosure map can still be seen in today’s landscape either in its original form or as a fossilised type. This process could transform landscapes at a stroke by imposing a new angular geometry where previously there had been winding lanes and sinuous fields. The scale of the impact, however, varies quite considerably between areas.



Parliamentary Enclosure in the AONB

The majority of fields, however, could not be linked to a Parliamentary Act suggesting that they were created through more informal methods for which there is no easily traceable documentary evidence. These fields share the same impact and the same regular, evenly spaced morphology that is seen with Parliamentary fields. In a few cases in the AONB the enclosure of much larger blocks of land can be identified which, unlike the types just discussed, can be defined as enclosure through consensus and exchange, and appears to be the result of a single landowner or group of neighbours enclosing large areas of formerly open downland. This type is primarily found on the West Wiltshire Downs.

There is also fossilised evidence in the landscape on the West Wiltshire Downs and in the Ebble Valley of an initial stage to the creation of these new fields when their boundaries were not formalised and they were left as open fields for some time, before being formally enclosed. Alternatively some fields created in the 19th century involved the reorganisation of earlier pre 1800 enclosed fields, as is seen in four locations in the Nadder Valley.

A third of the land identified as 18th and 19th century enclosure preserves evidence for previous land uses. The vast majority of these are earlier enclosure patterns which have been fossilised within the new enclosure pattern.

2.3 20th Century Fields

Background

20th century fields are created through a number of mechanisms.

Firstly, they have arisen through the creation of new fields. Secondly, they have been created through modifying existing field layouts. Thirdly, they have been created through amalgamation, where existing field boundaries are removed to create new larger fields.

In general terms these processes have resulted in the addition of over 2000 field boundaries since the 1880's as opposed to the approximate 350 which have been removed.

The most common process has been the creation of new fields which comprise 65% of this type. Modified fields account for 20% of the type which are probably linked to changes in agricultural practice and the intensification of farming. Far less common is the amalgamation of existing fields. In general terms there has been a trend over the last 100 years for an increase in the number of fields present in the AONB.



20th Century Fields in the AONB

Landscape Scale Impact

The impact of 20th century changes on the landscape can largely be linked to the large scale changes in agricultural practice and the intensification of farming. In the present day 20th century fields account for 34% of the AONB, they are widely distributed but are largely absent from the far north-western edge. These fields have come about through the creation of new fields, through modifying existing field layouts, and finally through amalgamation, where existing field boundaries are removed to create new

larger fields. In general terms there has been a trend over the last 100 years for an increase in the number of fields present in the AONB.

In general these fields show a whole range of morphologies and sizes. This reflects the different processes which have led to their creation and the number of fields under discussion (nearly 4000).

Over 90% of 20th century fields preserve evidence for previous land uses. This wealth of history is demonstrated from the 18 different groups of place names which have been recorded. In general these fields preserve evidence of previous phases of enclosed land or evidence that the land was previously unenclosed.

Historic Environment Actions



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

ACTION 15: Increase understanding of Medieval landscape elements of the AONB by academics, teachers and public.

The Threat and the Opportunity - There is perceived to be a lack of appreciation of the Medieval components of the AONB's landscape: settlements, buildings, castles, fields, pastures, woodlands, roads, mills, hunting chase, parks, etc, all of which contribute greatly to the fabric and character of the AONB as it survives today.

The Potential Mechanism - The lack of appreciation of the Medieval components of the AONB landscape could be combated by a seminar and the creation of a research framework that encourages and sets out a range of achievable goals for further research in the area.

ACTION 17: Improve management of historic field boundaries and ensure they are retained

The Threat - The historic fieldscapes of the AONB are key characteristics of the AONB landscape which are not at present subjected to integrated and holistic management. There has consequently been loss and gradual removal of the historic patterns of pre 1800 boundaries, including the distinctive pattern of small curving irregular fields around the Donheads. Elsewhere older field boundaries have not been maintained and are either degrading or, if originally hedgerows are becoming overgrown.

The Potential Mechanism - This action would aim to halt the decline in the condition of particular field boundaries and the legibility of historic field patterns by providing training for agri-environment and other land management advisors. There is already much advice available on historic field boundary conservation (including implementation of the 1997 Hedgerow Regulations) and management, often generated via the HECAS officers mentioned under Action 5, but most of this is specific to the region's where it was generated. However, this material can be reviewed and tailored to suit the needs of the AONB once a clearer understanding has been gained of the character and needs of the field boundaries within the Area.



This material should then form the basis of training sessions for farmers and land managers working within the AONB. Involvement in such an initiative might be attractive to partners such as FWAG, the National Trust, Natural England and the local Wildlife Trusts.

Version 1 December 2010. Written by Emma Rouse, HEAP Officer
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	B5	Local Distinctiveness
	B6	People in the Landscape
	B7	Major Historical Events, Trends and Fashions
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	A7	Fovant Terrace and the Area Between Chalbury and Woodlands
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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
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	M3	Creating and Describing Historic Environment Theme

Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Historic Environment Action Plans

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