

East Dorset District Council Areas of Great Landscape Value

Supplementary Planning Guidance No. 19 (June 1997)

Areas of Great Landscape Value

Introduction

A substantial part of the East Dorset Local Plan Area is included within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This area forms part of the chalklands belt that extends across Southern England and has clearly identifiable characteristics synonymous with this landscape type. It is a statutory designation, under Section 87 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1947.

There are other areas within the District having a landscape quality of no less value than the AONB that justify special recognition. These areas lie on the eastern and southern fringes of the AONB and in the Local Plan are identified as being of Great Landscape Value. The AGLV is essentially an informal designation.

The Report is intended to complement the Cranborne Chase Landscape Assessment and assist towards the formulation of planning policies to maintain the character and distinctiveness of these rural areas and ensure they are not adversely affected by new development.

Four AGLV's have been identified, varying considerably in size and character. The Report identifies and describes the distinctive features of each area, drawing out their special characteristics and sense of place.

Their diverse character stems from many factors, but the underlying geology represents perhaps the single most important influence. Those areas having a complex geological structure contain a variety of different landscapes, whilst simple formations lead to a more homogeneous landform and vegetation.

The more complex AGLV's have been sub-divided to aid their descriptive analysis. Sometimes, the landscape types are very distinct, for example, the river valleys. In other areas, the changes within the landscape are more gradual and the interface between the different types are more blurred. Such boundaries are entirely notional.

The boundaries surrounding each AGLV, however, are drawn more emphatically to distinguish between landscape which we generally perceive as being of high scenic value and other countryside.

Whilst the descriptions of the areas themselves are mostly objective, the definition of their boundaries inevitably involves value judgements which may be the subject of debate. A justification for the alignment of the boundaries of each AGLV is included in the assessment. Areas considered unsuitable for inclusion within the AGLV's include landscape adversely affected by development, including the cumulative effect of a number of small-scale developments, extensive areas of monoculture forestry and open landscape having little intrinsic interest in terms of landform and vegetation.

There are instances, however, where pleasant, but relatively ordinary landscape is included, on account of its unspoilt character and it being strongly influenced by

intrinsically more attractive landscape nearby. There are other instances where an intrinsically attractive landscape may be included despite being adversely affected by distant views of poor or despoiled landscape.

Survey work undertaken in late summer 1995.

1. WOODLANDS

Area of Great Landscape Value

Introduction

This area of some 50 square kilometres lies between the Cranborne Chase AONB to the west and the settlements of Alderholt, Verwood, Three Legged Cross and West Moors to the east. The AGLV forms a narrow, irregularly-shaped belt from the District boundary in the north, to Holt Heath in the south.

Geographically, it is a transitional area, having soils mostly derived from the underlying Clays, between the Chalk of the Cranborne Chase and the acidic lowland sands of the Ringwood Forest.

One of its most distinctive qualities is the variety of scenic landscapes that occur within such a small area. The AGLV is one of contrast, between the enclosure afforded by its hills and substantial areas of woodland cover, and the exposure of its open heathland and the often spectacular long-distance views from its hilltops.

Those boundaries defined by the Cranborne Chase and by the District boundary are fixed and irrefutable. Elsewhere, value judgements are required to distinguish defensible boundaries. In certain places the difference in scenic quality is clearly identifiable; in other areas, the differences are more marginal.

Adjacent to Cranborne Common in the north and Holt Heath in the south are large tracts of coniferous plantations. Although these form an attractive backdrop to the landscape, intrinsically they are not of sufficiently high landscape value to be included within the AGLV. The area also excludes Horton Common, once one of the most extensive areas of heathland in the District but now, following fires, agricultural improvement and insensitive recreational use, is now of little landscape value.

To the south-west of the area, modern developments in villages and hamlets such as Gaunts Common, Holt and Holt Wood, and individual properties beyond the village envelopes, have made an impact on the quality of the landscape and for this reason are omitted from the Area of Great Landscape Value.

Historical note

Much of the area formed part of the medieval Cranborne Chase, where the landscape was managed exclusively for game, firstly deer and then rabbits. Holt Heath and Holt Forest have for centuries formed part of the manorial lands of Kingston Lacy, even before Domesday. The woodlands were part of the Royal Forest, which in 1323 extended to 84,000 acres. From the early medieval period the

area was protected by Forest Law (as opposed to Chase Law on Cranborne Chase), but the restrictions were equally tight. As a result, there was very little agriculture and few settlements, other than keepers' farmsteads, such as Holt itself. The main settlements lay outside the Bounds, in valleys of the small streams that cross the area, at Horton (Hortune 1033), Petersham (Pitrichesham 1086) and Mannington.

To the north, much of the land was controlled by the monasteries, at Cranborne and near Alderholt until their dissolution by Henry VIII.

Medieval Deer Parks were created at Woodlands Park, Holt (to the north of the existing heath), to the south-east of Gaunts Common and Alderholt Park. The latter, extending to 154 acres, was 'disparked' by Henry VIII and the deer within destroyed.

The Chase also contained 'walks', eight in all, each of which comprised groups of individually named copses and woods. Most were located within the Inner Bounds in the vicinity of Rushmore but two, at Chetterwood and Alderholt, were more detached. Of all the walks, that at Alderholt was the largest, covering extensive areas of heathland with little human occupation.

Humphrey Sturt was a ranger to the Chase and was responsible for building the celebrated tower at Horton in the 1740's. The purpose of the tower is uncertain, but may have been used as an observatory for deer. The building forms a distinctive landmark and can be seen from many parts of the AGLV.

In the eighteenth century the Chase developed a reputation for lawlessness as smuggling intensified, sourced from Christchurch and Poole Harbours. One of the main routes north passed close to Moor Criche. The extensive woodland cover in this area provided ideal hiding places and the remote farms were used to replenish horses and store merchandise.

The narrow belt of clay and bountiful supplies of firewood provided Alderholt and Verwood with the raw materials for a thriving pottery industry. The history of pottery in the area dates from the C14th. Beginning on the edge of the heath at Alderholt, pottery continued as an important local industry for over 400 years and involved a high proportion of the working population, especially during the 17th and 18th centuries. At this time, kilns at Daggons, East Worth, Edmondsham, Horton, Crendell and Verwood were established. During the C19th, however, an influx of goods from the Staffordshire Potteries brought about a slow and progressive decline. Some pottery is still practised today, for example, at Hare Lane Pottery on Roke Hill, where traditional materials and skills are deployed.

Progressive clearance of the once-extensive Holt Wood and the sporadic growth of modern development at Gaunts Common, Holt and Holt Wood have impacted on the quality of the landscape in this area. Whilst there are localised parts of high landscape value, especially where tree-cover is still considerable, the overall quality falls below that of the AGLV as a whole. Nevertheless, it is still important that the quality of the area should be recognised and that the woods, copses and hedgerows be maintained in order to preserve this attractive living environment.

Approach

The AGLV comprises a rich variety of landscape, reflecting the underlying geology formations. In order to describe the AGLV, each landscape type is individually considered.

Sub-Areas 1 and 1A refer to areas on the western side which share many of the characteristics of the Chalk landscape of the Chase. To the east of this, Sub-Area 2 relates to farmland on the London Clay. Sub-Area 3 coincides with Holt Heath. Sub-Area 4 represents the largest area, of woods and copses, but with some variation in scene as identified in 4A and 4B. Sub-Area 5 relates to the other major area of Bagshot Sands to the north of Verwood. However, throughout the AGLV there are some features that are common to all:

Common characteristics of area:

- absence of major roads
- irregular road pattern, having an east-west emphasis with short north-south links. Narrow, winding lanes throughout the area, with high, dense hedgerows.
- extensive network of public footpaths and woodland and other tracks
- farmhouses and other modest rural dwellings, some timber-framed, especially in the south; few major historic buildings or churches
- general absence of archaeological remains, except for tumuli on hilltops
- oak tree species predominate; many areas densely wooded; heavy concentration of Ancient Woodlands
- coniferous woods
- quiet, peaceful countryside largely unaffected by modern development.

Sub-Area 1. (Horton)

A transitional area both in terms of its geology and landscape character. To the north and north-west of Horton, the area comprises Chalk; a ridge of Reading Beds occurs through the middle of the area, with London Clay to the east and south-east.

The highest land occurs as an undulating ridge to the west, forming the eastern edge of the Allen valley. The highest point is Chalbury Hill at 100m above sea level, but more typically the ridge ranges round the 69m contour. The landform to the north and south of Horton Road is incised by watercourses that flow into the Mannington Brook.

The area shares similar landscape characteristics to Cranborne Chase: long views, especially to the east and west, with wooded horizons. The countryside is open and gently rolling, with a predominance of arable agricultural land. Well-maintained hedges surround large, regular-shaped fields. Continuous clipped hedges having few hedgerow trees border the roads. A number of buildings, such as Woodlands

Manor Farm, form local landmarks but the most notable landmark building is Horton Tower, which can be seen from Stephen's Castle in the north-east, Peat's Hill in the east, Cannon Hill in the south, and Gussage Elms and Moor Crichel in the north-west. This dramatically sited building, designed by Thomas Archer for Humphrey Sturt in 1742, stands on a treeless hill overlooking the village of Horton. The 100' high hexagonal tower, with three round turrets at every other corner, forms the most distinctive landmark in the area. From any point on the compass, the building forms a surprising feature, yet appears entirely in harmony with its setting.

Sited in a shallow valley below the tower, is the village of Horton, the most important settlement in the AGLV. The village has ancient origins, being the site of a tenth-century monastery. Humphrey Sturt made his mark on the village too, remodelling the twelfth-century church, altering the fifteenth-century manor house and forming two ornamental lakes. Alas, the lakes were drained after Sturt inherited the Crichel Estate nearby.

Within the village, the Church of St Wolfrida and the remaining (service) wing of the Manor House form the two outstanding buildings. Their impact on the landscape is limited, however, by the landform, by tree-cover that surrounds both buildings and by the barns of Manor Farm which create a clear edge to this compact village.

Set on a hilltop on the north side of Horton stands the hamlet of Haythorn. It comprises a cluster of C18th. cottages around Haythorn Common and some recent development. Unlike Horton village, which is surrounded by open arable land, Haythorn is set amongst oak woodland, which hides the settlement from the surrounding landscape.

Sub-area 1A (Holwell)

The landscape character and quality of this area is similar to the Cranborne Chase AONB and is greatly influenced by it, both in terms of the surrounding woods and distant views.

The area coincides with a wedge of Chalk that extends in a south-easterly direction from the AONB boundary, east and north-east of Cranborne, to Lower Holwell. Erosion of the overlying Reading Beds has exposed the Upper Chalk, which is now bisected by a narrow band of alluvium following the course of the river.

The landform rises from 48m in the valley at Holwell to 74m near Roke Hill. From the valley floor, the Cranborne-Alderholt road makes a long and steep ascent, opening up long-distance views to the west across the Chase landscape.

The valley is enclosed by hills, most of which are wooded, the effect of which is to enclose the landscape further. The Douglas Fir plantation at Rushmore Farm on Roke Hill forms a distinctive landscape feature. At Bratch Copse, both oak and ash are prevalent, with hazel understorey. Within the wood and screened from view are plantations of Douglas Fir.

The fields are large and of regular shape. Trees are confined to field boundaries. Arable land is widespread with wheat much in evidence, thus giving a characteristic downland appearance to the landscape.

In the valley floor, water-meadows are much in evidence, a further characteristic of chalk scenery. At Holwell there are watercress beds, though now much reduced in size and commercial importance.

Sub-Area 2 (Woodlands - Mannington)

An introspective landscape tract of low-lying, gently undulating land, between 30m and 44m above sea level. Most of the area comprises London Clay, but with Bagshot sands on the southern edge where the land begins to rise towards Holt Heath. The evidence of bracken within the hedgerows are an indication of the acidity of the soils. The land drains to the south-east to Mannington Brook and Uddens Water.

The landuse is characterised by a mosaic of regular, medium-sized fields for stock grazing and silage. Fields are bounded by continuous, thick hawthorn hedgerows and hedgerow oaks. There are a number of individual oaks in the larger fields. The landscape is enclosed by Holt and Ferndown Forests to the west and Horton Wood and Harts Copse to the north. The oak woods have an understorey of hazel and holly, which provide a dense, but soft, edge between wood and pasture. The profile of the coniferous woods within Ferndown Forest, on the other hand, is more angular and spikey in comparison.

The highest point in the area, Peats Hill, near Monmouth's Ash, represents a significant landmark to the north-east.

The central part of the landscape tract coincides with the medieval Deer Park. At the northern edge of this stands Holt Lodge Farm. The farmhouse, dating from the C17th., is partly of timber-frame construction, now encased in brick. Its west chimney stack and leaded windows represent the main external clues to its age. To the west and south of the farm are three fields of semi-improved grassland having a rich ground flora.

Crooked Withies and Paradise House, on the southern edge of the Deer Park, date from the C17 and C18 respectively. The latter stands prominently at the end of a long unmetalled lane from Lower Row.

Extending in an east/west direction close to the southern edge of the area, is a high voltage power line. The pylons are sited on level ground with the higher landform of Holt Heath forming a backdrop. The effect of this is to lessen its visual impact on the surrounding landscape.

Coincidentally, Harts Bridge on the Horton Road forms a narrow link between the landscape tract described above and a similar landscape extending northwards as far as Woodlands village and centred on Woodlands Manor Farm.

Ground levels range from 38m near Woodlands Manor Farm, to 53m at Haythorne in the west. Two linear fishing lakes have in recent years been formed in the watercourse to the west of the farm, but these are largely obscured from the wider landscape. A line of copses define the watercourse that flows east to Mannington Brook.

The medium-sized fields, enclosed by hedges, are used predominantly for hay and for stock grazing, whilst other areas on this livestock and sporting farm are managed for game.

This landscape is strongly influenced by Woodlands Park that flanks the area to the east. An Ancient Replanted Woodland, this area too was a Medieval Deer Park. The woods have been the subject of considerable recent replantings and comprise several large conifer plantations. Around the perimeter, a belt of deciduous trees contrast in colour and form to the plantations and provide a soft edge to the woods. In amenity terms these are of crucial importance to the landscape.

Sub-Area 3. (Holt Heath)

In common with other heathland areas, Holt Heath lies on the sandy acidic soils of the Bagshot Beds. The north and western sides are capped with deposits of Plateau Gravel, which coincide with the highest parts of the heath. The highest point occurs at Crooked Withies, near the northern edge at 57 metres above sea level and near Higher Row (55 m).

Most of the heath is elevated above the surrounding landscape. Its open, largely tree-less character affords panoramic, long-distance views: those to the Isle of Wight and the coast being of particular note.

The landform slopes down fairly gently towards the east and south, but on the north and west sides the slopes are significantly steeper.

The southern edge is defined by White Sheet Plantation. These are comparatively recent coniferous plantations which today form an attractive contrast against the open heathland. The eastern edge of the AGLV is defined by Newmans Lane, which once coincided with the eastern bounds of the medieval Royal Forest. Historical placenames include Crooked Withies (Crooked Wythes 1598), and Mannington (Manitone 1086).

Holt Heath has a wild character, that belies its artificial management. Originally a wooded area, the heath was cleared during the Neolithic period and Bronze Age for stock grazing. The heathland once formed a vast tract extending almost continuously eastwards to the River Avon. As a National Nature Reserve administered by the National Trust, the heathland habitat is still maintained by the regular removal of regenerating pine. Occasional trees have been allowed to remain, which add considerably to the heath's visual qualities. The area comprises mostly dry heath, but there are also substantial areas of wet heath, especially in the east where willow and birch are characteristic.

The Holt -Three Legged Cross road passes through the heath, offering good views of the heathland to the south, as well as long-distance views to the Needles. Near Higher Row, the prospect shifts to the north, with Horton Tower standing prominent.

Holt Heath is also managed for passive recreation, with a well established network of informal paths and tracks. A small informal car-park, concealed by coniferous woodland, has been established at Whitesheet Hill.

Sub-Area 4. (Holt, Woodlands, Edmondsham, Alderholt)

This forms the most extensive landscape type within the AGLV and is consequently the most representative. Its geology comprises largely of London Clay, but with a narrow wedge of Bagshot Beds that extends north from Peat's Hill, near Monmouth's Ash to Sutton Hill. At Peat's Hill and Woodlands Common respectively are further outcrops of Plateau Gravel.

The area has an undulating landform, having been incised by the River Crane and its small tributaries. The area to the east and north-east of Edmondsham is especially hilly. The ground rises from 38m in Woodlands Park to 82m at Sutton Copse, near Sutton Holms and 91m near Great Rhymes Copse, north-east of Edmondsham. A ridge of high land extends north-westwards from Cripplestyle (King Barrow 98m) to Roke Hill (75m), Jordon Hill (99m) and beyond.

The River Crane rises as springs near Pentridge and flows in a narrow alluvial valley southwards to Romford before turning east around the southern edge of Verwood. North of Romford, the valley has an intimate character with steep sides and fringed by woods and copses, mostly of oak and ash with hazel understorey. Close to the river are watermeadows, alder beds and small plantations of poplar. The river skirts Great Rhymes Wood, an Ancient Semi-Natural oak Woodland, on the north-eastern edge of which is a steep escarpment. At several points along the river are remnants of sluices, indicating more intensive use in earlier times. Edmondsham Brook flows to the south of the village in a deep valley, through copses and woods before joining the Crane near Westworth Farm. Within the woods are two small linear lakes.

At Romford is the only water mill remaining on the Crane. This nineteenth-century brick and slate building contains much of the original machinery. Much older is Romford Mill Cottage, sited nearby, having seventeenth-century origins with evidence of timber-framing.

South of Romford, the river coincides with the western edge of Verwood. Here the valley profile is wider and more open in character. The landscape tract is defined by woods on part of Wedge Hill and by continuous lines of oaks alongside the river and disused railway line respectively. The Crane Valley Golf Course is sited on the western slope of the valley and although small groups of trees have been retained, there is a general deficiency in cover. The situation is not improved by the view due south to Redman's Hill (outside the AGLV), where recent heathland removal has

created an ugly gash on the landscape. Electricity pylons on the summit of the hill make the eyesore appear worse.

Throughout the area oak is predominant. They form woods, copses, hedgerow and roadside trees and individual specimens in abundance. There are many fine individual trees of immense size and stature and in all probability, great antiquity. The roadside trees enclose the narrow lanes still further and often create a tunnel effect. In certain areas, for example, near Crendall, ash is also common. Throughout the area are hazel hedgerows and woodland understorey, where it was traditionally coppiced. Coppicing and wattle-making is still locally practised, but only on a very limited scale. There are small plantations of poplar sited on the water-courses, for example, at Cheater's Gate. These woods and copses are of immense wildlife and amenity value.

Conifer woods contrast in form, colour and texture from the oak woods. The principal areas comprise Woodlands Park and Birches Copse to the south and High Wood further north, but copses and blocks of corsican and scots pine and douglas fir occur both within many other woods or as separate landscape features.

There are few settlements in the area, Woodlands being the largest village. Once confined to the area to the west, the village now extends as a mini linear sprawl eastwards to incorporate Whitmore. The substantial woodlands of Boys Wood to the north and Woodlands Park to the south enclose the settlement. Well-treed hedgerows reinforce its wooded character and belie the extent of development.

Hamlets such as Lower Daggon, Crendell and Sutton Holms are tiny self-contained settlements that nestle amongst the hills and woods. Brick and slate are common, with some earlier cob and thatched cottages. There are fewer timber-framed buildings than in more southern areas, reflecting its once-barren environment and close association with the Chase. Home Farm and Manor Farm House, next door in Alderholt Park, however, contain seventeenth-century timber-framing, as does the Old Vicarage in Woodlands.

Throughout the area are narrow, twisting lanes with high hedgerows, that connect the main settlements of Cranborne, Verwood and Alderholt and provide access to the many farms and farmsteads. Bracken is commonly found in the hedgerows indicating the acidic soils.

Some arable farming takes place in the area around Westworth Farm, where the land slopes gently down to the River Crane. Field sizes are relatively large and hedges are less significant, especially on the western side of the river. The other main farming area tends to be in the Alderholt Park area, where there is an emphasis on pasture. Elsewhere in the area, small enclosed fields of grassland and pasture are common, interspersed with the occasional well-cultivated field of wheat or barley.

A series of meadows near Sutton Holms are rare surviving grassland areas traditionally managed for hay and now containing rich plant communities. These small areas are designated as SSSIs.

Land which falls close to the formations of Bagshot Sands are characteristically poorer in agricultural quality with a higher proportion of rough pasture. Horse culture is a typical urban fringe activity, with a concentration at Woodlands and around the Heavy Horse Centre at Brambles Farm, north of Verwood.

The landscape in much of the area is enclosed by low hills and woodland. Most of the viewpoints in the AGLV occur on the edges, especially on the outcrops of Bagshot Beds described elsewhere. There are, however, some extensive long-distance views. At Hare Lane Farm near the Cranborne-Alderholt road, are extensive long-distance views to the south, across Horton Heath and Ferndown Forest.

At Sutton Hill (61m) there are similar long-distance views to the south and south-east, across the lower land of Ringwood Forest. The effects of perspective give the illusion of a densely-wooded landscape as scattered copses and hedgerow trees visually merge together.

At Monmouth's Ash there are further extensive views. The general landform rises gently before ascending steeply to form a knoll. At 72m, David's Cross is the highest point in this area, affording long distance panoramic views of the surrounding countryside.

The sandy soils of the Bagshot Beds supports a vegetation of Scots pine, birch, gorse and bracken. This area forms part of the western edge of Horton Heath, which was until a major fire in 1976 and subsequent ploughing in 1981, one of the largest areas of heathland in Dorset. Part of the area remains as heathland and is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Other areas, especially Wedge Hill Farm, has been despoiled by motorcycle scrambling, dumping and sand and gravel extraction and are consequently excluded from the AGLV.

Just below the knoll at David's Cross are small rough paddocks, surrounded by oak hedgerows. A long, well-treed lane from Horton Road, known as Slough Lane, provides access to a number of dwellings to the north-west of Peat's Hill. Some of these were originally squatters' cottages but are now much extended. They have continued to sporn ancillary buildings to form ranch-type farmsteads, a number of which intrude visually on the AGLV.

Sub-Area 4A (North of Alderholt).

Topographically, the area around Cripplestyle forms a watershed between the Crane catchment area and Ashford Water to the north-east. A series of springs in the vicinity of the hamlet feed into a small brook that meanders through the dense woodland floor of High Wood. It emerges amongst the folds of grassy hillsides before entering Ashford Water near Alderholt Mill. This is an eighteenth-century two-storey brick and slate building and attached mill-house in a quiet, sylvan setting. Much of the mill machinery remains.

A narrow band of London Clay separates the Reading Beds in the north from the Bagshot Sands to the south. Coinciding with the London Clay is a line of woods,

namely Hither Daggons Wood, Further Daggons Wood, Birch Wood and High Wood, that emphasises the division. The first two of these are Ancient Replanted Woodland whilst High Wood is Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland. Typically, such woods contain small areas of ancient oaks and more recent plantations of douglas fir, interspersed with sweet chestnut, ash, beech, birch and scots pine and with hazel understorey. Parts of the woodlands are therefore open in character, with grass or bracken forming the woodland floor and parts are densely vegetated. Access is from a network of tracks, some coinciding with public rights of way. The woods are managed predominantly as commercial forestry.

Aldersholt Park lies on the northern edge of the woods. The landscape here has a north-eastern orientation, relating to the water courses, and is more open in character. It is also more agricultural, with a scattering of small farms. The verdant fields tend to be small, enclosed by hedges and hedgerow oaks.

To the north-west of the Park, standing on the highest ground in the area, is Higher Bullhill Farm, from which point are extensive views to the north, south and east.

Sub-Area 4B. (Ferndown Forest)

This sub-area forms a southern appendix of area 4, being separated from the main area by open agricultural land in the vicinity of Holt Lodge Farm and Woodlands Manor Farm. Its underlying geology and superficial character are similar. However, the southern part of the area tends to be more populated or indirectly influenced by nearby settlements.

This is an area of mostly low-lying land, part of a belt of London Clay, that flanks the western edge of Holt Heath and extending northwards to include Holt and Ferndown Forests. The transition between the London Clay and Bagshot Beds of the heath is marked by a steep scarp which is most evident at Row Hill on the Holt - Three Legged Cross road.

Across the area, from south to north, the landform rises gently, from a low of 27 metres near Whitemoor Farm to 58 metres near Holt Wood. Falling within the Mannington Brook catchment area, one brook flows through Queens Copse; another, to the south, flows through farmland. The low-lying land in the vicinity of Holt Vale farm is subject to flooding, sometimes causing the ford at Bowering's Water to be unpassable.

The woods of the Ferndown Forest are a mixture of coniferous species and oak. Holt Forest is mostly of oak. Although much diminished in size, the influence of Holt Forest is still very much in evidence in the area on account of the widespread occurrence of oak, in small woods and copses, and enclosing small irregular-shaped fields to the south of the Forest. Many of the woods contain birch and an understorey of hazel and holly, together with a rich herb layer. Several, such as Margreed Copse near Row Hill, are Sites of Nature Conservation Interest.

This is a small-scale, intimate area characterised by small mixed farms and farmsteads.

Lower Row consists of small isolated groups of thatched cottages on low ground at the edge of the Heath. One group overlooks a wet meadow forming part of the Holt Heath National Nature Reserve. The secluded landscape is enclosed on its western side by Holt Wood. The vernacular buildings harmonise with the surrounding countryside and contribute to its visual quality.

Sub-area 5 (Alderholt)

This area is strongly influenced by the underlying Bagshot Beds. The acid, sandy soils support rough grassland, heather, birch and gorse and there are also extensive conifer plantations, especially at Telegraph Hill, where there is an outcrop of Plateau Gravel. The forests form attractive edges to the landscape, but tend to be of limited visual interest within. Around the edges, particularly to the north and west, there is much evidence of oak.

Marshy land in the vicinity of Cow Bridge, to the north of Telegraph Plantation, drains into Sleep Brook, a distant tributary of the Avon. From the brook, the land rises both northwards and to the south, from a low point of 45m to 96m on Telegraph Hill and 99m at King Barrow, near Cripplestyle.

The brook defines the eastern edge of the AGLV. Alderholt Common to the east has been reclaimed and is now used for agriculture. This is a generally featureless landscape of relatively low scenic quality, being generally flat and containing few trees.

Cranborne Common, on the other hand, remains as heathland and is managed as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Immediately to the north, near Cripplestyle, another SSSI has been designated, at King Barrow and its surrounding area.

The open, saucer-shaped common is enclosed on its south side by extensive conifer plantations, representing the northern limits of the Ringwood Forest. These commercial woods are almost entirely of corsican pine, the result of which is a uniform forest texture. At Telegraph Hill, however, the steep and elevated landform is such as to create a distinctive ridge profile, especially when viewed from Alderholt.

The views from Telegraph Hill, however, are restricted by the dense tree-cover. The area is intrinsically attractive, because of its topography and the quality of the surrounding landscape which it overlooks. By varying tree species and densities of planting, creating spaces and glades and opening up vistas, the woods could have considerable amenity and recreation potential.

Towards the western side of the area the open character of the heath is broken up by rough grassland and natural regeneration of pine. The disused railway line crosses the brook at Cow Bridge before continuing north-east to Charing Cross (Alderholt); throughout its length woodland regeneration has occurred, mostly of pine.

The view further west, from Telegraph Hill towards Edmondsham, is characterised by woods and copses, which owing to the visual effects of perspective, tend to merge to create a continuous and densely wooded landscape.

To the north of Telegraph Hill the landscape tract is enclosed on the north side by a range of hills, including King Barrow near Cripplestyle. This tumulus site is the highest point in the AGLV and stands as a heathy knoll flanked by pine-clad hillocks on each side. The hamlet of Cripplestyle, of little architectural merit in itself, is well concealed and makes little impact on the landscape.

At the southern extremity of the sub-area, south of Pistle Down, is another tumulus site, known as Stephen's Castle. Although at 76 metres, it is lower than King Barrow, the views of the surrounding countryside are longer and more panoramic. Steep, sandy cliffs on the south side create a sense of drama seldom encountered in the District. At the bottom of the cliff face are stagnant pools surrounded by dense vegetation.

There is an extensive network of pathways that radiate from Stephen's Castle, linking the site with Verwood and the surrounding forests. Such contrasts, between the exposure of the tumulus, with its panoramic views, and the deep forests nearby attract informal leisure pursuits, some causing more damage to the fragile heathland vegetation than others.

2. AVON VALLEY

Area of Great Landscape Value

Boundaries

This Area of Great Landscape Value includes part of the Avon Valley, from the A31 in the north to Barnsfield Heath in the south, the southern edge of which forms the District boundary. To the north-east of the AGLV is the residential neighbourhood of Avon Park, whilst to the west of the area are scattered modern dwellings and paddocks collectively known as the Grange Estate. The River Avon, which coincides with the District Boundary, defines the eastern edge of the AGLV, south of Avon Park.

The AGLV boundary has been drawn to avoid substantial areas of despoiled land in the area, notably to the north of Boundary Lane and to the west of Matchams House. A range of military and leisure activities respectively have left these areas badly scarred. Fortunately, both areas are well screened so their impact on the visual amenities of the surrounding landscape is minimal, even in winter. Certain parts of these denuded areas are of nature conservation interest, particularly as a habitat for lizards and other fauna.

Historical background

Around 1500BC, the area comprised oak woodland. Clearance by early farmers, however, caused nutrients to leach out of the sandy soils and the loss of fertility

resulted in the heathland flora which exists today. For centuries, the heather was a valuable source of fuel and was cut on a rotational basis. Gorse was used as kindling, being especially useful to heat bread-ovens on account of its fierce heat and little ash.

The River Avon formed the eastern extremity of the Cranborne Chase, a Royal hunting forest since medieval times. The enforcement of Chase law, though perhaps less strict than within the Inner Bounds, discouraged human habitation in the area. The River itself was an important means of transport from Christchurch harbour to Salisbury. But the need to maintain a constant depth of water for boats conflicted with the demands of mill-owners and farmers who needed to draw off the water to irrigate their meadows which resulted in its gradual decline during the eighteenth-century.

Character

The AGLV is narrow and irregular in shape. The A338 Bournemouth Spur Road, which occupies the route of the former Christchurch branch railway, extends from north to south and forms the main unifying element. The dual carriageway in itself has a major visual impact, occupying as it does a very substantial area of land, and traffic noise is all-pervasive. The impact of the A31, passing latitudinally on the northern edge of the area, is not so great although traffic noise is still significant.

Hurn Lane, immediately to the west of the Spur Road, is a comparatively narrow, undulating road that twists through the densely-wooded landscape, often edged by rhododendron and gorse.

One of the outstanding features of the area is the Viewpoint, an elevated informal open space forming part of the Avon Heath Country Park. Extensive views can be enjoyed to the south, following the meandering course of the River Avon, towards Christchurch harbour. Hengistbury Head and the tower of Christchurch Priory form distinctive landmarks. The wooded hillsides form a remarkable contrast to the open, flat meadowland of the valley floor.

The AGLV extends eastwards to the District boundary, but the landscape tract continues without interruption beyond the river towards the fringes of the New Forest.

The beauty of the AGLV is owed, in part, to its relationship with the adjacent valley landscape, which has been designed a Special Protection Area/Ramsar Site on account of its landscape and ecological importance. The AGLV and the adjacent valley fall within the respective County Green Belts.

Common characteristics of the area:

- Sandy soils of the Bracklesham Beds
- Extensive areas of pine and birch woodland
- Heathland areas with informal groups of pine and birch
- Varied landform, with steep slopes especially to the east
- Few visible signs of development from the public road

- Absence of fields and hedgerows
- Most areas subject to traffic noise

Geology and topography

The contrasting landforms of wooded hills and flat, open meadowland can be attributed to the influence of the River Avon. The infertile sandy soils of the Bracklesham Beds comprise the majority of the AGLV, with a small area of Plateau Gravel on the eastern boundary, whilst soils associated with Valley Gravel and Alluvium coincide with the valley floor.

The range of hills form an isolated feature in an otherwise flat landscape. In the southern half of the AGLV, the Spur Road follows the edge of the valley floor. To the west of the road, the hills rise steeply, from 8 metres above sea level near the river to 38 metres. The highest point (57 metres) is near North Lodge, close to the Boundary Lane/Hurn Lane junction. At this point, the landform projects as a short promontory into the valley, which causes the dual carriageway to be placed in a deep cutting. Hurn Lane spans the valley to the west of the Viewpoint. Following this lane, the contrast between the enclosure of the wooded road and the exposure of the elevated bridge is sudden and dramatic. The major road projects into the valley landscape towards the coast.

To the north of Boundary Road, the landform descends gently to 23 metres before rising again near the A31. The highest point (46 metres) is David's Hill, at the entrance to the North Park of Avon Heath Country Park. From this vantage point there are good views southwards across the syncline to the ridge south of Boundary Lane. The Ministry of Defence land (excluded from the AGLV) lies in between but is well screened by woodland.

Vegetation

The AGLV has a strongly homogeneous character. Large swathes of woodland conceal nearby eyesores and help to unify the land on each side of the Spur Road. Although much of the woodland is comparatively recent, as a result of afforestation of open heathland, the area has an empty, wild character, if the impact of the road can be ignored.

Trees also extend along the northern frontage to Boundary Road, effectively screening the Ministry of Defence land behind. Road-users, therefore, perceive a landscape clad almost entirely with trees.

On the acidic, sandy soils the predominant tree species are corsican pine, scots pine and birch, with some oak on the old roadside verges. Gorse, bracken and heather are common understorey species. The steep terrain brings out the rich colours and rough textures of the vegetation. Some areas contain plantations of single species; in other areas there is a mixture of coniferous and deciduous trees grown naturally. The varied ages of the conifers provide added interest, particularly where the woods are actively managed as at Avon Heath Country Park. Roe deer may still be found in the area.

The heathland areas (though now much fragmented) together with other heaths in the area, represent one of the largest areas of heathland in the County. They are less open and exposed than most East Dorset heaths, partly because of the substantial areas of regenerating birch and pine. The only significant open areas tend to be isolated parcels of acidic grassland, which articulate the heath and conifer woodland.

Much of the heathland is designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest on account of their rich fauna, including the Dartford Warbler, Nightjar and Woodlark.

Planning objectives should aim to link these fragmented sites and find ways of reclaiming areas of despoiled land.

On the west bank of the Avon, significant areas of coniferous woodland and heathland extend onto the Valley Gravel. Within the administrative boundary there are just two major areas of pastureland, at Week Farm and to the south of Wattons Ford. Pasture forms the predominant land-use on the east bank of the river. The grassland forms an attractive contrast in colour and texture to the polychromatic heath and wood, especially where they are juxtaposed.

All areas of woodland within the AGLV are important and make a crucial contribution to the area's special character and identity. It is important that the extensive tree-cover is maintained, not least in order to camouflage the otherwise discordant land-uses that occur within the area or nearby. Ridgetop trees are also important landscape features, for example, the ridgetop belts of conifers to the south of Boundary Lane and on Foxbury Hill respectively. Scots and corsican pine and birch form the predominant tree-species throughout the area and should be perpetuated wherever new planting is carried out.

3. STOUR VALLEY/MAPPERTON

Area of Great Landscape Value

This area of scenic countryside, extending to just under 8 square miles, comprises much of the Stour valley to the west of Wimborne, together with a landscape tract that extends to the south-west to include the hamlets of Almer and Mapperton. The Stour valley forms the southern edge of the Cranborne Chase AONB. The south-eastern boundary follows the A31 from Julians Bridge to the disused railway line, which crosses the main road to the west of the Coventry Arms. Between this area and the Corfe Mullen AGLV lies a narrow tract of countryside which lacks the distinctive qualities of either landscape, whilst further eastwards outlying developments on the fringes of Corfe Mullen impinge on the landscape character.

The villages of Shapwick, Almer and Mapperton have been included within the AGLV as they make a small but positive impact on the surrounding countryside. The boundary has been drawn to avoid the expanded village of Sturminster Marshall and the newly constructed golf course to the east of the settlement. The AGLV boundary skirts the western edge of the village and then follows the road past Newton Peveril farm to Stag Gate. The boundary then cuts back along the A31 to

include that part of Charborough Park within the District. Thereafter, the AGLV extends to the District boundary, skirting Winterborne Zelston in the south and Spettisbury in the north.

The A31 trunk road follows the southern edge of the Stour valley to Henbury before passing over higher ground at the eastern corner of the Drax Estate. The road then descends to Stag Gate and proceeds in a series of straights and bends round the northern perimeter of the Park. The road, which is a traditional single-carriageway with hedgerows and hedgerow trees, follows the valley of the River Winterborne, passing Almer to the north.

To the west of Sturminster Marshall, the A350 Poole - Blandford road coincides with the southern edge of the Stour valley, whilst the 'back road' from Blandford to Wimborne follows the northern edge. A number of historic bridges across the Stour punctuate the valley landscape, including the C16th White Mill Bridge, adjacent to White Mill, and Julians Bridge which dates from the C15th. More ancient bridging points once occurred at Shapwick and Cowgrove, providing access for Roman roads from Badbury to Dorchester and Hamworthy respectively, but there are few traces of these remaining.

The course of the Roman Road from Badbury to Dorchester passes through the centre of Shapwick in a north-east to south-westerly direction and continues in the same trajectory over high land to Winterborne Kingston and beyond. The Hamworthy road traversed Eye Mead to Lake Gates, now the western end of the Wimborne bypass. During the Roman occupation, from about AD 45, this was an important military site.

The fertile valley soils and ease of communication have resulted in long and continuous human settlement in the valley, yet the area has remained little changed since Saxon times. St Bartholomew's Church in Shapwick and the Parish Church of St Mary in Sturminster Marshall are of twelfth-century origin. Pamphill's commanding position over the Stour valley once attracted a substantial military presence here too.

The course of the Roman road passes through Abbot Street Copse, close to Kingston Lacy House, within which are various earthworks. These may be the remains of the nucleus of the Saxon manor, 'Cyninges tun', the early seat of Kingston Lacy Manor. To the south-east, the road passes close to the medieval Moot, a grassy plateau enclosed by banks and trees where local laws were enforced, taxes drawn and disputes settled by the Lord of the Manor and his Sheriff.

The field and settlement patterns in the valley have changed little over the centuries: many cottages and farmhouses from the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries remain, including a number of farmsteads that extend along the Cowgrove Road, complete with barns and yards and 'closes'. These were small enclosures near the farmhouse where animals for domestic needs were kept.

Two watermills remain on the Stour within the AGLV: White Mill and Corfe Mullen. Both structures contain fragments of earlier mills. White Mill, which has recently been restored by the National Trust, contains tandem mill machinery contemporary

with the eighteenth-century building, but no water-wheels. The mill at Corfe Mullen has lost all of its machinery except for the wheel.

The treed, riverside setting of White Mill and White Mill Bridge is especially scenic and forms a point of interest on the Wimborne - Shapwick riverside walk.

The valley of the Winterborne has a similar long history of habitation, focused in three early settlements at Mapperton, West Almer and East Almer, all recorded in Domesday Book. Moorcourt Farm also has very early origins. This area was surrounded by open fields until being subject to the Enclosures in 1845.

A small segment of Charborough Park that lies within East Dorset District is included within the AGLV. Formally a seventeenth-century deer park, the grounds were remodelled in the English Landscape manner in the eighteenth-century. The planting alongside the A31 forms part of the extensive perimeter tree-belt.

Clearly visible from the road stands Almer Manor, which is of particular historic and architectural interest, dating from around 1600. It is built partly of carstone and partly of limestone alternating with bands of flint, under a tile and stone slate roof. Of similar date and construction is Court House, just visible to the north of the A31 in Corfe Mullen. Although the house is but a fragment of a larger manor, it remains an imposing building and is noted for its elaborate Tudor plaster ceilings and Jacobean staircase.

Common characteristics of the area:

- open landscape
- predominantly agricultural land uses
- nucleated settlements
- very few other buildings
- A31 Trunk road

Geology and topography

The Stour valley comprises mostly alluvium, with river terraces of valley gravel. It is on these terraces where settlements are located: Shapwick, Sturminster Marshall and Cowgrove. The valley bottom of the Winterborne, west of Newton Peverill, also consists of Valley Gravel, on which are located the villages of Almer and Winterborne Zelston.

At Pamphill, there is an outcrop of Reading Beds, capped with a drift deposit of Plateau Gravel in the vicinity of Pamphill Green. To the east, the Reading Beds are edged by a small area of London Clay which is responsible for the springs in the steeply-sided valley known locally as 'Pamphill Glen'.

Between the valleys of the Stour and Winterborne, the underlying rock formation is of Chalk. The chalk landscape of the Cranborne Chase to the north of the Stour has a considerable influence on the character of the valley.

Unlike the more incised landscape of its tributaries and certain stretches up-stream, the valley of the Stour within the AGLV is wide and its sides rise but gradually over a long distance. Paradoxically, the valley is enclosed, yet open in character. The wide, sweeping meanders extend across the valley floor. The extensive system of ditches is indicative of the water management that has continued in the valley for centuries. More recently, flood alleviation dykes have been constructed around Shapwick and Sturminster Marshall respectively.

The notable exception to this low profile landscape is at Pamphill, where the Reading Beds have resulted in a steep escarpment rising some 26 metres.

The Stour itself represents an attractive visual feature as well as being of considerable wildlife value. Whilst its economic importance has diminished with the demise of the mills, the river supports a valuable angling economy. Other recreational activity is very limited other than for walking, Eye Bridge representing the only real opportunity for casual riverside relaxation and play.

The valley sides of the Winterborne are somewhat steeper and consequently more enclosed and a dry valley extending northwards from East Almer creates a more irregular landform. To the north and north-west of the dry valley, the land rises from 35 to 65 and 105 metres respectively.

From the exposure of the higher land there are long-distance views across the Stour valley to Badbury Rings and beyond. The woodland of Charborough Park, on successively higher ground further into the park, forms a wooded backdrop to the Winterborne valley. Amongst the treescape, Charborough Tower forms an architectural feature. From the A.31 the Park walls and trees deflect views into the open, rolling landscape.

Stag Gate is one of two Roman arch entrances to the Park, built in the 1840's. This arch contains a large sculpture of a stag located prominently above. Together, they form a striking incident in the landscape.

Within the Stour valley, views tend to focus on the river, particularly from White Mill bridge and Eye bridge which encourage quiet contemplation. However, this is not the case at Julians Bridge, which is subjected to heavy and often fast-moving traffic.

The densely treed hills of Henbury continue the wooded edge on the southern side, whilst to the north, the landscape is more open, punctuated by smaller woodland blocks. The church towers of St Bartholomews and St Mary's in Shapwick and Sturminster Marshall respectively sound a serenely English note, whilst further east, outside the AGLV stand the twin towers of Wimborne Minster set amongst the flat meadows of The Leaze.

There is a fine view of the Minster from Little Pamphill. This vantage point offers a panoramic view of the valley and landscape beyond, and to the west, a dramatic glimpse of the Stour.

Vegetation

On the rolling hills of the Chalk, trees are confined to a small number of woods. Part of Westley Wood, Big Almer Wood, Little Almer Wood and Great Coll Wood -the largest in the area- are all Ancient Replanted woodland and contain a variety of deciduous and coniferous species. However, much of Great Coll Wood has been replanted with conifers. In the dry valley between Westley Wood and Big Almer Wood stands a copse of mature elm and beech.

There are very few individual trees and these tend to be confined to the lower slopes; for example, between Mapperton and Almer there are some mature and overmature oaks. On the hillside overlooking Mapperton to the west, stand various parkland trees, including pine and fir. An avenue of lime forms the main road approach to Almer and there is a mixed stand of specimen trees around the Manor. Elsewhere, the landscape is open with little, if any, enclosure formed by individual trees, copses or hedgerows. The hedges are of hawthorn, regularly sheared, low and treeless. The remaining woods, therefore, are of considerable amenity value.

Within the Stour valley, trees are more evenly distributed and tend to be grouped in small copses; there are no larger areas of woodland. Most of the trees are close to the various watercourses. Willow, alder and oak are common but poplar much less so. Sometimes, pine or cedar may be seen, associated with the larger farmhouses, such as Cowgrove Farm and Bishop's Court Farm, or associated with churchyards, as at Shapwick or Sturminster Marshall. Within the valley, hedgerows tend to be higher, more informal and contain a larger number of species, including a rich ground ecology.

Cowgrove Common, lying on Valley Gravel near Cowgrove Farm, is an area of old grazing common; a flat, open area of 3.1 ha containing many typical grassland species. The pond, especially, is of high amenity and wildlife value.

Oak is prevalent on the Reading Beds of Pamphill and accounts for the leafy character of Abbot Street, Little Pamphill and Hillbutts. Pamphill Green is enclosed by oak woodland in the north which joins with extensive woods in Kingston Lacy Park. An avenue of oaks cross the Green from Pamphill School to St Stephen's Church.

To the west of the Green, Abbot Street Copse is Ancient semi-natural woodland, consisting of oak standards with hazel coppice, as too are Grove Wood and Bear Wood, to the south-east. These and other woods on the Estate are managed by the National Trust for amenity and for nature conservation.

Although small in number, groups of Scots pine are locally conspicuous at Little Pamphill, the northern end of Sandy Lane and near Queen Elizabeth's School.

Hedges form an important visual feature of the slopes that surround Pamphill. A mixture of hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel and holly, the hedges are thick and high and often contain hedgerow oaks.

Agriculture

Cereals are grown on the higher slopes of the Chalk, where the land is fertile and free-draining. A considerable area, where slopes are not too steep, justifies a Grade 2 agricultural land rating. Fields are geometric in shape and very large to aid mechanised farming methods. They are bounded by low, clipped thorn hedges devoid of trees, so that cover is very limited. The northern edge of the AGLV is particularly exposed, but towards the Winterborne, the blocks of woodland provide shelter. Visually they form distinctive edges to the landscape, their straight sides correlating with the geometry of the field pattern.

On the lower slopes and in the valley of the Winterborne itself where, soils are less free-draining, dairying is more common. A series of large mixed farm complexes are located in the valley bottom, combining traditional and modern structures.

Within the Stour valley, the alluvial soils are limited in their use to summer grazing by a high water table and risk of flooding, especially in winter and after heavy rain. Grass is grown for winter fodder. Fields tend to be large and regular in shape, with boundaries coinciding with drainage ditches. The farm buildings are located on the free-draining valley gravel terraces.

On the clay soils of the Reading Beds in and around Pamphill, the fields are difficult to work and tend to be restricted mainly to the production of grass. The Red Devon herd of Kingston Lacy are reared at Home Farm, north of Abbot Street Copse. Pamphill Glen, east of Pamphill, is managed by the National Trust as unimproved grassland. In this hilly area, fields are generally very small and enclosed by high, thick hedgerows of thorn and hazel and copses of oak. There are still many individual oak trees where cattle can find shelter.

Settlements

As an important historical communication route, it is not surprising that the Stour valley should be well-populated. Between Wimborne and Blandford are a succession of villages, hamlets and farms, all located on the valley gravel terraces. Individual houses are rare.

The form and character of settlements are influenced by their valley setting and they, in turn strengthen the unique identity of the AGLV. Shapwick, Pamphill (Cowgrove, Abbot Street and Hillbutts) and parts of Sturminster Marshall are Conservation Areas and their special qualities and characteristics are described in their respective Conservation Area Statements. Although Sturminster Marshall is excluded from the AGLV, the area is influenced by the settlement, particularly on the western side.

Shapwick and Sturminster Marshall are nucleated settlements, whilst Cowgrove and Abbot Street adopt a linear form. The oldest parts of Shapwick and Sturminster Marshall lie close to the Stour, with their respective churches prominently sited. The settlements are mostly inward-looking, facing away from the surrounding landscape. Whilst the village centres are compact, buildings both ancient and modern, stretch outwards along the rural lanes, creating a more open character. Shapwick, being considerably smaller, is strongly influenced by the surrounding landscape.

At Little Pamphill, a group of cob and thatch cottages are perched dramatically at the top of the escarpment and overlook the valley beneath them. At Cowgrove, the farmsteads and cottages are spaced sufficiently apart to blend with the surrounding valley landscape, whilst in Abbot Street and Hillbutts, thatched cottages are interspersed with trees and copses. Each village, though sharing many common characteristics, in terms of their farming backgrounds, building materials and styles, is quite distinct.

Because Mapperton and Almer are so small, their influence on the large-scale Chalk downland tends to be insignificant. The treed setting of Almer merges with the treescape of Charborough Park, the influence of which tends to creep across the A31 at this point. The small church of St Mary, dating from the twelfth-century, is largely hidden from view.

Whilst Almer is sited on flat land, Mapperton lies within a fold, surrounded on three sides by low hills and is dominated by Mapperton Farm, a complex of buildings grouped on both sides of the village street.

Other landscape features:

Railway

The Dorset Central Railway, linking Wimborne with Blandford was opened in 1860. Coal, building materials and fertiliser were the main 'imports', whilst milk represented an important 'export'. The line also served the military base at Blandford Camp. Its route skirted the southern edge of the Stour valley, passing just to the south of Sturminster Marshall where a station served the former cheese factory. Two years later, the line amalgamated with the Somerset Central Railway, making Wimborne the most important railway depot in the County. However, in 1844 a loop was constructed round Corfe Mullen to Poole, allowing trains direct access to the port without passing Wimborne.

The last steam train, the 'Hants and Dorset Branch Flyer', ran on 25 March 1967. The line was eventually closed in 1969, but the route remains largely intact, although there are few railway artifacts.

Power lines

High voltage power lines form an unfortunate visual feature of the AGLV, which is transected by no less than four lines. A 400kv line crosses over Pamphill (close to the First School) before passing in a south-westerly direction across the Stour near Burford Dairy and thence to Henbury. A 132kv line follows the valley bottom, passing immediately to the south of Shapwick and immediately to the north of Sturminster Marshall before turning further to the south towards Corfe Mullen. Another 132kv power line crosses the AGLV near its western end, passing to the east of Great Coll Wood and Winterborne Zelston. A relatively modest 33kv line extends from the west of Spetisbury in a south-easterly direction towards Newton Peveril.

In a landscape as open in character as this AGLV the influence of the power lines is perhaps more greatly felt than in more undulating countryside where a backdrop of

hills can reduce their impact. This is particularly evident in the valley itself. Whilst this may be accepted as a modern necessity, the routing of the 400kv over Pamphill is less acceptable. The alignment tends to contradict generally accepted principles of siting pylons away from prominent hills. The power line also makes an enormous impact on the character of the Conservation Area and detracts from its special historical interest.

4. CORFE MULLEN

Area of Great Landscape Value

This small area of just under 3 square miles, is situated to the west of Corfe Mullen and extends westwards to the District boundary. The area lies between the Stour Valley in the north and the western fringes of Upton Heath, known as Poor Common, in the south.

This attractive landscape forms an invaluable amenity and setting for Corfe Mullen. Its elevated position commands extensive views across the area to the distant countryside beyond. And when viewed from the north, the area's wooded hills provide an important backdrop to the Stour valley.

Despite its proximity to the urban area, the main roads that pass near by and the sand and gravel workings within, the AGLV is a surprisingly quiet and peaceful area. Most of the area is accessed by narrow country lanes and public footpaths. A short section of the A31 forms the northern edge of the area near Henbury House and at Bailie Gate roundabout it joins the Blandford to Poole road, which makes a brief incursion through the area.

The sand and gravel workings at Henbury Plantation represent the other significant intrusions, but their impact are minimised by the surrounding dense woodlands that provide effective screening.

The character of the AGLV is influenced by a diverse geological structure, creating three distinctive landscapes. The main part of the area may be divided roughly in half: a patchwork of small, enclosed fields and paddocks on the urban fringe and to the west, an extensive wooded landscape. Beyond this, from Henbury House to Coombe Almer, is an open, large-scale agricultural landscape typical of Chalk. Because the landscape characteristics of the sub-areas are so diverse, there are few features common to all.

Common characteristics of the area

- Undulating landform, punctuated by hilltops.
- Heavily influenced by woods, copses and hedgerow trees

Sub Area 1

Urban fringe area, including The Knoll

The AGLV boundary extends close to the western edge of the urban area. Hedgerow trees and copses screen the housing and reduce the influence of the settlement on the adjacent countryside.

All but the extreme northern part fall within an area of London Clay. A narrow tongue of Reading Beds extends southwards, coinciding with Brickyard Lane as far as The Knoll. The Knoll itself has a small drift deposit of Plateau Gravel.

This is an introspective landscape, centred on a shallow valley having a tiny watercourse that flows northwards to the Stour. The area is enclosed by hills, woods and hedgerows. It is well served by a network of narrow winding lanes, bordered by hedgerows and hedgerow trees that form a canopy overhead. The area is characterised by an irregular mosaic of small fields and paddocks, also enclosed by hedgerows and used almost exclusively for grazing horses.

The Knoll forms the highest point, at 70 metres above sea level. There is evidence of an early hamlet, in existence at least from 1327. A similar mound exists at Mountain Clump on the opposite side of Knoll Lane, around which are numerous banks and ditches, and to the north-west of the Clump are visible earthworks of the lost village. The main landuse today is Castle Court Preparatory School which, since the 1960's, has occupied an early nineteenth-century stucco and tiled mansion. Since this date a number of assorted modern buildings have provided additional accommodation.

The visual effects of the School on the surrounding landscape are minimised by the abundant tree-cover on the Knoll and nearby countryside, including an important mixed wood at Mountain Copse. In the fields to the north of the Clump, a number of mature individual trees create a parkland effect.

Knoll Lane cuts deeply through the summit of the Knoll, providing an element of drama for road-users and an opportunity for the School to form a pedestrian bridge to gain easy access to the playing field opposite. To the north of The Knoll the lane descends between hedgebanks before opening out in the Stour valley. The lane forms a direct link between the Knoll and St Huberts Church, dating from the mid thirteenth-century and was part of an ancient track that linked Lytchett Bay with Cranborne Chase.

Generally, the predominant tree specie is oak, with many fine specimens along the roadside. Ash, Scots pine, sweet chestnut and horse chestnut are also in evidence, with willow extending along the watercourses. There are a number of groupings of Monterey Pine, whose contrasting form and texture provide attractive features. An important line of some fifty Monterey pine occurs between Haywards Lane and Broadmoor Road. The fields to the south are surrounded by a series of similar Monterey Pine groupings. On Forest Clump, mentioned above, the mixed wood includes oak, ash, sycamore, beech, sweet chestnut, Scots pine and larch. An even

wider range of species may be found at Castle Court, including many specimen conifers.

Hedges throughout the area are characteristically mixed, comprising hawthorn, blackthorn, holly, hazel and bramble. Many are high and informally maintained. There is also evidence of bracken, indicating the acidity of the soils.

A few scattered farms and dwellings are generally well screened by trees. Some of these are thatched cottages which form attractive features in the countryside, but some of the more recent houses fit less comfortably into the landscape.

Sub Area 2

Chalk landscape

Confined by the irregular alignment of the District boundary, this landscape of open, agricultural land contrasts strongly from the woodlands and small-field pattern to the east of the AGLV. The landscape tract extends well beyond the administrative boundary to the west and northwest.

A band of chalk extends in an arc through the middle of the sub-area, flanked by Reading Beds to the north and south respectively, whilst to the north of Henbury House are alluvial soils of the Stour valley.

The landscape is strongly influenced by the steep-sided conical hills formed by the Reading Beds which rise to 75m near Castle Farm, 82m at Heron Grove and 85m near Windmill Barrow Farm. The hills enclose the chalk landscape in the form of a combe, which rises gently from 25m near the A31 to 40m at the District boundary to the west of Higher Combe Farm.

The hills also afford good vantage points to view the surrounding countryside. Ascending the lane to the west of Sandpit Farm, views open up of the woods on the steep slopes of Notting Hill, whilst to the north-east, High Wood, near Badbury Rings, can be seen in the distance. Turning to the west, Charborough tower stands above the Parkland woods. Near the top of the hill the lane takes a sharp left-hand turn, at which point is a view of the combe below.

The chalk soils are free-draining and support arable crops such as sweet corn, barley and wheat. These crops are rotated with stock grazing. Fields are large, of regular shape and bounded by low, clipped hawthorn hedges. The landscape is large-scale in character, not dissimilar to the Cranborne Chase AONB.

In common with the Chase, the landscape tends to be enclosed by blocks of woodland which cover the nearby hills and which form a more continuous landscape edge to the west. The woodland areas contrast with the open agricultural land which contain few individual trees. The woodland edges are particularly well-defined, but rounded rather than geometric. The woods tend to be mixed, with a predominance

of oak, but also containing sweet chestnut, birch, pine, ash and beech. The small woodland to the east of Combe Farm is of ancient origin.

The contrast between the woods and open landscape also occurs along the Poole Road. As the road ascends the hill from Bailie Gate roundabout, it cuts deeply into the ground to form steep hedgebanks. The dense woodland that overhangs the road on both sides create a tunnel effect, a characteristic feature of the Reading Beds, before emerging into the open fields.

The conifer plantations on Notting Hill (very much part of the landscape tract, though mostly outside the District) contrast in colour and texture to the greener, more rounded and softer deciduous woods.

The former Henbury Park, to the north of Henbury House, once contained specimen beech, horse chestnut and lime. Following the main road and driveway were groups of elm. Almost all the parkland trees have disappeared and the land has been turned to arable, divorcing the house from its setting. However, Heron Grove to the south of the House still forms an important backdrop and there remains some of the original trees that flank the building on either side. The avenue of walnut and sweet chestnut along the driveway is much depleted and it will be some years before the newly-planted trees will make any significant impact. Parkland trees occur closer to Bailie Gate roundabout, beyond the current house ownership and outside the District boundary.

Architecturally, Henbury House is the most important historic building within the AGLV. Built in 1770, this classical Georgian house is conspicuous from the main road, having an unusual low lunette window on the first-floor under a projecting pediment. The front door beneath is reached by twin flights of curved steps with iron railings. Little now remains of the former chapel, stables and out-houses which stood to the east and southeast of the house, but a walled enclosure, which once formed the vegetable garden still exists. And in the grounds which lead from the house to Heron Grove stands the original eighteenth-century Icehouse.

To the north and west of the House runs a high voltage power line, which crosses the A31 near the site entrance and follows a south-westerly route past Combe Almer towards Lytchett Matravers. Whilst the pylons are clearly alien to the natural landscape, their siting within the valley amongst large scale fields and wooded backdrops are such as to lessen their overall impact. Indeed, from the main road, the line of pylons tend to lead the eye towards the combe.

Sub Area 3

Central Woodlands

This area comprises the heart of the AGLV and is visually the most important, especially when seen from outside the area: the wooded hills can be seen from Poole Harbour in the south and Witchampton in the north.

A substantial part of the area, extending southwards and eastwards from Henbury, comprises Reading Beds, with a drift deposit of Plateau Gravel in the middle. A narrow wedge of London Clay extends south-westwards from sub-area 1. This separates the Reading Beds from the extensive Bagshot Beds to the south of the

area, only a fragment of which lies within the AGLV. This varied geology has resulted in a complex landform studded with hilltops.

The topography follows a north-east to south-west grain, parallel to the course of the brook in Crumpets valley. Barrow Hill (75m), Forest Hill (82m), Stoney Down (83m) and Allen Hill (80m) are highpoints to the south of the valley. Notting Hill (89m) encloses the valley to the north. Extensive sand and gravel workings immediately to the north-east have formed a deep crater, pitted with holes and ponds. Evidence of sand and gravel workings is well-concealed from all but the highest parts of the surrounding areas. From Allen Hill, the workings appear as a long, horizontal scar across the tree-clad landscape: a sandy cliff with dense woodland below and a band of continuous trees above. Curiously, Allen Hill itself comprises London Clay, a formation more commonly associated with lowland areas.

The north slopes of Notting Hill form a backdrop to Henbury House. Two small streams have cut into the hillside to form valleys, one of which articulates Heron Grove, a conical-shaped hillock of 82 metres that overlooks the Stour valley. The hill coincides with a narrow band of Plateau Gravel that extends from the sand and gravel workings.

Between the two ranges of hills is Crumpets Valley, which drains towards the Stour, an introspective small-scale landscape with few long-distance views.

The hilltops, on the other hand, afford some panoramic views. Allen Hill, where a block of conifer plantation has been recently cleared and re-planted, is a particularly good viewpoint. The middle-distance to the north is of green pastures, with dense woodland clothing the hillside behind. In the distance lies the Stour valley, with the perimeter woods of Kingston Lacy beyond. And beyond this extends even more distant countryside to the horizon.

From Forest Hill, the prospect is to the south. Along Rushall Lane there are open views across Poor Common towards Upton Heath, where the copse of pines on Beacon Hill forms a focal point. At the western end of the lane a long-distance view opens up of the Purbeck Hills, including a glimpse of Poole Harbour. At Jubilee Cross, open views extend across Elder Moor to the south and south-west towards the Purbeck Hills. From Barrow Hill, a landscape tract extends northwards, of gently undulating pasture framed by woods and copses and enclosed by Foxholes Wood in the distance.

A corridor of farmland extends north-eastwards through Crumpets Valley, linking the Stour valley with the open farmland around Lytchett Matravers. The valley is predominantly pasture land; at the time of survey, there were several small herds of Friesian cattle. The farmland separates and articulates the more extensive areas of dense woodland, some of which appear as 'hanging woods' on the adjacent hillside. From Poole Road in particular, the undulating fields provide an attractive green apron at the base of the wooded hills beyond.

The AGLV includes the small residential neighbourhood of Jubilee Cross. The settlement began as a row of inter-war bungalows and houses on the east side of Poole Road, accessed by a parallel gravelled drive. Towards Forest Hill the houses

become larger, more individual and are set in more extensive grounds. Much of the mixed woodland has been retained to give a sylvan character to the area. Elsewhere, the area is almost entirely wooded, with the notable exception of the substantial areas of gravel workings on Notting Hill and Heron Grove. (see below).

The principal woodland areas are Henbury Plantation and Stoney Down Plantation. Most of Henbury Plantation comprises mixed woodland, containing a variety of deciduous and conifer species. Within the plantation is Heron Grove, which is Ancient Replanted Woodland. Oak, ash, sweet chestnut, birch, and pine are the prevalent species.

Stoney Down Plantation extends from Rushall Lane to Brickyard Lane. Whilst much of the woodland is mixed, there are also substantial blocks of pine, douglas fir and larch plantations. Scattered within the woods are ancient oaks of immense size and copses of sweet chestnut. Disecting the woodland, beneath two power lines that cross the valley longitudinally, are corridors of land that have recently been cleared, leaving the ground uneven and exposing the sandy soils.

The two areas of woodland merge to create an extensive woodland tract. This contrasts with the surrounding open, flatter landscape, particularly that of the Stour valley to the north and Poor Common to the south. The wooded hills emphasise the varied colours and textures of the mixed species, especially on the sunny, south-facing slopes.

The woodland edges are characterised by a mixture of trees and dense understorey: oak, sweet chestnut, birch, and scots pine, with hazel, bramble and sometimes rhododendron below. Bracken is widespread. This varied woodland edge occurs on the north side of Rushall Lane, where the overhanging branches intermix with vergeside trees on the other side. To the west of Forest Hill there are a number of specimen roadside pines of considerable amenity value. A small pine wood forms an attractive feature on Wimborne Road, west of Jubilee Cross.

Dense planting on each side of Old Market Road effectively screen the sand and gravel workings to the north and south of the lane. The screen comprises a continuous ribbon of birch and pine with dense rhododendron understorey.

Old Market Road is used principally as an access to the sand and gravel workings. From its junction with Brickyard Lane, a public footpath follows the brook before turning south, past Allen Hill to the east, through Stoney Down Plantation. The path is well waymarked and passes through varied woodland scenery. In the valley, a mixture of oak, ash, sweet chestnut, with hazel and birch occurs on the lower ground, with conifer plantations higher up the slopes. Where the path meets Rushall Lane pine is prevalent, but less regimented and more open in character, allowing birch, sweet chestnut and oak to regenerate.