

**Melksham Neighbourhood Plan**

**Local Landscape Character**

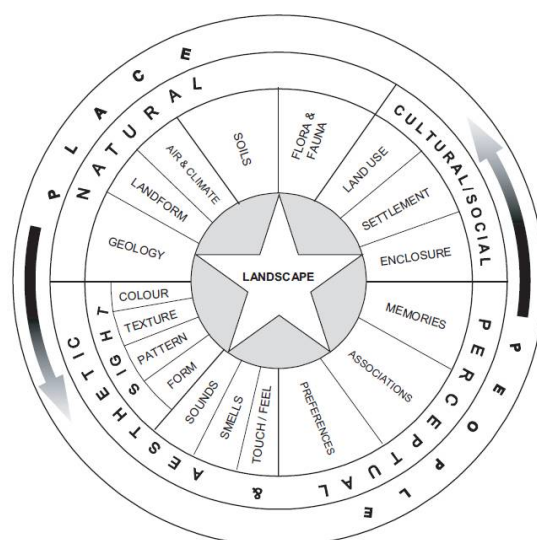
**Neighbourhood Plan  
Evidence Base Report**

## 1 Introduction

Landscape is about the relationship between people and place. People's perceptions of land turn it into the concept of 'landscape'.

This report brings together evidence on landscape character and setting, including information from the Wiltshire Local Plan's evidence base, and more local-level information collected as part of work on the Neighbourhood Plan.

The report forms part of the evidence base to support content and policies in the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan.



**Above: The Landscape Wheel from Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland**

## 2 Policy Context

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) promotes landscape protection, management and planning, and applies to all landscapes, and towns and villages, as well as open countryside. It covers ordinary or even degraded landscapes, as well as those that are afforded protection in the recognition that every landscape forms the setting for the lives of local people, and the quality of those landscapes can affect everyone's lives. The ELC is not a directive of the European Union – rather it is a Convention of the Council of Europe.

Core Strategy Core Policy 51 seeks to protect, conserve and enhance Wiltshire's distinctive landscape character and uses Landscape Character Assessments to implement the policy.

Landscape Character Assessments (LCA) classify and describe landscapes and set out what makes one place different from another, by identifying features and characteristics that contribute to a particular 'sense of place'. Each assessment provides detailed descriptions of the landscape and provides an overview of key issues and forces for change as well as guidance for the future of the landscape. LCAs help to manage the future development of an area by ensuring that proposals – including policies in Neighbourhood Plans – respect and enhance the landscape. For Melksham there are 3 key documents:

### **Natural England: National Character Area Profile: 117 Avon Vales<sup>1</sup>**

National Character Areas cover the whole of England. Melksham sits in Area 117 - Avon Vales. The Area is described as 'having in large part a clear riparian character, which although now influenced by modern development, retains characteristic features such as wetland pastures and wet woodland which are of biodiversity and landscape importance' This is especially true in parts of the Joint Melksham Plan Area.

*"Watercourses have shaped the land and led to the distinctive settlement pattern in the Avon Vales, including the historic stone built towns of Calne and Malmesbury. The towns were largely founded on and developed with the medieval wool trade. Some (Melksham) prospered from royal connections, some from being on communications routes"*

<sup>1</sup> <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4822288767647744?category=587130>

Opportunities listed in the Area Profile include:

- ensure that new developments or changes in land use are successfully integrated into the landscape, using vernacular materials and styles. Seek to expand the riparian semi-natural habitats in the NCA into a coherent ecological network, offering multiple benefits in regulating water flow, recreation and biodiversity. Work with local communities to recognise and celebrate what is characteristic and special about the Avon Vales.”
- plan to engage local communities in the work to accommodate development pressure in towns such as Melksham, Calne, Westbury and Trowbridge by designing and establishing a network of multi-functional greenspaces which both respects the current landscape and increases opportunities for people and nature’

**Wiltshire County Landscape Character Assessment (2005)<sup>2</sup> &  
West Wiltshire District Landscape Character Assessment (2007)<sup>3</sup>**

There is much overlap between these two documents for the plan area. Four areas of character are identified in the Melksham Plan Area (see also Map 1 – Landscape and Cultural Heritage Map):

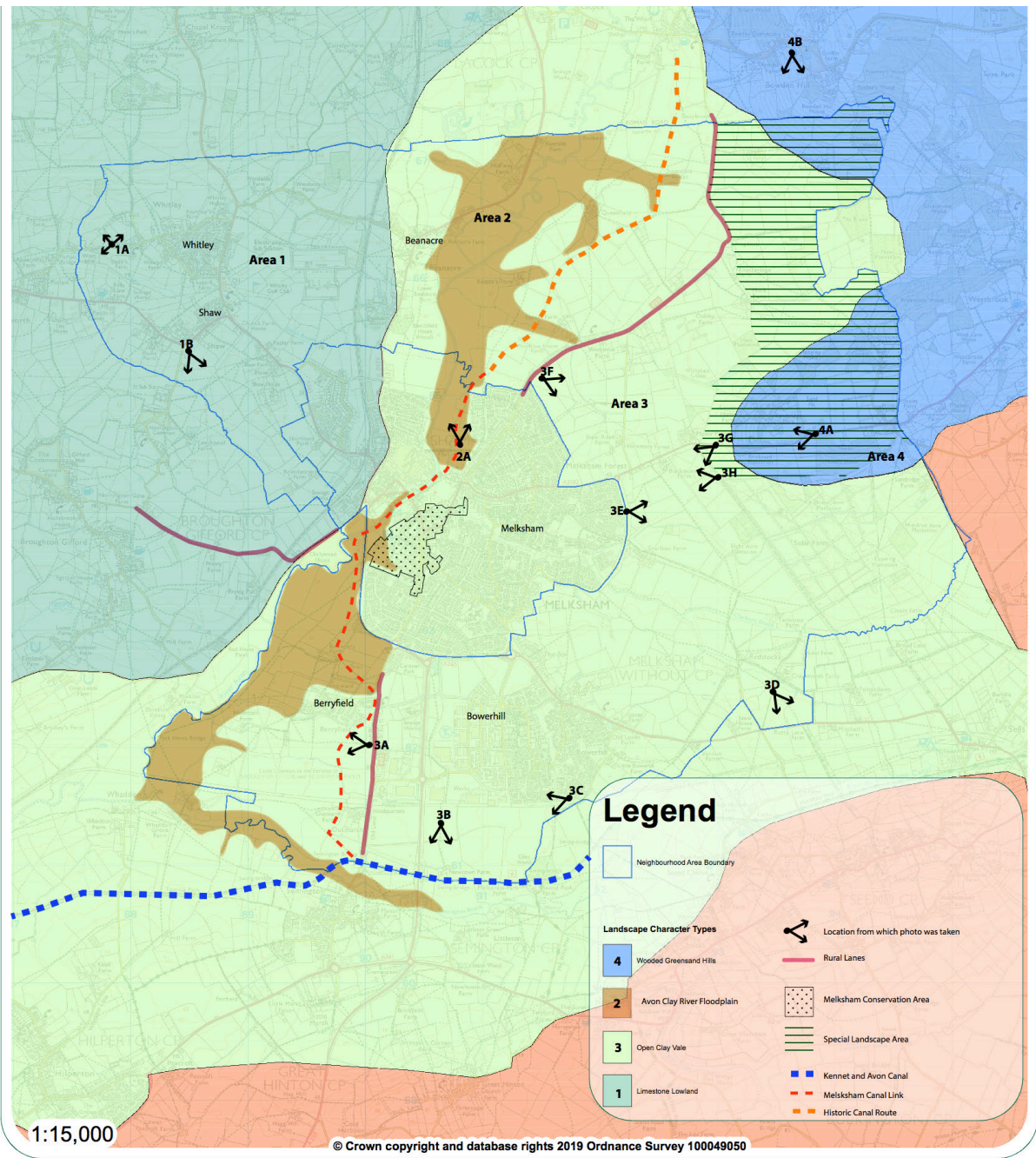
1. Limestone Lowland
2. Avon Clay River Floodplain
3. Open Clay Vale
4. Wooded Greensand Hills

An area to the north east of the Plan Area is also designated as a Special Landscape Area. This policy is a ‘saved policy’ from the West Wiltshire Local Plan included in the Wiltshire Core Strategy. A Special Landscape Area is an area of high landscape quality, locally designated. The Local Plan identified a number of landscape areas as being of County-Wide landscape importance.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planning-landscape-conservation>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planningpolicyevidencebase/evidencebasewest.htm#West\\_Wiltshire\\_planning\\_policy\\_evidence\\_base-Anchor-LCA](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planningpolicyevidencebase/evidencebasewest.htm#West_Wiltshire_planning_policy_evidence_base-Anchor-LCA)



Map 1 above – Landscape Character Areas & location of recorded views Map

## Area 1- LIMESTONE LOWLAND

This character area encompasses the villages of Whitley and Shaw. A large number of footpaths cut across the area, linking the villages and many scattered farms. The village of Shaw in the north of the area is situated along the A365 whilst Whitley is situated along secondary and more rural roads.

### Key Characteristics

- A level and gently undulating landscape
- Predominantly rural character with villages and scattered farm buildings connected by a dense network of rural roads and footpaths
- Distinct pattern of small sized mainly irregular fields enclosed in places fragmentary hedgerows with mature trees and includes an area of ancient woodland to the north east of Whitley – Daniel’s Wood.
- Generally extensive views
- Pylons are a conspicuous vertical element
- South Brook runs through a key area of landscape which separates Whitley and Shaw, providing space between the two villages contributing to the separate identity and character of the two villages and to local amenity with a number of footpaths crisscrossing the area.



## Area 2 AVON CLAY RIVER FLOODPLAIN

The Avon Clay River Floodplain flows from the north through Melksham, meandering south westwards to the north of Trowbridge and enters Bradford on Avon to the east. To the south of Melksham, the corridor of Semington Brook, which defines the south west border to Melksham Without Parish feeds westwards into the main Avon river corridor. The River Avon corridor is considered to be a key landscape and Green Infrastructure asset for the plan area.

### Key Characteristics

- Meandering River Avon and its adjacent low-lying, flat floodplain
- Generally an intimate river corridor, lined with riverside trees, including alder and willow
- Away from the settlements, a strong sense of tranquility throughout the area
- A comprehensive network of footpaths leads to, and along, the river corridor, notably the Riverside Millennium Riverside Walk.
- Forms a wedge of landscape into Melksham Town running in between areas of housing (Riverside Drive to the east and Forest to the west) and from the south as far as the town bridge taking in the Conigre Mead nature reserve from where it spreads out again into the Parish of Melksham Without towards the edges of Berryfield.
- Houses from Methuen Avenue, in the Forest area, on the east of this character area and houses from Riverside Drive on the west, front out onto accessible greenspace (allotments from Methuen Avenue)– providing an active frontage and connection to the landscape of the river Avon.

Below: Halfpenny Bridge crossing the River Avon at the edge of this character area as it comes into the centre of Melksham Town



### Area 3 - OPEN CLAY VALE

This is the dominant landscape character of the Neighbourhood Plan area. Despite mature field boundaries, there is a strong sense of openness throughout the area. Occasional deciduous copses – some ancient such as Morass Wood to the east are scattered throughout the landscape, although these are not a dominant characteristic. The landscape has a strong settled and urbanised feel in proximity to Melksham and Bowerhill (where views to the urban edge are apparent), however settlement pattern throughout the rest of the area is relatively isolated, consisting predominantly of scattered farmsteads.

#### Key Characteristics

- Flat, low-lying landscape (in places adjacent to the floodplain of the River Avon)
- Mixed use farmland, with ‘horsey culture’ as a significant element to the east of Melksham
- General sense of openness throughout the character area
- Road corridors lined in places with mature deciduous hedgerows and telegraph poles
- Pylons are also visible as dominant vertical elements in certain parts of the character area and large areas of solar farms are located in areas to the East of the Neighbourhood Plan area.
- Comprehensive footpath network
- Narrow rural routeways
- Scattered settlement pattern, with isolated farmsteads
- Brooks and stream corridors scattered across the landscape – notably Clackers Brook
- A strong edge between the south of Bowerhill and the landscape through a bunded tree edge that follows an old railway route (Brazabon Way).

*Below: photos below taken from Prater’s Lane to the east of Melksham overlooking from where the open, flat, expansiveness of the character area can be appreciated.*



*Below: Looking west from Berryfield across a large field with a strong sense of openness*



*Below: As the land starts to rise with Sandridge Hill, the expansive Clay Vale, with its frequent trees can be appreciated looking west towards Melksham. Note the extensive solar farm and pylons.*





#### **Area 4 - WOODED GREENSAND HILLS**

Bowden Hill is situated in the north eastern corner of the plan area. The sloping western sides of Bowden Hill overlook the open vale and floodplain landscapes to the south and east.

The northern part of this area is the hill upon which Sandridge Park is situated which forms a contained unit of landscape character which is accessed via the main A3102 and overlooks open clay vale to the north and south.

#### **Key Characteristics**

- Steeply rising western slopes of Bowden Hill, which facilitate dramatic views across the Melksham open clay vale and the Avon floodplain
- Rounded hill/ridge and steep slopes of Sandridge Park Greensand Hills, which facilitate dramatic views across adjacent open clay vales to the north and south
- Wooded parkland surrounding Sandridge Park.
- Overall strong sense of tranquility
- Small-scale, intimate character of the landscape

*Below: Looking west towards Melksham from Sandridge from the wooded and enclosed A3102*



*Below: Looking east from the edge of Melksham towards Sandridge Hill – rising up distinctively in from the flat Clay Vale.*



Photo 1A below – Looking north from Top Lane, Whitley



Photo 1B below – Looking south east from Norrington Lane



Photo 2A below – Looking north from Riverside Walk



Photo 3A below – Looking west from Semington Road



Photo 3B below – Looking south from near Swift Way



Photo 3C below - Brabazon Way to the south of Bowerhill (Note shot taken from Google – needs to be replaced)



Photo 3D below – Looking south east away from the Neighbourhood Area



Photo 3E below - Looking east from the edge of Melksham towards Sandridge Hill – rising up distinctively in from the flat Clay Vale.



Photo 3F below – Looking south east from Woodrow Road



Photo 3G below – Looking west towards Melksham from the A3102



Photo 3H below – Looking west back to Melksham Town from Prater’s Lane



Photo 4A below – Looking west towards Melksham from Sandridge Hill



Photo 4B below – taken from outside the Neighbourhood Area, looking south from Bowden Hill

