

General Description

The Chalk Downland Ridges are distinguished by series of small hills forming a ridgeline with sculptural and often dramatic scarps, although these are less frequent than found within the Chalk and Clay Landscape Character Types LT6 and 7. Due to the topography, these landforms have few roads or settlements associated with them and a low density of farmsteads.

The type is a mix of arable, with a weak hedgerow structure and groups of hedgeless fields creating further larger open expansive areas, and pasture. Woodlands predominantly located on the more inaccessible slopes, including scarps and adjacent farmsteads to provide enclosure.

Location

The Chalk Downland Ridges are similar in character to the Open Chalklands to the west and east but are distinguished by their prominent topography and a greater extent of unimproved chalk grassland. There is one area within the Borough where this Landscape Type occurs, to the east of Shipton Bellinger, on the western side of the Borough.

- LCA 11A Quarley Hill Downs

Physical Influences

Geology and Soils: Predominantly underlying Chalk geology.

Landform: A loose alignment of small hills, ridges and valleys, with some scarps, which contrast with the flatter open plains of the Open Chalklands Landscape Type.

Drainage: A pervious base, with no surface drainage.

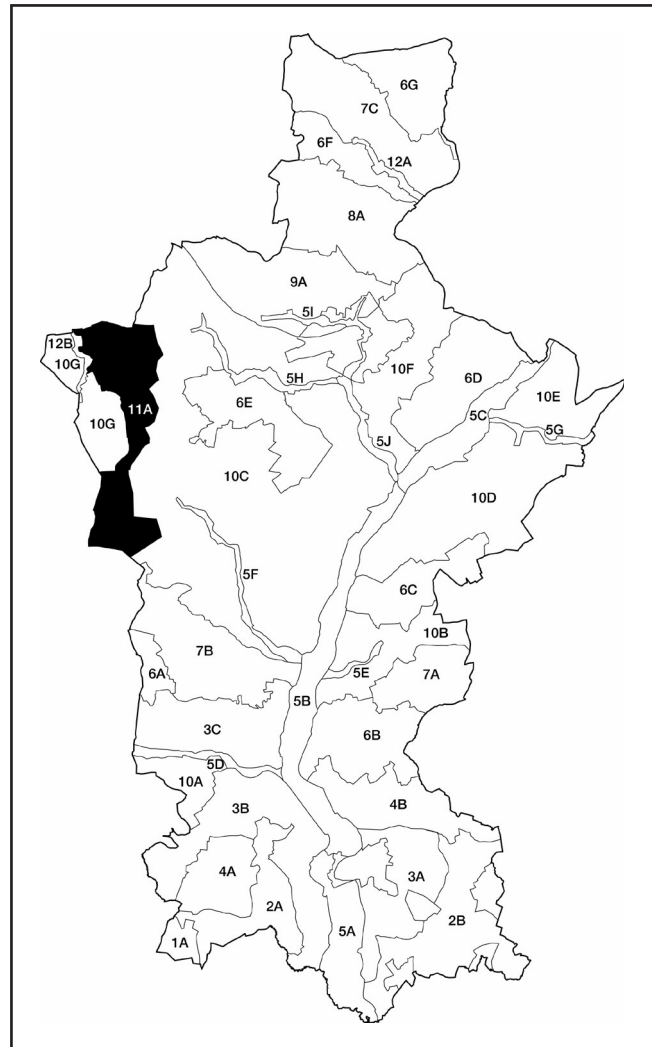
Biodiversity and Vegetation Pattern

This type is characterised by pastoral agricultural systems with calcareous downland and woodland. Farming is difficult in these areas and so the effect of intensive agriculture upon the surroundings is much less than other more easily cultivated areas, in this respect, remnants of unimproved calcareous grassland are frequent and have great conservation value. Arable farming is found where deeper soils occur.

Woodland is typically found on the steeper slopes and the crowns of the hilltops. Typical species are Yew, Whitebeam and Beech with some Ash, Field Maple and Oak.

Notable habitats

Unimproved chalk grassland



Historical Influences

Topographic highpoints within a landscape have attracted interest for thousands of years: as ridgeways by which the landscape could be traversed, as highly visible locations for the burial of dead and as a provider of readily defensible positions for local communities. Consequently burial mounds or barrows (Bronze Age) and hillforts (Iron Age) are prevalent upon these high points and can still be clearly identified today. Also present may be Celtic field systems (Iron Age) which have survived within land deemed too marginal to be worth bringing into cultivation.

The Chalk Downland Ridges, which are to be found upon the western border of the Borough, appear to retain several elements of largely later post-medieval formal (parliamentary) and informal enclosure. These tracts of agricultural land cut through the downland ridge at apparent right angles to the ridgeline although elements of downland survive relatively intact.

Settlement Pattern

No modern settlements can be identified within the

LCT11 Chalk Downland Ridges

Chalk Downland Ridges. No farmsteads are located upon the ridge but tend to take advantage of the lower more gentle relief provided away from the ridge lines and only occasionally occupying the pasture present upon the ridge.

Communication Network

Roadways extend down the slopes of the downland ridge and only very rarely across it. This allows access to the lower portions of the valley and up onto the pasture lands often located upon the downland ridges.

Key Natural and Cultural Landscape Issues

- Intensification of farming resulting in large fields and the loss of biodiversity and archaeological features
 - Isolation of small patches of unimproved chalk grassland habitat due to arable or scrub encroachment
 - Hedgerow fragmentation and loss
 - Declining farmland bird populations.
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