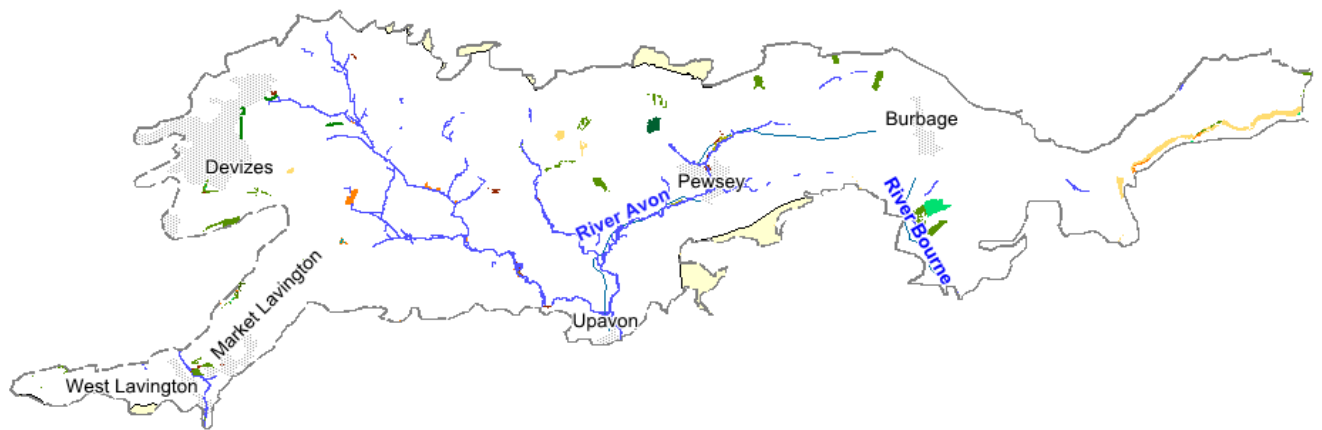


## Area 07 – Vale of Pewsey



Reproduced from 1:25,000 Scale Colour Raster by permission of Ordnance Survey® on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright 2013. All rights reserved. Licence number 100005798. SNA boundaries © Natural England copyright 2005. Priority habitats data © WSBRC 2012, reproduced with permission of WSBRC.

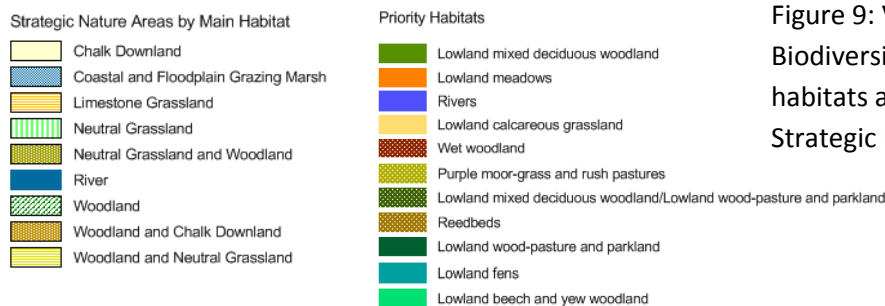


Figure 9: Vale of Pewsey Landscape Biodiversity Area indicating priority habitats and the labelled, numbered Strategic Nature Areas within this

### 4.7.1 Area Profile

**National Character Areas** – [Berkshire and Marlborough Downs \(116\)](#), [Avon Vale \(117\)](#), [Salisbury Plain and West Wiltshire Downs \(132\)](#)

**Landscape Character Types** – Greensand Vale (15)

**Landscape Character Areas** – The Vale of Pewsey (15A)

**AONBs** – North Wessex Downs AONB

**Related BAPs** - None

**SNAs** – There are no SNAs within Area 6, although details on adjoining SNAs can be found [here](#)

**Geology** – The base of the Vale is underlain by Upper Greensand with small areas of Gault Clay towards the western edge. A series of low undulating foothills of Lower Chalk flank the Vale sides and create some isolated outlier hills. At the junction of the porous chalk and impermeable greensand numerous springs issue which collect within the Vale forming minor streams draining to the headwaters of the Salisbury Avon. These stream and rivers deposit alluvium which creates rich soils in the mid section of the Vale.

**Community Area Boards** – Pewsey, Tidworth, and Devizes Community Area Boards

## 4.7.2 Background

Running through the geographical centre of the county is the Vale of Pewsey, an undulating, low lying greensand valley that separates the high chalk plateau of the Salisbury Plain to the south and the Marlborough Downs to the north. Relatively steep, rounded chalk scarps form the northern and southern boundaries as the land rises onto the chalk plateaus either side which are characterised by their elevation, large agricultural fields and comparatively low tree and hedgerow cover. Areas of lowland calcareous grassland are mainly restricted to a few small hills of Lower Chalk that are dotted along the northern edge of the Vale.

The Vale starts at the town of Devizes on the western edge and then narrows and undulates towards the east and the Hampshire border. It is predominantly a lowland landscape of meadows and pasture along the waterways and arable farming with medium to large fields enclosed by hedgerows dominating the chalk foothills. The Vale of Pewsey is an intensively farmed agricultural landscape and this has had consequences for the biodiversity of the area with removal of hedgerows in some places to create larger fields, wet woodlands being cleared and drained and orchards grubbed up. Elsewhere active efforts are being made to protect and enhance the same habitats and active replanting of hedgerows and orchards is underway<sup>8</sup>.

The Vale of Pewsey is threaded by various streams which feed the headwaters of the Hampshire Avon. These streams provide important riparian habitat and support a number of important wetland habitats including wet woodlands, flood meadows, fens and marshes. Jones's Mill is a SSSI and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust reserve along the headwaters of the Salisbury Avon, north east of Pewsey. Previously managed as a water meadow with some water cress beds, the pattern of vegetation here is complex with a mixture of fens, willow-scrub and willow and alder carr. It represents the best known example of calcareous valley mire in Wiltshire.

Built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Kennet and Avon canal runs through the Vale and acts as an important wildlife haven and corridor for species including water vole, dragonflies, water birds and otters. Flower rich towpaths and hedgerows often line the canal and provide important linear habitats for a range of species which aid species dispersal across the county from east to west.

## 4.7.3 Priority Habitats

Priority Habitats	Area (ha)
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland	141.97
Lowland calcareous grassland	101.57
Lowland meadows	31.31
Rivers	30.73
Lowland beech and yew woodland	29.81
Wet woodland	23.6
Lowland wood-pasture and parkland	16.18
Purple moor-grass and rush pastures	9.6
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland/Lowland wood-pasture and parkland	4.9
Reedbeds	3.07
Lowland fens	1.08
<b>Total</b>	<b>393.82</b>

## 4.7.4 Priorities and opportunities for conservation

### 1. Chalk Downland

- Lowland calcareous grassland
- Farmland Birds
- Arable Plants

### 2. Hedgerows

### 3. Rivers and associated habitats

### 4. Standing Water (canals)

#### 1. Chalk Downland – SNAs: 250, 52

##### Lowland calcareous grassland

The area is flanked by two very large resources of calcareous grassland, namely North Wessex Downs to the north and Salisbury Plain to the south. It is vital to maintain habitat connectivity within the Vale to aid the dispersal of species between these two significant areas of calcareous grassland, allowing species to shift in response to climate change and environmental pressures. Within the Area, calcareous grassland is mainly limited to the foothills of these chalk plateaus however the lower chalk does extend further between these areas, providing opportunities to create stepping stones in a north / south direction where this has been lost to arable use. It is important to monitor and maintain the integrity of these features within the largely arable landscape through the appropriate application of agri-environment options and conservation efforts. Priorities are therefore:

- Identify existing calcareous meadows and suitable restoration sites on lower chalk extending between Salisbury Plain and North Wessex Downs, targeting action in these areas as stepping stones
- Inform landowners and managers where they own / manage calcareous meadow sites
- Protect and secure favourable management of known calcareous meadows
- Restore degraded meadows using seed of local provenance
- Enlarge existing calcareous meadows through habitat creation
- Sow species-rich calcareous grassland at new sites where ground conditions are suitable

##### Farmland Birds

The adjacent landscape of North Wessex Downs and Salisbury Plain are known to support important populations of farmland birds, which have all suffered significant declines. Given the location of this area between those landscapes, there are significant opportunities to connect these important farmland bird populations and extend their distribution. Knowledge of important farmland bird populations is considered to be good. Priorities for farmland birds in this area are therefore:

- Sowing wild bird seed mixtures
- Creating and maintaining skylark plots
- Beetle banks
- Fallow plots
- Cultivated field margins
- Low input cereals

- Planting, restoring and sensitive management of hedgerows
- Sensitive crop management

## Arable Plants

Both Salisbury Plain and North Wessex Downs are recognised as important areas for rare arable plants, which have gone through significant declines due to advanced seed cleaning, increased use of fertiliser, new high yielding crop varieties and the introduction of herbicides. Although the Pewsey Vales area is not currently known to be important for these species, there is a significant level of arable land use in the area, the adjacent seed sources provide good opportunities for colonisation, and the area could provide a more permeable landscape for these species to improve the robustness of those populations and aid climate change adaptation. Knowledge of arable plant populations in the area is poor. As with arable birds, rare arable plants are also vulnerable to changing crop prices, and policy reform which might favour less sensitive land management practices.

- Surveys to identify important sites / areas for rare arable plants
- Target important sites and surrounding areas for sensitive management
- Create uncropped cultivated margins – no herbicide / pesticide
- Control pernicious weeds in September (if necessary)

## Existing conservation projects and initiatives

- The RSPB's **North Wessex Downs Farmland Bird Project** provides help and advice for landowners to create and manage habitat for farmland birds via promotion of Environmental Stewardship Schemes. The project concentrates on farmland bird species, in particular ten of the most seriously declining - corn bunting, grey partridge, tree sparrow, turtle dove, lapwing, yellow wagtail, skylark, linnet, yellowhammer and reed bunting. The project also ties in advice on other species groups, for example bumblebees and butterflies, and arable plants in particular. This project has the potential to produce benefits that will be felt beyond this Area and it is important that efforts are made to find ways of connecting up those areas where active management for farmland birds is occurring.
- The **'Stepping Stones'** project is a partnership project between the North Wessex Downs AONBs, Cranborne chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB, Natural England and the Wildlife Trust that is seeking to restore and link high quality calcareous grassland. In this Area the project has focussed on the area between the Pewsey Downs and Morgan's Hill to help support the establishment of chalk grassland species, including orchids.

## 2. Hedgerows

The hedgerow networks across much of this area are in a generally degraded as a result of Dutch elm disease, but also poor management practices and increasing arable field sizes. Use of fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides also reduce ground flora diversity due to generally intensive agricultural practices in the area. The remaining hedgerows network will not recover naturally, but will require management intervention at a landscape scale. Hedgerow networks also play an important role for

connectivity within and beyond the Vale of Pewsey, and help to mitigate sediment and nutrient run-off from arable fields. Priorities in relation to this habitat therefore include:

- Lay / coppice degraded hedgerows, planting up gaps
- Allow mature standard trees to develop within hedgerows
- Replant species-rich hedgerows where these have been completely lost
- Manage hedgerows regularly to maintain a wide and dense base
- Maintain grassland strips alongside hedgerows in arable fields

### 3. Rivers & associated habitats – SNAs: 775 – Avon; 779 - Bourne

The upper reaches of the Salisbury Avon thread through the area, forming an important wildlife corridor through Wiltshire that is likely to become increasingly important as a north-south route aiding climate change adaptation. The condition of the River Avon System SSSI that extends south from the Vale is currently categorised as ‘unfavourable no change’ according to Natural England’s most recent SSSI condition assessment<sup>1</sup>. This is due to a number of factors including inappropriate water levels, invasive freshwater species, siltation, water abstraction, and water pollution resulting from both agricultural run-off and discharge. The river is flanked by floodplain meadows, fens, small marshes and wet woodland along much of its length; although in many areas these have also been lost to intensive agriculture. Wetland habitats associated with the river and its tributaries support rare and protected species including Desmoulin’s whorl snail, whilst the Salisbury Avon itself supports important populations of Atlantic salmon. Priorities in this area are therefore:

- Identify and inform riparian landowners of existing important wet meadows wet woodland sites to secure favourable management
- Identify sites with suitable conditions for restoration of floodplain meadows (MG4), and wet woodland
- Restore meadows and wet woodland habitats in the floodplains
- Protect, enhance and sensitively manage riparian habitats
- Improve salmon habitats by creating reefs, creating riffles, removing barriers and sensitive bankside management<sup>2</sup>

### 4. Standing Water (Canals)

The Kennet and Avon Canal runs through the area in an east – west direction providing a strategically important continuous linear wetland feature through the landscape, linking the catchments of the Bristol Avon to the west, Salisbury Avon to the south and Kennet to the east. Visitor numbers have continued to grow since its restoration, increasing recreational pressure and demand for canal-side development. It is important to maintain and enhance this strategic wildlife corridor to maximise its potential within the wider ecological network. Priorities for this habitat therefore include:

- Protect existing habitats of the canal and adjacent areas
- Restore riparian habitats where they become damaged or degraded through neglect

---

<sup>1</sup> Natural England SSSI condition assessment, 2012

<sup>2</sup> Contact the Environment Agency / Wiltshire Council drainage team before planning or carrying out any works to the channel as a licence may be required






- Sensitive degrading regime to protect bankside habitats and fauna where possible
- Creation of offline wetland features, tree planting and grassland creation alongside the canal (where land available), to maintain and improve its value as a wildlife corridor

## Existing conservation projects and initiatives

- **Catchment Sensitive Farming ‘Priority Catchment’** - The upper reaches of the Salisbury Avon rise within the Vale of Pewsey. As a result of this, activities which impact upon the availability and quality of water in the Vale have the potential to have far reaching impacts throughout the downstream system. The Vale falls within the Catchment Sensitive Farming Hampshire Avon Priority Catchment and Capital Grant Scheme Target Area. Therefore, within this Area advice and support is available to landowners to reduce activities detrimental to the ecological status of the Avon. Capital works funding is available to undertake works to enhance natural flows within the headwaters and upper reaches of the Avon and for planting of riparian trees and vegetation to reduce run-off. Additionally, the England Biodiversity Strategy states that the Environment Agency and Natural England will work together with farmers to encourage the inclusion of Entry Level options under the Environmental Stewardship scheme where there are diffuse pollution problems.
- **Kennet and Avon Canal Trust** – Since 1962 the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust has been working with volunteers, Local Authorities and British waterways to protect and enhance the waterway, resulting in re-opening of 87 ½ miles of the formerly derelict canal. It is important to continue to work with the Trust to maintain the canal as a wildlife feature and to enhance the habitats along its length to aid the movement of species.

## 4.7.5 Conservation Initiatives

Please see the attached table of current conservation initiatives within the particular Landscape Biodiversity Areas

	"Bees for Everyone"	A project to raise public awareness of the importance of bumblebees and the problems that they face, and conducting active habitat management to safeguard, restore and create suitable bumblebee habitats.	8, 9, 30	Click folder for project details	
	Meadow research project	Floodplain Meadows Partnership (based at the Open University) has been monitoring the plants, soils and water of key floodplain meadows for many years. This information is used to develop our understanding of how these are great communities change in response to wider environmental factors and help guide the management of floodplain meadows elsewhere.	1 - North Meadow and Gattage Farm SACs	Click folder for project details	
	Great Western Community Forest	The purpose of GWCF is to create a multi-purpose forest throughout Swinson from the core of the town and into the surrounding countryside. Multi-purpose forestry encompasses the creation and use of a diverse natural and built environment including trees and woodland, grassland, wetlands, hedgerows, ponds and rivers.	1, 2, 3 & 5	Click folder for project details	