



NORTH WESSEX DOWNS

AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

Historic Landscape Character Areas and their special qualities and features of significance



Volume 1 EXTRACT

Third Edition March 2016

Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy





Emma Rouse, Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy

www.wyvernheritage.co.uk – info@wyvernheritage.co.uk – 01747 870810

March 2016 – Third Edition



Summary

The North Wessex Downs AONB is one of the most attractive and fascinating landscapes of England and Wales. Its beauty is the result of many centuries of human influence on the countryside and the daily interaction of people with nature. The history of these outstanding landscapes is fundamental to its present-day appearance and to the importance which society accords it. If these essential qualities are to be retained in the future, as the countryside continues to evolve, it is vital that the heritage of the AONB is understood and valued by those charged with its care and management, and is enjoyed and celebrated by local communities.

The North Wessex Downs is an ancient landscape. The archaeology is immensely rich, with many of its monuments ranking among the most impressive in Europe. However, the past is etched in every facet of the landscape – in the fields and woods, tracks and lanes, villages and hamlets – and plays a major part in defining its present-day character. Despite the importance of individual archaeological and historic sites, the complex story of the North Wessex Downs cannot be fully appreciated without a complementary awareness of the character of the wider historic landscape, its time depth and settlement evolution.

This wider character can be broken down into its constituent parts. This process called ‘Characterisation’ is the process of identifying areas of similar character, classifying and mapping them and describing their character.

The North Wessex Downs AONB has an existing landscape character assessment (Land Use Consultants 2002) which identifies unique single areas of particular landscape types within the AONB such as chalk river valleys such as the Kennet. It also has a complementary Historic Landscape Characterisation (Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy, 2012; Conway 2007) which characterises the distinctive historic dimension of today’s landscape. This is a complex and multifaceted database concerned with time depth in the landscape as well as present day character comprised of recurrent but not necessarily geographically discrete Historic Landscape Types.

*This database has therefore been used as a basis for the identification of more strategic **Historic Landscape Character Areas**, which are akin to Landscape Character Areas in that they identify geographically discrete areas, with distinctive historic environment characteristics. These highlight surviving time-depth and the legibility and the enjoyment of the past in the present landscape. They identify the North Wessex Downs landscape’s cultural, historic and archaeological attributes and the importance of change through time as a primary characteristic. They provide a systematic overview of the characteristics of the historic landscape in the AONB and in this revised edition includes **their special qualities and features of significance** which can be used as a basis for the identification of management priorities and issues and actions.*

Section 1: Introducing the North Wessex Downs AONB Historic Landscape Character Areas

Twenty Eight distinct Historic Landscape Character Areas have been identified in the North Wessex AONB. The attributes used to identify the Historic Landscape Character Areas were based on information in the AONB Historic Landscape Characterisation. The HLC provided two key pieces of information:-

1. The present day historic landscape character present in the AONB.
2. The surviving evidence of the historical development of the area.

The following descriptions aim to provide an overview of each area which encapsulate the main features of the Historic Environment present and include both the archaeological and historical, the very old and the more recent.

The process by which the Historic Landscape Character Areas were identified, and mapped, and the sources of information used to create these descriptions is documented in Section 3: Methodology.

Introducing Historic Landscape Character Areas

The creation of Historic Character Areas provides a method of consolidating historic characterisation data, and other sources such as Historic Environment Records into a more generalised dataset based on geographically specific areas.

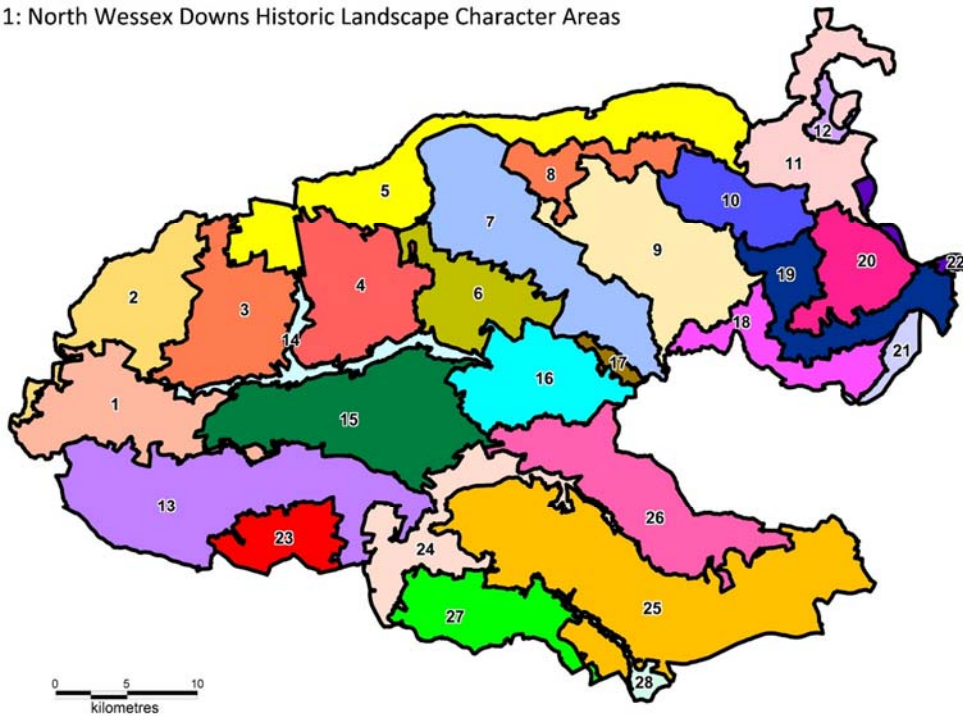
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

1. The characterisation dataset is often formed of many thousands of individual parcels of land each associated with a large amount of data.
2. The primary unit of these characterisations often called the Historic Character Type is usually not geographically specific. They often occur across the full geographical range of any given landscape. This forms a complex spatial pattern of interrelated types.
3. More recent characterisations record information on previous as well as present character

It is sometimes desirable to rework the datasets to provide a synthesis of the complex characterisation based on discrete geographical areas. This can be undertaken for three main reasons:

1. To allow the broad assessment of the historic and archaeological dimensions of the landscape.
2. To create areas that can be more easily engaged with and recognised by local people.
3. To aid in the creation of Historic Environment Action Plans and other management tools.

Figure 1: North Wessex Downs Historic Landscape Character Areas



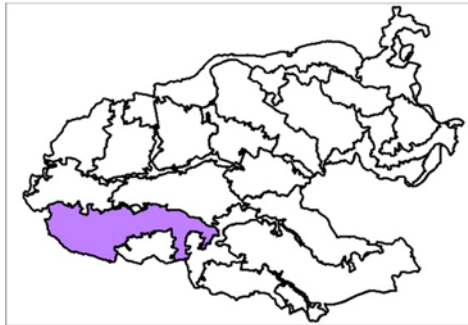
Map Produced by Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy 2012. © Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved (100049050) 2012.

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------|
| 1. | Pewsey Downs | 16. | Middle Kennet Valley |
| 2. | Avebury Plain | 17. | Stockcross-Wickham Heath |
| 3. | Barbury Downs | 18. | Snelmore and Bucklebury Commons |
| 4. | Aldbourn Downs | 19. | Pang Valley and Sulham Gap |
| 5. | Northern Chalk Escarpment | 20. | Pang-Thames Plateaux |
| 6. | Lambourn Wooded Plateau | 21. | Kennet Valley East |
| 7. | Lambourn Valley | 22. | Thames Valley South |
| 8. | West Ilsley and Downland | 23. | Milton Hill and Down |
| 9. | Winterbourne Valley and Downs | 24. | Shalbourne Vale and Wick Down |
| 10. | Upper Pang Valley | 25. | Linkenholt, Litchfield and Hannington |
| 11. | Greenhill and Thurle Downlands | 26. | Highclere and Inkpen Common |
| 12. | Thames Valley North | 27. | Chute Forest - Faccombe |
| 13. | Pewsey Vale | 28. | Bourne Valley and Hurstbourne Park |
| 14. | Upper Kennet Valley | | |
| 15. | Savernake Forest and West Woods | | |

See Volume 2 Figure 1 for an A3 version of this map and for A3 Maps showing the individual location of these areas in relationship to Ordnance Survey 1:25000 mapping.

Area 13: Pewsey Vale

An important conglomeration of prehistoric sites which include extensive Mesolithic flint scatters at Free Warren Farm; numerous Neolithic flint scatters; the Neolithic Marden Henge and associated sites. Significant areas of 1700-1900 enclosure survive to the West of the area, combined with relict water meadow. These are an important historical survival representing evidence of land use in this period and of the Sheep-Corn system of agriculture. There is a varied and rich evidence base of architectural heritage dating to the Medieval period onwards.



Location – Vale landscape running West from Devizes bounded by the chalk escarpments of the Downs South of Marlborough to the North and Salisbury Plain to the South.

Geology and Topography – The geology is mainly Greensand the vale is broad low lying almost flat. The vale forms a vast open level space

Landscape Character – The broad low lying Upper Greensand vale forms a vast open level space with varied

land cover. *Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Area 6A: Vale of Pewsey.*

Archaeological Character – The density of recorded archaeology in this area is much less than in the downland areas to the North partly due to the more extensive exploitation of this area in the Post Medieval period obscuring archaeological traces and partly due to lack of exploitation in earlier periods. Prehistoric archaeology was once presumed to be limited compared to the chalk downland areas to the North and South but new research has shown that it was exploited much more intensively than was previously thought. Important sites include extensive Mesolithic flint scatters at Free Warren Farm, numerous Neolithic flint scatters, Marden Henge and associated sites, and Henge to the North West of Wilsford House. There are several extant Bronze Age round barrows, plus ploughed out ring ditches. Dated later Bronze Age and Iron Age sites are infrequent though there is a density of undated field systems, many potentially prehistoric; these are located on the steep escarpment sides on the North and South side of the vale and on the sides of chalk outcrops.

Roman activity is limited although there is an identified Roman enclosure at Ingham Down and Roman kilns at Broomsgrove Farm. Most of the dated recorded archaeological traces relate to Medieval exploitation, including the Medieval deer parks at East Gratton, and Suddon Farm, fishponds on Burbage common, and rabbit warrens (pillow mounds). Traces of abandoned or former Medieval villages and settlements are common. Existing villages in the vale also have traces of their Medieval origins, and possibly with Early Medieval origin as well. There are a number of undated rectangular and circular enclosures and ditches, many identified on aerial photographs. Recorded Post Medieval archaeology is scarce relating to traces of relict water meadows and the World War II airfield at Manningford and Alton Barnes, and the Kennet and Avon Canal.

There is potential for new prehistoric sites to be uncovered but preservation may be varied. The origin of the relict field systems is not properly understood and many enclosures with a tentative prehistoric date remain undated. Occupation deposits from the early Medieval onwards are likely in historic settlement nuclei as well as deposits outside of settlements which are crucial to understanding the development of settlement in the area. The 19th century farms are important features but little is known about the nature of their historic building stock.



Ploughed field near Beechingstoke - The 20th century fieldscapes have been created through an even mixture of amalgamation or reorganisation of earlier field patterns.

© Copyright [Rog Frost](#) and licensed for [reuse](#) under a [Creative Commons Licence](#).



Kennet and Avon Canal and Vale near All Cannings – The most noticeable Post Medieval historic landscape component is the creation of a historic transportation corridor in the 19th century firstly by the canal and second by the railway, which both run East to West across the vale

© Copyright [Russel Wills](#) and licensed for [reuse](#) under a [Creative Commons Licence](#)



View from Martinsell Hill across the Pewsey Vale – The present day landscape has a very heterogeneous feel forming a mosaic of unaltered pre 1700, and 1700 to 1900 fields surrounded by areas of 20th century enclosure. The survival of pre 1700 fieldscapes becomes denser in the East of the area.

© Copyright [Brian Robert Marshall](#) and licensed for [reuse](#) under a [Creative Commons Licence](#).

Historic Landscape Trajectory – The western side of the area was dominated by a Medieval pattern of nucleated Medieval settlements surrounded by open fields which exploited the open grazing of downland areas to the South and North. These were enclosed pre 1700 at the same time as the eastern side. However the East of the area is defined by Medieval nucleated regular row settlements and does not have the same discernible pattern of open fields. Areas of pre 1700 irregular fields are concentrated between Bishop Cannings and Etchilhampton in the East of the area. These are irregularly-shaped fields and slotted into the framework of the landscape established by roads and tracks and open field strips, suggesting that they were enclosed on a gradual, piecemeal basis. They are interspersed evenly with regular pre 1700 enclosure across the rest of the area. These regular shaped fields were probably created following an agreement between local land-holders and farmers to rationalise and enclose holdings in common fields but obscure these earlier traces much more effectively. There are also small strips of enclosed meadows along the sides of the numerous watercourses which run East to West across the area to join the infant River Avon, which runs through Pewsey, or the river Bourne to the far East, these were enclosed into pasture fields post 1700.

Large areas of parliamentary and post parliamentary enclosure were created across the West of the area enclosing areas of open fields which had not already been enclosed prior to 1750, the main area of parliamentary enclosure stretched from All Cannings to Marden with areas of post-parliamentary enclosure around Stanton St Bernard and Alton Barnes and South West of Coate. 1700 to 1900 enclosures are much less common to the East of the area due to the domination of pre 1700 enclosure. Water meadows were created along the River Avon and its tributaries but these were less dominating than in the narrow valley of the River Kennet to the North.

Ancient woodland was scarce with small areas around the edge of watercourses with the exception of Southgrove Copse to the North of river Bourne.

Designed pre 1700 to 1900 parkland was common to the centre and South West of the area including around the Manor House at Manningford Bruce, Wilcot Manor, Stowell Park, Rushall, Marden Manor and Conock Manor.

Present day Historic Landscape Character – The present day character has a very mixed character forming a mosaic of unaltered pre 1700, and 1700 to 1900 fields surrounded by areas of 20th century enclosure. The survival of intact pre 1700 fieldscapes becomes denser in the East of the area. Some large blocks of 1700-1900 enclosure survive to the West of the area. The fields created by this process are usually regular in shape with straight boundaries and the boundaries are usually hedged and/or fenced. Water meadows form relict landscapes in the water channel bottoms. They utilised sophisticated water management systems (leats, sluices, ridges) to flood meadows, evidence of which survives today. The 20th century fieldscapes have been created through an even mixture of amalgamation or reorganisation of earlier field patterns. Amalgamated fields are created through the consolidation of existing, historic, enclosures into larger holdings while reorganised fields are formed through the consolidation of existing, historic, enclosures into more regular holdings. The commonest origin of this type is where irregular boundaries of historic fields are straightened and more regularly-shaped fields are created in their place. There is usually some trace of the prior field-system visible in these modernised fields while amalgamation is more likely to obscure previous traces. Small areas of new 20th century fields were created replacing early water meadows and paddocks have been created on the edge of settlements.

The area to the West and North of Pewsey is more wooded in character with regular post 1900 plantations and post 1600 to 1900 irregular deciduous woodlands being a much more noticeable component of the landscape than the areas to the East or West.

Small areas of open chalk downland survive on the tops of hill which form outcrops of the downland areas to the North.

The historic parklands preserve their historic characteristics.

The most noticeable Post Medieval historic landscape component is the creation of an historic transportation corridor in the 19th century firstly by the canal and secondly by the railway, which both run East to West across the vale. The railway takes a central more direct route while the canal meanders to the North of the area. These are much more noticeable than the road network which maintains its pre 1800 pattern.

Historic Settlement Character – The historic settlement pattern is formed of nucleated settlements to the West surrounded by isolated historic farms. These agglomerated settlements are grouped around a single point, often a church or manor house. In contrast to the East of Pewsey pre 1700 linear regular row settlements predominate surrounded again by isolated historic farms. These have developed arranged contiguously along a road. The plots can be of regular width. There are some exceptions to this rule for example the irregular row settlement which is more dispersed in character which developed around Manningford Bruce and Manningford Abbot.

The largest settlement today is Pewsey which has seen considerable growth around the historic core in the 20th century including the creation of light industrial areas and civic areas, compared to the other settlements in the vale. Individual new houses and farms have also spread from Pewsey into the surrounding countryside. The other village which has seen a great deal of infilling, masking its original linear plan is Burbage. Most other villages have seen some expansion in the 20th century but not to the detriment of the historic plan form.

Historic Farmstead Character – The pattern of historic farms is of clusters of farms to the West away from villages these become smaller and more dispersed to the West. There is a low-medium concentration of pre-1750 farmstead buildings. These farmsteads are often large with loose courtyard plans or 19th century regular courtyard plans and are associated with the valley bottom. Large timber-frame barns, some of 15th century date but more often of 17th – 18th century date may be typical of many farms.

Special Qualities and features of Significance

Archaeological Interest

- Important prehistoric sites include extensive Mesolithic flint scatters at Free Warren Farm, numerous Neolithic flint scatters, Marden Henge and associated sites, and Hange to the North West of Wilsford House. There are several extant Bronze Age round barrows.

- There is a notable concentration of Iron Age hillforts.
- Roman activity is limited although there is an identified Roman enclosure at Ingham Down and Roman kilns at Broomsgrove Farm .
- Traces of abandoned or former Medieval villages and settlements are common. Existing villages in the vale also have traces of their Medieval origins, and possibly with Early Medieval origin as well.

Historic Interest

Archaeological sites surviving as earthworks relating to Prehistory at Marsden henge have a strong illustrative interest.

Surviving areas of 1700 to 1900 fields can be used to illustrate early pre modern land use and in particular the sheep corn system of agriculture.

Historic Parks and Gardens at Conock Manor and Oare House have both strong illustrative and associative value.

Medieval archaeology combined with surviving buildings also has a strong illustrative value.

Architectural Interest

Important cluster of historic buildings associated with the nucleated settlements to the West surrounded by isolated historic farms and linear settlements to the East of Pewsey.

Surviving pre 1750 farm buildings including timber frame barns.

Buildings associated with historic parks at Conock Manor and Oare House.

Aesthetic and artistic interest

Conock Manor and Oare House has aesthetic value.

The canal corridor has a strong artistic interest being the focus of interest of numerous artists.

Coherence, Rarity and Time depth

The historic landscape of this area is extremely mixed forming a mosaic of unaltered pre 1700, and 1700 to 1900 fields surrounded by areas of 20th century enclosure.

Significant areas of large blocks of 1700-1900 enclosure survive to the West of the area, combined with relict water meadows these are an important historical survival representing evidence of land use in this period.

The historic parklands preserve their historic characteristics.

Dominant historic transportation corridor created in the 19th century.

There is strong time depth relating to the Medieval period.

Designated Heritage - Scheduled Monuments (8) include Marden Henge, Bronze Age round barrows, several deserted Medieval villages. The Listed Buildings (645) are spread throughout the vale and relate to the core of the historic settlements mentioned above, the historic farmsteads, the designed landscapes, and the Kennet and Avon Canal. There are 2 parklands on the register of parks and gardens at Conock Manor, where the garden and parkland date to c. 1820, and Oare House where formal gardens laid were out between 1921 and 1925 by Sir Bertram Clough Williams-Ellis within 18th century walled gardens.