



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





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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.

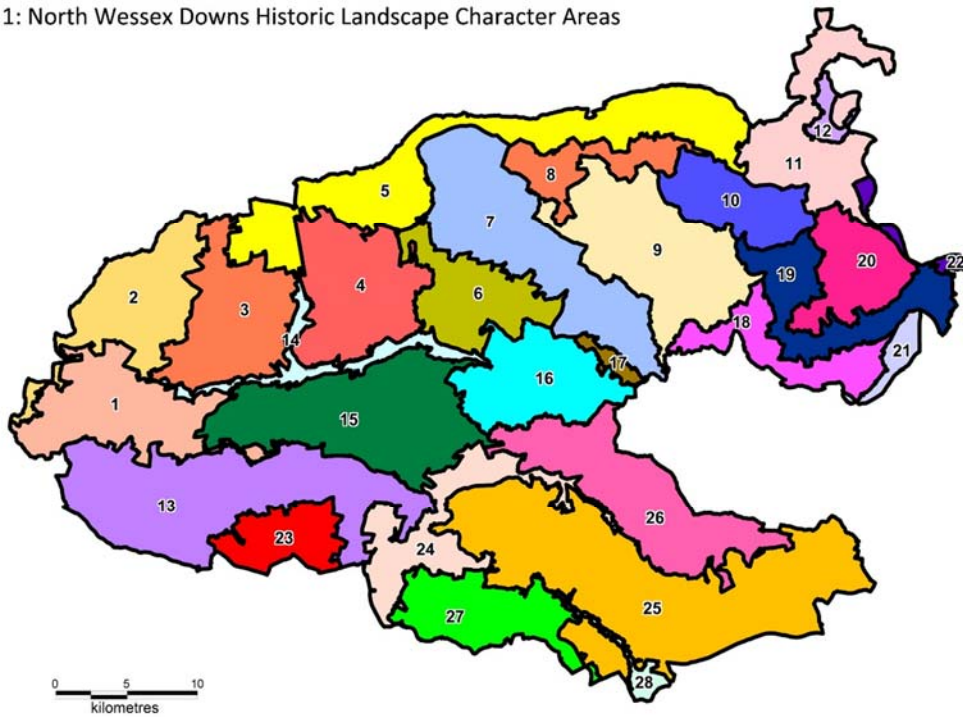
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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



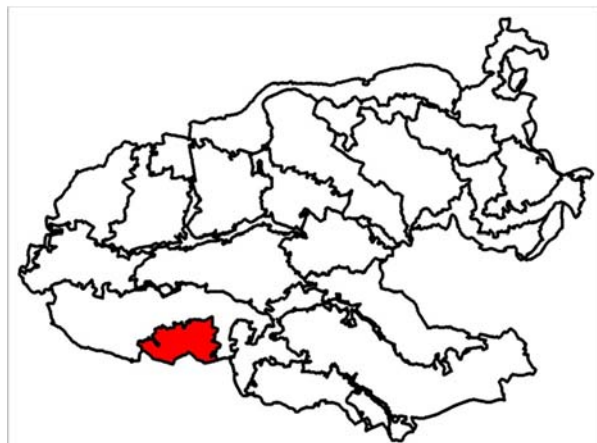
Map Produced by Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy 2012. © Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved (100049050) 2012.

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|-----|---------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------|
| 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 23: Milton Hill and Down

There are notable Prehistoric funerary monuments including Bronze Age round barrows and extensive areas of prehistoric field systems and related settlements. Areas of open unimproved chalk grassland survive on the steeper chalk escarpments and hilltops. These are an important survival of the earlier pre 1700 landscape. Small pockets of 1700 to 1900 parliamentary enclosures survive notably along the bottom of the chalk escarpment to the North on the greensand terrace and around Everleigh Ashes.



Location – Area to the South of Pewsey in Wiltshire; on the northern side the area follows the bottom of the chalk escarpment and downland of Salisbury Plain encompassing Pewsey Hill and Milton Hill. The southern boundary coincides with the boundary of the Salisbury Plain Defence Training Estate and the eastern side coincides with the upper slopes of the upper Bourne Valley.

Geology and Topography – Geology is dominated by upper chalk giving way to middle chalk along the steep scarp to the North. Steep sided chalk escarpment and downland rises dramatically from the lowing lying greensand in the Vale of Pewsey.

Landscape Character – Expansive chalk upland with an absence of clay with flints leading to a bleaker more open landscape. Arable fields predominant with isolated fragments of chalk grassland surviving especially along the edge of the steep escarpments. There are small patches of wood and scrub. *Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Type 4: High Chalk Plain.*

Archaeological Character - The dominant archaeological traces in this area are prehistoric, often surviving as extant monuments. This relates to the fact that the area was grazed unenclosed chalk grassland during the Medieval and early Post Medieval period meaning that these monuments were not subject to ploughing until post 1700. Typical archaeology includes prehistoric funerary monuments including Bronze Age round barrows and extensive areas of prehistoric field systems and related settlements. These date to the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age but not all have been formally dated. The late enclosure of downland areas and the subsequent recent ploughing means that there is a strong likelihood for prehistoric sites and finds to be identified through aerial photographic interpretation and field walking. This is supported by the density of find spots especially across the Northern half of the area.

Historic Landscape Trajectory - Prior to 1700 this area was dominated by open chalk downland with pockets of scrub, furze and ancient woodland, exploited for grazing and fuel by people living in the settlements in the vale below. This historic character survives in the pockets of open chalk downland notably linear areas following the sides of the steep chalk escarpments. A small area of enclosure was created prior to 1700 around Milton Hill Farm but the first large scale areas to be enclosed and converted to arable post 1700 were at the foot of the chalk escarpments and up its sides. The outlines of these parliamentary enclosure fields survive although their internal patterns have been modified in the last 100 years. This enclosure pattern spread laterally in the later 19th century through less regular post-parliamentary enclosure. Enclosure did not spread to the high downland areas until the 20th century when irregular new fields were created and the chalk grassland ploughed up to create arable land. This coincided with the establishment of regular woodland plantations, a pattern which began in the 19th century.



Fyfield Down - Just above Fyfield Field Barn showing surviving areas of pre 1700 open chalk grassland. Note the regular plantations on the crest of the downland.

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Byway, Milton Hill -Arable fields created in the 20th century retain the sense of openness of the former chalk grassland; pockets of ancient woodland also survive.

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Chalky track, Fyfield Down - A series of pre 1700 droveways provide access from the vale to the downlands, these run parallel to each other.

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Present Day Historic Landscape Character - The area is dominated by Post 1900 enclosure. This consists of two types, to the North linear ladder style fields with straight boundaries running from the Vale up the sides of the chalk escarpment to the edge of the higher downland. This represents modified 18th and 19th century parliamentary enclosure. Beyond this to the South, the fields are much more irregular with semi-irregular boundaries following the micro-topography of the downland. These are new fields created in the 20th century from former open chalk downland.

Areas of open unimproved chalk grassland survive on the steeper chalk escarpments and hilltops. These are associated with small regular plantations of woodland planted from 1800 onwards.

There are small pockets of 1700 to 1900 parliamentary enclosures surviving, notably along the bottom of the chalk escarpment to the North on the greensand terrace and around Everleigh Ashes. Everleigh Ashes itself is associated with an area of pre 1600 woodland surrounded by 1600-1800 woodland expansion and replanted ancient woodland all of which is inside the Defence Training Estate.

There is a small area of pre 1700 regular enclosure around Milton Hill Farm marking the first enclosure on this area of downland in the Post Medieval period.

Another distinctive feature are the parallel droveways which run North-West to South-East across the landscape providing access from the nucleated historic villages of the Vale of Pewsey to the downland above. These are heavily abraded in places; further up on the higher downland the impact of the military is felt in the presence of multiple criss-crossing tracks.

The droveways follow the same orientation as the parish boundaries which again run North-West to South-East providing each linear parish with a slice of vale, escarpment and downland; to the South the parishes fully on the downland are more irregular in shape such as Everleigh.

Pewsey White Horse, created in 1937 is a dominant feature of the escarpment below Pewsey Hill.

Historic Settlement Character – Settlement is extremely scarce consisting of isolated farms located at the top of the chalk escarpments and chalk hills.

Historic Farmstead Character – Farms and farm buildings do not start to appear in this area until the 18th century representing expansion of arable farming into downland areas and the replacement of the former sheep dominated agricultural regimes, even then they are isolated and small, associated with loose courtyard plans or represented by single field barns.

Special Qualities and features of Significance

Archaeological Interest

- Prehistoric funerary monuments including Bronze Age round barrows and extensive areas of prehistoric field systems and related settlements

Historic Interest

Archaeological sites in this area have strong illustrative value as many sites survive as earthworks. These have strong illustrative value.

Sites investigated by antiquarians have a strong associative value.

Architectural Interest

N/A

Aesthetic and artistic interest

The chalk downlands in general have 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 coherent dominated by 20th century fields. These consist of two types, modified 18th and 19th century parliamentary enclosure to the North and later field enclosed from downland to the South.

Small pockets of 1700 to 1900 parliamentary enclosures survive notably along the bottom of the chalk escarpment to the North on the greensand terrace and around Everleigh Ashes. These are an important survival.

Areas of open unimproved chalk grassland survive on the steeper chalk escarpments and hilltops. These are an important survival of the earlier 1700 landscape.

There is strong time depth relating to the prehistoric period.

Designated Heritage - Scheduled Monuments (15) are dominated by prehistoric earthworks which are still visible on ridges and hilltops including the Giant's Grave Neolithic long barrow on Milton Hill, round barrows groups on Easton Down, and Down Farm and extensive traces of Late Bronze Age and Iron Age field systems and associated settlements surviving as faint traces including on Milton Hill and Aughton Down. These field systems are likely to continue as cropmarks outside of the scheduled area. The Listed Buildings (2) are an early 19th Century aisled barn at Pewsey Hill Farm and a 19th century milestone.