



NORTH WESSEX DOWNS

AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

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



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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.

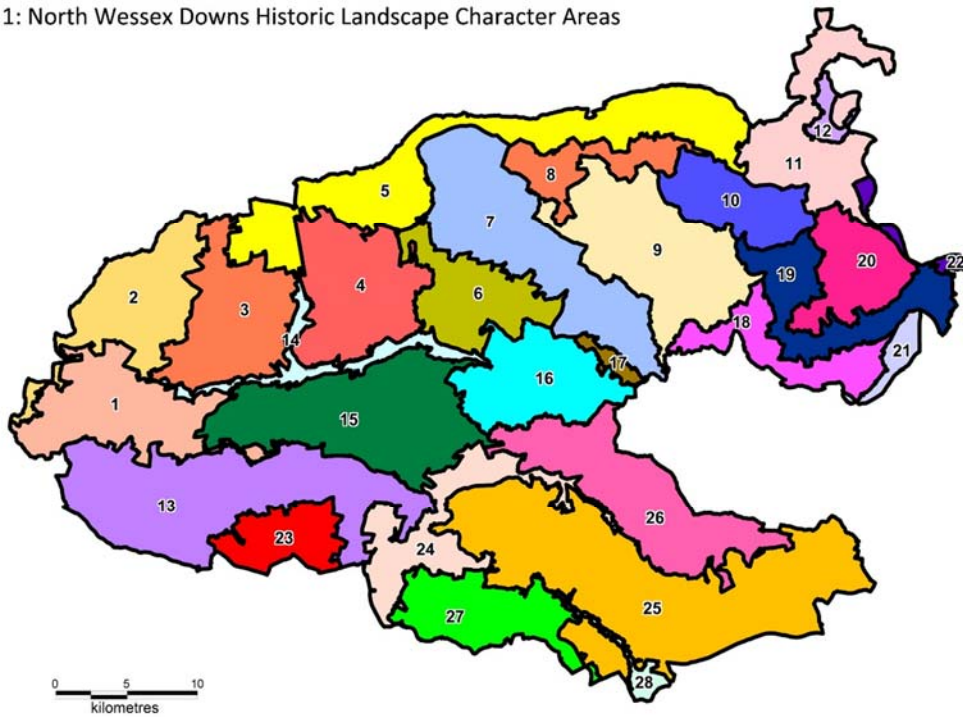
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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



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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 27: Chute Forest & Faccombe

Surviving areas of unaltered pre 1700 fields, ancient woodland and open chalk downland can be used to illustrate early post-medieval and earlier land use associated with the Medieval exploitation of Chute Forest. Archaeological earthworks dating to the Prehistoric and Roman period survive under woodland and on chalk downland.



Location – Area adjacent to the Southern AONB boundary and straddling the Wiltshire, Hampshire border. The area is bounded to the West by Collingbourne Wood and the North by the top of the North facing chalk escarpment. The area abuts the Bourne Valley to the East and the AONB boundary to the South. Villages include Upper and Lower Chute.

Geology and Topography – Geology is dominated by Upper Chalk. Topographically varied rolling chalk hills bounded to the North by a steep chalk escarpment.

Landscape Character – Part of the Southern block of chalk upland, capped by clays and presenting a varied landform of high rolling hills cut by steep sided dry valleys; a farmland-woodland mosaic. Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Type 2: downland with Woodland.

Archaeological Character – There is a Neolithic long barrow at Wick Down on the western edge and one towards the southern edge of the area and some Neolithic sites around Andover which suggest that the landscape to the South and West was settled. However it is likely that in the Neolithic the area itself was not intensively exploited, possibly used just for hunting and herding. This is reinforced in the Bronze Age, where burial mounds are richly clustered along the river valley to the South but infrequent within the character area itself. However by the Iron Age a range of sites are emerging and Celtic fields systems laid out which suggest that the landscape starts to be settled in this period. Interestingly, the Roman period is marked by a series of Roman villas and this may point to a landscape that is settled and evolves principally in the Roman period, rather than one that evolves out of a rich palimpsest of earlier settlement, which seems to be the case further South. There is potential for undiscovered earlier possible prehistoric features within the woodland which has existed since the Medieval period. Known recorded Medieval archaeology is limited and includes the pale of the Medieval deer park in Collingbourne Wood, it is likely that many other features relating the legacy of the Medieval hunting forest also await discovery.

Historic Landscape Trajectory – The area coincides with the Medieval hunting area of Chute Forest which lay partly in Hampshire and partly in Wiltshire and was first mentioned in historical sources in 1156. At its greatest extent on the 13th century it enclosed an area of over 100 square miles. A perambulation of 1300 reduced the limits to an area nearly co-terminus with the modern parish of Chute Forest although outside these bounds the manor of Ludgershall remained subject to forest

law. Collingbourne wood was disafforested in 1330 and the remaining areas of the forest were all disafforested by 1661. Source: A history of the County of Wiltshire: Victoria County History of Wiltshire Volume 4. The importance of this legacy to the historic landscape of the area is due to the effect of the special laws which governed the area and the gradual break up of the forest by disafforestation leading to gradual creation of large areas of Medieval and Post Medieval enclosure.



Collingbourne Woods

A track heading North between Merrylawne Copse and Whittle Copse – representing the core of the ancient Medieval Chute Forest

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Downland, Upper Chute – the mosaic of ancient woodland, unenclosed downland and surviving semi-irregular enclosure is a feature of this area

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Farmland, Tangley – Boundaries are associated with thick hedgerows and mature trees. Away from wooded areas the sense of openness remains.

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Prior to 1700 this area was dominated by two distinct areas of ancient woodland centre on Collingbourne Woods to the West and Dole Wood and Blagden Copse to the East, the latter of which has seen large areas of woodland clearance post 1700. Smaller areas of ancient woodland were also located on the steeper sides of the chalk downland hills. On the fringes of the woodland were areas of open chalk downland, common land and wastes. This historic character survives in small pockets of open chalk downland on the edge of woodlands. Between the two areas of woodland were large areas of pre 1700 enclosure marking the break up of the forest area. This includes assarts to the South of Collingbourne woods, regular later enclosure to the North and irregular possibly older in the centre and South of the area.

Present Day Historic Landscape Character - The area is heterogeneous in character, with replanted ancient woodland to the East and West sandwiching a mosaic of post 1900 and pre 1700 enclosure and parkland.

The pre 1900 enclosure consists of two types, modified pre 1700 enclosure and amalgamated pre 1700 fields. These are interspersed with pre 1700 enclosure which has escaped modification consisting of regular later enclosure to the North and irregular possibly older in the centre and South of the area.

There is only one small pocket of 1700 to 1900 parliamentary enclosures surviving around Tangle, much of which was subsequently modified post 1900.

Areas of open unimproved chalk grassland survive on the steeper chalk escarpments on the fringes of the woodland.

Smaller pockets of ancient woodland also survive to the North on the steep sides of chalk downland as woodland hangers and on the clay tops while much of the core of the Medieval hunting forest has been replanted post 1700, new sinuous and linear areas of woodland have also been created in the 1700 to 1900 period.

Another distinctive feature is the area of post 1600 parkland including that surrounding Biddesden House, Chute Lodge and Conholt Park.

Historic parish boundaries are closely related to the boundaries and woodlands of the former ancient hunting forest. No major roads cross the area, access to the forest, a royal forest, may for long have been restricted, and roads ran along its boundaries. The centre of the area is associated with a dense network of lanes with indicative place names such as Forest Lane, or Lodge Lane. The line of former Roman roads is also preserved in the line of existing roads and rights of way forming the only linear route (North-South) across the landscape.

Historic Settlement Character – The settlement pattern consists of dispersed hamlets and farmsteads along the edge of the lanes mentioned above; these are arranged in an East-West direction between the two areas of woodland; only the villages of Upper and Lower Chute have developed enough to become nucleated. Built forms included chalk, chalk cob and thatch with some timber framing.

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

- Neolithic long barrow at Wick Down
- A range of Iron Age sites and field systems
- Series of Roman villas

Historic Interest

Archaeological sites surviving as earthworks under woodland or on chalk downland, have a strong illustrative interest.

The historic parklands have a strong illustrative and associative interest.

Surviving areas of unaltered pre 1700 fields, ancient woodland and open chalk downland can be used to illustrate early pre modern land use.

Architectural Interest

Buildings associated with the dispersed settlement pattern. Built forms included chalk, chalk cob and thatch with some timber framing.

Aesthetic and artistic interest

The historic parklands have a strong aesthetic interest.

Coherence, Rarity and Time depth

The area is heterogeneous in character, with replanted ancient woodland to the East and West sandwiching a mosaic of post 1900 and pre 1700 enclosure and parkland.

Areas of open unimproved chalk grassland survive on the steeper chalk escarpments on the fringes of the woodland. Smaller pockets of ancient woodland also survive to the North.

Another distinctive feature is the areas of post 1600 parkland

There is strong time depth relating to the Iron Age and Roman period.

Designated Heritage - Scheduled Monuments (5) are dominated by Iron Age archaeology including Berisbury camp, Iron age enclosures and field systems. There are also several Bronze Age round barrows. The Listed Buildings (57) are related to grand houses (Grade I Chute Lodge, and Biddesden House) designed parkland features, historic farmsteads and Upper and Lower Chute. There is one parkland on the register of parks and gardens at Biddesdon (Grade II), an 18th century pleasure park with formal 18th century terraces and 19th century kitchen garden.