



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.

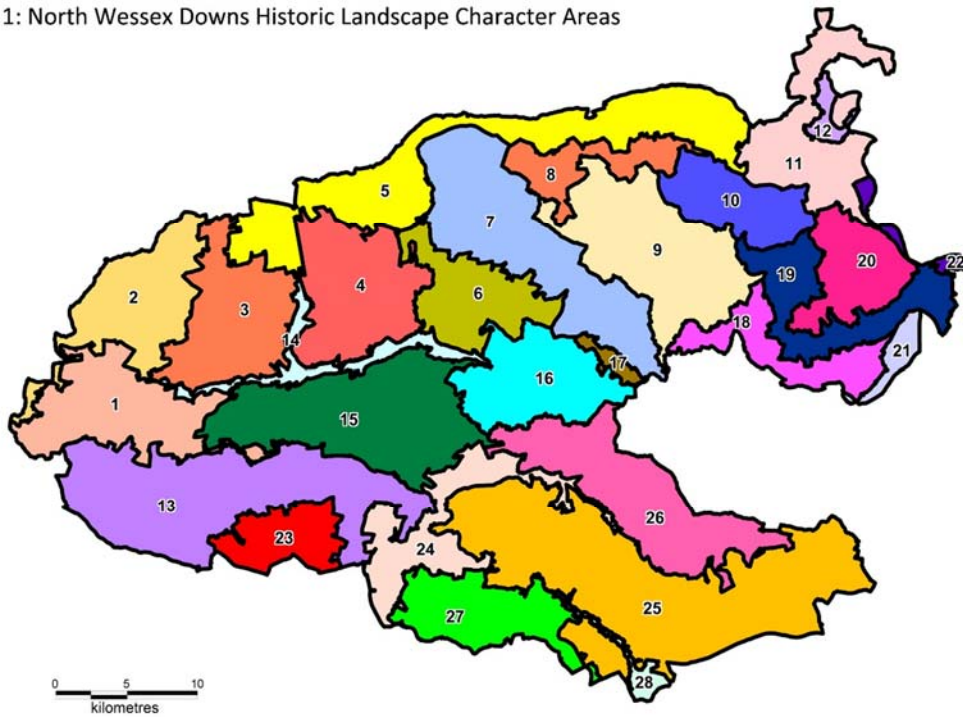
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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



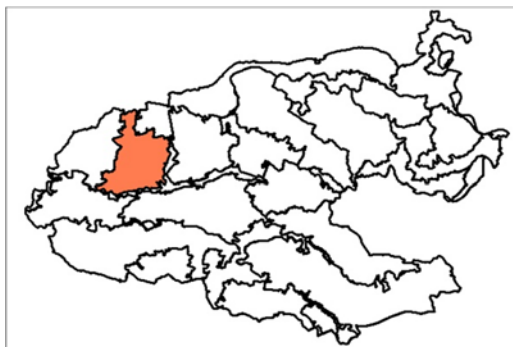
Map Produced by Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy 2012. © Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved (100049050) 2012.

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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 3: Barbury Downs

This area has a key association with the Avebury World Heritage Site, including an important concentration of Mesolithic Flint Scatters and the wealth of Neolithic monuments associated with the henge at Avebury itself. There is also an important array of archaeological features across Fyfield and Overton Downs. Together these form an extremely rare and intact survival representing an important landscape palimpsest, the diverse elements of which contain evidence of changing settlement, agriculture and economy from the Prehistoric to Post Medieval periods. Significant areas of open downland survive. These are an important historical survival representing a fraction of the former extent of chalk downland and relating to former pre 1800 land use. There is a rare survival of an unmodified 18th and 19th century landscape around Rockley Manor. 20th century military features in the area of Wroughton Airfield are an important survival with strong illustrative value relating to the history of warfare in the 20th century.



Location – This area, which forms the Western side of the Marlborough Downs is formed by an area of chalk downland bounded by the river Og to the East and the escarpment above the Avebury Plain to the West. Its southern boundary is formed by the river Kennet and by a prominent chalk escarpment to the North.

Geology and Topography – The geology is dominated by Middle and Upper Chalk. The topography is strongly articulated by rolling downland dissected by steep scarps along dry valleys and rising to gently rounded hills.

Landscape Character – The Downs form an open expanse of landscape of smoothly rolling downland mostly under arable cultivation. Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Area 1A: Marlborough Downs.

Archaeological Character – The archaeology of this area is so rich that this short overview is not sufficient to do it justice. This includes not just the more well known Prehistoric sites but also Roman and later archaeology as well. Mesolithic evidence is important and includes concentrations of flint scatters. The Neolithic and Early Bronze Age evidence is particularly rich; this includes sites within the boundary of the Avebury World Heritage Site which overlaps with the South West corner of the area. This includes the area to the East and South of the Avebury henge including the well known monuments of the West Kennet Avenue, and the Sanctuary. Whilst other Neolithic long barrows, the many Bronze Age round barrows and other associated sites are less well known, together they define one of the richest and most varied areas of Neolithic and Bronze Age ceremonial and ritual monuments in the country. Also within the World Heritage Site but again less well known are the complex array of archaeological features across Fyfield and Overton Downs. These offer an

important dimension to understanding the development of the prehistoric ceremonial complex at Avebury and its immediate environs. The remains are also broadly representative of those visible across much of the Marlborough Downs before the changes brought about by intensive agriculture in the 20th century. Together they are an extremely rare and intact survival representing an important landscape palimpsest, the diverse elements of which contain evidence of changing settlement, agriculture and economy from the prehistoric to Post Medieval periods. In the 20th century the archaeological remains within the downs were the subject of the longest and most intensive research project in Britain by Peter Fowler, with the result that they have become an important educational resource.



Barbury Castle – The Iron Age multivallate hillfort is one of many extant prehistoric earthworks surviving in this area.

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Grey wethers on Fyfield Down – The remains visible here are broadly representative of those visible across much of the Marlborough Downs before the changes brought about by intensive agriculture in the 20th century.

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Downland South of Wroughton – The present day historic landscape character is dominated by 20th century enclosure intermingled with large surviving areas of open chalk downland. Gallops and regular woodland plantations are also a common and distinctive feature.

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Prehistoric monuments, including numerous Bronze Age round barrows and prehistoric field systems and enclosures are also known across the rest of the area. Many of these have not been firmly dated but have been given a Bronze Age/ Iron Age and/or Roman date. There is also a developed multivallate Iron Age hillfort, Barbury Castle. Excavations have uncovered Iron Age rubbish pits. Iron Age /Roman and Anglo-Saxon finds have been made and Anglo-Saxon inhumations have been found. There is a similar wealth of Roman archaeology which includes burial mounds, Roman roads and settlement evidence including the villa on Barton Down.

Medieval archaeology includes strip lynchets, pillow mounds, deserted Medieval villages, and the historic route way of the Ridgeway. Post Medieval archaeology recorded includes the chalk cut figure of a horse at Rockley Down. These are iconic features of the AONB. There is also important Second World War archaeology relating to Wroughton airfield.

There is potential for deposits of Mesolithic to Romano-British date across the area but preservation may be varied. Deep ploughing is likely to have caused significant truncation of many features. The extent of survival of the cropmark features is unclear as few have been excavated. 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 period onwards are likely in historic settlement nuclei as well as deposits outside settlements which are crucial to understanding the development of settlement in the area.

Historic Landscape Trajectory – Open areas of close-cropped chalk grassland formerly dominated this area. This was used as grazing for animals. The land was also associated with small patches of scrub/gorse which were used as fuel and meandering open chalk track ways used to cross this area. These open areas were used as part of the common grazing regime that operated in many downs parishes in the Medieval period. Large swathes of common downland, between a third to a half, were enclosed during the 18th and 19th centuries. On the edges of the area this was created through parliamentary enclosures of the late 18th and early 19th century. The fields created by this process are usually regular in shape with straight boundaries and the boundaries are usually hedged and/or fenced. Examples in the South include the area to the East of Avebury, to the South of Fyfield Down, and to the South of Manton House. Likewise in the far North of the area parliamentary enclosure was created to the South of Wroughton and to the North-West of Ogbourne St George. Deeper into the downland area enclosure came later in the 19th century as part of post-parliamentary enclosure. The majority of fields of this type are morphologically similar to Parliamentary Enclosures; although some are more irregular in shape, often reflecting the land that they have been enclosed from - notably on Rockley Down, below the Western chalk escarpment and to the North-West of Ogbourne St George. These have been modified in the 20th century.

However, significant reserves of open land remained as a major part of the sheep/corn system of agriculture until the early 20th century. This was a system of grain production made possible by the large sheep flocks, supported by early crops of grass produced by the water meadows in the Kennet Valley, which fed all day on the high open chalk downland and by night were folded on arable lands to enrich the soils. With the collapse of this system in the 20th century further enclosure and ploughing up of chalk grassland occurred.

Today significant areas of open downland survive located especially in thin ribbons in areas where arable agriculture is impractical or uneconomic such as the edge of chalk escarpments or the edge of steep valleys. Examples include the chalk escarpment below Hackpen Hill, Wick Down, Rockley Down, Ogbourne Maizey Down and Smeathes Ridge. The exception to this is the area of Barbury where a large contiguous areas of open chalk survives and the even larger area of open downland at Fyfield Down. The latter is associated with scatters of sarsen stones which were once much more common across the area. This is, however, only a part of the former extent of chalk downland. Common land to the immediate West of Marlborough also survives. This was an area established in/by the Medieval period and used for grazing.

Small areas of pre 1700 irregular enclosure were located in the South of the area in an arc from the Kennet Valley up Clatford Bottom. These are typified by irregularly-shaped, small to medium sized fields with boundaries composed mainly of hedges. They have been modified in the 20th century. These were created from former Medieval open fields. These relate to the Medieval settlements of the Kennet and Og Valley which exploited the open fields on the valley sides and common grazing on riverside meadows as well as the open chalk downlands beyond. Their irregular shape suggests that they were 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. Regular pre 1700 enclosure, typified by regularly-shaped, small to medium sized fields with boundaries composed mainly of hedges, is located to the East leading from the Og valley up a dry valley to the North of Ogbourne Maizey. These were created from open fields but these were probably enclosed as part of early enclosure by agreement.

In the Medieval period woodland was limited; there was one small area of ancient woodland at Barton House. Post 1700 designed landscapes were created around Rockley Manor and a smaller area around Manton House to the South.

Present Day Historic Landscape Character - The present day historic landscape character is dominated by 20th century enclosures intermingled with large surviving areas of open chalk downland. The 20th century enclosure can be divided into two types:

Firstly, reorganised fields were created around the edges of the area by modifying earlier 18th and 19th century enclosure and the small areas of pre 1700 enclosure. These were formed through the consolidation of existing, historic, enclosures into more regular holdings, usually to enable more efficient, mechanised arable agriculture. This type is usually created through a mixture of boundary removal and realignment of existing fields. These are interspersed with smaller areas of amalgamated enclosures where field boundaries have simply been removed. The latter type results in a higher survival of earlier field boundaries and patterns.

Secondly, in the centre of the area new fields were created by ploughing up open chalk downland. These fields are usually regular in shape and have straight boundaries following the morphology of

the downland areas. The majority of these fields have been created due to the expansion of agriculture onto downland areas, traditionally used as grazing, that had escaped historic enclosure.

Some areas of 18th to 19th century enclosure remain unmodified in the Western side of the area and to the West of Rockley Manor. The centre of the area is associated with small but notable numbers of post 1800 regular woodland plantations and smaller and less frequent areas of 1600 to 1800 secondary woodland. Some of these extend as thin fingers of woodland along the edge of dry valleys. This is much more notable than the downland to the West. The centre of the area is also associated with extensive areas of gallops for racehorse training to the South and East of Beckhampton. These are characterised by long, often sinuous, strips of grass which are sometimes demarked by white rails. They are not as common as on downland areas to the East.

A significant 20th century industrial feature is the area of Wroughton Airfield in the North of the area. The station was an operational military installation from the late 1930s through the 1970s, during which time it served as host to maintenance units and was home to the RAF Princess Alexandra Hospital. Although it is no longer a military installation, the airfield and some of the original buildings still exist today. Part of the common land to the West of Marlborough has been converted into a golf course.

Historic Settlement Character – Historic settlement character pre 1700 was limited to occasional isolated farmsteads including at Manton and Rockley Manor. These were joined by a handful of farms in the 18th and 19th century and a few more in the 20th century as arable farming spread into the area.

Historic Farmstead Character – Where historic farmsteads do exist these are likely to have loose courtyard plans or 19th century regular courtyard plans.

Special Qualities and features of Significance

Archaeological Interest

- Mesolithic evidence is important and includes concentrations of flint scatters.
- The Neolithic and Early Bronze Age evidence is particularly rich
- Complex of prehistoric monuments at Avebury and its environs
- Complex array of archaeological features across Fyfield and Overton Downs. Together they are an extremely rare and intact survival representing an important landscape palimpsest, the diverse elements of which contain evidence of changing settlement, agriculture and economy from the prehistoric to Post Medieval periods.

Historic Interest

Archaeological sites surviving as earthworks relating to Prehistory and later have a strong illustrative interest as they can be used to communicate how past human activity shaped the landscape.

20th century military features in the area of Wroughton Airfield are an important survival with strong illustrative value relating to the history of warfare in the 20th century.

Surviving areas of open chalk downland can be used to illustrate early pre-modern land use.

Architectural Interest

Especially important buildings associated with Rockley Manor and Manton dating to pre 1700 and also surviving farm buildings relating to the 18th and 19th century are an important historic survival.

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 enclosure intermingled with large surviving areas of open chalk downland. The 20th century enclosure shows a clear split between reorganised fields and new fields in the centre of the areas.

Significant areas of open downland survive. These are an important historical survival representing a fraction of the former extent of chalk downland and relating to former pre 1800 land use.

Rarer survival of unmodified 18th and 19th century landscape around Rockley Manor.

There is strong time depth relating to archaeology of the area from the Prehistoric period through to the Medieval with the Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments being particularly important.

Designated Heritage Assets

Scheduled Monuments (92) are dominated by prehistoric monuments relating to the Avebury complex and further afield. Other monuments include Medieval villages and intact field systems. The Listed Buildings (31) are related to milestones, Rockley manor, Manton house and historic farm buildings. There are no parklands on the register of parks and gardens. The south western part of area is within the Avebury World Heritage Site and the area beyond that falls within the setting of the World Heritage Site.