



NORTH WESSEX DOWNS

AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

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



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Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy





Emma Rouse, Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy

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

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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.

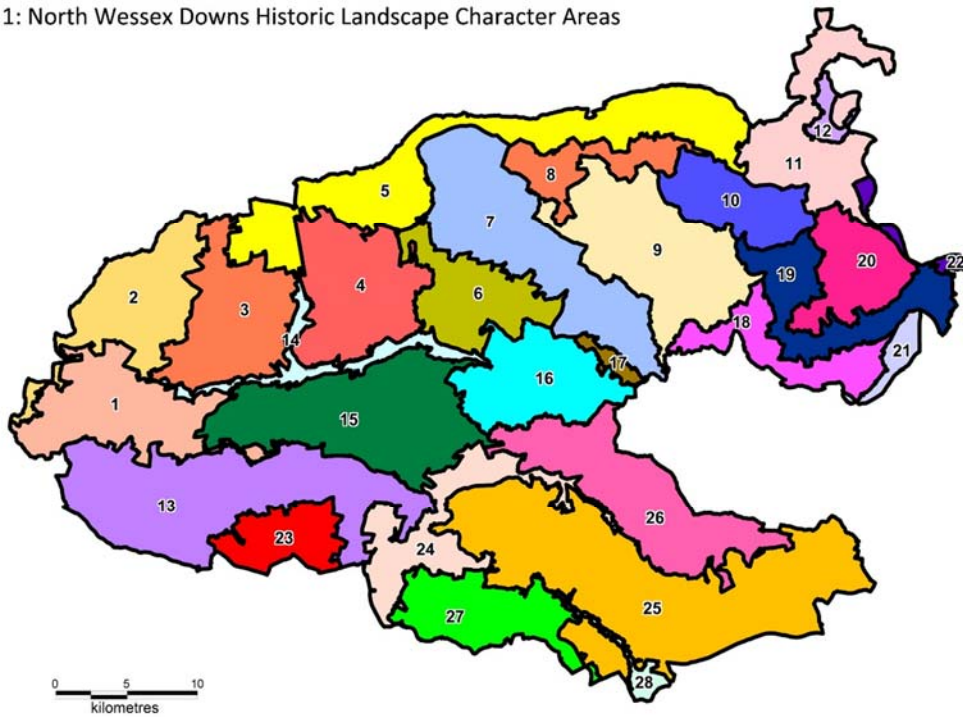
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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 17: Stockcross - Wickham Heath

Most notable archaeology features relate to the Roman period; for example surviving earthwork sections of Ermin Street. There is good archaeological potential for archaeology to survive within the woodland plantations and heathland which cover this area. Surviving areas of unmodified enclosures can be used to illustrate early pre 1800 land use.



Location – This is the South-Eastern tip of the Lambourn – Kennet watershed. It is a small, visually and geographically distinct area formed by a wooded gravel ridge between the Winterbourne Valley and the Lambourn Valley

Geology and Topography – This area has a different geology to neighbouring areas and is comprised of Reading Beds overlain on the ridge top by London Clay and capped by plateau gravels. The topography

is a broad flat topped plateau

Landscape Character – Densely wooded gravel ridge forming a broad flat topped plateau. Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Area 8c: Wickham Wooded Heath.

Archaeological Character – Archaeological information in this area is limited due to the 19th and 20th plantations which now cover the areas of extensive heathland common. The most notable archaeology features relate to the Roman period, the Ermine Street crosses the North East side of the area and evidence for Roman occupation has been uncovered from the area around Wickham Green.

There is good archaeological potential for archaeology to survive within the woodland plantations which cover this area.

Historic Landscape Trajectory – There was formerly a mix of early enclosures, extensive commons, small areas of woodland, dispersed settlement and some small to medium sized parks. This was a largely open landscape into the 18th century, centred on an extensive heathland common, Wickham Heath, which occupied most of the ridge. Some early enclosure fields were present around the fringes of the common; most were regularly-shaped but some irregular enclosures existed at Wickham, Stockcross and Hoe Benham. A large area of regularly-shaped early enclosures was present between Hoe Benham and Stockcross. The regularity of these fields suggests that this was a part of the common that was enclosed by agreement between commoners and local farmers. The majority of this common was enclosed into fields in the early 19th century by a series of Acts of

Parliament with only a small portion around Sole Common remaining unenclosed into the 20th century.

Some areas of woodland existed around the fringes of the common. These areas were a mix of ancient and other old woods that were mostly small in extent and coppiced.



Stockcross Woodlands - The most substantial change in this area is the huge growth in tree-cover.

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Pasture and Houses at Wickham – This was a largely open landscape into the 18th century, centred on an extensive heathland common, Wickham Heath, which occupied most of the ridge

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Hoe Benham Farm– The historic settlement pattern was dispersed and settlements were located on the edge of the common heath

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Present Day Historic Landscape Character - The area has been transformed over the course of the 20th century by agricultural changes and afforestation. The process of rationalising historic enclosures into fields more suited to modern agriculture has taken place widely across this area and most fields in the area have been altered to some extent. An area of largely unmodified historic enclosures remains between Hoe Benham and Ownham. Sole Common has remained unenclosed.

The most substantial change in this area is the huge growth in tree-cover. The majority of Parliamentary enclosures on the heath have been turned into conifer plantations. This process had begun in the 1880s, but most plantations were put in during the mid-20th century. It is likely that the heathland was found to be unsuited to agriculture soon after its enclosure and trees were planted instead as the most productive use of the land. This has altered the feel of landscape from a visually very open one, with views into Kennet and Lambourn valleys and to the high downs, to a very enclosed area with only short horizons due to the density and extent of tree-plantations. Some blocks of secondary woodland have also grown up on previously farmed land around the fringes of the area. Ancient woodlands in the area have had mixed fortunes; one wood was cleared for agriculture and several others have been cleared of native tree cover and replanted with other species.

Some parks are present in the area but are mostly small in extent, such as Foley Lodge and Deanwood. A larger landscape park existed at Wormstall, and this seems to have been created or enlarged in the later 18th century. This park may have been laid out over an extant or deserted Medieval settlement as an early church lies within the park extent at Wickham. The parks at Foley Lodge and Deanwood have largely been adapted for recreational use and are now home to the Vineyard hotel at Stockcross and a small golf course. The park at Wormstall has remained largely unaltered.

Historic Settlement Character – The historic settlement pattern was dispersed and settlements were located on the edge of the common heath. Stockcross and Wickham seem to be common-edge settlements but the nature of Hoe Benham is less clear. The settlement at Wickham Heath does not appear to have existed in the 18th century. It was established in the 19th century, perhaps to resettle commoners turned out when the Act to enclose the common was implemented. Stockcross also seems to have grown substantially in the early 19th century and this may also have been due to resettlement of commoners, although it is also an estate village.

Settlement growth has occurred at all historic settlement nuclei, except Hoe Benham, and is characterised by expansion around existing nuclei and infill within the historic core. It has been most significant at Stockcross where new housing and recreation areas have nearly doubled the size of the settlement. The growth of Stockcross has been spurred by it being far enough away from Newbury to feel rural but well-located for transport at the A4 and A34 junction.

Historic Farmstead Character – 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

- Most notable archaeology features relate to the Roman period; for example surviving earthwork sections of Ermin Street have been located and Wickham maybe the location of the Roman town of Spinae.
- Wickham is the suggested site of a Saxon or possibly earlier settlement
- Good archaeological potential for archaeology to survive within the woodland plantations and heathland which cover this area.

Historic Interest

Surviving areas of unmodified enclosures can be used to illustrate early pre modern land use.

Architectural Interest

N/A

Aesthetic and artistic interest

N/A

Coherence, Rarity and Time depth

The area has been transformed over the course of the 20th century by agricultural changes and afforestation. The most substantial change in this area is the huge growth in tree-cover.

There is strong time depth relating to the Roman Period.

Designated Heritage – There are 0 Scheduled Monuments. The Listed Buildings (5) are related to the area around Wickham Green and include Wickham House and more modest vernacular buildings. There are no parklands on the register of parks and gardens.