



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.

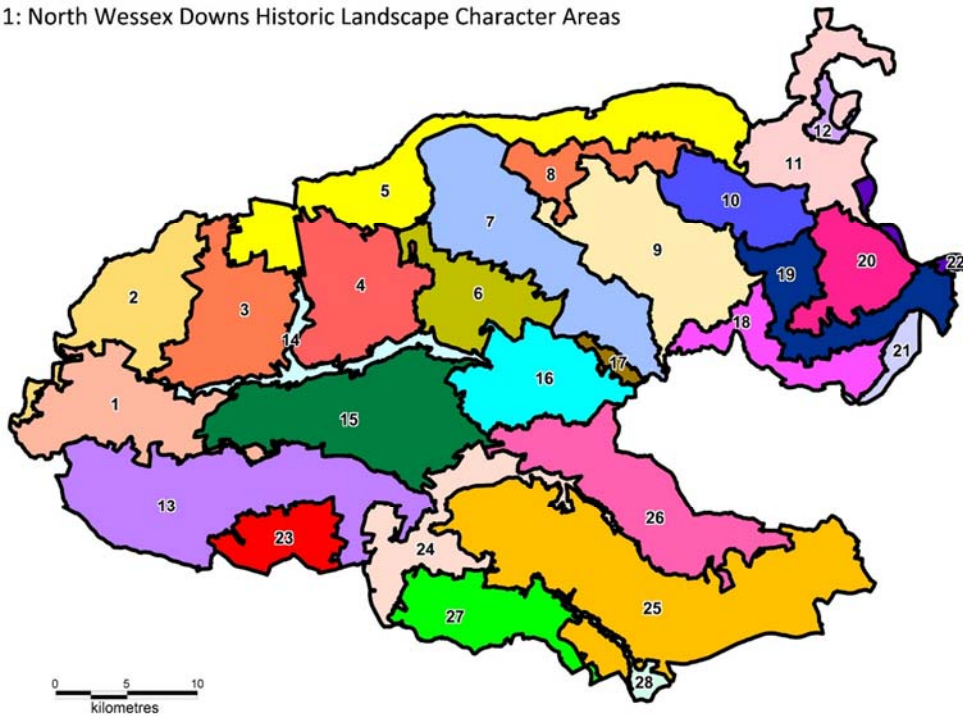
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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



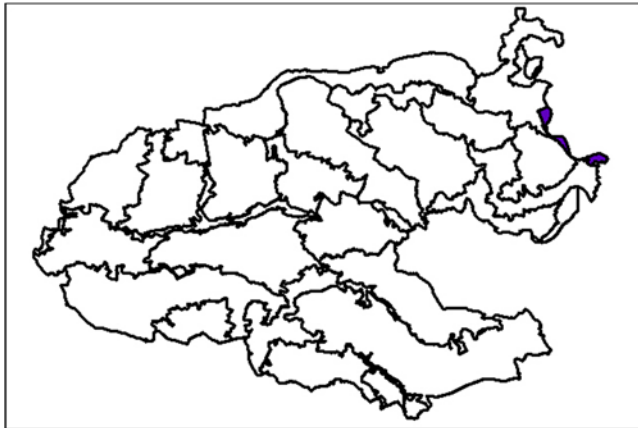
Map Produced by Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy 2012. © Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved (100049050) 2012.

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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 22: Thames Valley South

Important Palaeolithic and Mesolithic finds are associated with the river gravels and floodplain. Bronze Age round barrows have also been identified as cropmarks. Second World War archaeology is associated with defensive features on the banks of the River Thames. There is great potential for further archaeological information from the floodplain including relating to earliest Palaeolithic activity as well as later prehistoric and Roman exploitation of the same area.



Location – This area is in two discontinuous parts, but is composed of the West Berkshire side of the Thames valley from the Oxfordshire border to the outskirts of Reading. The Thames tow path marks the Eastern boundary. The valley floor forms most of the area.

Geology and Topography – The geology is chalk which is overlain by gravels on the valley floor. A mix of soil types is found in the

area. These are flat low-lying landscape with long views.

Landscape Character – A number of small areas of vale landscapes on the Eastern edge of the AONB.
Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Area 6D: Thames Valley Floodplain

Archaeological Character –The earliest archaeological information from this area relates to Palaeolithic tools recovered from the gravels exposed in the Thames floodplain. Mesolithic finds have also been found on the flood plain including blades and flakes at Streatley Farm and a series of Mesolithic sites South of Gatehampton (albeit on the opposite side of the river bank). Neolithic axes have also been recovered from the River Thames.

Bronze Age round barrows have also been identified as cropmarks on the floodplain, and possible prehistoric enclosures has been observed from cropmarks.

Evidence for later prehistoric and Roman exploitation of the floodplain is also apparent. Building foundations and numerous finds of Iron Age and Roman date were found near Streatley Farm in the early 19th century, some at least during gravel quarrying. The buildings seem to be regarded as Roman, and the presence of a villa has been suggested. Evidence for a villa was also found at Church Field at Basildon, during the construction of the railway in 1839.

Medieval archaeology is more limited and probably relates to existing settlement nuclei.

Second World War archaeology is associated with defensive features on the bank of the River Thames.

There is great potential for further archaeological information from the floodplain including relating to earliest Palaeolithic activity as well as later prehistoric and Roman exploitation of the same area. Deposits of occupation 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.



Wet grazing meadow, Streatley - Most of this area was formerly covered by common downland grazing.

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Westbury Lane – There has been significant modification to the area with large-scale changes to fieldscapes. Most historic enclosures have been reorganised.

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View past Streatley Farm – Some areas of open field and meadow land had been enclosed into fields by the 18th century, and farms established amongst these fields.

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Historic Landscape Trajectory – This was an area of nucleated settlement. Villages such as Streatley and Basildon were located at the edge of the valley floor with open fields on the valley floor and common meadow grazing next to the river on the floodplain. Most of this area was covered by common downland grazing. Some areas of open field and meadow land had been enclosed into fields by the 18th century, and farms established amongst these fields. Early enclosures at Streatley Farm and Basildon Farm were of regularly-shaped fields; this suggests that they may be planned enclosures resulting from agreement between local land-holders and farmers to rationalise holdings in the common fields. Early enclosures at Westbury Farm and Scrace’s Farm were irregularly-shaped suggesting that they were created on a more piecemeal basis. The remaining areas of open field, meadow and most downland were enclosed into fields by Act of Parliament in the early 19th century. Few other landscape elements existed in this area. A minor parkland existed around ‘The Grotto’, an 18th century mansion next to the Thames North of Basildon.

Present Day Historic Landscape Character - There has been significant modification to the area with large-scale changes to fieldscapes in the 20th century. Most historic enclosures have been reorganised but since much of the area was historically covered in regularly-shaped fields this has had less impact than in other areas.

The development of leisure facilities has introduced a significant element to the landscape that was not previously present. Beale Park, a wildlife visitor attraction, has been created on land that was Parliamentary fields created from open field.

Historic Settlement Character – Extensive settlement growth took place around Streatley in the late 19th and early 20th century and was spurred on by the construction of the railway through the area. The provision of a station serving both Streatley and Goring made working in Reading or further afield yet living in a pleasant riverside location achievable to the affluent. The housing of this period is typified by large detached villa properties. Housing growth has continued at Streatley and it has nearly trebled in size from its historic extent; some growth has also occurred at Basildon. Recent housing follows the pattern of early 20th century development and consists mostly of large, individually constructed detached houses.

Historic Farmstead Character – Some areas of open field and meadow land had been enclosed into fields by the 18th century, and farms established amongst these fields. Pre 1750 farmsteads are very rare.

Special Qualities and features of Significance

Archaeological Interest

- Palaeolithic tools recovered from the gravels exposed in the Thames floodplain
- Mesolithic finds have also been found on the flood plain
- A possible Neolithic monument complex is evidenced by cropmarks near Westbury Farm, including a possible mortuary enclosure and long barrow.

- Bronze Age round barrows have also been identified as cropmarks on the floodplain.
- Evidence for later prehistoric and Roman exploitation of the floodplain is also apparent
- Second World War archaeology is associated with defensive features on the banks of the River Thames

Historic Interest

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

Architectural Interest

Historic buildings associated with nucleated valley floor settlements.

Aesthetic and artistic interest

N/A

Coherence, Rarity and Time depth

The historic landscape of the Eastern Kenney Valley is dominated by modern field reorganisation although the pattern of 1700 to 1900 AD historic enclosures can still be read.

There is strong time depth relating to archaeology of the river gravels of the flood plain.

The Bronze Age territorial boundary earthwork of Grim's Ditch forms part of the parish boundary between Basildon and Streatley

Designated Heritage - Scheduled Monument (1) is a Dovecote. The Listed Buildings (46) are related to the nucleated historic settlements and farmsteads established on the floodplain and relate to manor houses, historic churches, cottages and barns. There are 0 parklands on the register of parks and gardens.