



# NORTH WESSEX DOWNS

AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

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



**Volume 1 EXTRACT**

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Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy





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## Summary

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*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

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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.**

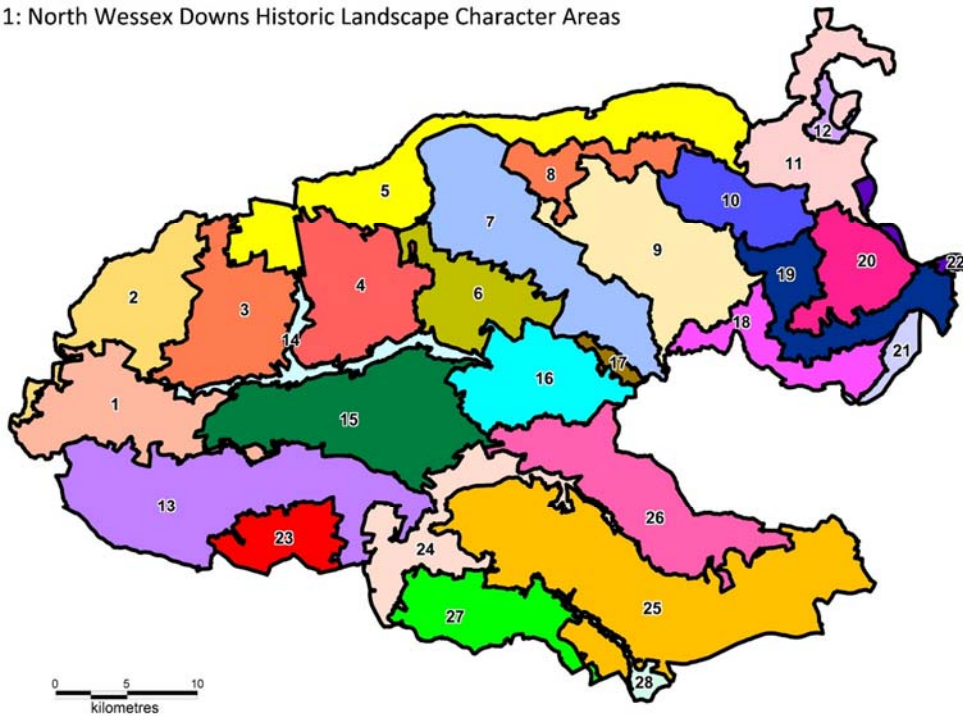
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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.

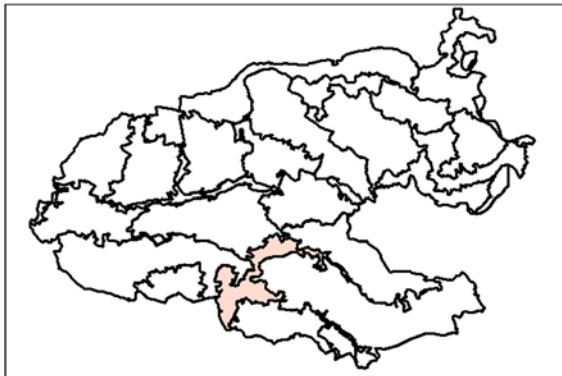
- |     |                                 |     |                                       |
|-----|---------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Pewsey Downs                    | 16. | Middle Kennet Valley                  |
| 2.  | Avebury Plain                   | 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 24 Shalbourne Vale and Wick Down

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There is considerable time depth present relating to the prehistoric period with Neolithic and Early Bronze Age sites being particularly rich. Ribbon like areas of unenclosed chalk downland survive across the area. These are an important historical survival representing a fraction of the former extent of chalk downland pre 1800. Compared with other areas large blocks of parliamentary enclosure survive especially in the vicinity of Gratton fields with their distinctive regular linear form providing evidence of the 19<sup>th</sup> century enclosure of the landscape.



**Location** – Downland and Chalk Escarpment arching between Collingbourne Kingston to the West, Shalbourne to the North and Ashmansworth to the East

**Geology and Topography** – The geology is mainly upper chalk with upper and lower chalk outcropping as narrow bands. Chalk upland with rolling topography dissected by dry valleys.

**Landscape Character** – Farmland woodland mosaic part of the Southern block of upland chalk.

Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Area 2E: Chute Forest - Facombe

**Archaeological Character** – There is a density of prehistoric archaeology in the area especially on the edge of chalk escarpment and higher chalk hill including on Hippenscombe Bottom, Maccombe Down and Wexcombe Hill. These are not as dense as recorded around the Avebury environs but include concentrations of Neolithic long barrows, for example, on Tidcombe Down, Fairmile Down and the Town Barrow. The area also has concentrations of Bronze Age round barrows on Wexcombe Down, Tidcombe Down, Scotspoor, North Hill Fairmile Down, as well as undated ploughed out ring ditches.

Dated later Bronze Age and Iron Age sites are infrequent though there are dense concentrations of field systems probably of a prehistoric or Roman origin. For example to the South of Collingbourne Ducis, on the escarpment edge at Hippenscombe, between Grafton and Wexcombe Down, and along the Ham Hill escarpment.

Roman traces are sparse but include an enclosure North-West of Spicey Buildings.

Early Medieval (Saxon traces) are more common including the Saxon burials at Boxley Copse and the modern villages with Saxon origins such as Shalbourne, Fosbury. There are many examples of Medieval village earthworks including abandoned sites and traces around existing villages again such as Shalbourne. Other Medieval sites on higher downland areas include Pillow Mounds and Ridge and Furrow on areas which are not density settled today such as Tidcombe Down and Ham Hill.



**The Slay** - This area marks the transition between downland and areas of open fields. The Medieval landscape was based around nucleated settlements set amongst open fields on the lower valley sides and utilising common grazing on adjacent or nearby downs. Most of this area cuts across linear parish boundaries which exploited this range of land uses.

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**Farmland, Scot's Poor** – 20<sup>th</sup> century enclosed fields dominate including new fields created post 1900 which enclosed in the remaining large areas of downland. Other 20<sup>th</sup> century fields relate to the reorganisation of previous fields .

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**Farmland , Grafton** – Compared with other areas large blocks of parliamentary enclosure survive especially in the vicinity of Grafton fields with their distinctive regular linear form.

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**Historic Landscape Trajectory** – This area marks the transition between downland and areas of open fields. The Medieval landscape was based around nucleated settlements set amongst open fields on the lower valley sides and utilising common grazing on adjacent or nearby downs. Most of this area cuts across linear parishes which exploited this range of land uses. Some open field to the East of Cadley had been enclosed by 1700. This process is far less widespread than in adjacent areas and most of the open field and downland were enclosed through Act of Parliament in the early 19<sup>th</sup>

century or through post Parliamentary Enclosure. These created regular grid like fields in the landscape.

This was a relatively unwooded area although some areas of ancient woodland did exist in the East of the area on the steep slopes of Maccombe Down

Small local historic parks were created between 1700 and 1900 in the East of the area at Ham Spray House and around Ham manor house.

**Present Day Historic Landscape Character** – Ribbon -like areas of unenclosed chalk downland survive across the area associated with steep slopes not suitable for modern agriculture and with small recent regular woodland plantations.

20<sup>th</sup> century enclosed fields dominate including new fields created post 1900 which enclosed the remaining large areas of downland. Other 20<sup>th</sup> century fields relate to the reorganisation of previous fields. These are modern fields 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. The commonest origin of this type is where irregular boundaries of historic fields are straightened and more regularly-shaped fields are created in their place. There is usually some trace of the prior field-system visible in these modernised fields.

The small historic parks and gardens survive in today's landscape

Compared with other areas large blocks of parliamentary enclosure survive especially in the vicinity of Gratton fields with their distinctive regular linear form.

Another 20<sup>th</sup> century creation is a large area of gallops near Lynden Down.

**Historic Settlement Character** – The area is only associated with two pre 1800 nucleated villages in the North at Shalbourne and Ham situated at the top of a steep combe and chalk stream which flows North West. These have undergone limited settlement expansion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Historic Farmstead Character** – There are only a few historic farm clusters in this area. Large courtyard farms, geared to large-scale arable production, are the dominant farmstead type. These include some of the earliest of this type (dating from the 18th century and earlier) in the country. Complete examples with one or more threshing barns, stabling, cartshed and a granary are very rare.

## Special Qualities and features of Significance

### Archaeological Interest

- Concentrations of Neolithic long barrows.
- Concentrations of Bronze Age round barrows on Wexcombe Down, Tidcombe Down, Scotspoor, North Hill Fairmile Down.



- Largest hillfort in West Berkshire – Walbury Hill
- Dense concentrations of field systems probably of a prehistoric or Roman origin Roman, evidence including field systems and a Roman road.
- Medieval village earthworks.

### **Historic Interest**

Archaeological sites surviving as earthworks relating to Prehistory and the early Medieval period survive as earthworks so have a strong illustrative interest.

Surviving areas of open chalk downland and areas of surviving Parliamentary enclosure can be used to illustrate early pre modern land use.

Sites investigated by antiquarians have a strong associative value.

Walbury Hill was excavated by O.G.S Crawford when he was a young man living locally

### **Architectural Interest**

Buildings associated with historic parks and gardens have architectural interest.

### **Aesthetic and artistic interest**

Buildings associated with historic parks and gardens have aesthetic value.

Combe Gibbet is a popular and long recognised local landmark – focus of famous 17<sup>th</sup> century murder case and 1940's film 'The Black Legend' directed by John Schlesinger

The Wayfarers Walk is a possible prehistoric trackway, now respected by a Right Of Way popular with walkers, horse riders and cyclists.

### **Coherence, Rarity and Time depth**

The historic landscape of this area is extremely coherent dominated by 20<sup>th</sup> century enclosure. Compared with other areas large blocks of parliamentary enclosure survive, especially in the vicinity of Gratton fields with their distinctive regular linear form.

The small historic parks and gardens survive in today's landscape.

Ribbon like areas of unenclosed chalk downland survive across the area. These are an important historical survival representing a fraction of the former extent of chalk downland.

There is strong time depth relating to the prehistoric period with Neolithic and Early Bronze Age evidence being particular rich.

**Designated Heritage** - Scheduled Monuments (32) are dominated by several Neolithic long barrows, multiple Bronze Age round barrows, Iron Age hillforts and the Wansdyke. The Listed Buildings (56) are related to the historic settlement core. There are no parklands on the register of parks and gardens.