



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





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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.

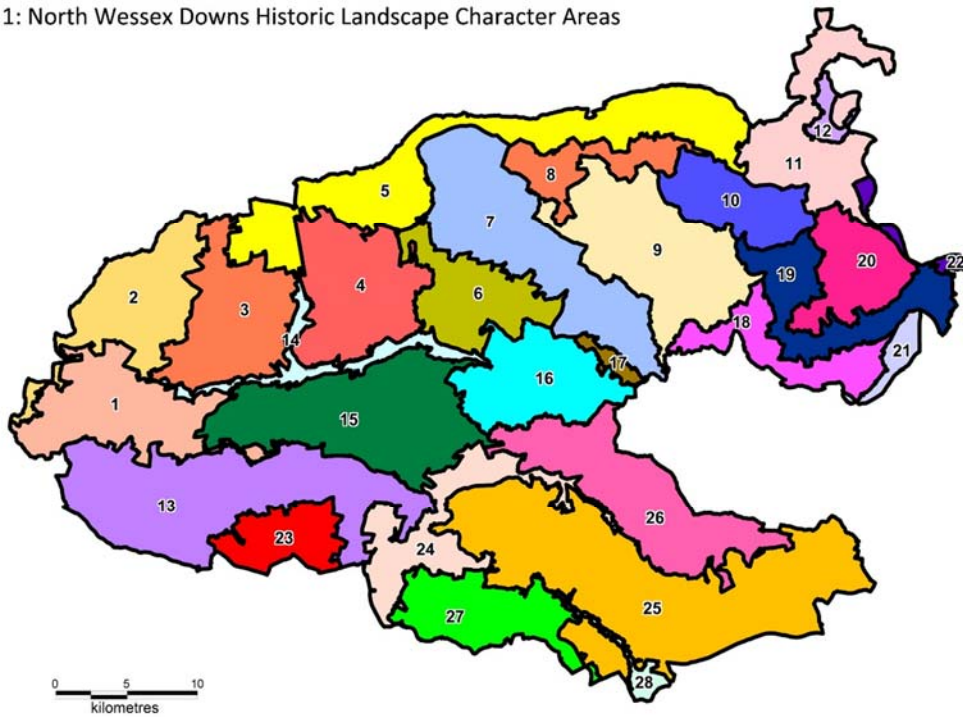
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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



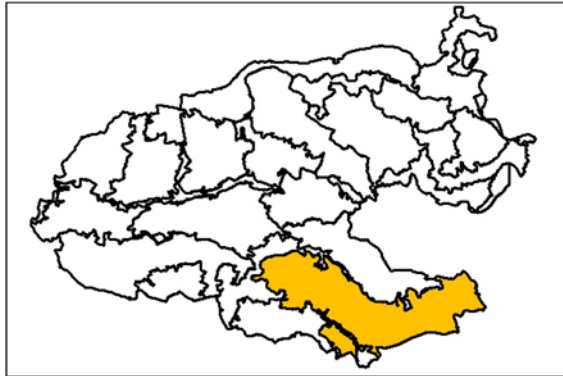
Map Produced by Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy 2012. © Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved (100049050) 2012.

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------|
| 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 25: Linkenholt, Facombe & Hannington

There is an extensive area of Later Prehistoric field systems around Linkenholt and Facombe and to the East in Wiltshire, for example around Smay Down. Surviving areas of unaltered pre 1700 fields and open chalk downland can be used to illustrate early pre modern land use. There is evidence of the post medieval pottery industry at Inkpen



Location – Downland stretching between Oxenwood to the West and the edge of the AONB at Quidhampton and Upper Wootton to the East. It straddles the Wiltshire Hampshire border.

Geology and Topography – The geology is mainly middle and upper chalk. An elevated rolling chalk upland.

Landscape Character – Elevated chalk upland distinguished by chalk with flints with a strongly rolling land form dominated by arable farmland. *Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Type 2: downland with woodland*

Archaeological Character – In the East on the dip slope behind the scarp as it runs across towards Kingsclere, there are two Neolithic long barrows and quite a number of features of Neolithic date clustered onto the open downland. This suggests that the downland landscape has been evolving as a farmed landscape from this time. Whilst no Bronze Age settlement has been found there are a number of undated simple enclosures which may yet be established to be of Bronze Age date. The field systems which have been plotted from cropmarks may in some cases have Bronze Age origins, and it remains possible that some elements of the evidence of early farming landscape structure may emerge. There are also quite a number of burial mounds in the area. Extensive Celtic field systems and numerous Iron Age settlements indicate that this area was farmed and settled in the Iron Age. There are a number of Roman sites, particularly on the edge of the Test in the South. However no villas have been found, and it might be possible to suggest that the farmed and settled landscape continues to evolve in the Roman period, being ‘newly settled’.

To the West the light and general spread of Mesolithic material, with a preference for areas close to water courses, suggests that the area was only lightly exploited. There is little evidence of Neolithic or Bronze Age settlement and landscape exploitation, although there is some settlement and burial mound evidence overlooking the Test.

This pattern continues into the Iron Age and the core of the character area probably remained under-exploited, perhaps suggesting a late evolution of this part of the landscape. However, there is an extensive area of Celtic field systems around Linkenholt and Facombe, and to the East in Wiltshire, for example around Smay Down. It is critical to understand whether these are of Iron Age or Roman in date as this may suggest when an agricultural landscape started to emerge. It is notable

that there is a relationship between the Celtic field systems embedded in the woods at Facombe and Celtic field systems still traceable within the present landscape.

Medieval activity relates to abandoned settlements for example around Chapel Cottages in Shalbourne.



Ashley Warren - The area was dominated by a Medieval pattern of nucleated dispersed settlements surrounded by open fields which exploited the open grazing of downland areas on higher ground.

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Lane South of Ashmansworth – Areas of pre 1700 irregular fields are concentrated to the north of the area. These are irregularly-shaped fields and 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.

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Farmland Vernham Dean – There is a high survival of pre 1700 enclosure interspersed with reorganised and amalgamated fields.

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Historic Landscape Trajectory – The area was dominated by a Medieval pattern of nucleated dispersed settlements surrounded by open fields which exploited the open grazing of downland areas on higher ground. These were enclosed pre 1700. Areas of pre 1700 irregular fields are concentrated to the North of the area. These are irregularly-shaped fields and 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. The South and East of the area is associated with regular pre 1700 enclosure. These regular shaped fields were probably created following an agreement between local land-holders and farmers to rationalise and enclose holdings in common fields but obscure these earlier traces much more effectively. There are also small areas of assarts where woodland has been cleared in the centre of the area near Faccombe. Only small areas of parliamentary and post parliamentary enclosure were created, notably to the North of Whitchurch. It should be noted that whilst the field patterns may be dominated by pre 1700 enclosure, there are large scale frameworks to those field patterns which are clearly much older, certainly medieval, possibly Saxon, and in some places even older. The field patterns sit within a much older framework.

Ancient woodland was common with small blocks scattered across the landscape. Designed pre 1700 to 1900 parkland was less common than in other areas with small parklands being associated with Fosbury house for example.

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

There is a high survival of pre 1700 enclosure interspersed with reorganised and amalgamated 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. On the North-East side of the area there is a mosaic of replanted ancient woodland and ancient woodland.

Historic Settlement Character – The historic settlement pattern is dispersed. Apart from the hamlet/farm clusters and isolated farms, pre 1800 settlement is rare and is represented by irregular row settlement in the North-West corner of the area around Inkpen Common and one nucleated settlement in the far Eastern side at Hannington. There has been limited post 1900 settlement infill and this is dispersed in nature focusing on the area around Ashmansworth.

Historic Farmstead Character – Large pre 1800 historic farmsteads are spread thinly throughout the area with notable concentrations in the far South-East and North-West. There is a concentration of hamlets and farm clusters related to the belt of dispersed woodland which runs between Buttermere and Litchfield.

A low density of farmsteads in the landscape, due to a large holding size by national standards and the concentration of farmsteads in villages and hamlets. 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.

Courtyard plans present blank exteriors to surrounding settlements and landscapes, openings being concentrated on the elevations facing into the yards. Aisled barns are an iconic feature of the downland landscape, their integrity being dependent on their degree of structural completeness and the dominance of the expanse of the roof. Long straw style thatch roofing may be present, which is rare in a regional context. Boundary walls are dominant and critical to the setting, particularly of village-based farmsteads.

Special Qualities and features of Significance

Archaeological Interest

- Two Neolithic long barrows and quite a number of **items** of Neolithic date cluster on the open downland.
- Number of undated simple enclosures which may yet be established to be of Bronze Age date
- There is an extensive area of Later Prehistoric field systems around Linkenholt and Facombe and to the East in Wiltshire for example around Smay Down.
- The Wansdyke - a linear earthwork ascribed in the Early Medieval period and associated with other sites of the same name in Wiltshire and Somerset
- Evidence of post medieval pottery industry at Inkpen

Historic Interest

Archaeological sites surviving as earthworks, from the Iron Age and Romano-British period have a strong illustrative interest. It is notable that there is a relationship between the Celtic field systems embedded in the woods at Facombe and Celtic field systems still traceable within the present landscape.

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

The area was used during preparations for D-Day, including the construction of a replica gun battery for training purposes.

Architectural Interest

Buildings associated with the dispersed settlement pattern, including large pre 1800 historic farmsteads, are spread thinly throughout the area with notable concentrations in the far South-East and North-West.

Aesthetic and artistic interest

N/A

Coherence, Rarity and Time depth

There is a high survival of pre 1700 enclosure interspersed with reorganised and amalgamated fields.

Ribbon like areas of unenclosed chalk downland survive across the North-East of the area representing an important historical survival

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

On the North-East side of the area there is a mosaic of replanted ancient woodland and ancient woodland.

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

Designated Heritage - Scheduled Monuments (16) relate to Neolithic long barrows, Bronze Age round barrows, Iron Age hillforts, a Roman Road and a deserted Medieval village. The Listed Buildings (193) are related to the historic cores of the settlements in the area. There are no parklands on the register of parks and gardens.