



# NORTH WESSEX DOWNS

AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

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



**Volume 1 EXTRACT**

Third Edition March 2016

Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy





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March 2016 – Third Edition



## 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.**

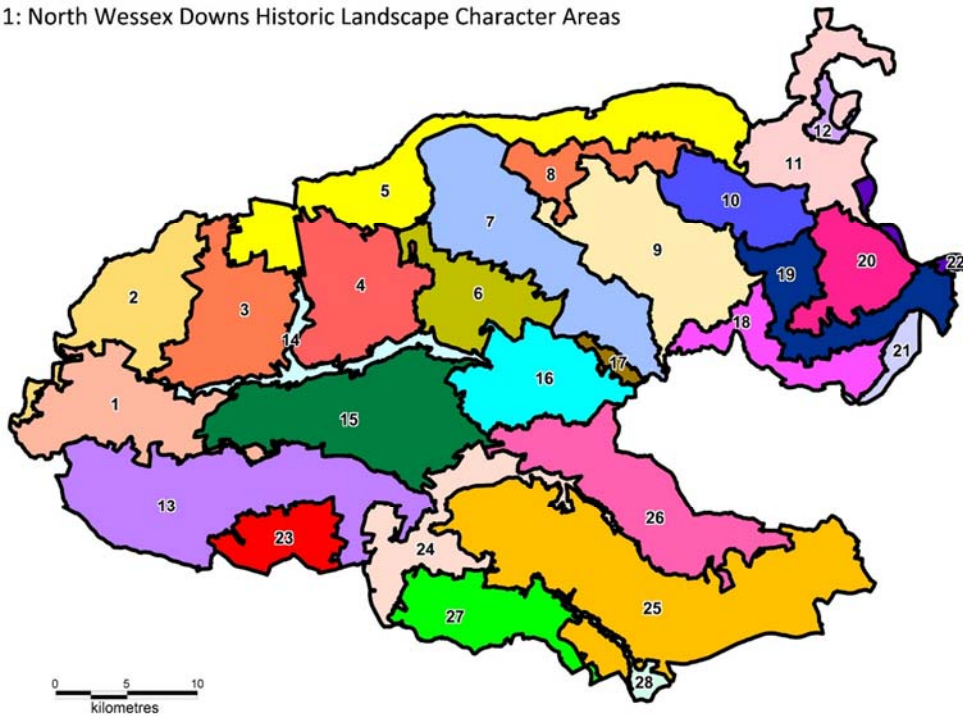
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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.

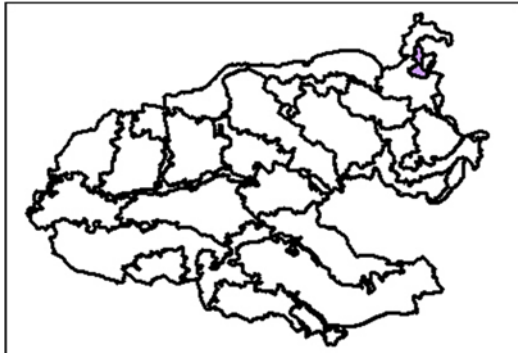
1.	Pewsey Downs	16.	Middle Kennet Valley
2.	Avebury Plain	17.	Stockcross-Wickham Heath
3.	Barbury Downs	18.	Snelmore and Bucklebury Commons
4.	Aldbourn Downs	19.	Pang Valley and Sulham Gap
5.	Northern Chalk Escarpment	20.	Pang-Thames Plateaux
6.	Lambourn Wooded Plateau	21.	Kennet Valley East
7.	Lambourn 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 12: Thame Valley North

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The area is notable for its Roman archaeology including cropmarks of a potential Roman road, enclosures and a possible 4<sup>th</sup> century Roman Settlement. Small areas of enclosure remain in the South of the area associated with surviving pre 1700 enclosed meadows. These are an important historical survival of earlier pre 1700 land use.



**Location** – Small area of Thames Floodplain to the East of Wallingford Geology and Topography – The valley floor is cut into the chalk and overlain by alluvium and gravels. It is a flat low lying landscape .

**Landscape Character** – Distinct low lying area crossed by numerous watercourses and dominated by arable fields. *Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Area 6D: Thames Floodplain*

**Archaeological Character** – Prehistoric archaeology is limited to stray finds including Bronze Age flint tools and an arrowhead.

The area is notable for its Roman archaeology including cropmarks of a potential Roman road, enclosures and a possible 4<sup>th</sup> century Roman settlement.

The church at Aston Tirrold has a Saxon origin with 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century fabric. There is also a possible early Medieval linear bank. Other later Medieval features include a moat around Lollington Farm, Cholsey and the manor house of South Moreton, now a farmhouse which appears to date from the late 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> century. It has a central hall and two wings but has been much altered. A moat surrounds the site. The manor house of Bray, South Moreton, is now converted into two cottages. The central hall of Tudor date remains, other parts are of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. There is also a motte castle.

There is archaeological potential for additional Roman sites and evidence of the Early Medieval origins of the historic settlements at their historic cores.

**Historic Landscape Trajectory** – Formerly in the Medieval period this area was dominated by open marshland which was part of the Thames floodplain with the nucleated historic settlement on higher ground. With the exception of one small area of pre 1700 enclosed meadow to the South of the area the marshland was enclosed through parliamentary enclosure between 1750 and 1850, and regular fields with drainage channels created. This transformed the landscape into an agriculturally productive landscape.

**Present Day Historic Landscape Character** – Today the area is dominated by reorganised and amalgamated fields which have modified the former areas of parliamentary enclosure. These are modern fields formed through the consolidation or amalgamation of existing, historic, enclosures



into more regular holdings, usually to enable more efficient, mechanised arable agriculture. Traces of the earlier field patterns will remain fossilised in these alterations. Areas of parliamentary enclosure remain in the South of the area associated with surviving pre 1700 enclosed meadows.



**Ashton Tirrold** Formerly in the Medieval period this area was dominated by open marshland which was part of the Thames floodplain with the nucleated historic settlement on higher ground. The marshland was enclosed through parliamentary enclosure between 1750 and 1850, and regular fields with drainage channels created.

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**High Street, North Moreton** – North and South Moreton are located on pockets of higher ground and have a loosely nucleated form.

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**Pasture, North Moreton** – Today the area is dominated by reorganised and amalgamated fields which have modified the former areas of parliamentary enclosure.

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**Historic Settlement Character** – Pre 1800 nucleated settlements is found at Ashton Upthorpe/ Ashton Tirrod which is located at the spring line at the bottom of the chalk escarpment. North and South Moreton are located on pockets of higher ground and have a loosely nucleated form. These have undergone post 1900 expansion but the historic plan remains. Building materials include thatch, red brick and weatherboard.

**Historic Farmstead Character** – There are very few isolated farms. Loose courtyard farms, mostly concentrated in villages, with often large barns, stables, granaries and open-fronted shelter sheds ranged around a yard are typical of the area. Often shelter sheds were attached to barns at right angles. Farm houses usually form one side of the yard, but detached from agricultural buildings, or lie close to, but away from the yard. Regular, planned courtyard farmsteads are also found.

## Special Qualities and features of Significance

### Archaeological Interest

- The area is notable for its Roman archaeology including cropmarks of a potential Roman road, enclosures and a possible 4<sup>th</sup> century Roman Settlement.
- Evidence of the Early Medieval origins of the historic settlements.
- Medieval features includes a moat around Lollington Farm, Cholsey and the manor house of South Moreton.

### Historic Interest

Where areas of pre 1700 enclosure survive these have a strong illustrative interest as they can be used to illustrate early pre modern land use.

### Architectural Interest

The church at Aston Tirrold has a Saxon origin with 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century fabric

Historic buildings associated with spring line settlements hold important evidence of the development of settlement in the area

### Aesthetic and artistic interest

Strong aesthetic value to the areas of formerly open marshland



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

The historic landscape of this area is extremely coherent dominated by 20<sup>th</sup> century enclosure, created through reorganised and amalgamated fields which have modified the former areas of parliamentary enclosure.

Small areas of enclosure remain in the South of the area associated with surviving pre 1700 enclosed meadows. These are an important historical survival of earlier pre 1700 land use.

There is strong time depth relating to the Roman period.

**Designated Heritage** – The single Scheduled Monument (1) is a motte castle. The Listed Buildings (112) are related to the nuclei of the historic settlements. There are 0 parklands on the register of parks and gardens.