



# 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





**Emma Rouse, Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy**

[www.wyvernheritage.co.uk](http://www.wyvernheritage.co.uk) – [info@wyvernheritage.co.uk](mailto:info@wyvernheritage.co.uk) – 01747 870810

March 2016 – Third Edition



## 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.**

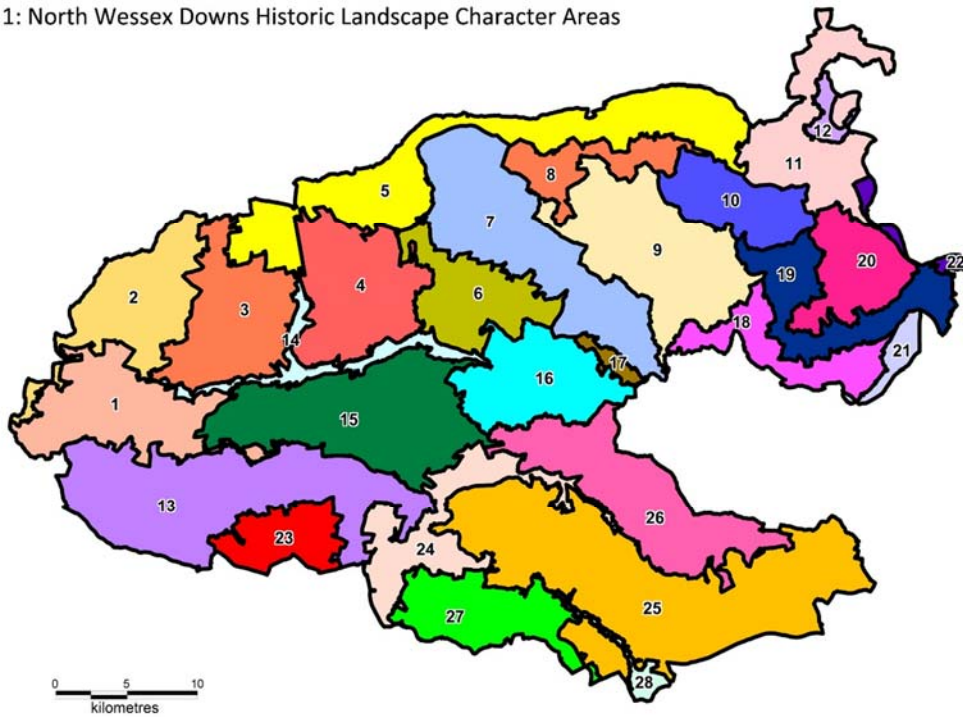
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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.

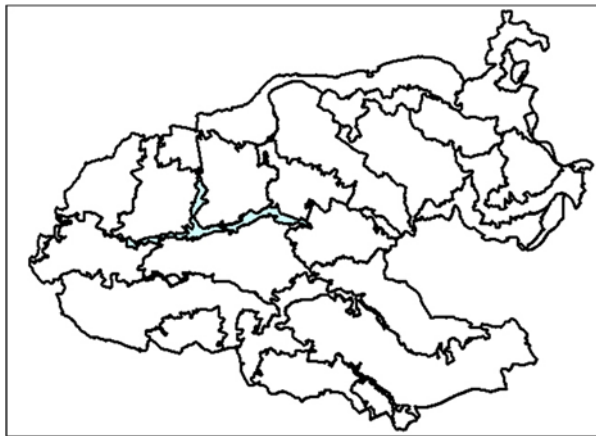
- |     |                                 |     |                                       |
|-----|---------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Pewsey Downs                    | 16. | Middle Kennet Valley                  |
| 2.  | Avebury Plain                   | 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 14: Upper Kennet Valley

---

The upper reaches of the Kennet valley are dominated by the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age monuments which are within the Avebury World Heritage Site including Silbury Hill and the West Kennet Palisade Enclosures. There is also Neolithic evidence at the head of the Lambourn Valley. There is also a notable presence of Roman archaeology; this includes a Roman settlement at the base of Silbury Hill, Roman roads, and the Roman Town at Cunetio (Mildenhall). Traces of early and late Medieval archaeology dominate due to the intense exploitation of the valley resources. Evidence for early Medieval settlement in the valley bottom. Small slivers of open land surviving along the South-Eastern valley edge. These are an important historical survival representing a fraction of the former open pre 1600 land use. These exist alongside surviving areas of 1700 landscapes, and later 1700-1900 relict water meadow landscapes.



**Location** – Valley containing the River Kennet flowing from Beckhampton to the East through Marlborough and Hungerford towards Newbury, includes the tributary of the Og flowing from the North and joining the Kennet at Marlborough.

**Geology and Topography** – There are alluvium and gravel deposits on the valley floor. The valley cuts through the chalk upland with a smooth valley form, relatively steep sides and a narrow valley floor.

**Landscape Character** – Chalk valley with steep sides and narrow floor dominated by pasture *Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Area 7a: Kennet Valley.*

**Archaeological Character** – The upper reaches of the valley are dominated by the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age monuments which are within the Avebury World Heritage Site. This includes the major Neolithic mound at Silbury Hill, standing 31 metres high, the West Kennet palisaded enclosure, sub-circular enclosures which cross the current course of the River and the Sanctuary, an excavated timber circle at the end of the West Kennet Avenue.

There is a notable presence of Roman archaeology; this includes a Roman settlement at the base of Silbury Hill, Roman roads, and the Roman Town at Cunetio (Mildenhall). The town lies at the point where at least six main Roman roads converge to cross the River Kennet. The town plan has been revealed by evidence from aerial photographs and consists of a street system with several stone buildings identifiable, including a large complex surrounding a courtyard within the centre of the settlement. The town was enclosed by two phases of defences, with stone defences replacing the earlier phase in the 4th century. There is also a high status Roman villa at Littlecote. This was first discovered in 1730 when the Orpheus Mosaic and a coin hoard, supposedly containing coins of Vespasian (AD 69-79), was found. The site was rediscovered and excavated from 1978. These sites are related to the extensive Roman field systems and settlements on the downland to the North.

The rest of valley is dominated by early and late Medieval archaeology due to the intense exploitation of the valley resources. This includes traces of Medieval settlements which in fills the existing settlement pattern for example at Littlcote, a Medieval hunting lodge and deer park again at Littlecote and also at Ramsbury. Both Marlborough and Overton have known Saxon origins. Marlborough was an important Medieval settlement with a motte and bailey castle established on the pre-existing Marlborough mound, and the town was granted a charter in 1204. A small priory was also established to the South of the town and was excavated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Post Medieval archaeology is dominated by the relict t water meadows which were established all along the river bottom.



**The A4 bypassing Silbury Hill** - The upper reaches of the valley are dominated by the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age monuments which are within the Avebury World Heritage Site. This includes the major Neolithic mound at Silbury Hill. Another notable feature is the historic coach road of the modern A4 which runs along the valley bottom.

© Copyright [Jim Champion](#) and licensed for [reuse](#) under a [Creative Commons Licence](#).



**Marlborough High Street** – This is a mixed area of both nucleated and nucleated regular row Medieval valley floor settlements punctuated by the Medieval planned town of Marlborough. Here the houses were arranged along the main road with regular Burbage plots in behind.

© Copyright [Ron Strutt](#) and licensed for [reuse](#) under a [Creative Commons Licence](#)



**Footbridge over the Kennet near Knighton** – Extensive open meadows probably existed on the valley floor and were used as common grazing but these have been obscured by water meadows. Small areas of marsh existed on the eastern edge of the area. Small areas of post 1700 woodland have naturally occurred on the eastern edge of the area as meadows have been taken out of use. © Copyright [Des](#)

[Blenkinsopp](#) and licensed for [reuse](#) under a [Creative Commons Licence](#).

**Historic Landscape Trajectory** – This is a mixed area of both nucleated and nucleated regular row Medieval valley floor settlements, surrounded by open fields with riverside meadow grazing, and of smaller settlements and scattered farms, early enclosures and woodland. Open field systems are documented as having operated on the lower slopes of the southern side of the valley and along the tributary of the Og. Extensive open meadows probably existed on the valley floor and were used as common grazing but these have been obscured by water meadows. Small areas of marsh existed on the eastern edge of the area.

The areas of open land were enclosed prior to 1700. The upper reaches of the Og valley, the area to the South of Ramsbury, to the South of Axford, to the North of Marlborough were all subject to irregular pre 1700 enclosure. These early enclosures were irregularly-shaped and slotted into the framework of the landscape that had been established by a network of roads and tracks either side of the river and leading to downland areas. The upper reaches of the Kennet valley and the lower reaches of the Og were covered at the same time by enclosed meadows. These are characterised by sinuous fields on low-lying ground in valley bottoms, usually next to the course of a river or stream. These were probably originally for hay cultivation but are now mainly grazing and are likely to be Medieval or early Post Medieval in origin. Like early enclosures, they represent an important component of the Medieval and early Post Medieval farming landscape. This pattern was infilled with areas of regular pre 1700 enclosure. These were probably created following an agreement between local land-holders and farmers to rationalise and enclose holdings in the common fields. About half of these fields have been modified in the 20<sup>th</sup> century although the majority of these enclosures have been altered in the Og valley.

There were also several deer parks, at Ramsbury and Littlecote dating to before 1700 which were subsequently transformed into large designed landscapes. A smaller post 1700 designed landscape was also created around Manton manor. In the period 1700 to 1900 expansive areas of water meadows were created in the bottom of the river valley. These utilised sophisticated water management systems (leats, sluices, ridges) to flood meadows during winter months to prevent the ground freezing and so ensure an early growth of spring grass for grazing animals (mostly sheep and lambs). The meadows formed a central feature of the local sheep/corn system of agriculture and are therefore intimately related to the downland areas to the North. They are comprised of enclosed fields with channels and sluices to ensure stable water flow over the meadow. These have been enclosed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Areas of ancient woodland were limited although trees lining the banks of the Kennet and may be of considerable antiquity.

**Present Day Historic Landscape Character** – Large areas of pre 1700 enclosure described above survive in the landscape today. However, in the Og valley and upper reaches of the Kennet reorganised 20<sup>th</sup> century fields were created. 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. In the area to the East of Marlborough some amalgamated 20<sup>th</sup> century fields were created especially adjacent to the water meadows in the centre of the valley. These enclosures are created by the removal of boundaries between fields – many are in use as pasture and remain as small to



medium sized units following boundary removal. There is usually some trace of the prior field-system visible in these modernised fields.

The water meadows themselves went out of use in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and were subsequently enclosed. Despite their relict nature the water meadow systems are not entirely destroyed and there are many instances where earthworks of the system (channels and ridges) still survive in the midst of these new fields.

The large areas of designed landscape survive and there are also small slivers of open land surviving along the south-eastern valley edge.

Small areas of post 1700 woodland have naturally occurred on the eastern edge of the area as meadows have been taken out of use.

The centre of the area is dominated by the expansion of settlement around Marlborough. This includes the development of the grounds of Marlborough College and the creation of a golf course on part of Marlborough common.

Another notable feature is the historic coach road route of the A4 which runs along the valley bottom.

**Historic Settlement Character** – This is a mixed area of both nucleated and nucleated regular row Medieval valley floor settlements punctuated by the Medieval planned town of Marlborough. Here the houses were arranged along the main road with regular Burbage plots in behind. These settlements are infilled by small farms and hamlets along the length of the valley.

Marlborough has seen considerable settlement growth infilling the junction between the river Og and the Kennet and including 1700 to 1900 settlement to the North-West, pre war settlement expansion to the North and post war expansion to the South and West. Most of the other nucleated villages in the valley have seen some settlement expansion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with many settlements doubling in size in some instances; this is creating a new linear settlement pattern spreading along the Kennet valley.

**Historic Farmstead Character** – Historic farmsteads were arranged on the edge of historic settlements and hamlets. 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

- Upper reaches of the valley are dominated by the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age monuments which are within the Avebury World Heritage Site including Silbury Hill and

West Kennet Palisade Enclosures. There is also Neolithic evidence at the head of the Lambourn Valley

- Notable presence of Roman archaeology; this includes a Roman settlement at the base of Silbury Hill, Roman roads, and the Roman Town at Cunetio (Mildenhall).
- Dominant traces of early and late Medieval archaeology due to the intense exploitation of the valley resources. Evidence for early Medieval settlement in the valley bottom.

### **Historic Interest**

Many prehistoric sites survive as earthworks and in particular Silbury Hill have a very strong illustrative value as they are such dominant features. Early Medieval and later earthworks in the valley bottom also survive.

Surviving areas of open land, earlier enclosures and water meadows can be used to illustrate early pre modern land use. Earlier Medieval activity can also be illustrated through surviving buildings and earthworks.

Sites investigated by antiquarians have a strong associative value.

### **Architectural Interest**

Historic buildings associated with Medieval valley floor settlements and the Medieval planned town of Marlborough. Vernacular chalk cob buildings. Pre-1750 farmstead buildings and in particular large timber-frame barns where these survive

Buildings associated with historic parks at Ramsbury Manor and Marlborough College

### **Aesthetic and artistic interest**

Historic parks and gardens at Ramsbury Manor and Marlborough College have an important aesthetic interest.

The prehistoric monuments of the Avebury WHS have been the focus of interest of many artists.

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

The historic landscape of this area is extremely mixed but dominated by survival of pre 1700 landscapes, and later 1700-1900 relict water meadow landscape.

Small slivers of open land survive along the South-Eastern valley edge. These are an important historical survival representing a fraction of the former open pre 1600 land use.

There is strong time depth relating to the prehistoric period with Neolithic and Early Bronze Age evidence being particularly rich, Roman archaeology is also present but the majority of the valley is dominated by early and late Medieval archaeology.

**Designated Heritage** - Scheduled Monuments (13) relate to the Avebury World heritage sites, the Roman villa at Littlecote, the Roman settlement at Cunetio and Medieval archaeology relating to the settlement of Marlborough. The Listed Buildings (506) are concentrated around the historic core of Marlborough and the core of the other historic settlements in the valley. There are 2 parklands on the register of parks and gardens. The landscape park to Ramsbury Manor which was originally a Medieval deer park, landscaped during the late 17th century and re-landscaped in the late 18th century, and the remains of a late 17th/early 18th century garden to Marlborough Castle House, which now form parts of the grounds of Marlborough College. The Western part of area is within the Avebury World Heritage site and the area beyond that falls within the setting of the World Heritage site.