



# 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

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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.**

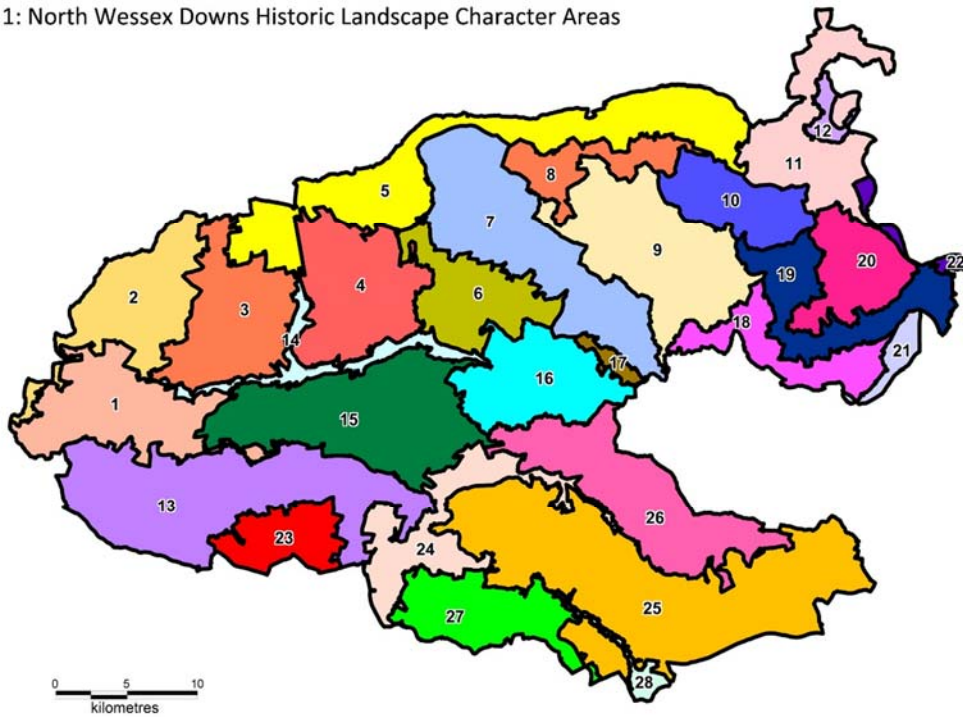
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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



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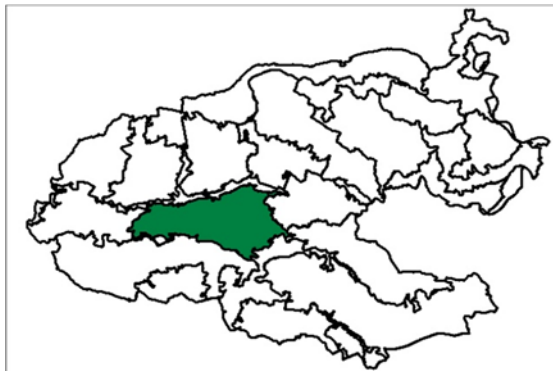
- |     |                                 |     |                                       |
|-----|---------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Pewsey Downs                    | 16. | Middle Kennet Valley                  |
| 2.  | Avebury Plain                   | 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 15: Savernake Forest and West Woods

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A rich patina of layers of human land use. There are a considerable number of later prehistoric sites including enclosures, linear boundaries and field systems which have been recorded throughout Savernake Forest and the immediate area. Two major Iron Age centres are known. In the Roman period the Forest formed the heart of the Savernake Ware Roman pottery industry and there is evidence for two Roman Villa Sites. Early Medieval archaeology is dominated by the Wansdyke. Significant areas of ancient woodland survive. These are an important historical survivals representing the core of the Medieval hunting area, which were subsequently shaped by the Great Enclosure of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.



**Location** – Area in the Western part of the AONB, comprising the area of West Woods and Savernake Forest to the South of Marlborough. It includes the River Dun and the Kennet and Avon Canal to the West. The boundary is defined to the North by the Kennet Valley and to the South by the Pewsey Vale.

**Geology and Topography** – The plateau is formed almost entirely of Upper Chalk overlain with clay-with-flint. Further to the East, clays sand and gravels are found. The plateau dips to the East. The

landform is of rolling hills dissected by small valleys.

**Landscape Character** – The area is distinguished by its dense woodland character and with its relationship to the former Medieval Royal Forest of Savernake. *Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Type 3A: Savernake Plateau.*

**Archaeological Character** – The earliest archaeological evidence is the recovery of a Palaeolithic hand axe on the North side of Granham Hill to the South of Marlborough. The cropmark remains of a Neolithic causewayed enclosure at Crofton were discovered in 2001 as part of an English Heritage survey. Now entirely plough-levelled it is only visible as a cropmark on aerial photographs. A Neolithic long barrow was excavated above West Overton in the West of the area and one is known within West Woods.

Though sparse and few in number, the potential Bronze Age barrows appear either to be situated in prominent locations on the northern and southern edges of the Savernake massif or at the head of dry valleys. Several other cropmarks of ring ditches, also presumed to be Bronze Age round barrows, are known.

Immediately to the West of Crofton aerial photographs have revealed the cropmarks of a probable later prehistoric farmstead. A considerable number of potentially later prehistoric sites including enclosures, linear boundaries and field systems have been recorded throughout Savernake Forest and the immediate area. Most of the sites identified outside the woodlands had been plough-levelled and only visible as cropmarks. The largest area of probable prehistoric fields recorded during

the NMP survey was seen to the South of the forest around Tottenham Park. Several prehistoric earthen banks and ditches are known to cross the area as well as dykes crossing the valleys.

There are two major Iron Age centres known in the area: Chisbury hillfort, a large multivallate hillfort and the possible late Iron Age oppidum at Forest Hill, possibly the regional capital prior to the Roman conquest large enclosure. The remains of a possible late Iron Age temple enclosure have been identified solely from lidar imagery in a heavily overgrown area within Savernake Forest. Another Iron Age or early Roman shrine has been found to the East of the 2<sup>nd</sup> -4<sup>th</sup> century AD villa site at Postern Hill. Another villa site is known at Villa Castle Copse, Great Bedwyn. A Roman road crosses the area cutting the forest.

The forest was the heart of the Savernake Ware Roman pottery industry. This industry almost certainly had its origins in, at the very least, the late Iron Age, and it is possible that some of the enclosures identified within the area were linked in some way to the pottery industry. Within Savernake Forest the combined sources of aerial photographs and lidar derived imagery have recorded a number of enclosures, many surviving as earthworks, probably the remains of small settlements or farmsteads of Iron Age or Roman date

Early Medieval archaeology is dominated by the Wansdyke which dates to the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> century AD. It consists of a ditch and a running embankment from the ditch spoil, with the ditching facing North. It ran between Savernake Forest, through West Woods, to Morgan's Hill.

The history of the Medieval hunting forest of Savernake has been researched using documentary sources and more recently lidar derived imagery supplied by the Forestry Commission. Prior to the emparkment of Savernake Forest and the creation of the deer park known as Savernake Great Park in 1570s, there were originally five hunting lodges vaguely marked on early maps, their exact locations have been lost. The possible site of only one, the Great Lodge, is thought to have been identified from aerial photographs. Savernake Forest is littered with the traces of numerous hollow ways, many of which are almost certainly the remains of former routes through the forest. There is also evidence for the Great Enclosure of 17<sup>th</sup> century. Outside the forest Medieval archaeology includes the deserted Medieval Village of Shaw to the West of West Woods, and Medieval field systems to the East of the river Dun.

Post Medieval archaeological sites include the traces of the former Marlborough railway line which runs North, South across the area between West Woods and Savernake Forest.

There is important Second World War archaeology including airfields at Marlborough Landing Ground, Overton Heath and Ramsbury, plus, within the forest, ammunition dumps and gas storage areas.

**Historic Landscape Trajectory** – The far West of the area is dominated by the ancient woodland of West Woods. This was part of the Savernake Forest at its greatest extent but was disafforested by the 13<sup>th</sup> century. West Woods has been subsequently replanted. It is surrounded by pre 1700 irregular enclosure the southern part of which has been enclosed from heathland. These early enclosures were irregularly-shaped and slotted into the framework of the landscape that had been established by a dense network of deeply incised roads and tracks and open field boundaries. This suggests that they were enclosed on a gradual, piecemeal basis.

The area between West Woods and Savernake was dominated by pre 1700 regular enclosure which has obscured traces of previous land uses apart from the southern edge of the Kennet Valley where open fields were present. These were probably created following an agreement between local land-holders and farmers to rationalise and enclose holdings in the common fields.



**Savernake Forest** - The centre of the area is dominated by Savernake Forest which was an established royal hunting forest by the time of the Domesday survey.

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**Kennet and Avon Canal, Crofton** – The Kennet and Avon Canal is an important historic feature running parallel to the river Dun through Great Bedwyn and Little Bedwyn. The area includes the Crofton pumping station for the canal which was built 1802-09. The engines are the earliest steam beam engines still in working order.

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**West Woods long barrow** – The far West of the area is dominated by the ancient woodland of West Woods. This was part of the Savernake Forest at its greatest extent but was disafforested by the 13<sup>th</sup> century. West Woods has been subsequently replanted. It includes monuments including this long barrow and the Wansdyke

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The centre of the area is dominated by Savernake Forest which was an established royal hunting forest by the time of the Domesday survey, and in common with other royal forests was managed primarily for hunting of game, particularly deer by the King. Hunting rights and rights to gather tithes were granted by the king to various noblemen or the church, and the forest was used, abused and



trespassed upon by commoners living around the periphery. Commoners and borderers (commoners living adjacent to the forest edge) exercised their rights to graze animals, collect firewood, brushwood and bracken. In 1280 the limits of the forest were much more extensive than now, running from West Overton to Denford beyond Hungerford. By the perambulation recorded in 1301, however, 80% of lands were disafforested, but two of the wooded parcels that remained correspond to what is now Savernake. Whilst there are several thousand ancient oaks and ancient beeches, as well as over a hundred ancient chestnut trees in the present forest, it must be remembered that a Medieval forest was a legal designation rather than a description and did not necessarily imply an abundance of trees. Given the importance of hunting in forests it is likely that in the Medieval period it would have been made up of sporadic copses and coverts for game. It was also likely to have been largely unenclosed until it passed into private hands in the 16th century at which point its deer were not protected by royal forest law and so a park pale was built (completed c 1600), some of which still survives. In the early 18th century there was a vigorous planting regime. 'Capability' Brown laid out the Grand Avenue, in the late 1790s. At its centre Eight Walks radiate out into the surrounding forest.

The land to the East of Savernake is formed by a series of pre 1700 assarts, enclosures created by the clearance of woodlands, small commons and ancient irregular blocks of woodland. These give way to pre 1700 irregular enclosure above the Western side of the Dun valley. The Eastern side of the river is characterised as an area of small irregular ancient woodland, assarts and pre 1700 irregular enclosures. The latter are enclosed from open fields the only such example in the area. In the area surrounding Little Bedwyn and to the South West of Great Bedwyn, on either side of the river, open fields survived until 1700 when they were enclosed by parliamentary enclosure.

**Present Day Historic Landscape Trajectory** – The West of the area is dominated by the ancient replanted woodland of West Woods surrounded by modified 20<sup>th</sup> century fields with pre 1700 enclosure surviving to the South.

The area between West woods and Savernake is 20<sup>th</sup> century modified fields to the South with a greater survival of pre 1700 enclosure to the South dotted with small regular post 1900 enclosures.

The centre of the area is dominated by the ancient replanted woodlands, ancient woodlands and designed landscapes of Savernake. These become increasingly fragmented to the East, interspersed with surviving pre 1700 enclosure and post 1900 fields

The areas to the West of the river Dun is formed of small ancient woodlands and a mixed pattern of pre 1700 enclosure and post 1900 enclosure. On the eastern side of the river **ancient** woodland becomes increasingly frequent surrounded by modified 20<sup>th</sup> century fields except around the designed landscape 1700 to 1900 AD park at Stype Grange where pre 1700 field patterns survive.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century fields are as mixture of amalgamated fields and reorganised fields but both types retain evidence of earlier field patterns.

The Kennet and Avon Canal is an important historic feature running parallel to the river Dun through Great Bedwyn and Little Bedwyn. The area includes the Crofton pumping station for the canal which was built 1802-09. The engines are the earliest steam beam engines still in working order. Another iconic feature is the Wilton Windmill this was built in 1821 and is the only complete windmill in Wiltshire.

**Historic Settlement Character** – The historic settlement pattern is mixed. On the Western side of Savernake it consists of deserted Medieval villages and surviving isolated farmsteads. Isolated farmsteads occur directly to the East of Savernake with common edge settlements further South. In contrast nucleated and nucleated regular row settlements occur along the length of the River Dun.

The only notable settlement growth in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been around Great Bedwyn. The pattern of historic farmstead has been slightly infilled by further post 1800 farmsteads.

**Historic Farmstead Character** – Isolated farmsteads are spread across the area, outside the wooded areas. There is a low-medium concentration of pre-1750 farmstead buildings. These farmsteads are often large with loose courtyard plans. 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

- Considerable number of potentially later prehistoric sites including enclosures, linear boundaries and field systems have been recorded throughout Savernake Forest and the immediate area
- There is a notable concentration of Iron Age hillforts
- Two major Iron Age centres known in the area. These are Chisbury hillfort, a large multivallate hillfort and the possible late Iron Age oppidum at Forest Hill
- Roman evidence including two villa sites, a potential shrine site and a Roman road
- Heart of the Savernake Ware Roman pottery industry
- Early Medieval archaeology is dominated by the Wansdyke
- Medieval archaeology relating to the use of the Forest
- Evidence for the Great Enclosure of 17<sup>th</sup> century
- important Second World War archaeology

### Historic Interest

Archaeological sites surviving as earthworks under trees relating to Prehistory and the Roman period so have a strong illustrative interest.

Surviving areas of ancient woodland can be used to illustrate early pre modern land use.

Designed landscapes have high illustrative value

### **Architectural Interest**

Many buildings associated with historic post-medieval parks. Low to medium concentration of pre-1750 farmstead buildings associated with large timber-frame barns, which where surviving have strong architectural interest.

### **Aesthetic and artistic interest**

The two historic Parks have aesthetic value.

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

The historic landscape of this area is very coherent. The western part of the area is dominated by the ancient replanted woodland of West Woods surrounded by modified 20<sup>th</sup> century fields with pre 1700 enclosure surviving to the South. The centre of the area is dominated by the ancient replanted woodlands, ancient woodlands and designed landscapes of Savernake

Significant areas of ancient woodland survive. These are an important historical survival representing the core of the Medieval hunting area.

There is strong time depth relating to the later prehistoric period.

**Designated Heritage** - Scheduled Monuments (39) are related to prehistoric monuments, the Wansdyke and other ditches and Roman sites including villas. The Listed Buildings (144) are related to the edge of Savernake Forest, Tottenham park, milestones on the Marlborough to Hungerford Road or the villages along the river Dun. There are 2 parklands on the register of parks and gardens at Tottenham House at Savernake Forest and Littlecote House. The latter is described in the area 'Upper Kennet Valley'.