



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.

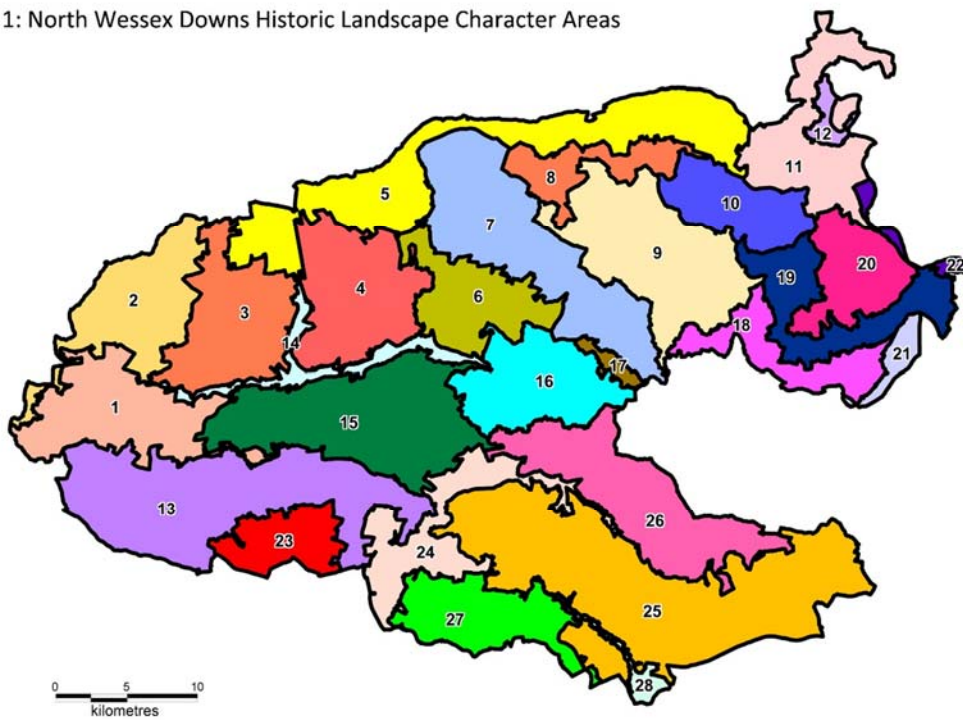
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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



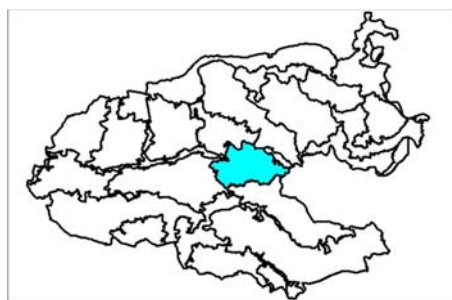
Map Produced by Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy 2012. © Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved (100049050) 2012.

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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 16: Middle Kennet Valley

This area contains important early archaeology including a rare example of an *in situ* Palaeolithic flint working site at Avington and nationally significant Mesolithic sites. Many medieval sites including Deer Parks and villages survive as earthworks and have a very strong illustrative value as they are such a dominant and visible feature. Freeman's Marsh represents a surviving example of late medieval land use. There is a nationally significant parkland at Benham Valence, originating as a 14th century deer park which then formed the core of the 18th century landscape park designed by Capability Brown. Industrial archaeology focused on the Kennet and Avon Canal provides important evidence relating to the industrial revolution.



Location – Middle stretch of the Kennet Valley from the Wiltshire border to Newbury, including the tributary valleys and watersheds of the Froxfield Stream and the Shalbourne. The Northern side of the valley is bisected by several dry valleys including a major valley that runs from Hungerford Newtown to Kintbury.

Geology and Topography –The geology is mostly chalk with small sections of Reading Beds at the northern and southern edges. There are extensive gravel deposits on the valley floor, the lower part of the Northern valley side and also in the bases of the dry valley North of Kintbury and the Froxfield Stream and Shalbourne valleys. 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 – HER records are common; they are densely distributed across the valley floor and unevenly distributed across the rest of the area. They are dominated by cropmarks, features known from documentary evidence and buildings. Most known sites are near the junction with the Kennet valley floor and its tributary or on the upper valley sides. The area has been covered by the National Mapping Programme, but little other archaeological work has been carried out.

Prehistoric activity has been documented at several locations. Early activity is attested by finds of Palaeolithic flintwork however, these seem to be from re-deposited material. Probable Mesolithic occupation sites have been located by fieldwalking and form a continuation of the concentration of Mesolithic material from Avington and Hamstead Marshall on the valley floor to the North-West side of the valley. It is unclear whether this reflects the extent of fieldwork or an actual pattern of Mesolithic land-use.

Cropmark ring ditches have been mapped at several locations and most are around the dry valley sides. Two large groups of cropmarked ring ditches, one East of Standen Manor and the other North-East of Anville's Farm, have been interpreted as later Neolithic/early Bronze Age barrow cemeteries.

Definite later prehistoric material is scarce and consists of Iron Age pottery found at Eddington. Areas of cropmark field systems thought to be later prehistoric/Romano-British in date have been mapped across the area. Some Romano-British evidence has been found in the area and consists of probable settlements and the course of a Roman road.

Early Medieval settlement is known to have existed. For example 'Standone' was recorded in Domesday and was thought to be Standen Manor, but it may be referring to North Standen Farm or both. The origin, extent and precise location of the early Medieval settlement are unclear and no deposits of this date have been found.

Hungerford Park was established in the mid-15th century and earthworks on its periphery are thought to be remnants of the Medieval park pale, but have not been investigated in detail. A deer park was referred to at Benham in 1349; its location is unclear, but it is assumed to have formed the core of the 18th landscape park of Benham Valence. Several deserted Medieval villages have been identified such as Leverton, North Standon and Calcot.

Several Post Medieval features are recorded in this area. Water meadows, Canal bridges and locks, milestones and toll-roads are an important component of the Post Medieval records.

World War Two evidence relating to the Kennet and Avon stop line exists

There are several areas with clear potential for below-ground deposits of Prehistoric, Romano-British and Medieval date. The potential of the area as a whole is hard to assess on present evidence. Later Prehistoric and Romano-British field systems may continue across the area. Most of the valley sides have been subject to ploughing since the Medieval period and it is possible that this has caused truncation of deposits in places. Below-ground archaeological deposits of early settlement are likely to survive; any such material is crucial in understanding the development of settlement in this area. On the valley floor much of the area has been covered by parkland, a land-use that can mask archaeological features, but could also preserve them. The area has the potential to contain Mesolithic material, but the location and quality of any deposits that may exist is unclear.

Historic Landscape Trajectory – This is a mixed area of both nucleated 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 northern side of the valley and to the South of the river around Hungerford and Kintbury.

Extensive meadows existed on the valley floor and were used as common grazing. It is unclear if the open fields spread into parts of the area of less-nucleated settlement or onto the higher valley slopes. Most of the area was enclosed into fields by the 18th century. Some of this land was probably enclosed on a piecemeal basis as implied by the irregularity of many of the early enclosures.

The majority of early enclosure fields were regularly-shaped, particularly North of the Kennet, suggesting that they may result from agreements between local land-holders and farmers to rationalise holdings in the common fields or grazing.

Most of the common meadows were enclosed into water meadows. This created the largest concentration of water meadows in the AONB and covered most of the valley floor between Chilton and Newbury.

Remaining areas of open fields and most areas of common land were enclosed by Act of Parliament in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and large areas of Parliamentary fields existed around Hungerford, Kintbury, Elcot and Speen. Freeman’s Marsh and Hungerford Common were common land that remained unenclosed into the 20th century.



Farmland, Templeton - The agricultural landscape has been subject to considerable modification. The majority of historic enclosures have been reorganised into modern fields more suited to mechanised agriculture.

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Kennet and Avon Canal, Freemans Marsh – The valley forms an important historic transportation corridor with river, canal, railway and historic coach road.

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Hungerford – The Medieval market town of Hungerford is the largest settlement within the area. The historic settlement pattern was a mix of nucleated settlements on the valley floor and farms and small hamlets scattered across the upper valley sides.

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The majority of wooded areas were ancient woodland and were located on the upper slopes of the Northern valley side or toward the Wiltshire border. Large blocks of ancient woodland existed between Elcot and Hungerford Newtown and between Littlecote Park and Hungerford. A significant

loss of ancient woodland occurred in the latter half of the 19th century when an extensive area of Winding Wood, next to Clapton, was cleared for fields.

Many extensive parklands, such as Elcot and Benham Valence, were established on the lower slopes of the valley.

Present Day Historic Landscape Character - The agricultural landscape has been subjected to considerable modification. The majority of historic enclosures have been reorganised into modern fields more suited to mechanised agriculture. Some historic enclosures have escaped reorganisation and examples can be found throughout the area with substantial blocks present between Denford, Hungerford Newtown and Clapton.

Another important effect of agricultural change is the loss of water meadows from the valley floor. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, active management of water meadows for early spring grazing ceased. Much of the area that was water meadows is now in use as pasture fields, but significant areas have also become wooded-over through both colonisation and planting, and some have been converted into arable fields. Woodland and arable uses are leading to the erosion and loss of water meadow features through ploughing and root disturbance.

Conversion of parkland to arable is particularly common and is most visible between Hungerford and Kintbury where large areas of former parks are now fields. Smaller-scale instances of clearance of ancient woodland for farming also exist. Large areas of paddocks have been created around the studs at Templeton and Marsh Benham.

Tree-cover has seen significant change with clearance of ancient woodlands and new woods and plantations created on previously unwooded areas. Although only a few ancient woods were cleared for agriculture, others have been cleared of native tree cover and replanted with other species.

Large areas of water meadow have become secondary woodlands through regeneration and scrubbing-over between Hungerford and Kintbury. Woodland plantations of various sizes have been created across the area. Most plantations are rectilinear in shape; this is particularly visible between North Standen Farm and Hungerford.

Historic Settlement Character – The Medieval market town of Hungerford is the largest settlement within the area and it is sited at a crossing point on the Kennet near its confluence with the Dun. The historic settlement pattern was a mix of nucleated settlements on the valley floor and farms and small hamlets scattered across the upper valley sides. Nucleated settlements, such as Kintbury and Avington, were sited just off the floodplain and seem to be spaced at fairly regular intervals along the valley. There was a mix of hamlets and large farms on the upper valley sides. Some hamlets are the centres of manors and seem to be shrunken Medieval settlements, such as Elcot, whilst others may be secondary or subsidiary settlements, such as Hungerford Newtown.

Settlement growth is focussed around Hungerford and Kintbury with only small growth around other historic settlement nuclei in the area. Both Hungerford and Kintbury have expanded since the 1970s with the additions of several large housing estates around the fringes of both settlements.

Historic Farmstead Character – Farms were fairly evenly distributed across the upper slopes of the valley and generally lie in areas of irregular early enclosure. Most farms are named after nearby places or topographic features. There is a low to 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

- Early activity is attested by finds of Palaeolithic flintwork, including a rare example of an *in situ* flint working site at Avington.
- Nationally significant Mesolithic sites have been found along the Kennet Valley; significant potential exists for further evidence.
- A possible Roman villa exists at Kintbury, following the discovery of a bath house in the 1950s
- Early Medieval and Medieval settlement at Eddington, Standen Manor and North Standen Farm
- Hungerford Medieval deer park.
- Deserted Medieval villages at Leverton and Calcot.
- 18th and 19th century transportation archaeology focused on the Kennet & Avon Canal.
- Nationally significant parkland at Benham Valence, originating as a 14th century deer park which then formed the core of the 18th century landscape park designed by Capability Brown
- 20th century military archaeology, in particular WWII defensive structures along the Canal.

Historic Interest

Many medieval sites including Deer Parks and villages survive as earthworks and have a very strong illustrative value as they are such a dominant and visible feature.

Surviving areas of 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.

Kennet & Avon Canal and associated structures such as locks etc. have good survival, as well as WWII defensive structures associated with this transportation route

Architectural Interest

Historic buildings associate with Medieval valley floor settlements and the Medieval Hungerford. Pre-1750 farmstead buildings and in particular large timber-frame barns were these survive.

Aesthetic and artistic interest

The Kennet & Avon canal may have some aesthetic or artistic interest

The Capability Brown designed landscape park at Benham Valence will have aesthetic or artistic interest.

Coherence, Rarity and Time depth

The historic landscape of this area is dominated by modern field reorganisation.

Some historic enclosures have escaped reorganisation and examples can be found throughout the area. There are also some surviving areas of relict water meadows. These are an important historical survival representing a fraction of the former open pre 1900 land use.

Freeman's Marsh represents a surviving example of late Medieval land use

Many parklands have also been converted to arable.

There is strong time depth relating to early and late Medieval archaeology.

Designated Heritage - Scheduled Monuments (1) is a Bronze Age round barrow at Hungerford Newton. The Listed Buildings (192) are related to the historic high street in Hungerford, the historic transportation links, designed landscapes and historic farmsteads scattered on the valley sides. There are no parklands on the register of parks and gardens.