



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.

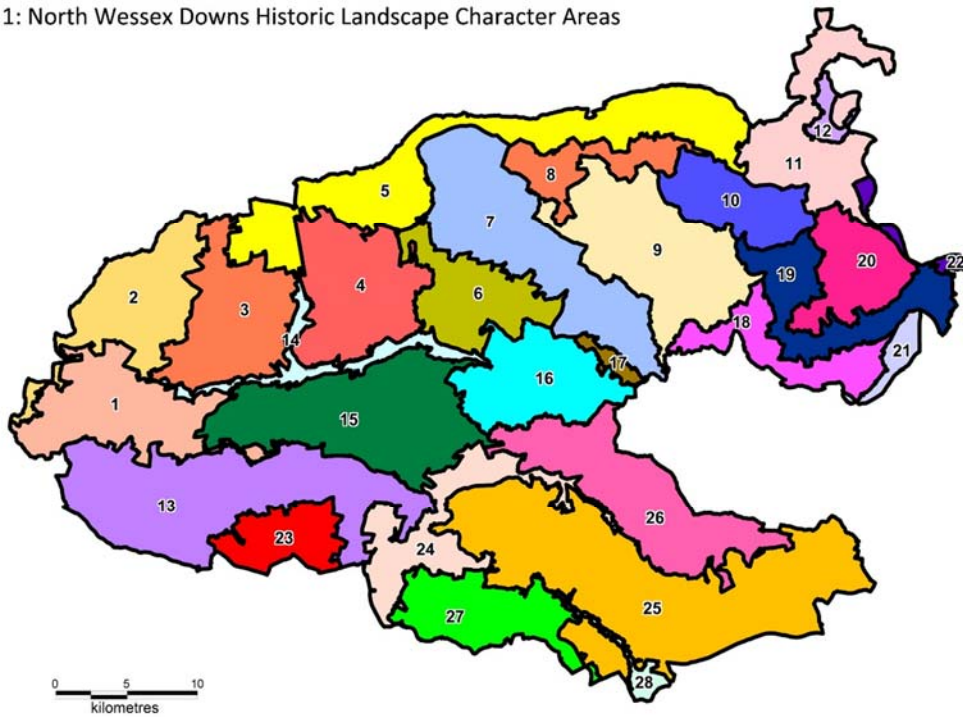
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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



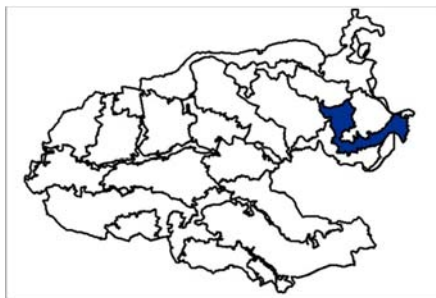
Map Produced by Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy 2012. © Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved (100049050) 2012.

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------|
| 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 19: Pang Valley and Sulham Gap

There is a concentration of significant early prehistoric sites, including a potential Palaeolithic-Mesolithic transition site at Nunhide farm. Significant Romano-British features, including a villa at Eling and Maidenhatch. Bucklebury is known to have been a Medieval royal manor and possibly the site of an Early Medieval 'proto-urban' centre. Surviving areas of earlier pre 1800 enclosures and settlement patterns on the Sulham Gap can be used to illustrate early pre modern land use. The historic gardens and park at Purley Hall have a strong illustrative interest and an associative interest due to their known link with Charles Bridgeman.



Location – This area comprises the middle and lower Pang Valley from above Hampstead Norreys to the Thames at Pangbourne. It also incorporates the area of the Sulham Gap to the East. This is an area which comprises low-lying marshy land around the Pang and the Sulham Brook and the slope of the Thames watershed at Reading.

Geology and Topography – Most of the area is chalk; South of Eling on the upper valley sides it is capped by Reading Beds. At the Southern end of the Eastern watershed the chalk is overlain by extensive Reading Beds with a capping of London Clays around Frilsham. Extensive gravel deposits exist on the valley floor. In the Sulham Gap. The landform comprises an open shallow valley.

Landscape Character – The River Pang flows through an open shallow valley which has varied character along its course varying from open arable to enclosed and wooded landscapes. *Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Area7D: Pang Valley.*

Archaeological Character – HER records are fairly evenly distributed in the North of the valley and more unevenly distributed further South. The area was covered by the Berkshire Downs Survey, Middle Thames Valley Survey and partially by the National Mapping Programme.

Evidence of prehistoric activity is not very common. Palaeolithic flintwork has been found at Bradfield Halland. Mesolithic finds are scarce. Early Neolithic to early Bronze Age flintwork has been found near Frilsham, Four Points and Beche Farm. Bronze Age activity is much better documented. Several definite and probable round barrows exist on the upper valley slope between Hampstead Norreys and Frilsham. Bronze Age finds have been recovered from several locations and two hoards with material of this period have been found. Iron Age material is limited and includes field-system ditches excavated at Maidenhatch prior to construction of the M4. Cropmarks of field systems of probable later prehistoric/ Romano-British date have been mapped across the Northern part of the area.

Significant Romano-British features, including a villa at Eling exist, but activity is not widespread over the area. The site has not been fully excavated and its date and whether any preceding Iron Age settlement existed are unknown. A villa and kiln were excavated at Maidenhatch prior to

construction of the M4. Scatters of building debris in plough soil South-West of Bucklebury have been interpreted as a possible villa. Evidence of Roman building material has also been found in Stanford Dingley and South and East of Bradfield.

The only evidence of early Medieval activity comes from documentary sources. Yattendon, Hampstead Norreys and Frilsham were all recorded in Domesday. A settlement existed at Pangbourne in the early Medieval period. Late Medieval features are dominated by buildings and earthworks. A settlement existed at Wyld Court, but was deserted by the early Post Medieval period.. A manor house, fortified in the mid-14th century, existed at de La Beche; earthworks of the moat and house platform are visible at the site. The manor house also had a deer park.

Post Medieval records are of industrial sites, mills and buildings. Watermills existed at Marlston, Bucklebury, Stanford Dingley, Bradfield and Tidmarsh. A structure interpreted as a windmill base was found during construction of Yattendon Court in the 19th century. A Second World War airfield was established North-West of Hampstead Norreys from 1940. Two gun-emplacements from the GHQ stop-line exist North-East of Tidmarsh between the Pang and Sulham Brook.



Farmland near Stanford Dingley - There have been major changes to the agricultural landscape. Most historic fields have been rationalised into fields better suited to modern agriculture and much of this has been through removal of historic field boundaries.

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Upper Pang Valley – The Medieval landscape of the area was characterised by nucleated settlements, mostly sited on the valley floor, surrounded by open fields on the valley slopes and with common meadow grazing by the riverside.

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Sulham Woods, Pasture and Brook – In contrast the area of the Sulham Gap was well-wooded and characterised by early enclosure fields and a dispersed settlement pattern. There have been varying degrees of change in this area

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The archaeological potential of the area is varied and deposits of Bronze Age to Romano-British date are likely to exist across much of the area. The preservation of deposits may be varied as ploughing since the Medieval period could have truncated archaeological layers. Deposits relating to early occupation may survive within historic settlement nuclei. The historic building stock is fairly well-studied but it is possible that further significant buildings or structural elements may be identified

Historic Landscape Trajectory – The Medieval landscape of the Pang Valley was characterised by nucleated settlements, mostly sited on the valley floor, surrounded by open fields on the valley slopes and with common meadow grazing by the riverside. Most of the open fields had been enclosed into fields by the 18th century. The majority of these fields were irregularly-shaped which suggests that much of the land was probably enclosed on a piecemeal basis. Areas of regularly-shaped early enclosures existed between Yattendon and Beche Farm, between Bucklebury and Stanford Dingley and around Bradfield. The regularity of these fields suggests that they were created in a more planned fashion and may result from agreement between local land-holders and farmers to rationalise holdings in the common fields and grazing or woods and turn them into fields. The valley floor meadows had also been largely enclosed by the 18th century; most were simply enclosed into pasture fields. Areas around Frilsham, between Bucklebury and Stanford Dingley and between Bradfield and Tidmarsh, were turned into water-meadows over the course of the 18th century. Parliamentary enclosures were only found around Hampstead Norreys and a small area at Frilsham.

The area was not well-wooded but some large blocks of woods existed on the upper valley slopes, mostly around Hampstead Norreys, Yattendon and Ashampstead. Most woods were ancient woodlands and existed either as large blocks or groups of woods on or near the top of the valley slopes. Areas of other old woods were present but were generally much smaller and less frequent than ancient woods, most existing along boundaries and historic track ways. Parks were not frequent features of this area and most were near the edge of the area. Minor parklands existed at Bucklebury House, Bradfield Hall, Marlston House, Frilsham Park and Yattendon Park.

In contrast the area of the Sulham Gap was well-wooded and characterised by early enclosure fields and a dispersed settlement pattern. The majority of fields were irregularly shaped early enclosures

with a small block of regularly shaped early enclosures immediately North-East of Sulham. The regular enclosures were enclosed from an area of open fields and probably resulted from an agreement between local land-holders and farmers. There was no trace of an open field system having operated in the rest of the area. Historic parkland and gardens were created around Purley Hall in the 18th century.

Historic Landscape Character - There have been major changes to the agricultural landscape of the Pang Valley. Most historic fields have been rationalised into fields better suited to modern agriculture and much of this has been through removal of historic field boundaries. All former water meadows have now been converted to arable. Although most enclosed meadows were also reorganised, blocks of them survive between Everington and Hampstead Norreys and around Stanford Dingley. The construction of the M4 further contributed to the reorganisation of the landscape by disrupting and truncating fieldscapes.

Substantial changes have occurred in the tree-cover of the area. Although no woodland has been cleared for other land-uses, large areas of ancient woodland have been cleared of native tree cover and replanted with other species. Large tree plantations have been created at several locations: the largest are between Frilsham and Yattendon, and between Stanford Dingley and Bradfield.

Much of the parkland in the area has been enclosed and converted to arable fields and many parks now have only small stubs of grounds immediately around the house, such as Frilsham Park and Bucklebury House. Parks have also been subject to change of use, with housing developed on sections of Yattendon Park and a school established at Marlston House.

In the Sulham Gap There have been varying degrees of change in this area: whilst fieldscapes have been substantially altered and recent leisure developments have had an effect on the area, there has been only some change to the extent of tree-cover and very little settlement growth. Historic enclosures have been subject to large-scale alteration across the area into modern fields more suited to mechanised agriculture. A group of unaltered historic enclosures interspersed with woodland is present around Sulham and gives a good example of what the historic landscape of the area was like. The construction of the M4 motorway also contributed to the reorganisation of the landscape by disrupting and truncating historic field systems. New areas of woodland are rare and include a couple of plantations and some small areas of secondary woodland that have developed on the fringes of historic woods. The 18th century historic gardens and park at Purley Hall have survived.

Historic Settlement Character – In the Pang Valley the historic settlement pattern of the area was nucleated and composed mainly of villages and hamlets located on the valley floor, such as Pangbourne, Bucklebury, Frilsham and Hampstead Norreys. Yattendon was an exception to this pattern and lay at the junction of several routes through the area on the crest of the Eastern watershed. The dominant building material is red brick. The historic settlement pattern in the Sulham Gap of the area was a mix of small hamlets, such as Sulham and North Street, and numerous small farms.

Pangbourne has experienced large-scale housing growth and is now several times the size of its historic extent. Growth at other settlements has been less marked and is typified by small-scale growth around the historic nuclei. Most growth has been at Yattendon and Hampstead Norreys.

Some new settlement nuclei have been created at previously unsettled locations, most of these being single large houses. In the Sulham Gap, despite being located next to Reading and the M4, this area has largely escaped the effects of settlement sprawl in the later 20th century. Some new housing has been constructed at Sulham and on the fringes of Tidmarsh.

Historic Farmstead Character – Farms were found in the area but were not particularly common features within the Pang Valley landscape. They were located either on the valley floor between villages or on the upper slopes of the valley; most were named after nearby places or topographic features. The dispersed settlement pattern in the Sulham Gap means small farms are more common.

Farmsteads typically consist of loose courtyard plans with detached buildings arranged around a yard. Some 19th century farmsteads, built to house cattle for fattening or dairying are more likely to be of L-or U-plan. Historically, farms in this area were small and there is a high density of farmsteads in the landscape. Small farm size often meant that there was little capital to replace buildings so Medieval and 16th/17th century farm buildings often survive. Within the wood-pasture areas and areas of better soils farmsteads typically consist of loose courtyard arrangements, often including an aisled barn.

Special Qualities and features of Significance

Archaeological Interest

- Significant early prehistoric sites, including a potential Palaeolithic- Mesolithic transition site at Nunhide farm
- Evidence of Bronze Age activity, including barrows and the Yattendon Hoard.
- Significant Romano-British features, including a villa at Eling and Maidenhatch.
- Bucklebury was a royal manor and possibly the site of an early Medieval ‘proto-urban’ centre
- A manor house, fortified in the mid-14th century, existed at de La Beche.
- Post Medieval records are of industrial sites, mills and buildings.
- A WWII airfield was established at Hampstead Norreys, for which many elements survive including pillboxes, runway fragments and other structures. Structural remains of the GHQ ‘Stop Line’ defensive system survive.

Historic Interest

Late Post-Medieval archaeology surviving as earthworks have a very strong illustrative value as they are such dominant features.

Surviving areas of earlier pre 1800 enclosures and settlement patterns on the Sulham Gap can be used to illustrate early pre modern land use.

The historic gardens and park at Purley Hall have a strong illustrative interest and an associative interest due to their known link with Charles Bridgeman.

Architectural Interest

Historic buildings associated with Medieval valley floor settlements in the Pang Valley. Pre-1750 farmstead buildings survive in the Sulham Gap including Medieval examples.

Architectural interest of buildings and designed features associated with Purley Hall.

Aesthetic and artistic interest

Purley Hall has a strong aesthetic interest in its designed landscape.

Coherence, Rarity and Time depth

The historic landscape of the Pang Valley area is dominated by modern field reorganisation and replanted ancient woodland. Much of the parkland has also been enclosed. In the Sulham Gap there have been varying degrees of change in this area: whilst fieldscapes have been substantially altered and recent leisure developments have had an effect on the area, there has been only some change to the extent of tree-cover and very little settlement growth.

There is strong time depth relating to post Medieval archaeology.

Designated Heritage - Scheduled Monuments (4) are the remains of Grim's Ditch, a late Bronze Age linear earthwork and ditch, Eling Roman Villa, a Motte at Hampstead Norreys and a Bronze Age round barrow. The Listed Buildings (196) are related to the nucleated settlements of the Pang Valley and are more dispersed and denser in the Sulham Gap. They include a number of historic manor houses, designed features and historic barns. There is 1 parkland on the register of parks and gardens the landscape park and formal gardens to Purley Hall. The formal gardens were designed by Charles Bridgeman in 1721. The park dates to the late 18th century-early 19th century and contains 20th century planting.