



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.

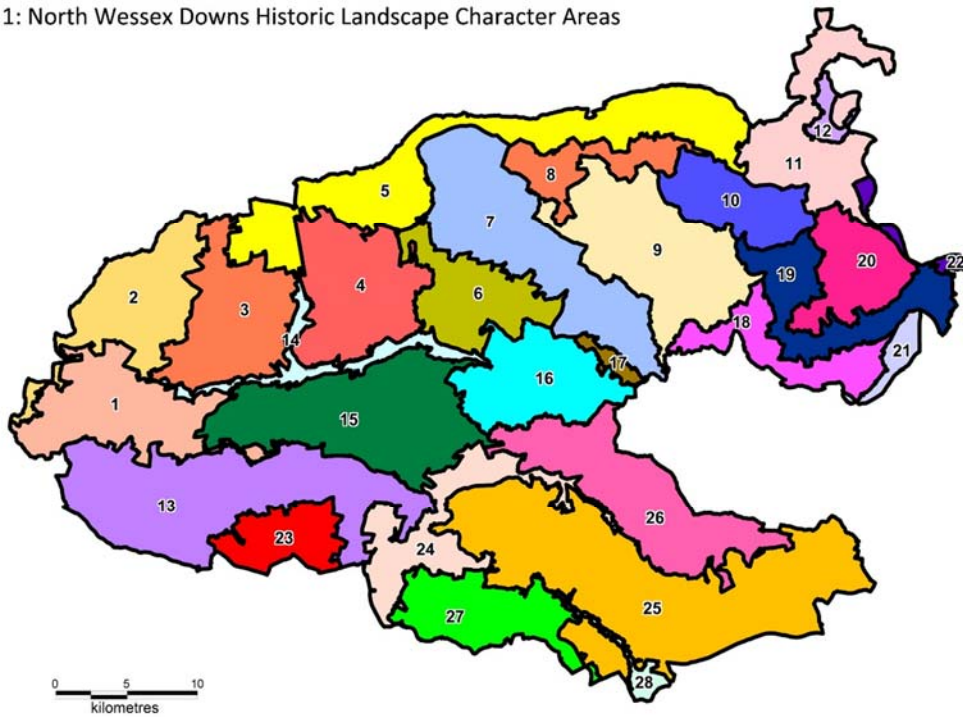
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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



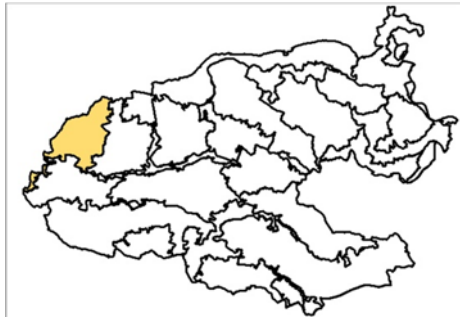
Map Produced by Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy 2012. © Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved (100049050) 2012.

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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 2: Avebury Plain

One of the densest concentrations of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age activity in Britain including the Causewayed Enclosure at Windmill Hill, the Henge and Stone Circle at Avebury, the Beckhampton avenue and numerous Neolithic long barrows and Bronze Age round barrows. Surviving areas of open chalk downland have a strong historic interest as they can be used provide an impression of the landscape prior to enclosure in the 18th and 19th century.



Location – Chalk escarpment and downland on western side of the AONB running from Heddington South of Calne to Overtown to the West of Wroughton, including Avebury to the South. The northern boundary is formed by the steep chalk escarpment above villages including Clyffe Pypard and the eastern boundary by the North South escarpment below the Ridgeway.

Geology and Topography – The area is a topographically homogenous area formed from Lower Chalk. The area is flat and level with clearly defined boundaries. The area slopes towards Avebury and the Winterbourne Stream.

Landscape Character – A level flat plain cut by the shallow valley of the Winterbourne Stream characterised by an expanse of open arable fields bounded by fences and thin hedges. Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Area 5a: Avebury Plain.

Archaeological Character – The dominant archaeological traces in this area are prehistoric, often surviving as extant monuments. This partly relates to the fact that the area was grazed unenclosed chalk grassland during the Medieval and early Post Medieval period meaning that these monuments were not subject to ploughing until post 1700. The southern tip of this area is dominated by the Avebury World Heritage Site, one of the densest concentrations of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age activity in Britain including the Causewayed Enclosure at Windmill Hill and the henge at Avebury itself, the Beckhampton avenue and numerous long barrows. The Avebury henge comprises a roughly circular ditch enclosing an area approximately 350 metres by 380 metres, with an external bank originally up to 6 metres in height. There are four entrances, at least three of which are of prehistoric origin. Three main settings of standing sarsens exist within the henge, a circle which follows the inner edge of the ditch plus two smaller circles, one in the North, the other in the South. The Neolithic Windmill Hill monument encloses an area of 8.45 hectares, making it one of the largest in England; it was also one of the first to be recognised as a causewayed 'camp' or enclosure.

The area subsequently became a focus for Bronze Age activity including important concentrations of Bronze Age round barrows. Later Prehistoric activity is represented by prehistoric field systems on

the chalk escarpment on the eastern edge of the area. Field systems have been recorded along the Winterbourne Valley, probably of prehistoric origin.

Roman activity is represented by several villas; examples including at Cuffs Corner and South of Windmill Hill.



Windmill Hill - Today ribbon like areas of unenclosed escarpment survive along the top of chalk escarpment to the North infilled with pre 1700 enclosure. Pre 1700 enclosure also survives either side and of the Kennet and the Winterborne stream. Open grassland also survives on areas with archaeological earthworks including deserted Medieval villages and Windmill Hill Neolithic enclosure.

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Avebury – The Southern tip of this area is dominated by the Avebury World Heritage Site, one of the densest concentrations of Mesolithic and later Neolithic activity in Britain including the Causewayed Enclosure at Windmill Hill and the Henge at Avebury itself, the Beckhampton avenue and numerous long barrows.

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Farmland East of Winterbourne Monkton – In the rest of the area post 1900 enclosure dominates. This is split into two types : reorganised fields along the base of the eastern chalk escarpment and to the South East of the area around Avebury, elsewhere amalgamated fields dominate.

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Medieval archaeology is less dominant but included deserted Medieval settlements along the dry valley bottoms echoed by the modern enclosure pattern, and a motte and bailey castle at Binknoll. Post Medieval archaeology includes airfields at Yatesbury and Clyffe Pypard and water meadows along the Winterbourne.

Archaeological potential is extremely high across this area. There is potential for buried deposits from the Neolithic to the Roman period. Many field systems, linear banks and ditches and enclosures remain undated. Additional information on the early and later Medieval exploitation of this area could also be gathered.

Historic Landscape Trajectory – The Medieval landscape was composed of communities within open fields utilising common grazing on adjacent or nearby downland. The only place that this pattern survived into the 1700s was between Broad Hinton and Broad Town to the North of the area. Pre 1700 enclosure dominated this landscape by 1700 with open land surviving along the edge of the chalk escarpment which marks the Northern edge of the area. This pre 1700 enclosure was in general regular in form. These fields were probably created following an agreement between local land-holders and farmers to rationalise and enclose holdings in the common fields.

However, earlier irregular enclosure existed on the steep slopes of the chalk escarpment and below between Highway and Broad Town, to the East of Theobald's Green, and on the plain to the North of Yatesbury and Winterbourne Bassett. 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. In addition, areas of sinuous pre 1800 enclosure were created on the land above Clewancy. The shape of these enclosures reflects a preceding open field regime, their sinuous boundaries preserving the pattern of strips within the common fields. It is likely that these fields were formed through piecemeal enclosure of these strips. The majority of these pre 1800 fields were modified in the 20th century.

There is only one area of 1700 to 1900 parliamentary enclosure which enclosed the remaining open fields to the North of Broad Hinton. These have been modified in the 20th century.

Thin strips of ancient woodland survived along the top edge of the Northern chalk escarpment and at Stanmore Copse.

Historic parkland dating to 1700 to 1900 was created around Compton Bassett House including areas of replanted ancient woodland.

Present Day Historic Landscape Character – Today ribbon like areas of unenclosed escarpment survive along the top of chalk escarpment to the North infilled with pre 1700 enclosure. Pre 1700 enclosure also survives either side and of the Kennet and the Winterborne stream. Open grassland

also survives on areas with archaeological earthworks including deserted Medieval villages and Windmill Hill Neolithic enclosure.

In the rest of the area post 1900 enclosure dominates. This is split into two types: firstly reorganised fields along the base of the eastern chalk escarpment and to the South East of the area around Avebury. This type is usually created through a mixture of boundary removal and the 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. Elsewhere amalgamated fields dominate. These enclosures are created by the removal of boundaries between fields and are also often known as prairie fields. Many of the examples are true prairie fields, especially those on the downs. However, significant numbers are also found that do not fit the prairie field pattern – many are in-use as pasture and/or 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.

Regular areas of post 1900 woodland plantation have been created across the plain and infilling the ancient woodland which stretches across the top of the chalk escarpment to the North.

Other post 1900 activity includes defunct military activity to the South West of the area to the South of Jugglers Farm.

Historic Settlement Character – The historic settlement pattern is spread into two types. Along the base of the chalk escarpment which bounds the North and West of the area there are a series of irregular row settlements. These are characterised by dispersed settlements intermittently found along a route way, in this case running up the escarpment or along the bottom. However to the East settlements become more nucleated. These are all located on the spring line at the base of the escarpment. On the plain itself settlements are nucleated and grouped around a single point, often the church or manor house. These are arranged down the Winterbourne or down the infant Kennet River. This picture is supported by the deserted Medieval villages which have been abandoned or survive as historic farmsteads such as at Richardson, or to the East of Avebury. The area is infilled by scattered and individual historic farmsteads. 18th and 19th settlement expansion only occurred to the West of Avebury around the Beckhampton roundabout

Post 1900 settlement growth has been focused on the Winterbourne valley with the settlements becoming more linear in nature. This is not as noticeable as in other areas and their settlement plan is still discernible. The historic pattern of farmsteads has been infilled with 19th and 20th century examples.

Historic Farmstead Character – A few isolated historic farmsteads dot the plain with other examples on the edge of historic settlements. 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.

Special Qualities and features of Significance

Archaeological Interest

- The dominant archaeological traces in this area are prehistoric often, surviving as extant monuments which provide a wealth of evidence about the Neolithic, Bronze Age, and Iron Age.
- One of the densest concentrations of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age activity in Britain including the Causewayed Enclosure at Windmill Hill and the Henge at Avebury itself, the Beckhampton avenue and numerous long barrows.
- There is a notable concentration of Iron Age hillforts.
- Later Prehistoric activity is represented by intact prehistoric field systems.
- There are an important number of Roman villas.
- Deserted Medieval Villages provide evidence of the former Medieval exploitation of the landscape.

Historic Interest

Archaeological sites surviving as earthworks relating to Prehistory and in particular to the Neolithic and Bronze Age have a strong illustrative interest as they can be used to communicate how past human activity shaped the landscape.

Surviving areas of open chalk downland have a strong historic interest as they can be used to illustrate early pre modern land use, as they provide an impression of the landscape prior to enclosure in the 18th and 19th century.

Sites investigated by antiquarians have a strong associative value, including those associated with William Stukeley (1687-1785), and Sir Richard Colt Hoare (1758-1838).

Architectural Interest

Buildings associated with irregular row settlements at the base of the chalk escarpment have architectural interest as they relate to the pre 1800 exploitation of the landscape. Areas of surviving pre 1750 farmstead buildings are important especially those dating to pre 1750.

Aesthetic and artistic interest

The chalk downlands in general have a strong artistic interest being the focus of interest of numerous artists, this is especially true of the Avebury area.

Coherence, Rarity and Time depth

The historic landscape of this area is extremely coherent and dominated by 20th century enclosure, although showing a clear split between East and West in the origin of these fields.

Ribbon like areas of unenclosed escarpment survive along the top of chalk escarpment to the North infilled with pre 1700 enclosure. Pre 1700 enclosure also survives either side and of the Kennet and the Winterborne stream. Open grassland survives on areas with archaeological earthworks including deserted Medieval villages and Windmill Hill Neolithic enclosure. These are an important historical survival representing a fraction of the former extent of chalk downland.

There is strong time depth particularly relating to the prehistoric period with Neolithic and Early Bronze Age evidence being particularly rich.

Designated Heritage - Scheduled Monuments (26) are dominated by monuments relating to the Avebury Neolithic complex, as well as Bronze Age round barrows, Bicknoll Camp and deserted Medieval villages. The Listed Buildings (167) are related to the historic settlements at the bottom of the chalk escarpment on the edge of the area and the nucleated historic settlements on the plain. There are no parklands on the register of parks and gardens. The South Eastern part of area is within the Avebury World Heritage Site and the area beyond that falls within the setting of the World Heritage Site.