



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





Emma Rouse, Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy

www.wyvernheritage.co.uk – info@wyvernheritage.co.uk – 01747 870810

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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.

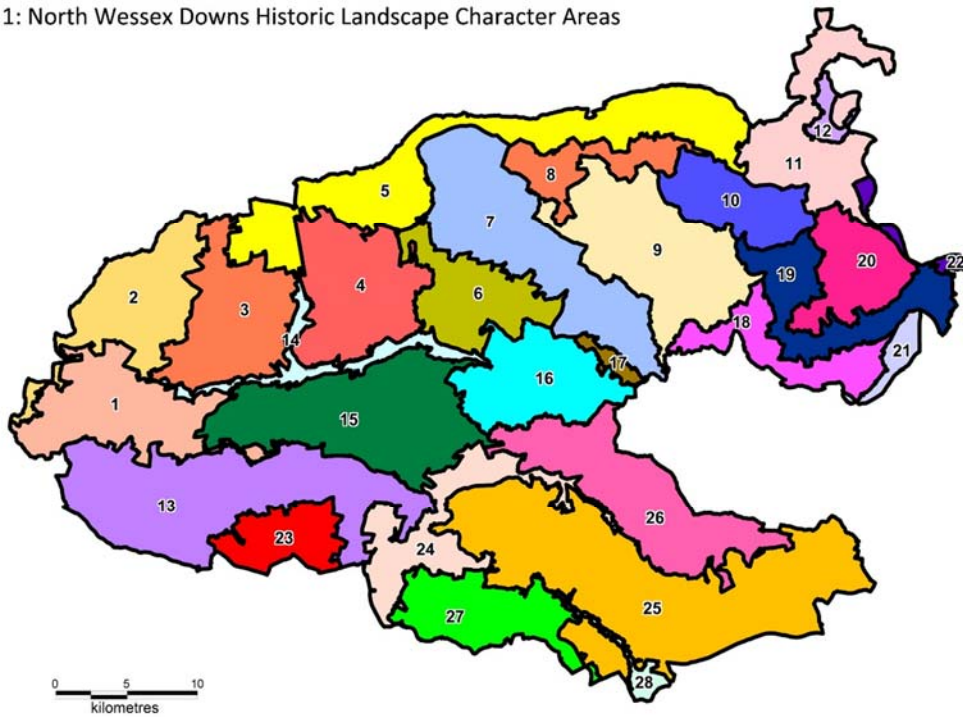
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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



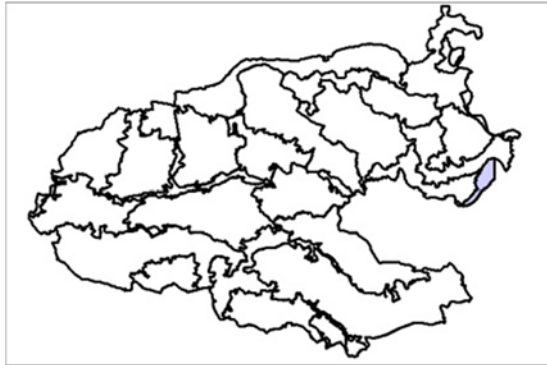
Map Produced by Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy 2012. © Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved (100049050) 2012.

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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 21: Kennet Valley East

There is an important possible Neolithic / Bronze Age ritual or funerary landscape at Aldermaston Wharf. Excavations at Ufton Bridge have produced rare settlement evidence dating to the Early Medieval period. Later Medieval and Post Medieval archaeology relates to the development of the Englefield Estate firstly as a Medieval deer park and later as a designed landscape.



Location – This area covers the lower slopes the Kennet Valley around and below Englefield, on the far Eastern edge of the AONB.

Geology and Topography – The geology is mainly London Clays which are overlain by extensive gravels on the valley floor. The landform is the sloping valley sides of the River Kennet valley.

Landscape Character – The Landscape Character

Area Assessment includes this area with the historic commons and irregular fields to the West.

Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Area 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons.

Archaeological Character – The earliest archaeological information from this area relates to Palaeolithic tools recovered from the gravels exposed in small scale gravel extraction around Englefield in the early 1900s. Stray Neolithic finds have also been found at Cranmere Lake in Englefield Park.

A series of four contiguous ring ditches lie along a terrace of the River Kennet one was excavated and identified as an early Bronze Age Round Barrow. The suggested sequence is some later Neolithic activity associated with Peterborough Ware, plus Grooved Ware pottery, including the pit, followed by construction of the ring ditch in the Early Bronze Age.

The area of fields to the South is associated with extensive mostly undated cropmarks identified from aerial photographs which include sub rectangular enclosures, pits and linear features which may be of later prehistoric date.

Englefield is accepted as Englafeld, the site of a battle between the Saxons and the Danes in 871, although published records have not identified any archaeological features relating to this historical event. Later Medieval and Post Medieval archaeology relates to the development of the Englefield Estate firstly as a Medieval deer park and later as a designed landscape.

Historic Landscape Trajectory – The area was characterised by open fields on the lower slopes of the valley below the nucleated linear village of Englefield and around Midgham. These areas were enclosed into fields by the 18th century. The fields near Englefield were much more regularly-shaped and probably represent a planned phase of enclosure. The London to Bath coaching route, itself formed from an earlier route and now the A4, runs along the Southern boundary of the area.

Ancient woodlands hug the steep North-Western slopes of the area.

Englefield Park began as a Medieval deer park and developed into a sizeable landscape park in the 18th and 19th centuries. Englefield had a significant impact on the landscape. Features include a walled kitchen garden situated to the East-North-East of the house. Most of the park is of open parkland with scattered mature trees. Woodland is present in belts or plantations in the North and West.



Road from Victoria Lodge - Huge changes have occurred in this area over the course of the 20th century, the major factors being agricultural change. Almost all fields have been altered either through re-organisation or boundary removal and, although traces of the historic fields survive, the fieldscapes of the area are modern in character.

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Mayridge Farm – Large farms were present throughout the area and were mainly found in areas of early enclosure of open fields.

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Engleford House and Grounds – Englefield Park began as a Medieval deer park and developed into a sizeable landscape park in the 18th and 19th centuries. Englefield had a significant impact on the landscape.

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Present Day Historic Landscape Character - Huge changes have occurred in this area over the course of the 20th century, the major factors being agricultural change. Almost all fields have been altered either through re-organisation or boundary removal and, although traces of the historic fields survive, the fieldscapes of the area are modern in character. Only a very few examples of unaltered historic fields remain and they survive as islands within the current farming landscape. The arable extent has also increased with the extension of cultivation into previously non-arable areas.

Ancient woodlands have been replanted with plantations on the upper slopes of these areas; however, tree-cover has increased greatly within this area through the creation of woodland plantations around the parkland.

Englefield Park has seen little significant change.

The South-West end of the area has seen post 1900 industrial development in the form of gravel extraction and the creation of factories to the West of Beenham Grange. Further to the East a private landing strip for Englefield Park can be made out in fields.

Historic Settlement Character – The historic settlement pattern is nucleated with settlement on the higher slopes of the valley toward the North-West edge of the area.

Housing growth has been extremely limited.

Historic Farmstead Character – Large farms were present throughout the area and were mainly found in areas of early enclosure of open fields. 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. This area has one of the main concentrations of timber-framed aisled barns in the country.

Special Qualities and features of Significance

Archaeological Interest

- Palaeolithic tools recovered from the gravels exposed in small scale gravel extraction around Englefield
- Possible Neolithic / Bronze Age ritual or funerary landscape at Aldermaston Wharf
- Excavations at Ufton Bridge have produced rare settlement evidence dating to the Early Medieval period
- Later Medieval and Post Medieval archaeology relates to the development of the Englefield Estate firstly as a Medieval deer park and later as a designed landscape
- Kennet and Avon Canal and associated structures, including WWII defences

Historic Interest

Historic post-medieval designed features and earlier archaeology relating to Englefield have strong illustrative value.

Surviving islands of earlier enclosures can be used to illustrate early pre modern land use.

Architectural Interest

Historic buildings associated with nucleated valley floor settlements.

Pre-1750 farmstead buildings survive; the small farm size often meant that there was little capital to replace buildings so Medieval and 16th/17th century farm buildings often survive.

Architectural interest of buildings and designed features associated with Englefield

Aesthetic and artistic interest

Englefield has a strong aesthetic interest in its designed landscape.

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

Coherence, Rarity and Time depth

The historic landscape of the Eastern Kenney Valley is dominated by modern field reorganisation and boundary removal. Only a very few examples of unaltered historic fields remain and they survive as islands within the current farming landscape.

Englefield Park has seen little change and remains as a coherent designed landscape.

There is strong time depth relating to the archaeology of the river gravels.

Designated Heritage Assets

There are no Scheduled Monuments (0). The Listed Buildings (18) are related to Englefield Park, the farmsteads to the South, milestones along the line of the A4 and the church of St Marks. There is 1 parkland on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens: the formal and woodland gardens situated in a landscape park to Englefield House. Formal gardens at Englefield Park had been laid out by the