



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.

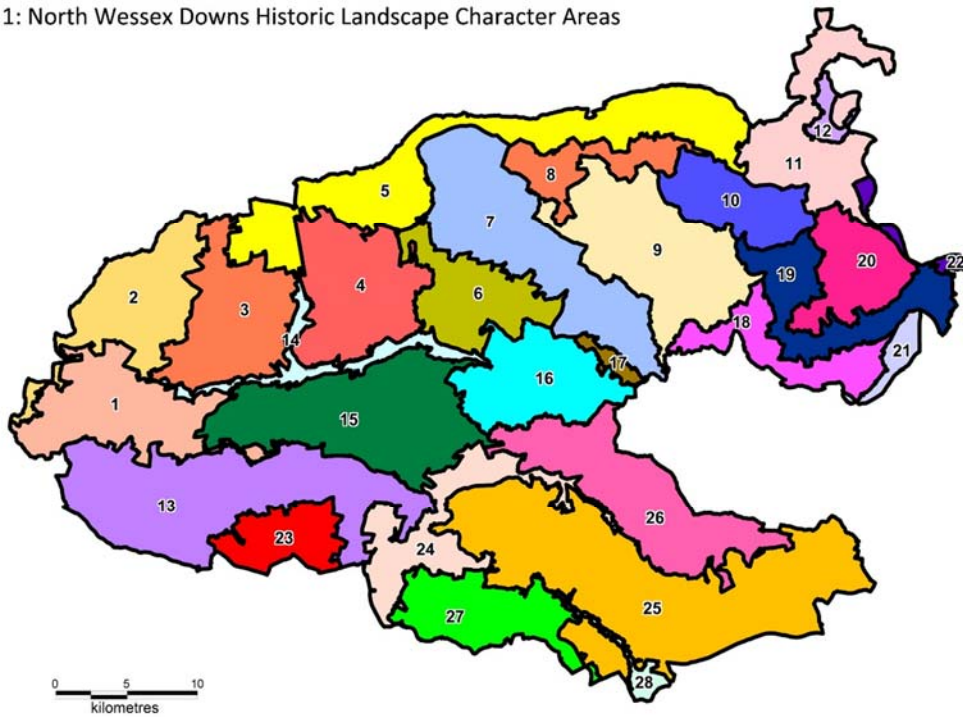
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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



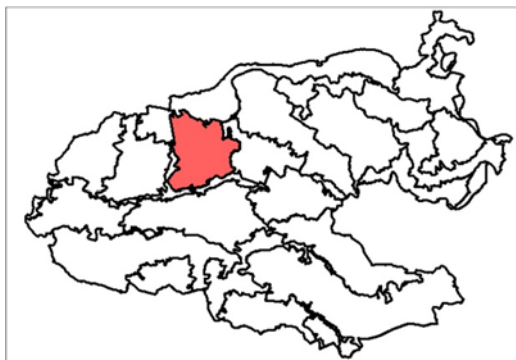
Map Produced by Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy 2012. © Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved (100049050) 2012.

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------|
| 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 4: Aldbourne Downs

There are extensive numbers of Bronze Age round barrows on higher downland areas including extant and ploughed out examples and complete barrow cemeteries. Iron Age archaeology is likewise extensive including settlements, banjo enclosures and cross dykes. There are also many known Roman sites. The extent of Medieval archaeology is particularly noteworthy including sites which can be used to illustrate activity within the former Medieval deer park of the Aldbourne Chase. This area is characterised by a greater proportion of surviving pre 1700 enclosure than the downland to the West or East which can be used to illustrate the early privatisation of the Medieval communal farming systems that had formerly supported many parishes.



Location – This area is formed by an area of chalk downland bounded by the river Og to the West and the Lambourn downs to the East which are more wooded. Its southern boundary is formed by the river Kennet and by a prominent chalk escarpment to the North. It forms the eastern half of the Marlborough Downs.

Geology and Topography – The geology is dominated by Middle and Upper Chalk. The topography is strongly articulated by rolling downland dissected by steep scarps along dry valleys and rising to gently rounded hills.

Landscape Character – The area forms an open expanse landscape of smoothly rolling downland mostly under arable cultivation. Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Area 1A: Marlborough Downs.

Archaeological Character – The earliest archaeological evidence is for stray Mesolithic finds and flint scatters. Neolithic archaeology is not as prominent as areas to the West but includes flint scatters, and finds including polished axes.

There are extensive numbers of Bronze Age round barrows on higher downland areas including extant and ploughed out examples and complete barrow cemeteries. Some of the extensive field systems identified may date to the later Bronze Age and there is evidence for later Bronze Age settlement.

Iron Age archaeology is likewise extensive including settlements, banjo enclosures and cross dykes as well as the earthwork remains of a small univallate hillfort at Liddington Castle

There are many known Roman sites not surprising when considering Cunetio lies just to the South. The Roman Ermin Street crosses the area while to the West the road from Cirencester to Mildenhall (Cunetio) runs roughly North to South. There are also substantial Roman field systems, and the area

seems to have been well farmed at this time. There is some evidence for the location of Roman farmsteads which complements the evidence for nearby high status buildings such as Littlecote.

The extent of Medieval archaeology is particularly noteworthy, including sites relating to the former Medieval deer park of the Aldbourne Chase. There are a number of deserted or shrunken villages, as well as the fortified manor at Lewisham Castle. These are surrounded by relict Medieval fields, ridge and furrow and lynchets and other features including pillow mounds. Post Medieval archaeology is limited and relates to the site of the battle of Aldbourne in the English Civil War and a stretch of the former Marlborough to Swindon railway which crosses the South East corner of the area.



Farmland near Warren Farm – The reorganisation of the landscape has been less complete than in other parts of the AONB, and large and coherent areas of early enclosures remain across the South of the area. Here this is a much greater survival of pre 1800 enclosure interspersed with ancient woodland and replanted ancient woodland.

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Aldbourne – The historic settlement pattern is dominated by the nucleated village of Aldbourne, originally built around a green and the church. However, this picture needs to be supplemented by the number of deserted Medieval villages which have been abandoned or survive as historic farmsteads such as Shaw, Snap, Woodsend and Upham.

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Farmland, Upham – The development of mechanised farming over the latter half of the 20th century led to substantial change in the area with many fields being heavily altered and the remaining areas of open field and downland enclosed by new fields especially in the North of the area.

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There is potential for deposits of Bronze Age to Romano-British date across the area but preservation may be varied. Deep ploughing is likely to have caused significant truncation of many features. The extent of survival of the cropmark features is unclear as few have been excavated. The origin of the relict field systems is not properly understood and many enclosures with a tentative prehistoric date remain undated. Deposits of occupation from the early Medieval period onwards are likely in historic settlement nuclei as well as deposits outside settlements which are crucial to understanding the development of settlement in the area. The 19th century farms are important features but little is known about the nature of their historic building stock.

Historic Landscape Trajectory – Like neighbouring downland areas to the East, the Medieval landscape was composed of communities living in nucleated villages within open fields utilising common grazing on adjacent or nearby downland. The open fields surrounded villages within the area, such as Aldbourne, or villages beyond, such as in the Kennet Valley to the South. This gave way to open chalk downland on the higher ground above. This was used as grazing for animals. This open land was also associated with small patches of scrub and gorse, which were used as fuel, and meandering open chalk track ways used to cross these areas. These open areas were used as part of the common grazing regime that operated in many Downs parishes in the Medieval period. Much of this open land was enclosed in the 18th and 19th century leaving a small amount of enclosure in the 20th century around Liddington Hill and Poulton Down.

Parliamentary enclosures of the late 18th and early 19th century were created to the West of Liddington Hill, East of Ogbourne St George, North-East of Marlborough, North of Axford and South and North East of Aldbourne. The fields created by this process are usually regular in shape with straight boundaries and the boundaries are usually hedged and/or fenced. In some parts of the North of the area enclosure came later in the 19th century as part of post-parliamentary enclosure. The majority of fields of this type are morphologically similar to Parliamentary Enclosures; although some are more irregular in shape, often reflecting the land that they have been enclosed from. Examples include South East of Liddington Hill and East of Aldbourne. These fields have been modified in the 20th century.

This area is characterised by a greater proportion of pre 1700 enclosure than the downland to the West or East. Many of these 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. They are located to the North-East of Ramsbury and to the East and West of Aldbourne. These are typified by irregularly-shaped, small to medium sized fields with boundaries composed mainly of hedges. The majority of early enclosures have few traces of previous land-use. In a number of cases, however, many of these fields show traces of having been created from open fields. These indicate an early privatisation of the Medieval communal farming systems that had formerly supported many parishes. Beyond these fields areas of more regularly-shaped early enclosures existed on higher downland. These were probably created following an agreement between local land-holders and farmers to rationalise and enclose holdings in the common fields. Other early fields include assarts created by clearing fields in ancient woodland located to the North-West of Ramsbury. Many of these fields were modified in the 20th century.

The South-West of the area, which forms a triangle with the Kennet Valley, at the bottom following the droveway to the West of Poulton Down as far North as Aldbourne Chase and then back South-East to Ramsbury, was associated with small areas of irregular ancient woodland some of which have been replanted post 1800, and which have been the subject of assarting.

Present Day Historic Landscape Character – The development of mechanised farming over the latter half of the 20th century led to substantial change in the area with many fields being heavily altered and the remaining areas of open field and downland enclosed by new fields created around Liddington Hill and on Poulton Hill.

However, the reorganisation of the landscape has been less complete than in other parts of the AONB, and large and coherent areas of early enclosures remain across the South of the area. Here this is a much greater survival of pre 1800 enclosure interspersed with ancient woodland and replanted ancient woodland. Unlike in the area to the North most field alteration has been through the amalgamation of fields by boundary removal as opposed to re-organisation and insertion of new boundaries. This has preserved some of the grain of the historic landscape and, in many cases, stubs of removed boundaries remain. Some of this area coincides with the Medieval deer park of the Aldbourne Chase

To the North of the area, the reorganisation of fields through a mixture of boundary removal and realignment of existing fields has eroded more of the pre 1900 enclosure pattern. Areas of 18th and 19th century enclosure survive to the South and East of Liddington Hill characterised by fields which are usually regular in shape with straight boundaries and the boundaries are usually hedged and/or fenced. Small regular woodland plantations have also been created on the tops of the hills.

The North is also associated with the surviving areas of open chalk downland surviving as thin ribbons, for example along the line of the chalk escarpment which runs down the South Western side of the area and from Liddington Hill towards Aldbourne.

A small area of 18th and 19th century designed parkland surrounds Upham Court.

20th century development includes the creation of a golf course on Ogbourne Down.

Historic Settlement Character – The historic settlement pattern is dominated by the nucleated village of Aldbourne, originally built around the green and the church. It was established in the 7th or 8th century AD at the junction of five dry valleys and by the Medieval period was established as a classic downland village surrounded by open fields to the North and West, with common grazing beyond. However this picture needs to be supplemented by the number of deserted Medieval villages which have been abandoned or survive as historic farmsteads such as Shaw, Snap, Woodsend and Upham. Indeed Upham Manor was the centre of a royal manor, with a hunting lodge on the edge of Aldbourne Chase. This picture was infilled by smaller hamlets and farmsteads spread throughout the remainder of the area. This settlement pattern contrasts strongly with the downland areas to the East.

The village of Aldbourne continued to prosper as an industrial centre in the 18th century. The 1960s and 1970s saw a large expansion of the village to the North, and there has also been settlement expansion to the South. Several new farms have also been established across the South of the area post 1900.

Historic Farmstead Character – Historic farmsteads of a pre 1800 origin dominate, some being the remnants of once larger Medieval settlements. There is a low-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

- There are extensive numbers of Bronze Age round barrows on higher downland areas including extant and ploughed out examples and complete barrow cemeteries.
- Iron Age archaeology is likewise extensive including settlements, banjo enclosures and cross dykes
- Many known Roman sites
- Medieval archaeology is particularly noteworthy

Historic Interest

Archaeological sites surviving as earthworks relating to Prehistory and the Roman period have a strong illustrative interest as they can be used to communicate how past human activity shaped the landscape.

The extent of Medieval archaeology is particularly noteworthy, including sites which can be used to illustrate activity within the former Medieval deer park of the Aldbourne Chase.

Surviving areas of pre 1700 enclosure have a strong illustrative value demonstrating an early privatisation of the Medieval communal farming systems that had formerly supported many parishes.

Sites investigated by antiquarians have a strong associative value.

Architectural Interest

Buildings associated with nucleated village of Aldbourne are important as they provide information on Medieval Settlement patterns in the AONB.

Historic farmsteads of a pre-1800 origin dominate, some being the remnants of once larger Medieval settlements which have strong illustrative interest where they survive especially when placed in context with the archaeology relating to the deserted Medieval villages.

Aesthetic and artistic interest

The chalk downlands in general have a strong artistic interest being the focus of interest of numerous artists.

Coherence, Rarity and Time depth

The historic landscape of this area is extremely coherent, dominated by 20th century enclosure. This has led to substantial change in the area with many fields being heavily altered and the remaining areas of open field and downland enclosed

However, this area is characterised by a greater proportion of surviving pre 1700 enclosure than the downland to the West or East. The North is also associated with the surviving areas of open chalk downland surviving as thin ribbons

There is strong time depth relating to the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Medieval period.

Designated Heritage - Scheduled Monuments (27) are related to Bronze Age round barrows, Iron Age and Roman settlement and field systems, Medieval settlement and field systems. The Listed Buildings (103) are related to the Medieval settlement of Aldbourne where most of the buildings are concentrated, historic milestones and historic farm buildings in the surrounding area. There is no parkland on the register of parks and gardens.