



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.

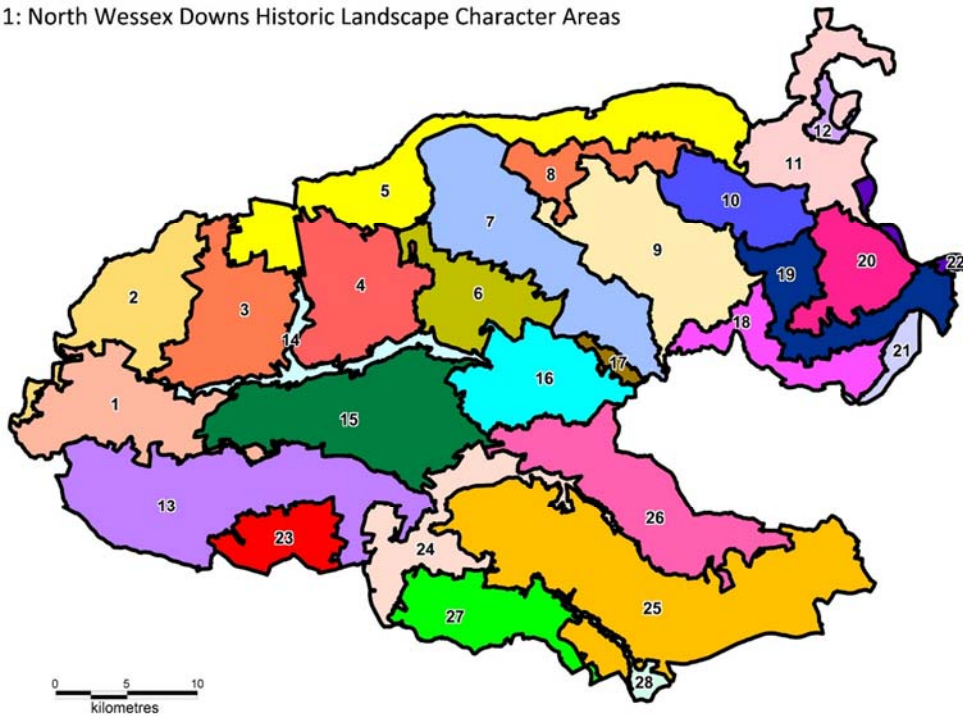
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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



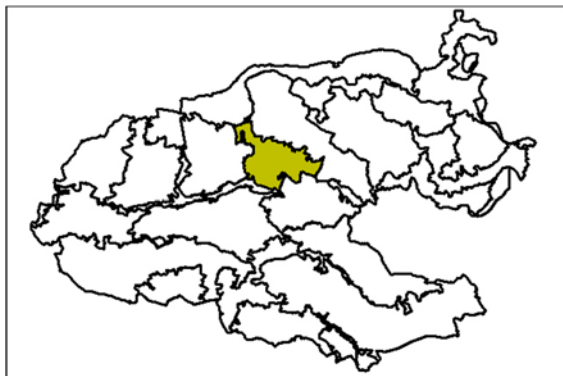
Map Produced by Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy 2012. © Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved (100049050) 2012.

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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 6: Lambourn wooded downs plateau

There is significant cropmark evidence of later prehistoric field systems (later Bronze Age and Iron Age) across the area. The Ermin Street Roman road is a dominant feature with associated Roman activity. On the northern side of the area small pockets of ancient woodland interspersed with post 1800 plantation and old secondary woodland (1600 to 1800) survive. These are an important historical survival representing evidence of the former medieval and post-medieval exploitation of woodlands. Historic Designed Parklands are another important historical survival. Surviving World War Two features including Membury Airfield have a strong illustrative interest these offer an opportunity for oral history and local 'stories'.



Location – This area is the highest section of the Kennet – Lambourn watershed. It is a wide plateau that drops steeply away on the North side to the Lambourn valley and more gently to the Kennet on the South. It abuts the Marlborough Downs to the West

Geology and Topography – The geology is mainly chalk with occasional very localised outcrops of Reading Beds. The floor of the major dry valley has deposits of valley gravels. The topography is formed of a rolling chalk plateau.

Landscape Character – A strongly rolling chalk plateau; a mosaic of woodland and mixed arable and pasture farmland. Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Area 2c: Lambourn Wooded Downs

Archaeological Character – There is little evidence for early use and management of the area as HER records are fairly sparse and there has been little archaeological work carried out on the ground. The East of the area was covered by the Berkshire Downs Survey and aerial photograph transcription and analysis by the National Mapping Programme. Little other archaeological work has been carried out. This is reflected in the fact that the Archaeological record is dominated by find spots rather than sites.

Prehistoric material is not common and includes a single long barrow at Balards Copse and isolated Bronze Age round barrows. A barrow of clearly Bronze Age date near Shefford Park Farm was excavated on at least two occasions. The Iron Age hillfort at Membury is a dominant feature.

However other prehistoric material is not common and is mostly limited to finds of worked flint from a handful of locations. The NMP mapped several groups of cropmark features thought to be part of later prehistoric/Romano-British field systems.

The dominant feature is the Ermin Street Roman road which still forms the major route through this area as the B4000. Although the course of Ermin Street is well-known and it is still largely in use, there has been limited investigation of the physical nature of the road itself. Other Romano-British features have been observed near the road including a probable building on the site of Membury Services and a group of Romano-British features, including a corn-drier, were excavated at Lodge Farm prior to construction of the M4. Beyond the road corridor evidence of Romano-British activity in this area is limited apart from the possibly contemporary field systems, and an a Romano-British industrial site in the West of the area.

Suggested early Medieval evidence comes from an inhumation burial found near Horseclose Copse. Records of late Medieval activity are also scarce and limited to two areas of lynchets North-East of Rooksnest Farm. A linear earthwork of possible Medieval date, Hug Ditch, runs along the part of the boundary between this area and the Lambourn Valley area to the East.

Later periods are represented almost entirely by standing buildings. Second World War military remains are found on land that was occupied by Membury airfield. Concrete runways remain within fields, and buildings related to the airfield are found over an extensive area to the North and East, many of which have been re-used for alternative, mainly industrial, uses.

It is hard to assess the archaeological resource in this area as little is known of the extent and quality of below-ground deposits. It is likely that prehistoric and Romano-British deposits are present where cropmarks of field systems exist, but it is not clear how well the features represented survive. A woodland archaeology survey of banks and enclosures in Coldridge Copse suggests that there may be other unrecorded earthworks in other woods in this area. Physical remains of the Roman road are likely to survive underneath the present road surface and in areas on the course of the road where the modern route has been diverted. Excavations in advance of the M4 found some evidence for contemporary settlement along Ermin Street and it is possible that further settlement deposits are located on the course of the road. The historic farm sites retain significant historic buildings and it is possible that deposits relating to early settlement and use of these sites may also remain. Any such deposits could be crucial in understanding the enclosure and exploitation of this area from the Medieval period onwards.



Hodd's Hill - Very little of the area remained unenclosed or not covered by mature woodland by the start of the 18th century. Although areas of pre 1700 open land has been identified including the slopes to the North of Chilton Foliat, and the area around the deeply incised valley flowing South from Aldbourne.

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Farmland near Greenlands Copse, East Garston Woodlands – Across the rest of the area fieldscapes have seen large-scale rationalisation through a combination of field reorganisation and boundary removal. This has led to a much less irregular-looking landscape. Boundary removal was commonest in the assarts around East Garston woodlands.

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Farmland near Woodland St Marys – Woodland was widely spread across the area. Most woodland is ancient; smaller areas of other old woods were also present for example around Ballams Wood. The ancient woodland was present in large blocks, most of which show signs of assartment.

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Historic Landscape Trajectory –This is a largely early enclosed landscape with substantial areas of woodland and a dispersed settlement pattern. The main route through the area was Ermin Street, the Roman road from Silchester to Cirencester, which ran along the crest of the watershed.

Numerous small, sinuous roads and tracks branched off Ermin Street linking the plateau and the valley floors.

Very little of the area remained unenclosed or not covered by mature woodland by the start of the 18th century, although areas of pre 1700 open land have been identified including the slopes to the North of Chilton Foliat, and the area around the deeply incised valley flowing South from Aldbourne. The fieldscapes were mostly composed of small-scale, irregularly-shaped enclosures interleaved with woodland. Some fields were identified as assarts and it is likely that other early enclosures may also be assarts; this could be clarified by further research. In the South-East of the area, fields are larger and more sinuous, suggesting that they may have been enclosed from open downland. In most cases there is no definite evidence of what kind of land the fields were created from, and the typical downs combination of open fields and common downland grazing seems absent from this area. The exception being the far North West of the area where the village of Baydon reflects just this pattern, with open fields and common downland not enclosed until the 20th century.

Parliamentary enclosures were only present at King's Heath. This was an area of common heath that, unlike the rest of the area, had remained unenclosed into the 19th century.

Woodland was widely spread across the area. Most woodland is ancient; smaller areas of other old woods were also present for example around Ballams Wood. The ancient woodland was present in large blocks, most of which show signs of assartment.

Small parklands are found in this area. Two smallish parks were established almost next-door to each other in the southern half of the area at Inholmes and Poughley and to the West of the area small parks existed at Membury House, Crowood House and Eastridge House.

The combination of farm names, assarted woodlands and the irregular early enclosed landscape suggests that this area had long been enclosed into fields, probably by individual farmers carving out their own farmland from the downs and woodlands. Much of this landscape is likely to date back at last to the Medieval period.

Present Day Historic Landscape Character – The western portion of the area has been heavily modified by the construction of Membury Airfield during WWII. This took an angular chunk out of the landscape, truncating surrounding fields, and included the insertion of shielding plantations of fast growing conifers around parts of the base's perimeter. Although now disused, the airfield still has a presence in the landscape. Most of the airfield area is farmed and the remains of runways and service routes form the boundaries of the fields. Many of the airfield buildings have been re-used as business and industrial premises leading to a small industrial estate developing in an otherwise very rural area. Membury motorway services have also been constructed within the former airfield footprint.

Across the rest of the area fieldscapes have seen large-scale rationalisation through a combination of field reorganisation and boundary removal. This has led to a much less irregular-looking landscape. Boundary removal was commonest in the assarts around East Garston Woodlands. The construction of the M4 motorway also contributed to this reorganisation through disruption and truncation of historic field systems. The conversion of historic enclosures into paddocks is common. They are most widespread around the Kingwood Stud but are also found in blocks across the rest of the area. Some blocks of historic fields survive around Lambourn Woodlands and East Garston Woodlands and South of King's Heath.

A few blocks of ancient woodland were cleared for agricultural use, mostly in the later 20th century. Some areas have also been cleared of their native woodland cover and been replanted with new trees; this is commonest to the South of Inholmes Park. The Northern side small pockets of ancient woodland interspersed with post 1800 plantation and old secondary woodland (1600 to 1800) including large blocks of new woodland the South Eastern side

Parks remain but have contracted slightly with some of their grounds having been turned over to agriculture.

Historic Settlement Character – The historic settlement pattern was dispersed and there are no nucleated villages. It is typified by small discontinuous settlements, such as Lambourn Woodlands and Shefford Woodlands, which are strung out along the Roman road and lack a clear centre. There is evidence for slight settlement growth over the 18th and 19th centuries with new housing built along the Roman road.

Settlement growth has been negligible and mostly consists of new houses or groups of houses constructed between historic settlement nuclei along the Roman road.

Historic Farmstead Character – Farms were fairly densely scattered across the area and most are named after individuals, such as Dixon’s Farm and Gooding’s Farm. 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

- Single long barrow at Balards Copse and isolated Bronze Age round barrows.
- There is significant cropmark evidence of later prehistoric field systems (later Bronze Age and Iron Age) and farming across the area.
- Dominant feature is the Ermin Street Roman road with associated Roman activity.
- Potential Early Medieval inhumation cemetery at Horseclose Copse
- 20th century military archaeology

Historic Interest

The Ermin Street Roman road is a dominant feature so has a strong illustrative interest relating to Roman activity in the landscape.

Surviving areas of ancient woodland can be used to illustrate early pre modern land use.

Surviving World War Two features have a strong illustrative interest. They offer an opportunity for oral history and local 'stories'

Architectural Interest

Historic farm buildings especially related to pre 1750 farm buildings and timber frame barns are important historic survivals.

Aesthetic and artistic interest

Surviving historic parks and gardens have a strong aesthetic value relating to their designed aspects.

Coherence, Rarity and Time depth

There is strong time depth relating to the Roman period.

The historic landscape of this area in the West of the area is dominated by the disused, Membury Airfield constructed in World War Two. Across the rest of the area fieldscapes have seen large-scale rationalisation through a combination of field reorganisation and boundary removal in the 20th century creating a coherent landscape.

On the Northern side of the area small pockets of ancient woodland interspersed with post 1800 plantation and old secondary woodland (1600 to 1800) survive. These are an important historical survival representing evidence of the former medieval and post-medieval exploitation of woodlands.

Historic Designed Parklands are another important historical survival.

Designated Heritage - Scheduled Monuments (3) relate to Membury Camp and the Neolithic long barrow at Ballard's Copse. The Listed Buildings (53) are related to historic farms and farm buildings and milestones. There is 0 parkland on the register of parks and gardens.