



# NORTH WESSEX DOWNS

AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

## Historic Landscape Character Areas and their special qualities and features of significance



**Volume 1 EXTRACT**

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Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy





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## Summary

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*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

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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.**

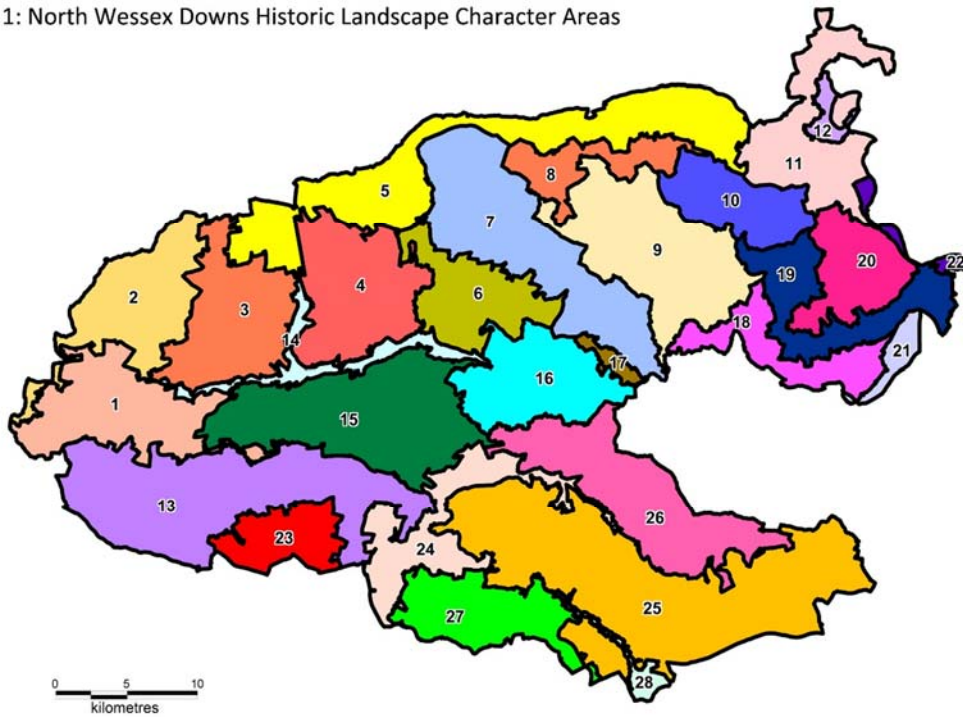
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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



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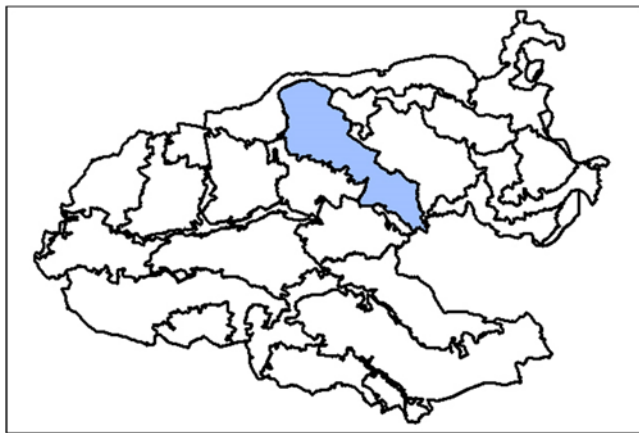
- |     |                                 |     |                                       |
|-----|---------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Pewsey Downs                    | 16. | Middle Kennet Valley                  |
| 2.  | Avebury Plain                   | 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 7: Lambourn Valley

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This area has important and rare surviving evidence for Palaeolithic activity. There is strong time depth relating to the prehistoric period with Neolithic and Early Bronze Age evidence being particularly rich. The Lambourn Seven Barrows cemetery has particular illustrative interest. There is significant cropmark and excavated evidence of Romano-British activity, particularly relating to settlements at Boxford and Maddal Farm. There is evidence for early Medieval settlement in the valley bottom and a possible Royal enclosure at Lambourn and a wealth of Medieval archaeology. There is a conglomeration of later Post-medieval built architectural heritage in the valley bottom.



**Location** – This area consists of the Lambourn valley and the surrounding downs from Bagnor to the valley heading North-West of Lambourn. The valley has a narrow floor with many dry valleys cut into the valley sides from its watersheds with the Kennet and Winterbourne.

**Geology and Topography** – The geology of the area is almost entirely chalk, although small areas of Reading Beds occur on the upper valley slopes South of Weston and a narrow band of gravel exists in the valley floor. Narrow valley with medium sloping sides.

**Landscape Character** – The River Lambourn flows through this narrow and visually contained valley, forming a small scale landscape of great interest. *Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Area 7B: Lambourn Valley.*

**Archaeological Character** – There is significantly more evidence of earlier prehistoric activity in the Lower Lambourn than in adjacent parts of the valley and watershed. Palaeolithic material has been recovered near Woodspen and Mesolithic material was also found at this location. Neolithic material is also more widespread and flint tools have been found at several sites. There is also some Neolithic evidence at the head of the Lambourn Valley. There is one Neolithic long barrow.

Evidence of Bronze Age activity in the lower valley comes from probable barrow sites and circular earthworks. There is significant cropmark evidence of later prehistoric settlement and farming all along the valley, in particular on the valley sides and fields have generally been ascribed a later prehistoric/Romano-British date. Elements of these field systems survived until recently as earthworks but have been levelled due to increased intensity of ploughing. It is likely that the river and valley floor were heavily exploited too in this period but that evidence has not been recognised due to a lack of both cropmark development and opportunities for chance finds. A possible Iron Age

hillfort exists on Borough Hill and a series of circular features were excavated on Boxford Common in the 1930s.



**Oxford Street, Lambourn** - Lambourn was a royal estate in the early Medieval period. The distinctive oval layout of the village's roads is likely to date back to this period and a church is thought to have stood at the site of the present church since at least the early 11<sup>th</sup> century. The road layout and positioning of church and market is similar to that seen at other settlements of this date.

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**Kington Bushes Plantation, Upper Lambourn** – 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century plantations are common sitting in open expanses of 20<sup>th</sup> century fields created by the ploughing up of formerly open chalk grassland.

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**Lambourn River at Woodspeen** – The older historic character of the meadows and fields of the valley bottom contrasts markedly with the more open and more recent fields on the valley sides. The archaeological pattern is also on of contrast with a greater concentration of Medieval and later activity focused on the valley bottom and probably obscuring earlier traces.

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There is significant cropmark evidence of Romano- British activity but evidence is limited to stray finds on the valley bottom. Significant Romano-British activity, in addition to the field-systems, is documented in the Lower Lambourn Valley, in the area from Stancombe Down to Great Shefford and at the head of the valley. In the lower valley the line of Ermine Street, the road from Silchester

to Cirencester, runs through the south-western side of the area. A villa also exists South of Wyfield Farm. At the head of the valley Roman settlement is widespread and includes the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century villa at Maddie Farm.

In the valley bottom there is evidence for early Medieval settlement at several locations. Boxford and Welford were both referred to in 10<sup>th</sup> century documents and Bagnor was mentioned as having a mill at Domesday. A settlement at Shefford was mentioned at Domesday. Most historic settlements had developed by the end of the late Medieval period. The churches at East Garston, Boxford, Welford, East Shefford and Great Shefford all retain significant Medieval elements despite Victorian alteration. Evidence of desertion or shrinkage exists at several settlements. In the lower Lambourn Medieval records are uncommon and consist mainly of finds. Large concentrations of finds from an area immediately North of Boxford Farm have been interpreted as from an early Saxon cemetery.

Post Medieval records are of buildings, industrial structures and transport features. Much of the building stock at each settlement dates from this period. Watermills existed at most historic settlements and the majority of remaining mill buildings date from this period. It is possible that these are on the site of Medieval mills. The Lambourn Valley railway was constructed through the area in the 1890s ;the line of the railway is preserved in places as a wooded earthwork.

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 present day settlements is poorly understood. Deposits of occupation from the early Medieval 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 19<sup>th</sup> century farms are important features but little is known about the nature of their historic building stock.

**Historic Landscape Trajectory** – The Medieval landscape of this area was based on nucleated settlements on the valley floor, with open fields on the valley sides and common grazing on riverside meadows and downs at the head of the valley and on its sides. The majority of the open fields south of East Garston were enclosed into fields by the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Most were irregularly-shaped and slotted into the framework of the landscape established by roads and tracks and open field strips, suggesting that they were enclosed on a gradual, piecemeal basis. Significant areas of more regularly-shaped early enclosures existed around East Shefford, East Garston and Welford. These were probably created following an agreement between local land-holders and farmers to rationalise and enclose holdings in the common fields. The meadows had also largely been enclosed by this date; some were simply enclosed into pasture fields, but the majority became water meadows. These covered the valley floor between East Garston and Bagnor and formed the AONB's most significant concentration of water meadows outside the Kennet Valley.

The majority of the remaining open fields and downs, including almost all of Lambourn parish, were enclosed into fields through Act of Parliament in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The only unenclosed downland that remained were small areas West of Lambourn and north of East Garston. Woodland was historically very sparse in this area with little ancient or other historic broadleaf woodland. Some blocks of ancient woodland did exist but they were generally small and most were in the South of the area near its edge. The only large ancient wood was on the Southern edge of Welford Park, the single substantial park in the area.



**Present Day Historic Landscape Character** - Agricultural mechanisation from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century led to a dramatic alteration of this landscape as existing fields were amalgamated into larger holdings, either through boundary removal or through reorganisation. Many historic features, such as hedgerows, were removed, creating expanses of relatively featureless arable fields. This trend also saw the enclosure of the majority of remaining downland for further large arable fields. Downland is now found only in small areas on steep scarp slopes where farming is uneconomic or impractical. Some historic fields do survive as functioning parts of the farming landscape, mostly around Boxford and Bagnor, but these are usually isolated instances of a couple of fields. Active management of water meadows ceased in the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century and most became pasture or fields. Some have become wooded areas, either through active plantation or gradual scrubbing over and re-colonisation.

Due to the growth of Lambourn as a nationally important centre of the racehorse industry, large parts of the landscape are now covered by land-uses related to horse breeding and training. This is most evident around Lambourn itself where significant areas of former fields and downs are now extensive stretches of paddocks and gallops. Several studs have been established, including some that have developed at historic farms in the downs above Lambourn.

A large American military base exists at Welford. The base started as an RAF airfield in WWII and has now become one of the USAF's most significant European bomb stores. Most previous land-use features, including field boundaries and a large area of ancient woodland, were removed by construction of the base.

There has been a slight increase in tree cover across the whole area. Woodland regeneration has contributed to this but the rise is largely due to the creation of tree plantations. Some plantations are 19<sup>th</sup> century in date, but most were created in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most were created as shelter features and are small and rectilinear. This is most visible in Lambourn parish, previously an almost totally un-wooded area that now contains many irregularly-shaped plantations. Despite overall growth, areas of ancient and other old woodland have been lost. Many were removed for cultivation or construction, as at RAF Welford, and some were replanted with non-native species. Replanted ancient woods exist between Boxford and Bagnor.

The changes have had a significant impact on character, as large and regular arable expanses have been created over the whole of the area where previously there would have been either open downland or a more intimate network of smaller fields.

**Historic Settlement Character** – Settlement was linear but nucleated and concentrated in a few large villages and hamlets of Medieval or earlier origin. These were sited on the valley floor and were spaced at fairly regular intervals. Timber-framing was the traditional construction form across much of the area until the later 17<sup>th</sup> century, after which time brick became the dominant walling material. Chalk cob was also widely used for cottages and boundary walls. Brick combined with flint is also characteristic – its use dating mainly from the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Settlement growth has been modest and confined largely to infill or growth around existing settlements and has centred on East Garston, West Shefford and Boxford. Most housing has been constructed since the later 20<sup>th</sup> century but a small amount of growth took place at East Garston in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Very few new settlement nuclei have been created.

**Historic Farmstead Character** – Farms were not common and were located either along the river in gaps between the hamlets and villages or, more commonly, on the upper slopes of the valley. Most were named after adjacent settlements or topographic features. 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. 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

- Evidence for Palaeolithic activity.
- Neolithic evidence at the head of the Lambourn Valley and possible cropmark of a henge at Elton lane
- Significant earthwork and cropmark evidence of Bronze Age barrows, including surviving cemeteries at the Seven Barrows and Stancombe Hatts.
- There is significant cropmark evidence of later prehistoric settlement and farming all along the valley in particular on the valley sides.
- Possible Iron Age hillfort exists on Borough Hill
- Significant cropmark and excavated evidence of Romano- British activity, particularly at settlements at Boxford and Maddle farm
- Evidence for early Medieval settlement in the valley bottom and possible royal enclosure at Lambourn
- Historic mill sites
- Landscape evidence of horse racing industry from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century
- WWII and Cold War structures at RAF Welford

### Historic Interest

Many prehistoric and Roman Archaeological sites do not survive as earthworks so have less illustrative interest than in other areas with the exception of the Bronze Age Lambourn Seven Barrows cemetery.

Early Medieval and later earthworks in the valley bottom do survive however. Surviving areas of open chalk downland and pre 1750 fields can be used to illustrate early pre modern land use.

Former RAF Welford has a strong illustrative interest relating to WWII.

### Architectural Interest

Importance should be attached to timber frame buildings surviving to before 1800. Vernacular chalk cob buildings and Pre-1750 farmstead buildings and in particular large timber-frame barns are also important historical survivals

### Aesthetic and artistic interest

Horse racing industry at Lambourn will have aesthetic and artistic interest

### **Coherence, Rarity and Time depth**

The historic landscape of this area is extremely coherent dominated by 20<sup>th</sup> century enclosure, created through the amalgamation of existing fields.

Small areas of open downland survive on steep scarp slopes. These are an important historical survival representing a fraction of the former extent of chalk downland.

Some historic fields do survive as functioning parts of the farming landscape, mostly around Boxford and Bagnor, but these are usually isolated instances of a couple of fields. These are an important historical survival.

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

**Designated Heritage** - Scheduled Monuments (25) are dominated by Bronze Age round barrows. The Listed Buildings (238) are related to the cottages and farmhouses along the valley bottom. There are 0 parklands on the register of parks and gardens.