



NORTH WESSEX DOWNS

AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

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



Volume 1 EXTRACT

Third Edition March 2016

Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy





Emma Rouse, Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy

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

March 2016 – Third Edition



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.

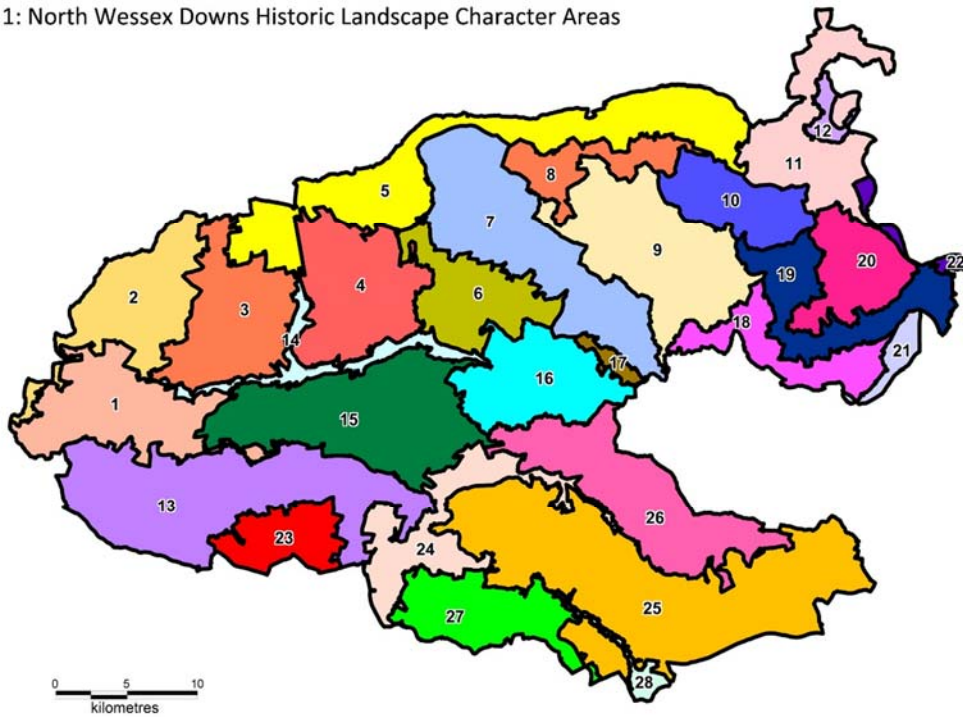
All historic characterisations (landscape, urban or seascape) form detailed, often complex, datasets which record the historic dimension of the present day. This complexity derives from the interrelation of several factors:

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



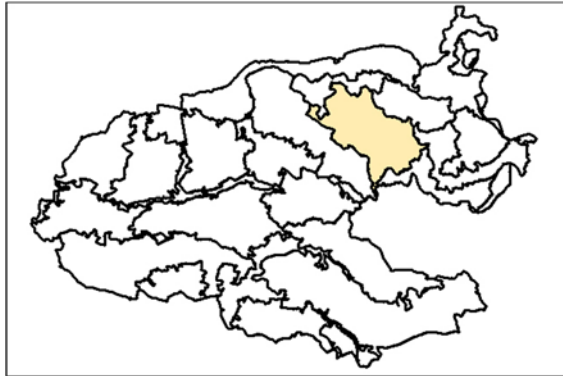
Map Produced by Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy 2012. © Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved (100049050) 2012.

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------|
| 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 9: Winterbourne Valley & downland

Iron Age activity is quite widespread and includes cropmarks of nine banjo enclosures. There is also significant evidence of Romano- British activity including Roman settlements. Important evidence for early Medieval settlement survives at Chieveley, Chaddleworth Fawley, Winterbourne and Leckhampstead, Catmore and Beedon. Large and coherent areas of early enclosures remain across much of the area. This has preserved evidence of the grain of the 15th to 19th century historic landscape of the AONB.



Location – This is the Winterbourne valley and areas of the high downs formed by watersheds between the Lambourn, Winterbourne and Pang rivers.

Geology and Topography – The geology is almost entirely chalk, although small outcrops of Reading Beds occur South of Leckhampstead and Chieveley.

The topography of the area is open rolling downland surrounded the Winterbourne Valley featuring dry incised valley.

Landscape Character – Open undulating downland with a mixed farmland landscape of pasture and arable fields enclosed by hedgerows. Source: North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Area 2A: Brightwalton Downs.

Archaeological Character – HER records exist across the area. Many records are derived from cropmarks and many were discovered through the National Mapping Programme. The area was also covered by the Berkshire Downs Survey and some excavation and field walking has been carried out by local archaeological groups. Other archaeological work has been limited. Most has been carried out in advance of development, particularly the Southern Feeder gas pipeline and improvement works at the M4/A34 junction. A significant landscape archaeology project is being undertaken at Peasemore by the Berkshire Archaeology Research Group and there is a long running excavation of an Iron Age and Romano-British site near Stanmore Farm being run by a local volunteer group.

There are limited Mesolithic find spots across the area. In the lower and middle valley, Neolithic material is more common than elsewhere but is limited to find spots and flint scatters. Bronze Age activity is dominated by definite and probable round barrows. The barrows are all located on the upper slopes of dry valleys and upper valley slopes. Evidence of a Bronze Age settlement near Beedon Wood was found by field walking by the Berkshire Downs Survey and later excavated.

Iron Age activity is quite widespread and includes cropmarks of nine banjo enclosures. An enclosed settlement, formed by three banjo enclosures, exists at Wellhill Road in the West of the area and in the East of the area Iron Age occupation has been found during excavations at Oareborough Hill, Stanmore and World's End. Patches of cropmarks of later prehistoric/Romano-British field systems exist across the area but become scarcer in the upper part of the valley.

An early Romano-British farmstead with some evidence of burials was also partially excavated at Chieveley prior to road construction. A rectangular cropmark exists South-East of Chaddleworth and field walking on site has produced Roman coins and pottery. Evidence of settlement of this period has been found during excavations at Stanmore, World's End and Oareborough Hill. The Iron Age settlement at Oareborough Hill was re-occupied during the late Roman period and it has been suggested, on the basis of finds and cropmarks, that a villa exists a short distance to the North of this settlement. Evidence of Romano-British buildings was also found during the 19th century at Stanmore Farm and Beedon Brickworks.

There is evidence for early Medieval settlement at Chieveley, Chaddleworth Fawley, Winterbourne and Leckhampstead. Leckhampstead is recorded as having a church in 1050 and the site of this was at Chapel Farm. But other evidence of early Medieval activity is quite scarce. In both Winterbourne and Leckhampstead settlement seems to have migrated from its original location around the church.

Most late Medieval evidence comes from buildings including churches and farmstead. Three deserted Medieval villages, Whatcombe, Henley and Woolley are recorded. Earthworks at Bussock Court have been interpreted as a manorial site mentioned in the 16th century. In the East of the area a deer park, established in the 14th century, existed immediately South-West of Beedon and elements of the park, such as at Park Copse, are still visible in the landscape.

Post Medieval records are mainly of buildings. A World War Two bombing decoy has been identified at Beedon.

Deposits of Bronze Age to Romano-British date are likely to exist across the area. The preservation of deposits could be varied, as ploughing since the Medieval period has possibly truncated the archaeological layers. Deposits relating to early occupation may survive within historic settlement nuclei and any such deposits could be crucial to understanding the development of settlement in this area. A high number of deserted Medieval village sites exist in the area and any deposits will be valuable as desertion is a poorly understood phenomenon in the AONB. The historic building stock is fairly well-studied, but it is possible that further significant buildings or structural elements may be identified.

Historic Landscape Trajectory– Like neighbouring downland areas, the Medieval landscape was composed of communities within open fields utilising common grazing on adjacent or nearby downland. Commons existed at Chaddleworth, Beedon and Rowbury, but these were not frequent features of downland areas. Most of the open field and some downland had been enclosed into private fields by the start of the 18th century.

Most 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. Significant areas of more regularly-shaped early enclosures existed around Brightwalton, Catmore, Leckhampstead and Winterbourne. These were probably created following an agreement between local land-holders and farmers to rationalise and enclose holdings in the common fields.

The majority of remaining open fields, commons and downs were enclosed into fields through Act of Parliament in the early 19th century, and large areas of Parliamentary fields existed in Chaddleworth, Chieveley and Beedon. Some open field and larger areas of downland around Fawley and South Fawley remained unenclosed into the 20th century.

This was a much more wooded area than other parts of the downs and large blocks of ancient woodland and smaller blocks of other old woods were distributed across the area. Most wooded areas were located on or near parish boundaries.

South of South Fawley the landscape was different, being comprised of irregularly-shaped fields and blocks of woodland with numerous small farms. It lacked traces of any open fields and most farms were named after individuals. This area may not have been part of the common farming regime but have been occupied by small farms and their fields throughout the Medieval period.

Parks however were relatively uncommon with only a handful (Woolley Park, Chaddleworth House, Winterbourne House and the adjoining Priorscourt and Bradley Parks) existing in the area.



Peasemore Hill - Most 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.

© Copyright [Pam Brophy](#) and licensed for [reuse](#) under a [Creative Commons Licence](#).



Farmland, Brightwalton – The development of mechanised farming over the latter half of the 20th century led to substantial change in the area. 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 much of the area.

© Copyright [Andrew Smith](#) and licensed for [reuse](#) under a [Creative Commons Licence](#)



Woolley House – All parks survive in some form in the landscape but large portions of parkland have come under arable cultivation.

© Copyright [Pam Brophy](#) and licensed for [reuse](#) under a [Creative Commons Licence](#).

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 most fields being heavily altered and the remaining areas of open field and downland enclosed.

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 much of the area. Unlike surrounding areas, most field alteration has been through 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, traces of removed boundaries remain. A significant area of paddocks has been created out of early enclosures at Fawley.

Existing woodland has had a mixed history; much seems to have survived but several large blocks of ancient woodland have been cleared for agriculture. This is largely a later 20th century phenomenon; however, one wood was cleared in the late 19th century. Ancient woodlands at Brightwalton and Catmore have been cleared of native tree cover and replanted with other species. There has been a small growth in new tree-cover, mostly linear shelter plantations around Catmore.

All parks survive in some form in the landscape but large portions of parkland have come under arable cultivation. The adjoining parks at Priorscourt and Bradley have seen most change. All of Priorscourt Park is now under different usage, the grounds mainly under arable cultivation and the house itself used as a school. Bradley Park is now a small stub around the house and the rest of the grounds are fields.

Historic Settlement Character – The historic settlement pattern was mixed and consisted of a few nucleated villages and a larger number of hamlets and farms; some dispersed types of settlement were also present. The villages (Farnborough, Brightwalton, Peasmore and Chieveley) were located on the valley slopes on ridges overlooking the valley floor. Hamlets were widely scattered across the area but were a varied group containing small hamlets, such as Fawley and Catmore, and settlements consisting of multiple foci, such as Beedon, Leckhampstead and Bothampstead. Many

parishes, such as Chaddleworth and Beedon, had no main central settlement but a series of small related hamlets instead. Red brick was the commonest building material with many thatch buildings also surviving.

Substantial growth in housing has occurred around Chieveley in recent years, largely due to its proximity to the M4/A34 junction. Most of this growth is in the form of small housing estates that have been built on the edge of Chieveley itself and to the North at Downend. Historically these were two separate settlement nuclei, but recent development has linked them, effectively creating one village. Little growth in settlement has occurred across the rest of the area and is mainly limited to ad-hoc infill and growth or construction of small housing developments in and around existing settlements, such as at Chaddleworth, Peasemore and Leckhampstead.

Historic Farmstead Character – Farms were common across the centre of the area and most were named after topographic features or the nearest settlement. 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

- In the lower and middle valley Neolithic material is common.
- Bronze Age activity is dominated by definite and probable round barrows
- Iron Age activity is quite widespread and includes cropmarks of nine banjo enclosures.
- Significant evidence of Romano- British activity including Roman settlements.
- Evidence for early Medieval settlement at Chieveley, Chaddleworth Fawley, Winterbourne and Leckhampstead, Catmore and Beedon
- Earthwork and cropmark evidence for deserted Medieval Villages

Historic Interest

Archaeological sites in this area have less illustrative value than other downland areas as the majority of sites are only known from cropmarks.

Architectural Interest

Medieval and post-medieval buildings associated with the villages of Farnborough, Brightwalton, Peasemore and Chieveley.

Buildings associated with pre-1750 farmstead buildings. Survival of large timber-frame barns, some of 15th century date.

Aesthetic and artistic interest

Aesthetic interest of surviving evidence for historic parks and gardens in the landscape although large portions of parkland have come under arable cultivation.

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 later 20th century enclosure. 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 much of the area. This has preserved some of the grain of the historic landscape.

There is strong time depth relating to the Roman and Early Medieval period.

Designated Heritage - Scheduled Monuments (5) are dominated by Bronze Age round barrows. The Listed Buildings (167) are dispersed across the area and relate to vernacular buildings, designed landscapes and farmhouses and farm buildings. There are 0 parkland on the register of parks and gardens.