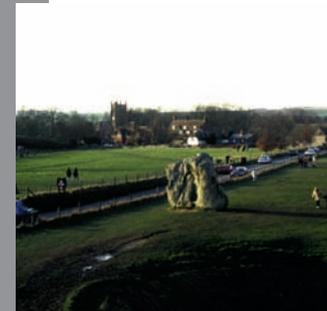
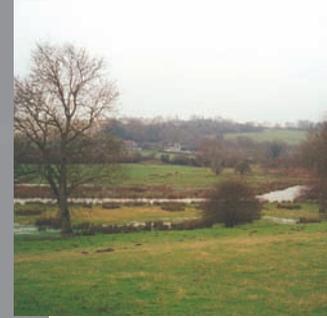


North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Integrated Landscape Character Assessment

Technical Report



NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB

**INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE
CHARACTER ASSESSMENT
TECHNICAL REPORT**

**Prepared for The Countryside
Agency
by
Land Use Consultants**

March 2002

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Community Council for Berkshire	Social Characteristics
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The study has been steered by an Advisory Group with the following members:

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Linda Tartaglia-Kershaw	Hampshire County Council
Paul Smith	Oxfordshire County Council
Bill Scott	Thames Valley Enterprise Ltd

Photographs have been provided by Ann Seth.

The study has involved consultation and gathering of existing data and information and we appreciate the time and involvement of many individuals and organisations. Details of those contacted are provided in Appendix 1. We have also drawn upon information collected as part of a wide ranging consultation exercise conducted as part of a recent study to investigate a proposed management structure for the North Wessex Downs AONB (Countryside Agency 2000). This included consultations with all the local authorities (11), statutory agencies, the farming and land management community including CLA, NFU and representatives of the main estates, key conservation agencies, local interest groups and recreation groups. In addition the draft technical report and a separate issues report were issued to 54 and 75 consultees respectively. A full list of consultees is provided in Appendix 5. This consultation has formed an important part of the characterisation process and provided additional detail for the final chapters of this report.

A diverse range of detailed landscape character assessments exist for the component local authorities within the AONB. This study has sought to bring this information together within a consistent framework for the AONB. We have, in consequence, drawn heavily on the information contained in these assessments (Appendix 2).

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1. INTRODUCTION

A Nationally Significant Landscape

- 1.1. The North Wessex Downs is a landscape of national significance as recognised by its designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is one of thirty seven AONB's in England and Wales, and is considered to be of equivalent importance in terms of landscape quality as a National Park.
- 1.2. The North Wessex Downs was designated as an AONB in 1972, giving coherence to one of the most continuous tracts of chalk downland in England. It covers 1,730 sq km and is one of England's largest AONBs. From its western tip at Calne in Wiltshire, it stretches across the South West and South East of England in a broad arc through Swindon, Berkshire and Oxfordshire, adjoining the Chilterns AONB along the River Thames before sweeping south, encircling Newbury, to encompass the northern reaches of the rolling chalk hills of the Hampshire Downs. It then continues towards Devizes across the high chalk upland of Salisbury Plain and the low lying Vale of Pewsey. The extent and location of the AONB is illustrated in Figure 1.
- 1.3. The underlying chalk geology is the uniting theme of the North Wessex Downs and has had a profound effect on hydrology, biodiversity, patterns of land use and settlement. The chalklands are etched with the impact of human use over the millennia and the archaeology of the AONB is immensely rich, with many of its monuments ranking among the most impressive in Europe and including the World Heritage Site at Avebury. The AONB is sparsely populated (125,000), with the settlement largely located within the river valleys. This concentration of habitation has left intervening open uninhabited downlands. Thus 'pools of tranquillity' with a strong sense of remoteness are an important feature of the AONB - a very special perceptual characteristic within the densely populated part of Southern England.
- 1.4. The North Wessex Downs is a landscape of great diversity with significant variation and contrast. The AONB includes parts of five Character Areas as shown on the joint Character of England Map published by the Countryside Agency and English Nature: 130 Hampshire Downs, 132 Salisbury Plain and the West Wiltshire Downs, 116 Berkshire and Marlborough Downs, 129 Thames Basin Heaths and 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales (small part). The landscape varies from the high open arable sweeps of the Marlborough Downs with their characteristic beech-top knolls and incised by narrow sheltered chalk river valleys, to the more intimate well-wooded areas, as in the area around Chute Forest and Savernake Forest. In the eastern part of the AONB the land is lower, overlying Thames Basin gravels and London Clay with a characteristic rich mosaic of woodland, pasture, heath and common land.

The Need for a Landscape Character Assessment

- 1.5. The Countryside Agency publishes detailed assessments for all of England's AONBs - the North Wessex Downs is the last remaining AONB to be studied. This assessment is timely, being produced when the profile is being raised of AONBs through the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000* and a wide range of other initiatives, including an increase in public funding available for AONB

management. The new policy framework provides an important opportunity to guide and shape the future character of the North Wessex Downs.

- **CROW Act:** The status of AONBs has recently been strengthened through measures introduced in the *Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000*, which provide greater support for their planning and management. These measures include a new duty on public bodies to 'have regard' to the need to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of AONB landscapes when carrying out their statutory functions. The Act also requires all AONBs to have management plans produced, published and regularly revised by their local authorities. By identifying the character of the AONB and its main pressures and sensitivities, this landscape character assessment is a fundamental part of the process towards future production of a management plan.
- **Understanding Management Needs:** The landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB is at a critical juncture and is on the threshold of significant change. Future restructuring within agriculture may have a dramatic impact on landscape character. At the same time the rapid growth of peripheral urban areas, based on the information and communications technology industries, brings a further range of pressures and opportunities. For these reasons an objective assessment is important to understand what is important about the landscape, to identify its special qualities and why they are valued. The real challenge for the future will be to manage and guide the change in a way that reinforces the diverse landscape character and the special perceptual characteristics of the North Wessex Downs. This landscape assessment should contribute to a better understanding of the importance and diversity of the landscape and help establish the unique identity and qualities of the area. In so doing, it should provide a strong framework for its holistic management, to be taken forward through the AONB Management Plan.
- **The North Wessex Downs Management Structure:** The Countryside Agency, with support of the local authorities and a wide partnership of statutory bodies, NGOs and local people is establishing an appropriate management structure for the North Wessex Downs AONB. The management structure will provide a mechanism to bring forward action to address the issues identified in the landscape character assessment.

- 1.6. **A Coherent Approach:** The assessment takes a comprehensive and coherent approach to the characterisation of the AONB landscape. The North Wessex Downs AONB includes parts of three county councils, two unitary authorities and six district/borough authorities.

Unitary Authorities	County Councils	District/Borough Authorities
West Berkshire District Council	Hampshire C.C.	Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council Test Valley Borough Council
Swindon Borough Council	Oxfordshire C.C.	Vale of White Horse District Council South Oxfordshire District Council
	Wiltshire C.C.	Kennet District Council North Wiltshire District Council

- 1.7. A large number of local authorities have undertaken independent assessments (see Appendix 2) of their areas and taken together, these assessments cover the entirety of the AONB, although they differ in approach, method and level of detail. This reinforces the need for a consistent and comprehensive character assessment focussed on the AONB, which fits within the national framework provided by the Character of England map and the emerging national landscape typology. It also builds on the local authority scale assessments to develop an overarching study for the AONB as a unified landscape area.
- 1.8. **Raising Awareness:** The AONB is split, on an administrative basis, between the South East and the South West Regions of England which means that it is divided between two Government Offices and at least two regional offices of all the statutory agencies. As a single entity, the AONB does not have a strong public resonance unlike the Chilterns or the Cotswolds and to many, appears to lack a sense of unity as a single discrete area. The preparation of this AONB assessment should help raise awareness of the AONB landscape as an entity among local people, visitors, the constituent local authorities, regional government and the statutory agencies that operate within the area.
- 1.9. This assessment aims to focus attention on the area and increase understanding of the issues and pressures that the AONB faces and its management requirements. It will guide and inform those responsible for developing policies for the AONB and will provide a framework for the future development of an AONB management plan.

The Structure of this Report

- 1.10. This Technical Report presents the results of the range of studies that have investigated the physical, ecological, historical, social, economic and cultural, and recreational characteristics of the AONB. It is structured into three main parts, which follow the introduction and method statement.

Part 1: Overview: Establishes the identity of the AONB as a whole and provides a summary of the main influences on contemporary landscape character. These include physical, cultural, ecological, social and economic characteristics. It also includes a review of perceptions of the AONB.

Part 2: The Character of the North Wessex Downs AONB: This is the main part of the report and contains the detailed character assessment, with descriptions of each of the integrated Landscape Types and their component Character Areas.

Part 3: The Future: The final section contains an overview of the principal forces for change set in the context of past changes. It looks at the key factors influencing the character of the North Wessex Downs, both positive change and issues that threaten the special qualities of the AONB. It concludes with some recommendations for future research.

- 1.11. The Technical Report provides the basis for a published report by the Countryside Agency 'The North Wessex Downs Landscape' (2002).

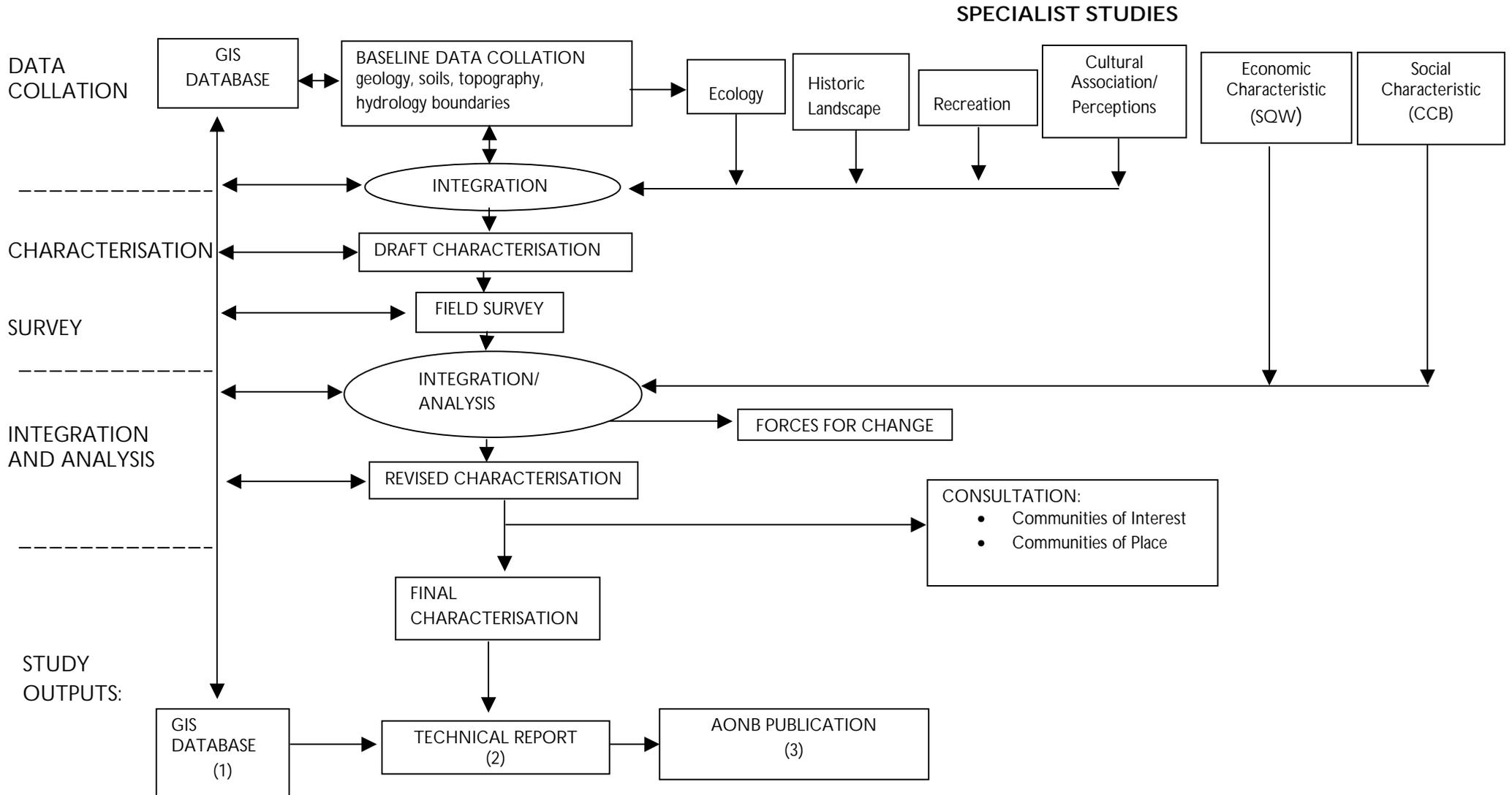
2. METHOD STATEMENT

- 2.1. The method for undertaking the landscape assessment follows the accepted method promoted by the Countryside Agency as set out in the document *"Interim Landscape Character Assessment Guidance 1999"*. The AONB-wide assessment has been prepared within the framework set by the Agency's Countryside Character Initiative as shown on the Character of England Map. It also fits within the context provided by the Agency's emerging National Landscape Typology.
- 2.2. The assessment builds upon the existing Local Authority assessments to develop a comprehensive and consistent characterisation for the AONB. The local authority assessments have attained a high degree of political and public acceptance within individual local authorities and many have been adopted as supplementary planning guidance or provide the basis for local plan policy. Some have been the subject of wide stakeholder involvement. It is therefore vital that they are integrated into the AONB assessment in a logical and consistent way, with the AONB-wide study providing the overarching framework for these more detailed studies. A detailed supplementary report on the analysis and integration of the existing assessments, showing how each of these relates to the AONB-wide classification has been prepared for the Countryside Agency.
- 2.3. This assessment seeks to present a fully integrated view of the landscape incorporating all the features and attributes that contribute to the special and distinctive character of the North Wessex Downs AONB. These include the physical, ecological, visual, historic and cultural forces that have shaped the present day landscape. It also recognises the AONB today as a living and working landscape and considers the social, economic and recreational characteristics that contribute to its current character.
- 2.4. This chapter provides a summary method statement and illustrates how the diverse aspects of the study have been integrated. A fuller method statement for each of the component studies is provided in Appendix 1.
- 2.5. The process for undertaking the study and the integration of the specialist studies is illustrated in a process diagram (overleaf). In summary, this involved five main stages, namely:
 - Data Collation;
 - Characterisation;
 - Survey;
 - Integration and Analysis;
 - Consultation.

NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT:

STUDY PROCESS



- 2.6. Each of these stages is described below. Throughout the study GIS was used as the tool for collating, manipulating and presenting data. It is anticipated that the GIS database developed as part of the study will provide an important tool for future management of the North Wessex Downs.

Data Collation

- 2.7. **Baseline Data:** This stage involved the collation and mapping of a wide range of existing information on the characteristics of the North Wessex Downs from sources including baseline maps of geology, topography, soils and drainage.
- 2.8. Information gathering through a series of structured telephone interviews with key individuals within statutory agencies, local authorities and other organisations was also undertaken. Details of key sources of information and consultees for each of the specialist studies on ecology, the historic landscape, recreation, economic and social characteristics are provided in Appendix 1.
- 2.9. **National Context:** As part of this initial stage the context provided by the framework of the five joint Character Areas and the emerging national Landscape Typology was reviewed and boundaries mapped to place the AONB in context within this national hierarchy.
- 2.10. **Local Context:** Almost the entirety of the North Wessex Downs is covered by local authority assessments. Each of these assessments was reviewed and its boundaries mapped. At the same time a detailed analysis of the key characteristics of each landscape type and character area described within these assessments was undertaken. This analysis provided the building blocks for developing a consistent AONB-wide classification.

Characterisation

- 2.11. The process of characterisation drew together all the information outlined above, to develop a draft classification for the AONB. The approach follows best practice as promoted by the Countryside Agency in the *Interim Landscape Character Assessment Guidance 1999* in maintaining a clear distinction between landscape types and character areas, and developing a hierarchical approach as follows:
- **Landscape Character Types** - which are generic and share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation and human influences, e.g. Open Downland or River Valleys;
 - **Character Areas** - which are single and unique, discrete geographical areas of the landscape type, e.g. Marlborough Downs or Kennet Valley.
- 2.12. The classification was informed by the ongoing specialist studies, particularly in the case of the historic environment. It is, however, important to note that the approach does not involve a range of separate characterisations of the historic landscape, recreation attributes and socio-economic data. The emphasis throughout has been on the integration of these diverse studies within the overall framework established by the landscape character assessment.
- 2.13. The draft characterisation of the North Wessex Downs AONB was presented and discussed by the steering group. This consultation process resulted in some further

refinement of the classification and fine tuning of boundaries to reflect local circumstances. The final classification encompasses eight landscape types, each with a set of component character areas.

Field Survey

- 2.14. A field survey was undertaken. This was specifically focussed on:
- refining boundaries and ensuring a consistent approach across the AONB for example in the definition of the scarp and river valleys;
 - fine tuning the classification particularly of the 'lowland' areas of the AONB falling within national Character Area 108 Thames Basin Heaths;
 - recording landscape character in a consistent manner to reinforce information within the existing assessments;
 - assessing condition, key trends and forces for change.
- 2.15. A systematic and rigorous approach was adopted for the survey, with information recorded on 1:25,000 scale maps and on a Field Record Sheet (Appendix 3).

Integration and Analysis

- 2.16. A process of integration and analysis followed the field survey. In particular emphasis was placed on the assimilation and synthesis of information from the specialist studies and using this to develop integrated descriptions of the North Wessex Downs and its component landscape types and character areas.
- 2.17. The table below shows how the information has been integrated within the report structure.

Specialist Study	AONB-WIDE	Landscape Types	Character Area
Ecology	✓	✓	✓
Historic Environment	✓	✓	✓
Recreation		✓	✓
Economic Character	✓		
Social Character	✓	✓ & Appendix 4	
Perceptions	✓	✓	

- 2.18. The AONB-wide information is presented in the first part of the report providing an overview of its character. For the **economic study**, although it was possible to draw a very broad distinction between the agricultural dominated core areas and the more settled border areas, it was difficult to break this down to a landscape type level. This is principally because the AONB cannot be considered in isolation and the whole area is linked with and strongly influenced by the surrounding economies of Swindon, Newbury, Reading, Andover, etc. and particularly in the eastern part by

its proximity to London. Using parish data it has been possible to consider **social/community** characteristics (population and services) at a more detailed level and provide a broad indication of the variation within each landscape type.

- 2.19. In preparing the detailed character area descriptions the emphasis has been on integrating information from all the diverse aspects of the study.

Consultation

- 2.20. The final stage of the study, involved consultation with a range of local stakeholders involving both communities of interest and communities of place. Two reports were circulated for consultation and a full list of Consultees appears in Appendix 5.
- 2.21. A consultation draft of the **technical report** was circulated to 54 consultees, including all the constituent local authorities, statutory agencies (English Nature, The Forestry Commission, English Heritage, Environment Agency, SEEDA, SWERDA, MAFF, main NGO's and key interests (the Wildlife Trust, Avebury WHS, National Trusts, RSPB) representatives of farming interests including the NFU and CLA, recreation and tourism interests and selected representatives of the community, including members of the Downlands Conference Steering Group (an informal AONB interest group and forerunner to the AONB management structure established in 2001).
- 2.22. A separate **short issues report** based on the 'Forces for Change' (Chapter 16) ' of the technical report was circulated to 75 consultees, involving individuals and organisations known to have an interest in the future of the North Wessex Downs. These were selected in conjunction with the Countryside Agency and included key contacts from the Downlands Conference.
- 2.23. Following receipt of comments two short reports summarising the main results of the consultation were circulated to the steering group for discussion. These reports included comments on boundary changes to reflect local perceptions, addition of detail and nuance to the descriptions, notes of management issues and recommendations for further work to be undertaken as part of the future AONB Management Plan.
- 2.24. The results of the consultation exercise are reflected in this report. Copies of all comments received have been passed to the Countryside Agency.

PART 1:

OVERVIEW

EVOLUTION OF THE LANDSCAPE

3. PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

- 3.1. The basic structure of any landscape is formed by its underlying geology. The actions of weathering, erosion and deposition alter the form of the landscape, drainage and soils and in turn, patterns of vegetation and land use. The North Wessex Downs is influenced by geological formations from the Cretaceous, Tertiary and Quaternary periods. The central and dominating feature, which gives structure and unity to the landscape, is the expanse of chalk at the heart of the Downs.
- 3.2. The geological structure of the North Wessex Downs is illustrated on Figure 2. The principal physical features, topography and hydrology are illustrated on Figure 3.

Geology and Soils

Cretaceous (145.6-65.0 million years ago)

- 3.3. The rocks underlying the North Wessex Downs were formed during the Cretaceous period some 130 million years ago and have a strong influence on landform and landscape character today. During this period, a time of intense tectonic activity in Europe, the London Platform was elevated high above sea level exposing Jurassic strata, which were extensively eroded. Subsidence of the Wessex Basin led to the deposition of early sediments of Lower Greensand, Gault Clays and Upper Greensand.
- 3.4. In the late Cretaceous period rising sea levels progressively inundated the area and calcareous sediments, which eventually became chalk, were deposited. Chalk was originally deposited throughout the region and during Alpine tectonic phases the south part of the region was folded into the broad asymmetric syncline of the London Basin. The principal outcrop of this chalk forms a broad arc radiating from Stonehenge with one arm stretching across Wiltshire, Hampshire and Sussex and the other across Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. These form the distinctive downland landscapes of southern England of which the North Wessex Downs is an integral part.
- 3.5. The chalk was deposited sequentially into layers of Lower, Middle and Upper Chalk. The Middle and Upper chalk comprise pure white chalks which have resisted weathering, giving rise to the distinctive elevated plateau of expansive downs including the Marlborough Downs, Lambourn Downs, Horton Downs, Blewbury Downs and North Hampshire Downs. The high plateau of open, smoothly rolling downland is dissected by a network of dry valleys and long sinuous scarp slopes interlocking with gently rounded domed summits, as for example at Walbury Hill (297m), the highest chalk hill in southern England. The thin covering of well-drained, nutrient poor soils overlying the chalk bedrock supports a characteristic vegetation of herbs and grasses. Traditionally grazed by sheep and rabbits, these create the distinctive short springy chalk downland turf. These soils are also ideal for cereal growing and much of the downs are now under intensive arable cultivation.
- 3.6. Along the northern edge of the North Wessex Downs the eroded surface of the Lower Chalk, a softer clayey substrate, which has given rise to a lower and more level land surface and leaves a prominent and dramatic chalk scarp. The scarp along

the northern edge descends to the heavy blue-grey Lower Cretaceous Gault Clay of the undulating clay plain of the Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.

- 3.7. The chalk upland is divided into two by the Vale of Pewsey. Here, the lower-lying vale exposes the softer, underlying Cretaceous deposits of Upper Greensand and Gault Clay. The deep well-drained loamy soils on the Greensand and deposited river alluvium have given rise to the rich agricultural landscape, which supports a mix of both cereal and dairying which characterises this Vale. Gault and Upper Greensand formations are also exposed on the north-west edge of the AONB, north of Chiseldon, where they have similarly given rise to a lowland agricultural landscape.

Tertiary (65.0 - 1.64 million years ago)

- 3.8. Further geological contrast is evident in the eastern part of the North Wessex Downs around Newbury, on the edge of the London Basin, where the chalk strata dip towards the north and are buried beneath the younger, softer Tertiary deposits of the Reading Beds, Bagshot Beds and London Clay, creating a low lying, gently sloping plateau is capped by gravels, cut through by shallow river valleys. The varied geology gives rise to a range of soil types with fertile loamy soils overlying the London Clay supporting a mixture of improved pasture, arable farming and blocks of woodland, while the nutrient poor acidic soils of the plateau gravels have given rise to heathland, woodland and pasture dominated landscapes.

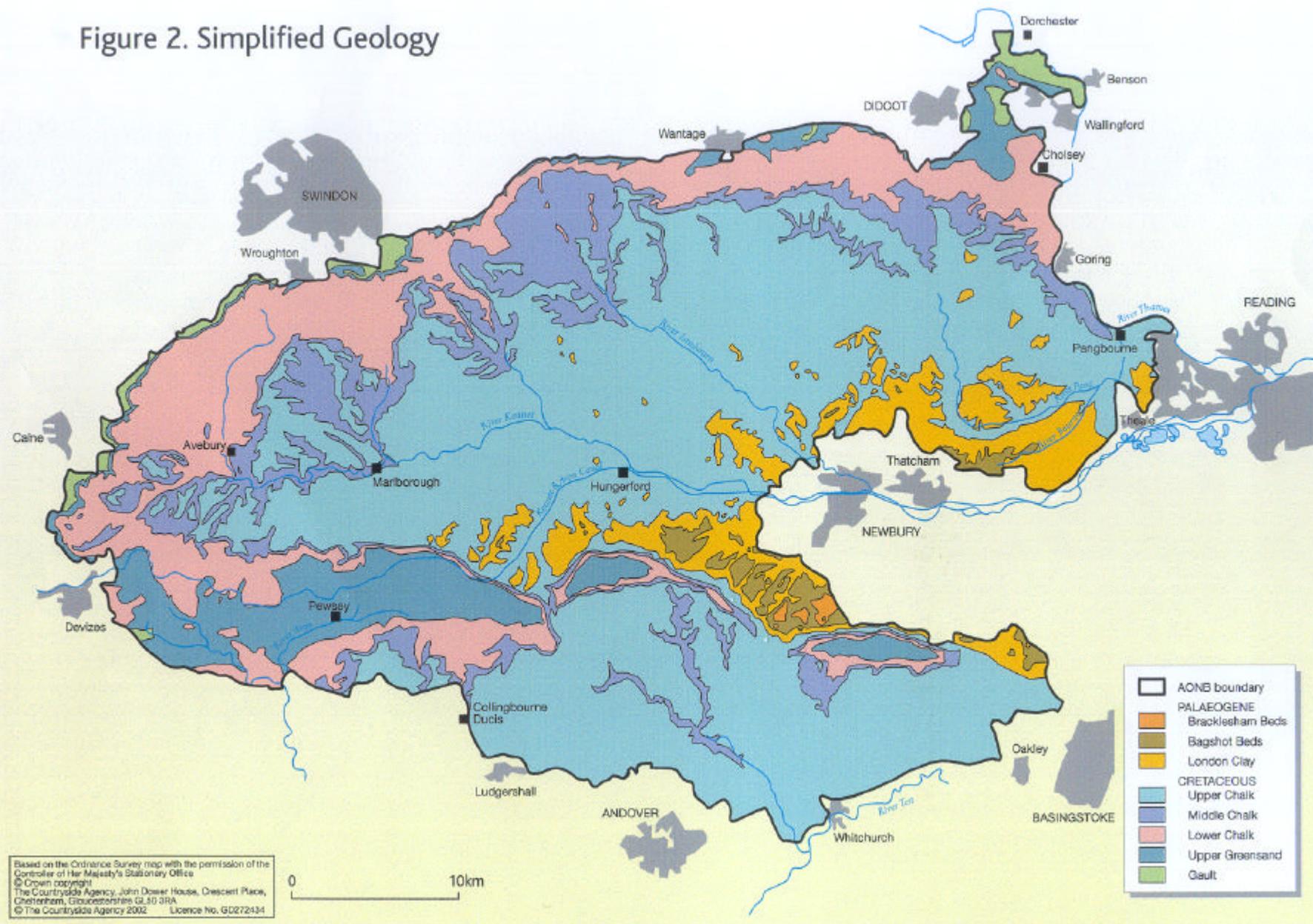
Sarsen Stones

Blocks of quartz sandstone, known as sarsens, are a particular feature of Overton Down, Fyfield Down and Piggledene on the Marlborough Downs, but are also found elsewhere within the chalk upland, forming one of the most distinctive features of the North Wessex Downs. The hard siliceous sandstones derive from tertiary deposits, later eroded and moved by glaciation. The sarsens have long been used for building stone – the best known forming the megalithic monuments such as at Avebury. They have also been used for domestic buildings and several villages, such as at West Overton, Lockeridge, Fyfield and West Kennet are constructed of roughly broken blocks of sarsen fitted together in a jigsaw pattern. A substantial stone cutting industry developed around the sarsen stones in the mid nineteenth century, with the stone being cut for tramways and paving kerbs, among other uses

Quaternary (1.64 million years ago - present)

- 3.9. The landscape is also considerably influenced by drift deposits, which overlay the solid geology. Many of the plateaux and ridges of the chalk downs are capped with Quaternary deposits of Clay-with-Flint; pockets of reddish brown clay containing flint pebbles. The heavier clay soils have retained their woodland cover and form the characteristic landscapes of the wooded downs, such as Chute Forest and Savernake Forest. The gently sloping plateau to the west of Newbury is capped by plateau gravels, deposits of acidic sand and gravels which have given rise to isolated areas of heathland.
- 3.10. Slope deposits, also known as 'combe deposits', are local features where frost-weathered debris accumulated during winter, forming a slurry when the snows melted and flowing down the slopes to create deposits resembling till. This type of

Figure 2. Simplified Geology



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deposit is widespread in the dry valleys of the downs. River alluvium dominates the main valley floodplains throughout the North Wessex Downs, such as along the Kennet, Lambourn and Pang creating rich wetland landscapes.

Watercourses

- 3.11. In general, it is the Thames Basin which determines the drainage pattern of the North Wessex Downs, with the main rivers flowing to the east. The River Kennet dissects the AONB from west to east. However, the separate catchments of the Salisbury Avon and Test also influence the pattern in the south, draining the Pewsey Vale and Hampshire Downs respectively.
- 3.12. The deeply incised chalk river valleys of the Lambourn, Kennet, Pang and Bourne are key features of the North Wessex Downs. With their clear, fast flowing waters these watercourses are highly prized for their distinctive ecology and their valleys form the main routes for communication and settlement, contrasting with the sparsely populated chalk summits. The downland is also dissected by a number of dry valleys, some of which support distinctive ephemeral winter streams or 'bournes'. These were formed during the Ice Age, when permafrost impeded sub-surface drainage and valleys, or coombes, were cut through the chalk. Today, however, much of the high open downland is waterless due to the porous nature of the bedrock.
- 3.13. Where the chalk formations of the central area meet the clays and gravels of the Reading and Bagshot Beds of the London Basin, water stored within the chalk aquifer issues along many spring lines. Minor, shallow tributaries drain this area into the rivers Enbourne, Kennet and Pang, which form part of the wider Thames catchment. These are frequently associated with ecologically important habitats and linear settlements. Springs are also a feature of the northern escarpment, issuing at the point where the porous chalk overlies the impermeable clays. These give rise to the distinctive scalloped coombe landform, such as The Manger on Whitehorse Hill, and spring line villages clustered along the foot of the slope.

The Kennet and Avon Canal

The Kennet and Avon Canal is a distinctive linear feature, threading through the heart of the North Wessex Downs linking its diverse landscapes. Constructed between 1794 and 1810, to join the river navigations of the Kennet and Avon it provided a direct and safe waterway between Bristol and London. Its route crosses the agricultural, lowland Vale of Pewsey, the narrow, meandering wooded valley of the river Dun and the distinctive chalk river corridor of the Kennet.

Designed by John Rennie, engineer and architect, the Kennet and Avon includes many fine structures including aqueducts, tunnels such as the brick built Bruce Tunnel at Savernake, bridges and lock flights. These features, along with the canalside and wharve buildings create a remarkable built heritage. Crofton pumping station in the Vale of Pewsey houses the oldest working steam engine in the world.

The canal found favour with the military when in the 1940s it was designated as part of the 'GHQ Line Blue', intended as a defence line in the event of a successful German invasion. Pillboxes and anti-tank obstacles still feature along its course through the North Wessex Downs.

The importance of the waterway for commercial trade declined following the opening of the Great Western Railway in 1841 and the canal went into a long period of deterioration. The 1960's saw the start of restoration of the waterway, initiated by the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust, and the full length of the canal was reopened in the 1990's. The Heritage Lottery Fund has recently awarded a grant of £25 million to secure the structure, operation and environment of the waterway.

Ecology

Context

- 3.14. An assessment of the ecological character of the North Wessex Downs is an important component in the definition of its landscape types. The ecological character of an area is closely linked to its landscape features. The combination of such features as the chalk geology, hydrology, topography and land-use, results in a set of biological conditions under which specific ecological communities develop. The diversity and variety of landscapes within the North Wessex Downs has therefore resulted in a corresponding variation in habitats. The AONB spans part of five of English Nature's Natural Areas namely Berkshire and Marlborough Downs, South Wessex Downs, Hampshire Downs, Thames and Avon Vales and London Basin. These Natural Areas are areas of countryside identified by their unique combination of physical attributes, wildlife, land use and culture.
- 3.15. The North Wessex Downs as a whole contain vast stretches of intensively cultivated arable fields supporting relatively little wildlife interest. However, within this context there are some very high quality habitats of local, national and international ecological importance. These include sixty-six Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the AONB boundary; six of these are also candidate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). There are also a large number of non-statutory sites of nature conservation interest.

- 3.16. The most ecologically characteristic habitats are the chalk grasslands and chalk rivers, plus semi-natural woodland and arable farmland. There are in addition, a wide variety of other habitats that are also important and characterise particular areas within the North Wessex Downs. These include the small remnant patches of heathland that survive on river gravel deposits in the east of the AONB, the distinctive communities of lower plants that have developed on the sarsen stones (which are a special feature of the downs), areas of chalk scrub and the wide unimproved grassy verges of the droveways which characterise the open chalk downlands. At a local level, the hedgerow network, springs and ponds also provide important refuge and habitats. Collectively, these represent a rich biological resource offering potential for restoration/recreation and management to enhance the overall ecological character of the North Wessex Downs.
- 3.17. The key habitats of the North Wessex Downs are those that are considered to be a priority for nature conservation (as documented in local BAPs), and are characteristic of and well represented within the AONB. These habitats and their associated species are summarised below. A detailed analysis of sites with statutory and non-statutory wildlife designations has been undertaken by character area and this information has been supplied to The Countryside Agency.

Chalk Grassland:

- 3.18. The thin, well-drained, nutrient poor soils overlying the chalk bedrock support a characteristic vegetation of herbs and grasses. Traditionally grazed by sheep and rabbits, this is the 'springy' turf characteristic of the downlands forming one of the most distinctive and ecologically notable habitats of the North Wessex Downs. Unimproved chalk grassland is one of Britain's botanically richest habitats supporting a diverse community of invertebrates, mammals and birds, and is a priority habitat of special conservation concern in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan¹ (UK BAP). Key features of the chalk grasslands of the North Wessex Downs include:
- important butterfly populations including: adonis blue, silver-studded blue, marsh fritillary, chalkhill blue, small blue, silver spotted skipper and Duke of Burgundy fritillary;
 - a large number of scarce plant species including; early gentian, an eyebright (*Euphrasia pseudokernerii*), pasque flower, Chiltern gentian, dwarf mouse ear, tuberous thistle, field fleawort, round-headed rampion, burnt orchid, bastard toadflax and musk orchid;
 - feeding and breeding habitat for a number of rare and declining birds including skylark and stone-curlew.
- 3.19. The last fifty years have seen extensive destruction and fragmentation of these important grassland areas. This is largely attributed to agricultural intensification and the ploughing up of the light shallow downland soils with an associated decline in grazing. Once widespread, the unimproved chalk grassland of the North Wessex Downs is now fragmented with small isolated blocks restricted largely to the steep scarp slopes and dry valleys plus areas maintained as pasture around archaeological

¹ Published by the government in 1994 it sets out the broad strategy and targets for conserving and enhancing species and habitats for the next 20 years.

sites. The chalk grasslands are especially characteristic of three landscape types: Open Downland (1) the Downs Plain and Scarp (5), with a smaller amount within the Downlands with Woodland (2). There is a particular concentration within the western part of the AONB, perhaps the area where arable farming has been less intensive. Today, with a reduction in livestock (most recently as a result of foot and mouth) and associated abandonment of marginal land, some remaining areas of unimproved chalk grassland are under threat of loss to scrub encroachment.

Chalk Streams and Rivers

- 3.20. The spring fed streams and rivers, which incise the chalk include the River Kennet, Lambourn, Pang, Salisbury Avon and Bourne. These are described under landscape type 7: River Valleys. Chalk rivers have been identified in the UK BAP as a key habitat because of the diverse and characteristic biological communities they support. They are of international significance and have distinctive environmental characteristics such as a high alkalinity and conductivity. The percolation of water through chalk filters out much of the solid material resulting in these rivers' characteristically clear water and they provide important fisheries. A particular feature of the AONB is the winterbournes - ephemeral streams that flow in the upper reaches only during late autumn, winter and early spring. Key features of the chalk rivers in the North Wessex Downs include:
- extremely rich in plant and animal communities deriving in part from the high-quality of the base-rich water which, being spring fed, is naturally clear and fast flowing;
 - important habitat for a number of near extinct species including otter (formerly believed to be extinct in the AONB but possibly beginning to re-colonise), and freshwater white-clawed crayfish;
 - support healthy fish populations including brown trout, salmon, grayling, perch, chub and dace – providing important game fisheries;
 - support a diversity of floating vegetation;
 - include the characteristic 'winterbournes' with a specialised flora adapted to wide variations in flow;
 - irrigate a rich mosaic of associated wetland habitats creating distinctive valley landscapes including fens, floodplains, water meadows, carr and wet woodland. Diverse 'wetland' habitats support many rare species. The Red Data Book summer snowflake survives, for example in seasonally flooded woodlands along the Kennet Valley.
- 3.21. The abstraction of water from chalk aquifers has resulted in low flows within the chalk rivers of the North Wessex Downs. Development on the periphery of the AONB places particular pressures on water resources. More recently, localised autumn and winter flooding of the valleys has also been a concern. Pollution from agricultural run off has contributed to a decline in the quality of the chalk river habitat.

Broadleaved Woodland and Wood Pasture

- 3.22. Semi-natural woodland is now a scarce and valuable ecological resource. In the North Wessex Downs many of these woodlands are found on steep scarps and in coombes inaccessible for cultivation (landscape type 5) or on the heavier soils where Clay-with-Flint caps the Chalk, notably within the Downlands with Woodland (landscape type 2) and on the Wooded Plateau (landscape type 3). The most densely wooded areas, for example Chute Forest and Savernake Forest are derived from former royal hunting forests. A further concentration of ancient semi-natural woodland is found on the lower clays and gravels in the eastern part of the AONB (landscape type 8 and 9). In much of the AONB, the density of semi-natural woodland is one of the defining features of the landscape, as reflected in the naming of the landscape types.
- 3.23. There are a variety of woodland stand-types in the AONB reflecting the range of environmental conditions including; hornbeam coppice, oak/ash stands, hazel/oak stands, birch, ash/wych elm coppice, ash/wych elm/oak/field maple/hazel stands, ash/maple stands, and hazel/ash stands. Within the valleys, such as Kennet Valley there are also important examples of wet alder woodland. Surprisingly, beech woodlands are limited in extent (compared for example to the adjacent Chilterns AONB) and restricted to beech hangers along the escarpments to the north (landscape type 5) and the escarpment along the north edge of the Hampshire Downs (2E).
- 3.24. The key features of the woodlands of the North Wessex Downs are:
- rich in invertebrate species especially butterflies, including some severely declining fritillaries, e.g. pearl-bordered fritillary;
 - long rotation hazel coppice provides important habitat for dormice, a UK BAP priority species;
 - provide roosting and/or feeding sites for a number of bats species including: Bechstein's, Barbastelle, greater horseshoe and noctule;
 - calcareous woodlands support a number of scarce species such as spiked star-of-Bethlehem,
 - provide good examples of calcareous bluebell woods;
 - hosts a number of nationally scarce moss species;
 - Savernake Forest (landscape type 3) is particularly important as a large remnant of wood pasture, with 900 ha designated as SSSI in recognition of its outstanding lichen flora, fungi, rare invertebrates and breeding bird community. A further important example of lowland wood pasture and parkland is provided by Highclere Park SSSI (landscape type 8).
- 3.25. The woodlands would formerly have been an important part of the rural economy. They provided a source of fuel and building materials, as evidenced by timber framed buildings, and were used for hurdle making in support of the sheep economy on the downlands. The decline in traditional techniques of woodland management such as

coppicing, and neglect are having an impact on the ecological value of the woodland resource.

Arable Farmland

- 3.26. Today, the dominant land use within much of the AONB is the open arable farmland with few hedgerows and occasional small wooded areas (landscape type 1) intermixed within a more wooded mosaic (in landscape type 2). The arable land is largely managed under modern intensive systems, although may still support a characteristic range of wildlife, including:
- rare and colourful arable weeds, such as dense flowered-fumitory, slender tare and shepherd's needle, which are dependent on a regular cropping regime and survive in the less intensively managed field margins;
 - an important range of farmland birds. Spring-tilled arable on stony chalk soils provide essential breeding sites for stone curlew, a bird formerly widespread on the chalklands of lowland England. Skylark and yellowhammers remain relatively common and widespread, while grey partridges, lapwings, turtle doves and corn buntings can also still be found;
 - a habitat for species such as the brown hare.
- 3.27. Agri-environment schemes, such as Countryside Stewardship, support the sensitive management of arable margins, which can enhance biodiversity within arable landscapes. In parts of the AONB large areas are now successfully managed through Stewardship. The integration of production and nature conservation objectives, supported by appropriate incentives represent a major opportunity for biodiversity within the AONB.
- 3.28. The diverse physical attributes of the AONB in combination with past patterns of land use (outlined in the following chapter) have resulted in a rich variety of landscapes and habitats within the AONB. These contribute much to its overall character.

4. THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

- 4.1. The landscape as we see it today is the product of a series of major changes through which its character has been transformed by the interaction of natural and human processes. While the basic landform remains the same, its covering is constantly subjected to change. Some periods of landscape change have been more rapid and radical than others. These changes are not only important from an archaeological perspective, but also significant in determining the overall character of the North Wessex Downs.
- 4.2. A summary of the key events in the development of the North Wessex Downs landscape is outlined below and provides the context for the individual character area descriptions. It is based on research undertaken by Wessex Archaeology. A method statement setting out the process for researching and analysing the historic landscape is provided in Appendix 1.
- 4.3. Six key themes or historical processes in the development of the AONB landscape have been identified. These are:
 - Social Life and Society Structure;
 - Ideology;
 - Buildings and Settlement;
 - Subsistence, Agriculture and Industry;
 - Trade, Artefacts and Communication;
 - Landscape Change.
- 4.4. It is these processes, whose importance and combination vary across time, which have created the individual components that give the landscape its distinctive character.

POST-GLACIAL HUNTERS AND HORTICULTURALISTS: 11,000 - 4,000 BC (Palaeolithic-Mesolithic)

The First Landscapes

- 4.5. During the last full glaciation between 18,000 - 11,000 BC much of southern Britain - untouched by the ice - was tundra, with heather, bilberry and crowberry. Arctic willow, dwarf birch, grasses and sedges were present in more sheltered places, although there were periods when birch and poplar woodland established themselves. By 8,000 BC (the Mesolithic period) the climate was warming, and pine, juniper and birch forest spread, giving way to hazel scrub and then more mixed broad-leaved oak woodland with elm, ash, alder, lime and hazel. Alder dominated forests to the west. The greensand areas to the east and the gravel floodplains of the Thames may have had lighter woodland cover. Heather and grass plant species indicate some clearings were forming, either naturally or through human action, and were then regenerating as hazel scrub.

Social life and society structure

- 4.6. During this period, Late Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic communities may have consisted of kin or family-related bands, which themselves would have often split up into various task groups such as hunting or fishing parties. At certain times of the year, these bands may have combined into larger affiliated groups, based on wider kinship or tribal ties.

Ideology

- 4.7. Over time, certain points in the landscape became especially significant for these communities and stories and myths would have emerged. Natural features - prominent trees, hills, streams or flint sources - might have been named, and thought of as inhabited by the spirits of animals, plants and the human dead. The symbolic potential of animals, trees and woodland would have been great.
- 4.8. Little evidence survives of the people themselves. Upper Palaeolithic burials are unknown on the North Wessex Downs and, like rare Mesolithic burials, occur mostly in cave sites near the coast. The absence of Mesolithic human remains indicates that the dead were exposed on the ground, on platforms or in trees, or set adrift in rivers and streams.

Buildings and settlement

- 4.9. Upper Palaeolithic inhabitation sites were mostly confined to caves and rock shelters, largely beyond the North Wessex Downs. Only a few open area sites are known from within the AONB, but scattered finds of flint tools suggest Upper Palaeolithic groups ranged far across them, and valleys such as those of the Rivers Thames and Kennet may have seen regular, seasonal-based activity. The evidence for Mesolithic activity also consists mainly of flint scatters although some excavations have recovered traces of temporary shelters.

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

- 4.10. The last full glaciation was very severe, and hunting groups may have been driven from Britain altogether. As the climate began to stabilise from 11,000 BC, Late Upper Palaeolithic groups returned. By 8,500 BC, the higher downland within the AONB may have formed upland hunting areas for Mesolithic groups, with valleys exploited for plant foods, freshwater fish and wildfowl. Several sites in the Kennet Valley suggest intensive exploitation of this favoured location. By the Late Mesolithic, groups were deliberately clearing areas of the forest uplands in the North Wessex Downs to attract grazing animals, and herds may have been selectively culled or even provided with fodder over the winter. Edible wild plants might also have been managed and encouraged to grow and spread.

Trade, artefacts and communication

- 4.11. During the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic, ties with certain places in the landscape would have developed, these sites being linked through traditional paths and weekly, seasonal and annual rounds. Contact with unrelated groups might have been infrequent, and may have occurred at only a few places in the landscape, where food, water or flint was especially abundant. Portland chert used in stone tools, distinctive stone axes and adzes, and slate and unusual pebbles from Devon and Cornwall were distributed quite widely across the area during the Mesolithic, which hints at developing patterns of social interaction.

EARLY AGRICULTURAL AND RITUAL PRACTICES: 4,000 - 2,400 BC (Neolithic)

- 4.12. The fifth and fourth millennia BC saw a major transformation in the landscape of the North Wessex Downs, from the gatherer-hunter economy to one involving food production. This resulted in a series of changes in material culture, plant cultivates and animal domesticates and the first human influenced changes to the landscape.

Social life and society structure

- 4.13. Evidence for new activities in the Neolithic included pottery making and weaving. Cattle, sheep, goats and pigs would have had to be taken to areas of grazing or forage, and clearings created where plants were cultivated or managed. Communities may still have been very small, though people were coming together in greater numbers at certain times of the year. This was the time when huge monuments were being built which suggests an advanced degree of co-operation and organisation. Developing territorial awareness may be seen in the clustering of long mounds and other Early Neolithic monuments into regionally distinct groups, such as those around Avebury. Monuments such as causewayed enclosures are absent from areas such as the Lambourn Downs and the North Hampshire Downs, although are present around the Vale of Pewsey, and this again suggests different regional traditions within the North Wessex Downs area.

Ideology

- 4.14. The theme of death and burial is a significant one in the landscape of the AONB. The earliest evidence for treatment of the dead comes from the Neolithic period in the form of two types of site where human bones are commonly found. These are large enclosures, formed by segmented (or "causewayed") ditches, and long mounds or long barrows.
- 4.15. As a monument type, causewayed enclosures are relatively rare, yet three examples are found in the AONB, at Windmill Hill, north west of Avebury, Knap Hill and Rybury on the scarp overlooking the Vale of Pewsey. Although the function of these monuments is by no means certain, archaeological evidence suggests that they may have been used to define an area where the dead could be excarnated. There are numerous examples of Neolithic long mounds from the area, including some 20 examples around Avebury. These monuments comprise long earthen mounds, which cover a variety of structures associated with burials. One of the most dramatic, the West Kennet long barrow, for example, is some 113m in length and contains individual chambers constructed of sarsen slabs. The long barrows are distinctive forms in the landscape and are often positioned on hilltops or ridges, or follow the lines of rivers and valleys.

Buildings and settlement

- 4.16. In southern Britain generally, remains of Neolithic buildings are very rare. Many groups may have led semi-nomadic lives, moving between specific areas at different times of the year, but returning to them again and again. Intensive survey in the eastern part of North Wessex Downs has shown many Neolithic artefacts lie over Mesolithic flint scatters, implying considerable antiquity for patterns of movement around the landscape. They are especially common on Clay-with-Flint areas, and as these soils were unsuitable for crops at that time, this suggests that flint sources and tradition were also important for inhabitation.

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

- 4.17. Marks made by the first crude ploughs or ards have been found underneath some Neolithic monuments such as the South Street long mound near Avebury. Instead of permanent fields maintained across generations it is now thought that Neolithic people may have planted crops in woodland clearings, using short-lived plots cultivated for only a few seasons. The herding of animals may have suited a nomadic or semi-nomadic existence, with people moving with the herds from season to season, and from upland to lowland.

Trade, artefacts and communication

- 4.18. In the Early Neolithic, stone axes were transported over long distances, either as rough-outs or as finished objects, from stone sources in Cornwall, Norfolk, Cumbria and North Wales. Pottery made from Cornish gabbroic clay has been found on sites such as Windmill Hill near Avebury, and other pottery from the lower Thames valley was also entering the North Wessex Downs. Causewayed enclosures such as Windmill Hill and Knap Hill may have seen regular but episodic gatherings of people, possibly linked through wider clans or kinship groups, who came together to celebrate ritual ceremonies, trade, broker marriages, exchange breeding stock, and carry out a host of other activities. These sites may have been located on the edges of developing territories. The importance of trackways and routes along ridges for trade - such as the Ridgeway, Harroway, Icknield Way and Portway - may have developed from this time.

Landscape change

- 4.19. The environmental evidence for the Neolithic period within the AONB indicates a landscape that was still substantially wooded, though areas of grassland were now established and some erosion of soil had begun. Some clearances remained open or expanded, but others were abandoned and left to regenerate into hazel scrub and light woodland. Early Neolithic monuments such as causewayed enclosures were located in woodland clearings at the margins of human occupation, and long mounds were also built in limited clearances. The management of woodland resources would have been necessary to meet demands for timber and firewood, created by massive monumental structures and new practices.
- 4.20. In the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (3,000-1,500 BC), evidence for scrub, long and short turfed grass and cereal cultivation is more apparent. Although woodland was still very significant in the landscape, many clearances became permanent and large communal monuments such as Avebury and the round barrow cemeteries were located in large, cleared areas. It was during this period that the characteristic open 'chalk downland' vegetation first appeared over large parts of the North Wessex Downs, with the heavy soils of the flint-capped areas tending to retain their woodland cover.

A MONUMENTAL LANDSCAPE: 2,400 - AD 43 (BRONZE AGE - IRON AGE)

Social life and society structure

- 4.21. By the Early and Middle Bronze Age, the lack of clear age or gender distinctions in barrow burials and cremations suggests that status was inherited rather than acquired, and that dominant lineages had now formed within societies. Large, linear

ditches dividing up the landscape appeared on the Marlborough Downs and Salisbury Plain during the Late Bronze Age, and together with increased evidence for warfare this suggests emerging territories on the chalk uplands. Rather than extensive social networks, the emphasis on roundhouses, enclosures, linear ditches and field systems may also reflect that kinship groups were becoming more important in these communities. The creation and maintenance of linear ditches, field system boundaries and hilltop enclosures may have become the favoured arenas for communal social activity and expressing identity. This development of tribal communities, with substantial defended sites - hillforts - sitting amongst an ordered landscape with enclosed settlements and hamlets reaches its apogee in Iron Age society.

Ideology

- 4.22. The Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (around 2,400 BC) is a time when the landscape of the North Wessex Downs became monumentalised. Huge henge enclosures such as at Avebury and at Hatfield Farm, Marden in the Vale of Pewsey were built, together with the remarkable circular mound of Silbury Hill. A similar massive mound at Hatfield Farm, known as the Hatfield Barrow, which once measured 7m in height and 147m in diameter, was levelled in the early nineteenth century. This period of construction was followed by a time of lithicization when many existing monuments were further enhanced by rows and circles of standing stones, as dramatically illustrated at Avebury. These monuments are, without doubt, some of the most remarkable manifestations of human organisation in prehistoric Europe.
- 4.23. Many of the numerous round barrows which are such a characteristic feature of the North Wessex Downs landscape, were constructed in the Early Bronze Age. Sometimes the barrows are highly visible on ridges and hill tops (or slightly below the actual top, on what is called the 'false-crest', so that when seen from below they are on the skyline), while others follow the lines of valleys and streams. Notable examples on the North Wessex Downs include the Seven Sisters by Beacon Hill and the Lambourn Seven Barrows. Many barrow groups are focused around earlier monuments, or form linear alignments, as on Overton Hill, near Avebury.
- 4.24. From the Middle Bronze Age the large communal monuments fell out of use. Instead, the places and routines of everyday life, the ditches, pits and postholes of enclosures and fields became the focus for spiritual activity. In the Late Iron Age however, small numbers of individual burials and cremation burials appear again in the region, many of high-status individuals, such as richly furnished cremation burials found in Marlborough and in a barrow at Blagden Copse in Hampshire. Extensive Late Bronze Age and Iron Age middens such as Potterne and All Cannings Cross, near Devizes, may have been connected to these ideas. Here, vast accumulations of everyday domestic refuse were mixed with more deliberate deposits of artefacts, many either unused or deliberately broken. Votive offerings of metalwork still continued in rivers such as the Thames, but are rare elsewhere in the North Wessex Downs. During the Iron Age the seasonally appearing bournes seem to have held a particular fascination. Along with springs and certain trees, these may have been favoured places of the gods.

Buildings and settlement

- 4.25. The overall pattern of settlement in the Middle Bronze Age seems to be one of a patchwork of small farms and hamlets with associated arable and pastoral fields and interspersed woodland on heavier clays. But from this time and especially in the Late Bronze Age, more substantial buildings and settlements began to appear, such as the hilltop enclosure on Rams Hill, near Uffington, which was one of the first examples of 'hillfort' construction. The general impression is of a move to more nucleated settlements and developing competitive social networks. Prominent ridge end or hilltop enclosures also appeared at this time. These large, defended sites, such as at Walbury and Ladle Hill on the escarpment of the southern block of chalk upland may have been the residences of emerging social elites. Evidence suggests they may also have functioned as refuges in time of trouble, and as redistribution centres for crops and livestock, although they were unlikely to have been inhabited year-round.
- 4.26. Both enclosed and unenclosed farmsteads continued into the Early Iron Age, consisting of roundhouses and possible raised-floor granaries, with associated field systems. These remained the predominant settlement types through into the Romano-British period. They were often sited between the upper downland and the river floodplains. In the Middle and Late Iron Age, small numbers of distinctively shaped 'banjo' enclosures appeared, as at Blagden Copse, some of which may have been more specialised settlements associated with herding.
- 4.27. The most visual manifestation of the Early and Middle Iron Age are the large numbers of hillforts, which are a very distinctive and visible feature of the landscape of the North Wessex Downs. A fine example is Ladle Hill where a hillfort was constructed (but never completed) within the earlier enclosure. Although many of these monuments had been abandoned by the Middle Iron Age, those that survived were often elaborated and increased in size. Some may have formed the seats of local chieftains, and may thus be related to power and display. Beacon Hill (which sits opposite Ladle Hill) in Hampshire and Liddington Castle and Barbury Castle in Wiltshire. The latter are classic examples in the line of hillforts sited approximately along the line of the Wiltshire/Berkshire Ridgeway.
- 4.28. In the last century or so before the Roman conquest a number of large nucleated settlements developed, often at strategic points in the landscape such as river crossings. Calleva (Silchester) and Venta (Winchester) both of which are just outside the AONB boundary, are well known, however archaeological evidence from Mildenhall in the Kennet Valley suggests this was another major focus possibly connected to a series of undated linear earthworks in the woods to the south of the valley.

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

- 4.29. Evidence for scrub, long and short turfed grass and cereal cultivation became apparent during the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, indicating an expansion of arable and pastoral agriculture. More dramatic changes came during the Middle and Late Bronze Age, when extensive field systems began to appear on the downlands, such as those on the Marlborough Downs, the Lambourn Downs, and Salisbury Plain. This was related to a move to 'short-fallow' agriculture, where fields were used more intensively, and ploughs and manuring were necessary to ensure the

productivity of the soil. Field boundaries may indicate that access to the land was more tightly controlled.

- 4.30. By the Iron Age, sheep and cattle were being grazed on downlands largely devoid of woodland, with wet valley bottoms providing rich summer grazing. Cattle were still significant although sheep were by far the most numerous livestock on the downs, reared for meat but mainly for wool. Pigs may have foraged in woodlands. During the Iron Age a great diversity of plant foods were produced in cultivated fields with crops including spelt wheat, emmer wheat, barley, oats and rye, in addition to Celtic beans, peas, vetch, sorrel and fat hen. Over time the soils on the chalk may have become thinner and less productive in some areas, and competition for land and resources may have led to or exacerbated social tensions.

Trade, artefacts and communication

- 4.31. Extensive communication and trade networks are demonstrated by the presence of non-local pottery on Middle Bronze Age and Late Bronze Age sites brought in from areas to the west. By the Middle Iron Age there were distinct pottery traditions in the Wiltshire Avon, the Kennet Valley and Berkshire Downs, and in Hampshire. Continental pottery styles and Gallic pottery vessels, wine amphorae and glass have been found on some Middle and Late Iron Age sites within the area and indicate that an export trade was operating.

Landscape change

- 4.32. During this period, forest clearance continued leading to the opening up of large tracts of land. Settlement appears to have expanded on the chalk downland, complemented by a great increase in the number of burial monuments. Woodland appears to have persisted preferentially on soils on Clay-with-Flint. These heavier acidic soils may have been deliberately avoided for agriculture. It is likely that the heathlands on the lower land in the eastern part of the AONB were also formed during the Bronze Age through forest clearance and depletion of the soils.
- 4.33. In the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age (1,100 BC - AD 43), hilltop enclosures formed by banks and ditches were very dramatic features. Extensive patterns of field systems divided up much of the landscape, whilst surviving woods must have been carefully maintained using techniques such as coppicing, to ensure a constant supply of building materials and fuel. Cattle were grazed in valleys close to water sources, but sheep require less water, and would have been grazed on the higher downland and maintained the distinct short-cropped downland turf. Hardier crops such as barley and spelt meant that cultivation had spread across the higher downs, even onto Clay-with-Flint areas, and the fragile downland soils were beginning to be eroded or exhausted in places.

TOWN AND COUNTRY, SETTLEMENT OF THE LANDSCAPE: AD 43 - 1066 (ROMAN - SAXON)

Social life and society structure

- 4.34. The Roman conquest of AD 43 brought some changes reflecting the new centralised administration, although there was still much continuity with the majority of native oppida continuing to develop as urban centres. Some existing native lineages and their leaders would undoubtedly have continued to be hostile to the Roman invaders long after the occupation, including the Atrebates whose territory included the

North Wessex Downs, but others rapidly adopted Roman customs and practices. Within a few centuries, native and Roman cultures had fused into a distinctive Romano-British identity that although similar to many other societies within the empire, was also subtly distinct from them.

- 4.35. By the late fourth century AD Saxons were among the raiders pillaging the southern and eastern areas of England. In AD 410 the last Roman legions officially departed from Britain, and by the later fifth century there were waves of Germanic immigration across southern England. A British victory over the Saxons at the battle of Mount Badon is recorded in the sixth century, the location of which may be within the North Wessex Downs. Thereafter the region became the scene of power struggles between the emerging kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia. It is during this time that some of the substantial Iron Age hillforts began to be redefended and massive earthworks such as the Wansdyke, which straddles the chalk uplands south of the Kennet, and Bedwyn Dyke, on the Savernake plateau, are thought to have been constructed. Place-name evidence also suggests quite widespread Anglo-Saxon settlement. Society was highly stratified, with a warrior aristocracy - the thegns, based in centres within each manor, and ruling over tenant peasants (villeins) and serfs. This evolved into the feudal society. Fighting between Wessex and Danish forces occurred on the Berkshire Downs in the late ninth century.

Ideology

- 4.36. Romano-British culture practised both cremation and inhumation burials, and larger centres had cemeteries located outside of the towns, on roads leading into the settlements. Early pagan Anglo-Saxon cremation and inhumation cemeteries of the fifth and sixth centuries AD have been found at Collingbourne Ducis, East Shefford near the River Lambourn, at Blacknall Field in the Vale of Pewsey, and just north of Andover. These contained grave goods such as pottery, brooches, tools, jewellery and weapons. Following the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity, burials took place around churches, usually without grave goods.

Buildings and settlement

- 4.37. The Romano-British period supposedly saw an intensification of settlement and reorganisation of land usage and landholding. In reality, many farmsteads continued to develop and expand following the Roman occupation, and remained little different in appearance. No forts have been identified on the North Wessex Downs, but the introduction of villa estates was a dramatic change. There are villas clustered close to Andover, whilst some on the Lambourn Downs make use of earlier field systems. Some villas were themselves developed out of earlier native farmsteads, and by the third century AD most villas had rectangular, tile-roofed stone buildings at their centres. Only a few Roman settlements were established close to the AONB, with Leucomagus or Andover and Cuentio or Mildenhall being the most notable. Some 'villages' also appeared during the Romano-British period, such as Chisenbury Warren, which had numerous buildings spread out along a central street.
- 4.38. There is little direct archaeological evidence for Anglo-Saxon settlement on the North Wessex Downs. However, these early settlements are likely to have clustered in the principal river valleys, close to water sources. Great Bedwyn, for example, is certainly known to have Anglo-Saxon origins, as it is mentioned in a charter. Typical Anglo-Saxon constructions were the grubenhauser or sunken-featured buildings. Early documentary records of around 888 AD, the oval street

plan and the possible Saxon origins of the church on the edge of the area suggest that the settlement of Lambourn has Saxon origins. Large Saxon estates on the Downs were sometimes subdivided to form parishes. The countryside was divided into villas and manors, with each administrative unit including a proportion of meadowland, arable lower slopes and pasture on the higher ground. The need to use these different areas led to the long, thin parishes characteristic of the chalk downlands of the AONB.

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

- 4.39. The Roman occupation has traditionally been seen as a period of great change in the rural landscape. There was an increase in cereal cultivation and livestock numbers, attributed to the introduction of ten percent taxation, and the demands of the Roman army for grain, meat and hides. Tanning and related crafts may have become industrial in scale, and a large-scale wool industry developed, with an expansion of field systems on the downs to meet the demand for wool.
- 4.40. In the third century AD mouldboard ploughs appeared, capable of working heavier soils. Livestock increased in size, wool became finer, and the appearance of mules and new varieties of horse, dog and fowl suggest an increased interest in breeding. Spelt and emmer wheat declined in importance, whilst bread/club wheat, rye and oats became more popular. Winter cropping of wheat probably began after the occupation, whilst cabbage, parsnips, turnips, carrots and flax were introduced to Britain for the first time, along with hay cropping.
- 4.41. Anglo-Saxon arable crops included wheat, barley and oats, especially free-threshing bread wheat, although at this time arable agriculture may have reduced on the downs due to declining soil fertility. Many villages and manors on the chalk adopted two field systems, where half of the arable land was left untilled each year to be grazed by cattle and recover its fertility. In more fertile areas such as the Vales villages adopted three or four field systems, with the land cultivated for two years for cereal crops, and then left fallow for a third year.

Trade, artefacts and communication

- 4.42. The Roman occupation saw dramatic changes in communication, trade and artefacts. Roman roads were revolutionary, allowing goods, livestock and people to move long distances in a relatively short time, replacing native trackways that had been used for centuries. The Portway linked Durnovaria or Dorchester with Calleva or Silchester, and at Leucomagus or Andover it met the road linking Venta or Winchester with Sorviodunum or Old Sarum. In addition Ermin Street ran between Silchester in Hampshire and Cirencester in Gloucestershire crossing the AONB for a substantial distance. New markets and consumers were created as a result of these new roads. The Roman roads continued in use during the early Anglo-Saxon period, although communications did become poorer, and trade therefore more restricted. Some Roman roads within the AONB are still in use today, for example the road between Mildenhall and Chiseldon.

Landscape change

- 4.43. Roman roads were the most obvious changes in the landscape following the invasion in AD 43. However, the bulk of the North Wessex Downs remain little changed in appearance, although field systems may have expanded further into previously open downland areas. Further woodland clearance took place, in part driven by increased

demands for firewood and charcoal for pottery kilns and smithies. During the Anglo-Saxon period it is likely that the North Wessex Downs would have been divided up by the Wessex royal family, the Church and the lay nobility or thegns. Areas of woodland such as Savernake Forest and that of Barroc were probably almost continuous, and the forests of Chute and Melchet were also quite large. These were all turned into royal hunting parks or haga. Massive linear earthworks such as the Wansdyke in Wiltshire, and Grim's Ditch in Berkshire and Devil's Ditch in Hampshire may date to the fifth and sixth centuries AD. They may have marked territorial boundaries, and were also perhaps defensive works.

- 4.44. Although hunting parks were established by the Saxons, it was the Normans who codified their management in the Forest Law. Chases such as Highclere Chase in Hampshire were unenclosed but nevertheless delimited hunting preserves, usually for the nobility. Royal Forests were not necessarily wooded, but usually consisted of a mosaic of woodland, scrub and grassland or heath. These were outside common law and subject to the special Forest Laws.

SETTLEMENT AND ORGANISATION OF THE LANDSCAPE: 1066 – 1499 (MEDIEVAL)

Social life and society structure

- 4.45. The Norman Conquest of England replaced an English speaking elite with a French speaking nobility, based in castles and manor houses. Castles were built at Marlborough and Ludgershall to ensure the stability of the area. The Crown, the nobility, the bishoprics of the Church and the great monastic houses owned most of the land within the North Wessex Downs.
- 4.46. The Domesday survey of 1086 provides an insight into how parts of the English landscape was organised prior to and following the Norman Conquest of 1066. Important landowners, particularly the King and the Church controlled large parts of the countryside either directly or indirectly. The harvest failures and famines of 1315 to 1322 and the Black Death caused widespread misery, the latter killing 40%-50% of the population, and altering the balance of economic and social power between peasants and lords. Serfdom largely disappeared, and paid labourers and classes of landed peasants and yeoman farmers emerged.

Buildings and settlement

- 4.47. The Normans established motte and bailey castles, such as the one at Marlborough, to act as local centres of power and control, and some new settlements appeared around them. The prosperity and growth which characterised the later-twelfth and thirteenth centuries led to the rapid expansion of towns just outside the AONB, such as Andover, Basingstoke, Overton, Newbury, and Lambourn which lies just inside the AONB.
- 4.48. Within the AONB settlement was concentrated along the river valleys, with scattered hamlets and isolated farmsteads restricted to clayland or the downland, where dairying, stock-raising and pasture-farming predominated. Large open fields divided into strips usually surrounded villages; these being owned individually but usually farmed together. Rectangular buildings with their own yards (the tofts and crofts) were arranged along the central roads or lanes that ran through the villages, often following the valley alignments. Manor houses and churches continued to be at

the heart of village life, although in some areas manor houses were located on the outskirts of the villages.

- 4.49. This general settlement pattern did vary. The Vale of Pewsey had a mixture of nucleated and dispersed settlements, often aligned across the valley rather than along it. The parishes of the Kennet valley were also more varied, and the area of downland in the south-east part of the AONB (west of Basingstoke) has a dispersed pattern of hamlets and individual farms. The Thames Valley, for example, saw a variety of smaller, nucleated, open green or dispersed settlements. These settlement patterns are still evident in the present day landscape.
- 4.50. After the Black Death, falling population, decline in arable acreage, and low corn prices contributed to the desertion and partial desertion of villages particularly along the chalkland valleys of the AONB. Other late medieval desertions came about because of the creation of deer parks, such as the great new park at Savernake created by the Dukes of Somerset during the sixteenth century.

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

- 4.51. During the thirteen century management of woodland and Royal Forests for game, timber and fuel was intense, and coppicing, pollarding and charcoal burning were all important practices in such areas. Villagers had common rights to some woodland and open areas, where grazing was also important. Rabbits were almost certainly introduced to Britain after the Norman Conquest, and were often managed in artificial warrens called pillow mounds with good examples evident on the Marlborough Downs. A population explosion (prior to the Black Death) also resulted in extensive areas of the AONB being cleared and ploughed, as evidenced by the many strip lynchets visible in the landscape today. These terraces, by which cultivation was extended up hillsides, enabled more land to be ploughed. Today, these are among the most common landscape features of the chalk and whole series survive along the northern edge.
- 4.52. The numerous small irregular shaped fields or assarts, which are especially prevalent in the east of the AONB are also evidence of this land-hunger and represent clearance of areas of forest waste or encroachment into heathland. Following the catastrophe of the Black Death, a declining population and reduced corn prices meant that arable farming was less profitable. There was a marked decrease in the extent of arable cultivation and land was allowed to revert to grass such as in the heavy clays of the Vale of the White Horse and on the thin soils of the Lambourn Downs. Sheep flocks, meanwhile, increased substantially as the wool industry developed further, with towns such as Marlborough, Whitchurch and Newbury becoming important textile centres.

Trade, artefacts and communication

- 4.53. By the medieval period, trade was becoming more long-distance and large-scale once more, with wool and livestock being the predominant export from the downlands. This was taken to burgeoning market towns often located on the fringes of the downs, such as Andover and Swindon. In turn this greatly affected the network of communications with many new tracks being established, although many medieval droveways and tracks may have had earlier origins. These tracks now form the

intricate network of footpaths, byways, and green lanes that can be found across the AONB.

Landscape change

- 4.54. The clay Vales were much more wooded at this time and along with the remains of Saxon royal woodlands such as the Forest of Chute and the Forest of Pamber were used as hunting areas. The management of these areas was codified in Forest Law by the Normans. However, by the thirteenth century there was a wave of disafforestation when the Crown relinquished Forest Law over many areas. This meant woodlands became smaller, and had often fragmented into individual deer parks, which are a particular feature of the lower lying eastern part of the AONB (e.g. Highclere Chase). Deer parks were surrounded by bank, ditch and fence boundaries often called pales. Deer-leaps allowed deer to move into the parks easily, but restricted their ability to leave. Although the Romans may have introduced fallow deer to Britain, they did not appear on the North Wessex Downs until after the Norman Conquest.
- 4.55. From the thirteenth century onwards, large areas of former arable land on the downs were converted to pasture, and the open and un-hedged landscapes characteristic of the chalk downland became dominant across much of the region. By the fourteenth century however, in many areas of the North Wessex Downs this pattern was changing, with the consolidation of land blocks and their enclosure as fields using hedges, banks or ditches. This may partly have been a result of the depopulation resulting from the Black Death.

POST MEDIEVAL: 1500 - 1799

Social life and society structure

- 4.56. By the sixteenth century there was a distinct 'middle-class' emerging in the countryside, with merchant and artisans in the towns, encouraged by expansion of the woollen cloth industry and the sale of monastic properties following the Dissolution. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the rural gentry built new large houses or refurbished old ones, but following enclosure many poor farmers who had previously owned small plots of land found themselves working as paid but landless labourers. There was some social unrest during the time of the Civil War, when Andover, Marlborough, Littlecote, Ludgershall, Donnington, Newbury, Basing and Reading were all drawn into the conflict or were the site of battles and sieges. The battlefield of Roundway Down (1643) occurred in the western part of the North Wessex Downs.

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

- 4.57. Many field systems remained little altered in some areas until the eighteenth century, but in others enclosure during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries meant land use became more intensive, and the management of water meadows developed within the river valleys. It was during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that there were more dramatic changes, partly prompted by the Napoleonic Wars. Land improvements included drainage, new crops such as hemp, flax, woad, cabbages and rape and increasing use of machinery. Chalk was often extracted and burnt in limekilns to produce lime fertiliser. Formal Parliamentary enclosure not only changed the appearance of the landscape, but also transformed the agricultural cycle

and the routines of the people who lived there. Farm sizes increased considerably in many areas.

Landscape change

- 4.58. By the eighteenth century, enclosure had created a patchwork of small, irregularly shaped fields and winding lanes and tracks in many areas. From the later eighteenth century though, some areas of pasture of the downs were converted to arable, and common woods, heaths and grasslands were also enclosed. The rectangular, regular patterns of field systems seen in most areas today were the result of these later Parliamentary enclosures. The eighteenth century also saw the wealthy financing the development of 'polite' landscape gardens, with Highclere Castle being a particularly spectacular example. The expansion of the navy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the demands of industry, caused large areas of surviving woodland to be clear-felled and the creation of the more open landscape character of much of the North Wessex Downs today.

THE MODERN LANDSCAPE: 1800 - PRESENT

Social life and society structure

- 4.59. Following the Napoleonic Wars conditions in the countryside for the poor were dire. There were economic crises in the 1820s and rural populations fell, while town populations grew rapidly. By the end of the nineteenth century more people were working in industries based in towns than were working in agriculture. Further declines in the rural population followed the First and Second World Wars, and the twentieth century saw major social and economic changes in the North Wessex Downs.

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

- 4.60. Lace and silk making were specialist industries that developed in places such as Marlborough and Whitchurch on the edge of the North Wessex Downs during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but during the nineteenth century the cloth industry declined markedly. Ironworks and engineering developed in the surrounding towns of Swindon, Andover and Devizes. The coming of the railways saw an increase in dairying, especially in the clay Vales, as it became much easier to transport milk to towns and cities. Watercress was an unusual nineteenth and twentieth century crop that continues to be cultivated in flooded beds within the river valleys, notably the Bourne, a tributary of the River Test.
- 4.61. Following the First and Second World Wars there was increased mechanisation on farms, and farm labouring as a way of life declined rapidly. Many farms on the downlands are now very large business concerns with intensive ploughing and use of fertilisers and insecticides maintaining high crop yields. Post-war intensification of agriculture, the use of fertilisers and insecticides and increased mechanisation has led many farmers to continue ploughing on slopes and elevated downland, and to remove many hedgerows and field boundaries, creating very large-scale fields. Many archaeological features have been destroyed, and in some instances much of the topsoil also has been lost.

Trade, artefacts and communication

- 4.62. Turnpike roads were a significant improvement in communication, and in 1810 the Kennet and Avon Canal was opened, serving Pewsey, Hungerford, Newbury and

Reading. The Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal was another important waterway. The construction of railways initiated an increase in milk production, and Swindon (a small market town until the Great Western Railway was constructed) became a major locomotive depot and repair centre. The railways served as the major communication and trade arteries until the 1970s, when most freight began to shift to road transport. The M4 and the A34 are the largest modern routeways in the AONB, and contrast with the relatively narrow roads that otherwise characterise the North Wessex Downs.

Landscape change

- 4.63. The development of the canal, railway and road networks has had a major impact on the landscapes of the North Wessex Downs, especially more recent road routes such as the M4 and A34. During the Second World War many areas such as the Lambourn Downs and Marlborough Downs that had been under pasture were ploughed up again to maximise arable production. This has created the open character of the landscape today.
- 4.64. The 20th century has witnessed major changes in the agricultural management. At the same time there has been a significant increase in the urban population and growth of development. These changes are not only significant from an archaeological perspective, but are significant in determining the overall character of the North Wessex Downs. They are considered further in Chapter 16.

5. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INFLUENCES

- 5.1. This chapter provides an overview of the economic and social character of the North Wessex Downs. It includes population characteristics, the structure of employment and a summary of the key economic sectors both internal and external to the AONB. It also contains information on social characteristics relating to housing and service provision. The information in this chapter has been drawn from two separate short research studies undertaken by the Community Council for Berkshire (CCB) on social characteristics (2000) and Segal Quince Wicksteed (SQW) on the economic character of the AONB (2000). It builds on information in a paper prepared by the Rural Economy Working Group for the Downlands Conference in January 1999². A method statement and information on data sources for each study is provided in Appendix 1.
- 5.2. A more in-depth analysis of the social characteristics, in terms of population and services, of key villages in each of the eight main landscape types identified within the North Wessex Downs is provided in Appendix 4. This appendix provides an important layer of information that enhances understanding of overall local character.

Overview

- 5.3. The economic and social characteristics of the North Wessex Downs are strongly influenced by its location. The relative proximity of London and high value-added industries of the Thames Valley and north Hampshire exert considerable impact on the economy and its social characteristics, for example in terms of housing and levels of service provision. The influence of London is most keenly felt to the east of the AONB and in particular those villages with good access to mainline stations. The proximity to international airports and channel ports, in particular the Southampton Container Port will increase economic pressure along the A34 (Euro Route EO 5), will have an increasing influence upon the area. The boundary of the North Wessex Downs skirts a number of economically significant towns such as Swindon, Andover, Whitchurch, Basingstoke, Reading, Devizes, Newbury and Didcot resulting in an economy that is largely 'outward looking' towards these 'boundary towns' and beyond. Furthermore the M4 motorway passes from east to west across the AONB, with the A34 being an important north-south link. These routes are important to the local economy providing good access to markets/clients for businesses located within the AONB, access to centres of employment beyond the AONB as well as income and employment from passing trade (e.g. service stations, hotels etc). The roads also mean that much of the AONB is highly accessible to commuters working in the adjacent towns.
- 5.4. The economic and social characteristics of the North Wessex Downs are shaped by the traditional and unique attributes of the locality at one level and by its prime

² The Downlands Conference Steering Group was an informal group set up by and for those with an interest in the future of the North Wessex Downs. Working groups reported on issues including the Rural Economy. In 2002 the Downlands Conference evolved into a formal AONB management structure.

location with access to the regional centres, the high technology industries and London at another. The AONB is not therefore a discrete area, but one with significant trading links, and daily migration patterns around its circumference. The attractive locality and proximity to expanding employment centres has resulted in an increase in population and created a high demand for housing within the AONB. This in turn is having a significant impact on the social and community characteristics of the area.

- 5.5. The overall picture masks locally significant intra-regional variations within the North Wessex Downs. The east of the AONB, for example, has slightly different characteristics from the west, with greater pressure on housing stock and recruitment in West Berkshire, Basingstoke and Deane and South Oxfordshire. The booming peripheral economy also masks pockets of rural deprivation, with the downturn in the fortunes of farming being particularly acute within parts of the AONB. In addition the Rural Economy Working Group of the Downlands Conference made a distinction between the edge of the AONB which are more strongly influenced by the surrounding urban areas and central part of the AONB, which is more remote.

Population and Employment Structure

Population

- 5.6. The total population of the North Wessex Downs is approximately 125,000 and as such it is comparatively sparsely populated within the context of southern England, with vast tracts of the chalk uplands without any substantial settlement. The majority live in the small villages of the AONB and the two market towns of Marlborough and Hungerford with the high downs including large expanses, without any significant habitation. Population growth in the AONB varies considerably from ward to ward, however, the general trend is typified by an increase in population of around 8% between 1981-1991, with a large proportion of the population now in-migrants (estimated to be as high as four-fifths). The population increase has largely been amongst the retired and working population. This has had a considerable impact on the demographic structure of the AONB, with the number of young people within villages declining as they leave to relocate to areas with better service provision and cheaper housing, resulting in a higher proportion of middle aged and elderly people (see para. 5.29).
- 5.7. Demographic change within the North Wessex Downs, across the periods 1981, 1991 and projections for 1999/2000 is illustrated in table 5.1. The figures in this table represent changes that have occurred in the wards and parishes within the AONB and not the whole of the local authority administrative area. It illustrates the population gain within the AONB. Kennet and West Berkshire wards, for example have each seen an increase of over 5000 since 1981.

Table 5.1: Population Change within the AONB

<i>Administrative Area (area in AONB)</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1999/2000</i> <i>0</i>	<i>Change</i>
West Berkshire	49310	51074	54370	5060 GAIN
Basingstoke & Dean	30119	30545	32954	2835 GAIN
Test Valley	3535	3476	3901	366 GAIN
Kennet District	28430	32241	34249	5819 GAIN
Vale of White Horse	N/a	18523	18345	178 LOSS (based on 1999/2000 projections)
South Oxfordshire	N/a	N/a	N/a	
North Wiltshire	15773	16460	17380	1607 GAIN
Swindon	12128	12300	12460	332 GAIN

Employment Levels

- 5.8. The economically active population of the North Wessex Downs is approximately 80,000, one third of whom work within the AONB, with two-thirds being outbound commuters to the surrounding urban areas, London and the South-East. The major transport networks of the M4, A34 and the railway enhance accessibility to the surrounding areas. Within the AONB itself it is estimated that around 60% of total employment is located in the peripheral areas, with 10% in the two market towns and the remaining 30% employed in the central part of the AONB.
- 5.9. The regional economy is generally buoyant. Unemployment is low and economic activity rates are high, with many jobs in high value-added industries within a short journey from villages in the AONB. As a consequence this has inflated house prices and increased the proliferation of “commuter villages”.
- 5.10. The east of the AONB (West Berkshire and Basingstoke and Deane in particular) is booming with some of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. Latest estimates for West Berkshire suggest that there are 8 jobs for every 3 people registered with the unemployment service. This has resulted in staff shortages with 80% of businesses reporting difficulties in recruiting staff in December 1999 (West Berkshire Council Economic Development Strategy 2000-2001). In parts of the AONB there is a shortage of key workers in important public services such as education and public transport. This is partly as a result of the high cost of living in the area (particularly house prices), which discourages people on limited income from moving into the area.
- 5.11. Similar patterns of economic growth are also apparent at centres within the AONB, for example Hungerford. However, these are localised ‘hot spots’. Generally, patterns of employment are such that outward migration is high throughout the majority of the area.
- 5.12. The AONB as a whole is relatively affluent, however this wealth is by no means uniform. The current changes in the agricultural sector (explored further later in this report) has put particular financial pressure on those employed in this sector, which is exacerbated by a shortage of affordable housing. The associated impacts on the local economy are recognised by Kennet District Council in a study on the economic characteristics Kennet, which states that *“official statistics tend only to be available for quite large areas, and poverty and social exclusion, while they exist, may be*

hidden from view, both on the ground, and in figures which give a fairly affluent picture." In addition there is a link between the lack of affordable housing and the growing shortage of key workers including bus drivers, primary school teachers, police and office support staff. It is clear that within the AONB, like many rural areas in south east, there is an increased polarisation between affluent and less advantaged inhabitants.

Employment by Sector and Occupation in the AONB and Adjacent Area

- 5.13. The Downlands Conference has estimated employment by sector within the AONB. Their work highlights the relative importance of land based industries (agriculture and race horse training) in the central part of the AONB as the main employers. The racehorse industry represents an important and locally distinct employment sector within the AONB. In the market towns services, distribution, hotel and catering are more dominant, while the business services sector is of greater importance in the border areas that enable better access to customers.

Features of the AONB Economy

Agriculture

- 5.14. Further detail on the future prospects for agriculture in the North Wessex Downs are considered in Chapter 17, 'Forces for Change'. This section summarises the current economic character of the industry, although it is recognised that the industry is currently in a great state of change. In the AONB, as nationally, the economy has moved away from its agricultural base since the 1960s. Villages and towns that were previously inextricably linked with agricultural production are now more closely linked with other sectors and in particular employment opportunities in the urban centres beyond the AONB boundaries.
- 5.15. Within the North Wessex Downs as a whole, it is estimated that 5% of the economically active population is directly involved in farming. This is compared to an average of 1.4% across the District/Boroughs, which partially include the AONB. Generally, the North Wessex Downs is considered to have a well-structured farming industry, with substantial assets of land, machinery, knowledge and entrepreneurial ability. A particular feature is the high proportion of land held within large well-managed estates. However, while agriculture within the AONB is more important than in the surrounding areas, employment within the sector is still falling. Between 1981 and 1991 employment in agriculture fell by 30% and a forecast for the period 1991-2001 suggested an 8% decrease. It is also suspected that there has been a shift away from full time employment towards a greater number of part time employees (internal RSPB study of the Berkshire Downs, 1995).
- 5.16. Within the AONB those employed in agriculture can be roughly divided as either farmers who manage their own land (38%), or as agricultural workers (62%). This ratio possibly indicates the capital intensive nature of farming within very large units and also reflects the large number of estates in single ownership. In the future, it is expected that some farms in the North Wessex Downs will restructure to achieve economies in scale and may continue to increase in size resulting in very large units, farmed under a single regime. In these cases it is likely that only a proportion will be owned, with large areas farmed under contract.

- 5.17. In the UK, the Total Income From Farming (TIFF) has more than halved since 1995, representing an average total income of approximately £10,000 per full time worker in 1999. This trend is also apparent throughout the North Wessex Downs AONB. In Hampshire, for example, farm income has declined by up to 60 percent since 1995 and stands at the same level as in 1985. It is clear that the economic vibrancy of the region as a whole is not reflected in agriculture where *“those who still work in those sectors [Agriculture and associated industries] face low pay, job insecurity and many other characteristics of rural poverty”* (North Wiltshire District Council Economic Development and Tourism Strategy 2000/01).
- 5.18. The downturn in the agricultural sector has also affected other industries that were previously built around agriculture, for example, in product processing. However, despite being no longer an important player in the regional economy, agriculture remains the dominant land use within the AONB and has a major influence in determining landscape character and quality. For these reasons, it is essential that new ways are found to support the agricultural economy and that rural diversification reflects the skills of local people and supports maintenance of the landscape character and quality of the North Wessex Downs.

Tourism

- 5.19. Tourism is widely recognised as an increasingly important sector, albeit currently operating from a relatively low base. There are a number of key attractions in the North Wessex Downs. These include the historic town of Marlborough, with a location on the A4, which has enabled the town to develop as a tourist “stop-off”. The North Wessex Downs also has a wealth of archaeological and historic sites that attract significant visitor numbers. Avebury World Heritage Site, for example, receives in the region of 400,000 visitors a year and revenue generated is an important contributor to the local economy. The Ridgeway National Trail similarly attracts in the region of 100,000 visitors a year, with an estimated annual spend in the region of £1.5 million. There is a wealth of smaller sites, historic houses and other tourism attractions within the AONB.
- 5.20. A number of tourist information guides for the region market the AONB and the outstanding landscape. More recently there has been an emphasis on promoting sustainable tourism (e.g. walking the Ridgeway, cycling using the new trans AONB national cycle route, horse tourism via the extensive linked network of bridleways, and visiting the Kennet and Avon Canal and archaeological sites.) A number of local authorities within the North Wessex Downs believe that tourism can play an increasingly important role in improving the quality and quantity of local employment opportunities and amenities for local people, and this is being reflected in local strategies and promotion. In North Wiltshire, for example, it is suggested that tourism centred around the District’s heritage sites such as the White Horse of Cherhill, should be managed to support economic activity in the villages adjacent to these sites.

The Racehorse Industry, Lambourn Valley

- 5.21. The North Wessex Downs and Lambourn, in particular is the second most important centre for the racehorse industry in Britain. The industry employs 800 people directly, and has an annual income of around £20m, £3m of which is foreign

revenue. The Lambourn Downs has a self-contained micro-economy with one third of the population employed locally.

A sign stating 'Valley of the Racehorse' signals entrance to the Lambourn Valley and the small village, nestling at the head of the valley, is dominated by farms and racing stables creating a unique community and local economy. The area is home to numerous race horse training establishments producing some of the most famous riders and horses in English racehorse history. In addition to training the Lambourn area supports many associated industries including horse transport, stabling and stud farms.

Armed Forces

- 5.22. The Armed Forces still play a significant role in the local economy, especially in places such as Tidworth and Ludgershall to the south of the AONB on the Wiltshire Hampshire border. In the light of the Strategic Defence Review, these areas may see a significant expansion. On the other hand changing priorities in government spending on defence have, in recent years, been reflected in the falling numbers of people involved in defence related activity in some parts of the area. This, in combination with infrastructure relating to the Second World War, such as the airfields, has resulted in a number of derelict military sites within the North Wessex Downs which offer opportunities for development for employment uses as well as significant opportunities for landscape re-creation and enhancement. It is clear that an appropriate balance needs to be struck between economic development and protection of the nationally important landscape.

External Influences

- 5.23. The economy of the North Wessex Downs is heavily influenced by employment opportunities on the periphery or outside the AONB. It is estimated that of the 80,000 economically active people in the AONB, two-thirds are outbound commuters (Rural Economy Working Group). The adjacent urban areas not only attract employees who choose to live within the AONB, but can also act as a catalyst to stimulate associated employment within the North Wessex Downs AONB. It should also be noted that a significant number of commuters travel greater distances, for example to London.
- 5.24. In the west of the AONB, Swindon exerts considerable economic influence. The effect of this is that villages, particularly within Swindon Unitary Authority, North Wiltshire and Kennet District Authorities, have become commuter villages. A similar pattern has occurred in the east of the AONB in relation to Reading and Newbury. To the south west, Devizes plays an important role within the economy with commuters from the Vale of Pewsey and surrounding villages travelling to work there.
- 5.25. To the north, Didcot, located on the northern boundary of the AONB, is one of four settlements named in the Oxfordshire Structure Plan where development until 2011 will be focused. This includes plans for 5,500 houses and redevelopment of the town centre. This development may result in Didcot having an increased influence of the north east of the AONB and the villages in this area. Wantage, and in particular the Grove Technology Park to the north of the town, already provides high value-added employment in the area, and are a short journey from the attractive villages within the AONB. Whilst both towns contribute to the outward migration of

workers from the AONB, the economic success of these towns has enabled significant development within the AONB, such as the International Business Centre for Science and Technology at Harwell and employment developments at Chilton.

- 5.26. Newbury, on the eastern edge of the AONB, has developed an international reputation within the ICT industry with major employers including 'Vodafone', 'Panasonic' and 'Quantel'. Interviews have suggested that demand for housing has become particularly high in this area and is reflected in high house prices increasing the shortage of affordable housing within the AONB. Significant high technology industry within the AONB can be found in one location at Compton in the Berkshire Downs, where Baxter Healthcare employs approximately 150 people at their national headquarters. The Institute of Animal Health is also a major player in the area employing approximately 400 people in Compton. Swindon also has a high ICT profile with major employers including Motorola, Intel, Lucent Technologies, Bookham Technology, EMI, and Mitel Semi Conductor.
- 5.27. Like Newbury, Basingstoke plays an important, if geographically peripheral, role in the economy of the AONB area. Successful ICT and service industries 'pull' employees into Basingstoke from the surrounding areas while small industrial estates in the villages of Overton, Whitchurch and Kingsclere on the edge of the AONB play an important role at a more local level. Andover, to the south of the AONB is also a significant employment centre and the proposed major expansion plan (increase in population in the region of 10,000 people) may increase its influence on the North Wessex Downs AONB.
- 5.28. The presence of thriving economic centres on the edge of the AONB and their draw to commuters seeking to enjoy a 'rural' lifestyle within the North Wessex Downs has many associated impacts on the character of the AONB, including increased traffic, loss of services and elevated house prices.

Social Influences: Housing and Services

Housing

- 5.29. As outlined above, the majority of the North Wessex Downs is under considerable pressure for development. The attractive quality of the area and accessibility to employment in adjacent towns has contributed to the growth in population. In order to accommodate this increasing population, there is inevitably pressure for housing, both for the in-migrants and the indigenous rural population, although their needs vary considerably. In this respect there is a clear need for policies that integrate aims for protecting the visual character and setting of settlements within this nationally important landscape with those that foster balanced rural communities.
- 5.30. There continues to be a huge demand to live in the attractive villages of the North Wessex Downs villages, and the ability of wealthy immigrants to acquire property has increased the market value of such property as competitiveness for it increases commensurately. This leaves those on lower wages and with less buying power unable to afford local accommodation. The disproportionate increase in property prices is evident throughout the AONB, but particularly in the West Berkshire wards where an "average" house now costs £146,157 compared to the national average of £97,000.

- 5.31. As a result there has been a trend for lower paid agricultural and service workers employed within the AONB to seek lower priced accommodation in surrounding areas, e.g. Swindon/Reading, setting up a process of reverse commuting. It is also suggested that, as elsewhere, key workers in teaching and nursing, for example, have been priced out of the area leaving significant local skill shortages. The lack of services in some villages, particularly those in the West Berkshire wards of the AONB, is leading to a reluctance from some Housing Associations to provide affordable housing where there is no service infrastructure to support a development. The trend for smaller household sizes, due to young people leaving the villages, smaller family units and a greater number of single older people, suggests that there is an urgent need to reassess current stock.

Service Provision

- 5.32. The AONB is sparsely populated but with an increasing proportion of service and middle classes. As illustrated above, the major economic activities are located around the periphery and there is high car ownership. Within the West Berkshire wards of the AONB, car ownership is particularly high, with 84% of households owning one car, with 47% having access to two or more. High car ownership may have contributed to the overall decline in public service provision and public transport across the AONB, with the majority of people able to counter this with regular trips to centres at the edge of the area or services which include shops, post office, banking facilities, education and health. Convenience shopping trips made when travelling to and from the workplace further increases the downturn in village shopping. However this masks significant difficulties for those who do not have access to private cars.
- 5.33. Table 5.2 illustrates the general pattern of service provision across the four counties in which the AONB falls (Survey of Rural Services 1997 RDC). These figures indicate that service provision in the rural area throughout, and particularly in Oxfordshire is poor.

Table 5.2: Figures show percentage of Parishes in each county lacking the named service

<i>Service</i>	<i>Berkshire</i>	<i>Wiltshire</i>	<i>Hampshire</i>	<i>Oxfordshire</i>
Permanent shop	34	42	34	50
Store	57	71	66	79
Post office	41	42	41	46
Village Hall	15	21	20	26
Public House	19	18	16	25
Daily Bus service	75	83	65	79
School	33	45	43	54
Bank	92	99	88	92
Parish GP	68	N/a	82	86
Pharmacy	70	N/a	75	84
Library	13	11	11	11
Police Station	88	N/a	84	96

- 5.34. It is suggested that the population growth in villages where commuters and those with access to private transport have moved in, may have compounded the decline of local services. The in-migration of service and middle classes with greater affluence and personal mobility, may have resulted in those on lower incomes, including the rural indigenous population, becoming marginalised and disadvantaged through their lack of access to basic services.
- 5.35. Further work is required to understand the extent of social exclusion and identify indicators of rural disadvantage within the North Wessex Downs, but the initial research suggests that there is an increased polarisation within the AONB, with those on high incomes, with two cars per household able to enjoy the best housing and access services in adjacent areas. By comparison households with lower income, have poor housing choice, less mobility and insufficient access to services.

Summary

- 5.36. The economy of the North Wessex Downs AONB is benefiting from the current strength of the regional economy and the towns surrounding its borders. Nevertheless, the booming peripheral economy is having detrimental impacts on the social structure of the AONB and access to services and affordable housing. This is in contrast to the expected trend whereby an increasing rural population with a high level of employment might lead to greater rural vitality. It is clear that the overall economic well being masks significant pockets of rural deprivation within the AONB.
- 5.37. Agriculture continues to be the main land use and as such plays an important economic and social role in the North Wessex Downs, as well as providing a mechanism for maintenance of the landscape. The current difficulties in farming suggest that diversification may be important to ensure future sustainability of the agricultural sector. Whilst the regional economy is generally performing well, it is important that diversification within farming is encouraged. However it is vital that this reflects the skills of local people and importantly that it supports maintenance of the landscape character and quality of the AONB.

- 5.38. The main challenge for the future will be to find ways to harness the vibrancy and buoyancy of the peripheral economy, in a way that is complementary to the character of the North Wessex Downs.

6. PERCEPTIONS OF THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB

This is pure downland; the breasted hills curving as if under the influence of a great melody. It is beautiful, a quiet, an unrenowned and a most visibly ancient land. [1]

Edward Thomas (1878-1917)

Introduction

- 6.1. A landscape can assume national significance not only because of its particular character and qualities, but also because of special associations and perceptions that it may have. These include the perceptions of local people who live and work in the area as well as artistic and literary associations. An examination of the way that others have perceived the landscape over time can also provide pointers to a consensus view on why an area is considered special, and what particular features have consistently attracted attention and comment. This chapter considers, first, the perception of the inhabitants of the North Wessex Downs of their local landscape and goes on to review artistic and literary associations, which have raised the profile of the AONB nationally. References are listed in Appendix 2b.

Local Perceptions

- 6.2. There is a strong local resonance and affinity with the landscape of the North Wessex Downs, particularly the individual downs and the river valleys that make up the AONB - the Marlborough Downs, the Lambourn Downs and the key features within it such as Avebury, the Uffington White Horse, the Ridgeway, Combe Gibbet above Inkpen, Watership Down, Savernake Forest, the Kennet and Avon Canal, the historic towns of Marlborough and Hungerford, the Ridgeway and many other outstanding features.
- 6.3. However, unlike the Chilterns or Cotswolds for example, which have a very strong image and identity in peoples' minds, the North Wessex Downs as an entity, is considered to cover a very large geographic area encompassing a diverse range of landscapes. The division into a large number of individual local authorities (11) and two government regions also reinforce the perceived lack cohesiveness. This view was stressed repeatedly at a series of community consultation workshops held as part of a recent study to identify a suitable management structure for the AONB (*LUC, for the Countryside Agency, 2000*).
- 6.4. The name of the AONB has also been described as misleading and an imposed artificial name, since local people consider themselves to be neither, north, Wessex or indeed wholly downland. This is not to say however, that residents do not have a strong affinity with the area, but most recognise it by the component parts rather than the AONB as a whole. These include the individual downs and the river valleys that make up the AONB – the Marlborough Downs, the Lambourn Downs and the key landscape features within it such as Avebury, Savernake Forest, the Kennet and Avon Canal, the historic towns of Marlborough and Hungerford, the Ridgeway and many other outstanding features. This perception is reinforced in the tourism and marketing of the area, with no single AONB wide strategy. The result is a rather

fragmented approach promoting individual features and sites within the AONB but with no strong image of the locality as a whole. Perhaps the area where the AONB designation is perceived to have real public significance is in adding value in house sales, with locations within the AONB often being marketed at a premium by estate agents.

- 6.5. It is perhaps true to say, however, that it is the AONB designation that has no local resonance, rather than the landscape itself. The enormous interest shown in the Downlands Conference, for example, is a strong testimony to the importance attached to the locality. Three conferences have been held since 1996, each attracting in the region of 100 participants drawn from communities of interest and place. Some 500 interested individuals are recorded on the Conference database. The great concern that people have for their area and perceived changes in its character and qualities are illustrated by the formation of working groups, under the Downlands Conference, which have reported on issues in relation to Natural Environment, Community Involvement, Traffic and Transport and the Rural Economy.

The Race Horse Training Industry

For many locals and visitors, the North Wessex Downs and in particular the Lambourn area, known as the 'Valley of the Racehorse', is renowned for its associations with the racehorse training industry. It has been a famous training area for over 150 years, producing winners of all the greatest races (Flat and National Hunt) in the Racing Calendar. Lambourn-trained horses, that became household names during their careers and are still remembered with affection include Mandarin, Mill House, Grundy, Garrison Savannah, Rheingold and the most recent Grand National Winner Party Politics. Celebrated trainers include Fred Winter, Peter Walwyn, Nicky Henderson, and Jenny Pitman the first woman to train a National Hunt winner. Jockeys particularly associated with the Lambourn area include Lester Piggott and Bruce Hobbs, among many others.

The distinctive landscapes of the Lambourn Valley and downs have formed a backdrop and setting for the racing novels of Dick Francis and equine artists have also been attracted to the area. A good example being the oil painting Morning on Lambourn Downs by Sue Wingate. The artist notes [2]:

"I had seen this particular gallop in Lambourn and liked the rolling landscape with groups of trees which add interest to the background. It was soft, slightly misty morning in the summer and the horses are shown returning to their yard after work."

Landscape Descriptions

- 6.6. The North Wessex Downs is a landscape rich in historic sites and natural features. This magical landscape has attracted naturalists, antiquarians and travellers to the area throughout recent history. Records of visitor's perceptions reveal how the landscape was viewed as well as how it has changed. In 1725 Daniel Defoe visited, and wrote of, the wonder of the Vale of the White Horse. He climbed the hill at Uffington for close examination of the white horse and commented on the

construction of these great features; *'trenches... about a yard long, and filled almost up with chalk'*. He then stood many miles off to observe the feature from some distance: *'you see the exact shape of a white horse... not ill-shaped I assure you'* [3]. However, views of the landscape were not always positive. William Gilpin wrote in 1770

'The Marlborough Downs is one of the most dreary scenes which our ancestors ... chose as the repositarium of their dead. Everywhere we see tumuli, which were raised over their ashes' [4].

- 6.7. In contrast, William Cobbett, writing in 1825, was impressed by the vast, scale of the landscape:

'I like to look at the winding side of a great down, with two or three numerous flocks of sheep on it, belonging to different farms; and to see, lower down, the folds, in the fields, ready to receive them for the night. Our point of destination was this village called Burghclere, which lies close under the north side of the lofty hill at Highclere, which is called Beacon Hill, and on top of which there are still the marks of Roman encampment. We saw this hill as soon as we got on Winchester Downs; and without regard to roads, we steered for it, as sailors do for a land-mark' [5].

- 6.8. Edward Thomas, similarly describes the vastness and remoteness of the landscape in the first chapter of his biography of Richard Jefferies (1909), again likening it to the ocean:

'The Downs in this immediate country of Richard Jeffries are among the highest, most spacious, and most divinely carved in rolling ridge and hollowed flank, and their summits commune with the finest summits of the more southerly downs - Inkpen, Martinsell, Tan Hill ... Jeffries often thought of the sea upon these hills. The eye expects it. There is something oceanic in their magnitude, their solitude ... They are never abrupt, but, flowing on and on, make a type of infinity ... they have a hugeness of undivided surface for which there is no comparison on earth'. [6].

- 6.9. Richard Jefferies (1848-1887), novelist, naturalist, essayist, and mystic grew up in a hamlet at the foot of the Downs. Jefferies developed an extraordinary sensitivity to nature and wrote many perceptive letters, essays and books on rural matters inspired by this part of the North Wessex Downs:

From the blue hill lines, from the dark copses on the ridges, the shadows in the combes ... there comes from these an influence which forces the heart to lift itself in earnest and purest desire. [7]

- 6.10. One of Jefferies' most well-known books *Wildlife in a Southern Country* (1879) contains an evocative description of the Ridgeway, which still has resonance today:

A broad green track runs for many a long, long mile across the downs, now following the ridges, now winding past at the foot of a grassy slope, then stretching away through a cornfield and fallow. It is distinct from the wagon-tracks which cross it here and there, for these are local only, and, if traced up, land the wayfarer presently in a maze of fields, or end abruptly in the rickyard of a lone farmhouse. It is distinct from the hard roads of modern construction which also at wide intervals cross its course, dusty and glaringly white in the sunshine With varying width, from twenty to fifty yards, it runs like a green ribbon ... a width that allows a flock of sheep to travel easily side by side [8].

- 6.11. Another native writer associated with the Downs is Alfred Williams (1877- 1930), a working man employed in the steam-hammer shop at Swindon railway works. Williams wrote both poetry and prose describing the local landscape of this part of the Downs.

"The slopes of the downs, if they have general forms, are continually changing and interchanging in localities, assuming new and strange shapes, charming and surprising with their grace and exquisiteness ... for ever reflecting the mood of the heavens" [9]

- 6.12. A standing sarsen stone, erected east of Barbury Castle on Buderop Down, commemorates Jefferies and Williams.

Myth and Legend

- 6.13. **Archaeological sites:** The area has a rich legendary heritage and local myth and mystery surrounds many of the ancient stone circles, burial mounds and hill-forts that characterise the North Wessex Downs, which are thought to be connected through the area by mysterious ley lines. Avebury World Heritage Site includes the largest stone circle in Europe and has intrigued visitors for hundreds of years with images often captured in topographical writings and drawings. William Stukeley, for example made a number of observations and line drawings of the monument in his visits to the area in the early eighteenth century. People remain fascinated by what they see and seek to find an explanation for its majesty and aura. One myth tells of the magician Merlin bringing the stones from Ireland.
- 6.14. Various legends have also been attached to Silbury Hill to help explain the creation of this unusual feature. Folklore has claimed it to be the burial place of King Sil, a knight in golden armour or fabled hidden treasure. It is also suggested as being a symbolic effigy of the ancient Mother Earth Goddess and associated with fertility rituals. Another explanation is that Silbury Hill could have been used as an accurate solar observatory by means of the shadows cast by the mound on the carefully levelled plain to the north, towards Avebury. Perhaps the most popular legend is that the hill was created by the Devil who was going to empty a huge sack of earth on the nearby town of Marlborough, but was forced to drop it at Silbury through the magic of priests at nearby Avebury.
- 6.15. Located on the Ridgeway, close to the White Horse is Waylands's Smithy, a Neolithic long barrow, sheltered by a grove of beech trees and built of massive sarsen stones. Legend has it that, if you leave your horse here overnight with a payment in silver, Wayland the smith of the Saxon gods, will shod it by dawn.
- 6.16. **Sarsen Stones:** A similar fascination exists for the enigmatic Sarsen Stones, which have cast their spell on many who see them. The stones are often known as 'grey wethers' on account of their resemblance to grazing sheep when seen from a distance, or alternatively as 'druid stones'. Henry of Huntingdon's *History of England*, written c.1130, describes '*stanenges, where stones of wonderful size have been erected after the manner of doorways, so that doorway appears to have been raised upon doorway; and no one can conceive how such great stones have been raised aloft, or why they were built there*' [10]. John Aubrey wrote of the stones in the 17th century '*many of them are mighty great ones, and particularly those in Overton Wood*' [11]. In 1668 Samuel Pepys visited Avebury and Silbury Hill, commenting ... *it was prodigious to see how full*

the downs are of great stones, and all along the valleys stones of considerable bigness most of them growing certainly out of the ground so thick as to cover the ground [12]. The fate of these stones may be traced to writings. Brentnal, writing at the end of the Second World War, noticed that *'the stones are gone for the most part to make the roads of Swindon'*. This was not the only use of the stones - many stones went into the making of early churches and footpaths - one such path of sarsen setts may still be seen between the villages of Alton Priors and Alton Barnes in the Vale of Pewsey.

- 6.17. **Chalk Carvings:** The spirit and mystery of ancient Wessex is perhaps symbolised best by the chalk-carved White Horses, which are redolent with myth and legend. Uffington White Horse, which stands out of the Downs above the Vale of the White Horse is the oldest example (at least 3,000 years old) and may have inspired the subsequent creation of the many other etched chalk figures which now characterise the North Wessex Downs. The Uffington figure is unique, with a long sleek body and beak like head. It is believed by some to represent the mythical dragon slain by St. George – a legend associated with the adjacent rounded hill called 'Dragon Hill'. It has also been attributed to Hengist and Horsa, two fifth century princes, and as a commemoration for King Alfred's defeat of the Danes, but is much older than either of these.
- 6.18. Bill Bryson in the introduction to the book *The English Landscape* (2000) [13] notes that *"what is truly notable about the White Horse is not that people at some time in the ancient past took the trouble to cut it into the hillside- but that continuously for over twenty centuries others have made the effort to maintain it. Whatever religious or ritualistic significance the White Horse may have had for its creators has long since faded away. For most of its existence – through plague and war and famine,..... the White Horse has been preserved simply because people liked it. I think that is splendid."* This tradition is continued today under National Trust ownership with its 'Scouring of the White Horse' event.
- 6.19. The Uffington White Horse is a symbolic landmark, commemorated by many poets and novelists, including G.K. Chesterton in his *Ballad of the White Horse*:
- Before the gods that made the gods
Had seen the sunrise pass
The White Horse of the White Horse Vale
Was cut out of the grass* [14].
- 6.20. **Crop Circles:** More recently the appearance of enigmatic crop circles, most notably in Wiltshire, and frequently associated with ancient monuments, have further contributed to the mystical charm of this landscape.

Artistic Connections

- 6.21. There is relatively little record of paintings from the North Wessex Downs, during the Victorian period. Paintings by Turner and Constable are plentiful from the surrounding area including Oxford, Stonehenge and Salisbury but absent from the Downs. Avebury, however, has long been a source of wonder and inspiration. Paul Nash (1889-1946) discovered the megaliths at Avebury during his stay in Marlborough in 1933. His surreal and imaginative style of painting was inspired by these great stones as objects of mystery in the 'Landscape of the Megaliths' series.

Nash wrote an evocative description of the stones in the book *Picture History* [15] as they were prior to the Keiller reconstruction:

The great stones were then in their wild state, so to speak. Some were half covered by the grass, others stood up in the cornfields were entangled and overgrown in the copses, some were buried under the turf. But they were always wonderful and disquieting, and, as I saw them, I shall always remember them Their colouring and pattern, their patina of golden lichen, all enhanced their strange forms and mystical significance.

- 6.22. Nash's distinctive style of painting also captured the character of other parts of North Wessex Downs including the beech topped knolls in '*Wood on the Downs*' and '*Wittenham Clumps*': Nash drew the beech clumps obsessively and saw them as the repossession of human works by nature.
- 6.23. The landscape of the North Wessex Downs has continued to inspire artists in the 20th century. The painter John Piper (1903-1992) knew and loved the Wiltshire Downs and designed a stained glass window for the Devizes Museum incorporating archaeological motifs from the Marlborough Downs including the stones of West Kennett Avenue, the Devil's Den dolmen, and several round barrows. Contemporary perceptions of the Ridgeway and surrounds have recently been gathered in *The Ridgeway: Europe's Oldest Road* [16]. This collection of paintings by contemporary landscape artists, including Keith Grant and Philip Hughes, illustrate perceptions and features of the present day landscape. Philip Hughes uses free flowing lines to represent the strong landscape patterns in the Downs.

Literary Associations

- 6.24. The author Thomas Hughes (1822-96) was born and brought up in the village of Uffington in the shadow of the Downs. He describes the countryside in that most English of books, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* [17] and in *The Scouring of the White Horse* [18].
- 6.25. It was the Victorian novelist, Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), who is reputed to be responsible for reviving the obsolete Saxon name of Wessex. The rolling chalk landscape south of Wantage (Alfredstone) forms a setting for his last, and probably most profound novel, *Jude the Obscure* [19]. Hardy's descriptions notes the increasing arable nature of the chalk landscape and describe it as 'ugly' and 'dry and 'dusty'. Maps of Hardy's Wessex identify Beacon Hill (Inkpen Beacon) and the Marlbury Downs (Marlborough Downs) as significant landmarks within the North Wessex Downs.
- 6.26. In the second half of the 19th century Kenneth Grahame wrote the *Wind in the Willows* [20]. He was a nature worshipper and sought inspiration from the Berkshire Downs. In his first book, *Pagan Papers* [21] (1898) he describes the Ridgeway and surrounding landscape.

'Join it at Streatley, the point where it crosses the Thames; at once it strikes you out and away from the habitable world in a splendid purposeful manner, running along the highest ridge of the Downs, a broad green ribbon of turf, with but a shade of difference from the neighbouring grass, yet distinct for all that. No villages nor homesteads tempt it aside or modify its course for a yard; . . . Out on that almost trackless expanse of billowy Downs such as track is in some sort humanly companionable; it really seems to lead you by the hand.'

- 6.27. D H Lawrence spent two years, between 1917 and 1919 in Hermitage, north of Newbury, after being moved away from the coast during the war. Of all Lawrence's writing, the story most closely based on Hermitage is '*The Fox*', first published in 1923.
- 6.28. Poets have also been inspired by the North Wessex Downs landscape. The highly regarded poet, Edward Thomas (1878–1917) developed a strong affinity with the area around the Marlborough Downs. Thomas was a great admirer of Richard Jefferies and was commissioned to write his biography, which includes some imaginative descriptions of the landscape of this part of the North Wessex Downs. Thomas's poetry captured the essence of the English countryside and was inspired by nature and the landscape. The Combe aptly describes the scarp edge north of the Marlborough Downs.

*The Combe was ever dark, ancient and dark.
Its mouth stopped with bramble, thorn and briar;
And no one scrambles over the sliding chalk
By beech and yew and perishing juniper
Down the half precipices of its sides, with roots
And rabbit holes for steps [22]*

- 6.29. Charles Hamilton Sorley (1895-1915) was a contemporary of Edward Thomas, and like Thomas was a victim of the Great War. Sorley, attended Marlborough College and wrote a number of poems, collected in his book *Marlborough and Other Poems*, inspired by the varied local landscape of high downs and scarp slopes incised by deep river valleys:

*I who have walked along her downs in dreams,
And known her tenderness and felt her might,
And sometimes by a her meadows and her streams
Have drunk deep-storied secrets of delight [23]*

More recently Michael Baldwin (b. 1930) has described the Uffington White Horse in his poem *Chalk Horse*:

*Men cut their Gods in the hills
The galloping Gods whose hooves
Go flying away in the grass
When the grass moves in the winds [24]*

John Betjeman (1906-1984) lived in Uffington and knew the local landscape well. In the 1950s he opened people's eyes to changes in the landscape as a result of the loss of public rights of way and heritage through his rhyming verse.

*He takes no part in village life beyond
Throwing his refuse in a neighbour's pond
And closing footpaths, not repairing walls
Leaving a cottage till at last it falls.
People protest. A law-suit then begins,
But as he's on the Bench, he always wins. [25]*

Writers and poets have continued to express concern about change in the landscape. *Watership Down* [26] was written in 1972 by Richard Adams and allows the reader to enter into the rabbit world and Watership Down, the area of countryside north of Overton. It provides detailed descriptions of the downland landscape and highlights the damaging impact that development can have on this inspirational landscape.

PART 2:

**THE CHARACTER OF THE
NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB**

7. THE CHARACTER OF THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB

Introduction

- 7.1. The physical, cultural, social and economic influences described in the previous chapters have combined to create the unique and distinctive character of the North Wessex Downs AONB. The area is characterised by a diversity of landscapes and these variations and differences are represented by eight **landscape types**.
- 1: Open Downland
 - 2: Downland with Woodland
 - 3: Wooded Plateau
 - 4: High Chalk Plain
 - 5: Downs Plain and Scarp
 - 6: Vales
 - 7: River Valleys
 - 8: Lowland Mosaic
- 7.2. Each of the generic landscape types has a distinct and relatively homogenous character with similar physical and cultural attributes, including geology, landform, land cover, and historical evolution. The landscape types can be further sub-divided into component **landscape character areas**.
- 7.3. These are discrete geographic areas that possess the common characteristics described for the landscape type. Each character area has a distinct and recognisable local identity.
- 7.4. The landscape classification for the AONB is set out in Table 7.1 (overleaf) and illustrated on Figure 7.1. Figure 7.1 has been prepared on a Geographic Information System (GIS), with mapping undertaken at a scale of 1:25,000 and with a viewing accuracy at 1:50,000. It should however be noted that there are subtle differences between and within the individual landscape types and character areas. The boundaries illustrated, therefore usually indicate transitions rather than marked changes on the ground.

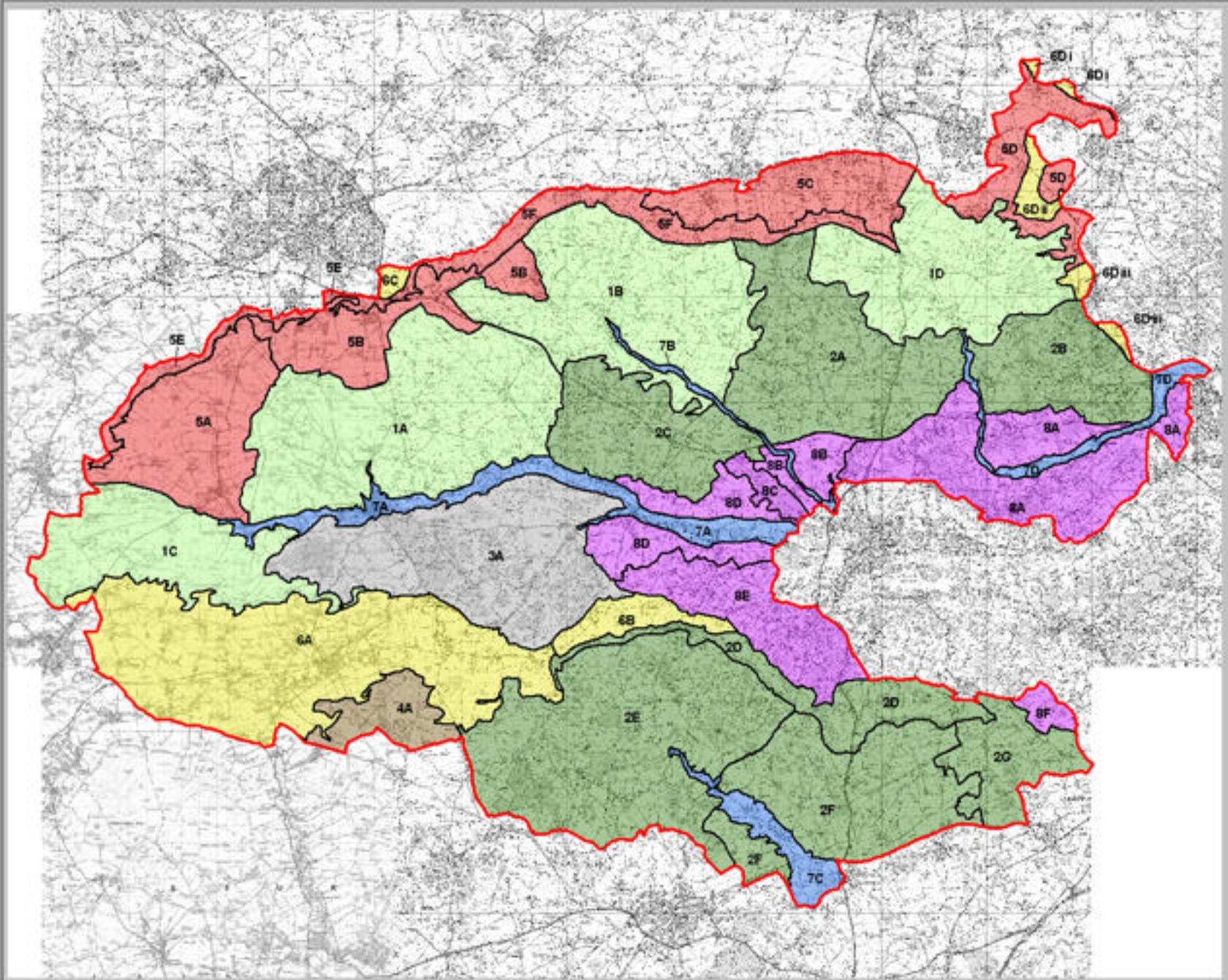
Table 7.1: Landscape Classification

North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Classification	
Landscape Type	Character Area
1. Open Downland	1A Marlborough Downs 1B Lambourn Downs 1C Horton Downs 1D Blewbury Downs
2. Downland with Woodland	2A Brightwalton Downs 2B Ashampstead Downs 2C Lambourn Wooded Downs 2D Walbury Hill -Watership Down Scarp 2E Chute Forest – Faccombe 2F Litchfield Downs 2G Hannington Downs
3. Wooded Plateau	3A Savernake Plateau
4. High Chalk Plain	4A Salisbury Plain
5. Downs Plain and Scarp	5A Avebury Plain 5B Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain 5C Hendred Plain 5D Moreton Plain 5E Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp 5F Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp
6. Vales	6A Vale of Pewsey 6B Shalbourne Vale 6C Wanborough Vale 6D Thames Floodplain
7. River Valleys	7A Kennet Valley 7B Lambourn Valley 7C Bourne Valley 7D Pang Valley
8. Lowland Mosaic	8A Hermitage Wooded Commons 8B Winterbourne Farmland 8C Wickham Wooded Heath 8D Hungerford Farmland 8E Highclere Lowlands and Heath 8F Ewhurst Parklands

Character of the North Wessex Downs

Figure 7.1:
Landscape Classification

- Key
- North Wessex Downs
ACNB Boundary
 - 1. Open Downland**
 - 1A - Marlborough Downs
 - 1B - Lambourn Downs
 - 1C - Horton Downs
 - 1D - Blewbury Downs
 - 2. Downland with Woodland**
 - 2A - Brighthelm Downs
 - 2B - Ashbury Downs
 - 2C - Lambourn Wooded Downs
 - 2D - Yalbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp
 - 2E - Cliffe Forest - Faccombe
 - 2F - Litchfield Downs
 - 2G - Haslington Downs
 - 3. Wooded Plateau**
 - 3A - Savernake Plateau
 - 4. High Chalk Plain**
 - 4A - Salisbury Plain
 - 5. Downs Plain and Scarp**
 - 5A - Avebury Plain
 - 5B - Olden - Yarnborough Plain
 - 5C - Hindred Plain
 - 5D - Moreton Plain
 - 5E - Cylfe Pyland - Badbury Wooded Scarp
 - 5F - Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp
 - 6. Valleys**
 - 6A - Vale of Pewsey
 - 6B - Balbourne Vale
 - 6C - Yarnborough Vale
 - 6Di - Thames Floodplain - Benson
 - 6DiI - Thames Floodplain - Moreton
 - 6DiII - Thames Floodplain - Stratley and Bapton
 - 7. River Valleys**
 - 7A - Kennet Valley
 - 7B - Lambourn Valley
 - 7C - Bourne Valley
 - 7D - Pang Valley
 - 8. Lowland Menial**
 - 8A - Heritage Wooded Commons
 - 8B - Winterbourne Farmland
 - 8C - Wickham Wooded Heath
 - 8D - Hungerford Farmland
 - 8E - Highclere Lowlands and Heath
 - 8F - Exhurst Parkland



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1 Open Downland



1A Marlborough Downs



1B Lambourn Downs



1C Horton Downs



1D Blewbury Downs

2 Downland with Woodland



2A Brightwalton Downs



2B Ashampstead Downs

All photography by Ann Seth

CHARACTER OF THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS

March 2002





2C Lambourn Wooded Downs



2D Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp



2E Chute Forest - Facombe



2F Litchfield Downs

3 Wooded Plateau



2G Hannington Downs



3A Savernake Plateau

All photography by Ann Seth

CHARACTER OF THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS

March 2002

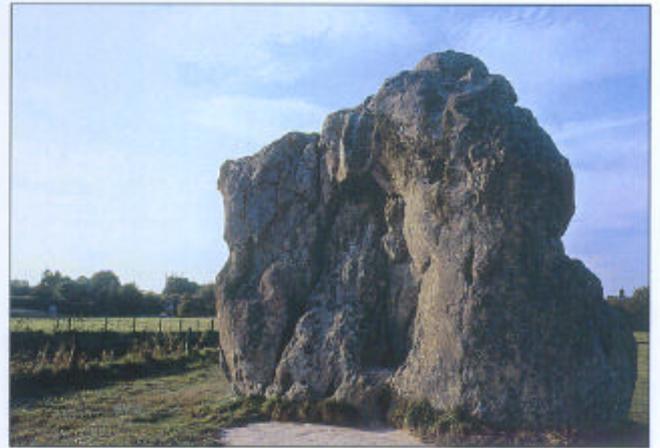


4 High Chalk Plain



4A Salisbury Plain

5 Downs Plain and Scarp



5A Avebury Plain



5B Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain



5C Hendred Plain



5D Moreton Plain



5E Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp

All photography by Ann Seth, except 5B and 5D by LUC

CHARACTER OF THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS

March 2002





5F Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp

6 Vales



6A Vale of Pewsey



6B Shalbourne Vale



6C Wanborough Vale

7 River Valleys



6D Thames Floodplain



7A Kennet Valley

All photography by Ann Seth, except 5F by LUC

CHARACTER OF THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS

March 2002





7B Lambourn Valley



7C Bourne Valley

8 Lowland Mosaic



7D Pang Valley



8A Hermitage Wooded Commons



8B Winterbourne Farmland



8C Wickham Wooded Heath

All photography by Ann Seth

CHARACTER OF THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS

March 2002





8D Hungerford Farmland

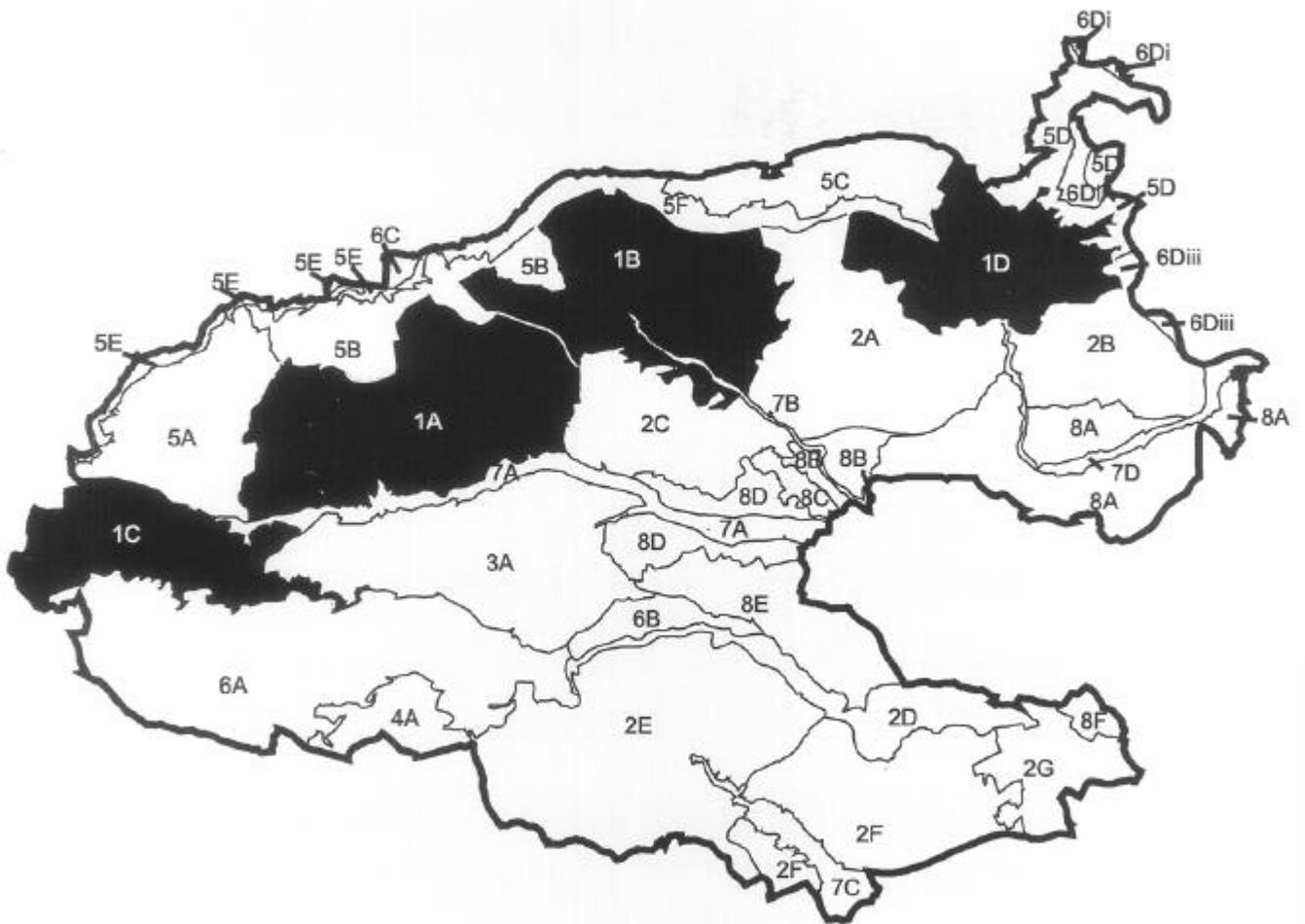


8E Highclere Lowlands and Heath



8F Ewhurst Parkland

Landscape Type I - Open Downland



8. LANDSCAPE TYPE 1: OPEN DOWNLAND

Location and Boundaries

- 8.1. The landscape type encompasses a number of distinct downland blocks from the Marlborough Downs (1A) and Horton Down (1C) in the west running through to the Lambourn Downs (1B) and Blewbury Downs (1D) in the east. Boundaries are mainly defined by topography and the Upper Chalk geology, and in the north relate to the top of the Scarp (landscape type 5). To the south, the edge of the chalk similarly forms a distinct boundary.

Overview

The Open Downlands are the remote heart and core of the North Wessex Downs, with the dramatic landscapes created by the underlying chalk rocks being one of the defining features of the AONB. The subtle curves and undulations of the landform are revealed by the uniform clothing of cropped grass or cereals creating a landscape with a simple and elemental quality, accentuated by vast skies. The open, expansive views are punctuated by distinctive beech clumps crowning the downland summits, forming prominent and highly visible landmarks.

Sparsely populated, the downlands possess a strong sense remoteness and isolation. Predominantly in arable cultivation these are landscapes of great seasonal variation, with muted browns and greys of the chalk and flinty soils in the ploughed autumn fields, giving way to fresh greens of the emerging crops in winter and spring and sweeping yellows and golds of summer. The characteristic close-cropped springy downland turf of the surviving herb-rich chalk grassland provides an important habitat and this landscape type contains the largest areas of designated chalk grassland in the AONB, with 15 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Under sympathetic management, the arable landscape also supports a diversity of wildlife. Rare and colourful arable weeds such as dense flowered fumitory, slender tare and shepherd's needle survive in less intensively managed field margins and farmland birds that include stone curlews, skylark, grey partridge, lapwing and corn bunting populate the vast skies.

The ancient resonance of the Open Downlands emanates from a wealth of archaeology, including dramatic and highly visible prehistoric monuments. Numerous long and round barrows and distinctive sarsen stones create a powerful sense of antiquity. The carved White Horses, etched into the scarp slopes, are highly distinctive features and provide a strong visual link from the past to the present day importance of the Open Downlands for the horse racing industry.

Together, the elevation, open and spacious topography, subtly receding horizons and long views all contribute to the sense of remoteness and solitude. The expansive skies and contrasting patterns of weather, clouds and light create an important temporal dimension to landscape character.

Key Characteristics

- an elevated plateau formed by the hard Middle and Upper Chalks. Soils are predominantly thin light, free draining calcareous and nutrient poor black or brown soils;
- open, smoothly rolling downland, dissected by a network of dry valleys and long sinuous steep scarps. Strong sweeping skylines;
- a landscape largely devoid of water due to the porosity of the chalk bedrock;
- dominated by intensively managed arable farmland with a few hedgerows and occasional wooded areas. Woodlands are virtually absent apart from the occasional linear shelterbelt and distinctive beech clumps crowning the summits;
- varied field patterns including 'ladder' fields and large rectangular fields;
- fragmented and isolated blocks of chalk grassland survive along the steep scarp slopes and dry valley sides and together these form an important component of the chalk grassland resource of the AONB;
- very sparsely populated - generally restricted to scattered farms and equestrian establishments - contributing to strong sense of isolation;
- varied built character including traditional knapped flint and brick, timber framed weather-boarded aisled barns and large scale modern farm buildings;
- recreational opportunities are characterised by the numerous tracks, byways, green lanes and footpaths plus open access associated with archaeological sites and nature reserves;
- closely associated with the race horse industry, with horse gallops being a distinctive feature;
- strong cultural resonance – visible features from many periods of history, but with particularly strong associations with the prehistoric in the form dramatic visible field monuments;
- remote, isolated settlements characterised by low service levels, resulting in a reliance upon access to the private car with consequent impact on traffic. Population levels increasing slightly;
- overall a very strong sense of remoteness and solitude.

Physical Influences

- 8.2. **Geology and Soils:** The Cretaceous Middle and Upper Chalk form the main elevated plateau of the Downs. Rising from the steep northern escarpment, the landform dips gently to the south and east and the underlying Lower Chalk outcrops occur in some areas on the edges of the landscape type. Superficial deposits of Clay-with-Flint overlie the Upper Chalk in a limited number of locations on high points and ridges, although this is not a characteristic feature, as in the Downland with Woodland (landscape type 2). Soils are predominantly thin light, free draining calcareous and nutrient poor black or brown soils, with deeper soils in coombes and dry valleys.
- 8.3. **Landform:** The Open Downland are defined by their elevation, rising to heights of between 200m-300m AOD, with notable gently rounded or flat-topped summits. The characteristic landform comprises a high plateau of open, smoothly rolling downland, dissected with a network of dry valleys and long sinuous steep scarps. It is a landscape largely devoid of water due to the porosity of the chalk bedrock.

Biodiversity

- 8.4. The most ecological significant habitat is the surviving unimproved chalk grassland, which mainly occurs as small fragmented blocks. The dominant habitat is arable farmland. Other habitats, such as woodland and water are virtually absent.
- 8.5. The Open Downland landscape type contains the largest area of designated chalk grassland in the AONB, with some 15 SSSI's covering some 1012.3ha (approximately 5% of the area). The designated chalk grassland is mainly distributed towards the west, although throughout the area chalk grassland survives within small fragmented and isolated blocks on the steep scarp slopes and dry valley sides. This herb-rich turf is a rich ecological resource and supports outstanding populations of downland butterflies including the adonis blue and Duke of Burgundy. Some steep slopes retain tiny patches of woodland (characteristically ash-maple) and regenerating scrub, including distinctive chalkland species such as wayfaring tree, privet, whitebeam, ash and occasionally juniper.
- 8.6. The dominant habitat is open arable farmland with few hedgerows and sparse woodland cover. The farmland is largely managed under intensive systems, although nevertheless may still support a characteristic range of wildlife and in some areas production and biodiversity objectives are being successfully integrated through agri-environment schemes, such as Countryside Stewardship. Rare and colourful arable weeds, such as fumitories, slender tare and shepherd's needle, which are dependent on a regular cropping regime and survive in the less intensively managed field margins. The open downs also supports an important range of farmland birds. Spring-tilled arable crops on stony chalk soils, provide essential breeding sites for stone curlew. Skylark and yellowhammers remain relatively common and widespread, while grey partridges, lapwings, turtle doves and corn buntings can also still be found.

Historic Environment

- 8.7. The Open Downland landscape of today is a product of 5000 years of human activity. Many of these past layers of human settlement and land use have a strong resonance in the landscape. It is in this landscape type; perhaps more than anywhere else in England, where prehistoric settlement and land use can be most easily appreciated. Evidence of the prehistoric survives in the form of dramatic visible field monuments that contribute much to character of the landscape today and creating a very strong sense of antiquity. The principal surviving historic features are summarised below.
- 8.8. **Prehistoric Monuments:** The western part of the landscape type (Marlborough Downs and Horton Down) is a major site of prehistoric activity, focused on the massive Neolithic henge and stone circles at Avebury. There are numerous long and round barrows. The great majority of the latter are in clusters or groups of three or more. These monuments are typically situated on high ground, along the skyline, often on spurs and are meant to be seen from below. By contrast, the character of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age occupation would appear to have been different on the Lambourn Downs, with far less emphasis on long mounds and communal monuments such as henges.
- 8.9. **Field Patterns:** One of the key characteristics of the landscape type today is the extent of enclosure across the downs. This is largely a legacy of the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries when continuing advances were being made in agriculture and farming techniques. The most notable and obvious change was the enclosure of open arable fields and the extension of arable cropping over large areas of former downland. Two types of field pattern seem to have emerged; the first appears to represent the creation of fields by the simple expedient of using existing roads, tracks and paths as their boundaries. This is particularly apparent on the Lambourn and Blewbury Downs. In some cases these 'ladder' fields are associated with tracks leading up to or over the downs - sometimes linking the valley floor to the downland through a series of parallel tracks. The second main field pattern is represented by a formal landscape of large rectangular fields with straight edges (often single species hedgerows). Such fields, particularly prominent on the Marlborough Downs, were carefully planned by professional surveyors and were the culmination of the long gradual piecemeal enclosure, the majority of which was undertaken during the Napoleonic Wars (1793-1815), under the impetus of high corn prices.

- 8.10. **The 'Corn-Sheep Cycle':** Significant agricultural improvements occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At this time corn was the major cash crop on the chalklands - and the whole pattern of farming on the downs was geared to the production of corn crops and the maintenance of the fertility of the thin chalk soils by folding the sheep flocks on them. Yields could only be increased by keeping larger sheep flocks and one of the most important and dramatic advances was made with the invention and rapid spread of artificially watered meadows along the valley bottoms (see landscape type 7) which stimulated early growth providing feed for lambs and ewes.

Settlement and Building Character

- 8.11. The Open Downlands are generally very sparsely populated, containing only scattered isolated farms or small hamlets. Occasionally and notably in the eastern part of the AONB small village settlements shelter in the folds of the downs at valley heads. Equestrian establishments, associated with the racehorse industry are also common within the landscape type. Built form varies considerably and includes traditional knapped flint and brick. Traditional farm buildings including timber framed weather-boarded aisled barns are a feature of the downs, with large-scale modern buildings, for example for grain storage, also prevalent.

Recreation Character

- 8.12. The Open Downland landscape type is characterised by the linear tracks, byways, green lanes and footpaths that cross the landscape, including the Ridgeway National Trail which runs along the northern edge, plus several long distance bridleway routes promoted by the British Horse Society. Together, these provide an extensive network for informal recreation. There are a large number of archaeological sites, which allow open access as well conserving important areas of chalk grassland, and are valuable visitor recreation sites. A number of the chalk grassland nature reserves also provide open access opportunities. Often strategically located along high points on the scarps these sites often provide spectacular views out across the surrounding lower lying landscapes. Much of the arable land is managed through Countryside Stewardship and this may also provide opportunities for permissive access in association with management of field margins, and access to areas of archaeological interest, although its full extent of this access is not known. The open

access legislation of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 provides for open access to downland and may result in recreation opportunities. However, the exclusion of cultivated land means that the impact of this legislation will be limited in the North Wessex Downs, where arable land is the overwhelmingly dominant land use on the downs.

Social and Economic Character

- 8.13. The Open Downlands landscape type is sparsely populated, with the majority of settlements comprising small remote scattered isolated hamlets and single farmsteads with few villages. In general population levels are increasing slightly - an interesting trend given that many of the parishes in the landscape type have poor facilities with heavy reliance on transport to enable access to basic services. Ultimately, this is based around access to the private car to access shops, banking facilities, healthcare and purchase fuel in the nearby market towns of Wantage, Hungerford or Marlborough. Employment is largely focussed in the urban centres outside the AONB, although farming also remains an important source of local employment. High car ownership is leading to some pressures on the rural lane network and urbanising effects in the form of erosion of verges and kerbing. In summary, the impression of an almost 'empty' uninhabited landscape with very little social or economic activity in its own right apart from the racehorse industry, which has a very visible landscape expression in the form of equestrian centres and gallops.

Key Issues

- in the past, intensification of farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** including biodiversity (e.g. chalk grassland/farmland birds), archaeological features and landscape character through the creation of large fields;
- impacts of the intensive agricultural economy on the social character of the AONB - declining employment, fewer larger farms with **pockets of rural deprivation** masked by relative affluence of estates and larger farm units;
- future restructuring within agriculture - which in this landscape type is likely to result in the amalgamation of holdings with large areas being managed as a single block resulting in further **homogenisation of the landscape** plus requirement for large grain storage buildings;
- further **reduction in livestock** (impact of foot and mouth), so that there is no longer the means to maintain existing areas of pasture. Some **marginal areas** are regenerating with scrub;
- **climate change** - potential impacts on chalk grassland habitats and possible future demands for irrigation of arable land - including construction of reservoirs and infrastructure;
- impact of England Rural Development Programme Schemes (ERDP) - woodland planting and **new types of crops**, e.g. energy crops;
- requirements for new **large scale farm buildings** plus a other farm units becoming redundant with potential for conversion;

- future potential demand for **chalk extraction**;
- impact of **tall structures** - communications masts and transmitters plus future renewable energy developments (wind turbines) that will be particularly intrusive on the strong sweeping skylines and could have a major impact on the sense of remoteness.

Key Management Requirements

8.14. The overall management requirement is to conserve the character of the Open Downlands with their special sense of remoteness and isolation. Key features to be conserved and enhanced are:

- surviving chalk grassland habitats, including opportunities for habitat restoration to extend and link isolated and fragmented sites;
- the unique collection of archaeological sites;
- sparse settlement pattern and absence of development;
- the clear ridges and strong skylines.

Character Areas

8.15. The Open Downlands landscape type is divided into four geographic character areas. These comprise.

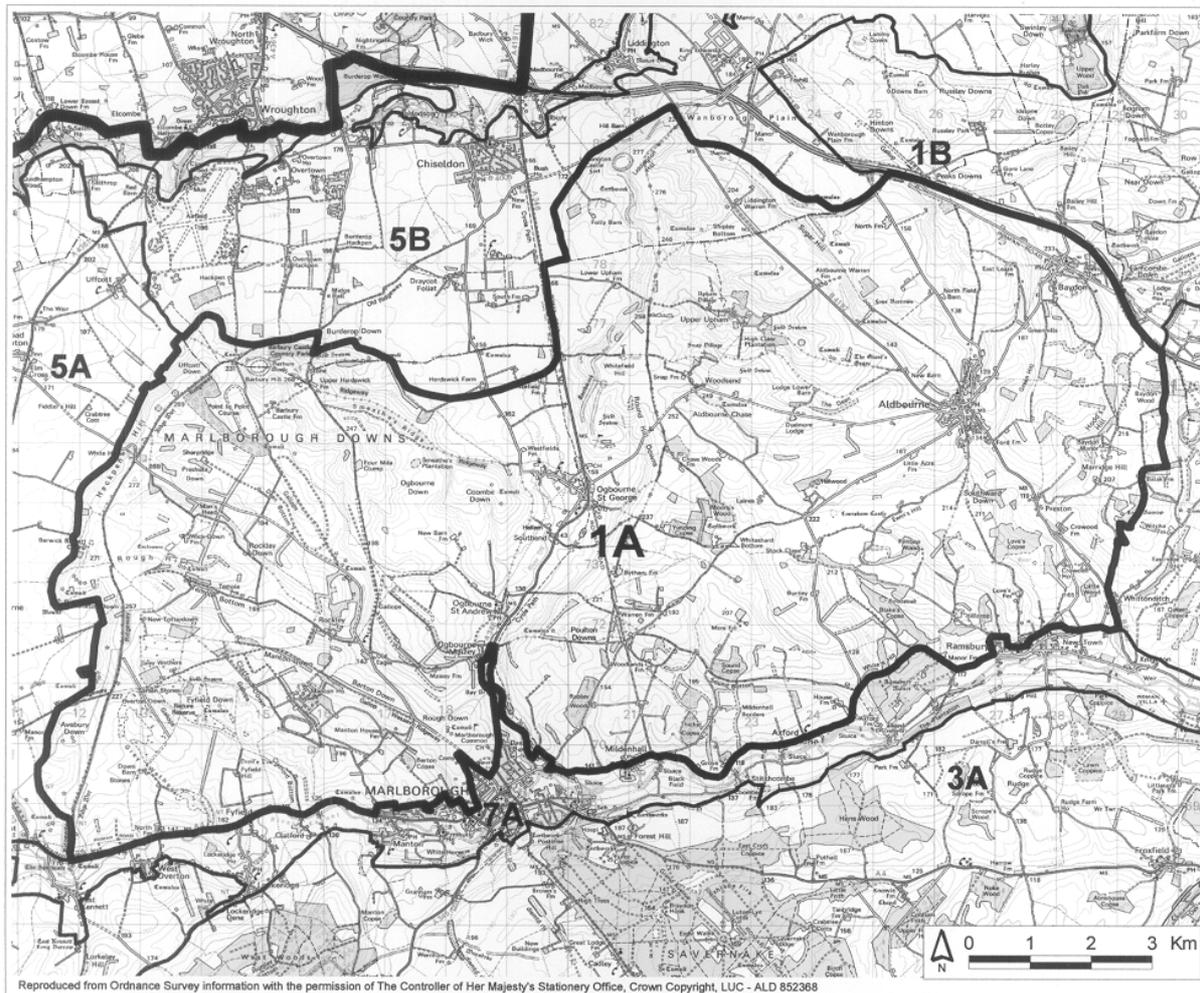
1A: The Marlborough Downs

1B: The Lambourn Downs

1C: Horton Downs

1D: Blewbury Downs

CHARACTER AREA 1A: MARLBOROUGH DOWNS



1. **Location and Boundaries:** The Marlborough Downs are a distinct topographical unit in the north west of the AONB. The boundaries of the character area are defined to the west and north by the base of a prominent, steep chalk scarp at an elevation of approximately 200m. To the south the boundary is formed by the River Kennet (7A) with the boundary running along a contour on the valley side. The eastern edge forms the divide with the Lambourn Downs (1B) and to the south-east a subtle change in geology with the increase in Clay-with-Flint marks a transition to the lower dip slope of Lambourn Wooded Downs (2C).

•

Landscape Character Description

2. The elevated chalk plateau of the Marlborough Downs forms an open expansive landscape of smoothly rolling downland, mostly under arable cultivation. Internally, the landform is topographically complex and includes the dramatic long sinuous scarps of Hackpen and Smeeths Ridge, interlocking gently rounded summits such as Overton Down and Ogbourne Down, with the intersecting valleys of the Og and Aldbourne creating further diversity. Barbury Hill (268m) and other elevated points along the top of the northern escarpment provide distant views across the adjacent lower lying Vale that extends beyond the AONB boundary.
3. Arable farmland dominates throughout, and is an almost exclusive land use on the high land in the north and west of the area, for example around Upper Upham and Ogbourne Down. This results in a very open landscape with long views, revealing the subtle curves and undulations of the underlying landform. The absence of field boundaries and woodland, combined with the elevation, creates a remote character that varies according to the weather from exposed and bleak to dramatic and exhilarating. To the east of the Og valley land cover is more diverse with scattered woodland blocks within arable farmland including ancient oak and ash woods on the slopes dipping down to the River Kennet creating a more enclosed landscape. The valleys of the Og and Aldbourne also have a more intimate character with their attractive settlements and remnant areas of valley floor pasture and hedged fields. Distinctive features include the beech clumps which crown the open summits as well as linear shelterbelt plantations such as at Mans Head.
4. The Marlborough Downs are a landscape with a very strong cultural resonance visibly expressed by the sarsen stones, round barrows and hill forts. Prominent Bronze Age round barrows occur following the lines of ridges and the scarp top and the Iron Age hill forts at Liddington Castle and Barbury Castle are strategically located along the scarp summit. The sarsen stones, scattered across the landscape at Fyfield Down and Overton Down are an outstanding feature. Surviving areas of permanent pasture are concentrated along the scarp slopes to the north and west of the area, with some sections of the scarp slope beginning to be covered by regenerating scrub. Although unimproved pasture is scarce and fragmented, Fyfield Down (SSSI and NNR) on the western edge of the Marlborough Downs is an important intact area and contains a range of grasslands ranging from acidic on Clay-with-Flints through to neutral and chalk grassland. It is also an important geomorphological site and displays the best assemblages of sarsen stones in Britain, supporting a nationally important lichen flora.
5. Several small attractive linear settlements shelter in the valleys of the Marlborough Downs and are an important feature of the character area. The small villages of Ogbourne St. George, Ogbourne St. Andrew and Ogbourne Maizey are located at regular intervals along the Og valley. Aldbourne nestles at the head of the Aldbourne Valley, while Baydon is on a scarp edge in the north-east part of the Downs. The tiny clustered hamlets of Rockley and Upper Upham shelter in dry valleys. Outside the valleys settlement is very sparse and limited to occasional isolated farms, with a concentration of equestrian establishments and gallops on the western part of the downs. Traditional building materials include brick, flint, sarsen and clunch with roofs of thatch or clay tile.

downs. Traditional building materials include brick, flint, sarsen and clunch with roofs of thatch or clay tile.

- 8.21. A network of relatively straight roads connect the settlements, with the A346 running north-south through the area following the course of a Roman Road and the Og Valley linking Swindon and Marlborough. An extensive network of public rights of way including the Ridgeway National Trail and the Chisledon and Marlborough Railway Path cross the area. Within this network of roads and paths, high summits such as Ogbourne Down remain inaccessible and remote.

Key Characteristics

- dominated by the hard rocks of Upper Chalk, with the Middle Chalk in the north west of the forming the escarpment west of Ogbourne St. George. Clay-with-Flint overlies the Upper Chalk on some high summits;
- strongly articulated landform dissected by steep scarps, dry valleys plus valleys of the Og and Aldbourne with the land rising to gently rounded summits. The landform creates a very distinct and dramatic skyline;
- an open expansive landscape dominated by arable farmland and absence of field boundaries allowing extensive views - a more enclosed landscape with woodland occurs to the east;
- notable for the concentration of sarsen stones plus numerous Bronze Age round barrows, many of which survive as highly visible earthworks. Prominent Iron Age hill forts such as Barbury Castle and Liddington Castle are strategically located along the northern scarp and Ridgeway;
- permanent pasture survives in small fragmented sites mainly concentrated along the scarp slopes to the north and west of the area, with some sections beginning to be covered by regenerating scrub;
- Fyfield Down on the western edge of the Marlborough Downs represent a significant intact area of chalk grassland. It is also an important geomorphological site and displays the best assemblages of sarsen stones in Britain, with classic examples of sarsen trains. The rock exposures also support a nationally important lichen flora;
- attractive small village settlements concentrated along the valleys of the Og and Aldbourne - elsewhere settlement is very sparse;
- traditional buildings materials include brick, flint and clunch with walls of thatch or clay tile. A particular feature of the built vernacular is the use of the distinctive blue-grey sarsen stone;
- extensive network of public rights of way, including the Ridgeway National Trail and the Chisledon and Marlborough Railway Path;
- horse gallops and other features associated with the race horse industry are a distinctive feature of the area;
- distinctive beech clumps crown the open summits as well as shelterbelt plantations such as that at Mans Head. To the east scattered woodland blocks occur on slopes that dip down towards the River Kennet.

Physical Influences

- 8.22. Hard rocks of the Middle and Upper Chalk dominate the geology of the Marlborough Downs. The Middle Chalk is found mainly in the north-west of the area and with the Lower Chalk forms the steep escarpment that runs west of Ogbourne St. George. The topography is strongly articulated, dissected by steep scarps along dry valleys and rising to gently rounded summits. The elevated plateau is cut by a number of minor

watercourses, providing further structural diversity, notably the River Og and River Aldbourne, which flow southwards through the area draining into the River Kennet. Clay-with-Flint mantles some of the highest points such as Hackpen Hill and Monkton Down. The clays create a richer loamy reddish soil in contrast to the thin calcareous downland soils. Alluvial deposits line both the dry and river valleys.

Historic Environment

- 8.23. **Sarsen Stones:** An outstanding distinctive feature of the Marlborough Downs is the sarsen stones or grey wethers, existing as blocks of sandstone scattered across the landscape notably in the *Valley of the Stones* on Fyfield Down and on at Overton Down. Some of these rocks have prehistoric cup-mark decorations or grooves made by polishing stone axes. Prehistoric people may have regarded them as mysterious or magical, and during the Late Neolithic many sarsen blocks were removed and incorporated in chambered mounds and stone circles. The stones have been quarried for building material and in this area are a distinctive feature found in gate-posts, boundary stones, milestones, village churches and building cornerstones.
- 8.24. **Early Prehistoric Landscape:** Several Neolithic long mounds are present in the area, and there are standing stones at Down Barn, close to the Avebury monument complex. However, the Marlborough Downs are most notable for their numerous Bronze Age round barrows, many surviving as earthworks although many others have now been ploughed flat. These barrows occur as single monuments but more often as groups, following the lines of ridges and the north-west scarp edge of the Marlborough Downs, where they can be a distinctive visual feature. From the Late Bronze Age, large areas of field systems and associated prehistoric settlements began to appear on the Marlborough Downs. Many of these field systems continued in use throughout the Iron Age and Romano-British periods. Concentrations of these fields and enclosures are present on Winterbourne Down, Wick Down, Overton Down, Burderop Down and Fyfield Down. Some of these features are still visible as earthworks, but others have been ploughed.
- 8.25. **Hillforts:** Many later prehistoric linear earthworks are also known, especially along Whitefield Hill, and close to Barbury Castle and Liddington Castle, both of which are Iron Age hill forts. These hill forts are strategically located at the summit of the scarp and command panoramic views and are frequently visible skyline features. They are located along the Ridgeway, which follows the scarp along the northern edge of the area. The Ridgeway formed a significant routeway throughout prehistory and later periods and, as a National Trail is an important recreational route today.
- 8.26. **Roman Roads:** A dominant feature in the landscape is the present-day A345 and A419 (T). This road follows the line of a Roman road which ran from the settlement of Wanborough, near Swindon, via *Cunetio*, near present day Mildenhall to *Venta* (Winchester). Running approximately north-west to south-east across the area is the line of another Roman road, Ermine Street, which linked *Corinium* (Cirencester) and *Calleva* (Silchester).

- 8.27. **Medieval Settlement and Land Use:** Important examples of medieval archaeology include the deserted medieval settlements at Upham and Snap, and the remains of smaller settlements such as Raddun on Overton Down. There is a medieval manor house at Ogbourne St. George. On Fyfield Down there is a good example of low, long and slightly sinuous undulations on the surface of the ground, known as ridge and furrow, which are the fossilised remains of medieval ploughed fields. Ridge and furrow is relatively rare on chalk downland and here the example is associated with a medieval settlement.
- 8.28. **Post-Medieval and Early Modern Periods:** Many gallops and rides were established over the Marlborough Downs. Many downs have pits from medieval and later quarrying, and there are also the remains of craters from First and Second World War munitions.

Biodiversity

- 8.29. The area to the northwest of the AONB, which comprises the Marlborough Downs, is largely under arable cultivation. However there are nearly 40 grassland sites and 25 woodlands with non-statutory designation in this Character Area. In addition there are 2 sites with statutory designation that are considered to be of national importance; these are Fyfield Down National Nature Reserve (NNR) and Piggledene (SSSI).
- 8.30. Fyfield Down is of particular scientific interest because of its unique combination of geomorphological, biological and archaeological features. The high geomorphological value is due to the site having the finest collection of sarsen stones in Britain. These stones, which are composed of sand particles cemented together to form hard sandstone, are distributed throughout the topographical range of the site. They support a rich lichen flora with many rare and unusual mixtures of lichen species. Many of these lichen species are very rare in southern Britain, and some are found only on this particular type of stone. Fyfield Down also supports a range of grassland communities; the majority of these are neutral, but pockets of both calcareous and acid grass occur throughout the site.

Key Issues

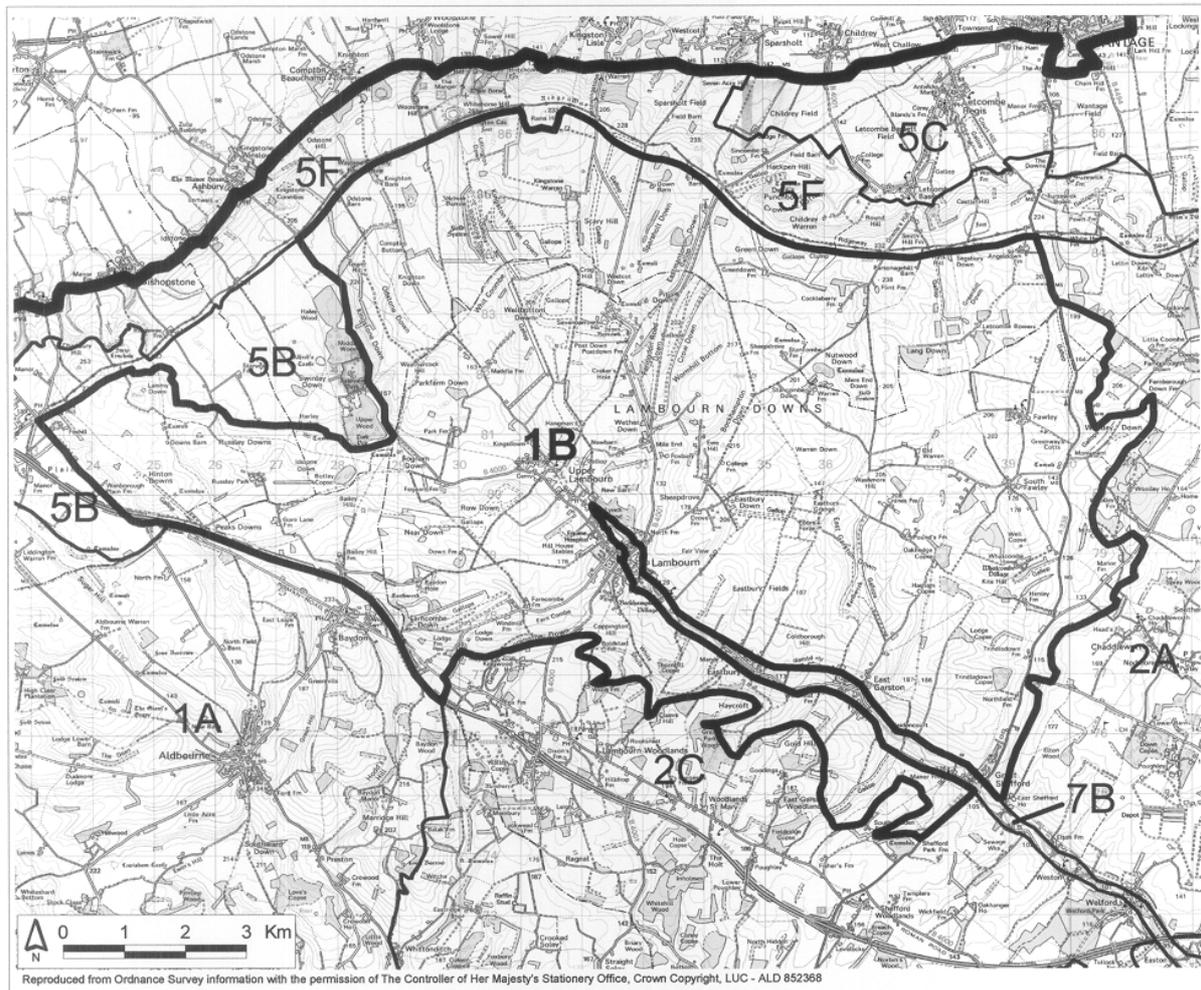
- **loss and fragmentation of chalk grassland** by arable conversion. Current threat of loss, as marginal land comes out of active management particularly in the absence of grazing livestock;
- **loss and damage to archaeological sites**, in the past by ploughing but now by damage from vehicles/trampling;
- **increasing intensification** within this already very large scale landscape with further loss of peripheral features including field boundaries and habitats;
- **inappropriate woodland planting** which would impact on the open, expansive, remote character and views particularly in the western part of the Downs;

- **drainage and cultivation of important floodplain pastures** within the River Og corridor;
- future requirements for visually intrusive **large scale farm buildings**, plus other redundant farm buildings with potential for **conversion** and associated range of issues, e.g. traffic;
- impact of further **tall structures** e.g. communications masts and transmitters plus future renewable energy developments in the form of wind turbines that could have a major effect on the sense of remoteness of the Marlborough Downs;
- future potential demand for **chalk extraction**;
- cumulative impact of **small-scale incremental change**, (e.g. signage, fencing, kerbing of rural lanes) on the remote qualities of the chalk upland landscape.

Key Management Requirements

- 8.31. The overall management requirement is to conserve the character of the Marlborough Downs with their special qualities of remoteness and isolation and tangible sense of history. Key features to be conserved and enhanced are the surviving chalk grassland habitats, views and archaeological sites, notably the sarsen stones, Bronze Age round barrows and scarp top Iron Age hillforts. The sparse settlement pattern and general absence of development should be maintained, including the clear ridges and skylines. There are particular opportunities to consider restoration of the chalk grassland habitats to extend and link existing isolated and fragmented sites.

CHARACTER AREA 1B: LAMBOURN DOWNS



- 1. Location and Boundaries:** The Lambourn Downs occupy a central location in the north of the AONB. The northern edge is defined by the contour that runs along the top of the steep scarp slope (5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp). The west edge is defined roughly by the M4 which forms the divide with the adjacent Marlborough Downs (1A). The south and eastern boundaries follows contours at a height of approximately 175m AOD, marking the change of character to the lower and more wooded downs around Lambourn Wooded Downs (2C) and Brightwalton (2A)

Landscape Character Description

- 8.33. The character of the Lambourn Downs is largely created by the strong structural landform and the spacious rolling topography typical of the Open Downlands. Long views can be gained across a series of subtly receding ridges, which form strong open horizons. Although topographically complex at the local level, the pattern is consistent and repeats across the area creating a landscape of drama and variety.
- 8.34. Large-scale arable farmland is the dominant landcover throughout, and fields are often without physical division, emphasising the scale and structure of the landscape. Where division does exist it is often post and wire fencing which is almost invisible from longer distances and therefore adds little sense of enclosure to the area. Extant hedgerows tend to be single lines of hawthorn with extensive gaps, maintained by intensive flailing. The occasional mature oak and ash trees that occur along boundaries are an important feature. In places the elevation combined with high intervisibility and uniform arable cover, creates an exposed or even bleak character. Woodlands are limited in extent and include thin linear skyline shelterbelts, which are a particular feature in the north west of the area around Kingstone Down and Scary Hill, plus the distinctive hill top beech clumps and small isolated mixed woodland blocks. The only area with a more enclosed wooded character is around the National Trust property at Ashdown Park, where extensive broadleaved woodlands occupy the foot of a steep scarp. The park is also notified as a SSSI for the lichen flora associated with sarsen stones.
- 8.35. The Lambourn Downs have been intensively improved for agriculture, and unimproved pasture is limited to tiny highly fragmented sites, usually on steep slopes. These include a number of small chalk grassland SSSI's in the western part of the Lambourn Downs, for example Croker's Hole which is noteworthy for its thriving population of nationally scarce bastard toadflax, and Seven Barrows which supports a rich chalk flora and a diverse butterfly community. The barrow group at Seven Barrows is a distinctive, albeit subtle landscape feature.
- 8.36. The character area is very sparsely populated. There are two tiny villages at Fawley and South Fawley on the eastern edge. The larger village of Lambourn is located at the head of its valley (7B), although the outer edges of the settlement and the adjacent Upper Lambourn extend into this character area. Elsewhere settlement is limited to occasional isolated farms and race horse establishments. Extensive areas of gallops occur on the downs to the north of the Lambourn Valley and are a distinctive feature of the landscape. Vernacular built form includes flint, red brick and weatherboard and clay tile roofs. Modern large scale farm buildings, associated with arable production including grain stores/silos also feature within the area.
- 8.37. The absence of settlement is reflected in the limited road access. Apart from the two B roads which follow dry valleys and link Lambourn into the Vale landscape to the north of the AONB, the road network is restricted to minor tracks many of which connect farms on the higher downs into the Lambourn Valley. By contrast there is an extensive network of public rights of way through the area.

Key Characteristics

- part of the main chalk plateau of the AONB, underlain by the hard rocks of the Upper and Middle Chalk which dip gently southwards;
- strong structural landform with a series of flat topped or gently rounded hills and ridgelines forming successive horizons, intersected by wide dry valleys;
- arable farming dominates with large scale fields. Extant hedgerows tend to be gappy and poorly maintained, although occasional mature hedgerow trees are a feature;
- unimproved pasture limited to tiny fragmented sites on steep slopes;
- thin linear skyline shelterbelts, hill top beech clumps and small isolated mixed woodland blocks are a distinctive feature of the area;
- sparsely populated with two hamlets and the outer edges of the larger valley settlement of Lambourn/Upper Lambourn. Elsewhere, settlement is limited to occasional isolated farms and racehorse establishments;
- many gallops and rides established over the downs, particularly to the north of Lambourn Valley;
- vernacular built form includes flint, red brick, weatherboard and clay tile roofs. Modern large scale farm buildings are also dominant;
- limited road access with minor tracks connecting farms. By contrast there is an extensive network of public rights of way;
- prominent barrows located on ridges and hilltops, plus lynchets and banks defining large blocks of later prehistoric field systems, trackways and settlements;
- field pattern including parallel and sinuous boundaries from 17th and 18th century informal enclosure, and the more regular, straight edged fields of Parliamentary enclosure;
- strong qualities of remoteness and openness.

Physical Influences

- 8.38. The Lambourn Downs are part of the main chalk plateau of the AONB, underlain by layers of the hard Upper and Middle Chalk which dip gently southwards. They are characterised by a rolling landform, with flat topped or gently rounded hills such as at Green Down and Warren Down and ridgelines forming strong horizons, intersected by convex slopes falling away to form wide dry valleys, as for example at Upper Lambourn. Shallow well-drained calcareous silty soils are found on the slopes and crests, with deeper soils in valley bottoms.

Historic Environment

- 8.39. **Prehistoric Monuments:** Characteristic Bronze Age remains include a few scattered round barrows on ridges and hilltop locations. There is one barrow group at Seven Barrows on the ridge at Postdown. Linear ditch and bank features, which may date to the late Bronze Age or Iron Age, are also visible as earthworks, with examples on Farncombe Down and at Winterdown Bottom.
- 8.40. **Prehistoric Field Systems:** In the Lambourn Downs, the most visible archaeology, particularly from the air, consists of lynchets and banks defining large blocks of later prehistoric field systems, trackways and settlements. Though some may originate in the

late Bronze Age, they became more extensive over time and apparently continued in use through into the Romano-British period, for some are concentrated around known Roman villas. Particularly extensive groups of these features are located at Woolstone Down, Knighton Down and Woolley Down.

- 8.41. **Medieval Deserted Village and Deer Park:** Although the majority of medieval settlement was concentrated along the valley bottoms, settlement did exist on the downland, as evidenced by the deserted medieval hamlet of Whatcombe in the east of the area. The area also contains some small, irregular copses that are the survivors of medieval and post-medieval assarts. Ashdown Park is bordered by a bank and ditch pale, characteristic of a medieval deer park.
- 8.42. **Field Patterns:** Much of the modern landscape consists of open downland. Some of the boundaries here represent 'ladder' fields, characterised by parallel and sinuous boundaries often running for several kilometres over the uplands. These probably result from seventeenth and eighteenth century informal enclosure, between existing tracks and droeways. More regular, straight-edged fields represent post-medieval formal Parliamentary enclosure.
- 8.43. **Gallops and Rides:** Many gallops and rides were established over the downs in the early modern period and these remain a very distinctive feature of the Lambourn Downs landscape.

Biodiversity

- 8.44. The Lambourn Downs Character Area is notable for supporting a number of small-unimproved chalk grasslands. Five of these grassland sites are designated as SSSI's and a further 12 grasslands have been given non-statutory designation. The 5 SSSI sites are Cleeve Hill (SSSI), Seven Barrows (SSSI), Westfield Farm Chalk Bank (SSSI), White Shute (SSSI) and Croker's Hole (SSSI). These chalk grassland sites are important for their high floristic diversity, and the presence of nationally scarce plant species, for example Croker's Hole (SSSI), which supports a thriving population of the rare bastard toadflax (*Thesium humifusum*).
- 8.45. In addition to these grassland sites, the Lambourn Downs contains 2 other nationally important sites, together with 21 sites with non-statutory designation, most of these sites are woodland, such as Baydon Hole and Well Copse.
- 8.46. The 2 SSSI's are Parkfarm Down (SSSI), which is an important locality for sarsen stones and its associated lichen flora, and Fogham Chalk Quarry (SSSI) which is important for geological reasons.

Key Issues

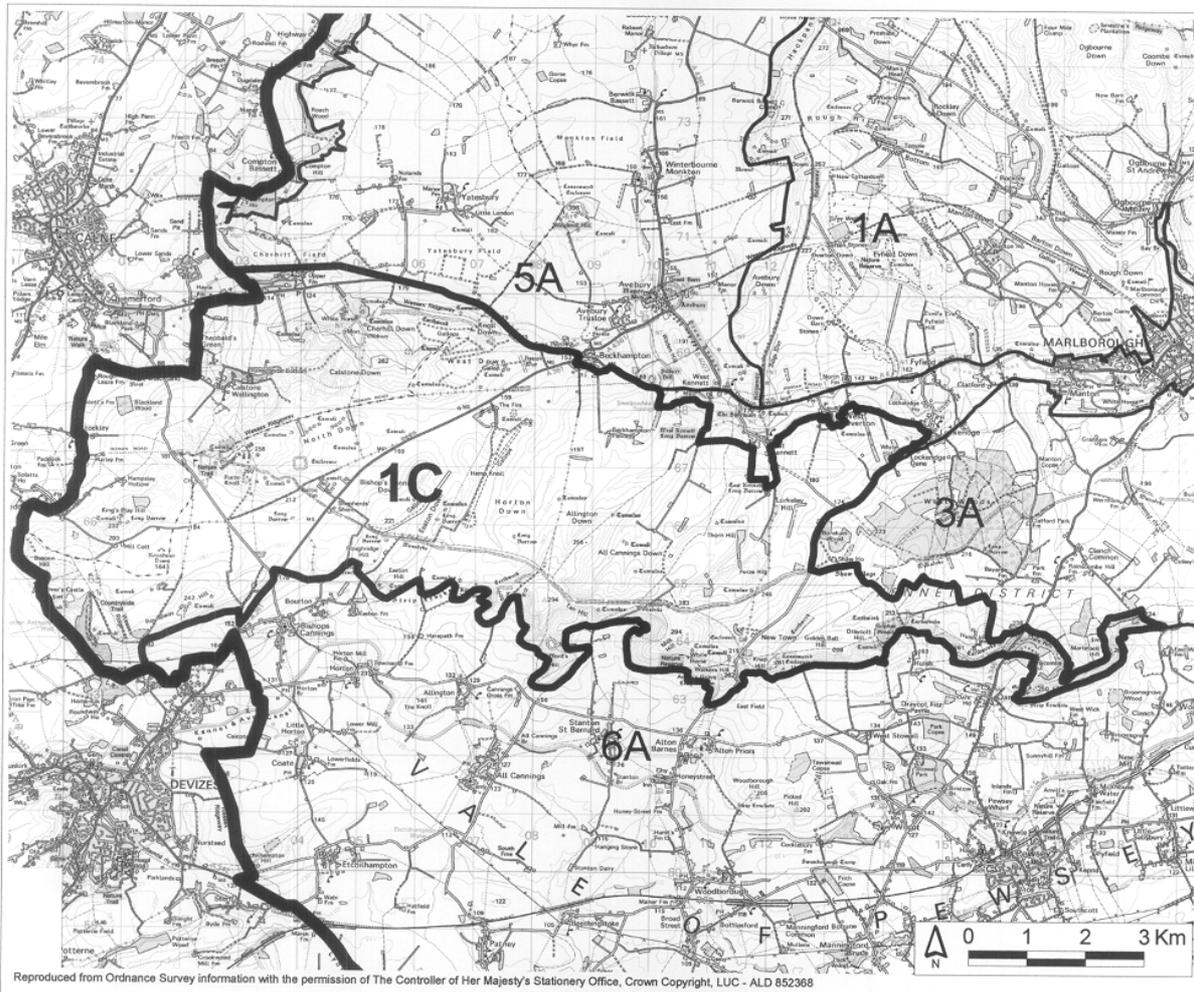
- **loss and fragmentation of chalk grassland** to arable conversion. Only tiny fragmented sites remain many of which are scrubbing over in the absence of grazing;
- increasing **intensification** within this already very large scale landscape including further loss of peripheral features e.g. field boundaries and habitats;

- future requirements for visually intrusive **large scale farm buildings**, plus other redundant farm buildings with potential for **conversion** and associated range of issues, e.g. traffic;
- **damage to archaeological sites**;
- **some inappropriate woodland planting** and **lack of management** of the small woodland copses;
- impact of **tall structures**, e.g. communications masts and transmitters plus future renewable energy developments that could have a major effect on the sense of remoteness of the Lambourn Downs;
- future potential demand for **chalk extraction**;
- **development pressures** including expansion of valley settlements into the higher downland areas;
- cumulative impact of **small-scale incremental change**, (e.g. signage, fencing, kerbing of rural lanes) on the remote qualities of the chalk upland landscape.

Key Management Requirements

- 8.47. The overall management requirement is to conserve the character of the Lambourn Downs with their special qualities of remoteness and openness. Key features to be conserved and enhanced are the surviving chalk grassland habitats, archaeological sites and views. The sparse settlement pattern and general absence of development should be maintained including the clear ridges and skylines. There are particular opportunities to consider restoration of the chalk grassland habitats to extend and link existing isolated and fragmented sites, plus instigating appropriate management of the small isolated woodland copses that characterise this area.

CHARACTER AREA 1C: HORTON DOWNS



8.48. **Location and Boundaries:** The Horton Downs represent the western most extent of the high chalk downland, with the AONB boundary wrapping around the base of the steep slopes at Heddington and Roundway, forming a clear landscape divide with the adjacent low lying Avon Vales (Countryside Agency joint Character Area 117). The same scarp slope also defines the southern boundary where the land drops steeply to the Vale of Pewsey (6A). The line of the A4 road following the foot of the slopes that rises from the Avebury Plain (5A), effectively defines the northern boundary. The eastern boundary is the transition to the more wooded Clay-with-Flint capped landscape of the Savernake Plateau (3A).

- 8.49. Horton Downs is commonly described as part of the wider Marlborough Downs, but has been defined separately in this assessment since it forms a geographically discrete area.

Landscape Character Description

- 8.50. The Horton Downs comprise a relatively simple chalk upland landform of open rolling downland dissected by dry valleys and coombes. It is a large scale landscape of extreme openness with strong ridgelines and wide expansive skies. The southern scarp above the Vale of Pewsey is a dramatic feature with scalloped steep slopes towering above the Plain, crowned by hills with a distinctive rounded profile. The scarp edge hills provide outstanding views out over the Vale, Salisbury Plain and beyond to the more wooded downlands around Chute Forest and into Hampshire. To the west the more highly convoluted indented scarp at Cherhill, with its distinguishing White Horse, is a similarly prominent landform. The sudden and surprising views, such as those obtained from the minor road crossing the downs from Lockeridge, are one of the most distinctive features of the character area offering seclusion within folds in the chalk topography contrasting with panoramic prospects out across the surrounding landscape. On a clear day, views from the summits on the western edge stretch to the Cotswolds, Mendips and the Brecon Beacons.
- 8.51. The landcover comprises an almost uniform arable monoculture, with very few boundary features except occasional roadside fences creating an open, prairie-like landscape with an exposed character. Sparse and infrequent woodland is limited to occasional linear shelterbelts around isolated farm buildings and areas of scrub regenerating along the scarps. The steep scarps retain an important area of herb-rich chalk grassland of exceptional botanical quality. This includes four large SSSI's along the western edge between Calstone and Cherhill Downs and Roundway. The extensive Pewsey Downs SSSI extends along much of the southern scarp and includes neutral and acidic grassland along the Clay-with-Flint capped escarpment top combined with an extremely rich chalk grassland flora. Archaeological sites are coincident with the unploughed areas of chalk grassland and include a concentration of Neolithic long barrows and Bronze Age round barrows, the later being located on hilltops and ridges. The hillforts, strategically located along the scarp summit overlooking the Vale of Pewsey are another prominent feature as are the two chalk cut White Horses. Together these historic features are an important contribution to the character of the area, creating a strong sense of antiquity and to some this represents a magical or mystical landscape.
- 8.52. The absence of development compounds the sense of remoteness and isolation, with buildings confined to a small number of downland farms. There are no larger settlements or villages, apart from the linear settlement at Calstone Wellington at the foot of the western scarp. Within the open horizontal landscape of ridgeline and sky, the radio masts at Morgan's Hill to the west are a prominent vertical feature. The area feels remote and inaccessible with roads tending to pass through the area rather than lead into it. These include the prominent A361 across the downs and the A4, which defines the northern edge of the character area, both of which are visually and audibly

intrusive. There is a large number of rights of way including numerous north-south routes across the downs, a part of the east-west route of the Ridgeway and a path alongside the Wansdyke. The Ridgeway and Wansdyke are both historic features originating on Morgan's Hill on the western edge of the area.

Key Characteristics

- dominated by the hard rocks of the Upper Chalk, but with isolated deposits of Clay-with-Flint capping hills in the east, e.g. at Thorn Hill, Golden Ball Hill and Martinsell Hill, supporting contrasting acidic grassland vegetation;
- open rolling topography, permeated by dry valleys. A dramatic scarp towers above the Vale of Pewsey, crowned by a series of distinctive rounded hills;
- large scale remote landscape of extreme openness with strong ridgelines and wide expansive skies;
- important concentration of Neolithic monuments, including distinctive long mounds, e.g. West Kennet, which are an integral part of the Avebury complex;
- large numbers of round barrows located on hill tops and along ridges, plus prominent hill forts located on scarp edge;
- open landscape with field patterns formed predominantly by Parliamentary enclosure. Managed as a uniform arable monoculture within large scale fields and few boundary features except occasional roadside fences;
- sparse and infrequent woodland limited to occasional linear shelterbelts around isolated farm buildings and areas of scrub regenerating along the scarp;
- extensive areas of exceptionally rich chalk grassland on the steep scarp slopes designated as SSSI;
- very sparsely populated with absence of development and settlement confined to a small number of isolated downland farms;
- extensive network of public rights of way including the Ridgeway and a path along the Wansdyke;
- the White Horse at Cherhill is a distinctive landmark.

Physical Influences

- 8.53. In common with all the Open Downlands, Upper Chalk predominates. The Middle Chalk occurs in the dry valleys that characterise the central part of the area including the shallow open corridor through which the A361 runs. Lower and Middle Chalk also outcrop along the steep scarp above the Vale of Pewsey and along the western edge and scarp top hills such as Roundway Hill. Isolated deposits of Clay-with-Flint cap hills in the east such as Thorn Hill, Golden Ball Hill and Martinsell Hill, marking the transition to the Savernake Plateau. Landform is typical of the upland chalk with and open rolling topography, permeated by dry valleys often hidden within the expansive landform. It has a pronounced southern scarp, forming a distinctive scalloped edge towering above the Vale of Pewsey. The scarp summit is marked by a series of distinctive rounded hills such as Milk Hill (294m), Knap Hill (261m) and Martinsell Hill (289m), which are significant landmarks with panoramic views across the Vale and beyond. To the west the scarp is indented by long steep coombes and has a more complex, convoluted form as for example around Cherhill and Calstone Down.

Historic Environment

- 8.54. **Neolithic Monuments:** The Horton Downs character area is particularly notable for its concentration of Neolithic monuments, including numerous long barrows, of which West Kennet, East Kennet, Giants Grave and Adam's Grave are fine examples. Excavations at the West Kennet palisaded enclosures complex provide rich evidence for Neolithic ritual and funerary practices, while two of the three causewayed enclosures, from the AONB are located on Knap Hill and Rybury, overlooking the Vale of Pewsey. Many of these monuments are part of the whole Avebury complex (character area 5A), and should not be considered in isolation.
- 8.55. **Bronze Age Round Barrows:** The area also includes large numbers of Bronze Age round barrows. Some barrows are isolated, but many occur in small groups on hilltops and along ridges where they are highly visible. Many of these monuments have been ploughed flat and although clearly visible on aerial photographs, they are no longer a recognisable landscape feature.
- 8.56. **Early Field Patterns:** There are many enclosures and field systems surviving in the area and visible as slight earthworks. Some of these may be Late Bronze Age in date, although there are also Iron Age and Romano-British enclosures.
- 8.57. **Hill Forts:** Oldbury, Rybury and Martinsell Hill (and possibly Oliver's Castle) are later prehistoric or Iron Age hill forts that occur within the area. These are characteristically located along the top of the southern scarp slope and command panoramic views out over the Vale of Pewsey. The Ridgeway that crosses the area on a roughly north-south axis was a significant routeway throughout prehistory and later periods.
- 8.58. **Linear Earthworks:** Large linear bank and ditches surviving as earthworks are a particular feature of the area. These are likely to be Late Bronze Age or Iron Age, such as those on Tan Hill and Huish Hill. The most substantial of these linear earthwork features is the Wansdyke. This may be based on a later prehistoric feature, but significant portions of the surviving monument are likely to date to the late Roman or Saxon periods.
- 8.59. **The Roman Period:** The most obvious Romano-British feature is the east-west road from that ran between *Cunetio* (Mildenhall) and *Aquae Sulis* (Bath). On Morgan's Hill the road is associated with a linear group of quarry pits. Many of the enclosures and field systems that survive as earthworks or cropmarks are also likely to be Romano-British in date.
- 8.60. **Saxon and Medieval Settlement and Land Use:** Some of the more sinuous field boundaries between West and East Overton represent Saxon estate boundaries. Medieval remains include the deserted medieval village of Shaw, the moated site at Blackland, and cigar-shaped mounds known as 'pillow-mounds', used as artificial warrens to breed rabbits for meat and fur. The more sinuous, narrow fields are also likely to follow early medieval and medieval boundaries.
- 8.61. **Chalk-cut figures:** One of the most remarkable features of the chalk landscape, the date of which is unknown, are the many chalk figures. There are two dramatic White

Horses on Horton Down, one cut into the scarp edge overlooking the Vale of Pewsey and the other located on the western scarp.

- 8.62. **The Modern Landscape:** Today the Horton Downs is characterised by its very open landscape, created by formal, post-medieval Parliamentary enclosure fields. There are also many gallops and rides established over the downs.

Biodiversity

- 8.63. The Horton Downs are has retained a number of important sites for chalk grassland communities, with 40 grassland sites in the area having non-statutory designation, for example All Cannings Down and Knapp Hill and a further 5 sites with SSSI status.
- 8.64. Important sites for nature conservation are particularly associated with the steep scarps, which have avoided agricultural improvement and exceptional examples of species rich chalk grassland are still present in this Character Area. Pewsey Downs (SSSI) is considered one of the finest examples of chalk downland in southern England. It is a cSAC under the European Habitats and Species Directive and holds a very significant population of the scarce early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*).
- 8.65. The 4 remaining chalk grassland SSSI's are Morgan's Hill (SSSI), and Roundway Down & Covert (SSSI), Calstone and Cherhill Downs (SSSI) and King's Play Hill (SSSI). These unimproved grasslands are important for a number of butterflies such as chalk hill blue, speckled wood and the Duke of Burgundy, as well as many plants such as rockrose (*Helianthemum nummularium*), carline thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*), meadow saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*), pyramidal orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*), and the nationally scarce round headed rampion (*Phyteuma orbiculare*).

Key Issues

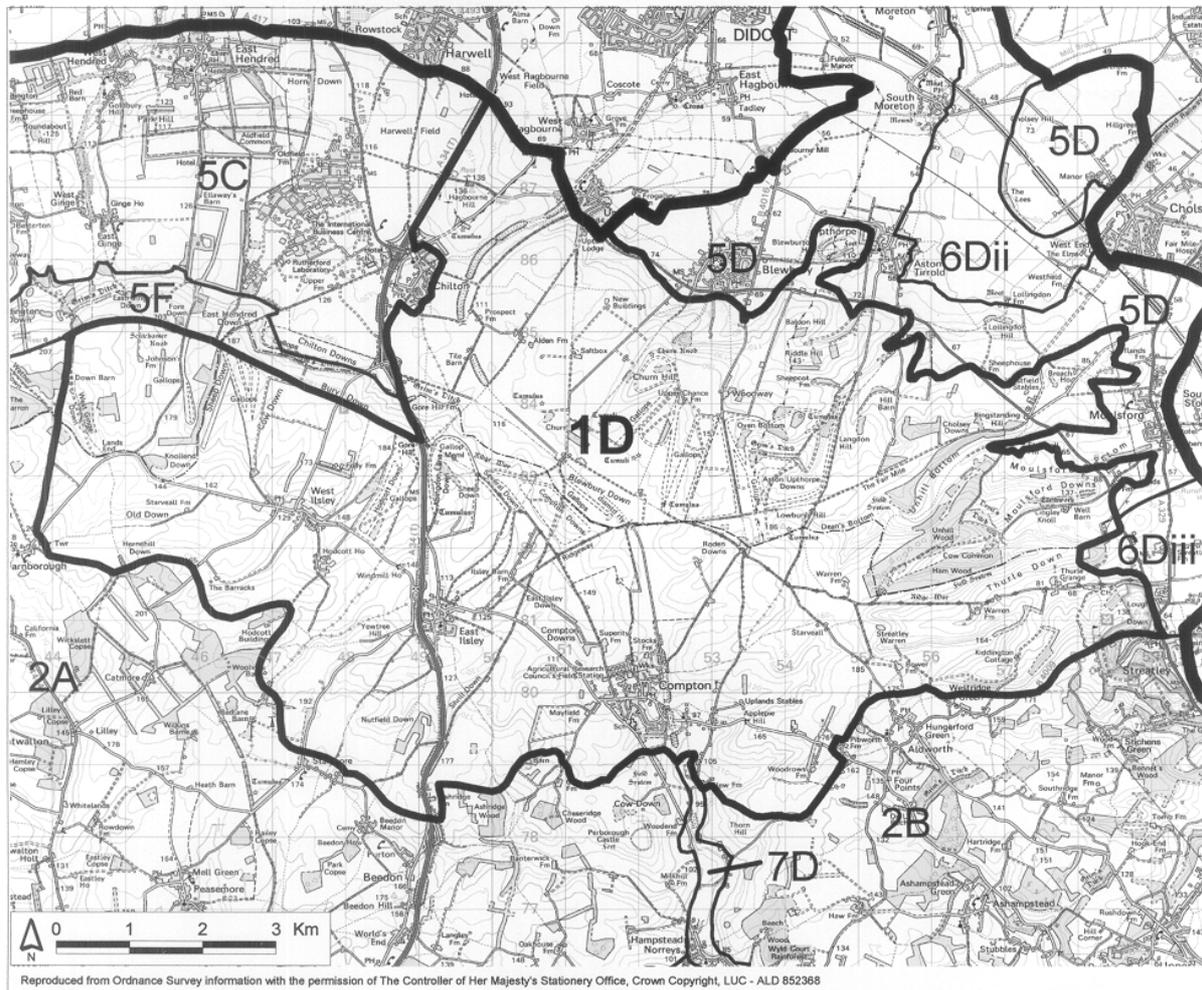
- **loss and fragmentation of chalk grassland** to arable conversion. Further **reduction in livestock** means that there may no longer be the means to maintain existing areas of pasture;
- increasing **intensification** within this already very open landscape including further loss of peripheral features, e.g. field boundaries and habitats;
- future requirements for visually intrusive **large scale farm buildings**, plus other farm buildings becoming redundant with potential for conversion and associated range of issues, e.g. traffic;
- damage to **archaeological sites**;
- **inappropriate woodland planting**;
- the **A361 and the A4** are prominent features - visibly and audibly intrusive and, in places, impact on the sense of isolation;

- visual impact of **radio masts at Morgan's Hill** plus future demand for further masts or wind turbines that could have a major effect on the remoteness of the Horton Downs;
- potential future demand for **chalk extraction**;
- cumulative impact of **small-scale incremental change**, (e.g. signage, fencing, kerbing of rural lanes) on the remote qualities of the chalk upland landscape.

Key Management Requirements

- 8.66. The overall management requirement is to conserve the character of the Horton Downs with their special qualities of remoteness, isolation and openness. Key features to be conserved and enhanced are the surviving chalk grassland habitats, archaeological sites and views. The sparse settlement pattern and general absence of development should be maintained with clear ridges and skylines. There are particular opportunities to consider restoration of the chalk grassland habitats along the western scarp to extend and link existing sites. Where possible, the impact of the A361 and A4 should be managed to minimise visual and audible intrusion; this is a particular requirement in relation to any future road improvement schemes.

CHARACTER AREA 1D: BLEWBURY DOWNS



8.67. **Location and Boundaries:** The Blewbury Downs represent the eastern extent of the high open downland within the AONB. The character area is defined topographically with boundaries roughly following contours at heights of between 160m and 190m, with the eastern edge including the distinct convoluted scarp slope that rises above Blewbury village. To the south, the high downs are surrounded by the downland with woodland landscapes on the dipslope that grade down towards the Kennet Valley (2A: Brightwalton Downs and 2B: Ashampstead Downs). To the north, boundaries are with the lower Plain (5D: Moreton Plain).

Landscape Character Description

- 8.68. The Blewbury Downs have a strong structural landform of rolling downland with gently rounded or flat-topped hills, intersected by dry valleys. A steep, deeply convoluted scarp cut through by dry valleys, forms the northern edge allowing long views out including to the development at Didcot on the AONB boundary. The downs are dominated by arable farmland, with little enclosure, apart from occasional post and wire fences creating a large scale open landscape. In contrast the thin soils on the steep slopes of the escarpment are extremely important for the extent of unimproved flower-rich chalk grassland that they retain, including five sites designated as SSSI, supporting an important range of flora and fauna. In addition to the close grazed chalk grassland, these steep slopes also contain a mosaic of chalk scrub, including juniper and small beech hangers and hazel coppice. Broadleaved woodland occurs in long sinuous blocks along the slopes. Isolated Bronze Age round barrows are highly visible along the scarp edge. Other prominent skyline features include an Iron Age hillfort on Blewburton Hill and a folly on Churn Hill.
- 8.69. The character area is more settled than other areas of Open Downland with three substantial villages at Compton, East Ilsey and West Ilsey, all set within dry valleys cutting the plateau top. Each village has its own associated area of downland and a network of radial routes (lanes) connecting into the higher surrounding land. The race horse industry is prominent in the landscape, with numerous equestrian centres plus a large number of gallops clustered along the northern slopes. Communication routes are a significant feature with the strategic north-south route of the A34 severing the area, and east-west B roads and lanes connecting the villages to the higher downs. A railway line (dismantled) crossing the downs from Didcot is also evident, as are many rights of way, including the Ridgeway National Trail.

Key Characteristics

- underlain by the Middle and Upper Chalk with overlying drift deposits of Clay-with-Flint and a mantling of Boulder Clay to the south;
- characteristic strong structural landform of elevated rolling downland with round or flat-topped hills, intersected by dry valleys;
- a steep, deeply convoluted scarp forms the northern edge allowing long views out including to the development at Didcot on the AONB edge;
- a large scale, open landscape dominated by arable farmland with sparse woodland cover on the tops. Little enclosure apart from the occasional post and wire fences;
- scarp retains important areas of unimproved herb-rich chalk grassland including four SSSIs, plus extensive linear hanging woodlands;
- more settled than other areas of Open Downland with three substantial villages at Compton, East Ilsey and West Ilsey. Absence of settlement on the scarp with large villages set at the base of the slope;
- isolated Bronze Age round barrows in highly visible locations on the scarp edge, plus an Iron Age hillfort on Blewburton Hill and a prominent folly on Churn Hill;
- the race horse industry is prominent with numerous equestrian centres plus a large number of gallops clustered along the northern slopes;

- dominant roads including the A34 and a number of B roads and lanes which connect the villages to the higher downs. A dismantled railway line crosses the downs from Didcot;
- numerous rights of way including the Ridgeway National Trail, following the line of a prehistoric routeway along the scarp top;
- sinuous land boundaries and tracks may date to medieval times but much of the area was probably open grazing and commons until the 18th or 19th centuries when large, regular and straight-sided fields were created as a result of formal Parliamentary enclosure.

Physical Influences

- 8.70. The Blewbury Downs are underlain by Middle and Upper Chalk, with overlying drift deposits of Clay-with-Flint. The chalk geology creates the characteristic strong structural landform of rolling uplands, with round or flat-topped hills, intersected by dry valleys. The plateau is at a slightly lower elevation compared, for example, to the Lambourn or Marlborough Downs, rarely rising above 200m and dipping gently to the south. Shallow well-drained calcareous soils predominate on slopes and crests, with thicker soils in the valley bottoms.

Historic Environment

- 8.71. **Early Landscapes:** The Blewbury Downs are intensively farmed and there are few surviving archaeological sites. The Bronze Age round barrows are restricted to isolated examples on ridgelines and hillsides, with occasional small barrow groups, as on the Compton Downs and Lowbury Hill, and just north of Hodcott Copse. The Ridgeway runs roughly northwest - southeast across the area, forming part of an important routeway throughout prehistory and later periods. A Romano-British temple site has been found on Lowbury Hill, and an enclosure and cemetery of this date on the Roden Downs.
- 8.72. **Medieval Villages:** This downland character area is distinctive for the presence of a number of villages. Some villages were laid out in the medieval period along central streets, as at West Ilsley. Others such as East Ilsley were nucleated. East Ilsley was an important local market in the late medieval period, and by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries three or four day fairs were being held there. During these, graziers bought sheep from the local downlands for fattening up for the London market.
- 8.73. **Field Patterns:** Some of the more sinuous land boundaries and trackways may be late medieval, and trackways such as Halfpenny Catch Lane are probably old droveways. Much of the area was probably open grazing and commons until the eighteenth or nineteenth century. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries large, regular and straight-sided fields were created as a result of formal Parliamentary enclosure. In recent decades some field boundaries have been removed to create very large 'prairie' fields.
- 8.74. **The Modern Landscape:** Rides and gallops were laid out over the downland during the modern period and form a prominent feature of the landscape.

Biodiversity

- 8.75. The steep scarp that forms the northern boundary of the Blewbury Downs supports a number of species-rich chalk grasslands and semi-natural woodlands. There are 21 sites with non-statutory designation, around half of which are woodland and half grassland. Four sites have been designated as SSSI's, all of which support chalk grassland assemblages, notable for their rich plant and butterfly communities. These chalk grassland SSSI's are Lardon chase (SSSI), which represents one of the largest remaining fragments of unimproved chalk grassland on the Berkshire Downs, Aston Upthorpe Downs (SSSI), Moulford Downs (SSSI) and Streatley Warren (SSSI).

Key Issues

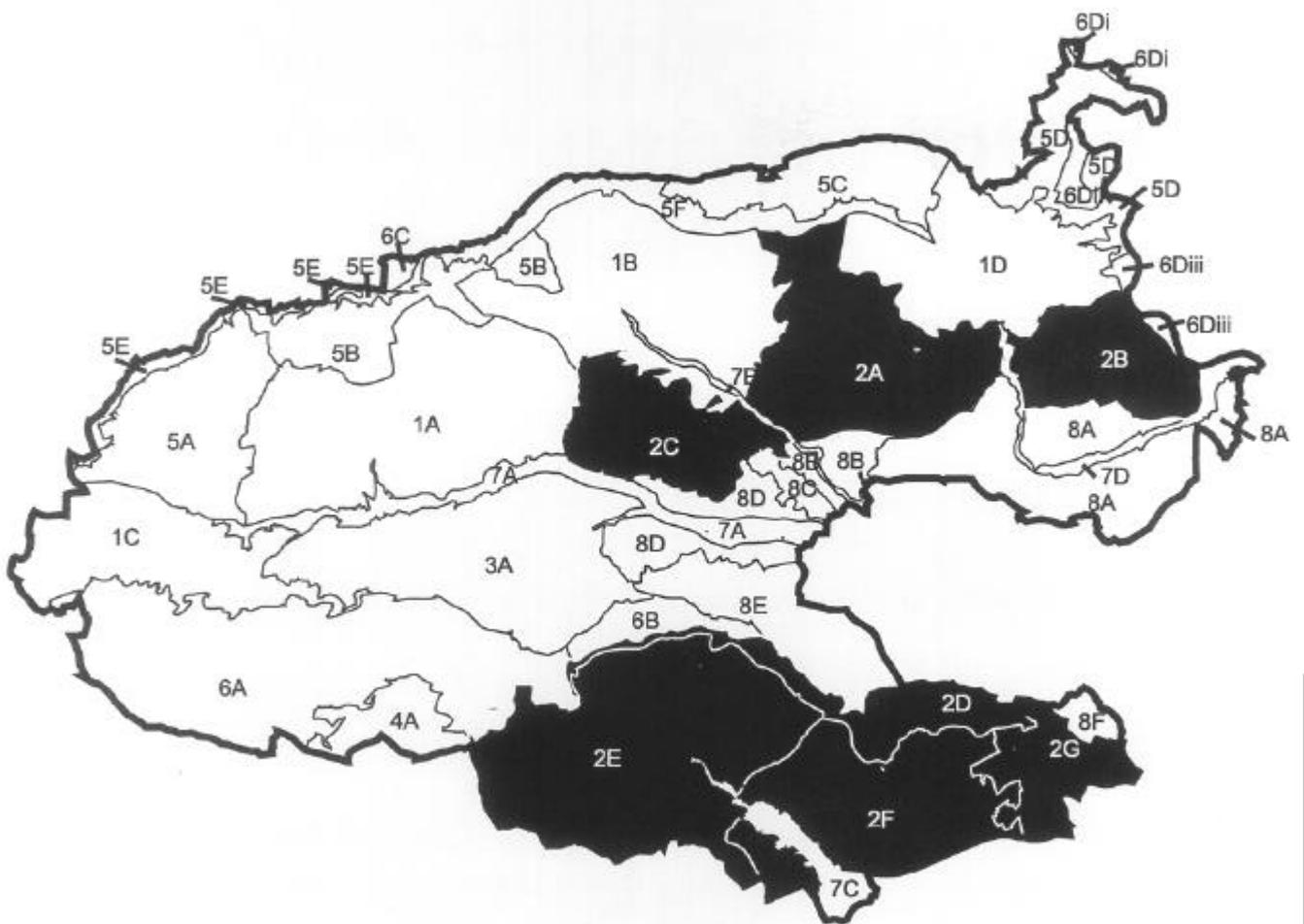
- **loss and fragmentation of chalk grassland** to arable conversion with grassland only remaining on the steep eastern scarp. **Reduction in livestock**, so that there is no longer the means to maintain existing areas of pasture;
- increasing **intensification** within this already very large scale, open landscape including further loss of peripheral features;
- future requirements for new visually intrusive **large scale farm buildings**, plus other redundant farm buildings with potential for conversion and associated range of issues, e.g. traffic;
- **development pressures** within the small villages in the dry valleys;
- damage to **archaeological sites**;
- **management of the characteristic chalk hanger woodlands** of the scarp slope;
- the prominent **A34** and a large number of **B roads** are visibly and audibly intrusive features;
- **high traffic levels** on the rural lane network is a concern - impacting on the rural character of the lanes and raising safety issues;
- future demand for **further masts or wind turbines** that could have a major effect on the sense of remoteness of the Lambourn Downs;
- future potential demand for **chalk extraction**;
- cumulative impact of **small-scale incremental change**, e.g. signage, fencing, kerbing of rural lanes on the remote qualities of the chalk upland landscape.

Key Management Requirements

- 8.76. The overall management requirement is to conserve the character of the Blewbury Downs with their special qualities of remoteness and openness. Key features to be

conserved and enhanced are the surviving chalk grassland habitats, the linear scarp slope hanger woodlands, archaeological sites and views. The sparse settlement pattern, with villages nestling at the heads of dry valleys and at the foot of the scarp should be maintained. There are particular opportunities to consider restoration of the chalk grassland habitats along the western scarp to extend and link existing sites and to instigate appropriate woodland management for the linear 'hanging' woodlands that characterise this area. Management of rural traffic along the narrow rural lanes and minimising the impact of the A34 are also key requirements in this more settled part of the open downlands.

Landscape Type 2 - Downland with Woodland



9. LANDSCAPE TYPE 2: DOWNLAND WITH WOODLAND

Location and Boundaries

- 9.1. The Downland with Woodland landscape type encompasses the downlands found in the east and southern part of the AONB, where extensive deposits of Clay-with-Flint overlie the Chalk. They occur in two main blocks: the first are those north of the River Kennet on the dip slope descending to Kennet Valley; the second block rises as an escarpment south of the Kennet and forms the beginning of the main chalk upland running south and east as part of the Hampshire Downs. Boundaries are mainly defined by geology and relate to the landscape transition where Clay-with-Flint becomes more dominant, marked by an associated increase in woodland cover. To the south, the second block of Downland with Woodland is clearly defined by the base of the distinctive linear escarpment that rises from the intervening clay lowlands.

Overview

This is a landscape defined by contrast; of open rolling downland and enclosed woodland, of light and shade, and of prospect and refuge. The landform is typical of chalk scenery with a strongly rolling topography, rising to gently domed hilltops and dissected by dry valleys. A thick mantling of Clay-with-Flint, differentiates this landscape type from the open chalklands, producing softer contours on the summits and creating heavy moist soils, which have retained their woodland cover. Sinuous woodlands cling to the steep slopes and, with the interconnected hedgerow network, create a strong framework and sense of enclosure in some areas. Ridge top woods are a particular feature, and form dark wooded horizons providing containment to the views. These enclosed areas are juxtaposed with contrasting more open arable and pastoral summits, and those areas where remnant chalk grassland survives on the steep slopes of the dry valleys and scarps. The Bronze Age and Iron Age hill forts, strategically located on high summits are a notable feature of the landscape type and command panoramic views over the surrounding countryside.

Ancient and semi-natural woodlands and hedgerows provide an important ecological resource. Wooded commons and deer parks are a particular feature originating from medieval deer parks enclosed from areas of Royal Forest. A number of these deer parks were refashioned in the eighteenth century and are now important designed landscapes.

Settlements are dispersed throughout this landscape type with numerous isolated farms and small clustered hamlets and villages sheltering in folds in the chalk topography or exposed on the ridge tops. Evidence from the Domesday Survey of 1086 suggests that many of these were created during the early medieval period, typically with a church or manor house, with widespread use of redbrick, flint, weatherboard and clay tile. The settlements are connected by an intricate network of narrow winding lanes, many originating as medieval droveways, sunken into the chalk with a dense overhanging woodland canopy and high grassy banks.

The Downland with Woodland remains a deeply rural landscape, with a strong sense of peacefulness and tranquillity.

Key Characteristics

- elevated chalk upland, distinguished by a thick capping of Clay-with-Flint. The reddish brown clay creates heavier sticky loams in comparison with the light, freely draining, calcareous soils found on the chalk;
- a strongly rolling landform with gently domed hill tops, dry valleys and notable scarp and dip slope topography;
- arable farmland dominates, although enclosure is provided by hedgerows and a mosaic of woodland cover, notably on the clay summits and as sinuous hangers along steep slopes;
- a sheltered landscape with a diverse range of woodlands including shelterbelts, wooded pasture, parkland, copses and ancient and secondary semi-natural woodland;
- remnants of chalk grassland survive, including two of the largest areas of protected chalk grasslands in the AONB;
- characterised by Bronze Age and Iron Age hill forts situated on prominent hill tops forming very visible and distinctive features;
- a wide range of field patterns present - a landscape of assorted fields, large wavy sided fields and fields bounded by tracks and roads, all typical of medieval enclosure, set against a more open landscape dominated by Parliamentary enclosure fields;
- numerous historic parks and designed landscapes, many originating as medieval deer parks;
- small villages nestled in sheltered valleys with widespread scattered farmsteads and hamlets, the latter being typical of a wood pasture landscape. Varied vernacular built form includes redbrick, flint and render, weatherboard, plus roofs of tile and thatch;
- intricate network of rural lanes, including characteristic sunken lanes overhung by deep grassy banks and woodland;
- recreational opportunities characterised by a high density of footpaths, bridleways and byways, which provide access to the attractive villages, woodlands, archaeological sites, and historic houses;
- small, attractive settlements with good accessibility popular with commuters. Poor levels of service provision suggest high car ownership and high traffic levels on the rural lane network;
- a peaceful, tranquil and secluded rural landscape, with sheltered enclosed woodland areas contrasting with more open, remote summits.

Physical Influences

- 9.2. **Geology and Soils:** The underlying geology of the landscape type is similar to that of the Open Downlands, comprising Middle and Upper Chalk. However, the geology is distinguished from the Open Downlands by a thick capping of Quaternary Clay-with-Flint drift deposits. In those character areas that lie to the north of the River Kennet the clay tends to occur in sporadic patches mantling the higher areas of plateau, while to the south of the second escarpment it forms a deeper clay layer sometimes completely

covering the underlying chalk. The reddish brown clay creates heavier sticky loam soils in comparison to the light, freely draining calcareous soils found on the chalk.

- 9.3. **Landform:** The landform is typical of chalk scenery with a strongly rolling landform, gently domed hilltops, dry valleys and notable scarp and dipslope topography which is, in some areas, more highly articulated compared to the expansive landform of the Open Downlands, although with summits often subdued by the clay capping. A very distinctive escarpment, as illustrated at Watership Down, defines the northern edge of the southern block of downland, from which the bed of Upper Chalk dips southwards. The elevated rolling plateau rises to summits of around 260m. Walbury Hill, at 297m, on the southern scarp, is the highest point on the chalk in southern England.

Biodiversity

- 9.4. In ecological terms this landscape type is very similar to the Open Downlands. The main difference is the greater number and size of woodlands present. These are frequently interconnected creating a wooded framework enclosing the mosaic of arable farmland. Remnants of chalk grassland also remain and are an important habitat component within the landscape type. They survive, in particular, on the scarp slopes and include two of the largest areas of protected chalk grasslands in the AONB. Woodland habitats consist of shelter-belts, wood pasture, parkland, copses and ancient semi-natural woodland blocks. A number of the steep slopes of the dry valleys are extensively wooded. There are several designated woodland sites and numerous remnants of ancient semi-natural woodland. The parklands, many of which originated as medieval deer parks, contain an important veteran tree resource.
- 9.5. The arable farmland is similar to that described in the Open Downland landscape type, although the greater degree of enclosure, through hedges and a mosaic of woodland blocks, increases its ecological interest and potential.

Historic Environment

- 9.6. **Landscape Development:** Land overlying a layer of Clay-with-Flint is more difficult to work than the soils of the chalk and the result is a landscape that has retained extensive woodland cover. This landscape can be compared with the mixed deciduous woodland forest that developed by the Neolithic period (c. 4000 BC) containing glades and open spaces exploited by human populations. The principal characteristics of the Downland with Woodland, as compared to the Open Downland, is the wider range of field and woodland patterns plus a denser settlement pattern. The principal surviving historic features are summarised below:
- 9.7. **Hill Forts:** One of the most characteristic aspects of this landscape type is a number of Bronze Age and Iron Age hill forts situated on prominent hilltops.
- 9.8. **Royal Forests:** Much of the landscape type was covered by Royal Forests, for example, Chute Forest and Royal Forests of Freemantle and Pamber. These were not necessarily wooded but consisted of a mosaic of woodland, scrub grassland or heath. These were subject to Special Forest Law.

- 9.9. **Field Patterns:** This is a landscape of assorted fields, large wavy sided fields and fields bounded by tracks and roads, set within a more open landscape dominated by fields created by Parliamentary enclosure. There appears to be a significant correlation in the distribution of areas of woodland today and areas of assart field patterns, which are assumed to reflect the clearance of earlier woodlands.
- 9.10. **Deer Parks, Commons and Historic Parkland:** Wooded commons may in some cases have once been open grazing pasture, but several are documented as being woodland grazing of ancient origin. The landscape type also includes a number of areas of parkland based on medieval deer parks.
- 9.11. **Medieval Settlement:** Settlement is characterised by small, scattered nucleated villages and hamlets and farms. Evidence from the Domesday Survey of 1086 suggests that many of these were new settlement created during the early medieval period, typically with a church and manor house. This was because so much of the fertile soil was already exploited during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and new settlements were created on more marginal lands (e.g. the Royal Forest of Chute). However, research on settlement patterns from this period in the AONB is limited. It is known, however, that a significant number of settlements were depopulated as a result of a change from arable to pasture farming, as was the case of the medieval village of Burghclere (now called Old Burghclere). These 'shrunken' Medieval villages are a characteristic feature of the landscape.

Settlement and Building Character

- 9.12. The landscape type is characterised by a greater frequency and density of settlement, compared to the Open Downland, with hamlets and villages assimilated within the landscape, sheltering in the dry valleys and folds in the chalk upland. These include nucleated and linear villages plus scattered farmsteads and hamlets plus a wide distribution of scattered farms. Vernacular domestic building style is very varied, and includes redbrick, flint and render weatherboard plus roofs of tile and thatch

Recreation Character

- 9.13. The Downland with Woodland contains a high density of footpaths, bridleways and byways providing recreational access into and through the landscape type to the attractive small villages and woodlands. Some of these rights of way have been linked into promoted routes, including the Whitchurch Cycle Trail, the Test Valley Way, the Wayfarers Walk, Walks from Pangbourne Station and two long distance bridleway routes promoted by the British Horse Society. Historical features include access to archaeological sites, such as the hill fort at Beacon Hill or footpaths following sections of Roman Road, plus numerous historic houses and parklands which are important visitor destinations. Other attractions and activities found in this area include a Gliding Club and several National Trust properties, such as at Common Wood/Holies Hanging and Basildon Park, which contain areas of open access.

Social and Economic Character

- 9.14. The Downland with Woodland landscape type contains a larger number of hamlets, small villages and settlements (in comparison with the Open Downland) and correspondingly has a higher population density. Most of the parishes within the landscape type have steadily increased in population over the past 20 years. It is a particularly appealing landscape with many charming small settlements and it is likely that the population increase is due both to the attractive quality of the area as well as its proximity to significant transport routes. There is a network of rural lanes linking the villages and feeding into more major routes that provide access to the larger adjacent urban areas, for example, of Andover, Newbury, Basingstoke and Reading. These are all booming economic centres and have resulted in particularly intensive pressures in this part of the AONB, not least heavily sought after commuter homes. The social consequences include a lack of affordable housing and polarisation in relative levels of affluence. Farming remains a local source of employment and the villages include some small businesses as well as an increasing number of businesses seeking to locate in redundant farm buildings.
- 9.15. Despite this area proving to be a popular place to live, it is very poorly served in terms of facilities. This situation suggests a high proportion of commuters within this area, and indicates high car ownership, and high traffic levels. The visible expression in the landscape includes the use of rural lanes as 'rat runs' plus road improvements including kerbing, signing and visibility splays which, in places, creates a more urban landscape. Villages by comparison are frequently very quiet, without any daytime activity or community focus.

Key Issues

- in the past, intensification in farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** including biodiversity (e.g. chalk grassland/farmland birds) archaeological features and landscape character;
- changes in farming practices - including loss of livestock so that some marginal areas of pasture may no longer be grazed leading to alternative uses, e.g. as **horse paddocks** or neglect/**scrub encroachment**;
- **loss of hedgerow boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows;
- **lack of appropriate management of woodlands** particularly ancient and semi natural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing and areas of wood pasture;
- **climate change** - potential impacts on chalk grassland habitats and requirement for irrigation of arable land - including possible future demand for construction of reservoirs and infrastructure. Impact on woodlands with potential increase in non native species and tree loss (drought/windthrow) on dry chalk soils;

- localised **visual intrusions** notably tall structures including pylons and masts, plus potential future demand for wind turbines, on the downland summits and skylines, which may impact on the secluded rural character;
- **increased traffic on the rural lane network**, plus road improvements including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, in places, creates a more urban landscape;
- intense **development pressures** particularly for new housing - potential effect on the character of the small nucleated hamlets and villages, plus demand for housing stock leading to inflated prices and absence of affordable housing;
- **decline in local services and facilities** with many villages becoming 'empty' commuter villages by day;
- impact of all of the above leading to a **loss of special qualities of tranquillity** and peacefulness within this quiet rural landscape.

Key Management Requirements

- 9.16. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the secluded rural character of the Downland with Woodland landscape type and its special qualities of peacefulness and tranquillity. Key features to be conserved and enhanced are:
- chalk grassland habitats with opportunities for habitat restoration and enhancement;
 - the pattern and character of woodland and hedgerows, through appropriate and sustainable management, including reintroduction of coppicing and hedgerow management and restoration of hedge boundaries;
 - archaeological sites, historic field patterns, historic parkland, and the historic lane network, including the characteristic sunken lanes;
 - the distinct character and pattern of settlement of small hamlets and villages assimilated within the landscape and scattered farms;
 - the downland summits, strong skylines and open panoramic views, which are particularly vulnerable to large scale/tall infrastructure.

Character Areas

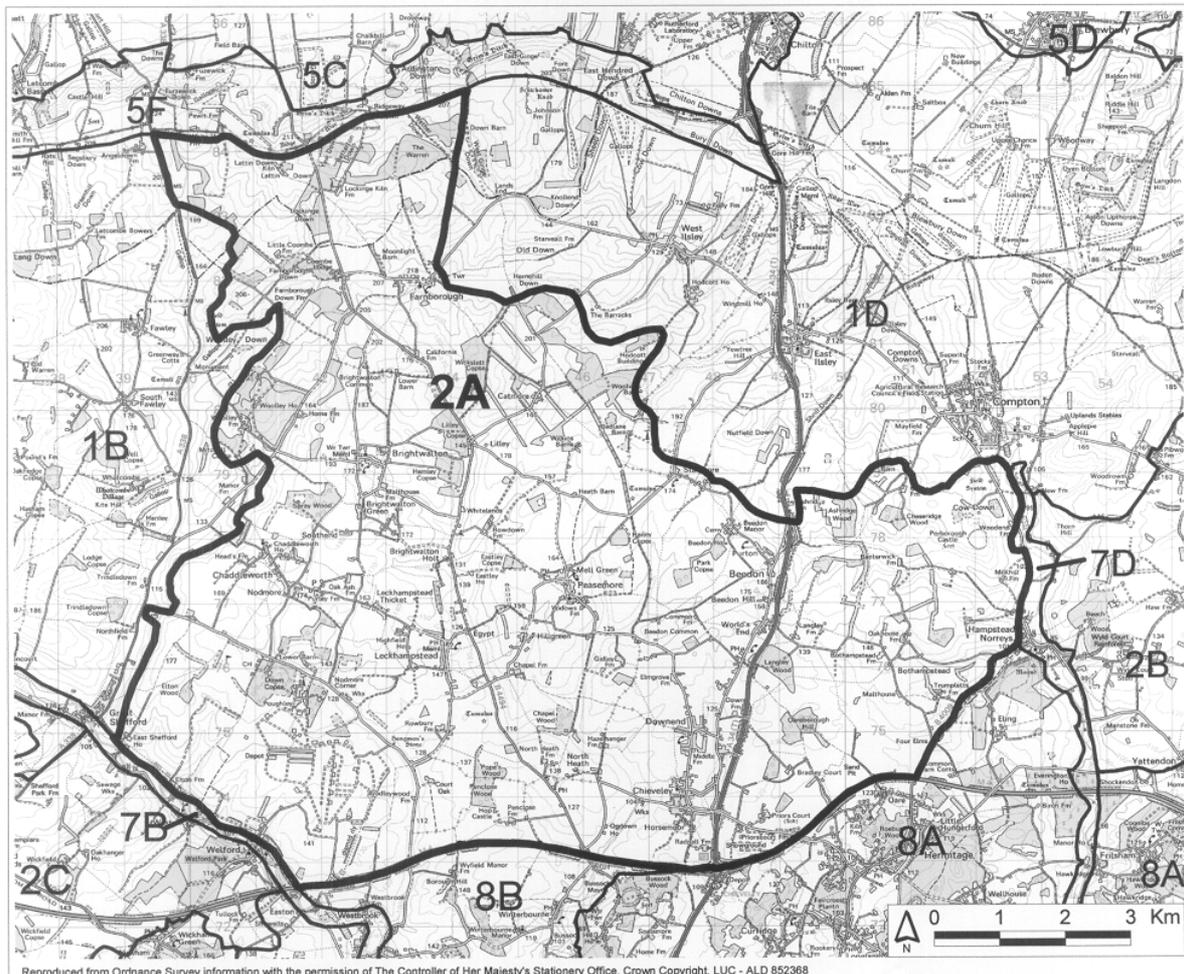
- 9.17. The Downlands with Woodland landscape type is divided into seven geographic character areas. These comprise.
- 2A: Brightwalton Downs
 - 2B: Ashampstead Downs
 - 2C: Lambourn Wooded Downs
 - 2D: Walbury Hill - Watership Downs Scarp

2E: Chute Forest - Faccombe Downs

2F: Litchfield Downs

2G: Hannington Downs

CHARACTER AREA 2A: BRIGHTWALTON DOWNS



1. **Location and Boundaries:** The Brightwalton Downs are a discrete area of downland with woodland occurring on the dipslope, between the more open downland areas of Lambourn Downs (1B) to the west and Blewbury Downs (1D) to the east. The boundaries are broadly defined by the transition in drift geology, at the point where the surface Clay-with-Flint deposits become dominant as a capping on the summits. The southern boundary is effectively formed by the line of the M4, separating this area from the Lowland Mosaic (Landscape Type 8).

Landscape Character Description

- 9.19. The Brightwalton Downs maintain the essential landform pattern and characteristics of the Open Downlands, although on a reduced scale with gentler contours and a more subdued topography. Internally, there are no prominent local landform features, however excellent views can be obtained at the northern edge, from which the escarpment (5F) drops steeply. Views also exist to the east and west of the area. Across the area, the Clay-with-Flint has resulted in heavier clay soils which have retained a high proportion of woodland cover as well as areas of pasture that have not been brought into cultivation. This creates a large scale, undulating mixed farmed landscape of pasture and arable fields, enclosed by hedgerows. Hedgerows frequently contain mature oak and ash hedgerow trees, although the boundaries are often denuded with gaps or intensively flailed. Large ridge top woodland blocks are a feature of the area and form dark wooded horizons providing visual containment. In some parts of the area, where woodland is less prevalent the landscape has a more open arable character, particularly where field boundaries have been removed.
- 9.20. The woods are very diverse and include recent mixed plantations and shelterbelts as well semi-natural woodlands of ancient origin. The latter include formerly coppiced woods of ash, maple and hazel with oak standards. They support many plants typical of old coppiced woodland including spiked star-of-Bethlehem, Solomon's seal and carpets of bluebell. The traditional management of coppice woodlands has been abandoned at many sites, which has resulted in woodlands developing a dense, more enclosed structure. Other distinctive features include the carefully positioned tree clumps, which draw the eye to the higher ground, plus a repetitious pattern of linear shelterbelts, as for example around Catmore. Together, the tree and woodland features combine to create a softer, sheltered character.
- 9.21. The area is well settled with a large number of individual farmsteads, plus a regular distribution of small villages, often surrounded by woodland and set within folds in the landform. They include loosely clustered hamlets/small villages at Chaddleworth, Peasemore, Brightwalton and Farnborough. The linear settlements of Leckhampstead, Downend and Chievely are located on low ridges, rather than in valleys. A number of larger houses and manors can also be found across the wider landscape. Red brick, mixed red and blue brick, clay tile, weatherboard and thatch are the most common vernacular building materials. An extensive network of interconnected rural lanes serves the settlements. These lanes, which are often deeply incised and overhung by grass banks, hedges and mature hedgerow trees contribute to the rich and intimate scale of the landscape. The rural lanes in combination with the numerous rights of way result in a high degree of permeability through the area. Overall, this is a quiet, rural landscape.

Key Characteristics

- chalk dipslope overlain with a capping of Clay-with-Flint creating a more subdued landform pattern. Excellent views can be obtained to the north, east and west;
- large scale, undulating, mixed farmed landscape of pasture and arable fields enclosed by hedgerows with frequent mature oak and ash hedgerow trees and woodlands;
- diverse pattern of woodland cover including recent mixed plantations, summit tree clumps, and shelterbelts as well as semi-natural woodlands of ancient origin on the steeper slopes of the dry valley sides;
- varied field patterns including some sinuous boundaries reflecting medieval or post medieval 'ladder' fields, particularly in Chaddlesworth and Beedon parishes. Generally large regular fields created by Parliamentary enclosure. Extensive boundary loss with very large scale open fields;
- chalk pits and dew ponds are a distinctive feature;
- a settled landscape comprising a large number of individual farmsteads, houses and manors, a regular distribution of small villages in dry valleys and linear settlements on ridges. Vernacular building materials include red brick and clay tile with thatch and weatherboard;
- extensive network of interconnected rural lanes, often deeply incised and overhung by grass banks, hedges and mature hedgerow trees contributing to the richness and intimate scale of the landscape;
- recreational opportunities are characterised by a high density of footpaths, bridleways and byways which provide a high degree of permeability;
- a quiet rural landscape.

Physical Influences

- 9.22. The Brightwalton Downs, underlain by the Upper and Middle Chalk, maintain the essential landform characteristics of the chalk downlands although contours are gentler and the topographical pattern softer and less intricate, compared to Lambourn Downs (1B) to the west. Across the area, a capping of Clay-with-Flint overlies the chalk. The area forms part of the dipslope, and slopes gently towards the lower lying clay pastures and river gravel deposits surrounding the Kennet Valley.

Historic Environment

- 9.23. **Prehistoric Landscape:** The survival of prehistoric archaeology is limited on Brightwalton Downs. There are a very few isolated Bronze Age round barrows on ridgelines and Perborough Castle is an Iron Age hill-fort. There are later prehistoric field systems on Woolley Down and Cow Down. Grim's Ditch, running along the northern edge of the scarp, is a Saxon linear earthwork.
- 9.24. **Medieval Settlement:** At Brightwalton, there is a medieval moated manor and it is likely that routes such as Old Street Lane and Hangman's Stone Lane may be old medieval or post-medieval droveways. Most of the small villages are mentioned in the Domesday Survey and the Dunmore Pond at Brightwalton can be traced back to 937.

- 9.25. **Field Patterns:** The landscape includes wooded copses on valley sides and steeper slopes and some show signs of assarting that may be late medieval or post-medieval in date. There are also some sinuous boundaries running north-south or northeast-southwest that may reflect late medieval or post-medieval 'ladder' fields, the result of informal seventeenth or eighteenth century enclosure, with fields laid out between existing tracks or droveways. Chaddleworth and Beedon parishes, in particular, contain many of these. The defining feature of the modern landscape is the large, regular field pattern resulting from formal eighteenth and nineteenth century Parliamentary enclosure. In some cases, further boundaries have been removed in recent years to create very large 'prairie' fields.

Biodiversity

- 9.26. Brightwalton Downs has retained a relatively high proportion of woodland cover, some of which is of ancient origin and therefore of particular nature conservation value. Particularly notable is Ashridge Wood (SSSI), but there are an additional 40 sites that have been given non-statutory designation, including Bassdown Copse, Langley Wood and Lilley Copse. These non-statutory sites comprise a variety of woodland types, such as small semi-natural copses, shelterbelts and plantation woodlands.
- 9.27. Ashridge wood (SSSI) is an ancient wood and supports many plants that are rare and local in the area. This wood is a good example of dry ash-maple woodland in association with southern calcareous hazel-ash woodland. Standard oaks (*Quercus robur*) occur throughout the site, with other woody species including wych elm (*Ulmus glabra*), cherry (*Prunus* sp) and whitebeam (*Sorbus aria* agg.).

Key Issues

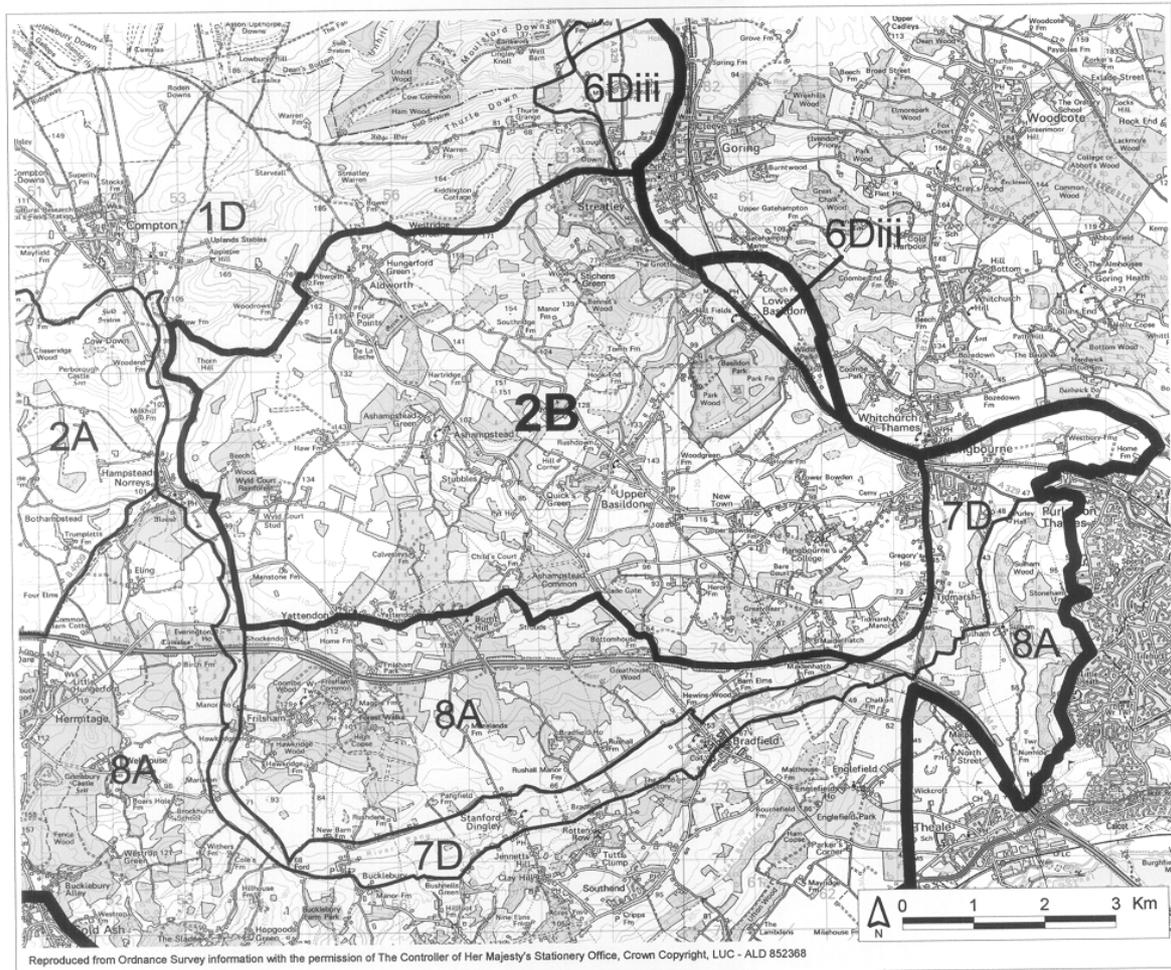
- **intensive arable farming** leading to loss of biodiversity (e.g. chalk grassland/farmland birds) archaeological features and creation of a very large scale landscape structure;
- changes in farming practices - including **loss of livestock** so that some marginal areas of pasture may no longer be grazed leading to alternative uses, e.g. as horse paddocks/training gallops or neglect/scrub encroachment;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows and failure to retain young hedgerow tree saplings;
- lack of **appropriate woodland management** particularly ancient and semi natural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing and areas of wood pasture;
- **incongruous plantings** of shelterbelts in regular linear formations which are visually discordant;
- **localised visual intrusions** plus potential future demand for tall structures, e.g. masts on the open summits which will impact on the secluded rural character;

- **increased traffic** on the narrow rural lane network making them dangerous for walking and riding, plus road improvements including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which are particularly intrusive within the distinctive sunken lanes;
- **development pressures**, particularly for new housing - potential effect of expansion on the character of the small nucleated hamlets and villages;
- **loss of tranquillity**, including impact of air traffic noise.

Key Management Requirements

- 9.28. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, rural character of the Brightwalton Downs. Key features to be conserved and enhanced are the open downland summits and views, archaeological sites and the historic field pattern. The wooded pattern and character of the landscape is a key characteristic and there are opportunities for reintroduction of management (coppicing) to the ancient and semi-natural woodlands, hedgerow restoration, and blending the regular linear shelterbelt planting into the landscape. The pattern of settlements with scattered villages and small hamlets and interconnected network of rural lanes should be maintained.

CHARACTER AREA 2B: ASHAMPSTEAD DOWNS



- 9.29. **Location and Boundaries:** The Ashampstead Downs are located on the eastern edge of the chalk upland of the AONB. The eastern boundary is formed by the River Thames, which cuts through the Goring Gap, separating the North Wessex Downs from the Chilterns. The northern boundary is defined by the top of a ridge at a height of approximately 165m AOD at the transition to the higher more open Blewbury Downs (1D). The Pang Valley (7D), marks the boundary to the west, with the southern boundary being formed by the change in geology and topography to the gravel and clay lowlands of Hermitage Wooded Commons (8A).

Landscape Character Description

- 9.30. The Ashampstead Downs form part of the chalk dipslope - high points in the north reach heights of 170m AOD, with the landform sloping gently to the south. Dissected by deeply incised valleys, the area has strong topographic variation, which in combination with the high amount of woodland creates an intimate, enclosed landscape with restricted views.
- 9.31. The area is characterised by its extensive woodland cover forming a dense mosaic with the arable farmland. Significant portions of the woodlands are ancient and semi-natural in origin and contain a diverse range of species including beech, oak, ash, cherry, and whitebeam. There are, in addition, larger more regular blocks of commercial coniferous plantation, particularly along the southern edge of the dipslope. The generally large blocks of woodland are often inter-connected creating a strong sense of enclosure throughout the area. Sinuous woodlands cling to the steep sides of some of the escarpments, such as at Harley Hill Wood and Rotten Hill Plantation. Pasture is also concentrated on the steeper slopes, particularly along the escarpments or along the dry valley floors and include Holies Down, designated as an SSSI for the quality of its unimproved chalk grassland. Basildon Park, with its pasture and ornamental planting provides a more formal element along the eastern boundary. The principal visible archaeological feature is Grim's Ditch which runs across the northern part the area, with its course marked by a line of mature trees.
- 9.32. The settlement pattern consists of hamlets and small villages of clustered form often focussed around cross roads or a small green. Ashampstead shelters within a dry valley. An intricate network of winding rural lanes cuts through the wooded landscape, often following the lines of the dry valleys. Overall, it is a quiet rural landscape.

Key Characteristics

- chalk rocks overlain by a thick deposit of Clay-with-Flint producing heavy brown clay loamy soils. Better drained calcareous soils supporting arable production occur to the east of the area;
- elevated plateau incised by dry valleys running east-west including the distinctive Ashampstead valley system. At Goring Gap the ridges between the valleys form a series of bold headlands above the Thames Valley;
- extensive interconnected semi natural woodland, much of ancient origin, on the valley sides and steep slopes creating a strong sense of enclosure, plus regular blocks of commercial plantation along the southern part of the dipslope;
- large scale open arable summits;
- pasture, including remnant herb-rich chalk grassland, concentrated along the steeper slopes, particularly along the escarpment or valleys;
- settlement consisting of hamlets and small villages of clustered form, often focussed around a crossroad or small green;
- an intricate winding network of minor roads, rural lanes and tracks, lined by dense hedgerows and woodland edges, often following lines of the dry valleys and contributing to the enclosed visual character;
- prominent archaeological feature of Grim's Ditch, runs across the northern section of the area - visible due to the accompanying line of trees;

- varied field pattern, including both sinuous medieval and post medieval enclosure and regular, straight edged fields resulting from Parliamentary enclosure;
- intimate scale, enclosed views - a quiet, rural landscape.

Physical Influences

- 9.33. The chalk dips gently southwards towards the Kennet Valley and is incised by several dry valleys systems running east- west leaving pronounced escarpments. At the Goring Gap the ridges between these east-facing valleys are truncated creating a series of bold headlands above the Thames Valley. The Ashampstead dry valley system is a particularly distinctive physical feature and runs south west from near Aldworth towards the Pang Valley. Overlain by a thick deposit of Clay-with-Flint, the soils are consequently brown clay loamy soils. Areas of better-drained calcareous soils occur to the east of the area and support arable production.

Historic Environment

- 9.34. **Prehistoric Sites:** There are few surviving prehistoric remains within this area, apart from one Bronze Age round barrow surviving as an earthwork on Folly Hill. Grim's Ditch, probably dating from Roman or early Medieval period, runs across the area in several interrupted sections.
- 9.35. **Field Patterns:** The area is very densely wooded, especially on valley sides and steeper slopes. Many of these woods show evidence for assarting, probably informal seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century intakes. Some field boundaries in the area are quite sinuous or irregular, and these may represent informal late medieval or post-medieval enclosure. Some of these might have been laid out between existing tracks. The regular, straight-edged fields are probably the result of formal eighteenth or nineteenth century Parliamentary enclosure.
- 9.36. **Parkland:** Basildon House and its associated parkland and gardens represents 'polite' landscape features dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

Biodiversity

- 9.37. The Ashampstead Downs Character Area has retained significant woodland cover, and supports nearly 50 woodlands with non-statutory designation, such as Dark Copse and Green Wood. Although these woodlands are not of national importance they do, as a whole, represent a significant biological resource. Situated on the steeper slopes of the escarpment and dry valley floors there is a nationally important grassland site, namely Holies Down (SSSI) which is important for its species-rich chalk grassland communities.

Key Issues

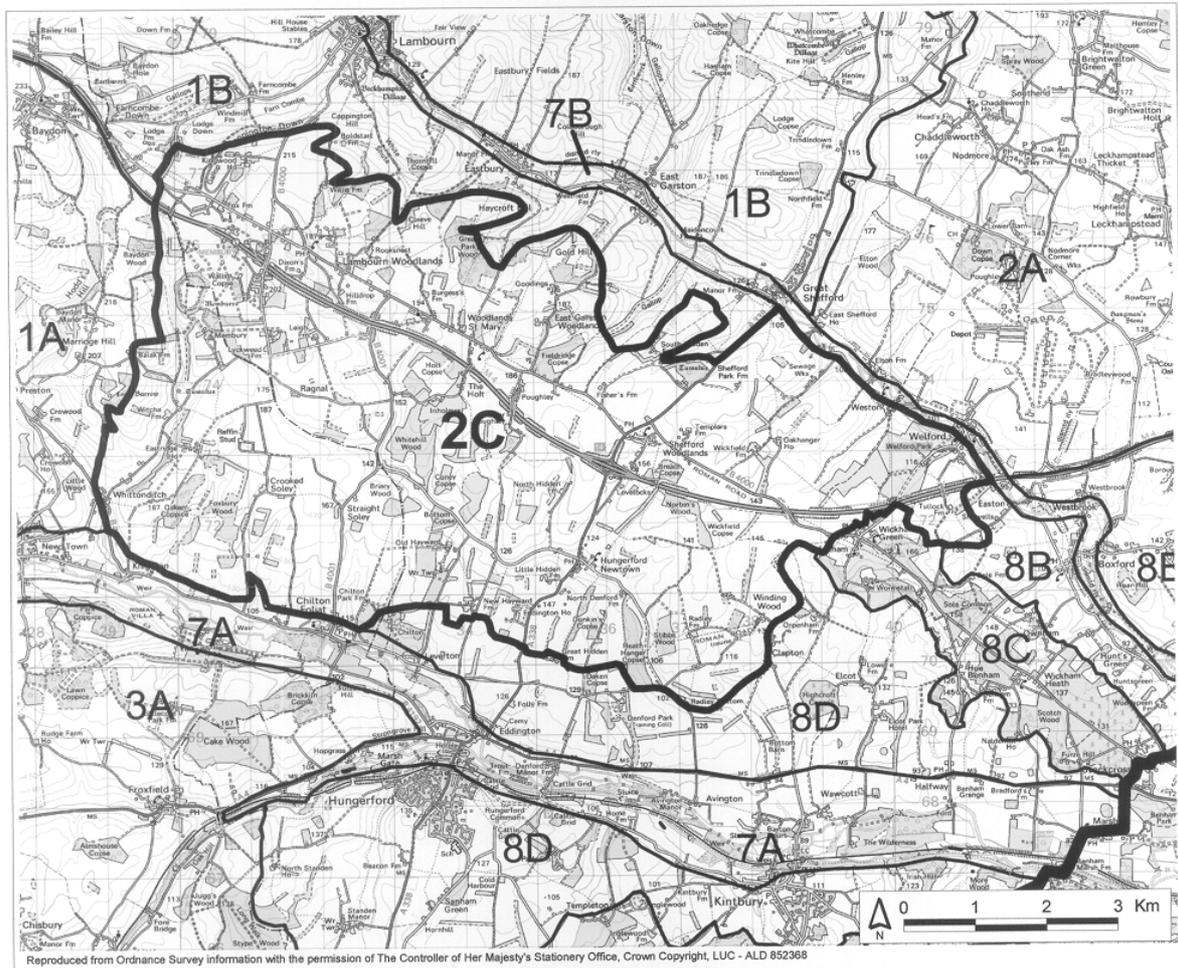
- **intensive arable farming** leading to loss of biodiversity (e.g. chalk grassland/farmland birds) archaeological features and creation of a very large scale landscape structure;

- changes in farming practices - including **loss of livestock** so that some marginal areas of pasture may no longer be grazed leading to alternative uses, e.g. as horse paddocks or neglect/scrub encroachment;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows;
- lack of **appropriate woodland management** particularly ancient and semi natural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing and areas of wood pasture;
- some large scale clear felling of **commercial plantations** and single species forestry blocks that can be visually discordant plus introduction of coniferous shelterbelts;
- **localised visual intrusions** plus potential future demand, e.g. tall structures/masts on the open summits and skylines, which would impact on the secluded rural character;
- **increased traffic** on the narrow rural lane network, plus road improvements including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, are particularly intrusive within the distinctive sunken lanes;
- localised visual and noise impact of the **M4** which form part of the southern boundary of the character area;
- **loss of tranquillity.**

Key Management Requirements

- 9.38. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, rural character of the Ashampstead Downs and the pattern and interplay of the various landscape elements including open arable and grassland and more enclosed woodland dominated areas. Key features to be conserved and enhanced are the open downland summits and views, historic features including archaeological sites, parkland and the historic field pattern. The wooded pattern and character of the landscape is a key characteristic and there are opportunities for reintroduction of management (coppicing) to the ancient and semi-natural woodlands and restoration of hedgerows. There are also opportunities to enhance management of areas of commercial plantations to ensure a better 'landscape fit'. Remnant chalk grassland is a feature along the scarps and dry valleys and should be conserved with opportunities for habitat restoration to link existing isolated sites. The pattern of settlements with scattered villages and small hamlets and interconnected network of rural lanes should be maintained.

CHARACTER AREA 2C: LAMBOURN WOODED DOWNS



- 9.39. **Location and Boundaries:** Lambourn Wooded Downs are centrally located within the AONB, with the high open downland of Lambourn (1B) to the north and Marlborough Downs (1A) to the west. The character area forms part of the gentle dip slope, which falls southwards to the Kennet Valley (7A).

Landscape Character Description

- 9.40. This is a well wooded landscape with the pattern of woodland largely relating to the distribution of Clay-with-Flint deposits, with a particular concentration along ridges and in the western part of the area. The chalk dip slope to the east is characterised by more open arable farmland. The plateau is dissected by a number of dry valleys, including the impressive system that runs from Lambourn Woodlands, through Old and New Hayward Bottom to Hungerford Newtown and beyond. The distinctive ridge top woodlands create strong wooded horizons, and the area includes substantial amount of ancient semi-natural woodland as well as more recent conifer plantations. These are combined with large scale fields to create a woodland/mixed arable and pasture farmland mosaic, with fields bounded by hedgerows and thick shelterbelts. Unimproved grassland is restricted to steep slopes and includes Westfield Farm Chalk Bank and Cleeve Hill SSSIs, both designated for their chalk grassland interest. Local variations in the landscape pattern include the regular rectilinear fields and ridge top woodlands in the area around Woodland St. Mary and a more enclosed area dropping to the Lambourn Valley, where deeply incised lanes run between high grassy banks overhung with oak, hazel and holly.
- 9.41. The settlement pattern is characterised by regularly spaced farmsteads and loose collections of buildings (Woodland St. Mary, Lambourn Woodlands) along the Roman Road (now B4000). A high density of scattered farmsteads and hamlets also occur throughout the area and there are a large number of equestrian centres and stud farms. Redbrick, flint and render, weatherboard, tile and thatch are all common building materials. A dense network of winding lanes, byways, tracks and footpaths connects settlements, often running between banks and hedges, and contributing to the intimate scale of the landscape. The M4, which cuts across the landscape has a major visual and noise impact.

Key Characteristics

- strongly rolling chalk plateau landform incised by dry valleys with Clay-with-Flint deposits capping higher sections of the plateau and softening the landform;
- a mosaic of woodland/mixed arable and pasture farmland. Large scale fields bounded by hedgerows, thick shelterbelts and distinctive ridge top woodlands. Unimproved chalk grassland retained on steep slopes;
- field patterns reflecting both formal and informal post medieval enclosure, plus many valley side woodlands which show signs of informal intakes by assarting;
- high proportion of ancient semi-natural woodlands including ash-hazel coppice, with a rich ground flora;
- a distinct landscape pattern around Woodland St. Mary and Lambourn Woodlands with a regular patterning of rectilinear fields, broad shelterbelts and ridge woodlands;
- isolated individual Bronze Age round barrows on ridgelines and a large prominent Iron Age hillfort at Membury;
- settlement pattern typical of a wood pasture landscape, characterised by a high density of regularly spaced farmsteads, hamlets and loose collections of buildings along the Roman Road, with few villages. Built form includes red brick, flint and render, weatherboard, tile and thatch;
- a large number of equestrian centres, stud farms and increasing number of pony paddocks;

- dense network of winding lanes, byways, tracks and footpaths, often running between high grassy banks and wooded hedges contributing to the intimate scale of the landscape;
- a lush, sheltered enclosed landscape, with a rich texture and pattern created by the variety of tree cover.

Physical Influences

- 9.42. Geologically, this area forms part of the chalk plateau. It is underlain by the Upper and Middle Chalk, creating the characteristic strong rolling landform with the plateau incised by dry valleys. The landscape is however modified by the overlying Clay-with-Flint deposits that cover the higher sections of the plateau. The soils are predominantly clay loamy soils with variable flint content with a smaller area of well-drained calcareous silty soil around Hungerford Newtown following the dry valley system of Old and New Haywood Bottom. The gently undulating landform slopes southwards with the highest point in the north occurring at Membury earthwork at 200m AOD and the lowest point in the south along the character area boundary at 100m AOD.

Historic Environment

- 9.43. **Landscape Development:** There is comparatively little evidence for the early use and management of this area, apart from isolated individual Bronze Age round barrows on ridgelines. The large Iron Age hillfort at Membury is a prominent feature. The Roman road from *Corinum* (Cirencester) to *Calleva* (Silchester) ran across the area. Near Radley Farm there are also some surviving fragments of another possible Roman road, though its original course is unclear.
- 9.44. **Medieval Settlement Pattern:** Settlement mostly consists of scattered hamlets and farms, typical of a wood pasture landscape.
- 9.45. **Field Patterns:** There are many small copses and 'hanger' woods on valley sides, and these show evidence for assarting. Some of the irregular modern field boundaries also represent assarts or intakes into woodland during the later medieval or post-medieval periods. Much of the landscape is still very open, and must have remained open grazing or commons until the post-medieval period. Chilton Foliat parish is characterised by its parallel, sinuous roads and field boundaries running north-south or north east-south west, many following ridgelines or valley bottoms. Many of these boundaries represent 'ladder' fields running for several kilometres over the uplands. Although some may reflect medieval boundaries, most probably result from informal post-medieval enclosure, sometimes in between existing tracks and droveways. More regular, straight-edged fields represent eighteenth and nineteenth century formal, Parliamentary enclosure.
- 9.46. **The Modern Landscape - parkland and gallops:** Kingswood House with its stables and gallops represents more 'polite' post-medieval or early modern landscape features.

Biodiversity

- 9.47. The Lambourn Wooded Downs support a significant number of woodlands, with a total of 47 woodland sites with non-statutory designation, including Balaam's Wood, Coldridge Copse and Whitehill Wood.
- 9.48. In addition to these characteristic woodland sites, the area support part of a nationally important chalk grassland site known as the Westfield Farm Chalk Bank (SSSI).

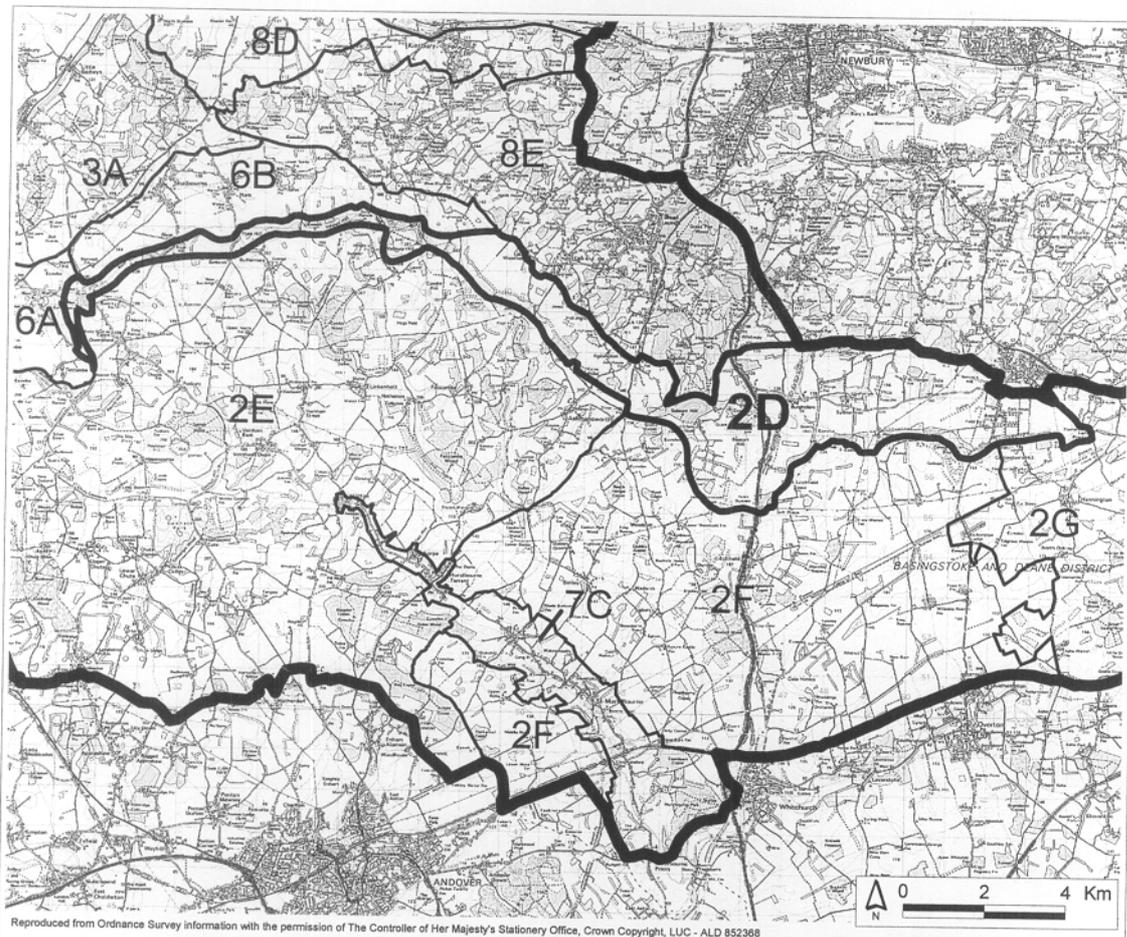
Key Issues

- intensive arable farming leading to **loss of biodiversity** (e.g. chalk grassland/farmland birds) **damage to archaeological features** and creation of a very **large scale landscape structure**;
- changes in farming practices - including **loss of livestock** so that some marginal areas of pasture may no longer be grazed with scrub encroachment or put to alternative uses e.g. horse paddocks;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows;
- lack of **appropriate woodland management** particularly ancient and semi natural woodlands, formerly managed by coppicing, and areas of wood pasture;
- some large scale clear felling of **commercial plantations** and single species forestry blocks that can be visually discordant, plus introduction of coniferous shelterbelts;
- **localised visual intrusions** - potential future demand e.g. for wind turbines, on the open downland summits and skylines, would impact on the secluded rural character;
- **increased traffic** on the narrow rural lane network and road improvements including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays. These are especially intrusive within the distinctive sunken lanes;
- **visual and aural intrusion** of the M4, which cuts across the area, plus severance effect;
- **development pressures** for new housing - and infill of the loose scattered settlement pattern along roads;
- visual impact associated with an **increase in equestrian-based land uses**, including pony paddocks;
- **loss of tranquillity**.

Key Management Requirements

9.49. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet rural character of the Lambourn Wooded Downs. Key features to be conserved and enhanced are the open downland summits and views contrasting with the strong wooded horizons, historic features including archaeological sites, the historic field pattern and road and lane network. The wooded pattern and character of the landscape is a key characteristic and there are opportunities for reintroduction of management (coppicing) to the ancient and semi-natural woodlands, sympathetic management of commercial forestry plantations and restoration of hedgerows. Remnant chalk grassland is a feature along steep slopes and should be conserved with opportunities for habitat restoration to link existing isolated sites. The distinctive pattern of settlements with dispersed farmsteads, hamlets and loose collections of buildings should be maintained.

CHARACTER AREA 2D: WALBURY HILL – WATERSHIP DOWNS SCARP



9.50. **Location and Boundaries:** Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp is a very distinct linear character area formed by the scarp slope, which marks the beginning of the southern chalk upland block of the North Wessex Downs. It extends from Marten and Botley Down in the west for some 25 km through to Kingsclere in the east. For its whole length the northern boundary is formed by the base of the scarp slope, marking the transition to the foothills and lowlands of Shalbourne Vale (6B) and the Highclere Lowlands and Heath (8E). To the east, near Kingsclere the boundary is coincident with the AONB boundary. The southern boundary generally follows contours at the top of the north facing scarp slope (generally around 250m) at the point where the land begins to fall more gently as the dip slope to the south.

Landscape Character Description

- 9.51. The character area is formed by the steep scarp, which marks the edge of the southern block of chalk upland within the AONB, extending as a clear linear east-west feature for some 25 km. The dramatic landform is sometimes highly convoluted by dry valleys and coombes and elsewhere presents a smooth sheer face rising abruptly by more than 100m. High rounded summits along the scarp top, such as Walbury Hill and Beacon Hill provide outstanding views across the adjacent low lying landscapes and into the wooded dipslope. Highly visible archaeological features, including the long barrow at Combe Gibbet and the Iron Age hillforts that crown the summits along the scarp, are defining features of the character area. Land cover is mainly pastoral on the steep slopes, with some arable on the shallower fringes intermixed with extensive blocks of semi-natural broadleaved woodland. Woodland cover is diverse including beech hangers and coombe woodlands, for example on the lower slopes at Watership Down, plus blocks of oak woodland and substantial areas of scrub regeneration. The area is extremely rich in chalk grassland, which survives in abundance on the steep slopes, and includes some seven SSSI, as for example at Walbury Hill, Burghclere Beacon, and West Woodhay Downs - with further small tracts of unimproved grassland along the whole of the scarp face.
- 9.52. The steepness of the topography is reflected in a virtual absence of settlement, apart from very occasional isolated farm buildings. Unlike other escarpment character areas the spring line occurs 1km – 2km away from the main scarp slope to the north. Access is limited but includes the scarp top lane (Wayfarers Walk), from where there are spectacular views out. A small number of narrow lanes climb the escarpment, as for example at West Woodhay Down. Sunk deeply into the landform, with steep earth banks and overhung by a tunnel of woodland; travelling through these lanes is a memorable experience. A more discordant feature is the line of pylons, which ascends the slopes to the west of Watership Down.
- 9.53. A sub-area of distinct character is created by the apron of sandstone forming the undulating foothills of the scarp west of Kingsclere. This area is characterised by its arable farmland, ornamental parkland at Sydmonton and an area of horse gallops creating a more managed landscape. This area also contains the only settlements, at Sydmonton and Old Burgclere. The micro-geography of this area (Nuthanger Farm) and the adjacent scarp provides the setting for the epic journey described in the novel Watership Down.

Key Characteristics

- a distinct escarpment formed by the Middle Chalk with a narrow belt of sand and sandstone protruding as undulating foothills in front of the scarp in the east between Kingsclere and Burghclere;
- dramatic steep scarp - a prominent and highly visible feature signalling the beginning of the southern block of chalk upland;
- landcover is mainly pastoral on the steep slopes, with some arable on the shallower slopes intermixed with extensive blocks of semi-natural broadleaved woodland.

- diverse woodland cover including beech hangers and coombe woodlands plus blocks of oak woodland and substantial areas of scrub regeneration;
- rich in chalk grassland, which survives in abundance on the steep slopes (6 SSSI's);
- highly visible archaeological remains, including the Neolithic long barrow of Combe Gibbet and Iron Age hillforts and earthworks along the top of the scarp at Beacon Hill, Ladle Hill and Walbury Hill, are a defining feature of the area;
- settlement is virtually absent with the exception of Old Burghclere, Sydmonton and occasional isolated farm buildings;
- narrow lanes climb the slopes, sunk deeply into the landform with steep earth banks and overhung by woodland;
- access across the area is limited but includes the scarp top Wayfarers Walk and the archaeological sites from which spectacular views may be gained;
- a distinct sub-area is created by the apron of sandstone which forms the foothills west of Kingsclere which is characterised by its arable farmland, ornamental parkland at Sydmonton and horse gallops;
- overall a quiet, rural character, but with dramatic and far reaching views from the elevated scarp top summits.

Physical Influences

- 9.54. The hard Middle Chalk, creates a dramatic scarp slope, forming an impressive backdrop to the low lying land to the north. Unlike the escarpment that defines the northern edge of the AONB, it is not linked to a level Plain of Lower Chalk. However, in the east between Kingsclere and Burghclere a narrow belt of sand and sandstone is exposed creating a strongly undulating landform protruding as the foothills of the scarp. The scarp is cut by numerous dry valleys and coombes, for example as at Watership Down creating in places a highly convoluted landform, whereas in other areas it presents a sheer cliff face, as for example at Inkpen Hill. Along the top of the scarp are numerous high rounded summits, such as Beacon Hill, which offer long views. Walbury Hill, at 297m, is the highest point in the AONB.

Historic Environment

- 9.55. **Prehistoric Earthworks:** The Neolithic long barrow of Combe Gibbet on Inkpen Hill is a significant monument. Bronze Age remains in the landscape include lynchets and linear earthworks such as those on Ladle Hill. Remnant field systems (soilmarks and lynchets) are preserved on the southern slopes of Beacon Hill, and at Ladle Hill.
- 9.56. **Iron Age hill forts** located along the top of the scarp at Walbury Hill, Beacon Hill and Ladle Hill are highly visible and one of the defining features of the area.
- 9.57. **Medieval Settlement and Land Use:** The medieval village of Burghclere (now called Old Burghclere) which was owned from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries by the Bishops of Winchester, is an example of a shrunken village. Its depopulation and desertion was influenced by a change from arable to pasture farming that occurred on episcopal estates in the later medieval period. Small irregular shaped fields in the east in Ecchinswell parish represent assarts or intakes into woodland during the fourteenth to

sixteenth centuries. Woodland still survives as numerous small copses, especially on steeper slopes. Historically this is part of a region that was formally known as 'The Woodlands' and in 1848 was described as 'very heavy strong wet land' (Dodd 1987, 242).

- 9.58. **The Modern Landscape:** Large regular, straight-edged fields in the west of the character area around East Woodhay are characteristic of eighteenth and nineteenth century formal Parliamentary enclosure. Prominent early modern landscape features include the Park House Stables and associated gallops.

Biodiversity

- 9.59. The Walbury Hill and Watership Down Scarp Character Area has retained a significant number of valuable chalk grasslands, with 7 SSSI's and around 20 non- statutory grassland sites. The sites of national importance are Botley Down (SSSI), Burghclere Beacon (SSSI), Ham Hill (SSSI), Inkpen and Walbury Hills (SSSI), Ladle Hill (SSSI), Old Burghclere Lime Quarry (SSSI) and West Woodhay Down (SSSI)
- 9.60. Ham Hill (SSSI) is a good example of these chalk grassland areas, where notable plant species include twayblade (*Listera ovata*), fragrant orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*) and autumn gentian (*Gentianella amarella*). These grasslands are a valuable habitat for butterflies, and support species such as the green hairstreak and chalk hill blue. Examples of the non-statutory grassland sites are Davidsons Farm Meadows and The Warren.
- 9.61. Ladle Hill (SSSI) is situated on the northern escarpment of the Hampshire Chalk Plateau, and is also an important site being very rich in plant species and is especially notable for its population of the rare July-flowering form of the burnt-tip orchid (*Orchis ustulata*).
- 9.62. In addition to these grassland sites, the Walbury Hill and Watership Down Scarp also support a number of semi-natural woodlands. There are around 15 woodlands with non-statutory designation, which range from oak woodland, beech hangers, coombe woodlands and scrub regeneration. These woodlands provide important local habitats, and offer food and shelter to a number of birds and mammals.

Key Issues

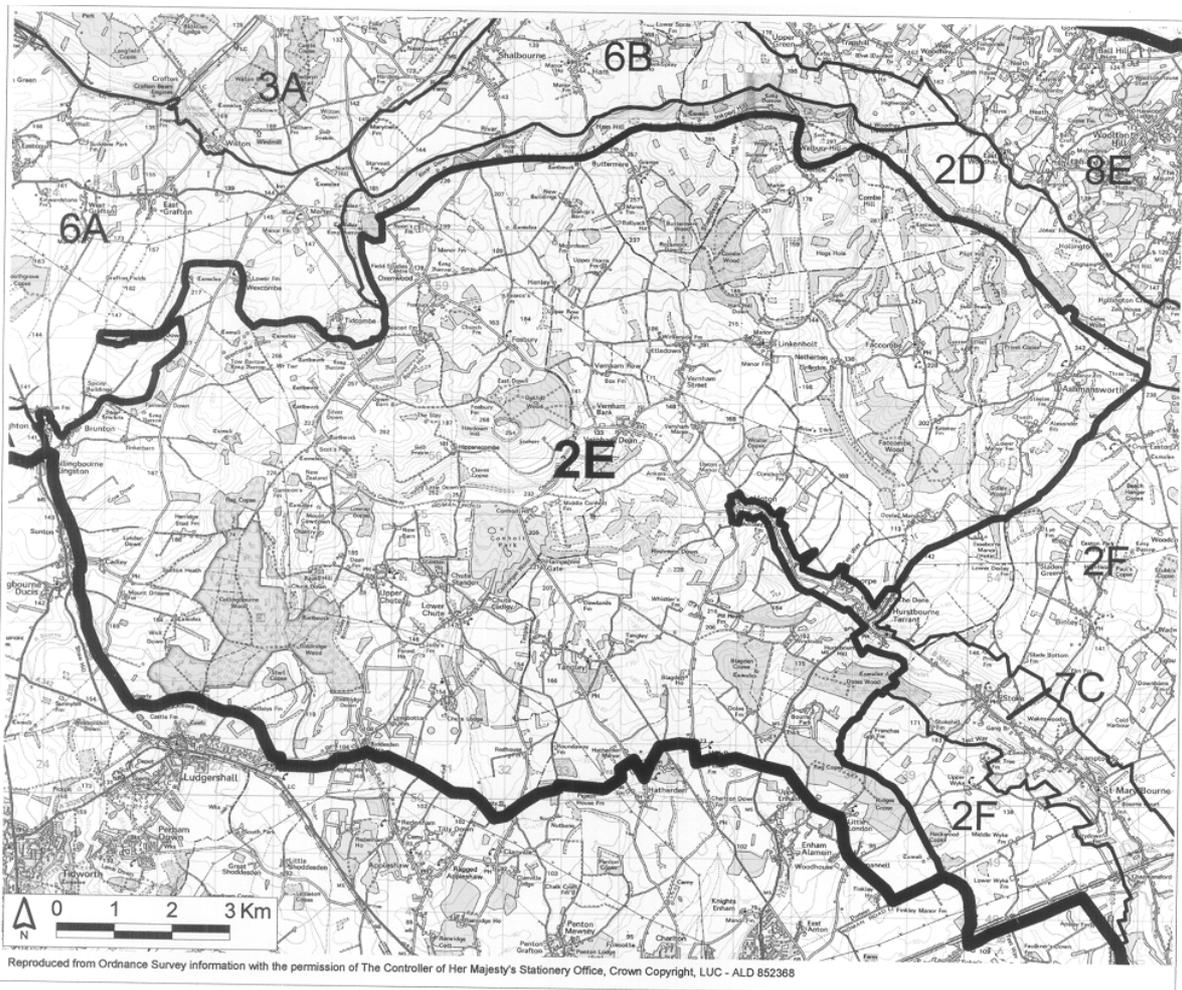
- intensive arable farming leading to **loss of biodiversity**, particularly chalk grasslands plus **damage to archaeological features**;
- changes in farming practices - including **loss of livestock** so that some chalk grasslands on the steep scarp slope are no longer grazed with **scrub encroachment** very evident;
- other areas coming out of farming and managed by **horse grazing** with visual impacts (rank grassland, poorly managed boundaries and inappropriate fencing);
- **intense recreation pressures** at key honeypot sites, e.g. Beacon Hill, resulting in erosion of the fragile chalk grassland and damage to archaeology;

- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows;
- lack of **appropriate woodland management** particularly ancient and semi natural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing;
- **localised visual intrusions** notably the major pylon lane at Watership Down, plus potential future demand for tall structures, e.g. wind turbines/masts on the scarp summit and skyline, which would have a major impact in views to the area;
- **increased traffic** on the narrow rural lane network, plus road improvements including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, are particularly intrusive within the distinctive sunken lanes;
- visual and noise intrusion from the **A34 and A343**;
- **loss of tranquillity**.

Key Management Requirements

- 9.63. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the character of the Walbury Hill/Watership Downs Scarp, with its mosaic of woodland and chalk grassland, absence of settlement/development, open skyline and spectacular views.
- 9.64. Key features to be conserved and enhanced are the smooth clean scarp skyline, which is particularly vulnerable to any form of development, chalk grassland and the archaeological features notably the Iron Age hillforts. The pattern and character of the landscape with its woodlands, pasture and narrow sunken lanes and absence of settlement should be maintained. There are opportunities for reintroduction of management (coppicing) to the ancient and semi-natural woodlands, restoration of hedgerows and restoration of the chalk grassland to extend and link the existing grassland sites along the scarp. There are particular opportunities to promote improved management of land that is no longer managed as part of the farming system, for example currently being used for horse-grazing.

CHARACTER AREA 2E: CHUTE FOREST – FACCOMBE



- 9.65. **Location and Boundaries:** Chute Forest - Faccombe character area embraces the densely wooded downland on the Wiltshire- Hampshire border. This landscape type is part of the southern block of chalk upland, which includes Salisbury Plain (3A) to the west and continues through the Hampshire Downs to the east. Boundaries are defined, to the north, by the escarpment rising from the Vale of Pewsey/Shalbourne Vale (the main part of which is included as character area 2D) and, to the south, by the AONB boundary. The boundary to the east is less distinct and is marked by a transition to the more open arable farmland that characterises the downs around Litchfield (2F).

Landscape Character Description

- 9.66. Chute Forest - Faccombe forms a distinct character area on the Wiltshire-Hampshire border. Underlain by the Upper Chalk, the landform has a great deal of topographical variation with a high rolling hills cut by steep sided dry valley, scarps and dramatic combes as for example at Vernham Dean. The area is characterised by the extensive and connected woodland cover, which occurs in association with the Clay-with-Flint covered summits. This produces a distinct landscape pattern comprising large blocks of woodland on the higher areas and long sinuous hangers clinging to the slopes of the steep combes where they are intermixed with pasture. The farmland woodland mosaic also includes areas of arable land on high ground enclosed by intact hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees plus smaller assorted fields, such as around Chute and Faccombe. These contrast with areas of more open arable land on the slopes dropping down towards both valleys of the River Bourne. Areas of parkland and estate farmland provide further variation as at Conholt Park. It is thus an area of great diversity with experiences ranging from intimate and enclosed to dramatic and open depending on the particular combination of landform and land cover. Taken as a whole the rolling, elevated plateau combined with the distinct and repetitive patterns of woodland cover provides a strong degree of cohesiveness and unity to the area.
- 9.67. The woodlands are varied ranging from areas of ancient woodland to more recent mixed plantations and shelterbelts. The vast Combe Wood and Linkenholt Hanging SSSI situated in a sheltered valley to the north of the area, is a good example of an ancient woodland and incorporates small areas of relict chalk grassland. Ash/field maple dominate the more calcareous soils, whilst the acidic clays support birch/pedunculate oak. The landscape pattern is repeated at Faccombe Wood and Netherton Hanging Copse. Sidley Wood is a further woodland SSSI of ancient hornbeam coppice. The steep slopes also retain important areas of chalk grassland, such as at Hogs Hole SSSI. The SSSI at Rushmore and Conholt Downs contains what has been noted as possibly the oldest known juniper population found on English chalk.
- 9.68. The area is fairly sparsely populated, with a low settlement density comprising small villages and hamlets sheltering in the folds of the chalk topography particularly on the south facing slopes, for example the Chutes, Tidcombe and Vernham Dean, as well as scattered isolated farmsteads and mansions (Conholt). Ashmansworth and Linkenholt are located on ridgelines. The small village of Collingbourne Kingston is located in the Bourne Valley to the west. Vernacular buildings in the area are predominantly of brick and flint, roofed with tile. Harder chalk was sometimes used in walls, and some older buildings retain timber framing, chalk cob and thatch.
- 9.69. An intricate network of rural lanes winds across the area linking settlements, often following the lines of dry valleys such as the lane along Doiley Bottom. There are few main roads except the A343 and the area retains an 'unspoilt' tranquil rural character seemingly remote from urban influences, despite its proximity to Andover and the garrison town of North Tidworth.

Key Characteristics

- part of the southern block of chalk upland, capped by clays and presenting a varied landform of high rolling hills cut by steep sided dry valleys, scarps and dramatic combes;
- landscape framework created by the repeating pattern of woodland with long sinuous hangers on steep dry valley sides plus extensive woodland blocks on the clay summits, interconnected by a thick hedgerow structure;
- varied woodland mix including areas of ancient woodland, possibly remnants of the Saxon Royal Forest of Chute, as well as more recent mixed plantations and shelterbelts;
- a farmland-woodland mosaic including areas of enclosed arable land on high ground and more open arable land on the slopes dropping down towards the valleys of the River Bourne. These contrast with small scale assorted pasture fields with woodlands around Chute and Faccombe;
- presence of large manor houses and parkland with medieval origins, subsequently refashioned in the 18th century, plus estate farmland;
- important areas of chalk grassland retained on steep slopes;
- varied field pattern including medieval assarts, 17th and 18th century informal enclosure and the regular fields of 19th century formal Parliamentary enclosure;
- sparsely populated with a low settlement density comprising small villages and hamlets generally in folds of the chalk topography on south facing slopes, as well as ridge top settlements and scattered isolated farms and mansions;
- built form includes harder chalk sometimes used in walls, brick and flint, chalk cob and thatch, with some older buildings retaining timber framing;
- an intricate network of rural lanes winds through the area linking settlements, often following the lines of dry valleys. Alignments of Roman roads are preserved in modern thoroughfares;
- a landscape with a great diversity with experiences ranging from intimate and enclosed to dramatic and open. The area retains an 'unspoilt' tranquil rural character.

Physical Influences

- 9.70. The underlying solid geology of the area is almost exclusively formed by the Upper Chalk, with the Middle and Lower Chalks outcropping only in narrow bands, for example along the scarp above the Vale of Pewsey and steep slopes around Ashmansworth. Deposits of Clay-with-Flint occur across the central and higher parts of the area, forming heavier clay soils. Landform is typical of chalk upland with a rolling topography, dissected by dry valleys, with the central part of the area cut through by the steep sided valley of the River Bourne* (7C) and characterised by a number of dry valleys running parallel to each other into the valley. The swelling steep sided form of Haydown Hill (258m) is a dominant feature in the north west of the area, with the steep slopes around Ashmansworth being a further distinct landform. The character area also includes the escarpment, which extends from Collingbourne Kingston in the west to Botley Down, near Marten, in the east. It is less distinct compared to the adjoining Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp (2E), but is nevertheless a clear landform feature.

* There are two Bourne Valleys, a minor river on the boundary to the west adjacent to Salisbury Plain and more prominent valley which cuts through the character area. The latter has a distinct character and is described separately (7C).

Historic Environment

- 9.71. **Prehistoric Earthworks:** Neolithic long barrows located at Tow Barrow, Fairmile Down and Smay Down in the western part of the area are prominent features. 'Celtic' fields visible as prominent terraces or lynchets on the scarp edge around Highdown and Hitchen had their origins during the late Bronze Age. Other Bronze Age remains include isolated round barrows, which survive as at Doles Copse, and Tringley Wood with a further group to the west of Heath Copse. Aerial photographs and excavations have shown that there were once many more round barrows in the area that have since been ploughed.
- 9.72. **Iron Age Settlement and Land Use:** During the Iron Age, this was a densely occupied landscape with individual farmsteads concentrated on ridges and hilltops, with access to water, summer grazing and the other resources of the wetter valleys. This legacy is reflected in today's landscape in the form of several prominent monuments from the period, such as the hill fort of Fosbury, situated on Knolls Down, with associated field systems located nearby. Iron Age enclosures also survive as earthworks at Bevisbury, Tangley Clumps and near Upton Manor. At Blagden Copse, the northernmost of two earthworks enclosures may be a ritual shrine dating to the first centuries BC and AD, commanding views southwards down to Andover.
- 9.73. **Roman Roads:** The Roman Icknield Way, preserved in the modern line of Hungerford Lane, runs across the area. At Haydown Hill the road follows a curved route around the landform, an example of how Roman Roads sometimes have to deviate from their course. To the south at the foot of the more elevated chalk downland, the road met the Portway, the Roman road that ran to *Calleva* (Silchester), with the settlement of *Leucomagus* or Andover developing as a minor market town at the junction. Romano-British settlements were concentrated along the river valleys and lower slopes of the chalk downs, with several villas and farmsteads clustered round Andover.
- 9.74. **Saxon Royal Forest of Chute:** Following the disruptions of the fifth century AD, many areas may have reverted to scrub or woodland, and these became part of the Saxon Royal Forest of Chute. The fact that pre-Saxon earthworks such as those in Blagden Copse survive today suggests that many woodland pockets are remnants of this forest. Place names such as Doiley, Doiley Wood, Doles Wood and Doles Copse may all be derived from the Old English word *Digerleah* meaning 'thick wood'. Netherton, in the north of the character area was a late Saxon manorial complex, and there was a small Saxon settlement and an early Saxon cemetery just north of Andover. The linear earthwork known as Grim's Ditch may date to the late fifth century AD, and may have protected the approaches to Silchester. It is visible today running through Sawyers Wood and into Netherton Hanging Copse. The linear earthwork known as Devil's Ditch may also be from this period.

- 9.75. **Medieval Settlement and Land Use:** Settlements include the now shrunken medieval village at Brunton. Biddesden was a separate manor to Ludgershall, and was owned by the Benedictine monastery (later a priory) of Amesbury. The medieval village at Netherton, was established on the earlier Saxon site, however, after the demise of the manor house in the fourteenth century, Netherton shrank as nearby Facombe expanded. Villages such as Vernham Dean were linear developments along central roads, but there were also scattered hamlets and individual farms.
- 9.76. **Field Patterns:** Much of the woodland shows signs of assarting. The fields are often small and irregular in these locations, with sinuous edges, and some may reflect medieval and early post-medieval boundaries (fifteenth/sixteenth centuries to the eighteenth/nineteenth centuries). In some cases the sequence of field intakes can be established, and some fields appear to have been piecemeal enclosures set out in between droveways or tracks formed by the clearance of woodland to create arable fields. Many of these tracks may also have medieval origins. Late medieval and post-medieval informal enclosure resulted in the medium to large sized regular fields with wavy or sinuous boundaries, typical of the open, more elevated chalk. This enclosure took place from the late fifteenth century, but was especially common during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. More formal enclosure in the nineteenth century produced regular, rectangular fields.
- 9.77. **Manor Houses and Parkland:** A particular feature of the area is the large manors and houses. Facombe Manor, Tangle Manor, Biddeston House, Netherton House, Ibthorpe House and Upton House all had medieval beginnings, but in the eighteenth century were refashioned by the gentry, with associated gardens and polite landscape features.

Biodiversity

- 9.78. This Landscape Character Area has a large number of sites with conservation value, containing 3 chalk grassland SSSI's; 2 woodland SSSI's; together with more than 50 woodlands and almost 30 grasslands sites with non-statutory designation.
- 9.79. Coombe Wood and Linkenholt Hanging (SSSI), is an example of nationally important woodland within the Chute forest / Facombe Character Area. This site forms an extensive area of ancient and secondary woodland located in a sheltered valley close to the point where the counties of Berkshire, Wiltshire and Hampshire meet. The site also supports small areas of chalk grassland and scrub, which are relicts of open downland. The woodland itself has developed good structural diversity and this together with its humid, sheltered position provide excellent conditions for epiphytic lichens and bryophytes.
- 9.80. The three nationally important chalk grassland sites that lie within the area are Hogs Hole (SSSI), Rushmore and Conholt Downs (SSSI) and part of Inkpen and Walbury Hills (SSSI), which extends south from the Walbury Hill and Watership Down Scarp Character Area (2D).

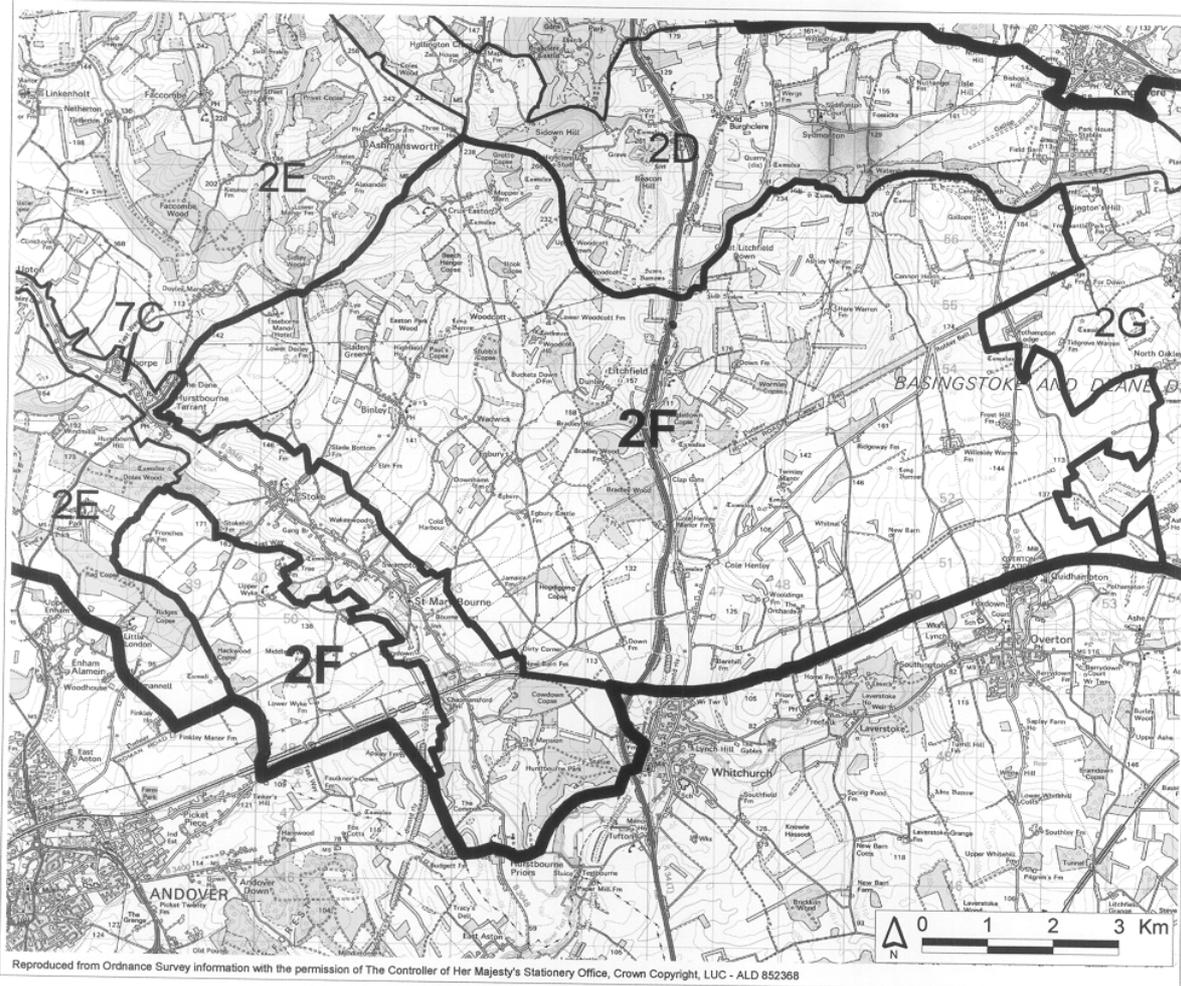
Key Issues

- intensive arable farming leading to **loss of biodiversity**, particularly chalk grasslands plus damage to **archaeological features**;
- changes in farming practices - including **loss of livestock** so that some areas of pasture are no longer grazed - with **scrub encroachment** or managed by **horse grazing** with associated visual impacts (rank grassland, poorly managed boundaries and inappropriate fencing);
- some **weakening of the hedgerow structure** - loss of boundaries and mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows;
- lack of **appropriate management for the extensive woodland cover** particularly ancient and semi natural woodlands (of Chute Forest);
- localised **visual intrusions**, plus potential future demand for tall structures, e.g. for wind turbines/masts on the open summits, which would have a major impact in views to the area;
- **increased traffic** on the narrow rural lane network, plus road improvements including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays;
- **loss of tranquillity**.

Key Management Requirements

- 9.81. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the unspoilt, tranquil character of the Chute Forest/Facombe character area with its varied landscapes from intimate and enclosed to dramatic and open.
- 9.82. Key features to be conserved and enhanced include open and wooded horizons and skylines, historic field patterns and hedgerow boundaries, historic parks, and archaeological features including prehistoric earthworks. There are specific opportunities for hedgerow planting. The distinctive pattern of woodland cover including hilltop woodlands and long sinuous hangers on the dry valley slopes is a distinctive feature of the area. There are significant opportunities for re-introduction of appropriate management (coppicing) to the ancient and semi-natural woodlands and diversification of the more uniform commercial plantations in favour of broadleaves in order to maintain the character of the woodlands. The settlement pattern comprising scattered farmsteads, isolated villages and hamlets and the character of the rural lane network should be maintained. Areas of herb rich chalk grassland should be conserved and opportunities exist for habitat restoration to link and extend sites.

CHARACTER AREA 2F: LITCHFIELD DOWNS



- 9.83. **Location and Boundaries:** The Litchfield Downs form a transitional unit between the heavily wooded enclosed landscape of Chute Forest - Facombe (2E) to the west and the distinct elevated clay plateau around Hannington (2G) to in the east. The dramatic steep Walbury Hill/Watership Down Scarp (2D) marks the northern boundary, with the character area extending to the AONB boundary in the south.

Landscape Character Description

- 9.84. The area essentially falls into two distinct parts with the more wooded and enclosed downs to the west and the strongly articulated sweeping landform of open arable downs to the east. It forms a transition between the enclosed wooded landscape to the west and the distinct elevated clay plateau at Hannington to the east. Unifying features are provided by strong sweeping chalk topography with its smooth rounded summits such as at Woodcroft Down, Great Litchfield Down and Willesley Warren and long sinuous dry valleys.
- 9.85. Land cover comprises arable farmland, which to the west is combined with a distinct pattern of woodland. Around Litchfield, for example, the large arable fields are bound by a strong hedgerow structure interspersed with frequent woodland blocks and shelterbelts to create a semi-enclosed landscape with low intervisibility. This is in sharp contrast to the area to the east, for example around Great Litchfield Down and Ashley Warren which has very large open arable fields and a comparatively weak hedgerow structure. Here, in the absence of woodland and hedgerows, the sweeping elevated landform is the overriding influence on landscape character creating a strong sense of exposure and expansiveness, with long views. The horse gallops and pylon line are therefore prominent features within the open landscape.
- 9.86. The woodlands include a mix of ancient semi-natural formerly coppiced copses, including small hangers on steep slopes, although these are not as extensive or continuous as the area around Faccombe (character area 2E). There are also some larger areas of plantation forestry. To the east, woodland cover is limited to occasional smaller regular shelterbelts. The linear planting of Caesar's belt marking the line of the Portway Roman Road creates a distinctive feature.
- 9.87. The landscape is sparsely populated, with settlement concentrated in small hamlets to the west including Lichfield and small scattered farms. To the east the settlement is even sparser with infrequent, but generally large scale farmsteads dispersed across the area, with few roads. The area retains a quiet rural character, although is crossed north-south by the A34 which is a dominant influence in the central part of the area. The settlements of Whitchurch and Overton are located on the AONB boundary to the south.

Key Characteristics

- strong sweeping chalkland topography forming part of the dip slope with smooth rounded summits cut by long sinuous dry valleys;
- varied land cover with arable farmland enclosed by hedgerows, shelterbelts and woodland in the west. The east is characterised by very large open arable fields, a comparatively weak hedgerow structure and absence of woodland;
- numerous isolated round barrows on ridges and hilltops which are subtle features in the landscape;
- woodlands include a mix of ancient semi-natural woodland, plantations, and small hangers on steep slopes. In the east planting is limited to occasional small regular shelterbelts;
- linear tree planting of Caesar's belt, marking the line of the Portway Roman Road

is a distinctive feature;

- varied field pattern including irregular assarts is characteristic of medieval enclosure in the west, plus 17th and 18th century informal enclosure and large regular Parliamentary enclosures. Boundary loss and large modern prairie fields are common in the east;
- a sparsely populated area with settlement concentrated in small hamlets and scattered farms in the west. To the east the settlement is even sparser with infrequent, but generally large scale, farmsteads dispersed across the area;
- the area retains a quiet and rural character, with a sense of openness and space.

Physical Influences

- 9.88. The area is underlain by the chalk beds, which are masked in places by the capping of Clay-with-Flint on summits. The area is dissected by dry valleys. In the north, backing the escarpment there is distinct area of elevated topography, with a strongly articulated landform which extends southwards through the area to Willesley Warren. Elsewhere the land slopes more gently as the dip slope to the south, rolling down to the valleys of the Bourne and the Test.

Historic Environment

- 9.89. **Prehistoric Landscape:** Bronze Age remains in the landscape include numerous isolated round barrows occurring on ridges and hilltops. Field systems, which may also date back to this period, are visible as lynchets on Great Litchfield Down. The Harrow Way track, which crosses the southern part of the character area may have originated in the later prehistoric period, and it is still used today.
- 9.90. **Field Patterns:** Some of the boundaries represent 'ladder' fields, characterised by parallel and sinuous boundaries often running for several kilometres over the uplands. These probably result from seventeenth and eighteenth century informal enclosure. More regular, straight-edged fields represent post-medieval formal Parliamentary enclosure. There has been extensive removal of field boundaries in the twentieth century to create a much more open landscape in contrast to the scarp to the north and the wooded area to the west.
- 9.91. **Parkland:** Parkland is an important feature in this landscape. Hurstbourne Park incorporates a medieval deer park (established in 1332) and an early designed landscaped park.

Biodiversity

- 9.92. The Litchfield Downs Character Area supports several woodland with non-statutory designation, including Bixley Copse and Paul's Wood. In addition there are 5 grasslands with non-statutory designation. There are no sites within the Litchfield Down which are considered to be of national importance.

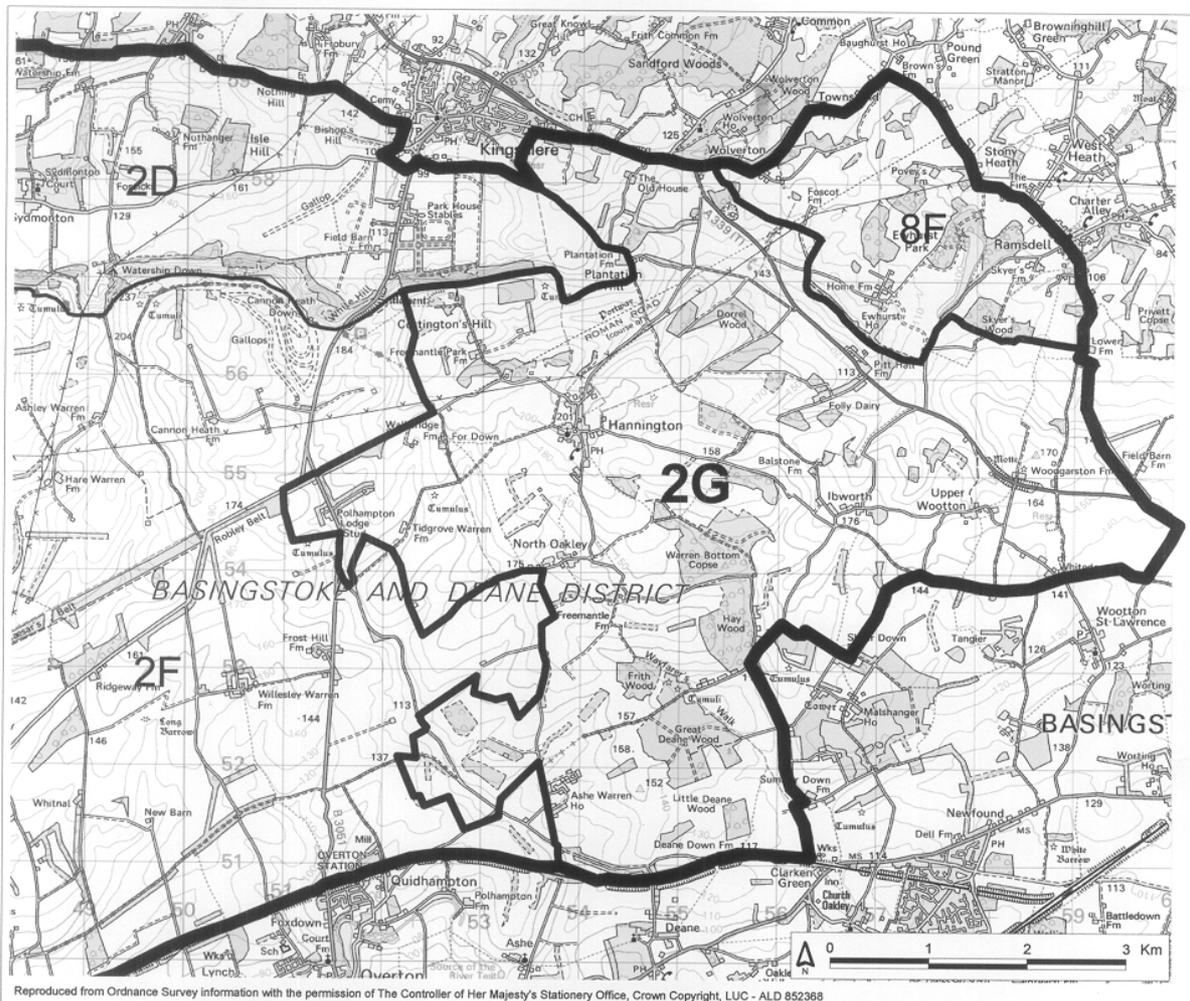
Key Issues

- intensive arable farming leading to **loss of biodiversity**, particularly chalk grasslands plus damage to **archaeological features**;
- changes in farming practices - including **loss of livestock** so that some areas of pasture are no longer grazed - with **scrub encroachment** or managed by **horse grazing** with associated visual impacts (rank grassland, poorly managed boundaries and inappropriate fencing);
- **weakening of the hedgerow structure** - loss of boundaries and mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows, - most notably in the eastern part of the area;
- lack of **appropriate woodland management** particularly ancient and semi natural woodland blocks formerly managed by coppicing;
- localised **visual intrusions**, e.g. **pylon lines** and large scale farm buildings, plus potential future demand for tall structures on the open summits e.g. for wind turbines/masts, which would have a major impact on the quiet rural character of the area;
- **increased traffic** - localised visual and noise intrusion of the A34, plus impact of high traffic levels on the narrow rural lane network and unsympathetic road improvements;
- **loss of tranquillity**.

Key Management Requirements

- 9.93. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet rural character of the Litchfield Downs, with its sense of openness and space. Key features to be conserved and enhanced are the open/wooded skylines and views, archaeological features and the historic field pattern. The wooded pattern and character of the landscape is a key characteristic and there are opportunities for reintroduction of management (coppicing) to the ancient and semi-natural woodlands and hedgerow restoration. In the eastern part of the area there is an opportunity for woodland creation and hedgerow restoration to provide a stronger landscape framework. The pattern of settlements with scattered villages and small hamlets and interconnected network of rural lanes should be maintained.

CHARACTER AREA 2G: HANNINGTON DOWNS



9.94. **Location and Boundaries:** The Hannington Downs are a distinct unit in the south east corner of the AONB, where the chalk is overlain by a thick and continuous layer of Clay-with-Flint. The boundaries of the character area are defined by the change in geology and relief to the north and west. The northern boundary is formed by the top of the Walbury Hill/Watership Down Scarp (2D) following a contour at a height of approximately 190 m AOD. The western edge marks the transition to the more open landscape of the Lichfield Downs (2F). Ewhurst Parklands (8F) lie to the north-east of the area with a distinct boundary being defined by the lower lying land and change in the geology and soils. The southern edge is formed by the AONB boundary.

Landscape Character Description

- 9.95. Landscape character is largely derived from the continuous clay deposit, which has created the elevated open plateau landscape of the Hannington Downs. The internal landform is varied with a number of indentations formed by dry valleys, and hills to the north of the area, which add to visual diversity. Cottington's Hill (225m AOD) and high points on the plateau at Hannington (200m AOD) provide panoramic views, which are reduced in slightly lower lying, more enclosed areas.
- 9.96. Land cover is a mix of open and semi-enclosed arable farmland/woodland mosaic, resulting in a changeable degree of intervisibility. The plateau top and western parts of the area are predominantly open with large arable fields, sometimes divided by low hedgerows and occasional small linear plantations. Within the more open exposed area, north of Hannington, long views are a feature and the mast at Cottington Hill and line of pylons are visually intrusive elements. Gallops are also a prominent feature on the northern slopes near Kingsclere. Mature hedgerow trees and woodland create a more enclosed landscape on the slopes to the east which are characterised by blocks of semi-natural woodlands of varying size and shape. These include a number of extensive woodland blocks, such as Hay Wood and Great Deane Wood.
- 9.97. Settlement consists of the nucleated village of Hannington, centrally located on the plateau top. There are in addition a number of small hamlets such as North Oakley and Ibbworth with scattered farms. An intricate network of narrow winding rural lanes connects Hannington and the smaller outlying settlements to the larger towns outside the AONB boundary. The A339T, cutting across the north-eastern edge of the area, is the only major road that runs through the area. The absence of new development also helps the area to retain a quiet unspoilt rural character.

Key Characteristics

- a distinctive area distinguished by a thick and continuous clay capping forming a high plateau with landform dropping away to either side. Elevated points provide panoramic views;
- large open arable farmland on the plateau top, becoming more enclosed with hedgerows, trees and woodland on the slopes;
- varied field pattern with medieval assarted fields in association with woodland, and piecemeal enclosures between droeways and tracks;
- extensive semi-natural woodland blocks on the slopes to the south and east, with small linear plantations on the more open slopes to the west, resulting in a changeable degree of intervisibility;
- isolated round barrows, located on prominent ridges and hilltops are a subtle feature;
- settlement consists of the nucleated medieval plateau top village of Hannington and a number of small hamlets with scattered farms;
- an intricate network of narrow winding lanes;
- a quiet and unspoilt rural character, with a sense of openness and space.

Physical Influences

- 9.98. Underlain by the rocks of the Upper Chalk, the area is distinguished by its thick and continuous clay capping which forms a distinctive high plateau landscape. A series of hills form the highest points to the north of the area with Cottington's Hill, on the edge of the scarp, at 225 m AOD. Soils are mainly silty, well drained and flinty. The character area is dry with no springs or watercourses.

Historic Environment

- 9.99. **Bronze Age Round Barrows:** Several isolated round barrows occur on ridges and hilltops across the area, such as around Willesley Warren Farm, Tidgrove Warren Farm and Ashe Warren Farm. They are a distinctive horizon feature.
- 9.100. **Roman Period:** There is a site of a Roman villa to north of Upper Wootton close to The Portway Roman road. The course of the road runs NE-SW across the area, although it is only reflected in the present day landscape as a road near Polhampton Lodge Stud.
- 9.101. **Medieval Settlement and Land Use:** A motte at Woodgarsten Farm is evidence of the Norman Conquest, while a moated manor site survives at Wyeford Farm, and Cottington's Hill is a deserted medieval village with fishponds and field systems surviving as earthworks. Other earthworks in the area are also derived from medieval fields. The medieval nucleated plateau-top village of Hannington is the principal settlement in the area.
- 9.102. **Medieval Field Patterns:** There are numerous pockets of woodland which show signs of assarting, and the surrounding fields are often small and irregular in these locations, with sinuous edges, and some may reflect medieval and early post-medieval boundaries. In some cases the sequence of field intakes can be established, and some fields appear to have been piecemeal enclosures set out in between droveways or tracks. Many of these tracks may also have medieval origins. Large scale Parliamentary enclosure fields predominate over much of the plateau today, with areas where there has been extensive boundary removal.

Biodiversity

- 9.103. This Character Area has retained significant woodland cover with around 20 woodland sites having non-statutory designation, including Coneygrove Copse, Deans Wood and Kingsdown Wood. There are no sites of national importance within the boundaries of the Hannington Downs.

Key Issues

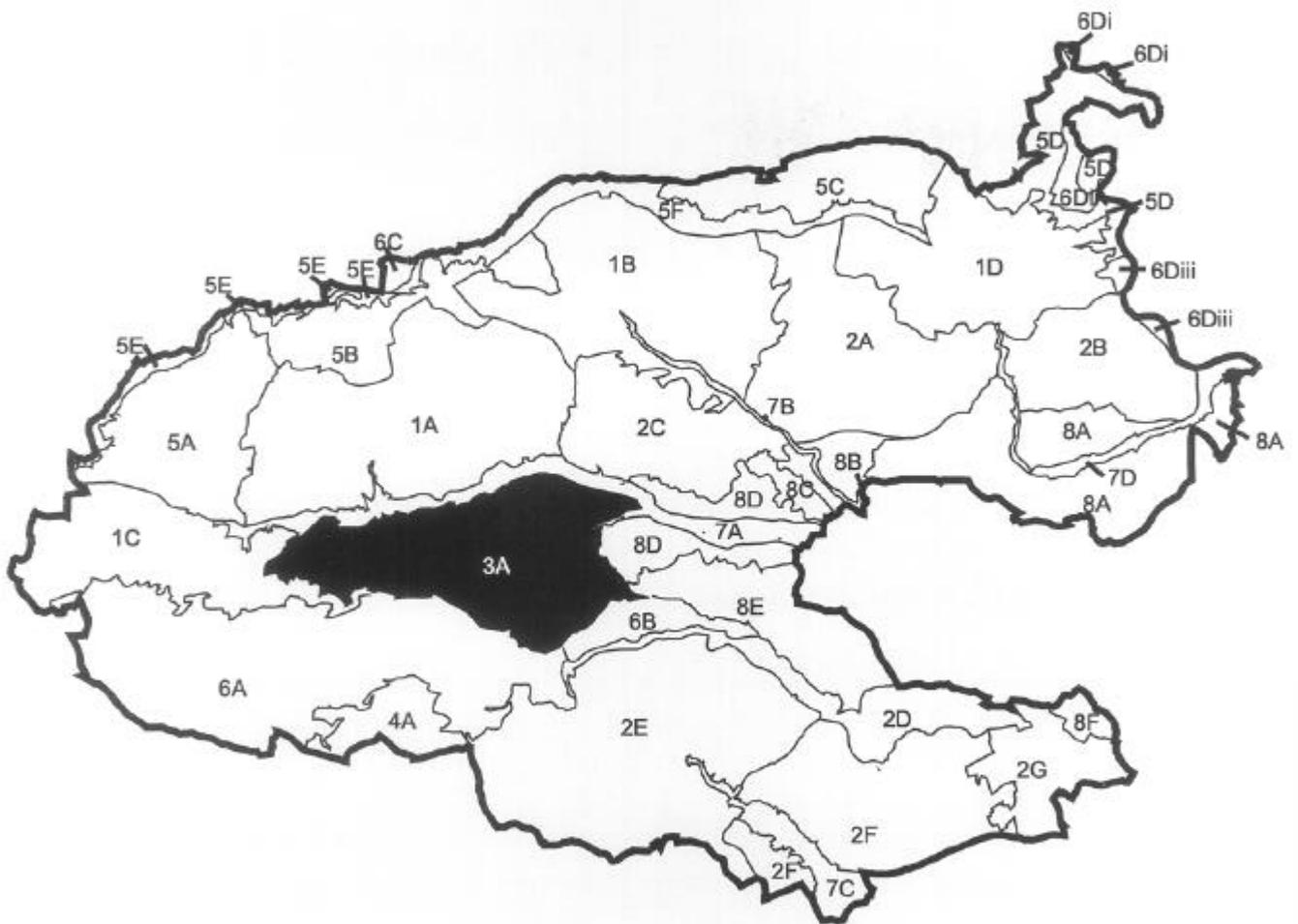
- intensive arable farming leading to **loss of biodiversity** plus damage to **archaeological features**;
- changes in farming practices - including **loss of livestock** so that some areas of pasture are no longer grazed - with **scrub encroachment** or managed by **horse**

- grazing** with associated visual impacts (rank grassland, poorly managed boundaries and inappropriate fencing);
- some **weakening of the hedgerow structure** - loss of boundaries and mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows;
 - lack of **appropriate woodland management** particularly ancient and semi natural woodland blocks formerly managed by coppicing;
 - localised **visual intrusions, e.g. pylon lines** and large scale farm buildings, plus potential future demand for tall structures on the open summits e.g. for wind turbines/masts, which would have a major impact on the quiet rural character of the area;
 - **increased traffic** levels on the narrow rural lane network;
 - **loss of tranquillity.**

Key Management Requirements

- 9.104. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet rural character of the Hannington Downs, with its sense of openness and space. Key features to be conserved and enhanced are the open plateau and long views, archaeological features and the field patterns. The woodland pattern on the lower slopes is an important characteristic and should be maintained. There are opportunities for woodland creation and hedgerow restoration to link isolated small sites. The sparse settlement pattern comprising the nucleated hill top village and a small number of scattered hamlet and farms connected by a network of rural lanes should be maintained.

Landscape Type 3 - Wooded Plateau



10. LANDSCAPE TYPE 3: WOODED PLATEAU

Location and Boundaries

- 10.1. The Wooded Plateau landscape occurs in one location and is defined as a single character area: the Savernake Plateau. It lies in the western part of the AONB. The boundary is defined to the north by the valley of the River Kennet (7A) and to the south by the low-lying Vale of Pewsey (6A), where the wooded plateau terminates as a steep scarp. The west and eastern boundaries are less clearly defined, in terms of landform or physical features but are determined by a change of geology, with the Middle and Upper Chalk of Horton Down (1C) becoming prominent to the west, and to the east descending to the Lowland Mosaic (landscape type 8).

Overview

The Wooded Plateau is an attractive, intimate rural landscape, with qualities of peacefulness and seclusion in contrast to the remoteness and isolation of the adjacent open chalk downs.

The landscape type occurs in one location and forms a single character area, namely the Savernake Plateau, distinguished by its dense, continuously wooded character and with its boundaries approximately representing the bounds of the medieval Royal Forest of Savernake. Throughout this area, a thick covering of Clay-with-Flint drift deposit masks the solid chalk resulting in rich, damp and heavy soils. The plateau dips gently down to the east towards Froxfield, where it is crossed by the narrow meandering valley of the River Dun, a route subsequently exploited by the Kennet and Avon canal. The waterway is an important feature of the landscape, with a wealth of associated industrial archaeology, including the distinctive brick-built Bruce Tunnel.

Distinctive, visible archaeological elements are features of the plateau and provide evidence for the past use, organisation and management of the landscape. The Wansdyke, one of the best-known early (Saxon) land boundaries in the country, cuts roughly east west through the area, in some places up to 26 metres wide. The Bedwyn Dyke also survives as a fragmentary earthwork. Along with the Saxon royal estate at Wootton Rivers. The Forest had been established by the time of the Domesday Survey as a Royal Hunting Forest and today the large woodland blocks remain the dominant feature of the landscape. Extensive areas of ancient woodland are designated as an SSSI consisting of relict oak wood pasture and 18th and 19th century beech plantation. It is especially notable for its magnificent veteran trees which support an outstanding lichen flora and rich invertebrate fauna, including nationally scarce butterflies and moths. The forest also encompasses Tottenham Park, the 18th century parkland with its majestic avenue, woodland rides, follies and formal planting forming a classic polite landscape.

There are few settlements within the area, reflecting the extensive woodland cover and patterns of land ownership. Those settlements that do exist are located in the east of the area in the valley of the River Dun, including Great Bedwyn and Little Bedwyn, the former with a surviving village wharf onto the canal. The brickworks at Great Bedwyn provided the source for distinctive rust coloured bricks that characterise many of the local buildings. Flint churches are prominent landmarks.

Key Characteristics

- high chalk plateau overlain by deposits of Clay-with-Flints. Clays, sands and gravels of London Clay, the Reading Beds, Bagshot Beds and Plateau Gravel are also found to the east;
- extensive and continuous woodland cover including the ancient wood pasture, semi-natural woodland blocks and beech and oak plantation of Savernake Forest and West Wood;
- an attractive woodland-farmland mosaic surrounds the Forest, plus a few areas of more open arable land;
- presence of historic parkland and formal designed landscapes of Tottenham Park and Littlecote Park, with their built features, permanent pasture, parkland trees, avenues and rides;
- small areas of remnant chalk grassland confined to scarp slopes on the southern boundary, plus relict areas of heathland commons on more acidic clays and gravels;
- Savernake Forest: an extensive (900ha) woodland established by 1086 as a Royal Hunting Forest, and an SSSI notable for its ancient trees and outstanding lichen flora;
- distinct pattern of settlement comprising a remote 'uninhabited' western plateau and a concentration of villages in the east of the area, in the valley of the River Dun. Building materials include some timber framing, with the main material being red brick;
- the Kennet and Avon Canal and associated industrial archaeology features;
- an extensive network of public rights of way allow good access to the many attractions of the Forest;
- smaller settlements (e.g. Froxfield) are characterised by a lack of local services whilst Great Bedwyn, has better service provision;
- quiet, rural and secluded character.

Physical Influences

10.2. **Geology and Soils:** The plateau is comprised almost entirely of the Upper Chalk, which is overlain across much of the area by Cretaceous deposits of Clay-with-Flint. Further to the east, clays, sands and gravels of London Clay, the Reading Beds, Bagshot Beds and Plateau Gravel are found. The superficial deposits mask the underlying chalk, creating damper heavier soils which support woodland cover and contribute to the distinct landscape character.

10.3. **Landform:** The plateau dips gently to the east towards Froxfield, where it is crossed by the River Dun, a route subsequently exploited by the Kennet and Avon Canal. The landform of the higher land is typical of the underlying chalk with rolling downland dissected by small valleys. The highest point in the area is Martinsell Hill, to the west, on the boundary with the Horton Downs character area (1C), which reaches a height of 289m AOD. The hills to the east of the area are generally lower, descending to heights of around 150-160m AOD.

Biodiversity

10.4. The Wooded Plateau contains a diverse range of habitats, predominantly, as the name suggests, extensive woodland habitats. These comprise a large ancient forest, formal historic parks and estates plus many areas of farmland/woodland mosaic. Remnant chalk grassland areas are small, scarce and found only along the scarp slope

of the southern boundary. The Kennet and Avon Canal, with its associated wetland habitats, crosses the eastern part of the area.

- 10.5. The dominant habitat and most important in terms of ecological value is the woodland. Of the woodlands well-over 50 sites have non-statutory designation, including Lady's Wood, Jugg's Wood and Oxlease Copse. In addition the nationally important Savernake Forest SSSI forms an extensive tract (900 ha) of ancient woodland consisting of relict oak wood pasture and eighteenth and nineteenth century beech and oak plantation. The trees were originally planted in an open parkland pasture setting, but are now mixed with more modern broadleaved and coniferous plantation. The wood has over 1,000 years of documented history and contains well over 500 species. With its magnificent ancient oak and beech trees, it is especially notable for its outstanding lichen flora and diverse plant communities, including species with nationally restricted distributions such as the scarce narrow lipped helleborine and green-flowered helleborine. The rich invertebrate fauna includes several rare insects, including nationally scarce butterflies and moths. In addition the Forest supports a diverse assemblage of birds and has mammal residents including dormice which are a UK BAP priority species.

Historic Environment

- 10.6. **Prehistoric Landscape:** There are a few visible monuments on the Savernake plateau including a Neolithic long barrow in the West Woods south-east of Lockeridge and several Bronze Age round barrows on hilltop ridges or higher ground, including two small groups in Savernake Forest and on Bedwyn Common. Linear earthworks visible on Postern Hill, south of Marlborough, may be late Bronze Age or Iron Age in date and a prominent earthwork enclosure at Chisbury also has possible Iron Age origins.
- 10.7. **Romano-British Period:** Although only visible in parts, the Icknield Way, the Roman road from Wanborough to *Venta* (Winchester), ran NW-SE across the area, through the settlement at *Cunetio* (Mildenhall).
- 10.8. **Saxon Earthworks and Settlement:** One of the most characteristic features of the open plateau in the west of the area is the **Wansdyke**, one of the best known of early land boundaries in the country. The earthwork, in places some 26 metres across, runs roughly east-west across the area, before petering out to the west of Cadley. It is thought to have been built around AD 500 as a defence against Saxon attacks from the north. The **Bedwyn Dyke** that survives as fragmentary earthworks may also be Saxon, and some modern field and wood boundaries and roads appear to follow its original course. Chisbury was re-used as a Saxon burgh, and was later the centre of a royal estate. Along with the Saxon royal estate at Wootton Rivers, it is likely that these formed the basis for the creation of a Royal Forest at Savernake.
- 10.9. **Savernake Forest:** The Character Area reflects the approximate bounds of the royal forest of Savernake which was at its greatest extent in the twelfth century. This was an area circumscribed by defined boundaries, which was the preserve of the king for hunting, particularly deer and wild boar, and was subject to special forest laws, outside the common law. Forest Law, even when not enforced to extremes, inhibited agricultural expansion during a period of population expansion - and the restrictions imposed upon landowners and commoners was a source of much

grievance throughout the early medieval period. It was not until the land was returned to common law - a process known as deforestation - which in the case of Savernake occurred in the mid sixteenth century, that changes took place in the landscape which give the area so much of its character today.

- 10.10. **Tottenham Park:** A new great park at Savernake was created in the early eighteenth century, which over the years became a classic 'polite' landscape with wooded rides, follies and plantings and avenues, many of which are still visible today. In the nineteenth century much of Savernake Forest was owned by the Marquis of Ailsebury, and in 1825 Tottenham House was extended and refurbished and the landscape gardens around it enhanced. In 1861 Mary Caroline, the Marchioness of Ailesbury, founded the grandiose St. Katherine's church for Savernake estate workers. By the late nineteenth century the Savernake estate was heavily in debt, and most of the woodlands were eventually handed over to the Forestry Commission, and Tottenham House became a school.
- 10.11. **Field Patterns:** South and south-west of Marlborough, and around Rudge and Froxfield, the largely open, modern landscape of large, regular fields is mostly the product of formal Parliamentary enclosure in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Prior to this, some areas may have been open grazing or commons. West of Hungerford, some more sinuous boundaries may reflect late medieval or early post-medieval informal enclosure. South of Lockeridge, the woods show some signs of assarting, probably post-medieval in date. South of Bedwyn and west of Shalbourne, lots of small copses also show signs of assarting, and the fields are smaller and more irregular. This may reflect informal late medieval or post-medieval enclosure.
- 10.12. **Nineteenth Century Canal and Railway:** The Kennet and Avon Canal and a now dismantled railway from Marlborough to Andover were important nineteenth century communication routes which exploited the pass through Savernake Plateau from Crofton to Hungerford.

Settlement and Building Character

- 10.13. There are few settlements within the Savernake Plateau landscape type, reflecting its extensive woodland area and patterns of land ownership. This is one of the key differences to the Downland with Woodland landscape type. The majority of settlements are located in the east of the area, in the valley of the River Dun and within the ancient forest. Great Bedwyn and the smaller village of Little Bedwyn are both situated adjacent to the canal. Further up the slope are the smaller hamlets of Chisbury and Froxfield. A number of the settlements are grouped around small greens. There is some timber framing, but the main building material is brick, with a former brickworks at Great Bedwyn, providing a local source and resulting in the distinctive rust brick buildings of this village. The flint churches are prominent landmarks.

Recreation Character

- 10.14. Excellent recreational opportunities are provided by Savernake Forest and other large areas of publicly accessible woodland. An extensive public rights of way network allows good access to the woodlands, which are significant attractions offering opportunities to view the magnificent bluebell display in West Woods during May or to walk along the Grand Avenue laid out by 'Capability' Brown in the

Savernake Forest. There are picnic sites within these woods and a campsite at Savernake Forest. A section of the Kennet and Avon Canal provides attractive walks and opportunities for coarse fishing and other attractions such as the Crofton Beam Engines. Other recreational routes that run through the area include sections of the Severn and Thames National Cycle Route, the Wiltshire White Horse Trail and a British Horse Society promoted Bridleway (the Downland Villages Riding Route).

Social and Economic Character

10.15. As noted, there are few settlements within the wider Savernake Plateau landscape type, and villages are restricted to the eastern part of the area. These include Froxfield and Great Bedwyn. Within both these parishes, the populations have increased steadily since 1981, with a total rise of approximately 30%. This steady growth may indicate successive generations of families remaining for the duration of their lifetime. However, proximity to a rail station at Great Bedwyn and accessibility to London, means that this area is also very attractive to commuters. On the whole, this area is considered to have greater employment links with London than the urban centres that fringe the AONB.

10.16. As a small settlement, Froxfield does not have any local services and its community only has the use of a village hall. Great Bedwyn, with a greater population, has a range of services. On the whole the two nearby market towns of Hungerford and Marlborough are the main service providers for this area.

Key Issues

- in the past, intensification in farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** including biodiversity (e.g. chalk grassland/relict heathland) archaeological features and creation of large open fields;
- need for **woodland management**, particularly areas of ancient and semi-natural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing and as wood pasture;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows;
- **climate change** - potential impact on woodland and parkland including increase in non-native species and tree loss (drought/windthrow);
- intense **development pressures**, notably for new housing in the villages in the eastern part of the area, which have good rail links to London - potential harmful effect on the character of the small nucleated hamlets and villages, plus demand for housing stock leading to inflated prices and absence of affordable housing;
- **loss of tranquillity.**

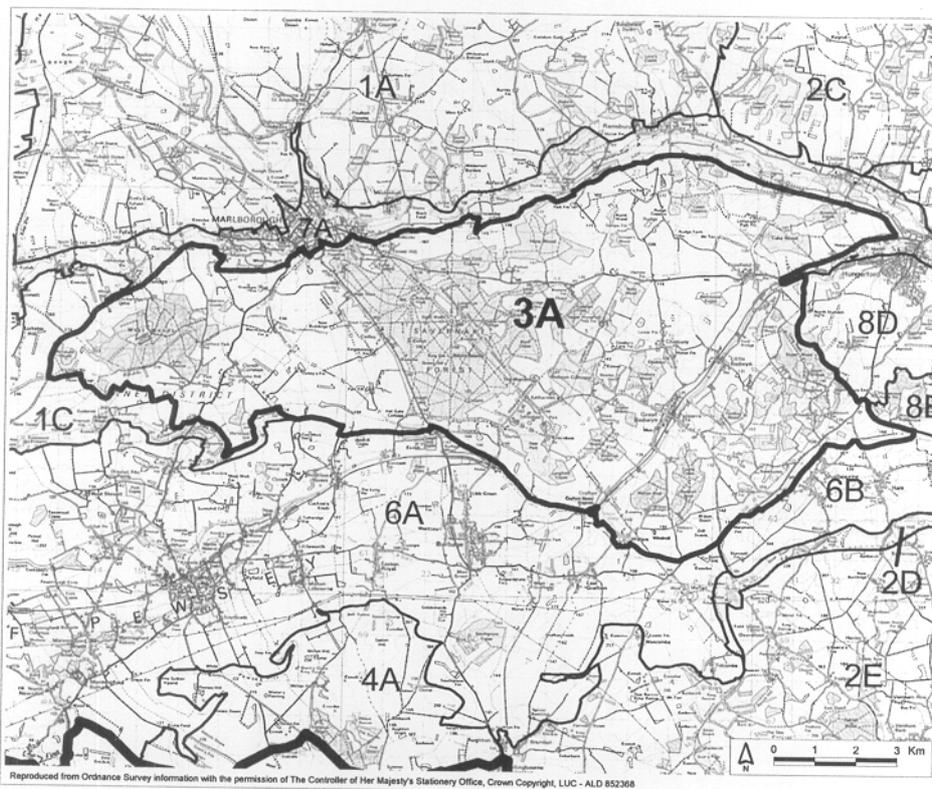
Key Management Requirements

10.17. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the character of the Wooded Plateau with its extensive woodlands and farmland mosaic, special qualities of peacefulness and seclusion, and wealth of sustainable recreation opportunities. Key features to be conserved and enhanced are:

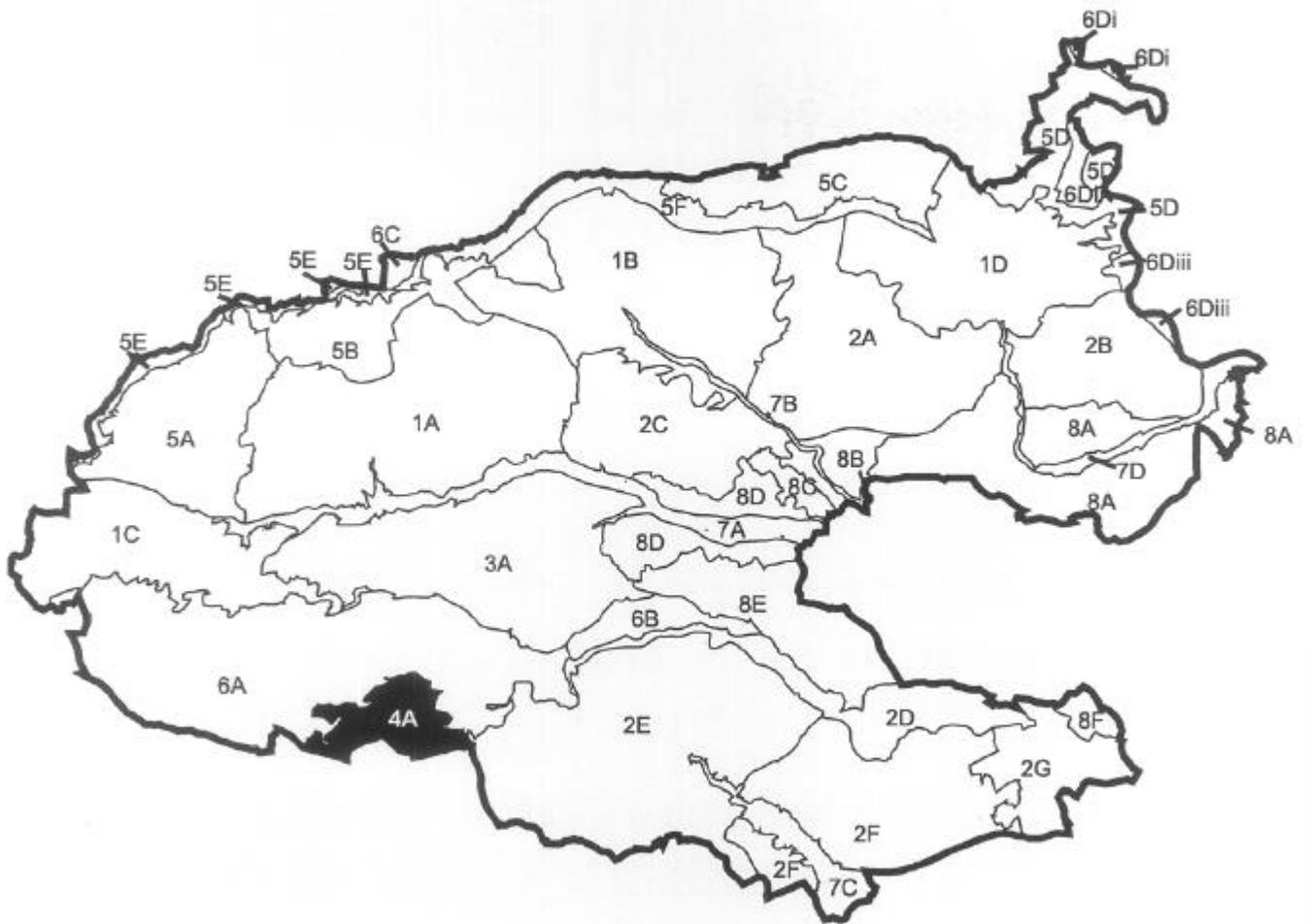
- the extensive woodland blocks at Savernake Forest and West Wood, plus the numerous ancient and semi-natural woodlands of great biodiversity value;
- the corridor of the Kennet and Avon Canal and associated features;
- intimate mosaic of woodland and farmland created particularly the intact pattern of hedgerows and smaller woodland blocks;
- remnant areas of heathland, with opportunities for management and habitat restoration;
- areas of open access, woodland walks and recreational paths;
- historic parkland and formal designed landscapes of Tottenham Park and Littlecote Park, with their permanent pasture, parkland trees, avenues and rides;
- the distinct pattern and character of the settlement with a remote uninhabited western plateau and small hamlets and villages in the east;
- the quiet, rural character of the plateau, which in the more open areas is particularly vulnerable to large scale or tall infrastructures.

Character Areas

- 10.18. The Wooded Plateau landscape type occurs in a single area, with a unity of character and therefore forms one character area: 3A: Savernake Plateau.



Landscape Type 4 - High Chalk Plain



11. LANDSCAPE TYPE 4: HIGH CHALK PLAIN

Location and Boundaries

- 11.1. The High Chalk Plain landscape type occurs in one location, and is represented by the single character area of Salisbury Plain, of which only the northern-most tip is within the North Wessex Downs, with the main part of the Plain extending southwards. The following description refers only to the small area in the AONB. The boundary of the landscape type is clearly defined by the base of the steep scarp slope (contour 135 - 155m AOD), which rises dramatically from the lower lying Vale of Pewsey to the north.

Overview

The high Chalk Plain landscape type is represented by the single character area of Salisbury Plain, of which only the northern-most tip is within the North Wessex Downs. The landscape description refers to this small area only.

The open, rolling landform of the Upper Chalk creates a bleak, spacious landscape with long views and a strong sense of remoteness and isolation. A dramatic escarpment forms the northern boundary, as at Pewsey Hill and Fyfield Down, and provides panoramic views across the adjacent lowland Vale of Pewsey. The Pewsey White Horse carved into the scarp slope is a distinctive landmark in views from the Vale. Unlike other parts of Salisbury Plain, the downland has been intensively cultivated and does not retain the ecological diversity of the wilder unimproved grasslands of the military training areas, although important bird species such as the stone curlew and skylark have a visible and audible presence. The land is almost wholly under arable cultivation within large, regular fields. The virtual absence of tree cover and sparse hedgerow enclosure, contributes to the sense of openness and remoteness.

The area includes a large number of archaeological sites. Several earthworks are visible on ridges and hilltops and stand out as prominent features on the skyline when viewed from below. These include Giant's Grave Neolithic long barrow and several Bronze Age round barrows. Contemporary settlement is limited to a very small number of isolated farms.

Key Characteristics

- expansive chalk upland landscape forming the northern edge of the vast rolling landscape of Salisbury Plain (beyond the AONB);
- absence of the Clay-with-Flint resulting in a bleaker, more open, landscape;
- pronounced scarp along the northern boundary forming a dominant feature from the lower lying Vale of Pewsey, providing outstanding views across the Vale;
- land cover dominated by arable farmland set within a large-scale irregular field pattern. Isolated fragments of chalk grassland survive and there are occasional woodlands and scrub areas;
- important habitat for declining farmland bird species, including stone curlew and skylark;
- numerous Bronze Age round barrows sited on prominent ridges and hill tops plus Giant's Grave - a Neolithic long mound;

- field pattern of large regular and straight edged fields resulting from formal 18th and 19th century Parliamentary enclosures, with more recent boundary removal to create a very open, large scale landscape;
- settlements confined to a small number of isolated farms;
- well served by a number of footpaths, bridleways and byways allowing a good recreational access to the area and its visible archaeological features;
- a large scale, open and remote character.

Physical Influences

- 11.2. **Geology and Soils:** The geology of the area consists largely of Upper Chalk, which forms the main upland areas of the Plain. The Upper Chalk gives way to Middle Chalk along the steep scarp to the north, and the Lower Chalk also outcrops in places along the scarp. An important difference in geology is the virtual absence of the Clay-with-Flint capping, creating a bleaker more open landscape. Well-drained calcareous soils dominate the area.
- 11.3. **Landform:** Landform is typical of the upland chalk, with an open, rolling topography sloping gently to the south. The pronounced scarp, which defines the northern boundary, as at Pewsey Hill and Fyfield Down is a visible and dominant feature from the lower lying Vale. There are outstanding views across the Vale of Pewsey from the scarp.

Biodiversity

- 11.4. Within the AONB there are some scattered fragments of chalk grassland that remain within the agricultural matrix, 11 of these fragments are of nature conservation interest and have non-statutory designation. To the south of the AONB boundary there are large areas of unimproved grassland, notably Salisbury Plain which is an important SSSI and military training area.
- 11.5. Unlike other areas south of the AONB boundary, the downland has been relatively unaffected by military activity, and has been intensively cultivated. The dominant habitat is therefore arable farmland with occasional woodland and scrub. This means that it has not retained the ecological diversity of the wilder unimproved grasslands of the Military training areas. Nevertheless the remote upland areas are of considerable biodiversity interest, with Salisbury Plain forming an important refuge for otherwise declining bird species including stone curlew and skylark, the latter being a particularly audible feature of this area.

Historic Environment

- 11.6. **Prehistoric Monuments:** Several earthworks visible on ridges and hilltops stand out as prominent features on the skyline when viewed from below. These include Giant's Grave Neolithic long mound and Bronze Age round barrows at Everleigh, Down Farm and Milton Hill Farm. Late Bronze Age or Iron Age field systems visible as slight linear earthworks occur across the area, at Easton Clump, Pewsey Down and on Aughton Down. Large circular enclosures, which may date to the prehistoric period, tend to be located on prominent hilltops, such as Godsbury.

- 11.7. **Medieval Land Use:** A series of prominent parallel terraces, or strip lynchets, cut into the scarp edge are probably the remains of medieval ploughing, although dating these features is difficult. Running approximately parallel to the contours, these were an extension of medieval open fields onto steep ground, at a time when flatter, more easily worked ground was in short supply.
- 11.8. **Field Patterns:** The area is now predominantly open country with a very few scattered farms. Much of the area was probably open downland grazing until the post-medieval period and the modern field pattern is the largely the result of formal, eighteenth and nineteenth century Parliamentary enclosure. Many of these large, regular and straight-sided fields have had boundaries removed to form very large, 'prairie' fields.
- 11.9. **Military Activity:** Some modern trackways and earthworks are the result of military activity following the First and Second World Wars. However, this northernmost part of the Salisbury Plain Training Area has not been as heavily disturbed as some of the more southerly areas.

Settlement and Building Character

- 11.10. There are no settlements, other than a small number of isolated farms. The remote, and even bleak, nature of this area is a special feature.

Recreation Character

- 11.11. This part of Salisbury Plain is well served by a number of footpaths, bridleways and byways allowing good recreational access to the area and its visible archaeological features such as strip lynchets and tumuli. The Pewsey White Horse is carved into the north facing scarp, and included on the Wiltshire White Horse Trail.

Social and Economic Character

- 11.12. Salisbury Plain is a remote area with a tiny population, containing only a few isolated farm buildings. No parishes were identified within the landscape type and there are, therefore, no statistics available to derive social and economic characteristics. There are no services or facilities and the only source of local employment is in the intensive arable farming operations. The farms units are largely managed under contract labour as opposed to small family farms.

Key Issues

- in the past, intensification in farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** including biodiversity (e.g. chalk grassland) archaeological features and landscape character with creation of large 'prairie' fields;
- **unsympathetic tree and woodland planting** in the form of irregular blocks and linear plantations of ornamental species;
- **climate change** - potential impacts on chalk grassland habitats and requirement for irrigation of arable land - including potential future demand for construction of reservoirs and infrastructure;
- **vulnerability to development**, particularly large scale or tall structures and potential impact in views to the scarp top from the Vale of Pewsey.

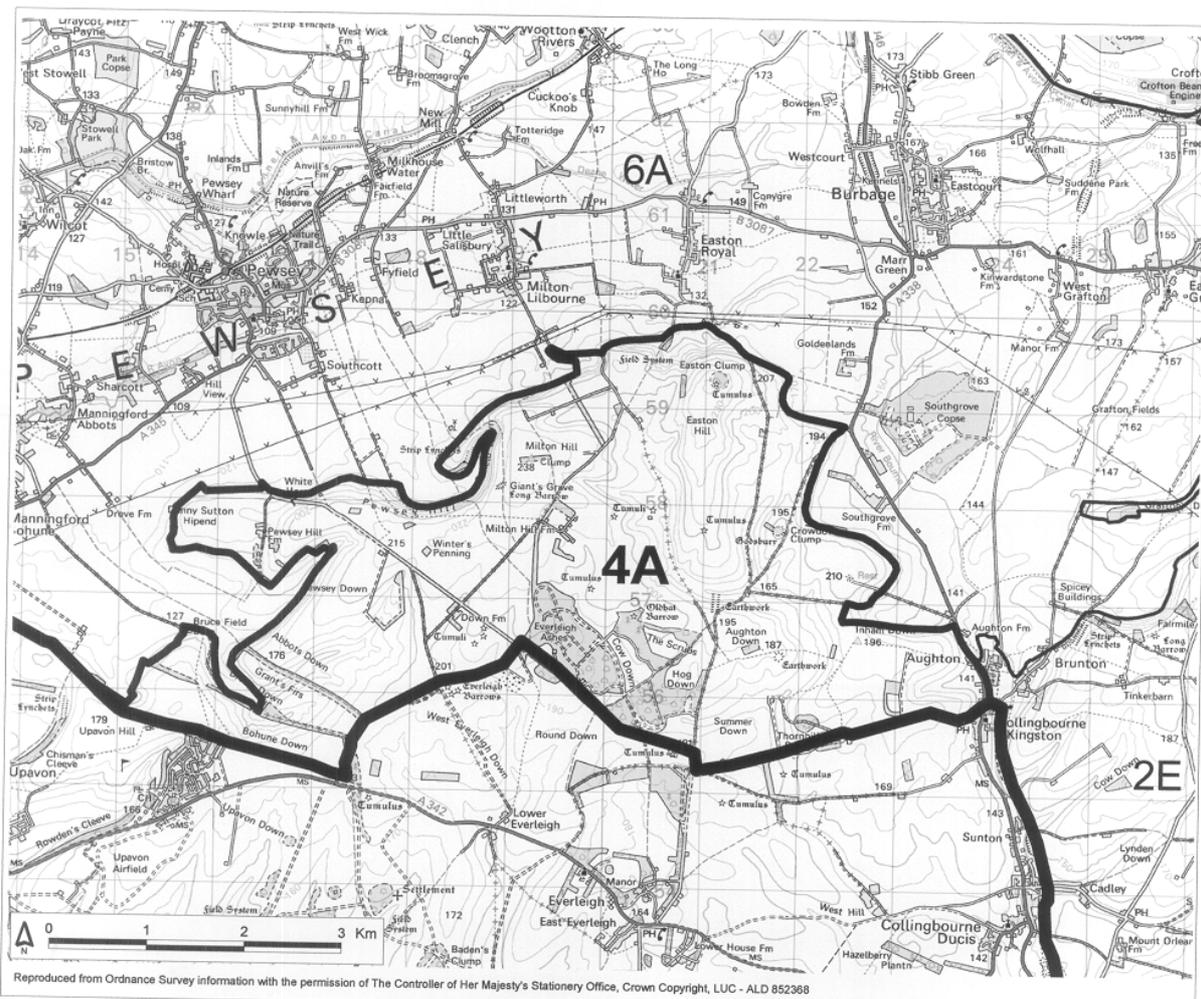
Key Management Requirements

11.13. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the expansive character of the High Chalk Plain with its openness, isolation, remoteness and absence of settlement. Key features to be conserved and enhanced include:

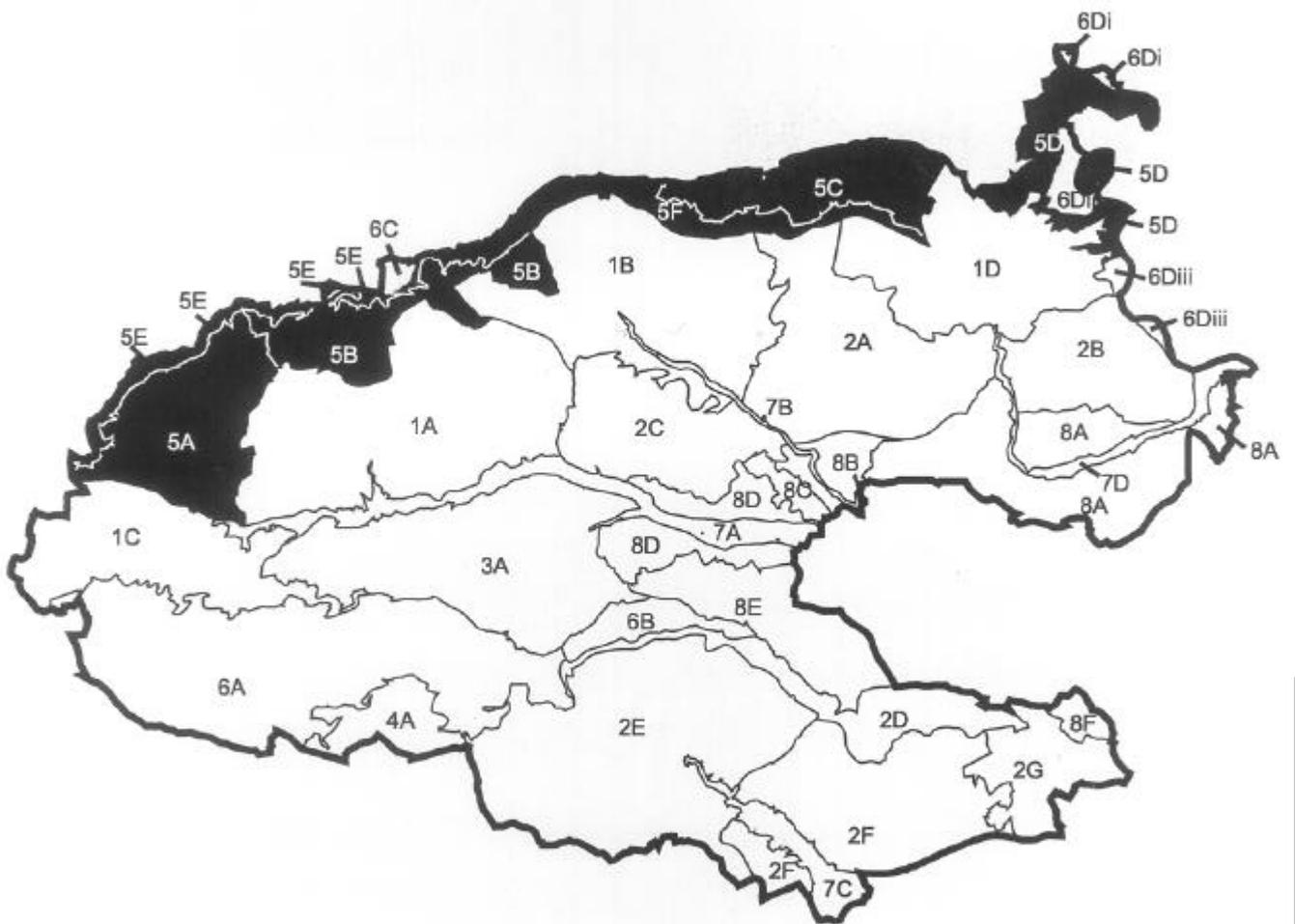
- isolated fragments of chalk grasslands with opportunities for restoration to extend and link habitats;
- the field pattern, with opportunities to restore hedgerows;
- importance as a habitat for declining farmland bird species – with a mosaic of arable land and chalk grassland;
- the unsettled character, clear ridgelines and horizons and absence of development, particularly along the open scarp above the Vale of Pewsey.

Character Areas

11.14. The Chalk Plain forms a single character area: 4A: Salisbury Plain, which itself is part of a much wider area extending south of the AONB boundary.



Landscape Type 5 - Downs Plain and Scarp



12. LANDSCAPE TYPE 5: DOWNS PLAIN AND SCARP

Location and Boundaries

- 12.1. The Downs Plain and Scarp landscape occurs along the northern edge of the AONB, extending from Cherhill in the west to Chilton in the east. It is largely differentiated by geology, with the Plain being formed by the eroded surface of the Lower Chalk resulting in a lower and more level land surface compared with the Upper and Middle Chalk of the Downlands. The base of the dramatic escarpment, which is generally coincident with the AONB boundary, forms the northern edge of the landscape type. Similarly an internal escarpment marking the transition of the Lower Chalk to the harder Middle/Upper Chalk frequently forms the southern boundary, although this is not always a clear physical feature and in places the Plain merges with the high downlands (landscape type 1).

Overview

The landscape of the Downs Plain and Scarp extends along the entire northern edge of the North Wessex Downs. It is defined by geology with the plain formed by the eroded surface of the Lower Chalk, creating a low, level surface extending as a ledge at the foot of the high downs, linked to a distinctive steep escarpment. The scarp slope descends abruptly to the adjacent Vale, except in the eastern part of the AONB where the slope curves to the south and forms the backdrop to the plain. Together, these two interlinked areas of plain and scarp, are described as a single landscape type. It is characterised by two of the most emblematic features of the North Wessex Downs: the prehistoric route of the Ridgeway running along the scarp top; and Avebury World Heritage Site with its unique concentration of Neolithic monuments.

The dramatic scarp landform creates a recognisable horizon visible from the lower lying landscapes to the north. The summit of the slope is characterised by Bronze Age barrows clustered along the skyline and Iron Age hill forts, connected by the prehistoric route of the Ridgeway. Waylands Smithy long barrow, Uffington Hill Fort and the enigmatic chalk-cut figure of the Uffington White Horse are among many symbolic landmarks that characterise these highly visible slopes. The long, sleek figure of the Uffington White Horse is undoubtedly Britain's oldest and most famous hill figure (at least 3,000 years old) and may have inspired the subsequent creation of further chalk carvings within the North Wessex Downs. The route of the Ridgeway has been celebrated in art and literature and today, walkers and cyclists continue to enjoy the experience of the Ridgeway National Trail.

The steep scarp is cut by springs creating a convoluted edge. The slopes are alternatively under woodland or pasture, with the variation in land cover reflected in their high biodiversity interest, with a notable number of SSSIs. These include an abundance of herb-rich chalk grasslands and linear hanging woodlands clinging to the steep slopes. The presence of parks and designed landscapes is a particular feature, where their positioning on the scarp allows enjoyment of both the extensive views and the water resources, with springs and streams frequently incorporated

into landscape schemes. By comparison, the flat level Plains are almost entirely in intensive arable cultivation, with large regular fields bound by close trimmed hawthorn hedgerows, the product of Parliamentary enclosure generally creating a much more uniform, open landscape.

To the far west of the plain lies Avebury Plain, one of the most extensively utilised areas in Europe in prehistory. It contains one of the densest concentrations of Neolithic monuments in Britain, including the distinctive stone circle at Avebury, the monumental mound at Silbury Hill and a Neolithic causewayed enclosure at Windmill Hill. Its international importance was formally recognised in 1986 when it was designated as a World Heritage Site.

Settlement is characterised by a string of attractive, small, clustered springline villages along the base of the scarp. This distinct pattern of settlement contrasts with the largely uninhabited plain, where former military airfields are often the only significant development.

Key Characteristics

Downs Plain

- underlain by the eroded surface of the Lower Chalk, a softer clayey substrate compared to the hard Middle and Upper Chalks;
- the Plains appear as an almost flat, level, surface;
- bleak open landscape dominated by arable land, within large fields without enclosure or hedge, scrub or tree cover – notable absence of hedgerow trees;
- Avebury Plain is the landscape setting for the unique complex of Neolithic monuments of the World Heritage Site;
- field patterns are characterised by large, regular fields, primarily the product of Parliamentary enclosure, with more recent boundary removal;
- general absence of settlement, which tends to be concentrated on the scarp;
- airfields and redundant military sites are a particular feature.

Scarp

- a dramatic landform feature marking the northern edge of the AONB and creating a very visible horizon and skyline from the lower lying clay Vales to the north and west;
- numerous springs issuing at the junction of the greensand and clay create distinctive combs incised into the slope;
- a mosaic of pasture, woodland and parkland in close proximity, forming a richly textured landscape pattern and important ecological resource;
- an abundance of herb-rich chalk grasslands including numerous SSSIs;
- western scarp extensively wooded with linear hanger woods and estate land with many trees;
- parkland and estates are a particular feature of the scarp, where their strategic position offers extensive views. Springs and streams are frequently being incorporated into designed landscape schemes;
- Bronze Age round barrows are characteristically located on the skyline in positions meant to be seen from below. Iron Age hillforts are also a feature of the scarp top;
- the prehistoric route of the Ridgeway running along much of the scarp top remains well used to this day as a National Trail. It links many archaeological sites, which are all important visitor 'honeypots';
- attractive springline villages clustered along the scarp;
- generally, this landscape type has experienced a small decrease in population over

the past 20 years. Parishes are poorly served in terms of facilities, suggesting a high car ownership and high traffic levels on the rural lane network.

Physical Influences

- 12.2. **Geology and Soils:** The area is underlain by the eroded surface of the Lower Chalk, a softer clayey substrate compared to the hard pure white Middle and Upper Chalk. Along the northern and western edge the scarp descends to the heavy Gault Clays and Greensands of the surrounding low-lying Vales. Soils reflect the underlying geology and tend to be shallow and calcareous with some heavier clay.
- 12.3. **Landform:** The softer eroded geology has given rise to a lower and more level land surface, which forms a ledge at the foot of the Downs. The Plains generally slope gently towards the scarp but appear almost flat. There are very few valleys on the Lower Chalk Plain and where they exist they are shallow and generally insignificant.
- 12.4. One of the most dramatic landform features within the whole AONB is the steep northern escarpment, which creates a highly visible horizon over much of the lower lying clay Vales to the north and west and signals the edge the North Wessex Downs from a wide area. Numerous springs issue at the junction of the chalk and clay, creating distinctive coombes incised into the slope. The presence of parks and designed landscapes is a particular feature of the scarp, where their strategic positioning allows them to enjoy both the extensive views and the water resources, with springs and streams frequently incorporated into designed landscape schemes.

Biodiversity

- 12.5. The steep chalk scarp, along with its coombes and valleys, contains a large number of important chalk grasslands. The western part of the scarp is extensively wooded with linear 'hanger' woodlands clinging to the steep ground along the scarp, as well as smaller wooded coombes. Estate land is also a feature of the scarp and these areas, with their trees and hedged fields also create a wooded character. Woodlands vary greatly according to the local conditions and include beech hangers and ancient semi natural ash and hazel coppice with oak, and wet ash-maple woodland on lower slopes. The mosaic of farmland, woodland and remnant areas of chalk grassland habitat, all in close proximity, makes the scarp a rich ecological resource. By contrast, the flat level surface of the Downs Plain has proved attractive for intensive farming and is dominated by open arable areas with very little hedge, scrub or tree cover, and has relatively little ecological interest under present management regimes.

Historic Environment

- 12.6. **Landscape Development:** Avebury Plain was one of the most extensively utilised areas in Europe in prehistory with a plethora of major archaeological sites and smaller residential community sites. Much of this area was used for arable cultivation in prehistory, resulting in soil depletion by early historic times and thus a change to a primarily pastoral use. It was this that provided the classic sheep-grazed downland.

Arable cultivation only returned to these areas in the post-war years, with the onset of steam, and then mechanised ploughing and fertilisation.

- 12.7. The scarps, however, were unsuited to tillage by view of their steep (up to 30°) slopes, and thin grey rendzina soils. Without agriculture and intensive grazing, many of these areas were wooded until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when they were cleared for timber and for pasture.
- 12.8. **Neolithic Monuments:** The density of major Neolithic monuments around Avebury including the henge, the West Kennet Avenue, Silbury Hill, the Sanctuary and Bronze Age round barrows, is unparalleled in the AONB. The distribution of earthwork monuments suggests that other areas of the North Wessex Downs saw less intensive inhabitation during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age. Nonetheless, the character of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age occupation would appear to have been different in these areas, with far less emphasis on long barrows and communal monuments such as henges.
- 12.9. **Bronze Age Round Barrows:** Round barrows are a ubiquitous feature; the great majority found in clusters or groups of three or more, typically situated on high ground, along the skyline of the scarp and often on spurs. The barrows are meant to be seen from below.
- 12.10. **Field patterns:** The landscape type is characterised by large, regular sized fields which are principally the product of formal post-medieval Parliamentary enclosure. On the scarp edge, there are some examples of strip lynchets, for example, on Charlbury Hill (5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp). These are the terraces by which cultivation was extended up the hillsides, thereby enabling more land to be ploughed. Unfortunately, such features are difficult to date, although it is clear that the great labour involved in their construction would not have been undertaken without considerable pressure on available arable land and an increased demand for food, for example, during the population expansion of the thirteenth century.

Settlement and Building Character

- 12.11. The very distinct settlement pattern consists of a string of small clustered springline villages along the base of the scarp. These include a number of attractive estate villages as well as houses and parklands.

Recreation Character

- 12.12. The many archaeological features and spring line villages within the landscape type are well connected by an intricate network of footpaths, bridleway and byways. These include linear routes, which utilise the slightly lower land on the edge of the high downs, as well as routes cutting up and down the scarp slope connecting the Vales and the downs. The landscape type contains many well-promoted long distance routes, including the Ridgeway National Trail, which runs along virtually the whole of the scarp top, plus the ancient Icknield Way, which runs along the foot of the Lower Chalk, above the point where springs issue onto the Greensand. The landscape also includes sections

of the Thames Valley Cycle Route, the Severn and Thames Cycle Route, the Chiselden and Marlborough Railway Path and the Downland Villages Riding Route (promoted by the British Horse Society). Letcombe Castle, Uffington Castle and Uffington White Horse are amongst the many impressive archaeological features and visitor 'honeypots' to be found in the landscape type. The steep scarp slope also includes numerous areas popular as hang-glider launching sites. Sites with open access include National Trust properties at Hinton Parva, Ashdown Park and Uffington. Other examples of open access land include the Little Wittenham Nature Reserve run by The Northmoor Trust. A Youth Hostel at Wantage Down provides accommodation for walkers and cyclists.

Social and Economic Characteristics

- 12.13. The spring line villages clustered along the scarp are a distinctive feature of the AONB. Surprisingly, many of the parishes within this Downs Plain and Scarp landscape type have experienced a small decrease in their population over the past 20 years, which is interesting given their location on the edge of the AONB and comparative accessibility to expanding areas such as Didcot and Swindon. The populations of Letcombe Bassett and East Hendred have, for example, experienced out-migration of approximately 15%.
- 12.14. The parishes within this landscape type are quite poorly served in terms of facilities. This may contribute to the fact that many have witnessed a population decline over the last twenty years. Chiseldon, located in close proximity to Swindon, is the only parish experiencing population growth and has the greatest range of facilities. The reliance upon services available elsewhere would suggest high car ownership within the area and high traffic levels. The actual impact on the landscape character is more difficult to assess. The villages appear as highly attractive, small settlements and, with the exception of Chiseldon, new development has been very restricted presenting an 'unspoilt' character. However, this picture disguises underlying trends with villages losing their younger populations as well as their services - so that in the day time the settlements are essentially empty with no internal life. Located on the edge of the AONB connections are mainly with the urban centres of Swindon, Wantage, Didcot and Oxford rather than the market towns within the AONB.

Key Issues

- in the past, agricultural intensification leading to **loss of environmental assets** including biodiversity (e.g. chalk grassland) archaeological features and landscape character;
- changes in farming practices - including loss of livestock with some marginal areas on the scarp slope no longer being grazed leading to **scrub encroachment, most notably on the steeper scarp slopes**;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows. This is a particular concern on the Plain, where field boundary loss has resulted in some very large open landscapes;

- **lack of appropriate woodland management** particularly the small ancient and semi natural woodlands of the scarp formerly managed by coppicing;
- **climate change** - potential impacts on chalk grassland habitats and requirement for irrigation of arable land - including construction of reservoirs and intrusive infrastructure. Impact on woodland and parkland with potential increase in non native species and tree loss (drought/windthrow);
- **Intensive recreational pressures** around 'honeypot' sites;
- **vulnerability to large scale development**, particularly tall structures (e.g. masts or turbines) on the scarp summit and re-use of redundant military infrastructure on the Plains, with associated impacts, e.g. traffic generation;
- **pressures for housing** and peripheral development of attractive springline villages along the scarp - potential loss of local vernacular character, and decline in rural services;
- impact of **development of the edge of the AONB**, for example at Wantage, Swindon, Harwell, Didcot - visual impact plus increased pressures on housing, roads, etc.;
- **loss of rural tranquillity**, resulting from the combination of the above.

Key Management Requirements

12.15. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the distinctive and contrasting character of the Downs Plain and associated Scarp. This includes:

- the distinct landform and clear skyline;
- the mix of landcover including woodland, pasture and historic parklands;
- the Ridgeway and unique collection of archaeological sites including management of recreational pressure around key sites;
- attractive spring line villages along the base of the scarp and the contrasting open, uninhabited plain;
- conservation of existing areas of chalk grassland and opportunities for habitat recreation to extend and link sites.
- restoration of landscape character by reinforcing the hedgerow pattern and considering opportunities for further woodland planting, particularly on the plain.

12.16. Consideration should also be given to the impact of development on the boundary of the North Wessex Downs on views from the higher ground of the Downs Plain and Scarp.

Character Areas

12.17. The Downs Plain and Scarp landscape type is divided into six component character areas. These comprise.

5A: Avebury Plain

5B: Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain

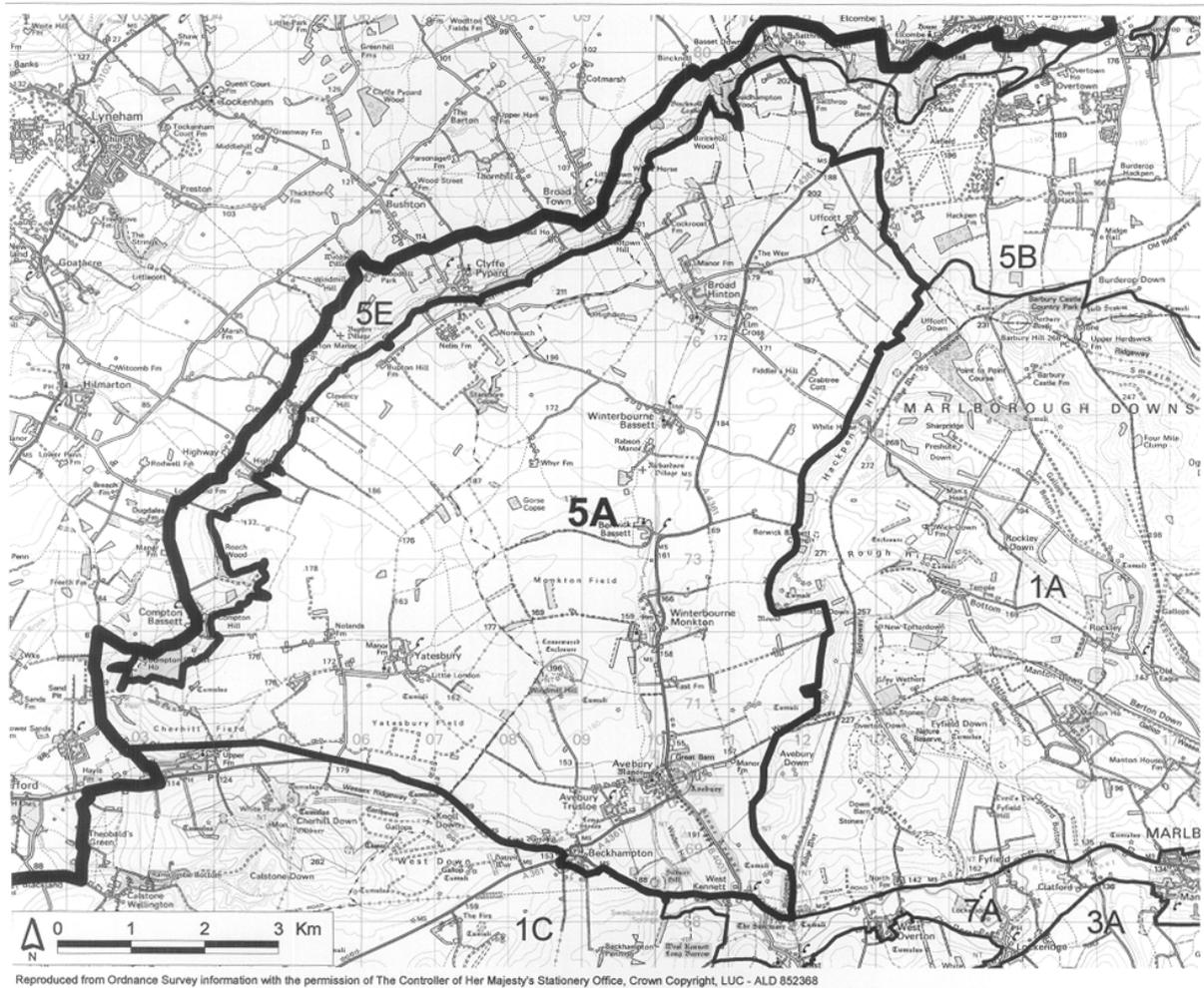
5C: Hendred Plain

5D: Moreton Plain

5E: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp

5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp

CHARACTER AREA 5A: AVEBURY PLAIN



- 1.18. **Location and Boundaries:** Avebury Plain is a flat level area on the Lower Chalk in the western part of the AONB. Boundaries are clear and distinct and are formed by the steep slopes of the Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp (5E) to the west, and to the south by the steep rising scarp topography associated with the change in geology to the Upper Chalk which underlies the Marlborough Downs (1A) and Horton Downs (1C).

Landscape Character Description

- 12.19. The flat level land surface is intensively cultivated and the area is characterised by expanses of large open arable fields, with boundaries formed by fences or thin lines of trimmed hawthorn, creating long views and a bleak, exposed character. The northern part of the area has a greater degree of enclosure with a stronger hedge pattern plus a number of small copses and shelterbelts. The shallow winterbourne valley contains permanent pasture along the valley floor in association with hedgerows and small copses. Silbury Hill is located in the southern part of the valley at the confluence with the River Kennet, forming a prominent feature.
- 12.20. Central to the character of the whole area are the monuments associated with Avebury World Heritage Site (WHS), which are locally prominent and imbue the wider landscape with a sense of antiquity and historical continuity. They include Avebury Henge and Stone Circles, West Kennet Avenue, Windmill Hill and Silbury Hill. The Sanctuary, Overton Hill, which is an integral part of the archaeological complex and the WHS are included within the adjacent River Kennet Valley (7A).
- 12.21. Settlements are confined to the winterbourne valley. Avebury and Avebury Trusloe are dramatically located within and adjacent to the stone circle creating an important relationship to, and setting for, the monument. To the north are the regularly spaced villages of Winterbourne Monkton, Berwick Bassett, Winterbourne Bassett and Broad Hinton. These typically contain a nucleus of church, rectory, manor house and farm with further buildings extending outwards, with the settlements taking on a more linear form. Building materials include sarsen stone in conjunction with brick to create a distinctive local vernacular style.

Key Characteristics

- a level flat Plain, cut by the shallow valley of the Winterbourne stream. Windmill Hill and Silbury Hill form visually prominent features in the landscape;
- one of the densest concentrations of Neolithic monuments in Britain forming Avebury World Heritage Site (WHS). The prominent monuments are central to the character of the area and provide a sense of antiquity and historical continuity;
- characterised by expanses of large open arable fields bounded by fences or thin hawthorn hedges allowing long views and creating a bleak character. To the north, a number of small copses and shelter belts plus a stronger hedgerow pattern provide a greater degree of enclosure;
- permanent pasture concentrated along the shallow Winterbourne valley floor and around the archaeological monuments;
- settlements are confined to the Winterbourne valley with regularly spaced villages typically containing a nucleus of a church, rectory, manor house and farm with further buildings extending outwards. Avebury and Avebury Trusloe are dramatically located within and adjacent to the stone circle;
- a distinctive vernacular building style involving 'squares' of bricks and dressed flint nodules, plus use of sarsen stone;
- long views and a sense of openness, with strong associations with the prehistoric period.

Physical Influences

- 12.22. Avebury Plain is a topographically homogenous area of relatively simple geology formed by the eroded level surface of the Lower Chalk. Although appearing virtually flat the area slopes gently towards the village of Avebury and the Winterbourne stream. The watercourse flows southwards through the area to the Kennet in a shallow open valley. It is joined at Avebury by a further small valley running eastwards from Yatesbury. Soils are mainly thin and calcareous, with some alluvium within the valleys. Windmill Hill is a visually prominent landform and one of the most important sites within Avebury World Heritage Site.

Historic Environment

- 12.23. **Neolithic Monuments:** The area contains one of the densest concentrations of Neolithic monuments in Britain and its international importance, together with Stonehenge, was recognised by its designation as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1986. Many of the monuments are Guardianship sites in the care of English Heritage, which rate the greatest degree of statutory protection. These include the Late Neolithic henge at **Avebury** consisting of massive banks and ditches with stone circles inside. An avenue of paired sarsen stones leads from Avebury henge to the remains of a smaller (possible) henge known as the Sanctuary, some 2.3 kilometres distant.
- 12.24. The area also contains **Silbury Hill**, the most famous example of a rare class of Neolithic monument known as monumental mounds. The monument comprises a flat-topped conical mound, over 39 m high and with a diameter of over 167 m, surrounded by a quarry ditch. It is located on a slight natural spur on the western side of the Kennet Valley, south of the village of Avebury. Although its exact function is unclear, the site would have had considerable importance to the prehistoric occupants of the area. Other Guardianship monuments include a Neolithic causewayed enclosure, located on **Windmill Hill**, a prominent but low hill north-west of Avebury. The monument comprises a small circular area of some 400 meters diameter, defined by three roughly concentric rings comprising banks and ditches.
- 12.25. **Bronze Age Round Barrows:** Around this exceptional collection of major ceremonial monuments are numerous Bronze Age round barrows, concentrated along ridges or on hilltops. Of particular prominence are the groups on Overton Hill and the Ridgeway, a significant prehistoric routeway which crosses the area.
- 12.26. **Medieval Settlement:** Modern villages such as Winterbourne Monkton are linear settlements spread along the dry valley bottoms, and this is a typical medieval pattern for the area, with Richardson in the Winterbourne Valley, being an example of a deserted medieval village.
- 12.27. **Field Patterns:** Many of the sinuous, long and narrow fields oriented at right angles to the scarp edge, or to the Winterbourne valley, may represent surviving medieval boundaries. In some cases these may represent 'filling in' or informal enclosure between existing tracks or droveways. Some of the few copses that do survive have irregular boundaries indicating late medieval or post-medieval assarts. Over much of the downland areas however, the landscape had reverted to open grazing and common

land. The large, straight-sided and regular fields of the modern landscape are chiefly the product of formal, post-medieval Parliamentary enclosure. Some of these fields have been further expanded in the modern period into very large, 'prairie' fields.

- 12.28. **Modern landscape:** In the post-medieval and modern periods the landscape around Avebury has seen many changes. This includes a small seventeenth century designed parkland around Avebury Manor, and the addition of tree clumps, known locally as 'hedgehogs' on barrows along the skyline of the ridgeway scarp to the east of Avebury. More modern development is represented by the remnants of a Second World War air base at Yatesbury Field.

Biodiversity

- 12.29. The Avebury Plain Landscape Character Area has retained a number of valuable woodland and grassland sites. There are 11 woodland and 10 grassland sites with non-statutory designation, together with Silbury Hill (SSSI), which is a nationally important area of chalk grassland.
- 12.30. Some examples of non-statutory woodland sites are Home Wood and Stanmore Copse, while grassland sites include Avebury Henge and Beckhampton Chalk.

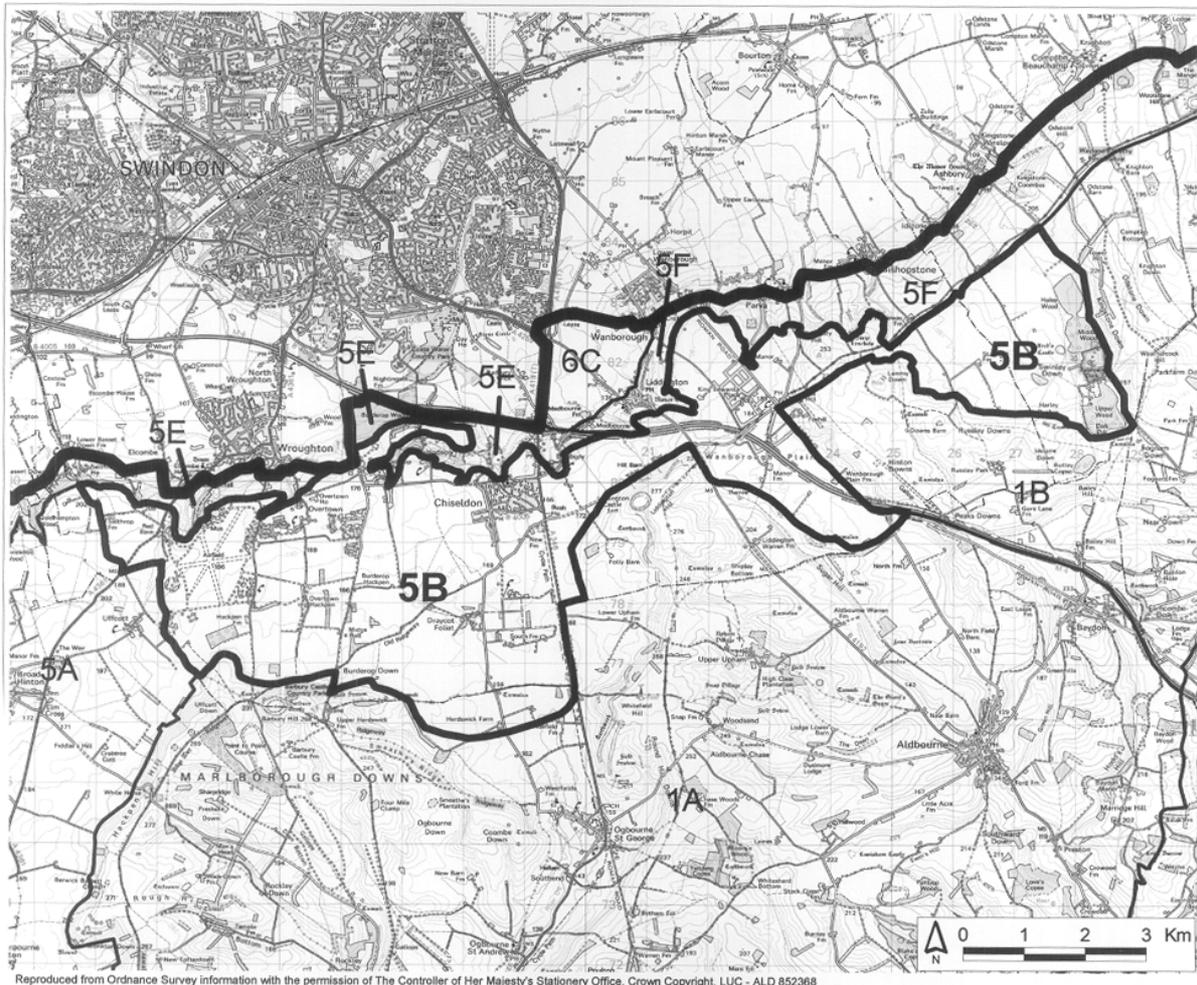
Key Issues

- in the past, intensification in farming (arable conversion) leading to **loss of environmental assets** including biodiversity (e.g. chalk grassland and waterside pasture in the valleys) archaeological features and the creation of large 'prairie' fields;
- changes in farming practices - including loss of livestock with some grassland no longer being grazed, leading to **scrub encroachment on open downland**. Grazed pasture is essential as the landscape setting for the archaeological monuments;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows creating a very open landscape;
- **vulnerability to large scale development** - high visual impact of existing pylons and large scale farm buildings plus potential impact of tall structures (e.g. masts or turbines) which will be very detrimental within this open landscape and on the setting of the WHS;
- **development pressures** within the small valley villages - impact on settlement character, and coalescence of distinct areas;
- localised visual and noise intrusion of **roads** A4, A4361 and B4003;
- **visitor pressures** around Avebury monuments resulting in localised erosion, plus the need resolve issues relating to access, circulation, interpretation, signage - as set out in the WHS Management Plan.

Key Management Requirements

- 12.31. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the special character of the Avebury Plain as the landscape and setting for the unique complex of archaeological monuments of the WHS. Detailed management recommendations for the WHS are contained in the Avebury WHS Management Plan.
- 12.32. The key features to be conserved and enhanced in the wider landscape include the sense of openness and long views, chalk grassland on the Plain, around archaeological sites and waterside pasture in the valleys, and the historic field patterns and hedgerow boundaries, particularly those around Avebury Village and the Winterbourne Valley. The distinct settlement pattern with an open unpopulated landscape should be maintained.

CHARACTER AREA 5B: CHISELDON – WANBOROUGH PLAIN



- 1.33. **Location and Boundaries:** The Chiseldon/Wanborough Plain is located on the level ledge of Lower Chalk that extends to the north of the Marlborough Downs (1A). Boundaries are clearly defined by the topography. They are formed in the north by crest of the steep scarp (5D: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp).

Landscape Character Description

- 12.34. The distinct character of the area is largely created by the level uniform land surface. However throughout the area, the backdrop created by the high land of the Marlborough Down is dominant on the skyline, creating a sense of enclosure and containment. The Plain is almost entirely under arable cultivation in large open fields, with few boundaries, apart from occasional hawthorn hedges and post and wire fences along roadsides. Woodlands are limited to a small number of linear shelter and screening belts planted in discordant regular patterns near Hackpen and Draycot Foliat. The absence of hedgerow enclosure and woodland, combined with the flat landform, creates a high degree of intervisibility with sweeping views through the area. In places the open landscape structure, without local pattern or detail, results in an open character, in stark contrast to the intimate landscape of the scarp and the drama of the downs.
- 12.35. Generally the settlements are located (outside the character area) at the foot of the scarp, with a north south orientation of parish boundaries from the villages up the scarp and onto the Plain. Settlement, within the character area, is limited to the lateral modern expansion of the scarp top village of Chiseldon, with only the small long established hamlet of Draycot Foliat actually located on the Plain. Farm buildings are infrequent and widely dispersed, and are not a characteristic feature of the area, suggesting that the Plains might have been used more as a resource by the villages on the scarp than settled in its own right. Roads tend to be long and straight running in a north south orientation and linked laterally by tracks. The routes of both the Ridgeway and the M4 cut across a small section of Wanborough Plain in the western part of the area. Views to development (Swindon) on the edge of the AONB are a key feature of the area.
- 12.36. Superimposed upon this largely unsettled landscape are twentieth century military developments, including Wroughton Airfield, with its hangers, runway and associated infrastructure, The Ministry of Defence hospital site also near Wroughton, and a First World War camp near Draycot Foliat. These installations are sizeable and, within this open landscape are now dominant features of the area, having a considerable visual impact, particularly in views out from the high downs to the north, for example from Barbury Hill.

Key Characteristics

- level flat Plain formed by a ledge of Lower Chalk. The high land of Marlborough Downs, to the south creates a dominant skyline feature providing a sense of enclosure and containment;
- almost entirely under arable cultivation in large open fields with few boundaries. Woodland is limited to a small number of linear shelter and screening belts;
- Ermine Way Roman road is preserved in the line of a modern road;
- settlement is limited to the lateral modern expansion of the scarp top village of Chiseldon with only the small hamlet of Draycot Foliat on the Plain and infrequent and widely dispersed farm buildings;
- 20th century military installations, including Wroughton Airfield and a First World War camp near Draycot Foliat, are dominant and defining features of the area;

- views to development on the AONB boundary (edge of Swindon);
- in places the absence of landscape structure results in a very open character in stark contrast to the intimate landscape of the scarp and the drama of the downs.

Physical Influences

12.37. The Plain is almost entirely underlain by the Lower Chalk creating a flat open level landform at a height of roughly 180m, with the land surface sloping very gently to the south to the top of the scarp slope. Thin calcareous soils overlie the surface and there are no watercourses. To the south the rising landform of the Marlborough Downs is a dominant feature and where this extends out, for example at Liddington Castle or Hinton Downs, it subdivides and separates the Plain into three distinct areas namely the wide Wroughton Plain and the narrower areas of Wanborough Plain and Bishopstone Plain.

Historic Environment

- 12.38. **Prehistoric Monuments:** There are many prehistoric monuments overlooking the area (within the adjacent character area 1A: Marlborough Downs) and these sometimes form dramatic visible features in the view from the Plain. However intensive agricultural land use has largely removed evidence of historic land use in the area itself.
- 12.39. **Roman Road:** The line of the Ermine Way Roman road is preserved in the modern road from Swindon to Aldbourne.
- 12.40. **Field Patterns:** Intensive agricultural use has largely removed evidence of the historic land use in this area. Some sinuous land boundaries around Chiseldon may reflect late medieval or post-medieval informal enclosure, but the area was probably mostly open downland grazing until formal Parliamentary enclosure in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, which produced the vast majority of the regular, straight-sided fields visible today.
- 12.41. **The Modern Landscape:** Prominent modern developments include Wroughton Airfield, the remains of a Second World War airbase and the M4 motorway.

Biodiversity

- 12.42. There Character Area supports one SSSI, together with around 14 grassland and 5 woodland sites with non-statutory designation.
- 12.43. The nationally important site is Ashdown Park (SSSI), which is of national importance for its collection of Sarsen stones and associated lichen flora.

Key Issues

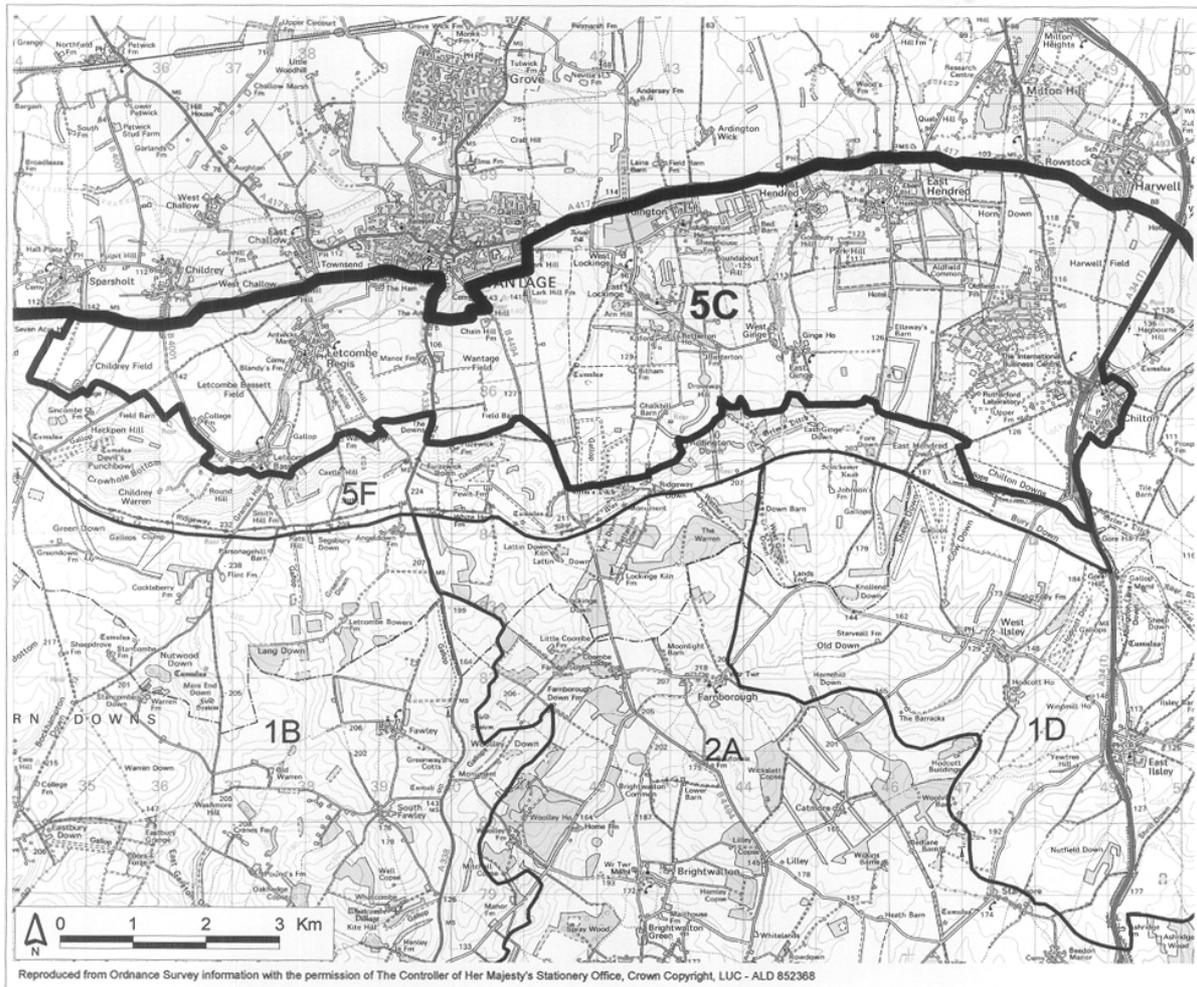
- intensive arable farming - **loss of environmental assets** including biodiversity, archaeological features and landscape character with creation of large 'prairie' fields;

- **absence of loss of hedgerow enclosure and woodlands**, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows creating a very open landscape;
- some **incongruous shelterbelt planting** creating a discordant feature;
- **flat, open landscape with particular vulnerability to large scale development** - high visual impact of existing buildings (hangars and associated infrastructure) at Wroughton Airfield, plus the MOD hospital site. Potential future impact of tall structures (e.g. masts or turbines);
- **development pressures** with the lateral expansion of the scarp top village of Chiseldon plus pressures for re-use of redundant military structures;
- visual impact of existing development and vulnerability to new **development on the edge of the AONB**;
- visual and noise intrusion of **roads** (M4).

Key Management Requirements

- 12.44. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the character of the Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain, with its open expansive views and strong contrast to the adjacent scarp. The area is characterised by the absence of larger settlements and is vulnerable to new/redevelopment of existing sites and development on the boundary of the AONB. Particular consideration should be given to the impact of development on both the character of the area and views gained from the higher ground in this area.
- 12.45. The key features to be conserved and enhanced in the wider landscape include: the distinctive open, sweeping character and long views including the backdrop skyline of the Marlborough Downs to the south, archaeological sites including the Ridgeway, and the historic field pattern, with opportunities for hedgerow boundary restoration.

CHARACTER AREA 5C: HENDRED PLAIN



- 1.46. **Location and Boundaries:** The Hendred Plain forms a low ledge of Lower Chalk extending in front of the Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp that runs along the northern edge of the AONB. It is a comparatively small area but has a very distinct character forming a transition between the high downs and the clay lowlands of the Vale of White Horse.

Landscape Character Description

- 12.47. The ledge of Lower Chalk protruding from the higher downs is a distinctive landform feature on the northern edge of the AONB, providing a transitional landscape between the high downs and the clay lowlands. Although essentially a flat level Plain, local variation is created by the numerous valleys that cut through the area. These create a more undulating landform compared to Avebury Plain and Wanborough Plain, for example. In addition the wooded stream sides form a much softer enclosed landscape. At Letcombe, the brook has been dammed to create a lake as part of a designed landscape scheme, and the presence of small parks and mansions at the point where springs emerge is a particular feature of the area. Other examples include Ginge House and Ardington House, with a deer park at East Hendred. These areas are frequently associated with extensive woodland and parkland planting. The narrow linear and small circular plantations, around East Hendred and Lockinge are an unusual feature and create a slightly discordant landscape pattern, particularly in views from the higher land to the south, although at close quarters they create a wooded backdrop.
- 12.48. The majority of the area is under arable cultivation. The landscape consists of large fields with insignificant boundaries, although the shelterbelts and waterside woodlands provide a sense of enclosure. Orchards lie along the northern edge, around East Hendred, and provide further diversity in land cover. The area includes a large number of straight north-south running lanes, byways or tracks which cross the Plain and terminate on the high downs, where they join the Ridgeway. These tracks would have formerly connected the resources of the Vales and the high downs, but today form good routes for recreational access.
- 12.49. The area is well settled and includes the attractive springline villages of Letcombe Regis, East Hendred, West Hendred and Ardington. These have a very varied built character and include blue flint and tile (east) plus stone and clunch (west). They generally have a clustered character, although new development has spread out from the centre. The Estate villages (e.g. Lockinge, Ardington, East Hendred) have a particular unity of character. There are, in addition, a large number of stables and equestrian establishments, as well as isolated large houses and mansions. The most significant development within the area and arguably within the whole of the AONB is the Harwell International Business Centre on a former airfield site.
- 12.50. The boundary of the AONB follows the line of the main A417 road. The accessibility this provides and the proximity to main employment centres means that this area is inevitably subject to development pressures. Harwell and Wantage are both expanding settlements located on the border of the AONB.

Key Characteristics

- a generally level surface which dips gently to the north. A locally more undulating landscape near West Hendred where the Plain is cut by numerous valleys;
- numerous springs, with small streams flowing down into the River Ock on the Vale;
- largely under arable cultivation within large regular Parliamentary enclosure fields with insignificant boundary features;
- shelterbelts, 18th and 19th century plantations, ornamental and waterside woodlands provide a sense of enclosure. Orchards along the northern edge around East Hendred provide diversity in land cover;
- small landscape parks and mansions, e.g. Lockinge House, are a particular feature of the area;
- a settled landscape with many springline villages e.g. Letcombe Regis, East Hendred, West Hendred and Ardington which generally have a clustered form. Estate villages have a particular unity of character;
- built form varies and includes blue flint and tile (east) plus stone and clunch (west);
- a large number of stables and equestrian establishments and gallops;
- Wantage and Harwell, located on the boundary of the AONB, plus Harwell Business Centre, on a former air field site within the AONB;
- overall, a quiet rural character.

Physical Influences

12.51. The area is almost entirely underlain by Lower Chalk, with Upper Greensand appearing along its northern edge, where the landform drops down to the Vale to the north. The higher land of the Upper Chalk forms a backdrop appearing as a range of higher hills to the south. The plain generally has a level surface dipping gently to the north, although is more undulating near West Hendred where it is cut by a series of small valleys as at Ginge Brook and Betterton Brook. Springs and small streams flowing down into the River Ock on the Vale are a feature. The valley of Ardington Brook, which runs along the northern edge of the character area between Ardington and East Hendred, forms a narrow band of the low lying Vale landscape.

Historic Environment

12.52. **Prehistoric routeway:** The Icknield Way may be later prehistoric or Roman, the line of which is still respected today by minor roads, tracks and field boundaries.

12.53. **Saxon and Later Settlement:** Wantage (on the AONB boundary) was a royal manor in the Saxon period, and a Saxon cemetery has been excavated at Arm Hill, just to the south-east of East Lockinge. The villages of West and East Hendred date to at least the medieval period and it was during this period that Wantage became an important local market centre, including a focal point for malting during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The town continued to prosper from trade in cattle, sheep, corn and cheese and during the nineteenth century, foundries and agricultural implement makers were established.

12.54. **Field Patterns:** The landscape of the area is essentially open and was probably mostly under open downland grazing until formal Parliamentary enclosure in the eighteenth or

nineteenth centuries created the vast majority of the regular, straight-sided fields visible today.

- 12.55. **The Modern Landscape:** Landscaped Gardens and Estates were created around Lockinge House, including ornamental tree plantings such as those on Ardington Down. The area also includes many rides and gallops.

Biodiversity

- 12.56. There are 4 sites with non-statutory designation in the Hendred Plain Character Area, 3 of these sites are wetland sites, namely Letcombe Cress Beds, Letcombe Reed and Swamp Ginge Brook. The fourth site is a grassland site known as Harwell Grassland. There are no sites considered nationally important in this Character Area.

Key Issues

- almost exclusively in intensive arable cultivation with of **loss of environmental assets** including biodiversity (e.g. chalk grassland) archaeological features and landscape character with creation of large 'prairie' fields;
- **absence of hedgerow enclosure and woodlands**, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows creating a very open landscape;
- need for management of the **small woodlands** and the linear riparian tree belts;
- management of the numerous **historic parklands and designed landscapes**;
- **open landscape with particular vulnerability to large scale development** - high visual impact of existing buildings including Harwell Business Centre on a former air field site. Potential impact of tall structures (e.g. masts or turbines);
- **development pressures** within the attractive small spring line villages, with expansion from their traditional clustered form;
- development on **AONB boundaries** at Harwell and Wantage - with visual and other associated impacts.

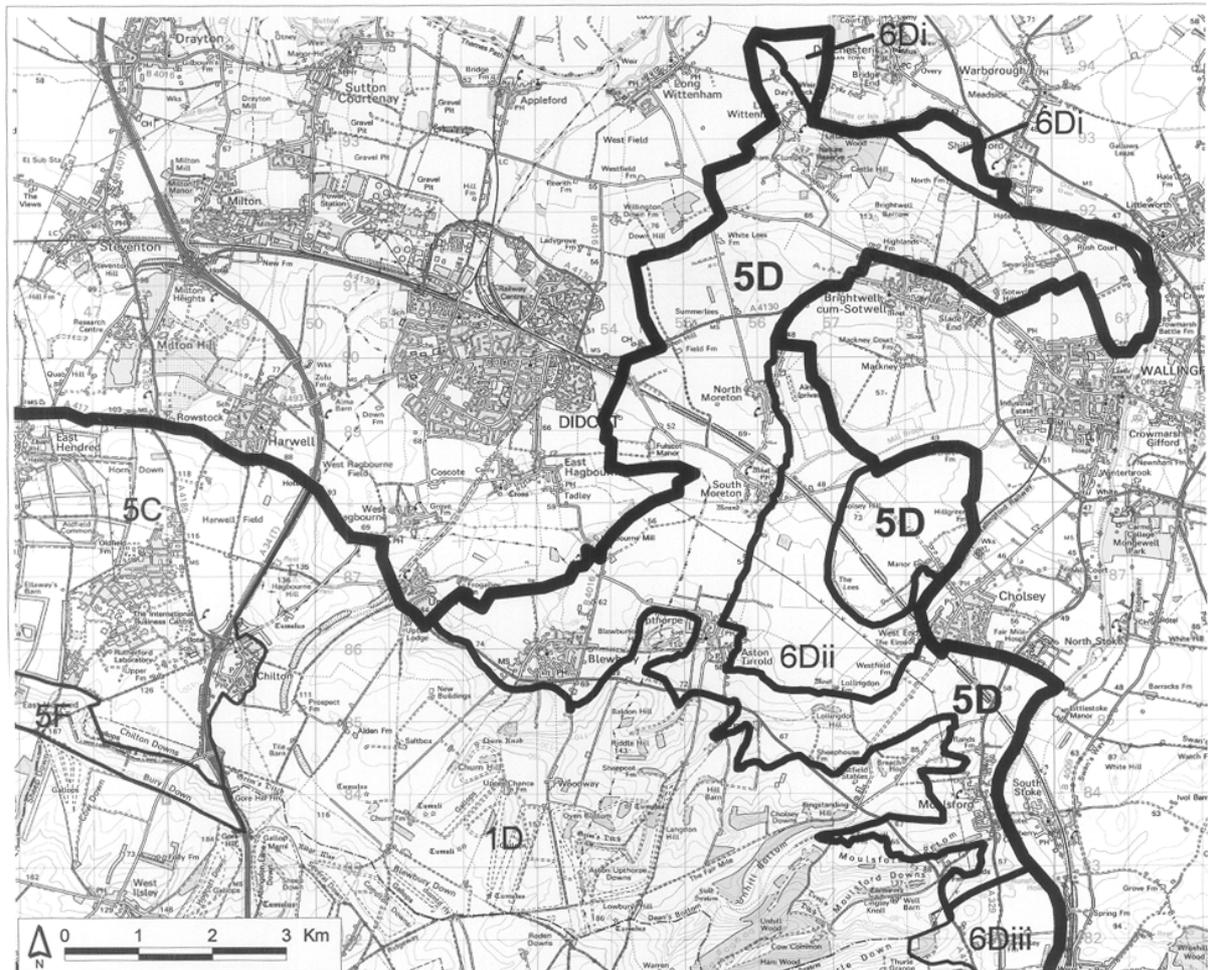
Key Management Requirements

- 12.57. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, rural character of the Hendred Plain, which provides a transition between the Vale of White Horse and the high downs.
- 12.58. The key features to be conserved and enhanced include: the pasture and woodlands along the streams with opportunities for reinstatement of pasture, particularly along watercourses; the distinctive settlement pattern with a concentration of nucleated villages along the springline, estate villages, plus widely dispersed large houses and mansions; the historic field pattern, with opportunities for hedgerow boundary

restoration; the historic designed park and gardens; and the strong skyline of the higher hills to the south.

- 12.59. Particular consideration should be given to the impact of new development on the boundary of the AONB (at Harwell and Wantage) on the character of this part of the North Wessex Downs and views from this area.

CHARACTER AREA 5D: MORETON PLAIN



1.60. **Location and Boundaries:** The Moreton Plain character area is located in the northward extension of the AONB, where it extends into South Oxfordshire to the River Thames. The boundaries are largely defined by the AONB boundary. The area wraps around the low lying Vale landscape, associated with the floodplain of the River Thames described in character area 6Di and ii. To the south the higher chalk downs of the Blewbury Downs (1D) are a dominant backdrop and skyline.

Landscape Character Description

- 12.61. Moreton Plain is a transitional landscape between the chalk uplands to the south and the clay Vale to the north. It is largely underlain by rocks of the Lower Chalk and Upper Greensand, but also includes outliers of the Higher and Middle chalk forming distinctive stranded hills, as for example at Chosley Hill and the Sinodun Hills which, with their open rolling landform, have a similar character to the high downs, although on a much more restricted scale. Throughout the area large fields of intensive arable crops dominate, with a weak or absent hedgerow structure. Tree cover is sparse except on the steeper slopes above the Thames, in the northern part of the area. Distinctive features include the clumps of woodland on prominent hilltops, as at Wittenham Clumps. Generally, this is a very open landscape with 'pockets' of remoteness and extensive views. The adjacent town and chimneys of Didcot, are often a dominant feature, in views gained from higher land.
- 12.62. The villages of North and South Moreton are located on pockets of higher ground and have a loosely nucleated form. Other larger settlements include Blewbury and Aston Upthorpe/Aston Tirrold, both of which are springline villages located at the foot of the scarp. There are many attractive buildings, with materials including thatch, red brick and weatherboard.

Key Characteristics

- underlain by layers of High Chalk, Middle Chalk, Lower Chalk, and Upper Greensand forming a transitional landscape between the high downs and the Thames Floodplain;
- a varied landform including strong ridges and skylines of downland outliers e.g. at Sinodun Hills, although the scale is reduced compared to the more dramatic 'downs' landscapes to the south;
- large fields of intensive arable farmland dominate the area, with a weak or absent hedgerow structure and a sparse covering of trees, except on the steeper slopes above the Thames to the north of the area;
- open, expansive landscape with 'pockets' of remoteness;
- field pattern includes some sinuous field boundaries of medieval origin between Long Wittenham and Little Wittenham. Elsewhere, most fields are large and regular, created by Parliamentary enclosure, with more recent boundary removal to form open 'prairie' type fields;
- the villages of North and South Moreton are located on pockets of higher ground and have a loosely nucleated form. Larger springline settlements of Blewbury and Aston Upthorpe/Aston Tirrold are located at the base of the scarp;
- built form includes many attractive vernacular buildings, with materials including thatch, red brick and weatherboard;
- clumps of woodland on prominent hilltops as at Wittenham Clumps are a distinctive feature of the area;
- the adjacent town and chimneys of Didcot are often a dominant feature in views due to the open nature of the landscape.

Physical Influences

- 12.63. The Moreton Plain area has a varied geology, and includes layers of High Chalk, Middle Chalk, Lower Chalk, and Upper Greensand. This geological diversity gives the area its distinct 'transitional' character. Landform is consequently very varied, although the scale is reduced compared to the more dramatic 'downs' landscapes to the south. Soils are distinctive calcareous 'flinty' soils.

Historic Environment

- 12.64. **Prehistoric landscape:** A Bronze Age round barrow close to Brightwell and a hillfort at Aston Upton are characteristic features in a landscape otherwise devoid of extant prehistoric monuments. Evidence of activity from the late Bronze Age through to the Romano-British period is concentrated north of Little Wittenham and west of Long Wittenham.
- 12.65. **Medieval Settlement and Land Use:** Remnants of medieval ridge and furrow occur to the north of Little Wittenham, and cropmarks of trackways and enclosures around Rise may reflect Romano-British or medieval settlement. There are medieval moated sites at Lollingdon Farm, at the base of the scarp where there was also a medieval abbey, now ruined. North of Rises, cropmarks of square enclosures, trackways and ridge and furrow mark the position of Littletown, a post-medieval hamlet deserted and destroyed in the nineteenth century.
- 12.66. **Field Patterns:** The landscape is fairly open, with very little woodland. Some field boundaries and trackways are very sinuous, and may have medieval origins, such as those between Long Wittenham and Little Wittenham, and those between North and South Moreton. Elsewhere, most fields are large and regular with straight sides, and are probably the result of formal eighteenth and nineteenth century Parliamentary enclosure. Some very large 'prairie' fields have been created in recent decades.

Biodiversity

- 12.67. There are 2 sites with non-statutory designation in the Moreton Plain Character Area; these are Didcot Marshalling Yard and Lollingdon Hill. There are no sites considered nationally important in this Character Area.

Key Issues

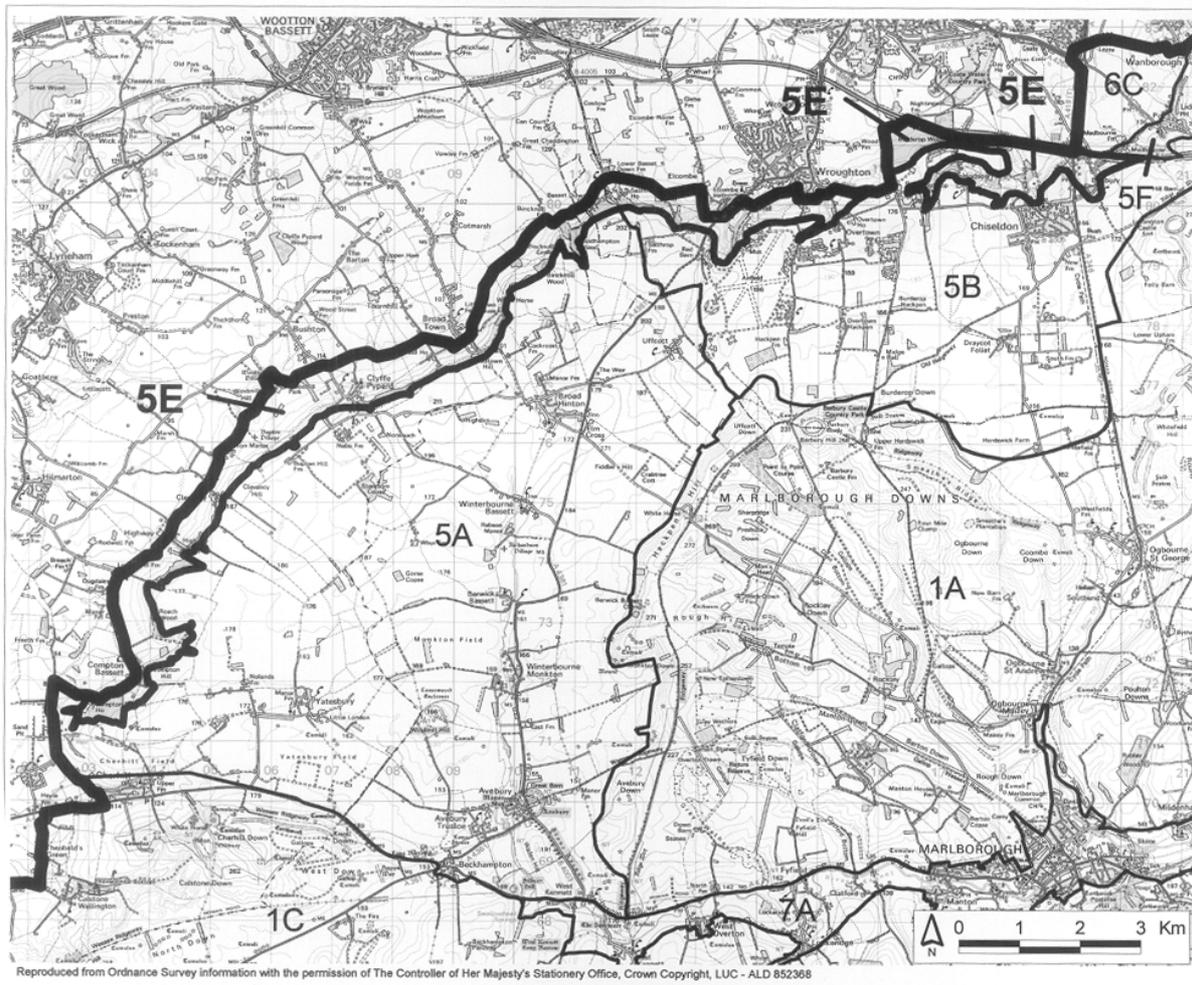
- almost exclusively in intensive arable cultivation with of **loss of environmental assets** including biodiversity (e.g. chalk grassland) archaeological features and landscape character with creation of large open 'prairie' fields;
- **loss of hedgerow enclosure** plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows creating a very open landscape;
- denuded woodland cover - need to **maintain distinctive hilltop clumps**;

- **open landscape with particular vulnerability to large scale development** - high visual impact of built development and power station at Didcot plus overhead power lines;
- management of **historic parklands and designed landscapes**, e.g. at Sinodun Hills;
- **development pressures** within the villages and impact on settlement character;
- development impinging on **AONB boundaries**, particularly at Didcot and to a lesser extent at Wallingford with visual and other associated impacts.

Key Management Requirements

- 12.68. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the rural agricultural character of the Moreton Plain, which provides a transition between the chalk uplands and the clay Vale.
- 12.69. The key features to be conserved and enhanced include historic field pattern, archaeological sites, historic gardens and parks, and chalk grassland. There are specific opportunities to extend and link sites of chalk grassland and restore hedgerows. The ridges and clear skylines, e.g. at Sinodun Hills and the backdrop of the high downs to the south, and the characteristic settlement pattern with villages located on high points on the Plain or along the scarp springline should be maintained. Consideration should be given to the impact of new development on the boundary on both the character of the AONB and in views from the higher ground.

CHARACTER AREA 5E: CLYFFE PYPARD – BADBURY WOODED SCARP



1.70. **Location and Boundaries:** The Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp defines the north west boundary of the AONB. The boundaries are formed by the AONB boundary, which runs along the foot of the scarp, and by contours at roughly 170m along the scarp top at the point where the surface levels out to form Avebury Plain (5A) in the west and Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain (5B) in the east.

Landscape Character Description

- 12.71. The steep smooth scarp defines the north-west edge of the AONB. It is distinguished by its wooded character, with long sinuous, continuous belts of woodland such as Clyffe Hanging and Binknoll Wood, clinging to the almost vertical upper slopes. These are mainly ancient semi-natural woodlands of hazel coppice and oak as well as distinctive beech hangers. In the western area one of the woods has been designated as an SSSI for its population of nationally and internationally rare mosses. More extensive blocks of ancient semi-natural woodland characterise the scarp around Chisledon, with areas of particular note being the large wet ash-maple woodland at Burderop Wood and the oak with ash-maple coppice at Clouts Wood (both SSSIs). The scarp is distinguished by a large number of estates, such as at Compton Bassett, Burderop, Elcombe and Salthrop, with houses located at the foot of the slope and associated farmland and parkland.
- 12.72. The lower scarp slopes are predominantly in pasture with some areas of arable land occupying shallower gradients. Fields are small and bounded by hedgerows which, together with the parkland and scarp top woodlands, creates a more enclosed intimate landscape contrasting strongly with the open and expansive character and long views from the scarp summit. Numerous springs issue along the escarpment at the base of the chalk creating a system of short but deeply incised valleys appearing as wooded indentations within the lower scarp slopes.
- 12.73. Settlement is a feature of the character area, with settlements located at the point where springs issue midway up the scarp. They include the small hamlets of Clyffe Pypard, Clevancy and the linear settlement of Broadtown, which straggles up the slope. Compton Bassett, at the foot of the slope is a village of more modern houses. The scarp is traversed by numerous narrow rural lanes that cut straight up and down the face. A notable feature is the large number of rights of way, which originate on the lower lying Vale and terminate on the Plain at the scarp top. The wooded skyline is an important landscape feature in views from surrounding lower land, such as around Lyneham (outside the AONB). In this context the masts at Nebb Farm are an intrusive feature.

Key Characteristics

- steep scarp slope rising abruptly from the lower lying clay Vale, presenting a smooth, profile with local indentations and coombes;
- numerous springs issue at the base of the chalk creating a series of short, deeply incised, often wooded, valleys along the lower slopes;
- almost vertical upper slopes with continuous belts of woodland (e.g. Clyffe Hanging and Binknoll Wood). Mainly ancient semi-natural woodlands of hazel coppice and oak/ash as well as distinctive beech hangers;
- lower scarp slopes predominantly in pasture with some areas of arable land occupying shallower gradients;
- small fields, bounded by hedgerows which, combined with the high woodland cover and parkland, create an enclosed intimate landscape;

- a large number of estates (e.g. Burderop, Elcombe and Salthrop) with houses located at the foot of the slope and associated estate farmland and parkland;
- settlement located at the point where springs issue midway up the scarp, including the small hamlets of Clyffe Pypard, Clevancy, and the linear settlement of Broadtown. Compton Bassett, at the foot of the slope contains more modern residential development;
- crossed by a large number of rights of way which originate on the lower lying Vales and terminate on the Plain at the scarp top, plus distinctive sunken lanes;
- the wooded skyline is an important feature in views from surrounding land.

Physical Influences

- 12.74. The main part of the slope is formed by the Lower Chalk, with Gault Clay and Upper Greensand. Deposits of Head and Coombe Rocks found at the base of the scarp. The slope has a very steep gradient rising abruptly by 100m from the lower lying clay Vale. It presents a smooth straight slope scored by local indentions and coombes, for example near Compton Bassett.

Historic Environment

- 12.75. **Landscape Development:** Unusually, Iron Age hill forts are not a feature of the scarp top in this area, and tended to be located further to the south at the second scarp of the Marlborough Downs (e.g. Barbury Castle). A castle, possibly of Medieval age, was established at Binknoll on the scarp edge. Deserted medieval villages include Bupton and Woodhill, located at the foot of the scarp edge defining the north-west edge of this area. Other medieval earthworks survive at Broad Hinton.
- 12.76. **Field Pattern:** The pattern of woodland cover and smaller fields with sinuous boundaries, particularly around Chiseldon, may also relate to Medieval clearance and enclosure.

Biodiversity

- 12.77. Within this Character Area there are 3 SSSI's, all of which are woodland sites, together with 17 woodlands, 10 grasslands and 1 wetland site with non-statutory designation. The nationally important sites are Burderop Wood (SSSI), Bincknoll Dip Wood (SSSI) and Clouts Wood (SSSI).
- 12.78. Burderop wood (SSSI) for example forms a 48 ha wet ash-maple and acid pedunculate oak-hazel-ash woodland, with a rich ground flora. The site also supports a range of typical woodland birds and invertebrates.
- 12.79. Blincknoll Dip Woods (SSSI) is notable for supporting nationally and internationally rare mosses such as *Barbula glauca*, a species that is found on shaded chalk faces, where earth filled crevices provide a suitable habitat. This inconspicuous species is currently only known from this single location in Britain, and has never been record outside Europe.

12.80. Clouts wood (SSSI) lies on the steep scarp of the Lower Chalk south of Swindon and is a good example of mainly ash-maple-hazel and invasive English elm woodland, with a rich ground flora.

Key Issues

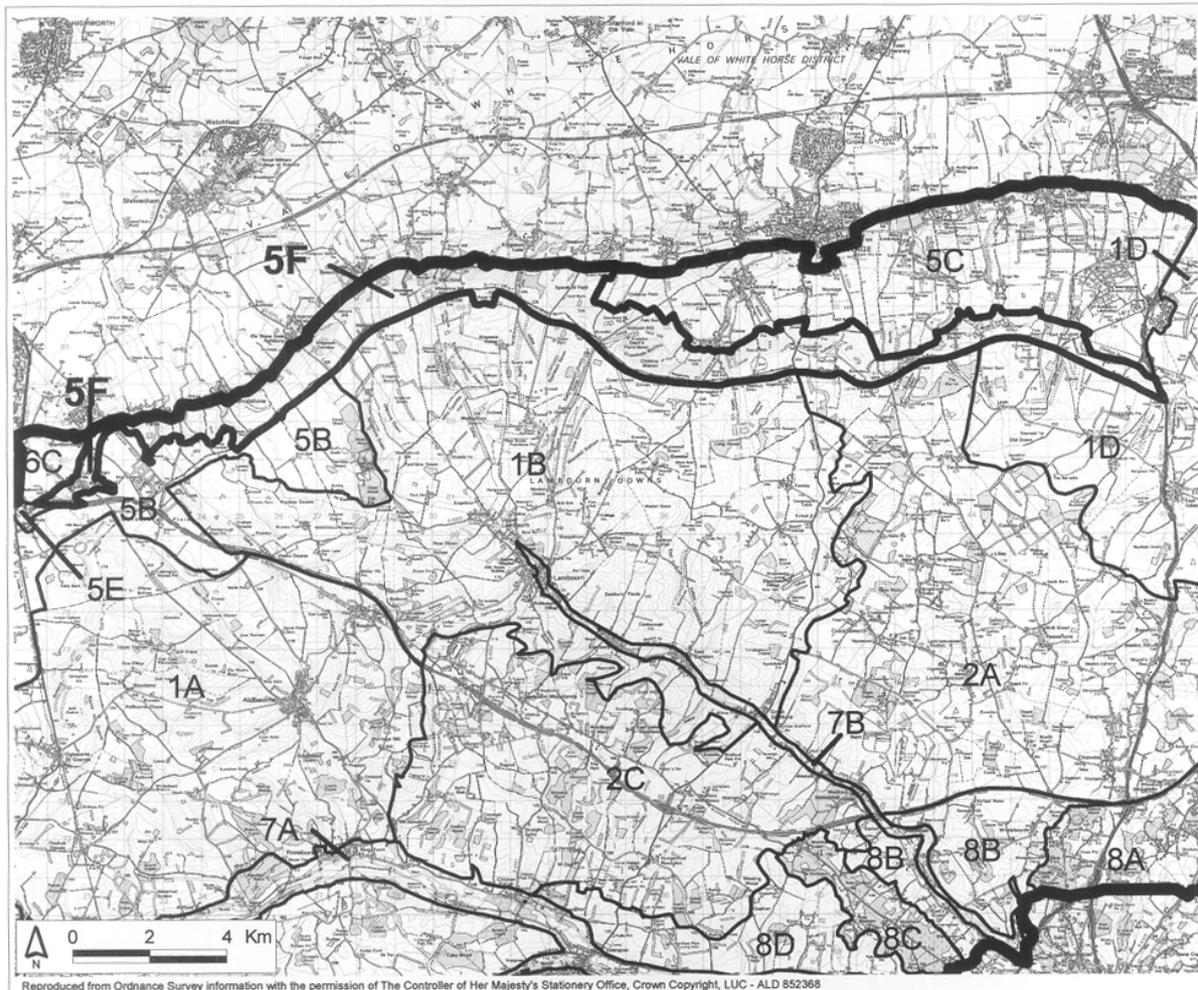
- in the past, intensification in farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** including biodiversity, e.g. chalk grassland and archaeological features;
- changes in farming practices - including loss of livestock with some marginal areas on the scarp slope no longer being grazed leading to **scrub encroachment** on areas of pasture;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows;
- **lack of appropriate management of woodlands** particularly the small ancient and semi natural woodlands of the scarp, formerly managed by coppicing;
- **vulnerability to large scale development**, particularly tall structures (e.g. masts or turbines) on the scarp summit and impact on views, e.g. masts at Nebb Farm;
- **pressures for housing** within the attractive scarp slope villages with some modern sprawl along roads up and downslope and loss of local vernacular character;
- impact of development of the **edge of the AONB**, for example at Wroughton and Swindon - visual impact plus increased pressures on housing, roads etc.;
- management of **historic parkland and estate landscapes**.

Key Management Requirements

12.81. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the enclosed, intimate wooded character of the scarp.

12.82. The key features to be conserved and enhanced include the historic field pattern, with opportunities for hedgerow restoration, chalk grasslands with opportunities for habitat restoration, and the archaeological sites, historic designed park and gardens and estate landscapes. The strong wooded skyline, which is a dominant feature, and the pattern and character of scarp slope woodlands should be maintained, with opportunities for re-introduction of management being apparent. The characteristic settlement pattern with springline villages on the scarp face and the sunken lanes that cut up and down the scarp should be maintained. Consideration should be given to the impact of new development beyond the AONB boundary on both the character of the AONB and in views from the higher ground.

CHARACTER AREA 5F: LIDDINGTON - LETCOMBE OPEN SCARP



- 1.83. **Location and Boundaries:** The Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp is a distinct and consistent landform feature forming a long sinuous character area rising abruptly from the Vale of White Horse. The northern edge is largely coincident with the AONB boundary except for a few areas such as around Wanborough (6C) where the clay Vale intrudes into the AONB at the foot of the scarp and to the west at Letcombe where the scarp turns inward and a level area of Lower Chalk and Greensand forming Hendred Plain (5G) extends in front of the scarp. The southern boundary relates to the crest of the scarp. For part of its length the boundary is drawn so that it includes the line of the Ridgeway, which runs along the summit.

Landscape Character Description

- 1.84. The scarp is the defining edge of the AONB and is a highly visible feature from Swindon and Wantage and the adjacent low lying clay Vales. The strong landform dominates skyline views and provides a dramatic backdrop from these areas signalling the presence of the North Wessex Downs. The steep gradients limit extent of arable cultivation so that a mix of grazed pasture within small hedged fields dominates. The area is characterised by its openness and the large blocks of woodland and hangers that characterise the scarp further west (5E) are largely absent. Woodland is confined to small areas of natural regeneration, and those associated with the parks and estates that are a feature of the area.
- 1.85. The scarp face is scored by dry coombes, one of the most spectacular being 'The Manger', cut into White Horse Hill. This is a classic example of a distinctive chalk karst landform and the site is designated as an SSSI. In addition to its physiographic features, the site also contains a high proportion of the remaining unploughed chalk grasslands along the escarpment. Other fragments of botanically rich chalk grassland occur along many of the steep slopes of the coombes, including the SSSI at Hinton Parva. A further distinctive and highly visible feature is the chalk cut Uffington White Horse, which for many symbolises the chalk downland of the AONB. There are a number of important prehistoric monuments along the scarp top including Wayland's Smithy, Neolithic long mound – a site redolent with local myth and legend and Iron Age hillforts at Uffington and Woolstone. These strategic sites are linked by the prehistoric route of the Ridgeway, which runs along the entire length of the character area.
- 1.86. The shelter and access to water provided by the scarp make it attractive to settlement, and the small clustered spring line villages, such as at Liddington. Bishopstone, Ashbury and Letcombe are a distinctive feature. Numerous lanes cut up and down the scarp face, often deeply incised and overhung by steep earth or grass banks. To the east, the line of the Ridgeway marks the crest line. Overall the scarp with its varied landform, sheltered coombes and mix of villages, parklands and open pastures has a very attractive rural character.

Key Characteristics

- steep scarp slope presenting a smooth, nearly vertical, face in some areas, while in others it is deeply convoluted. A strong horizon and skyline in the view from the lower lying Vales;
- numerous springs issue at the junction of the chalk and clay creating tiny incised coombe valleys running down to the Vale to the north;
- grazed pasture within small hedged fields forms a more open landscape compared to the wooded scarp to the west;
- unimproved herb-rich chalk grassland survives in fragments along the scarp and coombes;
- woodland is confined to small areas of natural regeneration, plus woodlands associated with the parks and estates;
- highly distinctive White Horse chalk cut figure at Uffington;
- Neolithic chambered long mound of Wayland's Hill plus isolated Bronze Age round barrows in prominent locations on the scarp edge;
- The Ridgeway, a prehistoric routeway, follows the top of the scarp and remains well used as a recreational route today;

- attractive clustered spring line villages, such as Liddington, Bishopstone, Ashbury, and Letcombe, are a distinctive feature;
- numerous lanes cut up and down the scarp face, often deeply incised and overhung by steep earth or grass banks;
- overall, an attractive character due to the varied landform, sheltered coombes and mix of villages, parklands and open pastures.

Physical Influences

- 1.87. The upper and middle part of scarp is formed by the Lower Chalk, which gives way to Gault Clay at the foot of the slope. Deposits of Head and Coombe rock frequently fill indentions on the lower slopes. In places, the slope presents a smooth near vertical face, while in other areas it is deeply convoluted by coombes, which run almost parallel to the scarp face. Numerous springs issue at the junction of the chalk and clay creating tiny incised valleys running down to the Vale to the north. In the eastern section there are also smaller dry coombes that run back to the Plains to the south creating further complexity in the landform.

Historic Environment

- 1.88. **Prehistoric Landscape:** The most important site within this area is Wayland's Smithy, a Neolithic chambered long mound. The Ridgeway follows the scarp along the southern edge of the area, with the scarp top providing an important strategic routeway throughout prehistory and later periods. Linear earthworks such as those south of Bishopstone may be late Bronze Age or Iron Age. Uffington Castle and Woolstone Hill are Iron Age hill forts, and the distinctive chalk cut figure of the Uffington White Horse may be later prehistoric in date, although this is still not certain. The linear earthwork of Grim's Ditch, probably of Saxon origin, runs along the northern edge of the scarp.
- 1.89. **Medieval Settlement and Land Use:** There were manor houses in Beauchamp, Ashbury and Bishopstone, the latter having shrunk from a larger medieval village. Abandoned tofts and crofts survive as earthworks, and on Charlbury Hill there are medieval strip lynchets. Many of the sinuous, long, narrow fields orientated at right angles to the scarp edge in the western half of the character area, may represent surviving medieval boundaries. In some cases these may represent 'filling in' or informal enclosure between existing tracks or driveways in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Biodiversity

- 1.90. The steep scarp slope supports 3 chalk grassland sites of national importance. This includes part of The Coombs, Hinton Parva (SSSI), White Horse Hill (SSSI) and Hackpen, Warren and Gramp's Hill Downs (SSSI). In addition to these SSSI's the area also contains in excess of 10 grasslands with non-statutory designation.
- 1.91. Hackpen, Warren and Gramp's Hill Down (SSSI) is an amalgamation of 3 discrete, adjacent tracks of unimproved chalk grassland, which in total represent an extensive area of some 73 ha. The site supports a rich grassland flora together with 11 species of butterfly.

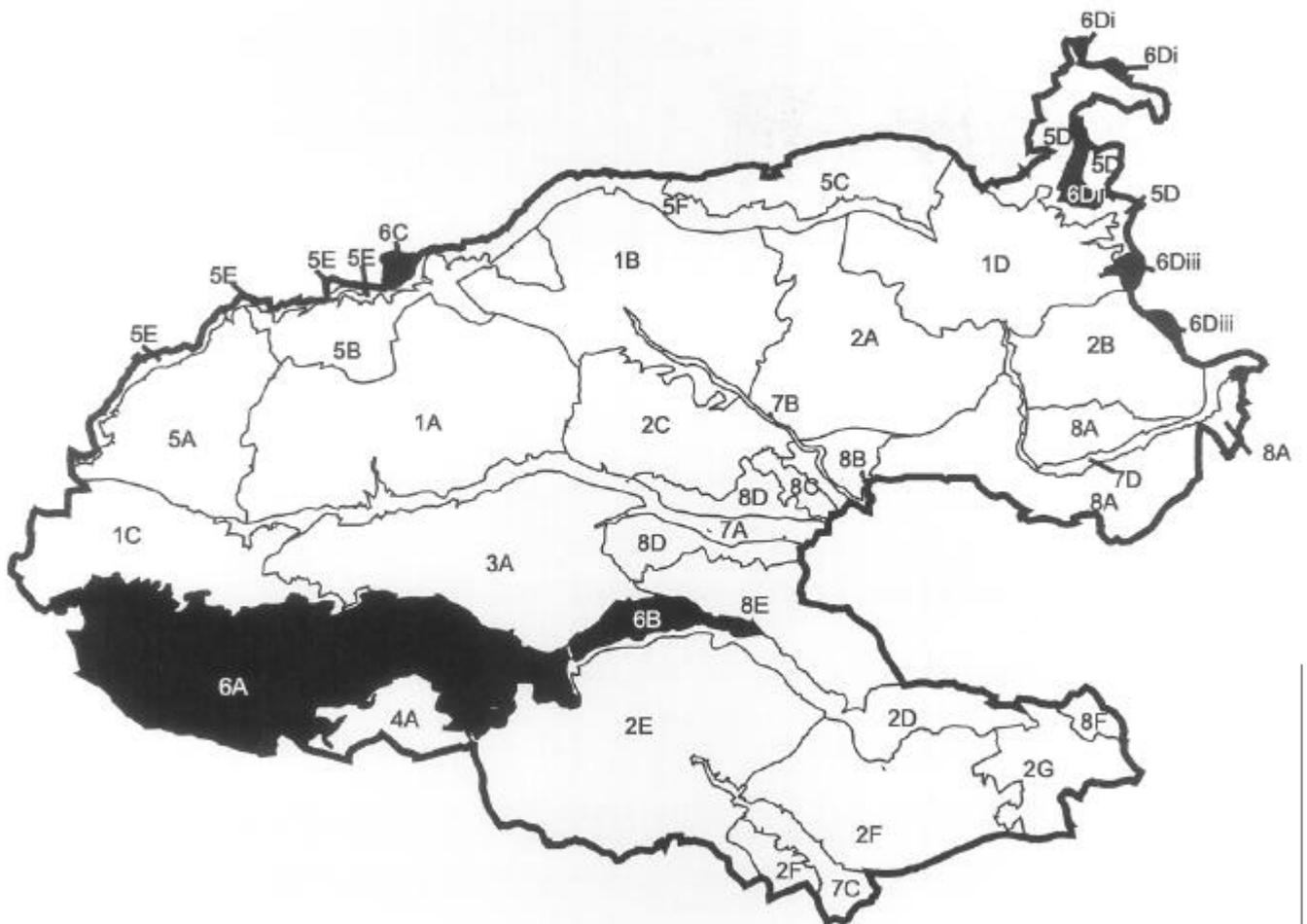
Key Issues

- in the past, intensification in farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** including biodiversity, e.g. chalk grassland and archaeological features;
- changes in farming practices - including loss of livestock with some marginal areas on the scarp slope no longer being grazed leading to **scrub encroachment on important areas of pasture**;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows;
- localised erosion around archaeological sites;
- **vulnerability to large scale development**, particularly tall structures (e.g. masts or turbines) on the scarp summit;
- **pressures for housing** and peripheral development of attractive springline villages and loss of vernacular character;
- management of **historic parkland and estate landscapes**.

Key Management Requirements

- 1.92. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the attractive, open character of the scarp.
- 12.93. The key features to be conserved and enhanced include the historic field pattern, with opportunities for hedgerow boundary restoration, archaeological sites, historic designed park and gardens and estate landscapes, and chalk grasslands with opportunities for habitat restoration to extend and link existing sites. The strong skyline, which is a dominant feature from the lower lying Vales should be conserved. The characteristic settlement form and pattern of the springline villages, and the character of the rural lanes that cut up and down the scarp including attractive sunken lanes should be maintained. Consideration should be given to the impact of new development beyond the AONB boundary on both the character of the AONB and in views from the higher ground.

Landscape Type 6 - Vales



13. LANDSCAPE TYPE 6: VALES

Location and Boundaries

- 13.1. The Vales are defined topographically, and are distinct areas of lowland, almost always below 130m AOD. The transition to these low lying landscapes is often dramatic, marked by a steep scarp slope. The Vale of Pewsey, including its narrow eastern extension towards Shalbourne, separates the two main chalk upland blocks of the Downs. In addition a number of smaller areas of low lying vale landscape occur along the northern and eastern edge of the North Wessex Downs and relate to the adjacent Countryside Character area 108: Upper Thames Clay Vales.

Overview

The chalk downs form an imposing backdrop to the flat low lying Vales – an example of the dramatic contrast and juxtaposition of landscape character within the North Wessex Downs. The towering slopes of the adjacent chalk scarps forming a dominant 'borrowed' landscape setting that contains and enclosing the Vales.

Underlain by Greensand, these lowland landscapes are well-watered, with numerous streams issuing at the junction of the chalk and the less permeable underlying rocks and characterised by watercourses meandering across the flat vale floor. Rich loamy and alluvial soils create a productive agricultural landscape, with a mix of both arable and pasture in fields bound by thick, tall hedgerows. Views are constrained and framed by the topography, rising scarp slopes of the downs and low hedgerows, producing a strong sense of enclosure. Woodland cover is sparse, except where linear belts of willow, alder and scrub accentuate the line of the watercourses that thread across the Vales. The streams, remnant waterside pastures and riparian woodlands form a lush 'wetland' landscape of considerable ecological value.

The concentration of settlement is one of the defining features of the vale landscapes. Settlement includes compact nucleated villages and hamlets, with widespread scattered farmsteads, using characteristic materials of timber frame, brick and flints, sometimes with thatched roofs. The flatter land has also been exploited for main communication routes including road, rail and canal. The Vales are consequently landscapes of movement and activity in contrast to the remote 'empty' downlands.

Key Characteristics

- underlain by Upper Greensand, Lower Greensand and Clays, with Lower Chalk flanking the Vale sides. Soils vary according to geology, with alluvial deposits lining the watercourses;
- distinctive low lying landform, with a level surface in strong contrast with the adjacent higher downs;
- dominant 'borrowed' landscape of the adjacent high downs;
- threaded by numerous minor streams draining to the headwaters of the River Avon in Pewsey Vale and River Thames along the northern and eastern edge of the AONB;
- a rich, well watered, agricultural landscape comprising fields under both arable and pastoral production;
- streams, remnant waterside pastures and riparian woodlands provide variety and ecological interest;

- a settled landscape with a concentration of compact small towns, clustered villages, hamlets and many dispersed residential and farm buildings;
- villages are comparatively well served by local services and have retained their small village schools.

Physical Influences

- 13.2. **Geology and Soils:** The edges of the Vales are generally formed by the Lower Chalk, which gives way to underlying Upper Greensand, Lower Greensand and Clays. Soils are variable with those on the Greensand tending to be better drained than those on clay. Alluvial deposits line the watercourses that thread through the Vale landscapes.
- 13.3. **Landform:** The Vales have a distinctive low-lying landform, with a flat level land surface, contrasting strongly with the adjacent higher downs. Occasionally the edges of the Vales are formed by foothills of the Lower Chalk, which create a more subtle transition. At the junction of the porous chalk and impermeable greensand/clays numerous springs issue, which collect within the Vales forming minor streams draining to the headwaters of the Salisbury Avon in Pewsey Vale and River Thames, along the northern and eastern edge of the AONB.

Biodiversity

- 13.4. The loamy and alluvial soils create a rich agricultural landscape, with a mix of both arable and pasture, often surrounded by thick hedgerows, through which small streams run - draining the higher chalk and collecting to form tributaries of larger rivers such as the Salisbury Avon (Pewsey Vale) and the River Thames. The damp clay pastures, streamside woodland and the hedgerow network are principal habitats of nature conservation interest. The upper part of the River Avon and its tributaries where they thread through the Vale of Pewsey include a number of SSSIs and represent a classic chalk river.

Historic Environment

- 13.5. **Landscape Development:** The character of the Vales is quite different to that of the downlands. This is rich, well-watered pasture land and which was famous for dairy farming. The main aim of most Vale farmers was the production of milk to be turned into butter and cheese, and the rearing of cattle and pigs. The importance of cows goes back to the Domesday Survey (1086) which refers to specialised dairy farms (vaccaria) and cheese making at three places in the Vale of the White Horse. Historically, arable and sheep farming played a much less crucial role in these areas.
- 13.6. **Medieval Settlement:** The Vales had already been enclosed into small farms before 1500 or by piecemeal arrangements between tenants during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Settlement today, as then, is characterised by compact nucleated villages, and scattered and isolated farmsteads and hamlets.
- 13.7. **Field Patterns:** Evidence of land hunger is seen in assarts or clearance of forest or waste to create small enclosed arable fields, many of which still survive today. However, it is the large-scale straight-sided fields dominating the Vales today, which were typically formed as a result of the Parliamentary Enclosure Acts of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Settlement and Building Character

- 13.8. The Vales are the most settled landscape type with a settlement pattern comprising small towns, clustered villages, hamlets and many dispersed residential and farm buildings.

Recreation Character

- 13.9. The landscape type contains a number of well promoted recreational routes including the Severn and Thames National Cycle Route, and the Wiltshire Whitehorse Trail. These and a large number of other Public Rights of Way connect a series of picturesque towns and villages. The Kennet and Avon Canal provides opportunities for cycling, fishing, camping, canoeing and boat trips, while the towpath provides a recreational route between Reading and Bath.

Social and Economic Character

- 13.10. The Vales are well settled landscapes, with numerous villages, with population levels that have remained fairly static over the past 20 years. Burbage, in the Vale of Pewsey is the exception and has accommodated considerable new development and a significant growth in population. The villages are comparatively well served by local services and the increase in population in Burbage has been met by the provision of services to meet the growing needs of the developing community. Unlike villages in other landscape types, parishes within the Vale areas have retained their small village schools, although generally inhabitants must travel to access basic services. Dependency upon the private car is therefore likely to be significant within this area with a large number of car journeys expected. The large number of settlements, comparatively high population and an extensive and well-used road network mean that the Vales generally appear as a busy and active landscape. The larger villages such as Pewsey serve a large population and heavy traffic levels and congestion are a particular concern.

Key Issues

- in the past, intensification in farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** particularly biodiversity with drainage and cultivation of the Vale floor pasture and widespread loss of hedgerows and archaeological features;
- potential changes in farming practices - including loss of livestock with some remaining Vale pastures no longer being grazed with **scrub encroachment**;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows;
- **climate change** - potential impacts including drying out of wetland habitats, requirement for irrigation of arable land - including construction of reservoirs and intrusive infrastructure. Impact on woodland and parkland with potential increase in non native species and tree loss (drought/windthrow);
- localised intrusion of **roads, overhead power lines and pylons** all of which are highly visible in the context of this flat low lying landscape;

- **increased traffic on the rural lane network**, plus road improvements including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, in places creates a more urban landscape;
- intense **development pressures**, particularly for new housing affect the character of the villages and their edges so that settlements are less assimilated into the landscape;
- impact of development of the **edge of the AONB**, for example at Devizes and Swindon - visual impact plus increased pressures on housing, roads etc.;
- **vulnerability** to impact of development (e.g. skyline structures) within the adjacent 'borrowed' landscape of the downland scarps which form prominent boundaries to the Vales.

Key Management Requirements

- 13.11. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the distinctive character of the Vales with their rural, agricultural character. This includes the pattern of hedgerows, streams and remnant waterside pastures, wet meadows and woodlands and concentration of small compact settlements. There are opportunities for hedgerow restoration and re-creation of pasture and riparian woodlands alongside watercourses. The objective should be to maintain the pattern of discrete villages set within a quiet rural landscape, with opportunities for management of traffic on the rural lanes that connect the settlements. The views to the clear skylines of the surrounding downland slopes should be conserved.

Character Areas

- 13.12. The Vales landscape type is divided into two main character areas. These comprise.

6A: Vale of Pewsey

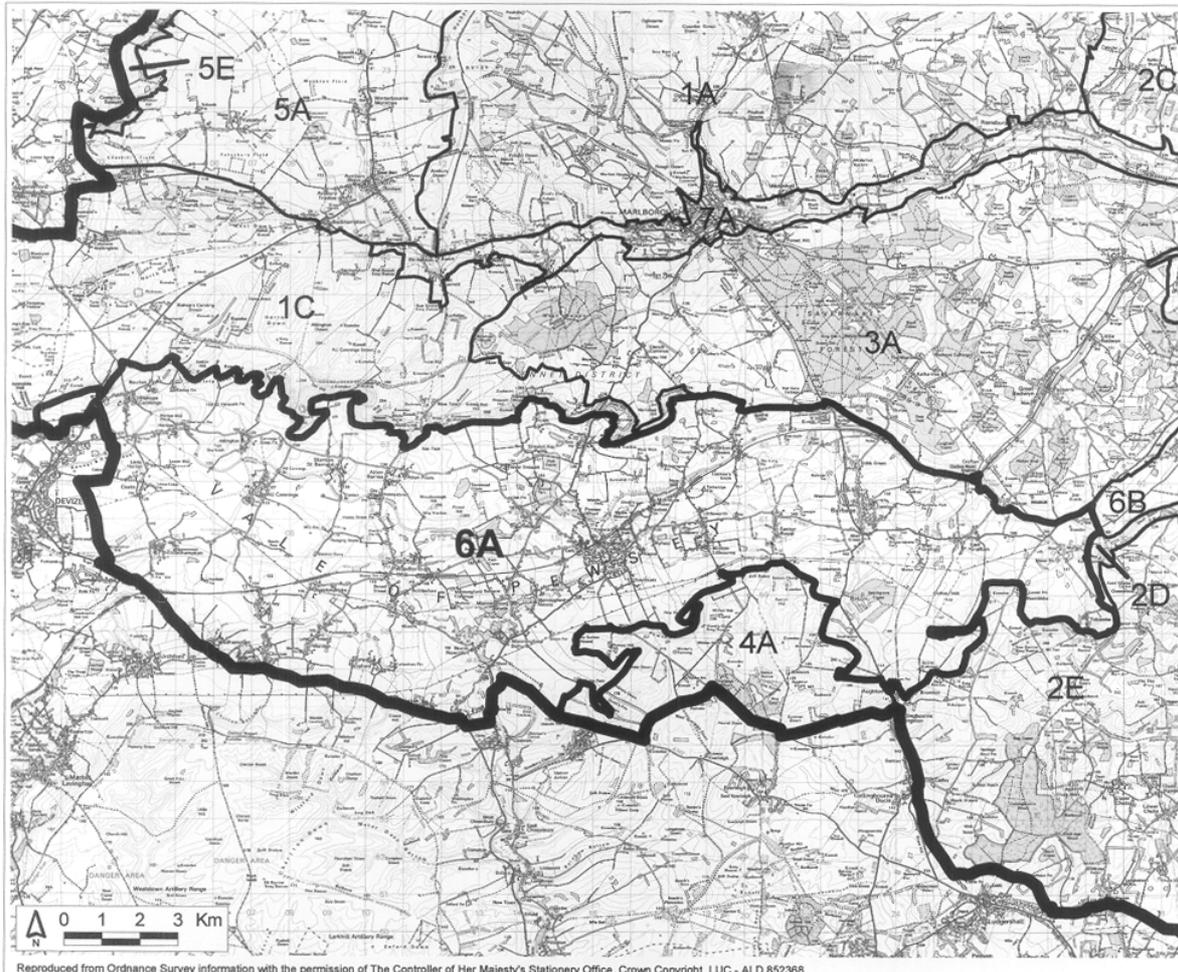
6B: Shalbourne Vale, which extends to the east of the Vale of Pewsey

- 13.13. In addition, along the north and eastern edge of the North Wessex Downs, the AONB boundary has been drawn so that it incorporates very small areas that are part of the wider surrounding landscape (character area 108: Upper Thames Clay Vales) that extends out beyond the AONB. These have been separately identified and named.

6C: Wanborough Vale

6D: Thames Valley Flood Plain which incorporates the geographically separate sub-areas of i) Benson, ii) Moreton and iii) Streatley and Basildon.

CHARACTER AREA 6A: VALE OF PEWSEY



- 2.14. **Location and Boundaries:** The character area is a clearly defined topographic unit forming a low lying landscape separating the two chalk upland blocks of Horton Downs (1C) and Savernake Plateau (3A) to the north and Salisbury Plain (4A) to the south. Boundaries are defined topographically and follow contours along the foothills at the base of the steep scarps that rise to the north and south. The western edge is formed by the AONB boundary and the eastern boundary at the point where the Vale narrows near Marten forming the separate character area of Shalbourne Vale (6B).

Landscape Character Description

- 13.15. The Vale of Pewsey forms a broad low lying landscape within the two main chalk upland blocks. It is contained and enclosed by dramatic stark scarp slopes to either side, which juxtaposed with the low almost flat Plain, have an exaggerated elevation creating a very distinctive skyline particularly along the northern edge. Landcover varies considerably with the low undulating foothills typically under arable cultivation. Large fields with limited enclosure create a very open landscape reminiscent of the chalk uplands. Towards the core of the Vale the farmland is a rich mix of pasture along tributaries with arable fields enclosed by hedgerows and woodlands characteristically surrounding the settlements. A network of water channels weave across the flat Vale floor and are lined by riparian vegetation with linear strips of alder and willow, creating a distinct and attractive local landscape character. The Kennet and Avon Canal is also an important water corridor, in the Vale, with its own distinct character. Throughout much of the area the hedgerow structure is weak with boundaries largely replaced by fencing and there are few hedgerow trees, which has resulted in the opening up of some long views. In this context tall features, such as the pylons in the south of the Vale can be visually intrusive.
- 13.16. Woodland cover is generally sparse, apart from the deciduous woods that line the River Avon and its tributaries around Manningford creating a more enclosed intimate character along this part of the river. The River Avon system is by far the most important feature of this area in terms of ecological value. The high quality of its clear, fast flowing water has resulted in extremely rich plant and animal communities. The river and its associated wetland habitats, including calcareous valley mire, contain two SSSIs (Avon River systems SSSI and Jones's Mill SSSI). These together with two further SSSIs outside the AONB are part of the River Avon candidate SAC.
- 13.17. The Vale is the most densely settled character area within the AONB, with a great variety of settlements. Pewsey, a large village on the River Avon, commands the central part of the Vale and is the focus for a confluence of road, rail and water routes. Burbage is a smaller compact settlement on the Vale floor to the east and All Cannings, a large village to the west. There are numerous small nucleated villages and hamlets scattered at a high density through the Vale including the spring line settlement on the northern foothills of Bishops Canning, Allington, Stanton St. Bernard and Alton Barnes. To the south the foothill villages of Wedhampton, Wilsford, Patney Chirton, Marden and Charlton have a looser linear character. Other notable settlements include those that have developed alongside the canal such as at Honeystreet and Wootton Rivers and the chain of attractive villages, the Manningfords along the River Avon. Dominant building materials are soft red brick and flint, often used in decorative styles, with other materials including limestone, sarsen, cob and timber frame, with roofs of straw thatch or clay tile.
- 13.18. The settlements are linked by a network of minor roads, including main north - south links between Marlborough and Salisbury via Pewsey and Burbage. On the Vale floor vast tracts of flat farmland remain undisturbed between the roads and these areas consequently have a strong sense of remoteness. The railway runs east-west through

the Vale, as does the Kennet and Avon canal, both introducing corridors of movement and forming dominant features within the landscape.

Key Characteristics

- Upper Greensand forms the flat base of the Vale, with small areas of Gault Clay revealed on the western edge. On the flanks of the Vale are a series of low undulating foothills of Lower Chalk;
- broad low lying almost flat Vale - forming a vast, level open space contained and enclosed by the dramatic stark escarpments of the chalk upland to either side;
- varied land cover, with pasture along tributaries and arable fields enclosed by hedgerows and woodlands. The low undulating foothills are typically under cultivation with very open large scale fields;
- a weak hedgerow structure through much of the area with few hedgerow trees and boundaries replaced by fencing - opening up some long views;
- a network of water channels weave across the flat Vale floor, lined by riparian vegetation with strips of alder and willow;
- historic continuity in settlements with Pewsey being Saxon in origin, Wootton Rivers once being the centre of a Saxon royal estate, and villages such as Coate and All Cannings on a typical medieval layout;
- the Kennet and Avon Canal, with its traditional structures including bridges and locks, and the Crofton Pumping Station, plus a diverse range of recreational opportunities;
- the Salisbury Avon is an important chalk river. The river and its associated wetland habitats are a candidate Special Area of Conservation (SAC);
- densely settled with a great variety of settlement including the compact town of Pewsey on the River Avon, numerous small villages and hamlets on the foothills of the downs, plus settlement along the canal and the River Avon;
- built form includes soft red brick and flint, often used in decorative styles, limestone, sarsen, cob and timber frame, with roofs of straw thatch or clay tile.

Physical Influences

13.19. Upper Greensand forms the flat base of the Vale, with small areas of Gault Clay revealed on the western edge. The meandering tributaries and headwaters of the Avon have deposited bands of alluvium, producing rich soils in the eastern part of the character area, with the remainder of the floor covered by deep well drained loamy soils. On the flanks of the Vale the landform rises as a series of low undulating foothills of Lower Chalk, such as at Woodborough Hill, and the Knoll near Allington. These gradually grade down to the flatter floor of the central part of the Vale, although isolated outliers of the Lower Chalk form distinctive 'stranded' hills. The Salisbury Avon and its network of shallow tributaries drain the whole Vale. Further south at Upavon, the valley of the Avon forms a distinct character area in its own right, but within the AONB its headwaters are assimilated within the wider low-lying Vale landscape. Throughout the whole area the 'borrowed' landscape of the surrounding scarps, which tower to either side create a dominant backdrop.

Historic Environment

- 13.20. **Landscape Development:** Generally, the intensive land use within the Vale means that archaeological evidence is limited compared to the chalk uplands that lie to either side. Evidence of late Neolithic and early Bronze Age activity includes the henge at Marden. There are some Bronze Age round barrows within the area, mostly isolated examples on ridges and hilltops, such as Swanborough Tump. Near Alton Barnes, a roughly north-south stretch of the Ridgeway survives passing up the scarp edge between Walkers Hill and Knap Hill. The line of the Romano-British road from *Cunetio* (Mildenhall) to *Leucomagus* (Andover), which crosses the Vale just to the east of the village of Wilton, is preserved in the present-day road pattern.
- 13.21. **Medieval Settlement and Land Use:** Medieval landscape features include a moated site at Marten, lynchets and field systems, such as those on Woodborough Hill. Villages such as Coate and All Cannings are laid out in a typical medieval manner, with plot boundaries arranged on either side of central streets. Some of the few more sinuous field boundaries may have medieval origins. The woods around Manningford Bruce and Manningford Abbots show some signs of assarting, perhaps in the late medieval or early post-medieval periods.
- 13.22. **Field Pattern:** Most of the field boundaries in the area are straight and regular, and probably reflect formal Parliamentary enclosure in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.
- 13.23. **Modern Landscape:** Early modern features include the Kennet and Avon Canal and associated industrial archaeology including Crofton pumping station. Settlements such as Pewsey Wharf also contain buildings associated with the canal. The main rail line to the west of England crosses the area.

Biodiversity

- 13.24. The Vale of Pewsey supports a good variety habitat types, including wetlands, grasslands, woodland and heathland. Of these habitats perhaps the most important and characteristic are the wetlands, for example Jone's Mill (SSSI) and The River Avon System (SSSI). There are also a significant number of non-statutory sites, with around 40 grassland, 16 woodland, 3 heathland and 8 wetland mosaic sites.
- 13.25. Jone's Mill (SSSI) provides the best example of calcareous valley mire in Wiltshire, and supports a good range of wetland plants. Many of these wetland species are rare in the county including bottle sedge (*Carex rostrata*), bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) and bog pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*).

Key Issues

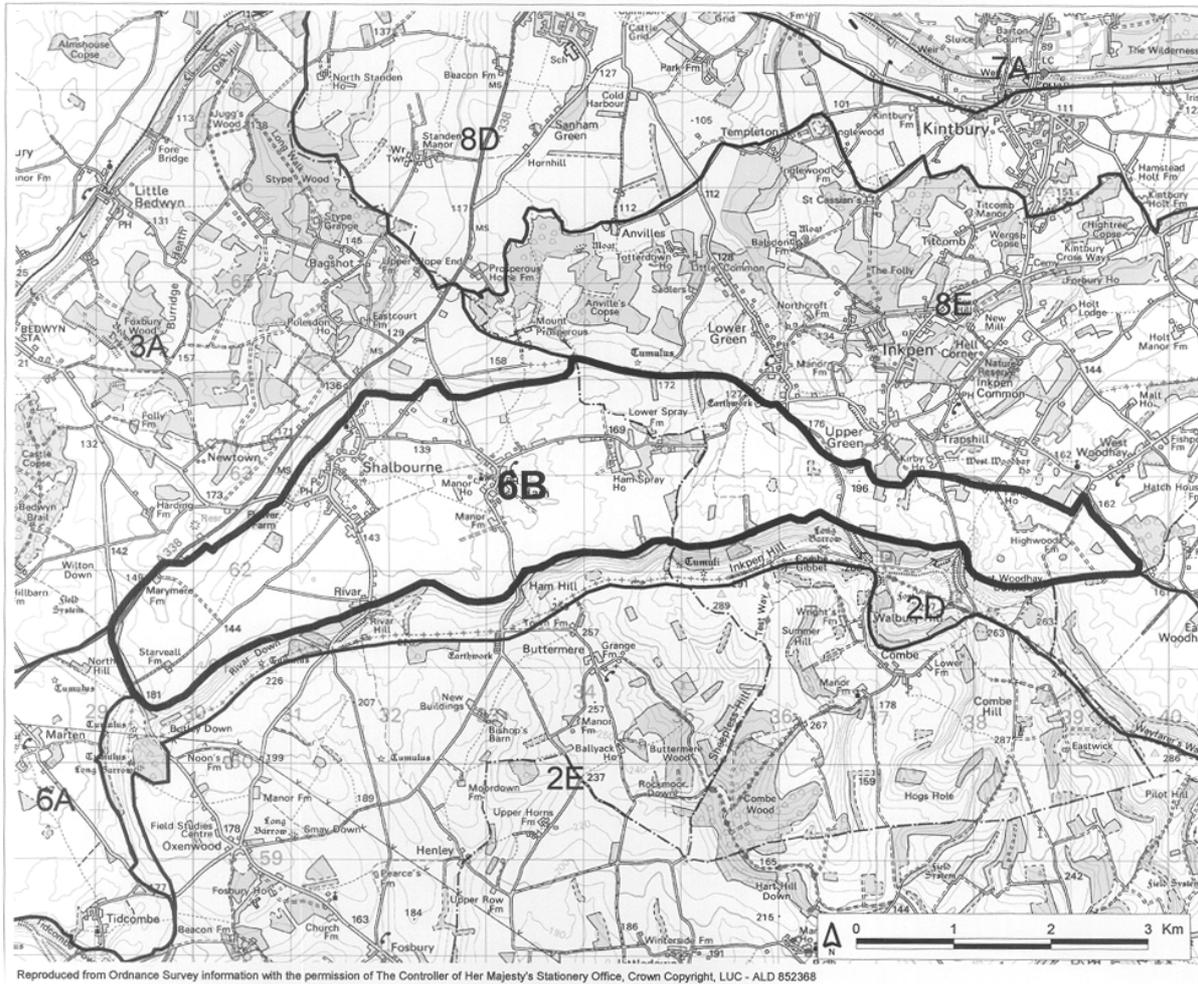
- intensive arable farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** particularly biodiversity by drainage and cultivation of permanent pasture, widespread loss of riparian vegetation plus nutrient run off to chalk rivers;

- potential changes in farming practices - including loss of livestock with some remaining Vale pastures no longer being grazed and **scrub encroachment or management as horse paddocks**;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows;
- localised intrusion of **roads, overhead power lines and pylons** all of which are highly visible in the context of this flat low lying landscape;
- **increased traffic on the rural lane network**, plus road improvements including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, in places creates a more urban landscape;
- need for appropriate management and enhancement of **woodlands, parklands and estate landscapes**;
- intense **development pressures**, particularly for new housing - impact on the character of the villages and their edges - so that settlements are less assimilated into the landscape;
- vulnerability to the impact development on the '**borrowed**' landscape of the scarps that tower to either side of the Vale.

Key Management Requirements

- 13.26. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the rural, agricultural character of the Vale of Pewsey with its vast open spaces enclosed by dramatic scarp slopes to either side. This includes the pattern of hedgerows, streams and remnant waterside pastures, wet meadows and woodlands and the traditional features associated with the Kennet and Avon canal corridor. There are opportunities for creation of new riparian woodlands, hedgerow planting and restoration of waterside pasture. The area is particularly vulnerable to change with significant pressures for new development. The objective should be to maintain the pattern of discrete small villages set within a quiet rural landscape.

CHARACTER AREA 6B: SHALBOURNE VALE



2.27. **Location and Boundaries:** Shalbourne Vale is the eastern extension of the wider Vale of Pewsey (6A), forming a narrow undulating belt of land, underlain by Greensand. It is contained between the two chalk upland belts of Savernake Plateau (3A) to the north and the Walbury Hill - Watership Down (2D) scarp slope to the south. It extends westward to the lowland landscapes of Highclere Lowlands and Heath (8E), with the boundary formed at the point where the geology changes and the landscape becomes more densely wooded around Inkpen.

Landscape Character Description

- 13.28. Shalbourne Vale forms an eastward extension of the Vale of Pewsey. It has a distinct character as a result of its narrow linear form, being more enclosed and contained and lacking the vast open level spaces of the area to the west. The Vale floor is predominantly under pasture, with some arable cultivation in medium to large fields, divided by mature hedgerows. Field boundaries vary from intact to those with a weaker structure. Woodland cover is very sparse apart from some small mixed copses east of Ham and a distinctive area of parkland with mature parkland trees set in pasture around Ham Spray House. However, the hedgerows and abundance of mature hedgerow trees which line the lanes and roads help create a more wooded character, as do the views to the surrounding wooded scarp slopes for example at Ham Hill and Inkpen Hill. Tree species including oak and birch indicate the lighter sandy soils present within this character area. The streams that drain the Vale, are very small scale and not generally important features of the landscape, although watercress beds are present at Shalbourne. Shalbourne and Ham are both loose linear settlements situated along roads running north-south across the Vale, elsewhere settlement is very limited, with just a handful of farms present.
- 13.29. The area is located at the junction of Wiltshire, Berkshire and Hampshire and similarly forms a transition between three joint character areas as shown on the Countryside Agency's Character of England Map, namely the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs (116), the Hampshire Downs (130) and the Thames Basin Heaths (129). Characteristics of each of these distinct areas are present to a greater or lesser degree within Shalbourne Vale.

Key Characteristics

- thin, eastern extension of the Vale of Pewsey, underlain by the Upper Greensand with light sandy soils;
- the narrow, undulating Vale is enclosed by the steep wooded scarp of River Down and Inkpen Hill to the south and a gentler slope rising to Savernake Plateau in the north;
- Vale floor predominantly under pasture, with some arable cultivation in medium to large fields divided by hedgerows, plus an abundance of mature hedgerow trees;
- some Bronze Age round barrows can be found on the ridges and hilltops which rise either side of the Vale;
- sparse woodland cover with the exception of small mixed copses east of Ham and an area of parkland around Ham Spray House;
- Shalbourne and Ham are both loose linear settlements based on a medieval layout. Elsewhere settlement is limited to a small number of farms;
- enclosed, contained and secluded character distinguishing it from the vast open level spaces of Pewsey Vale to the west.

Physical Influences

- 13.30. Geologically the area is very similar to the Vale of Pewsey, with Upper Greensand forming an undulating base to the Vale, with a thin band of Lower Clay extending around

the edge of the Vale, as the boundary with the higher chalk uplands. The clays and alluvium, however, are absent creating lighter sandy soils. The landform is much more enclosed than the Vale of Pewsey with a narrow, undulating floor enclosed by the steep scarp of Rivar Down and Inkpen Hill to the south and a gentler slope rising to Savernake Plateau in the north. The contours rise gradually to the west, with the Vale drained by small streams running to the north into the River Kennet, whereas the Vale of Pewsey drains to the Salisbury Avon system. The western part of the Vale is therefore the catchment divide. To the south east the rising undulating topography merges with the Lower Chalk foothills forming the escarpment below Walbury Hill.

Historic Environment

- 13.31. **Prehistoric earthworks:** Prominent prehistoric earthworks on the scarp edge to the south are visible from the Vale. These include a long barrow and Walbury Hill fort on Inkpen Hill and several isolated Bronze Age round barrows.
- 13.32. **Medieval Settlement and Land Use:** Villages such as Shalbourne and Ham are laid out in a typical medieval manner, with plot boundaries arranged on either side of central streets. Some of the few more sinuous field boundaries may have medieval origins.

Biodiversity

- 13.33. This Landscape Character Area includes 3 grassland and 5 woodland sites with non-statutory designation within its boundaries. Examples of the woodland sites are Ham spray copse and Inwood copse. There are no SSSIs within this character area.

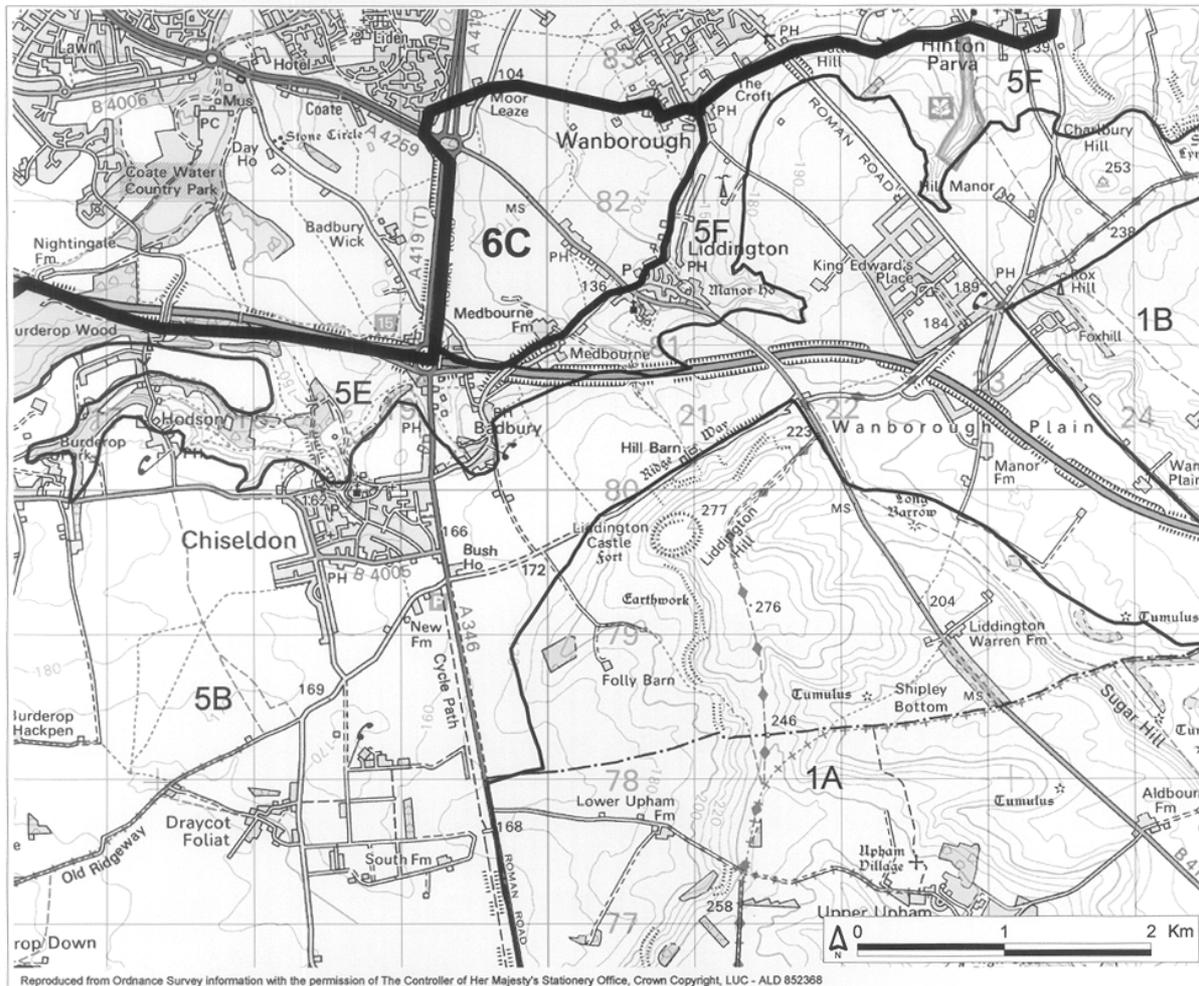
Key Issues

- in the past intensive farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** particularly biodiversity by drainage and cultivation of permanent pasture;
- future changes in farming practices - including loss of livestock with some remaining Vale pastures no longer being grazed resulting in **scrub encroachment** or pressure for alternative land uses;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows;
- **localised intrusion** of the A338, which runs along a slope above the Vale floor;
- need for appropriate management and enhancement of **woodlands, parklands and estate landscapes** e.g. Ham Spray House;
- the area is particularly vulnerable to the impact of **changes on the surrounding steep scarp slopes** of adjacent character areas, e.g. road improvements or tall structures on the scarp top.

Key Management Requirements

- 13.34. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, rural character of the Vale at Shalbourne. This includes the pattern of hedgerows, small-scale woodlands and historic features including parkland and watercress beds. There are opportunities to create a more intact hedgerow structure by new planting and restoration of pasture along the streamsides. The sparse settlement pattern should be maintained. The clear skylines and backdrop of the surrounding downland slopes should be maintained.

CHARACTER AREA 6C: WANBOROUGH VALE



2.35. **Location and Boundaries:** At Wanborough, the AONB boundary includes a very small part of the wider lower lying Vale landscape that continues to the north of the AONB and east of Swindon as the Vale of White Horse. In this area the AONB boundary extends to the edge of the Swindon urban area at Coate. The character area therefore forms a very important area of open land between the base of the scarp (5E & 5F) at Liddington and the urban edge.

Landscape Character Description

- 13.36. Wanborough Vale forms part of the much wider lower lying Vale landscape that extends to the north of the AONB. Here, the AONB boundary encompasses an important open area that abuts the development edge of Swindon. The area possesses many of the characteristics of the wider Vale with tree and shrub-lined streams and ditches draining to the River Cole through a mixed pasture and arable landscape. Fields are medium scale and bounded by a network of hedgerows, with abundant hedgerow trees. This area, however, has a distinct 'urban fringe' character, with the surrounding road network being a dominant influence. The main M4 Swindon junction forms the south-west corner, and the straight A346, following the route of a Roman road cuts the western edge. The area is wholly visible from the surrounding road network. Other urban influences include recent development on the edge of Wanborough (main part of the settlement outside the AONB boundary) plus views to the edge of Swindon.

Key Characteristics

- almost entirely level, flat Plain forming part of a much wider Vale landscape that extends beyond the boundary of the AONB. The rising scarp to the south is a dominant feature;
- drained by the streams rising on the scarp which flow north to form the headwaters of the River Cole;
- a mixed pasture and arable landscape with fields being medium scale and bounded by a network of hedgerows with abundant hedgerow trees;
- field pattern dominated by Parliamentary enclosure with more recent boundary removal to create a very open landscape;
- distinct 'urban fringe' character due to the presence of the M4 and A346 and recent development on the edge of Wanborough plus views to the edge of Swindon.

Physical Influences

- 13.37. Gault Clay, producing heavy clay soils, underlies the main part of the Vale, with Lower Greensand occurring at the base of the scarp. Topographically, the area is almost entirely level, but is dominated by the backdrop of the rising scarp slope to the south (5F: Liddington- Letcombe Open Scarp). It is drained by streams rising on the scarp and draining northwards forming the headwaters of the River Cole.

Historic Environment

- 13.38. **Landscape Development:** Intensive arable land use means that there is little extant archaeology. The villages of Liddington and Wanborough date to at least the medieval period. Otherwise, this area is dominated by the pattern of Parliamentary enclosure fields dating from the late eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.

Biodiversity

- 13.39. There are no statutory or non-statutory sites in this small character area.

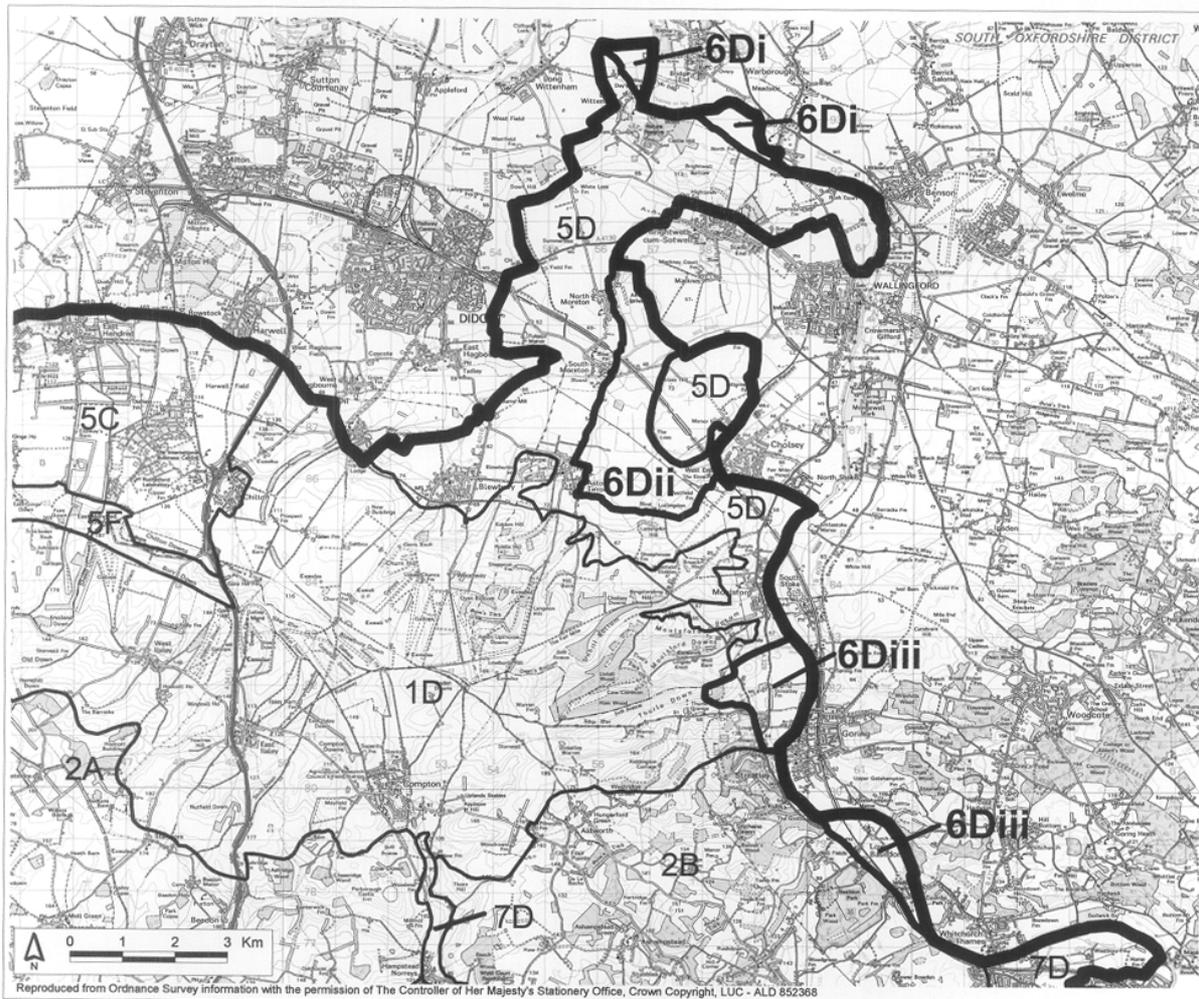
Key Issues

- urban fringe character - dominant **influence of the road network** - M4, A419 (T);
- recent **residential development** at Wanborough and views to the edge of Swindon;
- in the past intensive farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** particularly biodiversity by drainage and cultivation of permanent pasture;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and some mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows;
- vulnerable to the impact of development on the steep scarp slope to the south (borrowed landscape dominant in view).

Key Management Requirements

- 13.40. The overall management objective is to maintain this as an open agricultural landscape to provide a buffer between the urban expansion of Swindon and the scarp slope of the downs.

CHARACTER AREA 6D: THAMES VALLEY FLOODPLAIN



2.41. **Location and Boundaries:** The eastern boundary of the AONB takes in a number of small low lying Vale landscapes that form part of the Thames Valley Floodplain, with the river roughly following the eastern edge of the AONB between Benson and Pangbourne. The Thames Valley, itself is a major physical feature separating the chalk landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB to the west from the Chilterns AONB to the east. There are four geographically separate areas of the low lying Vale landscape within the AONB:

- i) Benson in the north-west corner of the AONB;
- ii) Moreton on the floodplain to the west of Wallingford;
- iii) Streatley and Basildon on the eastern edge;

A smaller area of the Thames valley around Pangbourne, is included in the Pang Valley character area (7D).

- 13.42. Individually, these comprise very small areas, with a landscape character that has much in common with the wider character areas of the Upper Thames Clay Vales (108) that extends beyond the AONB.

Landscape Character Description

- 13.43. **6D (i): Benson:** In the north-west corner of the AONB, the River Thames meanders within a wide floodplain contained by chalk escarpments. The AONB includes the course of the river and its adjacent floodplain to the south, from which the land rises steeply to the Sinodun Hills. The settlements of Dorchester and Warborough lie on the north bank of the Thames outside the AONB. The area within the AONB comprises large regular mixed arable/pasture fields, bounded by hedges and ditches lined with willow, alder and poplar. The bank of the river contains sinuous belts of broadleaved woodland that curve inside the meanders. The Thames Path National Trail runs along the northern side of the river, with recreational facilities and boat hire at Benson. To the south the floodplain and river are less accessible. This together with large fields and an absence of settlement creates a more remote and isolated landscape. Excellent views across this area can be obtained from Wittenham Clumps on the Sinodun Hills.
- 13.44. **6D (ii): Moreton:** The Moreton area forms part of the wider Thames floodplain which extends west from Wallingford (outside the AONB). It does not include the course of the river itself. This is a distinct, flat, low-lying area between the smoothly rounded hills of the higher chalk landscapes, with the Sinodun Hills to the north and the edge of the main chalk upland of the Blewbury Downs (1D) to the south. It is crossed by numerous watercourses with streams, such as Mill Brook, flowing to the Thames. A network of water-filled drainage ditches, subdivide the landscape in a regular rectilinear pattern. The thin lines of trees and shrubs along the ditches provide some landscape structure. Drainage has allowed the majority of fields to be put under arable cultivation, with little pasture remaining. Hedgerows bounding the fields are sparse and generally weak in structure with few hedgerow trees creating a very open landscape with expansive views. In this context the power lines which cross the area from Didcot are highly visible and intrusive. The villages of North and South Moreton are located on isolated pockets of higher ground (adjacent character area 5D), and the Vale itself is unsettled. The railway crosses east-west through the area, although despite this, or perhaps because of the severance by the rail line and comparative inaccessibility, the area has a remote, isolated character.
- 13.45. **6D (iii): Streatley and Basildon:** The River Thames meanders through a confined floodplain on the eastern edge of the AONB. In places where the river runs against the escarpment formed by the Chilterns, the floodplain contained within the meander to the

west is included in the North Wessex Downs AONB. This occurs in two locations, to the north of Goring and Streatley and to the east of Lower Basildon. These are small flat areas little more than a few fields wide located on river gravel terrace deposits, with the higher land of the chalk down rising to the west. These are large scale open pasture dominated areas contained by the higher land on either side. At Basildon, a more enclosed character is created by a parkland landscape with mature trees around Church Farm and the steep wooded cliffs on the west bank of the Thames.

Key Characteristics

- a number of small areas of 'Vale' landscapes on the eastern edge of the AONB form part of the larger floodplain of the Thames;
- a flat low-lying landscape generally below a height of 50m, with long views and comparative sense of remoteness and isolation;
- linear water-filled drainage ditches and other small watercourses flowing to the Thames are a defining feature;
- generally large scale fields with a mixture of arable and pasture with hedgerows of varying condition in addition to the ditch boundaries;
- tree and shrub lined streams and ditches provide landscape structure;
- numerous traces of pre-historic occupation in the area in the form of crop marks on the well drained gravels of the Thames floodplain including evidence for Palaeolithic activity;
- floodplain generally characterised by a lack of settlement with the exception of occasional farms.

Physical Influences

- 13.46. The Thames Valley is a major physical feature separating the two chalk upland blocks of the North Wessex Downs and the Chilterns. The river runs within a level floodplain, which narrows between steep wooded slopes at Goring Gap on the eastern edge of the AONB. The valley floor, which cuts into the chalk is overlain by gravel deposits and alluvium, with clays underlying the wider floodplain around North and South Moreton. It is a flat low lying landscape generally below the 50m contour.

Historic Environment

- 13.47. **Landscape Development:** There are numerous traces of prehistoric occupation in the area, but these take the form of cropmarks that form readily on the well-drained gravels of the Thames floodplain. The gravels themselves have produced evidence for Palaeolithic occupation in the area, including stone tools and animal remains of now extinct species. They also include evidence for late prehistoric (late Neolithic cursus and round barrows) and Romano-British features - today these can only be discerned on air photographs.
- 13.48. Large-scale regular fields, characteristic of formal eighteenth and nineteenth century enclosure, are the predominant field pattern.

Biodiversity

- 13.49 **6D (i): Benson:** The Thames floodplain – Benson Character Area contains 2 non-statutory wetland sites, namely Shillingford Hotel Meadow and Rush Court. There are no sites with statutory designation in this Character Area.
- 13.50 **6D (ii): Moreton:** There are no statutory or non-statutory sites in this small character area.
- 13.51 **6D (iii): Streatley and Basildon:** The Thames floodplain – Streatley and Basildon Character Area, contains 2 non-statutory wetland nature conservation sites, these are Child Beale and Streatley Meadows. There are no sites with statutory designation in this Character Area.

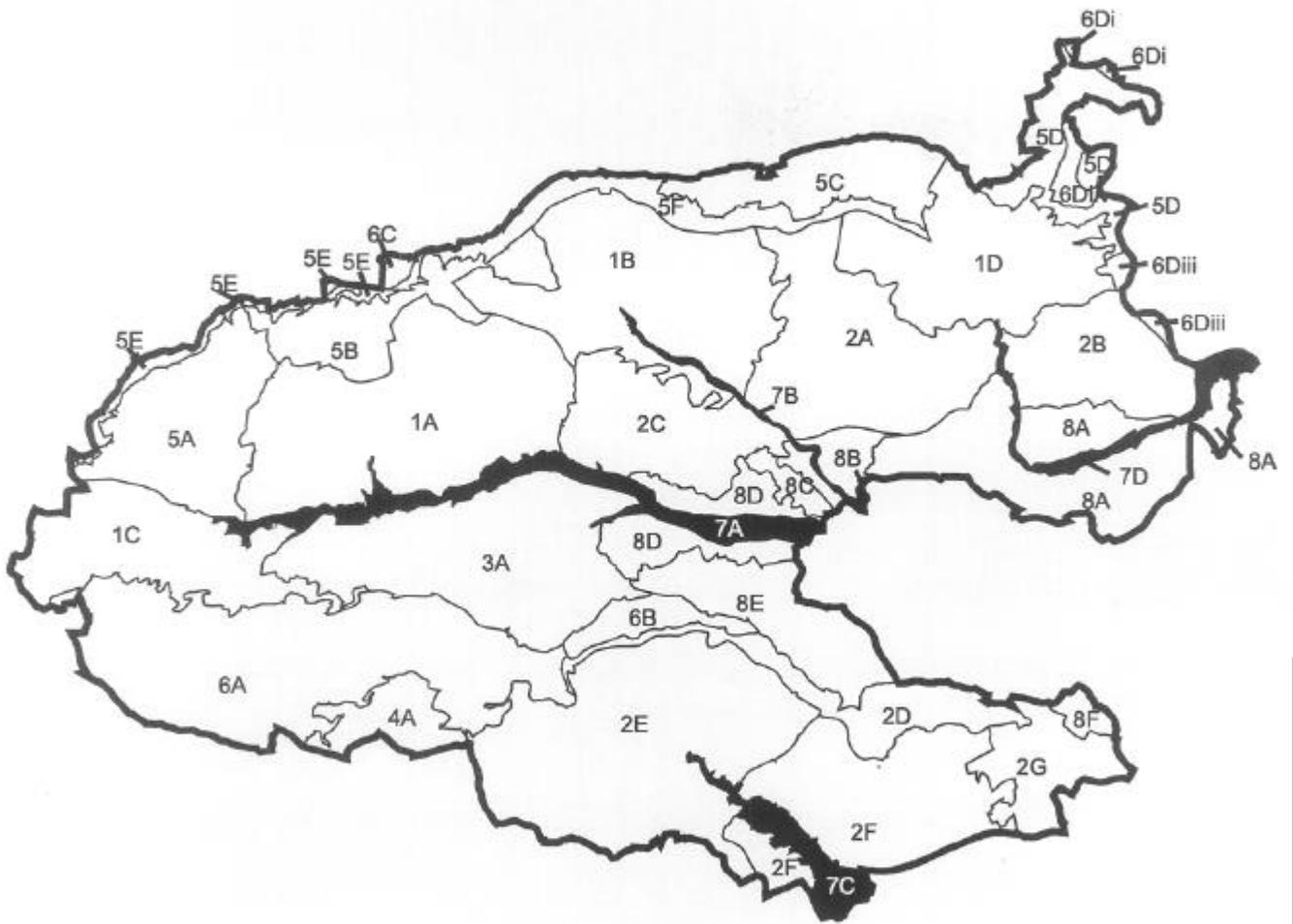
Key Issues

- in the past intensive farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** particularly biodiversity by drainage and cultivation of waterside pasture;
- future **changes in farming practices** - including loss of livestock with some remaining pastures no longer being grazed;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly riparian features including wet woodland and pollarded willows, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows and woodlands;
- **localised intrusion** of the pylons and overhead power lines;
- the area is particularly vulnerable to the impact of **changes on the surrounding steep slopes** of adjacent character areas.

Key Management Requirements

- 13.52 The overall management objective is to maintain the character of these floodplain landscapes on the edge of the AONB, with their comparative remoteness, and to enhance their ecological character through restoration of waterside pasture and riparian vegetation.

Landscape Type 7 - River Valleys



14. LANDSCAPE TYPE 7: RIVER VALLEYS

Location and Boundaries

- 14.1. The River Valleys landscape type incorporates the valleys of four rivers: the Kennet, Lambourn, Bourne and Pang. The general drainage pattern of the area is to the east, determined by the Thames Basin, into which the rivers ultimately flow. The Lambourn joins the Kennet at Newbury, and the Pang flows directly to the Thames at Pangbourne on the border of the AONB. The exception is the River Bourne, which drains southwards to the Test Valley. Within the AONB there are several other minor river valleys such as the Og, plus the Bourne and upper part of the Salisbury Avon in the Vale of Pewsey. The chalk upland is also cut by numerous dry valleys, which sometimes contain ephemeral 'winterbournes'. These minor valleys have not been identified separately as they are considered to be a feature and integral part of the character of the surrounding landscape type.
- 14.2. The boundaries of the River Valleys have been defined topographically. Although all the valleys drain a much wider part of the surrounding area, the immediate river corridor represents a very distinct change in character (a green pastoral valley floor compared to the rolling open arable upper valleys sides). For this reason the boundaries of the river valleys identify a relatively narrow corridor comprising the floodplain and immediate valley sides. The boundaries are usually defined by a physical feature, often a road that follows the first contour above winter flooding level.

Overview

The rivers valleys, which incise the chalk uplands of the North Wessex Downs, form very distinct linear landscapes characterised by a rich mix of grazed pastures, water meadows, wetland and woodland. The valleys are enclosed by steeply rising slopes, which limit vistas and create an intimate and enclosed character.

Typically, the river valleys have short, steep sides enclosing a narrow, flat alluvial flood plain. The spring-fed chalk streams and rivers with their characteristically clear, fast flowing waters are one of the most distinctive and important habitats of the North Wessex Downs, supporting a large number of rare plant and animal species. Their high ecological value is reflected in a large number of designated sites including SSSI and several candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSAC). The water and surrounding seasonal flood meadows, grazed pastures, fen, marsh, damp woodlands and lines of pollarded willow create a diverse texture and structure. Ancient woodlands and parklands are distinctive historic features.

The green pastures along the narrow valley floors are in strong contrast to the expansive arable fields that characterise the downs. These areas are, nevertheless, closely connected with the surrounding uplands, as evidenced by the numerous roads and lanes that climb the valley sides, perpendicular to the river course. The valleys have long been a focus for occupation, and this is reflected in a range of archaeological sites and artefacts dating from the prehistoric period. One the most notable historic features is the floated water meadows, which by the later 17th century were commonplace in most valleys in the North Wessex Downs. The meadows were carefully constructed with a network of channels and drains to cover the surface with a shallow, rapidly moving sheet of water during the winter, which

protected the grass from frost and stimulated early growth. Other distinctive features relating to past management include watercress beds, some of which are still operational and remnants of water mill systems including mill leats and pools.

Historically, settlement was concentrated in the valley and this remains the dominant pattern today. Linear and nucleated villages are characteristically located along a road on the first contour above the winter flood level on the south facing side of the valley. The villages have considerable vernacular charm and appeal and include tiny hamlets clustered around a church, many small villages and, in the Kennet Valley, the two market towns of Marlborough and Hungerford. The valleys have long formed important communications routes cutting through the uplands, with rail and road corridors often forming dominant features.

Key Characteristics

- the river valleys incised into the chalk uplands are one of the defining features of the AONB landscape with enclosure, pastoral land cover and settlement contrasting strongly with the 'remote' open arable uplands;
- typically the valleys have short, relatively steep sides with a narrow, flat floodplain;
- clear fast flowing waters and important chalk river habitats;
- a diverse and rich mosaic of land cover and habitats including wet woodlands, former 'floated' water meadows, watercress beds, grazed pasture and calcareous fen;
- field pattern of characteristically small hedged enclosures which may reflect medieval strips and furlongs;
- riparian woodlands, lines of poplar along ditches and willow pollards are distinctive features;
- concentration of settlement including tiny hamlets clustered around a church, many small villages and the two market towns of Marlborough and Hungerford;
- significant recreational opportunities including several promoted linear routes as well as the Kennet and Avon Canal which provide opportunities for boat trips and watersports. The chalk rivers are a prime location for salmon fishing;
- the river valleys have been a focus for occupation reflected in the range of archaeological sites and artefacts from the prehistoric period onwards. Continuity of settlement including numerous manors and villages, many of which are recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086;
- attractive villages plus accessibility makes the river valleys a popular location, reflected in a considerable population increase. Many settlements are now predominantly 'commuter villages', with associated traffic impacts on the rural lane network.

Physical Influences

- 14.3. **Geology and Soils:** The rivers all cut into the chalk, flowing on a chalk base, with gravels and alluvium deposits confined to a narrow belt on the valley floor.
- 14.4. **Landform:** The chalk river valley landform typically has short relatively steep sides enclosing a narrow flat floodplain, forming a distinct linear landscape type.

Biodiversity

- 14.5. The spring fed streams and rivers, which incise the chalk upland are extremely rich in plant and animal communities, deriving, in part, from the high-quality of the base-rich water which is naturally clear and fast flowing. The rivers irrigate the valley

floodplain to create a rich mosaic of associated wetland habitats including fens, water meadows, damp pasture, carr and wet woodland. The high ecological importance of the river valley landscape type is reflected in the large number of designated sites including SSSI and several candidate Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). The riparian copses and linear woodland, in combination with the hedgerows, provide a valuable habitat network throughout the whole of the valley and link into the designated sites.

Historic Environment

- 14.6. **A Focus for Occupation and Communication:** River valleys have long been a focus for occupation, partly because of the range of resources they supply (for example, fish, fowl, rich alluvial deposits, and characteristic fast-flowing clear streams) and this is reflected in the range of archaeological sites and artefacts from the prehistoric period onwards.
- 14.7. Historically, settlement was concentrated in the river valleys, close to the water supply is, as reflected in the numerous manors and villages, many of which are recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086.
- 14.8. The structure of the land also defines communication patterns. The Kennet, Lambourn, Pang and Thames Valley which drain the downlands in the north of the AONB, traditionally look towards Reading and London, ultimately leading to Europe. The Kennet Valley historically was a key east-west communication corridor, formalised by the building of the London to Bath Roman road through it and, subsequently, by the building of the Kennet and Avon canal in the nineteenth century, linking Bristol to London. By contrast, the Hampshire chalklands, drained by the Bourne, look naturally towards the Solent and the English Channel.
- 14.9. **Field patterns:** The fields within the river valleys are characteristically small with sinuous boundaries, which may reflect the shape of former medieval strips and furlongs.
- 14.10. **Watermeadows, Mills and Watercress Beds:** The fast flowing chalk streams provided ideal conditions for creating water meadows and by the later seventeenth century water meadows were commonplace in most valleys within the AONB. These meadows were carefully constructed with a network of channels and drains to cover the surface of the meadow with a shallow rapidly moving sheet of water during the winter, which protected the grass from frost and stimulated early growth providing feed for lambs and ewes. Other distinctive features relating to past management include watercress beds (some still operational) and remnants of mill systems including leats and pools.

Settlement and Building Character

- 14.11. The river valleys contain a concentration of settlement, following a very distinctive pattern. Both nucleated and linear villages occur at regular intervals along the valley sides, at a height just above the winter flood level, frequently on south facing slopes - as exemplified in the Kennet Valley. The settlements include tiny hamlets clustered around a church, many small villages and the two market towns of Marlborough and Hungerford. This concentration of settlement within the valleys, in contrast to the

almost uninhabited Open Downland, is one of the defining characteristics of the AONB.

Recreation Character

- 14.12. The River Valleys provide many opportunities for walking, riding and cycling along the numerous Public Rights of Way, including several promoted linear routes including Walks from Pangbourne Station, the Lambourn Valley Way, the Test Valley Way and the canal tow path along the Kennet and Avon Canal. The canal and rivers also provide opportunities for boat trips, watersports (canoeing) and fishing. The chalk rivers provide a prime location for salmon fishing.

Social and Economic Characteristics

- 14.13. The river valleys are distinguished by the presence of attractive settlements, which vary considerably in size, from the market town of Marlborough to smaller villages and hamlets. Parishes within the River Valleys have all increased in population since 1981, some quite considerably. Marlborough, for example, has experienced a significant increase in population of almost 40%. The Kennet Valley and the Lambourn Valley are also an increasingly popular place to live, with the Motorway (M4) enhancing accessibility.
- 14.14. The level of services available within parishes varies considerably. Ramsbury, for example, in the Kennet Valley, has a relatively high population and has a range of services. In contrast, St Mary Bourne in the Test Valley is poorly serviced and its parishioners must be heavily reliant upon the use of the car to get to facilities in the neighbouring town of Andover. The significant market town of Marlborough serves not only its resident population but also those in villages on its peripheral edge and a wider catchment, within the Downs. This concentration of service provision in the market towns further increases reliance on transport (usually by private car) resulting in congestion and traffic concerns in the valleys and surrounding areas. The valleys have long been important communication routes, however high traffic levels and road improvements are having an impact on the vernacular charm and appeal of the area.

Key Issues

- in the past, **low flows** in the chalk rivers has been a major cause for concern, particularly with increased abstraction requirements. More recently **flooding** within the valleys has been an issue for local residents;
- maintenance of **high water quality** in the streams and rivers, particularly by the nutrient pollution from riverside arable land plus road and urban run off;
- intensification in farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** particularly **drainage and improvement of permanent pasture** and water meadows on the floodplain and loss of riparian vegetation;
- potential changes in farming practices - including loss of livestock with some remaining valley pastures and meadows no longer being grazed with consequential **scrub encroachment**;

- maintenance of traditional valley features including **watercress beds** and historic features - **water meadow systems, mills and leats**;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows;
- **climate change** - potential impacts including increased abstraction and low flows, as well as autumn/winter flooding, concentrated levels of water pollution and drying out of wetland habitats. Potential impacts on woodland and parkland include increases in non native species and tree loss (drought/windthrow);
- localised intrusion of **roads (M4 and A4), overhead power lines and pylons** all of which are highly visible in the context of the small scale enclosed, intimate valley landscape;
- **increased traffic on the road network**, plus improvements to the lanes including kerbing, widening, signing and new river crossings which, in places create a more 'urban' character;
- potential future demand for **aggregate extraction** altering the form and character of the valleys;
- **development pressures**, particularly for new housing affect the character of the small settlements - discrete villages may appear to coalesce along the valley side roads;
- **loss of rural tranquillity**, resulting from the combination of the above factors.

Key Management Requirements

14.15. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the River Valley landscapes with their intimate, pastoral and tranquil character. This includes:

- the chalk streams and rivers with their characteristically clear, fast-flowing waters;
- the adjacent seasonal flood meadows, grazed pastures, fen, marsh, damp woodlands and historic parklands.

14.16. The small-scale character of the valleys mean that they are potentially sensitive to any development, including large scale farm buildings, new housing and communication infrastructure. The aim should be to maintain the distinctive pattern of settlement with discrete villages, hamlets and two market towns.

Character Areas

14.17. The River Valleys landscape type is divided into four geographic character areas. These comprise.

7A: Kennet Valley

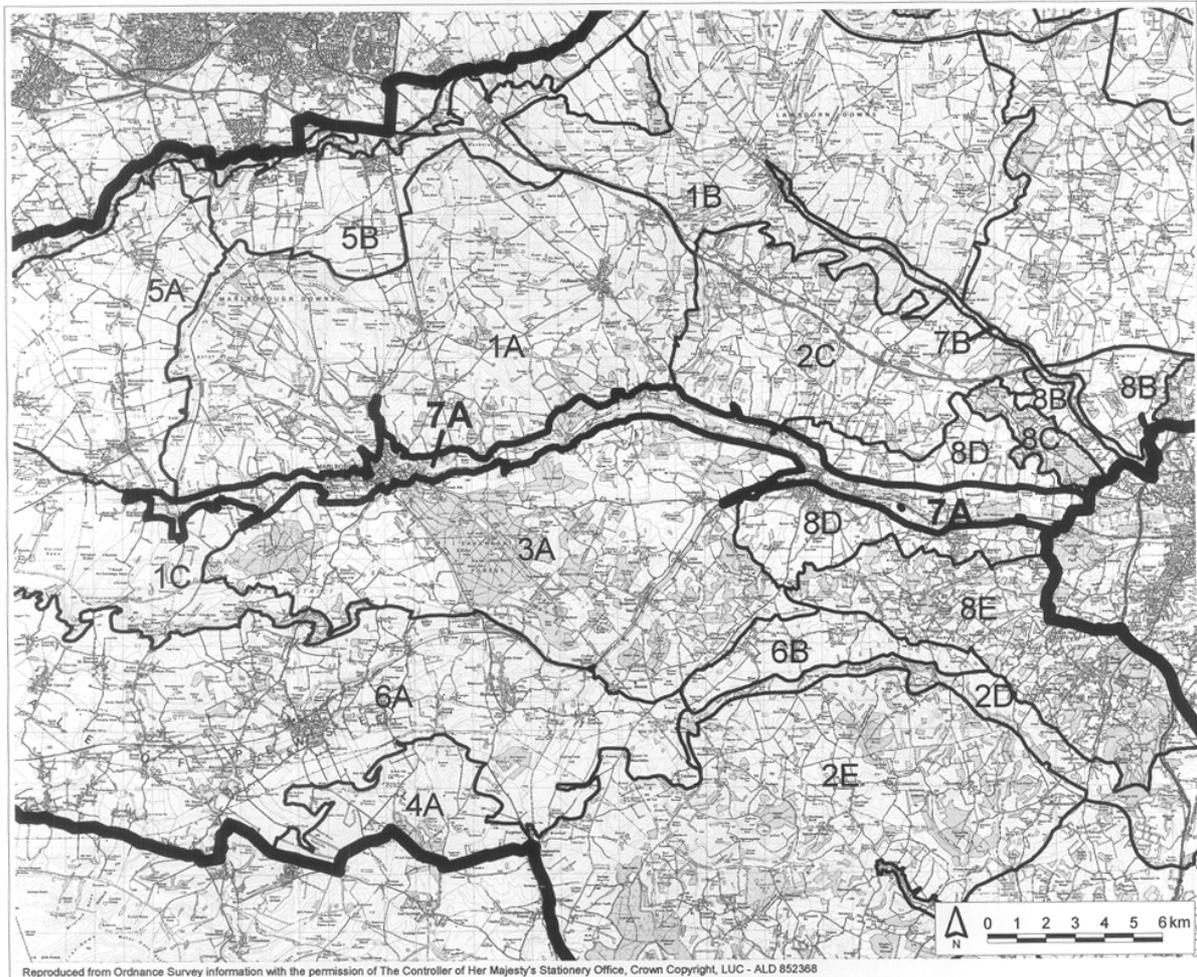
7B: Lambourn Valley

7C: Bourne Valley

7D: Pang Valley

(Note: the upper reaches of the Salisbury Avon are included in the Vale of Pewsey character area 6A).

CHARACTER AREA 7A: KENNET VALLEY



- 3.18. **Location and Boundaries:** The Kennet Valley drains the majority of the North Wessex Downs and dissects the AONB, virtually dividing it into two halves. The river rises on the chalk near Avebury and flows eastwards to the AONB boundary west of Newbury. The boundaries are defined topographically and generally relate to the mid valley sides, frequently following the line of roads or lanes. Occasionally, the boundaries of the character area have been widened to include the full extent of settlements that have developed within the valley, typically at bridging or fording points, such as at Marlborough and Ramsbury.

Landscape Character Description

- 14.19. A distinct topographic unit, the Kennet Valley has a narrow valley floor, strongly enclosed by the gentle, but well defined chalk sides widening out to a more open form beyond Hungerford. Landscape character changes distinctly along the length of the valley, from a small spring fed watercourse set within the open chalk landscape near Avebury, to a more substantial river flowing through water meadows, woodland and valley floor pasture between Marlborough and Hungerford. East of Hungerford the valley opens out and the river flows through a larger scale lowland landscape. In the upper reaches of the river, archaeological monuments associated with Avebury World Heritage Site (WHS), including The Sanctuary stone circle, are a prominent feature.
- 14.20. The valley floor is dominated by pasture particularly in its upper length, with the pasture intermixed with arable fields east of Hungerford. Along the whole length, the valley sides are generally under arable cultivation creating a definite and visible landscape boundary mid slope above the floodplain. The diverse vegetation creates a varied and attractive landscape structure with tracts of lush floodplain pasture, marsh and reedbeds. Vertical elements include lines of willow pollards and poplars plus hedgerows enclosing the fields and stands of regenerating alder, birch and oak along the river banks. East of Marlborough the valley is particularly well wooded, with sinuous belts of woodland lining the valley sides and some larger broadleaved woodland blocks on the valley floor. Further diversity is provided by the historic parklands, which are a feature of the middle section of the valley and include Ramsbury Manor, Chilton Foliat and Littlecote.
- 14.21. The River Kennet is an important chalk river habitat and for much of its length downstream from Marlborough is designated as a SSSI. It is especially species rich, having the highest average number of species per site surveyed of any other lowland river in Britain. The rich biodiversity of the floodplain is reflected in the four SSSI sites and its status (with the floodplain of the River Lambourn) as a candidate SAC. Of particular significance are the Kennet Valley Alderwoods which display a complete transition from open water through swamp to relatively dry woodland; a rare occurrence in Europe. There are, in addition, numerous local wildlife heritage sites, representing both wetland and wet woodland habitats. The seasonal flood meadows, riparian woodlands and pastures are an important plant habitat and refuge for a number of rare species.
- 14.22. Providing a main east-west communications corridor, the route of the A4 road follows the valley from its source to Marlborough. To the east of Hungerford the river has been modified by the construction of the Kennet and Avon Canal, which in some places merges with the river as a single water channel. This stretch of the valley is also shared with the railway line. A minor road set above the winter flood level follows the valley in its upper reaches. It is frequently joined by roads at right angles descending from the downs and across the valley, as at Stitchcombe and Axford, with the brick bridge crossings being a distinctive feature.
- 14.23. Attractive settlements are located along the whole valley, typically on the south facing valley side. Many illustrate a long continuity of settlement including those of Saxon and

Medieval origins. They include tiny hamlets (Fyfield, Stitchcombe, Axford, Knighton, Chiton Foliat), villages (Manton, Ramsbury, Mildenhall, Kintbury) and the busy market towns of Marlborough and Hungerford. Originally nucleated near bridging or fording points, just above the valley floor, some now extend as linear settlements along the valley or expanding out onto the valley sides as at Marlborough, Ramsbury and Hungerford. Ramsbury is a particularly attractive linear village settlement. Building materials generally reflect the local geology, with brick/flint and clay tile dominating east of Marlborough, and sarsen stone and brick dominating to the west. Mills and churches are distinctive built features within the valley.

14.24. Overall, the valley has an intimate, pastoral, riparian character, with attractive nucleated valley settlements and a rich ecological resource.

Key Characteristics

- relatively steep sides and a narrow valley floor providing a strong sense of enclosure in its upper reaches, broadening out to a wider lowland landscape east of Hungerford;
- valley floor dominated by pasture, although east of Hungerford pasture is intermixed with arable fields. Valleys sides are generally under arable cultivation;
- diverse vegetation including lush floodplain pasture, marsh and reedbeds, lines of willow pollards and poplars;
- varied field pattern including some small fields with sinuous boundaries near Overton, which may date to Saxon enclosure. Boundaries are formed by hedgerows;
- remnants of valley floor floated water meadows;
- historic parklands, based on medieval sites, are a particular feature of the middle section of the valley;
- sinuous belts of woodland line the valley sides and some larger broadleaved woodland blocks on the valley floor. More wooded character east of Marlborough;
- an important lowland chalk river - much of the length downstream from Marlborough is designated as a SSSI. Many important wetland and woodland habitats within the wider valley which includes four SSSI;
- many archaeological features, including the Sanctuary (part of the Avebury monument complex). Continuity of settlement e.g. Saxon settlement at Marlborough;
- the Kennet and Avon Canal is a dominant feature merging with the river east of Hungerford and includes industrial archaeological sites (sluices, locks and warehouses etc.) and World War II military structures;
- many attractive settlements of detached houses are located at regular intervals along the whole length of the valley, typically on the south facing side and range from tiny hamlets to the two market towns;
- varied built form reflects the local geology including brick/flint and clay tile dominating the area east of Marlborough, and sarsen stone and brick dominating the west. Mills and churches are a distinctive landmark and feature;
- overall, an intimate, pastoral rural valley character.

Physical Influences

- 14.25. The Kennet Valley cuts through the chalk upland forming a distinct topographical unit. The river starts as minor stream in the chalk near Avebury at approximately 155m and flows along a gentle gradient to approximately 85m at the eastern AONB boundary. It has a smooth valley form, with relatively steep sides and a narrow valley floor, providing a strong sense of enclosure in its upper reaches and broadening out to a more open lowland landscape east of Hungerford. Alluvium and gravel deposits line the valley floor along its entire length.

Historic Environment

- 14.26. **Prehistoric Landscape:** Archaeological evidence demonstrates that humans have exploited the Kennet valley for at least 10,000 years. However, prominent remains date from the Neolithic period and include The Sanctuary - the stone circle that the Beckhampton Avenue leads to - which must be considered in relation to the rest of the Avebury monument complex (character area 5A).
- 14.27. The Marlborough Mound, in the grounds of Marlborough College, was a motte for a Norman motte and bailey castle, but it has been suggested that this may have reused or been built over a Neolithic mound that may have been a smaller version of Silbury Hill. Several Bronze Age round barrows lie at the head of the Kennet valley near The Sanctuary stone circle, and to the east on the western outskirts of Speen and Newbury. Linear earthworks on and around Postern Hill to the south of Marlborough may be later prehistoric land divisions.
- 14.28. **Saxon Settlement:** Villages tend to cluster in sheltered sites above the floodplain and tend to be dominated by a manor house and church. Several, such as Overton and Marlborough, appear to have Saxon origins. Ramsbury is first documented in the tenth century as a Saxon bishopric, and may have been the principal administrative centre in the area at the time. Some surviving bank and ditch earthworks, and some of the more sinuous modern field boundaries represent Saxon estate boundaries, such as those between the parishes of East and West Overton, once belonging to separate Saxon estates. East Overton has since been absorbed into West Overton, which used to be located further to the west.
- 14.29. **Medieval Settlement and Land Use:** Ramsbury Manor and Littlecote are medieval sites and earthworks of medieval date which survive on the northern edge of Marlborough. From the medieval period onwards mills, water meadows and various drainage channels were constructed to utilise, improve or control water-flow. At West Overton, the earthworks of a managed watermeadow system, which probably originated in the seventeenth century, are still visible
- 14.30. **The Kennet and Avon Canal:** Just downstream and to the east of Hungerford, the River Kennet joins the Kennet and Avon Canal (opened in 1811). Along both forks of this area there are sluices, lock gates, warehouses and other industrial archaeological sites from the nineteenth century. There are also a number of World War II military structures along the canal as it was an important 'stop line' to prevent an invading

German army from pushing further north into England. The Great Western Railway, which opened in 1847, is a further important industrial feature.

Biodiversity

- 14.31. The Kennet Valley is characterised by a number of wetland sites. It has retained a number of important sites, including 5 SSSI's, two of which, namely the Kennet and Lambourn floodplain (SSSI), and the Kennet Valley Alderwoods (SSSI) have been considered for SAC status. The area also contains 35 sites with non-statutory designation, including an old railway line, around 14 grasslands, 13 wetlands and 7 woodlands.
- 14.32. The Kennet Valley Alderwoods (SSSI) is composed of two woodlands, the Wilderness and part of Ryott's Plantation. It supports a large proportion of the plant species associated with this woodland type and is particularly notable for exhibiting the complete transition from open water to swamp, and through to wet and dry woodland.
- 14.33. The 3 remaining SSSI's are Chilton Foliat Meadows (SSSI), the River Kennet (SSSI) and Freeman's Marsh (SSSI). Chilton Foliat Meadows (SSSI) comprises an extensive system of wet neutral meadows, watercourses, tall fen vegetation and scrub. These meadows are in the most part managed traditionally as hay meadows, and support a variety of birds, including high numbers of breeding waders. The meadows are also rich in plants species and more than 10 species of sedge can be found, including the flea sedge (*Carex pulicaris*), and tawny sedge (*C. hostiana*).

Key Issues

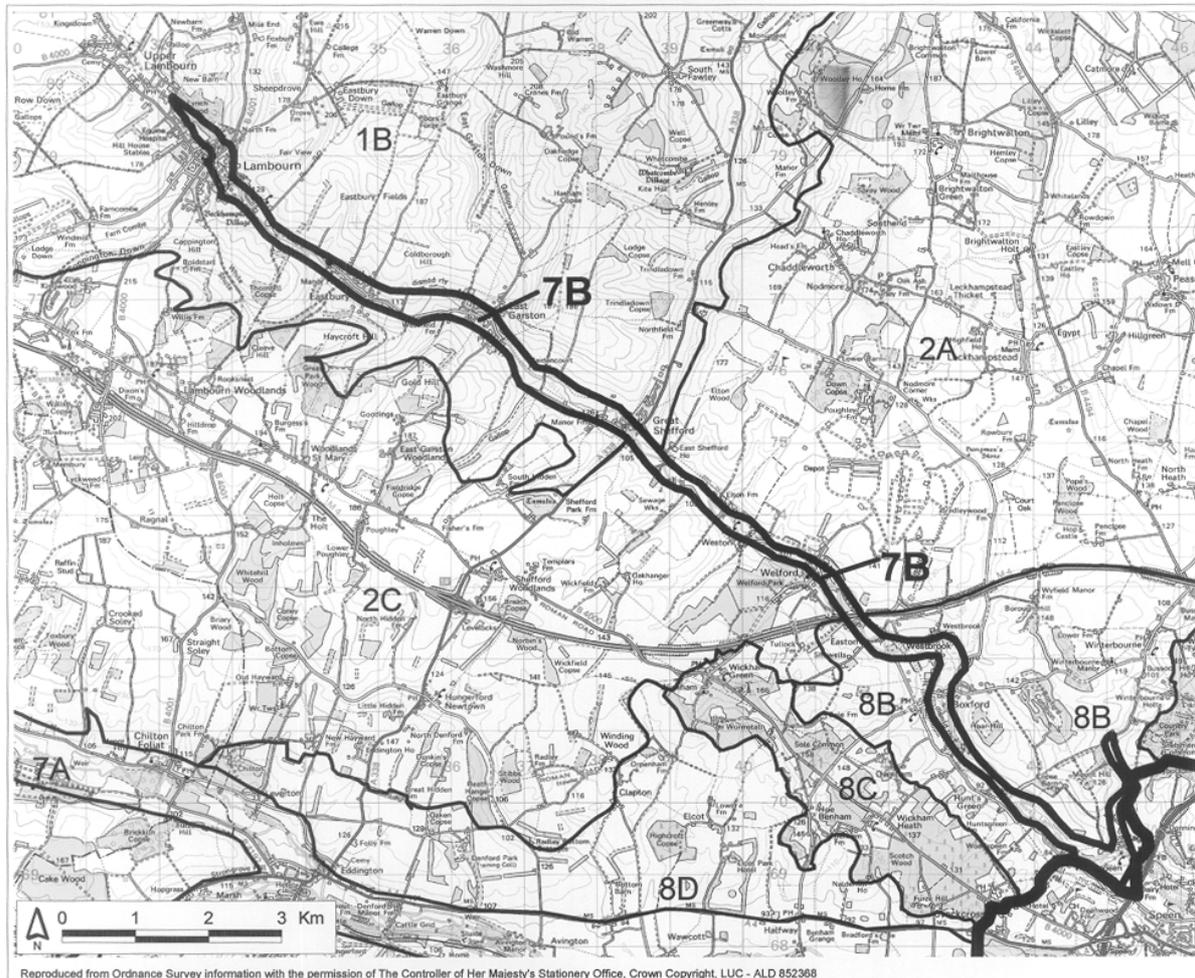
- **maintenance of water quality and flows.** More recently impact of localised flooding has been an issue for local residents;
- intensification in farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** particularly drainage and improvement of permanent pasture and water meadows on the floodplain and loss of riparian vegetation;
- potential changes in farming practices including loss of livestock, with some remaining valley pastures and meadows no longer being grazed resulting in **scrub encroachment**;
- maintenance of **historic features** including water meadow systems, mills and leats and **industrial features** associated with the **Kennet and Avon Canal** and Great Western railway;
- **loss of hedgerow boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows;
- localised **intrusion** of roads (A4) and rail line;
- **increased traffic on the road network**, plus improvements to the lanes including kerbing, widening, signing and new river crossings which, in places create a more 'urban' character;

- **development pressures**, particularly for new housing on the edge of Marlborough and other smaller valley settlements. Sensitivity of narrow, intimate scale valley to any form of large scale development;
- management and enhancement of **historic parkland** and estate landscapes.

Key Management Requirements

- 14.34. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the tranquil, intimate character of the Kennet Valley. This will include maintenance of key features including permanent pasture, wet grassland and riparian woodlands and historic features associated with the mills and water meadows, historic parklands and industrial archaeology associated with the Kennet and Avon Canal. There are opportunities for restoration of waterside pastures, replanting and management of hedgerows and limited native tree planting/regeneration.
- 14.35. The small-scale intimate character of the Kennet Valley is potentially sensitive to any new development. The aim should be to maintain the distinctive pattern of settlement, with discrete villages characteristically located along a road on the first contour above the winter flood level.

CHARACTER AREA 7B: LAMBOURN VALLEY



3.36. **Location and Boundaries:** The River Lambourn, a tributary of the Kennet, rises in the Lambourn Downs and flows south eastwards to the AONB boundary at Newbury. The boundaries are defined topographically, and generally follow the contour along the top of the immediate valley sides enclosing the floodplain. The river itself drains a much wider area of the surrounding chalk uplands within which land slopes gently down to the river. The valley widens out at the head, at the village of Lambourn, beyond which it forms a dramatic dry valley cutting into the chalk. This higher area is subsumed within the adjacent landscape type, namely the Open Downland of Lambourn Downs (1B).

Landscape Character Description

- 14.37. The River Lambourn flows within a narrow and visually contained valley, forming a small scale landscape of great interest, intimacy and detail within the context of the surrounding open chalk downland. Known as the 'Valley of the Racehorse' the race horse training industry is prominent, manifest in a very distinctive landscape of stables, stud farms and a series of horse paddocks enclosed within white-painted wooden rails. In addition to training the area supports many associated industries creating a distinct local economy and community.
- 14.38. In the upper part of the valley, above Great Shefford, the River Lambourn flows through a confined narrow corridor with mainly pasture and some arable landuse. It is a small scale landscape with fields bounded by fences or hedgerows, often in poor condition. South of Great Shefford the valley form is slightly wider and the river flows in a meandering and braided channel through a mosaic of former water meadows, cattle grazed wet pastures and broadleaved woodlands. Ornamental parkland at Great Shefford, Woodspeen and Welford is an important feature. The river itself is small scale and is not always evident on the valley floor, although lines of pollarded willow signal its course. Throughout its length areas of marsh and scrub are present creating a diverse landscape texture and structure contributing to the sense of enclosure and intimacy.
- 14.39. The River Lambourn is a classic example of a lowland chalk river, with the whole of the valley forming a rich ecological resource. The river and the floodplain (with the floodplain of the Kennet) are both candidate SACs. Along the wider lower reaches of the valley are Easton Mill and Boxford Water Meadows. These comprise flood pastures and disused water meadows, which would have been traditionally managed as 'floated' meadows with controlled flooding and secondary channels to encourage early sward growth for grazing. Numerous channels, weirs and mill pools along the valley floor indicate former water management practices.
- 14.40. The valley is characterised by the string of attractive linear settlements along the valley. These include Lambourn at the head of the valley, with the smaller and regularly spaced villages of Eastbury, East Garston, and Great Shefford. Below Great Shefford the villages are not as frequent but include Weston, Westbrook, Boxford and Bagnor. Occasional farmsteads are scattered through the lower part of the valley. Building materials include red brick, stone, flint and chalk with numerous timber framed buildings. Red clay tile is the most common roofing material, although there are also some thatched and slate roofs. Minor roads that run along the valley floor, crossing the river at several points, serve the villages. The M4 crosses the valley, south of Welford, on an embankment. This infrastructure is difficult to assimilate within the small-scale valley landscape, however, the visual and noise impacts are limited to an extent by the abundant tree cover. The Lambourn Valley Way, partly following the line of a dismantled railway, runs along the entire length of the valley, which provides an opportunity to explore the local detail and character of this attractive rural, valley landscape.

Key Characteristics

- the river, rising as a spring on the chalk uplands, flows through a narrow corridor along a gentle gradient to the Kennet. The valley sides form a close horizon, a contained visual setting and a strong sense of enclosure;
- mix of arable and pasture in the upper valley. South of Great Shefford the river meanders through a mosaic of former water meadows, cattle grazed wet pastures and broadleaved woodlands;
- varied field pattern including small fields with sinuous boundaries that may date to the Saxon period plus informal and later formal enclosures;
- large manor houses and manor farms with ornamental parkland are a feature;
- the Lambourn with its swift, clear flowing waters is a classic example of a lowland chalk river with valuable wetland habitats including flood pastures and water meadows;
- continuity of settlement with many villages, e.g. Lambourn, having Saxon origins. Medieval mills and weirs survive along the river e.g. at Weston. Remnant floated meadows are also a feature;
- regular spacing of attractive linear settlements along the valley with detached houses. Building materials include red brick, stone, flint and chalk with numerous timber framed buildings. Red clay tile is the most common roofing material with some thatched and slate roofs;
- Lambourn Valley Way, following the line of a dismantled railway provides an opportunity to explore the local detail and character of the valley;
- strong associations with the race horse training industry creating a very distinctive local landscape;
- overall, an attractive quiet river valley landscape.

Physical Influences

- 14.41. Rising as a chalk spring at 152 m at Lynch Wood, the River Lambourn cuts through the chalk, and flows through a narrow corridor south-eastwards along a relatively gentle gradient to join the Kennet at Newbury. Drift deposits of chalk drift plus small amounts of gravel and alluvial deposits overlie the valley floor. The valley sides form a close horizon and a contained visual setting, and a strong sense of enclosure. In its lower length, south of Great Shefford, the valley widens slightly with the river flowing within a meandering and braided channel.

Historic Environment

- 14.42. **Saxon Settlement:** The main settlement of Lambourn, at the head of the valley, is first documented in a will made by King Alfred around 888 AD, and may have been a royal residence. The oval street plan at the heart of Lambourn, and the possible Saxon origins of the church on the edge of this area, suggest that this settlement began as a Saxon *burh* or defended settlement. The manor house at Lambourn was also located within this oval area.
- 14.43. **Medieval Settlement and Land Use:** Lambourn expanded during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to the outside of its Saxon core, and to the south the streets and property boundaries are typical burgage plots. Some earthworks survive to the north of

the town centre, but medieval almshouses adjacent to the churchyard were rebuilt in the nineteenth century. Other medieval remains in the Lambourn Valley include the deserted medieval village of Bockhampton, and the moated manor site at East Shefford House. There would have been mills and weirs along the River Lambourn, some of which survive today, such as the mill at Weston. Water meadows and fish traps would have been important. Manor houses and churches located at regular intervals along the Lambourn Valley such as at Manor Farm, Welford and Boxford suggest that parishes were laid out approximately at right angles to the river.

- 14.44. **Field Patterns:** Some of the more sinuous fields orientated at right angles to the river may reflect medieval boundaries. Occupants of the valley settlements almost certainly exploited the chalk downland on the valley sides for agriculture and to provide grazing for their stock. Medieval and open field systems and downland were largely replaced by enclosure through informal means during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and later by Parliamentary enclosure.

Biodiversity

- 14.45. Within the boundaries of the Lambourn Valley Character Area there are 5 SSSI's, and 12 sites with non-statutory designation. The majority of these sites support wetland communities, but there are also 8 locally important grassland sites with non-statutory designation.
- 14.46. The River Lambourn (SSSI) is particularly notable as it has been proposed as a Special Area for Conservation (pSAC), because of the presence of good populations of bullhead (*Cottus gobio*) and brook lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*), two fish both of which are rare / threatened in a European context. This River supports one of Britain's best examples of floating vegetation dominated by water crow-foots (*Ranunculus* section *Batrachium*).
- 14.47. The Kennet and Lambourn floodplain (SSSI) is a good example of a nationally important wetland area, and is particularly notable for supporting one of the most extensive known populations of Desmoulins' whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*) in the UK. It is one of two sites selected to represent the species in the southwestern part of its range.
- 14.48. The Lambourn Valley also contains part of the River Lambourn (SSSI), Boxford chalk pit (SSSI), Easton Farm Meadow (SSSI), Boxford Water Meadows (SSSI)

Key Issues

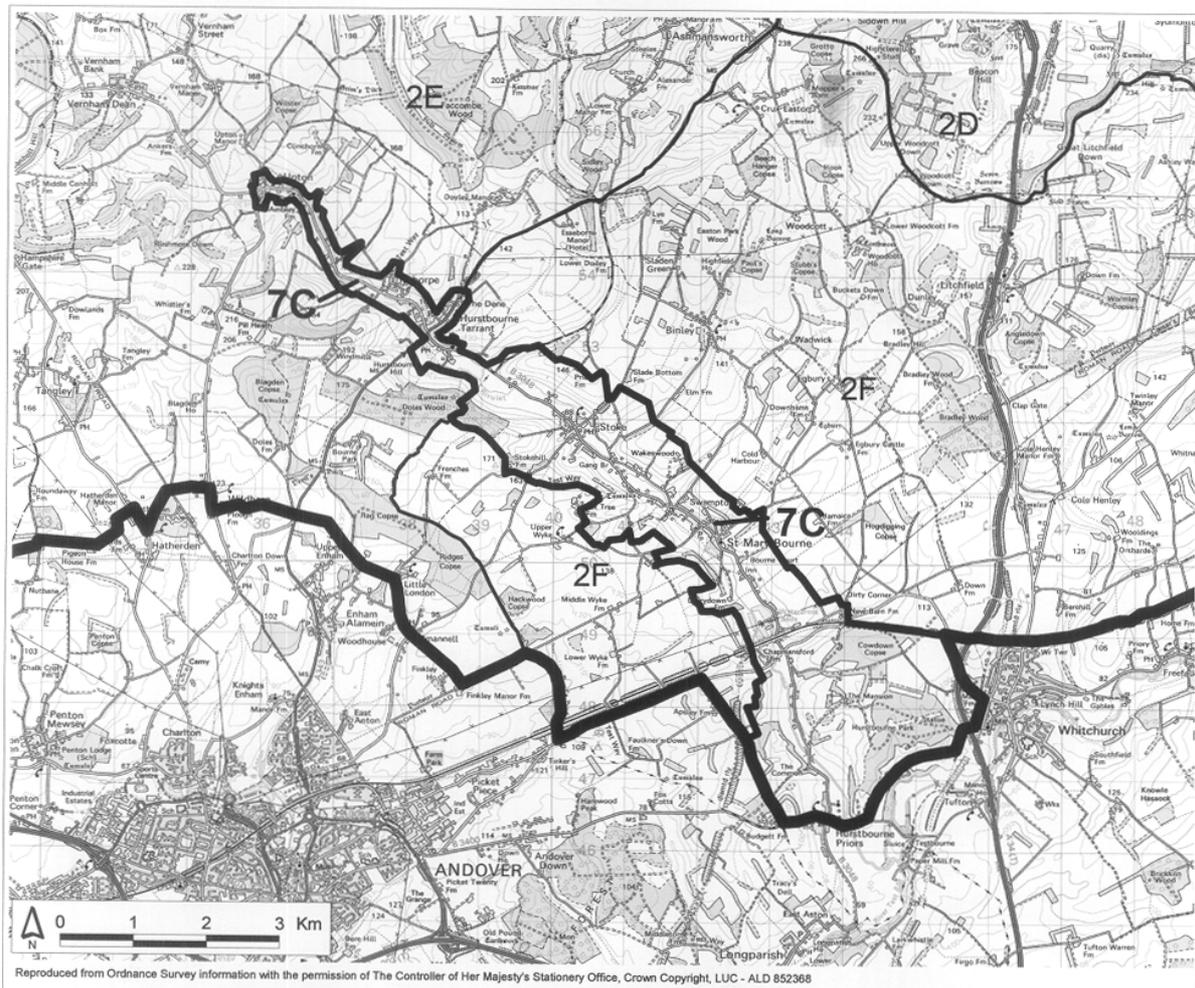
- **maintenance of water quality and flows.** More recently the impact of localised flooding within the valleys has been an issue for local residents;
- intensification in farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** particularly drainage and improvement of permanent pasture and water meadows on the floodplain and loss of riparian vegetation;
- potential changes in farming practices including **loss of livestock** with scrub encroachment on some valley pastures. Many areas being managed as horse paddocks with associated visual impacts;

- maintenance of **historic features** including water meadow systems, mills, weirs and leats;
- replanting and management of the pollard willows which are a feature of the valley;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows;
- localised **intrusion** of roads including M4 which cuts the lower part of the valley on a embankment with visual and noise impacts;
- **increased traffic on the network of minor roads**, plus improvements to the lanes including kerbing, widening, signing and new river crossings which, in places create a more 'urban' character;
- management and enhancement of **ornamental parkland** as at Great Shefford, Woodspeen and Welford;
- management of the **small semi-natural woodlands**;
- **pressure for residential development** with expansion of small scale villages within the narrow river corridor out onto the downland sides (e.g. Lambourn) or amalgamation into a continuous ribbon along the valley;
- **sensitivity** of the narrow, intimate scale valley to any form of large scale development.

Key Management Requirements

- 14.49. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the intimate pastoral character of the Lambourn Valley. This will include maintenance of key features including permanent pasture, wet grassland, field patterns, riparian woodlands and historic features associated with the mills, water meadows and historic parklands. There are opportunities for restoration of waterside pastures and replanting and management of hedgerows and limited native tree planting/regeneration.
- 14.50. The small-scale intimate character of the Lambourn Valley is potentially sensitive to any new development. The aim should be to maintain the distinctive pattern of settlement, with the regular spacing of attractive villages. There are opportunities to contain and minimise the impact of larger infrastructure, including the M4.

CHARACTER AREA 7C: BOURNE VALLEY



- 3.51. **Location and Boundaries:** The River Swift and then the Bourne, a tributary of the River Test, flows south-eastwards from its source near Upton and joins with the Test at Hurstbourne Priors on the southern boundary of the AONB. The boundaries of the character area have been defined to include the relatively narrow corridor of the immediate river valley, with its pastoral floodplain and settlement.

Landscape Character Description

- 14.52. The valley of the River Bourne with its narrow floor and abruptly rising valley sides is an enclosed and intimate landscape set within the surrounding chalk uplands. The valley is initiated at the spring at Upton where the River Swift issues. The Swift disappears into the chalk further downstream and emerges at Hurstbourne Tarrant as the Bourne Rivulet.
- 14.53. The Bourne is a minor feature, little more than a stream, although it can be glimpsed from many attractive crossing points. The floodplain is predominantly under pasture with small copses, typically of willow and alder, picking out the course of the river. The small fields of the valley floor are enclosed by hedgerows, which contribute to the intimate scale and enclosed character of the landscape and limit longer views within the valley. Thin linear beech plantations are a particular characteristic of the lower valley sides, which are otherwise mainly in arable use. Operational watercress beds, utilising the clear chalk stream waters, occur south of St. Mary Bourne.
- 14.54. The river corridor provides a communications route with a road connecting the numerous small settlements within the valley. These include Upton at the valley head and the small villages of Ibthorpe, Hurstbourne Tarrant, Stoke and the larger village of St. Mary Bourne. Some settlements have taken on a linear form extending along the valley, others are clustered on the valley side above crossing points. Buildings are largely of the local vernacular brick and tile. Numerous lanes and small tracks branch perpendicularly from the road to climb the valley sides creating a grid-like road pattern. These minor lanes frequently terminate on the higher downs or lead to a single isolated farm emphasising the interconnectedness of the downs and valleys landscapes. At its lower end the railway track and a line of pylons also intersect the valley.

Key Characteristics

- a flat, narrow floor, enclosed by relatively steep valley sides, creating a small scale intimate landscape;
- the valley is initiated at the spring at Upton where the River Swift issues, disappearing into the chalk further downstream and emerging at Hurstbourne Tarrant as the Bourne Rivulet flowing to the Test (beyond the AONB);
- narrow floodplain predominantly under pasture set in small fields enclosed by hedgerows and punctuated by small woodland copses, which pick out the course of the river;
- lower valley sides are mainly in arable use with thin linear beech plantations being a particular characteristic of these slopes;
- parkland is an important feature, with Hurtsbourne Park incorporating a medieval deer park and an early designed landscape park;
- operational watercress beds south of St. Mary Bourne are a distinctive feature;
- varied field pattern. Some fields are small and irregular and may represent late medieval or post-medieval enclosure, with the more regular, straight-edged fields resulting from formal Parliamentary enclosure;
- numerous small settlements - some extend in a linear form along the valley, and others cluster on the valley side above crossing points. Buildings are largely of the local vernacular brick and tile;

- distinctive pattern of roads, lanes and byways - many branching from the principal valley road creating a grid-like pattern.

Physical Influences

- 14.55. The river cuts through the Upper Chalk, exposing the Middle Chalk on the valley sides. Valley Gravel deposits overlay the valley floor, with some small patches of alluvium and peat. At its head, the dry valley cuts back into the downs terminating in a dramatic coombe at Vernham Dean. The upper part of the valley contains a true winterbourne, which uniquely floods in winter creating a large water pool high in the downs. This higher area has been included as apart of the wider Chute Forest - Facombe character area (2E). The valley has a distinctive form with a flat, narrow floor enclosed by relatively steep valley sides, creating a small-scale intimate landscape. The river flows down a gentle gradient from around 115m at its source at Upton to 60m at the confluence with the Test.

Historic Environment

- 14.56. **Settlement and Land Use:** The present landscape was probably initiated in the early prehistoric period (Neolithic and Bronze Age) when the original forest cover was largely cleared for arable agriculture and grazing, and after which only very limited patches of woodland survived or regenerated. Occupants of the early valley settlements almost certainly exploited the chalk downland on the valley sides for agriculture and to provide grazing for their stock. This pattern of movement is still visible in the landscape today with numerous roads and tracks leading from the valley floor on to the surrounding downs. Watercress is an unusual land use with operational beds outside St Mary Bourne.
- 14.57. **Medieval Settlement:** Many of the villages along the valley floor are one-street linear settlements, with an occasional side street, indicative of early medieval origins. Hurstbourne Tarrant, for example, dates from at least the eleventh century. Later the village expanded to incorporate the hamlet of Ibthorpe.
- 14.58. **Field Patterns:** Many of the modern boundaries in the Bourne valley are at right angles to the river, and some might reflect medieval parish boundaries. Some fields are small and irregular, and may represent late medieval or post-medieval piecemeal enclosure. The more regular, straight-edged fields are probably the result of more formal eighteenth or nineteenth century parliamentary enclosure.

Biodiversity

- 14.59. The Bourne Valley Character Area contains 13 sites with non-statutory nature conservation designation. There are no sites with statutory designation in this Character Area.

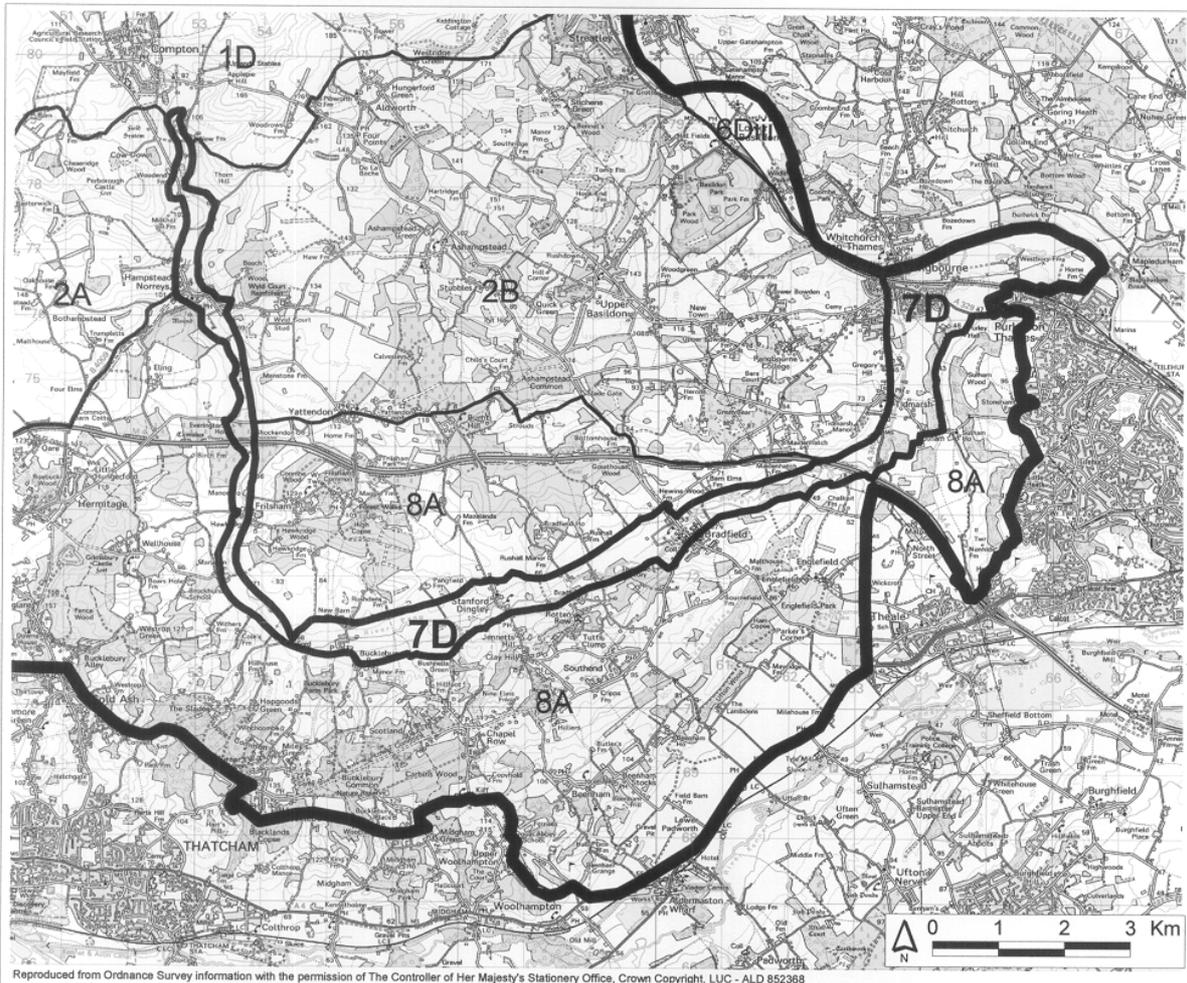
Key Issues

- **maintenance of water quality and flows.** More recently the impact of localised flooding within the valleys has been an issue for local residents;
- intensification in farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** particularly drainage and improvement of permanent pasture and water meadows on the floodplain and loss of riparian vegetation;
- potential changes in farming practices including **loss of livestock** with resulting scrub encroachment on some valley pastures and meadows;
- maintenance of **historic features** including watercress beds and management of historic parkland;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows;
- high **traffic levels** on the valley floor road and requirements for improvements to the road network (kerbing, etc.) resulting in a more urban character in places;
- management of the small streamside copses and **woodlands**;
- pressure for **residential development** with expansion of small scale villages within the narrow river corridor and amalgamation into a continuous ribbon along the valley;
- localised visual intrusions, e.g. pylons in lower valley, plus sensitivity of the narrow, intimate scale valley to any form of new **development**.

Key Management Requirements

- 14.60. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the intimate, secluded character of the Bourne Valley. This will include maintenance of key features including permanent pasture, wet grassland, the field pattern, woodland copses and historic features including the lane network, watercress beds and historic parkland. There are opportunities for restoration of waterside pastures, replanting and management of hedgerows and limited native tree planting/regeneration.
- 14.61. The small-scale intimate character of the Bourne Valley is potentially sensitive to any new development. The aim should be to maintain the distinctive pattern of settlement, with the string of discrete hamlets and villages.

CHARACTER AREA 7D: PANG VALLEY



- 3.62. **Location and Boundaries:** The River Pang drains the chalk upland in the north-western part of the AONB and flows through a narrow valley to the River Thames at Pangbourne. The boundaries are defined topographically and generally follow the contour along the top of the immediate valley sides enclosing the floodplain. For the lower part of its course the river flows through the clays and gravels of the lowland landscape of Hermitage Wooded Commons (8A).

Landscape Character Description

- 14.63. The River Pang flows within an open shallow valley, a landform that is less distinctive than the more incised valleys of the Bourne and Lambourn. It has a very varied character along its course with diverse vegetation cover, varying from open arable to enclosed and wooded. In its upper course the valley contains large arable fields descending from the surrounding downland, with a narrow arable-dominated valley floor. Here, only a thin belt of broadleaved woodland marks the presence of the river. The middle section of the valley turns to the east, where it has an asymmetrical cross section, with steeper slopes rising to the gravel capped plateau to the south. Willow pollards, poplar, alder and strips of pasture line the river banks. Low flailed hawthorn hedges and post and wire boundaries enclose medium to large fields and the valley retains a more open character. East of Stanford Dingley, towards Bradfield, the river flows through a noticeably more wooded landscape. At Bradfield Hall this includes an area of formal parkland, with mature oaks and lime scattered in pasture. The valley widens out significantly north of Bradfield, where it merges with the surrounding wooded farmland around Tidmarsh. In these lower reaches, the river flows through a mosaic of damp alder copses and seasonally flooded meadow on the valley floor, much of which is designated as a SSSI.
- 14.64. The settlement pattern consists of scattered farms situated at regular intervals on the valley floor and tiny hamlets, such as Bucklebury and Stanford Dingley, clustered around a church, plus the two villages of Hampstead Norreys and Bradfield. The dominant building material is red brick, with the white weatherboard church at Stamford Dingley being a distinctive feature. The attractive settlement of riverside Pangbourne is situated at the confluence of the valley with the Thames. The majority of the valley is comparatively isolated and contains only minor lanes and tracks linking the farms and settlements, with numerous bridges and fords providing crossing points over the watercourse. There are many sunken lanes overhung by banks of broadleaved woodland, such as at Brocks Lane, which creates a more intimate and secluded character. The M4 cuts across the grain of the valley in both its upper and lower reaches and has a high visual and noise impact. It is particularly intrusive in the upper reaches, where it severs the valley on an embankment.

Key Characteristics

- the River Pang flows through a more open, shallow landform - a less distinct form compared to the more incised valleys of the Bourne and Lambourn;
- varied land cover with arable farmland dominant in the upper sections, a more wooded middle course and widening out to flow through a lowland mosaic of woodland and wet meadows in the lower section;
- generally medium/large fields enclosed by low flailed hawthorn hedges and post and wire boundaries. Field boundaries include 17th and 18th century piecemeal enclosure plus regular straight edge fields of 18th and 19th century formal enclosure;
- willow pollards, poplar, alder and strips of pasture line the immediate river banks;
- manor houses and manor farms, particularly in the middle section of the valley and areas of formal parkland at Bradfield Hall;

- relict features on the valley floor including former watermeadows and watercress beds;
- settlement consists of scattered farms situated at regular intervals on the valley floor, a number of hamlets clustered around a church plus two villages. The small attractive settlement of Pangbourne is situated at the confluence of the valley with the Thames;
- the dominant building material is red brick, with the white weatherboarded church at Stamford Dingley being a distinctive feature;
- in parts, comparatively isolated, containing only minor lanes and tracks linking the farms and settlements (M4 is dominant in some areas). A sense of intimacy is afforded by the sunken lanes overhung by banks of broadleaved woodland.

Physical Influences

14.65. The River Pang rises on the chalk upland, with its source near Compton. Beyond this, the valley head cuts back into the downs as a series of steep dry valleys. However, this area and the shallow valley between Compton and Hampstead Norreys is assimilated as a feature of the surrounding landscape type - Blewbury Downs (1D). The river cuts through the chalk, which outcrops along the tops of the valley sides. Gravels and alluvium overlie the valley floor. It flows southwards initially, from Hampstead Norreys, through an open shallow valley. Close to Bucklebury it swings to the east and flows within a wider more open channel to the Thames.

Historic Environment

- 14.66. **Prehistoric Settlement:** Between Pangbourne and Purley, on the gravel floodplain of the Thames, aerial photographs show trapezoidal and oval enclosure patterns, linear ditch boundaries and a trackway. These may all be prehistoric in origin and are a vivid illustration of the length of continuity of human exploitation of the valley.
- 14.67. **Saxon and Medieval Settlement:** The village of Bradfield may be of Saxon origin and had a minster church. There is a medieval moated manor at Stamford Dingley, and there were also manors at Hampstead Norreys, Frilsham Manor and Bucklebury. Immediately south of Westbury Farm is the deserted medieval village of Purley Parva. Some relict water meadows survive in the area, including possible examples at Westbury Farm and Stamford Dingley.
- 14.68. **Field Patterns:** Many of the modern boundaries in the Pang valley are at right angles to the river, and some might reflect medieval parish boundaries. Many modern fields are small and irregular, and may represent late medieval or post-medieval piecemeal enclosure. The more regular, straight-edged fields are probably the result of more formal, eighteenth or nineteenth century parliamentary enclosure.

Biodiversity

- 14.69. The Pang Valley supports one SSSI, namely Sulham and Tidmarsh woods and meadows (SSSI) and 19 sites with non-statutory designations. Of the 19 regionally important sites, approximately 8 are wooded, 8 are grassland and 2 are wetland.
- 14.70. The nationally important Sulham and Tidmarsh woods and meadows (SSSI) comprise a broad valley of varied alluvial loams, gravel terraces and peat deposits. These complex soil patterns have resulted in a mosaic of damp copses and seasonally flooded meadows. The copses are dominated mainly by alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), but also with a number of other trees and shrubs including ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), birch (*Betula pendula*), and hazel (*Corylus avellana*).

Key Issues

- **maintenance of water quality and flows.** More recently the impact of localised flooding within the valleys has been an issue for local residents;
- intensification in farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** particularly drainage and improvement of permanent pasture and water meadows on the floodplain and loss of riparian vegetation;
- potential changes in farming practices - including **loss of livestock** with scrub encroachment on some valley pastures and meadows;
- maintenance of **historic features** including the field patterns and historic parkland;
- management of the **pollards** and **lines of poplar** which characterise some sections of the valley;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows;
- localised **intrusion of roads** including the M4 which cuts valley in both its upper and lower reaches, the former being on a embankment and particularly intrusive;
- **increased traffic on the network of minor lanes**, plus improvements to the lanes, which are particularly harmful to the character of the sunken lanes;
- management of the small **semi-natural riparian woodlands**;
- pressure for **residential development** with expansion of small scale villages within valley;
- sensitivity of the valley to any form of **development**.

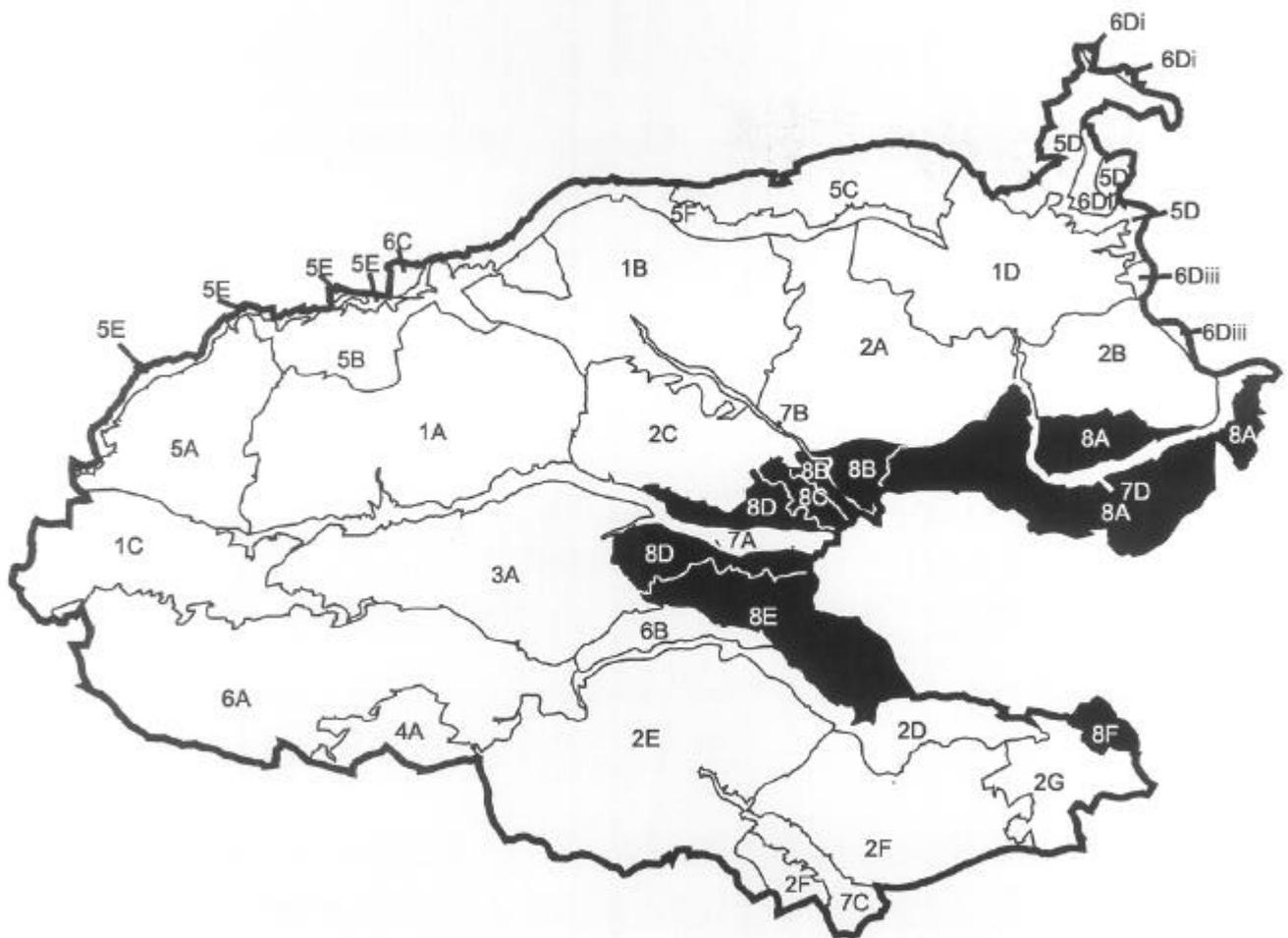
Key Management Requirements

- 14.71. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the intimate, secluded character of the Pang Valley. This will include maintenance of key features including

permanent pasture, wet grassland, field pattern, willow pollards, riparian woodlands and historic features including historic parkland. There are opportunities for restoration of waterside pastures, replanting and management of hedgerows and limited native tree planting/regeneration.

- 14.72. The small-scale intimate character of the Pang Valley is potentially sensitive to any new development. The aim should be to maintain the distinctive pattern of settlement, with tiny hamlets, two small villages and scattered farms. There are opportunities to contain and minimise the impact of larger infrastructure, including the M4.

Landscape Type 8 - Lowland Mosaic



15. LANDSCAPE TYPE 8: LOWLAND MOSAIC

Location and Boundaries

- 15.1. The landscape type comprises a lowland area in the eastern part of the AONB intervening between the two main chalk upland blocks to the north and south and lying to either side of the Kennet Valley (7A). The boundaries are essentially defined by geology with the change from the chalk to the Tertiary deposits of the Reading Beds, the Bagshot Beds and London Clay. In the north the chalk descends as a gradual dip slope (2A: Brightwalton Downs & 2B: Ashampstead Downs), while to the south it rises as a dramatic escarpment (2D: Walbury Hill - Watership Downs Scarp). The geological transition within this landscape type is clearly marked by the lower topography and the land cover of woodland and pasture.

Overview

The lowland mosaic is a distinct landscape in the eastern part of the North Wessex Downs occupying the low lying basin of gravel beds and clays which rise either side of the Kennet Valley. The area has a strong woodland character, with its origins as part of the medieval forests. In the early 17th century the forests were subject to gradual piecemeal enclosure, the legacy of which is reflected in numerous dispersed small settlements and farms. Today the area is characterised by irregular fields, cut out from the woodland during the medieval or post medieval period, interspersed with parcels of woodland and commons. Although in some areas, a more open landscape dominated by large-scale arable farmland is found.

One of the most densely inhabited parts of the North Wessex Downs, this lowland area has a diverse range of settlements ranging from large manor houses associated with the many parklands to the network of hamlets, lines of houses and villages that occur along the lanes and roads. Many villages have a clear nucleus, typically associated with a village green or church whilst others follow a more dispersed pattern typical of post medieval 'squatter' settlement. Red brick and tile are the principal building materials.

It is generally a small-scale intimate landscape with the widespread settlements linked by an intricate network of narrow rural lanes, winding through ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations and more open farmland areas. The lanes are frequently overhung by deep grassy or woodland banks and contribute to the 'secluded' enclosed character. Small areas of heathland on the drier gravel ridges are a distinctive and important feature, although many formerly open areas have reverted to scrub or woodland. The network of ancient semi-natural woodland, connecting hedgerows, areas of parkland including wood pasture and veteran trees create considerable ecological interest. Former medieval deer parks are a particular feature, with a number of these being refashioned in the eighteenth century as formal designed parks and gardens.

Overall, this is a diverse and complex landscape, which despite its variety has a coherent and intact rural character, although in places it's 'ruralness' is diluted by roads and development.

Key Characteristics

- underlain by a geology of clays, silts, sands and gravel, in strong contrast to the chalk. The pattern essentially comprises clay on the lower land, separated by gravel ridges;
- a low lying undulating area enclosed by the chalk to the north, south and west and forming a part of the Thames Basin Heaths which extend to the east of the AONB;
- a mosaic of landcover including fragments of remnant heathland, extensive woodlands and pasture, as well as more open areas of arable land;
- ecologically important habitats including: ancient woodland, wood pasture, parkland, ancient hedgerows, neutral grassland, hay meadows, heathland, acid grassland, bogs, fens and open water;
- parklands, including many originating as medieval deer parks, with subsequent designed landscape schemes, are a particular feature of the area;
- varied field pattern with irregular fields, interspersed with parcels of woodland and commons indicative of medieval and post medieval assarts. Fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries predominate and represent 'ladder' fields probably resulting from the 17th and 18th century informal enclosure. Plus large regular fields of Parliamentary enclosure;
- one of the most densely settled landscape types, with a diverse range of settlements ranging from large manor houses, villages, numerous hamlets and lines of houses along the roads and lanes;
- varied settlements with villages often having a clear nucleus, typically associated with a village green or a church. A more dispersed pattern may derive from 'squatter' settlement of disafforested areas. The principal building material is red brick;
- an intricate network of wooded rural lanes, plus a large number of footpaths, bridleways, and byways form an excellent resource for informal recreation. Visitor attractions include a number of historic houses and parklands;
- well settled landscape with a rising population due to proximity and accessibility to centres such as Reading, Newbury and Basingstoke - manifest in pressures for residential development, commuter villages and an increase in traffic on the rural lanes.

Physical Influences

- 15.2. **Geology and Soils:** The area is underlain by Tertiary deposits including clays, silts, sands and gravels of the Reading and Bagshot Beds. The pattern essentially is of clay on the lower land separated by gravel ridges. This gives rise to nutrient poor acidic soils with a mainly light or slowly permeable character which are a major factor in the land use. Localised tracts of more fertile loamy soils support arable farmland within the predominant land use of woodland, pasture and heathland.
- 15.3. **Landform:** This area is a predominantly low-lying undulating area with elevations varying between 50-166m AOD north of the Kennet and between 100m-179m AOD south of the Kennet. The river valleys of the Pang, Kennet and Lambourn dissect the landscape type. These create visual and topographical diversity across the generally undulating lowland landscape. High points include Wickham Green at 166m AOD, just south of the M4, and a hill south of Whitway just east of Highclere Park at 179m AOD. At higher points the slopes of the surrounding higher chalklands are visible, but otherwise this is a low, visually enclosed landscape.

Biodiversity

- 15.4. This landscape character type contains a number of ecologically important habitats including: ancient woodland, wood pasture, parkland, neutral grassland, hay meadows, heathland, acid grassland, bogs, fens and open water. It is characterised by the presence of areas of parkland (a UK BAP priority habitat), including permanent pasture and mature/veteran trees. Very small fragmented areas of dry and wet heathland are also a feature, on the gravel and sandy ridges. The most extensive ecological feature of this character type is the ancient semi-natural woodland. Ancient hedgerows are another feature of ecological importance of this landscape type lining the lanes, often in association with wide grassy verges. These hedgerows provide important habitats for animals and plant species as well as providing “green corridors” to aid the movement and dispersal of species across areas of farmland.

Historic Environment

- 15.5. **Lowland Heathland:** The area contains some of the few remaining areas of lowland heath in England, much of which is the direct result of prehistoric human action. It was formed by clearance of deciduous woodland cover on the sandy soils leading to podzolisation and the resultant heath dominated vegetation.
- 15.6. **A Wooded Landscape:** Archaeological evidence suggests much of the area remained a wooded landscape. For example, Romano-British pottery kilns from Kintbury, which required substantial quantities of timber for fuel, indicate a wooded area at this time. During the Saxon period, the decreasing fertility of the downland soils suggests that the claylands were becoming increasingly attractive to farmers. Place-names provide further evidence of a wooded landscape. Berkshire owes its name to the forest of *Barroc* which is thought to have stretched from Enbourne to Hungerford, centred on Kintbury. The area was also partially covered by the medieval forests of Pamber and Freemantle, areas defined by boundaries and placed under the special code of Forest Law.
- 15.7. **Piecemeal Enclosure and Squatter Settlement:** The Medieval forests were deforested in the early seventeenth century, and would have been subjected to gradual piecemeal enclosure, the legacy of which is reflected in numerous small settlements and farms and names such as Hell Corner and Rotten Row, indicative of squatter's settlement. On steeper slopes and ridge tops, where arable farming was impractical, small woods and copses still survive today.
- 15.8. **Field Patterns:** The area is characterised by numerous irregular fields, interspersed with parcels of woodland and commons, particularly in character areas 8E: Highclere Lowland and Heath and 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons. These represent medieval and post-medieval assarts or clearance of forest and waste to create small enclosed pasture or arable fields. Within the peripheral heath areas some of the assarts possibly reflect the enclosure of heathland rather than woodland.
- 15.9. In areas such as Winterbourne Farmland, fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries predominate and represent ‘ladder’ fields, probably resulting from seventeenth and eighteenth century informal enclosure. They would appear to link the Lambourn Valley floor enclosures to the higher downland, with the legs of the “ladders”

represented by tracks and paths linking the different resources. Elsewhere, a more open landscape is the result of formal Parliamentary enclosure.

- 15.10. **Parkland:** One of most the notable features of this area is the large number of parks, including former deer parks, for example, at Englefield (8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons), Highclere (8E: Highclere Lowlands and Heath), Hampstead deer park, the surviving park pale defining the AONB boundary (8D: Hungerford Farmland) and Wolverton (8F: Ewhust Parklands).
- 15.11. **Medieval Period:** There are also numerous quarry pits, particularly in Hermitage Wooded Commons (8A), for chalk, clay and gravel, many of which may have medieval origins. Medieval moated sites are also located at West Woodhay, Balsdon Farm and Yattendon.

Settlement and Building Character

- 15.12. This landscape type is one of the most densely settled areas within the AONB, with a diverse range of settlements, ranging from large manor style houses within and around the numerous parklands to the network of hamlets, lines of houses and villages that occur along or around roadways and the network of winding lanes. Villages may have a clear nucleus, typically associated with a village green or church or may follow a more dispersed settlement pattern typical of post-medieval 'squatter' settlement. Red brick is the principal building material within this landscape type.

Recreation Character

- 15.13. An extensive network of footpaths, bridleways and byways pass through this landscape type, connecting the small settlements. In addition a large number of the woodlands and commons have open access. Promoted routes include a small section of a bridleway endorsed by the British Horse Society, sections of the Berkshire Circular Routes, and Walks from Pangbourne Station. Other attractions include several historic properties and parklands.

Social and Economic Character

- 15.14. Unlike some of the other landscape types identified, this type is well settled with some urban influences, including larger settlement sizes and high accessibility via major roads and rail. The majority of the parishes within this area have increased in population since 1981, some quite considerably (by up to 50%). The location of this landscape type, i.e. on the periphery of the AONB, and near settlements such as Newbury and Reading, is likely to result in a high proportion of outbound commuting. The growth in population of this area may be attributed to those wishing to relocate to a more rural location yet still commute daily to urban workplaces. There are also pressures for rural diversification and conversion of farm buildings to new business uses within this area.
- 15.15. The parishes are far better serviced by local facilities than those in any other area of the North Wessex Downs. Although the tendency to provide a petrol station as opposed to a local shop or G.P. surgery suggests a high proportion of commuters within this area, indicating high car ownership, high traffic levels and poorly used local services where they do exist. The higher population and density of settlement has

resulted in a more developed road network linking villages and the surrounding urban centres. The landscape type thus has, in parts, a less remote rural character compared to other areas of the AONB.

Key Issues

- intensification in farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** particularly conversion of permanent pasture to arable;
- **decline in the extent of heathland vegetation** through conversion to forestry or lack of management with scrub invasion and development of woodland;
- potential changes in farming practices may include further **loss of livestock** with an increase in areas managed as 'hobby farms' or as **horse paddocks** - characterised by rank weedy grassland and poorly managed boundaries;
- **lack of appropriate management of woodlands** particularly ancient and semi natural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing and areas of wood pasture;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly **mature hedgerow trees**, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows by flailing so that hedgerow trees are often no longer present. Also need for management of adjacent grass verges;
- **climate change** - potential impacts on habitats including drying out of wet heathland and increased fire risk on dry heaths. Requirement for irrigation of arable land - including construction of reservoirs and intrusive infrastructure. Potential impacts on woodland and parkland include an increase in non native species and tree loss (drought/windthrow);
- localised intrusion of **roads** (M4, A34 and A343), which have a high impact in this quiet, rural landscape;
- **increased traffic on the road network**, plus road improvements to the lanes including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, in places creates a more 'urban' character;
- potential future demand for **aggregate extraction** altering the form and character of the valleys;
- **development pressures**, particularly for new residential development including suburbanising influence of built development and roads (fencing, signing, lighting and planting);
- **decline in local services and facilities** with many villages becoming 'empty' commuter villages by day;
- **loss of tranquillity**, resulting from a combination of the above.

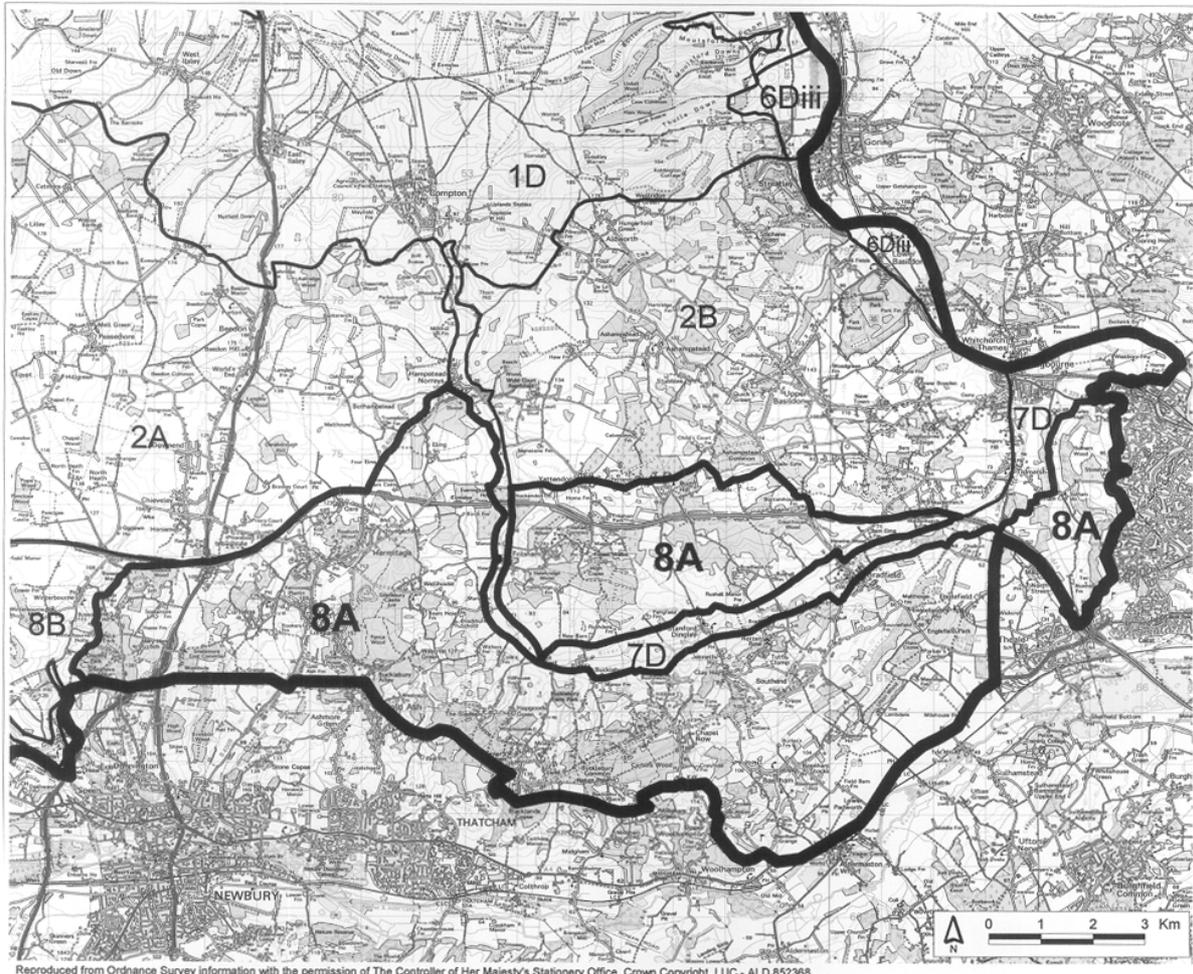
Key Management Requirements

- 15.16. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the distinctive small-scale and enclosed landscape of the Lowland Mosaic with its secluded, rural and tranquil character. This includes conservation and enhancement of the key assets, namely:
- the ancient and semi-natural woodlands;
 - field patterns and hedgerows and particularly through ensuring appropriate management to allow regeneration of hedgerow trees;
 - the hedgerows and grass verges which line the rural lanes;
 - heathland;
 - historic parkland.
- 15.17. There are opportunities for restoration of the fragile lowland heathland resource, through management and habitat restoration to extend and link isolated areas.
- 15.18. The aim should be to maintain the distinctive patterns of settlement and prevent the gradual expansion, merging and coalescence that will result in a more suburban character. Consideration should be given to measures that could lessen the impact of the roads and reduce high traffic levels on the rural lanes.

Character Areas

- 15.19. The Lowland Mosaic landscape type contains six component character areas. These comprise.
- 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons
 - 8B: Winterbourne Farmland
 - 8C: Wickham Wooded Heath
 - 8D: Hungerford Farmland
 - 8E: Highclere Lowlands and Heath
 - 8F: Ewhurst Parklands

CHARACTER AREA 8A: HERMITAGE WOODED COMMONS



Location and Boundaries

- 4.20. The Hermitage Wooded Commons character area is located in the eastern part of the AONB on the lower lying gravels, sands and clays to the south of the wooded dip slope of Brightwalton Downs (2A) and the Ashampstead Downs (2B). The southern and eastern boundaries are marked by the AONB boundary. To the west is the more open character of the Winterbourne Farmland (8B).

Landscape Character Description

- 15.21. The Hermitage Wooded Commons character area is distinctive for its varied geological pattern of clays, silts, sands and gravels, which result in the nutrient poor soils that dominate the area. The landform forms a broad lowland plateau dissected by the River Pang.
- 15.22. The landcover, reflecting the diverse geology, is highly variable with an intricate mosaic of woodland, pasture and small areas of remnant heathland. More open areas of arable land can be found locally across the area, notably, on the slopes dropping towards the Pang Valley and to the south-east near Beenham. Elsewhere the large, inter-connected woodland blocks and strong hedgerow pattern with mature trees restrict views and create a very enclosed landscape. The sense of intimacy is enhanced by when travelling along the wooded rural lanes. Many of the woodlands are ancient/semi-natural in origin, with some larger plantation woodlands also present. Formerly heathland commons, now covered by regenerating wooded, such as Ashampstead Common, Bucklebury Common and Upper Common, are a particular feature of the area. Small remnant areas of heath can also be found, though these are often colonising with gorse, willow and birch. Woodlands frequently cap ridges across the area, such as Brickiln Wood and Ash Plantation and these create low wooded horizons adding further to the sense of enclosure and containment. The area contains many features of biodiversity interest with seven SSSI, including a unique rock sequence at Fognam Chalk Quarry, the heathland, dry and wet woodland and bog at Snelmore Common, and areas of ancient woodland and wet meadow at Coombe Wood.
- 15.23. Hermitage Wooded Commons is a very well-populated landscape with settlements ranging from large nucleated villages such as Upper Bucklebury, linear villages such as Southend and Beenham to smaller lines of estate cottages at Englefield Village as well as many scattered farmsteads and residential country houses dispersed across the area along the intricate network of rural lanes. Red brick is the most common building material. Manor houses with associated parklands are a feature, many of which are now in institutional use.
- 15.24. The M4 runs east-west through the area, with a small section of the A34 running north-south. The road infrastructure, including the intersection at Chieveley has a significant local impact, severing the area. Generally, away from the road corridors the area retains a quiet rural character, apart from at the eastern edge where there are views to Reading and Theale.

Key Characteristics

- lowland area at the base of the chalk dip slope, underlain by clays, silts, sands and gravels of the Reading and Bagshot Beds and London Clay, giving rise to nutrient poor, often acidic, soils;
- a broad undulating plateau falling towards the Kennet Valley to the south east and dissected by River Pang;
- variable land cover forming an intricate mosaic of woodland, pasture and small areas of remnant heathland. Some more open areas of arable land can be found on the slopes that drop to the Pang Valley and to the south east near Beenham;

- large, interconnected woodland blocks and strong hedgerow pattern with mature trees restrict views and create an enclosed and intimate character. Low wooded horizons are a feature;
- numerous semi-natural woodlands of ancient origin, with some large commercial plantations. Wooded commons and small areas of remnant heath are a distinctive element;
- many features of biodiversity interest including heathland, dry and wet woodland, bog and areas of wet meadow;
- dominated by small irregular fields of informal and piecemeal enclosures, of medieval and post-medieval date with some larger, more regular and straight edged, formal Parliamentary enclosure on flatter terrain in the south-east and west;
- dispersed pattern of settlement characteristic of encroachment into areas of common and woodland. Includes large nucleated villages, lines of estate cottages, loose roadside settlements as well as many dispersed farmsteads and residential country houses;
- intricate network of rural lanes, many sunken and overhung by woodland plus more intrusive road infrastructure;
- historic parkland based on medieval deer parks and manor houses with associated ornamental parklands with gardens, rides and plantings are a particular feature.

Physical Influences

- 15.25. The Hermitage Wooded Commons form a broad undulating lowland plateau, underlain by the Tertiary deposits of clays, silts, sands and gravels of the Reading and Bagshot Beds and London Clay. This geological pattern gives rise to nutrient poor, often acidic soils, which support the matrix of heathland, woodland and pasture. Localised areas of more fertile loamy soils support arable farming. The plateau is at a height of between 145m and 100m falling to the Kennet Valley to the south east. It is dissected by the River Pang, which enters in the north curving eastwards through the area and introducing localised variations in landscape character with more open arable sides.

Historic Environment

- 15.26. **The Prehistoric Landscape:** Most of the evidence for prehistoric and Romano-British inhabitation in the area comes from cropmark or soil mark features visible on aerial photographs. Notable concentrations of features have been recorded south and south-east of Englefield Deer Park, between Field Barn Farm and Lower Padworth, Lamden's Farm, Beenham Grange and south of Sulham Wood. West of Lambden's Farm are ten circular features that may represent a group of late Neolithic or Bronze Age round barrows, of which only one survives as an earthwork. Other surviving earthwork remains include the Iron Age forts of Grimsbury Castle, located in woodland to the south of Hermitage and Bussock Camp in woodland near the western boundary of the area. Other possible Iron Age or Romano-British enclosure earthworks also survive in woodland to the north of Hermitage and in Robin's Copse east of Cold Ash.
- 15.27. **Quarries:** There are numerous quarry pits in the north and south-east of the area, the latter being mainly for gravel. Some may have originated in the post-medieval period.

- 15.28. **Gardens and Parkland:** Post-medieval and early modern 'polite' landscapes are represented by Englefield House and Englefield Deer Park, and by Yattendon Court and Yattendon Park. There are distinguished by their landscape gardens, rides and plantings.
- 15.29. **Settlement:** Present-day settlement is largely dispersed across the area and was probably formed by encroachment into areas of common and woodland, although dates and patterns of encroachment are not clearly understood and it is not sufficient to label all common-edge and roadside settlements as being post-medieval in origin - they may have much earlier origins.
- 15.30. **Field Patterns:** The area retains a considerable woodland cover. Many of the copses show evidence for assarting, probably representing post-medieval piecemeal intakes. Many of the fields and boundaries around Curridge, north of Upper Bucklebury, south of Frilsham and north-east of Cold Ash are irregular and sinuous. Some may represent medieval boundaries, but the small fields in particular may result from informal and piecemeal post-medieval enclosure, some of it between existing tracks and lanes. Elsewhere, especially in the south-east and west of the area, where the terrain is lower and flatter, the fields are larger, more regular and straight-edged. These are likely to be the result of formal Parliamentary enclosure during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Biodiversity

- 15.31. The Hermitage Lowlands and Heath Character Area contains a high number of areas of nature conservation value, and has significant woodland cover. In total there are 7 SSSI and 110 sites with non-statutory designation, the majority are wooded habitats, with 101 of the 110 non-statutory sites being classified as woodland.
- 15.32. The SSSI sites within the Character Area are Cold Ash Quarry (SSSI), Briff Lane Meadows (SSSI), Old Copse, Beenham (SSSI), Snelsmore Common (SSSI), part of Sulham and Tidmarsh Woods and Meadows (SSSI), Coomb Wood (SSSI) and King's Copse (SSSI).
- 15.33. An example of a nationally important woodland site is Old Copse, Beenham (SSSI), which is located on the north side of the Kennet Valley. This wood has been managed on a traditional coppice-with-standards system and this has resulted in a rich and varied ground flora. The site supports many species indicative of ancient woodland, including some relatively uncommon plants, for example wild daffodil (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*), thin-spiked wood sedge (*Carex strigosa*) and orphine (*Sedum telephium*).

Key Issues

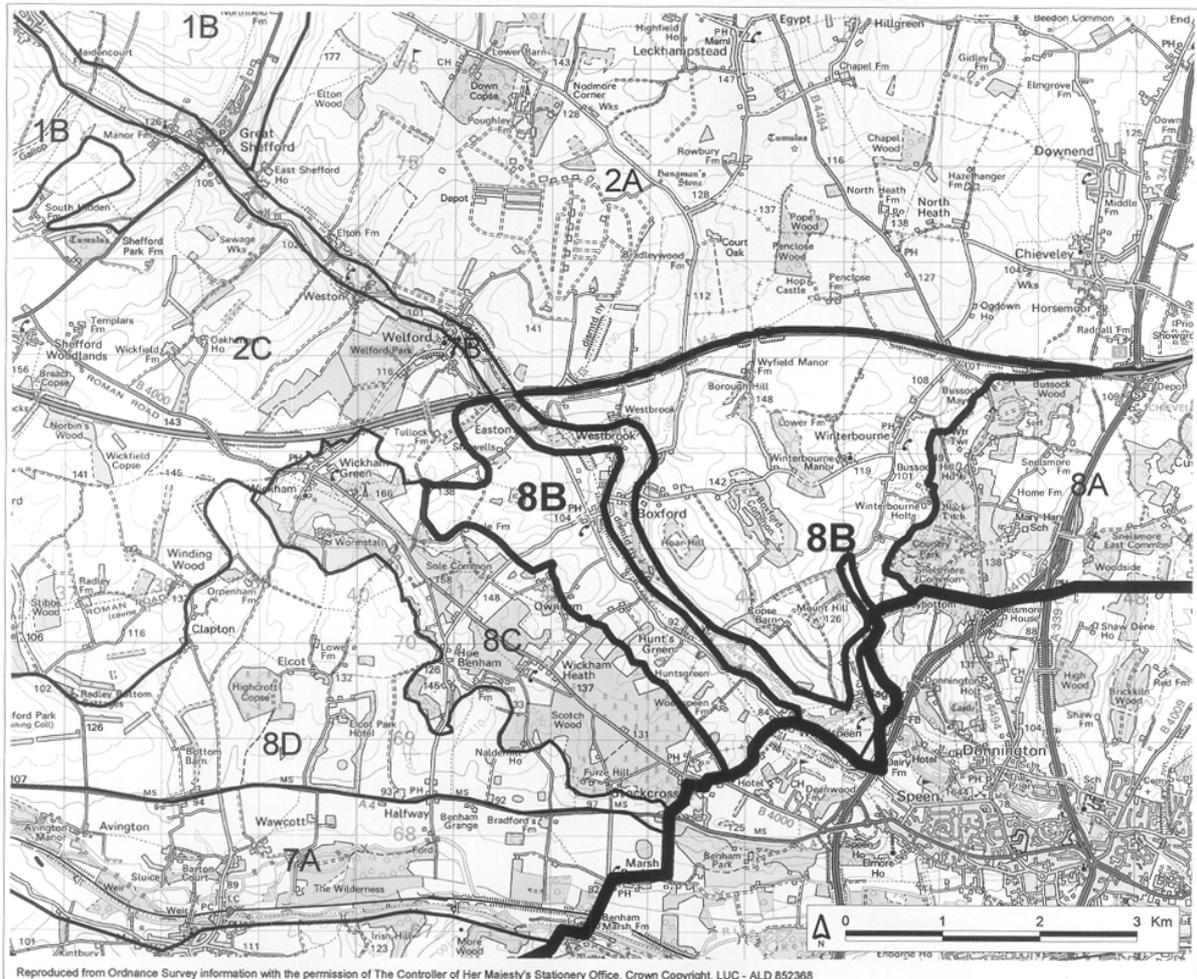
- **decline in the extent of heathland vegetation** through conversion to forestry or lack of management leading to scrub invasion and development of woodland;
- potential changes in farming practices may include further **loss of livestock** with an increase in areas managed as 'hobby farms' or as horse paddocks - characterised by rank weedy grassland and poorly managed boundaries;

- lack of appropriate **management of woodlands** particularly ancient and semi natural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing and areas of wood pasture;
- loss of **hedgerows boundaries** and mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows;
- **localised intrusion of road infrastructure** with the M4 cutting through the area with visual and noise impacts;
- **increased traffic** on the lane network (rat runs from main routes) and improvements to the lanes including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, in places create a more 'urban' character and are particularly damaging to the character of the sunken lanes;
- comparative accessibility resulting in **development pressures**, particularly for new residential development including suburbanising influence of built development (e.g. fencing, lighting and paddocks);
- **loss of tranquillity.**

Key Management Requirements

- 15.34. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, secluded character of the Hermitage Wooded Commons. This includes conservation and enhancement of the key assets, namely: ancient and semi-natural woodlands, pasture, field patterns and hedgerows, remnant heathland commons, historic parkland and the rural lane network. There are opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration of the hedgerow network and diversification of some of the plantations to include a broadleaved element. In the longer term, as part of a wider initiative, it may be appropriate to consider restoration of former areas of heathland to link existing sites.
- 15.35. The aim should be to maintain the distinctive pattern of settlement with its small hamlets and loose linear settlements and prevent the gradual merging and coalescence that will result in a more suburban character. Consideration should be given to measures that could lessen the impact of the road infrastructure and reduce high traffic levels on the rural lanes.

CHARACTER AREA 8B: WINTERBOURNE FARMLAND



4.36. **Location and Boundaries:** The Winterbourne Farmland character area comprises two small areas of open farmland on the slopes that rise to either side of the lower Lambourn Valley (7B). The Hermitage Wooded Commons (8A) and Wickham Wooded Heath (8C) character areas form the boundaries to the east and west respectively, with the southern edge formed by the AONB boundary. To the north the boundary follows the line of the M4, with the land beyond rising to form part of the wooded dip slope of the chalk downs.

Landscape Character Description

- 15.37. The Winterbourne Farmland has an open character with the predominant land use being arable farmland. The undulating landform rises to a series of low hills but overall dips gently down to the Lambourn Valley. Woodlands are confined to the higher land, and include hill top woods such as at Winterbourne Wood, Boxford Common and Hoar Hill, and linear shelterbelt plantings. Field patterns are invariably large, with the pattern and structure of the landscape primarily resulting from the regular Parliamentary enclosures. Many field boundaries have been removed and those that remain are often thin, heavily flailed hawthorn hedges creating a very large scale and open character. Crops include cereals, oil seed rape, linseed and a number of free-range pig units.
- 15.38. Settlement is sparse, with a few isolated hamlets such as Winterbourne and scattered farms and larger farms and manors. There is some expansion of settlement associated with the river valley, e.g. Boxford. The road network is similarly sparse and limited to relative straight lanes rising out from the Lambourn Valley. There is however, extensive access into the area through the network of green lanes, byways and footpaths. The M4 is a major feature forming the northern boundary to the character area.
- 15.39. Overall this is a large scale, open landscape, contrasting markedly with the intimate landscapes of the wooded heaths and commons to the east and west and the intervening valley landscape surrounding the River Lambourn. It forms a transition with the higher wooded downs to the north. The absence of settlement and access makes this a more remote and isolated area.

Key Characteristics

- the Winterbourne Farmland forms a broad lowland clay belt rising from either side of the lower part of the Lambourn Valley;
- predominantly arable, plus occasional free-range pig units set in large scale fields, with hedgerows often in poor condition, creating a more open landscape compared to the extensively wooded area to the east;
- mixed pattern of field enclosure with parallel and sinuous boundaries representing ladder fields from 17th and 18th century informal enclosure. Mainly formal 18th or 19th century Parliamentary enclosure;
- settlement includes scattered farms found along a series of farm tracks and rural lanes;
- an extensive network of rights of way passes through the area, which include the Lambourn Valley Way;
- linear belts of oak, beech and birch and occasionally Scot's Pine form small irregular copses on higher ground;
- an open large scale landscape.

Physical Influences

- 15.40. The landform is predominantly low lying and gently undulating, forming a series of low hills with the overall gradient dipping to the River Lambourn. The geology is based on the chalk with overlying drift deposits of clay and gravel capped ridges.

Historic Environment

- 15.41. **Field Patterns:** Some small woods and copses survive on steeper slopes and ridge tops. A small number of more irregular fields represent medieval and post-medieval assarts. Some of the fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries here represent 'ladder' fields, and probably result from seventeenth and eighteenth century informal enclosure. They often follow ridgelines or valley bottoms. Most fields are large and regular however, and the largely open landscape is the result of formal parliamentary enclosure and more recent removal of field boundaries to form very large, 'prairie' fields.
- 15.42. **Quarry Pits:** One of the characteristic features in this landscape are the numerous quarry pits. Dug for chalk, clay and gravel many may have their origins during the later medieval period and continued to be worked on a small-scale basis into the early modern period.

Biodiversity

- 15.43. This Character Area has 6 SSSI's and 10 sites with non-statutory designation within its boundary. It supports a good mix of habitats ranging from the open water of the River Lambourn (SSSI), to wetlands such as Boxford Water Meadow (SSSI), together with 3 grassland sites, 6 woodland sites and 1 wetland site with non-statutory designation.
- 15.44. Other nationally important sites include Boxford Chalk Pit (SSSI), Winterbourne Chalk Pit (SSSI), Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain (SSSI), and Snelsmore Common (SSSI).

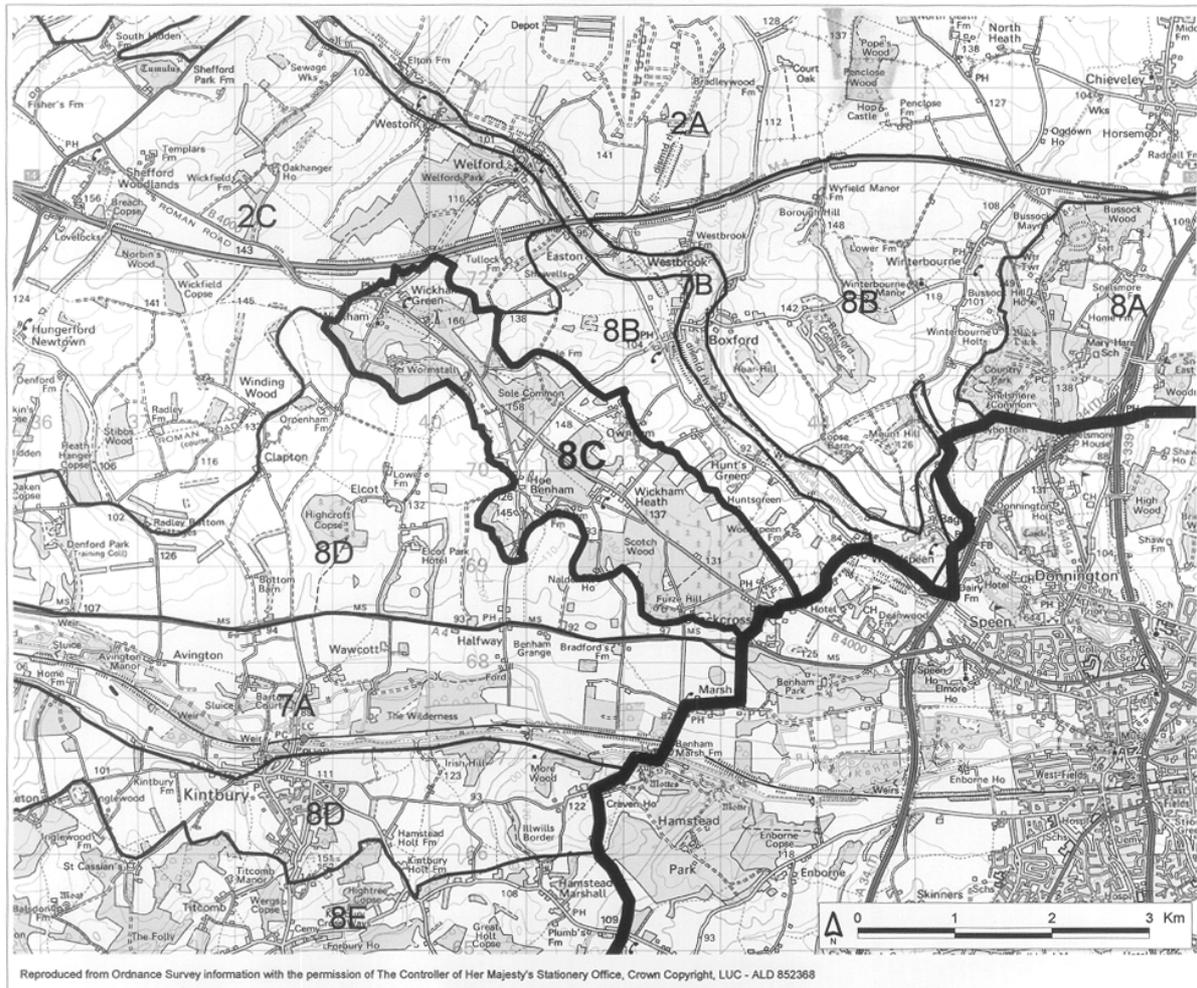
Key Issues

- intensification in farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** particularly conversion of permanent pasture to arable;
- potential changes in farming practices may include further **loss of livestock** with an increase in areas managed as 'hobby farms' or as **horse paddocks** - characterised by rank weedy grassland and poorly managed boundaries;
- **removal of woodlands** to create arable farmland;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows.

Key Management Requirements

- 15.45. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, agricultural character of the Winterbourne Farmland. There are opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration of the hedgerow network and planting of new woodland blocks to provide enclosure and link isolated hilltop woodland blocks to the more wooded landscapes that occur to either side of the character area.

CHARACTER AREA 8C: WICKHAM WOODED HEATH



4.46. **Location and Boundaries:** This is a very small, visually and geographically distinct character area formed by the wooded gravel ridge that separates the more open landscapes on the valley edges of the Winterbourne Farmland (8B) to the north and the Hungerford Farmland (8D) to the south.

Landscape Character Description

- 15.47. Dense woodland cover predominates in this area and is the defining influence upon landscape character. Scots pine and other conifers form a monoculture of plantation woodland across the central part of the ridge. These are managed on a commercial scale, with large areas of clear fell evident in places. Elsewhere beech, birch, oak and sweet chestnut form important components. Within this wooded framework there are small areas of commons and remnant heathland adding texture and variety as well as providing habitats for wildlife. Agricultural land use includes pockets of pasture, usually within small, regular shaped, fields with fencing or hawthorn hedges or surrounded by woodland.
- 15.48. The settlement pattern is typically dispersed and linear along straight ridge top roads. The linear arrangement has been supplemented with recent development infilling between the dispersed houses. More nucleated villages occur at Stockcross in the south of the area and Wickham in the north of the area.

Key Characteristics

- a small, visually and geographically distinct area underlain by a central gravel capped ridge forming a broad flat-topped plateau between the valleys of the Kennet and Lambourn;
- dense woodland cover is a defining influence upon landscape character. Coniferous plantation woodland, managed on a commercial basis, covers the central part of the ridge, with smaller semi-natural woods and copses on steeper slopes;
- small areas of commons and remnant heathland as well as pockets of pasture, typically set in regular shaped fields with fencing or hawthorn hedges, add texture and variety to the wooded backdrop;
- varied field pattern including some older enclosures but dominated by regular, straight-edged formal Parliamentary enclosures;
- settlement is typically dispersed and linear along roads, with some more recent infilling. Nucleated villages occur at Stockcross and Wickham;
- overall a quiet, intimate and secluded character.

Physical Influences

- 15.49. The area comprises a central gravel ridge, forming a broad flat-topped plateau between the valleys of the River Kennet and River Lambourn. Either side of the plateau are short steep slopes that drop to the valleys.

Historic Environment

- 15.50. **Heathland, Woodland and Field Patterns:** Historically, the poor free-draining acid soils of this area would have supported heathland. Although much of the woodland is modern plantation, many older woods and copses also occur especially on steeper slopes and valley sides. Some show signs of assarting. A few of the more irregular field boundaries may result from informal and piecemeal post-medieval enclosure. Most fields or land boundaries are regular and straight-sided, and are likely to be the result of formal eighteenth or nineteenth century Parliamentary enclosure.

Biodiversity

15.51. There are 4 non-statutory sites in the Wickham Wooded Heath Character Area, all of which are wooded to some extent, with Sole Common and Pond nature reserve having areas of both open-water and woodland. There are no sites with statutory designation in this Character Area.

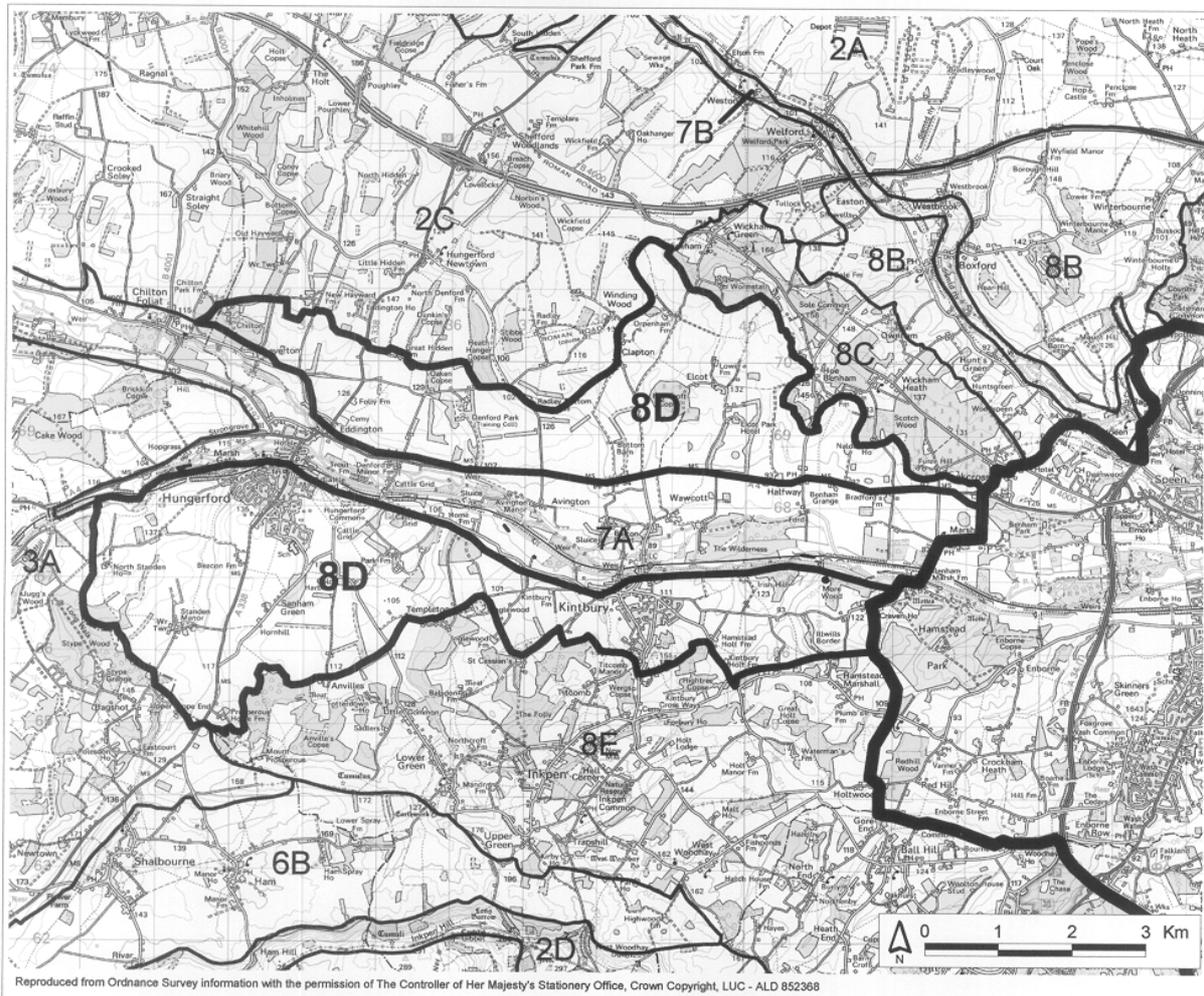
Key Issues

- extensive **plantation monoculture** - lack of woodland diversity, plus commercial forestry management including large areas of clear fell which can be visually intrusive;
- **decline in heathlands**, particularly through past losses to commercial forestry plus lack of management leading to scrub regeneration;
- potential changes in farming practices may include further **loss of livestock** with an increase in areas managed as 'hobby farms' or as **horse paddocks**;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows;
- **loss of tranquillity** with traffic on the main ridgetop road.

Key Management Requirements

15.52. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the intimate and secluded character of the Wickham Wooded Heath, with its woodland cover, pockets of pasture, heathy commons and distinct dispersed linear settlement pattern. There are opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration of the hedgerow network and diversification of some of the plantations to include a broadleaved element. In the longer term, as part of a wider initiative, it may be appropriate to consider restoration of some of the ridge top forest areas to heathland.

CHARACTER AREA 8D: HUNGERFORD FARMLAND



4.53. **Location and Boundaries:** The Hungerford Farmland character area comprises a distinct linear area of open arable farmland on the slopes to either side of the River Kennet (7A) in the eastern part of the AONB. It is visually distinct from the more enclosed mixed woodland and heathland mosaic landscapes which lie to the north - Wickham Wooded Heath (8C), and south - Highclere Lowlands and Heath (8E).

Landscape Character Description

- 15.54. The Hungerford Farmland rises to either side of the Kennet Valley. It has a fairly open and undulating character with the predominant land use being arable farmland. Field patterns are invariably large and rectangular although around Kintbury they are smaller and the scale more intimate with a good hedgerow structure, plus numerous streams and waterbodies. This character is not reflected in the remainder of the area, where field boundaries are often post and wire or non-existent. In many areas the only definition between the lanes and fields are low grassy banks with considerably deteriorated hedgerows.
- 15.55. Woodland blocks occur throughout the area and predominantly feature on the more clay capped ridge tops. South of Hungerford numerous narrow, coniferous shelterbelts occur. Free-range pig units and occasional pastoral fields help to break up the monotony of fields of cereal crops.
- 15.56. There is a sparse pattern of settlement within this area, particularly to the north of the river, with only occasional isolated farms, manor houses and hamlets. The area south of the river contains two large settlements, Hungerford to the west and Kintbury in the east, both associated with the corridor of the River Kennet (7A), although extending out onto the slopes above the valley. The road network is constrained by the river, which designates the crossing points. There is a simple, dispersed pattern of lanes through the area.

Key Characteristics

- an open and gently rolling landscape rising steadily from the Kennet Valley, underlain by clay and valley gravel deposits on chalk beds - forming a transitional lowland area between the valley and higher chalk downs;
- presence of water with many wells and numerous small streams influencing the landform;
- predominantly arable land use, with free-range pig units and occasional pastoral fields. Field boundaries are often post and wire fences or non-existent with the only definition, in many areas, between lanes and fields being low grassy banks;
- varied field pattern, but dominated by large regular fields of Parliamentary enclosure, with more recent removal of boundaries to create a very large scale open landscape in places;
- woodland blocks are a feature across the area and include small woods and copses on the clay capped ridgetops plus numerous narrow, coniferous shelterbelts south of Hungerford;
- earthworks include a deer park pale at Hamstead Park on the AONB boundary;
- sparsely settled, particularly to the north of the river, with occasional isolated farms, manor houses and hamlets connected by a fairly dispersed pattern of lanes throughout the area. To the south of the river are Hungerford and Kintbury, both associated with the river valley but extending out into this character area;
- a quiet, open rural character.

Physical Influences

- 15.57. This typically open and gently rolling landscape, which rises steadily out of the Kennet River Valley, is underlain by clay and valley gravel deposits on the chalk beds. Where outcrops of Clay with Flint deposits overlay the chalk, such as at Hungerford Port Down, a more wooded character prevails and the landscape becomes more enclosed. Numerous small streams incise the southern area feeding into the Kennet and these influence the landform of the area as does the river Kennet itself.

Historic Environment

- 15.58. **Medieval Settlement and Deer Parks:** Hungerford (main part included in character area 7A) was probably laid out between 1170-1296, and its High Street and the properties leading off it are typical of medieval burgage plots, although no medieval buildings survive. Three mottes are recorded north of Hamstead Park, and deer park pales survive as earthworks around the park, on the boundary of the AONB.
- 15.59. **Field Patterns:** A small number of irregular fields represent medieval and post-medieval assarts, particularly in the area of Hampstead Marshall. Some small woods and copses survive, on steeper slopes and ridge tops. Some of the fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries here represent 'ladder' fields, and probably result from seventeenth and eighteenth century informal enclosure. They often follow ridgelines or valley bottoms. Most fields are large and regular however, and the largely open landscape is the result of formal parliamentary enclosure and more recent removal of field boundaries to form very large, 'prairie' fields.
- 15.60. **Post Medieval and Early Modern Landscape:** Many of the area's quarry pits for chalk, clay and gravel may have their origins during the later medieval period. These continued to be worked on a small-scale basis into the early modern period.

Biodiversity

- 15.61. Within the Hungerford Farmland Character Area there are two nationally important SSSI's, together with 12 woodland and two grasslands sites with non-statutory designation.
- 15.62. The SSSI sites include one woodland, and one site notable for geological features. Irish Hill Copse (SSSI) for example is an ancient woodland site with a rich ground flora

Key Issues

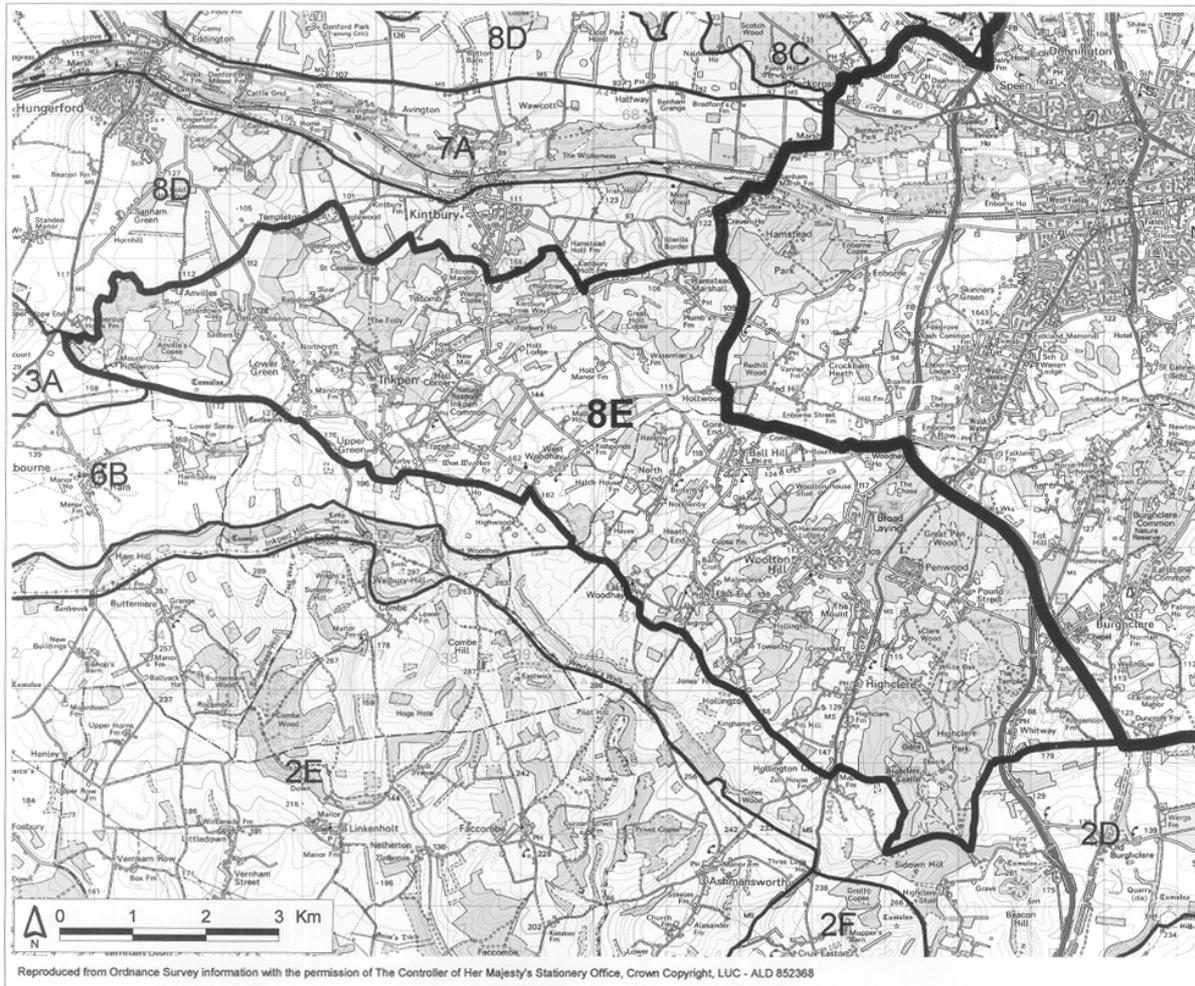
- intensification in farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** particularly conversion of permanent pasture to arable;
- potential changes in farming practices may include further **loss of livestock** (foot and mouth disease has already had an impact on open pig farming in this area);
- an increase in areas managed as 'hobby farms' or as **horse paddocks** - characterised by rank weedy grassland and poorly managed boundaries;

- **removal of woodlands** to create arable farmland and lack of management of remaining woodlands;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows.

Key Management Requirements

15.63. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, rural agricultural character of the Hungerford Farmland. There are particular opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration of the hedgerow network and planting of new woodland blocks to provide enclosure and link isolated hilltop woodland blocks. Other opportunities relate to enhanced management of land managed as horse paddocks.

CHARACTER AREA 8E: HIGHCLERE LOWLANDS AND HEATH



4.64. **Location and Boundaries:** The Highclere Lowlands and Heath character area is located in the eastern part of the AONB. It extends from the base of the abrupt scarp slope marking the edge of the southern block of chalk uplands (Walbury Hill/Watership Down Scarp 2D). To the north the boundary marks the transition to the less wooded landscape at Hungerford Farmland (8D) that flanks the Kennet Valley (8D). The eastern edge is created by the AONB boundary, although a landscape of very similar character extends further to the east, including areas such as Burghclere Common.

Landscape Character Description

- 15.65. The Highclere Lowlands and Heath character area has a complex micro topography created by the geology of clays, gravel and sands and the influence of the numerous small streams flowing out from spring line where the chalk meets the clay, which cut across the area. The watercourses are frequently dammed so that standing water within small on-stream ponds is a visible element of the landscape.
- 15.66. The area is still extensively wooded, but has been progressively cleared through the processes of 'assarting' to form a mosaic of irregularly shaped fields with wooded margins or contained by thick hedges. The woodlands vary from large scale coniferous plantations, as for example at Great Pen Wood near Woolton Hill to smaller ancient woodland of oak standards over hazel coppice. The woods are frequently linked by linear belts and hedges and form a large connected wooded matrix across the whole area. Within this wooded framework there is considerable diversity with the light sands and gravels creating a 'heathy' character in places. This is illustrated by commons of birch and bracken, heathy rides through the woodlands, and areas of poorer acid pasture. There are also important small areas of remnant heath as for example at Inkpen Common where the damp heathland is designated as an SSSI. Parklands, many originating as medieval deer parks, are a distinctive element, as illustrated by Highclere Park, with its later Capability Brown landscape. The areas of unimproved pasture with mature parkland trees, pasture woodland and lakes create a diverse range of habitats and it is designated as an SSSI. Other smaller areas of parkland are found at Woolton House and Hollington House.
- 15.67. The area is crossed by a lattice of minor roads and tracks and is relatively densely settled. A number of loose linear settlements extend along the roads. These include the main settlements of Highclere and Woolton Hill as well a number of smaller linear settlements as for example at Inkpen and Lower Green. In addition there are many residential properties, small hamlets and farms/studs dispersed throughout the area.
- 15.68. Despite the complexity and variety of landform and landcover, the landscape has a coherent character, with a consistent framework provided by the strong structure of woodlands, hedgerows and trees. This creates a small scale enclosed and even 'secretive' character. The proximity of settlements to the main road network of the A343 and the A34 means that these areas are highly accessible and there is, in consequence, evidence of development pressures, particularly within the small villages with suburbanising elements in the form of fences, lighting and horse paddocks.

Key Characteristics

- a lowland landscape, underlain by a mosaic of clays, gravels and sands, to the north of the abrupt scarp slope of the southern upland block of chalk;
- complex micro topography created by the diverse geology and the influence of the numerous small streams. Watercourses and ponds are a frequent feature;
- mosaic of small irregularly shaped fields of arable/pasture, often with wooded margins or contained by thick hedges - a pattern characteristic of piecemeal and informal medieval assarting and enclosure;

- extensive woodland cover, varying from large scale coniferous plantations to smaller ancient woodland coppices of oak standards over hazel coppice and wooded commons;
- parklands, which originated as medieval deer parks, are a distinctive element;
- remnant heathlands survive on the acidic sands and gravels, although these are frequently covered by woodland or scrub;
- formerly part of the medieval Forests of Pamber and Freemantle - reflected today in high woodland cover and 'squatter' settlement pattern resulting from piecemeal enclosure following disafforestation in the early 17th century;
- relatively densely settled with loose linear settlements extending along the intricate lattice of minor roads and tracks through the area. Many individual residential properties, small hamlets and farms/studs are also dispersed through the area;
- a coherent character formed by the strong structure of woodlands, hedgerows and trees - creating a small scale, enclosed and secretive landscape.

Physical Influences

15.69. The area is underlain by a mosaic of clays, gravels, sands, with a mix of soil types varying from clay loams to acid sandy soils creating a very diverse landscape at the micro scale. The land is gently undulating with an overall slope down to the north to the River Enbourne (not in the AONB) or, in the east, to the River Kennet. It is cut by numerous small streams issuing from the base of the chalk so that the landform comprises a series of consecutive ridges and shallow valleys.

Historic Environment

- 15.70. **Prehistoric Monuments:** In common with other character areas within this landscape type, there are few surviving prehistoric sites. One Bronze Age round barrow survives as an upstanding monument, west of Lower Green and the linear earthwork feature around Mount Prosperous may be late Bronze Age or Iron Age.
- 15.71. **Medieval Manors and Deer Parks:** There is a medieval moated site at Balsdon Farm, a motte at West Woodhay, and West Woodhay House itself was a medieval manor. In the medieval period Inkpen was a manor belonging to the Premonstratensian monastery of Titchfield, while Highclere manor was part of the bishopric of Winchester. A deer park is recorded by the thirteenth century, and some sections of the Park Pale earthwork still survive in Highclere Park. By the fourteenth century the Bishop of Winchester had an impressive manor house at Highclere, with an associated complex of ancillary buildings. The earthwork remains of a deserted medieval village within Highclere Park may have provided accommodation for servants and estate workers, or it may have been the original location of Highclere village itself.
- 15.72. **Parkland:** The estate at Highclere evolved into a 'polite' landscape during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and gardens, follies, landscaped wood and lake features became established around a remodelled house. Capability Brown influenced some of this work. The largest mansion in Hampshire, Highclere Castle was virtually rebuilt by Sir Charles Barry for the Earl of Carnarvon between 1839-1842.

15.73. **Field Patterns:** There is a high proportion of woodland within the area, especially on valley sides or steeper slopes. Some woods show evidence for assarting and may be earlier. Highclere manor, for example, is documented as being involved with assarting and agricultural expansion during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Some of the more irregular or sinuous boundaries in the area may be following late medieval boundaries. Fields are often small and irregular, and may represent piecemeal and informal post-medieval assarting and enclosure. In some cases this may have taken place between existing tracks and lanes. Other small but regular, straight-sided fields are the result of formal eighteenth and nineteenth century Parliamentary enclosure.

Biodiversity

- 15.74. The Highclere Lowlands and Heath Character Area have retained a significant number of grassland and woodland sites with nature conservation value. In total there are 4 SSSI's and 75 sites with non-statutory designations. The majority of these sites are woodland, with nearly 50 of the 75 non-statutory sites falling within this habitat category.
- 15.75. Catmore and Winterly Copses (SSSI), is ancient woodland largely consisting of a hazel coppice under oak standards, and has a rich associated ground flora. Inkpen Crocus fields (SSSI) is a nationally important grassland and is a very important site for the Red Data Book spring crocus (*Crocus vernus*), which is an alien species known to have been present at this site since 1800. The remaining 2 nationally important sites are Inkpen Common (SSSI) and Highclere Park (SSSI).

Key Issues

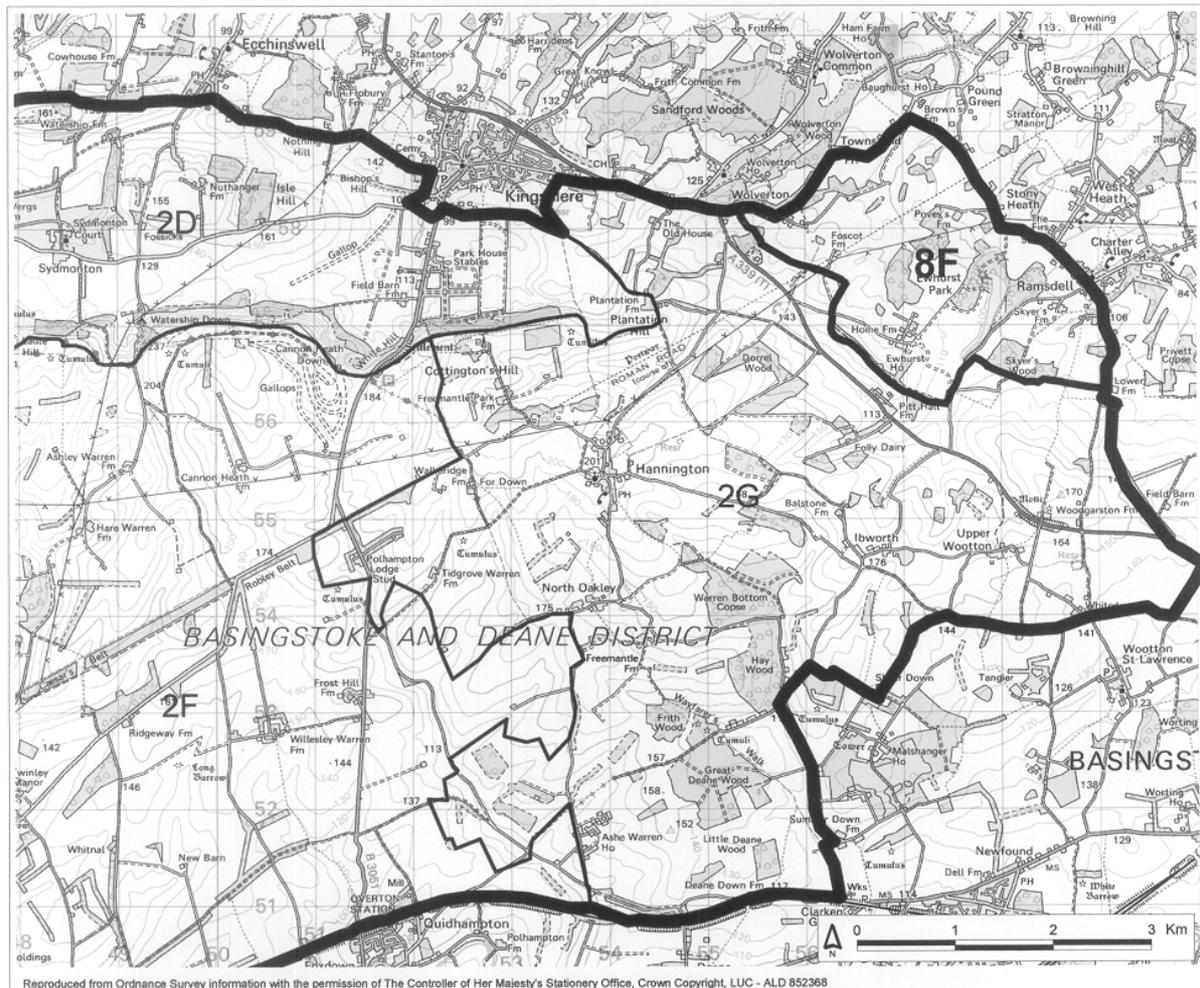
- **decline in the extent of heathland vegetation** through lack of management leading to scrub invasion or conversion to forestry;
- potential changes in farming practices may include further **loss of livestock** with an increase in areas managed as 'hobby farms' or as horse paddocks - characterised by rank weedy grassland and poorly managed boundaries;
- in some areas, extensive **plantation monoculture** - lack of woodland diversity and visual impacts, e.g. clearfell;
- lack of appropriate **management of woodlands** particularly ancient and semi-natural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing and areas of wood pasture;
- inappropriate **hedgerow management** and retention of hedgerow saplings;
- **localised intrusion of roads** with the A343 and A34 running through the area with visual and noise impacts;
- **increased traffic** on the lane network (rat runs from main routes) and improvements to the lanes including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, in places create a more 'urban' character and are particularly damaging to the character of the sunken lanes;

- comparative accessibility resulting in **development pressures**, particularly for new residential development including suburbanising influence of built development (e.g. fencing, lighting and paddocks);
- **loss of tranquillity.**

Key Management Requirements

- 15.76. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, secluded character of the Highclere Lowlands and Heath. This includes conservation and enhancement of the key assets, namely: ancient and semi-natural woodlands, pasture, field patterns and hedgerows, remnant heathland commons, historic parkland and the rural lane network. There are opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration of the hedgerow network and diversification of some of the plantations to include a broadleaved element. In the longer term, as part of a wider initiative, it may be appropriate to consider restoration of former areas of heathland to link existing sites.
- 15.77. The aim should be to maintain the distinctive pattern of settlement with its small hamlets and loose linear settlements and prevent gradual merging and coalescence that will result in a more suburban character. Consideration should be given to measures that could lessen the impact of the roads and reduce high traffic levels on the rural lanes.

CHARACTER AREA 8F: EWHURST PARKLANDS



- 4.78. **Location and Boundaries:** The AONB includes a small part of this 'lowland' character area, which is located at the foot of the steep slopes that rise to the chalk uplands and clay plateau of Hannington Downs (2G). The character area is distinguished by its geology and lower relief and forms an integral part of a much wider character area extending out beyond the AONB boundary on the clays and sands and gravels of the Thames Basin.

Landscape Character Description

- 4.79. The character of this small lowland area is derived largely from the underlying geology with gently undulating clay slopes extending from the base of higher chalk upland to the south west. Land cover comprises medium sized arable and grass fields contained within intact hedgerow boundaries. There is abundant woodland cover in a series of small irregular copses forming part of Ewhurst Park. These, together with the hedgerows provide a strong landscape structure and visual enclosure. The area includes several ponds and minor streams emerging onto the impermeable clay base and includes two designed lakes at Ewhurst Park, making water a particular feature compared to the dry chalk uplands. Ewhurst Park, located at the foot of the slopes, with its Home Farm, estate cottages, lakes, parkland planting and wooded copses, is the most prominent feature within the area. The well maintained estate landscape of intact hedgerows, uniform building style and local vernacular creates a strong unifying character.

Key Characteristics

- a small character area at the base of the chalk downs, formed by the change in geology to heavier clays with sands and gravels. The character area extends beyond the AONB;
- water is a particular feature of the landscape with several ponds and minor streams and two designed lakes at Ewhurst Park;
- land cover comprises small-medium sized arable and grass fields contained within intact hedgerow boundaries. There is abundant woodland cover in a series of small irregular copses in Ewhurst Park;
- medieval deer parks are characteristic, with lengths of bank and ditch pales still evident in the landscape, for example at Wolverton Common (just outside the AONB);
- heathland commons (wooded) are characteristic of the wider area and were once managed as part of the Royal Forest of Pamber;
- Ewhurst Park, is the most prominent feature. The well maintained estate landscape of intact hedgerows, uniform building style and local vernacular creates a strong unifying character.

Physical Influences

- 4.80. The distinct change in geology from chalk to heavy clays with sands and gravels is the dominant influence on landscape character, resulting in a gently undulating low-lying landform at the foot of the higher downs. Further to the east, beyond the AONB, boundary gravels become more dominant and the resulting landscape has a 'heathy' character, although this is not a feature of the small area within the AONB.

Historic Environment

- 15.81. **Medieval Settlement:** The present day settlement comprises numerous hamlets and farmsteads scattered across the area, several of which may have early medieval origins. Ewhurst and Wolverton, for example, are mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086.
- 15.82. **Royal Forest:** The area was once part of the Royal Forest of Pamber, was utilised for hunting and also for managed production of wood, although much of the heathland was used as common land. Today, numerous small woodland copses, possibly vestiges of this earlier woodland landscape, characterise the area. Some of the copses, however, may be timber plantations established in the nineteenth century.
- 15.83. **Medieval Deer Parks:** Lengths of the bank and ditch pale which defined a medieval deer park at Wolverton can still be seen around Wolverton House and Wolverton Common.
- 15.84. **Field Patterns:** Some of the surviving irregular field boundaries are characteristic of assarts or intakes into woodland during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, in order to expand land for agriculture, grazing and settlement.

Key Issues

- management of the **parkland landscape** with its lakes, pasture, woodlands and built features;
- **appropriate management of woodlands** particularly ancient and semi natural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing;
- maintenance of the **hedgerow network**;
- **decline in heathland** in the wider landscape (not a feature within the AONB boundary).

Biodiversity

- 15.85. There are no statutory or non-statutory sites in this Character Area.

Key Management Requirements

- 15.86. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the parkland character, with its lakes, woodlands, buildings and permanent pasture. Within the wider landscape there are opportunities for restoration and management of the mosaic of heathland and woodland.

PART 3:
THE FUTURE

16. FORCES FOR CHANGE WITHIN THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB

- 16.1. The North Wessex Downs is a dynamic landscape that has evolved and changed over time in response to prevailing economic and social conditions. It is the cumulative effect of past change that has created the special and distinctive character of the North Wessex Downs that is valued today. The landscape will continue to change in the future. However, as this chapter will illustrate, the pace and nature of change is accelerating and may impact on those very qualities that make this landscape special. Recent changes include the dramatic downturn in the agricultural economy and externally, the growth of the surrounding urban centres, including Basingstoke, Whitchurch, Andover, Newbury and Swindon. The challenge will be to understand, manage and direct future change in a way that ensures the outstanding landscape quality and its valued features and attributes are conserved and enhanced.
- 16.2. This chapter considers the main forces for change as they affect the character of the North Wessex Downs and highlights those facets of the landscape that are most vulnerable. In doing so it provides a framework for an AONB Management Plan, which is now a statutory requirement, under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000.
- 16.3. The forces for change are considered under seven main headings which include both global changes such as climate change and more detailed local issues.
- Climate Change
 - Agriculture
 - Development
 - Traffic and Transport
 - Military
 - Social Character
 - Recreation and Tourism.
- 16.4. For each of these the impact on landscape character and its main attributes, including biodiversity, cultural heritage and social and economic character is considered.

Climate Change

- 16.5. It is generally accepted that climate change is occurring and that CO₂ emissions from the combustion of fossil fuels are a major contributing factor. It is difficult to be precise about the actual implications of climate change and to an extent these will be dependent on responses, mitigation and adaptation. However, the climate of the South of England may already be changing. Since 1900 the average temperature has risen by 0.5°C and summer rainfall has decreased. Greater climatic changes are predicted over the next 100 years, and may include warmer weather all year, wetter winters, drier summers and weather extremes including storms and flooding. The

range of possible impacts of climate change on the landscape of the North Wessex Downs will need to be kept under review as knowledge increases. They may include:

- low flows (and drying out) in chalk streams and rivers in summer, plus a requirement for increased abstraction from the chalk aquifer to meet water demands from surrounding urban areas, exacerbating low flows;
- localised winter flooding, as for example witnessed by many communities in the valleys and vales of the North Wessex Downs in recent years;
- potential requirements for local flood defence measures that maybe unsympathetic to the small scale, intimate character of the valleys;
- higher wind speeds and more frequent storms causing damage to woodlands, parklands and crops;
- changes to the characteristic habitats, for example composition of chalk grassland, drying out of wetland, continued viability of some of the beech hangers, and increased fire risk to heathland;
- potential for damage to important archaeological sites e.g. waterlogging, erosion and loss of stability to earthwork structures such as Silbury Hill;

16.6. It should be noted that the Environment Agency, with other partners, is working on many of the above impacts. Their work includes low flows in chalk streams and response to winter floods amongst others.

16.7. It is anticipated that, farmers will need to adapt to a different climate with higher temperatures, longer growing seasons and summer drought, resulting in changes to the characteristic farmed landscapes of the North Wessex Downs. This will not necessarily be unfavourable and may include extensification of grazing and arable systems or a shift to more drought tolerant crops. However, there may also be a demand for increased irrigation of arable land with consequent impacts on water supplies and potential increase in soil erosion.

16.8. It is unclear what the human response to climate change will be in the long term. Indeed, it has also been noted that the impact of climate change may include much colder weather, comparable to other countries of our latitude, if the Gulf Stream is changed from its present course. The potential impacts should be kept under review and updated as knowledge increases.

Renewable Energy

16.9. The UK Climate Change Programme provides a national framework for moving towards a more sustainable, lower carbon intensive economy. It sets out a portfolio of related policy commitments and measures which the Government has put forward in an effort to combat climate change, including an overall target to reduce the UK's CO₂ emissions by 20% (below 1990 levels) by 2010. In an effort to meet this challenging target the Government has reinforced its support for the pursuit of sustainable energy solutions, including renewables. Significantly, the Government's White Paper on Renewable Energy '*New and Renewable Energy; Prospects for the 21st Century*' sets a target for securing 5% of electricity requirements from renewables by

2003, rising to 10% by 2010. The Renewables Obligation, due to be introduced in April 2002, also obliges electricity suppliers to supply a specified proportion of their electricity from renewable resources.

- 16.10. This commitment to renewable energy, in the North Wessex Downs this may manifest, for example, in the introduction of new types of energy crops such as *Miscanthus* (elephant grass) or short rotation coppice, as supported by grants in the England Rural Development Plan or demand for small scale wind energy development.
- 16.11. The likely number and scale of such future developments in the North Wessex Downs remains uncertain. However, in order to help translate the national targets for renewable energy into suitable developments on the ground, the Government has instructed all Regional Governments to set targets for renewable energy, based on an assessment of each region's capacity to generate electricity from renewable resources. Preliminary indications from the South West and South East Regional studies indicate that there could be a significant increase in the number of biomass and small scale wind energy developments throughout both Regions provided the commercial viability of electricity and heat generation from renewable sources can be established in the area. The AONB management plan will have an important role in influencing these regional studies to ensure that the pursuit of renewable energy targets maintains and enhances the character of the North Wessex Downs.

Agriculture and land management

- 16.12. The historic analysis undertaken as part of this assessment has indicated that the character of agriculture within the North Wessex Downs has fluctuated over time in accordance with prevailing economic circumstances and technological developments. For example, arable cultivation on the downs, was established as early as the prehistoric period and during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, corn was the major cash crop on the chalklands. In the mid nineteenth century, arable farming entered a decline until post-1945 national policy, and subsequently the CAP, established a new framework for agriculture and the intensive arable agriculture that now characterises the AONB is the result of these policies. Future reform of the CAP and adjustments to world markets will lead to further changes.

Impact of Past Agricultural Change

- 16.13. Post-war agricultural policy resulting in the intensification and indeed 'industrialisation' of farming in the North Wessex Downs has been a major force for change since designation of the AONB in 1972. A recent study by the RSPB¹³ using MAFF June Census data revealed that between 1968 and 1998 the total area under grassland in the AONB was reduced by 32%. The consequent effects on the character of the North Wessex Downs are well rehearsed and include:
- fragmentation of important habitats, notably chalk grassland into a few isolated remnant sites;
 - extensive areas of land being farmed as a single unit in very large scale fields, with loss of peripheral boundary features;

¹ Moorcroft, D, Hubbard, S. and Lucas. F. 'Agricultural Change in the North Wessex Downs AONB'. 2001

- mechanisation and reduction of farm labour means that there is no longer the skills to maintain woodland coppice, hedgerows and other landscape features which would formerly have been an integral part of the agricultural scene;
- loss of important archaeological, with many features such as roundbarrows only visible as cropmarks on air photos and no longer forming recognisable landscape features;
- impact of run off (fertiliser, herbicides plus soil erosion) from intensively farmed arable areas on the delicate habitats and high water quality of the chalk rivers that are a special feature of the AONB;
- reduction in livestock, as farms have converted to arable and more recently as a result of BSE and foot and mouth (but with intensification of stocking density on remaining areas of grassland) make it difficult to maintain extensive areas of grassland (but with loss of quality in other areas);
- impacts of capital intensive agricultural economy on the social character of the AONB. This has included declining employment in agriculture, fewer larger farms and a shift towards part time employment, resulting in pockets of rural deprivation (poverty and poor access to services) masked by wider affluence of the estates and larger farm units.

16.14. More recently the character of arable farming, has itself changed. These include development of hardier cereal varieties allowing a shift from spring to autumn drilling with consequent impacts on biodiversity, particularly farmland birds. Maize, now a widespread crop in parts of the AONB, is a significant contributor to soil erosion and diffuse pollution to watercourses due to the extent of bare ground within the crop. There have also been changes in the types of crops grown.

Current Changes in Agriculture

16.15. The effects of past agricultural intensification on landscape character, biodiversity and archaeology are widely recognised and understood. Of greater concern, in the context of the current downturn in farming, and not least the impact of foot and mouth, is to understand the future direction for agriculture. At the time of this study, UK farming is in serious recession and the local impacts of this are well documented in several recent studies such as the Hampshire Farming Study² and the Oxfordshire Farming Study³. In the AONB, where continued productivity of the thin calcareous soils, is dependent on high capital inputs (e.g. nutrients, mechanisation and water), the recession is likely to have a significant effect. The resultant changes and restructuring of agriculture may have an even greater impact on the character of the North Wessex Downs than the changes witnessed over the last 50 years. The following section outlines the projected trends and key issues emerging.

16.16. In the future it is anticipated that restructuring of the agricultural economy will see an increasing polarity in farming. This will include at one extreme an increase in large farm units seeking to increase production through achieving economies in scale, and at the other extreme marginal land coming out of agricultural management and

² Hampshire County Council 'Hampshire Farming Study' 1999 Review

³ Oxfordshire County Council 'Oxfordshire Farming Study' 1999.

put into new uses. However, there are also significant opportunities presented by the Agenda 2000 package and specifically those offered by the Rural Development Regulation - the second pillar of the CAP, as realised through the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP). The ERDP provides a mechanism to assist the agricultural industry within the AONB and may result in many positive environmental changes of benefit to local character.

- 16.17. The key issues and potential impact of these scenarios is explored further below.
- 16.18. **Increase in Large Farm Units:** The larger and well-structured arable farms of the North Wessex Downs are likely to be able to respond to the competitive global market, driven at the international level by world trade negotiations (GATT). This may result in increased specialisation with a concentration on the best and most productive land and the amalgamation of holdings with very large farms managed as a single unit under a block farming regime, mainly through contract labour. Anticipated adverse impacts may include further homogenisation of the landscape, reduction in the already very depleted biodiversity, potential demand for more centralised and large scale buildings such as grain storage facilities and further reduction in the level of agricultural employment. Increased specialisation and dominance of arable systems may also mean that in some areas there may no longer be livestock to maintain areas of grassland. However, it is also true that larger units may also have the resources, labour and capital to respond to environmental initiatives and pursue landscape and biodiversity enhancement in association with productive agriculture. It is acknowledged that many of the large farms currently operating in the North Wessex Downs are very conservation-minded, particularly with regard to game shooting interests.
- 16.19. **Surplus/Marginal Agricultural Land:** The concentration of resources on the 'best' land may result in marginal areas coming out of production resulting in pockets of unmanaged land throughout the AONB. The reduction in livestock, for example, may lead to some grasslands regenerating to new areas of scrub and woodland. Recent years have also witnessed an increase in marginal land being put into set-aside. While, this does have ecological benefits (e.g. for ground nesting birds and invertebrates) it also has a significant impact upon the landscape. There is potential for marginal or surplus agricultural land to be brought into positive environmental management, supported through agri-environment initiatives, for example to provide a connected habitat of chalk grassland potentially combined with a new access network.
- 16.20. At the same time, there are many pressures for new uses of 'marginal' land including 'lifestyle' farms or smallholdings, leisure uses and horse paddocks – all of which can have local visual impacts. It is suggested that with appropriate guidance and management advice new landowners may be responsive to AONB objectives and able to deliver positive landscape benefits.
- 16.21. **Medium and Small Farms:** It is also expected that the North Wessex Downs may see the emergence of a sector of small farms seeking to build on the opportunities presented by the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP). Under this scenario small scale family owned and tenanted farms may increasingly seek to produce high quality premium goods for local markets potentially under environmentally sensitive regimes, supported through measures such as Agri-

environment Schemes (Countryside Stewardship/Organic Farming Scheme) and the new Rural Enterprise Scheme and Processing and Marketing Grant. Although the largely arable landscape of the North Wessex Downs, would at first seem to offer few opportunities for this type of production, the recent emergence of a thriving organic sector within the AONB suggests that this is a model with considerable potential. However, the effort and ingenuity required to achieve these goals should not be under-estimated. Many of the necessary skills and labour are now much depleted within the area, for example, those in shepherding and animal husbandry. More fundamentally, perhaps, has been the change in consumer demand since the last time sheep extensively grazed open downland. At this time the demand was for wool and mutton; now the demand is for lamb. This potentially requires the development of new farming systems utilising the traditional sheep breeds of the downlands. It may also mean the linking of downland pastures with off-down pastures for finishing. And, in turn, if such production is to achieve a premium market, will require consideration of:

- the achievement of specific environmental standards (as an assurance to consumers);
- brand labelling, potentially linking to similar initiatives being taken in the Chilterns and South Downs AONBs and more general work the Countryside Agency is pursuing under their 'Eat the View' campaign.

16.22. Such ideas are beginning to be explored within the North Wessex Downs through the Ridgeway Project with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund but have the potential to be extended across much larger areas of the AONB.

16.23. The wider social and economic benefits arising from this potential re-direction of agriculture include re-establishing a local agricultural economy responding to local circumstance, greater employment opportunities within land-based industries and a strengthening of links between producers and consumers.

Diversification: New Land Uses

16.24. It is evident from a number of current studies of farm diversification that farmers given the opportunity would prefer to focus their diversification actively, within farming, i.e. into alternative crops and adding value, as opposed to pursuing other, non agricultural, activities. Thus the arable farming of the North Wessex Downs in the future may include some different crops and land uses.

16.25. **Energy Crops:** The ERDP recognises that energy crops have the potential to make a significant contribution to Government targets to reduce greenhouse emission and for renewable energy generation. The new Energy Crops Scheme (ECS) provides establishment for two energy crops, short rotation coppice and *Miscanthus* (Elephant grass). Proximity to energy consumers and the structure of farming in the AONB suggest that this might be an attractive option, although could have significant consequences on local character, not least the experience of openness, remoteness and the fundamental exposure of the chalk topography, which are key attributes of the AONB. The landscape assessment provides a baseline for a future more detailed study to assess areas most able to accommodate energy crops.

- 16.26. **Carbon Sequestration:** In the light of the Kyoto Protocol, there is considerable interest in how farmers, particularly on arable land, can benefit from schemes that alleviate carbon emissions and reward carbon sequestration and carbon trading. This is already acting as a major force for rural land use change in the US, Canada and parts of mainland Europe, including the introduction of new methods of farming (minimal tillage), different crops and an increase in woodland cover.
- 16.27. **Woodland Management and Planting:** The absence of appropriate forms of woodland management, has been highlighted as a critical issue in many of the landscape types and is considered to be key to retaining local character and ecological diversity. In particular, the absence of management of native coppice woodland has been noted, although there has recently been an increase in the amount of hazel coppice restoration due to the availability of grant funding. The ERDP including the Woodland Grant Scheme offers opportunities for woodland management and planting. However the North Wessex Downs is currently not well placed to meet the criteria and priorities established for new planting and therefore, at least in the short term, there may be no great incentive for significant woodland expansion. The preparation of the AONB management plan will provide an important tool for considering the future role of long-term woodland in the North Wessex Downs (within the context of this landscape character assessment) and potential discussions with the Forestry Commission to negotiate planting and management targets for the area.
- 16.28. **Conversion of Farm Buildings:** In addition, to requirements for new buildings, the changes in the structure of agriculture, may also result in existing buildings becoming redundant, through centralisation of operations. Many of these will come forward for conversion. The potential impacts are considered further under the heading of 'Development' below

Conclusions

- 16.29. What emerges from the above review is that agriculture within the North Wessex Downs is at a critical juncture and will be a fundamental force for change on landscape, social and economic character. This is not new and such forces have shaped the character of the AONB through history; but never before have the tensions been so clear between increasing intensification on the one hand and a shift towards systems more attuned to the achievement of integrated rural development on the other. This is within a context where agriculture is in crisis nationally and the very viability of farming on the downs is brought into question.
- 16.30. The **challenge for the AONB management plan** is to form the bridge between the contrasting forms of agriculture that are likely to emerge to ensure conservation and enhancement of the fundamental characteristics of the North Wessex Downs is economically rewarding for landholders;

Development

- 16.31. Development is a powerful force for change. National and local planning policies provide strong protection for the AONB, and these policies have a high priority in development control. Nevertheless, there are a number of key pressures within the North Wessex Downs. In many cases these cannot be considered in isolation, being

driven by wider economic changes beyond the AONB boundary. These are considered further below.

Peripheral Urban Development

16.32. The North Wessex Downs is located between the 'golden valley' of the M4/Thames Valley and the M3 corridor. It is ringed by rapidly expanding economies, including Swindon, Newbury, Reading and Basingstoke, based on the Information Communication Technology (ICT) industries, plus the growing urban centres of Whitchurch, Andover and Didcot. As the economy continues to grow the demand for housing will continue to increase and the need to balance economic growth whilst meeting environmental objectives will be one of the prime considerations for the management plan. At present household growth is not keeping pace with economic growth thus representing a key force for change as pressure to find development sites becomes apparent. In some cases existing development impinges on the AONB boundaries - which obviously has a visual impact in views from the high central core of the downs, but there are also significant underlying impacts including:

- demands on the water resources of the chalk aquifer, resulting in low flows within the region's prime chalk rivers;
- increasing recreation pressures and loss of tranquillity - a rare commodity in southern England;
- social and economic consequences for the North Wessex Downs including the influx of more affluent incomers and inflated house prices;
- a trend towards reverse commuting, with young workers in low paid jobs in service industries and agricultural contracting moving to areas such as Didcot or Swindon and those working in peripheral industries moving into attractive villages within the AONB;
- increased traffic levels on the rural lane network, resulting in both loss of tranquillity, higher accident levels, and damage to the character of the lanes.

Demand for Settlement

16.33. The North Wessex Downs is characterised by a great diversity in building styles and a very distinct pattern of settlement. There is a high demand for housing within the AONB particularly in the east, where there are many small attractive villages in close proximity to employment centres. The key issues are:

- severe planning restrictions on villages perceived, by some, to be leading to village cramming and need to achieve an appropriate balance between 'protection' and allowing settlements to expand gradually;
- inflated property prices, as commuters move to attractive villages in close proximity to urban centres and consequent need for provision of affordable housing to maintain balanced rural communities;

- need to ensure new development is sympathetic and of good design and helps maintains the local village character;
- inappropriate location of development which can have a significant impact on character, for example by expansion of villages along valleys, or up onto the open downlands;
- poor design in terms of style and materials - some parts of the AONB (notably some villages to the east) are considered to be taking on a more suburban character.

16.34. Community-led initiatives such as countryside design summaries, village design statements and parish maps can help promote good design, particularly if they are adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance. However, these initiatives are not yet established within many parts of the AONB and represent an important opportunity for the future.

Diversification - Conversion of Farm Buildings

16.35. The future of agriculture in the AONB and its potency as a major force for change has been discussed in detail above. Diversification of farm businesses and realisation of assets, including re-use of farm buildings is being promoted through the Government Action Plan for Farming and the Rural White Paper as one way of sustaining farm incomes³ and Planning Policy Guidance is provided in PPG7⁴. It can also help promote local economic vibrancy within rural areas. In the North Wessex Downs planning permission is being sought for both modern large portal frame constructions and traditional farm buildings for both residential and economic uses. Conversion of farm buildings and tensions with the need for strong landscape protection, are considered to be a major issue within the AONB. Farmers, on the other hand, have concerns that restrictive planning controls are hindering their ability to diversify and ultimately continue to operate. The key issues within the North Wessex Downs are:

- new uses include warehousing, industrial or business units, as well as a strong demand for equestrian uses, all of which may contribute to greater traffic levels in the AONB.
- need for associated infrastructure such as parking and lighting – impact on local character;
- impacts on the internal and external fabric of historic buildings;
- effect on a variety of declining wildlife species which co-exist with the agricultural use of buildings but can be disturbed or killed during conversion. These include barn owls, swallows, swifts and house martins and several species of bats.

³ The DETR has undertaken research to assess the implications of planning in relation to farm diversification including building reuse.

⁴ Planning Policy Guidance Note 7: The Countryside – Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development

- 16.36. There are also concerns that diversification should be in support of the local economy and linked to sustainable management of the whole farm unit, rather than simply bringing in new industrial uses, which promote reverse commuting from the surrounding urban centres.

Tall Structures: Wind Turbines, Masts and Overhead Power Lines

- 16.37. Perhaps the most obvious new developments in the North Wessex Downs are the tall structures on the ridges, crests and scarps which interrupt the smooth rolling skylines and are visible from a wide area. The AONB contains a number of communication masts, transmitters, and overhead power lines. There is only one small scale wind turbine at present, although preliminary indications from the South West and South East Regional studies indicate that there will be a significant increase in the number of wind energy developments in the future. A particular concern is the fact that each application is currently dealt with by the individual local authority with no consistent approach for the AONB as a whole. While a single tall structure can create a landmark, intervisibility between several can be very detrimental, diminishing the special perceptual qualities of remoteness and tranquillity. Other potential impacts include increased noise and air pollution caused by service traffic. The development of an AONB wide policy for tall structures is a key requirement. This landscape assessment should provide the basis for the basis for a more detailed study to assess the ability of different landscape types to accommodate such structures and provide guidance on appropriate siting and design.

Mineral Extraction

- 16.38. There are only limited areas of mineral extraction within the AONB, notably gravel extraction in the eastern part of the Kennet Valley. Possible future demand for aggregates from the lowlying sands and gravels in the eastern part of the AONB or chalk from the uplands could have a very significant impact on local character.

Redundant Military Infrastructure

- 16.39. The area includes several redundant Ministry of Defence sites, including a number of disused airfields concentrated along the flatter plain along the northern edge of the AONB. In Swindon these include Wroughton Airfield and Princess Alexandra's Hospital, both representing major development opportunities. To the east, the International Business Centre at Harwell, also on a former airfield, has plans for further expansion. Future development of these sites, while perhaps providing an opportunity for small scale peripheral landscape enhancement, such as tree screening, could also have potentially detrimental consequences in terms of bringing traffic, light pollution and further development pressures into the heart of the AONB. It is clear that economic benefits will need to be carefully balanced against environmental consequences and the national importance of the North Wessex Downs landscape; an AONB-wide strategic policy is recommended. It should be noted that interest in the historic fabric of military sites is growing and a small but increasing number of 20th century structures and sites are being statutorily protected.

Traffic and Transport

- 16.40. There are a number of linked issues relating to traffic and transport that have a fundamental influence on the quality of life for communities within the AONB. These are considered below:

Communication Infrastructure

- 16.41. The development of communication infrastructure has had a significant impact on the tranquillity. The M4 and latterly the route of the A34, providing a link between Southampton and the Midlands, have sliced across the North Wessex Downs. The road infrastructure has a major visual and noise impact on the AONB as well as a severance effect. It has also acted as a catalyst for development in the form of petrol stations, service areas and hotels. While further major road infrastructure within the AONB is not envisaged, the incremental upgrading of the rural roads and lanes is also having a detrimental impact on landscape character.

Access to Transport

- 16.42. Access to public transport is an important issue. Although there are good main line rail routes through the area these tend to operate as commuter services, while many rural rail lines (for example to Marlborough and Lambourn) have closed. Despite several local initiatives, such as the Post Bus, Call a Bus, or the Wiggley Bus, public transport remains virtually nonexistent for many of the smaller rural communities. The impacts include:

- compounding rural deprivation and isolation for those sectors of the population that do not have access to a private car;
- increasing traffic levels on the rural lane network through use of the car to access services elsewhere.

Traffic

- 16.43. High traffic levels are a major concern for communities throughout the North Wessex Downs and are impacting on quality of life as well as the rural character of the area. The increase in traffic volume, size and speed is caused by a number of factors, notably:

- larger scale of farming with large vehicles, bulk deliveries and heavy vehicles travelling through the rural lanes to comparatively remote farms;
- increased dependence on the private car through lack of local services and facilities (requirement for two car households);
- loss of rural jobs and growing trend towards out-commuting, with equally some conversion of farm buildings to employment resulting in localised increases in traffic and parking requirements;
- congestion on major routes with the rural lanes of the AONB being used as rat runs and becoming unsafe for walking and riding;

- increase in car-bourne tourism and recreation - adding to rural traffic levels and congestion.

16.44. The impacts of high traffic levels on the character of the AONB include

- higher accident levels and perceptions of danger making lanes unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists;
- erosion of road edges and verges, particularly on the narrow sunken lanes, with road improvements by kerbing, highway lighting, wide visibility splays and signing creating a more urban character;
- increased requirement for provision of parking both in villages and rural locations, for example at recreation sites;
- loss of rural tranquillity.

16.45. These impacts common throughout the AONB, but are a particular concern in areas in close proximity to urban centres, notably the Vales, Lowland Mosaic and Downland with Woodland landscape types.

Military

16.46. The Strategic Defence Review (1998) includes proposals for consolidation and expansion of activities at Tidworth and Ludgershall, on the boundary of the AONB. The MoD is in the process of consolidating training activities at Salisbury Plain (which joins with the south west part of the AONB). While unlikely to have a direct impact on the North Wessex Downs it has raised concerns, among local people. These include:

- possible future pressures for land acquisition for military training;
- visual impacts of development e.g. new buildings;
- associated impacts e.g. traffic and increased demand for housing and recreation.

Recreation and Tourism

16.47. The expanding peripheral population and increase in leisure time is anticipated to be a major force for change within the North Wessex Downs. This raises a number of issues:

- impact of motorised vehicles on green lanes including the Ridgeway;
- locally requirements for parking in the countryside plus an increase in traffic on the rural lane network;
- impacts on key 'honeypot' sites including damage to archaeology and erosion of fragile habitats;
- increase in noise from more intrusive countryside sports such as clay pigeon shooting;

- implications of provisions for open access under the CROW Act (actual open access areas are likely to be minimal, given that cultivated land is excluded. Nevertheless, the legislation is still perceived as a threat by many landowners as, for example, there may be cases of isolated downland in the middle of arable land with no statutory footpaths allowing access. In this instance there would be conflicts of interest arising between the public trying access the farm and landowners/farmers);
- implications of changes to Public Rights of Way under the CROW Act (Restricted Byways are afforded legal protection from damage by recreational off-road vehicles. However, Unclassified Country Roads and Byways open to all traffic remain vulnerable to damage).
- loss of sense of remoteness.

16.48. To a large extent these issues can be overcome through good management and anticipated growth in recreation and tourism could act a catalyst for positive change. Access opportunities, an outstanding landscape plus significant historic and cultural assets and attractive villages and market towns are together considered to provide an excellent package for the development of Green Tourism, particularly given the accessibility of the North Wessex Downs to consumers. This could tie into wider social objectives, for example supporting village services, and diversification of farm businesses. Currently there are a large number of initiatives promoting tourism within the area or at specific sites, although the area as a whole does not have a strong identity as a visitor/tourist destination. The promotion and marketing of the North Wessex Downs as a cohesive area is considered to be a major opportunity for the AONB.

Social Character of the AONB

16.49. A study of the changing social character of the AONB has been undertaken as part of this report. Significant forces for change and a number of key issues emerged. In summary, these include:

- population growth, with a high proportion of immigrants seeking to locate to rural areas and work in the nearby urban centres (education and training could be provided for Parish Councils to assist in the incorporation of new people entering the community and the countryside);
- a consequent increase in house prices and lack of affordable housing;
- perceived loss of younger people from villages;
- trend to outbound commuting with high traffic level in the AONB;
- loss of rural services, notably village shops, banking facilities and schools and poor public transport.

The Future

16.50. The North Wessex Downs AONB is a landscape that has evolved and developed over time. This chapter has aimed to summarise the current forces for change

although future impacts cannot always be predicted. The only certainty is that the North Wessex Downs will continue to change. Appendix 6 provides a list of environmental indicators by landscape type to enable the monitoring of trends in change within the North Wessex Downs.

- 16.51. A number of significant recent developments provide a strong framework to help manage the future direction of change within the AONB. Not least is the enhanced status of AONBs, through the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 and the increase in public funding available for AONB management. The framework developed by Agenda 2000 and taken forward through the ERDP, plus policy established by the Rural White Paper also provide an important opportunity to guide and shape the future character of the AONB.
- 16.52. A new management structure has recently been established for the North Wessex Downs AONB, with support from the local authorities, statutory agencies, voluntary bodies, landowners and the local community. This structure and partnership approach should mean that the AONB is well placed to secure a positive future. The AONB management plan (a statutory requirement under the CROW Act) has a vital role to play in establishing an overall vision for the North Wessex Downs, reconciling the diverse interests, and developing an integrated and positive way forward at the local level, drawing on the opportunities presented nationally. The forces for change and issues identified in this report should provide the framework for the management plan.
- 16.53. Areas for further research, which are considered necessary to increase understanding of the issues and to underpin the management plan are outlined in the following section.

17. AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK

- 17.1. The landscape character assessment has aimed to bring existing information together to provide an overarching framework assessment of the AONB. In so doing, a number of areas that would benefit from further or more detailed investigation have been identified. These areas for further research are in addition to the work identified for the future AONB management structure in developing the management plan, strategic policies and priorities, drawing in funding and delivering actions.
- 17.2. It is anticipated that the studies listed below will be important for taking forward a management plan for the AONB. The principal areas requiring further more in-depth study are:

The built character of the AONB.

- 17.3. Buildings could only be considered in brief detail by this landscape character assessment, with emphasis placed on the relationship of settlements to the landscape context. The AONB includes a great variety of building styles and materials, varying from clunch, chalk and sarsen in the west to red brick and clay tile in the east. It does not have a unifying vernacular built form, as for example in the Chilterns or Cotswolds. A further detailed study of built character and the form of individual villages (including origin, evolution, pattern, layout) and buildings (origins, materials and style) using the initial findings of this landscape character assessment, is required to guide the future design and location of development. This AONB-wide study should provide the framework for more detailed local initiatives such as village design planning.

Detailed historic landscape characterisation of the AONB.

- 17.4. The time available for the historic component of this project was necessarily limited. The aim therefore has been to provide the historic dimension to landscape character, as opposed to a full, separate historic landscape characterisation. The area would benefit from a more detailed archaeological assessment, including:
- use of a GIS-based package so that information concerning both standing earthwork monuments and below surface finds could be combined with aerial photographic and survey data. This could be correlated to physical landscape characteristics such as elevation, aspect and slope, vegetation cover (past and present) and proximity to watercourses, for example. More detailed, local evidence from environmental archaeology should also be included. Such a project may then be in a position to compare and contrast the different landscape types and character areas, and to begin to offer interpretations of their historic evolution.
 - an investigation of other, less quantifiable aspects of past human inhabitation. These could take into account the importance (or not) of monument intervisibility for example, although GIS-based viewshed analysis may be one method of assessing this.
 - an examination of past human movement and occupation of the landscape. It could therefore begin the process of understanding the everyday lives and

routine practices of people in the past, and to see how this varied between different areas, or changed over time. This would therefore seek to address the theoretical problems inherent with a purely empirical and descriptive approach to the landscape.

- 17.5. An AONB wide study would provide a valuable baseline upon which to base management objectives that aim to conserve the rich archaeological resource and allow the targeting of archaeological resources where they might be used to best effect. There are also benefits to be gained in terms of predictive modelling, for example the understanding of the development of the landscape. The study would also provide a wealth of information for interpretation and educational purposes. The value of such a study is enhanced by providing a product that is easily accessible to other professions and the general public.

A review of farm performance.

- 17.6. The assessment has indicated that agriculture is central to the character of the North Wessex Downs. A more detailed review of farm performance will be essential to the development of future management initiatives. As part of the management plan, we suggest that it will be valuable to develop a more detailed picture of agricultural performance based on review of the MAFF small area statistics and economic modelling of different farm types. This should allow a better understanding of the extent to which the scenarios, outlined in the previous chapter, will be realised and therefore enhance the ability to manage future change. The review will also help target opportunities for environmental enhancement.

Development of a woodland strategy.

- 17.7. As part of the management plan it would be useful to apply the findings of the landscape character assessment to develop an AONB-wide woodland strategy. This would look at capacity and sensitivities to woodland creation and consider opportunities for commercial forestry, recreation of woodland habitats and small-scale tree and woodland planting. The strategy should consider the difficulties and opportunities that are associated with creating or recreating woodlands characteristic of each landscape type. This should include planting guidance for those involved in new planting schemes, such as developers, parish councils and landowners, and should cover desirable and undesirable species. It would also provide an opportunity to consider the capacity for renewable energy crops such as short rotation coppice. Such a study could provide a basis for discussions with the Forestry Commission to negotiate planting and management targets for the area.

Hedgerow restoration.

- 17.8. The assessment has indicated that the decline in hedgerows is a problem throughout the AONB. Areas that are farmed intensively have suffered greatest losses, but in addition there are also regional patterns, for example within Landscape Type 8 (Lowland Mosaics), the effects of Dutch Elm disease has been attributed for the loss of hedgerow trees.
- 17.9. A detailed assessment of the historical patterns of hedgerow loss was not possible during this assessment. However, the reinstatement of some of these hedgerows could contribute significantly to landscape character and the conservation of

biodiversity. Hedgerow planting initiatives should be guided by historical information on hedgerow loss, together with detailed characterisation of regional hedge species and management styles.

Heathland restoration.

- 17.10. A number of heathland creation and restoration schemes have been implemented within the AONB. These projects have been in response to the serious decline in open heath vegetation, and associated biodiversity. All areas of remnant heathland should be mapped and a database created to enable informed decisions regarding site selection and management. An AONB-wide programme of restoration should be established by using a GIS system and the database.

Chalk grassland database.

- 17.11. Chalk grassland is one of the defining features of the AONB, although these are now highly fragmented. The location of all chalk grassland SSSI and locally designated chalk grassland sites in the AONB have been plotted as part of this study. Important work on chalk grassland restoration is being undertaken through the Ridgeway Project with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (focussed on the Ridgeway corridor). This initiative has the potential to be extended across much larger areas of the North Wessex Downs. The database and GIS system should be used to identify opportunities for restoration and management to produce an AONB-wide strategy.

Biodiversity (general).

- 17.12. An initial aim should be to draw together all biodiversity data within the AONB, including all Local Wildlife and Heritage Sites to inform management objectives. It should also be recognised that there are a number of conservation advisory projects already working in the area (e.g. RSPB Stone Curlew Project/FWAG/HMAP). All existing projects must be identified to avoid any duplication of effort. In addition, a further objective would be to review all local BAPs and ensure that the targets and actions are considered during the preparation of the management plan.

A local produce strategy.

- 17.13. This study could explore the market potential for the future development of local food production in the AONB. With the potential emergence of a sector of small farms producing high quality goods the scope for developing local markets should be examined. The study could explore issues such as opportunities for farming specialist breeds and local retail potential for organic produce. This would inform agricultural policy in the management plan and provide valuable information for farmers considering producing for the local market.

Study of the changing social characteristics of the AONB.

- 17.14. As part of the present study the social characteristics of the North Wessex Downs were investigated using service level provision as a key element. Social characteristics could only be considered in terms of data that exists already. No primary research was undertaken, with much of the data used from a survey undertaken by the Rural Development Council (now Countryside Agency) in 1997.

It is likely that significant changes may have occurred that could effect these results, including the proposed automation of the post office network, changes in education policy impacting on rural schools, a change in national administration and more recently the impact of farming change, including Foot and Mouth. There is scope for using the emerging results of the Rural Services Survey 2000 and additional primary research to feed into a more in-depth study of the social characteristics of the AONB to enable a better understanding of the pressures facing rural communities and allow subsequent targeting of resources.

Tourism and recreation.

- 17.15. A vast number of linear and open access sites as well as other visitor attractions exist across the AONB. At present the approach to recreation and tourism provision in the North Wessex Downs is fragmented. The majority of recreation providers cannot identify the AONB area, which does not encourage a strong sense of identity. A comprehensive review of recreation and tourism in should be carried out including calculation of visitor numbers and income generated, an examination of the tourism infrastructure, and an assessment of specific market sectors to develop and expand to deliver sustainable tourism. The review would inform tourism/recreation policies that will be developed as part of the management plan to guide this important element of the AONB.

APPENDIX 1

METHOD STATEMENTS

THE SOCIAL CHARACTER OF THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB

METHOD STATEMENT

A study of the social characteristics of the North Wessex Downs AONB, was undertaken by the Community Council for Berkshire (CCB) to inform the wider Landscape Character Assessment.

Purpose: The study seeks to provide an insight into the social characteristics of the North Wessex Downs AONB. For the purpose of this report, "social characteristics include reference to:

- Population and demographic change
- Employment and the economy
- Housing
- Service provision

The study provides a summary of the social characteristics for the AONB as a whole, followed by a more detailed study of the social structure of Landscape Types, identified by LUC.

Sources of Information: The study draws on existing written material. Specific information on population, employment, housing and services was drawn from a variety of written material, referenced in the bibliography, from relevant County, District and Unitary authorities, the existing Downlands Conference and the four relevant Rural Community Councils.

Method: The data was reviewed to develop to develop the AONB-wide context. The second part of the report, is a more in depth study of social characteristics within the eight specific landscape types identified. Within each landscape type a number of parishes were selected randomly, but ensuring an AONB-wide geographic distribution, to provide case study examples of service provision, population change and housing within the area (using parish-based data).

Parish boundaries, naturally, are not always coincident with the Landscape Types. Indeed a particular characteristic of some parishes in the AONB is their long shape which takes in the lowland and spring line villages on the edge, climb the scarp and include the downs summits. For this reason the results must be considered as the 'broad' characteristics of the landscape type rather than an exact analysis of data at the Type level.

However, this approach does enable subtle differences in parishes in the different landscape types to be extracted. The results have been incorporated into the landscape type descriptions. The data is presented as a series of tables in Appendix 4.

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THE ECONOMIC CHARACTER OF THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB

METHOD STATEMENT

A study of the economic characteristics of the North Wessex Downs AONB, was undertaken to inform the wider landscape Character Assessment.

Purpose: The study seeks to provide an overview of the economic characteristics of the North Wessex Downs AONB. The economic characteristics of this rural area can not be considered in isolation and a particularly important element of the study has been on understanding the interrelationship between the AONB and the rapid economic growth of the surrounding urban areas, including Basingstoke, Andover, Swindon, Newbury and Reading.

Sources of Information: Statistical data relating specifically to economic factors in the AONB is difficult to obtain for two key reasons. Firstly it intersects with two economic regions, four counties and eight local authority districts, all of which collate data in a range of different ways. Secondly, a lot of nationally available data is not available at a sufficiently local scale to be useful to the AONB. Consequently, this report draws upon a number of different data sources. These include existing studies, rural strategies, farming studies and local economic strategies and policy documents along with information from nine telephone interviews to evaluate the economy of the North Wessex Downs AONB.

The telephone interviews with economic development professionals from the local authorities in which the AONB is situated sought to gain insight into the latest local economic issues within the AONB and gain information on the state of the local economy. These interviews complemented the literature review and helped to “bottom out” local economic issues which might have been missed due to the fragmented nature of the AONB with its numerous statutory boundaries. The study also drew on a paper prepared by the Rural Economy Working Group for the Downlands Conference in January, 1999.

Method: The data was reviewed to develop to develop the AONB-wide context with a summary of the economic character, populations and employment structure and key industries within the AONB. It was not possible to provide any finer grained characterisation e.g. by landscape type, although a broad distinction could be drawn between the core agriculture dominated areas of the AONB in comparison with the more settled border areas. The AONB can not be considered in isolation and the whole area is interlinked with and strongly influenced by the surrounding economies of Swindon, Newbury, Reading, Andover etc. and particularly in the eastern end by its proximity to London.

Central to the land use and character of the AONB, but only peripheral in economic terms is agriculture. A detailed review of farm performance is well beyond this current study yet will be essential to the development of future management initiatives. For the purpose of this study reference has been made to the County Agriculture Studies such as those for Hampshire and Oxfordshire. As part of the management plan it may subsequently prove valuable to develop a more detailed

picture of agricultural performance based on review of the MAFF small area statistics and economic modelling of different farm types.

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Council "Economic Characteristics of Kennet" (website)

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North Wiltshire District Council, Economic Development and Tourism Strategy

INTERVIEWEES

David Gleave – Test Valley Borough Council

Jamie Freeth – Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council

Steven Smyth – West Berkshire District Council

Jill Oliver – South Oxfordshire District Council

Phil Scott – Vale of White Horse District Council

A. Houghton - Kennet District Council

David Evans – North Wiltshire District Council

David Atkinson – Swindon Unitary Authority

Alan Cole – Hampshire County Council

RECREATION CHARACTER OF THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS

METHOD STATEMENT

Purpose: The study seeks to provide an insight into the recreation provision of the North Wessex Downs AONB. For the purpose of this report "recreation" has been defined to include informal recreation (walking, cycling, horse riding) and water recreation (canoeing, fishing etc.). The study has reviewed linear access, open access and visitor attractions in the AONB.

Sources of Information: Information on open access/linear routes and visitor attractions was drawn from a variety of written and mapped material, referenced at the end of this method statement, and from relevant local authorities. Consultations by phone and letter were carried out with a number of other recreation providers/landowners across the AONB. A full list of consultees is provided below.

Method: The information sources were reviewed to develop the AONB-wide context. The majority of the principal recreation sites, open access areas and linear routes have been identified and mapped. Recreation provision has been described at the landscape type level, however many of the consultees, have not responded to letters of enquiry so the study is not at this stage, exhaustive.

CONSULTEES

Cycling

Sustrans

Walking

Berkshire Ramblers Association

Wiltshire and Swindon Ramblers Association

Hampshire Ramblers Association

Oxfordshire Ramblers Association

National Trails Office

Other Activities

Horse riding: British Horse Society

Canoeing: British Canoe Union

Orienteering: British Orienteering Society

Gliding: British Gliding Association

Tourist Information Offices

Marlborough, Newbury, Wantage, Swindon, Didcot, Calne, Calne, Devizes, Avebury, Basingstoke and Hampshire Borders.

Regional Tourist Boards

West Country Tourist Board

Southern Tourist Board

Local Authority Officers

Test Valley Borough Council

Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council

West Berkshire District Council

Oxfordshire County Council

Kennet District Council

Swindon Unitary Authority

Wiltshire County Council

Hampshire County Council

Other land Owners/Managers

The National Trust: Wessex Region, Thames and Chilterns Region, and Southern Region.

The Woodland Trust

The Forestry Commission

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THE ECOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB

METHOD STATEMENT

Purpose: The study seeks to provide an overview of the current ecological characteristics of the North Wessex Downs AONB to inform the landscape character assessment and to identify those areas of particular value, current protection or management and opportunities for enhancement.

Sources of information: The key information sources of ecological data have been the SSSI, SAC and NNR citations obtained from English Nature for sites with statutory designations. Information covering non-statutory sites was not so easily sourced and a number of organisations, including Local Authorities and County Wildlife Trusts, were approached for information.

In addition, Natural Area Profiles were obtained from English Nature, along with Local Biodiversity Action Plans and existing Landscape Assessments undertaken by the individual county, district and unitary authorities.

Method: The information gathered from these various sources was used to create a database covering all the statutory and non-statutory sites in the North Wessex Downs. This database achieved full coverage of the AONB and represents a valuable ecological knowledge base. The information available for non-statutory sites was however, rather limited and so the database covers only essential details for these reserves such as site name, location and when available habitat type. To simplify terminology, sites with non-statutory designation are referred to throughout this report as 'non-statutory sites'. This generic term was chosen to avoid possible confusion associated with the use of other frequently used terms such as Wildlife Heritage Site (WHS), Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and Site of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINC), these latter terms are often used interchangeably.

With a complete database covering all statutory and non-statutory sites, the next step was to digitise the information and produce a GIS layer showing the distribution of these reserves within the AONB. By overlaying this layer with the boundaries of the Landscape Character Areas (LCA), it was possible to create tables listing the statutory and non-statutory reserves for each LCA. These tables are presented in a separate supplementary report.

Brief ecological descriptions were then prepared for each LCA, using the tables for reference together with map overlays and citations. The descriptions highlight the most characteristic habitat(s) associated with each LCA, indicating the number of statutory and non-statutory designations, and also note any areas of particular conservation importance.

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CONSULTEES

BBOWT (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust)

English Nature – Hampshire and Isle of Wight Team

English Nature – Thames and Chilterns Team

English Nature – Wiltshire Team

Hampshire Wildlife Trust

Hampshire County Council

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

APPENDIX 2

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2A. REFERENCES

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APPENDIX 3

FIELD RECORD SHEET

NORTH WESSEX AONB LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT FIELD SURVEY SHEET

Sheet No: _____ Photograph Nos: _____
 Location: _____ Date: _____
 Direction of view: _____ Time: _____
 OS Grid Reference: _____ Weather: _____

DRAFT LANDSCAPE TYPE _____

DRAFT LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA: _____
Keywords describing the landscape: _____

PHYSICAL FEATURES

LAND

- | | | | |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flat | <input type="checkbox"/> Cliff/precipice | <input type="checkbox"/> Escarpment | <input type="checkbox"/> Broad valley |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rolling | <input type="checkbox"/> Rock outcrops | <input type="checkbox"/> Ridge | <input type="checkbox"/> Narrow valley |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Undulating | <input type="checkbox"/> Plain | <input type="checkbox"/> Knoll | <input type="checkbox"/> Deep gorge |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Steep slopes | <input type="checkbox"/> Plateau | <input type="checkbox"/> Basin | <input type="checkbox"/> Gully |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gentle slopes | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Dry valley |

WATER

- | | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> River (size.....) | <input type="checkbox"/> Streams | <input type="checkbox"/> Drainage channels | <input type="checkbox"/> Lake |
| <input type="checkbox"/> River Meanders | <input type="checkbox"/> Canal | <input type="checkbox"/> Flooded gravel pits | <input type="checkbox"/> Pond |

LAND COVER

LAND USE

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Farmland | <input type="checkbox"/> Residential | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial | <input type="checkbox"/> Forestry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parkland | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial | <input type="checkbox"/> Transport | <input type="checkbox"/> Natural |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic Parkland | <input type="checkbox"/> Leisure/Recreation | <input type="checkbox"/> Mineral Working | |

VEGETATION COVER

- | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arable | <input type="checkbox"/> Amenity grassland | <input type="checkbox"/> Small farm woods | <input type="checkbox"/> Scrub/bracken |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Perm. pasture | <input type="checkbox"/> Common | <input type="checkbox"/> Shelterbelts | <input type="checkbox"/> Heathland |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pasture | <input type="checkbox"/> Parkland | <input type="checkbox"/> Copses | <input type="checkbox"/> Wetland/Aquatics |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ley/improved | <input type="checkbox"/> Avenues | <input type="checkbox"/> Scattered Trees | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rough grazing | <input type="checkbox"/> Conif woodland | <input type="checkbox"/> Orchards | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wet Meadow | <input type="checkbox"/> Decid. woodland | <input type="checkbox"/> Hedgerow trees | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chalk Grassland | <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed woodland | <input type="checkbox"/> Hedgerows | |

LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS/FEATURES ✓ Subtle ✓✓ Evident ✓✓✓ Conspicuous

<input type="checkbox"/>	Motorway	<input type="checkbox"/>	Farm buildings	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fortifications	<input type="checkbox"/>	Barrows
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dual Carriageway	<input type="checkbox"/>	Manor/Parkland	<input type="checkbox"/>	Isolated Church	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stone circle
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rural Road	<input type="checkbox"/>	Landmark Building	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/>	Linear settlement
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rural Lanes Track	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mills	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hill forts	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dispersed settlem.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sunken Lane	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lighthouse/beacon	<input type="checkbox"/>	Earthworks	<input type="checkbox"/>	Industrial workings
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bridleway	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wind turbines	<input type="checkbox"/>	Moats	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vernacular Builds.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Footpath	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mast/poles	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tumuli	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nucleated settlem.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Railway	<input type="checkbox"/>	Church	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ridge and furrow	<input type="checkbox"/>	

FIELD PATTERNS

<input type="checkbox"/>	Banks	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fence - rural	<input type="checkbox"/>	Geometric	<input type="checkbox"/>	Small
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ditches	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fence – ‘urban’	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sinuous	<input type="checkbox"/>	Medium
<input type="checkbox"/>	Walls - rural	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hedge	<input type="checkbox"/>	Irregular	<input type="checkbox"/>	Large
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wall – ‘urban’	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hedgerow trees	<input type="checkbox"/>	Regular	<input type="checkbox"/>	

PERCEPTION

VIEWES	distant	framed	intermittent	panoramic	corridor
SCALE	intimate	small	medium	large	
ENCLOSURE	confined	enclosed	semi-enclosed	open	exposed
VARIETY	complex	varied	simple	uniform	
TEXTURE	smooth	textured	rough	very rough	
COLOUR	monochrome	muted	colourful	garish	
MOVEMENT	remote	vacant	peaceful	active	
UNITY	unified	interrupted	fragmented	chaotic	
NATURALNESS	undisturbed	restrained	tamed	disturbed	

LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION (including notes about materials/condition)

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MANAGEMENT ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

(highlight condition/survival, threats/pressures, fragility/vulnerability, management issues and opportunities)

Agriculture

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Field patterns/boundaries

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Trees and woodland

.....
.....

Archaeology/historic components

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.....

Buildings/settlement/development

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Linear features

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.....

Quarrying/mineral reclamation

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Other land uses

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General Notes

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SKETCH AND NOTES

APPENDIX 4

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHARACTER LANDSCAPE TYPE ANALYSIS

APPENDIX 4: SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS

The information in this Appendix is taken from a study of the social characteristics of the villages within the North Wessex Downs AONB, undertaken by the Community Council for Berkshire (CCB) as part of the landscape character assessment. The information is presented by landscape type. The results have been used to inform each of the landscape type descriptions in the main body of the report.

LANDSCAPE TYPE I: OPEN DOWNLAND

Population

<i>Parish</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1999 / 2000 projection</i>
Fawley	118	161	166
Ogbourne St Andrew	277	260	320
West Ilsley	305	334	305
East Ilsley	389	434	519
Ogbourne St George	404	400	440
East Garston	527	543	571
Compton	1238	1307	1407
Aldbourne	1473	1680	1730
Lambourn	3522	3740	4265

Parishes within this area have all increased in population since 1981, some quite considerably. Only West Ilsley is expected to witness a decline in population between 1991 and 1999 / 2000 projections, however this is minimal.

Although still a fairly small settlement, Fawley's population has increased by 40%. The overall increase in population is interesting to observe as the nature of this landscape type would suggest a tendency for remote, scattered settlements with low service levels, and yet population of typical villages within the landscape type have grown considerably.

Services

<i>Parish</i>	<i>P.O.</i>	<i>General Shop</i>	<i>Banking Facility</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>G.P.</i>	<i>Meeting Place</i>	<i>Petrol Station</i>
Ogbourne St Andrew	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Ogbourne St George	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Fawley	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

East Ilsley	1	0	0	1	0	4	0
West Ilsley	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
East Garston	1	1	1	0	0	3	0
Compton	1	1	2	2	1	3	0
Aldbourne	1	2	0	1	0	1	0
Lambourn	1	2	1	1	1	6	1

Many of the parishes within the Open Downland landscape type have the benefit of a local post office, and a number have local banking facilities, which are usually available within the post office facility. However, few have a permanent general shop to serve them, and due to the remote nature of most of these villages, heavy reliance is placed on transport to enable access to basic services. Ultimately, this reliance is based around access to the private car. Within most of the parishes above, the services of a G.P. have to be accessed at communal surgeries based in more densely populated parishes nearby.

Petrol is unavailable within the majority of these parishes, many having lost this facility due to the pressures faced by garages in rural areas, although due to the nature of the landscape, access to petrol is a key requirement. Perhaps as a result of low service levels, many parishioners are likely to shop, carry out their banking affairs and purchase fuel when making one return journey to nearby market towns of Wantage, Hungerford or Marlborough.

The larger villages of Lambourn, Aldbourne and Compton, appear to act as key settlements in terms of service provision, and have a range of facilities to sustain a village community. In Lambourn particularly, the village has the benefit of a significant local employment base, and its high number of meeting places encourages its many interest groups and voluntary bodies that are active within the parish.

LANDSCAPE TYPE 2: DOWNLAND WITH WOODLAND

Population

Parish	1981	1991	1999 / 2000 projection
Lichfield & Woodcott	139	141	152
Peasemore	200	238	277
Ashmansworth	225	226	216
Chilton Foliat	283	300	340
Chute	286	310	340
Leckhampstead	322	321	322
Ashampstead	363	361	378
Collingbourne Kingston	441	450	480
Chaddleworth	502	475	539
Hurstbourne Tarrant	709	691	827
Burghclere	1203	1125	1044
Basildon	1349	1545	1559

Most of the parishes within this area have steadily increased in population over the past 20 years. This landscape type is particularly attractive and small settlements dominate in the area. Therefore, it is likely that the population increase witnessed by the parishes shown above, is due in part to the attractive quality of the area and the proximity to significant transport routes. Only Ashmansworth appears to have witnessed a small decline in population between 1991 and 1999 / 2000 projections. Burghclere, however, has experienced a greater decline of almost 13%, although such a considerable change could be due to boundary changes or the loss of a significant local employer.

Services

<i>Parish</i>	<i>P.O.</i>	<i>General Shop</i>	<i>Banking Facility</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>G.P.</i>	<i>Meeting Place</i>	<i>Petrol Station</i>
Hurstbourne Tarrant							
Peasemore	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Leckhampstead	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Ashampstead	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Chilton Foliat	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Chute	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Collingbourne Kingston	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Lichfield & Woodcott	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Basildon	1	0	0	1	0	2	2
Ashmansworth	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Burghclere	1	0	0	2	0	4	1
Chaddleworth	1	1	0	1	0	2	0

Despite this area proving to be a popular place to live, it is very poorly served in terms of village services. A number of parishes have managed to maintain small village primary schools, though these are likely to have mixed age range classes, due to the low numbers of children on the roll.

General shopping, banking opportunities and the services of a G.P. have to be accessed outside of this locality, and few parishes have the benefit of a post office.

This situation suggests a high proportion of commuters within this area, which indicates high car ownership and high traffic levels.

LANDSCAPE TYPE 3: WOODED PLATEAU

Due to the nature of the landscape, there are few settlements within this landscape type, and the two identified below are the only parishes of any size where information was available.

Population

Parish	1981	1991	1999/2000 projection
Froxfield	288	360	370
Great Bedwyn	971	1180	1270

Within both parishes, the populations have increased steadily since 1981, culminating in a rise of approximately 30% based on 1999 / 2000 projections.

This steady growth may indicate that successive generations of families who are born within the area remain for the duration of their lifetime. It is not expected that there are high proportions of commuters or new settlers contributing to this steady increase, as the area is fairly unsettled with limited ease of access to major transport links.

Services

Parish	P.O.	General Shop	Banking Facility	School	G.P.	Meeting Place	Petrol Station
Froxfield	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Great Bedwyn	1	1	0	1	1	3	0

As might be expected for a small settlement, Froxfield does not have any local services. Its community only has the use of a village hall.

Great Bedwyn, with a greater population, has a range of services although parishioners have to travel to the neighbouring market town of Hungerford for banking facilities and to visit the nearest petrol station.

LANDSCAPE TYPE 4: HIGH CHALK PLAIN

No parishes identifiable.

LANDSCAPE TYPE 5: DOWNS PLAIN AND SCARP

Population

Parish	1981	1991	1999 / 2000 projection
Broad Town	575	570	540
Clyffe Pypard	299	320	280
Chiseldon	2454	2670	2610
Letcombe Basset	185	174	158
Lockinge	N.A.	177	163
East Hendred	1104	1027	913
Chilton	963	820	984
Moulsford	469	438	451

Many of the parishes within this landscape type have experienced a small decrease in their population over the past 20 years.

The populations of Letcombe Bassett and East Hendred have experienced a greater out-migration, by approximately 15%

Services

Parish	P.O.	General Shop	Banking Facility	School	G.P.	Meeting Place	Petrol Station
Broad Town	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
Clyffe Pypard	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bishopstone	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
Letcombe Bassett	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Lockinge	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Moulsford	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
East Hendred	1	1	0	2	0	6	0
Chilton	1	1	0	1	0	2	1
Chiseldon	1	3	0	1	1	4	1

The parishes within this landscape type are quite poorly served in terms of facilities. This may contribute to the fact that many of the parishes have witnessed a population decline over the last twenty years. In fact, the only parish shown to have increased population, Chiseldon, has the greatest range of facilities. However as in all of the other parishes listed, there are no banking services available.

There does tend to be opportunities for socialising within these parishes by means of the provision of a significant number of meeting places. This may indicate a high level of community activity. Within many of the smaller parishes, including Lockinge and Letcombe Bassett this is the only facility available.

This reliance upon services available elsewhere would suggest high car ownership within the area and thus high traffic levels.

LANDSCAPE TYPE 6: VALES

Population

Parish	1981	1991	1999 / 2000 projection
Woodborough	270	270	270
Ashbury	N.A.	503	470
East Garston	527	543	571
Shalbourne	560	550	550
Burbage	1319	1420	1600

There are no striking observations to make on the population change of typical parishes within this landscape type, as the populations of many of the parishes within this landscape area have remained fairly static over the past 20 years. Burbage is perhaps the exception, witnessing a significant growth of over 20%.

Services

<i>Parish</i>	<i>P.O.</i>	<i>General Shop</i>	<i>Banking Facility</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>G.P.</i>	<i>Meeting Place</i>	<i>Petrol Station</i>
East Garston	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Woodborough	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
Shalbourne	1	1	0	1	0	2	1
Burbage	1	1	0	1	1	4	1
Ashbury	1	1	0	1	0	1	0

Villages in this area are comparatively well served by local services, and the increase in population in Burbage has been met by the development of services to meet the growing needs of the developing community.

Unlike other villages in other landscape types, parishes within the Vale areas have retained small village schools, although there are no separate banking facilities available throughout the area.

With the exception of Burbage, the smaller parishes do not have access to their own locally based G.P. and do not have petrol available locally. It is anticipated that due to the location of this landscape type, dependency upon the private car must be significant within this area.

LANDSCAPE TYPE 7: RIVER VALLEYS

Population

<i>Parish</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1999 / 2000 projection</i>
Boxford	439	487	501
Welford	528	553	583
Ramsbury	1557	1880	1860
St Mary Bourne	2509	2287	3006
Marlborough	5749	7540	8010

Parishes within this area have all increased in population since 1981, some quite considerably.

Marlborough has experienced a significant increase in population of almost 40%.

These figures show the Kennet Valley and the Lambourn Valley as an increasingly popular place to live, particularly within this area, where the nearby Motorway (M4) enhances accessibility.

Services

<i>Parish</i>	<i>P.O.</i>	<i>General Shop</i>	<i>Banking Facility</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>G.P.</i>	<i>Meeting Place</i>	<i>Petrol Station</i>
Boxford	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Welford	1	0	0	1	0	3	1
St Mary Bourne	1	0	0	1	1	4	0
Ramsbury	1	2	1	1	1	0	1
Marlborough	2	27	6	4	1	3	5

As with variations in population, the service provision within parishes also varies considerably. Perhaps this highlights different priorities for service provision on the part of the relevant Local Authorities operating within this area. It is interesting to note that Ramsbury has a relatively high population and has a range of services yet does not have a meeting place within its parish. In contrast, Welford, which is a much smaller parish in terms of population, is quite poorly serviced yet has 3 meeting places. Perhaps this suggests that within a smaller community its members have a greater involvement within village activities.

In terms of its population, St Mary Bourne is poorly serviced and its parishioners must be heavily reliant upon the use of the car to get to facilities in the neighbouring town of Andover.

The presence of the significant market town of Marlborough within this landscape type suggests that it serves not only its resident population but also those in villages who are on its peripheral edge. This may suggest that where the two main market towns of Marlborough and Hungerford are situated, the parishes nearby may suffer from low service provision as they are affected by the services within the two market towns.

LANDSCAPE TYPE 8: LOWLAND MOSAIC

Population

<i>Parish</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1999 / 2000 projection</i>
Englefield	171	253	269
Yattendon	240	288	331
Inkpen	699	859	830
Hermitage	945	1105	1103
Bradfield	1414	1570	1673
Highclere	1474	1345	1462
Cold Ash	1870	2661	2981
East Woodhay	1965	2514	2756
Bucklebury	2300	2137	2150

The majority of the parishes within this area have increased in population since 1981, some quite considerably. The populations of Englefield and Cold

Ash have increased by over 50% during the past 20 years. Yattendon and East Woodhay have also become very popular places to live.

It would be expected that the location of this landscape type, i.e. on the periphery of the AONB, and near settlements such as Newbury and Reading, would give rise to a higher proportion of outbound commuting. It is reasonable therefore, to suggest that the relative growth in population of this area would be of those wishing to relocate to a more rural location yet still commute daily to urban workplaces.

Services

Parish	P.O.	General Shop	Banking Facility	School	G.P.	Meeting Place	Petrol Station
Hermitage	1	0	0	1	0	2	2
Bradfield	1	0	1	1	1	4	1
Cold Ash	1	0	1	2	0	4	2
Inkpen	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Highclere	0	1	0	1	0	3	0
Yattendon	1	1	1	1	0	2	1
Englefield	1	1	1	1	0	3	0
East Woodhay	1	2	1	3	1	4	1
Bucklebury	2	2	0	1	1	3	1

East Woodhay is noticeably well served in terms of local facilities.

All of the parishes within this area have meeting places; many have more than one.

However, for the majority, G.P. facilities are located outside of the parish at group practise surgeries.

The tendency to provide a petrol station within these parishes as opposed to a local shop or G.P. surgery suggests a high proportion of commuters within this area, which indicates high car ownership, high traffic levels and poorly used local services where they do exist.

In comparison to all of the other landscape areas within the North Wessex Downs, parishes within this particular landscape area are by far better serviced by local facilities than those in any other area.

CONCLUSIONS AND FORCES FOR CHANGE

SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS

Population

- The area has experience population growth over the last twenty years
- Few of the parishes identified have seen a population decline
- There is a perceived loss of younger people from villages

- There has been an increase in number of those commuting to work

Employment

- Much outbound employment occurs
- Land use traditionally has been agriculture
- There is falling agricultural employment and incomes
- New industry is developing where transport infrastructure permits
- Tourism is becoming a growing sector

Housing

- There is significant pressure for development
- Average house prices are high
- There is a lack of affordable housing

Services

- High car ownership
- Some villages have low accessibility to basic services

APPENDIX 5

CONSULTEES

NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB LCA: TECHNICAL REPORT

CONSULTEES

Mr David Ball (MAFF, SW Region)
Ms Judith Barrett (Downlands Conference Steering Group)
Mr David Bett (National Trust, Wessex Region)
Mr Alan Betts (Forestry Commission)
Mr David Bibby/Mr Peter Phillips (Test Valley Borough Council)
Mr Roy Bishop (SEEDA)
Mr Matthew Bodley (English Heritage)
* Mr Tim Boschi (Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council)
* Mr Patrick Cashman (English Nature, Wiltshire Team)
* Mr Clive Chatters (Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust)
Mr Duncan Coe (Wiltshire County Council)
Mr Peter Colling (Southern Tourist Board)
* Mr Richard Copas (Environment Agency)
Ms Caroline Cotterell (Countryside Agency)
The Conservator (The Forestry Commission)
Ms Judy Crompton (Environment Agency, S.W Region)
Mr Andrew Davis (Country Landowners Association)
* Mr Jeremy Davy (West Berkshire Council)
* Ms Tracey Dow (South Oxfordshire District Council)
Mr Ian Duffin (Downlands Conference Steering Group)
Mr Bill Duncan (Downlands Conference Steering Group)
Mr Richard Emmens (MAFF, SE Region)
C.J. Gingell (National Trust, Wessex Region)
* Mr John Hall-Craggs (Downlands Conference Steering Group)
Ms Jane Hallett (Defence Estates)
Mr Will Harley (Kennet District Council)
* Ms Penelope Hart (Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council)
Ms Jo Hawkins (Downlands Conference Steering Group)
Ms Jos Joslin (The National Trails Office, Ridgeway and Thames Path)
* Dot Williams (Wiltshire Tourism)
Ms Mary Lamb (Vale of White Horse District Council)
* Mr Mark Lang (Wiltshire Wildlife Trust)
* Mr Shaun Leavey (National Farmers Union, South East Region)
Mr Lee Locke (RSPB, South West Region Office)
Mr Frank Lucas (RSPB, South East Region Office)
Dr. Gary Mantle MBE (Wiltshire Wildlife Trust)
Mr Christopher NB Marriage (Downlands Conference Steering Group)
Mr. R. Mills (National Trust, Thames and Chilterns Region)
Mr R J Moulton (Downlands Conference Steering Group)
* Ms Amanda Newsome (English Nature, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Team)
Mr Patrick Norris (Downlands Conference Steering Group, selected)
Mr Keith Payne (English Nature, Thames and Chiltern Team)
* Ms Melanie Pomeroy (Avebury Management Plan Co-ordinator)
Mr Julian Sayers (Downlands Conference Steering Group)
* Ms Lesley Sproat (Environment Agency, Thames Region, West Area Office)
Mr Bill Scott (Thames Valley Enterprise Ltd)
Mr Steven Smallman (Downlands Conference Steering Group)
* Mr Duncan McCallum (English Heritage)
Mr Paul Smith (Oxfordshire County Council)

Mr Martin Spray (Bucks, Berks and Oxon Wildlife Trust)
Mr Tim Sykes (Environment Agency, Southern Region)
* Ms Charlotte Riggs (Swindon Borough Council)
* Ms Linda Tartaglia-Kershaw (Hampshire County Council)
* Mr Bob Young (Community Council for Berkshire)
* Mr Keith Wheal (Oxfordshire County Council)
Mr Colin White (North Wiltshire District Council)
Mr Bob Winfield (Downlands Conference Steering Group)
* Mr Jonathan Woodcock (English Nature, Thames and Chiltern Team)

* Indicates response received

NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB LCA: ISSUES REPORT

CONSULTEES

Mr Anthony Adamson (Bishops Canning Parish Council)
Mr C Allen (D C & R J Allen and Partners)
Mr Nick Allen (NFU North Hampshire)
Mrs Sheila Allen
Mr Richard Atkins (Three Valleys Water)
Ms Maureen Avens (Berkshire Association of Local Councils)
* Lady Jeannine Barber (CPRE)
* Mr William W Brown (Aldbourn Parish Council)
Mr Tim Browne (Cherhill Parish Council)
Mrs Barbara Bryant (North Hampshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry)
Mr Denis Butcher (Chieveley Parish Council)
* Dr Robin Buxton (Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum)
* Mr Gavin Parker (The University of Reading)
Mrs G Calder (Village Appraisal Contact)
Ms Caggy Canning (Community First)
Cllr Bryony Canning (Burghclere Parish Council)
Mr Nigel Carter
Dr G Chancellor (Wiltshire Archaeological & Natural History Society)
Pat Clarke (Highclere Parish Council)
Prof E J T Collins (University of Reading)
Ms Lisa Coward (Wiltshire FWAG)
Ms Pat Crabb (Ramblers Association)
Ms Carolyn Dooley (European Funding Consultancy)
Mr G Evans (Compton Parish Council)
Mr Roger Facer (The Ramblers Association)
* Mr Mike Faiers (Burghclere Parish Council)
Ms Kate Fielden (CPRE, Kennet Group)
Mr David Fisher (Village Retail Service Assoc)
* Mrs B Fowler (Hungerford Parish Council)
* D A W Gardiner (Green Lanes Environmental Action Movement)
Mr Steve Gilbert (RSPB South East Region)
Mr Andy Glencross (Countryside Service Wokingham District Council)
Mrs Maureen Glenister (Tenant Farmers Association)
Mr E Golton (CPRE Berkshire)
* Mr Terry Kemp (British Waterways)
Lady Goff (Chieveley Parish Council)
* Mr R Gore (West Ilsey Parish Council)
W J R Govett (Fosbury Estate)
Mr D N Gower (Pang Valley Conservation Volunteers)
Cllr. Gill Hall (Cold Ash Parish Council)
* D F Harbottle (Facombe Estate Ltd)
Mr John Hardwicke (Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils)
Mr Rob Harrison (Collingbourne Parish Council)
* Dr Stephen Head (Northmoor Trust)
Mr M Holt (Collingbourne Kingston Parish Council)
Ms Suzanne Hudson (Hampshire Association of Local Councils)
Mr Jack Ibbott (Ramblers Association, Oxfordshire Area)
Mrs Margaret Ibbott (Ramblers Association, Oxfordshire Area)
Mr John Kirkman (CPRE)

Mr Brian Langer (Overton Parish Council)
Mr Michael Leavey (CPRE, West Berks)
* Mr Bill Lewis (Collingbourne Kingston Parish Council)
Mr Bill McCardle (Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and Industry)
* Mr Richard Hugh Nicholson (Chair Litchfield and Woodcott Parish Meeting)
Mr Robert Owen (Swindon Chamber of Commerce & Industry)
Ms Philippa Read (Community First)
Ms Phillippa Reed (Wiltshire Association of Local Councils)
Mrs Penny Reid (British Horse Society)
Ms Dee Reeves (Letcombe Regis Parish Council)
Ms Emily Richmond (Ramblers Association)
Ms Fleur De Rhe-Philippe (Kennet and Avon Canal Trust)
Ms Patricia Phipps (Rural Housing Trust)
Ms Sue Roberts (Chair Highclere Parish Council)
Mr Ed Rowsell (Berks, Bucks and Oxon FWAG)
Ms Meryl Smith (Oxfordshire RCC)
Mr Mike Spence
Mr Richard Tulloch (Community Action Hampshire)
* Ms Sally Wallington (Pang and Kennet Valley Countryside Project)
Mr Peter Walwyn (Lambourn Trainers Association)
Mrs. Wickham (British Horse Society)
Mr Michael Williams (Wessex Chamber of Commerce and Industry)
Mr Jan Wilson (Andover Chamber of Commerce)
Major General Withall (Chute Parish Council)
* Mr Peter Woodman (Kingsclere Parish Council)

* Indicates response received

APPENDIX 6

INDICATORS

INDICATORS FOR THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB

LANDSCAPE TYPE 1: OPEN DOWNLAND		
Key Feature	Direction of Change	Objective
Sense of remoteness/openness	Development e.g. tall structures on skyline. Impact of noise – roads or aircraft, plus increase in residential development in this sparsely populated area	Maintain sense of remoteness and sparsely populated character
Chalk grassland	In the past, conversion to arable. More recently lack of grazing livestock leading to loss of quality and scrub encroachment	Maintain existing intact chalk grassland and seek to restore chalk grassland to link existing isolated sites
Farmland birds e.g. stone curlew, skylark and yellowhammer	In the past, loss through intensification of farming. Some recent recovery through agri-environment management	Increase the population of breeding farmland birds
Ephemeral winterbournes	Abstraction – low flows	Maintain water flows
Visible prehistoric monuments (long and round barrows)	Loss of features to ploughing. Some erosion and scrub encroachment	Maintain extant monuments as visible landscape features
LANDSCAPE TYPE 2: DOWNLAND WITH WOODLAND		
Key Feature	Direction of Change	Objective
Peaceful, secluded, rural character	Intense development pressures including tall structures on ridges, road improvements and demand for residential development. Increase in traffic on rural lanes	Maintain peaceful, rural character
Open downland areas juxtaposed with more enclosed woodland	Generally stable pattern of landcover	Maintain pattern of woodland and open downland
Extensive interconnected	Removal and poor management of hedgerows,	Maintain/Restore the connected pattern of woodland

woodland cover	lack of appropriate woodland management	cover. Promote appropriate management of woods and hedgerows
Bronze Age and Iron Age hillforts on prominent hilltops	Generally stable. Some erosion as a result of intensive recreational use	Maintain extant monuments as visible landscape features. Manage recreational use
Historic parks and designed landscapes (medieval deer parks)	Generally stable	Maintain character of historic parks and gardens. Opportunities for restoration e.g. in association with redevelopment/reuse of associated buildings
Distinct pattern of settlement – small villages and hamlets plus scattered farmsteads	Development pressures – new housing, plus absence of affordable housing – change in social character. Decline in local services and loss of village vibrancy	Maintain vibrant and balanced village communities. Maintain existing settlement pattern of small scattered villages and hamlets
Network of winding rural lanes including sunken lanes	Increase in traffic and lane improvements creating a more urban character	Maintain the character of the quiet rural lanes
LANDSCAPE TYPE 3: WOODED PLATEAU		
Key Feature	Direction of Change	Objective
Extensive and continuous pattern of woodland cover including ancient trees of Savernake Forest	Loss of quality - need for appropriate woodland management.	Maintain the pattern of woodland cover with large scale blocks of woodland. Promote appropriate management of woods and hedgerows
Historic parkland and formal designed landscapes	Generally stable	Maintain character of historic parks and gardens. Opportunities for restoration e.g. in association with forestry operations.
Relict heathland	Small fragmented areas, loss due to lack of management	Maintain in existing heathland areas – opportunity for restoration to link fragmented sites
Distinct settlement pattern – red brick villages concentrated in the Dun valley	Intense development pressures (rail links to London), absence of affordable housing – change in social character. Decline in local services and loss of village vibrancy	Maintain vibrant and balanced village communities. Maintain existing settlement character of small nucleated red brick villages along the Dun Valley

LANDSCAPE TYPE 4: HIGH CHALK PLAIN		
Key Feature	Direction of Change	Objective
Large scale, open remote character	Generally stable	Maintain large scale, open, remote character
Long views out over the Vale of Pewsey from pronounced scarp – forming dominant skyline feature	Generally stable, threat of development e.g. tall structures along the skyline	Maintain undeveloped character and clear scarp top skyline
Prehistoric archaeology – Neolithic long mound and numerous round barrows	Generally stable (in the past loss through plough damage)	Maintain extant monuments as visible landscape features
Farmland birds including stone curlew and skylark	In the past loss through intensification of farming. Some recent recovery through agri-environment management	Increase the population of breeding farmland birds
LANDSCAPE TYPE 5: DOWNS PLAINS AND SCARP		
Key Feature	Direction of Change	Objective
Scarp		
Chalk grasslands along steep scarp slopes	Absence of grazing – some scrubbing over	Maintain\Restore linked network of chalk grassland
Linear hanger woodlands, plus hedgerow boundaries	Loss of hedgerows and absence of appropriate woodland and hedge management	Maintain\Restore the connected pattern of woodland cover. Promote appropriate management of woods and hedgerows
Visible Bronze Age round barrows and Iron Age hillforts characteristically located along the skyline	In the past loss of monuments to the plough, some erosion through intensive recreational use or scrubbing over. Positive changes through Ridgeway HLF Initiative	Maintain unique complex of monuments along the scarp
Prehistoric route of the Ridgeway	Damage by intensive recreational use. Positive	Maintain\Restore character of the Ridgeway

along the scarp top	management through Ridgeway HLF Initiative and outcome of the CROW Act	
Attractive villages located along the springline	Development pressures –new housing, plus absence of affordable housing – change in social character. Decline in local services and loss of vibrancy	Maintain vibrant and balanced village communities. Maintain settlement character of compact villages at springline
Plain		
Flat, open, landscape – long views, absence of development	Development\redevelopment of former airfield sites – highly visible plus associated traffic, lighting impacts	Maintain open, undeveloped character
Avebury Plain – focus for unique complex of Neolithic Monuments (World Heritage Site)	Positive management through the WHS Management Plan	Conserve the unique complex of archaeological sites and their landscape setting
LANDSCAPE TYPE 6: VALES		
Key Feature	Direction of Change	Objective
Dominant 'borrowed' landscape of the surrounding chalk downs	Generally stable, threat of development e.g. tall structures along the skyline	Maintain undeveloped character and clear skylines surrounding the Vale
Settled landscape with concentration of compact small towns, villages and hamlets set within a quiet rural landscape	Intense development pressures – expanding villages. Localised intrusion of infrastructure roads, power lines, pylons	
Numerous watercourses and associated wetland habitats (waterside pasture and riparian woodland)	In the past losses of wetland habitats as a result of intensive farming practices (drainage)	Restore\Recreate riparian woodlands and waterside pastures and wet meadows
Network of hedgerow boundaries	Loss of hedgerows and lack of management	Maintain\Restore the hedgerow network

LANDSCAPE TYPE 7: RIVER VALLEYS		
Key Feature	Direction of Change	Objective
Clear fast flowing waters and important chalk river habitats	Abstraction – low flows and decline in water quality	Maintain high water quality and water flows
Diverse wetland habitats including wet woodland, water meadows, grazed pastures, marsh and fen	Loss through intensification in farming – drainage Recent agri-environment initiatives- positive effects	Maintain\Restore wetland habitats
Concentration of settlement, tiny hamlets, villages and market towns clustered at bridging points	Development pressures – expansion of settlements along the valley sides (coalescence)	Maintain distinct pattern of discrete valley settlements
Remnants of past land uses – including water meadows, mills and watercress beds	Loss through neglect\imposition of new land uses	Record and retain elements of former land uses as a historic resource
Enclosed, intimate character	Localised intrusion of roads and traffic (e.g. M4, A4), power lines and cables and development pressures	Maintain enclosed, intimate character and sense of rural tranquillity
LANDSCAPE TYPE 8: LOWLAND MOSAIC		
Key Feature	Direction of Change	Objective
Extensive connected woodland, mosaic – ancient semi-natural woods and plantations	Lack of appropriate management	Maintain the extensive woodland cover and promote appropriate management
Remnant heathland on gravel ridges	Loss through conversion to forestry and or lack of management	Restore the lowland heathland resource to extend and link isolated areas
Densely settled – compact villages nucleated around a church or green as well as a more dispersed	Increasing population – intense development pressures due to accessibility to London and peripheral towns	Maintain the distinctive pattern of settlement and prevent gradual, expansion, merging and coalescence

pattern derived from squatter settlement		
Intricate network of wooded sunken rural lanes	Increase in traffic, particularly commuter traffic resulting in road improvements – kerbing, signage, lighting and a more urban character	Maintain the character of the rural lanes
Historic landscape parks (originating as medieval deer parks)	Generally stable	Maintain character of historic parks and gardens. Opportunities for restoration e.g. in association with redevelopment\reuse of associated buildings
