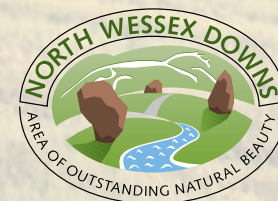


Management Plan 2019-2024

North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



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{ NORTH WESSEX
DOWNS
One of the
AONB Family

Produced on behalf of the Council of Partners

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all those who have assisted in the preparation of this Management Plan. In particular, we would like to thank the following:

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We would also like to thank Ted Hiscocks, Chairman of the Council of Partners, for his leadership and support.

This document is the statutory Management Plan for the nationally designated protected landscape of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), as required under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000. It is a plan for all those that have a responsibility to look after this precious and treasured landscape.

Following informal consultation in 2017, an initial draft was approved by the Partnership in July 2018 and published for public consultation between August and November 2018. All comments received were reviewed and recommendations approved by the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Working Group and a Management Plan Review Group, created to oversee the process on behalf of the Council of Partners. The North Wessex Downs Council of Partners and relevant local authorities have approved this Plan for publication.

Assessment, associated documents and further map data can all be found on the North Wessex Downs website:

www.northwessexdowns.org.uk. For Historic Environment mapping data visit: www.historicnorthwessexdowns.org.uk

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Foreword



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

I am delighted to welcome publication of this Statutory Management Plan
for the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

I am fortunate that England's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are part of my Ministerial responsibilities. Whether it be rolling hills, sweeping coastline or a tranquil village, spending time in an AONB can stir the heart and lift the spirit.

This is a pivotal moment for all AONBs. The Government has set its ambition in the 25 Year Environment Plan which states clearly the importance of natural beauty as part of our green future, while AONBs retain the highest status of protection for landscape through national planning policy. Leaving the EU brings with it an opportunity to develop a better system for supporting our farmers and land managers, who play such a vital role as stewards of the landscape. And the Review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty led by Julian Glover – the first of its kind for generations – has made recommendations to make sure our designated landscapes can flourish in the years ahead.

In my visits to AONBs around the country, I have been struck by the passion of many people – farmers, volunteers, and hard-working staff – for the beautiful places they live and work in. In this spirit I am delighted to welcome publication of this Statutory Management Plan for the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is significant that this plan will be delivered in partnership by those who value the North Wessex Downs. I would like to thank all those involved in preparation of this document, and wish you the best of success in bringing it to fruition.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gardiner of Kimble".

*Lord Gardiner of Kimble, Under Secretary of State (Minister for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity),
Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs*



Figure 1. Regional context of the North Wessex Downs AONB with other protected landscapes. Contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database rights 2019. Ordnance Survey 100051200.

Page 5 Looking across the Downs towards Newbury, Peter Orr



Introduction



It is vital that we do our utmost to protect and increase the huge benefits that our outstandingly beautiful landscape brings

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 the local authority members of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership have a statutory duty to produce a Management Plan for their designated landscape. This is the fourth North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan since the Partnership was established. The Plan has been drawn up after wide consultation and sets out strategic objectives for the period 2019 to 2024. It belongs to our nine local authority partners and is intended to guide the relevant activities of local authorities as well as Government agencies, businesses, communities and individuals in the North Wessex Downs.

Through the Management Plan, the AONB Partnership and staff team are actively involved in a variety of projects and other activities. Over the past five years, despite some challenging circumstances, much has been achieved and the foundations laid for future progress. A summary of activities under the previous Plan may be found elsewhere in this document, but the breadth of achievement ranges across governance, funding, farming, heritage, community, recreation, nature conservation, planning, natural resource management, communication, tourism, education, and arts projects to engage people with the landscape that surrounds them.

Straitened public finances continue to impose greater demands on the AONB Partnership. These demand imaginative responses. Under the previous Plan, the Partnership began to create a broader-based and more resilient framework for supporting the future of the North Wessex Downs, incorporating elements of the public, charitable and private sectors. This evolution will continue,

guided by the outcomes of the Glover review of designated landscapes and changes to the system of public support for land management.

Today we understand our interdependence and reliance upon the natural world better than ever before. The North Wessex Downs landscape and the AONB Partnership charged with its conservation and enhancement face greater pressures and threats than ever. Designation as an AONB does not guarantee protection for natural beauty, or enhancement; it is vital that we do our utmost to protect and increase the huge benefits that our outstandingly beautiful landscape brings. Our society benefits from its influence on our health and wellbeing and the cultural value that it represents. Our prosperity relies on our fund of natural capital – the essential goods and services that the natural environment provides and performs. Understanding what this means for managing the North Wessex Downs AONB and how we can encourage and reward beneficial management and prevent harmful change will be the core of our mission during the life of this Management Plan.

I would like to thank all the people and organisations who have contributed to the work of the North Wessex Downs Partnership and the development of this Plan, in particular our nine local authority partners. I hope that everyone who reads this Plan will be able to contribute in some way to its success.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'T. J. S. Hiscocks'.

*Ted Hiscocks, Chairman of the Council of Partners,
North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*

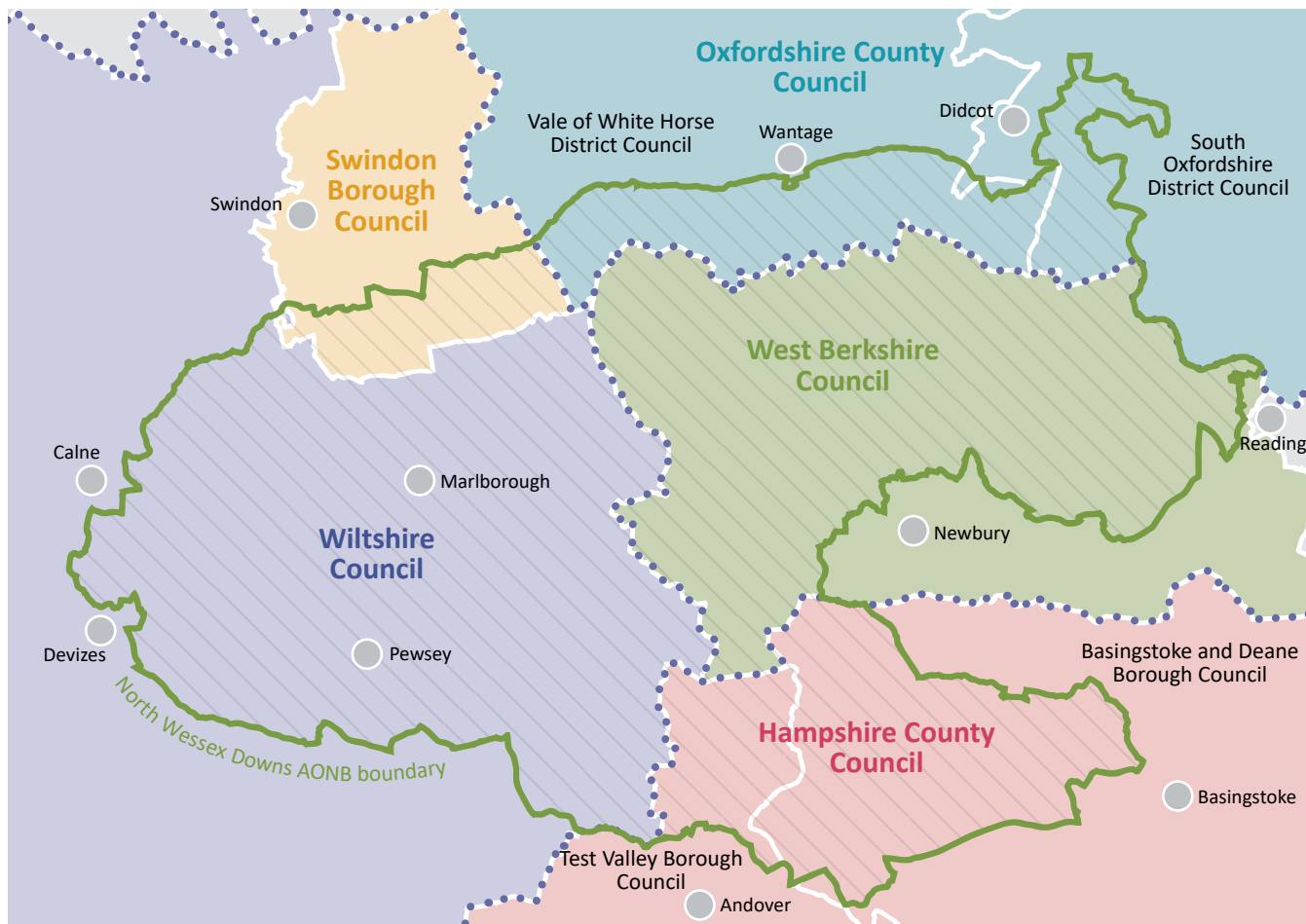


Figure 2. The partners of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database rights 2019. Ordnance Survey 100051200.

Page 7 Celebrating the landscape, Nigel Hutchings



Context and Framework

Setting the Scene

Providing a vision and long-term ambitions for the North Wessex Downs AONB from 2019 to 2024

1.1 The first two chapters of the 2019-24 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan set out a vision and long-term ambitions for the North Wessex Downs and the legal and policy framework for the Plan.

1.2 This is followed by thematic chapters which describe and explain the special qualities that make this landscape unique: Landscape, Rural Land Management, Biodiversity, Natural Resources, Historic Environment, Development, Communities, and Tourism, Leisure and Access. At the end of each thematic chapter are: a summary of the Special Qualities relating to that theme; the key issues relating to the theme; Strategic Objectives for the Plan period; and the AONB Policies to support these objectives and which are intended to guide and inform the policies and actions of all members of the North Wessex Downs Partnership.

1.3 The final chapters of the Plan cover implementation and monitoring of the Plan, including an outline of how stakeholders are expected to contribute to delivering Strategic Objectives and Policies. The Management Plan is supported by an AONB business plan that sets out the priorities for action on an annual 'review and revise' cycle.

About the North Wessex Downs

1.4 From their western tip at Calne in Wiltshire, the North Wessex Downs reach across central southern

England in a broad eastward arc through southern Swindon and Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. They abut the Chilterns AONB along the River Thames in the Goring Gap area north-west of Reading, dipping south and then sweeping west along the River Kennet valley then south to encircle Newbury, encompassing the northern reaches of the rolling chalk hills of the Hampshire Downs. They then stretch back towards Devizes, across the northern fringes of the high chalk upland of Salisbury Plain and the low-lying Vale of Pewsey.

1.5 The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is the third largest AONB in the country. This protected landscape extends to 1,730 km² (668 sq miles), an area equivalent to a medium-sized English county. Its resident population is just over 100,000 people (an average density across the AONB of 58.3 residents per km²); the two largest settlements inside the AONB boundary, Hungerford and Marlborough, have a total population of 13,100¹. In contrast, in the immediate setting of the North Wessex Downs, lie the significant urban centres of Reading, Newbury, Basingstoke, Andover, Swindon and Didcot, with a combined population of 615,000. An estimated 1.1 million residents live within 20 minutes' drive time of the AONB.

1.6 Two major highways – the M4 and A34 – pass through the area, aligned east-west and north-south respectively; the twin-track railway from London Paddington to Exeter and the South West passes through the centre of the AONB, following, successively, the Kennet, Dun and Avon river valleys; and the broader, larger four-track Great Western Railway route to Bristol and South Wales cuts through the north-eastern extremity of the area along the River Thames valley,

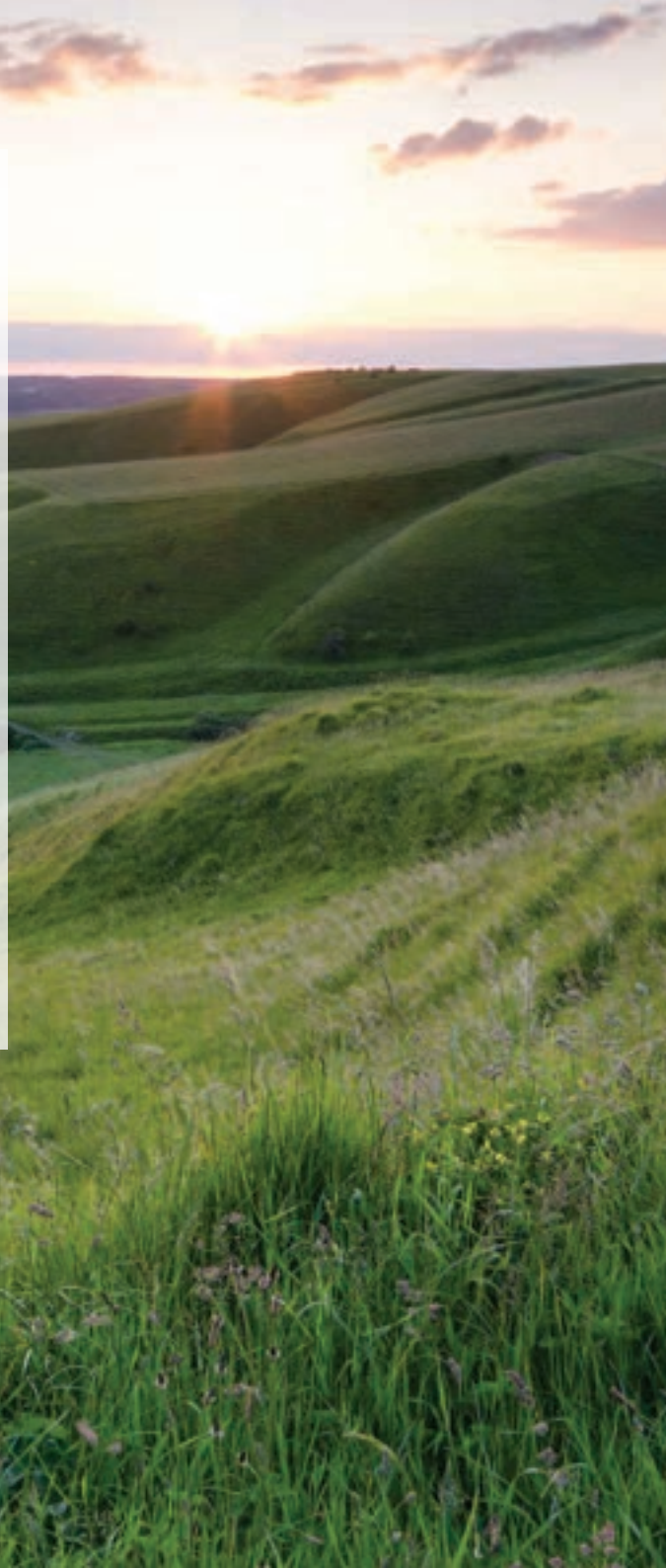
The North
Wessex Downs is
the third largest
Area of Outstanding
Natural Beauty in
the country

Icons of the North Wessex Downs



A Vision for the North Wessex Downs

Vast, dramatic, undeveloped and distinct chalk downlands with nationally significant areas of semi-natural chalk grassland, contrasting with well-wooded plateaux, arable lands and intimate and secluded valleys, all rich in wildlife and cultural heritage; a high quality landscape of national and international significance which persists in increasingly urbanised surroundings; where people live, work and relax; where visitors are welcomed and contribute to a vibrant rural economy; and access to which supports the health and wellbeing of local residents and visitors alike.



then follows the northern boundary outside the AONB, but within its setting and clearly visible from the northern scarp.

1.7 The North Wessex Downs was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1972 under the National Parks and Access to Countryside Act 1949. Following the introduction of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, the Government confirmed that the landscape qualities of National Parks and AONBs are equivalent.

1.8 The North Wessex Downs AONB contains all or part of 173 parishes, straddling the boundaries of two counties, three unitary authorities and four district/borough councils. It sits on a regional divide, with roughly half of the area in the South East and half in South West England, occupying a central position along the line of chalk-dominated landscapes from the Dorset coast to the northern edge of the Chiltern Hills.

1.9 The North Wessex Downs AONB is one of a family of nationally protected landscapes across England comprising 34 AONBs and 10 National Parks. Together, these finest, most outstanding English landscapes cover over 23% of the country. The importance of these designated landscapes is also recognised at international level, and North Wessex Downs is one of the UK's Category V Protected Landscapes, as defined by the International Union for the Conservation of Natureⁱⁱ.

-
- i All population data are based on the 2011 Census unless stated otherwise.
 - ii IUCN –officially the 'International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources'– is a global intergovernmental organisation. The IUCN maintains a database of the world's protected areas, categorised using definitions based upon management objectives.

The long-term goal is that the North Wessex Downs AONB will be a place:

- ▶ where land use, management and development are driven by an overarching principle of stewardship of the protected landscape; where people have the imagination, skills and energy to accommodate and adapt to change in ways that respect the unique qualities of the North Wessex Downs AONB and deliver wider environmental, economic and social benefits;
- ▶ where the highest environmental quality is seen as a key economic driver; where all economic activity is in harmony with maintenance of the landscape and its special qualities; where new buildings and other forms of development display high quality design worthy of one of England's designated finest landscapes;
- ▶ with thriving land-based and other rural enterprises where conserving and enhancing the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs is core to these businesses, ensuring a countryside rich in wildlife, heritage and recreational opportunities while producing high quality products, including sustainable farming that benefits the local economy and surrounding countryside;
- ▶ with high quality habitats reflecting the distinctive character of the North Wessex Downs and stable and recovering populations of key species; landscapes that are protected, expanded, linked and under beneficial management resilient to the pressures of climate change;
- ▶ with a rich and conserved cultural landscape where the pervasive historic landscape character is understood and appreciated, and informs future change; where iconic monuments, both designated and undesignated heritage areas, archaeological sites, buried archaeology and historic landscapes and historic settlements and their settings remain as indelible and visible footprints in an evolving scene, managed to the very highest standards;
- ▶ where the integrated management of land conserves high quality soils and water resources whilst retaining the distinctive seasonal winterbourne flows and the nationally and internationally significant chalk streams of the AONB;
- ▶ where a sense of remoteness and tranquillity predominates, and where vast night skies can thrill the eye, unaffected by light pollution; where these special qualities are recognised in development decisions within in the setting of the region, so that the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs AONB is protected;
- ▶ where development responds to genuine local need and where new buildings show continuity with the past, respecting and complementing the beauty of the landscape and the character of local vernacular building materials and styles;
- ▶ where the integrated approach to transport and travel satisfies local needs and minimises negative effects on the environment; where the dominance of roads and the impact of clutter are reduced;
- ▶ with vibrant rural communities, where villages and market towns meet the needs of local communities and visitors; where there is great local pride in the landscape and positive local contribution to the stewardship of its special qualities;
- ▶ that is a nationally recognised centre for responsible tourism and enjoyment of the countryside, developed and promoted in ways that are in harmony with the high environmental quality and the local community, helping to underpin the broader rural economy;
- ▶ that is recognised as a vital community resource, with potential benefits to physical and mental wellbeing of both local residents and visitors arising from access to nature and the countryside, to a tranquil environment, and to the opportunities presented for social interaction and volunteering;
- ▶ where there is wide public recognition of the protected status and special qualities of the North Wessex Downs among communities in and around the AONB; where all responsible bodies understand and respect the protected status of the area and their duties towards the AONB in their plans and proposals.



Page 10 Roundway near Devizes, Andrew Perrott

Page 11 Wittenham Clumps, Wilton Windmill, Cow at Wansdyke Way, all David Hall

North Wessex Downs

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

totals

1,730 km²
668 square miles

4 counties
9 local authorities
173 parishes

“Vast, dramatic, undeveloped and distinct chalk downlands, rich in wildlife and cultural heritage”



21,475 ha
of woodland

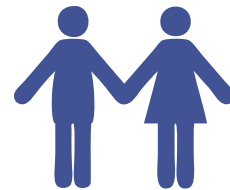
(12.4% of land cover)

About one-third is
ancient woodland

The
main
rivers
flowing
through
the
Downs
are the
Pang, the
Lambourn
and the
Kennet

Chalk
streams
support
a huge
range of
plants and
animals like
pea mussels,
water voles
and river
water-dropwort

THERE ARE
4 RIVER
CATCHMENTS
IN THE AONB



100,000 inhabitants

1.1 million within
20 minutes' drive

- ▶ 2,858 km (1,776 miles) of **rights of way**
- ▶ 102 km (64 miles) of **National Trails**
- ▶ 47 km (29 miles) of **canals**



**UNESCO World
Heritage Site**

Stonehenge and Avebury
is the only prehistoric
World Heritage Site in
England. Listed in 1986,
it includes the world's
largest prehistoric stone
circle at Avebury

**Agriculture
is the
dominant
land use
in the
AONB
with**

84%
of the
land
classified as
farmland



479

**Scheduled
Monuments**

15

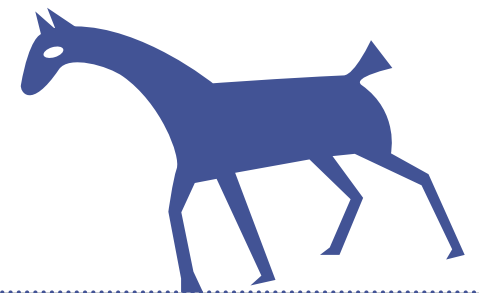
**Registered Parks
and Gardens**

1

**Registered
Battlefield**

4,069

Listed Buildings



66

Sites of Special
Scientific Interest
(SSSIs) totalling
3,330 ha

2

National Nature
Reserves (NNRs)
at Pewsey Downs
and Fyfield Down

9

Special Areas
of Conservation
(SACs) protecting
chalk grassland,
wetland and
woodland habitats

**Holds 9% of the
UK's remaining
chalk grassland**

15% of the area enjoys pristine night skies

73% of the area is in the two darkest night
sky categories*

*<0.5 NanoWatts/cm²/sr.

Legal and Policy Framework for the Management Plan

The primary purpose of AONB designation is “conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area”

AONB Purpose and the Meaning of ‘Natural Beauty’

1.10 The primary purpose of AONB designation is set out in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 as “*conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area*”ⁱⁱⁱ. The Act elaborates on this primary purpose, stating that any reference “*to the conservation of natural beauty of an area includes a reference to the conservation of its flora, fauna and geological and physiographic features*”^{iv}.

1.11 Natural beauty goes well beyond scenic or aesthetic value. The natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs is a function of the relationship between people and place over time. It encompasses everything that makes the area distinctive: the area’s geology and landform; its climate, soils and rivers; its wildlife and ecology; its rich history of human settlement and land use over millennia; its archaeology and buildings, and cultural associations; and the people who have occupied the area in the past and those who live and work here now.

1.12 This relationship is encapsulated in a policy position set out 25 years ago, stating that “*In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of economic and social development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment. Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses*”^v. More recent legislation in defining ‘natural beauty in the countryside’ establishes that “*land used for agriculture or woodlands, ... as a park ... or whose flora, fauna*

or physiographical features are partly the product of human intervention ... [may be] treated as being an area of natural beauty (or of outstanding natural beauty)”^{vi}.

1.13 The North Wessex Downs is thus an ancient, evolved cultural landscape, managed and nurtured by people over time. Those who manage the land are central to the future of this landscape. The North Wessex Downs Partnership is committed to long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values in the protected landscape, contributing to a wider network of protected areas. It is inevitable and appropriate that this cultural landscape will continue to change and develop but this needs to be in ways that conserve and enhance its special qualities.

Why is this Management Plan Important?

1.14 This AONB Management Plan presents an agreed agenda for the North Wessex Downs AONB for the next five-year period, 2019-2024. It sets out strategic objectives for AONB partners that are judged to be realistic and achievable during the Plan period, and policies which support the long term goals set out in the Vision Statement. Working together, the partners can realise these targets to the benefit of the landscapes and communities of this nationally designated, and internationally recognised, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

1.15 Responsible local authorities are required to prepare an AONB Management Plan and review the Plan no less than every five years. The North Wessex Downs Council of Partners have prepared this plan on behalf of the relevant local authorities of the AONB.

1.16 The Partnership comprises representatives of the constituent local authorities, the local communities, the farming and rural business community, and those interested in nature conservation, heritage, landscape and recreation.

1.17 All relevant authorities are legally obliged, “*in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty*” to “*have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of*

Page 13 Hackpen Hill, greatwestway.co.uk



Local authorities

must prepare an AONB Management Plan and review it at least every five years

This Plan sets out strategic objectives for AONB partners that are realistic and achievable in the Plan period

the area. 'Relevant authorities' include all statutory bodies and all tiers of government, including parish councils and holders of public office.

1.18 In addition to obligations under national legislation, the UK is a signatory to the European Landscape Convention (ELC), a multinational treaty which is devoted exclusively to the protection, management and planning of landscapes throughout Europe^{vii}. The ELC seeks to ensure that enhanced landscape planning, protection and management are achieved through 'quality objectives and an effective policy framework'. In particular, the Convention highlights the need to:

- ▶ recognise landscape in law;
- ▶ develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and creation of landscapes; and
- ▶ establish procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies.

1.19 The ELC encourages the integration of landscape into all relevant areas of policy, including cultural, economic and social policies, with a particular emphasis on the need for co-operation when administrative boundaries are crossed. The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019-24 is a significant contribution to the UK's implementation of the Convention.

1.20 Successful implementation of this Management Plan is beyond the resources of the Council of Partners and AONB team alone. It requires the active collaboration and participation of all those involved in its scope. This is a Plan for the North Wessex Downs AONB in its entirety; it is not for any single organisation within it. Implementation requires the support and involvement of the many organisations and individuals who play key roles in the future of the area, many of whom have been involved in preparation of the Plan.

1.21 One way of satisfying the 'Section 85' duties placed on government and other public bodies through the CRoW Act 2000

is by supporting the implementation of this Plan. Local parish councils, statutory agencies and local bodies acting individually or through partnerships can all contribute to fulfilling the Management Plan vision.

Planning for Change

1.22 This Management Plan sits alongside other plans and strategies prepared at national and local levels and a range of environmental legislation and policies and international commitments. The Plan period will be a time of transition as the UK adjusts domestic policy and legislation following its expected withdrawal from the EU.

1.23 The areas of EU policy and law that have greatest impact on the North Wessex Downs AONB's primary purpose to conserve and enhance natural beauty are the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the canon of EU environmental policy and legislative instruments. The UK Government has committed to maintain existing environmental protection arising from EU policy and law, so the objectives of, for example, the Water Framework

Directive, the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive are to be retained under national legislation. Agricultural support payments, including incentives to enhance biodiversity of the farmed environment, are also guaranteed to continue at least for the first years of this Management Plan. However, it is very clear from, for example, the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs' (DEFRA) 25 Year Environment Plan launched in January 2018, the consultation on future of food, farming and the environment launched in February and the Glover review of National Parks and AONBs announced in May this year, that significant reform of support mechanisms and incentives for agriculture

– the predominant land use in the North Wessex Downs – and of wider countryside policy and protected landscape can be expected. While the precise time frame for any changes cannot be predicted, it is quite possible that new opportunities will arise during this Plan period that will benefit the North Wessex Downs AONB.

Successful implementation of this Plan requires the participation of all those involved in its scope



1.24 In response to the opportunities and challenges presented through the process of the UK's withdrawal from the EU, the Management Plan has included proposals for priorities of a new environmental land management system (ELMS) which would support the special qualities of the AONB Landscape Character Types (Tables 3-11, pages 35-39). These proposals will be kept under review and adjusted as the proposed new ELMS develops.

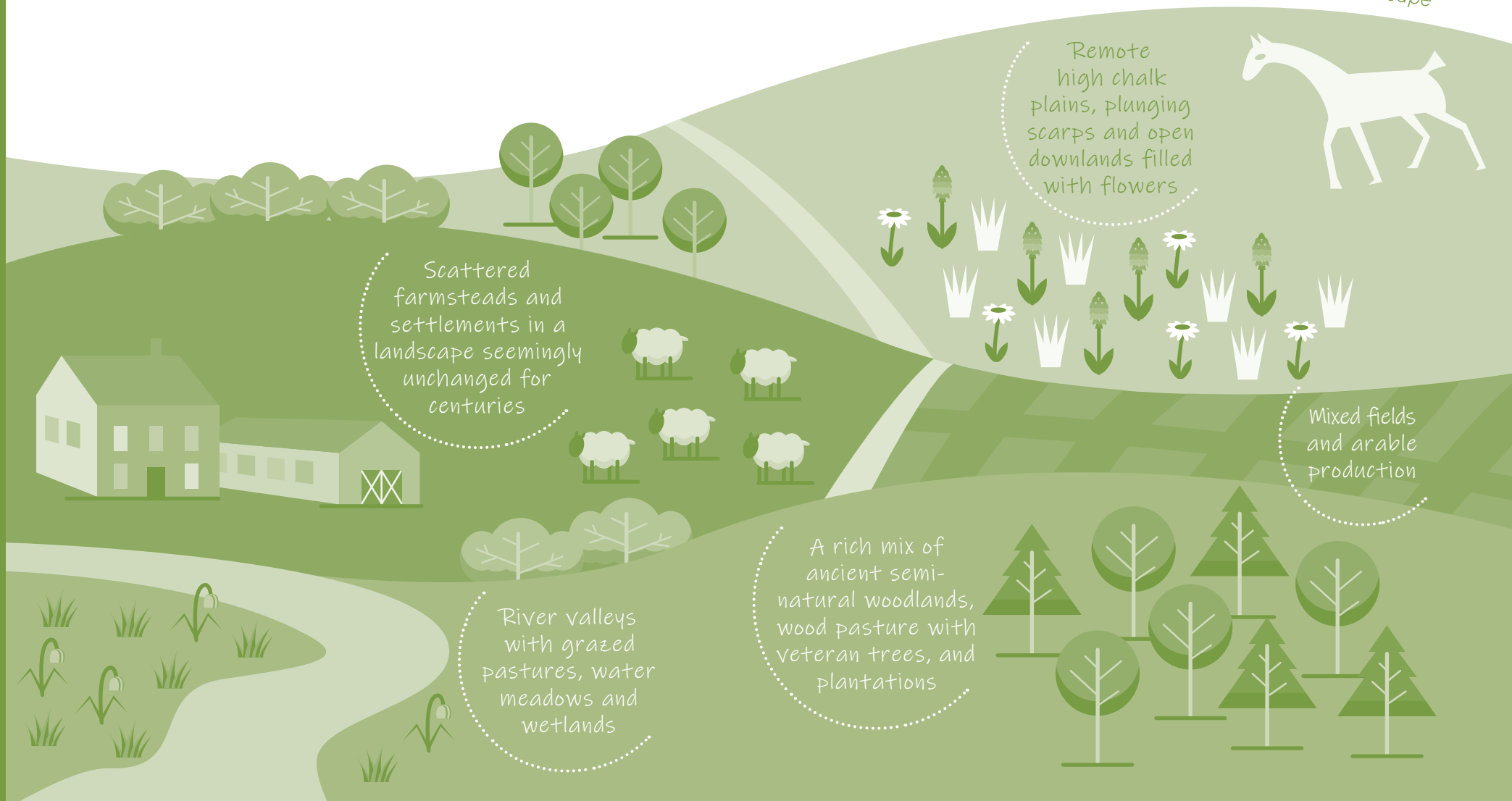
- iii Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000; Section 82.
- iv CROW Act 2000; Section 92.
- v Countryside Commission (1991) Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A policy statement. CCP 356; p. 5.
- vi Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act, 2006; Section 99.
- vii The European Landscape Convention (ELC) is a treaty of the Council of Europe. The UK's participation in the ELC is unaffected by withdrawal from the European Union.



Page 15 Horse-drawn barge at Kintbury, Peter Orr; Combine harvester, Lord Carnarvon; Short-eared owl, David White

theme 1 Landscape

AONB Special Qualities: Landscape



Scattered farmsteads and settlements in a landscape seemingly unchanged for centuries

Remote high chalk plains, plunging scarps and open downlands filled with flowers

Mixed fields and arable production

River valleys with grazed pastures, water meadows and wetlands

A rich mix of ancient semi-natural woodlands, wood pasture with veteran trees, and plantations



“The slopes of the downs, if they have general form, are continually changing and interchanging in localities, assuming new and strange shapes, charming and surprising with their grace and exquisiteness, forever reflecting the mood of the heavens.”

Alfred Williams (1877–1930)

Walbury Hill in Berkshire is the highest chalk hill in Southern England and is topped by an Iron Age fort

The Ridgeway has been in use since prehistoric times and is the oldest road in England

Page 17 Downs landscape, Peter Orr

Page 18 Avebury church, David Hall

Page 19 Sarsen stones at Fyfield Down, Peter Wakely/Natural England



An Ancient Landscape

The North Wessex Downs AONB forms a surprisingly remote, expansive and tranquil landscape in the heart of Southern England

2.1 The North Wessex Downs AONB is a visibly ancient landscape of great beauty, diversity and size. It embraces the high, open arable sweeps of the chalk downs and dramatic scarp slopes with their prehistoric monuments and beech knolls, the moulded dip slopes, sheltered chalk river valleys, intimate and secluded wooded areas and low-lying heaths with a rich mosaic of woodland, pasture, heath and commons. The North Wessex Downs AONB forms a surprisingly remote, expansive and tranquil landscape in the heart of Southern England.

2.2 The depth of history can still be seen in these landscapes, including the World Heritage Site of prehistoric Avebury; the royal hunting forest of Savernake, the Uffington White Horse, and the Ridgeway – the oldest road in England. The built environment makes a strong contribution to the beauty of the landscape, with historic towns and villages, churches, spectacular barns, manor houses with their parks and gardens, and the industrial heritage of the Kennet and Avon Canal. The Saxon name of Wessex reveals the area's literary connections, revived by Thomas Hardy and used as the setting for many of his novels. Around a century later, Richard Adams provided a vivid evocation of this area in 'Watership Down'.

Geology, Landform and Land Use

2.3 Geology, landform and the uses that humans have made of the land have together created the distinctive and beautiful landscapes of the area. The chalk forms an arc of high ground – the northern, western and southern parts of the AONB, cut through by the Vale of Pewsey to the west, and including, at Walbury Hill, the highest chalk hill in southern England. From this great rim, the land generally falls down the dip slope of the chalk, to the central basin of the east-flowing Rivers Kennet, Lambourn and Pang.

The North Wessex Downs AONB is a visibly ancient landscape of great beauty, diversity and size

2.4 The greater part of the area is underlain by chalk, resulting in the dramatic scarps and beautiful gentle rolling topography so characteristic of the North Wessex Downs. The steep scarp slopes of the chalk and Upper Greensand, with their expansive viewpoints, and the gentle rolling open chalk plateaux are very obviously influenced by the underlying geology. These chalk landscapes were traditionally in sheep grazing – the wool being the source of much of England's historic wealth. However, much of the chalk grassland has since been ploughed, and the resulting extensive, open arable land is now the most frequent landscape of the chalk downs. Herb-rich chalk grassland remains in fragments on the steeper scarps.

2.5 Where the chalk has a thick capping of clay-with-flints, the topography is softer, with smaller hedged fields and much greater woodland cover – a very different, enclosed and intimate landscape from the open sweep of the downs. Overlying the chalk are patches of more recent sediments, particularly in the lower part of the basin. These contrast with the chalk scenery by producing more acidic soils, with their associated heathland landscapes.

2.6 Some of the more impressive features of the landscape are the dry valleys or coombes, found across the chalk plateau and often forming deep rounded valleys. They are the result of torrents of water flowing over the surface of the chalk during cold periods when permafrost (frozen ground) made the chalk impermeable. The coombes are often associated with terrace features along the valleys, such as those at White Horse Hill in Oxfordshire. These result from the movement downhill of frost-shattered chalk during times of partial thaw. Large amounts of material moving down the slope of the valley can accumulate in the valley bottom, forming a deposit known as head. Sarsen stones are one of the most identifiable and well-known features of the North Wessex Downs, forming the great stone circle and avenues at Avebury and the fields of 'grey wethers' (because they look like sheep) at Fyfield Down. Sarsens are silica-cemented sand or pebble deposits, often moved a considerable way from their source by natural processes.

2.7 Whilst many of the chalk valleys are dry, some have characteristic ‘bournes’, generally dry, but flowing when the ground water is high. England has 85% of the world’s chalk streams and a large proportion of this resource is located within or near the North Wessex Downs. These have a rich and highly characteristic ecology, and frequently support rich biodiversity.

2.8 Settlement is also strongly related to the underlying physical setting. The high, dry chalklands have no water to support settlement, so have remained open, remote, and tranquil, with farmsteads and villages on the spring lines and in the more sheltered and fertile valleys. Traditional building materials include bricks from local clays, flints, Melbourn Rock, Chalk Rock (not the soft chalk), cob, Sarsens, thatch, and timber from the forests.

2.9 Designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty recognises the character, value and quality of the North Wessex Downs. The National Planning Policy Framework gives the highest level of protection to the overall diversity of landscape and scenic beauty of the areaⁱ. The North Wessex Downs are of high scenic quality, and their wildlife and cultural heritage are an integral part of their character and value. Although almost entirely a chalk landscape, the character differs markedly across the AONB, depending on local surface geology, soils, landform, land use, vegetation and settlement patterns. The greatest contrast, for example, is between the open arable chalk downs and the acid heathlands of the lower river valleys. Natural England has set out a Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) methodology to formally identify what it is that makes one landscape different from another. The landscape character assessment for the North Wessex Downs identifies the overall diversity of the landscape, recognising eight ‘Landscape Character Types’ across the AONB, each with its own distinct sense of place. These eight Landscape Character Types can be further subdivided into ‘Landscape Character Areas’; there are a total of 33 Character Areas across the AONB. LCA draws out the special qualities of the landscape, traces its evolution over the centuries and identifies the main issues that will need to be addressed to conserve its special character and outstanding qualities.

ⁱ Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018) National Planning Policy Framework; paragraph 172.

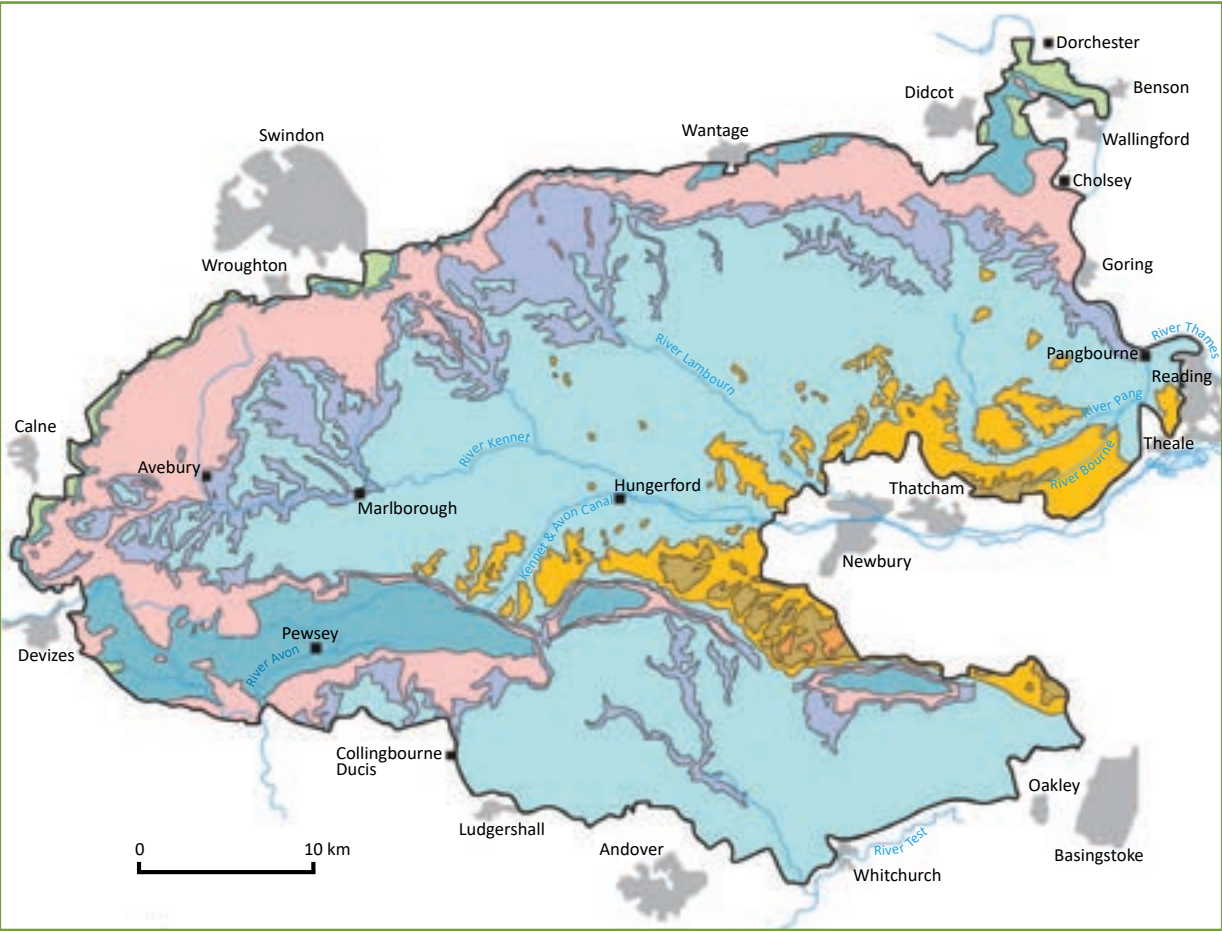
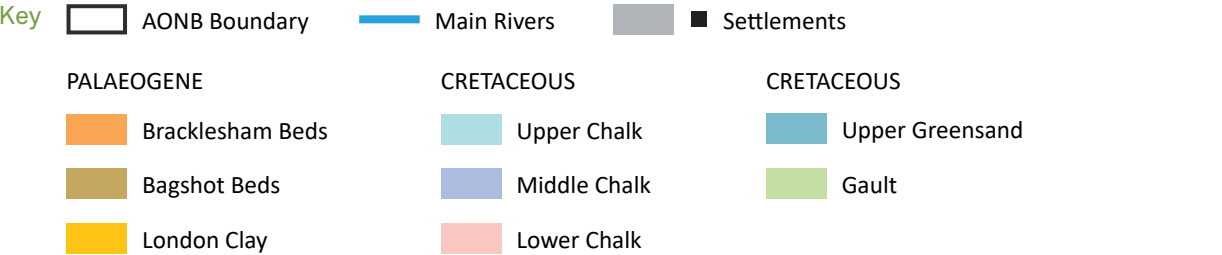


Figure 3. The geology of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database rights 2019. Ordnance Survey 100051200.





Page 20 Bluebell wood at Cobham Frith, Cedric Cottrell

Page 21 Chalk downland flowers, Chris Gomersall/Natural England

North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Types

Landscape Character Type 1: Open Downland

2.10 The Open Downland forms the backbone of the North Wessex Downs as an elevated plateau of the hard Middle and Upper Chalks. The landscape is of open, smoothly rounded downland dissected by dry valleys and long sinuous steep scarps, and is devoid of surface water. Tree cover is limited to distinctive beech clumps crowning summits and occasional linear shelter belts.

2.11 This is a remote, tranquil landscape of panoramic views where the sky forms a key part of the landscape, including the effect of cloud shadows on the ground and the wind creating swells through the crops. The dominant land use is of vast sweeping arable fields with small remnant patches of chalk grassland on steeper slopes. Settlement is extremely sparse and limited to scattered farmsteads and racing stables.

Landscape Character Type 2: Downland with Woodland

2.12 This landscape is distinctly different from the Open Downland. It is of lower elevation and has a thick capping of clay-with-flints over the chalk. It has softer contours and considerably greater woodland cover.

2.13 The scale is smaller, with field patterns a mixture of small irregular medieval enclosures and larger regular Parliamentary enclosures.

Landscape Character Type 3: Wooded Plateau

2.14 Centred on the woodland tracts of Savernake Forest and West Woods, the extent of this largely wooded area reflects the bounds of the medieval royal hunting forest of Savernake, established by the time of the Domesday survey. Throughout this gently dipping plateau, a thick covering of clay-with-flints and Tertiary deposits mask the solid chalk and results in damp and heavy soils.

2.15 Today, the Forest consists of extensive tracts of semi-natural ancient woodland, wood pasture with majestic veteran trees, and 18th and 19th century beech plantations, as well as more recent coniferous plantations. Reflecting its origins as a royal hunting forest, the countryside remains undeveloped, with settlement limited to villages in the valley of the River Dun – Great and Little Bedwyn.

Landscape Character Type 4: High Chalk Plain

2.16 This is the northernmost tip of Salisbury Plain. The open rolling landform of the Upper Chalk creates a bleak, spacious landscape under arable production and devoid of settlement, with long views and a strong sense of remoteness and isolation.

2.17 A dramatic escarpment forms the northern boundary, as at Pewsey Hill and Fyfield Down, and provides panoramic views across the Vale of Pewsey to the north.

Landscape Character Type 5: Downs Plain and Scarp

2.18 The landscape of the Downs Plain and Scarp extends along the entire length of the northern boundary of the North Wessex

Downs. The plain is formed by the eroded surface of the Lower Chalk, creating a low level surface extending as a wide ledge at the foot of the high Open Downland. The distinctive northern scarp plunges down from the chalk plain to the Vale of White Horse, creating a dramatic recognisable horizon when viewed from the north.

2.19 This area is characterised by some of the most emblematic features of the North Wessex Downs: The Ridgeway, the oldest road in England, running along the top of the scarp; the Uffington White Horse on the scarp face; and Avebury on the open Downs Plain, forming part of the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site.

2.20 The Downs Plain is characterised by vast arable fields, lack of surface water and a general absence of settlement. Conversely the dramatic scarp slope, cut by springs, creates a convoluted edge alternately under woodland and pasture, including significant areas of remnant chalk grassland. This is a landscape that feels as though it has hardly changed over the centuries, although it is increasingly affected by development at its foot, outside the AONB boundary.

Landscape Character Type 6: Vales

2.21 The Vale of Pewsey separates the two main upland chalk blocks that dominate the North Wessex Downs. The towering shapes of the adjacent chalk scarps contain and enclose this Greensand vale. Numerous springs issue from the chalk and Greensand boundary where the water table comes to the surface, their streams meandering across the Vale floor.

2.22 Rich loamy and alluvial soils create a productive agricultural landscape with a mix of arable, orchards and pasture now replacing a once predominantly pastoral scene important for dairy farming – hence the saying ‘chalk and cheese’, identifying the very different landscapes of the downs and the vales. The concentration of settlements is a defining feature of the Vale, including compact nucleated villages and hamlets, with widespread scattered farmsteads. The Vales character type also occurs at the north-eastern edge of the North Wessex Downs, with the sections of the Thames Valley floor that lie within this AONB. The eastern part of the Thames Valley floor here lies within the adjoining Chilterns AONB.

Landscape Character Type 7: River Valleys

2.23 The chalk rivers that cut through the chalk uplands 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, limiting views and creating an intimate and enclosed character.

2.24 Historically, the main settlements of the chalk were concentrated in these river valleys, as the only source of accessible water in an otherwise dry downland landscape. These settlements took a long linear form, following the bottom of the valley, and this remains the dominant pattern to this day. The chalk uplands (in other character areas) are also cut by numerous dry valleys, which sometimes contain ephemeral ‘winterbournes’ that only flow when the chalk water table rises to the surface during the winter and early spring.

Landscape Character Type 8: Lowland Mosaic

2.25 This is the lowest part of the ‘bowl’, curving around Newbury and the lower Kennet valley. This landscape, of largely medieval origins has a varied geology of clays, silts and sands giving rise to a diverse mix of soils and, in turn, a mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations, remnant heathland and more open farmland areas.

2.26 This is a small-scale and intimate landscape, where lanes are frequently overhung by deep grassy and wooded banks, heightening the sense of seclusion. There are some limited longer views, as at Bucklebury Upper Common. The network of ancient semi-natural woodland, connecting hedgerows, areas of parkland, including wood pasture and veteran trees, create considerable ecological interest.

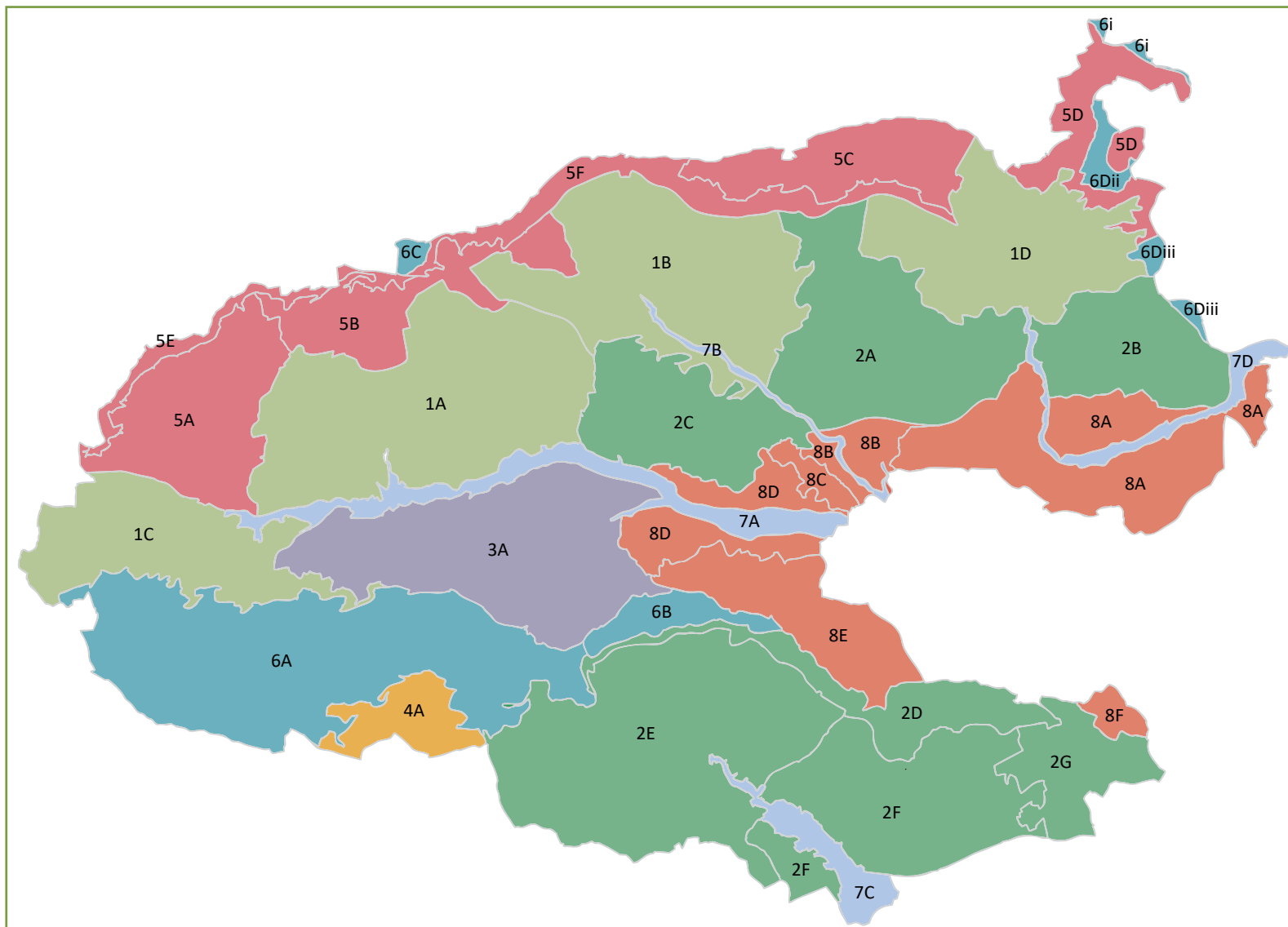
2.27 Former medieval deer parks are a particular feature, as at Englefield, Highclere and Hampstead, with a number of these having been re-fashioned in the 18th century as formal designed landscapes. This is one of the most densely inhabited areas of the North Wessex Downs, with large manor houses, a network of hamlets, and lines of houses and villages that have grown along the network of lanes.

Savernake Forest

is a medieval royal hunting forest, established before the Domesday survey

Avebury *on the open Downs Plain forms part of the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site*





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	Uffington – Letcombe Open Scarp
6 VALES	
6A	Vale of Pewsey
6B	Shalbourne Vale
6C	Wanborough Vale
6Di	Thames Floodplain – Benson
6Dii	Thames Floodplain – Moreton
6Diii	Thames Floodplain – Streatley and Basildon
7 RIVER VALLEYS	
7A	Kenet 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 Parklands
8F	Ewhurst Parklands

Figure 4. Landscape Character Types and Areas in the North Wessex Downs AONB. Contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database rights 2019. Ordnance Survey 100051200.

AONB Special Qualities: the Landscape

- 2.28 **Open Downland** extending from Roundway Down near Devizes to Lardon Chase overlooking the Thames at Streatley is dissected by dry valleys and long steep scarps, with limited tree cover and a sense of remoteness and tranquillity.
- 2.29 **Downland with Woodland** on the dip slope descending to Kennet Valley and south across the Hampshire Downs, offering softer contours, woodland cover and a mix of field patterns.
- 2.30 Centred on Savernake Forest and West Woods, the **Wooded Plateau** consists of extensive tracts of semi-natural ancient woodland, wood pasture with majestic veteran trees, and 18th and 19th century Beech plantations, as well as more recent coniferous plantations.
- 2.31 At the northernmost tip of Salisbury Plain, the open rolling landform of the **High Chalk Plain** creates a bleak, spacious landscape under arable production and devoid of settlement, with long views and a strong sense of remoteness and isolation.
- 2.32 The distinctive northern **Downs Plain and Scarp** plunges down from the chalk plain to the Vale of White Horse, creating a dramatic recognisable horizon.
- 2.33 The **Vales** of Pewsey and sections of the Thames Valley floor adjoining the Chilterns AONB offer productive loamy and alluvial soils where springs issue from the chalk and compact settlements contrast with scattered farmsteads.
- 2.34 The **River Valleys** of the Kennet, Lambourn, Pang and Bourne form very distinct linear landscapes, characterised by a rich mix of grazed pastures, water meadows, wetland and woodland. Steeply rising slopes create an intimate and enclosed character.
- 2.35 The **Lowland Mosaic**, curving around Newbury and the lower Kennet Valley has a varied geology of clays, silts and sands giving rise to a diverse mix of soils and, in turn, a

mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations, remnant heathland and more open farmland areas where sunken lanes heighten the sense of seclusion.

The Landscape: Key Issues, AONB Strategic Objectives and Policies

The North Wessex Downs AONB landscape faces a range of challenges which this Plan will address through the implementation of key objectives and policies

2.36 Key Issues

Key issues with the potential to have significant influence on the AONB's Landscape Special Qualities:

- a) The potential for development beyond the AONB boundary to visually damage or undermine the scale and critical qualities of landscape character areas.
- b) Managing the Ridgeway National Trail and other rights of way to maximise enjoyment by responsible users, protect wildlife and cultural heritage, and minimise conflicts.
- c) The need to maintain and, where possible, extend chalk grassland habitat.
- d) The need to conserve and enhance the remoteness and expansive open scale of the downland landscape.
- e) The need for viable agriculture and forestry to continue to contribute to AONB purposes.
- f) Availability of sufficient resources for management and understanding of archaeological sites.
- g) The need to conserve and enhance the remote, secluded and relatively undeveloped character of more enclosed and intimate landscapes, including the character of the lanes.
- h) The need for appropriate woodland management, including the viable use of timber products, particularly for fuel.



Page 23 Arable production, David Hall;
Ridgeway waymarker, Jonathan Humphrey;
Countryside lane, David Hall



- i) Encouraging restoration of wood pasture landscapes, husbandry and ecology and ensuring future veteran tree succession.
- j) The dominance of roads, in particular the impact of traffic noise, external lighting, road signs, insensitive materials and clutter on landscape character and people's experience of the landscape as they travel through it.
- k) The need to maintain the pattern of discrete villages set within a quiet rural landscape, ensuring that the views to the surrounding dramatic scarps are undamaged.
- l) The need to ensure continued improvement of water quality and water resources in rivers, supporting river managers and riparian landowners in river restoration and enhancement projects for fisheries and wildlife.
- m) The need to maintain and enhance adjacent seasonal flood meadows, grazed pastures, fen, damp woodlands and historic parkland.
- n) The need to conserve and enhance the small-scale, secluded and rural character of the lowland mosaic, including the fragile lowland heaths.
- o) Intense pressure for development throughout the AONB and its setting that threatens the character and quality of its landscape and risks merging of small settlements, encroachment by larger settlements and changes to the scale and nature of development boundaries.
- p) The need to protect and enhance historic sites, buildings and landscapes and their setting.
- q) The significant impact on the characteristic habitats in the AONB resulting from climate change, including increased extreme weather events and a potential increase in pests and diseases.

Page 24 The Wansdyke in the Vale of Pewsey, Steve Davison/
steve-davison.co.uk

Page 25 Action for the River Kennet (ARK) volunteers removing
non-native Himalayan balsam from a river, ARK

2.37 AONB Strategic Objectives for 2019-2024: the Landscape

- S.01 Maintain and enhance the tranquillity and distinctive landscape character of the North Wessex Downs and its setting with a focus on the contribution from agriculture and forestry, development and infrastructure.
- S.02 Promote understanding, appreciation and participation in the AONB by local communities, visitors and those making decisions affecting its distinctive character.



Extreme weather

events due to climate change will have a significant impact on the habitats of the Downs

Development

pressure threatens the character and quality of the AONB landscape

2.38 AONB Policies: the Landscape

LA 01	Encourage all partners and other stakeholders to have regard for AONB purposes across all relevant policies, programmes and activities.
LA 02	Seek to identify and address the main factors that threaten the special qualities of the AONB landscape, e.g. water abstraction, agricultural practices including diffuse pollution of watercourses, lack of woodland management, damage to historic sites, and built development.
LA 03	Use the North Wessex Downs Integrated Landscape Character Assessment to inform policy and decision making across the AONB and its setting.
LA 04	Support and promote good practice across all sectors that conserves and enhances the character and qualities of the North Wessex Downs landscape.
LA 05	Support and encourage efforts to conserve and explain the rich heritage of the North Wessex Downs, including archaeological sites.
LA 06	Ensure that all development in or affecting the setting of the AONB conserves and enhances the character, qualities and heritage of the North Wessex Downs landscape.
LA 07	Raise the policy profile of the North Wessex Downs locally, regionally and nationally to secure the co-ordination and resourcing of policies and programmes for the benefit of the AONB.

theme 2

Rural Land Management

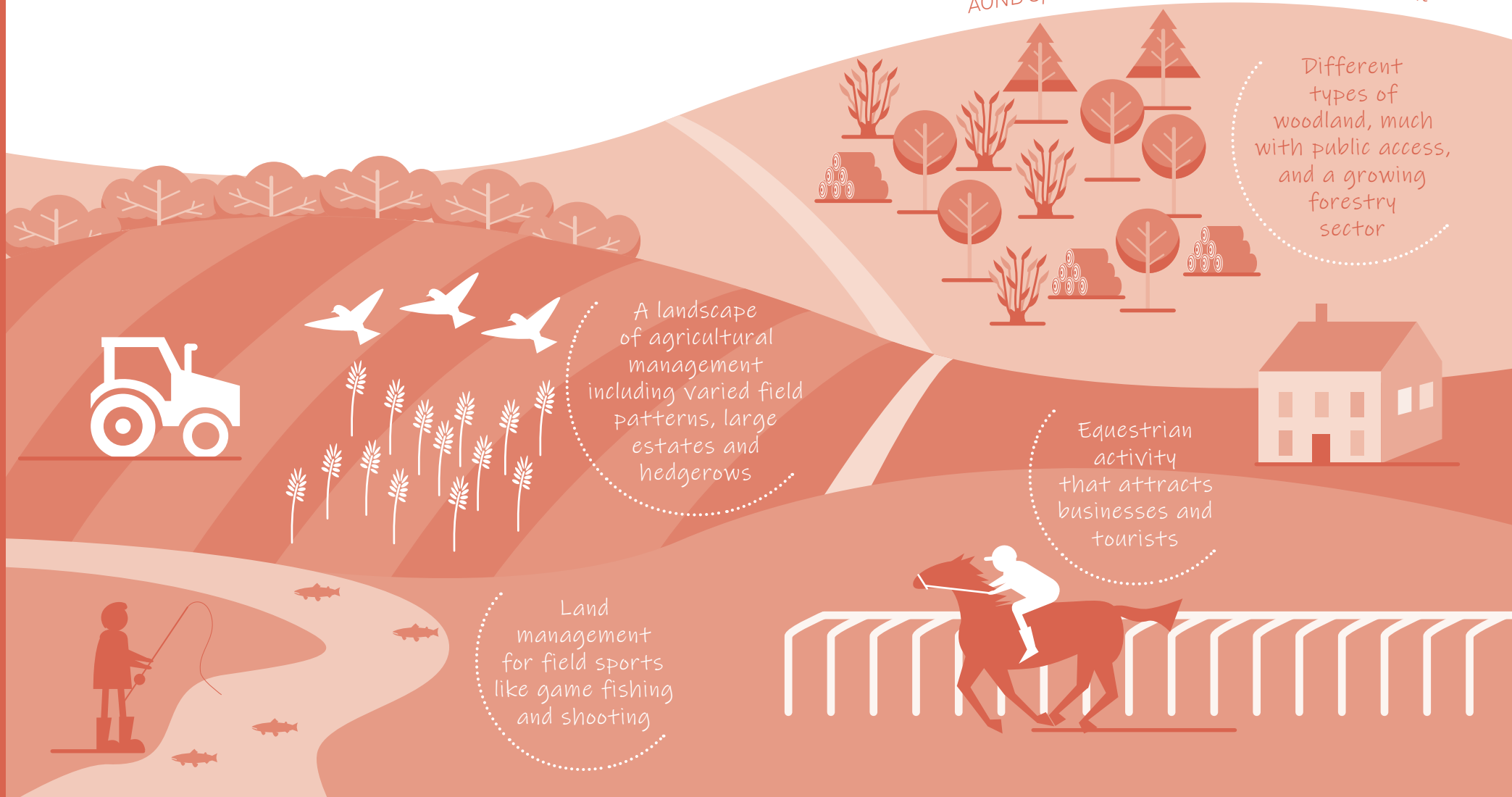
AONB Special Qualities: Rural Land Management

Different types of woodland, much with public access, and a growing forestry sector

Equestrian activity that attracts businesses and tourists

A landscape of agricultural management including varied field patterns, large estates and hedgerows

Land management for field sports like game fishing and shooting





“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.”

William Cobbett (1763-1835)

84% of the Downs is classified as farmland; about 48% of this was under arable cultivation in 2017

12.4% of the total AONB area is woodland, just over a third of which is Ancient Woodland

Page 27 Poppy fields and downs, NWD AONB
Page 28 Woodland management, NWD AONB



A Working Landscape

Land-based enterprises play a significant role in acting as stewards of the landscape and contributing to economic balance

Agriculture

3.1 Farmland and woodland dominate the landscape of the North Wessex Downs. Changes in these land uses have a major influence on the natural beauty of the area. Land-based enterprises play a significant role in acting as stewards of the landscape and contributing to an economic balance for communities. Additionally, equine activities and field sports are significant in terms of land use and management.

3.2 With 84% of the North Wessex Downs classified as farmland (of which in 2017 about 48% was under arable cultivation), agriculture is the dominant land use and the major influence on landscape character and quality. The agricultural workforce totalled 2,426 which amounted to 4.9% of the actively employed people in the AONB (2011 Census). This appears to be a decline from 5.9%, reported in 2005, but remains a relatively high proportion compared with the average of 1.3% for South East England.

3.3 Annual farm census statistics since 1990 indicate the proportion of land in the AONB under agricultural management appears to be fairly stable, with a slight net loss over time. This could be due to development, but also changes in holding distributions may represent a move to other land uses not classified as agricultural. The total number of farms is also falling. The highest proportion of farms are over 100 ha, a number that has steadily increased over the last decade. Defra defines farm types for a holding as the crop or livestock enterprise (or group of enterprises) that contributes more than two thirds of the total standard gross margin for the holding. The North Wessex Downs AONB has quite large areas of Grade 1 and 2 agricultural land, a high proportion of

which is put down to potatoes and field scale vegetables around the Pewsey Vale. Data from Natural England's 2018 'Provisional Agricultural Land Classification' indicate that most farms fall into the 'cereals' and 'lowland grazing livestock' categories.

3.4 Profitable agriculture can sustain the natural resources that have created rich diversity and natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs. Support for a sustainable farming sector is an important means of securing landscape management, as demonstrated through the North Wessex Downs Partnership support for initiatives such as the EU-supported rural development programme 'LEADER' (*Liaison entre actions de développement rural*).

3.5 Previous analysis of trends indicated a decline in livestock farming and greater sensitivity of arable production to prices of inputs. As with other sectors, consolidation will lead to larger farms and larger herd sizes to seek increases in efficiency. There have also been positive changes driven by the implementation of targeted agri-environment schemes.

3.6 A series of reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy has introduced an increasing emphasis on wildlife conservation through 'agri-environment' schemes, and there is a strong commitment by farmers in the North Wessex Downs AONB to use these schemes to support farmland bird populations, to protect and enhance habitats, and to safeguard soil and water resources. The de-coupling of support payments from production has required farmers to respond more readily to world market conditions. Fluctuations in commodity prices and input costs are making future arable profitability hard to predict. There is a risk that such market influences could thwart initiatives designed to improve natural resource protection and environmental enhancement. An example in the North Wessex Downs has been the difficulty in promoting arable reversion to chalk grassland under higher-level stewardship schemes in the light of fluctuating, and occasionally very high, cereal prices. Issues concerning animal movement and the loss of skilled graziers compound this.

Farmland and woodland dominate the landscape of the North Wessex Downs

3.7 Added to the drive for sustainability, food security and low-carbon energy is the uncertainty introduced by the UK’s decision to withdraw from the European Union. The Government’s stated ambition, once outside the Common Agricultural Policy, is to promote “a more dynamic, more self-reliant agricultural industry” and “a reformed agricultural and land management policy” which will remain “internationally competitive” and supply “products of the highest standards to the domestic market” while “increasing exports”. The impact that measures outlined in the ‘Health and Harmony’ consultation, or the introduction of a proposed new environmental land management system, might have on the farming community in the North Wessex Downs cannot be predicted. A new farming support system based on “public money for public goods” supported by a ministerial view that “the most important public good we should pay for is environmental protection and enhancement” could benefit the AONB, particularly when farmers work collaboratively to provide benefits for wildlife, access to the countryside and resource protection at a landscape scale. Alongside the policy and market incentives, climate change is likely to be a key consideration in terms of the types and varieties of viable crops that are grown in the North Wessex Downs. There are implications for sowing dates, irrigation, pests, diseases, water availability and soil erosion. Increased productivity needs careful management to maintain landscape character and the opportunity to expand wildlife habitats. There may also be diversification into novel crops and farming systems, or change of use from agriculture to other land uses such as equestrian businesses and leisure.

Forestry

3.8 The Forestry Commission’s National Forest Inventory data show that the area of woodland within the North Wessex Downs has increased by 656 ha over seven years and stands at 21,475 ha (12.4% of the total AONB area). Just under a half of this woodland has some form of wildlife designation and a little over a third is Ancient Woodland. Broadleaf trees dominate, at just under 70% of all woodland. Despite an increasingly healthy market for timber and woodfuel, many woodlands in the AONB still suffer from a lack of management, often due to difficulties accessing the woodlands. The ageing beech woodlands no longer produce

significant volumes of timber and are more valuable as places for recreation than as a productive part of the rural economy. The continued promotion of wood as a renewable fuel may stimulate improved management of some woodlands.

3.9 The National Forest Inventory shows that woodland within the AONB recorded as being managed has increased from 50% in 2013 to 62% in 2017. This is a positive change which probably reflects the increasing demand for woodfuel in particular. The timber quality of much of the woodland area within the AONB is not high – many of the woodlands are extremely small and a number of the woodlands comprise crops for which there is no longer a viable market. Consequently, the economics of forestry operations are problematic. There is a role for energy production in helping to manage small woodlands, and AONB partners have made progress in supporting the forestry sector through initiatives such as the EU-supported LEADER programme, ahead of an anticipated rise in demand for woodfuel and associated products.

Table 1. Data from 2016 for farm types (number of farms) in the North Wessex Downs AONB

Total Holdings	Farm Types (Number of Farms)						
	Cereals	General Cropping	Horticulture	Specialist Poultry	Dairy	Grazing Livestock (lowland)	Mixed
783	286	96	18	19	31	255	66

Table 2. Data from 2016 for farm size in hectares (number of farms) in the North Wessex Downs AONB

Total Holdings	Farm Size in Hectares (Number of Farms)				
	<5	>=5 and <20	>=20 and <50	>=50 and <100	>=100
783	69	168	105	99	342



3.10 The priority is to maintain and improve management of existing woodlands. Any new woodland should meet the objectives of the North Wessex Downs AONB Woodland Strategy. This values woodland designated for its nature conservation interest, and all ancient and semi-natural woodland. New woodlands can act as a buffer to protect this resource and create wildlife corridors between woodlands, which may, in turn, benefit natural flood management and water quality. The AONB Partnership encourages woodland owners to produce management plans in accordance with the UK Forestry Standard and will promote the accreditation of woodlands under the United Kingdom Woodland Assurance Scheme.

3.11 The dangers to woodland from pests and diseases are growing, with ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, also known as 'Chalara') and oak processionary moth (*Thaumetopoea processionea*) being two recent examples. Ash dieback is likely to have a major impact in woodlands across England, including in the North Wessex Downs, and it will be prudent to consider promoting measures to mitigate the consequences of the loss of this important tree species for wildlife and the landscape. Damage to woodlands from increasing deer populations or from squirrels is an ever-increasing problem, especially since it makes growing native broadleaved trees for timber difficult in spite of strong market demand. This highlights the need for the collaborative landscape-scale protection of our woodlands. The North Wessex Downs Partnership is working with the Forestry Commission and woodland owners and operators to raise awareness and, where appropriate, prevent or mitigate the effects of activity.

3.12 Climate change may lead to drought and lower summer rainfall. This is likely to affect the North Wessex Downs woodlands. For example, the shallow rooting beech does not thrive on dry soils and is likely to decline, but small-leaved lime needs warmth to set seed and will probably increase. Veteran trees of all species are more likely to be felled by storm force winds. However, in woods the impact of these storms can be positive, creating glades that species that thrive in sunlight can occupy. The recreational value may increase as people seek shade in the hottest months.

Horse Industry

3.13 Horse owning and riding is a popular activity across the South of England and the North Wessex Downs AONB is recognised as a nationally important horse racing centre, second only to Newmarket. The equestrian sector is estimated to have contributed £4.3 billion of consumer spending to the national economy in 2015 (an increase from £3.8 billion in 2011)ⁱ. Owners of horses have an important role to play in maintaining the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs. How horses are cared for and the developments associated with keeping and training horses can have a significant impact on the character and quality of the AONB landscape.

3.14 The North Wessex Downs is home to a range of important non-racing equestrian events, such as the annual Barbury Horse Trials. While there are no statistics to quantify horse ownership and riding in the AONB it is evident that the network of bridleways and routes linked to The Ridgeway National Trail is popular and well-used. A recent survey valued the non-racing horse industry in Hampshire at £313 million per annum to the Hampshire economy. A guide has been published in collaboration with Protected Landscapes in the South Westⁱⁱ to provide advice aimed at ensuring equine care and management makes a positive contribution to the landscape.

3.15 The Lambourn area and other racing yards in the AONB make a significant contribution to the local economy. Core horse racing businesses employ an equivalent of 1,370 full-time staff (just over 20% of employment in the agriculture and entertainment sectors in the AONB). A survey has identified 103 businesses within the area directly involved and a further 49 businesses associated with the racing industry in 2007. The horse racing industry contributes £16-38 million per annum of direct gross value added (GVA) to the local economy.

Field Sports

3.16 The rise of large-scale commercial shooting in recent years has had a significant influence on the landscape, especially in the downland. Much of the management of some small-scale woodland has been motivated by shooting, while the downs and valleys, notably the steep scarps, provide an ideal landscape for

partridge shooting. This has led to the planting of large blocks of maize cover crop, complementing grant-aided conservation plots such as wild birdseed mix. Shooting brings in substantial income, employment and revenue to local businesses within the rural economy, and is thus beneficial to the area. However, changes to the landscape may be viewed with mixed opinions, although the management of land for shooting brings significant wider benefits to wildlife in general.

3.17 Fly fishing is also an important feature of the AONB, especially in the world famous chalk streams such as the Kennet and Lambourn. The income from let fishing helps to support the conservation and restoration of these rivers.

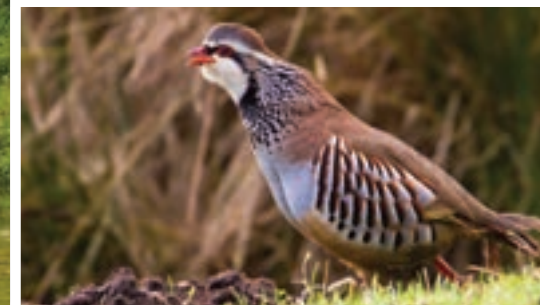
- i British Equestrian Trade Association. National Equestrian Survey 2015. <http://www.beta-uk.org/pages/industry-information/market-information.php>.
- ii South West Protected Landscapes Forum 'Horses, the landscape and you: Equestrian guide to keeping horses in protected landscapes.'



£16-38 million per annum is contributed to the AONB's local economy by the horse racing industry

Shooting has become popular in recent years, bringing in substantial revenue for the rural economy

Page 30 Overtown Racing, Dawn Hamblin, North Wessex Downs LEADER
Page 31 Fly fishing on the River Dun, Rob Starr, Town and Manor of Hungerford; Red-legged partridge, Natural England/ Allan Drewitt





Page 32 Grayling in the River Dun at Hungerford, Rob Starr, Town and Manor of Hungerford

Page 33 Wood anemones at Scratchface Copse, Becca Flintham

AONB Special Qualities: Rural Land Management

- 3.18 A landscape under the influence of **agricultural management** with typically large farmed estates, a high proportion of which are engaged in agri-environment agreements.
- 3.19 **Varied field patterns**; the open downlands are characterised by large regular fields, largely the product of 18th century Parliamentary enclosure, with more recent boundary removals creating vast fields, as on the Marlborough Downs. By contrast, the Vale of Pewsey in the south west of the AONB is the product of medieval clearance which created numerous, small, irregularly-shaped fields or assarts.
- 3.20 Stock fencing and extant **hedgerows** in the vales and river valleys containing some mature trees.
- 3.21 A growing forestry sector and different **types of woodland**, many with public access. Although oak and ash are the main forest canopy species there is a wide range of stand types including hornbeam coppice, oak/ash stands, hazel/oak stands, and birch and ash/wych elm coppice.
- 3.22 **Equestrian activity**, including the 'Valley of the Racehorse' in the Lambourn area that attracts visitors and businesses.
- 3.23 Significant land management for **field sports**, including highly valued game fishing which supports the native brown trout.

Rural Land Management: Key Issues, AONB Strategic Objectives and Policies

Rural land management in the North Wessex Downs AONB faces a range of challenges which this Plan will address through the implementation of key objectives and policies

3.24 Key Issues

Key issues with the potential to have significant influence on the AONB's Rural Land Management Special Qualities:

- a) The need to manage resources to achieve sustainable consumption and production.
- b) Potential for significant investment of public funding to promote diversification and micro-enterprise in the land management sector which align with AONB objectives.
- c) Potential for farmers to work collaboratively to enhance the delivery of public goods and services.

3.25 Agriculture

- d) Effects of the UK's expected withdrawal from the EU, in particular opportunities that could arise to invest in the conservation and enhancement of the AONB, for example through alternative environmental land management measures to deliver public goods with public funds.
- e) Market forces and major policy changes, such as demand for increased food security or biofuels, resulting in uncertainty regarding land management, influencing the mix of farming types and farm sizes.
- f) Impacts of changes in farming technology and energy prices.
- g) Shortage of livestock needed to graze downland pasture.
- h) Harnessing demand for locally produced food and drink in line

with AONB objectives, with increasing interest in producing and marketing local food in the North Wessex Downs.

- i) Climate change risk (increasingly identified by farmers in the North Wessex Downs AONB as a key threat and opportunity for the future) and the opportunities for land managers to invest in climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- j) Potential for improved co-ordination and consistency in the provision of agricultural land management advice to achieve AONB objectives.
- k) Poor agricultural land management practices, including livestock grazing and arable production, resulting in detrimental impacts on watercourses from nutrient run-off and silt pollution as a result of livestock damage to river banks.

3.26 Forestry

- l) Scope for more and better management of woodland in the AONB, especially of smaller woods, to improve habitat for wildlife and provide an economic return.
- m) Risk of harmful impacts on wildlife, archaeology and recreation from increasing exploitation of woodland to meet demand for timber, if not done in an environmentally sensitive way.
- n) Opportunities for better co-ordination of forestry with agricultural land management under new environmental management schemes.
- o) Widespread threats from pests and disease (e.g. *Phytophthora* and Chalara).
- p) Rising deer numbers inhibiting the natural regeneration of some woodland. Deer Management Groups are helpful but are insufficient on their own to control deer numbers.

3.27 Horse Industry

- q) Small-scale changes to the smooth, rolling landform around new buildings, which cumulatively have an adverse effect on the character of the AONB.

- r) Opportunities to support the racing industry, ancillary businesses and local communities through diversification, e.g. responsible tourism.
- s) Need to avoid the loss of biodiversity arising from the creation of new fields and paddocks on open chalk downland by promoting opportunities for landscape enhancement through equine habitat management, such as creation of wildflower-rich grassland.
- t) Change in landscape character by the replacement of hedgerows with fencing, leading to the 'suburbanisation' of landscape.
- u) Pressure to widen and straighten minor roads to improve vehicle access leading to 'suburbanisation' and loss of sense of place.
- v) Loss of integrity of historic settlements/hamlets/farmsteads.

3.28 AONB Strategic Objectives for 2019-2024: Rural Land Management

- S.03 Focus, facilitate and support landscape-scale conservation and land management initiatives that support the purposes of AONB designation.
- S.04 Promote AONB priorities for targeting and investment in rural land management and development to take advantage of changes anticipated to follow the expected withdrawal of the UK from the EU.
- S.05 Support the restoration of ancient woodland and wood pasture, and improved management of unmanaged and under-managed woodland across the North Wessex Downs AONB, promoting multiple benefits, including landscape character, wildlife, local economy and skills, recreation, and climate change mitigation.
- S.06 Support traditional and emerging land-based enterprises and their markets that respect and promote the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs AONB.

Food security

changes due to market forces may influence the mix of farming types and farm sizes

Demand for timber

may drive woodland exploitation and threaten wildlife, archaeology and recreation





Page 34 Conservation headland, Tony Matthews; Traditional sheep breed, David Hall; Roaming dairy farming, Dawn Hamblin, North Wessex Downs LEADER
Page 35 Arable landscape in the North Wessex Downs, Peter Orr

3.29 AONB Policies: Rural Land Management

RLM 01	Encourage national, regional and local land management policies to be consistent with the purpose of AONB designation.
RLM 02	Encourage and support joint working and expansion/replication of existing landscape-scale conservation and land management projects, both within and beyond the AONB, to assist in the delivery of AONB objectives.
RLM 03	Support sustainable farm diversification and multi-purpose woodland management where it achieves AONB objectives and accords with planning policy.
RLM 04	Support efforts to identify future land use options that are best able to assist farm viability and reflect the environmental objectives of the AONB.
RLM 05	Support local markets for local produce and the development of local supply networks.
RLM 06	Encourage management of sites in public and tenanted ownership within the North Wessex Downs AONB to be examples of best practice in the delivery of AONB objectives.
RLM 07	Support and promote efforts across the North Wessex Downs AONB to reduce invasive, non-native species or unsustainable populations of species where these threaten the biodiversity and sustainable management of woodland, watercourses and other habitats.
RLM 08	Encourage the active and environmentally sensitive use of woodland resources for viable products, helping to enhance biodiversity.
RLM 09	Support and help guide publicly funded investment in rural development.
RLM 10	Support investment in new agricultural infrastructure and redevelopment of farm buildings where it increases the sustainability of local businesses and aligns with AONB purposes.
RLM 11	Encourage awareness of the special qualities of the AONB among local businesses to help them understand and embrace their responsibilities alongside running a profitable enterprise.
RLM 12	Support improved co-ordination and consistency in provision of land management advice across the AONB.
RLM 13	Support efforts to identify and develop the skills required to care for the landscape and its special qualities, with opportunities for all to acquire such skills.
RLM 14	Encourage and support the local provision of practical training in traditional land management and the skills necessary to deliver enhanced rural land management and business diversification with clear landscape benefits.
RLM 15	Encourage good agricultural land management practices and adherence to good practice to contribute to resource protection, such as safeguarding watercourses from nutrient run-off and silt pollution.
RLM 16	Support the provision of advice on integrated management of grassland to enhance biodiversity as part of equine land management practices.
RLM 17	Support initiatives to achieve sustainable deer populations across the AONB through collaborative measures and partnerships among landowners and other stakeholders.

Future Land Management Support: Priorities for Funding and Advice by Landscape Character Type

3.30 The national family of AONBs has proposed that AONB Management Plans should serve as the framework within which future publicly and privately funded support mechanisms and other land management initiatives can be focussed and adapted to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the designated landscapes and their settings.

3.31 The priorities set out in the following tables (pages 35-39) identify broad priorities for environmental land management in the North Wessex Downs AONB and its setting. More detailed guidance, covering for example desired outputs and prescriptions where necessary, based on reliable evidence and applicable to

individual Landscape Character Areas, will be required once land management support arrangements to succeed the EU's Common Agricultural Policy have been defined.

3.32 Table 3 sets out a series of generic measures that could apply to more than one Landscape Character Type; subsequent Tables (4-11) set out measures that are aimed specifically at each of the eight Landscape Character Types described in Chapter 2.

Priorities for future rural land management support to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the AONB by Landscape Character Type

<i>Table 3. Generic aims applicable to more than one Landscape Character Type in the AONB</i>	
Support a landscape-scale approach to restoring, managing, buffering, extending and connecting currently fragmented, locally characteristic habitats. These include species-rich chalk grassland, arable field margins, wet pasture and native riparian woodland in river valleys, remnant heathland and common land, chalk rivers and streams, ancient woodland (especially Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites [PAWS]) and wood pasture.	
Protect archaeological sites and features, including through removal from cultivation, reducing cultivation depth, scrub management, sympathetic woodland management and protection from livestock damage as necessary.	
Adopt catchment-sensitive farming techniques across chalk river and stream catchments to reduce both diffuse and point-source pollution, minimise sediment run-off into watercourses and improve water quality.	
Restore and maintain a coherent network of habitat corridors through sympathetic management of, in particular, the huge ecological resource represented by road verges and banks, public rights of way and national trails across the AONB, harnessing their potential to form links between wildlife sites and other important habitat patches.	
Facilitate responsible public access to the landscape in places and in ways that are compatible with maintaining the special qualities of the AONB.	
Encourage and support more wildlife-friendly management of public and private open spaces, including recreation, sports and school grounds, parks, playgrounds, greens, allotments and commons.	



Table 4. Priorities for Open Downland

Restore unmanaged relict grassland and encourage greater diversity through sympathetic management.

Maintain existing chalk grassland habitats.

Maintain and enhance the value of arable land and chalk grassland for priority farmland bird and arable plant species (e.g. through spring sowing and winter stubbles, nesting plots, uncropped headlands, unsprayed field margins, and pollen, nectar and seed mixes). Create and maintain wildlife corridors (e.g. buffer strips, beetle banks, track and byway verges), wherever possible linking a range of different habitats.

Increase the diversity of semi-improved permanent grassland, especially where adjacent or close to unimproved grassland.

Extend, link and buffer chalk grassland habitats e.g. through targeted arable reversion (linking existing grassland areas along ridgelines in particular), wildflower restoration of semi-improved grassland, scrub management and removal of inappropriate woodland planting.

Maintain the expansive, open landscape character by avoiding new tree and hedge planting, including small areas which can cumulatively erode the special qualities of openness and sweeping views.

Protect archaeological sites and features, including through removal from cultivation, reducing cultivation depth, scrub management and protection from livestock damage as necessary.

Wherever possible create and maintain wildlife corridors (e.g. buffer strips, track and byway verges) across intensively managed arable and grassland, linking a range of different habitats including unimproved grassland and woodland.

Support specific advice and options for sympathetic management of land used to keep and train racehorses to enhance its value for wildlife.

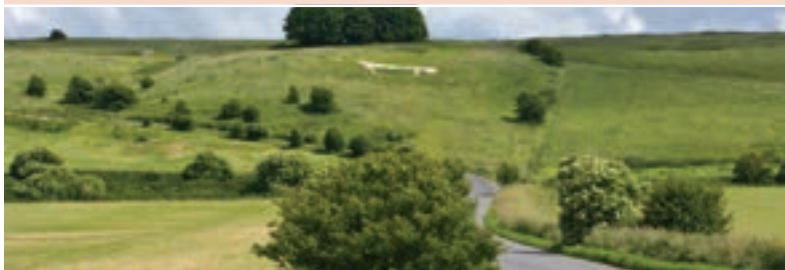


Table 5. Priorities for Downland with Woodland

Maintain the traditional pattern of field boundaries through sympathetic hedge management, restoration of historic hedge boundaries, creation of buffer strips and promotion and management of hedgerow trees.

Restore unmanaged relict grassland and encourage greater diversity through sympathetic management such as controlled grazing.

Maintain existing chalk grassland habitats.

Increase the diversity of semi-improved permanent grassland, especially where adjacent or close to unimproved grassland.

Maintain and enhance the value of arable land and chalk grassland for priority farmland bird and arable plant species (e.g. through spring sowing and winter stubbles, nesting plots, uncropped headlands, unsprayed field margins, and pollen, nectar and seed mixes). Create and maintain wildlife corridors (e.g. buffer strips, beetle banks, track and byway verges), wherever possible linking a range of different habitats.

Extend, link and buffer chalk grassland habitats e.g. through targeted arable reversion, scrub management and removal of inappropriate woodland planting.

Manage existing ancient woodland sympathetically to increase structural diversity (e.g. by restoring coppice, controlling deer numbers and promoting natural regeneration).

Restore Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) to conserve and enhance local landscape character and biodiversity.

Conserve existing veteran and ancient trees with careful management, and support succession of veteran tree habitat (e.g. by pollarding [including the creation of maiden pollards], and identification and management of future veterans).

Restore, conserve and enhance designed landscapes, other historic parkland and wood pasture.

Conserve and enhance the intricate network of sunken and other country lanes and tracks through sympathetic management of banks and verges.



Table 6. Priorities for Wooded Plateau

Conserve and enhance the intricate mosaic of woodland, farmland and hedges that surrounds Savernake Forest and West Woods.

Manage existing ancient woodland sympathetically to increase structural diversity e.g. by restoring coppice, controlling deer numbers and promoting natural regeneration.

Restore Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) to conserve and enhance local landscape character and biodiversity.

Conserve existing veteran and ancient trees with careful management, and support the succession of veteran trees as habitat for lichens and invertebrates in particular (e.g. by pollarding, including creation of maiden pollards, and identification and management of future veterans).

Restore, conserve and enhance designed landscapes, other historic parkland and wood pasture.

Restore, extend/link and sympathetically manage relict areas of heathland.



Table 7. Priorities for High Chalk Plain

Maintain existing chalk grassland habitats.

Restore unmanaged relict grassland and encourage greater diversity through sympathetic management.

Increase the diversity of semi-improved permanent grassland, especially where adjacent or close to unimproved grassland.

Extend, link and buffer chalk grassland habitats (e.g. through targeted arable reversion, scrub management and removal of inappropriate woodland planting).

Maintain and enhance the value of the mosaic of arable land and chalk grassland for priority farmland bird and arable plant species (e.g. through spring sowing and winter stubbles, nesting plots, uncropped headlands, unsprayed field margins, and pollen, nectar and seed mixes). Create and maintain wildlife corridors (e.g. buffer strips, beetle banks, track and byway verges), wherever possible linking a range of different habitats.



Page 36 Open Downland at Hackpen Hill, David Hall; Downland with Woodland at Combe Gibbet, NWD AONB

Page 37 Wooded Plateau at West Woods, David Hall; High Chalk Plain, CA

Table 8. Priorities for Downs Plain and Scarp

On the Plain, encourage restoration of historic hedge boundaries and improve existing boundaries through sympathetic hedge management, creation of buffer strips and promotion and management of hedgerow trees.

On the Plain, consider opportunities for sympathetic, small-scale tree-planting integrated within a network of well-managed hedges.

On the Plain, improve the value of the arable landscape for priority farmland birds, pollinators, arable plants and other wildlife (e.g. through spring sowing and winter stubbles, nesting plots, uncropped headlands, unsprayed field margins, and pollen, nectar and seed mixes). Create and maintain wildlife corridors (e.g. buffer strips, beetle banks, track and byway verges) wherever possible linking a range of different habitats.

Along the Scarp, maintain and enhance the diversity and wildlife value of the farmland/woodland/chalk grassland/historic parkland mosaic.

Along the western Scarp, promote sympathetic management of the varied and distinctive linear wooded hangers and wooded combs.

Support realisation of the potential for The Ridgeway National Trail to serve as a conservation corridor through the landscape, encouraging ecological enhancement of land adjacent and close to The Ridgeway.

Conserve and enhance the monumental landscape of the Avebury World Heritage Site and its setting, including through targeted arable reversion, increasing the diversity of semi-improved permanent grassland, scrub management and removal of inappropriate woodland planting.



Table 9. Priorities for Vales

Extend existing and create new waterside pastures and wet meadows.

Maintain the traditional pattern of field boundaries through sympathetic hedge management, restoration of historic hedge boundaries, creation of buffer strips and promotion and management of hedgerow trees.

Consider opportunities for sympathetic, small-scale, riparian native woodland creation along watercourses. This will both restore a feature of the historic landscape and help mitigate the warming effects of climate change on chalk stream ecology by providing shade.

Restore, conserve and enhance parkland, estate landscapes and other historic features, such as watercress beds.

In Pewsey Vale especially, promote new hedgerow trees as part of a landscape recovery strategy to counter the effects of Dutch elm disease and now ash dieback.



Table 10. Priorities for River Valleys

Encourage the restoration of historic hedge boundaries and improve existing boundaries through sympathetic hedge management, creation of buffer strips, and promotion and management of hedgerow trees.

Improve water quality and protect the ecology of chalk rivers and streams through sympathetic management of riparian land (e.g. by creating watercourse buffer strips, minimising sediment run-off, removing point sources of pollution and controlling poaching by livestock).

Maintain the landscape and ecological value of existing Valley habitats (including seasonal flood meadows, grazed pasture, fen, marsh, riparian woodland and pollards) through sympathetic management.

Conserve and enhance key wildlife sites (e.g. Kennet Valley Alderwoods SAC) by establishing buffers, and creating and linking areas of complementary habitat along River Valleys.

Restore, extend and link unmanaged or neglected flood meadows, valley pastures, fen and marsh, and encourage greater diversity through sympathetic management such as grazing where appropriate.

Consider opportunities for sympathetic, small-scale, riparian native woodland creation along watercourses to provide shade, thus helping to mitigate the warming effects of climate change on chalk stream ecology.

Restore, conserve and enhance ornamental and other historic parkland and River Valley features.



Table 11. Priorities for Lowland Mosaic

Maintain the remaining fragments of lowland heath through sympathetic management.

Improve the value and resilience of isolated patches of heathland by restoring abandoned or under-managed areas, and linking to other remaining heathlands.

Maintain the traditional pattern of field boundaries, particularly the ancient hedges that are a feature of the Lowland Mosaic, through sympathetic hedge management, restoration of historic hedge boundaries, creation of buffer strips on arable land, and promotion and management of hedgerow trees.

Restore, conserve and enhance designed landscapes, historic parkland, wooded commons and wood pasture.

Manage existing ancient woodland sympathetically to increase structural diversity (e.g. by restoring coppice, controlling deer numbers and promoting natural regeneration).

Conserve existing veteran and ancient trees with careful management, and support succession of veteran tree habitat (e.g. by pollarding [including the creation of maiden pollards], and identification and management of future veterans).

Conserve and enhance the intricate network of sunken and other country lanes and tracks through sympathetic management of banks and verges.



Page 39 Chalk stream in the River Valleys, Ann Seth/CA; Lowland Mosaic at Hungerford Common, Henry Oliver

theme 3

Biodiversity

AONB Special Qualities: Biodiversity

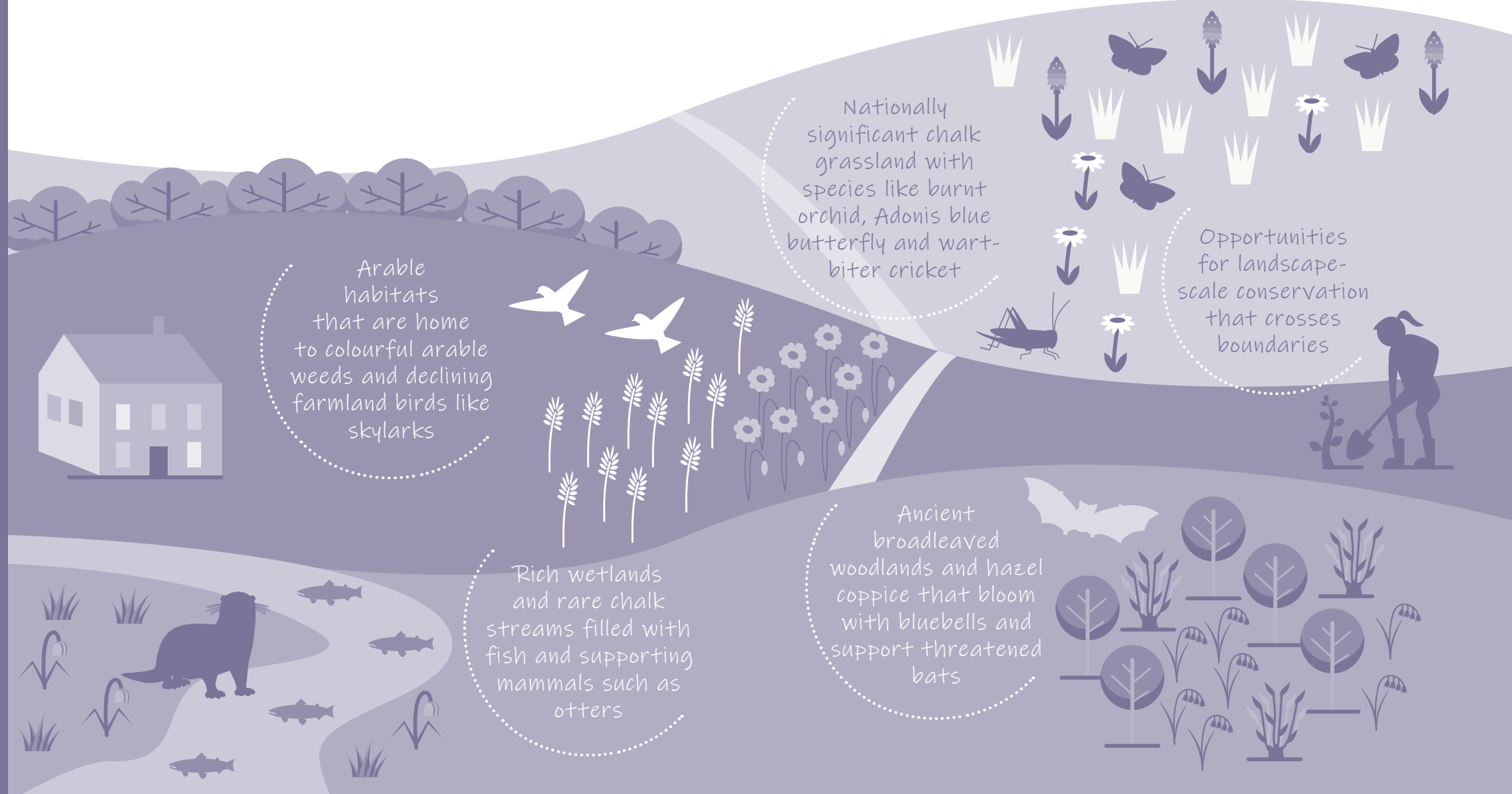
Arable habitats that are home to colourful arable weeds and declining farmland birds like skylarks

Nationally significant chalk grassland with species like burnt orchid, Adonis blue butterfly and wart-biter cricket

Opportunities for landscape-scale conservation that crosses boundaries

Rich wetlands and rare chalk streams filled with fish and supporting mammals such as otters

Ancient broadleaved woodlands and hazel coppice that bloom with bluebells and support threatened bats





“At length the snow ceases and the wind drops to a whisper; then over the hill-top the lapwings start up again and wheel in phantom flight, shrieking their weird night call.”

Edward Thomas (1878-1917)

There are 66 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), covering 3,330 ha, in the North Wessex Downs

29 SSSIs in the AONB contain chalk grassland, totalling 1,421 ha – just under half the total SSSI area



A Landscape Full of Life

The breadth of ecological diversity in the North Wessex Downs AONB reflects its landscape character and is the product of centuries of human influence

4.1 The breadth of ecological diversity reflects the varied landscape character of the North Wessex Downs. It is the product of centuries of human influence and active management. Within the area, there are seven Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), part of the 'Natura 2000' ecological network of sites established under the EU Habitats Directive and designed to safeguard habitats and species threatened at a European level. Both the Pewsey Downs SAC and Fyfield Downs Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are also National Nature Reserves. They have an outstanding chalk grassland flora and fauna, including nationally important populations of rare species, such as the endemic early gentian. The North Wessex Downs AONB contains 66 SSSIs covering 3,330 ha (2% of the area).

4.2 The most important habitats for nature conservation in the North Wessex Downs are the remnant areas of chalk grasslands, semi-natural broadleaf woodlands and wood pasture, chalk rivers, streams and associated wetlands, and arable farmland managed for conservation.

4.3 Other habitats of particular significance within the AONB range from remnant heathlands on river gravel deposits in the east, such as areas of semi-natural acidic grassland around Inkpen, to the wide grassy verges of the droveways crossing the downs. At a local level, the hedgerow network, springs, remnant water cress beds, road verges and dew ponds also provide important refuges and habitats. Chalk cuttings have magnificent displays of primroses and cowslips each year. This mosaic of habitats is especially important for bats, some species of which are known to commute 20 to 30 kilometres from their roosts in old trees or outbuildings to forage over a range of insect-rich habitats including wetlands, farmland, wood pasture and grassland.

Chalk grassland is one of the most biologically rich and diverse habitats in the UK

Chalk Grassland

4.4 Chalk grassland is one of the most biologically rich and diverse habitats in the UK. Over 40 species of flowering plants are found in a single square metre of the best quality turf. Around 9% of chalk grassland in the UK lies within the North Wessex Downs. Traditionally grazed by sheep, cattle and rabbits, the area's chalk grassland supports important populations of the early gentian, a scheduled protected species and one of Britain's few endemic plants. Unimproved chalk grassland is also important for the survival of many scarce invertebrate species such as the wart-biter cricket and the internationally threatened marsh fritillary butterfly. Other scarce chalk grassland butterflies include the Adonis blue, Duke of Burgundy, chalkhill blue and small blue; the habitat also supports good populations of skylarks.

4.5 Twenty-nine SSSIs in the North Wessex Downs contain chalk grassland, totalling 1,421 hectares – just under half the total SSSI area (and 0.8% of the AONB). A further suite of 249 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) have a chalk grassland component. These sites total 2,163 hectares (1.3% of the AONB), but the precise area of chalk grassland habitat within the LWS network is not known.

4.6 Nationally, areas of chalk grassland are a shadow of their extent in the 1900s. In the North Wessex Downs the area of chalk grassland declined by 32% between 1968 and 1998. The remaining areas are suffering increasing fragmentation. Today small isolated blocks of chalk grassland are largely restricted to the steep scarp slopes, dry valleys and areas maintained as pasture around archaeological sites. The total area of chalk grassland in the North Wessex Downs now is not known, but it is estimated that the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs Natural Area – which covers roughly two-thirds of the AONB – supports at least 1,250 hectares (about 3-5% of the total area of chalk grassland in England).

Woodland

4.7 According to the Woodland Trust, the North Wessex Downs

contain two nationally important ‘major concentrations’ of ancient woodland, centred on the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs and the Hampshire Downs; and areas of forest such as Savernake.

4.8 In the AONB:

- ▶ less than 0.1% of the total woodland area is designated as a National Nature Reserve;
- ▶ 0.5% is designated as Special Areas of Conservationⁱ;
- ▶ 7.5% is designated as Site of Special Scientific Interest; and
- ▶ 42.3% is designated as a Local Wildlife Site.

4.9 The diverse woodland types that make up these ancient woodlands include significant areas of wood pasture. They support a wide range of species, including important roosting sites for a number of bat species. Of particular importance are the calcareous woodlands that support a range of rare plants including herb-paris and green hellebore and provide home to substantial populations of native bluebells (for which Britain has a global responsibility, supporting about half the world’s bluebell population)ⁱⁱ.

Chalk Rivers and Streams

4.10 The spring-fed streams and rivers of the North Wessex Downs AONB support an extremely diverse range of plant and animal communities. Pea mussels, freshwater white-clawed crayfish and internationally rare floating vegetation of river water-dropwort can be found along their reaches. In turn, the rivers irrigate adjacent areas creating the distinctive valley landscape with its remnant fens and water meadows. The summer snowflake, a Red Data Book species, survives in seasonally flooded sites along the River Kennet. In recognition of their outstanding nature conservation value, the Lambourn, Kennet and Hampshire Avon rivers are all designated SSSIs, while the River Lambourn, the Hampshire Avon, and the Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain – a series of discrete sites supporting the globally vulnerable Desmoulin’s whorl snail – are SACs.



Page 41 Lapwing flock, David Kjaer
Page 42 Marbled white butterfly, Natural England/Chris Gomersall
Page 43 Brown hares boxing, Natural England/Allan Drewitt

Enclosed Farmland

4.11 Arable cultivation is the dominant land management activity in the area. The North Wessex Downs supports a wide range of nationally and regionally important species associated with arable farmland and adapted to colonise land disturbed through tillage. They include farmland birds such as stone-curlew and tree sparrow; rare arable plants such as corn buttercup and shepherd’s needle; and mammals such as brown hare and harvest mouse. Many of these species are listed as ‘Species of Priority Importance’ under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and are targets for the Government’s ‘Biodiversity 2020’

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- i SACs, originally designated to meet obligations under the EU Habitats Directive are defined in the new National Planning Policy Framework as falling “within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017” (NPPF 2018, Glossary page 67).
 - ii G. Vines (ed.) 2004 ‘Bluebells for Britain’ Plantlife, Salisbury.



strategy to implement commitments under the global Convention on Biological Diversity. An Arable Strategy was prepared for the AONB in 2008 to help protect and enhance the nationally important arable biodiversity found within the North Wessex Downs.

4.12 Although the downlands are essentially a large-scale landscape, traditional areas of mixed farming, responding to the underlying geology, have resulted in a range of habitats (grassland, scrub and arable lands) co-existing in close proximity. This complex of interlinked habitats provides some of the most favourable conditions for the characteristic birds and mammals of the North Wessex Downs, including brown hares, skylarks, lapwings, tree sparrows, corn buntings, linnets and grey partridges. Increased cover, nesting opportunities and a wider abundance of food supply occur where arable margins meet up with wildflower- and insect-rich downland and scrub. This supports an important community of ground-nesting birds and other species typical of arable and unimproved grassland which has been lost from many areas of arable farmland. The North Wessex Downs Farmland Bird Project has helped to target agri-environment resources to benefit these communities and species.

4.13 Changes to climate will alter the composition of the natural communities that are characteristic of chalk downland, woodland, streams and arable fields. Diverse natural communities of plants and animals are most likely to survive on soils and in streams with low nutrient status and in large patches of habitat. Given the pressures of climate change and the need for species migration, habitat corridors along rights of way and habitat networks are of increasing value.

Nature Conservation

4.14 A pivotal review of England's wildlife sites and its ecological network published in 2010 identified Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty as having great potential *"to establish a coherent and resilient ecological network"*. The key message from this report, which was adopted into policy through the 2011 'Natural Environment White Paper', was that to safeguard the country's wildlife habitats and species it was essential to *"make space for nature"*. It advocated that this could be most readily achieved by making existing sites that are important for wildlife *"bigger, better,*

and joined up” and by creating more such sites. The aim of this is to create a sustainable, resilient and more effective ecological network for England.

4.15 The North Wessex Downs Partnership encourages activities that:

- ▶ improve the quality of current sites by better habitat management;
- ▶ increase the size of current wildlife sites;
- ▶ enhance connections between or join up sites, either through physical corridors or through ‘stepping stones’;
- ▶ create new sites;
- ▶ reduce the pressures on wildlife by improving the wider environment, including through buffering wildlife sites.

4.16 These actions will help to establish an ecological network that meets the needs of wildlife and people today, and one that is more resilient to the future pressures, including climate change. There are trade-offs between these actions: the more we do to improve the quality of existing sites or to enhance the wider environment, the less we will need to do to create new sites. Our actions need to be adaptive, adjusting to what works as we progress.

4.17 ‘Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England’s wildlife and ecosystem services’ sets out the strategic direction for biodiversity policy for a decade on land (including rivers and lakes) and at sea. Biodiversity 2020 Objectives are to be delivered through a more integrated, large-scale approach to conservation on land and at sea, putting people at the heart of biodiversity policy, reducing environmental pressures, and improving knowledge. Defra’s 25 Year Environment Plan proposes to learn lessons from this existing strategy, to build on it with the stated aims to “achieve a growing and resilient network of land, water and sea that is richer in plants and animals”ⁱⁱⁱ.

4.18 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out measures to conserve and enhance the natural environment, including protecting and enhancing sites for biodiversity,

minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity including by establishing coherent ecological networks. Further, it makes clear that Local Plans should “take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries”^{iv}. Green Infrastructure is a “network of multifunctional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities”^v. It provides for recreation, biodiversity, health and wellbeing, and helps to address and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

4.19 Initiatives at local and regional levels have been taken to identify the areas which offer the best opportunities for habitat creation, connectivity and biodiversity enhancements. An initiative to define an ecological network of ‘Biodiversity Opportunity Areas’ (BOAs) in South East England was based on mapping key habitats and nature conservation sites identified at international, national and local levels. This identified 33 BOAs or equivalent sites in, or partly within, the North Wessex Downs boundary; they are considered to provide the best opportunities for targeted biodiversity enhancements and habitat creation at the landscape scale. Some local authorities have developed and embedded this concept into planning measures, such as the ‘Conservation Target Areas’ in Oxfordshire. The North Wessex Downs Partnership is contributing to a more joined up approach through its involvement in and support for local landscape scale conservation projects. The Marlborough Downs Nature Improvement Area is an example of such initiatives. This successful pilot project continues as the Marlborough Downs ‘Space for Nature’ farmer group, facilitated through the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund^{vi}.

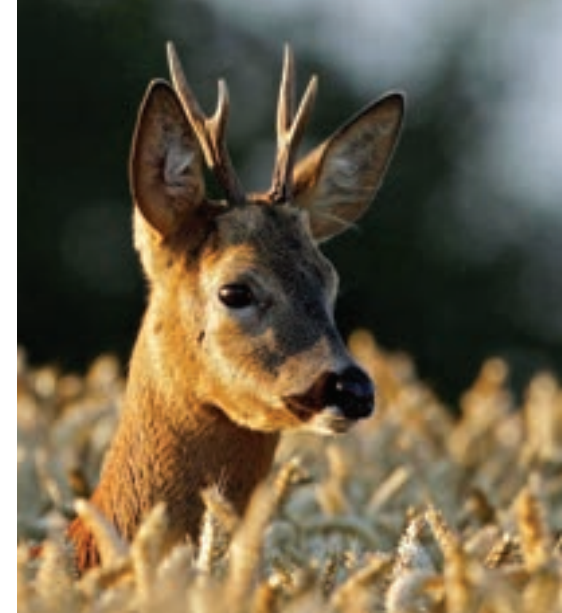
Our actions will help to establish an ecological network that meets the needs of wildlife and people

iii Defra 25 Year Environment Plan; pages 26 & 58.

iv NPPF (2018) paragraphs 170 & 171.

v NPPF (2018) Glossary, page 67.

vi <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/countryside-stewardship-facilitation-fund-provides-conservation-boost>



Page 44 Skylark nest and chicks, Natural England/P.N. Watts

Page 45 Roe deer in farmland, David White; Blue tit nesting box, Norman Smith; Marlborough Downs Space for Nature, David White

Chalk grassland

in the AONB supports rare plants like field fleawort, musk orchid and Chiltern gentian

Arable habitats

in the AONB provide feeding and breeding grounds for rare farmland birds like skylarks

AONB Special Qualities: Biodiversity

4.20 Designated wildlife sites that are home to rare habitats and species, including:

- ▶ A nationally significant area of **chalk grassland** including rare flora such as field fleawort, bastard toadflax, musk orchid and burnt orchid, early gentian, chalk eyebright, Chiltern gentian, dwarf mouse-ear, tuberous thistle and round-headed rampion; invertebrates such as the wart-biter cricket and important butterfly populations including Adonis blue, silver-studded blue, marsh fritillary, chalkhill blue, small blue, silver-spotted skipper and Duke of Burgundy fritillary.
- ▶ Substantial areas of **broadleaved woodland and wood pasture**, including a significant concentration of ancient woodlands, which provide roosting and/or feeding sites for bat species including Bechstein's, barbastelle, greater horseshoe and noctule; long rotation hazel coppice that provides important habitat for mammals such as dormice; concentrations of calcareous bluebell woods; and a number of nationally scarce moss species.

- ▶ Rare **chalk streams and rivers** with a high diversity of aquatic plants and invertebrate species including those that are nationally scarce, such as the white-clawed crayfish, supporting nationally and locally scarce bird species, mammals including otters and nationally declining water voles, and healthy fish populations including brown trout, salmon, grayling, perch, chub and dace.
- ▶ **Arable habitats** which are home to rare and colourful arable weeds, such as dense flowered-fumitory, slender tare and shepherd's needle, which are dependent on a regular cropping regime. Arable land use also provides feeding and breeding habitat for a number of rare and declining farmland birds including skylarks and stone-curlews.
- ▶ A rich mosaic of associated **wetland habitats** creating distinctive valley landscapes including fens, floodplains, water meadows, carr and wet woodland. As an example, the Red Data Book plant summer snowflake survives in seasonally flooded woodlands along the Kennet Valley.

4.21 Opportunities for landscape-scale conservation projects, working across a significant area and administrative boundaries.



Biodiversity: Key Issues, AONB Strategic Objectives and Policies

Biodiversity in the North Wessex Downs AONB faces a range of challenges which this Plan will address through the implementation of key objectives and policies

4.22 Key Issues

Key issues with the potential to have significant influence on the AONB's Biodiversity Special Qualities:

- a) General lack of knowledge about the full biological resource of the North Wessex Downs and how to manage it most effectively for biodiversity, including the management of sites that may support habitats and species of principal importance and other wildlife features of local significance.
- b) Habitat fragmentation degrading ecosystem functionality (dispersal and colonisation potential of wildlife populations is constrained, leading to loss of genetic diversity and risk of local extinctions).
- c) Impacts of climate change on habitats and species with both losses and gains. In addition to direct impacts on habitats (e.g. drying out of wetlands) there are likely to be indirect effects such as those caused through colonisation by non-natives responding to climatic change. The resilience and response of species to climate change, such as shifts in distribution, will be strongly influenced by habitat availability and connectivity.
- d) Uncertainties over future land use and land management patterns following the UK's expected withdrawal from the EU, in particular the impact on opportunities to deliver significant biodiversity improvements across the farmed landscape, and retention of improvements secured through past land management support schemes.
- e) Direct and indirect effects of agricultural intensification and land management changes having continued negative impacts on farmland wildlife.
- f) Continued decline of species, in particular those with narrow habitat requirements that have responded negatively to changes in land management practices.
- g) Nesting success and productivity is often insufficient to reverse declines or even to sustain current populations of many ground-nesting birds.
- h) Loss of once-common species of chalk streams and rivers such as the water vole and the white-clawed crayfish (both priority target species).
- i) Negative impacts of invasive non-native species on native wildlife.
- j) Economic fragility of low input/extensive farming systems and cost of replacement infrastructure (fencing, water supplies, etc.) leading to loss or deterioration of semi-natural habitats through both undergrazing and overgrazing.



Page 46 Adonis blue butterfly and hazel dormouse, both David Kjaer
Page 47 Water vole, Mark Bridger/
Shutterstock.com

Fragmentation

of habitats is a key issue, causing the degradation of ecosystem functionality

Poor habitat management

and changing practices are resulting in declines in biodiversity

- k) Bovine tuberculosis testing and movement regulations reducing the availability of cattle for conservation grazing.
- l) Lack of grazing livestock to manage remaining areas of semi-natural chalk grassland.
- m) Problems, where grazing is still practised, from recreational pressures including dog worrying and trespass.
- n) Increasing erosion of remnant areas of chalk grassland as a result of recreational activities.
- o) Degradation and loss of river and wetland habitats through inappropriate management, development, increasing water demand, pollution, eutrophication and climate change.
- p) Lack of or poor management of much ancient woodland, causing a decline in biodiversity.
- q) Lack of resources to maintain biodiversity and secure enhancements of the existing Green Infrastructure network, including road verges.
- r) Erosion of lane and byway verges by increased traffic use and larger vehicles.
- s) Change from the use of grass gallops (some of which retain remnant areas of chalk grassland) to artificial surfaces in the racing industry.
- t) The need for access restrictions to areas supporting vulnerable ground-nesting species, such as stone-curlew.
- u) The effect of development within the AONB setting on its species, habitats and wildlife sites.



4.23 AONB Strategic Objectives for 2019-2024: Biodiversity

- S.07 Identify and promote action to safeguard and to enhance habitats and species which are characteristic of the North Wessex Downs and are not at a favourable conservation status, in particular chalk downland, chalk rivers and streams, broadleaved woodlands, and populations of farmland birds and plants.
- S.08 Explore opportunities to promote the 'net gain to biodiversity' principles as elaborated in the revised NPPF and Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan across the AONB and its setting, taking account of lessons learned from the benefits arising from the Biodiversity 2020 strategy in the local area.

4.24 AONB Policies: Biodiversity

B 01	Resist proposals which have a likely significant effect (either alone or in combination with other plans and projects) upon a European-designated site unless it can be ascertained following an appropriate assessment that they will have no significant adverse effect on the integrity of the site concerned.
B 02	Support the delivery of Biodiversity 2020 objectives, and Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan along with landscape-scale strategies, catchment management and forestry plans to ensure effective management of all priority habitats and species in the AONB landscape.
B 03	Encourage a co-ordinated and consistent approach to biodiversity conservation across the AONB and its setting.
B 04	Support and encourage work to conserve and enhance the biodiversity of the North Wessex Downs through support for landscape-scale projects for habitat management, restoration and creation, particularly where they deliver identified priorities within areas identified as offering the best opportunities for investment in biodiversity, including through management of existing wildlife sites and valuable habitat to the highest standards.
B 05	Support land managers in restoring, creating and maintaining habitats for key species, including threatened arable plants, invertebrates and farmland birds.
B 06	Support the development of initiatives to safeguard and develop habitat corridors and ecological networks throughout the AONB, and in particular to enhance the ecological value of road verges and similar linear features such as public rights of way and National Trails.
B 07	Support partnerships with key stakeholders to promote and deliver projects that contribute to the achievement of good ecological status for water bodies in the AONB.
B 08	Encourage the improvement of connections between people and the natural environment and promote access to nature throughout the AONB.
B 09	Support efforts to communicate the benefits of the local natural environment and its value to society.
B 10	Encourage innovative use of initiatives such as Environmental Land Management schemes to deliver biodiversity benefits and the provision and protection of ecosystem goods and services.
B 11	Support research into causes of declines in ground nesting birds and support appropriate projects that aim to rebuild populations.
B 12	Encourage and support efforts to identify the extent of spread and damage caused by invasive non-native species, to eradicate or contain their spread, and to restore habitats and wildlife populations damaged by them.
B 13	Seek to secure readily accessible baseline biodiversity data across the North Wessex Downs.
B 14	Support the County Biological Record Centres and Historic Environment Records Centres serving the North Wessex Downs as the main repositories for information on the biodiversity and cultural heritage of the AONB and support initiatives to engage the public in biological recording/monitoring.
B 15	Support and encourage measures to enable grazing on all the main grassland areas of the AONB.
B 16	Support and encourage implementation measures to deliver net gain to nature to minimise the effects of development and to address key issues affecting biodiversity resources in the AONB and its setting.

theme 4

Historic Environment

AONB Special Qualities: Historic Environment



Medieval and post-medieval settlements with historic buildings like churches and tithe barns



Post-medieval infrastructure including windmills, canals, railways and WW2 airfields



Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments such as stone circles, barrows and chalk figures



Country houses, landscaped gardens and medieval deer parks

Iron Age, Roman and post-Roman relicts such as field systems, castles and the Roman town of Cunetio



An aerial photograph of the White Horse, a large chalk figure of a horse carved into a green hillside. The figure is white and stands out against the lush green grass. It is oriented horizontally, with its head to the right and its tail to the left. The body is elongated and tapers towards the tail, which is a simple curved line. The legs are also simple, with the front legs being slightly more defined than the hind legs. The head is small and rounded, with a simple outline for the face and ears. The overall shape is that of a horse in profile, facing right.

“What is truly remarkable 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 to its creators has long since faded away. For most of its existence ... the White Horse has been preserved simply because people liked it.”

Bill Bryson (Introduction to 'The English Landscape', 2000)

5,000 years ago

evidence of human influence on the area appeared with the creation of barrows at Avebury

3,000 years ago

the Uffington White Horse was carved into the chalk of the North Wessex Downs



A Landscape Woven with Time

The cultural heritage of the North Wessex Downs AONB makes a powerful and fundamental contribution to the present-day landscape and to our own lives

5.1 The North Wessex Downs is an ancient man-made landscape. This cultural heritage makes a powerful and fundamental contribution to the present-day landscape and to our own lives, as Bill Bryson neatly describes. Evidence of human influence on the area extends back at least 5,000 years when the long barrows at Avebury were constructed.

5.2 In the 3,000 years since the Uffington White Horse was carved, the landscape of the North Wessex Downs has constantly evolved to serve the changing needs of the successive generations of the people who have lived and worked here. What we see today is a rich and many-layered patchwork of features that record different stages in its evolution. Together they contribute an irreplaceable sense of time and personality to the present day scene. Past human influence is etched in every facet of the landscape – in the shape of fields and woods, the alignment of tracks and lanes, the form and texture of villages and hamlets. In years to come, the landscape of the North Wessex Downs will continue to evolve, but hopefully in ways that will allow the ingrained reminders of its past to add meaning and value to the lives of its future residents and visitors.

5.3 The importance of the historic environment is clearly recognised in the planning system. The National Planning and Policy Framework (NPPF) confirms that the significance of heritage assets lies in their interest and value not only to people today, but also to future generations¹. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. The significance of an asset derives not only from physical presence, but also from its setting – in other words, its relationship to nearby historic places and within the wider landscape.

Many of the area's archaeological sites have national or even international recognition

Features of the North Wessex Downs

5.4 A wide range of features of differing scale, visibility and significance make up the historic environment. Many of the area's archaeological sites have national or even international recognition. The landscape that includes the complex of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age monuments around Avebury (and including Silbury Hill, West Kennet long barrow, the causewayed enclosure on Windmill Hill, dozens of Bronze Age barrows and many other important sites) is of such global significance that it has been inscribed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as a World Heritage Site.

5.5 There are 479 Scheduled Monuments in the North Wessex Downs AONB; one of the densest concentrations in the country. These include:

- ▶ Neolithic long barrows of Waylands Smithy high on the chalk ridge overlooking the Thames Valley and Adam's Grave above the Vale of Pewsey;
- ▶ Bronze Age barrow cemeteries such as the Lambourn Seven Barrows;
- ▶ the Uffington White Horse and its adjacent Iron Age hillfort, (one of a string of major late prehistoric defensive sites that occupy prominent positions on the higher downs);
- ▶ the small Roman town at Cunetio near Mildenhall and Roman villas such as Littlecote; and
- ▶ the medieval motte and bailey castles at Hamstead Marshall and Marlborough College.

5.6 One Registered Battlefield is included within the AONB: Roundway Down, near Devizes. This site was the location of a major encounter fought in July 1643 when a Parliamentary army was heavily defeated by a significantly smaller Royalist force.

5.7 In addition to designated archaeological features, the local Historic Environment Records (HERs) maintained by the County Councils in Hampshire and Oxfordshire and the unitary



authorities in Wiltshire, Swindon and West Berkshire, contain records of more than 11,000 sites, monuments and finds of archaeological and historic interest within the boundary of the North Wessex Downs. Even though they may not yet have been designated as scheduled monuments, many of these sites are of national importance. Many others are of local significance and make a real contribution to local distinctiveness and sense of place. The information contained on the HERs is a vital part of the jigsaw of information that allows us to understand how our communities have developed and our landscapes have evolved over more than six millennia.

5.8 Another important part of the local heritage is the extensive network of footpaths, bridleways and byways, including the ancient ridgeway paths along the Marlborough Downs to the Chilterns and beyond. These historic communication routes are a characteristic feature of the AONB and are now a valuable recreational resource.

5.9 The built environment also makes a fundamental contribution to the landscape. The North Wessex Downs contain 4,069 Listed Buildings. More than 250 of these are listed at Grade I or II*, the two highest levels of importance. Buildings protected through

listing take many different forms and reflect nearly a thousand years of human settlement. As well as grand country houses, the market towns in the AONB are enriched by the town houses of wealthy merchants and its villages by many splendid medieval parish churches. Listed buildings in the North Wessex Downs also include: some spectacular and very early barns; locks and other structures associated with the Kennet and Avon Canal; milestones, roadside pumps and signs related to turnpike roads; and pillboxes built as part of the planned defence of Britain in the early phase of the Second World War.

5.10 The North Wessex Downs AONB includes 15 Registered Parks and Gardens. One of these, Highclere Park, is registered at Grade I, and four examples, Tottenham House, Purley Hall, Ashdown House and Inkpen House, are registered as II*. Although not on the national Register, many other areas of designed landscape, including historic parkland, gardens and cemeteries add significant local value, especially within and around some of the AONB's towns and larger villages.

i NPPF paragraph 184.

Page 51 White horse at Uffington, David Newham/Alamy Stock Photo
Page 52 Archaeological dig, Oliver Cripps
Page 53 Silbury Hill, David Hall



Page 54 Ashdown House in Berkshire, Peter Orr; Savernake Forest, David Hall;
Cottages at Great Bedwyn, Stan Green
Page 55 Church at Aldbourne and Denford Millhouse, both Stan Green

5.11 As with the archaeological resource, many local buildings and structures remain unprotected through the Listing mechanism. Nonetheless, they contribute to the landscape or to our understanding of historic events or processes. Some of these lie within the 109 Conservation Areas designated by local authorities in settlements of particular historic character or significance. Many others, especially isolated structures or farm buildings, receive little or no formal protection.

5.12 A further heritage asset, often overlooked in terms of importance to the historic landscape, is managed woodland, including deer parks, hunting forests, irreplaceable ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees. These areas, managed sensitively, play a significant role in protecting archaeological earthworks from damage by cultivation.

Historic Landscape Character

5.13 Defining and mapping the Historic Landscape Character Areas for the North Wessex Downs has provided new insights into the evolution of the landscape and the historic processes that have influenced the countryside. Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) is a way of analysing and recording how several millennia of human interaction with the land produces the rural landscape of today. It is nationally recognised as a means for understanding and managing the entire landscape and not just the isolated archaeological sites and buildings traditionally protected by scheduling or listing.

5.14 Better appreciation of how the landscape has evolved in relation to its underlying geology and changing socio-economic circumstances is vitally important. The methodology brings together a wealth of information, including semi-natural and living features (woodlands, hedges, etc.) as much as archaeological features, with a clear recognition of the dynamic nature of the landscape, interpreting landscape on the basis of its 'time-depth' – the natural and cultural history that has produced the landscapes we find in the AONB today.

5.15 The main aims of the HLC process are to gain a fuller understanding of the whole AONB landscape, to raise awareness among local communities, visitors and the wider population of the unique cultural heritage of the North Wessex Downs, and to provide a tool for the integrated management of the area's historic environment. The resource informs planning decisions, provides a framework for policy making and research and improves the county-based Sites and Monument Records (SMRs) and Historic Environment Records (HERs).

5.16 Whilst confirming that the landscape of the North Wessex Downs has always been predominantly rural, the HLC process has begun to show how its detailed character has changed over time. One of the most significant statistics concerns the loss of open chalk downland. Of the 18% of the area that could be characterised as unploughed pasture in the 19th century, just 3% survives today.

5.17 The rate of agricultural change is also illustrated by the fact that around 75% of pre-18th century field enclosures have been lost during the 20th century. In addition, some two-thirds of medieval 'assart enclosures' (woodland clearances) have been lost or significantly modified in the same period.

Settlement Pattern

5.18 The pattern and distribution of settlement within the North Wessex Downs has evolved over millennia of human occupation. However, most of the current towns, villages, hamlets and farms are likely to have originated in medieval or post-medieval times. Some of the most characteristic features of the Open Downland and Downland with Woodland Landscape Character Types are the long linear settlements of the river valleys – the main concentrations of population in otherwise open uninhabited downland. Characteristically, these are loosely strung along a road on the first contour above the winter flood level, with the winterbourne or river forming an integral feature of the village. Examples are at St Mary Bourne in Hampshire, Collingbourne Kingston in Wiltshire and Hampstead Norreys in Berkshire.

The
landscape of
the North Wessex
Downs AONB
has always been
predominantly
rural

5.19 The pattern in the Lowland Mosaic Landscape Character Type is distinctly different. This reflects its medieval origins in a network of hamlets, and lines of houses and villages along roads. Some villages have a clear nucleus, typically associated with a village green or church, while others have a more dispersed pattern, typical of post-medieval squatter settlements. This pattern is also reflected in the Downland with Woodland Landscape Character Type, which has small clustered hamlets and villages sheltering in folds in the chalk, as in the Chutes in Wiltshire, or exposed on ridgetops, as at Facombe in Hampshire. Evidence from the Domesday Survey of 1086 suggests that the creation of many of these settlements were during the Early Medieval (Saxon) period.

5.20 Another distinct settlement type of the North Wessex Downs is the string of attractive, small, springline villages that developed along the base of the lower north-facing scarp. Examples are Clyffe Pypard, Clevancy, Liddington, Letcombe, Ashbury and Bishopstone.

AONB Special Qualities: Historic Environment

- 5.21 **Neolithic and Bronze Age ritual and funerary monuments** including Knap Hill and Windmill Hill causewayed enclosures; West Kennet and Wayland's Smithy chambered tombs; Silbury Hill; Avebury stone circle and its surrounding ceremonial landscape; Bronze Age round barrows including Seven Sisters and Seven Barrows groups.
- 5.22 **Iron Age, Roman and post-Roman defences and settlements**, including Oldbury, Barbury Castle and Uffington Castle; Cunetio (Mildenhall) Roman town, Littlecote villa and the Roman road through Savernake Forest; Fyfield and Overton Down field systems; Wansdyke, Grim's Ditch and Devil's Ditch linear earthworks.
- 5.23 **Medieval and post-medieval settlements and buildings**, including castle earthworks, tithe barns, parish churches, and the layouts and historic buildings of Marlborough, Hungerford, Ramsbury and many smaller villages.
- 5.24 **Country houses and landscaped parks and gardens** such as at Basildon Park, Highclere Castle, Tottenham House and

Ramsbury Manor and Savernake Forest, many originating as medieval deer parks.

- 5.25 **Post-medieval buildings and infrastructure** including the Kennet and Avon Canal; extant and former railway lines and tunnels; watermills, windmills and pumping stations; water meadows; 18th/19th-century planned farmsteads; First and Second World War airfields, pillboxes, ammunition dumps and practice trenches.



Only 3% of the open chalk downland that existed as unploughed pasture in the 19th century is left today

Around 75% of the area's pre-18th century field enclosures were lost during the 20th century





Page 56 Waylands Smithy, NWD AONB
Page 57 Avebury stone monuments, David Hall

Historic Environment: Key Issues, AONB Strategic Objectives and Policies

The historic environment in the North Wessex Downs AONB faces a range of challenges which this Plan will address through the implementation of key objectives and policies

5.26 Key Issues

Key issues with the potential to have significant influence on the AONB's Historic Environment Special Qualities:

- a) Lack of knowledge about the broader historic landscape of the North Wessex Downs – the landscape speaks eloquently of its cultural history, but this needs to be better understood and more closely applied to management objectives.
- b) Many undiscovered archaeological sites, especially in wooded areas.

- c) Insufficient understanding of the historical evolution of individual settlements and how this should influence their future development.
- d) The need for a more consistent approach to the designation and management of Conservation Areas, in particular the systematic use of Conservation Area appraisals and management plans.
- e) Development pressure threats to the historic fabric and visual character of traditional market towns.
- f) Impact on archaeological sites, their settings and integrity, of inappropriate development, including siting of large agricultural buildings, renewable energy infrastructure, road infrastructure, traffic and signage.
- g) Poorly sited and designed new development that fails to reflect the historic form of settlements and building groups, their character and setting.
- h) Infilling and over-expansion on small plots, which may erode the traditional mixed character of individual settlements.
- i) Loss of local vernacular architecture and traditional farmstead layouts, especially through the insensitive conversion of traditional agricultural buildings.
- j) Loss of grazing animals, which is threatening the important archaeological sites with damage from uncontrolled scrub encroachment.
- k) Poorly managed recreational access to sensitive archaeological/cultural sites, including damage caused by inappropriate, irresponsible or illegal use of off-road motorised vehicles.
- l) Continued deep ploughing over archaeological sites and remains, and damage from burrowing animals.
- m) Impact of planting trees or biomass crops either directly on archaeological features, or on the character of the historic landscape through poor design and siting.
- n) Impact of modern farming practices on the character of the historic landscape.

5.27 AONB Strategic Objectives for 2019-2024: Historic Environment

- S.09 Promote wider use and understanding of Historic Landscape Characterisation to inform and guide strategic planning, development decisions, land management practices and other forces for change.
- S.10 Protect archaeological and historic features, sites and their landscape setting against inappropriate development and management practices.
- S.11 Support the inclusion of measures in neighbourhood plans to conserve and to enhance the character of settlements.



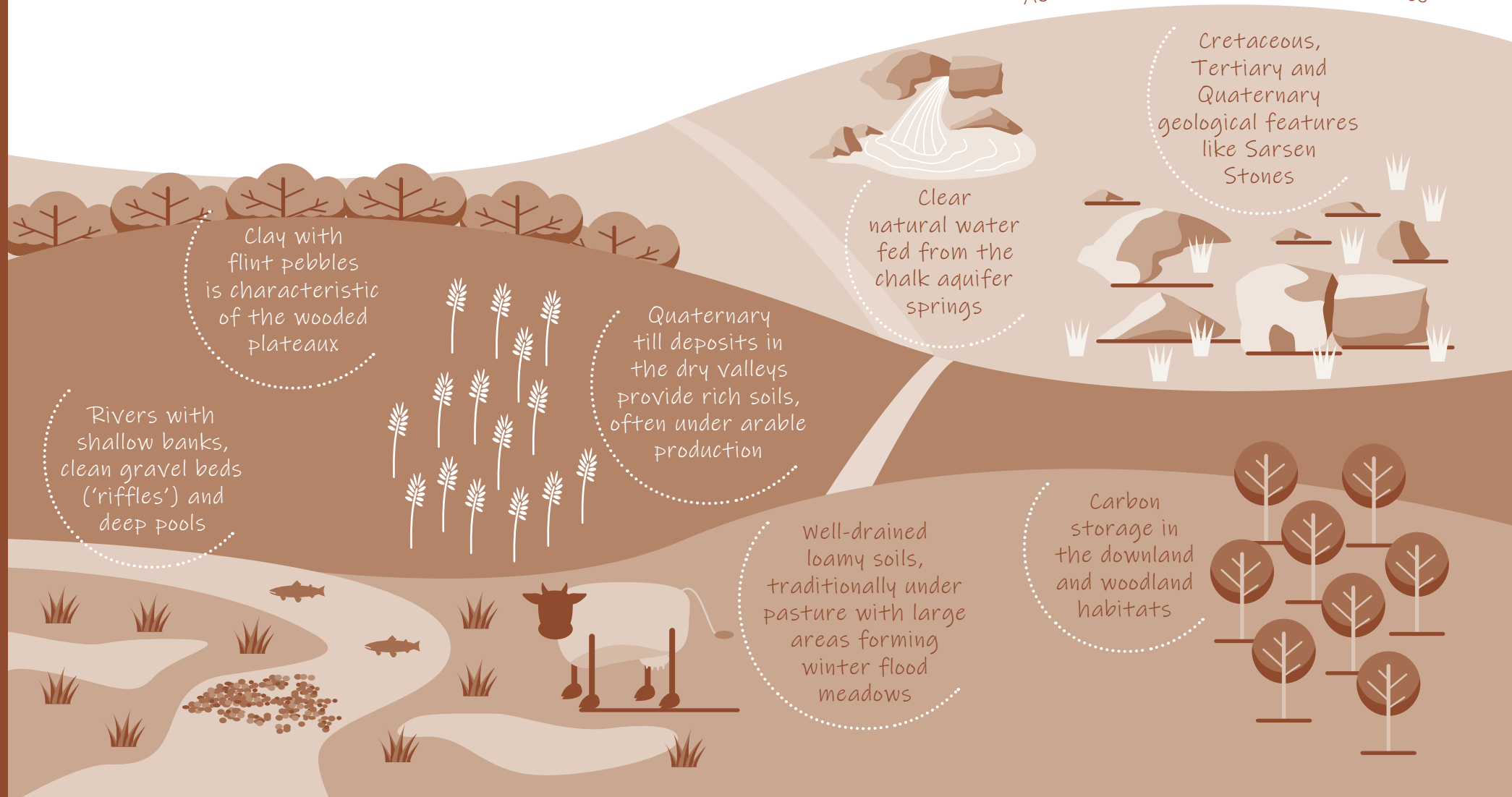
5.28 AONB Policies: Historic Environment

HE 01	Support efforts to ensure that sites, features and landscapes of historical importance are appropriately identified, recorded and managed.
HE 02	Encourage voluntary-sector research and collaboration on poorly understood aspects of the local historic environment.
HE 03	Encourage all stakeholders to use the English Heritage at Risk Register to focus on archaeological sites, historic buildings and conservation areas in special need of action.
HE 04	Work closely with the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site Partnership and other groups to develop shared objectives and deliver joint actions in support of the World Heritage Site Management Plan.
HE 05	Promote the production and publication of 'local lists' of heritage assets.
HE 06	Support initiatives that seek to provide long-term sustainable management of important heritage assets for social and economic benefits.
HE 07	Identify and promote opportunities to include the historic environment in community-generated Village Design Statements, Parish and Neighbourhood Plans, etc., linked where appropriate to Conservation Area Appraisals.
HE 08	Promote and encourage the use of Historic Landscape and Historic Settlement Characterisation to inform land management, policy making and planning decisions.
HE 09	Support more and better explanation, interpretation and promotion of the historic environment for residents and visitors.
HE 10	Support collaborative historic environment activity involving professional and voluntary sectors, such as research and advice from historic environment experts.

theme 5

Natural Resources

AONB Special Qualities: Natural Resources



Clay with flint pebbles is characteristic of the wooded plateaux

Rivers with shallow banks, clean gravel beds ('riffles') and deep pools

Quaternary till deposits in the dry valleys provide rich soils, often under arable production

Clear natural water fed from the chalk aquifer springs

Well-drained loamy soils, traditionally under pasture with large areas forming winter flood meadows

Carbon storage in the downland and woodland habitats

Cretaceous, Tertiary and Quaternary geological features like Sarsen Stones

A photograph of a narrow dirt path winding through a forest. The path is covered in fallen leaves and leads into a misty, hazy distance. Tall evergreen trees frame the path, while deciduous trees with yellowing leaves are visible in the background. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

“Our wealth as a nation and our individual wellbeing depend critically upon the environment. It provides us with the food, water and air that are essential for life and with the minerals and raw materials for our industry and consumption. Less obviously, it provides the processes that purify air and water, and which sequester or break down wastes. It is also ... where we find recreation, health and solace, and [where] our culture finds its roots.”

UK National Ecosystem Assessment, 2011

Natural capital is the Earth's stock of natural assets like minerals, air, water and biodiversity

Ecosystem services are the benefits that we receive from natural assets, such as clean water and fuel

Page 59 Savernake Forest in Wiltshire, stocker1970/Shutterstock.com

Page 60 Honey bee feeding on pear blossom, Norman Smith

Page 61 River Dun at Hungerford, Rob Starr, Town and Manor of Hungerford



A Landscape of Opportunity

The components of the natural environment that provide us with benefits to our health and wellbeing are known as 'natural capital'

Accounting for Natural Benefits

6.1 Whether we live in towns or in the countryside, we are dependent on ecological systems (ecosystems) for our health and well-being. The components of the natural environment that provide us with these benefits are known as 'natural capital'. The benefits which society derives from natural capital assets ('ecosystem services') are commonly grouped into four core categories of services:

- ▶ **Supporting services** (for example the processes which form soil, cycle nutrients and the essential photosynthetic process in plants).
- ▶ **Provisioning services** (for example, woodland that provides timber for fuel, construction and manufacturing, or plant communities which sustain populations of insects to pollinate crops).
- ▶ **Regulating services** (for example, soils and aquifers that absorb rainfall reducing flooding, and filtering water to give us healthy rivers and clean drinking water).
- ▶ **Cultural services** (for example, landscapes, wildlife and cultural heritage that give us a sense of identity, support tourism, offer recreational and learning opportunities, assist our physical and mental wellbeing and delight the soul).

6.2 The 2011 UK National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA) identified that inadequate consideration in decision-making of the full range of natural benefits and services that we derive from the natural environment is a significant factor contributing to the degradation of ecosystems. While we pay for some ecosystem

services, like food and fibre, we are often unaware of the importance of others, such as natural purification of water and air, and the attenuation of flood water. The cost of providing these artificially is considerable. In the years after the highly technical UK NEA reports were published, the environmental campaigner and writer Tony Juniper explained ecosystem services in an accessible and readily understandable format using a series of examples from around the world (in 'What has Nature Ever Done for Us?') and more recently from around the UK (in 'What Nature does for Britain'). These illustrate clearly the tendency to under-estimate the value of natural processes and the services and benefits we derive from the natural world. This leads to poorly informed decisions on how to safeguard these functions and utilise natural resources sustainably. The result is pollution, depletion of biodiversity, degraded ecosystems and substantial damage to the processes which are vital to life on Earth. There is a significant financial cost to restore ecosystem functionality or, if it is feasible to do so, to replace such functions with artificial alternatives.

6.3 Just as there are costs to restoring degraded ecosystems, there are benefits and savings from a healthy and naturally functioning environment. Degraded ecosystems present risks to businesses in terms of security of raw materials, waste disposal, insurance rates and brand image. In the North Wessex Downs, there are obvious direct links between ecosystems and the business activities of land-based industries such as farming and forestry (where soil health clearly underpins ecosystem function and the products from the land) and rural tourism. Associations can be less obvious or indirect for other businesses and relate, for example, to supply chains and investment choices.

6.4 In the rural landscape, sustainable agriculture and forestry could deliver widespread positive effects on ecosystems in the area. Grants, subsidies and advice can support and promote sustainable approaches to land use among farmers, foresters and other land managers.

There are benefits and savings from a healthy and naturally functioning environment

Conserving Resources and Maintaining Ecosystem Function

6.5 Protecting natural resources and the natural benefits arising from them by operating in a way that minimises damaging impacts is part of sustainable development. There is a particular need to conserve soil health, manage water and maintain clean air.

Soils

6.6 Soils are cultivated to produce essential items of food, clothing and fuel. Soils also deliver natural benefits, influencing water flows; storing carbon, and supporting wildlife habitats and nutrient cycling. The Government's strategy for soils in the Defra 25 Year Environment Plan sets out a case for improving soil health and protecting peatlands by addressing factors such as erosion, compaction and decline of organic matter. The stated policy objective is that *"By 2030, we want all of England's soils to be managed sustainably, and we will use natural capital thinking to develop appropriate soil metrics and management approaches."*

6.7 Chalk forms the underlying surface geological structure of the North Wessex Downs but the overlying soils influence vegetation cover and land use. Each soil type in the area has its own management requirements.

Sustaining Water Resources

6.8 The main rivers flowing through the downs – the Pang, the Lambourn and the Kennet – drain eastwards to the River Thames. Watercourses flowing off the northern escarpment into the vales also feed the Thames catchment. The separate catchments of the Hampshire Avon and the Test flow south, draining the Vale of Pewsey and Hampshire Downs respectively. The escarpment in the west around Calne falls into the Bristol Avon catchment, flowing west.

6.9 The status and condition of both surface waters and groundwater in terms of quality, availability and flow are important to people and to habitats and species in the AONB. The North Wessex Downs Partnership is committed to supporting the work of Catchment Partnerships, water companies, local planning





Page 62 Kennet and Avon Canal, Peter Orr; Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) in the AONB and Natural Flood Management (NFM) meeting in the Lambourn Valley, both ARK

authorities and other interested groups to help assess, protect and enhance these important assets.

6.10 One in six residential and commercial properties in England is at risk from flooding. In the North Wessex Downs, there has been localised flooding of villages in the river valleys in the winter. This is often associated with rising groundwater and springs rather than river flooding. Flood risk management may include the provision of sustainable measures to alleviate future flood risk, for example Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) incorporating urban attenuation ponds, and Natural Flood Management (NFM) schemes involving attenuating surface water runoff from agricultural land, river restoration and river floodplain enhancement.

6.11 In summer, some rivers suffer from lack of flows because of water abstraction. This may then lead to a reduction in water quality and ecological diversity caused, for example, by reduced capacity to dilute inflows downstream from sewage treatment works or to transport silt resulting in its deposition. Pressure for abstraction from the chalk aquifers that feed these rivers is directly related to the rising demand for water, including from new development. Drainage structures and other features modify natural flow regimes. Climate change, the deterioration of assets, as well as continuing pressure to build in areas of high risk flood zones, will contribute to increased risk of flooding affecting local communities.

6.12 The waters of the chalk aquifers and rivers are a major source of potable water. Ground waters from within the river catchments are abstracted to meet demands for public water supply and for industry, agriculture and aquaculture (water cress and fish farms). The level of abstraction and effect on river flows varies across the area. The Lambourn has a near natural flow regime with minimal abstraction. In contrast, the River Pang was one of 40 rivers in England identified in the 1980s as suffering from low flows caused by over abstraction (from a groundwater source at Compton). Despite abstraction ceasing in 1997, prompted by increased nitrate levels, the Environment Agency continues to monitor the flow characteristics of the river.

6.13 Groundwater abstraction points in the Kennet Valley are numerous, but the level of abstraction is low, amounting to only

5% of the available water resource. Following detailed studies by Thames Water, overseen by the Environment Agency, the Axford abstraction licence has been amended to safeguard flows in the River Kennet during low flows; in addition, the Ogbourne abstraction licence has been ended. These changes are part of a long-running programme of investigations and licence changes to make groundwater abstractions more sustainable across the AONB, although all licence reductions are still dependent on other sources of supply being available. Modelling indicates that abstraction is having a detrimental impact on river flows, although the proposed construction of a water supply pipeline from Farmoor Reservoir to Swindon is expected to reduce pressures for groundwater abstraction.

6.14 At the same time, the operational requirements of the Kennet and Avon Canal have an effect on the Kennet. Between Bath and the summit close to Crofton Pumping Station, the Canal is fed by the Bristol Avon; between the summit and Kintbury by the River Dun, a tributary of the Kennet; and between Kintbury and Reading by the Kennet. In-flows into the Canal from these river sources can result in less than optimum flows in the rivers, particularly in the summer months and in drier years. When the combined section of canal and river diverge, this can result in high levels of turbidity in the river. There has been significant progress amongst the various parties to minimise the impacts of the canal on the river, including the construction of bypass weirs at canal locks west of Hungerford to prevent canal water spilling over into the River Dun. It is a clear objective of the Canal and River Trust to optimise the use of water resources in the Canal and to use back-pumping to conserve water in the 'artificial' section between Bath and the Canal summit.

6.15 Under the Nitrates Directive, the majority of the North Wessex Downs is designated as a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ). Within these zones, farmers are required to limit the application of manures and nitrogen fertilisers, subject to a closed season for the application of certain manures. They are also required to keep records of cropping, stocking and the application of nitrogen fertilisers and manures.

6.16 Further control of diffuse pollution is a requirement of the EU Water Framework Directive. There is an obligation to manage

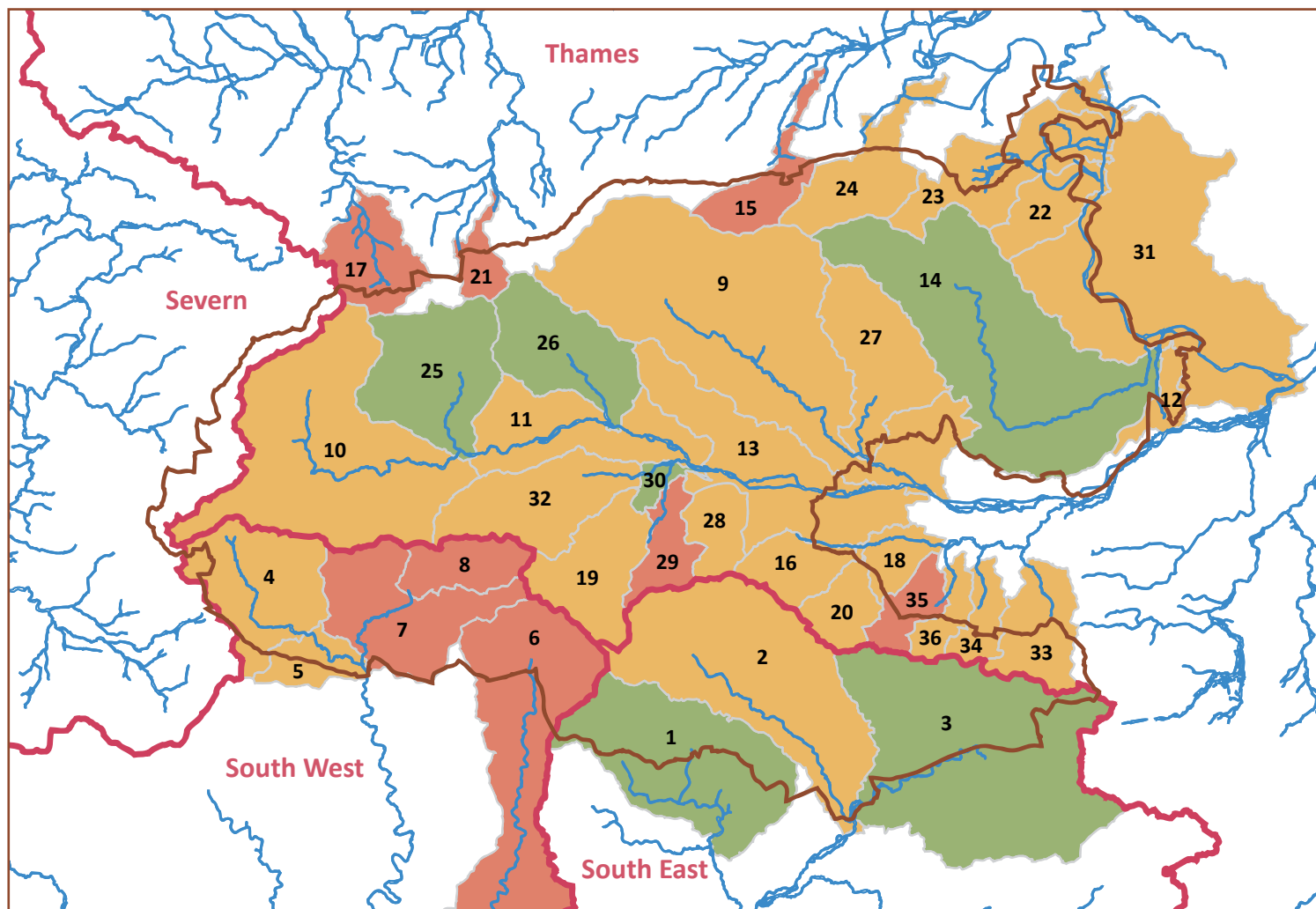


Figure 5. North Wessex Downs AONB surface water quality. Showing main river basins, river catchments and 2016 overall classification of ecological status. Contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database rights 2019. Ordnance Survey 100051200.

Key River Basin Districts

— Main Rivers

 AONB Boundary

Water Framework Directive Waterbody Catchments with 2016 Overall Ecological Status

Good

Moderate

Poor

No.	Waterbody name	Ecological status
1	Upper Anton	Good
2	Bourne Rivulet	Moderate
3	Upper Test	Good
4	Etchilhampton Water	Moderate
5	Hampshire Avon (West)	Moderate
6	Bourne (Hampshire Avon)	Poor
7	Hampshire Avon (East) and Woodborough Stream	Poor
8	Hampshire Avon (East) and Deane Water	Poor
9	Lambourn (source to Newbury)	Moderate
10	Upper Kennet to Marlborough	Moderate
11	Middle Kennet (Marlborough to Hungerford)	Moderate
12	Sulham Brook	Moderate
13	Middle Kennet (Hungerford to Newbury)	Moderate
14	Pang	Good
15	Letcombe Brook	Poor
16	Enborne (source to downstream A34)	Moderate
17	Ray (Wiltshire; source to Lydiard Brook)	Poor
18	Enborne (downstream A34 to Burghclere Brook)	Moderate
19	Upper Dun	Moderate
20	Penwood Stream	Moderate
21	Liden Brook, Swindon	Poor
22	Cholsey Brook and tributaries	Moderate
23	Mill Brook and Bradfords Brook System, Wallingford	Moderate
24	Ginge Brook and Mill Brook	Moderate
25	Og	Good
26	Aldbourn	Good
27	Winterbourne	Moderate
28	Inkpen Stream (source to Kennet)	Moderate
29	Shalbourne (source to Kennet at Hungerford)	Poor
30	Kennet and Avon Canal and Dun above Hungerford	Good
31	Thames Wallingford to Caversham	Moderate
32	Froxfield Stream	Moderate
33	Baughurst Brook	Moderate
34	Kingsclere Brook (source to Enborne)	Moderate
35	Earlstone Stream and Burghclere Brook (source to Enborne)	Poor
36	Ecchinswell Brook (source to Enborne)	Moderate

60% of nitrates,
25% of phosphorus and 70%
of the sediments in diffuse
pollution are a result of farming

**Agricultural
diseases,** such as
bluetongue, are on the increase,
partly due to climate change

river basins to deliver good environmental outcomes in both surface waters and groundwater. Agriculture is recognised as one of the main sources of diffuse pollution of water courses and groundwater. Defra encourages Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) as a key approach to resolving this by managing land in a way that is sensitive to the ecological health of the water environment. While farming is not the sole cause of diffuse pollution, it does contribute approximately 60% of nitrates, 25% of phosphorus and 70% of sediments along with other pollutants which enter our surface waters.

Maintaining Air Quality

6.17 A variety of air pollutants have known or suspected harmful effects on human health and the environment. In most areas of Europe, these pollutants are principally the products of combustion from space heating, power generation or motor vehicle traffic. Pollutants from these sources may not only prove a problem in the immediate vicinity, but can travel long distances, chemically reacting in the atmosphere to produce secondary pollutants such as acid rain or ozone. The nearest monitoring site to the North Wessex Downs is at Harwell. Other sites are in Reading Town Centre, Newbury, Thatcham, Bath and Oxford. Pollution is low, but there may be local issues, such as environmental quality related to traffic pollution.

Climate Change

6.18 There is increasing evidence and acceptance that the global climate is changing, largely as a result of human activity, and that we need both to mitigate the effects of high levels of atmospheric carbon and to adapt to the consequences of climate change. Government policies promote sustainable energy generation and more efficient consumption, and other actions aimed to achieve a low carbon economy. There is a broad consensus on how the climate of Southern England will change over the coming decades. These changes are expected to be progressive but gradual and may not be easily detectable over the

The
Partnership is
keen to refine its
understanding of
the impacts of
climate change



five-year period of this Management Plan. However, strategies are needed now because of the time scale involved to implement effective actions. The main changes are likely to be warmer, drier summers; wetter, milder winters; and increased frequency of extreme weather conditions, such as storms.

6.19 Climate change may result in more rainfall occurring as winter deluges, falling on already saturated ground.

This would provide the conditions for increased soil erosion, resulting in damage to historic features and more silt, nutrients and pesticides washing into rivers. These inputs arise predominantly from arable farmland and already have a significant impact on water quality and freshwater biodiversity. Drought and lower summer rainfall are likely to result in a contraction of the chalk stream network. Freshwater species will be lost from some of the winterbournes while some perennial streams will become seasonal



winterbournes. There may be an increase in the popularity of streamside recreation as people seek shade in the hottest months.

6.20 Other significant changes also have the potential to affect the landscapes, wildlife and communities of the AONB. Woodland may become dominated by species that cope better than beech with the likely changes in climate. The range of crops grown by farmers will change and there may be more growing of biofuels. We have already seen increases in agricultural diseases including African horse sickness, bluetongue disease and Schmallenberg virus (SBV) that can be attributed in part to climate change. Water flows in rivers and streams could become more erratic. Species populations and habitats may expand, contract or migrate. These changes may alter the structure and function of ecosystems; new species may migrate into the area, some of which could bring disease or pests that may be detrimental to indigenous species. Tourism pressures could increase as people alter holiday patterns to remain in the UK. All of these factors could affect the plants and animals which inhabit the North Wessex Downs.

6.21 The UK Climate Change Risk Assessment and the National Adaptation Programme are two initiatives that define these impacts. They are based on predictions put forward by the UK Climate Projections (UKCP09). The North Wessex Downs Partnership is keen to refine its understanding of the impacts of climate change and develop strategies for adaption to these effects.

6.22 'Making Space for Nature' outlined four key ways that we can adapt our ecological networks to a changing climate:

- ▶ Ensure that all parts of the network are in the best possible management.
- ▶ Increase the population sizes of vulnerable species.
- ▶ Reduce the risks of local extinction.
- ▶ Provide colonists for new sites.

6.23 To do this we must:

- ▶ allow species to adapt by shifting their distributions naturally to stay within their preferred 'climate envelope' through increasing connectivity (habitat patches and corridors and a network of protected sites to provide a more permeable countryside); and
- ▶ Enhance the opportunities for species to stay within their climate envelope through small-scale local movements (as opposed to being forced into long-distance dispersal) by promoting landscape level-heterogeneity within the AONB.

Page 64 Discovering the value of wetlands at Avington Estate and Denford Fisheries, ARK

Page 65 Cover crop and river restoration work, both ARK



AONB Special Qualities: Natural Resources

- 6.24 Cretaceous, Tertiary and Quaternary **geological history**, with features such as Sarsen Stones.
- 6.25 This geology in turn influences the main **soil types** of the North Wessex Downs:
- ▶ Thin chalk soils of the open downland, now primarily under arable production.
 - ▶ The capping of Quaternary Clay with Flints over the chalk found as pockets of reddish brown clay

Page 66 Vale of Pewsey, Dave Gray
Page 67 River Dun, Tony Bartlett



containing flint pebbles. These areas are particularly characteristic of the Downland with Woodland and Wooded Plateau Landscape Character Types.

- ▶ Quaternary Coombe deposits found where accumulated frost-weathered debris was carried down slope by melt waters at the end of the last glaciation. These have created till deposits in the dry valleys of the downs providing richer pockets of soil, often under arable production.
 - ▶ Deep well-drained loamy soils over Greensand and river alluviums in the Vale of Pewsey, traditionally under pasture with large areas forming winter flood meadows.
 - ▶ A mixed soil mosaic to the east of Newbury with nutrient-poor acidic soils over plateau gravels intermixed with fertile loamy soils overlying the London Clay, characterised by the Medieval landscape of the Lowland Mosaic Landscape Character Type.
- 6.26 Carbon storage in the characteristic habitats of the North Wessex Downs such as chalk grassland and broadleaved woodland.
- 6.27 Rivers with shallow sloping banks, clean shallow ‘washed’ **river gravel beds** (riffles) contrasting with deeper shaded pools.
- 6.28 Often a complex pattern of **river channels** (as on the Kennet downstream of Marlborough) reflecting the past use of the river to supply water to an extensive network of water meadows and mills, most of which are now disused. Upper winterbourne sections and winterbourne tributaries, flowing only during winter and spring when groundwater levels are at their highest.
- 6.29 **Clear natural water** fed from the chalk aquifer by springs which issue in the valleys of the chalk dip slope at the point where the water table comes to the surface. Limited fluctuations in water temperature throughout the year, resulting from the filtration of groundwater as it percolates through the chalk.

Natural Resources: Key Issues, AONB Strategic Objectives and Policies

The North Wessex Downs AONB faces a range of challenges with regard to its natural resources, which this Plan will address through the implementation of key objectives and policies

6.30 Key Issues

Key issues with the potential to have significant influence on the AONB's Natural Resources Special Qualities:

- a) Lack of agreement on the levels of acceptable environmental limits within the AONB.
- b) The need to raise awareness of water quality issues.
- c) Accelerated water run-off and soil erosion, especially on steeper slopes and under 'open' arable crops, such as maize.
- d) Opportunities to encourage no-till or minimum tillage and careful application of agricultural inputs.
- e) Overall air quality is generally good but activities outside the AONB can have a significant effect across the area; impacts of air pollution from road traffic and agriculture on ecosystem health is of concern.
- f) Overabstraction of groundwater and water from the chalk aquifer.
- g) Increasing water demand, especially during the summer months, as a result of climate change and changing lifestyles.
- h) Increasing water demand for crop irrigation as a result of climate change and more erratic weather patterns resulting in prolonged dry periods and intense summer rainfall.
- i) The influence of climate change on groundwater recharge patterns, overall water availability and elevated temperatures in chalk streams.

- j) Increasing water demand as a result of major development in the urban areas in and around the North Wessex Downs, also sometimes leading to export of water out of the AONB catchments.
- k) Loss of river habitats as a result of historical land drainage and channel modifications associated with past flood alleviation works and past industry (although some man-made features, e.g. mill leats, are of considerable historical importance).
- l) Decline in fish stocks and quality of fisheries.
- m) Excessive removal of bankside vegetation (on occasion associated with fisheries management).
- n) Watercourse maintenance to conserve habitat while reducing flood risk where feasible.
- o) Loss of winterbourne channels through agricultural cultivation.
- p) Increasing lock movements on the Kennet and Avon Canal taking water from the River Kennet and its tributaries.
- q) Pollution of rivers from point sources, including public and private domestic sewerage systems (with phosphorus discharges a particular problem), agriculture, commercial watercress beds, and fish farms.
- r) Impacts on the ecology of rivers from diffuse sources of pollution – often individually minor but collectively significant – including run-off from roads, houses and commercial areas, run-off from farmland, and seepage into groundwater from developed landscapes of all kinds, resulting in raised nutrient levels and toxic algal blooms.
- s) Pollution pressure on the River Kennet generated by poor water quality and boat traffic on the Kennet and Avon Canal.

Air pollution from traffic and agriculture impacts on ecosystem health

Over abstraction of groundwaters is of major concern, particularly in light of increased water demands due to climate change





6.31 AONB Strategic Objectives for 2019-2024: Natural Resources

- S.12 Promote and support measures to ensure chalk rivers and streams in the AONB achieve and are maintained at good ecological status including, for example, appropriate riparian planting to mitigate elevated water temperatures predicted as a consequence of climate change.
- S.13 Advocate full recognition in decision-making by relevant bodies of the importance of the AONB's natural capital assets.
- S.14 Ensure that all landscape interventions recognise and address the implications of climate change for the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs and its setting.
- S.15 Encourage efforts to determine the significance of air pollution to maintaining natural capital assets of the AONB and its special qualities, including ecosystem function, cultural heritage and community wellbeing; and responses to address concerns.
- S.16 Advocate the recognition of the importance of the North Wessex Downs landscape for the environmental goods and services it provides to the economy and society as a whole, including heritage, water quality, soils, food production, wildlife, flood management, carbon storage, recreation, health and wellbeing.

6.32 AONB Policies: Natural Resources

NR 01	Support co-ordinated action, guidance and measures on soil health issues.
NR 02	Promote and encourage initiatives for the sustainable management of soil by land managers to minimise soil degradation through erosion, compaction, pollution and impoverishment, particularly in the case of the thin chalk downland soils.
NR 03	Support and provide landscape input to AONB catchment partnerships. Contribute to research, projects and co-operation of partners with an influence on watercourses and catchments.
NR 04	Encourage all partners to take water demand and its consequences for landscape, ecology and fisheries fully into account in decisions regarding planning, changes to land use or cropping patterns within the North Wessex Downs.
NR 05	Support the introduction of demand management measures for water use in those settlements that draw on the aquifers of the North Wessex Downs, and of measures to monitor and reduce water wastage.
NR 06	Support efforts to ensure that no water is abstracted from catchments that are classified as ‘no water available’, ‘over licensed’ or ‘over abstracted’ under the Environment Agency’s Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy.
NR 07	Support work to identify and address the sources of diffuse and point pollution within the North Wessex Downs through agencies, local groups and volunteer initiatives.
NR 08	Promote and help co-ordinate remedial action through the Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative and other partnership schemes to restore and enhance degraded river sections within the North Wessex Downs.
NR 09	Work to ensure that no new abstraction licences are granted within the North Wessex Downs which export water out of the catchments of the AONB. Support measures to reduce abstraction and help businesses adopt new mitigation measures.
NR 10	Promote Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and natural flood management initiatives to maximise benefits, for example through restoration of traditional water meadow systems or shallow winter flooding in the floodplain to benefit people and wildlife.
NR 11	Promote restoration and continued maintenance of rivers and river corridors to further biodiversity and amenity objectives – re-creating natural river channels and re-linking rivers with their floodplains where this would not damage artificial channels of historic and cultural importance.
NR 12	Seek to develop a better understanding of the likely implications of climate change on the environment and economy of the North Wessex Downs.
NR 13	Support reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and methane, from all possible sources. Support mitigation measures including better on-farm management of fertiliser and animal waste, biomass heating from local fuel stocks and small-scale renewable energy generation appropriate within the protected landscape.
NR 14	Support and encourage greater domestic and commercial energy efficiency.
NR 15	Engage with opportunities to improve the availability and accessibility of sustainable modes of transport (e.g. bus and rail services, cycling) recognising in particular the health benefits of active modes (walking, cycling, riding, etc.) and promote their use.
NR 16	Encourage greater use of timber in construction from sustainable woodland and in particular short local supply chains to support forestry, woodland and wood products businesses in the AONB.
NR 17	Promote carbon sequestration as an objective and benefit of habitat creation and management of woodland and permanent grassland.
NR 18	Encourage simple greenhouse gas and carbon accounting to monitor the effectiveness of changes.

theme 6 Development

AONB Special Qualities: Development



Traditional rural economy contrasting with growing high tech sector



A light road network but good access to various economically significant towns



Sparsely populated chalk downlands with scattered farms and equestrian premises



Military installations including Wroughton airfield



River valley settlements with hamlets, villages and market towns displaying traditional building styles





“Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.”

National Planning Policy Framework,
2018

There are 58 residents per km²

in the AONB, compared to 205 per km² in West Berkshire

9 local authorities

cover the AONB area, each one considering the designation within its own policies and plans



A Changing Landscape

The North Wessex Downs AONB is a sparsely populated landscape, retaining a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity within the tightly packed South

7.1 The North Wessex Downs AONB is a sparsely populated landscape. The population density of 58 residents per km² across the AONB compares to an average for West Berkshire of 205 per km². The open, largely uninhabited downlands retain a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity, a very special perceptual characteristic within this otherwise densely populated part of Southern England. Attractive villages nestle in the river valleys of the Pang, Bourne, Kennet and Lambourn and cluster in the low-lying land to the east of the AONB. High environmental quality makes strong direct and indirect contributions to the wider regional economy.

7.2 Despite the relatively low population density, there are development pressures on the North Wessex Downs. This is due to its location within South East England and its proximity to London. There is a need to manage these pressures with sensitivity both within and in the setting of the AONB in order to reconcile maintaining economic and social viability with conserving and enhancing the character of the North Wessex Downs. Communities need to be economically viable and have adequate housing, amenities and facilities. However, the primary purpose of designation needs to be paramount when considering such issues.

7.3 There is also a need to ensure a consistent approach across the North Wessex Downs. The area extends across nine different local authority areas. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the relevant Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore, the North Wessex Downs AONB looks to its constituent local authorities to consider the designation within their Local Plans. This is set out in the CRow Act 2000 and NPPF. To assist its local

authority partners, the North Wessex Downs AONB Unit will:

- ▶ actively engage in the policy making process;
- ▶ provide advice on specific planning applications and appeals; and
- ▶ provide guidance through its Management Plan and Position Statements.

Relationship with the National Planning Policy Framework

7.4 The NPPF provides specific guidance for plan makers and decision takers in relation to AONBsⁱ. It states that ‘great weight’ should be given to conserving their landscape and scenic beauty, and that these designated areas have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. It further states that the scale and extent of development in these areas should be limited. In particular, major development should not be permitted in AONBs, except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated to be in the public interest. As a general guide to

assessing the likely impact of development on the AONB, the North Wessex Downs AONB Unit defines ‘major development’ as set out in the Town and Country Planning ‘Development Management Order’ⁱⁱ.

This approach provides the basis to decide whether NPPF paragraph 172 is relevant in terms of impact on the area in a local context. Footnote 6 to NPPF paragraph 11 (restricting the presumption in favour of sustainable development in AONBs) is pertinent to this principle.

7.5 A key element of the NPPF’s ‘environmental objective’ (supporting the defined purpose of the planning system to contribute to achieving sustainable development) is the protection and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment. To support the overarching purpose and objectives, Local Plans should allocate for development that land which has the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in the NPPFⁱⁱⁱ. The strategic policies in Local Plans should set out an

There are development pressures on the North Wessex Downs AONB due to its proximity to London

overall strategy, and sufficient provision for, the conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and Green Infrastructure^{iv}.

7.6 The NPPF provides specific guidance on measures to protect, restore and enhance biodiversity assets and to secure measurable net gains for biodiversity, setting out principles to avoid a significant harm to biodiversity^v. Local Plan policies should clearly differentiate between land within and outside AONBs. Recognition of the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs AONB by local authority partners will strengthen Local Plans. The AONB Unit will:

- ▶ advise their local authority and neighbourhood planning partners in the preparation of plans;
- ▶ advise on forming decisions on planning applications and appeals; and
- ▶ monitor objectives of Local Plans and development management decisions.

The Approach to Development

7.7 The North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership supports pre-application discussions from applicants and with the relevant Local Planning Authorities. The area is a 'sensitive area' as defined under the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations. Some forms of development may require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).

7.8 The AONB Partnership supports the emerging approach as set out in Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan to extend the scope of the concept to achieve 'net gain' through development and to apply this beyond biodiversity to embrace wider natural capital benefits, including the landscape and natural beauty.

Local Economy and Rural Business

7.9 The North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership believes that promoting and supporting local enterprise is a key part of conserving and enhancing the character and special qualities of the AONB. Local businesses are likely to:

- ▶ employ local people;



- ▶ provide services to improve the local quality of life;
- ▶ spend money locally;
- ▶ promote community cohesion; and
- ▶ have a smaller environmental footprint (by reducing the transportation of goods from across communities).

7.10 People like to live in a high quality environment. This attracts some businesses as it helps them retain staff. Support for small local businesses will provide local jobs and enhance the rural economy. For example, fast broadband is crucial for a healthy rural economy and we will work with relevant agencies to secure such infrastructure.

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- i NPPF (2018) paragraph 172.
 - ii Statutory Instrument (2010) No. 2184; Section 2(1).
 - iii NPPF (2018) paragraph 171.
 - iv NPPF (2018) paragraph 20.
 - v NPPF (2018) paragraphs 174-177.

Page 71 Aerial view of Marlborough, John Henshall/Alamy Stock Photo

Page 72 Children enjoying Hurstbourne Forest School, NWD AONB

Page 73 Cobbs Farm Shop and Kitchen near Hungerford, Cobbs Farm Shop



7.11 Significant employment areas exist within the area; for example, the Harwell Campus which is home to the Diamond Light Source, the UK national synchrotron science facility. This is part of 'Science Vale' in Oxfordshire which has a national profile as a centre for science and innovation, and in particular for space technology. As a large, previously developed area, partly designated as Enterprise Zone, opportunities exist here for redevelopment and intensification of the site. Where such development occurs, it is important to recognise the AONB purposes and minimise any potentially adverse impacts on the special qualities of the AONB.

Additional Guidance

7.12 When preparing plans and planning applications, those responsible should make reference to:

- ▶ the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan;
- ▶ relevant AONB Position Statements and Guidance Notes;
- ▶ the North Wessex Downs Integrated Landscape Character Assessment; and
- ▶ the Historic Landscape Character Assessment.

Planning Conditions, Community Infrastructure Levy and Mitigation

7.13 It may be possible to overcome a planning objection to a development proposal by imposing a condition on the planning permission or by entering into a planning obligation (a 'Section 106 Agreement'). Where this is appropriate, we may recommend planning conditions or a legal agreement to secure control over development and/or forms of mitigation. This will align with tests as set out in National Planning Policy Framework and supporting Planning Guidance and will be secured by our local authority partners in forming decisions on planning applications.

7.14 We will seek financial contributions through Section 106 Agreements where possible to mitigate harmful impacts on the special qualities of the AONB arising from new developments. We will also seek to access Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds from

local authority partners to support identified landscape, ecological, community, Green Infrastructure and environmental projects.

Remoteness and Tranquillity

7.15 The sense of remoteness and tranquillity is fundamental to the character of the North Wessex Downs AONB. It is central to the enjoyment and appreciation of the landscape. Dark night skies in the AONB contrast dramatically with surrounding urban areas. The absence of artificial light allows the full majesty of the night skies and stars to be appreciated unimpeded by the night time glow of our major urban areas. Light pollution can impact on wildlife, such as foraging bats. In some parts of the area there is already an ambient level of noise associated with transport networks and machinery. A certain level of activity and noise will always be expected within a largely farmed landscape and within the urban areas of the region.

7.16 These special perceptual qualities are fragile and under threat from a combination of factors, including major development, such as wind turbines, intruding into the open downland. Concerns raised by local residents and users of the landscape over loss of these special perceptual qualities will inform decisions on particular development proposals. New uses or new developments that individually or cumulatively result in a material increase in lighting, noise and or activity into the countryside are likely to be opposed.

Sensitivities and Constraints of the Landscape to Wind Turbines

7.17 The North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership commissioned a study to identify the sensitivities and constraints of the landscape to wind turbines. This work reveals that all Landscape Character Types within the area are constrained to a degree. There are specific sensitivities and values that would be adversely affected by such forms of development.

7.18 Four Landscape Character Types (Open Downland, High Chalk Plain, Downs Plain and Scarp, and River Valleys) are considered to be highly constrained in relation to wind turbine

development, where sensitivities to this form of development are high and any wind turbine is likely to have adverse impacts.

7.19 The remaining Landscapes Character Types (Downland with Woodland, Wooded Plateau, Vales, and Lowland Mosaic) are considered to be moderately to highly constrained in relation to wind turbine development. The particular landscape characteristics and configuration of these Landscape Character Types is such that it may be possible to find locations that are less constrained to some types of turbine development, although these locations are likely to be limited.

Other Renewable Energy Projects

7.20 As a response to climate change, there is a need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The security of energy supplies is also a concern. These factors are likely to lead to an increase in renewable energy generation. There are already many well established and sensitively located forms of renewable energy projects across the area. These include:

- ▶ micro-generation on individual residential and commercial properties;
- ▶ photovoltaic installations (some up to 1 ha in area);
- ▶ on-farm bio-digesters;
- ▶ woodfuel boilers; and
- ▶ hydro-electric generation projects within water courses.

7.21 Further information is contained with the North Wessex Downs AONB Position Statement on Renewable Energy concerning the likely acceptability of differing forms of renewable energy projects.

Green Infrastructure

7.22 'Green Infrastructure' (GI) is the network of multi-functional open spaces and other environmental features, including parks and gardens, woodlands, green corridors, watercourses and water bodies ('blue spaces'), street trees and open countryside. There is an opportunity for new development to secure and enhance the area's GI network, including through the CIL. This will support the sustainable management of natural resources; the delivery



Page 74 Harwell Campus, Courtesy of Harwell Campus

Page 75 Forwarder extracting timber and roaming dairy farm, both Dawn Hamblin, North Wessex Downs LEADER; Solar panels on barn roof, Ann Shepley

Swindon is a sizeable town just outside the AONB, but its Urban Fringe Action Plan impacts on the area

The M4 and A34 are the main arteries in the North Wessex Downs, connecting to smaller A roads and rural lanes

of sustainable development; biodiversity enhancement through habitat connectivity; local flood management; and the provision of opportunities to improve health and wellbeing through access to green and blue spaces. Schemes that improve links, including in particular public rights of way, for walkers, cyclists, riders, and carriage drivers, as well as securing biodiversity and landscape enhancements, will be supported. Where appropriate, new and existing GI features should provide the greatest range of functions possible to maximise benefits for people and wildlife.

Urban Fringe and Setting

7.23 A number of sizable and expanding towns lie just outside the North Wessex Downs AONB. In the west, the most notable is Swindon for which there is a specific strategy: the Swindon Urban Fringe Action Plan. This includes a part of the North Wessex Downs AONB and notes that the agricultural economy close to Swindon is under pressure. Due to uncertainty over the future, marginal viability and urban pressures (including vandalism and litter dumping), the Plan concludes that it could become an area of immense opportunity and multiple uses. However, targeted action is required to deliver this potential.

7.24 There are other proposals for growth outside the boundary but within the setting of the North Wessex Downs. These include developments at Wantage, Didcot, Andover and Devizes. The potential for harm to the setting of the area from large-scale urban extensions is substantial. Any new uses or development proposed outside, but within the setting of the area should consider the North Wessex Downs AONB Position Statement on Setting. Proposals should include detailed measures to mitigate against harm to the area. Forms of mitigation may include strategic landscape buffers, restrictions on building heights, care over massing and scale, care over roofscape design, or avoidance of development in the most exposed locations.

Built Environment and New Housing

7.25 The North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership's approach to the provision of new housing is set out in the AONB Housing Position Statement. This states that, in general, strategic levels



of new housing within the AONB should be avoided except in exceptional circumstances, in line with national planning policy^{vi}. Land of least environmental or amenity value situated outside the protected landscape and its setting should be the first choice for development. Only where it is necessary to meet appropriate local needs will new housing be supported. This should be within existing settlements, preferably on previously developed sites. Good design and siting of all new developments in the North Wessex Downs is essential. They should reflect the local landscape character and architecture and make use of local materials.

7.26 The Position Statement also states that only on the edges of Marlborough, Hungerford, Lambourn, Pewsey, and Pangbourne will there be support for new open market housing development on greenfield land. In other areas, there will be strict tests to minimise the impact on the landscape. In a far more limited role, small scale housing sites within or on the edges of the secondary larger villages may be supported where all landscape and other planning issues have been resolved. The provision of affordable homes through exception site policies could also be possible in



these locations. Need has to be demonstrated and landscape and environmental harm minimised.

7.27 Housing may also be delivered through the Neighbourhood Plan process. Such provision should still be in general conformity with any Core Strategy and be appropriate in terms of landscape and environmental impact.

Highways Infrastructure

7.28 The M4 (London to Wales) and the A34 (Southampton to Oxford) form the main arteries in a wider network of A-roads crossing the North Wessex Downs. Yet the overall impression is of a relatively sparse road network underlining the historical and current lack of settlement on the open downlands. The only part to have a dense network of winding rural lanes is the well wooded Hampshire Downs and the lowlands to the north east of Newbury – both areas with a medieval settlement pattern.

More could be done to find sensitive solutions to the maintenance of the highway network

7.29 More could be done to find imaginative and sensitive solutions to the maintenance of the existing highway network and the design of new roads. These should be sympathetic to the character and qualities of the North Wessex Downs. Many rural lanes have a rich character of their own. The challenge is to retain that character whilst meeting modern highway safety needs. Particular problems occur when urban solutions are imposed on the rural setting. This results in a loss of local character and the addition of lighting and clutter. The North Wessex Downs Unit will collaborate with the Highways Authorities to improve the existing highway environment and seek improvements to proposed new schemes. The development of new private driveways should retain rural character and reflect the historic qualities of settlements.

7.30 The North Wessex Downs AONB Unit has contributed to work that is helping to reduce the impact of highways infrastructure, such as through the Avebury World Heritage Site Transport Strategy. A Position Statement on Highways Design and Management will be produced to help provide guidance on this issue.

Minerals and Waste

7.31 It is national policy to avoid landbanks of non-energy minerals in AONBs^{vii}. Mineral schemes that are major developments within the area should be refused planning permission unless it can be demonstrated that there are exceptional circumstances and that the development is in the public interest^{viii}.

7.32 Waste proposals should substantially be meeting local needs. They should be of a scale relevant to the proposal and avoid greenfield sites. Any new facilities should be consistent with an up-to-date Local Plan, as defined in the National Planning Policy for Waste.

vi NPPF (2018) paragraph 172.
vii NPPF (2018) paragraph 205(a).
viii NPPF (2018) paragraph 172.

Page 76 Cycling in a green space, Visit Hampshire

Page 77 A rural road near Hackpen Hill, greatwestway.co.uk



AONB Special Qualities: Development

- 7.33 The sense of **remoteness and tranquillity** that comes from an undeveloped and rural quality with only limited human intervention, containing typically modest villages with distinctive and ancient settlement patterns:
- ▶ The **Open Downland, Downland with Woodland** and **High Chalk Plain** areas are generally very sparsely populated, containing scattered isolated farms, equestrian establishments or small hamlets sheltering in the dry valleys and folds of the chalk upland.
 - ▶ **Wooded Plateau** contains a distinct pattern of settlement comprising a remote 'uninhabited'

Page 78 Lambourn and Marlborough, both NWD AONB

Page 79 Dark skies over Silbury Hill, greatwestway.co.uk



western plateau, smaller settlements such as Froxfield and a concentration of villages in the east of the area, in the valley of the River Dun.

- ▶ In the **Downs Plain and Scarp** character area, attractive springline villages cluster along the base of the northern ridge or along the valley of Avebury Plain. 20th century military installations, including Wroughton Airfield and a First World War camp near Draycot Foliat, are dominant and defining features of the area.
- ▶ The **Vales** are settled landscapes with a concentration of compact small towns, clustered villages, hamlets and many dispersed residential and farm buildings, while the **River Valleys** display a concentration of nucleated and linear settlement including tiny hamlets clustered around a church, many small villages and market towns.
- ▶ The **Lowland Mosaic** remains one of the most densely settled Landscape Character Types, with a diverse range of settlements ranging from large manor houses, villages, numerous hamlets and lines of houses along the roads and lanes.

- 7.34 **Distinctive architectural styles** that vary throughout the AONB but within specific areas create a sense of place and vernacular local character due to the availability of local building materials and traditional building styles. This includes traditional knapped flint and brick, timber-framed farm buildings, thatch and tiled roofs, use of Sarsen Stone, blue flint and tile, and clunch and cobb walls.
- 7.35 A **sparse road network**, but with good access from 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.
- 7.36 Within the North Wessex Downs, the **traditional land based and rural economy** contrasts with a growing high tech and creative sector.

Development: Key Issues, AONB Strategic Objectives and Policies

Development in the North Wessex Downs AONB faces a range of challenges, which this Plan will address through the implementation of key objectives and policies

7.37 Key Issues

Key issues with the potential to have significant influence on the AONB's Development Special Qualities:

- a) The threat of expansion of the main urban areas just beyond the boundary of the North Wessex Downs – including the main centres of Swindon, Wantage, Didcot, Reading, Newbury, Basingstoke, Andover and Devizes, for example – creating urban fringe pressures and impact on the setting of the AONB.
- b) New large free-standing dwellings as replacement dwellings in the open countryside.
- c) The change of use of land to domestic garden use.
- d) The loss of rural character through suburbanising influences from new development (new fencing, lighting, signage, parking areas, paved footpaths, loss of native hedgerows and creation of new garden areas).
- e) New housing developments on greenfield sites.
- f) The threat of incremental housing development outside settlements from conversions, redevelopments or rural workers' accommodation which are not clearly beneficial.
- g) Impact on dark skies and tranquillity of high-powered external lighting, especially where poorly directed or in an exposed location (not usually subject to planning control).
- h) Potential for certain forms of development to intrude on the wider landscape, including masts, pylons, wind turbine developments, photovoltaic schemes, and minerals and waste

schemes, threatening the landscape quality, heritage assets, and the sense of remoteness and tranquillity.

- i) Potential for harm from smaller wind turbine developments if poorly located in exposed locations in landscapes recognised for their sensitivity to this form of development.
- j) Unsuitable development of redundant previously developed and part-developed sites within the North Wessex Downs, especially redundant airfields and military sites (e.g. Wroughton), and the impact upon landscape quality and heritage assets.
- k) New developments at the junction of the M4 and A34 or along their corridors which spread the impact from development yet further into the undeveloped parts of the AONB.
- l) Impact from the racing industry from new gallops and facilities where inappropriately located and/or designed.
- m) Impact from equestrian uses and structures generally where new development is expansive in area, in greenfield locations, poorly designed and/or located on exposed sites.

The expansion of the main urban areas just outside the AONB creates pressure on the area

High-powered external lighting impacts on the dark skies and tranquillity of the AONB



- n) Substantial new farm buildings where unjustified, poorly designed and or located in exposed locations.
- o) Development that results in a material loss of tranquillity and/or impact on the dark night skies within the North Wessex Downs or its setting.
- p) Development that does not provide for or support existing Green Infrastructure.
- q) Development that does not provide for appropriate mitigation (including through the Community Infrastructure Levy)
- r) New noise-creating activities, for example from quad or bike courses, microlights, shooting schools, kennels, and new industrial, minerals or waste operations.
- s) The illegal dumping of rubbish.
- t) Large-scale new commercial uses of farms or inappropriate farm diversification projects.
- u) New road building and route upgrades, including the proposed Oxford to Cambridge Expressway development.
- v) Impact of road signage, street lighting and other highway clutter on landscape character, including within settlements. Measures which have an urbanising effect on AONB character and are thus generally inappropriate include: oversized, multiple and yellow-backed road signs; new street lighting in previously unlit locations; lighting that allows spillage or glare; road markings; concrete kerbing; illuminated bollards; fencing; and elaborate traffic-calming schemes.
- w) Opportunities to reduce costs and maintain or restore the character of rural roads through adoption of a low-key rural design approach to roads across AONB.

7.38 AONB Strategic Objectives for 2019-2024: Development

- S.17 Ensure that the formulation and implementation of planning policies across the North Wessex Downs takes full account of the purposes for AONB designation, the character and the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs and its setting.
- S.18 Advise on appropriate sustainable development that in itself conserves and enhances the environment through the planning system in the context of this nationally protected landscape.

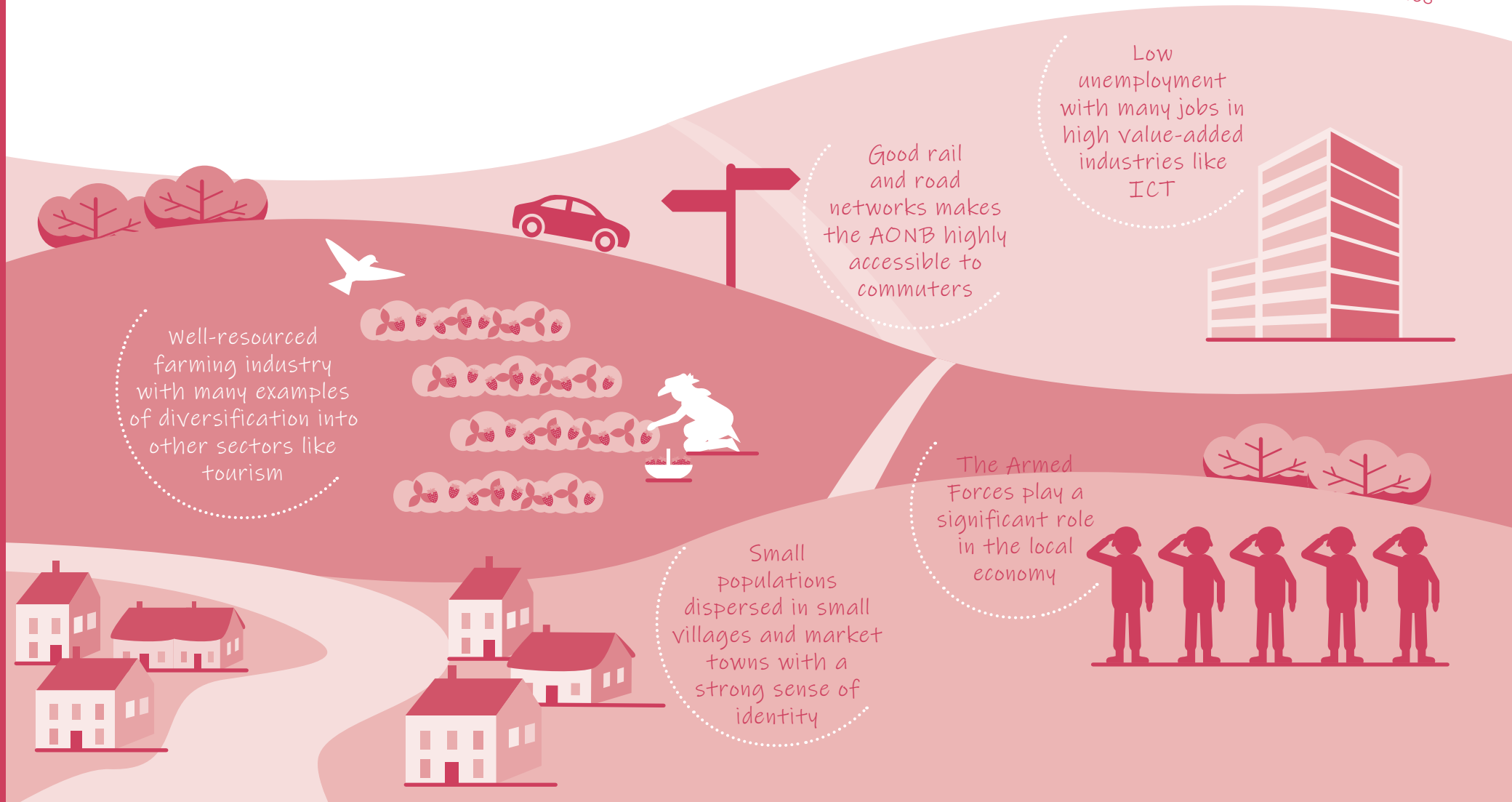


7.39 AONB Policies: Development

DE 01	Encourage all proposals for new development, redevelopment and re-use to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs. Oppose forms of development that fail to conserve and enhance the character and quality of the AONB and its setting and to make reference to the AONB's published guidance.
DE 02	Encourage high standards of design, comprehensive landscaping where required, traditional building styles, energy conservation and innovation that respect historic settlement patterns and the distinctive character of the North Wessex Downs.
DE 03	Encourage Local Plans, Supplementary Planning Documents and other policies to take account of the statutory protection of the AONB, in terms of location of development affecting the AONB and its setting, and specific AONB policy.
DE 04	Support the need for Local Plans, Supplementary Planning Documents and other policies to address issues such as landscape impact, local character, materials, and historic structure and scale of settlements.
DE 05	Encourage the consideration of landscape, including historic landscape, impacts at the earliest opportunity in the planning process through preparation of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Landscape and Visual Appraisal and Environmental Impact Assessment reports as appropriate to the location.
DE 06	Encourage, support and promote the expansion of 'net gain' principles developed for biodiversity, to apply to wider natural capital assets, including in particular to landscape and natural beauty.
DE 07	Resist noise-generating developments and activities within both the AONB and its setting.
DE 08	Avoid and reduce light pollution, including control of lighting schemes or other developments that threaten the integrity of dark night skies over the North Wessex Downs.
DE 09	Encourage, support and promote good practice in the design and management of roads in the AONB and its setting that conserves and enhances the character of the landscape and settlements.
DE 10	Support appropriate and sustainable farm diversification activities where planning applications are supported by a whole-farm plan and linked to design guidance.
DE 11	Encourage the use of planning briefs or master plans which guide developments within and on the edge of the North Wessex Downs and take account of AONB purposes.
DE 12	Encourage the retention of existing and provision of new 'Green Infrastructure'. Ensure that Green Infrastructure (including new or enhanced biodiversity assets) is incorporated within the area of all 'major developments', both within and in the setting of the AONB.
DE 13	Support the development of strategies and integrated projects to manage the pressures and opportunities presented by the AONB's close proximity to its surrounding urban centres.
DE 14	Work with local communities to increase capacity and involvement in development processes.
DE 15	Support local communities to engage with local and national planning policy consultations.
DE 16	Encourage local communities to identify local needs and assist in the conservation and enhancement of local distinctiveness through the preparation and development of Neighbourhood Plans, Parish Plans, Village Design Statements, Neighbourhood Development Orders and other initiatives.
DE 17	Encourage economic growth, new responsible tourism opportunities and diversification of the local economy within the overall aim of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB.
DE 18	Support broadband rollout where the installation of new equipment is in accordance with the national code of practice on siting of cabinets and masts and appropriate consideration is given to AONB purposes.
DE 19	Support training courses to encourage businesses within the North Wessex Downs to adopt sustainable approaches consistent with AONB objectives.
DE 20	Resist developments that would substantially increase traffic volume in sensitive areas.
DE 21	Encourage local planning authorities to use powers available to them under Section 106 of the Town & Country Planning Act, Community Infrastructure Levy and similar legislation to achieve the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan objectives and activities.
DE 22	Support economic activities that embrace sustainable development principles at a scale and nature compatible with the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs.
DE 23	Support initiatives that seek to add value to land-based products sympathetic to the natural beauty of the AONB.

theme 7 Communities

AONB Special Qualities: Communities





“Don’t be led away to think this part of the world important and that unimportant. Every corner of the world is important. No man knows whether this part or that is most so, but every man may do some honest work in his own corner.”

Thomas Hughes (1822-1896)

173 settlements

with Parish Councils exist in the North Wessex Downs, and two market towns

100,800 people live in the AONB, with approximately 48% of those recorded as in employment in 2011

Page 83 Hungerford High Street, Greg Balfour Evans/Alamy Stock Photo

Page 84 Kennet and Avon Canal, greatwestway.co.uk

Page 85 Discovering the Great West Way by train, greatwestway.co.uk



A Landscape for Living

In the North Wessex Downs AONB, there is a clear relationship between land stewardship, community, the economy and natural beauty, which combine to give the area its special character

8.1 The North Wessex Downs AONB is not a wilderness. It is a distinct and recognisable area arising from a long history of human occupation and the sustainable use of its natural resources. There is a clear relationship between land stewardship, community, the economy and natural beauty; these features and functions combine to give the area its special character.

8.2 Within the North Wessex Downs there are 173 settlements with parish councils, and two market towns: Marlborough and Hungerford. The total population of the AONB is just over 100,800 with approximately 48,500 (48%) recorded as being in employment (2011 Census). Around 30% of the active workforce is employed within the AONB; 60% commute to the surrounding urban areas and London, assisted by good rail connections. Many villages are now largely occupied by those commuting out of the area to work. This has stimulated rapidly rising house prices with very significant pressure placed on the affordable housing stock. In addition, villages are now left with a significantly reduced population during the day, undermining the viability of village services such as post offices, pubs and doctors' surgeries. There is a need for a broad mix of housing to maintain sustainable communities and support village services.

8.3 To have sustainable communities in the North Wessex Downs they must be places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. Sustainable communities should be:

- ▶ Vibrant and inclusive, with many community networks in place that bring people together for leisure and peer support purposes.
- ▶ In charge of their own destiny, able to identify their

own issues and access the skills and support needed to address them.

- ▶ Places that promote and enable the health and wellbeing of everyone and provide straightforward access to the services and facilities needed by people of all ages.
- ▶ Able to appreciate the unique nature of their environment and contribute towards its sustainability.

8.4 A number of parishes in the North Wessex Downs have undertaken community-led planning and the number of Neighbourhood Plans in the AONB is rising rapidly. Community-led plans include actions relevant to the social, economic and environmental objectives of the North Wessex Downs. We support this approach and provide advice and support to parishes where requested.

8.5 Compared to regional averages, most North Wessex Downs residents have poor access to services.

8.6 The North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust was established in 2016 *"to promote for the benefit of the public the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and its setting [and] to advance the education of the public in the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment."* It has the potential to play an increasingly important role in the wider (non-statutory) partnership that works to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs AONB.

A broad mix of housing is needed to maintain sustainable communities and support village services

Employment and Training

8.7 The majority of the local economy is part of a larger 'urban economy'. Many businesses benefit from the area's high landscape quality to attract either staff or customers. Only about 5% of the economically active population of the North Wessex Downs AONB is directly involved in agriculture. Where buildings

have been re-used as part of economic activities, many of the new uses relate to high-tech industries. Small village industrial estates, such as that at Inkpen, are dominated by businesses whose employees commute in from surrounding areas – as do employees in the horse racing industry.

8.8 The current fundamental changes in the area's land-based economy are requiring new skills and the re-learning of old skills. There is a need to understand, define and then meet training and education needs. Support comes from:

- ▶ National Training Organisations (NTOs) such as LANTRA, which represents the land-based sector;
- ▶ further education and training colleges; and
- ▶ representatives of community groups.

Travel and Transport

8.9 Local communities and visitors need access to services – a key issue for social inclusion. That access should be sustainable. The North Wessex Downs is within easy reach of three mainline railways:

- ▶ The Waterloo to Exeter line with stations at Basingstoke, Overton, Whitchurch and Andover.
- ▶ The Paddington to Penzance line with stations at Kintbury, Hungerford, Bedwyn and Pewsey (and a rail-bus link from Marlborough to Bedwyn).
- ▶ The Paddington to Bristol and South Wales line with stations at Pangbourne, Goring, Cholsey and Didcot.

8.10 Outside the main towns that ring the North Wessex Downs, bus services are limited. Although the distribution of bus routes suggests that rural areas are well served, many of these services run only infrequently. However, a number of innovative and flexible community transport schemes are operating within the North Wessex Downs. These often rely on the support of charitable funding and volunteers.



AONB Special Qualities: Communities

- 8.11 Containing a **dispersed and small population** spread over a large area; the majority live in the small villages and the two market towns of Marlborough and Hungerford, with the high downs including large expanses without any significant habitation. The number of young people within villages is declining as they relocate to areas with better service provision and cheaper housing, resulting in a higher proportion of middle-aged and elderly people.
- 8.12 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. Swindon, Newbury and Basingstoke in particular have developed international reputations within the ICT industry with some of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. The economic influence of London, the Thames Valley and north Hampshire is most keenly felt to the south-east and east of the AONB and in particular those villages with good access to mainline stations.
- 8.13 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.
- 8.14 **Good access to the wider area** and road network means that much of the AONB is highly accessible to commuters working in the adjacent towns. The east of the AONB – West Berkshire, Basingstoke and Deane, and South Oxfordshire – has greater pressure on housing stock and recruitment than the west of the region.
- 8.15 There is a well-structured and resourced **farming industry**, with substantial assets of land, machinery, knowledge and entrepreneurial ability. Many examples of diversification into food processing, tourism and provision of space for economic activity can be seen across the North Wessex Downs.
- 8.16 Villages and small towns enjoy a **strong sense of identity and wellbeing** linked to the historic landscape, with active and resourceful community groups.
- 8.17 There is a strong local resonance and **affinity with the landscape** of the North Wessex Downs, particularly the individual downs and river valleys, and other outstanding features.

Page 86 Armed Forces on parade, Joe Gough/Shutterstock.com; The Henge Shop at Avebury, greatwestway.co.uk
Page 87 Marlborough Community Market, Ellie Gill



Communities: Key Issues, AONB Strategic Objectives and Policies

Communities in the North Wessex Downs AONB face a range of challenges which this Plan will address through the implementation of key objectives and policies

8.18 Key Issues

- a) Widespread lack of awareness of the North Wessex Downs AONB among local residents and businesses.
- b) The expectation that all towns which surround the AONB will accommodate significant housing and employment development in the next 20 years.
- c) Increased volumes of traffic or an increasing demand for quicker journey times may lead to pressure for road widening and other 'improvement' schemes on roads in the AONB.
- d) Greater prosperity enjoyed by some people leads to other environmental impacts such as more over-flights by aircraft, more use of roads and rights of way for motorised leisure pursuits, and increased demand for second homes.
- e) Loss of affordable housing, reducing the social mix within settlements and leading to a loss of essential rural skills and services.
- f) Potential changes in demographic profile, social exclusion, access to services and loss of public transport routes and other key facilities.
- g) The trend of commuting to higher paid jobs outside the AONB whilst living in the area is resulting in rising house prices.
- h) High demand for traditional buildings to convert to residential use, so reducing the opportunities for business conversions.
- i) The positive benefits of a strong and active community spirit in many AONB communities, including a rich artistic and cultural life.
- j) Perceived limitations on opportunities for businesses in inaccessible locations.
- k) Opportunities and risks for the AONB associated with new instruments such as Neighbourhood Plans, which may form an increasingly important element of local decision-making.
- l) Financial pressures reducing the ability for town and parish councils to participate in partnerships and community activities.
- m) Lack of understanding of the impacts of daily lifestyle decisions on the environment of the North Wessex Downs – from individual travel decisions to the use of water as if it were an unlimited natural resource.
- n) Increasing volume of HGVs, delivery vans and commuter traffic on rural lanes. 'Rat-running' on minor lanes to escape congestion on the main arterial roads.
- o) Government requirements that businesses running apprenticeship schemes must have business premises (many traditional land-based contractors do not have formal business premises).
- p) The need for better understanding and awareness of the links between high environmental quality and ecosystem services and local business.
- q) Opportunities to increase involvement in local community activities to improve social cohesion and sense of belonging.
- r) The need for local sources of employment and opportunities for local people to develop skills that could support them into self-employment or enterprise.
- s) The need for a wide range of skills training for land managers and other rural enterprises within the North Wessex Downs.

House prices are rising as more people commute and buy second homes, reducing affordable housing

More traffic on rural lanes, escaping congestion elsewhere, puts pressure on the environment





8.19 AONB Strategic Objectives for 2019-2024: Natural Resources

- S.19 Support the development of the North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust in pursuit of its charitable purposes to promote actions which underpin the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.
- S.20 Support and facilitate community-led initiatives that help deliver AONB purposes and Management Plan objectives.
- S.21 Encourage an enhanced sense of respect and pride in the North Wessex Downs amongst local people and their increased participation in activities that raise the understanding and profile of the AONB.
- S.22 Assist the development of connectivity, based on principles of planning and integrating multi-functional Green Infrastructure assets, from neighbouring urban areas, facilitating active and sustainable access to the AONB to make it easier for these communities to experience and benefit from the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs.

8.20 AONB Policies: Communities

CO 01	Support efforts to raise the profile of the North Wessex Downs AONB among communities within and surrounding the area.
CO 02	Provide parishes and all other relevant community groups and individuals with information and training as necessary to raise awareness of the special qualities of the AONB and the need to conserve and enhance it.
CO 03	Encourage, support and celebrate local communities' engagement in the planning, conservation and enhancement of their local environment, protecting its natural beauty and enhancing the sense of local pride and ownership.
CO 04	Support projects to promote community use of renewable energy sources consistent with AONB objectives.
CO 05	Publicise relevant community activities and events across the North Wessex Downs.
CO 06	Support community initiatives aimed at retaining rural services, including the combining of services where this will improve their viability.
CO 07	Support initiatives to foster awareness, understanding and appreciation of the AONB landscape in local schools and encourage greater connectivity with nature and the environment in line with proposals in Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan.
CO 08	Support initiatives to address the specific needs of different groups within and around the AONB, such as access to training and social activities for young people and engagement with under-represented disadvantaged groups.
CO 09	Support provision of reliable and affordable broadband and mobile telephone connections throughout the North Wessex Downs in ways that respect the special qualities of the area.
CO 10	Ensure the development and implementation of transport plans and programmes addresses the needs of North Wessex Downs communities, reduces transport impacts on the environment, and conserves and enhances the special qualities of the landscape.
CO 11	Support measures, including easily accessible information, to provide integrated passenger transport across the North Wessex Downs that serves the needs of local people and visitors.
CO 12	Secure Travel Plans for new developments with significant traffic generation within the North Wessex Downs to encourage active and sustainable travel.
CO 13	Support good practice examples of community approaches that respond to locally identified needs and promote them as an inspiration to others (e.g. the establishment of local housing trusts, support for new village shops, community transport schemes, etc.).
CO 14	Support communities in landscape-led approaches to enabling the availability of housing for identified local needs that will be – and will remain – genuinely affordable in perpetuity, consistent with AONB purposes.



Page 89 Learning new skills, Oliver Cripps;
Local produce on sale, Nick Edwards/
Ciderniks; Berkeley Dairy Farm, Dawn
Hamblin, North Wessex Downs LEADER

theme 8

Tourism, Leisure and Access

AONB Special Qualities: Tourism, Leisure and Access

Historic attractions like country houses, Saxon churches and Neolithic monuments

An extensive rights of way network

One of the finest cultural landscapes, full of wildlife and history, which has inspired famous works

Picturesque market towns and villages with a variety of shops, pubs and hotels

Reflections of the social and industrial history of the area such as canals, railways and a windmill





“Out on that almost trackless expanse of billowy Downs such a track is in some sort humanly companionable; it really seems to lead you by the hand.”

Kenneth Grahame (1859-1932)

Tourist attractions

include Avebury World Heritage Site, Uffington White Horse, the Ridgeway and Thames Path, and the Kennet and Avon Canal

2,200 full time jobs

are supported by visitors to the AONB



A Landscape for Leisure

The magical landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB has attracted naturalists, antiquarians and travellers throughout history

Tourism and Leisure

9.1 The North Wessex Downs AONB is a landscape rich in historic sites and natural features. This magical landscape has attracted naturalists, antiquarians and travellers throughout history. Tourist attractions of international renown within the North Wessex Downs include: the 25 km² (9.6 sq miles) Avebury World Heritage Site (taking in Avebury Village and the Avebury Henge complex, as well as Silbury Hill, Windmill Hill and the West Kennet long barrow); the White Horse at Uffington; the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails; and the Kennet and Avon Canal providing a strategic waterways link between the Thames and Bristol Channel. But it is the spectacular scenery, highly attractive villages, and sense of tranquillity that are the primary recreational and tourism attractions of the area.

9.2 Although not large in number, there is a range of paying visitor attractions within the North Wessex Downs. These include Basildon Park, Lower Basildon (run by the National Trust) and Highclere Castle, near Newbury (owned by the Earl of Carnarvon), the Crofton Beam Engines and Pumping Station on the Kennet and Avon Canal at Great Bedwyn and the Living Rainforest environmental centre at Hampstead Norreys. There are many more attractions that could benefit from greater collective promotion and support.

9.3 Despite its close proximity to major areas of population, the North Wessex Downs is not well used as a place for quiet enjoyment. Green tourism offers enormous opportunities for the North Wessex Downs and a good business reason for conserving and enhancing the landscape. There may be opportunities for the tourism sector to support investment in rights of way

improvements and the provision of accommodation, facilities and information.

9.4 At present, visitors to the AONB directly support around 2,200 full time jobs. Of all visitors, 18% are from overseas, most of whom are travelling for business purposes and stay for a single night, during Monday-Thursday. Well over 90% of all foreign visitors are either business- or family-related. Nearly half of all visitors to the area stay with family or friends. The average length of stay by UK visitors is two days and it is estimated that a visitor spends an additional £27 in the North Wessex Downs. More than half of all serviced accommodation providers are un-graded for quality. There is potential to improve the performance of the area as a short-break destination, particularly with the development of bespoke activity packages, such as self-guided off-road cycle routes. The area has the opportunity to appeal to affluent young and older couples from London and the Home Counties, which would bring real benefits to the rural economy.

9.5 The North Wessex Downs can be an area for green tourism, with easily accessible information about its wildlife, culture and history, and with many opportunities to explore on foot, by bike and on horseback. In response the AONB Partnership has implemented two projects, the South East Protected Landscapes 'Our Land', and 'LEADER'-funded 'Love Your Land' initiative. Through a growing network of tourism businesses it is hoped that the value of the landscape will be reflected more widely in the tourism 'offer'.

Rights of Way and Access

9.6 Access to the countryside is an important part of the lives of people who live in the area and also for visitors as a tourism asset. The importance of using and enjoying woodlands and green spaces as part of an everyday healthy lifestyle has been demonstrated by Forestry Commission research. Exercise in the North Wessex Downs can have positive effects on many aspects of health and wellbeing. The North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership will look to build on initiatives such as the circular

Green tourism offers enormous opportunities and a good business reason for conserving the landscape

walks developed in partnership with the Ridgeway National Trail. The lack of convenient public transport imposes limits on the benefits and use of the resource.

9.7 Access and the needs of recreational users must be balanced with land-managing interests, as well as other issues such as conservation. Greater and easier access should be encouraged where this can be achieved without undue cost to conservation or the landowner’s use of the land. There may be opportunities from the growth of settlements on the fringes of the North Wessex Downs to offset some of the impact through improving and extending access.

9.8 The CRoW Act 2000 established access land which the public has the right to enjoy under certain conditions. There are 1,189 ha of open access land and 694 ha of registered commons in the North Wessex Downs. There are also permissive arrangements by which landowners grant access voluntarily or as part of inheritance tax agreements. At present some of this access can be difficult to determine due to the patchwork nature of its provision. In addition, there are 100 hectares of National Trust land to which there is access. An analysis of accessible natural greenspace provision in South East England a decade ago (February 2007) found that the North Wessex Downs AONB had the smallest proportion of all accessible natural greenspace (4% of the total) across the South East Protected Landscapes. No more recent data have been uncovered to indicate whether this has changed in recent years.

9.9 Of the accessible natural greenspace, 59% was woodland. In general, woodlands with open or partial access are owned by either the Forestry Commission, the Woodland Trust or the National Trust. A surprising 69% of the woodland area has a public right of way either crossing through it or along one edge of a woodland. However, ‘open access’ to woodland is at a different scale. Just 14% of the woodland area in the AONB has open access.

9.10 One of the most important resources of the North Wessex Downs is its extensive rights of way network, providing access to some of the most spectacular views and secluded valleys in Southern England. Not only does it underpin the recreational and tourism sectors, it also affords some opportunities for sustainable



and safe journeys to school and work. Important national and regional walking routes within the North Wessex Downs are set out in the table below. In addition, a very large number of other paths are promoted as recreational walking routes by the National Trust, partner local authorities, and the Ramblers Association.

Table 12. Walking routes of national and regional significance in the North Wessex Downs

Route name	Distance within the AONB	
	kilometres	miles
Ridgeway National Trail	88	55
Thames Path National Trail	14	9
Test Way	22	14
Wayfarers Walk	27	17
Lambourn Valley Way	29	18
Kennet and Avon Canal towpath	48	30

Page 91 Walking on Cherhill Down, greatwestway.co.uk
Page 92 Avebury World Heritage Site, David Hall
Page 93 Walking through bluebells at West Woods, Sharyn Ladds

Page 94 Wayfaring event at Basildon Park,
And Now/Nick Read
Page 95 Cycling at Hackpen Hill,
greatwestway.co.uk; Buying local produce,
Nigel White



9.11 A large number of advertised cycle routes (on- and off-road) pass through the area, taking advantage of quiet lanes, byways and bridleways. Route 4 of the Sustrans National Cycle Network also runs for 47 km (29 miles) through the North Wessex Downs AONB, in part following the Kennet and Avon Canal towpath.

9.12 The 'Three Downs Link' is a multi-user recreational route connecting the Ridgeway with the South Downs Way, and is used by horse riders, cyclists and walkers. The Ridgeway is promoted as a National Trail for horse riding. A number of shorter riding routes promoted by the British Horse Society use the Ridgeway, linking it with the much wider multi-use network. Responsible recreational cycling and horse riding are two of the key activities to encourage in the North Wessex Downs AONB. Supporting the provision of facilities, such as accommodation with access to stables or drying rooms, and the construction of bike wash facilities and cycle hubs, are examples of how this could be achieved.

9.13 The CRoW Act 2000 requires every county and unitary authority to set out their plans for improvement of the rights of way network. This is through the production of a 'Rights of Way Improvement Plan' (ROWIP; sometimes called a Countryside Management Plan or a Countryside Access Improvement Plan). These plans set out how an authority will maintain countryside access resources and take up opportunities for improving and promoting access to the countryside. The North Wessex Downs Partnership supports the work of the Wiltshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Mid and West Berkshire Local Access Forums (LAFs).

Strategic Development in Relation to the 'London City Region'

9.14 An initiative of the South East and East Protected Landscapes Group (SEPLG) brings together the dozen AONBs and National Parks which surround London. These provide the basis for an interconnected network of valuable green spaces stretching from Central London across South East England, and an opportunity to collaborate at an appropriate scale to promote the enjoyment of, and care for, these diverse, treasured landscapes by the growing population of the City Region.

9.15 The North Wessex Downs is a partner in SEPLG, sharing the seven key objectives in the Group's 25 year vision in relation to the protected landscapes of the London City Region to:

- ▶ conserve their intrinsic value;
- ▶ recognise their ecosystem value;
- ▶ maintain natural buffers;
- ▶ improve access and connections;
- ▶ promote appropriate jobs and industry;
- ▶ support physical and mental health and wellbeing; and
- ▶ engage stakeholders and work together.

AONB Special Qualities: Tourism, Leisure and Access

9.16 Some of the finest **cultural landscape** in England including chalk downland, river valleys, ancient woodland, historic sites. There is recognition of the landscape in literature and the arts, with locations such as Watership Down, Uffington White Horse and the Wittenham Clumps inspiring well known works.

9.17 **Historic attractions** reflecting the industrial and socio-economic history of the area including the Kennet and Avon Canal, Didcot and Swindon Railway Museums, Crofton Beam Engines and the Wilton Windmill.

9.18 **Picturesque market towns** and small villages with independent shops, superb pubs, restaurants and plenty of B&Bs and hotels. A growing reputation for local food and produce.

9.19 **Rich archaeological history** and evidence of our ancestors that can be found in greater concentrations than in much of the rest of the country.

9.20 **Great country houses** at Highclere, Basildon Park, Littlecote and Ashdown and the medieval, Norman and Saxon churches.

9.21 An **extensive rights of way** network offering many opportunities for quiet enjoyment of the countryside away from crowds, by ramblers, cyclists and horse-riders,



including the Thames Path and Ridgeway National Trails, access land, commons and accessible woodland.

9.22 A 'hot spot' for antiques between the towns of Hungerford, Marlborough and the village of Pewsey.

Tourism, Leisure and Access: Key Issues, AONB Strategic Objectives and Policies

Tourism, Leisure and Access in the North Wessex Downs AONB faces a range of challenges which this Plan will address through the implementation of key objectives and policies

9.23 Key Issues

Key issues with the potential to have significant influence on the AONB's Tourism, Leisure and Access Special Qualities:

a) The opportunity to raise the profile of North Wessex Downs as a short break destination and the opportunities for quiet recreation and green tourism that it can offer.

- b) Weakly co-ordinated marketing of the North Wessex Downs AONB as a whole, despite significant progress under the last AONB Management Plan.
- c) Fragmented and poorly co-ordinated provision of tourism in the AONB, supporting few jobs and limited income.
- d) Multiple destination management organisations across the AONB increase fragmentation.
- e) Generally poor (but increasing) recognition amongst AONB communities of the opportunities that association with a landscape of national importance offers for quiet recreation and green tourism and their associated economic benefits, e.g. for local food.
- f) Potential for insensitive, inappropriate or excessive tourism development to harm the special qualities of the AONB landscape.
- g) Popularity of a few 'honeypot' locations with resulting sprawl of car parking, wear and tear on verges and paths, litter and lower enjoyment, and potentially intrusive traffic management measures.
- h) Opportunities arising from changes to the management and promotion of the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails.



Limited public transport

links between key attractions and amenities reduces sustainable options

Noise pollution

is associated with certain recreational pursuits, such as trail biking and flying aircraft

- i) Infrequent public transport links to and between points of access, key attractions and accommodation. Very limited services at some railway stations, such as Pewsey, reduces sustainable transport opportunities.
- j) Increasing pressure on funding for management and maintenance of rights of way, poor condition and inadequate waymarking of some rights of way, and poor connectivity of the rights of way network in some areas for circular walks and rides.
- k) Irresponsible use of the rights of way network by motorised vehicles, of particular concern along the route of the Ridgeway.
- l) Noise associated with some recreation pursuits, including that from trail bike courses and powered aircraft and drones, affecting tranquillity and others' enjoyment.
- m) Need to encourage responsible and courteous use, where motorised users have a legitimate right of access that is compatible with AONB purposes and recognises the needs of other users; for example, as promoted by the Trail Riders' Fellowship (TRF).
- n) General lack of facilities for the non-horse owner to gain access to the recreational riding opportunities of the North Wessex Downs.
- o) Lack of indication (such as road signs) that visitors are entering, or in, the AONB.
- p) Lack of information and provision for the less able and other disadvantaged groups to access and enjoy the North Wessex Downs.
- q) The expected increase in visitors from the predicted growth in the population of London, associated with opportunities for, and pressures on, all protected landscapes in South East England.

9.24 AONB Strategic Objectives for 2019-2024: Tourism, Leisure and Access

- S.23 Facilitate opportunities for more people of all abilities to access and enjoy the North Wessex Downs that respect and promote the special qualities of the area and its setting.
- S.24 Support well-managed and sustainable tourism and recreation businesses to promote the North Wessex Downs as a destination for responsible tourism that respects and promotes the special qualities of the AONB and its setting.
- S.25 Encourage an enhanced sense of respect and pride in the North Wessex Downs amongst local people and their increased participation in activities that raise the understanding and profile of the AONB.
- S.26 Work in partnership with other AONBs and National Parks in southern and eastern England to promote the value and contribution of nationally protected landscapes to the future of the 'London City Region'.



9.25 AONB Policies: Tourism, Leisure and Access

TLA 01	Promote a strategic, partnership approach to planning and marketing green tourism and improved countryside access in the North Wessex Downs.
TLA 02	Work with destination management organisations, protected landscapes and other partners to promote responsible tourism in the North Wessex Downs, including through the Great West Way initiative.
TLA 03	Support the development of markets for short break opportunities that emphasise the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs.
TLA 04	Nurture tourism businesses and help to develop tourism networks across the North Wessex Downs. Support constructive and community-led projects that benefit the tourism economy.
TLA 05	Promote greater accessibility to the North Wessex Downs for users of all abilities for quiet enjoyment and improved health and wellbeing.
TLA 06	Encourage the provision of easily accessible information regarding access to and around the North Wessex Downs by public transport.
TLA 07	With relevant partners, identify and promote signs – or other ways of indicating to visitors that they are in the North Wessex Downs – that do not conflict with AONB purposes.
TLA 08	Encourage greater recognition among commercial transport providers such as train operating companies of the recreational / leisure potential of stations in and around the North Wessex Downs.
TLA 09	Support more and better monitoring of the distribution and demography of visitors and promote management approaches that reduce pressure on sensitive habitats.
TLA 10	Support events such as walking festivals that celebrate the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs, introduce new audiences to the landscape and contribute to a viable visitor economy.
TLA 11	Work with local authorities, Local Access Forums and others to manage and improve the network of public rights of way, ensuring that relevant plans for development and delivery of access to the area take full account of the local distinctiveness, character and quality of the North Wessex Downs and its setting.
TLA 12	Support efforts by user groups to promote and encourage responsible use of rights of way, including byways, consistent with AONB purposes.
TLA 13	Encourage the creation and maintenance of new permissive and definitive routes that link existing routes and enable recreational walkers, cyclists, riders and carriage-drivers to avoid busy roads.
TLA 14	Identify spinal and circular routes to be promoted in AONB publicity that are supported by the recreation and tourism infrastructure e.g. bicycle hire, farmhouse B&B/bunk barns and recreational bus links.
TLA 15	Support increased provision and management of accessible greenspace and the promotion of new and existing recreational opportunities in line with AONB purposes.
TLA 16	Recognise and protect those areas which are too sensitive to intrusion or disturbance, for example archaeologically or ecologically, for the promotion of public access.
TLA 17	Support research, tools and projects which support the development of a thriving recreation and tourism sector.
TLA 18	Support initiatives to help communities and businesses reduce the outflow of revenue, retaining and recycling wealth in the area for longer.
TLA 19	Promote and support the vision and activities of the South East Protected Landscapes Group to integrate development of the London City Region with the protection and enhancement of the protected landscapes surrounding the capital.

Stakeholder Responsibilities

Successful implementation

Implementation of the Plan is the responsibility of everyone whose activities affect the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs AONB

10.1 The AONB Management Plan belongs to the AONB Partnership, and most of all to the local authority partners which have a statutory duty to produce it. It is not an end in itself; success requires implementation. Implementation is not the sole preserve of the AONB Unit; rather it is the responsibility of everyone whose activities affect the special qualities of the landscape. Central among these are all the bodies which, under s.85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, have a statutory Duty of Regard for the purposes for which the AONB was designated: to conserve and enhance its natural beauty.

10.2 The following table outlines some of the main stakeholder groups and the principal opportunities for them to contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the North Wessex Downs AONB. This is by no means an exhaustive list and we welcome suggestions for further partners or examples of how these groups can help to deliver the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019-24.



Page 98 Working together in the AONB, Henry Oliver

Table 13. Stakeholders and opportunities to contribute

Partners	Principal opportunities	Delivery (examples)
Chambers of commerce	North Wessex Downs profile/marketing; tourism; local products.	Member information and events; North Wessex Downs tourism collaboration; Great West Way tourism initiative; local supplier networks; visitor payback.
Consultants and agents	Awareness, understanding and recognition of the character and sensitivities of the North Wessex Downs landscape.	Sensitivity to the heritage, natural environment, local economy and communities in developing and refining proposals and raising awareness among client base.
Educational institutions	Awareness, deeper understanding and pride in the landscape.	Engagement with landscape through the curriculum; research, collaborative projects; field trips; farm visits; outdoor classrooms/Forest Schools.
Energy companies	Landscape conservation/enhancement; energy conservation; climate change.	Reporting on efforts to conserve and enhance the North Wessex Downs under s.85 Duty of Regard (CRoW Act 2000); customer energy conservation advice; undergrounding or mitigating the impact of powerlines; appropriate renewable energy generation; infrastructure planning, design and management.
Farmers and land managers	Wildlife habitat; landscape character; local food; public awareness and understanding; natural resource management; tourism; responsible access; climate change.	Environmental Land Management Schemes; partnership conservation projects (e.g. farmer-led groups); catchment-sensitive farming; control of outdoor lighting; appropriate diversification projects; farm visits; carbon sequestration; rights of way maintenance; permissive access; appropriate farm-scale renewable energy generation.
Health sector, inc. commissioning bodies, GPs, support groups	Access to the landscape for mental and physical health and wellbeing benefits.	Green prescribing; walking for health; conservation volunteering; projects aimed at specific groups e.g. dementia sufferers; access improvements; public/active transport.
Highway authorities	Road decluttering; landscape character; dark skies; green and active travel/access; tranquillity; climate change; tourism; layout and design of new and re-development.	Reporting on efforts to conserve and enhance the North Wessex Downs under s.85 Duty of Regard (CRoW Act 2000); local transport planning; road maintenance and safety programmes; signs audits; community collaboration e.g. on clutter, speed enforcement, public transport; land use planning; National Trail partnerships; Local Access Forums; Rights of Way Improvement Plans.
Individuals	Natural resources; heritage and nature conservation; water abstraction; dark skies; tranquillity; local products; settlement character; climate change.	Participation in local projects; water and energy conservation; buying local; control of external lighting; conservation gardening; responsible access; green travel; pollution avoidance; planning and design.
Landscape-scale conservation initiatives	Landscape and nature conservation and restoration; ecosystem goods and services; community engagement; climate change.	Identifying local environmental networks; engaging the public, private and voluntary sector in collaborative protection and enhancement of the North Wessex Downs; educating young people and communities regarding the benefits of the natural environment.

Continued...

Table 13 continued. Stakeholders and opportunities to contribute

Partners	Principal opportunities	Delivery (examples)
Local authorities (including planning authorities)	Landscape and nature conservation; historic environment; settlement character; water abstraction; tranquillity; access, rights of way; AONB profile; public awareness and understanding; dark skies; affordable housing; diversification; ecosystem goods and services.	Reporting on efforts to conserve and enhance the North Wessex Downs under s.85 Duty of Regard (CRoW Act 2000); development plans; planning advice, decisions, conditions and enforcement; green travel plans; supplementary planning guidance; AONB signage; rights of way and interpretation; duties specified by NERC Act 2006.
Local businesses	Local products; tourism; North Wessex Downs profile; dark skies; natural resources; climate change.	Local sourcing; marketing; North Wessex Downs tourism promotion; Great West Way tourism initiative; promotion of green/active travel; control of external lighting; energy/water conservation; waste minimisation.
Local Enterprise Partnerships	Landscape and nature conservation and restoration; diversification; sustainable prosperity; local products; ecosystem goods and services; climate change; tourism.	Strategic investment in natural capital and Green Infrastructure; diversification support programme/s; green/active travel; landscape-scale environmental initiatives; environmental land management schemes.
National statutory agencies (including Environment Agency, Forestry Commission England, Historic England, Highways England, Natural England)	Historic environment; landscape and nature conservation; rivers and water quality; tranquillity; ecosystem goods and services.	Reporting on efforts to conserve and enhance the North Wessex Downs under s.85 Duty of Regard (CRoW Act 2000); land-use planning; Green Infrastructure; environmental land management schemes; land management advice; natural capital assessments; partnership conservation projects (e.g. farmer-led groups; woodland management advice, support and marketing; River Basin Management Plans; Conservation Area Appraisals; Catchment Partnerships and Catchment Management Plans; Route Management Strategies; Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site Management Plan).
Non-governmental organisations (including Action for the River Kennet [ARK], Canal and River Trust, Campaign to Protect Rural England [CPRE], Earth Trust, Friends of the Ridgeway, Kennet and Avon Canal Trust, National Trust, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Trust for Sustainable Living, The Wildlife Trusts)	Landscape, heritage and nature conservation and restoration; North Wessex Downs profile; settlement character; water abstraction; diffuse pollution; tranquillity; dark skies; affordable housing; responsible access; tourism; farm diversification; ecosystem goods and services.	Member/supporter communications; public information and interpretation; estate management; collaborative projects; planning and design; recreation marketing and management; green/active travel; North Wessex Downs tourism promotion; Great West Way tourism initiative.

Continued...

Table 13 continued. Stakeholders and Opportunities to Contribute

Partners	Principal opportunities	Delivery (examples)
North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust	North Wessex Downs profile and marketing; public awareness, understanding, pride in and care for the landscape; community engagement; education; health and wellbeing; tourism promotion; landscape, heritage and nature conservation; decluttering; tranquillity; dark skies.	Public communications, presentations and events; fundraising; neighbourhood planning; community projects; 'green prescribing'; educational talks/visits/projects; publications (e.g. walks leaflets).
Parish and town councils	North Wessex Downs profile/marketing; community identity and pride; community engagement; tourism; landscape and nature conservation; decluttering; historic environment; settlement character; tranquillity; dark skies.	Public communications and events; parish / town / neighbourhood planning; community projects; Village Design Statements; property and grounds management; publications (e.g. walks leaflets); control of external lighting; community transport; local sourcing.
Rights of way and countryside access forums and groups	Access to the North Wessex Downs; raising the profile and marketing; tourism; links to landscape and nature conservation.	Improving responsible access; contributing to collaborative marketing and tourism initiatives; recognition of the North Wessex Downs in Countryside Access Improvement Plans.
Tourism marketing bodies	North Wessex Downs profile/marketing; green/active travel; tourism; local products.	Destination marketing strategies; collaborative projects (e.g. Great West Way); North Wessex Downs tourism promotion; local supplier networks; National Trail partnerships; visitor payback.
Transport operators	Green travel; access; North Wessex Downs profile/marketing; sustainable tourism; tranquillity.	Business and marketing strategies; collaborative initiatives with local businesses and communities; AONB signage; National Trail partnerships.
Water companies	Water abstraction and consumption; water quality; diffuse water pollution; catchment-sensitive farming; habitat conservation and enhancement.	Reporting on efforts to conserve and enhance the North Wessex Downs under s.85 Duty of Regard (CRoW Act 2000); public information and advice; Water Resources Management Plans; Five-Year Plans; collaborative projects with local partners; demand management measures; use of abstraction licences; estate management; control of external lighting.

Summary of Activity 2014-19



Page 102 Guided walk in Pewsey, Mark Somerville; Cattle farming in Oxfordshire, Peter Orr

Page 103 Community engagement in planning, NWD AONB



Summary of activity for the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2014-2019

Local Partnership

- ▶ Secured £3,790,942-worth of benefits for the AONB area. £11.59 for every £1 invested by local authority partners.
- ▶ Established the North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust, a new Charitable Incorporated Organisation with a mission to support the purposes of the AONB designation.
- ▶ Undertook a detailed review of strategic aims and needs, resulting in adoption of the AONB Partnership's first Corporate Strategy.

National and Regional Collaboration

- ▶ Contributed to collective discussion and action through the National Association for AONBs.
- ▶ Submitted responses to national policy consultations on food, farming, transport and planning.
- ▶ Contributed to local, regional and national submissions to the Glover review of designated landscapes.
- ▶ Hosted a visit by a member of the designated landscapes review panel.
- ▶ Hosted and led a field visit as part of the national Landscapes for Life AONBs conference.
- ▶ With AECOM and South East and East Protected Landscapes partners, developed and published a Protected Landscapes Vision for the London City Region.

Note: most statistics include activity up to March 2019 only, and do not comprehensively cover the full five-year Plan period.

Landscape Enhancement

- ▶ Worked with National Grid to explore options to bury underground high-tension power lines under the Visual Impact Project.
- ▶ Submitted proposals to SSE for undergrounding of telegraph wires and poles at six prominent sites – one now completed, one approved and awaiting works, one rejected, three still under consideration.

Communities and Planning

- ▶ Engaged with Local Plans, Core Strategies, Minerals and Waste Plans and other policy documents for Basingstoke and Deane, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, South Oxfordshire, Test Valley, Vale of White Horse, West Berkshire and Wiltshire Councils.
- ▶ Prevented major harm to the AONB landscape from proposals for large-scale housebuilding at Harwell in Oxfordshire.
- ▶ Supported communities preparing Neighbourhood Plans in Wantage, Overton, Whitchurch, Goring, Burghclere, Kingsclere, Burbage, Woodborough, Marlborough, Calne, St Mary Bourne and North Newnton.
- ▶ Screened approx. 3,500 planning applications and commented on approx. 500.
- ▶ Gave evidence in seven appeals.
- ▶ Secured £3.75 million in compensation funding from Network Rail in relation to the Great Western Electrification Programme for a joint mitigation and landscape enhancement project in the Thames Valley with the Chilterns Conservation Board.

Farming and Forestry

- ▶ Ran an event to highlight opportunities offered by Defra's Facilitation Fund.
- ▶ Worked with local land managers to develop proposals for two new farmer clusters in the AONB.



- ▶ Supported the launch of the Southern Streams Farmer Group, focused principally on reducing soil erosion and improving water quality.
- ▶ Led efforts to form a farmer-led group on the Ridgeway in Oxfordshire.
- ▶ Held an Annual Forum on the benefits of collaborative farming for conservation on a landscape scale.
- ▶ Ran a highly successful Make Your Woodland Work for You conference in collaboration with the Forestry Commission, Cranborne Chase AONB, the Woodland Trust and LEADER, designed to encourage landowners and managers to undertake more and better management of woodland.

Wildlife

- ▶ Jointly led the landscape-scale Stepping Stones project with Cranborne Chase AONB and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. This aimed to enable chalk grassland wildlife to increase and colonise new areas by improving the habitat adjoining high quality sites and creating 'stepping stones' connecting areas of high-quality habitat around Salisbury Plain, and to involve volunteers in growing and planting wildflowers to



improve the quality of species-poor chalk grassland. Est. cash value to the North Wessex Downs AONB £63,000.

- Created, improved or worked on 344 ha of chalk grassland.
- Grew over 23,000 wildflower plug plants and planted them on strategically important sites.
- Engaged 28 farmers in landscape-scale conservation work across the North Wessex and West Wiltshire Downs.
- Delivered many hundreds of hours of volunteer time (650 hours on one sub-project alone).
- ▶ With the Sylva Foundation, delivered Good Woods, a programme of visits to provide woodland management advice aimed at encouraging economically viable woodland management, with benefits for landscape, ecology and public enjoyment. Funded by B&Q.
 - Advised 21 farms and estates in and around the North Wessex Downs.
- ▶ Collaborated with the Town and Manor of Hungerford to bring a range of wildflower species back to Hungerford Common Portdown, a landscape much used by local residents.
 - Area sown with wildflower seed: 5.59 ha.
- ▶ Supported, promoted and helped fund the landscape-scale Winning Ways for Wildlife project led by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust in partnership with the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and Butterfly Conservation. Aimed at targeted conservation of Duke of Burgundy butterfly and willow tit in north-west Hampshire straddling the AONB boundary.

Heritage

- ▶ Developed and delivered Written in the Land, a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) project that published interactive web mapping of historic landscape characterisation for the North Wessex Downs with descriptions, statements of significance, time-slice mapping and links, to help anyone

who wants it to find information about, and read, the history of the present-day landscape and why it matters.

- A new interactive historic landscape character website: www.historicnorthwessexdowns.org.uk
- 98 volunteer days
- 4 workshops
- Inaugural North Wessex Downs Heritage Forum
- New leaflet: 'Written in the land: archaeology and history in the North Wessex Downs'
- ▶ With Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site partners, secured £55,000 in HLF funding to scope and appraise options for a resilient model for future funding, governance and operation of the World Heritage Site Partnership and Co-ordination Unit.

The Arts

- ▶ Collaborated with Activate, And Now, Corn Exchange Newbury, 101 Outdoor Arts Creation Space and the National Trust to hold Wayfaring at Basildon Park, part of the Lifecycles and Landscapes project.
 - School children participating in art in the landscape days: almost 400
 - Factsheets produced for schools: 3
 - Presentations to primary schools: 13
 - Members of public attending the Wayfaring resolution event: 800
 - Views of NWD AONB Wayfaring film: 20,000+

Recreation and Tourism

- ▶ Fostered the development and establishment of new partnerships for the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails.
- ▶ Held a joint Forum with the Ridgeway Partnership on The Great Outdoors, highlighting the benefits of the AONB landscape for health and wellbeing, volunteering, tourism and artistic inspiration.

- ▶ Supported the Ridgeway Strategic Links project to encourage greater economic benefit to local communities from use of the National Trail.
- ▶ Developed a Tourism Toolkit for local tourism businesses to use in marketing the AONB landscape.
- ▶ Supported Visit Wiltshire's Great West Way initiative as a Destination Ambassador.
- ▶ With Visit Wiltshire, produced three North Wessex Downs AONB visitor itineraries for the Great West Way.
- ▶ Ran the inaugural North Wessex Downs Walking Festival in June 2019 comprising 14 walks over 16 days across the AONB.

Research

- ▶ Worked with Oxford University students on a series of research projects supporting AONB objectives.
- ▶ Supported events to highlight the results of research on cover crops and soil management.

Communications

- ▶ Developed the 'Story of the North Wessex Downs' presentation, trained 25 'Storytellers' in delivering it and gave 39 presentations to 1,140 people.
- ▶ Produced a revised 'Discover North Wessex Downs' leaflet and distributed 230,000 copies across the North Wessex Downs.
- ▶ Moved the AONB website to a responsive format suitable for all devices.
- ▶ Ran a photography competition focussed on people in the landscape.
- ▶ Produced two short films: 'An introduction to the North Wessex Downs' and 'Avebury to Basildon Park Along the Icknield Way'.
- ▶ Ran a travelling exhibition of Icons of the North Wessex Downs paintings to 12 venues in and around the AONB.
- ▶ Published quarterly eBulletins of AONB news.
- ▶ Aided the publication of 'Ash', a record of the contribution of ash trees to the English landscape, written and illustrated by Archie Miles, the Woodland Trust and the Ash Project.



Glossary of Terms

<i>Term used</i>	<i>Definition/explanation</i>
Agri-environment Schemes (AES)	A range of schemes operated by Defra designed to encourage environmentally friendly farming and public enjoyment of the countryside. Currently includes Countryside Stewardship.
Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW)	An ancient woodland site, believed to have had continuous woodland cover since 1600 AD, composed principally of native tree species that have not obviously been planted.
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)	Area designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, with the primary purpose of designation being to conserve natural beauty.
Biodiversity Net Gain	A principle by which development operations leave biodiversity in a better state than before. Consulted on by Government as a possible principle for national planning policy in 2018/19. Criticised by the Natural Capital Committee for failing to account for the complexities of environmental goods and services provided by natural capital (q.v.) assets.
Byway	A Byway open to all traffic (BOAT) is a Public Right of Way open to all users, including vehicular and all other kinds of traffic. Defined in 66(1) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. (See also Restricted Byway q.v.)
Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy (CAMS)	CAMS is a process used by the Environment Agency (EA) to provide both a consistent approach to local water resource management and greater public involvement in water management. The EA uses CAMS to determine its approach to catchment abstraction licensing within a given catchment. This is set out in a Catchment Abstraction Licensing Strategy for the catchment.
Catchment Partnership	A Catchment Partnership brings together a wide range of interests with local expertise to undertake integrated management of land and water, addressing each Water Framework Directive river catchment as a whole and delivering cross-cutting practical interventions on the ground. These aim to provide multiple benefits to water quality, wildlife, flood risk, resilience to climate change and more resource efficiency. Catchment Partnerships are active across England.
Catchment-Sensitive Farming (CSF)	A partnership between Defra, the Environment Agency and Natural England. It works with farmers and a range of other partners to improve water and air quality in high priority areas. CSF offers farmers free training, advice and support for grant applications. Also used to refer to the general approach advocated by CSF.
Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)	European Union-wide policy that supports agriculture through price support, market management and measures to improve the agriculture industry. Undergoing a Mid term review, introducing decoupling and more modulation and cross compliance.
Common land	Defined in section 22 of the Commons Registration Act 1965 as land subject to rights of common (as defined in this Act) whether those rights are exercisable at all times or only during limited periods.

Glossary continued...

<i>Term used</i>	<i>Definition/explanation</i>
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)	A planning charge, introduced by the Planning Act 2008 as a tool for local authorities to pay for infrastructure to support development in their area. Introduced by the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010. Development may be liable for CIL if the local planning authority has chosen to set a charge in its area.
Conservation Area	Defined by section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which is desirable to preserve or enhance.
Coppice	Woodland which has normally been regenerated from shoots formed at the cut stumps of the previous crop trees, root suckers, or both i.e. by vegetative means. Coppice is normally grown on a short rotation, e.g. 5-25 years, to yield small diameter material.
Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act (2000)	Contains measures to improve public access to the open countryside and registered common land while recognising the legitimate interests of those who own and manage the land concerned; it amends the law relating to rights of way; it amends the law relating to nature conservation by strengthening protection for Sites of Special Scientific Interest including tougher penalties and by providing extra powers for the prosecution of wildlife crime; it provides a basis for the conservation of biological diversity; and it provides for better management of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, including the requirement for local authorities to produce AONB management plans every five years and places a duty on public bodies to have regard to the purposes of AONB designation.
Countryside Stewardship (CS)	The current Common Agricultural Policy environmental land management support scheme introduced by Defra in 2014.
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)	The central government department with responsibility for protected landscapes, wildlife, food and farming, natural resources, etc.
Ecosystem goods and services	The assets and services, especially those of benefit to humans, provided by the functioning of an ecosystem or environment. Often categorised as: ▶ supporting e.g. soil formation, nutrient cycling, pollination ▶ provisioning e.g. food, timber, water ▶ regulating e.g. carbon sequestration, floodwater storage, air and water purification, climate regulation ▶ cultural e.g. landscapes, wildlife, etc. of aesthetic, cultural, historical, recreational or spiritual value to people.
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)	A process under which developers are required to provide, in addition to a planning application, an environmental statement evaluating the likely environmental impact of the development, together with an assessment of how this may be mitigated. EIA is intended to ensure that, when deciding whether to grant planning permission for a project which is likely to have significant effects on the environment, a local planning authority does so in full knowledge of the likely effects, and takes these into account in the decision making process. Governed by the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 in compliance with EU Directive 2011/92/EU.
Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)	The Higher Level Scheme was a Stewardship (i.e. agri-environment) scheme introduced in 2005 to concentrate on the more complex types of management needed to achieve the objectives of the Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) where land managers need advice and support, where agreements need to be tailored to local circumstances and where management needs to be carefully targeted.

Term used	Definition/explanation
Highways Authority	The Highways Act 1980 defines a Highway Authority as the body responsible for maintaining all highways maintainable at public expense and keeping them free of obstruction, including responsibility for public rights of way.
Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC)	A method used to define and map the historic and archaeological dimensions of the present-day landscape. HLC is an extremely useful tool for enabling better decision making about future land use management and change. By properly understanding the historic landscape context we can assess the likely effects of changes and make better informed decisions.
Historic Parks and Gardens	Parks and Gardens containing historic features dating from 1939 or earlier and registered by Historic England in three grades as with historic buildings.
Landscape	An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.
Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)	A process for identifying the effects of proposed changes (e.g. new development) on views and on the landscape itself. A depth of analysis and understanding of these two interrelated aspects is required to produce a successful LVIA. The Landscape Institute publishes guidelines for carrying out LVIA. LVIA may be required for significant planning applications within the AONB or its setting (q.v).
Landscape Character Area	Unique individual geographical areas in which Landscape Character Types occur, which share generic characteristics with other areas of the same type but have their own particular identity.
Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)	A method for identifying, understanding and expressing the different patterns and features i.e. woodlands, hedgerows, building styles and historic artefacts which give a place a distinctive character.
Landscape Character Type	A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from one another, rather than better or worse.
LEADER	European Union rural development initiative for assisting rural communities in improving the quality of life and economic prosperity of their area through the distribution of grant funding.
Local Access Forum (LAF)	Set up under CRow Act to represent a balance of local interests and views, providing independent guidance to the relevant local authorities and the Countryside Agency on how to make the countryside more accessible and enjoyable for open air recreation in ways that address social, economic and environmental interests. Each county has one covering its respective area of the North Wessex Downs.
Local Planning Authority (LPA)	The local authority, normally a unitary or local borough or district council, which is empowered by law to exercise planning functions.
National Nature Reserve (NNR)	Designated by the Government under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 to protect and conserve nationally important areas of wildlife habitat and geological formations and to promote scientific research.
National Trail	Routes based on public rights of way through the nation's finest and most characteristic countryside, allowing an extensive journey on foot, horseback or by bicycle and capable of attracting tourist use from home and abroad.
Natural beauty	Legislation and associated guidance defines natural beauty as including the physical elements of flora, fauna, geology and physiographic or geomorphological, the cultural and heritage elements, together with less tangible values such as intactness, rarity, wildness, remoteness, tranquillity and the appeal to the physical senses.

Glossary continued...

<i>Term used</i>	<i>Definition/explanation</i>
Natural capital	The elements of nature that directly or indirectly produce value to people, including ecosystems, species, freshwater, land, minerals, the air and oceans, as well as natural processes and functions. Natural capital is described in terms of assets. Natural capital is simply those assets provided by nature which have the capacity to generate goods and services. Natural capital can be regarded as the source of all other types of capital: whether manufactured, financial, human or social, underlining the importance of a healthy environment for human prosperity.
Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006	Legislation that extended the biodiversity duty in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to public bodies and statutory undertakers to ensure due regard to the conservation of biodiversity. The Act also refined the definition of 'natural beauty'.
Neighbourhood Plan	A document that a community may choose to prepare to set out a vision for how it wants an area to develop over the next 10-20 years. Once approved by an inspector and endorsed in a local referendum the plan becomes part of the statutory development plan for the area. Established by the Localism Act 2011.
Parkland	A large piece of ground usually comprising woodland, scattered mature trees, pasture and/or semi-formal gardens, often created to a specific landscape design and currently or once attached to a country house or mansion.
Pasture	An area of land dominated by grass, which is used only or principally for grazing, as distinct from a meadow that is mown. Pasture may be enclosed fields or unenclosed common land.
Permanent grassland	Any grassland, whether pasture or meadow, composed of perennial or self-seeding annual plants kept indefinitely and not sown or ploughed.
Permissive access	Public access to a route or area granted by the landowner, usually for foot access but occasionally for [horse] riders, which is not dedicated as a public right of way.
Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS)	Ancient Woodland Sites in which the former tree cover has been replaced, often with non-native trees. PAWS often retain important ancient woodland features including characteristic flora, fauna and archaeology.
Pollard	A tree which has had its top and/or upper branches cut some height above the ground to promote new and multiple growth, to avoid the reach of browsing animals or to create aesthetically pleasing forms, extend the life of the tree and/or maintain wildlife habitat.
Quiet Lane	Section 208 of the Transport Act 2000 makes provision for local traffic authorities to designate roads for which they are responsible as Quiet Lanes, enjoying voluntary speed restrictions and promotion for non-motorised traffic.
Regional Walking Routes	Longer named paths, promoted on the initiative of local authorities, signed and fully waymarked, and based on public rights of way, offering more than a day's travelling, perhaps following a theme or feature that offer tourism potential, such as the Wayfarer's Walk and the White Horse Trail.
Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)	Sections 60 to 62 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 require local highway authorities to prepare and publish Rights of Way Improvement Plans for improving rights of way in their areas, taking into account the needs of the public including people with disabilities.
River Basin Management Plan (RMBP)	A River Basin Management Plan, produced in compliance with the Water Framework Directive (q.v.), provides a framework for protecting and enhancing the benefits provided by the water environment. It also informs decisions on land-use planning. It consists of a number of different documents, maps and datasets. Overseen by the Environment Agency, there is one for each of the seven River Basin Districts in England.

<i>Term used</i>	<i>Definition/explanation</i>
Scheduled Monument	A structure identified by Historic England for protection under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.
Section 106 agreement	A binding agreement between a local planning authority and a developer associated with a grant of planning permission and regarding matters linked to the proposed development.
Setting (of the AONB)	The area within which development and land management proposals, by virtue of their nature, size, scale, siting, materials and design can be considered to have an impact, positive or negative, on the landscape, scenic beauty and special qualities of the AONB.
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	Area identified by Natural England under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 for protection by reason of the rarity of its nature conservation, wildlife features or geological interest.
Sites and Monument Record (SMR)	A database of sites of archaeological interest and potential within a particular area, usually a county.
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	Site designated according to the Habitats Directive 93/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and wild fauna and flora.
Special Qualities	The special qualities of the AONB are those aspects of the landscape for which it is considered important, and on which the priorities for its management are based. The interaction between natural and cultural factors can create a significance which is not recognised by looking at one aspect in isolation.
Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)	Documents prepared to support and amplify policies in the Local Development Plan. Such guidance must be consistent with national and local planning policy.
Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)	SuDS are intended to reduce flooding downstream of development by enabling surface water run-off to be controlled as near to the source as possible. National planning policy encourages use of SuDS and seeks to ensure that flood risk is considered on a catchment scale.
Tranquillity	Composite feature which seeks to characterise elements of wildness, solitude, peace and quiet, relating for example to low levels of built development, traffic, noise and artificial lighting.
Unimproved grassland	Grassland consisting of native grasses and herbs which have not been significantly affected by treatment with mineral fertilisers, pesticides, intensive grazing or drainage.
Veteran tree	Tree which by virtue of its great age, size and/or condition, is of exceptional value whether in cultural terms, for its landscape contribution or for the benefit of wildlife.
Water Framework Directive (WFD)	EU Directive 2000/60/EC aims to achieve good qualitative and quantitative status of all surface and groundwater bodies.
Wetland	Transitional areas between wet and dry environments; wetlands range from permanently or intermittently wet land to shallow water and water margins.
Whole Farm (Conservation) Plan	A plan that considers an individual farm as a whole, producing a bespoke conservation plan considering farm type, location and any particular landscape or wildlife value, identifying adjustments to management practices that can significantly benefit the landscape and wildlife.
World Heritage Site (WHS)	A cultural or natural heritage site inscribed under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Convention on the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage for its Outstanding Universal Value.

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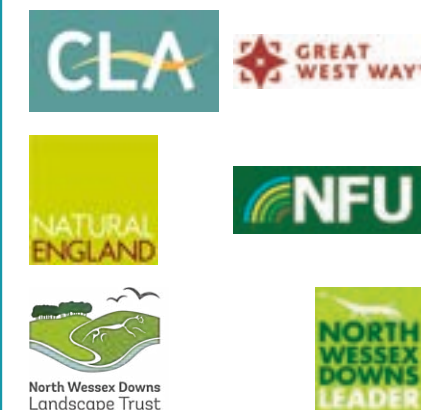
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The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Funded by:



In partnership with:





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