

9. LANDSCAPE TYPE 2: DOWNLAND WITH WOODLAND

Location and Boundaries

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

Overview

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

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

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

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

Key Characteristics

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

Physical Influences

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

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

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

Biodiversity

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

Historic Environment

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

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

Settlement and Building Character

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

Recreation Character

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

Social and Economic Character

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

Key Issues

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

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

Key Management Requirements

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

Character Areas

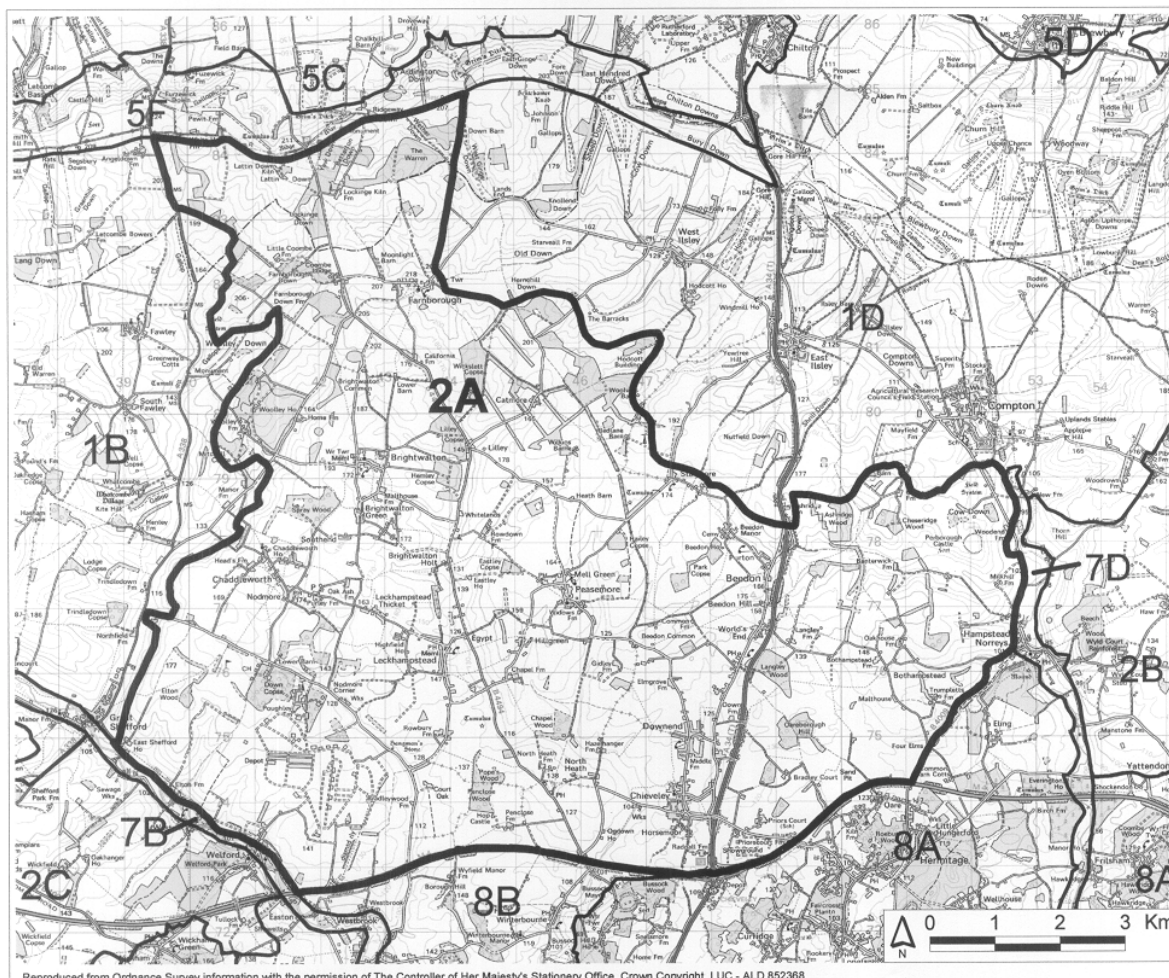
- 9.17. The Downlands with Woodland landscape type is divided into seven geographic character areas. These comprise.
- 2A: Brightwalton Downs
 - 2B: Ashampstead Downs
 - 2C: Lambourn Wooded Downs
 - 2D: Walbury Hill - Watership Downs Scarp

2E: Chute Forest - Faccombe Downs

2F: Litchfield Downs

2G: Hannington Downs

CHARACTER AREA 2A: BRIGHTWALTON DOWNS



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

Landscape Character Description

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

Key Characteristics

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

Physical Influences

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

Historic Environment

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

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

Biodiversity

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

Key Issues

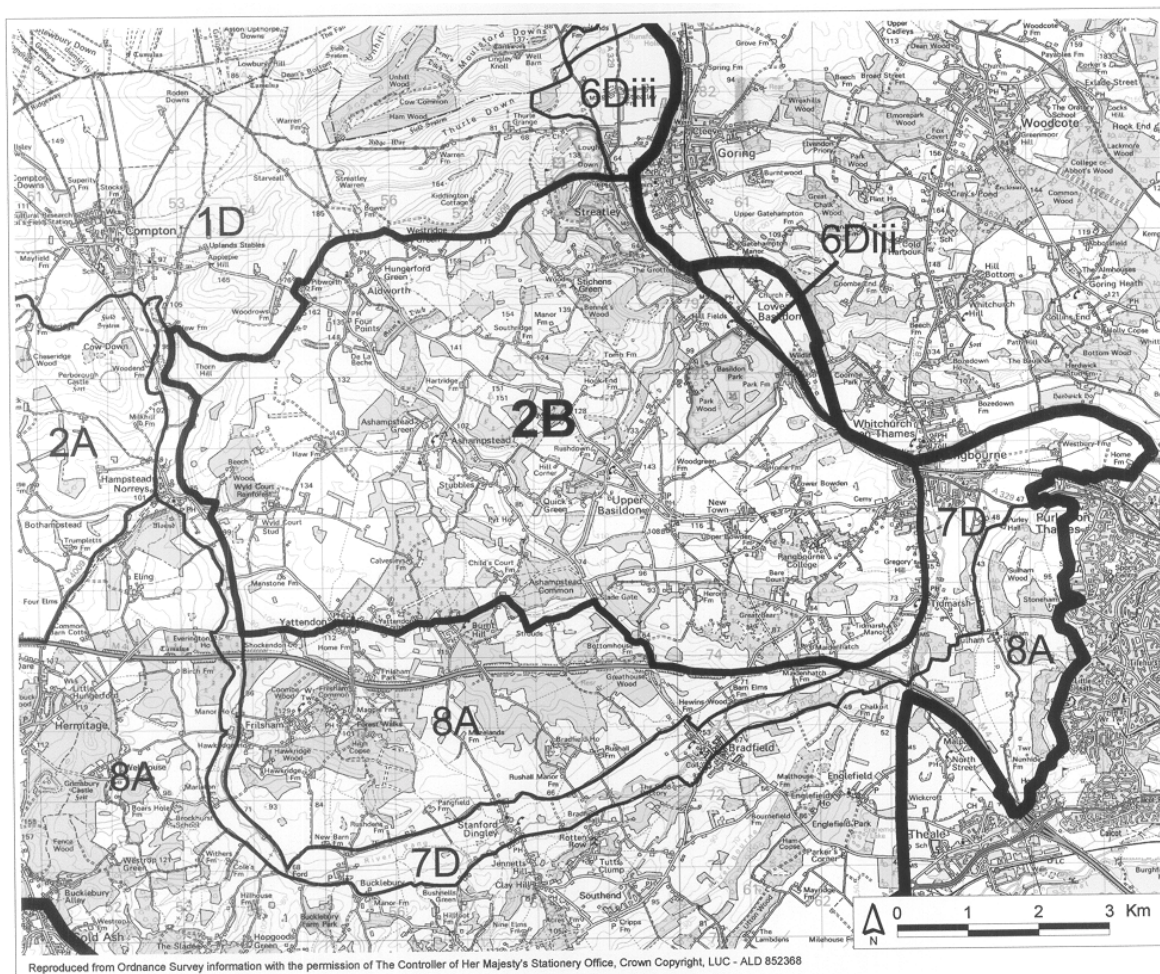
- **intensive arable farming** leading to loss of biodiversity (e.g. chalk grassland/farmland birds) archaeological features and creation of a very large scale landscape structure;
- changes in farming practices - including **loss of livestock** so that some marginal areas of pasture may no longer be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

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

Key Management Requirements

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

CHARACTER AREA 2B: ASHAMPSTEAD DOWNS



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

Landscape Character Description

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

Key Characteristics

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

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

Physical Influences

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

Historic Environment

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

Biodiversity

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

Key Issues

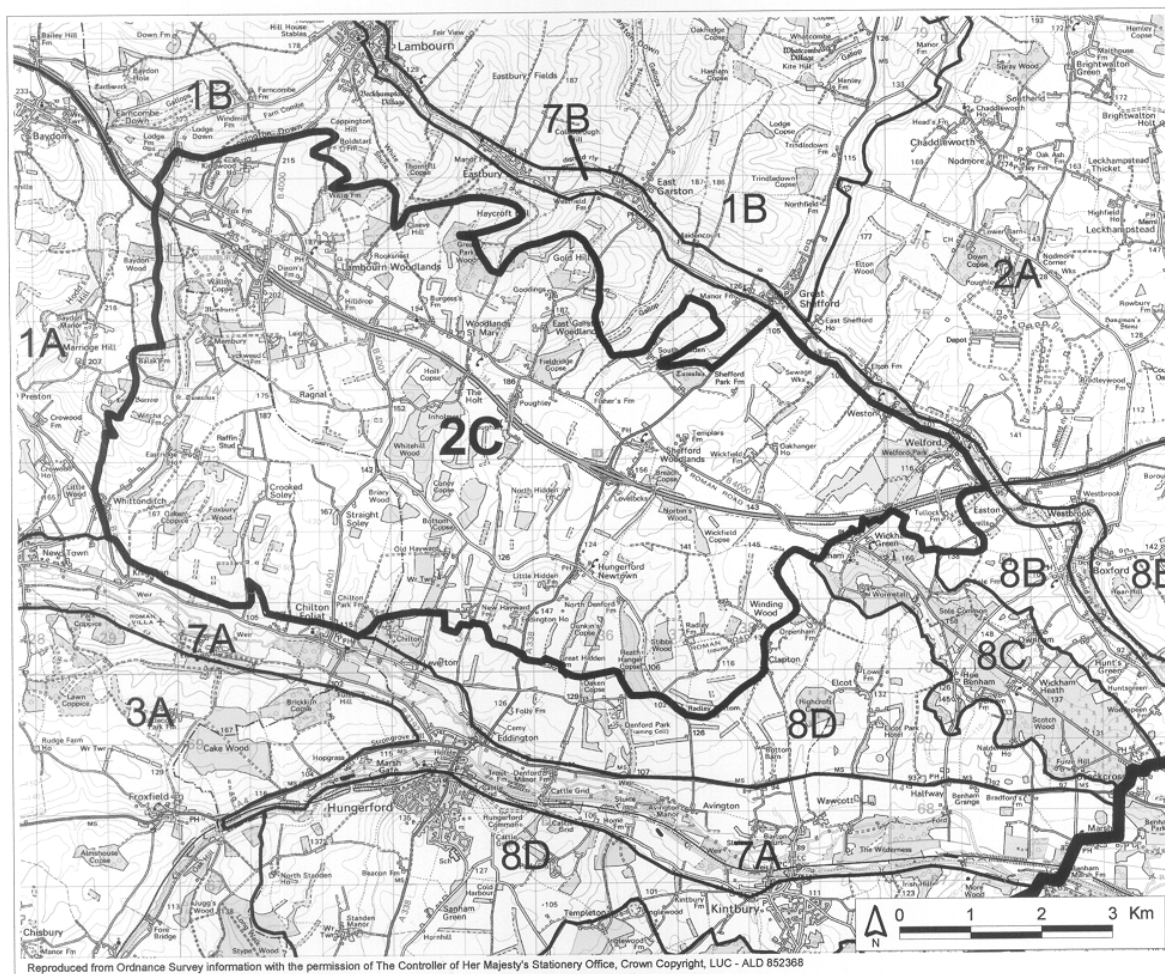
- **intensive arable farming** leading to loss of biodiversity (e.g. chalk grassland/farmland birds) archaeological features and creation of a very large scale landscape structure;

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

Key Management Requirements

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

CHARACTER AREA 2C: LAMBOURN WOODED DOWNS



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

Landscape Character Description

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

Key Characteristics

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

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

Physical Influences

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

Historic Environment

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

Biodiversity

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

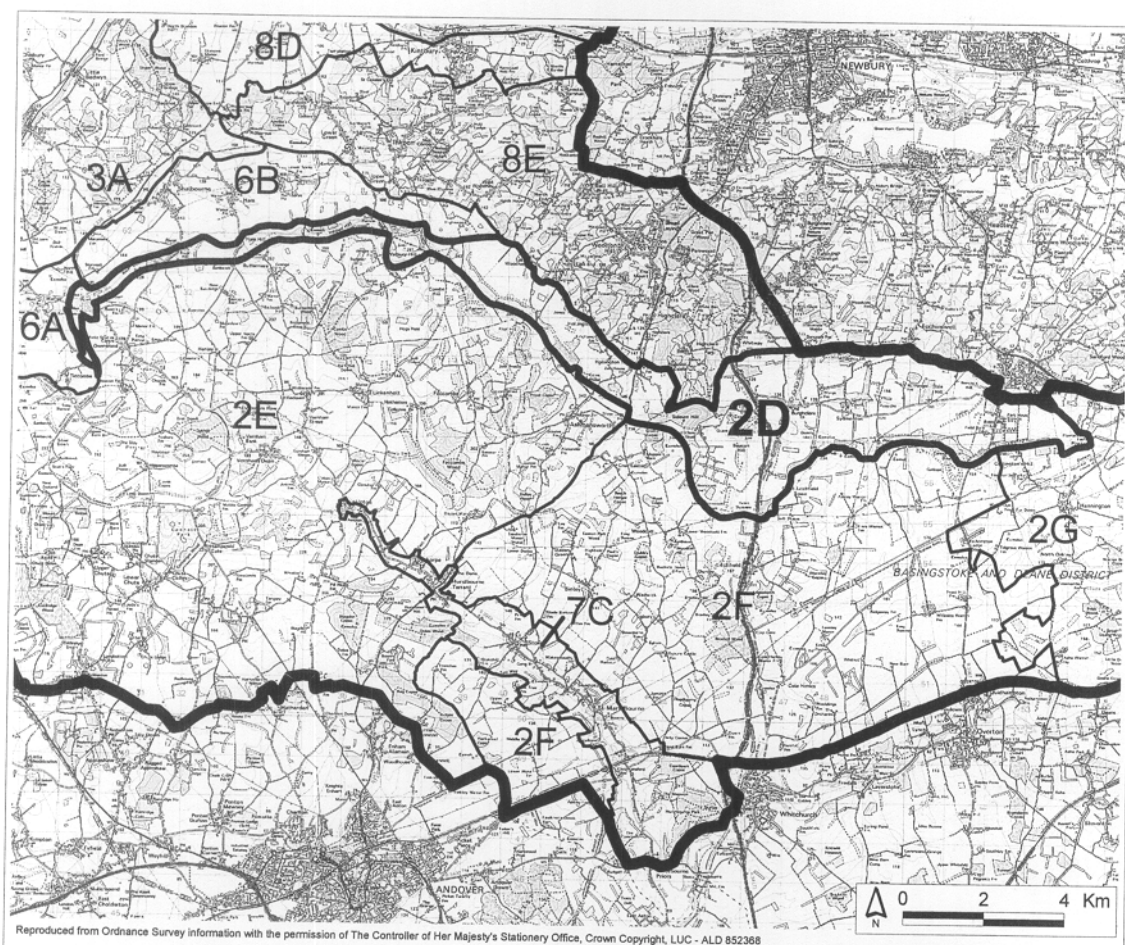
Key Issues

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

Key Management Requirements

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

CHARACTER AREA 2D: WALBURY HILL – WATERSHIP DOWNS SCARP



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

Landscape Character Description

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

Key Characteristics

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

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

Physical Influences

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

Historic Environment

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

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

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

Biodiversity

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

Key Issues

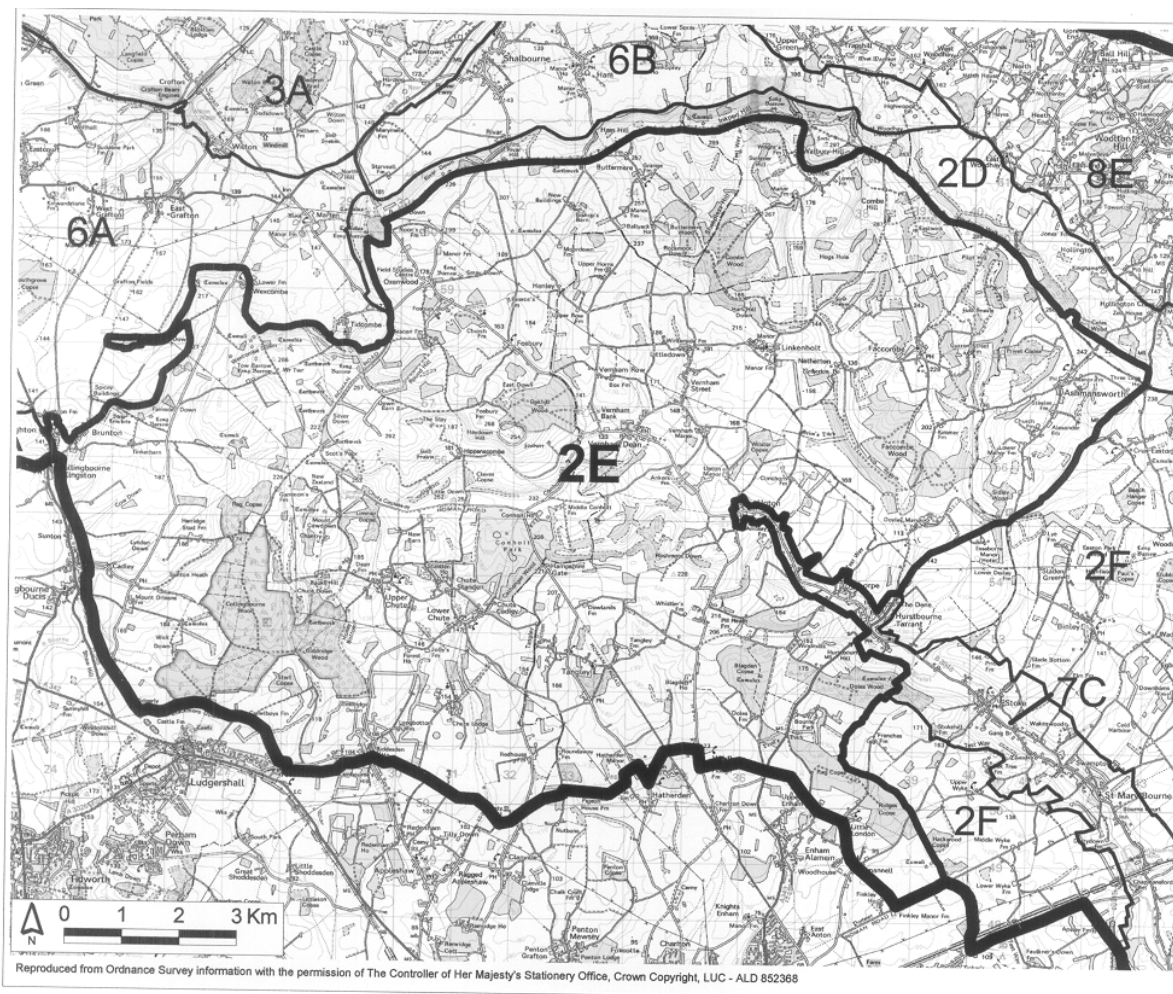
- intensive arable farming leading to **loss of biodiversity**, particularly chalk grasslands plus **damage to archaeological features**;
- changes in farming practices - including **loss of livestock** so that some chalk grasslands on the steep scarp slope are no longer grazed with **scrub encroachment**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

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

Key Management Requirements

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

CHARACTER AREA 2E: CHUTE FOREST – FACCOMBE



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

Landscape Character Description

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

Key Characteristics

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

Physical Influences

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

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

Historic Environment

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

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

Biodiversity

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

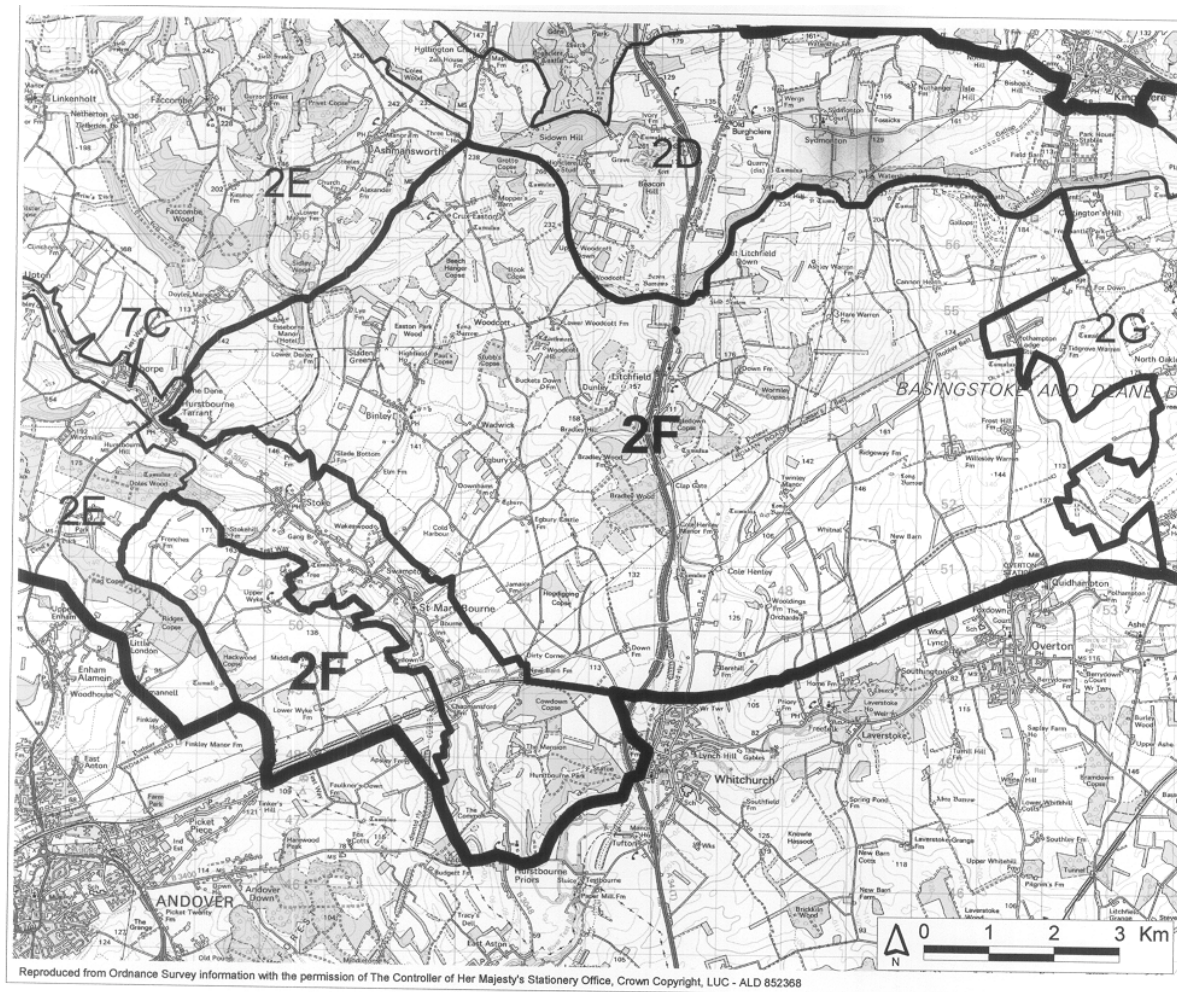
Key Issues

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

Key Management Requirements

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

CHARACTER AREA 2F: LITCHFIELD DOWNS



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

Landscape Character Description

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

Key Characteristics

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

is a distinctive feature;

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

Physical Influences

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

Historic Environment

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

Biodiversity

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

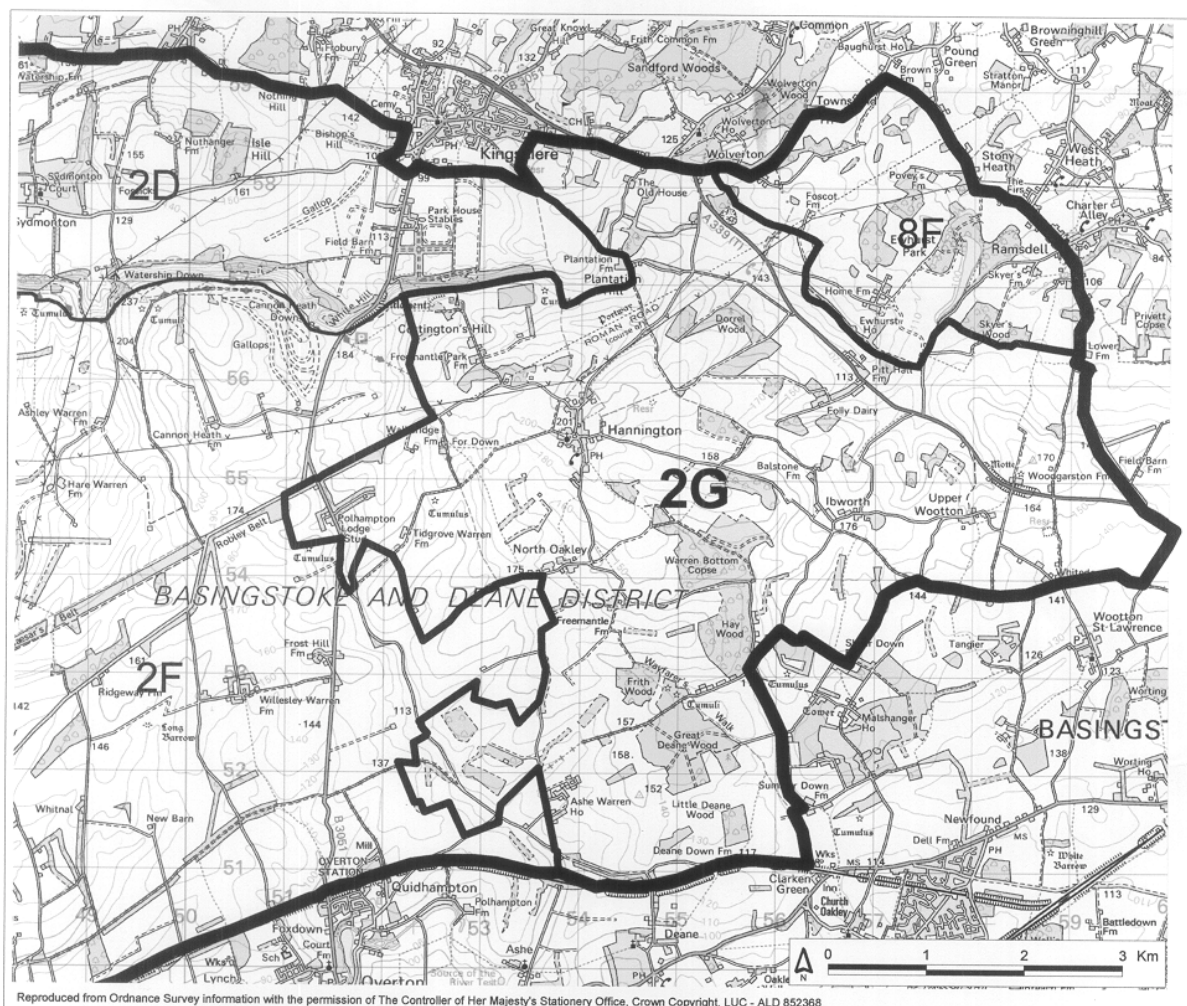
Key Issues

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

Key Management Requirements

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

CHARACTER AREA 2G: HANNINGTON DOWNS



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

Landscape Character Description

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

Key Characteristics

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

Physical Influences

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

Historic Environment

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

Biodiversity

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

Key Issues

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

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

Key Management Requirements

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