



**North Wessex
Downs**
National
Landscape

**Chair of the Council of Partners
Candidate Brief**

October/November 2024

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About the North Wessex Downs

The North Wessex Downs National Landscape (NWDNL) is a nationally protected landscape, designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1972 under the *National Parks and Access to Countryside Act 1949*. Straddling the boundaries of Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire and covering 173 parishes, it is the third-largest of the 46 AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

An AONB is a landscape whose distinctiveness and natural beauty are recognised as so outstanding that it should be protected for the nation.

In 2023 AONB Partnerships rebranded themselves as National Landscapes, reflecting their equal national status alongside National Parks and creating a consistency of approach across all National Landscapes. National Landscapes remain formally designated as AONBs and where this document refers to the legal basis of the designation, the term AONB rather than National Landscape (NL) is used.

The North Wessex Downs encompass 668 square miles (1,730 square km) of tranquil and stunningly beautiful landscape. Among the treasures to be found here are species-rich chalk grassland and sparkling chalk streams, ancient woodland, veteran trees, rolling arable farmland, river valleys, heaths, commons, ancient monuments and historic settlements. Thinly populated, the Downs project a feeling of remoteness and timelessness. In the vast skies above, skylarks, lapwings and majestic birds of prey can be seen.

The Ridgeway National Trail, running along the crest of the Downs, passes the Uffington White Horse, Avebury World Heritage Site and many other ancient barrows and hill forts. Close to major towns, the Downs are the ideal place to get away from it all and enjoy the freedom of the countryside while respecting the environment. There are many footpaths, bridleways and cycle paths criss-crossing the landscape and taking in many of the best views and ancient monuments. If you prefer to travel by water, you can hire a canal boat or go canoeing along the Kennet and Avon Canal.

The North Wessex Downs also have an industrial heritage. At the Crofton Pumping Station on the Kennet and Avon Canal you can see the world's oldest steam engine still working *in situ*, or visit the only working windmill in Wessex at Wilton. There are also fine country houses. Highclere Castle (television's Downton Abbey) has impressive staterooms and wonderful grounds to walk in. The picturesque market towns and villages of the Downs have much to offer. For those with an interest in history and prehistory there is a dense concentration of ancient monuments including an outstanding Neolithic ritual landscape dating back over five-and-a-half thousand years at Avebury and fascinating museums and visitor centres in Devizes, Pewsey, Wantage and Whitchurch.

For more information visit www.northwessexdowns.org.uk.



Purpose of the Designation

The primary purpose of AONB designation is set out in the *National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act 1949* as “conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area”, The *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000* 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”. Natural beauty goes well beyond scenic or aesthetic value.

The Government has confirmed that the landscape qualities of National Parks and AONBs/NLs have equivalent status. The protection given by the land use planning system to natural beauty in both should be equivalent.

The National Landscape is of international importance. Recognised as a Category V Protected Landscape by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), it is an evolved cultural landscape, managed and nurtured by people over millennia. Those who manage the land are central to the future of this landscape. It is inevitable and appropriate that this cultural landscape will continue to change but this needs to be in ways that conserve and enhance its special qualities.

The North Wessex Downs NL is managed by a Partnership, known as the Council of Partners. This is made up of the nine local authorities across whose areas the NL lies, together with representatives of Government agencies such as Natural England, community and parish councils, farming, forestry and rural business, the historic environment, nature conservation, rural recreation and tourism. The Partnership, and the officers of the NL Unit, are hosted by Wiltshire Council.

Section 89 of the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000* requires local authorities in whose area an AONB/NL lies to produce a single Management Plan, to implement it and keep it under review. The Plan must be reviewed every five years. A revised and updated Management Plan for 2019-2024 was approved by the Council of Partners in March 2019, adopted by the nine local authority partners and published in November 2019. The Plan period was recently extended by one year to 2025. This is to enable the Plan review to take account of changes in Government policy and guidance. The review to produce the revised Management Plan 2025-30 is currently underway.

The current Plan was developed in the context of the Landscapes Review that was published in September 2019. The Review, led by Julian Glover, discharged the commitment made by DEFRA 25 Year Environment Plan to commission an independent review of the nation’s protected landscapes. The underlying theme of the Review is that landscapes are a positive force for the nation’s well-being and therefore accessibility is one of the most important issues to be addressed.

Planning and land management are also key topics. To implement the Review recommendations, changes in resources, governance and legislation will be needed. The North Wessex Downs, alongside other NLs, is actively engaged with Government on these issues.



Role of the Council of Partners

In general terms, the Council of Partners is guided by the national policies for NLs.

The primary purpose of the Council of Partners is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the NL. The Council of Partners also:

- promotes sustainable development within, and appropriate enjoyment of, the NL (where these do not conflict with the primary purpose);
- promotes public and political awareness of and support for the NL both locally and nationally;
- works to make the NL relevant to the people who live and work in and around the North Wessex Downs, including having regard for the social and economic needs of communities in this living, working landscape (where these do not conflict with the primary purpose), and to visitors to the area; and
- prepares, produces and reviews the NL Management Plan on behalf of, and with permission from, the local authorities within the NL and for the local authorities to adopt, and oversees its implementation.

The Council of Partners is not a planning authority or an executive body. It does not attempt to control the work of its constituent bodies within their own areas of responsibility. The Council of Partners is an advisory, partnership body which acts as a catalyst and facilitator in forging consensus, developing and supporting initiatives, and making recommendations to its constituent bodies and other organisations on policies and the allocation of resources in relation to the conservation and enhancement of the NL. The Council of Partners also plays a significant part in developing an image and sense of identity for the North Wessex Downs.

See the Local Partnership Agreement (attached) for more information.

Role of the Management Working Group

The Council of Partners has established a Management Working Group to help take forward the work of the NL between meetings of the Council of Partners. The Group is accountable to the Council of Partners and reports to it.

The purpose of the Group is to help realise the strategic objectives of the Council of Partners and to ensure that its priorities are efficiently and effectively progressed. Members of the Group are required to have the capacity and necessary knowledge base and technical skills to drive forward initiatives. All members of the Group are expected to work on behalf of the Council of Partners and not to represent the organisation or authority (if any) to which they belong.

The Management Working Group guides and assists the Director and staff of the NL in the delivery of the Management Plan by advising on policy issues, helping to agree work plans and providing independent specialist expertise to the NL officers to assist with specific projects and tasks. The group comprises the Vice Chair of the Council of Partners (who is an elected member of a partner local authority), a representative of Natural England, independent specialists in land management, landscape and wildlife conservation and archaeology and heritage (etc.), and local authority officers appointed for their professional expertise. The Chair of the Council of Partners is an ex officio member.

See the Local Partnership Agreement (Appendix 1) for more information.

Role of the NL Director and Officers

To help fulfil their statutory duty to have regard for the purposes for which the NL is designated, i.e. to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape, the partners have established the NL Unit. This is a small team of professional staff that operates in support of the Partnership's work. The Director and officers of the NL are responsible for the preparation of the Management Plan for approval by the Council of Partners and adoption by the local authority partners. On behalf of the Council of Partners, staff work to lead, facilitate, encourage and support the implementation by a wide range of partners of the policies and actions in the Management Plan. They also advise the local authority partners and others on a broad range of matters relating to landscape character and conservation. Staff are employed and overseen by Wiltshire Council, as host authority, but work on behalf of the NL Partnership as a whole.

The North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust

The North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust (NWDLT), established in 2016 with support from the NL Partnership, is an independent charity whose objective is to support the National Landscape. It does this by developing relationships with individual, community, corporate, charitable and philanthropic supporters and donors with the aim of securing streams of funding or other forms of support in kind so as to undertake relevant projects, programmes and activities. The NWDLT may nominate a representative to sit on the Council of Partners. In a reciprocal arrangement, the Council of Partners nominates one of its members to sit on the board of the Trust at the invitation of the trustees. Since 2017 the Trust has managed the NL's Sustainable Development Fund on behalf of the Partnership under an annual agreement.



Role of the Chair

The Chair of the Council of Partners is appointed by the Council of Partners. The Chair's principal responsibilities, which will be discharged in accordance with the Nolan principles of Standards in Public Life, are as follows:

- representation of the NL at national, regional and individual local authority levels;
- chairing the Council of Partners meetings, which are held at four-monthly intervals;
- attending Management Working Group meetings, up to four times a year;
- chairing the North Wessex Downs NL Annual Forum; and
- liaison between the Council of Partners, the Chair and members of the Management Working Group, and the Director and officers of the NL Unit.

Other responsibilities include:

- a) promoting good relationships and communication between Council of Partners members, and between Council of Partners members and NL officers;
- b) acting as an ambassador and advocate for the North Wessex Downs NL and the Partnership, fully representing its priorities, resources and activities to a range of people and organisations;
- c) regularly visiting the NL office and being available for discussions with the Director and other officers;
- d) briefing politicians and senior representatives of partner organisations as appropriate;
- e) ensuring that the Vice-Chair is kept informed of all relevant matters.
- f) taking urgent decisions on matters which fall within the Council of Partners' responsibilities in consultation with the Vice Chair and reporting on those decisions to the next meeting of the Council of Partners and/or the Management Working Group.
- g) agreeing the movement of funds (virement) between budget heads in line with the protocol approved by the Council of Partners, in consultation with the Chair of the Management Working Group and the Director.



The Chair of the Council of Partners has no individual powers. However, the role is central to the governance structure and has the potential to significantly influence the direction and emphasis of NL activity. The Chair can be involved in setting budgets and identifying priorities for the Annual Work Programme for agreement by the Council of Partners. On behalf of the Partnership and jointly with the Chair of the Management Working Group, the Chair also has a role in holding the Director to account for agreed actions stemming from the Management Plan and the Annual Work Programme as approved by the Council of Partners.

In a serious case of misconduct or other malpractice, the Council of Partners has authority to remove the Chair and appoint a successor.

Skills, interests and experience

The new Chair of the Council of Partners will have some of the skills, interests and experience set out in the table below. This list is illustrative and is neither exclusive nor exhaustive.

The list draws from recommendations published by Reach Volunteering a nationally recognised charity that works to identify and recruit volunteers for governance in the public and the charitable sectors.

Essential	Desirable
An interest in, and enthusiasm for, landscape and natural beauty	Experience of protected landscapes
A commitment to environmental conservation and enhancement	A broad knowledge and understanding of the interrelationships between landscape, land management, wildlife and heritage conservation, planning and sustainable development
Experience of chairing meetings at a high level	Knowledge and experience of national and local government process and funding
Proven experience of organisational leadership and management at a senior level	Skills in advocacy, persuasion, negotiation and mediation
Strategic and business planning experience	Experience of successfully securing corporate sponsorship and external funding
A high degree of probity and integrity, with a commitment to the principles of accountability and openness	Experience of partnership or collaborative working in the environmental, land management, nature conservation and/or heritage fields
Political awareness; ability to apply sound independent judgement and political impartiality	Experience of dealing with the media
Experience of establishing and developing partnerships, and/or collaborative working	
Ability to analyse information critically and provide constructive challenge	

Time Commitment

The expected time involvement is variable, but not normally expected to be no more than around 3 or 3½ days per month on average, depending on whether optional responsibilities are included (see points n) and o) below). Over a typical year this is likely to entail the following:

- a) chairing three Council of Partners meetings – half days (sometimes longer if a site visit is included) usually in March, July and November;
- b) attendance at four Management Working Group meetings – half days usually in February, June, September and December;
- c) chairing the North Wessex Downs NL Annual Forum - one day (currently in the autumn);
- d) attending other, neighbouring NLs' annual Forums if invited – two or three days;
- e) representing the North Wessex Downs NL with the Director at the National Association for NLs Chairmen's meeting and AGM– one day, usually in London;
- f) attending other events, e.g. representing the NL at other organisations' events in liaison with staff, at the Chair's discretion;
- g) attending, at the NL Partnership's expense, the annual Landscapes for Life national NL conference run by the National Association for NLs - currently three days in July (optional);
- h) regular briefings with the Director and Management Working Group Chair, tied into the cycle of Council of Partners meetings (1-2 hours three or four times a year);
- i) occasional meetings with North Wessex Downs MPs, local authority leaders and senior officers, either alone or accompanied by NL staff;
- j) other meetings as required – these might include meeting partner organisations to address particular issues;
- k) ad hoc telephone or email communication with officers on matters arising;
- l) attendance at occasional training events;
- m) background reading and meeting preparation as appropriate;
- n) the Chair is invited to chair meetings of the Sustainable Development Fund Panel (but this is not a requirement of the role) - currently one or two half days a year; and
- o) the Chair may accept the role of representing the NL Partnership on the board of the North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust by default, or ask the Council of Partners to nominate another of its members instead.

Most internal meetings are held at the NL Office at Denford Manor, near Hungerford in Berkshire. Council of Partners meetings and the Annual Forum revolve around the NL. Other meetings, site visits and events will vary.



Key Internal Relationships

The key internal relationships are with the members of the Council of Partners, the Chair and members of the Management Working Group, the Director and staff of the NL Unit, the nine local authority partners, the National Landscapes Association, and Wiltshire Council as the host authority for the NL.

Terms of Appointment

The initial appointment is for a two-year term but this may be extended for two further terms of two years at the discretion of the Council of Partners.

The post is unpaid, but the Chair is entitled to claim an honorarium of £500 per annum. The Chair may also claim reasonable expenses for travel on NL business (bus and Standard Class rail fares, or mileage at the current Wiltshire Council rates).

Appointment Process

This role is being advertised publicly and is open to all. Application is by written submission. Selection will be by written application and interview. Applicants will be assessed by a selection panel for their aptitude and suitability for the role against the person specification and the other requirements of the role as set out in the Candidate Brief. The Council of Partners approves the selection panel and ratifies its decision. The panel is made up of: an officer and an elected member representative from the host authority (it should be noted that Cllr James Sheppard is the Wiltshire Council representative); another Local Authority elected member of the Council of Partners to represent the other councils; an Advisory member of the Council of Partners; and a member of the Management Working Group. The Director will be in attendance.

Interviews will take place on Friday 8th November 2024. The appointment will be ratified by the Council of Partners later in November 2024. Induction training for the successful applicant will be provided by NL staff and the host authority.

How to Apply

Please submit your CV together with a personal statement of up to 500 words explaining your motivation to undertake the role and what you would bring to the NL Partnership.

Please ensure that you include in your CV contact details for two referees who are willing to give a reference for your suitability for the role. Preferably, one should be someone able to comment on your professional skills and experience. If you consider that you do not have sufficient recent relevant professional experience, please include instead a referee able to comment on your contribution to public and/or community life. The other referee should be a person able to provide a character reference.

Please send applications to caroline.dale@northwessexdowns.org.uk putting "**Council of Partners Chair Application**" in the subject line.

For an informal confidential discussion about the role please ring Henry Oliver, NWDNL Director, tel. 07786 173296.

Please make sure your application is received by the NL office **no later than 12 midnight on Sunday 27 October 2024.**

Appendix 1.0
Partnership Agreement (Currently under review)