

North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Assessment

LCT 4

North Wessex Downs National Landscape

Draft report

Prepared by LUC

July 2025

LCT 4 High Chalk Plain

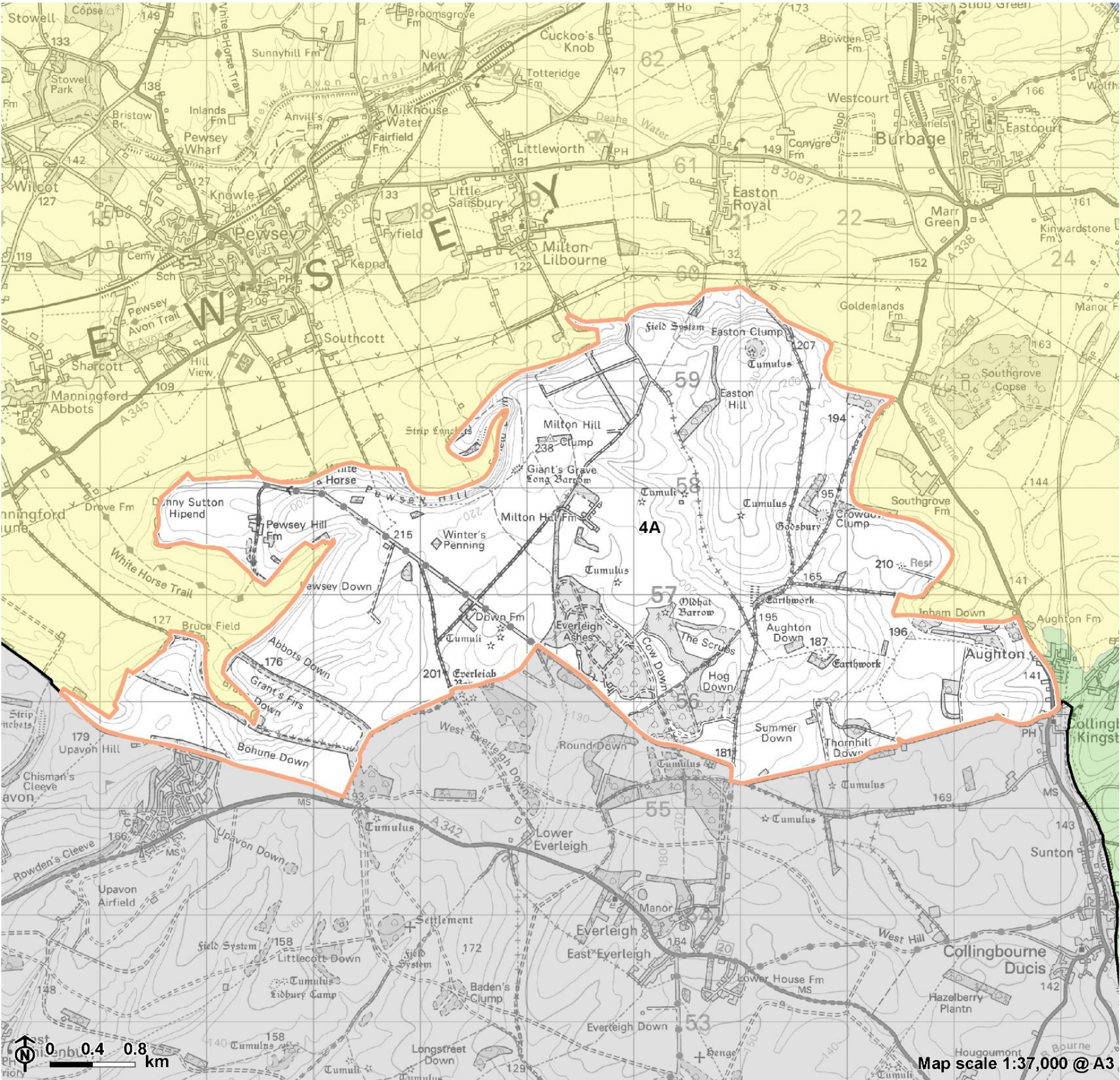
Figure 5.70: High rolling chalk with long views across the Pewsey Vale



Location and overview

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

Figure 5.71: Location of High Chalk Plain LCT

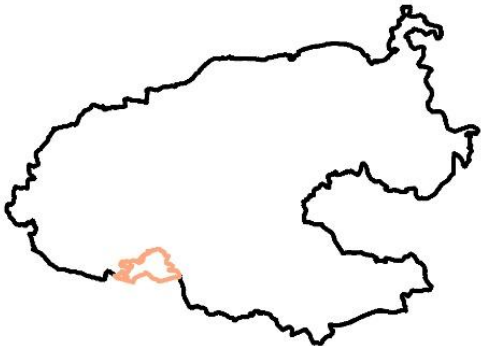


North Wessex Downs
Landscape Character Assessment
North Wessex Downs National Landscape



LCT 4 - High Chalk Plain

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Type**
- 4: High Chalk Plain
- 4A: Salisbury Plain



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

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

LCT 4 High Chalk Plain: Key Characteristics

- Expansive chalk upland landscape forming the northern edge of the vast rolling landscape of Salisbury Plain (beyond the National Landscape).
- Pronounced scarp along the northern boundary forming a dominant feature in views from the lower lying Vale of Pewsey, and providing outstanding views across the Vale.
- Land cover dominated by arable farmland set within a large-scale irregular field pattern. Isolated fragments of chalk grassland survive and there are occasional woodlands and scrub areas.
- Important habitat for declining farmland bird species, including stone curlew and skylark.
- Numerous Bronze Age round barrows sited on prominent ridges and hill tops including Giant's Grave - a Neolithic long mound.
- Settlement is confined to a small number of isolated farms.
- Well served by a number of footpaths, bridleways and byways allowing a good recreational access to the area and its visible archaeological features.

- A large-scale, open and remote landscape with a sometimes bleak character.

LCT 4 High Chalk Plain: Evaluation

Forces for change

5.280 The following are identified as forces for change common to the High Chalk Plain LCT:

- Increase in pig farming and associated structures in an otherwise very open landscape.
- Unsympathetic tree and woodland planting in the form of irregular blocks and linear plantations of ornamental species.
- Pressure for tall structures such as communications masts, transmitters and renewable energy developments (potentially wind turbines). These will be particularly intrusive on the strong sweeping skylines and could have a major impact on the sense of remoteness and have the potential to impact views from the Vale of Pewsey.
- High traffic levels on the rural lane network could impact the rural character of the lanes. Cumulative impact of small-scale incremental change for road upgrades e.g. signage, fencing, kerbing of rural lanes on the remote qualities of the chalk upland landscape.
- The High Chalk Plain landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including;
 - Changing temperatures and extreme weather events are creating vulnerabilities in chalk grassland landscapes, leading to increased soil erosion and run-off.
 - Drier summers and wetter winters could cause changes in plant and animal species and community composition of chalk grassland (for example loss of perennials, expansion of drought-tolerant ephemerals and dominance of grasses in the sward of chalk grassland), which could impact the character of the chalk plain.
 - Changes in rainfall patterns including wetter winters and drier summers may lead to different types of crop being grown (e.g. maize, grape vines, soya), which would change the appearance of the landscape.
 - Wetter winters and increased flash flooding on the thin arable soils will cause erosion and impact the winter crop sowings and also decrease the water quality for livestock on the downs. This could impact the land uses on the downs, changing the crops grown and numbers of grazing animals, changing the character of the landscape.

- Hotter, drier conditions in the summer will put more pressure on water resources, which may result in a change in crops to less water-reliant plants, and to increase the heat stress of livestock. This could lead to changes in the choice of crops grown, and an increase in shelters for livestock, changing the open character.
- Drier summers and wetter winters will cause increased tree mortality and die-back from drought and stress and waterlogging, affecting the occasional woodlands and tree clumps.
- Drier and hotter summers increase fire risk affecting grassland habitats and the recreational resource of the landscape.
- Hotter temperatures may result in increased competition from invasive species and greater numbers of insect and mammal pests. This could impact the choice of crops grown, and the appearance of the landscape.
- Drier summers leading to an increased fire risk affecting grassland habitats.

Landscape guidance

5.281 The following are identified as guidelines for protecting and enhancing valued characteristics of the High Chalk Plain, taking into consideration the forces for change which are affecting, or which are expected to affect, this landscape:

- Manage the small areas of distinctive chalk grassland at Pewsey Hill and Fyfield Down to enhance their biodiversity value; ensure best practice management through suitable grazing regimes and avoiding agrochemical and fertiliser inputs.
- Consider opportunities to increase the area of chalk grassland through re-creation and restoration around existing areas, extending and linking existing sites, including to the Salisbury Plain SAC, SPA and SSSI to the south outside of the National Landscape.
- Ensure appropriate woodland management plans and techniques are used to manage the ancient woodland at Everleigh Ashes and the former coppice ancient woodland in the south of the area at Linden Copse.
- Consider the visual impact of any increase in pig farms. Minimise the permanent structures required, and where possible locate these in areas with natural screening by topography or woodland.

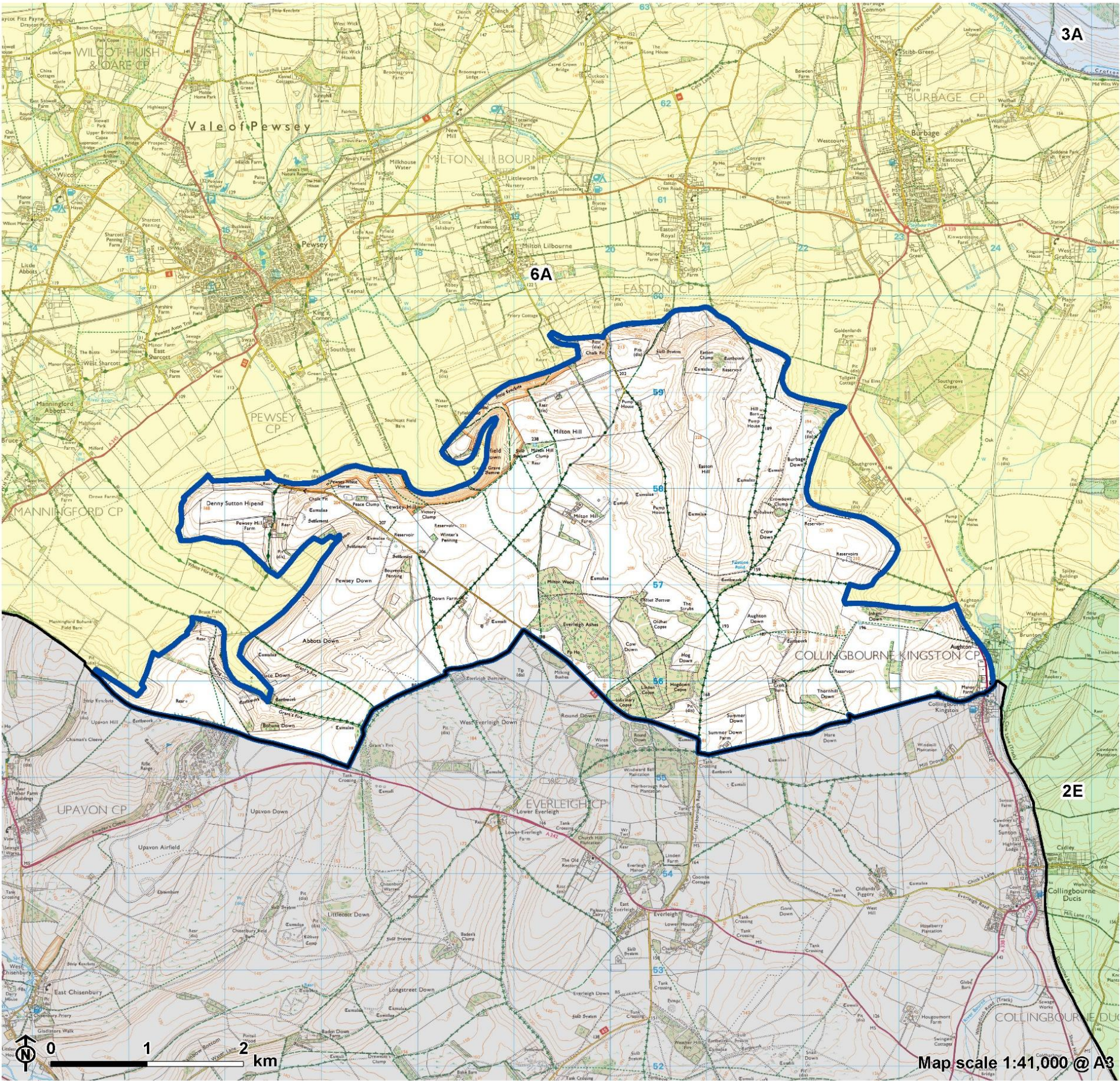
- Manage arable land to benefit landscape character and biodiversity, by maintaining soil health and minimising erosion and run off through enhancement of biodiverse hedgerows, linear scrub and buffer strips.
- Seek to mitigate climate change through enhancement of carbon sequestration capacity within the landscape and increasing below ground carbon stocks within vegetation and soil.
- Protect the dramatic landscape of open rolling fields, windswept and panoramic views. Carefully consider applications for further tall structures including telecommunications masts or wind turbines in this open landscape, and applications in adjacent landscapes which would be intrusive.
- Conserve, manage and seek to enhance access to and interpretation of the prehistoric and historic earthwork monuments, emphasising their interconnected nature. Ensure they are protected from any potential damage from agriculture and recreation.
- Improve access to and through landscapes with cycle paths and long-distance footpaths, to increase recreational and educational opportunities for engagement with the natural environment.
- Conserve and enhance landscapes for their tranquillity and dark skies particularly where they are under pressure from the potential impacts of development and associated infrastructure.

LCA 4A: Salisbury Plain

Figure 5.72: Salisbury Plain rising above the Pewsey Vale



Figure 5.73: LCA 4A: Salisbury Plain: Location

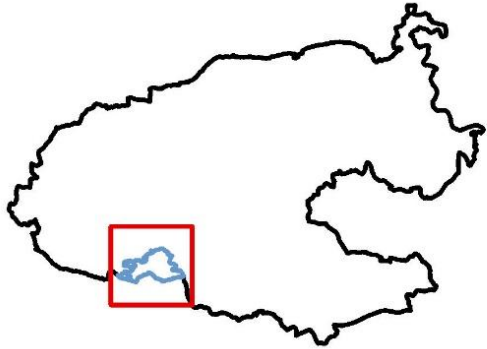


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4A: Salisbury Plain

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
Landscape Character Area
- 4A: Salisbury Plain
 - 1C: Horton Downs
 - 2E: Chute Forest - Facombe
 - 3A: Savernake Plateau
 - 6A: Vale of Pewsey



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Figure 5.74: Pewsey White Horse on the scarp edge



Figure 5.75: Elevated arable fields and pig farm



LCA 4A: Salisbury Plain: Description

5.282 The LCA location is the same as described for the Landscape Character Type.

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.283 Landform is typical of the upland chalk, with an open, rolling topography sloping gently to the south. The geology of the area consists largely of Upper Chalk, which forms the main upland areas of the Plain. The Upper Chalk gives way to Middle Chalk along the steep scarp to the north, and the Lower Chalk also outcrops in places along the scarp. An important difference in geology is the virtual absence of the Clay-with-Flint capping, creating a bleaker more open landscape. Well-drained calcareous soils dominate the area.

Biodiversity

5.284 Scattered fragments of chalk grassland remain within the agricultural matrix, particularly concentrated on the steep ridge in the north. The internationally and nationally important Salisbury Plain lies outside of the National Landscape.

5.285 Unlike other areas south of the National Landscape boundary, the downland in this LCA has been relatively unaffected by military activity and has been intensively cultivated. The dominant habitat is therefore arable farmland with occasional woodland and scrub. This means that it has not retained the ecological diversity of the wilder unimproved grasslands of the military training areas. Nevertheless, the remote upland areas are of considerable biodiversity interest, with Salisbury Plain forming an important refuge for otherwise declining bird species including stone curlew and skylark, the latter being a particularly audible feature of this area.

5.286 Small areas of woodland are scattered in the landscape, including some woodlands recorded as of ancient origin, concentrated in the south around Everleigh Ashes and Linden Copse.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.287 The area is now predominantly open country with a very few scattered farms. A large pig farm at Down Farm is a recent change in land use in the south.

5.288 Much of the area was probably open downland grazing until the post-medieval period and the modern field pattern is the largely the result of formal, eighteenth and nineteenth century Parliamentary enclosure. Many of these large, regular and straight-sided fields have had boundaries removed to form very large open fields.

Historic features

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

5.290 A series of prominent parallel terraces, or strip lynchets, cut into the scarp edge are probably the remains of medieval ploughing, although dating these features is difficult. Running approximately parallel to the contours, these were an extension of medieval open fields onto steep ground, at a time when flatter, more easily worked ground was in short supply.

5.291 Some modern trackways and earthworks are the result of military activity following the First and Second World Wars. However, this northernmost part of the Salisbury Plain Training Area has not been as heavily disturbed as some of the more southerly areas.

5.292 The Pewsey White Horse was cut into the chalk in 1937, designed to commemorate the coronation of George VI. It replaced a lost white horse figure, which was believed to have been cut in 1785.

Settlement pattern

5.293 Salisbury Plain is a remote area with a tiny population, containing only a few isolated farm buildings. The farm units are largely managed under contract labour as opposed to small family farms.

Communications and infrastructure

5.294 Marlborough Road is the only vehicle access through the landscape. This part of Salisbury Plain is well served by a number of footpaths, bridleways and byways allowing good recreational access to the area and its visible archaeological features such as strip lynchets and tumuli. The White Horse Trail crosses the west of the LCA.

Perceptual Influences

5.295 The pronounced scarp which defines the northern boundary at Pewsey Hill and Fyfield Down is a visible and dominant feature from the lower lying vale. There are outstanding views across the Vale of Pewsey from the scarp adding to the sense of openness in the area. Electricity pylon routes which cross the vale to the north, east and west are prominent vertical features in views.

5.296 The limited vehicle access and limited hedgerows and trees creates an isolated, sparsely inhabited, remote, and occasionally bleak landscape. The area has a good experience of tranquillity and dark night skies, with the only light pollution spilling into the area from Upavon Airfield to the south-west.

5.297 The Pewsey White Horse is the smallest white horse in Wiltshire, and the first cut in the 20th century.

LCA 4A Salisbury Plain: Evaluation

Salisbury Plain valued qualities

5.298 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 4A Salisbury Plain are:

- Dramatic upland chalk landscape with a prominent scarp that forms a dominant skyline in the Vale of Pewsey to the north.
- A mosaic of arable land and isolated fragments of chalk grasslands provides an important habitat for farmland bird species.
- Sense of time-depth from Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments located on prominent ridges and hills.
- Public Rights of Way including the promoted White Horse Trail provide recreational access across the chalk plain.
- A large-scale, open landscape with a high degree of isolation, remoteness and tranquillity.
- Panoramic views north and west over the Vale of Pewsey create a sense of place.

Salisbury Plain local forces for change/issues

5.299 As there is only one LCA within the High Chalk Plain LCT, all the forces for change are covered at LCT level.

Salisbury Plain strategy and local guidelines

5.300 As there is only LCA within the High Chalk Plain LCT there is no additional local guidance.