

# North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment

## Landscape Character Assessment

LCT 5

### North Wessex Downs National Landscape

**Draft report**

Prepared by LUC

July 2025

## LCT 5 Downs Plain and Scarp

**Figure 5.76: Open elevated scarp providing panoramic views**



## Location and overview

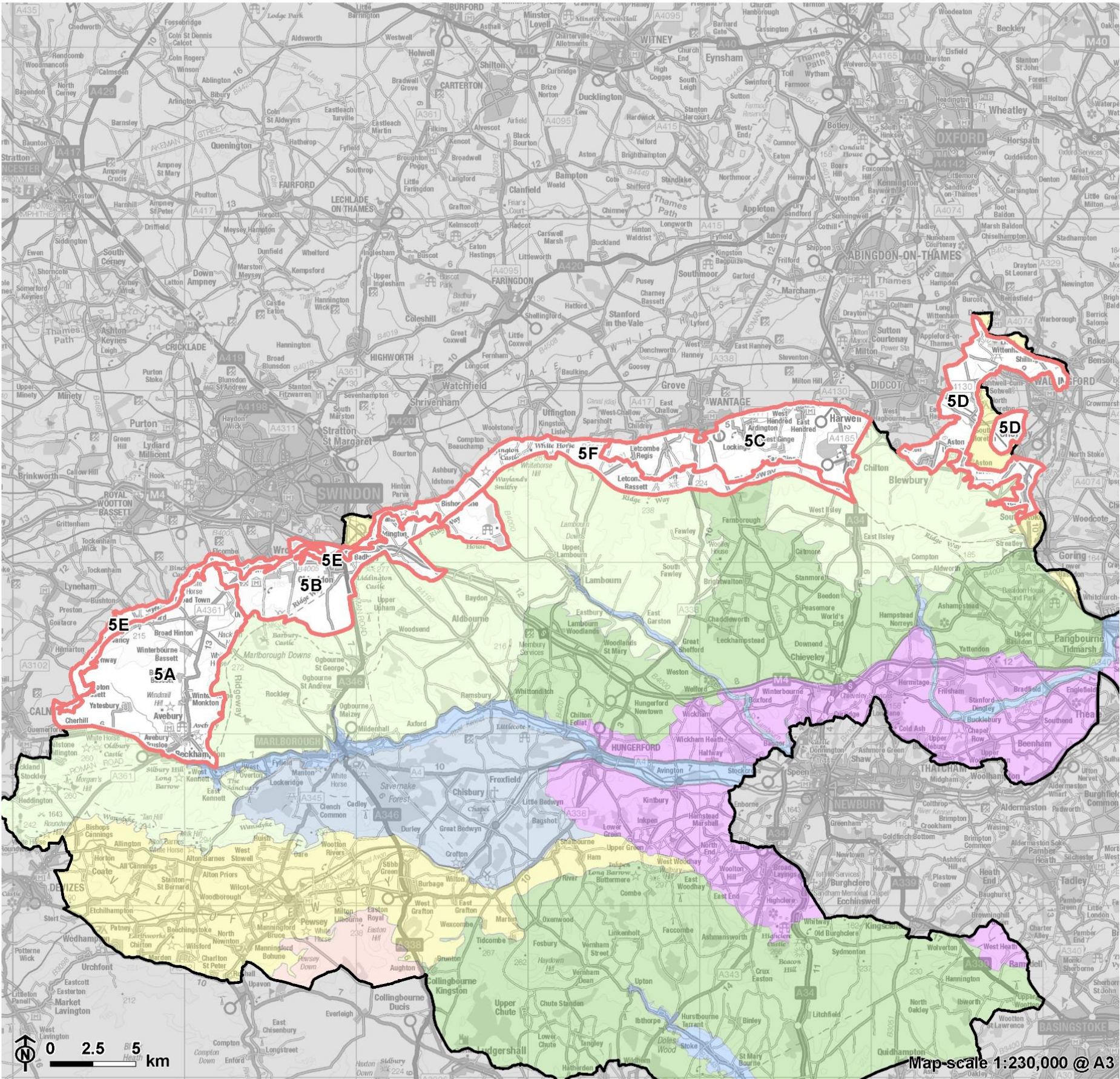
**5.301** The Downs Plain and Scarp landscape occurs along the northern edge of the National Landscape, extending from Cherhill in the west to Chilton in the east. It is largely differentiated by geology, with the Plain being formed by the eroded surface of the Lower Chalk resulting in a lower and more level land surface compared with the Upper and Middle Chalk of the Downlands. The base of the dramatic escarpment forms the northern edge of the landscape type, which is generally coincident with the National Landscape boundary.

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

- 5A: Avebury Plain
- 5B: Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain
- 5C: Hendred Plain
- 5D: Moreton Plain
- 5E: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp
- 5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp



Figure 5.77: Location of Downs Plain and Scarp LCT



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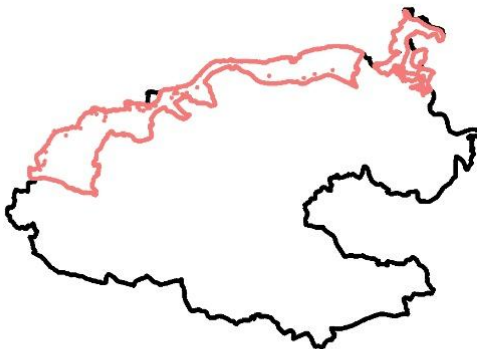


LCT 5 - Downs Plain and Scarp

North Wessex Downs National Landscape

Landscape Character Type

- 5: Downs Plain and Scarp
- 5A: Avebury Plain
- 5B: Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain
- 5C: Hendred Plain
- 5D: Moreton Plain
- 5E: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp
- 5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp



Map scale 1:230,000 @ A3

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

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

**5.305** The steep scarp is cut by springs creating a convoluted edge. The slopes are alternatively under woodland or pasture, with the variation in land cover reflected in their high biodiversity interest, with a notable number of SSSIs. These include an abundance of herb-rich chalk grasslands and linear hanging woodlands clinging to the steep slopes. The presence of parks and designed landscapes is a particular feature, where their positioning on the scarp allows enjoyment of both the extensive views and the water resources, with springs and streams frequently incorporated into landscape schemes. By comparison, the flat level Plains are almost entirely in intensive arable cultivation, with large regular fields bound by close trimmed hawthorn hedgerows, the product of Parliamentary enclosure generally creating a much more uniform, open landscape.

**5.306** To the far west of the plain lies Avebury Plain, one of the most extensively utilised areas in Europe in prehistory. It contains one of the densest

concentrations of Neolithic monuments in Britain, including the distinctive stone circle at Avebury, the monumental mound at Silbury Hill and a Neolithic causewayed enclosure at Windmill Hill. Its international importance was formally recognised in 1986 when it was designated as a World Heritage Site.

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



## LCT 5 Downs Plain and Scarp: Key Characteristics

- A chalk landscape of the level plain linked to the distinctive scarp slope which falls sharply to the Vale to the north, creating a dramatic and characteristic landform.
- Incised combes from numerous springs issuing at the junction of the greensand and clay create a distinctive landform, and influences settlement pattern of attractive springline villages clustered along the scarp.
- The western scarp is extensively wooded with linear hanger woods and estate land with many trees. Tree clumps on hills and ridges are a distinctive feature.
- An abundance of herb-rich chalk grasslands including numerous nationally designated sites.
- An open landscape dominated by arable land uses. Large fields without enclosure or hedges create an open landscape with panoramic and extensive views available from the scarp top.
- Parkland and estates are a particular feature of the scarp, where their strategic position offers extensive views. Springs and streams are frequently incorporated into designed landscape schemes.
- Airfields and former military sites are a particular feature across the landscape.
- Strong sense of time-depth, with internationally and internationally important prehistoric sites in elevated positions.
- The prehistoric route of the Ridgeway running along much of the scarp top remains well used to this day as a National Trail. It links many archaeological sites, which are all important visitor 'honeypot sites'.
- Strong sense of tranquillity and experience of dark night skies.

## LCT 5 Downs Plain and Scarp: Evaluation

### Forces for change

**5.308** The following are identified as forces for change common to the Downs Plain and Scarp LCT as a whole:

- Farmer-led groups throughout the Downs Plain and Scarps are delivering environmentally friendly farming practices at a landscape scale. Many Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier schemes are operating across the LCT, including nectar rich buffer strips and organic management schemes.
- Changes in farming practices, including some grasslands not being grazed, leading to scrub encroachment on chalk grassland and open downlands. Grazed pasture is essential as a landscape setting for the prehistoric archaeological monuments.
- Potential change in character from diversification of crops, including vineyards becoming more economically viable due to the changing climate.
- An increase in recreational users of the Ridgeway and visitor numbers to the many famous prehistoric sites generates higher levels of traffic along rural lanes impacting on their character. There may also be pressure to increase car parking availability to allow access.
- Increase in renewable energy development outside the boundary of the National Landscape, particularly solar farms, influencing the setting of the National Landscape. The glint and glare of the PV panels in the lower-lying vale is clearly seen from the Downs Plain and Scarp.
- Pressure for tall structures (such as telecommunications masts, electricity pylons and wind turbines) both in the LCT and in areas outside of the National Landscape. These structures would be particularly clear in views from the elevated Downs Plain and Scarp.
- Development in the setting to the National Landscape including large-scale and /or tall development on the edges of Didcot, Wantage, Swindon, Calne, and Wallingford. The increase in development affects the panoramic views from the escarpment and its wider setting, as well as the sense of remoteness and tranquillity.
- The Downs Plain and Scarp landscapes are 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, which could change the appearance of the landscape (for example loss of perennials, expansion of drought-tolerant ephemerals and dominance of grasses in the sward of chalk grassland).
- 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 distinctive hilltop woodlands and tree clumps.
- More extreme weather events leading to a greater risk of wind-throw and loss of mature trees, which could affect the ancient woodlands on the western scarp.
- 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.

## Landscape guidance

**5.309** The following are identified as guidelines for protecting and enhancing valued characteristics of the Downs Plain and Scarp, taking into consideration

the forces for change which are affecting, or which are expected to affect, this landscape:

- Manage the areas of distinctive chalk grassland to enhance its 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.
- Seek to conserve, enhance and increase characteristic broadleaved woodland in the steep-sided valleys and dips through appropriate management. Ensure the open character of the plain and scarp as a whole is not affected by increased woodland planting.
- On the Plain, encourage restoration of historic hedge boundaries and improve existing boundaries through sympathetic hedge management, creation of buffer strips and promotion and management of hedgerow trees. This would provide ecological and climate change mitigation benefits, however, should be carefully applied to ensure the open character of the Plain is retained.
- Manage arable land to benefit landscape character, biodiversity and act as climate change mitigation, by maintaining soil health and minimising erosion and run off through enhancement of biodiverse hedgerows, linear scrub and buffer strips.
- Improve the value of the arable landscape for priority farmland birds, pollinators, arable plants and other wildlife (e.g. through spring sowing and winter stubbles, nesting plots, uncropped headlands, unsprayed field margins, and pollen, nectar and seed mixes).
- Create and maintain wildlife corridors including buffer strips, beetle banks, track and byway verges. Wherever possible link a range of different habitats.
- Ensure that areas that might act as refugia from climate change (such as areas with north facing slopes, complex micro-topography and/or low nitrogen levels) are under optimal management.
- Support the potential for The Ridgeway National Trail to serve as a conservation corridor through the landscape, encouraging ecological enhancement of land adjacent and close to The Ridgeway.



- Conserve, manage and seek to enhance access to and interpretation of the prehistoric and historic earthwork monuments, emphasising their inter-connected nature. Ensure they are protected from any potential damage from agriculture and recreation.
- Retain the sparse settlement pattern. Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes to the small villages through extensions, which may change the character of the settlements.
- Ensure development in the setting of the National Landscape retains a clear sense of distinction between the open, expansive and largely undeveloped downland and the larger settlements in the vales. Any sense of the urban areas extending upslope should be avoided.
- 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.
- Consider the impact on the views from the Downs Plain and Scarp if introducing solar energy development in adjacent landscapes, as the solar arrays can cause glint in views.
- Conserve the dark skies and minimise lighting with new lighting only introduced where necessary. Consider the impact of lighting on night-time views both within the Downs Plain and Scarp and in the setting of the National Landscape.
- 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.
- Maintain the valued recreational use of the landscape which allow appreciation of views and landscape character. Carefully consider any new recreational facilities such as car parks and buildings, balancing the recreational need with maintaining the open, rural landscape.

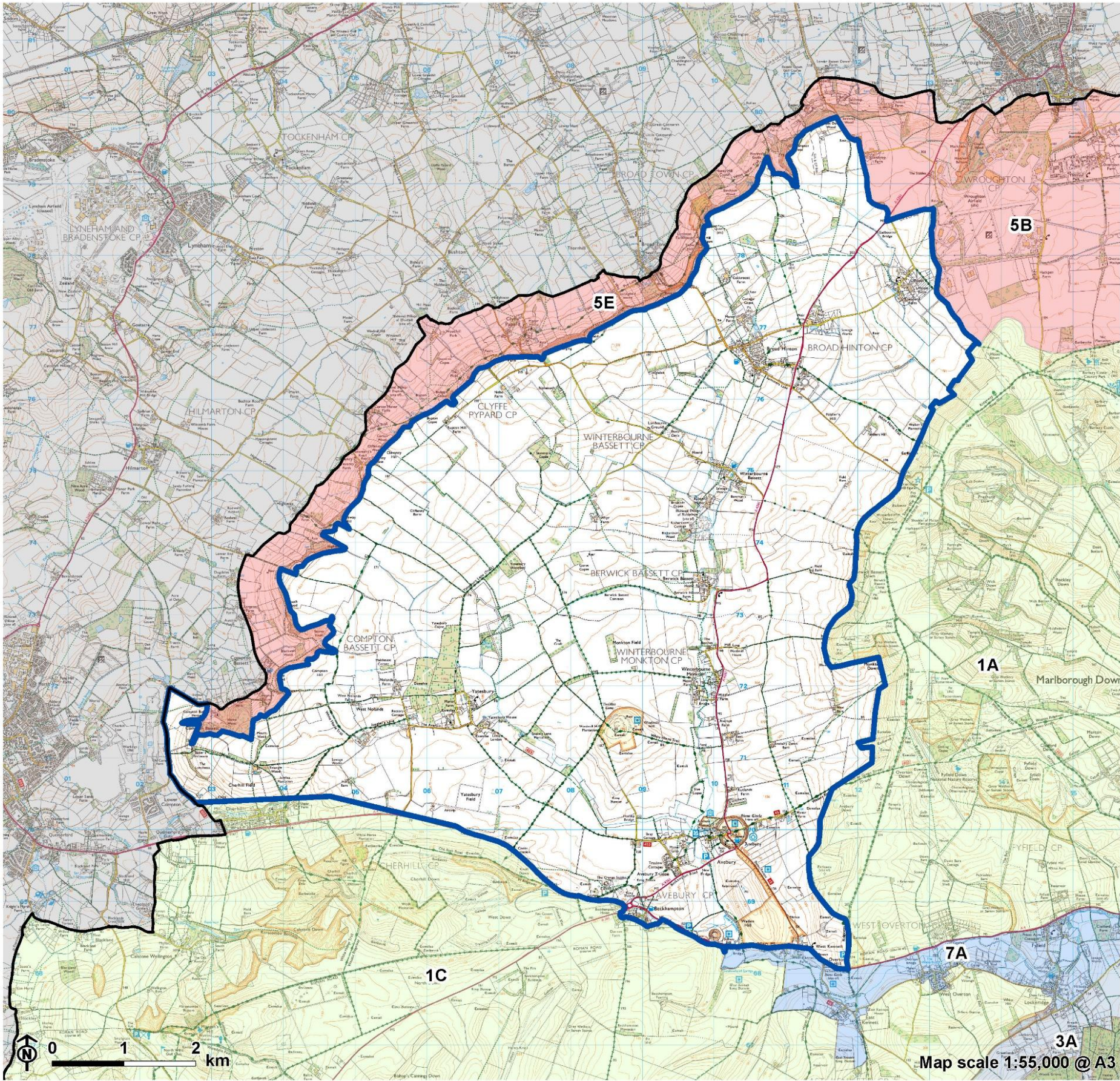
## LCA 5A: Avebury Plain

**Figure 5.78: Looking west across the downland plain from Winterbourne Down towards Winterbourne Bassett**





Figure 5.79: LCA 5A: Avebury Plain: Location

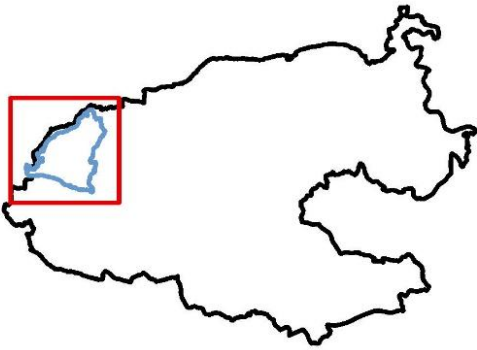


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5A: Avebury Plain

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Area
- 5A: Avebury Plain
- 1A: Marlborough Downs
- 1C: Horton Downs
- 3A: Savernake Plateau
- 5B: Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain
- 5E: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp
- 7A: Kennet Valley



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**Figure 5.80: View towards Winterbourne Monkton**



**Figure 5.81: Avebury stone circle**





## **LCA 5A: Avebury Plain: Description**

**5.310** Avebury Plain is a gently undulating area on the Lower Chalk in the western part of the National Landscape. Boundaries are clear and distinct. They are formed by the steep slopes of the Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp (LCA 5E) to the west and north, and to the south and east by the steep rising scarp topography associated with the change in geology to the Upper Chalk which underlies the Marlborough Downs (LCA 1A) and Horton Downs (LCA 1C).

### **Natural Influences**

#### **Landform, geology, water and soils**

**5.311** Avebury Plain is formed by the eroded level surface of the Lower Chalk. Although appearing virtually flat, the area slopes gently towards the village of Avebury and the Winterbourne stream. The watercourse flows southwards through the area to the Kennet in a shallow open valley. The Winterbourne stream is joined at Avebury by a further small valley running eastwards from Yatesbury.

**5.312** Two prominent hills lie in the south: Silbury Hill in the south of the valley, at the confluence with the River Kennet, and Windmill Hill to the west of the valley. Soils are mainly thin and calcareous, with some alluvium within the valleys.

#### **Biodiversity**

**5.313** The Avebury Plain has limited woodland cover, although a number of scattered valuable woodlands remain in the north, which are generally small in size. Richardsons Wood and Stanmore Copse are the only sites recorded as containing ancient woodland. The landscape also includes a number of grassland sites, with permanent pasture on the shallow Winterbourne valley floor.

### **Cultural Influences**

#### **Land use and field patterns**

**5.314** The flat level land surface is intensively cultivated, and the area is characterised by expanses of large open arable fields, with boundaries formed by fences or thin lines of trimmed hawthorn. The north has a stronger hedge

pattern plus a number of small copses and shelterbelts. The shallow winterbourne valley contains permanent pasture along the valley floor in association with hedgerows and small copses.

**5.315** Many of the sinuous, long and narrow fields oriented at right angles to the scarp edge, or to the Winterbourne valley, may represent surviving medieval boundaries. In some cases these may represent ‘filling in’ or informal enclosure between existing tracks or droveways. Some of the few copses that do survive have irregular boundaries indicating late medieval or post-medieval assarts. Over much of the downland areas however, the landscape had reverted to open grazing and common land. The large, straight-sided and regular fields of the modern landscape are chiefly the product of formal, post-medieval Parliamentary enclosure. Some of these fields have been further expanded in the modern period into very large fields.

### Historic features

**5.316** Central to the character of the whole area are the Neolithic monuments associated with Avebury World Heritage Site (WHS). This is one of the densest concentrations of Neolithic importance, together with Stonehenge, as recognised by its international designation. Key features include the Late Neolithic henge at Avebury consisting of massive banks and ditches with stone circles inside. An avenue of paired sarsen stones leads from Avebury henge to the remains of a smaller (possible) henge known as the Sanctuary, some 2.3 kilometres distant (within LCA 7A Kennet Valley).

**5.317** The area also contains Silbury Hill, the most famous example of a rare class of Neolithic ‘monumental mound’. The monument comprises a flat-topped conical mound, over 39 metres high and with a diameter of over 167 metres, surrounded by a quarry ditch. It is located on a slight natural spur on the western side of the Kennet Valley, south of the village of Avebury. Although its exact function is unclear, the site would have had considerable importance to the prehistoric occupants of the area. Other Scheduled Monuments include a Neolithic causewayed enclosure, located on Windmill Hill, a low but locally prominent hill north-west of Avebury. The monument comprises a small circular area of some 400 meters diameter, defined by three roughly concentric rings comprising banks and ditches.

**5.318** Around this exceptional collection of major ceremonial monuments are numerous Bronze Age round barrows, concentrated along ridges or on hilltops. Of particular prominence are the groups on Overton Hill and the Ridgeway, a significant prehistoric routeway which crosses the area.

**5.319** Richardson in the Winterbourne Valley is an example of a deserted medieval village. In the post-medieval and modern periods the landscape around Avebury has seen many changes. This includes a small seventeenth century designed parkland around Avebury Manor, and the addition of tree clumps, known locally as ‘hedgehogs’ on barrows along the skyline of the ridgeway scarp to the east of Avebury. Twentieth century development is represented by the remnants of a Second World War air base at Yatesbury Field (also a Conservation Area).

### Settlement pattern

**5.320** Settlements are confined to the dry valley bottom of the winterbourne, a typical medieval pattern for the area. Avebury and Avebury Trusloe are dramatically located within and adjacent to the stone circle creating an important relationship to, and setting for, the monument. To the north are the regularly spaced villages of Winterbourne Monkton, Berwick Bassett, Winterbourne Bassett and Broad Hinton. These typically contain a nucleus of church, rectory, manor house and farm with further buildings extending outwards, with the settlements taking on a more linear form.

**5.321** Building materials include sarsen stone in conjunction with brick and flint nodules to create a distinctive local vernacular style.

### Principal settlement

**5.322 Broad Hinton** is a small village in the north-east of the LCA with a population of around 650 inhabitants. Historically the village followed the High Street (B4041) however more recent development has seen it spread south-east along Post Office Lane. The Conservation Area in Broad Hinton is focused on the Grade I listed Church of St Peter Ad Vincula. Many of the village’s other historic buildings are Grade II listed, including the former vicarage Broad Hinton House and Marlborough House.

**Figure 5.82: Thatched roofs in Broad Hinton**

**5.323** Broad Hinton is located in a landscape of rolling chalk downland located towards the head of the valley of the Winterbourne stream. Land to the north and west slopes gently up to the scarp that marks the edge of the North Wessex Downs and beyond the Winterbourne to the east steep slopes rise up to the prominent heights of Hackpen Hill and Barbury Castle.

**5.324** The surrounding area is predominantly agricultural, with large open fields used for arable farming, but scattered woodlands and hedgerows break up the open fields creating a visual diversity in the landscape. Mature tree lines on the edges of the village and along nearby roads and field boundaries, and trees within the village itself give a visually contained character to the settlement's immediate setting. Beyond this, however, there are more expansive views across the open plain and up to the higher downland to the east. The white horse on Hackpen Hill, beneath the Ridgeway National Trail, is a notable historical landmark.



**Figure 5.83: View to Hackpen White Horse from the south-east of Broad Hinton**



### Communications and infrastructure

**5.325** Road access is limited, with only a handful of rural lanes providing access to the settlements. The A4361 joins settlements in the winterbourne valley bottom before turning north-east to run on the valley slope towards Broad Hinton and Wroughton.

**5.326** Public rights of way cross the landscape, providing access on tracks and footpaths. Promoted routes include the White Horse Trail and the Ridgeway in the south. The Neolithic monuments are also considerable attractions for tourism, with a museum and facilities at Avebury, and some parking at Silbury and West Kennett Avenue.

### Perceptual Influences

**5.327** A predominantly agricultural landscape with a gently undulating topography allows limited medium range views, largely between gaps in the hedgerows, across large modern arable fields in between the settlements of Avebury, Winterbourne Monkton and Broad Hinton along the A4361. In contrast, the open landscape in north creates long views and a bleak, exposed character.

**5.328** This sparsely settled, largely arable landscape with few roads and many footpaths and bridleways creates an area of relatively dark skies and high tranquillity.

**5.329** The sense of deep history at Avebury and surrounding monuments provides a connection to past communities. There are a number of myths and legends surrounding the stones, including people reporting music and dancing within the stones, and that one of the stones moves at midnight. It is also claimed that snakes cannot live within Avebury circle.

## LCA 5A Avebury Plain: Evaluation

### Avebury Plain valued qualities

**5.330** The key valued qualities identified for LCA 5A Avebury Plain are:

- Gently undulating chalk plain, which contrasts with the dramatic slopes of the scarp to the north.
- The chalk streams including the Winterbourne and Kennet are nationally important features, marked by small-scale riparian vegetation.
- Immense archaeological and cultural resource including the impressive banks, ditches and stone circles at Avebury and Neolithic monumental mound at Silbury Hill. Their importance and value are shown in the international designation as part of the Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Site. The prehistoric features are locally prominent and imbue the wider landscape with a sense of antiquity and historical continuity.
- Distinctive historic settlement pattern in the Winterbourne valley, with strong local vernacular of brick, dressed flint and sarsen stone. Sarsen stones are of national importance for their geology, ecology and long history of human use.
- Strong recreational access including on the ancient Ridgeway and White Horse Trail, with high recreational draw.
- Sense of openness due to limited tree cover and development, resulting in long views. Silbury and Windmill Hills are visually prominent, as are the scarp and edge of higher downs in the east.

### Avebury Plain local forces for change/issues

**5.331** In addition to the forces for change identified at LCT level, local forces for change and issues effecting LCA 5A Avebury Plain are:

- The Marlborough Downs Space for Nature Farmer-led Group has a positive impact in this area including the restoration and creation of dew ponds across the LCA.
- Existing electricity pylons and large-scale farm buildings have a large visual impact on this LCA. There is potential pressure for additional tall structures (e.g. masts or turbines) both within and in views from this LCA

which will be visually intrusive in this open landscape and on the setting of the World Heritage Site.

- Localised visual and noise intrusion of roads A4, A4361 and B4003 reduces tranquillity.
- Visitor pressures, particularly around the Avebury monuments, resulting in localised erosion, plus pressure to increase and improve access, circulation, interpretation and signage.

### **Avebury Plain strategy and local guidelines**

**5.332** In addition to the guidelines set out for the Downs Plain and Scarp LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Avebury Plain:

- Carefully consider the impact of residential and renewable energy development in the setting of the National Landscape around Calne and the south-west of Swindon in views from the Avebury Plain.
- Conserve and enhance the monumental landscape of the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site and its setting. This includes through targeted arable reversion, increasing the diversity of semi-improved permanent grassland, scrub management and removal of inappropriate woodland planting.



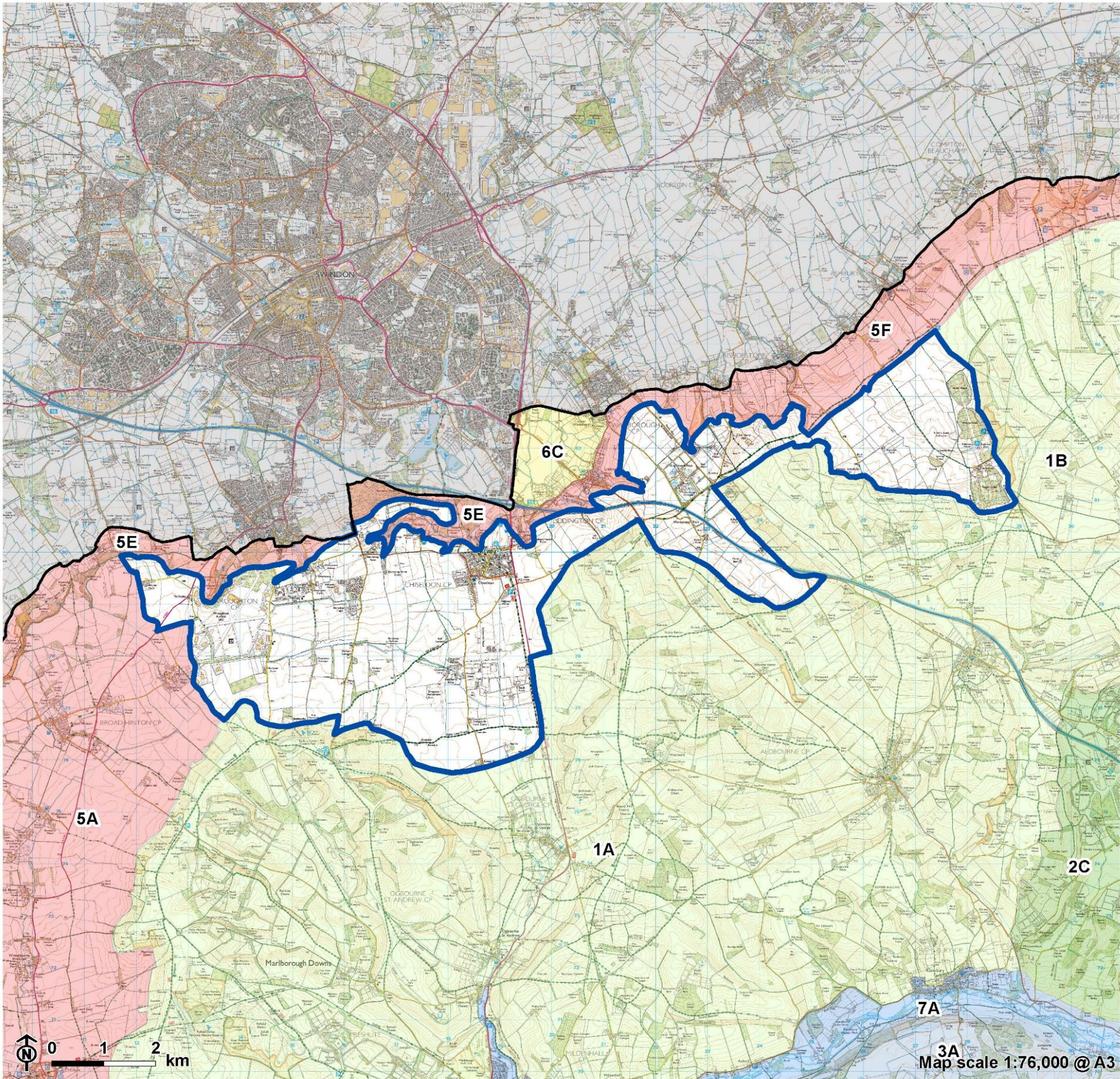
## LCA 5B: Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain

**Figure 5.84: Panoramic views north from the Ridgeway**





Figure 5.85: LCA 5B: Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain: Location

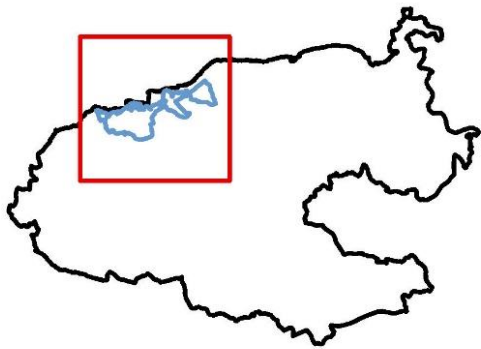


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5B: Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Area**
- 5B: Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain
  - 1A: Marlborough Downs
  - 1B: Lambourn Downs
  - 2C: Lambourn Wooded Downs
  - 3A: Savernake Plateau
  - 5A: Avebury Plain
  - 5E: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp
  - 5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp
  - 6C: Wanborough Vale
  - 7A: Kennet Valley





**Figure 5.86: B4192 looking east towards the M4**



**Figure 5.87: Solar farm at former RAF Wroughton seen from Barbury Castle**



## **LCA 5B: Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain: Description**

**5.333** The Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain is located on the level ledge of Lower Chalk that extends to the north of the Marlborough Downs (LCA 1A).

Boundaries are clearly defined by the topography. The northern boundary is formed by the crest of the steep scarp (LCA 5D: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp).

### **Natural Influences**

#### **Landform, geology, water and soils**

**5.334** The Plain is almost entirely underlain by the Lower Chalk creating a flat open level landform at a height of roughly 180 metres. The land surface slopes very gently to the south to the top of the scarp slope. Thin calcareous soils overlie the surface. The River Og rises near Draycot Foliat and flows south towards Ogbourne St George. Within this LCA it is a very small stream and has limited impact on the wider landscape. To the south the rising landform of the Marlborough Downs is a dominant feature and where this extends out, for example at Liddington Castle or Hinton Downs, it subdivides and separates the Plain into three distinct areas namely the wide Wroughton Plain and the narrower areas of Wanborough Plain and Bishopstone Plain.

#### **Biodiversity**

**5.335** Woodlands are limited to a small number of linear shelter and screening belts planted in discordant regular patterns near Hackpen and Draycot Foliat. Riparian vegetation follows the River Og from Draycot Foliat. Small areas of ancient woodland are recorded around Ashdown House in the east. Ashdown Park is also nationally designated as a SSSI for its collection of Sarsen stones and associated lichen flora.

### **Cultural Influences**

#### **Land use and field patterns**

**5.336** The Plain is almost entirely under arable cultivation in large open fields, with few boundaries, apart from occasional hawthorn hedges and post and wire fences along roadsides. Dew ponds, artificial ponds created in water scarce landscapes, are occasional features, such as at Charlbury Hill.



**5.337** The intensive agricultural use has largely removed evidence of the historic land use. Some sinuous land boundaries around Chiseldon may reflect late medieval or post-medieval informal enclosure, but the area was probably mostly open downland grazing until formal Parliamentary enclosure in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, which produced the vast majority of the regular, straight-sided fields visible today.

**5.338** Twentieth-century military developments are more modern features. These include Wroughton Airfield, with its hangers, runway and associated infrastructure, the Ministry of Defence hospital site also near Wroughton, and a First World War camp near Draycot Foliat.

### Historic features

**5.339** There are many prehistoric monuments overlooking the area (within the adjacent LCA1A Marlborough Downs) and these sometimes form dramatic visible features in the view from the Plain. However intensive agricultural land use has largely removed evidence of historic land use in the area itself. A few prehistoric and Roman Scheduled Monuments are recorded but there is now limited above-ground evidence.

**5.340** The line of the Ermine Way Roman road is preserved in the modern road from Swindon to Aldbourne.

**5.341** Ashdown House and Parkland (Grade II\* Registered Park and Garden) partly covers the site of a medieval deer park, and contains a 17<sup>th</sup> century hunting lodge and woodland, 19<sup>th</sup> century landscape park and formal parterre gardens. The house and grounds are now owned by the National Trust.

### Settlement pattern

**5.342** Settlements are generally located at the foot of the scarp (outside of the Plain), with a north south orientation of parish boundaries from the villages up the scarp and onto the Plain. Within this LCA, settlement is limited to the lateral modern expansion of the scarp top village of Chiseldon, with only the small long-established hamlet of Draycot Foliat actually located on the Plain.

**5.343** The traditional vernacular is rubble stone or chalkstone, with thatched roofs, with orange brick also frequently used. More recent development tends to use a range of brick and artificial stone.

**5.344** Farm buildings are infrequent and widely dispersed, and are not a characteristic feature of the area, suggesting that the Plains might have been used more as a resource by the villages on the scarp than settled in its own

right. Modern development associated with RAF bases is found near Wroughton airfield, as well as small areas of modern development near Draycot Foliat. These developments do not fit with the traditional settlement pattern of the LCA.

### Principal settlement

**5.345 Chiseldon** village has a long and rich history with evidence of human habitation dating back to prehistoric and Roman times. The name Chiseldon is derived from the Saxon 'Ceosel Dene' meaning 'gravelly valley'. The village was built around a spring fed valley with a mill, with the Grade I listed Anglo-Saxon Church of the Holy Cross sitting on the hillside. The village saw significant changes with the arrival of the Midland and South-West Junction Railway which ran along the valley and cut through the village centre. The village core is now surrounded by 20<sup>th</sup> century ribbon developments and cul-de-sacs, some of which date from the presence of a large World War army camp. The railway and the army camp closed in the early 1960s. The construction of the M4 motorway to the north of the village incorporated it into the M4 corridor leading to further housing expansion. The A346 marks the eastern boundary of Chiseldon and prevents the perception of coalescence with Badbury.

**Figure 5.88: Thatched stone cottages and sunken lane along Turnball**



**5.346** Chiseldon lies on the edge of the chalk scarp of the Marlborough Downs, surrounded by the open and rolling Marlborough Downs. It is set around a steep sided heavily wooded valley which cuts through the chalk. This contrasts with the landscape to the south of the village, which is flatter and open. There are long views south over the chalk downs, and Liddington Hill (within LCA 1A

Marlborough Downs) is a key feature in views east. Woodland and valley topography restricts views to the north.

### Communications and infrastructure

**5.347** Roads tend to be long and straight running in a north south orientation and linked laterally by tracks. There is a more limited network of public rights of way, although the ancient Ridgeway route crosses the north-east. The former Midland and South-West Junction railway line is now a popular walking and cycling route which leads between Swindon to the north and Marlborough to the south.

**5.348** The M4 runs through the north of the area, mostly in cutting. This reduces its visual impact on the landscape.

**5.349** In 2016 a 138 ha solar farm opened on part of the former RAF Wroughton airfield. The ground beneath the solar PV panels is still used for low-impact grazing, with the aim to support insects dependant on chalk grassland habitats. Woodland screening results in their being limited visual intrusion.

### Perceptual Influences

**5.350** The absence of hedgerow enclosure and woodland, combined with the flat landform, creates a high degree of intervisibility with sweeping views through the area. In places the open landscape structure, without local pattern or detail, results in an open character, in stark contrast to the intimate landscape of the scarp and the drama of the downs. The backdrop created by the elevated Marlborough Downs to the south and south-east is dominant on the skyline, creating a sense of enclosure and containment.

**5.351** From the northern edges of the LCA there are views over Swindon, including the Great Western Hospital which is visible from Charlbury Hill. In the west views of the hangars at the former RAF Wroughton and Ministry of Defence housing and hospital site is dominant within the open landscape, particularly in views out from the high downs to the north, for example from Barbury Hill.

**5.352** The proximity of the urban edges of Wroughton and Swindon and the M4 mean that the area feels less isolated and remote than the rest of the National Landscape, resulting in a lower sense of tranquillity. Dark night skies are also impacted by proximity to Wroughton and the M4, although light pollution decreases to the south.

## LCA 5B Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain: Evaluation

### Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain valued qualities

**5.353** The key valued qualities identified for LCA 5B Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain are:

- The level uniform land surface which forms a distinctive character, and a strong contrast to the adjacent scarp.
- Historic village of Chiseldon, with a strong local vernacular of rubble or chalk stone, orange brick and thatched roofs.
- Ashdown Park Registered Park and Garden and manor house, ancient woodland, wood pasture and parkland and sarsen stones (designated as a SSSI) are important ecological and tourism features.
- Recreational access on the former Midland and South-West Junction railway and the ancient Ridgeway route.
- The views to and from the escarpment and across the high Downs are defining features of the area.
- The northern margin of the high plain in combination with the downland scarp (LCT 5E and 5F) forms a distinctive setting to Swindon.

### Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain local forces for change/issues

**5.354** In addition to the forces for change identified at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 5B Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain are:

- Development pressures including the lateral expansion of the scarp top village of Chiseldon and pressures for re-use of redundant military structures.
- Development of the Great Western Hospital at Swindon has changed the views from the highest ground in this landscape, particularly Charlbury Hill.
- Large-scale development proposed to the south and east of Swindon as part of the New Eastern Villages Development with 8,000 new homes, new schools, employment spaces and community and leisure facilities will be visible from inside the National Landscape and will affect its setting and its relationship with the edge of Swindon.

- Increase in solar farms in the area immediately outside the boundary of the North Wessex Downs, especially around Wroughton, threatens to affect the setting of the LCA and wider National Landscape.
- Visual and noise intrusion of the M4 that cuts across the Wanborough Plain.

### **Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain strategy and local guidelines**

**5.355** In addition to the guidelines set out for the Downland with Woodland LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain:

- Conserve, manage and seek to enhance the long-range views both across the LCA and north out of the National Landscape by ensuring all future solar farms are appropriately sited to reduce their visual impact.
- Carefully consider views from the Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain when planning the planting and landscaping strategies of the New Eastern Villages Development, to avoid the sense of the town expanding upwards on the downs.



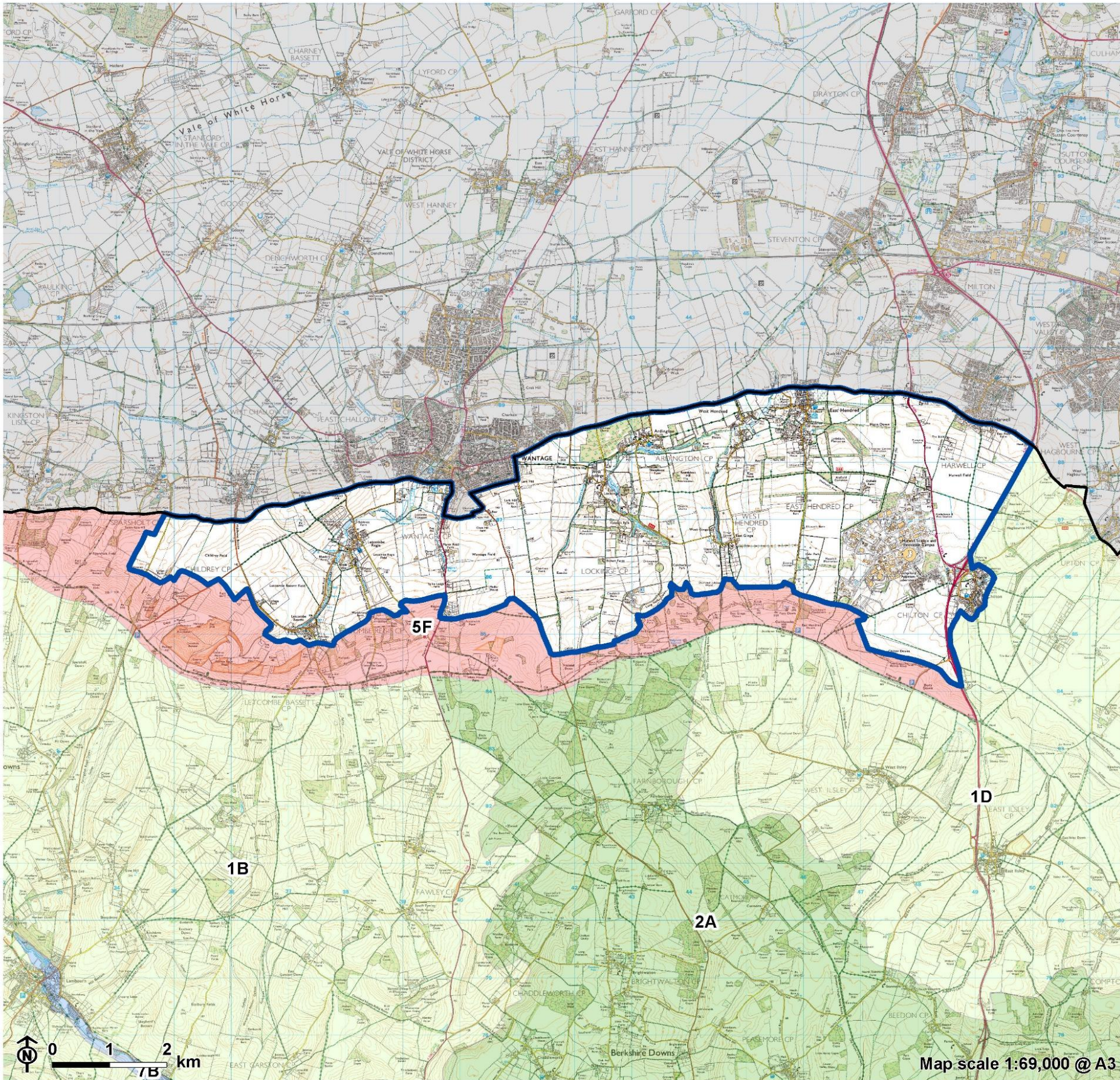
## LCA 5C: Hendred Plain

**Figure 5.89: Chain Hill looking south towards Ardington Down**





Figure 5.90: LCA 5C: Hendred Plain: Location

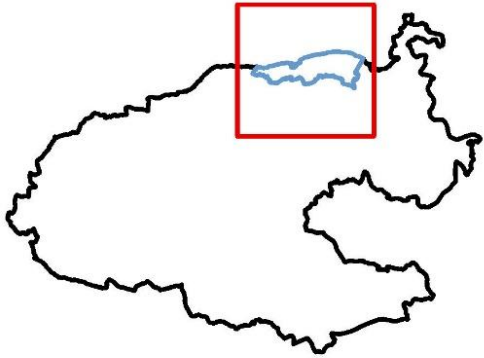


North Wessex Downs  
Landscape Character Assessment  
North Wessex Downs National Landscape



5C: Hendred Plain

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Area**
- 5C: Hendred Plain
  - 1B: Lambourn Downs
  - 1D: Blewbury Downs
  - 2A: Brightwalton Downs
  - 2C: Lambourn Wooded Downs
  - 5D: Moreton Plain
  - 5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp
  - 7B: Lambourn Valley





**Figure 5.91: South along Chain Hill across the open plain**



**Figure 5.92: Conifer shelter belts south of East Hendred**



## **LCA 5C: Hendred Plain: Description**

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

### **Natural Influences**

#### **Landform, geology, water and soils**

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

#### **Biodiversity**

**5.358** Semi-natural vegetation is concentrated on the chalk watercourses, including Letcombe Brook and Ginge Brook. Riparian woodland and vegetation provide enclosure and interest within the landscape. Away from the stream corridors there are limited woodlands or hedgerows. The narrow linear and small circular plantations around East Hendred and Lockinge are unusual features.

### **Cultural Influences**

#### **Land use and field patterns**

**5.359** The majority of the area is under arable cultivation. The landscape consists of large fields with insignificant boundaries, although shelterbelts and riparian woodlands provide a sense of enclosure. A vineyard at East Hendred and some remaining orchards provide further diversity in land cover. The area also includes many rides and gallops.

**5.360** The landscape of the area is essentially open and was probably mostly under open downland grazing until formal Parliamentary enclosure in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries created the vast majority of the regular, straight-sided fields visible today.

### Historic features

**5.361** Wantage (on the National Landscape boundary) was a royal manor in the Saxon period, and a Saxon cemetery has been excavated at Arm Hill, just to the south-east of East Lockinge. The villages of West and East Hendred date to at least the medieval period and it was during this period that Wantage became an important local market centre, including a focal point for malting during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The town continued to prosper from trade in cattle, sheep, corn and cheese and during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, foundries and agricultural implement makers were established.

**5.362** Other features which provide time-depth within the landscape include a Bronze Age Bowl Barrow at Churn Farm in the east and the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Goldbury Hill (both Scheduled Monuments).

### Settlement pattern

**5.363** The area is well settled and includes the attractive springline villages of Letcombe Regis, East Hendred, West Hendred and Ardington. These have a very varied built character and include blue flint and tile (east) plus stone and clunch (west). They generally have a clustered character, although new development has spread out from the centre. The estate villages (e.g. Lockinge, Ardington, East Hendred) have a particular unity of character. There are, in addition, a large number of stables and equestrian establishments, as well as isolated large houses and mansions. The most significant development within the area and arguably within the whole of the National Landscape is the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus on a former airfield site.

**5.364** Landscaped gardens and estates are a key feature, with small manor houses on the edge of many of the villages. These include Lockinge House and Amhill Park, which contain ornamental tree plantings, which create a slightly discordant landscape pattern, particularly in views from the higher land to the south, although at close quarters they create a wooded backdrop.

**5.365** At Letcombe, the brook has been dammed to create a lake as part of a designed landscape scheme, and the presence of small parks and mansions at the point where springs emerge is a particular feature of the area. Other examples include Ginge House and Ardington House, with a deer park at East



Hendred. These areas are frequently associated with extensive woodland and parkland planting.

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

### Principal settlements

**5.367 Harwell Science and Innovation Campus** in Oxfordshire lies south-east of East Hendred and west of the A4185. It is a 700 acre site which houses advanced scientific and technological disciplines. Initially grazed chalk grassland and racehorse gallops, in 1935 an RAF base was constructed at Harwell. It played an important role in D-Day, and in 1955 a memorial was unveiled to commemorate the base's role in the liberation of Europe. After the war, the base was converted to the Atomic Energy Research Establishment. This was the main centre for atomic energy research and development in the UK until the 1990s. Other science and computer laboratories were also built on the site, as well as a number of prefabricated houses for workers. In 2014 a new development, Chilton Field, was built on the site of the original prefabricated homes.

**Figure 5.93: Street trees and commercial buildings inside Harwell Campus**



**5.368** The Harwell campus buildings are typical of a research campus, with modern glass buildings up to 4 storeys in height. These are very different from the general vernacular of the Hendred Plain. Despite its size, Harwell Campus is well screened by woodland within the landscape. There are longer distance views over the development from the higher open downland, and in particular from the ancient Ridgeway.

**Figure 5.94: Harwell Campus seen from The Ridgeway**

**5.369 East Hendred** has strong religious ties. The parish church of St Augustine of Canterbury dates to the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the 15<sup>th</sup> century chapel of Jesus of Bethlehem, built by the monks of Sheen, still stands today on the village green. The village's layout and some of its historical buildings reflect its connection to the clothing industry during the Medieval period. Grass terraces and a green road known as the 'Golden Mile' are believed to be associated with cloth fairs. The village still contains many thatched and half-timbered cottages with a large number of listed buildings designated under the Conservation Area. The northern edge of the village is formed of late 20<sup>th</sup> century residential development that has filled the gap between East Hendred and the Reading Road (A417). Since 2015 development has crossed Reading Road changing the feel of the approach to the village as it now straddles the National Landscape boundary.



**Figure 5.95: Thatch and stone wall vernacular at East Hendred**



**5.370** East Hendred sits on the springline at the foot of the Berkshire Downs. The surrounding rolling downs and small wooded valleys provide a rural and enclosed setting to the village.

**Figure 5.96: Parkland character around East Hendred**





### Communications and infrastructure

**5.371** The area includes a large number of straight north-south running lanes, byways or tracks which cross the Plain and terminate on the high downs (in LCA 5F), where they join the Ridgeway. These tracks would have formerly connected the resources of the Vales and the high downs but today form good routes for recreational access.

**5.372** The A34 forms a strong boundary to the east, although is largely screened from view by roadside trees and vegetation. The A417 forms the northern boundary of the LCA, and of the National Landscape.

### Perceptual Influences

**5.373** This is an open landscape with limited woodlands to provide screening. There are often long-distance, panoramic views across the lower-lying vale to the north and up to the scarp to the south.

**5.374** The sense of openness creates a sense of tranquillity, and away from Harwell Campus, there is good experience of dark night skies.

## LCA 5C Hendred Plain: Evaluation

### Hendred Plain valued qualities

**5.376** The key valued qualities identified for LCA 5C Hendred Plain are:

- A high plain landscape with numerous springs cutting through the chalk, creating interest and undulations in the landform.
- The riparian vegetation along the chalk-fed springs provides ecological and visual interest to the landscape.
- Small historic parklands and estates such as Lockinge House create time-depth.
- Historic settlement form centred on the springline, with villages associated with the estates having a coherent character.
- Straight tracks and lanes provide access between the vale to the north and scarp and downs to the south.
- Quiet, rural character with strong sense of tranquillity and dark night skies.

### Hendred Plain local forces for change/issues

**5.377** In addition to the forces for change at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 5C Hendred Plain are:

- Pressure for new solar farms between Wantage and Didcot could affect the setting of the National Landscape and alter views from the LCA.
- The expanding Harwell Campus introduces a more suburban element to views.
- Development pressures on the small springline villages, with expansion from their traditional clustered form.
- Development outside the National Landscape boundaries at Didcot and Wantage including 1500 homes at Kingsgrove. This will impact the setting of the National Landscape as well as views from the LCA.

### Hendred Plain strategy and local guidelines

**5.378** In addition to the guidelines set out for the Downs Plain and Scarp LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Hendred Plain:

- Conserve, manage and seek to enhance the long-range views both across the LCA and north out of the National Park by ensuring all future solar farms are appropriately sited to reduce their visual impact (particularly the glint and glare).
- Ensure new development at Harwell Science and Innovation Campus is contained within the existing footprint of the campus, and retains the strong wooded boundaries to restrict visual impact on the rest of the landscape.
- Consider views from the LCA when planning the planting and landscaping strategies of new development at Didcot and Kingsgrove. Avoid any sense of development expanding upwards onto the downs.



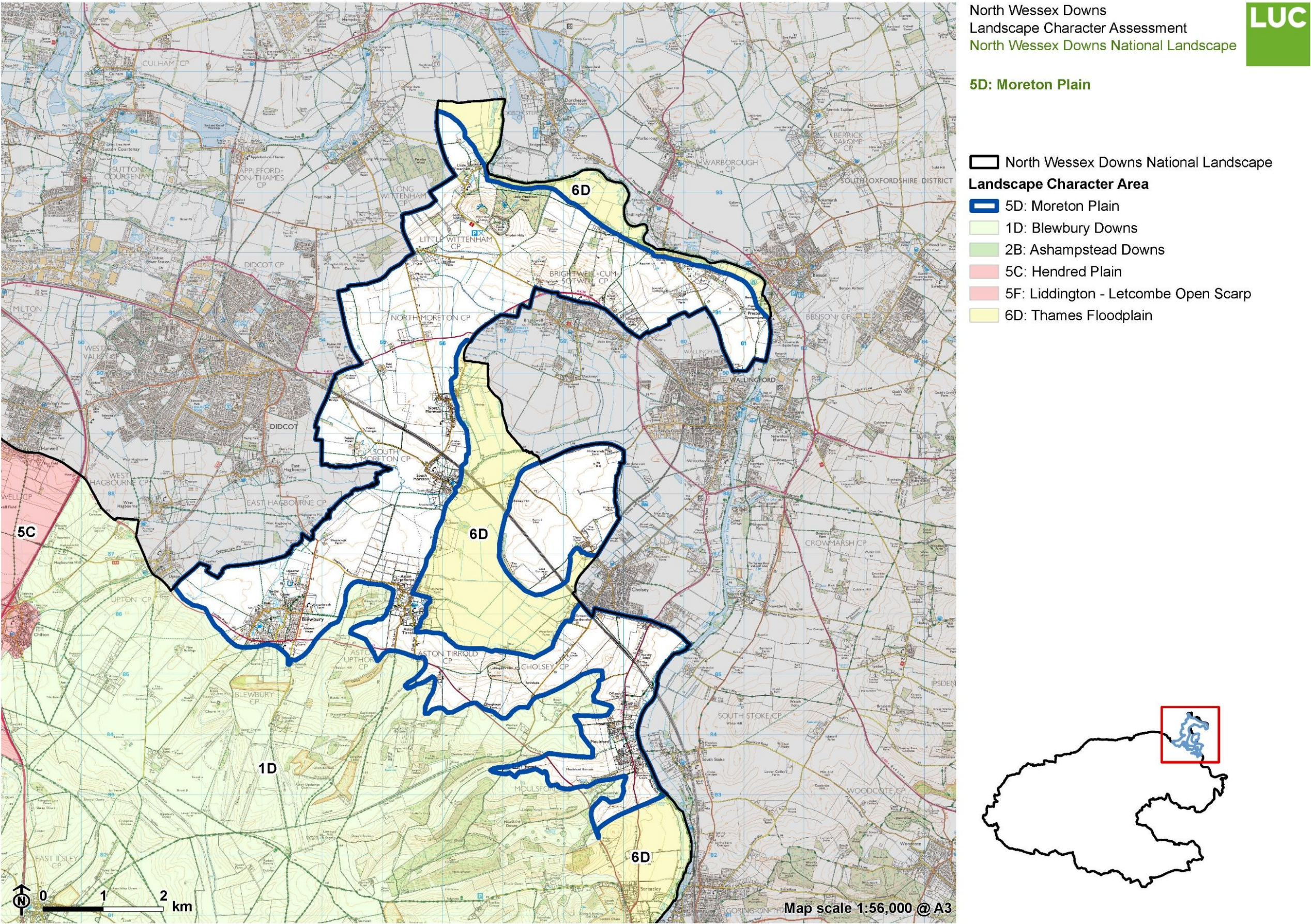
## LCA 5D: Moreton Plain

**Figure 5.97: Views over flat arable fields to Wittenham Clumps**





Figure 5.98: LCA 5D: Moreton Plain: Location



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**Figure 5.99: Electricity pylons cross the arable landscape south of South Moreton**



**Figure 5.100: Towards Lollingdon Hill**





## LCA 5D: Moreton Plain: Description

**5.379** The Moreton Plain LCA is located in the northward extension of the National Landscape, where it extends into South Oxfordshire to the River Thames. The boundaries are largely defined by the National Landscape boundary. The area wraps around the low-lying Vale landscape, associated with the floodplain of the River Thames (LCA 6D). To the south the higher chalk downs of the Blewbury Downs (LCA 1D) are a dominant backdrop and skyline

### Natural Influences

#### Landform, geology, water and soils

**5.380** Moreton Plain is a transitional landscape between the chalk uplands to the south and the clay Vale to the north. It has a varied geology, and includes layers of High Chalk, Middle Chalk, Lower Chalk, and Upper Greensand. Landform is consequently very varied, although the scale is reduced compared to the more dramatic downs landscapes to the south. The outliers of High and Middle Chalk form distinctive stranded hills at Cholsey Hill and the Sinodun Hills, which, with their open rolling landform, have a similar character to the high downs, although on a much more restricted scale. Soils are distinctive calcareous flinty soils.

#### Biodiversity

**5.381** Tree cover is sparse except on the steeper slopes above the Thames, in the north. Distinctive features include the clumps of woodland, some recorded as of ancient origin, on prominent hilltops, as at Wittenham Clumps.

**5.382** Ancient woodland, ponds, grassland and scrub at Little Wittenham supports one of the largest breeding populations of great crested newts in the UK and is designated internationally as a SAC and nationally as a SSSI.

**5.383** Small areas of priority habitat traditional orchards are found near settlements. There are also fragmented areas of calcareous grassland, semi-improved grassland and lowland meadows.

### Cultural Influences

#### Land use and field patterns

**5.384** The landscape is fairly open, with very little woodland. Some field boundaries and trackways are very sinuous, and may have medieval origins,

such as those between Long Wittenham and Little Wittenham, and those between North and South Moreton. Elsewhere, most fields are large and regular with straight sides and are probably the result of formal eighteenth and nineteenth century Parliamentary enclosure.

**5.385** Very large arable fields have been created in recent decades, with a weak or absent hedgerow structure.

### Historic features

**5.386** A Bronze Age round barrow close to Brightwell and a hillfort at Aston Upthorpe are characteristic features in a landscape otherwise devoid of extant prehistoric monuments. Evidence of activity from the late Bronze Age through to the Romano-British period is concentrated north of Little Wittenham and west of Long Wittenham.

**5.387** Remnants of medieval ridge and furrow occur to the north of Little Wittenham, and cropmarks of trackways and enclosures around Rise may reflect Romano-British or medieval settlement. There are medieval moated sites at Lollington Farm, at the base of the scarp where there was also a medieval abbey, now ruined. North of Rises, cropmarks of square enclosures, trackways and ridge and furrow mark the position of Littleton, a post-medieval hamlet deserted and destroyed in the nineteenth century.

### Settlement pattern

**5.388** The villages of North and South Moreton are located on pockets of higher ground and have a loosely nucleated form. Other larger settlements include Blewbury and Aston Upthorpe/Aston Tirrold, both of which are springline villages located at the foot of the scarp. There are many attractive buildings, with materials including thatch, red brick and weatherboard. Moulsoford is located alongside the Thames. All the villages, with the exception of Moulsoford, have designated Conservation Areas.

### Principal settlement

**5.389 Blewbury** is the principal settlement in this area. It is situated at the foot of the Berkshire Downs and known for its natural springs that rise at the foot of the downs. These springs have historically supported mills and watercress beds. The village features a varied vernacular, with stone, flint, cruck construction and rubble buildings all common. A Conservation Area covers the majority of the village around St Michael's Church and Blewbury Manor. The village also contains many examples of cob walls with their own thatched roofs



which are a distinctive feature of the area. The village has expanded to the east between South Street and Bessel's Way. The arrival of the Atomic Energy Research Establishment at Harwell after World War II brought scientific significance to the village.

**Figure 5.101: Grade I Listed Church of St Michael, Blewbury**



**5.390** Blewbury is surrounded by the rolling chalk hills of the Berkshire Downs with the underlying chalk geology influencing the location, the vernacular architecture of flint and chalk, and the surrounding arable agriculture. The settlement edges of Blewbury are well-integrated into the landscape, with shelterbelts along the B4016 restricting many views from the east and north. Blewburton Hill and Churn Hill (in adjacent LCA 1D) are distinctive landscape features in views from the village edge.

**Figure 5.102: View from Churn Hill looking towards Didcot, Blewbury is concealed by vegetation**



### Communications and infrastructure

**5.391** Small rural lanes connect the smaller villages, Blewbury and Didcot. The busy A417 runs along the south of the LCA, the A329 in the east and the Great Western Main Line crosses the east and north running towards Didcot.

**5.392** The area has a good network of public rights of way, while a short section of the dismantled Didcot, Newbury and Southampton Railway is now used as a cycleway (National Cycle Network 544), linking Upton and Didcot.

### Perceptual Influences

**5.393** Generally, this is a very open landscape with extensive views. Views to remnant tall industrial features at the former Didcot Power Station and recent and ongoing development on the eastern edge of Didcot (as part of the Didcot North East Strategic Allocation) reduce the sense of remoteness. The A4130 on the southern boundary is locally audibly disturbing. An overhead power line crosses the south and is a notable vertical feature in the otherwise flat landscape.

**5.394** The area's elevation provides strong views over open countryside, and generally there is a sense of rurality and distance from urban influences.



**5.395** Blewbury has attracted notable artists and writers, including Kenneth Grahame, author of *The Wind in the Willows* and poet John Betjeman, who celebrated Blewbury as the quintessential Berkshire village.

## LCA 5D Moreton Plain: Evaluation

### Moreton Plain valued qualities

**5.396** The key valued qualities identified for LCA 5D Moreton Plain are:

- Wittenham Clumps is a distinctive landmark in views from the low-lying vales to the north. The hills are nationally and internationally designated for their ancient woodland and grassland habitats.
- Rural character of the small villages, separated by open farmland, and covered by Conservation Areas, contributes to a sense of time-depth.
- Strong local vernacular of timber-framing, brick, flint and tile roofs.
- Strong recreational value with a network of public rights of way, and access to Sinodun Hills and Brightwell Barrow.
- Long-ranging panoramic views from the isolated hills provide a distinctive sense of place and tranquillity.

### Moreton Plain local forces for change/issues

**5.397** In addition to the forces for change set out at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 5D Moreton Plain are:

- Increased recreation at Wittenham Clumps, which may result in pressure for further recreational facilities including car parks, altering the rural character.
- Wittenham Clumps and Little Wittenham Wood are managed by the Earth Trust, which has been replenishing the end-of-life beech trees on the Clumps with hornbeam and lime.
- The recent electrification of the Great Western mainline railway has resulted in further vertical infrastructure in this landscape. To combat this, Network Rail have created the Mend the Gap programme, to enhance the areas of the National Landscape negatively impacted by the electrification. Funds are available to support hedgerow and tree planting to mitigate the gantries, and for enhancement projects. There are positive opportunities for landscape improvements within this landscape.
- Demolition of Didcot Power Station has altered views to the west, including from Wittenham Clumps. Redevelopment of this site, and additional



residential development at Didcot as part of the Didcot North East Strategic Allocation, may also impact views from higher ground.

### **Moreton Plain strategy and local guidelines**

**5.398** In addition to the guidelines set out for the Downs Plain and Scarp LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Moreton Plain:

- Conserve, manage and seek to enhance chalk grassland habitats along the western scarp to extend and link existing sites.
- Maintain distinctive hilltop clumps, continuing the tree management strategy to ensure continued coverage including more climate resilient hornbeam and lime.
- Consider views from the LCA when planning the planting and landscaping strategies of new development at Didcot, to retain a sense of separation between the vale and the downlands.
- Conserve the open views to and from Wittenham Clumps.

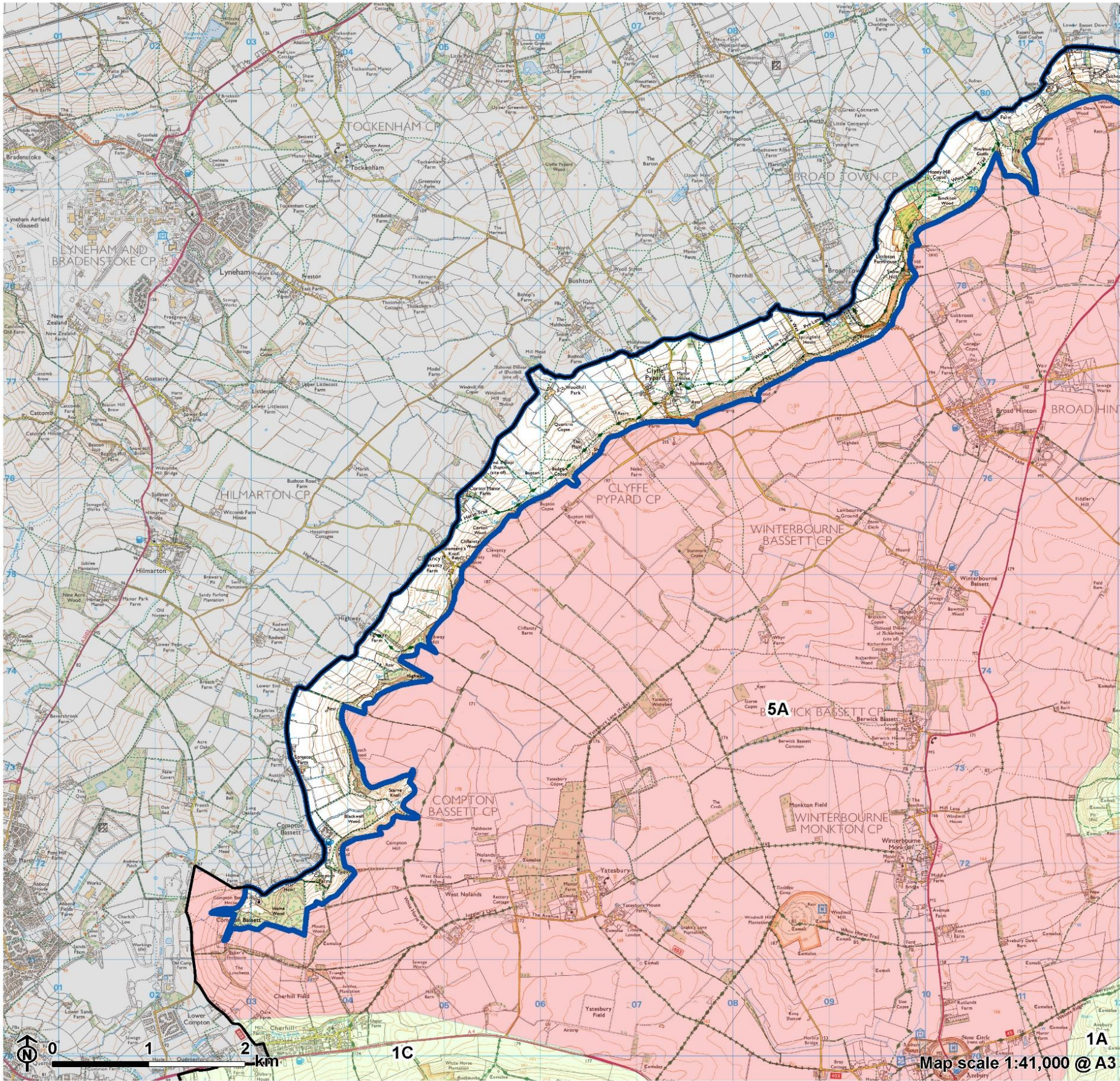
## LCA 5E: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp

**Figure 5.103: Looking up to the wooded scarp from Bushton**





Figure 5.104: LCA 5E: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp: Location (west)

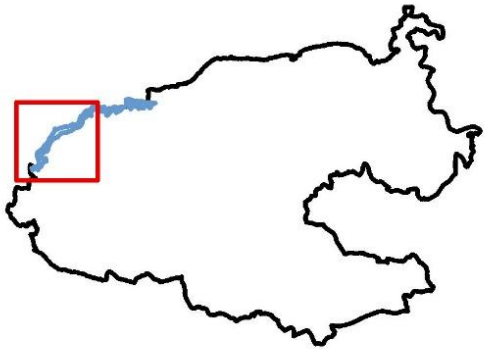


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**5E: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp (west)**

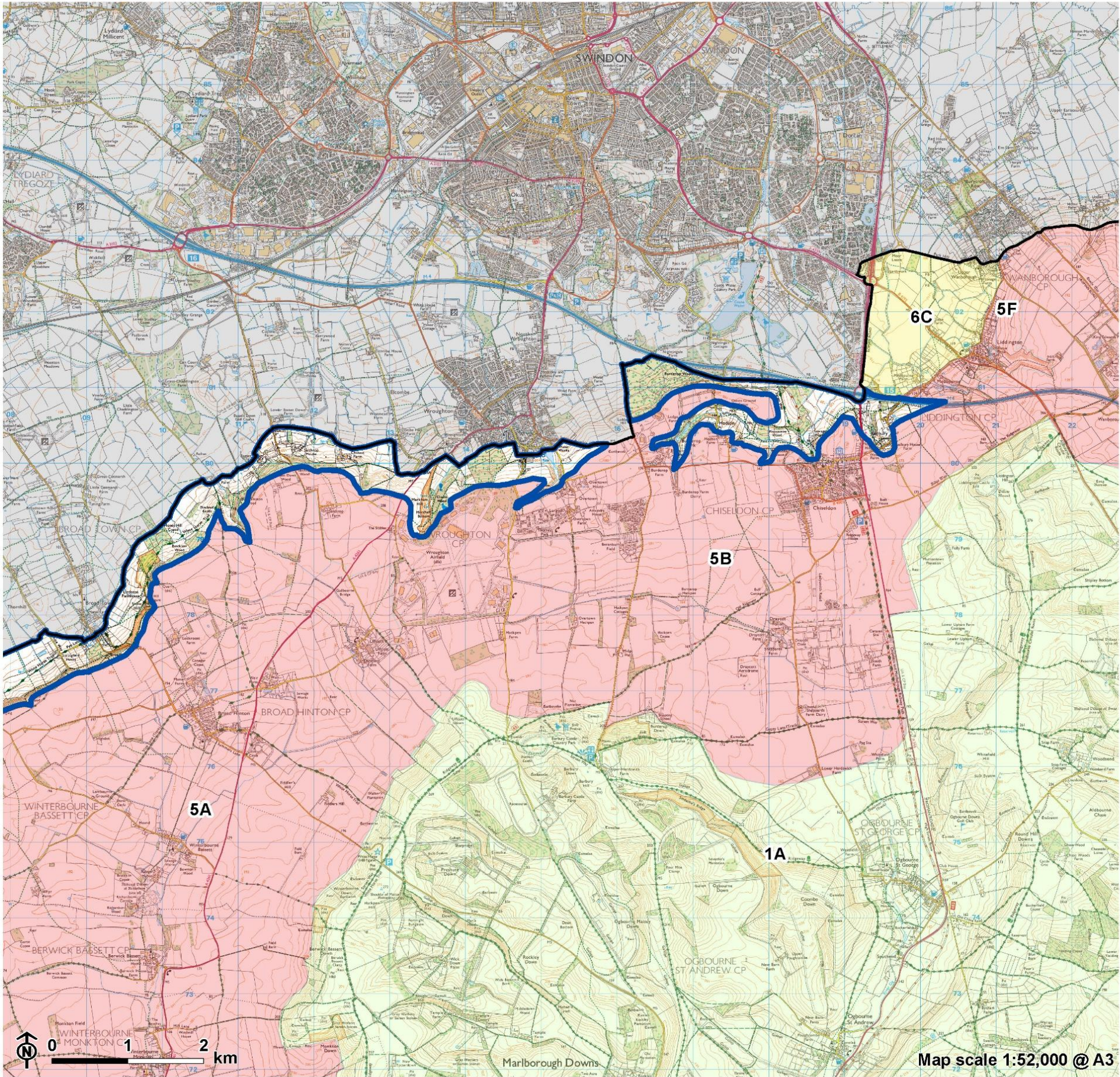
- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Area**
- 5E: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp
- 1A: Marlborough Downs
- 1C: Horton Downs
- 5A: Avebury Plain
- 5B: Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain



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Figure 5.105: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp: Location (east)

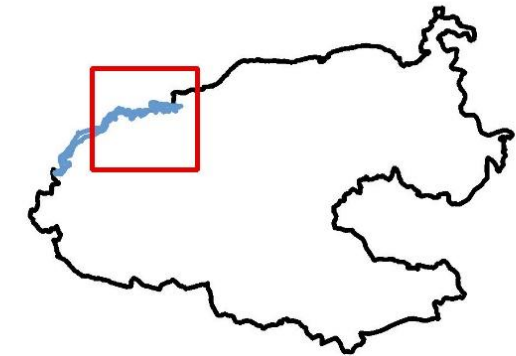


North Wessex Downs  
Landscape Character Assessment  
North Wessex Downs National Landscape



5E: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp (east)

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Area
- 5E: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp
- 1A: Marlborough Downs
- 5A: Avebury Plain
- 5B: Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain
- 5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp
- 6C: Wanborough Vale



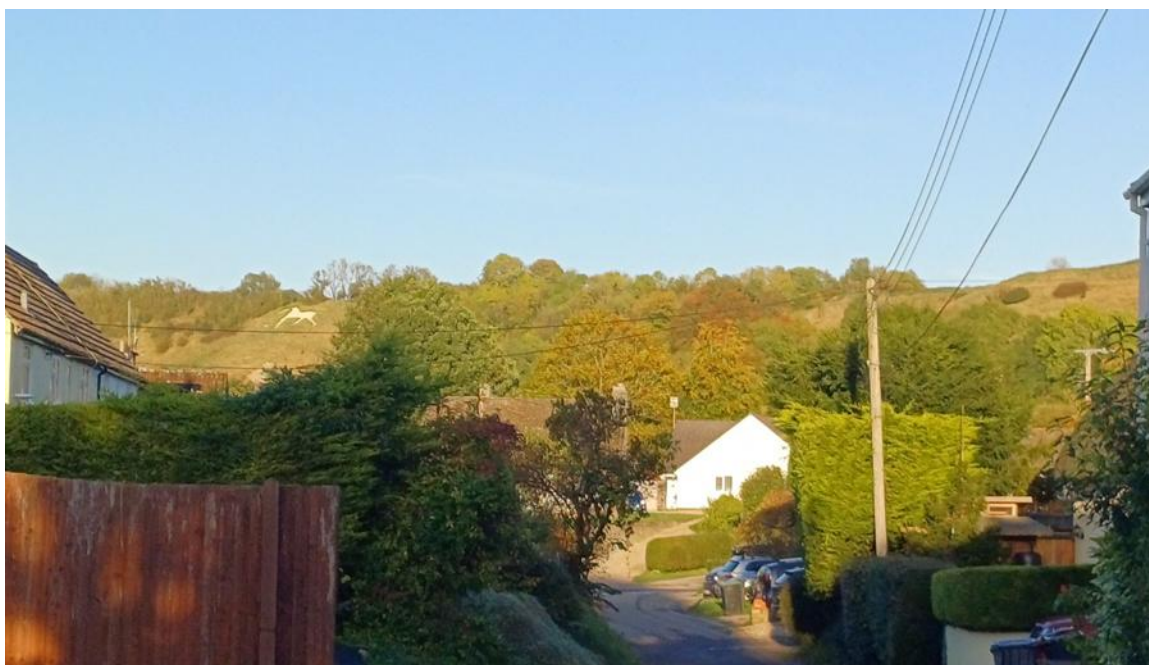
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**Figure 5.106: Long views over Swindon from the scarp top with steep wooded valleys in foreground**



**Figure 5.107: Broad Town white horse seen from the village**



## **LCA 5E: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp: Description**

**5.399** The Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp defines the north-west boundary of the AONB. The boundaries are formed by the AONB boundary, which runs along the foot of the scarp, and by contours at roughly 170 metres along the scarp top at the point where the surface levels out to form Avebury Plain (5A) in the west and Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain (5B) in the east. The LCA is split into two sections by the flatter plain of LCA 5B Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain.

### **Natural Influences**

#### **Landform, geology, water and soils**

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

**5.401** Numerous springs issue along the escarpment at the base of the chalk creating a system of short but deeply incised valleys appearing as wooded indentations within the lower scarp slopes.

#### **Biodiversity**

**5.402** The LCA is distinguished by its wooded character, with long sinuous, continuous belts of woodland such as Clyffe Hanging and Bincknoll Wood, clinging to the almost vertical upper slopes. These are mainly ancient semi-natural woodlands of hazel coppice and oak as well as distinctive beech hangers. Bincknoll Dip Woods in the western area has been designated as an SSSI for its population of nationally and internationally rare mosses. This inconspicuous species is currently only known from this single location in Britain and has never been record outside Europe. More extensive blocks of ancient semi-natural woodland characterise the scarp around Chiseldon, with areas of particular note being the large wet ash-maple woodland at Burderop Wood and the oak with ash-maple coppice at Clouts Wood (both SSSIs).

**5.403** Areas of lowland calcareous grassland are also found on the steep-sided slopes.



## Cultural Influences

### Land use and field patterns

**5.404** The lower scarp slopes are predominantly in pasture with some areas of arable land occupying shallower gradients. Fields are small and bounded by hedgerows which, together with the parkland and scarp top woodlands, creates a more enclosed intimate landscape contrasting strongly with the open and expansive character and long views from the scarp summit.

**5.405** The pattern of woodland cover and smaller fields with sinuous boundaries, particularly around Chiseldon, may relate to Medieval clearance and enclosure.

### Historic features

**5.406** Unusually, Iron Age hill forts are not a feature of the scarp top in this area and tended to be located further to the south at the second scarp of the Marlborough Downs (e.g. Barbury Castle). A castle, possibly of Medieval age, was established at Bincknoll on the scarp edge. Deserted medieval villages include Bupton and Woodhill, located at the foot of the scarp edge defining the north-west edge. Other medieval earthworks survive at Broad Hinton.

**5.407** The scarp is distinguished by a large number of estates, such as at Compton Bassett, Burderop, Elcombe and Salthrop, with houses located at the foot of the slope and associated farmland and parkland.

### Settlement pattern

**5.408** Small settlements are located at the point where springs issue midway up the scarp. They include the hamlets of Clyffe Pypard, Clevancy and the linear settlement of Broadtown, which straggles up the slope. Compton Bassett, at the foot of the slope has a more modern character. Conservation Areas cover Clyffe Pypard, Compton Bassett, Hodson and Badbury.

### Communications and infrastructure

**5.409** The scarp is traversed by numerous narrow rural lanes that cut straight up and down the face. A notable feature is the large number of rights of way, which originate on the lower lying Vale and terminate on the Plain at the scarp top.

**5.410** A White Horse was carved into the chalk scarp at Broad Town in the 1860s, and is visible from many miles. The promoted route the White Horse Trail provides access to the chalk figure.

### **Perceptual Influences**

**5.411** The wooded skyline is an important landscape feature in views from surrounding lower land, such as around Lyneham (outside the National Landscape). There are limited views out from the steep wooded scarp, due to the woodland, creating an intimate and enclosed character. Where views are available, these are expansive, looking north over surrounding farmland and Swindon. In this context the masts at Nebb Farm are an intrusive feature.

**5.412** There is a strong sense of tranquillity across the landscape and a good experience of dark night skies, although there is more light glow from Wroughton and Swindon in the east.

## **LCA 5E Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp: Evaluation**

### **Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp valued qualities**

**5.413** The key valued qualities identified for LCA 5E Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp are:

- The dramatic steep scarp slope, which rises abruptly from the lower lying clay vale to the north and provides a distinctive skyline to the surrounding land.
- Chalk springs which issue at the base of the chalk, creating a series of short, deeply incised wooded valleys.
- Distinctive scarp-face ancient woodlands on the almost vertical upper slopes, many recorded as ancient woodland and nationally designated.
- Settlement pattern located on the springline, with small historic villages and hamlets. Estates and associated parkland are also a common feature.
- Deeply incised narrow rural lanes and public rights of way provide access through and across the landscape.
- Intimate, enclosed character within the woodlands contrasting with long-ranging open views.

### **Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp local forces for change/issues**

**5.414** In addition to the forces for change set out at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 5E Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp are:

- Limited appropriate management of woodlands particularly the small ancient and semi natural woodlands of the scarp, formerly managed by coppicing.
- Incremental changes within the attractive scarp slope villages altering the settlement shape and character, including some modern ribbon development and use of materials not in keeping with the local vernacular.
- Impact of new development of the edge of the National Landscape at Wroughton and Swindon. These developments will be seen from the scarp and will also increase visitor pressure.
- Impact of solar farms on the edge of the National Landscape, such as the glint and glare of the solar farm at Basset Down.



- A new Western National Forest will be planted to the north of Swindon and may alter views from the scarp, providing a more wooded skyline.

### **Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp strategy and local guidelines**

**5.415** In addition to the guidelines set out for the Downs Plain and Scarp LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp:

- Conserve, manage and seek to enhance chalk grassland habitats along the western scarp to extend and link existing sites.
- Along the western scarp, promote appropriate and sympathetic management of the varied and distinctive linear wooded hangers and wooded combs.
- Consider views from the LCA when planning the planting and landscaping strategies of new development at Wroughton and Swindon, ensuring there is no sense of development climbing up the scarp. Retain a sense of separation between the vale and the scarp.
- Conserve, manage and seek to enhance the long-range views both across the LCA and north out of the National Landscape by ensuring all future solar farms are appropriately sited to reduce their visual impact.

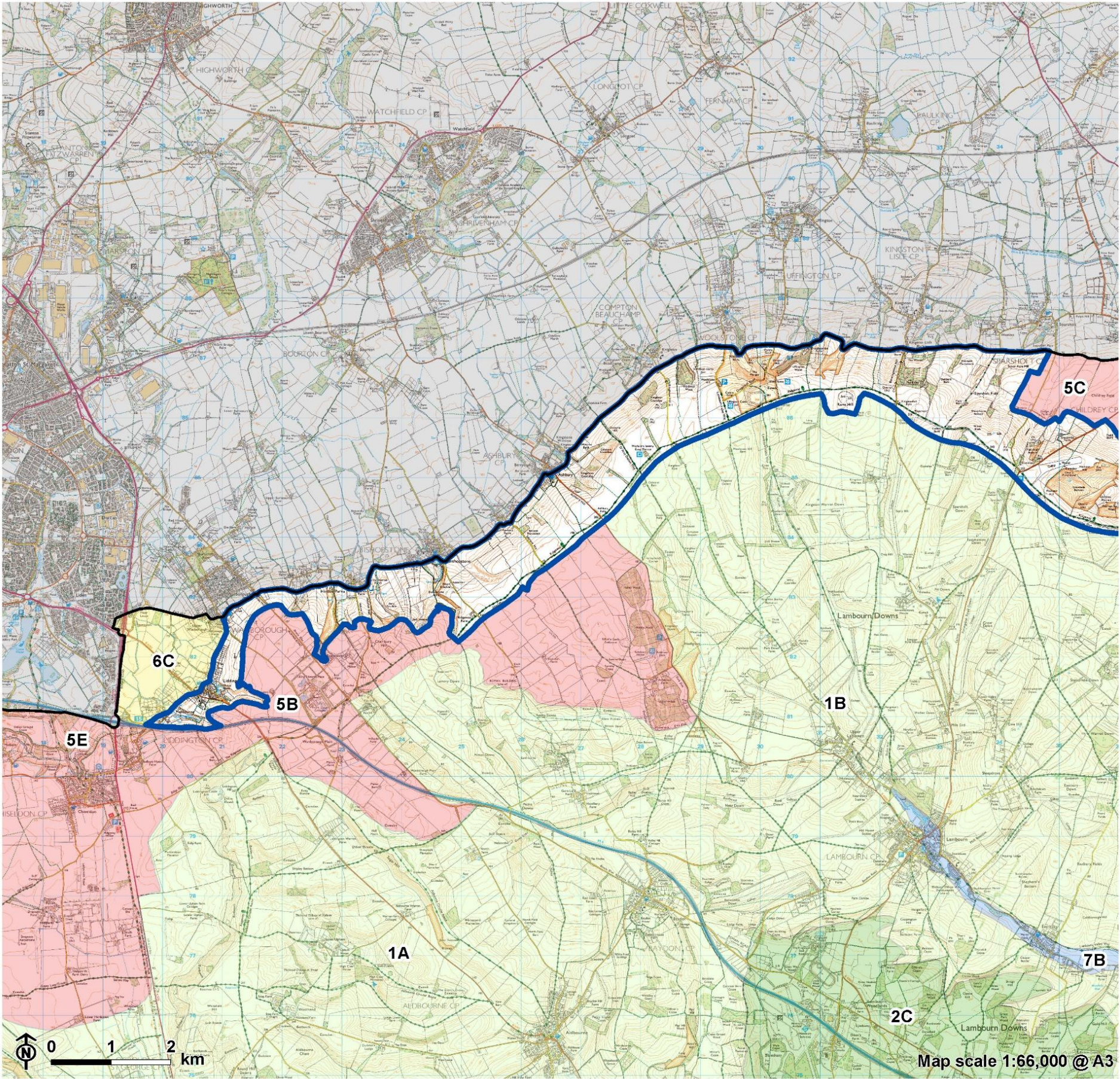
## LCA 5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp

**Figure 5.108: Dramatic landform at White Horse Hill, looking towards Westmill Wind Farm**





Figure 5.109: LCA 5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp: Location (west)



North Wessex Downs  
Landscape Character Assessment  
North Wessex Downs National Landscape



**5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp  
(west)**

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Area**
- 5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp
  - 1A: Marlborough Downs
  - 1B: Lambourn Downs
  - 2C: Lambourn Wooded Downs
  - 5B: Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain
  - 5C: Hendred Plain
  - 5E: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp
  - 6C: Wanborough Vale
  - 7B: Lambourn Valley

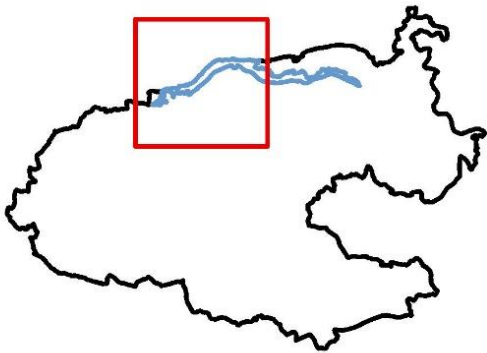
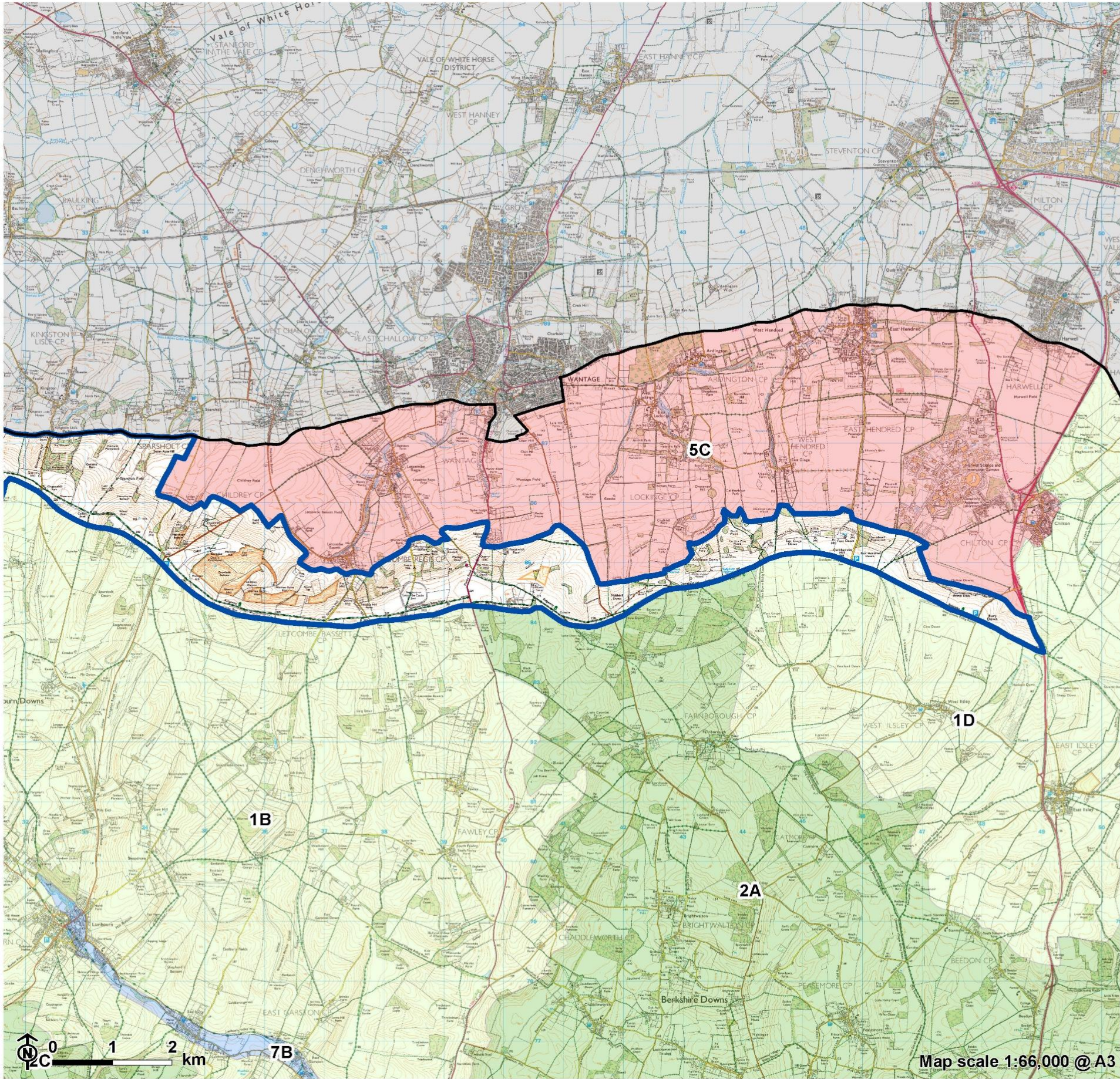




Figure 5.110: LCA 5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp: Location (east)

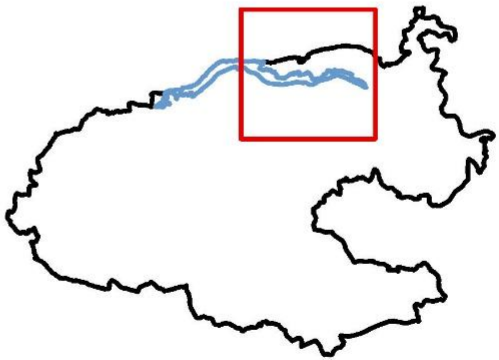


North Wessex Downs  
Landscape Character Assessment  
North Wessex Downs National Landscape



**5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp (east)**

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Area**
- 5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp
  - 1B: Lambourn Downs
  - 1D: Blewbury Downs
  - 2A: Brightwalton Downs
  - 2C: Lambourn Wooded Downs
  - 5C: Hendred Plain
  - 7B: Lambourn Valley



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**Figure 5.111: Looking north from the Ridgeway near Westcot**



**Figure 5.112: Waylands Smithy**



## **LCA 5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp: Description**

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

### **Natural Influences**

#### **Landform, geology, water and soils**

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

**5.418** The most spectacular dry combe is 'The Manger' cut into White Horse Hill. This is a classic example of a distinctive chalk karst landform, and the site is designated as an SSSI.

#### **Biodiversity**

**5.419** The scarp is characterised by its openness, with woodland largely absent. Woodland is confined to small areas of natural regeneration, and those associated with the parks and estates that are a feature of the area. An exception is the small linear lengths of hanger woodland, such as at Uffington Wood, which are recorded as of ancient origin.

**5.420** The steep scarp slope contains a high proportion of the remaining unploughed chalk grasslands along the escarpment. Hackpen Hill is international designated as an SAC for its chalk grassland and gentian



populations. Other sites of national importance for their chalk grasslands are The Coombs, Hinton Parva and White Horse Hill.

## Cultural Influences

### Land use and field patterns

**5.421** The steep gradients limit the extent of arable cultivation so that land use is a mix of grazed pasture, rough grass and scrub within small hedged fields.

**5.422** Many of the sinuous, long, narrow fields orientated at right angles to the scarp edge in the western half of the character area, may represent surviving medieval boundaries. In some cases these may represent 'filling in' or informal enclosure between existing tracks or droveways in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

### Historic features

**5.423** The most important prehistoric site within this area is Wayland's Smithy, a Neolithic chambered long mound with impressive sarsen stones. The Ridgeway follows the scarp along the southern edge of the area, with the scarp top providing an important strategic routeway throughout prehistory and later periods. Linear earthworks such as those south of Bishopstone may be late Bronze Age or Iron Age. Uffington Castle and Woolstone Hill are Iron Age hill forts, and the distinctive chalk cut figure of the Uffington White Horse may be later prehistoric in date, although this is still not certain. The linear earthwork of Grim's Ditch, probably of Saxon origin, runs along the northern edge of the scarp.

**5.424** There were manor houses in Beauchamp, Ashbury and Bishopstone, the latter having shrunk from a larger medieval village. Abandoned tofts and crofts survive as earthworks, and on Charlbury Hill there are medieval strip lynchets.

### Settlement pattern

**5.425** The shelter and access to water provided by the scarp made it attractive to settlement. Small, clustered springline villages, such as at Liddington, Bishopstone, Ashbury and Letcombe sit on the boundary of the National Landscape at the base of the scarp. Liddington is the only settlement to sit within the LCA, and is recorded from the late Saxon period, although may have had a relationship with the Iron Age Liddington Castle hillfort (in LCA 1A Marlborough Downs).

## Communications and infrastructure

**5.426** Numerous lanes cut up and down the scarp face, often deeply incised and overhung by steep earth or grass banks. In contrast the M4 lies to the south of the western edge of the LCA. However, its visual impact on the LCA is limited due to roadside vegetation, and restricted views from the sunken lanes.

**5.427** In the east of the LCA, the line of the ancient Ridgeway marks the crest line and is an important and popular recreational route. Small carparks adjacent to the Ridgeway provide further access. The Uffington White Horse, managed by the National Trust, and Wayland's Smithy, managed by English Heritage, are important tourist sites. Areas of Open Access Land are also found along the scarp.

## Perceptual Influences

**5.428** The scarp is the defining edge of the AONB and is a highly visible feature from Swindon, Wantage and the adjacent low lying clay vales. The strong landform dominates skyline views and provides a dramatic backdrop from these areas signalling the presence of the North Wessex Downs. There are clear views from the Ridgeway towards Harwell Campus, which is an incongruous feature in views.

**5.429** Wayland's Smithy is a site redolent with local myth and legend, linked to the Saxon god of metal working. One tradition states that if you leave a horse and small coin at the long barrow, an elven smith will reshoe the horse. The Uffington White Horse is one of the oldest chalk figures in the south of England, dating to the late Bronze Age or Iron Age.

**5.430** The limited settlement pattern, long views and sunken lanes create a rural, remote, and highly tranquil landscape. There is also a good experience of dark night skies.



## **LCA 5F Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp: Evaluation**

### **Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp valued qualities**

**5.431** The key valued qualities identified for LCA 5F Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp are:

- Complex topography of ridges and spurs creates a strong sense of place and is a landmark in views both within the National Landscape and from outside including the springline villages and Swindon.
- Internationally and nationally important remnant chalk grassland, and chalk springs.
- Strong sense of time-depth and connection to prehistory from sites including the Uffington White Horse and Wayland's Smithy. The landscape provides an open setting to these features.
- Recreational and historic value of The Ridgeway and Open Access Land, including at White Horse Hill.
- Limited settlement and development create a rural, tranquil and remote character with good experience of dark night skies.
- Panoramic views to the north over Swindon and the vale provide a sense of place.
- Liddington hill in particular is valued as a key feature in views from Swindon.

### **Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp local forces for change/issues**

**5.432** In addition to the forces for change at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 5F Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp are:

- The Uffington White Horse project is surveying the chalk figure and restoring the Horse to its position from the 1980s, which will make the figure more distinct, especially in distant views.
- Increased recreational pressure along the Ridgeway, including potential pressure for additional car parks.
- Development of the Great Western Hospital at Swindon has changed the views from the highest ground in this landscape, particularly from Liddington.

- Views to the expanding Harwell Campus and large-scale development proposed to the south and east of Swindon as part of the New Eastern Villages Development with 8,000 new homes, new schools, employment spaces and community and leisure facilities will be visible from inside the National Landscape and will affect its setting and its relationship with the edge of Swindon.
- A new Western National Forest will be planted to the north of Swindon and may alter views from the scarp, providing a more wooded skyline.

### **Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp strategy and local guidelines**

**5.433** In addition to the guidelines set out for the Downs Plain and Scarp LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp:

- Conserve, manage and seek to enhance chalk grassland habitats along the western scarp to extend and link existing sites.
- Along the western scarp, promote sympathetic management of the varied and distinctive linear wooded hangers and wooded combes.
- Conserve, manage and seek to enhance the long-distance views from the top of the scarp northward out of the National Landscape.
- Maintain the limited settlement pattern focussed at Liddington.
- Consider views from the LCA when planning the planting and landscaping strategies of new development at Swindon, ensuring there is no sense of development climbing up the scarp. Retain a sense of separation between the vale and the scarp.
- Ensure any new development at Harwell Campus does not spill onto the scarp, and that any taller buildings are concentrated close to existing tall buildings to reduce additional visual impacts, especially in views from the Ridgeway.