

# North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment

## Landscape Character Assessment

LCT 6

### North Wessex Downs National Landscape

**Draft report**

Prepared by LUC

July 2025

## LCT 6 Vales

**Figure 5.113: Views over the low-lying Vale of Pewsey towards the downlands**



## Location and overview

**5.434** The Vales LCT is defined topographically, and are distinct areas of lowland, almost always below 130 metres AOD. The transition to these low-lying landscapes is often dramatic, marked by a steep scarp slope. The Vale of Pewsey, including its narrow eastern extension towards Shalbourne, separates the two main chalk upland blocks of the Downs. In addition, a number of smaller areas of low lying vale landscape occur along the northern and eastern edge of the North Wessex Downs and relate to the adjacent National Character Area 108: Upper Thames Clay Vales.

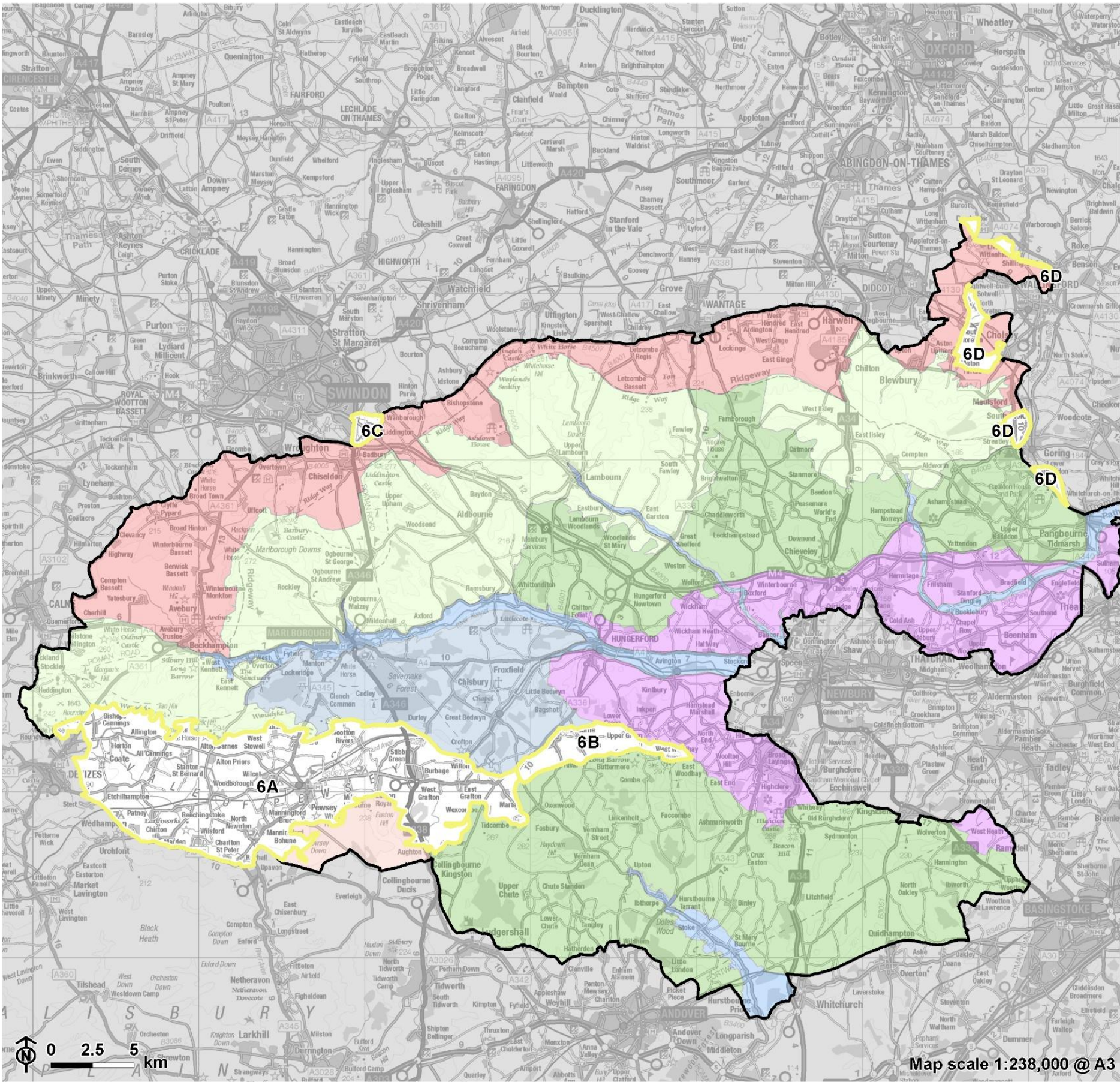
**5.435** The Vales landscape type is divided into two main character areas. These comprise.

- 6A: Vale of Pewsey
- 6B: Shalbourne Vale, which extends to the east of the Vale of Pewsey

**5.436** In addition, along the north and eastern edge of the North Wessex Downs, the National Landscape boundary has been drawn so that it incorporates very small areas that are part of the wider surrounding landscape (NCA 108: Upper Thames Clay Vales) that extends out beyond the National Landscape. These have been separately identified and named.

- 6C: Wanborough Vale
- 6D: Thames Valley Flood Plain which incorporates the geographically separate subareas of i) Benson, ii) Moreton and iii) Streatley and Basildon

Figure 5.114: Location of LCT 6 Vales



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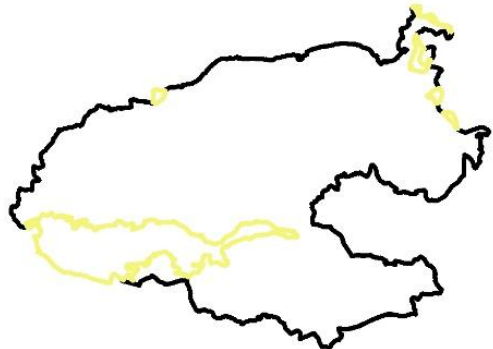


LCT 6 - Vales

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Landscape Character Type

- 6: Vales
- 6A: Vale of Pewsey
- 6B: Shalbourne Vale
- 6C: Wanborough Vale
- 6D: Thames Floodplain



**5.437** The chalk downs form an imposing backdrop to the flat low-lying Vales – an example of the dramatic contrast and juxtaposition of landscape character within the North Wessex Downs. The towering slopes of the adjacent chalk scarps forming a dominant ‘borrowed’ landscape setting that contains and enclosing the Vales.

**5.438** Underlain by Greensand, these lowland landscapes are well-watered, with numerous streams issuing at the junction of the chalk and the less permeable underlying rocks and characterised by watercourses meandering across the flat vale floor. Rich loamy and alluvial soils create a productive agricultural landscape, with a mix of both arable and pasture in fields bound by thick, tall hedgerows. Views are constrained and framed by the topography of the rising scarp slopes of the downs and low hedgerows, producing a strong sense of enclosure. Woodland cover is sparse, except where linear belts of willow, alder and scrub accentuate the line of the watercourses that thread across the Vales. The streams, remnant waterside pastures and riparian woodlands form a lush ‘wetland’ landscape of considerable ecological value.

**5.439** The concentration of settlement is one of the defining features of the Vale landscapes. Settlement includes compact nucleated villages and hamlets, with widespread scattered farmsteads, using characteristic materials of timber frame, brick and flints, sometimes with thatched roofs. The flatter land has also been exploited for main communication routes including road, rail and canal. The Vales are consequently landscapes of movement and activity in contrast to the remote ‘empty’ downlands.

## LCT 6 Vales: Key Characteristics

- Underlain by Upper Greensand, Lower Greensand and Clays, with Lower Chalk flanking the Vale sides. Soils vary according to geology, with alluvial deposits lining the watercourses.
- Distinctive low-lying landform, with a level surface in strong contrast with the adjacent higher downs.
- Dominant 'borrowed' landscape of the adjacent high downs.
- Threaded by numerous minor streams draining to the headwaters of the River Avon in Pewsey Vale and River Thames along the northern and eastern edge of the National Landscape.
- A rich, well watered, agricultural landscape comprising fields under both arable and pastoral production.
- Streams, remnant waterside pastures and riparian woodlands provide variety and ecological interest.
- A concentration of compact small towns, clustered villages, hamlets and many dispersed residential and farm buildings.
- Strong recreational routes including promoted footpaths and cycle routes and the Kennet and Avon canal.
- A busy and more settled landscape, with major transport routes, contrasting with the more tranquil downland.

## LCT 6 Vales: Evaluation

### Forces for change

**5.440** The following are identified as forces for change common to the Vales as a whole:

- Localised winter flooding which may change the crop composition or land use.
- Intensification of farming leading to loss of environmental assets particularly drainage and cultivation of permanent pasture, widespread loss of riparian vegetation plus nutrient run off to chalk rivers and streams.
- Potential changes in farming practices including loss of livestock, leading to scrub encroachment as pastures are no longer being grazed.
- An increase in horse paddocks and associated infrastructure changes the land use and character of the grassland landscape.
- Historic loss of hedgerows boundaries and mature hedgerow trees, and poor management of remaining hedgerows.
- Localised intrusion of roads and overhead power lines, which are highly visible in the context of this flat low lying landscape.
- Increased traffic on the rural lane network, plus road improvements including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, in places creates a more urban landscape.
- Development pressures within the villages, diluting the historic settlement form and pattern, and impacting on the character of the villages.
- Development in the setting to the National Landscape including large-scale and / or tall development on the edge of Devizes, Swindon and Goring.
- Views of skyline structures on the adjacent downland scarps, which form prominent boundaries to the Vales.
- The Vales landscapes are susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
  - Deciduous woodlands are facing decline due to warmer winters, altered rainfall patterns, drier summers and increased frequency of extreme events. This may lead to a shift in vegetation type and composition, increased competition from invasive species and greater

numbers of insect and mammal pests. There may also be a greater risk of infection by various soil and water-borne pathogens, and of wind-throw and loss of mature trees.

- Drier summers and wetter winters may lead to increased mortality and die-back of certain hedgerow tree species. An increased occurrence of insect pests and pathogens could lead to a potential loss or significant reduction in populations of key hedgerow tree species; and increased storm activity may lead to the loss of mature and veteran trees within hedgerows.
- Wetter winters may mean woody species in hedgerows are exposed to prolonged flooding in the growing season and will be at risk of dying, and winter trimming will become more difficult due to wet ground (preferred to autumn trimming to ensure food supply for birds).
- Intensification of adjacent land use leading to increased impacts on hedgerows such as pesticide drift and nutrient enrichment. This could impact the health and appearance of the hedgerow network.
- Hotter drier summers and wetter winters and winter flooding could result in changes to wetland and riparian plant community composition; some non-native species may become invasive, and other currently geographically restricted species may spread more easily.
- Wetter winters and higher peak river flows may lead to increased flood defence activity, creating more physical habitat degradation and introducing potentially detracting features.
- Hotter, drier summers and wetter winters will lead to changes in food production and growing seasons, and are likely to cause heat stress to livestock. Flooded land is only capable of supporting lower-value crops, pasture or woodland, which would impact important arable crops. Landscape appearance will likely also be altered, particularly if relocation of growing areas is required or crop diversification occurs (causing a need for changes in field pattern and the potential removal of field margins, hedgerows, woodlands).

## Landscape guidance

- Maintain and enhance waterflows and water quality in the distinctive chalk streams. Where appropriate improve visual and physical access and increasing riparian vegetation and tree cover, and thereby providing additional filtration, flood mitigation, and habitat.

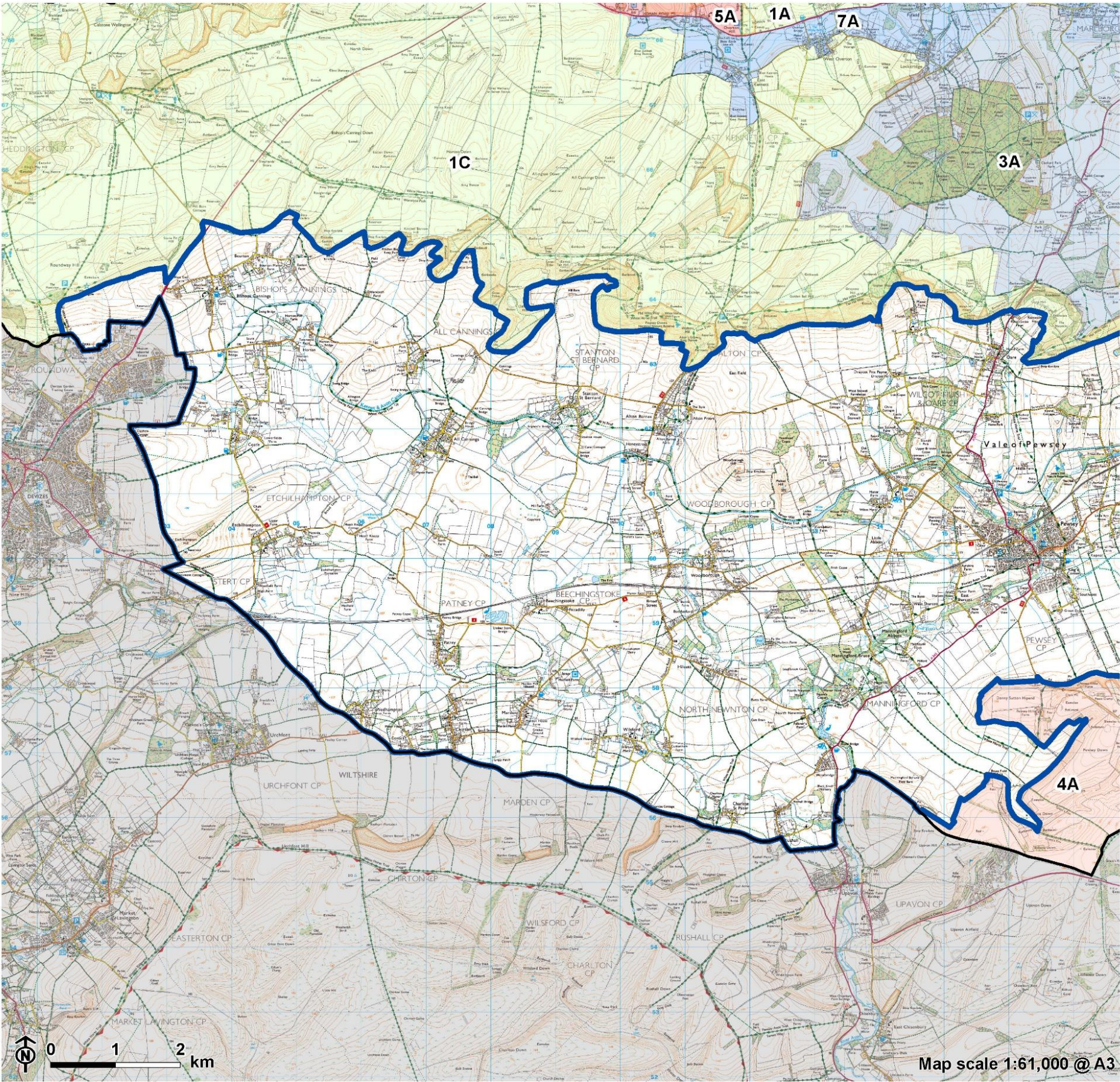
- Connect existing broadleaved woodlands and enhance woodland cover, increasing extent of habitat connectivity where appropriate.
- Manage arable land to benefit landscape character, biodiversity and act as climate change mitigation, by maintaining soil health and minimising erosion and run off through 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.
- Carefully consider applications for further tall structures including telecommunications masts or wind turbines in this open landscape, and applications in adjacent landscapes, including in the setting of the National Landscape, which would be intrusive in views from the Vales.
- 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 6A Vale of Pewsey

**Figure 5.115: Open arable fields with prominent pylon routes**



Figure 5.116: LCA 6A: Vale of Pewsey: Location (west)

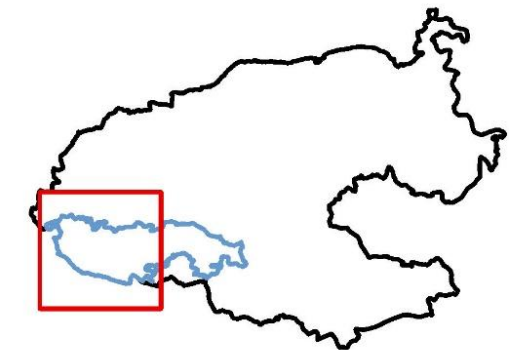


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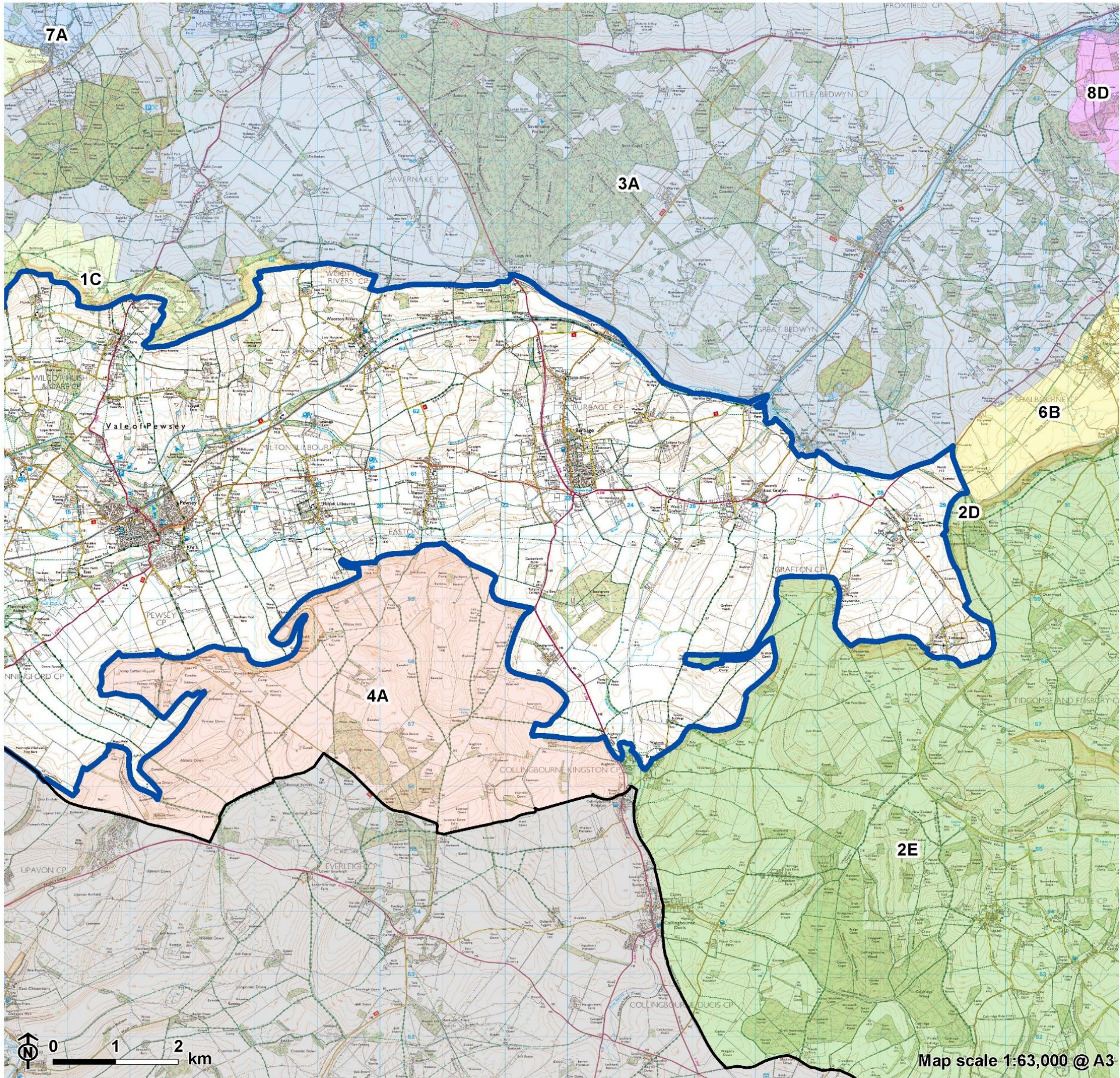
6A: Vale of Pewsey (west)

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Area**
- 6A: Vale of Pewsey
  - 1A: Marlborough Downs
  - 1C: Horton Downs
  - 3A: Savernake Plateau
  - 4A: Salisbury Plain
  - 5A: Avebury Plain
  - 7A: Kennet Valley



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Figure 5.117: LCA 6A: Vale of Pewsey: Location (east)

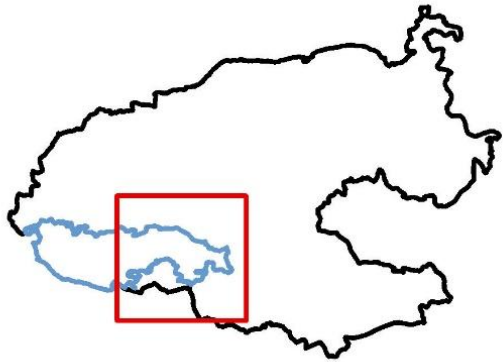


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6A: Vale of Pewsey (east)

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Area
- 6A: Vale of Pewsey
- 1C: Horton Downs
- 2D: Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp
- 2E: Chute Forest - Facombe
- 3A: Savernake Plateau
- 4A: Salisbury Plain
- 6B: Shalbourne Vale
- 7A: Kennet Valley
- 8D: Hungerford Farmland



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**Figure 5.118: Kennet and Avon canal, Honeystreet**



**Figure 5.119: Arable fields with the high downlands in the background**



## LCA 6A Vale of Pewsey: Description

**5.441** The Vale of Pewsey is a clearly defined topographic unit forming a low-lying landscape separating the two chalk upland blocks of Horton Downs (LCA 1C) and Savernake Plateau (LCA 3A) to the north and Salisbury Plain (LCA 4A) to the south. Boundaries are defined topographically and follow contours along the foothills at the base of the steep scarps that rise to the north and south. The western edge is formed by the National Landscape boundary and the eastern boundary at the point where the Vale narrows near Marten forming the separate character area of Shalbourne Vale (LCA 6B).

### Natural Influences

#### Landform, geology, water and soils

**5.442** The Vale of Pewsey forms a broad low-lying landscape within the two main chalk upland blocks. It is contained and enclosed by dramatic stark scarp slopes to either side, which juxtaposed with the low almost flat Plain, have an exaggerated elevation creating a very distinctive skyline particularly along the northern edge.

**5.443** Upper Greensand forms the flat base of the Vale, with small areas of Gault Clay revealed on the western edge. The meandering tributaries and headwaters of the Avon have deposited bands of alluvium, producing rich soils in the eastern part of the character area, with the remainder of the floor covered by deep well drained loamy soils. On the flanks of the Vale the landform rises as a series of low undulating foothills of Lower Chalk, such as at Woodborough Hill, and the Knoll near Allington. These gradually grade down to the flatter floor of the central part of the Vale, although isolated outliers of the Lower Chalk form distinctive 'stranded' hills. The Salisbury Avon and its network of shallow tributaries drain the whole Vale. Further south at Upavon, the valley of the Avon forms a distinct character area in its own right, but within the National Landscape its headwaters are assimilated within the wider low-lying Vale landscape.

**5.444** A network of water channels weave across the flat Vale floor and are lined by riparian vegetation with linear strips of alder and willow, creating a distinct and attractive local landscape character. The Kennet and Avon Canal is also an important water corridor in the Vale, with its own distinct character.

## Biodiversity

**5.445** Woodland cover is generally sparse, apart from the deciduous woods that line the River Avon and its tributaries around Manningford creating a more enclosed intimate character along this part of the river.

**5.446** The River Avon system is by far the most important feature of this area in terms of ecological value. The high quality of its clear, fast flowing water over chalk has resulted in extremely rich plant and animal communities. The river and its associated wetland habitats, including calcareous valley mire, contain two SSSIs (Avon River systems SSSI and Jones's Mill SSSI). These together with two further SSSIs outside the National Landscape are part of the River Avon SAC.

**5.447** Jones's Mill SSSI provides the best example of calcareous valley mire in Wiltshire, and supports a good range of wetland plants. Many of these wetland species are rare in the county including bottle sedge (*Carex rostrata*), bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) and bog pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*).

## Cultural Influences

### Land use and field patterns

**5.448** Landcover varies considerably with the low undulating foothills typically under arable cultivation. Large fields with limited enclosure create a very open landscape reminiscent of the chalk uplands. Towards the core of the Vale the farmland is a rich mix of pasture along tributaries with arable fields enclosed by hedgerows and woodlands characteristically surrounding the settlements. Throughout much of the area the hedgerow structure is weak with boundaries largely replaced by fencing and there are few hedgerow trees.

**5.449** Medieval landscape features include a moated site at Marten, lynchets and field systems, such as those on Woodborough Hill. Some of the few more sinuous field boundaries may have medieval origins. The woods around Manningford Bruce and Manningford Abbots show some signs of assarting, perhaps in the late medieval or early post-medieval periods.

**5.450** Most of the field boundaries in the area are straight and regular and probably reflect formal Parliamentary enclosure in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.

## Historic features

**5.451** Generally, the intensive land use within the Vale means that archaeological evidence is limited compared to the adjacent chalk uplands. Evidence of late Neolithic and early Bronze Age activity includes the henge enclosure at Marden. There are some Bronze Age round barrows within the area, mostly isolated examples on ridges and hilltops, such as Swanborough Tump. Near Alton Barnes, a roughly north-south stretch of the Ridgeway survives passing up the scarp edge between Walkers Hill and Knap Hill. The line of the Romano-British road from Cunetio (Mildenhall) to Leucomagus (Andover), which crosses the Vale just to the east of the village of Wilton, is preserved in the present-day road pattern.

**5.452** Conock Manor Registered Park and Garden is the only designated designed landscape within the LCA. The estate is of Medieval origin with 17<sup>th</sup> century parklands surrounding two manor houses. The Civil War Battle of Roundway Down in 1643 was fought in the west of the LCA, on the slopes surrounding Roundway Hill (in LCA 1C Horton Downs).

**5.453** Early modern features include the Kennet and Avon Canal and associated industrial archaeology including Crofton pumping station. Settlements such as Pewsey Wharf also contain buildings associated with the canal.

## Settlement pattern

**5.454** The Vale is the most densely settled character area within the National Landscape, with a great variety of settlements. There are numerous small nucleated villages and hamlets scattered at a high density through the Vale including the springline settlement on the northern foothills of Bishops Canning, Allington, Stanton St. Bernard and Alton Barnes. To the south the foothill villages of Wedhampton, Wilsford, Patney Chirton, Marden and Charlton have a looser linear character. Other notable settlements include those that have developed alongside the canal such as at Honeystreet and Wootton Rivers and the chain of attractive villages, the Manningsfords, along the River Avon. Villages such as Coate and All Cannings are laid out in a typical medieval manner, with plot boundaries arranged on either side of central streets.

**5.455** Dominant building materials are soft red brick and flint, often used in decorative styles, with other materials including limestone, sarsen, cob and timber frame, with roofs of straw thatch or clay tile.

## Principal settlements

**5.456 Pewsey** is the principal settlement, lying in the centre of the Vale of Pewsey. The village was centred around the High Street, Church Street, River Street and North Street, now covered by a Conservation Area. Timber framing and thatched roofs are common. The Kennet and Avon Canal just to the north of Pewsey opened in 1810 enhancing trade and transportation links. This was followed by the Berkshire to Hampshire railway line in 1862 which allowed fast travel to London. The transport links on the northern edge of the village facilitated the expansion of the village during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the former Pewsey hospital site was redeveloped for housing, resulting in the village expanding north of the railway line.

**Figure 5.120: Pewsey village centre with statue of King Alfred the Great**



**5.457** Pewsey sits in the vale on the headwaters of the River Avon. The vale is a broad valley, which is backdropped by steep chalk escarpments to the north and south. There is intervisibility between the village and the dramatic backdrop of the chalk escarpments. The escarpments provide a sense of enclosure and containment to the otherwise large-scale vale landscape.

**Figure 5.121: Views across Pewsey from Pewsey Hill to the south**

**5.458 Burbage** is a large village formed of a string of historic hamlets associated with the Savernake Estate just north of the village. Burbage has incorporated the hamlets of Stibb Green, Burbage and Marr Green running north-south, and Westcourt and Eastcourt to the east and west. The coalescence of these small settlements is apparent in the architectural character along the High Street as small clusters of traditional timber frame and thatch buildings are separated by infill of more modern red brick houses. The High Street is often sunken as it climbs up towards Stibb Green with high grass banks and mature hedges on either side creating a sense of enclosure. The village contains two Conservation Areas focused on the High Street and around the Grade II\* listed Church of All Saints at Eastcourt. The village is very well connected to the wider countryside through footpaths that radiate out from its centre linking north to the nearby Mid Wilts Way long distance trail which follows the route of the Kennet and Avon Canal.

**Figure 5.122: View along Eastcourt in Burbage**

**5.459** Burbage is positioned on the historic route between Salisbury and Marlborough, although the village is now bypassed by the A346. The village is located on a ridge of higher ground between the Marlborough Downs to the north and the Hampshire Downs to the south. There are views from Burbage to the neighbouring Savernake Forest, which contrast with the more open and rolling topography of the vale.

**Figure 5.123: Arable fields with mature oak hedgerow trees outside Burbage**

## Communications and infrastructure

**5.460** The flatter vale has been exploited for main communication routes including roads linking Devizes, Pewsey and Hungerford. The Kennet and Avon canal and Great Western Railway cross east-west through the centre of the vale, following the natural course of the River Avon. These corridors of movement form dominant features within the landscape.

**5.461** A network of minor roads provides internal access to the vale. A number of public rights of way cross the LCA, including the promoted routes the White Horse Trail and Mid Wilts Way, which both follow the Kennet and Avon canal in places. The Kennet and Avon Canal provides opportunities for cycling, fishing, camping, canoeing and boat trips, while the towpath provides a recreational route between Reading and Bath.

**5.462** Overhead electricity lines cross the south of the vale and are conspicuous tall structures in the otherwise flat and open landscape.

## Perceptual Influences

**5.463** Throughout the area the 'borrowed' landscape of the surrounding scarps, which tower above the vale to the north and south side create a dominant backdrop. Where hedgerows have been removed, there are long open views across the vale and towards the chalk downs. Pylons in the south of the vale can be visually intrusive in these open views.

**5.464** The vale has a good experience of dark night skies, with pockets of light pollution around Pewsey and Burbage, and close to Devizes. On the vale floor vast tracts of flat farmland remain undisturbed between the roads and these areas consequently have a strong sense of remoteness.

## LCA 6A Vale of Pewsey: Evaluation

### Vale of Pewsey valued qualities

**5.465** The key valued qualities identified for LCA 6A Vale of Pewsey are:

- A distinctive broad, low-lying vale landscape, enclosed by dramatic chalk escarpments to the north and south, which forms a clear sense of place.
- The River Avon and its wetland and riparian habitats are internationally and nationally designated and form an important feature within the vale landscape.
- The mixture of rich pasture, arable fields, hedgerows and woodlands creates a distinctive land use mosaic.
- Historic settlement pattern and historic villages creates a sense of time-depth, with a local vernacular of red brick, flint, timber frame and thatch or clay tile roofs.
- Strong transport links along the Avon and Kennet canal and railway line, set within the Avon valley.
- Recreational access along public rights of way and the canal towpath.
- Often remote character with strong sense of tranquillity and good experience of dark night skies.

### Vale of Pewsey local forces for change/issues

**5.466** In addition to the forces for change set out at the LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 6A Vale of Pewsey are:

- Changes in water management at the River Avon and Avon-Kennet canal to allow storage within the catchment, and changes in agricultural practices to limit fertiliser runoff.
- A small area of overhead line is being undergrounded north-east of Devizes, as part of the North Wessex Downs Visual Impact Provision project, funded by National Grid. This will provide positive change to reduce the visual impact of existing high voltage power lines.
- Pressure for development on the edge of Devizes, which could affect the setting of the National Landscape.

- Network Rail is exploring the potential for a new Devizes Gateway railway station. Initial high-level locational analysis indicates that a suitable site would be within the National Landscape.

### **Vale of Pewsey strategy and local guidelines**

**5.467** In addition to the guidelines set out for the Vales LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Vale of Pewsey:

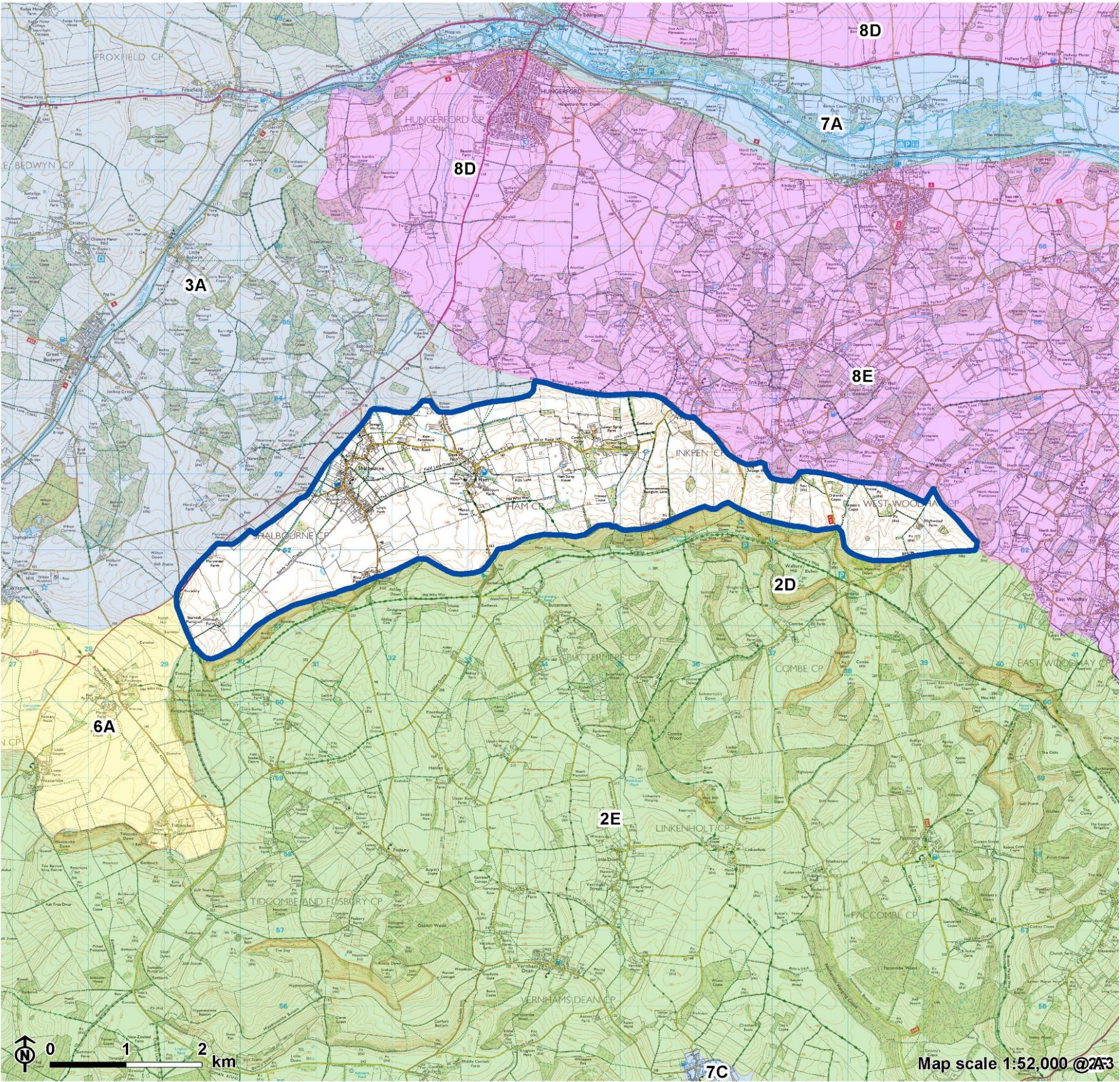
- Carefully consider intervisibility with the Vale of Pewsey when designing any new development on the edge of Devizes. Ensure tall buildings are not positioned in dominant positions where they could dominate the Vale of Pewsey.
- Any new railway station at Devizes Gateway should ensure that the associated infrastructure including car parks is kept to a minimum. Any lighting should also be minimised to retain the dark night skies associated with the Vale.

## LCA 6B: Shalbourne Vale

**Figure 5.124: Open arable fields backdropped by the Walbury scarp**



Figure 5.125: LCA 6B: Shalbourne Vale: Location

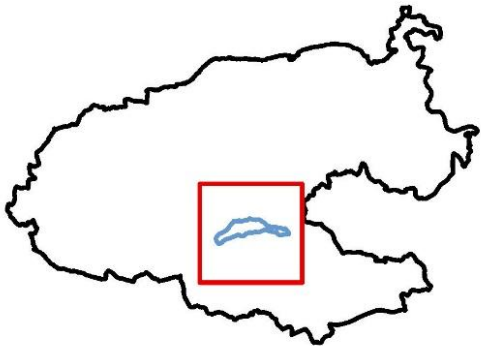


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6B: Shalbourne Vale

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape  
Landscape Character Area
- 6B: Shalbourne Vale
  - 2D: Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp
  - 2E: Chute Forest - Faccombe
  - 2F: Litchfield Downs
  - 3A: Savernake Plateau
  - 6A: Vale of Pewsey
  - 7A: Kennet Valley
  - 7C: Bourne Valley
  - 8C: Wickham Wooded Heath
  - 8D: Hungerford Farmland
  - 8E: Highclere Parklands



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**Figure 5.126: Gallows Down forms a backdrop to open arable fields**



**Figure 5.127: Ham village with vernacular of thatch roofs**



## LCA 6B: Shalbourne Vale Description

**5.468** Shalbourne Vale is the eastern extension of the wider Vale of Pewsey (LCA 6A), forming a narrow undulating belt of land, underlain by Greensand. It is contained between the two chalk upland belts of Savernake Plateau (LCA 3A) to the north and the Walbury Hill - Watership Down scarp slope (LCA 2D) to the south. It extends westward to the lowland landscapes of Highclere Lowlands and Heath (8E), with the boundary formed at the point where the geology changes and the landscape becomes more densely wooded around Inkpen.

### Natural Influences

#### Landform, geology, water and soils

**5.469** Shalbourne Vale forms an eastward extension of the Vale of Pewsey. Geologically the area is very similar to the Vale of Pewsey, with Upper Greensand forming an undulating base to the Vale, with a thin band of Lower Clay extending around the edge of the Vale, as the boundary with the higher chalk uplands. The clays and alluvium, however, are absent creating lighter sandy soils.

**5.470** The landform is much more enclosed than the Vale of Pewsey with a narrow, undulating floor enclosed by the steep scarp of River Down and Inkpen Hill to the south and a gentler slope rising to Savernake Plateau in the north. The contours rise gradually to the west, with the Vale drained by small streams running to the north into the River Kennet, whereas the Vale of Pewsey drains to the Salisbury Avon system. The western part of the Vale is therefore the catchment divide. To the south-east the rising undulating topography merges with the Lower Chalk foothills forming the escarpment below Walbury Hill.

#### Biodiversity

**5.471** Woodland cover is very sparse apart from some small mixed copses east of Ham and a distinctive area of parkland with mature parkland trees set in pasture around Ham Spray House. However, the hedgerows and abundance of mature hedgerow trees which line the lanes and roads help create a more wooded character, as do the views to the surrounding wooded scarp slopes for example at Ham Hill and Inkpen Hill. Tree species including oak and birch indicate the lighter sandy soils present within this character area.

**5.472** The streams that drain the Vale are very small scale and not generally important features of the landscape, although watercress beds are present at Shalbourne.

## Cultural Influences

### Land use and field patterns

**5.473** The Vale floor is predominantly under pasture, with some arable cultivation in medium to large fields, divided by mature hedgerows. Field boundaries vary from intact to those with a weaker structure.

**5.474** Most of the field boundaries are straight and regular, reflecting 20<sup>th</sup> century reorganisation. Some of the few more sinuous field boundaries in the east may have medieval origins.

### Historic features

**5.475** The only Scheduled Monument within this landscape is a section of Wansdyke in the north. This earthwork is believed to be the boundary marker between Wessex and Mercia. It was in place by the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century and may date from an earlier period.

**5.476** Small estates and parklands are found at Inkpen House and Ham Spray House. Inkpen House is a Grade II\* Registered Park and Garden, dating from the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century. It takes advantage of long views south towards Inkpen Hill (LCA 2D). Other historic features within this landscape are limited to listed buildings within the historic villages of Shalbourne and Ham.

### Settlement pattern

**5.477** Shalbourne and Ham are both loose linear settlements, laid out in a typical medieval manner, with plot boundaries arranged on either side of central streets. Elsewhere, settlement is very limited, with just a handful of farms present.

### Principal settlement

**5.478 Shalbourne** has a loose linear settlement pattern based on its medieval layout, which largely follows the meandering Kingston Road. The majority of the village is covered by a Conservation Area. The Grade II\* Church of St Michael and All Angels lies in the north of the village and Westcourt Farmhouse and Shalbourne Manor Farmhouse both in the south. The village retains its historic form, with a small area of modern housing at Little Mead off Rival Road.

**Figure 5.128: Historic buildings in Shalbourne**

**5.479** Small watercourses run along the north-western edge of the village and provide a view of lush riparian vegetation. The strips of woodland and vegetation of willow and alder are interspersed by a patchwork of small pastoral fields. To the south, east and west the village lies within a more productive arable landscape. The wooded scarp (LCA 2D Walbury Hill – Watership Down Scarp) provides a distinctive backdrop in views to the south. The village is well connected by public rights of way, including links to the Mid Wilts Way long distance trail.

**Figure 5.129: Looking east over Shalbourne from Savernake Plateau towards Ham**



### Communications and infrastructure

**5.480** Minor roads run north-south across the Vale and connect Shalbourne and Ham. The LCA has a few public rights of way, including the promoted Mid Wiltshire Way, however many areas are not publicly accessible.

### Perceptual Influences

**5.481** The LCA has a distinct character as a result of its narrow linear form, creating more enclosure and containment than the Vale of Pewsey to the west. The limited settlement and access creates a tranquil character, with good experience of dark night skies.

**5.482** The prehistoric earthworks on the scarp edge to the south are prominent features in views, including Walbury Hill fort on Inkpen Hill and several isolated Bronze Age round barrows.

**5.483** Ham Spray House has important connections to the Bloomsbury Group, after artists Dora Carrington, Ralph Partridge and writer Lytton Strachey moved to the house in 1924. Carrington wrote a number of her books at the house.

## LCA 6B Shalbourne Vale: Evaluation

### Shalbourne Vale valued qualities

**5.484** The key valued qualities identified for LCA 6B Shalbourne Vale are:

- Narrow, undulating vale enclosed by the Savernake Plateau to the north and Inkpen Hill to the south creates an enclosed, secluded landscape.
- Mature hedgerows and hedgerow trees line the rural roads and create a wooded character, increasing the sense of enclosure.
- Limited settlement pattern, concentrated at the Medieval villages of Shalbourne and Ham, providing time-depth.
- Parklands and small woodland features at Inkpen House and Ham Spray House also provide a sense of time-depth.
- The prehistoric monuments at Inken Hill provide an important backdrop to views.
- Tranquil, rural character due to the limited settlement pattern and access, with a good experience of dark night skies.

### Shalbourne Vale local forces for change/issues

**5.485** In addition to the forces for change identified at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 6B Shalbourne Vale are:

- Localised intrusion of the A338, which runs along a slope above the Vale floor.
- Vulnerability to the impact of changes on the surrounding steep scarp slopes to the south, including the erection of tall structures on the scarp top.

### Shalbourne Vale strategy and local guidelines

**5.486** In addition to the guidelines set out for the Vales LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Shalbourne Vale:

- Ensure appropriate hedgerow management is in place, including a regime of hedgerow tree planting, to retain the wooded character they create.
- Retain the medieval settlement pattern of Shalbourne and Ham.

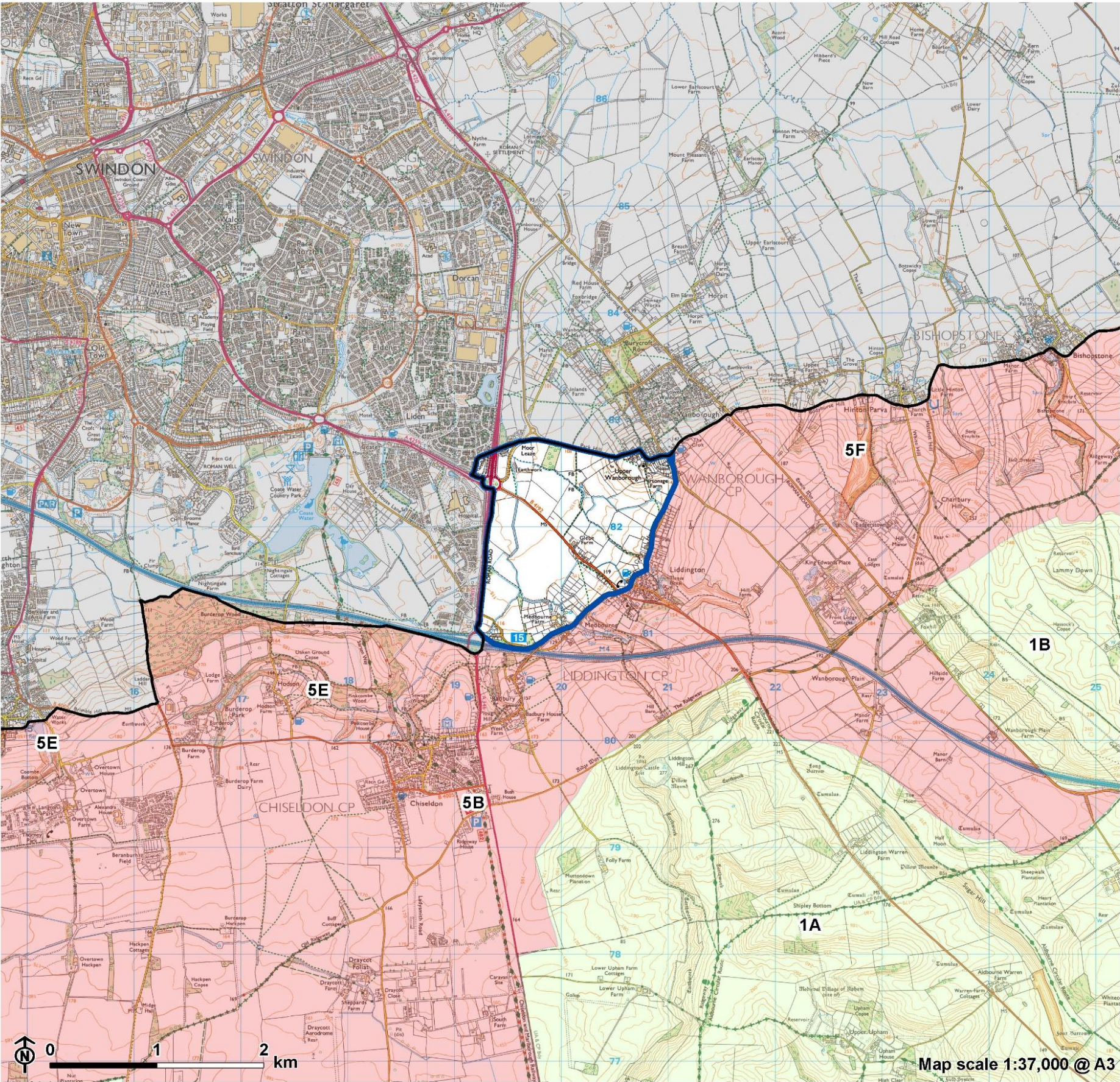
- The clear skies and backdrop of the surrounding downland slopes should be maintained. Carefully consider the impact of any tall structures on the scarp in views from Shalbourne Vale.
- Conserve and enhance the rural, secluded character of Shalbourne Vale.

## LCA 6C: Wanborough Vale

**Figure 5.130: Flat Wanborough Vale with wooded scarp behind**



Figure 5.131: LCA 6C: Wanborough Vale: Location

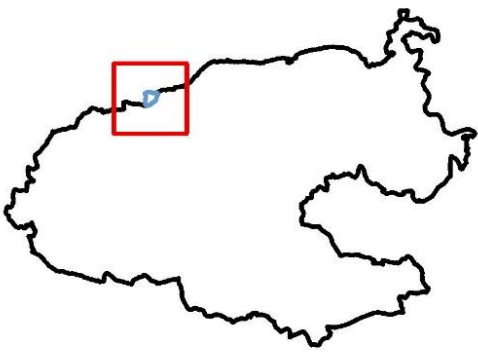


North Wessex Downs  
Landscape Character Assessment  
North Wessex Downs National Landscape



6C: Wanborough Vale

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



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**Figure 5.132: Badbury Park and the Great Western Hospital across the flat vale**



**Figure 5.133: Barbury Castle forms a strong backdrop to the vale**



## LCA 6C: Wanborough Vale Description

**5.487** The National Landscape boundary includes a very small part of the wider lower lying Vale landscape that continues to the north of the National Landscape and east of Swindon as the Vale of White Horse. This is therefore a small LCA, with the boundaries of the National Landscape forming the northern and western boundaries, extending to the edge of the Swindon urban area at Coate. The base of the scarp forms the eastern and southern boundaries (LCA 5F and 5E).

### Natural Influences

#### Landform, geology, water and soils

**5.488** Gault Clay, producing heavy clay soils, underlies the main part of the Vale, with Lower Greensand occurring at the base of the scarp. Topographically, the area is almost entirely level, lying around 110 metres AOD. A hill leading to Upper Wanborough in the north-east is the only topographic variation within the LCA. It is drained by streams rising on the scarp and draining northwards forming the headwaters of the River Cole.

**5.489** Wanborough Vale forms part of the much wider lower lying Vale landscape that extends to the north of the National Landscape.

#### Biodiversity

**5.490** The area possesses many of the characteristics of the wider Vale with tree and shrub-lined streams and ditches draining to the River Cole through a mixed pasture and arable landscape. Small areas of deciduous and coniferous woodland remain on the edges of the LCA, however few priority habitats are recorded.

### Cultural Influences

#### Land use and field patterns

**5.491** The majority of the area is under arable cultivation, with horse grazing around Medbourne Farm in the south. Fields are medium scale and bounded by a network of hedgerows, with abundant hedgerow trees. This area is dominated by the pattern of Parliamentary enclosure fields dating from the late eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.

## Historic features

**5.492** Intensive arable land use means that there is little extant archaeology. The villages of Liddington (on the scarp slope) and Wanborough (outside the National Landscape) date to at least the medieval period, and their Conservation Areas extend into the Wanborough Vale. An isolated milestone on the B4192 is the only listed building outside of the villages.

## Settlement pattern

**5.493** Liddington and Upper Wanborough are springline villages, located where water courses emerge from the chalk scarp. Outside of these villages settlement is limited to ribbon development along the B4192 and Ham Road, and farmsteads. There is a small cul-de-sac in the south-west, which dis out of character with the springline settlement pattern.

## Communications and infrastructure

**5.494** The area is heavily influenced by the surrounding road network. The main M4 Swindon junction forms the south-west corner, and the straight A346, following the route of a Roman road, cuts the western edge. There are some public rights of way which connect the minor road network and the settlements.

## Perceptual Influences

**5.495** This landscape has a distinct 'urban fringe' character, with the surrounding road network being a dominant influence. The proximity of the road network and Swindon results in limited experience of dark night skies and limited tranquillity.

**5.496** The rising scarp slope to the south (LCA 5F: Liddington- Letcombe Open Scarp) forms an important backdrop in views. Views are often open across the flat fields. The edge of Swindon and the recent expansion of the Great Western Hospital are dominant features in views to the north-west. Some areas of enclosure are provided by roadside vegetation.

**5.497** The vale landscape forms an important area of open land between the base of the scarp slope and the urban edge of Swindon. The area is wholly visible from the surrounding road network.

## LCA 6C Wanborough Vale: Evaluation

### Wanborough Vale valued qualities

**5.498** The key valued qualities identified for LCA 6C Wanborough Vale are:

- Flat vale landscape which contrasts with the rising scarp landscape to the south and east.
- Small streams rising on the scarp and draining northwards are lined by riparian vegetation, providing ecological corridors and visual interest in the landscape.
- Hedgerows, hedgerow trees and roadside vegetation combine to provide a partially wooded character.
- Limited settlement pattern and large-scale fields provide an undeveloped landscape between the scarp slope and the expanding urban edge of Swindon.

### Wanborough Vale local forces for change/issues

**5.499** In addition to the forces for change identified at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 6C Wanborough Vale are:

- Construction of Badbury Park to the west of the A419 has brought the settlement edge of Swindon closer to this LCA.
- The new Swindon Eastern Villages may be visible from this landscape and would contribute further to the urban fringe character on the edge of Swindon.
- The large road network has a dominant influence on the landscape.

### Wanborough Vale strategy and local guidelines

**5.500** In addition to the guidelines set out for the Vales LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Wanborough Vale:

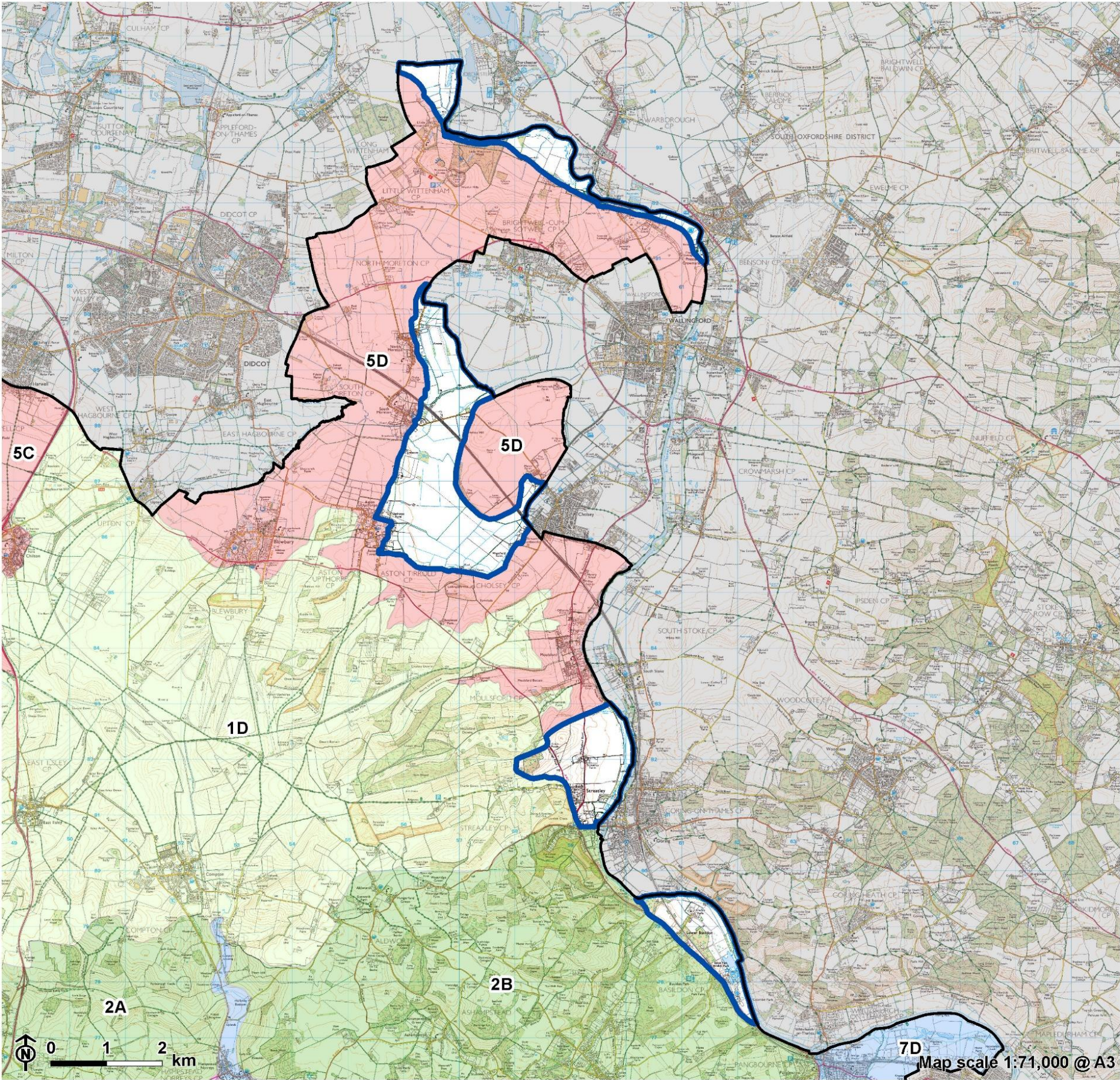
- Maintain an open agricultural landscape within this LCA, to provide a buffer between the expanding urban edge of Swindon and the scarp slope.
- Carefully consider the impact of development within the vale on views from the scarp. Reduce the visual impact of large / tall structures by using an appropriate colour palette.

## LCA 6D: Thames Floodplain

**Figure 5.134: Open arable fields looking towards Chiltern chalk escarpment**



Figure 5.135: LCA 6D: Thames Floodplain: Location

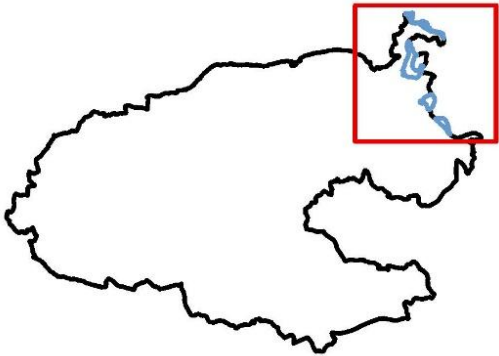


North Wessex Downs  
Landscape Character Assessment  
North Wessex Downs National Landscape



6D: Thames Floodplain

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Area**
- 6D: Thames Floodplain
- 1D: Blewbury Downs
- 2A: Brightwalton Downs
- 2B: Ashampstead Downs
- 5C: Hendred Plain
- 5D: Moreton Plain
- 5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp
- 7D: Pang Valley
- 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons



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**Figure 5.136: Arable fields with All Saints North Moreton in the background**



**Figure 5.137: River Thames at Streatley**



## LCA 6D: Thames Floodplain Description

**5.501** The eastern boundary of the National Landscape takes in a number of small low lying Vale landscapes that form part of the Thames Valley Floodplain. The river roughly follows the eastern edge of the National Landscape between Benson and Pangbourne. The Thames Valley itself is a major physical feature separating the chalk landscape of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape to the west from the Chilterns National Landscape to the east. This LCA is in four geographically separate areas by the National Landscape boundary. These are very small individual areas, with a landscape character that has much in common with the wider National Character Area Upper Thames Clay Vales (108) that extends beyond the National Landscape. The four areas are:

- Benson in the north-west;
- Moreton on the floodplain to the west of Wallingford;
- Streatley in the east; and
- Basildon on the eastern edge.

**5.502** A smaller area of the Thames valley around Pangbourne is included in the Pang Valley character area (LCA 7D).

### Natural Influences

#### Landform, geology, water and soils

**5.503** The Thames Valley is a major physical feature separating the two chalk upland blocks of the North Wessex Downs and the Chilterns. The river runs within a level floodplain, which narrows between steep wooded slopes at Goring Gap on the eastern edge of the National Landscape. The valley floor, which cuts into the chalk is overlain by gravel deposits and alluvium, with clays underlying the wider floodplain around North and South Moreton. It is a flat low-lying landscape generally below the 50 metre contour.

**5.504** The River Thames meanders within a wide floodplain contained by chalk escarpments in the north and south, around Benson, Streatley and Basildon. The National Landscape includes the course of the river and its adjacent floodplain to the south and west. The Moreton area forms part of the wider Thames floodplain which extends west from Wallingford (outside the National Landscape). It does not include the course of the river itself, but is crossed by

numerous tributary watercourses with streams, such as Mill Brook, flowing to the Thames.

**5.505** The distinct flat and low-lying landforms within this LCA lie between the smoothly rounded chalk hills, including Sinodun Hills to the north, Blewbury Downs to the south and west, and Ashampstead downs to the west.

### Biodiversity

**5.506** The bank of the River Thames contains sinuous belts of broadleaved woodland that curve inside the meanders. A small number are reocreded as priority habitat deciduous woodland, and there are areas of traditional orchard at farmsteads.

**5.507** A number of small wet grassland meadow sites are found adjacent to the River Thames, some designated as Local Wildlife Sites.

### Cultural Influences

#### Land use and field patterns

**5.508** Land use comprises arable and pasture fields, bounded by hedges and ditches lined with willow, alder and poplar. The majority of fields around Basildon in the south are in pasture use, with mixed arable and pasture at Benson in the north. The landscape at Moreton and Streatley is under arable cultivation. Around Moreton a network of water-filled drainage ditches subdivide the landscape in a regular rectilinear pattern. The thin lines of trees and shrubs along the ditches provide some landscape structure. Hedgerows bounding the fields are sparse and generally weak in structure with few hedgerow trees.

**5.509** The predominant field pattern is of large-scale regular fields, characteristic of formal eighteenth and nineteenth century enclosure. In many places these have been reorganised and amalgamated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Historic features

**5.510** There are numerous traces of prehistoric occupation in the area, but these take the form of cropmarks that form readily on the well-drained gravels of the Thames floodplain. The gravels themselves have produced evidence for Palaeolithic occupation in the area, including stone tools and animal remains of now extinct species. They also include evidence for late prehistoric (late Neolithic cursus and round barrows) and Romano-British features - today these

can only be discerned on air photographs. A handful of the farmsteads are recorded as listed buildings,

### Settlement pattern

**5.511** The vale is largely unsettled. Exceptions include Lower Basildon and a post-war development on the edge of Streatley between Wantage Road and Wallingford Road. The villages of North and South Moreton and Aston Upthorpe/Aston Tirrold are located on isolated pockets of higher ground (in adjacent LCA 5D), although the Conservation Areas of the Astons and North Moreton extend onto the vale.

### Communications and infrastructure

**5.512** The Great Western Main Line railway crosses east-west through the area, connecting Reading and Didcot. The A417 and A329 leading out of Streatley are the only major roads within the Thames floodplain. An overhead electricity line crosses the Moreton area, adding vertical elements to a largely flat landscape.

**5.513** The Thames Path National Trail runs along the northern side of the Thames, with recreational facilities and boat hire at Benson. To the south the floodplain and river are less accessible. Beale Park Wildlife Park in the south is a popular site for recreation,

### Perceptual Influences

**5.514** The large fields, limited access, including severance by the railway, and absence of settlement generally creates a remote and isolated landscape. A more enclosed character is created at Basildon by a parkland landscape with mature trees around Church Farm and the steep wooded cliffs on the west bank of the Thames.

**5.515** The generally open landscape has expansive views, including intervisibility with Wittenham Clumps on the Sinodun Hills in the north and the chalk escarpments both within the North Wessex Downs and in the Chilterns to the east.

**5.516** There is generally a good experience of dark night skies and tranquillity across the Thames floodplain, although proximity to Goring-on-Thames and Cholsey creates some light pollution.

## LCA 6D Thames Floodplain: Evaluation

### Thames Floodplain valued qualities

**5.517** The key valued qualities identified for LCA 6D Thames Floodplain are:

- Floodplain landscape which contrasts with the surrounding higher ground of both the North Wessex Downs and Chilterns National Landscapes.
- The River Thames and its small tributaries are defining features of the landscape, providing a sense of place.
- Riverside pasture and riparian vegetation provide structure in an open landscape, as well as important habitats.
- The Thames is a nationally famous landscape and provides strong recreational opportunities.
- Limited access and settlement results in a remote and often isolated character.

### Thames Floodplain local forces for change/issues

**5.518** In addition to the forces for change at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 6D Thames Floodplain are:

- 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 LCA, landscape/access/habitats
- Vulnerable to the impact of changes on the surrounding steep slopes of the adjacent chalk downs.

### Thames Floodplain strategy and local guidelines

**5.519** In addition to the guidelines set out for the Vales LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Thames Floodplain:

- Enhance and restore waterside pasture and riparian vegetation along the River Thames and its minor tributaries.

- Take up opportunities for landscape-scale enhancement through the Mend the Gap programme.
- Maintain the valued recreational use of the landscape, and consider opportunities to introduce additional connectivity between public rights of way, particularly along the riverbank and across the railway line.