

Planning & Development



Overview:

- The sense of remoteness and tranquillity that comes from an undeveloped and rural quality with only limited human intervention, containing typically modest villages with distinctive and ancient settlement patterns.
- The Open Downlands, Downland with Woodland and High Chalk Plateau areas are generally very sparsely populated, containing scattered isolated farms, equestrian establishments or small hamlets sheltering in the dry valleys and folds of the chalk upland.
- Wooded Plateau contains a distinct pattern of settlement comprising a remote, largely uninhabited western plateau, smaller settlements such as Froxfield and a concentration of villages in the east of the area, in the valley of the River Dun.
- In the Downs Plain and Scarp character area, attractive spring-line villages cluster along the base of the northern ridge or along the valley of Avebury Plain. 20th century military installations, including Wroughton Airfield and a First World War camp near Draycot Foliat, are dominant and defining features of the area.
- The Vales are settled landscapes with a concentration of compact small towns, clustered villages, hamlets and many dispersed residential and farm buildings, while the River Valleys display a concentration of nucleated and linear settlement including tiny hamlets clustered around a church, many small villages and market towns.
- The Lowland Mosaic remains one of the most densely settled landscape types, with a diverse range of settlements ranging from large manor houses and villages and numerous hamlets and lines of houses along the roads and lanes.
- Distinctive architectural styles that vary throughout the North Wessex Downs but within specific areas create a sense of place and vernacular local character due to the availability of local building materials and traditional building styles. These include traditional knapped flint and brick, timber-framed farm buildings, thatched and tiled roofs, use of sarsen stone, blue flint and tile and clunch and cobb walls.
- Dark Skies add to the beauty, tranquillity and sense of remoteness of a place that connects all landscapes. In the North Wessex Downs you can find areas as dark as any in the country. Looking up at a starry sky or across a moonlit landscape in this special place is a memorable and magical experience ¹.
- A sparse and intimate road network connecting settlements and landscape, but there is good access from a number of economically significant towns such as Swindon, Andover, Whitchurch, Basingstoke, Reading, Devizes, Newbury and Didcot, resulting in an economy that is largely outward looking towards these boundary towns and beyond.
- Within the North Wessex Downs, the traditional land-based and rural economy contrasts with a growing high-tech and creative sector.

¹ *Dark Skies of the North Wessex Downs – a guide to good external lighting*

“Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.”

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY
FRAMEWORK, 2024



8.1 The North Wessex Downs is a sparsely populated landscape with a population density of 59 residents per square km across the National Landscape². The open, largely uninhabited downlands retain a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity, a very special perceptual characteristic within this otherwise densely populated part of southern England. Attractive villages nestle in the river valleys of the Pang, Bourne, Kennet and Lambourn and cluster in the low-lying land to the east of the National Landscape. The quality of this valued landscape makes strong direct and indirect contributions to the wider regional economy.

8.2 Despite the relatively low population density, there are development pressures on the North Wessex Downs. This is due to its location within south east England and its proximity to London, which makes it an attractive place to live, work and visit. There is a need to manage these pressures with sensitivity both within and in the setting of the National Landscape in order to maintain economic and social viability whilst retaining the character of the North Wessex Downs. Communities need to be economically viable and have adequate housing, amenities and facilities, and longstanding guidance states that “Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of economic and social development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.”³ However, the primary purpose of the designation – to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape – needs to be paramount when considering such issues.

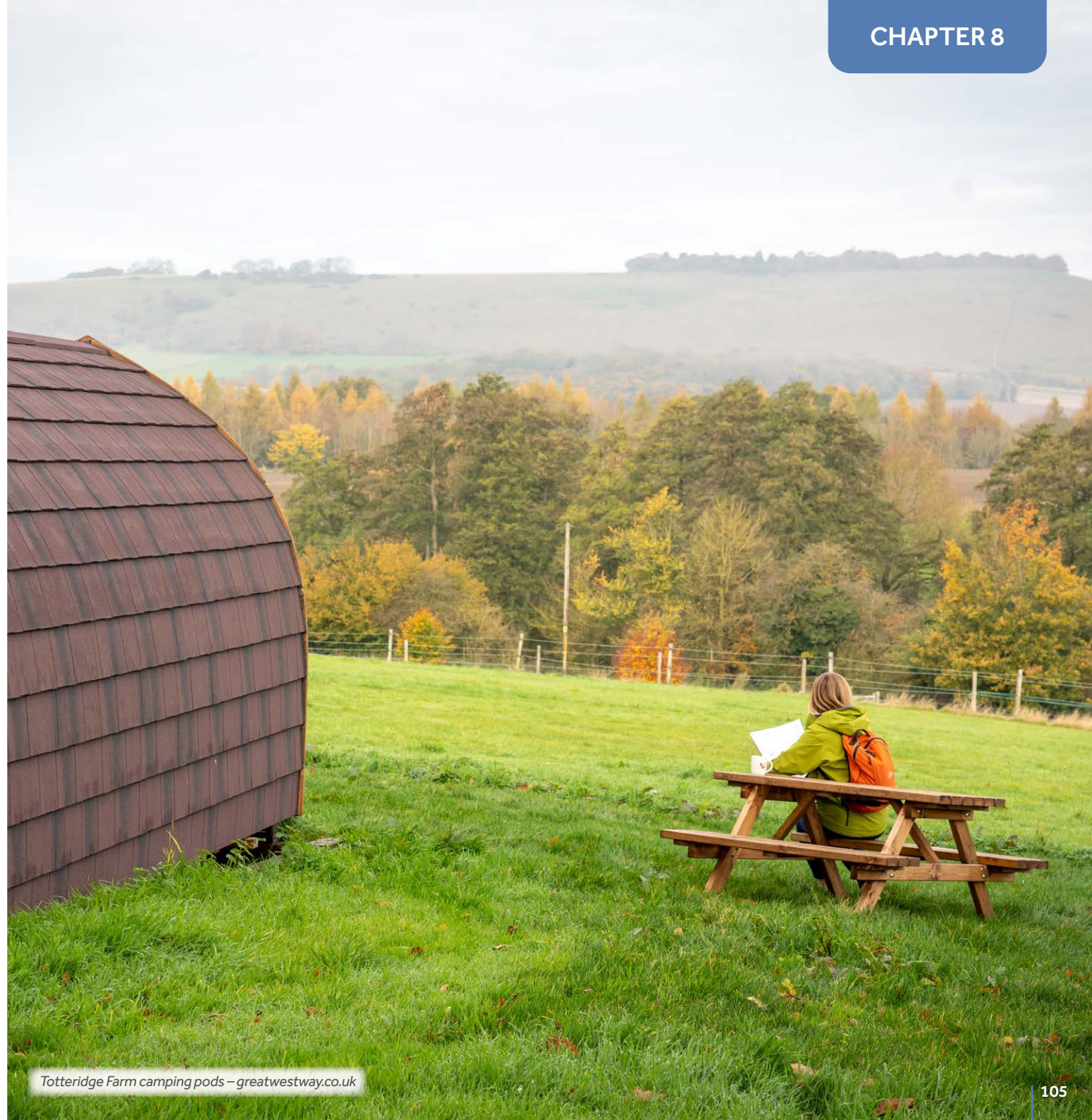
8.3 There is also a need to ensure a consistent approach across the North Wessex Downs. The National Landscape currently extends across parts of nine different local authority areas, although proposals for local government reorganisation could reduce this during the Plan period. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the relevant Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Management Plan is a statutory document. The North Wessex Downs looks to its constituent local authorities to adopt the Management Plan and use it to *"formulate their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it"*⁴.

8.4 In protected landscapes even more than elsewhere, a strong planning system is the unsung hero of environmental conservation and enhancement. Its value is often overlooked and underappreciated. Good planning provides certainty to landowners and investors, ensures consistency, enforces standards and supports community confidence. The process itself also has value in securing accountability for decisions, encouraging a degree of consensus about land use change and through scrutiny and discussion, often delivering better outcomes than would have otherwise resulted.

² ONS (2024) *Population estimates for national landscapes in England and Wales by single year of age and sex, mid-2021 and mid-2022*.

³ *Countryside Commission: Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: a policy statement CCP 356, 1991, p.5.*

⁴ *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, s.89(2).*



Relationship with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

8.5 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out that planning policies and decisions should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside⁵. Paragraphs 189 and 190 provide specific guidance for plan makers and decision takers in relation to National Landscapes. It states that “*great weight*” should be given to conserving their landscape and scenic beauty and that these designated areas have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues⁶. It further states that the scale and extent of development in these areas should be limited. In particular, major development should be refused in National Landscapes, except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated to be in the public interest. As stated in the NPPF,⁷ “*whether a proposal is major development is a matter for the decision maker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined.*” The NPPF makes clear that land within the setting of the National Landscape is as important as the land inside the protected landscape boundary. The NPPF must be read alongside the supporting National Planning Practice Guidance which provides a basis for plan making and decision taking. This states that the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not automatically apply within National Landscapes⁸ and that applying policies relating to National Landscapes may mean that it is not possible to meet objectively assessed needs for housing and other development in full⁹.

8.6 A key element of the NPPF’s environmental objective (supporting the defined purpose of the planning system to contribute to achieving sustainable development) is the protection and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment. To support the overarching purpose and objectives, Local Plans should allocate land for development with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in the NPPF.¹⁰ The strategic policies in Local Plans should set out an overall strategy, and sufficient provision for, the conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure.¹¹

8.7 The NPPF provides specific guidance on measures to protect, restore and enhance biodiversity assets and to secure measurable net gains for biodiversity, setting out principles to avoid a significant harm to biodiversity.¹² Local Plan policies should clearly differentiate between land within and outside National Landscapes. Recognition of the valued qualities of the North Wessex Downs by local authority partners will strengthen Local Plans.

The Approach to Development

8.8 The North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership supports pre-application discussions from applicants (the NWDNL staff unit offers a chargeable service) and with the relevant Local Planning Authorities. The protected landscape is a ‘sensitive area’ as defined under the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations and as such some forms of development may require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).

8.9 The Environment Act 2021 introduced 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) as a mandatory requirement for new development. The preference for on-site provision reduces the likelihood of large-scale BNG funding for nature recovery within the National Landscape. However, the North Wessex Downs is a protected landscape, and where BNG does apply the national status of the designation means there is a strong case for a higher BNG target which aims to deliver the priorities of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape’s Nature Recovery Plan and Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

8.10 The North Wessex Downs is a living and working landscape. The North Wessex Downs supports the provision of affordable housing that meets evidenced local need (right development, right place) and meets the purposes of the National Landscape to conserve and enhance natural beauty. To achieve this, Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans and development proposals within the National Landscape and its setting must be landscape-led. Allocations and development proposals should demonstrate an understanding of, and respond to, local context and natural beauty with the aim of embodying a sense of place throughout the process. The North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment along with landscape sensitivity assessments and landscape visual impact assessments are essential tools in achieving a landscape-led approach.

8.11 The cumulative impact of development needs to be fully assessed to avoid potential harm and erosion of the valued qualities of the National Landscape. This includes suburbanisation due to settlement extensions and smaller intrusions including changes to residential curtilages, extensions and outbuildings allowed as permitted development, street clutter / signage, increased traffic, noise and lighting.

Local Economy and Rural Business

8.12 The NWDNL Partnership believes that promoting and supporting appropriate local enterprise is a key part of conserving and enhancing the character and valued qualities of the National Landscape. Local businesses are likely to: employ local people; provide services to improve the local quality of life; spend money locally; promote community cohesion; and have a smaller environmental footprint (by reducing the transportation of goods from across communities).

8.13 People like to live in a high quality environment. This attracts some businesses as it helps them retain staff. Support for small local businesses will provide local jobs and enhance the rural economy. For example, fast broadband is crucial for a healthy rural economy and we will work with relevant agencies to secure such infrastructure in ways that are compatible with National Landscape purposes.

8.14 Significant employment areas exist within the area, for example the Harwell Campus which is home to the Diamond Light Source, the UK national synchrotron science facility. This is part of 'Science Vale' in Oxfordshire which has a national profile as a centre for science and innovation, and in particular for space technology. As a large, previously developed area, partly designated as Enterprise Zone, opportunities exist here for redevelopment and careful intensification of the site. Where such development occurs, it is important to recognise the purposes of the National Landscape designation and minimise any potentially adverse impacts on the valued qualities of the North Wessex Downs landscape.

Additional Guidance

8.15 When preparing plans and planning applications, those responsible should make reference to the North Wessex Downs National Landscape AONB Management Plan and all other relevant North Wessex Downs National Landscape guidance. This includes, but is not confined to, the following documents:

- the NWDNL Nature Recovery Plan
- relevant NWDNL Position Statements and other published Guidance;
- the NWDNL Landscape Character Assessment;
- the NWDNL Historic Landscape Character Assessment;
- the NWDNL Guidance on the Selection and Use of Colour in Development; and
- the NWDNL Guide to Good External Lighting.

For these documents and other guidance visit www.northwessexdowns.org.uk

⁵ NPPF (2024) paragraph 187.

⁶ NPPF (2024) paragraph 189

⁷ NPPF (2024) paragraph 190, footnote 67

⁸ NPPF (2024) paragraph 11 d) footnote 7.

⁹ NPPF (2024) paragraph 11 b) footnote 7.

¹⁰ NPPF (2024) paragraph 188.

¹¹ NPPF (2024) paragraph 20.

¹² NPPF (2024) paragraphs 192-195.

Planning Conditions, Community Infrastructure Levy and Mitigation

8.16 It may be possible to overcome a planning objection to a development proposal by imposing a condition on the planning permission or by entering into a planning obligation (a Section 106 Agreement). Where this is appropriate, NWDNL may recommend planning conditions or a legal agreement to secure control over development and/or forms of mitigation. This will align with tests as set out in National Planning Policy Framework and supporting Planning Guidance and will be secured by local authority Partners in forming decisions on planning applications.

8.17 We will seek financial or other contributions through Section 106 Agreements where possible to mitigate unavoidable, harmful impacts on the valued qualities of the National Landscape arising from new developments. We will also seek to access Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds from local authority partners to support identified landscape, nature recovery, community, green infrastructure and other environmental projects. A previous example of this is the IKEA development at Calcot in West Berkshire.

Remoteness and tranquillity

8.18 The sense of remoteness and tranquillity is core to rurality and the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs. It is central to the enjoyment and appreciation of the landscape and a key characteristic in all landscape character areas. Dark night skies in the National Landscape contrast dramatically with surrounding urban areas, providing a sense of remoteness and wildness. The widespread absence of artificial light allows the full wonder of the night sky to be appreciated unimpeded by the night-time glow of our major urban areas. *"Artificial light at night has revolutionised the way we live and work outdoors, but it has come at a price. When used thoughtlessly, lighting disrupts wildlife, damages human health, wastes money and energy, contributing to climate change, and it blocks our view of the starry sky"*¹³. In some parts of the area there is already an ambient level of noise associated with transport networks and machinery. A certain level of activity and noise will always be expected within a largely farmed landscape and within larger settlements.

8.19 These valued perceptual and scenic qualities are a fragile resource and under threat from a combination of factors, including major development, such as wind turbines, intruding into the open downland. Concerns raised by local residents and users of the landscape over loss of these valued perceptual qualities will inform decisions on particular development proposals. New uses or new developments

that individually or cumulatively result in a material increase in lighting, noise and/or activity in the countryside should be resisted. Dark skies add to the beauty, tranquillity and sense of remoteness of a place. As well as being integral to the valued qualities of the National Landscape, dark skies are important for the health of people, wildlife and heritage. The North Wessex Downs has areas as dark as any in the country. The NWDNL Vision is for it to be a place: Where a sense of remoteness and tranquillity predominates and where vast night skies can thrill the eye, unaffected by light pollution; where these valued qualities are recognised in development decisions within the setting of the National Landscape, so that the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs is protected.



Totteridge Farm camping pods – greatwestway.co.uk

Sensitivities and constraints of the landscape to wind turbines

8.20 The North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership commissioned a study to identify the sensitivities and constraints of the landscape to wind turbines.¹⁴ This work reveals that all Landscape Types within the area are constrained to a degree. There are specific sensitivities and values that would be adversely affected by such forms of development.

8.21 Four landscape types (Open Downland; High Chalk Plain; Downs Plain and Scarp; and River Valleys) are considered to be highly constrained in relation to wind turbine development, where sensitivities to this form of development are high and any wind turbine is likely to have adverse impacts.

8.22 The remaining Landscape Types (Downland with Woodland; Wooded Plateau; Vales; and Lowland Mosaic) are considered to be moderately to highly constrained in relation to wind turbine development. The particular landscape characteristics and configuration of these Landscape Types is such that it may be possible to find locations that are less constrained for some types of turbine development, although these locations are likely to be very limited.

Other Renewable Energy Projects

8.23 As a response to the climate crisis, there is a need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The security of energy supplies is also a concern. These factors are likely to lead to an increase in renewable energy generation. There are already many well established and sensitively located forms of renewable energy projects across the area. These include: micro-generation on individual residential and commercial properties; photovoltaic installations (some up to 1 ha in area); on-farm bio-digesters; wood fuel boilers; and hydro-electric generation projects within water courses.

8.24 Large scale photovoltaic arrays across farmland not only reduce the area of productive farmland but can have a significant effect on landscape character, shifting from a rural to industrial landscape which urbanises and unbalances the scenic quality, tranquillity and sense of place. To help meet net zero targets, the NWDNL would support the installation of roof-based PV installations and small-scale solar arrays that are compatible with the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the National Landscape.

8.25 Further information concerning the likely acceptability of different forms of renewable energy projects is contained within the NWDNL Position Statement on Renewable Energy.

Green and Blue Infrastructure

8.26 Green infrastructure (GI) is the network of multi-functional open spaces and other environmental features, including parks and gardens, woodland, green corridors, public rights of way, watercourses and water bodies ('blue spaces'), street trees and open countryside. There is an opportunity for new development to secure and enhance the area's GI network, including through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). This will support the sustainable management of natural resources; the delivery of sustainable development; biodiversity enhancement through habitat connectivity; local flood management; and the provision of opportunities to improve health and well-being through access to green and blue spaces. Schemes that improve links, including in particular public rights of way, for walkers, cyclists, riders and carriage drivers, as well as securing biodiversity and landscape enhancements will be supported. Where appropriate, new and existing GI features should provide the greatest range of functions possible to maximise benefits for people and wildlife.

Urban fringe and Setting

8.27 A number of sizeable and expanding towns lie just outside the North Wessex Downs, including Swindon, Wantage / Grove, Didcot, Newbury, Thatcham, Reading, Basingstoke, Andover and Calne. The agricultural economy on these urban fringes is under pressure due to uncertainty over the future, marginal viability and suburban pressures including vandalism and litter dumping. There is scope for such areas to become places of environmental and community opportunity, with multiple uses. However, targeted action is required to deliver this potential.

¹³ International Dark-Sky Association.

¹⁴ https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Wind_turbine_sensitivity_report_FULL_WEB.pdf

8.28 The setting of the North Wessex Downs does not have a defined geographical boundary but it should be addressed as the area within which development and land management proposals, by virtue of their nature, size, scale, siting, materials or design, can be considered to have an impact, either positive or negative, on the natural beauty and valued qualities of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

8.29 The potential for harm to the setting of the area from large-scale urban extensions is substantial. The area within the setting of the North Wessex Downs forms part of a transitional corridor. In some areas, particularly the northern boundary, long-distance views in and out of the National Landscape can be significant as the intervisibility between landscapes enhances the sense of openness and tranquillity. Any new uses or development proposed outside but within the setting of the area should be guided by the NWDNL Position Statement on Setting. Proposals should include detailed measures to mitigate against harm on and into the area. Forms of mitigation may include strategic landscape buffers, use of colour in building materials, careful design and restrictions on lighting, restrictions on building heights, care over massing and scale, care over roofscape design, or avoidance of development in the most exposed locations.

Built Environment and New Housing

8.30 The North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership's approach to the provision of new housing is set out in the NWDNL Housing Position Statement. This emphasises that strategic levels of new housing within the National Landscape should be avoided except in exceptional circumstances, in line with national planning policy.¹⁵ Land of least environmental or amenity value situated outside the protected landscape and its setting should be the first choice for development. Only where it is necessary to meet appropriate local needs should new housing be considered. This should be landscape-led within existing settlements, preferably on previously developed sites. Excellent design and siting of all new developments in the North Wessex Downs is essential. They should reflect the intrinsic character of the local landscape and avoid generic pastiche architecture that can have a suburban effect. New development will become part of the landscape's future cultural heritage and design should recognise and reflect this while sustainably meeting the needs of the present. A positive design approach (site capacity, layout, scale, materials and landscaping) that understands the site and surrounding landscape will improve the ability of a development to better integrate into the landscape.

8.31 Housing may also be delivered through the Neighbourhood Plan process. Such provision should still be in general conformity with any Local Development Plan and be appropriate in terms of landscape character and nature.

8.32 The replacement of small dwellings in the countryside with larger and grander houses can significantly alter the character of a site and local street scene, which can have a suburbanising effect on the rural character of the site and local area. It also reduces the supply of smaller rural dwellings. A replacement dwelling, when clearly disproportionate to the original, can be tantamount in its impact to a new dwelling, which in some areas would contradict national and local policy. Even where a site is well screened there is a wider concern to maintain the essential rural nature and qualities of the area. Large extensions on small dwellings also have the potential to erode local rural character.

Highways Infrastructure

8.33 The M4 (London to Wales) and the A34 (Southampton to Oxford) form the main arteries in a wider network of A-roads crossing the North Wessex Downs. Yet the overall impression is of a relatively sparse road network underlining the historical and current lack of settlement on the open downland. The only parts to have a dense network of winding rural lanes are the well-wooded Hampshire Downs and the lowlands to the north east of Newbury – both areas of ancient countryside with a mediaeval settlement pattern.

8.34 More needs to be done to find imaginative and sensitive solutions to the maintenance of the existing highway network and the design of new roads. These should be sympathetic to the character and valued qualities of the North Wessex Downs landscape. Many rural lanes have a rich character of their own. The challenge is to retain that character whilst meeting modern highway safety needs. Particular problems occur when urban solutions are imposed on the rural setting. This is sometimes the result of safety guidelines Highway Authorities have a duty to comply with, but results in a loss of local character and the addition of lighting and clutter. The NWDNL will collaborate with the Highways Authorities to improve existing highway environment and seek improvements to proposed new schemes. Examples could include better use of passing places and sensitive edge protection on lanes to prevent erosion of historic banks and species-rich verges. The development of new private driveways should retain rural character and reflect the historic qualities of settlements.

8.35 The NWDNL team has contributed to work that is helping to reduce the impact of highways infrastructure, such as through the Avebury World Heritage Site Transport Strategy.

Rail Electrification

8.36 Rail electrification has potential to cause widespread harm to landscape character and natural beauty. The failure of Network Rail to have regard for the purposes of protected landscape designation, as required by its duty under s. 85 of the CRow Act 2000, when electrifying the Great Western main line in the mid-2010s led to a swathe of unnecessarily intrusive infrastructure in the Thames valley between Reading and Didcot through the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs National Landscapes. The *Mend the Gap* programme that resulted from that project is leading mitigation and enhancement work within the affected landscapes to soften and reduce the impact of the infrastructure on natural beauty.

8.37 The other main line that runs through the North Wessex Downs, the Berks and Hants route from Newbury towards Westbury and the south west, has also been proposed for electrification. It will be important for any future major infrastructure work to be landscape-led, with reference to the strengthened s.85 duty on all relevant authorities.

Minerals and Waste

8.38 It is national policy to avoid landbanks of non-energy minerals in National Landscapes.¹⁶ Mineral schemes that are major developments within the area should be refused planning permission unless it can be demonstrated that there are exceptional circumstances and that the development is in the public interest.¹⁷

8.39 Waste proposals should substantially be meeting local needs. They should be of a scale relevant to the proposal and avoid greenfield sites. Any new facilities should be consistent with an up-to-date Local Plan, as defined in the National Planning Policy for Waste.

¹⁵ NPPF (2024) paragraph 189.

¹⁶ NPPF (2024) paragraph 224(a).

¹⁷ NPPF (2024) paragraph 190.



Barns, Rectory Farm Cholsey – David Olinski



Solar panels at Denford – NWDNL

Planning and Development: Key Issues

Key issues with the potential to have significant influence on the North Wessex Downs Development Valued Qualities:

- a) The threat of expansion of the main urban areas just beyond the boundary of the North Wessex Downs, including the main centres of Swindon, Wantage, Didcot, Reading, Newbury, Basingstoke, Andover, and Devizes for example, creating urban fringe pressures and impact on the setting of the National Landscape.
- b) New large free-standing dwellings as replacement dwellings in the open countryside.
- c) The change of use of land from agriculture which has the potential to harm landscape character.
- d) The erosion of rural character through suburbanising influences from new development (new fencing, lighting, excessive glazing, signage, parking areas, paved footpaths, loss of native hedgerows and creation of new garden areas).
- e) New housing developments on greenfield sites.
- f) The threat of incremental housing development outside settlements from conversions, redevelopments or rural workers' accommodation which are not clearly justified to be beneficial.
- g) Impact on dark skies and tranquillity from external lighting (commercial, domestic and agricultural), especially where poorly directed or in an exposed location (not usually subject to planning control).
- h) Potential for certain forms of development to intrude on the wider landscape, including telecommunications masts, pylons, wind turbine developments, photovoltaic schemes, and minerals and waste schemes, threatening the sense of remoteness and tranquillity, and landscape quality and heritage assets.
- i) Unsuitable development of redundant previously developed and part-developed sites within the North Wessex Downs, especially redundant airfields and military sites (e.g. as at Wroughton), and the impact upon landscape quality and heritage assets.
- j) New developments at the junction of the M4 and A34 or along their corridors which spread the impact from development yet further into the undeveloped parts of the National Landscape.
- k) Impact from the racing industry from new gallops and facilities where inappropriately located and/or designed.
- l) Impact from equestrian uses and structures generally where new development is expansive in area, in greenfield locations, poorly designed and/or located on exposed sites.
- m) Substantial new farm buildings and residential extensions where unjustified, poorly designed and or located in exposed locations that are deemed Permitted Development.
- n) Development that results in a material loss of tranquillity and/or impact on the dark night skies within the North Wessex Downs or its setting.
- o) New noise-creating activities, for example from quad or bike courses, microlight or other airstrips, shooting schools, kennels, new industrial, minerals or waste operations.
- p) Large-scale new commercial uses or inappropriate farm diversification projects.
- q) New road building, road and rail route upgrades and other large-scale infrastructure projects.
- r) Impact of road signage, street lighting and other highway clutter on landscape character, including within settlements. Measures which have an urbanising effect on National Landscape character include: oversized, multiple and yellow-backed road signs; new street lighting in previously unlit locations; lighting that allows spillage or glare; road markings; concrete kerbing; illuminated bollards; fencing; and insensitive traffic-calming schemes.

Planning and Development: Principles

1. Ensure that the formulation and implementation of planning policies across the North Wessex Downs take full account of relevant authorities' statutory duty to seek to further the purposes of the National Landscape designation, conserving and enhancing the character and the valued qualities of the North Wessex Downs and its setting.
2. Ensure that all development proposals, including allocations at Local Plan stage, are landscape-led and development is based on identified need to sustain the vitality of local communities in ways that conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs.



Hungerford railway bridge – greatwestway.co.uk

Planning and Development: Policies

DE 01

Development and use changes within the North Wessex Downs and its setting must seek to further the purpose of the National Landscape (to conserve and enhance the Natural beauty of the protected landscape) and should demonstrate how they have had regard to the Management Plan and guidance produced by the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership.

DE 02

Under the NPPF determining major development is a judgement for the local authority as decision taker; in determining this, plan makers and decision takers should consider the context of the locality and whether the development by reason of its scale, massing, character or nature, has the potential to have a significant adverse impact on the natural beauty and valued qualities of the North Wessex Downs. The potential for significant adverse impacts must include the consideration of both the impact of cumulative development and the individual characteristics of a proposed development or use of land.

DE 03

A landscape-led approach should be applied at the earliest stages of development of Local Plan policies and all development proposals within the National Landscape and its setting. Natural beauty must be a golden thread throughout all stages of the process and aim to encompass a sense of place. The North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment along with landscape sensitivity assessments and landscape visual impact assessments are essential tools in achieving a landscape-led approach.

DE 04

Development within the National Landscape and its setting should be of high quality which responds to local context, including; historic settlement pattern, height, massing, roof form, density, materials (inc. colour) and local building vernacular. All development should actively seek to conserve and enhance local distinctiveness, sense of place, tranquillity, biodiversity, the historic environment and dark skies.

DE 05

Historic settlement patterns and valued green spaces within and surrounding settlements form part of the distinctive character and heritage of the North Wessex Downs. Neighbourhood Plans, Development Plan allocations and development proposals should identify these characteristics and ensure their value is recognised and retained.

DE 06

The surroundings of the North Wessex Downs and the protected landscape itself add value to each other as the landscape and landforms link visually and functionally, joining the surroundings to the National Landscape. Proposals for development or change of use in the setting should therefore reflect and respond to the inter-connectivity with the National Landscape, its landscape character and valued qualities.

DE 07

Development (apart from exempted development) must encourage, support and promote biodiversity net gain and contribute to nature recovery by protecting, restoring and providing for new and improved habitats and connected nature recovery networks.

DE 08

To ensure that dark skies and tranquillity are protected, no new uses or developments that individually or cumulatively result in a material increase in lighting, noise, pollution and/or activity that fails to conserve and enhance the valued qualities of the National Landscape should be permitted.

DE 09

To avoid and reduce the potential for light pollution, details of external lighting should be submitted alongside a lighting assessment as part of any development or new use within the National Landscape and its setting, to ensure it meets the standards set out in the NWDNL Good Lighting Guide.

DE 10

Encourage, support and promote good practice in the design and management of roads in the National Landscape and its setting that conserves and enhances the character of the landscape and settlements. Opportunities should be taken to reduce erosion and maintain or restore the character of rural roads through adoption of a low-key rural design approach to roads across the North Wessex Downs.

Maintain the rural character and valued qualities of the National Landscape by preventing over-development of sites and the erosion of local character. The following should be considered:

DE 11

- The overall size, scale and massing of the replacement dwelling and/or extension compared to the original (new dwellings should not be materially larger in terms of volume).
- Site context and local context including natural and built character and features, visual prominence and the local vernacular.
- Relationship within the local street scene / countryside and potential to unbalance this.

Proposals for farm diversification, including the re-use of buildings, should be considered positively provided they will conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the National Landscape and its setting and:

DE 12

- can demonstrate that they meet a local need;
- contribute to the local economy;
- add value to land-based products, or form part of a whole farm / estate plan endorsed by the NWDNL unit and the local authority.

To help meet net zero targets, a net zero design approach should be adopted for all new developments. The installation of roof-mounted photovoltaic solar installations and other small-scale renewable energy proposals that are compatible with the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the National Landscape should be supported.

DE 13

Renewable energy schemes determined to be major development must demonstrate that the development is appropriate in location, scale and design which conserves and enhances the local landscape character and natural beauty of the National Landscape. Proposals for renewable energy should not have an adverse impact individually or cumulatively and should demonstrate that important views and tranquillity are maintained or enhanced.

DE 14

Encourage the retention of existing and provision of new green and blue infrastructure. Ensure that green and blue Infrastructure (including new or enhanced biodiversity assets) is incorporated within the area of all major developments, both within and in the setting of the National Landscape.

DE 15

The North Wessex Downs are home to globally rare chalk streams. These ecosystems are sensitive to change and play a key role in sustaining local biodiversity. Any development within the catchment area of watercourses within the National landscape and its setting, or supplied by water abstraction from the aquifers that feed them, must apply a nature-based approach to avoid, and if necessary mitigate, any potential impacts to this valued landscape assets and valued qualities. Nutrient neutrality requirements may also apply in some catchments.

DE 16

New landscape enhancement proposals and/or mitigation should apply a nature-based approach which is informed by local context, the NWDNL Nature Recovery Plan and the relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Non-native or invasive species will not be supported unless a valid reason can be demonstrated, it meets the priorities of the Nature Recovery Plan and conserves and enhances local landscape character and the natural beauty of the National Landscape.

DE 17

Encourage environmentally sustainable economic growth, new responsible tourism opportunities and diversification of the local economy of a scale and nature compatible with conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the National Landscape.

DE 18

Breaches of planning controls that undermine the purpose of designation should meet with prompt and robust enforcement action.

DE 19