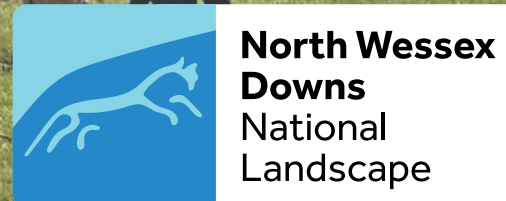


North Wessex Downs NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan
2025 – 2030



Produced on behalf of the Council of Partners

Our partners



Basingstoke
and Deane



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



Hampshire
County Council



National
Landscapes
Association



OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL



Listening Learning Leading



SWINDON
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Vale
of White Horse
District Council



Wiltshire Council

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Wild flowers & wheat
– Tony Matthews

Foreword

By Mary Creagh CBE MP, DEFRA Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Nature

Protected Landscapes are our most iconic and inspiring places. They were created from 1949, with post-war Britain recognising everyone has a right to access the countryside – from Northumberland’s dark skies to the South Downs’ Seven Sisters. 75 years on, the needs are greater than ever, with nature underpinning our health, economy and climate. That’s why this government will empower Protected Landscapes to become greener, wilder and more accessible.

Covering 25% of England, but half of our priority habitats, Protected Landscapes are essential to nature’s recovery. This government understands that we will not achieve our Environment Act targets or commitment to protect 30% of nature by 2030 without Protected Landscapes.

Recovering this natural capital is essential to ensure sustainable economic growth. Protected Landscapes are fundamental to strengthening the nation’s economic health by looking after the natural resources we depend on. Through nature’s recovery, Protected Landscapes protect communities from flooding, fight climate change, enable sustainable food production and create green jobs. They also have a vital role in connecting diverse communities with nature – underpinning the nation’s mental and physical health and reducing the strain on our NHS.

This incredible potential is beginning to be set out in the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework. However, it will only become reality through the work of Protected Landscapes teams in collaboration with local communities, land managers, public bodies and other partners.

Protected Landscape Management Plans provide the focal point for all partners to agree a local ambition and a pathway to deliver it, shaping the future of our most special places, and therefore the country. It is vital that all partners work together to develop and implement Management Plans. To support this collaboration, we have issued guidance on the Protected Landscapes duty which requires relevant authorities to seek to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes.

In recognising their importance to the nation, this government has committed to reinvigorating Protected Landscapes with new legislation, resources and tools. I look forward to developing this with you and other partners because it is only together that we can protect and enhance these remarkable places for generations to come.

Yours sincerely

Mary Creagh CBE MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Nature
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



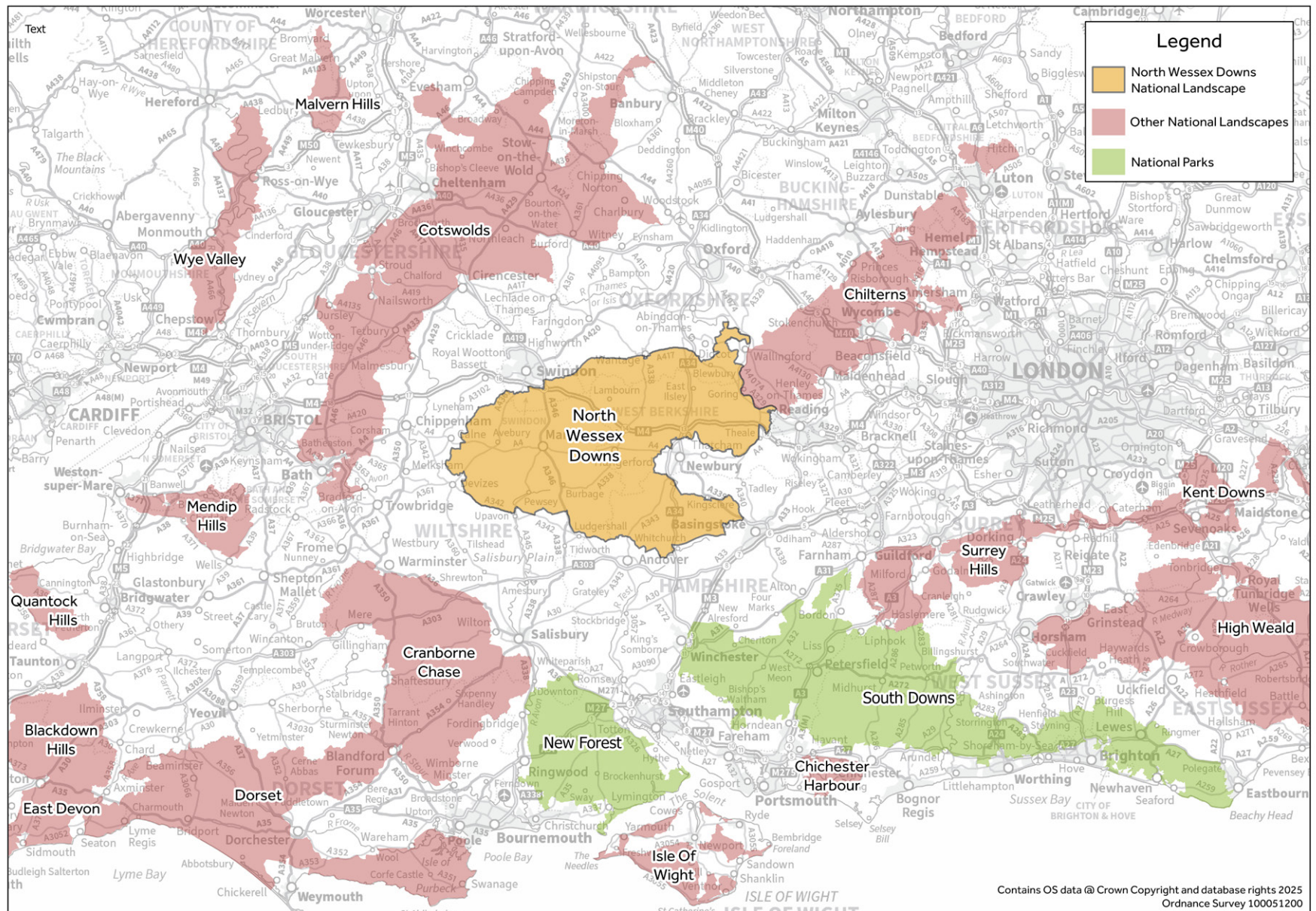
*Avebury stone circle
– David Hall*



*Bluebells at Cobham, Frith Malborough
– Cedric Cottrell*



Figure 1. Regional context of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape with other protected landscapes.



Introduction

By Sarah Nichols, outgoing Chair of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Council of Partners.



It has been an immense privilege to serve as Chair of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership during the past four years. As we look ahead to the 2025–2030 Management Plan, I reflect with pride on the progress made under the 2019–2024

Plan (extended to 2025), during which we strengthened our commitment to conserving and enhancing this extraordinary landscape for future generations.

One of the most exciting developments of my tenure has been our work to seek International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Green Listing accreditation – an internationally recognised standard for well-managed protected areas. This ambitious undertaking has required rigorous evaluation of our conservation efforts, governance, and community engagement, ensuring that the North Wessex Downs meets the highest global benchmarks. The process has fostered stronger partnerships and deeper collaboration, reinforcing our commitment to sustainability and biodiversity.

Over the past four years, we have faced both challenges and opportunities. There is widespread recognition that climate change and biodiversity loss require decisive action across all sectors, and new initiatives in regenerative agriculture, nature recovery, and heritage conservation have enhanced the resilience of our landscapes. We have also strengthened our engagement with communities, landowners, and policymakers, ensuring a shared vision for the future.

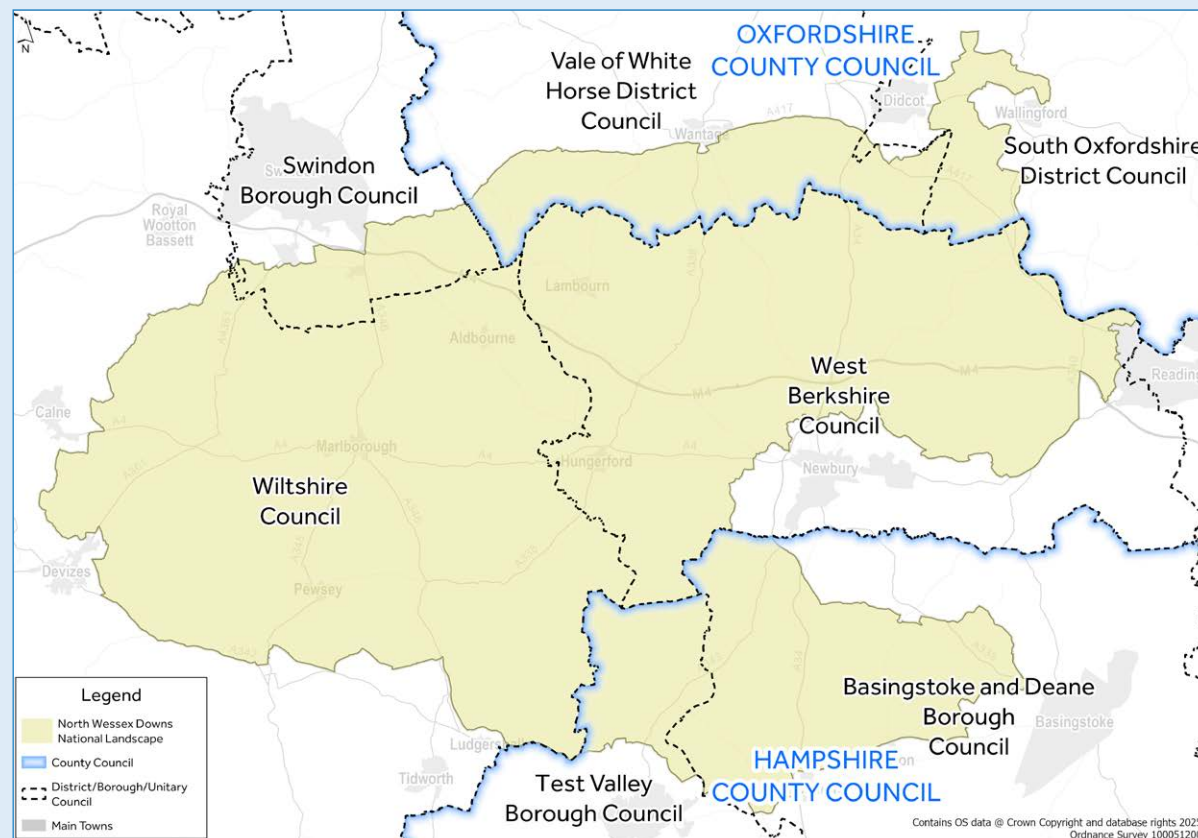
As I step down, I do so with confidence in the dedication of the Partnership, the staff team and our many stakeholders. The 2025–2030 Management Plan builds upon our achievements and sets an ambitious course for the future. I look forward to seeing the North Wessex Downs thrive in the years ahead.

S. J. Nichols

Sarah Nichols

Outgoing Chair, North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership

Figure 2. The local authority partners of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.



By Gill Haggarty, incoming Chair of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Council of Partners

The only constant is change – we must fully embrace it and the challenges and



opportunities it presents, in order to enhance and protect our outstandingly beautiful landscape.

I step into the chairmanship of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape (NWDNL) Council of Partners at an exciting and challenging time as the accelerating pace of change will materially influence NWDNL and all other National Landscapes.

This, the fifth Management Plan to be published since the formation of the NWDNL Partnership, continues to build

upon the successes and achievements of the previous Plans. It sets out strategic priorities for the next five years which must be carried out with ever-increasing impetus in order to ensure that we conserve and enhance this landscape as a place of natural beauty in which both wildlife and communities thrive. To do this we must engage with a wide audience and set ambitious targets.

A summary of the Partnership's activities and achievements during the last Plan period may be found elsewhere in this document.

Nationally, the Government enacted many important changes during the last Plan period which included strengthening of targets, adoption of 30by30* and a review of the first Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP). A significant output of the updated EIP was that the Government recognised the national importance of protected landscapes, as highlighted in the 2019 Glover Review, and in November 2023 all designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England and Wales became rebranded as National Landscapes. The duty on relevant authorities under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 was greatly strengthened: it now says they "must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty" of the National Landscape.

During the upcoming Plan period even more change is anticipated to environmental schemes and targets, funding, policies and governance; for example, the current review of local government organisation may reduce the current nine local authorities. This underlines the importance of interactions between the NWDNL and its local authorities to support them to deliver their strengthened s.85 Duty.

The biggest current threat to our habitats and species is climate change. The NWDNL Nature Recovery Plan (available on the NWDNL website) identifies habitat vulnerability to climate change and measures that will help our key habitats to be more resilient in the face of increasing global temperatures and changing weather patterns. The NWDNL Climate Adaptation Plan will be published during the Plan period.

The attainment of the IUCN Green Listing accreditation during this Plan period will be an important milestone, as the NWDNL will create the template for other National Landscapes to achieve Green Listing and this framework will provide the benchmarks by which we will measure our progress against both future targets and historic baselines, as set out in the Partnership's Business Plan.

This Management Plan is the culmination of the inputs from many teams and sources and has been widely consulted upon. It is owned by everyone and can only be achieved through close collaboration and partnership with the local authorities, businesses, farmers, communities and individuals who live, work and visit the NWDNL – together we can make a difference.

I look forward to working with all the partners of the NWDNL and I would like to thank Sarah Nichols for her chairmanship during the last Plan period as well as all the people that have contributed to the delivery of past achievements and to the development of this new Plan.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Haggarty'.

Gill Haggarty

Chair of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership

**The UK has committed to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 (30by30), to support the global 30by30 target agreed at the UN Biodiversity Summit (COP15) in 2022. Our commitment to this international target is enshrined within the 2023 Environmental Improvement Plan.*

A Vision for the North Wessex Downs

The vision for the North Wessex Downs National landscape is a place of vast dramatic, undeveloped and distinct chalk downlands with nationally significant areas of semi-natural chalk grassland, contrasting with well-wooded plateaux, arable farmland, heathland, chalk streams and intimate and secluded valleys, all rich in wildlife and cultural heritage; a high quality landscape of national and international significance which persists despite increasingly urbanised surroundings; a place where people live, work and relax; where visitors are welcomed and contribute to a vibrant rural economy; and access to which supports the health and wellbeing of local residents and visitors alike.

The long-term goal is that the North Wessex Downs National Landscape will be a place:

- 1** where land use, management and development are driven by an overarching principle of long-term stewardship of the protected landscape; where people have the imagination, skills, energy and resources to accommodate and adapt to change in ways that respect the unique qualities of the North Wessex Downs and deliver wider environmental, economic and social benefits
- 2** where the highest environmental quality is seen as a key economic driver; where all economic activity is in harmony with maintenance of the landscape and its valued qualities; where new buildings and other forms of development display high design quality worthy of one of England's designated finest landscapes
- 3** with thriving land-based and other rural enterprises that prioritise conserving and enhancing the valued qualities of the North Wessex Downs. This will ensure a countryside rich in wildlife, heritage and recreational opportunities, while producing high-quality products through sustainable farming practices that benefit both the local economy and the surrounding countryside
- 4** with high quality habitats reflecting the distinctive character of the North Wessex Downs and stable and recovering populations of key species; landscapes that are protected, expanded, linked by nature recovery networks, under beneficial management and increasingly resilient to the pressures of climate change
- 5** with a rich and conserved cultural landscape where the pervasive historic landscape character is understood, appreciated and informs future change; where iconic monuments, both designated and

undesigned heritage areas, archaeological sites, buried archaeology and historic landscapes and historic settlements and their settings remain as indelible and visible footprints in an evolving scene, managed to the very highest standards

- 6** where the integrated management of land conserves and improves high quality healthy soils and water resources whilst retaining the distinctive seasonal winterbourne flows and the nationally and internationally significant chalk streams of the National Landscape
- 7** where beautiful views delight and inspire all those who experience the landscape and its visual, scenic and aesthetic qualities are recognised, valued and maintained
- 8** 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

- 9** where the landscape's potential to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change is realised in ways that conserve and enhance its natural beauty: reducing emissions, storing more carbon and building resilience

- 10** where development responds to genuine local need and where new buildings show continuity with the past, respecting and complimenting the beauty of the landscape and the character of local vernacular building materials and styles, while embodying high quality contemporary design and sustainable construction

- 11** where an integrated approach to transport and active travel meets local needs and minimises negative effects on the environment; where the dominance of roads and highway clutter are reduced

- 12** with vibrant rural communities, where villages and market towns meet the needs of local communities and visitors; where there is great local pride in the landscape and a positive local contribution to the stewardship of its valued qualities

- 13** that is a nationally recognised centre for responsible tourism and enjoyment of the countryside, developed and promoted in ways that are in harmony with high environmental quality and local community, helping to underpin the broader rural economy

- 14** that is recognised as a vital community resource, welcoming to local residents and visitors of all backgrounds and abilities, with benefits for physical and mental wellbeing arising from access to nature and the countryside, to a tranquil environment and to the opportunities it presents for social interaction and volunteering

- 15** where there is wide public recognition of the protected status and valued qualities of the North Wessex Downs among communities in and around the National Landscape; where all responsible bodies understand and respect the protected status of the area and their active duties towards the National Landscape in their plans and proposals.