



North Wessex
Downs
National
Landscape

North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Assessment

LCT 1

North Wessex Downs National Landscape

Final report

Prepared by LUC

August 2025

LCT 1 Open Downland

Figure 5.2: Cherhill White Horse and Lansdowne Monument



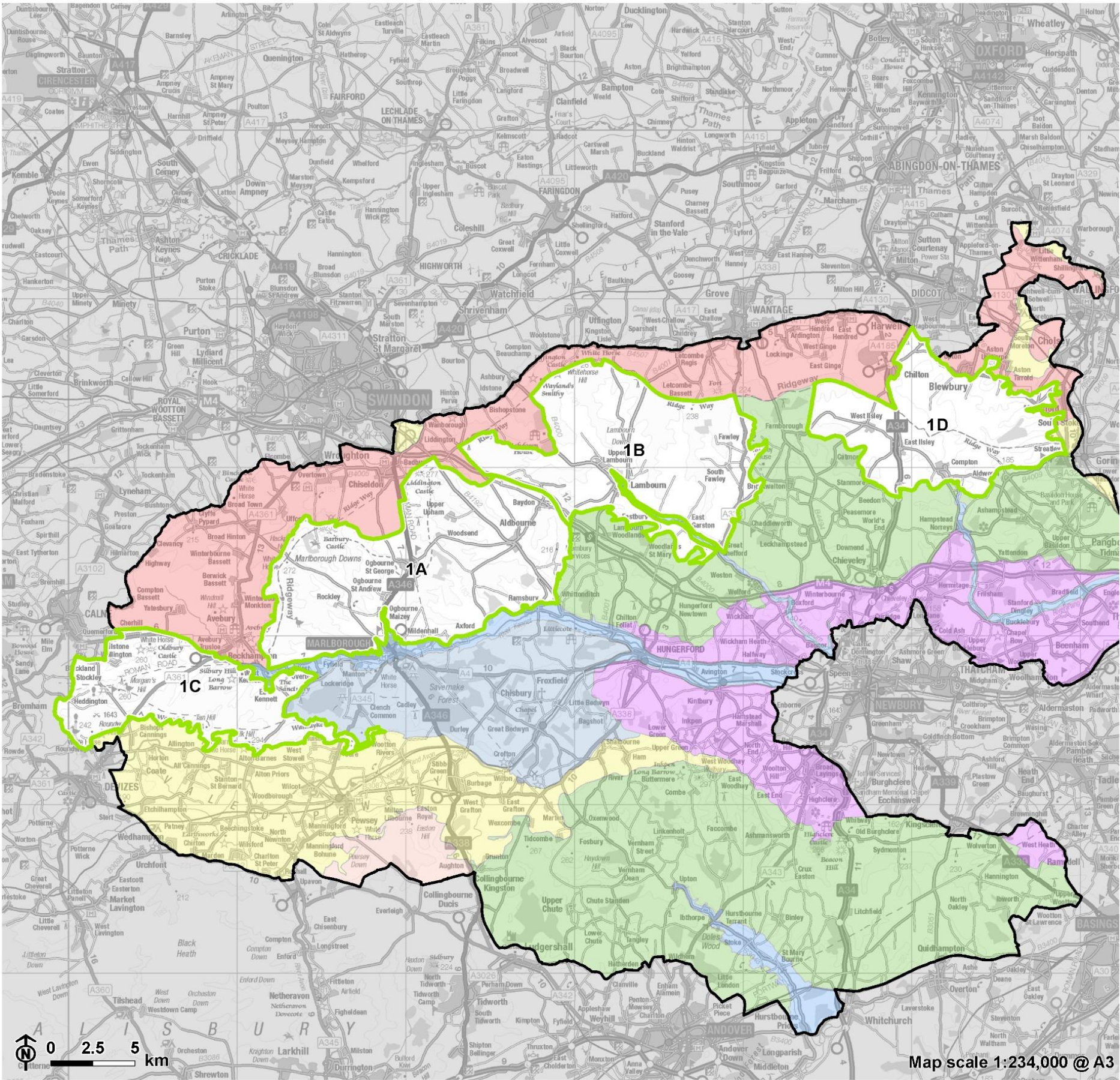
Location and overview

5.5 Open Downland LCT forms a significant proportion of North Wessex Downs, from Devizes in the west to the Thames Valley in the east. Boundaries are mainly defined by topography and the Upper Chalk geology, and in the north relate to the top of the scarp (LCT 5). To the south, the Open Downland transitions to Downland with Woodland (LCT 2), the Wooded Plateau south of the Kennet Valley (LCT 3), or is bounded by the Vale of Pewsey (LCT 6).

5.6 The Open Downlands landscape type is divided into four character areas. These comprise.

- 1A: The Marlborough Downs
- 1B: The Lambourn Downs
- 1C: Horton Downs
- 1D: Blewbury Downs

Figure 5.3: Location of the Open Downslands LCT



North Wessex Downs
Landscape Character Assessment
North Wessex Downs National Landscape



LCT 1 - Open Downland

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Type
- 1: Open Downland
- 1A: Marlborough Downs
- 1B: Lambourn Downs
- 1C: Horton Downs
- 1D: Blewbury Downs



5.7 The Open Downlands are the remote heart and core of the North Wessex Downs, with the dramatic landscapes created by the underlying chalk rocks being one of the defining features of the National Landscape. The subtle curves and undulations of the landform are revealed by the uniform clothing of cropped grass or cereals creating a landscape with a simple and elemental quality, accentuated by vast skies. The open, expansive views are punctuated by distinctive beech clumps crowning the downland summits, forming prominent and highly visible landmarks.

5.8 Sparsely populated, the downlands possess a strong sense of remoteness and isolation. Predominantly in arable cultivation these are landscapes of great seasonal variation, with muted browns and greys of the chalk and flinty soils in the ploughed autumn fields, giving way to fresh greens of the emerging crops in winter and spring and sweeping yellows and golds of summer. The characteristic close-cropped springy downland turf of the surviving herb-rich chalk grassland provides an important habitat, and this landscape type contains the largest areas of designated chalk grassland in the National Landscape, with eighteen Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Under sympathetic management, the arable landscape also supports a diversity of wildlife. Rare and colourful arable weeds such as dense flowered fumitory, slender tare and shepherd's needle survive in less intensively managed field margins and farmland birds that include stone curlews, skylark, grey partridge, lapwing and corn bunting populate the fields while red kites populate the vast skies.

5.9 The ancient resonance of the Open Downlands emanates from a wealth of archaeology, including dramatic and highly visible prehistoric monuments. Numerous long and round barrows and distinctive sarsen stones create a powerful sense of antiquity. The carved White Horses, etched into the scarp slopes, are highly distinctive features and provide a strong visual link from the past to the present-day importance of the Open Downlands for the horse racing industry.

5.10 Together, the elevation, open and spacious topography, subtly receding horizons and long views all contribute to the sense of remoteness and solitude. The expansive skies and contrasting patterns of weather, clouds and light create an important temporal dimension to landscape character.

LCT 1 Open Downland: Key Characteristics

- An elevated plateau formed by the hard Middle and Upper Chalks. Soils are predominantly thin, light, free draining calcareous and nutrient poor black or brown soils.
- Open, smoothly rolling downland, dissected by a network of dry valleys and long sinuous steep scarps provides strong sweeping skylines.
- A landscape largely devoid of water due to the porosity of the chalk bedrock.
- Fragmented and isolated blocks of chalk grassland survive along the steep scarp slopes and dry valley sides, forming an important component of the chalk grassland resource of the National Landscape.
- Dominated by intensively managed arable farmland with a few hedgerows. Woodlands are virtually absent apart from the occasional linear shelterbelt and distinctive beech clumps crowning the summits.
- Very sparsely populated, with remote small settlements, scattered farms and equestrian establishments, which contributes to the strong sense of isolation.
- Built character with local vernacular of traditional knapped flint and red brick, timber framed weatherboarded aisled barns and large-scale modern farm buildings. 20th century infill within settlements is common.
- Recreational opportunities are characterised by the numerous tracks, byways, green lanes and footpaths plus open access associated with archaeological sites and nature reserves.
- Closely associated with the racehorse industry, with distinctive horse gallops and stables a significant land use.
- The landscape has a strong cultural resonance. Prehistoric funeral monuments form dramatic earthworks, while the chalk White Horses are visible features from many periods of history.
- Overall, a strong sense of remoteness and solitude, with generally good levels of dark night skies.

LCT 1 Open Downland: Evaluation

Forces for change

5.11 The following are identified as forces for change common to the Open Downland as a whole:

- Slight increase in lowland calcareous grassland, although it is still rare and sites are fragmented, only remaining on the steep scarps.
- Slight changes in agricultural land cover including decreases in pig, cattle and poultry numbers, and decreases in arable and horticultural landcover, resulting in an overall stable land cover.
- An increase in visually intrusive larger agricultural barns disturbs the open horizon and interrupts the sinuosity of the smooth downland landscape.
- Development pressures within settlements both within the Open Downlands and in adjacent landscapes may alter the landscape character, disrupting the expansive skyline and panoramic views.
- Pressure for tall structures including communications masts, transmitters and renewable energy developments (potentially wind turbines), will be particularly intrusive on the strong sweeping skylines and could have a major impact on the sense of remoteness.
- Development in the setting to the National Landscape including large-scale and /or tall development on the edge of Didcot, Wantage, Swindon and Devizes. These affect panoramic views from the escarpment and its wider setting, as well as the sense of remoteness and tranquillity.
- High traffic levels on the rural lane network are a concern, impacting on the rural character of the lanes. Cumulative impact of small-scale incremental change for road upgrades e.g. signage, fencing, kerbing of rural lanes on the remote qualities of the chalk upland landscape.
- The Open Downland landscapes are susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Changes in rainfall patterns including wetter winters and drier summers may lead to different types of crop being grown (e.g. maize, grape vines, soya), which would change the appearance of the landscape.
 - Wetter winters and increased flash flooding on the thin arable soils will cause erosion and impact the winter crop sowings which would alter the appearance of the landscape.

- Hotter, drier conditions in the summer will put more pressure on water resources, which may result in a change in crops to less water-reliant plants, and may increase the heat stress of livestock.
- Drier summers and wetter winters will cause increased tree mortality and die-back from drought and stress and waterlogging, affecting the distinctive hilltop woodlands and tree clumps.
- Drier and hotter summers increase fire risk affecting grassland habitats and the recreational resource of the landscape.
- Hotter temperatures may result in increased competition from invasive species and greater numbers of insect and mammal pests. This could impact the choice of crops grown, and the appearance of the landscape.
- More extreme weather events leading to a greater risk of wind-throw and loss of mature trees, which could affect the ancient woodlands. Potential windthrow and loss of the characteristic beech clumps may impact this crowning feature of the open downland landscape.

Landscape guidance

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

- Manage the small areas of distinctive chalk grassland to enhance their biodiversity value; ensure best practice management through suitable grazing regimes and avoiding agrochemical and fertiliser inputs.
- Consider opportunities to increase the area of chalk grassland through re-creation and restoration around existing areas, extending and linking existing sites.
- Ensure that areas that might act as refugia from climate change (such as areas with north facing slopes, complex micro-topography and/or low nitrogen levels) are under optimal management.
- Maintain the distinctive pattern of very occasional scattered linear scarp slope woodlands on hilltops and slopes. Seek a strategy to reinforce/perpetuate the distinctive tree clumps, recognising that beech may not be a viable species in the long term.

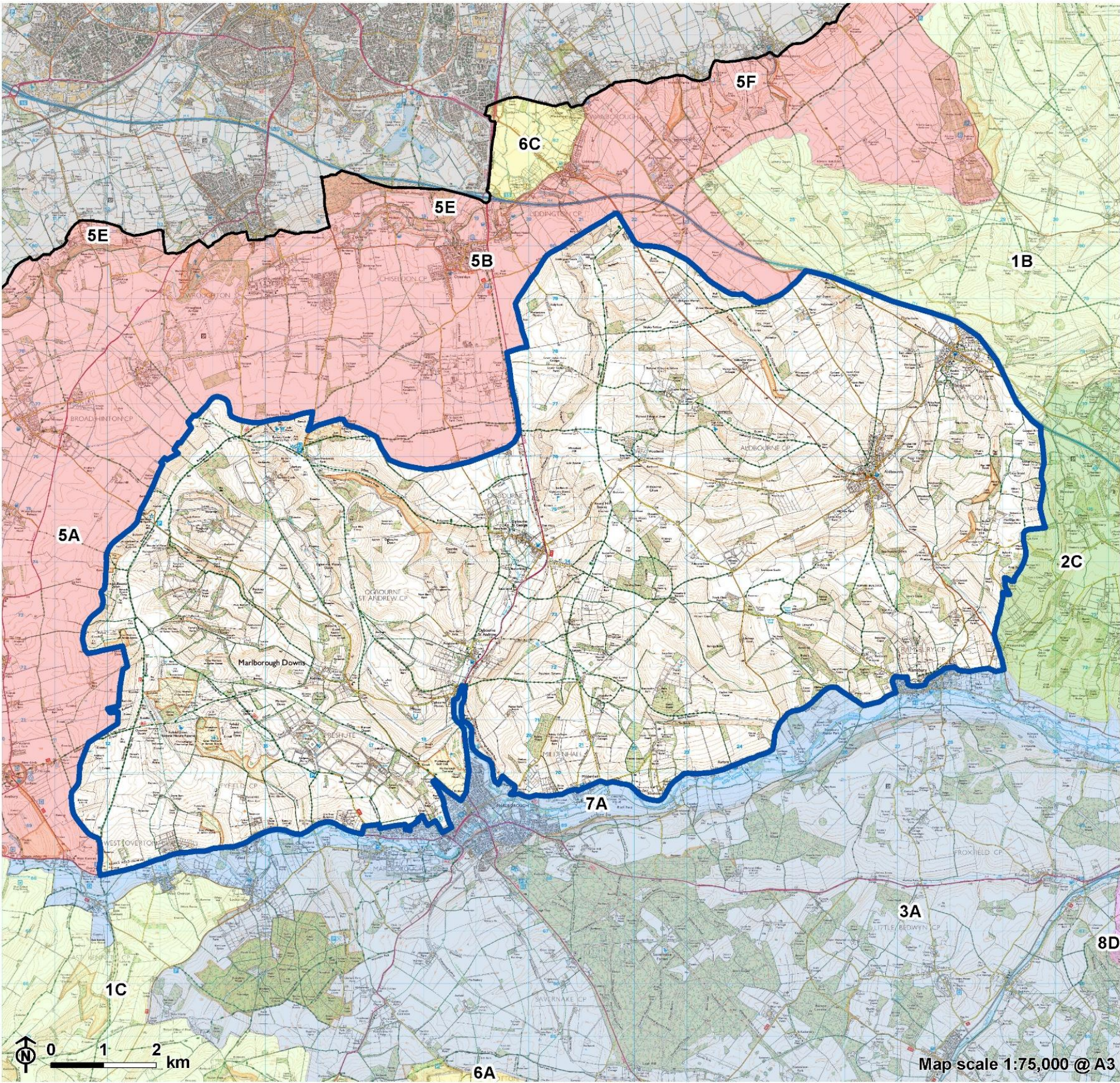
- Protect the dramatic landscape of open rolling fields, windswept and panoramic views. Carefully consider applications for further tall structures including telecommunications masts or wind turbines in this open landscape, and applications in adjacent landscapes which would be intrusive. Consider the impact on the views from the Open Downland if introducing solar energy development in adjacent landscapes, as the solar arrays can cause glint in views.
- Conserve, manage and seek to enhance access to and interpretation of the prehistoric and historic earthwork monuments, emphasising their inter-connected nature. Ensure they are protected from any potential damage from agriculture and recreation.
- Retain the sparse settlement pattern. Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes to the small villages through extensions, which may change the character of the settlements.
- Conserve the rural roads and lanes, minimising small-scale incremental change such as signage, fencing and kerbing, or improvements to the road network which could change their character. Promote the use of traditional signage features, using local styles and materials. Ensure any road lighting schemes retain the experience of dark night skies within the open downland.
- Protect the remote, tranquil character of the open downland. Consider the siting and colours used for any new agricultural barns or equestrian development so they do not disturb the open horizon and sinuosity of the smooth downland landscape as little as possible.
- Conserve the dark skies and minimise lighting, with new lighting only introduced where necessary. Consider the impact of lighting on night-time views from lower ground as well as within the locality.

LCA 1A: Marlborough Downs

Figure 5.4: Rolling downland near Aldbourne



Figure 5.5: LCA 1A Marlborough Downs: Location

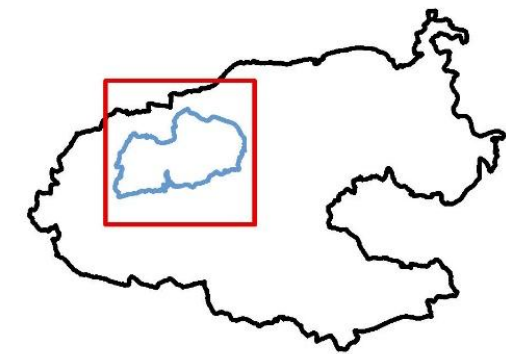


North Wessex Downs
Landscape Character Assessment
North Wessex Downs National Landscape



1A: Marlborough Downs

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Area**
- 1A: Marlborough Downs
 - 1B: Lambourn Downs
 - 1C: Horton Downs
 - 2C: Lambourn Wooded Downs
 - 3A: Savernake Plateau
 - 5A: Avebury Plain
 - 5B: Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain
 - 5E: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp
 - 5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp
 - 6A: Vale of Pewsey
 - 6C: Wanborough Vale
 - 7A: Kennet Valley
 - 8D: Hungerford Farmland



Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2025. Ordnance Survey License Number AC0000817126.

Figure 5.6: Rolling farmland with hedgerows from Albourne Road



Figure 5.7: View from Corwood Lane



LCA 1A Marlborough Downs: Description

5.13 The Marlborough Downs are a distinct topographical unit in the north-west of the National Landscape. The boundaries of the character area are defined to the west and north by the base of a prominent, steep chalk scarp at an elevation of approximately 200 metres. To the south the boundary is formed by the River Kennet (LCA 7A) with the boundary running along a contour on the valley side. The eastern edge forms the divide with the Lambourn Downs (LCA 1B) and to the south-east a subtle change in geology with the increase in Clay-with-Flint marks a transition to the lower dipslope of Lambourn Wooded Downs (LCA 2C)

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.14 Hard rocks of the Middle and Upper Chalk dominate the geology of the Marlborough Downs. The Middle Chalk is found mainly in the north-west of the area and with the Lower Chalk forms the steep escarpment that runs west of Ogbourne St. George. The topography is strongly articulated, dissected by steep scarps of Hackpen and Smeeths Ridge along dry valleys and rising to gently rounded summits such as Overton Down and Ogbourne Down. Barbury Hill (268 metres) and other elevated points along the top of the northern escarpment provide distant views across the adjacent lower lying Vale that extends beyond the National Landscape boundary.

5.15 The elevated plateau is cut by a number of minor watercourses, providing further structural diversity, notably the River Og and River Aldbourne, which flow southwards through the area draining into the River Kennet. Clay-with-Flint mantles some of the highest points such as Hackpen Hill and Monkton Down. The clays create a richer loamy reddish soil in contrast to the thin calcareous downland soils. Alluvial deposits line both the dry and river valleys.

Biodiversity

5.16 Scattered woodland blocks within arable farmland east of the Og valley include ancient oak and ash woods on the slopes dipping down to the River Kennet creating a more enclosed landscape. Distinctive features include the beech clumps which crown the open summits as well as linear shelterbelt plantations such as at Mans Head.

5.17 Surviving areas of permanent pasture are concentrated along the scarp slopes to the north and west of the area, with some sections of the scarp slope

beginning to be covered by regenerating scrub. Unimproved pasture is scarce and fragmented. Fyfield Down (SSSI) on the western edge of the Marlborough Downs is a unique combination of geomorphological, biological and archaeological features. It contains acidic, neutral and chalk grasslands. It also displays the best assemblages of sarsen stones in Britain. These stones, which are composed of sand particles cemented together to form hard sandstone, support a nationally important lichen flora, some of which are found only on this particular type of stone. Piggledene, the other SSSI within this LCA, also contains an abundance of sarsen stones, which house important lichen flora.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.18 Arable farmland dominates throughout and is an almost exclusive land use on the high land in the north and west of the area, for example around Upper Upham and Ogbourne Down. Open unenclosed downland at Barbury Hill, Smeathe's Ridge and Fyfield Down, uncommon within the National Landscape, is found only on steep scarps where arable agriculture is impractical or uneconomic. Before the Second World War, the high Downs were unenclosed and uninhabited, sheep-grazed pastures. Conversion to arable retained this open landscape. Field boundaries are minimal and defined by post-and-wire fencing or grass baulks.

5.19 Many gallops and rides are established over the Marlborough Downs. Many downs have pits from medieval and later quarrying, and there are also the remains of craters from First and Second World War munitions.

Historic features

5.20 The Marlborough Downs landscape has a very strong cultural resonance visibly expressed by the sarsen stones, round barrows and hill forts. Prominent Bronze Age round barrows occur following the lines of ridges and the scarp top and the Iron Age hill forts at Liddington Castle and Barbury Castle are strategically located along the scarp summit.

5.21 Several Neolithic long mounds are present in the area, and there are standing stones at Down Barn, close to the Avebury monument complex. However, the Marlborough Downs are most notable for their numerous Bronze Age round barrows, many surviving as earthworks although many others have now been ploughed flat. These barrows occur as single monuments but more often as groups, following the lines of ridges and the north-west scarp edge of

the Marlborough Downs, where they can be a distinctive visual feature. From the Late Bronze Age, large areas of field systems and associated prehistoric settlements began to appear on the Marlborough Downs. Many of these field systems continued in use throughout the Iron Age and Romano-British periods. Concentrations of these fields and enclosures are present on Winterbourne Down, Wick Down, Overton Down, Burderop Down and Fyfield Down. Some of these features are still visible as earthworks, but others have been ploughed.

5.22 Many later prehistoric linear earthworks are also known, especially along Whitefield Hill, and close to Barbury Castle and Liddington Castle, both of which are Iron Age hill forts. These hill forts are strategically located at the summit of the scarp and command panoramic views and are frequently visible skyline features. They are located along the Ridgeway, which follows the scarp along the northern edge of the area. The Ridgeway formed a significant routeway throughout prehistory and later periods and, as a National Trail is an important recreational route today.

5.23 The sarsen stones or grey wethers are scattered across the landscape, notably in the Valley of the Stones on Fyfield Down and at Overton Down. Some of these rocks have prehistoric cup-mark decorations or grooves made by polishing stone axes. Prehistoric people may have regarded them as mysterious or magical, and during the Late Neolithic many sarsen blocks were removed and incorporated in chambered mounds and stone circles. The stones have been quarried for building material and in this area are a distinctive feature found in gateposts, boundary stones, milestones, village churches and building cornerstones.

5.24 Important examples of medieval archaeology include the deserted medieval settlements at Upham and Snap, and the remains of smaller settlements such as Raddun on Overton Down. There is a medieval manor house at Ogbourne St. George. On Fyfield Down there is a good example of low, long and slightly sinuous undulations on the surface of the ground, known as ridge and furrow, which are the fossilised remains of medieval ploughed fields. Ridge and furrow is relatively rare on chalk downland and here the example is associated with a medieval settlement.

Settlement pattern

5.25 Several small attractive linear settlements shelter in the valleys of the Marlborough Downs and are an important feature of the character area. The small villages of Ogbourne St. George, Ogbourne St. Andrew and Ogbourne Maizey are located at regular intervals along the Og valley. Aldbourne nestles at the head of the Aldbourne Valley, while Baydon is on a scarp edge in the north-

east part of the Downs. The tiny, clustered hamlets of Rockley and Upper Upham shelter in dry valleys.

5.26 Outside the valleys settlement is very sparse and limited to occasional isolated farms, with a concentration of equestrian establishments and gallops on the western part of the downs. Traditional building materials include brick, flint, sarsen and clunch with roofs of thatch or clay tile.

Principal settlements

5.27 Aldbourne is a large village in Wiltshire and the principal settlement in the Marlborough Downs LCA. The historic core of the village is covered by a Conservation Area, centred on The Square. The Green to the north is overlooked by the Grade I Listed St Michael's Church with walls of flint, limestone and sarsen, and a gothic three-stage tower. The village was home to a bell foundry for over a century. Bells from the foundry are still in use at local parish churches including Blewbury, Uffington and Newbury. The village has seen relatively little change in the last century with housing development mostly concentrated to the north along Lottage Road and in the south at the Garlings and Whitley Road.

Figure 5.8: View across the green at Aldbourne



5.28 Aldbourne lies in a valley on the south slope of the Lambourn Downs at the head of a winterbourne stream which flows south towards Ramsbury where it

joins the River Kennet. The village is surrounded by arable farmland with historic field boundaries.

Figure 5.9: View from the north-east of Aldbourne



5.29 Baydon is a small village in Wiltshire situated on the Roman Road of the Ermin Street. The village's historic centre focuses on the Grade II* listed Church of St Nicholas. There is a strong local vernacular of knapped flint and red brick houses and boundary walls. Development in closes along Aldbourne Road and Ermin Street were added in the 20th century and detached and semi-detached houses at Newtons Walk and Ridgeway View in the 21st century.

Figure 5.10: Flint and redbrick houses around the green in Baydon

5.30 The village of Baydon is on a small hilltop in the north-east of Wiltshire, west of the M4 motorway. At 230 metres AOD it is one of the most elevated villages of the county. This elevation provides stunning views of the surrounding countryside. The topography of Baydon includes gently sloping hills and open fields, which are typical of the open downs area.

Figure 5.11: Rolling hills from the south-east of Baydon

Communications and infrastructure

5.31 The A345 and A419 (T) is a prominent feature which follows the straight line of a Roman road which ran from the settlement of Wanborough, near Swindon, via. Cunetio, near present day Mildenhall to Venta (Winchester).

Ermine Street, which linked Corinium (Cirencester) and Calleva (Silchester), runs north-west to south-east across the area.

5.32 A network of relatively straight minor roads connects the settlements. An extensive network of public rights of way including the Ridgeway National Trail and the Chisledon and Marlborough Railway Path cross the area. Within this network of roads and paths, high summits such as Ogbourne Down remain inaccessible and remote.

Perceptual Influences

5.33 The absence of field boundaries and woodland, and the elevation creates an open and remote character with long views that varies according to the weather from exposed and bleak to dramatic and exhilarating. The arable land use reveals the subtle curves and undulations of the underlying landform. The valleys of the Og and Aldbourne have a more intimate character with their attractive settlements and remnant areas of valley floor pasture and hedged fields.

5.34 The landform creates a very distinct and dramatic skyline, with strong intervisibility with the flatter and lower-lying landscapes to the north. The ridge of high downs at Badbury is particularly distinctive in views from the edge of Swindon.

5.35 Hackpen White Horse was cut to commemorate the coronation of Queen Victoria in 1838. It is a feature in views from the lower plain and vale, especially from Broad Hinton (in LCA 5A Avebury Plain).

5.36 There is a good experience of tranquillity and dark night skies across the Marlborough Downs, with the only sources of light pollution from settlements, especially Aldbourne. The M4 marks the north-eastern edge of the area. Although it locally disrupts the tranquillity, it is largely hidden from view by mature roadside tree planting.

LCA 1A Marlborough Downs: Evaluation

Marlborough Downs valued qualities

5.37 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 1A Marlborough Downs are:

- Strongly articulated chalk landform of dramatic, sinuous scarps, valleys and rounded summits creates a distinct and dramatic skyline.

- A large-scale landscape with a strong sense of openness and expansiveness that provides a highly scenic quality. Panoramic views to and from the escarpment and across the high Downs are defining features of the area.
- Scattered sarsen stones, including the best assemblage in Britain at Fyfield Down SSSI, are one of the most identifiable features of the North Wessex Downs; they are extremely rare and geomorphically important.
- Strong sense of time-depth though highly visible earthworks and archaeological sites including prominent Iron Age hill forts at Barbury Castle and Liddington Castle. The Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site extends over Fyfield Down.
- Hackpen White Horse is a distinctive chalk hill figure on Hackpen Hill, adding to the scenic qualities of the landscape, and is a popular recreation draw.
- A sparse settlement pattern with limited development outside of the small historic villages nestled in the valley bottoms of the Og and Aldbourne. Strong local vernacular of distinctive blue-grey sarsen stone, as well as red brick, flint and clunch.
- High recreational value, with the Ridgeway National Trail, White Horse Trail and Chiseldon and Marlborough Railway Path, along with local public rights of way, providing access across the downs.

Marlborough Downs local forces for change/issues

5.38 In addition to the forces for change set out for the Open Downland LCT, the following forces for change are of particular relevance to the Marlborough Downs:

- Change in land use within the River Og corridor, resulting in the further cultivation of floodplain pastures.
- Expansion of Swindon in the setting of the National Landscape, including at Badbury Wick and Swindon Great Western Hospital, which is visible in views from the highest elevations, bringing the urban edge closer to the scarp edge.
- Pressure for further tall structures e.g. communications masts, transmitters and future renewable energy developments in the form of wind turbines in the setting of the National Landscape would be visible in long views from the Marlborough Downs, potentially reducing the sense of remoteness.

Marlborough Downs strategy and local guidelines

5.39 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Open Downland LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Marlborough Downs:

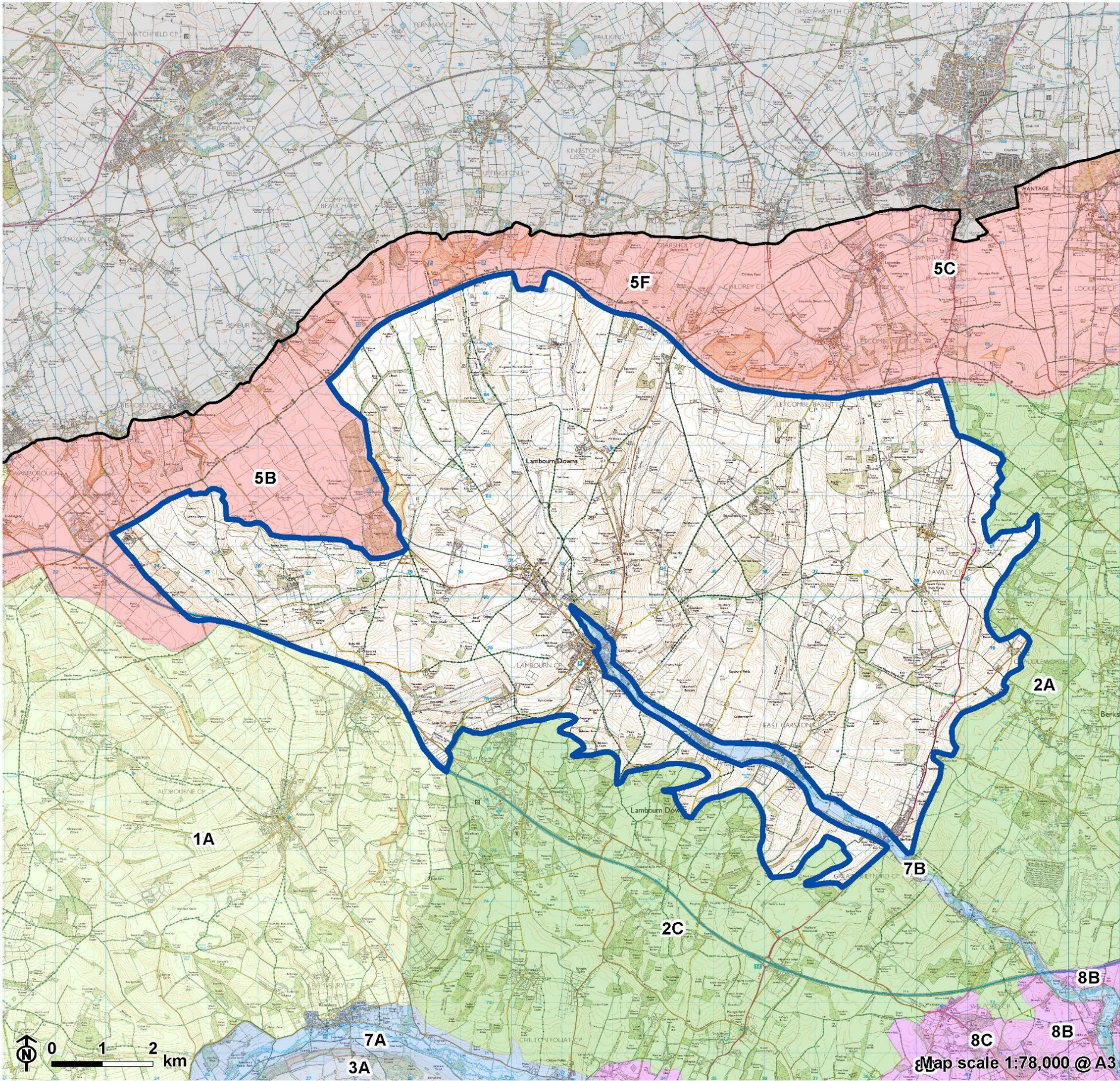
- Follow guidance set out in the Kennet Catchment Management plan for the River Og and associated floodplains to improve water quality and the surrounding biodiversity.
- Ensure the expanding urban edge of Swindon retains a buffer to the National Landscape, and remains on the lower-lying vale landscape, rather than climbing the scarp slopes.

LCA 1B Lambourn Downs

Figure 5.12: Rolling downland with distinctive white fencing used around horse gallops



Figure 5.13: LCA 1B Lambourn Downs: Location

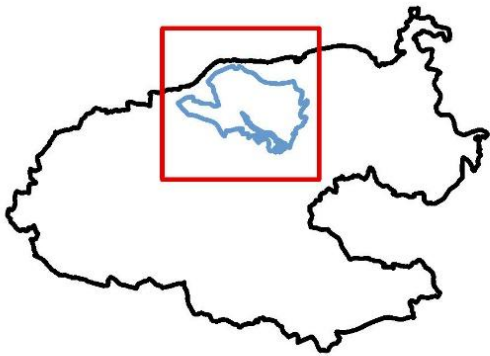


North Wessex Downs
Landscape Character Assessment
North Wessex Downs National Landscape



1B: Lambourn Downs

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Area**
- 1B: Lambourn Downs
 - 1A: Marlborough Downs
 - 2A: Brightwalton Downs
 - 2C: Lambourn Wooded Downs
 - 3A: Savernake Plateau
 - 5B: Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain
 - 5C: Hendred Plain
 - 5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp
 - 6C: Wanborough Vale
 - 7A: Kennet Valley
 - 7B: Lambourn Valley
 - 8B: Winterbourne Farmland
 - 8C: Wickham Wooded Heath
 - 8D: Hungerford Farmland



Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2025. Ordnance Survey License Number AC0000817126.

Figure 5.14: Gallops on Lambourn Down



Figure 5.15: Rolling downland with gallops near Upper Lambourn



LCA 1B Lambourn Downs: Description

5.40 The Lambourn Downs occupy a central location in the north of the National Landscape. The northern edge is defined by the contour that runs along the top of the steep scarp slope (LCA 5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp). The west edge is defined roughly by the M4 which forms the divide with the adjacent Marlborough Downs (LCA 1A). The south and eastern boundaries follow contours at a height of approximately 175 metres AOD, marking the change of character to the lower and more wooded downs around Lambourn Wooded Downs (LCA 2C) and Brightwalton (LCA 2A).

Natural influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.41 The Lambourn Downs are part of the main chalk plateau of the National Landscape, underlain by layers of the hard Upper and Middle Chalk which dip gently southwards. They are characterised by a rolling landform, with flat topped or gently rounded hills such as at Green Down and Warren Down and ridgelines forming strong horizons. These are intersected by convex slopes falling away to form wide dry valleys, as for example at Upper Lambourn. Shallow well-drained calcareous silty soils are found on the slopes and crests, with deeper soils in valley bottoms.

5.42 Parkfarm Down contains a number of scattered sarsen stones, with support rare and local lichens and is designated as a SSSI. Fognam Chalk Quarry contains the best section in southern England of its particular chalk sequences and also contains many ammonite fossils. It is designated as a SSSI for its geological importance.

Biodiversity

5.43 Woodlands are limited in extent. Thin linear skyline shelterbelts are a particular feature in the north-west around Kingstone Down and Scary Hill. There are also distinctive hilltop beech clumps and small isolated mixed woodland blocks. There is a more wooded character in the north-west borrowed from the National Trust property at Ashdown Park (within LCA 5B), where extensive broadleaved woodlands occupy the foot of a steep scarp.

5.44 The Lambourn Downs have been intensively improved for agriculture, and unimproved pasture is limited to tiny highly fragmented sites on steep slopes. A number of small chalk grassland SSSIs are recorded in the west of the Lambourn Downs and are important for their high floristic diversity. For

example, Croker's Hole hosts a thriving population of nationally scarce bastard toadflax (*Thesium humifusum*), and Seven Barrows supports a rich chalk flora and a diverse butterfly community. The barrow group at Seven Barrows is a distinctive, albeit subtle landscape feature.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.45 Large-scale arable farmland is the dominant landcover throughout, and fields are often without physical division, emphasising the scale and structure of the landscape. Where division does exist it is often post and wire fencing which is almost invisible from longer distances and therefore adds little sense of enclosure to the area. Extant hedgerows tend to be single lines of hawthorn with extensive gaps, maintained by intensive flailing. The occasional mature oak and ash trees that occur along boundaries are an important feature.

5.46 Much of the modern landscape consists of open downland. Some of the boundaries here represent 'ladder' fields, characterised by parallel and sinuous boundaries often running for several kilometres over the uplands. These probably result from 17th and 18th-century informal enclosure, between existing tracks and droveways. More regular, straight-edged fields represent post-medieval formal Parliamentary enclosure.

5.47 The Lambourn Valley is famous for its many gallops and rides, which were established over the downs in the early modern period. These remain a very distinctive feature of the Lambourn Downs landscape.

Historic features

5.48 In the Lambourn Downs the most visible archaeology, particularly from the air, consists of lynchets and banks defining large blocks of later prehistoric field systems, trackways and settlements. Though some may originate in the late Bronze Age, they became more extensive over time and apparently continued in use through into the Romano-British period, for some are concentrated around known Roman villas. Particularly extensive groups of these features are located at Woolstone Down, Knighton Down and Woolley Down.

5.49 Characteristic Bronze Age remains include a few scattered round barrows on ridges and hilltop locations. There is one barrow group at Seven Barrows on the ridge at Postdown.

5.50 The area also contains some small, irregular copses that are the survivors of medieval and post-medieval assarts. Ashdown Park is bordered by a bank and ditch pale, characteristic of a medieval deer park.

Settlement pattern

5.51 Although the majority of medieval settlement was concentrated along the valley bottoms, settlement did exist on the downland, as evidenced by the deserted medieval hamlet of Whatcombe in the east.

5.52 The landscape is very sparsely populated. Two tiny villages at Fawley and South Fawley are located on the eastern edge. The larger village of Lambourn is located at the head of its valley (LCA 7B), although the settlement and the adjacent Upper Lambourn extend up the rising slopes of the downs. Elsewhere settlement is limited to occasional isolated farms and racehorse establishments. Vernacular built form includes flint, red brick and weatherboard and clay tile roofs. Modern large scale farm buildings, associated with arable production including grain stores/silos also feature within the area.

Principal settlements

5.53 Lambourn is a rural service village in West Berkshire positioned at the source of the River Lambourn. The village is centred on the crossroads of the High Street and the old Market place, which is designated as a Conservation Area. The village contains many clear examples of buildings constructed using the squared local sarsen stone and brick quoining. The Grade II* College House and Grade II former Red Lion Hotel at the crossroads are particularly prominent. The original settlement pattern has been largely retained, although 20th century development has expanded the village up the valley sides to the east, west and north. Infill development has also created a denser village. The village has a long association with the racehorse industry and there are a number of equine related businesses and on the edge of the village.

Figure 5.16: Flint and red brick vernacular within Lambourn

5.54 The village lies at the head of the River Lambourn, a chalk stream, which originates in the village. The surrounding rolling downland can be seen from the village edges, although the settlement is largely hidden from view from the elevated downs by the topography and tree cover.

Figure 5.17: Rising downland seen from within Lambourn

5.55 Great Shefford is a small village of around 1000 inhabitants in the south-east of the LCA. The name Shefford is derived from the old English words for sheep and ford indicating its historical connection to sheep farming and the River Lambourn. The historic core is in the south-west centred on the Grade II* listed St. Marys Church and Manor House, designated as a Conservation Area. Ribbon development also ran along Wantage Road (now the A338) running north. The opening of the Lambourn Valley Railway in 1898 improved links with the rest of the country, supporting local agriculture. Development in the 20th century increased densities along Wantage Road and around the railway station. The railway closed in 1960, and the village has not grown significantly.

5.56 Great Shefford is situated across the River Lambourn and is surrounded by gently rolling downland that creates a sense of openness. The hills are primarily used for arable farming mixed with sheep farming with the Wiltshire Horn being commonly reared in the area. The shift from small farms to larger ones significantly shaped the local landscape and economy.

Figure 5.18: Floodplain pasture fields at Great Shefford



Communications and infrastructure

5.57 Road access within the Lambourn Downs is relatively limited. Two B roads follow dry valleys to the north-east and north-west of Lambourn, while the A338 runs north-south in the east. In contrast, many tracks and public rights of way

link the farms and villages to the higher downs and connect to the Ridgeway which runs along the scarp to the north (LCA 5F). The dismantled Lambourn Valley Railway which crossed the downs from Didcot is still visible in the landscape. The M4 marks the transition between the Lambourn Downs and the Marlborough Downs. It is in cutting along this stretch and therefore is not visually prominent.

Perceptual Influences

5.58 This is an open landform with the structural landform and rolling topography creating a spacious character. The combination of rolling downland and dry valleys creates a landscape of drama and variety.

5.59 Thin linear skyline shelterbelts, hilltop beech clumps and small isolated mixed woodland blocks are distinctive features of the area. Long views can be gained across a series of subtly receding ridges, which form strong open horizons. In places the elevation combined with high intervisibility and uniform arable cover, creates an exposed or even bleak character.

5.60 A highly tranquil and often remote character due to the limited settlement and road access. There is a good experience of dark night skies, although there is some light pollution from Lambourn.

LCA 1B Lambourn Downs: Evaluation

Lambourn Downs valued qualities

5.61 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 1B Lambourn Downs are:

- Distinctive chalk landform of hills and ridgelines intersected by wide dry valleys, creating a strong sense of place.
- Remnant chalk grassland habitats are found on the steep slopes, with Croker's Hole, Cleeve Hill and Seven Barrows nationally designated as SSSI, which provide ecological value and contribute positively to the landscape.
- Parkfarm Down SSSI contains an area of scattered sarsen stones, which are now extremely rare on the Berkshire Downs, and support a number of rare and local lichens.
- Settlement pattern of historic villages nestled in the valley bottoms of the Lambourn and Upper Lambourn. The strong local vernacular of flint, red brick, weatherboard and clay tile roofs provides a clear sense of place.
- A rich archaeological landscape, with prominent barrows on ridges and hilltops, creating a strong sense of time-depth.
- A strong sense of remoteness, tranquillity and dark night skies due to the sparse settlement character and limited road access.
- Dense network of public rights of way and Open Access Land provides access to this highly rural landscape. Strong association with the horse racing industry, centred around Lambourn and Upper Lambourn, known as the 'Valley of the Racehorse'. The traditional gallops landscape and views of racehorse training are highly distinctive features.

Lambourn Downs local forces for change/issues

5.62 In addition to the forces for change at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 1B Lambourn Downs are:

- A 2024 survey by Natural England indicated that the special lichen interest at Parkfarm Down SSSI is threatened by tall grass, nettles and scrub, and disturbance by human activities including the removal of the grassland buffer to the arable field.
- Potential development pressures around Lambourn and Great Shefford.

- Increase in horse gallops, including all-weather gallops. Although the racehorse industry is characteristic of the landscape, the incremental associated infrastructure such as car parking, outdoor lighting and welfare buildings on farms, can have an impact on landscape character.

Lambourn Downs strategy and local guidelines

5.63 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Open Downland LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Lambourn Downs:

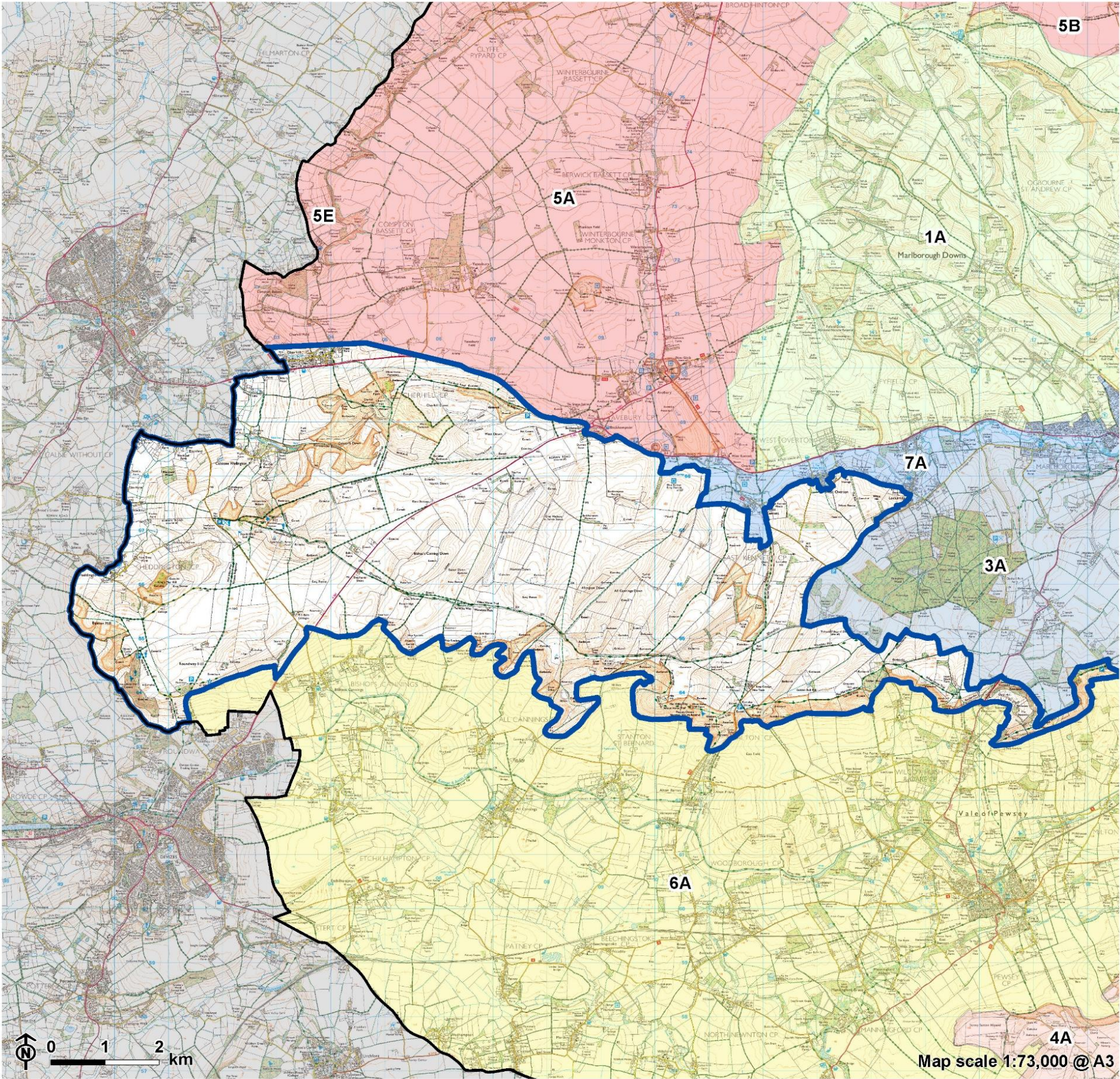
- Promote sustainable water management practices to reduce runoff and improve water quality, including the use of buffer strips along watercourses the River Lambourn catchment area and management plan.
- Conserve, manage and seek to enhance the remnant chalk grassland habitats, including retaining / introducing suitable and sustainable grazing regimes. Consider opportunities to extend and link existing sites.
- At Parkfarm Down SSSI increase the level of grazing to prevent shading of the lichens from tall vegetation and reinstate the grassland buffer between the sarsen stones and surrounding arable cultivation, to avoid disturbance by human activities.
- Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes through the addition / expansion of equine facilities, which may change the character of the Lambourn Downs.

LCA 1C Horton Downs

Figure 5.19: Roundway Iron Age hillfort



Figure 5.20: LCA 1C Horton Downs: Location

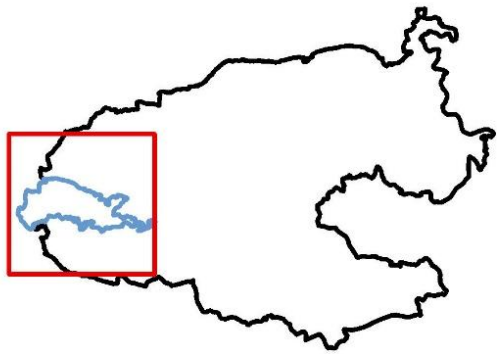


North Wessex Downs
Landscape Character Assessment
North Wessex Downs National Landscape



1C: Horton Downs

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Area
- 1C: Horton Downs
- 1A: Marlborough Downs
- 3A: Savernake Plateau
- 4A: Salisbury Plain
- 5A: Avebury Plain
- 5B: Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain
- 5E: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp
- 6A: Vale of Pewsey
- 7A: Kennet Valley



Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2025. Ordnance Survey License Number AC0000817126.

Figure 5.21: The Alton Barnes White Horse



Figure 5.22: Views across the undulating downland



LCA 1C Horton Downs: Description

5.64 Horton Downs is commonly described as part of the wider Marlborough Downs but has been defined separately in this assessment since it forms a geographically discrete area.

5.65 Horton Downs represent the western most extent of the high chalk downland, with the National Landscape boundary wrapping around the base of the steep slopes at Heddington and Roundway, forming a clear landscape divide with the adjacent low-lying Avon Vales (NCA 117). The same scarp slope also defines the southern boundary where the land drops steeply to the Vale of Pewsey (LCA 6A). The A4 which follows the foot of the slopes that rises from the Avebury Plain (LCA 5A), effectively defines the northern boundary. The eastern boundary is the transition to the more wooded Clay-with-Flint capped landscape of the Savernake Plateau (LCA 3A).

Natural influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.66 The Horton Downs is typical of the upland chalk with an open rolling topography, permeated by dry valleys and coombes often hidden within the expansive landform.

5.67 It has a pronounced southern scarp, forming a distinctive scalloped edge towering above the Vale of Pewsey. The scarp summit is marked by a series of distinctive rounded hills such as Milk Hill (294 metres), Knap Hill (261 metres) and Martinsell Hill (289 metres). To the west the scarp is indented by long steep coombes and has a more complex, convoluted form as for example around Cherhill and Calstone Down.

5.68 In common with all the Open Downlands, Upper Chalk predominates. The Middle Chalk occurs in the dry valleys that characterise the central part of the area including the shallow open corridor through which the A361 runs. Lower and Middle Chalk also outcrop along the steep scarp above the Vale of Pewsey and along the western edge and scarp top hills such as Roundway Hill. Isolated deposits of Clay-with-Flint cap hills in the east such as Thorn Hill, Golden Ball Hill and Martinsell Hill, marking the transition to the Savernake Plateau.

Biodiversity

5.69 Sparse and infrequent woodland is limited to occasional linear shelterbelts around isolated farm buildings and areas of scrub regenerating along the scarps.

5.70 The steep scarps retain an important area of herb-rich chalk grassland of exceptional botanical quality as they have avoided agricultural improvement. This includes four large SSSIs along the western edge between Calstone and Cherhill Downs and Roundway. The extensive Pewsey Downs is considered one of the finest examples of chalk downland in southern England and includes neutral and acidic grassland along the Clay-with-Flint capped escarpment top combined with an extremely rich chalk grassland flora. It is internationally designated as a SAC for its very significant population of the scarce early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*), as well as designated as a SSSI.

5.71 These unimproved grasslands are important for a number of butterflies such as chalk hill blue, speckled wood and the Duke of Burgundy, as well as many plants such as rockrose (*Helianthemum nummularium*), carline thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*), meadow saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*), pyramidal orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*), and the nationally scarce round headed rampion (*Phyteuma orbiculare*).

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.72 The landcover comprises an almost uniform arable monoculture, with very few boundary features except occasional roadside fences creating an open, prairie-like landscape with an exposed character.

5.73 Open unenclosed downland on the steep scarps in the south of the LCA and Calstone Down, uncommon within the National Landscape, is found only on steep scarps where arable agriculture is impractical or uneconomic.

5.74 There are many enclosures and field systems surviving in the area and visible as slight earthworks. Some of these may be Late Bronze Age in date, although there are also Iron Age and Romano-British enclosures. Some of the more sinuous field boundaries between West and East Overton represent Saxon estate boundaries. Medieval remains include the deserted medieval village of Shaw, the moated site at Blackland, and cigar-shaped mounds known as 'pillow-mounds', used as artificial warrens to breed rabbits for meat and fur. The more sinuous, narrow fields are also likely to follow early medieval and

medieval boundaries. Today the Horton Downs is characterised by its very open landscape, created by formal, post-medieval Parliamentary enclosure fields. There are also many gallops and rides established over the downs.

Historic features

5.75 The Horton Downs is particularly notable for its concentration of Neolithic monuments, including numerous long barrows, of which West Kennet, East Kennet, Giants Grave and Adam's Grave are fine examples. Excavations at the West Kennet palisaded enclosures complex provide rich evidence for Neolithic ritual and funerary practices, while two of the three causewayed enclosures, from the National Landscape are located on Knap Hill and Rybury, overlooking the Vale of Pewsey. Many of these monuments are part of the whole Avebury complex (LCA 5A) and should not be considered in isolation.

5.76 The area also includes large numbers of Bronze Age round barrows. Some barrows are isolated, but many occur in small groups on hilltops and along ridges where they are highly visible. Many of these monuments have been ploughed flat and although clearly visible on aerial photographs, they are no longer a recognisable landscape feature.

5.77 Oldbury, Rybury and Martinsell Hill (and possibly Oliver's Castle) are later prehistoric or Iron Age hill forts that occur within the area. These are characteristically located along the top of the southern scarp slope and command panoramic views out over the Vale of Pewsey. The Ridgeway that crosses the area on a roughly north-south axis was a significant routeway throughout prehistory and later periods. Large linear bank and ditches surviving as earthworks are a particular feature of the area. These are likely to be Late Bronze Age or Iron Age, such as those on Tan Hill and Huish Hill. The most substantial of these linear earthwork features is the Wansdyke. This may be based on a later prehistoric feature, but significant portions of the surviving monument are likely to date to the late Roman or Saxon periods.

5.78 The most obvious Romano-British feature is the east-west road from that ran between Cunetio (Mildenhall) and Aquae Sulis (Bath). On Morgan's Hill the road is associated with a linear group of quarry pits. Many of the enclosures and field systems that survive as earthworks or cropmarks are also likely to be Romano-British in date.

5.79 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). The area is designated as a Registered Battlefield.

5.80 One of the most remarkable features of the chalk landscape are the many chalk figures. There are three dramatic White Horses on Horton Down, one cut into the scarp edge overlooking the Vale of Pewsey at Alton Barnes, one at Cherhill Down in the north-west, and the Devizes horse which was cut to mark the millennium. The Lansdowne Monument obelisk which is also on Cherhill Down with the white horse was erected in 1845 and is a clear landmark in views.

Settlement pattern

5.81 There is very limited development on the Horton Downs, with buildings confined to a small number of downland farms. The linear settlements of Cherhill and Calstone Wellington in the west at the foot of the western scarp are the only small villages within the area. Cherhill lies on the old coaching road between London and Bristol (now the A4) and its historic core, including the 12th-century Church of St James is covered by a Conservation Area.

Communications and infrastructure

5.82 Within the open horizontal landscape of ridgeline and sky, the radio masts at Morgan's Hill to the west are a prominent vertical feature. Roads tend to pass through the area rather than lead into it. These include the prominent A361 across the downs and the A4, which defines the northern edge of the area.

5.83 There is a high level of recreational access across the Horton Downs, with the promoted routes the Mid Wiltshire Way, White Horse Trail, Sarsen Way and the Ridgeway all crossing the downs. The white horse figures and nature reserves at Pewsey Downs, Roundway Hill and Morgan's Hill are all popular visitor spots, with parking places.

5.84 The North Wiltshire Golf Course is a slightly incongruous feature in the north-west of the landscape, with a much higher proportion of trees than elsewhere in the downs.

Perceptual Influences

5.85 This is a large-scale landscape of extreme openness with strong ridgelines and wide expansive skies. The southern scarp above the Vale of Pewsey is a dramatic feature with scalloped steep slopes towering above the Plain, crowned by hills with a distinctive rounded profile. To the west the more highly convoluted indented scarp at Cherhill, with its distinguishing White Horse, is a similarly prominent landform. The rounded scarp edge hills such as Milk Hill, Knap Hill and Martinsell Hill are significant landmarks, and provide outstanding

panoramic views across the Vale, Salisbury Plain and beyond to the more wooded downlands around Chute Forest and into Hampshire. The sudden and surprising views, such as those obtained from the minor road crossing the downs from Lockeridge, are one of the most distinctive features of the character area offering seclusion within folds in the chalk topography contrasting with panoramic prospects out across the surrounding landscape. On a clear day, views from the summits on the western edge stretch to the Cotswolds, Mendips and the Brecon Beacons.

5.86 The important concentration of Neolithic monuments, hillforts and chalk cut White Horses create a strong sense of antiquity and to some this represents a magical or mystical landscape.

5.87 The absence of development and limited road access creates a sense of remoteness and isolation, and a good experience of dark night skies. There is some light pollution from Calne and Devizes in the west. There is also a high level of tranquillity, with only the main roads causing audible disturbance.

LCA 1C Horton Downs: Evaluation

Horton Downs valued qualities

5.88 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 1C Horton Downs are:

- The dramatic chalk scarp, crowned by distinctive rounded hills forms a dramatic sense of place, and is a landmark in views from the surrounding vale.
- Nationally important remnant chalk grassland habitats coat the steep scarp slopes of Pewsey Downs, Morgan's Hill, Roundway Down & Covert, Calstone and Cherhill Downs, and King's Play Hill, which are all designated as SSSI for their ecological value and contribute positively to the landscape.
- Strong sense of antiquity and connection to the past in the rich archaeological landscape, with its concentration of Neolithic monuments and prehistoric hillforts.
- The Cherhill, Devizes and Alton Barnes White Horses are distinctive chalk figure landmarks, adding to the scenic qualities of the landscape, and are a popular recreational draw.
- Extensive public rights of way that traverse the steep scarp slopes, including the Ridgeway, White Horse Trail and Mid Wiltshire Way.
- Panoramic views from the top of the ridge over the Vale and from the escarpment across the high Downs provide a distinctive sense of place.
- A large-scale, open landscape creates a sense of expansiveness and wide open skies that provides a highly scenic quality to the landscape.
- Very limited human habitation or settlement, creating a strong sense of remoteness, tranquillity, and experience of dark night skies.

Horton Downs local forces for change/issues

5.89 In addition to the forces for change set out at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 1C Horton Downs are:

- 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 solar farms and battery storage around Devizes and Calne, outside of the National Landscape, may be visible from the Horton Downs, and the glint and glare could affect the panoramic views.
- Increasing recreational use of The Ridgeway and visitors to the prehistoric monuments may increase pressure for further visitor facilities and car parks.
- Future demand for further masts or wind turbines could have a major effect on the remoteness of the Horton Downs.

Horton Downs strategy and local guidelines

5.90 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Open Downland LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Horton Downs:

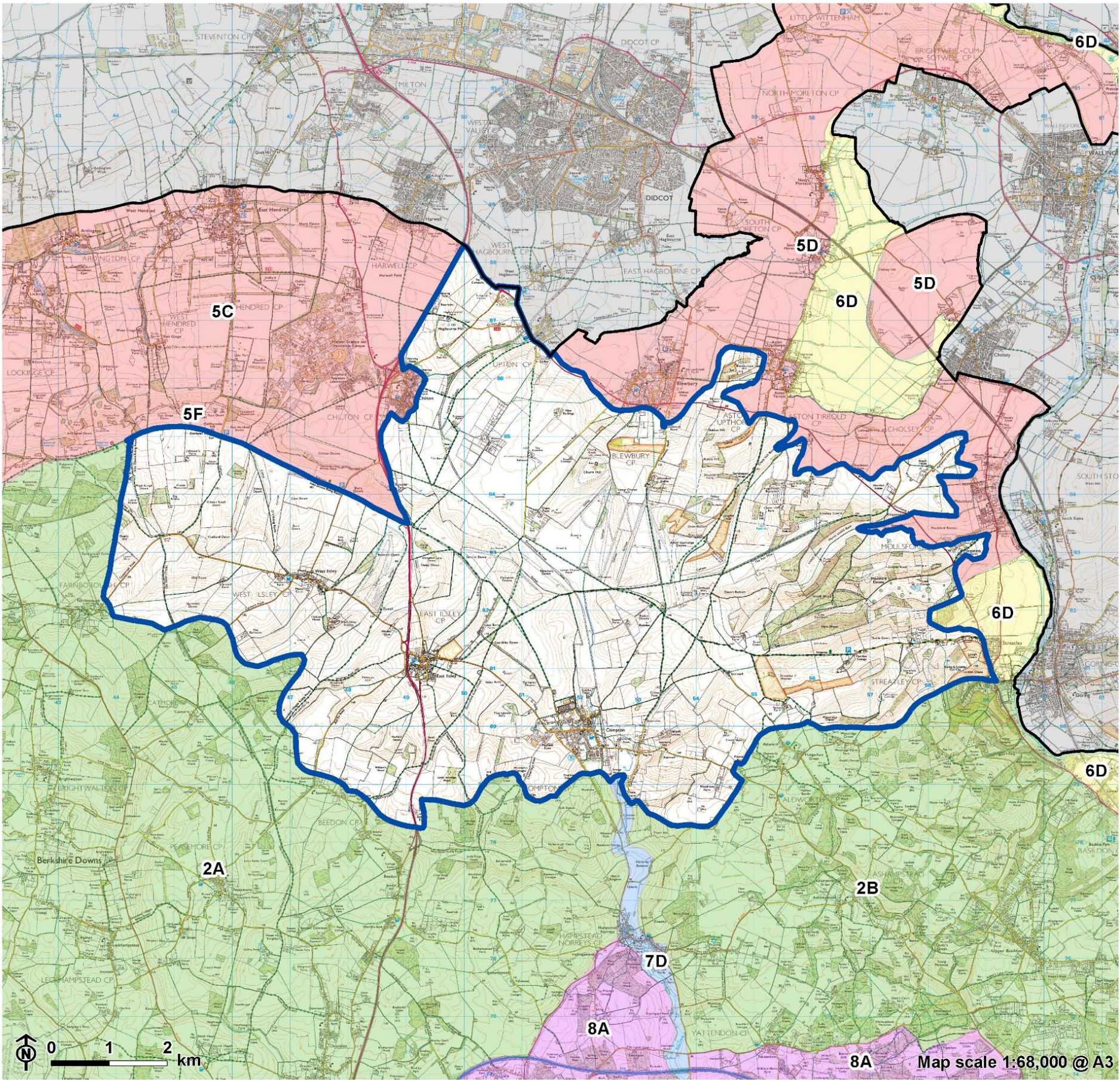
- Conserve, manage and seek to enhance chalk grassland habitats along the western scarp, including retaining / introducing suitable and sustainable grazing regimes. Consider opportunities to extend and link existing sites.
- Conserve, manage and seek to enhance the long-range views out of the National Landscape by ensuring all future solar farms, particularly around Devizes and Calne, are appropriately sited to reduce their visual impact including glint and glare.
- Ensure any additional recreational facilities are small-scale and in keeping with the rural character of the Horton Downs. Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes to car parks and minimise any lighting to retain the dark night skies.

LCA 1D Blewbury Downs

Figure 5.23: View from the Ridgeway towards Blewbury Down



Figure 5.24: LCA 1D Blewbury Downs: Location

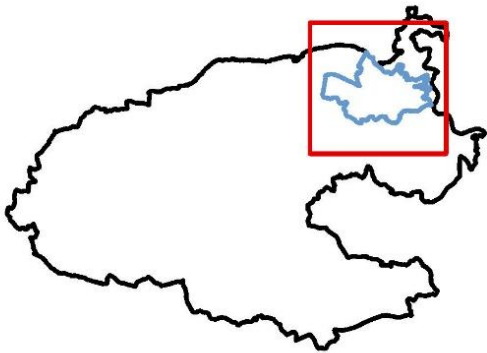


North Wessex Downs
Landscape Character Assessment
North Wessex Downs National Landscape



1D: Blewbury Downs

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



Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2025. Ordnance Survey License Number AC0000817126.

Figure 5.25: Gallops north of Compton



Figure 5.26: Rolling downland near East Ilsley



LCA 1D Blewbury Downs: Description

5.91 The Blewbury Downs represent the eastern extent of the high open downland within the National Landscape. The character area is defined topographically with boundaries roughly following contours at heights of between 160 metres and 190 metres, with the eastern edge including the distinct convoluted scarp slope that rises above Blewbury village. To the south, the high downs are surrounded by the downland with woodland landscapes on the dipslope that grade down towards the Kennet Valley (2A: Brightwalton Downs and 2B: Ashampstead Downs). To the north, boundaries are with the lower Plain (5D: Moreton Plain).

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.92 The Blewbury Downs are underlain by Middle and Upper Chalk, with overlying drift deposits of Clay-with-Flint. The chalk geology creates the characteristic strong structural landform of rolling uplands, with round or flat-topped hills, intersected by dry valleys. The plateau is at a slightly lower elevation compared, for example, to the Lambourn Downs (LCA 1B) or Marlborough Downs (LCA 1A), rarely rising above 200 metres and dipping gently to the south. Shallow well-drained calcareous soils predominate on slopes and crests, with thicker soils in the valley bottoms.

Biodiversity

5.93 The downs are dominated by arable farmland, with little enclosure, apart from occasional post and wire fences creating a large-scale open landscape. In contrast the thin soils on the steep slopes of the escarpment are important for the extent of unimproved flower rich chalk grassland that they retain supporting an important range of flora and fauna. The steep scarp slopes that form the northern boundary of the Blewbury Downs support a mosaic of chalk scrub, including juniper and small beech hangers and hazel coppice. Four chalk grassland sites have been designated as SSSIs, notable for their rich plant and butterfly communities. These chalk grassland SSSIs are Lardon Chase, which represents one of the largest remaining fragments of unimproved chalk grassland on the Berkshire Downs, Aston Upthorpe Downs, Moulford Downs and Streatley Warren. Broadleaved woodland occurs in long sinuous blocks along the slopes, including ancient woodland at Ham Wood and Unhill Wood.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.94 The area is predominantly in arable use, although was probably used for open grazing and commons until the eighteenth or nineteenth century. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries large, regular and straight-sided fields were created as a result of formal Parliamentary enclosure. The most common historic landscape field type is mid-20th century reorganised fields, where field boundaries have been removed and/or irregular boundaries straightened to create very large open fields. Some of the more sinuous land boundaries and trackways may be late medieval, and trackways such as Halfpenny Catch Lane are probably old drove ways.

5.95 The racehorse industry is prominent in the landscape, with equestrian centres and a large number of gallops clustered along the northern slopes. Rides and gallops were laid out over the downland during the 20th century and form a prominent feature of the landscape. The short grass-topped gallops are often species-rich with cowslips and turn bright yellow in spring, although this can vary depending on management regimes.

Historic features

5.96 Intensive farming has resulted in few surviving archaeological sites on the Blewbury Downs. However, small-scale isolated examples of Late Neolithic to Bronze Age funerary monument are concentrated in the east. These include round barrows on ridgelines and hillsides, with occasional small barrow groups, as on the Compton Downs and Lowbury Hill, and just north of Hodcott Copse. Lowbury Hill Camp is thought to be a Romano-British temple site or farmstead enclosure, while a Roman enclosure and cemetery of this date is on the Roden Downs. All are recognised as Scheduled Monuments.

Settlement pattern

5.97 The character area is more settled than other areas of Open Downland with three villages at Compton, East Ilsley and West Ilsley, all set within dry valleys cutting the plateau top. Each village has its own associated area of downland and a network of radial routes (lanes) connecting into the higher surrounding land. West Ilsley was laid out in the medieval period along central streets, while East Ilsley was nucleated. East Ilsley was an important local market in the late medieval period, and by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries three or four-day fairs were being held there. During these, graziers brought sheep from the local downlands for fattening up for the London market.

Principal settlement

5.98 Compton is the principal settlement in this area. The historic core of Compton, designated a Conservation Area, was formerly known as West Compton. The church is all that remains of what was probably the original settlement, to the east of the present-day village. Compton Manor is a Grade II listed 17th century house. The village significantly expanded in the latter half of the 20th century and has less of a distinct character than the historic core, although a vernacular of red brick and slate is apparent. Compton has a sizeable area of commercial/industrial development located on the northern edge of the village, the former Institute for Animal Health, which is not well-integrated into the village.

Figure 5.27: Historic terraced housing in Compton



5.99 Compton lies in the gently sloping upper reaches of the valley of the River Pang, through which the river only seasonally flows (the name 'Compton', of Saxon origin, means 'town in a coombe (dry valley)'). The village is surrounded by open arable farmland. The tree-lined course of the former Didcot, Newbury and Southampton Railway defines the eastern edge of the settlement.

Communications and infrastructure

5.100 The strategic north-south route of the A34 in the west severs the Blewbury Downs, while east-west B roads and lanes connecting the villages to the higher downs. The dismantled Didcot to Southampton Railway Line, closed in 1964, crosses the area from Upton to Compton, marked by a tree line and a number of brick bridges.

5.101 The Ridgeway runs roughly north-west to south-east across the area, forming part of an important routeway throughout prehistory and later periods. It provides good recreational access, along with other public rights of way.

Perceptual Influences

5.102 Much of Blewbury Downs is open and lacks significant hedgerow and tree cover. This provides expansive views across the chalk dipslope and, from the hills towards the northern edge of the Open Downland, views north across the Vale of White Horse towards the Corallian Limestone Ridge on the horizon. Development around Didcot, (within the setting of the National Landscape), and at Harwell Campus (within the National Landscape in LCA 5C), is prominent in some northward views but screened by landform from most of the downland.

5.103 Visible archaeological features, including Lowbury Hill, earthworks, barrows, the Ridgeway and other drove roads, impart an ancient and timeless quality. The general lack of settlement in the east, and the strong perception of dark skies throughout the area increase the sense of remoteness. The presence of the A34 cutting across the downland is a more modern feature within the landscape, which impacts tranquillity and remoteness. Dark sky mapping also shows there is some impact from lights in the villages at Compton, East Ilsley and West Ilsley.

LCA 1D Blewbury Downs: Evaluation

Blewbury Downs valued qualities

5.104 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 1D Blewbury Downs are:

- Flat topped hills, local ridgelines and dry coombes form a highly scenic landscape with extensive long-distance views.
- Rolling open topography and panoramic views create a dramatic landscape.
- Distinctive scattered woodland on hilltops and slopes including Ancient Woodland at Ham and Unhill Woods provide enclosure in an otherwise open landscape.
- Remnant chalk grassland habitats, with Lardon Chase, Aston Upthorpe Downs, Moulford Downs and Strealy Warren nationally designated as SSSI, which provide ecological value and contribute positively to the landscape.
- Distinctive hilltop sinuous blocks of ancient woodland at Ham Wood and Unhill Wood contrast with the otherwise open landscape.
- Prominent archaeological features on hilltops are designated as Ancient Monuments, including small-scale Late Neolithic to Bronze Age barrows and Lowbury Hill Camp, a potential Romano-British temple, provide significant time-depth and sense of place.
- Horse racing industry including gallops, which provides continuity of land use and can be aesthetically pleasing in spring with yellow cowslips on the grass gallops.
- Recreational value in the public rights of way that traverse the scarp slopes and connect settlements, especially the Ridgeway National Trail.

Blewbury Downs local forces for change/issues

5.105 In addition to the forces for change at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 1A Blewbury Downs are:

- The redevelopment of the Didcot Power Station site (in the setting of the LCA) may impact on views from higher ground. Large-scale redevelopment at Harwell Campus (within LCA 5C) may also impact on

panoramic views from the escarpment, reducing the sense of remoteness and tranquillity.

- The redevelopment of the large industrial area north of Compton, the former Institute for Animal Health, as a residential area is an opportunity to integrate a large new residential area into the LCA.
- The busy road A34 is a visibly and audibly intrusive feature and severs the connection between the historically linked East and West Ilsleys.

Blewbury Downs strategy and local guidelines

5.106 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Open Downland LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Blewbury Downs:

- Redevelopment of Harwell Campus (in LCA 5C) and at Didcot in the setting of the National Landscape should have careful consideration for the impact on views from the chalk escarpment, especially in the siting and design of tall/large scale structures.
- Recent planning permission for new residential development on the site of the former Institute for Animal Health at Compton is an opportunity to better integrate this area into the village. The new development should use careful design, in terms of siting, scale, style, layout and materials to integrate the new development into the existing settlement character and to preserve the views to and from the downs