



**North Wessex
Downs**
National
Landscape

North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Assessment

North Wessex Downs National Landscape

Final report

Prepared by LUC

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A Nationally Significant Landscape

1.1 The North Wessex Downs is a landscape of national significance as recognised by its designation as a National Landscape. It is one of 46 National Landscapes in England and Wales and is of equivalent importance in terms of landscape quality as a National Park.

1.2 The North Wessex Downs was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1972 (officially renamed a National Landscape in 2023). The designation gives coherence to one of the most continuous tracts of chalk downland in England. It covers 1,730 square kilometres and is one of England's largest National Landscapes. From its western tip at Calne in Wiltshire, it stretches across the South West and South East of England in a broad arc through Swindon, Berkshire and Oxfordshire. It adjoins the Chilterns National Landscape along the River Thames before sweeping south, encircling Newbury, to encompass the northern reaches of the rolling chalk hills of the Hampshire Downs. It then continues towards Devizes across the high chalk upland of Salisbury Plain and the low-lying Vale of Pewsey. The extent and location of the National Landscape is illustrated in Figure 1.1

1.3 The underlying chalk geology is the uniting theme of the North Wessex Downs and has a profound effect on hydrology, biodiversity, patterns of land use and settlement. The chalklands are etched with the impact of human use over the millennia. The archaeology of the National Landscape is immensely rich, with many of its monuments ranking among the most impressive in Europe, including the World Heritage Site at Avebury. The National Landscape is sparsely populated (approximately 125,000), with the settlement largely located within the river valleys. This concentration of habitation has left intervening open uninhabited downlands. Thus ‘pools of tranquillity’ with a strong sense of remoteness are an important feature of the National Landscape - a very special perceptual characteristic within the densely populated part of Southern England.

1.4 The North Wessex Downs is a landscape of great diversity with significant variation and contrast. The landscape varies from the high open arable sweeps of the Marlborough Downs with their characteristic beech-top knolls and incised by narrow sheltered chalk river valleys, to more intimate well-wooded areas, such as the area around Chute Forest and Savernake Forest. In the eastern part of the National Landscape the land is lower, overlying Thames Basin gravels and London Clay with a characteristic rich mosaic of woodland, pasture, heath and common land.

Background and Purpose of the North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment

1.5 LUC was commissioned in June 2024 to review and update the 2002 North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment. This will provide up to date evidence on the landscape character of the National Landscape, with advice on the management of change across the various landscapes and opportunities for restoration and enhancement. The updated assessment will also provide a basis for the updated Management Plan (2025-2030).

1.6 A Landscape Character Assessment can help provide a framework for more tailored landscape studies and sensitivity assessments and has wider applications around land management and land use change.

1.7 This document can be used to consider landscape character when considering any type of change. This includes opportunities for conserving existing character, strengthening, and enhancing character as well as opportunities to create new character.

The role of Landscape Character Assessment

1.8 Landscape character is defined as

“a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse” (Natural England, 2014) [\[See reference 1\]](#).

1.9 Landscape character assessment is the process of identifying and describing such variations in character across a landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of features and attributes (characteristics) that make different landscapes distinctive. The landscape is the result of the interaction between people and place which gives an area a local identity. The ‘landscape wheel’ below illustrates how the different natural, cultural, and perceptual attributes of a landscape combine to produce character. The process of Landscape Character Assessment is described in “An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment” (Natural England, October 2014).

1.10 Understanding the character of place and evaluating an area’s defining characteristics is a key component in managing growth sustainably and ensuring that the inherent character and qualities of the landscape can continue to be appreciated. Understanding of character can be used to ensure that any change or development does not undermine whatever is valued or characteristic in a particular landscape and help guide positive change that conserves, enhances, restores, or creates local character.

Policy context

1.11 The European Landscape Convention (ELC) came into force in the UK in March 2007. It establishes the need to recognise landscape in law; to develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and planning of landscapes; and to establish procedures for the participation of the public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies. The ELC definition of ‘landscape’ recognises that all landscapes matter, be they ordinary, degraded, or outstanding:

“Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.”

1.12 The ELC puts emphasis on the whole landscape and all its values and is forward looking in its approach, recognising the dynamic and changing

character of landscape. Specific measures promoted by the ELC of direct relevance to this study include:

- The identification and assessment of landscape; and
- Improved consideration of landscape in existing and future sectoral and spatial policy and regulation.

1.13 This Landscape Character Assessment builds on the 2002 North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment and has regard for landscape studies for the seven Local Planning Authorities which lie within the National Landscape. The updated Landscape Character Assessment helps to reaffirm the importance of landscape, coordinate existing work and guide future work to protect, manage and plan the landscape.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

1.14 The revised NPPF, published in December 2024, states at paragraph 187 that:

“Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan).
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland...”

1.15 Paragraph 189 goes on to state:

“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. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads.”

1.16 The NPPF is supported by Planning Practice Guidance which recognises the role that Landscape Character Assessment plays in helping to understand the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape.

Statutory framework

1.17 The statutory framework for the protection of land in England as National Landscapes (still referred to as AONB within the legislation) is set out in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act) [\[See reference 2\]](#). The objectives of AONB designation are to ensure that the statutory purpose set out in Section 82 of the CRoW Act is achieved, i.e. the conservation and enhancement of an area's natural beauty.

1.18 Section 85 of the CRoW Act was amended by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023, which introduced a new duty that means relevant authorities 'must seek to further the purposes' of the Protected Landscapes.

Relationship to published landscape studies

1.19 Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken at a variety of scales and levels of detail. The North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment is part of a hierarchy of landscape character assessment with information cascading down from the national to local level.

National level

1.20 At a national level, England is divided into 159 distinct National Character Areas (NCAs). Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, history, and cultural and economic activity. There are descriptive profiles available for each NCA setting out information on landscape character, changes in the landscape and an assessment of ecosystem services delivered.

1.21 There are six NCAs which are wholly or partly within the National Landscape:

- NCA 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales
- NCA 110 Chilterns
- NCA 116 Berkshire and Marlborough Downs
- NCA 129 Thames Basin Heaths
- NCA 130 Hampshire Downs
- NCA 132 Salisbury Plain and the West Wiltshire Downs

1.22 National landscape character areas within and surrounding the North Wessex Downs are illustrated on Figure 1.2

Local level

1.23 As shown on Figure 1.1, the North Wessex Downs National Landscape includes parts of seven Local Planning Authorities, which all have their own Landscape Character Assessments of varying ages:

- Swindon Borough Council (2004, currently under review)
- Wiltshire Council (2005)
- West Berkshire District Council (2019)
- Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council (2021)
- Test Valley Borough Council (2018)
- Vale of White Horse District Council (2024)
- South Oxfordshire District Council (2024)

1.24 The North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment draws on these separate assessments to provide a comprehensive and consistent character assessment focussed on the National Landscape.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Approach

2.1 This Landscape Character Assessment follows the method promoted by Natural England through 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment' (2014) [See reference 3], which embeds the principles of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) within it.

Process of Assessment

2.2 The process for undertaking the study involved the following key stages:

- Inception meeting
- Review and baseline data collection/collation of mapped data in GIS
- Desk-based review of the landscape character type and landscape character area classification of the landscape
- Field survey to check/identify key characteristics, collect aesthetic/perceptual information, take photographs and observe forces for change
- Consultation with key stakeholders; and
- Draft and final reporting.

2.3 The initial desk-based stage involved the collation of a wide range of up-to-date mapped information to 'sense-check' the existing landscape classifications and to update the baseline. Designations relating to cultural heritage, nature conservation and landscape were checked for any changes since 2002. Data used within the report, including data collated in the GIS database is shown in Appendix B.

2.4 Classification is concerned with dividing the landscape into areas of distinct, recognisable, and consistent character and grouping areas of similar character together. The existing classification conforms to the recommendations of Natural England, and divides the landscape into Landscape Character Types, which are then subdivided into Landscape Character Areas. Natural England promotes the idea that LCTs should be based on the identification of patterns in

the landscape resulting from the interaction of natural and socio-cultural factors. These are landscapes with a consistent, homogeneous character, sharing common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation, or human influences. Although not identical they share a common pattern of elements. Landscape Character Areas are single and unique, discrete geographical areas of the landscape type.

2.5 The presentation of the assessment is also updated to include clearer mapping on a 1:25,000 OS base, a range of representative photographs, text descriptions covering natural, cultural and perceptual influences, identified of valued qualities and more specific landscape and development management guidelines. The assessment has also been rationalised to avoid repetition. A list of forces for change and management guidelines is provided at the LCT level, with more local issues and guidelines presented at LCA level.

Stakeholder engagement

2.6 A workshop was held with team members from the National Landscape and relevant Local Planning Authority officers to present the updated approach to the Landscape Character Assessment. The workshop also explored what is valued about the landscape, what is changing in the landscape and any relevant guidance. These insights fed into the identification of valued qualities, forces for change, and guidelines.

2.7 An online consultation hub was also set up to provide further opportunities for Local Planning Authorities, councillors and parishes to comment on the valued qualities and forces for change in the landscape. Where relevant, the comments received were fed into the updated Landscape Character Assessment.

Outputs

2.8 The Landscape Character Assessment is presented in Chapter 5. The profiles are structured as follows:

LCT profile

- A location map which shows the extent of the LCT and its relationship with other LCTs, followed by summary paragraphs explaining its defining landscape character and location.

- Representative photograph of the LCT.
- Key characteristics in bullet points, providing a description of the character of the LCT.
- An evaluation comprising:
 - Forces for change acting on the landscape.
 - Guidelines on how to manage the impact of forces for change to ensure the valued qualities of the landscape are retained and enhanced. The guidelines can be considered as part of development management, for example guiding mitigation or enhancement, or influencing wider land management decisions for the rural environment.

LCA profile

- A location map at 1:25,000 scale showing the area covered by the LCA, and its relationship to the surrounding landscape.
- Representative photographs of the LCA.
- A description of the natural influences on the landscape, including designated habitats.
- A description of the most significant cultural influences on the landscape including designated cultural heritage assets.
- A detailed description of the principal settlement(s) within the LCA, and their setting within the landscape.
- A description of the most significant perceptual and aesthetic influences in the landscape.
- An evaluation comprising:
 - Landscape qualities – the landscape features and attributes that are particularly valued for their contribution to landscape character i.e. if any one of these features or attributes ceased to exist it would change the character to the detriment of the landscape.
 - Any additional local forces for change acting on the landscape.
 - Any additional local guidelines on how to manage the impact of local forces for change on valued qualities of the landscape.

Chapter 3

Evolution of the landscape

Physical Influences

3.1 The basic structure of any landscape is formed by its underlying geology. The actions of weathering, erosion and deposition alter the form of the landscape, drainage and soils and in turn, patterns of vegetation and land use. The North Wessex Downs is influenced by geological formations from the Cretaceous, Tertiary and Quaternary periods. The central and dominating feature, which gives structure and unity to the landscape, is the expanse of chalk at the heart of the Downs.

3.2 The geological structure of the North Wessex Downs is illustrated on Figures 3.1 and 3.2.

Geology and soil

Cretaceous (145.6-65.0 million years ago)

3.3 The rocks underlying the North Wessex Downs were formed during the Cretaceous period some 130 million years ago and have a strong influence on landform and landscape character today. During this period, a time of intense tectonic activity in Europe, the London Platform was elevated high above sea level exposing Jurassic strata, which were extensively eroded. Subsidence of the Wessex Basin led to the deposition of early sediments of Lower Greensand, Gault Clays and Upper Greensand.

3.4 In the late Cretaceous period rising sea levels progressively inundated the area and calcareous sediments were deposited, which eventually became chalk. Chalk was originally deposited throughout the region and during Alpine tectonic phases the southern part of the region was folded into the broad asymmetric syncline of the London Basin. The principal outcrop of this chalk forms a broad arc radiating from Stonehenge with one arm stretching across Wiltshire, Hampshire and Sussex and the other across Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. These form the distinctive downland landscapes of southern England of which the North Wessex Downs is an integral part.

3.5 The chalk was deposited sequentially into layers of Lower, Middle and Upper Chalk. The Middle and Upper chalk comprise pure white chalks which have resisted weathering, giving rise to the distinctive elevated plateau of expansive downs including the Marlborough Downs, Lambourn Downs, Horton Downs, Blewbury Downs and North Hampshire Downs. The high plateau of open, smoothly rolling downland is dissected by a network of dry valleys and long sinuous scarp slopes interlocking with gently rounded domed summits, as for example at Walbury Hill (297 metres), the highest chalk hill in southern England. The thin covering of well-drained, nutrient poor soils overlying the chalk bedrock supports a characteristic vegetation of herbs and grasses. Traditionally grazed by sheep and rabbits, these create the distinctive short springy chalk downland turf. These soils are also ideal for cereal growing and much of the downs are now under intensive arable cultivation.

3.6 Along the northern edge of the North Wessex Downs the eroded surface of the Lower Chalk, a softer clayey substrate, which has given rise to a lower and more level land surface and leaves a prominent and dramatic chalk scarp. The scarp along the northern edge descends to the heavy blue-grey Lower Cretaceous Gault Clay of the undulating clay plain of the Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.

3.7 The chalk upland is divided into two by the Vale of Pewsey. Here, the lower-lying vale exposes the softer, underlying Cretaceous deposits of Upper Greensand and Gault Clay. The deep well-drained loamy soils on the Greensand and deposited river alluvium have given rise to a rich agricultural landscape, which supports a mix of both cereal and dairying which characterises the Vale. Gault and Upper Greensand formations are also exposed on the north-west edge of the National Landscape, north of Chiseldon, where they have similarly given rise to a lowland agricultural landscape.

Tertiary (65.0 - 1.64 million years ago)

3.8 Further geological contrast is evident in the eastern part of the North Wessex Downs around Newbury, on the edge of the London Basin, where the chalk strata dip towards the north and are buried beneath the younger, softer Tertiary deposits of the Reading Beds, Bagshot Beds and London Clay, creating a low lying, gently sloping plateau capped by gravels and cut through by shallow river valleys. The varied geology gives rise to a range of soil types with fertile loamy soils overlying the London Clay supporting a mixture of improved pasture, arable farming and blocks of woodland, while the nutrient poor acidic soils of the plateau gravels have given rise to heathland, woodland and pasture dominated landscapes.

Sarsen Stones

Blocks of quartz sandstone, known as sarsens, are a particular feature of Overton Down, Fyfield Down and Piggledene on the Marlborough Downs, but are also found elsewhere within the chalk upland, forming one of the most distinctive features of the North Wessex Downs. The hard siliceous sandstones derive from tertiary deposits, later eroded and moved by glaciation. The sarsens have long been used for building stone – the best known forming the megalithic monuments such as at Avebury. They have also been used for domestic buildings and several villages, such as at West Overton, Lockeridge, Fyfield and West Kennet are constructed of roughly broken blocks of sarsen fitted together in a jigsaw pattern. A substantial stone cutting industry developed around the sarsen stones in the mid-19th century, with the stone being cut for tramways and paving kerbs, among other uses.

Quaternary (1.64 million years ago - present)

3.9 The landscape is also considerably influenced by drift deposits, which overlay the solid geology. Many of the plateaux and ridges of the chalk downs are capped with Quaternary deposits of Clay-with-Flint; pockets of reddish-brown clay containing flint pebbles. The heavier clay soils have retained their woodland cover and form the characteristic landscapes of the wooded downs, such as Chute Forest and Savernake Forest. The gently sloping plateau to the west of Newbury is capped by plateau gravels, deposits of acidic sand and gravels which have given rise to isolated areas of heathland.

3.10 Slope deposits, also known as 'combe deposits', are local features where frost-weathered debris accumulated during winter, forming a slurry when the snows melted and flowing down the slopes to create deposits resembling till. This type of deposit is widespread in the dry valleys of the downs. River alluvium dominates the main valley floodplains throughout the North Wessex Downs, such as along the Kennet, Lambourn and Pang creating rich wetland landscapes.

Watercourses

3.11 The topography and watercourses of the North Wessex Downs are shown on Figure 3.3. In general, it is the Thames Basin which determines the drainage pattern of the North Wessex Downs, with the main rivers flowing to the east. The River Kennet dissects the National Landscape from west to east. However, the separate catchments of the Salisbury Avon and Test also influence the pattern in the south, draining the Pewsey Vale and Hampshire Downs respectively.

3.12 The deeply incised chalk river valleys of the Lambourn, Kennet, Pang and Bourne are key features of the North Wessex Downs. With their clear, fast flowing waters these watercourses are highly prized for their distinctive ecology and their valleys form the main routes for communication and settlement, contrasting with the sparsely populated chalk summits. The downland is also dissected by a number of dry valleys, some of which support distinctive ephemeral winter streams or 'bournes'. These were formed during the Ice Age, when permafrost impeded sub-surface drainage and valleys, or coombes, were cut through the chalk. Today, however, much of the high open downland is waterless due to the porous nature of the bedrock.

3.13 Where the chalk formations of the central area meet the clays and gravels of the Reading and Bagshot Beds of the London Basin, water stored within the chalk aquifer issues along many spring lines. Minor, shallow tributaries drain this area into the rivers Enbourne, Kennet and Pang, which form part of the wider Thames catchment. These are frequently associated with ecologically important habitats and linear settlements. Springs are also a feature of the northern escarpment, issuing at the point where the porous chalk overlies the impermeable clays. These give rise to the distinctive scalloped coombe landform, such as The Manger on Whitehorse Hill, and spring line villages clustered along the foot of the slope.

The Kennet and Avon Canal

The Kennet and Avon Canal is a distinctive linear feature, threading through the heart of the North Wessex Downs linking its diverse landscapes. Constructed between 1794 and 1810 to join the river navigations of the Kennet and Avon, it provided a direct and safe waterway between Bristol and London. Its route crosses the agricultural, lowland Vale of Pewsey, the narrow, meandering wooded valley of the River Dun and the distinctive chalk river corridor of the Kennet.

Designed by John Rennie, an engineer and architect, the Kennet and Avon includes many fine structures including aqueducts, tunnels such as the brick-built Bruce Tunnel at Savernake, bridges and lock flights. These features, along with the canal side and wharf buildings create a remarkable built heritage. Crofton pumping station in the Vale of Pewsey houses the oldest working steam engine in the world.

The canal found favour with the military when in the 1940s it was designated as part of the 'GHQ Line Blue', intended as a defence line in the event of a successful German invasion. Pillboxes and anti-tank obstacles still feature along its course through the North Wessex Downs.

The importance of the waterway for commercial trade declined following the opening of the Great Western Railway in 1841 and the canal went into a long period of deterioration. The 1960s saw the start of restoration of the waterway, initiated by the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust, and the full length of the canal was reopened in the 1990s.

Ecology

3.14 The ecological character of an area is closely linked to its landscape features. The combination of such features as the chalk geology, hydrology, topography and land-use, results in a set of biological conditions under which specific ecological communities develop. The diversity and variety of landscapes within the North Wessex Downs has therefore resulted in a corresponding variation in habitats.

3.15 The North Wessex Downs contains vast stretches of intensively cultivated arable fields supporting relatively little wildlife interest. However, within this context there are some very high quality habitats of local, national and international ecological importance. These include sixty-six Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the National Landscape boundary; six of these are also Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). There are also a large number of non-statutory sites of nature conservation interest. The nationally designated sites are shown on Figure 3.5.

3.16 The most characteristic ecological habitats are the chalk grasslands and chalk rivers, plus semi-natural woodland and arable farmland. There are in addition, a wide variety of other habitats that are also important and characterise particular areas within the North Wessex Downs. These include the small remnant patches of heathland that survive on river gravel deposits in the east of the National Landscape, the distinctive communities of lower plants that have developed on the sarsen stones (which are a special feature of the downs), areas of chalk scrub and the wide unimproved grassy verges of the droveways which characterise the open chalk downlands. At a local level, the hedgerow network, springs and ponds also provide important refuge and habitats. Collectively, these represent a rich biological resource offering potential for restoration/recreation and management to enhance the overall ecological character of the North Wessex Downs.

Chalk Grassland

3.17 The thin, well-drained, nutrient poor soils overlying the chalk bedrock support a characteristic vegetation of herbs and grasses. Traditionally grazed by sheep and rabbits, this is the 'springy' turf characteristic of the downlands forming one of the most distinctive and ecologically notable habitats of the North Wessex Downs. Unimproved chalk grassland is one of Britain's botanically richest habitats supporting a diverse community of invertebrates, mammals and birds. Key features of the chalk grasslands of the North Wessex Downs include:

- important butterfly populations including: adonis blue, silver-studded blue, marsh fritillary, chalkhill blue, small blue, silver spotted skipper and Duke of Burgundy fritillary.
- a large number of scarce plant species including early gentian, eyebright (*Euphrasia pseudokernerii*), pasque flower, Chiltern gentian, dwarf mouse ear, tuberous thistle, field fleawort, round-headed rampion, burnt orchid, bastard toadflax and musk orchid.
- feeding and breeding habitat for a number of rare and declining birds including skylark and stone-curlew.

3.18 The 20th century saw extensive destruction and fragmentation of these important grassland areas. This is largely attributed to agricultural intensification and the ploughing up of the light shallow downland soils with an associated decline in grazing. Once widespread, the unimproved chalk grassland of the North Wessex Downs is now fragmented with small, isolated blocks restricted largely to the steep scarp slopes and dry valleys plus areas maintained as pasture around archaeological sites. The chalk grasslands are especially characteristic of three landscape types: LCT 1 Open Downland, LCT 5 Downs Plain and Scarp, and a smaller amount within LCT 2 Downlands with Woodland. There is a particular concentration within the west of the National Landscape, perhaps the area where arable farming has been less intensive. Today, the reduction in livestock and associated abandonment of marginal land, some remaining areas of unimproved chalk grassland are under threat of loss to scrub encroachment.

Chalk Streams and Rivers

3.19 The spring fed streams and rivers, which incise the chalk include the River Kennet, Lambourn, Pang, Salisbury Avon and Bourne. These are described in LCT 7 River Valleys. Chalk rivers are as a key habitat because of the diverse and characteristic biological communities they support. They are of international significance and have distinctive environmental characteristics such as a high alkalinity and conductivity. The percolation of water through chalk filters out much of the solid material resulting in these rivers' characteristically clear water and they provide important fisheries. A particular feature of the National Landscape is the winterbournes - ephemeral streams that flow in the upper reaches only during late autumn, winter and early spring. Key features of the chalk rivers in the North Wessex Downs include:

- extremely rich in plant and animal communities deriving in part from the high- quality of the base-rich water which, being spring fed, is naturally clear and fast flowing.
- important habitat for a number of near extinct species including otter (formerly believed to be extinct in the National Landscape but possibly beginning to re-colonise), and freshwater white-clawed crayfish.
- support healthy fish populations including brown trout, salmon, grayling, perch, chub and dace – providing important game fisheries.
- support a diversity of floating vegetation.
- include the characteristic 'winterbournes' with a specialised flora adapted to wide variations in flow.
- irrigate a rich mosaic of associated wetland habitats creating distinctive valley landscapes including fens, floodplains, water meadows, carr and wet woodland. Diverse 'wetland' habitats support many rare species. The Red Data Book summer snowflake survives, for example in seasonally flooded woodlands along the Kennet Valley.

3.20 The abstraction of water from chalk aquifers has resulted in low flows within the chalk rivers of the North Wessex Downs. Development on the periphery of the National Landscape places particular pressures on water resources. More recently, localised autumn and winter flooding of the valleys has also been a concern. Pollution from agricultural run off has contributed to a decline in the quality of the chalk river habitat.

Broadleaved Woodland and Wood Pasture

3.21 Semi-natural woodland is now a scarce and valuable ecological resource. In the North Wessex Downs many of these woodlands are found on steep scarps and in coombes inaccessible for cultivation (e.g. LCT 5) or on the heavier soils where Clay-with-Flint caps the Chalk, notably within LCT 2 Downlands with Woodland and in LCT 3 Wooded Plateau. The most densely wooded areas, for example Chute Forest and Savernake Forest are derived from former royal hunting forests. A further concentration of ancient semi-natural woodland is found on the lower clays and gravels in the eastern part of the National Landscape (LCT 8). In much of the National Landscape, the density of semi-natural woodland is one of the defining features of the landscape, as reflected in the naming of the landscape types. The extent of woodland coverage and recorded ancient woodland is shown on Figure 3.6.

3.22 There are a variety of woodland stand-types in the National Landscape reflecting the range of environmental conditions including hornbeam coppice, oak/ash stands, hazel/oak stands, birch, ash/wych elm coppice, ash/wych elm/oak/field maple/hazel stands, ash/maple stands, and hazel/ash stands.

3.23 Within the valleys, such as Kennet Valley there are also important examples of wet alder woodland. Surprisingly, beech woodlands are limited in extent (compared for example to the adjacent Chilterns National Landscape) and restricted to beech hangers along the escarpments to the north (in LCT 5) and the escarpment along the north edge of the Hampshire Downs (LCA 2E).

3.24 The key features of the woodlands of the North Wessex Downs are:

- rich in invertebrate species especially butterflies, including some severely declining fritillaries, e.g. pearl-bordered fritillary.
- long rotation hazel coppice provides important habitat for dormice, a UK priority species.
- provide roosting and/or feeding sites for a number of bats species including: Bechstein's, Barbastelle, greater horseshoe and noctule.
- calcareous woodlands support a number of scarce species such as spiked star-of- Bethlehem.
- good examples of calcareous bluebell woods.
- a number of nationally scarce moss species.
- Savernake Forest (LCA 3A) is particularly important as a large remnant of wood pasture, with 900 ha designated as SSSI in recognition of its

outstanding lichen flora, fungi, rare invertebrates and breeding bird community. A further important example of lowland wood pasture and parkland is provided by Highclere Park SSSI (LCA 8E).

3.25 The woodlands would formerly have been an important part of the rural economy. They provided a source of fuel and building materials, as evidenced by timber framed buildings, and were used for hurdle making in support of the sheep economy on the downlands. The decline in traditional techniques of woodland management such as coppicing, and neglect are having an impact on the ecological value of the woodland resource.

Arable Farmland

3.26 Today, the dominant land use within much of the National Landscape is the open arable farmland with few hedgerows and occasional small, wooded areas (LCT 1) intermixed within a more wooded mosaic (LCT 2). Figure 3.4 shows the Agricultural Land Classification. The arable land is largely managed under modern intensive systems, although may still support a characteristic range of wildlife, including:

- rare and colourful arable weeds, such as dense flowered-fumitory, slender tare and shepherd's needle, which are dependent on a regular cropping regime and survive in the less intensively managed field margins.
- an important range of farmland birds. Spring-tilled arable on stony chalk soils provide essential breeding sites for stone curlew, a bird formerly widespread on the chalklands of lowland England, and a focus of conservation projects in the North Wessex Downs. Skylark and yellowhammers remain relatively common and widespread, while grey partridges, lapwings, turtle doves and corn buntings can also still be found.
- a habitat for species such as the brown hare.

3.27 Agri-environment schemes through the Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELM) are designed to support the rural economy and align to Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan. Schemes support the sensitive management of arable margins, which can enhance biodiversity within arable landscapes. The integration of production and nature conservation objectives, supported by appropriate incentives represent a major opportunity for biodiversity within the National Landscape.

Historic Environment

Introduction

3.28 The landscape as we see it today is the product of a series of major changes through which its character has been transformed by the interaction of natural and human processes. While the basic landform remains the same, its covering is constantly subjected to change. Some periods of landscape change have been more rapid and radical than others. These changes are not only important from an archaeological perspective, but also significant in determining the overall character of the North Wessex Downs.

3.29 A summary of the key events in the development of the North Wessex Downs landscape is outlined below and provides the context for the individual character area descriptions. It is based on research undertaken by Wessex Archaeology and is largely unaltered from the 2002 Landscape Character Assessment. The extent of cultural heritage designations is shown on Figure 3.7.

Post-glacial hunters and horticulturalists: 11,000 - 4,000 BC (Palaeolithic-Mesolithic)

The First Landscapes

3.30 During the last full glaciation between 18,000 - 11,000 BC much of southern Britain - untouched by the ice - was tundra, with heather, bilberry and crowberry. Arctic willow, dwarf birch, grasses and sedges were present in more sheltered places, although there were periods when birch and poplar woodland established themselves. By 8,000 BC (the Mesolithic period) the climate was warming, and pine, juniper and birch forest spread, giving way to hazel scrub and then more mixed broad-leaved oak woodland with elm, ash, alder, lime and hazel. Alder dominated forests to the west, while greensand areas to the east and the gravel floodplains of the Thames may have had lighter woodland cover. Heather and grass plant species indicate some clearings were forming, either naturally or through human action, and were then regenerating as hazel scrub.

Social life and society structure

3.31 During this period, Late Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic communities may have consisted of kin or family-related bands, which themselves would

have often split up into various task groups such as hunting or fishing parties. At certain times of the year, these bands may have combined into larger affiliated groups, based on wider kinship or tribal ties.

Ideology

3.32 Over time, certain points in the landscape became especially significant for these communities and stories and myths would have emerged. Natural features - prominent trees, hills, streams or flint sources - might have been named, and thought of as inhabited by the spirits of animals, plants and the human dead. The symbolic potential of animals, trees and woodland would have been great.

3.33 Little evidence survives of the people themselves. Upper Palaeolithic burials are unknown on the North Wessex Downs and, like rare Mesolithic burials, occur mostly in cave sites near the coast. The absence of Mesolithic human remains indicates that the dead were exposed on the ground, on platforms or in trees, or set adrift in rivers and streams.

Buildings and settlement

3.34 Upper Palaeolithic inhabitation sites were mostly confined to caves and rock shelters, largely beyond the North Wessex Downs. Only a few open area sites are known from within the National Landscape, but scattered finds of flint tools suggest Upper Palaeolithic groups ranged far across them, and valleys such as those of the Rivers Thames and Kennet may have seen regular, seasonal-based activity. The evidence for Mesolithic activity also consists mainly of flint scatters although some excavations have recovered traces of temporary shelters.

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

3.35 The last full glaciation was very severe, and hunting groups may have been driven from Britain altogether. As the climate began to stabilise from 11,000 BC, Late Upper Palaeolithic groups returned. By 8,500 BC, the higher downland within the National Landscape may have formed upland hunting areas for Mesolithic groups, with valleys exploited for plant foods, freshwater fish and wildfowl. Several sites in the Kennet Valley suggest intensive exploitation of this favoured location. By the Late Mesolithic, groups were deliberately clearing areas of the forest uplands in the North Wessex Downs to attract grazing animals, and herds may have been selectively culled or even

provided with fodder over the winter. Edible wild plants might also have been managed and encouraged to grow and spread.

Trade, artefacts and communication

3.36 During the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic, ties with certain places in the landscape would have developed, these sites being linked through traditional paths and weekly, seasonal and annual rounds. Contact with unrelated groups might have been infrequent, and may have occurred at only a few places in the landscape, where food, water or flint was especially abundant. Portland chert used in stone tools, distinctive stone axes and adzes, and slate and unusual pebbles from Devon and Cornwall were distributed quite widely across the area during the Mesolithic, which hints at developing patterns of social interaction.

Early agricultural and ritual practices: 4,000 - 2,400 BC (Neolithic)

3.37 The fifth and fourth millennia BC saw a major transformation in the landscape of the North Wessex Downs, from the gatherer-hunter economy to one involving food production. This resulted in a series of changes in material culture, plant cultivates and animal domesticates and the first human influenced changes to the landscape.

Social life and society structure

3.38 Evidence for new activities in the Neolithic included pottery making and weaving. Cattle, sheep, goats and pigs would have had to be taken to areas of grazing or forage, and clearings created where plants were cultivated or managed. Communities may still have been very small, though people were coming together in greater numbers at certain times of the year. This was the time when huge monuments were being built which suggests an advanced degree of co-operation and organisation. Developing territorial awareness may be seen in the clustering of long mounds and other Early Neolithic monuments into regionally distinct groups, such as those around Avebury. Monuments such as causewayed enclosures are absent from areas such as the Lambourn Downs and the North Hampshire Downs, although are present around the Vale of Pewsey, and this again suggests different regional traditions within the North Wessex Downs area.

Ideology

3.39 The theme of death and burial is a significant one in the landscape of the National Landscape. The earliest evidence for treatment of the dead comes from the Neolithic period in the form of two types of site where human bones are commonly found. These are large enclosures, formed by segmented (or “causewayed”) ditches, and long mounds or long barrows.

3.40 As a monument type, causewayed enclosures are relatively rare, yet three examples are found in the National Landscape, at Windmill Hill, north-west of Avebury, Knap Hill and Rybury on the scarp overlooking the Vale of Pewsey. Although the function of these monuments is by no means certain, archaeological evidence suggests that they may have been used to define an area where the dead could be excarnated. There are numerous examples of Neolithic long mounds from the area, including some 20 examples around Avebury. These monuments comprise long earthen mounds, which cover a variety of structures associated with burials. One of the most dramatic, the West Kennet long barrow, for example, is some 113 metres in length and contains individual chambers constructed of sarsen slabs. The long barrows are distinctive forms in the landscape and are often positioned on hilltops or ridges or follow the lines of rivers and valleys.

Buildings and settlement

3.41 In southern Britain generally, remains of Neolithic buildings are very rare. Many groups may have led semi-nomadic lives, moving between specific areas at different times of the year, but returning to them again and again. Intensive survey in the eastern part of North Wessex Downs has shown many Neolithic artefacts lie over Mesolithic flint scatters, implying considerable antiquity for patterns of movement around the landscape. They are especially common on Clay-with-Flint areas, and as these soils were unsuitable for crops at that time, this suggests that flint sources and tradition were also important for inhabitation.

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

3.42 Marks made by the first crude ploughs or ards have been found underneath some Neolithic monuments such as the South Street long mound near Avebury. Instead of permanent fields maintained across generations it is now thought that Neolithic people may have planted crops in woodland clearings, using short-lived plots cultivated for only a few seasons. The herding

of animals may have suited a nomadic or semi-nomadic existence, with people moving with the herds from season to season, and from upland to lowland.

Trade, artefacts and communication

3.43 In the Early Neolithic, stone axes were transported over long distances, either as rough-outs or as finished objects, from stone sources in Cornwall, Norfolk, Cumbria and North Wales. Pottery made from Cornish gabbroic clay has been found on sites such as Windmill Hill near Avebury, and other pottery from the lower Thames valley was also entering the North Wessex Downs. Causewayed enclosures such as Windmill Hill and Knap Hill may have seen regular but episodic gatherings of people, possibly linked through wider clans or kinship groups, who came together to celebrate ritual ceremonies, trade, broker marriages, exchange breeding stock, and carry out a host of other activities. These sites may have been located on the edges of developing territories. The importance of trackways and routes along ridges for trade - such as the Ridgeway, Harroway, Icknield Way and Portway - may have developed from this time.

Landscape change

3.44 The environmental evidence for the Neolithic period within the National Landscape indicates a landscape that was still substantially wooded, though areas of grassland were now established and some erosion of soil had begun. Some clearances remained open or expanded, but others were abandoned and left to regenerate into hazel scrub and light woodland. Early Neolithic monuments such as causewayed enclosures were located in woodland clearings at the margins of human occupation, and long mounds were also built in limited clearances. The management of woodland resources would have been necessary to meet demands for timber and firewood, created by massive monumental structures and new practices.

3.45 In the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (3,000-1,500 BC), evidence for scrub, long and short turfed grass and cereal cultivation is more apparent. Although woodland was still very significant in the landscape, many clearances became permanent and large communal monuments such as Avebury and the round barrow cemeteries were located in large, cleared areas. It was during this period that the characteristic open 'chalk downland' vegetation first appeared over large parts of the North Wessex Downs, with the heavy soils of the flint-capped areas tending to retain their woodland cover.

A monumental landscape: 2,400 - AD 43 (Bronze Age - Iron Age)

Social life and society structure

3.46 By the Early and Middle Bronze Age, the lack of clear age or gender distinctions in barrow burials and cremations suggests that status was inherited rather than acquired, and that dominant lineages had now formed within societies. Large, linear ditches dividing up the landscape appeared on the Marlborough Downs and Salisbury Plain during the Late Bronze Age, and together with increased evidence for warfare this suggests emerging territories on the chalk uplands. Rather than extensive social networks, the emphasis on roundhouses, enclosures, linear ditches and field systems may also reflect that kinship groups were becoming more important in these communities. The creation and maintenance of linear ditches, field system boundaries and hilltop enclosures may have become the favoured arenas for communal social activity and expressing identity. This development of tribal communities, with substantial defended sites - hillforts - sitting amongst an ordered landscape with enclosed settlements and hamlets reaches its apogee in Iron Age society.

Ideology

3.47 The Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (around 2,400 BC) is a time when the landscape of the North Wessex Downs became monumentalised. Huge henge enclosures such as at Avebury and at Hatfield Farm, Marden in the Vale of Pewsey were built, together with the remarkable circular mound of Silbury Hill. A similar massive mound at Hatfield Farm, known as the Hatfield Barrow, which once measured 7 metres in height and 147 metres in diameter, was levelled in the early 19th century. This period of construction was followed by a time of transformation into stone, when many existing monuments were further enhanced by rows and circles of standing stones, as dramatically illustrated at Avebury. These monuments are, without doubt, some of the most remarkable manifestations of human organisation in prehistoric Europe.

3.48 Many of the numerous round barrows which are such a characteristic feature of the North Wessex Downs landscape, were constructed in the Early Bronze Age. Sometimes the barrows are highly visible on ridges and hill tops (or slightly below the actual top, on what is called the 'false crest', so that when seen from below they are on the skyline), while others follow the lines of valleys and streams. Notable examples on the North Wessex Downs include the Seven Sisters by Beacon Hill and the Lambourn Seven Barrows. Many barrow groups

are focused around earlier monuments, or form linear alignments, as on Overton Hill, near Avebury.

3.49 From the Middle Bronze Age, the large communal monuments fell out of use. Instead, the places and routines of everyday life, the ditches, pits and postholes of enclosures and fields became the focus for spiritual activity. In the Late Iron Age however, small numbers of individual burials and cremation burials appear again in the region, many of high-status individuals, such as richly furnished cremation burials found in Marlborough and in a barrow at Blagden Copse in Hampshire. Extensive Late Bronze Age and Iron Age middens such as Potterne and All Cannings Cross, near Devizes, may have been connected to these ideas. Here, vast accumulations of everyday domestic refuse were mixed with more deliberate deposits of artefacts, many either unused or deliberately broken. Votive offerings of metalwork continued in rivers such as the Thames but are rare elsewhere in the North Wessex Downs. During the Iron Age the seasonally appearing bournes seem to have held a particular fascination. Along with springs and certain trees, these may have been favoured places of the gods.

Buildings and settlement

3.50 The overall pattern of settlement in the Middle Bronze Age seems to be one of a patchwork of small farms and hamlets with associated arable and pastoral fields and interspersed woodland on heavier clays. But from this time and especially in the Late Bronze Age, more substantial buildings and settlements began to appear, such as the hilltop enclosure on Rams Hill, near Uffington, which was one of the first examples of ‘hillfort’ construction. The general impression is of a move to more nucleated settlements and developing competitive social networks. Prominent ridge end or hilltop enclosures also appeared at this time. These large, defended sites, such as at Walbury and Ladle Hill on the escarpment of the southern block of chalk upland may have been the residences of emerging social elites. Evidence suggests they may also have functioned as refuges in time of trouble, and as redistribution centres for crops and livestock, although they were unlikely to have been inhabited year-round.

3.51 Both enclosed and unenclosed farmsteads continued into the Early Iron Age, consisting of roundhouses and possible raised-floor granaries, with associated field systems. These remained the predominant settlement types through into the Romano-British period. They were often sited between the upper downland and the river floodplains. In the Middle and Late Iron Age, small numbers of distinctively shaped ‘banjo’ enclosures appeared, as at Blagden

Copse, some of which may have been more specialised settlements associated with herding.

3.52 The most visual manifestation of the Early and Middle Iron Age are the large numbers of hillforts, which are a very distinctive and visible feature of the landscape of the North Wessex Downs. A fine example is Ladle Hill where a hillfort was constructed (but never completed) within the earlier enclosure. Although many of these monuments had been abandoned by the Middle Iron Age, those that survived were often elaborated and increased in size. Some may have formed the seats of local chieftains and may thus be related to power and display. Beacon Hill (which sits opposite Ladle Hill) in Hampshire and Liddington Castle and Barbury Castle in Wiltshire. The latter are classic examples in the line of hillforts sited approximately along the line of the Wiltshire/Berkshire Ridgeway.

3.53 In the last century or so before the Roman conquest a number of large nucleated settlements developed, often at strategic points in the landscape such as river crossings. Calleva (Silchester) and Venta (Winchester) both of which are just outside the National Landscape boundary, are well known, however archaeological evidence from Mildenhall in the Kennet Valley suggests this was another major focus possibly connected to a series of undated linear earthworks in the woods to the south of the valley.

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

3.54 Evidence for scrub, long and short turfed grass and cereal cultivation became apparent during the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, indicating an expansion of arable and pastoral agriculture. More dramatic changes came during the Middle and Late Bronze Age, when extensive field systems began to appear on the downlands, such as those on the Marlborough Downs, the Lambourn Downs, and Salisbury Plain. This was related to a move to 'short fallow' agriculture, where fields were used more intensively, and ploughs and manuring were necessary to ensure the productivity of the soil. Field boundaries may indicate that access to the land was more tightly controlled.

3.55 By the Iron Age, sheep and cattle were being grazed on downlands largely devoid of woodland, with wet valley bottoms providing rich summer grazing. Cattle were still significant although sheep were by far the most numerous livestock on the downs, reared for meat but mainly for wool. Pigs may have foraged in woodlands. During the Iron Age a great diversity of plant foods were produced in cultivated fields with crops including spelt wheat, emmer wheat, barley, oats and rye, in addition to Celtic beans, peas, vetch, sorrel and fat hen.

Over time the soils on the chalk may have become thinner and less productive in some areas, and competition for land and resources may have led to or exacerbated social tensions.

Trade, artefacts and communication

3.56 Extensive communication and trade networks are demonstrated by the presence of non-local pottery on Middle Bronze Age and Late Bronze Age sites brought in from areas to the west. By the Middle Iron Age there were distinct pottery traditions in the Wiltshire Avon, the Kennet Valley and Berkshire Downs, and in Hampshire. Continental pottery styles and Gallic pottery vessels, wine amphorae and glass have been found on some Middle and Late Iron Age sites within the area and indicate that an export trade was operating.

Landscape change

3.57 During this period, forest clearance continued leading to the opening of large tracts of land. Settlement appears to have expanded on the chalk downland, complemented by a great increase in the number of burial monuments. Woodland appears to have persisted preferentially on soils on Clay-with-Flint. These heavier acidic soils may have been deliberately avoided for agriculture. It is likely that the heathlands on the lower land in the eastern part of the National Landscape were also formed during the Bronze Age through forest clearance and depletion of the soils.

3.58 In the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age (1,100 BC - AD 43), hilltop enclosures formed by banks and ditches were very dramatic features. Extensive patterns of field systems divided up much of the landscape, whilst surviving woods must have been carefully maintained using techniques such as coppicing, to ensure a constant supply of building materials and fuel. Cattle were grazed in valleys close to water sources, but sheep require less water and would have been grazed on the higher downland and maintained the distinct short-cropped downland turf. Hardier crops such as barley and spelt meant that cultivation had spread across the higher downs, even onto Clay-with-Flint areas, and the fragile downland soils were beginning to be eroded or exhausted in places.

Town and country, settlement of the landscape: AD 43 - 1066 (Roman - Saxon)

Social life and society structure

3.59 The Roman conquest of AD 43 brought changes reflecting the new centralised administration, although there was still much continuity with most native oppida continuing to develop as urban centres. Existing native lineages and their leaders would undoubtedly have continued to be hostile to the Roman invaders long after the occupation, including the Atrebates whose territory included the North Wessex Downs, but others rapidly adopted Roman customs and practices. Within a few centuries, native and Roman cultures had fused into a distinctive Romano-British identity, that was also subtly distinct other societies within the empire.

3.60 By the late 4th century AD Saxons were among the raiders pillaging the southern and eastern areas of England. In AD 410 the last Roman legions officially left from Britain, and by the later 5th century there were waves of Germanic immigration across southern England. A British victory over the Saxons at the battle of Mount Badon is recorded in the 6th century, the location of which may be within the North Wessex Downs. Thereafter the region became the scene of power struggles between the emerging kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia. It is during this time that some of the substantial Iron Age hillforts began to be redefended and massive earthworks such as the Wansdyke, which straddles the chalk uplands south of the Kennet, and Bedwyn Dyke, on the Savernake plateau, are thought to have been constructed. Place-name evidence also suggests quite widespread Anglo-Saxon settlement. Society was highly stratified, with a warrior aristocracy - the thegns, based in centres within each manor, and ruling over tenant peasants (villeins) and serfs. This evolved into the feudal society. Fighting between Wessex and Danish forces occurred on the Berkshire Downs in the late 9th century.

Ideology

3.61 Romano-British culture practised both cremation and inhumation burials, and larger centres had cemeteries located outside of the towns, on roads leading into the settlements. Early pagan Anglo-Saxon cremation and inhumation cemeteries of the 5th and 6th centuries AD have been found at Collingbourne Ducis, East Shefford near the River Lambourn, at Blacknall Field in the Vale of Pewsey, and just north of Andover. These contained grave goods such as pottery, brooches, tools, jewellery and weapons. Following the

conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity, burials took place around churches, usually without grave goods.

Buildings and settlement

3.62 The Romano-British period supposedly saw an intensification of settlement and reorganisation of land usage and landholding. In reality, many farmsteads continued to develop and expand following the Roman occupation and remained little different in appearance. No forts have been found on the North Wessex Downs, but the introduction of villa estates was a dramatic change. There are villas clustered close to Andover, whilst some on the Lambourn Downs make use of earlier field systems. Some villas were themselves developed out of earlier native farmsteads, and by the 3rd century AD most villas had rectangular, tile-roofed stone buildings at their centres. Only a few Roman settlements were established close to the National Landscape, with Leucomagus or Andover and Cuentio or Mildenhall being the most notable. Some villages also appeared during the Romano-British period, such as Chisenbury Warren, which had numerous buildings spread out along a central street.

3.63 There is little direct archaeological evidence for Anglo-Saxon settlement on the North Wessex Downs. However, these early settlements are likely to have clustered in the principal river valleys, close to water sources. Great Bedwyn, for example, is certainly known to have Anglo-Saxon origins, as it is mentioned in a charter. Typical Anglo-Saxon constructions were the grubenhauser or sunken-featured buildings. Early documentary records of around 888 AD, the oval street plan and the possible Saxon origins of the church on the edge of the area suggest that the settlement of Lambourn has Saxon origins. Large Saxon estates on the Downs were sometimes subdivided to form parishes. The countryside was divided into vills and manors, with each administrative unit including a proportion of meadowland, arable lower slopes and pasture on the higher ground. The need to use these different areas led to the long, thin parishes characteristic of the chalk downlands of the National Landscape.

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

3.64 The Roman occupation has traditionally been seen as a period of great change in the rural landscape. There was an increase in cereal cultivation and livestock numbers, attributed to the introduction of ten percent taxation, and the demands of the Roman army for grain, meat and hides. Tanning and related crafts may have become industrial in scale, and a large-scale wool industry

developed, with an expansion of field systems on the downs to meet the demand for wool.

3.65 In the 3rd century AD mouldboard ploughs appeared, capable of working heavier soils. Livestock increased in size, wool became finer, and the appearance of mules and new varieties of horse, dog and fowl suggest an increased interest in breeding. Spelt and emmer wheat declined in importance, whilst bread/club wheat, rye and oats became more popular. Winter cropping of wheat probably began after the occupation, whilst cabbage, parsnips, turnips, carrots and flax were introduced to Britain for the first time, along with hay cropping.

3.66 Anglo-Saxon arable crops included wheat, barley and oats, especially free-threshing bread wheat, although at this time arable agriculture may have reduced on the downs due to declining soil fertility. Many villages and manors on the chalk adopted two field systems, where half of the arable land was left untilled each year to be grazed by cattle and recover its fertility. In more fertile areas such as the Vales villages adopted three of four field systems, with the land cultivated for two years for cereal crops and then left fallow for a third year.

Trade, artefacts and communication

3.67 The Roman occupation saw dramatic changes in communication, trade and artefacts. Roman roads were revolutionary, allowing goods, livestock and people to move long distances in a relatively short time, replacing native trackways that had been used for centuries. The Portway linked Durnovaria or Dorchester with Calleva or Silchester, and at Leucomagus or Andover it met the road linking Venta or Winchester with Sorviodunum or Old Sarum. In addition, Ermin Street ran between Silchester in Hampshire and Cirencester in Gloucestershire crossing the National Landscape for a substantial distance. New markets and consumers were created because of these new roads. The Roman roads continued in use during the early Anglo-Saxon period, although communications did become poorer, and trade therefore more restricted. Some Roman roads within the National Landscape are still in use today, for example the road between Mildenhall and Chiseldon.

Landscape change

3.68 Roman roads were the most obvious changes in the landscape following the invasion in AD 43. However, the bulk of the North Wessex Downs did not change in appearance, although field systems may have expanded further into

previously open downland areas. Further woodland clearance took place, in part driven by increased demands for firewood and charcoal for pottery kilns and smithies. During the Anglo-Saxon period it is likely that the North Wessex Downs would have been divided up by the Wessex royal family, the Church and the lay nobility or thegns. Areas of woodland such as Savernake Forest and that of Barroc were probably almost continuous, and the forests of Chute and Melchet were also quite large. These were all turned into royal hunting parks or haga. Massive linear earthworks such as the Wansdyke in Wiltshire, and Grim's Ditch in Berkshire and Devil's Ditch in Hampshire may date to the 5th and 6th centuries AD. They may have marked territorial boundaries and were also perhaps defensive works.

3.69 Although hunting parks were established by the Saxons, it was the Normans who codified their management in the Forest Law. Chases such as Highclere Chase in Hampshire were unenclosed but nevertheless delimited hunting preserves, usually for the nobility. Royal Forests were not necessarily wooded, but usually consisted of a mosaic of woodland, scrub and grassland or heath. These were outside common law and subject to the special Forest Laws.

Settlement and organisation of the landscape: 1066 – 1499 (Medieval)

Social life and society structure

3.70 The Norman Conquest of England replaced an English-speaking elite with a French speaking nobility, based in castles and manor houses. Castles were built at Marlborough and Ludgershall to ensure the stability of the area. The Crown, the nobility, the bishoprics of the Church and the great monastic houses owned most of the land within the North Wessex Downs.

3.71 The Domesday survey of 1086 offers an insight into how parts of the English landscape was organised prior to and following the Norman Conquest of 1066. Important landowners, particularly the King and the Church controlled large parts of the countryside either directly or indirectly. The harvest failures and famines of 1315 to 1322 and the Black Death caused widespread misery, the latter killing 40%- 50% of the population, and altering the balance of economic and social power between peasants and lords. Serfdom largely disappeared, and paid labourers and classes of landed peasants and yeoman farmers emerged.

Buildings and settlement

3.72 The Normans established motte and bailey castles, such as the one at Marlborough, as local centres of power and control, and some new settlements appeared around them. The prosperity and growth which characterised the later-12th and 13th centuries led to the rapid expansion of towns just outside the National Landscape, such as Andover, Basingstoke, Overton, Newbury, and Lambourn which lies just inside the National Landscape.

3.73 Within the National Landscape settlement was concentrated along the river valleys, with scattered hamlets and isolated farmsteads restricted to clayland or the downland, where dairying, stock-raising and pasture-farming predominated. Large open fields divided into strips usually surrounded villages; these being owned individually but usually farmed together. Rectangular buildings with their own yards (the tofts and crofts) were arranged along the central roads or lanes that ran through the villages, often following the valley alignments. Manor houses and churches continued to be at the heart of village life, although some manor houses were located on the outskirts of the villages.

3.74 This general settlement pattern did vary. The Vale of Pewsey had a mixture of nucleated and dispersed settlements, often aligned across the valley rather than along it. The parishes of the Kennet valley were also more varied, and the area of downland in the south-east part of the National Landscape (west of Basingstoke) has a dispersed pattern of hamlets and individual farms. The Thames Valley, for example, saw a variety of smaller, nucleated, open green or dispersed settlements. These settlement patterns are still clear in the present-day landscape.

3.75 After the Black Death, falling population, decline in arable acreage, and low corn prices contributed to the desertion and partial desertion of villages particularly along the chalkland valleys of the National Landscape. Other late medieval desertions came about because of the creation of deer parks, such as the great new park at Savernake created by the Dukes of Somerset during the 16th century.

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

3.76 During the 13th century management of woodland and Royal Forests for game, timber and fuel was intense, and coppicing, pollarding and charcoal burning were all- important practices in such areas. Villagers had common rights to some woodland and open areas, where grazing was also important. Rabbits were almost certainly introduced to Britain after the Norman Conquest

and were often managed in artificial warrens called pillow mounds with good examples on the Marlborough Downs. A population explosion prior to the Black Death also resulted in extensive areas of the National Landscape being cleared and ploughed, as evidenced by the many strip lynchets visible in the landscape today. These terraces, by which cultivation was extended up hillsides, enabled more land to be ploughed. Today, these are among the most common landscape features of the chalk and whole series survive along the northern edge.

3.77 The numerous small irregular shaped fields or assarts, which are especially prevalent in the east of the National Landscape are also evidence of this land-hunger and represent clearance of areas of forest waste or encroachment into heathland. Following the catastrophe of the Black Death, a declining population and reduced corn prices meant that arable farming was less profitable. There was a marked decrease in the extent of arable cultivation and land was allowed to revert to grass such as in the heavy clays of the Vale of the White Horse and on the thin soils of the Lambourn Downs. Sheep flocks, meanwhile, increased substantially as the wool industry developed further, with towns such as Marlborough, Whitchurch and Newbury becoming important textile centres.

Trade, artefacts and communication

3.78 By the medieval period, trade was becoming more long-distance and large-scale once more, with wool and livestock being the predominant export from the downlands. This was taken to burgeoning market towns often on the fringes of the downs, such as Andover and Swindon. This increased the network of communications with new tracks being established, although many medieval droveways and tracks may have had earlier origins. These tracks now form the intricate network of footpaths, byways, and green lanes that can be found across the National Landscape.

Landscape change

3.79 The clay Vales were much more wooded at this time and along with the remains of Saxon royal woodlands such as the Forest of Chute and the Forest of Pamber were used as hunting areas. The management of these areas was codified in Forest Law by the Normans. However, by the 13th century there was a wave of disafforestation when the Crown relinquished Forest Law over many areas. This meant woodlands became smaller, and had often fragmented into individual deer parks, which are a particular feature of the lower lying eastern

part of the National Landscape (e.g. Highclere Chase). Deer parks were surrounded by bank, ditch and fence boundaries often called pales. Deer-leaps allowed deer to move into the parks easily but restricted their ability to leave. Although the Romans may have introduced fallow deer to Britain, they did not appear on the North Wessex Downs until after the Norman Conquest.

3.80 From the 13th century onwards, large areas of former arable land on the downs were converted to pasture, and the open and un-hedged landscapes characteristic of the chalk downland became dominant across much of the region. By the 14th century however, in many areas of the North Wessex Downs this pattern was changing, with the consolidation of land blocks and their enclosure as fields using hedges, banks or ditches. This may partly have been a result of the depopulation resulting from the Black Death.

Post medieval: 1500 - 1799

Social life and society structure

3.81 By the 16th century there was a distinct ‘middle-class’ emerging in the countryside, with merchant and artisans in the towns, encouraged by expansion of the woollen cloth industry and the sale of monastic properties following the Dissolution. In the 17th and 18th centuries the rural gentry built new large houses or refurbished old ones, but following enclosure many poor farmers who had previously owned small plots of land found themselves working as paid but landless labourers. There was some social unrest during the time of the Civil War, when Andover, Marlborough, Littlecote, Ludgershall, Donnington, Newbury, Basing and Reading were all drawn into the conflict or were the site of battles and sieges. The battlefield of Roundway Down (1643) occurred in the western part of the North Wessex Downs.

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

3.82 Many field systems remained little altered in some areas until the 18th century, but in others enclosure during the 15th and 16th centuries meant land use became more intensive, and the management of water meadows developed within the river valleys. It was during the 18th and 19th centuries that there were more dramatic changes, partly prompted by the Napoleonic Wars. Land improvements included drainage, new crops such as hemp, flax, woad, cabbages and rape and increasing use of machinery. Chalk was often extracted and burnt in limekilns to produce lime fertiliser. Formal Parliamentary enclosure not only changed the appearance of the landscape but also transformed the

agricultural cycle and the routines of the people who lived there. Farm sizes increased considerably in many areas.

Landscape change

3.83 By the 18th century, enclosure had created a patchwork of small, irregularly shaped fields and winding lanes and tracks in many areas. From the later 18th century though, some areas of pasture of the downs were converted to arable, and common woods, heaths and grasslands were also enclosed. The rectangular, regular patterns of field systems seen in most areas today were the result of these later Parliamentary enclosures. The eighteenth 18th also saw the wealthy financing the development of ‘polite’ landscape gardens, with Highclere Castle being a particularly spectacular example. The expansion of the navy during the 18th and 19th centuries, and the demands of industry, caused large areas of surviving woodland to be clear-felled and the creation of the more open landscape character of much of the North Wessex Downs today.

The modern landscape: 1800 - Present

Social life and society structure

3.84 Following the Napoleonic Wars conditions in the countryside for the poor were dire. There were economic crises in the 1820s and rural populations fell, while town populations grew rapidly. By the end of the 19th century more people were working in industries based in towns than were working in agriculture. Further declines in the rural population followed the First and Second World Wars, and the 20th century saw major social and economic changes in the North Wessex Downs.

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

3.85 Lace and silk making were specialist industries that developed in places such as Marlborough and Whitchurch on the edge of the North Wessex Downs during the 18th and 19th centuries, but during the 19th century the cloth industry declined markedly. Ironworks and engineering developed in the surrounding towns of Swindon, Andover and Devizes. The coming of the railways saw an increase in dairying, especially in the clay Vales, as it became much easier to transport milk to towns and cities. Watercress was an unusual 19th and 20th century crop that continues to be cultivated in flooded beds within the river valleys, notably the Bourne, a tributary of the River Test.

3.86 Following the First and Second World Wars there was increased mechanisation on farms, and farm labouring as a way of life declined rapidly. Many farms on the downlands are now very large business concerns with intensive ploughing and use of fertilisers and insecticides maintaining high crop yields. Post-war intensification of agriculture, the use of fertilisers and insecticides and increased mechanisation has led many farmers to continue ploughing on slopes and elevated downland, and to remove many hedgerows and field boundaries, creating very large-scale fields. Many archaeological features have been destroyed, and in some instances much of the topsoil also has been lost.

Trade, artefacts and communication

3.87 Turnpike roads were a significant improvement in communication, and in 1810 the Kennet and Avon Canal was opened, serving Pewsey, Hungerford, Newbury and Reading. The Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal was another important waterway. The construction of railways initiated an increase in milk production, and Swindon (a small market town until the Great Western Railway was constructed) became a major locomotive depot and repair centre. The railways served as the major communication and trade arteries until the 1970s, when most freight began to shift to road transport. The M4 and the A34 are the largest modern routeways in the National Landscape, and contrast with the relatively narrow roads that otherwise characterise the North Wessex Downs.

Landscape change

3.88 The development of the canal, railway and road networks has had a major impact on the landscapes of the North Wessex Downs, especially more recent road routes such as the M4 and A34. During the Second World War many areas such as the Lambourn Downs and Marlborough Downs that had been under pasture were ploughed up again to maximise arable production. This has created the open character of the landscape today.

3.89 The 20th century has seen major changes in the agricultural management. At the same time there has been a significant increase in the urban population and growth of development. These changes are not only significant from an archaeological perspective but are significant in determining the overall character of the North Wessex Downs. They are considered further in Chapter 4.

Perceptions

3.90 The North Wessex Downs National Landscape enjoys relatively high levels of tranquillity, largely due to elevation and distance from large settlements. The areas of lower tranquillity are found around the larger settlements and along the corridors of the major road network, as shown in Figure 3.8 Tranquillity.

3.91 Figure 3.9 Dark Skies shows the levels of light pollution within the North Wessex Downs, illustrating that the majority of the National Landscape enjoys dark or very dark night skies, with limited light pollution. As many as 3,000 stars can be seen from the darkest areas, and a number of locations on the chalk downs are promoted as stargazing spots. Dark night skies can make an important contribution to perceptions and enjoyment of the landscape.

This is pure downland; the breasted hills curving as if under the influence of a great melody. It is beautiful, a quiet, an unrenowned and a most visibly ancient land. **[See reference 4]**

Edward Thomas (1878-1917)

3.92 A landscape can assume national significance not only because of its particular character and qualities, but also because of special associations and perceptions that it may have. These include the perceptions of local people who live and work in the area as well as artistic and literary associations. An examination of the way that others have perceived the landscape over time can also provide pointers to a consensus view on why an area is considered special, and what particular features have consistently attracted attention and comment. This chapter considers, first, the perception of the inhabitants of the North Wessex Downs of their local landscape and goes on to review artistic and literary associations, which have raised the profile of the National Landscape nationally.

Local Perceptions

3.93 There is a strong local resonance and affinity with the landscape of the North Wessex Downs, particularly the individual downs and the river valleys that make up the National Landscape - the Marlborough Downs, the Lambourn Downs and the key features within it such as Avebury, the Uffington White Horse, the Ridgeway, Combe Gibbet above Inkpen, Watership Down, Savernake Forest, the Kennet and Avon Canal, the historic towns of Marlborough and Hungerford, the Ridgeway and many other outstanding features.

3.94 Unlike the Chilterns or Cotswolds which have a very strong image and identity in peoples' minds, the North Wessex Downs as an entity covers a very large geographic area encompassing a diverse range of landscapes. The name of the National Landscape has also been described as misleading and an imposed artificial name, since local people consider themselves to be neither, north, Wessex or indeed wholly downland. This is not to say however, that residents do not have a strong affinity with the area, but most recognise it by the component parts rather than the National Landscape as a whole.

The Racehorse Training Industry

The Lambourn area is known as the ‘Valley of the Racehorse’ and is renowned for its associations with the racehorse training industry. It has been a famous training area for over 150 years, producing winners of all the greatest races (Flat and National Hunt) in the Racing Calendar. Lambourn-trained horses that became household names during their careers and are still remembered with affection include Mandarin, Mill House, Grundy, Garrison Savannah, Rheingold and Party Politics. Celebrated trainers include Fred Winter, Peter Walwyn, Nicky Henderson, and Jenny Pitman the first woman to train a National Hunt winner. Jockeys particularly associated with the Lambourn area include Lester Piggott and Bruce Hobbs, among many others.

The distinctive landscapes of the Lambourn Valley and downs have formed a backdrop and setting for the racing novels of Dick Francis and equine artists have also been attracted to the area. A good example being the oil painting Morning on Lambourn Downs by Sue Wingate. The artist notes:

“I had seen this particular gallop in Lambourn and liked the rolling landscape with groups of trees which add interest to the background. It was soft, slightly misty morning in the summer and the horses are shown returning to their yard after work.”[\[See reference 5\]](#)

Landscape Descriptions

3.95 The North Wessex Downs is a landscape rich in historic sites and natural features. This magical landscape has attracted naturalists, antiquarians and travellers to the area throughout recent history. Records of visitor’s perceptions reveal how the landscape was viewed as well as how it has changed. In 1725 Daniel Defoe visited, and wrote of, the wonder of the Vale of the White Horse. He climbed the hill at Uffington for close examination of the white horse and commented on the construction of these great features; “trenches.... about a yard long, and filled almost up with chalk”. He then stood many miles off to observe the feature from some distance: “you see the exact shape of a white horse.... not ill-shaped I assure you” [\[See reference 6\]](#).

3.96 However, views of the landscape were not always positive. William Gilpin wrote in 1770:

“The Marlborough Downs is one of the most dreary scenes which our ancestors ... chose as the repositorium of their dead. Everywhere we see tumuli, which were raised over their ashe”” [\[See reference 7\]](#).

3.97 In contrast, William Cobbett, writing in 1825, was impressed by the vast, scale of the landscape:

‘I like to look at the winding side of a great down, with two or three numerous flocks of sheep on it, belonging to different farms; and to see, lower down, the folds, in the fields, ready to receive them for the night. Our point of destination was this village called Burghclere, which lies close under the north side of the lofty hill at Highclere, which is called Beacon Hill, and on top of which there are still the marks of Roman encampment. We saw this hill as soon as we got on Winchester Downs; and without regard to roads, we steered for it, as sailors do for a land-mark”” [\[See reference 8\]](#).

3.98 Edward Thomas, similarly describes the vastness and remoteness of the landscape in the first chapter of his biography of Richard Jefferies (1909), again likening it to the ocean:

“The Downs in this immediate country of Richard Jeffries are among the highest, most spacious, and most divinely carved in rolling ridge and hollowed flank, and their summits commune with the finest summits of the more southerly downs - Inkpen, Martinsell, Tan Hill

...Jeffries often thought of the sea upon these hills. The eye expects it. There is something oceanic in their magnitude, their solitude ... They are never abrupt, but, flowing on and on, make a type of infinity ... they have a hugeness of undivided surface for which there is no comparison on earth” [\[See reference 9\]](#).

3.99 Richard Jefferies (1848-1887), novelist, naturalist, essayist, and mystic grew up in a hamlet at the foot of the Downs. Jefferies developed an extraordinary sensitivity to nature and wrote many perceptive letters, essays and books on rural matters inspired by this part of the North Wessex Downs:

“From the blue hill lines, from the dark copses on the ridges, the shadows in the combs ... there comes from these an influence which forces the heart to lift itself in earnest and purest desire” [\[See reference 10\]](#)

3.100 One of Jefferies’ most well-known books *Wildlife in a Southern Country* (1879) contains an evocative description of the Ridgeway, which still has resonance today:

“A broad green track runs for many a long, long mile across the downs, now following the ridges, now winding past at the foot of a grassy slope, then stretching away through a cornfield and fallow. It is distinct from the wagon-tracks which cross it here and there, for these are local only, and, if traced up, land the wayfarer presently in a maze of fields, or end abruptly in the rickyard of a lone farmhouse. It is distinct from the hard roads of modern construction which also at wide intervals cross its course, dusty and glaringly white in the sunshine ... With varying width, from twenty to fifty yards, it runs like a green ribbon ... a width that allows a flock of sheep to travel easily side by side.” [\[See reference 11\]](#)

3.101 Another native writer associated with the Downs is Alfred Williams (1877-1930), a working man employed in the steam-hammer shop at Swindon railway works. Williams wrote both poetry and prose describing the local landscape of this part of the Downs.

“The slopes of the downs, if they have general forms, are continually changing and interchanging in localities, assuming new and strange shapes, charming and surprising with their grace and exquisiteness ... for ever reflecting the mood of the heavens” [\[See reference 12\]](#)

3.102 A standing sarsen stone, erected east of Barbury Castle on Buderop Down, commemorates Jefferies and Williams.

Myth and Legend

Archaeological sites

3.103 The area has a rich legendary heritage and local myth, and mystery surrounds many of the ancient stone circles, burial mounds and hillforts that characterise the North Wessex Downs, which are thought to be connected through the area by mysterious ley lines. Avebury World Heritage Site includes the largest stone circle in Europe and has intrigued visitors for hundreds of years with images often captured in topographical writings and drawings. William Stukeley, for example made a number of observations and line drawings of the monument in his visits to the area in the early 18th century. People remain fascinated by what they see and seek to find an explanation for its majesty and aura. One myth tells of the magician Merlin bringing the stones from Ireland.

3.104 Various legends have also been attached to Silbury Hill to help explain the creation of this unusual feature. Folklore has claimed it to be the burial place of King Sil, a knight in golden armour or fabled hidden treasure. It is also suggested as being a symbolic effigy of the ancient Mother Earth Goddess and associated with fertility rituals. Another explanation is that Silbury Hill could have been used as an accurate solar observatory by means of the shadows cast by the mound on the carefully levelled plain to the north, towards Avebury. Perhaps the most popular legend is that the hill was created by the Devil who was going to empty a huge sack of earth on the nearby town of Marlborough but was forced to drop it at Silbury through the magic of priests at nearby Avebury.

3.105 Located on the Ridgeway, close to the White Horse is Wayland's Smithy, a Neolithic long barrow, sheltered by a grove of beech trees and built of massive sarsen stones. Legend has it that, if you leave your horse here overnight with a payment in silver, Wayland the smith of the Saxon gods, will shoe it by dawn.

Sarsen Stones

3.106 A similar fascination exists for the enigmatic Sarsen Stones, which have cast their spell on many who see them. The stones are often known as 'grey wethers' on account of their resemblance to grazing sheep when seen from a distance, or alternatively as 'druid stones'. Henry of Huntingdon's *History of England*, written c.1130, describes 'stanenges, where stones of wonderful size have been erected after the manner of doorways, so that doorway appears to have been raised upon doorway; and no one can conceive how such great stones have been raised aloft, or why they were built there' [\[See reference 13\]](#). John Aubrey wrote of the stones in the 17th century "many of them are mighty great ones, and particularly those in Overton Wood" [\[See reference 14\]](#). In 1668 Samuel Pepys visited Avebury and Silbury Hill, commenting "... it was prodigious to see how full the downs are of great stones, and all along the valleys stones of considerable bigness most of them growing certainly out of the ground so thick as to cover the ground [\[See reference 15\]](#)". The fate of these stones may be traced to writings. Brentnall, writing at the end of the Second World War, noticed that "the stones are gone for the most part to make the roads of Swindon". This was not the only use of the stones - many stones went into the making of early churches and footpaths - one such path of sarsen setts may still be seen between the villages of Alton Priors and Alton Barnes in the Vale of Pewsey.

Chalk Carvings

3.107 The spirit and mystery of ancient Wessex is perhaps symbolised best by the chalk-carved White Horses, which are redolent with myth and legend. Uffington White Horse, which stands out of the Downs above the Vale of the White Horse is the oldest example (at least 3,000 years old) and may have inspired the subsequent creation of the many other etched chalk figures which now characterise the North Wessex Downs. The Uffington figure is unique, with a long sleek body and beak like head. It is believed by some to represent the mythical dragon slain by St George – a legend associated with the adjacent rounded hill called 'Dragon Hill'. It has also been attributed to Hengist and Horsa, two 5th century princes, and as a commemoration for King Alfred's defeat of the Danes, but is much older than either of these.

3.108 Bill Bryson in the introduction to the book *The English Landscape* (2000) [See reference 16] notes that "what is truly notable about the White Horse is not that people at some time in the ancient past took the trouble to cut it into the hillside.....but that continuously for over twenty centuries others have made the effort to maintain it. Whatever religious or ritualistic significance the White Horse may have had for its creators has long since faded away. For most of its existence – through plague and war and famine... the White Horse has been preserved simply because people liked it. I think that is splendid." This tradition is continued today under National Trust ownership with its 'Scouring of the White Horse' event.

3.109 The Uffington White Horse is a symbolic landmark, commemorated by many poets and novelists, including G.K. Chesterton in his *Ballad of the White Horse*:

"Before the gods that made the gods Had seen the sunrise pass / The White Horse of the White Horse Vale Was cut out of the grass." [See reference 17]

Crop Circles

3.110 More recently the appearance of enigmatic crop circles, most notably in Wiltshire, and frequently associated with ancient monuments, have further contributed to the mystical charm of this landscape.

Artistic connections

3.111 There is relatively little record of paintings from the North Wessex Downs, during the Victorian period. Paintings by Turner and Constable are plentiful from the surrounding area including Oxford, Stonehenge and Salisbury but absent from the Downs. Avebury, however, has long been a source of wonder and inspiration. Paul Nash (1889-1946) discovered the megaliths at Avebury during his stay in Marlborough in 1933. His surreal and imaginative style of painting was inspired by these great stones as objects of mystery in the ‘Landscape of the Megaliths’ series.

3.112 Nash wrote an evocative description of the stones in the book *Picture History* [See reference 18] as they were prior to the Keiller reconstruction:

“The great stones were then in their wild state, so to speak. Some were half covered by the grass, others stood up in the cornfields were entangled and overgrown in the copses, some were buried under the turf. But they were always wonderful and disquieting, and, as I saw them, I shall always remember them ... Their colouring and pattern, their patina of golden lichen, all enhanced their strange forms and mystical significance.”

3.113 Nash’s distinctive style of painting also captured the character of other parts of North Wessex Downs including the beech topped knolls in *Wood on the Downs* and *Wittenham Clumps*. Nash drew the beech clumps obsessively and saw them as the repossession of human works by nature.

3.114 The landscape of the North Wessex Downs has continued to inspire artists in the 20th century. The painter John Piper (1903-1992) knew and loved the Wiltshire Downs and designed a stained-glass window for the Devizes Museum incorporating archaeological motifs from the Marlborough Downs including the stones of West Kennett Avenue, the Devil’s Den dolmen, and several round barrows. Contemporary perceptions of the Ridgeway and surrounds were gathered in *The Ridgeway: Europe’s Oldest Road* [See reference 19]. This collection of paintings by contemporary landscape artists, including Keith Grant and Philip Hughes, illustrate perceptions and features of the present-day landscape. Philip Hughes uses free flowing lines to represent the strong landscape patterns in the Downs.

Literary Associations

3.115 The author Thomas Hughes (1822-96) was born and brought up in the village of Uffington in the shadow of the Downs. He describes the countryside in

that most English of books, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* [See reference 20] and in *The Scouring of the White Horse* [See reference 21].

3.116 It was the Victorian novelist, Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), who is reputed to be responsible for reviving the obsolete Saxon name of Wessex. The rolling chalk landscape south of Wantage (Alfredstone) forms a setting for his last, and probably most profound novel, *Jude the Obscure* [See reference 22]. Hardy's descriptions note the increasing arable nature of the chalk landscape and describe it as 'ugly' and 'dry and 'dusty'. Maps of Hardy's Wessex identify Beacon Hill (Inkpen Beacon) and the Marlbury Downs (Marlborough Downs) as significant landmarks within the North Wessex Downs.

3.117 In the second half of the 19th century Kenneth Grahame wrote the *Wind in the Willows* [See reference 23]. He was a nature worshipper and sought inspiration from the Berkshire Downs. In his first book, *Pagan Papers* (1898) he describes the Ridgeway and surrounding landscape.

"Join it at Streatley, the point where it crosses the Thames; at once it strikes you out and away from the habitable world in a splendid purposeful manner, running along the highest ridge of the Downs, a broad green ribbon of turf, with but a shade of difference from the neighbouring grass, yet distinct for all that. No villages nor homesteads tempt it aside or modify its course for a yard; ... Out on that almost trackless expanse of billowy Downs such as track is in some sort humanly companionable; it really seems to lead you by the hand." [See reference 24]

3.118 D H Lawrence spent two years, between 1917 and 1919 in Hermitage, north of Newbury, after being moved away from the coast during the war. Of all Lawrence's writing, the story most closely based on Hermitage is *The Fox*, first published in 1923.

3.119 Poets have also been inspired by the North Wessex Downs landscape. The highly regarded poet, Edward Thomas (1878–1917) developed a strong affinity with the area around the Marlborough Downs. Thomas was a great admirer of Richard Jefferies and was commissioned to write his biography, which includes some imaginative descriptions of the landscape of this part of the North Wessex Downs. Thomas's poetry captured the essence of the English countryside and was inspired by nature and the landscape. *The Combe* aptly describes the scarp edge north of the Marlborough Downs.

"The Combe was ever dark, ancient and dark. / Its mouth stopped with bramble, thorn and briar; And no one scrambles over the sliding chalk / By beech and

yew and perishing juniper / Down the half precipices of its sides, with roots And rabbit holes for steps.” [\[See reference 25\]](#)

3.120 Charles Hamilton Sorley (1895-1915) was a contemporary of Edward Thomas, and like Thomas was a victim of the Great War. Sorley attended Marlborough College and wrote a number of poems, collected in his book *Marlborough and Other Poems*, inspired by the varied local landscape of high downs and scarp slopes incised by deep river valleys:

“I who have walked along her downs in dreams, And known her tenderness and felt her might, / And sometimes by a her meadows and her streams Have drunk deep-storied secrets of delight.” [\[See reference 26\]](#)

3.121 More recently Michael Baldwin (b. 1930) has described the Uffington White Horse in his poem *Chalk Horse*:

“Men cut their Gods in the hills The galloping Gods whose hooves Go flying away in the grass / When the grass moves in the winds.” [\[See reference 27\]](#)

3.122 John Betjeman (1906-1984) lived in Uffington and knew the local landscape well. In the 1950s he opened people's eyes to changes in the landscape because of the loss of public rights of way and heritage through his rhyming verse.

“He takes no part in village life beyond Throwing his refuse in a neighbour's pond And closing footpaths, not repairing walls Leaving a cottage till at last it falls. / People protest. A law-suit then begins, / But as he's on the Bench, he always wins.” [\[See reference 28\]](#)

3.123 Writers and poets have continued to express concern about change in the landscape. *Watership Down* [\[See reference 29\]](#) was written in 1972 by Richard Adams and allows the reader to enter the rabbit world and Watership Down, the area of countryside north of Overton. It provides detailed descriptions of the downland landscape and highlights the damaging impact that development can have on this inspirational landscape.

Chapter 4

Forces for change

4.1 The North Wessex Downs is a dynamic landscape that has evolved and changed over time in response to prevailing economic and social conditions. It is the cumulative effect of past change that has created the special and distinctive character of the North Wessex Downs that is valued today. The landscape will continue to change in the future.

4.2 This chapter provides an overview of the main forces for change affecting the landscape of the North Wessex Downs. Area-specific current and future forces for change are included in individual LCT and LCA profiles.

Climate Change

4.3 Climate change is a major pressure on rural landscapes and is likely to result in increasingly unpredictable weather patterns, leading to more frequent and intense heatwaves, droughts, floods and storms. These changes are resulting in the need for agriculture to adapt to grow different crops and develop more flexible and responsive land management practices. For example, hotter summers and increases in temperatures could result in increased demands for agricultural irrigation.

4.4 Climate change and increasing demands for urban development can increase the urban heat island effect. Urban areas are warmer than the surrounding rural landscapes due to heat trapping from urban land use, including street layout, tarmac and roads and increased glazing in buildings.

4.5 Climate change resulting in more extreme weather could alter the species composition of existing species-rich woodlands and hedgerows, favouring species with lower water demand. The increasing frequency and intensity of storms could increase storm damage and reduce the number of veteran trees which are more susceptible to damage. Increasing incidences of pathogens may change the species mix of woodlands and higher temperatures and prolonged droughts are likely to put woodlands under further stress and increase the risk of wildfires. Climate change is increasing the impact of pests and diseases, including ash dieback and acute oak decline, and the increased spread of invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam.

4.6 Climate change is also likely to affect other important semi-natural habitats. These changes may manifest themselves within the natural environment through changes in habitats and a decline of flora and fauna which are unable to adapt quickly enough to the changing habitat conditions. Longer drier summers may affect heathland and dry grassland and increase the risk of fire. The changing seasons may also disturb migrating birds and invertebrates, as there will be an increasing mismatch in timing of the arrival of migratory species and food sources, affecting neutral grassland and woodland as well as intertidal habitats. Wetter winters shorten the growing season for crops, and impacts the types of crops it is possible to grow.

4.7 Wetter winters will increase the risk of flooding from watercourses, particularly along river valleys. Impacts of flooding on the landscape include the temporary evacuation or permanent abandonment of buildings and damage to roads, buildings and field boundaries. Measures to provide flood protection may lead to conflict between defences and wildlife value, and erection of flood defences may also have a visual impact on the landscape. Increased frequency of flooding can lead to increased runoff of pollutants from the land. Conversely, hotter and drier summers result in lower summer river flows, which means there is less water available for dilution and dispersion of pollutants such as nutrients and contaminated sediments. The risk of eutrophication and algal blooms increases the longer nutrients remain in a water body.

4.8 Many of the Local Planning Authorities have declared climate and ecological emergencies. These include targets of achieving carbon neutrality in the short-term. Mitigation and adaption to climate change, to achieve Net Zero, is also changing the landscape. This includes the demand for renewable energy, which in the North Wessex Downs could result in the introduction of new types of energy crops for digestors, short rotation coppice. Although demand for wind turbines and solar farms will remain small within the North Wessex Downs, renewable energy developments in the setting of the National Landscape will impact on the visual and perceptual characteristics.

Agriculture and Land Management

4.9 The historic analysis undertaken as part of this assessment has indicated that the character of agriculture within the North Wessex Downs has fluctuated over time in accordance with prevailing economic circumstances and technological developments. For example, arable cultivation on the downs was established as early as the prehistoric period and during the 17th and 18th centuries, corn was the major cash crop on the chalklands. In the mid-19th

century, arable farming entered a decline until post-1945 national policy, and subsequently the CAP, established a new framework for agriculture and the intensive arable agriculture that characterised the National Landscape.

4.10 The introduction of the Basic Single Payment (BPS) in 2005 replaced production linked subsidies and introduced cross compliance rules that required land managers to meet environmental, food safety, and animal welfare standards to receive payments. Agri-environmental schemes became more popular and influential on land management and agriculture in the early 2000s with the introduction of the Environmental Stewardship Scheme in 2005 (ESS). ESS promoted sustainable farming practices that benefited the environmental, wildlife, and sustainable food production. Widespread uptake of the lower Entry Level Stewardship resulted in greater participation in simple measures such as buffer strips and hedge management.

4.11 Continued CAP reform and an increasing public interest in sustainability, wildlife and climate resilience led to the next iteration of agri-environment schemes with the introduction of Countryside Stewardship (CS) in 2015. CS aimed to be more spatially focused but also introduced funding for a greater array of sustainable management practices such as herbal leys, nectar flower mixes and winter cover crops.

4.12 After Brexit, England exited the CAP framework, and an agricultural transition plan was created to support land managers and agriculture whilst the UK exited the European Union. The Agriculture Act 2020 replaced CAP in England, which involved phasing out BPS from 2021 to 2027 and push the new principle of ‘public money for public goods’. New Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMs) were introduced, which maintained the current Countryside Stewardship with alterations to options available and payment rates, but the introduction of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and the Landscape Recovery Scheme (LR). SFI had a high uptake of applicants, prior to its temporary pause in early 2025, which encouraged management for healthy soils, clean water, improved biodiversity and reduced emissions. A reformed scheme is expected to be announced later in 2025.

Past Agricultural Change

4.13 Post-war agricultural policy resulting in the intensification and industrialisation of farming in the North Wessex Downs has been a major force for change since designation of the National Landscape in 1972. A study by the RSPB¹³ using MAFF June Census data revealed that between 1968 and 1998 the total area under grassland in the National Landscape was reduced by 32%.

The consequent effects on the character of the North Wessex Downs are well known and include:

- fragmentation of important habitats, notably chalk grassland into a few isolated remnant sites.
- extensive areas of land being farmed as a single unit in very large-scale fields, with loss of peripheral boundary features.
- mechanisation and reduction of farm labour means that there are no longer the skills to maintain woodland coppice, hedgerows and other landscape features which would formerly have been an integral part of the agricultural scene.
- loss of important archaeological, with many features such as round barrows only visible as cropmarks on air photos and no longer forming recognisable landscape features.
- impact of run off (fertiliser, herbicides plus soil erosion) from intensively farmed arable areas on the delicate habitats and high-water quality of the chalk rivers that are a special feature of the National Landscape.
- reduction in livestock, as farms have converted to arable and because of BSE and foot and mouth, which make it difficult to maintain extensive areas of grassland.

4.14 Arable farming has itself changed. These include development of hardier cereal varieties allowing a shift from spring to autumn drilling with consequent impacts on biodiversity, particularly farmland birds. Maize, now a widespread crop in parts of the National Landscape, is a significant contributor to soil erosion and diffuse pollution to watercourses due to the extent of bare ground within the crop. There have also been changes in the types of crops grown.

Current Changes in Agriculture

4.15 Presently, a broad range of funding sources are available for both small- and large-scale land management projects that focus on building climate resilience, nature recovery and sustainable food production. The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) are government funds which have supported an increase in woodland cover. FiPL also supports hedge planting, habitat creation and restoration and regenerative farming machinery. Other funding sources available and likely to impact land management across the National Landscape include National

Lottery funding, Farming Equipment and Technology Fund, Biodiversity Net Gain opportunities and other local/community funding.

Increase in Large Farm Units

4.16 The larger and well-structured arable farms of the North Wessex Downs are likely to be able to respond to the competitive global market, driven at the international level by global trade agreements. This may result in increased specialisation with a concentration on the best and most productive land and the amalgamation of holdings with very large farms managed as a single unit under a block farming regime, mainly through contract labour. Anticipated adverse impacts may include further homogenisation of the landscape, reduction in the already very depleted biodiversity, potential demand for more centralised and large-scale buildings such as grain storage facilities and further reduction in the level of agricultural employment.

4.17 Increased specialisation and dominance of arable systems may also mean that in some areas there may no longer be livestock to maintain areas of grassland. However, it is also true that larger units may also have the resources, labour and capital to respond to environmental initiatives and pursue landscape and biodiversity enhancement in association with productive agriculture. Many of the large farms currently operating in the North Wessex Downs are very conservation-minded, particularly with regard to game shooting interests.

Surplus/Marginal Agricultural Land

4.18 The concentration of resources on the best land may result in marginal areas coming out of production resulting in pockets of unmanaged land throughout the National Landscape. The reduction in livestock, for example, may lead to some grasslands regenerating to new areas of scrub and woodland. Recent years have also witnessed an increase in marginal land being put into set-aside. While this does have ecological benefits (e.g. for ground nesting birds and invertebrates) it also has a significant impact upon the landscape. There is potential for marginal or surplus agricultural land to be brought into positive environmental management, supported through agri-environment initiatives, for example to provide a connected habitat of chalk grassland potentially combined with a new access network.

4.19 There are also pressures for new uses of marginal land including 'lifestyle' farms or smallholdings, leisure uses and horse paddocks – all of which can

have local visual impacts. With appropriate guidance and management advice new landowners may be responsive to National Landscape objectives and able to deliver positive landscape benefits.

Medium and Small Farms

4.20 It is also expected that the North Wessex Downs may see the emergence of a sector of small farms seeking to build on the opportunities presented by UK's agricultural reform program. Under this scenario small scale family owned and tenanted farms may increasingly seek to produce high quality premium, possibly organic, goods for local markets potentially under environmentally sensitive regimes, supported through measures such as Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes. However, the effort and ingenuity required to achieve these goals should not be under-estimated. Many of the necessary skills and labour are now much depleted within the area, for example, those in shepherding and animal husbandry. More fundamentally, perhaps, has been the change in consumer demand since the last time sheep extensively grazed open downland. At this time the demand was for wool and mutton; now the demand is for lamb. This potentially requires the development of new farming systems utilising the traditional sheep breeds of the downlands. It may also mean the linking of downland pastures with off-down pastures for finishing.

Diversification: New Land Uses

4.21 Studies have shown that farmers would prefer to focus their diversification actively within farming, for example into alternative crops and adding value. Both public and private funding for land management over the past twenty years has focused on prioritising sustainable practices, and most recently 'public money for public goods'. Recent changes to arable farming include:

- **herbal lays and cover crops:** herbal lays are introduced in the rotational cropping system to improve soil health but also provide a healthy, nutritional sward for grazing livestock. A herbal lay consists of a legume and forb rich sward, the deep-rooted herbs help to break up compacted soil and inclusion of legumes fix atmospheric nitrogen and reduce the need for artificial fertilisers. Winter cover crops are a non-harvested crop that is grown over winter months between cash crops, to minimise soil erosion, break up compacted layers of soil and fix nitrogen. Both crops introduce a visual green cover and promote sustainable practices which reduce soil erosion, improve soil health and reduce the need for artificial fertiliser application.

- plots within arable fields: funding for flower-rich margins, nectar plots, winter bird food and unharvested headlands have made this feature more common across arable fields. This has supported a greater diversity of habitats within arable landscapes, with the aim to support greater populations of pollinators, farmland birds and other local wildlife.
- soil and water protection: arable reversion to grassland and grassland buffer strips alongside watercourses and ditches have become more popular with funding from agri-environment schemes. Grassland helps to catch sediment, phosphorus and other substances which improves local water-quality. Greater grassland cover also improves soil health and retention.
- regenerative management practices: a greater interest in regenerative agriculture has been noted nationally. No-till management practices and organic farming have become more popular which prevents practices such as application of chemicals or ploughing which produce greenhouse gas emissions and reduce soil health and water quality.
- woodland management and planning: there has been a big push around sustainable woodland management and woodland creation. Loss of trees through diseases such as Dutch elm disease, ash dieback and acute oak decline have reduced the resilience of England's woodlands. Advice and guidance now promote planting of climate-resilient species, controlling deer pressure and supporting natural regeneration to manage native woodlands. Increasing woodland cover is also a main priority, with appropriate areas of grassland or arable land targeted for woodland creation. Planting of hedgerow trees and small copses have also been popular.

4.22 Energy crops have been introduced for use as biofuels, for anaerobic digestion and for biomass. Crops include wheat, sugar beet, maize, miscanthus and short rotation coppice. These can alter the landscape character of the North Wessex Downs, including the experience of openness, remoteness and the fundamental exposure of the chalk topography, which are key attributes of the National Landscape.

Development Pressure

4.23 Expanding settlements, increases in tourism, and renewable energy development are the main drivers for landscape change.

4.24 A number of large urban centres lie within the setting of the North Wessex Downs, including Swindon, Wantage, Didcot, Reading, Newbury, Basingstoke and Andover. Impacts on the National Landscape from development on the edge include:

- visual impacts not only from the immediately adjacent landscapes but also from the high central core of the downs.
- demands on the water resources of the chalk aquifer, resulting in low flows within the region's prime chalk rivers.
- increasing recreation pressures and loss of tranquillity, which is a rare commodity in southern England.
- increased traffic levels on the rural lane network, resulting in both loss of tranquillity, higher accident levels, and damage to the character of the lanes.

4.25 There is also a high demand for housing within the National Landscape particularly in the east, where there are many small attractive villages near employment centres. The key issues are:

- severe planning restrictions on villages perceived, by some, to be leading to village cramming and need to achieve an appropriate balance between 'protection' and allowing settlements to expand gradually.
- need to ensure new development is sympathetic and of good design and helps maintain the local village character.
- inappropriate location of development which can have a significant impact on character, for example by expansion of villages along valleys, or up onto the open downlands.
- poor design in terms of style and materials - some parts of the National Landscape (notably some villages to the east) are taking on a more suburban character.

4.26 Diversification of farm businesses and realisation of assets, includes pressure for the re-use of farm buildings. National guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and from Historic England provide sensitive methods of reusing these historic buildings, maintaining their presence in the landscape. In the North Wessex Downs planning permission is being sought for both modern large portal frame constructions and conversion of traditional farm buildings for both residential and economic uses. The key issues are:

- new uses include warehousing, industrial or business units, as well as a strong demand for equestrian uses, all of which may contribute to greater traffic levels in the National Landscape.
- need for associated infrastructure such as parking and lighting which impact on local character.
- impacts on the internal and external fabric of historic buildings.
- effect on a variety of declining wildlife species which co-exist with the agricultural use of buildings but can be disturbed or killed during conversion. These include barn owls, swallows, swifts and house martins and several species of bats.

Infrastructure

4.27 The development of communication infrastructure has had a significant impact on the tranquillity. The M4 and the A34 slice across the North Wessex Downs. The road infrastructure has a major visual and noise impact on the National Landscape as well as a severance effect. It has also acted as a catalyst for development in the form of petrol stations, service areas and hotels. While further major road infrastructure within the National Landscape is not envisaged, the incremental upgrading of the rural roads and lanes is also having a detrimental impact on landscape character. This includes the erosion of road edges and verges, particularly on the narrow sunken lanes, with road improvements by kerbing, highway lighting, wide visibility splays and signing creating a more urban character.

4.28 The recent electrification of the Great Western Railway saw the addition of large masts and gantries above the railway track. Although it was too late to change the design of the gantries in the North Wessex Downs, National Grid has funded the Mind the Gap programme. This has provided funding for both mitigation and enhancement projects to soften the scars left by the electrification and enhancing the outstanding landscape of the North Wessex Downs and adjacent Chilterns.

Recreation and Tourism

4.29 The expanding peripheral population and increase in leisure time is anticipated to be a major force for change within the North Wessex Downs. This raises a number of issues:

- impact of motorised vehicles on green lanes including the Ridgeway.
- locally requirements for parking in the countryside plus an increase in traffic on the rural lane network.
- impacts on key 'honeypot' sites including damage to archaeology and erosion of fragile habitats.
- increase in noise from more intrusive countryside sports such as clay pigeon shooting.
- loss of sense of remoteness.

4.30 Many of these issues can be overcome through good management and anticipated growth in recreation and tourism could act a catalyst for positive change. Tourism is widely recognised as an increasingly important sector, albeit currently operating from a relatively low base. There are a number of key attractions in the North Wessex Downs. These include the historic town of Marlborough, with a location on the A4, which has enabled the town to develop as a tourist stop-off. The North Wessex Downs also has a wealth of archaeological and historic sites that attract significant visitor numbers. Avebury World Heritage Site, for example, receives in the region of 400,000 visitors a year and revenue generated is an important contributor to the local economy. The Ridgeway National Trail similarly attracts in the region of 100,000 visitors a year. There is a wealth of smaller sites, historic houses and other tourism attractions within the National Landscape.

4.31 There has been a recent emphasis on promoting sustainable tourism, including walking the Ridgeway, cycling using the National Landscape national cycle route, horse tourism via the extensive linked network of bridleways, and visiting the Kennet and Avon Canal and archaeological sites.

Chapter 5

The character of the North Wessex Downs

5.1 The physical, cultural, described in the previous chapters have combined to create the unique and distinctive character of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. The area is characterised by a diversity of landscapes and these variations and differences are represented by eight landscape types. Each of the generic landscape types has a distinct and relatively homogenous character with similar physical and cultural attributes, including geology, landform, land cover, and historical evolution. The landscape types can be further sub-divided into component landscape character areas. These are discrete geographic areas that possess the common characteristics described for the landscape type. Each character area has a distinct and recognisable local identity.

5.2 The landscape classification identifies 8 LCTs and 42 LCAs. These are shown on Figure 5.1.

5.3 It is important to note that boundaries between one LCT or LCA and the next are often transitional: there is rarely a clearcut change in character ‘on the ground’. This assessment has been mapped at a scale of 1:25,000 which provides an appropriate level of detail for the landscape character assessment at the strategic unitary authority scale.

5.4 Profiles for the Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas are set out below.

1: Open Downland

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

2: Downland with Woodland

- 2A Brightwalton Downs
- 2B Ashampstead Downs
- 2C Lambourn Wooded Downs

- 2D Walbury Hill -Watership Down Scarp
- 2E Chute Forest – Faccombe
- 2F Litchfield Downs
- 2G Hannington Downs

3: Wooded Plateau

- Savernake Plateau

4: High Chalk Plain

- Salisbury Plain

5: Downs Plain and Scarp

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

6: Vales

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

7: River Valleys

- 7A Kennet Valley
- 7B Lambourn Valley
- 7C Bourne Valley

- 7D Pang Valley

8: Lowland Mosaic

- 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons
- 8B Winterbourne Farmland
- 8C Wickham Wooded Heath
- 8D Hungerford Farmland
- 8E Highclere Lowlands and Heath
- 8F Ewhurst Parkland

LCT 1 Open Downland

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

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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 droeways. 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.

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.

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.

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

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

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.

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

LCT 2 Downland with Woodland

Location and overview

5.107 Downland with Woodland occurs in two main blocks: on the dipslope north of the River Kennet; and as an escarpment south of the Kennet. The southern escarpment forms the beginning of the main chalk upland running south and east as part of the Hampshire Downs. Boundaries are mainly defined by geology and relate to the landscape transition where clay-with-flint becomes more dominant, marked by an associated increase in woodland cover. The southern block of Downland with Woodland is clearly defined by the base of the distinctive linear escarpment that rises from the intervening clay lowlands.

5.108 The Downlands with Woodland landscape type is divided into seven geographic character areas. These comprise.

- 2A: Brightwalton Downs
- 2B: Ashampstead Downs
- 2C: Lambourn Wooded Downs
- 2D: Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp
- 2E: Chute Forest - Faccombe Downs
- 2F: Litchfield Downs
- 2G: Hannington Downs

5.109 The Downlands with Woodland are defined by contrast; of open rolling downland and enclosed woodland, of light and shade, and of prospect and refuge. The typical chalk landform has a strongly rolling topography, rising to gently domed hilltops and dissected by dry valleys. A thick mantling of clay-with-flint differentiates this landscape type from LCT 1 Open Downlands. The geology produces softer contours on the summits and creates heavy moist soils, which have retained their woodland cover. Sinuous woodlands cling to the steep slopes and, with the interconnected hedgerow network, create a strong framework and sense of enclosure in some areas. Ridgetop woods are a particular feature and form dark wooded horizons providing containment to the views. These enclosed areas are juxtaposed with contrasting more open arable and pastoral summits, and those areas where remnant chalk grassland survives on the steep slopes of the dry valleys and scarps. Bronze Age and Iron Age hill

forts, strategically located on high summits, are a notable feature of the landscape type and command panoramic views over the surrounding countryside.

5.110 Ancient and semi-natural woodlands and hedgerows are an important ecological resource. Wooded commons and deer parks are a particular feature originating from medieval deer parks enclosed from areas of Royal Forest. A number of these deer parks were refashioned in the eighteenth century and are now important designed landscapes.

5.111 A dispersed settlement pattern with numerous isolated farms and small clustered hamlets and villages sheltering in folds in the chalk topography or exposed on the ridge tops. Evidence from the Domesday Survey of 1086 suggests that many of these were created during the early medieval period, typically with a church or manor house. Common vernacular includes redbrick, flint, weatherboard and clay tile. The settlements are connected by an intricate network of narrow winding lanes, many originating as medieval droveways, sunken into the chalk with a dense overhanging woodland canopy and high grassy banks.

5.112 The Downland with Woodland remains a deeply rural landscape, with a strong sense of peacefulness and tranquillity.

LCT 2 Wooded Downland: Key Characteristics

- Elevated chalk upland, distinguished by a thick capping of clay-with-flint. The reddish-brown clay creates heavy, sticky loams.
- A strongly rolling landform with gently domed hill tops, dry valleys and notable scarp and dipslope topography.
- A sheltered landscape with a diverse range of woodlands including on the clay summits, sinuous hangers on the steep slopes, shelterbelts, wooded pasture and parkland.
- Remnants of chalk grassland survive, including two of the largest areas of protected chalk grasslands in the North Wessex Downs.
- Arable farmland dominates, with strong hedgerow boundaries contributing to the mosaic of woodland cover. Medieval enclosure patterns of assarts are set against more open Parliamentary enclosure fields.
- Distinctive Bronze Age and Iron Age hill forts are prominent features on hill tops.

- Numerous historic parks and designed landscapes, many originating as medieval deer parks.
- Small villages nestled in sheltered valleys with widespread scattered farmsteads and hamlets. Varied vernacular built form includes redbrick, flint and render, weatherboard, plus roofs of tile and thatch.
- Intricate network of rural lanes, including characteristic sunken lanes overhung by deep grassy banks and woodland.
- High density of footpaths, bridleways and byways, which provide access to the attractive villages, woodlands, archaeological sites, and historic houses.
- A peaceful, tranquil and secluded rural landscape, with sheltered enclosed woodland areas contrasting with more open, remote summits.

LCT 2 Downland with Woodland: Evaluation

Forces for change

5.113 The following are identified as forces for change common to the Downland with Woodland as a whole:

- Decrease in livestock so that some marginal areas of pasture may no longer be grazed leading to alternative uses e.g. as horse paddocks/training gallops or neglect/scrub encroachment.
- Lack of appropriate management for woodlands, particularly ancient and semi-natural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing and as areas of wood pasture.
- Loss of hedgerow boundaries and poor management of remaining hedgerows, including hedgerow trees.
- The increased popularity in field sports, especially of shooting, impacts the management of both small-scale woodland and of nearby arable fields. This includes the planting of large blocks of maize as a cover crop to feed the young birds, complimenting grant-aided conservation plots such as wild bird seed mixes. The incremental associated infrastructure including platforms for shooting and pens for birds can have an impact on landscape character.

- 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 Downland with Woodlands and in adjacent landscapes may alter the landscape character, including the expansive skyline and panoramic views.
- Development in the setting to the National Landscape including large-scale and /or tall development on the edges of Andover, Basingstoke, Newbury, and Reading. These affect panoramic views from the downland and its wider setting, as well as the sense of remoteness and tranquillity.
- Pressure for tall structures such as communications masts, transmitters and renewable energy developments (potentially wind turbines) that will be particularly intrusive on the strong sweeping skylines and could have a negative impact on the sense of remoteness.
- High traffic levels on the rural lane network impact on the rural character of the lanes, and make them less attractive for walking and riding.
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 Downland with Woodland 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 and also decrease the water quality for livestock on the downs.
 - Hotter, drier conditions in the summer will put more pressure on water resources, which may result in a change in crops to less water-reliant plants, and to increase the heat stress of livestock.
 - Drier summers and wetter winters will cause increased tree mortality and die-back from drought and stress and waterlogging, affecting the distinctive pattern of woodlands.
 - 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.
- Deciduous woodlands are facing decline due to warmer winters, altered rainfall patterns, drier summers and increased frequency of extreme events. There may be a shift in vegetation type and composition, increased competition from invasive species, greater numbers of insect and mammal pests, a greater risk of infection by various soil and waterborne pathogens, and a greater risk of wind-throw and loss of mature trees. It could also lead to the die-back of certain hedgerow tree species, and increased storm activity may lead to the loss of mature and veteran trees within hedgerows.

Landscape guidance

5.114 The following are identified as guidelines for protecting and enhancing valued characteristics of the Downland with Woodland, 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 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.
- Focus on woodland areas that have been degraded to improve biodiversity and ecosystem health. Where appropriate, expand the extent of existing woodland through targeted restoration projects.
- Develop and implement woodland management plans that balance conservation and sustainable use by traditional practices including coppicing and selective thinning to maintain healthy woodlands.
- Carry out consistent management and restocking of hedgerows and nurture new hedgerow trees to maintain stock and enhance the historic

hedgerow network. Where possible avoid replacing hedgerows with fencing.

- Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes as a result of field sports and bird shoots. Minimise the size and extent of these structures where possible, using the existing woodland as screening where possible.
- 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 wooded downland.
- Conserve the expansive open views from higher ground. Consider the impact of any tall structures on views from within this landscape, and in views from outside the landscape.
- Protect the tranquil character of the wooded 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 2A: Brightwalton Downs

LCA 2A: Brightwalton Downs: Description

5.115 The Brightwalton Downs are a discrete area of Downland with Woodland occurring on the dipslope, between the more open downland areas of Lambourn Downs (LCA 1B) to the west and Blewbury Downs (LCA 1D) to the east. The boundaries are broadly defined by the transition in drift geology, at the point where the surface clay-with-flint deposits become dominant as a capping on the summits. The southern boundary is effectively formed by the M4, separating this area from the Lowland Mosaic (Landscape Type 8).

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.116 The Brightwalton Downs, underlain by the Upper and Middle Chalk, maintain the essential landform characteristics of the chalk. Clay-with-flint overlies the chalk, forming gentler contours and a softer and less intricate topographical pattern. The area forms part of the dipslope, and slopes gently towards the lower lying clay pastures and river gravel deposits surrounding the Kennet Valley.

Biodiversity

5.117 The clay-with-flint has resulted in heavier clay soils which retain a high proportion of woodland cover as well as areas of pasture that have not been brought into cultivation.

5.118 The woods are very diverse and include recent mixed plantations and shelterbelts as well semi-natural woodlands of ancient origin. The latter include formerly coppiced woods of ash, maple and hazel with oak standards. They support many plants typical of old coppiced woodland including spiked star-of-Bethlehem, Solomon's seal and carpets of bluebell. The traditional management of coppice woodlands has been abandoned at many sites, which has resulted in woodlands developing a dense, more enclosed structure. Ashridge Wood is the only SSSI in the LCA, notified for its ancient coppiced woodland. Standard oaks (*Quercus robur*) occur throughout the site, with other woody species including wych elm (*Ulmus glabra*), cherry (*Prunus* sp) and whitebeam (*Sorbus aria* agg.).

5.119 Other distinctive features include the carefully positioned tree clumps, which draw the eye to the higher ground, plus a repetitious pattern of linear

shelterbelts, for example around Catmore. Together, the tree and woodland features combine to create a softer, sheltered character.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.120 A large scale, undulating mixed farmed landscape of pasture and arable fields, enclosed by hedgerows. Hedgerows frequently contain mature oak and ash hedgerow trees, although the boundaries are often denuded with gaps or intensively flailed.

5.121 The wooded copses on valley sides and steeper slopes show signs of assarting that may be late medieval or post-medieval in date. There are also some sinuous boundaries running north-south or north-east south-west that may reflect late medieval or post-medieval 'ladder' fields, the result of informal 17th or 18th century enclosure, with fields laid out between existing tracks or droveways. Chaddleworth and Beedon parishes, in particular, contain many of these. The defining feature of the modern landscape is the large, regular field pattern resulting from formal eighteenth and nineteenth century Parliamentary enclosure. In some cases, further boundaries have been removed in recent years to create very large fields.

5.122 Former RAF Welford lies in the south-west of the LCA. The airfield was constructed in 1941 and was used by the American Air Force (USAAF) from 1943. It has remained in use by the USAAF as an ammunition store. The barbed wire and small storage sheds are generally screened from view.

Historic features

5.123 The survival of prehistoric archaeology is limited on Brightwalton Downs. There are a few isolated Bronze Age round barrows on ridgelines and Perborough Castle is an Iron Age hillfort. There are later prehistoric field systems on Woolley Down and Cow Down. Grim's Ditch, running along the northern edge of the scarp, is a Saxon linear earthwork.

5.124 Brightwalton has a medieval moated manor and it is likely that routes such as Old Street Lane and Hangman's Stone Lane may be old medieval or post-medieval droveways. Most of the small villages are mentioned in the Domesday Survey and the Dunmore Pond at Brightwalton can be traced back to 937.

Settlement pattern

5.125 The area is well settled with a large number of individual farmsteads, larger houses and manors, plus a regular distribution of small villages, often surrounded by woodland and set within folds in the landform. They include loosely clustered hamlets/small villages at Chaddleworth, Peasemore, Brightwalton and Farnborough. The linear settlements of Leckhampstead, Downend and Chieveley are located on low ridges, rather than in valleys. Red brick, mixed red and blue brick, clay tile, weatherboard and thatch are the most common vernacular building materials. Overall, this is a quiet, rural landscape.

Principal settlements

5.126 Chieveley has a rich history, with the Iron Age hillfort south at Bussock Camp indicating early settlement in the area. The name "Chieveley" is believed to derive from "Field of Chives", with historical records noting the presence of chives in the area as far back as 951. The village has been a primarily agricultural community with farming playing a central role in the local economy. The High Street is designated as a Conservation Area and features several listed buildings including Chieveley House, a Grade II* listed Queen Anne style house. St Mary's Church is a Grade II* listed dating to the 13th century, although a church has probably stood on the site since the Saxon era. The village retains its linear settlement pattern concentrated on the High Street, although has been expanded to the north in the 20th and 21st centuries.

5.127 Chieveley lies to the east of the Winterbourne Stream valley. The setting of the village is dominated by the A34 to the east and the M4 to the south. The area is further affected by the large junction where these two roads meet along with the motorway service station which sits alongside it.

Communications and infrastructure

5.128 An extensive network of interconnected rural lanes serves the settlements. These lanes, which are often deeply incised and overhung by grass banks, hedges and mature hedgerow trees contribute to the rich and intimate scale of the landscape. Public rights of way provide access between the settlements as well as links to the open downlands and scarp to the east, west and north. The rural lanes in combination with the numerous rights of way result in a high degree of permeability through the area. The M4 is a prominent feature along the LCA's southern boundary, while the A34 cuts through the east.

Perceptual Influences

5.129 Large ridgetop woodland blocks form dark wooded horizons providing visual containment. Much of the Brightwalton Downs is made up of open fields with a significant lack of hedgerows, creating an open arable character. Internally, there are no prominent local landform features, however excellent views can be obtained at the northern edge, from which the escarpment (LCA 5F) drops steeply. Views also exist to the east and west, with views to undeveloped skylines marked by woodlands. In some places where woodland is less prevalent, the landscape has a more open arable character.

5.130 Dark night skies are common across the LCA, with light pollution concentrated at RAF Welford and junction 13 of the M4 south of Chieveley. The LCA also has a good experience of tranquillity across the landscape. The M4 motorway forms a prominent feature along the LCA's southern boundary with the A34 cutting up from junction 13 northward towards Didcot. These roads create both an audible and visual intrusion, although this is localised.

LCA 2A Brightwalton Downs: Evaluation

Brightwalton Downs valued qualities

5.131 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 2A Brightwalton Downs are:

- Gentle contours forming part of the dipslope, linking the escarpment and Kennet river valley create a clear sense of place.
- Undulating mixed farmland interspersed with variety of woodland, some of ancient origin, including Ashridge Wood SSSI.
- Isolated distinctive prehistoric features including Bronze Age round barrows and Perborough Castle Iron Age hillfort.
- Historic settlement pattern of small villages set within the folds of the landform, loosely clustered or linear in form.
- Strong local vernacular of red brick, mixed red and blue brick with clay tile, weatherboard and thatch also common, creating a coherent character.
- Sunken rural lanes provide good level of access throughout the landscape, combined with a high density of public rights of way connecting the LCA to the escarpment and river valley.
- Quiet, rural landscape with good experience of dark night skies.
- Woodlands and tree clumps on higher ground create a soft, sheltered character, with long wooded views possible from higher ground to the north, east and west.

Brightwalton Downs local forces for change/issues

5.132 In addition to the forces for change identified at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 2A Brightwalton Downs are:

- A small section of 11kV wood pole overhead line is due to be dismantled and undergrounded near Beedon. This will reduce the visual impact of the electricity distribution network on the National Landscape.
- Pressure for new employment developments centred on the M4 and A34 junction and their corridors would extend the impact of development further into the undeveloped areas of the National Landscape.

Brightwalton Downs strategy and local guidelines

5.133 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Downland with Woodland LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Brightwalton Downs:

- Ensure any new developments associated with the major road network are carefully sited to avoid undue visual impact on the landscape. Aim to group any developments so they do not ‘straggle’ along the M4 or A34.

LCA 2B Ashampstead Downs

LCA 2B: Ashampstead Downs: Description

5.134 The Ashampstead Downs are located on the eastern edge of the chalk upland of the National Landscape. The eastern boundary is formed by the River Thames, which cuts through the Goring Gap, separating the North Wessex Downs from the Chilterns. The northern boundary is defined by the top of a ridge at a height of approximately 165 metres AOD at the transition to the higher more open Blewbury Downs (LCA 1D). The Pang Valley (LCA 7D) marks the boundary to the west, with the southern boundary being formed by the change in geology and topography to the gravel and clay lowlands of Hermitage Wooded Commons (LCA 8A).

Natural influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.135 The Ashampstead Downs form part of the chalk dipslope. The highest points in the north reach 170 metres AOD. The chalk dips gently southwards towards the Kennet Valley and is incised by several dry valleys systems running east-west leaving pronounced escarpments. At the Goring Gap the ridges between these east-facing valleys are truncated creating a series of bold headlands above the Thames Valley. The Ashampstead dry valley system is a particularly distinctive physical feature and runs south to west from near Aldworth towards the Pang Valley. The chalk is overlain by a thick deposit of clay-with-flint, which forms brown clay loamy soils. Areas of better-drained calcareous soils occur to the east of the area and support arable production.

Biodiversity

5.136 The area is characterised by its extensive woodland cover forming a dense mosaic with the arable farmland. Significant portions of the woodlands are ancient and semi-natural in origin and contain a diverse range of species including beech, oak, ash, cherry, and whitebeam. There are, in addition, larger more regular blocks of commercial coniferous plantation, particularly along the southern edge of the dipslope. The generally large blocks of woodland are often inter-connected creating a strong sense of enclosure throughout the area. Sinuous woodlands cling to the steep sides of some of the escarpments, such as at Harley Hill Wood and Rotten Hill Plantation.

5.137 Holies Down on the steeper slopes of the escarpment and dry valley floors is a nationally important grassland site, designated as a SSSI for its species-rich chalk grassland communities.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.138 The area is very densely wooded, concentrated on the valley sides and steeper slopes. Many of these woods show evidence for assarting, probably informal seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century intakes. Some field boundaries in the area are quite sinuous or irregular, and these may represent informal late medieval or post-medieval enclosure. Some of these might have been laid out between existing tracks. The regular, straight-edged fields are probably the result of formal eighteenth or nineteenth century Parliamentary enclosure.

5.139 Pasture is also concentrated on the steeper slopes, particularly along the escarpments or along the dry valley floors and include Holies Down, designated as an SSSI for the quality of its unimproved chalk grassland. Basildon Park, with its pasture and ornamental planting provides a more formal element in the north-east.

Historic features

5.140 There are few surviving prehistoric remains within this area, apart from one Bronze Age round barrow surviving as an earthwork on Folly Hill. Grim's Ditch, probably dating from Roman or early Medieval period, runs across the area in several interrupted sections.

5.141 Proximity to Reading and the Thames resulted in a number of small estates within the LCA. Basildon House and its associated parkland and gardens (designated as Grade II Registered Park and Garden) represents 'polite' landscape features dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Lancelot 'Capability' Brown designed the kitchen garden, and possibly advised on the park planting. The estate is now owned by the National Trust.

5.142 The manor house at Bere Court was founded in the 13th century, with alterations in the 16th and 18th centuries. It was once owned by Reading Abbey and then later by the Elizabethan mathematician Sir John Davies. Pangbourne College was built by John Belcher in 1897-98, in a redbrick William and Mary style. It was opened as The Nautical College, Pangbourne in 1917 to prepare boys for careers in the Merchant Navy.

Settlement pattern

5.143 A less-well populated LCA, with hamlets and small villages often focussed around crossroads or a small green. Ashampstead is a traditional village which occurs on a spur overlooking the dry valley while Pangbourne, as the name suggests, is set on the valley sides of the Pang. Conservation Areas are designated at Ashampstead, Aldworth, Pangbourne and Yattendon. Outside of the villages, red brick farmhouses are common.

Principal settlement

5.144 Pangbourne is a rural service village of approximately 3,300 inhabitants set on the valley sides of the River Pang. The Roman road between Silchester and Dorchester ran through the area, and is likely that a Romano-British settlement existed here. A settlement is first recorded in the 9th century, and two mills are mentioned in the Domesday Book. The introduction of the Great Western Railway in 1870 connected the village directly to Reading, and increased residential development. 20th and 21st century development has further expanded the village, which has spread west up the valley sides into the Ashampstead Downs and further east along the River Pang floodplain (LCA 7D). It has also expanded south along the A340.

5.145 Pangbourne is located at the confluence of the River Thames and the River Pang. This creates a scenic riverside setting with wide meadow and wetland areas on the eastern edges of the village. In contrast, the west of the village climbs the valley sides of the Pang and is set among semi-natural woodland. This coupled with the local rural lanes and dense hedgerows help to create a sense of enclosure and tranquil atmosphere to the area around Pangbourne.

Communications and infrastructure

5.146 An intricate network of winding rural lanes cuts through the wooded landscape, often following the lines of the dry valleys. The M4 motorway forms a short section of the south-eastern edge, on an embankment. Electricity infrastructure crosses the landscape and forms prominent skyline features above the otherwise undeveloped, wooded skylines.

5.147 A good network of tracks and footpaths provides recreational access. Ashampstead Common is a former deer park which now contains open mixed woodland with ancient yew trees. The Common is crossed by a network of footpaths and bridleways, and is a popular recreation spot, especially for

birdwatching. The Living Rainforest at Hampstead Norreys is also popular with visitors.

Perceptual Influences

5.148 The Ashampstead Downs have strong topographic variation which, in combination with the high amount of woodland, creates an intimate, enclosed landscape with restricted views. The area is generally remote and tranquil; there is a good experience of dark night skies, with the only light pollution from Pangbourne in the south-east.

5.149 Modern intrusions are limited and their impacts tend to be localised, for example noise and visual impact of the M4 in the south-east.

LCA 2B Ashampstead Downs: Evaluation

Ashampstead Downs valued qualities

- Distinctive chalk landscape with pronounced escarpments due to the incision of dry valley systems, including the dramatic Goring Gap, where the River Thames has cut down through the chalk.
- Extensive woodland cover, including areas of ancient woodland, which create an intimate and enclosed character.
- Small historic villages set around crossroads or village greens and estates at Basildon Park, Bere Court and Pangbourne provide a sense of time depth.
- Steep, winding rural lanes, tracks and public rights of way are distinctive features and provide a good level of access.
- Sparse settlement character combined with the topographic variation and woodland results in strong sense of tranquillity and a remote character.

Ashampstead Downs local forces for change/issues

5.150 In addition to the forces for change set out at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 2B Ashampstead Downs are:

- Some unsympathetic plantation woodlands, used for growing Christmas trees, are not in keeping with the deciduous woodland character of the landscape.
- Development pressure from Pangbourne, which may further climb the downland. Ribbon development along the A340 threatens the coalescence of Pangbourne and Tidmarsh.
- Localised visual and noise impact of the M4 which forms part of the southern boundary.

Ashampstead Downs strategy and local guidelines

5.151 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Downland with Woodland LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Ashampstead Downs:

- Plantation woodlands should be sympathetically managed to avoid intrusion on visual character. Selective felling should be adopted to utilise natural regeneration and reduce the landscape impact. Where new

plantations are created, the use of single-species planting or exotic conifers should be minimised.

- Carefully manage existing veteran and ancient trees, and support succession of veteran tree habitat by pollarding, including the creation of maiden pollards, and identification and management of future veterans within the parklands, especially at Basildon Park Registered Park and Garden.
- Ensure that any future development along the A340 retains a sense of separation between Tidmarsh and Pangbourne.

LCA 2C Lambourn Wooded Downs

LCA 2C Lambourn Wooded Downs Description

5.152 Lambourn Wooded Downs are centrally located within the National Landscape, with the high open downland of Lambourn (LCA 1B) to the north and Marlborough Downs (LCA 1A) to the west. The area forms part of the gentle dipslope, which falls southwards to the Kennet Valley (LCA 7A).

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.153 This area is underlain by the Upper and Middle Chalk, incised by a number of dry valleys, including the impressive system that runs from Lambourn Woodlands, through Old and New Hayward Bottom to Hungerford Newtown and beyond. This creates the characteristic strong rolling plateau landform. The overlying clay-with-flint deposits cover the higher sections of the plateau, producing predominantly clay loamy soils with variable flint content. Around Hungerford Newtown a smaller area of well-drained calcareous silty soil follows the dry valley system of Old and New Haywood Bottom. The gently undulating landform slopes southwards with the highest point in the north occurring at Membury earthwork at 200 metres AOD and the lowest point in the south at 100 metres AOD as it transitions to the Kennet river valley and lowland landscapes.

Biodiversity

5.154 This is a well wooded landscape with the pattern of woodland largely relating to the distribution of clay-with-flint deposits, with a particular concentration on ridges and in the west. There is a substantial amount of ancient semi-natural woodland as well as more recent conifer plantations.

5.155 Unimproved grassland is restricted to steep slopes and includes nationally important chalk grasslands at Westfield Farm Chalk Bank and Cleeve Hill, both designated as SSSIs.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.156 Large scale fields are interspersed with woodlands to create a woodland mixed arable and pasture farmland mosaic, with fields bounded by hedgerows and thick shelterbelts. The chalk dipslope to the east is characterised by more

open arable farmland. Local variations in the landscape pattern include the regular rectilinear fields and ridge top woodlands in the area around Woodland St Mary and a more enclosed area dropping to the Lambourn Valley, where deeply incised lanes run between high grassy banks overhung with oak, hazel and holly.

5.157 A more recent land use is the conversion to equestrian use. Equestrian centres, stud farms and pony paddocks are common, particularly in the north associated with the Lambourn Valley (within LCA 1B).

5.158 Many of the small copses and ‘hanger’ woods on valley sides show evidence for assarting. Some of the irregular modern field boundaries also represent assarts or intakes into woodland during the later medieval or post-medieval periods. Much of the landscape is still very open and must have remained open grazing or commons until the post-medieval period. Chilton Foliat parish is characterised by its parallel, sinuous roads and field boundaries running north to south or north-east to south-west, many following ridgelines or valley bottoms. Many of these boundaries represent ‘ladder’ fields running for several kilometres over the uplands. Although some may reflect medieval boundaries, most probably result from informal post-medieval enclosure, sometimes in between existing tracks and droveways. More regular, straightedged fields represent eighteenth and nineteenth century formal, Parliamentary enclosure.

Historic features

5.159 There is comparatively little evidence for the early use and management of this landscape, apart from isolated individual Bronze Age round barrows on ridgelines. The large Iron Age hillfort at Membury is a prominent feature. Ermin Way, a Roman road from Corinum (Cirencester) to Calleva (Silchester) ran across the area, and its route survives as the B4000.

5.160 Kingswood House with its stables and gallops represents more ‘polite’ post-medieval or early modern landscape features. while Welford Park (Grade I listed) is a 17th century country house set in a small landscaped park.

Settlement pattern

5.161 There are no villages within this landscape; the settlement pattern is characterised by regularly spaced farmsteads and loose collections of buildings (for example Woodland St Mary and Lambourn Woodlands) along the B4000 (former route of Ermin Way Roman road). There are a large number of equestrian centres and stud farms, as well as farmsteads that are now in use as

business centres. Redbrick, flint and render, weatherboard, tile and thatch are all common building materials.

Communications and infrastructure

5.162 A dense network of winding lanes, byways, tracks and footpaths connects settlements, often running between banks and hedges, and contributing to the intimate scale of the landscape. These contrast with the busy M4 which cuts east-west across the landscape, and has a large junction with the A138 in the east.

5.163 Membury Airfield was constructed in 1942 and used by the American RAF (USAARF) until 1947 before being privately owned and operated. Part of the site is now used as the Membury motorway service station, while a 17MW solar farm has been constructed on another part of the airfield. The solar farm is well-placed and screened, and so has little visual impact on the wider landscape.

Perceptual Influences

5.164 The landscape as a whole is affected by the intrusion of noise generated by traffic on the visually prominent M4 motorway which winds through the landscape from east to west. Away from Membury services and junction 14 of the M4, the landscape has a good experience of dark night skies.

5.165 The distinctive ridge top woodlands create strong wooded horizons and provide an enclosed and often intimate character. Sunken rural roads create a strong sense of enclosure. This contrasts with expansive open views from higher ground where woodland allows.

5.166 Welford Park is a well-used filming location, including for a number of seasons of the Great British Bake Off.

LCA 2C Lambourn Wooded Down: Evaluation

Lambourn Wooded Downs valued qualities

5.167 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 2C Lambourn Downs are:

- Chalk plateau landform incised by extensive dry valley systems create a strong, rolling landscape, especially the dramatic Goring Gap.
- Well wooded character, particularly along ridges and in the west. Many woodlands are of ancient origin, and combined with hedgerows and conifer plantations create an enclosed and intimate landscape.
- Remnant chalk grassland habitats, including the nationally important Westfield Chalk Bank and Cleeve Hill SSSI.
- Mosaic landscape pattern formed of arable and pasture farmland interspersed with the woodlands.
- Sparse settlement pattern with small historic landscape parks at Kingswood House and Welford Park.
- The open, largely uninhabited high downs offer vast skies, panoramic views, often of strong, wooded horizons, and a sense of remoteness and tranquillity. Experiences of tranquillity are high except along the M4.

Lambourn Wooded Downs local forces for change/issues

5.168 Local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 2C Lambourn Wooded Downs are:

- Membury Camp Scheduled Monument is on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register due to the decline of woodland management on the earthwork.
- Increase in equine land uses. 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.
- Pressure for further incremental changes to farmsteads to accommodate businesses and commercial endeavours, reducing the rural character of the area.

- The potential for further commercial development along the M4 corridor especially near Membury airfield and service station where there is already a strong commercial presence.
- Visual and aural intrusion of the M4, which cuts across the area, and severs access.

Blewbury Downs strategy and local guidelines

5.169 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Downland with Woodland LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Lambourn Downs with Woodland:

- Conserve, manage and seek to implement suitable woodland management regime to consolidate the status of Membury Camp Scheduled Monument which is on the Historic England Heritage at Risk Register.
- Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes through the addition / expansion of equine facilities, which may change the character of the Lambourn Wooded Downs.
- Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes to farmsteads in visual terms, encouraging the sympathetic reuse of farm buildings.

LCA 2D: Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp

LCA 2D: Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp: Description

5.170 Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp is a very distinct linear character area formed by the scarp slope, which marks the beginning of the southern chalk upland block of the North Wessex Downs. The northern boundary is formed by the base of the scarp slope, marking the transition to the foothills and lowlands of Shalbourne Vale (LCA 6B) and the Highclere Lowlands and Heath (LCA 8E). To the east near Kingsclere the boundary is concurrent with the National Landscape boundary. The southern boundary generally follows contours at the top of the north facing scarp slope (generally around 250 metres) at the point where the land begins to fall more gently as the dip slope to the south.

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soil

5.171 The hard Middle Chalk, creates a dramatic scarp slope, forming an impressive backdrop to the low-lying land to the north. Unlike the escarpment that defines the northern edge of the National Landscape, it is not linked to a level plain of lower chalk. However, in the east between Kingsclere and Burghclere a narrow belt of sand and sandstone is exposed creating a strongly undulating landform protruding as the foothills of the scarp. Unlike other escarpment character areas the spring line occurs 1 km – 2 km away from the main scarp slope to the north. The scarp is cut by numerous dry valleys and coombes, for example at Watership Down, creating in places a highly convoluted landform. In other areas it presents a sheer cliff face, for example at Inkpen Hill. Along the top of the scarp are numerous high rounded summits, which offer long views, such as Beacon Hill and Walbury Hill, which at 297 metres, is the highest point in the National Landscape.

Biodiversity

5.172 Land cover is mainly pastoral on the steep slopes, with some arable land on the shallower fringes intermixed with extensive blocks of semi-natural broadleaved woodland. Woodland cover is diverse, ranging from oak woodland, beech hangers and coombe woodlands, for example on the lower slopes at Watership Down, and substantial areas of scrub regeneration. These woodlands provide important local habitats and offer food and shelter to a number of birds and mammals.

5.173 The area is extremely rich in chalk grassland, which survives in abundance on the steep slopes. Many of these sites are of national importance and designated as SSSIs, as for example at Walbury Hill, Burghclere Beacon, and West Woodhay Downs. Ham Hill SSSI is a good example of these chalk grassland areas, where notable plant species include twayblade (*Listera ovata*), fragrant orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*) and autumn gentian (*Gentianella amarella*). These grasslands are a valuable habitat for butterflies, and support species such as the green hairstreak and chalk hill blue.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.174 Large regular, straight-edged fields in the west of the character area around East Woodhay are characteristic of eighteenth and nineteenth century formal Parliamentary enclosure. Small irregular shaped fields in the east in Ecchinswell parish represent assarts or intakes into woodland during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries.

5.175 An 'apron' of sandstone forms the undulating foothills of the scarp west of Kingsclere. This area is characterised by its arable farmland, ornamental parkland at Sydmonton and an area of horse gallops creating a more managed landscape. This area also contains the only settlements, at Sydmonton and Old Burghclere.

Historic features

5.176 The area contains significant prehistoric monuments, demonstrating the long human presence. The Neolithic long barrow of Combe Gibbet on Inkpen Hill is a significant monument. Bronze Age remains in the landscape include lynchets and linear earthworks such as those on Ladle Hill. Remnant field systems (soilmarks and lynchets) are preserved on the southern slopes of Beacon Hill, and at Ladle Hill. The scarp top route is reputed to be of Roman origin.

5.177 The medieval village of Burghclere (now called Old Burghclere) which was owned from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries by the Bishops of Winchester, is an example of a shrunken village. Its depopulation and desertion was influenced by a change from arable to pasture farming that occurred on episcopal estates in the later medieval period. Woodland still survives as numerous small copses, especially on steeper slopes. Historically this is part of

a region that was formally known as 'The Woodlands' and in 1848 was described as 'very heavy strong wet land' (Dodd 1987, 242).

5.178 The parkland of Highclere Park (Grade I Registered Park and Garden) extends into this LCA at Sidown Hill.

Settlement pattern

5.179 The steepness of the topography has resulted in a virtual absence of settlement. Settlement within the LCA is limited to isolated farm buildings in the east. Large manor houses with large estates are also found in the east, for example Highclere Park (Highclere Castle lies to the north in LCA 8E), Old Burghclere and Symonton.

Communications and infrastructure

5.180 The scarp top route Wayfarer's Walk / Test Way / Mid Wilts Way provides the only access to the west. Two car parks are located on prominent scarp-top locations and a panoramic viewpoint is also provided. Much of the scarp is also open access land, and popular with hang gliders, paragliders and radio enthusiasts.

5.181 A small number of narrow lanes climb the escarpment, as for example at West Woodhay Down. Sunk deeply into the landform, with steep earth banks and overhung by a tunnel of woodland; travelling through these lanes is a memorable experience. The dual carriageway A34 in the east is a more modern feature. The route of a disused railway, part of the Didcot, Newbury and Southampton line, is still visible in the landscape as a tree-lined route. Overhead electricity pylons ascend the slopes to the west of Watership Down.

Perceptual Influences

5.182 High rounded summits along the scarp top, including Walbury Hill and Beacon Hill provide outstanding views across the adjacent low-lying landscapes and into the wooded dipslope. Highly visible archaeological features, including the long barrow at Combe Gibbet and the Iron Age hillforts that crown the summits along the scarp, are defining features of the character area. Conversely, the scarp top is visible from many of the surrounding landscapes, forming a dramatic and distinctive skyline.

5.183 The LCA has a very good experience of dark night skies, with the only light pollution emanating from Kingsclere to the north-east. The limited settlement and road access provides a strong sense of remoteness. This is

reduced in close proximity to the A34 in the east. Although the road is largely screened by planting, it has an audible impact on the otherwise peaceful landscape.

5.184 Combe Gibbet has cultural and romantic associations – a replica gibbet at the top of Combe Gallows marks where George Broomham and Dorothy Newman were gibbeted in 1676 after their execution for murdering Broomham's wife Martha and son Robert.

5.185 The micro-geography of this area (Nuthanger Farm) and the adjacent scarp provides the setting for the epic journey described in Richard Adams' novel *Watership Down*.

LCA 2D Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp: Evaluation

Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp valued qualities

5.186 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 2D Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp are:

- Dramatic and prominent north-facing chalk scarp slope which has sinuous and sculptural qualities, and includes Walbury Hill, the highest point in the North Wessex Downs.
- Beech hangers, coombe woodlands and ancient oak woodlands provide a richly wooded character.
- The steep slopes host calcareous grassland; a nationally rare priority habitat supporting many priority species, including two nationally designated SSSIs.
- Prominent scarp top archaeological remains including long barrows, hillforts and earthworks provide evidence of early human occupation and provide popular attractions for visitors.
- Highly rural and remote landscape, accessed by narrow sunken lanes and a network of public rights of way including the ancient trackway Wayfarer's Walk.
- Spectacular panoramic views from the elevated scarp top summits, with big skies and a sense of tranquillity.

Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp local forces for change/issues

5.187 In addition to the forces for change set out at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 2D Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp are:

- Intense recreation pressures at key sites including Beacon Hill, resulting in erosion of the fragile chalk grassland and damage to archaeology.
- Localised visual intrusions, notably the pylon route at Watership Down, plus potential future demand for tall structures, e.g. wind turbines/masts on the scarp summit and skyline, which would have a significant impact in views to the area.
- Visual and noise intrusion from the A34 and A343.

Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp strategy and local guidelines

5.188 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Downland with Woodland LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp:

- Conserve and enhance the chalk grasslands and extend and connect isolated chalk grassland habitats along steeper slopes. Seek to enhance the visual appearance of grassland managed as horse paddocks.
- Encourage restoration of areas eroded by visitor pressure and seek sensitive design solutions to minimise the local impacts of recreation facilities.
- Carefully site any potential tall infrastructure to minimise impacts on the open skyline and sensitive scarp ridge.

LCA 2E: Chute Forest - Faccombe Downs

LCA 2E: Chute Forest - Facombe Downs: Description

5.189 The Chute Forest - Facombe LCA forms a distinct character area on the Wiltshire-Hampshire border. It is part of the southern block of chalk upland, which includes Salisbury Plain (LCA 3A) to the west and continues through the Hampshire Downs to the east. Boundaries are defined to the north by the escarpment rising from the Vale of Pewsey/Shalbourne Vale (LCA 2D) and to the south by the National Landscape boundary. The boundary to the east is less distinct and is marked by a transition to the more open arable farmland that characterises the downs around Litchfield (LCA 2F).

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.190 The underlying solid geology of the area is almost exclusively formed by Upper Chalk, with Middle and Lower Chalks outcropping only in narrow bands, for example along the scarp above the Vale of Pewsey and steep slopes around Ashmansworth. Deposits of clay-with-flint occur across the central and higher parts of the area, forming heavier clay soils.

5.191 Landform is typical of chalk upland with a rolling topography, dissected by valleys, with the central part of the area cut through by the steep sided valley of the River Bourne* (LCA 7C). The high-rolling hills are cut by a number of dry valleys running parallel to each other into the Bourne valley. Scarps and dramatic coombes are also characteristic, for example at Verham Dean, the swelling steep sided form of Haydown Hill (258 metres) in the north-west, and the distinct steep slopes around Ashmansworth. The escarpment extends from Collingbourne Kingston in the west to Botley Down, near Marten, in the east. Although less distinct compared to the adjoining Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp (LCA 2E), is nevertheless a clear landform feature.

5.192 * There are two Bourne Valleys, a minor river on the boundary to the west adjacent to Salisbury Plain and more prominent valley which cuts through the character area. The latter has a distinct character and is described separately (LCA 7C).

Biodiversity

5.193 The area is characterised by the extensive and connected woodland cover, which occurs in association with the clay-with-flint covered summits. This

produces a distinct landscape pattern comprising large blocks of woodland on the higher areas and long sinuous hangers clinging to the slopes of the steep combs where they are intermixed with pasture.

5.194 The woodlands are varied ranging from areas of ancient woodland to more recent mixed plantations and shelterbelts. The vast Combe Wood and Linkenholt Hanging SSSI in a sheltered valley to the north is a good example of an ancient woodland and incorporates small areas of relict chalk grassland. This site forms an extensive area of ancient and secondary woodland located in a sheltered valley close to the point where the counties of Berkshire, Wiltshire and Hampshire meet. The site also supports small areas of chalk grassland and scrub, which are relicts of open downland. The woodland itself has developed good structural diversity and this together with its humid, sheltered position provide excellent conditions for epiphytic lichens and bryophytes.

5.195 Ash/field maple dominate the more calcareous soils, whilst the acidic clays support birch/pedunculate oak. The landscape pattern is repeated at Faccombe Wood and Netherton Hanging Copse. Sidley Wood is a further woodland SSSI of ancient hornbeam coppice.

5.196 The steep slopes also retain important areas of chalk grassland, such as at Hogs Hole SSSI. The SSSI at Rushmore and Conholt Downs contains what has been noted as possibly the oldest known juniper population found on English chalk.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.197 Much of the woodland shows signs of assarting. The fields are often small and irregular in these locations, with sinuous edges, and some may reflect medieval and early post-medieval boundaries (fifteenth/sixteenth centuries to the eighteenth/nineteenth centuries). In some cases the sequence of field intakes can be established, and some fields appear to have been piecemeal enclosures set out in between droveways or tracks formed by the clearance of woodland to create arable fields. Many of these tracks may also have medieval origins. Late medieval and postmedieval informal enclosure resulted in the medium to large sized regular fields with wavy or sinuous boundaries, typical of the open, more elevated chalk. This enclosure took place from the late fifteenth century but was especially common during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. More formal enclosure in the nineteenth century produced regular, rectangular fields.

5.198 The farmland woodland mosaic also includes areas of arable land on high ground enclosed by intact hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees plus smaller assorted fields, such as around Chute and Faccombe. These contrast with areas of more open arable land on the slopes dropping down towards both valleys of the River Bourne. Areas of parkland and estate farmland provide further variation as at Conholt Park.

Historic features

5.199 Neolithic long barrows located at Tow Barrow, Fairmile Down and Smay Down are prominent features in the west. 'Celtic' fields visible as prominent terraces or lynchets on the scarp edge around Highdown and Hitchen had their origins during the late Bronze Age. Other Bronze Age remains include isolated round barrows, which survive as at Doles Copse, and Tringley Wood with a further group to the west of Heath Copse. Aerial photographs and excavations have shown that there were once many more round barrows in the area that have since been ploughed.

5.200 During the Iron Age, this was a densely occupied landscape with individual farmsteads concentrated on ridges and hilltops, with access to water, summer grazing and the other resources of the wetter valleys. This legacy is reflected in today's landscape in the form of several prominent monuments from the period, such as the hill fort of Fosbury, situated on Knolls Down, with associated field systems located nearby. Iron Age enclosures also survive as earthworks at Bevisbury, Tangley Clumps and near Upton Manor. At Blagden Copse, the northernmost of two earthworks enclosures may be a ritual shrine dating to the first centuries BC and AD, commanding views southwards down to Andover. Romano British settlements were concentrated along the river valleys and lower slopes of the chalk downs, with several villas and farmsteads clustered round Andover. The Roman Icknield Way, preserved in the modern line of Hungerford Lane, runs across the area. At Haydown Hill the road follows a curved route around the landform, an example of how Roman Roads sometimes have to deviate from their course. To the south at the foot of the more elevated chalk downland, the road met the Portway, the Roman road that ran to Calleva (Silchester), with the settlement of Leucomagus or Andover developing as a minor market town at the junction.

5.201 Following the disruptions of the fifth century, many areas may have reverted to scrub or woodland, and these became part of the Saxon Royal Forest of Chute. The fact that pre-Saxon earthworks such as those in Blagden Copse survive today suggests that many woodland pockets are remnants of this forest. Place names such as Doiley, Doiley Wood, Doles Wood and Doles

Copse may all be derived from the Old English word *Digerleah* meaning ‘thick wood’. Netherton in the north was a late Saxon manorial complex, and there was a small Saxon settlement and an early Saxon cemetery just north of Andover. The linear earthwork known as Grim’s Ditch may date to the late fifth century AD, and may have protected the approaches to Silchester. It is visible today running through Sawyers Wood and into Netherton Hanging Copse. The linear earthwork known as Devil’s Ditch may also be from this period.

Settlement pattern

5.202 The area is fairly sparsely populated, with a low settlement density comprising small villages and hamlets sheltering in the folds of the chalk topography particularly on the south facing slopes, for example the Chutes, Tidcombe and Vernham Dean. Scattered isolated farmsteads and mansions (Conhault). Ashmansworth and Linkenholt are located on ridgelines. The small village of Collingbourne Kingston is located in the Bourne Valley to the west.

5.203 Vernacular buildings in the area are predominantly of brick and flint, roofed with tile. Harder chalk was sometimes used in walls, and some older buildings retain timber framing, chalk cob and thatch.

5.204 Settlements include the now shrunken medieval village at Brunton. Biddesden was a separate manor to Ludgershall, and was owned by the Benedictine monastery (later a priory) of Amesbury. The medieval village at Netherton, was established on the earlier Saxon site, however, after the demise of the manor house in the fourteenth century, Netherton shrank as nearby Facombe expanded. Villages such as Vernham Dean were linear developments along central roads, but there were also scattered hamlets and individual farms.

5.205 A particular feature of the area is the large manors and houses. Facombe Manor, Tangle Manor, Biddesden House, Netherton House, Ibthorpe House and Upton House all had medieval beginnings, but in the eighteenth century were refashioned by the gentry, with associated gardens and polite landscape features. Biddesden House is a Grade II Registered Park and Garden, designated for its 18th and 19th century park and garden from the early 1930s.

Communications and infrastructure

5.206 An intricate network of rural lanes winds across the area linking settlements, often following the lines of dry valleys such as the lane along Doiley Bottom. There are few main roads except the A343, connecting Andover

to Newbury. Two overhead electricity lines cross the landscape, and there is a single wind turbine north of Faccombe.

5.207 Many Public Rights of Way, including the promoted routes the Test Way and Brenda Parker Way, provide a good level of access across this LCA, linking the high downs to the Bourne Valley, lowlands to the north and vale to the west.

Perceptual Influences

5.208 The limited settlement pattern and intricate network of rural lanes creates a remote and tranquil rural character despite proximity to Andover, Ludgershall and the garrison town of North Tidworth.

5.209 The diverse landscape pattern creates experiences ranging from intimate and enclosed to dramatic and open depending on the particular combination of landform and land cover. Taken as a whole the rolling, elevated plateau combined with the distinct and repetitive patterns of woodland cover provides a strong degree of cohesiveness and unity to the area.

LCA 2E Chute Forest - Facombe Downs: Evaluation

Chute Forest - Facombe Downs valued qualities

5.210 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 2E Chute Forest - Facombe Downs are:

- Dramatic landform of rolling hills, scarps, combes and dry valleys creates a distinctive sense of place.
- Woodland coverage including sinuous wooded hangers on coombe slopes, ancient and semi-natural woodlands.
- Remnants of unimproved chalk grassland are nationally important, as demonstrated by the SSSI designations of Hogs Hole and Rushmore and Conholt Downs.
- Strong sense of time-depth from prehistoric earthworks including Neolithic long barrows and Iron Age hill fort at Fosbury, along with historic field pattern with evidence of assarting, and large manors with associated parks, including Grade II Registered Biddesden House.
- Intricate network of winding rural lanes, with characteristic sunken lanes overhung by deep grass banks and trees creates an enclosed, tranquil character.
- Peaceful, unspoilt and tranquil landscape with long-reaching views from the higher ground towards wooded horizons and skylines.

Chute Forest - Facombe Downs local forces for change/issues

5.211 In addition to the forces for change at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 2E Chute Forest - Facombe Downs are:

- Lack of appropriate management for the extensive woodland cover of the ancient and semi natural woodlands of Chute Forest.
- An existing single wind turbine has recently gained permission to be extended in height. This may create pressure for new, taller wind turbines and other large infrastructure which could be very visible within this landscape.

Chute Forest - Facombe Downs strategy and local guidelines

5.212 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Downland with Woodland LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Chute Forest - Facombe Downs:

- Develop and implement woodland management plans for Chute Forest that balance conservation and sustainable use by traditional practices including coppicing and selective thinning to maintain healthy woodlands. Where appropriate, consider new planting to link woodland areas, and convert conifer plantations to appropriate native deciduous woodlands.
- Carefully consider future applications for tall infrastructure including wind turbines within this landscape, and applications in adjacent landscapes which would be intrusive.

LCA 2F: Litchfield Downs

LCA 2F: Litchfield Downs: Description

5.213 The Litchfield Downs form a transitional unit between the heavily wooded enclosed landscape of Chute Forest - Faccombe (LCA 2E) to the west and the distinct elevated clay plateau around Hannington (LCA 2G) to in the east. A small part of the west of the LCA is separated by the Bourne Valley (LCA 7C). The dramatic steep Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp (LCA 2D) marks the northern boundary, with the character area extending to the National Landscape boundary in the south.

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.214 The area is underlain by the chalk beds, which are masked in places by the capping of clay-with-flint on summits. The area is dissected by dry valleys. In the north, backing the escarpment there is distinct area of elevated topography, with a strongly articulated landform which extends southwards through the area to Willesley Warren. Elsewhere the land slopes more gently as the dip slope to the south, rolling down to the valleys of the Bourne and the Test.

5.215 The area essentially falls into two distinct parts with the more wooded and enclosed downs to the west and the strongly articulated sweeping landform of open arable downs to the east. It forms a transition between the enclosed wooded landscape to the west and the distinct elevated clay plateau at Hannington to the east. Unifying features are provided by strong sweeping chalk topography with its smooth rounded summits such as at Woodcroft Down, Great Litchfield Down and Willesley Warren and long sinuous dry valleys.

Biodiversity

5.216 Scattered woodlands include a mix of ancient semi-natural formerly coppiced copses, and some small hangers on steep slopes, although these are not as extensive or continuous as the area around Faccombe (LCA 2E). There are also some larger areas of plantation forestry. To the east, woodland cover is limited to occasional smaller regular shelterbelts. The linear planting of Caesar's belt marking the line of the Portway Roman Road creates a distinctive feature.

5.217 The steep slopes host small remnant areas of lowland chalk grassland, although none are designated.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.218 Land cover comprises arable farmland, which to the west is combined with a distinct pattern of woodland. Around Litchfield, for example, the large arable fields are bound by a strong hedgerow structure interspersed with frequent woodland blocks and shelterbelts to create a semi-enclosed landscape with low intervisibility. This is in sharp contrast to the area to the east, for example around Great Litchfield Down and Ashley Warren which has very large open arable fields and a comparatively weak hedgerow structure.

5.219 Some of the boundaries 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. More regular, straight-edged fields represent post-medieval formal Parliamentary enclosure. There has been extensive removal of field boundaries in the twentieth century to create a much more open landscape in contrast to the scarp to the north and the wooded area to the west.

5.220 Parkland is an important feature in this landscape. Hurstbourne Park incorporates a medieval deer park (established in 1332) and an early designed landscaped park.

Historic features

5.221 Bronze Age remains in the landscape include numerous isolated round barrows occurring on ridges and hilltops. Field systems, which may also date back to this period, are visible as lynchets on Great Litchfield Down. The Harrow Way track, which crosses the southern part of the character area may have originated in the later prehistoric period, and it is still used today. The Roman Road Portway, which may have predated the Roman occupation of Britain, ran between Silchester (Callewa Atrebatum) and Old Sarum (Sorbiodunum).

Settlement pattern

5.222 The landscape is sparsely populated, with settlement concentrated in small hamlets to the west including Litchfield and small scattered farms. Settlement is even sparser in the east with infrequent, but generally large-scale farmsteads dispersed across the area, with few roads. The larger settlements of Whitchurch and Overton are located on the National Landscape boundary to the south.

Communications and infrastructure

5.223 Narrow, hedgerow-bound rural lanes cross the area, contrasting with the dual carriageway the A34 which runs north-south in the centre of the LCA. The A34 is in cutting for much of its length, with considerable tree-coverage along its route. The West of England Main Line railway runs along the southern boundary of the LCA. The railway route is largely lined by woodland, restricting its visual influence on the landscape.

5.224 Public Rights of Way provide access into the landscape, including the Test Way, Brenda Parker Way, and an old railway line north of Whitchurch. However, there are considerable areas with no public access, adding to the sometimes remote character of the landscape.

5.225 A number of overhead electricity routes cross the LCA, and the pylons are noticeable vertical features in an otherwise largely undeveloped landscape.

Perceptual Influences

5.226 The limited settlement and access means that the area retains a quiet rural character, with a good experience of dark night skies. Areas of light pollution are recorded close to Andover in the south-west and Overton in the south-east.

5.227 In much of the LCA the extensive woodland cover, shelterbelts and strong hedgerow structure create an enclosed landscape with limited long-distance views. In contrast, the absence of woodland and hedgerows in the east around Hannington, creates a sweeping elevated landform, which brings a strong sense of exposure and expansiveness, with long views. Watership Down is clearly visible, as is the tower of Highclere Castle to the west.

5.228 Woodcutt House was built on land owned by the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem (better known as the Knights Hospitaller) until the Dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII. The 20th century house has a garden designed by renowned landscape designer Gertrude Jekyll.

LCA 2F Litchfield Downs: Evaluation

Litchfield Downs valued qualities

5.229 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 2F Litchfield Downs are:

- Strong sweeping chalk topography with smooth summits, dissected by dry valleys, creates a distinctive sense of place.
- Scattered woodlands, some of ancient origin, combined with small hangers on steep slopes plantation forestry and a strong hedgerow network create a wooded character.
- The linear planting along the Portway Roman Road and historic Harroway Belt are distinctive features in the landscape.
- Sparsely populated landscape, limited to small hamlets and scattered farms.
- Quiet, rural character with high levels of dark night skies. Some areas of limited access create a remote character.
- Contrast between generally enclosed and intimate views due to woodland cover, with panoramic longer distance views to the east, which have a strong sense of exposure and expansiveness.

Litchfield Downs local forces for change/issues

5.230 Local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 2F Litchfield Downs are:

- Pressure for new developments at Whitchurch, immediately south of the National Landscape including new residential development and a new railway station car park may locally alter the rural character of the area.

Litchfield Downs strategy and local guidelines

5.231 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Downland with Woodland LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Litchfield Downs:

- Ensure any new lighting associated with the proposed car park extension north of Whitchurch is appropriate and retains the area's good experience of dark night skies.

LCA 2G: Hannington Downs

LCA 2G: Hannington Downs: Description

5.232 The Hannington Downs lie in the south-east of the National Landscape. The boundaries of the LCA are defined by the change in geology and relief to the north and west. The northern boundary is formed by the top of the Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp (LCA 2D) following a contour at a height of approximately 190 metres AOD. The western edge marks the transition to the more open landscape of the Lichfield Downs (LCA 2F). Ewhurst Parklands (LCA 8F) lie to the north-east of the area with a distinct boundary being defined by the lower lying land and change in the geology and soils. The southern edge is formed by the National Landscape boundary.

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.233 Underlain by the rocks of the Upper Chalk, the area is distinguished by its thick and continuous clay capping which forms a distinctive elevated open plateau landscape. The internal landform is varied with a number of indentations formed by dry valleys, and hills to the north of the area, which add to visual diversity. A series of hills form the highest points to the north of the area including high points on the plateau at Hannington (200 metres AOD) and Cottington's Hill, on the edge of the scarp, at 225 metres AOD. Soils are mainly silty, well drained and flinty. The character area is dry with no springs or watercourses.

Biodiversity

5.234 Mature hedgerow trees and woodland create a more enclosed landscape on the slopes to the east which are characterised by blocks of semi natural woodlands of varying size and shape. These include a number of extensive woodland blocks, such as Hay Wood and Great Deane Wood, many of which are recorded as semi-natural ancient woodland.

5.235 Tidgrove Warren Farm in the north-west is an important site that is managed for biodiversity, and contains chalk grassland, scrub and wooded margins.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.236 Land cover is a mix of open and semi-enclosed arable farmland and woodland mosaic, resulting in a changeable degree of intervisibility. The plateau top and west of the area are predominantly open with large arable fields, sometimes divided by low hedgerows and occasional small linear plantations.

5.237 There are numerous pockets of woodland which show signs of assarting, and the surrounding fields are often small and irregular in these locations, with sinuous edges, and some may reflect medieval and early post-medieval boundaries. In some cases the sequence of field intakes can be established, and some fields appear to have been piecemeal enclosures set out in between droveways or tracks. Many of these tracks may also have medieval origins. Large scale Parliamentary enclosure fields predominate over much of the plateau today, with areas where there has been extensive boundary removal.

Historic features

5.238 Several isolated round barrows occur on ridges and hilltops across the area, such as around Willesley Warren Farm, Tidgrove Warren Farm and Ashe Warren Farm. The site of a Roman villa lies to north of Upper Wootton, while the Portway Roman road crosses the north of the LCA. The course of the road runs NE-SW across the LCA (and continues west into LCA 2F), although it is only reflected in the present-day landscape as a road near Polhampton Lodge Stud.

5.239 A motte at Woodgarsten Farm is evidence of the Norman Conquest, while a moated manor site survives at Wyeford Farm, and Cottington's Hill is a deserted medieval village with fishponds and field systems surviving as earthworks. Other earthworks in the area are also derived from medieval fields. The medieval nucleated plateau-top village of Hannington is the principal settlement in the area.

Settlement pattern

5.240 Settlement is concentrated in the nucleated village of Hannington, centrally located on the plateau top. Hannington developed around a central village green, with later growth along the road to the north and south. The majority of the village is covered by a Conservation Area. Outside of Hannington there are a number of small hamlets such as North Oakley and Ibworth, and scattered farms. The local vernacular of brick and clay tiles is apparent, with older buildings often of brick and timber-frame.

Communications and infrastructure

5.241 An intricate network of narrow winding rural lanes connects Hannington and the smaller outlying settlements to the larger towns outside the National Landscape boundary. The A339T, cutting across the north-east, is the only major road that runs through the area. The West of England Main Line railway runs along the south-west of the LCA. The railway route is largely lined by woodland, restricting its visual influence on the landscape.

5.242 Public Rights of Way including the promoted Wayfarer's Walk and Harrow Way provide access through the area and connect the rural lanes. There is less access within this LCA than others.

Perceptual Influences

5.243 Cottington's Hill (225 metres AOD) and high points on the plateau at Hannington (200 metres AOD) provide panoramic views, which are reduced in slightly lower lying, more enclosed areas. The round barrows are distinctive horizon features.

5.244 Within the more open exposed area, north of Hannington, long views are a feature and the mast at Cottington Hill and line of overhead electricity pylons are visually intrusive elements.

5.245 The limited settlement pattern, limited access and absence of new development allows the area to retain a quiet unspoilt rural character. There is a good experience of dark night skies, with the only light pollution coming from Kingsclere and Oakley to the north and south outside of the National Landscape.

LCA 2G Hannington Downs: Evaluation

Hannington Downs valued qualities

5.246 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 2G Hannington Downs are:

- Distinctive open plateau landscape with visual diversity from dry valleys and hills in the north, including Cottington's Hill.
- Scattered extensive woodland blocks, many of ancient origin, which create enclosure on the slopes in the east and provide a wooded landscape mosaic.
- Isolate round barrows on ridges and hilltops provide time-depth and are distinctive landmarks on the horizon.
- Limited settlement, concentrated in the historic plateau top village of Hannington which has a strong local vernacular.
- Narrow, winding lanes create a rural character.
- Tranquil, sometimes remote character due to limited access, with a good experience of dark night skies.

Hannington Downs local forces for change/issues

5.247 In addition to the forces for change set out at the LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 2G Hannington Downs are:

- Lack of appropriate woodland management particularly ancient and semi natural woodland areas historically managed by coppicing at Warren Bottom Copse.
- Planned new development of Manydown on the north-eastern edge of Basingstoke (outside of NWD National Landscape) may affect the setting of the character area as well as the wider North Wessex Downs.

Hannington Downs strategy and local guidelines

5.248 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Downland with Woodland LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Hannington Downs:

- Develop and implement woodland management plans for woodlands that balance conservation and sustainable use by traditional practices including coppicing and selective thinning to maintain healthy woodlands. Where

appropriate, consider new planting to link woodland areas, and convert conifer plantations to appropriate native deciduous woodlands.

- Ensure the Manydown development does not extend up the downland slopes and retains a sense of separation between Basingstoke and the Hannington Downs.

LCT 3 Wooded Plateau

Location and overview

5.249 The Wooded Plateau LCT occurs in one location and is defined as a single character area: the Savernake Plateau. It lies in the west of the National Landscape. The boundary is defined to the north by the valley of the River Kennet (LCA 7A) and to the south by the low-lying Vale of Pewsey (LCA 6A), where the wooded plateau terminates as a steep scarp. The west and eastern boundaries are less clearly defined, in terms of landform or physical features but are determined by a change of geology, with the Middle and Upper Chalk of Horton Down (LCA 1C) becoming prominent to the west, and to the east descending to the Lowland Mosaic (LCT 8).

5.250 The Wooded Plateau is an attractive, intimate rural landscape, with qualities of peacefulness and seclusion in contrast to the remoteness and isolation of the adjacent open chalk downs.

5.251 The landscape type forms a single character area, the Savernake Plateau, distinguished by its dense, continuously wooded character. Its boundaries approximately represent the bounds of the medieval Royal Forest of Savernake. Throughout this area, a thick covering of Clay-with-Flint drift deposit masks the solid chalk resulting in rich, damp and heavy soils. The plateau dips gently down to the east towards Froxfield, where it is crossed by the narrow meandering valley of the River Dun, a route subsequently exploited by the Kennet and Avon canal. The waterway is an important feature of the landscape, with a wealth of associated industrial archaeology, including the distinctive brick-built Bruce Tunnel.

5.252 Distinctive, visible archaeological elements are features of the plateau and provide evidence for the past use, organisation and management of the landscape. The Wansdyke, one of the best-known Saxon land boundaries in the country, cuts roughly east west through the area, in some places up to 26 metres wide. Other Saxon survivals include the Bedwyn Dyke fragmentary earthwork, and royal estate at Wootton Rivers. The Forest had been established by the time of the Domesday Survey as a Royal Hunting Forest and today remains the dominant feature of the landscape. Extensive areas of ancient woodland are designated as an SSSI consisting of relict oak wood pasture and 18th and 19th century beech plantation. It is especially notable for its magnificent veteran trees which support an outstanding lichen flora and rich invertebrate fauna, including nationally scarce butterflies and moths. The forest also encompasses Tottenham Park, a 18th century parkland with its majestic avenue, woodland rides, follies and formal planting forming a classic designed landscape.

5.253 There are few settlements within the area, reflecting the extensive woodland cover and patterns of land ownership. Those settlements that do exist are located in the east of the area in the valley of the River Dun, including Great Bedwyn and Little Bedwyn, the former with a surviving village wharf onto the canal. The brickworks at Great Bedwyn provided the source for distinctive rust-coloured bricks that characterise many of the local buildings. Flint churches are prominent landmarks.

LCT 3 Wooded Plateau: Key Characteristics

- High chalk plateau overlain by deposits of Clay-with-Flints. Clays, sands and gravels of London Clay, the Reading Beds, Bagshot Beds and Plateau Gravel are also found to the east.
- Extensive and continuous woodland cover including the ancient wood pasture, semi-natural woodland blocks and beech and oak plantation of Savernake Forest and West Wood, designated as a SSSI.
- Attractive woodland-farmland mosaic surrounds the Forest, with areas of more open arable land.
- Historic parkland and formal designed landscapes of Tottenham Park and Littlecote Park, with their built features, permanent pasture, parkland trees, avenues and rides.
- Small areas of remnant chalk grassland confined to scarp slopes. Relict areas of heathland commons on more acidic clays and gravels.
- Savernake Forest is an extensive woodland established as a Royal Hunting Forest.
- Distinct pattern of settlement comprising a remote uninhabited western plateau and a concentration of villages in the east of the area, in the valley of the River Dun. Building materials include some timber framing, with the main material being red brick.
- The Kennet and Avon Canal and associated industrial archaeological sites are an important feature.
- An extensive network of Public Rights of Way allows good access to the many attractions of the Forest.
- A quiet, rural and secluded character.

LCT 3 Wooded Plateau: Evaluation

Forces for change

5.254 The following are identified as forces for change common to the Wooded Plateau:

- Forestry England adopted a new management plan in spring 2023, Our Shared Forest: Savernake Forest Land Management Plan. The new plan will change the management of the Forest. It sets out a vision to create a more open woodland with associated grassland and heathland clearings, restore ponds and wetlands, and maintain and enhance recreational access and facilities.
- Changes in management for the River Kennet Catchment area aimed at improving the quality of the chalk streams that run through the character area including the Dun, Shalbourne, and Inkpen Stream.
- Tottenham House and Savernake Forest Registered Park and Garden is on the Heritage at Risk Register, although a process of conservation and repair has begun under a new private owner.
- Development pressure from adjacent settlements, particularly Marlborough to the north would impact the rural character and tranquil nature of the landscape.
- Pressure for renewable energy development including solar PV panels would change the appearance of the woodland-farmland mosaic.
- The Wooded Plateau landscapes are susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Deciduous woodlands are facing decline due to warmer winters, altered rainfall patterns, drier summers and increased frequency of extreme events. There may be a shift in vegetation type and composition, increased competition from invasive species, greater numbers of insect and mammal pests, a greater risk of infection by various soil and waterborne pathogens, and a greater risk of wind-throw and loss of mature trees. It could also lead to the die-back of certain hedgerow tree species, and increased storm activity may lead to the loss of mature and veteran trees within hedgerows.
- 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 outside the woodlands, and change 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 a crowning feature of the open downland landscape

Landscape guidelines

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

- Adopt and implement Forestry England's Our Shared Forest: Savernake Forest Land Management Plan.
- Focus on replanting areas of coniferous woodland when they reach their natural lifespan to improve biodiversity and ecosystem health. Expand the extent of existing woodland through targeted restoration projects.
- Encourage the appropriate management of woodland, including to reduce the impacts of pests and diseases and to increase its age structure and structural heterogeneity (including creation of glades). Consider the promotion of natural colonisation adjacent to existing woodland, allowing locally native species to develop resilience to the pressures of climate change through natural processes.
- 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.
- Consider the visual and landscape impacts of new solar farms. Use existing and newly planted hedgerow boundaries with appropriate species to screen ground-level features of solar renewable energy developments. Where possible continue the existing land use underneath the solar PV panels.

LCA 3A: Savernake Plateau

LCA 3A: Savernake Plateau: Description

5.256 The LCA location is the same as described for the Landscape Character Type).

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.257 The plateau is comprised almost entirely of the Upper Chalk, which is overlain across much of the area by Cretaceous deposits of Clay-with-Flint. Further to the east, clays, sands and gravels of London Clay, the Reading Beds, Bagshot Beds and Plateau Gravel are found. The superficial deposits mask the underlying chalk, creating damper heavier soils which support woodland cover and contribute to the distinct landscape character.

5.258 The plateau dips gently to the east towards Froxfield, where it is crossed by the River Dun, a route subsequently exploited by the Kennet and Avon Canal. The landform of the higher land is typical of the underlying chalk with rolling downland dissected by small valleys. The highest point in the area is Martinsell Hill, to the west, on the boundary with the Horton Downs character area (LCA 1C), which reaches a height of 289 metres AOD. The hills to the east of the area are generally lower, descending to heights of around 150-160 metres AOD.

Biodiversity

5.259 The Wooded Plateau contains a diverse range of habitats, predominantly, as the name suggests, extensive woodland habitats. These comprise a large ancient forest, formal historic parks and estates plus many areas of farmland/woodland mosaic. Remnant chalk grassland areas are small, scarce and found only along the scarp slope of the southern boundary. The Kennet and Avon Canal, with its associated wetland habitats, crosses the eastern part of the area.

5.260 The nationally important Savernake Forest SSSI forms an extensive tract (900 ha) of ancient woodland consisting of relict oak wood pasture and eighteenth and nineteenth century beech and oak plantation. The trees were originally planted in an open parkland pasture setting but are now mixed with more modern broadleaved and coniferous plantation. The wood has over 1,000 years of documented history and contains well over 500 species. With its

magnificent ancient oak and beech trees, it is especially notable for its outstanding lichen flora and diverse plant communities, including species with nationally restricted distributions such as the scarce narrow lipped helleborine and green-flowered helleborine. The rich invertebrate fauna includes several rare insects, including nationally scarce butterflies and moths. The Forest also supports a diverse assemblage of birds and has mammal residents including dormice which are a UK BAP priority species.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.261 The farmland between the extensive woodlands is predominately under arable cultivation, with smaller areas of pasture on the steeper slopes on the southern scarp boundary and the banks of the River Dun.

5.262 South and south-west of Marlborough, and around Rudge and Froxfield, the largely open, modern landscape of large, regular fields is mostly the product of formal Parliamentary enclosure in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Prior to this, some areas may have been open grazing or commons. West of Hungerford some more sinuous boundaries may reflect late medieval or early post-medieval informal enclosure. South of Lockeridge, the woods show some signs of assarting, probably post-medieval in date. South of Bedwyn and west of Shalbourne, lots of small copses also show signs of assarting, and the fields are smaller and more irregular. This may reflect informal late medieval or post-medieval enclosure.

5.263 The Kennet and Avon Canal and a now dismantled railway from Marlborough to Andover were important nineteenth century communication routes which exploited the pass through Savernake Plateau from Crofton to Hungerford.

Historic features

5.264 There are a few visible monuments on the Savernake plateau including a Neolithic long barrow in the West Woods and several Bronze Age round barrows on hilltop ridges or higher ground, including two small groups in Savernake Forest and on Bedwyn Common. Linear earthworks visible on Postern Hill, south of Marlborough, may be late Bronze Age or Iron Age in date and a prominent earthwork enclosure at Chisbury also has possible Iron Age origins. Wansdyke in the west is one of the best known of early land boundaries in the country. The earthwork, in places some 26 metres across, runs roughly

east-west across the area, before petering out to the west of Cadley. It is thought to have been built around AD 500 as a defence against Saxon attacks from the north. The Bedwyn Dyke that survives as fragmentary earthworks may also be Saxon, and some modern field and wood boundaries and roads appear to follow its original course. Chisbury was re-used as a Saxon burgh and was later the centre of a royal estate. Along with the Saxon royal estate at Wootton Rivers, it is likely that these formed the basis for the creation of a Royal Forest at Savernake.

5.265 The Savernake Plateau reflects the approximate bounds of the royal forest of Savernake which was at its greatest extent in the 12th century. This was an area circumscribed by defined boundaries, which was the preserve of the king for hunting, particularly deer and wild boar, and was subject to special forest laws, outside the common law. Forest Law, even when not enforced to extremes, inhibited agricultural expansion during a period of population expansion - and the restrictions imposed upon landowners and commoners was a source of much grievance throughout the early medieval period. It was not until the land was returned to common law - a process known as deforestation - which in the case of Savernake occurred in the mid sixteenth century, that changes took place in the landscape which give the area so much of its character today.

5.266 A new great park at Savernake was created in the early eighteenth century, which over the years became a classic 'polite' landscape with wooded rides, follies and plantings and avenues, many of which are still visible today. In the nineteenth century much of Savernake Forest was owned by the Marquis of Ailesbury, and in 1825 Tottenham House was extended and refurbished and the landscape gardens around it enhanced. The pleasure gardens, parkland and forest are now designated as a Grade II* Registered Park and Garden. In 1861 Mary Caroline, the Marchioness of Ailesbury, founded the grandiose St Katherine's church for Savernake estate workers. By the late-19th century the Savernake estate was heavily in debt, and most of the woodlands were eventually handed over to the Forestry Commission. Tottenham House became a school. The estate was bought in 2014 and is being restored to a family home.

5.267 Although only visible in parts, the Icknield Way, the Roman road from Wanborough to Venta (Winchester), ran NW-SE across the area, through the settlement at Cunetio (Mildenhall).

Settlement pattern

5.268 There are few settlements within the Savernake Plateau, reflecting its extensive woodland area and patterns of land ownership. The majority of settlements are located in the east of the area, in the valley of the River Dun and within the ancient forest. Great Bedwyn and the smaller village of Little Bedwyn are both situated adjacent to the canal. Further up the slope are the smaller hamlets of Chisbury and Froxfield. A number of the settlements are grouped around small greens. There is some timber framing, but the main building material is brick, with a former brickworks at Great Bedwyn, providing a local source and resulting in the distinctive rust-brick buildings of this village. Sarsen stones occur as lintels and gate posts and in foundations, while weatherboarding occurs in areas where woodland is more prevalent, for example in and around Savernake Forest. The flint churches are prominent landmarks.

Principal settlement

5.269 Great Bedwyn is focused on the historic crossroads of the High Street, Farm Lane, Church Street and Brook Street, and lies on the western banks of the River Dun. A Roman road crossed the parish, and Bedwyn is named in the will of King Alfred the Great. The Conservation Area covers this crossroads. The Kennet and Avon canal and Reading to Taunton railway follow the valley of the River Dun, and their introduction increased development in the village. The village vernacular is a mix of thatched and tiled roofs houses built from red brick or dressed ashlar stone. In the 20th century in-fill housing has expanded the village north-east, between the railway line and Brown's Lane.

5.270 Great Bedwyn is situated in the shallow valley of the River Dun, surrounded by rolling chalk downland, ancient woodland and mature hedgerow boundaries. The varied topography allows for occasional long-range views between woodland blocks to the distant downlands to the north and south.

Communications and infrastructure

5.271 Excellent recreational opportunities are provided by Savernake Forest and other large areas of publicly accessible woodland. An extensive public rights of way network allows good access to the woodlands, which are significant attractions offering opportunities to view the magnificent bluebell display in West Woods during May or to walk along the Grand Avenue laid out by 'Capability' Brown in the Savernake Forest. There are picnic sites within these woods and a campsite at Savernake Forest. A section of the Kennet and Avon Canal provides attractive walks and opportunities for coarse fishing and other attractions such as the Crofton Beam Engines. Other recreational routes that run through the area include sections of the Severn and Thames National

Cycle Route, the Wiltshire White Horse Trail and a British Horse Society promoted Bridleway (the Downland Villages Riding Route).

Perceptual Influences

5.272 The Savernake Plateau is the most wooded area within the National Landscape. The extensive woodlands create a feeling of enclosure throughout the area with short range, sheltered views framed by large areas of woodland with mature oaks and many mature hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Occasional long-range views are available especially along the southern edge across the valley featuring the Kennet and Avon Canal.

5.273 The enclosed character results in limited views of modern infrastructure, resulting in a tranquil landscape. There is a generally good experience of dark night skies, although some light pollution spills into the area from Marlborough to the north-west and around the railway at Great Bedwyn.

LCA 3A Savernake Plateau: Evaluation

Savernake Plateau valued qualities

5.274 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 3A Savernake Plateau are:

- Distinctive mosaic of woodland and farmland pattern with hedgerows and smaller woodland blocks, which creates a clear sense of place.
- Extensive ancient woodland concentrated at Savernake Forest, which is partially nationally designated for its outstanding lichen flora, fungi, rare invertebrates and breeding bird community.
- Sense of time-depth within Savernake Forest due to its history as a royal hunting forest, and later historic parkland and formal designed landscapes at Tottenham Park.
- The settlement pattern of a remote uninhabited western plateau and small hamlets and villages in the east provides a clear sense of place. Traditional building materials include thatch, red brick, flint, chalk and weatherboard. Distinctive sarsen stones occur as lintels and gate posts and in foundations.
- Historic importance and recreational use of the Kennet and Avon Canal.
- Strong recreational access through areas of open access at West Woods, The White Horse National Trail, National Cycle Routes and numerous woodland walks and recreational paths.
- A quiet, tranquil landscape with generally enclosed views due to the woodland coverage.

Savernake Plateau local forces for change/issues

5.275 As there is only one LCA within the Wooded Plateau LCT, all the forces for change are covered at LCT level.

Savernake Plateau strategy and local guidelines

5.276 As there is only one LCA within the Wooded Plateau LCT, there is no additional local guidance.

LCT 4 High Chalk Plain

Location and overview

5.277 The High Chalk Plain LCT occurs in one location, and is represented by the single character area of Salisbury Plain, of which only the northern-most tip is within the North Wessex Downs, with the main part of the Plain extending southwards. The following description refers only to the small area in the National Landscape. The boundary of the landscape type is clearly defined by the base of the steep scarp slope (contour 135 – 155 metres AOD), which rises dramatically from the lower lying Vale of Pewsey to the north.

5.278 The open, rolling landform of the Upper Chalk creates a bleak, spacious landscape with long views and a strong sense of remoteness and isolation. A dramatic escarpment forms the northern boundary, as at Pewsey Hill and Fyfield Down, and provides panoramic views across the adjacent lowland Vale of Pewsey. The Pewsey White Horse carved into the scarp slope is a distinctive landmark in views from the Vale. Unlike other parts of Salisbury Plain, the downland has been intensively cultivated and does not retain the ecological diversity of the wilder unimproved grasslands of the military training areas, although important bird species such as the stone curlew and skylark have a visible and audible presence. The land is almost wholly under arable cultivation within large, irregular fields. The virtual absence of tree cover and sparse hedgerow enclosure, contributes to the sense of openness and remoteness.

5.279 The area includes a large number of archaeological sites. Several earthworks are visible on ridges and hilltops and stand out as prominent features on the skyline when viewed from below. These include Giant's Grave Neolithic long barrow and several Bronze Age round barrows. Contemporary settlement is limited to a very small number of isolated farms.

LCT 4 High Chalk Plain: Key Characteristics

- Expansive chalk upland landscape forming the northern edge of the vast rolling landscape of Salisbury Plain (beyond the National Landscape).
- Pronounced scarp along the northern boundary forming a dominant feature in views from the lower lying Vale of Pewsey, and providing outstanding views across the Vale.
- Land cover dominated by arable farmland set within a large-scale irregular field pattern. Isolated fragments of chalk grassland survive and there are occasional woodlands and scrub areas.
- Important habitat for declining farmland bird species, including stone curlew and skylark.
- Numerous Bronze Age round barrows sited on prominent ridges and hill tops including Giant's Grave - a Neolithic long mound.
- Settlement is confined to a small number of isolated farms.
- Well served by a number of footpaths, bridleways and byways allowing a good recreational access to the area and its visible archaeological features.

- A large-scale, open and remote landscape with a sometimes bleak character.

LCT 4 High Chalk Plain: Evaluation

Forces for change

5.280 The following are identified as forces for change common to the High Chalk Plain LCT:

- Increase in pig farming and associated structures in an otherwise very open landscape.
- Unsympathetic tree and woodland planting in the form of irregular blocks and linear plantations of ornamental species.
- Pressure for tall structures such as communications masts, transmitters and renewable energy developments (potentially wind turbines). These will be particularly intrusive on the strong sweeping skylines and could have a major impact on the sense of remoteness and have the potential to impact views from the Vale of Pewsey.
- High traffic levels on the rural lane network could impact 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 High Chalk Plain landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including;
 - Changing temperatures and extreme weather events are creating vulnerabilities in chalk grassland landscapes, leading to increased soil erosion and run-off.
 - Drier summers and wetter winters could cause changes in plant and animal species and community composition of chalk grassland (for example loss of perennials, expansion of drought-tolerant ephemerals and dominance of grasses in the sward of chalk grassland), which could impact the character of the chalk plain.
 - Changes in rainfall patterns including wetter winters and drier summers may lead to different types of crop being grown (e.g. maize, grape vines, soya), which would change the appearance of the landscape.
 - Wetter winters and increased flash flooding on the thin arable soils will cause erosion and impact the winter crop sowings and also decrease the water quality for livestock on the downs. This could impact the land uses on the downs, changing the crops grown and numbers of grazing animals, changing the character of the landscape.

- Hotter, drier conditions in the summer will put more pressure on water resources, which may result in a change in crops to less water-reliant plants, and to increase the heat stress of livestock. This could lead to changes in the choice of crops grown, and an increase in shelters for livestock, changing the open character.
- Drier summers and wetter winters will cause increased tree mortality and die-back from drought and stress and waterlogging, affecting the occasional 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.
- Drier summers leading to an increased fire risk affecting grassland habitats.

Landscape guidance

5.281 The following are identified as guidelines for protecting and enhancing valued characteristics of the High Chalk Plain, 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 at Pewsey Hill and Fyfield Down 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, including to the Salisbury Plain SAC, SPA and SSSI to the south outside of the National Landscape.
- Ensure appropriate woodland management plans and techniques are used to manage the ancient woodland at Everleigh Ashes and the former coppice ancient woodland in the south of the area at Linden Copse.
- Consider the visual impact of any increase in pig farms. Minimise the permanent structures required, and where possible locate these in areas with natural screening by topography or woodland.

- Manage arable land to benefit landscape character and biodiversity, by maintaining soil health and minimising erosion and run off through enhancement of biodiverse hedgerows, linear scrub and buffer strips.
- Seek to mitigate climate change through enhancement of carbon sequestration capacity within the landscape and increasing below ground carbon stocks within vegetation and soil.
- 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.
- Conserve, manage and seek to enhance access to and interpretation of the prehistoric and historic earthwork monuments, emphasising their interconnected nature. Ensure they are protected from any potential damage from agriculture and recreation.
- Improve access to and through landscapes with cycle paths and long-distance footpaths, to increase recreational and educational opportunities for engagement with the natural environment.
- Conserve and enhance landscapes for their tranquillity and dark skies particularly where they are under pressure from the potential impacts of development and associated infrastructure.

LCA 4A: Salisbury Plain

LCA 4A: Salisbury Plain: Description

5.282 The LCA location is the same as described for the Landscape Character Type.

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.283 Landform is typical of the upland chalk, with an open, rolling topography sloping gently to the south. The geology of the area consists largely of Upper Chalk, which forms the main upland areas of the Plain. The Upper Chalk gives way to Middle Chalk along the steep scarp to the north, and the Lower Chalk also outcrops in places along the scarp. An important difference in geology is the virtual absence of the Clay-with-Flint capping, creating a bleaker more open landscape. Well-drained calcareous soils dominate the area.

Biodiversity

5.284 Scattered fragments of chalk grassland remain within the agricultural matrix, particularly concentrated on the steep ridge in the north. The internationally and nationally important Salisbury Plain lies outside of the National Landscape.

5.285 Unlike other areas south of the National Landscape boundary, the downland in this LCA has been relatively unaffected by military activity and has been intensively cultivated. The dominant habitat is therefore arable farmland with occasional woodland and scrub. This means that it has not retained the ecological diversity of the wilder unimproved grasslands of the military training areas. Nevertheless, the remote upland areas are of considerable biodiversity interest, with Salisbury Plain forming an important refuge for otherwise declining bird species including stone curlew and skylark, the latter being a particularly audible feature of this area.

5.286 Small areas of woodland are scattered in the landscape, including some woodlands recorded as of ancient origin, concentrated in the south around Everleigh Ashes and Linden Copse.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.287 The area is now predominantly open country with a very few scattered farms. A large pig farm at Down Farm is a recent change in land use in the south.

5.288 Much of the area was probably open downland grazing until the post-medieval period and the modern field pattern is the largely the result of formal, eighteenth and nineteenth century Parliamentary enclosure. Many of these large, regular and straight-sided fields have had boundaries removed to form very large open fields.

Historic features

5.289 Several earthworks are visible on ridges and hilltops stand out as prominent features on the skyline when viewed from below. These include Giant's Grave Neolithic long mound and Bronze Age round barrows at Everleigh, Down Farm and Milton Hill Farm. Late Bronze Age or Iron Age field systems visible as slight linear earthworks occur across the area, at Easton Clump, Pewsey Down and on Aughton Down. Large circular enclosures, which may date to the prehistoric period, tend to be located on prominent hilltops, such as Godsbury.

5.290 A series of prominent parallel terraces, or strip lynchets, cut into the scarp edge are probably the remains of medieval ploughing, although dating these features is difficult. Running approximately parallel to the contours, these were an extension of medieval open fields onto steep ground, at a time when flatter, more easily worked ground was in short supply.

5.291 Some modern trackways and earthworks are the result of military activity following the First and Second World Wars. However, this northernmost part of the Salisbury Plain Training Area has not been as heavily disturbed as some of the more southerly areas.

5.292 The Pewsey White Horse was cut into the chalk in 1937, designed to commemorate the coronation of George VI. It replaced a lost white horse figure, which was believed to have been cut in 1785.

Settlement pattern

5.293 Salisbury Plain is a remote area with a tiny population, containing only a few isolated farm buildings. The farm units are largely managed under contract labour as opposed to small family farms.

Communications and infrastructure

5.294 Marlborough Road is the only vehicle access through the landscape. This part of Salisbury Plain is well served by a number of footpaths, bridleways and byways allowing good recreational access to the area and its visible archaeological features such as strip lynchets and tumuli. The White Horse Trail crosses the west of the LCA.

Perceptual Influences

5.295 The pronounced scarp which defines the northern boundary at Pewsey Hill and Fyfield Down is a visible and dominant feature from the lower lying vale. There are outstanding views across the Vale of Pewsey from the scarp adding to the sense of openness in the area. Electricity pylon routes which cross the vale to the north, east and west are prominent vertical features in views.

5.296 The limited vehicle access and limited hedgerows and trees creates an isolated, sparsely inhabited, remote, and occasionally bleak landscape. The area has a good experience of tranquillity and dark night skies, with the only light pollution spilling into the area from Upavon Airfield to the south-west.

5.297 The Pewsey White Horse is the smallest white horse in Wiltshire, and the first cut in the 20th century.

LCA 4A Salisbury Plain: Evaluation

Salisbury Plain valued qualities

5.298 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 4A Salisbury Plain are:

- Dramatic upland chalk landscape with a prominent scarp that forms a dominant skyline in the Vale of Pewsey to the north.
- A mosaic of arable land and isolated fragments of chalk grasslands provides an important habitat for farmland bird species.
- Sense of time-depth from Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments located on prominent ridges and hills.
- Public Rights of Way including the promoted White Horse Trail provide recreational access across the chalk plain.
- A large-scale, open landscape with a high degree of isolation, remoteness and tranquillity.
- Panoramic views north and west over the Vale of Pewsey create a sense of place.

Salisbury Plain local forces for change/issues

5.299 As there is only one LCA within the High Chalk Plain LCT, all the forces for change are covered at LCT level.

Salisbury Plain strategy and local guidelines

5.300 As there is only LCA within the High Chalk Plain LCT there is no additional local guidance.

LCT 5 Downs Plain and Scarp

Location and overview

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LCT 5 Downs Plain and Scarp: Key Characteristics

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

LCT 5 Downs Plain and Scarp: Evaluation

Forces for change

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

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

- Changing temperatures and extreme weather events are creating vulnerabilities in chalk grassland landscapes, leading to increased soil erosion and run-off.
- Drier summers and wetter winters could cause changes in plant and animal species and community composition of chalk grassland, which could change the appearance of the landscape (for example loss of perennials, expansion of drought-tolerant ephemerals and dominance of grasses in the sward of chalk grassland).
- Changes in rainfall patterns including wetter winters and drier summers may lead to different types of crop being grown (e.g. maize, grape vines, soya), which would change the appearance of the landscape.
- Wetter winters and increased flash flooding on the thin arable soils will cause erosion and impact the winter crop sowings and also decrease the water quality for livestock on the downs. This could impact the land uses on the downs, changing the crops grown and numbers of grazing animals, changing the character of the landscape.
- Hotter, drier conditions in the summer will put more pressure on water resources, which may result in a change in crops to less water-reliant plants, and to increase the heat stress of livestock. This could lead to changes in the choice of crops grown, and an increase in shelters for livestock, changing the open character.
- Drier summers and wetter winters will cause increased tree mortality and die-back from drought and stress and waterlogging, affecting the distinctive hilltop woodlands and tree clumps.
- More extreme weather events leading to a greater risk of wind-throw and loss of mature trees, which could affect the ancient woodlands on the western scarp.
- Drier and hotter summers increase fire risk affecting grassland habitats and the recreational resource of the landscape.
- Hotter temperatures may result in increased competition from invasive species and greater numbers of insect and mammal pests. This could impact the choice of crops grown, and the appearance of the landscape.

Landscape guidance

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

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

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

- Conserve, manage and seek to enhance access to and interpretation of the prehistoric and historic earthwork monuments, emphasising their inter-connected nature. Ensure they are protected from any potential damage from agriculture and recreation.
- Retain the sparse settlement pattern. Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes to the small villages through extensions, which may change the character of the settlements.
- Ensure development in the setting of the National Landscape retains a clear sense of distinction between the open, expansive and largely undeveloped downland and the larger settlements in the vales. Any sense of the urban areas extending upslope should be avoided.
- Protect the dramatic landscape of open rolling fields, windswept and panoramic views. Carefully consider applications for further tall structures including telecommunications masts or wind turbines in this open landscape, and applications in adjacent landscapes which would be intrusive.
- Consider the impact on the views from the Downs Plain and Scarp if introducing solar energy development in adjacent landscapes, as the solar arrays can cause glint in views.
- Conserve the dark skies and minimise lighting with new lighting only introduced where necessary. Consider the impact of lighting on night-time views both within the Downs Plain and Scarp and in the setting of the National Landscape.
- Improve access to and through landscapes with cycle paths and long-distance footpaths, to increase recreational and educational opportunities for engagement with the natural environment.
- Maintain the valued recreational use of the landscape which allow appreciation of views and landscape character. Carefully consider any new recreational facilities such as car parks and buildings, balancing the recreational need with maintaining the open, rural landscape.

LCA 5A: Avebury Plain

LCA 5A: Avebury Plain: Description

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

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

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

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

Biodiversity

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

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.314 The flat level land surface is intensively cultivated, and the area is characterised by expanses of large open arable fields, with boundaries formed

by fences or thin lines of trimmed hawthorn. The north has a stronger hedge pattern plus a number of small copses and shelterbelts. The shallow winterbourne valley contains permanent pasture along the valley floor in association with hedgerows and small copses.

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

Historic features

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

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

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

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

Settlement pattern

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

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

Principal settlement

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

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

5.324 The surrounding area is predominantly agricultural, with large open fields used for arable farming, but scattered woodlands and hedgerows break up the open fields creating a visual diversity in the landscape. Mature tree lines on the edges of the village and along nearby roads and field boundaries, and trees

within the village itself give a visually contained character to the settlement's immediate setting. Beyond this, however, there are more expansive views across the open plain and up to the higher downland to the east. The white horse on Hackpen Hill, beneath the Ridgeway National Trail, is a notable historical landmark.

Communications and infrastructure

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

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

Perceptual Influences

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

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

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

LCA 5A Avebury Plain: Evaluation

Avebury Plain valued qualities

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

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

Avebury Plain local forces for change/issues

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

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

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

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

Avebury Plain strategy and local guidelines

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

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

LCA 5B: Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain

LCA 5B: Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain: Description

5.333 The Chiseldon - Wanborough Plain is located on the level ledge of Lower Chalk that extends to the north of the Marlborough Downs (LCA 1A). Boundaries are clearly defined by the topography. The northern boundary is formed by the crest of the steep scarp (LCA 5D: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp).

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

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

Biodiversity

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

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

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

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

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

Historic features

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

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

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

Settlement pattern

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

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

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

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

Principal settlement

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

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

Communications and infrastructure

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

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

5.349 In 2016 a 138 ha solar farm opened on part of the former RAF Wroughton airfield. The ground beneath the solar PV panels is still used for low-impact

grazing, with the aim to support insects dependant on chalk grassland habitats. Woodland screening results in their being limited visual intrusion.

Perceptual Influences

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

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

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

LCA 5B Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain: Evaluation

Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain valued qualities

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

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

Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain local forces for change/issues

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

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

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

Chiseldon – Wanborough Plain strategy and local guidelines

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

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

LCA 5C: Hendred Plain

LCA 5C: Hendred Plain: Description

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

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

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

Biodiversity

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

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

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

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

Historic features

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

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

Settlement pattern

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

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

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

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

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

Principal settlements

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

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

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

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

Communications and infrastructure

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

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

Perceptual Influences

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

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

LCA 5C Hendred Plain: Evaluation

Hendred Plain valued qualities

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

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

Hendred Plain local forces for change/issues

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

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

Hendred Plain strategy and local guidelines

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

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

LCA 5D: Moreton Plain

LCA 5D: Moreton Plain: Description

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

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

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

Biodiversity

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

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

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

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.384 The landscape is fairly open, with very little woodland. Some field boundaries and trackways are very sinuous, and may have medieval origins, such as those between Long Wittenham and Little Wittenham, and those between North and South Moreton. Elsewhere, most fields are large and regular with straight sides and are probably the result of formal eighteenth and nineteenth century Parliamentary enclosure.

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

Historic features

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

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

Settlement pattern

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

Principal settlement

5.389 Blewbury is the principal settlement in this area. It is situated at the foot of the Berkshire Downs and known for its natural springs that rise at the foot of the downs. These springs have historically supported mills and watercress beds. The village features a varied vernacular, with stone, flint, cruck construction and rubble buildings all common. A Conservation Area covers the

majority of the village around St Michael's Church and Blewbury Manor. The village also contains many examples of cob walls with their own thatched roofs which are a distinctive feature of the area. The village has expanded to the east between South Street and Bessel's Way. The arrival of the Atomic Energy Research Establishment at Harwell after World War II brought scientific significance to the village.

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

Communications and infrastructure

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

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

Perceptual Influences

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

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

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

LCA 5D Moreton Plain: Evaluation

Moreton Plain valued qualities

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

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

Moreton Plain local forces for change/issues

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

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

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

Moreton Plain strategy and local guidelines

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

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

LCA 5E: Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp

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

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

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

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

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

Biodiversity

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

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

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

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

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

Historic features

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

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

Settlement pattern

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

Communications and infrastructure

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

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

Perceptual Influences

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

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

LCA 5E Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp: Evaluation

Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp valued qualities

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

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

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

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

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

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

Clyffe Pypard - Badbury Wooded Scarp strategy and local guidelines

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

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

LCA 5F: Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp: Description

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

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

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

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

Biodiversity

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

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

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

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

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

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

Historic features

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

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

Settlement pattern

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

Communications and infrastructure

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

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

Perceptual Influences

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

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

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

LCA 5F Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp: Evaluation

Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp valued qualities

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

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

Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp local forces for change/issues

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

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

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

Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp strategy and local guidelines

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

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

LCT 6 Vales

Location and overview

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LCT 6 Vales: Key Characteristics

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

LCT 6 Vales: Evaluation

Forces for change

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

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

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

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

Landscape guidance

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

- Connect existing broadleaved woodlands and enhance woodland cover, increasing extent of habitat connectivity where appropriate.
- Manage arable land to benefit landscape character, biodiversity and act as climate change mitigation, by maintaining soil health and minimising erosion and run off through enhancement of biodiverse hedgerows, linear scrub and buffer strips.
- Improve the value of the arable landscape for priority farmland birds, pollinators, arable plants and other wildlife (e.g. through spring sowing and winter stubbles, nesting plots, uncropped headlands, unsprayed field margins, and pollen, nectar and seed mixes).
- Create and maintain wildlife corridors including buffer strips, beetle banks, track and byway verges. Wherever possible link a range of different habitats.
- Carefully consider applications for further tall structures including telecommunications masts or wind turbines in this open landscape, and applications in adjacent landscapes, including in the setting of the National Landscape, which would be intrusive in views from the Vales.
- Conserve and enhance landscapes for their tranquillity and dark skies particularly where they are under pressure from the potential impacts of development and associated infrastructure.

LCA 6A Vale of Pewsey

LCA 6A Vale of Pewsey: Description

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

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

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

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

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

Biodiversity

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

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

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

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

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

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

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

Historic features

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

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

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

Settlement pattern

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

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

Principal settlements

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

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

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

Figure 5.1: View along Eastcourt in Burbage

5.459 Burbage is positioned on the historic route between Salisbury and Marlborough, although the village is now bypassed by the A346. The village is located on a ridge of higher ground between the Marlborough Downs to the north and the Hampshire Downs to the south. There are views from Burbage to

the neighbouring Savernake Forest, which contrast with the more open and rolling topography of the vale.

Communications and infrastructure

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

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

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

Perceptual Influences

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

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

LCA 6A Vale of Pewsey: Evaluation

Vale of Pewsey valued qualities

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

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

Vale of Pewsey local forces for change/issues

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

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

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

Vale of Pewsey strategy and local guidelines

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

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

LCA 6B: Shalbourne Vale

LCA 6B: Shalbourne Vale Description

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

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

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

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

Biodiversity

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

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

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

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

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

Historic features

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

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

Settlement pattern

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

Principal settlement

5.478 Shalbourne has a loose linear settlement pattern based on its medieval layout, which largely follows the meandering Kingston Road. The majority of the village is covered by a Conservation Area. The Grade II* Church of St Michael and All Angels lies in the north of the village and Westcourt Farmhouse and

Shalbourne Manor Farmhouse both in the south. The village retains its historic form, with a small area of modern housing at Little Mead off Rival Road.

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

Communications and infrastructure

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

Perceptual Influences

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

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

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

LCA 6B Shalbourne Vale: Evaluation

Shalbourne Vale valued qualities

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

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

Shalbourne Vale local forces for change/issues

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

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

Shalbourne Vale strategy and local guidelines

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

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

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

LCA 6C: Wanborough Vale

LCA 6C: Wanborough Vale Description

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

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

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

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

Biodiversity

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

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

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

Historic features

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

Settlement pattern

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

Communications and infrastructure

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

Perceptual Influences

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

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

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

LCA 6C Wanborough Vale: Evaluation

Wanborough Vale valued qualities

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

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

Wanborough Vale local forces for change/issues

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

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

Wanborough Vale strategy and local guidelines

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

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

LCA 6D: Thames Floodplain

LCA 6D: Thames Floodplain Description

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

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

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

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

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

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

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

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

Biodiversity

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

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

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

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

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

Historic features

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

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

Settlement pattern

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

Communications and infrastructure

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

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

Perceptual Influences

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

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

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

LCA 6D Thames Floodplain: Evaluation

Thames Floodplain valued qualities

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

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

Thames Floodplain local forces for change/issues

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

- The recent electrification of the Great Western mainline railway has resulted in further vertical infrastructure in this landscape. To combat this, Network Rail have created the Mend the Gap programme, to enhance the areas of the National Landscape negatively impacted by the electrification. Funds are available to support hedgerow and tree planting to mitigate the gantries, and for enhancement projects. There are positive opportunities for landscape improvements within this LCA, landscape/access/habitats
- Vulnerable to the impact of changes on the surrounding steep slopes of the adjacent chalk downs.

Thames Floodplain strategy and local guidelines

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

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

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

LCT 7 River Valleys

Location and overview

5.520 The River Valleys LCT incorporates the valleys of four rivers: the Kennet, Lambourn, Bourne and Pang. The general drainage pattern of the area is to the east, determined by the Thames Basin, into which the rivers ultimately flow. The Lambourn joins the Kennet at Newbury, and the Pang flows directly to the Thames at Pangbourne on the border of the National Landscape. The exception is the River Bourne, which drains southwards to the Test Valley. Within the National Landscape there are several other minor river valleys such as the Og, plus the Bourne and upper part of the Salisbury Avon in the Vale of Pewsey. The chalk upland is also cut by numerous dry valleys, which sometimes contain ephemeral 'winterbournes'. These minor valleys have not been identified separately as they are considered to be a feature and integral part of the character of the surrounding landscape type.

5.521 The boundaries of the River Valleys have been defined topographically. Although all the valleys drain a much wider part of the surrounding area, the immediate river corridor represents a very distinct change in character (a green pastoral valley floor compared to the rolling open arable upper valleys sides). For this reason the boundaries of the river valleys identify a relatively narrow corridor comprising the floodplain and immediate valley sides. The boundaries are usually defined by a physical feature, often a road that follows the first contour above winter flooding level.

5.522 The River Valleys landscape type is divided into four geographic character areas. These comprise.

- 7A: Kennet Valley
- 7B: Lambourn Valley
- 7C: Bourne Valley
- 7D: Pang Valley

(Note: the upper reaches of the Salisbury Avon are included in the Vale of Pewsey character area 6A).

5.523 The river valleys which incise the chalk uplands of the North Wessex Downs form very distinct linear landscapes characterised by a rich mix of grazed pastures, water meadows, wetland and woodland. The valleys are enclosed by steeply rising slopes, which limit vistas and create an intimate and enclosed character.

5.524 Typically, the river valleys have short, steep sides enclosing a narrow, flat alluvial flood plain. The spring-fed chalk streams and rivers with their characteristically clear, fast flowing waters are one of the most distinctive and important habitats of the North Wessex Downs, supporting a large number of rare plant and animal species. Their high ecological value is reflected in a large number of designated sites including SSSI and several internationally designated Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). The water and surrounding seasonal flood meadows, grazed pastures, fen, marsh, damp woodlands and lines of pollarded willow create a diverse texture and structure. Ancient woodlands and parklands are distinctive historic features.

5.525 The green pastures along the narrow valley floors contrast with the expansive arable fields that characterise the downs. These areas are, nevertheless, closely connected with the surrounding uplands, as evidenced by the numerous roads and lanes that climb the valley sides, perpendicular to the river course. The valleys have long been a focus for occupation, and this is reflected in a range of archaeological sites and artefacts dating from the prehistoric period. Floated water meadows are one of the most notable historic feature, which by the later 17th century were commonplace in most valleys in the North Wessex Downs. The meadows were carefully constructed with a network of channels and drains to cover the surface with a shallow, rapidly moving sheet of water during the winter, which protected the grass from frost and stimulated early growth. Other distinctive features relating to past management include watercress beds, some of which are still operational and remnants of water mill systems including mill leats and pools.

5.526 Historically, settlement was concentrated in the valley and this remains the dominant pattern today. Linear and nucleated villages are characteristically located along a road on the first contour above the winter flood level on the south facing side of the valley. The villages have considerable vernacular charm and appeal and include tiny hamlets clustered around a church, many small villages and, in the Kennet Valley, the two market towns of Marlborough and Hungerford. The valleys have long formed important communications routes cutting through the uplands, with rail and road corridors often forming dominant features.

LCT 7 River Valleys: Key Characteristics

- The river valleys incised into the chalk uplands are one of the defining features of the National Landscape with enclosure, pastoral land cover and settlement contrasting strongly with the remote open arable uplands.
- Short, relatively steep valley sides with a narrow, flat floodplain.
- Clear fast flowing waters and important internationally and nationally designated chalk river habitats.
- A diverse and rich mosaic of land cover and habitats including wet woodlands, former 'floated' water meadows, watercress beds, grazed pasture and calcareous fen.
- Riparian woodlands and lines of poplar along ditches and willow pollards are distinctive features.
- Field pattern of characteristically small hedged enclosures which may reflect medieval strips and furlongs.
- Concentration of settlement including tiny hamlets clustered around a church, many small villages and the two market towns of Marlborough and Hungerford.
- Long history of occupation reflected in the range of archaeological sites and artefacts from the prehistoric period onwards. Continuity of settlement including numerous manors and villages, many of which are recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086.
- Significant recreational opportunities including several promoted linear routes as well as the Kennet and Avon Canal which provide opportunities for boat trips and water sports. The chalk rivers are a prime location for salmon fishing.
- Many transport routes follow the river valleys, utilising the flat valley bottoms, which provides considerable access but also reduces tranquillity.

LCT 7 River Valleys: Evaluation

Forces for change

5.527 The following are identified as forces for change common to the River Valleys as a whole:

- Eutrophication from excessive nutrients results in high levels of algae, changing the clear character of the chalk streams and can cause bad smells which affects their recreational use. Phosphate is the main cause of eutrophication, which can enter rivers from wastewater treatment works and agricultural fertilisers.
- Chalk streams are under threat from abstraction both for household water use and agricultural irrigation. This leads to low river levels and potentially changes the ecosystem the river is able to support.
- Changes in agricultural practices including the loss of grazing on valley pastures leading to scrub encroachment.
- Positive changes in water management through catchment partnerships to allow storage within the catchment, including natural flood management, physical modification of the river channel and riparian habitat restoration.
- The incremental changes to the road network including curbs, widening, and signage create a more urban character in the river valleys.
- Development in the setting to the National Landscape including large-scale and / or tall development on the edges of Newbury and Reading could affect views from the river valleys.
- Development pressure from settlements within the river valleys, particularly Marlborough, Hungerford, Kintbury, Compton, Lambourn, and Pangbourne which would increase development in an already well-settled landscape.
- Limited access to the river and its floodplains for recreational access in places.
- The River Valleys landscapes are susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Hotter, drier summers have led to chalk streams drying up, and ephemeral winterbourne streams not flowing, even in wetter years.
 - Hotter drier summers and wetter winters and winter flooding could result in changes to wetland and riparian plant community composition;

some non-native species may become invasive, and other currently geographically restricted species may spread more easily. This would change the character of the rivers.

- Drier summers and wetter and stormier winters may lead to an increase in insects, pests and pathogens, which could lead to a reduction in key hedgerow tree species.
- Increased storm activity may lead to the loss of mature and veteran hedgerow trees.
- Wetter winters may mean woody species in hedgerows are exposed to prolonged flooding in the growing season and will be at risk of dying, and winter trimming will become more difficult due to wet ground (preferred to autumn trimming to ensure food supply for birds).
- Intensification of adjacent land use leading to increased impacts on hedgerows such as pesticide drift and nutrient enrichment.
- Wetter winters and higher peak river flows may lead to increased flood defence activity, creating more physical habitat degradation and introducing potentially detracting features.

Landscape guidance

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

- Engage with the Kennet Catchment Partnership, Test & Itchen Catchment Partnership and Thames21 to consider actions across the whole of the catchments which will positively impact the River Valleys in the North Wessex Downs.
- Continue to encourage Catchment Sensitive Farming to reduce agricultural run-off into and eutrophication of the rivers and improve waterscape quality and character.
- Improve the landscape and waterscape character and quality of watercourses and waterways, where appropriate increasing riparian vegetation and tree cover, to provide additional filtration, flood mitigation, and habitat.
- Conserve and enhance the pattern of lowland meadows, floodplain grazing marsh and riparian vegetation along the river, to enhance their contribution to landscape character and their nature conservation value;

encourage greater diversity through sympathetic management such as grazing where appropriate.

- Seek opportunities to enhance connectivity with other habitats nearby by creating green corridors and networks, including to the chalk grassland and woodland found on the valley slopes.
- Manage arable land to benefit landscape character and biodiversity, by maintaining soil health and minimising erosion and run off through enhancement of biodiverse hedgerows, linear scrub and buffer strips.
- Conserve and enhance heritage assets for their physical and cultural contribution to landscape and waterscape character and quality.
- Retain the existing settlement patterns of riverside towns and villages, avoiding development creeping up the valley sides or ribbon development diminishing settlement separation.
- Protect and manage the valued recreational use of the landscape on public rights of way. Consider opportunities to improve public right of way connections, infrastructure and signage, including providing greater access to the rivers.

LCA 7A Kennet Valley

LCA 7A Kennet Valley: Description

5.529 The Kennet Valley drains the majority of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and dissects the area, virtually dividing it into two halves. The river rises on the chalk near Avebury and flows eastwards to the National Landscape boundary west of Newbury. The boundaries are defined topographically and generally relate to the mid valley sides, frequently following the line of roads or lanes. Occasionally, the boundaries of the character area have been widened to include the full extent of settlements that have developed within the valley, typically at bridging or fording points, such as at Marlborough and Ramsbury

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.530 The Kennet Valley cuts through the chalk upland forming a distinct topographical unit. The river starts as minor stream in the chalk near Avebury at approximately 155 metres and flows along a gentle gradient to approximately 85 metres at the eastern National Landscape boundary. Alluvium and gravel deposits line the valley floor along its entire length.

5.531 The Kennet Valley has a narrow valley floor, strongly enclosed by the gentle, but well defined chalk sides in its upper reaches. The valley widens out to a more open lowland landscape east of Hungerford.

Biodiversity

5.532 The River Kennet is a nationally and internationally important chalk river habitat. The mosaic of wetland habitats include the chalk stream itself, wet natural meadows, tall fen vegetation and scrub. The floodplain is designated as part of the Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain SSSI. The riverside meadows are in the most part managed traditionally as hay meadows, and support a variety of birds, including high numbers of breeding waders. The meadows are also rich in plants species, with three meadows designated as SSSI. The Kennet Valley Alderwoods (SSSI) exhibit the complete transition from open water to swamp, and through to wet and dry woodland.

5.533 The Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain and Kennet Valley Alderwoods are internationally designated as SAC for the presence of the Desmoulin's whorl snail and the alluvial alder woods on the floodplain. The seasonal flood

meadows, riparian woodlands and pastures are an important plant habitat and refuge for a number of rare species.

5.534 Sinuous belts of woodland line the valley sides, with some larger broadleaved woodland blocks on the valley floor, particularly to the east of Marlborough.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.535 The valley floor is dominated by pasture particularly in its upper length, with the pasture intermixed with arable fields east of Hungerford. Along the whole length, the valley sides are generally under arable cultivation creating a definite and visible landscape boundary mid slope above the floodplain.

5.536 There is a varied field pattern including some small fields with sinuous boundaries near Overton, which may date to Saxon enclosure. Boundaries are formed by hedgerows.

Historic features

5.537 Archaeological evidence demonstrates that humans have exploited the Kennet valley for at least 10,000 years. However, prominent remains date from the Neolithic period and include The Sanctuary, the stone circle that the Beckhampton Avenue leads to, which must be considered in relation to the rest of the Avebury monument complex (in LCA 5A).

5.538 The Marlborough Mound was a motte for a Norman motte and bailey castle. It may have reused or been built over a Neolithic mound that was a smaller version of Silbury Hill. It was incorporated into an 18th century garden, and now lies in the grounds of Marlborough College, as part of a Registered Park and Garden. Several Bronze Age round barrows lie at the head of the Kennet valley near The Sanctuary stone circle, and to the east on the western outskirts of Speen and Newbury. Linear earthworks on and around Postern Hill to the south of Marlborough may be later prehistoric land divisions.

5.539 Historic parklands are a feature of the centre of the valley and include Ramsbury Manor, Chilton Foliat and Littlecote. Ramsbury Manor was built in the 1680s with the surrounding parkland and woodland dating from the late 17th century with improvements including the lake and orangery made in the late 18th century.

5.540 From the medieval period onwards mills, water meadows and various drainage channels were constructed to utilise, improve or control water-flow. At West Overton, the earthworks of a managed water meadow system, which probably originated in the 17th century, are still visible.

5.541 To the east of Hungerford the River Kennet joins the Kennet and Avon Canal (opened in 1811). Along both forks of the river there are sluices, lock gates, warehouses and other industrial archaeological sites from the nineteenth century. There are also a number of World War II military structures along the canal as it was an important 'stop line' to prevent an invading German army from pushing further north into England. The Great Western Railway, which opened in 1847, is a further important industrial feature.

Settlement pattern

5.542 Attractive settlements are located along the whole valley. Villages tend to cluster in sheltered sites above the floodplain, typically on the south facing valley side. They tend to be dominated by a manor house and church. Many illustrate a long continuity of settlement including those of Saxon and Medieval origins. They include tiny hamlets (Fyfield, Stitchcombe, Axford, Knighton, Chiton Foliat), villages (Manton, Ramsbury, Mildenhall, Kintbury) and the busy market towns of Marlborough and Hungerford. Originally nucleated near bridging or fording points, just above the valley floor, some now extend as linear settlements along the valley or expanding out onto the valley sides as at Marlborough, Ramsbury and Hungerford.

5.543 Ramsbury is first documented in the tenth century as a Saxon bishopric and may have been the principal administrative centre in the area at the time. Some surviving bank and ditch earthworks, and some of the more sinuous modern field boundaries represent Saxon estate boundaries, such as those between the parishes of East and West Overton, once belonging to separate Saxon estates. East Overton has since been absorbed into West Overton, which used to be located further to the west.

5.544 Building materials generally reflect the local geology, with brick/flint and clay tile dominating east of Marlborough, and sarsen stone and brick dominating to the west. Mills and churches are distinctive built features within the valley.

Principal settlements

5.545 Marlborough has a long history of settlement with evidence of prehistoric occupation from the Marlborough Mound, as well as Roman and Saxon habitation. The town became a royal residence and hunting ground through Savernake Forest in the 13th century, received its first market charter in 1204. The town was historically a major staging point on the road between Bath and London. The famously wide High Street was built following major fires in the 17th century. The Conservation Area covers the High Street, Marlborough College, and the St Martins area. The introduction of the Swindon, Marlborough and Andover railway created a barrier to expansion to the east and south, and therefore prompted Victorian and Edwardian expansion to the north. Post-war development expanded Marlborough to the west, and further north and south up the valley sides. Further expansion followed the opening of the M4 motorway in 1971 as more commuters moved to the area. Marlborough's character is typified by its unified townscape of red tiled roofs, gable ends facing the street and tile hung walls. The town has a heavy Georgian influence with many high classical facades, pedimented doorways and Palladian windows.

5.546 Marlborough has expanded from the floodplain of the Kennet valley up the valley sides to the north and south. Savernake Forest to the south-east forms a distinctive wooded backdrop to the town, with views to the open Marlborough Downs forming contrasting views to the north.

5.547 Ramsbury is a village located on the steep northern slope of the Kennet valley between Marlborough and Hungerford. Like many settlements in the area Ramsbury developed around agriculture and milling, with the Grade II listed Old Mill on Scholards Lane still standing today. The village began as a linear settlement along Oxford Street and the High Street, with the 13th century Grade I listed Holy Cross Church in the centre. The settlement pattern has been largely unchanged, although Ramsbury has expanded to the east and north-west in the 20th and 21st centuries. The local vernacular represents available local materials with brick, flint, and clay tile common. present in the majority of the Conservation Area.

5.548 Ramsbury is located on the steep northern hillside at a narrow part of the river valley, creating an enclosed and intimate character. Views north are to the vast open fields of the rolling Marlborough Downs and to the south to the elevated wooded plateau of Savernake Forest.

5.549 Hungerford is a historic market town between Marlborough and Newbury on the south side of the Kennet valley. It developed as a ford at the confluence of the Rivers Dun and Kennet and retained importance as a coaching town on

the route between London and Bath. The town retains a strong sense of identity through its historic core centred on the north-south 13th century High Street, which crosses the Kennet at Eddington Bridge. The village of Eddington on the north bank of the Kennet has now coalesced with Hungerford. The construction of the Kennet and Avon Canal and Great Western Railway in the late 18th and early 19th centuries increased the population size and expanded the town on the southern banks of the Dun. Recent housing developments from the 1970s onwards have grown on either side of the A338 to the south of the town. Hungerford Port Down to the east is a distinctive parkland grazing landscape of ancient and veteran trees with views north across the Kennet Valley. This large area of common land has created a strong barrier to development on the eastern edge of Hungerford.

5.550 The landform north of Hungerford is lower and flatter as part of the Kennet valley floor, with views to the rolling downland beyond. The west of the town is highly visible from the rolling downland to the north as well as from the rising slopes to the south-west. Longer distance views towards Hungerford are often screened by intervening woodland associated with the Savernake Forest or the wooded downlands.

5.551 Kintbury lies on the southern bank of the River Kennett between Hungerford and Newbury. It was a Saxon Minster on the river, and may have been a Royal estate. The medieval layout of a linear settlement has largely been retained in the Conservation Area along High Street, Church Street, and Newbury Street. Kintbury originally surpassed Hungerford in commercial importance holding a weekly market, and was a centre for the silk industry during the 17th and 18th centuries. The architecture in this area is characterised by red and grey brick cottages with mostly tiled and occasional thatched roofs. The introduction of the Kennet and Avon Canal and the Great Western Railway had a more limited influence of settlement expansion than other settlements. The village has expanded to the south-east onto the valley sides, away from the river corridor.

5.552 The historic core of Kintbury lies within the Kennet valley, with the modern expansion to the south climbing the gentle valley sides. Riparian vegetation and wetland habitats in the wider valley (part of the Kennet Valley Alderwood SAC and SSSI) provides a wooded backdrop to the village and largely screens the settlement from view from the north. The canal, river and associated towpaths provide a strong visual connection to the area's industrial heritage as well as to recreational links to the wider landscape. Land south of Kintbury is more agricultural, although the falling topography and areas of woodland to the south also provide screening of views to the village.

Communications and infrastructure

5.553 The river valley has long been exploited for transport routes, providing an important east-west communications corridor. The A4 (Bath Road) follows the valley from its source to Marlborough. A number of minor roads cross the river valley, linking the two areas of chalk downland. Brick bridge crossings, such as at Stitchcombe and Axford, are a distinctive feature.

5.554 To the east of Hungerford the river has been modified by the construction of the Kennet and Avon Canal, which in some places merges with the river as a single water channel. The canal opened in 1811, and the sluices, lockgates and warehouses provide a link to the industrial past. This stretch of the valley is also shared with the Great Western Railway, built in the 1840s. One overhead electricity line crosses the Kennet valley running from the west of Kintbury to Halfway to the east.

5.555 Public rights of way cross the Kennet valley including the White Horse Trail and Ridgeway in the west and follow the Kennet and Avon canal in the east. There are fewer cross-valley rights of way east of Ramsbury. The river also provides recreational opportunities such as boating and fishing.

Perceptual Influences

5.556 The Kennet valley has an intimate character due to the considerable riparian vegetation and enclosure provided by the relatively steep valley sides, particularly in the west. Views are generally enclosed, with few opportunities for views along the river corridor. The surrounding landscapes provide a wooded backdrop to glimpsed longer distance views from the valley.

5.557 Despite the presence of a number of settlements and transport infrastructure the landscape retains a rural character, with a good experience of dark night skies outside of Marlborough and Hungerford.

5.558 Marlborough College is one of the oldest boarding schools in the UK, and has a number of alumni including William Morris, John Betjeman, Nick Drake and the Princess of Wales.

LCA 7A Kennet Valley: Evaluation

Kennet Valley valued qualities

5.559 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 7A Kennet Valley are:

- The sense of place created by the distinctive steep-sided valley with a narrow floor which provides an enclosed character in the west, contrasting with the broadening lowland east of Hungerford.
- Internationally and nationally important habitats related to the chalk River Kennet and its tributaries, with a rich mix of floodplain pasture, marsh and riparian woodlands, creates a rich ecological resource.
- The sense of time depth and heritage associated with the mills, water meadows, historic parklands and industrial heritage associated with the Kennet and Avon Canal.
- The pattern of attractive valley villages and towns which have a strong continuity of settlement and provide time-depth. The vernacular reflects the local geology, moving from brick and sarsen stone in the west to brick, flint and clay tiles in the east.
- The importance of the valley for transport links, including the Kennet and Avon Canal, Great Western railway and A4 Bath Road, as well as for recreational activity including boating on the river and canal, and public rights of way.
- The pastoral, rural character of the landscape with a good experience of dark night skies away from Hungerford and Marlborough.

Kennet Valley local forces for change/issues

5.560 In addition to the forces for change set out at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 7A Kennet Valley are:

- Modifications are being made to the River Kennet to improve, create and restore river and wetland habitats. An example is at The Wilderness, Kintbury where proposals are underway to reshape the existing channel and create new channel sections to re-naturalise the river. These works will help improve the condition of the River Kennet SSSI (currently in an unfavourable condition).
- Recent flooding along the Kennet valley including in Marlborough and Hungerford could lead to pressure for hard engineering solutions to flood management, which could impact the natural character of the valley.
- Development pressures, particularly for new housing on the edge of Marlborough and Hungerford, which could impact the narrow, intimate scale valley landform.

Kennet Valley strategy and local guidelines

5.561 In addition to the guidelines set out for the River Valleys LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Kennet Valley:

- Engage with the Kennet Catchment Partnership and its strategies to use natural flood management (NFM) and sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) to manage flood risk.
- Ensure new developments in the river valley are in keeping with the historic settlement pattern and do not cause the coalescence of any smaller settlements.

LCA 7B: Lambourn Valley

LCA 7B: Lambourn Valley Description

5.562 The River Lambourn, a tributary of the Kennet, rises in the Lambourn Downs and flows south eastwards to the National Landscape boundary at Newbury. The boundaries are defined topographically and generally follow the top of the immediate valley sides enclosing the floodplain. The river itself drains a much wider area of the surrounding chalk uplands within which land slopes gently down to the river. The valley widens out at the head, at the village of Lambourn, beyond which it forms a dramatic dry valley cutting into the chalk. This higher area is subsumed within the adjacent landscape type, namely the Open Downland of Lambourn Downs (LCA 1B).

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.563 Rising as a chalk spring at 152 metres at Lynch Wood, the River Lambourn cuts through the chalk, and flows through a narrow corridor south-eastward along a relatively gentle gradient to join the Kennet at Newbury. Drift deposits of chalk drift and small amounts of gravel and alluvial deposits overlie the valley floor. In its lower length, south of Great Shefford, the valley widens slightly with the river flowing within a meandering and braided channel.

Biodiversity

5.564 The River Lambourn is a classic example of a lowland chalk river, with the whole of the valley forming a rich ecological resource. The river and the floodplain (with the floodplain of the Kennet) are both internationally designated as SAC. The Lambourn is designated for its populations of bullhead (*Cottus gobio*) and brook lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*), two fish both of which are rare / threatened in a European context. The Lambourn also supports one of Britain's best examples of floating vegetation dominated by water crow-foots (*Ranunculus section Batrachium*).

5.565 Along the wider lower reaches of the valley are Easton Mill and Boxford Water Meadows, both designated as SSSI. These comprise flood pastures and disused water meadows, which would have been traditionally managed as 'floated' meadows with controlled flooding and secondary channels to encourage early sward growth for grazing. Numerous channels, weirs and mill pools along the valley floor indicate former water management practices.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.566 In the upper part of the valley, above Great Shefford, the River Lambourn flows through a confined narrow corridor with mainly pasture and some arable landuse. It is a small scale landscape with fields bounded by fences or hedgerows, often in poor condition. South of Great Shefford the valley form is slightly wider and the river flows in a meandering and braided channel through a mosaic of former water meadows, cattle grazed wet pastures and broadleaved woodlands.

5.567 Lambourn is known as the 'Valley of the Racehorse' as the racehorse training industry is prominent, manifest in a very distinctive landscape of stables, stud farms and a series of horse paddocks enclosed within white-painted wooden rails. In addition to training, the area supports many associated industries creating a distinct local economy and community.

5.568 Some of the more sinuous fields orientated at right angles to the river may reflect medieval boundaries. Occupants of the valley settlements almost certainly exploited the chalk downland on the valley sides for agriculture and to provide grazing for their stock. Medieval and open field systems and downland were largely replaced by enclosure through informal means during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and later by Parliamentary enclosure.

5.569 Historic features

5.570 The main settlement of Lambourn, at the head of the valley, is first documented in a will made by King Alfred around 888 AD, and may have been a royal residence. The oval street plan at the heart of Lambourn, and the possible Saxon origins of the church on the edge of this area, suggest that this settlement began as a Saxon burh or defended settlement. Lambourn expanded during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to the outside of its Saxon core, and to the south the streets and property boundaries are typical burgage plots. Some earthworks survive to the north of the town centre, but medieval alms houses adjacent to the churchyard were rebuilt in the nineteenth century.

5.571 Other medieval remains in the Lambourn Valley include the deserted medieval village of Bockhampton, and the moated manor site at East Shefford House.

5.572 There would have been mills and weirs along the River Lambourn, some of which survive today, such as the mill at Weston. Water meadows and fish

traps would have been important. Manor houses and churches located at regular intervals along the Lambourn Valley such as at Manor Farm, Welford and Boxford suggest that parishes were laid out approximately at right angles to the river.

Settlement pattern

5.573 The valley is characterised by the string of attractive linear settlements along the valley. These include Lambourn at the head of the valley, with the smaller and regularly spaced villages of Eastbury, East Garston, and Great Shefford. Below Great Shefford the villages are not as frequent but include Weston, Westbrook, Boxford and Bagnor. Occasional farmsteads are scattered through the lower part of the valley.

5.574 Building materials include red brick, stone, flint and chalk with numerous timber framed buildings. Red clay tile is the most common roofing material, although there are also some thatched and slate roofs.

Principal settlement

5.575 Lambourn is a 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 has a number of equine related businesses.

5.576 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.

Communications and infrastructure

5.577 Minor roads serving the villages run along the valley floor, crossing the river at several points. The M4 crosses the valley, south of Welford, on an embankment. The motorway infrastructure is difficult to assimilate within the

small-scale valley landscape, however, the visual and noise impacts are limited to an extent by the abundant tree cover.

5.578 The Lambourn Valley Railway was constructed through the area in the 1890s. It was closed in 1973 and most elements, including stations, were removed. The line of the railway is largely preserved as a wooded earthwork and forms the basis of the Lambourn Valley Way. This runs along the entire length of the valley and provides an opportunity to explore the local detail and character of this attractive rural, valley landscape.

Perceptual Influences

5.579 The valley sides form a close horizon and a contained visual setting, which limits outward views, creating a strong sense of enclosure.

5.580 There is a good experience of dark night skies across the Lambourn valley, with light pollution only coming from Lambourn in the north and proximity to Newbury in the south-east.

LCA 7B Lambourn Valley: Evaluation

Lambourn Valley valued qualities

5.581 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 7B Lambourn Valley are:

- The narrow river corridor creates a contained visual setting and a strong sense of enclosure, creating a strong sense of place.
- The Lambourn chalk river creates important wetland and riparian habitats, which are designated internationally and nationally. These are an important ecological resource and landscape feature.
- Grazed pasture fields and water meadows are traditional rural land uses, providing a link to the past.
- The historic pattern of small linear settlements along the Lambourn valley creates a sense of continuity and time-depth.
- The Lambourn Valley Way provides often the only recreational access to the valley.
- Associations with the racehorse industry in the upper reaches as part of the 'Valley of the Racehorse' creates a distinctive local landscape.
- A rural and peaceful valley landscape, with a good experience of dark night skies.

Lambourn Valley local forces for change/issues

5.582 Local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 7B Lambourn Valley are:

- The River Lambourn SSSI is in unfavourable, recovering condition. The Kennet Catchment Partnership is working on a number of habitat improvements, including channel enhancement works upstream of Great Shefford and between the M4 and Boxford. The Partnership has identified further work to install fish passes and introduce woody debris would improve the water quality and ecological conditions. The Partnership have identified road runoff from the M4 as a key source of pollution, and is working with Highways England to find ways to better manage runoff.
- Potential changes in farming practices including loss of livestock resulting in scrub encroachment on some valley pastures. Some areas are being

managed as horse paddocks with associated visual impacts from the associated structures.

- Incremental effects of converting barn and farm buildings into residential development, reducing the rural character of the valley.
- Pressure for residential expansion of the small villages within the narrow river corridor either out onto the downland sides (e.g. Lambourn) or with the potential for coalescence forming a continuous developed ribbon along the valley.

Lambourn Valley strategy and local guidelines

5.583 In addition to the guidelines set out for the River Valleys LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Lambourn Valley:

- Engage with the Kennet Catchment Partnership and its strategies to use natural flood management (NFM) and sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) to manage flood risk.

LCA 7C: Bourne Valley

LCA 7C: Bourne Valley Description

5.584 The River Swift and then the Bourne, a tributary of the River Test, flows south-eastwards from its source near Upton and joins with the Test at Hurstbourne Priors on the southern boundary of the National Landscape. The boundaries of the character area have been defined to include the relatively narrow corridor of the immediate river valley, with its pastoral floodplain and settlement.

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.585 The valley of the River Bourne has a distinctive form with a flat, narrow floor enclosed by abruptly rising valley sides, creating a small-scale intimate landscape. The valley is initiated at the spring at Upton where the River Swift issues. The Swift disappears into the chalk further downstream and emerges at Hurstbourne Tarrant as the Bourne Rivulet. The river flows down a gentle gradient from around 115 metres at its source at Upton to 60 metres at the confluence with the Test.

5.586 The river cuts through the Upper Chalk, exposing the Middle Chalk on the valley sides. Valley Gravel deposits overlay the valley floor, with some small patches of alluvium and peat. At its head, the dry valley cuts back into the downs terminating in a dramatic coombe at Vernham Dean. The upper part of the valley contains a true winterbourne, which uniquely floods in winter creating a large water pool high in the downs. This higher area has been included as a part of the wider Chute Forest - Faccombe character area (LCA 2E).

Biodiversity

5.587 The River Bourne is recorded as a chalk stream, an internationally and nationally rare habitat. Extensive priority habitat coastal and floodplain grazing marsh is found along the river floodplain. Deciduous woodlands line the steeper valley slopes, with a concentration at Hurstbourne Park in the south-east. Thin linear beech plantations are a feature of the lower valley sides. Some woodlands including Doles Wood in the north and Cowdown Copse in the south-east are recorded as ancient woodlands.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.588 The Bourne is a minor feature, little more than a stream, although it can be glimpsed from many attractive crossing points. The floodplain is predominantly under pasture with small copses, typically of willow and alder, picking out the course of the river. The small fields of the valley floor are enclosed by hedgerows, which contribute to the intimate scale and enclosed character of the landscape and limit longer views within the valley. Arable fields occupy the lower valley sides. Operational watercress beds, utilising the clear chalk stream waters, occur south of St. Mary Bourne.

5.589 Many of the modern field boundaries in the Bourne valley are at right angles to the river, and some might reflect medieval parish boundaries. Some fields are small and irregular, and may represent late medieval or post-medieval piecemeal enclosure. The more regular, straight-edged fields are probably the result of more formal eighteenth or nineteenth century parliamentary enclosure.

Historic features

5.590 The present landscape was probably originated in the early prehistoric period (Neolithic and Bronze Age) when forest cover was largely cleared for arable agriculture and grazing, and after which only very limited patches of woodland survived or regenerated. Occupants of the early valley settlements almost certainly exploited the chalk downland on the valley sides for agriculture and to provide grazing for their stock. This pattern of movement is still visible in the landscape today with numerous roads and tracks leading from the valley floor on to the surrounding downs.

5.591 The manor of Hurstbourne, encompassing Hurstbourne Tarrant, St Mary Bourne and Hurstbourne Priors was owned by the Bishop of Winchester until the dissolution. Hurstbourne Park, now a Registered Park and Garden, is largely the result of the ownership of the Earls of Portsmouth and includes surviving features from the late 18th century designs of Thomas Archer.

Settlement pattern

5.592 The river corridor provides a communications route with a valley floor road connecting the numerous small settlements within the valley. These include Upton at the valley head and the small villages of Ibthorpe, Hurstbourne Tarrant, Stoke and the larger village of St Mary Bourne. Some settlements have

taken on a linear form extending along the valley, others are clustered on the valley side above crossing points

5.593 Many of the villages along the valley floor are one-street linear settlements, with an occasional side street, indicative of early medieval origins. Hurstbourne Tarrant, for example, dates from at least the eleventh century. Later the village expanded to incorporate the hamlet of Ibthorpe.

5.594 Buildings are largely of the local vernacular brick and tile, with red clay tile and thatched roofs common.

Principal settlement

5.595 Hurstbourne Tarrant is a small village located on the valley floor of the winterbourne River Swift, which has now coalesced with the small hamlet of Ibthorpe a mile to the north-west. The village appears to have developed along the main road, east-west valley road and staggered crossroads, which was an important staging post for travellers on the Andover to Newbury route. The village and hamlet have retained much of their historic settlement pattern, and is covered by a Conservation Area. Ibthorpe historically maintained its independence from Hurstbourne Tarrant, declaring in the 17th century that residents were freeholders and all the land around the village, including the Common Land, belonged to them. Although modern development is generally limited, 20th century development at Dines Close has effectively coalesced the two settlements.

5.596 Hurstbourne Tarrant and Ibthorpe are located within the shallow winterbourne valley of the River Swift in the south of the National Landscape. The wooded chalk downland to the south, including ancient woodland at Doles Wood, Hurstbourne Common, and Blagden Copse, provide a dramatic backdrop to the village. From the top of Hurstbourne Hil far reaching views of undulating farmland with hedged fields and tree-lined horizons from key vistas. The area to the north-east of the village known as the Dene is part of a dry river valley that once fed into the Bourne Valley.

Communications and infrastructure

5.597 A main road runs the length of the valley floor, connecting the villages. Numerous lanes and small tracks branch perpendicularly from the road to climb the valley sides creating a grid-like road pattern. These minor lanes frequently terminate on the higher downs or lead to a single isolated farm emphasising the interconnectedness of the downs and valleys landscapes. At its lower end the West of England Main Line railway crosses the valley, including over an

impressive viaduct south of St Mary Bourne. A line of electricity pylons also intersect the south of the valley.

5.598 The promoted route the Test Way provides access between Hurstbourne Tarrant and St Mary Bourne. A number of other public rights of way link the valley with the downlands to the north and south, although few provide access across the valley. There is more limited access around Hurstbourne Priors, and generally limited access to the river itself.

Perceptual Influences

5.599 The valley of the River Bourne with its narrow floor and abruptly rising valley sides is an enclosed and intimate landscape set within the surrounding chalk uplands. There are views to the surrounding downlands with pockets of deciduous woodlands, which add to the enclosed character. There are also occasional long-distance views to Watership Down.

5.600 This is a generally rural landscape, with high levels of tranquillity. There is generally a good experience of dark night skies, although this is impacted in the south by proximity to Andover and Whitchurch, as well as some light pollution from the industrial watercress beds south of St Mary Bourne.

LCA 7C Bourne Valley: Evaluation

Bourne Valley valued qualities

5.601 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 7C Bourne Valley are:

- The flat, narrow valley floor enclosed by steep valley sides creates a distinctive sense of place and an intimate, enclosed landscape.
- The chalk river characteristics of the River Swift and Bourne Rivulet are internationally and nationally rare. Extensive areas of floodplain grazing marsh are an important ecological resource.
- Pasture fields are a traditional land use along the river floor, with small woodland copses on the valley sides providing enclosure and variation in the landscape character.
- The historic character of Hurstbourne Park provides a sense of time-depth and distinct sense of place in the south of the valley.
- The settlement pattern of small settlements either in a linear form along the valley or on the valley side at crossing points provide time-depth.
- Small roads, lanes and byways provide access by car and on foot, creating a rural character.

Bourne Valley local forces for change/issues

5.602 In addition to the forces for change identified at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 7C Bourne Valley are:

- The River Bourne has been part of the Watercress and Winterbournes Landscape Partnership Scheme from 2020-2025, through the Test and Itchen Catchment Partnership. This has provided chalk stream habitat restoration, natural flood management and other initiatives. This Heritage Lottery Funded project is a positive force for change.
- Recent residential development north of the railway line which is out of keeping with the existing settlement pattern.
- Increase in large commercial sheds at the Vitacress watercress beds. Although the watercress industry is an important part of the history of this landscape, the associated built development is out of keeping with the rural character of the Bourne valley.

- High traffic levels on the valley floor road, reducing tranquillity, and adding pressure for improvements to the road network (such as kerbing) resulting in a more urban character in places.
- Incremental changes to residential buildings including extensions and conversion of outbuildings to residential use which may result in a more suburban character to the small settlements.

Bourne Valley strategy and local guidelines

5.603 In addition to the guidelines set out for the River Valleys LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Bourne Valley:

- Continue to engage with the Watercress and Winterbourne project, and other initiatives from the Test and Itchen Catchment Partnership to improve water quality and access to the river.
- Ensure new developments in the river valley are in keeping with the historic settlement pattern and do not cause the coalescence of any smaller settlements.
- Any new commercial or agricultural sheds should be carefully sited and use a suitable colour palette to avoid being visually intrusive.

LCA 7D: Pang Valley Description

5.604 The River Pang drains the chalk upland in the north-west of the National Landscape and flows through a narrow valley to the River Thames at Pangbourne. The boundaries are defined topographically and generally follow the contour along the top of the immediate valley sides enclosing the floodplain. The lower part of the river flows through the clays and gravels of the lowland landscape of Hermitage Wooded Commons (LCA 8A).

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.605 The River Pang rises on the chalk upland, with its source near Compton. Beyond this, the valley head cuts back into the downs as a series of steep dry valleys. However, this area and the shallow valley between Compton and Hampstead Norreys is assimilated as a feature of the surrounding Blewbury Downs (LCA 1D).

5.606 The river cuts through the chalk, which outcrops along the tops of the valley sides. Gravels and alluvium overlie the valley floor. It flows southwards initially, from Hampstead Norreys, through an open shallow valley. Close to Bucklebury it swings to the east and flows within a wider more open channel to the Thames.

5.607 The River Pang flows within an open shallow valley, a landform that is less distinctive than the more incised valleys of the Bourne and Lambourn. It has a very varied character along its course with diverse vegetation cover, varying from open arable to enclosed and wooded.

5.608 East of Stanford Dingley, towards Bradfield, the river flows through a noticeably more wooded landscape, before widening out significantly north of Bradfield, where it merges with the surrounding wooded farmland around Tidmarsh.

Biodiversity

5.609 The upper course of the chalk River Pang is marked by a thin belt of broadleaved woodland. Occasional small linear woodlands are found on the valley sides. East of Stanford Dingley, towards Bradfield, the river flows through a noticeably more wooded landscape. The wider valley floor has created space

for floodplain grazing marsh and seasonally flooded meadow. Willow pollards, poplar, alder and strips of pasture line the river banks. Low flailed hawthorn hedges and post and wire boundaries enclose medium to large fields and the valley retains a more open character.

5.610 The floodplain near Tidmarsh east of the M4 is designated as the nationally important Sulham and Tidmarsh Woods and Meadows SSSI. The complex soil pattern of alluvial loams, gravel terraces and peat deposits have resulted in a mosaic of damp copses and seasonally flooded meadows. The copses are dominated mainly by alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), but also with a number of other trees and shrubs including ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), birch (*Betula pendula*), and hazel (*Corylus avellana*).

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.611 Land cover varies across the course of the River Pang. In its upper course the valley contains large arable fields descending from the surrounding downland, with a narrow arable-dominated valley floor. The middle section of the valley as it turns to the east has a mixture of pasture and arable fields. The lower reaches of the Pang are generally in pastoral use.

5.612 Many of the modern field boundaries in the Pang valley are at right angles to the river, and some might reflect medieval parish boundaries. Purley, Westbury Farm and Stanford Dingley have fields that are likely to be relict water meadows which could date back to the late 17th century. Many modern fields are small and irregular and may represent late medieval or post-medieval piecemeal enclosure. The more regular, straight-edged fields are probably the result of more formal 18th or 19th century Parliamentary enclosure.

Historic features

5.613 Trapezoidal and oval enclosure patterns, linear ditch boundaries and a trackway between Pangbourne and Purley, on the gravel floodplain of the Thames, may be prehistoric in origin. They are a vivid illustration of the length of continuity of human exploitation of the valley.

5.614 The village of Bradfield may be of Saxon origin and had a minster church. Many of the settlements developed around medieval manor houses, such as Hampstead Norreys, Frilsham and Bucklebury. There is a medieval moated manor at Stanford Dingley. Immediately south of Westbury Farm is the deserted medieval village of Purley Parva.

5.615 Areas of formal parkland with mature oaks and limes scattered in pasture are found at Bradfield Hall and Purley Hall – the latter is a Registered Park and Garden. The manor at Bradfield was converted into public school, Bradfield College, which opened in 1850.

Settlement pattern

5.616 Settlements are located on minor roads crossing the valley. These include scattered farms situated at regular intervals on the valley floor, tiny hamlets such as Bucklebury and Stanford Dingley and the two larger villages at Hampstead Norreys and Bradfield. The attractive riverside settlement of Pangbourne is situated at the confluence of the valley with the Thames.

5.617 The dominant building material is red brick, and the white weatherboard church at Stamford Dingley is a distinctive feature. The small villages and hamlets are all covered by Conservation Areas.

Principal settlements

5.618 Pangbourne is a rural service village of approximately 3,300 inhabitants set on the valley sides of the River Pang. The Roman road between Silchester and Dorchester ran through the area and it is likely that a Romano-British settlement existed here. A settlement is first recorded in the 9th century, and two mills are mentioned in the Domesday Book. The introduction of the Great Western Railway in 1870 connected the village directly to Reading, and increased residential development. 20th and 21st century development has further expanded the village, which has spread west up the valley sides into the Ashampstead Downs (LCA 2B) and further east along the River Pang floodplain. It has also expanded south along the A340.

5.619 Pangbourne is located at the confluence of the River Thames and the River Pang. This creates a scenic riverside setting with wide meadow and wetland areas on the eastern edges of the village. In contrast, the west of the village climbs the valley sides of the Pang and is set among semi-natural woodland. This coupled with the local rural lanes and dense hedgerows help to create a sense of enclosure and tranquil atmosphere to the area around Pangbourne.

Communications and infrastructure

5.620 The majority of the valley is comparatively isolated and contains only minor lanes and tracks linking the farms and settlements, with numerous bridges and fords providing crossing points over the watercourse. There are

many sunken lanes overhung by banks of broadleaved woodland, such as at Brocks Lane, which creates a more intimate and secluded character.

5.621 The Great Western Mainline railway crosses east-west cross the valley at Pangbourne. The M4 cuts across the grain of the valley in both its upper and lower reaches. Electricity pylons cross the valley between Sulham and Purley, and are a visible vertical presence in the landscape.

5.622 Public rights of way are concentrated on the edges of Pangbourne and between Bucklebury and Bradfield, where there are some tracks which cross the valley floor. Upstream of Bucklebury there is more limited recreational access, and limited access to the river across the whole river valley. The Thames Path follows the southern bank of the River Thames at the eastern edge of the LCA.

Perceptual Influences

5.623 The M4 has a high visual and noise impact on the landscape. It is particularly intrusive in the upper reaches, where it severs the valley on an embankment. Away from the M4 there is a sense of enclosure and isolation, increased by the valley landform, sunken lanes, and woodlands.

5.624 There is a good experience of dark night skies in the north and centre of the river valley. The east of the landscape is impacted by proximity to Reading and Pangbourne.

LCA 7D Pang Valley: Evaluation

Pang Valley valued qualities

5.625 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 7D Pang Valley are:

- The woodlands and wetland habitats relating to the internationally and nationally rare River Pang chalk stream. These include floodplain grazing marsh, and the nationally designated Sulham and Tidmarsh Woods and Meadows SSSI, are ecologically important habitats.
- The attractive rural settlement pattern formed around manor houses and farms provides a sense of time-depth and continuity of settlement.
- Areas of parkland, medieval village patterns and historic former water meadows and watercress beds create a sense of time-depth.
- The enclosure formed by areas of woodland, valley sides and rural sunken lanes creates a rural and tranquil landscape, with an isolated character at times.

Pang Valley local forces for change/issues

5.626 In addition to the forces for change identified at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 7D Pang Valley are:

- Wastewater is discharged into the River Pang from a wastewater treatment works at Hampstead Norrey. Action for the River Kennet are proposing river restoration works to realign the river channel upstream of the discharge point and use wetland planting to naturally filter the discharges. This is a positive force for change which should enhance the landscape character and water quality of the River Pang.
- The recent electrification of the Great Western mainline railway has resulted in further vertical infrastructure in this landscape. To combat this, Network Rail have created the Mend the Gap programme, to enhance the areas of the National Landscape negatively impacted by the electrification. Funds are available to support hedgerow and tree planting to mitigate the gantries, and for enhancement projects. There are positive opportunities for landscape improvements within this LCA, landscape/access/habitats.
- Using funds from the Mend the Gap programme, Action for the River Kennet have recently created a wetland at Sulham Woodmeadows to take advantage of existing seasonal flooding. This will allow water to be kept on

the land for longer, increasing the wetland habitat and increasing biodiversity. This will improve the landscape character of former arable fields.

- Development pressures, particularly on the edge of Pangbourne, could impact the valley landscape and detract from the distinctive rural character of the valley villages.

Pang Valley strategy and local guidelines

5.627 In addition to the guidelines set out for the River Valley LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Pang Valley:

- Engage with the Kennet Catchment Partnership and Action for the River Kennet to use natural flood management (NFM) and sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) to manage flood risk and improve water quality.
- Conserve the rural sunken roads, 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 river valley.
- Maintain the network of public rights of way and consider opportunities to improve access in the upper reaches of the Pang valley as well as access to the river itself.

LCT 8 Lowland Mosaic

Location and overview

5.628 The Lowland Mosaic comprises a lowland area in the east of the National Landscape, located between the two main chalk upland blocks to the north and south and lying to either side of the Kennet Valley (LCA 7A). The boundaries are defined by geology with the change from the chalk to the Tertiary deposits of the Reading Beds, the Bagshot Beds and London Clay. In the north the chalk descends as a gradual dip slope (LCA 2A: Brightwalton Downs and LCA 2B: Ashampstead Downs), while to the south it rises as a dramatic escarpment (LCA 2D: Walbury Hill - Watership Downs Scarp). The geological transition within this landscape type is clearly marked by its lower topography and land cover of woodland and pasture.

5.629 The Lowland Mosaic landscape type is divided into six geographic character areas. These comprise.

- 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons
- 8B: Winterbourne Farmland
- 8C: Wickham Wooded Heath
- 8D: Hungerford Farmland
- 8E: Highclere Lowlands and Heath
- 8F: Ewhurst Parklands

5.630 The Lowland Mosaic occupies the low lying basin of gravel beds and clays which rise either side of the Kennet Valley. The area has a strong woodland character, with its origins as part of the medieval forests. In the early 17th century the forests were subject to gradual piecemeal enclosure, the legacy of which is reflected in numerous dispersed small settlements and farms. Today the area is characterised by irregular fields, cut out from the woodland during the medieval or post medieval period, interspersed with parcels of woodland and commons. In some areas, a more open landscape dominated by large-scale arable farmland is found.

5.631 One of the most densely inhabited parts of the North Wessex Downs, this lowland area has a diverse range of settlements ranging from large manor houses associated with the many parklands to the network of hamlets, and lines of houses and villages that occur along the lanes and roads. Many villages have a clear nucleus, typically associated with a village green or church whilst others follow a more dispersed pattern typical of post medieval 'squatter' settlement. Red brick and tile are the principal building materials

5.632 It is generally a small-scale intimate landscape with the widespread settlements linked by an intricate network of narrow rural lanes, winding through ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations and more open farmland areas. The lanes are frequently overhung by deep grassy or woodland banks and contribute to the secluded enclosed character. Small areas of heathland on the drier gravel ridges are a distinctive and important feature, although many formerly open areas have reverted to scrub or woodland. The network of ancient semi-natural woodland, connecting hedgerows, areas of parkland including wood pasture and veteran trees create considerable ecological interest. Former medieval deer parks are a particular feature, with a number of these being refashioned in the eighteenth century as formal designed parks and gardens.

5.633 Overall, this is a diverse and complex landscape, which despite its variety has a coherent and intact rural character, although in places it's 'ruralness' is diluted by roads and development.

LCT 8 Lowland Mosaic: Key Characteristics

- Underlain by a geology of clays, silts, sands and gravel, in strong contrast to the surrounding chalk. The pattern essentially comprises clay on the lower land, separated by gravel ridges.
- A low lying undulating area enclosed by the chalk to the north, south and west and forming a part of the Thames Basin Heaths which extend to the east of the National Landscape.
- A mosaic of landcover including fragments of remnant heathland, extensive woodlands and pasture, as well as more open areas of arable farmland.
- Ecologically important habitats including ancient woodland, wood pasture, parkland, ancient hedgerows, neutral grassland, hay meadows, heathland, acid grassland, bogs, fens and open water.
- Parklands, including many originating as medieval deer parks, with subsequent designed landscapes, are a particular feature of the area.
- Varied field pattern with irregular fields, interspersed with parcels of woodland and commons indicative of medieval and post medieval assarts.
- A densely settled landscape type, with a diverse range of dispersed settlements ranging from large manor houses, villages, numerous hamlets and lines of houses along the roads and lanes. The principal building material is red brick.
- An intricate network of wooded rural lanes, plus a large number of footpaths, bridleways, and byways form an excellent resource for informal recreation. Visitor attractions include a number of historic houses and parklands.

LCT 8 Lowland Mosaic: Evaluation

Forces for change

5.634 The following are identified as forces for change common to the Lowland Mosaic as a whole:

- The succession of open habitats to woodland is an ongoing process affecting the internationally designated heathlands as well as other habitats. Birch, oak and Scots pine are all invasive species on the heathlands. Support for grazing and clearance determines whether open habitats are maintained and this is largely carried out by conservation organisations funded by agri-environment schemes.
- An increase in horse paddocks which has altered historic field boundary patterns and introduced weak boundary features including post and wire fencing.
- Pressure for solar farms, which could be visually intrusive, both from within the Lowland Mosaic landscapes and in views from the surrounding higher downlands.
- Increasing recreational use of the large number of footpaths, bridleways and commons may increase pressure for further visitor facilities and car parks.
- Increased traffic on the road network creates pressure for road 'improvements' including curbs, widening, and signage, which would create a more suburban character.
- Development pressure on the edges of Reading, Newbury, Thatcham and Basingstoke. These would affect the setting of the National Landscape, as well as its sense of enclosure, seclusion and tranquillity.
- The Lowland Mosaic landscapes are susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - More extreme weather events leading to a greater risk of wind-throw and loss of mature trees, which could affect the ancient woodlands.
 - Drier and hotter summers increase fire risk affecting grassland and heathland habitats and the recreational resource of the landscape.
 - Hotter temperatures could lead to a longer growing season, resulting in an increase in pine, gorse, bracken and scrub, which would change the colour and form of the landscape.

- Flooding and damage to buildings and structures, including heritage assets, could also increase in frequency and severity.
- Hotter temperatures may result in increased competition from invasive species and greater numbers of insect and mammal pests.

Landscape guidance

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

- Where possible, restore historic extents of open heathland through clearance of encroaching scrub and felling of failing or redundant plantations and secondary woodland on former heathland. Target scrub and tree clearance on former heathland where this will most improve the habitat mosaic, and where historic extent of common land has been lost. There are opportunities to generate biomass from scrub and tree clearance from heathlands.
- Maintain the diversity of the landscape cover, by ensuring structural diversity in the habitat mosaic, including, where possible, bare ground, areas dominated by mosses and lichens, herbs, dwarf shrubs of diverse age classes, wet heath and mire, and scattered trees and shrubs.
- Manage and create corridors linking heathlands into a network that is resilient to climate change and wider environmental pressures, particularly taking into account the risks of fire.
- Maintain the wooded character of the area, recognising that conifers as well as native species can positively contribute to landscape character in some places. Connect existing broadleaved woodlands and enhance woodland cover, increasing extent of habitat connectivity where appropriate.
- Conserve historic hedgerows and protect veteran trees in any location in order to maintain the biodiversity and landscape value of these features. Plan for successors to veterans, particularly within the parklands.
- Adapt horse paddocks so that they better reflect historic boundary patterns and boundary types.

- Manage arable land to benefit landscape character and biodiversity, by maintaining soil health and minimising erosion and run off through enhancement of biodiverse hedgerows, linear scrub and buffer strips.
- Conserve and enhance the characteristic and historic landscape patterns of woodland, grassland and pasture.
- Encourage sensitive management of historic parklands, including strategies for veteran parkland trees.
- Ensure new development does not alter the existing settlement pattern of nucleated villages and dispersed loose linear settlements.

LCA 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons

LCA 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons Description

5.636 The Hermitage Wooded Commons character area is located in the eastern part of the National Landscape on the lower lying gravels, sands and clays to the south of the wooded dip slope of Brightwalton Downs (LCA 2A) and the Ashampstead Downs (LCA 2B). The southern and eastern boundaries are marked by the National Landscape boundary. To the west is the more open character of the Winterbourne Farmland (LCA 8B).

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.637 The Hermitage Wooded Commons form a broad undulating lowland plateau, underlain by the Tertiary deposits of clays, silts, sands and gravels of the Reading and Bagshot Beds and London Clay. This distinctive and varied geological pattern of clays, silts, sands and gravels result in the nutrient poor soils that influence the land use of the area.

5.638 The undulating plateau falls from 145 metres AOD to 100 metres to the Kennet Valley to the south-east. The Hermitage Wooded Plateau is dissected by the River Pang, which enters in the north curving eastwards through the area.

Biodiversity

5.639 The intricate mosaic of woodland, pasture and small areas of remnant heathland are ecologically important, with many nationally designated as SSSI. These include a unique rock sequence at Fognam Chalk Quarry, the heathland, dry and wet woodland and bog at Snelsmore Common, and areas of ancient woodland and wet meadow at Coombe Wood.

5.640 Many of the woodlands are ancient and semi-natural in origin, with some larger plantation woodlands also present. Formerly heathland commons, now covered by regenerating wooded, such as Ashampstead Common, Bucklebury Common and Upper Common, are a particular feature of the area. Small remnant areas of heath can also be found, though these are often colonising with gorse, willow and birch. Woodlands frequently cap ridges across the area, such as Brickiln Wood and Ash Plantation and these create low wooded horizons adding further to the sense of enclosure and containment.

5.641 An example of a nationally important woodland site is Old Copse, Beenham (SSSI), which is located on the north side of the Kennet Valley. This wood has been managed on a traditional coppice-with-standards system and this has resulted in a rich and varied ground flora. The site supports many species indicative of ancient woodland, including some relatively uncommon plants, for example wild daffodil (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*), thin-spiked wood sedge (*Carex strigosa*) and orphine (*Sedum telephium*).

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.642 The landcover, reflecting the diverse geology and soils, is highly variable with an intricate mosaic of woodland, pasture and small areas of remnant heathland. Localised areas of more fertile loamy soils support arable farming, notably, on the slopes dropping towards the Pang Valley and to the south-east near Beenham. There are numerous quarry pits in the north and south-east of the area, the latter being mainly for gravel. Some may have originated in the post-medieval period.

5.643 The area retains considerable woodland cover. Many of the copses show evidence for assarting, probably representing post-medieval piecemeal intakes. Many of the fields and boundaries around Curridge, north of Upper Bucklebury, south of Frilsham and north-east of Cold Ash are irregular and sinuous. Some may represent medieval boundaries, but the small fields in particular may result from informal and piecemeal post-medieval enclosure, some of it between existing tracks and lanes. Elsewhere, especially in the south-east and west of the area, where the terrain is lower and flatter, the fields are larger, more regular and straight-edged. These are likely to be the result of formal Parliamentary enclosure during the 18th and 19th centuries.

5.644 Present-day settlement is largely dispersed across the area and was probably formed by encroachment into areas of common and woodland. Dates and patterns of encroachment are not clearly understood and it is not sufficient to label all common-edge and roadside settlements as being post-medieval in origin – they may have much earlier origins.

Historic features

5.645 Most of the evidence for prehistoric and Romano-British inhabitation in the area comes from cropmark or soil mark features visible on aerial photographs. Notable concentrations of features have been recorded south and

south-east of Englefield Deer Park, between Field Barn Farm and Lower Padworth, Lamden's Farm, Beenham Grange and south of Sulham Wood. West of Lamden's Farm are ten circular features that may represent a group of late Neolithic or Bronze Age round barrows, of which only one survives as an earthwork. Other surviving earthwork remains include two Iron Age forts at Grimsbury Castle, located in woodland to the south of Hermitage, and Bussock Camp in woodland near the western boundary of the area. Other possible Iron Age or Romano-British enclosure earthworks also survive in woodland to the north of Hermitage and in Robin's Copse east of Cold Ash.

5.646 The Forest of Berkshire encompassed the areas north of the Enborne and Kennet, making this area subject to Forest Law. Even after extensive disafforestation in 1227, these gravel plateau areas retained a predominantly wooded and heathy character and their continued value as hunting grounds is evident in the large number of deer parks created in the medieval period. Many of these deer parks were refashioned in the 18th century as formal designed parks and gardens, distinguished by their landscape gardens, rides and plantings. Examples include Yattendon Court and Englefield House, the only Registered Park and Garden in the area.

Settlement pattern

5.647 Hermitage Wooded Commons is a very well-populated landscape with settlements ranging from large nucleated villages such as Upper Bucklebury, linear villages such as Southend and Beenham to smaller lines of estate cottages at Englefield Village. Many of the villages have designated Conservation Areas. There are also many scattered farmsteads and residential country houses dispersed across the area along the intricate network of rural lanes. Red brick is the most common building material. Manor houses with associated parklands are a feature, many of which are now in institutional use.

Principal settlements

5.648 Hermitage sits at a fork in the road from Newbury that splits to Compton in the north and Pangbourne in the east, north-east of Newbury. The first mention of the village is from 1641, and it is likely it grew around the crossroads of two ancient trade routes, at what is now the junction of Marlston Road and Newbury Road. The current village is formed of the coalescence of two settlements, Hermitage and Little Hungerford to the north. The 1882 arrival of the now dismantled Didcot, Newbury, and Southampton Railway increased development within the village. It also increased production at the brickworks and led to the Pinewood Brickworks being developed on the northern edge of the village. The brickworks closed in 1967, and has now been redeveloped as

the Forest Edge estate. During the World War II the railway was used for the transportation of locally extracted sand to London for sandbags as well as for troop transportation to Southampton. The military is still present in Hermitage with Denison Barracks at the village's western edge.

5.649 Bradfield Southend is a small village situated between Pangbourne to the north-east and Thatcham to the south-west. It is part of series of close-by hamlets of Bradfield, Southend and Tutts Clump, as was a hamlet until the opening of St Peters Church in 1965. The village is organised around a triangle of Heath Road, Cock Lane, and South End Road with a recreation ground at its centre. There is a limited historic character to the village, with only three listed buildings. Development in the mid 20th century was focussed on South End Road, which has created a more linear character to the settlement.

5.650 Bradfield Southend sits on a ridge of sand and gravel between the Rivers Pang and Bourne. The extensive woodland cover of the Hermitage Wooded Commons, and proximity to Bucklebury Common to the west provides a wooded, enclosed character to the village, with few long distance views.

Communications and infrastructure

5.651 An intricate network of rural lanes connects the small settlements. Many are sunken and overhung by woodland, creating a rural and enclosed character. These contrast with the M4 which runs east-west through the area, and a small section of the A34 running north-south. The road infrastructure, including the intersection at Chieveley has a significant local impact, including severing the lowland mosaic from the downland to the north.

5.652 The area is well served by public rights of way, and large areas of Open Access Land at Bucklebury Common, Snelsmore Common and Oare Common.

Perceptual Influences

5.653 Views within the landscape are often enclosed, with low wooded horizons common. Generally, the area retains a quiet rural character, apart from at the eastern edge where there are views to Reading and Theale. There is a good experience of dark night skies. However, this is impacted in the east by proximity to Theale, Reading and Pangbourne and in the south by proximity to Thatcham and Newbury. The Chieveley junction and services is also a major source of light pollution and impacts on tranquillity.

LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons: Evaluation

Hermitage Wooded Commons valued qualities

5.654 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons are:

- The mosaic of heathland, woodland, and pasture creates a distinctive sense of place, with contrasts of open and enclosed areas.
- Nationally important ancient woodlands, heathland, bog and wet meadow are found across the Hermitage Wooded Commons. They are designated as SSSI for their ecological value and contribute positively to the landscape.
- Considerable woodland coverage creates an intimate, enclosed character, with low, wooded horizons common.
- The dispersed settlement pattern has historic origins, with numerous designated Conservation Areas, which provide time-depth.
- Historic parklands have a strong connection with the Forest of Berkshire, having been refashioned from medieval hunting grounds, creating time-depth and a continuity of land use.
- Sunken rural lanes are a distinctive feature, providing access through the landscape and further add to the sense of enclosure.
- Open Access Land at Bucklebury Common, Snelsmore Common and Oare Common and public rights of way provide strong recreational access.

Hermitage Wooded Commons local forces for change/issues

5.655 In addition to the forces for change identified at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons are:

- A site at Chieveley services has been allocated for mineral extraction in the West Berkshire Minerals and Waste Plan. This may increase the light pollution and impact on tranquillity in an area already impacted by human influence.
- Pressure for commercial development, including large warehouses along the M4 corridor, particularly around Chieveley junction and services. This would be out of character within the dispersed settlement pattern, and associated lighting would further reduce dark night skies.

- Pressure from development on the edge of the National Landscape at Theale, Reading, Purley on Thames and Reading, which could impact tranquillity and dark night skies, as well as increase pressure on roads and recreational areas.

Hermitage Wooded Commons strategy and local guidelines

5.656 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Lowland Mosaic LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Hermitage Wooded Commons:

- Ensure any additional recreational facilities are small-scale and in keeping with the rural character of the Hermitage Wooded Commons. Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes to car parks and minimise any lighting to retain the dark night skies.
- Ensure any applications for development in the setting of the National Landscape retain the rural, enclosed character of the Hermitage Wooded Commons. Any necessary lighting schemes should be designed to reduce light spill.

LCA 8B: Winterbourne Farmland

LCA 8B: Winterbourne Farmland Description

5.657 The Winterbourne Farmland character area comprises two small areas of open farmland on the slopes that rise to either side of the lower Lambourn Valley (LCA 7B). Hermitage Wooded Commons (LCA 8A) and Wickam Wooded Heath (LCA 8C) form the boundaries to the east and west respectively, with the southern edge formed by the National Landscape boundary. To the north the boundary follows the line of the M4, with the land beyond rising to form part of the wooded dipslope of the chalk downs.

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.658 The landform is predominantly low lying and gently undulating, with the overall gradient dipping to the River Lambourn. A series of low hills such as Hoar Hill and Mount Hill provide topographic variety. The geology is based on the chalk with overlying drift deposits of clay and gravel capped ridges. Boxford Chalk Pit is designated as a geological SSSI for its late Cretaceous chalk sequence, which also contains fossils of a micro-fauna of sharks.

Biodiversity

5.659 Woodlands are confined to the higher land, and include hilltop woods such as Winterbourne Wood, Boxford Common and Hoar Hill. Bagnor Wood, Winterbourne Wood and Wyfield Copse are all recorded as ancient woodland. Linear shelterbelt plantings are also common.

5.660 The chalk stream River Lambourn runs through a small part of the Winterbourne Farmland and is designated as a SSSI and internationally as a SAC for supporting the Desmoulin's whorl snail. Areas of lowland meadows are recorded adjacent to the river and its tributaries.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.661 The Winterbourne Farmland has an open character with the predominant land use being arable farmland. Crops include cereals, oil seed rape, linseed and vines. Many field boundaries have been removed and those that remain are

often thin, heavily flailed hawthorn hedges creating a very large scale and open character.

5.662 The Winterbourne Farmlands have some small woods and copses which survive on steeper slopes and ridge tops. A small number of more irregular fields represent medieval and post-medieval assarts. Some of the fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries here represent 'ladder' fields, and probably result from 17th and 18th century informal enclosure. They often follow ridgelines or valley bottoms. Most fields are large and regular, and the largely open landscape is the result of formal Parliamentary enclosure and more recent removal of field boundaries to form very large fields.

Historic features

5.663 One of the characteristic features in this landscape are the numerous quarry pits. Dug for chalk, clay and gravel many may have their origins during the later medieval period and continued to be worked on a small-scale basis into the early modern period.

5.664 Community archaeological digs at Boxford between 2015 and 2017 uncovered a number of Roman buildings, indicating a significant early community. Finds included as spectacular Roman mosaic, one of only three known mosaics of its kind in the world.

Settlement pattern

5.665 The settlement pattern is sparse, concentrated at the isolated hamlet of Winterbourne, scattered farms and larger farms and manors. Boxford is covered by a Conservation Area and has a number of listed buildings. The village of Boxford and its nearby hamlet Southfields, on the western valley slopes, both extended up the Lambourn valley slopes in the 20th century.

Communications and infrastructure

5.666 The road network is similarly sparse and limited to relative straight lanes rising out from the Lambourn Valley. There is however, extensive access into the area through the network of green lanes, byways and footpaths, including the promoted Lambourn Valley Way. The dismantled Lambourn Valley Railway which ran between Newbury and Didcot is still visible in the landscape, despite being decommissioned in the 1970s.

5.667 The M4 is a major feature forming the northern boundary to the Winterbourne Farmland, and restricting connectivity between the lowland landscape and the downs to the north.

Perceptual Influences

5.668 This is a large scale, open landscape, which contrasts with the intimate landscapes of the wooded heaths and commons to the east and west and the intervening valley landscape surrounding the River Lambourn. It forms a transition with the higher wooded downs to the north. The absence of settlement and road access makes this a more remote and isolated area, with a good experience of tranquillity and dark night skies.

LCA 8B Winterbourne Farmland: Evaluation

Winterbourne Farmland valued qualities

5.669 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 8B Winterbourne Farmland are:

- Open landscape which contrasts with the enclosed wooded heaths to the west and west and vegetated Lambourn Valley.
- Small hilltop woods provide a wooded horizon and are of ecological importance.
- Dispersed, sparse settlement pattern creates a rural character, and sense of time-depth.
- Extensive public rights of way provide recreational access to the landscape, including the Lambourn Valley Way.
- Quiet, rural landscape provides a sense of tranquillity and good experience of dark night skies.

Winterbourne Farmland local forces for change/issues

5.670 In addition to the forces for change identified at the LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 8B Winterbourne Farmland are:

- Natural England have surveyed the Boxford Chalk Pit SSSI as in unfavourable–declining condition due to the poor exposure of the features of interest, including from thick vegetation at the base of the former pit.
- Changes in land use include the reduction in large-scale pig farming, increase in equine facilities and introduction of vineyards to the Winterbourne Farmland. The incremental associated infrastructure of equine facilities and vineyards can lead to a reduction in the rural character, for example through welfare buildings, large gates and outdoor lighting.

Winterbourne Farmland strategy and local guidelines

5.671 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Lowland Mosaic LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Winterbourne Farmland:

- Where possible put in place vegetation management and clearance at Boxford Chalk Pit SSSI to enable the features of interest to be exposed.

- Consider opportunities to replace lost hedgerows and hedgerow trees, while ensuring the open character of the area is not altered.
- Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes through the introduction of further equine facilities or vineyards, which may change the rural character of the Winterbourne Farmland.

LCA 8C: Wickham Wooded Heath

LCA 8C: Wickham Wooded Heath Description

5.672 Wickham Wooded Heath is a very small, visually and geographically distinct character area formed by the wooded gravel ridge that separates the more open landscapes on the valley edges of the Winterbourne Farmland (LCA 8B) to the north and the Hungerford Farmland (LCA 8D) to the south.

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.673 The Wickham Wooded Heath comprises a central gravel ridge, forming a broad flat-topped plateau between the valleys of the River Kennet and River Lambourn. Either side of the plateau are short steep slopes that drop to the valleys.

Biodiversity

5.674 Dense woodland cover predominates in this area and is the defining influence on the landscape character. Scots pine and other conifers form a monoculture of plantation woodland across the central part of the ridge. Elsewhere beech, birch, oak and sweet chestnut form important components, with small areas of ancient woodland recorded. Within this wooded framework there are small areas of commons and remnant heathland adding texture and variety as well as providing habitats for wildlife.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.675 The woodlands are managed on a commercial scale, with large areas of clear fell evident in places. Agricultural land use includes pockets of pasture, usually within small, regular shaped, fields with fencing or hawthorn hedges or surrounded by woodland.

5.676 Historically, the poor free-draining acid soils of this area would have supported heathland. Although much of the woodland is modern plantation, many older woods and copses also occur especially on steeper slopes and valley sides. Some show signs of assarting. A few of the more irregular field boundaries may result from informal and piecemeal post-medieval enclosure.

Most fields or land boundaries are regular and straight-sided, and are likely to be the result of formal 18th or 19th century Parliamentary enclosure.

Historic features

5.677 There is limited development within this area, which would have supported a heathland and woodland mosaic of habitats. Occasional scattered farm buildings are recorded as listed buildings.

Settlement pattern

5.678 The settlement pattern is typically dispersed and linear along the straight ridge top road. The linear arrangement has been supplemented with recent development infilling between the dispersed houses, such as on Coombesbury Lane. Nucleated villages occur at Stockcross in the south of the area and Wickham in the north of the area. Wickham village lies on the course of the Roman road that linked Silchester and Cirencester. The Church of St Swithin, with its 10th century Saxon tower, and the rectory, now Wickham House, are set apart from the main village, which expanded in the 20th century.

Communications and infrastructure

5.679 The ridgetop road (B4000) is the main route through the Wickham Wooded Heath and roughly follows the course of the Roman Ermine Street. Perpendicular smaller lanes branch off the B4000, linking to the small farmsteads and areas of settlement.

5.680 There is more limited access by foot, although some of the small lanes are also byways.

Perceptual Influences

5.681 The wooded character of this landscape creates an enclosed and occasionally intimate character. There is limited sense of remoteness due to the limited access by public rights of way.

5.682 There is a generally good sense of tranquillity and dark night skies, although this is impacted slightly by proximity to Newbury in the south and to the M4 to the north.

LCA 8C Wickham Wooded Heath: Evaluation

Wickham Wooded Heath Valued Qualities

5.683 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 8C Wickham Wooded Heath are:

- The dense, extensive woodland cover provides a distinctive sense of place.
- Small areas of deciduous woodland on the steeper slopes, some recorded as ancient, create a rich ecological habitat and landscape feature.
- Dispersed linear settlement pattern provides a sense of time-depth, and contributes to the tranquil character.
- A sense of history through the ridgetop road, part of the Roman Ermine Street, with perpendicular small lanes branching off onto the steeper slopes.
- A quiet, rural and sometimes secluded character, due to the wooded character, with a good experience of dark night skies.

Wickham Wooded Heath local forces for change/issues

5.684 In addition to the forces for change set out at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 8C Wickham Wooded Heath are:

- The extensive plantation monoculture results in a lack of woodland diversity. Commercial forestry management including large areas of clear fell can be visually intrusive.
- There are no recorded priority habitat heathlands within the area, although there are some heathy areas in clearings.
- A planned woodland adventure facility will increase recreational interest in the area, and will potentially include a new permissive path to increase access on public rights of way. The new site may result in a loss of tranquillity with an increase in traffic on the main ridgetop road.

Wickham Wooded Heath strategy and local guidelines

5.685 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Lowland Mosaic LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Wickham Wooded Heath:

- Plantation woodlands should be sympathetically managed to avoid intrusion on visual character. Selective felling should be adopted to utilise natural regeneration and reduce the landscape impact. Where new plantations are created, the use of single-species planting or exotic conifers should be minimised.
- Target scrub and tree clearance at former heathlands where this will most improve the habitat mosaic, where historic extent of common land has been lost.
- Ensure any new development has limited lighting to ensure the dark night skies and rural character of the landscape is maintained.

LCA 8D: Hungerford Farmland

LCA 8D: Hungerford Farmland Description

5.686 The Hungerford Farmland character area is split into two distinct linear areas of open arable farmland on the slopes north and south of the River Kennet (LCA 7A) in the eastern part of the National Landscape. It is visually distinct from the more enclosed mixed woodland and heathland mosaic landscapes which lie to the north and south – Wickham Wooded Heath (LCA 8C) and Highclere Lowlands and Heath (LCA 8E) respectively.

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.687 A gently rolling landscape which rises steadily out of the Kennet River Valley. It forms a transitional lowland area between the Kennet valley and the higher chalk downs. Hamstead Marshall Pit is designated as a geological SSSI for its exposure of an important fluvial terrace.

5.688 Numerous small streams incise the southern area feeding into the Kennet and these influence the landform of the area as does the River Kennet itself.

Biodiversity

5.689 Woodland blocks occur throughout the area and predominantly feature on the more clay capped ridge tops, such as at Hungerford Port Down. A few woodlands are of ancient origin, including Irish Hill Copse SSSI. Irish Hill Copse shows evidence of a long continuity of coppice management, and the plant communities reflect the change from acid soils on the gravel cap to the base-rich soils on the chalky lower slopes. South of Hungerford numerous narrow, coniferous shelterbelts occur.

5.690 The Kennet tributary streams in the southern area have recorded floodplain grazing marsh.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.691 The predominant land use is arable farmland. Occasional pastoral fields, grape vines and horse grazing help to break up the monotony of fields of cereal crops.

5.692 Field patterns are invariably large and rectangular, with field boundaries either delineated by post and wire fencing or removed entirely. In many areas the only definition between the lanes and fields are low grassy banks with considerably deteriorated hedgerows. Around Kintbury the field pattern is smaller, with a good hedgerow structure.

5.693 A small number of irregular fields represent medieval and post-medieval assarts, particularly in the area of Hampstead Marshall. Some small woods and copses survive, on steeper slopes and ridge tops. Some of the fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries here represent 'ladder' fields, and probably result from 17th and 18th century informal enclosure. They often follow ridgelines or valley bottoms. Most fields are large and regular however, and the largely open landscape is the result of formal parliamentary enclosure and more recent removal of field boundaries to form very large fields. Many of the area's quarry pits for chalk, clay and gravel may have their origins during the later medieval period. These continued to be worked on a small-scale basis into the early modern period.

Historic features

5.694 There are limited recorded historic features within this landscape. Hamstead Park, which largely lies outside of the National Landscape, extends into the east of this area, with a small area designated as part of the Registered Park and Garden. It was a medieval deer park which was then reimagined as a country park. A number of manor houses and associated parklands are still evident, including at Chilton Lodge, Denford House and Standen Manor. There is also a strong parkland feel at Hungerford Common (also known as Common Port Down) with long mature avenue of trees.

Settlement pattern

5.695 Outside of Hungerford and Kintbury, which both developed along the River Kennet, there is a sparse pattern of settlement, particularly to the north. Isolated farms, manor houses and hamlets are scattered north and south of the river.

Principal settlements

5.696 Hungerford is a historic market town between Marlborough and Newbury on the south side of the Kennet valley. It developed as a ford at the confluence of the Rivers Dun and Kennet and retained importance as a coaching town on the route between London and Bath. The town retains a strong sense of identity through its historic core centred on the north-south 13th century High Street,

which crosses the Kennet at Eddington Bridge. The village of Eddington on the north bank of the Kennet has now coalesced with Hungerford. The construction of the Kennet and Avon Canal and Great Western Railway in the late 18th and early 19th centuries increased the population size and expanded the town on the southern banks of the Dun. From the 1970s onwards housing has expanded on either side of the A338 to the south of the town. Hungerford Port Down to the east is a distinctive parkland grazing landscape of ancient and veteran trees with views north across the Kennet Valley. This large area of common land has created a strong barrier to development on the eastern edge of Hungerford.

5.697 The landform north of Hungerford is lower and flatter as part of the Kennet valley floor, with views to the rolling downland beyond. The west of the town is highly visible from the rolling downland to the north as well as from the rising slopes to the south-west. Longer distance views towards Hungerford are often screened by intervening woodland associated with the Savernake Forest or the wooded downlands.

5.698 Kintbury lies on the southern bank of the River Kennett between Hungerford and Newbury. It was a Saxon Minster on the river and may have been a Royal estate. The medieval layout of a linear settlement has largely been retained in the Conservation Area along High Street, Church Street, and Newbury Street. Kintbury originally surpassed Hungerford in commercial importance holding a weekly market and was a centre for the silk industry during the 17th and 18th centuries. The architecture in this area is characterised by red and grey brick cottages with mostly tiled and occasional thatched roofs. The introduction of the Kennet and Avon Canal and the Great Western Railway had a more limited influence of settlement expansion than other settlements. The village has expanded to the south-east onto the valley sides, away from the river corridor.

5.699 The historic core of Kintbury lies within the Kennet valley, with the modern expansion to the south climbing into the Hungerford Farmland. Riparian vegetation and wetland habitats in the wider valley (part of the Kennet Valley Alderwood SAC and SSSI) provides a wooded backdrop to the village and largely screens the settlement from view from the north. The canal, river and associated towpaths provide a strong visual connection to the area's industrial heritage as well as to recreational links to the wider landscape. Land south of Kintbury is more agricultural, although the falling topography and areas of woodland to the south also provide screening of views to the village.

Communications and infrastructure

5.700 There is a simple, dispersed pattern of small rural lanes bounded by overgrown hedgerows. The road network is constrained by the river, railway line and, in the north, the A4.

5.701 Recreational access is provided on footpaths, bridleways and byways, and at Open Access Land at Hungerford Common and Craven Keep.

Perceptual Influences

5.702 The landscape has an open character due to the limited field boundaries. Areas of higher woodland coverage, such as at Hungerford Port Down, creates a more enclosed and intimate landscape. The low rolling hills provide a rural backdrop to the River Kennet (LCA 7A).

5.703 This is a tranquil, rural landscape with a good experience of dark night skies away from Hungerford and Kintbury in the south.

LCA 8D Hungerford Farmland: Evaluation

Hungerford Farmland valued qualities

5.704 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 8D Hungerford Farmland are:

- A gently rolling landscape which forms a clear transition between the Kennet valley and the chalk uplands, creating a strong sense of place.
- Wooded horizons provide visual enclosure and a wooded backdrop to, and from settlements, particularly at Hungerford.
- Estate and manor houses and their associated parkland provide time-depth.
- Public rights of way and Open Access Land provide important recreational access through the landscape.
- An open, tranquil and rural character, which provides a rural setting to the adjacent Kennet valley.

Hungerford Farmland local forces for change/issues

5.705 In addition to the forces for change identified at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 8D Hungerford Farmland are:

- Natural England have surveyed the Hamstead Marshall Pit SSSI as in unfavourable–declining condition due to the poor exposure of the features of interest, including from thick woodland and a water-filled ditch at the base of the pit faces.
- Past loss of hedgerows boundaries and particularly mature hedgerow trees, with continued poor management of remaining hedgerows could result in the loss of the existing field pattern.
- An increase in equine facilities, where the incremental addition of associated infrastructure can lead to a reduction in the rural character, through, for example welfare buildings, large gates and outdoor lighting.
- Pressure for potential residential expansion of Hungerford and Kintbury, and also from Newbury outside of the National Landscape. This could impact tranquillity, dark night skies, as well as increase pressure on the local roads and recreational areas.

Hungerford Farmland strategy and local guidelines

5.706 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Lowland Mosaic LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Hungerford Farmland:

- Where possible put in place vegetation management and clearance at Hamstead Marshall Pit SSSI to enable the features of interest to be exposed.
- Consider opportunities to replace lost hedgerows and hedgerow trees, and replace post and wire fencing with native-species hedgerows, while ensuring the open character of the area is not altered.
- Ensure any applications for development in the setting of the National Landscape retain the rural, enclosed character of the Hungerford Farmland. Any necessary lighting schemes should be designed to reduce light spill.
- Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes through the introduction of further equine facilities, which may change the rural character of the Hungerford Farmland.

LCA 8E: Highclere Lowlands and Heath

LCA 8E: Highclere Lowlands and Heath Description

5.707 The Highclere Lowlands and Heath is located in the east of the National Landscape. It extends from the base of the abrupt scarp slope marking the edge of the southern block of chalk uplands (Walbury Hill/Watership Down Scarp LCA 2D). To the north the boundary marks the transition to the less wooded landscape at Hungerford Farmland (LCA 8D) that flanks the Kennet Valley. The eastern edge is created by the National Landscape boundary, although a landscape of very similar character extends further to the east, including areas such as Burghclere Common.

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.708 A gently undulating landscape with an overall slope down to the north to the River Enbourne (outside the National Landscape) or, in the east, to the River Kennet. The area is underlain by a mosaic of clays, gravels, sands, with a mix of soil types varying from clay loams to acid sandy soils creating a very diverse landscape at the micro scale. It is cut by numerous small streams issuing from the base of the chalk in the south, so that the landform comprises a series of consecutive ridges and shallow valleys. The watercourses are frequently dammed so that standing water within small on-stream ponds is a visible element of the landscape.

Biodiversity

5.709 A highly wooded landscape, with a high proportion of ancient woodland. Catmore and Winterly Copses SSSI is an ancient woodland largely consisting of a hazel coppice under oak standards, and has a rich associated ground flora.

5.710 Within the wooded framework there is considerable diversity with the light sands and gravels creating a heathy character in places. This is illustrated by commons of birch and bracken, heathy rides through the woodlands, and areas of poorer acid pasture. This is demonstrated at Highclere Park SSSI, where the mature parkland and wood pasture trees are linked by lakes, lowland grassland, rush pasture and lowland neutral grassland. There are also important small areas of remnant heath as for example at Inkpen Common where the damp heathland is designated as an SSSI.

5.711 Inkpen Crocus Fields SSSI is a nationally important grassland and is a very important site for the Red Data Book spring crocus (*Crocus vernus*), which is an alien species known to have been present at this site since 1800.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.712 The area is still extensively wooded but has been progressively cleared through the processes of assarting to form a mosaic of irregularly shaped fields with wooded margins or contained by thick hedges. Highclere Manor, for example, is documented as being involved with assarting and agricultural expansion during the 13th and 14th centuries. The woodlands vary from large scale coniferous plantations, as for example at Great Pen Wood near Woolton Hill to smaller ancient woodland of oak standards over hazel coppice. The woods are frequently linked by linear belts and hedges and form a large connected wooded matrix across the whole area.

5.713 Outside of the woodlands, there is a mosaic of small arable and pasture fields with wooded margins or thick hedge boundaries.

5.714 Some of the more irregular or sinuous boundaries in the area may be following late medieval boundaries. Fields are often small and irregular and may represent piecemeal and informal post-medieval assarting and enclosure. In some cases this may have taken place between existing tracks and lanes. Other small but regular, straight-sided fields are the result of formal 18th and 19th century Parliamentary enclosure.

Historic features

5.715 In common with the rest of the Lowland Mosaic landscapes there are few surviving prehistoric sites. One Bronze Age round barrow survives as an upstanding monument, west of Lower Green and the linear earthwork feature around Mount Prosperous may be late Bronze Age or Iron Age.

5.716 The Highclere Lowlands and Heath were formerly part of the medieval Forests of Pamber and Freemantle and managed under Forest law. Evidence of the medieval era are from a medieval moated site at Balsdon Farm, which originally surrounded the 13th century Balsdon manor house, and a motte at West Woodhay. The Inkpen manor belonged to the Premonstratensian monastery of Titchfield, while Highclere manor was part of the bishopric of Winchester. The earthwork remains of a deserted medieval village within

Highclere Park may have provided accommodation for servants and estate workers, or it may have been the original location of Highclere village itself.

5.717 Parklands, many originating as medieval deer parks, are a distinctive element, with small areas of parkland at Woolton House and Hollington House. The estate at Highclere, now a Grade I Registered Park and Garden, evolved into a ‘polite’ landscape during the 17th and 18th centuries. The gardens, follies, landscaped wood and lake features became established around a remodelled house. Capability Brown influenced some of this work. The largest mansion in Hampshire, Highclere Castle was virtually rebuilt by Sir Charles Barry for the Earl of Carnarvon between 1839-1842.

Settlement pattern

5.718 The area is relatively densely settled in a number of loose linear settlements which extend along the roads. These would have formed from ‘squatter’ settlements resulting from piecemeal enclosure of the landscape after disafforestation in the early 17th century.

5.719 The main settlements of Highclere and Woolton Hill are very close to each other but do not give the appearance of coalescence due to the enclosed wooded character of the lanes which join the settlements. Smaller linear settlements are found at Inkpen and Lower Green. In addition, there are many residential properties, small hamlets and farms/studs dispersed throughout the area. Some 20th century developments are not in keeping with the loose linear settlement pattern, for example the 1960s and 1970s estates at Penwood. However, strong vegetation on the boundaries, screens many of these from view.

Communications and infrastructure

5.720 The area is crossed by a lattice of minor roads and tracks, which are often bounded by mature hedgerows or woodland. The A34 cuts through the east of the landscape, and with its large junctions and service station at Tot Hill is out of character with the wider road network.

5.721 There is good recreational access within the Highclere Lowlands and Heath, including on the promoted route, Brenda Parker Way. A number of the commons and woods are managed for both ecology and recreation, including Inkpen Common (Berkshire Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust), Great Pen Wood (Forestry Commission) and The Chase (National Trust).

Perceptual Influences

5.722 Despite the complexity and variety of landform and landcover, the landscape has a coherent character, with a consistent framework provided by the strong structure of woodlands, hedgerows and trees. This creates a small scale, enclosed and even 'secretive' character.

5.723 The proximity of settlements to the main road network of the A343 and the A34 means that these areas are highly accessible and there is, in consequence, evidence of development pressures, particularly within the small villages, with suburbanising elements in the form of fences, lighting and horse paddocks.

LCA 8E Highclere Lowlands and Heath: Evaluation

Highclere Lowlands and Heath valued qualities

5.724 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 8E Highclere Lowlands and Heath are:

- Location on the springline between the chalk downs and clay creates a number of watercourses and ponds, which are distinctive features.
- The ancient and semi-natural woodlands, some nationally designated as SSSIs, are of ecological importance and create a wooded, enclosed character.
- Remnant areas of heathland are of ecological importance and provide a distinct sense of place.
- Historic parklands, including Highclere Park, provide time-depth and continuity with medieval deer parks.
- A loose linear settlement pattern, linked by small rural lanes, with strong hedgerows and wooded boundaries.
- A coherent rural character formed by the strong structure of woodlands, hedgerows and trees, which provides a sense of place and a tranquil, enclosed landscape.

Highclere Lowlands and Heath local forces for change/issues

5.725 In addition to the forces for change set out at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 8E Highclere Lowlands and Heath are:

- The decline in the extent of heathland vegetation, through lack of management leading to scrub invasion or conversion to forestry.
- Changes in land use include an increase in equine facilities. The incremental associated infrastructure of equine facilities can lead to a reduction in the rural character, for example through welfare buildings, large gates and outdoor lighting.
- A slight increase in tourism and events related development including glamping and large-scale marques can result in incremental changes to the rural character through the introduction of large gates and outdoor lighting.

- Pressure from development on the edge of the National Landscape, particularly on the edge of Newbury, which could impact tranquillity and dark night skies, as well as increase pressure on roads and recreational areas.

Highclere Lowlands and Heath strategy and local guidelines

5.726 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Lowland Mosaic LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Highclere Lowlands and Heath:

- Aim to enhance and restore areas of heathland, targeting scrub and tree clearance. Where possible plan to link remnant areas of heath.
- Ensure any additional recreational facilities are small-scale and in keeping with the rural character of the Highclere Lowlands and Heath. Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes to car parks and minimise any lighting to retain the dark night skies.
- Ensure any applications for development in the setting of the National Landscape retain the rural, enclosed character of the Highclere Lowlands and Heath. Any necessary lighting schemes should be designed to reduce light spill.

LCA 8F: Ewhurst Parklands

LCA 8F: Ewhurst Parklands Description

5.727 The National Landscape includes a small part of this lowland area, which is located at the foot of the steep slopes that rise to the chalk uplands and clay plateau of Hannington Downs (LCA 2G). The area is distinguished by its geology and lower relief and forms an integral part of a much wider character area extending out beyond the National Landscape boundary on the clays and sands and gravels of the Thames Basin.

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.728 The distinct change in geology from chalk in the south-west to heavy clays with sands and gravels is the dominant influence on landscape character. This results in a gently undulating low-lying landform at the foot of the higher downs. Further to the east, beyond the National Landscape, boundary gravels become more dominant, and the resulting landscape has a 'heathy' character, although this is not a feature of the small area within the National Landscape.

5.729 The area includes several ponds and minor streams emerging onto the impermeable clay base and includes two designed lakes at Ewhurst Park, making water a particular feature compared to the dry chalk uplands.

Biodiversity

5.730 There is abundant woodland cover in a series of small irregular copses forming part of Ewhurst Park. The majority of the copses are recorded as ancient woodland. There are some smaller areas of conifer plantation.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.731 Outside of the areas woodland land cover comprises medium sized arable and grass fields contained within intact hedgerow boundaries.

5.732 Ewhurst Park, located at the foot of the slopes, with its Home Farm, estate cottages, lakes, parkland planting and wooded copses, is the most prominent feature within the area. The well maintained estate landscape of

intact hedgerows, uniform building style and local vernacular creates a strong unifying character.

5.733 Some of the surviving irregular field boundaries are characteristic of assarts or intakes into woodland during the 14th to 16th centuries, in order to expand land for agriculture, grazing and settlement.

Historic features

5.734 The area was once part of the Royal Forest of Pamber. It was utilised for hunting and for managed production of wood. Much of the heathland was used as common land. Today, numerous small woodland copses, possibly vestiges of this earlier woodland landscape, characterise the area. Some of the copses, however, may be timber plantations established in the nineteenth century.

5.735 It subsequently formed part of two deer parks belonging to Wolverton House (outside of the National Landscape) and Ewhurst. Ewhurst Estate was owned by the Dukes of Wellington from 1817 to 1943. The original manor house was reduced to a single wing in the 1950s, and replaced in the 21st century by a house more in keeping with the scale of the estate.

Settlement pattern

5.736 The present day settlement comprises hamlets and farmsteads scattered across the area, several of which may have early medieval origins. Many of the farmsteads are listed buildings. Ewhurst and Wolverton, for example, are mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086.

Communications and infrastructure

5.737 Road access is around the perimeter of the LCA. Only Lloyd's Lane provides access through the area. The area is relatively inaccessible, with no public access through Ewhurst Park. A handful of public rights of way provide links to the wooded chalk downs to the west and south. An electricity pylon line runs through the north of the area.

Perceptual Influences

5.738 The areas of woodland and hedgerows provide a strong landscape structure and visual enclosure. There are some views to the wooded chalk downs to the south and west, which provide a backdrop to the area.

5.739 The limited access and woodland create an enclosed character, with a good experience of tranquillity and dark night skies.

LCA 8F Ewhurst Parklands: Evaluation

Ewhurst Parklands valued qualities

5.740 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 8F Ewhurst Parklands are:

- The role the landscape plays in the transition from the chalk downs to the lowland clay areas.
- Extensive woodland copses, much of ancient origin, provides ecological importance.
- Ponds, designed lakes and minor streams create a water-filled landscape, and a strong sense of place.
- The parkland character creates a continuity of character, and links to the medieval deer parks and Royal Forest of Pamber.
- A rural, tranquil landscape with a sense of isolation through the limited access.

Ewhurst Parklands local forces for change/issues

5.741 In addition to the forces for change set out at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 8F Ewhurst Parklands are:

- Ewhurst Park has embarked on an estate-wide biodiversity project, with plans to introduce low numbers of cattle, horses and pigs to mimic natural grazing, river restoration and wetland creation, including the introduction of beaver.
- Increase in tourism infrastructure including holiday lets and glamping. This could lead to an associated increase in traffic and pressure for outdoor lighting, which would reduce the tranquillity and rural character of the landscape.

Ewhurst Parklands strategy and local guidelines

5.742 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Lowland Mosaic LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Ewhurst Parklands:

- Continue to explore the rewilding of Ewhurst Park, balancing the nature improvements with increased recreational access to the area, to ensure the rural character of the area is maintained.

- Protect and manage the valued recreational use of the landscape on public rights of way. Consider opportunities to improve public right of way connections, infrastructure and signage.
- Ensure any additional recreational facilities are small-scale and in keeping with the rural character of the Ewhurst Parklands. Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes to car parks and minimise any lighting to retain the dark night skies.

Appendix A

Glossary of terms and abbreviations

Table A.1: Glossary of terms and abbreviations

Term	Abbreviation and meaning
AOD	Above Ordnance Datum (sea level).
Agricultural Land Classification (ALC)	The classification of agricultural land in England and Wales.
Analysis	The process of breaking the landscape down, usually in descriptive terms, into its component parts to understand how it is made up.
Ancient trees and veteran trees	<p>Individual trees or groups of trees with wood pastures, historic parkland, hedgerows, orchards, park, and other areas. They are often found outside ancient woodlands. irreplaceable habitats with some or all the following characteristics.</p> <p>Ancient trees</p> <p>An ancient tree is exceptionably valuable. Attributes can include its great age, size, condition, biodiversity value (because of significant wood decay and the habitat created from the ageing process), cultural and heritage value.</p> <p>Veteran trees</p> <p>A veteran tree may or may not be very old, but is has decay features,</p>

Term	Abbreviation and meaning
	such as branch death and hollowing. These features contribute to its biodiversity, cultural and heritage value.
Ancient woodland	Woodland which the evidence shows has had continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD and has only been cleared for underwood or timber production. It is an extremely valuable ecological resource, with an exceptionally high diversity of flora and fauna.
Approach	The stepwise process by which a landscape assessment is undertaken.
Arable	Land used for growing crops.
Assessment	An umbrella term used to encompass all the different ways of looking at, describing, analysing, and evaluating landscape.
BAP	UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species and habitats were identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation action under the UK BAP. The original lists of UK BAP priority habitats were created between 1995 and 1999 and were subsequently updated in 2007. See http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5155 for further information.
Biodiversity	The measure of the variety of organisms present in different ecosystems.

Term	Abbreviation and meaning
Bourne (or winterbourne)	Ephemeral stream which is often dry during the summer months.
Built form	The characteristic nature of built development.
Characteristic	An element that contributes to local distinctiveness (e.g. narrow winding lanes, vernacular building style).
Classification	A process of sorting the landscape into different types, each with a distinct, consistent, and recognisable character.
Coppicing	The traditional method of woodland management in which trees are cut down to near the ground to encourage the production of long, straight shoots, which can subsequently be harvested.
Cultural heritage	Cultural heritage includes objects, monuments, individual sites and buildings and groups of buildings and sites that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance. It includes tangible heritage and intangible cultural heritage.
Description	Verbal description of what a landscape looks like. This is usually carried out in a systematic manner, but it may also include personal reactions to the landscape.

Term	Abbreviation and meaning
Drift	The name for all material of glacial origin found anywhere on land or at sea, including sediment and large rocks.
Element	A component part of the landscape, for example hedges, roads, woods.
Enclosure	The placing in private hands of land to which there were previously common rights; the merging of commonly held strip fields to form a block surrounded by hedges.
Eutrophication	A body of water, or parts of it, contains an excess of minerals and nutrients, particularly nitrogen and phosphorus. This can cause a dense growth of plant life.
Feature	A prominent, eye-catching element, for example beech clumps on a hilltop, or a church spire.
Floodplain	The area that would naturally be affected by flooding if a river rises above its banks.
GIS	Geographic Information System.
GPS	Global Positioning System.
Grassland	Land used for grazing. Grassland can be improved (by management practices) semi-improved (modified by management practices and have a range of species less diverse than unimproved grasslands), or unimproved (not treated with fertiliser,

Term	Abbreviation and meaning
	herbicide or intensively grazed and consequently species diversity is high).
Habitat	The natural home or environment of an animal, plant or other organism.
HLC	Historic Landscape Characterisation.
Hydrology	The science dealing with the occurrence, circulation, distribution and properties of the waters of the earth and its atmosphere.
Intact	Not changed or diminished.
Land cover	Combinations of land use and vegetation that cover the land surface.
Landmark	An object or feature of a landscape or town that is easily seen and recognized from a distance, especially one that enables someone to establish their location.
Landscape	The term refers primarily to the visual appearance of the land, including its shape, form, and colours. However, the landscape is not a purely visual phenomenon; its character relies on a whole range of other dimensions, including geology, topography, soils, ecology, archaeology, landscape history, land use, architecture, and cultural associations.
Landscape character	A distinct pattern or combination of elements that occurs consistently in a particular landscape.

Term	Abbreviation and meaning
Landscape Character Area (LCA)	A unique geographic area with a consistent character and identity, which forms part of a landscape character type.
Landscape Character Type (LCT)	A generic term for landscape with a consistent, homogeneous character. Landscape character types may occur in different parts of the county, but wherever they occur, they will share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation, or human influences.
Landscape condition	Based on judgements about the physical state of the landscape, and about its intactness, from visual, functional, and ecological perspectives. It reflects the state of repair or intactness of individual features or elements (relating to that feature's primary condition or ultimate desire).
Landscape value	The relative value that is attached to different landscapes. In a policy context the usual basis for recognising certain highly valued landscapes is through the application of a local or national landscape designation. Yet a landscape may be valued by different communities of interest for many different reasons without any formal designation, recognising, for example, perceptual aspects such as scenic beauty, tranquillity or wildness; special cultural associations; the influence and presence of other conservation

Term	Abbreviation and meaning
	interests; or the existence of a consensus about importance, either nationally or locally.
Linear settlement	A settlement that is built along a road, in comparison to a nuclear or dispersed settlement.
Listed building	A building, object or structure that has been judged to be of national importance in terms of architectural or historic interest, as designated under Section 1 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
National Landscape	A statutory national landscape designation, formerly known as Area of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB).
Natural character	Character as a result of natural or semi-natural features such as woodland, grassland, hedgerows etc.
Natural heritage	Natural features, geological and physiographical formations and habitats that are valued for science, conservation or natural beauty.
NCN	National Cycle Network Route.
NNR	National Nature Reserve.
Nucleated settlement	A settlement that is clustered around a centre or focal point, in comparison to a linear or dispersed settlement.
Open Access Land	An area where the public have a right of access on foot as set out in the

Term	Abbreviation and meaning
	Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2005.
OS	Ordnance Survey.
Pastoral	Land used for keeping or grazing sheep or cattle.
Remnant	A part of quantity left after the greater part has been removed or destroyed.
Riparian habitat	Riverbank habitat.
SAC	Special Area of Conservation (EC Directive 92/43/EEC Habitats Directive)
Scheduled Monument	Nationally important archaeological sites or historic buildings, given protection against unauthorised change, as designated under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.
Semi-natural vegetation	Any type of natural vegetation which has been influenced by human activities, either directly or indirectly.
Sense of place	A person's perception of a location's indigenous characteristics, based on the mix of uses, appearance and context that makes a place memorable.
Sensitive	The response to change or influence.
Skyline	The outline of a range of hills, ridge or group of buildings seen against the sky.

Term	Abbreviation and meaning
SPA	Special Protection Area (EC Directive 2009/147/EC on the Conservation of Wild Birds).
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest.
Time depth	The time period expressed in the landscape, or the extent to which the landscape reflects a certain time period (a landscape with greater time depth will comprise older elements than a landscape with lesser time depth).
Topography	Combinations of slope and elevation that produce the shape and form of the land surface.
Valued landscape attributes	Positive features and characteristics that are important to landscape character and that, if lost, would result in adverse change to the landscape.

Appendix B

Data sources

Table B.1: GIS Data

Mapping

Name	Source
Aerial Imagery	ESRI
Topography	ESRI
OS 25k	North Wessex Downs Team
OS 50k	North Wessex Downs Team

Administrative boundary

Name	Source
National Landscape boundary	OS boundary line

Natural heritage

Name	Source
NNR	Natural England
SSSI	Natural England
AWI	Natural England
National Forest Inventory	Forestry Commission
SAC	Natural England

Name	Source
SPA	Natural England
Priority habitats	Natural England
RSPB Reserve	RSPB
IBA	RSPB

Landscape character and designated landscapes

Name	Source
National Character Areas	Natural England
National Landscapes	Natural England
North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment (2002)	North Wessex Downs Team

Historic environment

Name	Source
Listed buildings	Historic England
Scheduled Monuments	Historic England
Registered Parks and Gardens	Historic England
Heritage at Risk Register	Historic England
Conservation Areas	Historic England
World Heritage Sites	Historic England
Historic Landscape Characterisation	North Wessex Downs Team

Access and recreation

Name	Source
National Cycle Network	Sustrans
National Trails	Natural England
Open Access: Common Land	Natural England
Country Parks	Natural England

Dark skies and tranquillity

Name	Source
Light pollution	CPRE
Tranquillity	CPRE

Agriculture

Name	Source
Agricultural Land Classification	Natural England
Corine Landcover	EEA

Other sources of information**Adjacent Landscape Character Assessments**

- Basingstoke & Deane Landscape Character Assessment (2021), HDA
- South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Landscape Character Assessment (2024), LUC
- Swindon Landscape Character Areas (2004), Swindon Borough Council

- Test Valley Landscape Character Assessment (2018), Terrafirma
- West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2019), LUC
- Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment (2005), LUC

Agriculture

- National Character Area data and associated databases, including the Landscape Change Evidence Hub <https://nelandscapechange.co.uk/>
- Agri-environment schemes monitoring.

Cultural heritage

- Conservation Area Appraisals.
- North Wessex Downs Historic Landscape Characterisation (2007, updated 2012).
- West Berkshire Historic Landscape Characterisation (2007).
- Wiltshire Historic Landscape Characterisation (2016).
- Hampshire Historic Landscape Assessment (1999).

Planning

- Local Plans for the Local Authorities
- Neighbourhood areas and plans

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