

North Wessex Downs NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

Management Plan 2025 – 2030

Cover image to be updated



**North Wessex
Downs
National
Landscape**

Produced on behalf of the Council of Partners

Our partners



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Foreword

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

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

Recovering this natural capital is essential to ensure sustainable economic growth. Protected Landscapes are fundamental to strengthening the nation’s economic health by looking after the natural resources we depend on. Through

nature’s recovery, Protected Landscapes protect communities from flooding, fight climate change, enable sustainable food production and create green jobs. They also have a vital role in connecting diverse communities with nature – underpinning the nation’s mental and physical health and reducing the strain on our NHS.

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

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

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

Yours sincerely

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Food & Rural Affairs

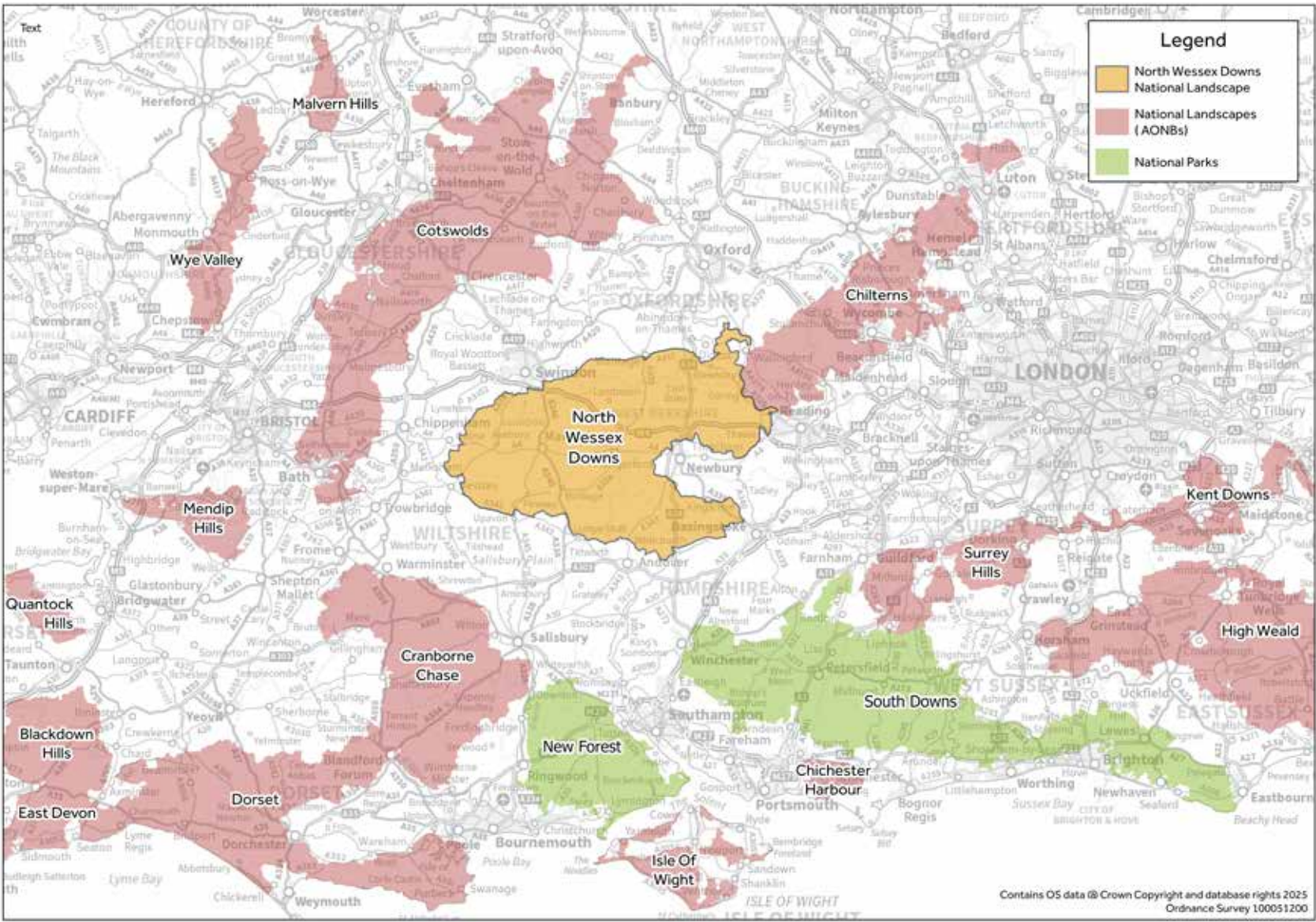


Figure 1. Regional context of the North Wessex Downs AONB with other protected landscapes. Contains OS data ©Crown Copyright and database rights 2019. Ordnance Survey 100051200.

Introduction

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



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

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

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

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

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

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Sarah Nichols
Outgoing Chair, North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership



Figure 2. The partners of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.
Contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database rights 2019. Ordnance Survey 100051200.

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



The only constant is Change - we must fully embrace it and the challenges and opportunities it presents, in order to enhance and protect our outstandingly beautiful landscape

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Gill Haggarty
Chair of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership

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

A Vision for the North Wessex Downs

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

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

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

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

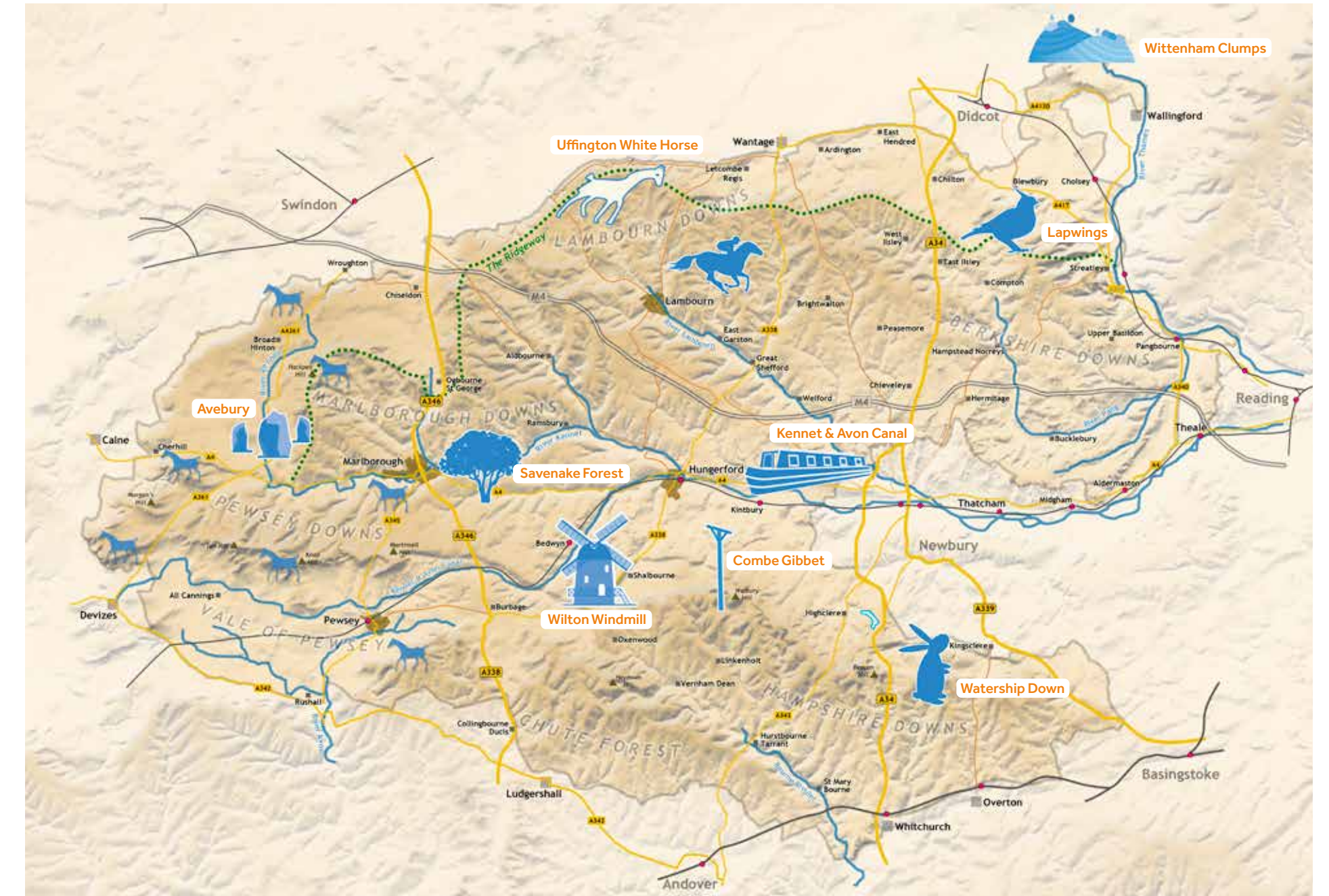
- 6 where the integrated management of land conserves and improves high quality healthy soils and water resources whilst retaining the distinctive seasonal winterbourne flows and the nationally and internationally significant chalk streams of the National Landscape
- 7 where beautiful views delight and inspire all those who experience the landscape, and its visual, scenic and aesthetic qualities are recognised, valued and maintained
- 8 where a sense of remoteness and tranquillity predominates and where vast night skies can thrill the eye, unaffected by light pollution; where these valued qualities are recognised in development decisions within the setting of the National Landscape, so that the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs is protected
- 9 where the landscape's potential to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change is realised in ways that conserve and enhance its natural beauty: reducing emissions, storing more carbon and building resilience
- 10 where development responds to genuine local need and where new buildings show continuity with the past, respecting and complimenting the beauty of the landscape and the character of local vernacular building materials and styles, while embodying high quality contemporary design and sustainable construction
- 11 where an integrated approach to transport and active travel meets local needs and minimises negative effects on the environment; where the dominance of roads and highway clutter are reduced
- 12 with vibrant rural communities, where villages and market towns meet the needs of local communities and visitors; where there is great local pride in the landscape and positive local contribution to the stewardship of its valued qualities

- 13 that is a nationally recognised centre for responsible tourism and enjoyment of the countryside, developed and promoted in ways that are in harmony with the high environmental quality and local community, helping to underpin the broader rural economy
- 14 that is recognised as a vital community resource, welcoming to local residents and visitors of all backgrounds and abilities, with benefits for physical and mental wellbeing arising from access to nature and the countryside, to a tranquil environment, and to the opportunities it presents for social interaction and volunteering
- 15 where there is wide public recognition of the protected status and valued qualities of the North Wessex Downs among communities in and around the National Landscape; where all responsible bodies understand and respect the protected status of the area and their active duties towards the National Landscape in their plans and proposals.

Context & Framework



Icons of The North Wessex Downs National Landscape



Setting the Scene

1.1 The first three chapters of the 2025–30 National Landscape Management Plan present a vision and long-term ambitions for the North Wessex Downs; set out overarching principles for the Plan's implementation; summarise the priorities for this Plan period; address implementation and monitoring; suggest how all stakeholders can contribute to achieving the Plan priorities; and describe the legal and policy framework for the Plan.

1.2 This is followed by thematic chapters which describe and explain how the valued qualities for which the landscape is designated, set out in detail in the North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment, relate to different themes: Landscape, Farming and Land Management, Biodiversity and Nature Recovery, Natural Resources, Historic Environment, Planning and Development, Communities, and Access, Recreation and Tourism. In each thematic chapter is a list of Key Issues relating to the theme; Priorities for the Plan period; and Policies to guide and inform delivery of the Plan and the purpose of designation.

1.3 The Management Plan is owned by the local authorities whose areas include part of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape; it is their Plan. However, its implementation is the responsibility of everyone whose policies, decisions and actions affect the natural beauty of the National Landscape and its setting.

1.4 The North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership has identified Partnership Goals and Strategic Objectives that support delivery of the Management Plan. These guide the work of the National Landscape staff unit on the Partnership's behalf. The governing Council of Partners monitors progress against the agreed Business Plan, which is regularly reviewed and rolled forward.

¹. Office for National Statistics: Population Estimates for National Landscapes in England and Wales by Single Year of Age and Sex, mid-2022. Available at www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/lationestimates//2094populationestimatesforationalallandscapeinenglandandwalesbysingleyearofageandsexmid2021andmid2022.

About the North Wessex Downs

1.5 From their western tip near Devizes in Wiltshire, the North Wessex Downs reach across central southern England in a broad eastward arc south of Swindon, through Oxfordshire to the western end of Berkshire. They abut the Chilterns National Landscape along the River Thames in the Goring Gap north-west of Reading, dipping south and then sweeping west along the Kennet valley, then south to encircle Newbury, encompassing the northern reaches of the rolling chalk hills of the Hampshire Downs. They then stretch back across the northern fringes of the high chalk upland of Salisbury Plain and the low-lying Vale of Pewsey.

1.6 The North Wessex Downs is the third largest National Landscape in the country. This protected landscape extends to 668 square miles / 1,730 square km, an area equivalent to a medium-sized English county. Its resident population is just over 100,000 people¹ (an average density across the National Landscape of 58.3 residents/square km); the two largest settlements inside the National Landscape boundary, Hungerford and Marlborough, have a total population of 14,702². In contrast, in the immediate setting of the North Wessex Downs lie the significant urban centres of Reading, Newbury, Basingstoke, Andover, Swindon and Didcot, with a combined population of 720,483³. 1.23 million residents live within 10 km of the National Landscape boundary⁴.

1.7 Two major highways, the M4 and A34, pass through the area, aligned east-west and north-south respectively. The A4 runs straight through the National Landscape, as does the Berks and Hants railway line from London towards the south west, following, successively, the Kennet, Dun and Avon river valleys. The Great Western Railway route towards Bristol and South Wales cuts through the north-eastern extremity of the area along the Thames valley, then follows the northern boundary, outside the National Landscape but within its setting and clearly visible from the northern scarp. The South Western main line runs along the southern reaches of the National Landscape between Basingstoke and Andover.

1.8 The North Wessex Downs was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1972 under the National Parks and Access to Countryside Act 1949. Following the introduction of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the government confirmed that the landscape qualities of National Parks and AONBs are equivalent.

1.9 In 2023 all AONBs in England and Wales became known as National Landscapes, reflecting their national importance and a consistency of approach across all the National Landscapes. The North Wessex Downs remains formally designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Management Plan is legally an AONB Management Plan.

1.10 The North Wessex Downs National Landscape contains all or part of 173 parishes, straddling the boundaries of two county councils, three unitary authorities and four district/borough councils. It sits on a regional divide, with roughly half of the area in [south east and half in south west England,] occupying a central position along the line of chalk-dominated landscapes from the Dorset coast to the northern edge of the Chiltern Hills.

1.11 The North Wessex Downs is one of a family of nationally protected landscapes across England comprising 34 National Landscapes and ten National Parks. Together, these finest, most outstanding English landscapes cover around 25% of the country. The importance of these designated landscapes is also recognised at international level, and the North Wessex Downs is recognised by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as one of the UK's Category V Protected Landscapes. The IUCN defines a Category V Protected Landscape as:

*A protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value: and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values.*ⁱ

1.12 The IUCN Green List is the internationally recognised standard for well-managed protected areas. In 2022 the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership embarked on an intensive process of internal review covering governance, design and planning, effective management and conservation outcomes with the aim of achieving Green List accreditation.ⁱⁱ In early 2025, the IUCN accepted the North Wessex Downs as an applicant for Green List status, piloting the standard in the UK. The North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership is committed to completing this process during this Management Plan period.

². Hungerford: 5,869, Marlborough 8,833, from: https://citypopulation.de/en/uk/southwestengland/wiltshire/E63005127__marlborough/

<https://www.hungerford-tc.gov.uk/stats>

³. Reading: 174,200 - <https://www.reading.gov.uk/about-reading/borough-profile/>. Newbury: 42,260 - https://citypopulation.de/en/uk/southeastengland/west_berkshire/E63005168__newbury/. Basingstoke: 185,200 - [https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/census#:~:text=The%202021%20Census%20population%20of,since%202011%2C%20approximately%2010.4%25](https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/census#:~:text=The%202021%20Census%20population%20of,since%202011%2C%20approximately%2010.4%25.). Andover: 50,815 - https://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/southeastengland/admin/test_valley/E04012839__andover/. Swindon: 233,410 - https://citypopulation.de/en/uk/southwestengland/admin/E06000030__swindon/

⁴. ONS op. cit.



Why is this Management Plan important?

1.13 This National Landscape Management Plan presents an agreed agenda for the North Wessex Downs for the next five-year period, 2025–2030. It sets out priorities and policies for all those whose activities affect the National Landscape which support the long-term goals set out in the Vision Statement. Working together, the partners can realise these targets to the benefit of the landscapes and communities of this nationally designated, and internationally recognised, protected landscape.

1.14 Responsible local authorities are required to prepare an AONB (National Landscape) Management Plan and review the Plan no less than every five years. The North Wessex Downs Council of Partners has prepared this plan on behalf of the relevant local authorities of the National Landscape.

1.15 The Partnership comprises representatives of the constituent local authorities; the local communities; the farming and rural business community; nature conservation, heritage and recreation interests; Natural England; and the North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust.

1.16 As detailed below, “*in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty*” all relevant authorities “*must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty [National Landscape]*” and not merely have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area. “Relevant authorities” include all statutory bodies and all tiers of government, including parish councils and holders of public office.

1.17 In addition to obligations under national legislation, the UK is a signatory to the Council of Europe Landscape, a multinational treaty which is devoted exclusively to the protection, management and planning of landscapes throughout Europe.ⁱⁱⁱ The Convention promotes landscape protection, management and planning through co-operation, public awareness and an effective policy framework. In particular, the Convention highlights the need to:

- recognise landscape in law;
- integrate landscape into other policy areas;
- develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and creation of landscapes;
- raise awareness of landscape value; and
- encourage public participation and the involvement of the public in decisions affecting their landscape.

1.18 The Convention encourages the integration of landscape into all relevant areas of policy, including cultural, economic and social policies, with a particular emphasis on the need for co-operation when administrative boundaries are crossed. The North Wessex Downs National Landscape Management Plan is a significant contribution to the UK’s implementation of the Convention.

1.19 Successful implementation of this Management Plan is beyond the resources of the Council of Partners and National Landscape staff unit alone. It requires the active collaboration and participation of all those involved in its scope. This is a Plan for the North Wessex Downs in its entirety; it is not for any single organisation within it. Implementation requires the support and involvement of the many organisations and individuals who play key roles in the future of the area, many of whom have been involved in preparation of the Plan.

1.20 One way of satisfying the Section 85 duty placed on Government and other public bodies by the CRoW Act 2000 is by supporting the implementation of this Plan. Town and parish councils, statutory agencies and local bodies acting individually or through partnerships can all contribute to fulfilling the Management Plan vision.

Context and Collaboration

1.21 The North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership does not work in isolation: the National Landscape is part of the national network of protected landscapes that includes National Parks, National Trails and other National Landscapes. The National Landscapes Association represents National Landscapes at national level, and leads or guides collaborative initiatives. The North Wessex Downs National Landscape actively participates in ambitious collaborative programmes and initiatives that look far beyond our boundaries. Some current examples are described below.

Mend the Gap

1.22 Network Rail planned and carried out the Great Western Route Modernisation project in the mid-2010s, electrifying the Great Western main line through the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs National Landscapes. Network Rail’s failure to have regard for the purposes of protected landscape designation, as required by its duty under s. 85 of the CRoW Act 2000, caused a public outcry from communities nearby and has done major harm to the Thames valley landscape shared by the two protected landscapes between Reading and Didcot. After several years of discussion which did not result in any mitigation of the landscape impact, Network Rail agreed to fund the Mend the Gap programme, which has been run jointly by the two National Landscapes and the community-led Railway Action Group since 2020.

Mend the Gap consists of two principal elements: tree/hedge planting and management to mitigate the visual impact of the electrification, and a larger landscape enhancement programme. The latter prioritises chalk grassland, arable and wetland habitat enhancements; and improved knowledge, access and enjoyment of the landscape between Reading and Didcot. The Programme has transformed the two National Landscapes’ approaches to the Thames valley from viewing it as two unconnected boundary zones to a coherent, connected single landscape providing the focus for active community engagement, nature recovery and landscape enhancement. The Mend Gap programme is expected to run until 2028.

Strategic context in relation to the London global city region

1.23 The South East and East Protected Landscapes group (SEEPL) brings together the National Landscapes and National Parks which surround London. These provide the basis for an interconnected network of valuable green spaces stretching from central London across south east and eastern England, and an opportunity to collaborate at an appropriate scale to care for and promote the enjoyment of, these diverse, treasured landscapes by the growing population of the London city region.

1.24 The North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership is a partner in SEEPL, sharing the seven key objectives in the group’s 25-year vision for the protected landscapes of the London city region to:

- conserve and enhance their intrinsic value;
- recognise and increase their ecosystem value;
- maintain natural buffers;
- improve access and connections;
- promote appropriate jobs and industry;
- support physical and mental health and wellbeing; and
- engage stakeholders, working together.

Big Chalk

1.25 One of the ways wildlife adapts to climate change is to move northwards to a new ‘climate space’. This means that we need to think about the National Landscape’s future wildlife in addition to that currently present, particularly that currently found to the south of the North Wessex Downs. Big Chalk^{iv} is a hugely ambitious partnership programme that aims to improve ecological connectivity across and between the calcareous landscapes of southern England from the south coast to the midlands.

1.26 Covering 19% of England, Big Chalk has the primary objective of building a robust nature recovery network over a vast area. This will be achieved by identifying opportunities to transform these landscapes by the application of the Lawton principles on a hitherto unimagined scale. Thriving chalk landscapes can deliver an array of public goods including sustainable employment and products, carbon sequestration, water supply (to tens of millions of people) and quality, flood management and soil stabilisation. Restored species-rich landscapes can also support public health and wellbeing, giving access to beautiful open spaces and connections to our past, for example through chalk carvings, and ancient monuments and byways.

1.27 Due to their history and the character of the underlying geology, these calcareous (chalk and limestone) landscapes in the south of England are the most species-rich habitats in the UK. When combined across the whole landscape, these habitats make it the best place to allow wildlife to recover and adapt to climate change. Given the rarity of chalk geology on a world scale, this is a programme of global importance.

Legal and Policy Framework for the Management Plan

National Landscape purpose and the meaning of ‘Natural Beauty’

1.28 The primary purpose of AONB (National Landscape) designation is set out in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 as “conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area”. The Act elaborates on this primary purpose, stating that any reference “to the conservation of natural beauty of an area includes a reference to the conservation of its flora, fauna and geological and physiographic features.”^{vi}

1.29 In 2023, the CROW Act 2000 was amended by s.245 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act. The s.85 duty on public bodies, which had required that “a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty” was much strengthened. The s.85 duty now requires that “a relevant authority ... must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty [National Landscape]”.

1.30 The legislative amendments also give the Secretary of State the power to:

- make provision through regulations about how a relevant authority is to comply with the strengthened duty, including things that the authority may, must or must not do to comply with it; and
- make regulations requiring protected landscape Management Plans to contribute to the meeting of any target set under Chapter 1 of Part 1 of the Environment Act 2021, including setting out how they will do so, and setting out how “any plan under section 89 relating to an area of outstanding natural beauty in England” must further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of that area.



1.31 These changes have implications for all aspects of local authorities’ activity where they affect the protected landscape and its setting, requiring an active commitment to furthering the purpose of designation. Paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework complements the Duty by stating that “great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes, which have “the highest status of protection”.

1.32 Natural beauty goes well beyond scenic or aesthetic value. The natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs is a function of the relationship between people and place over time. It encompasses everything that makes the area distinctive: the area’s geology and landform, its climate, soils and rivers, its wildlife and ecology; the rich history of human settlement and land use over millennia, its archaeology and buildings, cultural associations; the people who have occupied the area in the past and those who live and work here now.

1.33 This relationship is encapsulated in a policy position set out by the Countryside Agency in 1991, stating that “*In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities.*

*Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of economic and social development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment. Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.”^{vii} More recent legislation in defining ‘Natural beauty in the countryside’ establishes that “*land used for agriculture or woodlands, ... as a park ... or whose flora, fauna or physiographical features are partly the product of human intervention ... [may be] treated as being an area of natural beauty (or of outstanding natural beauty).*”^{viii}*

1.34 The North Wessex Downs is thus an ancient, evolved cultural landscape, managed and nurtured by people over time. Those who manage the land are central to the future of this landscape. The North Wessex Downs Partnership is committed to long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values in the protected landscape, contributing to a wider network of protected areas. It is inevitable and appropriate that this cultural landscape will continue to change and develop but this needs to be in ways that conserve and enhance its valued qualities.



**North Wessex
Downs
National
Landscape**

totals

1,730km

(668 square miles)

4 COUNTIES

9 LOCAL AUTHORITIES

173 PARISHES

102,000 INHABITANTS



1.23 million within

10 km of the NATIONAL
LANDSCAPE BOUNDARY

66 Sites of SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC
INTEREST (SSSIs) totalling 3,330 ha

2 NATIONAL NATURE RESERVES (NNRs)
at Pewsey Downs and Fyfield Down

9 Special AREAS OF CONSERVATION
(SACs) protecting chalk grassland,
wetland and woodland habitats

The MAIN RIVERS flowing
through the Downs are the
PANG, the **LAMBOURN** and
the **KENNET**

*Chalk streams support a huge
range of plants and animals like
pea mussels, water voles and
river water-dropwort*

THERE ARE **4**
RIVER CATCHMENTS
IN THE NATIONAL
LANDSCAPE

27,688 ha

OF WOODLAND

(just under 16%
of land cover.)

*About one-third is
ancient woodland*

Holds **9%** of
the UK's remaining
chalk grassland

478 SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

15 REGISTERED PARKS AND GARDENS

1 REGISTERED BATTLEFIELD

4,069 LISTED BUILDINGS



Agriculture is the dominant
land use in the National
Landscape with

84% of the
LAND CLASSIFIED
AS FARMLAND

15% of the area enjoys
PRISTINE NIGHT SKIES

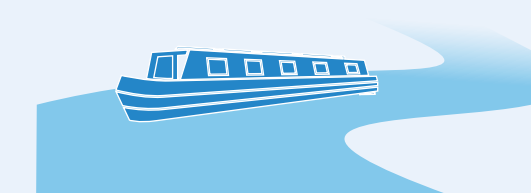
73% of the area is in the
TWO DARKEST NIGHT
SKY CATEGORIES*



**“Vast, dramatic, undeveloped and
distinct chalk downlands, rich in
wildlife and cultural heritage”**

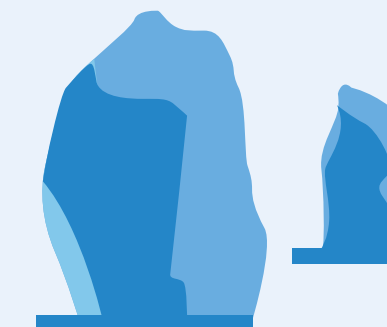
2,858 km (1,776 miles)
OF RIGHTS OF WAY

102 km (64 miles)
OF NATIONAL TRAILS



47 km (29 miles)
OF CANALS

UNESCO World Heritage Site
Stonehenge and Avebury is the **ONLY**
PREHISTORIC World Heritage Site
in England. Listed in 1986, it includes
the world's largest prehistoric stone
circle at Avebury



Principles, Policies & Implementation

Overarching Principles

1.1 In using and implementing the Management Plan, relevant authorities and other stakeholders should apply the following Overarching Principles.

1. All change should be landscape-led, seeking to conserve and enhance natural beauty and landscape character.
2. Management and change should respect the cultural landscapes and the communities of the North Wessex Downs.
3. Decisions about future landscape change should always be informed by an understanding of the past, using tools such as historic environment characterisation.
4. No major development should take place either in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape or where it would harm the setting, except where it has been demonstrated through supporting evidence that exceptional circumstances exist which clearly override the highest level of protection.
5. Farming, forestry and other land management systems should be environmentally sustainable and nature-friendly.
6. Nature recovery should be pursued hand in hand with economically viable farming and land management.
7. Nature recovery should aim to restore ecological connectivity, contributing to the Nature Recovery Network to build and support resilient wildlife populations in the face of climate change.
8. Land management should support climate mitigation and adaptation, using nature-based solutions that deliver multiple benefits and respect landscape character.
9. The importance of engagement, outreach and landscape accessibility for all, including underrepresented communities, removing physical, cultural and perceptual barriers and creating equitable opportunities to connect with the landscape and be active partners in its stewardship, should be recognised.
10. The value of the landscape for access, education, health and well being should be realised in ways that resolve, remove and prevent conflicts between access and biodiversity and the historic environment.
11. Change should not further exceed environmental limits of natural resources, e.g. demand for water must not exceed levels that threaten the ecology of chalk streams.
12. Actions within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape should take place with an awareness of the wider context, including the landscape setting and the geography of Big Chalk.



Summary of Priorities by Theme

1.2 The Management Plan identifies a set of Priorities for the Plan period under each chapter theme. All the priorities are listed here for ease of reference, and to emphasise the interlinked nature of the thematic chapters.

Landscape Priority

1. Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, tranquillity and distinctive landscape character of the North Wessex Downs and its setting.

Farming & Land Management Priorities

1. Focus, facilitate and support landscape-scale conservation and land management initiatives that support the purposes of National Landscape designation.
2. Promote National Landscape priorities for targeting and investment in rural land management and appropriate development to take advantage of changes arising from the agricultural transition following Brexit.
3. Support the restoration of ancient woodland and creation and restoration of wood pasture, improved management of unmanaged and under-managed woodland across the North Wessex Downs, promoting multiple benefits, including landscape character, wildlife, local economy and skills, recreation and climate change mitigation.
4. Support traditional and emerging land-based enterprises and their markets that respect and promote the valued qualities of the North Wessex Downs and its setting.
5. Promote and support sustainable best practice initiatives for farming, woodland management and all country sports.
6. Encourage Government to provide agri environment support programmes (e.g. ELMS) and encourage and support farmers and land managers to take them up in ways that support National Landscape objectives.

Biodiversity & Nature Recovery Priorities

1. Collaborative action to implement the NWDNL Nature Recovery Plan, aligned with Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
2. Action to meet DEFRA targets and contribute towards 30x30, as set out in this Plan.
3. Develop an expanded and connected nature recovery network in the North Wessex Downs which helps improve resilience to the impacts of climate change and supports the movement of habitats and species throughout the landscape and beyond.
4. Foster a more equitable partnership between people and their natural environment, ensuring land use decisions respect nature, farming practices share space with nature and recreation is effectively managed to protect vulnerable habitats and species.
5. Enable landscape-scale initiatives that respond to the central position of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape within the geography of the Big Chalk.



Historic Environment Priorities

1. Increase the knowledge and enjoyment of the North Wessex Downs heritage and culture by local residents, visitors and the wider public, and inspire a greater understanding and appreciation of heritage to wider parts of society.
2. Seek new discoveries of unknown heritage assets and improve understanding of those already identified, to reveal the significance of the historic environment and cultural heritage of the National Landscape.
3. Develop a better understanding of the current condition of heritage assets of the National Landscape, beyond the Heritage Risk Register.
4. Promote wider use and understanding of Historic Landscape Characterisation to inform and guide strategic planning, development decisions, land management practices and other forces for change.
5. Secure greater protection for archaeological and historic features, sites, and their landscape settings in the face of inappropriate development or management practices, or forms of access that can cause damage.

Natural Resources Priorities

1. Action to ensure that chalk rivers and streams in the National Landscape achieve and are maintained at good ecological status including, for example, appropriate riparian planting to mitigate elevated water temperatures predicted as a consequence of climate change.
2. Collaborative landscape-scale action to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, for example through nature-based solutions (NbS).
3. Develop a Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the North Wessex Downs National Landscape
4. Ensure that all landscape interventions recognise and address the implications of climate change for the valued qualities of the North Wessex Downs.
5. Secure full recognition by decision makers of the importance of the North Wessex Downs landscape for the value of its natural capital and the environmental goods and services it provides to the economy and society as a whole, including heritage, water quantity and quality, healthy soils, food production, wildlife, flood management, carbon storage, recreation, health and well-being.



The North Wessex Downs National Landscape is a visibly ancient landscape of great beauty, diversity and size



Planning & Development Priorities

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

Communities Priorities

1. Support the development of the North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust in pursuit of its charitable purposes to promote actions which underpin the conservation and enhancement of the National Landscape.
2. Support and facilitate community-led initiatives that help deliver National Landscape purposes and Management Plan objectives.
3. Encourage an enhanced sense of respect and pride in the North Wessex Downs amongst local people and their increased participation in activities that raise the understanding and profile of the National Landscape.
4. Assist the development of connectivity, based on principles of planning and integrating multi-functional green infrastructure assets, from neighbouring urban areas and within the area, facilitating active and sustainable access to and around the National Landscape to make it easier for communities to experience and benefit from the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs.

Access, Recreation & Tourism Priorities

1. Facilitate opportunities for more people of all backgrounds and abilities to access and enjoy the North Wessex Downs in ways that respect and promote the valued qualities of the National Landscape and its setting.
2. Greater awareness of the value and benefits of access and enjoyment of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape for public health and well being.
3. Develop a strategic framework to guide the use of funding provided to the North Wessex Downs National Landscape for access enhancements.
4. Co-ordinated promotion of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape by the tourism and recreation sector as a destination for responsible access that respects and promotes the valued qualities of the protected landscape and its setting.

Implementation

1.3 Everyone can play a role in looking after the National Landscape through the Management Plan. Some partners will be able to do more than others because of the nature of their role.

1.4 This Management Plan belongs to the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership, and most of all to the local authority partners which have a statutory duty to produce it. It is not an end in itself: success requires implementation. Implementation is not the sole preserve of the NWDNL Partnership; rather, it is the responsibility of everyone whose activities affect the valued qualities of the landscape. Central among these are all the bodies which, under s.85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, as amended have a statutory Duty to seek to further the purposes for which the landscape was designated: to conserve and enhance its natural beauty.

North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership Commitments

1.5 The North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership will:

1. Promote, encourage, facilitate, enable and support implementation of the Management Plan and other activities to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.
2. Support development of a shared understanding of landscape character, condition and opportunities across the National Landscape to facilitate informed decision-making.
3. Produce and disseminate supporting information, strategies, position statements and other resources to help everyone understand what their

responsibilities to the National Landscape mean in practice and contribute to the purposes of designation.

4. Directly contribute to implementation of the Management Plan, guided by the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership Goals, Strategic Objectives and Business Plan.
5. Conserve and enhance the National Landscape and its setting through delivery of initiatives such as Mend the Gap, Partnerships for Nature, Farming in Protected Landscapes, Access for All and other funded projects and programmes.
6. Develop and seek funding for collaborative projects and initiatives to deliver nature recovery, nature-friendly farming, better public access and understanding, heritage conservation and interpretation, climate mitigation, resilience and adaption and other National Landscape priorities.
7. Contribute landscape-focussed advice to the drafting and review of local authority development plans, policies, proposals and guidance.
8. Strive to increase the level of understanding of the protected landscape designation, and role of the NWDNL Partnership and Team, among key stakeholders.
9. Advise local authority partners on the landscape impacts of planning, highways, infrastructure and other development proposals in the National Landscape or affecting its setting.
10. Seek to play a convening role supporting decision-making and collaboration among farmers and land managers.

11. Contribute landscape-focussed advice to the drafting and review of Neighbourhood Plans and other community-led documents.
12. Advise landowners, applicants and agents on the landscape aspects of activities and proposals.
13. Play its part in regional and national collaboration among National Parks and National Landscapes, including through the Big Chalk, South East and East Protected Landscapes, and the National Landscapes Association.
14. Publicise National Landscape projects and activities through the NWDNL web site, newsletters, posts, Annual Review and events.
15. Monitor and report on its contribution to the delivery of the Management Plan through regular reporting and review of the NWDNL Partnership Business Plan.
16. Endeavour to monitor actions identified for stakeholders, and relevant authorities' compliance with their s.85 Duty.

Stakeholder Responsibilities

1.6 The following table lists some of the main stakeholders with responsibility for the protected landscape, indicates some of the opportunities for them to contribute to its conservation and enhancement, and gives examples of actions they should or could take to implement the Management Plan and, where applicable, fulfil their s.85 Duty. This is by no means an exhaustive list and we welcome suggestions for further partners or examples of how these groups can help to deliver the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Management Plan 2025–30.

STAKEHOLDERS	PRINCIPAL OPPORTUNITIES	EXAMPLES OF IMPLEMENTATION
Chambers of commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding streams to support management of the landscape as a tourism asset Local producers and services NWDNL profile in tourism marketing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration to promote NWDNL tourism Raise the NWDNL profile in Great West Way tourism marketing Promote the NWDNL in member information and events Support local suppliers and networks Develop visitor payback scheme/s that support landscape conservation and enhancement
Consultants & agents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness, understanding and recognition of the character, valued qualities and sensitivities of the NWDNL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise awareness of the protected landscape and Management Plan among clients. Take a landscape-led approach to developing and refining proposals that shows sensitivity to the heritage, natural environment, local economy and communities of the NWDNL
Educational institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness, deeper understanding and pride in the landscape among pupils/students and staff Opportunities for nature recovery in school grounds management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with the North Wessex Downs landscape through the curriculum, research, collaborative projects, field trips, farm visits, outdoor classrooms, Forest Schools etc. Manage grounds for nature Reduce, direct and control outdoor lighting: follow the NWDNL good lighting guide Use opportunities and resources presented by the North Wessex Downs landscape to support educational aims

Energy sector, including OFGEM, National Grid & energy companies

- Climate mitigation
- Energy conservation
- Landscape conservation/enhancement

- Take action to conserve and enhance the NWDNL under the s.85 Duty (CRoW Act 2000, as amended), and monitor and report on it
- Adopt a landscape-led approach to infrastructure planning, design and management
- Offer customers energy conservation advice and a support
- Support and/or deliver undergrounding of powerlines or actions to mitigate their landscape impact
- Support appropriate renewable energy generation compatible with National Landscape purposes

Farmers & land managers

- Climate change mitigation and adaptation
- Enabling responsible access
- Green tourism
- Improved natural resource management
- Landscape and nature restoration
- Local food production and marketing
- Nature- and heritage-friendly farming techniques
- Protecting and improving soil health
- Raising public awareness and understanding
- Wildlife habitat management

- Consider appropriate diversification projects
- Consider farm-scale renewable energy generation compatible with National Landscape purposes
- Consider scope for carbon sequestration and use of nature-based solutions
- Enable opportunities for permissive access
- Maintain public rights of way
- Offer farm visits
- Protect and improve healthy soils, e.g. through regenerative farming techniques such as changes to tillage and rotations
- Implement catchment-sensitive farming measures
- Put land into ELMS
- Reduce, direct and control outdoor lighting: follow the NWDNL good lighting guide
- Set up, join or contribute to farmer-led groups and other partnership conservation initiatives
- Support the suggested priorities for land management set out in this Plan
- Undertake baseline farm carbon audits)

Health sector, inc. commissioning bodies, GPs, support groups

- Access to the landscape for mental and physical health and well being benefits
- Access improvements
- Active/public transport improvements

- Consider the NWDNL as a resource for green social prescribing
- Consider conservation volunteering among health and well being options
- Develop landscape health and well being projects aimed at specific groups e.g. dementia sufferers;
- Promote and enable walking for health initiatives

Highways, including National Highways and local highway authorities

- Better layout and design of new and re-development
- Climate change mitigation
- Enabling green and active travel/access
- Green tourism
- Landscape restoration
- Light pollution reduction
- Local transport planning
- Restoration or improvement of ecological connectivity e.g. removal of barriers to species migration
- Road decluttering
- Road noise reduction to enhance tranquillity
- Sensitive rural road management
- Verge management for wildlife

- Take action to conserve and enhance the NWDNL under the s.85 Duty (CRoW Act 2000, as amended), and monitor and report on it
- Adopt a landscape-led approach to management of the rural minor road network, prioritising the needs of walkers, cyclists and riders
- Avoid new severance of habitats and ecological networks and consider opportunities to remove existing barriers to connectivity.
- Conduct signs audits and remove unnecessary highway clutter
- Foster community collaboration e.g. on highway clutter, speed enforcement, public transport
- Make wildflower restoration and management an aim of road maintenance and safety programmes
- Respect the Valued Qualities of the NWDNL in the design and management of all highways within the National Landscape and its setting
- Take opportunities for traffic noise reduction wherever possible
- Use sympathetic highway designs, measures and materials in the NWDNL, including within settlements

Individuals & families

- Action on climate change Conserving and enhancing settlement character
- Conserving natural resources
- Heritage and nature conservation
- Preventing/reducing light pollution
- Protecting tranquillity
- Reducing water consumption
- Supporting local producers

- Buy local products and services, support local shops and businesses
- Choose to walk, cycle or use public transport instead of driving
- Comment on local and neighbourhood plans and planning applications
- Follow the Countryside Code when out in the landscape
- Generate your own energy, e.g. through roof-top solar panels Keep dogs on leads during the nesting season (March-July)
- Make space for nature at home, e.g. nesting/roosting spaces for birds and bats and wildlife-friendly gardening
- Participate in local conservation or heritage projects
- Put a bell on your cat's collar
- Reduce, direct and control outdoor lighting: follow the NWDNL good lighting guide
- Reduce your personal/household carbon footprint
- Save water and use less energy
- Take dangerous chemicals for safe disposal - don't pour them down the drain
- Use locally sourced wood fuel instead of fossil fuels

Landscape-scale conservation initiatives

- Community engagement
- Climate change mitigation and resilience
- Ecosystem goods and services
- Landscape and nature conservation and restoration

- Consider opportunities for climate action, e.g. nature-based solutions, in project design and delivery
- Engage the public, private and voluntary sectors in collaborative protection and enhancement of the landscape
- Help young people and communities appreciate the benefits of the natural environment
- Identify and complement local nature recovery networks

Local authorities,
including planning
authorities

- Access and rights of way improvement
- Affordable housing provision Economic diversification Historic
- Environment conservation and interpretation
- Landscape and nature conservation
- Maintaining settlement character
- Profile of the NWDNL
- Protecting dark skies
- Protecting tranquillity
- Public awareness and understanding
- Reducing water abstraction
- Valuing and supporting ecosystem goods and services.

- Take action to conserve and enhance the NWDNL under the s.85 Duty (CRoW Act 2000, as amended), and monitor and report on it
- Adopt a landscape-led approach to development plans, policy and decision-making, using the support of NWDNL officers
- Avoid land use changes that will lead to increased abstraction from chalk aquifers
- Fulfil duties specified by the NERC Act 2006
- Impose planning conditions in support of National Landscape purposes and ensure prompt enforcement against breaches
- Produce supplementary planning guidance to support National Landscape purposes
- Protect and maintain rights of way
- Protect wildlife habitats and species and support nature recovery
- Require green travel plans for relevant developments
- Resist development proposals that would fail to further National Landscape purposes
- Take full account of NWDNL planning advice
- Use the NWDNL Landscape Character Assessment, Management Plan and additional guidance when considering options and making decisions

Local businesses

- Dark skies
- Climate change
- Green tourism
- Local products
- Natural resources
- NWDNL profile

- Minimise waste
- Practise energy and water conservation
- Promote green/active travel in the NWDNL
- Promote the NWDNL in tourism and product marketing
- Reduce, direct and control outdoor lighting: follow the NWDNL good lighting guide
- Source products and services locally

Government
agencies including:

- Environment Agency
- Forestry Commission
- Historic England, National Highways
- Natural England

- Supporting the valued qualities of the NWDNL
- Conserving the historic environment
- Facilitating landscape restoration and nature recovery
- Protecting and extending tranquillity
- Protecting rivers and improving water quality
- Providing and supporting ecosystem goods and services
- Reducing the landscape impact of infrastructure

- Take action to conserve and enhance the NWDNL under the s.85 Duty (CRoW Act 2000, as amended), and monitor and report on it
- Take a landscape-led approach, respecting the Valued Qualities of the NWDNL, to: land-use planning proposals; green and blue infrastructure; use of environmental land management schemes; provision of land management advice; natural capital assessments; partnership conservation projects, e.g. farmer-led groups; provision of woodland management advice, support and marketing; preparation of River Basin Management Plans; use and review of Conservation Area Appraisals; Catchment Management Plans and the work of Catchment Partnerships; development of Route Management Strategies; and use of the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site Management Plan, where they may affect NWDNL or its setting

Non-governmental
organisations
including:

- countryside, wildlife, heritage, river recreation trusts & groups

- Conserving settlement character
- Enabling affordable housing
- Landscape, heritage and nature conservation and restoration
- Managing tourism
- Monitoring landscape condition and change
- Preventing diffuse pollution
- Promoting responsible access
- Protecting and extending tranquillity
- Protecting dark skies
- Providing ecosystem goods and services
- Raising awareness of the NWDNL
- Reducing water abstraction

- Conserve and enhance the Valued Qualities of the NWDNL in estate management
- Enable and encourage green/active travel to sites
- Feature the NWDNL in recreation marketing and management
- Highlight the NWDNL priorities and activities in member/ supporter communications
- Partner with the NWDNL in collaborative projects
- Refer to the NWDNL in public information and interpretation
- Support implementation of the Management Plan in organisations' own projects and activities
- Take a landscape-led approach to planning and design in the NWDNL and its setting

North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust

- Community engagement in the landscape
- Education about the NWDNL
- Landscape, heritage and nature conservation projects
- NWDNL profile and marketing
- Promotion of the landscape as a source of health and well being
- Protecting tranquillity and dark skies
- Public awareness, understanding, pride in and care for the landscape
- Tourism promotion

- Champion the natural beauty and tranquillity of the NWDNL among communities and decision-makers
- Enable community projects that support National Landscape purposes
- Facilitate landscape projects and activities that further the purposes of designation
- Raise awareness of the NWDNL through public communications, presentations, visits, events, publications and signage.
- Support neighbourhood planning with input relating to the NWDNL

Parish & town councils

- Community identity and pride; Community understanding and engagement in the landscape
- Encouraging green tourism
- Conserving the historic environment
- Decluttering (e.g. road signs)
- NWDNL profile/marketing
- Protecting and extending tranquillity
- Protecting dark skies
- Protecting settlement character
- Supporting or doing landscape and nature conservation

- Take action to conserve and enhance the NWDNL under the s.85 Duty (CRoW Act 2000, as amended), and monitor and report on it
- Adopt a landscape-led approach to parish / town / neighbourhood planning
- Champion the natural beauty and tranquillity of the NWDNL among communities and decision-makers
- Ensure actions and decisions that affect buildings and settlement character are informed by an understanding of historic landscape character
- Initiate or support community projects that foster pride in the NWDNL and support the purposes of designation
- Promote public enjoyment of the Landscape through publications (e.g. walks leaflets, web resources)
- Raise awareness of the NWDNL through public communications and events
- Recognise and support the role of communities in climate change mitigation and adaptation
- Reduce, direct and control outdoor lighting: follow the NWDNL good lighting guide
- Support and promote community transport
- Support nature recovery as part of grounds management
- Support local producers and businesses through local sourcing if possible

Rights of way & countryside access forums & groups

- Improving access to and within the NWDNL
- Green infrastructure networks
- Making links to landscape, heritage and nature conservation
- Promoting green tourism
- Raising the profile and marketing the NWDNL

- Consider options such as the Walkers are Welcome initiative
- Contribute to collaborative marketing and tourism initiatives in the NWDNL
- Encourage responsible access by residents and visitors
- Ensure recognition of the NWDNL in Rights of Way Improvement Plans.
- Identify access-related opportunities for heritage conservation and nature recovery, e.g. scheduled monument management or wildflower verges
- Identify needs and opportunities for access improvements
- Include reference to the NWDNL in communications (e.g. web sites) and distribute Discover the NWDNL leaflets

Statutory undertakers, including energy, highways, railway infrastructure, telecoms & water companies

- Facilitating landscape restoration and improving ecological connectivity
- Reducing the landscape impact of infrastructure
- Supporting the valued qualities of the NWDNL

- Take action to conserve and enhance the NWDNL under the s.85 Duty (CRoW Act 2000, as amended), and monitor and report on it
- Adopt a landscape-led approach to network planning, construction and management

Tourism sector, including Local Visitor Economy Partnerships & other marketing bodies

- Landscape/heritage/nature/farm tourism
- Local products and services
- NWDNL profile/marketing
- Opportunities for green/active travel

- Build the NWDNL into destination marketing strategies
- Consider visitor payback schemes that support landscape conservation and enhancement
- Develop and support local supplier networks
- NWDNL tourism promotion
- Promote the NWDNL in collaborative initiatives, e.g. Great West Way
- Support National Trail partnerships

Transport operators
including train & bus
companies

- Green travel
- Improved public transport access
- NWDNL profile/marketing
- Sustainable tourism
- Tranquillity

- Build the NWDNL into business and marketing strategies
- Develop or support collaborative initiatives with local businesses and communities
- Improve and promote access from public transport routes into the NWDNL
- Install NWDNL signage and information e.g. at stations and on buses and trains
- Support collaboration by operators with National Trail partnerships, rights of way authorities and access groups

Water sector,
including OFWAT &
water companies

- Improving water quality
- Promoting catchment-sensitive farming
- Reducing water abstraction and consumption
- Supporting habitat conservation and enhancement
- Tackling diffuse water pollution

- Take action to conserve and enhance the NWDNL under the s.85 Duty (CROW Act 2000, as amended), and monitor and report on it
- Build NWDNL aims into estate management
- Engage with the NWDNL and local partners to develop and support collaborative projects to improve natural resource management
- Inform customers about NWDNL impacts in public information and advice
- Reduce, direct and control outdoor lighting: follow the NWDNL good lighting guide
- Seek to further National Landscape purposes in Water Resources Management Plans
- Support demand management measures
- Take a landscape-led approach to abstraction licensing



“The slopes of the downs, if they have general form, are continually changing and interchanging in localities, assuming new and strange shapes, charming and surprising with their grace and exquisiteness, forever reflecting the mood of the heavens”

ALFRED WILLIAMS (1877–1930)

Landscape



“The slopes of the downs, if they have general form, are continually changing and interchanging in localities, assuming new and strange shapes, charming and surprising with their grace and exquisiteness, forever reflecting the mood of the heavens”

ALFRED WILLIAMS (1877–1930)



3.1 The North Wessex Downs is a visibly ancient landscape of great beauty, diversity and size. It embraces the high, open arable sweeps of the chalk downs and dramatic scarp slopes with their prehistoric monuments and beech knolls, the moulded dip slopes, sheltered chalk river valleys; intimate and secluded wooded areas and low-lying heaths with a rich mosaic of woodland, pasture, heath and commons. The North Wessex Downs form a surprisingly remote, expansive and tranquil landscape in the heart of southern England.

3.2 The depth of history can still be seen in these landscapes, including the World Heritage Site of prehistoric Avebury; the royal hunting forest of Savernake, the Uffington White Horse, and the Ridgeway – the oldest road in England. The built environment makes a strong contribution to the beauty of the landscape, with historic towns and villages, churches, spectacular barns, manor houses with their parks and gardens, and the industrial heritage of the Kennet and Avon Canal. The Saxon name of Wessex reveals the area’s literary connections, revived by Thomas Hardy and used as the setting for many of his novels. Around a century later, Richard Adams provided a vivid evocation of this area in *Watership Down*.





Geology, Landform and Land Use

3.3 Geology, landform and the uses that humans have made of the land have together created the distinctive and beautiful landscapes of the area. The chalk forms an arc of high ground – the northern, western and southern parts of the National Landscape, cut through by the Vale of Pewsey to the west, and including, at Walbury Hill, the highest chalk hill in southern England. From this great rim, the land generally falls down the dipslope of the chalk, to the central basin of the east-flowing Rivers Kennet, Lambourn and Pang.

3.4 The greater part of the area is underlain by chalk, resulting in the dramatic scarps and beautiful gentle rolling topography so characteristic of the North Wessex Downs. The steep scarp slopes of the chalk and Upper Greensand, with their expansive viewpoints, and the gentle rolling open chalk plateau are very obviously influenced by the underlying geology. These chalk landscapes were traditionally in sheep grazing – the wool being the source of much of England's historic wealth. However, much of the chalk grassland has since been ploughed, and the resulting extensive, open arable land is now the most frequent land use and landscape of the chalk downs. Herb-rich chalk grassland remains in fragments on the steeper scarps.

3.5 Where the chalk has a thick capping of clay-with-flints, the topography is softer, with smaller hedged fields and much greater woodland cover – a very different, enclosed and intimate, landscape from the open sweep of the downs. Overlying the chalk are patches of more recent sediments, particularly in the lower part of the basin. These contrast with the chalk scenery by producing more acidic soils, with their associated heathland landscapes.

3.6 Some of the more impressive features of the landscape are the dry valleys or coombes, found across the chalk plateau and often forming deep rounded valleys. They are the result of torrents of water flowing over the surface of the chalk during cold periods when permafrost (frozen ground) made the chalk impermeable. The coombes are often associated with terrace features along the valleys, such as those at White Horse Hill in Oxfordshire. These result from the movement downhill of frost-shattered chalk during times of partial thaw. Large amounts of material moving down

the slope of the valley can accumulate in the valley bottom, forming a deposit known as head. Sarsen stones are one of the most identifiable and well-known features of the North Wessex Downs, forming the great stone circle and avenues at Avebury and the fields of 'grey wethers' (because they look like sheep) at Fyfield Down. Sarsens are silica-cemented sand or pebble deposits, often moved by natural processes a considerable way from their source.

3.7 Whilst many of the chalk valleys are dry, some have characteristic 'bournes', generally dry, but flowing when the ground water is high. England has 85% of the world's chalk streams¹ and a large proportion of this resource is located within or near the North Wessex Downs. These have a rich and highly characteristic ecology, and frequently support rich biodiversity.

3.8 Settlement is also strongly related to the underlying physical setting. The high, dry chalklands have no water to support settlement, so have remained open, remote, and tranquil, with farmsteads and villages on the spring lines and in the more sheltered and fertile valleys. Traditional building materials include bricks from local clays, flints, Melbourn Rock, Chalk Rock (not the soft chalk), cob, sarsens, thatch, and timber from the forests.

3.9 Designation as a National Landscape recognises the character, value and quality of the North Wessex Downs. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), updated in December 2024, gives the highest status of protection to the overall diversity of landscape and scenic beauty of the area². This means that these areas are given special consideration in planning decisions. The North Wessex Downs are of high scenic quality and with their wildlife and cultural heritage an integral part of their character and value. Although almost entirely a chalk landscape, the character differs markedly across the National Landscape, depending on local surface geology, soils, landform, land use, vegetation and settlement patterns. The greatest contrast, for example, is between the open arable chalk downs and the acid heathlands of the lower river valleys.

3.10 Natural England has set out a landscape character assessment (LCA) methodology to formally identify what it is that makes one landscape different from another. The landscape character assessment for the North Wessex Downs identifies the overall diversity of the landscape, recognising eight 'Landscape Types' across the National Landscape, each with its own distinct sense of place. These eight Landscape Types can be further subdivided into Landscape Character Areas: there are a total of 33 Character Areas across the National Landscape. Landscape character assessment draws out the valued qualities of the landscape, traces its evolution over the centuries and identifies the main issues that will need to be addressed to conserve its special character, its outstanding qualities and its natural beauty.

¹ CaBA: <https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/chalk-stream-strategy/> Retrieved 12 June 2025

² Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: *National Planning Policy Framework (2024)*, paragraph 189. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>. Retrieved 12 June 2025.

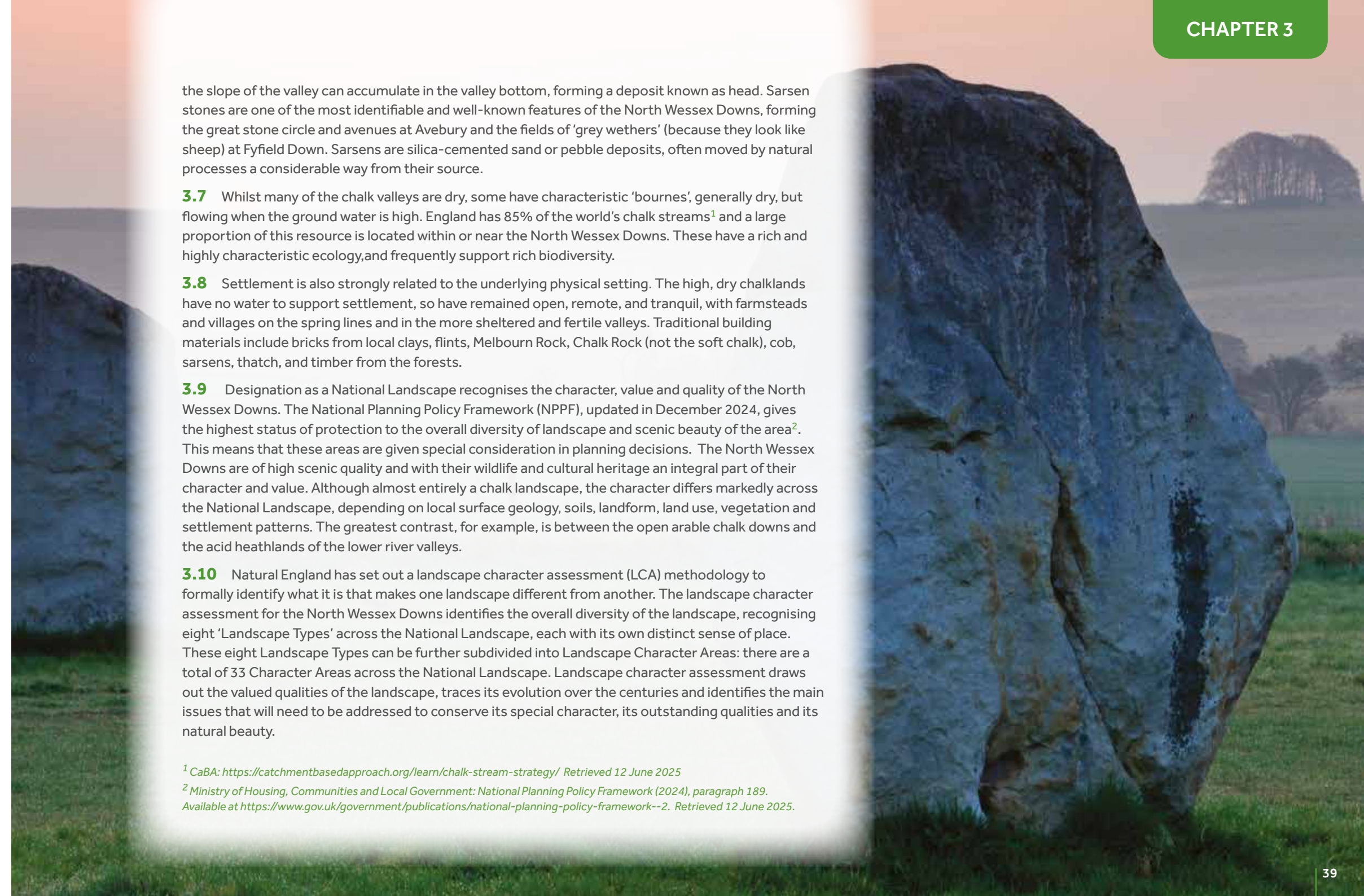
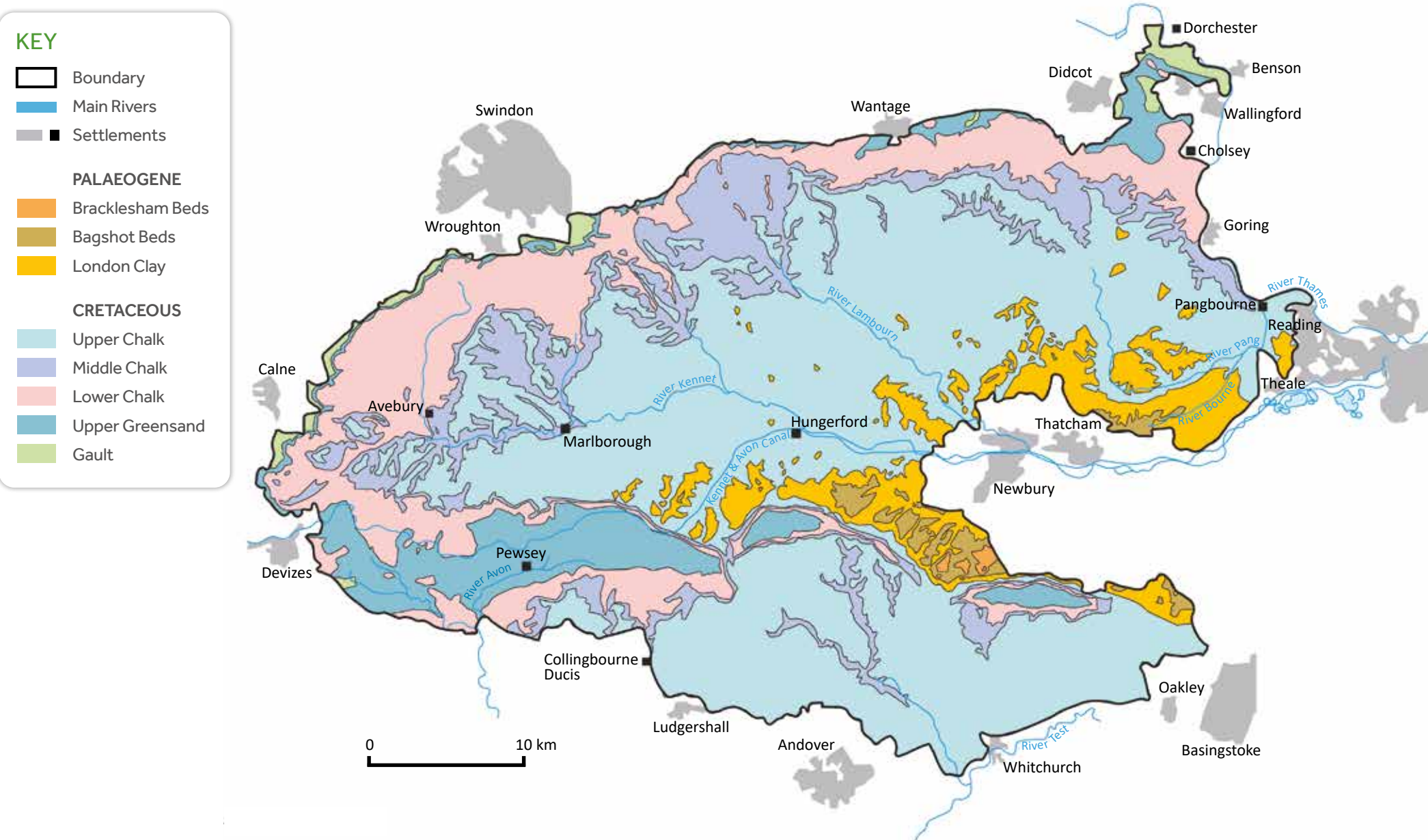


Figure 3. The geology of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

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North Wessex Downs National Landscape Types



Landscape Type: *Open Downland*

3.11 Open Downland extending from Roundway Down near Devizes to Lardon Chase overlooking the Thames

at Streatley is dissected by dry valleys and long steep scarps, with limited tree cover and a sense of remoteness and tranquillity.

3.12 The Open Downland forms the backbone of the North Wessex Downs as an elevated plateau of the hard Middle and Upper Chalks. The landscape is of open, smoothly rounded downland dissected by dry valleys and long sinuous steep scarps, and is devoid of surface water. Tree cover is limited to distinctive Beech clumps crowning summits and occasional linear shelter belts.

3.13 This is a remote, tranquil landscape of panoramic views where the sky forms a key part of the landscape, including the effect of cloud shadows on the ground and the wind creating swells through the crops. The dominant land use is of vast sweeping arable fields with small remnant patches of chalk grassland on steeper slopes. Settlement is extremely sparse and limited to scattered farmsteads and racing stables.



Landscape Type: *Downland with Woodland*

3.14 This landscape is distinctly different from the Open Downland. It is of lower elevation and has a thick

capping of clay-with-flints over the chalk. It has softer contours and considerably greater woodland cover.

3.15 The scale is smaller, with field patterns a mixture of small irregular medieval enclosures and larger regular Parliamentary enclosures.



Landscape Type: *Wooded Plateau*

3.16 Centred on Savernake Forest and West Woods, the Wooded Plateau consists of extensive tracts of semi-natural ancient

woodland, wood pasture with majestic veteran trees, and 18th and 19th Century Beech plantations, as well as more recent coniferous plantations.

3.17 Centred on the woodland tracts of Savernake Forest and West Woods, the extent of this largely wooded area reflects the bounds of the medieval royal hunting forest of Savernake, established by the time of the Domesday survey. Throughout this gently dipping plateau, a thick covering of clay-with-flints and Tertiary deposits mask the solid chalk and results in damp and heavy soils.

3.18 Today, reflecting its origins as a royal hunting forest, the countryside remains undeveloped, with settlement limited to villages in the valley of the River Dun – Great and Little Bedwyn.



Landscape Type: *High Chalk Plain*

3.19 At the northernmost tip of Salisbury Plain, the open rolling landform of the High Chalk Plain creates a bleak, spacious landscape

under arable production and devoid of settlement, with long views and a strong sense of remoteness and isolation.

3.20 A dramatic escarpment forms the northern boundary, as at Pewsey Hill and Fyfield Down, and provides panoramic views across the Vale of Pewsey to the north.



Landscape Type: *Downs Plain and Scarp*

3.21 The distinctive northern Downs Plain and Scarp plunges down from the chalk plain to the Vale of White Horse, creating a

dramatic recognisable horizon when viewed from the north.

3.22 The landscape of the Downs Plain and Scarp extends along the entire length of the northern boundary of the North Wessex Downs. The plain is formed by the eroded surface of the Lower Chalk, creating a low level surface extending as a wide ledge at the foot of the high Open Downland. .

3.23 This area is characterised by some of the most emblematic features of the North Wessex Downs: The Ridgeway, the oldest road in England – running along the top of the scarp; the Uffington White Horse on the scarp face; and Avebury on the open Downs Plain, forming part of the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site.

3.20 The Downs Plain is characterised by vast arable fields, lack of surface water and a general absence of settlement. Conversely the dramatic scarp slope, cut by springs, creates a convoluted edge alternately under woodland and pasture, including significant areas of remnant chalk grassland. 3.24 This is a landscape that feels as though it has hardly changed over the centuries, although it is increasingly affected by development at its foot, outside the National Landscape boundary.



Landscape Type: Vales

3.25 The Vales of Pewsey and sections of the Thames Valley floor adjoining the Chilterns National Landscape offer productive loamy

and alluvial soils where springs issue from the chalk and compact settlements contrast with scattered farmsteads.

3.26 The Vale of Pewsey separates the two main upland chalk blocks that dominate the North Wessex Downs. The towering shapes of the adjacent

chalk scarps contain and enclose this Greensand vale. Numerous springs issue from the chalk and Greensand boundary where the water table comes to the surface, their streams meandering across the Vale floor.

3.27 Rich loamy and alluvial soils create a productive agricultural landscape with a mix of arable, orchards and pasture now replacing a once predominantly pastoral scene important for dairying – hence the saying ‘chalk and cheese’, identifying the very different landscapes of the downs and the vale. The concentration of settlements is a defining feature of the Vale, including compact nucleated villages and hamlets, with widespread scattered farmsteads. The Vales character type also occurs at the north-eastern edge of the North Wessex Downs, with the sections of the Thames valley floor that lie within this National Landscape. The eastern part of the Thames valley floor here lies within the adjoining Chilterns National Landscape.



Landscape Type: River Valleys

3.28 The River Valleys of the Kennet, Lambourn, Pang and Bourne that cut through the chalk uplands 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, limiting views and creating an intimate and enclosed character.

3.29 Historically, the main settlements of the chalk were concentrated in these river valleys, as the only source of accessible water in an otherwise dry downland landscape. These settlements took a long linear form, following the bottom of the valley, and

this remains the dominant pattern to this day. The chalk uplands (in other character areas) are also cut by numerous dry valleys, which sometimes contain ephemeral ‘winterbournes’ only flowing when the chalk water table rises to the surface during the winter and early spring.



Landscape Type : Lowland Mosaic

3.30 The Lowland Mosaic is the lowest part of the ‘bowl’ curving around Newbury and the lower Kennet valley. This

landscape, of largely Medieval origins, has a varied geology of clays, silts and sands giving rise to a diverse mix of soils and, in turn, a mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations, remnant heathland and more open farmland areas where sunken lanes heighten the sense of seclusion.

3.31 This is a small-scale and intimate landscape, where lanes are frequently overhung by deep grassy and wooded banks, heightening the sense of seclusion. There are some limited longer views, as at Bucklebury Upper Common. The network of ancient semi-natural woodland, connecting hedgerows, areas of parkland, including wood pasture and veteran trees, create considerable ecological interest.

3.32 Former mediaeval deer parks are a particular feature, as at Englefield, Highclere and Hampstead, with a number of these having been re-fashioned in the 18th Century as formal designed landscapes. This is one of the most densely inhabited areas of the North Wessex Downs, with large manor houses, a network of hamlets, and lines of houses and villages that have grown along the network of lanes.

KEY

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	
3A	Savernake Plateau
4 HIGH CHALK PLAIN	
4A	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	Uffington – Letcombe Open Scarp
6 VALES	
6A	Vale of Pewsey
6B	Shalbourne Vale
6C	Wanborough Vale
6i	??????
6Di	Thames Floodplain – Benson
6Dii	Thames Floodplain – Moreton
6Diii	Thames Floodplain – Streatley and Basildon
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 Parklands
8F	Ewhurst Parklands

Figure 4. Landscape Character Types and Areas in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. Contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database rights 2019. Ordnance Survey 100051200.



The Landscape: Key Issues

Key issues with the potential to have significant influence on the National Landscape's Valued Qualities:

- a)** Intense pressure for development throughout the National Landscape and its setting that threatens the character and quality of its landscape and risks merging of small settlements, expansion and encroachment by larger settlements, renewable energy and other infrastructure, and changes to the scale and nature of development boundaries.
- b)** The potential for development beyond the National Landscape boundary, in the setting, to harm the protected landscape visually or in other ways, undermining the valued qualities of landscape character areas.
- c)** The need to achieve progress towards extremely ambitious national and North Wessex Downs targets for nature recovery.
- d)** The challenges and opportunities relating to the National Landscape's role in effecting climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- e)** The need for viable agriculture, forestry and equine management to continue, and to contribute more to National Landscape purposes.
- f)** Availability of sufficient resources for management and understanding of archaeological sites.
- g)** The need to manage the Ridgeway National Trail and other rights of way to maximise enjoyment by responsible users protect wildlife and cultural heritage and minimise conflicts.
- h)** The dominance of roads, in particular the impact of traffic noise, external lighting, road signs, insensitive materials and clutter on landscape character and people's experience of the landscape as they travel through it.
- i)** The need to protect remaining dark sky areas and extend them by reducing light pollution, minimising and controlling external lighting in the landscape.
- j)** The need for the landscape to be adaptable and resilient, conserving and enhancing natural beauty in the face of ongoing physical, economic and cultural change.
- k)** The need to maintain, connect and extend chalk grassland habitat wherever possible.
- l)** The need to conserve and enhance the remoteness and expansive openness of the downland landscape.
- m)** The need to conserve and enhance the remote, secluded and relatively undeveloped character of more enclosed and intimate landscapes, including the character of the lanes.
- n)** The need to ensure woodland creation, new hedges, agro-forestry and other tree planting respect and reinforce landscape character and nature recovery priorities, and the need for appropriate woodland management, including the viable use of timber products..
- o)** The need to encourage restoration of wood pasture landscapes, husbandry and ecology and ensure future veteran tree succession.
- p)** The need to maintain the pattern of discrete villages set within a quiet rural landscape, ensuring that interconnectivity with the surrounding landscape is maintained and views to the surrounding dramatic scarps are undamaged.
- q)** The need to ensure continued improvement of water quality and water resources in chalk streams and rivers, supporting river managers and riparian landowners in river restoration and enhancement projects for wildlife, fisheries and flood management.
- r)** The need to maintain and enhance and restore adjacent seasonal flood meadows, grazed pastures, fen, damp woodlands and historic parkland.
- s)** The need to conserve and enhance the small-scale, secluded and rural character of the lowland mosaic, including the fragile lowland heaths.
- t)** The need to protect and enhance historic sites, buildings and landscapes and their setting.
- u)** The need to protect visual amenity, in particular significant views and panoramas within, from and towards the protected landscape.
- v)** The significant impact on the characteristic habitats in the National Landscape resulting from climate change, including increased extreme weather events, risk of wild fires and a potential increase in pests and diseases.

The Landscape: Priority

P.01 Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, tranquillity and distinctive landscape character of the North Wessex Downs and its setting.

The Landscape: Policies

- LA 01** Encourage all partners and other stakeholders to seek to further National Landscape purposes across all relevant policies, programmes, activities and decision..
- LA 02** Recognise and respond to the main factors that threaten the valued qualities of the National Landscape: e.g. built development; light pollution; water abstraction; agricultural practices including diffuse pollution of watercourses; climate risk; lack of woodland management; damage to historic sites; and poorly managed access, seeking to avoid, minimise, mitigate and reverse them whenever possible.
- LA 03** Use the North Wessex Downs Integrated Landscape Character Assessment to inform policy and decision making across the National Landscape and its setting.
- LA 04** Support and promote a landscape-led approach across all sectors that conserves and enhances the character and qualities of the North Wessex Downs landscape.
- LA 05** Support and encourage efforts to conserve and interpret the rich heritage of the North Wessex Downs.
- LA 06** All development in or affecting the setting of the National Landscape should conserve and enhance the character, valued qualities and heritage of the North Wessex Downs landscape.



Farming & Land Management



Overview:

- A landscape under the influence of **agricultural management** with typically large farmed estates, over 50% of which are currently engaged in agri-environment agreements.
- **Varied field patterns:** the open downlands are characterised by large regular fields, largely the product of 18th Century parliamentary enclosure, with more recent boundary removals creating vast fields, as on the Marlborough Downs. By contrast, the Vale of Pewsey in the south west of the National Landscape is the product of Medieval clearance which created numerous, small, irregularly-shaped fields or assarts.
- A growing forestry sector and different **types of woodland**, many with public access. Although oak and, historically, ash are the main forest canopy species, there is a wide range of stand types including hornbeam coppice, oak/ash stands, hazel/oak stands, and birch and ash/wych elm coppice. The long-term impact of ash die-back on the landscape is still unclear.
- **Equestrian activity**, including the 'Valley of the Racehorse' in the Lambourn area that attracts visitors and businesses.
- Significant land management for **field sports**, including highly valued game fishing which supports the native brown trout.



“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.”

WILLIAM COBBETT (1763-1835)



Farming and Land Management in the North Wessex Downs

3.1 Farmland and woodland dominate the landscape of the North Wessex Downs. Changes in these land uses have a major influence on the natural beauty of the area. Additionally, equine activities and field sports are significant in terms of land use and management. Land-based enterprises play a significant role in acting as stewards of the landscape and contributing to an economic balance for communities.

Agriculture

3.2 With 84% of the North Wessex Downs classified as farmland, of which in 2024 about 53% was under arable cultivation¹, agriculture is the dominant land use and the major influence on landscape character and quality. In 2024, the agricultural workforce totalled 2,346.

3.3 Annual farm census statistics since 1990 indicate land in the National Landscape in agricultural management appears to be fairly stable, with a slight net loss over time. This could be due to development but also changes in holding distributions may represent a move to other land uses not classified as agricultural. The Total number of farms has slightly increased, by 4% over the last five years. 43% of farms in the NWD exceed 100 ha in size, nationally over 50% of farms are larger than 100 ha. There has been a significant increase of 18% in the number of farms between 20-50 ha over the last five years. DEFRA defines farm types for a holding as the crop or livestock enterprise (or group of enterprises) that contributes more than two thirds of the total standard gross margin for the holding. The North Wessex Downs has seen a 33% increase in horticultural crops over the last 5 years. Statistical data from DEFRA's survey of Agriculture and Horticulture 2024 indicates that most farms fall in the 'cereals' and 'lowland grazing livestock' categories.

3.4 Sustainable agriculture can help to protect and enhance the natural resources that have created the rich diversity and natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs. Supporting farmers in adopting Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) and other agri-environment approaches and working with farmer-led groups are vital strategies for securing landscape management, as demonstrated through the DEFRA-funded Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

3.5 Analysis of trends indicates a decline in livestock farming and greater sensitivity of arable production to prices of inputs. **Total cattle numbers have fallen by 14%. Sheep by 22% - however poultry has risen by 84% in the last 10 years.**² In some instances the reduction of numbers could be due to efficiencies. For example, by harnessing new technologies with support from the Farming Equipment and Technology Fund, dairy farmers are able to reduce herd size while maintaining or even increasing production. The Fund has also supported sheep farmers in subsidising electronic identification (EID) readers, allowing farmers to better identify unproductive ewes and remove them from flocks. There have also been positive changes driven by the implementation of targeted agri-environment schemes.



3.6 ‘Conventional’ farming is predominant in the National Landscape. There are also a number of organic farms and some biodynamic farms. The closure of Elm Farm Organic Research Centre during the last Management Plan period was a significant loss to the area. There is an increasing interest in ‘regenerative agriculture’, which promotes minimising soil disturbance, maximising crop diversity, keeping the soil covered, maintaining a living root system and integrating livestock.

3.7 The evolution of ELMS (Environmental Land Management Schemes) and other agri-environment measures is a key driver to help deliver conservation for wildlife, soils and water quality. Over half of the North Wessex Downs farmed land is entered into one or more of the schemes and there is a strong commitment by farmers to utilise these schemes. Farmers’ willingness to apply for funding and deliver public goods that support National Landscape aims has also been demonstrated by the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme (FiPL), with land managers covering more than 54% of the farmed landscape having engaged with the programme by March 2025. The need for farmers to deliver ‘public goods for public money’ has also required farmers to respond more readily to world market conditions. Fluctuations in commodity prices and input costs are increasing uncertainty for future arable profitability. There is a risk that such market influences could thwart initiatives designed to improve natural resource protection and environmental enhancement. An example in the North Wessex Downs has been the difficulty in promoting arable reversion to chalk grassland under higher-level stewardship schemes in the context of fluctuation in cereal prices.

3.8 Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) have been designed to support the rural economy while achieving the goals of the Government’s Environmental Improvement Plan and a commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2050³. Climate change is likely to be a key consideration in terms of the types and varieties of viable crops that are grown in on the North Wessex Downs in the future. Farmers and landowners also need to consider flood mitigation and, where possible, consider adopting natural flood management, which is also being supported through ELMS. At the other extreme, planning for increasing water scarcity is likely to require greater water storage capacity on-farm. There are implications for sowing dates, irrigation, pests, diseases, water availability and soil erosion. Increased productivity needs careful management to maintain landscape character and realise the opportunities to expand wildlife habitats. There may also be diversification into novel crops and farming systems, or change of use from agriculture to other land uses, such as equestrian businesses and leisure.

3.9 Soils are increasingly being recognised as one of our most valuable resources (see the Natural Resources chapter). Farmers and land managers being encouraged, through ELMs, to preserve and protect soils as much as possible, for example through incorporating herbal leys to ensure the soil is covered at all times, while adding organic matter. Minimum or no tillage to limit soil disturbance is also being supported through other grants, such as the Farming Equipment and Technology Fund. Through increasing soil organic matter, soils can sequester more carbon, reduce nitrogen inputs and help farmers/land managers mitigate against climate change issues such as flooding and periods of drought.⁴ Private finance companies are also emerging, further supporting efforts to increase soil organic matter for carbon credits.

3.10 Since around 2017, there has been an explosion of interest and activity relating to collaborative farmer-led groups (also known as farmer clusters) in and around the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. From two - the pioneering Marlborough Downs Space for Nature and the Pewsey Downs Farner Group, by 2025 the number had grown to at least 13 active groups in the area. Several of these have been set up with the support and encouragement of the National Landscape and most have received National Landscape funding to develop and deliver their aims. By collaborating among themselves and with other groups, these farmer and land managers can achieve benefits, e.g. for nature recovery, on a genuinely landscape scale.

¹ Total cereals + all other arable crops

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/structure-of-the-agricultural-industry-in-england-and-the-uk-at-june>

³ The Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019, SI 2019/1056

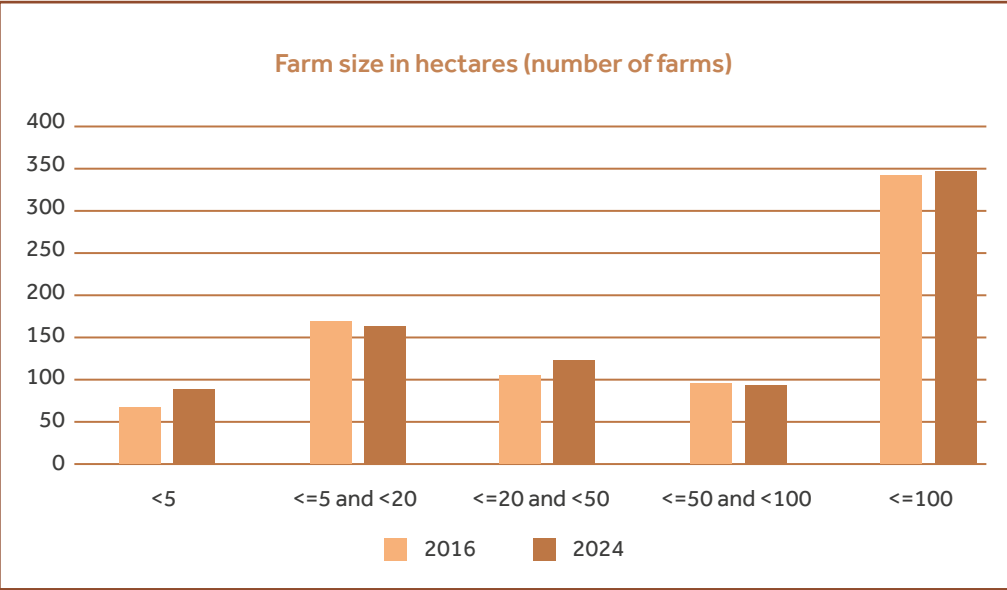
⁴ Reference Soil Association: Soil Association (2019). To plough or not to plough: Policy briefing.

Table 1: Number of Farms by Type

Total holdings	Farm types (number of farms)						
	Cereals	General Cropping	Horticulture	Specialist Poultry	Dairy	Grazing Livestock (lowland)	Mixed
818	289	154	12	16	23	258	54

Table 2: Number of Farms by Size of Holding

Total holdings	Farm size in hectares (number of farms)				
	<5	<=5 and <20	<=20 and <50	<=50 and <100	<=100
818	90	162	124	95	347



% change is available from Chapter 3 Statistics JS.



Trees and Woodland

3.11 Trees, woodland, wood pasture and hedges are a valuable and important feature of parts of the North Wessex Downs landscape. The Forestry Commission's National Forest Inventory data show that the area of woodland within the North Wessex Downs stands at 21,190.28ha (12.57% of the total National Landscape area). Broadleaf trees dominate, at just over 70% of all woodland, well over a third 8,823.9 ha, or 41.8% is Ancient Woodland, of which 3,908 ha, or 18%, is Plantation on Ancient Woodland sites (PAWS). Despite an increasingly healthy market for timber and wood fuel, much woodland in the National Landscape still suffers from a lack of management, often due to difficulty of access. The ageing beech woods no longer produce significant volumes of timber and are more valuable as places for recreation than as a productive part of the rural economy. The continued promotion of wood as a renewable fuel may stimulate improved management of some woodlands. There are now ELMS options that include woodland management plans, as well as the availability of grants to assist with some of the associated cost of ash die-back.

3.12 The National Forest Inventory indicates that managed woodland within the National Landscape recorded as being managed has continued to increase from 50% in 2013, 62% in 2017, to 66% in 2024. This is a positive change which probably reflects the increasing demand for wood fuel in particular. The timber quality of much of the woodland area within the National Landscape is not high; many of the woods are extremely small, and a number of them comprise crops for which there is no longer



a viable market. Consequently, the economics of forestry operations are problematic. There is a role for energy production in helping to manage small woods. Previously, progress was made in supporting the North Wessex Downs forestry sector through initiatives such as the EU-funded LEADER programme, but since that ended there has been less activity.

3.13 Owing to the landscape, heritage and biodiversity characteristics for which much of the North Wessex Downs is designated, scope for new woodland planting varies greatly across the area depending on local landscape character and the associated valued qualities. Some Landscape Character Types and Areas are not suitable for significant expansion of tree cover. However, in suitable areas there is significant scope for more trees and shrubs in the landscape, including: extending, buffering and linking ancient woodland habitat, hedge restoration, increasing the population of large hedge trees, management of scrub as part of an open habitat mosaic, reintroduction of important

species such as disease-resistant elm, restoration and creation of wood pasture habitat, promoting new generations of veteran trees, riparian planting for shade in response to higher temperatures, and sensitively located and designed agro-forestry. Any new planting should meet the objectives of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan and tree guidance. The priority is to maintain and improve management of existing woodland, particularly that designated for its nature conservation interest and all ancient and semi-natural woodland. New woodland can act as a buffer to protect this resource and create wildlife corridors between woods, and which may in turn benefit natural flood management and water quality. The National Landscape Partnership encourages woodland owners to produce management plans in accordance with the UK Forestry Standard.

3.14 The dangers to trees from pests and diseases are growing, with ash die-back (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, also known as Chalara) and oak processionary moth (*Thaumetopoea processionea*) being two recent examples. Ash die-back is likely to have a major impact in woodland across England, including in the North Wessex Downs, and it will be prudent to consider promoting measures to mitigate the consequences of the loss of this important tree species for wildlife and the landscape. Damage to woodland from increasing deer populations and from squirrels is an ongoing problem, especially since it makes growing native broadleaved trees for timber difficult in spite of strong market demand. Overgrazing by deer can also dramatically reduce the value of woodland for other wildlife. This highlights the need for collaborative landscape-scale protection of woodland.

3.15 Climate change may lead to frequent drought and reduced summer rainfall, which could significantly impact the woodland of the North Wessex Downs. For instance, beech trees, which have shallow roots and struggle in dry soils, are likely to decline. In contrast, small-leaved lime trees, which require warmth to set seed, may thrive and become more prevalent. Veteran trees of all species are more likely to be felled by storm force winds. However, in woods the impact of these storms can be positive, creating glades that species adapted to sunlight can occupy. The impact of higher autumn and winter rainfall may be partly mitigated by planting, for example reducing soil run-off to rivers by hedge planting and management to interrupt overland flows. The recreational value of woodland may increase as people seek shade in the hottest months.



Racing and Equestrian

3.16 Horse owning and riding is a popular activity across the south of England. The North Wessex Downs is recognised as a nationally important horse-racing centre, second only to Newmarket, and the Lambourn area and other racing yards in the National Landscape make a significant contribution to the local economy. The non-racing equestrian sector is estimated to have contributed £5 billion of consumer spending to the national economy in 2023 (statistics-0225.pdf), an increase from £4.3bn in 2015. The contribution of the non-racing equestrian sector in Hampshire, an area part covered by the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, was estimated at £330 million supporting many small businesses in the county (source: Hampshire Countryside Access Forum Equestrians-in-Hampshire.pdf). It should also be noted that:

- the input of the non-racing equestrian sector in West Berks in 2022 has been estimated at £38 million per annum, but we believe this has not been published;
- in a report dated 2019⁵, the racing sector in the Lambourn Valley was estimated to contribute £23 million per annum.

3.17 The North Wessex Downs is home to a range of important non-racing equestrian events, such as the annual Barbury Horse Trials. While there are no statistics to quantify horse ownership and riding in the National Landscape, it is evident that the network of bridleways and routes linked to The Ridgeway National Trail are popular and well-used.

3.18 How horses are cared for and the developments associated with keeping and training horses can have a significant impact on the character and quality of the National Landscape, and horse owners have an important role to play in maintaining the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs. The North Wessex Downs Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme has included well-received events providing advice to help ensure equine care and management makes a positive contribution to the landscape.

⁵ <https://jockeyclubestates.co.uk/news/report-highlights-the-value-of-the-valley-of-the-racehorse>

Farming and Land Management: Key Issues

Key issues with the potential to have significant influence on the National Landscape’s Farming and Land Management Valued Qualities:

- a)** The need to manage resources to achieve sustainable consumption and production.
- b)** Potential for significant investment of public funding to promote diversification and micro-enterprise in the land management sector that aligns with National Landscape objectives.
- c)** the need for support and co-operation from famers and land managers to achieve nature recovery in the North Wessex Downs.
- d)** The need to sustain and expand collaborative action among farmers to achieve National Landscape objectives.
- k)** Potential for improved availability, co-ordination and consistency in the provision of agricultural land management advice to achieve National Landscape objectives.
- l)** Poor agricultural land management practices, including in livestock grazing and arable production, resulting in flooding from surface water run-off and detrimental impacts on watercourses from nutrient run-off and silt pollution, sometimes as a result of livestock damage to river banks.
- m)** Soil management plays a key role in sustaining the landscape, with best practices in maintaining, conserving and improving soils crucial in mitigating against climate change and providing long term sustainability for arable production.
- n)** Risk to agriculture from diseases such as bovine tuberculosis, avian influenza and bluetongue.

Agriculture

- e)** Opportunities are continuing to arise to invest in the conservation and enhancement of the National Landscape, for example through agri-environment measures such as Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) to deliver public goods with public funds. Private funding opportunities are also beginning to emerge.
- f)** Market forces and major policy changes, such as demand for increased food security or biofuels, resulting in uncertainty regarding land management, influencing the mix of farming types and farm sizes.
- g)** Impacts of changes in farming technology, and energy and fertiliser prices.
- h)** Shortage of livestock needed to graze downland pasture.
- i)** Harnessing demand for locally produced food and drink in line with National Landscape objectives, with increasing interest in producing and marketing local food in the North Wessex Downs.
- j)** Climate change risk (increasingly identified by farmers in the North Wessex Downs as a key threat and opportunity for the future) and the opportunities for land managers to invest in climate change adaptation and mitigation. Flooding continues to have a significant impact on land management, with crops becoming waterlogged.
- o)** Scope for more and better management of woodland in the National Landscape, especially smaller woods, to improve habitat for wildlife and provide an economic return.
- p)** Risk of harmful impacts on wildlife, archaeology and recreation from increasing exploitation of woodland to meet demand for timber, if not done in an environmentally sensitive way.
- q)** Opportunities for better co-ordination of forestry with agricultural land management under new environmental management schemes.
- r)** Widespread threats from pests and disease (e.g. Phytophthora and Chalara).
- s)** Rising deer numbers inhibiting the natural regeneration of some woodland and suppressing the ground flora. Deer Management Groups are helpful but are insufficient on their own to control deer numbers.

Trees and Woodland

Racing and Equestrian

- t)** Small-scale changes to the smooth, rolling landform around new buildings, which cumulatively have an adverse effect on the character of the National Landscape.
- u)** Opportunities to support the racing industry, ancillary businesses and local communities through diversification, e.g. in responsible tourism.
- v)** Need to avoid soil erosion, overgrazing and loss of biodiversity arising from the creation of new fields and paddocks on open chalk downland by promoting opportunities for landscape enhancement through equine habitat management, such as creation of wildflower-rich grassland.
- w)** Change in landscape character by the replacement of hedgerows with fencing, leading to the suburbanisation of landscape.
- x)** Pressure to widen and straighten minor roads and tracks to improve vehicle access, leading to erosion of landscape character and sense of place.
- y)** Loss of integrity of historic settlements/hamlets/farmsteads.

Farming and Land Management: Priorities

1. Focus, facilitate and support landscape-scale conservation and land management initiatives that support the purposes of National Landscape designation.
2. Promote National Landscape priorities for targeting and investment in rural land management and development to take advantage of changes arising from the agricultural transition following Brexit.
3. Support the restoration of ancient woodland and creation and restoration of wood pasture, improved management of unmanaged and under-managed woodland across the North Wessex Downs, promoting multiple benefits, including landscape character, wildlife, local economy and skills, recreation and climate change mitigation.
4. Support traditional and emerging land-based enterprises and their markets that respect and promote the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs and its setting.
5. Promote and support sustainable best practice initiatives for farming, woodland management and all country sports.
6. Encourage and support farms/estates to take up ELMS and other agri-environment measures in ways that support National Landscape objectives.



Farming and Land Management: Policies

FLM 01	Encourage national, regional and local land management policies to be consistent with the purpose of National Landscape designation.	FLM 08	Encourage the active and environmentally sensitive use of woodland resources for viable products, helping to enhance biodiversity.
FLM 02	Encourage and support farmer-led groups and other joint working, and expansion/replication of existing landscape-scale nature recovery and land management projects, both within and beyond the National Landscape, to assist in the delivery of National Landscape and Big Chalk objectives.	FLM 09	Support and help guide publicly funded investment in rural development.
FLM 03	Support sustainable farm diversification and multi-purpose woodland management where it achieves National Landscape objectives and accords with planning policy.	FLM 10	Support investment in new agricultural infrastructure and redevelopment of farm buildings where it increases the sustainability of local businesses and aligns with National Landscape purposes.
FLM 04	Support efforts to identify future land use options that are best able to assist farm viability and reflect the environmental objectives of the National Landscape.	FLM 11	Encourage awareness of the special qualities of the National Landscape among local businesses to help them understand and embrace their responsibilities alongside running a profitable enterprise.
FLM 05	Support local markets for local produce and the development of local supply networks.	FLM 12	Support improved availability, quality, co-ordination and consistency in provision of land management advice across the National Landscape.
FLM 06	Encourage management of sites in public and tenanted ownership within the North Wessex Downs to be examples of best practice in the delivery of National Landscape objectives.	FLM 13	Support efforts to identify and develop the skills required to care for the landscape and its valued qualities, with opportunities for all to acquire such skills.
FLM 07	Support and promote efforts across the North Wessex Downs to reduce invasive, non-native species or unsustainable populations of species where these threaten the biodiversity and sustainable management of woodland, watercourses and other habitats.	FLM 14	Encourage and support the local provision of practical training in traditional land management and the skills necessary to deliver enhanced rural land management and business diversification with clear landscape benefits.
		FLM 15	Encourage good agricultural land management practices and adherence to good practice to contribute to resource protection, such as healthy soil management, preventing flooding from surface water

Farming and Land Management Support: Priorities for funding and advice by Landscape Character Type

3.22 National Landscape Management Plans have a role to play as the framework within which publicly and privately funded support mechanisms and other land management initiatives can be focussed and adapted to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the designated landscapes and their settings. The North Wessex Downs National Landscape Management Plan provides the lens through which national objectives for farming and nature recovery can be applied to the landscapes and valued qualities of the North Wessex Downs

3.23 To support this role, the priorities set out in the following Table identify broad priorities for environmental land management in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and its setting.

3.24 The first column in the Table sets out a series of generic measures which could apply to more than one Landscape Character Type; subsequent columns set out measures which are aimed specifically at each of the eight Landscape Character Types (as described in Chapter 2).

FLM 16	run-off and safeguarding watercourses from nutrient run-off and silt pollution.
FLM 16	Support the provision of advice on integrated management of grassland to enhance biodiversity as part of equine land management practices.
FLM 17	Support initiatives such as better routes to market, working with game processors, to achieve sustainable deer populations across the National Landscape through collaborative measures and other stakeholders.
FLM 18	Encourage and support landowners to develop whole estate plans where suitable to enable long-term, integrated landscape management.
FLM 19	Encourage and support farmers and land managers to adopt practices that sequester carbon, minimise soil carbon loss and support climate mitigation and adaptation through nature-based solutions aligned with National Landscape purposes.



Priorities for farming and land management support to conserve and enhance the valued qualities of the National Landscape by Landscape Character Type

Generic aims applicable to more than one Landscape Character Type in the National Landscape	Aims specific to National Landscape Character Types	
	Open Download	Download with Woodland
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Support a landscape-scale approach to restoring, managing, buffering, extending and connecting currently fragmented, locally characteristic habitats. These include species-rich chalk grassland, arable field habitats, wet pasture and native riparian woodland in river valleys, heathland and common land, chalk rivers and streams, traditional orchards, ancient woodland (especially Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites) and wood pasture.● Protect archaeological sites and features, including through removal from cultivation, reducing cultivation depth, scrub management, sympathetic woodland management and protection from livestock damage as necessary.● Adopt catchment-sensitive farming techniques across chalk river and stream catchments to reduce both diffuse and point-source pollution, minimise sediment run-off into watercourses and improve water quality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Restore and enhance unmanaged relict grassland and encourage greater diversity though sympathetic management, e.g. small areas of scrub/grassland mosaic.● Maintain, and enhance existing chalk grassland habitats.● Maintain and enhance the value of arable land and chalk grassland for priority farmland bird and arable plant species e.g. through spring sowing and winter stubbles, nesting plots, uncropped headlands, unsprayed field margins, pollen, nectar and seed mixes. Create and maintain wildlife corridors (e.g. buffer strips, beetle banks, track and byway verges), wherever possible linking a range of different habitats.● Increase the diversity of semi-improved permanent grassland, especially where adjacent or close to unimproved grassland.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Restore and enhance unmanaged relict grassland and encourage greater diversity though sympathetic management, e.g. small areas of scrub/grassland mosaic.● Maintain, and enhance existing chalk grassland habitats.● Maintain and enhance the value of arable land and chalk grassland for priority farmland bird and arable plant species e.g. through spring sowing and winter stubbles, nesting plots, uncropped headlands, unsprayed field margins, pollen, nectar and seed mixes. Create and maintain wildlife corridors (e.g. buffer strips, beetle banks, track and byway verges), wherever possible linking a range of different habitats.● Increase the diversity of semi-improved permanent grassland, especially where adjacent or close to unimproved grassland.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Restore and maintain a coherent network of habitat corridors though sympathetic management of, in particular, the huge ecological resource represented by road verges and banks, public rights of way and National Trails across the National Landscape, harnessing their potential to form links between wildlife sites and other important habitat patches.● Facilitate responsible public access to the landscape in places and in ways that are compatible with maintaining and promoting the valued qualities of the National Landscape.● Encourage and support more wildlife-friendly management of public and private open spaces, including recreation, sports and school grounds, parks, playgrounds, golf courses, greens, allotments and commons.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Extend, link and buffer chalk grassland habitats e.g. through targeted arable reversion (linking existing grassland areas along ridgelines in particular), wildflower restoration of semi-improved grassland, scrub management and removal of inappropriate woodland planting.● Maintain the open, expansive, open landscape character by avoiding new tree and hedge planting, including small areas which can cumulatively erode the valued qualities of openness and sweeping views.● Protect archaeological sites and features, including through removal from cultivation, reducing cultivation depth, scrub management and protection from livestock damage as necessary.● Wherever possible create and maintain wildlife corridors (e.g. buffer strips, track and byway verges) across intensively managed arable and grassland, linking a range of different habitats including unimproved and semi-improved grassland and woodland.● Support specific advice and options for sympathetic management of land used to keep and train racehorses to enhance its value for wildlife.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Extend, link and buffer chalk grassland habitats e.g. through targeted arable reversion (linking existing grassland areas along ridgelines in particular), wildflower restoration of semi-improved grassland, scrub management and removal of inappropriate woodland planting.● Maintain the open, expansive, open landscape character by avoiding new tree and hedge planting, including small areas which can cumulatively erode the valued qualities of openness and sweeping views.● Protect archaeological sites and features, including through removal from cultivation, reducing cultivation depth, scrub management and protection from livestock damage as necessary.● Wherever possible create and maintain wildlife corridors (e.g. buffer strips, track and byway verges) across intensively managed arable and grassland, linking a range of different habitats including unimproved and semi-improved grassland and woodland.● Support specific advice and options for sympathetic management of land used to keep and train racehorses to enhance its value for wildlife.
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Aims specific to National Landscape Character Types		
Wooded Plateau	High Chalk Plain	Downs Plain and Scarp
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Conserve and enhance the intimate mosaic of woodland, farmland and hedges that surrounds and connects Savernake Forest and West Woods.● Manage existing ancient woodland sympathetically to increase structural diversity e.g. by restoring coppice, controlling deer numbers and promoting natural regeneration.● Restore Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) to conserve and enhance local landscape character and biodiversity.● Conserve existing veteran and ancient trees with careful management and support succession of veteran tree habitat for lichens and invertebrates in particular, (e.g. by pollarding, including creation of maiden pollards) and identification and management of future veterans).● Restore, conserve and enhance designed landscapes, other historic parkland and wood pasture.● Encourage restoration of historic hedge boundaries and restore and enhance existing boundaries through sympathetic hedge management, creation of buffer strips and promotion and management of hedgerow trees.● Restore, expand/link and sympathetically manage remaining areas of heathland.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Maintain, and enhance existing chalk grassland habitats.● Restore and enhance unmanaged relict grassland, encouraging greater diversity though sympathetic management.● Increase the diversity of semi-improved permanent grassland, especially where adjacent or close to unimproved grassland.● Extend, link and buffer chalk grassland habitats (e.g. through targeted arable reversion, scrub management and removal of inappropriate woodland planting).● Maintain and enhance the value of the mosaic of arable land and chalk grassland for priority farmland bird and arable plant species (e.g. through spring sowing and winter stubbles, nesting plots, uncropped headlands, unsprayed field margins, pollen, nectar and seed mixes). Create and maintain wildlife corridors (e.g. buffer strips, beetle banks, track and byway verges), wherever possible linking a range of different habitats.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● On the Plain, encourage restoration of historic hedge boundaries and enhance existing boundaries through sympathetic hedge management, creation of buffer strips and promotion and management of hedgerow trees.● On the Plain, consider opportunities for sympathetic, small-scale tree-planting integrated within a network of well-managed hedges.● On the Plain, 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, pollen, nectar and seed mixes). Create and maintain wildlife corridors (e.g. buffer strips, beetle banks, track and byway verges) wherever possible linking a range of different habitats.● Along the Scarp, maintain and enhance the diversity and wildlife value of the farmland/woodland/chalk grassland/historic parkland mosaic.● Along the western Scarp, promote sympathetic management of the varied and distinctive linear wooded hangers and wooded combes.● Conserve, enhance and restore the ecological value of drove roads and tracks linking to Open Downland through sympathetic management of banks and verges.● Support realisation of 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 and enhance the monumental landscape of the Avebury World Heritage Site and its setting, including through targeted arable reversion, increasing the diversity of semi-improved permanent grassland, scrub management and removal of inappropriate woodland planting.



Biodiversity & Nature Recovery



Overview:

Designated wildlife sites that are home to rare habitats and species, including:

- A nationally significant area of chalk grassland including rare flora such as field fleawort, bastard toadflax, musk orchid and burnt orchid, early gentian, chalk eyebright, Chiltern gentian, dwarf mouse ear, tuberous thistle and round-headed rampion; invertebrates such as the wart-biter cricket and important butterfly populations including: Adonis blue, silver studded blue, marsh fritillary, chalkhill blue, small blue, silver spotted skipper and Duke of Burgundy fritillary.
- Substantial areas of broadleaved woodland and wood pasture, including a significant concentration of ancient woodlands, which provide roosting and/or feeding sites for bats species including Bechstein's bat, barbastelle, greater horseshoe bat and noctule; long rotation hazel coppice provides important habitat for mammals such as dormice; concentrations of calcareous bluebell woods; and a number of nationally scarce moss species.

- Rare chalk streams and rivers with a high diversity of aquatic plants, and invertebrate species including those that are nationally scarce, such as the white-clawed crayfish; supporting nationally and locally scarce bird species; mammals including otters and nationally declining water voles; and healthy fish populations including brown trout, salmon, grayling, perch, chub and dace.
- Arable habitats which are home to rare and colourful arable wildflowers, such as dense-flowered fumitory, slender tare and shepherd's needle, which are dependent on a regular cropping regime. Arable land use also provides feeding and breeding habitat for a number of rare and declining farmland birds including skylarks and stone-curlews.
- A rich mosaic of associated wetland habitats creating distinctive valley landscapes including fens, floodplains, water meadows, carr and wet woodland. As an example, the Red Data Book plant summer snowflake survives in seasonally flooded woodlands along the Kennet Valley.
- Opportunities for landscape scale conservation projects, working across a significant area and administrative boundaries.



The Ecology of the North Wessex Downs

4.1 The breadth of ecological diversity in the North Wessex Downs reflects its varied landscape character, shaped by centuries of human influence and active management. The area includes seven Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), which are part of the Natura 2000 ecological network, established under the EU Habitats Directive to protect habitats and species threatened at a European level. The Pewsey Downs SAC is also a National Nature Reserve. It has an outstanding chalk grassland flora and fauna, including nationally important populations of rare species, such as the endemic early gentian. The North Wessex Downs contains 66 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) covering 3,344 hectares, which is approximately 1.9% of the area. An estimated 19,772 ha, or 11.4% of the National Landscape, is classed as Priority Habitat. Nearly three-quarters of this, an estimated 14,459 ha, is deciduous woodland¹.

4.2 The most important habitats for nature conservation in the North Wessex Downs are the remnant areas of chalk grassland; semi-natural broadleaf woodland and wood pasture; chalk rivers, streams and associated wetlands, including wet woodland; and arable farmland managed for conservation.

4.3 Other significant habitats within the National Landscape include remnant heathlands on river gravel deposits in the east, such as Bucklebury Common, areas of semi-natural acidic grassland around Inkpen, lowland dry acid grassland and lowland meadow habitats around Highclere, and the wide grassy verges of the droveways crossing the Downs. Locally, the hedgerow network, springs, remnant watercress beds, road verges and dew ponds serve as important refuges and habitats. Chalk cuttings have magnificent displays of primroses and cowslips each year. This habitat mosaic is especially important for bats, as some species commute 20 to 30 kilometres from their roosts in old trees or outbuildings to forage across insect-rich habitats like wetlands, farmland, wood pasture and grassland.

Chalk Grassland

4.4 Chalk grassland is among the UK's most biologically rich and diverse habitats, with over 40 species of flowering plants found in just one square metre of high-quality turf. Approximately 9% of the UK's chalk grassland is located within the North Wessex Downs. The chalk grassland in the area supports significant populations of the early gentian, a scheduled protected species and one of Britain's few endemic plants. Unimproved chalk grassland is crucial for the survival of many scarce invertebrate species such as the wart-biter bush cricket and the internationally threatened marsh fritillary butterfly. Other scarce chalk grassland butterflies include the Adonis blue, Duke of Burgundy, chalkhill blue and small blue. This habitat also supports good populations of skylarks.

4.5 Twenty-nine SSSIs within the North Wessex Downs feature chalk grassland, covering a total of 1,421 hectares, which is nearly half of the total SSSI area and 0.8% of the National Landscape. Additionally, 249 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) include a chalk grassland component, covering 2,163 hectares (1.3% of the National Landscape). However, the exact area of chalk grassland within the LWS network is not known. Other, non-statutory, identified sites such road verges also hold chalk grassland habitat.

4.6 Nationally, chalk grassland areas have significantly diminished from their extent in the 1900s. In the North Wessex Downs, chalk grassland declined by 32% between 1968 and 1998. The remaining chalk grassland areas are becoming increasingly fragmented. Currently, small, isolated blocks are mainly confined to steep scarp slopes, dry valleys, and pastures around archaeological sites. The total area of lowland calcareous grassland in the North Wessex Downs is estimated at 3,942 ha². It is estimated that the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs National Character Area, covering about two-thirds of the National Landscape, supports at least 1,250 hectares, which is approximately 3-5% of England's total estimated area of lowland calcareous grassland.



Woodland

4.7 The National Forest Inventory shows 21,109 ha of the North Wessex Downs as wooded³, Tree and canopy cover outside woodland is estimated to cover a further 6,579 ha⁴, making a total of 27,688 ha, or just under 16% of the National Landscape area. Of this, 8,824 ha is estimated to be ancient woodland (including plantations on ancient woodland sites)⁵. According to the Woodland Trust, the North Wessex Downs contain two nationally important major concentrations of ancient woodland, centred on the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs and the Hampshire Downs; and areas of forest such as Savernake.

- 4.8** In the North Wessex Downs National Landscape:
- less than 0.1% of the total woodland area is designated as a National Nature Reserve;
 - 0.5% is designated as Special Areas for Conservation (SAC);
 - 7.5% is designated as Site of Special Scientific Interest;
 - 42.3% is designated as a Local Wildlife Site.



4.9 The diverse woodland types that make up these ancient woodlands include significant areas of wood pasture. They support a wide range of species, including woodland birds and important roosting sites for a number of bat species. Of particular importance is the calcareous woodland that supports a range of rare plants including herb paris and green hellebore and provides home to substantial populations of native bluebells (for which Britain has a global responsibility, supporting about half the world’s bluebell population).

Chalk Rivers and Streams

4.10 The spring-fed chalk streams and rivers of the North Wessex Downs support an extremely diverse range of plant and animal communities. Pea mussels and internationally rare floating vegetation of river water-dropwort can be found along their reaches. In turn, the rivers irrigate adjacent areas creating the distinctive valley landscape with its remnant fens and water meadows. The summer snowflake, a Red Data Book species, survives in seasonally flooded sites along the River Kennet. In recognition of their outstanding nature conservation value the Lambourn, Kennet and Hampshire Avon rivers are all designated SSSIs, while the Lambourn, the Hampshire Avon, and the Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain – a series of discrete sites supporting the globally vulnerable Desmoulin’s whorl snail – are Special Areas of Conservation.

Enclosed Farmland

4.11 Arable cultivation is the dominant land management activity in the area. The North Wessex Downs support a wide range of nationally and regionally important species associated with arable farmland and adapted to colonise land disturbed through tillage. They include farmland birds like stone-curlew and tree sparrow; rare arable plants such as corn buttercup and shepherd’s needle; and mammals such as brown hare and harvest mouse. Many of these species are listed as

Species of Priority Importance under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and are targets for the Government’s strategy to implement commitments under the global Convention on Biological Diversity. An Arable Biodiversity Strategy has been prepared for the NWDNL to help conserve and enhance the nationally important arable biodiversity found within the North Wessex Downs.

4.12 Although the downs are essentially a large-scale landscape, traditional areas of mixed farming, responding to the underlying geology, have resulted in a range of habitats (grassland, scrub and arable lands) co-existing in close proximity. This complex of interlinked habitats provides some of the most favourable conditions for the characteristic birds and mammals of the North Wessex Downs, including brown hare, skylark, lapwing, tree sparrow, corn bunting, linnet and grey partridge. Increased cover, nesting opportunities and a wider abundance of food supply occur where arable margins meet up with wildflower and insect rich downland and scrub. This supports an important community of ground-nesting birds and other species typical of arable and unimproved grassland which has been lost from many areas of arable farmland.

4.13 Changes to climate will alter the composition of the natural communities that are characteristic of chalk downland, woodland, streams and arable fields. Diverse natural communities of plants and animals are most likely to survive on soils and in streams with low nutrient status and in large patches of habitat. Given the pressures of climate change and the need to protect and enhance a nature recovery network that enables species migration, habitat corridors along rights of way and habitat networks are of increasing value.



Nature Conservation and Recovery

4.14 A review of England’s wildlife sites and its ecological network, chaired by Sir John Lawton and published in 2010, identified Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty as having great potential ‘to establish a coherent and resilient ecological network’. The key message from this report, which was adopted in policy through the 2011 Natural Environment White Paper, was that to safeguard the country’s wildlife habitats and species it was essential to ‘make space for nature’. It advocated that this could be most readily achieved by making existing sites that are important foar wildlife ‘bigger, better, and joined up’ and by creating more such sites. The aim of this is to create a sustainable, resilient and more effective ecological network for England.

25-Year Environment Plan

4.15 The UK Government Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) published a 25-Year Environment Plan (25YEP) in 2018. Among the commitments made in the Plan were to commission a review of protected landscapes and develop a nature recovery network⁶.



The 25YEP set out 10 goals for the environment:

- GOAL 1:** Thriving plants and wildlife
- GOAL 2:** Clean air
- GOAL 3:** Clean and plentiful water
- GOAL 4:** Managing exposure to chemicals and pesticides
- GOAL 5:** Maximise our resources, minimise our waste
- GOAL 6:** Using resources from nature sustainably
- GOAL 7:** Mitigating and adapting to climate change
- GOAL 8:** Reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards
- GOAL 9:** Enhancing biosecurity
- GOAL 10:** Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment

Environmental Improvement Plan

4.16 The Environment Act 2021 commits the Government to refresh the 25 Year Environment Plan every five years. The first review was published as the Environmental Improvement Plan in January 2023. This retained the 10 Goals set out in the 25YEP and set out an “apex goal” of improving nature, which is supported by all the other goals. Following the General Election in 2024, the Government initiated a review of the Environmental Improvement Plan.

4.17 In January 2024, DEFRA published the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF), which outlines the targets from the Environmental Improvement Plan that Protected Landscapes bodies, relevant authorities and partners are expected to prioritise. These include Goals 1, 7 and 10 on the previous page.

0.00004.18 Some targets are action focused, while others set a clear numerical target for how much Protected Landscapes are expected to contribute as areas to the national targets. The paper adds that “targets should be seen as a minimum contribution rather than a limit on a Protected Landscape’s ambition”.

4.19 It is important to emphasise that the PLTOF states: “The targets are for the Protected Landscapes as places (the geographic area covered by the designation). Action will be coordinated by Protected Landscape bodies through their statutory management plan. It will be the responsibility of all stakeholders, partners and land managers in the area to support their delivery” and that “the framework will empower Protected Landscape bodies, relevant authorities, farmers, land managers and other organisations to work together in planning and targeting resources and activity.”⁷

30 by 30

4.20 In 2019, under the umbrella of the National Landscapes Association, the family of National Landscapes launched the Colchester Declaration. This is a formal commitment to redress declines in species and habitats within the context of a wider response to climate change. The commitments include that, by 2030:

- at least 200,000 ha of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in National Landscapes will be in favourable condition;
- at least 100,000 ha of wildlife-rich habitat outside of protected sites will have been created/restored in National Landscapes; and
- at least 36,000 ha of new woodland will have been planted or allowed to regenerate in National landscapes following the principle of the right tree in the right place.



4.21 National Landscapes also pledged to publish Nature Recovery Plans with priorities in their areas for achieving these national commitments.

4.22 The independent Landscapes Review was commissioned by the Government as an action from the 25YEP and chaired by Julian Glover. The Glover Review recommended that “National landscapes should form the backbone of Nature Recovery Networks – joining things up within and beyond their boundaries”, and that they “should be at the centre of coordinated action to integrate effective ecological networks with landscape objectives and other uses, including farming, education, recreation, tourism and the provision of other ecosystem services.”

4.23 Internationally, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework was adopted in 2022 at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. This Framework supports the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and sets out targets for 2030 and Goals for 2050. The UK is a signatory to the Convention and has adopted the target to conserve 30% of land, waters and seas 2030, often referred to as 30 by 30.

4.24 In a document published in October 2024, the Government stated that “Delivering the UK’s 30 by 30 target on land in England requires urgent and significant action to drive nature’s recovery. This will require a strategic approach, to address the scale of action needed, and ensure a diverse and well-connected network of 30by30 areas. This approach also supports our wider objectives for nature’s recovery, food security, and beyond.”⁸

4.25 It is expected that the primary focus of T1 will be enhancement, restoration and creation of species-rich calcareous grassland, which is the top priority habitat in the NWDNL Nature Recovery Plan. Other contributions will come from chalk stream restoration, floodplain meadows and grazing marsh and lowland fen, arable field margins and other in-field measures, restoration of Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS), and heathland restoration/creation. At the time of writing, information for the area of wildlife-rich habitats within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape outside protected sites (Target T1) was not yet available.

Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework: Apportioned EIP Targets for the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

National Target	North Wessex Downs National Landscape	
	Increase (ha) by 2030	Increase (ha) by 2042 (T1) by 2050 (T8)
T1 Restore or create more than 250,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats within Protected Landscapes, outside protected sites by 2042 (from a 2022 baseline of 0).	3,000	14,000
T8 Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of total land area in Protected Landscapes by 2050 (from a 2022 baseline of 0).	400	1,750

4.26 Target T8 is more challenging in terms of landscape character, given almost 16% of the landscape already has tree canopy or woodland cover and important landscape character types such as Open Downland are not suitable for new woodland planting. Constraints include the open character of much of the designated landscape; the impact planting would have on historic monuments and landscape character; conflicts between tree-planting and priority habitats and species such as calcareous grassland, arable wildflowers and ground-nesting birds; and the loss of productive arable land. However, because the target goes beyond conventional afforestation, relating instead to all kinds of tree canopy cover, there is significant scope for well-considered expansion without conflicting with landscape character and the area’s valued qualities. In particular, there are opportunities buffering and linking ancient woodland sites, restoration and creation of wood pasture landscapes, restoring and creating new traditional orchards, promoting many more large hedgerow trees, street trees within settlements and sensitively designed agro-forestry. It should be noted that the canopy will take some years to develop and the relatively low target for 2030 should be read with the understanding that a larger area will need to be addressed by then for the 2050 target to be met.

4.27 It should be noted that some of the 10 targets are not applicable to the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, while others require further guidance and clarification from DEFRA.

Nature Recovery Plan

4.28 Through the Colchester Declaration we pledged to produce a Nature Recovery Plan for the North Wessex Downs. The North Wessex Downs National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan⁹ was informed by wide consultation and launched in 2023.

4.29 The Nature Recovery Plan sets out the National Landscape Partnership's priorities for nature, working with partners, stakeholders and community groups. It is not intended to be exhaustive, but sets out the status of key habitats and identifies species occurring within the National Landscape that are of particular significance. It identifies actions, targets and practical opportunities to reverse the declines and losses we have witnessed over recent decades.

4.30 The biggest current threat to our habitats and species is climate change. The Nature Recovery Plan, informed by the Climate Change Adaptation Manual 2020, identifies habitat vulnerability to climate change and suggests measures that will help our key habitats to be more resilient in the face of increasing global temperatures and changing weather patterns. Other threats include intensive agriculture, intensive game shooting, urbanisation, pollution and the spread of invasive non-native species.

4.31 In tandem with an urgent need to tackle climate change and other threats, we need to do more to allow nature and wildlife to recover and to support natural processes to function. Ill-considered actions to sequester carbon and mitigate climate change can have an adverse impact on biodiversity, as well as the landscape character and natural beauty for which the National Landscape is designated. Nature recovery must be planned, hand in hand with climate change actions, in ways that conserve and enhance the area's natural beauty in line with its national and international status as an IUCN Category V Protected Landscape.

4.32 The North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership encourages activities that:

- improve the quality of current sites by better habitat management;
- increase the size of current wildlife sites;
- join, or enhance connections between, sites, either through physical corridors or through 'stepping stones';
- create new sites;
- reduce the pressures on wildlife by improving the wider environment, including through buffering wildlife sites.

4.33 These actions are designed to help establish a Nature Recovery Network that meets the needs of wildlife and people today, and one that is more resilient to the future pressures, including climate change. There are trade-offs between these actions: the more we do to improve the quality of existing sites or to enhance the wider environment, the less we will need to do to create new sites. Our actions need to be adaptive, adjusting to what works as we progress.

Biodiversity Duty on Public Authorities

4.34 The Environment Act 2021 strengthened the biodiversity duty on public authorities. The duty requires them to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity, agree policies and specific objectives based on their consideration, and act to deliver their policies and achieve their objectives.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies

4.35 Under the Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs sets out the requirement for Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs). The Government has appointed 48 responsible authorities to lead on preparing LNRSs for England. There are four LNRSs covering parts of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape: Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire, including Swindon. Each LNRS must agree priorities for nature recovery and propose actions in the locations where it would make a particular contribution to achieving those priorities. Every strategy must contain a) a habitat map of the most valuable areas for wildlife, b) a list of opportunities to improve nature in the future and c) a written statement of biodiversity priorities. Responsible authorities are expected to work with other organisations and partners in their area to agree what should be included in their LNRS. At the time of writing the LNRSs are at various stages of development. The priorities in the NWDNL Nature Recovery Plan have informed the preparation of the LNRSs. It will be important to ensure that the agreed LNRSs reflect the Nature Recovery Plan for the NWDNL and that the latter is aligned with and complements the LNRSs. The North Wessex Downs National Landscape will act as a delivery partner, convening partners, encouraging collaborative action across the National Landscape, developing projects and facilitating or supporting delivery.

National Planning Policy and Legislation

4.36 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out measures to conserve and enhance the natural environment, including protecting and enhancing sites for biodiversity, minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity including by establishing coherent ecological networks. Further, it makes clear that Local Plans should "take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries. Green infrastructure is a "network of multifunctional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities" and it helps address and mitigate the impacts of climate change, providing for recreation, biodiversity, health and wellbeing. On a detailed level, the NPPF highlights the importance in development of incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs.

4.37 The Environment Act 2021 created a new biodiversity net gain (BNG) condition for planning permissions. All applicable developments are now required to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was before. A biodiversity metric is used to calculate the BNG of a development. As an incentive to focus nature recovery actions in the most strategic locations, development projects that create, enhance or recover habitat in locations which are mapped in a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (see below) are given a higher biodiversity value than they would receive elsewhere.

Recording

4.38 The Biological Record Centres and Historic Environment Records Centres serving the North Wessex Downs play an important role as the main repositories for information on the biodiversity and cultural heritage of the National Landscape and its setting. In addition to gathering data and evidence from specialists, there is scope for greater use of citizen science, engaging the public in biological recording/monitoring of key species and habitats, including the presence of invasive non-native species.

“At length the snow ceases and the wind drops to a whisper; then over the hill-top the lapwings start up again and wheel in phantom flight, shrieking their weird night call.”

EDWARD THOMAS (1878-1917)



Biodiversity and Nature Recovery: Key Issues

Key issues with the potential to have significant influence on the National Landscape's Biodiversity and Nature Recovery Valued Qualities:

- a)** Recording – significant gaps in our understanding of the distribution and abundance of habitats and species across the National Landscape and how to manage it most effectively for biodiversity.
- b)** Habitat fragmentation degrading ecosystem functionality. Dispersal and colonisation potential of wildlife populations is constrained, leading to loss of genetic diversity and risk of local extinctions.
- c)** Climate change – impacts of flooding, winterbournes, watercourses, carbon sequestration, vulnerable habitats, changes in the climatic range of species (both losses and gains). The resilience and response of species, such as shifts in distribution, will be strongly influenced by habitat availability and connectivity.
- d)** Continuing uncertainty over future UK land management patterns, in particular the future role of protected landscapes in farming and the potential for environmental land management schemes (ELMs) to deliver significant biodiversity improvements across the farmed landscape, and retain improvements secured through past land management support schemes.
- e)** Direct and indirect effects of agricultural intensification and land management changes having continued negative impacts on farmland habitats and species.
- f)** Lack of management and other pressures leading to the loss and degradation/decline of priority habitats and species.
- g)** Nesting success and productivity is often insufficient to reverse declines or even to sustain current populations of many ground-nesting birds.
- h)** Negative impacts of invasive non-native species on native wildlife and habitats.
- i)** Economic fragility of low input/extensive farming systems and cost of replacement infrastructure (fencing, water supplies etc.) leading to loss or deterioration of semi-natural habitats through poor management.
- j)** Need for grazing – lack of livestock to manage remaining areas of semi-natural chalk grassland and restored or newly created grassland, movement restrictions, recreational pressure, bovine tuberculosis testing and movement regulations.
- k)** Degradation and loss of river and wetland habitats through inappropriate management, development, increasing water demand, pollution, eutrophication, past human engineering, shading and climate change.
- l)** Lack of or poor management of much woodland, including ancient woodland, and hedges causing a decline in biodiversity.
- m)** Existing green infrastructure network – erosion of lane and byway verges by increased traffic use and larger vehicles, lack of resources and management to maintain biodiversity and secure enhancements.
- n)** Change from the use of grass gallops (some of which retain remnant areas of chalk grassland) to artificial surfaces in the racing industry.
- o)** Increased recreational pressure, with dog-worrying of livestock, disturbance to vulnerable ground-nesting birds, and erosion of chalk grassland and other fragile habitats..
- p)** Development within the NWDNL and its setting – direct loss of habitat and wildlife and creation of obstacles to nature recovery networks through built development, and indirect impacts, e.g. increased recreational pressure from bigger human population, increasing population of domestic pets, domestic lighting affecting invertebrates and bats.
- q)** Pesticides in the environment adversely impacting terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates (inc. pollinators).
- r)** Lack of reliable, coherent long-term resources necessary to recover nature at scale, e.g. to meet 30x30 challenge.
- s)** Dearth of experienced and skilled advisors with agri-ecological skills to advise farmers and land managers.
- t)** Threat of smaller, family farms that may support more biodiversity having to be sold and absorbed by bigger, highly commercial agri-businesses.
- u)** Green finance and markets still evolving with challenges for farmers and landowners to understand opportunities and find trustworthy viable partners.
- v)** Nature poverty, people not having, or not understanding how to have, access to nature.
- w)** Plastics polluting the environment especially streams/rivers, including micro plastics and plastics used in farming.

Biodiversity and Nature Recovery: Priorities

- 1.** Collaborative action to implement the NWDNL Nature Recovery Plan, aligned with Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
- 2.** Action to meet DEFRA targets and contribute towards 30x30, as set out in this Plan.
- 3.** Develop an expanded and connected nature recovery network in the North Wessex Downs which is resilient to the impacts of climate change and allows the free movement of habitats and species throughout the landscape and beyond.
- 4.** Foster a more equitable partnership between people and their natural environment, ensuring land use decisions respect nature, farming practices share space with nature and recreation is effectively managed to protect vulnerable habitats and species.
- 5.** Enable landscape-scale initiatives that respond to the central position of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape within the geography of the Big Chalk.



Biodiversity and Nature Recovery: Policies

BNR 01	Support the delivery of NWDNL Nature Recovery Plan priorities and targets in the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework. To ensure effective management of all priority habitats and species in the National Landscape.	BNR 08	Support the development of initiatives to safeguard and develop habitat corridors and ecological networks throughout the National Landscape, and in particular to enhance the ecological value of road verges and similar linear features such as public rights of way and National Trails.	BNR 14	Secure maximum biodiversity gain and protection of ecosystem goods and services through innovative use of emerging environmental mechanisms including Environmental Land Management schemes, natural capital, carbon markets, biodiversity net. gain etc.
BNR 02	Resist proposals which will lead to the direct or indirect degradation or loss of nationally or locally designated wildlife sites, priority habitats or populations of protected and priority species.	BNR 09	Support Catchment Partnerships and other key stakeholders including water companies to promote and deliver projects to conserve, restore and enhance chalk streams, rivers and other waterbodies to achieve good ecological status.	BNR 15	Resist proposals which have a likely significant effect (either alone or in combination with other plans and projects) upon a European designated site unless it can be ascertained following an appropriate assessment that they will have no significant adverse effect on the integrity of the site concerned.
BNR 03	Encourage a co-ordinated and consistent approach by Local Nature Recovery Strategies to nature recovery networks, aligned with North Wessex Downs priorities, across the National Landscape and its setting.	BNR 10	Encourage and support restoration of Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites and protection and management of woodland generally for nature recovery, as well as its recreational, carbon storage and economic value.	BNR 16	Realise the potential for actions that align nature recovery with the rich cultural heritage of the North Wessex Downs, e.g. hedge restoration and management, arable reversion to grassland on historic monuments, sensitive woodland management etc..
BNR 04	Support farmers and land managers in restoring, creating and maintaining a resilient network habitats with thriving populations of key species, guided by the Nature Recovery Plan and LNRS priorities.	BNR 11	Encourage the greater connection between people and the natural environment, promoting responsible access to nature in appropriate locations, and effectively communicate its value to people.		
BNR 05	Support efforts to understand and respond to the localised impacts of climate change on vulnerable habitats and species within and surrounding the North Wessex Downs, to improve resilience and adaptation.	BNR 12	Support the County Biological Record Centres and Historic Environment Records Centres serving the North Wessex Downs as the main repositories for information on the biodiversity and cultural heritage of the National Landscape and support initiatives to engage the public in biological recording/monitoring.		
BNR 06	Encourage and support landscape-scale action for habitat management, restoration and creation.	BNR 13	Support research, including to understand the causes of declines in key species such as ground-nesting birds and support appropriate action to rebuild populations, and use of tools such as citizen science to monitor the impact of habitat restoration and improved management practices in the National Landscape.		
BNR 07	Support and encourage actions to enable grazing on all the main grassland areas of the National Landscape.				



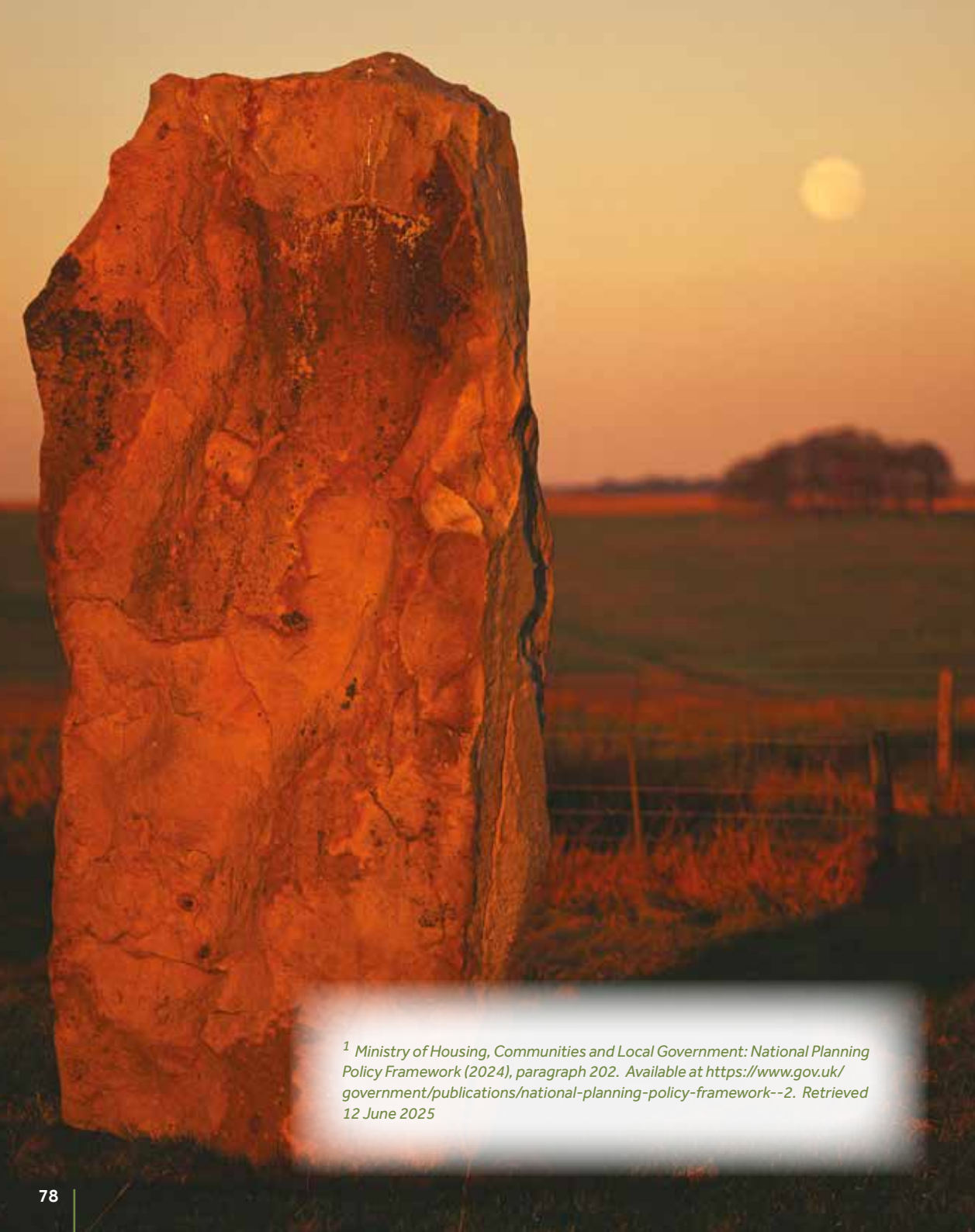
Historic Environment



Overview:

- **Neolithic and Bronze Age ritual and funerary monuments** including Knap Hill and Windmill Hill causewayed enclosures, West Kennet and Wayland's Smithy chambered tombs, Silbury Hill, Avebury stone circle and its surrounding ceremonial landscape, and Bronze Age round barrows including Seven Sisters and Seven Barrows groups. Also other features such as the Ridgeway.
- **Iron Age, Roman and post-Roman defences and settlements**, including hillforts at Oldbury, Barbury Castle and Uffington Castle, the Roman town of Cunetio (Mildenhall), Littlecote villa, the Roman road through Savernake Forest, Fyfield and Overton Down field systems and the linear earthworks of the Wansdyke, Grim's Ditch and Devil's Ditch.
- **Mediaeval and post-mediaeval settlements and buildings**, including castle earthworks, tithe barns, parish churches, and the layouts and historic buildings of Marlborough, Hungerford, Ramsbury and many smaller villages.
- **Country houses and landscaped parks and gardens** such as at Basildon Park, Highclere Castle, Tottenham House and Ramsbury Manor and Savernake Forest, many originating as mediaeval deer parks.
- **Post-mediaeval buildings and infrastructure** including the Kennet and Avon Canal, extant and former railway lines and tunnels, windmills, windmills, pumping stations, water meadows, 18th–19th-century planned farmsteads, historic trackways and paths, and First and Second World War airfields, pillboxes, ammunition dumps and practice trenches.





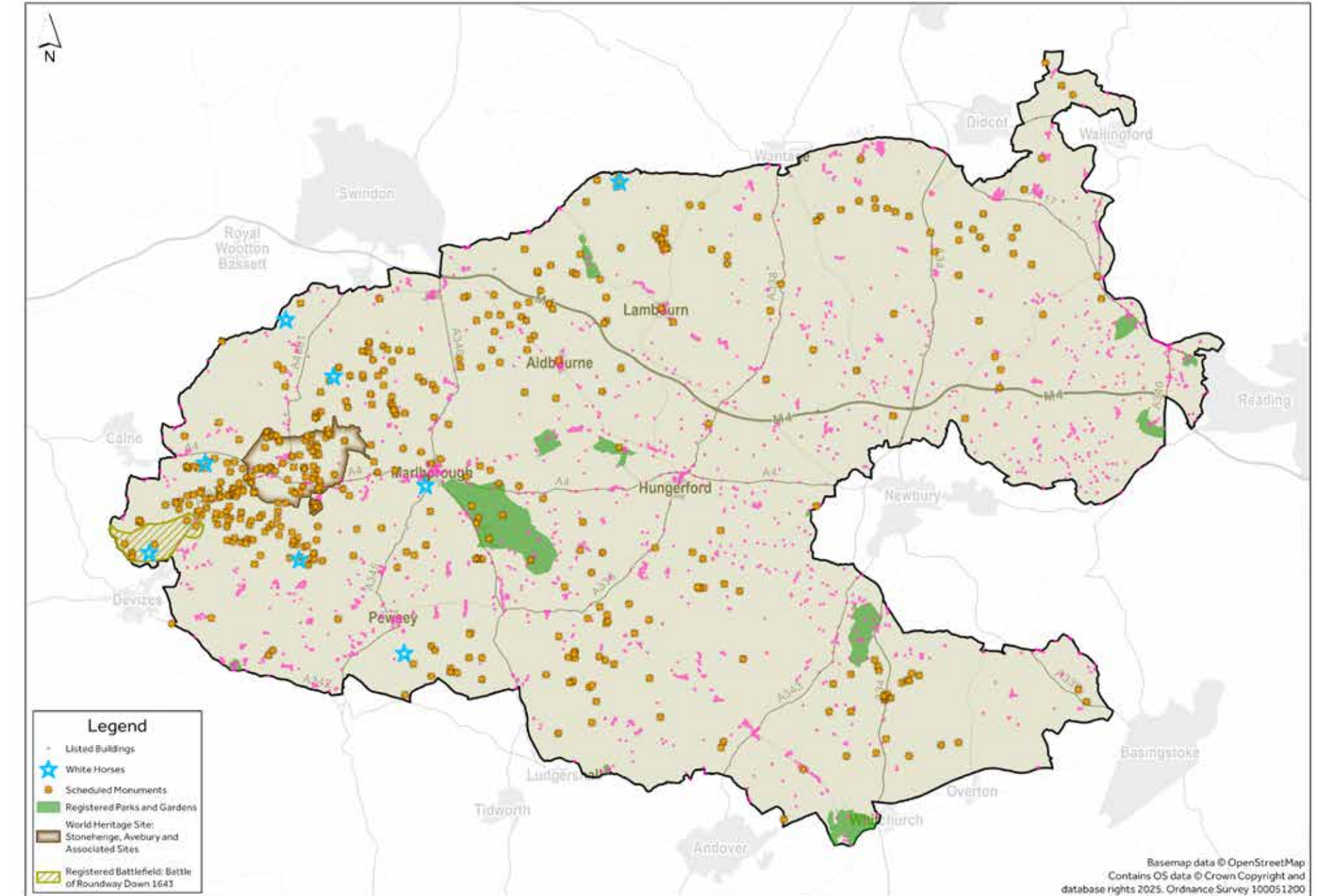
¹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: National Planning Policy Framework (2024), paragraph 202. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>. Retrieved 12 June 2025

5.1 The North Wessex Downs is an ancient landscape, shaped by human hands. This cultural heritage makes a powerful and fundamental contribution to the present-day landscape and to our own lives, as Bill Bryson neatly describes. Evidence of human influence on the area extends back at least 5,000 years when the long barrows at Avebury were constructed.

5.2 In the three thousand years since the Uffington White Horse was sculpted, the landscape of the North Wessex Downs has been continually shaped to serve the changing needs of the successive generations of the people who have lived and worked here. What we see today is a rich and many-layered patchwork of features that demonstrate the different stages in its evolution. Together these features contribute an irreplaceable sense of time and character to the present-day scene. Past human influence is etched in every facet of the landscape – in the shape of fields and woods, the alignment of tracks and lanes, the form and texture of villages and hamlets, even the courses of streams and rivers. In years to come, the landscape of the North Wessex Downs will continue to evolve, but, it is to be hoped, in ways that will allow the underlying reminders of its past to add meaning and value to the lives of its future residents and visitors.

5.3 The importance of the historic environment is clearly recognised in the planning system. The National Planning and Policy Framework (NPPF) confirms that significance of heritage assets lies not only in their interest and value to people today but also to future generations.¹ That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. The significance of an asset derives not only from physical presence, but also from its setting – in other words, its relationship to nearby historic places and within the wider landscape.

5.4 Furthermore, the NPPF states that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource which deliver wide social, economic, cultural and environmental benefits. Change is inevitable and so in the face of mounting threats, careful management is needed. There is a deficit in the understanding not only the historical evolution of individual settlements and how this should influence their future development, but also in the overall quantity of archaeological assets in the NWD, particularly in woodland areas. Where it is available, LiDAR data and its analysis can greatly help as a first step in understanding archaeological assets in woodland.



Features of the North Wessex Downs

5.5 A wide range of features of differing scale, visibility and significance make up the historic environment. Many of the area's archaeological sites have national or international recognition. The landscape that includes the complex of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age monuments around Avebury (and including Silbury Hill, West Kennet long barrow, the causewayed enclosure on Windmill Hill, dozens of Bronze Age barrows and many other important sites) is of such global significance that it has been inscribed on the World Heritage List by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as a World Heritage Site.

5.6 There are 478 Scheduled Monuments in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, one of the densest concentrations in the country. These include:

- Neolithic long barrows at Wayland's Smithy high on the chalk ridge overlooking the Thames Valley and at Adam's Grave above the Vale of Pewsey.
- Bronze Age barrow cemeteries such the Lambourn Seven Barrows and the Windmill Hill complex (barrows comprise over 60% of the scheduled monuments in the NDWNL).
- The Uffington White Horse and its adjacent Iron Age hillfort, (one of a string of major late prehistoric monuments that occupy prominent positions on the higher downs).
- The small Roman town at Cunetio near Mildenhall and Roman settlements such as Maddle Farm and the villa at Littlecote.
- The mediaeval motte and bailey castles at Hamstead Marshall and Marlborough College.

5.7 One Registered Battlefield is included within the National Landscape: Roundway Down, near Devizes. This site was the location of a major encounter fought in July 1643 when a Parliamentarian army was heavily defeated by a significantly smaller Royalist force.

5.8 In addition to designated archaeological features, the local Historic Environment Records (HERs) maintained by the County Councils in Hampshire and Oxfordshire and the unitary authorities in Wiltshire, Swindon and West Berkshire, are estimated to contain records of close to 12,000 sites, monuments and finds of archaeological and historic interest within the boundary of the North Wessex Downs. Whilst these features may not be designated as scheduled monuments, many of these sites are of national



importance. Many others are of local or regional significance and make a substantial contribution to local distinctiveness and sense of place. The information contained on the HERs is a vital part of the jigsaw of information that allows us to understand how our communities have developed and our landscapes have evolved over several thousand years.

5.9 Another important aspect of the local heritage is the extensive network of footpaths, bridleways and byways, including the ancient ridgeway paths along the Marlborough Downs to the Chilterns and beyond. These historic communication and trade routes are a characteristic feature of the North Wessex Downs and, in addition to being a legacy of human activity, they are now a valuable recreational resource.

5.10 The built environment also makes a fundamental contribution to the landscape. The North Wessex Downs contain 4,088 Listed Buildings. More than 250 of these are listed at Grade I or II*, the two highest levels of importance. Buildings protected through listing take many different forms and reflect nearly a thousand years of human settlement. As well as grand country houses, the market towns in the National Landscape are peppered with town houses of wealthy merchants and the villages are host to splendid mediaeval parish churches. Listed buildings in the North Wessex Downs also include very early farm buildings and barns, as well as locks and other structures associated with the Kennet and Avon Canal. Listed milestone markers, roadside pumps, and signs related to turnpike roads tell the story of moving about the post mediaeval

landscape, and pillboxes built during the early phase of the Second World War illustrate the North Wessex Downs' part in the planned defence of Britain against expected invasion.

5.11 The North Wessex Downs include 15 Registered Parks and Gardens. One of these, Highclere Castle, is registered Grade I, and four examples, Tottenham House, Purley Hall, Ashdown House and Inkpen House, are registered as II*. Many other areas of designed landscape, including historic parkland, gardens and cemeteries, whilst not on the National Register, nonetheless add significant local value.

5.12 As with the undesignated archaeological resource, many local buildings and structures remain unprotected through the listing mechanism. Even so, they contribute both to our understanding of historic events or processes, and to the overall narrative of the National Landscape. Some of these lie within the Conservation Areas designated by local authorities in settlements of particular historic character or significance. Many others, however, particularly isolated structures or farm buildings, receive little or no formal protection.

5.13 A further heritage asset, often overlooked in terms of importance to the historic landscape, is managed woodland. This can include deer parks, hunting forests, irreplaceable ancient woodland, as well as ancient and veteran trees, historic pollard trees and coppice stools. These areas, managed sensitively, can play a significant role in protecting archaeological earthworks from damage from cultivation.





Historic Landscape Character

5.14 Defining and mapping the Historic Landscape Character Areas for the North Wessex Downs has provided new insights into the evolution of the landscape and the historic processes that have influenced the countryside. Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) is a way of analysing and recording how several millennia of human interaction with the land produces the rural landscape of today. It is nationally recognised as a means for understanding and managing the entire landscape and not just the individual and often isolated archaeological sites and buildings traditionally protected by scheduling or listing. Written in the Land is a publicly available resource which draws on HLC data to provides an insight into the archaeology and history of the North Wessex Downs, and can be accessed via the North Wessex Downs website.²

5.15 A greater appreciation of how the landscape has evolved in relation to its underlying geology, human interventions and activities, and changing socio-economic circumstances is vitally important. The HLC methodology brings together a wealth of information, including semi-natural and living features (e.g., woodland, hedges, waterways) as much as archaeological features, with a clear recognition of the dynamic nature of the landscape, interpreting landscape on the basis of its ‘time-depth’ – the natural and cultural history that has produced the landscapes we find in the North Wessex Downs today.

5.16 The HLC process facilitates a fuller understanding of the whole protected landscape, not only raising awareness of the unique cultural heritage of the North Wessex Downs among local communities, visitors and the wider population, but also providing a tool for the integrated management of the area’s historic environment. The resource informs planning decisions and provides a framework for policy-making and research, whilst improving the county-based Sites and Monument Records (SMRs) and Historic Environment Records (HERs).

5.17 HLC has confirmed that the landscape of the North Wessex Downs has always been predominantly rural, but it has also illustrated how its detailed character has changed over time. One of the most significant statistics concerns the loss of open chalk downland. Of the 18% of the area that could be characterised as unploughed pasture in 19th century, barely 3% survived in the early 21st century³.

5.18 The rate of agricultural change is also evidenced by the fact that nearly 75% of pre-18th century field enclosures have been lost during the 20th century. In addition, some two-thirds of mediaeval assart enclosures (woodland clearances) have been lost or significantly modified in the same period.



“Whatever religious or ritualistic significance the White Horse may have had to its creators has long since faded away. For most of its existence – through plague, war and famine... the White Horse has been preserved simply because people liked it. I think that is splendid.”

BILL BRYSON (INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH LANDSCAPE, 2000)



Settlement Pattern

5.19 The pattern and distribution of settlement within the North Wessex Downs has evolved over millennia of human occupation. However, most of the current towns, villages, hamlets, and farms are likely to have originated in mediaeval or post-mediaeval times. Some of the most characteristic features of the ‘Downland’ and ‘Downland with Woodland’ landscape character areas are the long linear settlements of the river valleys – the main concentrations of population in otherwise open uninhabited downland. Characteristically, these are loosely strung along a road on the first contour above the winter flood level, with the winterbourne or river forming an integral feature of the village. Examples are at St Mary Bourne in Hampshire, Collingbourne Kingston in Wiltshire and Hampstead Norreys in Berkshire.

5.20 The pattern in the Lowland Mosaic landscape character area is distinctly different. This reflects its mediaeval origins in a network of hamlets, lines of houses, and villages along roads. Some villages have a clear nucleus, typically associated with a village green or church, while others have a more dispersed pattern, typical of post-mediaeval squatter settlements. This pattern is also reflected in the Downland with Woodland landscape type, which has small, clustered hamlets and villages sheltering in folds in the chalk, as in the Chutes in Wiltshire, or exposed on ridgetops, as at Faccombe in Hampshire. Evidence from the Domesday Survey of 1086 suggests that the creation of many of these settlements was during the Early Mediaeval (Saxon) period.

5.21 Another distinct settlement type of the North Wessex Downs is the string of small, spring-line villages that developed along the base of the lower north-facing scarp. Examples of these aesthetically attractive villages are Clyffe Pypard, Clevancy, Liddington, Letcombe, Ashbury, and Bishopstone.

² <https://www.historicnorthwessexdowns.org.uk/>
³ Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy for the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership: North Wessex Downs National Landscape Historic Landscape Characterisation report 2012, page XX.

Historic Environment: Key Issues

Key issues with the potential to have significant influence on the National Landscape’s Historic Environment Valued Qualities:

Development pressure

- a) Inappropriately sited or poorly designed new development that fails to reflect the historic fabric and visual character of traditional market towns and villages.
- b) Insensitive conversions, inappropriate siting of agricultural buildings or infrastructure for renewable energy and transport.
- c) Erosion of traditional mixed character of settlements from infilling and over-expansion on small plots.
- d) Limited consistency in the designation and management of Conservation Areas, in particular the systematic use of Conservation Area appraisals and management plans.

Land management practices

- e) A decline of traditional agriculture and industry leading to changes in land and woodland management.
- f) Loss of grazing animals, threatening archaeological sites with damage from uncontrolled scrub encroachment.
- g) Uncontrolled or inappropriate scrub management makes archaeology more vulnerable to burrowing animals.

- h) Deep ploughing over archaeological sites and remains.
- i) Negative impacts to buried and undesignated archaeology from planting trees or biomass crops directly on archaeological features.
- j) Some modern farming practices impact on the overall character of the historic landscape.
- k) Inappropriate tree planting and wetland creation as a response to national targets and green finance incentives threaten both archaeological sites and visual landscape character.

Poor understanding and limited engagement

- l) Poor or incomplete understanding of some aspects of heritage in the North Wessex Downs, particularly woodland.
- m) Limited data for condition monitoring of sites at risk.
- n) Narrow audience demographic engaged with heritage in the landscape.
- o) Insufficient accessibility to the heritage of the wider landscape to enhance people’s enjoyment and understanding of the North Wessex Downs.
- p) Inappropriate or illegal use of off-road motorised vehicles, which places sensitive sites at risk.

Historic Environment: Priorities

1. Increase the knowledge and enjoyment of the North Wessex Downs heritage and culture by local residents, visitors and the wider public, and bring a love of heritage to wider parts of society.
2. Seek new discoveries of unknown heritage assets and improve understanding of those already identified, to reveal the significance of the historic environment and cultural heritage of the National Landscape.
3. Develop a better understanding of the current condition of heritage assets of the National Landscape, beyond the Heritage Risk Register.
4. Promote wider use and understanding of Historic Landscape Characterisation to inform and guide strategic planning, development decisions, land management practices and other forces for change.
5. Secure greater protection for archaeological and historic features, sites, and their landscape settings in the face of inappropriate development or management practices, or forms of access that can cause damage.

Historic Environment: Policies

HE 01

Encourage and facilitate work to improve the condition of designated heritage assets that are on Historic England’s Heritage At Risk register and explore the designation or greater protection of other heritage assets through work with local Historic Environment Records, Historic England and Natural England.

HE 02

Encourage and support collaborative activity on poorly understood aspects of the local historic environment, involving professional and voluntary sectors, such as research and advice from historic environment experts and use of citizen science.

HE 03

Work closely with the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site Partnership and other groups to develop shared objectives and deliver joint actions in support of the World Heritage Site Management Plan.

HE 04

Encourage and support the production and publication of local lists of heritage assets.

HE 05

Encourage owners of designated heritage assets to create Conservation/ Heritage Management Plans and manage/restore assets appropriately.

HE 06

Promote opportunities to include the historic environment in community-generated Village Design Statements, Parish and Neighbourhood Plans etc., linked where appropriate to Conservation Area Appraisals.

HE 07

Promote and encourage the use of Historic Landscape and Historic Settlement Characterisation to inform land management, policy making and planning decisions.

HE 08

Support more, better, and joined-up explanation, interpretation and promotion of the historic environment for residents and visitors.

HE 09

Encourage the sensitive restoration of historic buildings for new uses, where appropriate and in alignment with National Landscape purposes, to ensure their long-term survival.

HE 10

Encourage improvements in agricultural practice to remove or mitigate the threat to archaeological sites from arable cultivation, e.g. through ELMS.

HE 11

Encourage the consistent use of Conservation Area appraisals and management plans as important considerations to inform planning decisions.




Natural Resources & Climate Change



Overview:

- Cretaceous, Tertiary and Quaternary **geological history**, with features such as Sarsen Stones.
- This geology in turn influences the main **soil types** of the North Wessex Downs:
 - Thin chalk soils of the open downland, now primarily under arable production.
 - The capping of Quaternary Clay with Flints over the chalk found as pockets of reddish-brown clay containing flint pebbles. These areas are particularly characteristic of the Downland with Woodland and Wooded Plateau Landscape Types.
 - Quaternary Coombe deposits found where accumulated frost-weathered debris was carried down slope by melt waters at the end of the last glaciation. These have created till deposits in the dry valleys of the downs providing richer pockets of soil, often under arable production.
 - Deep well-drained loamy soils over Greensand and river alluviums in the Vale of Pewsey, traditionally under pasture with large areas forming winter flood meadows.
- A mixed soil mosaic to the east of Newbury with nutrient-poor acidic soils over plateau gravels intermixed with fertile loamy soils overlying the London Clay, characterised by the Medieval landscape of the Lowland Mosaic Landscape Type.
- Carbon storage in the characteristic habitats of the North Wessex Downs such as chalk grassland and broadleaved woodland.
- Rivers with shallow sloping banks, clean shallow 'washed' **river gravel beds** (riffles) contrasting with deeper shaded pools.
- Often a complex pattern of **river channels** (as on the Kennet downstream of Marlborough) reflecting the past use of the river to supply water to an extensive network of water meadows and mills, most of which are now disused. Upper winterbourne sections and winterbourne tributaries, flowing only during winter and spring when groundwater levels are at their highest.
- **Clear natural water** fed from the chalk aquifer by springs which issue in the valleys of the chalk dip slope at the point where the water table comes to the surface. Limited fluctuations in water temperature throughout the year, resulting from the filtration of groundwater as it percolates through the chalk.





“Our wealth as a nation and our individual well-being depend critically upon the environment. It provides us with the food, water and air that are essential for life and with the minerals and raw materials for our industry and consumption. Less obviously, it provides the processes that purify air and water, and which sequester or break down wastes. It is also in our environment where we find recreation, health and solace, and in which our culture finds its roots and sense of place”.

UK NATIONAL ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT, 2011

Accounting for Natural Benefits

6.1 Whether we live in towns or in the countryside, we are dependent on ecological systems (ecosystems) for our health and well-being. The components of the natural environment that provide us with these benefits are known as natural capital. The benefits which society derives from natural capital assets (ecosystem services) are commonly grouped into four core categories of services:

- **Supporting services** (for example the processes which form soil, cycle nutrients and the essential photosynthetic process in plants).
- **Provisioning services** (for example, woodland that provides timber for fuel, construction and manufacturing; plant communities which sustain populations of insects to pollinate crops).
- **Regulating services** (for example, soils and aquifers that absorb rainfall reducing flooding, and filtering water to give us healthy rivers and clean drinking water).
- **Cultural services** (for example, landscapes, wildlife and cultural heritage that give us a sense of identity, support tourism, offer recreational and learning opportunities, assist our physical and mental well-being and delight the soul).

6.2 The UK National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA 2011) identified that inadequate consideration in decision-making of the full range of natural benefits and services that we derive from the natural environment is a significant factor contributing to the degradation of ecosystems. The Follow-on report (2013) (NEAFO 2013) emphasised that “the natural world, its biodiversity and its constituent ecosystems are critically important to our well-being and economic prosperity, but are consistently undervalued in conventional economic analyses and decision-making”¹ and concluded that embedding knowledge of our ecosystems and their services into project, programme and policy appraisals, is critical for decision-making. While we pay for some ecosystem services, like food and fibre, we are often unaware of the importance of others, such as natural purification of water and air, and the attenuation of flood water. The cost of providing these artificially is considerable. In the years after

the highly technical UK NEA reports were published, the environmental campaigner and writer Tony Juniper explained ecosystem services in an accessible and readily understandable format using a series of examples from around the world (in *What has Nature Ever Done for Us?*) and from around the UK (in *What Nature does for Britain*). These illustrate clearly the tendency to under-estimate the value of natural processes and the services and benefits we derive from the natural world. This leads to poorly informed decisions on how to safeguard these functions and utilise natural resources sustainably. The result is pollution, depletion of biodiversity, degraded ecosystems and substantial damage to the processes which are vital to life on Earth. There is a significant financial cost to restore ecosystem functionality or, if it is feasible to do so, to replace such functions with artificial alternatives.

6.3 Just as there are costs to restoring degraded ecosystems, there are benefits and savings from a healthy and naturally functioning environment. Degraded ecosystems present risks to businesses in terms of security of raw materials, waste disposal, insurance rates and brand image. In the North Wessex Downs, there are obvious direct links between ecosystems and the business activities of land-based industries such as farming and forestry (where soil health clearly underpins ecosystem function and the products from the land) and rural tourism. Associations can be less obvious or indirect for other businesses and relate, for example, to supply chains and investment choices.

6.4 In the rural landscape, sustainable agriculture and forestry could deliver widespread positive effects on ecosystems in the area. Grants, subsidies and advice can support and promote sustainable approaches to land use among farmers, foresters and other land managers.

¹ *UK National Ecosystem Assessment Follow-on – Synthesis of the Key Findings, UNEP-WCMC 2013.*

Conserving Resources and Maintaining Ecosystem Function

6.5 Protecting natural resources and the natural benefits arising from them by operating in a way that minimises damaging impacts is part of sustainable development. There is a particular need to conserve soil health, manage water and maintain clean air.

Soils

6.6 Soils are cultivated to produce essential items of food, clothing and fuel. Soils also deliver natural benefits, influencing water flows; storing carbon, and supporting wildlife habitats and nutrient cycling. The Government's strategy for soils in the DEFRA Environmental Improvement Plan sets out a case for improving soil health and protecting peatland by addressing factors such as erosion, compaction and decline of organic matter. The stated policy objective is that *"By 2028 we will bring at least 40% of England's agricultural soil into sustainable management through our new farming schemes, increasing this to up to 60% by 2030."*² Healthy soils are one of the indicators chosen to monitor and evaluate progress.

6.7 Chalk forms the underlying surface geological structure of the North Wessex Downs but the overlying soils influence vegetation cover and land use. Each soil type in the area has its own management requirements.

Sustaining Water Resources

6.8 The main rivers flowing through the Downs – the Pang, the Lambourn and the Kennet – drain eastwards to the River Thames. Watercourses flowing off the northern escarpment into the vales also feed the Thames catchment. The separate catchments of the Hampshire Avon and the Test flow south, draining the Vale of Pewsey and Hampshire Downs respectively. The escarpment in the west around Calne falls into the Salisbury Avon catchment, flowing west.

6.9 The status and condition of both surface waters and groundwater in terms of quality, availability and flow is important to people and to habitats and species in the National Landscape. The North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership is committed to supporting the work of Catchment Partnerships, water companies, local planning authorities and other interested groups to help assess, protect and enhance these important assets.

6.10 One in four residential and commercial properties in England is at risk from flooding. Flooding costs the UK economy £2.2 billion a year, with projections indicating a 27% increase by 2050. In the North Wessex Downs, localised flooding of villages in the river valleys in the winter is regular, and climate models



indicate that flooding at the scale experienced in January 2024 is likely to be more frequent and have greater impact. The most severe flooding has been caused by a combination of high groundwater, surface water and river flooding. Flood risk management may include the provision of sustainable measures to alleviate future flood risk, for example Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) incorporating biodiverse rain gardens, attenuation basins and wetlands and Natural Flood Management (NFM) schemes involving attenuating surface water runoff from agricultural land, river restoration, river floodplain enhancement and the creation of wetlands. The NFM approach delivers sustainable flood resilience, biodiversity gains, improvements in water quality, carbon capture, and enhanced health and wellbeing for communities. Groundwater flooding is a challenge particular to chalk landscapes and NFM is not usually a solution to this type of flooding, although it can reduce surface water flooding.

6.11 In summer, some rivers suffer from lack of flows because of water abstraction. At its most extreme it leads to dry river beds and the death of aquatic life, but more subtly it leads to *a deterioration in water quality and ecological diversity caused, for example, by* reduced capacity to dilute inflows downstream from sewage treatment works or to transport silt resulting in its deposition. Pressure for abstraction from the chalk aquifers that feed these rivers is directly related to the rising demand for water, including from new development. Drainage structures and other features modify natural flow regimes. Climate change, the deterioration of assets, as well as continuing pressure to build in areas of high risk flood zones, will contribute to increased risk of flooding affecting local communities. Gradual urban creep from paving gardens, tarmacking tracks and infill development can significantly increase volumes of storm water runoff, leaving drainage networks unable to manage.

6.12 The waters of the chalk aquifers and rivers are a major source of potable water. Ground waters from within the river catchments are abstracted to meet demands for public water supply and for industry, agriculture and aquaculture (watercress and fish farms). The level of abstraction and effect on river flows varies across the area.

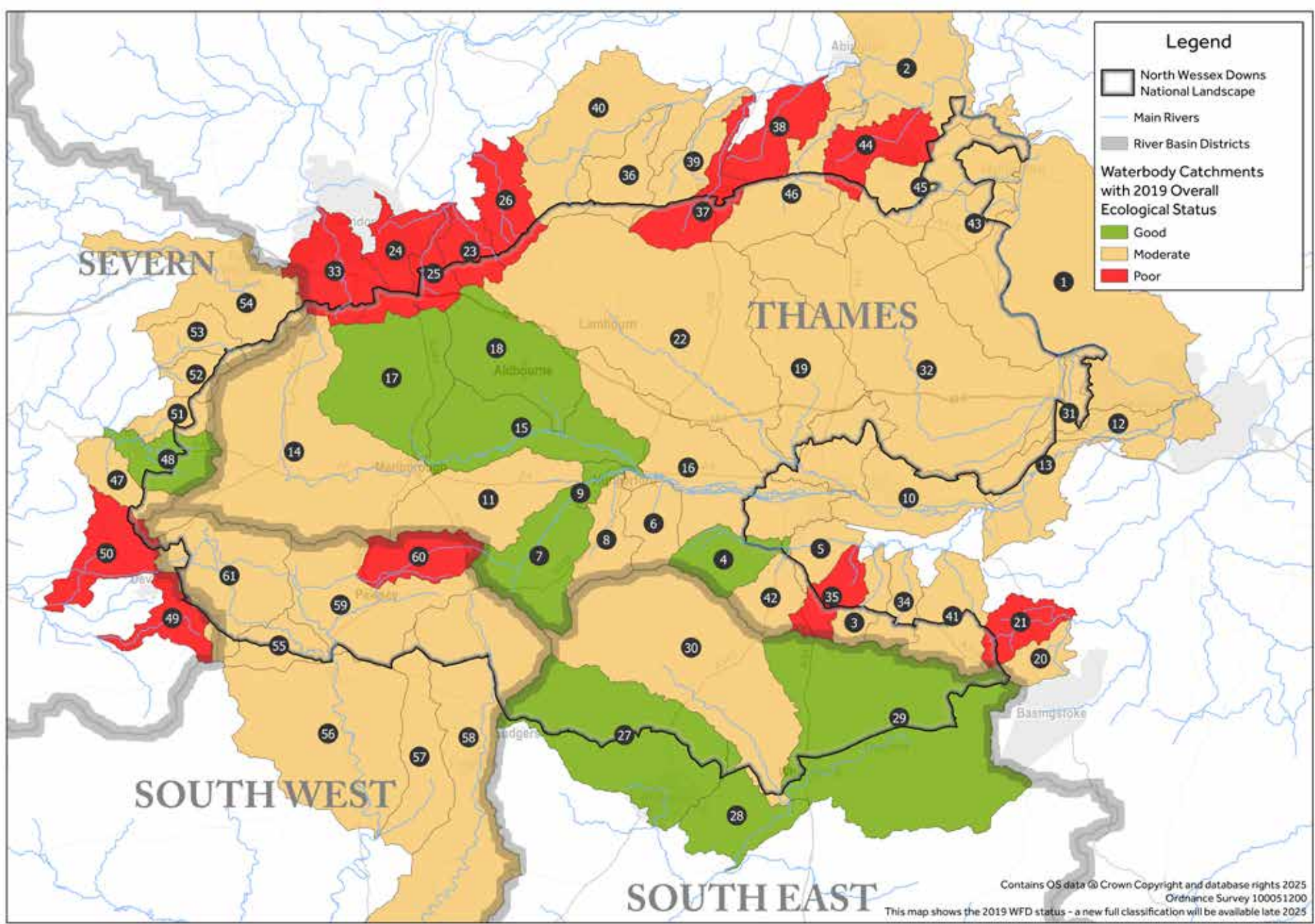
6.13 Groundwater abstraction points in the Kennet valley are numerous, The Chalk Stream Restoration Strategy expresses abstraction as a percentage of recharge (A%R) and considers 10% to be a sustainable level. Across the North Wessex Downs abstraction varies from 1.1% of recharge on the Pang to 33% of recharge on the Enborne., A long-running programme of investigations and licence changes to make groundwater abstractions more sustainable across the National Landscape is still under way, with low flow investigations on the Kingsclere Brook and Upper Kennet in progress. All licence reductions are still dependent on other sources of supply being available. Overall, pressure on rivers from abstraction has reduced in the last 20 years, but it is critically important that new development should not be allowed to reverse these hard-won gains.

² Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 - First revision of the 25 Year Environment Plan, DEFRA 2023



No.	Waterbody name	Ecological status
1	Thames Wallingford to Caversham	Moderate
2	Thames (Evenlode to Thame)	Moderate
3	Ecchinswell Brook (source to Enborne)	Moderate
4	Enborne (Source to downstream A34)	Good
5	Enborne (downstream A34 to Burghclere Brook)	Moderate
6	Inkpen Stream (source to Kennet)	Moderate
7	Upper Dun	Good
8	Shalbourne (source to Kennet at Hungerford)	Moderate
9	Kennet and Avon Canal and Dun above Hungerford	Good
10	Kennet (Lambourn confluence to Enborne confluence)	Moderate
11	Froxfield Stream	Moderate
12	Holy Brook	Moderate
13	Lower Kennet (Sheffield Bottom to Reading)	Moderate
14	Upper Kennet to Marlborough	Moderate
15	Middle Kennet (Marlborough to Hungerford)	Good
16	Middle Kennet (Hungerford to Newbury)	Moderate
17	Og	Good
18	Aldbourn	Good
19	Winterbourne	Moderate
20	Vyne Stream	Moderate
21	Bow Brook (Pamber End to Bramley)	Poor
22	Lambourn (Source to Newbury)	Moderate
23	Lenta Brook, East of Swindon	Poor
24	Cole (source to Lenta Brook)	Poor
25	Liden Brook, Swindon	Poor
26	Tuckmill Brook and tributaries	Poor
27	Anton - Upper	Good
28	Test - Bourne Rivulet to conf Dever	Good
29	Test (Upper)	Good
30	Bourne Rivulet	Moderate
31	Sulham Brook	Moderate

32	Pang	Moderate
33	Ray (Wiltshire) source to Lydiard Brook	Poor
34	Kingsclere Brook (Source to Enborne)	Moderate
35	Earlstone Stream and Burghclere Brook (source to Enborne)	Poor
36	Stutfield Brook (source to Ock)	Moderate
37	Letcombe Brook	Poor
38	Cow Common Brook and Portobello Ditch	Poor
39	Childrey and Woodhill Brooks	Moderate
40	Ock (to Cherbury Brook)	Moderate
41	Baughurst Brook	Moderate
42	Penwood Stream	Moderate
43	Cholsey Brook and tributaries	Moderate
44	Moor Ditch and Ladygrove Ditch	Poor
45	Mill Brook and Bradfords Brook system, Wallingford	Moderate
46	Ginge Brook and Mill Brook	Moderate
47	Willow Brook (Bristol Avon and North Somerset)	Moderate
48	Marden - source to conf Cowage Bk	Good
49	Worton Str - source to conf Semington Bk	Poor
50	Summerham Brook	Poor
51	Abberd Bk - source to conf R Marden	Moderate
52	Hoppingstone Stream	Moderate
53	Cowage Bk - source to conf unnamed trib	Moderate
54	Brinkworth Brook	Moderate
55	Hampshire Avon (West)	Moderate
56	Hampshire Avon (Upper) u/s Nine Mile River confl	Moderate
57	Nine Mile River	Moderate
58	Bourne (Hampshire Avon)	Moderate
59	Hampshire Avon (East) and Woodborough Stream	Moderate
60	Hampshire Avon (East) and Deane Water	Poor
61	Etchilhampton Water	Moderate

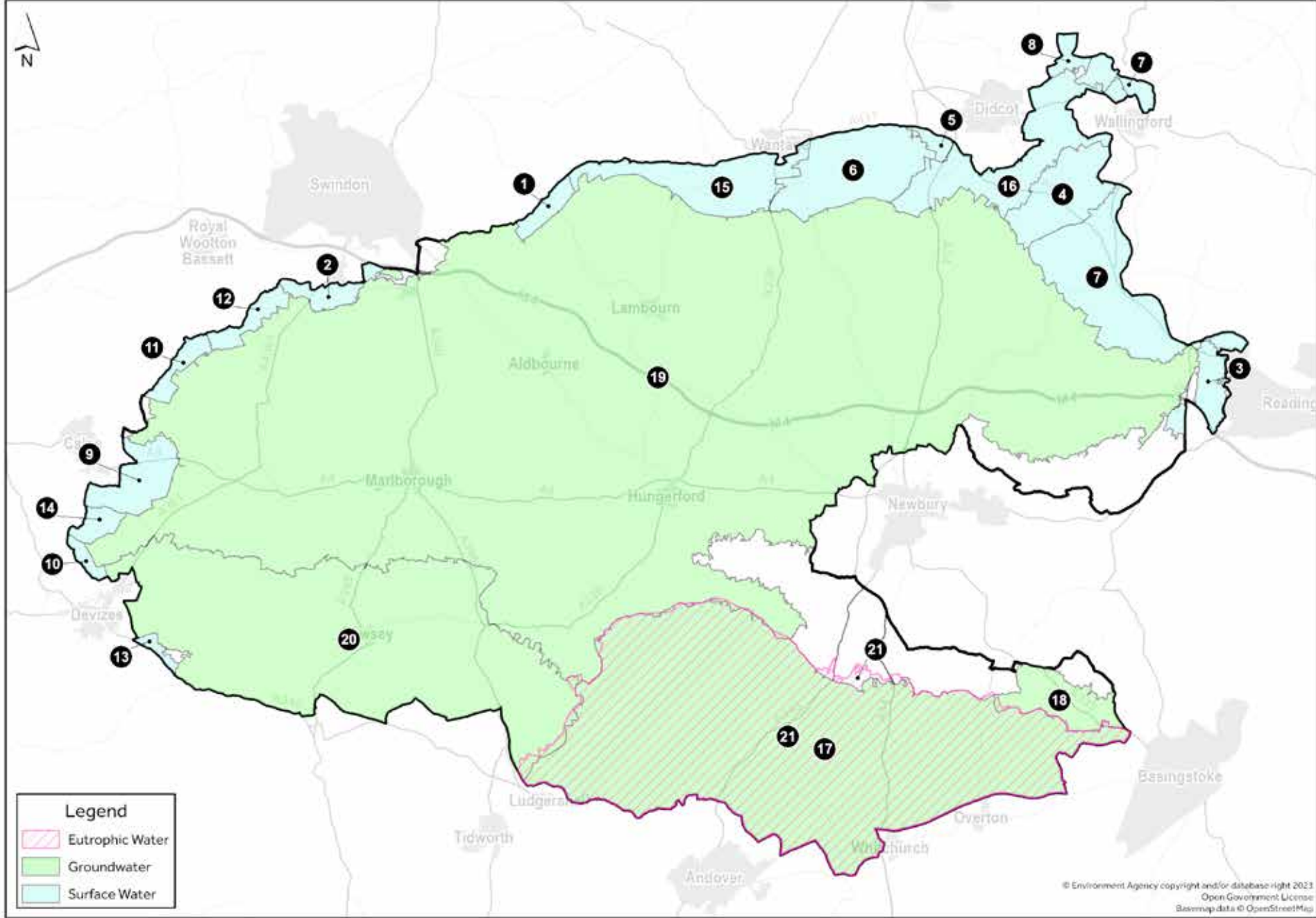


6.14 At the same time, the operational requirements of the Kennet and Avon Canal have an effect on the Kennet. Between Bath and the summit at Crofton Pumping Station the Canal is fed by the Bristol Avon; between the summit and Kintbury by the River Dun, a tributary of the Kennet; and between Kintbury and Reading by the Kennet. There has been significant progress amongst the various parties to minimise the impacts of the Canal on the river and vice versa. Under the Kennet Water Level Management Plan, examples of where action has been taken to optimise flows in the river channels are the diversion of the Froxfield Stream under the Canal to flow directly into the Dun, and the better management of Sherman’s Hatches to augment important flushing flows in the Kennet during high flow (previously, more winter flow was siphoned off the Kennet into the Canal via the Kintbury feeder, bypassing long sections of braided river channel). As a result, loss of flow from reaches of the Kennet to the Canal is currently deemed not to be significant in terms of impacts. . There remain issues with water quality, especially where the Canal and river come together. Small tributaries including the Pear Tree Bottom and Inkpen Streams are known to bring high volumes of sediment into the slow-moving canal., Actions to address water quality pressures have included the construction of bypass weirs at canal locks west of Hungerford to reduce canal water spilling over into the River Dun. Wet winters in 2024 and 2025 have tested these beyond their design limits and canal overflows remain a challenge for the river. It is a clear objective of the Canal and River Trust to optimise the use of water resources in the Canal and to use back-pumping to conserve water in the ‘artificial’ section between Bath and the Canal summit. It is a clear objective of the Kennet Catchment Partnership to minimise the impact of the canal on water quality in the river.

6.15 Under the Nitrates Directive, the majority of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape is designated as a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ). Within these zones, farmers are required to limit the application of manures and nitrogen fertilisers, subject to a closed season for the application of certain manures. They are also required to keep records of cropping, stocking and the application of nitrogen fertilisers and manures. As a consequence of post-war farming practices, nitrate level in groundwater is high across the North Wessex Downs, which has ecological impacts and renders some groundwater sources of drinking water unuseable without treatment or dilution.

6.16 Further control of diffuse pollution is a requirement of the Water Framework Directive. There is an obligation to manage river basins to deliver good environmental outcomes in both surface waters and groundwater. Agriculture is recognised as one of the main sources of diffuse pollution of water courses and groundwater. DEFRA encourages Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) as a key approach to resolving this by managing land in a way that is sensitive to the ecological health of the water environment. While farming is not the sole cause of diffuse pollution, it does contribute approximately 60% of nitrates, 25% of phosphorus and 70% of sediments along with other pollutants which enter our surface waters.

No.	NVZ Name	NVZ Type
1	Tuckmill Brook and tributaries	Surface Water
2	Thames (Churn to Coln)	Surface Water
3	Sulham Brook	Surface Water
4	Cholsey Brook and tributaries	Surface Water
5	Moor Ditch and Ladygrove Ditch	Surface Water
6	Ginge Brook and Mill Brook	Surface Water
7	Thames Wallingford to Caversham	Surface Water
8	Thames (Leach to Evenlode)	Surface Water
9	R Marden - source to conf Abberd Bk	Surface Water
10	Summerham Bk - Poulshot Str to conf Semington Bk	Surface Water
11	Cowage Bk - conf unnamed trib to conf R Marden	Surface Water
12	Brinkworth Bk- Hancocks Wtr to conf R Avon (Brist)	Surface Water
13	Worton Str - source to conf Semington Bk	Surface Water
14	Willow Brook (Bristol Avon and North Somerset)	Surface Water
15	Ock and tributaries (Land Brook confluence to Thames)	Surface Water
16	Mill Brook and Bradfords Brook system, Wallingford	Surface Water
17	Hampshire Chalk	Groundwater
18	Kingsclere and Greywell	Groundwater
19	Berkshire Downs	Groundwater
20	South Wessex	Groundwater
21	Hamble Estuary Eutrophic (TraC)	Eutrophic Water



6.17 Sewage treatment works serving communities in the North Wessex Downs discharge both treated and untreated sewage effluent into our rivers. Marlborough Sewage Treatment works was the first in the country to benefit from phosphate-stripping, and the long-term data show the benefit in reducing phosphate levels in the Kennet as a consequence. Across the North Wessex Downs there are more than 100 storm overflows, which spill untreated sewage into rivers for tens of thousands of hours every year when groundwater is high or after rain. Chalk streams have been prioritised in water companies' storm overflow reduction programmes but no real improvement is expected until 2030. Some rural communities within the National Landscape are served by private septic tanks, which do not provide a reduction in phosphate and require management and maintenance to function effectively.

6.18 Untreated run-off from roads drains into rivers in the protected landscape. For example, the M4 motorway drains directly to both the Lambourn and the Pang. This storm water carries complex chemicals known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), as well as hydrocarbons which both bioaccumulate and are carcinogenic. There is little research and no regulation regarding these pollution but it is an emerging threat to the health of rivers and communities.

Maintaining Air Quality

6.19 A variety of air pollutants have known or suspected harmful effects on human health and the environment. In most areas of Europe, these pollutants are principally the products of combustion from space heating, power generation or from motor vehicle traffic. Pollutants from these sources may not only prove a problem in the immediate vicinity but can travel long distances, chemically reacting in the atmosphere to produce secondary pollutants such as acid rain or ozone. The nearest monitoring site to the North Wessex Downs is at Harwell. Other sites are in Reading town centre, Newbury, Thatcham, Bath and Oxford. Pollution is low but there may be local issues such as environmental quality relating to traffic pollution.

Climate Change

6.20 There is clear and mounting evidence that global climate change is accelerating, primarily due to human activity, including use of fossil fuels for transport and energy, deforestation, changes in land use and industrial processes. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report (2021) confirms that human influence has unequivocally warmed the atmosphere, ocean, and land, with significant consequences for biodiversity, agriculture, water resources, and communities. In response, the UK Government has committed to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, as set out in the Climate Change Act 2008 (amended 2019).

6.21 The UK Climate Projections 2018 (UKCP18) provide the most up-to-date assessment of expected climatic shifts. For southern England, these include:

- hotter, drier summers, increasing risks of drought and water scarcity;
- milder, wetter winters, leading to greater flood risks and soil erosion; and
- more extreme and unpredictable weather events, including storms, heatwaves, and seasonal shifts.

6.22 These changes will affect land use, biodiversity, water resources, ecosystems and community resilience in the North Wessex Downs. While some shifts may be gradual, many impacts require urgent action due to the time needed for implementation.

6.23 Based on the UK Climate Projections 2018 (UKCP18), the UK's third Climate Change Risk Assessment (published in 2022) and the National Adaptation Programme 2023-2028 are key initiatives that define climate change impacts and adaptation strategies. The North Wessex Downs Partnership is keen to refine its understanding of the impacts of climate change and develop strategies for adaption to these effects.

6.24 Making Space for Nature outlined four key ways that we can adapt our ecological networks to a changing climate:

- Ensure that all parts of the network are in the best possible management.
- Increase the population sizes of vulnerable species.
- Reduce the risks of local extinction.
- Provide colonists for new sites.

6.25 The Making Space for Nature principles remain relevant, with the Environment Act 2021 and the Environmental Improvement Plan (2023) further emphasising the need for nature recovery and increased ecological resilience.

Impacts on the North Wessex Downs

1. Water Resources and Hydrology

- Increased winter rainfall may cause more flooding and soil erosion, damaging historic landscapes and increasing sediment and nutrient runoff into rivers.
- Drought conditions in summer will contract the chalk stream network, with some perennial streams becoming seasonal winterbournes, threatening freshwater biodiversity.
- Changes in rainfall patterns will affect groundwater recharge, putting additional pressure on water availability for agriculture, wildlife, and local communities.

2. Biodiversity and Habitat Shifts

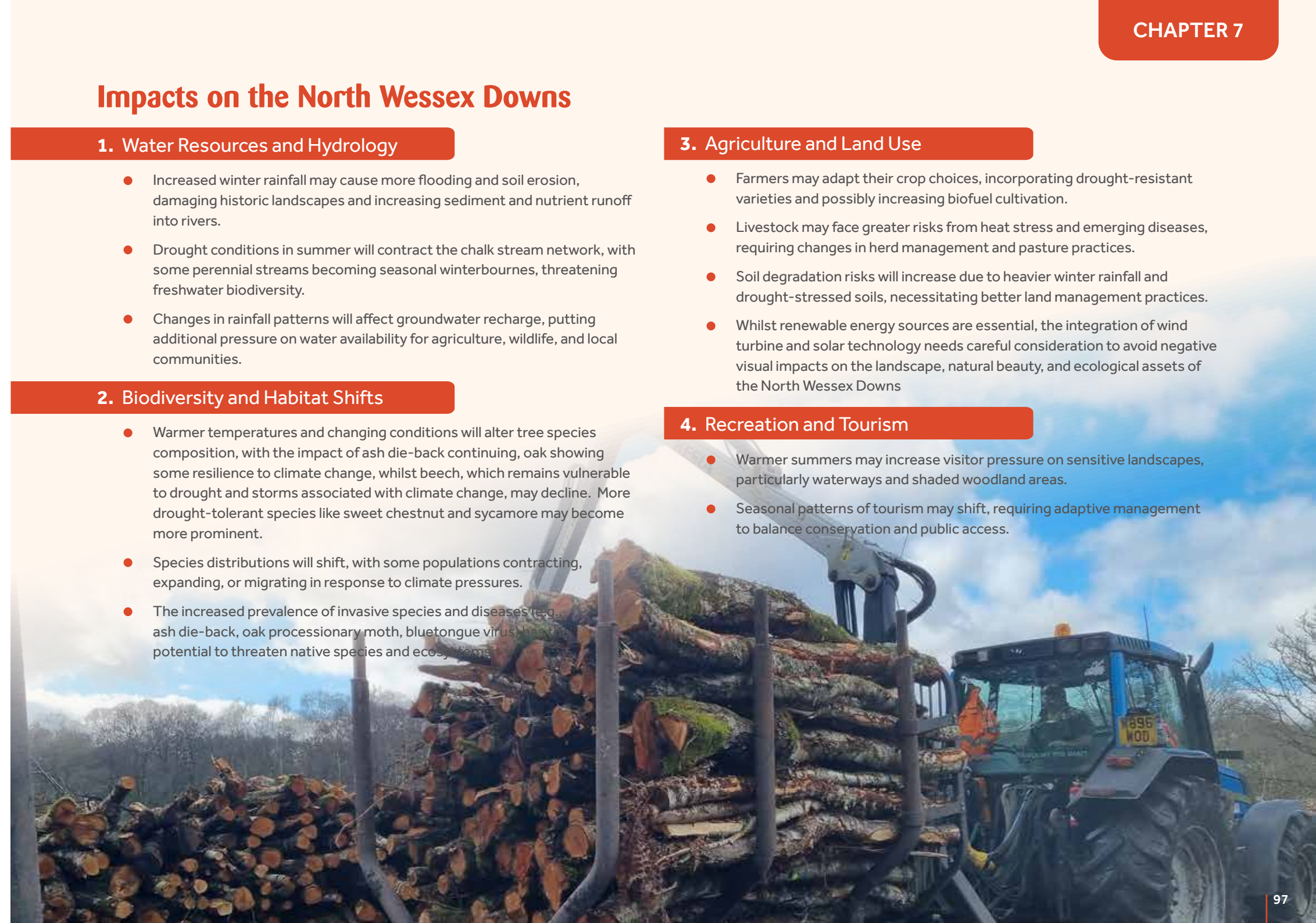
- Warmer temperatures and changing conditions will alter tree species composition, with the impact of ash die-back continuing, oak showing some resilience to climate change, whilst beech, which remains vulnerable to drought and storms associated with climate change, may decline. More drought-tolerant species like sweet chestnut and sycamore may become more prominent.
- Species distributions will shift, with some populations contracting, expanding, or migrating in response to climate pressures.
- The increased prevalence of invasive species and diseases (e.g., ash die-back, oak processionary moth, bluetongue virus) has the potential to threaten native species and ecosystems.

3. Agriculture and Land Use

- Farmers may adapt their crop choices, incorporating drought-resistant varieties and possibly increasing biofuel cultivation.
- Livestock may face greater risks from heat stress and emerging diseases, requiring changes in herd management and pasture practices.
- Soil degradation risks will increase due to heavier winter rainfall and drought-stressed soils, necessitating better land management practices.
- Whilst renewable energy sources are essential, the integration of wind turbine and solar technology needs careful consideration to avoid negative visual impacts on the landscape, natural beauty, and ecological assets of the North Wessex Downs

4. Recreation and Tourism

- Warmer summers may increase visitor pressure on sensitive landscapes, particularly waterways and shaded woodland areas.
- Seasonal patterns of tourism may shift, requiring adaptive management to balance conservation and public access.



6.26 The North Wessex Downs Partnership is committed to refining its understanding of climate change impacts and developing effective adaptation strategies, in line with the latest scientific evidence and national policy frameworks.

6.27 To do this we must:

- Allow species to adapt by shifting their distributions naturally to stay within their preferred 'climate envelope' through increasing connectivity (habitat patches and corridors and a network of protected sites to provide a more permeable landscape).
- Enhance the opportunities for species to stay within their climate envelope through small-scale local movements (as opposed to being forced into long-distance dispersal) by promoting landscape level heterogeneity within the National Landscape.
- Promote nature-based solutions, such as habitat restoration and connectivity and wetland restoration/creation.
- Enhance soil health and regenerative farming practices to reduce erosion and carbon loss.
- Increase tree canopy cover and hedgerow restoration/planting where they align with landscape character and National Landscape purposes, to mitigate temperature extremes and capture carbon.
- Improve water conservation measures and encourage sustainable land management.
- Strengthen biodiversity networks through the principles of Making Space for Nature, ensuring species have the ability to adapt and migrate as needed.
- Value the crucial role the extensive grasslands of the North Wessex Downs play in carbon sequestration and maintaining water quality, further supporting the vital ecosystem services within the landscape.
- Prioritise nature-based solutions to climate change..
- Prioritise climate change mitigation and adaptation responses that are landscape-led and enhance the characteristics, valued qualities, and distinctiveness of the North Wessex Downs

6.28 In accordance with the UK government's third National Adaptation Programme (NAP3), the North Wessex Downs National Landscape will develop a dedicated Climate Change Adaptation Plan by 2028. This plan will be embedded within and directly linked to this Management Plan. It will outline specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely actions and objectives designed to adapt the National Landscape to the impacts of climate change, encompassing nature, people, and place. This Adaptation Plan will be reviewed and updated on a five-yearly cycle, aligning with future iterations of the Management Plan, ensuring a proactive and adaptive approach to climate change resilience.



Natural Resources and Climate Change: Key Issues

6.29 Key issues with the potential to have significant influence on the National Landscape's Natural Resources Valued Qualities:

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| <p>a) Lack of agreement on the levels of acceptable environmental limits within the National Landscape.</p> <p>b) The need to raise awareness of water quality issues.</p> <p>c) Accelerated water run-off and soil erosion, especially on steeper slopes and under 'open' arable crops, such as maize.</p> <p>d) Opportunities to encourage minimum tillage and careful application of inputs,</p> <p>e) Overall air quality is generally good but activities outside the National Landscape can have a significant effect across the area; impacts of air pollution from road traffic and agriculture on ecosystem health is of concern.</p> <p>f) Over abstraction of groundwater.</p> <p>g) Increasing water demand, especially during the summer months, as a result of climate change and changing lifestyles.</p> <p>h) Increasing water demand for crop irrigation as a result of climate change and more erratic weather patterns resulting in prolonged dry periods and intense summer rainfall.</p> | <p>i) The influence of climate change on groundwater recharge patterns, overall water availability and elevated temperatures in chalk streams.</p> <p>j) Increasing water demand as a result of major development in the urban areas in and around the North Wessex Downs, also sometimes leading to export of water out of the National Landscape catchments.</p> <p>k) Loss of river habitats as a result of historical land drainage and channel modifications associated with past flood alleviation works and past industry (although some man-made features, e.g. mill leats, are of considerable historical importance).</p> <p>l) Need to maintain wild fish stocks and quality of fisheries.</p> <p>m) Excessive removal of bankside vegetation (on occasion associated with fisheries management).</p> <p>n) Watercourse maintenance to conserve habitat, and a need for a change in emphasis from dredging to slowing the flow.</p> <p>o) Loss of winterbourne channels through agricultural cultivation, or destruction of character of winterbourne channels by dredging.</p> | <p>p) Increasing lock movements on the Kennet and Avon Canal taking water from the River Kennet and its tributaries.</p> <p>q) Pollution of rivers from point sources, including public and private domestic sewerage systems (with phosphorus discharges a particular problem), agriculture, commercial watercress beds, and fish farms.</p> <p>r) Impacts on ecology of rivers from diffuse sources of pollution - often individually minor but collectively significant - including run-off from roads, houses and commercial areas, run-off from farmland, and seepage into groundwater from developed landscapes of all kinds, resulting in raised nutrient levels and toxic algal blooms.</p> <p>s) Pollution pressure on the River Kennet generated by poor water quality and boat traffic on the Kennet and Avon Canal.</p> <p>t) Domestic pet flea treatments as a source of pollutant harm to water quality and river ecology.</p> |
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Natural Resources and Climate Change: Priorities

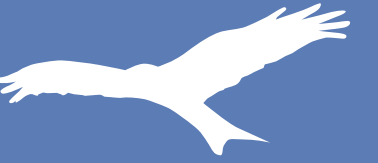
1. Action to ensure that chalk rivers and streams in the National Landscape achieve and are maintained at good ecological status including, for example, appropriate riparian planting to mitigate elevated water temperatures predicted as a consequence of climate change.
2. Collaborative landscape-scale action to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, for example through nature-based solutions (NbS).
3. Develop a Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the North Wessex Downs National Landscape
4. Ensure that all landscape interventions recognise and address the implications of climate change for the valued qualities of the North Wessex Downs and its setting.
5. Secure full recognition by decision makers of the importance of the North Wessex Downs landscape for the value of its natural capital and the environmental goods and services it provides to the economy and society as a whole, including heritage, water quality, healthy soils, food production, wildlife, flood management, carbon storage, recreation, health and well-being.

Natural Resources and Climate Change: Policies

NR 01	Support co-ordinated action, guidance and measures on soil health issues.	NR 06	Encourage action to identify and address the sources of diffuse and point pollution within the North Wessex Downs.	NR 11	Develop a better understanding of the likely implications of climate change on the environment and economy of the North Wessex Downs.
NR 02	Promote and encourage initiatives for the sustainable management of soil by farmers and other land managers to minimise soil degradation through erosion, compaction, pollution and impoverishment, particularly in the case of the thin chalk downland soils.	NR 07	Encourage co-ordinated remedial action through the Catchment Sensitive Farming programme and other partnership schemes to restore and enhance degraded river sections within the North Wessex Downs.	NR 12	Support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, such as carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and methane, from all possible sources.
NR 03	Support landscape awareness and understanding among catchment partnerships in and around the North Wessex Downs, and encourage collaborative research, projects and management to protect and improve watercourses and catchments.	NR 08	Support measures to reduce abstraction and help businesses adopt new mitigation measures.	NR 13	Support climate mitigation measures including nature-based solutions, energy efficiency improvements, better on-farm management of fertiliser and animal waste, biomass heating from local fuel stocks and small-scale renewable energy generation consistent with conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape.
NR 04	Encourage all partners to take water demand and its consequences for landscape, ecology and fisheries fully into account in decisions regarding development, changes to land use or cropping patterns within the North Wessex Downs.	NR 09	Promote well designed Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), taking into account unique characteristics of the chalk geology and groundwater levels, which benefit water quality, water quantity, biodiversity and amenity in urban areas. Promote natural flood management initiatives, particularly upstream in the catchment, to maximise multiple benefits to benefit people and wildlife.	NR 14	Engage with opportunities to improve the availability and accessibility of sustainable modes of transport (e.g. bus and rail services, cycling) recognising in particular the health benefits of active modes (walking, cycling, riding etc) and promote use their use.
NR 05	Support the introduction of demand management measures for water use in those settlements that draw on the aquifers of the North Wessex Downs, and measures to monitor and reduce water wastage.	NR 10	Promote restoration and continued maintenance of rivers and river corridors to further biodiversity and amenity objectives – re-creating natural river channels and re-linking rivers with their floodplains where this would not damage artificial channels of historic and cultural importance.	NR 15	Encourage greater use of timber from sustainable woodland, and in particular short local supply chains to support forestry, woodland and wood products businesses in the National Landscape.
				NR 16	Promote carbon sequestration as an objective and benefit of habitat creation and management of woodland and permanent grassland.
				NR 17	Encourage and support simple greenhouse gas and carbon accounting to monitor the effectiveness of changes.
				NR 18	Encourage and support knowledge exchange among landowners and farmers to adapt to the impacts of climate change, e.g. including sustainable farming practices, soil health, circular water economy principles (reduced usage, grey water re-use, increased resilience to water shortages), and micro-generation of renewable energy compatible with National Landscape purposes.



Planning & Development



Overview:

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



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

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY
FRAMEWORK, 2024



7.1 The North Wessex Downs are a sparsely populated landscape with a population density of 59 residents per km² across the National Landscape¹ⁱⁱ. The open, largely uninhabited downlands retain a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity, a very special perceptual characteristic within this otherwise densely populated part of southern England. Attractive villages nestle in the river valleys of the Pang, Bourne, Kennet and Lambourn and cluster in the low-lying land to the east of the National Landscape. The quality of this valued landscape makes strong direct and indirect contributions to the wider regional economy.

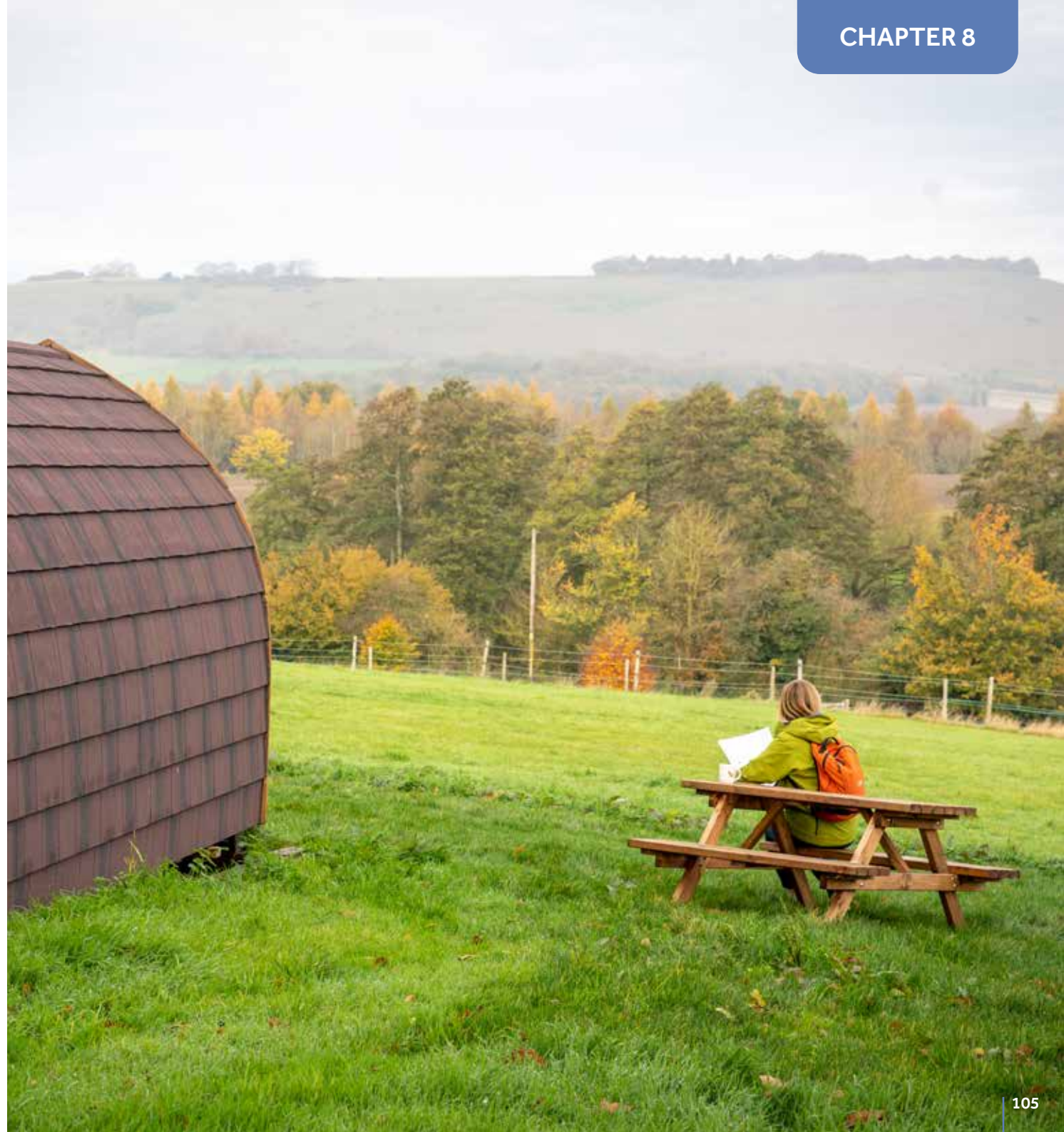
7.2 Despite the relatively low population density, there are development pressures on the North Wessex Downs. This is due to its location within south east England and its proximity to London, which makes it an attractive place to live, work and visit. There is a need to manage these pressures with sensitivity both within and in the setting of the National Landscape in order to maintain economic and social viability whilst retaining the character of the North Wessex Downs. Communities need to be economically viable and have adequate housing, amenities and facilities, and longstanding guidance states that “Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of economic and social development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.”² However, the primary purpose of the designation - to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape - needs to be paramount when considering such issues.

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

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

¹ ONS (2024) *Population estimates for national landscapes in England and Wales by single year of age and sex, mid-2021 and mid-2022*

² Countryside Commission: *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: a policy statement CCP 356, 1991, p. 5.*



Relationship with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

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

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

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

The Approach to Development

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

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

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

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

Local Economy and Rural Business

7.12 The North Wessex Downs Partnership believes that promoting and supporting local enterprise is a key part of conserving and enhancing the character and valued qualities of the National Landscape. Local businesses are likely to:

- employ local people;
- provide services to improve the local quality of life;
- spend money locally;
- promote community cohesion; and
- have a smaller environmental footprint (by reducing the transportation of goods from across communities).

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

7.14 Significant employment areas exist within the area, for example the Harwell Campus which is home to the Diamond Light Source, the UK national synchrotron science facility. This is part of 'Science Vale' in Oxfordshire which has a national profile as a centre for science and innovation, and in particular for space technology. As a large, previously developed area, partly designated as Enterprise Zone,

opportunities exist here for redevelopment and careful intensification of the site. Where such development occurs, it is important to recognise the purposes of the National Landscape designation and minimise any potentially adverse impacts on the valued qualities of the North Wessex Downs.

Additional Guidance

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

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

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



Planning Conditions, Community Infrastructure Levy and Mitigation

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

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

Remoteness and tranquillity

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

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

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



Sensitivities and constraints of the landscape to wind turbines

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

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

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

Other Renewable Energy Projects

7.23 As a response to the climate crisis, there is a need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The security of energy supplies is also a concern. These factors are likely to lead to an increase in renewable energy generation. There are already many well established and sensitively located forms of renewable energy projects across the area. These include:

- micro-generation on individual residential and commercial properties;
- photovoltaic installations (some up to 1 ha in area);
- on farm bio-digesters;
- wood-fuel boilers; and
- hydro-electric generation projects within water courses.

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

7.25 Further information concerning the likely acceptability of differing forms of renewable energy projects is contained with the North Wessex Downs Position Statement on Renewable Energy.

Green and Blue Infrastructure

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

Urban fringe and Setting

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

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

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

Built Environment and New Housing

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

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

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

Highways Infrastructure

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

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

7.35 The North Wessex Downs Unit has contributed to work that is helping to reduce the impact of highways infrastructure, such as through the Avebury World Heritage Site Transport Strategy.

Rail Electrification

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

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

Minerals and Waste

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

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



Planning and Development: Key Issues

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

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

Planning and Development: Principles

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



REFERENCES

- i Dark Skies of the North Wessex Downs – a guide to good external lighting
- ii Population estimates for national landscapes in England and Wales by single year of age and sex, mid-2021 and mid-2022
- iii Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, s.89(2).
- iv NPPF (2024) paragraph 187.
- v NPPF (2024) paragraph 189
- vi NPPF (2024) paragraph 190, footnote 67
- vii NPPF (2024) paragraph 11 d) footnote 7.
- viii NPPF (2024) paragraph 11 b) footnote 7.
- ix (19 NPPF (2024) paragraph 188.
- x (20 NPPF (2024) paragraph 20.
- xi (21 NPPF (2024) paragraphs 192-195.
- xii International Dark-Sky Association
- xiii https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Wind_turbine_sensitivity_report_FULL_WEB.pdf
- xiv (22 NPPF (2024) paragraph 189.
- xv (23 NPPF (2024) paragraph 224(a).
- xvi (24 NPPF (2024) paragraph 190.

Planning and Development: Policies

DE 01

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

DE 02

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

DE 03

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

DE 04

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

DE 05

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

DE 06

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

DE 07

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

DE 08

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

DE 09

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

DE 10

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

DE 11

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

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

DE 12

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

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

DE 13

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

DE 14

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

DE 15

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

DE 16

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

DE 17

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

DE 18

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

DE 19

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

Communities



Overview:

- Containing a **dispersed and relatively small population** spread over a large area, the majority live in the small villages and the two market towns of Marlborough and Hungerford with the high downs including large expanses, without any significant habitation. The trend of young people leaving to relocate to areas with better service provision and cheaper housing continues, resulting in a higher proportion of middle aged and elderly people in many communities.
- Unemployment remains low and **economic activity** rates high, with many jobs in high value-added industries within a short journey from villages in the National Landscape. Swindon, Newbury and Basingstoke in particular maintain international reputations within the technology sector with some of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. Remote working practices have increased since the pandemic, enabling more residents to work for distant employers while living in the National Landscape. The economic influence of London, the Thames Valley and north Hampshire is most keenly felt to the south east and east of the National Landscape and in particular those villages with good access to mainline stations.
- The **Armed Forces** continue to play a significant role in the local economy, especially in places such as Tidworth and Ludgershall to the south of the National Landscape on the Wiltshire-Hampshire border.
- **Good access to the wider area** and road network means that much of the National Landscape is highly accessible to commuters working in the adjacent towns. The east of the National Landscape continues to experience greater pressure on housing stock in West Berkshire, Basingstoke and Deane and South Oxfordshire.
- A well-structured and resourced **farming industry**, with substantial assets of land, machinery, knowledge and entrepreneurial ability, though facing significant challenges with the continuing transition to Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS). Many examples of diversification into food processing, tourism and provision of space for economic activity can be seen across the North Wessex Downs.
- Villages and small towns with a **strong sense of identity and wellbeing** linked to the historic landscape, active and resourceful community groups.
- There is a strong local resonance and **affinity with the landscape** of the North Wessex Downs, particularly the individual downs and the river valleys and other outstanding features.





Communities of the North Wessex Downs

9.1 The North Wessex Downs National Landscape is not a wilderness. It is a distinct and recognisable area arising from a long history of human occupation and the sustainable use of its natural resources. There is a clear relationship between land stewardship, community, the economy and natural beauty; these features and functions combine to give the area its special character.

9.2 Within the North Wessex Downs there are 173 parish councils and two market towns, Marlborough and Hungerford. In mid-2022, the total population of the National Landscape was estimated as 102,352¹. Post-pandemic working patterns have evolved, with a notable increase in remote and hybrid working arrangements. Many villages are now largely occupied by those who split their working time between home and offices outside the area. This has continued to stimulate rising house prices, with very significant pressure placed on the affordable housing stock. In addition, villages often have a reduced population during parts of the day, undermining the viability of village services such as post offices, pubs and doctors' surgeries. There is a need for a broad mix of housing to maintain sustainable communities and support village services.

9.3 To have sustainable communities in the North Wessex Downs they must be places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. Sustainable communities should be:

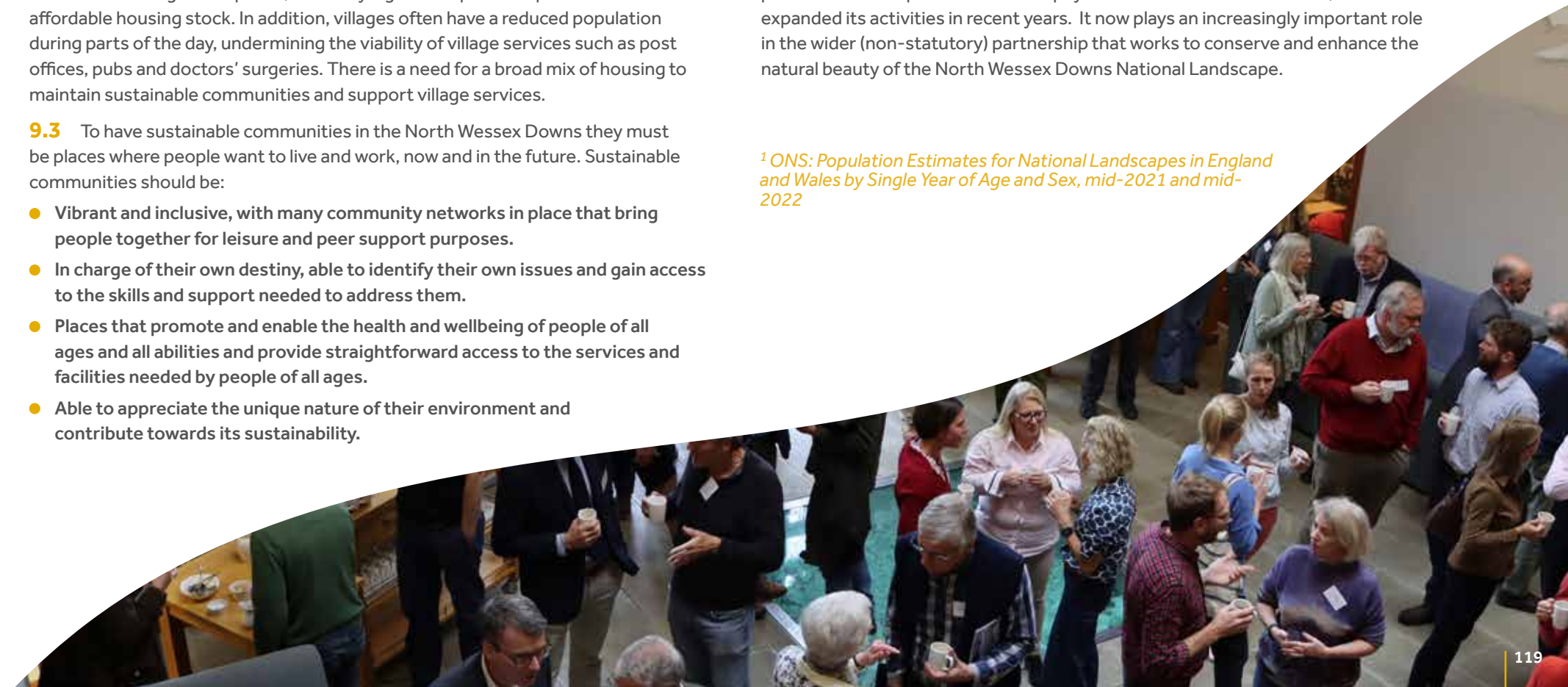
- Vibrant and inclusive, with many community networks in place that bring people together for leisure and peer support purposes.
- In charge of their own destiny, able to identify their own issues and gain access to the skills and support needed to address them.
- Places that promote and enable the health and wellbeing of people of all ages and all abilities and provide straightforward access to the services and facilities needed by people of all ages.
- Able to appreciate the unique nature of their environment and contribute towards its sustainability.

9.4 A number of parishes in the North Wessex Downs have undertaken community-led planning, and the number of Neighbourhood Plans in the National Landscape has continued to increase since 2019. Community-led plans include actions relevant to the social, economic and environmental objectives of the North Wessex Downs. We support this approach and provide advice and support to parishes where requested.

9.5 Most North Wessex Downs residents continue to have poor access to services when compared to regional averages, though digital service provision has improved access to some services.

9.6 The North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust, established in 2016 "To promote for the benefit of the public the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and its setting." [and] "To advance the education of the public in the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment", has expanded its activities in recent years. It now plays an increasingly important role in the wider (non-statutory) partnership that works to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

¹ ONS: Population Estimates for National Landscapes in England and Wales by Single Year of Age and Sex, mid-2021 and mid-2022





Employment and Training

9.7 The majority of the local economy remains part of a larger 'urban economy', a characteristic that is likely to have been reinforced and extended by the changes to living and working patterns in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many businesses benefit from the area's high landscape quality to either attract staff or customers. Agriculture, forestry and fishing businesses are the third-largest business types in the North Wessex Downs, accounting for approximately 10% of all businesses in the area.

9.8 The fundamental changes in the area's land-based economy continue to require new skills and the re-learning of old skills. There is a need to understand, define and then meet training and education needs. Support comes from:

- **National Training Organisations (such as LANTRA representing the land-based sector);**
- **Further education and training colleges;**
- **Representatives of community groups.**
- **Travel and Transport**

9.9 Local communities and visitors need access to services – a key issue for social inclusion. That access should be sustainable. The North Wessex Downs is within easy reach of three mainline railways:

- **The Waterloo to Exeter line with stations at Basingstoke, Overton, Whitchurch and Andover;**
- **The Paddington to Penzance line with stations at Kintbury, Hungerford, Bedwyn and Pewsey (and connections to Marlborough);**
- **The Paddington to Bristol and South Wales line with stations at Pangbourne, Goring, Cholsey, and Didcot.**

9.10 Outside the main towns that ring the North Wessex Downs, bus services remain limited and have faced further reductions in some places since 2019. Although the distribution of bus routes suggests that rural areas are well served, many of these services run only infrequently. Some routes between significant towns, e.g. Hungerford and Wantage, are not served at all. However, a number of innovative and flexible community transport schemes continue to operate within the North Wessex Downs. These often rely on the support of charitable funding and volunteers. During the last Management Plan period, the new Wiltshire Connect service has been rolled out to cover much of the western half of the North Wessex Downs. This includes both timetabled services and a flexible on-demand bus service supported by a dedicated app, that allows passengers to book from seven days to 30 minutes in advance.

Communities: Key Issues

9.18 Key issues with the potential to have significant influence on the National Landscape's Communities Valued Qualities:

- a)** Widespread lack of awareness of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape among local residents and businesses.
- b)** The towns which surround the National Landscape are all expected to accommodate significant housing and employment development.
- c)** Impact of the main strategic highway corridors running through the National Landscape, including the M4 and A34. Increased volumes of traffic or an increasing demand for quicker journey times may lead to pressure for widening and other 'improvement' schemes on these and other roads in the National Landscape and its setting.
- d)** Greater prosperity enjoyed by some people leads to other environmental impacts such as more over-flights by aircraft, more use of roads and rights of way for motorised leisure pursuits, and increased demand for second homes.
- e)** Loss of affordable housing, reducing the social mix within settlements and leading to a loss of essential rural skills and services.
- f)** Potential changes in demographic profile, social exclusion, access to services and loss of public transport routes and other key facilities.
- g)** The trend of commuting to higher paid jobs outside the National Landscape whilst living in the area is resulting in rising house prices, though increased remote working is changing some of these patterns.
- h)** High demand for traditional buildings to convert to residential use, so reducing the opportunities for business conversions.
- i)** The positive benefits of a strong and active community spirit in many National Landscape communities, including a rich artistic and cultural life.
- j)** Perceived limitations on opportunities for businesses in inaccessible locations, although improved digital connectivity is reducing some barriers.
- k)** Opportunities and risks for the National Landscape associated with instruments such as Neighbourhood Plans, which form an increasingly important element of local decision-making
- l)** Financial pressures reducing the ability for town and parish councils to participate in partnerships and community activities.
- m)** Lack of understanding of the impacts of daily lifestyle decisions on the environment of the North Wessex Downs – from individual travel decisions to the use of water as if it were an unlimited natural resource.
- n)** Increasing volume of HGVs, delivery vans and commuter traffic on rural lanes. 'Rat-running' on minor lanes to escape congestion on the main arterial roads.
- o)** Government requirements that businesses running apprenticeship schemes must have business premises (many traditional land-based contractors do not have formal business premises).
- p)** The need for better understanding and awareness of the links between high environmental quality and ecosystem services and local business.
- q)** There are opportunities to increase involvement in local community activities to improve social cohesion and sense of belonging.
- r)** The need for local sources of employment and opportunities for local people to develop skills that could support them into self-employment or enterprise.
- s)** The need for a wide range of skills training for land managers and other rural enterprises within the North Wessex Downs.
- t)** The impacts of the transition to the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) on farming businesses and communities.
- u)** The opportunities and challenges presented by changes to living patterns in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, including increased remote working and use of telecommunications for shopping and access to services.
- v)** The role of communities in climate change mitigation and adaption.
- w)** Poor level and extent of bus services across some parts of the National Landscape.
- x)** The need to decarbonise travel and transport.
- y)** The challenges of enabling school-age children to learn about the history, management and conservation of the National Landscape.

Communities: Priorities

1. Support the development of the North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust in pursuit of its charitable purposes to promote actions which underpin the conservation and enhancement of the National Landscape.
2. Support and facilitate community-led initiatives that help deliver National Landscape purposes and Management Plan objectives.
3. Encourage an enhanced sense of respect and pride in the North Wessex Downs amongst local people and their increased participation in activities that raise the understanding and profile of the National Landscape.
4. Assist the development of connectivity, based on principles of planning and integrating multi-functional green infrastructure assets, from neighbouring urban areas and within the area, facilitating active and sustainable access to and around the National Landscape to make it easier for communities to experience and benefit from the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs.



Communities: Policies

CO 01	Support efforts to raise the profile of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape among communities within and surrounding the area.	CO 08	Support initiatives to address the specific needs of different groups within and around the National Landscape, such as access to training and social activities for young people and engagement with under-represented and/or disadvantaged groups.
CO 02	Provide parishes and all other relevant community groups and individuals with information and training as necessary to raise awareness of the valued qualities of the National Landscape and the need to conserve and enhance it.	CO 09	Support provision of reliable and affordable broadband and mobile telephone connections throughout the North Wessex Downs in ways that respect the valued qualities of the area.
CO 03	Encourage, support and celebrate local communities' engagement in the planning, conservation and enhancement of their local environment, protecting its natural beauty and enhancing the sense of local pride and ownership.	CO 10	Ensure the development and implementation of transport plans and programmes, including those related to the strategic highway corridors running through the National Landscape, addresses the needs of North Wessex Downs communities, reduces transport impacts on the environment, and conserves and enhances the valued qualities of the landscape.
CO 04	Support communities to play their part in climate change mitigation and adaption, including projects to promote community use of renewable energy sources, consistent with National Landscape objectives.	CO 11	Support measures to enable active travel and provide integrated and demand-responsive passenger transport, including easily accessible information, across the North Wessex Downs that serves the needs of local people and visitors.
CO 05	Publicise relevant community activities and events across the North Wessex Downs.	CO 12	Secure Travel Plans for new developments with significant traffic generation potential within the North Wessex Downs to reduce car use and encourage active and sustainable travel.
CO 06	Support community initiatives aimed at retaining rural services, including the combining of services where this will improve their viability.	CO 13	Support good practice examples of community approaches that respond to locally identified needs and promote them as an inspiration to others (e.g. the establishment of local housing trusts, support for new village shops, community transport schemes, etc).
CO 07	Support initiatives to foster awareness, understanding and appreciation of the National Landscape in local schools and encourage greater connectivity with nature and the environment in line with proposals in DEFRA's 25 Year Environment Plan and the 2023 Environmental Improvement Plan.	CO 14	Support communities in landscape-led approaches to enable the availability of housing for identified local needs that will be -and will remain- genuinely affordable in perpetuity, consistent with National Landscape purposes.

Access, Recreation & Tourism



Overview:

- Offering some of the finest **cultural landscapes** in England including chalk downland, river valleys, ancient woodland, historic sites. There is recognition of the landscape in literature and the arts, with locations such as Watership Down, Uffington White Horse and the Wittenham Clumps inspiring well known works.
- **Historic attractions** reflecting the industrial and socio-economic history of the area including the Kennet and Avon Canal, Crofton beam engines and Wilton Windmill.
- **Picturesque market towns** and small villages with independent shops, superb pubs, restaurants and plenty of B&Bs and hotels. A growing reputation for local food and produce.
- **Rich archaeological history** and evidence of our ancestors that can be found in greater concentrations than much of the country.
- The **great country houses** at Highclere, Basildon Park, Littlecote, Tottenham and Ashdown and the medieval, Norman and Saxon churches
- The **extensive Rights of Way** network offering many opportunities for quiet enjoyment of the countryside away from crowds, by ramblers, cyclists and riders, including the Thames Path and Ridgeway National Trails, access land, commons and accessible woodland
- A '**hot spot**' for antiques in Hungerford, Marlborough and Pewsey.





9.1 The North Wessex Downs is a landscape rich in historic sites and natural features. This magical landscape has attracted naturalists, antiquarians and travellers throughout history. Tourist attractions of international renown within the North Wessex Downs include the 25 km² (9.6 square miles) Avebury World Heritage Site (taking in Avebury Village, the Avebury Henge complex, as well as Silbury Hill, Windmill Hill and the West Kennet long barrow); the White Horse at Uffington; the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails; and the Kennet and Avon Canal providing a strategic waterways link between the Thames and Bristol Channel. But it is the spectacular scenery, highly attractive villages, and sense of isolation that are the primary recreational and tourism attractions of the area.

9.2 There are different types of users for access, recreation and tourism in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape who have different priorities and needs, and will engage with different partners across the area. These include tourists visiting or touring in the National Landscape; tourists to major destinations outside the protected landscape, e.g. Stonehenge, Blenheim, Oxford, or visitors on business who are staying in the North Wessex Downs for its proximity to other places; residents in the National Landscape; residents of adjacent towns; and groups who use the area for recreation, including ramblers, runners, road cyclists, mountain bikers, youth and school groups, horse riders and carriage drivers.



Rights of Way and Access

9.3 Access to the countryside is an important part of the lives of people who live in the area and also for visitors as a tourism asset. There is widespread recognition of the importance of using and enjoying the natural environment for health and well being, yet the potential of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape to enable and support this has so far been largely untapped. Government funding for access in the National Landscape tends to be short-term in nature and restricted to capital projects. Long-term commitment and resourcing will be needed to build links with the surrounding large towns and other communities to better understand their needs and facilitate their engagement with the landscape. The lack of convenient public transport imposes limits on the benefits and sustainable use of the protected landscape as a resource. The on-demand Wiltshire Connect bus service, which now serves a wide area linking Marlborough, Pewsey, Great Bedwyn, Hungerford and Devizes, is a good example of what can be done to improve green travel options for residents and visitors.

9.4 Access and the needs of recreational users must be managed alongside those of farmers/land managers and objectives for nature recovery and heritage conservation. Wider and easier access should be encouraged where this can be achieved without conflicting with conservation aims or the landowner's use of the land. There may be opportunities arising from the growth of settlements on the fringes of the North Wessex Downs to mitigate some of the impact by improving and extending access.

9.5 The CRoW Act 2000 established access land which the public has the right to enjoy under certain conditions. There are 1,189 ha of open access land and 694 ha of registered commons in the North Wessex Downs. There are also permissive arrangements by which landowners grant access voluntarily or as part of inheritance tax agreements. At present some of this access can be difficult to determine due to the patchwork nature of its provision. In addition, there are 100 hectares of National Trust land to which there is access. An analysis of accessible natural greenspace provision in South East England (2007) found that the North Wessex Downs National Landscape had the smallest proportion of all accessible natural greenspace (4% of the total) across the South East Protected Landscapes. No more recent data have been found to indicate whether this has changed in recent years]

9.6 Of the accessible natural greenspace, 59% was woodland. In general woodland with open or partial access is owned by the Forestry Commission, the Woodland Trust or the National Trust. Sixty-nine per cent. of the woodland area has a public right of way either crossing through or along one edge of a wood. However, open access to woodland is at a different scale, at just 14% of the total National Landscape woodland area.

9.7 One of the most important resources of the North Wessex Downs is its extensive rights of way network, providing access to some of the most spectacular views and secluded valleys in southern England, free for all to use. Not only does it underpin the recreational and tourism sectors but also affords some opportunities for sustainable and safe journeys to school and work. Important national and regional walking routes within the North Wessex Downs are set out in the Table below. In addition, a very large number of other paths are promoted as recreational walking routes by a diverse range of local authorities and national and local organisations, on the ground, online and in published walking guides.

Table 1: Walking routes of National and Regional significance in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape (some figures are estimated)

Route name	Approximate Distance within the NWDNL	
	Kilometres	Miiles
Ridgeway National Trail ¹	68	42
Thames Path National Trail ²	13	8
Kennet & Avon Canal towpath	48	30
Lambourn Valley Way	29	18
Mid-Wilts Way	59	37
Pewsey Vale Circular Way	116	73
Test Way	22	14
Watership Down Trail	37	23
Wayfarer’s Walk	27	17
White Horse Trail	29	18

¹ Natural England: PLTOF Additional statistic 8: The length of National Trails within Protected Landscapes 2024.
² As footnote 1.

9.8 There are a large number of advertised cycle routes (on- and off-road) that pass through the area, taking advantage of quiet lanes, byways and bridleways. Route 4 of the Sustrans National Cycle Network (NCN4) runs for 29 miles / 47 km through the North Wessex Downs, in part following the Kennet and Avon Canal towpath. NCNs 45, 246, 403, 482 and 544 also pass through the National Landscape. Cycling UK has developed a 217 mile / 350 km circular leisure cycle route, King Alfred’s Way, part of which goes along the Ridgeway National Trail.

9.9 The Three Downs Link is a multi-user recreational route connecting The Ridgeway with the South Downs Way, utilised by riders alongside cyclists and walkers. The Ridgeway is promoted as a National Trail for riding. There are a number of shorter riding routes promoted by the British Horse Society that utilise the Ridgeway and link with the much wider multi-use network. These include the Ilsley Downs Riding Route and the Downland Villages Riding Route, both shown on the OS Explorer map and waymarked on the ground. Responsible recreational cycling and riding are two of the key activities to encourage in the North Wessex Downs. Supporting the provision, consistent with the purposes of designation, of facilities such as accommodation with access to stables and paddocks, parking for horse boxes and trailers, drying rooms, bike wash facilities and cycle hubs are examples of how this could be achieved.

9.10 The CRoW Act 2000 requires every county and unitary authority to set out their plans for improvement of the rights of way network. This is through the production of a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP, sometimes called a Countryside Management Plan or a Countryside Access Improvement Plan). These plans set out how an authority will maintain countryside access resources and take opportunities for improving and promoting access to the countryside. The Act also requires these authorities to establish a Local Access Forum with a membership representing a range of stakeholders, which advises the authority on matters relating to public rights of way and other types of access.

9.11 Landowners are often reluctant, for example because of the associated liability and responsibilities for maintenance, to dedicate new public rights of way so permissive paths may be the only way to improve connectivity of the existing network. The Eling Way in Berkshire is a good example of a permissive route created in the last few years.



“Out on that almost trackless
expanse of billowy Downs such
a track is in some sort humanly
companionable; it really seems to
lead you by the hand.”

KENNETH GRAHAME (1859-1932)



Recreation and Tourism

9.12 Although not large in number, there is a range of paying visitor attractions within the North Wessex Downs. These include Basildon Park, Lower Basildon (run by the National Trust) and Highclere Castle, near Newbury (owned by the Earl of Carnarvon), the Crofton Beam Engines and Pumping Station on the Kennet and Avon Canal at Great Bedwyn, and the Living Rainforest environmental education centre at Hampstead Norreys. There are many more attractions in the National Landscape or its setting that could benefit from greater collective promotion and support. These tend to be individual small sites, often managed by independent charities. They include museums and heritage centres in Devizes, Pewsey, Wallingford, Whitchurch and Wantage; nature reserves, commons and access land managed by the Wildlife Trusts, the National Trust and private owners; the wealth of ancient monuments across the whole landscape; prominent landmark sites such as Wilton windmill; and individual urban properties such as the Merchant's House in Marlborough. The North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust's Postcards Project (2025) may help to address this with the promotion of interesting, historic or quirky local landmarks.

9.13 Despite its close proximity to major areas of population, the North Wessex Downs is not well used as a place for quiet enjoyment. Green tourism offers enormous opportunities for the North Wessex Downs and a good business reason for conserving and enhancing the landscape. Many visitors (and residents) are unaware that they are in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape when they are in a particular town or village or passing through the area - most users of the Kennet and Avon Canal and walkers on the Ridgeway National Trail and the Thames Path are passing through the North Wessex Downs or Chilterns National Landscapes. The North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust's welcome signage programme for the North Wessex Downs will help address this issue. It is also important for any organisation promoting its town, village, or site to include information about the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. Tourists who use the National Landscape as a base for exploring external attractions also represent a potential market that could be encouraged to discover the North Wessex Downs. There are opportunities for the tourism sector to support investments in improving rights of way, providing accommodation, facilities, and information.

9.14 At present, visitors to the National Landscape directly support around 2,200 full time jobs. Of all visitors, 18% are from overseas, most of whom are travelling for business purposes and stay for a single night, during Monday-Thursday. Well over 90% of all foreign visitors are either business or family related. Nearly half of all visitors to the area stay with family or friends. The average length of stay by UK visitors is two days and it is estimated that a visitor spends an additional £27 in the North Wessex Downs. More than half of all serviced accommodation providers are un-graded for quality. Budget accommodation for young visitors and others is very limited, but at the time of writing includes Streatley Youth Hostel in the Thames valley and the Court Hill Centre above Wantage in Oxfordshire. Despite efforts by the local community, supported by the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs National Landscapes during the last Management Plan period, the future of Streatley Youth Hostel remains uncertain. There is great potential to improve the performance of the area as a short break destination. This is especially with the development of bespoke activity packages, such as self-guided off-road cycle routes. The area can appeal particularly to affluent visitors from London and the Home Counties. That could bring significant benefits to the rural economy.



Access, Recreation and Tourism: Key Issues

9.17 Key issues with the potential to have significant influence on the National Landscape's Access, Recreation and Tourism Valued Qualities:

- a)** Increasing pressure on local authority funding for management and maintenance of rights of way, poor condition of some rights of way, especially byways used by off-road vehicles, and poor connectivity of the rights of way network in some areas for circular walks and rides.
- b)** Irresponsible use of the rights of way network by motorised vehicles, of particular concern along the route of the Ridgeway and green lanes in and around the World Heritage Site at Avebury, on the downs south-east of Pewsey and on some commons, e.g. at Bucklebury.
- c)** Impact of behaviour of some rights of way users, including littering, dogs off leads disturbing wildlife and worrying livestock, leaving gates open etc.
- d)** Noise associated with some recreation pursuits, including that from trail bike courses and powered aircraft, affecting tranquillity and others' enjoyment.
- e)** Lack of information and provision for the less able and other disadvantaged groups to access and enjoy the North Wessex Downs.
- f)** Popularity of a few 'honeypot' locations with resulting impact of traffic noise and disturbance, car parking, wear and tear on verges and paths, litter and lower enjoyment, and potentially intrusive traffic management measures.
- g)** Management and resourcing challenges and opportunities presented by the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails.
- h)** Infrequent or non-existent public transport links to and between points of access, key attractions and accommodation. Limited services at some railway stations reduce green travel opportunities.
- i)** Increasing recreational pressures and associated opportunities arising from the predicted growth in the population of settlements surrounding the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.
- j)** Tourism provision in the National Landscape is fragmented and poorly co-ordinated, supporting relatively few jobs and limited income considering its accessibility, natural beauty and historic interest.
- k)** Multiple destination management organisations and Local Visitor Economy Partnerships across the National Landscape mean that co-ordinated marketing of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape as a whole remains weak, despite significant progress in recent years.
- l)** Lack of indication such as road/railway station, bus stop and waymark signs that visitors are entering or in the National Landscape.
- m)** Generally limited recognition amongst North Wessex Downs communities of the opportunities that association with a landscape of national importance offers for quiet recreation and green tourism and their associated economic benefits, e.g. for local produce.
- n)** Potential for insensitive, inappropriate or excessive recreational or tourism development to harm the valued qualities of the National Landscape.
- o)** Impacts and risks associated with climate change, particularly more extreme weather. Extreme rainfall, storms and drought cause impacts, costs and risks for access, for example through tree damage, flooding, path erosion and wildfire risk.
- p)** The need to manage pressures relating to holiday accommodation, including proposed development or intensification of holidays parks and other sites, and pressure on the housing stock from second homes and short-term lets.

9.15 A number of sites in the National Landscape offer educational visits. There is increasing interest among farmers in hosting school visits and the North Wessex Downs Farming in Protected Landscapes programme has enabled more farms to do so, helping to fund training and infrastructure such as classrooms and trailers. To deliver a greater benefit from grant funding, beneficiaries are encouraged to make agreements to share use of trailers, for example with other members of the same farmer-led group. Rushall Manor Farm in Berkshire (run by the John Simonds Trust, Oxenwood Outdoor Education Centre in Wiltshire and Linkenholt Countryside Adventure Centre in Hampshire, (both run by Community First, the latter in partnership with the Blagrove Trust) offer outdoor learning facilities for school and youth groups.

9.16 The North Wessex Downs can be an area for green tourism, with easily accessible information about its wildlife, culture and history, and with many opportunities to explore, on foot, by bike and on horseback. Following the previous Our Land and Love Your Land initiatives to encourage local businesses to reflect the protected landscape better in their offer, the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership has become a Designated Ambassador under the Great West Way (London to Bristol) destination touring initiative led by Visit Wiltshire.



Access, Recreation and Tourism: Priorities

1. Facilitate opportunities for more people of all backgrounds and abilities to access and enjoy the North Wessex Downs in ways that respect and promote the valued qualities of the National Landscape and its setting.
2. Greater awareness of the value of access and enjoyment of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape for public health and well being.
3. Develop a strategic framework to guide the use of funding provided to the North Wessex Downs National Landscape for access enhancements.
4. Co-ordinated promotion of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape by the tourism and recreation sector as a destination for responsible access that respects and promotes the valued qualities of the protected landscape and its setting.

Access, Recreation and Tourism: Policies

ART 01	Enable greater accessibility to the North Wessex Downs National Landscape for users of all backgrounds and abilities for quiet enjoyment and improved health and well-being, consistent with National Landscape purposes..	ART 08	Encourage events such as walking festivals that celebrate the valued qualities of the North Wessex Downs, introduce new audiences to the landscape and contribute to the visitor economy
ART 02	Support local initiatives by communities and businesses to promote responsible recreation and tourism across the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.	ART 09	Encourage and facilitate signage or other ways of informing visitors and residents that they are in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, consistent with the purpose of designation.
ART 03	Manage and improve the network of public rights of way, ensuring that relevant plans for development and delivery of access to the area take full account of the local distinctiveness, character and quality of the North Wessex Downs and its setting.	ART 10	Encourage greater recognition among commercial transport providers such as train operating companies and bus operators of the recreational / leisure potential of stations in and around the North Wessex Downs, including access from the 'gateway towns' on the edge of the National Landscape.
ART 04	Promote and encourage non-motorised journeys throughout the North Wessex Downs by the creation and appropriate maintenance of new - and improvement of existing - permissive and definitive routes, including links using the road network.	ART 11	Support initiatives to help communities and businesses reduce the outflow of revenue, retaining and recycling income from visitors in the area for longer.
ART 05	Encourage the creation and maintenance of new permissive and definitive routes that link existing routes and enable recreational walkers, cyclists, riders and carriage-drivers to avoid busy roads.	ART 12	Support more and better monitoring of the distribution and demography of visitors and promote management approaches that reduce pressure on sensitive habitats.
ART 06	Recognise and protect those areas which are too sensitive to intrusion or disturbance, for example archaeologically or ecologically, for the promotion of public access.	ART 13	Support land managers and the access sector to recognise and manage the potential for tensions between public access and commercially sensitive areas, for example livestock farms or game shoots where disturbance could have a damaging impact.
ART 07	Promote a strategic, collaborative, approach among destination management organisations, Local Visitor Economy Partnerships and other partners to marketing responsible access and tourism and in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.	ART 14	Enable, encourage and promote active and sustainable transport access, including but not limited to particular 'honeypot' locations which are under stress from car-borne visitors, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality and conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape.

Summary of Activity

under the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019-2025

North Wessex Downs National Landscape (NWDNL) Partnership

- The Partnership's governing Council of Partners was chaired by Ted Hiscocks (2015-2021), Sarah Nichols (2021-2025) and Gill Haggarty (2025-).
- Continued Partnership meetings and activity throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Committed to becoming the first UK candidate protected area to achieve the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Green List standard.
- Undertook a comprehensive governance review, inc. a revised Partnership Agreement, new Partnership Goals and Strategic Objectives, and a new Business Plan.
- Supported 20 community projects with grants from the Sustainable Development Fund, managed on our behalf by the North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust.

Value for Money

- Delivered an increase in the annual value of benefits to the NWDNL levered by each £1 of partners local authorities' funding contributions from £4.82 (2019-20) to £22.46 (2023-24).

National and Regional Collaboration

- Hosted field trips and visits for the National Landscapes annual conference (twice); DEFRA Environment Bill, 30 by 30 and Landscapes, Access and People teams; the Protected Landscapes Partnership;; and the Minister responsible for protected landscapes.
- Supported National Landscapes Association activities.
- Participated in the Big Chalk calcareous landscapes nature recovery initiative as a board member, inc. hosting a field trip at the inaugural Big Chalk Conference.
- Participated in the SE and E Protected Landscapes Lead Officers' Group and the SE, E and SW Protected Landscapes Planning Officers' Group.
- Collaborated with other landscapes on FiPL projects such as Pasture and Profit in Protected Landscapes.
- Chaired the Avebury World Heritage Site Steering Committee.

Communications

- Commissioned an entirely new web site focussed on public access in light of experience during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Celebrated the 50th anniversary of the designation of the North Wessex Downs as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- Rebranded ourselves as a National Landscape and published a new visitor guide leaflet.
- Produced regular newsletters and social media posts and grew our general and targetted mailing lists, social media following and web site visits.

Access, Recreation and Tourism

- Ran annual walking festivals 2022-24 with delivery partners.
- Delivered access improvements using DEFRA's Access for All Fund.
- 22 projects supported.
- £414,000 in project grants to make new or existing rights of way more accessible; replace styles with gates, create permissive paths, install publicly available lavatories on or next to rights of way, add way markers and other improvements to recreation across the NWDNL.
- Promoted the NWDNL as a Destination Ambassador for the Great West Way tourism initiative.



Dark skies and Lighting

- Published a Good Lighting Guide and leaflet to help minimise light pollution in the National Landscape and its setting.
- Partnered with Marlborough Town Council and Marlborough College to hold the first Marlborough Dark Skies Festival, with 30 events attracting more than 4,500 people.
- Offered dark skies training to our partner local authorities.
- Supported local astronomy groups with grants and community-led light level monitoring.

Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Programme

FiPL is a national DEFRA programme of advice, guidance and grants for farmers and land managers. It is focussed on four pillars of nature climate, people and place, viewed through the prism of each protected landscape's Management Plan. In the first four years 2021-25:

- Over 200 grant applications received.
- 176 projects awarded grants.
- £3,073,638.66 in grant funding given to environmental projects.

Major projects:

Some of the highest value projects supported (all over £50K):

- Pond creation at Englefield Home Farms.
- Restoration of Manor Farm Barn, Old Burghclere.
- Pasture cropping trial to assess landscape scale change ro farming system.
- Hedgerow dormouse project within the Wessex Farm Conservation and Southern Streams Farmer Groups.
- Micro-scale vegetable tannery for cattle hides and create an education hub at Great Cotmarsh Farm.
- Regenerative farming and re-introduction of livestock at Manor Farm, Wilton.
- Cactus Guards, fencing, farm surveys, bird boxes, a short educational film, bridleway access gates and automatic magnesium chloride water dispenser at Yatesbury House Farm.
- Dew ponds on the Pewsey Downs.
- Saving England's Lowland Junipers – revitalising populations in the North Wessex Downs (Plantlife).

Other projects and support:

- Also supported river enhancement and wetland creation, scrub removal, arable reversion, access improvements, fenceless collars to aid conservation grazing, a sheep dairy, deer management/venison initiatives (training, diversification scheme), public access, including toilets and information, repair and restoration of historic listed barns, and re-introduction of Large blue butterfly in collaboration with NE and other partners.
- Helped establish eight new farmer-led groups.
- Convened regular meetings of the facilitators of all farmer led groups in NWDNL.

Education:

- Training for farmers to host schools, e.g. LEAF collaboration.
- Knowledge-sharing for farmers and the public, e.g. Pasture for Life, FiPL events, equine events.
- Equipment and facilities, e.g. trailers, classrooms, to enable improved visits.
- Support for local community gardens to feed and educate local groups.

Going Underground at Roundway Hill

Under the £500m Visual Impact Provision agreed with Ofgem, NWDNL is benefitting from one of four National Grid projects to reduce the impact of overhead electricity transmission lines on protected landscapes. The route runs across the site of the Battle of Roundway Down (1643), a Registered Battlefield, and close to Roundway Down and Covert SSSI and the Devizes Millennium White Horse. On completion, 4.5km of overhead electricity line will be buried underground, removing 13 pylons from the National Landscape. We have:

- Engaged closely with National Grid from the project's inception. The scheme received consent in 2023.
- Worked with National Grid and the Pewsey Downs Farmer Group to identify associated opportunities for nature recovery and landscape enhancement along the route.

Historic Ridgeway

- With partners we helped develop, match funded and supported delivery of this Ridgeway Partnership project with funding from Historic England to survey scheduled and unscheduled monuments along the Ridgeway National Trail and identify conservation, access, interpretation, and nature recovery needs and opportunities.

Landscape Character

- Commissioned an Environmental Colour Assessment and published Guidance on the Selection and Use of Colour in Development. Designed to minimise potential negative impacts of development on the character of the National Landscape by providing advice on colour selection and material use to help integrate development into the protected landscape.
- Held a training session for local authority partners.
- Commissioned the first comprehensive review of the NWDNL Landscape Character Area Assessment since 2002 to provide an up-to-date evidence base for the new Management Plan.



Mend the Gap

- Mend the Gap is a joint initiative between the North Wessex Downs and Chilterns National Landscapes and the Railway Action Group to soften and heal the landscape harm caused by electrification of the Great Western mainline between Reading and Didcot. It is funded by Network Rail. The programme has delivered:

Landscape Enhancement:

- Softened the impact of the overhead wires and gantries with over 4km of hedge planting and over 600 trees so far.

Communities:

- Worked with eight Parish Councils to help them support nature recovery in their communities, including a new management plan for Pangbourne Meadows.
- Worked with over 6000 children to support them to better understand the Landscape and nature around them, with over £200,000 committed to school grounds projects.

Wildlife:

- Levered over £700,000 in nature recovery projects so far to enhance chalk and wetland habitats, for example working with farmers and expert botanists to restore chalk grassland and raise awareness of the Goring Gap’s importance for wild plants.
- Delivered a Joint project with Partnerships for Nature to fund and new wetland with grassland and arable plant conservation on the Sulham Estate.

The Arts:

- Worked with two artists on the Springline Project at Aston Tirrold and Cholsey to commission artwork to communicate the special wildlife of the Cholsey and Mill brooks.

Nature Recovery Plan

- Fulfilled our commitment under the Colchester Declaration (2019) by developing a Nature Recovery Plan for the NWDNL, sent to over 115 consultees in addition to the online consultation.
- Launched at our Nature Recovery-themed Annual Forum in October 2023.
- Contributed to the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies in Berkshire, Hampshire Oxfordshire and Wiltshire.

Partnerships for Nature

We secured £1.75m from DEFRA's Species Survival Fund with matched funding for a Partnerships for Nature programme of habitat creation and restoration involving nine partners across seven sites in NWDNL.

- Restoration/enhancement of 2.5 km of chalk stream habitat and regrading of 2.36 km of riverbank habitat.
- Restoration and enhancement of 26 ha of existing lowland heathland, 31 ha of newly created heathland and 200 ha of wood pasture, with a ranger service and reintroduction of grazing by non-breeding, native breed cattle.
- 26ha arable field demonstration site for regenerative farming inc. agroforestry, with wildlife-rich habitats alongside food production.
- Restoration/enhancement of 20 ha of chalk grassland
- Creation of 0.5ha of wetland habitat.
- Restoration/enhancement of two coppice plots (1.6 ha and 2 ha).
- Restoration/enhancement of two dew ponds.
- Creation of ten hibernacula.
- Recruitment and training of project volunteers.
- A series of activities including organised site walks, workshops for local farmers and landowners, practical advice for farms on how to introduce species and nature recovery into their longer-term business models, habitat interpretation materials.



Planning and Design

- Engaged with Local Plans, Core Strategies, Minerals and Waste Plans and other policy documents for Basingstoke and Deane, Hampshire, Vale and South Oxfordshire, Test Valley, West Berkshire and Wiltshire Councils.
- Prevented major harm to the setting of the National Landscape from a large commercial Science Park development on the edge of Swindon. We worked alongside Council Officers during the application and at appeal.
- Screened over 5,000 applications and commented on approximately 2,000.
- Collaborative working with Natural England and West Berkshire Council which resulted in a landscape-led local plan review and the formulation of a standalone National Landscapes policy.
- Supported Swindon Borough Council at an Enforcement Inquiry against unauthorised change of use and development at Wroughton Airfield. The appeal was dismissed and the enforcement notices upheld.

Sparkling Streams

We Secured £990,000 Green Recovery Challenge Funding for the Sparkling Streams Project: a catchment approach, working with Action for the River Kennet (ARK) and the Town and Manor of Hungerford to improve the condition of the River Kennet chalk stream and its Shalbourne and river Dun chalk stream tributaries, increasing wildlife and connecting people with nature.

- 1.1 km of new or enhanced chalk stream and a fish pass created at Eddington Mill.
- 3 km of enhanced in-river, and riparian habitat work carried out on eight sites on the river Dun and the Shalbourne.
- 1 km hedge (5,025 plants) and 6 ha woodland (3,400 trees) planted on six sites.
- 64 volunteer tasks held.
- 145 people (94 new volunteers) gave over 1,600 hours of their time.
- Rain garden created at Shalbourne Primary School.
- 381 adults and 60 children attended activities.

Protected Landscape Targets

Protected Landscape targets

The Protected Landscape targets are non-statutory and create a shared ambition for all 44 of England's Protected Landscapes. The targets are for the Protected Landscapes as places (the geographic area covered by the designation). Action will be coordinated by Protected Landscape bodies through their statutory management plan. It will be the responsibility of all stakeholders, partners and land managers in the area to support their delivery.

Some targets are action-focussed, while others set a clear numerical target for how much Protected Landscapes are expected to contribute as areas to the national targets.

The targets are based on an analysis of the environmental potential of the Protected Landscapes. They are also set proportionally, based on the characteristics of these areas and the share of relevant natural assets within them. The targets are set for Protected Landscapes as geographical areas and will be delivered and monitored as such.

The targets in this framework are set at a national level for all 44 landscapes as a collective. Each individual Protected Landscape body, working with relevant local partners, will set their own individual contribution, which will be embedded in their management plan. Natural England will support this process and ensure contributions represent a fair share and add up to the national total.

Thriving plants and wildlife targets

Protected Landscapes have significant environmental potential, containing almost half of England's priority habitats. They also contain over half of our most precious sites for biodiversity, land designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). To ensure these habitats are reaching their full potential for nature recovery, we have set targets to motivate more activity on the components needed to ensure wildlife can thrive.

The protection, restoration, creation, and management of priority habitats will increase species abundance. It will help turn the tide on extinction risk and support our international commitment to protect 30% of land by 2030 (30by30). The adoption of nature friendly farming practices will help stop biodiversity loss and increase species abundance alongside sustainable food production.

Protected Landscape bodies and partners should seek to increase the amount of land in favourable management in Protected Landscapes through meeting the targets below and other available means. This will maximise the contribution that Protected Landscapes can make towards our national targets for nature recovery.



TARGET 1

Restore or create more than 250,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats within Protected Landscapes, outside protected sites by 2042 (from a 2022 baseline).

TARGET 2

Bring 80% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes into favourable condition by 2042.

TARGET 3

For 60% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes assessed as having 'actions on track' to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028.

TARGET 4

Continuing favourable management of all existing priority habitat already in favourable condition outside of SSSIs (from a 2022 baseline) and increasing to include all newly restored or created habitat through agri-environment schemes by 2042.

TARGET 5

Ensuring at least 65% to 80% of land managers adopt nature friendly farming on at least 10% to 15% of their land by 2030.

Mitigating and adapting to climate change targets

Protected Landscapes contain some of the UK's most important carbon stores, including significant tracts of peatland, woodland and hedgerows providing important carbon sinks for achieving net zero. To ensure we are maximising the opportunities for climate mitigation within our Protected Landscapes we have set targets for restoring peat and increasing tree planting. Restoration and ongoing management of these habitats is essential for sequestering and storing carbon into the future, and therefore reducing net greenhouse gas emissions. They can also provide natural flood management and other benefits for farmers and local communities. Protected Landscapes are leading action to achieve net zero at a landscape level, working

with residents, businesses and communities, aiming to reduce emissions and deliver nature-based solutions. We have set a target to support them in this ambition and strengthen their important contribution to our world leading target to achieve net- zero by 2050. Tree planting and peat restoration at scale will support new skills and green jobs, attract private investment and help grow the rural economy. For the long-term protection of our iconic landscapes, action is needed to increase their resilience and that of the communities within them. We must mitigate climate risks through nature-based solutions and adapt to the unavoidable impacts, planning for a changing future.

TARGET 6

Reduce net greenhouse gas emissions in Protected Landscapes to net zero by 2050 relative to 1990 levels.

TARGET 7

Restore approximately 130,000 hectares of peat in Protected Landscapes by 2050.

TARGET 8

Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of total land area in Protected Landscapes by 2050 (from 2022 baseline).



Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment targets

Protected Landscapes are designated for their natural beauty and provide a range of health and wellbeing benefits and educational opportunities. We know these benefits are not currently being enjoyed equally by all parts of society. Protected Landscapes have a distinctive sense of place and represent our shared heritage and national identity. These special qualities must be protected for everyone to enjoy. The Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) made a commitment that everyone in England should live within 15 minutes' walk of a green or blue space. It also committed to reduce other barriers that prevent people from accessing green and blue spaces, such as physical challenges, lack of confidence and lack of information. Protected Landscapes should be setting the standard for meeting this commitment, leading efforts to increase responsible access and engagement with nature. To ensure that more people have the opportunity to enjoy and learn from these special places, we have set targets to improve accessibility for all. Protected Landscapes are leading the way to promote accessibility to the natural environment. They are using a range of tools such as engaging schools, providing disabled facilities and improving trails and waymarking. Targets will also conserve the important sense of place that these landscapes bring to our country and communities.

The government wants to boost visitor numbers in a safe and manageable way for local areas, allowing people, communities and businesses to reap the benefits of tourism, growing the rural economy, whilst preserving heritage and natural assets.

We rely on Protected Landscape bodies to gather relevant data to measure progress towards our beauty, heritage and engagement outcome. We will continue to work with Protected Landscape bodies and other partners to explore the benefits of further developing targets to improve and promote accessibility and engagement.

TARGET 9

Improve and promote accessibility to and engagement with Protected Landscapes for all using existing metrics in our Access for All programme.

TARGET 10

Decrease the number of nationally designated heritage assets at risk in Protected Landscapes.



Source: DEFRA Policy paper: Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework, January 2024

Glossary

Term used	Definition / Explanation
Agri-environment Schemes (AES)	A range of schemes operated by DEFRA designed to encourage environmentally friendly farming and public enjoyment of the countryside. Currently includes Countryside Stewardship.
Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW)	An ancient woodland site, believed to have had continuous woodland cover since 1600 AD, composed principally of native tree species that have not obviously been planted.
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)	Area designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, the purpose of designation being to conserve natural beauty.
Biodiversity Net. Gain	A principle by which development operations lead to a net gain in biodiversity. It was introduced by Government as a possible principle for national planning policy in 2018/19. It aims to account for the complexities of environmental goods and services provided by land.
Byway	A Byway open to all traffic (BOAT) is a Public Right of Way open to all users, including vehicular and all other kinds of traffic. Defined in 66(1) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. (See also Restricted Byway q.v.)
Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy (CAMS)	CAMS is a process used by the Environment Agency (EA) to provide both a consistent approach to local water resource management and greater public involvement in water management. The EA uses CAMS to determine its approach to catchment abstraction licensing within a given catchment. This is set out in a Catchment Abstraction Licensing Strategy for the catchment.
Catchment Partnership	A Catchment Partnership brings together a wide range of interests with local expertise to undertake integrated management of land and water, addressing each Water Framework Directive river catchment as a whole and delivering cross-cutting practical interventions on the ground. These aim to provide multiple benefits to water quality, wildlife, flood risk, resilience to climate change and more resource efficiency. Catchment Partnerships are active across England.
Catchment-Sensitive Farming (CSF)	A partnership between Defra, the Environment Agency and Natural England. It works with farmers and a range of other partners to improve water and air quality in high priority areas. CSF offers farmers free training, advice and support for grant applications. Also used to refer to the general approach advocated by CSF.

To follow

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)	European Union-wide policy that supports agriculture through price support, market management and measures to improve the agriculture industry. Undergoing a Mid term review, introducing decoupling and more modulation and cross compliance.
Common Land	Defined in section 22 of the Commons Registration Act 1965 as land subject to rights of common (as defined in this Act) whether those rights are exercisable at all times or only during limited periods.
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)	A planning charge, introduced by the Planning Act 2008 as a tool for local authorities to pay for infrastructure to support development in their area. Introduced by the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010. Development may be liable for CIL if the local planning authority has chosen to set a charge in its area.
Conservation Area	Defined by section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which is desirable to preserve or enhance.
Coppice	Woodland which has normally been regenerated from shoots formed at the cut stumps of the previous crop trees, root suckers, or both i.e. by vegetative means. Coppice is normally grown on a short rotation, e.g. 5–25 years, to yield small diameter material.
Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act (2000)	Contains measures to improve public access to the open countryside and registered common land while recognising the legitimate interests of those who own and manage the land concerned; it amends the law relating to rights of way; it amends the law relating to nature conservation by strengthening protection for Sites of Special Scientific Interest including tougher penalties and by providing extra powers for the prosecution of wildlife crime; it provides a basis for the conservation of biological diversity; and it provides for better management of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, including the requirement for local authorities to produce AONB management plans every five years and places a duty on public bodies to have regard to the purposes of AONB designation.
Countryside Stewardship (CS)	The current Common Agricultural Policy environmental land management support scheme introduced by DEFRA in 2014.
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)	The central government department body with responsibility for protected landscapes, wildlife, food and farming, natural resources etc.
Ecosystem Goods and Services	The assets and services, especially those of benefit to humans, provided by the functioning of an ecosystem or environment. Often categorised as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● supporting e.g. soil formation, nutrient cycling, pollination● provisioning e.g. food, timber, water● regulating e.g. carbon sequestration, floodwater storage, air and water purification, climate regulation● cultural e.g. landscapes, wildlife etc. of aesthetic, cultural, historical, recreational or spiritual value to people.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)	A process under which developers are required to provide, in addition to a planning application, an environmental statement evaluating the likely environmental impact of the development, together with an assessment of how this may be mitigated. EIA is intended to ensure that, when deciding whether to grant planning permission for a project which is likely to have significant effects on the environment ,a local planning authority does so in full knowledge of the likely effects, and takes this into account in the decision making process. Governed by the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 in compliance with EU Directive 2011/92/EU.
Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)	The Higher Level Scheme was a Stewardship (i.e. agri-environment) scheme introduced in 2005 to concentrate on the more complex types of management needed to achieve the objectives of the ELS where land managers need advice and support, where agreements need to be tailored to local circumstances and where management needs to be carefully targeted.
Highway Authority	The Highways Act 1980 defines a Highway Authority as the body responsible for maintaining all highways maintainable at public expense and keeping them free of obstruction, including responsibility for public rights of way.
Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC)	A method used to define and map the historic and archaeological dimensions of the present-day landscape. HLC is an extremely useful tool for enabling better decision making about future land use management and change. By properly understanding the historic landscape context we can assess the likely effects of changes and make better informed decisions.
Historic Parks and Gardens	Parks and Gardens containing historic features dating from 1939 or earlier and registered by Historic England in three grades as with historic buildings.
Landscape	An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.
Landscape Character	A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from one another, rather than better or worse.
Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)	A process for identifying the effects of proposed changes (e.g. new development) on views and on the landscape itself. A depth of analysis and understanding of these two interrelated aspects is required to produce a successful LVIA. The Landscape Institute publishes guidelines for carrying out LVIA. LVIA may be required for significant planning applications within the AONB or its setting (q.v).
Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Unique individual geographical areas in which landscape types occur, which share generic characteristics with other areas of the same type but have their own particular identity.
Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)	A method for identifying, understanding and expressing the different patterns and features i.e. woodlands, hedgerows, building styles and historic artefacts which give a place a distinctive character.

LEADER	European Union rural development initiative for assisting rural communities in improving the quality of life and economic prosperity of their area through the distribution of grant funding.
Local Access Forum (LAF)	Set up under CRow Act to represent a balance of local interests and views, providing independent guidance to the relevant local authorities and the Countryside Agency on how to make the countryside more accessible and enjoyable for open air recreation in ways that address social, economic and environmental interests. Each county has one covering their respective areas of the North Wessex Downs.
Local Planning Authority (LPA)	The local authority, normally a unitary or local borough or district council, which is empowered by law to exercise planning functions.
National Nature Reserve (NNR)	Designated by Government under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 to protect and conserve nationally important areas of wildlife habitat and geological formations and to promote scientific research.
National Trail	Routes based on Public Rights of Way through the nation’s finest and most characteristic countryside, allowing an extensive journey on foot, horseback or by bicycle and capable of attracting tourist use from home and abroad.
Natural Beauty	Legislation and associated guidance defines natural beauty as including the physical elements of flora, fauna, geology and physiographic or geomorphological, the cultural and heritage elements, together with less tangible values such as intactness, rarity, wildness, remoteness, tranquillity and the appeal to the physical senses.
Natural Capital	The elements of nature that directly or indirectly produce value to people, including ecosystems, species, freshwater, land, minerals, the air and oceans, as well as natural processes and functions. Natural capita is described in terms of assets. Natural capital is simply those assets provided by nature which have the capacity to generate goods and services. Natural capital can be regarded as the source of all other types of capital: whether manufactured, financial, human or social, underlining the importance of a healthy environment for human prosperity.
Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006	Legislation that extended the biodiversity duty in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to public bodies and statutory undertakers to ensure due regard to the conservation of biodiversity. The Act also refined the definition of “natural beauty”.
Neighbourhood Plan	A document that a community may choose to prepare to set out a vision for how it wants an area to develop over the next 10-20 years. Once approved by an inspector and endorsed in a local referendum the plan becomes part of the statutory development plan for the area. Established by the Localism Act 2011.
Parkland	A large piece of ground usually comprising woodland, scattered mature trees, pasture and/or semi-formal gardens, often created to a specific landscape design and currently or once attached to a country house or mansion.
Pasture	An area of land dominated by grass, which is used only or principally for grazing, as distinct from a meadow that is mown. Pasture may be enclosed fields or unenclosed common land.
Permanent Grassland	Any grassland, whether pasture or meadow, composed of perennial or self-seeding annual plants kept indefinitely and not sown or ploughed.

Permissive Access	Public access to a route or area granted by the landowner, usually for foot access but occasionally for [horse] riders, which is not dedicated as a public right of way.
Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS)	Ancient Woodland Sites in which the former tree cover has been replaced, often with non-native trees. PAWS often retain important ancient woodland features including characteristic flora, fauna and archaeology.
Pollard	A tree which has had its top and/or upper branches cut some height above the ground to promote new and multiple growth, to avoid the reach of browsing animals or to create aesthetically pleasing forms, extend the life of the tree and/or maintain wildlife habitat. This is called pollarding.
Quiet Lane	Section 208 of the Transport Act 2000 makes provision for local traffic authorities to designate roads for which they are responsible as Quiet Lanes, enjoying voluntary speed restrictions and promotion for non-motorised traffic.
Regional Walking Routes	Longer named paths, promoted on the initiative of local authorities, signed and fully waymarked, and based on public rights of way, offering more than a day's travelling, perhaps following a theme or feature that offer tourism potential, such as the Wayfarer's Walk and the White Horse Trail.
Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)	Sections 60 to 62 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 require local highway authorities to prepare and publish Rights of Way Improvement Plans for improving rights of way in their areas, taking into account the needs of the public including people with disabilities.
River Basin Management Plan	A River Basin Management Plan (RBMP), produced in compliance with the Water Framework Directive (q.v.), provides a framework for protecting and enhancing the benefits provided by the water environment. It also informs decisions on land-use planning. It consists of a number of different documents, maps and datasets. Overseen by the Environment Agency, there is one for each of the seven River Basin Districts in England.
Scheduled Monument (SAM)	A structure identified by Historic England for protection under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.
Section 106 agreement	A binding agreement between a local planning authority and a developer associated with a grant of planning permission and regarding matters linked to the proposed development.
Setting (of the AONB)	The area within which development and land management proposals, by virtue of their nature, size, scale, siting, materials and design can be considered to have an impact, positive or negative, on the landscape, scenic beauty and special qualities of the AONB.
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	Area identified by Natural England under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 for protection by reason of the rarity of its nature conservation, wildlife features or geological interest.
Sites and Monument Record (SMR)	A database of sites of archaeological interest and potential within a particular area, usually a county.
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	Site designated according to the Habitats Directive 93/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and wild fauna and flora.
Special Qualities	The special qualities of the AONB are those aspects of the landscape for which it is considered important, and on which the priorities for its management are based. The interaction between natural and cultural factors can create a significance which is not recognised by looking at one aspect in isolation.

Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)	Documents prepared to support and amplify policies in the Local Development Plan. Such guidance must be consistent with national and local planning policy
Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS)	SUDS are intended to reduce flooding downstream of development by enabling surface water run-off to be controlled as near to the source as possible. National planning policy encourages use of SUDS and seeks to ensure that flood risk is considered on a catchment scale.
Tranquillity	Composite feature which seeks to characterise elements of wildness, solitude, peace and quiet, relating for example to low levels of built development, traffic, noise and artificial lighting.
Unimproved Grassland	Grassland consisting of native grasses and herbs which have not been significantly affected by treatment with mineral fertilisers, pesticides, intensive grazing or drainage.
Veteran Tree	Tree which by virtue of its great age, size and/or condition, is of exceptional value whether in cultural terms, for its landscape contribution or for the benefit of wildlife.
Water Framework Directive	EU Directive 2000/60/EC aims to achieve good qualitative and quantitative status of all surface and groundwater bodies.
Wetland	Transitional areas between wet and dry environments; wetlands range from permanently or intermittently wet land to shallow water and water margins.
Whole Farm (Conservation) Plan	A plan that considers an individual farm as a whole, producing a bespoke conservation plan considering farm type, location and any particular landscape or wildlife value, identifying adjustments to management practices that can significantly benefit the landscape and wildlife.
World Heritage Site (WHS)	A cultural or natural heritage site inscribed under the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage for its Outstanding Universal Value.

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This document is the statutory Management Plan for the nationally designated protected landscape of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), as required under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000. It is a plan for all those that have a responsibility to look after this precious and treasured landscape.

Following informal consultation in 2017, an initial draft was approved by the Partnership in July 2018 and published for public consultation between August and November 2018. All comments received were reviewed and recommendations approved by the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Working Group and a Management Plan Review Group, created to oversee the process on behalf of the Council of Partners. The North Wessex Downs Council of Partners and relevant local authorities have approved this Plan for publication.

Assessment, associated documents and further map data can all be found on the North Wessex Downs website: www.northwessexdowns.org.uk. For Historic Environment mapping data visit: www.historicnorthwessexdowns.org.uk

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**North Wessex
Downs
National
Landscape**



North Wessex Downs National Landscape

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