

PART 1:

OVERVIEW

EVOLUTION OF THE LANDSCAPE

3. PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

- 3.1. The basic structure of any landscape is formed by its underlying geology. The actions of weathering, erosion and deposition alter the form of the landscape, drainage and soils and in turn, patterns of vegetation and land use. The North Wessex Downs is influenced by geological formations from the Cretaceous, Tertiary and Quaternary periods. The central and dominating feature, which gives structure and unity to the landscape, is the expanse of chalk at the heart of the Downs.
- 3.2. The geological structure of the North Wessex Downs is illustrated on Figure 2. The principal physical features, topography and hydrology are illustrated on Figure 3.

Geology and Soils

Cretaceous (145.6-65.0 million years ago)

- 3.3. The rocks underlying the North Wessex Downs were formed during the Cretaceous period some 130 million years ago and have a strong influence on landform and landscape character today. During this period, a time of intense tectonic activity in Europe, the London Platform was elevated high above sea level exposing Jurassic strata, which were extensively eroded. Subsidence of the Wessex Basin led to the deposition of early sediments of Lower Greensand, Gault Clays and Upper Greensand.
- 3.4. In the late Cretaceous period rising sea levels progressively inundated the area and calcareous sediments, which eventually became chalk, were deposited. Chalk was originally deposited throughout the region and during Alpine tectonic phases the south part of the region was folded into the broad asymmetric syncline of the London Basin. The principal outcrop of this chalk forms a broad arc radiating from Stonehenge with one arm stretching across Wiltshire, Hampshire and Sussex and the other across Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. These form the distinctive downland landscapes of southern England of which the North Wessex Downs is an integral part.
- 3.5. The chalk was deposited sequentially into layers of Lower, Middle and Upper Chalk. The Middle and Upper chalk comprise pure white chalks which have resisted weathering, giving rise to the distinctive elevated plateau of expansive downs including the Marlborough Downs, Lambourn Downs, Horton Downs, Blewbury Downs and North Hampshire Downs. The high plateau of open, smoothly rolling downland is dissected by a network of dry valleys and long sinuous scarp slopes interlocking with gently rounded domed summits, as for example at Walbury Hill (297m), the highest chalk hill in southern England. The thin covering of well-drained, nutrient poor soils overlying the chalk bedrock supports a characteristic vegetation of herbs and grasses. Traditionally grazed by sheep and rabbits, these create the distinctive short springy chalk downland turf. These soils are also ideal for cereal growing and much of the downs are now under intensive arable cultivation.
- 3.6. Along the northern edge of the North Wessex Downs the eroded surface of the Lower Chalk, a softer clayey substrate, which has given rise to a lower and more level land surface and leaves a prominent and dramatic chalk scarp. The scarp along

the northern edge descends to the heavy blue-grey Lower Cretaceous Gault Clay of the undulating clay plain of the Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.

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

Tertiary (65.0 - 1.64 million years ago)

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

Sarsen Stones

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

Quaternary (1.64 million years ago - present)

- 3.9. The landscape is also considerably influenced by drift deposits, which overlay the solid geology. Many of the plateaux and ridges of the chalk downs are capped with Quaternary deposits of Clay-with-Flint; pockets of reddish brown clay containing flint pebbles. The heavier clay soils have retained their woodland cover and form the characteristic landscapes of the wooded downs, such as Chute Forest and Savernake Forest. The gently sloping plateau to the west of Newbury is capped by plateau gravels, deposits of acidic sand and gravels which have given rise to isolated areas of heathland.
- 3.10. Slope deposits, also known as 'combe deposits', are local features where frost-weathered debris accumulated during winter, forming a slurry when the snows melted and flowing down the slopes to create deposits resembling till. This type of

Figure 2. Simplified Geology

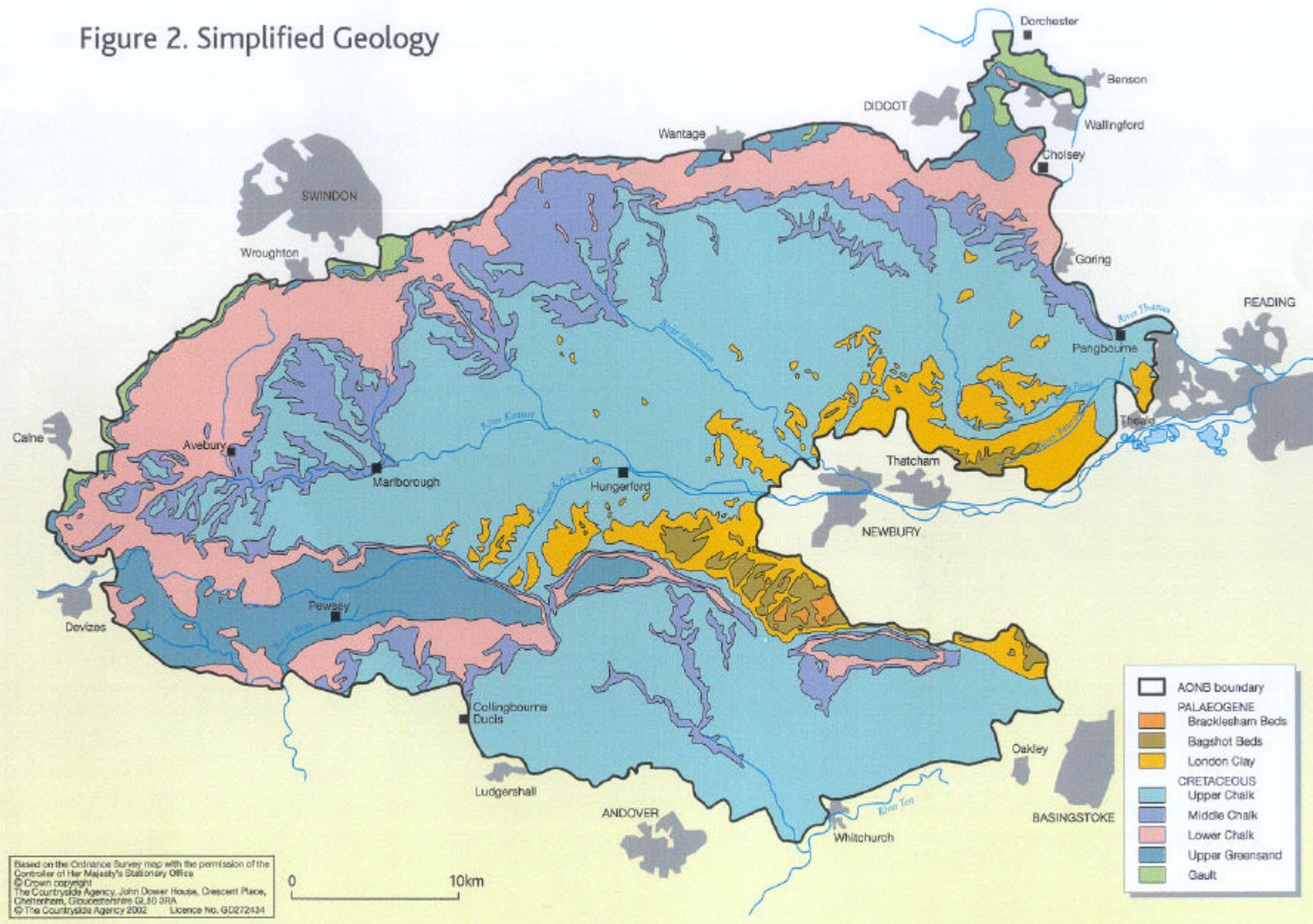
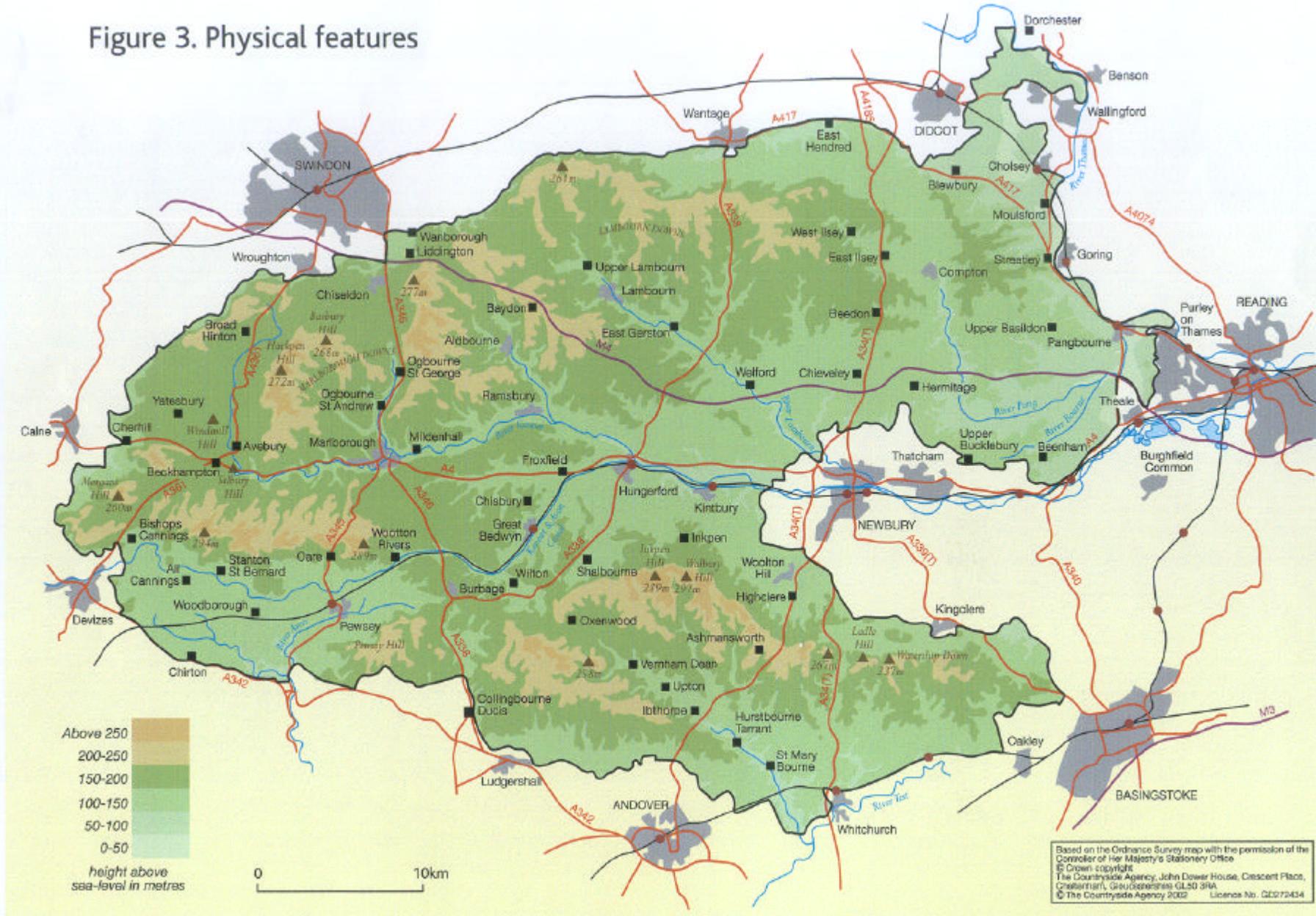


Figure 3. Physical features



deposit is widespread in the dry valleys of the downs. River alluvium dominates the main valley floodplains throughout the North Wessex Downs, such as along the Kennet, Lambourn and Pang creating rich wetland landscapes.

Watercourses

- 3.11. In general, it is the Thames Basin which determines the drainage pattern of the North Wessex Downs, with the main rivers flowing to the east. The River Kennet dissects the AONB from west to east. However, the separate catchments of the Salisbury Avon and Test also influence the pattern in the south, draining the Pewsey Vale and Hampshire Downs respectively.
- 3.12. The deeply incised chalk river valleys of the Lambourn, Kennet, Pang and Bourne are key features of the North Wessex Downs. With their clear, fast flowing waters these watercourses are highly prized for their distinctive ecology and their valleys form the main routes for communication and settlement, contrasting with the sparsely populated chalk summits. The downland is also dissected by a number of dry valleys, some of which support distinctive ephemeral winter streams or 'bournes'. These were formed during the Ice Age, when permafrost impeded sub-surface drainage and valleys, or coombes, were cut through the chalk. Today, however, much of the high open downland is waterless due to the porous nature of the bedrock.
- 3.13. Where the chalk formations of the central area meet the clays and gravels of the Reading and Bagshot Beds of the London Basin, water stored within the chalk aquifer issues along many spring lines. Minor, shallow tributaries drain this area into the rivers Enbourne, Kennet and Pang, which form part of the wider Thames catchment. These are frequently associated with ecologically important habitats and linear settlements. Springs are also a feature of the northern escarpment, issuing at the point where the porous chalk overlies the impermeable clays. These give rise to the distinctive scalloped coombe landform, such as The Manger on Whitehorse Hill, and spring line villages clustered along the foot of the slope.

The Kennet and Avon Canal

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

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

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

The importance of the waterway for commercial trade declined following the opening of the Great Western Railway in 1841 and the canal went into a long period of deterioration. The 1960's saw the start of restoration of the waterway, initiated by the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust, and the full length of the canal was reopened in the 1990's. The Heritage Lottery Fund has recently awarded a grant of £25 million to secure the structure, operation and environment of the waterway.

Ecology

Context

- 3.14. An assessment of the ecological character of the North Wessex Downs is an important component in the definition of its landscape types. The ecological character of an area is closely linked to its landscape features. The combination of such features as the chalk geology, hydrology, topography and land-use, results in a set of biological conditions under which specific ecological communities develop. The diversity and variety of landscapes within the North Wessex Downs has therefore resulted in a corresponding variation in habitats. The AONB spans part of five of English Nature's Natural Areas namely Berkshire and Marlborough Downs, South Wessex Downs, Hampshire Downs, Thames and Avon Vales and London Basin. These Natural Areas are areas of countryside identified by their unique combination of physical attributes, wildlife, land use and culture.
- 3.15. The North Wessex Downs as a whole contain vast stretches of intensively cultivated arable fields supporting relatively little wildlife interest. However, within this context there are some very high quality habitats of local, national and international ecological importance. These include sixty-six Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the AONB boundary; six of these are also candidate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). There are also a large number of non-statutory sites of nature conservation interest.

- 3.16. The most ecologically characteristic habitats are the chalk grasslands and chalk rivers, plus semi-natural woodland and arable farmland. There are in addition, a wide variety of other habitats that are also important and characterise particular areas within the North Wessex Downs. These include the small remnant patches of heathland that survive on river gravel deposits in the east of the AONB, the distinctive communities of lower plants that have developed on the sarsen stones (which are a special feature of the downs), areas of chalk scrub and the wide unimproved grassy verges of the droveways which characterise the open chalk downlands. At a local level, the hedgerow network, springs and ponds also provide important refuge and habitats. Collectively, these represent a rich biological resource offering potential for restoration/recreation and management to enhance the overall ecological character of the North Wessex Downs.
- 3.17. The key habitats of the North Wessex Downs are those that are considered to be a priority for nature conservation (as documented in local BAPs), and are characteristic of and well represented within the AONB. These habitats and their associated species are summarised below. A detailed analysis of sites with statutory and non-statutory wildlife designations has been undertaken by character area and this information has been supplied to The Countryside Agency.

Chalk Grassland:

- 3.18. The thin, well-drained, nutrient poor soils overlying the chalk bedrock support a characteristic vegetation of herbs and grasses. Traditionally grazed by sheep and rabbits, this is the 'springy' turf characteristic of the downlands forming one of the most distinctive and ecologically notable habitats of the North Wessex Downs. Unimproved chalk grassland is one of Britain's botanically richest habitats supporting a diverse community of invertebrates, mammals and birds, and is a priority habitat of special conservation concern in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan¹ (UK BAP). Key features of the chalk grasslands of the North Wessex Downs include:
- important butterfly populations including: adonis blue, silver-studded blue, marsh fritillary, chalkhill blue, small blue, silver spotted skipper and Duke of Burgundy fritillary;
 - a large number of scarce plant species including; early gentian, an eyebright (*Euphrasia pseudokernerii*), pasque flower, Chiltern gentian, dwarf mouse ear, tuberous thistle, field fleawort, round-headed rampion, burnt orchid, bastard toadflax and musk orchid;
 - feeding and breeding habitat for a number of rare and declining birds including skylark and stone-curlew.
- 3.19. The last fifty years have seen extensive destruction and fragmentation of these important grassland areas. This is largely attributed to agricultural intensification and the ploughing up of the light shallow downland soils with an associated decline in grazing. Once widespread, the unimproved chalk grassland of the North Wessex Downs is now fragmented with small isolated blocks restricted largely to the steep scarp slopes and dry valleys plus areas maintained as pasture around archaeological

¹ Published by the government in 1994 it sets out the broad strategy and targets for conserving and enhancing species and habitats for the next 20 years.

sites. The chalk grasslands are especially characteristic of three landscape types: Open Downland (1) the Downs Plain and Scarp (5), with a smaller amount within the Downlands with Woodland (2). There is a particular concentration within the western part of the AONB, perhaps the area where arable farming has been less intensive. Today, with a reduction in livestock (most recently as a result of foot and mouth) and associated abandonment of marginal land, some remaining areas of unimproved chalk grassland are under threat of loss to scrub encroachment.

Chalk Streams and Rivers

- 3.20. The spring fed streams and rivers, which incise the chalk include the River Kennet, Lambourn, Pang, Salisbury Avon and Bourne. These are described under landscape type 7: River Valleys. Chalk rivers have been identified in the UK BAP as a key habitat because of the diverse and characteristic biological communities they support. They are of international significance and have distinctive environmental characteristics such as a high alkalinity and conductivity. The percolation of water through chalk filters out much of the solid material resulting in these rivers' characteristically clear water and they provide important fisheries. A particular feature of the AONB is the winterbournes - ephemeral streams that flow in the upper reaches only during late autumn, winter and early spring. Key features of the chalk rivers in the North Wessex Downs include:
- extremely rich in plant and animal communities deriving in part from the high-quality of the base-rich water which, being spring fed, is naturally clear and fast flowing;
 - important habitat for a number of near extinct species including otter (formerly believed to be extinct in the AONB but possibly beginning to re-colonise), and freshwater white-clawed crayfish;
 - support healthy fish populations including brown trout, salmon, grayling, perch, chub and dace – providing important game fisheries;
 - support a diversity of floating vegetation;
 - include the characteristic 'winterbournes' with a specialised flora adapted to wide variations in flow;
 - irrigate a rich mosaic of associated wetland habitats creating distinctive valley landscapes including fens, floodplains, water meadows, carr and wet woodland. Diverse 'wetland' habitats support many rare species. The Red Data Book summer snowflake survives, for example in seasonally flooded woodlands along the Kennet Valley.
- 3.21. The abstraction of water from chalk aquifers has resulted in low flows within the chalk rivers of the North Wessex Downs. Development on the periphery of the AONB places particular pressures on water resources. More recently, localised autumn and winter flooding of the valleys has also been a concern. Pollution from agricultural run off has contributed to a decline in the quality of the chalk river habitat.

Broadleaved Woodland and Wood Pasture

- 3.22. Semi-natural woodland is now a scarce and valuable ecological resource. In the North Wessex Downs many of these woodlands are found on steep scarps and in coombes inaccessible for cultivation (landscape type 5) or on the heavier soils where Clay-with-Flint caps the Chalk, notably within the Downlands with Woodland (landscape type 2) and on the Wooded Plateau (landscape type 3). The most densely wooded areas, for example Chute Forest and Savernake Forest are derived from former royal hunting forests. A further concentration of ancient semi-natural woodland is found on the lower clays and gravels in the eastern part of the AONB (landscape type 8 and 9). In much of the AONB, the density of semi-natural woodland is one of the defining features of the landscape, as reflected in the naming of the landscape types.
- 3.23. There are a variety of woodland stand-types in the AONB reflecting the range of environmental conditions including; hornbeam coppice, oak/ash stands, hazel/oak stands, birch, ash/wych elm coppice, ash/wych elm/oak/field maple/hazel stands, ash/maple stands, and hazel/ash stands. Within the valleys, such as Kennet Valley there are also important examples of wet alder woodland. Surprisingly, beech woodlands are limited in extent (compared for example to the adjacent Chilterns AONB) and restricted to beech hangers along the escarpments to the north (landscape type 5) and the escarpment along the north edge of the Hampshire Downs (2E).
- 3.24. The key features of the woodlands of the North Wessex Downs are:
- rich in invertebrate species especially butterflies, including some severely declining fritillaries, e.g. pearl-bordered fritillary;
 - long rotation hazel coppice provides important habitat for dormice, a UK BAP priority species;
 - provide roosting and/or feeding sites for a number of bats species including: Bechstein's, Barbastelle, greater horseshoe and noctule;
 - calcareous woodlands support a number of scarce species such as spiked star-of-Bethlehem,
 - provide good examples of calcareous bluebell woods;
 - hosts a number of nationally scarce moss species;
 - Savernake Forest (landscape type 3) is particularly important as a large remnant of wood pasture, with 900 ha designated as SSSI in recognition of its outstanding lichen flora, fungi, rare invertebrates and breeding bird community. A further important example of lowland wood pasture and parkland is provided by Highclere Park SSSI (landscape type 8).
- 3.25. The woodlands would formerly have been an important part of the rural economy. They provided a source of fuel and building materials, as evidenced by timber framed buildings, and were used for hurdle making in support of the sheep economy on the downlands. The decline in traditional techniques of woodland management such as

coppicing, and neglect are having an impact on the ecological value of the woodland resource.

Arable Farmland

- 3.26. Today, the dominant land use within much of the AONB is the open arable farmland with few hedgerows and occasional small wooded areas (landscape type 1) intermixed within a more wooded mosaic (in landscape type 2). The arable land is largely managed under modern intensive systems, although may still support a characteristic range of wildlife, including:
- rare and colourful arable weeds, such as dense flowered-fumitory, slender tare and shepherd's needle, which are dependent on a regular cropping regime and survive in the less intensively managed field margins;
 - an important range of farmland birds. Spring-tilled arable on stony chalk soils provide essential breeding sites for stone curlew, a bird formerly widespread on the chalklands of lowland England. Skylark and yellowhammers remain relatively common and widespread, while grey partridges, lapwings, turtle doves and corn buntings can also still be found;
 - a habitat for species such as the brown hare.
- 3.27. Agri-environment schemes, such as Countryside Stewardship, support the sensitive management of arable margins, which can enhance biodiversity within arable landscapes. In parts of the AONB large areas are now successfully managed through Stewardship. The integration of production and nature conservation objectives, supported by appropriate incentives represent a major opportunity for biodiversity within the AONB.
- 3.28. The diverse physical attributes of the AONB in combination with past patterns of land use (outlined in the following chapter) have resulted in a rich variety of landscapes and habitats within the AONB. These contribute much to its overall character.

4. THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

- 4.1. The landscape as we see it today is the product of a series of major changes through which its character has been transformed by the interaction of natural and human processes. While the basic landform remains the same, its covering is constantly subjected to change. Some periods of landscape change have been more rapid and radical than others. These changes are not only important from an archaeological perspective, but also significant in determining the overall character of the North Wessex Downs.
- 4.2. A summary of the key events in the development of the North Wessex Downs landscape is outlined below and provides the context for the individual character area descriptions. It is based on research undertaken by Wessex Archaeology. A method statement setting out the process for researching and analysing the historic landscape is provided in Appendix 1.
- 4.3. Six key themes or historical processes in the development of the AONB landscape have been identified. These are:
 - Social Life and Society Structure;
 - Ideology;
 - Buildings and Settlement;
 - Subsistence, Agriculture and Industry;
 - Trade, Artefacts and Communication;
 - Landscape Change.
- 4.4. It is these processes, whose importance and combination vary across time, which have created the individual components that give the landscape its distinctive character.

POST-GLACIAL HUNTERS AND HORTICULTURALISTS: 11,000 - 4,000 BC (Palaeolithic-Mesolithic)

The First Landscapes

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

Social life and society structure

- 4.6. During this period, Late Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic communities may have consisted of kin or family-related bands, which themselves would have often split up into various task groups such as hunting or fishing parties. At certain times of the year, these bands may have combined into larger affiliated groups, based on wider kinship or tribal ties.

Ideology

- 4.7. Over time, certain points in the landscape became especially significant for these communities and stories and myths would have emerged. Natural features - prominent trees, hills, streams or flint sources - might have been named, and thought of as inhabited by the spirits of animals, plants and the human dead. The symbolic potential of animals, trees and woodland would have been great.
- 4.8. Little evidence survives of the people themselves. Upper Palaeolithic burials are unknown on the North Wessex Downs and, like rare Mesolithic burials, occur mostly in cave sites near the coast. The absence of Mesolithic human remains indicates that the dead were exposed on the ground, on platforms or in trees, or set adrift in rivers and streams.

Buildings and settlement

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

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

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

Trade, artefacts and communication

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

EARLY AGRICULTURAL AND RITUAL PRACTICES: 4,000 - 2,400 BC (Neolithic)

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

Social life and society structure

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

Ideology

- 4.14. The theme of death and burial is a significant one in the landscape of the AONB. The earliest evidence for treatment of the dead comes from the Neolithic period in the form of two types of site where human bones are commonly found. These are large enclosures, formed by segmented (or "causewayed") ditches, and long mounds or long barrows.
- 4.15. As a monument type, causewayed enclosures are relatively rare, yet three examples are found in the AONB, at Windmill Hill, north west of Avebury, Knap Hill and Rybury on the scarp overlooking the Vale of Pewsey. Although the function of these monuments is by no means certain, archaeological evidence suggests that they may have been used to define an area where the dead could be excarnated. There are numerous examples of Neolithic long mounds from the area, including some 20 examples around Avebury. These monuments comprise long earthen mounds, which cover a variety of structures associated with burials. One of the most dramatic, the West Kennet long barrow, for example, is some 113m in length and contains individual chambers constructed of sarsen slabs. The long barrows are distinctive forms in the landscape and are often positioned on hilltops or ridges, or follow the lines of rivers and valleys.

Buildings and settlement

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

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

- 4.17. Marks made by the first crude ploughs or ards have been found underneath some Neolithic monuments such as the South Street long mound near Avebury. Instead of permanent fields maintained across generations it is now thought that Neolithic people may have planted crops in woodland clearings, using short-lived plots cultivated for only a few seasons. The herding of animals may have suited a nomadic or semi-nomadic existence, with people moving with the herds from season to season, and from upland to lowland.

Trade, artefacts and communication

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

Landscape change

- 4.19. The environmental evidence for the Neolithic period within the AONB indicates a landscape that was still substantially wooded, though areas of grassland were now established and some erosion of soil had begun. Some clearances remained open or expanded, but others were abandoned and left to regenerate into hazel scrub and light woodland. Early Neolithic monuments such as causewayed enclosures were located in woodland clearings at the margins of human occupation, and long mounds were also built in limited clearances. The management of woodland resources would have been necessary to meet demands for timber and firewood, created by massive monumental structures and new practices.
- 4.20. In the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (3,000-1,500 BC), evidence for scrub, long and short turfed grass and cereal cultivation is more apparent. Although woodland was still very significant in the landscape, many clearances became permanent and large communal monuments such as Avebury and the round barrow cemeteries were located in large, cleared areas. It was during this period that the characteristic open 'chalk downland' vegetation first appeared over large parts of the North Wessex Downs, with the heavy soils of the flint-capped areas tending to retain their woodland cover.

A MONUMENTAL LANDSCAPE: 2,400 - AD 43 (BRONZE AGE - IRON AGE)

Social life and society structure

- 4.21. By the Early and Middle Bronze Age, the lack of clear age or gender distinctions in barrow burials and cremations suggests that status was inherited rather than acquired, and that dominant lineages had now formed within societies. Large, linear

ditches dividing up the landscape appeared on the Marlborough Downs and Salisbury Plain during the Late Bronze Age, and together with increased evidence for warfare this suggests emerging territories on the chalk uplands. Rather than extensive social networks, the emphasis on roundhouses, enclosures, linear ditches and field systems may also reflect that kinship groups were becoming more important in these communities. The creation and maintenance of linear ditches, field system boundaries and hilltop enclosures may have become the favoured arenas for communal social activity and expressing identity. This development of tribal communities, with substantial defended sites - hillforts - sitting amongst an ordered landscape with enclosed settlements and hamlets reaches its apogee in Iron Age society.

Ideology

- 4.22. The Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (around 2,400 BC) is a time when the landscape of the North Wessex Downs became monumentalised. Huge henge enclosures such as at Avebury and at Hatfield Farm, Marden in the Vale of Pewsey were built, together with the remarkable circular mound of Silbury Hill. A similar massive mound at Hatfield Farm, known as the Hatfield Barrow, which once measured 7m in height and 147m in diameter, was levelled in the early nineteenth century. This period of construction was followed by a time of lithicization when many existing monuments were further enhanced by rows and circles of standing stones, as dramatically illustrated at Avebury. These monuments are, without doubt, some of the most remarkable manifestations of human organisation in prehistoric Europe.
- 4.23. Many of the numerous round barrows which are such a characteristic feature of the North Wessex Downs landscape, were constructed in the Early Bronze Age. Sometimes the barrows are highly visible on ridges and hill tops (or slightly below the actual top, on what is called the 'false-crest', so that when seen from below they are on the skyline), while others follow the lines of valleys and streams. Notable examples on the North Wessex Downs include the Seven Sisters by Beacon Hill and the Lambourn Seven Barrows. Many barrow groups are focused around earlier monuments, or form linear alignments, as on Overton Hill, near Avebury.
- 4.24. From the Middle Bronze Age the large communal monuments fell out of use. Instead, the places and routines of everyday life, the ditches, pits and postholes of enclosures and fields became the focus for spiritual activity. In the Late Iron Age however, small numbers of individual burials and cremation burials appear again in the region, many of high-status individuals, such as richly furnished cremation burials found in Marlborough and in a barrow at Blagden Copse in Hampshire. Extensive Late Bronze Age and Iron Age middens such as Potterne and All Cannings Cross, near Devizes, may have been connected to these ideas. Here, vast accumulations of everyday domestic refuse were mixed with more deliberate deposits of artefacts, many either unused or deliberately broken. Votive offerings of metalwork still continued in rivers such as the Thames, but are rare elsewhere in the North Wessex Downs. During the Iron Age the seasonally appearing bournes seem to have held a particular fascination. Along with springs and certain trees, these may have been favoured places of the gods.

Buildings and settlement

- 4.25. The overall pattern of settlement in the Middle Bronze Age seems to be one of a patchwork of small farms and hamlets with associated arable and pastoral fields and interspersed woodland on heavier clays. But from this time and especially in the Late Bronze Age, more substantial buildings and settlements began to appear, such as the hilltop enclosure on Rams Hill, near Uffington, which was one of the first examples of 'hillfort' construction. The general impression is of a move to more nucleated settlements and developing competitive social networks. Prominent ridge end or hilltop enclosures also appeared at this time. These large, defended sites, such as at Walbury and Ladle Hill on the escarpment of the southern block of chalk upland may have been the residences of emerging social elites. Evidence suggests they may also have functioned as refuges in time of trouble, and as redistribution centres for crops and livestock, although they were unlikely to have been inhabited year-round.
- 4.26. Both enclosed and unenclosed farmsteads continued into the Early Iron Age, consisting of roundhouses and possible raised-floor granaries, with associated field systems. These remained the predominant settlement types through into the Romano-British period. They were often sited between the upper downland and the river floodplains. In the Middle and Late Iron Age, small numbers of distinctively shaped 'banjo' enclosures appeared, as at Blagden Copse, some of which may have been more specialised settlements associated with herding.
- 4.27. The most visual manifestation of the Early and Middle Iron Age are the large numbers of hillforts, which are a very distinctive and visible feature of the landscape of the North Wessex Downs. A fine example is Ladle Hill where a hillfort was constructed (but never completed) within the earlier enclosure. Although many of these monuments had been abandoned by the Middle Iron Age, those that survived were often elaborated and increased in size. Some may have formed the seats of local chieftains, and may thus be related to power and display. Beacon Hill (which sits opposite Ladle Hill) in Hampshire and Liddington Castle and Barbury Castle in Wiltshire. The latter are classic examples in the line of hillforts sited approximately along the line of the Wiltshire/Berkshire Ridgeway.
- 4.28. In the last century or so before the Roman conquest a number of large nucleated settlements developed, often at strategic points in the landscape such as river crossings. Calleva (Silchester) and Venta (Winchester) both of which are just outside the AONB boundary, are well known, however archaeological evidence from Mildenhall in the Kennet Valley suggests this was another major focus possibly connected to a series of undated linear earthworks in the woods to the south of the valley.

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

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

productivity of the soil. Field boundaries may indicate that access to the land was more tightly controlled.

- 4.30. By the Iron Age, sheep and cattle were being grazed on downlands largely devoid of woodland, with wet valley bottoms providing rich summer grazing. Cattle were still significant although sheep were by far the most numerous livestock on the downs, reared for meat but mainly for wool. Pigs may have foraged in woodlands. During the Iron Age a great diversity of plant foods were produced in cultivated fields with crops including spelt wheat, emmer wheat, barley, oats and rye, in addition to Celtic beans, peas, vetch, sorrel and fat hen. Over time the soils on the chalk may have become thinner and less productive in some areas, and competition for land and resources may have led to or exacerbated social tensions.

Trade, artefacts and communication

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

Landscape change

- 4.32. During this period, forest clearance continued leading to the opening up of large tracts of land. Settlement appears to have expanded on the chalk downland, complemented by a great increase in the number of burial monuments. Woodland appears to have persisted preferentially on soils on Clay-with-Flint. These heavier acidic soils may have been deliberately avoided for agriculture. It is likely that the heathlands on the lower land in the eastern part of the AONB were also formed during the Bronze Age through forest clearance and depletion of the soils.
- 4.33. In the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age (1,100 BC - AD 43), hilltop enclosures formed by banks and ditches were very dramatic features. Extensive patterns of field systems divided up much of the landscape, whilst surviving woods must have been carefully maintained using techniques such as coppicing, to ensure a constant supply of building materials and fuel. Cattle were grazed in valleys close to water sources, but sheep require less water, and would have been grazed on the higher downland and maintained the distinct short-cropped downland turf. Hardier crops such as barley and spelt meant that cultivation had spread across the higher downs, even onto Clay-with-Flint areas, and the fragile downland soils were beginning to be eroded or exhausted in places.

TOWN AND COUNTRY, SETTLEMENT OF THE LANDSCAPE: AD 43 - 1066 (ROMAN - SAXON)

Social life and society structure

- 4.34. The Roman conquest of AD 43 brought some changes reflecting the new centralised administration, although there was still much continuity with the majority of native oppida continuing to develop as urban centres. Some existing native lineages and their leaders would undoubtedly have continued to be hostile to the Roman invaders long after the occupation, including the Atrebates whose territory included the

North Wessex Downs, but others rapidly adopted Roman customs and practices. Within a few centuries, native and Roman cultures had fused into a distinctive Romano-British identity that although similar to many other societies within the empire, was also subtly distinct from them.

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

Ideology

- 4.36. Romano-British culture practised both cremation and inhumation burials, and larger centres had cemeteries located outside of the towns, on roads leading into the settlements. Early pagan Anglo-Saxon cremation and inhumation cemeteries of the fifth and sixth centuries AD have been found at Collingbourne Ducis, East Shefford near the River Lambourn, at Blacknall Field in the Vale of Pewsey, and just north of Andover. These contained grave goods such as pottery, brooches, tools, jewellery and weapons. Following the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity, burials took place around churches, usually without grave goods.

Buildings and settlement

- 4.37. The Romano-British period supposedly saw an intensification of settlement and reorganisation of land usage and landholding. In reality, many farmsteads continued to develop and expand following the Roman occupation, and remained little different in appearance. No forts have been identified on the North Wessex Downs, but the introduction of villa estates was a dramatic change. There are villas clustered close to Andover, whilst some on the Lambourn Downs make use of earlier field systems. Some villas were themselves developed out of earlier native farmsteads, and by the third century AD most villas had rectangular, tile-roofed stone buildings at their centres. Only a few Roman settlements were established close to the AONB, with Leucomagus or Andover and Cuentio or Mildenhall being the most notable. Some 'villages' also appeared during the Romano-British period, such as Chisenbury Warren, which had numerous buildings spread out along a central street.
- 4.38. There is little direct archaeological evidence for Anglo-Saxon settlement on the North Wessex Downs. However, these early settlements are likely to have clustered in the principal river valleys, close to water sources. Great Bedwyn, for example, is certainly known to have Anglo-Saxon origins, as it is mentioned in a charter. Typical Anglo-Saxon constructions were the grubenhauser or sunken-featured buildings. Early documentary records of around 888 AD, the oval street

plan and the possible Saxon origins of the church on the edge of the area suggest that the settlement of Lambourn has Saxon origins. Large Saxon estates on the Downs were sometimes subdivided to form parishes. The countryside was divided into villas and manors, with each administrative unit including a proportion of meadowland, arable lower slopes and pasture on the higher ground. The need to use these different areas led to the long, thin parishes characteristic of the chalk downlands of the AONB.

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

- 4.39. The Roman occupation has traditionally been seen as a period of great change in the rural landscape. There was an increase in cereal cultivation and livestock numbers, attributed to the introduction of ten percent taxation, and the demands of the Roman army for grain, meat and hides. Tanning and related crafts may have become industrial in scale, and a large-scale wool industry developed, with an expansion of field systems on the downs to meet the demand for wool.
- 4.40. In the third century AD mouldboard ploughs appeared, capable of working heavier soils. Livestock increased in size, wool became finer, and the appearance of mules and new varieties of horse, dog and fowl suggest an increased interest in breeding. Spelt and emmer wheat declined in importance, whilst bread/club wheat, rye and oats became more popular. Winter cropping of wheat probably began after the occupation, whilst cabbage, parsnips, turnips, carrots and flax were introduced to Britain for the first time, along with hay cropping.
- 4.41. Anglo-Saxon arable crops included wheat, barley and oats, especially free-threshing bread wheat, although at this time arable agriculture may have reduced on the downs due to declining soil fertility. Many villages and manors on the chalk adopted two field systems, where half of the arable land was left untilled each year to be grazed by cattle and recover its fertility. In more fertile areas such as the Vales villages adopted three or four field systems, with the land cultivated for two years for cereal crops, and then left fallow for a third year.

Trade, artefacts and communication

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

Landscape change

- 4.43. Roman roads were the most obvious changes in the landscape following the invasion in AD 43. However, the bulk of the North Wessex Downs remain little changed in appearance, although field systems may have expanded further into previously open downland areas. Further woodland clearance took place, in part driven by increased

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

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

SETTLEMENT AND ORGANISATION OF THE LANDSCAPE: 1066 – 1499 (MEDIEVAL)

Social life and society structure

- 4.45. The Norman Conquest of England replaced an English speaking elite with a French speaking nobility, based in castles and manor houses. Castles were built at Marlborough and Ludgershall to ensure the stability of the area. The Crown, the nobility, the bishoprics of the Church and the great monastic houses owned most of the land within the North Wessex Downs.
- 4.46. The Domesday survey of 1086 provides an insight into how parts of the English landscape was organised prior to and following the Norman Conquest of 1066. Important landowners, particularly the King and the Church controlled large parts of the countryside either directly or indirectly. The harvest failures and famines of 1315 to 1322 and the Black Death caused widespread misery, the latter killing 40%-50% of the population, and altering the balance of economic and social power between peasants and lords. Serfdom largely disappeared, and paid labourers and classes of landed peasants and yeoman farmers emerged.

Buildings and settlement

- 4.47. The Normans established motte and bailey castles, such as the one at Marlborough, to act as local centres of power and control, and some new settlements appeared around them. The prosperity and growth which characterised the later-twelfth and thirteenth centuries led to the rapid expansion of towns just outside the AONB, such as Andover, Basingstoke, Overton, Newbury, and Lambourn which lies just inside the AONB.
- 4.48. Within the AONB settlement was concentrated along the river valleys, with scattered hamlets and isolated farmsteads restricted to clayland or the downland, where dairying, stock-raising and pasture-farming predominated. Large open fields divided into strips usually surrounded villages; these being owned individually but usually farmed together. Rectangular buildings with their own yards (the tofts and crofts) were arranged along the central roads or lanes that ran through the villages, often following the valley alignments. Manor houses and churches continued to be at

the heart of village life, although in some areas manor houses were located on the outskirts of the villages.

- 4.49. This general settlement pattern did vary. The Vale of Pewsey had a mixture of nucleated and dispersed settlements, often aligned across the valley rather than along it. The parishes of the Kennet valley were also more varied, and the area of downland in the south-east part of the AONB (west of Basingstoke) has a dispersed pattern of hamlets and individual farms. The Thames Valley, for example, saw a variety of smaller, nucleated, open green or dispersed settlements. These settlement patterns are still evident in the present day landscape.
- 4.50. After the Black Death, falling population, decline in arable acreage, and low corn prices contributed to the desertion and partial desertion of villages particularly along the chalkland valleys of the AONB. Other late medieval desertions came about because of the creation of deer parks, such as the great new park at Savernake created by the Dukes of Somerset during the sixteenth century.

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

- 4.51. During the thirteen century management of woodland and Royal Forests for game, timber and fuel was intense, and coppicing, pollarding and charcoal burning were all important practices in such areas. Villagers had common rights to some woodland and open areas, where grazing was also important. Rabbits were almost certainly introduced to Britain after the Norman Conquest, and were often managed in artificial warrens called pillow mounds with good examples evident on the Marlborough Downs. A population explosion (prior to the Black Death) also resulted in extensive areas of the AONB being cleared and ploughed, as evidenced by the many strip lynchets visible in the landscape today. These terraces, by which cultivation was extended up hillsides, enabled more land to be ploughed. Today, these are among the most common landscape features of the chalk and whole series survive along the northern edge.
- 4.52. The numerous small irregular shaped fields or assarts, which are especially prevalent in the east of the AONB are also evidence of this land-hunger and represent clearance of areas of forest waste or encroachment into heathland. Following the catastrophe of the Black Death, a declining population and reduced corn prices meant that arable farming was less profitable. There was a marked decrease in the extent of arable cultivation and land was allowed to revert to grass such as in the heavy clays of the Vale of the White Horse and on the thin soils of the Lambourn Downs. Sheep flocks, meanwhile, increased substantially as the wool industry developed further, with towns such as Marlborough, Whitchurch and Newbury becoming important textile centres.

Trade, artefacts and communication

- 4.53. By the medieval period, trade was becoming more long-distance and large-scale once more, with wool and livestock being the predominant export from the downlands. This was taken to burgeoning market towns often located on the fringes of the downs, such as Andover and Swindon. In turn this greatly affected the network of communications with many new tracks being established, although many medieval droveways and tracks may have had earlier origins. These tracks now form the

intricate network of footpaths, byways, and green lanes that can be found across the AONB.

Landscape change

- 4.54. The clay Vales were much more wooded at this time and along with the remains of Saxon royal woodlands such as the Forest of Chute and the Forest of Pamber were used as hunting areas. The management of these areas was codified in Forest Law by the Normans. However, by the thirteenth century there was a wave of disafforestation when the Crown relinquished Forest Law over many areas. This meant woodlands became smaller, and had often fragmented into individual deer parks, which are a particular feature of the lower lying eastern part of the AONB (e.g. Highclere Chase). Deer parks were surrounded by bank, ditch and fence boundaries often called pales. Deer-leaps allowed deer to move into the parks easily, but restricted their ability to leave. Although the Romans may have introduced fallow deer to Britain, they did not appear on the North Wessex Downs until after the Norman Conquest.
- 4.55. From the thirteenth century onwards, large areas of former arable land on the downs were converted to pasture, and the open and un-hedged landscapes characteristic of the chalk downland became dominant across much of the region. By the fourteenth century however, in many areas of the North Wessex Downs this pattern was changing, with the consolidation of land blocks and their enclosure as fields using hedges, banks or ditches. This may partly have been a result of the depopulation resulting from the Black Death.

POST MEDIEVAL: 1500 - 1799

Social life and society structure

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

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

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

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

Landscape change

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

THE MODERN LANDSCAPE: 1800 - PRESENT

Social life and society structure

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

Subsistence, agriculture and industry

- 4.60. Lace and silk making were specialist industries that developed in places such as Marlborough and Whitchurch on the edge of the North Wessex Downs during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but during the nineteenth century the cloth industry declined markedly. Ironworks and engineering developed in the surrounding towns of Swindon, Andover and Devizes. The coming of the railways saw an increase in dairying, especially in the clay Vales, as it became much easier to transport milk to towns and cities. Watercress was an unusual nineteenth and twentieth century crop that continues to be cultivated in flooded beds within the river valleys, notably the Bourne, a tributary of the River Test.
- 4.61. Following the First and Second World Wars there was increased mechanisation on farms, and farm labouring as a way of life declined rapidly. Many farms on the downlands are now very large business concerns with intensive ploughing and use of fertilisers and insecticides maintaining high crop yields. Post-war intensification of agriculture, the use of fertilisers and insecticides and increased mechanisation has led many farmers to continue ploughing on slopes and elevated downland, and to remove many hedgerows and field boundaries, creating very large-scale fields. Many archaeological features have been destroyed, and in some instances much of the topsoil also has been lost.

Trade, artefacts and communication

- 4.62. Turnpike roads were a significant improvement in communication, and in 1810 the Kennet and Avon Canal was opened, serving Pewsey, Hungerford, Newbury and

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

Landscape change

- 4.63. The development of the canal, railway and road networks has had a major impact on the landscapes of the North Wessex Downs, especially more recent road routes such as the M4 and A34. During the Second World War many areas such as the Lambourn Downs and Marlborough Downs that had been under pasture were ploughed up again to maximise arable production. This has created the open character of the landscape today.
- 4.64. The 20th century has witnessed major changes in the agricultural management. At the same time there has been a significant increase in the urban population and growth of development. These changes are not only significant from an archaeological perspective, but are significant in determining the overall character of the North Wessex Downs. They are considered further in Chapter 16.

5. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INFLUENCES

- 5.1. This chapter provides an overview of the economic and social character of the North Wessex Downs. It includes population characteristics, the structure of employment and a summary of the key economic sectors both internal and external to the AONB. It also contains information on social characteristics relating to housing and service provision. The information in this chapter has been drawn from two separate short research studies undertaken by the Community Council for Berkshire (CCB) on social characteristics (2000) and Segal Quince Wicksteed (SQW) on the economic character of the AONB (2000). It builds on information in a paper prepared by the Rural Economy Working Group for the Downlands Conference in January 1999². A method statement and information on data sources for each study is provided in Appendix 1.
- 5.2. A more in-depth analysis of the social characteristics, in terms of population and services, of key villages in each of the eight main landscape types identified within the North Wessex Downs is provided in Appendix 4. This appendix provides an important layer of information that enhances understanding of overall local character.

Overview

- 5.3. The economic and social characteristics of the North Wessex Downs are strongly influenced by its location. The relative proximity of London and high value-added industries of the Thames Valley and north Hampshire exert considerable impact on the economy and its social characteristics, for example in terms of housing and levels of service provision. The influence of London is most keenly felt to the east of the AONB and in particular those villages with good access to mainline stations. The proximity to international airports and channel ports, in particular the Southampton Container Port will increase economic pressure along the A34 (Euro Route EO 5), will have an increasing influence upon the area. The boundary of the North Wessex Downs skirts 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. Furthermore the M4 motorway passes from east to west across the AONB, with the A34 being an important north-south link. These routes are important to the local economy providing good access to markets/clients for businesses located within the AONB, access to centres of employment beyond the AONB as well as income and employment from passing trade (e.g. service stations, hotels etc). The roads also mean that much of the AONB is highly accessible to commuters working in the adjacent towns.
- 5.4. The economic and social characteristics of the North Wessex Downs are shaped by the traditional and unique attributes of the locality at one level and by its prime

² The Downlands Conference Steering Group was an informal group set up by and for those with an interest in the future of the North Wessex Downs. Working groups reported on issues including the Rural Economy. In 2002 the Downlands Conference evolved into a formal AONB management structure.

location with access to the regional centres, the high technology industries and London at another. The AONB is not therefore a discrete area, but one with significant trading links, and daily migration patterns around its circumference. The attractive locality and proximity to expanding employment centres has resulted in an increase in population and created a high demand for housing within the AONB. This in turn is having a significant impact on the social and community characteristics of the area.

- 5.5. The overall picture masks locally significant intra-regional variations within the North Wessex Downs. The east of the AONB, for example, has slightly different characteristics from the west, with greater pressure on housing stock and recruitment in West Berkshire, Basingstoke and Deane and South Oxfordshire. The booming peripheral economy also masks pockets of rural deprivation, with the downturn in the fortunes of farming being particularly acute within parts of the AONB. In addition the Rural Economy Working Group of the Downlands Conference made a distinction between the edge of the AONB which are more strongly influenced by the surrounding urban areas and central part of the AONB, which is more remote.

Population and Employment Structure

Population

- 5.6. The total population of the North Wessex Downs is approximately 125,000 and as such it is comparatively sparsely populated within the context of southern England, with vast tracts of the chalk uplands without any substantial settlement. The majority live in the small villages of the AONB and the two market towns of Marlborough and Hungerford with the high downs including large expanses, without any significant habitation. Population growth in the AONB varies considerably from ward to ward, however, the general trend is typified by an increase in population of around 8% between 1981-1991, with a large proportion of the population now in-migrants (estimated to be as high as four-fifths). The population increase has largely been amongst the retired and working population. This has had a considerable impact on the demographic structure of the AONB, with the number of young people within villages declining as they leave to relocate to areas with better service provision and cheaper housing, resulting in a higher proportion of middle aged and elderly people (see para. 5.29).
- 5.7. Demographic change within the North Wessex Downs, across the periods 1981, 1991 and projections for 1999/2000 is illustrated in table 5.1. The figures in this table represent changes that have occurred in the wards and parishes within the AONB and not the whole of the local authority administrative area. It illustrates the population gain within the AONB. Kennet and West Berkshire wards, for example have each seen an increase of over 5000 since 1981.

Table 5.1: Population Change within the AONB

<i>Administrative Area (area in AONB)</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1999/2000</i> <i>0</i>	<i>Change</i>
West Berkshire	49310	51074	54370	5060 GAIN
Basingstoke & Dean	30119	30545	32954	2835 GAIN
Test Valley	3535	3476	3901	366 GAIN
Kennet District	28430	32241	34249	5819 GAIN
Vale of White Horse	N/a	18523	18345	178 LOSS (based on 1999/2000 projections)
South Oxfordshire	N/a	N/a	N/a	
North Wiltshire	15773	16460	17380	1607 GAIN
Swindon	12128	12300	12460	332 GAIN

Employment Levels

- 5.8. The economically active population of the North Wessex Downs is approximately 80,000, one third of whom work within the AONB, with two-thirds being outbound commuters to the surrounding urban areas, London and the South-East. The major transport networks of the M4, A34 and the railway enhance accessibility to the surrounding areas. Within the AONB itself it is estimated that around 60% of total employment is located in the peripheral areas, with 10% in the two market towns and the remaining 30% employed in the central part of the AONB.
- 5.9. The regional economy is generally buoyant. Unemployment is low and economic activity rates are high, with many jobs in high value-added industries within a short journey from villages in the AONB. As a consequence this has inflated house prices and increased the proliferation of “commuter villages”.
- 5.10. The east of the AONB (West Berkshire and Basingstoke and Deane in particular) is booming with some of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. Latest estimates for West Berkshire suggest that there are 8 jobs for every 3 people registered with the unemployment service. This has resulted in staff shortages with 80% of businesses reporting difficulties in recruiting staff in December 1999 (West Berkshire Council Economic Development Strategy 2000-2001). In parts of the AONB there is a shortage of key workers in important public services such as education and public transport. This is partly as a result of the high cost of living in the area (particularly house prices), which discourages people on limited income from moving into the area.
- 5.11. Similar patterns of economic growth are also apparent at centres within the AONB, for example Hungerford. However, these are localised ‘hot spots’. Generally, patterns of employment are such that outward migration is high throughout the majority of the area.
- 5.12. The AONB as a whole is relatively affluent, however this wealth is by no means uniform. The current changes in the agricultural sector (explored further later in this report) has put particular financial pressure on those employed in this sector, which is exacerbated by a shortage of affordable housing. The associated impacts on the local economy are recognised by Kennet District Council in a study on the economic characteristics Kennet, which states that *“official statistics tend only to be available for quite large areas, and poverty and social exclusion, while they exist, may be*

hidden from view, both on the ground, and in figures which give a fairly affluent picture." In addition there is a link between the lack of affordable housing and the growing shortage of key workers including bus drivers, primary school teachers, police and office support staff. It is clear that within the AONB, like many rural areas in south east, there is an increased polarisation between affluent and less advantaged inhabitants.

Employment by Sector and Occupation in the AONB and Adjacent Area

- 5.13. The Downlands Conference has estimated employment by sector within the AONB. Their work highlights the relative importance of land based industries (agriculture and race horse training) in the central part of the AONB as the main employers. The racehorse industry represents an important and locally distinct employment sector within the AONB. In the market towns services, distribution, hotel and catering are more dominant, while the business services sector is of greater importance in the border areas that enable better access to customers.

Features of the AONB Economy

Agriculture

- 5.14. Further detail on the future prospects for agriculture in the North Wessex Downs are considered in Chapter 17, 'Forces for Change'. This section summarises the current economic character of the industry, although it is recognised that the industry is currently in a great state of change. In the AONB, as nationally, the economy has moved away from its agricultural base since the 1960s. Villages and towns that were previously inextricably linked with agricultural production are now more closely linked with other sectors and in particular employment opportunities in the urban centres beyond the AONB boundaries.
- 5.15. Within the North Wessex Downs as a whole, it is estimated that 5% of the economically active population is directly involved in farming. This is compared to an average of 1.4% across the District/Boroughs, which partially include the AONB. Generally, the North Wessex Downs is considered to have a well-structured farming industry, with substantial assets of land, machinery, knowledge and entrepreneurial ability. A particular feature is the high proportion of land held within large well-managed estates. However, while agriculture within the AONB is more important than in the surrounding areas, employment within the sector is still falling. Between 1981 and 1991 employment in agriculture fell by 30% and a forecast for the period 1991-2001 suggested an 8% decrease. It is also suspected that there has been a shift away from full time employment towards a greater number of part time employees (internal RSPB study of the Berkshire Downs, 1995).
- 5.16. Within the AONB those employed in agriculture can be roughly divided as either farmers who manage their own land (38%), or as agricultural workers (62%). This ratio possibly indicates the capital intensive nature of farming within very large units and also reflects the large number of estates in single ownership. In the future, it is expected that some farms in the North Wessex Downs will restructure to achieve economies in scale and may continue to increase in size resulting in very large units, farmed under a single regime. In these cases it is likely that only a proportion will be owned, with large areas farmed under contract.

- 5.17. In the UK, the Total Income From Farming (TIFF) has more than halved since 1995, representing an average total income of approximately £10,000 per full time worker in 1999. This trend is also apparent throughout the North Wessex Downs AONB. In Hampshire, for example, farm income has declined by up to 60 percent since 1995 and stands at the same level as in 1985. It is clear that the economic vibrancy of the region as a whole is not reflected in agriculture where *“those who still work in those sectors [Agriculture and associated industries] face low pay, job insecurity and many other characteristics of rural poverty”* (North Wiltshire District Council Economic Development and Tourism Strategy 2000/01).
- 5.18. The downturn in the agricultural sector has also affected other industries that were previously built around agriculture, for example, in product processing. However, despite being no longer an important player in the regional economy, agriculture remains the dominant land use within the AONB and has a major influence in determining landscape character and quality. For these reasons, it is essential that new ways are found to support the agricultural economy and that rural diversification reflects the skills of local people and supports maintenance of the landscape character and quality of the North Wessex Downs.

Tourism

- 5.19. Tourism is widely recognised as an increasingly important sector, albeit currently operating from a relatively low base. There are a number of key attractions in the North Wessex Downs. These include the historic town of Marlborough, with a location on the A4, which has enabled the town to develop as a tourist “stop-off”. The North Wessex Downs also has a wealth of archaeological and historic sites that attract significant visitor numbers. Avebury World Heritage Site, for example, receives in the region of 400,000 visitors a year and revenue generated is an important contributor to the local economy. The Ridgeway National Trail similarly attracts in the region of 100,000 visitors a year, with an estimated annual spend in the region of £1.5 million. There is a wealth of smaller sites, historic houses and other tourism attractions within the AONB.
- 5.20. A number of tourist information guides for the region market the AONB and the outstanding landscape. More recently there has been an emphasis on promoting sustainable tourism (e.g. walking the Ridgeway, cycling using the new trans AONB national cycle route, horse tourism via the extensive linked network of bridleways, and visiting the Kennet and Avon Canal and archaeological sites.) A number of local authorities within the North Wessex Downs believe that tourism can play an increasingly important role in improving the quality and quantity of local employment opportunities and amenities for local people, and this is being reflected in local strategies and promotion. In North Wiltshire, for example, it is suggested that tourism centred around the District’s heritage sites such as the White Horse of Cherhill, should be managed to support economic activity in the villages adjacent to these sites.

The Racehorse Industry, Lambourn Valley

- 5.21. The North Wessex Downs and Lambourn, in particular is the second most important centre for the racehorse industry in Britain. The industry employs 800 people directly, and has an annual income of around £20m, £3m of which is foreign

revenue. The Lambourn Downs has a self-contained micro-economy with one third of the population employed locally.

A sign stating 'Valley of the Racehorse' signals entrance to the Lambourn Valley and the small village, nestling at the head of the valley, is dominated by farms and racing stables creating a unique community and local economy. The area is home to numerous race horse training establishments producing some of the most famous riders and horses in English racehorse history. In addition to training the Lambourn area supports many associated industries including horse transport, stabling and stud farms.

Armed Forces

- 5.22. The Armed Forces still play a significant role in the local economy, especially in places such as Tidworth and Ludgershall to the south of the AONB on the Wiltshire Hampshire border. In the light of the Strategic Defence Review, these areas may see a significant expansion. On the other hand changing priorities in government spending on defence have, in recent years, been reflected in the falling numbers of people involved in defence related activity in some parts of the area. This, in combination with infrastructure relating to the Second World War, such as the airfields, has resulted in a number of derelict military sites within the North Wessex Downs which offer opportunities for development for employment uses as well as significant opportunities for landscape re-creation and enhancement. It is clear that an appropriate balance needs to be struck between economic development and protection of the nationally important landscape.

External Influences

- 5.23. The economy of the North Wessex Downs is heavily influenced by employment opportunities on the periphery or outside the AONB. It is estimated that of the 80,000 economically active people in the AONB, two-thirds are outbound commuters (Rural Economy Working Group). The adjacent urban areas not only attract employees who choose to live within the AONB, but can also act as a catalyst to stimulate associated employment within the North Wessex Downs AONB. It should also be noted that a significant number of commuters travel greater distances, for example to London.
- 5.24. In the west of the AONB, Swindon exerts considerable economic influence. The effect of this is that villages, particularly within Swindon Unitary Authority, North Wiltshire and Kennet District Authorities, have become commuter villages. A similar pattern has occurred in the east of the AONB in relation to Reading and Newbury. To the south west, Devizes plays an important role within the economy with commuters from the Vale of Pewsey and surrounding villages travelling to work there.
- 5.25. To the north, Didcot, located on the northern boundary of the AONB, is one of four settlements named in the Oxfordshire Structure Plan where development until 2011 will be focused. This includes plans for 5,500 houses and redevelopment of the town centre. This development may result in Didcot having an increased influence of the north east of the AONB and the villages in this area. Wantage, and in particular the Grove Technology Park to the north of the town, already provides high value-added employment in the area, and are a short journey from the attractive villages within the AONB. Whilst both towns contribute to the outward migration of

workers from the AONB, the economic success of these towns has enabled significant development within the AONB, such as the International Business Centre for Science and Technology at Harwell and employment developments at Chilton.

- 5.26. Newbury, on the eastern edge of the AONB, has developed an international reputation within the ICT industry with major employers including 'Vodafone', 'Panasonic' and 'Quantel'. Interviews have suggested that demand for housing has become particularly high in this area and is reflected in high house prices increasing the shortage of affordable housing within the AONB. Significant high technology industry within the AONB can be found in one location at Compton in the Berkshire Downs, where Baxter Healthcare employs approximately 150 people at their national headquarters. The Institute of Animal Health is also a major player in the area employing approximately 400 people in Compton. Swindon also has a high ICT profile with major employers including Motorola, Intel, Lucent Technologies, Bookham Technology, EMI, and Mitel Semi Conductor.
- 5.27. Like Newbury, Basingstoke plays an important, if geographically peripheral, role in the economy of the AONB area. Successful ICT and service industries 'pull' employees into Basingstoke from the surrounding areas while small industrial estates in the villages of Overton, Whitchurch and Kingsclere on the edge of the AONB play an important role at a more local level. Andover, to the south of the AONB is also a significant employment centre and the proposed major expansion plan (increase in population in the region of 10,000 people) may increase its influence on the North Wessex Downs AONB.
- 5.28. The presence of thriving economic centres on the edge of the AONB and their draw to commuters seeking to enjoy a 'rural' lifestyle within the North Wessex Downs has many associated impacts on the character of the AONB, including increased traffic, loss of services and elevated house prices.

Social Influences: Housing and Services

Housing

- 5.29. As outlined above, the majority of the North Wessex Downs is under considerable pressure for development. The attractive quality of the area and accessibility to employment in adjacent towns has contributed to the growth in population. In order to accommodate this increasing population, there is inevitably pressure for housing, both for the in-migrants and the indigenous rural population, although their needs vary considerably. In this respect there is a clear need for policies that integrate aims for protecting the visual character and setting of settlements within this nationally important landscape with those that foster balanced rural communities.
- 5.30. There continues to be a huge demand to live in the attractive villages of the North Wessex Downs villages, and the ability of wealthy immigrants to acquire property has increased the market value of such property as competitiveness for it increases commensurately. This leaves those on lower wages and with less buying power unable to afford local accommodation. The disproportionate increase in property prices is evident throughout the AONB, but particularly in the West Berkshire wards where an "average" house now costs £146,157 compared to the national average of £97,000.

- 5.31. As a result there has been a trend for lower paid agricultural and service workers employed within the AONB to seek lower priced accommodation in surrounding areas, e.g. Swindon/Reading, setting up a process of reverse commuting. It is also suggested that, as elsewhere, key workers in teaching and nursing, for example, have been priced out of the area leaving significant local skill shortages. The lack of services in some villages, particularly those in the West Berkshire wards of the AONB, is leading to a reluctance from some Housing Associations to provide affordable housing where there is no service infrastructure to support a development. The trend for smaller household sizes, due to young people leaving the villages, smaller family units and a greater number of single older people, suggests that there is an urgent need to reassess current stock.

Service Provision

- 5.32. The AONB is sparsely populated but with an increasing proportion of service and middle classes. As illustrated above, the major economic activities are located around the periphery and there is high car ownership. Within the West Berkshire wards of the AONB, car ownership is particularly high, with 84% of households owning one car, with 47% having access to two or more. High car ownership may have contributed to the overall decline in public service provision and public transport across the AONB, with the majority of people able to counter this with regular trips to centres at the edge of the area or services which include shops, post office, banking facilities, education and health. Convenience shopping trips made when travelling to and from the workplace further increases the downturn in village shopping. However this masks significant difficulties for those who do not have access to private cars.
- 5.33. Table 5.2 illustrates the general pattern of service provision across the four counties in which the AONB falls (Survey of Rural Services 1997 RDC). These figures indicate that service provision in the rural area throughout, and particularly in Oxfordshire is poor.

Table 5.2: Figures show percentage of Parishes in each county lacking the named service

<i>Service</i>	<i>Berkshire</i>	<i>Wiltshire</i>	<i>Hampshire</i>	<i>Oxfordshire</i>
Permanent shop	34	42	34	50
Store	57	71	66	79
Post office	41	42	41	46
Village Hall	15	21	20	26
Public House	19	18	16	25
Daily Bus service	75	83	65	79
School	33	45	43	54
Bank	92	99	88	92
Parish GP	68	N/a	82	86
Pharmacy	70	N/a	75	84
Library	13	11	11	11
Police Station	88	N/a	84	96

- 5.34. It is suggested that the population growth in villages where commuters and those with access to private transport have moved in, may have compounded the decline of local services. The in-migration of service and middle classes with greater affluence and personal mobility, may have resulted in those on lower incomes, including the rural indigenous population, becoming marginalised and disadvantaged through their lack of access to basic services.
- 5.35. Further work is required to understand the extent of social exclusion and identify indicators of rural disadvantage within the North Wessex Downs, but the initial research suggests that there is an increased polarisation within the AONB, with those on high incomes, with two cars per household able to enjoy the best housing and access services in adjacent areas. By comparison households with lower income, have poor housing choice, less mobility and insufficient access to services.

Summary

- 5.36. The economy of the North Wessex Downs AONB is benefiting from the current strength of the regional economy and the towns surrounding its borders. Nevertheless, the booming peripheral economy is having detrimental impacts on the social structure of the AONB and access to services and affordable housing. This is in contrast to the expected trend whereby an increasing rural population with a high level of employment might lead to greater rural vitality. It is clear that the overall economic well being masks significant pockets of rural deprivation within the AONB.
- 5.37. Agriculture continues to be the main land use and as such plays an important economic and social role in the North Wessex Downs, as well as providing a mechanism for maintenance of the landscape. The current difficulties in farming suggest that diversification may be important to ensure future sustainability of the agricultural sector. Whilst the regional economy is generally performing well, it is important that diversification within farming is encouraged. However it is vital that this reflects the skills of local people and importantly that it supports maintenance of the landscape character and quality of the AONB.

- 5.38. The main challenge for the future will be to find ways to harness the vibrancy and buoyancy of the peripheral economy, in a way that is complementary to the character of the North Wessex Downs.

6. PERCEPTIONS OF THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB

This is pure downland; the breasted hills curving as if under the influence of a great melody. It is beautiful, a quiet, an unrenowned and a most visibly ancient land. [1]

Edward Thomas (1878-1917)

Introduction

- 6.1. A landscape can assume national significance not only because of its particular character and qualities, but also because of special associations and perceptions that it may have. These include the perceptions of local people who live and work in the area as well as artistic and literary associations. An examination of the way that others have perceived the landscape over time can also provide pointers to a consensus view on why an area is considered special, and what particular features have consistently attracted attention and comment. This chapter considers, first, the perception of the inhabitants of the North Wessex Downs of their local landscape and goes on to review artistic and literary associations, which have raised the profile of the AONB nationally. References are listed in Appendix 2b.

Local Perceptions

- 6.2. There is a strong local resonance and affinity with the landscape of the North Wessex Downs, particularly the individual downs and the river valleys that make up the AONB - the Marlborough Downs, the Lambourn Downs and the key features within it such as Avebury, the Uffington White Horse, the Ridgeway, Combe Gibbet above Inkpen, Watership Down, Savernake Forest, the Kennet and Avon Canal, the historic towns of Marlborough and Hungerford, the Ridgeway and many other outstanding features.
- 6.3. However, unlike the Chilterns or Cotswolds for example, which have a very strong image and identity in peoples' minds, the North Wessex Downs as an entity, is considered to cover a very large geographic area encompassing a diverse range of landscapes. The division into a large number of individual local authorities (11) and two government regions also reinforce the perceived lack cohesiveness. This view was stressed repeatedly at a series of community consultation workshops held as part of a recent study to identify a suitable management structure for the AONB (*LUC, for the Countryside Agency, 2000*).
- 6.4. The name of the AONB has also been described as misleading and an imposed artificial name, since local people consider themselves to be neither, north, Wessex or indeed wholly downland. This is not to say however, that residents do not have a strong affinity with the area, but most recognise it by the component parts rather than the AONB as a whole. These include the individual downs and the river valleys that make up the AONB – the Marlborough Downs, the Lambourn Downs and the key landscape features within it such as Avebury, Savernake Forest, the Kennet and Avon Canal, the historic towns of Marlborough and Hungerford, the Ridgeway and many other outstanding features. This perception is reinforced in the tourism and marketing of the area, with no single AONB wide strategy. The result is a rather

fragmented approach promoting individual features and sites within the AONB but with no strong image of the locality as a whole. Perhaps the area where the AONB designation is perceived to have real public significance is in adding value in house sales, with locations within the AONB often being marketed at a premium by estate agents.

- 6.5. It is perhaps true to say, however, that it is the AONB designation that has no local resonance, rather than the landscape itself. The enormous interest shown in the Downlands Conference, for example, is a strong testimony to the importance attached to the locality. Three conferences have been held since 1996, each attracting in the region of 100 participants drawn from communities of interest and place. Some 500 interested individuals are recorded on the Conference database. The great concern that people have for their area and perceived changes in its character and qualities are illustrated by the formation of working groups, under the Downlands Conference, which have reported on issues in relation to Natural Environment, Community Involvement, Traffic and Transport and the Rural Economy.

The Race Horse Training Industry

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

The distinctive landscapes of the Lambourn Valley and downs have formed a backdrop and setting for the racing novels of Dick Francis and equine artists have also been attracted to the area. A good example being the oil painting Morning on Lambourn Downs by Sue Wingate. The artist notes [2]:

"I had seen this particular gallop in Lambourn and liked the rolling landscape with groups of trees which add interest to the background. It was soft, slightly misty morning in the summer and the horses are shown returning to their yard after work."

Landscape Descriptions

- 6.6. The North Wessex Downs is a landscape rich in historic sites and natural features. This magical landscape has attracted naturalists, antiquarians and travellers to the area throughout recent history. Records of visitor's perceptions reveal how the landscape was viewed as well as how it has changed. In 1725 Daniel Defoe visited, and wrote of, the wonder of the Vale of the White Horse. He climbed the hill at Uffington for close examination of the white horse and commented on the

construction of these great features; *'trenches... about a yard long, and filled almost up with chalk'*. He then stood many miles off to observe the feature from some distance: *'you see the exact shape of a white horse... not ill-shaped I assure you'* [3]. However, views of the landscape were not always positive. William Gilpin wrote in 1770

'The Marlborough Downs is one of the most dreary scenes which our ancestors ... chose as the repositarium of their dead. Everywhere we see tumuli, which were raised over their ashes' [4].

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

'I like to look at the winding side of a great down, with two or three numerous flocks of sheep on it, belonging to different farms; and to see, lower down, the folds, in the fields, ready to receive them for the night. Our point of destination was this village called Burghclere, which lies close under the north side of the lofty hill at Highclere, which is called Beacon Hill, and on top of which there are still the marks of Roman encampment. We saw this hill as soon as we got on Winchester Downs; and without regard to roads, we steered for it, as sailors do for a land-mark' [5].

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

'The Downs in this immediate country of Richard Jeffries are among the highest, most spacious, and most divinely carved in rolling ridge and hollowed flank, and their summits commune with the finest summits of the more southerly downs - Inkpen, Martinsell, Tan Hill ... Jeffries often thought of the sea upon these hills. The eye expects it. There is something oceanic in their magnitude, their solitude ... They are never abrupt, but, flowing on and on, make a type of infinity ... they have a hugeness of undivided surface for which there is no comparison on earth'. [6].

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

From the blue hill lines, from the dark copses on the ridges, the shadows in the combes ... there comes from these an influence which forces the heart to lift itself in earnest and purest desire. [7]

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

A broad green track runs for many a long, long mile across the downs, now following the ridges, now winding past at the foot of a grassy slope, then stretching away through a cornfield and fallow. It is distinct from the wagon-tracks which cross it here and there, for these are local only, and, if traced up, land the wayfarer presently in a maze of fields, or end abruptly in the rickyard of a lone farmhouse. It is distinct from the hard roads of modern construction which also at wide intervals cross its course, dusty and glaringly white in the sunshine With varying width, from twenty to fifty yards, it runs like a green ribbon ... a width that allows a flock of sheep to travel easily side by side [8].

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

"The slopes of the downs, if they have general forms, are continually changing and interchanging in localities, assuming new and strange shapes, charming and surprising with their grace and exquisiteness ... for ever reflecting the mood of the heavens" [9]

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

Myth and Legend

- 6.13. **Archaeological sites:** The area has a rich legendary heritage and local myth and mystery surrounds many of the ancient stone circles, burial mounds and hill-forts that characterise the North Wessex Downs, which are thought to be connected through the area by mysterious ley lines. Avebury World Heritage Site includes the largest stone circle in Europe and has intrigued visitors for hundreds of years with images often captured in topographical writings and drawings. William Stukeley, for example made a number of observations and line drawings of the monument in his visits to the area in the early eighteenth century. People remain fascinated by what they see and seek to find an explanation for its majesty and aura. One myth tells of the magician Merlin bringing the stones from Ireland.
- 6.14. Various legends have also been attached to Silbury Hill to help explain the creation of this unusual feature. Folklore has claimed it to be the burial place of King Sil, a knight in golden armour or fabled hidden treasure. It is also suggested as being a symbolic effigy of the ancient Mother Earth Goddess and associated with fertility rituals. Another explanation is that Silbury Hill could have been used as an accurate solar observatory by means of the shadows cast by the mound on the carefully levelled plain to the north, towards Avebury. Perhaps the most popular legend is that the hill was created by the Devil who was going to empty a huge sack of earth on the nearby town of Marlborough, but was forced to drop it at Silbury through the magic of priests at nearby Avebury.
- 6.15. Located on the Ridgeway, close to the White Horse is Waylands's Smithy, a Neolithic long barrow, sheltered by a grove of beech trees and built of massive sarsen stones. Legend has it that, if you leave your horse here overnight with a payment in silver, Wayland the smith of the Saxon gods, will shod it by dawn.
- 6.16. **Sarsen Stones:** A similar fascination exists for the enigmatic Sarsen Stones, which have cast their spell on many who see them. The stones are often known as 'grey wethers' on account of their resemblance to grazing sheep when seen from a distance, or alternatively as 'druid stones'. Henry of Huntingdon's *History of England*, written c.1130, describes '*stanenges, where stones of wonderful size have been erected after the manner of doorways, so that doorway appears to have been raised upon doorway; and no one can conceive how such great stones have been raised aloft, or why they were built there*' [10]. John Aubrey wrote of the stones in the 17th century '*many of them are mighty great ones, and particularly those in Overton Wood*' [11]. In 1668 Samuel Pepys visited Avebury and Silbury Hill, commenting ... *it was prodigious to see how full*

the downs are of great stones, and all along the valleys stones of considerable bigness most of them growing certainly out of the ground so thick as to cover the ground [12]. The fate of these stones may be traced to writings. Brentnal, writing at the end of the Second World War, noticed that *'the stones are gone for the most part to make the roads of Swindon'*. This was not the only use of the stones - many stones went into the making of early churches and footpaths - one such path of sarsen setts may still be seen between the villages of Alton Priors and Alton Barnes in the Vale of Pewsey.

- 6.17. **Chalk Carvings:** The spirit and mystery of ancient Wessex is perhaps symbolised best by the chalk-carved White Horses, which are redolent with myth and legend. Uffington White Horse, which stands out of the Downs above the Vale of the White Horse is the oldest example (at least 3,000 years old) and may have inspired the subsequent creation of the many other etched chalk figures which now characterise the North Wessex Downs. The Uffington figure is unique, with a long sleek body and beak like head. It is believed by some to represent the mythical dragon slain by St. George – a legend associated with the adjacent rounded hill called 'Dragon Hill'. It has also been attributed to Hengist and Horsa, two fifth century princes, and as a commemoration for King Alfred's defeat of the Danes, but is much older than either of these.
- 6.18. Bill Bryson in the introduction to the book *The English Landscape* (2000) [13] notes that *"what is truly notable about the White Horse is not that people at some time in the ancient past took the trouble to cut it into the hillside- but that continuously for over twenty centuries others have made the effort to maintain it. Whatever religious or ritualistic significance the White Horse may have had for its creators has long since faded away. For most of its existence – through plague and war and famine,..... the White Horse has been preserved simply because people liked it. I think that is splendid."* This tradition is continued today under National Trust ownership with its 'Scouring of the White Horse' event.
- 6.19. The Uffington White Horse is a symbolic landmark, commemorated by many poets and novelists, including G.K. Chesterton in his Ballad of the White Horse:
- Before the gods that made the gods
Had seen the sunrise pass
The White Horse of the White Horse Vale
Was cut out of the grass* [14].
- 6.20. **Crop Circles:** More recently the appearance of enigmatic crop circles, most notably in Wiltshire, and frequently associated with ancient monuments, have further contributed to the mystical charm of this landscape.

Artistic Connections

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

Nash wrote an evocative description of the stones in the book *Picture History* [15] as they were prior to the Keiller reconstruction:

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

- 6.22. Nash's distinctive style of painting also captured the character of other parts of North Wessex Downs including the beech topped knolls in '*Wood on the Downs*' and '*Wittenham Clumps*': Nash drew the beech clumps obsessively and saw them as the repossession of human works by nature.
- 6.23. The landscape of the North Wessex Downs has continued to inspire artists in the 20th century. The painter John Piper (1903-1992) knew and loved the Wiltshire Downs and designed a stained glass window for the Devizes Museum incorporating archaeological motifs from the Marlborough Downs including the stones of West Kennett Avenue, the Devil's Den dolmen, and several round barrows. Contemporary perceptions of the Ridgeway and surrounds have recently been gathered in *The Ridgeway: Europe's Oldest Road* [16]. This collection of paintings by contemporary landscape artists, including Keith Grant and Philip Hughes, illustrate perceptions and features of the present day landscape. Philip Hughes uses free flowing lines to represent the strong landscape patterns in the Downs.

Literary Associations

- 6.24. The author Thomas Hughes (1822-96) was born and brought up in the village of Uffington in the shadow of the Downs. He describes the countryside in that most English of books, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* [17] and in *The Scouring of the White Horse* [18].
- 6.25. It was the Victorian novelist, Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), who is reputed to be responsible for reviving the obsolete Saxon name of Wessex. The rolling chalk landscape south of Wantage (Alfredstone) forms a setting for his last, and probably most profound novel, *Jude the Obscure* [19]. Hardy's descriptions notes the increasing arable nature of the chalk landscape and describe it as 'ugly' and 'dry and 'dusty'. Maps of Hardy's Wessex identify Beacon Hill (Inkpen Beacon) and the Marlbury Downs (Marlborough Downs) as significant landmarks within the North Wessex Downs.
- 6.26. In the second half of the 19th century Kenneth Grahame wrote the *Wind in the Willows* [20]. He was a nature worshipper and sought inspiration from the Berkshire Downs. In his first book, *Pagan Papers* [21] (1898) he describes the Ridgeway and surrounding landscape.

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

- 6.27. D H Lawrence spent two years, between 1917 and 1919 in Hermitage, north of Newbury, after being moved away from the coast during the war. Of all Lawrence's writing, the story most closely based on Hermitage is '*The Fox*', first published in 1923.
- 6.28. Poets have also been inspired by the North Wessex Downs landscape. The highly regarded poet, Edward Thomas (1878–1917) developed a strong affinity with the area around the Marlborough Downs. Thomas was a great admirer of Richard Jefferies and was commissioned to write his biography, which includes some imaginative descriptions of the landscape of this part of the North Wessex Downs. Thomas's poetry captured the essence of the English countryside and was inspired by nature and the landscape. The Combe aptly describes the scarp edge north of the Marlborough Downs.

*The Combe was ever dark, ancient and dark.
Its mouth stopped with bramble, thorn and briar;
And no one scrambles over the sliding chalk
By beech and yew and perishing juniper
Down the half precipices of its sides, with roots
And rabbit holes for steps [22]*

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

*I who have walked along her downs in dreams,
And known her tenderness and felt her might,
And sometimes by a her meadows and her streams
Have drunk deep-storied secrets of delight [23]*

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

*Men cut their Gods in the hills
The galloping Gods whose hooves
Go flying away in the grass
When the grass moves in the winds [24]*

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

*He takes no part in village life beyond
Throwing his refuse in a neighbour's pond
And closing footpaths, not repairing walls
Leaving a cottage till at last it falls.
People protest. A law-suit then begins,
But as he's on the Bench, he always wins. [25]*

Writers and poets have continued to express concern about change in the landscape. *Watership Down* [26] was written in 1972 by Richard Adams and allows the reader to enter into the rabbit world and Watership Down, the area of countryside north of Overton. It provides detailed descriptions of the downland landscape and highlights the damaging impact that development can have on this inspirational landscape.