THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS
AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

Management Plan
2009 - 2014
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Foreword

The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) includes within its 1730 sq.kms. some of the finest landscape in England - chalk downland, river valleys, ancient woodland, historic sites and much more besides.

The Council of Partners of the North Wessex Downs AONB advises its Local Authority members how best to discharge their statutory responsibility for conserving and enhancing that landscape, for increasing everyone’s understanding and enjoyment of it, and for encouraging the social and economic well-being of those who live within it.

This Management Plan describes how that responsibility will be discharged over the next five years, and builds on the very real achievements of our first Management Plan, which covered the period from 2005 to 2009. It is wide-ranging, as it is required to be. It focuses principally on issues which relate directly to the North Wessex Downs AONB and on which we and our partners can have a real influence, but it includes some aims which require national action and in which the North Wessex Downs AONB can play only a supporting role.

Partnership in its widest sense is the key to the success of the new Plan, as it has been to the achievements of its predecessor. The Plan was born out of a wide consultation with all those of you with an interest in the future of the North Wessex Downs AONB, and it will be impossible to reach our new objectives without the continuing support and encouragement of you and others like you.

Lack of awareness of the North Wessex Downs AONB and its purposes, among those living and working within it, continues to be an issue; resolving that is one of the Plan’s objectives, and you can help by spreading the word.

Like so much of this country, the North Wessex Downs have been shaped by thousands of years of human activity, and we humans of today have to work together to keep it in the best possible shape for future generations. We are immensely grateful for all the support we have received in the North Wessex Downs AONB’s short life so far, and we are confident that all those of you who, like us, care deeply for its glorious landscape will help us equally generously in the future.

Sir Charles Nunneley  Chairman of the Council of Partners
Introduction

Where is the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

From its western tip at Calne in Wiltshire, the North Wessex Downs AONB reaches across the south west and south east of England in a broad arc through Swindon, Berkshire and Oxfordshire, adjoining the Chilterns AONB along the River Thames, before sweeping south, encircling Newbury, to encompass the northern reaches of the rolling chalk hills of the Hampshire Downs. It then reaches back towards Devizes, across the high chalk upland of Salisbury Plain and the low-lying Vale of Pewsey.

The North Wessex Downs AONB covers 1,730 sq km (the third largest AONB nationally) but has a population of only 125,000 people. Hungerford and Marlborough are the two largest settlements, with a combined population of 14,000. Yet the AONB is surrounded by the significant urban centres of Reading, Newbury, Basingstoke, Andover, Swindon and Didcot, collectively providing a population of over 1.2 million within 20 minutes of the AONB. It is crossed east-west by the M4 and north-south by the A34.

The AONB encompasses 173 parishes. It straddles the boundaries of two counties, three unitary authorities and four district councils. It is also bisected by the boundary between the South East and the South West Government Regions, with roughly half of the AONB falling into each region.

The AONB landscape is also of international importance, recognised as a Category V Protected Landscape by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It is an evolved cultural landscape, managed and nurtured by people over millennia. Those who manage the land are central to the future of this landscape. It is inevitable and appropriate that this cultural landscape will continue to develop but this needs to be in ways that conserve and enhance its special qualities.

The North Wessex Downs AONB does not stand alone but forms one of a family of nationally protected landscapes across England made up of 37 AONBs and three National Parks. Together this family of protected landscapes covers over 35% of southern England.

The primary purpose of AONB designation is ‘conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area’. This is important because the AONB designation is about promoting sustainable forms of economic and social development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment. Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

Definition of natural beauty

Section 114 of the National Parks and Access to Countryside Act 1949 states that "references to the preservation or conservation of the natural beauty of an area shall be construed as including references to the preservation or, as the case may be, conservation of its flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features". This definition was further refined by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. It is a plan for all those that have a responsibility to look after this precious and treasured landscape.

North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan

The Plan has been prepared by the North Wessex Downs Council of Partners on behalf of the constituent local authorities of the AONB. This Partnership was formed in July 2001 to oversee the future of the AONB. It includes not only the constituent local authorities of the North Wessex Downs but also representatives of the local communities, the farming and rural business community, and those representing nature conservation, heritage and landscape, and recreation interests, including members of government and voluntary agencies.

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

The 2004-9 Management Plan was subject to review from January 2009. The revised draft plan was subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment and to public consultation in April and May 2009. This plan has been formally approved by the North Wessex Downs AONB's Council of Partners and relevant local authorities. It has been published with the assistance of the partners responsible for much of the plan's delivery. This Management Plan, the Strategic Environmental Assessment and the Landscape Character Assessment can all be found on the North Wessex Downs AONB website: www.northwessexdowns.org.uk

Enquiries about these documents can be made to the North Wessex Downs AONB team through the website or by telephone: 01488 685440.

1 Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, paragraph 21 - HMSO 2004
2 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, section 82
3 Countryside Commission Policy Statement on Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty 1991

What is the significance of AONB designation?

The North Wessex Downs was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1972 under the National Parks and Access to Countryside Act 1949. Following the introduction of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the government confirmed that the landscape qualities of National Parks and AONBs are equivalent. The protection given by the land use planning system to natural beauty in both types of area should therefore be equivalent.
North Wessex Downs Management Plan

Why is this Management Plan important?

Preparation of an AONB Management Plan is a statutory requirement placed upon local authorities by the CRoW Act 2000, with a review required every five years. This Management Plan presents an agreed agenda for the North Wessex Downs AONB, setting out objectives and policies for AONB partners that are believed to be realistic and achievable in the next five years. Working together, the partners can realise these targets to the benefit of the landscapes and communities of this nationally designated area.

In addition, the European Landscape Convention was ratified by the UK on 1 March 2007. The Convention is a Treaty devoted exclusively to the protection, management and planning of all landscapes in Europe. The Convention seeks to ensure enhanced landscape planning, protection and management through quality objectives and an effective policy framework. The Convention highlights the need to:

1. recognise landscape in law;
2. develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and creation of landscapes; and
3. establish procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies.

The Convention also encourages the integration of landscape into all relevant areas of policy (including cultural, economic and social policies) and there is a particular emphasis on the need for co-operation in implementing programmes relating to landscapes that cross administrative and national boundaries. The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan is a significant contribution to the achievement of the aims of the Convention.

Who is this Management Plan aimed at?

Under Section 85 of the CRoW Act 2000, it is a legal duty for all relevant authorities to "have regard to" the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB in exercising or performing any functions affecting land in the area. These relevant authorities include all statutory bodies and all tiers of government, including parish councils and holders of public office.

Successful implementation of this Management Plan is beyond the resources of the Council of Partners and AONB team alone and will require the active collaboration and participation of all those involved in its scope. This is a plan for the geographic area of the North Wessex Downs and not for any single organisation within it. Implementation needs the support and involvement of the many organisations and individuals who play key roles in the future of the area. Many of these have been involved in drawing up the plan.

For government, local authorities, other public bodies and other ‘relevant authorities’, active support for the implementation of this plan is the key to satisfying their ‘Section 85’ duty. Local parish councils, statutory agencies and regional bodies acting individually or collaboratively through Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements can all contribute to fulfilling the AONB vision.

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Relationship to other plans and strategies

This Management Plan forms part of an increasing web of plans and strategies being prepared at the national and regional level. National and local climate change policy is likely to affect most aspects of daily life, business and methods of land management. Sustainable development will continue to rise in importance.

Agricultural support under the Common Agricultural Policy has moved away from subsidies for agricultural production and towards incentives for environmental management. Implementation of the Water Framework Directive will require significant changes to land management. Forestry policy now clearly focuses on supporting the wide range of benefits that woodlands can provide with a particular emphasis on the conservation of our ancient woodland resource.

Under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, Natural England has been created as the government agency responsible for conserving and enhancing England’s natural environment and raising public understanding and enjoyment of it. Its policies and initiatives inform much of the policy development within the AONB.

As part of sustainable development, Government is placing increasing focus on maintaining mixed and vibrant communities and is strongly committed to making understanding and enjoyment of the countryside accessible to all, linked to agendas for health and education.

Methods of delivering policy are changing too. Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, 2004, the planning system was reformed and streamlined, with an emphasis on spatial planning. The statutory land use plan, or Development Plan, now consists of a Regional Spatial Strategy and Local Development Frameworks (LDFs). The local planning authorities are producing their LDFs, which comprise a range of statutory Local Development Documents allocating land for development or containing planning policies by which planning applications are determined.

Covering the North Wessex Downs are two adopted LDFs (with five in progress), four Minerals and Waste Development Frameworks and two Regional Spatial Strategies (the South West and South East plans). This Management Plan does not form part of the statutory Development Plan for any part of the AONB but, as a statutory document in its own right, should be a material consideration in the planning process and an instrument for securing consistency across the AONB in planning matters.

The Highway Authorities must prepare Local Transport Plans to set out proposals for improving transport in their area and there are five covering the AONB. Local Authorities have a duty to prepare Sustainable Community Strategies for their areas. Within the AONB, all Authorities have set up Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and agreed Local Area Agreements that set out the priorities for a local area agreed between central government and a local area (the local authority and Local Strategic Partnership) and other key partners at the local level. With more communities undertaking Parish Plans, Village Appraisals, Village Design Statements and Community Plans, there are now increased opportunities for local people to influence what happens in their areas. There are other landscape strategies in place in the area that will inform the development of policy, such as the Avebury World Heritage Site Management Plan (2005).

As appropriate, these and other plans and strategies are described in more detail under the individual Themes. Inevitably this policy context will change over time. Within the North Wessex Downs, such changes will need to be interpreted through the AONB objectives which will remain a constant throughout the life of this Management Plan.

Public Service Agreements 2008 - 2011

Since their introduction by the Government in the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review, Public Service Agreements (PSAs) have played a vital role in galvanising public service delivery and driving major improvements in outcomes. The Government has now agreed in the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 30 new PSAs. These set out the Government’s highest priority outcomes for the period 2008 to 2011. As a part of this initiative, a new local government performance framework has been established with a single set of 198 national indicators. The national indicators will be the only measures on which central Government will monitor outcomes delivered by local government working alone or in partnership. The priorities for action by public bodies working within the North Wessex Downs AONB will be set by the Comprehensive Spending Review targets.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a statutory process. A formal SEA is required for new plans and programmes that are likely to have significant effects on the environment. SEA aims to provide protection of the environment at a strategic level and contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans with a view to promoting sustainable development.

Preparation of our SEA has been undertaken in consultation with Natural England, the Environment Agency, English Heritage, the local authorities and partner organisations. An Environmental Report has been published along with this plan that assesses its environmental impact. An Environmental Statement has also been published which explains how the plan has been influenced by the SEA process.

Appropriate Assessment

The Partnership has undertaken and published an Appropriate Assessment of the potential impact of the objectives of the Management Plan on the conservation objectives of sites of European importance for nature conservation affected by the plan, as required by The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) (Amendment) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006. Natural England has confirmed that the assessment complies with the legislative requirements.
A Vision

for the North Wessex Downs

A vision statement is an idealised description of the desired or intended future state for the area. It is our inspiration, the framework for all our strategic planning.

Reflecting the disciplines of the ‘Golden Thread’, we have:

A vision of vast, dramatic, undeveloped and locally distinct chalk downlands with extensive areas of semi-natural chalk grassland, contrasting with well-wooded plateaux, arable lands and intimate and secluded valleys, all rich in biodiversity and cultural heritage; a national landscape that stands apart from the increasing urban pressures that surround it; where people live, work and relax; and where visitors are welcomed and contribute to a vibrant rural economy.

We seek to make the North Wessex Downs AONB:

- A place where actions meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- A place where people have the skills and energy to adapt to change in ways that respect the unique qualities of the North Wessex Downs and deliver wider environmental, economic and social benefits.
- A place where the highest environmental quality is seen as a key economic driver and where all economic activity is in harmony with maintenance of the landscape.
- A place with thining land based enterprises where the sustainability of the North Wessex Downs is core to the business, ensuring a countryside rich in wildlife and recreational opportunities while producing high quality products that are bought in the knowledge that the local economy and surrounding countryside benefit.
- A place with high quality well managed habitats reflecting the distinctive character of the North Wessex Downs, giving a species-rich landscape with interlinking wildlife corridors available for migration and adaptation in response to climate change.
- A place with a rich and conserved cultural landscape where iconic ancient monuments and intact historic landscapes remain as indelible footprints in an evolving scene, managed to the very highest standards.
- A place where the integrated management of land conserves unpolluted soils and high quality water resources whilst retaining the distinctive seasonal winterbourne flows.
- A place where development is low-impact and affordable with a distinctive but subtle vernacular building style that combines the best of the old with the best of the new and where the integrated approach to transport and travel satisfies local needs and minimises negative effects on the environment.
- A place with a sense of remoteness and tranquility, where vast night skies can thrill the eye unaffected by light pollution.
- A place with vibrant and balanced rural communities, with villages and market towns meeting the needs of local people and visitors, where there is great local pride and positive local contribution to the management of the landscape.
- A place that is a nationally recognised centre for sustainable tourism and the quiet enjoyment of the countryside, developed and promoted in ways that are in harmony with the high environmental quality and community needs of the area, helping to underpin the land based and broader rural economy.
The slopes of the downs, if they have general form, are continually changing and interchanging in localities, assuming new and strange shapes, charming and surprising with their grace and exquisiteness, for ever reflecting the mood of the heavens.

Alfred Williams

The North Wessex Downs is a visibly ancient landscape of great diversity and size. It embraces the high, open arable sweeps of the Marlborough Downs with their beech-top knolls and narrow, sheltered chalk river valleys, the intimate and secluded wooded areas of Chute and Savernake Forest, and the low-lying land of the Thames Basin Heaths with a rich mosaic of woodland, pasture, heath and common land. It is a predominantly chalkland landscape with dramatic scarp slopes and moulded dip slopes that reflect the underlying chalk geology.

The North Wessex Downs have inspired many works of literature. The Saxon name Wessex was revived by Thomas Hardy, who used the area as the setting for his novel Jude the Obscure. More recently Richard Adams provided a vivid evocation of part of the area in Watership Down. An Historic Landscape Characterisation of the North Wessex Downs has been completed that helps to identify some of the oldest landscapes in the area and improves our understanding of the evolution of the landscape. This is discussed under the Historic Environment.

The North Wessex Downs is underlain by chalk resulting in the beautiful gentle rolling topography which is so characteristic of the North Wessex Downs. The area records sedimentary deposition in the Wessex Basin which extended to the east as far as London. The basin underwent periods of uplift and tilting which created the small anticlines (upward folds) of the Vale of Pewsey, Vale of Harrow and Kingsclere Inlier, exposing the older Upper Greensand enclosed by younger Chalk. Overlying the chalk are patches of Palaeogene and Quaternary sediments which contrast with the chalk scenery by producing more acidic soils.

About the land

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North Wessex Downs AONB Geodiversity Resource

The Upper Cretaceous chalk dominates the solid geology of the AONB as well as much of its landscape. Although there is a 200 metre thickness of chalk in the AONB, it is thought that as much again has been removed from the top as a result of erosion during the last 65 million years or so when the basin was uplifted and tilted. The formation of flint in the chalk is not well understood. It is thought that it forms as a result of the concentration of silica (dissolved from the skeletons of silicious animals such as sponges and some plankton).

Palaeogene: 65-23 million years ago

The deposits of the Palaeogene in the North Wessex Downs are unconsolidated sediments which provide no distinctive landscape feature other than the development of neutral to acidic soils leading to the establishment of heath type...
Geology of the North Wessex Downs

Vegetation and are extremely poorly exposed. The most common of the Palaeogene rocks are the sarsens. These scattered blocks of hard sandstone are one of the most... cementsed by silica.

Quaternary Deposits: 2 million years ago to present

Although much of England was covered by advancing ice at some point during the last 2 million years, there is no evidence in the North Wessex Downs that the ice ever covered this part of southern England. There is evidence that the area suffered periglacial conditions. In the AONB there are three principal types of Quaternary deposit. There are the river terrace deposits, alluvium (modern day river sediments) and a deposit known as clay-with-flints. It is thought that the river terrace sediments were deposited during the cold periods and not during the warmer interglacial periods of the Quaternary. As ice sheets grew, sea level fell. This rejuvenated rivers and increased their erosive power so they cut deep into the relatively soft bedrock. The terrace sediments are predominantly gravels with sand, though some clays and muds are also preserved. The terrace development reflects the successive cutting of ancient floodplains, the older terraces being the highest ones preserved. Terraces and their sediments have been preserved in all major modern day river valleys in the AONB. Alluvium is the modern day deposits of rivers, it is mainly silt and clay but can also contain sand and gravels from flood events.

Unlike the terrace deposits and the alluvium, the clay-with-flints is not the result of river channel activity. It is thought more likely to be the remains of the Cretaceous chalk after the effects of intense weathering. It can often be mapped by the presence of woodland, particularly in the central and southern parts of the AONB.

Building stone

The only true building stones within the North Wessex Downs are the hard bands of the Melbourn Rock, the Chalk Rock and sarsen stones. The chalk is not ideal (as it is not waterproof) and so foundations of flint, brick or occasionally hard bands within the Upper Greensand have been used to prevent damp. A thatch roof with overhanging eves also helps to prevent rainwater dissolving away the walls. The chalk has also been used to create cob, a mixture of clay or chalk, water and straw which is built up in layers to create walls.

Sarsens have been used as construction materials since Neolithic times. Their use can be seen not only in the Neolithic but also in the medieval and post medieval cottages and agricultural buildings.

The Gault Clay and London Clay have been used for brickmaking. Kintbury and Hermitage were major brick making areas in the 18th and 19th centuries, utilising Palaeogene clays. In the Kennet Valley there was a medieval tile and pottery industry also utilising the Palaeogene clays. Flints have also been used in conjunction with brick to produce a more decorative feature and stronger structure. Flints have been used both in their natural state, and knapped to form a flatter surface.

Landscape character types

The overall diversity of landscape is revealed through the landscape assessment for the AONB published in 2002. This recognises eight Landscape Character Types and a total of 3S Landscape Character Areas across the North Wessex Downs, each with its own distinct sense of place. The study draws out the special qualities of the landscape, traces its evolution over the centuries and identifies the main issues which will need to be addressed to conserve its special character and outstanding qualities.

The eight Landscape Types are briefly described below. The ‘Key issues’ and ‘Key management requirements’ are those proposed in the Integrated Landscape Character Assessment, Technical Report. It is now proposed to review the issues and management actions by developing a Landscape Management Strategy.

13 The relationship of these landscape types and character areas to those identified in adjoining areas is set out in the Technical Report that accompanies the landscape character assessment.
Open Downland

The Open Downland forms the backbone of the North Wessex Downs as an elevated plateau of the hard Middle and Upper Chalks. The landscape is of open smoothly rounded downland dissected by dry valleys and long sinuous steep scarpas, devoid of surface water. Tree cover is limited to occasional linear shelter belts and distinctive beech clumps crowning summits. This is a landscape of panoramic views where the earth meets the sky. The dominant land use is vast sweeping arable fields with small remnant patches of chalk grassland on steeper slopes. Habitation is extremely sparse and limited to scattered farmsteads and horse race stables.

Key issues

- In the past, intensification of farming leading to loss of environmental assets including biodiversity, archaeological features and landscape character through the creation of large fields.
- Impacts of the intensive agricultural economy on the social character of the AONB - declining employment, fewer larger farms with pockets of rural deprivation masked by relative affluence of estates and larger farm units.
- Future restructuring within agriculture - which in this landscape type is likely to result in the amalgamation of holdings with large areas being managed as a single block resulting in further homogenisation of the landscape plus requirement for large grain storage buildings.
- Further reduction in livestock (impact of foot and mouth), so that there is no longer the means to maintain existing areas of pasture. Some marginal areas are regenerating with scrub.

Key management requirements

The overall management requirement is to conserve the character of the Open Downlands with their special sense of remoteness and isolation. Key features to be conserved and enhanced are:

- surviving chalk grassland habitats, including opportunities for habitat restoration to extend and link isolated and fragmented sites;
- the unique collection of archaeological sites;
- Climate change - potential impacts on chalk grassland habitats and possible future demands for irrigation of arable land - including construction of reservoirs and infrastructure.
- Impact of England Rural Development Programme Schemes (ERDP) – woodland planting and new types of crops, e.g. energy crops.
- Requirements for new large scale farm buildings with other farm units becoming redundant with potential for conversion.
- Future potential demand for chalk extraction.
- Impact of tall structures - communications masts and transmitters plus future renewable energy developments (wind turbines) that would be particularly intrusive on the strong sweeping skylines and could have a major impact on the sense of remoteness.

Downland with Woodland

This landscape is distinctly different from the Open Downland. It is of lower elevation and has a thick capping of clay with flints over the chalk. It has softer contours and considerably greater woodland cover. The scale is smaller with field patterns made up of a mixture of small irregular Medieval enclosures and larger regular Parliamentary enclosures. Hedgerows and a mosaic of woodland cover, notably on the clay summits and as sinuous hangers along steeper slopes, create a sense of containment. There are also considerable areas of wood pasture and parkland. Agricultural land use is more varied with an intermixing of arable and pasture. Small villages nestle in sheltered valleys or are strategically located on ridgetops with widespread scattered farmsteads.

Key issues

- In the past, intensification in farming leading to loss of environmental assets including biodiversity, archaeological features and landscape character.
- Changes in farming practices - including loss of livestock so that some marginal areas of pasture may no longer be grazed leading to alternative uses, e.g. as horse paddocks or neglect/scrub encroachment.
- Loss of hedgerow boundaries and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows.
- Lack of appropriate management of woodlands particularly ancient and semi natural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing and areas of wood pasture.
- Climate change - potential impacts on chalk grassland habitats and requirement for irrigation of arable land - including possible future demand for construction of reservoirs and infrastructure. Impact on woodlands with potential increase in non native species and tree loss (drought/windthrow) on dry chalk soils.
- Localised visual intrusions notably tall structures including pylons and masts.
- Potential future demand for wind turbines on the downland summits and skylines, which would impact on the secluded rural character.
- Increased traffic on the rural lane network, plus road improvements including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, in places, creates a more urban landscape.
- Intense development pressures particularly for new housing - potential effect on the character of the small nucleated hamlets and villages, plus demand for housing stock leading to inflated prices and absence of affordable housing.
- Decline in local services and facilities with many villages becoming empty commuter villages by day.
- Impact of all of the above leading to a loss of special qualities of tranquillity and peacelessness within this quiet rural landscape.

Key management requirements

The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the secluded rural character of the Downland with Woodland landscape type and its special qualities of peacelessness and tranquillity. Key features to be conserved and enhanced are:

- chalk grassland habitats with opportunities for habitat restoration and enhancement;
- the pattern and character of woodland and hedgerows, through appropriate and sustainable management, including reintroduction of coppicing and hedgerow management and restoration of hedge boundaries;
- archaeological sites, historic field patterns, historic parkland, and the historic lane network, including the characteristic sunken lanes;
- the distinct character and pattern of settlement of small hamlets and villages assimilated within the landscape and scattered farms;
- the downland summits, strong skylines and open panoramic views, which are particularly vulnerable to large scale/tall infrastructure.
Wooded Plateau

Centred on the woodland tracts of Savernake Forest and West Woods, the extent of this largely wooded area reflects the bounds of the Medieval royal hunting forest of Savernake, established by the time of the Domesday survey. Throughout this gently sloping plateau a thick covering of clay with flints and Tertiary deposits masks the solid chalk and results in damp and heavy soils. Today the Forest consists of extensive tracts of semi-natural ancient woodland, wood pasture with majestic veteran trees, and 18th and 19th century beech plantations, as well as more modern coniferous plantations. Reflecting its origins as a Royal hunting forest, settlement is limited to a concentration of villages in the valley of the River Dun – Great Bedwyn and Little Bedwyn.

Key issues

• In the past, intensification in farming and creation of large open fields led to loss of environmental assets including biodiversity and archaeological features.
• Need for woodland management, particularly areas of ancient and seminatural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing and as wood pasture.
• Loss of hedgerow boundaries and mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows.

Key management requirements

The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the character of the Wooded Plateau with its extensive woodlands and farmland mosaic, special qualities of peacefulness and seclusion, and wealth of sustainable recreation opportunities. Key features to be conserved and enhanced include:

• the extensive woodland blocks at Savernake Forest and West Wood, plus the numerous ancient and semi-natural woodlands of great biodiversity value;
• the corridor of the Kennet and Avon Canal and associated features;
• intimate mosaic of woodland and farmland, particularly the intact pattern of hedgerows and smaller woodland blocks;
• remnant areas of heathland, with opportunities for management and habitat restoration;
• areas of open access, woodland walks and recreational paths;
• historic parkland and formal designed landscapes of Tottenham Park and Littlecote Park, with their permanent pasture, parkland trees, avenues and rides;
• the distinct pattern and character of the settlement with a remote uninhabited western plateau and small hamlets and villages in the east;
• the quiet, rural character of the plateau, which in the more open areas is particularly vulnerable to large scale or tall infrastructures.

High Chalk Plain

This makes up the northern-most tip of Salisbury Plain. The open rolling landform of the Upper Chalk creates a bleak, spacious landscape devoid of settlement and under arable production, with long views and a strong sense of remoteness and isolation. A dramatic escarpment forms the northern boundary, as at Pewsey Hill and Fyfield Down, and provides panoramic views across the Vale of Pewsey immediately to the north.

Key issues

• In the past, intensification in farming leading to loss of environmental assets including biodiversity, archaeological features and landscape character with creation of large ‘prairie’ fields.
• Intense development pressures, notably for new housing in the valleys in the eastern part of the area, which have good rail links to London – potential harmful effect on woodland and parkland including increase in non-native species and tree loss (drought/windthrow).
• Climate change – potential impacts on woodland and parkland including increase in non-native species and tree loss (drought/windthrow).
• Unsympathetic tree and woodland planting in the form of irregular blocks and linear plantations of ornamental species.
• Climate change - potential impacts on chalk grassland habitats and requirement for irrigation of arable land - including potential future demand for construction of reservoirs and infrastructure.
• Vulnerability to development, particularly large scale or tall structures and potential impact in views to the scarp top from the Vale of Pewsey.

Key management requirements

The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the expansive character of the High Chalk Plain with its openness, isolation, remoteness and absence of settlement. Key features to be conserved and enhanced include:

• isolated fragments of chalk grasslands with opportunities for restoration to extend and link habitats;
• the field pattern, with opportunities to restore hedgerows;
• importance as a habitat for declining farmland bird species – with a mosaic of arable land and chalk grassland;
• the unsettled character, clear ridgelines and horizons and absence of development, particularly along the open scarp above the Vale of Pewsey.
Downs Plain and Scarp

The landscape of the Downs Plain and Scarp extends along the entire length of the northern boundary of the North Wessex Downs. The plain is formed by the eroded surface of the Lower Chalk, creating a low level surface extending as a wide ledge at the foot of the high Open Downland. The distinctive northern scarp plunges down from this chalk plain to the Vale of White Horse, creating a recognisable horizon which viewed from the north. This area is characterised by two of the most emblematic features of the North Wessex Downs – the Ridgeway, the oldest road in England, running along the top of the scarp – and Avebury on the open Downs Plain, forming part of the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site. The Downs Plain is characterised by vast arable fields, lack of surface water and a general absence of settlement. Conversely the dramatic scarp slope, cut by springs, creates a convoluted edge alternately under woodland and pasture, including significant areas of remnant chalk grassland.

Key issues

• In the past, agricultural intensification leading to loss of environmental assets including biodiversity, archaeological features and landscape character.
• Changes in farming practices - including loss of livestock with some marginal areas on the scarp slope no longer being grazed leading to scrub encroachment, most notably on the steeper scarp slopes.
• Loss of hedgerow boundaries and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows. This is a particular concern on the Plain, where field boundary loss has resulted in some very large open landscapes.
• Lack of appropriate woodland management particularly the small ancient and semi natural woodlands of the scarp formerly managed by coppicing.
• Climate change - potential impacts on chalk grassland habitats and requirement for irrigation of arable land - including construction of reservoirs and intrusive infrastructure. Impact on woodland and parkland with potential increase in non native species and tree loss (drought/windthrow).
• Intensive recreational pressures around ‘honeypal’ sites.
• Vulnerability to large scale development, particularly tall structures (e.g. masts or turbines) on the scarp summit and re-use of redundant military infrastructure on the Plains, with associated impacts, e.g. traffic generation.
• Pressures for housing and peripheral development of attractive springline villages along the scarp - potential loss of local vernacular character, and decline in rural services.
• Impact of development on the edge of the AONB, for example at Wantage, Swindon, Harwell, Didcot - visual impact plus increased pressures on housing, roads etc.
• Pressures for housing and peripheral development of attractive springline villages along the scarp - potential loss of local vernacular character, and decline in rural services.
• Impact of development on the edge of the AONB, for example at Wantage, Swindon, Harwell, Didcot - visual impact plus increased pressures on housing, roads etc.
• Potential changes in farming practices - including loss of livestock with some remaining Vale pastures no longer being grazed, with scrub encroachment.
• Loss of hedgerow boundaries and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows.
• Climate change - potential impacts including drying out of wetland habitats, requirement for irrigation of arable land - including construction of reservoirs and intrusive infrastructure. Impact on woodland and parkland with potential increase in non native species and tree loss (drought/windthrow).
• Localised intrusion of roads, overhead power lines and pylons all of which are highly visible in the context of this flat low lying landscape.
• Increased traffic on the rural lane network, plus road improvements including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, in places creates a more urban landscape.
• Intense development pressures, particularly for new housing, affecting the character of the villages and their edges so that settlements are less assimilated into the landscape.
• Impact of development on the edge of the AONB, for example at Devizes and Swindon - visual impact plus increased pressures on housing, roads etc.
• Vulnerability to impact of development (e.g. skyline structures) within the adjacent ‘borrowed’ woodland management at the downs and the scarp.

Key management requirements

The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the distinctive rural, agricultural character of the Vales. This includes the pattern of hedgerows, streams and remnant waterside pastures, wet meadows and woodlands and concentration of small compact settlements. There are opportunities for hedgerow restoration and re-creation of pasture and riparian woodlands alongside watercourses. The objective should be to maintain the pattern of discrete villages set within a quiet rural landscape, with opportunities for management of traffic on the rural lanes that connect the settlements. The views to the clear skylines of the surrounding downland slopes should be conserved.

Vales

The Vale of Pewsey separates the two main upland chalk blocks that dominate the North Wessex Downs. The towering shapes of the adjacent chalk scarps form a dominant landscape feature of the Vale, including compact nucleated villages and hamlets with widespread scattered farmsteads.

Key issues

• In the past, intensification in farming leading to loss of environmental assets particularly biodiversity with drainage and cultivation of the Vale floor pasture and widespread loss of hedgerows and archaeological features.
• Potential changes in farming practices - including loss of livestock with some remaining Vale pastures no longer being grazed, with scrub encroachment.
• Loss of hedge boundary and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows.
• Climate change - potential impacts including drying out of wetland habitats, requirement for irrigation of arable land - including construction of reservoirs and intrusive infrastructure. Impact on woodland and parkland with potential increase in non native species and tree loss (drought/windthrow).
• Localised intrusion of roads, overhead power lines and pylons all of which are highly visible in the context of this flat low lying landscape.
• Increased traffic on the rural lane network, plus road improvements including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, in places creates a more urban landscape.
• Intense development pressures, particularly for new housing, affecting the character of the villages and their edges so that settlements are less assimilated into the landscape.
• Impact of development on the edge of the AONB, for example at Devizes and Swindon - visual impact plus increased pressures on housing, roads etc.
• Vulnerability to impact of development (e.g. skyline structures) within the adjacent ‘borrowed’ landscape of the downland scarps which form prominent boundaries to the Vales.

Key management requirements

The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the distinctive rural, agricultural character of the Vales. This includes the pattern of hedgerows, streams and remnant waterside pastures, wet meadows and woodlands and concentration of small compact settlements. There are opportunities for hedgerow restoration and re-creation of pasture and riparian woodlands alongside watercourses. The objective should be to maintain the pattern of discrete villages set within a quiet rural landscape, with opportunities for management of traffic on the rural lanes that connect the settlements. The views to the clear skylines of the surrounding downland slopes should be conserved.

Consideration should also be given to the impact of development on the boundary of the North Wessex Downs on views from the higher ground of the Downs Plain and Scarp.
River Valleys

The chalk rivers that cut through the chalk uplands form very distinct linear landscapes, characterised by a rich mix of grazed pastures, water meadows, wetland and woodland. The valleys are enclosed by steeply rising slopes, limiting views and creating an intimate and enclosed character. Historically, the main settlements of the chalk were concentrated in these river valleys (as the only source of accessible water in an otherwise dry downland landscape without the benefit of a capping of clay with flints). These settlements took a long linear form, following the bottom of the valley, and this remains the dominant pattern to this day. The chalk uplands are also cut by numerous dry valleys, which sometimes contain ephemeral ‘winterbourne’ which only flow when the chalk water table rises to the surface during the winter and early spring.

Key issues

- Climate change - potential impacts including increased abstraction and low flows, as well as autumn/winter flooding, concentrated levels of water pollution and drying out of wetland habitats. Potential impacts on woodland and parkland include increases in non native species and tree loss (drought/windthrow).
- Localised intrusion of roads (M4 and A4), which have a high impact in this quiet, rural landscape.
- Increased traffic on the road network, plus road improvements to the lanes including kerbing, widening, signing and new river crossings which, in places creates a more ‘urban’ character.
- Potential future demand for aggregate extraction altering the form and character of the valleys.
- Development pressures, particularly for new residential development including suburbanising influence of built development and roads (fencing, signing, lighting and planting).
- Maintenance of high water quality in the streams through ensuring appropriate management to allow regeneration of hedgerow trees; historic parkland.

Key management requirements

The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the River Valley landscapes with their intimate, pastoral and tranquil character. This includes:

- the chalk streams and rivers with their characteristically clear, fast-flowing waters;
- the adjacent seasonal flood meadows, grazed pastures, fen, marsh, damp woodlands and historic parklands.

The small-scale character of the valleys mean that they are potentially sensitive to any development, including large scale farm buildings, new housing and communication infrastructure. The aim should be to maintain the distinctive pattern of settlement with discrete villages, hamlets and two market towns.

Lowland Mosaic

Concentrated around the ‘Newbury bight’ this is a landscape of largely Medieval origins. The varied geology of low lying clays, silts and sands gives rise to a diverse mix of soils and, in turn, a small-scale and intimate landscape with a mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations, remnant heathland and more open farmland areas. Lanes are frequently overhung by deep grassy and wooded banks, heightening the sense of seclusion. The network of ancient semi-natural woodland, connecting hedgerows, areas of parkland, including woodland and ancient trees, create considerable ecological interest. Former Medieval deer parks are a particular feature as at Englefield, Highclere and Hampstead, with a number of these having been re-fashioned in the 18th Century as formal designed landscapes. This is one of the most densely inhabited areas of the North Wessex Downs with large manor houses, a network of hamlets, and lines of houses and villages that have grown along the network of lanes.

Key issues

- Intensification in farming leading to loss of environmental assets particularly conversion of permanent pasture to arable.
- Decline in the extent of heathland vegetation through conversion to forestry or lack of management with scrub invasion and development of woodland.
- Potential changes in farming practices may include further loss of livestock with an increase in areas managed as ‘hobby farms’ or as horse paddocks - characterised by rank weedy grassland and poorly managed boundaries.
- Lack of appropriate management of woodlands particularly ancient and semi natural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing and areas of woodland.

Key management requirements

The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the distinctive small-scale and enclosed landscape of the Lowland Mosaic with its secluded, rural and tranquil character. This includes preservation and enhancement of the key assets, namely:

- the ancient and semi-natural woodlands;
- field patterns and hedgerows, particularly through ensuring appropriate management to allow regeneration of hedgerow trees;
- the hedgerows and grass verges which line the rural lanes;
- heathland;
- historic parkland.

There are opportunities for restoration of the fragile lowland heathland resource, through management and habitat restoration to extend and link isolated areas. The aim should be to maintain the distinctive pattern of settlement and prevent the gradual spread, merging and coalescence that will result in a more suburban character. Consideration should be given to measures that could lessen the impact of the roads and reduce high traffic levels on the rural lanes.
Sustainability

Five related external ‘forces for change’ will impact significantly across all aspects of the North Wessex Downs AONB.

• Call for sustainable development
• Call for sustainable consumption and production
• Climate change
• Call for environmental protection and enhancement
• Desire for sustainable communities

Call for sustainable development

Sustainable development lies at the heart of Government policy in which there is a clear expectation that the protected landscapes will make a strong contribution to both the local delivery of sustainable development and its wider promotion. The principles of sustainable development are woven into this Management Plan.

The commonly accepted definition of sustainable development is: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

World Commission on Environment and Development

The UK Government stated in 1990:

‘sustainable development means living on the earth’s income rather than eroding its capital. It means keeping the consumption of renewable resources within the limits of replenishment. It means handing down to successive generations not only man made wealth ... but also natural wealth ... ’

Under the UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy (2005), caring for the environment is seen as a fundamental starting point of sustainable development, rather than attempting to deal with the consequences of environmental degradation. Living within environmental limits is a pre-requisite for the future. Within the North Wessex Downs AONB, working within environmental limits means the following.

• Working with a strong evidence base that provides a sound understanding of place and environmental limits.

Since the early 1990s, virtually all government environmental policy has been influenced and driven by the concept of sustainable development.

16 HMSO (1990) ‘This Common Inheritance’ White Paper
18 see www.defra.gov.uk/sustainable/government
As a contribution to sustainable development, the protected landscapes deliver a wide range of benefits essential for human survival and well-being, sometimes referred to as ‘ecosystem services’. An ecosystem is an area of land or water with interacting living and non-living components. An ecosystems approach aims to treat the natural environment holistically, weighing the impact of society on the natural environment whilst seeking to ensure a supply of ‘ecosystem services’ from which society benefits. Those services are the wide range of benefits that a healthy natural environment provides for people, either directly or indirectly. The benefits range from the essentials for life, including clean air and water, food and fuel, to things that improve our quality of life and wellbeing, such as recreation and beautiful landscapes. But they also include natural processes, such as climate and flood regulation.  

The most significant ‘ecosystem services’ provided by the North Wessex Downs include:

- clean drinking water, mainly drawn from the chalk aquifer;
- food and fibre, primarily from cereals and sheep;
- flood protection, with water storage in the flood plains providing natural protection from fluvial flooding; and
- opportunities for exercise and spiritual refreshment.

Call for sustainable consumption and production

Sustainable consumption and production requires us to achieve more with less. The earth’s resources are unlikely to be sufficient to sustain equivalent ‘western’ standards of consumption for all nations. Some calculations suggest that three planets’ worth of resources would be needed to achieve UK levels of consumption across the world. The landscape of the AONB is dominated by farmland and woodland and changes in these land uses have a major influence on the natural beauty of the area.

The long term decline in the market for UK timber has had a pronounced effect on the area’s woodlands, with many suffering from a lack of management. The ageing beech woodlands no longer produce significant volumes of timber and are more valuable as places for recreation than as a productive part of the rural economy. The promotion of wood as a renewable fuel may stimulate improved management of some woodlands.

Coupled with the drive for global sustainability, UK food and energy security considerations are likely to become major influences on land management over the next 20 years, with significant implications for landscape character and the scope for expanding wildlife habitats as the pressure grows for novel crops and farming systems. There may also be greater diversification into related activities, such as equestrian businesses and leisure.
Climate change

A changing global climate, principally caused by the activities of man, is now regarded as an indisputable fact by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Government and local authorities. We are being encouraged by government to change the way we generate and use energy, and conduct other activities that release greenhouse gases. The precautionary principle is promoted. There is a broad consensus on the likely changes to the climate of Southern England over the next few decades. These changes will be gradual and may not be noticeable within the life of this plan but strategies are needed now because of the long lead-in time for actions to be effective.

The likely changes are:
- summers will become warmer and drier
- winters will become milder and wetter
- extreme weather conditions will become more frequent

These changes have the potential to affect the landscapes, wildlife and communities of the AONB. Woodlands may be dominated by oak and ash which cope better than beech with the likely changes in climate. The range of crops grown by farmers will change and there may be more growing of bio-fuels. Water flows in rivers and streams could become more erratic. Habitats may expand, contract or migrate. New species may enter the area, some bringing disease or pests that may be detrimental to ‘native’ species. Tourism pressures could increase as more people decide to holiday in the UK. All of these factors would affect which flora and fauna can flourish in the area.

The implications of climate change are profound and present three challenges for the North Wessex Downs:

Research
Developing a better understanding of the likely implications of climate change on the environment and economy of the North Wessex Downs.

Mitigation
Mitigation requires the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, such as carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and methane, from whatever source that can be managed. Mitigation measures include the following.
- Better on-farm management of fertilizer and animal waste.
- Increased reliance on renewable energies, biomass heating from local fuel stocks and appropriately scaled renewable energy generation.
- Enhanced domestic and commercial energy efficiency.
- Greater availability of alternative fuels for cars, commercial vehicles and plant machinery e.g. batteries, LPG, bio-fuels.
- Improved availability and accessibility of sustainable modes of transport (buses, cycling).
- Greater use of timber from sustainable woodland in construction.
- Carbon capture as an objective of habitat creation and management of woodlands.
- Encouraging simple greenhouse gas and carbon accounting to monitor the effectiveness of changes.

Adaptation
Changing our behaviour to respond to the impacts of climate change is known as ‘adaptation’. Adaptation measures include:
- dissemination of advice on bio-security and disease control in domestic and wild animals;
- modeling groundwater response to climate change as a part of planning policy development;
- increasing measures to manage the risk of flooding;
- securing future water resources by water storage and transfer schemes that reduce abstraction;
- encouraging water efficiency in homes and businesses and encouraging reuse;
- linking, extending and buffering fragmented habitats to improve opportunities for species migration and population stabilisation.

Call for environmental protection and enhancement

The use of natural resources is vital for all sorts of human activity. In the context of natural resource protection, we must also consider those resources which we do not intend to use but which might become compromised or damaged as a result of our activities. Protection of eco-systems, even if they are far away from the activities which might damage them, is now recognised as a vital consideration. Protecting natural resources by operating in a way which minimises damaging impacts is, therefore, part of sustainable development. There is a need to conserve soil, geological deposits, water and clean air. 

20 The authoritative reference source for all climate change calculations and prediction is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change http://www.ipcc.ch
21 PSA 27 uses the global effort to avoid dangerous climate change.
22 PSA 28 ensures a healthy natural environment for today and the future.
Desire for sustainable communities

Sustainable communities in the North Wessex Downs are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future.*

Sustainable communities should be:

- active, inclusive and safe - fair, tolerant and cohesive with a strong local culture and other shared community activities;
- well run - with effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership;
- environmentally sensitive - providing places for people to live that are considerate of the environment;
- well designed and built - featuring a quality built and natural environment;
- well connected - with good transport services and communication linking people to jobs, schools, health and other services;
- thriving - with a flourishing and diverse local economy;
- well served - with public, private, community and voluntary services that are appropriate to people's needs and accessible to all;
- fair for everyone - including those in other communities, now and in the future.

The UK population is projected to increase by 10% (5 million) by 2026.† Of this, a 750,000 increase is expected to be in the South West Region‡ [similar increases are expected in the South East]. People are living longer and the average size of households is decreasing with more single occupancy. Much of the increase in population in rural areas is the result of migration for lifestyle reasons, including retirement. The scale of development required to provide housing, employment and services to this expanding population will be considerable.

- The towns which surround the AONB are all expected to accommodate significant housing and employment development in the next 20 years.
- Whilst housing and employment development within the villages of the AONB is likely to address only local needs, market towns such as Marlborough can be expected to accommodate significant new development.
- The increasing demand for quicker journey times between employment centres may lead to pressure for road widening and other 'improvement' schemes on roads in the AONB.

- Increased prosperity enjoyed by some people leads to other environmental impacts such as more over-flights by aircraft of all kinds; the use of roads and rights of way for motorised leisure pursuits; and a demand for second homes.

Skills and lifelong learning

The current fundamental changes in the AONB's land-based economy are requiring new skills and the re-learning of old skills. The Learning and Skills Council has overall responsibility for all training and education for people over 16 years of age in England. Within the North Wessex Downs, this responsibility is delivered through four local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) – the Wiltshire and Swindon LSC; the Berkshire LSC; the Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton LSC; and the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire LSC. Each works alongside the National Training Organisations (such as LANTRA representing the land-based sector), further education and training colleges, and representatives of community groups, to understand, define and then meet training and education needs.

Data from the 2001 Census show that 79% of people resident in the AONB are qualified to at least the equivalent of O/CSE/GCSE level (any grade), more than in the South East (76.1%) and the South West (73.8%) and more than any of the towns surrounding the North Wessex Downs AONB, excluding Tidworth. The most noticeable difference is in those with a first degree or equivalent, where the figure for the AONB of 27.2% is 5.5% higher than that for the South East and 8.4% higher than in the South West. It would appear that the North Wessex Downs AONB enjoys a relatively low level of deprivation in education.

There is a need for at least seven types of rural skills learning within the North Wessex Downs:

- Relearning of traditional land-based skills such as woodland management, animal husbandry and hedge laying.
- Keeping up to date with current agricultural best practice and environmental legislation (e.g. pesticide use) amongst the farming community.
- Encouragement of traditional building skills including thatching, thatchwork and green oak construction.
- Obtaining necessary business management skills such as IT, book keeping and accountancy.
- Obtaining the skills necessary for new business development from hospitality training to food hygiene.
- Developing entrepreneurship and recognising diversification opportunities.
- Raising awareness and skills in implementing environmental management for rural business.

Key issues

- Loss of affordable housing, reducing the social mix within settlements and leading to a loss of essential rural skills.
- Shift towards contract and casual working, lessening the opportunity to ‘learn on the job’.
- Government requirements that businesses running apprenticeship schemes must have business premises (many traditional land-based contractors do not have formal business premises).
- Lack of business management and marketing skills amongst potential rural business entrepreneurs.
- Lack of adult education: courses within the AONB and transport to gain access to further and tertiary education either inadequate or too expensive.
- Some skills gaps not covered by local courses.
- Lack of willingness to recognise the business links that can be made to high environmental quality.

Conclusion

Unless effectively managed, all of these pressures will work individually and cumulatively to impact adversely on both the landscape character and special qualities of the area. The Partnership’s role is to ensure that the conservation and enhancement of the landscape is a key issue, effectively addressed in strategies and plans produced by other agencies.
Land management

Three industries dominate the land management sector: Agriculture; Horse Racing; and Forestry.

Agriculture

The North Wessex Downs AONB covers 1730 km² and approximately 84% of the land within it is classified as farmland with over 60% under arable cultivation. This means that agriculture is the dominant land use and the major influence determining landscape character and quality. 2002 data indicate that the North Wessex Downs had 2,787 people working in agriculture (total farm labour) at that time, representing 5.9% of the total workforce. The average proportion for the South East region was 1.3%. The North Wessex Downs is the most strongly agricultural of the South East AONBs.

Agricultural statistics since 1990 show that the area of land in agricultural management appears to be fairly constant, with a slight net loss over time. This could be due to development, but also changes in holding distributions may represent a move to other land uses not classified as agricultural. The AONB lost approximately half its full time farmers between 1990 and 2005. The number of holdings in private ownership has consistently risen, the agricultural area is declining very slowly and the number of small holdings is increasing; so it can be concluded that land holdings are breaking up into smaller privately held units.

Defra define farm types for a holding as the crop or livestock enterprise or group of enterprises that contributes more than two-thirds of the total standard gross margin for the holding. The North Wessex Downs AONB has quite large areas of Grade 1 and 2 agricultural land but despite this there is little horticulture. The most common farm type is other followed by cereals with some cattle and sheep (grazing livestock). Farm profitability varies significantly by farm type, and also by farm size within farm type. The AONB has a large proportion of large holdings and a large quantity of cereal farms. Relatively speaking, these are liable to remain profitable under current conditions although the proportion of farms specialising in cereals has been declining slowly as has the proportion of dairy. Pigs and poultry have increased (doubling between 2000 and 2005) but still representing a low level (c.4%). The proportion of ‘other’ farms has increased greatly, probably reflecting increased levels of specialisation and diversification but also representing non-classifiable holdings. This category may be growing through an increase in specialist horses or specialist forage to support the horse racing industry in the area – but this cannot be demonstrated from the data.

Since the 1990s, the cereals sector has contracted as it comes under increased pressures from European Union Common...
Agricultural Policy changes. Intervention prices, export subsidies and direct support have decreased. Decreasing subsidies mean a greater dependence upon trade and sensitivity to market prices and exchange rates. The high level of mechanisation in this sector also makes it vulnerable to increasing oil prices. The dairy sector is also under pressure from declining rates of subsidy. The trend suggests that dairy farm numbers will decline with a move over to lowland cattle and sheep to make use of existing infrastructure. As with other sectors, consolidation will lead to larger farms and larger herd sizes to seek increases in efficiency.

Climate change may affect the types and varieties of crops that can be grown with implications for sowing dates, irrigation, pests, diseases and soil erosion. Arable farming may expand into the floodplains and valleys in response to longer growing seasons and new crop varieties, with potentially negative impacts on grassland and wetland wildlife, landscape character, buried archaeology and access. More rain will fall in winter deluges, when the ground is already saturated. An increase in soil erosion can be expected, resulting in damage to historic features and more silt, nutrients and pesticides washing into rivers. These inputs come predominantly from arable farmland and already have a significant impact on water quality and freshwater biodiversity.

A detailed presentation of socio-economic data associated with agriculture in the AONB is found in Tantram et al (2007).

Key issues

- Against the background shown by the statistics, farming has generally become less profitable in recent years and together with market conditions, this has influenced the mix of farming types and farm sizes.
- Market forces and policy reform will continue as major factors in the future together with technology, climate risks and energy prices. Food security, biofuels and increasing localisation will also have effects.
- Volatile markets result in uncertainty regarding land management in the AONB.

Horse Racing

The Lambourn area in the North Wessex Downs AONB is second in its importance as a centre of activity for the horseracing industry only to Newmarket. It is a significant industry that attracts visitors and businesses to the area.

A survey in 2007 identified 103 businesses within the AONB that were directly involved in the horseracing industry. A further 49 businesses were identified as being or wanting to be associated with the racing industry. About 10% of Britain’s racehorse trainers and approximately 3,700 racehorses are located in the AONB. It is a significant employer and contributor to the local economy. The core businesses employ approximately 1,370 full-time equivalent staff, just over 20% of employment in the agriculture and entertainment sectors in the area. It is estimated that the horseracing industry contributes £16-38 million per annum of direct gross value added to the economy; however the total economic output of the industry in this area is up to £70 million per annum. A detailed presentation of the issues associated with horse riding in the AONB is found in Smiths Gore (2007).

Key issues

- Small scale changes to the smooth, rolling landform around new buildings, which cumulatively have an adverse effect on the character of the AONB.
- The loss of biodiversity by the creation of new fields and paddocks on open chalk downland.
- A change in landscape character by the replacement of hedgerows with fencing, leading to the ‘suburbanisation’ of landscape.
- Pressure to widen and straighten minor roads to improve vehicle access leading to ‘suburbanisation’ and loss of sense of place.
- Loss of integrity of historic settlements, hamlets, and farmsteads.
Forestry

The area of woodland within the AONB is estimated to be approximately 23,300 hectares, or 13.5% of the AONB’s area. The Wooded Plateau Landscape Type, which roughly follows the historic bounds of the Medieval royal hunting forest of Savernake, has 28% woodland cover, while the Lowland Mosaic Landscape Type has 25% woodland cover, reflecting the Medieval origins of these landscapes. Conversely, the open downlands typically have around 3.5% woodland cover and the Vale of Pewsey only 2.5% cover – although prior to the onset of Dutch Elm disease this landscape would have been characterised by a checkerboard of hedgerows with mature Elm, creating a distinctly treed landscape.

The Government’s Strategy for forestry seeks to provide a resource of trees, woods and forests in places where they can contribute most in terms of environmental, economic and social benefits now and for future generations. The wish is to make existing and newly planted trees, woods and forests resilient to the impacts of climate change and also contribute to the way in which biodiversity and natural resources adjust to a changing climate. Opportunities are to be found to protect and enhance the environmental resources and the cultural and amenity values of trees and woodland. The contribution that trees, woods and forests make to the quality of life for those living in, working in or visiting England is to be increased. There is also a move to improve the competitiveness of woodland businesses and promote the development of new or improved markets for sustainable woodland products and ecosystem services where this will deliver identifiable public benefits, nationally or locally, including the reduction of carbon emissions.1

Just under a half of the woodland in the AONB has some form of wildlife designation and a little over a third is Ancient Woodland. Broadleaf trees dominate (62%). Little is known regarding the amount of woodland management within the AONB, nor the objectives and the quality of management being practiced. During 2005, a survey of local woodland professionals indicated that some 10,230 hectares (or 44%) of the woodland area was being managed. The rest was unmanaged. The timber quality of a lot of the woodland area within the AONB is not high and many of the woodlands are extremely small, making the economics of forestry operations problematic, and a number of the woodlands comprise crops for which there is no longer a viable market. There are unlikely to be high timber prices for the foreseeable future and support must come from a number of small initiatives rather than a single ‘big idea’. One recent big idea has been the use of wood as a fuel in line with government initiatives to meet targets for emissions of greenhouse gases under the ‘renewables’ programme. There is a role for energy production in helping to manage small woodlands.2 The main focus of resources should be directed towards the existing woodland resource rather than the establishment of new woodland areas. Any new woodland should be sited to meet the objectives of the North Wessex Downs AONB Woodland Strategy. All woodlands designated for their nature conservation interest and all ancient and semi-natural woodland will be particularly valued and efforts made to improve their management, to buffer them with additional woodland and wherever possible to seek to link them together. The AONB will support the accreditation of woodlands under the United Kingdom Woodland Assurance Scheme. A detailed presentation of issues associated with woodland in the AONB is found in Matthews R. (2005).3

Climate change may lead to drought and lower summer rainfall. This is likely to affect the North Wessex Downs woodlands. For example, the shallow rooting beech does not thrive on dry soils and is likely to decline but small leaved lime needs warmth to set seed and will probably increase. Veteran trees of all species are more likely to be felled by storm force winds. However, in woods the impact of these storms can be positive, creating glades that species adapted to sunlight can occupy. The recreational value may increase as people seek shade in the hottest months.

Key issues

- By and large, smaller woodlands receive less management than larger ones and many woodland areas are effectively unmanaged.
- Even on large woodlands the poor economics mean that the level of woodland management (in particular thinning broadleaved woodlands) is significantly less than the desirable level.
- The lack of management is leading to a relatively evenly aged high forest with a consequent perceived reduction in biodiversity value.
- The battle to control the grey squirrel population is being lost.
- Deer numbers are continuing to rise and are inhibiting the natural regeneration of some woodland areas. Deer Management Groups are helpful but are insufficient on their own to control deer numbers.

LAND MANAGEMENT Special qualities

- The North Wessex Downs is quintessentially an agricultural landscape and the most strongly agricultural of the South East AONBs.
- The open downlands are characterised by large regular fields, largely the product of 18th century parliamentary enclosure, with more recent boundary removals creating vast fields, as on the Marlborough Downs.
- By contrast, the Vale of Pewsey in the south west of the AONB is the product of Medieval clearance which created numerous, small, irregularly-shaped fields or assarts.
- A typical AONB farm is larger than the regional average.
- The North Wessex Downs has a significant concentration of ancient woodlands (total 8,592 hectares) and is ranked sixth amongst all AONBs in England and Wales in terms of its total area of ancient woodland.
- Although oak and ash are the main forest canopy species there is a wide range of stand types including hornbeam coppice, oak/ash stands, hazel/oak stands, birch and ash/wych elm coppice.
- The ‘Valley of the Racehorse’ in the Lambourn area has established a unique landscape type that attracts visitors and businesses.
The varied geology of the North Wessex Downs is reflected in the breadth of ecological diversity. Within the AONB, there are seven Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), part of the internationally important network of European Natura 2000 sites. Both Pewsey Downs SAC and Fyfield Downs SSSI are also National Nature Reserves with outstanding chalk grassland flora and fauna that include nationally important populations of rare species, including the endemic Early Gentian. The AONB contains 66 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) covering 3,330 hectares (or 2% of the area of the AONB) of which 29 have a chalk component amounting to 1,421 hectares (0.8% of the AONB area). In addition, there are a total of 249 locally important wildlife sites (known by various names, for example County Wildlife Sites, Conservation Target Areas and Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation) that have a chalk grassland component. The total area of these sites amounts to 2,163 hectares or 1.3% of the AONB area. Unfortunately the absolute figure for chalk grassland within the local sites has not been calculated, so this information is not available.

The most ecologically important habitats within the AONB are the remnant chalk grasslands, semi-natural broadleaf woodlands and wood pasture, chalk rivers and associated wetlands, and arable farmland managed for conservation. A wide variety of other habitats characterise particular areas within the AONB, from remnant heathland on river gravel deposits in the east, including areas of seminatural acidic grassland in the area around Irkpen, to the wide grassy verges of the droveways crossing the downs. At a local level the hedgerow network, springs, remnant cressbeds, road verges and dew ponds also provide important refuges and habitats – with chalk cuttings having magnificent displays of Primrose and Cowslip each year.

Changes to climate will alter the composition of the natural communities that are characteristic of chalk downland, woodland, streams and arable fields. Diverse natural communities of plants and animals are most likely to survive on soils and in streams with low nutrient status and in large patches of habitat.

The North Wessex Downs AONB spans five of Natural England’s Natural Areas: Berkshire and Marlborough Downs, South Wessex Downs, Hampshire Downs, Thames and Avon Vales, and London Basin. The AONB forms part of the delivery for the regional biodiversity targets for the South East and South West regions and the County Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) for Oxfordshire, Hampshire, Wiltshire, and Berkshire (the targets for Swindon are included in the Wiltshire BAP). All actions proposed in this Management Plan support BAP policies. It also has the potential to contribute to Defra’s Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets for farmland birds and favourable management of wildlife sites.

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We still do not know one thousandth of one percent of what nature has revealed to us

Albert Einstein
Chalk grassland

Since the publication of the last Management Plan, the AONB Partnership has commissioned a study of chalk grassland within the AONB (Tom Cairns et al 2005). Chalk grassland is one of the most biologically rich and diverse habitats in the UK with over 40 species of flowering plants recorded from a single square metre of the best quality turf. Just under 9% of the UK’s chalk grassland resource lies within the AONB. Traditionally grazed by sheep, cattle and rabbits, the AONB’s chalk grassland supports important populations of the Early Gentian, a scheduled protected species, and one of Britain’s few endemic plants. Unimproved chalk grassland is also important for the survival of many scarce invertebrate species such as the Wat-toler Cricket and the internationally threatened Marsh Fritillary butterfly. Other scarce chalk grassland butterflies include the Adonis Blue, Chalkhill Blue and Small Blue whilst bird species include the Skylark.

The area of chalk grassland was probably at its most extensive during the 16th century, with the chalklands forming sheep and corn country. The sheep, run on the open downs by day, were folded overnight on the arable land. The latter benefited both from the sheep’s dung and from the consolidation of the light soils. Today, the areas of chalk grassland are a shadow of their extent in the 1900s. Between 1966 and 1980 there was a 30% decline in the area of chalk grassland nationally. In the North Wessex Downs, this trend has been mirrored by a 32% decrease in the area of (all) grassland between 1968 and 1998, supplemented by increasing fragmentation of remaining areas.

Today, small isolated blocks of chalk grassland are largely restricted to the steep scarp slopes, dry valleys and areas maintained as pasture around archaeological sites. The total area of remaining chalk grassland within the AONB is not known but it is estimated that the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs Natural Area (14) (which covers roughly two-thirds of the AONB) supports at least 1,250 hectares or 3-5% of the total English resource of chalk grassland. More recent work on the Ridgeway corridor within the AONB (defined as 2.5km to either side of the Ridgeway) suggests that there is a total of 1,545 hectares of chalk grassland within the corridor that has either been notified as an SSSI (663 hectares) or designated as a non-statutory nature conservation site (893 hectares). This indicates that the Natural Area description may be an underestimate.

Ancient semi-natural woodland

Since the publication of the last Management Plan, the AONB Partnership has commissioned a study of woodland within the AONB.

The North Wessex Downs AONB has a significant concentration of ancient woodlands (total 8,592 hectares) and is ranked sixth amongst all AONBs in England and Wales in terms of its total area of ancient woodland. Overall, just over 45% of the woodland area in the AONB has some form of wildlife designation. According to the Woodland Trust, the AONB contains two nationally important ‘major concentrations’ of ancient woodland, centred on the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs and the Hampshire Downs; and areas of forest such as Savernake. Less than 0.1% of the woodland area is designated as a National Nature Reserve, 0.5% as Special Areas for Conservation, 7.5% as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and 42.3% as County Wildlife Sites or Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation. Woodlands on the Wooded Plateau character type are the most highly protected, with the Vales landscape character type having the smallest percentage of designated woodlands. Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) forms a significant proportion of the woodland resource of the AONB. Overall, the 8,646 hectares of ASNW represent some 37.1% of the total area of woodland. It should be noted that the inventory of ASNW prepared by Natural England is still provisional.

The diverse woodland types that make up these ancient woodlands include significant areas of woodland and support a wide range of species, with roosting sites for a number of bat species. Of particular importance are the calcium-rich woodlands which support a range of rare plants including Herb-Parsley and Green Hellebore and provide home to a high proportion of the world’s population of Bluebells.

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46 Defined as situations where ancient woodland in neighbouring 5km squares exceeds 5% cover over 250 sq km. These major concentrations cover 10% of England.
North Wessex Downs Management Plan

Chalk streams and rivers
The spring-fed fast flowing streams and rivers of the North Wessex Downs support an extremely diverse range of plant and animal communities. Pea Mussel, freshwater White Clawed Crayfish and internationally rare floating vegetation of River Water-dropwort can be found along their reaches. In turn, the rivers irrigate adjacent areas creating the distinctive valley landscape of remnant fens, water meadows and carr. The Summer Snowflake, a Red Data Book species, survives in seasonally flooded sites along the River Kennet. In recognition of their outstanding nature conservation value the Lambourn, Kennet and Hampshire Avon are all designated SSSIs within the AONB, while the River Lambourn, the Hampshire Avon, and the Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain (a series of discrete sites supporting the Desmoulin’s whorl snail) are SACs.

Strategies are in place to support the good management of these waters, with a recent update to the County BAPs. The ‘England Catchment Sensitive Farming Delivery Initiative’ is a partnership between Defra, Natural England and the Environment Agency that aims to reduce the pollution of surface-water bodies caused by farming operations. Local initiatives also exist, such as ‘Action for the River Kennet’ whose members include local people who enjoy having a healthy river as part of their living environment; tourists and visitors who enjoy walking by and fishing in the Kennet; and environmentalists who want to see a valuable chalk stream protected.

Arable farmland
Arable cultivation is the dominant land management activity in the AONB (see chapter on Land Management). The North Wessex Downs supports a wide range of nationally and regionally important species associated with arable farmland. They are adapted to colonise disturbed land achieved through tillage. This includes farmland birds such as Stone-curlew and Tree Sparrow, rare arable plants such as Corn Buttercup and Shepherd’s Needle, and mammals such as Brown Hare and Harvest Mouse. Many of these species are listed on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. An Arable Strategy was prepared in 2008 to help protect and enhance the nationally important arable biodiversity found within the North Wessex Downs (S Smart et al 2008). 46

Habitat mosaics
Although the downlands are essentially a large-scale landscape, traditional areas of mixed farming, responding to the underlying geology, have resulted in a range of habitats (grassland, scrub and arable lands) co-existing in close proximity. This interlinking range of habitats provides some of the most favourable conditions for the characteristic birds and mammals of the North Wessex Downs, such as the Brown Hare, Skylark, Lapwing, Tree Sparrow, Corn Bunting, Linnet and Grey Partridge. Increased cover, nesting opportunities and a wider abundance of food supply occur where arable margins meet up with wildflower and insect rich downland and scrub. This allows bird and other species typical of arable and unimproved grassland to be present together. Certain species respond very well, such as Lapwing which often nest on tilled arable land and walk their chicks onto grazed pasture to feed, and the Skylark which in a mosaic of different vegetation structures can make multiple nesting attempts. Given the pressures of climate change and the need for species migration, habitat corridors along rights of way and habitat networks are of increasing value. The habitat mosaic is mapped as Biodiversity Opportunity Areas by regional groupings. This shows the regional priority areas of opportunity for restoration and creation of BAP habitats.

Special qualities
- A nationally significant area of chalk grassland.
- A nationally significant area of ancient woodland.
- Internationally important, high quality spring-fed fast flowing streams and rivers.
- Nationally important populations of rare flora and fauna.

Key issues
- General lack of knowledge about the full biological resource of the North Wessex Downs and how to manage it most effectively for biodiversity, including the management of sites that may support BAP target species.
- The vulnerability of fragmented habitats and species at the edge of their southern range to the effects of climate change.
- Loss of wildlife corridors with the increasing scale and intensity of agriculture.
- The implication of CAP reform and whether this will lead to agricultural intensification or land abandonment on less productive land and intensification elsewhere.
- Uncertainty over the future of agri-environment schemes and their ability to deliver significant biodiversity improvements for the North Wessex Downs, including support for the appropriate management of existing valued habitats.
- A continuing trend in the shift from spring sown to winter sown arable crops.

Biodiversity


49 Nationally important mammal populations such as species of bat, hares, birds such as stone curlews, turtle doves, corn buntings, lapwings, grey partridges, yellow wagtail, tree sparrow and significant areas of chalk grassland habitats (10% of UK total exploited) - sign and notable plants including burnet rose, Ordnance, slender knotgrass, Galium junciflorum, field Bindweed, Sanguisorba officinalis and the nationally scarce British endemic early gentian, Gentianella anglica. Also includes populations and species of thistle butterfly.
What is truly remarkable about the White Horse [at Uffington, within the AONB] 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 to its creators has long since faded away. For most of its existence – through plague, war and famine… the White Horse has been preserved simply because people liked it. I think that is splendid.

The historic environment resource

The historic environment resource is comprised of a wide range of features of varying scale, presence or significance. Many have been recognised nationally, or even internationally; the complex of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Monuments (centred on Avebury, but including Silbury Hill, West Kennet Long Barrow, the causewayed enclosure on Windmill Hill, hundreds of Bronze Age barrows and many more important sites) is of such significance that it has been inscribed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

Since these ancient times, the landscape has changed immeasurably, creating a patina of features and historic elements as evidence of the different stages in its evolution which contribute a real sense of time-depth to the present day scene. Past human influence is etched in every facet of the landscape – in the fields and woods, tracks and lanes, villages and hamlets. The impact of changing land use and lifestyles over thousands of years has created the landscape of today and left ingrained reminders of different points in history.

The North Wessex Downs is an ancient man-made landscape. This cultural heritage makes a fundamental contribution to the present-day landscape. But it also tells us something about how we relate to it, as summed up in the pertinent extract by Bill Bryson in the introduction to his book The English Landscape (2000) quoted opposite.

The built environment makes a fundamental contribution to the landscape. The North Wessex Downs contains over 4,000 Listed Buildings. Over 250 of these are listed at Grade I or II*, the two highest levels of importance. Buildings protected through listing include a wide ranging collection of structures.

As well as the grand country houses of the 18th and 19th century, the large town houses of wealthy merchants in the market towns and the many splendid medieval parish churches, listed buildings in the North Wessex Downs also include some spectacular and very early barns; locks and other structures associated with the Kennet and Avon Canal; milestones, roadside pumps and signs related to turnpike roads; and pill boxes built as part of the planned defence of Britain in the early phase of the Second World War.

The North Wessex Downs includes 15 Registered Parks and Gardens. One of these, Highclere Castle, is registered at Grade I, and four examples, Tottenham House, Purley Hall, Ashdown House and Inkpen House, are registered at II*.

One Registered Battlefield is included within the North Wessex Downs; Roundway Down, near Devizes was the location of a major encounter fought in July 1643 when a Parliamentary army was heavily defeated by a significantly smaller Royalist force.
In addition to the designated archaeological features mentioned, the local Historic Environment Records (HERs) maintained by the County Councils in Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire and by West Berkshire District Council, contain records of over 11,000 sites, monuments and findspots of archaeological and historic interest that lie within the ACNB.

Many of the sites recorded are of national importance but have yet to be considered for designation; many more are of local significance and make a real contribution to local distinctiveness and sense of place. All of the information contained on the HERs is a vital part of the jigsaw of information that allows us to understand how our communities have developed and our landscapes evolved over several millennia.

As with the archaeological resource, there are many local buildings and structures that make a contribution to the landscape or to our understanding of historic events or processes but that remain unprotected through the listing mechanism. Some of these lie within the 109 Conservation Areas designated by local authorities in settlements of particular historic character or significance. Many more, especially isolated structures or farm buildings receive little or no recognition or protection.

**Historic Landscape character**

One of the priority actions for the first management plan was the undertaking of a Historic Landscape characterisation (HLC) project for the North Wessex Downs. This project has been completed and has provided new insights into the evolution of the landscape and the historic processes that have influenced the countryside we see today.

HLC is a way of analysing and recording how several millennia of human interaction with the land has produced the rural landscape we experience today. It is recognised as a means for understanding and managing the entire landscape and not just the archaeological sites and buildings traditionally protected by scheduling or listing.

Whilst confirming that the landscape has remained predominantly rural it has begun to show how the character has changed. A particularly significant statistic is that whereas approximately 18% of the North Wessex Downs could be characterised as chalk downland in the 19th century, this has reduced to around 3% today. The rate of agricultural change is also illustrated by the fact that around 75% of pre-18th century enclosures have been lost during the 20th century and that some two thirds of medieval assart enclosures have been lost or significantly modified in the same time.
Settlement pattern
The pattern and distribution of settlement within the AONB has evolved over millennia of human occupation, although most of the current towns, villages, hamlets and farms are likely to have originated in medieval or post-medieval times. One of the most characteristic features of the Downland and Downland with Woodland landscape character areas is the long linear settlements of the river valleys – the main concentrations of population in otherwise open uninhabited downland. These are characteristically loosely strung along a road on the first contour above the winter flood level with the winterbourne or river forming an integral feature of the village as in St Mary Bourne in Hampshire, Collingbourne Kingston in Wiltshire, or exposed on ridgetops, as at Faccombe in Hampshire. Evidence from the Domesday Survey of 1086 suggests that many of these settlements were created during the Early Medieval (Saxon) period.

Another distinct settlement type of the North Wessex Downs is the string of attractive, small, springline villages along the base of the lower north facing scarp, such as at Cliffe Pypard, Clevancy, Liddington, Letcombe, Ashbury and Bishopstone. All combined, these provide a significant variation in settlement form.

Key issues
- Lack of knowledge about the broader cultural landscape of the North Wessex Downs – the landscape speaks eloquently of its cultural history, but this needs to be better understood and applied to management objectives.
- Many undiscovered archaeological sites and little knowledge of their location, including woodland archaeology.
- Lack of designation or protection for many important archaeological and historic sites – although there are many Scheduled Monuments and Listed Buildings within the North Wessex Downs, this is not a designation-rich or well protected historic landscape.
- Insufficient understanding of the historical evolution of individual settlements and how this should influence their future.
- Need for more consistent approach to the designation and management of Conservation Areas, in particular the approach used for Conservation Area appraisals and management plans.
- Development pressure threats to traditional market towns.
- Poorly sited and designed new development that fails to reflect the historic form of settlements and building groups, their character and setting.
- Infilling and over-expansion on small plots which erode the traditional mixed character of individual settlements.
- Loss of local vernacular architecture with the insensitive conversion of historic buildings including traditional agricultural buildings.
- Loss of grazing animals which is threatening the continued grazing of important archaeological sites (grazing is a valuable management tool preventing scrub encroachment).
- Poorly managed recreational access to sensitive archaeological/cultural sites.
- Continued deep ploughing over archaeological sites and remains.
- Biomass planting in areas where this threatens the historic environment.
- Impact of tree planting, either its direct impact on archaeological features, or its impact on the character of the historic landscape through poor design and siting.
- Impact of modern farming practices on the character of the historic landscape.

Special qualities
- Significant visible archaeological evidence of 4th and 5th millennia BC funerary and ritual practices.
- Internationally important Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age monumental landscape at Avebury.
- Prominent islets or prehistoric hill forts overlooking the main scarp slopes.
- A variety of ancient settlement patterns.
- Distinctive medieval market towns of Marlborough and Hungerford with their planned wide market places.
- Communication corridors such as The Ridgeway that “... commands vast soaring and diving grounds for the delighted eyes, among solitary slopes of green and white hills, of turf and cloud.” – Edward Thomas
- The Kennet and Avon Canal, an example of late 18th-early 19th century engineering.
- Distinctive and ancient settlement patterns.
- Great country houses and their associated parks and gardens such as Basildon Park, Highclere Castle and Tottenham House.
The sun shines not on us, but in us. The rivers flow not past but through us. Nature was made not just for us, but for itself and its own happiness, and is the very smile of the Divine.

John Muir

Natural resources

Natural resources are vital to our existence. A community’s health and well-being is closely linked to the quality of our air, water, soils and biological resources (see the chapter on Biodiversity for biological resources). The economy is reliant on functioning ecosystems. Many people believe that natural resources have their own intrinsic value regardless of their functional value. There is a need to consider ecosystems as a whole, taking into account social, economic and environmental objectives. To do this there needs to be a better understanding of how ecosystems work, their resilience and vulnerability, how they are affected by cumulative and combined pressures, and the benefits essential for human survival and well-being that they provide.

This includes establishing where environmental limits exist (as defined in the Forces for Change Section). While resources such as biodiversity and soils are thought of as “renewable”, they can be exploited to the extent that long-term irreversible damage will be caused. Protecting natural resources by operating in a way which minimises damaging impacts is, therefore, part of sustainable development. There is a need to conserve soil, water and clean air as these resources sustain life and support biological resources on which we depend. The actions proposed in this management plan complement the national soil protection review and other diffuse pollution land management projects.
Air quality

A variety of air pollutants have known or suspected harmful effects on human health and the environment. In most areas of Europe, these pollutants are principally the products of combustion from space heating, power generation or motor vehicle traffic.

Pollutants from these sources may not only prove a problem in the immediate vicinity of these sources but can travel long distances, chemically reacting in the atmosphere to produce secondary pollutants such as acid rain or ozone. The nearest monitoring site to the AONB is at Harwell. Other sites are in Reading Town Centre, Bath and Oxford. In both the South East and South West rural areas, pollution is considered low.

Soils

Chalk forms the underlying structure to the North Wessex Downs but the overlying soils have had a profound influence on vegetation cover and agricultural activity. Soils are of five main types.

- The thin chalk soils of the open downland, now primarily under arable production but also supporting the remnant areas of chalkgrassland.
- The capping of Quaternary Clay with Flints over the chalk found as pockets of reddish brown clay containing flint pebbles. These areas are distinctly associated with the downs and are particularly characteristic of the Downland with Woodland and Wooded Plateau Landscape Types.
- Quaternary Coombe deposits found where accumulated frost-weathered debris was carried down slope by melt waters at the end of the last glaciation. These have created till deposits in the dry valleys of the downs providing richer pockets of soil, often under arable production.
- Deep well-drained loamy soils over Greensand and river alluviums in the Vale of Pewsey, traditionally under pasture with large areas forming winter flood meadows.
- A mixed soil mosaic to the east of Newbury with nutrient-poor acidic soils over plateau gravels intermixed with fertile loamy soils overlying the London Clay, characterised by the Medieval landscape of the Lowland Mosaic Landscape Type.

Watercourses

The main rivers of the AONB – the Pang, the Lambourn and the Kennet – drain eastward to the Thames. In addition, the separate catchments of the Hampshire Avon and the Test flow southward, draining the Vale of Pewsey and Hampshire Downs respectively (the Bourne Rivulet, a tributary of the Test, is the only water course of the Test catchment within the AONB boundary). Species associated with winterbourne habitats include: kingfisher, mayfly, brown trout and water crowfoot.

Climate change may give rise to more rainfall in winter deluges, when the ground is already saturated. An increase in soil erosion can be expected, resulting in damage to historic features and more silt, nutrients and pesticides washing into rivers. These inputs come predominately from arable farmland and already have a significant impact on water quality and freshwater biodiversity. Drought and lower summer rainfall is likely to result in a contraction of the chalk stream network. Freshwater species will be lost from some of the winterbournes while some perennial streams will become seasonal winterbournes. There may be an increase in the popularity of streamside recreation as people seek shade in the hottest months.

Water abstraction and levels

In terms of flows, the rivers of the chalk are a contradiction. In winter there may be localised flooding of villages in the river valleys, often more associated with rising groundwaters and springs than with river flooding, while in summer some rivers suffer from lack of flows as a result of water abstraction which, in turn, may lead to a reduction in water quality and ecological diversity (through lack of dilution and silt deposition).

The waters of the chalk aquifers and rivers are a major source of potable water. Ground waters from within the river catchments are abstracted for public water supply (the main source of demand) and for industry, agriculture and aquaculture (water cress and fish farms). However, the level of abstraction and effect on river flows varies. The Lambourn has a near natural flow regime with minimal abstraction. Conversely, in the 1980s the Pang was one of 40 rivers in England identified as suffering from low flows caused by over abstraction (from a groundwater source at Compton). Despite abstraction ceasing in 1997 (as a result of increased nitrate levels), the Environment Agency is continuing to monitor the flow characteristics of the river.

In the case of the Kennet, there are numerous groundwater abstractions but, over the catchment as a whole, these only amount to 5% of the available resource. The largest single abstraction adjacent to the river is at Oxford (between Marlborough and Hungerford), with 70% of the water exported out of the catchment. Modelling indicates that this abstraction is having a detrimental impact on river flows. Currently, abstraction is at 13.1Ml/d (peak). Progressive tightening of the licensing conditions resulted in reversion to the ‘base’ abstraction level (11.09Ml/d average up to March 31st 2011; 9.34Ml/d thereafter).

At the same time, the operational requirements of the Kennet and Avon Canal have had an effect on the Kennet. Between Bath and the summit at Crofton Pumping Station the Canal is fed by the Bristol Avon; between the summit and Kirtlington by the River Dun (a tributary of the Kennet); and between Kirtlington and Reading by the Kennet. In-flows into the Canal from these river sources can result in less than optimum flows in the rivers, particularly in the summer months and in drier years. This also has a severe effect in reducing the water quality of the river, particularly by increasing the turbidity (Environment Agency 2000). However, it is a clear objective of British Waterways to optimise the use of water resources in the Canal and to use back-pumping to conserve water in the ‘artificial’ section between Bath and the Canal summit.

There is a need to work within the demands of European Directives. Under the Nitrates Directive (Council Directive 91/676/EEC) introduced in December 2002, the majority of the North Wessex Downs AONB is designated as a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone. Within these zones, farmers are required to limit the application of manures and nitrogen fertilisers, subject to a closed season for the application of certain manures, and required to keep records of cropping, stocking and the application of nitrogen fertilisers and manures.

Control of diffuse pollution is further reinforced under the Water Framework Directive (Implementation) (England and Wales) Regulation 2003. The Water Framework Directive is an example of the move towards an ecosystems approach. This legislation requires river basins to be managed as an entity to deliver good environmental outcomes in both surface and groundwater. This requires the preparation of River Basin Management Plans, which may introduce further measures to reduce the impacts of agriculture and other land uses, especially in terms of diffuse pollution of ground and surface water. Agriculture is one of the main sources of diffuse pollution and Defra wishes to encourage Catchment Sensitive Farming - managing land in a way that is sensitive to the ecological health of the water environment. Farming is not the sole cause of these problems, but it does contribute approximately 60% of nitrates, 25% of phosphorus and 70% of sediments entering our waters, amongst other pollutants.

Special qualities

Rivers have very distinctive characteristics which contribute to the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs. 57

- Shallowly sloping banks.
- Often a complex pattern of river channels (as on the Kennet downstream of Marlborough) reflecting the past use of the river to supply water to an extensive network of water meadows and mills, most of which are now disused.
- Fed by natural springs which issue in the valleys of the chalk dip slope at the point where the water table comes to the surface.
- Clear sparkling water, resulting from the filtration of groundwater as it percolates through the chalk.
- Fairly regular flows throughout the year (except where channels have been severely modified).
- Limited fluctuations in water temperature throughout the year.
- Clean shallow ‘washed’ river gravel beds (riffles) contrasting with deeper shaded pools.
- Upper winterbourne sections and winterbourne tributaries, flowing only during winter and spring when groundwater levels are at their highest.
- Highly valued game fishing – supporting the native brown trout.
- High diversity of aquatic plants, and invertebrate species including those that are nationally scarce, such as the white-clawed crayfish, and important habitats (e.g. reed beds on the Kennet) supporting nationally and locally scarce land bird species and nationally declining mammals such as the water vole.
- Flowering water vegetation including water crowfoot – forming snowy carpets across the water surface in summer.

In recognition of these unique characteristics and high biodiversity value, the Lambourn, Kennet and Hampshire Avon are all designated SSSIs within the AONB, while the Lambourn and the Hampshire Avon are also SACs.

Key issues

- There is no agreement on the levels of acceptable environmental limits within the AONB.
- Soils
  - The key issue is erosion, especially on steeper slopes and under ‘open’ arable crops, such as maize.
- Air
  - Air quality is currently good but activities outside the AONB can have a significant effect across the area.

Water

The key issues relate to management, water abstraction and pollution:

Management

- Loss of river habitats as a result of historical land drainage and channel modifications associated with past flood alleviation works and past industry (although some man-made features (e.g. mill leats) are of considerable historical importance).
- Loss of once common species of chalk streams and rivers such as the water vole and the white-clawed crayfish (both BAP target species).
- Decline in fish stocks and quality of fisheries.
- Excessive removal of bankside vegetation (on occasion associated with fisheries management).
- Weed cutting and river clearance to reduce downstream flooding (although this is carefully regulated by the Environment Agency).
- Loss of winterbourne channels through agricultural cultivation.

Water abstraction and loss

- Increasing water demand during the summer months as a result of climate change and changing lifestyles.
- Increasing water demand for crop irrigation as a result of more erratic weather patterns resulting in prolonged dry periods and intense summer rainfall events.
- The influence of climate change on groundwater recharge patterns and overall water availability.
- Increasing water demand as a result of major development in the urban areas around the North Wessex Downs, such as Swindon, leading to export of water out of the catchments of the North Wessex Downs.
- Increasing lock movements on the Kennet and Avon Canal taking water from the Kennet and its tributaries.

Pollution

- The need to raise awareness of water quality issues.
- Pollution of rivers from point sources, including public and private domestic sewerage systems (with phosphorus discharges a particular problem), agriculture, commercial watercress beds, and fish farms.
- Diffuse sources of pollution include run-off from roads, houses and commercial areas, run-off from farmland, and seepage into groundwater from developed landscapes of all kinds. Diffuse sources are often individually minor but collectively significant. Increases in nutrient levels can result in toxic algal blooms, resulting in adverse impacts on the food chain which supports fish, animals and birds.
- Pollution pressure on the River Kennet generated by poor water quality and boat traffic on the Kennet and Avon Canal.

Soils

- The key issue is erosion, especially on steeper slopes and under ‘open’ arable crops, such as maize.

57 http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/environment/water/csf/index.htm
The North Wessex Downs AONB is a sparsely populated landscape with a population density of 72 people per square kilometre (compared to an average for West Berkshire of 205 people per square kilometre). The open, uninhabited uplands retain a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity – a very special perceptual characteristic within this densely populated part of southern England.

Attractive villages nestle in the river valleys of the Pang, Bourne, Kennet and Lambourn and cluster in the low-lying land to the east of the AONB. Appropriate economic regeneration and development are essential to support sustainable communities. High environmental quality is recognised as making strong direct and indirect contributions to the wider regional economy. There is a need to manage development pressures with sensitivity both within and in the setting of the AONB in order to maintain a balance in promoting economic and social viability whilst retaining the character of the North Wessex Downs. Communities need to be economically viable and have adequate housing, amenities and facilities. However, the primary purpose of designation of the AONB needs to be paramount when considering such issues.

Remoteness and tranquillity
The sense of remoteness and tranquility associated with the North Wessex Downs is fundamental to the character of the AONB and vital to the enjoyment and appreciation of the landscape. These special perceptual qualities are a fragile resource and under threat from a combination of factors, including major development, such as wind turbines, intruding into the open downland. Darkness at night is one of the things that defines the countryside and makes it so different from surrounding urban areas. Darkness allows the majesty of the skies and stars to be seen away from the orange glow that now spreads for miles outside towns and cities blotting out the sight of thousands of stars. Ambient noise associated with transport networks and machinery can further erode this special quality.

Sensitivities and constraints of the landscape to wind turbines
The North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners commissioned Land Use Consultants to prepare a draft study to identify the particular sensitivities and constraints of the landscape to wind turbines. The Study reveals that all landscapes within the North Wessex Downs are constrained to turbine development to a degree, with specific sensitivities and values that would be adversely affected by such forms of development. There are four landscape types that are considered to be highly constrained to turbine development, namely the Downland, High Chalk Plain, Scarp and River Valleys. These are the landscapes where sensitivities to this form of development are high and any wind turbine is likely to have adverse impacts. There are four landscapes which are considered to be moderately – highly constrained to wind turbine development, namely the Downland with Woodland, Wooded Plateau, Downs Plain, Vales and Lowland Mosaic. Within these landscapes, there may be fewer or lesser sensitivities to some forms of wind turbine development, notably those of lower height classes. The particular landscape characteristics and configuration of these four landscape types means that it may be possible to find locations that are less constrained to some types of turbine development, although these locations are likely to be limited.

As a response to climate change, there is an imperative to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and concerns over security of energy supplies are likely to lead to an increase in renewable energy generation. There will be an increased pressure to favour wind turbine development.
Development

Special qualities

- The sense of remoteness and tranquility.
- All landscapes sensitive to change.
- Distinctive and ancient settlement patterns.
- Architectural styles vary throughout the AONB, dependent on availability of building materials.
- The built environment forms an integral part of local character and distinctiveness and adds to the diversity of the AONB landscape as a whole.

Key issues

- Expansion of the main urban areas just outside the AONB, including the main centres of Swindon, Reading, Newbury, Basingstoke and Andover, creating urban fringe pressures on the boundaries of the AONB.
- New large free-standing houses as replacement dwellings in open countryside and insensitive farm diversification activities and associated signage.
- Unsympathetic incremental expansion of the settlements of and adjacent to the AONB, detracting from the surrounding countryside.
- Potential for major development to intrude onto open downland, including masts, pylons, major wind turbine developments, and mineral extraction and waste management, threatening the senses of remoteness and tranquillity.
- The future use of redundant ‘brown field’ sites within the AONB, especially redundant airfields and military sites (as at Wroughton), and the impact upon landscape.
- The pressure for new developments at junctions of the M4 and A34.
- Development needs of the racing industry and the landscape impact of new gallops and facilities.
- Lack of knowledge about the boundaries of the current pools of tranquillity and dark night skies within the AONB and the implications of light spillage from development in and around the AONB.
- Lack of understanding of the value and role of green infrastructure networks.
- Noise associated with some recreation pursuits, including that from trail bike courses and from shooting schools.
- The dumping of rubbish within the AONB.

Green infrastructure

‘Green infrastructure’ (GI) is the physical environment within and between the towns and villages. It is a network of multi-functional open spaces, including formal parks, gardens, woodlands, green corridors, waterways, street trees and open countryside. There is an opportunity for new development to secure and enhance the AONB’s GI. This will support the sustainable management of land and water resources, including production (e.g. energy and food crops), pollution control, climatic amelioration and increased porosity of land cover. Biodiversity is supported by ensuring the connectivity of habitats. Public health and well-being is enhanced with the recreational development of greenways and the use of non-car routes.

Urban fringe

A number of sizable and expanding towns lie just outside the AONB. In the west, the most notable is Swindon and a strategy has been prepared, the Swindon Urban Fringe Action Plan, which includes a part of the AONB. It notes that the agricultural economy close to Swindon is under pressure as a result of uncertainty over the future, marginal viability, and urban pressures, including vandalism and litter dumping. It concludes that with carefully guided support it could become an area of immense opportunity and multiple use, but without specific focus much of that which is most valued could be squandered and the great potential of the area, both as the gateway to the North Wessex Downs AONB and to Swindon and as the bridge between town and country, could be lost.

Built environment

The appropriate and sympathetic design and siting of all new developments, reflecting local landscape character, architecture and the use of local materials, is vital to ensuring that development maintains the essential character of the AONB and the settlements within it. The development of individual settlements should be guided by an assessment of local landscape character that takes account of the historical evolution, architecture and current community needs of individual settlements, including those for affordable housing. Within the AONB there is previously developed land where developers may seek a new use.

The impact on the character of the AONB by the reuse of these sites can be significant if for residential or industrial use. Change of use of existing buildings can have an impact on adjoining properties and the wider countryside, as well as bringing a potential increase in traffic movements. In addition, it may bring the potential for loss of services such as pubs, shops, garages, etc through conversion to residential properties. In the AONB, the authorities will take a strategic approach to requests for major developments with the support of planning briefs and sub-regional strategies.

86 From EU Green Infrastructure Planning Guide - http://www.greeninfrastructure.eu
Population and demography
There has been a 2.5% rise in people over 60 in the AONB between 2000 and 2007. Approximately 30% work within the AONB and 90% commute to the surrounding urban areas and London (assisted by good rail connections). Many villages in the AONB are now largely occupied by those commuting out of the area to work, which has stimulated rapid rising house prices with very significant pressure placed on the affordable housing stock. Equally, the emphasis on out-commuting leaves villages with a significantly reduced population during the day, challenging the viability of remaining village services such as post offices, pubs and doctors’ surgeries. There is a need for a broad mix of housing to maintain sustainable communities and support village services.

The majority of the population within the North Wessex Downs AONB suffer from poor access to services when compared to regional averages.

- 87.9% live over 2km from a GP premises (South East Region 23% and South West Region 29%).
- 42.6% live over 2km from a Primary School (SE 6.7% and SW 9.5%).
- 67.2% live over 2km from a Post Office (SE 8.5% and SW 9%).
- 84.9% live over 2km from a supermarket or convenience store (SE 21% and SW 26.6%).

With the lack of access to services it is hardly surprising that the percentage of households without a car is less in the AONB (10.7%) than in the SE (19.4%) and SW (20.2%).

Economy
Natural England has devised a process for assessing the viability of market towns. The market town health check process is primarily a tool leading to a local action plan that guides and plots regeneration activity. In addition, there is scope for the process itself to be used to involve communities and strengthen relationships. Communities use the health check to identify their town’s strengths and weaknesses then determine how to address them. Each health check results in a local plan of action, endorsed by a regional partnership of organisations which can offer funding to support practical and imaginative projects. They are community focussed and often include innovative solutions. A market town health check has been completed for Hungerford, complete with a Town Plan. Marlborough could also benefit from this process. There may be scope for developing the initiative for use in smaller communities.

Only 5% of the economically active population of the North Wessex Downs AONB is directly involved in agriculture. The majority of the AONB’s economy is part of a larger urban economy, though many businesses benefit from the area’s high landscape quality to attract either staff or customers. Where farm buildings have been re-used as part of economic diversification activities, many of these uses relate to high-tech industries driven by the surrounding urban economies. In turn, small village industrial estates, such as that at Irken, are dominated by businesses whose employees in-commute from surrounding areas. This is also true of employees in the horse racing industry.

Communities

The North Wessex Downs AONB encompasses 173 parish councils and there are the two market towns (Marlborough and Hungerford). The overall population of the AONB is 125,000 and the economically active population is estimated to be approximately 90,000 (72%).

A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm

Henrik Ibsen
Communities

• Loss of affordable housing, reducing the social mix within settlements and leading to a loss of essential rural skills.
• Social exclusion.
• Aging population requiring increased community support.
• Lack of residential accommodation and sheltered housing for vulnerable groups.
• The trend of commuting to higher paid jobs outside the AONB whilst living in the area, resulting in rising house prices.
• High demand for traditional buildings to convert to residential use, so reducing the opportunities for business conversions.
• A bucolic economy masking areas of local deprivation.
• Business opportunities perceived to be limited for businesses in inaccessible locations.
• Communications and flexible working across the AONB.
• Low employment participation rates for women in rural areas.
• Lack of adult education courses within the AONB, and transport to gain access to further and tertiary education either inadequate or too expensive.
• Closure of key facilities in rural areas including village shops, surgeries, post offices and pubs.

The two main trunk roads crossing the North Wessex Downs, the M4 (London to Wales) and the A34 (Southampton to Oxford and M40), form the main arteries in a wider network of A-roads crossing the AONB. Yet the overall impression is of a relatively sparse road network underlining the historical and current lack of settlement on the open downlands. The only part of the AONB to have a dense network of winding rural lanes, is the well wooded Hampshire Downs and the lowlands to the north east of Newbury – both areas with a Medieval settlement pattern.

Outside the main towns that ring the AONB, bus services are limited. Although the distribution of bus routes suggests that rural areas are well served, many of these services run only infrequently. However, a number of innovative and flexible bus schemes are operating within the North Wessex Downs. These include the Ridgeway Explorer Bus, the Cango Bus Service and the Dial-a-bus running between Pangbourne and Newbury.

Special qualities

• Dispersed and small population spread over a large area.
• Community spirit strong in many settlements.
• Villages and small towns with a strong sense of identity
• High level of community interaction and closeness
• Safer areas with low level of antisocial behaviour compared with national averages
• Active and resourceful community groups
• Sense of links to previous generations, heritage and the land

Key issues

• Lack of access to essential services for those without access to a car.
• A fear of rising crime and erosion of community trust.
• Lack of funding for town and parish councils to participate in partnerships and community activities.
• Infrequency of conventional public transport provision serving rural communities, including the requirement for improved waiting and interchange facilities.
• Lack of understanding of the impacts of daily life style decisions on the environment of the North Wessex Downs – from individual travel decisions to the use of water as an unlimited natural resource.
• Increased volumes of traffic on main roads fueling further ‘improvement’ of roads crossing the North Wessex Downs, including the M4 and A34.
• Increased volume of HGVs, delivery vans and commuter traffic on rural lanes.
• Rat running on minor lanes to escape congestion on the main arterial roads.
• Increased lighting associated with road improvements especially along the M4 and A34, but also at more minor road junctions, such as the Burbage roundabout.
• Urbanisation from standard highway design, management and maintenance protocols.
Leisure and tourism

The North Wessex Downs AONB is a landscape rich in historic sites and natural features. This magical landscape has attracted naturalists, antiquarians and travellers throughout history. The AONB can be an area for green tourism, with easily accessible information about its wildlife, culture and history, and with many opportunities to explore, walk, cycle and ride.

The AONB 2004 Management Plan highlighted the lack of understanding amongst residents of the potential benefits that tourism can bring if appropriately managed, the lack of identity of the North Wessex Downs and the opportunities for quiet recreation and green tourism that it can offer. This remains true. While certain of the issues facing the AONB are clearly understood by different sectors, there is not always shared understanding of how these issues interrelate and how solutions could and should be developed to provide mutual benefit. There is general agreement that a better understanding needs to be developed of how lifestyle choices affect the environment of the AONB – seeking to encourage everyone to develop more sustainable lifestyles.

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

Kenneth Grahame
Access to the countryside

Access to the countryside is an important part of the lives of people who live in the AONB and also for visitors as a tourism asset. Natural England’s “Walking the way to Health” initiative aims to encourage people who take very little exercise to start walking more and gain the confidence to continue exercising on a regular basis, either in a group or on their own. The importance of using and enjoying woodlands and green spaces as part of an everyday healthy lifestyle has been demonstrated by Forestry Commission research.72

Exercise in the North Wessex Downs can have positive effects on many aspects of health. There needs to be a programme of events and information to realise this benefit, such as the circular walks developed by the AONB team in partnership with the Ridgeway National Trails Officer. Features such as green lanes, including the Ridgeway, form an important part of the landscape. The lack of convenient public transport imposes limits on the benefits and use of the resource.

However, access must be balanced with land managing interests, as well as other issues such as conservation. Greater and improved access should be encouraged where this can be achieved without undue cost to conservation or the landowner’s use of the land. The provision of access, including improving accessibility of CRoW Open Access land, provides a valuable opportunity to increase public enjoyment of the countryside and to raise awareness of the work farmers do to protect and enhance the environment.

The CRoW Act established access land which the public has the right to enjoy under certain conditions. There are 1189 hectares of open access land and 694 hectares of registered commons within the AONB. In addition, there are 100 hectares of National Trust land to which there is access. An analysis of accessible natural greenspace provision in the South East73 in February 2007 found that the North Wessex Downs has the smallest percentage of accessible natural greenspace (4%) of all of the SE Protected Landscapes.

Of that accessible natural greenspace, 59% was woodland. In general woodlands with open or partial access are owned by the Forestry Commission, the Woodland Trust or the National Trust. A surprising 89% of the woodland area has a public right of way either running through the woodland or along one edge of the woodland. The figures fall dramatically for open access to woodland, the total area of open access woodland is only 14% of the total woodland area.

Access to the countryside

Rights of way

One of the most important resources of the North Wessex Downs AONB is its extensive rights of way network, providing access to some of the most spectacular views and secluded valleys in southern England. Not only does it underpin the recreational and tourism sectors but also offers some opportunities for sustainable and safe journeys to school and work. Important national and regional walking routes within the North Wessex Downs include (with the length within the AONB): the Ridgeway National Trail (88km); the Thames Path National Trail (144km); the Test Way (22km); the Wayfarers Walk (27km); the Lambourn Valley Way (29km); and the towpath of the Kennet and Avon Canal which is a National Waterways Link and one of the busiest paths in the British Waterways Network. In addition, a very large number of other paths are promoted as recreational walking routes by the National Trust, the constituent local authorities, and the Ramblers Association.

Route 4 of the Sustrans National Cycle Network also runs for 47 km through the North Wessex Downs, part following the Kennet and Avon Canal towpath. In addition, there are a large number of advertised cycle routes (on and off road) that pass through the AONB, taking advantage of the low trafficked lanes. At the same time the Three Downs Link horse riding route offers huge potential for recreational riders, linking the Ridgeway with the Hampshire Downs and South Downs, along with a number of advertised shorter riding routes that utilise the Ridgeway and link with the much wider multi-use network of the AONB.

The CRoW Act requires every county/unitary authority to set out its plans for improvement of the Rights of Way network through the production of a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIPs). These plans, which cover the 5 year period, 2006-2011, identify opportunities for improving and promoting access to the countryside and as such could help maximise the benefits of access on arable land. This is supported by the findings of the North Wessex Downs Arable Strategy.74 In the section on access, opportunities for permissive routes across arable land were identified. The target completion date for RoWIPs was November 2007. So far Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire have completed their Plans.

72 http://www.whi.org.uk/
Tourism

Tourist attractions of national renown within the North Wessex Downs AONB include Avebury World Heritage Site (taking in Avebury Village, the Avebury Henge complex, Silbury Hill and the West and East Kennet long barrows); the White Horse at Uffington; the route of the Ridgeway; and the Kennet and Avon Canal providing a strategic waterways link between the Thames and Bristol Channel. But it is the spectacular scenery, highly attractive villages, and sense of isolation that are the primary recreational and tourism attractions of the area.

The AONB also has considerable opportunities for angling, including fly fishing on the Kennet, Lambourn and Pang, with wild stocks of brown trout and grayling supplemented in many lengths by hatchery reared trout. Coarse fishing takes place on the Kennet and Avon Canal and on a number of stocked reservoirs and lakes, such as at Barton Court Fishery at Barton Court near Kintbury.

Although not large in number, there is a range of paying visitor attractions within the AONB, from Basildon Park, Lower Basildon (run by the National Trust) and Highclere Castle, near Newbury (owned by the Earl of Carnarvon), to the Crofton Beam Engine and Pumping Station on the Kennet and Avon Canal at Great Bedwyn and the Living Rainforest environmental centre at Hampstead Norreys.

Tourism provision in the AONB is fragmented and poorly coordinated, with a low number of jobs and income. Despite its close proximity to major areas of population, the North Wessex Downs is not well used as a place for quiet enjoyment. If managed the right way, green and sustainable tourism offers enormous opportunities for the North Wessex Downs and a financial rationale for the conservation and enhancement of the landscape. There may be opportunities for the tourism sector to support investment in

Special qualities

- Some of the finest landscape in England - chalk downland, river valleys, ancient woodland, historic sites and much more besides.
- A legacy of historical associations with past human influence etched in every facet of the landscape.
- A diversity of tourism destinations such the great country houses, the Avebury World Heritage Site and the Kennet and Avon Canal.
- Despite a sparse road network there is good access from the surrounding conurbations.
- The extensive Rights of Way network, including the Ridgeway National Trail.
- The attractive villages and bustling market towns of Hungerford and Marlborough.

Key issues

- A poor perception of tourism amongst residents of the North Wessex Downs and a failure to recognise that association with a landscape of national importance can bring real economic benefits, especially in the areas of tourism and local foods.
- Lack of coordinated marketing of the North Wessex Downs AONB and poor understanding amongst the wider population of the opportunities that it offers for quiet recreation and green tourism.
- Lack of accessible natural green space.
- Increased popularity of a few “honeypot” locations with resulting sprawl of car parking, wear and tear on paths, litter and lower enjoyment, and potentially intrusive traffic management measures – although the number of such sites is currently small.
- Infrequent and unreliable public transport links to key attractions and access points.

- Inadequately funded management and maintenance of the rights of way and poor connectivity of the rights of way network in some areas for circular walks and rides.
- Increased use of the rights of way network by motorised vehicles, of particular concern along the route of the Ridgeway.
- Noise associated with some recreation pursuits, including that from trail bike courses and from shooting schools.
- General lack of facilities for the non-horse owner to gain access to the recreational riding opportunities of the North Wessex Downs.
- Lack of information and provision for the less able and other disadvantaged groups to access and enjoy the North Wessex Downs.
- A failure to understand that conservation and enhancement of this national landscape is a product of all decisions affecting its future.

References

76 Report from Roger Budden, Tourism South East (2007)
Delivery plan

This section sets out the actions required to deliver the policies and objectives of the Management Plan. Each year, the North Wessex Downs AONB will develop a delivery plan which sets out who is doing what, describes the role of the North Wessex Downs AONB team in the action, identifies the lead body, and defines the outcomes to be delivered.

The North Wessex Downs AONB team may have one of the following roles:

- **Things we do ourselves and take full responsibility for:** Deliverer
- **Things we take forward in partnership (or co-ordinate):** Facilitator
- **Things we make happen by raising awareness:** Influencer
- **Things we help others to do:** Supporter

**A Vision**

of vast, dramatic, undeveloped and locally distinct chalk downlands with extensive areas of semi-natural chalk grassland, contrasting with well-wooded plateaux, arable lands and intimate and secluded valleys, all rich in biodiversity and cultural heritage; a national landscape that stands apart from the increasing urban pressures that surround it; where people live, work and relax; and where visitors are welcomed and contribute to a vibrant rural economy.
**OBJECTIVES**

1 To maintain and enhance the distinctive landscape character of the North Wessex Downs.

**POLICIES**

1.1 Use the AONB Landscape Character Assessment study to inform policy and strategy development within the North Wessex Downs (as measured using national and local indicators).

**ACTIONS**

Prepare and publish a Landscape Management Strategy by 2014, to develop and support landscape management strategies for each landscape character type.

Raise the policy profile of the North Wessex Downs AONB locally, regionally and nationally to secure the co-ordination of policies and programmes for the benefit of the AONB.

Engage with other AONBs through the exchange of information and experience and the development of joint initiatives. Developing unified responses to specific types of intrusive development such as power lines.

**OBJECTIVES**

2 To raise the profile of the North Wessex Downs AONB.

**POLICIES**

2.1 Identify and promote the special qualities and features that contribute to the local distinctiveness of the North Wessex Downs.

**ACTIONS**

Promote the AONB Team as a central source of information on the North Wessex Downs.

Ensure that relevant national and regional research programmes help contribute to a better understanding of the North Wessex Downs and its resources.

Encourage land managers and the wider business community to promote the environment as a business opportunity.

Explore the concept of landscape as an inspiration for the arts, and its associations with local folklore and traditions.

Promote outreach and education activities that raise awareness of the North Wessex Downs to residents and visitors.

**OBJECTIVES**

3 To encourage initiatives that facilitate sustainable land management.

**POLICIES**

3.1 Work with land managers and other organisations to ensure sustainable practices enhance the landscape.

**ACTIONS**

Co-ordinate joint working and expansion of existing land management projects to assist in the delivery of the AONB objectives.

Encourage the development of policy and grant aid schemes that support the conservation and enhancement of the special qualities and features of the North Wessex Downs.

Promote best land and business management practices that secures the purposes and objectives of AONB designation by the provision of co-ordinated advice.

Co-ordinate and promote a series of best practice sites and events that demonstrate sustainable land and business management practices appropriate to the North Wessex Downs.

Encourage national, regional and local land management policies to be consistent with the purpose of AONB designation and that land coming out of agricultural production can positively assist in meeting Management Plan objectives.
**OBJECTIVES**

4 To encourage diverse and viable agriculture, forestry, horseracing and other land based enterprises that support the delivery of a wide range of public benefits, including:

- the conservation and enhancement of the area’s special qualities and features;
- the provision of access opportunities; and
- support for local markets.

**POLICIES**

4.1 Support sustainable farm diversification and multi-purpose woodland management where it achieves North Wessex Downs Management Plan objectives and accords with planning policy.

**ACTIONS**

Manage sites in public and tenanted ownership within the North Wessex Downs as best practice examples in the delivery of the AONB objectives.

Co-ordinate efforts across the North Wessex Downs to reduce unsustainable populations of species where these threaten the sustainable management of woodland and woodland regeneration.

Promote environmental assurance schemes in land-based production and other business enterprises where these are able to bring clear environmental benefits.

Develop co-ordinated and integrated advice to farmers and non-farming land-owners that fully reflects the objectives for the North Wessex Downs.

Use whole farm / enterprise planning as a means of delivering and acting upon integrated advice at the farm / enterprise level.

Ensure that there are a sufficient number of advisors with the necessary range of skills to deliver the required advice across the North Wessex Downs.

Identify future land use options that are best able to assist farm viability and reflect the environmental objectives of the AONB, including biomass planting.

Seek fiscal incentives in support of bio-fuel crops that reflect the landscape character of the North Wessex Downs.

Encourage the active use of woodland resources for viable products that help enhance biodiversity.

**OBJECTIVES**

5 To create a diverse rural skills base to support traditional and emerging land based enterprises that enhance the special qualities and features of the North Wessex Downs.

**POLICIES**

5.1 Identify and develop the skills required to care for the landscape and its special qualities, with opportunities for all to acquire such skills.

**ACTIONS**

Develop a register of local traditional land-based skills.

Ensure the local availability of practical training in traditional land management and the skills necessary for adding value and land-based diversification activities, including business planning, IT skills, accountancy, and food hygiene.

Ensure training providers understand the AONB objectives and sell the benefits to businesses of being located within a nationally important landscape.

Ensure that local authority programmes that tackle skill shortages and training needs to ensure appropriate land management within the AONB. Develop initiatives with local business support organisations to develop business skills within the land-based sector.

**OBJECTIVES**

6 To ensure that the characteristic habitats and species of the North Wessex Downs are conserved and enhanced.

**POLICIES**

6.1 Ensure the coordinated management of species and habitats.

**ACTIONS**

Secure management agreements for sites of high landscape, cultural and / or biodiversity importance across the AONB.

Encourage innovative use of initiatives such as Environmental Stewardship schemes to deliver biodiversity benefits.

Support the delivery of biodiversity action plans, other landscape strategies, catchment management and forestry plans to ensure effective management of all priority habitats and species.

Assess progress with the delivery of these plans. Identify further action, where necessary, to create, update, or progress these plans.

Progress recommendations made by AONB publications and research, such as the Chalk Grassland Strategy and Woodland Strategy.
**OBJECTIVES**

6 To ensure that the characteristic habitats and species of the North Wessex Downs are conserved and enhanced.

**POLICIES**

6.1 Ensure the coordinated management of species and habitats.

**ACTIONS**

Encourage and support projects that seek to identify the extent of spread and damage caused by non-native invasive species; to eradicate and/or control non-native species; and to restore habitats and wildlife populations damaged by such species.

6.1 Secure readily accessible baseline biodiversity data across the North Wessex Downs.

**ACTIONS**

Support the County Biological Record Centres and Sites and Monuments Records serving the North Wessex Downs as the main repositories for information on the biodiversity and cultural heritage of the AONB.

6.2 Safeguard and enhance the biodiversity of the North Wessex Downs by identifying, creating and enhancing habitat networks to ensure ecological diversity and connectivity.

**ACTIONS**

Ensure a co-ordinated programme of work is in place to restore, recreate, link and buffer UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats and species throughout the North Wessex Downs.

Identify key biodiversity sites within the AONB and the opportunities to enlarge and link these as part of a broader programme at the regional level.

Extend existing conservation grazing initiatives to cover all the main grassland areas of the AONB.

**HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT**

**OBJECTIVES**

7 To enhance the protection, management and setting of the archaeological and historic features, sites and landscapes that characterise the North Wessex Downs.

**POLICIES**

7.1 Ensure that sites, features and landscapes of historical importance are appropriately identified, recorded and managed.

**ACTIONS**

Co-ordinate with English Heritage state of the Historic Environment reporting to develop the use of Heritage at Risk Register.

Promote a review of designated sites across the North Wessex Downs AONB to ensure that the lists are current and appropriate. Work closely with the WHS groups to ensure shared objectives and joint actions.

Promote the production and publication of ‘local lists’ of historic environment features.

8 To promote an increased level of awareness, use and enjoyment of the historic and cultural fabric of the North Wessex Downs.

**POLICIES**

7.1 Ensure that sites, features and landscapes of historical importance are appropriately identified, recorded and managed.

**ACTIONS**

Support initiatives that seek to provide long term sustainable management of important Historic environment assets.

Support a settlement characterisation project for the AONB.

Support the production of a joint design guide for the North Wessex Downs.

Identify opportunities to include the historic environment in community-generated Village Design Statements, linked where appropriate to Conservation Area Appraisals.

9 To realise the potential value of the Historic Environment data.

**POLICIES**

9.1 Promote research and advice from Historic Environment experts.

**ACTIONS**

Ensure that HLC data is used in the development and updating of other strategies, i.e. the landscape management strategy, the woodland strategy, the chalk grassland strategy, etc.

Promote an integrated understanding of the historic environment resource through Historic Environment Character Zoning and through the development of Historic Environment Action Plans.
OBJECTIVES

10. To conserve and improve the quality and depth of soils in the North Wessex Downs.

11. To ensure that the water environment, including fisheries is sustainably managed.

POLICIES

10.1 Resist further losses impoverishment and pollution, particularly in the case of the thin chalk soils of the downland.

11.1 Coordinate research, projects and cooperation of those partners that influence watercourses and catchments.

ACTIONS

Co-ordinate actions to maximise environmental benefits.

Promote guidance on soil conservation measures.

Ensure that soils are used sustainably by maintaining a range of land uses that minimises pollution and loss through erosion.

Develop a better understanding of the nature of river flows and demand for water across the North Wessex Downs.

Introduce demand management of water use in those settlements that draw on the aquifers of the North Wessex Downs, and monitor and reduce water wastage.

Ensure no water is abstracted from catchments that are classified as ‘no water available’, ‘over licensed’ or ‘over abstracted’ under the Environment Agency’s Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy.

Take water demand fully into account in any future decisions regarding planning, changes to land use or cropping patterns within the North Wessex Downs.

Examine the sources of diffuse and point pollution within the North Wessex Downs.

Develop partnerships with existing diffuse pollution projects to promote ways to reduce diffuse pollution in soils and watercourses.

Ensure the local distinctiveness, character and quality of the North Wessex Downs are fully recognised in the development and implementation of river basin strategies.

OBJECTIVES

11.2 Promote and coordinate remedial actions through the Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative and other partnership schemes to restore and enhance degraded river sections within the North Wessex Downs.

ACTIONS

Promote and coordinate remedial actions through the Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative and other partnership schemes to restore and enhance degraded river sections within the North Wessex Downs.

Survey and assess river networks and channels.

Ensure that no new abstraction licences are granted within the North Wessex Downs which export water out of the catchments of the AONB.

Promote flood alleviation works which maximise all-round benefits, e.g. through restoration of traditional water meadow systems or shallow winter flooding in the floodplain of benefit to wildlife.

Promote river restoration to further biodiversity / amenity objectives – re-creating natural river channels and re-linking rivers with their floodplains where this would not damage artificial channels of historic / cultural importance.

11.3 Ensure the sustainable use of water resources.

Reduce and re-use water in the Kennet and Avon Canal, so as to minimise any effects on flows and water quality in all rivers, catchments and other watercourses.

DEVELOPMENT

OBJECTIVES

12. To encourage appropriate development that meets the economic and housing needs of the AONB and surrounding communities.

12.1 Encourage the adoption of guidance that is sustainable and enhances the special qualities of the AONB.

POLICIES

12.1 Encourage the adoption of guidance that is sustainable and enhances the special qualities of the AONB.

ACTIONS

Encourage high standards of design, traditional building styles, energy conservation and innovation that respects traditional settlement patterns and the distinctive character of the North Wessex Downs.

Assess the need for Supplementary Planning Documents and other policies to address issues such as local character, materials and historic structure and scale of settlements.

Prepare Parish Plans / Village Design Statements / Town Design Statements to inform the future development of individual settlements and their landscape setting, taking account of the historic evolution of each settlement, its characteristic architecture and use of materials.
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<th>DEVELPMENT cont</th>
<th>OBJECTIVES</th>
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</table>
| 13 To ensure that the formulation and implementation of planning policies across the North Wessex Downs takes full account of the purposes of designation and the character and quality of the AONB and its setting. | 13.1 Ensure the purposes and objectives of AONB designation are fully recognised in the development and local, regional and national planning policies. | Secure the coherent and consistent implementation of planning policies across the North Wessex Downs. Provide training / guidance for planners, elected members on planning committees and others involved in the planning process with the AONB. Promote a better understanding of the extent of tranquility, remoteness and dark night skies within the North Wessex Downs and the factors that impact on them. Promote the use of Landscape Visual Impact Assessments for developments, including for those outside of but visible from the AONB, in order to maintain the area’s distinctive character and setting. Adopt consistent AONB-wide approaches to the construction of telecommunication masts and other intrusive structures. Resist noise-generating developments and sports both within the AONB and its setting. Reduce light pollution, including control of lighting schemes or other developments that threaten the integrity of dark night skies within the North Wessex Downs. Support appropriate and sustainable farm diversification activities where planning applications are supported by a whole farm plan and linked to design guidance. Encourage the use of planning briefs which guide developments within and on the edge of the North Wessex Downs and take account of AONB purposes. | |}

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| 13 To ensure that the formulation and implementation of planning policies across the North Wessex Downs takes full account of the purposes of designation and the character and quality of the AONB and its setting. | 13.3 Encourage the preservation and provision of adequate “Green Infrastructure” | Develop strategies and integrated projects to manage the pressures and opportunities presented by the AONB’s close proximity to its surrounding urban centres. Ensure that “green infrastructure” (new or enhanced biodiversity assets) is incorporated within the area of all medium or large-scale developments, both within and near the AONB. | |}

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<tr>
<th>OBJECTIVES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14 To promote a sustainable rural economy</td>
<td>14.1 Encourage economic growth and diversification of the local economy</td>
<td>Support economic activities that embrace sustainable development principles at a scale and nature compatible with the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs. Establish networks to support small businesses in the AONB and identify opportunities for further assistance. Support initiatives that seek to add value to land-based products sympathetic to the natural beauty of the AONB. Encourage collaboration between local businesses and the promotion of local purchasing to maximise returns to the local economy and minimise the travel of raw materials and goods. Develop training courses to encourage businesses within the North Wessex Downs to adopt sustainable approaches consistent with AONB objectives.</td>
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## OBJECTIVES

15. To enable vibrant communities to develop sustainably in the North Wessex Downs by stimulating economic prosperity and local culture.

16. To encourage an enhanced sense of ownership and respect for the distinctive character of the North Wessex Downs amongst local people.

## POLICIES

15.1 Provide support for communities and opportunities to develop their capacity.

15.2 Encourage different approaches to retaining rural services, including the combining of rural services where this will improve their viability.

16.1 Encourage and support local communities to engage in the planning and conservation of their local environment, enhancing the sense of local pride and ownership.

16.2 Encourage community groups to record, maintain, celebrate and share their cultural heritage through community-based projects, events, festivals and activities.

## ACTIONS

Provide advice and support to local and community services to improve their ability to respond to customers.

Develop demonstration projects to promote community use of renewable energy sources consistent with AONB objectives.

Secure reliable data on community activity and quality of life in the North Wessex Downs, and a better understanding of the range of cultural activities available.

Promote engagement with marginalised groups such as young people, rural poor and black and minority ethnic communities.

Assess the range and scale of economic diversity within the North Wessex Downs and determine the opportunities and constraints associated with these activities.

Secure affordable broadband and mobile telephone connections throughout the North Wessex Downs in ways that respect the special qualities of the area.

Support the development of partnerships to make housing more affordable in and around the North Wessex Downs and ensure schemes respect local landscape and settlement character.

Prepare Parish Plans/Village Design Statements to enable local communities to identify their own needs, especially in terms of affordable housing, community energy sources, access to local services, and employment needs, to guide future community provision.

Promote good practice examples of community approaches that have responded to locally identified needs as an inspiration to others (e.g. the establishment of local housing trusts, support for new village shops, community transport schemes, or community energy schemes).

## OBJECTIVES

17. To provide transport that is more sustainable and meets the needs of residents and visitors of the North Wessex Downs.

## POLICIES

17.1 Ensure the purposes and objectives of the North Wessex Downs are fully recognised in the development and implementation of transport planning and management.

17.2 Develop a consistent approach to the design, provision and maintenance of highways that is sympathetic to the landscape character of the North Wessex Downs.

## ACTIONS

Ensure that Local Transport Plans and other transport plans, strategies and programmes protect the tranquillity and special qualities of the landscape and reduces transport impacts on the environment.

Promote an integrated passenger transport scheme co-ordinated across the North Wessex Downs and serving the needs of local people and visitors.

Provide simple and easily accessible information on passenger transport provision within the AONB.

Secure Travel Plans for new developments with significant traffic generation within the North Wessex Downs to encourage sustainable access solutions.

Identify measures to improve road safety and the quality of the environment for both road users and non-users, especially on lanes used for recreational purposes.

Identify methods of reducing the noise and visual impact of the M4 and A34 within the North Wessex Downs.

## OBJECTIVES

18. To ensure that everyone has the opportunity to access and enjoy the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs while minimising the impacts of visitors.

## POLICIES

18.1 Increase accessibility to the North Wessex Downs for users of all abilities for quiet enjoyment and improved health and well being.

## ACTIONS

Identify spinal and circular routes to be promoted in AONB literature that are supported by the recreation and tourism infrastructure e.g. bicycle hire, farmhouse B&B / bunk barns and recreational bus links.

Increase provision and management of accessible greenspace.

Develop tools to monitor the impacts of visitors and consider management approaches that reduce pressure on sensitive habitats.
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<tr>
<td>18 To ensure that everyone has the opportunity to access and enjoy the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs while minimising the impacts of visitors.</td>
<td>18.2 Manage and improve the network of public rights of way.</td>
<td>Ensure that local authority Rights of Way Improvement Plans take full account of the local distinctiveness, character and quality of the North Wessex Downs and its setting, in their development and delivery of access to the area.</td>
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<td>Create new permissive and definitive routes that link existing routes and circular routes to take recreational walkers, cyclists and riders off busy roads.</td>
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<td>Support positive and consistent AONB-wide control of inappropriate use of the byways of the North Wessex Downs and along the Ridgeway.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 To promote a recreation and tourism sector that is well managed, sustainable and adding value to the local economy whilst respecting the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs.</td>
<td>19.1 Develop research, tools and projects which supports the development of a thriving recreation and tourism sector.</td>
<td>Develop a sustainable tourism strategy for the North Wessex Downs.</td>
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<td>Contribute to a promotional strategy for the tourism sector of the South East and Southwest AONBs which includes consideration of branding and quality assurance.</td>
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<td>Establish a coordinated marketing initiative to support the provision and promotion of tourism services and operations.</td>
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<td>Research into the demand for and current provision of transport, accommodation and attractions for residents and visitors to the AONB.</td>
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<td>Deliver training to tourism providers on enhancing the quality of accommodation, catering, transport, access and quiet recreation. Encourage sustainable tourism certification.</td>
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